"DO YOU REALLY THINK RUSSIA SHOULD PAY UP FOR THAT?"

HOW THE RUSSIA-BASED TV CHANNEL *RT* CONSTRUCTS RUSSIAN-BALTIC RELATIONS

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Abstract

Mediated public diplomacy plays an important role in achieving foreign policy objectives by trying to influence public opinion in other countries. The Russia-based global TV channel *RT* serves as a central tool of Russian mediated public diplomacy. Its objective is not only to present the Russian perspective on different issues but also to propagate it. However, there is not much research on *RT* in general and none on the strategies *RT* employs to persuade its viewers of the rightness of the Russian stance. This article explores the use of persuasive strategies in the *RT* interview show *Spotlight*. A qualitative content analysis of 15 episodes, which discuss Russian relations to its Baltic neighbours Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, revealed that *Spotlight* constructed a one-sided pro-Russian reality. Various strategies are employed to hedge this reality against doubts about its trueness as well as to support Russia's position in conflicts with the Baltic States. By this, *RT* aims to isolate the Baltic States internationally in order to help Russia in achieving its foreign policy objectives.

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Introduction

"Estonia: Genocide that Never Was," "Human Rights in Latvia," "Is Denial a Crime?" When it comes to the three Baltic countries Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, the interview show *Spotlight* on the Russia-based global TV channel *RT* (formerly *Russia Today*) introduces controversial topics. In the often tense Russian-Baltic relations, *Spotlight* as well as its broadcasting organisation *RT* take sides, trying to persuade audiences of the rightness of the Russian stance.

This article examines persuasive strategies used in the *Spotlight* show. To introduce the reader to Russian-Baltic relations, the article first provides a short account of the lines of conflict. Then it discusses the topic in a broader perspective of mediated public diplomacy, focusing on the role of media in general and *RT* in particular. At the core of this article lies a qualitative content analysis which was carried out to answer the research question of how *RT* attempted to persuade its viewers of the rightness of the "official" Russian stance.

Russia and the Baltic States: Shared History, Contradictive Memories

Ever since the former Soviet republics Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania regained independence in the early 1990s, their relations with Russia have been tense. The Bronze soldier, a Soviet World War II memorial in Tallinn, erected in 1947 to commemorate the liberation of the city by the Red Army, can serve as an illustrative example (Pääbo 2008; Kattago 2009). It demonstrates how different lines of conflict are related. The monument became known worldwide in 2007, when Estonian officials removed it from the centre of Tallinn to re-erect it at a military cemetery. This relocation caused severe riots in Estonia, during which one person was killed, a siege of the Estonian embassy in Moscow and cyber attacks on official Estonian homepages conducted from computers located in Russia. Being far more complex than can be summarised here, the reasons for these incidents are found in the early 20th century history. According to the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact Estonia was within the Soviet sphere of influence. Consequently, it was annexed in 1940. With Germany's assault on the USSR and its fast winnings in the first period of the fighting, the "Third Reich" conquered Estonian territory in 1941, just to be driven out of the country again three years later by the Soviets.

During Estonia's Soviet period, the ruling party tried to establish an official history and, consequently, a collective memory which knows these events of 1944 as liberation of Estonia. However, another collective memory survived (and was fostered) in Estonian private spheres, regarding the "liberation" as the beginning of yet another occupation. This opposing memory challenged the hegemonic memory in the late Gorbachev period and has become the dominant understanding since Estonia regained its independence – opposing the present day "Russian memory" which originates from the former Soviet one (Kivimäe 1999; Onken 2007). As both interpretations of the events – liberation or occupation – are deeply rooted within the respective national collective memory, they strongly affect national narratives and identities. Therefore, they are often the origin of current conflicts. For example, in Soviet times the Kremlin conducted a vast settlement programme to Estonia with the aim of Russification. As a result, the share of Estonians among the total

population decreased dramatically. Having regained independence, Estonia had to face the challenge of integrating this huge "minority" – which Estonians often regard as occupants or colonists – into the new state. It is a process which has not been finished up to today, raising issues as education, the status of non-citizens and, eventually, minority rights. Russia is monitoring the process closely, regarding itself as the defender of Russian-speaking minorities in neighbouring countries. Latvia and Lithuania faced a comparable fate, though with its national specificities.

Apart from these current domestic discussions, Russia regards interpretations of the role of the Red Army other than as liberator as an attempt to rewrite and, thereby, falsify history. Given the central importance of the Great Patriotic War (as the Soviet war against Nazi Germany is called in Russia) to its national identity (Gudkov 2005), Russia considers opposite interpretations to be an offensive act.

The Impact of Mass Media on Foreign Policy

Since the end of the Cold War at the latest, there is little doubt about the importance of soft power as part of a smart power strategy. As opposed to hard power, which is based on military and economic strength, soft power describes "the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments. It arises from the attractiveness of a country's culture, political ideals, and policies" (Nye 2004, x). A decisive tool for managing one's soft power is public diplomacy. An early definition by Tuch (1990, 3) specifies public diplomacy as "a government's process of communicating with foreign publics in an attempt to bring about understanding for its nation's ideas and ideals, its institutions and culture, as well as its national goals and current policies." Besides official state institutions, recent research points out the growing importance of NGOs and individuals in the field of public diplomacy (Gilboa 2008). In a globalised world, mediated public diplomacy plays the crucial role in a public diplomacy strategy. Entman (2008) develops a concept of mediated public diplomacy which differs from classic definitions of public or media diplomacy (Gilboa 2000). In comparison to these two concepts, mediated public diplomacy "involves shorter term and more targeted efforts using mass communication (including the internet) to increase support of a country's specific foreign policies among audiences beyond that country's borders" (Entman 2008, 88).

Mediated Public Diplomacy

(Mediated) public diplomacy addresses foreign publics. This logic clearly follows Ferree et al.'s (2002) description of the public sphere as an arena in which various actors try to gain influence in the process of shaping the public opinion. Governments in democratic states monitor public opinion and orient their decisions towards it. Mediated public diplomacy consequently aims at becoming an influential actor in the arena to influence public opinion and, by this, decisions of foreign governments. In a globalised world, mediated public diplomacy has to take into account not only single national but also transnational public spheres. Global news networks such as *CNN, BBC World, Al-Jazeera* and *RT* can be precious instruments for mediated public diplomacy because they guarantee access to these public spheres.

Access is the prerequisite for making one's voice being heard in the arena. How this voice can be employed in order to achieve foreign policy objectives is another

issue. To gain an understanding of it, we have to consider the main assumptions of writings on the construction of reality. Schütz (1932) and Berger and Luckmann (1966) conceive reality as man-made and not as natural. Things and events do not have a meaning "on their own," but meaning is a result of the process in which it is constructed. The construction is a social process. Through primary and secondary socialisation every member of a community acquires "reality competence"– s/he constructs the reality in a way that is congruent with the constructions of other members from the same community.

In modern societies mass media are a powerful actor in this process (McQuail 2010). Viewers refer to media reality when constructing their own realities. Mediated public diplomacy tries to profit from this process. It constructs realities which are intended to influence its viewers in an aspired way. Controlling media organisations gives an advantage that enables to construct realities independently from journalists. For example, this creates the possibility of presenting political stances and defining the circumstances under which they are presented.

RT: News Network Controlled by the Kremlin

The establishment of the international Russia-based news network *RT* can be regarded as an attempt to actively intervene in public discourse on issues which affect Russia. *RT* is a global 24-hour television news network which was formed in 2005, then still known as *Russia Today*. It transmits its programme in English, Spanish and Arab via satellite and cable. Currently, it is available in 100 countries, but apart from that there is also the possibility of watching the channel online on rt.com. Even though *RT* is not operated by the Kremlin itself, but by the NGO *TV-Novosti* (which, however, is funded to the greatest part by the state) and even though it is depicted differently in official appearances, there is a serious doubt that the channel is journalistically independent.

Press freedom in Russia is an issue of great concern. For example, the Press Freedom Index 2010 by Reporters Without Boarders places Russia on place 140 out of 178 countries. Other analyses perennially highlight the issue of suppression of journalistic freedom, too (cf. Dunn 2009; Kiriya and Degtereva 2010). The Kremlin is in the position to influence the coverage of topics in the press, be it by direct intervention or by journalists' anticipatory obedience and self-censorship. This is especially true for TV coverage. Why, then, should this be different with *RT*, a channel of strategic importance?

Unfortunately, there is very little research on *RT* in general and on the issue of journalistic independence in particular. Only few content analyses were carried out. Hsu (2010) examines 14 episodes of the weekly political summary show *In context* in late 2008. His discourse analysis finds that the "main theme revealed from the discourse is nationalism" (Hsu 2010, 20), presenting Russia as a pragmatic state which, by deliberation, could solve the world's conflicts more successfully than the idealistic USA. Cruikshank (2010) compares the coverage of the 2008 presidential elections in the USA in the prime-time newscasts of *Al-Jazeera*, *BBC World* and *RT* during 30 days. She finds that *RT* portrays both candidates, Barack Obama and John McCain, significantly less often in a positive way than the other two channels. Furthermore, the elections are described as unfair far more often than as fair, again in contrast to the other two channels. Cruikshank (2010, 22) concludes that

RT's "coverage of the U.S. politics, particularly of the U.S. presidential elections, manifests Russia's deep rooted rift with the United States." However, both analyses do not raise the issue of journalistic independence.

Ioffe (2010) gives evidence about both, direct censorship of journalists and the dependence of the reporting on the Kremlin's official position throughout *RT*'s programme. For example, Ioffe refers to the case of William Dunbar (2010) working in *RT*'s Tbilisi studio during the South Ossetia War in 2008. In a life interview, Dunbar mentioned rumours according to which Russian forces had bombed undisputed Georgian territory. When, shortly after, he was told not to mention these rumours anymore, he tendered his resignation. Although casting grave doubt on journalistic independence, Ioffe's evidence is merely anecdotal. However, it is supported by Kiriya and Degtereva (2010, 43) who assign *RT* a "propagandistic function" in their overview of the Russian TV market. In summary, all evidence tells that *RT* is not an independent journalistic organisation but a tool for Russian mediated public diplomacy.

RT as a Tool for Achieving Goals in Foreign Policy

Eventually, I will bring together the different aspects which have been discussed hitherto. *RT* is considered to be a tool for Russian mediated public diplomacy. It does not follow journalistic logics but answers to the Kremlin. This way the Kremlin can secure access to global and foreign national public spheres. Here, *RT* tries to become an influential actor in public debates, thus to influence the public opinion and eventually the decision making of democratic governments and some transnational institutions like the European Union or the Council of Europe. Finally, this may result in the achieving of Russian foreign policies' objectives. With regard to the coverage of the Baltic republics it can be assumed that the target audience of the reports is a third party and not the viewers in these states. The decision making of Western organisations, of which Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania are members (like EU and NATO), strongly influences national politics. By influencing public opinion on the Baltic States in third countries, Russia tries to influence decision making on national (e.g. US foreign policies' objectives in regard to Latvia) and international level. By this it shall not be said that it is *RT* alone which can cause all these effects. Nevertheless, it is one instrument among others, and for sure not the least powerful one if applied successfully. Consequently, the aim of this study is to analyse which strategies *RT* uses in its programmes to convince its viewers of the rightness of the Russian stance.

Research Method

To examine the attempt to persuade a single viewer of the presented Russian position on the micro-level of the actual reporting, the whole *RT* programme should be analysed. As this is not possible, Russian-Baltic relations are chosen as a limited field of analysis. This choice is made because (1) the lines of potential conflict can be identified clearly on the basis of the existing literature; (2) taking into account the literature on the coverage of at least Latvia in Russian national media (Muižnieks 2008) it can be assumed that there will be one-sided coverage of Russian-Baltic conflicts; (3) the researcher has personal experience in this field.

Selecting Cases

To obtain a sample which is manageable in size, only the interview show *Spotlight* is selcted. *Spotlight* is one of the flagships of *RT*. Host of the show is journalist Aleksandr (Al) Gurnov. Its aim is to give "an insight into Russia's stance on important issues" (RT website). At the same time, the journalistic independence is highlighted, which is an additional reason for choosing *Spotlight*. According to its homepage, the show is designed to "demonstrate that the Russian media has a true forum in which it can voice its opinions" (RT website). With a length of 26 minutes per episode, it is assumed that there are sufficient chances for identifying employed strategies in depth.

In the first step, 36 out of the roughly estimated 900 *Spotlight* episodes were identified as possibly relevant on the basis of the title and summary. These episodes were watched to determine whether they contain any topics related to the Baltic States. As a result, 15 episodes were identified as relevant. They constitute the sample of the analysis.[1] References to the Baltic republics differ between these episodes: some are on a single country, others refer to the Baltic States in general; some episodes deal exclusively with the Baltic States, others refer to them only in parts. The thematically relevant parts of the 15 episodes were transcribed. This adds up to 229 minutes of transcribed material. Table 1 provides an overview of the analysed episodes, their country settings, and the length of the transcribed parts of single episodes.

Table 1: Overview of the Sample

No.	Title*	Date of screening	EST	LV	LT	BALT in general	Transcription (min)
e01	Lithuanian chairmanship of OSCE	07.02.2011			x		15
e02	Latvia-Russia dialogue: A step forward	21.12.2010		x			25
e03	Council of Europe: United for human rights	13.07.2010				x	15
e04	Standing up for European values	22.06.2010		x			7
e05	WWII: Dividing page in history?	01.05.2010				x	9
e06	Surviving the catastrophe	26.01.2010			x		9
e07	Latvia goes east?	20.11.2009		x			10
e08	Telling myth from truth	08.05.2009				x	10
e09	Is denial a crime?	26.02.2009				x	12
e10	Human rights in Latvia	28.07.2008		x			24
e11	Estonian veteran's trial: Judging the Soviet past	28.05.2008	x				24
e12	How can ethnic minority rights be protected?	05.02.2008				x	10
e13	Estonia: Genocide that never was	09.01.2008	x				24
e14	Human rights: Whose rights?	18.09.2007		x			24
e15	Spotlight with Dmitry Sklyarov	27.05.2007	x				11

* All episodes can be retrieved from rt.com

A *Spotlight* episode consists of different components. All episodes start with an introduction to the topic by Gurnov, being alone in the studio. This is followed by an introduction of the guest(s) in the shape of CV and off-stage commentaries. Then, the interview begins. Depending on the studio, Gurnov and his guest(s) sit opposite to each other either at a desk or in armchairs without any barriers between them. There is a screen in the background of most studios, usually displaying either the logo of

the show or filmed material in connection to the topic discussed. In one episode the background screen serves the purpose of a live connection to Latvia from where a second interview guest is taking part in the discussion. Sometimes the television screen is split, showing in one window the continuing interview and in a second one related pictures. During some of the episodes, the interview is interrupted by a report on a specific issue. Furthermore, every interview is interrupted by a set of *RT* programme trailers at about halfway through the episode. This break has a length between 30 and 150 seconds. The trailers were considered irrelevant.

Analytic Procedure

Four dimensions were identified as possibly important for answering the research question: *dialogue, action, subtitles* and *(background) screen*. *Dialogue* refers to any kind of utterances, from laughing to the interview talk. *Action* designates any kind of actions by the interview participants, e.g. flipping through documents. There are different kinds of *subtitles*. Some subtitles show the name of the guest or the topic of the episode, while others provide the viewer with background facts or give summaries of what has been said. The latter two are of interest for this analysis. Furthermore, there can be a news ticker, temperature, time or stock exchange information in additional subtitles. These subtitles were ignored. Screenings on the (*background) screen* have been transcribed if they are related to the specific topic of the interview. Split screen settings, as described above, were always regarded as relevant.

A transcript of the relevant parts was made. It served as the basis for a qualitative, exploratory content analysis. The analysis used the procedure of *open coding* as described by Strauss and Corbin (1990). *Open coding* renounces any kind of pre-limitations and allows the widest possible perspective for describing, sorting and connecting persuasive strategies.

The analysis aimed to identify strategies used to convince viewers of the rightness of the Russian stance. In several turns of coding, concepts and categories were derived from the material to describe, sort and connect identified strategies. To find and explain connections between them, questions were addressed to the text, which guided individual turns of coding. Thus, concepts and categories were confirmed, re-formulated or dismissed. The processes of coding and analysing were carried out alternately. Due to the advancing understanding of the subject of examination all episodes were coded and re-coded several times. This process was not ended until category saturation was reached. The computer software programme ATLAS.ti was used to support the coding and analysing process.

Results

This section presents the results of the qualitative content analysis of 15 *Spotlight* episodes with a thematic reference to the Baltic States. The description of identified strategies, which are used to persuade viewers of the rightness of the Russian stance, is organised around summarising categories.

Topics Discussed

Four grand topics, which are discussed in the analysed *Spotlight* episodes, can be identified: history, Russian minority in the Baltic countries, Baltic-Russian relations

in general and economy. Among these, historical issues are the most frequent ones. They are discussed in 12 out of 15 episodes. Historical issues are derived from the common history of Russia and the Baltic States since 1940. Baltic collaboration with Nazi-Germany and Soviet liberation respectively occupation are frequent topics. The discussion of a process of rewriting or politicising history by Baltic politicians and historians is a more present theme. A fourth frequent historical issue is current court trials against former Red Army members which are discussed in four episodes. All these topics are closely intertwined as they have their common origin in the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact. Another grand theme is the status of the Russian minority in the Baltic countries. It concerns only Estonia and Latvia. If the issue of minority is raised, it is discussed with a focus on systematic violation of human rights. Four episodes address Russian relations to one of the Baltic countries from a general perspective. These relations are mostly pictured as slowly improving. Raising trade figures are connected to improving relations. The only exception is episode 15, in which attacks on official Estonian websites are discussed which Estonian specialists traced back to Russia.

Table 2 shows which grand topics are discussed in the given episodes. The choice of the discussed topics can be deployed strategically. It serves an agenda setting function.

Table 2: Overview of the Topics

		History				Russian minority in Baltic countries	Baltic-Russian relations	Economy
No.	Title	Nazi-cooperation	Soviet occupation	Rewriting/ politicizing history	Current court decisions/trials			
e01	Lithuanian chairmanship of OSCE		x	x			x	x
e02	Latvia-Russia dialogue: A step forward		x	x		x	x	x
e03	Council of Europe: United for human rights		x	x		x		
e04	Standing up for European values			x	x			
e05	WWII: Dividing page in history?	x		x				
e06	Surviving the catastrophe	x						
e07	Latvia goes east?					x	x	x
e08	Telling myth from truth	x		x				
e09	Is denial a crime?	x		x				
e10	Human Rights in Latvia	x		x	x	x		
e11	Estonian veteran's trial: Judging the Soviet past	x	x		x			
e12	How can ethnic minority rights be protected?					x		
e13	Estonia: Genocide that never was	x	x	x	x			
e14	Human rights: Whose rights?		x			x		
e15	Spotlight with Dmitry Sklyarov						x	

Guests

Two divergent episode settings can be identified depending on whether the guest supports a pro-Russian position or not. Pro-Russian positions are taken by ethnic Russians. Nine out of 15 episodes feature pro-Russian guests. If the guest is

not ethnic Russian, he does not take a pro-Russian position. Here, two variants can be distinguished: representatives of international bodies (of which both Russia and the Baltic States are members) adopt a neutral position in between pro-Russian and pro-Baltic. Ethnically Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian guests support a pro-Baltic position. The only guest that does not fit the scheme is historian Adzhiashvili, an ethnic Georgian. Nevertheless, his role in the interview is clearly designated: in the only episode with a pro- and a con-guest, he takes the pro-Baltic position. As will be shown later, the guest setting explains some of the strategies used. Table 3 provides an overview of the guests.

Table 3: Overview of the Guests and Their Positions

No.	Guest	Role designation	position		
			pro-Russian	neutral	pro-Baltic
e01	Audronius Ažubalis	Lithuanian Foreign Minister			x
e02	Andris Teikmanis	State Secretary, Latvian Foreign Ministry			x
e03	Thorbjorn Jagland	Secretary General, Council of Europe		x	
e04	Jean-Louis Laurent	Director General of Democracy and Political Affairs, Council of Europe		x	
e05	Anatoly Torkunov	Head, Moscow State University of International Relations	x		
e06	Maria Rolnikaite	Holocaust survivor	x		
e07	Ainars Slesers	Vice major of Riga			(x)
e08	Sergey Khrushchev	Nikita Khrushchev's son	x		
e09	Natalya Narochnitskaya	Head, Russian Institute of Democracy and Co-operation	x		
e10	Tatyana Zhdanok	Member, European Parliament	x		
e11	Ilya Adzhiashvili	Historian			x
	Mikhail Demurin	Expert on Baltic States	x		
e12	Knut Vollebaek	High Commissioner on National Minorities, OSCE		x	
e13	Aleksandr Dyukov	Historian	x		
e14	Anatoly Kucherena	Chairman, Public Chamber commission	x		
	Ruslan Pankratov	Latvian citizen	x		
e15	Dmitry Sklyarov	Information security expert	x		

(x)=assumed position

The choice of guests can be employed strategically. Constellations featuring pro-Russian guests predict an interview in which contra-Russian positions are attacked and no criticism towards Russia is expressed. Inviting other guests raises the risk of contra-Russian arguments being voiced. However, it also has advantages. For example, if such a guest expresses acceptance or even support for the Russian

position or if the position of such a guest can be presented in a negative way, the Russian position receives legitimisation.

Construction of Reality

In the *Spotlight* episodes a unitary reality is constructed. This reality represents the cosmos in which the viewers shall be convinced.

General Strategies. A basic strategy for constructing reality as factual is to *claim the factuality* of assertions. They are presented as true descriptions of how the world is. This is usually done by stating contingent interpretations simply as facts. This strategy is not only observed in the interview talk, but also in the subtitles. Subtitles supply the viewer with background information. Since they are presented as facts they do not raise the issue of stake, which might lower their credibility. To erase doubt about the factuality of a statement, it is sometimes pointed out that its trueness is commonly known. A strategy similar to claiming factuality, although not as obvious, is *hidden evaluation*: Gurnov does not evaluate issues directly, but a statement he makes or a question he poses is implying an indirect evaluation. For example, in one episode Gurnov asks his interview partner:

Gurnov: *Mister Torkunov, why does the West turn a blind eye to this collaborationism?* (e05, 17'31).[2]

This question implies that Western countries indeed "turn a blind eye to" politicians' collaborationism with nowadays' fascists and, more importantly, that there actually is such a collaborationism.

Another basic strategy for assessing the constructed reality is *category entitlement*. By choosing a positive or negative signifier for a person, an object or an issue, an evaluation of it is given. In the following extract, killed persons are called "collaborators":

Gurnov: *Well, one of the most notorious cases of persecution in contemporary Latvia is the case of Mister Wasilli Kononov, who was convicted by the Latvian authorities of ordering the killing of nine Latvian collaborators in 1944* (e10, 1'47).

The word "collaborator" has a negative denotation. It implies that there was a just reason for killing these people as they supported the Nazi enemies and thus had allowed or even taken part in their crimes. Therefore, this *category entitlement* (which, by the way, differs from the original indictment) is used. Furthermore, the entitlement justifies the description of the case as "notorious." If it was collaborators who were killed, why should Kononov be persecuted?

The issue of *credibility* is of vital importance. There are strategies for both enhancing and reducing credibility. In the *Spotlight* interviews, *scientificity* is used as a tool for attributing credibility. Science is orientated towards the truth. Scientific proof demonstrates the trueness of a statement. In two episodes (e05, e09) it is explicitly mentioned by the guests, both historians, that in international scientific discourse there is no doubt about the truth of the Russian interpretation of history. Rewriting history is described as a merely political issue. It is frequently noted if a pro-Russian guest has published scientific works. These notes are used to attribute credibility and reputation to the guests. The quantity of scientific output is particularly emphasised. Finally, there are frequent references to scientific research, and archive material is deployed to proof the rightness of a statement.

Dyukov: *I can refer to recently published research of doctor of historical science (Jelena Sybkova), a Russian historian, called "The Baltic States under Kremlin." She has researched quite a lot of information. She demonstrates that joining of the Baltic States to the Soviet Union could not be called an occupation* (e13, 15'21).

In this example, *scientificity* is deployed to proof the adequacy of the Russian position that the Baltic States were incorporated and later liberated in the 1940s, but not occupied. Other interpretations do not meet the scientific truth. They are devaluated.

Another strategy which is related to *scientificity* is *empiricist discourse*. It is not humans who interpret social reality. Data reveals reality objectively.

Subtitle: *Achieve information shows that the overall death toll of Stalin's terror in Estonia, from 1940-1941 and 1945-1953, was 9.450* (e13, 10'36).

Accuracy, being another strategy to evoke credibility, is connected to *scientificity* because *accuracy* is a trademark of scientific research. For example, providing precise numbers implies a thorough and accurate analysis of what really happened.

Subtitle: *20.535 were deported to Siberia in March 1949* (e11, 8'32).

The visual dimension is important for attributing credibility. We believe in what we see. On these grounds, a strategy I refer to as *eye witness* can be identified. Pictures shown in the studio's background or on one side of a split screen are employed to make credible what is said simultaneously. For example, while talking about the will to revenge and a national inferiority complex as motives for human rights' violations in Latvia, pictures of Latvian nationalists marching through Riga are shown on the split screen (e14). Young men in dark cloths with military haircuts carry Latvian flags. There are a huge number of heavily armoured police officers at the spot. In the first scene, the camera focuses on the boots of a police officer. In the background, the nationalists are walking by. The film material is shot from street level. This visual material produces a threatening atmosphere and by that, supports what is said. In two episodes (e01, e13) *eye witness* is employed for undermining credibility. While an Estonian historian refers to the intrusion of the Red Army into Estonia as maybe the most miserable period in the national history, pictures show Soviet soldiers passing by with flowers in their hands and civilians cheering at them. The pictures directly contradict the evaluation of the historian. At the end of the promotional break, just before the beginning of the second half of the interview with the Lithuanian Foreign Minister Ažubalis, a clip is screened saying in big letters: "Lithuania rejects Gay Fairy Tale for Kids" – "Conservative Values beat European Tolerance" – "No Easy Way to teach Open-mindedness." Pictures illustrate the statements. Thus, the credibility of the guest is seriously questioned as Ažubalis refers to European values and solidarity during the interview. The two last cases are extreme examples of situations in which the credibility of persons, who take contra-Russian sides, is undermined.

Role Specific Strategies. There are strategies, which can be used by both the moderator and the guest. The ones discussed hitherto belong to this category. Asking questions, however, is a strategy which is only available to the moderator. It is pursued for *guiding the conversation*. As he poses questions, Gurnov decides which issues will be discussed and to what extent. He also sets the frame. The only topics

talked about are the ones, which fit the constructed, desired reality. Aspects from the guest's answer can either be ignored or picked up depending on whether they fit the aspired reality.

The moderator can point out single aspects of a topic by explicitly enquiring about them. In the interview with the Holocaust survivor Rolnikaite, Gurnov asks about the involvement of Lithuanians in the repressions against Jews.

Gurnov: *Who was behind those repressions against the Jews? The Germans or the local population?*

Rolnikaite: *The Germans, of course. Lithuanians were merely doing what they were told. In fact, during mass executions, they were saying Ponary to use the old Polish name of the place. Germans were giving orders, but they kept low profile. If you look at the footage you only see Lithuanians in execution squads. Lithuanians agreed to do it because they would get a bottle of vodka and the cloth of the people they killed because people were executed naked* (e06, 4'40).

Generally, this is a question which can be expected in an interview. However, only shortly after, Gurnov asks the same question a second time.

Gurnov: *What about local people? Those who they call collaborators? Was there coercion? Were they forced to collaborate under the threat of death?* (e06, 6'10).

He again receives the same answer. In addition, the involvement of Lithuanians is stated in a subtitle. Through this redundancy, the involvement is highlighted to discredit Lithuanians as a nation. Apart from that, it is dedicated a prominent position within the narrative of the episode.

While this example demonstrates the influence of the moderator on a micro level, there are interviews, which seem to be composed on a broader scale, following an outlined narration from the very beginning. By asking questions, Gurnov can make the guests take their intended role in the composition even without their active concession. These episodes usually climax in a final question which has been carefully prepared through the course of the interview. Because of this, the answer Gurnov gets is of high plausibility. For example, from the starting point of the already mentioned court trail of Kononov against Latvia it is concluded that EU membership helps Latvia covering human rights' violations (e10).

Role Specific Strategies Depending on the Guest Setting. Different strategies for guiding the conversation in this way can be identified and their use is often depending on the guest's position towards the Russian stance. Pro-Russian guests are very unlikely to elaborate on contra-Russian arguments. In some interviews with pro-Russian guests, Gurnov does not employ such arguments either. Both sides agree on one version of reality. Because of this congruence, the constructed reality is unquestioned and thus appears to be commonly agreed upon. In some other episodes, Gurnov presents contra-Russian arguments and asks the guest for a comment. Although this is a usual journalistic strategy in doing objectivity, in the context of the analysed interviews it gets another spin. In all cases, the guest disproves of the presented argument and Gurnov does not challenge the confutation any further. In this way, the contra-Russian argument is devaluated. The idea, which lies behind this strategy, can be called *argument inoculation*: if viewers of the show will be confronted with the same argument in the future they might not take

it seriously because they witnessed its confutation and the confutation's acceptance. *Argument inoculation* is another example of how moderator and pro-Russian guest work together in a team in constructing an aspired reality.

The circumstances are different if the guest does not represent a pro-Russian position. It is more likely that such a guest is airing opinions, which might question the aspired reality. In such interviews other strategies are employed. For example, Gurnov puts questions in a way, which provokes guests to utter understanding or even support for pro-Russian stances. These questions are often asked in such a way that only one answer is (morally) possible.

Gurnov: *You've heard about fuelling the nationalistic feelings which is okay, I mean, for a country or let's say for a government that has a feeling that their country was oppressed for nearly 100 years want to raise the nationalistic feelings. But what's your attitude when this is done by demonising other country like Russia. Is that right? Does anybody count when you're trying to do something good for your people, or not?* (e03, 7'39).

The aim of this strategy is to get a *neutral witness* for a pro-Russian position. If a person with an allegedly pro-Russian position supports a pro-Russian argument stake is suspected. How valuable this support is, depends a lot on reputation. This is why the reputation of pro-Russian guests is highlighted frequently during the interviews. If a guest without a pro-Russian perspective supports such an argument, his credibility is much higher. There is no stake suspected and thus, the understanding or support is based on the quality of the argument itself.

Another strategy used in neutral-Russian or contra-Russian constellations is that Gurnov critically *challenges the statements* of his guests much more often than he does with pro-Russian arguments. In the interview with the Lithuanian Foreign Minister Ažubalis this strategy is taken to an extreme. Gurnov treats his guest in a close to hostile way, thus challenging his statements. For example, the repeated use of the word "listen" puts Ažubalis in the minor position of someone who looks up to Gurnov and who has to follow his commands. "Listen" is not used in this way in any other analysed episode. Furthermore, Gurnov repeatedly gives the impression that Ažubalis' arguments cannot be taken seriously. For example, talking about possible compensations for the Soviet assault on the TV tower in Vilnius in 1991, Gurnov asks:

Gurnov: *Do you really think that Russia, that the Russian Federation should pay up for that?* (e01, 14'08).

The word "really" implies that asking Russia for compensations is an idea which cannot be understood by common sense. Gurnov has to inquire if his interview partner might seriously ask for compensations. By all this, Ažubalis' status is deeply undermined. This goes hand in hand with questioning his credibility through the discussed clip in the break between the two parts of the interview.

There is another telling example of how Gurnov tries to introduce a pro-Russian valuation of events to an interview with a pro-Baltic guest, a case of *hidden evaluation*. In the interview with the Latvian State Secretary in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Teikmanis, Gurnovs puts his questions in a way which implies that it is the Latvian side that has to take all the blame for tense relations with Russia.

Gurnov: *The two presidents as far as I heard, they spoke Russian. This was the work-*

ing language of the visit. Does it mean that the Latvian allergy to all this Russian is over? (laughing) (e02, 2'39).

Now that there are some signs of improvement in Russia-Latvia relations, this is all due to the fact that Latvia gradually changes its position. Russia, on the other hand, has always maintained moderate stances which are acceptable for both sides if only Latvia left its more extreme position. On top, "allergy" can be identified as negative *category entitlement*.

Episode 11 features a unique guest constellation. It is the only one in the sample in which both a guest with a pro-Russian and a guest with a contra-Russian position are invited. To ensure that the pro-Russian guest performs more convincingly, there are different strategies employed, which can be summarised under the label of *guest inequality*. In the introduction to the topic Gurnov refers to the pro-Russian guest Demurin as a "retired diplomat and *Baltic expert*," but to his counterpart Adzhiashvili simply as a "historian." This inequality in addressing can be observed a couple of times. The presented CV of the ethnic Georgian Adzhiashvili provides no hint why he was invited to take the pro-Estonian side. While the CV is screened, off-stage commentaries do not refer to it, but give another introduction to the topic. Demurin, however, is introduced in detail. Furthermore, Demurin is granted the right to provide the interview with a summary. Thus, he assesses what has been said from his pro-Russian perspective at the very end of the episode. But even in the performance of the two guests, inequality can be observed. Demurin is obviously well-prepared. He is shown flipping through a file he brought to the show, citing accurate numbers of deported Estonians under Stalin rule. This action attributes him high credibility. In contrast, Adzhiashvili seems to be unprepared as he provides rather anecdotal proof for supporting his point of view.

The Grand Narrative. As a last set of strategies the following section will examine the construction of a "grand narrative" in the *Spotlight* episodes. The narrative goes like this: The Baltic peoples welcomed the German army as a liberator in 1941. Then, they took part in the crimes of Nazi-Germany. Although the Red Army finally liberated the Baltic States, the liberation is regarded as occupation. History is falsified to support this interpretation. As revenge for the occupation period, foremost Latvia and Estonia violate the rights of the Russian minorities living in the newly independent countries. At the same time, they glorify their taking sides with the Germans in WW2.

This grand narrative is used to interpret events and actions by Baltic politicians and historians. It grants plausibility to the Russian interpretation because the constructed stake makes sense within it. Russia plays the role of the good and just who is trying to fight evil. Therefore, the viewer is intended to take sides with Russia.

The terrible crimes of German National Socialism are collectively condemned in the Western world. They contradict common European values in the most blatant way. Stating Baltic sympathies towards Hitler-Germany serves to discredit morally the countries on international level. No-one wants to support a state, which officially glorifies fascist ideology. At the core of the strategies lies the accusation of Baltic collaboration with Nazi Germany. The involvement in SS unites and the Holocaust is often brought up. This is not only a historical issue, but it has relevance even today, as it is stated that the Baltic countries glorify Nazism.

Narochnitskaya: *What happened to our conscience? Why are we so blind? And what is the aim of this? Why nobody condemns the parades of SS legionaries in Estonia and Latvia and they erect monuments to the SS troops which …*

Gurnov: … *is illegal in the European Union and they are members of the EU, yeah.*

Narochnitskaya: *Absolutely, but this is part of the European Union* (e09, 10'53).

If Baltic positions contradict Russian ones, this is often explained by collaboration with Nazi Germany. Criticizing Russia or the USSR is tantamount to having sympathies for Fascism. To indispose repressions of the Baltic peoples during Soviet times as reasons for criticism, it is a common strategy to relativise or even justify them. *Relativisation* means that it is admitted that there were repressions, but at the same time their extent or intensity is presented as modest or mild-lined. Compared to other Soviet ethnics, the Baltic peoples suffered less and therefore should not complain. *Justification* goes a step further. Repressions are again admitted, but now they are justified.

Dyukov: *The repressive policy of the Soviet Union was gradually developed in Estonia. First ones to be repressed were those involved in war crimes during the civil war, those involved in persecuting the communists as well as the White Army officers and others. Practically, they were repressed for their past mistakes* (e13, 19'21).

Only persons, who had committed war crimes, were repressed. Repressions are presented as an ordinary form of criminal persecution. *White washing* is another strategy to present the Soviet Union in a positive way. For example, the positive role of the USSR in liberating Europe is highlighted and crimes, of which it is accused, are rebutted.

Having established the connection between criticising the Soviet Union and sympathising with fascist ideology, current conflicts are interpreted in this framework. One of the main issues is human rights. There are permanent violations of the rights of the Russian minorities in Latvia and Estonia. The motives employed to explain these violations are taken from the constructed grand narrative. The Russian minority is a victim of the Baltic will to revenge for the Soviet period. By violating the rights, Latvia in particular tries to overcome a national inferiority complex. Therefore, the minority is systematically deprived of its rights.

Gurnov: *You said you met the foreign minister of Estonia and you mentioned the obstacles that they have in fulfilling the proclaimed goals. But what are those obstacles? Can you name those obstacles? Because as it is seen from Moscow, we might be biased, but we think that the only obstacle is the absence of just good will* (e12, 19'17).

A scenario of ethnic segregation is constructed with a growing, even physical threat to the Russian minority.

Kucherena: *I will be honest. Even though I wouldn't want to accuse the political leadership of Latvia of doing it deliberately, what we have there now shows that the position of the government is just straight up deconstructive. And it is also escalating* (e14, 23'35).

It is only Russia which pays attention to this injustice. Court decisions, both in the Baltic States and at the European Court of Human Rights, are motivated by an anti-Russian bias and thus fail to condemn these violations. It is Russia's duty to protect the minorities.

The discussion about rewriting and thus falsifying history follows the same scheme. *Stake* is given to actions of Baltic politicians, thus stating morally questionable motives. For example, history is politicised to fuel nationalistic feelings.

Gurnov: *Why do you think historians in these new European states, particularly in Ukraine and the Baltic States, why do they glorify Nazi collaborationists so much?*

Torkunov: *As for our neighbours I would like to repeat once again that it was above all the political will of their leadership. In this way, the leaders of those countries tried to strengthen their positions as national or rather nationalistic leaders* (e05, 14'39).

This statement implies that there is no scientific ground for rewriting the Russian interpretation of history. Rewriting is presented as a strategy of foreign politicians who want to strengthen their positions. Another motive for challenging the Russian interpretation of history is the will of the Baltic States to justify or even deny their collaboration with Nazi-Germany. They try to improve their international reputation and self-identity. Therefore, they ignore historic facts and invent a new interpretation of history.

The strategy used in the last examples is constructing the Baltic States as having some *stake* in a course of actions. The reasons for having a stake are drawn from the logic of the grand narrative. Contra-Russian arguments are presented as being made up strategically. They do not correspond with factual reality.

Conclusion

This analysis started with describing the news network *RT* as a tool for Russian mediated public diplomacy which is designed to convince its viewers of the rightness of the Russian stance. The interview show *Spotlight*, one of the flag ships of *RT*, was examined in a qualitative, exploratory content analysis. Russian-Baltic relations were chosen as applied object of investigation.

The analysis identified a broad range of different strategies which are pursued to fulfil the objective of the programme. Already in the run-up to the interview, first strategic selections are made by choosing topic and guest(s). Depending on the position of the guest(s) towards the Russian stance, different strategies are employed. There is a broad scope for pro-Russian guest(s) to present and justify their opinion, while episodes with a non-pro-Russian guest aim at either provoking him to utter understanding or even support for the Russian stance or to delegitimize his position. The moderator uses his specific role privileges to put questions in a way which takes the talk to the desired outcome. More general strategies aim at constructing a one-sided pro-Russian reality, which appears to be factual and true. This involves presenting pro-Russian stances as mere descriptions of an "objective reality" as well as attributing credibility and incredibility. In the context of Russian-Baltic relations, a grand narrative, deployed to evaluate actions of those involved, is constructed. Russia plays the role of the good and just. In contrast, Baltic actors are primarily motivated by the will to revenge for the period of Soviet occupation and their sympathies towards Fascism.

Throughout all the found conflicts between Russia and its Baltic neighbours, the described strategies aim at isolating the Baltic States in an international environment. The Russian position prevails from the perspective of justice, morality, truth and common sense. By constructing such a reality, *Spotlight* tries to convince its

viewers of taking sides with Russia. As an actor in the arena of the public sphere, it aims at influencing public opinion in a pro-Russian way. National governments which monitor public opinion may adopt a Russia-friendly position. Within international bodies (e.g. EU, NATO, Council of Europe) they may act to the benefit of Russia or at least not confront it. Thus, *RT* becomes a tool for achieving Russian foreign policies' goals.

While this analysis mapped out employed strategies, it does not give any clue whether they are used successfully. To explore if the viewers of *RT* actually take sides with the Russian stance audience reception has to be examined. Different situations of reception should be considered, e.g. live broadcast and videos uploaded to *YouTube*. Due to material limitation, the exploratory design did not allow to investigate a representative number of *Spotlight* episodes. While possibly all episodes with a thematic link to the Baltic States were included into the sample, other issues were systematically ignored. It might be that there are topics with a more balanced covering, particularly non-political topics. This is presumably of some importance to journalistic mimicry. Finally, it is not possible to draw conclusions about the complete *RT* programme.

Despite these limitations, the analysis provides a detailed insight into how a pro-Russian reality is constructed as factual. It is the first analysis which focuses on the application of persuasive strategies in *RT* shows and one of the rare content analyses of the network's programme. Therefore, it is an important step towards an understanding of the working method of *RT* and other Russian mediated public diplomacy outcasts such as *Russia beyond the Headlines* or *Russia Now*. The findings provide a useful ground for further research. Quantitative analyses should be conducted in order to validate and generalise the outcomes of this study and thus to deepen the understanding of Russian mediated public diplomacy.

Notes:

1. There are two further episodes of possible relevance which are not available online. Hence, they are not part of the sample.

2. The starting time of the extracts is indicated in the brackets (minute'second). Actions, subtitles, and background screen are quoted only if necessary to understand the extract. Differences in style of language depend on the fact that some interviews are conducted in English, others in Russian. Russian interviews get a voice-over in English, which removes some specificities of verbal communication such as repetition of words or incomplete sentences.

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