

**UNDERSTANDING PUTIN’S POWER CONSOLIDATION AND
SOCIAL IDENTITY FORMATION THROUGH THE NEW YEAR’S
EVE SPEECHES FROM 2000 -2015**

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Abstract: After Boris Yeltsin resigned from his position on the eve of 2000, Vladimir Putin became the next President of the Russian Republic. The New Year’s Eve Speech given by the President was very symbolic and illustrated the transition from an old Yeltsin regime to a new one with Putin. This article argues that the speeches given by the President during the New Year’s Eve could be considered as an important indicator of personalistic power consolidation of Putin in the country. The main argument is that the more authoritarian regime (and Putin) becomes the more visible are the changes in the speeches he gives. Moreover, this article also argues that New Year’s Eve Speeches play an important role for Social Identity Formation of the country.

Key words: Power, Consolidation, Authoritarian regime, Putin, Social Identity

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**2000- 2015 YILLAR ARASINDA RESMİ YILBAŞI KONUŞMALARININ
İÇERİĞİ ÜZERİNDEN PUTİN İKTİDARININ PEKİŞTİRME SÜRECİNİN
VE SOSYAL KİMLİK OLUŞUMUNUN ANALİZİ**

Öz: Boris Yeltsin'in 2000 yılı arifesinde görevinden istifa etmesinden sonra Rusya Cumhuriyeti'nin bir sonraki Cumhurbaşkanı Vladimir Putin oldu. 2000 yılı, Rusya Cumhurbaşkanının Yeni Yıl Arifesi Konuşması oldukça sembolikti ve eski Yeltsin rejiminden, Putin ile yeni bir rejime geçişini simgeliyordu. Bu makale Vladimir Putin'in on beş sene zarfında, yılbaşında yaptığı konuşmaların, ülkesinde siyasi iktidarının pekiştirmesinin önemli bir göstergesi olarak değerlendirilebileceğini savunmaktadır. Makalenin ana argümanı, ülkenin rejimi ve Cumhurbaşkanı ne kadar otoriter hale gelirse, yaptığı konuşmalarındaki değişikliklerin o kadar görünür hal almaktadır. Ayrıca bu makale, Yılbaşı Konuşmalarının ülkenin Sosyal Kimlik Oluşumunda önemli bir rol oynadığını da tartışmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İktidar, Pekiştirme, Otoriter rejim, Putin, Sosyal Kimlik

INTRODUCTION

The end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union have lead to the emergence of fifteen independent states including the largest leading state of the Russian Federation. Towards the end of Brezhnev's rule as a communist party leader of USSR, it became evident that the political and economic model of the Soviet Union was no longer efficient enough to maintain the previous success of the Empire. After the death of Brezhnev in 1982, Yuriy Andropov came to power and has shifted his focus towards the necessary economic reforms and aimed to modernize the stagnating industry. Unfortunately these plans were put to hold due to his sudden death in 1984. The next in line for the chair was Konstantin Chernenko, who came to power in 1984, and stayed in the office only a year and has also died due to the heart failure a year after his succession (TASS.ru). This unfortunate series of deaths has resulted in the political power void and the lack of strong leadership in the Moscow's office which has brought the last official communist party leader to power. This person was Mikhail Gorbachev. Gorbachev is arguably one of the most well known leaders of his time. The main thing he became famous for was his attempt at liberalization of the Soviet Union. His major strategies included the new plan known as; 'perestroika' – the reformation of politics and the economy and social and political change known as: 'glasnost' which has focused on the freedom of speech and press in the country. Despite his efforts to reform the Soviet Union in the late 1990's, the economy of the country has been already deteriorating for quite some time which has limited his ability to fulfill his vision. Years of economic stagnation has resulted in one of the worst economic crises that the

country has ever experienced. The state planned economy has crushed and was no longer able to feed thousands of people of the Union. It could be argued, that as the result this and combination of other issues (willingness of Baltic states to separate and fall of Berlin wall) has eventually led to the disintegration of the last biggest empire – The Soviet Union.

After the collapse, the newly formed Russian state has faced the major difficulty of rebuilding a new country following the global capitalist economic and political order and despite his efforts Gorbachev wasn't the one to do it. In 1991, first Presidential election took place in Russian Federation. There were two major candidates in this race: Boris Yeltsin and Genadiy Zyuganov. It could be argued, that this election could be labeled as the most democratic race in the history of Russian Federation. This race has resulted in 53,82 percent of total votes in favor of Boris Yeltsin and 40,31 percent of total votes were given to Zyuganov (Sakwa, 2014:57). As the result of this election, Yeltsin became the first President of Russian Federation. It could be argued that the first term of Yeltsin as the President of a newly founded Republic could be labeled as semi – successful (Medvedev, 2000:10). On one hand, he urged the integration of market economy and continuation of adoption of democratic processes in the country; on the other hand, he was battling with the war that has erupted in Chechnya. The war in Chechnya should have made the candidacy of Yeltsin for next term as the President minimal; however, despite all odds he was able (with his team) to gain the necessary support of the public and was yet again elected as the President (Medvedev, 2000:18). However, in his second term Yeltsin became weaker as a leader mainly due to his deteriorating health condition (already surviving one myocardial infarction) and due to his visible alcohol problem. As a result of this unfortunate condition, Yeltsin has symbolically resigned during a 1999 – 2000 New Years Eve speech leaving his power to his right hand, Vladimir Putin (Cummings, 2005: 21). It could be argued that this speech has a certain symbolism illustrating an important process of power transition due to this day. Yeltsin's final speech was followed by the speech of Vladimir Putin, who at that point has officially become an Acting President of the Russian Federation.

This brief history of the last leaders of Soviet Union and the first Presidents of Russian Federation leads us to the longest ruling President of the country, Vladimir Putin. The symbolism of the New Year Speech that took place in 2000 became a starting point of Putin's long-lasting leadership journey of the country. Throughout, the years Putin was able to consolidate his power as a leader of the country and create a personalistic authoritarian regime type continues to exist until today. This article aims at understanding how the psychological profile of the leader has changed throughout the years. The changes in the political psychological patterns could also be observed in the changes in his speeches that he provided throughout the years in the media

outlets. However, since there are hundreds of media outlets, this article will confine to the New Year's Eve Speeches that the leader gave throughout the years. The purpose of this article is to understand whether Putin's New Year's Eve Speeches have changed as his power consolidated. This article will provide a brief content analysis of Putin's speeches from 2000 to 2015. The speeches that not be included in the analyses are the ones given by the Dmitry Medvedev during his rule from 2009 to 2012. This article will analyze the content of Putin's speeches and how they have changed in almost fifteen years. Moreover, this article will attempt to apply this information to the theory of democratic breakdowns and reversal to authoritarianism.

The first part of the paper will provide the literature review on the theory of democratic breakdowns and authoritarian regimes. This part of the paper will touch up on the literature of Geddes on regime breakdowns and types of authoritarian regimes, Linz's theory on authoritarianism and Levitski and Way's literature on Hybrid Regimes. The purpose of an extensive literature review is to understand the variables and the research question that is to be answered in this paper. The second part of this paper will outline the major research question and the hypotheses that are derived from that question. This part will also include the methodology that will be used in this paper and provide a brief information on what this methodology is and how it works. The last part of the paper will discuss the data and findings, this part will address some of the similarities, repetitions and some of the issues that existed in the data. The last part of the paper will conclude the overall analysis and prove or disregarded the hypotheses that have been set in the first section of the paper.

I. LITERATURE REVIEW – REVIEWING THE THEORY OF AUTHORITARIANISM

An interesting aspect about regime type classification is that for the most part research has been mainly focused on the patterns of democratization and the labeling of democracies rather than other types of existing regimes (Bosch, 2014:13). In his article, Bosch argues that the separation of political regimes into democracies and non-democracies only happened between 1960- 1970's with the famous works of Dahl on 'Polyarchy' and Hannah Arendt's writings on totalitarianism (Bosch, 2014:19). One of the major contributions in terms of understanding the non-democratic regimes and how they operate has been later published in Juan Linz's book on 'Totalitarian and Authoritarian' regimes the final version of which was published in 2000's (Linz, 2000: 159). The initial purpose to label the regime as 'authoritarian' was to distinguish this particular type of regime from the one known as 'Totalitarian', the second having other characteristics that distinguished it from being totalitarian (Linz, 2000: 161). However, it should be noted that these regime types are have been classified

within the typology of the non-democratic regimes by the author. This means that they are the opposites of the Dahl's mapping on the democratic regimes which he labels as the polyarchies. In his initial work Linz defines authoritarian regimes the following way:

Authoritarian regimes are political systems with limited, not responsible, political pluralism, without elaborate and guiding ideology, but with distinctive mentalities, without extensive nor intensive political mobilization, except at some points in their development, and in which a leader or occasionally a small group exercises power within formally ill-defined limits but actually quite predictable ones.(Linz, 2000: 159)

One of the distinct features in this definition is that an authoritarian regime unlike their counterpart totalitarian lacks a strict ideology. One more important feature of authoritarian regime is suppression of the any kind of opposition, making the regime non-competitive. Another distinctive feature of autocracies is in way similar to democratic regimes, authoritarian regimes could also be motivated in creation of the institutions; however, unlike in the case of liberal democracies, they have fewer constraints in terms on how to do it. In general Linz argument on autocracies is that they are basically the reversed versions of the democratic regimes (Linz, 2000: 170).

Geddes on the other hand, provides us with a detailed typology on the types of authoritarian regimes (Geddes, 1999:115). In her article she characterizes regime types according to the wave of authoritarian breakdowns and some of the characteristics that countries portray during this process. In her article she introduces three authoritarian regime types: military, single-party and personalistic regimes (Geddes, 1999:120). According to her in military regimes, the major actors are the military junta and they are the major decision makers on who is going to exercise power and influence the policies (Geddes, 1999:127). In the single-party regimes, the major actor that has power in the office is the ruling party and the party members decide on the major policies and politics flow of the country (Geddes, 1999:131). And the last, personalistic regimes in which it is up to a single person to decide on the faith of the country (Geddes, 1999:139).

In terms of the quantitative data an important tool that helps us to measure a regime type is a well known Polity IV dataset released by the Systemic Peace Center. Even though Polity V is also available focusing on the later years and regime changes, Polity IV has the same data that illustrates the regime types from 1945 – 2015. This data set includes the scores for 167 countries and depicts on the regime type of each country (POLITY IV). This dataset illustrates the regime types according to the existence of the freedom of speech, freedom of press, free and fair elections, free and open opposition and other

characteristics of liberal democracies. These markings range between 10 and -10 (POLITY IV). The highest 10 stands for 'Full Democracy', from 6 to 9 stands for 'Democracy', from 5 to -5 for anocracy and from -10 to -6 stands for autocratic regimes (POLITY IV). This dataset is far from perfect and includes some of the gaps in it however; this is arguably one of the most inclusive quantitative datasets (in terms of number of the countries) with an open online access.

After a brief literature review on authoritarian regimes that has been brought by Linz and Geddes, several other authors started to create new typologies to explain and differentiate the different types of authoritarian regimes. Important contributors to the new typologies are Levitsky and Way. They have published their book on new typology which they called 'Competitive Authoritarianism'. The collapse of the Soviet Union has brought the perception of the domination of the Western capitalist system over the rest of the world. According to them this meant that liberal democracies were the only legitimate systems towards which the world was leading (Levitsky, Way, 2009: 7). The general idea became that all the countries would eventually resemble the West and lean towards liberalization. This has created the monopoly of democratic regimes, dislodging all the other ones from the political arena. The extensive attempts for the liberalization of the non-democratic regimes that took place after the Cold War in the literature became known as the 4th wave of democratization (Levitsky, Way, 2009: 3). The expectation of this wave was that the transition phase would be similar to that of the other waves of liberalization smoothly transferring illiberal regimes to the fully grown democracies (Levitsky, Way, 2009: 5-6).

Nevertheless, the expectations of scholars have been proven wrong. Instead of having fully consolidated democracies as the result of the democratization, an alternative scenario has emerged. The non-democratic regimes that were supposed to become liberal democracies had hard time consolidating and adapting to the new democratic value system and instead, mutated and transformed into hybrids resulting in the emergency of competitive authoritarian regimes. Following this trend, Levitsky and Way have based their book on the theory of competitive authoritarianism applying it the multiply case study analysis explaining the reasons on why these regimes have turned into hybrids (Levitsky, Way, 2009: 10). The typologies for these regimes that they have come up with are known as the 'Hybrid Regimes', the regime types that resemble democracies by having system of election and necessary institutions. (Levitsky, Way, 2009: 12). However, in reality these regimes are highly authoritarian and do not meet the necessary criteria of a 'liberal democracies' in terms of rights and freedoms (Levitsky, Way, 2009: 14). In their book authors place Russia under the notion of competitive authoritarianism. For the purpose of this paper, even though this placement seems to be the most appropriate for

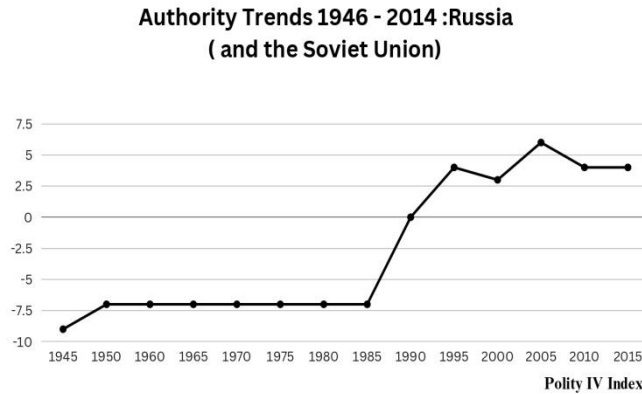
this country case, in this work Russia will be labeled according to the typology provided by Barbara Geddes which is the personalistic authoritarian regime (Levitsky, Way, 2009: 16). The reason for this is because, this paper puts Putin as the major unit of analysis and analyses the case of power consolidation through the leader rather than an institution. Consequently, placing this case under personalistic regime type seems to be more appropriate.

The last theory that is going to be used in this research is the theory of political psychology. The theory that could be applied to this study is known as the ‘social identity theory of leadership’. According to Hogg et.al social identity theory of leadership, is an extension of another theory known as social identity theory of the group, and social identity analysis of the social influence that is used to explain the leadership as the social phenomenon (Hogg, Knippenberg, Rast, 2012: 259). In this paper I will try to apply argument provided by Loftus, that through the social identity theory of leadership (in international relations) leaders can construct a positive image of the country (Loftus, 2018: 60). In order to do so, according to this theory, leaders construct ‘Self’ vs ‘others’ which help the leaders to achieve a preferred form of the social order (Loftus, 2018: 59). This paper will review whether this type of creative social construct is visible throughout Putin’s New Year’s Eve Speeches.

II. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

As it has been mentioned earlier the purpose of this article is to provide content analysis on the official New Year speeches of Vladimir Putin addressed to the citizens of Russian Federation. The purpose of this analysis is to find an answer to the following research question: *Did the content in the New Year speeches change throughout the years and as the regime became more consolidated?* This question is asked accepting the fact that in the years span since republic was founded Russia became more authoritarian without any signs of regime breakdown. The answer on possibilities of personalistic breakdowns has been outlined in the work written by Barbara Geddes (Geddes, 1999: 124). Moreover, the Polity IV index is another illustration of Russia’s continued authoritarianism. According to this index the most democratic period of Russian Federation was from 2000 to 2005 when Russia received 6 points and was labeled as a democratic country (POLITY IV). During the transition years approximately from 1993 to 2000, the country was labeled as autocratic as it is illustrated in the graph below. From 2005 to 2016, points of the country are stable at 4 points hence, it can be interpreted as a continuation of non-democratic or the better term ‘authoritarian’ regime (POLITY IV).

The graphing of this index is illustrated below:



Graph I: Polity IV index

As of for now, the total consolidation of autocratic regime according to this graph is seen starting from 2005 up until 2015 according to the available data (POLITY IV). This illustrates the no changes in the regime patterns for ten years, not including the time frame from 2015 to 2019. Consequently, even though this research will provide an analysis of all these years (that were under the Putin rule) it will specifically focus on the time line from 2005 to 2015.

Hypotheses

H₁: The more consolidated autocracy becomes the less willingly Putin will talk about the failures of his office.

The first hypothesis is based on the speeches from 2012 to 2015 in when Putin was already confident of his power, consequently had no need to address anything important to the public and towards his supporters. No mentions of corruption whatsoever. Moreover, with the development of alternative sources of media such as YouTube in the last years it became really difficult to hide the real problems of the country and the existence of the official opposition made it more difficult to manipulate certain segment of the society. Consequently, the main tactic of the ruling government was acting as if opposition doesn't really exist. The idea behind such strategy was that if you do not officially acknowledge that the opposition exists, then it doesn't. Additionally, the expectation is that the New Year's Eve Speeches (especially in the third term of the Presidency) lacked a detailed acknowledgement of the economic and social weaknesses which they did in the earlier speeches.

H₂: The more consolidated Putin's power becomes, the more conservative Putin's speeches have become.

As it has been mentioned earlier, since autocratic regimes are not ideologically driven as it is in the case of totalitarian ones, at some point it becomes necessary to fill in this ideological gap. Therefore, the prediction is that the more consolidated Putin's power has become the more conservative tone his speeches acquired. What is meant by conservative tone is that his speeches start to focus more on things such as; family values and its importance in Russian culture and society. Also might be some mentions in terms of church, God and religion.

H₃: The more consolidated Putin's power becomes, the less talk on country's foreign affairs will be.

The money spent on the military operations in Syria, and other operations overseas will be concealed and not mentioned in the speeches. Instead, the major focus will be on domestic affairs mainly focusing on extraordinary situations in Russia (such as natural disasters or terrorism).

H₄: The more consolidated Putin's power becomes, the more obvious the social identity construct will become.

This hypothesis reveals the nationalistic social construct and placement of Russia as the greater nation. This is also linked to the hypothesis number two, that speeches will become more conservative and will focus on Russia as a mighty nation.

The validity of these hypotheses will be viewed after reviewing the patterns of the speeches. The two hypotheses mentioned above are the major guide of what is to be measured while analyzing the speeches. After the detailed analysis, alternative hypothesis might be added. The next part of the paper will focus on the method which is will be used in this research paper.

III. METHODOLOGY

The method which is used in this article is known as the content analysis. According to Haggarty, the content analysis is “*a research method which allows the qualitative data collected in research to be analyzed systematically and reliably so that generalizations can be made from them in relation to the categories of interest to the researcher*” (Haggarty, 1996: 99). The categories of the interest have been already outlined in the previous section of this paper. Another common definition of content analysis is provided by Holsti and according to them: “*Content analysis is any technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages*” (Parker, Baker, Edwin, 1970: 356). Holsti's definition is arguably the most systemic definitions of content analysis which is available in the qualitative

research method. In political science, the data for the content analysis could be measured with the different programs that enable text readings. In this paper however, since the data set which will be used includes only transcribed New Year speeches of Vladimir Putin, using the transcription program would be unnecessary.

The unit of analysis in this research could be labeled as an individual. The unit analyzed is a President of Russian Federation Vladimir Putin. The amounts of speeches analyzed are 11, from 2000 -2008 and from 2012 to 2015. The reason for that the fact that Medvedev has been elected as the President; hence, the New Year Speeches have been given by him will not be included in the analysis. Moreover, speeches from 2015 to 2019 will also be omitted due the fact that they are too recent and hence do not correspond to the Polity IV index. In this case the dependent variable in this research is power consolidation, while the independent one is the speeches given by the leader. For the better analysis the transcription of the speeches will be used. The official transcription is only available in Russian language; consequently, the summaries of the speeches have been translated in to English.

IV. ANALYZING THE DATA

In this part of the paper each speech will be analyzed in the consecutive order. The speeches are divided in to two parts: part one – from 2000 to 2008, the second part will continue from 2012 to 2015. In each speech I will select and recite important and unique parts of the speech which were not mentioned previously. Moreover, the general parts of the speeches that include similar celebration of the New Year will be excluded.

Part – I

Yeltsin's resignation and the Power Transition (1999 -2000)

The first part of this speech is the famous resignation statement of Boris Yeltsin, who asked an apology from the fellow citizens and said that he was no longer able to continue his term as the President. Shortly after, Putin came as a temporary replacement for the Yeltsin and this was the first New Year Speech he has given. This speech could be summarized as the most democratic speech that has been given by Putin. In this speech he reassures the citizens that the new election of President of Russian Republic will take place in three months and that it will in accordance to the democratic standards. Moreover, he consoles the citizens by saying that there will be no power vacuum in the government, and all the attempts for unconstitutional actions will be detained. He also mentioned that all the democratic processes within the country will be retained.

Analysis: The very first speech given by Putin was when he was not yet an officially elected President. Additionally, high emphasis is put on the stability and insurance of democratic order due to the war in the Chechen Republic.

Putin's first year as the President (2000-2001)

Putin starts his speech by saying that *"in the last minutes of this year, it is time to make a comparison of the expectations and realities that we have achieved."* *"We have left behind another year together and faced both happy and tragic events. This year was the year of difficult decisions. However, we were able to achieve the visible elements of stability, which is very difficult to achieve. We together know that in this holiday night, not everyone has a rich table to celebrate it and not everyone is happy and successful, we need to remember that. There is still a lot of work to do together, and only then when time will surely come and we will be calm both for our old people and for our children"*(Putin, 2001).

Analysis: The first year as a President has been proven difficult on one hand the process of privatization and on the other is the continuation of the Chechen war. It can be argued that in this speech we can see the acknowledgment of the difficulties that country faces, the speech seems sincere and soothing filled with sympathy towards the citizens. He also mentions of the overall economic difficulties that the country faces. Yet Putin reassures that the bright future could be achieved together.

Putin's second year as the President (2001 -2002)

The important messages in his speech are the following: *"This year there have been both successful and dramatic events. For Russia this year in general was successful in terms of internal and external affairs. Each passing day of this year alienated us from the economic and social shocks. We did a lot to achieve this together. We worked together to make our life more stable. This year we were able to continue the successes of the last, proving that these successes were not simple short episodes. This year we were able to create a legislative basis for enhancement of the economy. Moreover, Russia was able to create a better image in the international arena and join the fight against terrorism. Russia joined the forces with international community for peace, stability and the sake of humanity"* (Putin, 2002).

Analysis: This speech in a way resembles the one given the year before, however, includes more optimistic points. Putin again acknowledges that there are still certain issues in terms of the country's economy and social situation. However, he stresses out all the achievements that his office has achieved during this year. Additionally, he mentions Russia's role in the international community and ensures Russian stance on the topic of terrorism (mainly due to the 9/11 attack).

New Year's Eve Speech of 2002 - 2003

In this speech Putin made general remarks and wishes. *“On this New Year's Eve, I thank you for everything. For all that has been achieved by us in the past year. After all, what awaits us ahead depends on what has already been done. Each of us has this year has developed in different ways. But now, not forgetting about the past, we are thinking, of course, about the future.”* *“I wish all your dreams and plans to come true. I wish everyone to become more successful in the next year.”* *“I wish for all parents and children to be healthy”* (Putin, 2003).

Analysis: In his speech of 2003 Putin gave a general wishes without mentioning any specifics on politics or economy as it has been done in the previous two years. In this speech he mentions the importance of family and rich history of Russia. This is the first speech were family was put in the center.

New Year's Eve Speech of 2003 - 2004

Here is the fragment of the speech: *“This year was different, there were difficulties and faults, and there are still a lot of problems that remain unsolved. However, we all together were seeking and finding the necessary solutions. And everything that we have achieved is not a coincidence, but the result if hard work. All this hard work resulted in the rise of prestige of the country and brought dignity to the nation of Russia. The good news is that more citizens were born in the country, indicating that people have hopes for the better future”* (Putin, 2004).

Analysis: One of the crucial events of 2004 in Russia was a terrorist attack in Beslan School Siege in which 1000 of people were held hostage out 323 people died including children and many more were heavily injured. In his speech Putin did not mention this event nor did he provide condolences during his speech. Instead, he chose to give the statement above that could be linked to events in Beslan. In terms of social identity the message of unification and actions ‘together’ as a family is the major aspect of national identity that Putin is trying to put forward.

Putin 2nd term as the President (2004 – 2005)

The section of the speech: *“This passing year will take its part in the Russian history. There were new projects, approaches to solving urgent national problems. We have taken serious steps aimed at increasing the efficiency of power, its openness to society and responsibility to it. The economic, defense potential has strengthened, the possibilities of our country have increased. We began to invest more in education and science. Disclosing the possibilities of everyone, improving people's lives is the main task, the main internal strength of Russia's development. The upcoming 2005 year is special for all of us - the*

year of the 60th anniversary of the Victory in the Great Patriotic War. This is a great holiday for us” (Putin, 2005).

Analysis: In this speech Putin recalls the economic success of the country and stresses the importance of education. Moreover, in this speech Putin has a patriotic point where he point out the upcoming Victory Anniversary. In this speech Putin once more mentions the past as a part of social identity construct again putting emphasis on the nationalistic note.

New Year’s Eve Speech of 2005 - 2006

“We can safely say that 2005 as a whole, which went down in history, was positive for us in almost all areas. And he convincingly proved: we are capable of a great deal. Of course, we still have enough problems, and we know that we can only solve them ourselves. We have big, very serious plans in the economy and social sphere. We will strengthen Russia's defense capability. And in the broadest sense of the word we will protect the interests of our citizens. And we will do it” (Putin, 2006).

Analysis: This speech could be labeled as the beginning of power consolidation process. Here he claims that Russia can only rely on herself and due to this there is a necessity to strengthen the defense of the country. Here we can see the image of Russia as the strong country as the part of social identity construction.

New Year’s Eve Speech of 2006-2007

“Today we celebrate the New Year 2007. We are already confident about the future. We are significantly expanding the horizons of our plans. This was made possible thanks to the common efforts to revive and strengthen the country in recent years. I believe that we will do everything possible so that the results we achieved in the economy will lead to series of positive changes in the life of each individual person. And that these results will decrease the number of poor.

We create conditions for the development of spirituality and culture, education and science. These values are the determinants for the further development of the country. Respect for the older generation is a sign of the maturity of any society and its sustainability. The state is obliged and will support and help older people, but this will not replace the warmth of their loved ones” (Putin, 2007).

Analysis: It could be argued that this speech is very similar to the one that Putin gave in 2006. There are no significant changes in the overall message or the tone in which it has been written. However, it should be noted that in both 2006 and 2007 Putin seems to be confident about Russian economy at the level it has raised.

New Year’s Eve Speech of 2007-2008

“Today I want to say special words to you and, seeing off the outgoing year, I sincerely thank you for everything we have done together over the past eight years. We not only restored the territorial integrity of Russia, but also once again it felt that we were united. And all these years we have worked together to save the country, to turn it into a modern, free, strong state, convenient and comfortable for the life of citizens. We can see how Russia is gaining strength from year to year and is getting stronger, how our economy is growing and new opportunities are opening up for our people. Of course, not everything was done. But I am sure: the path chosen by the people of Russia is the right one, and it will lead us to success. We have everything for this: our great history, enormous resources, courage, diligence and intellectual potential of our great people” (Putin, 2008).

Analysis: From the very first sentence this speech resembles the farewell speech of the leader. In a way it actually was a short farewell, since in the next term Putin didn't put his Presidency forward in the election campaign. 'Strong Russia' as the key of social identity. Moreover, this is the year of sudden drop in the Polity IV index to 4 points labeling Russia as non-democratic. This could be connected to the fact that 2008 was the year that started to conclude the war in Chechnya. In the next year Dmitry Medvedev will be elected as a President (endorsed by Putin) who stayed in power from 2008 – 2011.

Part – II

Putin 3rd term as a President (2012-2013)

“I would like to sincerely thank you for your work and its results, to thank you for your trust and support. But nevertheless, we primarily rely on our own strength, on those who are near us, on what we can accomplish ourselves through work, study and creativity we can change the life around us and become a little better. After all, only together we, the people of Russia, can confidently go forward, stand up to any challenges, solve the most difficult tasks, built a strong, successful, modern state and prosperous free society” (Putin, 2013).

Analysis: This is one of the general speeches given by Putin, he thanks his supporter for voting for him and as in the other speeches recalls that we need to only trust ourselves and no other. It could also be seen that nationalistic identity seems to be constructed and is openly revealed in the speech. This speech is a continuation of power consolidation, where Putin won for the third time (with no real opposition). This sign of consolidation is also illustrated in polity IV index were Russia remains with 4 points on the scale and is labeled as non-democratic.

New Year's Eve Speech of 2013-2014

“Last year we had to face problems and take up the challenge of serious tests. These included inhumane terrorist acts in Volgograd and unprecedented natural disaster in the Far East. This year, dear friends, I address you with a New Year’s message not as usual from the Moscow Kremlin, but from the Far East, where I came to celebrate the New Year with those who passed the test of elements with honor and dignity, but cannot yet to celebrate the holiday in their own home, and together with them to congratulate the whole country, raise a glass for our people, for the health of all those who selflessly fought against the flood, who showed mercy and selfless generosity.

Dear friends! We bow our heads to the victims of the brutal attacks. We will confidently, firmly and consistently continue the fight against terrorists until they are completely destroyed. In the coming year, we have much to do: in the economy, in improving people’s lives, to ensure their safety, to hold the Olympic and Paralympic Games at the highest level, to which just over a month is left”(Putin, 2014).

Analysis: This speech differs from the other speeches in the way that Putin is giving this speech from Habarovsk as a sign of solidarity to the victims of the flood. This is the beginning of Euro maidan revolution in Ukraine as Russian forces are ready to enter the country. Additionally, this year Russia openly supported Assad in Syria. As it has been hypothesized, with the consolidation of power Putin mentions less of the plans in terms of foreign affairs.

New Year’s Eve Speech of 2014-2015

“Love for the Motherland is one of the most powerful, elevating feelings. It was fully manifested in the fraternal support of the inhabitants of the Crimea and Sevastopol, when they firmly decided to return to their homeland. This event will forever remain the most important milestone in national history. Now, when we are summing up the outgoing year, I would like to sincerely thank you for your solidarity and solidarity, for your deep feelings of truth, honor, justice, responsibility for the fate of your country, for your constant readiness to defend the interests of Russia, to be with her and in the days of triumph, and at the time of testing, to achieve the execution of our most ambitious and ambitious plans. A few years ago, the Olympic Games in Sochi were perceived as a dream. But it did not just come true: we not only prepared and held the best in the history of the winter Olympics, but also won it. In this victory - the merit of all citizens of our country: the Olympians themselves, and those who supported them” (Putin, 2015).

Analysis: Eruption of the Russian-Ukraine war and Russian annexation of Crimea, as a result of which Putin gives a celebratory speech to congratulate those that have joined Russia Federation. Sanctions are put on Russia due to the annexation; as a result Russia aborts all the American Educational Programs in

the country. As in the previous years, none of these are mentioned in the New Year's Eve Speech. The Social Construct of Nationalistic identity is visible again with strong Russia in the center and the unstable Ukraine as the enemy.

CONCLUSION

The main aim of this article was to find out whether the content of the New Year's Eve Speeches have changed as Putin's power consolidated over time. The answer to this question throughout this research is yes they have changed. The discrepancies in the speeches are especially visible during the first years of Putin being in power. The first speeches had the wave of transition, and Putin through his speeches, gave hope for a better democratic future. It should also be noted that Putin's posture and the way he gave his speeches has also changed, in the first years he seemed to be more humble which in a way made him closer to the general public. There is a big difference in a comparison with the recent speeches, in which Putin adopted a figure of the strong autocratic leader which became possible throughout the years of social identity construct. In terms of the hypotheses, it could be argued that throughout the research all of them have been proven to be true. In the first years of office, Putin talked about poverty and economic problems openly without hesitation, throughout the time this became non-existent. The worsening of corruption in the country and in the office has not been addressed by the leader at all. Instead, Putin started to focus on such things as family values and Russian tradition. Moreover, the consolidation of the power has correspondent with construction of social identity which made his speeches automatically more conservative and based on the nationalistic sentiments. In terms of internal conflicts of Chechnya and tragic events of Beslan and Nordost, Putin didn't mention the two events specifically and instead told that year was hard and as the country they did well throughout those difficulties.

And lastly, the hypothesis that didn't really meet the expectations is 'the more consolidated power became, the less talk on foreign affairs will be', while this proves to be right for New Year's Eve speeches, it could also be linked to the general purpose of the speech, which is to outline the good and bad things that happened inside the country and not counting the foreign affairs. Moreover, in the later speeches Putin will talk more about foreign affairs to prove how great of a nation Russia really is.

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