Mediated Public Diplomacy: How the Russian English-language news network RT framed the ongoing tension between Russia and the West that ensued from the Ukrainian crisis

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Abstract
Mediated public diplomacy plays an important role in attaining foreign policy objectives by communicating with foreign audiences in order to establish a dialogue intending to inform and influence. The Russian state-funded global network RT serves as an important tool of Russian mediated public diplomacy. Its purpose is not only to cover major global events that are often missed by the Western mainstream media, but also to apprise an international audience of an alternative pro-Russian perspective. Interestingly, although there are a few researches analysing Moscow's efforts to rebrand its international image in the last decade, there has been very little work done giving a good insight into Russian media. This dissertation seeks to participate in the discussion about public diplomacy in general by applying the framing theory as a tool of mediated diplomacy. A qualitative analysis of 97 articles discussing the effects of international sanctions imposed on Russia in the aftermath of the escalation of the Ukrainian crisis, revealed a constructed pro-Russian narrative. Several strategies are pursued to convince its audience about the rightness of the Russian stance and gain support for the Kremlin's assertions. Finally, RT aims to wipe out the demonisation of Putin and its administration and counterbalance the penetration of the West in its sphere of influence.

Keywords: public diplomacy, mediated public diplomacy, framing theory, frames, RT, Crimean crisis, Ukrainian crisis, Russia
# Table of Contents

1. Introduction .......................................................................................................................... 4  
   1.1 Research Purpose .......................................................................................................... 5  
   1.2 Research Questions ...................................................................................................... 6  
   1.3 Research Limitations and Delimitations ...................................................................... 7  
   1.4 Chapter Overview ........................................................................................................ 8  

2. Background ............................................................................................................................ 9  
   2.1 The Origins of Russia's New Conflict with the West ................................................. 9  
   2.2 A Change in the Russian Foreign Policy .................................................................. 10  
   2.3 Russian Perceptions of Western Influence .............................................................. 10  
   2.4 Crafting a Russian Strategy ....................................................................................... 11  
   2.5 Russian Information Warfare ................................................................................... 11  
   2.6 RT: Mouthpiece of the Kremlin? ............................................................................... 12  

3. Public Diplomacy .................................................................................................................. 14  
   3.1 Soft Power .................................................................................................................. 16  
   3.2 The Impact of Mass Media on Foreign Policy ......................................................... 17  
   3.3 The Russian Case ....................................................................................................... 18  

4. Framing Theory ..................................................................................................................... 20  
   4.1 Framing as a Process .................................................................................................... 21  
   4.2 News Framing .............................................................................................................. 22  
   4.3 Identifying Frames in the News ................................................................................. 23  
   4.4 Typologies of News Frames ...................................................................................... 24  
   4.5 International Frame-building .................................................................................... 25  

5. Methodology .......................................................................................................................... 26  
   5.1 Research Design .......................................................................................................... 26  
   5.2 Data Selection and Collection .................................................................................... 27  
   5.3 Coding ........................................................................................................................ 28  
   5.4 Reliability and Validity ............................................................................................... 29  
   5.5 Ethical Considerations ............................................................................................... 30  

6. Analysis ................................................................................................................................ 31  
   6.1 Topics Discussed .......................................................................................................... 31  
   6.2 Interviewees ................................................................................................................ 32  
   6.3 Strategies for Reality Construction .......................................................................... 34  
   6.4 Framing Functions ...................................................................................................... 39  
   6.5 The Constructed Narrative ......................................................................................... 43  
   6.6 Relevance to Public Diplomacy Objectives .............................................................. 45  

7. Conclusion .............................................................................................................................. 46  
   7.1 Critical Review ............................................................................................................ 46  
   7.2 Discussion ..................................................................................................................... 47  
   7.3 Future Research .......................................................................................................... 48  

Bibliography ............................................................................................................................. 49
1. Introduction

As soon as the fighting in Ukraine was intensified and separatists conducted a referendum on independence on March 16, 2014, international affairs analysts in the United States, Europe, Russia and elsewhere increasingly started discussing about the menace of a second Cold War between the United States and Russia (Saunders 2014). Apparently, the emergence of such wording could not come without big confrontation.

In an article in The National Interest, Legvold (2014) stresses that the usage of the term ‘new Cold War’ for describing the ongoing crisis between Russia and the West should not by any means be inconsiderate. Besides, he argues, the current tension “hardly matches the depth and scale of the contest that dominated the international system in the second half of the twentieth century” (Legvold 2014). Still, Legvold recognises that the collapse in relations between Russia and the West deserves to be labelled as a new Cold War, since it would be quite impossible for their relations to restore their status prior to the Ukrainian crisis. He appears to be quite pessimistic and essentially sees no hope for Moscow and Washington to find common ground for deliberation on a number of critical issues.

On November 13, 2014, an article on CNN's website was titled “Russian provocations on the rise: Is it a new Cold War?” questioning on the same topic with the occasion of the largest submarine hunt in Swedish waters since the end of Cold War. In addition to that, the tripling of intercepts of Russian planes in European airspace by NATO in 2014, its increased military presence and exercises along its Eastern borders, have all contributed to a greater contact between the two sides than before (Greene 2014). In this context, Moscow allegedly tests its defence systems and seeks “propaganda victories by using force, or the threat of it, against its neighbours” (Greene 2014).

On December 1, 2014, in his interview with the Russian state-owned TASS news agency, former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev accused the American “triumphalism” of stirring a ‘new Cold War’ (Parfitt and Oliphant 2014). A day before the partial ceasefire agreement between the Ukrainian military and separatists forces on December 2, he called for “avid militarists” to stop dragging Europe into conflict (Parfitt and Oliphant 2014). Furthermore, Gorbachev openly argued that “now there are once again signs of a Cold War”. He further warned that fences built around Russia may push towards an anti-Russian sentiment that happens “in the presence and due to instigation from the American side” (Gorbachev 2014). However, Gorbachev remarked that there is still time to diffuse the stalemate between Russia and the West.

Just like Legvold (2014) sums up, the Ukrainian crisis is central to the direction the
confrontation will take. That is because, at the moment, the dispute over Ukraine seems to be very tense. Therefore, if the Ukrainian crisis deepens in the following period, so will do the new Cold War. Conversely, if it somehow dwindles, the new Cold War will weaken as well. Though, as in the case of the original Cold War, there are many other factors that can influence the fortune of the relations between the two sides. Indeed, several months after the outbreak of the crisis in Crimea, the equilibrium of power seems more unstable than even before in this century.

Since its foundation in 2005, RT, the Russian state-funded broadcaster directed to audiences outside Russia, has been harshly criticised for being a mouthpiece of the Kremlin (Ioffe 2010), while the network is self-proclaimed as merely giving “an alternative perspective on major global issues, and acquaint[ing] an international audience with the Russian viewpoint” (“About RT”, n.d.). By any means, the role of RT can be analysed with the theory of public diplomacy. Broadly speaking, public diplomacy is the communication with foreign audiences in order to establish a dialogue intending to inform and influence. In other words, it describes the organised attempts of a certain government to attain its strategic objectives without the use of military or economic coercion. The term, in fact, has no specific definition, and usually allows a number of different ones that change over time. However, public diplomacy can be more easily described in terms of the instruments and methods it employs.

Moscow's public diplomacy has attracted a growing interest in the last decade (see Tsygankov 2006; Simons 2011, 2014). Still, the curiosity for this particular research emanates from the renewed ongoing tension, hostility and political antagonism, between Russia and the West that dramatically escalated throughout 2014. As a country that seeks to reintroduce itself to foreign audiences, Russia aims at enhancing its power and stabilising its strategic role in the Eurasian region (Simons 2014). In this context, Russia seems in need of presenting its own perspective on current affairs surrounding the Ukrainian crisis. To secure an alternative coverage of the events, the Kremlin employs RT as a tool for attaining its public diplomacy objectives. However, as for the moment, there is but minimal research on RT that focuses on the interpretations it suggests and the strategies it pursues to convince its audience about the rightness of the Russian stance.

1.1 Research Purpose

The purpose of this study is to contribute to the research about mediated public diplomacy. This can be fulfilled through the investigation of the role of RT as an instrument for Russia's mediated public diplomacy on the occasion of the Ukrainian crisis. In other words, my goal is to exhibit how the apparent growing tension between Russia and the West is portrayed and framed by RT and its relevance for Russian public diplomacy. To this end, I will focus on the generated content related to
Given the unfortunate concurrence of the current European economic and political crisis and the decline of the United State's diplomatic leverage in European and Eurasian affairs, Putin seems willing to avail himself of this opportunity. Therefore, the academic relevance of the thesis will be well resonated by its very relevance and importance to international current affairs. After all, a new period of contest between the two sides West suggests that even if the new Cold War was shorter that the original one, it would be surely costly and with long-term consequences for both sides, given the multipolarity of the current equilibrium of world power.

Since I do not intend to falsify the dominant paradigm of how public communications media conduct their mission of international relations, I study this topic with the main objective to explore a specific case (i.e. the role of RT) in a lens that has not been done before. Although there are a few researches analysing Moscow's efforts to rebrand its international image in the last decade, there has been very little work done giving a good insight into Russian media. Thereby, I aspire to contribute to the understanding of the strategies of RT and deepen the knowledge of Russian mediated public diplomacy. Besides, understanding what is the message that the Kremlin wants to disseminate to foreign audiences and why it should be channelled through RT, a news network of significant and confirmed strategic importance, would reveal the possibility to respond to it.

1.2 Research Questions

As mentioned above, this dissertation will look into how RT framed the ongoing tension between Russia and the West that ensued from the Ukrainian crisis. Formally, the main research questions were formulated as follows:

1) What are the main frames produced by RT during the international sanctions?
This question seeks to explore how RT attempted to build the narrative of the rightness of the Russian stance through news framing. By extension, this question points to investigate what of Entman's four basic functions (i.e. problem definition, causal analysis, moral evaluation, and remedy promotion) each of these frames perform.

2) How do these frames contribute to Russian public diplomacy?
This question intends to examine RT's coverage of the Ukrainian crisis in respect with the public diplomacy goals of the Kremlin. A ten-month period, from March to December 2014, was selected for the investigation due to the international sanctions imposed on Russia.
1.3 Research Limitations and Delimitations

In a qualitative research like this, there are always concerns regarding the generalisation of the findings to a larger extent. Correspondingly, my case study is limited in its findings in the followings ways. First and foremost, the material I analysed comes entirely from a single platform (i.e. RT). That means it is impossible to draw general conclusions for framing as a mean to exercise public diplomacy in the sense that, for instance, a comparative study could provide. It is not, though, the purpose of this dissertation to challenge the general theory, nor to make daring methodological propositions. On the contrary, the focal point is plainly to dig as deep as possible in this specific case and hence to bring out all its characteristics and mechanisms.

Besides, from the very beginning, I was not interested in replicating a common research design and conduct a comparative study. More precisely, I wanted to avoid conducting a study that would contrast the coverage of the Ukrainian crisis by different media outlets (e.g. BBC-RT or CNN-RT). This approach would severely jeopardise the validity of the research since a significant discordance in coverage would be quite easy to foretell. While this study intends to map out how and what objectives of Russian public diplomacy RT serves, it does not give any clue whether they are successfully fulfilled. Another limitation regards the fact that I have not examined the viewership and readership of RT, nor calculated the social media effect. Thus, it was impossible to explore the framing effects on foreign audiences.

A challenge of the present study concerns data selection. While the volume of the material was massive, the research design did not allow me to investigate a more representative sample of articles. Even though all articles had a strong thematic link to the Ukrainian crisis under the prism of the sanctions imposed on Russia, other aspects of the turmoil were systematically ignored. It might also be the case that there are other topics with a more balanced and less partial coverage than the one analysed in this research.

Had I the opportunity to redesign the research, I would have selected and organised my material in a whole different way so that I could focus entirely on op-eds instead of being involved with news report articles. Throughout the coding process, I had a hard time to analyse this part of the material. Firstly, this came from the fact that news report articles are short texts covering the current affairs with a high level of objectivity. Besides, mere news reporting does not really offer the possibility for the author to step in and evaluate or interpret the given event, issue or actor involved. Secondly, another problem was that I had to analyse a big sample of news report articles that had remarkably little to contribute to my findings. That is to say that I was quite unfortunate to spend too many hours investigating this material over again while trying to identify framing
mechanisms within it. On the other hand, op-eds proved far more appropriate for my research design. Normally being significantly longer compared to news reports, they were abundant in excerpts that hid a broad range of framing strategies. Having the insight that I lacked when I set up the research, now I would decide to focus exclusively on a smaller, more manageable sample of op-eds.

1.4 Chapter Overview

The introductory chapter lays out a brief description of the topic, purpose and motivation of the study. Two research questions are presented along with the limitations and delimitations.

The second chapter pores over the background of the newly revived antagonism between Russia and the West by exploring the origins of this animosity. Several aspects of Russia's long-term diplomatic interests and objectives are reviewed. The specific nature of RT is also pointed out.

The third chapter delves into the theoretical concept of public diplomacy and more particularly, mediated public diplomacy as introduced by Entman. It further goes through the concept of soft power and the potential impact of mass media on foreign policy. A closer look at the distinctiveness of the Russian case is taken.

The fourth chapter sets out by explaining the framing theory and arguing for its relevance to study international frame-building. At the same time the researcher maps out the different approaches and previous researches in the field of news framing.

The fifth chapter discusses the methodology applied to the study and argues for the relevance of the research. The research design presents the qualitative tools chosen for conducting this research. Moreover, a detailed account of data selection and collection and coding. Reliability, validity and possible ethical considerations are addressed here.

The sixth chapter consists of the analysis of the main topics as emerged from the coding process. The strategies that help the construction of a pro-Russian reality and the classification of framing functions are demonstrated. At the end of this chapter the fully deployed narrative is presented.

The seventh chapter includes a critical review of the findings. Building upon the results of the research questions, this section will extensively discuss about the implications of the study. Limitations and potential further research are also examined.
2. Background

2.1 The Origins of Russia's New Conflict with the West

Almost twenty-five years after the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the ongoing Ukraine crisis marks a radically new and more unstable stage for the relations between Russia and the West. Putin's third administration has taken steps for Russia that directly challenges the order that centred on the United States and its NATO allies, most characteristically in Syria and Ukraine. However, the crisis in US-Russian relations extends well beyond these cases, and hence it is rather possible to last much longer than any confrontation of the post-Cold War era.

Mankoff (2014, 5) suggests that the United States should resort to a combination of Cold War-style containment and engagement policy in order to confront the challenges posed by a revisionist Russia. He also argues that Washington should not only escalate the economic measures against Moscow, but further exert political and military pressure, while maintaining communication channels with the Kremlin in search of a diplomatic settlement. Besides, without regard to the shortcomings of the post-1991 European security framework, the failure of Russia's strategy to change the status quo by force, remains of vital interest for the United States foreign policy. As the sole superpower though, in a steadily declining status, the United States has endeavoured to avoid a sustained confrontation with Russia. Instead, it focuses on gradually intensifying the economic pressure on Moscow through sanctions, while “emphasising the availability of “off ramps” to Russian President Vladimir Putin” (Mankoff 2014, 6).

Apparently, this strategy has proved quite inefficient as for December 2014. Although the imposed sanctions did have significant cost on the Russian economy, they failed to change the cost-benefit equilibrium for the Kremlin. Having secured its grip on the self-proclaimed Republic of Crimea, Russia continues to provide military assistance to the separatist groups in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts. Meanwhile, Moscow has increased its military provocations against both NATO members and neutral states, such as Sweden and Finland. At the same time, the usefulness of the sanctions has been put into question within the transatlantic alliance, given that the economies of certain European countries accustomed to extensive trade with Russia seem severely afflicted, amidst the ongoing financial crisis, and thus unable to go back to growth rates.

This crisis is not only about the position of Ukraine in the European economic and security context, but first and foremost about Russia's. Both countries remained outside of the institutional reforms undertaken towards a more liberal and deeply integrated within European framework. Evidently, Russia was not seen as part of this process. Though, the assumption that Moscow shared
these values created the impression that Russia could be part of this expanded notion of the West. Finally, this transition for Russia was never effectuated, as it intercepted by a nationalistic introversion on the one side and economic failure and institutional inertia on the other, hence paving the way for a growing suspicion between the two sides.

2.2 A Change in the Russian Foreign Policy

The Ukrainian crisis is much more complicated than Moscow's discontent towards the prospect of Ukraine signing an association agreement with Brussels which would lead the country's trade patterns and centre of gravity away from the Russian sphere (Mankoff 2014, 11). In fact, there is an underlying change in Russia's foreign policy in recent years, driven by the global financial crisis as well as the inherent problems of its political system. Putin appears to strive not only to hinder the expansion of Western institutions in his area of influence, but also to create an alternative order (Mankoff 2014, 11). The latter objective aims at challenging the predominance of the establish Western, liberal international system at both the European and global level. In this context, Russia's strategy to intervene in Ukraine not only drags Kiev on the negotiation table for a revised European security framework, but so does with the West (Mankoff 2014, 11).

2.3 Russian Perceptions of Western Influence

Even though Russia has taken a critical stance about the expansion of Western influence in the post-Soviet states, it did little to prevent this (Mankoff 2014, 11). Nevertheless, in recent years, the prevalent idea that the West is in decline while other peripheral countries are the “emerging” powers, has allowed Russia to fight back for primacy in Eastern Europe. This narrative has been further fuelled by the Eurozone debt crisis that hit hard even its core economies, especially since Russia itself recovered rather fast benefited from high oil and gas prices. An overture towards China and the establishment of institutions, such as the BRICS summit and the New Development Bank (NDB), clearly demonstrate the belief that Russia has an important role to play as an independent power in a new multipolar global order.

Under these circumstances, the inauguration of a more confrontational foreign policy by Moscow is based on the narrative that Washington has been reluctant to restrain its power projection in areas of fundamental geostrategic interest for Russia (Mankoff 2014, 11-12). This can become more comprehensible if we take into account the fact that Russia always considered the colour revolutions in Ukraine and Georgia that installed pro-Western governments to be backed by the United States. As a country that regards itself a great power, Russia asserts the United States' unilateral actions threaten its security interests while undermining regional stability. In his October
2014 speech to the Valdai Discussion Club, Putin reminded that “unilateral diktat and the imposition of [the West’s] own template has brought about the opposite result: instead of resolving conflicts, they have escalated; instead of sovereign, secure states, [there is a] growing field of chaos”\(^1\). Similar to the colour revolutions of the 2000s, the Kremlin deemed the Euromaidan unrest in Kiev that led to the removal of Yanukovych from office in early 2014 as part of a US strategy to estrange the post-Soviet states from Russia and put them under Western influence. It remains of vital importance for Russia to keep Ukraine and its neighbours in its geopolitical orbit, out of both EU and NATO.

**2.4 Crafting a Russian Strategy**

Attacking the West and all its works fits well into the strategy of national mobilisation that Putin has launched to fight domestic political unrest. Scared of the potential of a colour revolution in Russia itself, the Kremlin responds to this threat with “a combination of repression and the deliberate cultivation of national chauvinism to provide an alternative narrative” (Mankoff 2014, 13). During his third presidential term, one of Putin's main foreign policy objectives is also the project of Eurasian integration, embodied in the Eurasian Economic Union that came finally into force on January 1 2015. Presumably, Ukraine with its industrial economy and ties with Europe was planned to hold a key role in this union. Therefore, Russia's interference to prevent an association agreement between Ukraine and EU should not surprise anyone.

Indeed, Russia envisions Eurasia as a project to counterbalance EU and NATO that are determined by liberal principles, which it sees as incompatible. Thereby we can explain the risks and costs that Moscow has undertaken to secure the participation of its neighbours in the Eurasian project, while preventing Ukraine and Armenia from a closer affiliation with the EU and its liberal ideals. Meanwhile, Russia attempts not only to block the Western organisations' expansion, namely the EU and NATO, but to undermine them from within. By manipulating the access to energy supply and financially supporting several pro-Russian populist movements in Europe (Orenstein 2014), the Kremlin intends to disrupt the EU and encourage alienation from the Euro-Atlantic integration.

**2.5 Russian Information Warfare**

Russia's information warfare strategy was developed in response to the new generation of Western warfare concepts (Darczewska 2014, 7). Interestingly, this theory draws upon the psychological warfare techniques conducted in the Soviet Union for influencing and leading the public. Moreover,

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the doctrine evaluates information very high as it is a critical weapon that is cheap and applicable on a global scale, with unlimited range, easily accessible and spreads throughout all countries without restrictions. Moscow is constantly adjusting and perfecting its informational techniques, taking into consideration new media tools and introducing new tactics, such as activity in social networking sites.

For Darczewska (2014), the Crimean operation has served as an opportunity for Moscow to demonstrate to the entire world the potential of information warfare. In this context, the main objective is to use undetectable methods to subordinate the elites and public in foreign countries by employing different secret and overt channels (i.e. secret services, diplomacy and the media), psychological impact, and ideological and political sabotage (Darczewska 2014, 5). Besides, Russian politicians and journalists have stressed the necessity of information war for the “Eurasian civilisation” to challenge the “informational aggression from the Atlantic civilisation led by the United States” (Darczewska 2014, 5).

The federal TV and radio channels, newspapers and numerous online resources have been engaged in an unusually large disinformation campaign launched on the occasion of the turmoil in Ukraine (Bugorkova 2015). The operation has been supported by diplomats, politicians, international relations and geopolitics experts, along with representatives of the academia. Indeed, harsh anti-Ukrainian information initiatives were undertaken at the beginning of 2014. They mostly targeted at destabilising the situation in Ukraine and putting pressure upon its government and people to follow the solutions suggested by Russia and diverge from the Western sphere of influence. At the outburst of the Euromaidan demonstrations, this common front was combined with ideological infiltration, provocation and diplomatic initiatives (Darczewska 2014, 5). After the referendum on the status of Crimea on March 16 2014, the campaign changed orientation towards building credibility for Moscow's causes and covering up the inconsistencies around the military involvement and plans for the annexation of Crimea.

Darczewska (2014, 6) assumes the Crimean operation as a good example of what is the information warfare's very essence: the apathy and compliance of the victim of the initial aggression. In this case, the Russian-speaking citizens of Ukraine having been subjected to informational and psychological treatment, eventually engaged in the separatist movement that resulted in the de facto annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation.

2.6 RT: Mouthpiece of the Kremlin?

The establishment of the international Russia-based news network RT can be deemed as an effort to boldly intervene in public discourse on issues that concern Russia. RT is a global 24-hour television
network that was founded in 2005, with the name *Russia Today*. Its programme is broadcasted in English, Spanish and Arabic via satellite and cable. Currently, it is transmitted in more than 100 countries, available to some 700 million people\(^2\). However, there is also the possibility of watching the channel with via live streaming on *rt.com*. Although *RT* is not operated by the Russian government, in fact it is a brand of the principally state-funded TV-Novosti, which in its turn is included in the list of the core organisations of strategic importance of Russia by the Kremlin\(^3\). Despite the efforts to be depicted differently, there are serious objections against the network's journalistic freedom and autonomy. Besides, press freedom in Russia is a matter of great concern. In the Press Freedom Index of 2014, Russia ranks 148\(^{th}\) out of 180 countries. After all, 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” (Borchers 2011, 92). Therefore, inevitably the question raised is why should this be different for *RT*, a channel of significant and confirmed strategic importance.

The case is that there is very little research on *RT*. Cruikshank (2009) compared the coverage of the 2008 presidential elections in the United States in the prime-time newscasts of *Al-Jazeera*, *BBC World Service* and *RT* during 30 days. Her central finding was that *RT* portrayed both candidates, Barack Obama and John McCain, significantly less favourably than the other two networks. Additionally, Cruikshank noted that the elections were characterised as unfair far more frequently than as fair, unlike to the other two channels. She finally concluded 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” (Cruikshank 2009, 69). Hsu (2010) studied 14 episodes of the weekly political show *In Context* in late 2008. His findings demonstrated that the “main theme revealed from the discourse is nationalism” (Hsu 2010, 20), thereby presenting Russia as a pragmatic country which deliberately could solve the world's conflicts more efficiently than the idealistic United States.

All available evidence converge to the assumption that *RT* is conceived to be a tool for Russian mediated public diplomacy. It appears not to follow journalistic ethics but rather to resonate the Kremlin's interests and perceptions. By that, the Russian government can secure access to foreign (namely Western) audiences, increase its global status and influence over the public opinion and the policy making of foreign governments and transnational institutions (e.g. European Union).


3. Public Diplomacy

Public diplomacy is a widely known concept and a practice utilised by several governments around the world. Although its roots date back in the pre-modern era, it was more systematically developed during the Cold War. Nowadays, more than two decades after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the subsequent dissolution of the Soviet Union that signalled the end of the Cold War, public diplomacy is still extensively employed and progressing. This growing interest in public diplomacy has been captured by numerous studies focusing on Western countries, predominantly the United States and the United Kingdom (Entman 2004; Lord 2006; Cull 2009; Seib 2009, 2012). Simultaneously, more attention has been paid to other countries, including Israel (Shenhav et al. 2010), the Arab World (Fahmy et al. 2012) and Russia (Tsygankov 2006; Simons 2011, 2014).

Apparently, Russia constitutes a good example of a country that combines a high profile and a poor image. According to Simons (2014, 1), these features hinder “a number of different state directed ambitions, including hampering the ability to develop its desired great power status and role”. Besides, particular stereotypes and associations make this reputation further obnoxious, hence affecting its credibility as a messenger unfavourably (Simons 2011). Naturally, the question that emerges now is what is Russia's message to the world? To answer it, firstly the term public diplomacy should be defined, namely what kind of practices it comprises and why governments pursue it so vigorously.

Edmund Gullion first coined the term public diplomacy in 1965. The concept referred to the process of international information and cultural relations (Fahmy et al. 2012, 731). The United States immediately embraced public diplomacy because it offered a favourable alternative to terms like “propaganda” and “psychological warfare” (Cull 2009, 17). Thus, a clear distinction was provided between the Western democratic practices and propaganda policies pursued by the Soviet Union during the Cold War. Nevertheless, it is true that the term is still -erroneously- used interchangeably with propaganda or nation branding (Lord 2006, 27; Snow and Taylor 2009, ix). Below, the definition provided will clarify what public diplomacy essentially is and why governments engage with it.

Public diplomacy... deals with the influence of public attitudes on the formation and execution of foreign policies. It encompasses dimensions of international relations beyond traditional diplomacy; the cultivation by governments of public opinion in other countries; the interaction of private groups and interests in one country with another; the reporting of foreign affairs and its impact on policy; communication between those
whose job is communication, as diplomats and foreign correspondents; and the process
of intercultural communications (Jowett and O’Donnell 2012, 287).

As the excerpt above remarks, this type of communication basically involves a government
and a foreign audience. Moreover, it pinpoints the scale of impacts that public diplomacy can
potentially accomplish; enhancing peoples’ understanding with one’s country, enhancing peoples’
respect of one’s country, getting people engaged with one’s country and influencing people
(Leonard et al. 2002, 9-10). Seib argues that “public diplomacy is a process, but it cannot be
separated from policy” (2012, 122). In fact, there are far more fundamental reasons for a country to
employ public diplomacy, other than the superficial objective of making itself more attractive to
foreigners. Such goals can be the raise of awareness, management of reputation, change of
legislation or attitudes (Coombs and Holladay 2010, 299).

Cull (2009) introduced a simple taxonomy of public diplomacy's elements: listening, (the
foundation for all effective public diplomacy), advocacy, cultural diplomacy, exchange, and
international broadcasting. Listening regards the collection of the opinions and data from the
targeted public by listening, rather than talking to them in order to redirect the public diplomacy
accordingly. Advocacy is an actor's international communication initiative to promote a specific
policy or general interests towards a foreign audience. Cultural diplomacy is defined as an initiator's
effort to make its cultural resources and achievements known abroad. In other words, a country's
attempt to capitalise on its cultural exports. Exchange diplomacy involves sending its citizens
abroad and reciprocally accepting foreign citizens for a period of study or cultural assimilation. At
this point, Cull notes that cultural diplomacy and exchanges usually overlap and thus the two have
been often combined though rarely peacefully (Cull 2009, 19). International broadcasting refers to
the usage of technologies like radio, television and Internet to engage with the foreign public. Later
on this chapter I will go back to international broadcasting.

Nevertheless, public diplomacy is not merely a persistent struggle for “selling” an idea or
policy to foreign audiences, but as Simons (2014, 2) observes it is also “an exercise in reputation
management... [that] emphasises mass media in order to increase the effect of the message”. Obviously, this task becomes more feasible when a foreign government controls its own media
assets, thereby reducing the probability of the message to be distorted after passing through various
media outlets (Simons 2014, 2).

Both Seib (2009) and Snow and Taylor (2009) have acknowledged that public diplomacy
evolves into more interactive forms in a constantly changing international environment. Within such
a rapidly changing global system, public diplomacy needs to develop in order to meet new needs
and challenges (Simons 2014). In this context, Cull (2009) and Snow (2010) have made the distinction between *traditional* and *new* public diplomacy. According to Cull (2009, 12), “historically public diplomacy has taken the form of contact between one government and the people of another state”. However, he stresses that public diplomacy does not necessarily seek its audience directly. In some cases, for instance, there are educated individuals within the targeted population that act influentially on their own. Furthermore, public diplomacy is not always associated with an immediate attempt to influence a foreign public, but sometimes it is also about tuning into it and then to change your policy or strategy correspondingly.

Snow (2010, 89) lists the main characteristics of *traditional public diplomacy* as it follows: it is government-to-public oriented (G2P), official in nature; a “necessary evil” as technology and new media have democratised international relations; it is also linked to foreign policy and national security results; it is one-way informational and two-way asymmetric (namely, the parts are unequal in communication); it gives us the best future players; though it reserves a passive role for the public merely; and it is crisis driven and reactive.

On the contrary, the term *new public diplomacy*, as suggested by Cull (2009), is mostly identified with the following features: the international actors are increasingly non-traditional (i.e. non-states) and NGOs are notably prominent; the mechanisms used by these actors to communicate with foreign public have switched to real-time and networking technologies; these technologies have blurred the formerly rigid lines between the domestic and international news spheres. Unlike older approaches, *new public diplomacy* makes increasing use of concepts on one hand explicitly derived from marketing (e.g. nation branding) and on the other hand concepts emerging from network communication theory; thus, there is a new terminology of public diplomacy as the language of prestige and international image has given way to talk of *soft power* and *branding*. On top of everything, *new public diplomacy* signals the departure from the government-to-public and the rise of a new people-to-people contact, with the international actors having a more facilitating role (Cull 2009, 13). All in all, this new model has abandoned the top down messaging and turned to a more “relationship building” approach.

### 3.1 Soft Power

As mentioned above, a key feature of the new public diplomacy is the emergence of the term soft power. In fact, Sheafer and Gabay (2009, 448) assert that soft power is the “most suitable conceptual frame for understanding the strategic contest of national actors for the international arena”. Based on this new public diplomacy direction, Nye used the term *soft power* to define:
… 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. When our policies are seen as legitimate in the eyes of others, our soft power is enhanced (2004, x).

Indeed, Nye reasonably argues that seduction through democracy or human rights is far more preferable than coercion because it is more effective. Hence it is the combination of attraction and inducement that democracies can rely on, in order to get others to want the same outcomes that the initiator wants. However, Nye clarifies that soft power should not be unquestionably identified with influence, although related to each other, since the latter can also rest on the hard power of military threats or payments (2004, 6). Instead, soft power is chiefly about the ability of an actor to get what it wants in the international environment based on persuasion and attraction, as “attraction often leads to acquiescence” (Nye 2004, 6). Public diplomacy can be a very efficient instrument to deploy soft power, but it should not be confused with soft power when there are international actors having public diplomacy and not soft power (e.g. North Korea) or soft power while only nominal public diplomacy (e.g. Ireland) (Cull 2009, 15).

Hard power's foundation is built upon military and economic capacity, while soft power's upon “the ability to shape the preferences of others” (Nye 2004, 5). Simons suggests that soft power is usually associated with intangible assets, such as attractive profile, culture, political values and institutions, and policies seen as being legitimate or having moral authority (2014, 3). When it comes to a country, soft power lies upon its culture, political values and foreign policy (Nye 2004, 11).

3.2 The Impact of Mass Media on Foreign Policy

Public diplomacy can constitute a decisive tool for managing one's soft power. In a globalised environment where NGOs and individuals progressively increase their influence in the field of public diplomacy, news media has become the main arena for public diplomacy attempts of nations (Entman 2008). The emergence of international television news networks, and more recently, the internet boost has facilitated reaching foreign audiences around the globe (Sheafer and Shenhav 2009, 275). Nye (2004) and Sheafer and Gabay (2009) have already noted that political and even military actors have acknowledged the importance and necessity to create a favourable image in foreign publics. Furthermore, there is a growing understanding that a positive media coverage is a prerequisite for achieving these goals and that access to media is an critical factor in modern warfare and political competition (Baum and Porter 2008; Sheafer and Gabay 2009).
This mediated arena of public diplomacy is defined by Entman as the organized attempts by a government to exert as much control as possible over the framing of the country’s policy in foreign media (2008, 89). In comparison to classic definitions of public or media diplomacy, mediated public diplomacy differs as it “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). In this context, a successfully mediated strategy should improve a country's international image among foreign audiences and by extension, foreign policymakers (Sheafer and Shenhav 2009, 275).

Borchers (2011) detects a particular linkage between the concept of mediated public diplomacy and the description of the public sphere as proposed by Ferree et al. (2002), as an arena where several actors try to gain influence in the process of shaping the public opinion. Democratic governments listen to public opinion and direct their policies towards it. Therefore, mediated public diplomacy attempts to grow into an influential actor in the arena to shape public opinion and, by this, policies of foreign governments (Borchers 2011, 91). Within the globalised environment described above, mediated public diplomacy should take into consideration not solely national but also transnational public spheres. Global news networks such as BBC World Service, CNN, Al-Jazeera and RT “can be precious instruments for mediated public diplomacy because they guarantee access to these public spheres” (Borchers 2011, 91).

Access is essential for making an actor's perspective being disseminated in the global arena. How this perspective can be employed in order to accomplish foreign policy objectives is another issue. Theories and events are not self-existent, meaning that their content is the outcome of a long social process in which it is constructed. In modern societies mass media is a major factor in this process (McQuail 2010). Audiences refer to media reality when constructing their own realities, and mediated public diplomacy tries to take advantage of this process (Borchers 2011, 92). Controlling media networks gives the advantage to construct realities independently from the journalists. Likewise, governments can present their policies and define the conditions under which they are exposed.

3.3 The Russian Case

In the article What Russia and China don't get about soft power to Foreign Policy, Nye (2013) criticised both countries for failing to understand the nature and practice of soft power. His main argument is that soft power cannot be generated by the state alone, but it is also a by-product of a prosperous private sector that can be achieved only within a free society. Indeed, there has been a great debate in Russia regarding the issues of soft power and public diplomacy; how these concepts
are related and how to further expand (Simons 2014, 3). One of the aspects of the ongoing
discussion has been the example of the United States and what is the possibility to adapt and apply
certain policies for Russia. This could potentially include institutional changes (e.g. the creation of
the Russian equivalent of the U.S. Information Agency) beyond the mere theoretical and conceptual
level. Others advocate the idea that Russia needs to develop its own soft power concept without
imitating foreign models. In any case, this discussion unveils the necessity to develop a viable soft
power concept. Otherwise Russia's international status and potential will be severely shrunk
(Simons 2014, 4).

Among the central problems encountered by Russian public diplomacy concerns the
credibility, and hence the believability of the messenger (Simons 2011, 329). This is especially
pronounced when the messenger is closely tied to the Russian authorities mainly because of the
strong anti-democratic reputation that has been attained during Putin's administration.
4. Framing Theory

Similarly with other concepts of media and communication research, framing is a staple term in popular discourse. Politicians, pollsters and media critics have long recognised that wording can decisively frame an issue in a specific way (Tankard 2001, 95). Different polls about the same issue, for instance a contagious infection, will often produce contrary results. Kahneman and Tversky (1984) provide one of the most widely cited examples of the power of framing and the way it operates by selecting and highlighting certain features of reality while omitting others. The researchers set the following question:

Imagine that the U.S. is preparing for the outbreak of an unusual Asian disease, which is expected to kill 600 people. Two alternative programs to combat the disease have been proposed. Assume that the exact scientific estimates of the consequences of the programs are as follows: If Program A is adopted, 200 people will be saved. If Program B is adopted, there is a one-third probability that 600 people will be saved and a two-thirds probability that no people will be saved. Which of the two programs would you favour? (1984, 343)

In this experiment, 72% of respondents chose Program A and 28% chose Program B. In the next stage, the participants were offered identical options to treat the same disease, but framed in terms of death probability instead of remedy. “If Program C is adopted, 400 people will die. If Program D is adopted, there is a one-third probability that nobody will die and a two-thirds probability that 600 people will die” (Kahneman and Tversky 1984, 343). Unsurprisingly, the percentages choosing the same options were reversed due to the framing. Program C was chosen by 22% and Program D was selected by 78%.

Hackett (1984) argued that communication research should shift its focus from the study of objectivity and bias to the study of ideology in the news. In this context, he suggested the concept of framing as a good alternative approach, given its potential of getting beneath the surface of news coverage and exposing the hidden assumptions. For Hackett, ideology transcends bias in the sense that the former can offer a framework through which the news media often present events.

Likewise, Tankard (2001) deems media framing approach important especially as a substitute to the old “objectivity and bias” paradigm which dominated mass communication research for years. Further to that, he underlines the difference between framing and bias, stressing that framing “is a more sophisticated concept [that] goes beyond notions of pro or con, favourable
or unfavourable, negative or positive” (Tankard 2001, 96). Moreover, framing recognises to a text (or other media presentation) the capacity to define a situation, the key issues and hence to set the terms of the debate. After all, “convincing others to accept one’s framing means to a large extent winning the debate” (Tankard 2001, 96).

4.1 Framing as a Process

De Vreese (2005, 51) outlines communication as a dynamic process rather than a static one, which involves two phases: frame-building and frame-setting. Frame-building, that is how frames emerge, is characterised by those factors that determine the structural qualities of news frames. Shoemaker and Reese (1996) focused on the internal to journalism factors that influence how journalists and news agencies frame issues, while others and stressed the equally important role of external factors, such as the interplay between journalists and elites (Gans 1979; Tuchman 1978) and social movements (Cooper 2002). Frames themselves are the actual outcomes of this process as they appear in the text.

Frame-setting is about the interaction between media frames and audience's preconceptions. In other words, frames in the news may affect the way people receive, interpret and evaluate issues and events. This phase of the process is the one mostly examined by media scholars, chiefly with the objective to investigate “the extent to which and under what circumstances the audience reflect and mirror frames made available to them in, for example, the news” (de Vreese 2005, 52).

Thus it becomes clear that, based on this typology, frames can be studied both as independent and dependent variables. More particularly, media frames may be examined with a focus on the effects of the news production process, given the organisational pressure, journalistic practices and elite discourse (de Vreese 2005, 52). Though, media frames can be also regarded as independent variables, that is to say the antecedents of audience interpretations. De Vreese (2005) further creates an integrated process model for framing (see Figure 1), which he aspires could enhance future research by relating either features of the production of news with the content (i.e. frame-building) or content with analysis of uses and effects (i.e. frame-setting). Such an association of content with either production or effects is critical to prevent researchers from studying frames that do not bring any evidence or contribute to the general discussion of news framing in actual news reporting.

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4 Italics in the original text.
4.2 News Framing

Gitlin (1980, 7) describes frames as “persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation of selection, emphasis and exclusion by which symbol-handlers routinely organise discourse”. Likewise, Gamson and Modigliani (1989) illustrate frames as “interpretative packages” that give meaning and provide a way to understand a certain issue or event. Cappella and Jamieson (1997, 47) argue that frames stimulate knowledge, trigger “stocks of cultural morals and values, and create contexts”. De Vreese (2005, 53) very aptly remarked that “the vast majority of framing studies, more or less explicitly, apply a broader definition of frames”, a notion that gives meaning to an unfolding string of events, weaving a connection among them. To summarize all, de Vreese notes that “a frame is an emphasis in salience of different aspects of a topic”, basically concerned with the presentation of issues.

Entman, in his attempt to conceptualise the idea of framing, notes that whatever its specific use, analysis of frames sheds light on how “influence over human consciousness is exerted by the transfer (or communication) of information from one location -such as a speech, utterance, news report, or novel- to that consciousness” (1993, 51-52).

In the same vein as de Vreese, Entman relates framing to two processes: selection and salience (Entman 1993, 52). Framing has been defined as the process of selecting a few elements of perceived reality and compiling a narrative that emphasizes the connections among them to promote a specific interpretation (Entman 2007, 164). According to Entman (1993, 2004), fully developed frames typically perform four basic functions: problem definition, causal analysis, moral evaluation, and remedy promotion. Problem definition is the act of identifying certain effects or conditions as problematic; causal analysis refers to identification of its causes; moral evaluation signifies conveying a moral judgment; and remedy implies endorsing particular solutions or improvements. However, although a sentence in a text may perform more than one of these functions, it is also
possible to perform none.

But, how do frames work in communication? Frames bring out some bits of information concerning the item/subject of a communication, hence heightening them in salience. In other words, it pinpoints a piece of information and “makes it more noticeable, meaningful, or memorable to audiences” (Entman 1993, 53). The enhancement of centrality can be achieved either by placement or repetition, or even with association with culturally familiar images.

4.3 Identifying Frames in the News

Past research on news framing have little common ground conceptually while it is predominantly utilize unsettled definitions suggested for the purpose of the specific study. Therefore, there is but minimum consensus on how to identify frames in the news. On the one side, we may employ an inductive approach that does not analyse news stories with a priori defined news frames in mind (e.g. Gamson 1992). However, induction-oriented researches, where the frames emerge from the material during the analysis process, have been criticised for relying on small samples and hence for being difficult to replicate (Hertog and McLeod 2001). On the other side, there is the possibility to choose a rather deductive approach, which examines frames that are already defined prior to the analysis.

Cappella and Jamieson (1997) argue that viewing any production feature of verbal or visual texts as possible news frames is a too broad perspective. Instead, they introduce four criteria indispensable for a frame to meet. First, a news frame needs to have identifiable conceptual and linguistic characteristics. Second, it must be regularly observed in journalistic practice. Third, it should be distinctive from other frames. Fourth, a frame must have representational validity, that is to say to be recognisable by others, and not be just a fabrication of a researcher's imagination (Cappella and Jamieson 1997, 47; 89)

De Vreese (2005, 54) stresses that when working with a deductive approach, the relevant question is: what (what elements) in a news story constitutes a frame? Entman (1993, 52) notes that that frames in the news can be seen and studied by “presence or absence of certain keywords, stock phrases, stereotypical images, sources of information and sentences that provide thematically reinforcing clusters of facts or judgements”. In the same context, Gamson and Modigliani (1989) identify metaphors, exemplars, catch-phrases, depictions, and visual images as framing devices that abridge information and give to audience a media package of an issue.

Price et al. (1997, 488) considered a frame by varying “introductory and concluding paragraphs to establish a unique journalistic frame” with information limited to the frame while the
rest of the paragraphs in the news articles were identical. Similarly, Neuman et al. (1992, 126) divided their articles into sections containing frames and sections containing facts. This distinction between core elements and frame-related elements has been applied in several studies of framing effects (e.g. Cappella and Jamieson 1997; Price et al. 1997).

4.4 Typologies of News Frames

Although journalists and news agencies may engage in several different frames in their coverage of an event, media scholars acknowledge that this plethora of ways to tell and construct news stories can be apprehended when analysed as specific distinctive characteristics (de Vreese 2005, 54). With regard to this, de Vreese introduces a rather general typology concerning the nature and content of a news frame. He also attempts to bridge the gap between the aforementioned past researches and the different types of frames. In this context, those frames relevant to certain issues or events alone are classified as issue-specific frames. Others that go beyond thematic restrictions and can be applied to different issues, some even over time and in different cultural frameworks are labelled as generic frames (de Vreese 2005). Ideally, this typology would serve to better bring out the meaning of the catch-all “framing” concept.

When an issue-specific approach is employed to implement the investigation of a news frame, this allows for a serious level of adequacy and completeness. Nonetheless, this convenience comes along with a serious intrinsic pitfall. This high level of issue-speciality does not allow an analysis drawing on issue-specific frames easily to generalise and be used as a starting point to further theorise. The lack of comparability has led researchers to “too easily finding the evidence for what they are looking for” and to contribute to “one of the most frustrating tendencies in the study of frames and framing [being] the tendency for scholars to generate a unique set of frames for every study” (Hertog and McLeod 2001, 150-151).

In Projections of Power: Framing News, Public Opinion, and U.S. Foreign Policy, Entman (2004) developed a typology that let us understand in greater detail the objects of framing in the news. The core idea here is that “frames in the news are typically a part of the reporting process for three different classes of objects: political events, issues, and actors” (Entman 2004, 23). Generally, the same set of news stories frame more than one object at the same time, providing thus a fully framed narrative. Such characteristic cases in the research literature are the Gulf War and the War on Terror.

However, it must become clear that not necessarily all functions of a particular frame will be fulfilled in every case. For instance, there may be a news coverage where the problem definition in
framing the event is definite, as well as the remedy in framing a related issue and the moral evaluation of an actor involved. Moral judgements for the related event or issue might be omitted from the report. Entman argues that news media often display such “voids in framing, gaps that audience may fill by using tacit understandings… or that they may simply ignore” (Entman 2004, 23).

4.5 International Frame-building

Chong and Druckman (2007, 101) remark that the role of multiple competing frames in frame-building is largely uncharted. Frame-building is identified with the “processes that influence the creation or changes of frames applied by journalists” (Scheufele 1999, 115). These processes can be regarded as strategic, given that “participants manoeuvre strategically to achieve their political and communicative objectives. Each actor needs to take strategic steps to ‘get messages across’ and win arguments” (Pan and Kosicki 2003, 40; see also Entman 2004, 47).

International actors have now well realised that favourable media coverage is a critical condition for political influence, hence the frantic antagonism for gaining access to the media is a core element to dominate in modern political conflicts (Baum and Potter 2008; Gans 1979). Consequently, understanding mediated public diplomacy is pivotal since news framing can have a significant effect on the audience's support for war and peace (e.g. Sheafer and Dvir-Gvirsman 2010; Wolfsfeld 1997, 2004). The focus of this research is Russia's effort to control or influence international frame-building.
5. Methodology

5.1 Research Design

When conducting an empirically oriented study, the researcher can opt to firstly establish the theoretical foundation that will be the basis for that and determine if what is being examined involves theory building. In this research, there is no such thing, but the theory is rather the point of departure from which the research design is originated. Then, in its turn, the research design is constructed around an empirical content analysis. This method lets the researcher analyse in depth the articles selected for the study and, thus investigate the frames produced over the course of ten months as they cover the respective events.

As this dissertation tries to identify frames by providing an interpretative account of news articles linking up frames with broader thematic elements, a hermeneutic approach is employed. Rooted in the qualitative paradigm, this study is based on a sample that reflects the discourse surrounding the Ukrainian crisis and the sanctions imposed; although frames are comprehensively described, no quantification is provided. The qualitative method is preferred over the quantitative one in this research because the empirical nature of this study requires a thorough review of the material by using a categorical process to organise and retrieve data. Besides, qualitative analysis deals with patterns while quantitative analysis investigates duration and frequency.

To study how RT framed the tension between Russia and the West and to see how this could be related to Moscow's public diplomacy objective, the procedure is the following: Firstly, the themes related to the sanctions and subsequent tension were uncovered, along with the interpretations provided. During the identification process, framing mechanisms are detected (e.g. descriptions, key phrases, historical references). Secondly, the most prominent and striking ones are commented and presented in the analysis part. Finally, the interpretations are categorised following Entman's framing functions typology; problem definition, causal analysis, moral evaluation, and remedy promotion. However, after several courses of content analysis were performed, it was evident that the first two framing functions (i.e. definition of a problem and attribution of responsibility) should be merged. As Sheafer and Shenhav (2014, 156-157) suggest, when studying a conflict between two actors (Russia and the West in this case), it is “almost impossible to separate the attribution of responsibility from the definition of the problem, as problem definitions in such conflicts are usually actor-driven. Therefore, when a problem is designated it is usually linked to the attribution of responsibility, articulated by phrases such as “actor x is doing y”.

In deciding the themes and frames, a subtle mixture of inductive and deductive approach is
used. More particularly, the inductive approach resonates an overall in-depth analysis of the material that allows me to identify the main topics and strategies. For more detailed analysis of coverage and conveyed meaning, general themes are broken down into frames. On the flipside, the deductive approach refers to making use of the predetermined typology of frame functions as proposed by Entman.

5.2 Data Selection and Collection

After choosing the topic and starting formulating the research questions, I found myself in difficulty for delimiting the research regarding the period under investigation. This task turned out to be quite problematic as the Ukrainian turmoil is a prolonged crisis that started on November 21, 2013, when then-President Yanukovych suspended the preparations for signing an association agreement between Ukraine and the European Union, and it is still ongoing. Therefore, since I was interested in examining the tension between Russia and the West that ensued from this situation, I determined to focus on the topic of international sanctions.

The Ukrainian crisis urged a number of states to impose sanctions against officials, businesses and individuals from Russia and Ukraine starting from March 2014. During the same period, Russia responded itself with sanctions against several countries. It was on March 17, 2014, the day after the Crimean referendum took place and Moscow recognised Crimea as an independent state, that the first round of specifically targeted sanctions was launched by the United States, the European Union and Canada. Although the following days additional countries announced further sanctions (e.g. Japan, Australia), there would be two more rounds of sanctions until December 19, 2014, when President Obama imposed sanctions on Russian-occupied Crimea by executive order banned exports of US goods and services to the region. It was the last action taken in 2014. Given this background, I decided the study to examine the whole ten-month period described above. It was assumed that it would be a timespan that normally would provide interesting material to investigate since the tension throughout these months could not but be at its highest.

For the data collection, both news report and op-ed articles were extracted for analysis. While news articles are those simply reporting current and recent news, op-eds are more openly subjective pieces published that either express the opinion of a named writer, usually someone not affiliated with the editorial board, or puts up an interview with a person of relevant expertise. As far as RT is concerned, all op-eds have a disclaimer statement at the bottom of the page, that reads “the statements, views and opinions expressed in this column are solely those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of RT”. The time frame used dated from 6/3 through 19/12, 2014, and
the material is taken from RT’s English-language international website (i.e. [www.rt.com](http://www.rt.com)).

A careful selection of articles is critical at this point of research given the plethora of articles uploaded daily on RT. To access the news stories related to my case, the website has been searched using the keywords “Ukraine turmoil” and “Sanctions”, the former being a generic trend and the latter a specific tag. In order to ensure precision and relevance, only articles having both labels have been selected for analysis. By that, I have assured that every single article related to my topic would be displayed so to archive them. For saving the online material, I have used a demo version of “HTML to PDF Converter”, a mini software tool by Winnovative created for converting web pages and HTML code to PDF and/or images.

5.3 Coding

The computer software programme ATLAS.ti (free trial version), a computer programme largely used for qualitative data analysis, was chosen to support the coding and analysis process. It gave me the possibility to identify and systematically analyse phenomena hidden in unstructured data (e.g. texts, images, videos, audio files). By using ATLAS.ti I aimed to detect, code and annotate findings in the first place and then to evaluate their significance and relevance to my research questions. Each piece that dealt with the sanctions under the prism of the Ukrainian crisis was considered a unit of analysis and as a result it was inserted in the software.

The hermeneutic documents served as the foundation for the exploratory content analysis. This is the file format when data is assigned on ATLAS.ti. Due to limitations of the trial version, I was only allowed to include ten articles per hermeneutic unit. That is to say that I had to create ten of them, so to incorporate all the data available. This procedure turned out quite time-consuming because the creation of different hermeneutic units forced me to insert the same set of codes manually time and again to each one of those. The analysis used the process of open coding as described by Strauss and Corbin (1990), which rejects any pre-limitations and offers the broadest possible perspective for identifying, categorising and connecting persuasive strategies.

To conduct a successful content analysis, the researcher should use codes that will be appropriate for organising data. According to Strauss (1987) there are four basic guidelines for coding; ask the data a specific and consistent set of questions, analyse the data meticulously, intercept the coding to write a theoretical note, and never assume the relevance of any traditional variable until the data proves it as relevant. Thereby codes can be evolved in coding frames that helps to carry out content analysis. This task required successive merging of the emerging codes and categorisation into code families. For instance, in this research the framing mechanisms are looked
at by categorising different concepts of persuasive strategies. The procedure sorted the bulk of data into categories of strategies, which were then more accessible to identification of patterns. Coding process and classification enabled me to break down the data into a more workable form that further helped me to interpret the findings and integrate them with theory.

5.4 Reliability and Validity

There are several different approaches to derive a set of frames given a particular topic under investigation. David et al. (2011, 331) argue that “these were developed, in part, because questions continue to be raised about the validity and reliability of different types of framing analysis of media texts”. Content analyses of news frames may vary from completely qualitative interpretive or hermeneutic-qualitative approaches to entirely software automated-oriented ones (Scheufele and Scheufele, 2010).

Qualitative content analysis is usually based on a small sample of text, heavily interpreted and exhaustively investigated, in order to identify and illustrate frames used in the media discourse surrounding a topic. According to Scheufele and Scheufele (2010) the procedure through which frames appear from the reading of a text is predominantly obscure. Elements of texts are analysed and given interpretations based on their depictions of the broader cultural context within which the discourse takes place (Matthes and Kohring 2008, 259). An advantage of this method is that the closer the engagement with the text, the more frame-related elements will emerge from the text, that would be surely missed by an automated software analysis (David et al. 2011, 331). However, it is a drawback of this method that such in-depth readings cannot be applied to large samples, hence would not be feasible to generate data to demonstrate how prevalent certain frames are and how they are scattered over news outlets. To attain a high degree of generalisability requires some form of quantification.

Using a particular definition of framing and then deriving the appropriate number of frames gives a reliability advantage. To the contrary, more holistic approaches to frames that aim to classify a larger conceptual element, it is expected that although it is difficult to achieve, yet “with continued refinements in category definitions acceptable levels of reliability are certainly within reach” (David et al. 2011, 345). Thus, it appears that the more the researcher goes deep in the coding process, the easier it is to reach an sufficient level of reliability. Meanwhile, the latter methods have a comparative advantage when it comes to validity. Since automated software analysis is necessarily dependant on how frequent a specific element of frame or code is encountered in the dataset, sporadically appearing categories, which may be very essential though,
will be normally overlooked. Instead, when a holistic and inductive methodology is employed the risk of omitted infrequent patterns is at lower level.

5.5 Ethical Considerations
According to Shoemaker and Reese (1996), the hierarchy of influences on media content takes place on different levels: ideology, external factors, organisational influence, journalistic routine and the individual level. Among these, although the personal factor reflects at the micro-level, it exerts considerable influence on the construction of reality in media. Reese (2001) suggests that at this level “the attitudes, training, and background of the journalist” should be taken into consideration. According to an analysis of the Centre for International Media Ethics, one of the three primary objectives to attain media ethics is to maintain “objectivity by providing different sides of an issue, which empowers audiences to formulate their own judgements and increases levels of truthfulness in reporting” (Centre for International Media Ethics CIME 2009, 5). Thus, objectivity is a fundamental principle when it comes to media research.

Since the subject of the study does not represent a particularly sensitive topic for the researcher, I can ensure that my research is independent and impartial. Moreover, given that the research design does include neither interviews nor access to confidential or classified material, I need not to secure the confidentiality or anonymity of the study.
6. Analysis

The following part will present the results of the qualitative content analysis of 97 RT articles that were published under the keywords “Ukraine turmoil” and “Sanctions”. It will demonstrate a summarised description of identified strategies which are used to convince the audience about the rightness of the Russian causes.

6.1 Topics Discussed

Three major themes that are discussed in the analysed articles, can be identified: economy, conflict and global security. Economic topics are derived from the exchange of sanctions between Russia and Western countries (i.e. EU, Canada, Japan and the United States) over Ukraine. In the articles that preceded the Crimean referendum, sanctions were perceived as an instrument for EU leaders to coerce Moscow into a de-escalation of the situation in Ukraine unless it engaged in direct talks with the Kiev. Eventually, sanctions comprised visa restrictions for people of the Russian elite, but the escalation of the crisis in Ukraine brought about more economic and financial measures over certain companies and banks that are assumed to be of strategic importance for the Kremlin. Apart from sanctions, energy is another economic aspect that was given primacy in the articles. The dependence of several EU members on Russian energy constrained their leadership to strongly back further economic measures against Russia.

The effects of the Ukrainian crisis on global security is one of the main sources of dispute between Russia and the West. Putin's decision to annex Crimea and support Russian ethnics in eastern and southern Ukraine for armed conflict towards separation showed that he is not tolerable anymore to colour revolutions in its sphere of influence. For the West, these initiatives have raised fundamental questions about the security in Eastern Europe while the Kremlin holds that NATO seeks to establish a new order in the region where it would have a more influential presence.

Finally, conflict is seen through the prism of the illegitimate government in Kiev that seized power in coup. By propping up the Euromaidan opposition, the EU and the US politicians violated the sovereignty of Ukraine and overthrew the democratically elected government of Yanukovych. In the aftermath of that, the discussion revolves around the military units that took over Crimea and the protests held in eastern regions of Ukraine in support of the Russian language and secession from Ukraine. Another recurring topic is the momentum that far-right wing groups had gained, some of which identify closely with neo-Nazism and their subsequent ascension to power.
6.2 Interviewees

The selection of interviewees is another factor that can be strategically deployed. An overflow of pro-Russian respondents would apparently predispose the audience in a respective pro-Russian position where anti-Russian opinions are blamed and no criticism towards Russia is expected. Besides, a profusion of divergent voices increases the risk of anti-Russian arguments being expressed. In this case, when it comes to interviewed pundits, politicians and journalists, people with a relevant expertise that are called to present their accounts on the given topic, three different outlooks are identified depending on whether they adopt a pro-Russian, neutral or anti-Russian stance. The classification was based on the use of words with specifically favourable or derogatory connotation to interpret the parties and individuals involved.

A pro-Russian position is taken by the majority of the interviewees with 11 out of 19 supporting Moscow's causes and interests. Seven of them adopt a rather neutral position while only one is assumed to be supportive of the West side. Interestingly, nationality does not play any significant role to the attachment since most of the interviewees come from Western countries (i.e. Germany, France, UK, United States). The only interviewee that does not fall in the pro-Russian line is Jack Matlock, Jr., a retired American diplomat who served as ambassador to the Soviet Union from 1987 to 1991. Moreover, this approach can produce further legitimisation for the Russian stance even in cases where anti-Russian perspectives are expressed by presenting them in a negative way. Table 1 presents a detailed overview of the interviewees.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Role description</th>
<th>Stance</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Pro-Russian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Philipp Mißfelder</td>
<td>German MP</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Daniel McAdams</td>
<td>Executive Director of the Ron Paul Institute for Peace and Prosperity</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Alain Corvez</td>
<td>Former Adviser at the French Foreign Ministry</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Nebojsa Malic</td>
<td>Foreign Affairs Analyst</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Peter Truscott</td>
<td>British Petroleum and Mining Consultant</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Ron Paul</td>
<td>Author, Former Republican Congressman</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Martin Sieff</td>
<td>Chief Global Analyst at the Globalist Research Centre</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Gregor Gysi</td>
<td>Parliamentary Head of The Left (Die Linke)</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Charles Shoebridge</td>
<td>Security Analyst</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Richard Sakwa</td>
<td>Professor of Russian and European Politics at the University of Kent</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Andrew Leung</td>
<td>International and Independent China Strategist</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Patrick Young</td>
<td>Global Financial Markets Expert</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Lawrence Freeman</td>
<td>Editor at Executive Intelligence Review</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Wolfgang Munchau</td>
<td>Director at Euintelligence News Blog</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Jack Matlock, Jr.</td>
<td>Former US Ambassador to the USSR</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Alexander Pavic</td>
<td>Political Analyst</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>Aleksandr Nekrassov</td>
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<td>18</td>
<td>George Galloway</td>
<td>British MP</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Roslyn Fuller</td>
<td>Research Associate at the INSYTE Group</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Overview of the Interviewees

5 Assumed stance
6.3 Strategies for Reality Construction

Although I cannot assert that the analysed articles present a constructed unitary reality, I suggest that there is a comprehensive narrative proposed by RT that the audience should be initiated. Below there are some general strategies illustrated that are recurrently employed in the articles. A key strategy for building a credible narrative is to claim the actuality of allegations. That is to say that they are presented as true depictions of what is the real case. To be more precise, this is usually implemented by articulating conceivable interpretations simply as facts. Furthermore, this is not an approach encountered solely in the interview articles or the op-eds, but also in the news reporting ones. These interpretations are often presented as facts, hence they do not raise the issue of stake as it would diminish their credibility status. To further remove doubt about the actuality of a statement, it is frequently implied that its veracity is common knowledge.

For instance, in one interview Malic, a Serbian foreign affairs analyst, comments on accusations coming from the United States and United Kingdom that Russian troops have taken over Crimea: “So again, I don’t really see a problem here. There’s been no invasion, the people in Crimea are happy enough. They’re posting selfies with these soldiers, they’re smiling, they are walking around with flowers”. His statement leaves no room for doubt over the alleged Russian incursion. Since the Crimeans are happy enough to take selfies with the soldiers, then there is no point to contest on whether they are local self-defence units or Russians. In another article, Freeman discloses the western-inspired plan behind the deposition of Yanukovych:

The State Department and particularly Victoria Nuland have been behind this coup at the end of last year. These are the people who are actually running the show, probably more than Obama, he is just a puppet at this stage. And they want to force the confrontation... the truth of matter is the US government, the US State Department, President Obama supported Nazis, Svoboda and Right Sector who carried out overthrow of the government.

His account of events is unfolded in such a way that promotes an openly partial interpretation of facts, however without concerning about the factuality of it at all.

Likewise, another strategy that is used, yet not so noticeable, is latent evaluation. This occurs when the author of the article or the interviewee does openly evaluate the topic of discussion, but rather makes an assertion that implies an indirect judgement. In a news report article, it is stated that “Crimeans began protesting after the new Kiev authorities introduced a law abolishing the use of other languages for official purposes in Ukraine. More than half the Crimean

population is Russian and uses only this language for their communication”. This report implicitly argues that the arbitrary government in Kiev harshly discriminated the ethnic Russians of Ukraine after abolishing their only language for the administrative affairs. Former adviser of the French Foreign Ministry, Corvez, was asked why the European Parliament had dismissed the forthcoming referendum in Crimea as illegitimate and did not support the separatists although it was not the first case of a region demanding its self-determination. He answered that “this is the law of the strongest. I have written about this in my article. The French writer La Fontaine has written about this in his fable “The wolf and the lamb” published in the 17th century”. The analogy is very clear in this allegory; the West does not have the slightest interest in treating the Crimeans better than a wolf treats a lamb despite its democratic facade.

Another fundamental process for assessing the constructed narrative is category entitlement. It refers to attributing either a positive or negative signifier for a person, a group or an issue, thus making an indirect evaluation of it. In the following extract, taken from a news report article about popular uprisings in eastern Ukraine, the newly appointed governor of Donetsk is “Ukrainian oligarch, billionaire Sergey Taruta”. The same article continues saying that the “the oligarch governor failed to come to Donetsk immediately after the appointment, so demonstrators have chosen a “people’s governor” of their own, the leader of the ‘National levy’ Pavel Gubarev”. The word “oligarch” has a clearly negative denotation. In fact, it is attributed to a group of extremely rich and businessmen that have gained immense political influence as a part of an elite that exercises an undemocratic and hidden form of power to serve their own interests. Therefore, there is two-dimensional picture constructed in this case. Firstly, the Ukrainian government gives the office to a person strongly tied with it but with minimal political legitimacy. Secondly, since the oligarch did not assume his position the citizens of Donetsk have the legitimate right to elect their own governor, who coincidentally enough turned out to be an inveterate Russian Nazi. However, the stigma of Nazism has been systematically connected with the new government in Kiev after the removal of Yanukovych from power. Global analyst Sieff blames the EU leaders for “waking up very slowly to the kind of allies it now has in Kiev. Neo-Nazis, rioters, violent revolutionaries, anti-Semitism - these are very unstable people. This new national militia is a very worrying development”.

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presidency by a coup orchestrated by the West which supported this mob of extremists to seize power in Ukraine.

Credibility is obviously a concept of central importance as far as reality construction is concerned. There are methods for both increasing and decreasing credibility. In the RT articles I selected to investigate, scientificity is one of the strategies employed to attribute credibility. Given that science is the systematic enterprise that builds and organises knowledge focusing on the search for truth, scientific evidence exhibits the rightness of a statement. For instance, Malic argues that there is a pattern by “Russophobic hysterics in Western mainstream media” to convince their audience that the problem in Ukraine is Russian aggression by constantly utilising fabrications, ridicules and personal attacks. To further enhance his argument he cites a book by radical American political activist Saul Alinsky called Rules for Radicals. He writes that “its 10 chapters are dedicated to 12 rules for successful political activism. All 12 apply to some extent to the propaganda war currently being waged against Russia, but five in particular are obviously in play”. Going deeper into some of these rules to better ground his argument, Malic explains why rule 12 (“Pick the target, freeze it, personalise it, and polarize it”) corresponds well with the West's perception of Vladimir Putin. Putin who is “made out to be a Bond super-villain, personally behind every perceived slight to the West, at the same time a Stalinist and a Tsarist and a reincarnation of Hitler”.

Closely related to scientificity is another strategy that could be defined as empiricist discourse. This approach aims at putting data forward in order to interpret reality objectively, without analytical interference. Besides, numbers always tell the truth, in the sense that they cannot be distorted. In the same vein, accuracy is an integral element to evoke credibility as one of the cornerstones of scientific inquiry. Therefore, providing exact numbers or percentages implies a careful, detailed and accurate representation of an undeniable reality. When discussing the economic implications for EU members that sanctions against Russia would have, there is a specific article that sheds light on Merkel's reluctance to escalate the tensions and impose further measures. Trying to interpret German Chancellor's insistence on working for a political solution to the stalemate over the Ukrainian crisis, the writer provides statistical data that proves the interdependence of German and Russian economy. It is stated that the “bilateral trade volume equalling to some 76 billion euros in 2013. Further around 6,000 German firms and over 300,000 jobs are dependent on Russian partners with the overall investment volume of 20 billion euros”.

Another news article notifies that many Ukrainian military units started joining up with the pro-Russian Crimean government in addition to some locals who organised self-defence units. Given the extensive speculation around the alleged interference of Russian troops, the writer juxtaposes in detail the Russian-Ukrainian Partition Treaty that determines the issue of the military bases and vessels maintained by Russia in Crimea. According to the treaty that was signed in 1997 and renewed in 2010:

Russia is allowed to have up to 25,000 troops, 24 artillery systems (with a calibre smaller than 100 mm), 132 armoured vehicles, and 22 military planes, on the peninsula’s territory. The Russian Black Sea fleet is allowed to stay in Crimea until 2042. Moscow annually writes off $97.75 million of Kiev’s debt for the right to use Ukrainian waters and radio frequencies, and to compensate for the Black Sea Fleet’s environmental impact.  

Through a thorough and accurate analysis, it is implied that Russia still holds the legitimacy to maintain a remarkable military force on the Crimean peninsula and hence even if there is some sort of Russian intervention it is probably within the context of the agreement.

The visual aspect is also very important for attributing credibility as people tend to believe in what they see far easier than something written on a website. In this context, I identified another strategy that involves featured images. Pictures shown under the title of the article are given significant visibility as they are the very first thing a reader notices as long as he clicks on the article. Yet, even those that are shown within the text they have the power to enhance the credibility of what is written. For instance, in an article discussing the support that Ukrainian rebels were offered from the Western governments, there are two pictures included. The first image shows a soldier wearing a black balaclava, i.e. a knitted headgear that exposes only his eyes, with the caption “Kiev” underneath. In collective conscience, balaclava is often associated with concealment in the course of illegal activities. Besides, it is an accessory that has been extensively used by paramilitary organisations in the past to conceal their identities (e.g. members of IRA used to wear balaclavas in every occasion). The second one shows two soldiers who in addition to their balaclavas, they wear military helmets. It is also noteworthy that one of them wears a helmet with Right Sector insignia while the other's balaclava is reminiscent of a human skull.

This visual material provokes a sinister feeling to the reader, and by that it serves its purpose. The images are employed in order to give the most negative connotation to Ukrainian rebels by identifying them with the nationalist far-right paramilitary groups that prevailed at the 

Euromaidan protests in Kiev, and to further disparage the Western leaders for backing these extremists. On the flipside, images displaying soldiers of United Armed Forces of Novorossiya present a far more positive, or even romanticised, aspect of the conflict. One of them shows a group of soldiers atop and around an armoured vehicle whose hood has been decorated with flowers while the caption reads “People's militia soldiers in the occupied village of Marinovka, near the town of Snezhnoye”. The pictures reproduces very well the story of armed volunteer groups that liberate parts of Eastern Ukraine formerly occupied by Ukrainian forces and who are ardently welcomed by the local population. Another features a close-up of two soldiers standing side by side; the one in the background is looking through his binoculars while the other seems to contemplate. Their faces are not covered and they both look very assertive and inspirational.

All these strategies that were described so far can be applied by both the journalist and the interviewee. However, asking questions is a means available only to the former, aiming at guiding the conversation. When asking questions, the journalist essentially decides which topics will be part of the agenda and to what extent, hence setting the general frame. Naturally, the topics mostly discussed are the ones which fit the desirably constructed reality. The interviewer may call attention to particular elements of an issue by purposely question about them. Again in the interview with Malic, the journalist asks what proof does the West have of a Russian intervention in Crimea. Apparently this is a much-expected question to start an interview conducted amidst the military intervention that resulted into the annexation of Crimea by Russia. Malic's response is that “they have any proof, but then again, they’ve never needed any proof for any of their allegations over the past 25 years. They simply say what they want the public to believe and expect the public to believe it”. Surprisingly, right after that, the journalist changes entirely the direction of the discussion and questions Malic the following: “They said Russia is violating Ukraine's sovereignty. But what about the EU and the US politicians propping up the Maidan opposition before it came to power?”. Through this shift, the interviewer intends firstly to belittle the accusations against Moscow and secondly to reinvigorate the interest about the events surrounding the Euromaidan unrest and the role of the United States and European Union. Thereby, Malic need not to further apologise for the alleged Russian incursion, and is given the opportunity to disseminate his own interpretation of the events.

But not every interviewee shares similar pro-Russian beliefs with Malic. That could not be the case in any way. Besides, if a person without a pro-Russian viewpoint supports pro-Russian

positions such an argument has a much higher credibility. For example, when German Left opposition leader Gysi is asked whether he is concerned about far-right radicals in the Ukrainian government, he categorically condemns the involvement of such people:

Yes, there are real fascists in the government. They are currently in leading positions. They have the vice-prime minister position, defence minister, and minister of agriculture and environment minister positions. Besides that, there is the co-founder of Svoboda party, who is not a member of this party right now, but he is in charge of the security committee, some sort of intelligence service.\(^{18}\)

Indeed, this kind of questions are usually posed in such a manner that only one answer is morally acceptable. That is to say that despite the fact that Gysi comes from a Western country, which is also a leading EU member, there is no room for evasive responses.

6.4 Framing Functions

Having identified the main themes occurred and strategies employed that build the pro-Russian narrative, I am now going to categorise the interpretations found according to the framing function they exert. As already stated, not necessarily all functions of a particular frame will be fulfilled in every case. Nevertheless, Entman (2004, 6) stresses that the most relevant functions of framing are problem definition, because it predetermines the the rest of the frame, and remedy, because it directly promotes support or opposition to certain policies. He also notes that “frames in the news are typically a part of the reporting process for three different classes of objects: political events, issues and actors” (Entman 2004, 23). For the purpose of this classification, three frames will be analysed in respect of the main topics; economy and global security belong to the class of issues while conflict constitutes a political event.

I. Economy

As for the economy, the problematic effect is basically a series of sanctions imposed on Russia by way of reprisal for the annexation of Crimea. From the very first moment, sanctions were regarded as an act of war against a major world power, as McAdams, an executive director of the Ron Paul institute, makes apparent in an article even before their implementation.\(^{19}\) He continues suggesting that the idea of sanctioning Russia “is absurd. This is not Syria, this is not Cuba that you are going to embargo. And it is a ridiculous move for the US and EU to face”. It becomes clear that Russia


cannot be treated as a minor or peripheral power by the West.

In fact, there were statements by Western leaders that received much criticism. Then European Council President, Van Rompuy, warned that “if Moscow does not manage a de-escalation of the situation in Ukraine, it will seriously affect the relations between the EU and Russia. If there is no de-escalation, the EU will decide on additional measures, such as visa restrictions, asset freezes and cancellation of the Russia-EU summit”\(^{20}\). In the same vein, British Prime Minister Cameron was portrayed as threatening Russia when he stated that “asset freezes and unspecified travel bans could be imposed on Russia ‘relatively quickly,’ unless progress is made on dialogue with Ukraine”. Therefore, it is not only the Russia economy that is being attacked as a result of the sanctions, but it is also its prestige of the country. From the early stages of the Ukrainian crisis, Putin's government made clear that it will not tolerate any abasement from the West.

In an op-ed article entitled *Sanctions: The sanctimonious solution*, Dr. Fuller remarks: “President Obama announced further sanctions against Russian politicians and businessmen to a chorus of economists gleefully predicting the havoc to be wrought on the Russian economy”\(^{21}\). She continues saying: “there’s not much evidence that sanctions have every actually achieved anything beyond making life difficult for lesser or greater numbers of people”. Understandably, the columnist does very consciously pick her words. The words “gleefully” and “havoc” are indeed so emotionally charged that they can create a visual image. They can vividly represent a scene where Obama and some bank executives meet behind doors with their sole objective to machinate against Russia. Most importantly, this conspiracy turns out to afflict only a certain number of ordinary people, and not the elite or the banking sector as initially planned. Thereby, the implied moral judgment vindicates the firm sentiment that the motivations of the West are genuinely revengeful, unforgiving and cruel.

When it comes to remedy, namely the proposed solution to the problem of sanctions, the sole improvement is to repeal all sanctions and re-establish a constructive and honest cooperation between the countries. Lord Truscott, British petroleum and mining consultant, asserts “we need to move on instead of having these tit-for-tat sanctions. I think we need to focus on a diplomatic solution to this crisis and think about the relationship that we have between Russia and the West and how productive that has been over the recent years. That's what they should be doing instead of threatening each other with sanctions they should get around the table and negotiate a diplomatic

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solution to this crisis.”. Besides the cost of maintaining the sanctions is mutually onerous, as “economic sanctions would hurt European economies as well as that of Russia”, especially given the European Union’s high level of dependence on Russian energy. For example, Germany “is heavily dependent on Russian energy with around 35 percent of its natural gas imports coming from Russia.”

II. Global Security

Regarding the frame of global security, the core of the problem lies upon what the Kremlin deems as the West's expansionist policy oriented towards establishing a new order in the region where the former should maintain its dominant position and influential presence. In an article discussing NATO activity in Eastern Europe, the interviewer informs security analyst, Shoebridge, about its intention “to protect member states against what it calls ‘Russian aggression’.” Later in the same interview, Shoebridge speculates on the “deployment of [NATO] extra forces in the Baltic States. And even yesterday announcing that there would be some form of NATO presence now in countries such as Armenia, Azerbaijan and Moldova”. After NATO announced boosting its military presence in the region, Lavrov, Russian Foreign Minister, asked for detailed explanations regarding expansionist activity in Eastern Europe. In the article covering this story, at some point the writer reminds to his readers: “although Russia has repeatedly denied any troop build-up on the borders with Ukraine, as well as plans to send any troops into Ukraine, the West has been turning a deaf ear to the claims”.

It is of vital importance for Moscow to secure the participation of its neighbours in the Eurasian Economic Union. This is resonated by pro-Russian endorsement for the annexation of Crimea and Eastern regions of Ukraine this solution. Likewise, this is also the case of Ukraine. Russia intercepted its closer affiliation with the European Union and blocked the sign of an association agreement which is “a top priority task for the European leaders”.

23 Ibid.
III. Conflict

Regarding the frame of conflict, as it has been already stated, the distinction between the function of problem definition and causal analysis is almost unattainable since the case study concerns a confrontation between two actors, i.e. Russia and the West. The conflict has essentially arisen from the support that the EU and the United States provided to the Euromaidan opposition, which in its turn led to the overthrow of the democratically elected government of Yanukovych and the rise to power of an illegitimate government in Kiev. In an article discussing Congress' decision to approve a $1 billion aid package to Ukraine in late March, an op-ed published by Ron Paul was reproduced. Being a long-time adversary of foreign aid, former US Congressman harshly criticised this initiative writing:

> Recently a democratically-elected government was overthrown by violent protesters. That is the opposite of democracy, where governments are changed by free and fair elections. What is shocking is that the US government and its NGOs were on the side of the protesters! Washington does not want to talk about its own actions that led to the coup, instead focusing on attacking the Russian reaction to US-instigated unrest next door to them.28

Few days later, on April 3, security analyst Shoebridge said on RT that “Crimea is being used as pretext to increase Western defence budgets, although what’s happened there really has little impact on the vital national interests of NATO-members”29 Following a symbolic resolution issued by the Council of Europe that suspended the voting and leadership rights of the Russian delegation in mid-April, Draitser, an independent geopolitical analyst, interpreted this decision as “an attempt to further isolate Russia diplomatically”.30

As far as the moral evaluation proposed, this mostly revolves around the condemnation of the involvement of far-right wing groups in Euromaidan protests, some of them closely related with neo-Nazism, and their subsequent ascension to power. To put it differently, within this conflict, it is Russian side that has the ethical advantage over its western rivals, since the latter have supported far-right extremists among others in their effort to overthrow the democratically legitimate government of Yanukovych. According to Malic, “the crowd in Maidan didn't have any sort of democratic legitimacy. What they did have is that they had weapons. And they had money from the West, and the diplomatic support of Western governments”.31 Moreover, the government in Kiev that

was formed after the ousting of President Yanukovych has been repeatedly characterised as coup-imposed and associated with fascist elements, always with the connivance of Western governments.

When it comes to remedy, a proposed solution to appease the tension, the general idea is that compromises need to be made by both sides so to introduce a new period of communication between the two sides and hence terminate the post-Cold War asymmetry that caused the ongoing tension. On April 18, Sakwa suggested:

_Everyone has got to take a step back. And then the step forward is convening a European Security Conference. [Thereby] we actually can establish a new organization possibly or a new charter of security and peace, because ultimately the security is indivisible._

Lozansky and Sieff, both coming from the American University of Moscow, called on the need for a return to reason regarding the US-Russia relations. In an op-ed, they stressed the urgency “as tensions rise and the conditions in Ukraine continue to deteriorate” that “policymakers in Washington and Moscow need to recognize the extremely urgent need to find a means of extricating themselves from this crisis... before it transforms from a regional crisis to a full- blown international conflagration”.

In another article, Draitser asserts that any comprehensive solution for the Ukrainian crisis “must address the issues of territorial integrity and regional autonomy”. More precisely, he also demonstrates the necessity for “Russia, together with the EU and other interested parties, would need to come to an agreement regarding the territorial integrity of these regions”. However, this objective would require “assurances from Russia regarding their non-intervention” on the one hand, and “guarantees of protection of ethnic Russians throughout Ukraine, as well as other vital Russian interests in the region” from the Ukrainian government and its western allies on the other.

### 6.5 The Constructed Narrative

In this part, the fully framed narrative, will be investigated. After analysing all the material, the narrative may be summarised as follows: During the Euromaidan demonstrations the US and EU leaders bolstered up certain far right Ukrainian nationalist groups (e.g. Right Sector, Svoboda) in order to overthrow the democratically elected incumbent president Yanukovych and establish a new pro-Western government. An armed coup took place in Ukraine and the legitimate government was ousted from power. Following that, protests by pro-Russian and anti-revolution activists began

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across the largely Russian-speaking eastern and southern Ukraine, namely the oblasts of Crimea, Donetsk, Kharkiv, Luhansk, and Odessa. After local self-defence forces and armed volunteers took over the Crimean peninsula, a self-declared pro-Russian government organised a referendum on secession from Ukraine to Russia. Although the vote for integration of the region into the Russian Federation was 97% with an 83% voter turnout, the West did not recognise the results and the referendum was declared invalid through a UN resolution. Kosovo's unilateral separation from Serbia had set a precedent and the West should acknowledge Crimeans' right to self-determination. In response to the annexation of Crimea by Russia, many Western governments and organisations led by the United States and European imposed sanctions on high profile Russian individuals and companies, whose scope was later increased as the unrest in eastern and southern Ukraine was escalated. The Kremlin imposed thus retaliatory sanctions against American and Canadian individuals. The war of sanctions intends to hit Russia both economically and strategically while it derails peace process in Ukraine, even though there may be unintended consequences for the Western economies too.

The constructed narrative above is utilised to interpret events and initiatives of both sides in such way to grant plausibility to the Russian account of story. Moscow has the role of the good and just who is simple trying to protect the rights of Russian-speaking population in Ukraine whose very existence is in danger since the far-right radicals took over governmental positions in Kiev. Therefore, the audience is determined to take sides with Russia.

RT: Washington says the rights of minorities are protected in Ukraine. But what about those ultra-nationalists affiliated with the government, who made no secret about their hatred towards Russians and other ethnic groups?

Malic: How can the United States government say the minority rights are protected in Ukraine when the very first thing that the rebel government did was pass a law banning the use of Russian language? If that is a protection of minorities, then what’s going on in Kosovo is multi-ethnic democracy, and Kosovo has been ethnically cleansed of everybody but Albanians, and even the Albanians who disagree with the current regime – which was also installed by the United States. Obviously some definitions are not all straight here.35

The crimes committed by Nazism are collectively condemned by any means throughout the Western world. In fact, they blatantly contradict shared European values that led to European integration in the decades following the World War II. Implying that the West endorsed paramilitary groups ideologically affiliated with Nazism serves to morally discredit these governments. Nobody wants to be identified with groups that unashamedly adopt fascist and Nazi symbols. At the core of

the strategy lies the defamation of Western governments that backed the extremists to overthrow a legitimate government. In the confrontation that followed the sanctions this argument is constantly brought up.

6.6 Relevance to Public Diplomacy Objectives

As it was stated already, Putin's third presidential term has been characterised by his persistence on promoting the project of Eurasian integration, largely in the context of the Eurasian Economic Union. At the same time Russia seeks to promote not only this institution, but also the cooperation with other BRICS members as an initiative to counterbalance the influence of the EU, NATO and other Western oriented transnational organisations. Under this scope, it is quite understandable why Moscow has risked so much to secure the participation of neighbouring countries in these projects.

Let alone the efforts Russia undertakes to block the Western expansion in Eastern Europe, it concurrently brings about specific plans to manipulate the access to energy supply. Another disrupting strategy includes financially supporting several pro-Russian populist movements in Europe.

In the short term, the most evident proof that the Kremlin has launched an disinformation war against what is perceived as the informational aggression from the West, is the very strategy to engage different channels on the occasion of the Ukrainian turmoil. As Darczewska (2014) underlines, after the referendum on the status of Crimea, the efforts aim to enhance credibility for Russian's causes and obscure its plans regarding the military involvement and annexation. Especially the case of the Russian-speaking population in Eastern and South Ukraine illustrates how it has been subjected to informational and psychological treatment.
7. Conclusion

7.1 Critical Review

The subject of this dissertation was to conduct a qualitative framing analysis of articles, published on RT and related to the sanctions imposed on Russia, in order to explore the frames produced. This study has explored the main frames produced in ninety-seven articles in the aftermath of the Ukrainian crisis. The purpose was to contribute to the research about mediated public diplomacy through the investigation of the role of RT as an instrument for Russia's mediated public diplomacy. As discussed in the introduction and background chapters the international Russia-based news network was identified as a tool for Russian mediated public diplomacy. That is to say that RT aims at convincing its audience of the rightness of the Kremlin's interests and perceptions.

The analytical part look at a broad scope of different strategies that are employed to effectuate the objectives of the news agency. Firstly, strategic selection refers to determining the topics on the agenda as well as the interviewees. Different strategies are pursued depending on whether it is a news report article or an op-ed presenting an interview. There is indeed a wide range of pro-Russian interviewees to present and defend their positions, while for the rest there is the possibility either to emphasise their neutral record of events or pose the questions in such a manner that only one answer is morally acceptable. The interviewer uses his privileged position to ask questions that would lead the talk to a desirable direction and give a favourable result. More general strategies intend to build a biased pro-Russian reality that notwithstanding, looks as if it is factual and true. Particularly, this includes presenting pro-Russian positions as a comprehensive depiction of an objective reality and attributing credibility. In the case of the Ukrainian turmoil, this constructed narrative is deployed to evaluate decisions and policies of the major actors involved. Meanwhile Russia plays the role of the right and just, the West condemns its involvement in the Crimean crisis. In contrast, the United States and European Union are primarily motivated by their desire to change the status quo in Eastern Europe.

Throughout all the fields of antagonism between Russia and the West, the strategies applied are designed to discredit the latter at an international scale, by associating it with the far right extremist groups that emerged in the Ukrainian scene. Instead, Russia prevails in the context of legitimacy, morality, truth and justice. Thereby RT indoctrinates its readers with pro-Russia sentiment and convinces the audience about the rightness of the Moscow's causes. As a primary actor in the arena of international broadcasting it secures access to foreign audiences to the Russian government, contributes to the latter's global status and influence over the public opinion, foreign governments and transnational institutions. Thus, RT becomes a tool for Russia to pursue its public
diplomacy objectives. More precisely, the three frames (i.e. economy, security, conflict) produced by RT during period of the international sanctions constructed a discourse that justifies the idea of the unprovoked western intervention to the affairs of Ukraine which, however, has been always in the Russian sphere of influence. Furthermore, the frames also appear to endorse the idea of creating an alternative political order as a counteract to the predominant Western, liberal and international system. In the same vein, the advocacy of the idea that emerging peripheral nations will play an important role in the following years within a new multipolar global order. In this context, Russia intends to make overtures towards the BRICS and, principally promote the projects of the New Development Bank and Eurasian integration through Eurasian Economic Union.

7.2 Discussion
Mediated public diplomacy is a critical aspect of public diplomacy in which political communication and media outlets interact to achieve shorter term and more targeted diplomatic objectives by improving a country's international image among foreign audiences and by extension, foreign policymakers. More specifically, it targets at disseminating a particular frame either directly to foreign audiences or indirectly through foreign news media. If the frame is positively received, then mediated public diplomacy should be considered successful.

When it comes to the evaluation of a certain mediated public diplomacy strategy employed by media, it is fundamental in the first place to establish a method that serves to analyse media frames and its key elements, as it has been done in this research. Firstly, the identification of topics in the articles provides the evidence that there are some of recurring themes especially associated with the Ukrainian crisis, at least throughout the given period. Additionally, the analysis of the frame functions offers the possibility to comprehend fully which strategies have been used, how the articles have compiled the specific narrative and what interpretation is promoted. Building upon previous relevant studies, the analytical process verifies that the frames.

In retrospect, drawing on the widely accepted definition of frames as introduced and developed by Entman, along with the contribution of de Vreese provides all the necessary theoretical tools to design effectively and implement a research on public diplomacy. However, although framing research deals with the properties and characteristics of a frame, it fails to discuss news framing in relation to the implications for the audience. To determine whether and how media frames interact with audience's preconceptions, that is the way people receive, interpret and evaluate issues and events would require a second level of analysis, namely frame-setting, as de Vreese's typology suggests.
7.3 Future Research

The intentional focus of this study was to investigate how the frames produced by RT during the Ukrainian crisis could benefit Russia to pursue its public diplomacy objectives. For this purpose, the investigation's focal point was the articles uploaded on RT's international website. Although this analysis outlined which topics are given salience and what are the employed strategies, it does not investigate the penetration they have to RT's audience. To explore to what extent the readers and viewers of RT take sides with the Russian policies, future research should focus on audience's reception. This could be attained by quantifying different ways of reception, for example the viewership of the videos uploaded to YouTube or the reposts of articles on other social media platforms (i.e. Facebook, Twitter, Reddit, Google+, Tumblr).

More methodologically-wise, regarding the model created by Pan and Kosicki (1993), I would be mostly interested in a future research based on the linguistic approach. By analysing selection, placement and structure of specific words and sentences within a text, identification of frames would be more systematic and thorough. In brief, this approach determines linguistic elements that signify a frame by distinguishing structural dimensions of a frame that can be measured, such as theme, syntax, script and rhetoric. Still it is a method of inordinate complexity, as has been already pointed out by Esser and D' Angelo (2003, 624), that is not suitable for a standardised frame analysis with large text samples.

Nevertheless, the study gives a well-grounded and detailed insight into how a narrative can be constructed as factual and true. It is the first empirical study that focuses on the application of persuasive strategies on RT's online articles with the help of framing theory, reflecting on the complex picture of mediated public diplomacy. Given the increasingly aggressive role that Russia takes over the European affairs, there is a growing interest in the expansion of RT and other Russian mediated public diplomacy networks (i.e. Sputnik, Russia Beyond the Headlines). Therefore, this study may be used as a springboard towards understanding the methods they apply to convince international audience to take sides with Moscow's diplomatic interests.
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