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PETROVA NATALIIA DMITRIEVNA

RUSSIA IN THE EUROPEAN UNION'S FOREIGN POLICY STRATEGY (2014–2024): A POLITICAL-TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

Specialization: 5.5.4 – International Relations, Global and Regional Studies

DISSERTATION ABSTRACT
for the degree of
Candidate of Political Sciences

Academic Supervisor:
Candidate of Historical Sciences, Associate Professor
Sergey Vladimirovich Demidenko

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The relevance of the research topic is driven by the following circumstances:

1. First, the growing scholarly interest in discourse and text analysis within the field of International Relations. Given the impact of digitalization and the increasing importance of public documents and statements, these approaches make it possible to identify deep-seated value differences, the processes by which the image of the "Other" is constructed, and the mechanisms of institutional legitimation regarding the EU's foreign policy course.
2. Second, the need to understand EU strategic communication in the context of the intensifying "hybrid threats" narrative and the shift toward a multi-layered security system. These concepts are emerging as a response to perceived Russian influence, particularly in the post-Soviet space. In this context, it is crucial for Russia to understand how its image is constructed within European discourse through such communication practices and to determine the appropriate tactics for positioning the country in the foreign policy arena.
3. Third, the profound transformation of relations between the European Union and the Russian Federation during the 2014–2024 period, marked by a shift from a strategic partnership format to a confrontational model of interaction. The events of 2014 and subsequent European security crises led to a revision of EU policy toward Russia; this resulted in the institutionalization of a new engagement strategy, an expansion of sanctions, and a shift in official rhetoric, wherein Russia came to be characterized as a source of threats or a systemic challenge to European security.
4. Fourth, the emergence — within official EU documents — of a new political narrative that legitimizes the policy of containing Russia and isolating it internationally. Within this narrative, Russia is portrayed as an actor that undermines Europe's energy security, violates norms of international law, and destabilizes regional security. Conversely, the Russian side promotes an alternative interpretation of international processes, invoking principles such as multipolarity, strategic stability, and the indivisibility of security. The coexistence of these competing interpretations gives rise to a conflict of political narratives that is becoming a significant element of contemporary international communication.

5. Fifth, the growing importance of information and communication technologies and political communication in modern international interaction. The rapid spreading of information via the Internet and social media, along with the development of digital diplomacy, is transforming texts and public statements into key instruments of foreign policy influence. Analyzing these texts is becoming a crucial way to understand the underlying mechanisms behind the formation of identity and the legitimation of the EU's foreign policy strategy.

The level of scientific research on the topic. To address the study's objective, it is necessary to outline the various bodies of scholarly literature relevant to the subject matter, as they facilitate a comprehensive analysis of the work's constituent parts. General issues regarding the functioning and security of the EU are addressed in the works of N.K. Arbatova, T.A. Romanova, L.O. Igumnova, O.G. Lekarenko, Yu.G. Agafonov, G.M. Mikhaleva, M.A. Gordeeva, N.Yu. Kaveshnikov, N.A. Medushevsky, M.N. Marchenko, E.M. Deryabina, O. Holman, R. Whitman, N. Tocci, E. Barbé, and P. Morillas, as well as in collective monographs published by the Institute of Europe of the Russian Academy of Sciences (IE RAS) under the editorship of Al.A. Gromyko and V.V. Zhurkin. The works of T.A. Romanova, M.L. Entin, M.N. Marchenko, N.Yu. Kaveshnikov, and E.M. Deryabina elucidate the institutional and legal foundations of the EU's international activities and help structure an understanding of the system of EU institutions and the principles governing interaction between member states and external actors. Furthermore, monographs by L.O. Igumnova, O.G. Lekarenko, Yu.G. Agafonov, O. Holman, and R. Whitman offer valuable, in-depth, and multifaceted analyses of the EU foreign policy concept and recent development trends—insights that are particularly relevant to the study's chosen timeframe. The IE RAS monograph "Security of Europe" explores fundamental concepts of EU security — including military, economic, and information security — which is especially pertinent to Chapter 3; meanwhile, a collective study from 2023 addresses contemporary aspects of Europe's political development, including the role of media, the policies of individual states (specifically Germany, relevant to the case study in Chapter 2), and security challenges.

Research by N.K. Arbatova, N. Tocci, E. Barbé, and P. Morillas help assess the contribution of the 2016 EU Global Strategy to the transformation of EU foreign policy — including regarding Russia — and analyze the prioritization within that policy as well as the EU's self-conception as a global political actor and a "pole" of power on the world stage. When specifically addressing the analysis of Russia-EU relations, including key changes, trends, and areas of interaction, one must mention the works of E.G. Entina and M.L. Entin, I.S. Ivanov, S.S. Zhiltsov, and V.A. Ryzhkov. These authors identify the key factors shaping the evolution of Russia-EU relations and attempt to forecast future stages of this relationship, drawing upon the political, economic, and social context. Furthermore, it is worth highlighting the body of scholarly literature dedicated to the regional and global aspects of how the European Union perceives Russia on the political stage.

The clash of interests within the EU's Eastern Partnership countries — territories that Russia views as part of the post-Soviet space and a zone of significant political and economic influence — has been examined in works by R.S. Mukhametov, B. Mikhailenko and V.I. Mikhailenko, L. Delcour, B. Futak-Campbell, I. Musiałkowska, P. Idczak, O. Potlaka, and M.G.A. Witsere. Research by R.S. Mukhametov and B. Futak-Campbell focuses on the specific characteristics of Russia's "soft power" in Eastern Partnership countries, how these states and the EU perceive it, and its effectiveness and methods. These articles explore the perception of Russia's "soft power" as a threat within the EU — a crucial element of the EU's strategy regarding Russia. In a thematically similar study, M.G.A. Witsere analyzes the concept of hybrid threats in the context of Russian influence in the region and reflects on the role of the 2016 Global Strategy in sharpening the EU's foreign policy focus on these threats in its relations with Russia. A study by I. Musiałkowska, P. Idczak, and O. Potlaka examines the EU's Eastern policy through the lens of policy coherence between EU institutions and member states; this coherence is a fundamental principle of the Common Foreign and Security Policy and shapes the conditions for formulating strategies regarding Russia's role.

Global aspects of the EU's perception of Russia are addressed in studies by V.I. Bartenev, M.N. Katz, and E.A. Primakov. At the same time, a comprehensive political-textual analysis of the transformation of Russia's image in official European Union documents from 2014 to 2024 has not yet received sufficient attention in domestic political science.

The object of this study is the European Union's foreign policy from 2014 to 2024.

The subject of this study is the EU's foreign policy communication, particularly regarding Russia.

The aim of this study is to determine — using methods of political text analysis and discourse analysis — how the image of Russia is shaped and transformed in official EU documents from 2014 to 2024, and to examine how this rhetorical transformation serves as an instrument of the European Union's foreign policy strategy and identity-building processes.

In line with this aim, the following key ***research objectives*** were established:

1. To analyze the theoretical foundations of the European Union's foreign policy strategy regarding Russia;
2. To define the key characteristics of political text analysis as a research method, including within the context of the EU's specific nature as an actor in international relations;
3. To analyze the institutional and regulatory mechanisms governing the formulation and implementation of the European Union's foreign policy, serving as the context for the shaping of political discourse regarding Russia;
4. To identify the factors shaping the image of Russia in EU foreign policy documents since 2014;
5. To identify narratives regarding Russia within the political communication of specific EU member states (Germany and Italy);
6. To determine how EU institutions formulate and convey — in official documents — the rationale for competitive interaction with Russia in the post-Soviet space;

7. To identify the mechanisms involved in the textual construction of Russian "hybrid threats" within EU strategic documents.

The study's ***hypothesis*** implies that between 2014 and 2024 the European Union, by framing Russia as a systemic threat in its documents and rhetoric, used discursive practices not only to legitimize a policy of containment, but also to reinforce its own normative identity. This confirms the thesis that the excessive homogenization of EU discourse simultaneously fosters the Union's consolidation and constrains the diversity of national interpretations among member states.

Key propositions submitted for defense, possessing scientific novelty:

1. It has been demonstrated that during the 2010s, the European Union constructed an image of Russia primarily as a partner, notwithstanding certain elements of its perception as a potential threat in the spheres of energy, security, and democracy. Following 2014 — and particularly after the start of the special military operation in 2022 — a persistent narrative of Russia as a systemic threat emerged within official EU strategies and communications, cemented through institutional documents, rhetorical formulas, and sanctions. This reflects a shift in the perception of Russia from an ambivalent partner to a direct threat and evidences the evolution of EU communication, the strengthening of its normative identity, and its aspiration to global leadership based on that identity.

2. It has been determined that official EU documents, communiqués, strategies, and press releases exhibit a consistent institutional language and characteristic textual structures; these not only convey the Union's values and goals but also systematically shape and reinforce an image of Russia as an "Other" and a "threat"—a finding derived from a comprehensive political-textual and institutional discourse analysis of a corpus of EU texts (including the most recent materials from 2022–2024, which have not previously been studied in detail in Russian scholarship) and aimed, among other things, at consolidating EU member states.

3. It has been established that despite the presence of pragmatic interests and elements of partnership in the policies of individual EU member states, the EU's institutionalized foreign policy and common rhetoric create rigid identity frameworks

in which alternative interpretations are marginalized through mechanisms of textual control and the uniformity of official communication.

4. It has been found that the competition between the EU and Russia in the post-Soviet space is reflected in EU strategic documents and programs, which shape a narrative centered on "hybrid threats," "information wars," and the need for democratic reforms. These discourses legitimize the expansion of EU influence and cast Russia as a systemic adversary — a dynamic particularly evident in the case of Kazakhstan.

Theoretical and practical significance of the research. The theoretical significance of the study lies in its contribution to the development of political science by conceptualizing the mechanism of the political-discursive transformation of the state image as a component of foreign policy strategy. The work substantiates the understanding of official EU texts and communications as instruments for the institutional legitimation of foreign policy, thereby expanding the scope of the constructivist approach in international relations theory through an analysis of rhetorical constructs and discursive framing strategies within an inter-institutional context. The analytical approaches proposed in the study can be utilized for the further development of theories regarding political textology, institutional discourse analysis, and the study of normative power in international relations.

The practical significance of the research lies in the potential application of its findings across four key areas:

1. Educational and instructional activities: the dissertation materials can be used to develop and update courses on international relations, EU foreign policy, political communication, strategic analysis, and political textology.

2. Analytical and expert practice: the identified rhetorical patterns and transformations in the image of Russia within EU political documents can be utilized in the preparation of reports, recommendations, and forecasts within the field of international analysis.

3. Strategic communication decision-making: the research findings provide a deeper understanding of how the image of an "enemy" or "threat" is constructed through language and official documents; this insight can inform the formulation of

public diplomacy and media strategies for the Russian Federation, as well as the development of counter-narratives and communication policies.

4. In the formulation of strategies for the Russian Federation's engagement with the European Union and states falling within its normative and ideological sphere of influence: the research findings can be utilized by the Russian Foreign Ministry, the State Duma, national security agencies, and other political actors involved in international relations to analyze current political processes and generate forecasts based on the identified narratives.

Research design and methods. The key research method is qualitative content analysis, supplemented by discourse analysis techniques. In this study, discourse analysis serves as an additional analytical tool, enabling the interpretation of identified categories within the context of power relations, norms, and identities.

The study also employs systems and structural-functional approaches, allowing EU foreign policy communication to be viewed both as an element of the broader international relations system and as a mechanism for maintaining the Union's internal institutional integrity through the reproduction of specific norms, values, and security perceptions—while accounting for the distinct positions of individual states.

Furthermore, the study utilizes the case study method, which facilitates a detailed, contextual examination of a specific instance or bounded system, revealing underlying mechanisms, logics of action, and cause-and-effect relationships.

The validity of the research findings is supported by an analysis of a wide range of theoretical and empirical sources, including works by domestic and foreign scholars in the fields of political communication, European studies, constructivist theory, and institutional discourse analysis. The study draws on an analysis of over 100 official documents from EU institutions (the European Commission, the European Parliament, and the European External Action Service) spanning the period from 2014 to 2024, including strategic communications, resolutions, press releases, and policy papers on security and foreign affairs.

Approbation of dissertation results. Four (4) works with a total volume of 3 printer's sheets have been published on the dissertation topic.

Materials related to the dissertation published by the author include:

B. Articles in publications included in the List of journals recommended by the Higher Attestation Commission (VAK) of Russia for publishing the main scientific results of dissertations for the academic degree of Candidate (Doctor) of Sciences:

1. Chegodar N.D. Specifics of European Union foreign policy decision-making: the case of relations with Russia // Issues of National and Federal Relations, 2023, Vol. 13, No. 4. DOI: 10.35775/PSI.2023.97.4.048

2. Chegodar N.D. Evolution of the Eastern Partnership project: strategic use of European Union "soft power" against Russia // Bulletin of Moscow University. Series 12: Political Science, 2023, Vol. 1, No. 1 – pp. 81-97. DOI: 10.55959/MSU0868-4871-12-2023-1-1-81-97

3. Chegodar N.D. Political communication in modern international relations: the case of the European Union // Issues of Political Science, Vol. 13, No. 3. DOI: 10.35775/PSI.2023.91.3.045.

C. Articles in scientific journals indexed in the RSCI database.

1. Sharoychenko N.D. European Union policy on countering Russia's "soft power" in Eastern Partnership countries // Bulletin of Moscow Region State University, 2022, Vol. 2, No. 2 – pp. 108-123.

Structure of the dissertation research. The work consists of an introduction, three chapters comprising seven sections, a conclusion, a list of references and sources, and appendices.