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**PROCESS OF IDENTITY FORMATION
AMONG THE RUSSOPHONIC COMMUNITY OF GERMANY
DURING THE MID-2010S CONFLICT IN UKRAINE**

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The Ukrainian crisis that has led to an enormous polarization in international relations, creates a special context for Russian-speaking minorities abroad. Today's Russia is claimed not only to send weaponry to the conflict zone, but also to undertake an attempt to undermine the stability of the West. Russian-speakers living in the Western states are accused of being Moscow's 'fifth column'. At the same time, Russian media tell a story of 'aggressive West' that disrespects Moscow's natural interests and should be opposed to. The thesis argues that the Russophones in Germany find themselves stuck between two discursive formations, and this situation finds its reflection in the patterns of self-identification and, therefore, political preferences of the group.

Based on the poststructuralist understanding of identity, the thesis claims that the identification is based on the continuity of discursive acts, with the latter being limited by the existing discursive background. Therefore, I study the narratives present in two main sociopolitical spaces that the group might belong to – German and Russian, as well as those (re)produced by the group's individual members and communities. The previous background associated with the 1990s-2014 German representations of the group is taken into consideration, too. I come to the conclusion that the group experienced prolonged 'othering' from the receiving society, which pushed them to the edge of political spectrum. Furthermore, the massive 'integrationist' stigmatization has led to internal divisions within the group.

Throughout the research, it has become clear that the Ukrainian crisis has not changed the previous tendencies. Despite the initial signs of (limited) unification, the internal differences laid during the previous periods were not overcome. In this sense, the accusations of Russophones' being an instrument of Russian policy have proved to be false.

Key words: Russian-speakers, Germany, identity, poststructuralism, Laclau and Mouffe, Ukrainian crisis

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the research problem

The Ukrainian crisis has marked a very special shift in international relations. In 2014 General Phil Breedlove, NATO's Supreme Allied Commander Europe described Russia as waging “the most amazing information warfare blitzkrieg we have ever seen in the history of information warfare” (cit.ex.: McIntosh 2015 : 299-300). Today’s Russia is often claimed not only to send weaponry to conflict zones, but also to undertake an attempt to shake the stability of the West through the means propaganda. The narrative of a reciprocal Western information warfare can also be traced in Russian public sphere (Strategiya natsional'noy bezopasnosti Rossiyskoy Federatsii 2015).

Growing tensions place Russophonic communities abroad in a very specific position of alleged ‘Kremlin’s agents’. TIME's columnist Shuster (2014) argues that Russia is fighting for the allegiance of Russophones in order to create a 'fifth column' in the neighboring states, and the 2014 events are associated with an intensification of such activities. He emphasizes that Russophones in the Baltic states tend to read Russian mass-media – and this fact is skillfully used for the aims of propaganda. Shuster’s approach makes an accent on the role of media in constructing a difference between Russian-speaking population and the native population of Baltic states. According to his logic, this artificially exaggerated dissimilarity might help Moscow pursue an aggressive policy in the region, as it previously happened in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine.

Although the Russophones in Germany can hardly be argued to support separatism, the recent years have seen them being accused of failing to integrate into the German society and turning into an instrument of Russian propaganda (cf. Zeit online 2016, Kamatozov 2017). At the same time, mainstream Russophonic media came up with a campaign of ‘protecting the truth’ that more or less explicitly refers to former compatriots as potential allies (see more: Russian media & the Ukrainian conflict). As a result, the pre-existing differences between the Russophonic community and the Germany society are further politicized. The thesis argues that the group finds itself stuck between two discursive formations, and this situation might find its reflection in patterns of self-identification and, therefore, political preferences.

1.2 Theoretical framework

While selecting the theoretic approach, I generally had to choose between two ones (as the concept of identity is only given attention by a limited number of schools in IR): constructivism and post-

structuralism. My giving preference to the poststructuralist approach was based on its concentration on non-state actors, its specific shift from 'self-other' to 'self-order' relations and an interestingly designed discourse analysis perspective. Among the works of the poststructuralist scholars, I selected the research conducted by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe that is consonant with my own views of political problematique. Furthermore, I felt myself attracted by Laclau's understanding of populism that, from my point of view, can be projected on the processes of identification among immigrant marginalized groups (with Russophones in Germany making no exception).

The poststructuralist theoretic framework claims that the production and circulation of signs constitute the social world. The authors who apply this approach for their research give special attention to discourses, i.e. "systems of thoughts composed of ideas, attitudes, courses of action, beliefs and practices that systematically construct the subjects and the worlds of which they speak" (Lessa 2006 : 285). The key concepts that define the poststructuralist approach (in its variation represented by the works of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe) are a nodal point, an empty signifier and identity. Thus, a *nodal point* is defined as a "privileged sign around which the other signs [get] ordered" and, therefore acquire their specific meanings. (Jorgensen&Phillips : 26). Within the sphere of IR such concepts as democracy or human rights might function as nodal points that create their own co-ordinate systems in liberal discourses. The same would be true for national interests within realist discursive practices.

An *empty signifier* is, strictly speaking, understood as "a signifier without a signified" (Laclau 2007 : 36). When it comes to a certain quilting point, it is often claimed to be empty inasmuch as its function of representing the universality of an equivalence chain (i.e. the cluster of signs) prevails over that of expressing a particular meaning. Moreover, some terms (e.g. justice, freedom, equality) normally function as empty signifiers, as their semantic role doesn't consist in expressing any positive content. What they do instead is incarnating an absent fullness (Laclau 2005).

Identity, the last of the key concepts outlining the approach of Laclau and Mouffe, is not defined by authors in a direct way. However, several main notions specifying their understanding can be formulated. First, identities (as well as meanings in general) are socially constructed on the basis of the ongoing language use i.e. discursive practices. Secondly, identities are flexible and never completely fixed. Thirdly, there are no objective laws that divide society into particular group, which makes every individual type of identification as 'natural', as all others. Returning back to the above-mentioned concepts, one can describe identity as a shared notion of equivalence, a plurality of ties between the actors that is established and re-established through discursive acts.

1.3 Research gap

As the literature review, conducted within the current research, has demonstrated, most studies devoted to the Russophones in Germany are concentrating either on the Russlanddeutsche (e.g. Strobl 2006, Worbs et.al. 2013, Rabkov 2006, Kiehl 2009) or on the Russophonic Jews (e.g. Isurin 2011, Roberman 2014, Kessler 2003, Körber 2005). Comparative studies that might include the category of other Russophones are less common and are usually carried out by Russophonic scholars (Verschinin 2011, Polyan 2004). Meanwhile, de-naturalizing the divisions between the groups that are dominant within the German academia might be of interest when new strategies of working with the group are looked for.

Furthermore, the analysis of previous research found out that the textuality of the Russophones' own media was only given little attention to. Most authors (cf. Smolyarova 2012, Kurennoi 2005) evaluate the corresponding media through the dichotomy of professional/amateurish. Hence, the media are represented as more or less effectively reflecting the 'objectively existing' social reality, not participating in its active construction. The issues of mainstream media influencing immigrants seems to be more elaborated within the German academia (e.g. Zinn-Thomas 2006). Here making the focus on the Ukrainian crisis seems to be a logical next step in studying the media effects, as these events have created a situation when the discursive formations, influencing the Russophones' identities, found themselves in a direct conflict.

My own research is not aimed at either making a detailed analysis of all the Russophones mass media, or labeling any representations of the Ukrainian events as 'corresponding to the facts'. In this case, the Ukrainian conflict functions as a research framework (as the identities are context-bound and cannot be described without such a limitation), while the reference to the mass media is made to trace both the dominant and challenging discourses.

1.4 Research questions

The chosen analytical basis brings me to an important presupposition that channels my research. Thus, I believe that there are no 'naturally pre-existing' relations between Russophones in Germany, as well as between them and the state they come from/they live in. All the types of ties are being constantly constructed by discursive practices that define 'we-ness' and exclude 'otherness'. Inasmuch as the identification processes are defined by the existing discursive background, I put myself a task of outlining the discourses dominating in sociopolitical spaces the group finds itself in. Within the framework of the current research I assume that Russophonic and German media discourses play the key role in the identity construction of the group. However, I fully realize that the group is also

influenced by other discourses formulated at national (e.g. within other post-Soviet states), supranational and global levels.

According to my supposition, against the background where previously co-existing national discursive formations come in a direct conflict, the group might either (1) experience growing identification with one of the sides, or (2) face internal divisions and general marginalization. Therefore, finding out whether any of the options functions as a legitimate one becomes my key research question.

Additional research questions can be formulated as follows:

- a) What kinds of identities do German media discourses referring to the Ukrainian events prescribe to Germans? Russians? Russophones?
- b) What kinds of identities do Russian media discourses referring to the Ukrainian events prescribe to the above-mentioned groups?
- c) What understandings dominate within the Russophonic community in Germany and how do they correlate with the main media discourses?
- d) Is it possible to say that the Ukrainian crisis has become a point that marks a shift in the group's identification processes? If it is, what influence has it exerted?

Analyzing the tendencies of immigrants' identification within the discipline of IR might have several implications for political practice. On the one hand, it deals with the tasks normally interpreted as belonging to domestic politics: i.e. the strategies of working with immigrant communities that help to avoid their radicalization. On the other hand, this kind of research might be helpful for governments working with the former compatriots living abroad. Finding the right instruments increases the chances of receiving more favorable political choices and avoiding the marginalization of the group. One of the main presuppositions of my research here deals with the notion of domestic and foreign politics being interpenetrative. Furthermore, I demonstrate that the sphere of political has flexible borders, which lets lifestyle choices be politicized and both national and international levels.

1.5 Data & Method

The research material is represented by diverse types of data: (1) 15 in-depth interviews with the representatives of the group and (2) material of the mass communication. The interviews were conducted between September 2016 and April 2017 via Skype. All the interviewees were given pseudonyms to protect their identities. The recruitment of the interviewees followed several tracks: thus, some of them were found through the group's online communities, while others were attracted on the basis of the 'snowballing' method or personal ties of the researcher.

The mass communication analysis was conducted with the use of three main categories of media: (1) German media; (2) Russian media; (3) Russophobic media published in Germany. Thus, such material included online and printed articles, TV items, blog posts and comments. The selection of mass media was primarily based on quantitative indices; at the same time, both mainstream and strong oppositional discourses are represented within the current research.

The material was processed on the basis of discourse analysis techniques suggested by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, as well as their colleagues (cf. Wodak et al. 2009) that concentrate on the use of lexical units and syntactic devices. Such discursive instruments included, for instance, personal pronouns, temporal references and dichotomies.

1.6 Thesis structure

In view of the formulated research questions, the study is divided into six main sections: Introduction, Research background & Literature review, Theoretical Framework, Data & Method, Analysis and Conclusion. Chapter 1 (Russophones in Germany, media & the Ukrainian conflict) outlines refers to the general characteristic of the group, makes a critical review of the literature dealing with similar topics and outlines the place of the current research among other studies. Chapter 2 (Theoretical & Methodological Framework) consists of three subsections and embraces the principal theoretical presuppositions of my research; specifies the key characteristics of poststructuralist approach and expands such concepts as discourse, identity, nodal point and empty signifier. The last subsection of the chapter refers to discourse analysis as theory and method in its variation elaborated by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. Chapter 3 (Method of data collection) describes the specific characteristics of an interview as a method of data collection and comments on the choice of mass media research data. Chapter 4 (Russophones in Germany: tendencies of identity construction) is divided into four main subsections. The first one describes the patterns of identification that were formed between the early 1990s and 2014. The second subsection (which also has a composite structure) is devoted to the discursive background constituted within Russian and German sociopolitical spaces. Thus, both dominating and strong oppositional discourses are mentioned. The third subsection of the analytical chapter refers to the influence that the dominant representations of the Ukrainian conflict have exerted on the Russophobic community. Finally, the 'Discussion' subsection specifies the contribution of my conclusions to the general discussion outlined in Chapter 1.

2. RUSSOPHONES IN GERMANY, MEDIA & THE UKRAINIAN CONFLICT

The following chapter both studies the general background of the analyzed group and the ways it was referred to by scholars. The main accent herein is made on the compound character of the Russophonic community that embraces several main groups primarily defined on the basis of formal ethnic belongings. Although an overwhelming majority of previous research concentrates on an individual subgroup and/or characterizes the community's own media through the dichotomy of professional/amateurish (i.e. underestimates their constitutive role), several works that resonate with my own conclusions were found, too. Thus, I would like to especially emphasize the research of Savoskul (2006) who draws parallels between the concept of integration and immigrants' self-identification; Verschinin (2011) who demonstrates that the problem of isolation is something that different subgroups of Russophones do face in a similar way; and Zinn-Thomas (2006) who argues that specific representations of Russophones in mass media influence their life tracks. Furthermore, the chapter explains why the Ukrainian crisis might make a suitable background to study Russophones' identities.

2.1 Russophones in Germany: general characteristics & previous research

The group of the Russophones in Germany quite rarely appears in literature as a whole. Scholars normally distinguish between three main subgroups within the Russophonic community of Germany: (1) repatriates (also referred to as *Russlanddeutsche*, *Spätaussiedler*); (2) Russian-speaking Jews; (3) ethnic Russians and other Russophones. Individual authors tend to concentrate on separate groups that are sometimes analyzed in comparison with similar collectives living in other countries.

This comparative strategy is often applied when the identities of the Russian-speaking Jews are studied. For instance, Isurin (2011) inquiries into the peculiarities of the linguistic constructions applied by Russian-speaking Jews living in the USA, Germany and Israel. It should be specially mentioned that referring to this group Isurin recurrently uses the signifier 'Russians' and even the title of her book includes the construction 'Russian diaspora'. Furthermore, she treats certain characteristics shared by the representatives of the group as a consequence of their being brought up in the Russian culture (e.g. special perception of friendship or the prevalence of collectivism over individualism in behavior patterns). At the same time, Isurin seems to concentrate on 'Russianness' and ignore the category of 'Sovietness'. Thus, the adjective 'Soviet' only appears when legal practices (such as restrictions on Jewish emigration) are described; moreover, the author emphasizes that the respondents she worked with, demonstrate no negativity towards Russia or Russian people in general, but sometimes express 'a strong sense of hatred' towards 'the Soviet communist system' (ibidem : 197).

The productive power of Soviet practices vis-à-vis the respondents' identity formation is, thus, left outside the research framework.

The idea that the 'Jewishness' of the Russian-speaking Jews in Germany is constructed, can also be found in the work of Sveta Roberman (2014). Unlike Isurin, Roberman is quite careful with using the adjective 'Russian' and prefers 'Soviet' and 'Russian-speaking' instead. Nevertheless, similarly to her colleague, she writes that the Jews who came to Germany from the ex-Soviet Union sometimes didn't realize that being Jewish was a critical component of their 'migration contract'. Roberman defines 'Jewishness' as an empty signifier that was filled up with different content in the Soviet Union and in post-Cold War Germany. Thus, in the Soviet Union the concept of 'Jewishness' was based on one's origin and disappeared from the public space. The German perception implied that Jews were expected to follow their identity through both religious and civic practices. (ibidem : 201-204)

The largest group of research devoted to the Russophones in Germany concentrates on the repatriates. A logical question is: what makes this group such an attractive object of study? First, the repatriation of the *Spätaussiedler* ('late returnees', as their status was defined by the *Bundesvertriebenengesetz* – Federal Law on Refugees and Exiles) constituted a very specific case of immigration from the legal point of view. The original 1953 law defines an expellee as a German citizen or an ethnic German who resided in the former Eastern territories of the German Reich, "temporarily located under foreign administration", or in areas outside the German Reich as of 31 December 1937, and who as a result of the World War II events suffered expulsion, in particular through deportation or escape. The amended law entitles to the German citizenship those citizens of the ex-communist states, who themselves – or whose ancestors – were persecuted or discriminated between 1945 and 1990 for their German or alleged German ethnicity by the governments of the respective states (*Gesetz über die Angelegenheiten der Vertriebenen und Flüchtlinge*). It implies that soon after the naturalization *Spätaussiedler* would be reflected as Germans (or 'citizens with migration experience') in the state statistics and treated as such.

In 1997 a further amendment was made that introduced a proof of language proficiency as a precondition to being granted an access to the German citizenship. However, the test was only made obligatory for *Spätaussiedler*, while their accompanying spouses and children were not expected to pass it. This point once again emphasized the difference constructed between foreigners and repatriates in the German legislation. Thus, the term 'foreigners' (*Ausländer*) as defined by the Foreigners Act of 9 July 1990 embraced all the categories of people who were neither citizens nor the members of the German people (labor migrants, EU citizens, remote kinsmen of the *Aussiedler* or their spouses married for less than 3 years etc.). *Spätaussiedler* had several 'privilege' unique among the immigrant

groups. For instance, repatriates were entitled to attend German language courses for up to 6 months and receive integration benefits for a 10-month period, indexed according to their needs. *Spätaussiedler* from the ex-Soviet Union could also receive special tax reductions, assistance in realizing educational or employment opportunities and the right to unemployment benefits and pensions as if they had worked and lived in the FRG for their entire lives. On the contrary, the first integration programs for foreigners were established in 2004 when the new Immigration Law was passed. Interestingly, it was the same law that introduced an obligatory language proficiency test for the *Spätaussiedler* family member as a prerequisite to their access to the German territory. (Takle 2011 : 171-176)

Secondly, repatriates can be defined a specific group of the Russophones. The duality of their status is reflected even in the term '*Russlanddeutsche*' (Russian German) applied in German to describe the group. Groenendijk (1997 : 473) writes that in everyday life the repatriates are sometimes simply referred to as '*Russkis*' (Russians). At the same time, the official documents might put the *Spätaussiedler* into the category of Germans – which leads to the situations similar to that described by Ayse Caglar. She writes that there were cases when young repatriates with poor knowledge of German language constituted a greater part of school classes – but still didn't break the established quotas of foreigners – thereby leading to worse results for the whole classes (2001 : 344).

Whereas the Russian-speaking Jews coming to Germany were invited to be different and reproduce their specific forms of behavior (although to a certain extent external and foreign to them), the repatriates were expected to dissolve in the German society. In the 1990s the project of 'integration', which in fact was based on the concept of assimilation, faced multiple difficulties. A research conducted by the Bielefeld University between November 1998 and February 1999 in schools where young repatriates studied, indicated that 69,7% of the newcomers could hardly read German texts. 61,5% of the interviewed were almost exclusively incorporated into *Spätaussiedler* social networks. (Strobl 2006 : 95-97)

Working with the issues of repatriates' integration, scholars couldn't avoid directing their attention to 'formal' failures and their 'objective' reasons. Quite logically, the most large-scale state-sponsored research of the recent years, devoted to the Russophones in Germany, was that concentrating on the adaptation of the *Russlanddeutsche*. The 2013 report (*Spät-)Aussiedler in Deutschland* Worbs et. al. outlines the main sociodemographic characteristics of the group concerned. The authors find out some differences between the German and the repatriates' lifestyles. Thus, they write that the percentage of marriages and number of kids in the *Spätaussiedler* families are both higher than among the Germans without migration experience. (Worbs et. al. 2013 : 38-44) Special attention in the report is given to

the education indicators among the representatives of the group. Unlike in the late 1990s, in 2013 81% of the *Spätaussiedler* and 99% of their children claim to speak either good or very good German (ibidem : 142-143). Summarizing several individual indices (e.g. the share of adults without school education or the share of children attending *Gymnasien* – the most advanced of the three types of German secondary schools), the scholars come to the conclusion that the results among the repatriates are worse than among the Germans without migration experience, but still not the worst among the immigrant groups (ibidem : 49-50).

However, not only those working under the auspices of the state structures introduce an implicit “Who is guilty that the assimilation wasn’t successful?” question into their analysis. Rabkov (2006 : 323) mentions several integration obstacles described by her colleagues: cultural differences between the sending and the receiving societies, lack of linguistic competences among immigrants, absence of ‘democratic uprising’ in the ex-communist states, absence of previous contacts with the receiving society etc.

Another cluster of works is devoted to the personal experiences of the returnees and their possible tracks of ‘integration’. These studies are usually on some interview material; a good example can be found in Svetlana Kiehl's *Wie deutsch sind Russlanddeutsche?* (To which extent are Russian Germans German?). Kiehl specially emphasizes that the migrants' identities are a product of social construction. After holding a set of interviews, she comes to the conclusion that successful integration is only possible in the cases when a repatriate has a positive perception of his or her “ethno-cultural belonging”. At the same time, Kiehl writes that those having a negative perception tend to “invent a victim role”, i.e. to make the fact that their ancestors suffered expulsion, an important element of self-identification. Such a behavior is stigmatized by the scholar as non-integrationist (Kiehl 2009 : 182-189). Thus, when describing the lifestyles of *Spätaussiedler*, Svetlana Kiehl, in fact, reproduces the specific understandings of being a ‘good’ and a ‘bad’ repatriate, which became dominating in the German society of the 1990s.

The phenomena of internal splits between more and less 'integrated' *Russlanddeutsche* also appears in Maria Savoskul's *Russlanddeutsche in Germany: integration and types of self-identification*. Savoskul (2006) describes three main categories of identification among the *Spätaussiedler*: (1) purely German self-identification, associated with successful integration and active civic participation; (2) dual identification associated with integration through the cultural pluralism; (3) crisis of identification, understood as an inability to build into either German or Russian social structures. Although the author tries to avoid obvious stigmatizing, several facts do indicate that a ‘good-bad’ repatriate scale is still present in her work. First, there’s a general impression that the boundaries of the groups are relatively

stable, and it depends upon the initial perception of the repatriate's position by him- or herself, whether he or she would belong to a concrete group. Secondly, the strict connection between self-identification and integration seems to be undertheorized. Savoskul makes an attempt to critically analyze the concept of integration, however, the identification component is approached to in a quite automatic way. Third, the images of the group representatives look quite stereotypic. For instance, those having an identification crisis are portrayed as those having a poor education and working on temporary low-paid jobs. Thus, an idea is promoted that being in the process of identification transit is deviant and inevitably leads to social exclusion.

Critical voices do sound among those who study the *Spätaussiedler* group, too. Rabkov criticizes the concept of integration that implies that the [German] social system with its specific culture and structure finds itself in a condition of balance. The arrival of immigrants, she argues, is thought to destroy the balance, and their successful integration – to restore it back. According to Rabkov (2006 : 324), this kind of thinking leaves outside the brackets the mechanisms that lead to the construction of social boundaries. However, when it comes to empirical analysis, the dominant perceptions remain unchallenged: differences are perceived as objectively pre-determined, not as existing within a specific discursive terrain.

From my point of view, cross-group studies that include different categories of the German Russophones have a greater potential. First of all, this is the only type of studies that pays attention to the existence of the third group – i.e. 'ethnic Russians and other Russophones'. In the early 2000s Pavel Polyak (2004) estimated the total number of the group members at 400,000 people, however, most one-category researchers totally ignore their voices. Secondly, only the scholars working with the Russophones in general might observe how both the commonness and difference between the above-mentioned categories are socially constructed. Thus, I have previously mentioned the recurrent theses that the 'Jewishness' of the *Kontingentflüchtlinge* and the 'Germaneness' of the *Russlanddeutsche* are not natural, but get constituted as a result of specific social, political and linguistic practices. Cross-group studies open the space for comparative strategies (cf. Baerwolf 2006) and demonstrate how the former compatriots follow the discursively inscribed identities, and internal boundaries are being constructed. An interesting example of such a work is Sergei Vershinin's article devoted to the issues of identification of the Russian-speaking migrants in Germany. Thus, he comes to the conclusion that different groups of the Russophones might have diverging socioeconomic characteristic, but the isolationism, typical of the minority in general, is to a certain extent stimulated by the milieu (2011 : 59).

For the aims of my research, I find it reasonable to follow a cross-group approach, too. Such a decision is based on both the focus on media discourses and the choice of linguistic commonality as a characteristic that unites the otherwise heterogeneous group. Hence, I make an assumption that the representatives of all the three subgroups are subject to German and Russophonic media discourses at the same time.

2.2 Russophones & media: previous research

Although the mass media function as a source of data, not a research object of my analysis, I find it vital to add some general characteristics of media studies. Such a step is designed to place my work on the map of the previous research and reinforce the specific understandings of media influence that I share. Furthermore, research on ethnic media is added, as the latter demonstrates some characteristics that distinguish it from other studies of the Russophonic community. For instance, this type of research gravitates to cross-group studies (which corroborates my own choice) and feels more comfortable with non-ethnic adjectives (Soviet, post-Soviet, coming from the CIS space etc.).

Since the early 20th century there exists a broad consensus among Western scholars that the mass media exercise a great influence on social life. However, the concrete ways of approaching this influence have changed. Whereas in the interwar period mass media were generally understood as an instrument of propaganda attacking defenseless audience, the academia of the 1950s came up with a model representing the society as a honeycomb of small groups, where individual ties shielded the group members from the media influence. During the late 1960s and 1970s this model was challenged by both neo-Marxists, who argued that their predecessors paid little attention to the role of media in maintaining class domination, and the so-called ‘new look’ researchers, who demonstrated that the mass media shouldn’t be underestimated against the changing political and communication background (weak partisanship, higher voter volatility rates, increasing importance of television as a medium of political communication). (Curran et. al 2005 : 6-9; Blumler & Gurevitch 2005 : 241-243)

Within the framework of the current study, it seems especially important to emphasize that the 1970s research finally brought the text into the focus of academic attention. Previously the researchers of mass communications worked with rather abstract models of media influence on audiences. The second half of the 1970s opened a way for a systematic account of media discourse, introducing the concepts of ideology and hegemony into the mass communication studies (van Dijk 1985 : 3). In 1980 Stuart Hall, one of the key theorists of the new wave, defined media as a “major cultural and ideological force, standing in a dominant position with respect to the way in which social relations and

political problems were defined and the production and transformation of popular ideologies in the audience addressed” (cit. ex.: ibidem).

Multiple understandings elaborated in this period – with Hall’s one making no exception – seem to be based on the Gramscian heritage. Antonio Gramsci, an Italian Marxist who wrote in the 1920s and 1930s, argued that the power of the dominant groups is based on both coercion and consent. The latter is thought to be established at the level of ideological domination, when the modes of thinking of the ruling groups are transmitted by intellectuals and thereby transformed into the commonsense assumptions (Croteau, Hoynes & Milan s.a. : 159-160). Reinterpreting mass media as an instrument of hegemony in the second half of the 20th century was an act of bringing in the political in its broad sense. Using the words of Fairclough (1995 : 2), this turn demonstrated that mass media have a “signifying power” (i.e. the power to represent events in a particular way). Similar idea runs through the works of Mouffe who prefers regarding mass media as *one* of the fields where hegemony is created and reproduced, but also can be challenged (Carpentier & Cammaerts 2006 : 969).

Whereas the media research in general experiences a radical breakthrough in the 1970s, the branch dealing with ethnic media remained rather marginalized. According to Oh (2016 : 264-266), the first attempt to theorize on the role played by the ethnic media in the lives of immigrants was made in 1922 by Robert Park. This research has become fundamental in the sense that it had been almost exclusively structuring the academic perceptions of ethnic media for 70 years, and still keeps the role of a meaningful background taken into consideration by scholars. Park’s approach, known as ‘assimilation-pluralism’ paradigm, consisted in analyzing the ethnic press through the question of whether it slowed the immigrants from assimilation into the dominant society (pluralism), or facilitated their assimilation. In some way, this approach resonates with the later studies of migrants’ civic organizations made by German sociologists several decades later. Thus, in the 1980s Germany witnessed so-called ‘Elwert-Esser debates’. Whereas Elwert came up with a thesis of ‘*Binnenintegration*’ (inner integration) that implied a positive influence of migrants’ own organizations on their integration into the receiving society, his colleague Esser insisted that the establishment of such organizations can lead to the formation of a ‘parallel society’ (Elwert 1982, Esser 1986).

Dichotomies similar to those described by Park appear in contemporary studies, too. Thus, Georgiou (2003) applies the conceptual pair of inclusion/diversity, while Elias and Lemish (2011) distinguish between ‘inward’ integration (preservation of the group unity and its specific cultural characteristics) and ‘outward’ integration (adaptation to the receiving society). At some point this ‘re-branding’ might be useful, as it helps to bypass the specific connotation associated with individual concepts. However, an important observation was made by Oh: in each conceptual pair one side is more or less explicitly

defined as preferable. This process of putting two concepts into specific relations of power might influence the researchers. For instance, Park worked in the period when assimilation was understood as a positive social outcome – and his research underpinned the thesis that ethnic press was more assimilationist than pluralistic. On the contrary, contemporary Western scholars tend to evaluate multiculturalism as a preferable outcome – as a result, the pluralistic role of ethnic media is applauded (Oh 2016 : 265).

The aim of overcoming the ‘assimilation-pluralism’ approach to ethnic media implies changing the focus of research from their audiences to the texts (i.e. discourses) produced by them. Nevertheless, most studies devoted to the Russophones in Germany don’t try to challenge the dominating paradigm. For instance, Elias and Lemish (2011 : 1266-1268) perform a comparative analysis of the media use among Russian-speaking immigrants in Israel and Germany. The conclusion they come to can be characterized as a classic ‘assimilation-pluralism’ thesis: thus, they argue that three kinds of media (host, homeland and global) can be classified according to their contribution to either to the preservation of a shared language and family consolidation (‘inward’ integration), or to the incorporation into the host society (‘outward’ integration). Similar to her Israeli colleagues, Russian scholar Smolyarova (2012) distinguishes between ‘integrating’ and ‘isolating’ media. Following the ideas of Park, she mentions several functions performed by the ethnic media: orientation of immigrants in the host society, formation of common media-space, consolidation of the immigrant group. The place of a concrete periodical on the assimilation-pluralism scale is, thus, defined on the basis of its dominating functions.

The thesis of media playing a constitutive role remains underrepresented; most authors refer to the mass media as a mirror that (sometimes ineffectively) reflects the *already existing* state of affairs. As a result, ethnic media are criticized for being 'amateurish' and 'unprofessional' (cf. Smolyarova 2012, Kurennoi 2005), i.e. representing the social reality in an ineffective way. Even in cases when the final aim is defined as analyzing the identity issues (as it was made by Pfetsch, 1999), the role of media might be reduced to addressing the problems of belonging, not shaping them.

Meanwhile, the media in general demonstrate a great constitutive potential, when it comes to ethnically/culturally specific communities. In their cross-border study of migrants' media representations Gemi, Ulasiuk and Triandafyllidou (2013) argue that the mainstream media cover immigration in a very specific way. For instance, news on ethnic minorities are only gathered when something sensational happens; more attention is given to negative news and emotion-laden stories. The scholars don’t go as far as to give a theoretic interpretation to these facts from the point of view of the political science, however, they describe at least one example of a media-constructed behavior.

They write that migrants tend to avoid media attention, when their previous experience demonstrates that a negative representation is inevitable (ibidem : 277). A more complicated story is scrutinized by Zinn-Thomas (2006). She argues that German mass-media create a negative image of *Spätaussiedler* (they are represented as a criminal non-integrating community that wastes the state budgets) – as a result, a social distance between the native population and the repatriates is growing. Young immigrants, Zinn-Thomas claims, are often experiencing some kind of social exclusion, or find themselves stigmatized as ‘criminals’ – a characteristic that influences their life tracks.

So far, the researchers dealing with the Russian-speaking community have paid little attention to the new media. Thus, Kurennoi (2005 : 8) only gives a short formal description of a single ethnic web-site (germany.ru). The same web-site is mentioned by Androutsopoulos (2006) who makes a comparative study of diasporic media communities in Germany. Although the conclusions that he makes on the connection of those media with identification processes might be relevant within the current research, the Russophonic material doesn't seem to be the key basis of research, giving place to Persian and Greek web-sites. Kissau (2008 : 31-32) analyzes the strategies of using Internet among different groups of migrants and argues that those coming from Russia are especially interested in surfing local information web-sites, and prefer establishing online contacts with their former compatriots, rather than native Germans. However, the information provided by Kissau and her colleagues can already be called outdated, as it doesn't take into consideration the recent development of Internet media. The most up-to-date analysis of Russophonic media use in Germany can be found in 2016 *Rusmedia Group* market report that gives a detailed characteristic of audiences, but, quite logically, leaves the textual content of media outside its framework (Mediadaten 2016: Russische Medien in Deutschland).

Meanwhile, the effects of the user generated contents' gaining more weight in the media space shouldn't be underestimated. Whereas the 'traditional' mass media are based on a strict distinction between professional journalists and audiences, new media seem to have broken this boundary. The communication flows stop being unidirectional; those who were previously defined as listeners now participate in the production of media discourses. (Croteau, Hoynes & Milan s.a : 135-136). Furthermore, time gaps between events and their media interpretations grow shorter; messages are easier transmitted to larger audiences all over the world. Local voices previously absent from the global media sphere, are becoming visible. Those dramatic changes initiated new debates in academia. Some of the authors concentrated on the potential of the new mass media in inducing social disturbance (Abbott 2013), others concentrated on how the very character of news is changing (Croteau, Hoynes & Milan s.a : 137-138), or whether using the new media can be interpreted as realizing direct democracy (Carpentier & Cammaerts 2006 : 969-970). For the aims of the current

research, I would follow the track outlined by Chantal Mouffe in her 2006 interview (ibidem). Mouffe argues that new media share the main characteristic of traditional mass communication: they discursively reproduce hegemony, but also have a counter-hegemonic potential. Inasmuch as my research aims are connected to the textuality of mass media, I would only give little attention to the 'objective' characteristics of their audiences, as well as academic debates on the media 'revolutions'.

2.3 Mid-2010s Ukrainian conflict as a special case

One of the key presuppositions of the current research is that identities are flexible and undergo a persistent process of discursive construction (see: The concept of identity in international relations). Such an approach implies that a researcher is unable to describe a context-traversing collective identity; what is made instead can be characterized as outlining a *limited* plurality of identities. The limits of a concrete plurality are not predefined by any 'natural' factors, and get defined by a scholar on the basis of his or her research aims.

When it comes to analyzing the identities of the Russophones in Germany, the mid-2010s Ukrainian conflict seems to make a suitable background. Whenever the academia interprets the crisis as a logical next step in worsening EU-Russia relations (e.g. Feklyunina 2015) or an outcome that could've been avoided (e.g. Forsberg & Haukkala 2016), the Ukrainian events are generally represented as a situation when diverging narratives turned into conflicting ones. Especially challenging the situation becomes for those groups whose identities used to be constructed by both discursive terrains.

For instance, analyzing the Ukrainian state identity, Feklyunina (2015) demonstrates that before 2014 the country's sociopolitical space was dominated by three discursive modes: (1) Ukraine as a part of '*Russkii mir*' (Russian world); (2) Ukraine as a part of Europe; (3) Ukraine as alternative Europe with traditional values. Almost the same story is told by scholars working with Russophonic minorities – with Russophones in Germany making no exception. The very titles of the above-mentioned works (e.g. '*Zuhause fremd – Russlanddeutsche zwischen Russland und Deutschland*' <Alien at home - Russian Germans between Russia and Germany>, '*In Russia we were Germans, and now we are Russians.*' - *Dilemmas of identity formation and communication among German-Russian Aussiedler*', '*Wie deutsch sind Russlanddeutsche?*' <To which extent are *Russlanddeutsche* German?>]) indicate a specific status that members of the group have. Scholars describe different ethnic, linguistic, religious identities – as well as those transcending individual categories. My hypothesis is that the Ukrainian events that have led to the polarization and confrontation of previously co-existing discourses of (1) Russianness/Sovietness and (2) Germaneness. Following these events, new divisions inside the group might be constructed.

My second argument in favor of choosing the Ukrainian crisis as a background for the Russophones' identity analysis relates to the specific situation in the sphere of mass communication provoked by those events. In 2014 General Phil Breedlove, NATO's Supreme Allied Commander Europe described Russia as waging 'the most amazing information warfare blitzkrieg we have ever seen in the history of information warfare' (cit.ex.: McIntosh 2015 : 299-300). The narrative of information warfare from the side of the West can also be traced in Russian public sphere (Strategiya natsional'noy bezopasnosti Rossiyskoy Federatsii 2015). Whenever we accept the claims that an unprecedented threat does *objectively* exist from any side (which is not the case within the current research), it should be noted that the sides of the conflict give special attention to the potential of the mass media, including the new ones.

(Expected) effects of the hegemonic intervention induced by the Ukrainian crisis can be described in a different manner. TIME's columnist Shuster (2014) argues that Russia is fighting for the allegiance of Russophones in order to create a 'fifth column' in the neighboring states, and the 2014 events are associated with an intensification of such activities. He emphasizes that Russophones in the Baltic states tend to read Russian mass-media – and this fact is skillfully used for the aims of propaganda. Shuster's approach makes an accent on the role of media in constructing a difference between Russian-speaking population and the native population of the Baltic states. According to his logic, this artificially exaggerated dissimilarity might help Moscow pursue an aggressive policy in the region, as it previously happened in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine. However, there's also a generally formulated 'big Other' behind those small enemies. Thus, Shuster quotes Russian diplomat Konstantin Dolgov saying that Moscow regards itself an adversary of "the ghost of neo-Nazism" (ibidem : 48).

Goble (2016) makes a different accent: he claims that Russia is actively constructing a community transcending the state borders on the basis of a *positive* (i.e. not based on explicit othering) similarity. This community – 'Russian world' – is defined in purely ethnic terms, that leads to general dissatisfaction of the non-Russian population of the country, and undermines the internal solidarity.

Within the framework of the current research, I was both trying to find out the positivity and the negativity constructed by the discursive background the group lives against. Although relatively much attention is given to the individual representations of the Ukrainian conflict, I wasn't following the task of either finding out its reasons, or labeling any representation as 'corresponding to the facts'. When referring to the concrete nominations applied by any side (e.g. separatists/*opolchency*¹, Russia-conflict/the state failure in Ukraine etc.), I didn't set an aim of evaluating the corresponding actors and

¹ From Russian: members of people's volunteer corps

events, but made an attempt to demonstrate how the identities are discursively constructed through the naming of individual social elements and their insertion into specific chains of equivalence (see more: Discourse analysis).

3. THEORETICAL & METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

The current chapter outlines the poststructuralist approach as both a theory and method of research. It refers to the specific characteristics of this research platform and its place among approaches within the discipline of International Relations. The subchapter devoted to the concept of identity – one of the key concepts for the representatives of this research direction – embraces both a constructivist and a poststructuralist approaches thereto. The specific shift from 'self-other' relations to 'self-order' ones that can be traced within the poststructuralist approach, functions here as one of the main arguments in favor of choosing it for the current research. The third subchapter describes the backbone notions of this approach and defines the main concepts (nodal point, chain of equivalence, empty signifier etc.) that would be applied for the aims of empirical study.

3.1 Poststructuralism in International Relations

The discipline of International Relations (IR) is often mapped on the basis of the so called 'Great Debates', with the first of them being that between idealists and realists in the late 1930s and the early 1940s and the second one – between behaviouralists and traditionalists in the 1960s. The substance of the third 'Great Debate', as well as the exact number thereof are disputable. For instance, Alexander Wendt argues that third 'Debate' deals with the role of 'individual and shared meanings that motivated actors to do what they did' (Wendt 2002 : 101-102). For Wendt, the Third debate is the one that transcends the discipline of IR and lies in the sphere of wider philosophical disputes. By contrast, Milja Kurki and Colin Wight distinguish between the neo-neo third debate and the fourth debate between positivism and post-positivism (Kurki & Wight 2013 : 20). At the same time, there are scholars who deny that the new approaches inspired by the post-positivist turn can be placed on the classical 'Great Debates' map (cf. Campbell 2013 : 225).

Whenever a concrete scholar follows the tradition of 'Great Debates' mapping, most of them do share the idea of the second half of the 20th century being marked by an entrance of specific modes of thinking into the discipline of IR. Thus, Campbell writes that the changes were induced by the general dissatisfaction with the dominant realist perspectives that failed to embrace the global transformations and hear the voices of those excluded from the 'normal' political process. He argues that the introduction of new approaches into the IR was based on the linguistic and post-positivist turns in the Anglo-American philosophy. The result thereof is defined by Campbell as 'poststructuralism'. (ibidem : 225-228). The peculiarity of this approach (and Campbell specifically mentions that poststructuralism is an approach, not a school) is interestingly explained by the author through the comparison with another product of the discipline environment – namely constructivism:

Even some constructivists maintain a strict sense of the material world external to language as a determinant of social and political truth. When faced with poststructural arguments, they will maintain that no discursive understanding can help you when faced with something as material as a bullet in the head. [...] So how would a poststructuralist respond? First, they would say that the issue is not one of the materiality of the bullet or the reality of death for the individual when struck by the bullet in a particular way. [...] Second, they would say that such a world – the body lying on the ground, the bullet in the head, and the shell casing lying not far away – tells us nothing itself about the meaning and significance of those elements. They would say that *the constitution of the event and its elements is a product of its discursive condition of emergence*, something that occurs via the contestation of competing narratives. Did the body and the bullet get to be as they are because of suicide, manslaughter, murder, ethnic cleansing, tribal war, genocide, a war of inter-state rivalry, or . . . ? (ibidem : 235-236)

Hence, Campbell unites under the term of poststructuralism a plurality of approaches that study the way discourses constitute the social reality. Discourse, therefore, is understood not simply as an instrument that social agents use to describe certain objects, but as a way of constructing meanings that organizes and re-organizes both the objective sphere and actors' conceptions of themselves (cf. Cheskin 2010 : 134). The classical concept of discourse is rather broad; thus, Lessa generalizes the Foucauldian concept of discourse as “systems of thoughts composed of ideas, attitudes, courses of action, beliefs and practices that systematically construct the subjects and the worlds of which they speak” (Lessa 2006 : 285). In fact, it means that not only written and spoken texts can be interpreted as discourse, but also modes of behavior, norms, institutionalized practices etc. Nevertheless, for the aims of the current research I am going to concentrate on the texts in their ‘classical’ form, still keeping in mind that a broader analysis is possible and making some remarks on audial and visual characteristics of texts whenever it is feasible and necessary.

The term poststructuralism itself indicates that the authors applying this approach refer to the heritage of structuralism. One of the central theses of structuralism, which also appears in poststructuralist texts, is the idea that every social element exists within a particularly structured system, and can only be understood in this context. Another structuralist thesis followed by poststructuralists, is a proposition that the production and circulation of signs constitute the social world. However, there is at least one key point where the scholars of the two directions disagree. Poststructuralists introduce the category of power as one of the key elements of their analysis (Merlingen 2013). Power is understood not just in repressive terms (i.e. as something that imposes limits), but in productive ones. Therefore,

the aim of the poststructuralist analysis is not to eliminate exclusions, but to highlight the forms of exclusions that constitute the social reality (Campbell 2013 : 233-234).

Authors following the poststructuralist mode of thinking deal with different material within the discipline of IR. For instance, Campbell (1992) studied how the US foreign policy practices construct the US identity, while Edkins (1999) demonstrated how the dominant representations of famine and humanitarian crises construct specific understandings thereof. One of the most important advantages of this approach for me as a researcher consists in its giving attention to the context and issues normally excluded from the international relations analysis. So are the identities of ethnic/linguistic minorities: within the 'traditional' IR studies they are either prescribed a specific role (e.g. that of the 'Fifth Column' or a group infringed on its rights), or excluded as subjects of other disciplines. The poststructuralist approach to the IR broadens the sphere of the political and challenges an automatic understanding of group unities. At the same time, it brings in the idea of each identity's being a product of concrete discourses, not transcendental belongings. Within the framework of the current research I am going to use the methodological set of instruments elaborated by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe described in subsequent chapters.

3.2 The Concept of identity in International Relations

The nowadays generally accepted although disputable term «identity» originates from antiquity (from Latin *identitas* – “sameness”). Its variations are found in the classical German philosophy as well as Sigmund Freud's psychological theory. In the 1960s the term was introduced into social sciences, where its transformed definition resonated with the generational rebellions and the rise of the Black Power movement. The tide reached its peak in the 1980s with the development of race, class and gender criticism within academia. (Brubaker, Cooper 2000 : 2-3)

As the term was becoming ubiquitous both in everyday discourses and academic research, several approaches to what identity is, were elaborated among scholars. Wodak, de Cilia, Reisigl and Liebhart (2009 : 11) distinguish between “static” and “dynamic” conceptualizations of identity. According to them, static concepts imply that people belong to a certain collective unit because of sharing some specific characteristics and, therefore, feel obliged to react as a group when this unit is threatened. The scholars characterize the static approach as being typical for early social theories of identity. By contrast, dynamic concepts try to embrace the complexity and inconstancy of identification processes.

Within the discipline of IR, the introduction of the term identity is associated with the so-called constructivist turn. Taking into consideration the specific nature of the IR traditional object of study (here one should remark that the first constructivist works were state-centric, too – but in a different way than realist ones), it is rather logical that the “dynamic” conceptualizations of identity have become dominating in the IR research. With some rare exceptions (e.g. Huntington’s “Clash of Civilizations”) IR theorists concentrate on transformations rather than pre-defined actors’ identities.

In “Anarchy is what States Make of it: The Social Construction of Power Politics” Alexander Wendt, one of the key figures of the constructivist IR research, defines identity in the following way:

Actors acquire identities – relatively stable, role-specific understandings and expectations about self – by participating in such collective meanings. Identities are inherently relational: "Identity, with its appropriate attachments of psychological reality, is always identity within a specific, socially constructed world," Peter Berger argues. Each person has many identities linked to institutional roles, such as brother, son, teacher, and citizen. Similarly, a state may have multiple identities as "sovereign," "leader of the free world," "imperial power," and so on. (Wendt 1992 : 398)

In his later work, “Social Theory of International Politics”, first published in 1999, Wendt further elaborates the constructivist idea of [state] identities and interests being constructed by shared ideas, intersubjective understandings and expectations (Wendt : 2006).

One of the recurrent topics within the academic discussions concerning the identity formation, which also appears by Alexander Wendt², is connected with the conceptual pair of self/other. An exhaustive review of academic approaches to this dichotomy is made by Iver Neumann in “Uses of the Other: The East in European Identity Formation”. Neumann traces the concept's roots from Hegelian dialectics to postmodernist authors while including both philosophers, social anthropologists, historians, political scientists and IR theorists into a common map of the self/other research.

Among others, Neumann cites Norwegian anthropologist Barth, who proposed to study the self/other nexus in terms of the boundary markers of identity (“*diacritica*”). Initially, Barth described the choice of *diacritica* (e.g. clothes, language or lifestyle) as a haphazard process, but has changed his mind in later works (Neumann 1999 : 4-5, 196). In Barth's “Ethnic Groups and Boundaries” one can follow the

² Thus, in “Collective Identity Formation and the International State” Wendt writes: “Identification is a continuum from negative to positive—from conceiving the other as anathema to the self to conceiving it as an extension of the self. It also varies by issue and other: I may identify with the United States on military defense but with the planet on the environment. In any given situation, however, it is the nature of identification that determines how the boundaries of the self are drawn”. (Wendt 1994 : 386)

idea of political process being associated with political groups trying to influence the selection of certain signals. (Barth 1969 : 35)

On the other side of his map of self/other studies Neumann makes a distinction between what he calls “the continental philosophical path” and “the Eastern excursion”. The former category is constructed in order to embrace the assimilatory practices in Western academia, while the latter includes such authors as Edward Said and goes back to the ideas of Russian philosopher Bakhtin (Neumann 1999 : 9-20). Thus, Neumann quotes Bakhtin's criticism of “epistemological consciousness” that, according to the philosopher, pervaded all the nineteenth-century and twentieth-century philosophy:

Epistemological consciousness, the consciousness of science, is a unitary and unique consciousness, or, to be exact – a single consciousness. [...] Any unity is its own unity; it cannot admit next to itself any other unity that would be different from it and independent of it (the unity of nature, the unity of another consciousness), that is, any sovereign unity that would stand over against it with its own fate, one not determined by epistemological consciousness. (Neumann 1999 : 13)

Neumann himself expresses certain sympathy to the “Eastern excursion” path that follows the traditions of dialogical understanding of identity formation (as opposed to the dialectical interpretation associated with “the continental philosophical path”). Another academic dispute that Neumann discusses on the pages of “Uses of the Other...” is that between constructivists and poststructuralists. According to Neumann, poststructuralist scholarship faces several main limitations. He argues that the process of identification in poststructuralist studies is an affair “between a self and an order” instead of that “between a self and an other”, as it happens in constructivism (Neumann 1999 : 208-209). Furthermore, he presents a borderline between the scholarships as based on the issue of context-traversing identities. Thus, poststructuralists claim that identities are “context-bound instantiations” that cannot be stable (Neumann 1999 : 212). Neumann himself endorses this argument as an ontological presupposition, but insists on introducing what he calls an “as if story” when it comes to political practice:

Where practice is concerned, in order to be effective in the political field, one simply cannot put the self under erasure but must have what I will refer to as an "as if" story to tell about it. [...] Another, much more fatal example is the case of Bosnia-Herzegovina in the 1995. Once nationalist essentialist stories of self began to dominate, the only partially effective political counterstrategy was to be found in the representation of an alternative story of self that, being inevitably an "as if" story, stressed that different ethnic groups had "always" lived together

peacefully and that a splitting up of the community along ethnic lines would be a break with "tradition." [...] Without an "as if" story to tell about the self of the human collective whose identity they wanted to represent, they were left politically inefficient (Neumann 1999 : 215)

At the same time, he suggests following anthropologists and sociologists (namely Lemert and Gullestad) and distinguish between identities as such (context-bound identities) and selves (the term that is thought to embrace the ontologically impossible context-traversing identities):

I would like to suggest that the making of selves is a narrative process of identification whereby a number of identities that have been negotiated in specific contexts are strung together into one overarching story. [...] it is a never-ending process, since there will always exist more identities than can easily be accommodated in a coherent story of self (Neumann 1999 : 218-219)

Such an approach places Neumann closer to the constructivist side of his own map of academic research. As it was stated previously, constructivist understanding of the other's role is based on the idea of recognition. Thus, Alexander Wendt writes in "Social Theory of International Relations" that one of the outstanding contributions of the constructivist scholarship within the IR studies consists in emphasizing the role of mutual recognition of external sovereignty in mitigating the effects of international anarchy (2006 : 208). Neumann traces the same idea of recognition in Erik Ringmar's works and comes to the rather sympathetic conclusion that Ringmar has something that poststructuralists lack – "as if stories" of a state's self. Within this theoretical construction a 'self' has three different options: to accept the stories being told of it by others, to abandon those stories that a not recognized in favor of others, or to insist on the original stories (Neumann 1999 : 223-224).

What we see by poststructuralists, argues Neumann, is the disappearance of the 'other' as a subject (ibid : 222). Here I would better reformulate Neumann's idea: what we see in poststructuralist scholarship is the transformation of 'otherness'. Within the model described by constructivists, a 'self' and an 'other' carry on some kind of a dialogue based on Neumann's "as if stories", where each side makes respectful pauses to listen to the other one. As a result, an impression of (ontologically impossible) context-traversing identities is created. On the contrary, the poststructuralist 'dialogue' turns into a persistent exchange of information on the border of informational noise. Such a manner of contact erodes the borders between a 'self' and numerous 'others' and makes the one's identities non-fixable.³

³ Here one can remember Lacan's concept of a not "in-dividual" subject that describes an indefinable subject in permanent search of one's self (Il'in 2001)

In order to visualize the research potential that the poststructuralist perspective might afford within the current study, I turned to the works of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe working within the corresponding platform of political analysis.

Although the authors avoid giving a direct definition to the term identity, several main ideas characterizing their approach can be formulated. (1) Identities (as well as meanings in general) are socially constructed on the basis of the ongoing language use i.e. discursive practices; (2) identities are flexible and never completely fixed; (3) there are no objective laws that divide society into particular groups; (4) collective identity follows generally the same principals as individual identity. (Jorgensen&Phillips 2002 : 25-44)

In his work “On Populist Reason” first published in 2005, Ernesto Laclau elaborates the idea of a constructing role of the equivalence/difference dichotomy, as was previously done in “Hegemony and Socialist Strategy”. Laclau's social and political groups (for the purposes of his research the author concentrates on the group named "the people") are not based on pre-existing ‘real’ relations between social agents, but are constituted by discursive practices instead. Elements of the group are becoming the sources of multiple differently directed demands. When the political system fails to absorb those demands in a differential way (each in isolation from others), an equivalence relation is established between the unsatisfied demands. If the process successfully follows this track, we see how a vague feeling of solidarity transforms into a stable system of signification. The logic of equivalence leads to the consolidation of the unsatisfied group; its demands get condensed in the form of empty signifiers. Those signifiers reflect the plurality of individual demands and stay empty by their nature. At the same time, the logic of difference (as understood in Laclau’s “On Populist Reason”, see: Discourse Analysis) divides the society into two opposing camps: oligarchy/people; dominant groups/silent majority etc. (Laclau 2005 : 73-88)

Following the same logic in “Hegemony and Socialist Strategy”, Laclau and Mouffe wrote:

...a relation of equivalence absorbing all the positive determinations of the colonizer in opposition to the colonized, does not create a system of positive differential positions between the two, simply because it dissolves all positivity; the colonizer is discursively constructed as the anti-colonized. [...] What we affirm is [...] that certain discursive forms, through equivalence, annul all positivity of the object and give a real existence to negativity as such. (2001 : 128-129).

In her independently elaborated article “For a politics of nomadic identity” Chantal Mouffe continues her attack directed against the objectivism and essentialism that “dominate political analysis”. She argues:

[L]iberal thought employs logic of the social based on a conception of being as presence, and which conceives of objectivity as being inherent to things themselves. This is why it is impossible for liberal thought to recognize that there can only be an identity when it is constructed as a 'difference', and that any social objectivity is constituted by the enactment of power. (Mouffe 2005 : 103).

Mouffe believes that there are no natural and original identities, as each identity is a result of multiple ceaseless interactions. At the same time, she adds an interesting remark to the analysis of collective identities. Thus, Mouffe argues that there always exists a possibility of antagonization within the pair of 'us' and 'them'. She connects such an option with a situation when the 'other', who up until now has been considered as different, starts to be perceived as a threat to the group's existence. From that moment on, emphasizes Mouffe, the us/them relationship becomes political. (ibidem : 104-107)

At this stage I would like to make some remarks concerning the choice of theoretic basis within my study. Although my initial intention was to follow the constructivist track of research, it has soon become obvious for me that a poststructuralist perspective might be even more fruitful. First of all, my choice can be explained by what Iver Neumann (1999 : 209) calls the constructivists' unwillingness "to try to sling out of the political problematic surrounding sovereignty". Indeed, most constructivist works devoted to the problems of identity concentrate on the national identity. As Adamson and Demetriou (2007 : 496-497) fairly note, non-national collective identities (such as diaspora ones) might be constructed in a way somehow similar to that of national identities, but they still differ from them in terms of their organizational structure and spatial logic. As the object of my research belongs to non-national collective identities, it seems reasonable to concentrate on a scholarship that works without strict connection with state borders.

Furthermore, I find myself attracted by the transformation of the constructivist 'self-other' dichotomy into the 'self-order' one that developed within the poststructuralist mode of thinking. I believe that this shift lets us relatively privilege the 'order side'. Inasmuch as the limited time resources prevent me from making a detailed analysis of the 'self' group, I concentrate on the order, i.e. on the general discursive background the group lives against.

My final argument in favor of poststructuralist approach deals with its interestingly designed discourse analysis perspective elaborated by the corresponding scholars. Thus, this mode of research interlaces both theoretical and methodological guidelines, and leaves enough space for specific approaches of an individual researcher. The peculiarities of poststructuralist discourse analysis would be discussed later in "Discourse analysis".

Summing up, the main theses concerning the concept of identity (and its practical application to the object of my research) can be formulated as follows:

1. Collective identities, as well as individual ones are results of numerous and continuous social interactions.
2. There are no 'natural', pre-existing relations between living-in-Germany Russophones. If any unity does exist among them, it is being discursively constructed.
3. If a chain of equivalence is being constructed among the Russophones, this process develops simultaneously with the processes of differentiation.

3.3 Discourse analysis

When it comes to discourse, two different approaches to the term might be distinguished. As it was stated previously, a broad Foucauldian approach embraces the overall unity of social practices and institutions in a given a field, while a narrow one refers to textual claims that had to be analyzed in relation to non-discursive domains (Selby 2007 : 327). Within the current research, it seems reasonable to primarily concentrate on the textual understanding of discourse and fix several statements as a basis for our understanding: 1) every discourse is a product of concrete time and space, there are no universal or timeless discourses; 2) it is the ongoing language use that structures the social; 3) social meanings or divisions are never ultimate or fixed, but undergo a ceaseless process of discursive construction.

Inasmuch as Laclau and Mouffe do not do much detailed discourse analysis of empirical material themselves and concentrate on theoretic constructions instead, I follow the track suggested by Jorgensen and Phillips (2002 : 49) and recapitulate the main concepts applied by the poststructuralist authors. Probably, the most fundamental mechanism mentioned in their work is a '*nodal point*':

“A nodal point is a privileged sign around which the other signs are ordered; the other signs acquire their meaning from their relationship to the nodal point”. (Jorgensen&Phillips : 26)

When criticizing the classical concept of socialism in “Hegemony and Social Strategy”, Laclau and Mouffe pay special attention to such concepts as *classism* (i.e. the idea that the working class is an incarnation of social change regardless of the current climate in an individual sociopolitical formation) and *revolution* (understood as a foundational act that leads to a rational reorganization of society). The authors argue that in both cases we face some special kind of signifiers that can be called 'nodal points', or 'master-signifiers' (Laclau&Mouffe 2001 : 177). The characteristic feature of these signifiers is that being a particular element, they at some point become empty and assume a universal

structuring function within a discursive field (ibidem : xi). In the concrete case of classism and revolution it means that other signs are built into a concrete discursively constructed chain:

In as much as Marxism claims to know the unavoidable course of history in its essential determinations, the understanding of an actual event can only mean to identify it as a moment in a temporal succession that is fixed a priori. Hence discussions such as: is the revolution of year x in country y the bourgeois-democratic revolution? Or, what forms should the transition to socialism assume in this or that country? (ibidem : 21)

In “On Populist Reason” Laclau comes up with a semantically close term ‘*quilting point*’. When explaining the term, Laclau turns to Žižek's example of Marlboro advertisement. Thus, Žižek shows how American identity is constructed through the recognition of the USA a Marlboro country. “Without Marlboro Americanness — in Žižek's example – would be a set of diffuse themes which would not be articulated into a meaningful totality”, writes Laclau. (2005 : 104-105)

In Laclau's methodology, a *nodal/quilting point* becomes a key element of the collective identity formation. Laclau describes the entire process using the example of the Russian Empire at the beginning of the 20th century. The situation was characterized by extreme oppression, when workers started striking for higher wages, liberal politicians – struggling for liberal freedoms, students – supporting the relaxation of discipline in educational establishments etc. All these particular demands started to constitute an anti-system *chain of equivalence*. As a result, a need for a general equivalent, representing the chain as a whole, emerged. The body of one individual demand had to be emptied and assume a function of universal representation. At this moment it becomes a quilting point – as it happened with “bread, peace and land” in the example of the Russian revolution – and a new anti-system identity might get crystalized around it (Laclau 2000 : 302-303; Laclau 2005 : 97).

At this point I should dwell on the concept of *empty signifiers* often referred to by Laclau and Mouffe. Strictly speaking, Laclau defines an empty signifier as “a signifier without a signified” (2007 : 36). Laclau's argument consists in the following: when it comes to a specific quilting point, it is empty inasmuch as its function of representing the universality of an equivalence chain prevails over that of expressing a particular meaning. Moreover, some terms (e.g. justice, freedom, equality) normally function as empty signifiers, as their semantic role doesn't consist in expressing any positive content. What they do instead is incarnating an absent fullness; as Laclau fairly notes, in every social situation one can find some kind of injustice that gives sense to justice itself. (2005 : 96) Following this understanding, Laclau introduces the concept of *floating signifiers* to demonstrate how different discourses struggle to fix the meanings of some key elements:

Let us suppose a political discourse asserting that 'Labour is more capable than the Tory Party to ensure the unity of the British people'. [...] 'Unity' is a floating signifier because its signifieds are fixed only by the concrete contents provided by the antagonistic forces; but, at the same time, this floating is not a purely contingent and circumstantial one, because without it political argument would be impossible and political life would be a dialogue between the deaf. (2007 : 94-95)

This quotation is significant inasmuch as it both shows how floating signifiers function within the political process, and brings us to the understanding of *objectivity* and related concepts. Jorgensen and Phillips (2002 : 36) note that Laclau's term objectivity refers to the discourses that are so firmly established that their non-natural character is forgotten. Interestingly, one can trace some parallel here with Žižek's concept of nomination: thus, he believes that "it must be part of the meaning of each name that it refers to a certain object because *this is its name*". Žižek interprets this "dogmatic stupidity" as the dimension of the "big Other" (Neumann : 220). The "big Other" is also visible in both above mentioned cases. With the term "unity" we see how certain borders of floating are *being fixed*⁴. With *objectivity*, we observe a similar process: borders of the normal, limits of the generally accepted are being constructed.

Here I should note that in "Hegemony and Socialist Strategy" Laclau and Mouffe distance themselves from the classical Marxist understanding of hegemony associated with a fundamental class. What they suggest instead is a concept of hegemonic interventions exercised by whatever subject within the field of discursivity (2001 : 134-135). This term is applied to describe a "reservoir of meanings" that an individual element might have or used to have (Jorgensen&Phillips : 27). Any discourse, Laclau and Mouffe argue (ibid : 112), can be understood as an attempt to dominate the field of discursivity. With hegemonic interventions we observe the following scheme: 1) an antagonistic articulation comes from the field of discursivity and triggers the formation of a new equivalential chain and construction of new frontiers; 2) if the existing relational system finds itself in an organic crisis (i.e. there's a general weakening of the identity chains within the given sociopolitical space), it becomes vulnerable to external hegemonic interventions; 3) if the hegemony is successful, a new structural system of identities is constructed. At this point the relations of hegemony transform into relations of power (idem : 134-138).

Returning back to the mechanism of identity formation, I would like to once again emphasize that *the logic of equivalence* functions in parallel with *the logic of difference*. The latter leads to the particularization of equivalential chains and disperses a concrete 'universal' identity into a larger number of more specific ones (Laclau 2000 : 303). The introduction of this logic reflects one of the

⁴ According to Žižek, an inevitably impersonal form of such constructions indicates the dimension of the big Other

basic ideas of poststructuralist studies: neither meanings nor social divisions are fixed. The chains of equivalence are always interrupted by other hegemonic interventions that construct meanings and identities through different equivalential chains (ibid : 305).

A *hegemonic intervention* is defined by Laclau as “an articulation that by means of force reconstitutes unambiguity”. (Jorgensen&Phillips 2002 : 48) In a more specific sense, a hegemonic intervention implies that one discourse is undermined by another one and a re-articulation of meanings and identities takes place. As an example thereof, Jorgensen and Phillips describe the situation of the First World War when an already established worker identity was suppressed through a hegemonic intervention in favor of national identities. (ibid) Within the framework of the current research the task of tracing the hegemonic interventions is fulfilled through introducing two types of national discourses, as well as outlining strong oppositional discourses within the national sociopolitical spaces.

As it was stated previously (see: The Concept of Identity in International Relations), the concept of otherness doesn't disappear from poststructuralist studies. Thus, in Laclau's “On Populist Reason” one can see a slightly divergent idea of what the logic of difference is. When it comes to analyzing the differentiation process concerning a “universal” group of elements, he argues:

[T]he only possibility of having a true outside would be that the outside is not simply one more, neutral element but an excluded one, something that the totality expels from itself in order to constitute itself (to give a political example: it is through the demonization of a section of the population that a society reaches a sense of its own cohesion). This, however, creates a new problem: vis-a-vis the excluded element, all other differences are equivalent to each other — equivalent in their common rejection of the excluded identity. (Laclau 2005 : 70)

Therefore, Laclau argues that identities are formed through the interaction of equivalence and difference logics. As a result, what the author is trying to trace when deconstructing political texts is the way those logics function in every single case. Laclau himself gives few methodological instructions to follow; nevertheless, the general idea can be grasped. For example, Laclau recommends paying special attention to such a rhetoric instrument as *synecdoche* (simplistically explained by the author as “a part representing the whole”). From his point of view, a synecdoche incarnates a sociolinguistic process of an individual element becoming a quilting point, a master signifier that both constructs the chain of equivalence and represents it (idem : 72).

Further instructions suitable for discourse analysis carried out in Laclaudian fashion, can be found in “The discursive construction of a national identity” by Wodak, de Cillia, Reisigl and Liebhart. Thus, the scholars divide all the practices into several groups depending on whether they contribute to the

restoration, legitimation or relativisation of a social status quo and pay special attention to the establishment of power relations through the discursive acts (2009 : 8). When analyzing lexical units and syntactic devices that contribute to the construction of unity, sameness, difference, continuity or change, they recommend concentrating on such linguistic instruments, as metonymy, personification, the use of personal pronouns, temporal references and comparisons. The general tone, i.e. emotional background of the texts is to be taken into consideration, too (ibidem : 35-47).

However, my first steps in empirical analysis have proved that consecutive tracing of all the lexical instruments might be challenging when large amounts of data are processed. Therefore, I formulated my task as finding out the *patterns* of discursive representations, i.e. emphasizing the most recurrently used linguistic devices belonging to the above-mentioned categories. Furthermore, special attention was given to the task of studying the ways how ‘we-ness’ and ‘otherness’ are formulated against the background of the Ukrainian crisis. To a certain extent, the indication of specific nodal points, as well as ‘we’ and ‘other’ groups is based on intuitive application of the theoretical framework, which makes the analysis vulnerable to criticism directed against its ‘subjectivity’. However, the chosen platform of research denies the possibility of ‘objectivity’ as such and emphasizes that the researcher always finds him- or herself within a specific discursive background that inevitably influences one’s perceptions.

4. METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION

The following chapter is devoted to the interview as the major method of data collection applied for the current research. The first section traces the introduction of this method into social studies and emphasizes the main characteristics of poststructuralist research. Thus, the words of interviewees are not evaluated on the basis of 'objective/biased' dichotomy; what is brought into focus instead, are the group's perceptions and what they tell an interviewer about this collective. The second subchapter is devoted to Skype interviewing as a specific method of synchronous interviewing that has both its advantages (e.g. spontaneity of responses, access to non-verbal cues) and drawbacks (dependence on good Internet connection, lack of interview 'intimacy' etc.). The third subchapter outlines the process of respondents' recruitment and gives some general features of the online social spaces popular among the representatives of the group. A short return to the issue of interview distortion can be found in the fourth section, while the fifth one deals with another type of data relevant for the current research – namely, the mass communication materials belonging to one of the three main categories: German media, Russian media, Russophonous media published in Germany.

4.1 Interview as a method of data collection

Nowadays an interview can be described as one of the most ubiquitous methods of data collection within the social science; however, its inclusion into the researchers' set of instruments was not a linear process. Platt (2011 : 33) distinguishes between an interview as a practice and as a methodological term. Whereas an interview as a practice can be traced already in the 17th century (although it wasn't characterized as such and separated from other modes of acquiring information), the first attempts to theorize on interviewing were made in the 20th century (Briggs 2011 : 911-912).

In the 1920s and the 1930s an interviewee was regarded as a 'gatekeeper', i.e. a person who has a unique access to unknown information. Therefore, the researchers of that wave distinguished between respondents who can give objective information, and those who are biased – with a logical preference to the former. It was generally recommended to make no notes during an interview; in publications, the words of interviewees were given in a form of a summary. The same historical period witnessed the first steps being made in political polling and market research. This kind of activities stimulated the development of standardized structured interviews carried out by a group of interviewers instructed from a center. Such interviews followed an aim of accuracy, and were evaluated as successful if they had a great predicting potential. The standardized studies gave way to a concept of sampling – i.e. considering a respondent a member of a specific sample. (Platt 2011)

After the Second World War interviewing gains its full weight as a method of social research. However, in the late 1960s and 1970s traditional modes of interviewing found themselves under attack from a new generation of researchers. In their 1968 work on social research methodology Sjoberg & Nett criticized structured interviews for their orientation on testing an already existing hypothesis, instead of being “concerned with a discovery per se” (cit. ex.: *ibidem* : 41). In 1984 Taylor & Bogdan wrote on the importance of structuring an in-depth interview as a conversation of equals, where individual phrases can be misunderstood when taken out of context (*ibidem* : 42).

Feminist research, as well as poststructuralist research in general, stimulated the academic interest to the question of how specific power relations are imposed into and reinforced through interviewing practices. Thus, feminist researchers addressed the question of women being spoken for in the very structure of the traditional interview. Therefore, they challenged the dominating presupposition that the relations of an interviewer and an interviewee are neutral, and the interview material can therefore be regarded as objective and independent (Fontana 2010 : 168-169). Similar thesis can be found in “Learning how to ask” written by poststructuralist scholar Briggs. He argues that the typical interview situations create power asymmetries between the sides, as an interviewer controls the context of interview by posing questions, regulating the length and scope of answers and later re-contextualizing the information in academic and media writings (Briggs 2011 : 910).

Within the framework of the current research, the application of an interview as one of the methods of data collection partly follows the task of bringing the excluded voices in. Thus, the Russophones in Germany are recurrently spoken for against the background of some political events – and, at the same time, rarely given a chance to speak. However, gathering absent first-person stories was not the only aim. While working with the textuality of interviews, I tried to find out whether the dominating national discourses are (re)produced by the representatives of the group, and which layers of meaning are added by them.

When conducting my interviews, I followed one of the main principles of poststructuralist interviewing that distinguishes it from the above-mentioned modes. Inasmuch as poststructuralist thinking erodes the border between ‘reality’ and its representations, an interview material is not evaluated through the lens of ‘objective-biased’. Therefore, when interviewing the respondents, I don’t follow an aim of finding out, what the mid-2010s Ukrainian conflict is ‘really’ about. My interest lies in the sphere of perceptions and the ways they are constructed.

When referring to the poststructuralist trends in interviewing, Fontana (2010 : 166-167) distinguishes two main paths of asking questions. The first one is coded as ‘detached researcher’, and implies that an

interviewer is trying to deprivilege his or her agency. Although the concept of an interviewer's invisibility comes from quantitative research, this type of interview has a qualitative orientation. A researcher minimizes his or her privileges (e.g. by making an interview less structured) – and the focus is moved to what an interviewee is willing to say. The second path, described by Fontana, increases the comparative weight of an interviewee. Some scholars (e.g. Seidman 1991) develop this approach to the stage of 'we'-relations constructed between an interviewer and interviewee. The power of an interviewer is, thus, not put outside the brackets, and an interview is analyzed as any other social encounter.

Following the aims set in the framework of the current research, I found it reasonable to choose the first track. Although I fully realize that an interview would inevitably lead to power disparities, I would like to leave those issues for further analysis. In this research, I was interested in the ways identities of respondents are constructed through their discursive acts. In order to deprivilege my stance, I avoided strictly structured question; although I had a quite detailed plan of questions I would like to ask (see: Appendix 1), I only followed the general directions of questions with collaborative respondents. Thus, there were 5 categories of questions in the questionnaire: (1) finding out whether a respondent is familiar with the Ukrainian events; (2) determining the main sources of information on the Ukrainian crisis used by the respondent; (3) characterizing one's personal perception of the Ukrainian crisis; (4) characterizing the respondent's identity; (5) sociodemographic information. Whereas categories (1), (2) and (5) left less space for improvisation, categories (3) and (4) were normally structured in a more flexible form.

4.2 Skype interviewing as a specific method

Inasmuch as logistic constraints make a set of face-to-face interviews impossible in the framework of this research, I had to choose one of the methods associated with modern communication technologies. When making a further choice between synchronous (e.g. telephone interviews, video-calls, chats) and asynchronous instruments (e.g. e-mail interviews), I preferred the former. Thus, asynchronous interviewing leaves more space for an interviewee to drop out of the process and stop responding to later questions (see: O'Connor et.al. 2011 : 272), which creates potential problems for me as an interviewer. Although providing a respondent with additional time to answer the questions and edit his or her answers, an asynchronous interview destroys the spontaneity of responses and, according to O'Connor et. al. (ibidem: 275), encourages the participant to produce 'socially desirable' reactions, which are less applicable for identity analysis. Furthermore, this mode of interviewing is not designed for semi-structured interviews, and implies that additional e-mails should be sent to clarify unclear points.

Among the synchronous interviewing methods, Skype interviewing seems to be the most suitable one. Being an online instrument, this method embraces several meaningful features of a traditional face-to-face interview. Thus, it provides an interviewer with an opportunity to establish a positive ambience needed to deprivilege his or position (or, vice versa, to privilege the position of the respondent). Another characteristic that makes Skype interviewing especially suitable for poststructuralist research, consists in its providing the researcher with non-verbal cues that might help to contextualize the interview (Deakin, Wakefield 2014 : 605-606).

Skype is a software that can be downloaded for free; it enables interviewers to connect with otherwise inaccessible respondents all over the world. However, this mode of interviewing is also associated with specific difficulties. The most obvious problem discussed by Seitz (2016 : 230-231) relates to technical issues. Successful interviewing critically depends on the sides' access to the high-speed Internet, and even in those cases calls might unexpectedly disconnect. Further difficulties emerge when the 'intimacy' of interviews is taken into consideration. Warren (2011 : 93-94) and Seitz (2016 : 232) both come to the conclusion that a fear of being audio- and videotaped influences the potential respondents, especially in those cases when issues that might be personally damaging, are discussed. However, scholars make different accents when addressing this problem. Whereas Seitz concentrates on an interviewer's inability to establish a personal connection online, Warren emphasizes how different the 'on and off the record' behavior of a respondent might be due to his or her own perception of audio- and videotaping, influenced by social class, age, context and previous experiences.

4.3 Recruiting respondents

The logic of survey research implies that a 'sample' group of people representing larger population is interviewed so that the conclusions true for a smaller group would be generalizable for the concrete population (Warren 2011 : 87). However, 'sampling' research is quite difficult to be conducted. If the generalizations are to be made on large populations, a relatively large 'sample' group of respondents should be interviewed too, which makes it almost impossible for a single researcher to make a representative sample survey within a limited period. In each single case a researcher is expected to define key characteristics (e.g. age, gender, ethnic background, education level etc.) and put others outside the research framework. Furthermore, specific quotas are to be observed when recruiting respondents (Elias & Lemish 2011 : 1252).

Briggs (2011 : 918) criticizes the logic of sampling; he writes that classifying interviewees as members of a specific group, a researcher follows a presupposition that a respondent is speaking for this group – thereby representing him or her as a one-sided subject. Taking this thesis into consideration, I try to be

quite cautious with generalizations based on my interviews, and continuously re-contextualize them through the use of larger segments of data (e.g. the material of mass communication). Nevertheless, when recruiting respondents, I tried to maximize the number of represented subgroups. Thus, I took into consideration the formal belonging to one of the above-mentioned categories (*Spätaussiedler*, Russian-speaking Jews, other Russophones), gender, age and country of origin (Russia and Ukraine). Such a decision was based on my hypothesis that certain subgroups are exposed to specific hegemonic interventions (e.g. the narrative of Germaneness was expected to be directed at the Russian-speaking repatriates).

The process of recruiting the respondents turned out to be one of the most challenging stages of research. Taking into consideration the aim of maximizing the representativeness, I applied two strategies of recruitment. The first group of interviewees embraces those whom I previously had contact with, their relatives and acquaintances. Following the track described by Richardson (cit. ex. Warren 2011 : 89), I announced my research interest to most people I met with the hope that they would either volunteer themselves (if they meet the requirements of living in Germany for at least 3 years and speaking Russian as a mother tongue), or put me in contact with those who might be willing to participate. After finding a respondent, I made an attempt to practice ‘snowballing’ method (ibidem : 90), i.e. asked him or her to draw in further interviewees through his or her social networks.

The second group of respondents includes those found via social networks (facebook.com, vk.com, ok.ru). The 2016 *Rusmedia* report mentions websites *Odnoklassniki* (ok.ru) and *Vkontakte* (vk.com) among the most popular social networks used by Russophones in Germany. The weekly number of users coming from Germany is evaluated at the level of 1.348.617 for *Odnoklassniki* and 550.710 for *Vkontakte* (Rusmedia 2016 : 49-51). Almost no information on typical characteristics of users from Germany can be found in open sources; most user portraits are outlined on the basis of Russian material. Thus, the report of *Brand Analytics* (2016 : 6-9) claims that almost an equal number of *Vkontakte* users belong to 18-24 years and 25-34 years age categories (32,3% and 32,1% respectively), while the audience of *Odnoklassniki* is primarily divided between three leading categories: 25-34 years (26,6%), >55 years (20,9%) and 35-44 years (20,7%). However, the absence of age data in a relatively large portion of cases (more than 60% accounts in *Vkontakte*) makes the statistic unreliable.

Facebook, the world’s largest social network (Statista 2017), is only casually mentioned in the *Rusmedia* report, which might be explained by the purposes of the paper. Thus, it is prepared by a transmitting company working exclusively with Russophonic media in order to give guidance on how advertisement can be distributed. Furthermore, it doesn’t mention such popular Germany-based

networks, as *VZ-networks* (www.meinvz.net, www.studivz.net) or *Wer-kennt-wen* (www.wer-kennt-wen.net).

Although my observations on the Russophones' online activities cannot be called generalizable due to the absence of statistical instrumentation, I would suppose the following behavior pattern to be typical of different audiences:

- younger Russian-speaking users from Germany tend to use *Facebook*;
- in both Facebook and above-mentioned Germany-based networks communities that must embrace Russophones usually use German as a language of communication;
- *Vkontakte* is more popular among up-to-35-year-old Russophones living in Germany, whereas older users prefer *Odnoklassniki* and *Mail.ru*;
- the most active public communities of Russophones in Germany are located on *Vkontakte* platform with the users representing the third analytical subgroup (other Russophones) being the most active participants thereof.

After investigating the online communities on platforms chosen as the key sources (facebook.com, vk.com, ok.ru), I decided to concentrate on the following types of public pages: (1) groups of compatriots in Germany in general, or individual cities in particular; (2) '*Podslushano*' (from Russian – 'overheard') in Germany, or in a particular city; (3) communities where political topics are discussed. The first category has proved to be rather ineffective for massive recruitment, inasmuch as the communities of this type are in most cases left by their moderators, and, hence, full of repeated advertisements. However, the vast lists of communities' participants still gave me as a researcher a chance to recruit respondent through the mechanism of personal messages. On the contrary, '*Podslushano*' groups represent the currently popular type of communities, where the content is actively co-produced by the participants and published anonymously. Such a mechanism let me announce the respondents' recruitment to a relatively large public. In some individual cases I faced the problem of moderator's unwillingness to publish a post that mentions Ukraine, as the latter might provoke disputes among the participants. The third category of communities, i.e. the political ones, were processed in the manner close to the groups of compatriots. In order to recruit potential interviewees, I analyzed the lists of community participants, writing out those coming from Germany. After taking a fluent view of their personal pages, I chose active users to write a personal message to.

My typical recruitment announcement published in online communities was formulated as follows:

Dear participants of the community,

My name is Anastasia Strakevich and I am currently working on a master thesis for Saint-Petersburg State University and the University of Tampere (Finland) devoted to the perceptions of the Ukrainian conflict by the Russophones living in Germany. For my research, I conduct a series of interviews with the representatives of the group.

If you (1) speak Russian as your mother tongue; (2) live in Germany for more than 3 years; (3) would like to participate in the research, please, write me a personal message or leave a comment under this post.

The interviews are conducted via Skype. The questions are connected with:

- 1) the mass media that you use to get information on the Ukrainian events;
- 2) your personal perception of the Ukrainian conflict (you will be expected to give detailed answers);
- 3) your personal perception of the Russophonic community in Germany and its relations with the receiving society.

The interviews will be audiotaped. The materials will only be used for research purposes. The interviews are anonymous, and all the quotations will be given under pseudonyms.

One of unexpected problems that arose during the respondents' recruitment was connected with the use of a specific preposition in the Russian version of the phrase 'in Ukraine'. Thus, the Russian linguistic norm permits both options 'na Ukraine' and 'v Ukraine' (Gramota.ru 2017), while Kiev insists on the application of 'v' preposition, explaining it through the similar phonation of 'na Ukraine' (in Ukraine) and 'na okraine' (on the periphery) that is claimed to prescribe the state with a minor role compared with Russia. In one of the cases my automatic use of 'na' preposition provoked intensive debates among the participants of a Russophonic online community.

All in all, I managed to recruit 15 respondents with different backgrounds. The proportion between the representatives of the three Russophonic subgroups in Germany (Russlanddeutsche, Russophonic Jews and other Russophones) turned out to be different from that among the Russophonic population in general - thus, most interview requests sent to *Spätaussiedler* were declined, while Russophonic Jews and other Russophones (Russophonic students and specialists working in Germany) were, as a rule, more eager to participate. A list of respondents' pseudonyms with the respective sociodemographic data can be found in Appendix 2.

4.4 Interview distortion & Research ethics

The Ukrainian topic has a reputation of being a dangerous one. Multiple narratives circulating in Russian sociopolitical space got organized by the Ukrainian crisis into the common discourse of

‘othering’ the West. As a result, the West has become the key Other, whose shadow is recurrently traced in the spheres having no direct connection with the foreign politics. At the same time, the Western media portray today's Russia as threat similar to that that existed during the Cold War (see: German media & the Ukrainian conflict, Russian media & the Ukrainian conflict).

Such an atmosphere seems to have created a situation, when the Russophones feel the pressure of choosing between ‘us’ and ‘them’. From this angle, an interview with a Russian researcher represents a case of exaggerated choice. Although no obvious threat does exist for those living in Germany, the media background of being represented as “Kremlin’s agents” still might influence those supporting pro-Russian perceptions of the Ukrainian crisis. The proponents of the pro-Ukrainian point of view might expect a Russian interviewee to distort their opinions in a damaging way. As a result, the share of neutral statements was expected to be high, while many interview requests sent to politically radical citizens were expected to come without answer.

The expectations have proved to be true; however, this was not the only type of distortion possible in the concrete interview situation. Some nuances might have arisen while interviewee ‘neutral’ respondents, too. In order to avoid being ‘othered’ by an interviewee and, therefore, being included into the process of one’s identity formation to the extent that won’t let avoid following Fontana’s second track (see: Interview as a method of data collection), I took the stance of a sympathetic interviewer. Additional questions were asked when a participant was telling his or her personal stories and attitudes; multiple non-verbal signs from the side of an interviewer (nodding, smiles etc.) were given to make the respondent feel comfortable with the situation.

Special attention was given to the issue of personal data safety. Interviewees were suggested to use pseudonyms to protect their personal information. Furthermore, when questions concerning sociodemographic data were asked, the respondent were allowed to give indistinct answers (e.g. to describe their occupation in general phrases, or mention the *Bundesland* they live in instead of naming a concrete city or town – which was especially actual for the interviewees living in small communities).

The context of an online interview itself had a dual influence on the level of personal safety. On the one hand, some of the respondents whom I contacted with, were using fake accounts in social media, which made it difficult for a non-specialist to reveal their identities. On the other hand, the delusiveness of online anonymity has become widely discussed topic in today’s mass media – as a result, more people get concerned with the protection of personal data. Users realize that their location might be traced, and the words they say on the record might be published or intercepted by an

unknown third side. When conducting the interviews, I tried to make it clear that the respondents' identities are protected. All the collected information is stored on an encrypted USB flash drive; no real names are mentioned in the verbatim report.

4.5 Mass communication analysis

Poststructuralist thinking makes an accent on the fact that the narratives (re)produced by social actors are limited by the existing discursive background. Consequently, a scholar who tries to trace those narratives should first analyze the discourses dominating within the concrete social formation, and delineate the potential hegemonic interventions (i.e. strong oppositional discourses). In order to reach this aim, I carried out an analysis of the key mass media belonging to three main categories: (1) German media; (2) Russian media; (3) Russophonous media published in Germany. One of the media – RT (Russia Today) channel – is placed in the group of the Russian sources with certain reservations. Thus, the channel embraces several news networks broadcasting in different languages from Moscow, London and Washington (RT 2017). Within the framework of the current research, I concentrate on the Russian version of the channel – although I realize that there are Russophones who prefer watching a non-Russian version thereof. Furthermore, the limited character of the time resources made me decline an intention to analyze non-Russian media issued at the post-Soviet space (above all, the Ukrainian ones), as well as Western media that have global audiences.

My choice of individual mass media was primarily based on quantitative indices. Thus, the German media were selected on the basis of the 2015 report prepared by the Union of Private Radio- and TV-media (Verband Privater Rundfunk und Telemedien e.V.). For instance, FOCUS online takes the first place among the most popular online periodicals in Germany with 19,45 Mio unique users pro month (VPRT-Mediennutzungsanalyse 2015 : 53), while Bild holds the second place in the same rating, and the sixth one when websites with dominating user-generated content are included (ibidem). Spiegel, having the third place, was chosen as a key leftist paper that challenges the conservative understandings (Ahler 2016 : 132). ZDF, the channel with the second largest audience in Germany, was selected to give an example of discourse analysis that doesn't confine itself with 'classic' textuality, but includes other visual and audial instruments in addition. Finally, far less popular Junge Freiheit was chosen for its strong right orientation and association with the far right party *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD). Here I should note that there is at least one more paper that was previously often referred to as 'AfD's mouthpiece' – Compact Magazin. Nowadays it finds itself in conflict with the party's leadership (Elsässer 2017). Due to the general similarity of the views expressed by two editions, Compact Magazin is not included into the analysis. However, one outstanding characteristic thereof should be mentioned: the paper has a Russian version (Compact Online 2017).

The choice of Russophonic mass-media turned out to be rather complicated. There's almost no research on Russian media preferred by Germany-based Russophonic communities. The *Rusmedia* report (2016 : 34) only mentions Channel 1 as one of the key Russophonic TV channels available in Germany. With 250 million viewers in 190 countries, Channel 1 positions itself as most popular Russophonic channel in the world (Pervyi kanal 2017). An analysis of the local providers' supply demonstrated that most companies offering Russophonic TV packages also include RTR⁵ channels therein. Two of them – Rossiya 1, the second largest TV channel in Russia, and Rossiya 24, an influential news channel – were also selected for the current research. Ekho Moskvyy, an oppositional radio station, was picked out to demonstrate an example of challenging discourses. The specific choice of this mass medium was based on *Liveinternet* statistics that indicate a relatively high interest of German audiences to the station's website (Liveinternet 2017).

The third category of mass communication, i.e. Russophonic media published in Germany, embraced both 'classic' printed editions and new media with user-generated contents. The selection of printed editions was primarily based on their contents, as most of the Russophonic media published in Germany confine themselves with advertisement, legal advice and entertainment sectors. Those referring to political topics (*Russkaya Germaniya*, *Berlinskii Telegraf*, *Neue Zeiten*) were picked out for the current research. More attention was given to new media: most of the online communities that (1) were active throughout the researched period and (2) deal with political topics, were found at either *Vkontakte*, or *Odnoklassniki* platform. The pages I concentrated on, included local and nation-wide communities of Russophones (e.g. *Podslushano Germaniya*, *Zhivjom v Germanii: Novosti i Politika*, *Nasha Germaniya*, *Russlanddeutsche für Deutschland*) and political communities with Russophonic background (e.g. *Russlanddeutsche für AfD*, *Die Einheit*).

⁵ RTR (Federal State Unitary Enterprise "The Russian Television and Radio Broadcasting Company"), the largest media corporation in Russia

5. RUSSOPHONES IN GERMANY: TENDENCIES OF IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION

The following chapter is devoted to the analysis of empirical data. The first section describes the general social background faced by the Russophonic community between the early 1990s (the first post-bipolar wave of migration) and 2014. It elaborates the notion of Russophones in Germany being initially ‘othered’ by the German society. The premises for two main tendencies in collective identification are traced: (1) the tendency of disintegration based on formal criteria of ethnic belonging; (2) the tendency of ‘negative’ unification pre-defined by common problems faced by different subgroups. The second section is structured in a way that distinguishes between the discourses dominating in Russian and German sociopolitical spaces. Strong oppositional discourses are traced, too. The third subchapter brings together the findings of research. It outlines the ways the dominant/oppositional discourses are reproduced in immigrants’ social spaces and makes several assumptions on the tendencies of Russophones’ identification. However, it should be noted that the ‘order’ faced by the Russophonic ‘self’ is multidimensional, which makes the causal effects of the Ukrainian events quite limited. Inasmuch as the concrete limits of the causation are questionable, I concentrate on the ‘tendencies of identification *during* the Ukrainian crisis’, not ‘*caused by* the crisis’. Finally, the ‘Discussion’ subsection specifies the contribution of my conclusions to the general discussion on the topic. For instance, I claim that my findings implicitly support the arguments of Georg Elwert who emphasized the positive influence of migrants’ own organizations on their adaption in the receiving society.

5.1 Russophones in Germany: between 1990s and 2014

From the identification point of view, the situation the *Spätaussiedler* found themselves in, was rather difficult. The dismantling of the communist regime led to the reevaluation of personal identities all over the ex-Soviet space. The collapse of the Soviet Union turned out to be a pure identification crisis, when the existing quilting points that condensed around the communist ideology lost their meanings. The ‘Soviet people’ was disintegrating together with the Soviet state with multiple individual identities (ethnic, religious, territorial etc.) being established. A striking example of the influence exerted by these events can be found in the interview of a *Russlanddeutsche* Eugen Litwinow.

As we were living in Kazakhstan, I never realized that my mother is German by birth. After the collapse of the Soviet Union the Kazakh language became the state one, and my parents said:

we won't stay here anymore. There was a choice of either to follow my father's descent and go to Russia, or to resettle to Germany.⁶ (Mediendienst Integration 2014)

The case of Eugen Litwinow demonstrates how an identity might be constructed on the basis of ethnic origin being given a special meaning against the background of an identity crisis. The situation was quite different for those who were already aware of being *Russlanddeutsche* when the iron curtain fell down. Such an example can be found in an interview of Georg Schmalz, an active member of the Russophonic community:

My ancestors were from Wiesenburg (now located in France) and came to the Ukrainian village Landau around 1840 – and lived there till the communists came to power. After some of my ancestors were accused of being kulaks, dispossessed and executed, the family was dispersed all over the Soviet state [...]. My grandmother taught me German, and I'd been speaking German till I went to school. When I later came to Germany, I realized that my grandmother's language was a 19th century one [...]. I believe, I am German, although we are called *Russlanddeutsche* in Germany. (Agentstvo politicheskikh novostei 2008)

Thus, he acknowledges that being German was something that he realized when living in the Soviet Union – however, this was a specific, 19th-century ‘Germanness’. Similar experience of being alien both in the (ex-)Soviet Union and Germany can be found in another interview given by *Russlanddeutsche* Tamara Barabasch:

People hear my name and my accent and say: oh, you are Russian! [...] We thought we were returning to our homeland, but we stay strangers. (Thüringer Allgemeine 2016)

Thus, the representatives of the group were living inside an ethnically alien social space. Some of them were deeply incorporated into the existing social ties within this space (for instance, a 16-year-old girl Elena writes: “Here [in Germany] I am German, there [in Russia] I am Russian” (Merkul'ewa 2013: 30), while other groups practiced some kind of ‘othering’ vis-à-vis Russians to keep their own identity.⁷ There existed a shared mythologized belief that the group of the *Russlanddeutsche* was belonging to a larger group of the German *Volk*. On the other side of the border a myth of a German *Volk* transcending the formal state territory was also established – not without reason was the German legislature formulated in a fashion that both provided for the re-unification of the state and the repatriation of the «expellees». However, what is more important is that these were two separated

⁶ Hereinafter the translations from German and Russian are mine. The original quotations can be found in Appendix 3

⁷ An interesting example thereof is a story of a 59-year-old woman whose grandmother often told her, as she was a child, to keep her feet clean in order to be different from «Russian girls» (Savoskul 2006).

myths and two different identities – that can be proved by the experiences of such people as Tamara Barabasch or Georg Schmalz who claim to be repeatedly treated as Russians.

The German state has made an enormous effort to break the social boundaries between the «normal» Germans and the resettlers – as well as between the Western and the Eastern parts of the united country. However, the discursive construction of *commonness* was developing in parallel with other types of discourses. The most graphic reflection of the debates can be found in the above-mentioned transformation of the German legislature – the *Spätaussiedler* who were first perceived as a special group of Germans gradually became *a* group of foreigners (cf. Takle 2011). «The door is kept open. We are on the side of those people who belong to *us*», claimed Federal Representative for Foreigners Horst Waffenschmidt in 1996 (Spiegel 1996b). The same year a rather populist SPD-politician Oskar Lafontaine put the *Spätaussiedler* in a row with all other foreigners and accused them of burdening the German social system and living off pensions and welfare benefits (Spiegel 1996a). Several surveys conducted in 1996 showed that more than 60% of Germans agreed with Lafontaine's idea of restricting the number of newcomers (Münz & Ohliger 2004 : 290).

The common feature of the 1990s and the first years of 2000s was a de-facto absence of the resettlers in the German sociopolitical space. Thus, Münz and Ohliger wrote that by 1998 only about 10 Aussiedler had got seats in town council in the areas where they constituted approximately 20% of the population. Even those representatives of the community claimed to be ignored by others as incompetent. A special attention should be given to the case of *Heimat* – an organization established in 1998 to represent the Russian-speaking community in Germany. Münz and Ohliger argue that the relative unpopularity of the *Heimat* was based on its self-identification as a group for Russian Germans, while a plurality of *Aussiedler* wanted to be treated simply as Germans. (ibidem).

This statement functions as a good indicator of the processes in the environment the group found itself in. In fact, the *Spätaussiedler* were reproducing the discourses of the receiving society that stigmatized *Russianness* as anti-social behavior. German mass-media recurrently mentioned *Russlanddeutsche* in the context of discussing crime; resettlers described in articles gamble, abuse drugs, find themselves in prison (cf. Zeit online 2000, Deutsche Welle 2002, Spiegel 2004). The districts they lived in were characterized as unsafe and criminalized (Frankfurter Allgemeine Rhein-Main 2004). Furthermore, the representatives of the group were portrayed as state dependents (Spiegel TV 1996). Positive images of the *Russlanddeutsche* simply disappeared: being good therefore could be interpreted as being German and get rid of all the *Russianness* in one's identity.

Such a conclusion brings us to a broader question: was the reception of the *Spätaussiedler* an integrationist or an assimilationist practice? The German state itself apparently prefers the term

«integration». The introduction of this concept into the political lexicon was a hard step: till the late 1990s the German political elites had resisted recognizing the FRG a country of immigration (Weber 2011 : 5). Between 2000 and 2005 a new rhetoric of multiculturalism was formulated with the term «multiculturalism» functioning as a typical empty signifier. The meanings attached to the term reflected the current relations of power between the competing discourses. Thus, while the CDU/CSU promoted the inclusion of migrants on the basis of the dominating culture (*Leitkultur*), the Red-Green coalition promoted a more civic approach that allowed immigrants to keep their cultural characteristics (Volkery 2004). Anyway, the focus of the discussion changed: while in the 1990s the *Spätaussiedler* issues were considered to be the main problem, the 2000s saw a securitization of Muslim immigrants.

Prominent migration researchers Castles and Miller distinguish between three strategies a government might apply to deal with multi-ethnic population: differential exclusion, assimilation and multiculturalism. For the aims of the current research I suggest concentrating on the latter two concepts.

Assimilation may be defined as the policy of incorporating migrants into society through a one-sided process of adaptation: immigrants are expected to give up their linguistic, cultural or social characteristics and become indistinguishable from the majority population.

Multiculturalism [...] implies that immigrants should be granted equal rights in all spheres of society, without being expected to give up their diversity. (Castles & Miller 2003 : 250-251)

Bringing these concepts of assimilation and multiculturalism into the identity sphere and taking into consideration the fact that the referent group consists of *repatriates*, I can reformulate it as follows. Assimilationist practices suggest the establishment of ethnic identification chains as an ideal goal, while integrationist practices (i.e. multiculturalism) set an aim of civic identification. Whereas a ‘good Turk’ was expected to follow his or her cultural traditions in a way compatible with the German legislature and public interests (in this case an idea of organizing Islamic religious education on the German soil is worth being mentioned), «a good *Russlanddeutsche*» was expected to *become* German. Not without reason are the *Spätaussiedler* characterized as Germans in the official statistics – although this might even prevent the authorities from estimating the number of the group representatives (Frankfurter Allgemeine Rhein-Main 2004). The German state applied a purely assimilationist practice towards the group, and the social structures got involved into this hegemonic intervention.

Although the legal status of the so-called *Kontingentflüchtlinge* (i.e. those whose entry into the FRG was based on Jewish descent) was different from that of *repatriates*, the problems that they faced turned out to be quite similar. Thus, Judith Kessler adduces statistics indicating that 75% of the

Russophonic Jews in Berlin didn't have a chance to work within their speciality, and their linguistic competences were limited and degraded because of dominant intra-group contacts (Kessler 2003). As it was stated previously, the invitation of Russophonic Jews was aimed at re-establishing the *Judentum* in Germany. They were expected to practice the specific forms of Jewish life so that the social landscape could be enriched by their culture. Therefore, the government promoted the development of Jewish communities; using the term of German sociologist Elwert (1982), one can say that the *Binnenintegration*⁸ was active among the community members. Thus, the community formed its own religious and cultural organizations, support groups, educational and sports unions (Ben-Rafael et al. 2010 : 36).

However, a large part of the group was soon accused of being 'non-Jewish' and 'othered' by both the Jewish minority and the German society in general. When referring to this issue, Körber (2005 : 22-23) cites her interview with the President of a Jewish community:

I ask people: do you know why you came to Germany? They answer: yes, because the life became bad in Russia. I tell them: [the government wants you to] restore the Jewish communities. It means that you should join the community, and the community is not a cultural organization, but a religious institution

The campaign against 'fake Jewishness' among the Russophones was developed by mass media, too. Whereas during the first years of immigration Russophonic Jews were generally recognized to be a well-educated group that should be represented positively (Körber 2005 : 65), the mid-1990s saw a dramatic turn in media discourses. In August 1995 Spiegel published an article that claimed: "most [Russophonic] Jews only get acquainted with Jewishness after arriving to Germany" (Spiegel 1995a). The same article makes an attempt to celebrate the contribution of the Russophones to the development of the German culture; however, several months later the tone of the paper changed. Thus, a December 1995 article accuses Russophonic Jews of being connected with Russian mafia and forging documents that affirm their Jewish descent (Spiegel 1995b).

The situation was further poisoned by cases that were interpreted as direct anti-Semitism. Thus, the representatives of the group tell stories of being denied a job or insulted by individual Germans because of their Jewish descent (cf. Kessler 2003, Frankfurter Allgemeine 2005). However, it must be the fear to sound anti-Semitic that deterred German media discourses. Whereas the direction of discourses on *Russlanddeutsche* was almost stable, the discussion on Russophonic Jews experienced

⁸ Sociologist Georg Elwert claimed that the formation of migrants' own organizations helps them to get integrated into the receiving society. *Binnenintegration* (inner integration) is a term that describes the process of such organizational activities.

some fluctuations with the experiences of the group's members being at times represented in social spaces.

Despite the sporadic attempts to move the focus on Jewishness, the group faced the same problem as their former compatriots of German origin: they were claimed to be Russians. Kessler (2003) quotes a characteristic answer of one of her respondents, a 35-year-old geologist: "In Russia I was Jewish, and here I am Russian. I cannot say what I like more, as both [nominations] are *negative*". Thus, it can be argued that a negative notion of Russianness, embracing both *Russlanddeutsche* and Russophonic Jews, was constructed in Germany. Not simply coming from Russia, but having 'Russian' characteristics was stigmatized – as a result, the aim of getting rid of them (i.e. getting integrated) was formulated.

Whereas the discourses on *Russlanddeutsche* and Russophonic Jews are quite structured, in German social spaces, tracing the discourses on 'other Russophones' turned out to be rather challenging. The group doesn't seem to be perceived as a one to discuss: strictly speaking, the 'Russian-issue' is indirectly referred to either through the discourses embracing two larger groups of the Russophones, or through the general debates on immigration. Thus, the German media discussed the possibility of attracting Russian IT-specialists when a broader topic of Green Cards for high-qualified immigrants was vital (Spiegel 2000) and criticized Russians who work as doctors when anti-immigration sentiments started growing in the 2010s (Scholz 2013). In this sense, these relatively new discourses resemble the ones that were previously used to refer to Turkish workers: the society indirectly claims that they are not here to stay.

The final critical issue that I would like to address here, is the existence of internal divisions within the group. For instance, other Russophonic subgroups often accuse *Russlanddeutsche* of "getting the citizenship too easy". Throughout the analyzed period Russophonic Jews were charged by their former compatriots with being supercilious, while *Spätaussiedler* were stereotypically treated as less educated people. Furthermore, all the groups have been expressing hostility towards *Au Pair* workers and the so-called "Russian wives".

Summing up, I claim that between the early 1990s and the mid-2010 two diverse groups – Russophonic repatriates and Jews – faced similar pressures. Both of them were accused of deceiving the German society by pretending to be non-Russian. Positive public representations of the group were insufficient; mass media generally associated them with high criminalization. The task of becoming 'integrated' was set, where the term 'integration' functions as a typical empty signifier, i.e. a concept that might acquire different meanings depending on the context. *Russlanddeutsche* were expected to

get assimilated, while the Russophonic Jews were meant to dissolve within the Jewish community. The organizational activities of the Russophonic groups were strongly restrained by the described public expectations.

5.2 Media representations of the Ukrainian conflict

When analyzing the changes in the German media coverage of Russia associated with the Ukrainian crisis, Ahler (2016 : 132-133) comes to the conclusion that in 2014 the main focus shifted from Putin's person in both foreign and domestic policy to the conflict as a single topic. She writes that most German media shared a consensus on Russia's being responsible for the outbreak of the conflict. At the same time, she mentions a tide of criticism from the public that defined the dominating coverage as one-sided and biased. Counterbalancing this criticism, Ahler cites the report of the Federal Agency for Civic Education that demonstrated that the number of pro-Russian participants of German talk shows outweighed the number of pro-Ukrainian ones.

Quite similarly to most other authors commenting on the media coverage of the Ukrainian crisis (cf. Nygren et. al. 2016), Ahler traces the main narratives outlining the image of the Ukrainian conflict. However, articles and videos devoted to the Ukrainian topic not only constitute the audiences' perceptions of the corresponding events, but also frame their self-perceptions. Taking this thesis as a presupposition for my study, I formulate the following questions that function as my research guidelines:

- What kinds of identities do German media discourses devoted to the Ukrainian events prescribe to Germans? Russians? Russophones?
- What kinds of identities do Russian media discourses devoted to the Ukrainian events prescribe to the above-mentioned groups?

An analysis of media coverage of the Ukrainian conflict is aimed at outlining the discourses dominating two main sociopolitical spaces that the Russophones in Germany might find themselves between. No attention here is given to other media spaces (e.g. European, Western, post-Soviet etc.), however, I fully recognize their potential and leave their analysis for future research.

5.2.1 German media & the Ukrainian conflict

The current section studies the key discourses on the Ukrainian crisis dominating the German media spaces. Although individual modes of representation differ, several main patterns can be traced. Thus, the German media either follow the 'humanitarian' track and formulate the 'we-ness' through the role of a detached observer, or develop the 'general conflict' track that implies Germany's belonging to a

broader 'we-ness' (Western, European etc.). The 'humanitarian' track usually deals with the concept of 'an 'intra-Ukrainian conflict', where the Ukrainian events are interwoven into the chain of other 'overseas' crises with limited importance for Germany. On the contrary, the 'general conflict' track unifies the Ukrainian crisis and other Moscow's steps through the quilting point of 'Russian aggression'. Depending on an individual mass-media, Germany might be represented either as one of the conflict sides, or as a potential victim. The second track is aimed at the mobilization of the audience, it applies emotive vocabulary and – similarly to the Russian-media discussed below – embraces multiple references to historical events, which might trigger misunderstandings between Russophones and the receiving society. Quite interestingly, a strong oppositional discourse, represented here by *Junge Freiheit*, doesn't function as an echo of Russian dominant discourses.

5.2.1.1 FOCUS online

From the very beginning of the Ukrainian events (Maidan protests, disturbances, flight of President Yanukovych) FOCUS online formulated a consistent image of what was happening in the country. The sources of the conflict were initially connected with the Kremlin's domestic policy and the personality of Vladimir Putin:

(quoting the memoirs of Vladimir Putin of his 1989 work in the GDR) "It was clear to me that the Soviet Union was ill. It was a fatal, incurable illness. A paralysis of power'. For the last 14 years, he has done his best to overcome this paralysis. But not in the Western sense: not the absence of freedom, democracy and transparency were understood as the biggest mistakes of the Soviet Union, but the fact that the reforms of Mikhail Gorbachev weakened the CPSU regime. [...] Demonstrations, disturbances – they destroyed his world back in the GDR. And now they are back. In Kiev. On Maidan". (Reitschuster 2014)

The edition actively applies the narrative of a gap existing between the Russian authorities and people. The authorities are represented as formulating nearly fascist concepts of foreign policy, while the nation is paralyzed by the memories of Stalin's terror. Therefore, Ukraine is claimed to play an important symbolic role for Russia: Russians and Ukrainians have strong connections, and the democratization of Ukraine jeopardizes the "kleptocratic authoritarian system of power" in Russia (Umland 2015a). "Putin's Russia" is represented as an aggressive state that wages a hybrid war against Ukraine; the very definition of the Ukrainian events as a conflict or a civil war is rejected (ibidem). At the same time, the possibility of further escalation in Europe is evaluated as high (FOCUS online 2016a) with *limited* security risks for the EU – e.g. associated with the nuclear objects in Ukraine (Umland 2015b).

FOCUS online is rather restrained when it comes to Kiev's own policy. For instance, an author mentions extreme right tendencies in the party landscape and notes that Russia bases its steps on the Ukrainian political mistakes, but also applies multiple fake images (Umland 2015a). Strictly speaking, the Ukrainian policy is only given residual attention of the newsmakers. Ukraine is never constituted as a part of 'us' that in case of FOCUS online seems to embrace the West. Thus, cognate words 'pro-Western', 'West-oriented', 'Western', 'West' appear in most news blocks devoted to the Ukrainian events. By asserting the Western orientation of the Ukrainian government, the FOCUS journalists counterbalance the statement by recurrently citing the cultural closeness of Russia and Ukraine. Another interesting point: compared with other editions, FOCUS online almost avoids tying the Ukrainian crisis up with the Syrian events (rare exception – Umland 2016), and grounds the importance of selective cooperation with Russia in other regions (FOCUS online 2016).

What, however, causes anxiety of the FOCUS journalists is the “propaganda offensive” that is claimed to be taken by Russia. FOCUS argues that multiple 'negative' tendencies in the Western political landscape (e.g. the election of Trump, activation of right forces in European countries and their growing popularity) have external reasons. For instance, journalists write that the situation with refugees is actively securitized by the Russian media – and therefore, it becomes an issue (cf. Focus online 2016b).

Since the early 2016 FOCUS demonstrates a very critical attitude towards Russophones in Germany. The older generation of Russophones is defined as a 'lost' one; 20% of the Russlanddeutsche are called 'badly integrated' that contradicts the data of the 2013 state-sponsored research (cf: Hufelschulte 2016; Worbs et. al. 2013). FOCUS argues: having poor linguistic competences, they receive a large portion of information from Russophonic sources – and turn into the champions of Kremlin's policy. Interestingly, the edition considers all the Russophones as constituting a common group (Haltaufderheide 2016) that was absent on the political scene, but now experiences an awakening.

To the authors' regret, *Alternative für Deutschland*, represented as a nationalist party, profited from this awakening. 'Russlanddeutsche often think in a quite nationalist manner' - quotes FOCUS an 'insider', one of the representatives of the group. The repatriates are called a 'weapon against Merkel'; their presence in the German politics is characterized as abnormal, pressing the centrists out to the political periphery (ibidem). As it was done in 1990s, FOCUS works to obliterate an image of a good Russian(-speaker) out of the German sociopolitical space. Most articles issued for the last year mention Russians in negative external (e.g. 'How Russian made sport unattractive') and internal ('Russian mafia spreads across Germany') contexts.

All in all, the Ukrainian conflict is represented at two different levels by FOCUS. At the first level, that was constructed back in 2014, the Ukrainian events are represented as a hybrid war waged by an Other on Other's territory. A German reader is prescribed with a role of a detached observer facing almost no security risks. At the second level, that was added in 2016, an idea of a propaganda campaign initiated by Russia and directed against the Western states is expressed. This time an Other is traced in the space that was previously defined as one's own – which indicates that the discourse is no more constructed as an unchallengedly dominating one.

5.2.1.2 Bild

Being a tabloid, Bild presents information in a style typical for this kind of journalism. Thus, authors use loud headlines (e.g. “Putin must have bought Le Pen”, “Putinland is burnt to ashes”, “Economic crisis spoils Christmas to Russians”) and scandalous stories (e.g. an article devoted to the question of whether Putin might be a vampire) to attract the readers' attention.

Whereas FOCUS reports are primarily based on othering non-German actors, Bild constructs the images of 'foes' in the internal sociopolitical space, too. Thus, the edition actively criticizes the policy of German foreign minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier and recommends him put a reminder on the wall at his desk: “As those quiet men never become known, as they use soft tones to talk about brotherhood and peace, as they – similar to other dictators – always lay territorial claims 'for the last time', some of us believe their words and reconcile themselves with their aggressive tribes” (Reichelt 2017). The narrative of the ‘last territorial claims’ here functions as an implicit reference to the policy of Hitler's Germany – which is a very sensitive topic for the German society. In fact, it might be interpreted as an appeal to a reader implying that a policy of appeasement would support further aggression.

Another interesting reference to the events of the World War II is made when the short messages allegedly sent by Russians to the Ukrainian soldiers fighting in the East of the country, are discussed. The journalist quotes such a message: “Ukrainian fighters, you are like Germans near Stalingrad”. Interestingly, Bild repeats the words “you are like *Germans*” (without the reference to Stalingrad) once again in the middle of the article – this time in bold (Röpcke 2017c). Thus, although Bild demonstrates no solidarity with Ukraine as a pro-Western (democratic, European etc.) state, this case seems to be an attempt to represent both Ukrainians and Germans as (potential) victims of Putin's policy.

Paradoxically, Ukraine's own policy almost disappears from the sphere of Bild's attention – not without reason are some of the articles tagged as “Russia conflict” or “As in the Cold War” (e.g. Uhlenbroich 2016). What the journalists pay attention to instead, are the steps of “Tsar Putin” and Merkel as his political rival. The articles that bring the high politics closer to the earth, are usually

devoted to the separatists stigmatized as “Putin’s butchers” (cf. Röpcke 2016, 2017a, Bild 2016a). Thus, Bild elaborates no portraits of the direct victims of the conflict – which makes it rather easy for a reader to associate him- or herself with those ‘mythical’ people. The portraits of ‘Putin’s butches’, on the contrary, are quite detailed – and illustrated with multiple pictures and videos.

According Bild, Putin’s actions in different regional and subject spheres should be considered as belonging to a common chain. Thus, the Russian president is claimed to wage a 'ruthless air warfare against hospitals and civilians' in Syria (Reichelt 2017). Other tags applied together with the Ukrainian one, include *doping*, *Trump*, *Le Pen*, *AfD* etc. Hard criticism is directed against “Putin’s propaganda war”. Unlike other editions, Bild analyses several articles and videos of Russian mainstream media in order to demonstrate how “propaganda” functions. For instance, when referring to the *Channel 1* video, Bild writes: “the moderator, who applies to *millions of Russians* every week, claims that Merkel has destroyed the policy of her outstanding forerunners [...] by her pro-American and anti-Russian policy. Thus, Merkel acknowledges no more that without Russia's goodwill there would've been neither united Germany, nor united Europe” (Röpcke 2017b). The journalist calls the program deceitful (*Lügen-Sendung*) and criticizes its authors for racism, although no direct comments are given on some quotations (e.g. on the statement that Germany was trying to absorb Ukraine in order to expand its Lebensraum, and applied “the lie of democracy” for this aim).

A refusal to disprove the narratives of a counter-discourse indicates the established dominance of the analyzed one. There’s no need to prove that the choice of Kiev was far from being a result of Germany’s occupying *Mitteleuropa*; the Bild’s audience already knows it. At the same time, *Channel 1* audiences (i.e. Russians) seem to be othered. But is it true for the Russian-speaking audiences in Germany?

Citing the report of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Bild writes that *Russlanddeutsche* belong to the groups especially susceptible to fake news (Bild 2016c). The conclusion is, quite logically, based on the demonstrations inspired by the 'Liza-case'⁹ in January 2016 (Bild 2016b). However, other cases are mentioned, too: when referring to the electoral campaign run by right party *AfD* among Russophones, Bild applies an unusual nominator *German Russians* (Kain 2016). For a society where the dominating nominator sounds as *Russian Germans* (*Russlanddeutsche*) and where the German component is emphasized, such a reversal must have a specific meaning: the members of the group are represented as Russians.

⁹ In January 2016 Russian media told a story of an alleged rape with Russophonic girl Liza being a victim. See more: Channel 1

The general position of the discourse (re)produced by Bild can be characterized as follows. It is based on othering both extra- and intra-German actors; where a quilting point (i.e. the concept that stands at the top of the discursive chain) can be characterized as ‘hidden truth’ or ‘justice’. The German information space is only criticized when being a part of the big Other’s invasion (e.g. Steinmeier believing that Russia can be cooperated with, or *Russlanddeutsche* protesting under the influence of Russian television), where the big Other is aggressive Putin’s Russia. Putin’s aggression is presented as pure, resting on no specific logic.

5.2.1.3 Spiegel online

Unlike other media that tend to prescribe Germans with a role of either detached observers, or potential victims of the conflict, *Spiegel* apparently tries to make its readers feel sympathy with people suffering at the battle line. Spiegel is actively humanizing the conflict by giving voice to the citizens living in destroyed areas and refugees (most of them – women). In 2016 the edition appealed to its readers calling them to make a donation so that a charitable foundation could provide Ukrainian pensioners with medicines (Mayer & Steffens 2016). Lots of attention is given to the international organizations working in the conflict area.

Human rights violations from both sides are mentioned; only one of the articles openly recognizes that one of the sides could have committed more of them. Thus, a correspondent quotes an OBSE representative: “When it is written [in our report] that there was an outgoing fire from a specific position, it is clear, which side shot. But it is more difficult to tell who is guilty in every single case. Fire can be opened for the aims of defense [...] In 90% of cases separatists restrain us. We have a big problem to get to the Russia-Ukraine border. This indicates unambiguously: there's something there that the separatists hide” (Gathmann 2016).

Another specific characteristic of Spiegel articles: after the initial 2014 attempts to represent the conflict as a Hitlerlike aggression of Putin (cf. Spiegel 2014a), the edition shifts to a more reserved vision. Spiegel authors try to trace a defensive logic behind Russia’s steps (Spiegel 2014b, 2016b) and recognize that Brussels thinks in geopolitical categories, too (Spiegel 2015). Although the Russian background doesn’t disappear from the conflict analysis, Spiegel makes a distinct accent on its intra-Ukrainian character. Furthermore, Spiegel brings in Ukraine as an actor, and demonstrates that its domestic politics are far from being ideal. Thus, according to Spiegel, Ukrainians don’t trust their allegedly corrupted government and buy arms to protect their families (Spiegel 2016a, 2017c).

Compared with the above-mentioned media, Spiegel emphasizes the German component of the ‘we’ concept. Thus, the concepts of ‘West’, or ‘Europe’, or ‘the free world’ seem to give place to the

national identification. Merkel and Germany, represented as mediators in the conflict, are often mentioned in the articles devoted to the Ukrainian problematic. At the same time, an active inclusion of the humanitarian component makes a collective sense of Germany's actorness more visible.

The Ukrainian crisis seems to function as one of the steps on the way of Germany's identity formation – and ultimately not the decisive one. Furthermore, the discursive binding of the Ukrainian crisis with further Russian steps on the international arena is not as straightforward, as by Bild. This peculiarity becomes especially evident when the Spiegel's comments on Russian mass media are analyzed. Thus, although Spiegel criticizes Russian media for distorting the information on the crisis (cf. Neef 2015, Bidder 2015), the narrative of all the actions being parts of a common plan is absent.

2016 and 2017 have seen Spiegel accusing Russia of trying to deepen the intra-Western social splits (Spiegel 2017a). Apart from the comments on the report of the Ministry of Internal Affairs that calls the *Russlanddeutsche* one of the most unprotected groups in the situation of disinformation campaigns (Knaup & Traufetter 2016), Spiegel came up with a big video report on Russians in Germany. Compared with the 1990s absent or manifestly negative representations of the *Russlanddeutsche*, the report (Aden & Kreller 2016) provides an audience with an image of a 'good' repatriate. The characters play football, buy groceries and organize a district celebration – a great contrast with the 1990s images of criminalized new-comers. However, the portrayal of a *Russlanddeutscher* in this video still differs from a normal representation of a German. Except for several details (such as a tablet in the interviewee's hands appearing for several seconds in a 29-minute-long video), nothing indicates that the events in the video happen in 2016. The *Spätaussiedler* in the video seem to live an old-fashioned life with no computers on their working desks and television as the main source of information. Furthermore, only one of them is openly represented as a worker; at the same time, his work is inseparably linked with Russians. 5 out of 6 characters speak German with a heavy accent; all of them seem to be more oriented into the Russian (Soviet) past than in the German present. Interestingly, the Ukrainian problematic is only casually mentioned by the authors: thus, a group of *Russlanddeutsche* is told to gather in order to discuss the Ukrainian conflict in a pro-Russian manner.

Once again, an image of an 'effectively integrated' repatriate is underrepresented in a German edition. The group is othered; its political concerns are claimed to be provoked by an external power. The political activation of the *Spätaussiedler* is discursively connected with the activation of the extreme right forces. In 2017 when describing an action of AfD candidate Elene Roon, who posted a picture of Hitler in her WhatsApp-Chatgroup with a caption "Lost since 1945. Adolf, please communicate with us! Germany needs you! German nation" (Spiegel 2017d), Spiegel emphasizes her belonging to the group of *Russlanddeutsche*, which wasn't made either by FOCUS, or by Bild. Another interesting

detail: Spiegel pays attention to the fact that some of the Russlanddeutsche can vote in Russia, too, which makes them potential electorate of Vladimir Putin (Amann & Lokshin 2016).

5.2.1.4 ZDF

Similar to their Spiegel colleagues, ZDF seems to give no special importance to the Ukrainian crisis: according to ZDF, this is just one of the events, not an outstanding one. What makes their approach special is the vocal discursive connection constructed between the Orange revolution and the Maidan events. Giving voices to Ukrainians (most of whom, however, live in the Western countries for several years and speak very good German), the channel represents both events as a continuous struggle for democracy and freedom (cf. ZDF 2014a, 2015, 2017a). “There can be no sovereign Ukraine without a Western idea, [...] and there will be no EU if Ukraine doesn't hold out in this war against Putin”, – argues one of the interviewees, thereby trying to represent Ukraine as a part of the endangered European ‘us’ (ZDF 2015).

Taking ‘freedom’ as a quilting point, ZDF still doesn’t seem to share this statement of belonging. Although the Maidan protesters came out in defense of democracy and Western orientation, the government that came power has failed to overcome the crisis – claims ZDF (2016b). The channel implicitly demonstrates the similarities between the Russian and the Ukrainian societies, othering both of them. Moreover, it asks and answers the question of how the authoritarian tendencies in the region can be explained. Thus, ZDF prepared a 42-minute report on political orientation of young people in Russia. The ‘Putin generation’ is described as politically passive: most young people, according to the report, appreciate the rule of Vladimir Putin for giving them a chance to develop in a personal sphere and not to care for their social future (ZDF 2017b).

Using the tacit consent inside the country, the Kremlin is trying to propagate its ideology outside the country. ZDF accuses Putin of constructing a ‘net of extreme right friends’ all over Europe that embraces such forces as *Front National* (France), *Vlaams Belang* (Belgium), *Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs* (Austria) and *Jobbik* (Hungary). In Germany Kremlin supports the activities of several groups hostile towards foreigners (*PEGIDA*, *AfD*, *NPD*). An interesting detail: when an AfD functionary is asked whether his party is sponsored by Russia, he answers ‘definitely not’ and nods. Claiming to “fill the information vacuum” and protect the freedom of speech, Moscow wages an information war – asserts ZDF. Thereby the channel stigmatizes the alternative visions of Russian media as conscious distortions and propaganda. Moreover, a mistrust towards ‘non-political’ activities of Russia is fueled by representing the Tolstoy Institute musical evenings as meetings of right radicals (ZDF 2016a).

Unlike key printed editions, ZDF makes an attempt to give voice to those who see the Ukrainian events differently. For instance, the journalists interview a man living in the areas occupied by 'pro-Russian separatists', who claims that he doesn't want to live in Ukraine anymore after the attacks of the Ukrainian army (ZDF 2017c). Another example: along with the Ukrainians living Europe, ZDF interviews a German journalist who thinks that it is important to understand the logic of Putin instead of demonizing him:

...we, the audience, the readers of newspapers and TV-viewers, are shown a black-and-white film that accuses Putin of all the negative things that happen. But the reality is not a black-and-white film. We, the West, also have our own interests... It is always represented as if all we want is democracy, freedom and human rights, while Putin would like to expand his empire, is aggressive and thirsts for war. But it doesn't correspond to the reality (ZDF 2014b).

However, in both cases the alternative impetus of the interviewees' words is neutralized by the journalist's comments. Thus, in the first case the words of a man are represented as a part of 'usual mutual accusations' of the conflicting side, while second speaker inevitably faces the questions contracting his point of view (e.g. "What makes the position of Putin wrong?").

5.2.1.5 Junge Freiheit

The general tone of the right paper *Junge Freiheit* differs from the manner typical for mainstream German media. Whereas the latter stigmatize attempts to understand Putin, *Junge Freiheit* claims to search for deeper reasons of the Ukrainian crisis associated with both Western and Russian political steps:

According to Western-American point of view, Russia bears the responsibility for the escalation of the Ukrainian conflict to an undeclared war; according to Russian point of view, the West does [...]. A hundred years after the World War I, one should spread [the idea] that there can be no sole initiator of a war; that the more convinced the political and military elites of the conflicting powers are that they are the only right side [...], the easier it is for a local conflict to turn into a comprehensive collision (Paulwitz 2014)

The paper openly gives platform to such '*Putin-versteher*'¹⁰ as John Mearsheimer who openly lays the blame for the Ukrainian conflict on the West (*Junge Freiheit* 2014). Furthermore, *Junge Freiheit* supports the thesis that was recurrently repeated by the Russian authorities when it came to the discussion on sanctions: economic issues should be perceived as more fundamental than political ones

¹⁰ From German verb 'verstehen' – to understand

(Fasbender 2016d). Finally, the mass medium seems to recognize that Crimea de-facto belongs to Russia, and reproduces the claim that the Minsk process is currently frozen because of Kiev's rigidity (Fasbender 2016b).

However, the concept of 'we-ness' formulated by the paper, apparently doesn't embrace Russia. According to Junge Freiheit, Russia should be understood (Fasbender 2016a), but still kept at a distance. 'Russian bears' are talked of as an Other thinking in practices categories, while Europe is 'turning up its nose' and losing 'on all fronts' (Fasbender 2016c). Thus, in terms of IR theory, the concept suggested by the paper can be interpreted as a need to return to a realist foreign policy that is allegedly already pursued by Russia. Such a policy implies that there can be no stable 'we-ness', but a plurality of changing alliances.

Although the paper is associated with the AfD party that is often referred to as a force supported by Russophones in Germany, no specific references are made to the group. Quite the contrary, the mass medium challenges this connection by adducing the statistics claiming that only 4,7% of the Spätaussiedler support *Alternative für Deutschland* (Junge Freiheit 2016).

5.2.2 Russian media & the Ukrainian conflict

Similarly to the previous subchapter, this section deals with media representations of the Ukrainian conflict – this time, with Russian ones. Whereas the German mainstream discourses formulate an image of 'attacking Russia', Russian mass media construct the story of 'aggressive West' that disrespects Moscow's interests and challenges its diverging choices. One of the key quilting points here is 'the truth' – a typical empty signifier filled with specific content. Thus, 'the truth' – whenever this nomination refers to historical events or current political choices – is often represented as something that should be protected by the common efforts of the 'we-community'.

Two main strategies are applied by the mainstream media following this track: they either give exhaustive information (often presented by multiple experts) on controversial points, or emotively denounce the proponents of different points of view. The application of such instruments can galvanize Russian-speaking communities in Western countries, as it is obviously based on othering the corresponding societies. However, the unifying concept of 'truth' is only based on positivity in its part oriented into the past, while the present-day content is primarily formulated through negativity. As a result, no clear prospects for Russophonic 'truth-seekers' can be traced. At the same time, liberal oppositional discourses, represented here by *Ekho Moskvy*, are strongly oriented at praising the Western choices and values, which might limit their potential among 'othered' Russophones in European countries.

5.2.2.1 Channel 1

The way *Channel 1* represents the Ukrainian conflict, differs from manner typical for the most popular German media. Differences can be found in the style used by the journalists. Whereas non-tabloid top German media avoid emotive vocabulary, Channel 1 reports abound in words holding specific connotations. Thus, certain understandings are created by the usage of such words as “*ukropy*” (scornful for ‘Ukrainian patriot’) and “*pravoseki*” (scornful for ‘members of the Ukrainian far-right party *Pravyj Sektor*’ prohibited in Russia), as well as through the stigmatization of the Ukrainian policy as “neo-Nazism”, “fascism” and “witch-hunt” (cf. Pervyi kanal 2014a, 2014b, 2015a, 2015d).

Using an image of a ‘fascist attack’, Channel 1 constructs a similarity between the pro-Russian fighters in Eastern Ukraine (nominated as “*opolchency*”, i.e. members of people's volunteer corps) and those who fought against the aggression of Nazi Germany during the Great Patriotic War. Not without reason has the Georgian ribbon, previously associated with the Victory Day, become a symbol of Antimaidan activists (Pervyi kanal 2014c). The “Ukrainian nationalists” (this signifier is usually applied to describe either the Ukrainian army, or the members of private/voluntary militias fighting against the pro-Russian groups in Eastern Ukraine) are told to abuse drugs and, therefore, demonstrate groundless aggression towards the civilians (Pervyi kanal 2017). Quite symptomatically, the same narrative of using drugs’ was applied by another top Russian channel – *Rossiya 24* – when describing the Maidan events (Rossiya 24 2017).

This metaphor of Ukrainians’ being physically misled resonates with a wider narrative defining the country’s role in the international relations. Channel 1 seems to portray the USA as a master of Ukraine that doesn’t really care for the countries’ citizens, and is going to abandon it when this burden becomes too heavy (cf. Pervyi kanal 2015b, 2015e). Whereas the German media make an accent on the military aspect of the conflict, Channel 1 makes an attempt to document a ‘state failure’. Sometimes the very sustainability of the post-Soviet Ukrainian state is brought into a question. “In Russia – even in the worst years of the 1990s – the state existed as a self-defying value, and our oligarchs positioned themselves against this background. In Ukraine, there was no state, apart from those oligarchs” – claims journalist Leont'ev (Pervyi kanal 2015a).

In this scheme, Russia is represented as an actor that ‘saves’ Ukraine. Unlike its German colleagues, Channel 1 emphasizes the collective character of Russia’s actorness. Russia (not personally Putin, but Russia in general) provides the Eastern Ukraine with the humanitarian aid, receives refugees and seriously ill patients (cf. Pervyi kanal 2014d, 2015f). All those people seem to be defined as belonging

to 'us' – as well as common Ukrainians in general. However, the borders of 'we-ness' constructed by Channel 1 are quite vague. It lacks positivity, but follows a unification-through-negativity track.

The big Other can be traced in the image of the West. At the same time, Channel 1 clearly emphasizes that there is a difference between the USA (an absolute Other) and Europe (a relative Other). A dialogue with the latter is both possible and desirable; Europe is represented as a confused actor that is unaware of the real state of affairs (Pervyi kanal 2015c).

Although the accent on former compatriots definitely gives way to a more general appeal to an indefinite group of 'truth-seekers' in Channel 1 reports, at least one reference to Russophones in Germany is worth being mentioned. Thus, in January 2016 Channel 1 came up with a report (Pervyi kanal 2016) on an alleged rape of a Russian-speaking girl in Germany, thereby provoking demonstrations among the members of the group. Leaving the question of whether the demonstrations were paid by the Russian governmental structures outside the brackets, I would like to refer to the textuality of this item. Several observations might be made here. First, the citizenship of the girl is not mentioned; further reaction of the Russian Minister of foreign affairs makes the audience believe she might have a Russian pass. Secondly, the text is based on the double-othering: (1) cultural othering of the «barbaric East» condensed around the image of a refugee and (2) othering of the German state that cannot be relied on. Therefore, Channel 1 skillfully bypasses the issues of any specific Russian cultural identification (no matter whether the girl believes she is Russian, German or *Russlanddeutsche* – we all face the common threat), but challenges the established institutional (i.e. civic) identification. Such an approach reveals a broader character of the hegemonic intervention that constructs a preferable image of a state as a protector.

5.2.2.2 Rossiya 1

The manner that Rossiya 1, the second largest TV channel in Russia, discusses the Ukrainian events resembles the instruments applied by Channel 1. Similarly to their colleagues, Rossiya 1 reporters make an accent on emotional representations. Metaphoric constructions that they tend to introduce (“[Ukraine] is sinking as a giant ship, but there are petty intrigues at the upper deck” (Rossiya 1 2014c); “the plague of Kiev chaos is spreading throughout the country” (Rossiya 1 2014b) are aimed at both demonizing and debasing the revolutionary forces in Kiev. What the channel suggests its audience to be afraid of, is an abstract revolution in general and the instability generated by it. However, the individuals standing at the top of the Ukrainian state are represented as weak and unable to control the forces got awakened:

“The tragedy of Ukraine consists in its geographical and spiritual collapse, but also [in the fact that] what has remained of this state is now ruled by external forces. There are, in fact, no people [in the government of the country] who can take decisions independently” (Rojkov 2014)

Furthermore, the journalists come up with criticism directed against the alleged initiator of the crisis – the United States. Ukraine is claimed to be “Obama's mistake” and failed project similar to the Syrian one (Rossiya 1 2016b). Thus, following the logic elaborated by its Channel 1 colleagues, Rossiya 1 tells a story of the aggressive USA and emphasizes the role of Obama as a 'weak and inconsistent leader'. The narrative of the “state failure” can be traced in the channel’s items, too. The reporters apply multiple historical comparisons: parallels are constructed between the Ukrainian crisis and the 1917 Russian revolution or the collapse of the Soviet Union (Rossiya 1 2014a). In all the cases, revolutionary forces supported by some external sponsors are claimed to have 'leveled at the regime and hit the country'.

Ukraine is represented as a part of a larger ‘territory of chaos’. In some territories, this chaos is claimed to be brought by ill-considered US military actions (as in Libya and Syria), while in others it is explained through the concept of erroneous liberal ideas (refugee crisis in Europe). Visual and audial instruments are applied to create an atmosphere of anxiety when those territories are mentioned (cf. Rossiya 1 2016c).

Quite the contrary, Russia is constituted as a stronghold of stability. The collective ‘we-ness’ formulated by Rossiya 1, is based on the idea of having no democratic illusions. Special importance is given to military values as a basis of the state’s prosperity; those who privilege other types of values are either stigmatized, or accused of lying (Rossiya 1 2015b). At some points the military rhetoric might sound rather aggressive. Thus, Dmitry Kiseljov came up with a claim that “Russia is the only country in the world that can turn the USA into radioactive ashes” which was afterwards actively discussed by Western media (Rossiya 1 2014b). However, the items are generally oriented at internal audiences; as such, they do not express a threat to an external force, but construct the idea of a strong government’s hand that would prevent chaos from entering ‘our’ space.

As the quilting point (the privileged sign) of the discourse might be formulated as internal stability, non-Russian viewers are rarely referred to. Two main types of items mentioning Russophonic communities outside Russia can be observed: (1) dealing with the narrative of unheard minorities in collapsing Europe (e.g. Rossiya 1 2016a); (2) praising those who have strong political identification with Russia – for instance, those fighting in Eastern Ukraine (Rossiya 1 2015a). The former seems to

encourage different Russophonic groups to keep the idea of ‘disillusionment’, while the latter can hardly be called an instrument of massive recruitment: such videos are quite rare.

5.2.2.3 Rossiya 24

Unlike Channel 1, news channel *Rossiya 24* tries to distance itself from the most emotional comments on the Ukrainian events. Compared with non-tabloid German colleagues, *Rossiya 24* still abuses sensational headlines (e.g. “Atrocities of Ukrainian chastisers: Russia demands investigation of Donbass war crimes” or “Human shield: Ukrainian military doesn't let people out of Debaltsevo pocket” (*Rossiya 24* 2014, 2015). Nevertheless, the general tone of the dialogue between the channel and its audience differs from that of Channel 1. Thus, Channel 1 speaks with its audience as equals; colloquial vocabulary and sarcastic phrases both work to create an image of a 'silly Other' who doesn't understand the obvious truth. As a result, most characters in Channel 1 reports are common people. *Rossiya 24* follows a different track: when commenting on the Ukrainian crisis, it interviews experts and officials who are claimed to possess exclusive knowledge. When people with radical points of view are given voice, the channel tries to distance itself from them (e.g. *Rossiya 24* 2017).

Reports are always full of details and multiple; even in 2017 some days witness 3 and more Ukrainian reports being issued. Compared with the German media that only make a sketchy description of the Ukrainian events, *Rossiya 24* reports seem to be more effective in representing their views as a ‘broad picture’. The information is given in a way that marks it as ‘objective’ – and the inevitable interpretations are more implicit than by the German media. However, there is at least one method that makes the interpretative part of the reports visible: similar to Channel 1, *Rossiya 24* stigmatizes the Ukrainian state as fascist. The comparison of the today’s events with the Great Patriotic War reaches its peak when the journalists interview a veteran of the war who claims that he saw the current Ukrainian heroes wearing fascist uniform near Stalingrad. “Today the Ukrainian history needs to be protected. When the black is represented as white, and enemies are celebrated as heroes. When the Georgian ribbon, a symbol of victory over fascism, is called a sign of aggression. And a swastika is demonstrated in the center of Kiev, at Sofia square” – concludes the journalist (*Rossiya 24* 2016).

Thus, once again a Russian mass medium is (re)producing an image of Russia as a guardian of the truth. Nevertheless, in this case the ‘we’ concept is formulated more precisely. Special attention is given to the idea of ‘*Russkii mir*’ based on both ethnic and linguistic commonality. Quoting the speeches of Vladimir Putin, Konstantin Kosachev and Sergey Lavrov made during the Congress of compatriots, *Rossiya 24* outlines the following two key concepts: (1) in a situation when an anti-Russian 'information war' is led, the compatriots might become a part of our winning a 'geopolitical

game' and (2) people outside Russia should be sure that we would protect their interests (Rossiya 24 2015).

In 2014 when the Ukrainian conflict was about to reach its peak, Rossiya 24 told the stories of former compatriots who came from the countries of Western Europe (including Germany) to “write the truth about the war” for the European audience. “I feel so mournful about the events happening here, Russians are being killed”; “This is my land, these are my people. When they are hurt, I am hurt, too” – say the returnees (Rossiya 24 2014). Thus, in both reports the former compatriots are encouraged to keep the solidarity with ‘*Russkii mir*’ (with Ukraine being an integral part thereof) and resist the aggression *started* by outer forces against Russia. This case demonstrates, how differently the Ukrainian events might be perceived. Rossiya 24 intertwines them into the chain of equivalence defined as ‘Western offensive against Russia’, while FOCUS represents a group of media that advocates a contrary position: an offensive was initiated by Russia in order to destabilize the West.

A German viewer might also pay attention to a specific role prescribed to Germany in the discourse (re)produced by Rossiya 24. Whereas the West (the USA plus the EU) is generally described in negative terms, Germany is holding a privileged position. An interesting example thereof can be found in the comments on Germany’s reaction to the ‘Liza case’ Thus, Steinmeier accused Lavrov of intervention into internal affairs and advised Russian authorities to avoid using the situation “for the aims of propaganda”. Rossiya 24 gives an unexpectedly moderate reaction, claiming that although Steinmeier gave in to emotions, he has good relations with Lavrov, and the close ties between Russia and Germany are still kept in place (Rossiya 24 2016). At the same time, the alleged ‘close ties’ don’t prevent the channel from (re)producing the discourse of Russians in Germany being ignored (e.g. Rossiya 24 2016).

5.2.2.4 Ekho Moskvyy

The discourses (re)produced by oppositional radio-station Ekho Moskvyy differ from those typical for state-owned media. Although certain characteristics liken them to those of Western media – for instance, the authors claim that Kremlin pursues an aggressive policy both in Ukraine and in the Middle East to suppress discontent in Russia (Veller 2017) – the station makes different accents when discussing Ukraine. Whereas the leading German media approach foreign politics as an independent sphere, Ekho Moskvyy refuses to analyze it independently from internal issues.

For both the guests and journalists of the station, the matter of the Ukrainian crisis consists in the infringed freedom of speech in Russia. The attack on this freedom is said to be based on two main mechanisms. First, asserts Ekho Moskvyy, the TV propaganda is ‘zombifying’ their compatriots and,

therefore, leading to a general degradation of the Russian society (Zhuravleva & Gusarov 2016). Unlike some of their German colleagues, Ekho Moskvyy journalists avoid dismantling individual TV items. Their criticism is formulated in general phrases; a member of a 'we' collective is represented as a person who shouldn't be explained why those videos are falsified.

Secondly, thoughtful and critical citizens (i.e. 'we' as formulated by Ekho Moskvyy) are claimed to face unprecedented pressure that prevents them from expressing divergent points of view (Larina 2014, Petrovskaya & Larina 2014). "Russia is leaving the track to civilization that all the world is following. Russia is staying alone" – concludes one of the guests (Parkhomenko 2015). In this sense, 'we-ness' is associated with the Western choice and understandings similar to European ones. At the same time, militaristic values praised by other journalists are represented in a negative way (Ekho Moskvyy 2017).

The station makes a unique type of references to Russophonic communities, including the Russophones in Germany. Thus, it gives voice to people who claim that "90% of [Russophones] managed to get used to the new reality' and their growing political activities are a consequence of a 'growing civic consciousness'" (Nemtsova 2017). Interestingly, this normalization of the group is added by an assertion that the situation in Germany (and Europe in general) is far from being as complicated as described by Russian media. Once again, Russophonic Germans are represented as having an immunity to 'Putin's propaganda'. Thus, no more than 15% of them are said to share Russian understandings of the 'Liza case' (Naryshkin 2016)

5.2.2.5 RT (Russia Today)

Accused of being one of the most dangerous instruments of 'hostile propaganda' (RT 2016a), RT follows a track different from that of the mainstream Russian media, when it comes to discussing the situation in Ukraine. Emotional vocabulary, typical for such media as Channel 1 or Rossiya 1, gives way to more reserved descriptions based on expert comments. However, the total amount of technical details is several times smaller than that provided by Rossiya 24 – in this sense, the RT 'we-ness' is based on being immune to falsification, rather than knowing all the facts.

RT claims to play a role of a mass medium that gives voice to those telling an inconvenient truth. Thus, it often comes up with reprints of critical articles issued by Western mass media (cf. RT 2016b, 2016c, 2016f) and leads it often campaign unmasking anti-fake forces. For instance, RT demonstrates that the Ukrainian Stopfake.org website is financed by the British and American governments (RT 2016d).

The whole concept of information warfare is inserted into a more general narrative describing the East-West conflict:

Even after the collapse of the Soviet Union an unofficial East-West confrontation has never lost its urgency. It has become obvious recently, when the situation in Ukraine made NATO return to its 'keep the Russians out, the Americans in, and the Germans down' rhetoric. [...] NATO is, above all, a military alliance of the Western civilization. (RT 2014)

In this case, Russia's leaving the Western track of development that was criticized by Ekho Moskvy, is represented as a normal state of affairs. Russia has never been a part of the West, claims RT, and the Ukrainian crisis has only made it obvious. Similarly to Ekho Moskvy and the German mainstream media, RT sees the Russian agenda as the key one in the Ukrainian crisis; discussing Ukraine, thus, means referring to Russia. Nevertheless, the stream of information that it provides, is far less limited than by most Western media: in 2014 and 2015 the media published more than 5 articles on the Ukrainian topic a day.

At least one important characteristic differs RT from all the Russian mainstream media. Thus, RT platform embraces *InoTV*, a mass medium that publishes reprints of articles issued in Western states. Sometimes the latter represent views different from the channel's position, however, no refuting comments are given (cf. InoTV 2015a, 2015b, 2016b). Such an approach might be quite effective in providing an effect of truth. The channel represents its position in a way that doesn't require strong words to be defended; giving opposing opinions without arguments against is already a strong claim.

As for the Russophones in Germany, no specific references are made to this group. The 'Liza case' is mentioned in a very restrained manner, most comments concentrate on the official position of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation (RT 2016g). At the same time, the narrative of internal splits in Germany is applied. RT asserts that more and more people in Germany feel unheard by the politicians and the Russophonic community is just one of the politically invisible groups that are, quite logically, attracted by the right forces (RT 2016c, 2016e, InoTV 2016a).

5.3 Russophones' identities during the Ukrainian crisis

After giving a general characteristic of a discursive background that was formed during the Ukrainian crisis, the question of influence that it (might) have had on the Russophones in Germany can be raised again. Thus, my analysis has demonstrated that the group faces an intensive discursive pressure exerted by multiple and often conflicting sides. In the most general sense, the narrative dominating within the German-language societal space can be formulated as 'attacking Russia', where the

Ukrainian events are represented as a part of a general Kremlin's aggression carried out on multiple fronts. Therefore, 'we-ness' in its different variations is formulated on the basis of 'othering' Russia. Whenever openly referred to, Russophones in Germany are represented as Kremlin's (potential) allies, who consciously avoided being integrated and now gravitate towards destructive forces supported by Moscow.

On the contrary, the discourse of mainstream Russophonic media is structured by the concept of 'justice'. Telling their audiences a story of 'aggressive West' that disrespects Russia's interests and challenges its diverging choices, Russian mainstream media refer to an indefinite group of 'justice-seekers' that also includes former compatriots. The narrative of Russophones' being unheard in their states is applied, too. Consequently, I can assume that the mainstream Russian media *indirectly* encourage Russophonic communities to search for alternative forces that would heed their voices and their truths. However, the main audience of the Russian mainstream media is, quite logically, an internal one. Here the incumbent government is constructed as a defender of 'justice' and stability, while the Western countries are represented as a territory of chaos.

The discourses dominating in Russian and German sociopolitical spaces are being added and challenged by other discursive formations: e.g. by the oppositional discourses circulating in the respective countries. For instance, the Russophonic discourses of this type challenge the claim that the Russian government defends the truth; to a certain extent, the narratives that they reproduce are consonant with the dominant German ones, but with a specific reference to the Russian audience. Unlike Russian oppositional discourses that make an attempt to include Western countries into the common 'we-ness', German oppositional discourses are primarily based on othering Russia. Thus, although certain models of Russia's policy are evaluated as worth being followed, their 'we-ness' is still formulated on a German basis.

Before proceeding to the identification issues, I would like to once again emphasize a limited character of my analysis. Thus, Russophones are the group that embraces people coming from several post-Soviet states. As a result, their national identifications and the sources of information they rely on, might not be associated with Russia. Furthermore, the group is influenced by representations formulated at subnational, supranational and global level. When drawing specific conclusions on identification processes, I assume that Russophonic and German discourses play the key role in their construction. Therefore, introducing additional discursive layers might constitute a basis of further research.

After holding a set of interviews and analyzing the Russophonic social communication spaces (e.g. online spaces with user-generated contents, printed media and materials of organized communities), I found out several tendencies characterizing the patterns of identification of the Russophonic community during the Ukrainian crisis. To begin with, a dividing line between Russians and Ukrainians is being constructed. Whereas before 2014 the Ukrainian ‘we-ness’ was mostly (re)produced by the Ukrainian-speaking communities (cf. Hata skraju), the beginning of the conflict has brought the idea of internal differences into the Russophonic ones. It should be noted that although those divisions are formally defined in ethnical terms, the dichotomies that they constitute, are often non-ethnical. Interviewee Andrej (36, ethnic Ukrainian) implicitly raises this issue:

“There are Russians in Germany who are very good people, and there are those who watch one channel – for [such a person] we, Ukrainians, are wrong when we try to remove our corrupted government”.

Answering the question of whether he faced any hostility in Germany because of speaking Russian, Victor (25, originally comes from Donezk), told me a story of politically inspired misunderstandings with his former compatriot:

“When I was a student, there was a guy from Kiev, one year younger...he avoided having contacts with people from Russia, including me and another guy from Donetsk. I think it happened because of politics, as when we started to contact I realized that he shared quite anti-Russian views”.

Similar idea of a new Ukrainianness being constructed as a political concept can be traced in the significant online comment of Olga, a Ukrainian Russophone living in Germany:

Glory to Ukraine! Glory to the Heroes! I was born at Poltavshchyna [...]. I have been living in Germany for almost 20 years and bemoaning my country, looking at it from the outside. [...] When I emigrated in the hard 1990s, we were afraid of expressing our opinions when queueing for sugar and butter. We were persecuted by the police, drained by racketeers [...] Nothing has changed for the last 20 years! Everything has become more expensive and horrifying! Your vision¹¹ must have lost sharpness if you don't see [what] you live in, [whom] you obey! It is an exploit that people decided to rise against those tyrants! (Schapovalova 2014).

Thus, in all the cases we can trace how the Ukrainianness is formulated through othering 'Russianness', 'Sovietness' or 'non-Westerness'. In this case 'Russianness' (or any other variation of this concept) is

¹¹ Here the commentator is referring to the author of a personal blog, a writer living in Russia

often perceived as a phenomenon transcending the state borders and embracing the opposition to modernization. At least some of the Russophones are thought of as the bearers of these ideas – and therefore represented in a negative way. An anecdote about a Ukrainian who refused to eat a cake brought by a Russian is circulating both in Russia and among Russophones living outside the country – and in both cases, it gathers lots of ‘likes’, indicating the existing tensions (e.g. Podlushano Germaniya 2016b, 2017).

An analysis of comments in the main social networks demonstrates that the ‘Ukrainian’ posts usually attract a number of ‘supervisors’ who seem to either consolidate the dominating discourses, or reinforce the group’s ties with the oppositional ones. In the most general sense, those commentators can be characterized as follows: (1) they indicate either Ukraine or Russia (in some cases – the Baltic states) as a country of origin in their profiles; (2) their comments are aimed at shaming the interlocutors for the opinions they express; (3) an effect of shaming is multiplied by the application of words with deep emotional connotations.

A significant example of a supervising comment can be found in *Poslushano Germaniya* public page on *Vkontakte* platform:

...I was born in Ukraine, and we lived in Ukraine, and then some people came and told us: “There's no more Ukraine here, it is Luhansk People's Republic”, and I have to go and fight for the LPR, and tomorrow the Whites will come and say that it is their territory, and then the Reds will come, and then the Greens [...] Would I have to fight for all of them? [...] This emigration cattle who was given a chance to come to Germany, they think they are Aryans. You are refugees, but [it was easier for you] to get here. So, don't forget who you are and where you come from. And when German taxpayers start thinking they are Russian patriots – I cannot stop laughing (Podlushano Germaniya 2016a)

Comments indicating the belonging of concrete users to any organized communities are quite rare in social networks (an example motivating people to participate in a pro-Russian demonstration: *Russkie v Germanii ot 16 do 25* : 2014). On the contrary, printed media demonstrate more evidence of being connected with some organized ‘supervising’ structures. A visible contrast between different issues of *'Berlinskii Telegraf'*, a Russophonic paper published in Germany, gives certain grounds to think that the edition belongs to this category.

Thus, the first issue printed in 2014 draws a parallel between the Winter War of 1939-1940 and the current Ukrainian crisis. The author applies titles with specific connotations (e.g. “Helsinki - the

mother of Russian cities”, “Crimean variant”, “Finnish Izvarino”) and transmits the narrative of habitual Russian lie. Furthermore, Russia is represented as the USSR that has changed the name, while the latter is recurrently compared with Nazi Germany. “The USSR take out the equipment of concentration camps [...] The equipment from Germany is still massively used by Russian enterprises, however, it is unknown whether the German equipment from concentration camps is still applied in Russian prisons”. (Berlinskii Telegraf 2014 : 4-5, 11)

The same issue tries to expose the Russian representations of the “Slavyansk drama” by attacking the heroic images of the fighters: “using the fleeting high feelings of impressionable population, a group of people captures the town and all its businesses. This all is made under the pretense of protection. [...] but the heroes have a specific manner of fighting – they hide behind perambulators and hospitals” (ibidem : 12). The first five issues of the paper publish advertisements calling to donate to the Ukrainian refugees and soldiers (Berlinskii Telegraf 2014 : 21; 2015a : 26). However, the 6th issue marks a radical change in the editor's policy. It starts with an interview with the Russian Consul, wherein the interviewer calls the comparison between the ideologies of Nazi Germany and the USSR “absurd” (Berlinskii Telegraf 2015b : 8). Pro-Ukrainian materials that could be found in all the previous issues disappear; none of them can be read in further issues either. In 2016 Berlinskii Telegraf once again comes up with an article “prepared in cooperation with the Russian Consulate” (2016 : 12-13). At the same time, this young paper experiences a great de-politicization and returns to the topics typical for the Russophonic media printed in Germany: healthcare, entertainment, local services etc. Such a radical change can be interpreted as a sign of direct intervention from the Russian side.

Aimed at reproducing the transboundary solidarity (i.e. constructing state-transcending chains of equivalence), such steps might, however, induce the growing feeling of insecurity among the members of the group. For instance, interviewee Marina (47, *Russlanddeutsche*) expressed her fears in the following way:

“I know that Russophones are afraid here, because you can face difficulties finding a job, if the information leaks out”.

In a certain sense, the representatives of the group do share the narrative of 'intervening Russia' that controls the events far behind its borders – a narrative that is actively reproduced by the German media (cf. FOCUS online, Bild, Spiegel online). Although the respondents often refute this notion, their behavior indicates the opposite. The respondents break off the phrases when they feel that their words might have harmful consequences. More than 70% of my interview requests weren't answered at all;

several respondents revoked their consent right before the interview. Some cases of unexpected refusal followed when the German media published a sensational information that the Turkish Secret Service was spying on its citizens living in Germany (for details see: Spiegel 2017b) – although the connection of those refusal with the mentioned events is still to be proved.

The insecurity is deepened by the intra-group ‘supervision’ that can be observed in social spaces, too. Here one of the most frequent types of the comments embraces the narrative ‘the Ukrainian events shouldn’t concern us’. A typical comment can be found in a Russophonic group under a video devoted to Ukraine:

“This group is for Russophones in Germany...and this fellow appeared here with a video to aggravate people again!” (*Zhiviyom v Germanii - Novosti i Politika 2016*)

One of my interview requests in Vkontakte was reacted to in a similar way:

“The Russian population of Germany [doesn't care] what kind of conflicts happen in Ukraine, Kenia or Alpha Centauri” (*Podlushano Germaniya 2017*).

Thus, an attempt to establish some kind of inner discipline within the group is made. Those who transmit this narrative, function as the consolidators of ‘Germanness’ within the group of the Russophones. Unlike those who work to establish transboundary chains of equivalence, internal ‘supervisors’ avoid temporal references with the past: what does matter, according to them, is the German present. The paradox of such comments consists in the background they are written against. An overwhelming majority of the commentators participating in online discussions devoted to Ukraine, seem to be highly engaged with the topic. Moreover, in some spaces (especially in groups located within *Odnoklassniki* website) such discussions attract more commentators than others.

An interesting step towards conciliating the existing interest to the Ukrainian topic and the task of reinforcing the political identification with Germany, was made by ‘*Russkaya Germaniya*’ paper. Along with publishing the letters of their readers embracing contrary points of view (e.g. *Russkaya Germaniya 2014b*), the paper comes up with the following statement:

Dear friends, we are neither for the Reds, nor for the Whites. We are not on side of emotions, we are not for division, but for the unification instead. [...] Of course, many people here associate us with Russia. For many years, they were jealous because of its richness, its successes in economy and sport. Now someone might reproach us with Russian military and political activities of the latter days. But those compliments reproaches are not for us. It is a

trace of a myth, of a fable, nothing more. We are people of the Russian culture, Russian-German, European traditions. But not people of the Russian policy and Russian-German relations (Russkaya Germaniya 2014a).

This quotation uncovers the dichotomy that, from my point of view, plays a key role in the identification process of Russophones in Germany – the one of culture vs. politics. The journalists of Russkaya Germaniya actively try to reinforce the ‘cultural’ ties between the Russophones: thus, most of the instruments they apply, correspond to the scheme described by Laclau & Mouffe. Comparisons here (*the Reds* and *the Whites* to describe the conflicting sides) are used to establish the unity and stigmatize the ‘civil war’ among the Russophones in Germany provoked by the Ukrainian events. Constructing the dichotomy of ‘emotions-facts’ (where being emotional has negative connotations), the paper makes its contribution into supervising the internal discipline. Furthermore, it works to constitute a ‘we-ness’ that is both divided from Russia and vaguely described “some people” who perceive the representatives of the group as Russians. At the same time, these are different types of othering. Whereas connections with Russia are emotionally denied through the nomination ‘fable’ (which makes Russophones a subject of decision-making), the German ‘they’ is given a privilege of defining what is cultural and what is political. It means that the subjectivity belongs to a transcendental actor whom the group is not similar to, but wants to join.

This shift of focus reproduces one of the most typical patterns characterizing the German media. Thus, along with the above-mentioned attempts to tell the story of multidirectional Russian aggression, most German mass media tie the political orientation of the group with the issue of integration. Thus, being prone to ‘Russian disinformation’ is interpreted as a sign of non-effective integration. The representatives of the group seem to discern this signal: not without reason does *Die Einheit* the first *Spätaussiedler* political party, that actively criticizes the German policy in Ukraine in Russophonic social spaces (e.g. PolitWera 2016) and reproduces the narratives typical for Russian media (e.g. D'yakonov 2017, Rempel 2017a), come up in the German space with a program that bypasses those issues (Die Einheit 2017).

Russophones seem to perceive the concept of integration (without strict reference to their own story) as a positive one: thus, the ‘Einheit’ members emphasize the need to organize obligatory integration courses for new-comers (ibidem). In this case, the party is using the anti-immigrant (anti-refugee, anti-Muslim) rhetoric quite popular among the Russophones in Germany. However, they might also judge other Russophones through the lens of integration. While conducting the interviews, I found out that Russian-speaking students and young specialists often participate in shaming (i.e. accusing of improper behavior, denying the right to belong to ‘we’ collective) ‘non-integrating’ representatives of

their linguistic community. A vague concept of what integration implies was (re)produced by Valeriya (25, Russophone from Ukraine):

Many of the Russophonic immigrants don't try to get integrated into the environment, although they are Europeans and Christians (most of them)... I mean, that they try to have contacts within their own company [...] although they often speak German [...] they often date and marry people coming from Russophonic states. There are, of course, Russian shops, Russian discos that they attend. I don't think it's negative, but if they had come to Germany, they should've got integrated.

Telling about the groups within the Russophonic community, Victor (25, Russophone from Ukraine) openly divided them into 'good' and 'bad' subgroups depending on their ability to get integrated:

People like me, who came to study and work, are often good integrated. They sometimes speak German almost without an accent, and it is difficult to distinguish them from Germans. Another cluster [embraces] young women who came to get married. They have difficulties integrating, as they often speak German at the minimum level. [...] They are often the least integrated.

This kind of shaming is quite similar to what was previously defined as 'internal supervision'. The 'supervisors' consider being 'integrated' a positive characteristic, where the integration is expected to satisfy the receiving society, and the borders of what integration implies are unclear and defined by the latter. Bringing this concept in line with the above-mentioned dichotomy of cultural vs. political identification, we might interpret integration as "keeping the (situationally) correct level of cultural and political identification". In this sense, a receiving society usually requires full renunciation of political identification with the country of origin, while the permissible cultural identification (as well as the understanding of what can be called culture) are regulated by social contexts.

The set of interviews has demonstrated an interesting tendency among the representatives of the group: whereas those who came to Germany in the early 1990s tend to define their identification within the framework of 'Russia-German' dichotomy, migrants of further waves tend to name other types of identification (e.g. 'European') or even have difficulties to define one. Although this tendency is still to be confirmed by wider interview material, it can be assumed that the changing patterns correlate with the development of integration processes in Europe. In this case, similarly to the above mentioned 'Ukrainianness', 'Europeanness' is understood as a political, a choice of modernity instead of classical 'nation-state' identification.

What, however, unites different groups of Russophones in Germany, is a general skepticism towards media discourses. In this sense, the group demonstrates results different from the nation-wide statistics. According to the 2014 Zeit research, 47% of the German respondents believed that the mass media represent political events in a one-sided manner (<http://www.zeit.de/politik/deutschland/2014-12/umfrage-medien-russland-putin-kriegsgefahr>). On the contrary, almost 100% of the Russophonic respondents whom I contacted with between 2016 and early 2017 expressed doubts on whether mass media can be trusted. A typical position thereon was formulated by Irina (23, Russophonic student):

"The more languages you know – the more news you can read. To tell the truth, I don't trust news, as they only give 10% of information. Other things are only said to make people trust [something] that is beneficial. [...] Mass media work to portray themselves in the most favorable light and help the state."

Paradoxically, even those who take a definitely pro-Russian stance accuse Russophonic media of exaggerations. For instance, interviewee Elena (36, Jewish Russophone) who reproduced the main narratives of the Russian mainstream media (e.g. the Nazi character of the Ukrainian government) and even accused Putin of not sending forces to 'protect' Eastern Ukraine, expressed surprising skepticism on Russian mass communication:

"Ukrainian, Russian and German mass media represent information differently – depending on what is beneficial to them. [...] Ukrainian media garble [all the facts]. German media can be trusted a bit more. And Russian media exaggerate it a little bit."

Against such background, Russophones tend to represent themselves as the most critical citizens who have access both to alternative points of view represented in Russian media and stories of eye-witness (relatives and friends who stayed in Ukraine). What, however, is even more important, is a general feeling of disappointment that seems to dominate among older migrants. "Yes, we watch news from both sides, we understand it all – but who needs our understanding?" – told me one of the respondents, 47-year-old Nikolaj. So, it can be argued that Russophones feel that their opinions are marginalized and their access to the 'truth' is stigmatized within the society they live in. In this sense, the Ukrainian crisis can hardly be called a point that induced this understanding, but it definitely marked one of the most prominent peaks in the process.

After living years within the system that denies a possibility of immigrants' civic ties with the country of origin, the representatives of the group have a full potential of being integrated into the normal political system of the receiving society. However, such a step requires that no massive attacks on their

cultural identification and specific views are undertaken. The refusal of the German society to follow this track has led to the transformation of the most marginalized part of the group (above all, first-wave immigrants who failed to get rid of the characteristics sensed as Russian) into the potential electorate of the right-wing forces.

Although right-wing media indicate relatively low support from the side of Russophones (Junge Freiheit 2016) and some points of the *Alternative für Deutschland* program might contradict the interests of the group¹², there are several points that make the connection of the Russophonic community with the right forces a topic to pay attention to. To begin with, the AfD made the most successful attempt in the 2010s to directly refer to the representatives of the group. Thus, the party came up with a Russian translation of its program (Alternative für Deutschland / Brandenburg 2014) and nominated candidates who speak good Russian (Sputnik 2017). Secondly, an analysis of the group's online communities demonstrates that most politically oriented organizations of Russophones formed within recent years are either associated with the party, or share similar understandings (e.g. *Russlanddeutsche für AfD*; *Vertriebene, Aussiedler und deutsche Minderheiten in der AfD*; *Russlanddeutsche Front*; to a certain extent – *die Einheit*). Those communities that try to 'pacify' the group (see more at: Der Tagesspiegel 2016) and protect it from being "used by external forces" (e.g. 'Vision' in Marzahn or 'Lyra' in Lichtenberg) enjoy far less support among Russophones. Furthermore, the fact that they formulate their aims in terms of integration, but exclude the 'political' side thereof might play against them in the changing situation.

The character of the AfD itself should also be mentioned. Thus, a party can be evaluated as a populist force in Laclau's terminology, inasmuch as it tries to attract voters by uniting a plurality of unsatisfied individual demands under an umbrella of 'empty' rhetoric – primarily, anti-immigration one. In a normal political climate, the protests against the incumbent government's immigration policy with a high probability wouldn't have gained such a great importance. However, the imposition of a discursive taboo on anti-immigration opinions¹³ has led to the transformation of such statements into a perfect 'empty signifier'. The use of populist rhetoric attracts marginalized forces whose attempts to make their opinions heard generally failed within the 'normal' political spectrum – and the silent part of the Russophonic community might become one of them.

¹² For instance, the far-right party supports the concept of *Leitkultur* ('dominating culture') instead of multiculturalism, i.e. insists on assimilation practices vis-à-vis new-comers (see more: https://www.alternativefuer.de/wp-content/uploads/sites/111/2017/01/2016-06-20_afd-kurzfassung_grundsatzprogramm_webversion.pdf)

¹³ Thus, anti-immigration forces are often accused of promoting racism and fascism (e.g. <http://www.zeit.de/gesellschaft/zeitgeschehen/2015-01/pegida-rassismus-einwanderung-rente-fachkraeftemangel>)

After bringing in a thesis of the group's growing right-wing preferences, I would like to once again emphasize: the Ukrainian conflict was not a trigger that induced this tendency, but it has definitely accelerated the process. What that makes the Ukrainian conflict a special case is the two-layered character of its representations in both German and Russophonic mass communication. The first – and the less developed – layer describes this conflict as a limited regional confrontation. At this stage, humanitarian issues and local dynamics are paid attention to; the 'we-ness' formulated through such discourses deals with a role of a detached observer. However, there's also the second layer that represents the conflict as a manifestation of a global clash between two 'we-communities' that the Russophones might belong to: Russia and the West.

As it was stated previously (see: Russophones in Germany: between 1990s and 2014), for the last twenty five years the German society has been conducting a step-be-step offensive on the identification of the Russophonic group. The space of 'cultural' identification has been shrinking through the extension of the 'political' sphere. The latter was stigmatized through the concept of 'non-integration' that was (re)produced by both intra- and extra-group actors. The dominance of the Ukrainian conflict's representations that constitute a notion of a global clash, has led to the articulation of the two-decades-long pressures directed against the Russophones in Germany. Nowadays the question of whether they should be treated as an internal threat is raised.

In a situation when the Russian discourses are often based on historical references, this type of experiences is further politicized. In 2015 Körber (2015 : 25) wrote: "The arrival of Russophonic Jews has changed the collective memory of the group, as [the Russophones] see the Great Patriotic war as its center, not the Holocaust". Indeed, the interviewees whom I worked with, indicated that historical experiences constitute an important part of their identities. Thus, Elena (36, Jewish Russophone) claimed that Russianness is about "celebrating May, 9¹⁴ and February, 23¹⁵", while Sofiya (27, Russophonic wife of a German citizen) emphasized the importance of patriotic emotions condensed around the figure of Juri Gagarin, the first cosmonaut to fly into outer space.

At the same time, the discourses concentrating on history seem to have failed the task of creating a stable transnational community. The initial tide of historical debates in Russophonic social spaces began to abate. Signs of dissatisfaction with the dominance of historical discourses can be traced in Russian internal spaces, too (cf. Dolya 2017). Outside the Russian territory, the potential of such narratives is seriously challenged by the need to deal with societies with other dominant discourses.

¹⁴ Victory Day, a holiday devoted to the victory of the Soviet Union over Nazi Germany in the Great Patriotic War.

¹⁵ Defender of the Fatherland Day, a holiday celebrated in several post-Soviet countries. It was first celebrated during the Russian Civil War and was initially devoted to the establishment of the Red Army. Nowadays is often referred to as the "Men's Day"

Thus, the ‘orientation in the past’ gives the former compatriots no clear hopes for their future lives, which most of them intend to connect with Germany. In this sense, the far-right discourses that combine abstract ideas of truth-seeking with current political issues have a greater potential.

The above-mentioned disillusionment on the attempts to make their views heard, is further poisoned by intra-group conflicts among Russophones in Germany. Although the Russian representations of the Ukrainian conflict have given an impact to the discursive unification of the group (thus, in 2014-2015 the reproduction of Russian media narratives was especially active in the corresponding social spaces), the internal disagreements prevented a stable community from being established. The Jewish respondents whom I worked with, often accused *Russlanddeutsche* of being “uneducated” and not critical enough towards what mass media say. On the other hand, at least one of the interviewed repatriates expressed her annoyance over Jews’ attempts to “repeat everything that the Germans want them to”.

5.4 Discussion

One of the major features that define the place of the current research among other studies consists in its cross-group character. By bringing in the discursive background, I demonstrated that different groups of Russophones face similar issues. At the same time, my study was not structured as a comparative one (as it was made by Baerwolf, 2006; Kurennoi, 2005 or Verschinin, 2011). The decision to take several subgroups into consideration was primarily based on my presupposition that the hegemonic intervention undertaken by the Russian side, might have led to unification tendencies among the representatives of the group – which has only proved to be partly true.

Throughout the research, it has become clear that the concept of integration does function as one of the nominators structuring the identification processes among the Russophones in Germany. However, my interpretation of this concept differs from the perception of Savoskul (2006) who argues that one's ability to build into the receiving society *objectively* predefines the person's identification. Thus, I argue that the integration is not an objective characteristic, but a socially constructed dividing line between the 'socially accepted' behavior of immigrants and the 'reproached' one. In other words, I try to break the 'good/bad immigrant' dichotomy that is both implicitly present in sociopolitical communications and in some research (e.g. by Savoskul 2006, Kiehl 2009). Following this track, I demonstrated how this stigmatization might influence the Russophones' identification and political choices, thereby adding the conclusions made by Münz & Ohliger (2004) and Zinn-Thomas (2006).

My research also makes an indirect contribution to the Esser-Elwert debates on *Binnenintegration* (internal integration). I claim that being denied normal civic participation pushes the group to the edge

of political spectrum – a position that is somehow consonant to the arguments of Georg Elwert (1982) who emphasized the positive influence of migrants' own organizations on their adaption in the receiving society. By adapting Laclau and Mouffe's thesis that both the logic of equivalence and the logic of difference work for identity construction, I emphasize the potential of far-right forces in attracting the unsatisfied individual demands under the 'umbrella' of empty slogans. It means that, despite the difference between some *AfD* rhetoric and the demands of the group, such forces still can count on the group's support. However, my reference to this topic shouldn't be perceived as a final conclusion – what I do instead is outlining the prospects for future research that might deal with a rather understudied topic of the political preferences of Russophones in Germany.

As for the media aspects of my research, the current thesis can be evaluated as an attempt to bring in the textuality into the immigrants' media studies. Thus, I tried to make a step from the classical 'assimilation-pluralism' paradigm dominating within ethnic media research (Oh 2016 : 264-266) to the poststructuralist understandings of the mass media roles. Following the ideas of Chantal Mouffe, I regard mass media as one of the main fields where hegemony is created and reproduced, but also can be challenged (Carpentier & Cammaerts 2006 : 969). No specific characteristics of individual mass media were given, which differs my research from the previous studies (e.g. Smolyarova 2012, Kurennoi 2005). Furthermore, my reference to the Ukrainian crisis is only by the task of analyzing the identification tendencies that are context-bound and cannot be studied without a strictly defined framework. To a certain extent, this choice functioned as 'updating' the previous research in the view of the latest tendencies.

6. CONCLUSION

The specific patterns of representing the Ukrainian crisis that are characteristic of German mainstream media, on the one hand, and Russian mainstream media, on the other hand, have created a situation, when the Russophones in Germany found themselves stuck between two conflicting discursive formations. The current thesis set an aim of finding out the influence exerted by the Ukrainian events on the group's identification processes.

The analysis has demonstrated that both the German and Russian mass communication discourses represent the conflict through a two-layered model. The first – and the less developed – layer describes this conflict as a limited regional confrontation. At this stage, humanitarian issues and local dynamics are paid attention to; the 'we-ness' formulated through such discourses deals with a role of a detached observer. The second one represents the conflict as a manifestation of a global clash between two 'we-communities' that the Russophones might belong to: Russia and the West. Within the second layer, the German mainstream media spaces are dominated by the notion of 'attacking Russia', where the Ukrainian events are represented as a part of a general Kremlin's aggression carried out on multiple fronts. Whenever openly referred to, Russophones in Germany are represented as Kremlin's (potential) allies, who consciously avoided being integrated and now gravitate towards destructive forces supported by Moscow.

For their part, Russian media draw a picture of 'aggressive West' that disrespects Russia's interests and challenges its diverging choices. In an attempt to resist this pressure, Russian mainstream social communications refer to an indefinite group of 'justice-seekers' that also includes former compatriots. This appeal is supported by multiple references to historical events – especially those connected with World War II. Therefore, the community that they try to construct, acquires a strong orientation into the past, but gives the former compatriots no clear hopes for their future lives, which most of them intend to connect with Germany.

Although during the first two years of the crisis Russophonic social media actively reproduced dominant Russian narratives, 2016 observed a general decline in this type of behavior. Such a tendency can be explained by both the limited importance of the conflict for those who permanently live in Germany, and the general feeling of marginalization experienced by the representatives of the group. Thus, after being included into the unity of the 'truth-seekers' promoted by the Russian media, the Russophones in Germany stay isolated within the community of distant like-minded people.

The roots of the group's marginalization within the German society can be found in the early 1990s. Those years, negative representations of *Russlanddeutsche* and Russophonic Jews – two main subgroups of the Russophones – became dominant. Whereas the *Spätaussiedler* (repatriates) were shamed for their failure to get assimilated, Russophonic Jews got accused of forging documents that affirm their Jewish descent. Despite the formal nominations, both groups were recurrently referred to as 'Russians' in their everyday lives. In this sense, 'Russianness' was socially constructed as a negative characteristic that should be got rid of through the process of 'integration'. This attack on the specific identification of the group is referred by me through the dichotomy of 'cultural vs. political'. Thus, I argue that the receiving society stigmatized the political identification with the country of origin and gradually limited the sphere of permissible cultural identification. To a certain extent, this process was strengthened by 'internal supervision', i.e. the intra-group actors who work to establish discipline within the community.

The groups' wish to follow public expectations restrained its organizational activities. Most organizations formed to defend the interests of the group members had to radically adapt their claims to the interests of the receiving society – therefore, a feeling of being unheard was growing among the Russophones. It has become clear throughout the thesis that the Ukrainian conflict was not a trigger that induced this tendency, but it has definitely accelerated the process. Being marginalized within the 'normal' political spectrum pushes the group towards far-right forces that present themselves as outsiders and base their programs on populist rhetoric. Although the current statistic (Junge Freiheit 2016) indicates that the support of the far-right party *Alternative für Deutschland* among Russophones is quite limited, the tendency should not be underestimated.

Answering the question of whether the representations of the Ukrainian conflict have led to the formation of a stable community, I have to state that it has not happened. The second option mentioned in my key research question turned out to be more realistic: despite the initial signs of (limited) unification, the group is currently facing growing internal divisions. One of the most remarkable splits can be observed between the Russophonic community in general and those Russophonic Ukrainians who supported Kiev's policy. New concept of 'Ukrainianness' was formulated through othering 'Russianness', 'Sovietness' or 'non-Westerness', where the latter were understood as the opposition to modernization. Furthermore, the conflict has further deepened the years-long internal splits between *Russlanddeutsche* and Russophonic Jews.

The research implies several directions to be developed in. Thus, it can grow into a broader comparative study that takes into consideration diverse social groups within the German society (e.g. Russophones and Turks; Russophones and people with no migration experience). However, this kind

research would require a specific discursive framework that should be associated with a case having utmost importance for both groups. Such a case might allegedly deal with the refugee issue that was recurrently mentioned by the respondents as influencing their identification. A different research track might be connected with the focus on far-right forces, the chains of equivalence that they construct and the unsatisfied groups that they work with. Both options have an immense potential as a basis of political strategies' elaboration, which can be used by both the governmental and foreign actors for their own aims.

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APPENDIX

Appendix 1

Interview questions¹⁶

1. Name (preferred pseudonym);
2. Age;
3. Occupation;
4. Education level;
5. Term of living in Germany;
6. Citizenship.
7. How often have you inquired about the Ukrainian events?
8. Which source(s) have you used to get information on the Ukrainian crisis?
9. Which mass media can be described as your main sources of information on the Ukrainian crisis? How can you describe the point of view reflected in these mass media?
10. Have you familiarized yourself with the alternative points of view on the Ukrainian crisis? Which sources of information have you used? How would you comment on their approaches?
11. How can you evaluate the recent policy of the Russian Federation in Ukraine? How do you evaluate the Crimean events? How do you personally evaluate the Euromaidan events? (in your own words)
12. Which side, from your point of view, bears the responsibility for unleashing the armed conflict in Eastern Ukraine? (in your own words)
13. Do you believe that Russian troops are/used to be present in Eastern Ukraine? If yes, how do you personally evaluate it?
14. How would you describe yourself? (e.g. Russian, German, Russlanddeutsche, Jew etc.) You may use several characteristics at a time.
15. If the respondent has described himself/herself as a «Russian»: what, from your point of view, being Russian is about?
16. Which groups do you mostly contact in your free time?
17. How would you characterize Russophones in Germany?
18. Which influence have the Ukrainian events exerted on your perception of Russia?
19. Have you faced situations since 2014, when you felt uncomfortable speaking Russian or telling someone you are Russian/you come from Russia? If yes, describe those situations.

Appendix 2

¹⁶ These are the key questions; their order and formulation might have varied. In some cases, not all the questions were asked

Respondents' general characteristic

Name	Age	Formal category
Larisa	46	Jewish Russophone
Valeriya	25	other Russophones; comes from Ukraine
Irina	23	other Russophones
Petr	N/A	other Russophones; comes from Ukraine
Ekaterina	23	Jewish Russophone
Sofiya	27	other Russophones
Dmitrij	N/A	Jewish Russophone
Victor	25	other Russophones; comes from Ukraine
Marina	47	<i>Russlanddeutsche</i>
Elena	36	Jewish Russophone
Andrej	36	other Russophones; comes from Ukraine
Nikolaj	47	<i>Russlanddeutsche</i>
Tamara	61	<i>Russlanddeutsche</i>
Mikhail	55	<i>Russlanddeutsche</i>
Vadim	33	other Russophones

Key quotations translated from Russian and German (original text)

Mass media quotations:

Eugen Litwinow interview (pp. 49-50): Solange wir in Kasachstan lebten, war mir nicht bewusst, dass meine Mutter deutsche Wurzeln hat. Als die UdSSR zusammenbrach und Kasachisch als Hauptsprache eingeführt werden sollte, sagten meine Eltern: Hier wollen wir nicht bleiben. Sie standen vor der Wahl: Entweder den Wurzeln meines Vaters nach Russland folgen oder eben denen meiner Mutter. (Mediendienst Integration 2014)

Georg Schmalz interview (p. 50): Moi predki vyekhali iz goroda nem. Wiesenburg / fr. Wissembourg (sejchas Frantsiya) na Ukrainu v selo Landau primerno v 1840 godu — gde i prozhili do prihoda kommunistov k vlasti. Posle raskulachivaniya i rasstrellov moih pradedov, sem'i i rodstvenniki byli razbrosany po vsemu sovetskomu gosudarstvu. [...] Nemetskomu yazyku menya nauchila babushka, do shkoly ya razgovarival na nemetskom v sem'e. Priekhav v Germaniyu, ya ponyal chto babushkin yazyk ostalsya na urovne 19 veka. [...] Ya sebya schitayu nemtsem — hotya nas nazyvayut russkimi nemtsami v Germanii. (Agentstvo politicheskikh novostei 2008)

Tamara Barabasch interview (p. 50): Die Leute, erzählt sie, hören meinen Namen, den Akzent, und sagen: Ach so, Sie sind Russin. [...] Wir dachten, wir kehren in die Heimat zurück und bleiben die Fremden. (Thüringer Allgemeine 2016)

FOCUS online article (p. 57): „Mir wurde klar, dass die Sowjetunion erkrankt ist. An einer tödlichen, unheilbaren Krankheit. Der Lähmung der Macht.“ Seit 14 Jahren versucht Putin alles, um diese Lähmung zu überwinden. Aber nicht im Sinne des Westens: Nicht den Mangel an Freiheit, Demokratie und Transparenz hält er für den größten Fehler der Sowjetunion - sondern dass Reformier Michail Gorbatschow das Regime der KPdSU gelockert hat. Demonstrationen, Aufruhr - sie haben damals in der DDR seine Welt zerstört. Und jetzt kamen sie wieder. In Kiew. Auf dem Majdan. (Reitschuster 2014)

Bild article (p. 58): Weil diese stillen Männer nie laut werden, weil sie in sanftem Ton von Brüderlichkeit und Frieden sprechen, weil sie – wie schon andere Diktatoren vor ihnen – immer, nur noch ein letztes Mal‘ territoriale Ansprüche erheben, fallen einige unter uns auf ihre Worte herein und finden sich mit ihrem aggressiven Treiben ab. (Reichelt 2017)

Bild article (p. 58): Der Moderator, dem Millionen Russen wöchentlich zuschauen, kommt zu dem Schluss: Merkel habe mit ihrer pro-amerikanischen und russland-feindlichen Politik „die Politik ihrer hervorragenden Vorgänger“ [...] „zerstört“. Denn im Gegensatz zu ihnen erkenne Angela Merkel nicht mehr, dass „ohne Russlands Wohlwollen weder ein vereintes Deutschland noch ein vereintes Europa gebaut werden kann“. (Röpcke 2017b)

Spiegel online article (p. 60): Wenn dort steht, von einer bestimmten Position sei "outgoing fire" registriert worden, dann ist klar, welche Seite schießt. Weitaus schwieriger ist es jedoch, zu benennen, wer im konkreten Fall die Schuld für die Eskalation trägt. Ein Schuss kann auch ein Abwehrmanöver sein [...]. In 90 Prozent der Fälle sind es die Separatisten, die uns behindern. Wir haben etwa große Probleme, an die russisch-ukrainische Grenze zu kommen. Das kann nur eines bedeuten: Es gibt dort etwas, das die Separatisten verbergen. (Gathmann 2016)

ZDF program (p. 63): ...uns, dem Publikum, den Zeitungslern, den Fernsehzuschauern ein Schwarzweißfilm vorgeführt wird, in dem alles was am negativen passiert, Herr Putin angelastet wird. Der Realität ist aber kein Schwarzweißfilm. Wir, der Westen, haben hier auch Interessen. Es wird immer so getan, als ob wir nur Demokratie, Freiheit und Menschenrechte auf der Fahne stehen hätten, und Putin will nur sein Reich expandieren, ist aggressiv, will Krieg und so... Das entspricht nicht der Realität. (ZDF 2014b)

Junge Freiheit article (p. 64): Aus westlich-amerikanischer Sicht trägt Rußland die Alleinschuld an der Eskalation des Ukraine-Konflikts zum unerklärten Krieg, aus russischer Sicht „der Westen“, genauer [...]. Hundert Jahre nach Ausbruch des Ersten Weltkriegs sollte sich indes herumgesprochen haben, daß es in Kriegen selten Alleinschuldige gibt, daß konkurrierende Mächte aber um so leichter aus einem lokalen Konflikt in eine umfassende Auseinandersetzung schlitern, je fester ihre politischen und militärischen Eliten davon überzeugt sind, nur ihr gutes Recht zu wahren und „alternativlos“ das Richtige zu tun. (Paulwitz 2014)

Pervyi kanal program (p. 67): V Rossii dazhe v hudshie vremena 90-h gosudarstvo sushchestvovalo, kak nekaya samotsennaya sushchnost', i nashi oligarhi pozitsionirovalis' otnositel'no gosudarstva. Na Ukraine nikakogo gosudarstva, pomimo ehtih oligarhov, ne bylo. (Pervyi kanal 2015a)

Rossiia 1 program (p. 68): Trageliya Ukraina sostoit ne tol'ko v ee geopoliticheskom i duhovnom krahe, segodnya ona fakticheski upravlyaetsya vneshnimi silami. <v pravitel'stve> net tekhn, kto prinimaet resheniya nezavisimo (Rojkov 2014)

RT article (p. 72): Dazhe posle raspada SSSR neofitsial'noe protivostoyanie «Vostok-Zapad» nikogda ne perestavalo byt' aktual'nym. Sovsem nedavno ehto protivostoyanie stalo ochevidnym - v svyazi s situatsiej, slozhivshejsya na Ukraine, NATO vnov' vzyalsya za ritoriku, kotoruyu v svoyo vremya pervyj general'nyj sekretar' al'yansa Gastings Lajonel Ismej vyrazil takimi slovami: «...uderzhivat' russkih v storone, amerikantsev vnutri, a nemtsev pod». [...] v pervuyu ochered' NATO – ehto voennaya organizatsiya zapadnoj tsivilizatsii. (RT 2014)

Russkaya Germaniya article (p. 78): Druz'ya-chitateli, my – ne za «krasnyh» i ne za «belyh». My – ne na storone ehmotzij, ne za razdelenie, a za edinenie. [...] Konechno, mnogie zdes' assotsiiruyut nas s Rossiej. Dolgie gody revnovali k eyo bogatstvu, ehkonomicheskim i sportivnym uspekham. Teper', vozmozhno, kto-to i popreknyot kogo-to rossijskoj voenno-politicheskoj aktivnost'yu poslednih dnejj. No ehti komplimenty i upryoki – ne k nam. EHto sled mifa, narodnoj legendy, ne bolee togo. Ne stoit ni uteshat'sya imi, ni ih opasat'sya. My – lyudi russkoj kul'tury, rossijsko-nemetskih, evropejskih traditsij. No nikak ne rossijskoj politiki i nikak ne germano-rossijskih otnoshenij. (Russkaya Germaniya 2014a)

Interview materials:

Andrej (p. 74): Est' russkie v Germanii ochen' horoshie lyudi, a est' chto chuvstvuetsya smotrit odin kanal i dlya nego my, ukrainsy, nepravil'no delaem, chto pytaemsya skinut' korrupsionnuyu vlast'

Victor (p. 74): Kogda ya byl studentom, so mnojj uchilsya paren', no ne v moej gruppe, na god mladshe... On voobshche izbegal obshchat'sya s temi, kto iz Rossii - v tom chisle so mnojj i eshche odnim parnem iz Donetska. Ya dumayu, ehto bylo svyazano s politikoj, potomu chto, kogda my potom nachali obshchat'sya, on takie...antirossijskie vzglyady vyskazyval.

Marina (p. 77): Ya znayu, chto russkoyazychnye tut boyatsya, potomu chto esli informatsiya vsplyvet, to ne smozhesh' rabotu najti.

Valeriya (p. 80): Mnogie russkoyazychnye immigranty ne pytayutsya integrirovat'sya v sredu, hotya oni evropejtsy i hristiane... Nu, bol'shinstvo iz nih. YA k tomu, chto oni starayutsya obshchat'sya tol'ko svoej kompaniej [...] hotya ona chasto govoryat po-nemetski [...] chasto vstrechayutsya i zhenyatsya na lyudyah iz russkoyazychnyh stran. YA ne dumayu, chto ehto negativno, no raz uzh oni priekhali v Germaniyu - nado integrirovat'sya.

Victor (p. 81): Lyudi vrode menya, kotorye syuda priekhali rabotat' i uchit'sya, obychno horosho integrirovany. Oni inogda po-nemetski govoryat pochti bez aktsenta, ih dazhe ot nemtsev slozhno

otlichit'. Eshche est' gruppa molodyh devushek, kotorye syuda priekhali zamuzh. Oni ploho integriruyutsya, nemetskij u nih minimal'nyj [...]. Oni chasto naimenee integrirovany.

Irina (p. 82): Chem bol'she yazykov ty znaesh' - tem bol'she novostej mozhesh' prochitat'. Esli chestno, ya ne ochen' veryu novostyam, oni govoryat tol'ko protsentov 10 informatsii. Ostal'noe govoryat, tol'ko chtoby lyudi poverili v to, chto im vygodno. [...] SMI starayutsya predstavit' sebya v luchshem svete i pomoch' gosudarstvu.

Elena (p. 82): Ukrainskie, rossijskie, nemetskie SMI po-raznomu vse predstavlyayut - chto im vygodno [...]. Ukrainskie vse fakty perevirayut, nemetskim nemnozhko bol'she doveriya. A russkie nemnozhko preuvelichivayut.

Quotations from social media¹⁷:

Olga (p. 76): Slava Ukraine! Geroyam Slava! YA rodilas' na Poltavshchine [...]. Sejchas zhivu v Germanii, pochti 20 let zhivu i oplakivayu stranu svoyu , glyadya na neyo so storony. Kogda ya uezzhala v ehti lihie 90 -tye my vse boyalis' rot otkryt'... stoya v ocheredyah za saharom i maslom. Nas travili militsionery, doili reketiry na bazarah. Za 20 let ne izmenilos' nichego! Vsyto stalo dorozhe i strashnej v 20 raz! U vas zamylylsya glaz, vy ne videte v kakom [...] zhivyote... kakomu [...] podchinyaetes'! (Schapovalova 2014)

Anonymous (p. 76-77): Moj brat rodilsya v SSSR, a ya rodilsya v Ukraine, i zhili my v Ukraine, a potom prishli kakie to lyudi i govoryat "tut bol'she ne Ukraina, a LNR", i ya dolzhen idti voevat' za LNR, a zavtra pridut belye i skazhut tut ne LNR, a territoriya belyh, posle nih pridut krasnye, potom zelenye... I chto, za kazhdogo voevat'? [...] EHto ehmigratsionnoe bydlo, ktoromu dali vozmozhnost' syuda priekhat', i oni vozomnili iz sebya arijtsev. Da takie zhe vy bezhentsy, tol'ko bolee po lajtu syuda vorvalis', s bOl'shim kolichestvom prav. Tak chto, ne zabyvajte kto vy i otkuda. Prosto smeshno chitat'. A kogda v nemetskih nalogopatel'shcikah prosypayutsya russkie patrioty, u menya prosto isterika. (Podlushano Germaniya 2016a)

Nataliya (p. 76-77): Ehta gruppa dlya russkogovoryashchih v Germanii...A ehtot tip vlez syuda so svoim rolikom, chtoby rastravit' narod opyat'!

Pavel (p. 78): Russkomu naseleniyu v Germanii gluboko po barabanu, chto tam za konfilkty v Ukraine, Kenii ili na Al'fa Tsentavre.

¹⁷ The spelling is corrected in several cases