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Foreign Policy Image of the Eurasian Economic Union in the Mass Media of the United Kingdom

Olga Yu. Vikhrova  , Iaroslava S. Gorlova 

Lomonosov Moscow State University, Moscow, Russian Federation

eurasiansu@gmail.com

Abstract. In a mediatized world, the images of regional unions can sometimes become more important than their territorial and raw material resources. These components are subject to close monitoring of international organizations, the media and the public. A negative attitude towards the union, which can be formed by various audiences amid international information confrontation in times of inaction or insufficient actions on the part of the authorities, and underestimation of the real success of integration, can not only serve as a barrier to an increase in direct foreign investment, but also negatively affect trade turnover with external partners, as well as the attractiveness of national and general labor markets. In this regard, in the context of building a system of interaction with international partners, it is imperative to ascertain what patterns and discourses are formed by foreign media in the minds of various national audiences. Under the conditions of the redistribution of influence spheres and the currently observed change in the balance of power in the international arena, it is of particular interest to analyze the image of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) formed by the United Kingdom (UK) media from the year of the signing of the Treaty on the Eurasian Economic Union until the end of 2022. In the course of this study, a frequency content analysis of relevant publications in the British online news media was carried out, as well as an analysis of the emotional tone of these articles. The results suggest that initially, the Union was portrayed in the UK news with a negative image, characterized as Vladimir Putin's own attempt to revive the USSR and confront the European Union (EU). However, since 2016, there has been a sharp decline in journalists' interest in this topic. Due to the aggravation of the political crisis in 2022, the EAEU returned to the agenda of the British media, but mainly in the context of Russia's foreign policy. This leads to the assumption that in the period from 2014 to 2022 the EAEU did not take any actions that would contribute to the formation of its foreign policy image, which underlines the necessity of such a study in the current circumstances.

Key words: Eurasian integration, image of EAEU, information support of Eurasian integration, content analysis, Russia, Vladimir Putin

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Внешнеполитический имидж Евразийского экономического союза в СМИ Великобритании

О.Ю. Вихрова  , Я.С. Горлова 

МГУ имени М.В. Ломоносова, Москва, Российская Федерация

 eurasiamsu@gmail.com

Аннотация. В медиатизированном мире образы и имиджи региональных объединений, находясь под пристальным вниманием международных организаций, СМИ и общественности, порой приобретают большее значение, чем территориальные и сырьевые ресурсы, имеющиеся в распоряжении этих объединений. Негативное отношение к объединению, которое может сформироваться у различных аудиторий в условиях международного информационного противоборства при бездействии или недостаточных действиях со стороны властей, а также недооценка реальных успехов интеграции могут не только служить барьером к увеличению объемов прямых иностранных инвестиций, но и негативно влиять на товарооборот с внешними партнерами, а также привлекательность национальных и общего рынков труда. В этой связи в контексте выстраивания системы взаимодействия с международными партнерами крайне важно установить, какие паттерны и дискурсы в сознании различных национальных аудиторий формируют зарубежные медиа. В период передела сфер влияния и наблюдаемого в настоящее время изменения баланса сил на международной арене особый интерес представляет анализ образа Евразийского экономического союза (ЕАЭС), формируемого средствами массовой информации Великобритании с года подписания договора о Евразийском экономическом союзе до конца 2022 г. В ходе исследования проведен частотный контент-анализ релевантных публикаций британских новостных онлайн-СМИ и анализ эмоциональной тональности данных материалов. Выявлено, что изначально в новостных ресурсах Великобритании сложился негативно окрашенный образ объединения, характеризующегося как собственный проект В.В. Путина по возрождению СССР и противостоянию Европейскому союзу (ЕС), однако уже с 2016 г. начался резкий спад интереса новостных журналистов к данной теме. В связи с обострением политического кризиса в 2022 г. ЕАЭС вернулся в повестку британских СМИ, однако преимущественно в контексте внешней политики России. Это позволяет судить о том, что за 2014–2022 гг. со стороны ЕАЭС не было принято мер, которые бы способствовали формированию его внешнеполитического имиджа, что подчеркивает необходимость подобной работы в текущих условиях.

Ключевые слова: евразийская интеграция, имидж ЕАЭС, информационное сопровождение евразийской интеграции, контент-анализ, Россия, В.В. Путин

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Introduction

In recent years, both domestic and foreign researchers have worked on the conceptual issues surrounding the notion of the ‘foreign policy image’ of states. In particular, efforts have been made to operationalize the construct of ‘state image’ and to analyze the main mechanisms influencing the behavior of states in the international arena in connection with shifts in their image (Kiselev, 2003; 2007). It is also noteworthy that in this context the problem

of the relationship between the concepts of ‘vision of the state’ and ‘image of the state’ also arises. In the article *Image of the EAEU in the Leading U.S. News Media Outlets* O.Yu. Vikhrova presents various views on this issue and concludes that the concepts of ‘vision’ and ‘image’ can be used as synonyms to a certain extent. At the same time, the author indicates that the main difference between the image of a territory and the vision is that the image represents the results of planned work to promote the formed position, while the vision

develops spontaneously in the perception of the audience (Vikhrova, 2021, pp. 439–440).

In the works of T.E. Grinberg, special attention is paid to the image formation of states in the international arena. Examining the components of the image of the “state as a corporation,” the researcher distinguishes two groups: conditionally static and conditionally dynamic. And if the objective parameters (conditionally static), to which the researcher of the Moscow school refers, “the natural resource potential; the national and cultural heritage of society and geopolitical parameters,” can be scaled up to the general characteristics of states suitable for assessing the image of integration unions, then the components of the social block (subjective) are not amenable to such ‘unification.’ The socio-psychological sentiments in each of the union states, the principles of the activity of socio-political unions of countries, the moral aspects of the development of societies, as well as the compliance of legal norms with international requirements, cannot be ‘averaged’ or ‘brought to a common denominator’ (Grinberg, 2008).

Among the most notable Russian works devoted to the foreign policy image of the state are the scientific works of D. Trenin (2021), P.I. Zhukova (2010) and T.A. Pashkina (2012). The latter notes that the interpretation of the concept of ‘image of the territory’ in the works of modern researchers is multivariate, but all the definitions interpret ‘image of the territory’ using the concept of ‘image.’ Furthermore, the author attributes geographical characteristics, climatic conditions and raw materials to the invariant component of the image, which are also amenable to conditional union on a ‘regional attribute’ in order to further assess the image of the integration union (Pashkina, 2012, p. 64).

In the works of Russian and foreign researchers, within the scope of the formation of approaches to the definition of elements of the ‘foreign policy image,’ the concept of ‘identity of the state’ is also considered. Moreover, the notions of ‘identity of the state’ and ‘national identity’ are identified. I.Yu. Kiselev (2003; 2007), Ju.P. Goryaina (2012), A.G. Smirnova

(2011), E.A. Toropova (2010), O.S. Dragacheva (2006) and others are particularly interested in the relationship issues of territorial image and national identity.

The notion of ‘supranational identity’ is currently enshrined only in the Maastricht Treaty on the European Union (EU), as well as highlighted in the works of foreign scientists dealing with the formation and study of European identity.¹

However, it is not currently possible to discuss the formation of any other supranational identity in the context of considering the components of the image of integration unions. Notwithstanding the presence of unifying elements among the population of the post-Soviet states, such as a uniform linguistic space and a common historical heritage, which can serve as the basis for the formation of a common Eurasian identity, such an approach seems artificial due to the dominant aspirations of the states to strengthen their independence after the fall of the USSR, which are often expressed in a radical form bordering on derusification.

The issues of media’s influence on the formation and perception of the image of territories by the audience are examined in the works of A.A. Morozova (2018), M.M. Rusyaeva, E.F. Cheremushkina (Rusyaeva & Cheremushkina, 2017), O. Elkov (2011), L.E. Khrustova, E.A. Fedorova, F.Yu. Fedorov (Khrustova, Fedorova & Fedorov, 2020) and a number of other national researchers (Palitai, 2018; Krivokhizh, Soboleva & Melnikova, 2023).

In particular, A.A. Morozova posits that “The political image of the country, like any other image, is formed in the mass consciousness through a system of certain ideas and incoming information presented by the media” (Morozova, 2018, p. 36). In his work,

¹ Tekiner U. The ‘European (Union) Identity’: An Overview // E-International Relations. April 15, 2020. URL: <https://www.e-ir.info/2020/04/15/the-european-union-identity-an-overview/> (accessed: 23.08.2022). See also: (Caporaso, 2005; Haller & Ressler, 2006; Todorov & Bracher, 2008; Latcheva, Datler & Rossbacher 2012; Westle & Segatti, 2016; Royuela & López-Bazo, 2020).

O. Elkov examines in detail the influence of the media on foreign policy, noting that, for example, the United States “succeeded in establishing a system that provides information support for the implementation of their national priorities in every corner of the globe ... The White House not only creates and maintains its image, but also exerts influence over the news policies of other states, forming informational occasions” (Elkov, 2011).

I.S. Palitai examines the transformation of the image of Great Britain broadcasted by the media of the United States and the European Union against the background of Brexit. He concludes: “Changes in the country’s foreign policy course and its role in international organizations really represent significant factors in changing the image in the information and communication space” (Palitai, 2018, p. 52).

The scientific community is also actively exploring the formation of the image of international supranational associations. Thus, one of the most recent contributions to this field, devoted to the perception of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization through the prism of the Chinese media, belongs to S.V. Krivokhizh, E.D. Soboleva and E.S. Melnikova (Krivokhizh, Soboleva & Melnikova, 2023). In addition, it is noted that “In most cases, there is a clear absence of serious and thorough analysis of data in the materials of news agencies, and the available information is adjusted to ready-made subjective conclusions” (Bachmann, Eisenegger & Ingenhoff, 2022).

In the work *The Image of Russia in the Mirror of the English-language Media*, published back in 2017, M.M. Rusyaeva and E.F. Cheremushkina emphasize that “An information war in which propaganda occupies one of the prevailing positions has been launched in the media,” and that “If talking about the image of Russia in the UK, then the British media are experiencing the process of operating with stereotypes about Russia, which were formed during the Cold War and have reappeared today” (Rusyaeva & Cheremushkina 2017, p. 14).

“Representatives of the philological community have repeatedly noted the

stereotypical nature of the image of Russia and the Russian people in the English-language media. Russia is frequently characterized as a party in opposition to the leading countries participating in international relations. The perception of Russia as an aggressor country with a rigid vertical of power by the foreign community is formed, among other things, in conjunction with the current trend among foreign (including English-speaking) media of covering events taking place in the country in a negative light,” the researchers rightly point out (Khrustova, Fedorova & Fedorov, 2020, p. 294).

Taking into consideration that the Russian Federation is the dominant state in trade and the economy of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), it is conceivable that the main thematic dominants of the British media publications on the EAEU during the analyzed period will be directly related to Russia and the stereotypes associated with it, and most materials will be characterized by a negative emotional tone. This assumption is also based on the results of a similar study conducted on the material of the US news media. It has shown that “Unregulated and completely transferred to the management of the Western media, the formation of the image of the Eurasian Economic Union in the US media space led to the fact that during its formation it was characterized as a ‘doubtful from the point of view of viability integration association’ ... From 2017 to the present, the Eurasian Integration Union has not actually been present in the US information space” (Vikhrova, 2021, p. 445). Nevertheless, in order to either confirm or refute this hypothesis, it is necessary to conduct an appropriate analysis, given that there is currently no research on this topic using the material of the British media.

Research Methodology and Results

To examine the image of the EAEU formed by the leading online news media in the United Kingdom (UK), a frequency and thematic content analysis was carried out, as well as an evaluation of the emotional tone of the

Table 1

The most popular news websites in the UK in 2020 and their auditory indicators

The name of the website	Link to the resource	Followers on Facebook*, mln	Followers on Twitter (X), mln	Followers on Instagram*, mln	Social Media Engagement**
BBC News	www.bbc.co.uk/	51.9	10.3	11.6	25
The Guardian	www.theguardian.com/uk	8.2	8.2	–	800
Daily Mail Online	www.dailymail.co.uk/home/index.html	16.4	0.3	1.1	146
The Telegraph	www.telegraph.co.uk	4.4	2.9	0.5	56
The Independent	www.independent.co.uk	8.8	3	–	90
Daily Mirror	www.mirror.co.uk	3.2	1.2	0.2	48
The Sun	www.thesun.co.uk	2.7	1.3	–	94
Daily Express	www.express.co.uk/news	1.4	0.8	–	93
Metro	www.metro.co.uk	2.4	0.3	0.06	18
Channel 4 News	www.channel4.com/news	4.6	2.4	0.1	31

Notes.

* — The activity of the social networks *Facebook* and *Instagram* owned by *Meta* recognized as extremist in the Russian Federation.

** — Social Media Engagement — an indicator based on the number of reposts, likes and comments from the audience regarding the content (activity) of a news website in social networks.

Source: compiled by O.Yu. Vikhrova and I.S. Gorlova on the basis of: Top 70 UK News Websites to Follow in 2020 // FeedSpot. February 23, 2024. URL: https://blog.feedspot.com/uk_news_websites/ (accessed: 23.08.2022).

published texts containing references to the integration union from January 2014 to December 2022 inclusively. The search was carried out using the following keywords: EAEU, Eurasian Economic Union, Eurasian Union.

The most popular news websites in the UK by the number of subscribers on social media² in 2020, when the methodological basis of the study was being developed, were: *BBC News*, *The Guardian*, *Daily Mail Online*, *The Telegraph*, *The Independent*, *Daily Mirror*, *The Sun*, *Daily Express*, *Metro* and *Channel 4 News*. More detailed information is provided in Table 1.

Furthermore, the total number of articles mentioning the EAEU over the full 8-year period is only 114. Table 2 also demonstrates the dynamics of interest, illustrating the extent to which British online media has engaged with the creation and placement of articles that are either directly or indirectly related to the Eurasian Economic Union.

The number of articles decreased from 36 in the year of the signing of the treaty on the Eurasian Economic Union to two in 2020. It is noteworthy that a sharp decline has already been observed in 2016 (8 articles published compared to 29 in 2015). In the period between 2016 and 2021 inclusively, the number of published articles mentioning the EAEU ranged from 2 to 8, with an average of 5.3. These indicators illustrate a decline in interest among British journalists in the integration union of the post-Soviet space and the absence of any purposive work on the formation of the foreign policy image of the EAEU.

The slight increase in the number of mentions of the EAEU in 2019 is associated with the coverage of different, unrelated events: Vladimir Putin’s speech at the forum in Beijing, the proposal of the German business group “Eastern Committee” to develop contacts between the EAEU and Europe, the discussion of the possible accession of North Macedonia to the EAEU, and the refusal of the American politician and personal lawyer of Donald Trump Rudolph Giuliani to speak at the same conference as V.V. Putin. Thus, the slight

² Top 70 UK News Websites to Follow in 2020 // FeedSpot. February 23, 2024. URL: https://blog.feedspot.com/uk_news_websites/ (accessed: 20.08.2024).

increase in the number of publications cannot be associated with a certain information occasion and can be regarded as an illustration of a distinct pattern.

The Daily Express' 5 articles, published in 2017 amidst the general disregard of the EAEU topic by the British media, are devoted to such phenomena and events as Moldova obtaining the status of an observer country in the EAEU, the signing of an agreement between Armenia

and the European Union, Vladimir Putin's press conference during the G20 summit, and the cooperation between Russia and China. At the same time, only two materials pertaining to Moldova and Armenia are specifically dedicated to the Eurasian Economic Union. In other cases, the integration union is mentioned in the context, but is not the primary subject of the publication.

Table 2

Number of articles in leading UK media mentioning the EAEU, January 1, 2014 — December 31, 2022

The name of the publication / The number of articles per year	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Overall
BBC News	5	5	2	0	2	2	0	1	1	18
The Guardian	14	10	2	0	1	2	0	0	3	32
Daily Mail Online	4	3	1	0	0	2	1	0	2	13
The Telegraph	6	6	2	0	0	0	0	1	3	18
The Independent	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	4
Daily Mirror	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	4
The Sun	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	1	3
Daily Express	3	2	1	5	1	2	1	0	4	19
Metro	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Channel 4 News	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Total	36	29	8	5	6	8	2	3	17	114

Source: compiled by O.Yu. Vikhrova and I.S. Gorlova.

The publications were also analyzed in terms of their emotional tone. To assess this indicator, the study took into account elements such as evaluative lexis, mentioning the EAEU in a positive or negative context, and describing the prospects for the existence of the Union as positive or negative.

As a result of the analysis, it was established that in the vast majority of online publications, the journalistic articles pertaining to the Eurasian Economic Union or mentioning it are characterized by a negative tone (Table 3). Both publications of *Channel 4 News* were evaluated as negative, and therefore the percentage of negative background predominance in this news channel was 100%. In other media, most publications were negative or neutral.

The only media where the EAEU was mentioned in a positive context over the study period was the website of *The Daily Express*.

The article, described as positive, was devoted to Sergey Lavrov's statement that the Kremlin was open to expanding economic cooperation between the Eurasian Economic Union and the EU. He added that Putin had discussed this with the President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, but presumably "EU leaders appeared to be unaware of the offer."³ Nonetheless, in this case, the positive tone is rather conditional and is explained by the fact that against the background of the negative characteristics of J.-C. Juncker, S.V. Lavrov, in this context representing Russia and the EAEU, is viewed positively.

³ Gutteridge N. What Democracy? Russia Says Juncker Buried Offer of Cooperation from Elected Leaders // *Daily Express*. October 26, 2016. URL: <https://www.express.co.uk/news/politics/725629/Jean-Claude-Juncker-EU-chief-member-states-Russia-Sergei-Lavrov-Vladimir-Putin> (accessed: 13.08.2022).

Table 3

The emotional tone of articles in leading UK media mentioning the EAEU, %

The name of the publication	Percentage of predominance of a negative tone	Percentage of predominance of a positive tone	Percentage of predominance of a neutral tone
Channel 4 News	100	0	0
Daily Mirror	75	0	25
The Telegraph	72	0	28
Daily Express	68	5	27
The Sun	67	0	33
Daily Mail Online	62	0	38
BBC News	56	0	44
The Guardian	53	0	47
The Independent	50	0	50
Metro	0	0	100

Source: compiled by O.Yu. Vikhrova and I.S. Gorlova.

Characteristics of the Coverage of the EAEU in the British Media by Main Thematic Areas

In the general array of materials, two thematic dominants can be distinguished. Within the framework of the first of them, the Eurasian Economic Union is characterized as a “Kremlin project,” created to confront the European Union (“enemy of the EU”; “a counterweight to the European Union”; “rival of the European Union”; “opposing entity to the European Union”; “the goal of the EAEU is victory over the West”). In some cases, this dominant appears in a more neutral light, with no obvious negative comparisons and connotations: “*Putin hoped the Moscow-dominated Eurasian Union would function as an alternative to the EU.*”⁴

However, it should be noted that even if the EAEU itself is not characterized negatively, the perception of its image may be influenced by negative assessments given to Russia as the largest state of the union: “*Russia regards the European Union with increasing hostility, and Ukraine was integral to President Putin’s plan to build a rival trade bloc, the Eurasian Union.*”⁵ Thus, the characteristics of Russia

based on stereotypes existing in Western discourse are projected onto the EAEU: “the evil empire”, “Moscow’s bear hug.”

The second key thematic area is the explanation of the EAEU’s existence as an attempt at re-Sovietization: the authors of the publications claim that this union was created by Russia mainly for the purpose of reviving the USSR (“Economic grouping is cover for a drive by Vladimir Putin’s Kremlin to corral Russia’s post-Soviet neighbours into ever-closer political union”; “The EAEU is an attempt to recreate an empire”; “The EAEU is a disguised effort to recreate the USSR”). For example:

— “*While he has described the end of the Soviet Union as ‘the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century,’ Putin denies he is seeking to resurrect it. The West is not so sure; former US secretary of state Hillary Clinton has described the Eurasian Union as ‘a move to re-Sovietise the region’.*”⁶

— “*Vladimir Putin has sought to undermine the West at every opportunity as President of Russia, but he was comprehensively snubbed when trying to form an EU-style bloc of nations to revive the legacy of the Soviet Union, humiliating the Kremlin in*

⁴ Burke J. Post-Soviet World: What You Need to Know About the 15 States // The Guardian. June 9, 2014. URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jun/09/sp-profiles-post-soviet-states> (accessed: 23.08.2022).

⁵ Holehouse M. Brilliant Putin Is the Leader I Most Admire, Says Nigel Farage // The Telegraph. March 31, 2014. URL: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/>

[vladimir-putin/10733446/Brilliant-Putin-is-the-leader-I-most-admire-says-Nigel-Farage.html](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/feb/18/brief-primer-vladimir-putin-eurasian-union-trade) (accessed: 23.08.2022).

⁶ Henley J. A Brief Primer on Vladimir Putin’s Eurasian Dream // The Guardian. February 18, 2014. URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/shortcuts/2014/feb/18/brief-primer-vladimir-putin-eurasian-union-trade> (accessed: 23.08.2022).

the process ... After years of negotiation he eventually managed to bring together the Eurasian Economic Union in January 2015, but it proved to be just as unpopular as the blocs of nations that had come before it."⁷

It is noteworthy that one of the most frequent assessments is the characteristic of the EAEU as a personal project of V.V. Putin ("Armenia is a member of President Vladimir Putin's Eurasian Economic Union", "Vladimir Putin's integration project", "Vladimir Putin's dream of the Eurasian Union"). Examples of such rhetoric can be found in both of the above-mentioned thematic areas. For example: "*He wants Ukraine inside his pet project, the Eurasian Union, Russia's answer to the EU ... If you don't have Ukraine in the tent, Putin's Eurasian project is really just Moscow and a bunch of central Asian dictators.*"⁸

It is also important to note that the above-mentioned topics are not mutually exclusive and can coexist in the same publication. For example, *The Guardian* article of July 11, 2016, comprises the rhetoric dedicated to Putin's role in the EAEU, the opposition between the EAEU and the EU as well as the attempt to re-Sovietization: "*In recent years, Putin has been keen to push his own Eurasian Union as an alternative to the EU ... Critics have called the Eurasian Union an updated version of the Soviet Union.*"⁹

The active inclusion of the considered thematic dominants in publications leads to the fact that in the British news media, the union is considered primarily as a geopolitical bloc competing with the European Union and

striving to restore the influence of the USSR: "*This may sound fanciful, but in the meantime, the Kremlin is likely to continue to welcome discord inside the EU and the ascent of Eurosceptic parties, many of which have a friendlier line towards the Kremlin than current national governments ... During the 1960s and 70s the Soviet Union had a policy of trying to drive a wedge between the US and Europe, and between different European countries ... There is the same policy now.*"¹⁰

The political aspect of the media coverage of the EAEU, which dominates the materials of the British media, is emphasized when the Union is mentioned in the same context as Ukraine. This can be explained by the fact that the creation of the Eurasian Economic Union coincided with the aggravation of relations between Russia and Ukraine, and thus British authors tend to analyze these phenomena together, especially during 2014–2015: "*Putin, meanwhile, is equally determined to effectively annex Ukraine and enlist it as a member of a new trading block centred on Russia, called the Eurasian Union.*"¹¹

The comparison of the EAEU with China's integration initiatives (the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Belt and Road Initiative) can also be distinguished. This may be due to the orientation of both projects to the Eurasian region and, in particular, to the countries of Central Asia. The authors of publications in which the EAEU and China appear together address the issue of dominance in the region and the possible development of relations between Russia and China: "*Instead of linking up the Eurasian Economic Union and the Belt and Road, we may end up with the EEU being subordinated to this Chinese scheme.*"¹²

⁷ Bradley Ch. Putin Snub: Russia's Botched Effort to Form EU-Style Soviet Bloc Revealed // *The Daily Express*. December 12, 2019. URL: <https://www.express.co.uk/news/world/1216449/putin-news-russia-eu-soviet-union-emmanuel-macron-balkans-nato-spt> (accessed: 23.08.2022).

⁸ Mardell M. Ukraine Crisis: Why Russia and EU Both Stand to Lose // *BBC News*. February 21, 2014. URL: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-26299178> (accessed: 23.08.2022).

⁹ Walker S. What Russia Thinks of Brexit — And How it Could Gain from a Fractured Europe // *The Guardian*. July 11, 2016. URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jul/11/what-russia-thinks-of-brexit-and-how-it-could-gain-from-a-fractured-europe> (accessed: 23.08.2022).

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Burleigh M. Return of the Evil Empire and a Nation on the Brink of Civil War: America and Europe Look on in Fear as Violence Grips Ukraine // *The Daily Mail*. February 19, 2014. URL: <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2563404/Return-evil-empire-nation-brink-civil-war-America-Europe-look-fear-violencegrips-Ukraine.html> (accessed: 23.08.2022).

¹² Christys P. China and Russia Can Keep GLOBAL PEACE, Says Xi Jinping — But They Can't Agree on

The study of British media publications of 2021–2022 deserves special mention, as it shows how the presentation of news related to the EAEU has changed amidst the political crisis and the beginning of a special military operation in Russia. In total, during two years, 20 materials mentioning the Eurasian Economic Union were published in the studied media. Moreover, in 2022 there were almost six times more publications on this topic than in 2021 (17 vs. 3, respectively).

The overwhelming majority of materials can be characterized by a negative emotional tone, which is particularly typical for publications from 2022. The EAEU is mainly mentioned in the context of Russia's actions in Ukraine, including economic phenomena (sanctions and counter-sanctions, parallel import), the course and possible consequences of the special military operation. Accordingly, the Eurasian Economic Union appears a priori in a negative context in the presentation of these media.

In 2021 and 2022, the main line of portraying the EAEU as a project of Russia continues. There are several publications in which the Union is mentioned exclusively in the context, for instance, to describe that Vladimir Putin has announced something at a meeting of the leaders of the EAEU. For example:

— *“Mr. Putin asserted that some of the issues related to supplying these men were now easing as he spoke at the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) summit in Kyrgyzstan.”*¹³

— *“The bloc’s (European Union) move, just a day before the EAEU’s meeting, is thought to have fuelled Putin’s emphasis on talking down sanctions.”*¹⁴

Much... // The Daily Express. May 15, 2017. URL: <https://www.express.co.uk/news/world/804730/Russia-China-trade-infrastructure-Eurasian-Economic-Union-Belt-and-Road> (accessed: 23.08.2022).

¹³ Putin Admits Russia Can’t Supply Clothing to Front Line Troops // The Telegraph. December 9, 2022. URL: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/world-news/2022/12/09/ukraine-russia-news-ukraine-russia-news-putin-war-latest-missiles/> (accessed: 23.08.2022).

¹⁴ Gottein Martinez T. Putin Health Latest: New Pictures Show Despot Looking Pale as He Speaks from Moscow // Daily Express. May 26, 2022. URL:

In addition, the authors of the publications in the analyzed British media claim that the EAEU is the Kremlin’s ‘pet project,’ essential for Russia’s political manipulation and fulfillment of imperial ambitions:

— *“The terms (of Ukraine’s surrender) will almost certainly include a pledge of Ukrainian neutrality, and might go further by committing Ukraine formally to Russia’s sphere of influence with a membership in Russia’s Collective Security Treaty Organization or its Eurasian Economic Union.”*¹⁵

— *“In 2000, he (Putin) created the Eurasian Economic Community, a rival to the European Union, to bring about closer cooperation between former Soviet states. Renamed the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) in 2014, it includes Russia and the pro-Putin governments in Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan.”*¹⁶

Another thematic dominant of the 2022 publications is the EAEU countries as Russia’s policy allies. Two of the publications reviewed (first in *Metro*, the second in *The Daily Express*) are devoted exclusively to the enumeration of Russia and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) allies amidst the military conflict in Ukraine. It is noteworthy that the emotional tone of these materials is neutral, the authors operate with factual data and do not resort to estimates:

— *“Russia also has several allies in the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) which is mostly made up of former Soviet Union states.”*¹⁷

<https://www.express.co.uk/news/world/1616438/putin-health-latest-pale-pictures-moscow-video-conference> (accessed: 23.08.2022).

¹⁵ Chivvis C. S. I’ve Studied the Possible Trajectories of the Russia-Ukraine War. None Are Good // The Guardian. March 8, 2022. URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/mar/08/russia-ukraine-war-possible-trajectories> (accessed: 23.08.2022).

¹⁶ Blair A. Evil Empire: Vladimir Putin’s Twisted Dream of a New Russian Empire Stretching 10,000 Miles Encompassing Britain & Europe // The Sun. April 7, 2022. URL: <https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/18174670/vladimir-putin-urasia-ukraine-war-dmitry-medvedev/> (accessed: 23.08.2022).

¹⁷ Carey D. NATO vs Russia Allies: Who Is Supporting the World Superpowers? // Daily Express. June 28, 2022.

—“Russia has some consistent allies, particularly the countries in the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). The EAEU is a political and economic union first proposed by Putin in 2011 and signed into being by initial member states Belarus and Kazakhstan alongside Russia.”¹⁸

In two materials, the EAEU was also mentioned in the context of the protests in Kazakhstan in January 2022. The authors stressed that protests in the country could frighten the president of Russia, and also made predictions that it was more likely for Kazakhstan to remain in the EAEU, regardless of the outcome of the situation. Indicatively, one and the same wording ‘pet project’ was used in relation to the Eurasian Economic Union:

– “It is unlikely (for Kazakhstan) to slip out of Moscow’s orbit even if the current government falls, although Moscow will be anxious to ensure the successor does not quit pet projects like the Eurasian Economic Union.”¹⁹

– “Even if Kazakhstan’s government were to completely fall, the country is unlikely to entirely slip out from under the influence of Moscow, although Russia will be concerned about pet projects such as the Eurasian Economic Union.”²⁰

URL: <https://www.express.co.uk/news/world/1632481/nato-vs-russia-allies-who-supports-world-superpowers-evg> (accessed: 23.08.2022).

¹⁸ Slater J. Do Russia Have Any Allies and What Have They Said About Ukraine? // Metro. March 19, 2022. URL: <https://metro.co.uk/2022/02/27/russia-ukraine-war-which-countries-are-russias-allies-16182955/> (accessed: 23.08.2022).

¹⁹ Oliphant R. Kazakhstan Crisis Exposes Flaw at the Heart of Vladimir Putin’s Authoritarian Model // The Telegraph. January 5, 2022. URL: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/world-news/2022/01/05/kazakhstan-crisis-exposes-fragility-heart-putins-authoritarian/> (accessed: 23.08.2022).

²⁰ Jewers C. Why Kazakhstan Uprising Will Strike Fear in Putin: Protests Against Another of Vladimir’s Allies Show Citizens of Former Soviet Nations Are Ready to Rise Up After Decades of Suppression // Daily Mail Online. January 6, 2022. URL: <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10374723/temp.html> (accessed: 23.08.2022).

The materials of 2021 are mainly characterized by a neutral tone and are devoted to the analysis of Russia’s relations with other states. For example, the author of the *BBC News* publication *Vladimir Putin: What Russian President’s India Visit Means for World Politics* dated December 6, 2021 examines relations between Russia and India and possible prospects for their development, considering various factors: India’s affiliation with the Quad (alliance with the United States, Japan and Australia), conflicts between India and China, the trade sizes between India and the Russian Federation: “Talks over a free trade agreement between India and the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union are also likely to progress. If the deal happens, it will help businesses move goods easily between the two regions.”²¹

Discussion

The study of the perception of the EAEU by the UK online news media in the period from 2014 to 2021 characterizes how professional journalists reacted to the activities of the union in conditions of relative political stability. Against the background of the aggravation of the political crisis in Ukraine and the confrontation between Russia and the West, which turned into a ‘heated’ phase in 2022, the Eurasian Economic Union began to reappear on the agenda of Western media in a negative way. In this regard, it is of interest to further study current trends in the Western information field, including the perception of processes in the post-Soviet space, not only by professional journalists, but also by a wide audience.

Conclusion

According to the findings of the study’s content analysis, by 2021 the Eurasian Economic Union has practically disappeared from the news field of the British news media. The media’s close attention to the Union,

²¹ Pandey V. What Russian President’s India Visit Means for World Politics // *BBC News*. December 5, 2021. URL: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-59515741> (accessed: 23.08.2022).

recorded in 2014–2015, is associated with mostly negative assessments of the goals of the creation of the EAEU. It can be assumed that the reason for such a reaction (or rather, the absence of any reaction) was the lack of any purposeful work on building the foreign policy image of the union. Also, in the early years of its formation, the policy of the Eurasian Economic Union was mainly aimed at internal issues and interaction with partners in the Asian region. Accordingly, the Union almost never generated information occasions that would appeal to a broad international audience.

Thus, in the absence of an alternative agenda, the image of the Eurasian Economic Union has been formed in the Western media as Vladimir Putin's personal geopolitical project, created for the purposes of confronting the

European Union and reviving the USSR. This trend has continued in 2022, when the Eurasian Economic Union began to appear in the British media in the context of Russia's foreign policy. At the same time, British journalists pay almost no attention to the economic aspect of the EAEU, although it is dominant in this integration project. In this context, it seems important to demonstrate to the international audience the success of the union in the economic field, including establishing ties with partners outside the post-Soviet space: Thailand, Vietnam, Egypt, and others. Comprehensive informational work is required in order to build a correct foreign policy image of the EAEU, and the current political crisis makes this need even more urgent.

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About the authors:

Vikhrova Olga Yurievna — PhD (Philology), Associate Professor, Department of Media Theory and Economics, Faculty of Journalism, Lomonosov Moscow State University; eLibrary SPIN-code: 1713-1204; ORCID: 0000-0002-9208-906X; e-mail: eurasiamsu@gmail.com

Gorlova Iaroslava Sergeevna — PhD Student, Department of Media Theory and Economics, Faculty of Journalism, Lomonosov Moscow State University; ORCID: 0009-0002-9505-7933; e-mail: jaroslava.gorlova@yandex.ru