

# **The Power of Norms in Warfare:**

**A comparative case study of the Normative and Cultural aspects of Russian Hybrid  
War against Latvia and Moldova**



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# 1. Abstract:

I foråret 2024 udgav den danske stat en række retningslinjer for hvad civilbefolkningen skulle være i stand til at tage vare på i tilfælde af at en krise skulle ramme landet. Der var hovedsageligt tale om kriser relateret til hybride angreb, såsom nedbrud af strømforsyningen og dertil relaterede problemstillinger. Bemærkelsesværdigt var der fra regeringens side intet fokus på de mere abstrakte facetter ved hybride angreb, til trods for at disse øjensynligt kan udgøre samme fare for samfundet som de materielle aspekter. Grundet dette har jeg udarbejdet dette Kandidatspeciale, der fokuserer på det ideationelle aspekt af Ruslands hybridkrig, med særligt fokus på Letland og Moldova. I dette speciale forsøger jeg at illustrere hvordan Rusland, gennem brugen af normer, forsøger at destabilisere de to lande gennem en normbaseret hybridkrig. For at gøre dette arbejder jeg ud fra en konstruktivistisk model, og den centrale teori i mit speciale er Finnemores *Norm Diffusion Theory*, der bliver brugt til at forklare både vigtigheden af normer, men også hvordan disse spredes fra et samfund til et andet, hvem der gør det og hvordan dette kan kobles på hybridkrig. For at udføre analysen har jeg først måtte konstruere en brugbar definition af hybridkrig, og dernæst forklaret hvordan denne skal skelnes fra andre IR koncepter såsom *Soft power*. I selve analysen har jeg først etableret hvilke normer Rusland eksporterer, hvordan disse er opbygget og hvad deres indhold er, samt hvordan disse kan ses i den indsamlede data. Her har jeg hovedsageligt gjort brug af Tom Casiers forskning om Ruslands normeksport, for at have et solidt akademisk fundament til mine empiriske undersøgelser. Resten af analysen bruger denne sektion som et referencepunkt når det kommer til at identificere normerne der kan findes i de givne dataset. Der er derfor tale om en kodning af teksten, for at vise hvornår en givet norm bliver omtalt af enten datasættet eller mig selv. Vedrørende min data er der hovedsageligt blevet brugt artikler fra de russiske nyhedsmedier TASS og Sputnik, udskrifter fra det russiske udenrigsministerium, samt partiprogrammer fra udvalgte politiske partier i Moldova. Grundet at Ruslands normbaserede hybridkrig er forskellig fra min ene case til den anden, er analysen forskellig på et par punkter. Først og fremmest er der i Letland sektionen et større fokus på russisktalende lettere, end der i Moldova sektionen er for moldovere der taler russisk. Dette er fordi de to lande har en vidt forskellig folkefortælling om deres tid i Sovjetunionen, hvor Letland historisk set har haft en

negativ opfattelse, hvor Moldova har haft en mere nuanceret opfattelse. Ruslands muligheder for normbaseret hybridkrig anderledes i Letland end i Moldova, hvor Rusland kan gøre brug af en relativt stor del af befolkningen der er enten nostalgisk for sovjettiden, eller har et særdeles positivt syn på Rusland. I Letland er Rusland derfor mere nødsaget til at gøre brug af kontroverser der har med mindretalsproblemer at gøre, hvorfor min analyse af Letland hovedsageligt fokuserer på disse folkegrupper, medens analysen af Moldova er mere multifacetteret.

## 2. Introduction:

Terms such as hybrid warfare and hybrid threats are often thrown around by politicians and military analysts these days, but how can we define hybrid war? Is hybrid war when a cable in the Baltic sea is severed or is there more to it than that. In this master's Thesis I aim to answer three important questions. First, how can we define hybrid war, and how can we define the ideational hybrid war being waged by Russia in its near-abroad and beyond. Since the Russian annexation of Crimea western governments have focused on the hybrid nature of Russia's conflict with Ukraine and the West. By using Norm Diffusion theory, I intend to illustrate how norms can be used by an aggressor state as a tool to destabilise their neighbours and thus achieve the political goals of the diffusing actor.

To analyse Russia's hybrid war via Norm Diffusion Theory, Latvia and Moldova will serve as a comparative case study, through which I will analyse the hybrid war. To accomplish this, I will use the works of previous researchers to construct a working definition of hybrid warfare that can be used for this thesis. Then I will gather relevant data for the analysis, which will be used in conjunction with previous research to establish which specific norms are being diffused by Russia, how these are identified, and lastly how these can be observed in action so to speak. To do this I will look at articles from Russian media sources readily available, as well as dispatches from the

Russian MFA, and the party programs of specific political parties that have been decried as being pro-Russian.

I have chosen my research question on the grounds that I seek to explore an avenue of research in hybrid warfare that I have not witnessed done in depth before. While I am by no means the first to analyse how hybrid war may be waged in a non-material sense, I have yet to come across research into how hybrid war may be waged through the spread of norms and narratives, and as such this provides me with a relatively new avenue of research in comparison to other distinct analyses of Russian hybrid warfare

My thesis is structured into a theoretical and an analytical part. The first part contains the definition of hybrid warfare, choice of theoretical framework, a section on norms as well, a description of Finnemore's Norm Diffusion Theory, as well as a short description of Benjamin Anderson's theory of Imagined Communities. In the second part I will apply the theories in my analysis of the two cases to illustrate how Russia's ideational hybrid war is waged through media and local actors.

### 3. Research Question:

*How does Russia make use of Norm Diffusion to weaponise cultural issues as part of their hybrid war regimen against Latvia and Moldova?*

### 4. Hybrid warfare construction:

Hybrid warfare as a term may be difficult to define in any concrete sense, and depending on from what academic discipline one wishes to do it, one may need to apply wildly different methods. For this thesis it is of paramount importance to have a concrete working definition of what Hybrid warfare is, how it may be identified and, also, how it may differ from conventional war. To define what Hybrid warfare is it may be pertinent to first describe its relationship with conventional warfare, how they are alike and how they may differ in a theoretical and practical sense.

## 4.1 Conventionality and Hybridity:

Initially we may define war as a state of conflict between two opposing actors within a well-defined sphere, such as a military conflict between opposing states. This is however far too vague to serve as a proper definition, as with this perspective any slight political disagreements between two states could potentially be defined as a war, for such purposes we have different terms for example *Trade War*. According to Carl von Clausewitz, a war is a state organised phenomenon with its own logic.<sup>1</sup> Due to its volatile nature war is prone to escalations, since the aim of war is the destruction of an opponent's army, and the enforcement of the victor's political goals. All the resources at the disposal of a state are therefore mobilised in the pursuit of war, where all of society is managed by the state for the sole purpose of achieving a final victory.<sup>2</sup> If the end result of a conventional war may be the complete destruction of the state, or its people, then we may confidently say that the successful conduct of war is of the utmost importance to the state.

Wars may be different, may be fought over a myriad of reasons, and may have drastically different outcomes, but all wars by definition share one aspect. Wars are a potentially devastating enterprise seeking to enforce the political will of the state.<sup>3</sup> If we accept this definition of war as being proper, we may separate it into two parts. First there is the requirement of violence. With this in mind, war must be violent before we may consider it a "proper war," that is one of the outcomes of war must be physical devastation of a defined area. The second part is the enforcement of the political will of the state. Firstly, Hybrid Warfare is not necessarily violent. The inherent nature of the term "Hybrid" suggests a combination of a multitude of malignant methods aimed at achieving a relatively low priority political goal for the aggressive party. By forgoing the need for destruction as the defining characteristic of war, we make use of Christopher Finlay's definition of war, which references the three intentions of the offensive state. Firstly, is the intention of the state to achieve its political will through the means of violence, secondly the attacked state should be harmed proportionally to the satisfaction of the aggressor and thirdly is applying the appropriate means in

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<sup>1</sup> Clausewitz, Carl von. *On War*, pp. 13-44

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

Boda, Mihály, *Hybrid War: Theory and Ethics*, p. 5

<sup>3</sup> Clausewitz, Carl von. *On War*, pp. 13-44

harming the attacked state sufficiently to satisfy the aggressive intentions of the offensive state.<sup>4</sup>

## 4.2 Defining 'Hybrid':

Owing to its name, Hybrid War may be a multitude of hostile acts by one actor towards another. Furthermore, there are terms such as Hybrid Attacks and Hybrid Threats, both of which falls under the umbrella of Hybrid Warfare, as the nature of these threats and attacks are almost identical, and therefore the terms may for all intents and purposes be used interchangeably. However, in this Thesis threats and attacks will be viewed as being the content of Hybrid Warfare, rather than differing terms and as such only Hybrid Warfare will be used in an Academic sense. So, to proceed with defining Hybrid it must first be said that defining it in a theoretical sense, as here, may differ from e.g. a legal sense.

According to Billing & Feldtmann, Hybrid threats:

*"[...] Covers a diverse number of unwanted activities such as the 'weaponizing' of migrants, cyberattacks against private or public systems, or physical attacks against private or public systems, or physical attacks against critical infrastructure on land or at sea. [...] the concept of hybrid threat is not clearly defined or delimited in law."*<sup>5</sup>

Evidently, the "contents" of Hybrid war can be far ranging in both their character and their initial intent, but all of them share the central tenet that their ultimate purpose is to harm the targeted state in some way, shape, or form. This view is shared by Frank C. Hoffman, stating that:

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<sup>4</sup> Finlay, Christopher J. *Just war, Cyber War, and the Concept of Violence*, pp.367-372

Boda, Mihály, *Hybrid War*, pp. 1-5

<sup>5</sup> Billing, Fenella & Feldtmann, Birgit. *The Role of Criminal Law Approaches Against Hybrid Threats*, p. 3

*“Hybrid threats incorporate a full range of different modes of warfare including conventional capabilities, irregular tactics and formations, terrorist acts including indiscriminate violence and coercion, criminal disorder.”<sup>6</sup>*

Hybrid warfare is then a highly flexible tool to be used as a replacement for direct war in cases where the full use of force may not be warranted. Both Billing & Feldtmann as well as Hoffman give us very workable ways to identify certain parts of Hybrid Warfare, however most of what has been mentioned is entirely within the material sphere.

The problem herein, is that it confines Hybrid warfare solely within the material world, that which we can grasp in some way, shape, or form with our hands, while leaving out the immaterial world, the world of ideas, ethics and morals. It is of vital importance for a universal definition of Hybrid Warfare to break the confines of the material and physical space. If we consider Hybrid Warfare solely within the physical sphere of existence then the war of ideas are not elements of Hybrid Warfare, as these exist solely within a philosophical and immaterial sphere. Manipulating the populace of a sovereign state, influencing the elections of a liberal democracy to undermine its stability or promote the agenda of a hostile power, both of these examples are functionally hostile actions aimed at achieving the political aims of an aggressor. This is by definition an immaterial act of hostility, neither property nor human beings are harmed physically, yet destabilising a democracy through the use of propaganda or local actors can achieve many of the same goals as overt military force. Also, a social constructivist might argue that since the driving force in the International Arena is the populace of Nation States, excluding the immaterial world from a definition of Hybrid Warfare would only create an incomplete definition. The lack of focus on the immaterial is not limited to the theoretical world but also within certain policy making. In the spring of 2024, the Danish government published a set of guidelines regarding Hybrid Attacks. However, these government guidelines only focused on material aspects.

When it comes to the political arena of Hybrid Warfare more than the battleground of national parliamentary politics is meant. The political arena of Hybrid Warfare is identified as the national parliamentary political battlefield, but also all

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<sup>6</sup> Hoffman, Frank C, *Conflict in the 21st Century: The Rise of Hybrid Wars*, p. 8

aspects related to this. Subjects may become politicized, such as language policy in bilingual states or states with large national and linguistic minorities. Owing to this, a wholly materialistic definition of Hybrid Warfare would exclude indirect attacks on the vital organs of the state through compromised local actors. Thus, the European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats becomes important for the construction of a working definition for Hybrid Threats:

*“1. Coordinated and synchronized action that deliberately targets democratic states and institutions’ systemic vulnerabilities through a wide range of means. 2. Activities that exploit the threshold of detection and attribution, as well as the different interfaces (war-peace, internal-external security, local-state, national-international). 3. Activities aimed at influencing different forms of decision-making at the local (regional), state, or institutional level, and designed to further and/or fulfil the target’s strategic goals while undermining and/or hurting the target”.<sup>7</sup>*

With this definition on what a Hybrid Threat is, we have a good way to incorporate the immaterial within a definition of Hybrid Warfare. Firstly, it touches upon an attack on the political decision-making process, this has the potential to severely hamper a nation’s ability to govern itself responsibly. Furthermore, turning the political arena into either a quagmire of political stagnation or getting parts of the political establishment to serve the interests of a foreign state, can severely compromise the ability of the state to either defend itself or its interests abroad. Lastly “[...] *fulfil the target’s strategic goals while undermining and/or hurting the target.*”<sup>8</sup> Perfectly fits the criteria of war as described by Finlay, and as such we have a definitive way to join together the terms “Hybrid” and “Warfare.”

Furthermore, researchers such as Tanja Ellingsen, Sandra Kalniete, Tomass Pildegovics and Mikael Wigell all focus on these immaterial aspects in their research into hybrid war as well. Ellingsen explicitly states that a significant part of what hybrid warfare seeks to do, is the destruction of a society’s social cohesion.<sup>9</sup> One of the

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<sup>7</sup> European Centre for Excellence in Countering Hybrid Threats.

<sup>8</sup> European Centre for Excellence in Countering Hybrid Threats.

<sup>9</sup> Ellingsen, Tanja. *Hybrid Threats as a Threat to Democracy Soft and smart tactics and three dimensions of democracy*, p. 1

Kalniete, Sandra & Pildegovics Tomass. *Strengthening the EU’s resilience to hybrid threats*, p. 1

desired results from the initiator of these Hybrid attacks is then a disruption of ethnic cohesion in multiethnic society<sup>10</sup>. From this we infer that the immaterial dimension of Hybrid Warfare may also be directed solely at a potentially flammable cultural situation. In such cases a Hybrid Attack could very well seek to inflame existing social tensions, thus undermining the political stability of a country.<sup>11</sup>

The introduction of these elements also means that we must differentiate between hybrid warfare and disinformation. It is true that certain hybrid attacks can come in the form of a targeted disinformation campaign, disinformation itself need not be part of a Hybrid Attack. According to the Oxford English Language Dictionary, disinformation can be defined as: “*False information, which is intended to mislead, especially propaganda issued by a government organisation to a rival power or the media*”.<sup>12</sup> With this definition, disinformation may be considered to be a part of hybrid warfare, but blindly applying the term hybrid warfare to disinformation could be potentially dangerous. If we take the first part of the definition, that is of false information with the intention of misleading, this in itself is vague. While there is certainly potential for a foreign power to disinformation for their own political goals, one should be cautious about blindly calling every type of this hybrid war, lest we muddle the waters of an already very vague term.

As such we consider Hybrid Warfare to be a versatile tool that a state uses to destabilise an adversary, by targeting its vital institutions and civil society through the use of physical sabotage or political pressure and political attacks, with the goal of achieving the political aims of the aggressor in the attacked country without the overt use of military force to achieve this.

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Wigell, Mikael. *Hybrid Interference as a wedge strategy: a theory of external interference in liberal democracy*, pp. 1-3

<sup>10</sup> Ellingsen, Tanja. *Hybrid Threats as a Threat to Democracy*, p. 2

Kalniete, Sandra & Pildegovics Tomass. *Strengthening the EU's resilience to hybrid threats*, p. 3

<sup>11</sup> Ellingsen, Tanja. *Hybrid Threats as a Threat to Democracy*, pp. 8-11

<sup>12</sup> Oxford English Dictionary

### 4.3 Hybrid war as different from regular war:

Now that we have established what war is and outlined some of the characteristics of the hybrid term, it is important to also state how hybrid warfare differ from regular warfare. Firstly of course, since Hybrid Warfare is not necessarily rooted in a violent exercise of power or influence, the largest difference is the potential absence of violence in hybrid warfare. While both hybrid and regular warfare shares the end goal, of political change in favour of the aggressor, the means through which this goal may be achieved is one of the ways these two concepts differ. A more concrete way the two differ from each other could be gauged by looking at the United Nations Charter. Article 51 of the UN charter explicitly states that:

*“Nothing in the present Charter shall impair the inherent right of individual or collective self-defence if an armed attack occurs against a Member of the United Nations, until the Security Council has taken measures necessary to maintain international peace and security. [...]”*<sup>13</sup>

This vital part of our current global political order may serve to give us insight into why finding a common universal definition of Hybrid Warfare is difficult, and why we thusly must operate either on a case-by-case basis or seek to have a working definition that can serve its purpose in certain situations. It may be the case, that the ambiguity of when something is an “armed attack” or when it is a Hybrid Attack serves a purpose since it allows for a potential de-escalation of tensions. It may be beneficial to maintain that something does not constitute an armed attack and an act of war and instead relegate it to the sphere of a less serious Hybrid Attack. Maintaining this ambiguity imbues both the aggressor and the victim with a measure of flexibility within the international arena. Furthermore, owing to the nature of this thesis, it may serve the interests of the state to construct Hybrid Warfare to be as broad as possible to shield itself from a populace that may view its government as being too complacent in responding to an armed attack. As Hybrid Warfare itself is a Social Construct, it is a term whose meaning is agreed upon by a body of people, be it a group of experts or

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<sup>13</sup> *Charter of the United Nations and Statute of The International Court of Justice*, pp. 10-11

the people itself, stretching its definition may serve the interests of a state to avoid a larger international conflict or engagement.

For the purpose of this thesis, we may define Hybrid Warfare as the following:

A type of asymmetrical warfare that may encompass both the material and immaterial dimensions, aiming at achieving the political goal of the aggressor through the destabilization of the target's political, social or economic spheres, thereby weakening their defensive capabilities without engaging in open conventional warfare.

#### 4.4 Hybrid History: How the term evolved

When describing the history of hybrid warfare, it should be separate into two different sections, one detailing the history and evolution of the term itself as a theoretical concept, and a section about different examples through history that we may call hybrid warfare today but was not called so at the time. The first section will help us get an understanding of how the term may have originated. Lastly, the second section may help us understand current practices of Hybrid Warfare by comparing them to historical examples, and furthermore it may help us challenge the notion that Hybrid Warfare is solely in the repertoire of Authoritarian states, by demonstrating its usage by democracies.

#### 4.5 Terminological history:

In 1999 the strategist Colin Gray outlined the evolution of armed conflicts into the 21st century by stating that wars “[...] *can be waged between conventional regular armies,*

*between regulars and irregulars, and between irregular opponents.*"<sup>14</sup> Now this in of itself would today perhaps be called either low intensity conflict or asymmetrical warfare, as our current understanding of Hybrid Warfare does not limit itself to the sphere of violence. James K. Wither however notes that this notion reflects the erstwhile general western understanding of Warfare as a phenomenon of organised large scale armed conflict, with a clear distinction between war and peace.<sup>15</sup> No doubt the classical notion of warfare must have been challenged by early conflicts of the new millennium such as The War on Terror following the 9/11 attacks, and Gray even conceded to this fact in a later publication.<sup>16</sup>

The War on Terror evidently challenged the traditional western understanding of war, and the distinctions of war and peace becomes muddled as we dig deeper. At this state, it seems that there is little relation between our current understanding of Hybrid Warfare, and the one outlined by Gray in 1999 or 2006, but the connection is there, even if it is difficult to discern. One of the defining aspects of Hybrid Warfare is how it blurs the lines between war and peace. Today the lines between what is peace and what is war is decidedly less clear than it was half a century ago, and this uncertainty is one of the central points that connects our present day understanding of Hybrid Warfare, and the early 21st century understanding.<sup>17</sup> Felix Wassermann, James K. Wither and Peter R. Mansoor all observe, at different times during this and the preceding decade, that the lines between war and peace have become increasingly unclear in the present, and for Wassermann's case the lines between different types of warfare becomes washed out. It is from this small yet important aspect that we may draw some similarities between our current understanding of hybrid warfare, and how Gray defined it. However, the erstwhile definition of hybrid warfare was still that which we may today term asymmetrical warfare.

Until 2014 the prevailing opinion in the west was that hybrid warfare is a phenomenon wherein the exercise of violence during armed conflict is not the sole prerogative of warring states, it is also exercised by irregular formations. These non-conventional forces were not, as Gray observed, limited to act solely as irregulars:

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<sup>14</sup> Gray, Collin S. *Modern Strategy*, p. 159

<sup>15</sup> Wither, James K. *Hybrid Warfare Revisited: A Battle of "Buzzwords"*, pp. 1-2

<sup>16</sup> Gray, Collin S. *Another Bloody Century: Future Warfare*, p. 199

<sup>17</sup> Mansoor, Peter R. *Hybrid Warfare in History*, p. 1

Wither, James K. *Hybrid Warfare Revisited*, pp. 1-4

Wassermann, Felix. *The Blurring of Interstate Wars, Civil Wars and Peace*, pp. 1-3

*“The convenient binary distinction between regular and irregular warfare is much less clear in practice than it is conceptually [...] when regular forces adopt an irregular style of war, and when irregular warriors shift back and forth between open and guerilla warfare, the distinction disappears.”*<sup>18</sup>

Thus the lines between war and peace, or regular and irregular warfare, are not blurred solely due to an actor using both conventional and unconventional means, we’ve seen this for centuries, but increasingly by the very fact that the combatants themselves blur the lines by also engaging in asymmetrical means of warfare amongst themselves.<sup>19</sup> This was the prevailing definition of Hybrid Warfare for all of the 2000’s and a large part of the 2010’s.

## 4.6 Modern concept of hybrid warfare:

For western observers, strategists and academics, the current understanding of Hybrid Warfare largely came about as a result of the Russian annexation of Crimea, and the related operations conducted immediately before and after the fact to destabilise Ukraine. While we may confidently say that the annexation of Crimea was a largely military operation, it is perhaps the propaganda war in the time leading up to the seizure and afterwards where we start to see modern Hybrid Warfare trends materialise more clearly. Both Michael Kofman, Matthew Rojansky and Ralph D. Thiele identified the nonmilitary aspects of Russia’s operations in Ukraine in the aftermath of Crimea and the uprisings in the Donbass: *“Crimea began as a covert military operation, combining ambiguity, disinformation, and the element of surprise at the operational level with more traditional aids such as electronic warfare.”*<sup>20</sup> Here Kofman and Rojansky combine the material-physical aspect of war, the “kinetic”

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<sup>18</sup> Gray, Collin S. *Another Bloody Century*, p. 199

<sup>19</sup> Mansoor, Peter R. *Hybrid Warfare in History*, pp. 3-10

Gray, Collin S. *Another Bloody Century: Future Warfare*, p. 199

Wither, James K. *Hybrid Warfare Revisited*, p. 3

Wassermann, Felix. *The Blurring of Interstate Wars, Civil Wars and Peace*, pp. 1-3

<sup>20</sup> Kofman, Michael & Rojansky, Matthew. *A closer look at Russia’s ‘Hybrid War’*, p. 3

aspect, with the immaterial, or non-kinetic aspects of modern warfare. Thiele too observed the Hybridity of Russia's attacks on Ukraine in 2014 stating that:

*"Russia's Hybrid campaign in the Ukraine appears to be achieving Moscow's desired results. Flooding the region with illegal weapons, using mercenaries to destroy regional infrastructure, weakening local economy, blocking state function, in particular law enforcement, justice, social welfare, causing a refugee crisis, exploiting social media & information warfare and introducing own peace keeping forces proved to be effective."*<sup>21</sup>

Here Thiele outlines what have become central pillars in modern day understanding of Hybrid Warfare, whereby the attacking nation impairs the governance of the victim through covert and overt means, to reduce their defence capability and political stability. One may observe that such actions proved to be effective for Russia in 2014, as the illegal occupation and annexation of Crimea was achieved without great loss of life for the attacker, and the subsequent Russian intervention in the Donbass proved to be a lasting problem for successive Ukrainian governments until the 2022 Invasion. Complimentary to these contemporary observations regarding the hybrid nature of Russia's campaign against Ukraine by Kofman, Rojansky and Thiele, Wither offers an observation of the events with the modern definition of Hybrid Warfare:

*"Russia's tactics included an aggressive disinformation campaign that portrayed the new government in Kyiv as a fascist junta, electronic warfare attacks on Ukrainian security services' communications, the sponsorship of civil unrest, economic coercion by Gazprom, and the use of proxy forces. Russia's strategic disinformation campaign also successfully manipulated Ukrainian and Western perceptions, fostered confusion and distrust, and crippled effective crisis decision-making."*<sup>22</sup>

In Wither's observation we see the modern combination of aspects that make up Hybrid Warfare. There is the spreading or control of narratives, e.g. the supposed fascist nature of the Ukrainian government, there is a neutering of vital government

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<sup>21</sup> Thiele, Ralph D. *Crisis in Ukraine - The emergence of Hybrid Warfare*, pp. 2-3

<sup>22</sup> Wither, James K. *Hybrid Warfare Revisited*", p. 5

services, as well as the spreading of disinformation to confuse relief efforts. So, it is in 2014 and beyond with Russia's multifaceted Hybrid War in Ukraine, that the term takes on its modern shape and meaning. Rather than being simply a term to denote the usage of regular and irregular military forces, something that is not a novel concept, it has come to mean the full utilisation of different military and non-military means to achieve the political goals of the aggressor country, leading to lessened defensive capabilities in the targeted country, and potential economic or structural damage inflicted.

#### 4.7 The past reimagined: How Hybrid War can be applied to past conflicts:

Now with a short history of the term itself, it would be poignant to also give examples where we may see Hybrid Warfare being used throughout history. It must be noted, however obvious it may be, these observations naturally stem from a modern-day interpretation of Hybrid Warfare and Warfare in general. Erstwhile strategists may have viewed these multifaceted actions as being the ordinary conduct of war, but for present observers they may appear in line with our understanding of Hybrid Warfare.

In the Peloponnesian war between the Greek City States of Sparta and Athens in the fifth century BCE, we see examples of what we might today call Hybrid Warfare. Sparta was a highly aggressive and militarised monarchy, where a soldier class ruled over the slave Helot class. The ruling classes depended on the labour of their enslaved subjects.<sup>23</sup> It was necessary for Sparta to garrison soldiers near the slaves to prevent an uprising. Athens sought to exploit this by sending irregulars into Spartan territory to destabilise the situation and attempting to provoke slave uprisings. This falls in line with Hybrid Warfare in the "old" understanding of the term, although if we consider the use of proxies to be irregular forces it may still fit the present-day categorisation of the term. While the usage of irregulars is undoubtedly a military phenomenon, using them

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<sup>23</sup> Mansoor, Peter R. *Hybrid Wars in History*, pp. 2-4

to wreak havoc on the economy of a country, or to upset its social status quo we start to see some semblance to what outcomes Hybrid Attacks potentially have today.

During World War II we are also able to observe the usage of Irregular forces to undermine or disrupt the operations of an enemy.<sup>24</sup> British material assistance to European resistance groups during German occupation helped disrupt German supply lines in occupied countries, forced the Germans to station larger amounts of troops there than would have been the case otherwise, and the very existence of these groups would also serve to undermine the narratives that Germany would try to diffuse in the societies of occupied countries. The domestic and foreign propaganda value of a “peaceful” occupation is then lost, if it becomes evident that parts of the populace, or even the populace at large, is opposed to the continued military presence of a foreign army in the occupied country. In Eastern Europe too Irregulars posed a problem to the Germans, although on a far grander scale. Both in Yugoslavia and the USSR did the Germans face a major problem of partisan attacks.<sup>25</sup>

Examples more related to the immaterial aspect of Hybrid Warfare could be Germany’s hostile actions towards Czechoslovakia before and after the Munich Conference of 1938. Adolf Hitler led an aggressive propaganda campaign aimed at Germans outside of Germany, such as in Austria or in the mainly German inhabited Czechoslovak border area known as the Sudetenland. The campaign firstly stressed the right of self-determination of nations, that ethnic groups had a sovereign right to decide where they lived, and also to demonstrate the supposed desire of the population to return to Germany. To justify this land grab, German media and the government continuously stressed how the German minority in Czechoslovakia was being persecuted and mistreated by the Czech majority. In addition to the propaganda campaign, the Germans also made use of local political actors to advance their goals, namely the local SdP party, to agitate initially for cultural and political autonomy within Czechoslovakia, and then for the transfer of the Sudetenland to Germany.<sup>26</sup> Other

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<sup>24</sup> Weinberg, Gerhard L. *A World at Arms: A Global History of World War II*, pp. 150  
Mansoor, Peter R. *Hybrid Wars in History*, pp. 5

<sup>25</sup> Grenkevich, Leonid. *The Soviet Partisan Movement, 1941-1944: A Critical Historiographical Analysis*, pp. 107-147  
Mansoor, Peter R. *Hybrid War in History*, pp. 4-5

<sup>26</sup> Glassheim, Eagle. *Cleansing the Czechoslovak Borderlands: Migration, Environment, and Health in the Former Sudetenland*, p 35

examples of German propaganda to justify their enmity towards Czechoslovakia, can be found in the German propaganda poster *Ein kleinstaat bedroht Deutschland* which depicted the potential range of bombers stationed in Czechoslovakia, all of Germany in two hours, explicitly suggesting that this much smaller state, could pose a serious threat to German security, sovereignty or territorial integrity.<sup>27</sup>

Now the example of Germany destabilising Czechoslovakia and attempting to dismantle them territorially is much more in line with our modern understanding of Hybrid War, especially so if we consider the working definition of this thesis, and parallels can be drawn to the present day in both Ukraine with the Donbas and Moldova with Transnistria. The usage of narratives, such as the persecution of Germans, and the infiltration and absorption of local political actors, is a perfect example of the power norms and public perception holds in International Relations, and it displays the power of propaganda in destabilising nations, while also underlining the dangers of a hostile foreign power taking advantage of inter-ethnic strife to initiate or exacerbate an international crisis.

## 4.8 Cold War and beyond:

If we were to stretch the term hybrid warfare over a larger period of time, one might even consider the entirety of the Cold War to be an exercise of Hybrid Warfare. If we accept that the main goals of hybrid warfare are to undermine a rival government politically and military through indirect means, then the competition between the United States and the Soviet Union could very well be considered to be one large exercise of hybrid war. If at first we look at the more material aspect of hybrid war, then the proxy conflicts between the two Superpowers, such as in Vietnam or Afghanistan, are good indicators of how one party was trying to undermine the other part without engaging in a true confrontation. Waging indirect war against your main opponent by Proxy, to undermine their defensive capability or to shatter their ideological truth is something both Superpowers engaged in, and as such we may in one way dispel the notion that

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<sup>27</sup> Derwent, Whittlesey. *German Strategy for World Conquest*, p. 140

Hybrid Warfare is a tool only used by Authoritarians against Liberal democratic states.<sup>28</sup>

Furthermore, the usage of propaganda tools such as Radio Free Europe by the United States is an explicit example of using media to undermine not only the defensive capabilities of the targeted nation, but also to undermine the very foundations and legitimacy of the state where the propaganda is disseminated.<sup>29</sup>

While we may suggest that an Authoritarian state is better disposed to wage an information-based hybrid war against a Liberal democracy, taking advantage of their free press laws and market economies, the reverse can also be the case. A difference we might observe here though, this dissemination of propaganda could not happen on par with how an Authoritarian state might do it in a liberal democracy.<sup>30</sup>

The Soviet Union, or Russia, might view Radio Free Europe as a tool of the US in undermining the Communist Bloc, not unfairly, and one might even say it has, in the Russian perception, a modern successor. Russian General and Strategist Valery Gerasimov has categorised events such as the “*Colour Revolutions*” in Post-Soviet states as hostile acts perpetrated by the US government and constitutes an example of US Hybrid Warfare waged with the goal of undermining the Russian state.<sup>31</sup> Whether or not the Post-Soviet Colour revolutions are an example of Hybrid Warfare waged against Russia is in of itself not important, but the perception that it may be is important. From the view of the Russian establishment, Hybrid War is different from the western definition, and Russian strategy in Europe is not considered any different than regular warfare in Russia.<sup>32</sup> As such Liberal states are also able to engage in Hybrid Warfare by looking at the Cold War and more contemporary examples, if we accept the Russian claim regarding Colour Revolutions. Furthermore, while we may

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<sup>28</sup> Wither, James K. *Hybrid Warfare Revisited*”, pp. 15-16

Hughes, Geraint. *My Enemy's Enemy: Proxy Warfare in International Politics*, p. 2

<sup>29</sup> Mansoor, Peter R. *Hybrid War in History*, p. 9

Musteata, Sergiu. *Soviet Moldova in the Radio Free Europe Broadcasting during the Cold War. Efim Crimerman's contributions*, pp. 1-4

<sup>30</sup> Wither, James K. *Hybrid Warfare Revisited*”, p. 19

<sup>31</sup> Gerasimov, Valery. “The Value of Science in Prediction,” *Military-Industrial Kurier*, February 27, 2013, available in English in Mark Galeotti, “The Gerasimov Doctrine and Russian Non-Linear War,” In *Moscow's Shadows Blog*, July 6, 2014, <https://inmoscowsshadows.wordpress.com/2014/07/06/the-gerasimov-doctrine-and-russian-non-linear-war/> .

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

Wither, James K. *Hybrid Warfare Revisited*”, p. 12

consider Russian actions relating to political, cultural or economic coercion to be part of a Hybrid War against the West, in Russia it is simply considered part of their conventional military strategy

## 4.9 Soft Power vs. Hybrid War:

Now one might wonder why it is necessary to go to such lengths to construct a working definition of a hard to define concept, rather than use another already established term that may cover certain aspects of hybrid warfare. Why not use a term such as, say, soft power to describe these strategies, what about the term Hybrid Warfare justifies its own specialised subject rather than just including it as a part of Soft Power?

Soft Power as a term is, like Hybrid Warfare, relatively new, dating to 1990. The term is attributed to Joseph Nye in his article *Bound to lead: The changing nature of American power*, where he discusses the development of US power projection across the globe from the end of WWII, and to his time.<sup>33</sup> Nye goes into depth to describe the changing landscape of geopolitics immediately after the fall of the Berlin Wall. In the article Nye draws parallels to other Imperial Powers and how their international dynamics changed from their beginning to the twilight years of their Imperial order.<sup>34</sup> Although Nye only makes use of the term Soft Power once, at the very end to contrast Hard Power, his thoughts and thorough analysis of changing modes of preserving hegemony serves as the foundation for other scholars in the succeeding decades.

According to Okvan Bilonga, in their article *The Influence of Soft Power in Contemporary Diplomacy*, soft power is identified as

*“[...] the ability of a country to shape the preferences and behaviours of other countries through attraction and persuasion rather than coercion or payment [...] soft power draws upon cultural appeal, values, and diplomacy to foster goodwill and build lasting relationships between nations”<sup>35</sup>*

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<sup>33</sup> Nye, Joseph. *Bound to lead: The changing nature of American power*, pp. 1-31  
Bilonga, Okvan. *The Influence of Soft Power in Contemporary Diplomacy*, pp. 1-2

<sup>34</sup> Nye, Joseph. *Bound to lead*, p. 1

<sup>35</sup> Bilonga, Okvan. *The Influence of Soft Power in Contemporary Diplomacy*, p. 1

For Bilonga one of the central tenets of soft power is that of culture, as the diffusion of culture into another society grants the originator country significant soft power. Examples of these could be Hollywood for the US, with its dominance on the world stage, Hollywood has been a staple exporter of American ideas and values to the entire world for a century, which has created a positive image of the US or American values.<sup>36</sup> Another example could be the Chinese Confucius Institutes. The stated goals of the Confucius Institutes are to promote Chinese Language and Culture, and while the institutes have been embroiled in controversy regarding their true goals, such will not be discussed here as their potential soft power value is what is of interest.<sup>37</sup>

As the Confucius Institutes promote Chinese Culture and Language, it is not inconceivable that they also in some way promote Chinese values or norms, as these are intertwined with culture. As such we may determine that these institutes shares this with e.g. Hollywood for the USA, Anime for Japan, or even the Nordic Model for Nordic countries, namely the shaping of public perception of the societies from which they originate.<sup>38</sup> Therefore we may for the sake of this Thesis define Soft Power as the ability of a country to influence and attract other countries through the use of culture, values, politics and by creating a positive image for said country, without the use of militarily or economically coercive efforts.<sup>39</sup>

Soft power is the art of influencing another country through non-hostile means to accomplish a certain goal, and as such we see a reason for why hybrid warfare does not fit neatly within the framework of soft power. While the cultural aspect of soft power is undoubtedly something that is shared with hybrid warfare, the very fluid nature of hybrid warfare means that it is impossible to define it as solely within the purview of soft power, without discarding some of the central aspects of the term. Since hybrid warfare is by definition an act of hostility by one actor against another, it cannot be

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<sup>36</sup> Bilonga, Okvan. *The Influence of Soft Power in Contemporary Diplomacy*, p. 2

<sup>37</sup> Nurhusna, Nadia & Sakinah, Zaskia. *Confucius Institute: Soft Power and Cultural Diplomacy*, pp. 1-4

<sup>38</sup> Bilonga, Okvan. *The Influence of Soft Power in Contemporary Diplomacy*, p. 3

<sup>39</sup> Bilonga, Okvan. *The Influence of Soft Power in Contemporary Diplomacy*, p. 1

Nurhusna, Nadia & Sakinah, Zaskia. *Confucius Institute*, p. 2

Wang, Yue. *Educational Aid and Soft Power: The Case of the EU and Ukraine*, p. 2

said to fit within the framework of non-hostile usage of culture and other influencing factors, and the potential material-physical nature of a hybrid attack means the term could also be considered to be hard power. As such the term hybrid warfare does not in its entirety fit within either the terms hard power or soft power. We may then confidently say that while preexisting soft power makes a culture or narrative based hybrid attack an easier enterprise to engage in, it should by no means be regarded as the only factor, nor should it be seen as an umbrella term that neatly includes all the facets of hybrid warfare within it.

## 5.Theoretical Framework and Operationalisation

## 6.Constructivism Theory:

As a theory of International Relations, Social Constructivism has its genesis Nicholas Onuf in 1989.<sup>40</sup> Foundationally, Constructivism views Human civilisation as being made up of and driven by human ideational developments and interaction. Therefore, one could say that ontologically and epistemologically the world is socially constructed, and as such the focus of Social Constructivism is on Human awareness, and the role this plays in International relations. The origin of the theory can be found in the 18th century Italian Philosopher Giambattista Vico. Vico identified a difference between the natural world, which is made by god, and the historical world, which is made by man. Therefore, human history and its development do not exist separately from man, it is made by ordinary men and women every day. In addition to this, as human beings make their own history they also form states which exists as artificial historical constructs, they are fully human in their origin, and therefore to Vico they must

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<sup>40</sup> Jackson, Robert. Sørensen, Georg & Møller, Jørgen. *Introductions to International Relations, Theories and Approaches*, p. 225

necessarily originate in the creative intelligence of mankind and be entirely beholden to the shifting nature of Human intelligence.<sup>41</sup>

Due to this focus on Human awareness, social interaction and ideational evolution, Constructivism rejects a materialist-based worldview. We might therefore say that there is a rigid dichotomy between the social world and the material one, both are almost polar opposites in their construction, but while this dichotomy does exist, we might compare the intersubjective reality of the material world, with the intersubjective communication of the social world. Global politics are therefore seen to be guided by the intersubjective ideas and norms shared by people, and therefore the evolution of global political trends is inescapably bound to the fluid and flexible nature of norms.<sup>42</sup>

It is the continued evolution of norms and public perception that prevents states from stagnating ideologically and societally and provides an avenue of ever-changing perceptions both for the people and the states they shape. Without the people shaping norms, values and public perception, there would be no or very little activity domestically and internationally, as it is the convergence or divergence of norm-based societies that create global cooperation and competition. The values of a society are what determines where said society positions itself on key issues, and it is also what dictates how states interact amongst each other in the geopolitical arena.

As such the ideational foundation of societies means that the state is a self-organised unit, being continuously constructed and reconstructed from within by the evolving and changing norms of society. If a state is organised continuously by its people, then we must also concede that the identity of the state is dependent on the identity of its people. As such we may also infer that the fixation on norms, and in extension of this also identity, invariably bleeds into the international sphere to autonomously create models on how states will interact with each other. Thus, a “us versus them” perception of states emerges, and states group together based on shared ideals and perceptions of the existing world, thus creating a sort of *imagined*

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<sup>41</sup> Jackson, Robert. Sørensen, Georg & Møller, Jørgen. *Introductions to International Relations*, p. 211

<sup>42</sup> Jackson, Robert. Sørensen, Georg & Møller, Jørgen. *Introductions to International Relations*, pp. 100, 208-229

Zehfuss, Maja. *Constructivism in International Relations the Politics of Reality*, pp. 2-7

Copeland, Dale C. *The Constructivist Challenge to Structural Realism*, pp. 1-3

Theys, Sarina. *Constructivism*, p. 1

Wendt, Alexander. *Social Theory of International Politics*, pp. 1-15

*community* of states, aligned by perceived commonality against an external actor who is determined to be an “other”.<sup>43</sup> Including terms such as imagined communities, a term that is more sociological than IR, might seem out of scope for an IR paper, but I would argue that the very nature of the term is thoroughly constructivist in nature. Benedict Anderson defines imagined communities as such:

*“[...] the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion [...] Finally it is imagined as a community, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship [...]”*<sup>44</sup>

It is due to the nature of Social Constructivism that I would argue the above quotation describing how nationalities or nations are imagined can be used when describing both the actions of nations in the international arena, but also the nature of how states find common ground and create alliances and commonwealths. Since the nation is a reflection of the norms of the society that constructs it, then the relations of one state with another must implicitly also be a product of the norms and perceptions of the populace, and therefore the imagined community transcends national borders to include the population of an allied country, and therefore becomes an imagined community of both the peoples inhabiting the states, but also of the states themselves. It is the very ideational nature of human existence and interaction that makes it possible to make use of terms such as imagined communities and apply them in a much broader context than initially intended.

## 6.1 Anarchy:

This leads us to the concept of Anarchy in the International Arena. While a Neorealist might view an Anarchic international arena as where states necessarily engage in

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<sup>43</sup> Theys, Sarina. *Constructivism*, pp. 1-2

Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, p. 6-7

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

mutually conflictual self-help, in constructivism Anarchy, as observed by Wendt, is “*what states make of it*”.<sup>45</sup> This means that the relationship between states is not static or unchanging in nature, but merely that the relationships between states are always changing, and are continuously redefined in the social sphere.<sup>46</sup> The norms of a given pair of countries continuously define the international situation and therefore they are a significant influence on international political development.<sup>47</sup> The International Community is not necessarily a place of competition and conflict.<sup>48</sup> It is interesting to consider however, that Anarchy may still become the sphere of fierce competition if the necessary social conditions are fulfilled. If we assume that Anarchy is what states make of it as Wendt maintains, then a state may use the international arena to facilitate fierce competition or hostile behaviour. Furthermore, while it may sound paradoxical, Anarchy is in of itself a larger global structure.

## 6.2 International Organisations:

We may view Anarchy, both as an organisational concept and as an International Geopolitical one, to be the total absence of hierarchy, organised structure and authority over the individual actor. But this absence of structure is itself a structure, indeed Hopf finds that Anarchy is meaningless without any set of intersubjective norms and practices, that is for a “structureless structure” such as anarchy to exist, there must be an existence of intersubjective norms with which the actors within the structure can socialise.<sup>49</sup> The International structure is a facilitator of social exchange and socialization among states, and likewise international organisations and power blocs such as the UN, EU, EAEU, CIS or NATO are tremendously important to Constructivist scholars, as these structures are all examples of the social power of norms, as they provide a forum for global actors to resolve their conflicts or promote their norms or

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<sup>45</sup> Wendt, Alexander. *Social Theory of International Politics*, pp.6-42

Theys, Sarina. *Constructivism*, pp. 2

<sup>46</sup> Sørensen, Georg, Møller, Jørgen & Jackson, Robert H. *Introduction to International Relations*, pp. 208-229

<sup>47</sup> Zehfuss, Maja. *Constructivism in International Relations: the Politics of Reality*, p. 4

Sørensen, Georg, Møller, Jørgen & Jackson, Robert H. *Introduction to International Relations*, pp. 208-229

<sup>48</sup> Zehfuss, Maja. *Constructivism in International Relations*, p. 11-14

<sup>49</sup> Hopf, Ted. *The Promise of Constructivism in International Relations Theory*, pp. 171-174

the structure can serve as a unifying force for likeminded actors where the superiority of a set of norms are reinforced and propagated.<sup>50</sup>

An example hereof is the *Commonwealth of Independent States*, most commonly referred to as the CIS. The CIS is a Post-Soviet International Organisation originally intended to be a “soft” reorganisation of the USSR. The CIS today exists less as a reorganised Soviet Union, and more as a forum where the Post-Soviet states still somewhat aligned with Russia are able to reinforce and reproduce their normative narratives together, or to present an illusion of commonality.

International organisations, if organisations they be, such as the EU and EAEU are both spheres where the socialization of different actors have resulted in either economic integration, or a combined socio-political and economic integration. It is difficult to imagine a structure such as the EU to exist if not for the common values and norms of its member states, such is the power of norms and values in international politics. When states are able to find common ground and undergo increasing integration with other states that exhibit similar social values, then we must consider that the fora wherein the states are able to socialise to such an extent to be extremely important structures in a Constructivist sense.<sup>51</sup> Therefore in Social Constructivism the importance of International structures challenges the perception of states as the exclusive primary actors.

As Constructivism is a theory that regards social interactions and social norms as the driver in International Relations, we must consider that the changing of norms in a state will also affect the international composition both with regards to Anarchy, but also the cooperation between states. When the norms change, the states will also realign their own foreign policies concurrently with their domestic ones. We have examples of this within the last few decades, with Russia temporarily aligning with the west after the fall of communism in 1991, where Post-Soviet states at large experienced a period of *détente* with the west along with aspirations on joining western power blocs such as the EU and NATO, with the Baltic States succeeding, and the

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<sup>50</sup> Hopf, Ted. *The Promise of Constructivism in International Relations Theory*, pp. 171-200

<sup>51</sup> Hopf, Ted. *The Promise of Constructivism in International Relations Theory*, pp. 171-200

rest of the Post-Soviet sphere either still trying to join the west, or gravitating towards a reestablished power centre in Moscow.

### 6.3 Conventional Constructivism:

Within the framework of Constructivism itself there are many different schools of thought, and although all constructivists share a fundamental common understanding of the core concepts of constructivism, this Thesis will focus primarily on what is sometimes termed “conventional constructivism”, especially as formulated by Alexander Wendt due to his strong focus on identity.

It is central to conventional constructivist thought that actors act according to their identity, and as such it is possible to predict how a given actor may proceed based on this. It is in this current of constructivism that we find a causal view of the world, and an interest in discovering the links between actors, and discovering the relationships with their norms. It is in this school we see an investigative delve into the modus operandi of the actor to see if they act according to their norms and identity.<sup>52</sup> This focus on actors acting within the limits of their identity, fits well within the overarching focus of this thesis.<sup>53</sup> If we accept the notion that actors reinforce their identity by acting within the limits of said identity, then a country waging hybrid war against its enemies, must undoubtedly be reinforcing its own identity as a world power capable of using subterfuge of this calibre to weaken an adversarial state. We may then consider the waging of hybrid war to be typical of the identity of the actor, and perhaps also in line with its own narrative self-perception as well as identity, as far as these two can be separated. Conventional constructivism may therefore provide us with not only an explanation for how identity and norms can shape the international arena, but it is also able to assist us in understanding the identity and self-image a society may have or chose to reproduce.

The importance of identity is as Hopf points out that “*Identities perform three necessary functions in a society: they tell you and others who you are and they tell you who others*

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<sup>52</sup> Theys, Sarina. *Constructivism*, pp. 1-6

Hopf, Ted. *The Promise of Constructivism in International Relations Theory*, p. 174

<sup>53</sup> Hopf, Ted. *The Promise of Constructivism in International Relations Theory*, pp. 171-173

are”.<sup>54</sup> Identity has this great power to create inclusivity, by defining the common “us” it allows a group of people to associate with each other and consider themselves to belong to a larger group. This achieves two things, firstly it gives the group a clear definition, thus allowing it to define its own identity, and it allows the individual member to feel a sense of belonging to the group. If this is extrapolated on society, identity has the power to define both the identity of a state’s society, but also the identity of the state itself, thus creating a continuous feedback loop of norms and values being used, reused and changed in a gradually evolving society.

This great power of inclusivity and belonging is contrasted by the just as potent power of “othering” inherent in identity. Since one of the core functions of identity is describing “who” you belong to, it is likewise able to define who does not belong in a group. This is an immensely potent power as it gives the group the ability to exclude people they do not deem worthy of being included in the identity. It lends power to the narrative efforts of an actor by allowing said actor to construct an image of who the “other” is, be it a person, culture or nation. Thus, country A can create an image among its citizenry that country B is a threat or an “other” because they do not share the fundamental, good, values of country A, and as such should be viewed as an enemy. It is this immense power that allows for the spreading of narratives dehumanising an adversary and allows a society to e.g. reinforce the narrative reality of them being surrounded by enemies. As identities are closely bound with the norms and values of society a constructivist is able to investigate how social norms dictate how actors behave socially. Furthermore, constructivists are able to recognise the power dynamics in social interactions, both between people and between states, but without taking a direct stance on them. A constructivist is therefore able to identify behavioural trends in the social interactions of national and international actors in a removed almost scientific observational way. Power is to the conventional Constructivist analytically neutral, and it is extremely influential on social relations and interactions.<sup>55</sup>

All in all, Conventional Constructivism can be divided into five categories: Ontology, Epistemology, Identity, Position of the researcher, and Power. In Ontology, there is a notion that it is possible to find agreement on intersubjective statements

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<sup>54</sup> Hopf, Ted. *The Promise of Constructivism in International Relations Theory*, p. 175

<sup>55</sup> Chwedczuk-Szulc, Karol. *Social Constructivism in IR - A short Success Story?* p. 90

within the epistemic community. With Epistemology, the intersubjective rules of positivist methodology are accepted by conventional constructivists, and further the intersubjective nature of knowledge is also accepted. Conventional constructivists focus mainly on the reproductive practices of identity, and by knowing these it is possible to predict the actions of an actor under the correct circumstances. Conventional constructivists adopt a view comparable to a natural scientist when establishing the position of the researcher, that is to say, the researcher acts as an objective observer, as if peering into their subject area from a distant intellectual position. The researcher simply acts as an uninvolved observer who describes the research subject in a sterile manner.<sup>56</sup>

## 7. Norms:

### 7.1 A short description:

A central aspect of this thesis is that of norms. To fully illustrate the importance of norms both for a social and immaterial hybrid warfare but also IR itself, it is first necessary to define or explain what a norm is.

To some, norms may seem as though they belong in the disciplines of sociology, after all they are useful descriptors of how social human beings act, and how they can be expected to act, but norms are also of vital importance for the field of IR, especially so within a Social Constructivist framework. Hoffmann states that norms are “[...] *Conceived as aspects of social structure that emerged from the actions and beliefs of actors in specific communities and in turn norms shaped those actions and beliefs by constituting actors’ identities and interests.*”<sup>57</sup>

Norms are an accumulation of the actions and beliefs of both an individual, and a society. This mass is shaped by the collective actions of society, and in turn they

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<sup>56</sup> Chwiedczuk-Szulc, Karol. *Social Constructivism in IR* pp. 89-90

<sup>57</sup> Hoffmann, Matthew J. *Norms and Constructivism in International Relations*, pp. 2-3

also shape society, and thus one might say the existence of norms is dependent upon a society to shape them, but society is likewise dependent upon a set of norms to define it.<sup>58</sup> Norms allow an actor to discern what actions are socially appropriate, to follow them entails an acceptance into society, and to breach them will result in social sanctions that may isolate the individual from the community. Norms on a basic level therefore share with identity an extremely potent power inclusion and exclusion, while we continually shape and are shaped by norms, they likewise dictate how we are “allowed” to act as individuals in a social setting, and seeing as societies and countries are but reflections and extensions of the people who inhabit them, norms likewise transcends the intersubjectivity of human to human understanding, and ascends to a sphere of actor to actor relationship in an international geopolitical situation.<sup>59</sup> Since States are not autonomous entities that exist of their own accord, it must then be true that norms must govern the actions of states and other actors, as they govern the actions of human beings.<sup>60</sup>

Norms are, according to Wendt and Wiener, constitutive entities, they create categories of actors as well as actions, and at the same time they determine the identities as well as the actions of the actors. Norms are inherently linked with notions of identity.<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, this power of inclusivity and exclusivity can serve the interests of an actor in achieving a desired goal in another society, it is for example possible that the reinforcement of a “us versus them” norm can contribute to the radicalisation of a minority by a foreign power, by highlighting supposed normative incompatibilities between the group and their wider society, thus serving to link them more strongly with the foreign actor than with their own country of residence. As such norms have enormous malicious potential in hybrid war, as the subsequent destabilisation of civil society brought on by this normative change or reinforcement may hinder the ability of the targeted nation to counter foreign norms with their own,

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<sup>58</sup> Hoffmann, Matthew J. *Norms and Constructivism in International Relations*, pp. 1-10

<sup>59</sup> Winston, Carla. *Norm Structure, diffusion, and evolution: A conceptual approach*, pp. 3-4

<sup>60</sup> Axelrod, Robert. *An Evolutionary Approach to Norms*, pp. 1-2

<sup>61</sup> Winston, Carla. *Norm Structure, diffusion, and evolution*, pp. 1-4

Hoffmann, Matthew J. *Norms and Constructivism in International Relations*, pp. 1-10

Wiener, Antje. *The Invisible Constitution of Politics*, pp. 5-8

Wiener, Antje. *A Theory of Contestation*, pp. 2-18

Hopf, Ted. *The Promise of Constructivism in International Relations Theory*, pp. 171-173

Wendt, Alexander. *Social Theory of International Relations*, pp. 1-28

potentially turning the targeted minority into a possible fifth column such as with how Germany radicalised German minorities in Czechoslovakia and Poland in the 1930's.

It is partly due to this utilitarian nature of norms that they are of value to IR scholars, as they are able to explain, understand, and predict the actions of a country in the international arena, and at the same time go into the minutia of how norms may be spread to another society, and what consequences this may have.<sup>62</sup>

It should be noted however, that the perception of what a certain set of norms is, or how it should be, may be different from state to state, and norms by their very nature are, perhaps rather oxymoronic, at one time fixed, and at the same time rather fluid.<sup>63</sup> Norms are by their nature rather stable constructs, after all societies tend to remain rather normative homogenic in periods of relative stability.<sup>64</sup> This is not to say that norms are unchanging entities of human social existence, merely that while norm constitution and reconstitution is a regularly occurring process, norms themselves experience very little fundamental change in their lifetime, and as such we may say that while they naturally go through different iterations and variations, they maintain a soft homogeneity at their core level.<sup>65</sup> Despite this stable constitution of norms, it must be noted that different actors may have different interpretations of the same norm.<sup>66</sup>

## 7.2 Norm Diffusion Theory:

With a short explanation of what a norm is, how it may come to be and why it is useful to analyse them in IR, we also need an explanation of how norms may spread in both their own "native" as well as "foreign" societies.

Firstly, it is poignant to briefly demonstrate the process of the evolution of norms, the "norm life cycle" as Finnemore and Sikkink terms it. The life cycle is made up of three distinct steps, which is: norm emergence, norm cascade, and norm internalisation. Norm emergence is characterised by norm entrepreneurs being the

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<sup>62</sup> Hoffmann, Matthew J. *Norms and Constructivism in International Relations*, p. 3

<sup>63</sup> Hoffmann, Matthew J. *Norms and Constructivism in International Relations*, p. 1-7  
Winston, Carla. *Norm Structure, diffusion, and evolution*, p. 3

<sup>64</sup> Hoffmann, Matthew J. *Norms and Constructivism in International Relations*, p. 5

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Winston, Carla. *Norm Structure, diffusion, and evolution*, p. 3

prime engine of convincing societies, or as Finnemore and Sikkink terms it, “norm leaders” of the legitimacy of the promoted or diffused norm.<sup>67</sup> Here the norm entrepreneurs seek to convince the states to embrace the new norm(s), and therefore we may look to these entrepreneurs as being the prime movers of the initial stages of the norm life cycle. The second stage, norm cascade, is characterised by a dynamic of imitation, as the influenced societal actors, the norm leaders, now attempt to socialise other actors who were not targeted by the norm entrepreneurs, into becoming norm followers. The norm leaders thus spread the norms to actors that have not embraced the new norms. Finnemore and Sikkink points out that identifying the underlying drivers for *why* this stage occurs may be difficult, as we cannot always identify a single driving factor, as the actors’ motivations may be manifold.<sup>68</sup>

We may however see the effectiveness of norm cascading by looking at how the norm “cascades” through society via a combination of factors, such as pressure of conformity, enhancing international legitimisation, or from a desire by national elites to enhance their own profiles. When the norm has cascaded through society it approaches the final stage of the life cycle, where the norms acquire a certain “taken-for-granted” character. This essentially means that the norm becomes viewed as a normal, natural, and ever-present fact of society, its existence is no longer maintained solely by a body of influencing actors, but by the daily reproduction and reconstruction of the norm by the wider society. The norm thus becomes taken-for-granted in the same vein as other aspects of daily life that we may engage in without deeper considerations.<sup>69</sup> Initially, norms are diffused in society through the action of norm entrepreneurs, who seek to spread a desired norm in a foreign society, and in doing so they need to socialise national elites, who may then cascade the norm throughout society before the norm can attain a “everyday” character, where the populace will stop questioning the existence and legitimacy of a norm. When the norm is internalised the last stage of the life cycle is complete, and one may say that the norm has been successfully socialised in the targeted society. Examples of norms that have been thoroughly socialised internationally could be that of democracy as stated previously.

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<sup>67</sup> Finnemore, Martha & Sikkink Kathryn. *International Norm Dynamics and Political Change*, p.9-15

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Finnemore, Martha & Sikkink Kathryn. *International Norm Dynamics and Political Change*, p. 9, 16-18

Democracy has reached a stage of socialization where the overwhelming majority of states have professed to being democracies in one way shape or form, it would be totally alien for these actors to make a public break with democracy *sensu lato*, but the norm is still flexible enough that democracy can be publicly embraced by authoritarian or totalitarian states. We may therefore see a scenario where an illiberal state embraces democracy *sensu lato*, but per the observation of a liberal democratic state, they fail to embrace democracy *sensu stricto*. For the liberal state, democracy has to be liberal to be truly democratic, and therefore the illiberal state is not seen as having fully embraced the norm of democracy in any deeper manner, instead being only superficially democratic.<sup>70</sup>

### 7.3 Norm Entrepreneurs:

The concept of norm entrepreneurs will now be further explained, as they are immensely important in the initial process of diffusing norms, and as such are vital for this thesis. In line with what has been explained earlier, it should come as no shock that norms are social constructs made by human beings for human beings, they are neither naturally occurring nor do we observe them in non-human animals.<sup>71</sup> As norms do not occur on their own in some cultural abiogenesis, it must stand to reason that norms must be spread in the same way that they are created, through the active propagation by human actors. Norm entrepreneurs operate by creating or bringing to attention certain issues of society that should be corrected for the good of the people. They do this by sensationalising use of rhetoric to interpret and dramatise the norms. As norms have an inherent logic of appropriateness, norm entrepreneurs face a substantial challenge when seeking to supplant an already socialised norm with

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<sup>70</sup> Finnemore, Martha & Sikkink Kathryn. *International Norm Dynamics and Political Change*, pp. 9-20

<sup>71</sup> Hoffmann, Matthew J. *Norms and Constructivism in International Relations*, pp. 1-10

Winston, Carla. *Norm Structure, diffusion, and evolution*, pp. 3-4

Axelrod, Robert. *An Evolutionary Approach to Norms*, pp. 1-2

Winston, Carla. *Norm Structure, diffusion, and evolution*, p.4

Wendt, Alexander. *Social Theory of International Relations*, pp. 24-28

Wiener, Antje. *The Invisible Constitution of Politics*, pp. 5-8

Wiener, Antje. *A Theory of Contestation*, pp. 2-18

another that differs from it markedly. As the established norm helps govern what is appropriate behaviour, acting contrary to it may help its supporters frame normative detractors as antisocial or socially inappropriate.<sup>72</sup> To overcome this, the entrepreneur must accept that their actions will be viewed as inappropriate by the wider society, and must then through acts of inappropriateness attempt to challenge the prevailing normative logic of appropriateness. The entrepreneurs will seek to enact a paradigm shift and make the appropriate inappropriate.

Due to their task, norm entrepreneurs cannot operate on their own accord or as independent actors in their entirety, they need an organisation or platform to back them up. These organisations may vary in shape and size depending on the inherent difficulty of getting the norm accepted, or whether or not the norm is diffused on an international scale, or in a single country. A political party, NGO or a lobbyist group may all act as organisations and platforms through which the norm promoter is able to diffuse the norm, either by acting on the organisation's track record of public service, promotion of similar beneficial norms, or as a conduit through which the norm can be spread to a mass of people who identify with the organisation.<sup>73</sup> To illustrate the possible size difference of these normative organisations, there will be two short demonstrations of organisations that vary in size, but are both integral to the work of norm entrepreneurs on a global scale. The UN is perhaps the largest size an organisation can attain at this point in Human history, virtually all sovereign states in the world are represented in this forum, and since its founding has had a certain set of norms it has attempted to uphold and diffuse in member states. Decolonisation is a prime example of a norm espoused by a country, the USA, acting as a Norm Entrepreneur through the UN. The notion that European Empire should gradually withdraw from their colonial holdings in Africa and Asia and grant the local populace self-rule and responsible government. This norm can be said to have been thoroughly diffused in member states, as there remains very little of the European Empires around the globe, and there is, with some exceptions, a prevailing global norm of respecting the sovereignty of nations and refraining from establishing new Empires.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Finnemore, Martha & Sikkink Kathryn. *International Norm Dynamics and Political Change*, pp. 10-14

<sup>73</sup> Ibid

<sup>74</sup> Finnemore, Martha & Sikkink Kathryn. *International Norm Dynamics and Political Change*, p. 13

As for organisations or groups that exist on a smaller scale we may look at political parties or advocacy groups, such as those advocating women's rights, or advocating for a more traditionalist societal model. Both are imbued with a set of conflicting norms that actively oppose each other, yet both are similar as far as we may use each as an example of a tool facilitating the diffusion of norms in society. If a norm entrepreneur associated with either one is able to make use of the expanded resources afforded to them due to this mutually beneficial alliance, their task of socialising political elites becomes easier.<sup>75</sup> These organisations allows for norm diffusion either locally, in a single society, or more globally in an attempt to internationalise the norm and break the global normative status quo. We may therefore state that the norm entrepreneur, with their tools of norm diffusion, are an immensely important part of norm diffusion, as the entire process is dependent upon these actors to actively spread or create a new normative reality. Were it not for the entrepreneur to be the so-called “boots on the ground” the spread of norms would be severely impaired.

With a brief description of norm emergence and the importance of normative actors, it is now time for a description of why norm diffusion is a potent part of a state's repertoire. The inherent potential of culture in norm diffusion is evident in the observations of Elkins and Simmons: “*entities that share similar cultural attributes tend to adopt the same practices [...] Actors negotiating a complex set of political choices regard the actions of actors with perceived common interests as a useful guide to their own behaviour*”.<sup>76</sup> The process of norm diffusion is significantly eased by the cultural connections between the actors, and the potential norm adoptees are more likely to emulate the entrepreneurs if there is a shared cultural bond.<sup>77</sup> We must therefore consider a state which seeks to destabilise or maliciously influence a neighbour, is potentially advantaged by the existence of national minorities in the targeted country, insofar as these feel a deeper affinity to the diffusing actor. The diffusing state will, according to Elkins and Simmons, have a much greater chance of an agreeable outcome than if they attempted to spread their own norms amongst a less culturally similar society. If the machinations of a hostile state are more conducive in a society where a large portion of the populace feels a certain affinity to the state in question,

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<sup>75</sup> Finnemore, Martha & Sikkink Kathryn. *International Norm Dynamics and Political Change*, p. 13-15

<sup>76</sup> Elkins, Z & Simmons, B. *On waves, clusters, and diffusion: A conceptual framework*. pp. 33-51

<sup>77</sup> Winston, Carla. *Norm Structure, diffusion, and evolution*, p. 7

then it stands to reason that the state will seek to exploit this cultural connection by any means necessarily insofar as it will be beneficial for their strategic goals.

Exemplary of this could be Russia's attempt at co-opting the Russian or Russophile minorities and populations in the near abroad, here exemplified by Latvia and Moldova. Furthermore, it must be noted that as this population becomes socialised by the normative progenitor, they in turn may become norm entrepreneurs in their own societies by influencing local and national government through pressure groups and political parties. In this case the diffusing country may achieve two major results from their effort. Either the socialised group is able to internalise the norm in their state, thus potentially causing a realignment of the state's international priorities and identity, or they may fail at this while still becoming a significant force within the country, that provides the diffusion actor with an increased amount of soft power and potential for further destabilisation.<sup>78</sup>

## 8. Operationalisation:

For this thesis, social constructivism will serve as the theoretical framework, as this thesis attempts to analyse the potential ideational nature of hybrid warfare, it is the theory best suited for such a task. The focus on identity and human social interactions and perception as the driving force of international relations is complementary to the nature of Ideational hybrid warfare, that it is possible through normative and identitarian influence to achieve the political and strategic aims of a hostile power in the target country.

Norm Diffusion theory will be the central theory for this Thesis, as it deals with the emergence and spreading of norms in society and on the international scale.

Granted this thesis will be mostly occupied with the diffusion of social and cultural

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<sup>78</sup> Casier, Tom. *Russia and the diffusion of political norms: the perfect rival?* pp. 1-4

Winston, Carla. *Norm Structure, diffusion, and evolution*, p. 7

Elkins, Z & Simmons, B. *On waves, clusters, and diffusion*. pp. 33-51

Hopf, Ted. *The Promise of Constructivism in International Relations Theory*, pp. 171-173

norms in a specific society, it is still important to consider that these norms has the potential of both becoming international norms, and in addition to this there is the potential that the diffused norms are able to enact a complete paradigm shift in the target country, causing it to realign its interests with that of the diffusing power, thus achieving a political goal for the aggressor. With this in mind the theory is imminently capable of explaining why it is important to look at the immaterial, ideational aspects of Russia's hybrid war regiment instead of, or in addition to, the physical-material aspect of hybrid and conventional warfare. Russia's position as a normative exporter, and its history of hostile immaterial intervention, provides the imperative for a normative analysis of Russian hybrid war through Norm Diffusion theory. If Russia is able to, through the diffusion of norms, destabilise Moldova and Latvia, it would be unwise for anyone to doubt the relevance of norms to IR scholarship, and deciding to relegate social constructivism and research of norms to a sociological sphere could have devastating consequences. The theory will therefore be used to establish a link between the norms observed in the dataset, and hybrid warfare, by using the theory as a tool to analyse how the norms are diffused in society, how this can be observed, and how this can in any way be of use to Russia.

When seeking out the Data that will form the greater part of the analysis, the focus is on data that shows Russia attempting to spread certain norms, especially those relating to issues of Language and culture. For Moldova, this linguistic focus will be on the discourse surrounding the Russian language, as well as the political debate of whether or not Moldovan is a separate language from Romanian. In Latvia, the language issue will be confined to just the Russian language, as there is no comparable situation in Latvia to the discourse surrounding the Moldovan language. Furthermore, in Latvia the focus will be solely on Russian media, as there is not any organisations or parties of comparable influence to the pro-Russian ones in Moldova. When it comes to cultural issues in general, the focus will be on data that shows Russia trying to influence the target populations in Latvia and Moldova, such as weaponising the debate of the countries' handling of their Soviet legacies, as well as Russia's attempt to reinforce the Russian world norm in both nations.

## 9. Methodology:

In this section I will explain the qualitative methods of analysis I use in my thesis, their merits and why I have chosen them. In exploring Russian weaponisation of cultural or linguistic issues as part of their hybrid war, I have decided to proceed by making a comparative case study. I have gathered a variety of data for this purpose such as foreign policy dispatches, articles from Russian state media, interviews by Russian media with politicians, and party programs. The data I collected will be rigorously vetted and have their quality and. I must add that I am not interested in the factuality of the data I use insofar as it will not harm the quality of my thesis, the factuality of e.g. the contents of a foreign policy brief is immaterial to the thesis, as long as it is able to demonstrate the existence of effort on behalf of Russia to weaponise the aforementioned aspects.

### 9.1 Case Studies:

Case study involves the qualitative and in-depth examination of a single subject of interest.<sup>79</sup> A case study can generally take a multitude of shapes, and there are multiple notions of what such a study should look like, but a common denominator within political science is that a case study allows for the attainment of generalisable knowledge within empirical studies.<sup>80</sup> The case study, has the core principle of seeking knowledge regarding a clearly defined subject or area.<sup>81</sup> For the thesis I have decided on a comparative illustrative case study. The comparative case study of this thesis takes the form of a small-N research design, as I seek to analyse only two cases comparatively.<sup>82</sup> This design is complementary to my goals as I seek to illustrate the key patterns of similarity in my cases, as well as the difference between these. In doing so I seek to prove the applicability of Norm Diffusion theory, as it can

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<sup>79</sup> Seha, Esther & Müller-Rommel, Ferdinand. *Case Study and Analysis*, p. 1

<sup>80</sup> Ibid

<sup>81</sup> Seha, Esther & Müller-Rommel, Ferdinand. *Case Study and Analysis*, p. 5

<sup>82</sup> Seha, Esther & Müller-Rommel, Ferdinand. *Case Study and Analysis*, p. 2

be used on two cases that are rather different from each other. My thesis is illustrative since it aims to show the applicability of the theory by way of concrete empirical examples where the theory can be applied, despite the differences between my two cases.<sup>83</sup> My cases are illustrative because the central focus is on Russian norm diffusion itself, rather than on my cases per se. While the cases themselves are undoubtedly important to analyse Russian ideational hybrid war, it is the hybrid war itself that is of most importance to the thesis, and thus the cases serve to illuminate the manner in which Russia conducts this ideational hybrid war.

It is because of this illustrative nature of my research design that I have chosen Latvia and Moldova. While I could have gone with two or all of the three Baltic states due to their similarity, I chose Moldova as the second case not because of the comparability, but due to a different range of factors, which I will explain now. Firstly, both countries are former Soviet Republics that struggle with how to handle or perceive their Soviet past. For Latvia the question has been more in line with how to treat it rather than with how to perceive it, whereas Moldova has long fluctuated between cherishing and despising it.<sup>84</sup> Secondly, both Latvia and Moldova have large Russophone minorities within their countries, and for both these have at times been a source of unease, as both Riga and Chisinau may fear that Russia will use them as pawns in the geopolitical game.<sup>85</sup>

## 9.2 Limitations:

This thesis is constrained in some respects. A significant limitation has to do with my data collection. As I am not a native nor proficient speaker of Russian or Romanian, although I am perfectly capable of reading Cyrillic, I am limited in my ability to gather

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<sup>83</sup> Levy, Jack S. *Case Studies: Types, Designs, and Logics of Inference*, p. 7

<sup>84</sup> Vichkitova, Anna. *Memory of The Soviet Period in Moldova: The Influence of Social Trauma and Contemporary Politics*, pp. 5-10

<sup>85</sup> *Prospect for Conflict Settlement in Transnistria* <https://besacenter.org/conflict-settlement-in-transnistria/>  
Balkan Insight: *Via Southern Ukraine, Russia eyes "Another Route" to Moldova* <https://balkaninsight.com/2022/04/22/via-southern-ukraine-russia-eyes-another-route-to-moldovas-transnistria/>  
Zois. *The War in Ukraine and Latvia's Russian-Speaking Community*. <https://www.zois-berlin.de/en/publications/zois-spotlight/the-war-in-ukraine-and-latvias-russian-speaking-community>

data in the Russian and Romanian languages due to my lacking proficiency in both. This of course presents a significant obstacle to my thesis writing, but I will try to overcome this by the following means. First, for the case of the Russian MFA or a media like TASS; there are English language versions of whatever is written in Russian. Especially for the MFA this is useful, as everything there is published in both English, Russian and Chinese and as far as I have been able to gather, the text of the English language version is fairly in line with that in Russian. Secondly, by building on what previous scholars have done in the field, I will attempt to turn this weakness around by using previous research as an anchor point.

Furthermore I am limited by the scope of the thesis. It is unfeasible to make a completely exhaustive project that covers the entire history of my two cases, and as such I have decided to limit the scope of data collection to between 2020 and 2025. I have chosen this period since it covers the years immediately prior to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, which set in motion or exacerbated many of the cultural and linguistic issues in Latvia and Moldova, and for both a heightened anxiety about Russia's willingness to wage war in the name of Russian minorities in the near-abroad.

### 9.3 Data gathering and analysis:

The Data I gather will be used first to display the norms Russia seek to diffuse in Latvia and Moldova. This will be done by first gathering data that relates to the general norms that Russia seeks to diffuse internationally, to establish an anchor point for the analysis. It is my intention through qualitative methods to display and analyse the manner of the norms themselves, not necessarily how they are diffused. I will seek out patterns and similarities between the Russian norms and the shape they take when they are diffused and reproduced by domestic actors. As such I am employing a method of coding in the text to establish when a specific norm is being diffused or reproduced by using the section on Russian norms as the frame of reference. For the sake of ease, my data will be separated into primary and secondary. The primary data will be made up of those which originate inside of Russia, the primary norm entrepreneurs. I consider these to be the primary sources

due to the fact that the norms, narratives and viewpoints being diffused originate in and are wholly Russian. The quality of this data is determined by the fact that they originate in the military-political establishment of the Russian Federation.

The secondary data will be made up of those which originate within local agitators and norm spreaders inside the cases, such as political parties. The quality of this data will be determined by the fact that it can be gathered from official policy papers.

My data will be credible in the sense that it allows me to lay bare so to speak, the strategy behind it vis-a-vis hybrid warfare. The credibility then means in lieu of the academic value of the source in a strategic connection, not a factual one. The data's factual credibility is, as mentioned previously, of little importance.

I have gathered the data mainly from Tass and Sputnik, two Russian medias with branches in multiple countries as well as in multiple languages. Sputnik for example has a site specifically for Moldova, which provides news in both Russian and Romanian. In the same vein there is a news service specifically for the Russian populations in the Baltic called *Baltnews*. While this site contains news articles relating to, among others, Russian "Special military Operation" in Ukraine, I have decided against using it as I cannot guarantee the quality of the data due to my limited proficiency in Russian, but I see fit to mention the sites as they have been part of my data collection. Most of the data I have gathered has been through the usage of the websites of Sputnik, Tass and the Russian MFA. All three websites have excellent user interfaces that make it easy to seek out the desired information. A great majority of my Data collection has been in this manner, and only a few of them, for example the party programs of the Sor and PSRM parties have been through different means. For these I specifically sought out the websites of the specific parties to see whether or not these would have detailed party programs. The PSRM had a rather large party program on their site in document form, while the Sor party merely had a modest text wall. I was unable to find any policy papers of the Victory bloc, but since its leader is the head of the Sor party I decided their policy was sufficient.

As my Data is mainly made up of Russian media articles, it is necessary to mention the strong link between the Russian state and its media. Russia is by and far considered an autocracy without freedom of the press by the west, and as such Russian media such as Tass, Sputnik or others like RT are seen as extensions of

the Russian government's reach. Normally it should be cautioned against suggesting the monolithic nature of diverse entities like the media, but due to the unfree nature of Russia's media landscape, it must be stated that they all need to conform to the views and wishes of the regime, and therefore a monolithic description of them is permissible.<sup>86</sup>

## 9.4 Moral considerations and Bias:

As with all scientific work, I must be mindful of any possible moral dilemmas with my research. For this thesis, the main thing I need to be conscious about is that I run the risk of accidentally reproducing some of the norms that I seek to analyse. Since I work so closely with Russian norms, and read a lot of Russian propaganda, I must be mindful that my text does not appear as though I take these articles at face value, or that I actively seek to reproduce any of the norms, thus becoming part of Russia's norm diffusion. In addition, I will state once and for all that I do not agree with any of the Russian norms, I do not condone the actions of Russia in either their hybrid or conventional war, and lastly that I am bitterly opposed to both the ideology and actions of the Russian autocracy.

With my dislike of the Russian regime in mind, I must also be mindful of my own biases, and I will attempt to the best of my ability to be as unbiased as possible in my thesis, while also being mindful of potential bias in the research I use.

# 10. Analysis:

## 10.1 Russian Norms

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<sup>86</sup> Jadwiga, Rogoza. *Media in the Russian Federation*, pp. 5-22

While this thesis first and foremost focuses on Latvia and Moldova, it is important to note that the ideational hybrid war being waged against them is not only being fought within these countries. It is therefore necessary to first analyse how Russia makes use of cultural issues in their hybrid warfare and establish what norms and narratives that Russia seeks to diffuse in neighbouring countries, through their usage of local norm elites as well as propaganda.

According to Tom Casier, Russian norms can be split into three categories; Sovereign right to choose, regime promotion, and traditional conservative values.<sup>87</sup> Furthermore, norms such as the west's Russophobia is a central part of a Civilisational norm, which has been observed in the research and my data collection, and on these grounds have decided to include in the analysis.<sup>88</sup> This is not to say that I disagree with Casier's notion that Russian norm diffusion can broadly be covered by the three aforementioned categories, rather the Civilisational narrative warrants its own category. A challenge when categorising the different aspects of Russia's ideational hybrid war toolbox, is the significant overlap of narrative categories. As mentioned previously, norms govern how we can act as individuals in our society without facing social or cultural sanctions, and the state and all of its aspects must necessarily reflect the most potent and prevailing norms of society. Therefore, Russia as a normative society that values, what they term traditional values, must mean that the regime is intrinsically linked with these notions of tradition. It is therefore as impractical as it is essentially futile to create a rigid system of categorisation of Russian norms and narratives that are exported. Indexing them in such a manner is helpful as it allows us to detect and group varying narratives rather than leaving them on their own with nothing to compare them to, and as such I see no issue in proceeding in the same manner as Casier has done, with slight adjustments.

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<sup>87</sup> Casier, Tom. *Russia and the diffusion of political norms*, pp. 1-4

<sup>88</sup> Robinson, Neil. *"Russophobia" in Official Russian Discourse*, pp. 6-13

Darczewska, Jolanta, Zochowski, Piotr. *Russophobia in the Kremlin's Strategy*, pp. 13-19

## 10.2 Traditional Values & Sovereignty:

A significant element of Russian norm diffusion is the insistence that Russia is a paradise of traditional European values and norms against a postmodernist west that has forgotten its roots. This narrative seeks to portray the west as having lost touch with its cultural origin, having abandoned European values for something that is foreign and alien.<sup>89</sup> It positions western values as a malignant force that seeks to eradicate European identity and replace it with a neoliberal LGBT multicultural amalgamation.<sup>90</sup> Examples hereof can be found in e.g. the Russian news media *Sputnik*, with several articles about the moral decrepit west versus the virtuous Russian society. Two articles in particular, seek to illustrate the difference between Russia and the west, with headlines such as “*Homeland Defence and Family Values: What’s New in Russia’s Schools*” and “*Russian Schools Teach About Family Values While Western Install Drag Show*”.<sup>91</sup> The former shortly describes how Russia’s school curriculum have been changed to emphasise the military and traditional values, while the latter directly seeks to illustrate the moral deficiency of the west, teaching about LGBT people, using money on transgender restroom access, but what was most emphasised was the alleged usage in New York of over \$200.000 in tax money to make drag shows for school children. These are exemplary of Russia attempting to first depict themselves not just as defenders of traditional values, but also as the defenders of children, and then to sow discord in the west by fanning the flames of a culture war. If the intention of such coverage has been to convince sections of the western population of the veracity of such claims, then we must consider it as a successful application of norm diffusion, as western paleoconservatives regard Russia as a beacon of traditionalism.<sup>92</sup> The values of contemporary Western Europe is depicted in Russian media such as *Sputnik* as being contrary to genuine European beliefs, which are identified with Russian beliefs, as well as being against the wishes of the EU population, suggesting that people

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<sup>89</sup> Curanovic, Alicja. *The Guardians of Traditional Values: Russia and the Russian Orthodox Church in the Quest for Status*, pp. 8-10

<sup>90</sup> Casier, Tom. *Russia and the diffusion of political norms*, pp. 6-9

Data 1, 9, 11, 14, 17, 21-25, 27

<sup>91</sup> Data 2

Data 3

<sup>92</sup> Casier, Tom. *Russia and the diffusion of political norms*, pp. 6

who veer away from the neoliberal line are hounded by the media.<sup>93</sup> Herbert Kickl, leader of the Austrian FPÖ Party, who is addressed in Data 4 can be considered an example of a norm entrepreneur in a western country, seeking to spread Russian norms. The reason for this characterisation is the following: Kickl is, as per the article and his own statements, supportive of Vladimir Putin, against aid to Ukraine, and of the opinion that Nato and Russia started the war in Ukraine. Furthermore, according to Sputnik, Kickl is a stickler for traditional values and opposes sanctions on Russia. It is due to these several reasons, according to Russia, that he is being hounded by the mainstream media.<sup>94</sup> Furthermore Russia is painting European mavericks such as Orban and Fico as defenders of moral and traditional values, with many articles from TASS even stating that the moral decline of the west precipitates an increasing interest among people to move to Russia for spiritual and moral fulfilment.<sup>95</sup> This narrative is central to Russian norm diffusion as it seeks to convince the recipient populations that western narratives regarding Russia are untrue, and that Russia is in actuality the true normative European society. This of course is intended to create discord in western society as Russia seeks to end western sanctions against them and to turn public opinion against the liberal status quo.

A norm that relates to that of Traditional values, is the Russian norm of Sovereign Democracy or Sovereign Right to choose. It might seem odd to group it close together with the norms of traditional values, but it is simply because those two are oftentimes used together such as in Data 5, where the traditional moral values are depicted as being under threat by a tyrannical EU that rejects the sovereignty of member states to make their own choices.<sup>96</sup> This norm strongly emphasises the need for stability, power, and sovereignty as the fundamental prerequisites for a state to effectively govern itself, democracy is therefore dependent on the political stability as well as political independence of the state. The implications are clear: the state cannot be democratic if it is limited in its ability to project power or if its sovereignty is impacted by the influence of a foreign actor. As such we may view this

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<sup>93</sup> Data 4

Data1

<sup>94</sup> Data 4

<sup>95</sup> Data 1 - 14, 22

<sup>96</sup> Data 5

Casier, Tom. *Russia and the diffusion of political norms*, pp. 2-5

norm as one that directly challenges western institutions such as the EU and NATO as being detrimental to the democratic development of states, because both organisations impose their will onto member states or potential member states, thus infringing on national sovereignty.<sup>97</sup> A term that is often thrown around in Kremlin discourse, is that of “colour revolution”, this term alludes to the political revolutions in certain post-Soviet countries in the early 2000’s and 2010’s that saw pro-Russian leaders be ousted by a popular revolution, and subsequently replaced by ones that were either more aligned with the west, or tried to have a multi vector foreign policy. What is being inferred by this in articles such as *“INTERVIEW: Georgia’s people, new government lack desire to become West’s pawn — Lavrov”* by TASS is that these revolutions were orchestrated by the west against the wishes of the local people, and subsequently all protests against regimes that are perceived to be pro-Russian, are framed by Russia as being attempts by the west to orchestrate a colour revolution in the country.<sup>98</sup> Furthermore, with this narrative Russia attempts to create a dichotomy where they champion the right of countries to choose their own ways, and where the west represents the opposite.

The other part of this norm, Sovereign Democracy, is on the one hand potent because it allows for Russia to justify its own system and to discredit criticism of it and on the other hand it gives Russia the rhetorical ability to lambast the west for their perceived hypocrisy for viewing western rules as universal. Surely the existence of Russian Democracy despite its obvious differences from western liberal democracy must mean that the western path is not the only one, that is the central point of the norm.<sup>99</sup> Furthermore this part of the norm, along with that of sovereign right to choose, frames countries aligning with Russia not of becoming pro-Russian, but rather prioritising their own independence and national interests. The TASS article *“US, EU cannot accept that more countries pick path of sovereignty—Russian lawmaker”* quotes Leonid Slutsky, Head of the State Duma Committee on International Affairs, as saying that the outcome of the 2024 Georgian Parliamentary election was not an example of the Georgians voting in a pro-Russian party, but one

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<sup>97</sup> Data 7, 15 - 25

<sup>98</sup> Data 18 - 26, 43

<sup>99</sup> Casier, Tom. *Russia and the diffusion of political norms*, pp. 2-5

that values national independence and sovereignty.<sup>100</sup> Standing with Russia or acting in accordance with Russian norms and aims is merely symptomatic of countries wanting to chart their own course. This two-pronged norm allows Russia to depict itself as the champion of sovereignty and non-interference, while painting the west as the complete opposite, attempting to delegitimise western political and military institutions as tyrannical and imperialist.<sup>101</sup> This is relevant due to multiple factors. The most important one deals directly with hybrid warfare. If Russia can disseminate this norm in either Latvia or Moldova, amongst the Russophone as well as the rest of the population, it will serve Russian political interests in creating a wedge between the two post-Soviet nations and the west. If Russia manages to get this norm to become internalised not only amongst the Russians of the two republics, that we must assume to be most at danger, but also amongst the rest of the population, Russia can exert more influence over the domestic as well as foreign policies of the republics. If Russia manages to create a connection between themselves and values such as independence and sovereignty, while painting NATO membership as subjugation, then Russian power projection in the western camp will be substantially augmented.

### 10.3 Russian World:

The next Norm that will be covered is that of *Ruskiy Mir*, or Russian World. This norm is more difficult than the others to place within a normative box or category, as it transcends more than one category, and in some ways is more of a Russian philosophy than a norm that is being diffused. Furthermore, covering this specific norm is also about showing how it is used in and by Russia for a justification for their actions abroad. Russian World is an idea that Russia is not limited to the confines of the Russian state as it exists now. The Russian World transcends borders and is to be understood as the sum of all that is Russian.<sup>102</sup> Russian World is the idea that

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<sup>100</sup> Data 21

<sup>101</sup> Data 50

<sup>102</sup> Data 51

Kudors, Andis. "*Russian World*" - *Russia's Soft Power Approach to Compatriots Policy*, pp. 1-5

Laruelle, Marlene. *The "Russian World" Russia's Soft Power and Geopolitical Imagination*, pp. 1-15

Russians outside of Russia are still Russian in a nationality context as well as an ethnic one. Furthermore, the idea of the Russian World corresponds geographically with the former Soviet Union, and on a philosophical aspect it is fundamentally about the right of Russia to interfere in the near abroad due to the shared Soviet and Imperial history, as well as the existence of the previously mentioned Russians minorities.<sup>103</sup> Russia therefore considers itself as the custodian not only of post-Soviet states, but also as the protector of ethnic Russians outside of Russia. Understanding this norm helps illustrate Russia's actions in the former USSR, and it provides an example of Russia using culture as a potential *casus bello*, stating that Russia has a duty and right to interfere on behalf of Russians in their other countries. This in essence explains, why Russia does a lot to emphasise the supposed mistreatment of Russians outside of Russia, it is their duty to protect these, and it is Russia's duty to provide a homeland to the Russians outside of their host countries.<sup>104</sup>

## 10.4 Russophobia:

We now turn to the last norm, which is of special significance for the minority focused part of the thesis, the norm of Russophobia. Russophobia may be separated into three narrative categories: Hate against the Russian people, hate against the Russian state, and hate against Russian values. According to this overall norm, there is a pervasive current of Russophobia in the west, where rampant hatred against the Russian nation as well as the Russian people is being stoked by EU elites. According to this worldview, the hostile relationship between Russia and the west is due solely to the pervasive actions of a Russophobic political. Furthermore, most counter measures taken by the west in response to Russian actions, are

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<sup>103</sup> Tishkov, Valery. *The Russian World - Changing Meanings and Strategies* pp. 1-4

Kudors, Andis. "Russian World", pp. 1-5

Laruelle, Marlene. *The "Russian World"*, pp. 1-15

Kaprans, Martins & Mierina, Inta. *Minority Reconsidered: Towards a Typology of Latvia's Russophone Identity*, pp. 1-3

<sup>104</sup> Kaprans, Martins & Mierina, Inta. *Minority Reconsidered*, pp. 1-7

framed as Russophobic aggression, as noted by Neil Robinson, Jolanta Darczewska, and Piotr Zochowski.<sup>105</sup>

Russophobia is thus seen as a pervasive virus that has gripped western society due to the xenophobic nature of western political elites. But Russophobia is not limited to the way in which European nations reject Russia, but also to how they reject Russian norms. One extremely potent expression of rejection of Russia and Russian values is the ban on soviet era symbols or the demolition of pro-soviet monuments as seen in the former Warsaw Pact.<sup>106</sup> The demolition of Soviet monuments is depicted as a direct attempt of historical revisionism, to reject the historical truth of the USSR liberating Europe from fascism, and instead seeking to foster enmity towards Russia while promoting neo-Nazi ideals in an effort to strengthen the narrative front towards Russia.<sup>107</sup> This pervasive hatred is depicted by Russia as a plan to draw the west and Russia into direct armed confrontation, with the intention of destroying not only Russia but also the Russian people.<sup>108</sup>

This norm seeks to portray Russia as a victim of a Xenophobic military bloc that seeks to destroy the Russian world through military, economic and political means. It is interesting to note that while this norm lambasts the west for Xenophobia, we may observe Russian xenophobic pundits as well, as both previous narratives disparaged western neo-liberal cultural practices of Multiculturalism as a weapon against European culture and values.<sup>109</sup> This shows the versatility of a normative hybrid war, seemingly contradictory elements may be used at leisure, since the factuality of what is disseminated to the targeted state is of no concern if it achieves its goal of sowing discord within society.

If Russia, by spreading the narrative of Russophobia, is able to convince the Russophone populations of Moldova and Latvia that these states, actively seek to promote hatred against Russians, then both countries will have a large portion of

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<sup>105</sup> Data 26, 28 - 29

Robinson, Neil. *"Russophobia" in Official Russian Discourse*, pp. 6-13

Darczewska, Jolanta, Zochowski, Piotr. *Russophobia in the Kremlin's Strategy*, pp. 13-19

<sup>106</sup> Data 39, 48 - 49

<sup>107</sup> Data 28-39, 48 - 49

<sup>108</sup> Data 28-49

<sup>109</sup> Data 3, 5, 23

their population be increasingly worried that their own countrymen could view them as enemies. This then factors into the problems of identity. As identity is a potent tool of finding out where one belongs, it is as previously stated just as, if not more, potent when it defines where one does not belong. By labelling the entire west as Russophobic xenophobes, Russia is actively trying to sow distrust between ethnic communities in the former USSR. By continuing to spout the narrative that all western governments hate the Russian people with a burning sensation, the Kremlin is attempting to break down the cross-ethnic national communities of Latvia and Moldova. Indeed, if we view nationality as essentially an imagined community, people are of the same stock because they themselves believe so, then what Russia is doing is a perfect example of attempting to tear up the imagined community, and drawing the target group, towards Russia and away from their country of residence. In this manner, the Russophobia norm becomes a tool with which Russia seeks to convince Russophone populations that they have nothing in common with the national communities that seemingly reject them, and that the Russian motherland is the true cultural and national home of these groups.

The use of disinformation, propaganda and normative strength to create or exacerbate ethnic tensions is a most potent tool indeed, and therefore the norm is justified in its inclusion, and I therefore find it fitting to include it in the analysis, as the potential damage a societal upheaval of this scale could wreak in a sovereign state is not unlike the hybrid war Russia waged against Ukraine between the Euromaidan and the annexation of Crimea, and beyond. We may draw similarities with what happened in the Donbass after 2014, and what has been going on in Transnistria since the 1990's and if ideational hybrid war is able to create or maintain ethnic conflicts on the scale of the war in Donbass, then we must consider it an extremely dangerous tool indeed

## 11. The Case of Moldova:

## 11.1 Media Landscape:

The media landscape of Moldova is an area of vital importance for research in ideational hybrid warfare, as this is one of the venues where the information war is being fought the most. Russian norms and narratives are being spread actively in Moldova by traditional as well as digital media, either by platforms located in Moldova, or those located in Russia.<sup>110</sup> Before going in depth about Russian and Russian language media in Moldova, it is important to note that the reasons for Russian media historically having a strong influence in the post-soviet mediascape of Moldova, is partly due to the relative power and status of the Russian language in Moldovan society. A large part of the Moldovan populace is proficient in the Russian language, uses it at home or in school, and for the consumption of media. According to the Internews report, Russian as well as Romanian speaking Moldovans consume Russian language media to the same extent as they do Romanian language media.<sup>111</sup> It is then clear that a majority of the Moldovan populace is in some way regularly exposed to Russian media, and thus to Russian norms, talking points and narratives. Due to this, Russia is potentially able to influence the Moldovan populace to a larger degree than if their “only” audience would have been the Russian speaking part of the population.

## 11.2 Language and Ethnicity:

Now we must address the issue of language and ethnicity, or at least how these are vital parts of Russian hybrid war. As previously noted, Moldova is not a monolingual or monocultural country, quite the contrary. As is the case with many former Soviet Republics, Moldova is quite the patchwork of languages and ethnicities.<sup>112</sup> Russian is the language of choice for communication for a majority of the minorities. This

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<sup>110</sup> Curraru, Andrei. *Moldova*, pp. 9-11

Magenta Consulting. *Perceptions of the Population of the Republic of Moldova on Mass Media*, p. 38

CIVIS Centre. *Ethnobarometer Moldova 2020*, p. 4-5

<sup>111</sup> Magenta Consulting. *Perceptions of the Population of the Republic of Moldova on Mass Media*, p. 38

<sup>112</sup> CIVIS Centre. *Ethnobarometer Moldova 2020*, pp. 16-30

presents us with two related utilities for the Russian hybrid war toolbox.<sup>113</sup>

Firstly, Russian enjoying the status that it does allows Russia to influence a larger part of the population, and spread their narratives to a larger audience, without having to expend further resources to direct these at different languages. This is paramount in the battle of norms and narratives being waged in Moldova, and Russia is helped along by the status of Russian in Moldovan society.

Secondly, the presence of a large body of Russian speaking people in Moldova reinforces the Russian World narrative, giving the Kremlin a pretext for their covert and overt actions in the country. As mentioned in the section about Russian norms and narratives, the Russian world is first and foremost a linguistic-cultural phenomenon that seeks to spread the idea that the Russian linguistic space translates to a Russian political, cultural, national and ethnic space.<sup>114</sup> As such Russia's actions in Moldova can be viewed through the understanding that Moldova's history with Russia in the USSR, and the presence of the Russian language in Moldova is at the same time a justification for Russian meddling in Moldova, and a tool in their hybrid war. With this norm Russia may seek to influence the general Moldovan populace by pivoting to their shared history, culture and language to create a sense of belonging to Russia in the Moldovan people. As such Russia is using Russian World to justify their overt measures in Moldova and using it as a tool to create a larger imagined community between the different ethnic groups of Moldova, and Russia.

Thirdly, and perhaps as an extension of the second point, the presence of a large body of Russian speakers can, as is the case in Latvia, be used by Russia as an effort to label those who speak the language as Russians.<sup>115</sup> In this case Russia is again using the seeming cultural and linguistic ties to disrupt or weaken the bonds Russian speaking Moldovans have with their country, by disrupting the Moldovan imagined community and supplanting it with a Russian or Russian oriented one. This in substance is also why Russian and Soviet iconography and heritage is an important factor in Russia's malignant actions in Moldova, it is a point of connection between the two societies that may be exploited to create an identity that is further

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<sup>113</sup> CIVIS Centre. *Ethnobarometer Moldova 2020*, pp. 4-5

<sup>114</sup> Data 51

<sup>115</sup> Kudors, Andis. *Latvia*, p. 2

linked with Russia, by stressing the linguistic, ethnic and cultural connection between the two. Furthermore, this is helped along by Russia continuing to stress that the national language of Moldova is Moldovan rather than Romanian. This helps weaken the bonds with Romania and Romanian culture, by stressing that the Moldovans share a cultural and ethnic bond with Russia rather than Romania. We may view all the mentioned norms and narratives being diffused by Russia as being part of a concerted effort by the Russian state to create or reinforce a dichotomy in Moldovan society, that between the Romanian and European legacy, and a Moldovan and Soviet legacy. The Moldovan and soviet legacy is exemplified by the supposed close relationship between Moldova and Russia, such as their Soviet, linguistic and Orthodox heritage as well as common societal values. This is supported by the efforts of Russia and Russian friendly actors in Moldova, especially on the issue of language.

### 11.3 The battle for Moldovan culture:

Russian media and pro-Russian norm entrepreneurs continuously create, recreate and reinforce a narrative about the uniqueness of Moldovan language and its separate identity from Romanian.<sup>116</sup> Actors such as Yevgenia Gatsul, head of Moldova's Gagauzia region, tries to create a connection between the pro-European parties, or pro-Romanian parties as she calls them, and the absorption of Moldova into Romania. The result of such an action, according to Gatsul, would be the extinction of Moldovan culture and language.<sup>117</sup> It is clear that Gatsul, and the Kremlin, infers that pro-European parties are attempting to destroy Moldova, by erasing the linguistic autonomy and uniqueness of the country, whereas Gatsul and her compatriots wish to preserve the identity and sovereignty of Moldova. This touches upon both the issues of language, but it also neatly positions Gatsul et.al. as the champions of Moldovan culture and independence and, by extension, Russia as a guarantor of sovereignty.

This fits well into the sovereignty and sovereign right to choose norms

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<sup>116</sup> Data 52-56

<sup>117</sup> Data 52

spouted by Russia, and there seems to be a concerted effort to connect these narratives and bind Moldova with Russia by depicting the country as an anchor point for the continued existence Moldovan culture.<sup>118</sup>

Combining conflicts of identity with conflicts of sovereignty allows the norm entrepreneur to connect one extremely important aspect of human social existence, that of identity, with an external actor. Conflicts over language can be boiled down to a crisis over identity, and by anchoring Moldovan identity firmly with Russia, pro-Russian normative actors may shape the domestic narrative such that people will associate their Moldovan identity more with Russia, than with Romania or the west. This is further supported by the fact that the church in Moldova, historically has promoted pro-Russian positions, and the church is seen by most Moldovans to be a credible and trustworthy institution.<sup>119</sup>

Furthermore, around a quarter of all Moldovans, of any ethnicity, consider cultural belonging and belonging to traditions to be an important part of their own national identification. This in essence means that an organisation such as the church, which enjoys unparalleled amounts of trust and has consistently held pro-Russian positions may act as local norm entrepreneurs, and the combination of traditional values with that of national identity and sovereignty, makes a potent tool for societal influence. With this Russia is, through less overt channels, attempting an ideational and cultural deconstruction, or at the very least a decoupling from Romania.

## 11.4 Russian language in Moldova:

Another related issue to that of the Moldovan versus Romanian language discussion, is the status of the Russian language, or rather how Russia is depicting the political issues surrounding it. As is the case with all former republics of the USSR, the Russian language has a large presence in society. In Moldova has since Soviet times served as the interethnic language of communication. Due to this, political or

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<sup>118</sup> Data 16-18, 21, 23, 50-56

<sup>119</sup> CIVIS Centre. *Ethnobarometer Moldova 2020*, pp.4-6, 18-19, 25, 71

cultural issues rooted in language policy vis-a-vis the Russian language has potential to escalate due to the language's immense value to minority communities, and its social and cultural legacy from Soviet times. Moldova has tried to curb the influence of Russian media since 2023 by banning or restricting the access of certain Russian media, such as Sputnik or TASS, to Moldova while also attempting to strengthen the presence of Romanian in the country. The responses from Russia and pro-Russian actors are twofold and should be understood as such.

Russia and pro-Russian actors routinely use words such as repression, censorship and Russophobia when describing the language policy of the Sandu government.<sup>120</sup> Moldova's attempt to strengthen the status of the national language, Romanian, in public is met with allegations of Russophobia by figures such as Gatsul who has stated that:

*"The Russian language de facto remains the language of interethnic communication in our country. We consider it absolutely logical that this status should again be enshrined in law. At the same time, of course, we understand that the current Russophobic central government in Chisinau will resist this initiative."*<sup>121</sup>

Gatsul, and TASS through their reporting on the subject, is trying to draw parallels between the strengthening of Moldova's Romanian linguistic identity as an attempt to repress the Russian language, which is noted as the language of interethnic communication. With this, Gatsul and TASS seek to portray the current Moldovan government as an oppressive force that erodes minority rights, by squeezing out the minority language from the public in favour of a foreign one. This serves a dual purpose, firstly it lends credence to earlier comments by Gatsul about the destruction of Moldovan culture by the government and their Romanian backers, it also insinuates that the government is seeking to assimilate the minorities, and therefore the Russophone populations must stand together against oppression. This plays into the previously mentioned sovereignty norms, and it also helps create or reinforce a shared identity amongst Russophone or Russophile parts of the population in

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<sup>120</sup> Data 57-67

<sup>121</sup> Data 58

opposition to the Romanian identity that the government seeks to impose. The aim of Russia is to worsen the language conflict in Moldova to drive a wedge between pro-western and pro-Russian forces, by once again positioning Russia as a defender of sovereignty, and Moldovan culture and nationhood.

In extension of this, Russia's depiction of the banning of Russian media serves a dual purpose. Firstly, the 10 articles gathered from TASS and Sputnik all disparages the Moldovan government for censorship and repressive measures.<sup>122</sup> Russia is cleverly trying to tie the current political positions of the government with measures that may be viewed as tyrannical. By doing this Russia seeks to portray the cynicism of the Moldovan government, in banning Russian media while seeking political alignment with the liberal west. Here Russia is reinforcing the narrative of sovereign democracy, that there is not one path of democratic development, and further showing the supposed undemocratic nature of the west as opposed to Russia. Surely a democratic state would have no need for limiting the free flow of information. In doing this Russia seeks to convince Moldovans of the tyrannical nature of their government, so that they may oppose it no matter their language, culture or ethnicity.<sup>123</sup>

The second, more potent purpose of Russia's media offensive is found in the language of the articles. In all but three of the articles collected, the Moldovan measures are referred to as the oppression of Russian language media, rather than Russian media. This is an important distinction, as the latter merely refers to a political fight, while the former seeks to portray the actions of the Moldovan government as being motivated by a hatred of the Russian language or Russian people.<sup>124</sup> Referring to the banning of Russian media as Russian language media circles back to linguistic and cultural issues.<sup>125</sup> By using terms such as *oppression*, *persecution* and *suppression*, Russia through TASS and Sputnik seem to emphasise the supposed xenophobic rather than political character of the ban, pointing out the Russophobic nature of the Moldovan government. By doing this, the conflict is changed from being a geopolitical fight between two states, to being a cultural battle

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<sup>122</sup> Data 57, 59-67

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Data 57, 63, 64

<sup>125</sup> Data 58-62, 65-67

between Moldova and the usage of Russian language in the country, echoing Gatsul's assertion of Moldova's Russophobia.

In doing so, Russia is reinforcing the narrative of Moldova destroying its own culture by seeking to distance themselves from the common cultural heritage the country shares with Russia, and at the same time it exposes the mentality of Russia regarding its Russian world concept, linking the status of Russian within Moldova with its connection to the Russian socio-political and cultural sphere.<sup>126</sup>

Furthermore, this seeks to alienate those in Moldova who have a favourable view of Russia and the country's Soviet past. By portraying Moldova's actions vis-a-vis Russian media as being an attempt by Moldova to sever the cultural and linguistic ties, Moscow is implicitly suggesting that Moldova is attempting a complete transformation of national culture by abandoning the Soviet and Russian legacy of the country in favour of being absorbed by Romania.

## 11.5 Transnistria:

A final area of study around the ideational hybrid war in Moldova is the issue of Transnistria. While Transnistria is arguably an area of mostly military and material proportions, it is necessary to include it in any case study about Moldova that touches upon ideational aspects of their relationship with Russia. This is due to the underlying issues of why Transnistria exists as a para-state today. While it is true that Transnistrian independence is maintained solely by the Russian military stationed in the breakaway region, its existence is rooted in conflicts of identity, language and culture and as such it must be included in this analysis.<sup>127</sup>

The very existence of Transnistria is due to the conflict of identity in late Soviet Moldova, founded in the question about the authentic existence of the Moldovan

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<sup>126</sup> Data 51

<sup>127</sup> Comai, Giorgio & Venturi, Bernado. *Language and education in multi-ethnic de facto states: the cases of Abkhazia and Transnistria*, pp. 1-2

Demblinska, Magdalena. *Legitimising the Separatist Cause: Nation-building in Eurasian de facto states*, p. 4

Miarka, Agnieszka. *Para-states as an instrument for strengthening Russia's position - the case of Transnistria*, pp. 2-5

language.<sup>128</sup> The language conflict between the more Russophone Transnistria and Moldova proper led to a civil war that ended with a de-facto independent Transnistria under Russian protection. Furthermore, the role of identity in the conflict is made all the clearer by the assertion of Transnistrian authorities that Transnistria represented the “true” Moldovan identity, against the diluted Romanian encroachment that is Moldova proper.<sup>129</sup>

From its inception Transnistria has viewed itself as the only remnant of “original” Moldovan identity, an identity that is firmly connected to its Soviet and Russian past, and such notions fall in line with the earlier mentioned norm of Moldova being robbed of its identity by a pro-Romanian regime.<sup>130</sup> The existence of Transnistria is then, from a Constructivist view, legitimised by the fact that it ostensibly preserves Moldovan culture, and protects it from being absorbed by Romanian. This in essence does two important things. First it serves to legitimise Transnistrian independence internally, by providing a mission that the state must accomplish. Second, it ties the existence of Moldovan culture with the relationship with Russia. If Transnistria is the only thing keeping true Moldovan culture alive, and Russia is the only thing keeping Transnistria alive, then Russia is either by proxy or directly the only guarantor of Moldovan culture. Russia then becomes the guardian of Moldovan culture, which fits with the narratives of Gatsul and likeminded individuals, further demonstrating that the relationship with Russia is paramount to the preservation of Moldovan identity. This is dangerous to the wellbeing of the Moldovan state because it carries with it the possibility of legitimising Transnistrian concerns and narratives in Moldova proper, along with the Russian influence it may carry. Therefore, Russia has the potential to further destabilise Moldovan society through Transnistria, if it does so by coupling it with the diffusion of other norms and narratives regarding Moldova’s relationship and common history with Russia, in essence solidifying Moldova’s place in the Russian world.

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Demblinska, Magdalena. *Legitimising the Separatist Cause*, p. 5

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

Data 16-18, 21, 23, 50-56

Lastly, Transnistria's existence itself fulfils certain goals of Russia's geopolitical strategy, by keeping Moldova out of NATO. As a country with border disputes cannot join NATO, Moldova is prevented from doing so as long as Transnistria maintains its de-facto independence, which has a debilitating effect on Moldova's ability to protect itself militarily against a potential incursion by Russia. Furthermore, the overwhelming Russophone character of Transnistria, along with its past as part of Ukraine means that the territory is firmly within the Russian World, and as such the very existence of Transnistria provides Russia with the ideological self-justification for its present and potentially future acts of hostility against Moldova.

## 11.6 Local Norm Entrepreneurs:

After analysing the norms being diffused in Moldova by Russian sources, it is important to also cover local Moldovan actors that function as local Norm Entrepreneurs through which Russia may destabilise or "win" Moldova. According to the COE, the most influential pro-Russian political organisations in Moldova would be the Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova, who are currently in an electoral bloc with the communists. Another important organisation is the banned Sor party.<sup>131</sup> Whilst banned, the members of the Sor party are now part of a new political coalition, founded in Moscow, called "Victory", and as such any references to either Sor or Victory may be used interchangeably.<sup>132</sup> These are considered pro-Russian due to their positions regarding Moldova's relationship with Europe contra Russia, and influential members of both Victory and the PSRM continuously stress the importance of Moldova's ties with Russia, and are in favour of joining Russian led political and economic organisations.<sup>133</sup> The Sor / Victory grouping is an especially potent force of Russian influence in Moldova, as they continuously agitate for a closer relationship between Moldova and Russia, while echoing Russian norms through their statements and policies. One of the clearest examples of this is the

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<sup>131</sup> Hybrid COE. *The Russian hybrid threat toolbox in Moldova: economic, political and social dimensions*, p. 11-14

<sup>132</sup> Data 68

<sup>133</sup> Hybrid COE. *The Russian hybrid threat toolbox in Moldova*, p. 11-14  
Data 69-70

often-stated opinion that Moldova should join Russian led organisations such as the EAEU, but more importantly the Union State while tacitly supporting the Russian invasion of Ukraine.<sup>134</sup>

## **PSRM:**

The Party Program of the PSRM stresses the party's devotion to the maintenance of Moldovan sovereignty, culture and the neutral vector of foreign policy as well as the importance of maintaining traditional family structures.<sup>135</sup> Once again there is a clear identifiable overlap between parts of the party program and Russian norms. Firstly, the maintenance of Moldovan sovereignty. In identifying Moldovan sovereignty with their own party, the PSRM explicitly imparts to the voter that their party is one of sovereignty, and therefore what they do is in the interest of maintaining the independence of Moldova. Combined with the tacit support of Russia's geopolitical positions, this means that the PSRM, through positive reinforcements, seeks to bind the success of their party with the success of the country, and such success is dependent on a close relationship with Russia. Secondly, the party states that it will seek to defend the identity, history and culture of Moldova, firmly positioning itself on the Moldovenist side of the linguistic debate, in line with other political actors mentioned previously, and of course with Russia. Included within the clause about Moldovan culture is an emphasis on the importance of victory day on the 9th of May, as well as the liberation of Moldova on the 24th of February.

With the 9th of May is a clear signal to the soviet legacy of Moldova, by firmly placing such an event as celebrated in the USSR within Moldovan culture and history, the PSRM implicitly supports the cultural ties with Russia, as well as an understanding of Moldova's shared history with Russia rather than Romania or Europe. Secondly, the 24th of February symbolises the liberation of Moldova from the fascists, which in a historical context can be understood either to mean Romania, Germany, or the European Axis powers in general. It is a shrewd choice to identify the liberation from fascism with the PSRM, or at least with a Moldovenist

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<sup>134</sup> Data 68-71

Hybrid COE. *The Russian hybrid threat toolbox in Moldova*, p. 11-14

<sup>135</sup> Data 72

Data 73

understanding of the cultural-linguistic issue, as it draws on the liberation of Moldova, or occupation depending on the reader, with the USSR, and thus with Russian culture. Secondly it seeks to firmly position the celebration or appreciation of the expulsion of fascism within a single part of the ideational conflict in Moldova and implicitly suggesting that the pro-European or pro-Romanian aisle to be opposed to the celebration of important historical moments in Moldovan history. In doing so the PSRM firmly establishes a connection between the victory over fascism, with their own political fortunes, and as such a victory of the PSRM is a victory over fascism.<sup>136</sup>

Lastly is the importance of maintaining traditional family values in Moldova. By stressing the importance of traditional values, the PSRM further positions themselves as the defender of traditional Moldovan history and values. Other than pivoting to conservative sections of society, such a norm positions the PSRM further in the pro-Russian camp, and by drawing potential parallels between themselves, their policies and Russia, the PSRM at once legitimises themselves by alluding to a shared ideological conviction with other societies, and by drawing on the history of Moldova's relationship with Russia, with positive connotations. It is important to note that there are no references to Russia within the party program, and as such calling the party pro-Russian is not related to any overtly stated geopolitical position regarding Russia, but rather due to the overlap in norms, and when it comes to foreign policy. As such the conglomeration of Russian inspired norms within the PSRM program, along with statements of prominent members, firmly positions it within a pro-Russian political sphere.

### **Sor / Victory:**

The Sor / victory party is, like the PSRM, a party that is not overtly pro-Russian, which is to say the party does not explicitly position itself in the Russian camp in their statutes, party program or the like. Where we may be able to safely consider this grouping as pro-Russian is in the subtext of its statutes, the activities of its leaders, and their own stated opinions

In the party program for Sor, the party does not focus on political or cultural

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<sup>136</sup> Data 72

matters to a great extent except for the belief that Moldova should maintain its sovereignty and neutrality: “*We are adamant regarding the unconditional preservation and consolidation of Moldovan statehood and its military neutrality*”.<sup>137</sup> Here the Sor party clearly, through its stated position, places itself in the pro-Russian camp by reproducing Russian norms regarding Moldova’s political and military alignment.<sup>138</sup> Russian media frames Moldova’s neutral status, that is them not integrating in western structures, ensures stability in the region by promoting cooperation and reconciliation in the Transnistria conflict. Therefore, we must consider that when Sor states that Moldova’s military neutrality must be maintained, that they are specifically referring to the rejection of Nato membership. Furthermore, by combining the subjects of sovereignty and neutrality, Sor may attempt to insinuate that the abandonment of neutrality will lead to a loss of statehood, no doubt referring to a possible union with Moldova. With these few words the party is aptly connecting the issues of sovereignty and military nonalignment, suggesting that Sor, or now Victory after the banning of Sor, seeks to maintain Moldovan statehood, and that it cannot be done if the nation were to join Nato, as the pro-western political parties seek. Furthermore, we can gauge the position vis-a-vis Russia through the statements or actions of the political leadership of the party, such as when the party head Ilan Shor stated that Moldova should join the Union State of Russia and Belarus.<sup>139</sup> In an article from Sputnik Shor lambasts the West for having ill intentions with Moldova, while suggesting that Moldova needed to embrace Russia:

*“Why do they need Moldova? And I’ll tell you – it’s a testing ground. A testing ground for free hands of war. It’s a testing ground to bully. Maybe they’ll send immigrants to us at some point. We have nothing in common with them. Here [with Russia and Belarus] we’ve been in the same family for years, we know each other, we speak the same language. We understand each other, we have common values.”*<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Data 74

<sup>138</sup> Data 75

<sup>139</sup> Data 69

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

Shor manages to reproduce a couple of Russian norms in his statement to Sputnik. Firstly, there is of course that of Moldovan sovereignty; By stating that Nato needed Moldova to be a testing ground he is directly suggesting that Moldovan sovereignty means nothing to Nato, that the organisation will simply use Moldovan territory as a staging ground for conflict with Russia. This in essence combines the sovereignty, neutrality as well as Russophobia norm, that Moldova will be reduced to a military staging area from which the west may attack Russia. Next there is a rejection of western values and an embracing of Russian ones. Moldova has nothing in common with the west, but with Russia they share culture, values, language and more. This is a brilliant combination of several Russian normative stories, where notions of the traditional family values of Russia are contrasted with those of the west, if indirectly, as well as the wholehearted embrace of Moldova's place in the Russian world. By using terms such as family Shor seeks to portray the Russian world as a united cultural sphere where Moldova belongs, thus reinforcing the perceived normative reality of Moldovan cultural distinctiveness from Romania, and its firm place among the other post-Soviet nations rather than with the west.

Other than the statements of the party leader we must consider the fact that the party was launched in Moscow, and the fact that party leaders partake in Russian cultural rituals while in the Russian capital.<sup>141</sup> Founding the party can be interpreted as symbolising two distinct, and perhaps contradictory things. Firstly we may, as Shor himself says, consider that Victory is founded in Russia to be an indication that the party elite seeks to portray themselves as champions of a occupied people, that is to say the party is founded in another country because Moldova has been taken over by a western satellite regime, and as such Moldovan patriots are not able to fight for Moldovan statehood within the country, but must do so from without.<sup>142</sup> Analysing this position we are able to draw some obvious normative foci based on previous research and data collection. By forming the bloc in Moscow, and by stating that Moldova has been conquered, Shor neatly portrays his party as the defender of Moldovan sovereignty, and at the same time it implicitly connects this fight with Russia and Russian assistance. Once again benevolent Russia is connected to the

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<sup>141</sup> Data 68, 70

<sup>142</sup> Data 68

struggle for Moldovan statehood implicitly by having the founding ceremony of Victory in Moscow. Furthermore, by insinuating that it would be impossible to found the bloc in Moldova itself, Shor implicitly accuses the Moldovan government of being anti-democratic, while stating that Russia, as both a guarantor of Moldovan statehood and patron of the party, is a force of democratic development.<sup>143</sup> Partaking in cultural rituals such as laying flowers at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Moscow further reinforces the normative reality of Moldova being part of the Russian world, sharing a common Soviet legacy with Russia.<sup>144</sup> Partaking in this event is more than just diplomatic or political niceties, it stresses the soviet legacy, and thus cultural and historical ties with Russia, and it further reinforces the view of Russia as the protector of Moldovan statehood, by honouring Soviet soldiers who died in the second world war, thus taking the historical reality of the USSR's fight against Germany in WWII, and juxtapose it with the current "struggle" for a sovereign Moldova.

## 12. The Case of Latvia:

### 12.1 Latvia's Media Landscape:

As with Moldova the Latvian media landscape is an important tool in gauging how Russian norms are being diffused inside of Latvia. Latvia has historically had a problem when dealing with the consumption of Russian media by certain parts of the Latvian population.<sup>145</sup> The defining difference between the Moldovan and Latvian cases is that Russian media in Latvia predominantly targets Russophone Latvians, as opposed to the general catch-all approach in Moldova.<sup>146</sup> An explanation for this

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<sup>143</sup> Data 18, 21, 24, 52, 68-70

<sup>144</sup> Data 70

<sup>145</sup> Kudors, Andis. *Latvia*, p. 1-8

Kaprans, Martins & Mierina, Inta. *Minority Reconsidered*, p. 6

Petrovska, Olga. *Reshaping the Baltic Identity: Russian Soft Power and the Security Strategies of Latvia and Estonia*, pp. 4-6

<sup>146</sup> Kudors, Andis. *Latvia*, p. 1-8

is the fact that the Latvian situation is markedly different from that of Moldova. While Moldova became part of the USSR by being detached from Romania, thus necessitating the artificial creation of a language and culture to shift the feeling of belonging towards Russia, Latvia in its entirety was occupied by the Soviet Union. Thus, there was no need to create a new identity for the local population, because there were no external cultural homeland they could use as a cultural anchor point, and as such the language issue in Latvia is more about minority rights than it is about the ostensible erasure of a distinct culture. Furthermore, while Moldova has struggled with how to regard its Soviet and Russian past, no doubt influenced by the cultural and linguistic conflict, Latvia has been remarkably homogenic in the retelling of its own history, and Soviet times have always been regarded as a period of occupation and the forceful extinguishing of Latvian independence. As such, Russia is less able to make use of splits in society proper, thus necessitating a focus on minority politics and the normative battle between the dominant European norms, and the Russian norms being either embraced by or diffused in the Russophone communities.

According to Olga Petrovskā, Andis Kudors, as well as Martins Kaprāns and Inta Mierina, the presence of Russian media in the Latvian information space has been a cause of concern as well as problems for the Latvian state. Indeed, Russia has been apt at using the media as a vector through which to spread Russian norms amongst the Russophone population in Latvia. Russian media goes to great lengths to paint the Latvian state as being Nazi, chauvinistic, undemocratic and decadently western, while painting Russia as the opposite.<sup>147</sup> Furthermore, Russia intentionally depicts all Russophone Latvians as being Russian, despite the fact that a sizable part of this population is Belarussian and Ukrainian as well.<sup>148</sup> This fits within the Russian world norm.<sup>149</sup> Russia attempting to create an overarching Russian community in Latvia by amalgamating the Russophone populations into one constructed identity is thus in line with the understanding of what Russia is in the Russian world narrative.

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<sup>147</sup> Petrovskā, Olga. *Reshaping the Baltic Identity*, pp. 4-6

<sup>148</sup> Kudors, Andis. *Latvia*, p. 2

<sup>149</sup> Kudors, Andis. "Russian World", pp. 1-5

Laruelle, Marlene. *The "Russian World"*, pp. 1-15

Tishkov, Valery. *The Russian World*, pp. 1-4

Kaprāns, Martins & Mierina, Inta. *Minority Reconsidered*, pp. 1-3

Furthermore, in doing so the Kremlin justifies Russian interference in Latvian affairs, both by claiming to protect Russians from discrimination, but also by virtue of Latvia being in the Russian world owing to the large Russophone population in the country, thus justifying Russia's geopolitical actions and goals in the country through a mix of ethnic protection and a civilizational understanding of global affairs.<sup>150</sup>

## 12.2 Russophobia in Latvia:

Russia is much more vocal about Russophobia in Latvia than in Moldova, indeed most of the gathered data revolves in some way shape or form around what Russia describes as the Russophobic actions of the Latvian government. Russia goes to great lengths to portray the situation of Russian speakers in Latvia as the total oppression of Russians in Latvia by a xenophobic government.<sup>151</sup> Examples of this can be found in the dispatches of Russia's MFA, where two spokespeople address the deportation of Boris Katkov, the chairman of the Latvian-Russian Cooperation Association, a pro-Russian interest group, to Russia, and the language policy of Latvia respectively. In the former, the actions of Latvia in expelling Boris Katkov are depicted firstly as a morally bankrupt and heartless act against an innocent man solely due to his ethnic and linguistic character. Katkov is, according to spokeswoman Zakharova, being targeted in a campaign to intimidate the Russophone Latvians, justifying it as a measure vital for national security. In her description of Katkov and of the Latvian government, Zakharova seeks to impress on the reader that the Latvian government is a neo-Nazi organisation that justifies its obvious oppression of Russians by claiming it is vital for national survival. This is perfectly in line with both the Russophobia norm, as well as the Civilisational conflict and Sovereign Democracy norms.<sup>152</sup> Zakharova implicitly lambasts the perceived hypocrisy of the west in condemning the human rights abuses of Russia, while the Latvian police state deports an old man from his home.<sup>153</sup> In doing so Zakharova

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<sup>150</sup> Kaprans, Martins & Mierina, Inta. *Minority Reconsidered*, pp. 1-2

Data 50

<sup>151</sup> 76-77

<sup>152</sup> Casier, Tom. *Russia and the diffusion of political norms*, pp. 1-5

Data 5, 7, 15-49

<sup>153</sup> Data 76

sows doubt in the democratic nature of western values by suggesting that the west is doing the very same thing it accuses Russia of doing, thus seeking to expose western moral outrage of the west with Russia as hypocrisy.

Furthermore the language of the dispatch is much in line with previously analysed Russian rhetoric regarding the targeted country, and words such as *neo-Nazi*, *Russophobia* and *Police State* are neatly packaged together to form a coherent normative message, that seeks to portray Latvia as a undemocratic xenophobic state that seeks to oppress it's Russian minorities, implicitly stating that Russophone people in Latvia cannot be safe while such a government is in power. The very last line of the dispatch reads "*Russia will stand by the people expelled by Latvia and will offer them the assistance they need*", the last part of the line of course invokes feelings of altruism, but it is the first part that is of interest here.<sup>154</sup> There is an implicit warning in this message, that Russia will stand by these people, while the wording may seem clear and concise there is a certain vagueness to the exact meaning of the message, and it is not wholly improbable to suggest that Russia is warning Latvia and likeminded states of the potential consequences of suppressing Russia's compatriots in the near-abroad, thus hearkening back to the concepts of the Russian world and Russia's duty to protect Russians outside of Russia.<sup>155</sup>

There is, according to Russian media, an aggressive campaign in Latvia to expel or otherwise oppress the Russians in Latvia, simply due to their ethnic makeup.<sup>156</sup> Here Russia labours to firstly reinforce the view that Latvia is a Nazi state that acts in the interests of the west and against its own people, and secondly to use the lived experiences, real or otherwise, of expellees in an attempt to strengthen Russia's normative power in Russophone communities.

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid

<sup>155</sup> Kudors, Andis. "*Russian World*", pp. 1-5

Laruelle, Marlene. *The "Russian World"*, pp. 1-15

Tishkov, Valery. *The Russian World*, pp. 1-4

Kaprans, Martins & Mierina, Inta. *Minority Reconsidered*, pp. 1-3

Data 51

<sup>156</sup> Data 79-82, 84

## 12.3 Xenophobia & Civilisational Struggle:

By depicting Latvia as a virulently xenophobic nation, Russia attempts to justify its own actions vis-a-vis Latvia, drawing on Russia's Soviet past in fighting fascism, while delegitimizing those that hold western values as being hypocritical fascists that only care about human rights when such concerns can be used to undermine Russia. As such we may connect Russia's position on this matter with both the Russophobia norm as well as with the norm of civilisational clashes, thus illustrating that Russia seeks to portray the actions of the Latvian government as both an attack on Russians in Latvia, and as a part of a larger civilisational clash between the west and the Russian world.<sup>157</sup> By depicting this civilisational clash in line with the supposed Russophobia of Latvia, Russia attempts to combine these norms into a single normative perception of the geopolitical struggle, as being waged by the west against the Russian people, due to hatred of the Russian language, people and state.

As such this normative combination attempts to draw the Russophone Latvians away from Latvia and towards Russia, in an attempt to undermine the national community in Latvia by fostering loyalty to another state than the one they reside in. Russia attempts to create a potential fifth column in Latvia, a large part of the population that will look towards Russia for their cultural and national orientation rather than towards Latvia, thus creating a serious security dilemma for the country. To do this Russia seeks to win the normative battle against Latvia and replace whatever western norms may have been internalised within the Russophone community, with Russian norms as well as by attempting to sow distrust between the Russophone communities and the Latvian ones, to further alienate them from the state at large.

## 12.4 Russophone views:

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<sup>157</sup> Data 17, 22, 26-28, 36-39, 45, 48-50, 79-81, 84, 97

A way to gauge this potential alienation is to look at the opinions of Russophone Latvians regarding certain essential questions. While an entire sociological study could be made regarding this community, for the purpose of this thesis it is important to look at how Latvian Russophones perceive the status of their language in society, as this allows us to see if Russia's ideational hybrid war has fertile soil through which it can cultivate societal problems through norm diffusion. While most Russophones feel close to Latvia, there is within this diverse group a rather large split when it comes to the issue of language.<sup>158</sup> In their study of the Russophone population, Kaprans and Mierina find that while an overwhelming majority of Russian speaking Latvians feel closeness to or pride in being Latvians, a plurality of them also view the Latvian government as a threat to their language.<sup>159</sup> Roughly 48 percent of those surveyed displayed some manner of agreement with the statement that the Latvian government endangers the Russian language and culture within Latvia, compared to the 39 percent that disagreed to some extent. While this does not directly show us whether or not Russia is or has previously been successful in their Norm Diffusion campaign in Russophone communities, what it does show is that there is at the very least a population that may be vulnerable to this type of hybrid war in the information space, since they already feel that their language is endangered. Therefore these 48 percent of the Russophone population are more at danger since they may feel vindicated in their belief if it is supported by "evidence" from Russian media sources, playing on and affirming their lived experiences, and since language is a powerful component of identity, it is also a point of radicalisation for a minority that may feel the very core of their being is under attack.

Latvian Russophones already regard their home country as dangerous to their cultural existence, and therefore Russian norms such as Russophobia may, as seen in the gathered data, be used to convince Russophone Latvians that Latvia is indeed a neo-Nazi state that seeks to destroy their culture, and as such notions of the Russian World may become more important to Russophone Latvians, and Russia's efforts to corral all Russian speaking Latvians into one single Russian ethnicity may bear fruit as the people seek integration with their own linguistic communities rather

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<sup>158</sup> Kaprans, Martins & Mierina, Inta. *Minority Reconsidered*, p. 9-11

<sup>159</sup> Kaprans, Martins & Mierina, Inta. *Minority Reconsidered*, p. 10-11

than with the national one, and thus shifting their view towards Russia as the cultural and anchor point, thus creating or seizing control of a cultural, national or ethnic community in opposition to the Latvian one.<sup>160</sup>

## 12.5 Soviet Material Past:

Another subject where Russia goes to great lengths to make its opinion known, is that of Soviet memorials and other material artifacts from Soviet times. When it comes to monuments and other physical remnants of the USSR there is a rather sizable uproar any time the status of these is brought up in society.

To the Latvian people the statues symbolise an era of stagnation, brutal oppression and the subjugation of Latvia by a foreign, oftentimes Russian, conqueror who tried to extinguish the young independent Latvian Nation. For a country such as Russia, which cherishes its Soviet past as a time of greatness and power, the Latvian view naturally comes across as hostile and bewildering. Russia has long lambasted the Baltics for what they consider a lack of appreciation for the Soviet past and its monuments, but it has increased ever since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, when the removal of these monuments became a topic of discussion in Latvian society. In 2022 Zakharova stated in a radio interview with Sputnik, that the demolition of Soviet monuments in Latvia was a deliberate attempt at rewriting history, and an attempt to polarise Latvian society against the Russophone minority.<sup>161</sup>

With this it is clear that Russia seeks to frame the demolition of monuments as a wholly Russophobic action, which is to say whatever rationale Latvia may claim to have for removing these monuments is a front to shield their actions, to further marginalise Russian minorities in Latvia. To underscore this, many articles on the subject stresses that Latvia is removing the memory of Soviet soldiers liberating Soviet Latvia from the Nazi invaders, subtly suggesting that Latvia is attempting to erase the positive history of Latvia's inclusion in the Soviet Union, while being

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<sup>160</sup> Data 17, 22, 26-28, 36-39, 45, 48-50, 79-81, 84, 97  
Kudors, Andis. *Latvia*, p. 2

<sup>161</sup> Data 89

sympathetic to the Nazis.<sup>162</sup> This supposed effort by Latvia to erase the memory of the USSR occurs partly due to the fact that the generation that lived during the Second World War has largely passed away in Latvia, and as such there are few left to authentically refute the supposedly ahistorical actions of the Latvian government, and reinforce the true historical narrative regarding Soviet actions in Latvia.<sup>163</sup> Furthermore, by suggesting that Latvia is erasing its history to suit its own goals, Russia is drawing on other occurrences in the rest of Europe, to create a view amongst the Russian population that Europe, spurred by Russophobia, actively destroys its own cultural heritage simply because they wish to combat Russia.<sup>164</sup> Russia thus attempts to impart on the Russophone population in Latvia that their country of residence hates them, and seeks to repress theirs as well as Latvia's own history due to this blinding hatred.

By doing this Russia seeks to control the story regarding the removals, to have a monopoly on the normative retelling of these events so as to remove any incompatible or opposing views regarding this issue and use it to strengthen Russia's position in the geopolitical conflict. Whatever reason the Latvian state and people may have for removing these monuments to Soviet times, be it to overcome a burdensome past or to finally tell the Latvian story of Soviet times is, as the very fact that Latvia seeks to remove something Soviet implies both a rejection of Soviet and Russian norms, but also a rejection of the "universal truth" of Russia's own retelling of the Soviet experiment.<sup>165</sup> To discredit Latvia's actions is thus an attempt to take away from them the power to retell their own history as much as it is about radicalising or seizing control of the Russophone minority. It is interesting to consider that while the Soviet past is important to the Russophone minority, Russia is misrepresenting what is happening with the statues, and for good reason.

It is true that the Latvian government seeks to remove Soviet monuments, but where Russia seeks to portray this as a destruction of historical artefacts, in reality Latvia is simply moving these to museums, an action that is widely supported by Latvian

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<sup>162</sup> Data 90-92, 95, 96

<sup>163</sup> Data 90

<sup>164</sup> Data 26, 35-36, 39-40, 44, 47-48, 89-97

<sup>165</sup> Kaprans, Martins & Mierina, Inta. *Minority Reconsidered*, p. 6  
Petrovska, Olga. *Reshaping the Baltic Identity*, pp. 1-8

Russophones.<sup>166</sup> Due to this Russia must up the rhetoric to convince the Russophone Latvians of the reality of the Russian normative retelling of the issue, which is why Russia makes use of neo-Nazi comparisons in their discourse.

On the 80th anniversary of the Liberation of Riga in 2024, Sputnik published an article about how this event is celebrated today. Ilya Tsukanov, the author of the article, goes to great lengths to impart upon the reader that Latvia has totally abandoned the Soviet past, and is instead now idolizing locals who collaborated with the Germans, in particular Latvian SS volunteers and conscripts.<sup>167</sup> Latvia's political elite is depicted as a neo-Nazi clique that is virulently Russophobic, and has long attempted to draw Latvia and Nato into a war with Russia. This is far from the only article specifically alleging Nazism in Latvia, other parts of the Dataset do so as well.<sup>168</sup>

This in essence achieves two things. First it seeks to imprint on the Russophone population that Latvia today supports the ideas and ideologies that led to the invasion of both the Baltics as well as the rest of the USSR, implying that Russophones should fear what the Latvian state might do to them because of their culture. Secondly, it fits within the overarching narrative of Russia being encircled by hostile powers, and that Latvia is trying to foster armed conflict between the west and Russia. If this were to happen, the implication is that Latvian Russophones will either be targeted due to their culture, and thus potentially dubious loyalty to Latvia, or that Latvia will force them to fight against their compatriots in Russia.<sup>169</sup> By joining together the issue of Soviet monuments with Russophobia and the general civilisational clash, Russia seeks to radicalise the Russophone population so as to destabilise the Latvian state. Although Russian speaking Latvians today are generally supportive of Latvia, it has not always been so, and it is not guaranteed to remain thus. If Latvia were to lose the normative battle with Russia, then the Latvian state would have to allocate more resources to try to get normative control back, or to further securitise the Russophone population. As such Latvia would in the short term be less able to defend itself, as it would have to dedicate further resources to

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<sup>166</sup> Pupcenoks, Juris & Schulze, Jennie L. *Securitizing Russian-speakers in Estonia and Latvia: The Frame-Policy Nexus before and after Russia's Invasion of Ukraine*, pp. 1-25

<sup>167</sup> Data 88

<sup>168</sup> Data 95-96

<sup>169</sup> Data 97

insulate the Russophone population from Russian influence, and at the same time plan contingency measures for a potential fifth column of Russophones in Latvia comparable to the Sudeten Germans in Czechoslovakia. In fact, we already see the need to securitise the Russophone population due to their dependence on Russian language media, and as such this issue is already an actuality, if less serious than it may become in the future.<sup>170</sup>

## 13. Discussion:

Lastly I will address a question that may be raised as to the “authenticity” of what I have described in my analysis, as to whether or not it can truly be considered Hybrid War. One might be tempted to conclude that Russia’s weaponisation of linguistic and cultural issues is simply an exercise of soft power, after all Russia does have a significant amount of soft power owing to the large Russophone populations in both of my cases, as well as a history of cultural connection. Would it not then be better to classify Russia’s acts as using soft power to influence its neighbours in the near-abroad? By drawing on the definitions of both soft power and hybrid wars that have been constructed or used in this thesis, I must say that the actions of Russia as shown in the collected data is an exercise of hybrid war rather than soft power. The purpose of soft power is the creation of goodwill towards the exercising country through a benevolent act of cultural exchange and diplomacy. With this in mind we cannot consider what has been analysed in this thesis an exercise of soft power, since soft power does not aim to destabilise the targeted country, nor does it seek to divide society. Thus, I feel confident in stating that Russia’s actions can be considered an example of ideational hybrid war within the confines of the working definition. Russia’s actions materialised through their usage of mass media takes advantage of societal rifts and sectarian or ethnic divisions, with the purpose of achieving Russia’s political goals without the use of overt force.

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<sup>170</sup> Kudors, Andis. *Latvia*, p. 1-16

## 14. Conclusion:

Throughout this thesis I have laboured to answer the following research question:

*How does Russia make use of Norm Diffusion to weaponise cultural issues as part of their Hybrid War regimen against Latvia and Moldova?*

One of the apparent strengths of Russia's approach to the ideational hybrid war, is the fact that the norms can be diffused to a large audience not only in Latvia and Moldova, but the rest of the world. Russia diffusing its norms via news media in several different languages, foremost Russian and English, means that the norms they seek to export can be diffused not only in Russian speaking countries or communities, but also in countries with anglophone populations.

First for the Russophone populations it provides a newsfeed solely in their language, which is in some ways catered to them specifically. This in essence means Russia is able to project power in the Baltic states as well as Moldova simply by providing Russophone populations with news in their one mother tongue, thus shaping a national community in such a way that they look more towards Russia for their media consumption than they do to their own countries. This gives Russia an edge in the war of norms in the country, by having almost exclusive access to Russophone populations Russian narratives and norms can be diffused with much less difficulty than if they had to compete with local or western norms, thus creating a normative isolation of the community from society at large, further strengthening the relations between the minority and Russia in an attempt to weaken the national cohesion of the target country by making the Russophone minority identify more with Russia than their host country.<sup>171</sup> Furthermore, this focus on national minorities may also illustrate Russia's attempt of making minority plight a casus belli against

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<sup>171</sup> Hybrid COE. *The Russian hybrid threat toolbox in Moldova*, p. 23  
Karabeshkin, Leonid & Sergunin, Alexander. *Understanding Russia's Soft Power Strategy*, p. 2-14  
Petrovska, Olga. *Reshaping the Baltic Identity*, pp. 5-6

“offending” countries, thus creating a pretext for armed intervention if need be.

Secondly for the non-Russian but pro-Russian or potentially pro-Russian population, the diffusion of Russian norms, especially that of traditional values, Russia provides the political right both a blueprint or a source of inspiration, but also a point of reference for where they want their own country to move towards, and these local political actors may act as local norm entrepreneurs, spreading Russian norms and narratives in the host countries, due to a perceived ideological connection between Russia as the normative originator, and the political groups as normative adopters. For this reason, Russian norm diffusion may target not only the cultural or ethnic Russophone minorities of the host countries, but also a political minority that may act as conduits for Russian norms, seeking to agitate on behalf of Russia in Latvia and Moldova, thus potentially acting as either a fifth column, or a destabilising factor.

Lastly, Russian norm diffusion through English language channels may of course help courting right-wing groups in the rest of Europe, but more importantly it may potentially help turn public opinion in targeted countries against Latvia or Moldova. If Russia is successful at portraying Moldova as an aggressive, unreasonable and xenophobic state to a majority of the EU population, a desire for closer relations between the West and Moldova may be damped in such an event. This last example is of course not, at this point, a realistic scenario, but it is nonetheless important to remember that ideational hybrid war against a country may be waged indirectly by diffusing norms to third parties.

For Latvia, due no doubt to the relative homogeneity of the public perception of Soviet times, Russian norm diffusion is mainly focused on the Russophone minority, and Russia seeks to gain control as it were, of this diverse group. Through the use of mass media Russia has for many years tried to gain normative control of the Russian speaking population of Latvia, first by diffusing Russian norms through Russian media, and secondly by attempting to artificially unite all Russophones into a single identity. By constantly referring to all Russian speakers as simply Russians, Russia operates firstly from the understanding of the Russian world norm, and secondly they seek to create an imagined community of Russians, Belarusians, Ukrainians and others where their separate identities are discarded in favour of an overall belonging to Russia. Russia does this by combining different norms and narratives and disseminating them

to the populations. By combining Russophobia and Russian world norms Russia attempts to impart on the Russophone populations that they are unwanted, hated and slated for cultural destruction, and that they will be forced to fight against their compatriots in Russia, should Nato be successful in drawing both Latvia and Russia into war. Furthermore, by intensifying the debate regarding demolition or removal of Soviet Statues, Russia states that the Russophones of Latvia is having their history erased, and that a normative shift towards neo-Nazism is happening by extinguishing the memory of Latvia's liberation from fascism by Soviet soldiers. Lastly, by undermining the democratic nature of Latvia, Russia attempts to create disillusionment amongst the Russophone population with Latvia's institutions, to foster mistrust towards their society and fellow countrymen in an effort to destabilise Latvia.

For Moldova, the situation is rather different. While Russia has made claims to the oppression of Russians and Russian language in relation to Moldova, Russia's norm diffusion is aimed at a much broader audience than is the case in Latvia. This is no doubt due to Moldova's much more complex situation vis-a-vis its remembrance of Soviet times, with society more divided on how the Soviet Legacy should be viewed. As such, Russia's norm diffusion is aimed not at a particular linguistic group, but rather at those Moldovans that feel an affinity towards Russia, either due to a nostalgic view on Soviet times, political normative overlap, or due to other factors. As such the linguistic issues that Russia takes advantage of in Moldova is not limited to Russian language issues, but also to the larger Moldovan-Romanian language debate. Russia portrays itself and those aligned with it as the champions of Moldovan culture and language, against those that seek to subsume Moldova into Romania. Furthermore, Russia portrays the current Moldovan government as an autocratic, anti-Moldovan and anti-Russian clique that works for western interests, rather than Moldovan. Russia attempts to draw the Moldovans towards Russia with a combination of normative and narrative devices. Most prominent among these are the aforementioned Moldovan language issue, that of Russophobia, Russian world as well as traditional values that are in opposition to western ones. Russia makes use of these norms to bind the Moldovan population with Russia by stressing their mutual history, cultural similarities as well as linguistic kinship. As such Russia seeks to maintain the Soviet identity of Moldova, to prevent or slow down Moldova's reorientation towards Europe. Other tools which Russia uses for this purpose is their local norm entrepreneurs in political parties

such as the PSRM and Sor/Victory, which although not expressively pro-Russian all make use of Russian talking points, and exalt the same norms as Russia does.

Russia portraying the two cases as being Russophobic anti-democratic liberal hellscapes is helpful when alienating a local cultural minority from its country and subsequently radicalising the group, it helps the political anti-liberal right of the country by providing an example of how a “sovereign democracy” should look like, and where these political groups might find inspiration for their own normative development, and lastly it is useful when alienating the people of another country against them.

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