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**RUSSIA'S ACCESSION TO THE WTO:  
THE DEBATE IN THE RUSSIAN  
MASS MEDIA**

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The paper focuses on debates about Russia's accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) that have unfolded in Russia's print media. The authors highlight the initial arguments of supporters and opponents of this accession, the ways in which those arguments are presented in the media, and the differences in the standpoints of the business, governmental and expert communities. The authors further analyze changes in the content of this discussion and its discursive space following Russia's accession to the WTO.

Keywords: risks and potential benefits of Russia's WTO accession, public discussion, agenda-setting in media

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В работе анализируется дискуссия, развернувшаяся в российских печатных СМИ по поводу вступления России в ВТО. Авторы выделяют аргументы сторонников и противников этого шага, особенности их презентации в пространстве СМИ, специфику позиции бизнеса, власти и экспертов. Также изучаются изменения в содержании российских печатных СМИ и в составе участников дискуссии до и после присоединения России к ВТО.

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The mass media serve as means by which certain interest groups transmit their opinions of important public events to a wider audience. This paper analyzes the discussion of Russia's accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) that has unfolded in the Russian media. Our analysis spans a period of three years – one and one-half years before and after Russia's official accession to the WTO. In this paper, we first contrast the arguments of the supporters and opponents of the accession decision; next, we reveal the particular standpoints of the business, governmental and expert communities; and finally, we compare the state of the discussion of the WTO before and after Russia's accession.

## **1. Related work**

One of the mass media's primary functions is to inform and sensitize the public about various events [Wolfe et al., 2013]. However, there is still little agreement among scholars about the way in which agenda setting takes place. There is a widespread opinion that the mass media's response to particular social and economic issues is dependent on the scale and importance of those issues. Debaters who participate in such discussions are usually perceived as neutral observers whose purpose is to deliver information to the audience [Johnstone, Slawski, Bowman, 1972; Graber, 1980; Kosicki, 1993]. This positivistic approach relies on a conviction that a true and unbiased worldview exists, which the mass media strive to maintain.

However, there is also an alternative approach, according to which the agenda is shaped by the mass media to bring importance to particular social issues. At the same time, there is no such thing as 'natural importance', which automatically excites the mass media with respect to certain events and draws them into the broadcasting focus [Blumer, 1971]. The interpretation of an issue largely depends on the social stance of an interpreter; i.e., his or her membership in a certain occupational community [Berger, Luckmann, 1966], which makes it almost impossible for the mass media to report anything with complete objectivity.

The way in which different issues are problematized, sensitized and interpreted in the mass media is greatly influenced by different authorities [Tidmarch, Hyman, Sorkin 1984; Walker, 1977] and large corporations [Hill, Watson, 2000]. However, the opposite is also possible: the mass media's close attention to particular problems enables politicians and corporations to solve them. For instance, in the mid-1980s, the active mass-media discussion of increasing crime rates in the USA pushed the American government to increase its efforts in solving the problem [Wolfe et al., 2013].

Authorities can influence agenda setting either in the form of public appearances or in the form of taking certain measures. It has already been shown that politicians' attention to various issues has a very short-term effect [Cohen, 1995]. A more enduring effect can only be achieved through more direct measures, such as interfering with legislation and/or the business environment [Olds, 2013]. That is, certain economic measures or merely the intention to impose them affects agenda setting to a much more significant extent.

However, to think that the mass media only passively broadcasts the agendas of the authorities and social movements is a false assumption. Different mass media continuously struggle for market share, which forces them to react only to those issues that particularly excite their real and potential audiences [Graber, 1980; Leighley, 2004; Picard, 2005; Berelson, 1960]. The choice that the mass media make from among the numerous competing narratives and interpretations of the same issue is exactly how they contribute to shaping the public agenda [Berelson, 1960; Hilgartner, Bosk, 1988].

This orientation towards public appeal, however, leads to negative selection: in making an issue comprehensible to a wider audience, the mass media often fall into the trap of oversimplifying content and exploiting people's most primitive reactions. This is the case, for instance, with modern Russian television [Zvereva, 2009]. This oversimplification triggers feedback from the audience, which not only passively absorbs information but also attempts to critically assess it. Thus, realistically speaking, setting an agenda involves several parties simultaneously, i.e., experts, authorities, the media itself and individuals [Dearing, Rogers, 1987].

The tendency to oversimplify and scandalize issues at the expense of providing serious analysis was particularly noticeable in discussions related to the WTO. For instance, some note that the popular (mass) media paid too much attention to protests related to the WTO summits, whereas the content and results of discussions that occurred at those summits were largely neglected [Swinnen, Francken, 2006]. Simultaneously, in publicizing these protests, the mass media also appeared to be mostly supportive of the WTO and government's position [McFarlane, Hay 2003; Hendershot, 2004]. In commenting on anti-globalist protests against the WTO accession in Seattle in 1999, the mass media made sharp remarks about the protesters' lack of education, their low economic literacy and their unkempt appearance [McFarlane, Hay, 2003]. Thus, by expressing the interests of political elites, the mass media tried to devalue both the protests and the arguments of the protesters.

Comparative analysis of the public debate on the WTO in other countries has shown how deeply this problem is settled within the context of national policies. For instance, public

discussions about protection of intellectual property within the WTO agreement have revealed striking differences between China and the USA [Creemers, 2012]. However, significant differences in viewpoints towards the WTO can also be observed within countries, rather than just between them. Media in three American states (North Carolina, Illinois and California) have expressed significantly different opinions about China's accession to the WTO, depending on how that event would most likely impact their state's economy [Kong, 1997].

Moreover, in general, the mass media's attention to the WTO appears to increase substantially with the arrival of major events; i.e., summits, high-level meetings and anti-globalist protests [Swinnen, Francken, 2006]. Otherwise (i.e., in between such events), the WTO is often neglected or remains a minor issue.

## **2. Data and methods**

### ***2.1. Chronology***

Our analysis of the debate about Russia's accession to the WTO in the Russian mass media spans *three years: from December 2010 to December 2013*. This timeline was chosen for specific reasons.

The Russian mass media have shown an interest in the WTO since the beginning of Russia's post-Soviet period (see Figure 1). This interest peaked in 2006 during the Asia Pacific Forum, when Russia made its first agreements with the USA about accession to the WTO. The success of these first bilateral negotiations with the USA generated hopes for Russia's approaching accession to the trade organization. However, soon it became clear that these hopes would not be realized, leading to a sharp decline in interest. A new wave of intense debates about Russia's membership in the WTO was generated at the end of 2010 due to the Russia-EU summit, during which a memorandum was signed about Russia's eventual accession.<sup>1</sup> The accession ultimately took place on August 22, 2012; after that date, interest in the WTO naturally decreased.

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<sup>1</sup> Russia's WTO website is located at <http://www.wto.ru>.

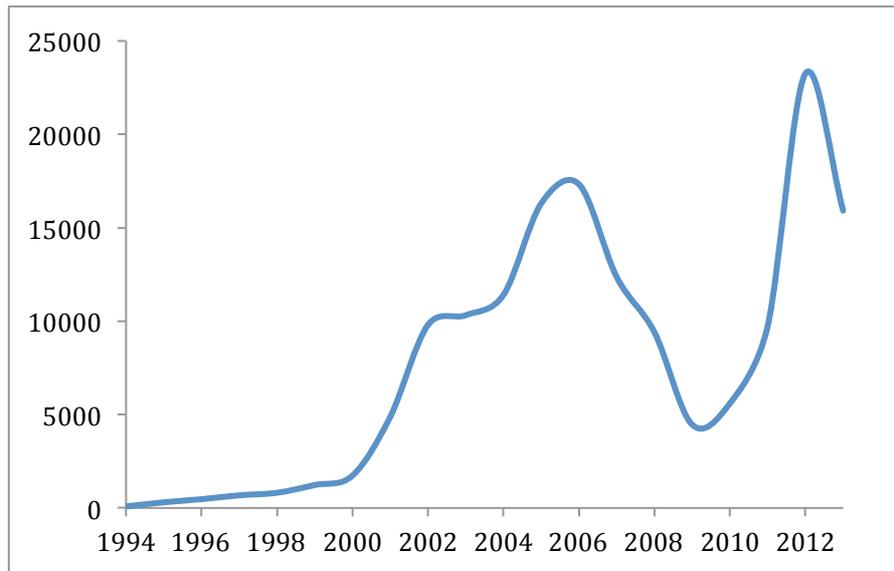


Figure 1. Change in the number of WTO mentions in the Russian mass media

Our task in this paper is to compare the debates that took place *before* and *after* Russia's accession to the WTO, which is why we study the content of those debates over a period encompassing one and one-half years before and after the accession.

## 2.2. Data and sampling of materials

Our analysis focuses on the debates that unfolded in the Russian printed mass media, i.e., those publications that have high subscription rates and target a wider audience. In particular, we have avoided the use of the following media: 1) academic journals, 2) foreign mass media, 3) radio and television discussions, and 4) on-line publications for which there are no printed subscriptions. Moreover, we ignored the ideological stances of the mass media studied because our intent is to analyze as many different opinions as possible about Russia's accession to the WTO.

Russia has more than 90,000 registered media outlets, including central, regional and sectorial media outlets.<sup>2</sup> Russians' trust in printed Russian mass media is typically higher than their trust in radio and foreign media, but somewhat lower than their trust in on-line resources and television.<sup>3</sup> We selected the most influential newspapers, journals and magazines using the Title Popularity Ranking (TPR) of printed Russian media.<sup>4</sup> This ranking is calculated based on the following three parameters: circulation, advertising prices and citation ratios

<sup>2</sup> See: <http://www.fapmc.ru/rospechat/docs/newsmi.html?maincustom0=1&>.

<sup>3</sup> Following is the distribution of answers to the question 'Which sources of mass media do you think most accurately depict our country's current situation?': 13% selected federal newspapers, 40% selected central television, and 45% selected the Internet (June 2013) [Levaschov, 2013, p. 257].

<sup>4</sup> TPR for Russian media is calculated on a quarterly basis by using available open data. Access can be found at the following website: <http://www.exlibris.ru/rejting-izdaniy>.

(i.e., citation of one media outlet in other print media outlets). Thus, TPR evaluates the popularity of a media outlet among the general population, advertisers and journalists.

In TPR, the print media are classified into certain information categories. We selected three leaders in each of the three following information categories: popular newspapers, popular business publications and popular publications focused on politics and public affairs. Thus, our sample included nine publications, which represent different political views and sufficiently reflect the diversity of opinions on public issues.

As expected, the WTO issue was quite actively discussed in the selected publications: it was mentioned in 1,636 articles during the 18 months before the accession and in 1,179 articles during the 18 months after the accession. It must be admitted, however, that the majority of these publications printed no opinions or comments on Russia's accession to the WTO and only mentioned the accession as a symbol of economic integration and globalization. Such articles were excluded from further analysis. The final sample, which was subject to our analysis, was composed of 397 articles (see Table 1).

*Table 1.* Articles in the Russian print media related to WTO accession  
(December 2010 – December 2013)

Leaders among print media according to TPR	Number of publications before Russia's accession (December 2010 – August 2012)		Number of publications after Russia's accession (September 2012 – December 2013)	
	Total	Containing opinions and comments	Total	Containing opinions and comments
<i>Popular newspapers</i> («Аргументы и Факты», «Московский комсомолец», «Комсомольская правда»)	336	56	280	68
<i>Popular business publications</i> («Эксперт», «Коммерсантъ», «Ведомости»)	748	56	497	94
<i>Popular publications focused on politics and public affairs</i> («Российская газета», «Известия», «Новая газета»)	552	63	402	60
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,636</b>	<b>175</b>	<b>1,179</b>	<b>222</b>

The table shows that *the share of problem-oriented articles containing discussions of Russia's accession to the WTO* grew after the accession had already taken place. Moreover, this discussion has become most prominent in business publications; i.e., the discussion has become more focused and expert-based.

### 2.3. Analytical scheme

To analyze the content of the articles chosen, we used Lasswell's communication model [Lasswell, 1927]. According to this model, the following aspects are of particular interest: the communicator, the message, the medium and circumstances of communication, the audience and the impact of the message. To put it more simply, the scheme seeks answers to the following questions: Who initiates the argument? What is communicated? How it is communicated? To whom it is addressed? When it is communicated? The operationalization of this approach is presented in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Operationalization of article components

Components	Indicators	Indicator values
Communicator	Sphere of origin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Economy (industry, agriculture)</li> <li>• Politics, government</li> <li>• Academic expertise</li> <li>• Journalism</li> </ul>
Message	Attitude towards accession	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Negative</li> <li>• Neutral</li> <li>• Positive</li> </ul>
	Emotionality of response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emotional</li> <li>• Unemotional</li> </ul>
	Communicated issue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Usefulness of Russia's accession to the WTO</li> <li>• Terms of Russia's accession to the WTO</li> <li>• Adapting to WTO conditions</li> </ul>
	Platform of interests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Industry and businessmen</li> <li>• Consumers</li> <li>• Country as whole (geopolitics)</li> </ul>
	Level of argumentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Abstract arguments (raising country's prestige, threat to country's economic sovereignty, inevitability of globalization, etc.)</li> <li>• Elaborated arguments (relying on strong evidence, cases and notable experts)</li> </ul>
	Character of argumentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appealing to influential people</li> <li>• Appealing to surveys of public opinion</li> <li>• Appealing to statistical data</li> <li>• Appealing to historic cases</li> <li>• Appealing to experiences of other countries</li> <li>• Appealing to economic models and research</li> <li>• No argumentation</li> </ul>
Medium of communication	Information category of publication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Popular newspapers</li> <li>• Popular business publications</li> <li>• Popular publications focused on politics and public affairs</li> </ul>
	Ideological stance of publication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Liberal</li> <li>• Relatively neutral</li> <li>• Pro-government</li> </ul>

### 3. Results

#### 3.1. Changes in discussion about Russia's accession to the WTO

Following the initial debate on the usefulness of Russia's accession to the WTO, the discussion in the print media has substantially changed to address the risks and real opportunities in this new situation.

The first noticeable development is *diminishing optimism about the accession*. Before the accession, the print media was mostly flooded with supporters' opinions: positive views were present in 47% of the articles, whereas negative views were present in only 37%. However, following the accession criticism has been dominant, with support dropping to 24% and opposition peaking at 54% (see Figure 2).

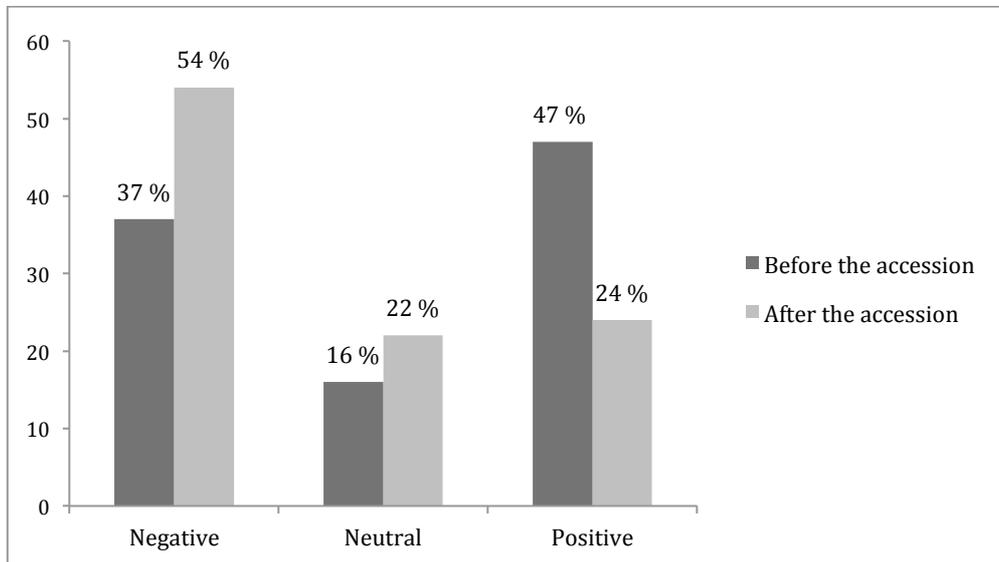


Figure 2. Attitudes towards Russia's accession to the WTO

Second, the composition of the debaters has changed. Academic experts and government officials seem to have abandoned the debate, leaving it to journalists and the business community (see Figure 3). Politicians and officials lost interest in the WTO discussion after the issue was ultimately resolved.

Third, the debate has shifted *from discussing the accession to the WTO itself to discussing the particular terms that Russia agreed to when it became a member*. Before August 2012, a majority of articles (68%) either criticized or praised Russia's intention to join the WTO. They either propagated a commitment to supporting integration with the world economic community or, conversely, demanded protectionist measures to safeguard the national economy. After the accession, the debate has become more focused: 56% of the articles moved towards discussing tariffs on particular goods, allowed subsidy rates, limits for state support,

etc. This ‘late response’ may be because the last phase of negotiations was hastened (which was quite unexpected given the relatively long history of Russia’s accession), and business was actually informed about many of the decisions after the deal had been settled.<sup>5</sup>

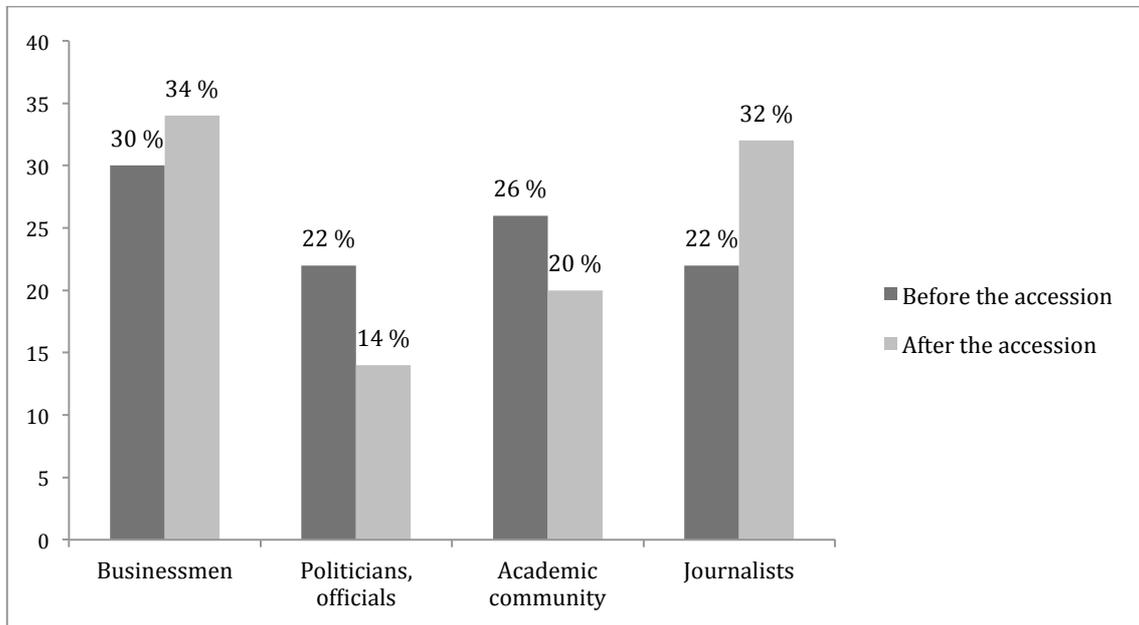


Figure 3. Different communities’ rate of participation in discussion about the WTO

Fourth, *the emotional weight of the discussion has decreased*. When the WTO membership became a *fait accompli* in Russia, there was no longer a reason to struggle against it, and the debate more or less calmed down: 84% of the articles were less expressional (i.e., terming the event as ‘catastrophic’, ‘devastating’, ‘dramatic’, etc.), instead focusing on facts and analytics.

It was also characteristic of the WTO discussion that *most opinions were expressed relatively boldly and were unsupported by sufficient evidence and arguments*. Approximately 60% of the articles chosen contained nothing but empty speculations about the WTO’s possible usefulness or harm, i.e., they represented *mere allegations* (see Table 3). If any argumentation was present, it relied mostly on statistical data. However, it looked as though the use and interpretation of statistics were manipulated to back the view of either supporters or opponents of accession.

Relying on other countries’ experiences was much less popular, with supporters most typically extolling the cases of China, Vietnam and Hong Kong and opponents pointing to the

<sup>5</sup> ‘It was only after all of the formal procedures of Russia’s accession to the WTO were completed that Russian meat producers learned about them’ (Колбасная капитуляция // Эксперт. 2012. September 10); ‘No one ever told us that the 40% tariff for pork imports <...> would go down to 5%. I have no idea why they remained silent. Was it an accident or on purpose?’ (Свиноводов поймали на «живка» // Эксперт. 2012. October 1).

cases of Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan. Finally, it is characteristic of the debate itself that appeals to public opinion were insignificant.

*Table 3.* The character of argumentation in debates about Russia’s accession to the WTO (before and after accession)

Character of argumentation	Share of articles (in percent)	
	Before accession	After accession
Appeal to statistical data	30	38
Appeal to foreign experience	7	3
Appeal to historic cases	3	1
Appeal to research	1	0
<b>No serious argumentation</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>58</b>

In summary, the debate about the WTO in the Russian print media has become less optimistic and emotional and more focused on discussing terms that affect certain sectors of economy, making the debate appear somewhat similar to conspiracy-type lobbying.

### **3.2. The arguments of supporters and opponents of Russia’s membership in the WTO**

Our analysis of the chosen articles also reveals the arguments that were used in the debate about the WTO (see Table 4). Each article could contain many arguments. **The opponents** of Russia’s membership in the WTO most often mentioned the threat to certain economic sectors or the Russian economy as a whole due to the general uncompetitiveness of Russian producers.

*Table 4.* Arguments against Russia’s accession to the WTO

Argument	Share of articles containing each respective argument	
	Before accession, %	After accession, %
Threat to certain economic sectors	41	40
Threat to economy as a whole due to uncompetitiveness of Russian producers	56	27
Limitation on support for undeveloped industries	13	11
Increase in low-quality imports (GMOs, etc.)	7	7
Reduced taxes	6	4
Increased unemployment/lack of new workplaces	6	2
Threat to national food security	5	1
Russia’s unpreparedness for accession	4	1
Threat to national sovereignty	1	1
Price inflation	0	1
Absence of qualified negotiators to promote Russia’s interests in trade agreements	0	4
Possible claims/complaints of other countries against Russia	0	8

Table 4 shows that politicized arguments, such as arguments related to threats to Russia’s sovereignty and food security, were unpopular. The discussion was primarily centered on the economy and drifted from discussing the WTO’s impact on the Russian economy as a whole to examining problems related to particular industries.

It is characteristic that with accession to the WTO, the list of ‘worries’ has expanded rather than contracted. Following accession, the list included the risk of possible lawsuits due to Russia’s discriminatory economic policy, along with the lack of qualified negotiators to defend national interests within the WTO infrastructure. Prior to August 2012, the debates did not mention those threats.

Supporters of Russia’s membership in the WTO tried to prove that accession would create an impetus for development, reduce prices and ease Russian companies’ entry into foreign markets (see Table 5). Incidentally, WTO supporters have never commented on the fact that Russia became the world’s leading grain exporter without being a WTO member.

Table 5. Arguments in favor of Russia’s accession to the WTO

Argument	Share of articles containing each respective argument	
	Before accession, %	After accession, %
WTO as an impetus for development	32	14
Reduction in consumer prices	19	10
Entrance to foreign markets	17	11
Foreign investment	13	3
Minimal/no negative consequences	10	9
Increasing Russia’s prestige	9	1
Straightforward rules	7	1
Favorable terms of accession	6	3
Impossibility of falling behind	3	1
Possibility of OECD membership	3	1

Supporters relied heavily on economic arguments, whereas geopolitical arguments (Russia’s world prestige, the prospect of OECD membership) were not very popular. It is important to note that the argument that the WTO would be an impetus for economic development lost its popularity in the mass media: before accession it was mentioned in nearly every fifth article in support of the WTO; after accession it was mentioned in only every tenth article. Foreign investment and competition arguments also became less popular. On the other hand, the most widespread reasons in favor of the WTO related to reduced prices for imported goods and easier access to foreign markets. Thus, the discussion shifted from addressing

a broad spectrum of WTO benefits towards debating export opportunities and consumer gains. Other suggested benefits of the WTO (access to investment, impetus for development, competition, etc.) gradually faded away, although initially those were the exact arguments used by the campaign to promote Russia's accession.

**3.3. The standpoints of business, governmental and expert communities**

To reconstruct the standpoints of businessmen, experts and governmental authorities, attempt to generalize those communities' arguments *before* and *after* Russia's accession to the WTO. Figure 4 reveals the distribution of these standpoints in two dimensions: 1) either favoring or rejecting accession (a horizontal axis); and 2) either relying on abstract or more elaborated arguments (a vertical axis).

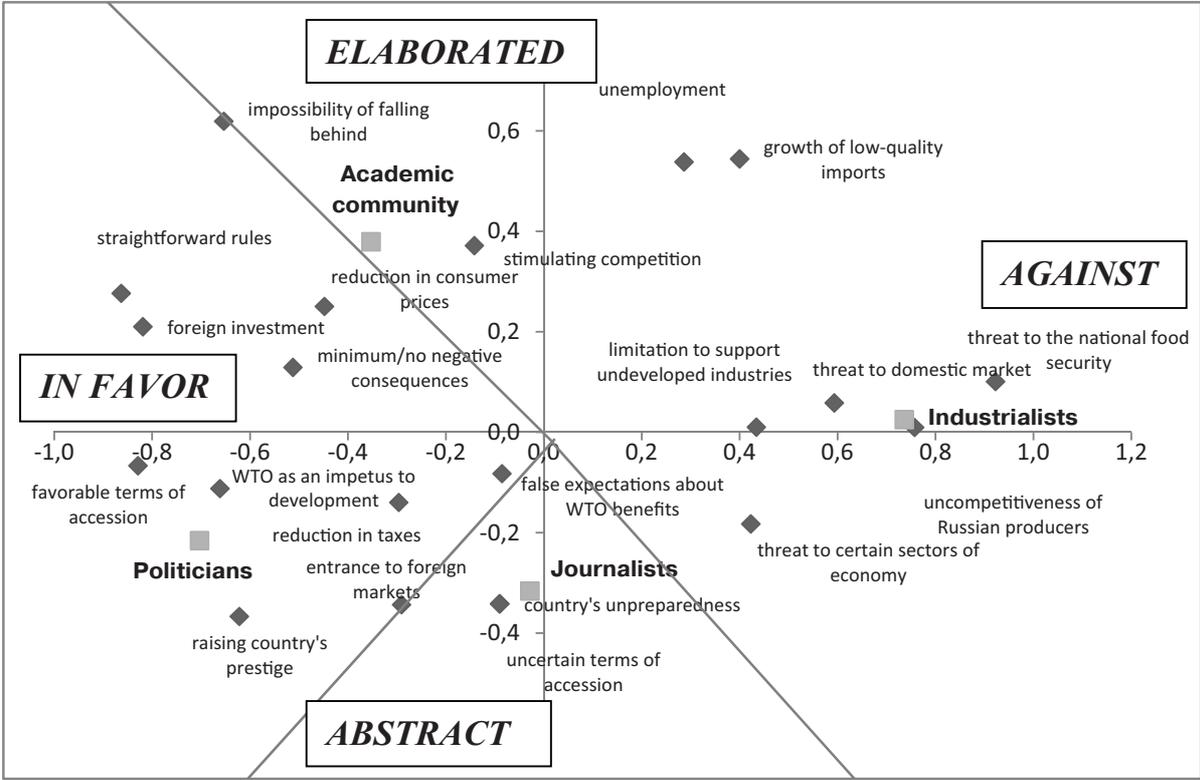


Figure 4. The character of argumentation among different debaters in discussions of the WTO (before accession)

Our analysis shows that the more active opponents of Russia's accession in the Russian print media are from the *business community*. The most critical response to accession is observed among agricultural producers and producers of agricultural machinery, and their responses are directly related to the situation in their economic sectors and their unpreparedness to compete in the absence of active state support. Those sectors of the business community

that in fact had reasons to favor the WTO did not participate in public discussion at all, instead allowing government officials and politicians to engage in all of the agitation.

WTO opponents explained their negative reaction by referring most often to arguments such as threats to domestic markets and particular economic sectors, the general uncompetitiveness of Russian producers and the WTO-imposed limits on state support for undeveloped industries. Businessmen who exploited these arguments were usually more abstract in their reasoning than the academic expert community; however, they were substantially more precise than authorities and journalists.

The most active WTO supporters in the Russian media were found among **government officials**, particularly those in the Ministry of Economic Development, along with ruling-party parliamentary deputies («Единая Россия»). Their opponents from opposition parties withdrew from the discussion, which resulted in the illusion of complete consensus on the issue. The few attempts by opposition parties to block Russia's accession to the WTO were rather inconsistent and fragmentary, and opposition leaders very little use of the mass media to promote their arguments to a wider audience.

However, the agitators in favor of Russia's accession to the WTO primarily relied on abstract judgments and arguments. The only possible loss, which they openly acknowledged, was a possible reduction in tariffs. The most popular arguments to promote the WTO's generally positive impact on Russia's economy were the potential increase in foreign investment and the positive influence of increasing competition.

The **academic community**, which also participated in the public discussion, represented a minority, but generally favored Russia's accession. However, their optimism was quite reserved because they were more aware of the possible risks and threats that the WTO could bring. Their arguments were also highly precise and elaborated.

Experts' primary concern was the possible growth of unemployment, the weakening of control over product quality and an increase of GMO imports. In popular newspapers, experts have usually accepted the role of consumer advocates. However, it should be noted that at that the time of the WTO debate, the academic community was itself undergoing a serious reform, which might have affected its ability (to some extent) to promote particular arguments in the public discussion. Being well aware that the government itself supported Russia's accession to the WTO, the academic community apparently withdrew from active debates in favor of focusing on the problems of consumer rather than those of producers.

Indeed, most of the abstract argumentation on the WTO is found among **journalists**, who failed to present any single opinion about WTO membership to the wider audience.

On the one hand, journalists attempted to sensitize the public by articulating Russia’s general unpreparedness for the accession process, along with the unclear and uncertain terms of the accession. On the other hand, journalists were also highly critical of ‘primordial protectionism’ and declared that joining the WTO would open foreign markets to Russia.

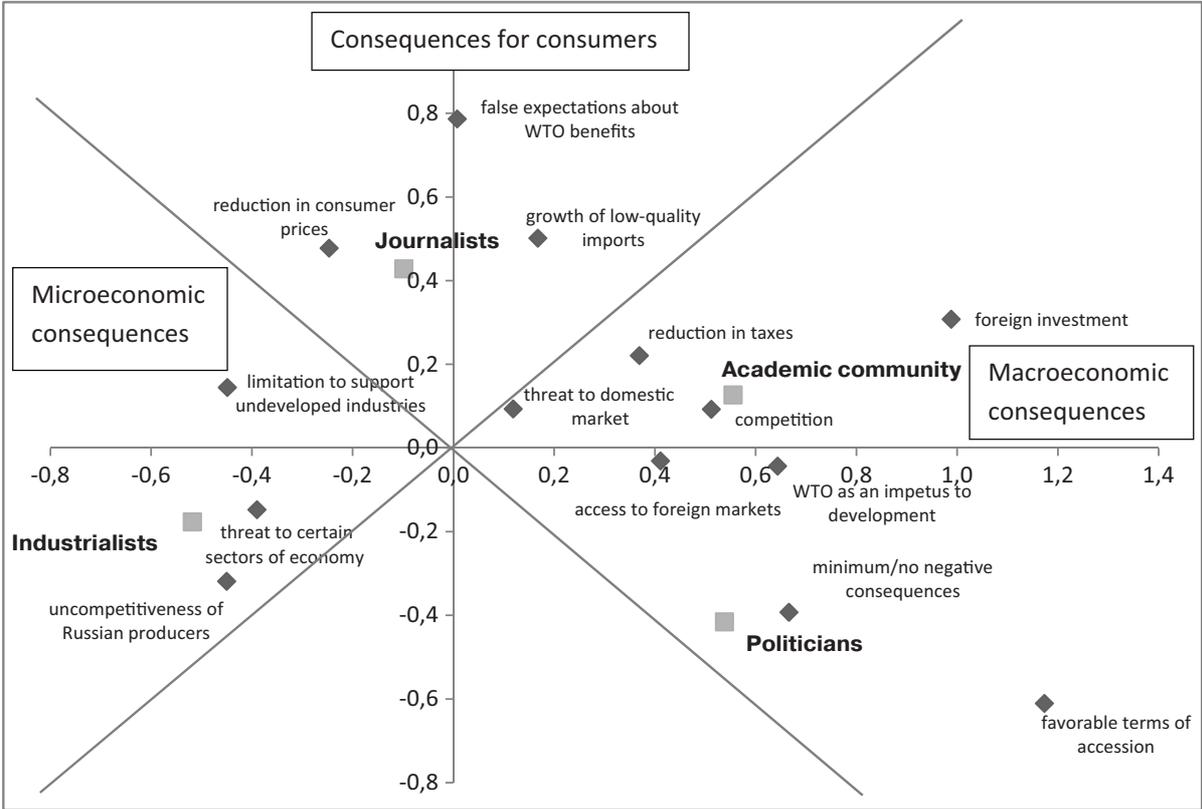


Figure 5. The character of argumentation among different debaters in discussions of the WTO (after accession)

In general, the standpoints of debaters prior to Russia’s accession can be summarized as follows: the *business community* clearly *rejected* the accession; *government, politicians and officials* were explicitly *in favor* of the accession; the *expert community* favored the accession, although to a less extent, dictated by their naturally higher awareness of the risks; the *journalist community* remained highly *uncertain*, depending largely on their publications’ ideological stances; and the *mass media* served mostly as a platform for the intense debate that unfolded between authorities and businessmen.

Politicians have accepted the role of a ‘progressively thinking’ community with a primary objective of helping Russia to keep up with world tendencies and overcome the gap in its development, whereas businessmen openly resisted this intention in favor of protectionist measures by positioning themselves as nationally oriented bourgeoisie struggling against

the cosmopolitan views of the political and academic elites. Indeed, businesses have actively relied on patriotic discourse and urged the necessity of protecting particular industries, which quite possibly would be devastated by Russia’s accession to the WTO.

This struggle ended in August 2012, when Russia finally became a WTO member WTO. The discussion then shifted to discussing the consequences of accession. Has anything changed in the eyes of business, the authorities, experts and journalists?

**After** Russia’s accession, all of the judgments about its consequences can be roughly classified into three domains: consequences for consumers, consequences for producers (micro-consequences) and consequences for the economy as a whole (macro-consequences) (see Figure 5).

**Businessmen** have essentially withdrawn from discussing the macro-consequences of the accession after Russia joined the WTO. The spectrum of their arguments has significantly contracted and became too focused on the risk posed to particular industries by the accession. On the other hand, the **expert community** has largely redrawn its attention to the WTO’s impact on the macroeconomic situation. However, that community is also quite concerned with the microeconomic consequences for consumers. In contrast, **government officials** tend to interpret real and potential changes related to the WTO accession from producers’ points of view. Finally, journalists have accepted the role of consumer advocate by focusing on such issues as reduced prices, GMOs and low-quality imports (see Table 6).

Table 6. Debaters’ standpoints

Sphere of origin	Before accession		After accession	
	Standpoint towards accession	Level of argumentation	Focus of discussion	Participation in discussion
Business	Rejected decisively	A balance of abstract and elaborated arguments	Problems of certain industries and economic sectors	Increased
Authorities	Favored decisively	Highly abstract	Problems of economy as a whole, political dividends	Decreased
Academic experts	Favored moderately	Highly elaborated and evidence-based	Problems related to consumer markets	Decreased
Journalists	No clear standpoint	Mostly abstract	Problems related to consumer markets (quality of goods, GMO imports, prices, etc.)	Increased

## Conclusions

The negotiations for Russia's accession to the WTO took 18 years to complete. Throughout this entire period, Russia's intention to join the WTO was constantly debated in Russia's mass media. However, the intensity of this discussion, along with the standpoints of the debaters themselves, has never been stable. Relative indifference to the WTO problem in the 1990s has been replaced with broad interest in the 2000s. The protraction of the accession date due to various unresolved issues was always followed by a decrease in interest, whereas each success of Russia's negotiators revived the discussion. In addition, it was not until the spring-summer of 2012, when the accession finally took place, that the WTO problem became the most heavily sensitized. Moreover, since that time, the debate has continuously faded.

After comparing the character of this discussion in the Russian print media before and after the accession, it can be summarized that the debate has become less optimistic and emotional and more focused on the terms that govern particular economic sectors. The most attention has been given to the problems of Russian agriculture and pork producers. The change in the character of the discussion is primarily associated with a change in the composition of debaters. Politicians and officials – the major supporters of Russia's accession to the WTO – abandoned the debate soon after Russia became a member. Those debaters were primarily replaced with representatives of the business community, who were largely skeptical about the usefulness of Russia being a part of the WTO on the terms that were eventually accepted. After the accession, businessmen tried to turn their skepticism into a legitimate form of lobbying by demanding more state support and preferences to mitigate the losses caused by Russia's WTO membership. The assertion of devastating effects for certain sectors of the Russian economy was an attempt to manipulate public opinion, thus legitimizing the demand for additional state support.

To put it very roughly, before Russia's accession to the WTO the primary argument unfolded between optimists (represented by politicians and government officials, i.e., mostly agitators) on the one hand, and pessimists (mostly businessmen, i.e., people in practice) on the other. Moreover, it was only after accession became a fact that pessimists began to take over the argument about the WTO issue in the Russian print media.

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