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Nationalist and Imperialist Thought in
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A Discursive Analysis from 1991 to
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1. Introduction

“People’s attitudes are fragmented: One person still considers himself to be living in the Union, another sees himself as living in the CIS, a third in Russia, and a fourth considers himself simply a resident of Moscow” (1 Mar. 1993).

This quote, written by Anatoly Anatov, the General Director of the Center for Socio-Strategic Research, illustrates well just how contested the nation and state-building in post-Soviet Russia was. This thesis analyzes the discourse presented both in political debates, speeches, and decrees and in Russian newspapers in the period from January 1991 to spring 1994. The early 1990s can be understood as a period in which most concepts concerning the state or nation were up for debate; a period, in which the diversity of voices presented in the media and individual freedom increased, accompanied by a sense of cultural, social, and political disorientation. These years can therefore be characterized as what Soifer refers to as a ‘critical juncture’: *“The distinct feature of a historical juncture with the potential to be critical is the loosening of the constraint of structure to allow for agency or contingency to shape divergence from the past, or divergence across cases”* (Soifer 2012: 1573). Soifer describes in what conditions historical change can occur (Soifer 2012: 1575). It is exactly in these early years of the early 1990s that the dissolution of the Soviet Union, preceded by an increasingly weakened Communist party, legitimization and economy led to the *“loosening of the constraint of structure”*. On the other hand, political actors both in the last year of the Soviet Union and in the newly emerging states, such as Boris Yeltsin or Leonid Kravchuk but also regional leaders such as the president of Tatarstan, Mintimer Shaimiev, or the Chairman of the Parliament, Ruslan Khasbulatov, utilized their window of opportunity, their agency.

The goal of this work is to reconstruct an open debate with multiple, competing concepts of state and nation, nationalism, and imperialism, during a period that was constitutive for the development of the Russian Federation. This is especially relevant, as processes of nation-building are accompanied by discursive practices (Askiumov and Avksentev 2022: 187). As Soifer points out critical junctures are times of contingency, openness: Events or circumstances are possible, but cannot be predicted with certainty. It is by no means the goal of this paper to wish to portray current events as pre-determined by the discourse of the early 1990s, but rather to demonstrate the plurality of perspectives and openness of the period. This

paper thus hopes to contribute to the understanding of this period by attempting to answer the following questions:

Which nationalist and imperialist ideas were present in the public discourse from January 1991 to spring 1994? Which ideals of statehood and policies accompanied them? Which groups were in support of the emerging Russian Federation, which ones in opposition or in critical distance?

It is important to make transparent that the perspective analyzed here is a “Russian” perspective, albeit one that ranges from ultranationalist groups to democrats. The master thesis hopes to contribute to missing gaps in current research, among them the lack of a cohesive understanding of imperial practices and narratives for the case of post-Soviet Russia (Gerasimov et al. 2005: 48, Oskanian 2021: 32) and a general lack of applicable theories for this subject (Mogilner 2014: 41). Furthermore, much of the existing research “*downplays the cultural component of imperial history*” (Gerasimov et al. 2005: 53). Therefore, the paper wants to approach this field, first, by contributing to a better understanding of the competing traditions of political thought that (re-)appeared, changed, or merged in the early 1990s. This appears to be relevant since many references in current Russian discourse, especially prevalent with Russia’s full-scale invasion into Ukraine, oftentimes refer to long-lasting narratives in political thought such as exceptionalism, “brotherly nations”, Eurasianism or Pan-Slavism. Second, this thesis hopes to test whether the suggested typologies match the discourse that existed in the early 1990s. Many of the currently used typologies to research the discourse around nationalism and imperialism analyze either Tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union or focus on the time after the 2000s after Putin became president. However, it seems justified to research the existing debate from 1991 to 1994, as it is this period that strongly shaped the Russian Federation in its current form and that can thus be characterized as constitutive. With the approaching 30-year anniversary of the constitutional crisis of 1993, it is also time to re-evaluate and historicize the then existing debate. Third, by connecting the competing narratives with the proponent’s ideal of state(hood), this paper can possibly demonstrate the existing support or opposition to the emerging institutions and the emerging Russian Federation, thus improving our understanding for the stability or instability of the state and its institutions in the early 1990s. This can also help us to improve our understanding of today’s discourse by having a greater awareness of continuities and discontinuities in the Russian case.

The structure of his master thesis will be as follows: Chapter 2 introduces the current state of research. As a framework, concepts such as ethnic, civic, and multicultural nationalism, internal and external imperialism, Eurasianism, Pan-Slavism, civilizational discourses and the nation-state are introduced and their relevance and applicability for the research question and design is discussed. Chapter 3 provides insights into the method chosen, Mayring's qualitative content analysis, the sampling, and the developed codes, as well as remarks about the context in which the sources were written (source criticism). Chapter 4 presents the empirical findings. As the material analyzed indicated that questions of statehood, nationalism and imperialism were mostly discussed in regard to concrete policies or institutions – in this case the Union Treaty, the Russian Federation under the old constitution, the Russian Federation under the new constitution and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) - the subchapters are arranged accordingly. Chapter 5 attempts to bring the results of the analysis together and discuss the findings. In chapter 6, the conclusion, the research design, and its limitations will be reflected.

Clearly, the proposed research design has its limitations. By studying nationalism, imperialism and the state, this paper might fall into the pitfall of what Wimmer and Glick Schiller refer to as 'methodological nationalism', "*the assumption that the nation/state/society is the natural social and political form of the modern world*" (Wimmer & Glick Schiller 2002: 302). Where possible, I will thus try to demonstrate the construction of nation, state and empire and the discourses around it. This paper will furthermore focus on a "Russian" perspective. Especially with Russia's invasion into Ukraine, but also preceding the war, scholars increasingly recognize the need to turn towards the former Union republics, attempting to analyze this vast geographical space without reproducing a Russian imperial view. However, as there are still gaps in our understanding of the nationalist and imperialist discourses of the early Russian Federation, especially in the researched period, it appears valid to turn to this topic. Additionally, the chosen sources (newspaper articles, decrees, and speeches) have to be analyzed with caution. Not only did the newspapers increasingly publish articles in the context of the conflict between executive and legislative, the parliament and the government and president, but also television gained importance. However, since the period analyzed is relatively long, and a big sample was chosen, it is likely that many positions presented during that period were included in the analysis. Lastly, longer-lasting international border conflicts such as the conflict around Nagorno Karabakh or Abkhazia are excluded in

this work. While imperialist views towards the former Union republics will be analyzed and references to for example a “Slavic” construction of the nation or the “protection of ethnic Russians” will be included, an analysis of conflicts that reemerged with the dissolution of the USSR would go beyond the scope of what is possible in this work.

2. State of the Art: Nationalism and Imperialism in Post-Soviet Russia

This thesis focuses on the period between January 1991 and spring 1994 - a period, in which the Union Treaty served as an attempt to reform, but save the USSR, in which eventually the dissolution of the Soviet Union occurred, followed by the creation of the Commonwealth of Independent States, a period in which the Russian Federation as a state emerged, accompanied by intense debates about the (imperial) heritage of the USSR and which form the Russian state should take, culminating in the constitutional crisis of 1993. In December 1993, B. Yeltsin received his presidential constitution, while he, again, was opposed by communist and nationalist political factions in the parliament after the elections. Was the Soviet Union an empire? Can the Russian Federation be considered a nation state? Which imperial legacies survived the transformation that occurred in the early 1990s, which innovations emerged? In order to grasp and categorize these intensively debated questions, scholars have proposed a variety of terms ranging from empire, imperialism, nation-state and nationalism to civilization. These terms will be introduced and their applicability to the examined period critically discussed.

Nationalism is oftentimes analyzed through a dichotomy first popularized by Hans Kohn: Ethnic and civic nationalism (Kohn 1946: 574; Jaskułowski 2010: 289). However, this dichotomy is oftentimes criticized for its simplification. Ethnic nationalism refers to characteristics like shared beliefs about a group’s history, origins, and values (Wollman & Spencer 2005: 11), while oftentimes essentializing these characteristics in relation to a perceived “other” (Wollman & Spencer 2005: 11), thus bearing an exclusive character (Lepsius 1985: 486). Civic nationalism focuses on individual rights and universal citizenship, equal to all citizens of the territory “*in which the constitutional order is valid*” (Lepsius 1985: 495). Shulman points to the highly normative aspect of this categorization, in which the civic nation is understood positively against the ethnic nation. The sharp distinction also underestimates their interrelation and mixed forms and overestimates the focus on ethnicity, whereas cultural aspects tend to be neglected (Shulman 2002: 557). A cultural understanding of ethnicity, according to Smith, allows for flexibility, the integration of new members and therefore social and cultural adaption (Smith 2005: 27). Khazanov argues that “*all civic*

nations have a cultural core and a historical narrative linked with the dominant ethnocultural groups” and that civic nations are not less prone to cultural discrimination (Khazanov 2003: 79). Thus, for Shulman, civic identity could be a result of assimilation (Shulman 2002: 560). Blakkisrud on the other hand argues for exactly this dichotomy as a prism to analyze the post-Soviet experience (Blakkisrud 2002 :4).

How where these ideal types applied to the Russian case? In the case of the Russian Federation, nationalism in the late 1980s and early 1990s was accompanied by a focus on ethnic Russians. Russian (ethnic) nationalism oftentimes included narratives such as the assumption that ethnic Russians profited less from the USSR (Furman 2011: 9): In other Union republics, the “*titular nations*” received “*greater rights and representation*” (Treisman 1997: 221) and massive resources for ‘modernization’ (Furman 2011: 8) on their specific territories and thus profited from policies of affirmative action (Giuliano 2006: 281), whereas “ethnic Russians” as the biggest ‘titular nation’ were suppressed.

Still, ethnic nationalism varied greatly regarding the political goals and ideals its supporters pursue(d): Some would focus on ethnic Russians as the “state bearing” or “state forming people” (Kolstø 2016a: 34), as added in the constitutional amendment of 2020, thus accepting the multi-ethnic composition of the Russian Federation while claiming a specific, privileged, and hierarchical role for ethnic Russians (Aksiumov & Avksentev 2022: 192 and 196). Others would prefer an ethnically homogenous state, possibly accepting a smaller territory (Blakkisrud 2022: 4). However, ethnic nationalism can also bear imperialist notions if the ethnic construction of the state specifically refers to territories outside of its borders (Tolz 1998a: 999). Since with the dissolution of the USSR approximately 25 million Russians and five million Russian speakers (Tolz 1998a: 1001) ended up living outside of the territory of the Russian Federation in for example the Baltics state, Georgia, Ukraine, Belarus or Kazakhstan, a central topic of the discourse in the early 1990s concerned the “protection” of ethnic Russians and Russian speakers abroad. A part of the ethnic Russians in those states as well as certain nationalist movements within Russia wished to integrate those territories inhabited by ethnic Russians into the Russian Federation, thus bearing a strong ethnic focus as well as irredentist elements (Kolstø 2016a: 34). A good part of the political factions represented in the parliament in post-Soviet Russia shared the position that when the Russian Federation inherited the borders of the RSFSR, a mismatch between population and territory occurred.

However, due to the multiethnic composition of Russia, the conceptualization of the Russian state as a homogenous nation state with a strong focus on ethnic Russians had wide limitations, especially since separatist movements were strong in the early years of the 1990s. Aksiumov and Avksentev (2022) and Blakkisrud (2022) introduced the ideal types of multi-cultural or multiethnic nationalism. The multi-cultural discourse refers to the Russian Federation as a multi-ethnic state, sometimes accompanied with a focus on ‘multi-cultural federalism’ (Aksiumov & Avksentev 2022: 192). It differs from the “ethnic nationalism” discussed above by acknowledging the multiple ethnic groups that live on the territory of the Russian Federation, whereas the purely ethnic nation stresses the role of ethnic Russians (Blakkisrud 2022: 4). In the period analyzed in this work, the Russian Federation was quickly confronted with separatist movements by its autonomous republics such as Chechnya, Tatarstan or Bashkortostan (Dunlop 1993: 63). It was feared that the Russian Federation might repeat the experience of the USSR and break up into many smaller republics. A focus too strong on ethnic Russians would have not only encouraged regional leaders even more to claim sovereignty or independence, but also endangered the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation (Shevel 2011: 186; Breslauer & Dale 1997: 304). While ethnic nationalism did play a role, its propagation without threatening territorial integrity was limited from the beginning.

Was there, then, the chance for civic nation-building? Boris Yeltsin in the early 1990s engaged for a civic and multinational nation-building and state-building by putting the focus on “rossiiskii” instead of “ruskii”, Russia as a multi-ethnic state instead of an ethnic Russian state and – at least initially – rejecting an overarching ideology and the imperial tradition (Breslauer & Dale 1997: 314; Goode 2019: 140). Civic nation-building in Russia is most prominently associated with Valery Tishkov, the chairman of the State Committee of the RSFSR on nationalities under Yeltsin, who promoted an inclusive, citizenship-based nationalism on the territory of the Russian Federation. Vera Tolz argues that those promoting civic nationalism were, while a minority, “*the real innovators in the Russian context*” (Tolz 1998a: 1017). However, they remained politically a minority since the concept in the early 1990s was mostly perceived as a rather shallow concept in public discourse (Aksiumov & Avksentev 2022: 195) and as something that did not appeal to the population (Khazanov 2003: 90). With the communists regaining strength and the rise of nationalist factions, B. Yeltsin was increasingly pressured and discursively isolated in his state-building attempts. With time passing, he increasingly took up ethnicity centered policies such as the claimed

necessity to protect Russians in the ‘Near Abroad’ from discrimination (Shevel 2011: 190; Tolz 1998a: 1009) while continuing to promise equal citizenship (Breslauer & Dale: 317 and 325).

Russian nationalism is oftentimes ascribed as a particularity: It was politically suppressed both in Tsarist Russian and in the Soviet Union, leading to the rejections of the understanding that ethnic Russians constituted the “center” of the empire (Furman 2011: 8, Lieven 1995: 611) or not understanding the USSR as an empire in the first place (Tolz 1998b: 271). Bassin refers to what he calls “ethnonational disadvantage” (Bassin 2015: 176) – the notion that ethnic Russians especially suffered in the USSR or that they had to carry the excessive economic burden of the empire (Tolz 1998a: 1002). Like in the other Union republics, the center of the empire was perceived as constituted by the Soviet Union, embodied by the CPSU and less by its biggest ethnic group, ethnic Russians. Russian nationalism, and especially Yeltsin’s nationalism, contributed to the breaking up of the Soviet Union (along with the national movements in the Union republics, beginning with the Baltic states). However, it was the Russian culture and language that spread throughout the territory of the USSR. Therefore, many ethnic Russians identified rather with the Soviet Union than with the RSFSR (Blakkisrud 2022: 2; Kolstø 2016a: 43), whereas the population in other Union republics increasingly identified with the newly independent states. After the dissolution of the USSR, this led to a widespread sentiment that the Russian Federation in its current form with its boundaries did not correlate with what should constitute “Russia”, thus bearing a breeding ground for imperialist and revisionist positions (Tolz 1998a: 996). With Russia being the legal successor state of the USSR and the strengthening of the so-called red-brown coalition, the new neighboring states increasingly attributed imperialist characteristics to the Russian Federation. This was reinforced by the discursive ascendancy of communists and nationalists and their shared imperialism, as will be discussed in the following.

In the case of Russia, ideal types of imperialism include empire-saving nationalism, internal imperial nationalism, and external imperial nationalism. Especially strongly represented in the early 1990s was what Kolstø refers to as empire-saving nationalism. Its proponents, among them Gorbachev and later the so-called red-brown coalition, wanted to save or restore the Soviet Union (Kolstø 2016a: 28), opposing the independence of both Union and Autonomous republics. One major last attempt at preserving the disintegrating Soviet Union was the attempt to draft and pass the Union Treaty in 1991, initiated by Gorbachev. While accepting

the necessity for reform, the state was conceptualized as the entirety of the USSR, not the RSFSR. After the dissolution of the USSR, empire-saving nationalism refers to the reinstatement of either the CPSU or a State Committee for the State of Emergency as done during the August coup in 1991, or the recreation of the Soviet Union. The imperial nationalism proposed by Aksiumov and Avksentev (2022) has two components: internal and external. The internal imperial nationalism concentrates on the Russian Federation, perceiving ethnic Russians as the ‘core’ and Russian language and culture as the connecting aspect (the “cultural clue”) of the Federation. The external imperial nationalism refers to the former Union republics, to what is nowadays discursively referred to as the “Near Abroad”, “Russian speaking space” or “Russkii mir” (Aksiumov and Avksentev 2022: 196).

It is important to note that imperialism by these scholars is still characterized as a part of nationalism. It is argued that ‘imperial nationalism’ (Pain 2016: 46) refers to a specific connection of nationalism and imperialism in the Russian case, arguing that Russian nationalism has inherently contradictory goals: To create a Russian nation state while maintaining an empire (Furman 2011: 6; Rowley 2000: 25). In political theory, however, “empire” and “nation” are traditionally perceived as contradictory, opposite terms (Pain 2016: 47; Kolstø 2016b: 21). *“Empire is by definition the antipode of democracy, popular sovereignty and national-self-determination”*, according to Lieven (Lieven 2005: 79).

Thus, a few remarks about the terms state (-building) and nation state should be made, even though the vast existing research cannot be reproduced or discussed here. It is important to separate the terms state and nation clearly (Cederman 1997: 17). The state is associated with state institutions, a specific territory that needs to be governed, limited in its sovereignty by others state (Breuilly 1993: 61; Cederman 1996: 18), but also internally by laws such as constitutions (Breuilly 1993: 63). The nation state on the other hand, only occurred *“when the state and the nation coincide territorially and demographically”* (Cederman 1997: 19). However, the state clearly can have – and usually has – different boundaries than the imagined nation (Breuilly 1993:67). Can Russia be considered a nation state? Khazanov argues for the widespread understanding that Russia was never a nation state and that ethnically, culturally and linguistically, state and “nation” did not coincide (Khazanov 2003: 85) and that the state rather governed a multiethnic, even multinational population (Khazanov 2003: 87). Branches of Russian nationalism partially operate from this understanding, in which the (ethnic) Russians in the former Soviet Union republics should constitute part of the nation (Khazanov 2003: 90), partially from the understanding that other areas, not populated

by “ethnic” Russians, are part of the Russian state (Khazanov 2003: 93). Khazanov diagnoses Russian nationalism little innovation and characterizes it as “*antimodernist, anti-Western, antidemocratic, illiberal, authoritarian*” (Khazanov 2003: 94).

In addition to the above introduced ideal types of ‘imperialism’, scholars also argue that cultural and political (meta-)narratives such as (Neo-)Eurasianism, Pan-Slavism, but also Orthodoxy, the understanding of Russia as an own civilization include imperialistic aspects or fulfill imperialistic functions. Laruelle, for example, stresses the relationship between territory or territorial claims and political legitimization. The underlying assumption in the presented narratives is that territorial size is understood as representative of the country’s mission, state and culture (Laruelle 2019: 11). Neo-Eurasianism, as presented by writers such as Alexandr Dugin, was perceived as an attractive discursive model in post-Soviet Russia as it allowed to reconcile the dissolution of the Soviet Union with a cohesive understanding of the territory of the Russian Federation (Laruelle 2019: 40; Laruelle 2015: 188). Laruelle points to a central element of Neo-Eurasianism also found in the material: “*Russia is an empire, in the sense that the Russian nation and the Russian state do not totally overlap [...]: part of what should be included in the nation [...] is to be found outside the state, and some elements that are not always considered a part of the nation are inside state boundaries*” (Laruelle 2015: 190). “Eurasia” in Russian discourse furthermore reinforced the claim that Russia should have a distinctive role in the post-Soviet space (Laruelle 2015: 191).

Regarding Pan-Slavism, Suslov argues that it includes an inherently imperialistic aspects, as it “*transcends frontiers and borders, requires a substantial reshaping of the existing states*” (Suslov 2012: 577). It fulfills the function to “*rescue the image of Russian centrality in the world*” (Suslov 2012: 581). While oftentimes overlapping, Pan-Slavic “projects” range from “*Russkii Mir*” with a focus on “*Russian compatriots*”, to a messianic understanding of Orthodoxy, to an ethnic and/or cultural understanding of Eastern Slavs that would include Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova and sometimes Kazakhstan (Suslov 2012: 585; Tolz 1998a: 995). Orthodoxy, oftentimes referenced in both Eurasianism and Pan-Slavism, can then legitimize the necessity for a ‘civilizing mission’ (Bassin et al. 2015: 6; Suslov 2012: 578), in which constructions such as Russia as its own distinct, exceptional culture or civilization are stressed (Oskanian 2021: 36, Laruelle 2019: 48, Mogilner 2014: 39). While it is by no means possible to present the history and diversity of both Eurasianist and Pan-Slavic (meta-) narratives here, this short overview should sensitize to the outward-looking imperialist aspects of those narratives.

Lastly, attention should be drawn to the fact that studies about the Soviet Union and the Russian Federation and their complex imperial legacy, especially from a postcolonial (cultural) perspective, were slow to emerge (Oskanian 2021: 32). Oskanian explains this with a dominating tradition to analyze Western empire on the one hand and with the Soviet Union's peculiar form as an empire on the other hand. As an overland empire, the lines in the Soviet Union between its center and its borderland are blurred, complicating clear "othering", especially with the multicultural composition of the elite (Oksianin 2021: 33; Lieven 1995: 610). The dominating ideology of the Soviet Union as an 'anti-imperial camp', a union 'of free peoples' with claims to universalism and 'progress' furthermore hindered the analysis (Lieven 1995: 608). Consequently, the understanding of imperialist narratives remained rather weak in public discourse.

It is the goal of this thesis to contribute to this research field. Blakkisrud for example only constructs his ideal types as phases (Blakkisrud 2022: 4), rather than them existing mutually at the same time. In general, though, the referenced scholars agree that as ideal types, they never occur in such a pure form in the actual political discourse (Tolz 1998a: 993), but that phenomena of nationalism and imperialism usually overlap and can only rarely be distinguished as clearly as suggested here. As already argued above, the period right after the dissolution of the Soviet Union is oftentimes neglected in the construction of these typologies. It is thus the hope of this thesis to test whether the suggested typologies match the discourse that existed in the early 1990s.

While the introduced ideal types were used as a starting point for coding, the material shows that the actual discourse was much richer. None of the papers discussed in this chapter connect their research to actual policies and take political or discursive power into consideration. Therefore, this thesis hopes to connect the introduced frameworks with the multiple constructions of statehood and nation that were negotiated in the first years of the Russian Federation. Imperialism and nationalism were discussed in relation to concrete policies and institutions, such as the drafting of the Union Treaty, the construction of the Commonwealth of Independent States, the splitting up of Union property and the Armed Forces or the construction of the Russian state and its constitution. They were part of an intensive political struggle, that resulted in Yeltsin greatly enhancing his formal power as president, while communist, imperialist, and nationalist factions dominated not only politically in the parliament, but, as the material will show, also discursively in the

newspapers. It is thus important to include both actual policies and power relations in the analysis, as it can greatly sharpen our understanding for the stability or instability of the Russian state and its institutions in its early 1990s.

3. Research Design

3.1. Mayring's proposed steps of a Qualitative Content Analysis

Bearing the above-mentioned literature review in mind, we can now turn towards the research design. The research question (*Which nationalist and imperialist ideas were present in the public discourse from January 1991 to spring 1994?*) was specified in so far, as the terms nationalist and imperialist, as well as their limitation, should be much more contextualized at this point. To answer the research question, Philipp Mayring's Qualitative Content Analysis was chosen. His proposed method is suitable to answer the research question for several reasons: First, it accounts for an analysis of both bigger samples (in distinction to in-depth analysis of a limited number of interviews) and for the analysis of newspaper articles. Second, the Qualitative Content Analysis proposed by Mayring includes step-by-step instructions, leading to transparent and ideally reproduceable research. Third, these steps allow a combination of both quantitative and qualitative methods. This is ideal since quantitative elements will be introduced in the form of frequency counts of the coded categories. It will help to evaluate which concepts were more present or more urgently discussed than others, thus adding a dimension of weighting the importance of certain concepts, as well as contributing to the above-mentioned power-analysis.

Before starting the analysis, Mayring suggests specifying the sample, its context of emergence, formal characteristics, leading up to source criticism that will be discussed separately below (Mayring 2015: 54). To answer the research question, material from the digital archive of *The Current Digest of the Russian Press* will be used. *The Current Digest of the Russian Press*, earlier *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, is a collection of Soviet and then Russian newspaper articles, speeches, decrees, and government documents. It was founded in 1949 in Minneapolis (USA) and has since published material for research translated into English on a weekly basis. The material is suitable for examination as it provides the possibility to reconstruct and analyze the discourse in those early years of the

1990s. The positions found in the material and the typologies and narratives introduced in the chapter above are understood as discursive, following a constructivist approach and stressing the importance of “*discursive practices in nation-building*” (Aksiumov & Avksentev: 187).

The material has the following formal characteristics: Newspaper articles, which constitute most of the material used for this work, include information such as the date of publication, the author’s name, sometimes the author’s respective position and the newspaper in which the article was published. Some newspaper articles appear only in shortened form. Decrees or political speeches provide similar information as newspaper articles, including a reference to the publishing institution or the place of presentation. In some documents, translations are specified by providing the Russian word(s) and cultural references are partially explained in brackets.

It is important to note that some meaning could have gotten lost in translation. For example, whereas in languages such as Russian or German¹ the distinction between “rossiiskii” (multicultural nationalism) and “russkii” (ethnic nationalism) is possible, the English language does not provide for this distinction. Thus, it can be assumed that this specific meaning is lost in translation and that this thesis cannot properly analyze the occurrence and differentiation in the material. Adding to this, the material used for this paper has already been pre-selected by the editors of *The Current Digest of the Russian Press*. However, as the discourse is analyzed over a period of more than three years, most existing positions and narratives should in fact be represented.

As a sample, all articles, documents, or decrees from January 1991 until April 1994 were included that dealt with topics introduced above, such as sovereignty, statehood, nationalism and imperialism, the debates about the Union Treaty and the Commonwealth of Independent States, the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the emerging Russian state and its form, as discussed mostly within the context of the drafting of a constitution. If multiple texts or documents were published about a specific event, such as a declaration of sovereignty by a Union or an Autonomous republic, the one(s) with narrative structure instead of simple newspaper reports consisting only of a few lines were included in the sample. In total, around 600 documents matched these criteria and were read. In this thesis, approximately 119 documents are quoted to exemplify the trends found in the analysis. The documents will be quoted numerically with information about the month and year of publication. The exact place of finding within the digital archive will be specified in the annex under “8. Sources”.

¹ Im Deutschen: Russländisch und Russisch.

The research question itself is derived from theoretical assumptions made transparent above (Mayring 2015: 59). Mayring suggests that scholars specify their direction of their question and therefore their analysis (Mayring 2015: 58). It is neither the intention of this work to analyze, as common in linguistics, the semantics of the language, nor to look at the intentions of each individual author of an article. Instead, the analysis will focus on the content of the material and the conveyed meaning, including assessments and values or value systems associated with broader concepts such as nationalism, imperialism or statehood. Ideally, by centering the then existing public debates, it will be possible to demonstrate how exactly these abstract terms were constructed and that they were in fact in the process of being *imagined*, as first prominently shown by Anderson (2016: 14).

Mayring proposes three “techniques of analysis”: Summary, explication, and structuring (Mayring 2015: 67). The technique of structuring is the most central one for this work, both in regard to the research question and to the amount of material. The main purpose of this approach is to structure the material by using pre-defined and then continuously adapted categories that are rooted in theory (Mayring 2015: 97). Thus, the material is approached in a deductive manner with the goal to structure the material.

For the structuring of content, Mayring proposes the following eight steps (Mayring 2015: 98 and 104): 1. Specification of the unit of analysis (word, sentences, paragraphs or entire pages), 2. The Introduction of categories rooted in theory and 3. Development of a system of categories, 4. Development of definition of categories, specified with examples from the material and the introduction of coding rules in the case that the distinction between multiple categories is unclear, 5. Place of finding specified by the coding guidelines, 6. First analysis of the material, extraction of matching text passages 7. The revision of categories and definition and the repetition of the process, 8. Presentation of results. Making the steps of analysis transparent should allow others to retrace them and thus allow qualitative research to be somewhat reproducible, something it is oftentimes criticized for.

For 1, all units will be chosen that either directly refer to the defined categories or convey the meaning defined for the categories. The smallest unit to be included in the analysis will be a sentence, the largest a paragraph or multiple paragraphs. As mentioned above, it is not the goal of this work to pay attention to semantics, thus smaller units, such as a part of a sentence or single words, will not be analyzed. The codes initially chosen for the analysis are derived from the literature review, thus being rooted in theory and existing research: Nationalism (ethnic, civic, multi-ethnic nationalism) and Imperialism (empire-saving nationalism, internal imperial nationalism and external imperial nationalism). These codes were used to analyze the

material in a deductive manner (Mayring 2015: 68). However, during a first round of coding it became clear that such a categorization would greatly reduce the content and richness of the material in regard to the research question. The material showed that statehood, imperialism and nationalism were discussed in regard to specific policies such as the Union Treaty, the Commonwealth of Independent States and the construction of the Russian state and that the initial codes did not provide the possibility to connect them to concrete policies and to analyze opposition or support – assessments which are highly associated with the meaning ascribed to the events of this period. Thus, codes referring to specific attempts of state building and their distinction into support, criticism and opposition were added.² It was also decided to structure the chapters accordingly, as this enabled not only a more precise analysis but also a structuring of the material closer to the proposed research question introduced above. A more detailed coding guideline in which definitions, examples, rules of distinction and place of finding are included (steps 2-4), can be found in the annex under “9. Coding Guidelines”. The results will be presented and discussed in the following chapter.

Next to the qualitative content analysis describe above, quantitative elements will be introduced in the form of frequency counts of the coded categories. This will help to evaluate which concept were more present or more urgently discussed than others, thus adding a dimension of weighting the importance of certain concepts. For all steps, the program MAXQDA will be used.

3.2. Source criticism: The situation of the press in the early 1990s

While it is impossible to describe and analyze the historical context of every piece of material, it is important to consider the general context of the material, especially the newspaper articles, in order to accurately assess the political, cultural and historical context in which those articles were published. In the early post-Soviet years, media outlets, like other spheres of society, were confronted with economic challenges. While newspapers such as *Izvestia* or *Pravda* during communist rule were state subsidized (Rosenkrans 2001: 550), the incipient reforms led to inflation and reduction in newspaper output (McNair 1994: 122). As a result of the reforms, the readership and thus circulation of the newspapers sank drastically, whereas before newspapers were widely accessible. This might have led to phenomena such as shared

² While the general structure of support, opposition and criticism worked for most chapters, the material showed that during the period categorized as “Russian Federation under the old constitution” the debate was especially polarized. As a result, positions otherwise classified as “criticism” were less present. This can partially be explained with the fact that the newspapers reported along the lines of conflict between president/ government and parliament. As a result, the chapter “Russian Federation under the old constitution” consists only of “support” and “opposition”.

subscriptions, passing on of a newspaper after having read it or a turn towards more regional and local papers (Wedgwood 1996: 474; Belin 2002: 140). The economic and political crisis also led to a growing distrust towards the media (Richter 1995)³, with the media oftentimes being blamed for the crisis (McNair 1994: 115). However, during this period smaller opposition papers, oftentimes portraying nationalist or communist positions, might have even increased, as they were regularly distributed at anti-government demonstrations (Wedgwood 1996: 474). To overcome their economic situation, newspapers had to develop a number of survival strategies. They included the reorganization towards larger organizations or some meager attempts to use advertisements (McNair 1994: 123). Yet, newspapers couldn't offer companies consumption-oriented consumers with high purchasing power during a period in which many Russians experienced economic decline paired with a mistrust about the "commercialization of their culture" (McNair 1994: 124). *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, *Izvestia* and *Kommersant* received foreign currency, either by being sold abroad, by starting English versions or by cooperating with western newspapers. For example, *Izvestia* cooperated with *The Financial Times* to produce *Finansovye izvestia* (Richter 1995). Most available financing options, however, related to the possibility to influence the content of the newspapers. Managers of profitable sectors or emerging entrepreneurs were able to buy newspapers (Rosenkrans 2001: 554; McNair 1994: 125). While newspaper plurality eventually increased, the structure of the economy did not change in the same speed: Many newspapers had to print their papers in a single state-owned printing press (Belin 2002: 140). Newspapers also continued to be highly dependent on state subsidies, which gave the state leverage to control them (Wedgwood 1996: 473).

Thus, in general, newspapers and broadcasting emerged as the sphere in which the political power struggle was negotiated. In this context, McNair diagnoses that "*the Soviet tradition of viewing media as instruments of political power, rather than as objective reporters of, and watchdogs over it, was retained by all side in the dispute, with each seeking to establish control over key sectors*" (McNair 1994: 126). Initially, political influence on media and newspaper decreased drastically from 1986 to 1990. It became increasingly possible to publish anti-communist views, one of the prime examples being Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago* or *Literaturnaia Gazeta* (Wedgwood 1996: 471). Meanwhile, the so-called central press such as *Pravda*, *Izvestia* or the *Komsomolskaia pravda* during that period kept their high numbers of circulation (Rosenkrans 2001: 550) with little serious competition.

³ At the time of the publication of this article by Richter, the Canadian Journal of Communication does not allow the download of papers as a PDF that include the pages of the article. Therefore, it is not possible to quote the exact page.

Journalist and editors continued to be wary of possible penalties, unsure how freely they could report on topics such as alcoholism, lack of goods or corruption and oftentimes preferred interviews with officials instead of opinion-pieces (Jensen 1993: 101). During this period Gorbachev put in place editors that were loyal to his reforms (Richter 1995). The new media law of August 1990 eventually changed the legal context in which newspapers operated, officially forbidding censorship and ending the communist party's control over registration of new media outlets (McNair 1994: 116). However, the media law only marginally provides insight into the relation between state and media. The law did enable emerging groups and parties to find their own newspapers and intensified the erosion of Marxism-Leninism as the dominant ideology, while at the same time hinting at the emerging public sphere (McNair 1994: 118; Richter 2007: 4). Nevertheless, the CPSU continued to interfere into media affairs, restricting free coverage of events (Richter 2007: 5). Since the sample includes newspaper articles from this period, we must assume that they were written and published in a time in which more increasingly topics earlier restricted were being discussed, although not without restriction.

During the August coup of 1991 against Gorbachev, the Emergency committee probably underestimated the role of media outlets as it failed to fully control the coverage of the event (McNair 1994: 120). In this situation, the editors of the most important newspapers together created *Obshchaia gazeta*, which was passed out in the metro and street underpasses in Moscow to inform about the ongoing coup (Jensen 1993: 109). In the aftermath of the August coup, Yeltsin passed a decree to ban the six CPSU newspapers that supported the coup while also transferring their assets to Russian jurisdiction (McNair 1994: 127), a step for which he was criticized by his supporters (Jensen 1993: 111). While the decree was later annulled, it became one of the first examples of political control on newspapers exercised by Yeltsin. Both Yeltsin and the speaker of the Supreme Soviet, Ruslan Khasbulatov, attempted to coopt media for their positions. Khasbulatov, for example, singled out *Izvestia* blaming it for “*non-objective coverage of the Congress*” and repeatedly refused its registration as an independent newspaper (Jensen 1993: 111). Subsidies were distributed according to loyalty towards either the government or the parliament. Thus, the newspapers *Moskovskie Novosti*, *Izvestia*, *Rossiiskie vesti* and the television channel *Channel II* can be characterized as pro-Yeltsin and pro-government, *Pravda*, *Sovietskaia Rossiia* and *Channel I* as pro-parliament, whereas the newspaper *Den* published nationalistic and imperialistic positions that Jensen refers to as reactionary (Jensen 1993: 114). When the political confrontation between the executive and legislative branches intensified in 1992, the media followed “*their typical lines of political*

loyalty” (Jensen 1993: 116). Whereas Yeltsin eventually found the so-called Federal Information Center for the Russian Federation, justified with the need to have an official government channel to provide governmental information, members of parliament and journalists alike expected restricted access to information following Yeltsin’s party line (Rosenkrans 2001: 551, Jensen 1993: 118). Khasbulatov attempted to transfer the control of subsidies from the Ministry of Press to the Supreme Soviet (Jensen 1993: 119). In March 1993, Yeltsin announced two decrees on media that increased his possibilities to exert control over the media, laying out concepts of “objectivity” and “professional responsibility” (Jensen 1993: 120). During the constitutional crisis of 1993, B. Yeltsin forbid both oppositional parties and newspapers (Nov. 1993 Vol 45 No 40, p. 17-18) with *Pravda* and *Sovetskaia Rossiia* being prevented from covering the December elections in 1993 (Wedgewood 1996: 472). An EU monitoring report concluded that “*a genuine fair discussion*” of the Constitution was not possible, as “*pressure, particularly with regard to the draft Constitution, was directly and indirectly applied by the government on all media*” (European Institute for Media 1994: 35).

Overall, television increasingly replaced newspapers as the main source of information (Belin 2002: 140) in the analyzed period and television and broadcasting played a central role in the conflict between government and parliament that culminated in 1993 (Wedgwood 1996: 475). These above-mentioned aspects are a restriction to the laid-out research design: It has to be assumed that legally, politically and discursively there were limits in what could have been debated and that newspaper increasingly became part of the conflict between executive and legislative. Furthermore, this work analyzes a period in which next to newspapers television and broadcasting gained importance. However, bearing these limitations in mind, it should still be possible to gain an understanding of the debates of this period by analyzing the articles, decrees and speeches.

4. Empirical Findings

4.1. The Union Treaty

The Union Treaty can be understood as an attempt to replace the 1922 Treaty on the Creation of the USSR and thus as an attempt to reform the crisis-ridden Soviet Union in its last year. Six Union republics, the Baltic states Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, as well as Armenia, Georgia and Moldova refused to participate in the drafting of the Union Treaty. The remaining nine republics, the Russian SFSR, Belarus, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan,

Kirghizia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, generally supported a reformed Union and participated in the process of the drafting of the Union Treaty within the 9+1 format (the nine republics plus the USSR). The signing of the Union Treaty was prevented by the August 1991 coup by hardliners of the CPSU against Gorbachev. In the immediate aftermath of the coup, Ukraine and Azerbaijan declared their independence, making a New Union Treaty highly likely, resulting in the Belovezha Accords⁴ that led to the dissolution of the USSR by the political leaders of Ukraine, Russia and Belarus in December 1991.

However, the Union Treaty is of importance for the research question as it is within the framework of the Union Treaty that central aspects such as statehood and different conflicting conceptions of sovereignty, as well as nationalism and imperialism were discussed. In order to conceptualize the variety of positions of the reform-minded part and the hardliners of the CPSU, the democrats and the Union republics, (critical) support and opposition to the New Union Treaty will be discussed.

The analysis of the material indicated that first, the conflicting conceptions of sovereignty greatly hampered the drafting of the Union Treaty. Second, the Union Treaty was opposed by the six above mentioned Union republics with strong national movements, representing a case of anti-imperial nationalism. These Union republics regularly referred to the USSR as imperialist and or as occupation. Third, the hardliners within the CPSU feared the reforms for a loss of power and strongly opposed the national movements as “unworthy of a Great Power” as which they understood the USSR. Lastly, Yeltsin’s propagated nationalism was directed at the Center, constituted by the CPSU, not (ethnic) Russians. (Ethnic) Russians according to Yeltsin especially suffered in the USSR. While formally participating in the process of drafting the Union Treaty, Yeltsin increasingly build an alliance with other Union republics against the center, greatly strengthening his position via the Gorbachev and the CPSU.

4.1.2. Critical support towards the Union Treaty

The aspects discussed in this chapter such as sovereignty, territory or statehood of the USSR were mostly discussed by those that – in principle – agreed to the need to transform the USSR, the leadership of the nine Union republics and the reform-minded part of the CPSU. In quantitative terms of the analysis, as well as when considering the results of the March

⁴ Belovezhkaia is where the dissolution of USSR was decided, and the Alma-Ata agreement refers to the creation of the Commonwealth of Independent States. (118 Apr. 1992)

referendum in 1991 about a transformed Union, those favoring a renewed USSR were in the majority.

Sovereignty

One of the central aspects found in the material, both in the articles and speeches concerning the Union Treaty, is the question of how to reconcile the sovereignty of the Union Republics, but also of the autonomous republics with the “statehood” and sovereignty of the Soviet Union. The conflicting conceptions of sovereignty and statehood greatly hampered the drafting of the Union Treaty.

On the one hand, the Soviet Union was perceived as a regular state instead of a massive land empire, its institutions as the ones maintaining general state functions. During the fifth sessions of the Deputy of the USSR Supreme Soviet, S. Akhromeyev said:

“This Union is a sovereign state that has its own territories, borders, citizenship, emblem, anthem, and flag. This state has sovereign bodies of state power, acts independently within the bounds of its powers, and has armed forces and security and law-enforcing agencies. It takes its place before the outside world, upholds the state interests of the Soviet Union” (2 Aug. 1991).

In this understanding, sovereignty and statehood is attributed primarily to the Soviet Union, less so to its members, the Union and autonomous republics. R. N. Nishanov, in his role as First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Uzbek SSR, delivered a report at the Fourth Congress of USSR People’s Deputies and sketched out what, in his opinion, should remain in the jurisdiction of the center:

“If we set the goal of reconfiguring the USSR into a sovereign federal state, then we must firmly specify that without ... territory, citizenship, property finances (including taxes) and legislation there cannot be an independent state” (3 Aug. 1991).

He continues to argue that “*the laws adopted within the bounds of the jurisdiction of the USSR Supreme Soviet*” (the entirety of the territory of the USSR) have to be implemented “*at the republic and local levels*” (3 Aug. 1991).

However, when a number of Union republics refused to participate in the process of drafting the New Union Treaty, the question of what exactly could account for the territory of the USSR became increasingly unclear. Scholars in *Komsomolskaia Pravda* discussed, that “one highly important condition of the referendum remains totally unclear, namely, within what territorial borders its results will be respected.” (4 Mar. 1991).

The wish to reform the Soviet Union in its then existing form as imagined by Gorbachev did not imply the abandonment of the USSR as the central pillar of statehood. Instead, M. Gorbachev rather referred to a re-organization of state institutions and political power with the goal of “getting away from excessive centralization and the unitary approach” (5 Jan. 1991). However, the need for a Union center in this perspective remains, as without central state structures, so Gorbachev’s argumentation, the state would cease to function or even exist: “At the center, a center has to be maintained that will preserve this state as living organism, so that this will benefit all the republics” (6 Jan. 1991).

In contradiction to this understanding, both Union Republics and Autonomous republics declared their sovereignty in the years of Perestroika. From their perspective, the Union Treaty was to be constructed as a Union of sovereign states, in which sovereignty and thus statehood were to be placed at the level of the Union and the Autonomous republics.

Consequently, one of the central distinction lines and recurring arguments in the process of drafting the Union Treaty refers to the relation of sovereignty of the center and the republics, as acknowledged by R. N. Nishanov:

“At present, there are differing opinions on two aspects of this matter. Some assert that two sovereignties are incompatible, that if the republics are sovereign then the Union cannot be sovereign, and, vice versa, that if the Union is sovereign then the republics lose their sovereignty” (7 Feb. 1991).

For Gorbachev and those in favor of a transformed Union, it seemed possible to “[combine] the sovereignty of the USSR with the sovereignty of the republics” (5 Jan. 1991). To others, such as several liberals that urged Yeltsin in an article in *Nezavsimaiia gazeta* not to sign the Union Treaty, the concept of two combined sovereignties remained utterly unclear:

“To this day, no one has been able to explain intelligibly what this means: sovereign states forming another independent sovereign state whose leadership

will, in the process, be endowed with broader rights and powers than they have”
(8 Sept. 1991).

Even though much less prevalent in the material, the question of sovereignty was further complicated by the unclear relation or hierarchy between the Union Republics and the autonomous republics. When the nine participating Union Republics declared that only those participating in the meetings to discuss the Union Treaty would sign it, the Autonomous republics within the Russian SFSR demanded the right to sign the Union Treaty as well - arguing that they too had declared their sovereignty and thus had the right to self-determination. *Izvestia* reported that the autonomous republics claimed that since they too “*are a state formation*”, they should be given equal status: “*How should the state sovereignty adopted by a Union republic differ legally from the sovereignty adopted by an autonomous entity? [...]. It doesn't differ at all, nor should it*” (9 June 1991). The report continues acknowledging that the Autonomous republics would vote with one voice together with the RSFSR, thus implicitly acknowledging a hierarchy between the Union and Autonomous republics. This serves as an example of how ambiguously the term “sovereignty” was claimed and conceptualized.

While the nine Union republics participating in the drafting of the Union Treaty generally favored a transformed Union, this did not imply a consensus about the actual content of the new Union Treaty. Analogue to the controversy of sovereignty, it remained unclear to which level juridical competence should be assigned, pointing to the fact of just how difficult it was to reform the USSR's highly intertwined political system and centrally planned economy. With the refusal of the six republics to support the Union Treaty, the remaining nine republics had to contribute to the Union budget what before 15 republics had shared. Since military expenses constituted a big part of the Union budget, this mostly affected the Armed Forces (10 May 1991). Such aspects contributed to the feeling that remaining within the Union appeared unattractive even for those republics that generally supported a transformed Union. A journalist of *Komsomolskaia Pravda* thus concluded: “*You can't help but envy the runaway republics*” (10 May 1991).

It was hoped that a Union-wide referendum in March 1991 could overcome the political impasse and legitimize the Union Treaty. While the majority of the population living in the territory of the USSR voted for a renewed Union, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, Armenia,

Moldova and Georgia (with the exception of Abkhazia and South Ossetia) did not participate. Furthermore, of those republics participating in the referendum, Kazakhstan and Russia for example adapted the wording. Whereas the initial wording referred to a “*Union of Soviet Socialist Republics in a renewed federation of equal, sovereign republics*”, Kazakhstan changed it to “*a Union of equal, sovereign states*” (11 Apr. 1991), pointing again to an ambiguous understanding of which form a renewed Union should take (Union, confederation or federation) and to the described conflicting understanding of statehood. In the RSFSR, a question about the introduction of the post of Russian president was added.

Correspondingly, even those Union republics that supported the drafting of a new Union Treaty had their concerns to fully accept the Soviet Union as the main bearer of statehood, hoping to maintain legislation and political power on the level of their republics after their declarations of sovereignty. This greatly impeded the drafting and the possibility to reform the USSR in the framework of the Union Treaty.

4.1.3. Opposition towards the Union Treaty

The following part will attempt to map the central opposing forces and their interests and positions until the conservative coup in August 1991, both in regard to the Union Treaty and the emerging national movements in the Union republics. Opposition towards Gorbachev’s taken reform path existed from two different sides: Opposition by the leadership of those six Union republics and the so-called democrats⁵ on the one hand and the opposition of the hardliners within the CPSU and other institutions that opposed the (extent of the) reforms of Gorbachev on the other hand. The former mostly represent national movements. The latter represent an imperial approach of maintaining the Soviet Union not only as a unitary state. The material showed that they also assessed the national movements as an offense to the “Great Power” as which they understood the USSR. The national movements were also oftentimes opposed by all-Union institutions such as Army members or members of the respective Communist parties. Interestingly, the democrats and especially Yeltsin played a double game: They participated in the New Union Treaty, while building an alliance with the Union republics against the Center and harshly criticizing Gorbachev. In Yeltsin’s argumentation, it is the CPSU that forms the empire and the center, not (ethnic) Russians as the biggest ethnic group.

⁵ What is referred to as radical democrats emerged from the Interregional Group of Deputies, of which Yeltsin was a part, within the Congress of People’s Deputies and Supreme Soviet (Gill and Markwick 2000: 68).

Opposition to the Union Treaty by certain Union Republics

It is especially the republics of Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Armenia, Moldova and Georgia that voiced their opposition towards both the Union itself and the Union Treaty, while arguing for the establishment of their independent statehood. The Baltic states, among the earliest to declare their sovereignty and their non-participation in the Union Treaty process, operated from the position that “*they did not sign the 1922 Union Treaty and that the procedure for their annexation in 1940 was illegal*” (12 Jan. 1991). For Z. Gamsakhurdia, then Chairman of the Georgian Supreme Soviet, “*Georgia will in fact be independent only after the fall of the world’s last empire, the Soviet Union*” (13 May 1991). By mid-July 1991, the Ukrainian parliament declared that the current draft of the Union Treaty did not live up to the declared sovereignty and as a consequence, it was questioned whether the Ukrainian SSR should sign this draft, while generally expressing its wish to remain part of the Union (14 Aug. 1991). The August coup against Gorbachev hastened the unwillingness of more Union republics to sign a treaty with a center in which conservative communist forces had just attempted a coup (Marples 2014: 88). With Ukraine’s criticism of the existing Union Treaty draft, a continuation of the Union Treaty became highly unlikely (Marples 2014: 93). It is not surprising from the perspective of those Union republics that terms such as imperialism, colonialism or occupation were frequently used, pointing to the characterization of the national movements as anti-imperial movements as argued by Oskianian (2021: 26).

Yeltsin’s alliance with the Union republics

B. Yeltsin somewhat played a double game: He supported the drafting of the Union Treaty, because the process of drafting it enhanced the role of the RSFSR and that of him as president (Marples 2014: 90). Meanwhile, he positioned himself in alliance with the Union republics, arguing that the center disregarded not only their sovereignty, but also that of the RSFSR. In this view, the center is constituted by the CPSU and not by (ethnic) Russians as the largest ethnic group. Ethnic Russians, so Yeltsin, greatly suffered under the CPSU and the USSR. As will be shown further below, Yeltsin’s nationalism thus presents an interesting case, as his positions change greatly over time.

Challenging the center, B. Yeltsin attacked both Gorbachev and the CPSU for “*defending the old political system*” (15 Feb. 1991). Instead of “*democratization, glasnost and a state based on the rule of law*”, he accused the center of “*a turn towards an openly reactionary political course*” (15 Feb. 1991) and the preservation of a “*rigid, centralized power*” (16 Mar. 1991).

He “*sees it as his task to restore independence to people [...] and regions*” (17 July 1991). In the process of drafting the Union Treaty, Yeltsin continuously criticized the center’s unwillingness to give independence to the republics: “*there is also the matter of disregard for the process of the republic’s attainment of sovereignty*” (15 Feb. 1991).

Yeltsin strategically positioned himself as fighting with the other Union republics for the attainment of independence. Not only did he sign a bilateral treaty with Lithuania as president of the RSFSR, recognizing “*the sovereignty of the Lithuanian state*” (18 Aug. 1991). In the aftermath of the Soviet Army’s military confrontation in Lithuania and Latvia in January 1991, Yeltsin condemned “*the use of the Army against the civil population, the bloodshed in relations between nationalities*” (16 Mar. 1991). Instead of military involvement, he supported diplomatic solutions. A journalist of *Sovetskaia Rossiia* covered Yeltsin’s speech at the third session of the RSFSR Supreme Soviet:

“Life, [Yeltsin] believes, has shown the ineffectiveness of the hard-line approach to solving the problems of the Russian-speaking population. The roots of many discriminatory decisions against the Russian-speaking population can be found in the center’s policy of force. Pressure damages relations among nationalities and the prestige of the USSR, and casts a shadow on other republics. The leadership of the RSFSR is committed to a different approach, one that is based on mutual trust, honest dialogue on a firm legal basis, and clear-cut mutual obligations. The conclusion of treaties with other republics is opening up an opportunity to change the situation” (15 Feb. 1991).

The material indicates that the Union republics increasingly understood Yeltsin as promising or as a possible political ally for achieving their own independence. After declaring that Georgia would not sign the Union Treaty, the Georgian Supreme Soviet Chairman Zvia Gamsakhurdia stated:

“If Gorbachev’s Moscow refuses, we’ll try to establish this kind of relation with Yeltsin’s Moscow, directly with Russia and other republics. Strategically speaking, we are allies in the struggle against the center” (19 Jan. 1991).

Since Yeltsin focused so much on the Union republics, the Autonomous republics within the Union republics were rather critical towards the democrats, as they “*have been accused by their political opponents to disregard the rights of “small peoples”*” (20 Apr. 1991). As a

consequence, “*the Center [was] pinning great hopes on possible discord between the Russian leadership and the autonomous units that are part of that republic*” (11 Apr. 1991).

Opposition to the Union Treaty by the hardliners

Gorbachev found himself in the middle position between the demands of the Union republics, B. Yeltsin’s and the democrat’s criticism on the one hand, and the hardliners of the CPSU, as well as members of all-Union institutions on the other hand.

It is the latter group that rhetorically referred to the USSR as a Great Power and to whom both a New Union Treaty and the national movements represented “shameful” and “unworthy” developments. For example, Yu. Blokhin, co-chairmen of the Union group, clearly voiced his full-blown opposition to the Union Treaty:

“Yu. Blokhin said unequivocally: ‘We don’t need the new draft Union Treaty’. The Union group is completely satisfied with the 1922 Union Treaty, to which ‘shameful clarifications and additions should not be made’. As for the new draft Union Treaty, it was said that it is being ‘insistently imposed on us’, and that it creates ‘an impression of fraud’ (21 May 1991).

The Great Power-discourse was especially strong in regard to national movements, who were harshly dismissed and continuously framed as “Stalinism”, (22 Apr. 1991), “fascist”, “Apartheid” or “Nazism”. The discourse around the sovereignty of the Union republics clearly showed imperial views, as well demonstrated by this quote written by an *Izvestia* journalist:

“It’s a sorry spectacle: The prestige of a great power is falling because the voice of its central spokesmen is being interrupted, as at an oriental bazaar, by the voices of local pitchmen trying to convince everyone to buy only their wares and to offer assistance only to them or through them” (23 Apr. 1991).

For this group, both the reforms and the national movements endangered the existence of the USSR, because of which “*not only a country, but a branch of world history may perish, and its death will be a global, worldwide catastrophe*” (24 Jan 1991). This quote, taken from an article directed at Gorbachev written by factory heads, military commanders, writers and

scholars, illustrates that the reforms were oftentimes accompanied by warnings of chaos, poverty or civil war. Those opposing the reforms and the national movements threatened the renegade republics by economic, political and military means (25 June 1991) and Gorbachev himself and the reformers were frequently criticized for their “weak” handling of the national movements.

However, next to the Great Power discourse, the reforms were discussed as a weakening of their power base. Yu. Blokhin describes the opposition to the Union Treaty as following: “*The chief complaint against the draft was ‘the incompatibility between the presidential form of state administration and the power of the Soviets’*” (21 May 1991). Leading up to the August putsch in 1991, newspapers reported about an increased “*confrontation between the Cabinet of Ministers and the Supreme Soviet, on the one hand, and the President of the USSR, on the other hand*” (26 July 1991):

“Party officials, generals and marshals, and many Union Ministers think that their political life will simply end with the possible transformation in the Union legislative body. ... Gorbachev, forced to reckon with realities, is not perceived by them as a person who will protect their interests” (26 July 1991).

Similar to those in higher state position fearing a loss of status, the same holds true for members of All-Union institutions, such as members of the Army or the national branches of the Communist parties in the Union republics. Increasingly turning into “non-local” USSR citizens, a break-up of the USSR was not in their interest. This was mostly discussed in the case of the Baltics, as different laws on citizenship (and later laws on privatization) gravely aggravated the legal, political, and economic status of this group (27 Jan 1991).

As a consequence, the so-called Union group demanded an extraordinary Congress of the USSR People’s Deputies to ask the USSR Prosecutor’s Office “*to prepare indictments against the initiators of perestroika*” already in April 1991 (21 May 1991). The declaration of the hardliners in August 1991 that Gorbachev was unable “*to perform the duties of the President of the USSR due to his state of his health*” and the introduction of the State Committee for the State of Emergency (SCSE) (28 Sept. 1991) greatly accelerated the dissolution of the USSR and pushed the CPSU temporarily into illegality. More and more Union republics declared their independence. By decree B. Yeltsin as “*popularly elected President of the RSFSR*” put himself in charge of “*all USSR bodies of executive power*”, including “*the USSR State Security Committee, the USSR Ministry of Internal Affairs and the*

USSR Ministry of Defense” (29 Sept. 1991). Yeltsin’s public protest the SCSE strengthened his position as president.

In December 1991, the heads of the republics of Ukraine, Belarus and Russia declared the dissolution of the USSR, thus leading both to the creation of the Commonwealth of Independent States as well as the establishment of at least formal statehood in the Union republics. How the emerging Russian state was assessed will be addressed in the following chapters.

4.2. Russian Federation under the old constitution

4.2.1. Support for the Russian State

The emerging Russian state was mostly supported by those that perceived Yeltsin as the best bet against the “revival of the empire” and the so-called “red-brown coalition” regaining power. However, the material indicates that the support towards Yeltsin was less due to Yeltsin offering a widely accepted model of state-building or market reforms. References towards abstract values such as democracy or a general support for a market economy did not dominate in the material. Instead, support towards B. Yeltsin was expressed because he was understood as the only politician that could effectively stand in the way of the “national patriots”.

Standing in this line of argumentation, Gavriil Popov, Chairman of the Russian Democratic Reform Movement, encouraged voters to confirm Yeltsin as president, his government’s socio-economic policies and early elections in the referendum on April 25th. He introduces Yeltsin as

“the main guarantor of Russia’s continued development on a constitutional basis and the guarantor of an accelerated process of adopting a new Constitution and eliminating the Soviet system as the main nutrient medium for attempts at Communist or national-Communist revenge” (30 May 1993).

This quote demonstrates as how urgent the possibility of the Communists’ regaining power was assessed. Andrei Kozyrev, Minister of Foreign Affairs, explicitly warns of the danger of the “neo-Bolsheviks” regaining power and the loss of support by the democratic forces: *“The moderate spectrum is being washed away”, “what is happening in our country now is similar to Germany in 1933, when some of the democrats began to shift to nationalistic positions”*.

He too, concludes, that as a consequence, *“the President remains the only hope. He remains the only rock, the only real force opposing the current, and we must all unite around him”* (31 July 1992).

Occasionally Yeltsin was discussed, in this case by a journalist of the newspaper *Sevodnia*, as a *“transitional figure”*, that was needed only as long as the *“real danger of a return to communism disappears in Russia”*, when *“he will no longer be needed as President”*, introducing a *“post-Yeltsin era”*. Until then, he remains the *“guarantor against the restoration of communism”* (32 Oct. 1993).

Some articles and newspapers indicated that the democrat’s position was understood as a race against time. According to the journalist Dmitry Furman of *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, the democrats had to be in power long enough for certain policies to develop fully, before revisionist forces could take over:

“If Russia's democratic forces halt our slide toward wars and fascism and if we can get at least 10 years of peaceful democratic development, calm down just a little and come to our senses, the very worst will be behind us. But if this is to happen, the democratically minded people of Russia will have to struggle with all their might against attempts to forcibly change borders, even if they are justified by the loftiest and most obvious principles of fairness” (33 Aug. 1992).

It is the parliament that was understood as the place of conflict between the executive and the legislative. *Izvestia* as a pro-Yeltsin newspaper argued that the parliament is *“the wall against which all of Yeltsin’s ideas are smashed”*, that *“deprived the executive branch to function normally, to exercise its constitutional powers and pursue the policy that [...] was supported in the April referendum”* (34 Oct. 1993). It is against this background that the introduction of presidential rule was supported, mostly, but not only, by pro-Yeltsin and pro-reform groups. The Russian Democratic Reform Movement, a party that did not make the threshold in the elections in 1993, suggested to *“establish presidential rule for two and a half years, during which the present Constitution would not be in effect”* (35 Dec. 1992). Arguing against constitutional drafts that bear traces of the Soviets, drafts favoring a presidential republic circulated. As the Supreme Soviet, the parliament in the constitution inherited from the RSFSR, was understood by the democrats as the institution standing in the way of political and market reforms, support for a presidential system was accompanied by claims of *“not being ready”* for parliamentary form: *“We are not yet ready for a parliamentary form. That*

requires a developed political system, one that has parties, a special level of sophistication, and firmly states rules of play” (36 June 1993). While generally supporting the government’s policies, a historian in *Literaturnaia gazeta* argued that “*it will take at least a generation*” for “*shifts in the masses’ consciousness in favor of individualism over collectivism*” to occur (37 Feb. 1992).

Yeltsin’s powerbase initially laid with the so-called radical democrats, loosely organized with parties such as Democratic Russia, the Radical Democrats, and the Nonparty faction in the parliament. A journalist of *Nezavisimaia gazeta* characterized this group as “*the radically minded Western-oriented intelligentsia, people from all segments of the population who respond to openly anticommunist slogans, and a significant portion of entrepreneurial circles*” (38 Sept. 1992). Discursively, they referred to the support of the population against the CPSU and for Yeltsin, as expressed in the referendum in April 1993: “*The people rejected that choice [the SCSE], but it is being imposed on them again*” (39 July 1993). With the increasing conflict between president and parliament, Yeltsin also attempted to build a bridge to the centrist Civic Alliance. When Yeltsin decided to dissolve the legislative by decree, parties such as the party of Economic Freedom or members of the Russia’s Choice fraction supported this. However, Yeltsin’s decision also resulted in him losing support of formerly pro-Yeltsin parties and/or fractions such as the Republican Party of the Russian Federation, as a result of which “*the ‘coup’ has united the forces of the centrists and the oppositionists*” (40 Oct. 1993).

Lastly, and similar to the arguments in the earlier chapter, Yeltsin continued to be perceived as a rather positive figure by the former Union republics, especially in comparison to other available politicians. *Izvestia* writes that while “*he argues with them, disagrees, concedes and bargains*”, he does not follow the Great Power chauvinist foreign policy approach demanded by the right political spectrum (41 Oct 1993). It is the democrats that spoke out against military involvement in former Union republics, for the reform of the KGB and the security apparatus (31 July 1992), against the “*Great Power zealots*” (42 Oct. 1992). They did not want the Russian speaking population in former Union republics to be made “*hostage of the national patriots*” and be perceived as “*some sort of fifth column of an imperialistic power*” (31 July 1992). This again ties back to the multinational state-building of Yeltsin and his nationalism as directed against the CPSU and the USSR.

However, it is by no means that the liberal factions were entirely free of revisionist approaches. On the one hand, Gleb Iakunin, a well-known and politically active Russian-

orthodox priest condemned the People's Accord bloc, the Constitutional Democrats and the Christian Democrats for their "*great-power overtones*". He criticized that they see "*Russia's borders as practically identical to those of the former USSR*". However, he also concludes that "*our principle is that borders are unshakable. At least for the transitional period*" (43 Nov. 1991).

The material showed that the democrats understood themselves as the political force behind a supposedly democratic state-building, while the parliament was understood as the main place of conflict – proving the perceived necessity for a presidential and thus highly concentrated constitution. Yeltsin, in this view, is the "guarantor" for statehood and the main politician against the red-brown coalition. However, it is astonishing how little the debates concerned both the question of what kind of state should be build other than a presidential one, and how little they considered social questions in their evaluation of reforms.

4.2.2. Opposition to the Russian state

Both the quantitative count of the codes as well as the analysis of the content indicated that those in opposition to the emerging Russian state were in a majority discursively. At the same time, it doesn't seem surprising that those labeled "hardliners or conservatives" in the Union Treaty chapter remained an oppositional force to the newly emerging Russian state. Main narratives found in the analysis were that the dissolution of the USSR was illegitimate and that the Soviet Union, at least legally, continues to exist. Consequently, the Russian Federation in its existing form was also perceived as illegitimate or Russia was equated with the territory of the USSR, already implying strong revisionist tendencies. It is against this backdrop that "external imperialism" was especially present by claiming certain regions in which a lot of Russian speakers lived, for example Ukraine or Crimea, Kazakhstan or Georgia, thus representing ethnic nationalism. This points to the close link of external imperialism and ethnic nationalism already argued in the Union Treaty chapter. Overall, Yeltsin's state-building was strongly opposed and democracy intensively delegitimized.

While the opposition to the emerging Russian state was huge, it was by no means homogenous. Especially political parties were numerous, but their weakness (low levels of organization and membership and ideological vagueness) increased the fragmentation of the political spectrum (38 Sept. 1992). Political groups might have converged on their assessment of the dissolution of the Soviet Union as illegitimate, support for a strong unitary state and the

revival of Great Russia. They differed greatly in their evaluation of the Communist Party and the communist past. Whereas the political left such as the All-Union Communist Party or the United Working People's Front wanted to restore communist rule, (far) right groups such the Democratic Party of Russia, the Russian Christian Democratic Movement or the Party of People's Freedom were anti-communist (44 Dec. 1991). While the far left suffered from the temporary ban of the CPSU and huge ideological differences within and the population's experience with the CPSU, they continued to be strongly represented "*in the Fatherland, Agrarian Union, Russia, and Sovereignty and Equality faction*", as well as in the provinces and local Soviets (38 Sept. 1992). The political right, heterogenous but sharing a national-patriotic orientation, oftentimes assessed the Communist past as "*a period of the ruin of national traditions*" (38 Sept. 1992). Shared key positions, however, were the revival of Great Russia, Pan-Slavism, "*prevention of humiliation of the Russian people both within Russia itself and beyond its borders, and total opposition to the Yeltsin government*" (38 Sept. 1992). The Army and the KGB are also oftentimes mentioned as former all-Union institutions opposing Yeltsin's state-building.

In the following, the key "talking points" of what commonly is referred to as the "red-brown coalition" or "national-patriots" and the variety of positions will be introduced and discussed. While they were heterogenous, they shared their opposition towards the emerging Russian state regarding its territory and borders, its developing state form and economic system.

A common departing point was the assumption that the Belovezha Accords were illegitimate and unconstitutional, and that the USSR remains in place legally. The material showed a common narrative of "betrayal" or "being swindled" (33 Aug. 1992): Yeltsin, so the narrative, destroyed the Soviet Union as part of his struggle for power (33 Aug. 1992), the USSR got "*artificially dismembered*" (45 Feb. 1993). Sazhi Umalatova, head of the so-called Permanent Presidium of the Congress of People's Deputies of the USSR in 1992, an organization (unrecognized by the Russian authorities) that claimed to be the highest authority of the no-longer existing USSR, supported the August Putsch in 1991 and strongly opposed Yeltsin in the constitutional crisis in Oct 1993. In March 1992, she still claimed that "*the Union exists*" (46 Apr. 1992):

"People are asking themselves increasingly often why they kept quiet when the leaders of three republics declared that the USSR ceased to exist. The participants

in the “Belovezhskaia plot” forgot that only a Congress of USSR People’s Deputies can declare the country’s Constitution inoperative” (46 Apr. 1992).

Other hardliners, consisting of 31 parliamentary deputies, shared this understanding of events. For them *“the 1977 USSR Constitution remains in legal force [...] and republics can secede from the Union only on the basis of its legislation” (47 Oct. 1992).*

This narrative resulted in either claims to revise the inherited borders or simply the equation of Russia to the entirety of the territory of the USSR, thus representing strong external imperialist positions: As a result of Yeltsin’s actions, the *“Russians lost their home in a single day, a great state that had been created over centuries” (48 July 1992).* The dissolution of the Soviet Union is thus framed as a loss of “home”, the USSR thus understood as “home” – this understanding is widely contradictory to Yeltsin’s nationalism. In an interview in *Nezavisimaia Gazeta*, one of the founders of the All-Russian’s People’s Union, Sergei Baburin, equates Russia with the Soviet Union:

“There is an immense difference between Russia and the Russian Federation: Russia is the former Soviet Union. Russia was always a multinational state ... but the Russian Federation is the offspring of Bolshevik experiments. And as an unnatural entity, it could not hold back the destruction of the USSR at its borders” (49 Feb. 1992).

As a result of the equation of Russia to the territory of the Soviet Union and the perception of the emerging Russian Federation as artificially constructed and illegitimate, the borders, and therefore the territory of the Russian Federation, were vividly discussed and equally perceived as illegitimate. Alexander Rutskoi, then Vice-president, later turned critic of Yeltsin, wrote in *Pravda* in January 1991:

“The historical consciousness of Russia’s people will not allow anyone to automatically combine the borders of Russia and those of the Russian Federation and to renounce glorious pages of Russian history” (50 Feb. 1992).

This aligned with an understanding that *“the borders that Russia and the other republics inherited are absurd borders, and one simply cannot bring oneself to talk about their unshakability” (33 Aug. 1992).* Already indicating revisionist tendencies in the early 1990s,

the existing borders of the Russian Federation were subject to debates about redrawing them: *“The dominant national-imperial ethnic theme of “Moscow as the Third Rome” [...] channels efforts solely towards maintaining or expanding borders”* (51 Jan. 1993). The quotes presented here show a strong external focus and a conception of the Russian state as insufficient in its existing territory.

In different debates and newspapers, regions such as Crimea or the entirety of Ukraine, Northern Kazakhstan or Georgia were named. An editor of *Kommersant* commented that

“there is a great deal of land that the patriots would like to have: The subjugators of the Crimea are also laying claim to North Kazakhstan, taking the historical viewpoint, now popular in the Russian Federation Supreme Soviet, that the present border between Russia and Kazakhstan is just as dubious as the border between Russia and Ukraine” (52 Feb 1992).

However, the perceived “loss of territory” is especially strong in relation to Ukraine, which indicates that in those political factions and groups described above, Russian statehood is understood as including Ukraine. Alexander Tsipko in *Komsomolskaia Pravda* argued that the leaders of the RSFSR *“don’t understand that, strictly speaking, without today’s Ukraine there is not and cannot be a Russia in the old, true sense of the world”* (53 Mar. 1992). In January 1992, the parliament, the Russian Supreme Soviet, dominated by the nationalists and imperialists, voted that transferring Crimea to the Ukrainian SSR *“was not confirmed in advance by the RSFSR Supreme Soviet; therefore, the acts of 1954 have no legal force, and the Crimea is part of the Russian Federation”* (54 Feb. 1992). Four Army naval and air officers agreed with this assessment in a newspaper article: Khrushchev gave away an *“Integral, truly Russian part of Russia’s territory”* and the inflicted humiliation on Russia that must be corrected (55 Feb. 1992). While they acknowledge that the ethnic composition of Crimea is a result of forced deportation and re-settlement of certain ethnicities, oftentimes ethnic Russians, they nevertheless conclude that the ethnic composition (there is *“no other province in our country with such a homogeneous ethnic composition*) makes *“the Crimea [...] a historical territory of Russia and the Russian people”* (55 Feb. 1992). Again, the strong ethnic focus accompanied by claiming territory outside of the state boundaries, demonstrates the link between ethnic nationalism and external imperialism.

Next to perceiving the Russian state's borders and partly its existence as illegitimate, Yeltsin and the democrats were harshly criticized for their attempts at state-building. In this discourse, "democracy" was intensely delegitimized. Gennady Osipov, to whom the popularization of sociology in the late Soviet Union and in Russia is attributed, a strong supporter of Eurasianism, turned to a patriotic-nationalistic agenda in the early 1990s (Shalin 2011: 340). At a meeting of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Gennady's report included remarks such as the following:

"Myth number four: the myth of democracy as an end in itself and a means of solving all problems. This is the most dangerous myth in practical terms. According to it, democratically elected representatives and executive bodies express the will of the people; they are always right and their actions are therefore lawful. As a result, science, professionalism and competence are cast aside. They are replaced by the opinion, elevated to law, of the representative majority or democratically elected authoritarian individuals who start rebuilding the social world in their own image." (56 Apr 1992)

While some referred to the "weaknesses of democracy", others argued that Russia was either incapable or "not ready" for democracy: *"It should be clear even now that Russia cannot be simultaneously unified and democratic in the foreseeable future"* (57 June 1993). In this quote, democracy is associated with the fear of splitting up the Russian Federation. Therefore, either a choice for a united or a democratic Russia, has to be made. Democracy is associated with something foreign, western, represented by *"a mercenary government of national traitors"*, introduced *"to please the West"* (58 July 1992). In an address directed towards the provinces, the Russian National Assembly refers to Yeltsin and his government as *"the occupation government"*, that are conducting the *"colonialization of the country"*, *"as to put the country's natural, material and technical resources at the direct disposal of Western capital"* (59 July 1992).

Because of perceiving democracy and the government as illegitimate, foreign, newspaper articles included calls for indictment or even physical threats. *Narodnoe Delo* published texts that included passages like this:

"Democracy is our number-one enemy. The Criminal Code provides for the death penalty for serious betrayal of the homeland and the Constitution. And we will not protest if the Army, the final bulwark of the state, takes power into its own hands"

and applies the supreme penalty on a mass scale to the traitor democrats and other dregs of society" (60 July 1992).

Instead of democracy, other concepts of statehood were discussed that ranged from the re-introduction of monarchy to calls for a strong authority. In June 1993, a group of self-declared patriotic forces (among them the Union for Russia's Rebirth, The Russian Christian Democratic Movement, the Christian Democratic Union of Russia, the Constitutional Democratic Party, the Socialist Working People's Party etc.) gathered with the goal to propose an alternative, patriotic draft of a constitution. It was discussed that the Constitution "*should proceed from the country's national traditions*", among which "*indisputable values*" such as "*the constitutional monarchy and zemstvo traditions*" were discussed (61 July 1993). While it is not the goal of this work to analyze how the economic reforms were discussed, they were sometimes connected to what kind of state was imagined. Distinguishing "Russian popular rule" and "Western democracy", S. Baburin argued that the introduction of private property was incompatible to Russia: "*Property is the basis of individual independence. [...] But for centuries a distinctive feature of our culture has been a communal economy and a communal culture. Socialism or collectivism is rooted in our history*" (62 Feb 1992).

It is this red-brown coalition that increasingly pressured Yeltsin politically and discursively, eventually resulting in the constitutional crisis of 1993, the dissolution of the parliament by decree and the emergence of the Russian Federation as codified in the constitution of December 1993. This chapter demonstrated just how much Yeltsin's state-building was opposed discursively, indicating the instability that accompanied the many conflicting conceptions of nation and state. How these described conflicts continued under the new constitution will be analyzed in the following chapter.

4.3. The Russian Federation under the new Constitution

Rules of the game, institution building and attempts for "Social Accord"

While the constitution came into effect after the referendum on December 12th 1993, specific procedures, for example in the parliament, remained unclear or contested. *Izvestia* reported that the first meeting of the newly elected Duma led to debates about "*the minimum number of Deputies needed to give a group the right to create a faction*" (63 Feb. 1994). When the factions were formed, V. Zhirinovskiy insisted on "*the right to conduct the meeting [...] 'as*

the representative of the winning faction” (64 Feb. 1994). In February 1994, *Sevodnia* reported that while it was expected that the upper chamber, the Council of the Federation, would “‘show its teeth’ to the President, the government, and the capital city in general”, it “started meeting for half a day at a time, wrangling over internal matters of procedure and rules” (65 Mar. 1994). An entrepreneur criticized the work of the parliament in *Moskovskie novosti*, claiming that “not one of the very important laws on which the country’s economic development depends has been adopted, even on first reading. In two months’ time!” (66 Apr. 1994). While the constitution offered a framework, it was by no means specific enough to guide parliamentary processes and there was no parliamentary tradition to refer to (67 Jan 1991). Thus, procedures remained contested and subject of political debates, instead of guiding them. This also holds true for central democratic processes such as voting. A journalist of the newspaper *Stolitsa* questioned whether universal suffrage works for Russia (68 Feb. 1994), while *Izvestia* published an article referring to the non-participation in the elections as a sign of political protests: “Urban residents have been using the stay-at-home tactic as a kind of active expression of their political position [...] (we aren’t participating, they say, as a protest against the fact that participation was mandatory under the Bolsheviks)” (69 Apr. 1994). In terms of institution-building, the creation of an Information Administration by the president (an institution that should provide state and policy-centered information to the news media) (70 Apr. 1994), the state of the multiparty system (71 Apr. 1994) and the relationship between the institutions of the executive, legislative and judiciary spheres were discussed.

Another central topic found in the material after the constitution was accepted and in the aftermath of the events in October 1993 was the re-establishment of “Social Accord”. While B. Yeltsin initially framed the constitution as a means of reconciliation (72 Jan. 1994), he began to push the idea of a document on civil peace in March 1994 (73 Apr. 1994). This can be understood as a direct reaction to the Duma declaring amnesty for those participants of the October events that remained imprisoned until March 1994 (74 Apr. 1994), something that was perceived as a first attack against Yeltsin by the new parliament. Yeltsin’s document on civil peace can thus be estimated as an attempt to prevent a new escalation with the political leaders of the former parliament out of prison. By bringing different groups together with the objective to maintain “peace and tranquility in Russia”, B. Yeltsin hoped to tie those signing such a document to the commitment to limit societal and political confrontation (73 Apr. 1994). The so-called pact was discussed in *Izvestia* more as a political document than a legally binding one (75 May 1994), whereas the newspaper *Megapolis-Express* criticized its

limits: Not all parties and movements were willing to sign the agreement, the leaders of those organizations did not fully control their members, the pact partly contradicts the rights established in the constitution (74 Apr. 1994). As reported by *Megapolis-Express*, a memorandum “*On Achieving Civil Accord in Russia*” was to be signed by the President, the government, the Federal Assembly, the members of the Federation, political parties, trade unions and other public organizations on April 28th (74 Apr. 1994). Eventually, the pact was signed by Y. Gaidar, Shakrai and V. Zhirinovskiy, whereas the Communists and the Agrarians demanded concessions and G. Iavlinsky (Jabloko) did not sign the pact because “*he simply sees no point in such documents, which impose no obligations on anyone*” (76 May. 1994).

4.3.1. The Russian Federation after October 1993: Opposition

After October 1993, Yeltsin declared that both elections and a referendum on the constitution were to occur on December the 12th 1993. In the aftermath of the constitutional crisis, the opposition turned either into an in-system opposition or an out-of-system opposition. While the parliament’s political influence was greatly reduced within the framework of the new constitution, discursive opposition in relations to topics such as the protection of Russian speakers, the borders or the economic reforms remained. While the parties agreed to participate in the parliamentary elections in December to maintain at least some level of political influence, many of the oppositional parties voted against the constitution. This can partly be explained by the fact that the constitution greatly reduced the parliament’s power, but also with a continued opposition to the state-building attempt suggested in the constitution. However, some sort of normalization within the political system appeared to occur after the elections in December 1993. Nevertheless, an out-of-system opposition continued to exist.

Parties such as the Communist Party, Civic Union, members of the Agrarian Party, the Socialist Working People’s party, the Russian Communist Workers’ Party and the Russian Union of All the People and Working Moscow participated in the elections, but strongly opposed the passing of the Constitution. Gennady Zyuganov, Chairman of the Russian Federation Communist Party, expressed his position that the elections are illegal (77 Dec. 1993), but he agreed to participate in them (78 Nov. 1993), hoping both that the “*centrist and the popular-patriotic forces will have a solid representation*” (77 Dec. 1993). On December 4th, just eight days before the election, the mentioned parties, as well as individuals who were

associated with or participated in the “October events” such as Valery Zorkin, Oleg Rumiantsev, Sergei Baburin, Viktor Alknis, Mikhail Astafyev and Viktor Aksiuchits held a so-called “Constitutional Congress” (79 Jan. 1994). The congress, according to an article in *Sevodnia*, mostly debated possibilities to prevent the acceptance of the Constitution in the referendum:

“If we succeed in bulldozing the Constitution on Dec. 12, then, when we take our seats in the State Duma, we will be able right away to vote to rename it the Supreme Soviet and will again begin to operate in accordance with all the stringency of the old Constitution” (79 Jan. 1994).

While this quote demonstrates the wish to return to the Soviet system, an article in *Nezavisimaia gazeta* from November 11th discussed that next to the red-brown coalition, also “parties and movements with a central orientation and some that are basically democratic” share “serious apprehensions that the referendum on the Constitution could lead [...] to the establishment of an authoritarian regime in our country” (80 Dec. 1993). The constitution, if it were to be passed, was furthermore perceived as transitional, tolerated mostly due to the perceived necessity to reinstate some sort of Basic Law, not because of the normative values presented in it (81 Dec. 1993).

The material indicates that months after the elections some sort of normalization in the political processes took place. Journalists of *Nezavisimaia gazeta* even discussed that “Zyuganov’s party is gradually becoming an increasingly respectable and law-abiding organization that tries to avoid unnecessary conflicts with the present authorities” (82 May 1994). The discourse and the chosen methods likely became less heated. Zyuganov, for example, argued that the parliament cannot voice its disobedience as “the fate of the former Supreme Soviet will befall it” (77 Dec. 1993).

However, this does not signify that the in-system opposition did not continue its claims for a change of borders, the protection of Russian speakers in the “Near Abroad” (83 Mar. 1993) or its criticism of the economic reforms, perceived as the “Westernization of Russia” (84 Jan. 1994). During the second World Congress of Russian Communities with representation of parliamentarians, change of borders were demanded so that a “reunification of the Russian nation” would be possible, thus bearing strong irredentist elements (85 Mar. 1994), yet again demonstrating the close link between ethnic nationalism and external imperial nationalism and the perceived mismatch of nation and state territory.

Next to the in-system opposition, an out-of-system opposition continued to exist. In an article in *Izvestia*, Yegor Gaidar, understands the elected parties in the parliament as peaceful, as the in-system opposition, arguing that “*legal oppositionists are the prevailing force in the Duma*” (86 Mar. 1994). Gaidar refers to the “out-of-system” opposition as those that were imprisoned in the Lefortovo prison after the events in October 1993 but were released by the Duma and thus remain in a position of rejecting the political system while being armed (86 Mar. 1994). When the newly elected Duma granted amnesty to figures such as Aleksandr Rutskoi, Ruslan Khasbulatov, Albert Makashov, Viktor Anpilov, it was assessed as a first attack by the new parliament directed at Yeltsin. *Chas pik* discusses how the release of participants in the October 1993 events “*put an end to Yeltsin’s quiet life*”:

“The release of Aleksandr Rutskoi, Ruslan Khasbulatov, Albert Makashov, Viktor Anpilov and other active participants in the October [1993] events drastically alter the political situation in Russia. Before the amnesty, Yeltsin’s position could be considered satisfactory. True, political forces opposed to him made up the majority in parliament, but nevertheless there was hope that something resembling cooperation would develop between the presidential structures and the parliament. But the freeing of the “Octobrists” puts an end to Yeltsin’s quiet life. There is no doubt that the individuals who have left Lefortovo will become the leaders of forces opposing the President. Furthermore, and this is more tragic these forces will not seek to make use of the parliamentary rostrum; their element is the streets, the squares, the masses” (87 Mar. 1994).

While Yeltsin received broader competences with the new constitution, greatly weakening the parliament, and while most opposition parties turned into an in-system opposition, the social and political polarization remained high.

4.3.2. The Russian Federation after October 1993: Criticism

Yeltsin and the parties supporting him found themselves in a position in which the president’s power formally increased, but the parliament’s composition consisted of mostly opposing factions. With the red-brown coalition clearly winning the parliamentary elections, the liberals were criticized for their policies. Next to criticism about Russia’s Choice, the economic reforms and the impoverishment of the population, two main narratives were found in the material: First, the argumentation that Yeltsin and the liberal democrats entirely

miscalculated their strength, their support within the population and their chosen methods and second, that they underestimated “the voter’s mindset” and specifically the perceived need for a “national idea” in the construction of a nation-state. Third, as a result of the discursive isolation, Yeltsin increasingly adopted nationalist and imperialist tones. Thus, in 1994 a shift in Yeltsin’s nationalism and policies occurred.

The first line of argumentation implied that the pro-Yeltsin forces miscalculated their strategy. Viacheslav Nikonov, an adviser of the Reform Foundation, argued in the newspaper *Nezavisimaia gazeta* that the pro-Yeltsin forces continued to understand the political situation as one of confrontation between democrats and communists, “*which created the illusion that it was possible to win an easy victory by dissolving the Soviets and to elect a new parliament democratically*” (88 Jan. 1994). As a result of this miscalculation, so Boris Fyodorov, Deputy to the State Duma, the government finds itself without a political base (89 Apr. 1994). A journalist in the newspaper *Stolitsa* writes that in comparison to the Duma after the 1993 elections, dealing with the Supreme Soviet was “*a piece of cake*” (68 Feb. 1994). While Yeltsin, according to the Viacheslav Nikonov, did enhance the president’s power in formal terms, the constitutional crisis in 1993 weakened his power. V. Nikonov concludes: “*A mighty blow was dealt to the prestige of the entire post-perestroika political establishment, and the opposition gained the halo of the persecuted, which is so revered in Russia*” (88 Jan. 1994).

Another line of argumentation directed towards Yeltsin and the democrats/ pro-reform forces referred to their nationalism. According to Aleksei Bogaturov of the Russian Academy of Science’s Institute of the US and Canada, the liberal-democratic forces in Russia underestimated the “*ideological-political component of the voters’ frame of mind*” (90 Jan. 1994). The population, so the argumentation, is concerned with topics such as discrimination against Russians “*and a high-and-mighty attitude towards Russia on the part of the young independent states*” (90 Jan. 1994), implying that the former Union republics needed to show “respect” to the Russian Federation. The liberals’ focus on democracy and individual freedom has led to a contradiction between “*the ideological-political universalism of the government’s foreign policy and the mood in society*” (90 Jan. 1994). The liberals thus underestimated the importance and integrative role of a national idea in constructing a nation-state and failed to “*direct them into a moderate/ liberal channel*” that could prevent “*the revival of a totalitarian ideology, of which Zhirinovskiy’s neo-imperialism is a new form*” (90 Jan. 1994), a claim that hints at the perceived necessity of national ideas for state-building. A journalist of *Izvestia* fears that Yeltsin will increasingly be pressured for his stance on Ukraine and Crimea, by the new Duma “*which is dominated by Communists and nationalists*” and which is unlikely to

“resists the temptation to play the Crimea card, and later the Donetsk, Lugansk and Dnepropetrovsk cards” (91 Apr. 1994). While this, unfortunately, was quite an early and accurate assessment, it also indicates that the outcome of the December 1993 elections isolated Yeltsin politically, even though he gained greater formal competences. As a result, B. Yeltsin and his ministers increasingly adopted a partly nationalist, partly imperialist discourse. Prof. Dashichev of the Russian Academy of Science Institute of Economic and Political Research argued that

“Yeltsin's associates were forced to reshape their policy, sharply increasing its nationalist tone and demonstrating [...] its commitment to the traditional "special" national interests of Russia as a great power in the Eurasian space. It remains a mystery to what extent the demands of the power struggle within the country, on the one hand, and inherited great-power ambitions, on the other, caused the President's associates to lean toward great-power thinking” (92 May 1994).

The author continues that Andranik Migranian, member of the Presidential Council and a person the scholar Vera Tolz singles out for his intellectual influence on the Yeltsin government (Tolz 1998a: 1013), declared that Russian foreign policy should follow a Russian Monroe Doctrine, meaning that the entire geopolitical space of the former Soviet Union is to be perceived as a Russian sphere of influence, clearly bearing external imperial notions. While the author acknowledges that *“it’s a long way from an idea to its implementation”*, he nevertheless notices that *“neither President B. Yeltsin nor Foreign Minister A. Kozyrev has dissociated himself from A. Migranian’s statement”* and concludes in the following question: *“Is present-day Russia the heir to great-power expansionism?”* (92 May 1994).

As a result of the elections and the composition in the parliament, B. Yeltsin increasingly integrated nationalist and imperialist elements in his policies, albeit less strong than the right and left factions in the parliament demanded. Interestingly, the material at this point includes less perspectives of leaders of former Union republics than for the previous chapters. This might be explained by the fact that whereas before the media still had a broader international focus, the debates in Russian newspapers increasingly focused on national debates and perspectives. Furthermore, international questions oftentimes were discussed within the

framework of the Commonwealth of Independent States, which will be discussed further below.

4.3.3. The Russian Federation after October 1993: Support

Boris Yeltsin's and the government's power base laid with the pro-reform factions and thus included the parties Russia's Choice, the Party of Russian Unity and Accord, the Russian Democratic Reform Movement, the Cause Bloc and August (Party of Economic Freedom and Constitutional Democrats). It was Russia's Choice that was increasingly understood and conceptualized as a governmental party (while Yeltsin remained independent) and that gave "*unconditional support to Boris Yeltsin*" (81 Dec. 1993). Discursively, Yeltsin repeated his speaking points of the role of the president as "*the main guarantor of its [Russia's] unity*" (72 Jan. 1994), the necessity of a "*strong rule*" (93 Jan. 1994), the Constitution that enables "*a unified and strong state*" (72 Jan. 1994) and introduces the rule of law (93 Jan. 1994). While the West increasingly also built direct ties with the former Union republics, Yeltsin continued to be perceived by the West as the best bet on democratic developments in Russia. The continued support by Western countries and institutions towards Yeltsin even after the dissolution of the parliament by decree, the shooting of the parliament and the composition of the parliament as clearly anti-Yeltsin must be critically assessed (Fetissenko 2022: 168).

4.4. Commonwealth of Independent States

Why is the CIS important? Like the Union Treaty, questions of statehood, international cooperation as well as the construction of the state as either Slavic or Eurasian were discussed. Since in this chapter a longer period is analyzed than in others (from its creation in December 1991 until spring 1994), the presented positions of certain actors were more likely to change: Ukraine, for example, was a co-founder of the CIS, whereas it later tried to withdraw from most attempts to build a supranational structure arguing that the CIS represented just another obstacle to regain statehood. Ukraine was increasingly, but continuously referred to as an unstable partner within the CIS and the analysis showed a strong revisionist approach towards Ukraine's borders. Then again Kazakhstan strongly criticized the creation of the CIS by Belarus, Russia and Ukraine as a "Slavic organization", later on, however, became a strong supporter. In general, the CIS was discussed as somewhat of a replacement organization for the USSR, albeit it remained much less influential and popular. Those that opposed the dissolution of the USSR strongly criticized the CIS, as it was

oftentimes understood as the framework to split up former Union property. It is furthermore in the context of the CIS that Pan-Slavism and Eurasianism were discussed in Russian media and politics, accompanied by ideas about Orthodoxy, messianism and Russia representing an own civilization, taking over the function of a replacement ideology. Here again, the debates entirely lacked an understanding of the imperial legacy and, while concepts such as Pan-Slavism or Eurasianism clearly include imperialist notions, were never perceived or discussed as such.

4.4.1. Support towards the CIS

Clearly, among the early supporters of the CIS were its creators, the political leadership of Ukraine, Russia, and Belarus. In a speech by Yeltsin at the Fourth Session of the RSFSR Supreme Soviet shortly after the dissolution of the USSR and the creation of the Commonwealth of Independent States, he defended the CIS as a stabilizing factor since “*it halted the process of the spontaneous, anarchic disintegration*” of the USSR, while it at the same time “*put an end to the principle obstacle, the Union Center, which proved incapable of freeing itself from the traditions of the former system*” (94 Jan 1992). Here again, Yeltsin frames the USSR and the CPSU as the center, much less (ethnic) Russians as the biggest ethnic group of the USSR.

The CIS was credited the role of stabilizing the transition after the dissolution of the USSR, albeit it remained much less influential and less popular. In an article reflecting on the one year-anniversary of the existence of the CIS in *Nezavisimaja Gazeta*, the CIS was understood as a “*mechanism for a civilized divorce*”, that eased “*the societal stress experienced by the population of the former Union*” and whose existence is “*psychologically comforting*” (95 Feb. 1993). Within the framework of the CIS, “*the new states have acquired the basic attributes of statehood*”, “*the consolidation of the ruling elites has taken place*” and “*the property of the former USSR, in particular the Army, has been divided up for the most part*”. Furthermore, the CIS has managed to maintain a state of “*incomplete disintegration*” (95 Feb. 1993).

In the analyzed period the Central Asian States can be classified as supporters of further integration within the CIS. However, Kazakhstan, but also the other Central Asian States, were initially strong opponents of the dissolution of the USSR and the founding of the CIS. The fact that the end of the USSR was decided without their knowledge, participation, or support and by the leadership of the three “Slavic” republics Russia, Belarus and Ukraine was perceived as a creation of a “Slavic Commonwealth” where their participation was not

accounted for. Still, with time passing, it was especially the Central Asian states that were in favor of a stronger integration within the framework of the CIS and partly with Russia. Since some of the former Union republics such as Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Moldova and Kyrgyzstan were more hesitant to deepen integration, Russia attempted to build an alliance within the CIS with Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Armenia (96 June 1992). Nazarbayev, the president of Kazakhstan, spoke out for further economic integration, a collective security treaty (97 June 1992) and was even referred to as “*the main stabilizing force of the entire CIS and the only republic that is proving in practice that a way out of the postcommunist crisis is possible*” (98 Apr. 1992) or as a “*booster of economic integration*” (99 Aug. 1993) by journalists.

However, in an article in *Nezavisimaja Gazeta* it was also discussed that Nazarbayev’s strong support for further integration within the framework of the CIS can be understood as a tactical decision – in order to prevent a confrontation with Russia about those parts of Kazakhstan that were highly populated by ethnic Russians or Russian speakers: “*Nursultan Nazarbayev is afraid of it because of the possible exacerbation of the situation in Northern Kazakhstan*” (97 June 1992). A. Migranian discussed this dilemma for Kazakhstan: “*To leave Russia now would mean losing Russian-speaking East Kazakhstan*” (100 Nov. 1992). This indicates that there was already an imperial understanding of the Russian Federation, and that Russia was, probably also against the background of the ongoing conflicts in Transnistria, Nagorno Karabakh, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, perceived as a threat. It also highlights once again the close link between ethnic nationalism and external imperial nationalism.

4.4.2. Opposition towards the Commonwealth of Independent States

Like the Union Treaty, the Commonwealth was opposed from two different sides/perspectives: On the one hand, those that wished for the continuation of the USSR and who oftentimes were members of all-Union institutions that were especially affected by their splitting up. The analyzed material shows that especially the Armed Forces as an all-Union institution and its members voiced their opposition to the CIS. This is not surprising as it is mostly within the framework of the CIS that the splitting up of Union property and institutions was discussed and formalized. On the other hand, the Commonwealth was opposed by republics that feared that the CIS would develop into another obstacle to gain statehood. It is in this context that Ukraine increasingly developed from a founding member to a strong opponent of further integration within the framework of the CIS.

To those opposing the dissolution of the USSR, *“the signing of the Belovezhkaia and Alma-Ata agreement was an ‘unconstitutional conspiracy’ by the republics’ elites, a conspiracy that brought down the USSR once and for all”* (95 Feb. 1993). Instead of the CIS, Sergei Baburin would have preferred the creation of a federation of Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Kazakhstan *“and whatever other republics might want to join”* (49 Feb. 1992). Equipped with unclear and limited competences, he is convinced that *“this Commonwealth is a stillborn child”* (49 Feb. 1992). To Alexander Tsipko, a Russian political scientist, the CIS is *“a hoax, a mental aberration”* (53 Mar. 1992).

Since it was within the framework of the CIS that topics such as the splitting up of Union property and the Armed Forces were discussed and formalized, it is not surprising that those organizations that were affected voiced their discontent. For Deputy Viktor Aksychts, Chairman of the Political Council of the Russian Christian Democratic Movement, a Union Treaty would have been the possibility to consistently solve central questions while maintaining *“legal continuity in all spheres, including that of international affairs”*. Instead, it is under the CIS that *“disputes about the army”* occurred, preventing it from *“remaining a Union army”* (101 Feb. 1992). Various Army officers shared their concern for the Armed Forces in an article in the newspaper *Sovetskaia Rossiia* at the eve of the All-Army Assembly, demanding from the *“CIS Presidents”*: *“No more breaking up the army. They are the only remaining institution that possesses a consolidating force guaranteeing stability”*. An officer of the Black Sea Fleet of which both Russia and Ukraine claimed ownership after the dissolution of the USSR, argues that the oath they swore refers to *“all the people of our republics”* and *“that he does not intend to take another oath”* (102 Feb. 1992). Another captain vividly voices his lacking respect for the CIS: *“The CIS is a soap bubble, not a state”* (102 Feb. 1992), indicating that the CIS was not understood as a solid-state structure.

These comments are made in the context of both the splitting up of Union property in general and of Ukraine attempting to strengthen its just-regained statehood and gain control over the military stationed on its territory. To better assess Ukraine’s position on these (military) questions, the arguments and their development presented in the material will be discussed. Ukrainian political actors increasingly understood the dissolution of the USSR and their restraint towards the CIS as a possibility to restore their independent statehood. When confronted with his hesitation towards signing the Union Treaty, Leonid Kravchuk, the first president of Ukraine, answered:

“The desire to be the master in one’s own land is ineradicable. Everywhere! It is ineradicable by its very nature, because it is in a human being’s genes. On top of everything else, we have the terrible experience of a totalitarian regime that brought the country to a catastrophe. The desire for independence is not people’s blind faith in a miracle, but the hope that a state of their own will be closer to them, will protect their interest. They say: If we had had a state of our own, would it have built the Chernobyl Atomic Power Station so near Kiev? Never! [...] (103 Dec. 1991).

While referring to the Union Treaty, the topic of “regaining statehood” reappears also in the context of the CIS. Ukraine raised the “*question of the division of former Union property*” in March 1992. While “*it did not obtain Russia’s consent to consider the question*”, Ukraine “*was supported by the rest of the CIS members*” and “*Kiev believes that as a state it won*” (104 Apr. 1992). It was noted that a member of the Ukrainian delegation, Dmitro Paylychko, Chairman of the Parliament’s Committee on International Affairs, published a poem in the newspaper *Literaturna Ukraina*, “*which says that the day is not far off when ‘we will no longer sit under Moscow’s watchful eye’ and ‘with our own invincible weapons, will leave the CIS as we left the old prison’*” (104 Apr. 1992). Thus, Ukraine’s relation to the Commonwealth of Independent State, while being a founding-member, increasingly turned into a question of “*achieving genuine state independence for Ukraine*” (104 Apr. 1992).

Ukraine already had a hesitant position on an increased integration within the framework of the CIS. This position strengthened when it came to topics concerning supranational institutions or security cooperation. Ukraine and Russia especially diverged in their evaluation of the role of Crimea and the Black Sea fleet of which both claimed ownership. Furthermore, Ukraine’s possession of a part of the nuclear arsenal was perceived as “*de facto depriving Russia of the status of sole legal successor to the USSR in this field*” (105 June 1992). When the Russian parliament adopted a repeal of the 1954 act (when Brezhnev transferred Crimea to Ukraine), Kravchuk viewed this as “*a direct encroachment on its territorial integrity by another state*”, a reference to the strongly presented revisionist positions in the parliament. He continued, “*Ukraine has absolutely no territorial claims against Russia, it only wants Russia to recognize Ukraine as an independent and sovereign state with equal rights*” (97 June 1992). The continuous questioning of the borders of Ukraine by the Russian Parliament increased the Ukrainian leadership’s hesitation to turn in its inherited military equipment, as it

was understood as a means of protecting borders and statehood continuously questioned in Russian politics. Moreover, Ukraine refused to sign any documents that would create superstate structures, for examples the creation of a CIS interstate television or radio company, a single monetary system or a supstate structure of authority in the Commonwealth (106 Nov. 1992). Boris Tarashyk, Ukraine's Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and Chairman of the National Committee on Questions of Disarmament, said that

“if the trend towards creating a supstate structure of authority in the Commonwealth framework wins out, Ukraine will be unable, according to well-known decisions of the republic Supreme Soviet, to agree to the changes in the conception of the CIS, and this will affect its attitude towards the Commonwealth as a whole” (106 Nov. 1992).

Ukraine turned from one of the CIS founding-members to a member that increasingly reduced its participation within this framework. As will be shown further below (in the chapter about Pan-Slavism), Russian statehood was partially imagined as including Ukraine, thus clearly conflicting Ukraine's regained statehood. Ukraine's hesitations were closely followed and commented in Russian media and consequently, it was confronted with harsh accusations. Sergei Stankevich, Russian Federation State Advisor on Political Questions, accused Ukraine of *“only using the CIS as a means of dividing up the Union legacy before a ‘final’ parting of the ways”* (107 Apr. 1992). Russian Deputies adopted a statement to the Ukrainian Supreme Soviet, speaking of *“doubts [...] about the true intentions of certain founders of the CIS who are seeking to break it up”* (97 June 1992). In June 1992, a journalist discussed the option of Russia taking *“key spheres on which Ukraine's survival as an independent state depends”*: *“In Russia's upper echelons, there are people who are convinced that this is precisely the time when Russia should demonstrate its strength to Kiev, showing that the stability of any regime in Kiev depends to a large extent on Russia”* (105 June 1992). This openly voiced wish for dependence signifies the normality of imperial and revisionist ambitions that were present in post-Soviet Russia. The strong focalization on Ukraine in the period after the dissolution of the USSR was especially discussed as *“the necessity of a pan-Slavic alliance”* and the CIS was continuously criticized for its lacking geopolitical clearness.

4.4.3. Criticism of the Commonwealth of Independent States

It is in the context of the CIS that concepts such as Pan-Slavism or Eurasianism were discussed. While both conceptions appear also in other contexts in the material, it is within the framework of the CIS that they are discussed in a concrete relation to statehood or state-building. They were coded as “criticism of the Commonwealth of Independent States” because their supporters oftentimes voiced their discontent towards Russia’s assumed preferred alliances either towards Ukraine and Belarus or towards Central Asian states. As introduced in the literature review, Pan-Slavism and Eurasianism, but also references to Orthodoxy, spirituality and messianism, can be classified as replacement ideologies, as ideologies that enabled to reconcile the perceived “unjust loss of territory” with a cohesive understanding of Russian statehood (Laruelle 2015: 188). Nevertheless, they clearly construct Russian statehood in connection with territory outside of the borders of the Russian Federation, thus representing the complex imperial legacy the Russian Federation inherited from the USSR.

Pan-Slavism

When it became clear that the leaders of Belarus, Ukraine and Russia would meet in December 1991, yet still unclear that this meeting would lead to the dissolution of the USSR and the creation of the Commonwealth, *Izvestia* already reported that “*suppositions about the emergence of some kind of Slavic Union in opposition to the Moslem republics*” existed (108 Jan. 1992). The declaration of the CIS by the three Slavic Republics “*came as a complete surprise to Nazarbayev*” and he “*almost never resorted to vague wording to express his attitude toward the ‘Slavic’ commonwealth*” at a press conference (109 Jan. 1992). Thus, the Pan-Slavic construction of the CIS was on the one hand criticized by states feeling excluded. However, the CIS was also criticized for not representing a Pan-Slavic alliance enough, Russian statehood without Ukraine was assessed as “painful” or incomplete.

In January 1992, the program of the newly founded Russian Party of National Revival was discussed in *Sovetskaia Rossiia*. The party’s chairman, Valery Ivanov, described the program as follows:

“We are convinced that the Russian state should be revived [...] by people who have been Russian from time immemorial Great Russian, Ukrainians and Belorussians in fraternal alliance. [...] Both the Program and the Concept that

were adopted at the party's Founding Congress in December are based on a recognition of the vital need for a comprehensive unification of all Russian people around the idea of reviving the nation and Russia. This can be achieved, specifically, by reviving Russian spirituality [...]. Finally, a Great Russian state Great Russia will be created within the structure of the Russian Federation” (110 Feb. 1992).

Here, the conception of statehood as a Great Russian state, including Ukraine and Belarus, becomes especially visible, as well as the strong ethnic understanding as “Slavic” nations in “fraternal alliance”, a reference to clear hierarchies between the “bigger brother”, ethnic Russians, and the “smaller brothers”. Supporters of a state that would include first and foremost Russia, Ukraine and Belarus transferred this conception of a state to the CIS. In an article in *Nezavizimaia Gazeta*, the conception of the CIS as Eurasian or Slavic was discussed:

“There are many supporters of the ‘European’ choice in society. They say that it is necessary to defend the Eastern Orthodox basis of the future community at any price as a natural counterweight to the ‘Eastern element’, with its faster demographic growth and economic lag” (98 Apr. 1992).

Again, the role of Orthodoxy is stressed, this time against a highly orientalist description of the presumably Central Asian States: The “Eastern element” most likely refers to Islam and the region is negatively associated with “faster demographic growth” and economic underdevelopment. However, with Ukraine’s hesitation towards further integration in the CIS, journalists of *Komsomolskaia Pravda* concluded that “*the Slavic alliance, on which the initial emphasis was placed, has proven to have nowhere near the desired strength*” (111 June 1992).

This seemingly clear construction of the Russian state as primarily “Slavic” (rarely accompanied by a specification on how to reach a possible “reunification” against Ukraine’s hesitation) was used to criticize the liberal democrat’s construction of the CIS. *Izvestia* for example published an article in which “*the possibility of the creation of an independent Ukrainian state and the disconnection of Ukraine and Russia*” are assessed as “*an extremely serious and painful problem*”, that gives “*rise to understandable sorrow in many people*” (112 Jan. 1992). Alexandr Tsipko claims that the democrats “*never looked at the map and pictured*

to themselves what their new independent state would look like without Ukraine and Belorussia” (113 Mar. 1992). Yeltsin, so *Izvestia*,

“has not yet had his say in the dispute over Crimea. The fact that Russia lacks a nationally recognized concept of statehood leaves him maneuvering room. But it seems that the time has come for the Russian President either to dispel the suspicions about the presence of secret imperial ambitions, or- No one wants very much to believe that this is what he will do, not something else” (114 June 1992).

It seems that support for a “Slavic” Russia was especially strong for Russian nationalists. When Vladimir Kryzhanovsky, Ukraine’s Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to Russia, insisted that *“there is a third way-cooperation between the two independent states”*, Sergei Baburin, head of the Russian Party of National Revival, bluntly replied, *“No. If a new reunification does not take place, there will always be conflicts between Ukraine and Russia”* (114 June 1992). Alexandre Solzhenitsyn who received the Nobel prize for literature for his oeuvre *“The Gulag Archipelago”* and who can be considered a public figure in Russian discourse, supports the idea about the *“inseparableness of Russia, Ukraine, Belorussia and Kazakhstan. He stressed the historical inevitability of their unity, while conceding that Central Asia, for example, might split off from the CIS”* (115 Sept. 1992). Again, a highly ethnic understanding of “Slavic people” is underlying (and Kazakhstan is included due to the concentration of ethnic Russians there) and connected to claims for territory outside of the Russian Federation.

Eurasianism

Simultaneously, both the Russian state and the CIS were imagined as Eurasianist, accompanied by claims to “unite” and “harmonize” the vast territory. Journalists in *Nezavisimaia gazeta* argued for an alliance with the Central Asian states, placing Russia in an *“intermediate position between the traditional West and East”* (98 Apr. 1992). Eurasianism as found in the material was imagined as including Slavism (the West), rather than being a construction in concurrence to Pan-Slavism. It was argued that the Russian state *“came into being and gained strength as a unique historical-cultural alloy of Slavic and Turkic, Orthodox and Moslem elements”* (107 Apr. 1992). Russian policy should enable it to be *“the conciliator, Russia the unifier, Russia the harmonizer”*, and *“a country that takes in West and*

East, North and South, and that is uniquely capable perhaps it alone has this capability of harmoniously unifying many different elements, of achieving a historic symphony” (107 Apr. 1992). The focus on “harmonization” and “unification” clearly bears imperialist traces and this passage implicitly refers to hierarchies. The author of the article, Sergei Stankevich, Russian Federation State Advisor on Political Questions, supports giving up communist messianism, but claims that Russia continues to need a mission: “*In denying messianism, we may end up rejecting the concept of a mission, which sounds similar, but it is not the same thing. A policy that is built only on interests [...] in Russia is simply disastrous*” (107 Apr. 1992). As argued in the literature review, messianism can fulfill a role in justifying imperial narratives.

It is in the context of Eurasianism that Russia as its own (Eurasian) civilization is discussed: “*The Slavic Assembly [...] declares the priority of national Slavic values over universal human ones [...] and advocates a ‘third way’ a Eurasian civilization*” (116 July 1992). In an article in *Novoye vremia*, the figure of Aleksandr Prokhanov, founder of the newspaper *Den* and his views are discussed. Prokhanov’s Eurasianism is described as an idea to fight American influence on Russia as a civilization:

“Russia is no longer Russia, Moscow is no longer the capital, but behind the flying debris shines the idea of Eurasia, which repudiates America [...]. The breakup of the USSR has meant the spread of hostile continents that are breaking the backbone of Eurasia. We are a toppled, vanquished and captive civilization in a noose fashioned by an alien civilization” (117 June 1993).

In relation to the CIS, an article in *Nezavisimaya gazeta* discusses a meeting of the CIS leaders in Tashkent during which the Collective Security Treaty of the CIS was discussed: “*It was there that Russia turned its face towards Asia. [...] After the passage of several months, it is becoming clear that the Central Asian government’s loyalty is more beneficial than Ukraine’s geographic position*” (96 June 1992). Moscow’s perceived preference towards Ukraine should not lead to it “*losing the trust and attention of its Asian neighbors*” (98 Apr. 1992). Thus, Russia’s focus on Ukraine and Belarus within the CIS was criticized, as it is argued that Russia should understand itself also as a Eurasian state. As shown above, this would imply reference to both Orthodox and Slavic countries in the West.

However, both Eurasianism and Pan-Slavism were also discussed as an obstacle to the development of the nation-state. The nation-state is understood as turning inwards,

developing the country, using the resources on its own population, whereas the external focus is understood as “bearing the cost” for other regions:

“Russian adversaries of the neo-imperialist option fear that Russia’s political and economic interests will again be subordinated to the supertask of maintaining control over post-Soviet space (for which Russia will once again have to pay the bills in full and sacrifice its citizen’s standard of living, the quality of their life. Other republics fear “Russian hegemony”. Many of its initial supporters dissatisfied (119 Feb).

5. Nationalist and Imperialist Thought in Post-Soviet Russia

The chapters above discussed notions of statehood, sovereignty, nationalism and imperialism as found in the empirical material. It was found that varying and oftentimes conflicting conceptions were politically and discursively available and the empirical material indicated that nationalism, imperialism and statehood were discussed mostly in relation to concrete policies, dictating the structure of the capitals (Union Treaty, Russian Federation and CIS). To better conceptualize the results, key findings will be brought together and discussed in this part.

To start with, it was shown that a discourse about the USSR’s imperial legacy – or the understanding of the USSR as an empire – was mostly absent even in the last years of the Soviet Union’s existence, but also in Russian discourse. This can be explained with the long-standing ideology of “internationalism” and “brotherly nations” that resulted in a predominantly negative evaluation of nationalist movements in the Union republics by the “Center” and members of the CPSU, resulting in accusations of Nazism, apartheid or even Stalinism. However, political leaders of Union republics with strong independence movements regularly referred to the USSR as imperialistic. The emerging national movements of the Union republics in the Baltic states, later also in other Union republics such as Georgia – can be classified as what Oskianin (2022) refers to as anti-imperialist nationalism in the hope of (re-)gaining statehood.

The interesting, and unusual case of nationalism here is Russian nationalism, or more specifically the development of Russian nationalism as propagated by Yeltsin. In Yeltsin’s understanding, the empire was represented by the CPSU and thus the USSR, not by (ethnic) Russians themselves, who, according to him, greatly suffered under the CPSU and in the

USSR. Hence, B. Yeltsin initially understood himself in an alliance with the other Union republics against the center. The empirical material indicates that he was as a politician positively perceived by the leaders of the other Union republics. He thus strengthened his own position as president of the RSFSR by referring to the necessity of Russian nationalism, the opposition to the Center and building an alliance with the other Union republics. However, with the strengthening of the red-brown coalition and thus the emergence of what is called empire-saving nationalism, the experience of the transitions in the early 1990s, an increasing identification with the USSR emerged. Consequently, at the end of the period analyzed, Yeltsin also shifted his nationalism to include nationalist and imperialist undertones.

With the dissolution of the Soviet Union by the leaders of Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus in the Belovezha Accords, Yeltsin started with a state-building program based on a civic, multinational nationalism with a high concentration of power for the president as codified in the constitution of 1993. In terms of foreign policy, he initially, at least discursively, preferred diplomatic and not militaristic relations with the former Union republics and a protection of ethnic Russians by legal norms.

However, the empirical material clearly shows just how much Yeltsin's state-building attempts were opposed from the beginning by the left and right political spectrum, the so-called red-brown coalition. While they diverged in their evaluation of the communist past, they shared certain narratives, for example that the dissolution of the USSR and the inherited borders of the Russian borders were illegitimate, opposing the constitution of 1993 and Yeltsin's state- and institution-building, oftentimes accompanied by a harsh delegitimization of democracy and Western influences. At best, Yeltsin was perceived by some as the best option to prevent the re-emergence of Communism. The state and the constitution of 1993 were oftentimes described as transitional. Therefore, the discrepancy between Yeltsin's intended state-building and the political majorities in the country indicate the instability of the political system from its early years.

While not necessarily using the terms "imperialism" and "nationalism" in the analyzed newspapers, speeches and decrees, the debate ranged from becoming a nation-state on the one hand or remaining an influential Great Power on the other hand. To become a nation state, the Russian Federation could start investing its existing resources inward, renounce expansion and thus develop internally without having to bear the cost of vast territories. To remain a Great Power would have meant to repudiate the emerging "isolationism" of the state, referring to the inability of the Russian state to exist in its then existing form, arguing for a mismatch

between territory and nation and a special role to influence the areas around the Russian Federation. It is between those two poles that the public debate developed.

It is not without irony that while Yeltsin initially was understood as an ally by leaders of the Union republics, whereas the Russian Federation with the strengthening red-brown coalition was increasingly perceived as heir to great-power thinking. Clearly, imperialist thinking did not disappear with the dissolution of the USSR and in quantitative terms, continued to dominate the discourse in the analyzed period. A central theme referred to the illegitimacy of the inherited borders and strong claims of revisionism and a general sense of a mismatch between the territory of the Russian Federation and the ethnically constructed nation, ethnic Russians, or Russian speakers in former Union republics.

The theory chapter introduced among other ideal types of ethnic nationalism and external imperialism. These ideal types are generally constructed as non-complementary. However, one result of this thesis is that in the public discourse, they discursively oftentimes went together. The borders and territories mostly referred to as “unjust” are those in which, as a result of migration and re-settlement, many ethnic Russians and/or Russian speakers lived, such as Crimea, parts of Kazakhstan and parts of the Baltic states. Thus, ethnic nationalism paired with claims to territory outside of the Russian Federation, and therefore being irredentist – and imperialist.

Ideologies such as Pan-Slavism and Eurasianism furthermore served as replacement ideologies. Pan-Slavism appeared dominant in quantitative terms. It also refers to the construction of Russian statehood as including Ukraine and, therefore, the inability to fully accept Ukraine’s independence. Pan-Slavism and Eurasianism, as discussed in the respective chapter, were understood mostly as complementary, since Russia as a Eurasianist state was not understood as excluding the “Slavic countries” Ukraine and Belarus. Interestingly, both ideologies showed what is called legitimization theories in the theory chapter, such as references to messianism, Russia as its own civilization, Orthodoxy, and spirituality. Again, they are not discussed as imperialist in the analyzed newspaper articles.

It was shown that multiple conceptions of state and nation co-existed, partially overlapping, partially conflicting. While conceptions of state and nation tend to be conflicting in all cases and are never static, none of the ones found in the material were possible, realistic, or widely supported: Neither Yeltsin’s unpopular civic, multinational state-building, nor the at least partially propagated wish to restore the Soviet Union, nor the construction of a Great Russia including Ukraine, Belarus and sometimes Kazakhstan. The same is true for both an ethnic state-building that would accept less territory, as well as an ethnic nationalism that claimed

parts of the independent states. Thus, it seems fair to conclude that the Russian Federation was lacking – and one might argue that this remains an issue – a positive, inclusive, generally accepted conception of state and nation.

Yeltsin's initial state-building culminated in the Constitution of 1993 – a result of the forceful confrontation of the constitutional crisis in October 1993. The material indicated that in the aftermath, some sort of normalization occurred and the political parties that were elected into the new parliament developed – for the most part – into an in-system opposition. Whereas the political methods chosen by the opposition were less harsh, the above-mentioned talking points – and thus the delegitimization of the Russian state in its existing form - were continued discursively.

While Yeltsin formally greatly increased his power and his room for maneuver as president, he and the liberal faction were increasingly isolated and discursively pressured. Clearly, Yeltsin was supported by Western countries and financial institutions as the most-likely politician to continue economic and political reforms according to economic and political liberalism. It has to be critically assessed that Yeltsin continued to receive western support even when Yeltsin opted for clearly undemocratic practices such as the dissolution of the parliament by decree and the shooting of the White House and when he was increasingly losing support both in the population and politically.

As a result of the parliamentary election in December 1993, which led to a win of the left and right political factions, Yeltsin increasingly integrated nationalist and imperialist aspects, such as the discussion of a so-called Russian Monroe Doctrine, a declaration to claim – analogue to the American Monroe Doctrine - special interests of Russia in the post-Soviet space or the declared goal to protect ethnic Russians or Russian speakers. This again demonstrates the close link between ethnic nationalism and external imperial nationalism discussed above.

Are the introduced ideal types of nationalism and imperialism then useful for the analysis? While the ideal types were to some extent present in the material, they, taken just for themselves, do not necessarily explain much. For the period analyzed, it was shown that conceptions of nation, empire and statehood were discussed in relation to concrete political questions. It was thus decided to follow the structure found in the empirical material and to categorize support, opposition, and criticism towards policies such as the Union Treaty or institutions such as the Commonwealth of Independent States. The ideal types furthermore do not capture the longer traditions of political thoughts in which they stand (as in the case of for example Eurasianism or Pan-Slavism), nor is their analysis able to demonstrate how exactly the ideas influenced the evaluation of a certain political event. Adding to this, the literature

discussed in the theory chapter rarely considered power dynamics in their analysis, but rather conceptualized the ideal types either as phases or as existing simply simultaneously. It was attempted to include an understanding of how strong certain positions were both by quantitative data and by structuring the chapters in opposition, support, and criticism. While it should not be assumed that a clear line runs from the discourse found in newspaper articles and speeches to “reality”, it can in fact be assumed that the public discourse (and traditions of political thought) does affect how the state or nation are imagined. This ties back to the argument that nation and state are imagined as argued by Anderson and a result of discursive practices.

Lastly, the notion that the empire, the Soviet Union, simply broke up according to ethnic lines appears to be too limited. While any explanation of the dissolution of the Soviet Union should be multi-faceted, the material clearly referred to political cleavages that existed also within those Union republics that had strong national movements with the goal of (re-)establishing independent statehood. Thus, in Union republics and then independent states such as Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia or Georgia, but also within the RSFSR pro-Union and anti-Union positions, support for national movements and opposition to the national movements were present. They can partly be explained with ethnic lines, as for example ethnic Russians or Russian speakers feared a loss of status. However, they were also influenced by political cleavages, evaluations, and interests, as for example members of all-Union institutions such as the Army or the respective Communist parties had an interest in preventing the splitting up of the USSR and its property.

6. Conclusion

In the beginning of the thesis, the concept of critical junctures in which historical change can occur, was introduced. It was shown that the analyzed period – January 1991 until spring 1994 – can be understood as especially open, as full of critical junctures: What would have happened if the August coup in 1991 had been successful? How would the Russian Federation have developed if Yeltsin hadn't declared the dissolution of the Supreme Soviet by decree, resulting in the shooting of the of the White House? How would Russia look today, had he not opted for a strong president in the constitution of 1993? These events developed into a different direction because political actors were able to influence them. However, as the analysis in Chapter 4 showed, the “constraint of structure”, as Soifer calls it, quickly returned.

The later the period, the stronger the imperialist and revisionist approaches, the stronger the blame for the dissolution of the USSR or at least the loss of territory.

Yeltsin, by no means an ideal democrat, and his state-building became increasingly unpopular, highly contested. This can be understood as one of the main take-aways of the analysis: That lack of a widely- accepted idea of nation or state greatly contributed to the instability of the political system. Conceptualization of the state ranged from a strong president to the Soviets, from democracy to monarchy, from a centralized state to a federation, from accepting the territory of the Russian Federation to perceiving its borders as unjust. The nation was partially imagined as ethnic, as multi-cultural, as Slavic, as Eurasian, as Soviet. Partially, what Pain (2016) refers to as “imperial nationalism” was also found repeatedly in the material analyzed: That claims to territories of other states occurred especially in reference to the ethnic Russians and Russian speakers living there, signifying both the perceived “mismatch” of nation and state and the argued connection between external imperial nationalism and ethnic nationalism. It was also shown that Yeltsin himself shifted in his nationalism: Initially, he directed his criticism and nationalism mostly against the CPSU, the center, claiming the unproportioned suffering of ethnic Russians. This oftentimes occurred in alliance with the Union republics. After attempting to build a civic, multinational state, but being strongly opposed by the political spectrum, he initially shifted to include nationalist and imperialist approaches. Unfortunately, it remained unclear from the material whether his shift is a result of the existing political majorities or a shift of ideas.

Clearly, this thesis is subject to limitations. First, in regard to the material and the research design. It was argued, especially in the chapter titled “source criticism”, that the newspaper articles, decrees, and speeches must be assessed with critical distance. It was attempted to distill the narratives presented in them, less to understand the content as facts. This is especially relevant as the newspaper articles increasingly became part of the political conflict, thus lessening the possibility to report objectively, as well as being highly influenced by the economic crisis and a crisis in funding. Furthermore, television overtook newspapers as the most important resource of information. In addition, it can be assumed that some meaning got lost in translation, such as the rather important distinction between “russkii” and “rossiskii”. Second, regarding Mayring’s qualitative content analysis, he proposes the steps so that the research can be traced and understood by others. It was attempted to be as transparent as possible both in regard to the coding guideline, as well as the chosen steps of analysis. However, analyzing the amount of material as only one researcher does not allow to test the consistency of the research (reliability). The validity of the research was attempted to be

achieved not only by including a wide range of perspectives, but also by covering a longer period, including different newspapers in the sample. However, there remain limitations to the validity. For example, questions concerning the economic reforms, a hugely important and highly controversial question in the transformation from planned economy to market economy, were excluded. Yet, it can be assumed that part of the opposition to the government can be understood much less in regard to their state-building, but as a result of the economic reforms and the population's impoverishment. Third, perspectives of the Union republics, but also of the Autonomous republics within the Russian Federation, are underrepresented. As this work focused on the construction of nationalism and imperialism within Russia, it is these perspectives that are included and analyzed here. It was attempted demonstrate the construction of the state and nation, neither falling it the pitfall of "methodological nationalism", nor being apologetic towards the imperial positions found in the material.

Are concepts of nationalism and imperialism the proper framework for the analysis? Partially yes, partially no. All the proposed ideal types were to some extent present in the material. Typically for ideal types, however, they rarely occurred in a pure form. Yet, many narratives found in the material are not captured properly by them, for example the assessment that the dissolution of the USSR was illegal, not covered by the Soviet constitution and that the Union remains in place. Additionally, as was argued above, the typologies used oftentimes lack references to concrete policies, as well as a critical understanding of the power struggle in which they are negotiated. Both aspects were attempted to include in this work.

While it was shown that multiple, conflicting conceptions existed, many of the narratives found in the material are still present today, such as calls for the "protection of ethnic Russians", the perception that the dissolution of the USSR was a catastrophe leading to unjust borders, accusations of Nazism or the construction of Russia as including (parts) of Ukraine. They were neither only used for purely propagandistic purposes, nor did they occur only once Putin gained power. Instead, they were widespread – and even dominating – in the material, indicating that they refer to longer lasting traditions of thoughts and thus having deeper cultural roots. At the same time, those narratives almost never were recognized as imperialist in the material. When or if the population will acknowledge its imperial legacies, remains to be seen.

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9. Coding guideline

Code	Definition	Example	Rule for Coding/ Commentary	Quantitative number
Union Treaty (support)	Support for the Union Treaty by those, that wished to reform, but maintain the Union; Gorbachev, reformist faction of CPSU, but also leaders of Union republics that agreed to the process of drafting New Union Treaty.	<p>Above all, it seems to me that there is every reason to state that there is growing agreement in the country and among the people with respect to the need to preserve the Union, transformed and on democratic principles. (Jan 1991 Vol 42 No 51 p. 10-13)</p> <p>First, what we are talking about is preserving the integrity of our territory and its population within the boundaries that have developed over a thousand years, as the foundation of a new Union, and ensuring historical continuity in the development of the statehood of our peoples. (Aug. 1991 Vol 43 No 28 p. 8-11)</p>		33
Union Treaty (criticism)	Participation in the drafting of the Union Treaty, but criticism of certain parts of the draft or the general direction.	<p>The draft Union Treaty is still insufficiently legalistic, something that is reflected in concepts, terminology and legal relationships and descriptions. This has to do with the names of many phenomena (state, republic, member of the federation, sphere of jurisdiction, powers, etc.), the legal regulation of the structures to be created, and the "cleanness" of the agreement on principles, content, and form of the renewed Union. The republics are striving to gain possession of all property on their territory. This gives rise to justifiable objections, since property on any territory was created by the labor of all peoples. (Aug. 1991 Vol 43 No 28 p. 8-11)</p> <p>To this day, no one has been able to explain intelligibly what this means, sovereign states are forming another independent, sovereign state whose leadership will, in the process, be endowed with broader rights and powers than they have. No one is able to explain why Russia, as well as any other republic, has to have two Presidents over it, if we do not want to be dependent on the state of relations between them. Why do we need two Supreme Soviets, the source of the "war of laws"? Why do we need two governments, one over</p>		27

the other one? And can a state based on the rule of law live under two Constitutions at the same time? (Sept. 1991 Vol 43 No 32 p. 5-6)

Union Treaty (opposition)

Opposition to the Union Treaty consisting of 1. Hardliners, against any reforms of the USSR and 2. The 6 Union republics that refused participating in the process of drafting it altogether.

Hardliners:

In his speech, Yu. Blokhin said unequivocally: "We don't need the new draft Union Treaty." The Union group is completely satisfied with the 1922 Union Treaty, to which "shameful clarifications and additions should not be made." As for the new draft Union Treaty, it was said that it is being "insistently imposed on us," and that it creates "an impression of fraud." The chief complaint against the draft was "the incompatibility between the presidential form of state administration and the power of the Soviets." (May 1991 Vol 43 No 16 p. 7-8)

Our second task is to preserve the USSR.

Q.How can the republics be held back if they want to leave the USSR?

A.It isn't the republics that want to leave, it's their leaders. Leaders are temporary, but geopolitical interests are eternal. (Sept 1991 Vol 43 No 33 p. 27-28)

6 Union republics:

With respect to the restoration of an independent Lithuanian state, the Democratic Labor Party of Lithuania advocates an evolutionary path for establishing such a state [...]. Brazauskas stated that the party, and he personally, regard the draft [Union Treaty] with skepticism, since it doesn't contain any "new approaches" and, in essence, is not progressive. On the whole, the DLPL is against signing the Union Treaty. (Jan. 1991 Vol 42 No 49 p. 21)

If you look at my ideological platform, I am a Christian democrat. I favor the creation of a parliamentary democratic republic in Georgia. Under that form of state structure, can any problems of one nation be solved by infringing on the rights of another, nonindigenous nation. (Apr. 1991 Vol 43 No 9 p. 13-14)

- 1. 37
- 2. 14

Russian Federation under

General support towards the

Either Russian society will be able, as it did in August, once again to reject the path of the SCSE and, gritting its teeth, advance along a democratic road,

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the old constitution (Support)

independence of Russia, Yeltsin as president and the perceived necessity to reform both the political system and the economy.

combining firmness with restraint and subtlety in its approaches, or we, without having resolved a single conflict between nationalities, will bring both the Dnestr region and Ossetia here, to Russia. Democracy inside and national-communist methods outside are two incompatible things. (July 1992 Vol 44 No 26 p. 3-5)

At the same time, it is the President who is now the main guarantor of Russia's continued development on a constitutional basis and the guarantor of an accelerated process of adopting a new Constitution and eliminating the Soviet system as the main nutrient medium for attempts at Communist or national-Communist revenge. (May 1993 Vol 45 No 15 p. 14)

Russian Federation under old constitution (criticism)

Criticism of the president and the government in regard to the reforms, the constitution or the conflict between legislative and executive.

On a number of questions, we differ greatly. For example, I don't agree with Gaidar that the goal of the reform is to create a market and a class of private owners. That is only the means. The goal is an efficient economy and a normal standard of living for the population, a standard based on fitting remuneration for labor. (Oct 1992 Vol 44 No 36 p. 11-13)

The President's rash initiatives on March 20, like the inappropriate actions of the Constitutional Court and the confrontational decisions of the ninth Congress, did not bring the country one step closer to resolving the constitutional conflict and the political crisis. On the contrary, we are now on the brink of real multiple authority bordering on anarchy, in which all branches of power are determined to ignore one another, and hence on the brink of a total stoppage of the state machinery. A large-scale, undeclared, cold civil war is going on in Russia. Thank God it's still a cold one. (May 1993 Vol 45 No 14 p. 14-15)

Contrary to "RF under the old constitution (opposition)", the parts coded as criticism generally understood the government and the independence of the Russian Federation as legitimate.

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Russian Federation under old constitution (opposition)

Opposition towards the Russian state after the dissolution of the USSR, oftentimes expressed in opposition to the inherited borders and partially the dissolution of the USSR, Yeltsin's state-building the

There is an immense difference between Russia and the Russian Federation: Russia is the former Soviet Union. Russia was always a multinational state. But the Russian Federation is the offspring of Bolshevik experiments. And as an unnatural entity, it could not hold back the destruction of the USSR at its borders. (Feb. 1992 Vol 44 No 1 p. 19-20)

Overt sabotage of all the Russian Federation's reforms is on the rise, underground province and district committees of the "banned" CPSU are being formed and actively functioning, trade union functionaries are openly inciting workers to stage mass strikes, brazen sabotage of the land reform is

The analysis has shown that numerically and thus discursively the opposition to the Russian state dominated.

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constitution and the economic reforms.

continuing, control by the military-industrial complex over personnel in industry is growing stronger, anti-Yeltsin blocs are being hammered together in parliament, people in the military are talking about the possibility and necessity of replacing the people in power, and so on. (Apr. 1992 Vol 44 No 9)

Russian Federation under new constitution (support)

Support for the Russian state in its then existing form, including the proposed constitution and institutions.

"No matter whom the voters cast their ballots for, they were agreed on one point: Russia needs strong rule, Russia needs order, people are irritated by the amorphous nature of power, they are tired of inconsistent and halfhearted decisions, and they are exasperated by the rise in crime. The Constitution affords an opportunity to establish order in a legitimate way, based on the rule of law. A popular mandate to strengthen the system of government has been received. As President, I will be guided by that mandate in every respect," he said. (Jan 1994 Vol 45 No 51 p. 1-2)

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Russian Federation under new constitution (criticism)

General support for economic and political reforms and the constitution of 1993, but criticism concerning certain political decision.

Today, not only in the ranks of the irreconcilable national-Communist opposition, which doesn't try to conceal its revanchist ambitions, but also in parties and movements with a centrist orientation and some that are basically democratic, there are serious apprehensions that the referendum on the Constitution could lead to a disruption in the balance of power and, consequently, to the establishment of an authoritarian regime in our country. Contributing to this fear is the fact that the new draft Constitution is not the result of a societal accord and a political compromise but the fruit of the "victory" of one part of society over another and the embodiment of the President's will. (Dec. 1993 Vol 45 No 45 p. 3-4)

The current federal government is unlikely to become authoritarian, at least in the near future, because the necessary preconditions and foundation are not in place. But neither will our country make the shift to stable democracy in the foreseeable future, because there is no deeply rooted institution of private property and no civil society, without which there can be no strong and independent parliamentarism. The most likely scenario . . . is that Russia will remain, for an indefinite period, in an unstable intermediate condition that can with equal justification be called both pre-authoritarianism and pre-parliamentarism. (Dec. 1993 Vol 45 No 45 p. 19-20)

To distinguish from RF under new constitution (support): Chosen when there was support for the general direction, but still choices of president or government (parties) were criticized.

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Russian

Opposition to the

Those participants in yesterday's Constitutional Conference who are running

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Federation under new constitution (opposition)	Constitution, the economic reforms and the existing borders, both in-system and out-of-system opposition, those that participated in the events of Oct. 1993.	for the Federal Assembly argued, in all seriousness, that "if we succeed in bulldozing the Constitution on Dec. 12, then, when we take our seats in the State Duma, we will be able right away to vote to rename it the Supreme Soviet and will again begin to operate in accordance with all the stringency of the old Constitution. (Jan. 1994 Vol 45 No 49 p. 5) "trying to put Russia back together." Answering a question from an M-E commentator, Shumeiko explained what he means by this expression. In his opinion, "we were accustomed to seeing Russia constantly expand, but suddenly it narrowed down to the administrative borders of the Russian SFSR. We must rectify this historical injustice, especially because for the republics of the former Union with the exception of the Baltic countries nothing can ever replace Russia." (Feb. 1994 Vol 46 No 02 p. 14)	13
Commonwealth of Independent States (support)	Support for the dissolution of the USSR by the leaders of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus, acceptance of the newly gained independence of the Union republics, support for (partial) integration within the framework of the CIS.	We have put an end to the principal obstacle to this, the Union Center, which proved incapable of freeing itself from the traditions of the former system. Chief among those traditions was the self-conferred right to command the peoples and fetter the republics' independence. (Jan. 1992 Vol 43 No 50 p. 11-12) The Commonwealth, even in the form it has today, is playing an important role as a construct that makes it easier to maintain economic ties (although not at the necessary level) and facilitates the establishment of a network of bilateral relations among its members, without which there can be no hypothetical integration in the future, and also as a mechanism for multilateral accords on various questions among those members of the Commonwealth that desire this. (Feb. 1993 Vol 45 No 1 p. 8-9)	36
Commonwealth of Independent States (criticism)	Criticism towards the CIS from different perspectives: Splitting up of Union property, for integration or against integration, weakness of CIS.	Unlike all the previous "summits," however, the Tashkent meeting is interesting because of the rather clearly defined consolidation of the participants around two "ideological" (so to speak) centers-Russia and Ukraine: While the former is deliberately trying to unite all the CIS members around itself, the latter is, on the other hand, engaged in a search for comrades in resisting such a union. The Collective Security Treaty became a litmus test dividing the former Soviet republics into camps. Russia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Armenia signed it. Ukraine, Belarus, Azerbaijan, Moldova and Kyrgyzstan did not accede to the document. (June 1992 Vol 44 No 19 p. 2-3)	36

In assessing the present state of the CIS, statements such as "The CIS never materialized," "Nothing came of the CIS," etc., seem inadequate. In order to make statements of this kind, one must first spell out specifically what did not materialize or come about. A "great leap" from a unitary Union into a Eurasian community, an eastern analogue of the European Community and NATO, did not come about. The creation of an effective interstate association with coordinating bodies, with a single economic space, a single currency, a single strategy for market reforms, a coordinated tax and customs policy, joint armed forces, easily crossed internal borders, joint control of external frontiers, etc., did not come about. (Feb. 1993 Vol 45 No 1 p. 8-9)

Commonwealth of Independent States (opposition)

Understanding that dissolution of USSR was illegal or even a coup, USSR partially remains in place, CIS as entirely illegitimate.

The Union republics carried off a coup within the framework of the USSR. And when people say there was no alternative, that's a lie. There has always been an alternative the route that we suggested taking: the creation of a federal basis for a new state. That is, a federation of Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Kazakhstan and whatever other republics might want to join. (Feb. 1992 Vol 44 No 1 p. 19-20)

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I will say at the outset that the Union exists, no matter how hard "democratic" propaganda tries to prove the contrary. The shock into which the "August revolution" plunged the country has, thank God, passed. People are asking themselves increasingly often why they kept quiet when the leaders of three republics declared that the USSR had ceased to exist. The participants in the "Belovezhskaia plot" forgot that only a Congress of USSR People's Deputies can declare the country's Constitution inoperative, and that no one except the voters can take away our powers. (Apr. 1992 Vol 44 No 10 p. 8)

Multicultural nationalism

Coded when references to Russia as a multicultural/ multinational state occurred, oftentimes in relation to the Federal Treaty and questions of (de-) centralization of the RF.

There are two points of view on this score. One is based on the principle of ethnonationalism: An ethnic community the highest type of ethnic community, in the form of a nation constitutes the basis for a state. The second concept is that of a multiethnic community of fellow citizens. This is not necessarily a Western model. It is worldwide. Self-determined states in Asia, Africa and Latin America and the principles of the UN have been built on this model. On the same basis, we talk about the national interests of Russia. You might say that we are taking the monoethnic content out of the concept of "nation." (Oct. 1992 Vol 44 No 39 p. 1-3)

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Ethnic nationalism	Coded when a specific role of ethnic Russians (as the numerically biggest group within the RF) was proclaimed, especially in relation to a dominant role of ethnic Russians or the proclaimed suffering of ethnic Russians (both within the RF and in the former Union republics).	One cannot build a state while ignoring the rights of the most numerous nationalities. (Feb 1992 Vol 44 No 1 p. 19-20) However, every cloud has a silver lining. Since a reorganization of the TV station is inevitable, the Russian Party is proposing its own alternative to create new editorial staffs according to the principle of proportional representation by nationality, using as the basic criterion "the percentage of Russians, Jews and other nationalities on the territory of the Russian Federation." (July 1992 Vol 44 No 23 p. 21-22) After the breakup of the USSR, about 30 million Russians and Russian-speakers were left on the territory of foreign states. Borders within the USSR, recognized by no one and arbitrarily established, became international borders, giving rise to clashes between nationalities and interethnic conflicts. In the process, a number of national autonomous entities and concentrated settlements of Russian-speakers in the newly formed states, having called into question the legitimacy of the states that had been formed and their new borders, asked for Russia's protection. Many of these territories (Ossetia, Karabakh, the Crimea, the Dnestr region) were parts of the Russian Empire long before they were incorporated into the newly formed independent states. (Sept 1992 Vol 44 No 32 p. 1-4)	Dominant form of nationalism found in the material. However, the material is translated from Russian language into English. Consequently, the distinction between "rossiiskii" and "russkii" is less clear. Ethnic nationalism was only coded when it was contextually clear that ethnic Russians were referenced.	41
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Nation state	Coded when nation state was references, especially in regard to "turning inwards" or accepting a smaller, but ethnically more homogenous territory	And there is no reason to hastily disown what the State says. Unlike an empire, which presupposes the concentration of a country's manpower and resources on goals of external expansion, a state means that the country turns inward, renounces expansion, and mobilizes its internal forces and resources for an economic and cultural upswing and for a peaceful and civilized breakthrough to the level of the great powers. I have a clear premonition that Russia will never again be an empire, but that it is bound to become a State. We should all do as much as possible to see that this happens. (Aug 1992 Vol 44 No 27 p. 10-11)		15
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Civic nationalism	Coded when equal	The solution . . . is to understand Russia as a state of Russian citizens in which		17
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citizenship and legal protection of individuals is referenced.

the republics are not nation-states but multinational entities in which the Buryats, Kalmyks, Tatars and so forth should acquire the dominant cultural role. The Russians were and still are the dominant group from the standpoint of access to power, to say nothing of the spheres of culture and information. (May 1993 Vol 45 No 17 p. 11-12)

Obtain Russian citizenship. Any citizen of the former Union, regardless of where he lives, can now obtain it at his place of residence on Russian Federation territory. (Sept. 1993 Vol 45 No 35 p. 19-20)

Internal imperial nationalism

Coded when either accusations of colonialism occurred by the Autonomous republics within the RF or when remarks about the "inferior" status of ethnic minorities were made.

Logically, the final option is Russia's disintegration into a number of medium-sized, small and tiny sovereign and semi- sovereign states and geographic areas with the de facto status of colonies and semicolonies. (Jan. 1993 Vol 44 No 52 p. 9-12)

In response, the newspaper Suverenitet printed, under the headline "The Birth of Fascism?" letters from readers promising to "kill all the stinking ethnics" and expressed indignation at a banner in the same Volga-Ural newspaper, which chose to print above its name a quotation from Zhirinovskiy: "And I'll resettle the Bashkirs and the Tatars in Mongolia. Filth and syphilis there, so let them live there." (Dec. 1991 Vol 43 No 47 p. 1-2)

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External imperial nationalism

Coded when claims to territory outside of the territory of the Russian Federation or claims to control over the "post-Soviet space" were made, as well as references to the illegitimacy of the existing borders and the independence of the former Union republics.

The ultimate goal that can be discerned in all these measures is the establishment of real control by Russia over certain key spheres on which Ukraine's survival as an independent state depends. (June 1992 Vol 44 No 21 p. 6)

Therefore, people here consider logical the thought, expressed by the Chairman of Georgia's State Council, to the effect that this statement was designed primarily for the imperial forces in Russia and for that portion of the Russian parliament that dreams of a greater Rus "uniting forever" its little brothers. (July 1992 Vol 44 No 24 p. 16-17)

It seems to me that Russia should declare to the world community that the entire geopolitical space of the former USSR is a sphere of its vital interests. (Sept 1992 Vol 44 No 32 p. 1-4)

Dominating form of imperialism found in the material.

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Pan-Slavism	Coded when references to “Great Russia”, “Slavic alliances” or “the Slavs” occurred, oftentimes with a specific focus on Ukraine and Belarus.	We are convinced that the Russian state should be revived not by internationalist nobodies with no national allegiance but by people who have been Russian from time immemorial Great Russians, Ukrainians and Belarusians in fraternal alliance with those indigenous peoples who, despite any temptations of pseudovereignization, will not betray the cause of goodness, justice and creative endeavor: These are the values to which the Russian people have remained faithful to this day. (Feb. 1992 Vol 44 No 4 p. 26-27)	55
Eurasianism	Coded when claims to Russia as a Eurasianist power occurred; “Russia between East and West”, “both Orthodox and Muslim” etc.	Russia acquired its global geopolitical functions thanks to its intermediate position between the traditional West and East. The Soviet global role, including the Soviet global-strategic role, remained largely a derivative of Russia's role, something that even the residents of Russia themselves, to say nothing of the residents of the other republics, have ultimately begun to dimly realize. (Apr. 1992 Vol 44 No 12 p. 14) Our state came into being and gained strength as a unique historical-cultural alloy of Slavic and Turkic, Orthodox and Moslem elements. (Apr. 1992 Vol 44 No 13 p. 1-4)	26
Orthodoxy	Coded when Orthodoxy was put into relation to the state or nation, the spirituality and unification of the (Russian) people.	Both the Program and the Concept that were adopted at the party's Founding Congress in December are based on a recognition of the vital need for a comprehensive unification of all Russian people around the idea of reviving the nation and Russia. This can be achieved, specifically, by reviving Russian spirituality and the Russian national world view on the basis of the sacred traditions and teachings of the Orthodox Church and the nation's entire historical heritage. (Feb. 1992 Vol 44 No 4 p. 26-27)	14
Civilization	Coded when the understanding of “Russia as its own civilization” occurred, especially in distinction to perceived “Western” traditions.	Our understanding of rule by the people is indeed different from Western Europe's. And for that matter, different from Asia's. Because Russia was and remains, despite everything, a unique state, and a separate civilization. (Feb 1992 Vol 44 No 1 p. 19-20)	16