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# 'The non-dormant beast': Antisemitism in communities of Russian nationalists on Vkontakte

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**Abstract**

The article explores the specifics of Russian antisemitic discourse of recent years using the example of three nationalist communities on Vkontakte, the most popular Russian social networking site, by means of critical discourse analysis. The main strategies they employ to frame the Jews online are stereotyping Jews as ungrateful and greedy, labelling the liberal opposition as Jews and using conspiracy narratives of Jews controlling the elites. The war in Ukraine has added nuances: Jews are accused of helping Ukraine, undermining the Russian political system and orchestrating the conflict. A situation of socio-political turmoil transforms the perceived threat presented by Jews in 'pro-regime' nationalist discourse from symbolic (identitarian) to realistic (economic and political) by providing underpinnings for the traditional fears. For nationalist communities based on the ethnic and racial understanding of a nation, this transformation is less present because they originally perceived Jews as a realistic threat. Though sociologically, Russian antisemitism has been in stable decline offline in recent decades, it is more visible online because of social media's apparent anonymity and content generation affordances.

**KEYWORDS**
antisemitism, far-right, Russian nationalism, social media, Vkontakte

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Antisemitism has been in the academic spotlight for many decades, particularly concerning its occurrences in Western Europe (Haviv-Horiner, 2021). The post-Soviet space presents a no less interesting venue for research on antisemitic trends, especially in the context of the ongoing war in Ukraine, since major socio-political changes usually lead to a rapid increase in the dynamics of antisemitism (Sherlock, 2022). Indeed, as Anna Shternshis (Professor of Yiddish Studies, Toronto University) has said, '[E]very time something happens in Russia, some upheaval, some change, Jews are always in danger' (cited in Maqbool, 2022).

As in nearly all European countries, Russian society has a long history of antisemitism, implicitly supported by the state during both the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union (Gibson & Howard, 2007; Rossman, 2013). Since the collapse of the USSR, state support disappeared, and the sociological data have demonstrated a stable decline of antisemitic sentiments (Gudkov, 2021; Likhachev, 2006). However, unlike in face-to-face polls, antisemitism is quite widespread on Russian social media, as demonstrated by recent reports (Aharon & Aldubi, 2022). Most political scientists who specialise in the field also predicted a rise in antisemitism (both on- and offline) after the beginning of the full-scale war in Ukraine (Khanin, 2023; Sherlock, 2022).

The discrepancies between the sociological data and scholarly assessments from communicational and political science prompted us to identify the specific features of the current stage of antisemitism in Russia (in its social media dimension) and to find out how Russian nationalists perceive Jews since the start of the full-scale war.

Antisemitism on social media has already been widely studied. However, with many studies focusing on antisemitic communication on such social media sites as Facebook, Twitter and TikTok, Vkontakte, despite being a major social media platform in Russia, remains understudied.[1] For those who disagree with the incumbent regime, Vkontakte is considered the most dangerous social media platform because it is closely monitored by the security services. However, various radical actors (on both the right and left) who do not explicitly oppose the government praise Vkontakte for being a highly permissive network where extremist content is rarely deleted (Aharon & Aldubi, 2022, p. 1; Willaert et al., 2022, p. 7).

Many accounts of offline Russian antisemitism have been produced (Gudkov, 2021; Khanin, 2023; Likhachev, 2006), but its online aspect remains relatively overlooked. Some good practice-oriented analysis has been provided in the form of reports or 'toolkits', but because of their applied nature, they do not pay specific attention to conceptualisation and background matters (ISD, 2022; MDA, 2021; WJC, 2016). Even those reports that contain a couple of pages dedicated to the Russian situation mostly do not cover Vkontakte, instead focusing on the more familiar Twitter and Facebook, or do not include an analysis of Russian-language posts and threads.

The paper aims to fill this gap by identifying the primary strategies employed by Russian nationalists to frame the Jewish issue in online communities on Vkontakte. Moreover, the current situation of the full-scale military conflict in Ukraine provides an opportunity to address the differences in the use of key tropes concerning Jews before and during major socio-political upheavals.

## 2 | THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### 2.1 | Antisemitism, conspiracy thinking and nationalism

For the purposes of this study, we employ the definition of antisemitism proposed by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) in 2016[2]:

> Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities. (…)

> Contemporary examples of antisemitism … include, but are not limited to: (…) Making mendacious, dehumanizing, demonizing, or stereotypical allegations about Jews as such or the power of Jews as collective (…); Accusing Jewish citizens of being more loyal to Israel, or to the alleged priorities of Jews worldwide, than to the interests of their own nations. (IHRA, n.d.)

Antisemitism today, as a form of social prejudice and ideological trope, has several dimensions (ethnic, racial, religious, anti-Israeli), but all are rooted in conspiracy thinking or a conspiracy mentality (Moscovici, 1987). The word 'conspiracy' presupposes that groups and individuals secretly cooperate to pursue some malicious goals, and conspiracy thinking provides simple explanations for complex phenomena. In the opinion of those who believe in conspiracies, 'whatever happens in society … is the result of direct design by some powerful individuals and groups' (Popper, 1966, p. 295). People's feeling of powerlessness and lack of control over a situation organically leads to belief in conspiracy theories because they produce the illusion of predictability, regaining control and reducing chaos (Imhoff & Bruder, 2014, p. 25).

Conspiracy theorists see Jews as a real or potential threat to the dominant group's well-being, security and integrity. Integrated threat theory distinguishes between realistic (physical, economic, political) and symbolic threats (threats to national integrity, cultural identity, etc.) (Lissitsa et al., 2022; Stephan et al., 2009). As is evident from sociological and political science accounts (Arnold, 2010; Gudkov, 2021; Khanin, 2023), in most post-socialist societies, including Russia, Jews do not form a sufficiently significant force to present an economic or political threat. However, as will be shown in this study, they are still perceived as both real and potential enemies of the dominant groups. The symbolic threats and perceived powers associated with the Jews become part of national(ist) narratives that are an inherent element of political and national identity. In these narratives, Jews often get the role of a mysterious malevolent force that remains behind the curtain and orchestrates history. In the narrative of nationalism, the image of the Jew often becomes one of the auxiliary elements that allows for combining other tropes and explaining gaps and failures in a heroic story. For instance, in the Russian nationalist narrative, the Jews are supposed to have been behind the October Revolution and the USSR's collapse, to name just two examples.

Not all nationalism is antisemitic since it depends on the historical circumstances, political culture and demographic and sociocultural characteristics of the respective Jewish community. However, all antisemitism is nationalist (in the broadest sense of the word), regardless of the positioning of an antisemitic actor on the ideological spectrum. For the purposes of this article, nationalism might be defined as an instrumental mobilisation of national identity and loyalty to the nation.[3] Whether the Jews are seen as a powerful malevolent force behind the scenes or just as annoying internal agents of discontent, the image constructed of them is one of a people who do not share a common identity and lack the necessary loyalty. They are suspected of destroying national unity and the healthy national 'corpse' and being unable to sacrifice their alleged interests to the idea of national prosperity.

The foregoing explains why nationalist communities are studied in the present article. Nationalism per se is a multifaceted phenomenon as it depends on a nationalist subject, state support, etc. This study focuses on Russian nationalism. Numerous attempts have been made to categorise it, following different classificatory criteria (Laruelle, 2017; Tolz, 1998; Verkhovskii & Pain, 2012). Apart from a universal distinction between the orientations towards the state and towards the ethnic group, an additional typology is proposed here based on the criterion of primary loyalty. The latter might be exerted towards (a) the empires of the past (the Russian Empire and Stalin's Soviet Union), (b) the incumbent Russian political regime, (c) Russians as an ethnic group and (d) the general white race of which the Russians form a part. These respective types are to be called 'imperialist', 'pro-regime', 'ethnic' and 'racial'. Verkhovskii and Pain (2012) also specifically highlighted neo-Eurasianist and Orthodox fundamentalist versions of Russian nationalism. However, nowadays, they seem to be dispersed across the types mentioned above.

Though all these types presuppose a certain degree of radicalism (which in some cases might also develop into extremism), quite often, the (semi)official and patriotic nationalism ingrained in state-produced rhetoric are hardly discernible from more radical variations, being located on the same ideological continuum. Thus, although this article's analysis and findings concentrate on the radical nationalist types, they might also be applied to more moderate nationalist manifestations when the image of a Jew is invoked.

## 2.2 | 'Dormant' antisemitism in Russia

Antisemitism is usually not a central element of an ideological corpus (except for Nazism) but part of a national-conservative 'ideational syndrome' (Volkov, 2006, p. 56) characterised by anti-modernism. Since the late 19th century, Jews have symbolised modernisation, Westernisation and so-called 'cultural Marxism'.[4] They have thus been internalised into Russian nationalist discourse and the narratives accompanying it: Jews are nowadays not 'just Jews', but their images are 'created along the lines of the anti-Russian Other: a Liberal, foreigner, or a morally corrupt person' (Yablokov, 2019, p. 308). Tellingly, some Russian nationalists (e.g., Alexander Sevastyanov and Igor Strelkov-Girkin) eagerly use the euphemism 'ethnic liberals'.[5]

Reproducing century-old stereotypes about the malicious Jews controlling the world is characteristic of so-called 'traditional antisemitism' (Weimann & Masri, 2021, p. 700). It is one of the four types of contemporary online antisemitism on social media identified by Oboler (2016), together with overt incitements of physical aggression and new, more specific forms, such as Holocaust denial and 'new antisemitism', disguised as anti-Zionism (Schwarz-Friesel, 2019). Traditional antisemitism dominates the nationalist online narrative both in Russia (Aharon & Aldubi, 2022, p. 2) and in the rest of the world (Oboler, 2016, p. 7).

In the Russian context, 'new antisemitism' is not widespread, mainly because in a post-socialist culture, the taboo of 'traditional' antisemitism is not as strong as in Western Europe (Subotić, 2019), so antisemitism does not have to be disguised with anti-Zionist justifications. Nevertheless, the discursive link between Jews and Israel/Zionism is still powerful. Among the most utile categorisations of Russian antisemitism is the scheme coined by Vadim Rossman (2013, pp. 11–14), who distinguished between different categories that can also be applied to social media: the 'neo-Slavophile' (the Jew as a 'rootless' cultural enemy), the 'Orthodox' (the Jew as a religious enemy), the 'national Bolshevik' (the Jew as an economic, 'arch-capitalist' enemy), the 'racist' (the Jew as a 'racial' enemy) and the 'Eurasianist' (the Jew as a 'geopolitical' enemy).

Since the activities of Dmitry Vasilyev's National Patriotic Front *Pamyat'* ('Memory') and Alexander Barkashov's Russian National Unity in the 1990s, antisemitism has been a marginal element of the Russian public nationalist discourse, except in some neo-Nazi circles. In the 1990s and 2000s, Jews were rarely targeted by lynchings or *pogroms*; violence directed against them was mainly symbolic (Arnold, 2010, p. 38), namely, the desecration of memorials and cemeteries, and vandalism of synagogues (Shnirelman, 2001; Yablokov, 2019, p. 297). The most authoritative researchers in the field (Gudkov, 2021; Khanin, 2023; Laruelle, 2017; Likhachev, 2006; Shnirelman, 2001) reported a stable decline in the level of antisemitism in Russian society after the 1990s. On the surface, new phobias came to replace antisemitism, notably migrantophobia and hatred of 'anyone who does not look Russian' (Laryš & Mareš, 2011, p. 134). The main reasons for this change were the deactualisation of the Jewish factor in Russian public life, turning the Jews into an 'invisible object' (Khanin, 2023, p. 193), and the growing oppression of nationalist actors by law enforcement services (Holzer et al., 2019). Moreover, antisemitism was no longer considered a politically utile prejudice (Gibson & Howard, 2007).

However, although antisemitism has lost its importance in the political and intellectual domains, it still exists at the everyday household level as a part of anti-modernist and anti-Western ideational complexes and might easily resurrect (Gudkov, 2021; Khanin, 2023). According to the Anti-Defamation League Global 100 Antisemitism Index, in 2023, 26% of adults in Russia answered 'probably true' to a majority of the antisemitic stereotypes tested (ADL, 2023). There is an 'antisemitic core' that has been relatively stable since the early 1990s, accounting for approximately 8%–15% of the Russian population (Gudkov, 2021; Likhachev, 2006), who foster a deep-rooted and firm animosity towards the Jews. During major socio-political upheavals, this core coopts new members, and antisemitic ideas resurrect not only in the kitchens but also in the public discourse.

Antisemitism is 'a cultural category deeply embedded in collective memory' (Schwarz-Friesel, 2019, p. 315), so it will not disappear. It is not a coincidence that a huge rise in online antisemitic rhetoric was identified during the COVID-19 pandemic (European Commission, 2021). The increase in online antisemitism, inter alia, on Vkontakte since the beginning of the full-scale military conflict in Ukraine has become even more obvious (Aharon & Aldubi, 2022;

Gershovich, 2023). In 'normal' situations, overt public antisemitism is socially unacceptable; however, in periods of socio-political turmoil, this 'spiral of silence' is broken because the majority becomes more permissive. So, Russian antisemitism, apparently 'dormant' (Gudkov, 2021, p. 74), is a 'sleeping beast' waiting to be kissed by a passing prince.

Since 2014 and the start of the violent clashes between the Ukrainian army and pro-Russian separatists in southeast Ukraine (so-called 'Novorossiya'), Jews have gradually started to reclaim their role as the Russian nationalists' enemies. For the 'defenders' of the 'people's republics' of Donetsk and Luhansk, the Jews were a natural scapegoat because they embodied the 'West' (for the 'patriots'), capitalism (to please the 'socialists'), and the 'Antichrist' (for the 'Orthodox imperialists') at the same time (Laruelle, 2016, p. 71). An overlap with the above-mentioned categorisation proposed by Rossman (2013) is evident: 'Eurasianist', 'National-Bolshevik' and 'Orthodox' types come to the fore together, with 'racist' and 'neo-Slavophile' types also implicitly present.

Since 2014, Alexander Dugin, an influential Russian fascist thinker, has been emphasising the role of the Jews in the 'eternal struggle' against the Russian people (Laruelle, 2016). Igor Girkin (Strelkov) and Pavel Gubarev, insurgent leaders, reminded their audience of the Jewish bankers financing the 'Kyiv regime', and Alexey Mozgovoy, one of the leading Donbas separatist warlords, claimed that the separatists were struggling against the 'New Israel'. The Jewish origin of Volodymyr Zelensky, Ukraine's president, is frequently mentioned on Russian federal TV channels and in the remarks of Russian president Vladimir Putin, ex-president Dmitry Medvedev and foreign minister Sergey Lavrov.

The current framing of the 'Jewish question' by Russian state officials is instrumental: they claim to be fighting against an 'antisemitic regime' in Kyiv, thus playing the 'Jewish card' (Gershovich, 2023; Khanin, 2023, pp. 211–213). However, this narrative is intended primarily for the external audience. Regarding the internal agenda, the words of Sergey Glazyev, professor, academician and Putin's economic adviser (2012–2019), are more representative. For instance, he writes about 'the possibility of a mass transfer of those who live in the Promised Land to South-Eastern Ukraine after it is cleansed of the Russian population' (Glazyev, 2019).[6]

Obviously, '[t]he Russian invasion of Ukraine in late February 2022 will likely further weaken the obstacles to antisemitism in Russia' (Sherlock, 2022, p. 176); it has already done so. Both pro- and anti-war camps find ways to accuse the Jews. For the former, the Jews are undermining Russian society and its military capacities from within and without.[7] They are presented as being 'ungrateful if they do not remember their rescue by the Soviet army during World War II and give their support instead to the Ukrainians' (Gershovich, 2023, p. 28). The pejorative nickname *zhidobanderovtsy* ('Yido-Banderites') is commonly used to refer to Jews who support Ukraine. In contrast, some opponents of the war view Jews as the main architects of the conflict who are trying to achieve their own goals by inciting hatred between 'two brotherly nations'—a narrative typical for NS/WP[8] groupuscules.

## 2.3 | The strategies of online antisemitism

Online antisemitic practices represent the picture sufficiently since online Web 2.0 users produce a standard narrative that mostly reflects their 'offline' life stances (Gibbs & Hall, 2021, p. 291). Online affordances are widely used by radical nationalist groupings to disseminate their ideology and recruit new adherents. Since the early 2000s, a significant part of nationalist activities has taken place in the online realm. One has to agree that 'the increasing importance of Web 2.0 communication makes antisemitism generally more acceptable in mainstream discourse' (Schwarz-Friesel, 2019, p. 311); hence, Web 2.0 has basically become the primary domain for antisemitism.

Since social media platforms are '(1) unmediated, (2) personal, (3) interactive, (4) cheap and easy to use, and (5) able to go viral' (Jacobs & Spierings, 2016, p. 20), their affordances 'broaden exposure to and amplify extreme content' (Miller-Idriss, 2020, p. 145). Hence, a new type of antisemitism has emerged on social media called 'platformed antisemitism' (Riedl et al., 2022) or 'antisemitism 2.0' (Oboler, 2016). This kind of antisemitism is based on classical and newer antisemitic narratives but exploits social media platforms to reach a broader audience and normalise hate speech (often in hidden and sarcastic forms) while hiding supporters' true identities.

Social media platforms differ in their in-built and perceived affordances, so the strategies for using them differ as well. For instance, antisemites on Twitter traditionally use a lot of (specific) hashtags (Riedl et al., 2022), TikTok users have to compress the information into a short video clip (and take into account that the audience's attention will be focused on the visual message) (Weimann & Masri, 2021), and Facebook nationalists use various euphemisms so as to avoid the platform's strict moderation policies (Becker et al., 2022). The next subsection zooms in on the specificity of Vkontakte as a platform for online antisemitism.

## 2.4 | Vkontakte as a fieldsite

Vkontakte was initially designed as a 'Russian Facebook' and borrowed most features from its American counterpart. Over the course of the years, it has significantly changed; however, the interface still retains the same basic principles. Vkontakte is a classical social networking site, very similar to Facebook or MySpace in its functionality. Unlike such social media as Instagram, Pinterest, TikTok or Snapchat, it does not focus exclusively on visual materials; also, its functionality is far broader than message/imageboards like 4Chan or Reddit and instant messaging services such as WhatsApp or Telegram. The main principle behind Vkontakte is the creation of a personalised profile page. Page holders can share texts, images, videos and music; exchange private and public ('on the wall') messages; form communities; and comment on the content created by other users.

Both far-right and far-left actors have often considered Vkontakte a 'free speech' alternative to the more mainstream media since it takes a comparatively permissive stance towards all manifestations of racial and ethnic hatred. Only a small percentage of the hate-speech content is removed (Aharon & Aldubi, 2022, p. 1; Willaert et al., 2022, p. 7). However, since the late 2010s, new legislation has been implemented in Russia to combat online communities not conforming to the country's ever-stricter laws, and many radical communities have been 'de-platformed' (Rogers, 2020) or at least renamed (Kashpur et al., 2020).

Initially a safe haven for non-conformists of all kinds and a hub for free music and cinema (Enikolopov et al., 2020), Vkontakte was forcefully acquired in 2014 by the de facto state-owned company Mail.Ru. Nowadays, especially since the 2020 constitutional amendments and the 2022 invasion of Ukraine, Vkontakte is considered the most dangerous social media site for those who disagree with the current regime (McKay et al., 2022).[9] Most regime opponents, as well as many of the regime's supporters, have migrated to Telegram. Moreover, many significant ideological communities in Vkontakte have alter egos on Telegram, where content is less moderate.

However, instant messaging services have a different architecture compared to social media sites. All in all, in the realm of social media sites, despite all the dangers associated with its use, Vkontakte is still an absolute leader in Russia,[10] at least partly because one needs a VPN (partially blocked by the Russian governmental agencies) to access Facebook or Instagram. Although Telegram is now the dominant arena for the circulation of extreme and radical ideas, Vkontakte is still widely used for ideological communications. In terms of their extremist and radical usage, different platforms complement each other to reach a greater audience (Schulze et al., 2022, p. 1108). Hence, Vkontakte forms a very significant segment of semi-political discourse and constitutes an important venue for the early political socialisation of the youth.

## 3 | METHODS AND SAMPLE

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) was chosen as a method for this study as interpreted by Fairclough, who suggests a three-dimensional view of CDA, namely, 'analysis of context, analysis of processes of text production and interpretation, [and] analysis of text' (1992, p. 213). CDA is the most suitable method to study texts potentially containing hate speech because it allows for uncovering hidden meanings, irony and euphemisms often used by authors to avoid persecution (Myagkov et al., 2020, p. 11). For this article, CDA was combined with elements of the

multimodal critical discourse analysis (MCDA) approach (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001) because antisemitic texts on social media are often accompanied by still visual images that complement the text, become inherent parts thereof and often transform its meaning. Online nationalist rhetoric has been studied qualitatively utilising (M)CDA by, inter alia, Weaver (2013), Awan (2016) and Jasser et al. (2023).

The sampling strategy proved challenging because, on Vkontakte, there are numerous nationalist communities that contain authors and users who express antisemitic views. Our sampling followed several criteria:

1. The communities mentioning Jews should not be explicitly antisemitic since, in that case, they would be focused on the 'Jewish problem' from the outset and would not be representative enough of the broader Russian nationalist cluster. As mentioned above, the latter mainly regards antisemitism as a structural but not a central element of its narrative.
2. The posts published in the communities should be original (not reposted from other communities).
3. The communities should represent various camps of Russian nationalism (indicated in the preceding section).
4. The sample should allow for the study of dynamics, that is, it should include posts written both before and after February 2022 to show whether and how the rhetoric changed in connection with the full-scale war in Ukraine.
5. The posts should be filtered by the amount of 'likes' gained ('more than 100') to ensure that a particular piece was sufficiently visible.
6. The results should also be filtered by the type of content ('text + photo') since most ideological messages are accompanied by an illustration, thereby bringing in the aspect of multimodality.

Considering that not every community on the state-controlled Vkontakte would openly claim its ideological orientation in a title or self-description, certain linguistic markers needed to be employed to find the most relevant public pages. The in-built Vkontakte search engine does not allow for a detailed and nuanced search of communities, but looking for particular blog entries that can be traced back to public pages is possible. The keyword combination 'Russian + Jewish + national' was employed so as to include both 'referent groups' and the aspect of interest (to avoid most of the neutral uses of the two ethnonyms taken together).

This search delivered 308 results that were initially analysed manually to pick up antisemitically oriented postings and exclude those communities that did not match the above-mentioned criteria. Communities that explicitly dealt only with historical matters (like 'The History of Ancient Rus') or were inactive for various reasons were excluded as well. Consequently, we were left with three major communities: *Russkiye Onlain*, *ArKon* and *Tipichniy Mnogonatsional*. Their characteristics are summarised in Table 1.

Using the website's in-built search engine, searches were conducted in these communities for predefined terms that would most probably be associated with antisemitic expressions, namely, roots such as 'Jew', 'Yid', 'Israel' and 'Zion'. Reposts from other communities and comment threads were deliberately excluded from the analysis to focus on the communities' self-presentation. We concentrated on analysing 64 posts (16 for 'Russians Online', 25 for 'Typical Multinational' and 23 for 'ArKon') published from 31 January 2019 to 31 January 2023.

**TABLE 1** Key characteristics of the sample Vkontakte communities.

| Name in Russian | Name in English | Website address | Number of subscribers (as of August 2023) | Year of registration |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Русские онлайн | Russians Online | https://vk.com/rusonline | 422,000 | 2013 |
| АрКон | ArKon | https://vk.com/arkon7521cm3x | 110,000 | 2013 |
| Типичный Многонационал | Typical Multinational | https://vk.com/mnogonazi2 | 50,000 | 2020 |

The study was conducted after obtaining approval from the Institutional Ethics Committee for Non-Clinical Human Studies at Ariel University (AU-COM-SL-20240108). No registration was required to access the publications in the researched communities, that is, the content analysed was open to external observers. All authors of the original posts were anonymous (the texts are authored by 'the community'). Finally, the posts cannot be traced by searching for the citations online because they were originally written in Russian; all citations in this article are translations.[11]

## 4 | FINDINGS

### 4.1 | Russians Online

The visual self-representation of the 'Russians Online' community, the biggest in the sample, leaves no room for interpretation regarding its pro-war and pro-government position. In its profile picture, there is a huge 'Z' (the symbol used by the Russian troops for the 'special military operation') and the motto '*za nashikh*' ('For our people'). The profile's background depicts the Kremlin (as a symbol of state power) and a large Russian flag. The profile does not present any particular textual self-description except for a brief sentence: 'ENTRANCE to this group is free only to those who are able to think'; this wording implicitly praises 'open-mindedness' in a world full of propaganda.

The Vkontakte interface allows several cross-platform links to friendly communities to be placed on a community profile page. 'Russians Online' uses this possibility to post links to its own YouTube channel, three pro-war and pro-Russian communities on Vkontakte ('Russian Federation', 'Russian Review. Russia. Putin', 'Great Rus. Russians Don't Surrender'), and Vladimir Putin's fan page. Such admiration for the incumbent president and the actions of the Russian state makes it clear that 'Russians Online' is a state-oriented, pro-government nationalist community. It is very close to the mainstream (semi-official) type of Russian nationalism; since the community does not call for direct violence, it can hardly be called extremist. However, some of its views are quite radical.

The Jewish issue is raised in the 'Russians Online' community primarily in connection to two subjects: the Holocaust and the war in Ukraine. Unlike 'Typical Multinational', the community authors do not question the essence of the Holocaust but use it instrumentally to praise the bravery of the Russians who saved and liberated the 'ungrateful Jews' from extermination. The 1742 decree of Empress Elizabeth expelling Jews from the Russian Empire was also discussed, as was the Russian liberal opposition (presumably Jewish), called there a 'collective Shenderovich'.[12] The latter group was also criticised for 'hypocritically' supporting Israel in the Middle East conflict while condemning the Russian war in Ukraine.

Before the full-scale conflict in Ukraine, World War II was the main subject of attention in connection with the Jewish people. However, since February 2022, the war in Ukraine has become the primary topic of discussion in the community, including alleged Jewish involvement. These themes were already mentioned during the preliminary phase of the war in 2014–2022, but the discussion was reduced essentially to interviews with the warlord Alexey Mozgovoy, who blamed 'Zion' for the 'Ukrainian aggression', and the fake 'Jewish' biography of Dmytro Yarosh, the Ukrainian far-right politician.

Since the start of the full-scale war, the Jewish topic has been intensively rising in importance. The recurrent theme of Volodymyr Zelensky being a Jew is invoked in a number of posts; for instance, his family picture in traditional clothing is captioned with the text: 'A Jew in a Russian shirt – it's very Ukrainian!'[13] The Russian foreign minister Sergey Lavrov's statement about Adolf Hitler's 'Jewish blood'[14] is commented on by the community in the following way: 'The Israeli MFA is already excited and waiting for apologies. And when will we get apologies for the Jews helping the Ukrainian fascists today?'[15] The overall idea is that the Jews are supporting the 'Ukrainian Nazis', and here, the Holocaust subject is invoked again: the 'ungrateful Jews' are ready to forget what the Nazis did to them (here, the community follows the Russian propaganda of Ukrainians being 'Nazis'). Russian artists who disapprove of the war are stereotyped as 'foreign-born artists who fled to Israel and hope that Russia capitulates'.[16]

## 4.2 | ArKon

The second largest community in the sample is 'ArKon', the mouthpiece of Russian neo-pagan nationalism (Mitrofanova, 2016). Its name derives from Arkona (Jaromarsburg), a cult site for the Rani, a Slavic tribe, on the island of Rügen, Germany. The community administration follows the theories of Valery Chudinov, a pseudo-historian who considered the Slavs (and Russians in particular) to be the world's first civilisation, which founded Arkona as its capital in the Palaeolithic. Simultaneously, ArKon (with a capitalised 'K') is the name of a star in the Daaria galaxy described in science-fiction novels by Sergey Tarmashev. Both name sources are mentioned in the community. The name was changed on 16 May 2022; previously, it was *Rasa* ('The Race'), which is also remarkable.

The profile picture coincides with the background photo and depicts a blue star (Tarmashev's ArKon, presumably), with the community's name written in quasi-runic letters.[17] The textual self-description consists of several mottos ('Let the ancestors be proud of their descendants! The time has come for those strong in spirit! For the sake of the People, the Homeland, and the Race!') and is accompanied by a link to the 'community rules', namely, general phrases about conscience, honour and responsibility. The cross-links placed in the profile lead to websites about folk healing, the 'Slavic-Aryan' calendar, Slavic scripts and 'ancient' geographic maps. The profile also contains some audiovisual materials, including songs by the Russian folk-rock singer Ratibor (Andrei Antonov), films about the 'Slavic worldview' and the 'hidden secrets of Rus', and books on the Slavic pre-Christian legacy.

Recent posts are devoted to the veneration of the Russian assaults on Ukraine; support for the 'Wagner' paramilitary group that attempted a coup d'état in June 2023; and anti-Christian, anti-Western and antisemitic propaganda. Interestingly, although supportive of the war in general (as an expression of the 'Russian spirit'), the group does not seem to back Putin and his team personally (as 'Russians Online' explicitly does). Instead, a number of posts criticise the incumbent Russian regime for its economic policies and a certain 'laissez-faire' attitude towards Jews and migrants.

'ArKon' represents the neo-pagan, predominantly racial stream of Russian nationalism. It also attracts those Russian nationalists who are indifferent towards neo-paganism but share a racialist view of the Russian ethnic continuum.[18] In some posts, direct calls to violence are made, so the community might be categorised as not only radical but also extremist. Though supportive of the war against Ukraine, it does not pay as much attention to it as 'Russians Online'. 'ArKon' occupies a rather traditional position for radical Russian nationalists, that is, suspicion and criticism of the incumbent regime, even though its current actions in Ukraine are considered justified. 'ArKon's' version of nationalism is hardly compatible with the official narrative based, in significant part, on quasi-imperial and Orthodox tropes and avoiding racialist connotations.

Since 'ArKon' does not pretend to see the Russian nation as a community of compatriots but explicitly reduces it to 'ethno-racial Russians', the degree of antisemitism in its discourse is much higher than in 'statist' communities. Most of the Jewish-related posts are concerned with anti-Christian motives and conspiracy theories. The discourse on 'ArKon' is highly anti-Christian, and users unequivocally link Christianity to the subversive Jewish influence. The Bible is a 'Jewish history book', and Christianity 'was forged by the Jewish priests to turn non-Jews into Slaves', with Christians being a 'big scapegoat for the Jews'.[19] The Jews substituted the original pagan holidays for their 'ethnic' holidays (like Christmas or Epiphany).

In the accompanying drawings and cartoons, neo-pagan families and gods are presented as bright, simple and mighty, whereas Christian symbolism is either mocked or presented as morose and oppressive. Also, Christian symbols are used together (or interchangeably) with Jewish ones to create the illusion of their sameness. St. Vladimir the Great, who is believed to have officially introduced Christianity to the East Slavic lands, is called a 'traitor', a 'Jewish agent' and a 'crypto-Jew' on 'ArKon'.[20] He is compared with his father, Svyatoslav, who remained true to his pagan beliefs and attacked ancient Khazaria (perceived by contemporary Russian antisemites as a Jewish state).

Anti-Christianism follows logically from the broader conspiracy logic. Some of the theories are so extravagant that one could suspect irony, but the texts' overall tone demonstrates the seriousness of the authors' intent. The community cites faked 'documents' and spreads texts accusing Jews of trying to kill all the Slavs, despising all

non-Jews, concealing 'uncomfortable' facts and controlling the media. The Jews are said to alcoholise the Slavs, enslave them with the bank system, induce them with the Jewish worldview via Disney cartoons[21] and poison them with mercury-based vaccines. For instance, a fake speech by Menachem Mendel Schneerson[22] was reposted from a 2001 antisemitic newspaper. According to that speech, Chabad contemplated killing several hundred thousand Russians and turning Russia into 'New Khazaria'.[23]

The community also disseminated a 'Plan for the Destruction of the Russian Nation, adopted at the 1989 Moscow Zionist Congress'[24] (authored de facto by Vladimir Popov, a prominent antisemitic activist of the 1990s). In another post containing fabricated Talmud quotations, the 'Yids' are called 'hereditary schizophrenics, thieves, liars, and rapists who strive for world dominance'.[25] The very fact that the social networking site did not ban this kind of aggressive parlance confirms Vkontakte's permissiveness for antisemitic content.

Interestingly, before the full-scale conflict, the situation in Ukraine did not attract any attention on 'ArKon'. After the war started, Jews were mentioned just once in that context, and not even in an original post (hence its omission from the present analysis).

## 4.3 | Typical Multinational

The very name of the 'Typical Multinational' community makes one think of irony and sarcasm. This branding strategy is continued in the profile's self-representation. The profile picture depicts a number of Slavic-looking, blonde, blue-eyed girls holding a poster with the words '*Chechnya kruto*' ('Chechnya is cool'). The Chechen Republic (colloquially, Chechnya) is one of the Russian regions with a predominantly Muslim population located in the Northern Caucasus and associated with ethnic crimes (a legacy of the two wars against the federal centre in the previous decennia).

The textual self-description consists of the mottos 'We are for the peoples' friendship' (*My za druzhbu narodov*) and 'Russia is for Russian citizens' (*Rossiya dlya rossiyan*), clearly mocking the official semi-multicultural ideology and playfully transforming the traditional nationalist motto 'Russia is for the Russians'. The community's name similarly parodies the official rhetoric about the 'multinational people of the Russian Federation'.[26] For 'Typical Multinational', the ethnic composition of Russian society is a top priority issue; thus, 'Russianness' is understood in exclusively ethnic (both racially and culturally tainted) terms. Thus, though the community aligns with the mainstream (semi-official) nationalist positions in some aspects, it has a significantly different, ethnicised focus. Although radical in its judgements and at times inciting ethnic hatred, 'Typical Multinational' tries to avoid directly encouraging violent crimes against ethnic and religious groups, so it can hardly be categorised as extremist.

The main target of the community's administration and active members are the migrants from the former USSR republics and from the 'ethnic' regions of the Russian Federation itself. Since Jews are not that much different in their appearance from the Slavic population (compared with Chechens, Roma or Uzbeks) and are rarely accused of so-called 'ethnic crimes' (Arnold, 2010), they do not count as the Significant Other for 'Typical Multinational'. However, the Jewish presence is also discussed here because of their 'Otherness' and the administrative support the Jewish community in Russia has enjoyed in recent decades. Also, the war against Ukraine has become a popular issue since 2022, and it is frequently discussed in terms of Jewish involvement on the Ukrainian side (the community administration supports official Russian propaganda, although they are also critical of some Russian, allegedly 'pro-Ukrainian' officials).

Overall, the attitude towards the Jews in the 'Typical Multinational' community is explicitly negative. Posts' authors try to 'unmask' the Jewish origin of various public figures, including Russian state officials, but mostly artists (like the singer Morgenshtern and the actress Liya Akhedzhakova), journalists and politicians who support the opposition. References to their (actual or alleged) Israeli citizenship are quite common, as are references to their 'real' Jewish names and surnames—a practice widespread in marginal antisemitic circles in the 1990s when, for instance, Boris Yeltsin was referred to as 'Baruch Eltzind' (Likhachev, 2006). Speaking about Sergey Kravtsov, the Russian Minister of Education, the anonymous author advises him, 'as an Awardee of the Federation of Russian

Jewish Communities Award (...), to go to Israel, his homeland'.[27] The 'Jewishness' of the elite, both Russian and Ukrainian, is frequently mentioned: 'Now it is forbidden [in Ukraine] to criticize the ethnic group of the president and of the majority of the economic, political, and cultural elite of the state.'[28] After the repatriation of Vladimir Mau, the ex-rector of the Russian Presidential Academy (RANEPA), 'Typical Multinational' is happy that Mau's successor has no apparent Jewish roots: 'At least he isn't going to repatriate to Israel, which is good enough in a multinational country.'[29]

The community justifies criticism of the official numbers of Jews killed during the Holocaust, calling the persecution against Vladimir Matveev, an academic and Holocaust denier, a manifestation of 'obscurantism'. Numerous Jewish public figures who criticise the current war are blamed for 'pumping money out from Russia' or trying 'to earn [in Russia] some Shekels to feed'.[30] Some of them, like Leonid Gozman and Leonid Volkov, opposition politicians, are called 'Jewish nationalists'. A photo of the singers Alla Pugacheva, Semyon Slepakov and Ivan Alekseev (Noize MC) is captioned as follows: 'All that these people have in common is an Israeli passport'.[31]

A recurrent theme is criticism of Jewish politicians and journalists (Russian citizens) for 'intervening' in 'Russian domestic affairs'. They are sarcastically advised to 'do in Israel what they deem appropriate for Russia'[32] or to compare the Kuril Islands (a Russian territory claimed by Japan) to the Golan Heights. The Jews as a collectivity are negatively stereotyped both implicitly (in most Jewish-related postings) and explicitly: 'He [the lawyer Yuri Luchinsky] is a typical anti-Russian Jew; actually, they are all like this.'[33]

Israel is criticised as a state because it is the epitome and symbol of Jewishness. Commenting on the victory of the Israeli gymnast Linoy Ashram over her Russian counterpart Dina Averina at the 2021 Tokyo Olympics, the community wrote that 'the Jews acquired this victory by bribing judges'[34]; the post is accompanied by a photo of Ashram in a gymnastic bow with the caption, 'Oh look, a penny'.

Notably, 'Typical Multinational', unlike the other two communities studied here, has adopted the symbolic parlance and tropes employed by the American and European alt-right and conspiracy authors. Apart from the above-mentioned Holocaust denial, the content creators also use the 'SJW' abbreviation that stands for 'social justice warrior' and the triple parentheses (also known as the (((echo))) symbol) for persons and organizations they deem Jewish (Tuters & Hagen, 2020). For instance, this symbol is used to refer to Radio Free Europe, the 'SOVA' Center for Information and Analysis, which studies extremism in Russia, and the words 'elite' or 'Russian' (when the authors mean that the actors are, in fact, Jewish).

## 5 | DISCUSSION

Of the types of Russian nationalism indicated above, the 'pro-regime' ('Russians Online'), 'racial' ('ArKon') and 'ethnic' ('Typical Multinational') types are represented in the sample. The fourth type, 'imperialist', is partly present in all three communities, but the veneration of either the Soviet Union or the Russian Empire is not a central element for them. Despite belonging to different nationalism types, the communities share a pro-war orientation (most anti-war communities have left Vkontakte because of its proneness to police surveillance) and antisemitism. All three communities match the IHRA definition of antisemitism adopted by this study since they make 'demonizing, or stereotypical allegations about Jews', accuse them of double loyalty and so forth. As 'online antisemites', the communities in question make use of social media affordances to increase their audience and normalise hate speech while hiding their identities. The online realm on the whole and the hate-permissive Vkontakte in particular present both a safe haven for manifestations of extreme antisemitism and a 'safety valve', allowing negative attitudes to be expressed online (though offline perpetrators may also be inspired by social media content).

For the communities under study, antisemitism is not a central element but an auxiliary feature of their self-identity (Volkov, 2006). The 'Russians Online' community dislikes the Jews because of their 'ungratefulness' and accuses them of helping the 'neo-Nazi' political regime in Ukraine, mirroring the instrumental strategy of antisemitism's use in official Russian propaganda (Khanin, 2023). This pattern is close to that of 'Typical

Multinational', which also presents all oppositional activists (and some state officials) as (crypto-)Jews and Israelis who 'intervene' in domestic Russian affairs; this strategy of 'unmasking' latent Jews is traditional for all currents of Russian nationalism (Likhachev, 2006). For 'ArKon', antisemitism is more substantive and less instrumental than for the two other communities. For them, Jews are the existential enemy; traditional Russian life is among the main targets of Jewish non-human cruelty.

All forms of Russian antisemitism identified by Rossman (2013) are present in the three communities: neo-Slavophile; racist, geopolitical, national Bolshevik (in its economic dimension); and even Orthodox (though Christianity is replaced by paganism in the role of a religious subject). Classical narratives dominate, thus confirming the observation of Aharon and Aldubi (2022) about the traditional type of antisemitism being prevalent in the Russian discourse. Jews are synonymous with social change, undesired modernisation, liberalism and political opposition, and antisemitism is part of the anti-modernist 'ideational syndrome' (Volkov, 2006). Although the link between Jews and Israel persists, 'new antisemitism' is relatively absent from the public discourse because Israel is presented merely as a visible external epitome of internal Jewry.

However, the current stage of antisemitism in Russia also has specific features that demarcate it from the antisemitism of the previous decades. Russian antisemitism after 24 February 2022 is seen against the background of the full-scale war against Ukraine. It is evident that, substantially, antisemitic narratives have not changed but gained a new incentive. Antisemitic myths are now substantiated by new circumstances: the war-opposing liberals are labelled as Jews, the Jews are accused of helping Ukraine, and the entire war is seen as just another display of the Jewish conspiracy. During crises, conspiracy theories become the handiest tool and strategy for regaining the illusion of control (Schulze et al., 2022). However, judging by the empirics presented here, if a community has already been centred around conspiracy narratives, it does not tend to become even *more* conspiracy-affiliated but just gets further 'confirmation' of its beliefs.

The war has facilitated the instrumental usage of traditional antisemitic narratives by further associating Jews, first, with treason and disloyalty and, second, with malevolent forces that stay behind the curtain. An important effect the conflict has had on the perception of Jews in nationalist circles is that the Jews, rather than being a mostly symbolic threat to 'cultural integrity' and other non-palpable matters, have become a realistic (although still just perceived) threat to the political and economic interests of the Russian people. The war provided the necessary grounds for the decades-long accusations of Jews being not loyal enough: according to the nationalist authors, they have now 'shown their true colours'.

For 'Russians Online', the 'pro-regime' nationalists, the war is a justified action performed by the political regime with which they associate the Russian nation. Since they accused the Jews of undermining support for the war, the intensity of their antisemitism has increased. No longer merely the 'symbolic Other', Jews turned into a realistic threat to the Russian military capacities and internal and external security.

The same is partly true for 'Typical Multinational', the 'ethnic' nationalists, who support the war as the 'Russian cause' and find additional reasonings for their antisemitism in the Jewish anti-war position and (alleged) support for Ukraine. However, the transformation of the perception of the 'Jewish threat' was not as drastic as in the case of 'Russians Online'; only further nuances were added. This can be explained by the fact that for the 'ethnic' nationalists, the Jewish threat was already more 'realistic' initially than for their 'pro-regime' counterparts.

Finally, the threat's perception hardly changed in the case of 'ArKon'. Although the community administration seems to support the war, it is not linked directly to the 'Jewish question'. The conflict did not transform traditional anti-Jewish conspiracy narratives but further enhanced them, and since the Jews were perceived as an existential, 'more-than-realistic threat' from the outset, no further threat transformation occurred.

The war's catalytic impact is hence directly linked to the nature and intensity of a community's initial antisemitism and its relative centrality in the discourse construction: the more important antisemitic narratives initially were for a particular nationalist community, the less visible the effect of the military conflict. This happens because, in a highly antisemitic community (that is, in the case of racial nationalism and nationalism coloured by conspiracy thinking), there is no space for further radicalization.

## 6 | CONCLUSIONS

This study aimed to identify the main strategies that Russian online nationalist communities on Vkontakte employ to frame the Jewish presence, especially after the start of the full-scale military conflict in Ukraine. The framing strategies of the three communities studied here revolve around the exploitation of traditional anti-Jewish narratives: accusing the Jews of ingratitude, ascribing liberal opposition to Jewry, stereotyping all Jews as greedy and 'Russophobic' and reproducing conspiracy theories about the Jews controlling the media and national governments. The war against Ukraine has not transformed the existing narratives but further intensified their usage and brought additional nuances. After 24 February 2022, not only the liberal opposition but everyone who criticises the war, as well as the Ukrainian political leadership, is 'accused' of being Jewish. The Jews are not just 'ungrateful' but are said to express their ungratefulness by helping Ukraine. The Jews are believed not only to control the national governments but also to make them launch wars. Though Gudkov (2021) called offline Russian nationalism 'dormant', in the online domain, it does not sleep. Operating online helps to maintain (the illusion of) anonymity, so radical actors are less restrained when expressing their true beliefs.

By using Vkontakte as a case study, this article contributes to the literature on the dynamics of antisemitism and nationalism in Russia, which tends instead to focus on its offline manifestations (Gudkov, 2021; Khanin, 2023; Likhachev, 2006) or on social media sites less widely used in the Russian Internet segment (Becker et al., 2022; Riedl et al., 2022). The findings also contribute to the integrated threat theory (Stephan et al., 2009), demonstrating that major socio-political turmoil, such as a full-scale military conflict, intensifies the threat perception in a 'pro-regime' nationalist discourse and makes symbolic threats look realistic in terms of political and economic risks. However, in 'ethnic' and 'racial' nationalist discourse, this intensification is less visible because the respective actors have regarded Jews as a realistic threat and not as a merely symbolic one from the outset, so there is not much space for further radicalization. The war's catalytic impact is thus linked to the nature and discursive centrality of the community's antisemitism.

It must be stated that our approach has certain limitations. First, it has only concentrated on Vkontakte. Comparing discourse on Vkontakte with discourse on other platforms may shed light on the influence of platform-specific affordances on rhetorical strategies. Second, the sampling was based on manual searches, thus limiting the output to the most popular (shared and liked) textual units. A larger automated analysis of nationalist texts on Vkontakte, combined with in-depth discourse research techniques, could deliver significant results. Third, the users' comments were not included in the textual pool because of methodological constraints. Studying the audience's reception of the targeted nationalist texts would provide another important research dimension.

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### ENDNOTES

[1] A number of (quantitative) studies have focused on extremism on Vkontakte in general but not specifically on antisemitic content (Kashpur et al., 2020; Myagkov et al., 2020).

[2] The IHRA's definition is the most widespread nowadays (as of 2023, 39 countries have adopted it) and has been officially enforced by European Union institutions (notably, the European Parliament adopted it on 1 June 2017) (Becker et al., 2022, p. 9). However, it is not the only possible interpretation of the phenomenon. For a thorough discussion of the various attempts to define antisemitism, see Marcus (2013).

[3] This definition is based on Calhoun's (2002) and Smith's (1998) interpretations of nationalism.

[4] Originating in academic vocabulary, the term 'cultural Marxism' is now employed as a conspiratorial trope denoting left-leaning academics and journalists associated with the 'Frankfurt School' and Critical Theory.

[5] In the Russian context, liberalism is frequently associated with opposition to the ruling regime, the weak state of the 1990s, the human rights agenda and the 'pernicious influence' of Europe and the United States.

[6] Glazyev describes the 'New Khazaria' conspiracy theory, which suggests the war in Ukraine is the result of a conspiracy to settle Jews unhappy with the situation in the Middle East on the Ukrainian steppes.

[7] According to expert estimations (more precise study methods are currently inaccessible), 'only 10 to 15 per cent of Jewish people in Russia support the war' (Jack, 2022).

[8] NS/WP (National Socialism/White Power) is an umbrella term designating a number of neo-Nazi extremist groups.

[9] There seems to be an inconsistency between Vkontakte being permissive of extremist rhetoric, on the one hand, and its being closely monitored by the Russian security services on the other. However, it is mostly rhetoric relating to political opposition and anti-Putin protests that is being looked for, not manifestations of nationalism.

[10] According to Mediascope (2023), in February 2023, 31% of Russian social media users indicated Vkontakte as their primary choice, compared with just 1% for Facebook and 2% for Instagram.

[11] For a detailed review of contemporary social media research ethics, see Kozinets (2019, p. 161–187).

[12] Posted on 16 May 2021; Viktor Shenderovich is a popular Russian liberal writer and journalist of Jewish origin.

[13] Posted on 20 May 2021.

[14] Lavrov's remarks are based on a conspiracy theory that dates back to the 1920s about the family of Hitler's father, Alois Schicklgruber. The identity of Hitler's parental grandfather remains unknown, giving rise to speculation about him being a Jew.

[15] Posted on 3 May 2022.

[16] Posted on 2 July 2022.

[17] The script visually resembling the Germanic runic alphabet is sometimes used for Cyrillic texts to confer the air of pre-Christian traditions.

[18] According to a 2012 study of religious life in Russia, just 1.2% of the Russian population identify themselves as (neo-)pagan (https://sreda.org/arena). However, not all Russian neo-pagans consider their belief system a 'religion'; also, not all of them adhere to the Slavic pagan pantheon.

[19] Posted on 4 December 2022.

[20] Posted on 29 April 2022.

[21] One of the texts claims that '90 percent of cartoons are produced by Disney and WB, companies controlled by Zionist Jews'. For its author, big American brands probably implicitly epitomize the 'West' that is under the Jewish influence.

[22] The last Rebbe of the Chabad Lubavitch Hassidic dynasty, one of the major Orthodox Jewish leaders of the 20th century.

[23] Posted on 18 May 2021.

[24] Posted on 1 January 2020.

[25] Posted on 1 April 2021.

[26] The Russian official discourse produces an image of Russia as a multicultural country (without explicitly referencing the concept of multiculturality) with many ethnic groups peacefully co-existing and enjoying equal rights. Since the 1990s, the distinction between ethnic Russians (*russkiye*) and Russian citizens (*rossiyane*) has been frequently underscored in the official rhetoric. 'People's friendship' used to be one of the main tenets of the Soviet ideology.

[27] Posted on 28 September 2022.

[28] Posted on 15 February 2022.

[29] Posted on 25 January 2023.

[30] Posted on 30 December 2022.

[31] Posted on 12 November 2022.

[32] Posted on 24 December 2020.

[33] Posted on 21 August 2021.

[34] Posted on 8 August 2021.

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