



“Russophobia” in Official Russian Political Discourse

Neil Robinson

1. Introduction

Until relatively recently the term “Russophobia” was used infrequently in official Russian discourse and in discussions of Russian domestic and foreign policy generally. There were, of course, many claims that Russia was misunderstood and that policy towards it was wrong. Such claims were made both by Russians about other Russians and non-Russian commentators and analysts, and by non-Russians about each other and about Russians. These claims only rarely escalated into a charge of Russophobia, however.

This reticence to lay a charge of Russophobia has ended in recent years. Over the last five or so years there has been a rapid growth in charges of Russophobia and the term has become a fixture of political debate. This article looks the development of Russophobia’s use at the apex Russian official political discourse, at how the term is used by senior Russian politicians and spokespeople. It is not the intent to judge the validity of charges of Russophobia. Before 2012 the term was used sparingly and, largely, to criticise ethnic discrimination against Russians in other post-Soviet states. It was also used by second-tier officials, that is not by Putin or other senior officials. This partial usage of Russophobia was because there was no wider ideational frame for the charge of Russophobia to work within. As a result, in official political discourse at least, the accusation of Russophobia was either not differentiated from general critiques of Russian politics and policy, or was a specific and geographically focussed accusation of ethnic bias. This changed somewhat after 2012 and the adoption by Putin of a conservative-traditional discourse based on a broader understanding of “Russianness”. This enabled the charge of Russophobia to be levelled at a wider range of regime opponents but at the same time did not identify the Russian political system and Putin’s regime with ethnic Russians alone so that some of the potential dangers of using an accusation that has nationalist overtones were weakened. This change goes some way to explaining the wider social and media usage of Russophobia, and the wider usage of the term by regime politicians, but at the apex of the Russian polity the term has still been used relatively sparingly. It has been used more than previously, but it is still used in a focussed fashion, as a critique of Ukraine, as a means of explaining why Russia’s policy toward Ukraine has not been accepted in the West, and as an explanation for what is seen as mistaken hostility to Russia in the USA and its allies.

2. Russophobia and Official Discourse, 2000-2012

Russophobia can be defined as an excessive animus against the Russian state and its actions, and/or ethnic Russians, that constitutes part of the belief system of critics of Russia. Russophobia's roots have been described as laying in what Lieven (2000) calls a historicist approach to Russian politics. This historicist approach views Russian sins as a consequence of essential historical and political-cultural patterns that Russia cannot escape. Tsygankov (2009: 14-15) argues that Russophobia is based on three "myths" about Russia, namely that Russia is intrinsically anti-Western and expansionist; it is autocratic and inimical to liberal rights; and that Russia is driven to oppress other national groups, particularly those that share its geo-political space. These myths and the way that they inform the historicist approach to Russia lead Russophobes to find historical equivalences in Russian policy and politics that lead to distorted, and one-sided, critiques of Russia. For example, it is asserted that there is an equivalence between, say, the deportation of the Chechens under Stalin and human rights abuses during the first and second Chechen wars under Yeltsin and Putin. Such critiques are decontextualised historically and ethically. Differences between historical events are not explored so that contemporary Russian behaviour and political personalities are equated to historical figures and events – Putin = Stalin – and Russia's policies and policy preferences are thus dismissed as abnormal and abhorrent. Ultimately, the purpose of this is to undermine the nation's political reputation and force Russia "into submitting to the United States in the execution of its grand plans to control the world's most precious resources and geostrategic sites" (Tsygankov 2009: xiii, xiv).

Most of the literature on Russophobia, like the work cited above, focusses on attitudes towards Russia amongst foreign policy makers and intellectuals. Some of the critiques of Russophobe attitudes that are identified in this literature are no doubt valid, as is the charge of double standards that the anti-Russophobe literature often makes about the West ("we kill people because they are bad; Russians kill people because Russians are bad"). However, the charge of Russophobia was used sparingly. The texts by Lieven and Tsygankov, cited above, were, until recently, the only ones that levelled the charge against critics of Russian foreign policy that did not come from some extremist element of the Russian nationalist/communist community. Russophobia was something that had been common in the nineteenth or early twentieth centuries (Gleeson 1950; McNally 1958), and had occasionally endured under special circumstances into the middle of the twentieth century, but had since faded away (Luostarinen 1989). This is not surprising given that generally, and for most analysts, Russophobia was supplanted after 1917 by "Sovietophobia", which was seen as a rational fear based on intellectual disagreement with Marxism-Leninism rather than an irrational phobia. Where Russophobia was discussed as a modern phenomenon it was – Lieven and Tsygankov excepted – seen as in decline (Taras 2014), or it was a concept that used at the fringes of Russian political debates (Epstein 1994; Brun-Zejmis 1996). When used at the fringes of political debate the

charge of Russophobia was as likely to be levelled against the Russian government, and Putin, as it was levelled against the West. Indeed, the West and Russia's regime were often seen as acting in tandem to diminish and destroy Russia and Russians. For example, in October 2011 Vladimir Nikitin (2011), a member of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation's (CPRF) Presidium argued to the CPRF Duma faction that the "world government" aimed to exterminate Russians as a "superfluous people" in the same way that Native Americans had once been decimated. The Russian government was, he argued, complicit in this since

[g]uided by the West the Russian powers-that-be are obediently realizing [a Western] anti-Russian plan for the moral and physical destruction of the Russian nation, for the sophisticated humiliation of the Russian people both in Russia and beyond.

Whilst there was some reference to the term in state controlled media, Russophobia did not get used much by Russian officials (Feklyunina 2012: 98). Official complaints about the West tended to be framed in terms of "bias" rather than "phobia". Bias was a result of factors such as a lack of understanding of Russia's position and politics due to ignorance, poor information or the malign influence of anti-Russian information from Russia's enemies that had taken people in and duped them (Feklyunina 2012). It was also a product of what Sergei Lavrov (2007) called "the inertia of bloc-based attitudes" that the West had still to overcome in the post-Cold War world. Bias, as Lavrov went on to explain, could be overcome if "[b]oth sides (...) display a broad-minded and unbiased vision", something that should be possible if Russia and the USA recognised that they were "two branches of the European civilization, each contributing its own share of value added. We could meet at the 'common table' on the basis of the European view of the world".

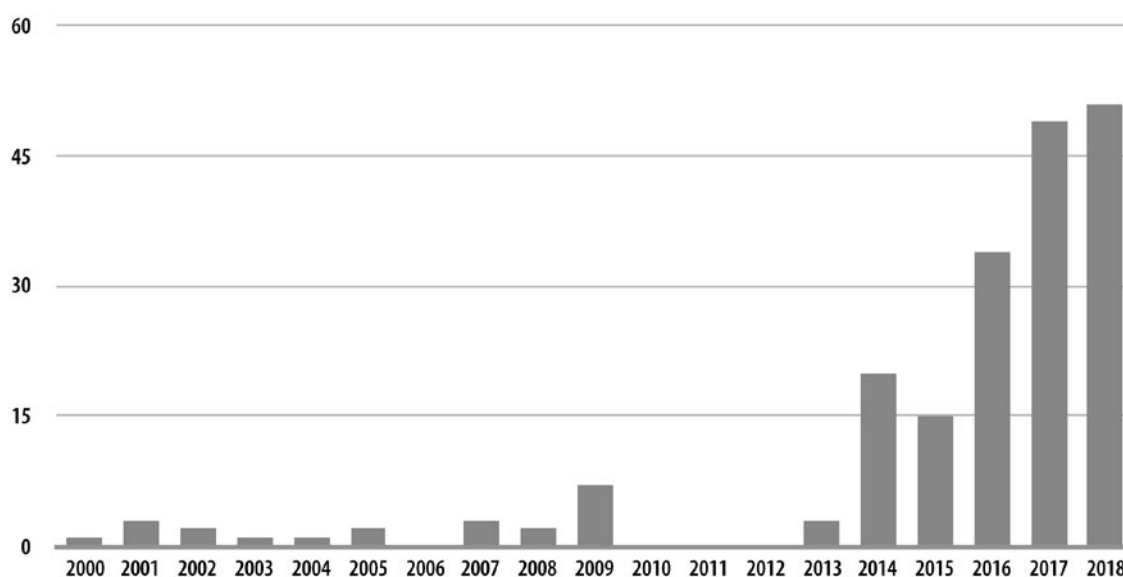
The preference for explaining Western criticisms of Russia as a product of correctable bias rather than phobic hatred of Russia meant that accusations of Russophobia were relatively rare, and when made from "below" were sometimes dismissed. For example, in 2006 the failure of Aleksei Mordashov's Severstal to take over Arcelor (a European steel firm), was condemned by Viktor B. Khristenko, the minister of energy and industry as an instance of Western double-dealing and blamed in the Russian media on Severstal's rivals exploiting "the 'Russian threat' myth" (Timmons and Kramer 2006). Not long after this Putin was asked about Russophobia in the West in an interview with a French TV channel. Like Lavrov, Putin (2006) blamed inertia in thinking, rather than Russophobia, for problems in Russian relations with the rest of the world, but saw this inertia as a diminishing problem:

not everyone in the West has understood that the Soviet Union has disappeared from the political map of the world and that a new country has emerged (...) some still base their positions on an outdated view of the world, but I think that the situation is changing quite fast (...) sooner or later everything will fall into place in any event, because life itself will show just how fundamentally Russia has changed and how its role in the modern world is changing.

On this occasion, and on others around this time where charges of Russophobia were made, Putin ignored the term completely. Occasionally there was some overlap between a charge of Russophobia and "the inertia of bloc-based attitudes", as when the Russian ambassador to the USA, Yuri Ushakov, linked Russophobia to "Cold War sentiments still nurtured by some members of the US political establishment", when criticising remarks made by the late Senator John McCain at the time of the Yukos affair (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, MFA 2003). Even here, however, the expectation was that these Russophobic sentiments were hangovers from the past that were out of sync with positive developments in Russia's relations with the USA so that the charge was again as much one of bias as hatred. Similar sentiments were expressed about Russophobia in other countries (for example Sweden, see MFA 2008a).

Not surprisingly, therefore, instances of official usage of the term Russophobia were very rare. Figure 1 shows the number of times that a charge of Russophobia is recorded in the online archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs between 2000 and mid-September 2018. A charge of Russophobia was made more than once in only a few years prior to 2014, and in four years no charge of Russophobia was made at all. Where the charge of Russophobia was made it was generally very specifically. The most frequent charges of Russophobia were made against the Baltic states. These charges fell into two categories: over Baltic state elite attitudes towards the Russian state; and over attitudes towards ethnic Russians living in the Baltic states.

Figure 1. Charges of Russophobia in Ministry of Foreign Affairs communications, 2000-2018 (based on data from the MFA website, www.mid.ru, 1 January 2000 to 17 September 2018).



An example of the former, from March 2000, is an MFA (2000) press release commenting on an interview in a Latvian newspaper Estonian foreign minister Toomas Ilves. The MFA's charge against Ilves was that he had used a Russophobic historicist frame of the type identified by Lieven and Tsygankov, equating Russia and

the USSR and falsely claiming that Russia was a threat to Latvian and Estonian territorial sovereignty. Similar arguments were made later in the decade following the 2008 war with Georgia. Charges of Russophobia that followed the war argued that criticisms of Russia were made from historicist positions that treated the war as an equivalent of tsarist-Soviet aggression rather than as an unique event that had specific causes and for which Georgia was to blame. For example, in an interview Aleksandr Yakovenko, then a deputy minister in the MFA (and now ambassador to the United Kingdom and levelling other kinds of accusations of Russophobia), argued that not just “noted Russophobes” but a “significant part of the Council of Europe’s parliamentarians” could not accept that Russia was a different state to previous iterations of the country, and that its actions, unlike actions taken in the past were in accord with international law and agreed international obligations. Consequently, criticisms of Russia were not fully objective. Even where there was recognition of Georgian malfeasance, as in the resolution that Yakovenko was criticising, there was inertial thinking and bias, which in this case meant that there was alignment between Russophobic thinking and other criticisms of Russia (MFA 2008b).

Examples of charges of Russophobia about attitudes towards ethnic Russians living in the Baltic states can be found in other MFA press releases condemning lack of action in the Baltics against groups and publications promoting Russophobic racial intolerance towards Russians (MFA 2001a, 2002, 2004, 2007), or double standards over treatment of Russian nationalists and “home-grown” Baltic “fascists” (2001b). Unlike the other charges of Russophobia discussed above, these accusations of Russophobia had ethnic connotations, i.e., the charge is that there is a specific animus against Russians as an ethnic group. However, there is no association in these texts of the Russian state with ethnic Russians. To be prejudiced against ethnic Russians was a separate and distinct problem from attitudes to the Russian state, the issue in the historicist examples of Russophobia. Of course, it would probably be right to infer that people who were (are) prejudiced against Russians as an ethnic group also have an animus against the Russian state. However, this inference was not drawn in official communiques; when people were Russophobic they were offensive to all the peoples of Russia, the *rossiiskie*, rather than to ethnic Russians (the *russkie*). This is clearly a very different use of the term Russophobic to that of people like Nikitin, where (at best) ethnic differences within Russia are subsumed into an all encapsulating “Russianness” that erases the line between ethnic and non-ethnic Russians so that they are all threatened as an ethnic group.

The character of accusations of Russophobia in official discourse during the first years of Putin’s rule and the period of the Putin-Medvedev “tandem” was therefore somewhat mild. Moreover, accusations of Russophobia were generally made by second rank officials rather than by the top political leadership. There was only a weak, and very focussed association of Russophobia with hostility to Russians as a people, something that was in marked contrast to accusations of Russophobia that were made by political actors outside the regime. It might be that the relative mildness of official

uses of Russophobia was partly because of a desire to separate official critiques of foreign actors distinct from those of non-regime actors. Hence Russophobia was often associated with bias, rather than prejudice. Where it was associated with prejudice the accusation of Russophobia was focussed, i.e., it was concerned with actions and attitudes towards relatively small groups of ethnic Russians living in the Baltic states. This specificity of accusations of prejudice rather than bias is, perhaps, telling. If Russophobia is a prejudice against an ethnic group levelling the charge runs the risk of associating a political actor with that ethnic group. This would have conceded political ground to oppositional political forces, both "systemic", like the CPRF, and "non-systemic", like fringe Russian nationalist groups. This might have emboldened them and, moreover, it would have been contrary to the idea that Putin was a unifying figure, the antithesis of the types of factional politics that had led to chaos under Yeltsin, as was argued by 'ideologists' of the Putin system like Vladislav Surkov (2007). There was, as yet, no discursive frame in official political discourse that defined "Russianness" in a way that would allow Russophobia to be used as a general charge without problems like these presenting themselves. Such a frame only developed after the 2012 presidential election.

3. Official Discourse and Russophobia after 2012

Putin's return to the presidency in 2012 was based on what Richard Sakwa (2013) has called a "cultural turn", a move toward a increased use of culture as a tool for rallying support to the regime. The "cultural turn" saw distinctions drawn between regime opponents and supporters along cultural lines. Supporters were increasingly defined as being true to a Russian traditions and organic ideas about community, opponents were described as betraying (at worst) or undervaluing (at best) these ideas and traditions (Robinson 2017).

The ideational foundation of this cultural turn created the basis for a wider usage of Russophobia. It did this because of the way that it conceived the Russian state as a civilizational entity. Russia, Putin (2013a) argued, is a "state-civilization". By this he means that there is a close alignment between Russia's ability to exist as a state and as a civilization; each depends on the other; without the state there would be no civilization, and without the civilization, there would be no state. The strength of a state is a function of how strong its civilizational identity is. This identity is a resource, one that needs to be protected so that the state can survive, and one that the state has to protect so that it can survive. The character of this civilization is essentially a religious one, but it is not determined by one religious denomination and hence is not dominated by one ethno-confessional group. Although the main source of Russian civilization is Christian Russian orthodoxy, something that Russia shares with Belarus and Ukraine, Russia's "state-civilization" is not underpinned by Orthodoxy alone. Russia's "state-civilization" is formed because Orthodoxy and the other religions that are present inside the territory of Russia are joined by a common concern for

the preservation of traditional moral values (religiosity, family, heterosexuality etc.). This enables Russia to exist as a multi-faith society and a multi-ethnic society. The dominant values are Orthodox and Russian, but the other faiths fit with Orthodoxy and coexist with it to support the state. There is no room or need for them to propose state missions of their own in the form of separatist projects, because their core moral concerns are already addressed in the larger Russian Orthodox faith. As a result, they are, according to Putin's logic, subsumed in the greater Russian "state-civilization" and have not (and cannot and should not) develop state-bearing cultures of their own.

The task of the Russian state, according to Putin, is to protect Russia as a "state-civilization". This, Putin argued, has never been more necessary than at the present. Other "state-civilizations" are giving up and debasing the traditional values that they once had. This is because of globalization, on the one hand, particularly cultural globalization, and because of their abandonment of traditional values. The key danger is the latter. Putin acknowledged that there has always been competition between states, of which globalization is just the latest form. However, globalization is different to previous types of competition because it is not just military or economic, it is also ideational. Population movements and the attempts to deal with them have given rise to multiculturalism. This multiculturalism is not based on any organic intellectual foundations like the mixture of religions that underpin Russia's "state-civilization". It is instead founded on abstract principles, like the idea of "tolerance" which, Putin argued, are "neutered and barren". As a result, Putin (2013b) argued in his address to the Federal Assembly in 2013:

Today, many nations are revising their moral values and ethical norms, eroding ethnic traditions and differences between peoples and cultures. Society is now required not only to recognise everyone's right to the freedom of consciousness, political views and privacy, but also to accept without question the equality of good and evil, strange as it seems, concepts that are opposite in meaning. This destruction of traditional values from above not only leads to negative consequences for society, but is also essentially anti-democratic, since it is carried out on the basis of abstract, speculative ideas, contrary to the will of the majority, which does not accept the changes occurring or the proposed revision of values.

This quote is telling in several different ways. First, Putin is not rejecting "democracy", but claiming to be its truest representative, articulating a truly populist position that is more in tune with societal aspirations than anything that can be uncovered through an electoral system, especially where elections, such as to parliaments, are designed to secure representation of sectional interests, i.e., fractions of the people that destroy representation of the majority (Robinson and Milne 2017). Putin is putting himself above such elections as President and representative of the majority, which of course and according to him, is opposed to the erosion of traditional values. In this way Putin sets his version of democracy against the forms of democracy that are most common in Europe. Not surprisingly Putin also argues that the erosion of traditional values

is especially advanced in Europe, which thereby stands in stark contrast to Russia. Second, Putin is arguing that Russia is preserving ethnic differences by adhering to traditional values that are shared by the different religious and ethnic groups within the Russian Federation. A civilizational basis of "Russianness" is therefore a guarantee of ethnic particularities preservation rather than a threat to any ethnic group. Threats to ethnic groups comes from "false" universalisms (like liberalism and multiculturalism), rather than the organic universalism created by an alignment of religiously inspired traditions.

For Putin (2013c), Russian "state-civilization" as a conglomeration of ethnic and religious traditions is a form of immunity that keeps at bay revolutionary and reformist ideas that have negative results. Such ideas "are always some kinds of bacillus that destroy this social or public organism". When "immunity decreases (...) millions already believe that things cannot get any worse, let's change something at any price, we shall destroy everything there, 'we shall build our new world, and he who was nothing will become everything'. In fact, it did not happen as one wished it to be". Change meant that the "loss of the state self-identity both during the Russian Empire's collapse and during the Soviet Union's breakup was disastrous and destructive". The chief culprit in this was the elite, in particular the intelligentsia, which was keen to "emphasise their civility, their level of education; people always want to be guided by the best examples". The result was copying from abroad, which was tantamount to opposing Russia as a collective, multi-ethnic state civilization (Putin 2013c). Equally dangerous and perverse is the threat of "mono-ethnicism", which for Putin is any attempt to put the interests of ethnic Russians above those of the broad set of inter-religious traditional values that join different ethnicities and religionists in the Russian "state-civilization". Putting one nationality above another, Putin argued, "was the formula used by those who paved the way to the collapse of the Soviet Union", and stands in contrast to the longer-standing cultural values of Russia that have been reaffirmed over the centuries. Promoting "Russia first" simply opens up the floodgates to competing claims to sovereignty as it did when the USSR collapsed, and is anyway a Western idea too since it is based on "the notorious concept of self-determination, a slogan used by all kinds of politicians who have fought for power and geopolitical dividends, from Vladimir Lenin to Woodrow Wilson" (Putin 2012). Although many nationalists and liberals would see themselves as poles apart in Russian politics, they are, Putin argued, essentially the same. They both work from abstractions and as a result the differences between them "cancel each other out insofar as they are used to express something identical underlying them all", namely their opposition to the true values of Russia's "state-civilization".

Russia, Putin argues, was lucky to survive previous attempts at change through revolution and reform. The dangers to Russia from reform are, however, greater than ever before. In the past, competition between cultures was not as intense as it is now and it did not so clearly involve the transfer of "ways of life" from one place to another. The signs of this for Putin (2012b, 2013a) are many: "global development is becoming increasingly

contradictory and dynamic"; the very idea of "soft power" "implies a matrix of tools and methods to reach foreign policy goals by exerting information and other levers of influence" that uses "illegal instruments" "to manipulate the public and to conduct direct interference in the domestic policy of sovereign countries". The cultural ties that bind Russian people are, for Putin (2013a), weaker than they have been before as Russia's tolerance of "corruption, brazen greed, manifestations of extremism and offensive behaviour" shows. Traditional values can no longer be relied on to renew themselves as they have in the past, because they are not a finite resource in the current global order. This Putin has argued on several occasions, is the lesson that has been learnt over the course of Russia's post-communist history and as Russia has dealt with competition from abroad: "we eventually came to the conclusion that there are no inexhaustible resources and we must always maintain them. The most important resource for Russia's strength and future is our historical memory" (Putin 2013d). The fact that the "Russian people are state-builders, as evidenced by the existence of Russia" remains true, but the "cultural code" that has historically underpinned state building "has been attacked ever more often over the past few years; hostile forces have been trying to break it, and yet, it has survived. It needs to be supported, strengthened and protected" (Putin 2012a).

This view of Russia and "Russianness" that Putin put forward opened up the possibility of putting charges of Russophobia to greater use. It avoided the issue of conceding ground to nationalists on both the left and right by conceptualising "Russianness" as an inclusive entity, rather than as an ethnic one. Being Russian was no longer either an ethnic category or a legal one based on fulfilment of citizenship criteria, as the traditional distinction made between *ruskii* and *rossiiskii* had it. To be Russian was to be a part of a community of values that were opposed to the values of others, particularly the value of the (falsely) universalising Western "Other" with its globalist project and their colour revolutionary outcomes. This view of Russia had much in common with one of the foundational texts about Russophobia, Igor Shafarevich's ([1991] 2005) *Rusofobiya*. Shafarevich ([1991] 2005: 14), like Putin, argued that "Western democracy" is presented as a "universal solution to all social problems" and, therefore, "the only solution to our problems". However, it was not "natural", it was just another form of messianic ideology, like Marxism that was being exported to Russia. The attractiveness of Western democracy, for its proponents was, according to Shafarevich ([1991] 2005: 12), the fact that it was not Russian; it is "an alien experience that does not grow organically from Russian history (...) it is not infected with the poisons that impregnate (...) all of our past". However, since democracy was not natural, in Europe let alone in Russia, it could only be developed through "a painful and bloody cataclysm: it is obvious that some sort of violence is required to overthrow the natural historical process". Could Russia, Shafarevich ([1991] 2005: 14), asked and Putin echoed, "risk such a cataclysm (...) ? Is it possible for it to survive?" For Shafarevich, and for Putin, the only possible solution to Russia's problems was for it to be true to the history of the mass of its people, rather than to accept the dismissive view of Russian history propagated by elites, both foreign and Russian (for Putin's approach to history see Edele, 2017).

The overlap between some of Putin's ideas and those of thinkers like Shafarevich points to the ways in which the articulation of the new ideational framework about "Russianness" by Putin around 2012 implicitly identified elements of oppositional and foreign critiques of Russian policy and politics as Russophobic. Putin, without actually using the term Russophobia, laid out the intellectual ground from which accusations of Russophobia could be made; anything that was not "organically" Russian, that was an attack on the sovereignty of the Russian state, anything that was not "traditional" could be Russophobic since it was opposed to the essence of "Russianness". Not surprisingly, and largely in response to this and then to events in Ukraine, accusations of Russophobia multiplied and it became a mainstay of what some label Russian "state propaganda" (Darczewska and Żochowski 2015). There has been much greater usage of the term by Russian politicians (see the examples cited in Whitmore, 2017). As we have seen from Figure 1 above, the use of the term by MFA officials rose from 2014 onwards. So too did its use in the Duma, and the deputies who used it changed too. Before 2012 the term was used relatively rarely and generally by CPRF or nationalist deputies. Duma records of debates record only one example of the term's use in 1990s (by a Liberal Democratic Party of Russia deputy). There was more reference to Russophobia in the 2000s: under Medvedev, for example, there were twelve mentions of Russophobia in the Duma, again mostly by opposition deputies. After 2012 its use grew – there were 30 mentions in 2017 alone – and the term was used by a wide range of deputies. For example, it was used by A.K. Pushkov in November 2015. Pushkov at the time was a United Russia deputy and the Chairman of the Duma Committee on Foreign Affairs. His comments fit the new discursive frame of Russianness as a civilization as he argued that "Russophobia is not only a dislike for Russians, it is the rejection of our whole country – Russia as such. (...) Russophobia (...) is turning into a systemic ideological basis for the contemporary policies of several countries of the Western alliance"¹.

Making accusations of Russophobia became something of a cottage industry. The annual use of the term in the Russian media rose threefold in 2014 and 2015 in comparison to usage between 2011 and 2013 (Deprez 2016). Naturally the term has gone online: there's a #Russophobia on Twitter and it gets used on a daily basis to protest perceived anti-Russian bias in the non-Russian media and in policy. The Ministry of Culture, for example, announced a study into Russophobia in July 2016 that was to look at its effect on "national interests and national security" and its internal and global dimensions². *Russia Today* (2017, 2018) has run stories listing its 'top ten Russophobes' of the year since 2017 and 2018. Internationally there have been a spate of publications that have outlined how Russophobia has been created. These have often been published by people with links to Russian media and cultural institutions. The author of *Russophobia. How Western media turns Russia into the enemy* (Basulto 2015), was at the

¹ Data from <http://www.duma.gov.ru/>; Pushkov 2015 comments from Utrennee plenarnoe zasedanie Gosdumy 10 noyabrya, http://www.duma.gov.ru/news/273/1375579/?sphrase_id=2895296.

² "Russia's culture ministry orders Russophobia study", *Moscow Times*, 1 July 2016, <https://themoscowtimes.com/news/russias-culture-ministry-orders-russophobia-study-53547>.

time of publication the US executive editor of *Russia Direct*, which was supported at the time by *Rossiiskaya gazeta* (which is owned by the Russian government). Guy Mettan (2017), the author of *Creating Russophobia*, has associations with Natalia and Vladimir Yakunin's "Endowment of St Andrew the First Called Foundation", and Russian culture minister Vladimir Medinsky³. Mettan's book (originally in French) has been translated into Russian, Italian, German, Finnish and other languages, and the Russian version was launched at TASS. This campaign may have had some affect as some Western conservatives have argued that there is a common cultural ground between Russia and the West (even if they do not necessarily understand what Russia sees as that cultural ground) that should lead to common foreign policy positions, and would if it were not for Russophobes (see, for example, Donovan 2014). This, in turn, has helped to make the charge of Russophobia a political trope in US politics given the furore over possible Russian interference in US elections, links between Russia and the Trump campaign and administration etc. (Tsygankov 2018).

A distinction needs to be drawn, however, between the large amount of accusations of Russophobia that appeared in the Russian media, the implicit charge of Russophobia that Putin's "cultural turn" involved, and high level accusations of Russophobia. The accusations of Russophobia that appeared in the Russian media and the implicit charge of Russophobia that came with the "cultural turn" are broad and often sweeping, such as Pushkov's claim that Russophobia was taking on aspects of a "systemic" ideology. However, accusations of Russophobia from Putin and from senior ministers and spokespeople continued to be specific as in the past. Senior officials have generally often described Russophobia as being instrumental in character, tactical if you like, rather than as having a fundamental essence, an in-built and insurmountable hostility to Russia, a pathology. Occasionally, the implicit accusations of Russophobia in Putin's championing of "traditional values" have led to specific charges of national betrayal as when Putin (2014a and 2014b) talked of the possibility of a "fifth column" in Russia and drew distinctions between the "nationally oriented opposition", i.e., parliamentary parties, and "the so-called non-systemic opposition", which he equated with the type of oppositional betrayal of national interests that led to Russia's defeat in World War I. However, these have been relatively rare, and sometimes subsequently, at least partially, disavowed⁴. More generally, charges of Russophobia made from the apex of the Russian political system have shown continuity with earlier accusations of Russophobia, discussed above, made by foreign policy officials in the period 2000-2012.

What has changed is the focus of accusations of Russophobia, which, unsurprisingly, moved to Ukraine, and accusations have been made more commonly by Putin and senior ministers, like Lavrov. There is continuity, however, in that the effect of Russophobia is still largely seen as creating misunderstanding of Russian

³ <http://www.st-andrew-foundation.org/en/2016/05/12/russkij-izdana-kniga-gi-mettana-o-prichinax-zapadnoj-rusofobii/>.

⁴ See Putin's December 2014 comments that clarified his use of the term "fifth column" in *Bol'shaya press konferentsiya Vladimira Putina*, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/47250>.

policy, although to this has been added an equivalence between Russophobia and anti-Semitism. Putin himself has taken the lead on creating this equivalence. Two of his infrequent mentions of Russophobia have been made at events marking International Holocaust Remembrance Day and one at an event commemorating the centenary of the Armenian genocide (Putin 2015a, 2015b, 2018). This equivalence between Russophobia, anti-Semitism and other forms of extremism dovetails with the charge that the events of the EuroMaidan and after were "anti-Russian" in inspiration and character and led by extremist, chauvinist forces, neo-Nazis etc. The West, this narrative continues, took its lead from these forces when allocating responsibility for what followed the fall of the Yanukovych regime. Consequently, Western understanding of the events has been flawed, biased and one-sided. This has prevented an equitable solution to the crisis in Ukraine as Russia and pro-Russian forces, it is argued, are expected to make all of the compromises in Ukraine. The West was supporting "Russophobic sentiments" in Ukraine, as (Putin 2014c) explained to a German TV channel, and not doing enough to influence them so that a joint resolution of the conflict could be achieved. This support for, and demonstration of, Russophobia was just ignorance, the turning of "a blind eye to (...) violent Russophobia and anti-Semitism" (MFA 2014). The result was that the West had connived with the establishment of "a government of Russophobes" (Lavrov 2015a) and was "acquiescing with the revival of neo-Nazism in a very important European country" (Lavrov 2014a).

These accusations of Russophobia divided it into two parts. Some states were being fooled into anti-Russian action – they were "on the leash of Russophobes" as Lavrov put it (2014b) – whilst others, the ones holding the leash were pathologically Russophobic. These pathological Russophobes were the new NATO member states, particularly the Baltic states but also Poland and occasionally Bulgaria. The Russian argument was that they had warned the traditional NATO states that they were admitting irrational Russophobes into the alliance before enlargement, but that this warning had been neglected and Russia had been given false assurances: "NATO leaders assured us that as soon as they become members of NATO they would calm down, they have not (...) they have started to do everything to call the tune in this organisation" (Lavrov 2014c, also 2016a). Russophobia was, therefore, at least in part a virus that had spread and could be gotten rid of: time will heal all those who are now "sick", and our relations will resume their normal course. However, to do so it is imperative to do away with Russophobic paranoia and stop trying to exploit instincts that harken back to the era of McCarthyism or the Cold War in order to achieve political goals in the United States (Lavrov 2016b also 2015b). Russophobia is therefore serious, but at the same time is dismissed as a folly. Russophobia in the USA in particular, is dismissed as "a trend from the past" (Zakharova 2015), or seen as something deployed instrumentally as "just business (...) a good way to make some good money. The fact that Washington plans to increase its already significant defence budget is a clear and obvious proof of this" (Zakharova 2016). Alternatively, it is instrumental as a by-product of political competition – "primarily a result of the escalating political infighting" (Putin 2017) – that had little to do with Russia and could pass a result.

4. Conclusion

Putin's adoption of a more aggressive form of cultural conservatism enabled the adoption of Russophobia by a broader segment of Russian political society, but it did so indirectly. We are accustomed to Western politicians being accused of "dog whistling", where they articulate some position into which potential supporters can read their own prejudices. In many ways the expanded use of the charge of Russophobia looks like a Russian example of politicians responding to a dog whistle. Putin set out a framework in which Russia and the West were described as diverging: Russia kept to an organic route of development whilst the West went further off into a world of its own in which elite values have diverged from popular ones. Since Russia and the West possess such different values, and because the West's are artificial but given an inflated "superior" status by the wealthy and powerful states that articulate them, they had to be opposed to Russia, to be anti-Russian and condescending. This opened up the floodgates for the condemnations of the Russophobia that we have seen over the last few years in the Russian media. However, as we have pointed out, the usage of Russophobia in top level official discourse has been more muted, has only identified Russophobia as pathological in a few countries. Except in these few states, Russophobia is a bias that they have taken on from the pathological and they can overcome this bias if they communicate with Russia. In this way the regime has kept possible channels of communication open, sought to divide Western forces into "good" and "bad" camps, whilst at the same time rallying domestic political forces to the flag and occupying a part of a section of the opposition camp's rhetorical space.

This strategy may be a risky one. The distinctions that it rests on are subtle. They may not be appreciated by either domestic constituencies who are persuaded of Western hostility to Russia, or by Western audiences, elite or otherwise, who get messages about Russophobia from the Russian media as well as from Putin, Lavrov et al. In the first case, it may prove difficult to put the Russophobia weapon back in its case when it is no longer needed, or persuade Russians that the Russophobe threat is over if at some point Putin wants to compromise over Ukraine or some other foreign policy issue. In the second case, the broader message of Russophobia that is received in the West helps develop the idea that foreign policy differences with Russia are existential. This feeds the idea of a "new Cold War" as more than a cooling of relations but as an ideational divide that cannot be bridged. Ironically, accusations of Russophobia as they are made beyond the subtle discourse of Putin and Lavrov might in the end be the Russophobes best weapon by becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy that drowns out the subtleties of official discourse.

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