

**NATIONAL SCHOOL OF POLITICAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE  
STUDIES**

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**ABSTRACT**

**DOCTORAL THESIS**

**Speech, image, rhetoric  
in the geopolitical strategy of contemporary Russia**

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*Once you cross the border and enter the land of the Russians, you notice that the social order they have created suits only them. You have to be Russian to live in Russia, although things seem to be like anywhere else. The difference lies in the elements that form the foundation - Marquis de Custine, Letters from Russia*

To understand Russia in all its power and aspirations you have to have been born there. Only if you understand and know the underlying elements of the Russian mentality can you step into the mysteries that surround this country. We cannot talk about the present and the future while neglecting the past. It is only by delving into history that we can understand some of the landmarks that lie behind the mysterious present. Russia has always stood out from other countries, not only because of the vastness of its territory, but also because of the power it has wielded over the years. If we were to flip through the pages of the 20<sup>th</sup> century we could see how Russia has seen invasions, the rise and fall of a totalitarian regime and has been marked by numerous internal upheavals.

Day after day, Russia arouses interest whether we are talking about the political field or the field of those who follow the evolution of relations between states at international level. The media, both print and broadcast, extensively cover and debate topics and themes on evolutions in the development of diplomatic, economic, military etc. relations taking place in this country. By stepping into history through literary or historical sources, we could have the opportunity, symbolically speaking, to open this *Matryoshka*. Of course, I will not talk about the successive stages in the formation of what is Russia today, but I will bring to your attention a few historical considerations that can help us better understand the shaping of the image of a great state with a vast territory covering one-eighth of the globe.

Winston Churchill's expression that Russia is a *riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma* may well have aroused Western presuppositions about Russia, believing its citizens to be too complicated to understand. I believe, however, that if we take the time to learn about Russia's past, we might have a chance of understanding their behaviour, which in many situations today can be incomprehensible. As in the history of every state, so in the case of Russia, the landmarks of the past have left their mark on developments to date. I will not be able to capture all the elements that define Russia today, but I would like to cross the imaginary border of the past in order to get to know the Russian space and the mentality of those who make up the Russian nation, to try to overcome the historical complex in order to be better informed about those with whom we share history, without neglecting the existing facts and reality.

We all want to have an image of Russia that is as close to reality as possible, but an image that comes strictly from the Western channel, which highlights exclusively negative things (of course not without reality) cannot help us to build a real image of this country. Russia is not just about what is happening around the Kremlin. On the other hand, if we look only at sources from within, we see the image Russia wants to portray, an image of a great power: pillar of Christianity, energy power, military power, diplomatic power, huge space, etc. To understand Russia, a balance must be kept between the image from within versus the image formed outside. We cannot relate to Russia only by what the limited knowledge provided by media information makes up the thin veneer that envelops an entire nation. The contrast between the image emanating from within and that seen from the outside requires a correct and accurate assessment of the elements and landmarks that define the image of Russia today.

What are the historical landmarks on which Russia is built today? What are the values that underpin the Russian mentality? What is the unifying force of the people? What elements build Russia's economic capacity? On what is the military power it displays based? What messages are conveyed through the device of the diplomatic apparatus? How does Russia communicate? What image of the Kremlin leader is emerging from his speeches? What are the elements on which his speeches are built? What is the purpose behind the political messages conveyed? I try to answer these and other questions not included here in the course and content of this paper. Knowing and evaluating landmarks that come from the past and that laid the foundations of a thinking of imperialist scope we could understand various actions in the present that emanate a vision of the world and Russia's place in the global equation.

I would like to bring attention to some of the elements on which today's society is built and which project a strong Russia whether we like it or not. The correlation of various notions that define traditions, attitudes, value orientations and perspectives in the Russian mentality could allow us to understand Christian spirituality and the messianic role assumed by Russia. I also aim to bring to the fore aspects that contribute to defining Russia, highlighting three components that give it power and that shape its approaches and actions in both domestic and foreign policy: Russia as an energy power, military power and diplomatic power. These and other elements are reflected in the Kremlin leader's speech and may be the trump cards that Russian President Vladimir Putin is counting on to build the image of a Greater Russia both at home and abroad.

I intend to follow elements that come from within and that contribute to the construction and display of the image of Russia as it is intended to be conveyed by Russian officials, mirroring the perceptions of leaders in Romania on how the image of Russia is understood

abroad based on history, facts and obvious realities, but also by means of lived experiences. I will try to identify some of the aspects that Russia is counting on and highlighting as worthy of international attention. It is obvious that over time Russia has understood and seen its strengths, and today we can see how it is investing in them. They are used and contribute to shaping the image of a strong state that sees its place and role in the global power equation. However, the way Russia believes it can use its strengths to achieve its goal is perceived and interpreted by Romanian leaders based on factors that cannot be ignored. The events recorded in history, as well as Russia's current decisions and actions, underline and highlight the way Russia is portrayed as it is perceived abroad.

I mention at the outset my preference for a semantic interpretation. I adopt this perspective in order to be able to further analyse the messages coming from the Russian space, as well as the perceptions from the outside resulting from the implementation of a question guide, aimed at providing a qualitative analysis. This type of instrumentation can be applied and can give the possibility to study the image of any other society that could be the subject of the evaluation. Also, in line with the assumed and highlighted position, I will also resort to a specific case study in analysing the four inaugural speeches of the Kremlin leader, bringing historical, cultural and social arguments. I believe that they had an emotional and motivational impact on Russian society.

The approach of the work is interdisciplinary, being at the intersection of communication sciences and political sciences, but I will include historical, psychological, social etc. perspectives throughout the work, in order to assess as accurately as possible the processes, actions and approaches coming from the Russian space. Since the actions taking place in the Russian space are in the vicinity of the Romanian space and may have repercussions on our national integrity and security, I consider this research to be of general interest both from the perspective of direct relations and from the perspective of existing international relations in the European space and geopolitical changes.

I want this paper to contribute to a closer understanding of the Russian reality, so that we can try to identify points of support for new interpretations and a more adequate understanding of recent movements and developments in the Russian space. I have tried to trace the elements that underlie the definition and understanding of communication, how messages are conveyed in Russian space, and how they are perceived externally. I also aimed to highlight the similarities and differences in perceptions of actions in Russia coming from the Romanian space. Methodologically, I used discourse analysis to capture the characteristic elements of the Kremlin leader's political message, qualitative analysis applied to a guide of questions on the

perception of several important voices in Romania, from the academic, journalistic, political, diplomatic, specialists and experts of the Russian space.

**In the first chapter** I have tried to capture some of the milestones in Russian history that have marked the evolution of this society both nationally and internationally. I have aimed to bring to attention components of imperialist thinking based on economic power, military power, the role of the church in unifying the people, integration policy and expansionist actions. I have also tried to highlight some of the milestones of communism and its ideology that have left their mark on the Russian mentality and I have tried to highlight some of the moments that have been at the basis of the construction of the current image of Russia. I have tried to describe the geopolitical process highlighted by the transformation that has taken place both internally and externally. I have tried to identify the role of expansionism for the Russian people and to what extent the influences of the past echo in today's foreign policy. I will try to emphasize how the geopolitical process took shape, taking into account both the transformations that took place both internally and through the external movements. I intend to identify the role of the Russian people's expansionism and the extent to which the influences of the past are echoed in today's foreign policy.

**In the second chapter** I will highlight the geopolitical movements experienced by Russia after the collapse of the USSR, but also the impact that these changes had on the Russian society. I have also tried to point out the role that the Kremlin leader Vladimir Putin is assuming. I will try to identify some of the steps he has taken to rehabilitate Russia's image. I will try to highlight some of the domestic and foreign policy strategies that have brought Russia to the attention of the international community. I plan to identify the sectors of activity which are invested in and which Russia considers to be important pillars in the reconstruction of the image of the Russian state. Another aspect that I will follow will be the arguments that Russia brings forth and for which it considers that it is a state that should be part of the global powers.

**In the third chapter** I want to bring attention to the concept of political communication and discourse. I have tried to point out that the process of political communication is a dynamic one and that it is closely related to the concept of power. I aimed to highlight the concerns given by communication and to what extent the context can influence the conduct of communication. I have tried to talk about the mediating role of the image between the sender and the receiver and I have also tried to take into account personality notes in the construction and shaping of the image of a political leader. I have also tried to show how the image of a political leader is also highlighted by the way he chooses to convey messages. The role of political discourse in shaping the image is important and is emphasised by verbal and non-verbal communication, as

well as the techniques used. I have tried to highlight the importance of knowing how to get to the essence of a message through discourse analysis. This discourse analysis can be applied to observe the effects produced by a political message. Many speeches by political leaders reveal character flaws, but they can also open windows for understanding different moments and events in history.

**In the fourth chapter** I have tried to highlight the way and the communication tool through which the public can be influenced and convinced. A geopolitical strategy also incorporates non-traditional components that are related to a soft side of power. Thus, in the third chapter I will try to identify how a discursive strategy aims at positioning itself in the field of relations with power. I have attempted an analysis of the political messages coming from the Russian space, taking into account the context in which they are propagated. Through a semantic analysis I sought to identify and highlight the elements that define the Kremlin leader's discourse, but also the purpose behind the messages conveyed. I also sought to highlight the framework and the social picture in which the Kremlin leader's political message is propagated, but also in what way the speech is the one that shapes and defines his image and what are the main components underlying Vladimir Putin's speech both internally and externally. The challenge was to determine whether the elements that give power to the discourse on the internal plane are reflected in the structure of the discourse on the external plane. At the conclusion of this chapter we have included a semantic analysis for all four of the Kremlin leader's inauguration speeches. I set out to identify the defining elements of these messages, the purpose behind them and the intended effect. An analysis of the Kremlin leader's speeches will lay the groundwork for creating an image of the Russian leader, but also of Russia conveyed from within.

**In the fifth chapter** I tried to focus the research effort on an assessment of the perceptions of the most important voices in Romania regarding Russia. I tried to capture the elements that underlie the formation of the perceptions of Romanian leaders regarding Russia's strategic role as an energy power in terms of the international political game, regarding Russia's military strategy during Putin's presidency from a geostrategic point of view, and regarding the role that Vladimir Putin's policy has played and continues to play in Russia's evolution and affirmation at the global level from a diplomatic point of view. I have sought to highlight whether Russia's resources, whatever their nature, are transformed into political tools in the pursuit of objectives. I have used a guide of questions in delineating an analysis as objective as possible of the perceptions of Romanian leaders. By means of the qualitative analysis we sought to determine the elements that were at the basis of the construction of the image of Russia perceived abroad

through the prism of education, mentalities, lived experiences, information from the media and based on our own documentation.

I would like this paper to be useful in order to familiarize us with the concept of *political communication* which is closely related to the concept of *power*, so that we can capture the elements that underlie the shaping of an image through the political message conveyed, but also to identify and make an analysis as close to reality of the image by means of how the message is perceived. It goes without saying that this paper will not be able to include all the elements that define the image of the Russian space, but I want the elements chosen to be representative for understanding the complexity of the reality existing in the Russian Federation. Beyond the everyday reality itself, the perception of this reality conveyed through acts of communication is an extremely important element in the global society of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, when the act of communicating a decision can sometimes be more important than the decision itself. The circle of a state's geopolitical strategy, in addition to the strong elements that give it power, such as economic resources, armed potential, internal development, huge space, etc., is closed by the discursive strategy that highlights the soft elements of the arguments, which are related to will, power, historical background, nationalism based on religion, etc., all of which together strengthen its position as a key player in Europe and Asia and legitimise the interests of Russia, which it has dominated for centuries.