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# Russian Foreign Policy Discourse during the Kosovo Crisis: Internal Struggles and the Political *Imaginaire*

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## Abstract

The Kosovo crisis gave rise to a domestic political crisis in Russia. The NATO bombings called into question the efficiency of Russian foreign policy, which was against them, challenging the worldview that the government conveyed, thereby reinforcing the communist anti-establishment vision. The present article, by analysing the press conferences given by both the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Communist Party, argues that each of the two narratives aimed to construct and impose (or defend) its own worldview and dividing principles of the world. In both narratives, this struggle was backed up using very strong political identity myths – namely Russia's relation to the West and the memory of the Second World War – that are referred to in opposite ways. The Kosovo example allows us to highlight the stakes and themes that work their way into Russian foreign policy discourse and contribute to exploiting foreign policy issues in Russian domestic political debate, and also cast light on the distorting effects caused by this instrumentalization.

On a more theoretical ground, this article argues for the need to dissociate foreign policy discourse analysis from foreign policy analysis itself insofar as foreign policy discourse does not relate solely to foreign policy. In particular, it is suggested that to fully understand foreign policy discourse, its two-level grounding in domestic political struggle as well as in political *imaginaire* must be taken into account, these two being articulated around 'the symbolic struggle for the conservation or transformation of the (social) world through the conservation or transformation of the vision of the (social) world and of the principles of division of this world' (Bourdieu, 1991: 181).

Consequently the insight into foreign policy discourse that is proposed in this article uses theoretical tools that do not belong exclusively to the IR theoretical arsenal - namely, Bourdieu's notion of political field and Barthes' of myth -, and that are rarely referred to in IR works, even if our conception of discourse is indebted to work by the 'Danish school' of IR on foreign policy discourse analysis.

## Résumé

La crise du Kosovo a donné lieu, en Russie, à une véritable crise politique interne. En effet, les frappes de l'OTAN ont non seulement remis en question l'efficacité de la politique étrangère russe qui s'y était opposée, mais elles ont plus largement remis en cause la vision du monde soutenue par le pouvoir russe, alimentant *a contrario* la vision contestataire soutenue par les communistes. A travers l'analyse des conférences de presse données par le ministère des Affaires étrangères et par le Parti communiste au moment de la crise du Kosovo, cet article montre que ce sont en fait deux récits qui s'affrontent, chacun cherchant à construire et à imposer (ou à défendre) sa 'vision et ses principes de division du monde'. Cette lutte s'appuie notamment sur le recours à des mythes identitaires très forts, qu'il s'agisse de la question des relations avec l'Occident ou de l'évocation du souvenir de la seconde Guerre mondiale, dont chacun des récits fait un usage antagoniste. L'exemple du Kosovo permet ainsi de mettre en évidence la manière dont certains enjeux et certains thèmes interfèrent dans le discours de politique étrangère et contribuent à l'utilisation des questions de politique étrangère dans le débat politique russe avec, pour conséquence, des déplacements des enjeux associés à ces questions.

D'un point de vue plus théorique, l'accent est mis dans cet article sur la nécessité de dissocier l'analyse du discours de politique étrangère de celle de la politique étrangère dans la mesure où le discours de politique étrangère ne relève pas exclusivement de la politique étrangère. Une meilleure compréhension du discours de politique étrangère suppose notamment de rendre compte de son ancrage simultané dans la lutte politique interne et dans l'imaginaire politique. Ces deux niveaux s'articulent autour de 'la lutte symbolique pour la conservation ou la transformation du monde (social) à travers la conservation ou la transformation des principes de division de ce monde' (Bourdieu, 1991 : 181). Dans cette perspective, l'analyse du discours de politique étrangère proposée dans cet article a recours à des instruments théoriques qui ne relèvent pas exclusivement du cadre des relations internationales, qu'il s'agisse des travaux de Bourdieu sur le champ politique ou de ceux de Barthes sur le mythe. En revanche, notre conception du discours doit beaucoup aux travaux de « l'Ecole danoise » de relations internationales sur l'analyse discursive de la politique étrangère.

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## INTRODUCTION

The Russian President's threat to start a Third World War, rumours about strategic missiles being aimed at NATO 'aggressors', appeals for 'traditional, orthodox Slav fraternity' to come to the aid of the Serb 'brother', the import of discourse in Russia and the resonance brought about in the country by NATO bombings of Yugoslavia and so on... How can we make sense from what appears nonsense?<sup>2</sup> How can we explain these stances without attributing them to an emotional and irrational reaction of the part of those who took them? How much store should be set by them, i.e. how should they be apprehended and at which level should they be analysed? These questions are as much methodological as they are analytical in nature.

The aim of this article is to analyse political discourse held in Russia during the Kosovo crisis. It puts forward the following assumption: foreign policy discourse was, during the period at hand, the preferred field of political struggle in Russia.

More precisely, the hypothesis underpinning our reading of Russian foreign policy discourse held after the NATO bombings of Yugoslavia is that the Kosovo crisis served as a catalyst for what was actually an internal political crisis which, at least in the first phase, almost totally overshadowed the international dimension of the crisis. In this light, the terms of the debate, which was structured around the interpretation of the Kosovo events and Russia's position on these events, did not lie either in the potential breach in the relationship between Russia and western countries (through NATO) or in their possible confrontation. The core of the debate lay instead – at least in its first phase – in a power struggle, in a challenge to the worldview that the government conveyed, as well as in the possibility of a swing from government to opposition, from the prevailing worldview to another one.

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<sup>2</sup> In that sense, this work starts from the same premises as this of Bobo Lo (2002) even if here we are dealing with Russian foreign policy discourse rather than Russian foreign policy: "Attempting to conceptualize the foreign policy of the past decade is a daunting, perhaps even foolhardy endeavour. How does one explain its myriad twists and turns, and emerge with a more or less coherent picture from the chaos of competing ideas and interests? Can one speak of a discrete approach with a common thread, or is it more useful instead to dismiss it as a loose amalgam of constantly shifting bits and pieces, devoid of meaningful conceptual or philosophical bases? (...) This book has been written in the conviction that it is indeed possible to make sense from what, in many instances, appears nonsense. The tortuous course of foreign policy in post-Soviet Russia offers an untidy but by no means inexplicable story." (2002: 1-2)

This hypothesis would allow us, in particular, to account for the impact of the Kosovo crisis in Russia, that is to say the intensive mobilisation of discourse it generated and, especially, the striking disconnection between the chronology of events in Kosovo and the chronology of the press conferences devoted to it by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. On March 26, 1998, in the second press conference held after the bombing began, the minister of Foreign Affairs - Igor Ivanov - declared his intention to set up daily press conferences on the Kosovo crisis.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, between March 25 and April 19, the MFA held eleven official press conferences (on March 25, 26, 29 and 31 and on April 2, 6, 7, 9, 14 and 19), ten of which were held in the presence of the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Yet, from mid-April onwards, the MFA gave up this type of conference. This does not mean the situation in Kosovo no longer required them: on the contrary, there were more bombings, greater collateral damage and a continuous flow of refugees fleeing from Kosovo. It means that the internal situation no longer required these press conferences. The increase in the number of press conferences may indeed be seen as a move to take over the media, in other words to fill the space where events are interpreted, in order to impose, justify and preserve the established 'worldview' challenged by the opposition, particularly the communists, the most resilient and powerful as well as the most credible opposition.

By way of this hypothesis, we would also like to offer an analysis of foreign policy discourse that is not solely a contribution to foreign policy analysis. In other words, we dissociate the analysis of foreign policy discourse from that of foreign policy. In so doing, we will show that this discourse has a certain autonomy in comparison to foreign policy which accounts for the solid grounding of foreign policy discourse in the internal 'sphere'.

It may seem paradoxical to shift the focus away from foreign policy to foreign policy discourse. In effect, in the domain of 'international relations', foreign policy discourse is first and foremost understood with reference to foreign policy. More precisely, discourse analysis is oriented towards understanding the practices that underpin it, which supposes establishing a correspondence between the discourse and the practice, between actions undertaken (or to be undertaken) internationally and the discourse held. Even when internal foreign policy decision-making processes are examined in the domain of Foreign Policy Analysis,<sup>4</sup> which

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<sup>3</sup> "Henceforth, taking into account the development of the situation in Yugoslavia, we [Igor Ivanov and the press] will meet daily so that we [the Ministry for Foreign Affairs] can inform you of our appreciation of the events" (MFA, March 26).

<sup>4</sup> "FPA enquires into the motives and other sources of the behaviour of international actors, particularly states. It does this by giving a good deal of attention to decision-making, initially so as to probe behind the formal self-descriptions (and fictions) of the processes of government and public administration. In so doing it tests the

also, to a certain extent, implies the conditions in which foreign policy discourse is produced, this interest appears to be motivated, above all, by the need to account for decisions made and actions undertaken internationally. In this view, emphasis should logically be placed on discourse held by those participating in foreign policy.<sup>5</sup> Thus, foreign policy discourse would be defined as official discourse held by state representatives internationally. We consider that the 'international relations' approach is thus inadequate to give a comprehensive account of foreign policy discourse because it gives bias to analysis of the discourse. And this bias becomes particularly problematic when it reveals a misunderstanding or a certain incredulity of the discourse held, as was the case during the Kosovo crisis. This approach also tends to neglect the discourse of participants, political opponents for example, who intervene only marginally in the formation of foreign policy. This poses a problem when, on any given question, it is precisely such discourse which is the most pervasive.

### **Grounding foreign policy discourse in the 'internal sphere'**

We believe the grounding of foreign policy discourse in the internal sphere can be analysed on two levels which in fact reflect two conceptions of foreign policy discourse. On the first level, foreign policy discourse is a practice that belongs both to the field of International Relations and the field of internal policy. On a second level, foreign policy discourse is also a matrix for interpreting international events grounded in the political *imaginaire*, thus making up a component of political culture,<sup>6</sup> Russia's in this case. It can also be shown that these two levels are intricately linked and that the grounding of foreign policy discourse in the field of politics presupposes that it is first grounded in the political *imaginaire*. The use of myths in foreign policy discourse illustrates this interaction between grounding in the *imaginaire* and the political struggle.

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plausible hypothesis that the outputs of foreign policy are to some degree determined by the nature of the decision-making process." (Hill, 2003: 10)

<sup>5</sup> To define what we mean by 'foreign policy' and so as to avoid a terminological debate which is only incidental to this article, we will use here the definition put forward by Christopher Hill in his latest work: "The sum of official external relations conducted by an independent actor (usually a state) in international relations." (2003: 3)

<sup>6</sup> These two notions, political culture and political *imaginaire*, are so closely related that it is worth elucidating the distinction between them. We refer to political culture rather as a system and to political *imaginaire* as its content. By political *imaginaire* - which is the notion referred to most often in this article-, we mean the shared and evocative universe of common references which is the stuff of political culture and through which some sense of political events can be made. Political *imaginaire* includes the stereotypes and the common places that can be associated with those events. Stereotypes and common places are not understood here in a pejorative way. They relate to the necessity to refer to pre-existing 'pieces of sense' so as to make sense of the events.

## Grounding political discourse in the political field

To paraphrase John Austin's famous formula, in foreign policy, one can do things with words,<sup>7</sup> and a great part of diplomatic activity takes place on the level of discourse. If, then, we agree to consider foreign policy discourse in its 'performative'<sup>8</sup> dimension, meaning as a practice grounded in a social universe and which derives its meaning with respect to conventions that define its conditions of efficiency and felicity, it should be realised that this practice belongs not only to foreign policy but also to internal policy. Of course, foreign policy is the object of foreign policy discourse or, rather, its pre-text (which justifies the fact of speaking) and its con-text (which constitutes the matter), but foreign policy discourse cannot be expressed merely as a development, a simple manifestation of foreign policy. In effect, the producer (speaker) of this discourse, i.e. the person given over to this practice, or foreign policy-maker, is also a domestic policy-maker. He or she is, then, simultaneously involved in (at least) two fields, the field of international relations and that of internal policy. As a foreign policy-maker, his or her discourse is in relation, even in competition, with that of his or her counterparts internationally. The speaker therefore commits his country to his position at the international level.<sup>9</sup> But, as a policy-maker, his or her discourse may also be competing with that of other political professionals at the domestic level. Consequently, foreign policy discourse takes on meaning as regards the international stakes in question as well as the constraints of the field of international relations. This also applies to internal political stakes and the constraints pertaining to the political field.

It is thus necessary to widen the analysis of foreign policy discourse to the discourse held on questions of foreign policy and on official discourse<sup>10</sup> by political figures competing with the policy-maker. We have, therefore, and for the purposes of this article, elected to

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<sup>7</sup> We refer here to John L. Austin's work (1962).

<sup>8</sup> It should, however, be pointed out that here, we do not envisage foreign policy discourse within the strict framework of the theory of 'speech acts'. It is nevertheless true that diplomatic discourse, inasmuch as it obeys the rules of diplomatic protocol that organise it and define its conditions of felicity belongs to the field of these 'speech acts' put forward by John Austin.

<sup>9</sup> On this level, foreign policy discourse takes part in the struggle for the interpretation of international events which is also a struggle for the imposition, maintaining or transformation of a world vision and which makes up an important component, one of the main stakes of international relations.

<sup>10</sup> In the interests of thoroughness, one could also separate 'foreign policy discourse' from 'discourse on questions pertaining to foreign policy'. The former includes all discourse held (official communiqués, speeches, press conferences) by official state representatives on 'official external relations conducted by the state in international relations' (Hill, 2003: 3), in that as this discourse is part of foreign policy and belongs to the field of international relations. 'Discourse on questions pertaining to foreign policy', which constitutes the object of this article, includes, on the one hand, the above-mentioned discourse in that it also plays a role in internal political struggle and therefore belongs to the field of internal politics, as well as competing speeches by other political figures. We have chosen to use the expression 'foreign policy discourse' indifferently in both cases.

analyse not only the MFA press conferences that were held between March 24 and April 19, but also those held by the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF) in the Duma.<sup>11</sup> In fact, as will be seen later, at the time of the Kosovo crisis the communist party represented the largest and most credible opposition,<sup>12</sup> inasmuch as its discourse was truly in competition with the official discourse.

If the dual role of the foreign policy-maker, theoretically, enables foreign policy discourse to be grounded in the field of internal policy, this can only come about under certain conditions. These conditions can be understood in view of the way the political field functions and, more particularly, the constraints on political discourse. John B. Thompson, in his preface to Pierre Bourdieu's work, *Language and Symbolic Power*, distinguishes two different types of constraints: a constraint of distinction, which notably assumes the existence of discourses which are at once competitive and in competition,<sup>13</sup> and a constraint of legitimisation, assuming the possibility of mobilisation on the question under consideration and, hence, public<sup>14</sup> interest in the question.

“The discourses produced by political professionals are therefore determined by two broad sets of constraints. One set of constraints derives from the logic of the political field itself, in which professionals are competing with one another, taking stances vis-à-vis one another, etc. In this respect, their utterances acquire a relational status: that is, they make sense only in relation to other utterances issued from other positions in the same field. (...) The second set of constraints which operates in the production of political discourse derives, not from the field itself, but from the relation between the field and a broader range of social positions, groups and processes. While the political field has a considerable degree of autonomy, it

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<sup>11</sup> As the Communist party's press conferences were not as numerous, not as long and not exclusively dedicated to the Kosovo crisis, we have momentarily added the Russian Popular and Patriotic Union's official declarations. The Russian Popular and Patriotic Union is, in fact, a regrouping of parties and associations around the CPRF. Its President is Gennadii Zyuganov, leader of the Communist Party. It should be kept in mind that the declarations do not target the same audience as the press conferences, which target a larger audience: as a consequence, they are more violent, direct and explicit in the worldview they suggest and in their challenging of the established order.

<sup>12</sup> The threat embodied by the communists is, thus, much stronger than that of the LPDR (Liberal Democratic Party of Russia), for example, whose position with regard to the powers is, moreover, not devoid of ambiguity. Despite its very violent discourse, this party, beginning with its leader, has virtually always supported the government during decisive votes. During the Duma vote on continuing the Impeachment procedure, Vladimir Zhirinovskiy called on his ranks not to vote in favour of the five accusations. This refusal was decisive, as only 17 votes were needed in order for the accusation relating to the war in Chechnya to be adopted and for the procedure to follow its course. However, it can be noted that, on the Kosovo question and on international questions generally, LDPR discourse mainly agrees with, feeds and credits the communist worldview. This matters except for some small details; the LPDR's worldview being, for instance, anti-western whereas that of the KPRF is, above all else, anti-American.

<sup>13</sup> The existence of competitive discourses does not automatically mean that they are in competition. Entering into competition assumes that there is an actual political struggle which, in the Russian context, is not necessarily the case.

<sup>14</sup> By 'public', we mean this 'referential third party' from which political figures draw their legitimacy. 'Public' stands as much for public opinion as for voters, or rather the image political figures make of them. In this sense, the public seems to be an abstraction on the part of the political figures themselves, which really only comes into being during election periods.

is not completely independent of other fields and forces. Indeed, one of the distinctive characteristics of the political field is that, in order for professionals to succeed within it, they must appeal to groups or forces which lie outside the field. This is quite different from, for instance, the fields of science and art, where an appeal to non-professionals is not only unnecessary, but would in all likelihood be counter-productive. In the political field, politicians must constantly appeal to non-professionals in order to secure the support – the 'credit' or 'political capital' – which will enable them to wage a successful battle against other professionals." (1991: 27-8)

It can also be seen that these conditions were met in Russia at the time of the Kosovo crisis.

### **Grounding foreign policy discourse in the political *imaginaire***

When speaking about foreign policy, we imagine that everyone is talking about the same thing, which allows us to place the various discourses on the same level. However, from one country and one political culture to another, the meaning of concepts and, thus, of events, varies. In this connection, Henrik Larsen showed how *"the different conceptions [in Denmark as compared to Great Britain] of the role of 'parliamentary sovereignty' and the 'people' in the political process, and the basic connotations of the states in the two countries, have constituted the framework for differences in policy."* (1999: 452)

The cultural grounding of foreign policy discourse is understood in reference to a conception of discourse and, more fundamentally, a conception of language that should be specified here. This point is based on work by several Scandinavian authors on foreign policy discourse analysis, including Lene Hansen, Henrik Larsen and Ole Waever. The latter gives this definition of discourse:

"Discourse is the dimension of society where meaning is structured. It forms a system regulating what can be meaningfully said. The discursive space is the field in time and space sharing a discursive system. The system is a layered set of key concepts and constellations of concepts. At each layer, a particularly dense and powerful constellation is defined which we call a structure." (Waever, 1996)

Discourse is perceived here as a system of values and rules which dictate a way of comprehending and operating in a given linguistic and cultural context. As a continuation of Michel Foucault's 'archaeological' work (1984; 1989), the level of discourse seems, here, to be a level of autonomous reality with its own rules and which, this being so, forms a pertinent object for analysis in itself. This conception of discourse means not seeing language as something natural but as something constructed; the relation between the signifier (the word)



and the signified (the thing) is arbitrary,<sup>15</sup> so that the meanings of the words do not rely on the essence of things but rather on the differences between concepts. Within this differential conception, language is not a neutral medium. It is a system whose structure can be studied and which constitutes a stratum of reality in itself. And this system is specific to each political culture and discourse. In effect, “(...) *the impact of words derives not only from the difference between them but from the social values given to them (or more correctly the values given to the different signifiers) and the rules determining the ways in which words can be connected*” (Larsen, 1997: 14).

Discourse is, then, similar to an interpretation matrix. More specifically, foreign policy discourse is like an interpretation matrix of international events; that is to say a certain way of making sense of these events which fits in with a historical background, a given linguistic and cultural context and a political culture and *imaginaire* which are, in our case, unique to Russia. Thus, discourse appears autonomous with regard to foreign policy<sup>16</sup> inasmuch as it escapes the control of those who hold it. They do not totally master the discourse they hold, as they are not so much the players of this discourse as its playthings. What Daniel Cefaï says about political cultures which “*restrain us, in that we only perceive, interpret and act within the horizons of the world that their networks of concepts and stories articulate beforehand*” (2001: 100-1) can also be applied to political discourse. More precisely, political discourse appears as one of the components through which political culture exercises its power (to be taken in Foucault's meaning of 'conduct of conducts'), how it orientates and governs the way we think, speak and act.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> On this point, see Ferdinand de Saussure (1959).

<sup>16</sup> The work quoted considers foreign policy discourse as a structural factor in foreign policy. In fact, foreign policy discourse defines the area of what is speakable, thinkable and, to a certain degree, feasible in the field of foreign policy. To quote Henrik Larsen, it is “*the framework of meaning within which foreign policy takes place*” (1997: 453). In relation to our current topic, this status of discourse can explain the way political debate may be structured around a foreign policy question.

<sup>17</sup> Although our argument is very indebted to Henrik Larsen, we consider, unlike him, that political discourse (and foreign policy discourse) is a component of political culture. Indeed, we find it difficult to support any national specificity in foreign policy discourse - by way of which he compares French and British discourse (1997) or British and Danish discourse (1999) on Europe - without making a connection to political culture. It is true that Henrik Larsen does not envisage this national grounding as an absolute premise (“*discourse does not a priori have a clear border on the other side of which it no longer applies. It could in principle cross borders of several countries or be an entirely international discourse (...)*” 1999: 24), but as a hypothesis to be applied to the key concepts of his analysis (Europe, nation/state, security and the nature of international relations).

## **Articulation between grounding in the political field and grounding in the political *imaginaire*: the double-sided nature of political struggle**

Discourse, as solidly grounded as it may be in a given culture, is still not necessarily a closed, set and pacified system. Certain elements of this system may be challenged. Within the same culture or discourse, there is a construction of meaning originating in an internal struggle between several interpretations or sub-discourses, one of which may be dominant or legitimate: the official discourse.

Following on from Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1985), Henrik Larsen thus evokes the existence of “*a discursive field in which meaning is contested, in which a battle over meaning is taking place*” (1997: 19). In fact, within this discursive field, “*a multitude of such struggles in different issue areas*” (1997: 19) takes place. This discursive struggle, brought up by Henrik Larsen, most certainly bears comparison with the symbolic and cognitive struggle mentioned by Pierre Bourdieu, which to his mind makes up one of the essential dimensions of political struggle:

“The struggle which sets professionals against each other is no doubt the form par excellence of the symbolic struggle for the conservation or transformation of the social world through the conservation or transformation of the vision of the social world and of the principles of division of this world (...)” (1991: 180-1)

The grounding of foreign policy discourse in the political field and its 'cultural' grounding in the political *imaginaire* are doubtlessly articulated around this symbolic struggle. More precisely, grounding a foreign policy question in the political field assumes, first, that it is grounded or appropriated by the political culture, so that issue makes sense for the public, thereby making mobilisation – a constraint imposed by the political field — possible. Second, it assumes that the meaning the issue takes on is challenged within this culture through discourse, allowing the issue to become the vector for political struggle via symbolic struggle.

## **Use of myths: from *imaginaire* to political struggle**

The concept of myth, taken in Roland Barthes' meaning (1973) provides an apt illustration of this articulation between the two levels of grounding discourse. It is at once a manifestation or clue of the grounding of discourse in the political *imaginaire* and a structuring element of political struggle (via symbolic struggle); myth appears, in fact, as an

efficient instrument for the legitimisation of discourse, all the more so as its great imprecision opens the way for different possible uses and allows competing discourses to take hold.

### **Myth as a manifestation of grounding in the political *imaginaire***

The use of myths in foreign policy discourse indicates its cultural grounding via its grounding in the political *imaginaire*. Indeed, myths are specific to a given culture; they are even one of its constitutive components, so that studying a culture depends greatly on studying its myths.

It may be more precise to speak here of complete appropriation, rather than of simple grounding. In fact, by latching on to a question, myth deforms its meaning, or even empties it of its original meaning, only keeping what is echoed in the culture in question. “*Through the [mythical] concept, it is a whole new history which is implanted in the myth*” (Barthes, 1973: 128).

In Russian foreign policy discourse, references to the mythical images of the West, Europe and even NATO and the United States, and to the mythical memory of the Great Patriotic War, 'suck the lifeblood', so to speak, from the Kosovo question and invest it with a whole different history, with another 'parasitical' signification, which is specific to Russia.

### **The mobilising power of myth**

One may also consider reference to myths from the angle of their political function in the framework of symbolic struggle. In this view, the solicitous nature of myth must be borne in mind. This makes it an efficient instrument for political figures to solicit identification and, hence, adhesion to their discourse.

“Myth has an imperative, buttonholing character: stemming from an historical concept, directly from contingency (a Latin class, a threatened Empire) it is I whom it has come to seek. It is turned towards me, I am subjected to its intentional force, it summons me to receive its expansive ambiguity.” (Barthes, 1973: 134)

Myth gives rise to adhesion without the need for convincing, because it comes across as something natural and not constructed, because it “*transforms history into nature*” (Barthes, 1973: 140).

“Myth does not deny things, on the contrary, its function is to talk about them; simply, it purifies them, it makes them innocent, it gives them a clarity which is not that of an explanation but that of a statement of fact. If I state the fact of French imperialism without explaining it, I am very near to finding that it is natural and goes without saying: I am reassured. In passing from history to nature, myth acts economically: it abolishes the complexity of human acts, it gives them the simplicity of essences, it does away with all dialectics, with any going back beyond what is immediately visible, it organizes a world which is without contradictions because it is without depth, a world wide open and wallowing in the evident, it establishes a blissful clarity: things appear to mean something by themselves.” (Barthes, 1973: 156)

In this perspective of adhesion, it can be seen that most of the myths used in the discourse analysed here are myths belonging to Russian national culture and not to a specific sub-culture and which may, thus, be considered as constitutive elements of Russian identity. In this sense, they are particularly interesting from the angle of political mobilisation and legitimisation. In fact, these myths are widely unifying; in Russia, they make immediate sense.

#### **Use of myths and political struggle**

It may seem paradoxical that myth can be both a vector of political struggle and a mobilising factor. In fact, through its 'naturalising' power and this capacity, which is the “*very principle of myth*”, to “*transform history into nature*” (Barthes, 1973: 140), which endows it with its mobilising power, myth is not open to debate. It cannot, therefore, be submitted to competing interpretations. This is how Roland Barthes is able to speak of myth as ‘depoliticised speech’ (1973: 155).

Thus, it is not on the level of the meaning or interpretation of myth that political struggle can be structured, but on the level of its use. The mythical concept is “*a kind of nebula, the condensation, more or less hazy, of a certain knowledge*”, whose “*elements are linked by associative relations*” and which “*is supported not by an extension but by a depth*”, whose “*mode of presence is memorial*” (1973: 132). Given this characteristic imprecision, myth lends itself to a variety of uses.

The hypothesis guiding our reading of Russian foreign policy discourse during the Kosovo crisis, which holds that this crisis gave rise to an internal political crisis in Russia, rests on the theoretical premises we have just referred to. In fact, our hypothesis lays two types of question open to analysis: the problem of 'how' - how could the Kosovo question be the vector of an internal political crisis in Russia? -, and the problem of 'why' - precisely why

did political struggle build itself around a foreign policy question in general, and that of Kosovo in particular?

We have chosen here to concentrate mainly on 'how'. Our purpose is to account for the content of the discourse held and the form it took. As for 'why', we will limit ourselves to suggesting some avenues for further reflection. We must surely refer to the status of foreign policy questions in general, the status of these questions in Russia and, in particular, to the status of some of these in Russia, including the Kosovo question, in order to understand their propensity to structure political struggle. First, let us invoke the intricate link between identity stakes and foreign policy considered as a set of exclusion practices and the subsequent definition of a stance towards otherness (which can be considered as some form of negative identification) as conceptualised by David Campbell in his highly stimulating book:

“...it is an impoverished understanding to regard foreign policy as a bridge between pre-existing states with secure identities. Given the alternative standpoints from which one can appreciate the coeval emergence of the 'state' and the 'international system', it is not possible simply to understand international relations as the existence of atomised states that are fully-fledged intensive entities, in which identity is securely grounded prior to foreign relations. The consequence of this argument is a fundamental reorientation of our understanding of foreign policy. foreign policy shifts from a concern of relations between states which takes place across ahistorical, frozen and pre-given boundaries, to a concern with the establishment of the boundaries that constitute, at one and the same time, the 'state' and 'the international system'. Conceptualized in this way, foreign policy comes to be seen as a political practice that makes 'foreign' certain events and actors.” (1992: 69)

Since Russian identity, or at least Russian identification, is currently rather uncertain,<sup>18</sup> and since the 'demand' for identity is consequently quite strong, the proximity between foreign policy issues and the most fertile identity myths (namely Russia's definition in relation to Western countries and remembrance of the Second World War) may become more decisive. Besides, foreign policy issues in Russia have gained greater legibility because of the loss of legibility of other stakes, such as economic stakes. Indeed, the latter have seemingly lost the legibility they had at the beginning of the 1990s: back then, all economic reforms were closely linked to a modernization project: to catch up with and imitate the Western economic model. It is probably because discourse on the world can be the vector for discourse on Russia's future that political divides could be structured around what was at stake internationally. In fact, there is a certain correspondence between the international and the internal focus, a shifting of internal stakes to the international arena. This takes shape around issues concerning Russia's identity, the way forward for Russia or a plan for Russia.

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<sup>18</sup> See on this point, Lev Gudkov (1997).

The issue of 'how' can be broken down into two questions: the way in which the Kosovo question became a vector of political struggle and how the political and cognitive confrontation between the government in place and the communist opposition was structured around the Kosovo question.

In connection with the first of these two questions we shall first evoke the Russian political context. Over the months leading up to the Kosovo crisis, a rebalancing of the political and cognitive forces between the government and the communist opposition could be observed. In other words, the political struggle and the risk of a political crisis became real. It will then be shown how the evolution of the terms of debate around the Kosovo question allowed it to become grounded in the Russian political field via its grounding in the Russian political *imaginaire*. It is, however, the second question which is truly at the heart of this article. In order to tackle it, we shall first examine how two competing worldviews, of Russia's position in this world and, thus, two competing conceptions of Russian identity, came into confrontation. We shall then analyse the 'result' of this political struggle. In our opinion, the failure of communist opposition could be explained by its inability to gain legitimacy in the public eye. The very different use that was made of identity myths, particularly that of the Great Patriotic War, in each of these discourses accounts for this failure.

#### **THE CONDITIONS FOR GROUNDING THE KOSOVO QUESTION IN THE POLITICAL FIELD AND THE RUSSIAN POLITICAL *IMAGINAIRE***

How could the Kosovo issue become exemplary enough to become the vehicle of a political struggle, confronting two worldviews and two identity projects? How did the Kosovo crisis lead to a political crisis? A previous analysis (Colin, 2000) of the outbreak of the Kosovo crisis and its subsequent development has allowed us to identify the preconditions making this possible.

## Discredited Authorities and a Credible Opposition: Towards a Rebalancing

A crisis can exist because there is real competition between political forces and the two worldviews they support. In Russia, given an unbalanced institutional system favouring the executive branch, such a phenomenon implies some re-balancing of power.

The presence of real competition in the political field can be envisaged both from the angle of a political balance of power and from a cognitive balance of power. If we consider this competition from the angle of a political balance of power, it must be remembered that the Kosovo crisis took place in against a backdrop of extremely weakened presidential power, embodied by Boris Yeltsin,<sup>19</sup> at a time when the communist opposition, just months before the elections, seemed to be in a position of strength, i.e. in a context where the communists' challenge to the (president's) authority had never seemed more credible. Furthermore, this credit (as evidenced by the communists' good showing in opinion polls) lent strong credibility to the communist opposition, since it seemed as though they were going to capitalize on it either at the December elections or even earlier than that, in the event early elections were held, a frequently mentioned possibility.<sup>20</sup>

But this crisis can also be considered from the more symbolic, although no less decisive, angle of a cognitive balance of power, i.e. the credibility of (and adhesion to) different, competing worldviews: in effect, *“political subversion presupposes cognitive subversion, a conversion of the vision of the world”* (Bourdieu, 1991: 127). From this standpoint, one must remember that recent events had discredited the established or prevailing vision (the government's) and reinforced the anti-establishment vision (the communists').

First, the vision upheld by the government was deeply affected by the August 1998 financial crisis, which challenged the set of reforms related to this worldview, as well as by

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<sup>19</sup> This weakness was first of all physical, as Boris Yeltsin was more and more often hospitalized. It was also political. Scandals were increasing around the presidential clan under the impulse of the Attorney General, Yurii Skuratov whose resignation Boris Yeltsin asks for. This is, according to the rumor, what led Yeltsin to dismiss the head of his administration (also Secretary of the Security Council), Nikolai Bordyuzha, who was replaced by Aleksandr Voloshin. Lastly, the Impeachment procedure against the Russian President was running its course. A special plenary session at the Duma was scheduled for April 15.

<sup>20</sup> “We do not fear early elections and we are ready to face them. The nation will say who must rule the country” (Gennadii Zyuganov's reaction to rumors of a cabinet reshuffle, March 4, *Summary of World Broadcast*, SU/3475 B/5, March 5).

the December 1998 Iraqi crisis, which discredited the partnership with the United States.<sup>21</sup> Second, alongside the discredit affecting the prevailing vision, the anti-establishment vision based on anti-Americanism and the rejection of liberal reforms ('the liberal revenge' as the communists say) was reinforced by the same events and was consecrated by NATO strikes.

### **A shift in stakes as a prerequisite to mobilisation**

Another factor bringing the Kosovo issue into domestic politics was a progressive shift in the meaning and the stakes of the issue between March 1998 and March 1999.<sup>22</sup> This shift can be traced to NATO's October 1998 ultimatum to the Yugoslavian authorities and the violent reactions it brought about. The crisis fizzled out, but it helped inject the Kosovo issue into the dynamic current of Russia's relationship with the West (which NATO embodies or serves as a figure in our terminology) and of the history of relationships with NATO and associated mobilisations.

Such a shift in stakes, which in our opinion is not fortuitous (since it is intrinsically linked to the specific status of Russian foreign policy mentioned earlier), entails two indissociable sets of consequences. For one, the Kosovo issue crystallised competing worldviews and thus entailed a political struggle. Through the mediation of a struggle between efforts to preserve the international order or challenge it (rather than transform it), a struggle between the dividing principles of this world, it is actually the definition of Russia's role in this world that was at stake. Consequently, through the mediation of this interrogation on Russia's place in this world, i.e. its relationship to the world, the question in fact boiled down to a question of Russia's identity. The Kosovo issue thus became more readable and so, more liable to interest the population. Due to this displacement of the issues, mobilisation became feasible, and mobilisation is, as mentioned earlier, a prerequisite for political struggle.

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<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, the Russian government was also discredited on the external scene. One has to recall the climate of suspicion that characterised relations between Russia and the United States due to the financial crisis as well as the BONY scandal that broke out in September 1998 concerning money-laundering of International Monetary Fund (IMF) loans up to more than 7 billion US\$ via the Bank of New York (BONY). Moreover, the international community, led by the United States, was very critical of the Keynesian policy led by the new Russian government to overcome the consequences of the August crisis.

<sup>22</sup> In an earlier work (Colin, 2000), we highlighted how the Russian diplomacy somehow contributed to these shifts in meaning, and thus facilitated the insertion of the Kosovo issue into Russian political debate.



In this context, the NATO bombings struck the final blow, challenging the basis of the Russian foreign policy followed since 1996, i.e. Evgenii Primakov's appointment as head of Russian diplomacy.<sup>23</sup> With the NATO bombings, we encounter "*a conjuncture of critical discourse and an objective crisis, capable of disrupting the close correspondence between the incorporated structures and the objective structures which produce them, and of instituting a kind of practical époque, a suspension of the initial adherence to the established order.*" (Bourdieu, 1991: 128). These bombings seemed to have made possible 'cognitive subversion' (a conversion of the worldview), a prerequisite for 'political subversion' and a 'heretical break with the established order'.

## **DESIGNATING THE ENEMY AND CONSTRUCTING A WORLDVIEW: THE TWO NARRATIVES**

How is the political struggle revealed in the interpretations of the Kosovo events? Beyond the question of the appropriateness of Russia's response to these events, two readings of the world and of Russia's place in it (and consequently two visions of its identity) were at odds: a conservative one, justifying the established order, and a revolutionary one which challenged it. In the discourse on the Kosovo crisis, the political struggle was hardly put forward. On the contrary, it was often claimed to be nonexistent.<sup>24</sup> Yet it was still real. However, it is not so much in the discourse as beyond the discourse that the political struggle evolved, in the implications of the discourse as well as in the evocations it triggered, which helped to build and impose a specific worldview. The political struggle lay, rather, in the way the threats were defined, the way the enemy was designated, it lay in the denunciation of the reactions and the stands taken and their justification in the invocation of the past. Therefore, when studying this corpus of political speeches, a corpus of reactions to the events in

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<sup>23</sup> This policy was based on Russia's capacity of opposition on major international issues conferred by its right of veto in the Security Council and its nuclear capacity, on the institutionalisation of the relationships with NATO, which was to allow Russia to take part in or, at least, to exert an influence on NATO's decision-making process, in particular within the framework of the Permanent Joint Council instituted in May 1997.

<sup>24</sup> The Ministry of Foreign Affairs even evoked the existence of a deep consensus (Igor Ivanov, MFA, March 29) between the Government and the opposition, beyond the apparent divergences which were finally only formal: "Let me say that we are in one of these cases when, in spite of the complexity of the problem, the tasks of foreign policy are easy to solve because the position of the leaders of the country, the position of the President and the Government, are supported by practically all the country's main political forces. You can notice it at the Duma and at the Council of Federation. If there are other opinions which are expressed, they do not criticise the position of the Government and the President, but propose other ways and other means of solving the problem."

Kosovo, one should focus on their symbolic signification rather than on their literal meaning by underlining the mythical dimension they contain. In other words, what myths are used in the speeches and how?

Designating the enemy and the threat obviously helps to structure the two narratives. The NATO strikes challenged the worldview and above all the dividing principles in this world upheld by Russian diplomacy (since they are a 'gross' infringement of the 'NATO-Russia founding Act on Mutual Relations', Igor Ivanov, Press conference, March 25). As a consequence, these strikes required Russia to redefine the threats it faced and who its enemies were. The two narratives seemingly converge on the same unanimous and harsh criticism of NATO's action, yet the criticism has a different scope and meaning for each actor. In the communist narrative, the target of criticism was the American enemy and the international order it stood for, the true nature of which was revealed by the Kosovo events. This is obviously not the case in the 'diplomatic' narrative, which attempted to reconcile fierce condemnation of NATO with a refusal to break off relations with the United States and its allies.

### **The Communist Narrative, Building a New World: the United States as a Foe vs. Europe as a Victim and a Partner**

The communist reading of the Kosovo events (and the subsequent worldview) is highly polarized. It equated NATO with the United States and made the two figures out to be evil by systematically making comparisons and even analogies with Nazi Germany.

The image of the United States as an evil empire was held up in contrast to the image of an 'enchanted' Europe which includes Russia<sup>25</sup> and whose unity the United States would like to break. A strong opposition is therefore built by the communist discourse between the United States and NATO on the one hand and Europe on the other. Such a dichotomy also implies a separation between the United States and European countries, most of which are NATO members and took part in the bombings. NATO's American allies have almost completely disappeared from communist discourse ('NATO's American allies' were

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<sup>25</sup> Gennadii Zyuganov referred to General de Gaulle's alleged plan for the construction of Europe to extend from the Atlantic to the Urals. (CPRF, February 3).

mentioned once in the March 31 press conference and 'NATO countries' were mentioned once in the April 16 press conference) – or, better still, they are presented as victims.<sup>26</sup> Yet this dissociation between Europe and the United States is mainly sustained by reactivating the conspiracy theme, which presents Europe (including some NATO members and Russia) as the main victim of an American plot:

'I have already said it quite clearly in my speech: the main cause of war in the Balkans is that the USA doesn't want a united Europe, it is not in their interest. They don't want the European Union to become their competitor.'<sup>27</sup>

Such a world construction appeals to Cold War *imaginaire* and stereotypes. The denunciation of the 'imperialist aggression against Yugoslavia' or the evocation of the conspiracy of a 'small pro-American group heading Russia' which was alleged to have destroyed the USSR and the Warsaw bloc in America's own interest<sup>28</sup> are examples of the recurrent reactivation of Cold War reflexes. Through this conspiracy theme, the communist narrative links denunciation of the American enemy with that of the enemy within (Yeltsin, Chernomyrdin and, more generally, all those considered as 'Russian liberals'), and questions the international order and the submissive domestic order. The Russian Popular and Patriotic Union's declarations always resort to the conspiracy theme, since it mobilises the audience targeted by their declarations.<sup>29</sup> Although somewhat veiled, the conspiracy theme also appears from time to time in the press conferences.<sup>30</sup> The worldview constructed by the

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<sup>26</sup> "NATO evokes a contemporary Teutonic order ignoring the opinion of all the participants in international agreements, the opinion of the UN, the Security Council, the European Union, and which did not even take the decision of the Parliaments of its Member States into account. The French Parliament, for example, did not authorize the military participation of its country in this aggressive operation. It is the first time that this has occurred in the post-war history of France, which is a significant and great State" (CPRF, March 31).

<sup>27</sup> Gennadii Zyuganov, Press conference, April 30. This plot against Europe had already been evoked on several occasions before the bombing began (CPRF, February 3): "This conflict is the work of special services, of all those who hate the Slavic world, and of those who do not wish Europe to be united from the Atlantic to the Urals, as General de Gaulle had dreamed in his time".

<sup>28</sup> Gennadii Zyuganov, PPUR, March 25.

<sup>29</sup> "Using fascist aggression of NATO against the Serb Brothers, during this global antislavic putsch, Russian 'NATO supporters' and the American protégés prepare for political revenge. (...) All this pushes the government to extremist acts with American support. The government should dismiss the Duma and cancel presidential elections, should return in politics the "Chubais-Gaidar group' hated by people, should fix scandalous inequality, degradation of the country, its bringing down to a role of the helpless satellite of America. (PPUR, March 26) – "The Patriotic and Popular Union of Russia (...) analyzes the present tragedy in Yugoslavia as an inevitable result of activity by pro-American forces and their satellites in all the post-Soviet space. Because of their efforts, the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact have been destroyed, Russia and all countries of the CIS disarmed. These forces, which are the fifth column in our countries, have destroyed our economy as a result of the implementation of IMF policy and have systematically exterminated our Defense potential." (PPUR, April 2) –see also a similar declaration in the Patriotic and Popular Union of Russia's official Statement of 25 March.

<sup>30</sup> "I consider that Yeltsin, Kozyrev, and all those who conducted foreign policy then, simply betrayed our friends and companions-in-arms, as they betrayed their own country, their party, their friends and allies" (CPRF, February 3). In connection with Viktor Chernomyrdin's appointment: "I share this assessment completely. He already took

communist narrative is based on the systematic association of all Western figures and functions that are negatively connoted, disregarding the natural ambivalence of the perception of the West.

This worldview exploits the sense of threat that is mainly associated with the figures of NATO and the United States, as well as feelings of weakness and economic dependence sometimes associated with the IMF.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, the United States is at the head of countries that, according to the Russians, may represent a danger or a threat of war.<sup>32</sup> Between August 1997 and April 1999 (Iraqi crisis, Kosovo crisis), the opinion according to which Russia had enemies likely to carry out military action against it was widespread, from 45% in August 1997 to 60% in August 1998<sup>33</sup> and nearly 75% in April 1999.<sup>34</sup> And the figure of NATO largely concentrates this sense of threat attached to the West: A majority of Russian people declare a fear of NATO,<sup>35</sup> Two-thirds<sup>36</sup> perceiving NATO's enlargement (to the Baltic States) as a threat. The consequence of this strong sense of threat was the unanimous denunciation of the Western aggressor. This was obvious during the Kosovo crisis, but it was also the case when the US bombed Iraq a few months earlier in December 1998 (even if Iraq is not a sister country), an act that was disapproved by more than 80% of the population.<sup>37</sup> The Russians massively condemned the NATO bombings (90% of the population),<sup>38</sup> they mainly held Western countries responsible for the conflict, half of them considering that the aggressive U.S. and NATO policy had led to aggravation of the conflict and that NATO was "the most guilty party" in the conflict (over 60% of the population).<sup>39</sup> They also felt that the flight of Albanian civilians from Kosovo was triggered by NATO bombings instead of by ethnic cleansing, meaning that it was not Milosevic, but instead the Western leaders who

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part in the ransacking of the country five years ago, he led our economy and our defense complexes to such a situation that nobody takes Russia into account any more" (CPRF, April 16).

<sup>31</sup> See on this point my earlier work (Colin, 2000: 125-126)

<sup>32</sup> FOM (Public Opinion Foundation), December 1996 and November 1997: [http://classic.fom.ru/week/t300\\_8.htm](http://classic.fom.ru/week/t300_8.htm)

<sup>33</sup> FOM, August 1998: [http://classic.fom.ru/week/t395\\_2.htm](http://classic.fom.ru/week/t395_2.htm)

<sup>34</sup> FOM, April 1999: [http://classic.fom.ru/week/t1043\\_2.htm](http://classic.fom.ru/week/t1043_2.htm)

<sup>35</sup> FOM, May 1997: <http://bd.fom.ru/report/map/of19972401>

<sup>36</sup> FOM, July 1999: [http://classic.fom.ru/week/t1056\\_2.htm](http://classic.fom.ru/week/t1056_2.htm)

<sup>37</sup> FOM, December 1998: [http://classic.fom.ru/week/t451\\_10.htm](http://classic.fom.ru/week/t451_10.htm)

<sup>38</sup> FOM, March 1999: [http://classic.fom.ru/week/t1041\\_1.htm](http://classic.fom.ru/week/t1041_1.htm)

<sup>39</sup> FOM, April 1999: [http://classic.fom.ru/week/t1042\\_1.htm#2](http://classic.fom.ru/week/t1042_1.htm#2)

were responsible for it.<sup>40</sup> Nevertheless, the so-called Russo-Serb brotherhood remained very limited,<sup>41</sup> and support for President Milosevic was at the very least mitigated.<sup>42</sup>

## **The Diplomatic Narrative: Preserving the World Order**

In Russia, the issue of the West is multiform. It is part of a historical debate that has regularly resurfaced and which contributes to structuring perceptions of the West, even if the collapse of the USSR partly led to challenging it. It was initially a recurring debate within the elite on Russia's identity and the path of development the country should follow.<sup>43</sup> This debate contributed to structuring the perception of the West. The Soviet system also played a strong role in structuring beliefs about the West. Indeed, propaganda likened the West, and even identified it, to the image of the Enemy and, incidentally, to that of the competitor. The Soviet system was thus apparently somewhat detached from the Identity issue (even if defining the Enemy is a way of defining the Other and thus to define oneself), without managing to discard it, as the emergence of a Neoslavophile movement testifies. The downfall of the USSR and the opening of Russia to the outside world upset this quasi-monopolistic situation of the frame of reference about the West. In fact, the Russian population's relationship to the West is no longer defined in ideological and strategic terms, but in economic and cultural terms as well. Although the Enemy/Friend dichotomy has not completely vanished, it no longer has the monopoly of structuring perception of the West. This perception has diversified considerably in keeping with the new functions attached to the West. The frames of reference, i.e. the resources likely to be called up in perceptions of the West, have become increasingly complex. The perception of the West does not amount to the perception of the West strictly speaking (*Zapad*). All the figures attached to the West in the Russian *imaginaire* (Europe, the United States and France as well as NATO, the IMF, etc.) are part of it. Indeed, each figure also refers to a particular function of the West — economic collaboration, cultural influence, identity model — which generates a certain number of stereotypes.

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<sup>40</sup> FOM, April 1999 and May 1999: [http://classic.fom.ru/week/t1047\\_4.htm](http://classic.fom.ru/week/t1047_4.htm)

<sup>41</sup> WCIOM (The Russian Centre for Public Opinion), 25-27 October 1998.

<sup>42</sup> FOM, May 1999: [http://classic.fom.ru/week/t1047\\_4.htm](http://classic.fom.ru/week/t1047_4.htm)

<sup>43</sup> This debate led, in the middle of the 19th century, to the dispute between the Slavophiles and the Westernisers; it was then revived at the end of the 19th century by the Danilevski's Eurasian current; the development of a current known as Neoslavophile. in the 1960s constituted another misadventure.

The MFA tried to integrate this ambivalence and the increasing complexity of affects associated with the perception of the West into its discourse. The MFA appealed to a more complex and pragmatic vision. Indeed, it had to face a dilemma: the MFA had to justify maintaining relations with Western countries, particularly those, such as the United States, that took part in NATO strikes while continuing to direct strong criticism at the NATO strikes since this was what conditioned its international and inner credibility, given its previous positions on the issue. The diplomatic narrative is threefold:

- the enemy's 'hyperlocalisation': the most adamant speeches as well as the only retaliation measures focused on this enemy.
- emphasis on the diversity of Western institutions, which proved the superiority of Russia's position over that of its partners.
- construction of a common threat to Western countries and to Russia, namely the Islamic terrorist threat.

#### **NATO Strategists as a Foe**

NATO was presented as an evil figure in the diplomatic narrative; this figure was already discredited in Russia since it was perceived as an aggressive military alliance. Not only was 'the NATO aggression' vehemently condemned, but NATO strategists were also stigmatised as cynical and immoral, whose "stubbornness" is "maniacal".<sup>44</sup> The indignation provoked by NATO strikes is displaced onto this *imaginaire*<sup>45</sup> figure of NATO as a demonic and inhuman technocracy.

#### **Ambivalent Status of the United States**

The strong condemnation of NATO and NATO strategists can be paired with the ambiguity of the diplomatic position towards the United States. The dilemma is even more difficult to resolve when it comes to the issue of relations with the United States, whose connections to NATO are obvious. The diplomatic narrative could not and did not deny U.S.

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<sup>44</sup> Igor Ivanov, MFA, April 2.

<sup>45</sup> When a journalist asked him for explanations on these so-called strategists, Igor Ivanov answered: "I do not know concretely who these strategists are. Some are surely civilian, others are politicians, a large number of them take part in the decision-making" (MFA, March 26).

responsibility.<sup>46</sup> Denouncing the “American diktat”<sup>47</sup> on the one hand, and underlining the need to uphold relations and a partnership with the United States<sup>48</sup> on the other hand, the diplomatic narrative exploits the historical ambivalence of the perception of the United States. Indeed, the United States is the enemy par excellence in the *imaginaire* built by Soviet propaganda, but it also won the Second World War (together with the USSR) and the Cold War. It is thus both a liberator and the country responsible for the collapse of the Soviet Union (according to this point of view). Therefore, it is considered as the country that did the most good (23%) as well as the country that caused the most harm to humanity (28%) in the 20 century.<sup>49</sup> Yet this ambivalence is also due to the plurality of American functions (on which we shall concentrate below). The United States is the rival, but also the political, military and strategic partner (that is to a certain extent the country responsible for the current crisis). Thus, the United States performs a variety of functions that can be encountered in a rather dissociated way when embodied in other figures (NATO or the IMF, for instance). It should be noted that the diplomatic narrative also refers to the Cold War, but this reference acts as a foil, in order to justify its refusal to break off relations with the United States.<sup>50</sup>

### The Western Partners

The communist narrative is bipolarised; on the contrary the diplomatic narrative is structured around the diversity of “international partners and interlocutors” and that of their own interests. It also points out the diversity of the institutions.<sup>51</sup> Russian diplomacy uses the diversity of the institutions and affects attached to them to emphasise its connections with

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<sup>46</sup> “I [Igor Ivanov] recall that, over these last months, this is already the second act of this type planned and perpetrated by command of Washington against an independent State. Yesterday, it was Iraq. Today, Yugoslavia. Who will be next?” (MFA, March 25) – “In spite of what NATO asserts in connection with the unity and the cohesion within NATO, it is clear for all that Washington is the main instigator of this aggression, and that it is in Washington that the decisions were made (...)” (MFA, March 29).

<sup>47</sup> “Whatever the arguments put forward by American strategists to justify these actions, their true objectives are obvious: to impose on the political, military and economic diktat of the United States on the world, (...)” (MFA, March 25).

<sup>48</sup> “I repeat, we have already pronounced and still pronounce ourselves against the rupture of relations with the United States. We value these relations highly (...). We are aware of how significant these relations between the United States and Russia are for the whole world.” (MFA, March 25). See also the press conferences of 26 and 29.

<sup>49</sup> WCIOM, August 1999.

<sup>50</sup> “However, in any case, that does not mean that we must give everything up now, the things we built together in Europe, and to revert to the Cold-War times, to the times of confrontation, of the arms race” (MFA, March 26).

<sup>51</sup> “We based and we continue to base ourselves on the fact that NATO is a reality on the European military and political theatre, and that it is thus necessary to take this reality into account, as it is necessary to take into account the European Union, the WEU [Western European Union] and other organizations which exist” (Igor Ivanov, MFA, April 2).

positively connoted institutions (the OSCE, since it is the largest and Russia is a founding member; the European Union, since it does not include the United States, the G8, since it includes Russia and, therefore, gives it the aura of a superpower) to the detriment of negatively connoted institutions (NATO, first and foremost, but also the Contact Group). It also stresses any dissensions between the various countries taking part in NATO bombings,<sup>52</sup> particularly the tensions between the United States and leaders of the European countries who were unable to counter the American strategy (MFA, March 25). The European countries are also presented as divided.<sup>53</sup> The diplomatic narrative also tried to explain dissensions within European countries, between leaders and public opinion.<sup>54</sup>

Through the emphasis placed on the multiplicity of actors and the diversity of their interests, the diplomatic narrative justifies the need for Russia to maintain relations with all its Western partners (NATO apart). The diplomatic narrative builds a world from which Russia is not excluded, in which Russia has a great role to play as a mediator, for instance. Russia is not only integrated in this world order, it emerges as its best supporter and defender. The main reason for Russia's refusal to take stronger measures to stop NATO bombings can be ascribed neither to its inability nor its weakness. On the contrary, it should be attributed to its moral and legal superiority.<sup>55</sup> Because of these principles, Russia refused to behave like NATO and resort to force and ultimatum. The NATO bombings were not only illegal<sup>56</sup> and immoral, but they were also ineffective. Moreover they were responsible for a humanitarian catastrophe and may even have entailed severe ecological damage. In other words, the Russian position, already shared by a large majority of the world community, was the most reasonable from any standpoints (legal, moral, ecological, humanitarian, and in terms of effectiveness), and Russia's Western partners were bound to soon realize – if they had not already -, that they were mistaken.

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<sup>52</sup> Russian diplomacy recalled that "the problem of the refugees arises acutely in Italy and Greece"; it pointed out the reserves of the French military as to the effectiveness of a strategy that would only be based on air strikes even if it was extended." (MFA, March 26).

<sup>53</sup> "You know that not a single opinion was expressed in the last meeting of the European Union. And there are also other examples." (Igor Ivanov, MFA, March 26)

<sup>54</sup> "In many countries, protests against this aggression are increasing in public opinion. In Great Britain, 70% of the people polled declare themselves against this aggression. In the United States, 50%." (MFA, March 29). "To be fair, one should only speak of the leaders, because all the population of the NATO countries does not support this barbaric aggression against a Sovereign state" (MFA, March 31).

<sup>55</sup> In a March 25 declaration, the Russian President underlined this moral superiority. Russia kept in reserve "extreme measures, but nevertheless we decided not to resort to them, to leave this out. We are superior to the Americans from the moral point of view." [*Actualités russes*, 03/26/99, n°1298, p. II].

<sup>56</sup> "Now, concerning the legal aspect of the question, to which I asked you to pay close attention." In this same press conference of April 2, Igor Ivanov also referred to this proliferation of legal references, for example he admitted: "I may pay too much attention to legal aspects, but it is very important, because there are many speculations there, and the diplomats must answer only basing on solid facts."



## The Islamic Threat, the Real Threat

Last but not least, the diplomatic narrative refers abundantly to the Islamic and terrorist threat. This threat is embodied by the 'so-called KLA' [Kosovo Liberation Army], as Russian diplomacy terms it, to underline that the KLA must not to be considered as a 'liberation Army' but as an extremist terrorist organization. Evoking this threat, the diplomatic narrative first intends to discredit NATO once more, along with the United States, which gave their active support to 'Islamic, extremist organizations delivering them means and weapons', and, to a certain extent, those European countries which gave their tacit support to the KLA and did not dare oppose American strategy.<sup>57</sup> But this evocation also aims at creating a threat that is shared by Western countries and Russia as well. It is a way of suggesting that Russia and the West belong to the same bloc, to the same world, to the same civilisation:

'Can European people take advantage of the emergence of a centre of Islamic extremism on the continent? Why don't Americans understand that backing extremist Muslims in Kosovo amounts to helping a new Bin Laden to emerge? (...) Does Europe need the constitution of a centre of Islamic extremism, a centre of weapons and drug trafficking?'<sup>58</sup>

Furthermore, the diplomatic narrative uses very striking and evocative images to refer to this threat: speaking about the new 'Bin Laden' that the United States feed, evoking the Khatab's training camps where KLA terrorists were trained, and hinting at the participation of 'Mujahideen fundamentalists from Afghanistan, Pakistan and several other countries of the Persian Gulf with the support of Saudi secret services'.<sup>59</sup> The diplomatic narrative aimed to shift the danger from NATO and the United States to the Islamic threat, which appears far more frightening for the Russian people and is less ambiguous. This theme of a common Islamic threat was already present in the Russian Official discourse during the Kosovo crisis. It will be usefully revived during the second Chechen war and after the events of September 11.

The two narratives are built upon two very different worldviews. But at the same time, by interpreting the Kosovo events, these narratives contribute to constructing such worldviews. The communist narrative, which challenges the present global (and domestic) order, revived (and was based on) a clear dividing principle that is a Friend/Enemy dichotomy. While the communist narrative presents a conflicting worldview, the diplomatic narrative presents a diversified world. Refusing any polarization or confusion, it differentiates

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<sup>57</sup> Igor Ivanov, MFA, March 25.

<sup>58</sup> Igor Ivanov, MFA, March 25.

<sup>59</sup> Igor Ivanov, MFA, April 9.

NATO from the United States, the United States from Europe, the European countries which belong to NATO from those which do not and the Western leaders from their public opinion. Russia is not excluded from this world order; it is on the contrary an insider; there is no doubt that Russia belongs to the club of great powers and developed countries (which explains the symbolic importance that the MFA attached to solving the conflict within the G8).

The Kosovo events resulting from American hegemonic inclinations and from the weakness of its allies, who did not have the courage to express their dissension, may have hampered Russia's relationships with its Western partners and rivals. However, Russia is mindful of the fact that they belong to the same world and are endangered by the same threats. Thus each of these narratives implies a certain role, a certain status and a certain identity for Russia. Each of these constructions refers to some Western figure, that is, to some image of Russia that is reflected in this Western figure. Besides, the strength of these narratives, on which political struggle is based, is due to their power of evocation and identification rather than to their relevance.

## **MYTHS, MOBILISATION AND IDENTIFICATION**

As these two constructions of the world have a considerable explanatory dimension, their ability to win the support of the audience is very strong. Indeed, the struggle for the "preservation or the transformation of the vision and dividing principles of the world" cannot be dissociated from the struggle to impose such a worldview or the struggle to ensure identification with such a view. In the context of the NATO bombings, the genuine emotion<sup>60</sup> aroused by these bombings should then, theoretically, be converted into support for one's own worldview.

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<sup>60</sup> According to a survey conducted by the FOM on April 3-4, 43% of the population kept up with the news on Yugoslavia several times a day, 34% up with it once a day, 14% once over several days, and only 7% did not keep with it at all [[http://classic.fom.ru/week/t1042\\_1.htm](http://classic.fom.ru/week/t1042_1.htm)]. According to a FOM survey conducted on March 27-28 [[http://classic.fom.ru/week/t1041\\_1.htm](http://classic.fom.ru/week/t1041_1.htm)], 92% of the population disapproved of it. The same proportion of the population felt that NATO did not have the right to begin the bombings without UN Security Council approval (WCIOM, March 27-30) and mainly attributed responsibility for the war to NATO. The population did not only disapprove of NATO's action, but it even appeared strongly affected by what was happening in Yugoslavia. Regarding these strikes and the justifications advanced by NATO, the population was thus divided between indignation (52%), anxiety (26%) and fear (13%) (WCIOM, March 27-30)

Identification with this worldview is first created by identification with the threats, the Islamic threat in the diplomatic discourse, the NATO and US threat in the 'communist' discourse. By evoking the Islamic threat, the diplomatic narrative fuels Russian stereotypes and anxieties about invasion from the South. When the 'communist' narrative refers to the next target of NATO bombings, which could be a former Soviet Republic,<sup>61</sup> if not Russia,<sup>62</sup> it aims to arouse anxieties and fears in order to mobilise public opinion.

The omnipresent reference – in the communist discourse as well as in the diplomatic discourse - to the memory of the Second World War (WWII) has to be understood from this viewpoint of mobilisation by identification. Beforehand, the status of this memory of WWII in the Russian *imaginaire* has to be recalled.

### **The Victory as a Myth**

The Second World War, or the Great Patriotic (War) as it is called in Russia, is certainly one of the most (if not the most) evocative historical events in the Russian *imaginaire*. It is the most meaningful, the one the Russian people feel most strongly about. According to several opinion polls, the 1945 Victory is considered to be “the most important event in 20th-century Russian history” and “the event in which they take the most pride” (Gudkov, 1997: 13). Lev Gudkov sees in WWII “the sole positive landmark in the national pride of post-soviet society”. Indeed, constant reference to the memory of the Second World War is not so much a reference to historical facts as the evocation of a real founding myth. It appeals to affects rather than to knowledge, to an intimate certainly exempt from all rationalization and distancing attempts, rather than an accurate and rationalized historical understanding. “As the key moment of great-power consciousness, this symbol impedes possibilities of rationalizing the past” (Gudkov, 1997: 92). As Lev Gudkov points out, even though its unforgettable remembrance was often invoked, the war was subject to a specific task of oblivion, of interpretation and eviction of its undesirable aspects (the true causes of the huge number of Russian casualties, for instance). This increased taboos and psychological bars

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<sup>61</sup> “The next aggression will be perpetrated against one of the sister republics of the former Soviet Union.” (Gennadii Zyuganov, CPRF, March 31)

<sup>62</sup> “Who will be next to be bombed? Minsk, Kiev or Moscow. I do not know.” (Gennadii Zyuganov, CPRF, April 16)

as regards WWII. The memory of the War was made sacred. Everything related to the War became sacred and exempt from all attempts at rationalization, since rationalization could only be blasphemous.

### **The ‘Great Patriotic War’ and Other Myths in the Communist Discourse: from Identification to Mobilisation**

In the communist narrative, references to the ‘Great Patriotic War’ sounded like a call for Russian *grandeur* and heroism, a call for unity and general mobilisation. Comparing NATO,<sup>63</sup> and the US,<sup>64</sup> to Nazi Germany was meant to construct an enemy that is equal to the expected mobilisation and rouse the People into action.<sup>65</sup> The communist narrative highlighted the national-patriotic side of this memory and its enthusiastic and voluntaristic dimension.<sup>66</sup> This invocation of the Great Patriotic memory was buoyed by several demonstrations (March 27, April 7, etc.). Slogans for Victory Day (May 9), as well as for Labour Day, refer to events in Yugoslavia.<sup>67</sup>

The numerous references to ‘Slavic Brotherhood’ and to support for the ‘Serb brothers’ are part of the national patriotic rhetoric too. ‘Slavic Brotherhood’ can be considered as an identity myth, but it surely is not as unquestionable and unquestioned, universal and evocative, as the WWII memory. Without doubt, that is the main reason that there are almost no explicit references to ‘Slavic Brotherhood’ in diplomatic speeches, that it is only hinted at

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<sup>63</sup> We can give some striking examples: “‘Natofascism’, with the American Secretary of State and Clinton at its head, has crushed Europe.” (CPRF, June 2) – or the denunciation of “the NATO-American lobby” (PPUR, April 2) – “NATO is on the path of Hitlerism” (CPRF, April 30)

<sup>64</sup> “If the essence of the American ideology is examined, added the CPRF leader, it recalls Hitlerism in the full meaning of the word: a superpower dictates its conditions to the world” (CPRF, March 31) – “The Americans are on the path of Hitlerism. (...) the United States established a global dictatorship using neo-fascist methods” (PPUR, March 25).

<sup>65</sup> “Using our own networks, we are currently leading consultations to raise a popular wave of protest in all countries. (...) “A whole series of demonstrations is envisaged, one of which in Moscow” (Gennadii Zyuganov, CPRF, March 31).

<sup>66</sup> “We call each patriot of Russia, to the extent of his abilities, to do everything to contribute to the ousting of the anti-popular Government from the country, and to bring his assistance to the Serb Brothers in this difficult moment for them” (PPUR, March 25)

<sup>67</sup> “‘For peace in the world and the end of the war in Yugoslavia’, it is with this slogan that we will demonstrate on May 1 and on Victory day, May 9.” (Gennadii Zyuganov, CPRF, April 16) – “Solidarity with the people of Yugoslavia is extremely significant. That is why one of the main slogans tomorrow at the demonstrations will be ‘Out of Yugoslavia’.” (Gennadii Zyuganov, CPRF, April 30).

in the communist press conferences, and that these references are conversely very numerous<sup>68</sup> in the declarations of the National-Patriotic Union of Russia. It is likely that references to 'Slavic Brotherhood' are mainly aimed at communist supporters because 'Slavic Brotherhood' is only a partial identity myth.<sup>69</sup>

Finally, calling for mobilisation appears to be indissociable from calling world order into question. Indeed, mobilisation cannot occur until the circumstances are defined as critical. From this standpoint, mention of WWII helps to make the situation critical, and lends credibility to critical discourse.

### **Multiple uses of myth: The Second World War in Diplomatic Discourse, From Mobilisation to Demobilisation**

Although sacred and untouchable, the memory of the War can be used in several ways. Lev Gudkov identifies two levels of national consciousness related to the memory of the war which appeal to two types of contradictory affects. The communist narrative clearly addresses the first level of consciousness, namely national and patriotic enthusiasm, as well as pride in the victory to which the memory of Soviet power and *grandeur* is also linked. It also targets the Russian people's extraordinary patience and its ability to sublimate itself under critical circumstances. This is what Lev Gudkov has called the 'Parade version' (*paradnaya versiya*) of the myth. Yet the diplomatic narrative addresses a second level of consciousness which, conversely, does not appeal at all to patriotic enthusiasm. Indeed, beyond the glorious memory, the War is a traumatising memory that entails strong yearnings for order and stability. Such consciousness, vulnerable and precarious, as well as the desire to preserve one's own relative well-being, leads to a certain type of asthenia from a "society which is tired of the 'state of siege'" (Gudkov, 1997: 92), which in turn entails strong demobilisation.

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<sup>68</sup> To struggle against the destruction "of one of the oldest centers of Slavic-Orthodox civilisation in the Balkans" (Gennadii Zyuganov, PPUR, April 6), the Communists call for "the strategic Union of Russia, Byelorussia, Ukraine, Yugoslavia and of all the Slavic peoples" (Gennadii Zyuganov, PPUR, March 25).

<sup>69</sup> It is interesting to note that the use of the Slavic Brotherhood rhetoric is not backed by the stigmatisation of the Muslim Albanian people as an enemy or recourse to the 'Islamic threat' rhetoric. The Communists, on the contrary, called for "closer relationships between Russia and the great countries of Asia and with the national civilisations of the World of Islam, which are not the vassals of the American dictatorship" (PPUR, April 2)

Indeed, the diplomatic narrative systematically referred to WWII to point out the fact that the NATO action was unprecedented ('For the first time in Europe since WWII...', "Never since 1945..." [MFA, March 25]; "Never in Europe since the times of WWII..." [MFA, March 26]; "Much in this conflict is unprecedented, for the first time since WWII, the capital of a sovereign European country has been bombed..." [Press conference, April 6]). Thus, the MFA stressed its destabilising effect, suggesting that NATO's action called into question the stable world order that emerged from WWII.<sup>70</sup> But references to the War aimed mainly to revive the tragic and painful aspect its memory evokes. The MFA appealed to "Europe, which has endured two world wars and which remembers the millions of victims" (MFA, March 26). It emphasised the humanitarian consequences of NATO strikes, evoking the scale of bombings against Yugoslavia which were "equivalent to two Hiroshimas" (MFA, April 2), "towns and villages that are destroyed", "schools and hospitals that are bombed", "civilians that are killed" (MFA, March 29), several times denouncing the "unconcealed genocide against the peoples of Yugoslavia", and asserting that one month of NATO bombing raids was more destructive in Yugoslavia than the several years of WWII (MFA, April 19).

Thus, references to the memory of the War played a great role in demobilising and in neutralising national-patriotic enthusiasm. They justified the Government's refusal to take any measure likely to drag Russia into war, its refusal to give way to hysteria (i.e. the National patriotic rhetoric),<sup>71</sup> and eventually the diplomatic efforts carried out by Russian diplomacy.

The appropriation of this strong symbol has become the crux of the political struggle to impose a certain worldview and identification with it. The struggle between these two narratives about the world order can be analysed as a struggle between an enchanted narrative - with enchanted figures (the United States and NATO as enemies, Europe as a friend, the Slavic world, etc.) backed by references to a largely enchanted memory of the War -, and a partly disenchanting narrative that takes into account the increasing complexity and diversity of the Western figure (but which nevertheless uses enchanted figures of NATO and of the Islamic threat) and which emphasises the tragic and painful dimension of the War memory.

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<sup>70</sup> "It is a strike against the world order which has taken shape and become confirmed after the Second World War and it seemed that it would develop after the end of the Cold War (...) This is an assault on the world order" (Evgenii Primakov in a live interview at NTV on 26 March, *Summary of World Broadcast*, SU/3494, B/1)

<sup>71</sup> Igor Ivanov affirmed the need "to keep a cool head" (MFA, March 26).

## From multiple uses of myth to ambivalence of public opinion

The struggle between two worldviews and the different uses they make of myths (the West, the Second World War) is in fact based on, and reinforced by, a real ambivalence in public opinion. Actually, analysis of the surveys, with the reservations that such an analysis requires, as much related to the reliability of these surveys as to the difficulty in gauging Russian opinion, illustrates real ambivalence in the Russian assessment of foreign policy, and Russia's identity related to it. Three quarters of the Russians<sup>72</sup> assign as a goal for Russia in the decade to come, 'the return to a normal and stable life' (for less than one-fifth of whom the priority is 'the rebirth of Russia as a great Power'). And, although most of them (approximately 75%)<sup>73</sup> feel the army is insufficiently prepared to face an external threat, they refuse to substitute military expenditure for welfare expenditure. However, this concern of the Russians for the status and role of their country, which is not perceived as a top priority either in the short or medium term, is unanimously shared; nearly 85% of the population subscribes to the opinion that Russia must once again become 'a great Power which is respected and feared'.<sup>74</sup> This concern is also expressed through the Russians' assessment of the meetings between President Yeltsin and foreign leaders<sup>75</sup> or the efforts made by the Russian diplomacy in Yugoslavia,<sup>76</sup> largely viewed as positive. But this desire for *grandeur* is especially moderated by very strong pacifism or rather, an isolationism, of the Russian population. This isolationism is actually based on the fear of any commitment likely to result in the disruption of what already seems to be a very precarious situation. It occurs each time that international tension reveals the risk of war. At the time of the tensions between the United States and Iraq, the Russians mainly came out 'against war in general' (approximately 50%)<sup>77</sup> rather than expressing their sympathy with regard to one protagonist or the other (nearly 10%). Thus, while at the same time in the event of war between Yugoslavia and the West, Russian sympathy would go massively to Yugoslavia, the Russians even more massively approve acceptance by President Milosevic of the Western requirements to avoid

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<sup>72</sup> FOM Info, n°6 (251), January 1999: <http://classic.fom.ru/fominfo/99/info-251.htm>

<sup>73</sup> FOM, August 1998: [http://classic.fom.ru/week/t395\\_2.htm](http://classic.fom.ru/week/t395_2.htm)

<sup>74</sup> FOM, August 1998: [http://classic.fom.ru/week/t396\\_2.htm](http://classic.fom.ru/week/t396_2.htm)

<sup>75</sup> FOM, November 1997: [http://classic.fom.ru/week/t304\\_1.htm](http://classic.fom.ru/week/t304_1.htm)

<sup>76</sup> FOM, October 1998: [http://classic.fom.ru/week/t416\\_4.htm](http://classic.fom.ru/week/t416_4.htm)

<sup>77</sup> FOM, November 1997: [http://classic.fom.ru/week/t304\\_1.htm](http://classic.fom.ru/week/t304_1.htm)

the conflict.<sup>78</sup> This isolationism leads the Russians to dismiss any significant action, any commitment of Russia in a conflict where it is not directly concerned. In the Kosovo crisis, this rejection of the population appears all the more massive since this potentiality proves to be probable, direct (sending of troops) and imminent. In October 1998, the possibility of Russian support (other than the sending of troops) for Yugoslavia divides between *pros* and *cons* (35%).<sup>79</sup> But as soon as there is some question of providing military support for NATO bombings, the position of rejection becomes much stronger (nearly 60%).<sup>80</sup> The only diplomatic actions approved by the population are those where Russia plays the peaceful role of mediator, i.e. between Iraq and the United States or in Yugoslavia. This is why eventually, in spite of the initial power discredit, public opinion did not support communist initiatives and massively approved diplomatic efforts carried out by Russian diplomacy.

One thus observes a deep dissociation between a voluntaristic discourse of *grandeur* and the very strong refusal of any commitment, i.e. of any attempt to implement such a policy. This shift should be related to the conscience of a certain weakness, and especially to the priority assigned to economic recovery, which supposes no break in diplomatic relations with the West. This tension between rhetoric and action plays a strong role in structuring the perception of the West. It leads to a truly paradoxical situation. On the one hand, indeed, the West, i.e. primarily the United States and NATO,<sup>81</sup> appears as a threat and an attacker. On the other hand, the population is very attached to maintaining its ties with the Western figures and refuses any possibility of a break. Such an ambivalence could be observed in the assessment of Russia's surprise occupation of the Pristina airport at the end of the Kosovo war, which, according to a survey conducted by WCIOM,<sup>82</sup> gave rise to pride (13%) and satisfaction (15%) as well as embarrassment (15%), affliction (13%) and indignation (11%).

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<sup>78</sup> FOM, October 1998: [http://classic.fom.ru/week/t416\\_4.htm](http://classic.fom.ru/week/t416_4.htm)

<sup>79</sup> FOM, October 1998: [http://classic.fom.ru/week/t416\\_4.htm](http://classic.fom.ru/week/t416_4.htm)

<sup>80</sup> WCIOM, 25-27 October 1998.

<sup>81</sup> At least as concerns the strategic and international policy dimensions of the perception of the West.

<sup>82</sup> WCIOM, 12-18 June 1999.



## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we would like to recall our initial hypothesis. Asserting that foreign policy has become the preferred field of political struggle does not mean that the contribution of foreign policy issues to voting is determining. "Foreign policy is only one of the policy areas of interest to the electorate" (White, Munro and Rose, 2000: 15).<sup>83</sup> What we have tried to demonstrate is that foreign policy issues have implicitly to do with very strong aspirations and anxieties, and with a very evocative *imaginaire*. Moreover, through foreign policy issues and through a reflection on Russia's place in the World order, its status and even its identity, Russian society can experience itself as a whole. All this contributes to giving a particular status to foreign policy issues, which gives rise to several consequences. First, foreign policy issues are likely to catch domestic political attention, or rather to be seized by domestic political debate, as it seems to be a good medium for mobilisation (given that Russian society is deeply demobilised and fragmented). This implies that the issue had been adapted and distorted beforehand, so as to be appropriate to the above-mentioned aspirations, anxieties and *imaginaire*. Therefore, once integrated in the domestic political debate, foreign policy issues are partly denied their own stakes and take on a strong symbolical dimension.

This symbolic dimension was particularly striking and meaningful during the Kosovo crisis, as has been analysed in this paper. One may assume that the Kosovo crisis found such an echo in Russia, because it occurred in a particular context, characterised by the government's high degree of vulnerability, subsequent to the August financial crisis, and conversely by the high credibility of the opposition. Even though the Kosovo crisis issue was used to exacerbate the political polarisation of society, fuelling anti-government protest, it did not, paradoxically, contribute to intensifying this political polarisation of society. Although the polarisation, in the discourse, on two worldviews is backed by a real ambivalence in public opinion, it does not so much seem to refer to a political polarisation of society around these two standpoints, as to a largely shared ambivalence, even if in variable proportions. Thus, the exploitation of foreign policy issues in the Russian domestic political debate has a

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<sup>83</sup> In the above-mentioned article, Stephen White, Neil Munro and Richard Rose conclude: "foreign policy issues were not central to the Duma, or to the presidential campaign. But they were unavoidably a part of the discussion about Russia's economic future, given the extent to which existing policies had been financed and recommended by Western nations. They were a part of any discussion of the future of the federation itself, given the extent to which the outside world sought to mediate in the dispute between the Russian government and the Chechens. And they were implicitly a part of the discussion that had continued throughout the post-communist years about the nature of Russian society – was it different, even unique, or should it follow the patterns that had been established in the capitalist and liberal-democratic West? (...)" (2000: 29)

'twofold distorting effect'. First, it implies a shift or distortion of the stakes of these issues. Second, it artificially dissociates contradictory aspirations and anxieties, which as in fact are mixed, converting them into opposite and irreconcilable worldviews, constructing artificial political cleavages. One may also assume that, among other reasons, Putin's high rate of support can be explained by his ability to reconcile the irreconcilable, to reconcile these contradictory aspirations and anxieties, such as longing for stability and desire for *grandeur*.

## **Kosovo Crisis and Russian Internal Struggle: A Short Chronology (March 1998 – August 1999)**

**1998**

- Spring-Summer 1998:

Tensions between ethnic Albanians and Yugoslav security forces escalate into armed conflict. Hundreds are killed and nearly 300,000 civilians are displaced from their homes.

- 11 March 1998:

The Russian State Duma approves its first resolution on the Kosovo issue. Between March 1998 and June 1999, it adopts 13 resolutions on the issue.

- 23 March 1998:

Boris Yeltsin fires Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin and the entire Cabinet, saying reforms were not energetic enough. He names virtually unknown Energy Minister Sergei Kiriyenko as acting prime minister. Markets already uneasy over turmoil in Asia and a slump in world oil prices, and many investors retreat to the sidelines amid political uncertainty.

- 27 March 1998:

Boris Yeltsin formally nominates Kiriyenko prime minister, vowing to dissolve parliament if it fails to approve him, which it finally does one month later.

- June 1998:

On June 23, U.S. envoy Richard Holbrooke meets with Slobodan Milosevic in Belgrade to urge an end to the conflict. On June 24, Richard Holbrooke meets with ethnic Albanian commanders in the village of Junik. U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan cautions NATO that it must seek a Security Council mandate for any military intervention.

- 17 August 1998:

Financial Crisis in Russia.

- 23 August 1998:

Boris Yeltsin sacks Prime Minister Sergei Kiriyenko, who is replaced by former premier Viktor Chernomyrdin.

- 31 August 1998:

Viktor Chernomyrdin rejected by Duma as prime minister, 253 to 98.

- 11 September 1998:

Evgenii Primakov approved as prime minister by the Duma by 317 to 63. He names Yurii Maslyukov as First Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Policy (Communist Duma member and former head of Gosplan). Igor Ivanov replaces Primakov as Foreign Minister.

- 23 September 1998:

The UN Security Council adopts Resolution 1199. The resolution demands that all parties end hostilities and maintain a cease-fire.

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**October Crisis (12-24 October 1998)**

- 12 October 1998:

President Clinton announces that President Milosevic has committed to comply fully with UN 1199 and to allow for a verification regime. NATO agrees to delay a decision on air strikes for 96 hours.

- 13 October 1998:

The North Atlantic Council issues Operation Determined Force's activation order (ACTORD).

- 24 October 1998: The UN Security Council adopts Resolution 1203. The resolution supports NATO and OSCE verification missions and demands all parties in Kosovo to comply with the agreement.

- November 1998: Dozens of international monitors begin training in Kosovo before fanning out throughout the province to verify October's cease-fire agreement.

### **Iraq Crisis (16-19 December 1998)**

The U.S. and Britain (without U.N. approval) launched a four-day bombing attack aimed at suspected weapons locations. President Boris Yeltsin loudly condemned the air strikes against Iraq, calling them unprovoked and outrageous.

## 1999

- 16 January 1999:

The bodies of more than 40 ethnic Albanians who were apparently executed are found in the village of Racak. The international community condemns this massacre of civilians.

- 30 January 1999:

The Contact Group demands that all parties agree on a political settlement for Kosovo by 20 February 1999. The NAC (North Atlantic Council) agrees that NATO's Secretary General may authorise air strikes against targets on FRY territory.

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### **Rambouillet negotiations (6-23 February 1999)**

- 6 February 1999:

Peace talks to halt ethnic violence in Kosovo open in Rambouillet, France, under the auspices of the Contact Group and the co-Chairmanship of Hubert Vedrine and Robin Cook.

- 23 February 1999:

A partial agreement is reached on a future political settlement for Kosovo, to be policed by a NATO peacekeeping force deployed in the province. Negotiations are thus adjourned until 15 March.

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### **Paris talks (15-19 March 1999)**

- 19 March 1999:

The peace talks adjourn in failure, following the refusal of the Serbs to sign on, and international monitors prepare to leave Kosovo.

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### **NATO bombing on Yugoslavia: 24 March – 10 June 1999**

- 24 March 1999:

Operation Allied Force begins at 1900 hours GMT.

- 25 March 1999:

Igor Ivanov gives his first press conference since the beginning of NATO air strikes. Russian Foreign Minister states his intention to set up daily press conferences on the Kosovo crisis. Between March 25 and April 19, the MFA holds eleven official press conferences, ten of which were held in the presence of the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

- 27 March 1999:

The State Douma dedicates an extraordinary plenary session to the events in Yugoslavia in the presence of Igor Ivanov.

- 30 March 1999:

A mission to Belgrade by Russian Prime Minister Evgenii Primakov produces an offer by Slobodan Milosevic to negotiate that western leaders say falls well short of what is required. Serb forces ship Kosovars to the Macedonian border in sealed trains.

3 April 1999:

First air strike against target in central Belgrade.

- 9 April 1999:

Russian President Boris Yeltsin warns NATO powers they risk a European or possibly world war if they attempt to "seize Yugoslavia."

- 13 April 1999:

US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright meets Igor Ivanov in Oslo but they remain at odds over the proposed deployment of international troops in Kosovo. Yugoslav forces mount a cross-border attack on a village in north Albania.

- 15 April 1999:

President Yeltsin named former prime minister Viktor Chernomyrdin to be his special envoy to the Balkans.

- 24 April 1999:

NATO holds its Fiftieth Anniversary summit in Washington, D.C.

- 5 May 1999:

Chinese Embassy in Belgrade hit accidentally by NATO weapons.

- 12 May 1999:

Boris Yeltsin sacks cabinet, including Evgenii Primakov.

- 13 May 1999:

Impeachment hearings begins in Duma.

- 15 May 1999:

Impeachment vote against Boris Yeltsin fails.

- 19 May 1999:

Duma approves Sergei Stepashin as new Prime Minister

- 6 June 1999:

G8 adopt seven principles for political solution to Kosovo crisis.

- 9 June 1999:

NATO and Yugoslavia sign the "Military Technical Agreement" requiring the withdrawal of Yugoslav police and soldiers from Kosovo and the complete disarming of the KLA. It also allows NATO to set up KFOR, the "Kosovo Force" in Kosovo.

- 10 June 1999:

Serb forces begin to withdraw from Kosovo. NATO Secretary General announces **suspension of bombing campaign**. UNSCR 1244 adopted allowing a peace implementation team to enter Kosovo.

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- 11 June 1999:

Russian troops arrive at Pristina airport.

- 12 June 1999:

KFOR troops enter Kosovo.

- 9 August 1999:

Sergei Stepashin dismissed as prime minister.

- 16 August 1999:

Vladimir Putin confirmed as prime minister.

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- Address to the participants of the CIS Interparliamentary Assembly, 2 April 1999 [<http://www.kprf.ru/archiv/990402os.htm>]
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### **Opinion polls and surveys**

The surveys conducted by the Public Opinion Foundation (FOM) are still available on the former FOM Website [<http://classic.fom.ru>] as well as on the new FOM Website [<http://bd.fom.ru>] whereas the surveys quoted, which were conducted by the Russian Centre for Public Opinion and Market Research (WCIOM), are no longer available on the WCIOM Website [<http://www.wciom.ru>], which has been totally overhauled since the departure of Yurii Levada and his team. Nevertheless the 'then WCIOM' surveys can be found in the WCIOM bi-monthly journal (*Ekonomicheskie i social'nye peremeny: monitoring obshchestvennogo mneniya* [Economic and Social Changes. Monitoring of Public Opinion])