

# The image of Europe and the European Union in digital media of Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia (discourse analysis 2005–2019)

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## Abstract

The image of the EU and Europe in digital mass media of Ukraine, Belarus and Russia is studied in this article using the methodology of discourse analysis. Independent digital mass media *Ukrainska Pravda*, *Nasha Niva*, *Lenta.ru*, *Novaya Gazeta* are analysed (online publications from years 2005–2019). Three images of Europe in the media are indicated as a result of the research. In Ukraine: a strong reliance on Europe as the idea is observed. The EU and its institutions are stably present in political news, but European politicians are not so popular. In Belarus: Europe doesn't structure political discussions, however, efforts of the neighbouring EU Member States may be important in the image creation. In Russia: there is not much interest towards Europe, but some approaches to present constant clashes between Russia and the West are evident in digital mass media. The research has confirmed the main hypothesis, which supposed that the mechanisms of creating the image of Europe and the EU in post-Soviet countries' mass media are different, and the specifics of political discourse, as well as the states' international politics define the image.

**Keywords:** media discourse, post-Soviet countries, digital mass media, Europe, EU, political emotions, image

## Wizerunek Europy i Unii Europejskiej w mediach cyfrowych na Ukrainie, Białorusi i w Rosji (analiza dyskursu 2005–2019)

### Streszczenie

W niniejszym artykule przedstawiono wizerunek Europy i Unii Europejskiej (UE) w mediach cyfrowych na Ukrainie, Białorusi i w Rosji. Badanie zrealizowano metodą analizy dyskursu. Zbadano publikacje w niezależnych internetowych mediach *Ukrainska Pravda*, *Nasha Niva*, *Lenta.ru*, *Novaya Gazeta* w latach 2005–2019. W wyniku przeprowadzonej analizy zaobserwowano kreowanie przez media trzech obrazów Europy. Na Ukrainie w dyskursie medialnym obserwuje się silne zainteresowanie Europą jako ideą. UE i jej instytucje są często obecne w wiadomościach politycznych, ale europej-

scy politycy nie są tak popularni. Na Białorusi natomiast słowo „Europa” nie porządkuje dyskusji politycznych, jednak działania sąsiadujących z Białorusią państw członkowskich UE mogą mieć kluczowe znaczenie w tworzeniu wizerunku UE. W Rosji nie widać dużego zainteresowania Europą w dyskusji niezależnych mediów, częściej dominują tematy związane z ciągłą walką między Rosją a Zachodem. Badania potwierdziły główną hipotezę, że mechanizmy kreowania wizerunku Europy i UE w mediach krajów postsowieckich są odmienne, a specyfika dyskursu politycznego i polityka międzynarodowa państw określają ten obraz/wizerunek.

**Słowa kluczowe:** dyskurs medialny, kraje postsowieckie, media cyfrowe, Europa, UE, emocje polityczne, wizerunek

The image of Europe and the EU's in media discourse of post-Soviet Ukraine, Belarus and Russia may reflect the states' paths towards democratisation/authoritarianism and their international relations with the European Union. The “Europeanisation” (i.e. the movement towards European values or the EU integration) is an outer stone for political changes and uprisings in the some post-Soviet states (eg. Euromaidan in 2014, Belarusian protests in 2020). “Euro”-rhetoric is often used by leading politicians during pre-election presidential campaigns (e.g. Poroshenko, Yushchenko – Ukraine, Sandu – Moldova). Belarusian and Russian leaders exploit theses about the “dangerous” links of opposition politicians with Europe. Post-Soviet countries' interrelations with the EU are not stable, and it is important to understand its dynamics. Mass media analysis may be useful for this purpose. It is possible to use the texts as the “mirror” of international relations. Additionally, digitalisation may change some traditional approaches to news texts; thus, an idea (the idea of Europe, for instance) should be competitive to be present in the news.

To study the image of Europe and the EU in post-Soviet political discourse, the countries on the crossroad were chosen: three states that have a border with the EU, and have a significant percent of Russian-speaking population (more than 30%) and popular Russian-language (or bi-lingual) mass media. Thus, Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia – countries with different approaches to the idea of Europe and European integration – will be examined in this research.

**The main research hypothesis** supposes that the mechanisms created the image of Europe and the EU in post-Soviet countries' mass media are different, and the specifics of political discourse, as well as the states' international politics define the image. So, the research objective is to demonstrate these differences and specifics, and to compare the modern history of the states' relations with the EU and representation of the EU/Europe in the news.

To study the mechanisms of Europe's concept construction in the mass media, we should define:

- if Europe as the idea is present in the mass media texts, and if this idea is competitive (more salient than other territories, countries);
- if the EU, its political actors and institutions are explicated in the news and included in the political discourse;

- if Europe as a concept launches political emotions (in digital times it is impossible to sell information without emotions, and high emotionality reflects intensive political interactions).

Thus, I expect to get different indicators of Europe vision within these questions and different images of Europe in the mass media texts. This will help add more contexts to the problem of the countries' relations with the EU, the character, and the dynamics of these relations.

As for the states' relations with the EU, clear differences are presented in the scientific discourse. Ukraine was always interested in the cooperation with the EU and the EU membership (Franke et al. 2010: p. 156). "Deep integration with the EU has been a long-term priority for Ukraine" (Dragneva, Wolczuk 2014). Since 2005 a significant progress in the EU-Ukraine relations has been observed (Sushko 2007: p. 84). Ukraine was perceived as "a key ENP player" after European Neighbourhood Policy was implemented (Hillion 2007: p. 170). However, sometimes there were only Ukrainian politicians' statements about European values' importance and they were not supported by real actions (Solonenko 2011). Ukrainian officials' withdrawal from signing the Association Agreement with the EU led to protests all over the country. Furthermore, Euromaidan in 2013-2014 "demonstrated to the world Ukraine's geopolitical choice to move closer to Europe" (Chaban 2018). Afterward, the Agreement was signed on June 27, 2014. And nowadays, President Zelenskyy declared his wish to achieve a desirable membership for Ukraine, and announced that seven EU countries would vote for this (Interfax 2021).

In Belarus the EU "almost completely failed to impress the regime and population" (Bosse 2009). The EU-Belarus relations worsened between 1994-1997, when Lukashenko was elected and implemented restrictions on the opposition, changing the Constitution, etc. (Bosse, Korosteleva-Polglase 2009: p. 147). The mistrust towards the EU was observed (Rotman, Veremeeva 2011). The presidential election in 2010 in Belarus led to the EU's "restrictive measures towards certain Belarusian elites" and in 2015 there was some improvement in the mutual understanding (Lukashenko's role in the Russia-Ukraine conflict mattered) (Karliuk 2020). Nevertheless, the 2020 presidential elections "have dismantled illusions and put at risk the progress of past years in EU-Belarus relations" (Šteinbuka, Avetisyan 2021). Russia also may be a defining factor for the EU-Belarus relations. Russian officials see Belarus as a part of the Eurasian Integration Project and even as part of Russia itself. However, Lukashenko's mood is constantly changing, and sometimes closer cooperation with the EU may be perceived as something profitable (Basov 2019).

Russia and the EU have become estranged since the mid-2000s (Busygina 2018: p. 83). Scholars indicate several significant dates and events that defined that situation: NATO expansion, elections in Ukraine in 2004-2005 (Monaghan 2006), the Russia-Georgia conflict, the EU's politics towards Moldova, Ukraine, and Georgia (Tumanov et al. 2011), the Skripal case (Ananieva 2020). As N. Kapoor (2021) wrote: "beginning in the mid-2000s [...] the relationship steadily declined, reaching its lowest in 2014 in the aftermath of the Ukrainian crisis". Nowadays, according to Russian scholars, Russia and the EU are not situated in the common space anymore and "belong to different political and economic

communities" (Suslov 2016). The EU and Russia have some economic interdependence (energetic issues mostly), but not a mutual political understanding (Busygina 2018: p. 83). There is some progress in regional dialogue, whereas a political one is not successful (Prudskaya 2021: p. 246).

To sum up, three countries exploit different politics towards the EU with some dynamics during 2005–2019. So, with the mass media analysis, I expect to see Europe's image. On the paper, Europe is perceived as the idea that must be attractive in order to be covered in mass media. As far as in digital reality, political actors and ideas have "a limited attention space" (Schroeder 2018) to conquer the public's attitudes. Thus, messages in media discourse have been transforming into more emotional, personalised, conflict spheres.

This article is structured as follows: at first, important peculiarities of modern political communication will be defined. Secondly, Europe's image in mass media of three countries will be analysed. We'll see if Europe or some EU countries are included in the texts of the mass media and compare Europe's presence with the dynamic of other countries' mentions. Global, not regional agenda has been becoming more popular with mass media digitalisation, so this factor may influence the image of Europe. Thirdly, the EU's institutions and political actors' mentions will be studied. We'll see if the institutions and actors are compatible compared with global ones. And finally, the emotionality of messages about Europe will be analysed, as far as emotions that are significant for online texts and for political communication.

## Political communication in digital times

Digital technologies have been changing our understanding of space, territories, countries and their boundaries. Nowadays the technologies give the possibility for new political actors, digital activists, transgovernmental organisations, transnational elites to be represented in the process of political geography construction.

However, the representation of different countries, territories, political actors remains disproportional and partial (Bailey et al. 2017), "warped" (Griffin, Stevenson 1994), biased (Howe 2009). And this imaginative geography influences the real one. Thus, with analysing the geography's construction via media and technologies it is possible to discover "whose knowledge is being produced, by and for whom" (Ash et al. 2018). Nowadays this construction is produced in real time and public image may radically change in a new world "without fixed spatial relations" (Bargues-Pedreny et al. 2019).

Meanwhile, speaking about the EU's representation in modern political geography, we should take into account the liberal order crisis (Acharya 2018), Brexit, the rise of populism, focus on domestic, not international affairs for European countries, and modern world order challengers – China, Russia. In a more complicated field of international relations, Europe's position may be perceived as shaking one.

To spread messages via highly competitive Internet environment, politicians should create more personalised (Pérez-Curiel, Naharro 2019), emotional (Schneiker 2019), au-

thentic (Pain, Chen 2019) texts. Additionally, breaking rules and impoliteness have been perceived as something normal for political communication, and "attack" tweets may be more popular among users (Lee, Xu 2018).

Thus, dealing with Europe's image in modern digital discourse, we should take into account the changing nature of political interrelations. Europe's role in world order seems to be different, European politicians, trying to influence their colleagues in post-Soviet countries and to reach citizens of the countries' digital agenda, must compete with both domestic and powerful international political actors. And, of course, their messages will be spread only if they meet the new standards of political communication.

## Materials and methods

To formalise mass media texts analysis, computer programmes, written in Python language, were used. To define Europe's presence in the texts, vocabularies of countries, cities, territories were created. To study the EU political actors and institutions image, vocabularies of political subjects and institutions (domestic and international) were created. At first, a computer programme *find\_political\_actors.py* looked for proper names in headlines. Afterward, the words were divided into several categories: domestic and international political actors (politicians, activists, journalists, experts, parties, government structures, organisations, mass media, etc.), countries, and their capitals.

To define emotions, vocabularies of state verbs (like "want", "know", "assume", "demand", etc.) were composed. Verbs, not adjectives and adverbs, were used for news texts analysis. As we know, in news texts an author should be objective and should avoid adjectives and adverbs. However, with verbs, it is possible to observe emotionality in such texts. For instance, in sentences like: "European Solidarity" **demands** that Zelenskyy be summoned to a special commission on the Wagner Group Affair – Petro Poroshenko" or "Putin **blames** Europe for gas price crisis – The Moscow Times". Here, the verbs "to demand" and "to blame" show that the informational occasion does not contain action, but emotion, feeling.

Websites of independent online media were processed (news items only) from 2005–2019, all the texts without samples. To choose mass media, the list of criteria was composed: independence from state or oligarchs, high professional standards, popularity (Similarweb data was considered), early internet professionalisation (usage of web 2.0 standards), and texts written in Russian. In Ukraine, *Pravda.com.ua* was chosen, because it is in the top-3 of the most popular websites, and it is included in the so-called "white list of media" – mass media with the highest quality (see: IMI 2021). In Russia, *Lenta.ru* as the most popular digital mass media was chosen, however, only texts before 2013 were analysed (because this website was bought by an oligarch associated with Kremlin, and since 2014 *Lenta.ru* cannot be considered as independent media). From 2014–2019 news from *Novaya Gazeta* were analysed, as far as the paper is the prominent independent mass media in Russia (in 2021 its editor was awarded by Nobel Peace Prize). As for Belarus, because of restrictions to independent media, it was technically impossible to

collect texts from the most popular independent mass media (BelaPAN, tut.by), thus less popular, but independent website *Nasha Niva* was analysed. In some cases for *Nasha Niva* and *Novaya Gazeta*, web archives were also used.

## Results of the research

The following outcomes were elaborated on the basis of conducted research.

### Europe's image

In the mass media of Ukraine, Belarus and Russia, Europe and European countries are represented differently.

For Ukraine, Europe (average 1.49%) is significant as an entity. It is constantly present in the top-5 mentions among other countries (Russia 7.2%, the USA 1.9%) except for 2016–2017 (see *Table 1*). During 2005–2013 Europe was in the top-3 (with Russia and the USA), afterward it has lost position. It may be interpreted that Europe's concept struggle with Russia as Ukrainian neighbour (and after 2014 – aggressor), and the USA as a world power. Europe has been losing in this struggle. Thus, Russian aggression strongly influenced the Europe's representation in the news. Before 2014 mostly the EU countries were popular (Poland, Germany) and a post-Soviet Georgia. Geographically, the news were not global, but regional. Europe here was quite competitive. Afterward, the global approach prevailed. Furthermore, Europe as the concept should compete for the attention not only with Russia and the USA but with the states, which were parts of international conflicts and tensions (Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Libya, Syria, and Turkey). In these conflicts, Europe was less represented and has been becoming less popular. Other EU countries have become more popular (Poland – since 2014, Germany – since 2012). This may be interpreted as the gradual change of priorities: interest not in Europe as an entity, but in interactions with specific EU Member States as countries-partners.

**Table 1: The top-10 most popular countries in the news of *Pravda.com.ua***

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	Total
	Percent of mentions per year															
Russia	3.37	4.32	2.66	6.5	5.64	3.11	2.93	2.58	3.91	14.64	14.1	12.3	10.9	12.49	9.21	7.24
USA	0.82	0.79	0.56	0.96	0.85	0.54	0.77	1.23	1.79	2.24	2.62	2.77	4.34	4.26	4.03	1.9
Europe	0.75	1.35	1.6	1.29	2.52	2.06	2.69	1.98	1.89	0.76	0.81			0.83	0.78	1.49
Poland		0.21	0.26	0.5		0.3	0.48	0.42		0.51	0.55	1.04		0.84	0.76	0.53
Syria									0.56		1.04	1.12	0.76	1.22		0.94
Germany			0.13			0.2		0.39	0.53	0.51						0.35

DPRK																		1.01			1.01
Turkey																				0.88	0.88
Georgia		0.1			1.6	0.57															0.76
Libya								0.62													0.62

Source: own elaboration based on the discourse analysis.

For Belarus, Europe as a concept is not so significant (0.87%). It was on the 4th–5th place in 2009, 2011–2014, 2016–2017 (see *Table 2*). Thus, it was not at the centre of political debates, as in Ukraine, and Europe’s role was episodic, whereas constant attention to this concept after the 2010 presidential elections and Lukashenko’s repressions on the opposition should be taken into consideration. Here Europe was included as a possible hope or judge, but Russia (4.23%), Ukraine (1.93%) and the USA (1.38%) were much more popular. Interest in these three countries has been growing since 2008. Additionally, three European countries were mentioned more or less constantly: Lithuania, Latvia, and Poland. Thus, in Belarusian mass media, neighboring countries and ties with them are more important than all-European efforts to discuss some issues of the authoritarian country. And Russia–Ukraine relations seem to be more newsworthy, than Europe as well. Additionally, in Belarusian mass media, the transition from regional towards global agenda isn’t so vivid, like in Ukraine since 2014. For instance, interest towards Poland was respectively high in 2014, in 2016 interest towards Europe grew. So, here we can see reliance towards certain EU Member States, whereas Europe’s popularity isn’t high and constant.

**Table 2: The top-10 most popular countries in the news of *Nasha Niva* (nn.by)**

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	Total
	Percent of mentions per year															
Lithuania	0.29	0.57	0.37	0.41	0.73	0.65	0.67	0.61	0.84	0.55			0.66		0.78	0.59
Poland	0.24	1.3	1.23	1.16	0.67	0.85	0.59	0.61	0.51	1.18	0.9	1.76	1.41	0.77	0.87	0.94
Ukraine	0.19	0.65	0.42	0.6	0.92	1.04	0.68	0.61	1.48	9.54	3.88	1.17	2.45	2.42	2.83	11.93
Europe					0.9		0.7	0.6	0.8	1.18		1.2	0.7			0.87
USA		0.44	0.46	1.16	0.42	1.06	1.04	1.31	1.11	1.7	1.75	2.35	2.21	2.15	2.13	11.38
Latvia		0.32	0.11	0.28	0.35									0.31		0.27
Georgia			0.24	0.71												0.48
Syria									0.39		0.79	1.17		0.75		0.78
Estonia			0.22		0.23											0.23
Russia				0.39	2.5	2.87	2.57	1.31	2.79	9.34	6.12	5.88	5.14	6.28	5.87	4.23

Source: own elaboration based on the discourse analysis.

In the case of Russia (see *Table 3*) Europe is not popular at all, but so-called „old” European countries are present in media discourse (Great Britain and sometimes Germany). If we speak about the GB, with references to the USA (3.7%), which is the most popular for Russia, this could be interpreted as an approach to contrast Russia and the “Anglo-Saxon” world. Thus, here powerful European countries are much more salient, than Europe and other European states. By the way, post-Soviet countries are not in attention of mass media, only Ukraine (2.6%) is constantly mentioned, and Georgia – twice. Of course, here the geographical position of Russia should be taken into account. That is why some Asian neighbouring countries are popular. However, events within European space are not a significant part of Russian media news, especially after 2013–2014, when Ukraine, Syria, the USA, and Turkey were at the forefront.

**Table 3: The top-10 most popular countries in the news of *Lenta.ru*, *Novayagazeta.ru***

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	Total
	Percent of mentions per year															
USA	9.42	3.65	3.24	3.36	2.90	2.42	2.81	2.66	5.18	2.97	1.36	3.29	4.20	5.07	3.66	3.75
Ukraine	5.54	1.90	1.74	1.62	2.12	1.64	1.01	1.29	1.96	9.73	3.51	1.48	2.96	2.66	1.96	2.74
Syria								1.01	2.94		2.73	5.09	2.27	1.61	0.76	2.34
Turkey	2.09										1.95	3.07	0.89			2.00
GB	2.17	2.19	3.34	2.83	2.07	1.42	1.46	1.29						1.22	1.00	1.90
Iran		1.46							1.82							1.64
Izrael		2.14	0.96						1.40							1.50
China	1.96			1.16		0.70										1.27
Germany					1.04	1.78	1.56	1.24		0.66						1.26
Georgia				1.46	0.91											1.19

Source: own elaboration based on the discourse analysis.

### Political actors

In Ukrainian mass media, the EU is also one of the most popular institutions (see *Table 4*), it is in the top-3, except for 2016. Along with the EU, other European institutions (PACE, OSCE, ECHR) and politicians (Merkel, Kwasniewski, Fule, Solana) are present in mass media news. However, if Ukraine is included in European space on the institutional level, European politicians are rarely presented in the headlines. Thus, their surnames mostly aren't recognisable for mass audience in the digital environment. Moreover, because of the transition from regional towards global agenda, mostly American and Russian political subjects dominate, not only the presidents and officials, but also heroes

of "hot events" (Snowden, Nemtsov, Manafort). Thus, American and Russian politicians are disproportionally represented in Ukrainian media discourse, and a clash of these state's personalities shapes the news agenda.

**Table 4: The most popular political actors in the news of *Ukrainska Pravda* (*pravda.com.ua*)**

2005		2006		2007		2008	
Niyazov	EU	Putin	NATO	Putin	EU	Putin	NATO
Lukashenko	NATO	Lukashenko	EU	Chernomyrdin	NATO	Medvedev	EU
Bush	SES	Bush	WTO	Luzhkov	Gazprom	Bush	Gazprom
Saakashvili	WTO	Niyazov	Gazprom	Zhirinovskiy	WTO	Saakashvili	WTO
Chernomyrdin	IMO	Zatulin	CIS	Lukashenko, Solana	RosUkrEnerg	Luzhkov	RosUkrEnerg
2009		2010		2011		2012	
Putin	Gazprom	Medvedev	IMF	Putin	EU	Putin	EU
Medvedev	IMF	Putin	EU	Medvedev	IMF	Obama	PACE
Obama	EU	Kirill	NATO	Pence	Gazprom	Medvedev	IMF
Pence	NATO	Obama	PACE	Gaddafi	PACE	Merkel	Gazprom
Lukashenko	Kremlin	Pence	RWB	Lukashenko	Customs Union	Lukashenko	Customs Union
2013		2014		2015		2016	
Putin	EU	Putin	EU	Putin	OCSE	Trump	OCSE
Fule	Customs Union	Merkel	OCSE	Merkel	EU	Obama	UN
Kwasniewski	ECHR	Lavrov	NATO	Nemtsov	NATO	Feygin	NATO
Snowden	Gazprom	Obama	UN	Lavrov	UN	Clinton	FSS
Obama	PACE	Zakharchenko	Boing	Obama	ISIS	Merkel	Kremlin
2017		2018		2019			
Trump	OCSE	Putin	EU	Putin	EU		
Putin	EU	Trump	OCSE	Hahn	NATO		
Vorononkov	UN	Manafort	UN	Merkel	UN		
Merkel	NATO	Skripal	NATO	Biden	OCSE		
Lavrov	Kremlin	Walker	Kremlin	Walker	Kremlin		

Source: own elaboration based on the discourse analysis.

There is a more diverse representation of European institutions in the Belarusian case because of a more tabloid approach to news policy (see *Table 5*). Along with the EU, European Parliament, OSCE, and European Council, soccer clubs and mass media are mentioned. Eurovision is also popular. So, in Belarusian mass media, the institutional level is not so well represented, however, there are approaches to actualise Europe on other levels (culture and sports). Additionally, tabloid-style may be perceived as a forced step to produce political news in the authoritative country, where a number of political events is limited, and political actors do not produce enough news occasions, appropriate for the web.

**Table 5: The most popular political actors in the news of *Nasha Niva* (nn.by)**

2005		2006		2007		2008	
Blair	UN	Castro	EU	Putin	EU	Obama	Gazprom
Nobel	DW	Putin	Gazprom	Bush	Gazprom	Medvedev	IMF
Bush	Union of Poles	Yanukovich	CIS	Castro	UN	Putin	OSCE
Becket	Gazprom	Yuschenko	UN	Chaves	Eurocommission	Castro	EU
Putin	Euronews, Eurovision	Bush, Chaves	RT, Euro Parliament, European Council, Radio Liberty	Yanukovich	Eurovision	Bush, Yuschenko	Zenit, Real
2009		2010		2011		2012	
Obama	EU	Yanukovich	EU	Gaddafi	EU	Putin	EU
Medvedev	IMF	Bakiev	Gazprom	Putin	IMF	Breivik	Eurovision
Putin	Google	Medvedev	Customs Union	Medvedev	Barcelona	Obama	KHL
Yuschenko	Euro Parliament	Putin	IMF	Castro	UN	Buffon	Customs Union
Castro	Barcelona	Obama	Eurovision	Obama	KHL	Castro	Embassy of Poland
2013		2014		2015		2016	
Putin	EU	Putin	EU	Hubarev	ISIS	Obama	Apple
Yanukovich	Uralkali	Poroshenko	NATO	Nemtsov	Charlie Hebdo	Clinton	NATO
Navalny	KHL	Yanukovich	UN	Putin	Huawei	Merkel	Google
Chaves	Eurovision	Obama	NBA	Dadaev	Viber	Messi	BMW

Obama	IMF	Medvedev	Donbas Battalion	Motorolla	ZTE, EU, Pentagon	Bartholomew I	UN
<b>2017</b>		<b>2018</b>		<b>2019</b>			
Trump	EU	Putin	EU	Zelenskyy	EU		
Putin	Eurovision	Trump	Google	Putin	NATO		
Poroshenko	ISIS	Skripal	Real	Trump	Eurovision		
Navalny	Google	Poroshenko	Facebook	Poroshenko	Google		
Saakashvili	Apple	Kim Jong Un	Eurovision	Maduro	FSS		

Source: own elaboration based on the discourse analysis.

In Russia (see *Table 6*) European political actors (persons and institutions) were represented with the EU, which is displaced by transnational organisations (Microsoft, Google, Apple), especially during 2007–2013, however, afterward they were on the list with other international organisations, and Islamic State (ISIS). Here, we can see two phases of the EU perception: in the field of popular culture (little by little *Lenta.ru* was transforming from more serious mass media with hard news towards tabloid format) and in the field of qualitative press (*Novaya Gazeta* – since 2014). Analysing political geography and Europe’s concept coverage, we did not see any differences. Other political actors (the UN, ISIS, and NATO) were more popular, and the EU had 2nd or 3rd position (except for 2018–2019). As for political personalities, European politicians mostly were not represented. Citizenship of the mentioned persons – the USA, Ukraine, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, Syria, and Libya. Merkel and, not so often, Holland, May, and Johnson were present in Russian media discourse from time to time.

**Table 6: The most popular political actors in the news of *Lenta.ru*, *Novayagazeta.ru***

<b>2005</b>		<b>2006</b>		<b>2007</b>		<b>2008</b>	
Bush	UN	Bush	UN	Yushchenko	Chelsea	Obama	Microsoft
Yushchenko	Pentagon	Yushchenko	Hamas	Bush	UN	McCain	UN
Tymoshenko	EU	Yanukovych	EU	Tymoshenko	Verkhovna Rada	Bush	NATO
Sharon	NATO	Lukashenko	Google	Yanukovych	EU	Yuschenko	Google
Lukashenko	HAMAS	Tymoshenko	Microsoft	Lukashenko	Microsoft	Tymoshenko	EU
<b>2009</b>		<b>2010</b>		<b>2011</b>		<b>2012</b>	
Obama	Google	Yanukovych	Google	Gaddafi	Google	Obama	Google

Yushchenko	Microsoft	Obama	Face-book	Obama	Face-book	Tymoshenko	Facebook
Tymoshenko	EU	Tymoshenko	Apple	Tymoshenko	Apple	Romney	Apple
Jackson	Chelsea	Bakiev	Micro-soft	Lukashenko	EU	Lukashenko	KHL
Klychko	Apple	Klychko	EU	Klychko	NATO	Assad	EU
<b>2013</b>		<b>2014</b>		<b>2015</b>		<b>2016</b>	
Obama	Google	Poroshenko	UN	Poroshenko	ISIS	Trump	NATO
Snowden	NHL	Merkel	NATO	Merkel	EU	Obama	EU
Yanukovych	Facebook	Yanukovych	EU	Obama	NATO	Clinton	UN
Lukashenko	Apple	Obama	Boing	Assad	OCSE	Erdogan	ISIS
Saakashvili	EU	Klychko, Holland, Yatsenyuk	HAMAS, Verkhovna Rada	Kerry, Yanukovych, Yatsenyuk	UN	Poroshenko	OCSE
<b>2017</b>		<b>2018</b>		<b>2019</b>			
Trump	UN	Trump	EU	Trump	EU		
Merkel	ISIS	Skripal	UN	Zelenskyy	NATO		
Erdogan	EU	Poroshenko	NATO	Poroshenko	UN		
Poroshenko	NATO	Merkel	Penta-gon	Erdogan	Penta-gon		
Clinton, Saakashvili	Reuters, State Department, IOC, Pentagon, FIFA	May	State Department	Johnson	ISIS		

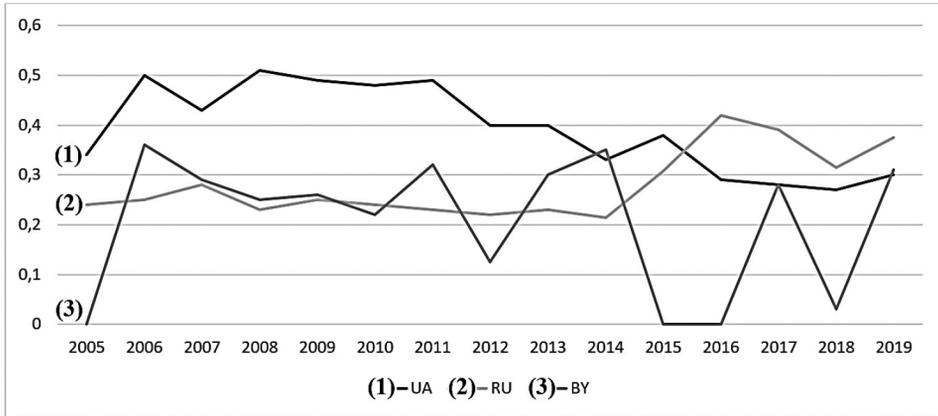
Source: own elaboration based on the discourse analysis.

To sum up, the mass media of the three states of research have different approaches to Europe and European political actors representation. In Ukraine: we see the concentration on Europe as an entity with high reliance on European institutions, which promotes democracy and security. For Belarus: not the whole Europe, but neighbouring countries are popular, and lack of cooperation on the state level is compensated by cultural and sport activities. In Russia: Germany and Great Britain are more popular, and the number of EU's mentions has been increasing since 2015. Before this period EU was less popular, comparing to transnational companies and international organisations.

### Political emotions

Now let's take a look at the situation with political emotions. Average numbers demonstrate the most emotional perception of the EU and Europe in Ukraine (39.7% of headlines, where the EU or Europe are mentioned, contain state verbs), and less emotional in Russia (27.9%) and Belarus (20.9%).

**Figure 1: Emotions in the headlines with the EU/Europe mentions (Ukrainian, Belarusian, and Russian mass media)**



Source: own elaboration based on the discourse analysis.

Analysing political emotions' curve (see *Figure 1*), in the Ukrainian case, one may see highly emotional coverage during 2006–2011 and a decrease of the indicator since 2012. We may explain this with Yanukovich's presidency, when Ukrainian Eurointegration was questioned. However, afterward, numbers continued to decrease. Thus, Ukrainian international politics is not the only reason. Russian aggression also did not lead to a higher emotionality. It means that despite numerous appeals of Ukrainian political actors towards the EU, the European political actors' efforts were not covered through feelings, wishes, fears, etc. And additionally, the social consensus in Ukraine about its European future may also be a cause of the indicator's decrease.

Furthermore, two periods can be differentiated in Ukrainian media discourse. The first one is when European "issues" were at the center of political discussions and provoked emotions and tensions. The mass media interest in it was high. The second one, when Europe and European institutions were covered with more neutrality and impartiality. The attention towards Europe has been declining.

If we speak about Belarus, the high volatility of the curve should be taken into account. There were periods, when emotionality about Europe was higher than in Russia, however, there also were periods, when state verbs were minimally used, and emotionality was low. Thus, when Europe was not at the centre of political dialogue, both attention to the concept and emotionality were not stable. For instance, attention towards Europe was high before the presidential election in 2010, when the Belarusian website translated the EU countries' reaction, and Belarusian opposition politicians' appealed towards European leaders. However, the election in 2015 did not cause either attention towards Europe, or emotionality, because Russia–Ukraine relations were at the forefront. Moreover, Lukashenko used the situation to represent himself as a peacekeeper.

Therefore, if in Ukraine, emotional attitudes towards Europe are higher, more stable, and underline Ukrainian politicians' desire to discuss the possibility for Ukraine to be included in European space, the Belarusian situation is different. Here, we have a more stable picture before 2010, which can be explained with opposition politicians promoting an idea of Belarus as a partner of Europe. However, because of political repressions and geopolitical instability, caused by Russian aggression, indicators have been getting unstable.

Moreover, in Russia, we may also differentiate two periods: with low emotionality (before 2014), and high and unstable afterward. As a consequence, we see that low attention towards Europe and its' institutions caused low emotionality. However, since 2015, it has been growing along with interest towards the EU, which may be explained by Russian international politics. Here, we see different situations: (1) Ukraine, where aggression and global changes in world order led to more calm coverage, and (2) Russia, where emotions have been increasing with Russian efforts to destabilise both European and world security.

## Conclusions and discussion

After Europe's images in mass media of Ukraine, Belarus and Russia studying, three different visions of this concept were observed. It was supposed that the mechanisms creating the image of Europe and the EU in post-Soviet countries' mass media are different, and the specifics of political discourse, as well as the states' international politics define the image. Now it is possible to confirm this hypothesis.

Thus, in the Ukrainian case, we can see a strong reliance on Europe as the idea, the EU and its institutions/actors. Europe is stably present in political news, and its position is salient. European institutions are also explicated and included in the media discourse. However, politicians' presence is not intensive. Despite minimal attention towards the EU in political news, texts about Europe and its institutions provide emotions and, thus, should be competitive in the digital times. This means, that for the Ukrainian political discourse emotions play an important role. Significant issues, like European integration, launch rivalry, and political actors compete for the public attention in "the limited attention space" (Schroeder 2018), which is typical for more democratic states. Additionally, there is plenty of recognisable political actors (persons and institutions), and the politicians find ways to refer to the European future for Ukraine as a dream, and more particularly to European institutions to gain some political capital. These results confirm the previous observations about the essence of the EU–Ukraine relations, Ukraine's inspirations to be included in the EU's agenda, and to get the EU's membership. However, it was possible to see, that Europe's representation in media discourse has been changing since 2014. In digital times, with a more global approach to the news, regional issues have been becoming less salient. And the attention of the Ukrainian mass media was concentrated on Russia, the USA, and only certain European countries. Therefore, Europe was not so popular among the Ukrainian journalists, as it was before, and the emotionality of texts

about it and the EU has been declining as well. So, here some additional efforts may be needed to attract attention to Europe, the EU–Ukraine relations in the future, and avoid disappointment in the idea of Europe, European and democratic future for Ukraine.

In Belarus, lack of attention towards Europe in official discourse is being compensated in the media discourse of independent media with references to neighboring countries. Here, Europe doesn't structure political discussions, there are no clear intentions to include EU institutions in the discourse constantly. However, analysing unstable emotionality and references towards the EU institutions, we see a gap between official indifference and collective efforts in the discourse of independent media to stir up interest towards a possible European future for Belarus. Consequently, it means for the state political discourse that there are no constant issues for political actors to discuss. Thus, there is no "limited attention space", and political actors (government and opposition) may include some issues artificially. Tabloid-style is used to sell desirable issues, so politicians do not have enough political capital to include significant issues into media discourse, which is typical for authoritative states. However, it was possible to see that some important political events, like the 2010 elections, may be used to attract the mass media attention towards Europe, the EU actors, and institutions. So, in the future, the idea of Europe may be widely exploited. Therefore, the study's results demonstrated the complicated relations between Belarus and the EU. However, it was observed that in the Belarusian case, efforts of the neighbouring EU Member States may be vital in creating the representation of the idea of Europe in media discourse.

Also, for Russia, there is not much interest towards Europe and EU institutions, and there are neither intentions towards integration in Europe as a whole space, nor any steps to deepen contacts with neighbouring countries. Moreover, some approaches to represent constant clashes between Russia and the West are evident. This means that in Russian political discourse there is a lack of alternative agenda. Domestic political debates do not stimulate the public interest towards the idea of Europe, the EU institutions and politicians. On the contrary, international geopolitical issues and rivalry are mostly represented to divert attention from domestic issues. The ignorance of Europe in the mass media underlines the Russian perception of Europe as foreign space and foreign ideas. However, it was possible to observe some changes of the Europe and the EU's image in Russian news – an increase in emotionality since 2014. Europe and the EU institutions were not so popular but were represented with emotions. This may be interpreted as a future possibility to gain more attention and to promote the idea of Europe and European values.

Our analysis additionally confirms the changes in the representation of different countries and territories in the new digital reality, especially this is true for Europe, which sometimes loses the competition with transnational actors (especially in Russia). European political actors are not popular so much, as American and Russian ones. This fact may lead to the fragmented understanding of European policy towards the post-Soviet countries in domestic media discourses.

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