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HIGHER SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS

*Sergei V. Akopov*

**“DUTY” AND “BLAME” IN  
RUSSIAN OFFICIAL SYMBOLIC  
REPRESENTATIONS OF  
SOVEREIGNTY (1994-2018)**

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## **“DUTY” AND “BLAME” IN RUSSIAN OFFICIAL SYMBOLIC REPRESENTATIONS OF SOVEREIGNTY (1994-2018)<sup>2</sup>**

This article aims to add to the exiting poststructuralism literature on Russian sovereignty two more dimensions. In the first part of the article we show the evolution of the symbolic representations of sovereignty in speeches of three Russian presidents and make their comparative analysis. The second part of the article highlights issues of “blame” and “moral duty” and to what degree they enable Russian elites to authoritatively claim to be the agent of its people. Analysis of key metaphors of Russian sovereignty is also exploring whether symbolic representations of sovereignty could be considered a Russian version of “state simulacrum”.

Based on inductive approach this research explores sovereignty as a discursive practice narrated as part of official political discourse of Russian Federation. We seek to answer who and how is talking about Russian sovereignty, what are symbolic practices and new frames of its articulation. As an empirical base paper uses 1994-2018 Addresses of Russian president to Federal Assembly as well as several other principal text on sovereignty.

**Keywords:** Russia, Sovereignty, Symbolic Representations, Blame, Duty, Political Discourse

**JEL Classification:** Z

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<sup>1</sup> National Research University Higher School of Economics. Department of Applied Political Science. Professor; E-mail: sakopov@hse.ru

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## Introduction

“Blame” and “moral duty” throughout the history played a significant role in Russian foreign and domestic relations. Not accidentally two famous questions in Russian history relate to questions “Who is to blame?” (*Kto vinovat?*) and “What’s to be done?” (*Chto delat’?*) (Herzen 1984). The reason why it might be useful to look at this subject again is not the lack of literature in the field, but a recent strengthening of the performative component in Russia’s narrative of sovereignty and search for new approaches to analyse it. For example, on March 1, 2018 in his Address to the parliament Russian president played video with new prototypes of Russian “preventive” nuclear weapons and noted: “technological lag and dependence translate into reduced security and economic opportunities of the country and, ultimately, *the loss of its sovereignty*<sup>i</sup>” (Poslanie... 2018). Three years before that Russian president speaking at the Council for Science and Education used another metaphor saying that in a rapidly changing world what is at stake is “our *scientific and technological sovereignty*, and the need to ensure that external challenges and attempts to restrict our country or hold us back... do not become barriers for our development and growth” (Putin, 2015). Earlier his predecessor Dmitry Medvedev launched an economical metaphor talking of Russian “*sovereign debt*” as a balance of Russia’s international reserves (Poslanie... 2010).

According to the results of this research word *sovereignty or sovereign* was used within 1994-2018 Addresses of Russian president to Russian parliament 55 times. What is the reason for constant return to sovereignty by different Russian presidents? Is it because sovereignty, for example, can be a “floating signifier” of Russian politics (Ernesto Laclau)? Or, perhaps, sovereignty is just another mediation tool between Russian political regime and its people (Graham Gill)? Without disregarding both authors mentioned above this research is testing Cynthia Weber’s idea that political speeches “may be analysed as performative enactments of a state sovereignty” (Weber 1998, 92). For such survey I will use inductive research strategy and qualitative methods of textual analysis where symbolic representations of sovereignty will become units of analysis.

Considering that I investigate sovereignty as a discursive practice methodologically in this research I am leaning towards the constructivist tradition of grounded theory rooted in an epistemology, which assumes that neither data nor theories are discovered, but researchers construct them as a result of emerging analyses (Charmaz and Thornberg 2014, 153). In order to construct my research I will (1) start by explaining my choice of political metaphors as an instrument of analysis. I will then (2) proceed to developing initial coding in relation to sovereignty / intervention justifications issue based on “the Crimean Speech” of Russian president, that should help me to synthesize and develop larger theoretical frames of symbolic

representations of sovereignty. Further (3) I will need to test whether the developed frames are representative for other speeches, for which I will undertake a systematic analysis among the pool of texts of 1994-2018 Addresses of Russian president to Federal Assembly. Because “intervention justifications” are often related to notions of “blame” and “moral duty”, I will then (4) use the same theoretical frames of symbolic representations of sovereignty as filters for employment of “duty” and “blame” in the same 1994-2018 Addresses of Russian president to parliament. I will suggest that frames of symbolic representations of sovereignty, which will accumulate most of mentioning of “blame” and “duty”, can indicate towards particular ways how Russian state tries to maintain control over symbolic representations of Russian people and make authoritative claim to represent them. Finally (5) I will make graphs of sovereignty, duty and blame correlations for different Russian presidents to discuss results of research in a comparative perspective.

### **Political Metaphors as a Tool to Analyse Symbolic Representations of Sovereignty**

Scholars from international relations theory did not yet come to common normative grounds as far as to what extent the principle of nation-state sovereignty is the best way to organize the political community in modern world (see Walker 1993). An extensive study of the ambivalence of modern philosophical interpretations of sovereignty is a special subject of discussion, which has given rise to significant literature (see, Krasner 1999 or Skinner 2010) but goes beyond the idea of this research. At the same time we can point out that in the literature it is customary to problematize the nature of sovereignty, singling out several grounds of this “essentially contested and essentially uncontested” (Bartelson 1995) phenomenon. As noted by Tanja Aalberts, like any other concept, a concept of “sovereignty” is meant to structure the reality around us. However, behind this lies a more complex question of how does “sovereignty” actually correlate to that empirical reality? Referring to the analytical philosophy of L. Wittgenstein, Dutch scholar points towards a performative nature of sovereignty. In her view, “sovereignty” not just describes, but also *constitutes* a certain reality (Aalberts 2016, 184). Moreover, although sovereignty tends to be seen as the founding principle of the modern state there is no comprehensive account of sovereignty that is universally applicable to all cases of statehood. Therefore sovereignty does not have a clear correlation with any particular referent object:

“While we can list many things that are closely related to, symbols or manifestations of sovereign statehood – such as armies, citizens, embassies or monarchical rituals – none of

these capture sovereignty completely. Similarly, sovereignty relates to many intangible elements – for example, supremacy, territoriality, jurisdiction, autonomy – yet none of them is equivalent to sovereignty in its entirety. Rather, like any concept, sovereignty relates multiple elements, aspects and experiences to each other. Moreover, these elements can only be identified as territory (rather than mere soil) and citizens (rather than random human beings) by virtue of sovereign statehood as an institution of international society. And, crucially, sovereignty itself is the product of this configuration (Ibid).

Jens Bertelson suggested thinking of “sovereignty” as a web of concepts, each of which generates elements that all acquire meaning only within a specific historical and theoretical frame (see Bertelson 1995). In this article I agree with scholars who say that the use of the concept of “sovereignty” can act as a powerful figurative expression (“even if it is unclear what it exactly “is”, sovereignty is a powerful trope” (Aalberts 2016, 195) performed within a practice of exercising political power, and also “sovereignty” can be interpreted and studied as a discursive practice when internal and external sovereignty are not neutral dimensions of what sovereignty is, but analysed in terms of their performativity (Ibid, 192).

In this study under sovereignty I will understand exactly the latter – a set of performative discursive practices. Here, the performative nature of concept of sovereignty is expressed in the fact that it does not so much *describe* the reality, but rather itself is (political) action towards *construction* of reality. Performativity can also be manifested in an attempt to represent something conditional and conventional (like, for instance, modern Russian collective identity) as unconditional, natural, universal or even the only “normal” political order. Cynthia Weber described that as a phenomenon of “simulating sovereignty” and “performative states” where ideas of sovereignty and legitimized interventions are mutually constituent. As Weber emphasized it back in 1992 in relation to USA invasions to the Caribbean:

“...In the sovereignty/intervention pairing, it is *sovereignty which serves as the foundational concept and intervention which is meaningful only in relation to sovereignty*. The construction of sovereignty as both a guarantee of the meaning of intervention and as a term that is meaningful in and of itself is done by theorists. Conventional analyses about intervention begin by positing sovereignty as an operationalized definition (as scientific-behaviouralists do) or as a constitutive or first principle (as traditionalists do). Either way, such a premise disallows any questions about changes in the meaning and/or practice of sovereignty across time and in different regions” (Weber 1992; 201-202).

Drawing from works of French poststructuralist philosopher Jean Baudrillard Weber points that his notion of *simulation* can be also applied to discourses of sovereignty and intervention because “just as in simulation no ultimate foundation exists to ground indicators, so too with discourses of sovereignty, no ‘domestic community’ can be distinguished and made to serve as

the foundation of sovereign authority within a state” (Ibid, 215). According to Weber the only way for sovereignty not be seen, as referring only to itself is the existence of another category – category of intervention. Intervention she even metaphorically calls “an alibi” of sovereignty, because intervention always implies a violation of some sovereignty (Ibid). Sussex University scholar outlines two alternatives to speak on behalf of the source of sovereign authority:

First, states are ‘written’ effects of attempts to exert effective control over representation, both political and symbolic. ‘Political’ representation involves a presumed exchange between the state and its citizenry. A citizenry authorizes the state to serve as its agent so long as the state honors its obligation to stand for and further the interests of that citizenry both domestically and internationally. What makes this relationship between the state and its citizenry possible is a second type of representation – ‘symbolic’ representation understood as the act of depiction, the act of portraying officialized myth. In this case, what is portrayed is the mystical source of sovereign authority, ‘the people’. Symbolic representation is a strategy whereby the sovereign authority of the state is ‘written’ or invented in a specific form which serves as the grounding principle of the state (Weber, 1992: 216).

C.Weber ideas on *simulation of sovereignty* were new in International relations but not in general in social sciences. From Erving Goffman and also later Judith Butler we learned that power of language can performativity constitute identities, and that, for example, “genders can be neither true no false, but are only produced as the truth effects of a discourse of primary and stable identity” (Butler 2007, 136). When we look at sovereignty as a discursive practice here political metaphors can become useful tools to unveil particular frames that speaker is enacting in order to gain support of social groups he/she is targeting. Of course some metaphors are random, while others more representative and can become powerful political symbols and ideas (like the metaphor of “sovereign democracy” did in Russia in 2006 and earlier in the political history of USA and Taiwan). In that sense we are interested not at random metaphors, but rather in widely accepted ones that can witness in favour of well-established frames of political communication and, perhaps, channels of political mobilization. Metaphors (for instance metaphors of security) even can become an effective unit of analysis to study Russia’s puzzled collective political subconscious (see Chilton 1996, 47).

By exploring metaphors we literally let the language of Russian official discourse speak for itself allowing tropes to take us beneath the surface of rational *ad hoc* and *post hoc* scholarly argumentations, towards unknown mechanisms of emotional construction of social solidarity (Hutchison 2014), organization of hate (Ahmed 2004) or into the hidden depth of affective political communities (Hutchison 2016). Certainly language of official discourse cannot speak on behalf of all Russians. However it at least can mirror certain trends of public opinion and help

to reproduce key frames of currently dominant symbolic politics. This is not any new idea, particularly if you relate such investigation of political metaphors to classical frame analysis, which explained conceptual frames as ways of organizing experience, structure an individual's perception of society and identity:

“The manner in which the role is performed will allow for some “expression” of personal *identity*, of matters that can be attributed to something that is more embracing and enduring than the current role performance and even the role itself, something, in short, that is characteristic not of the role but of the person—his personality, his perduring moral character, his animal nature, and so forth... There is a relation between persons and role. But the relationship answers to the interactive system—to the frame—in which the role is performed and the self of the performer is glimpsed” (Goffman 1986, 573).

Besides Erving Goffman I also drew my epistemology from works on myths and signifiers by Roland Barthes (1972) and analysis of ‘metaphors we live by’ from George Lakoff (1980). The latter explored framing media as a strategy of political communication promoting specific interpretations of political reality. Lakoff claims that frames determine our opinions and values as mental structures that influence our thinking, often unconsciously:

Communication itself comes with a frame. The elements of the Communication frame include: a message, an audience, a messenger, a medium, images, a context, and especially, higher-level moral and conceptual frames. The choice of language is, of course, vital, but it is vital because language evokes frames — moral and conceptual frames (Lakoff, 2006).

As we know, originally the idea of frames was spotted by Gregory Bateson who observed fighting games between monkeys in San-Francisco Zoo. He believed that monkeys exchange metacommunicative signals letting know whether this fight is a “fight for real” (reality “for real”) or rather a “game-fight” (reality “for fun”). It seems that we can find similarities in how monkeys exchange their metacommunicative signals and how politicians frame their rhetoric towards potential voters by producing metaphors as signals letting know how much their fight is a “fight for real”. In other words a widely used political metaphor becomes a “metacommunicative frame” when messages of the speaker outside particular frame may be simply ignored (Bateson 1987, 193).

So what is the connection between frames and metaphors? Authors suggest that metaphors are very important cognitively because they are widely used to describe personal meaning. They defined that as a “conduit metaphor”: a speaker can put ideas or objects into words or containers, and then send them along a channel, or “conduit”, to a listener who takes that idea or object out of the container and *makes her own meaning* of it (see Lakoff & Johnson,

1980). Therefore the most powerful political metaphors are those that suggest multiple ways of *making meaning* for the largest amount of politically mobilized actors.

Why do some “conduit metaphor” get more emotional resonance while others make a total mismatch? Based on Lakoff and Johnson we could suggest that this happens when metaphors become an asset that allows *a variety of ways to make meaning* for a significant amount of politically mobilized population. After all “framing” is related to issues of symbolic representation and means with which we communicate about the world and construct our “life worlds”. Lakoff defines *framing* through language and communication that are heavily involved in the *production of the sense of a political reality*. In this article I would suggest considering political metaphors as metacommunicative signals targeting towards reactivation of different frames and *systems of political meanings*. Or, as Olga Malinova’s puts it, political leaders expect that their arguments will correspond to particular frames to provoke a desirable reaction from the audience which is limited by the *established semantic repertoires* (Malinova 2012, 4).

### **Initial Coding: Vladimir Putin’s 2014 “Crimean speech”**

If we consider justified intervention as “an alibi” of sovereignty, then, perhaps, we should start our initial coding with Vladimir Putin’s “Crimean speech”. Of course before 2014 Ukrainian crisis Russia had experienced dealing with several justified interventions. Those were the 1990’s crisis in Yugoslavia, 2008 War in Georgia, 2008-2009 campaign for independence of Kosovo. However, before the 2014 crisis in Ukraine Russia usually managed to find an alliance among several Western states. Most evident was a case of Russia’s joint opposition to 2003 US invasion in Iraq together with France and Germany. So eventually it was only after the conflict over Crimea that the West was unified in their decision to impose sanction on Russia, while Russia replied with countersanctions and significantly changed its foreign strategy. It was the case of Crimea that opened the floodgate of mutual accusations in intervention – both justified and non justified. The disputes over suspension of several Russian athletes at Winter Olympic games in PyeongChang, issue with Russia’s trace in US elections and 2018 scandal with chemical weapons in Salisbury make just a small number of cases out of many other in that respect. Unsurprisingly those countries who (although to a different degree) shared Russia’s justification for ‘Crimea is ours’ case soon became *priorities and key partners of the Russian Foreign Policy*: BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and the Republic of South Africa), the SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organization), RIC (Russia, India and China) (see Foreign Policy Concept of RF 2016).



All the above explains why the “Crimean speech” (known as “*Krimskaya Rech’ Putina*”) was chosen as starting pull for rich data initial coding. The speech was made on March 18, 2014 in the St. George Hall in Kremlin where Russian President addressed Russian parliament in connection with the new status of Crimea. I used that speech to create qualitative codes and provide results of “open” coding which finally consisted of 20 constellations (see Table 1).

**Tab. 1. List of 20 initial codes of “sovereignty” from V.Putin’s “Crimean Speech” (2014)**

1. Integration, gathering together ( <i>sobiranie</i> ); Reunification of Russia regardless the opposition of the West; Primordial unity of Slavic countries (panslavism); Ancient Rus as a common source of heritage; inseparability of Crimea from Russia.
2. Glorification of Russian military (for example, historical victories in Crimea).
3. Soviet “sovereignty parade” as a negative phenomena.
4. Victimization of Russian nation as being forcefully divided and historically split apart. Political metaphor of “the sack of potatoes” as symbol of lack of recognition of Russian-speaking diaspora abroad.
5. Speculating on Russia’s trauma of 1990’s.
6. Russia’s population (relative) deprivation.
7. Opposition between the suffering ordinary people vs irresponsible elites and highly paid global nomads.
8. Unmasking and unveiling of nationalism (case of conflict in Ukraine); References to fascism and WWII.
9. President as defender and protector of ordinary people (paternalism); Russian expression: “We do not abandon our men” (“ <i>Mi svoih ne brosaem</i> ”)
10. The “spring” metaphor – Russian resilience and need to be assertive; Sovereignty and self-determination; sovereignty as an immunity from the West;
11. Importance of maintaining political stability and seeking world’s order within system of UN
12. Soft power and foreign intervention via “colour revolutions”
13. Sarcasm and hypocrisy of the West; condemning exceptionalism of the USA.
14. Gratefulness to the countries of the East / BRICS for support of Crimea becoming Russian.
15. Keeping “ones house in order” metaphor (political and legal order in Russia)
16. Collectivism and collective will; Solidarity and “spiritual bracing” (“ <i>duhovnie skrepi</i> ”);
17. Russia facing a threat of fifth column (“... <i>this disparate bunch of ‘national traitors’</i> ”)
18. Legal aspect of sovereignty (Kosovo, Ukraine’s illegal revolt, Crimean Referendum)
19. Ungratefulness of the West.
20. People as the ultimate source of every authority and sovereignty.

Later I synthesized and reorganized these 20 constellations into 6 groups – *frames of symbolic representation* – on the principle of their relativeness to sovereignty and justified interventions. I provide them below and illustrate with key abstracts:

1. First frame of symbolic representation I marked under “**the spring**” metaphor. That includes codes of Russian resilience and its need to be assertive against the West / NATO,

sovereignty as immunity from the West (code number 10\*<sup>ii</sup>). That couples with sarcasm and hypocrisy of the West and Western exceptionalism (13\*). Emblematic in that sense can be an abstract from Putin's speech when he threatens his Western partners with Russian "spring" striking ("snapping") them back:

*"They are constantly trying to sweep us into a corner because we have an independent position, because we maintain it and because we call things like they are and do not engage in hypocrisy. But there is a limit to everything. And with Ukraine, our western partners have crossed the line, playing the bear and acting irresponsibly and unprofessionally. After all, they were fully aware that there are millions of Russians living in Ukraine and in Crimea. They must have really lacked political instinct and common sense not to foresee all the consequences of their actions. Russia found itself in a position it could not retreat from. If you compress the spring all the way to its limit, it will snap back hard. You must always remember this"* (Putin, 2014).

2. Second frame I marked under Putin's metaphor **"the sack of potatoes"** (4\*). Regretting the marginalization and division of Russian nation Russian president noted: "Millions of people went to bed in one country and awoke in different ones, overnight becoming ethnic minorities in former Union republics, while the Russian nation became one of the biggest, if not the biggest ethnic group in the world *to be divided by borders*" (Ibid). Criticizing Russia for lack of assertiveness in world politics he noted: "Now, many years later, I heard residents of Crimea say that back in 1991 they were handed over *like a sack of potatoes*. This is hard to disagree with. And what about the Russian state? What about Russia? It humbly accepted the situation" (Ibid). In this group I also placed codes like speculating on Russia's trauma of 1990's (5\*) and victimization of Russian nation as being forcefully split apart and divided (4\*). They seem to be based on idea of Russia's (relative) deprivation (6\*).

3. Third group of symbolic representations fall under the metaphor of **"spiritual ties"** (16\*) for national (re)unification. Here primordial unity of Slavic countries and panslavism (1\*) in general play key role in promoting historical civilizational unity of three Slavic countries "where Prince Vladimir was baptized. His spiritual feat of adopting Orthodoxy predetermined the overall basis of the culture, civilization and human values that unite the peoples of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus" (Ibid). Russia is being threatened with fifth column (17\*) that can put its unity under threat. Reunification of Russia alongside regaining of its national sovereignty, regardless of how it can complicate Russia's international relations (1\*) and glorification of its military plays a key role here (2\*): "This is also Sevastopol – a legendary city with an outstanding history, a fortress that serves as the birthplace of Russia's Black Sea Fleet. Crimea is Balaklava and Kerch, Malakhov Kurgan and Sapun

Ridge. Each one of these places is dear to our hearts, symbolizing Russian military glory and outstanding valor” (Ibid).

4. The **“house in order”** metaphor unites under a single frame codes like the importance of maintaining political stability (15\*) and seeking world’s stability challenged by decline of UN (11\*). *A la J.J. Rousseau's Le Contract social* Russian President notes: “There was not a single armed confrontation in Crimea and no casualties. Why do you think this was so? The answer is simple: because it is very difficult, practically impossible *to fight against the will of the people*” (Ibid). Stability should be achieved, according to Putin, via collective will of the people as ultimate source of legitimacy (second part of 19\*):

“We see that the *overwhelming* majority of people in Crimea and the absolute majority of the Russian Federation’s people support the reunification of the Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol with Russia. Now this is a matter for Russia’s own political decision, and any decision here can be based only on the *people’s will*, because the *people are the ultimate source of all authority*. Members of the Federation Council, deputies of the State Duma, citizens of Russia, residents of Crimea and Sevastopol, today, in accordance with the *people’s will*, I submit to the Federal Assembly a request to consider a Constitutional Law on the creation of two new constituent entities of Russian Federation” (Ibid).

5. In relation to that idea of the collective will of the people I have distinguished a separate frame concentrated around the metaphor of **“The Defender of ordinary people”**. Defending common people, defending in their name (and on their behalf) stability vs hypocrisy of political elites (9\*) frames itself in a widely spread Russian expression: “We do not abandon our men” (*“Mi svoih ne brosaem”*):

“Naturally, we could not leave this plea unheeded; *we could not abandon Crimea* and its residents in distress. This would have been *betrayal on our part*. First, we had to help create conditions so that the residents of Crimea *for the first time in history* were able to peacefully express their free will regarding their own future. However, what do we hear from our colleagues in *Western Europe and North America*? They say we are violating norms of international law. Firstly, it’s a good thing that they at least remember that there exists such a thing as international law – *better late than never*” (Ibid).

6. Finally, the last frame – the idea of **Moral Debt based on The Ungratefulness of the West to Russia** (20\*). Here we can see an example:

“We understand that these actions were aimed against Ukraine and Russia and *against Eurasian integration*. And all this *while Russia strived to engage in dialogue with our colleagues in the West*. We are constantly proposing cooperation on all key issues; we want to strengthen our level of trust and for our relations to be equal, open and fair. But *we saw no reciprocal steps*. On the contrary, *they have lied to us many times*, made decisions *behind our backs*, placed us before an accomplished fact. This happened with NATO’s expansion to the East, as well as the deployment of military infrastructure at our borders. They kept telling us the same thing: “Well, this does not concern you.” That’s easy to say. It happened with the deployment of a missile defense system... It happened with the endless *foot-dragging in the talks on visa issues*, promises of fair competition

and free access to global markets. Today, we are being *threatened with sanctions*, but we already experience many limitations, ones that are quite significant for us, our economy and our nation” (Ibid).

We can compare *the ungratefulness of the West to Russia* rhetoric with how it contrasts with the code of the *gratefulness to the countries of the East* (14\*):

“At the same time, we are *grateful* to all those who understood our actions in Crimea; we are *grateful to the people of China*, whose leaders have always considered the situation in Ukraine and Crimea taking into account the full historical and political context, and greatly appreciate *India’s* reserve and objectivity” (Ibid).

The abovementioned six categories of symbolic representation remain instrumental for our further investigation.

### **Symbolic Representations of Sovereignty in Annual Address of Russian Presidents to Federal Assembly (1994 – 2018)**

As we remember from Cynthia Weber’s note on performative nature of sovereignty, discourses of sovereignty imply discourses of (legitimate/justified) interventions (1992, 201). In case of Russian politics those interventions could also be split into internal and external ones. Looking at the 6 symbolic frames of representations of sovereignty we can see that they can be coupled with justifications of internal and external interventions (Table 2).

**Tab. 2. Symbolic representations of sovereignty coupled with possible justifications of internal and external interventions**

<b>Inside</b>	<b>Outside</b>
“The Defender of Common People” Being Victimized	The “Sack of Potatoes” as “Russian” Diaspora Abroad
“The Spiritual Ties” of Russia	The “Elastic Spring” of Russian Resistance
The Need to “Keep Our House in Order”	Moral Debt of the Ungrateful West

However we don’t know yet how valid are our six symbolic representations of sovereignty? In order to verify that we need to see how often did Russian presidents use notions like *sovereignty* or *sovereign* in their speeches? Also does this mentioning of sovereignty actually correspond to our six earlier synthesized frames of symbolic representations or these six frames are simply a product of speculation. Here empirical analysis is required.

As you can see from textual analysis below, Russian presidents did use notions like *sovereignty* or *sovereign* in their speeches rather frequently. I have systemized (Table 3) every mentioning of sovereignty or sovereign in annual Addresses of Russian Presidents to Federal Assembly from 1994 till 2018. After each year I provided in brackets abbreviations of names of

Russian presidents, for example “1994 (BE)” – for speeches delivered by president Boris Yeltsin, (“2000 VP”) – Vladimir Putin, “2008 (DM)” – Dmitry Medvedev and so forth.

**Tab. 3. Employment of “sovereignty” in 1994 – 2018 Addresses of Russian presidents to parliament (55 times)**

Year	No	Representation of <b>sovereignty (S.)</b> inside and outside Russia
1994 (BE)	6	<b>Inside:</b> S. of multinational people of Russia granted by its Constitution that should protect their equality (1) and guaranteed by Russian Armed Forces that protect territorial integrity (2) <b>Outside:</b> problem of building united monetary system with Belarus (3); if necessary defending Russia’s legitimate interests “firmly and harshly” (4); Russia is not required to request permission from the world community for its UN peacekeeping operations within CIS (5); in relation to European security - against the expansion of NATO without Russia (6)
1995 (BE)	1 5	<b>Inside:</b> Ensure S. independence and unity of Russia (1); S. and need to overcome crisis improving the quality of life (2); S. and building proper federalism and municipal management (3-4), S. against separatism (5); S. vs. “banditism” in Chechnya as loss of territorial integrity and power fragmentation (6-13); defending S. (14) and the stability of state borders (15)
1996 (BE)	6	<b>Inside:</b> S. of nationalism movements lead to the fall of the USSR (1) while “paralyzed” Russia could not become a “foothold” against nationalism of former USSR republics (2); President Boris Yeltsin protects Russian people as source of real S. in 1993 conflict with The Supreme Council (3); satisfaction that finally in 1991-1993 the Soviet “parade of sovereignties” was channelled into the Federal Treaty of Russia (4) <b>Outside:</b> Alma-Ata agreements on the creation of CIS from S. states (5); tendency for integration prevails now over the former “run-away” of some CIS S. states (6)
1997 (BE)	0	-
1998 (BE)	0	-
1999 (BE)	2	<b>Inside:</b> Russian sovereignty declaration underpins new Russian parliamentary tradition (1) <b>Outside:</b> protecting S. vs solving problems by force, with methods “from the Stone Age” (2)
2000 (VP)	2	<b>Inside:</b> “challenge for Russia state S.” vs global terrorism getting inside the country, but also aspiring geopolitical recomposition of the world (in case of Chechnya) (1) <b>Outside:</b> attempts to infringe upon the sovereign rights of post Soviet states under the guise of “humanitarian interventions” (2)
2001 (VP)	0	-
2002	0	-

(VP)		
2003 (VP)	0	-
2004 (VP)	0	-
2005 (VP)	4	<b>Inside:</b> our values determine our S. and we will stay strong (1); Russia chose democracy itself and decides how/when to build it itself (2); gratitude to soldiers defending S. during WWII (3) <b>Outside:</b> those who “buried” S. of Russia ahead of time made a mistake (4)
2006 (VP)	0	
2007 (VP)	3	<b>Inside:</b> national spiritual unity as grounds for S. (1); “State S. is also determined by cultural criteria”, wrote D.Likhachev (2) <b>Outside:</b> we will only be able to preserve our statehood and S. if our citizens see, feel, and be confident that all efforts of the state are aimed at protecting their vital interests – to improve their lives, to improve their welfare and safety (3)
2008 (DM)	1	<b>Inside:</b> any “reformatory itching” is inappropriate, S. of people and constitution should remain intact for a long time
2009 (DM)	0	-
2010 (DM)	1	<b>Outside:</b> the size of sovereign debt is minimal. Today's level of international reserves of Russia is significantly higher than at the end of 2008
2011 (DM)	0	-
2012 (VP)	5	<b>Inside:</b> not disruption of S. but continuity in Russia’s political development, promotion of the direct democracy, including people’s initiatives in Internet on line (1) <b>Outside:</b> Russia should remain S., and influential in 21 c. world, keeping its national and spiritual identity (2); S. as strong diplomacy and military might (3); to be S. we should multiply and be more young, creative and moral (4); unity, integrity and S. of Russia vs separatism, nationalism, Russian S. vs outside intervention including though foreign agents (5)
2013 (VP)	1	<b>Outside:</b> Russia will target towards leadership in defending international law, seeking respect for national sovereignty, independence and unique identity ( <i>samobitnost'</i> ) of its peoples
2014 (VP)	7	<b>Inside:</b> this year we overcame together hardships proving that we are a mature nation, a really S. and strong state, that can defend its compatriots (1) and respect S. of Ukraine (2-3) <b>Outside:</b> Russian S. vs. S. loss by states in Europe (4-5); S. vs dissolve, get lost in the world (6) <b>Outside:</b> Eurasian Union as integration, based on keeping national identity of its states 7)
2015	0	-



(VP)		
2016 (VP)	1	<b>Outside:</b> S. as unity based on patriotic values vs. sanctions against Russia
2018 (VP)	1	<b>Outside:</b> technological delay as loss of S. that is equivalent to the loss of economic energy

I then have attributed each mentioning of sovereignty to one of six frames of symbolic representations and calculated number in each group. Those emplyements that I could not ascribe to any of my groups I placed into the “Other frames” category. Below you can the results and how look on the diagram.

### 1) “The Defender of Common People” Being Victimized - 5

- S. as granted by all the people. It is unacceptable to divide the inhabitants into representatives of the so-called “indigenous” and “non-indigenous” nationalities (1994)
- S. and need to overcome economic crisis through improving the quality of life of citizens (1995)
- Russian people as source of real S. together with B.Yeltsin in conflict with The Supreme Council that acted against the will of the people (1996)
- Any “reformatory itching” is inappropriate, S. of people and constitution should remain intact for a long time (2008)
- Not the disruption of S. but continuity in the development of the direct democracy, including people’s initiatives in the Internet and on line (2012)

### 2) “The Spiritual Ties” of Russia – 5

- Our values determine our S. and we will stay strong (2005)
- National spiritual unity as grounds for S. (2007)
- “State S. is also determined by cultural criteria”, wrote D.Likhachev (2007)
- We will only be able to preserve our statehood and S. if our citizens see, feel, and stay confident that all efforts of the state are aimed at protecting their vital interests (2007)
- Russia should remain S., and influential in 21 c. world, keeping its national and spiritual identity (2012)

### 3) The Need to “Keep Our House in Order” – 21

- [2 times] S. as building proper federalism and municipal management in Russia (1995)
- Need to ensure S. as independence and unity of Russia
- S. as opposition of separatism (1995)
- [8 times] S. vs “banditism” in Chechnya as loss of territorial integrity and power fragmentation (1995)
- [2 times] Defending S. as the stability of state borders (1995)
- In 1991-1993 the “parade of sovereignties” managed to be successfully channelled into the Federal Treaty (1996)
- [2 times] S. of nationalism movements has lead to the fall of the USSR while “paralyzed” Russia could not become a “foothold” against nationalism of former USSR republics (1996)
- Russian S. declaration underpinning emergence of new Russian parliamentary system (1999)
- “Challenge for Russia state S.” vs global terrorism getting inside the country and aspiring geopolitical recomposition of the world (case of Chechnya) (2000)
- The size of sovereign debt is minimal. Today's level of international reserves of Russia is

significantly higher than at the end of 2008 (2010)

- Unity, integrity and S. of Russia vs separatism and nationalism, Russian S. vs outside intervention including vis foreign agents (2012)

#### **4) Other Frames (inside) – 3**

- S. guaranteed by Armed Forces that protect Russia's territorial Integrity (1994)
- Gratitude to soldiers who defended S. during WWII (2005)
- To be S. we should multiply and be more young, creative and moral (2012)

#### **5) The “Sack of Potatoes” as “Russian” Diaspora Abroad – 5**

- In order to protect interests of our compatriots who are outside the Russian Federation, Russia is not required to request permission from the world community for its UN authorized peacekeeping operations within CIS (1994)
- Protecting S. vs solving problems by force and with methods “from the Stone Age” in relation to the Russian-speaking population of Latvia and Estonia (1999)
- **[2 times]** General respect of S. right of Ukraine for independent (originally supported by Russia in 1990's anyways) doesn't stop Russia from protecting Russian speakers and compatriots in Ukraine/Crimea (2014)
- This year we overcame together hardships proving that we are a mature nation, a really S. and strong state, that can defend its compatriots (2014)

#### **6) The “Elastic Spring” of Russian Resistance – 10**

- Defending Russia's legitimate interests “firmly and harshly” (1994)
- Even though the Cold War is over attempts to infringe upon the S. rights of states under the guise of “humanitarian interventions” still take place (2000)
- Russia chose democracy by itself and will decide how and when to build this democracy also by itself (including specificity of Russian national security interests) (2005)
- See Russian S. as possessing strong diplomacy and military might (2012)
- We will target towards leadership defending international law, seeking respect for national sovereignty, independence and unique identity of our peoples (2013)
- **[2 times]** S. of Russia vs. lost S. by European countries, for whom “national pride is a long-forgotten concept, and possessing a sovereignty is too much of a luxury” (2014)
- Be S. vs dissolve, get lost in the global world (2014)
- Eurasian Union as integration, based on keeping national identity and S. (2014)
- S. as unity based on patriotic values together with Russian President vs. sanctions against Russia (2016)

#### **7) Moral Debt of the Ungrateful West – 2**

- Against the expansion of NATO without Russia (1994)
- Those who “buried” S. of Russia ahead of time made mistake (2005)

#### **8) Other Frames (outside) – 4**

- Technological (scientific) delay as loss of S. and economic energy (2018)
- Problem of building united monetary system during integration with Belarus (1994)
- Positive assessment of Alma-Ata agreements on the creation of CIS from S. states in order to stop the fall of the USSR (1996)
- Tendency for economic integration prevails now over the former “run-away” of some CIS S. states (1996)



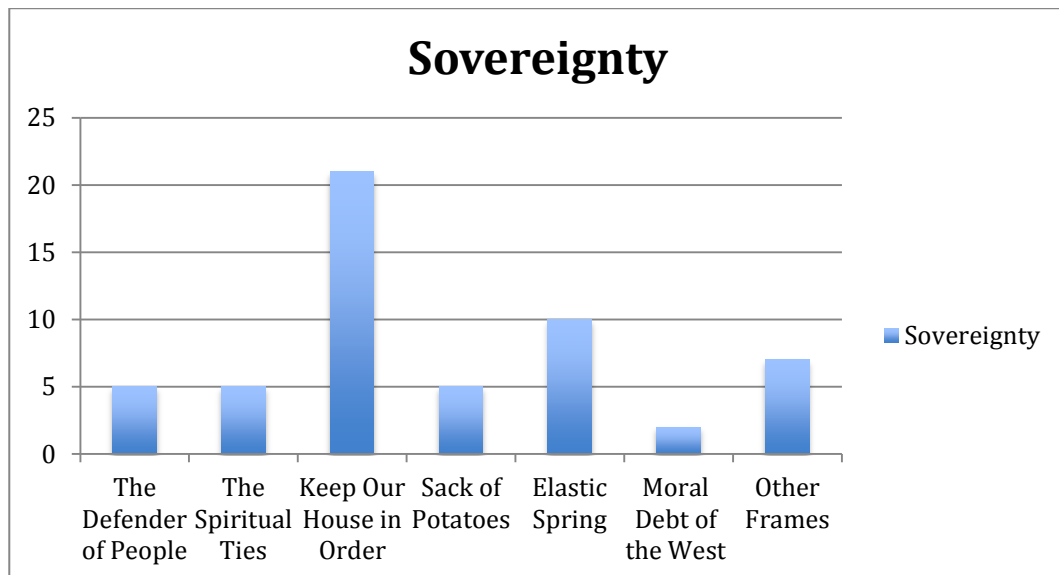


Fig. 1. “Sovereignty” in 1994 – 2018 Addresses of Russian presidents to parliament attributed to frames of symbolic representation

We can see that earlier detected 6 symbolic representations generally do relate to the utilization of sovereignty in texts of 1994 – 2018 Addresses of Russian president, however to a different degree. Graph 1 shows that 21 operations of term “sovereignty” fall under the symbolic frame **“Keep Our House in Order”**. This is a rather wide symbolic pool where we can emphasize sovereignty represented as building strong federalism and an opposition to separatism, to “banditism” and loss of territorial integrity (signalling about the two Russian wars in Chechnya). Another aspect to be emphasized here is a close link between claims for sovereignty and idea of strong Russian state, its financial independence (for instance, 2010 D.Medvedev’s declaration that Russia’s “sovereign debt is minimal”).

Second most multiple symbolic representation of sovereignty falls under the frame **“Elastic Spring”** of Russian resistance with 10 samples selected and rather proportionally scattered from 1994 to 2016. While the frame – the need to **“Keep Our House in Order”** – mostly relates to inside issues (like wars in Chechnya), the **“Elastic Spring”** touches issues of Russia’s foreign relations: “humanitarian interventions that still occur regardless the end of the Cold war”; European countries, for whom “possessing a sovereignty is too much of a luxury” (see Table 3). Never the less in both frames sovereignty is utilized in relation to possible justifications of interventionism – internal in the first frame or extern in the second.

Realistically speaking it is natural that 6 symbolic frames synthesized on the grounds of only one (“Crimean”) speech could not cover all the mentioning of sovereignty in 23 Addresses of three different Russian presidents. Therefore we get a group of **“Other Frames”** that we could not consider in the beginning. Among that group 3 out of 7 employment of sovereignty

were related to Russia's articulated attempts to build harmonious neighbourhood within CIS or the post-Soviet countries. I also found two notions directly relating to issues of biopolitics. That is particularly 2012 talk about why Russian population in order to remain sovereign should multiply and be younger, and also 2018 discussion on sovereignty loss as technological delay. In the latter case Russian president claims that the lag in technologies "inevitably weakens and erodes the human potential. Because new jobs, modern companies and an attractive life will develop in other, more successful countries where educated and talented young people will go, thereby *draining* the society's vital powers and development energy" (Poslanie... 2018). The "draining" metaphor hints that humans could be regarded as a tool serving for maintaining country's economic and technological sovereignty (on Russian biopolitics also see Makarytchev and Yatsyk 2016).

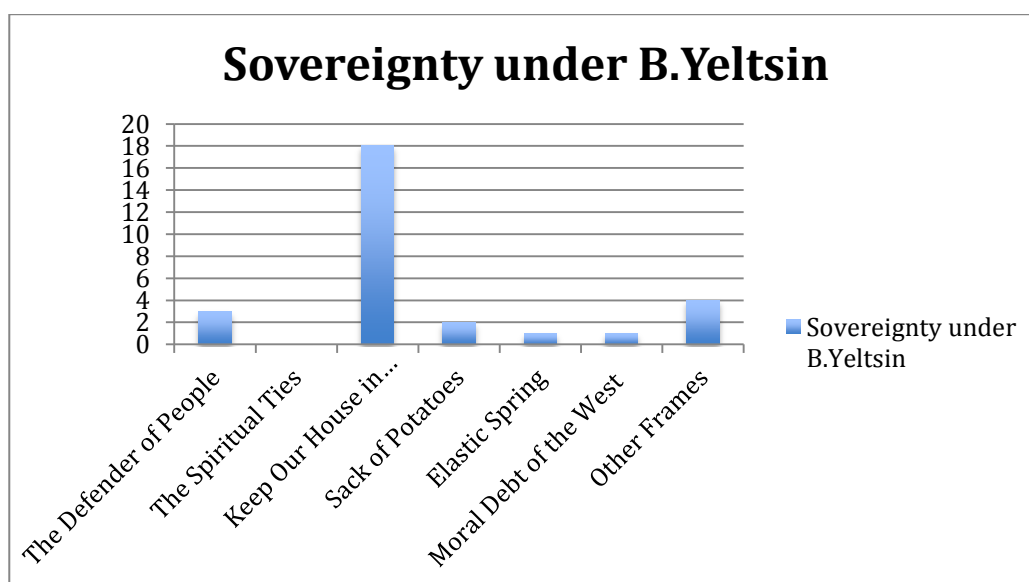
According to the Ggraph 1 equally influential became symbolic representations of sovereignty in frames of **"The Defender of Common People" (5)** and **"The Spiritual Ties" (5)**. The latter relates sovereignty of Russian state and its political leader to spiritual unity of a nation, preservation of its unique cultural identity (*samobitnost'*). The former is more concerned with representation of president as a main defender of interests of common people. For example, in 1993 Boris Yeltsin protected interests of Russian people in conflict with The Supreme Council, which "acted against the will of the people". In a comparable way in 2014 Vladimir Putin (in patriotic unity with people) defended interests of Russian in conflict with NATO and against the sanctions of the West.

As we could see the symbolic representation of sovereignty showing Russian diaspora abroad as **"Sack of Potatoes" (5)** usually refers to them as compatriots (*sootechestvenniki*), whether they live in Lathvia, Estonia or Ukraine. In reference to **"Moral Debt of the Ungrateful West" (2)** we can emphasize the notion of long expected by the West fail of Russian statehood and sovereignty. This narrative started to evolve in Russian discourse already under the first term of the presidency of V.Putin. For instance in relation to the task of "keeping state sovereignty" already in his 2005 Presidential Address to Russian parliament he said: "it *seemed to many* that our young democracy was not a continuation of Russian statehood, but its final collapse. That it was just a prolonged agony of the Soviet system. *Those* who thought this way made a mistake". In 2007 in Munich Putin developed this idea regarding OSCE being transferred into "a vulgar instrument designed to promote the foreign policy interests of *one or a group of countries*" (Putin 2007). According to Russian president "it is obvious that such interference does not promote the development of democratic states at all. ... We expect that the OSCE be guided by its primary tasks and build relations with sovereign states based on respect, trust and transparency" (Ibid). Already in 2014 the similar line of argumentation condemned 2008-

2009 interventions in Kosovo:

“Our *western partners*, led by the United States of America, prefer not to be guided by international law in their practical policies, but by the rule of the gun. They have come to believe in their exclusivity and exceptionalism, that they can decide the destinies of the world, that only they can ever be right. They act as they please: here and there, they use force against sovereign states, building coalitions based on the principle “If you are not with us, you are against us.” To make this aggression look legitimate, they force the necessary resolutions from international organisations, and if for some reason this does not work, they simply ignore the UN Security Council and the UN overall” (Putin 2014).

Eventually by 2018 this logic grows into full scale opposition of Russia to the West with Putin noting that “*those* who in the past 15 years have tried to accelerate an arms race and seek unilateral advantage against Russia... everything *you* have tried to prevent through such a policy has already happened. *No one* has managed to restrain Russia” (Poslanie 2018). The passage above demonstrated that symbolic representations of “**Moral Debt of the Ungrateful West**” and “**Elastic Spring**” are interconnected. Pointing out to this interconnectedness is valuable. Moreover we can find C.Weber’s link between sovereignty and intervention also inside “**Keep Our House in Order**” because it includes rhetoric of sovereign Russia opposing outside intervention through colour revolutions or foreign agents (see Poslanie... 2012). A useful way to emphasise tendencies for symbolic representations of sovereignty under each president is to build separate graphs for B.Yeltsin, D.Medvedev and V.Putin as we did below:



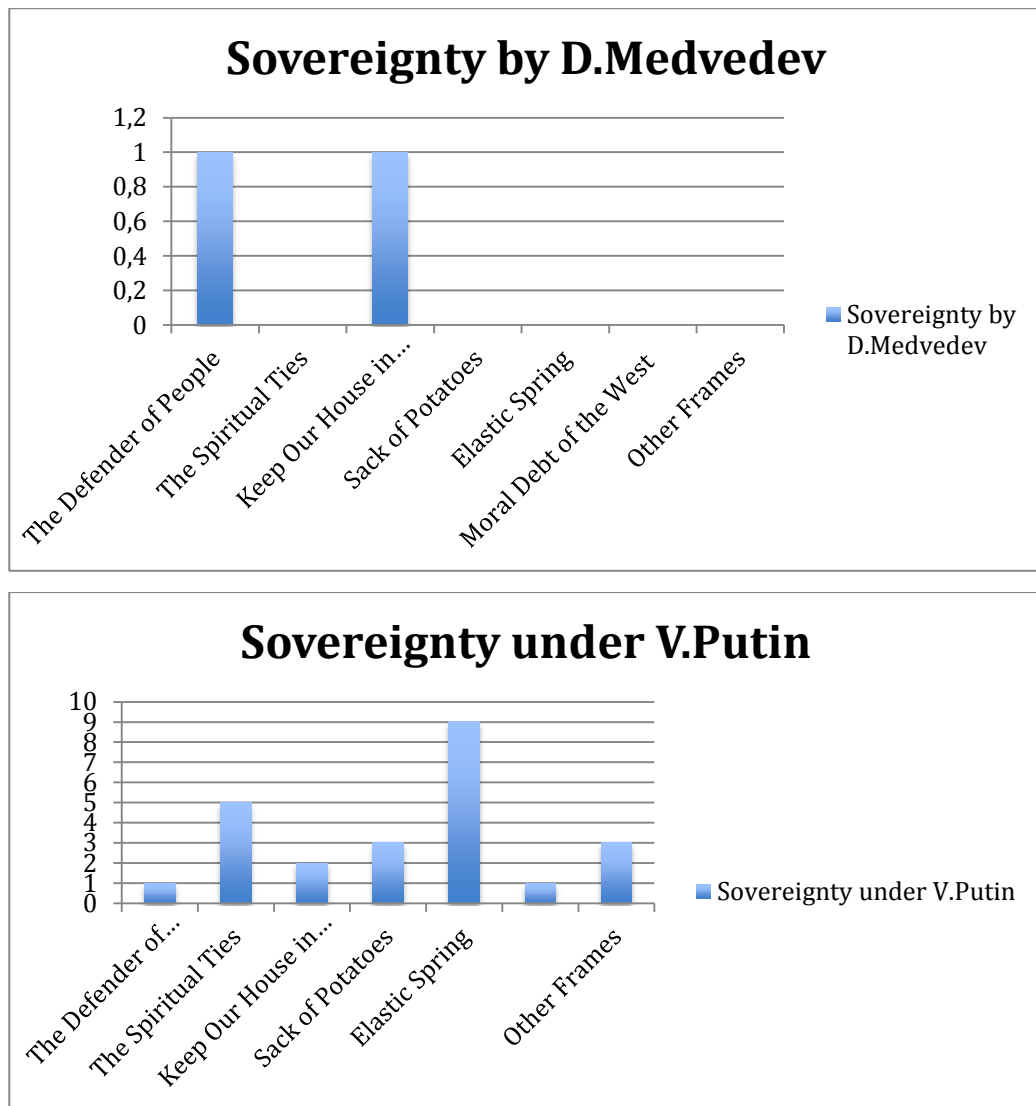


Fig. 2 1994 – 2018 symbolic representations of “sovereignty” from Addresses to Russian parliament by B.Yeltsin, D.Medvedev and V.Putin attributed to frames of symbolic representation

Fig. 2 above shows that sovereignty was used much more often by B.Yeltsin than two other presidents (also partly because Yeltsin’s Addresses to the parliament were almost twice longer). Regardless of that fact we can evidently see that for the first president of Russia sovereignty was more of a domestic concern – a problem of not letting his “house to fall apart” (including as a result of interventions from separatists). For V.Putin (after settling separatism in Chechnya) sovereignty has clearly become the way to talk about spiritual unity and consolidation with Russian people, defending rights of Russian-speaking diaspora abroad. Graph 2 shows V.Putin as a more a foreign policy president. His construction of sovereignty was heavily loaded with symbolic representations of resistance to interventions of his “partners from the West”.

## **Symbolic Representations of Moral Duty and Blame in Annual Address of Russian Presidents to Federal Assembly (1994 – 2018)**

In the first part of the article we have determined several key symbolic representation of sovereignty in official discourse of Russian presidents and its relations to interventionism. We now can pass towards exploring our earlier suggestion that notions of “moral duty” and “blame” can point out towards sovereignty performatively constructed as state simulacrum.

By “moral duty” (later just – “duty”) we will understand a sense of moral or legal obligation and a responsibility. “The blame” is the feel that (someone or something) is responsible for a fault or wrong<sup>iii</sup>. Based on the coding of the “Crimean speech” we have determined 6 frames of symbolic representation of sovereignty which (to a different degree) corresponded to symbolic representation of sovereignty contained in 23 Addresses of Russian presidents. Now for us to claim that there is a link between symbolic representations of sovereignty and justifications of interventions in a form of “blame” and “moral duty”, we should be able to find “duty” and “blame” within the same symbolic frames as we discovered for sovereignty. Therefore we have to code notions of “duty” and “blame” within the same 23 Addresses of Russian presidents. If we find out that they eventually also relate to earlier detected 6 symbolic frames we then (without claiming any effects of causality) can generally relate symbolic representation of “sovereignty”, to “duty” and “blame”.

The research of moral, “duty” (debt) and “blame” (guilt) in social theory has a long and reach tradition. As shown by Kenneth Dyson these categories are often interconnected. Even etymologically guilt (in old English – *gylt*) meant “a crime, sin, fault, fine, debt”, and derived from *gielðan* “to pay for debt”. Moreover in Dutch and German, the word *Schuld* means both debt and guilt. A similar linguistic association is found in the Hebrew word *Chayav*. All the terms illustrate the deep-seated cultural anxiety attached to debt and the powerful feelings of shame they can provoke (Dyson, 2015). In a similar way in Russian language blame (*vina*) etymologically derives from ancient Slavic word *veina* which means something “that deserves to be punished” and is also close to latin *vindex* – “an avenger”, or someone who “appoints a fine”, which also related guilt to debt (close to irish *dligim* – “I deserve, I claim”) (Fasmer).

However before we proceed to the empirical research, like we did with sovereignty, we need to provide theoretical grounding of this question in existing literature. Key theoretical issue here is: what is the nature of relations between “duty” and “blame”? Key empirical questions could be: at what point in time and why did “duty” and “blame” become relevant in modern Russian discourse within the presidential Addresses to the parliament? Which of three presidents and how were talking about moral “duty” and “blame”; what are the elements of such discourse,

how does this impact Russian foreign policy orientation today?

In relation to the first we can summarize the current state of knowledge and note that the research of relations between “duty” and “blame” has largely drawn from fields of international relations theory, political philosophy, psychology, and cultural anthropology. From the *International relations* literature we know that emotional factors (nostalgia, traumas, “competitive victimhood” etc.) often play significant role as a driving force of political life (see Branscombe & Doosje 2004). The latter is attributed to what is called *a cultural turn* in foreign policy studies. For instance, scholars often raise questions about the role of non-material factors in foreign affairs analysis. The notions of French colonial moral duty and responsibility towards countries of Africa and Central America (Payton 2017, 70), or German guilt and shame after the WWII (Dresler-Hawke and Liu 2006, 133-134) have been studied as important factors that often cloak political behaviour “in the garb of international law and political morality” (see Goldsmith & Posner). However, when applied to Russia, many scholars somehow still try to explain Russia’s recent domestic and foreign politics forgetting that Russian society might be driven by the same powerful and largely irrational factors of blame / moral duty like once the French or Germans nations were. The latter undermines the factor of identity in a form of peoples’ self-constructed perceptions that often play key role in Russia’s domestic and foreign affairs. Without disregarding the role of material factors such as strategic balances of power scholars systematically investigates the role of *fear* and securitization in making of foreign policy in France, Russia and Sweden (see Taras 2016, 43). As we know from P.Katzenstein, indeed, one can hardly underestimate the role of fear, when fear is stronger than hope (Anti-Americanisms in World Politics, p. 34). What about the role of guilt and moral debt? Evidently without claiming that “duty” and “blame” can be a master explanation of specificity of the construction of Russian sovereignty and its recent anti Western turn I mean to distinguish several different frames of interconnectedness between sovereignty, interventions, “moral duty” and “blame”.

In *political philosophy* Friedrich Nietzsche related blame, guilt and punishment to the contractual relationship between *creditor and owner*. He believed this relationship goes back to the times when human commerce was governed by a custom which said that a creditor was entitled to punish a debtor who had not repaid him (usually by damaging or extracting body parts of the latter). In 1915 Nietzsche's approach was developed by Max Sheler who related collective feelings of jealousy and revenge to the phenomenon of *ressentiment*. Sheler hints us that *ressentiment* is a type of an overcompensation for the lack of a social acknowledgment which would satisfy the national self-esteem. Further research on guilt and blame was deepened by Jean-Paul Sartre who in his play *The Flies* used metaphors from ancient Greek tragedy to raise his voice against the totalitarian Nazi regime in occupied Paris. In his eminent novel *The Fall*

Albert Camus metaphorically depicted European guilt for the holocaust during the WWII. German collective guilt soon became a renowned theme in political philosophy due to Hanna Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem* and Theodor Adorno's *Guilt and Defence*. What is vital for this research is that all the scholars above – Nietzsche, Scheler, Sartre, Camus, Arendt, Adorno – in their texts on collective blame and guilt condemned driven by fear authoritarian personality, reduced to just one of the herd. Here the authoritarian state builds up its sovereignty making intervention into self-sovereignty and autonomy of an individual, and it is the collective guilt and self blame that makes a justification for such intervention.

At least since Sigmund Freud *psychological approach* to guilt and blame is rooted in the investigation of collective subconscious. Similar to Nietzsche Freud was concerned with tension between civilization and the individual. However, he tried to understand how patients manage their guilt in relation to notions of individual freedom vs conformity, collective neurosis and “father's figure”. Freud explored redirection of aggressive instincts against a rival nation where guilt becomes the price we pay in order to live together harmoniously inside our own political communities. For our interpretation of sovereignty as a discursive and performative practice it is interesting to remember how Jacques Lacan introduced a *symbolic* dimension of guilt in a form of symbolic Other. According to him guilt is a ‘fault’ constructed in the very moment of the construction of human subjectivity because signification of the guilt can never be fixed and final. For Lacan signified guilt would always slide underneath its signifier and can only obtain meaning through the production of more signifiers. In this article following C. Weber we assume that sovereignty can be blamed and simulated *on behalf of* very different historical justifications. Just to briefly mention several of such blames (using the wording in which they are framed in Russian Media today): Russian 12-14 century salvation of Western Europe from the hordes of Genghis Khan and the Tartars Yoke; Russia's 20<sup>th</sup> century self-sacrifice by testing Europe born Marxism on its own people; debt for liberation of Europe by the USSR from the fascism after WWII; moral debt of former USSR republics for financial aid from Moscow provided prior to *Perestroika*; guilt for the lack of the European support for reunification of Russia with a Crimean peninsula (in exchange for Russia's former 1990 support of the reunification of Germany); guilt for unwillingness of NATO countries (to the contrast with Russia) to ratify 1999 Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe; putting blame on NATO for unleashing nuclear arms race; moral guilt for lack of appreciation by the Western Europe Russia's efforts on war with global terrorism (against ISIS in Syria), finally recent blame of the West for exclusion of Russian athletes from 2018 Olympic Games in South Korea. Here I by no means claim that Russia in 12-14 century was the same Russia or had similar structural relation with Europe then it does today. I rather point to a situation when all these narratives become symbolic resources for contraction



of national sovereignty in Russian today. Using Lacanian expression, we can say that all the mentioned above blames of Europe in fact may be just “sliding underneath its signifier”. Whereas Russian sovereignty still remains a “floating signifier” whose meaning is fixed only temporarily (for example, via official political discourse of Russian presidents), but these meaning will be continuously contested, reshaped and rearticulated by power struggles (see Laclau and Mouffe 2001).

*Cultural anthropology* investigates interdependence between blame and moral duty through mechanisms of reciprocity of gifts. Claude Levi-Strauss noted that goods are not merely exchanged for some economic profit but they are also vehicles of influence, power, sympathy and status. Therefore in his opinion the exchange can be interpreted as a sort of a game that consists of a number of complex *conscious or unconscious manoeuvres*, in order to gain security and to fortify one’s self against risks incurred through alliances and rivalry. Such game includes process of self-recognition and self-identification. According to Dutch scholar Aafke Komter gift exchange can be motivated by so called “authority ranking” - a desire to *emphasize one’s own status* or power position, which promotes exhibiting prestige items or symbols of rank and status. As we can see what unites all these three approaches is that they all closely link moral duty and blame with notions of conscious or unconscious processes of individual and collective *identification*. In case of my research it is important because I want to understand whether appeals to “duty” and “blame” can become *conscious or unconscious* links between performative construction of sovereignty in Russian official discourse and emotional resonance in finds among the Russian voters, as seen from results of March 18, 2018 presidential elections. To do that I have coded employment of word “duty” in 1994 – 2018 address of Russian presidents, including “financial duty/debt” when used in a sense of moral responsibility and obligation.

**Tab. 4. Employment of “duty” in 1994 – 2018 Addresses of Russian presidents to parliament (86 times in total)**

	<b>№</b>	Representation of “ <b>moral duty</b> ” (D) inside and outside Russia
1994 (BE)	5	<b>Inside:</b> Our D. is to use the chance for renewal and stability in Russia (1); the need to pay of domestic financial debt (2-3); <b>Outside:</b> need for paying off external debt as financial burden and economic constraint (4 -5);
1995 (BE)	8	<b>Inside:</b> moral D. (duty) of defence of the Fatherland (1) moral D. to seniors (2) and veterans of WWII (3); State moral D. for lack of effective judicial protection (4) and D. to help reforms in regions (5); <i>Moral debt</i> is to fight against the <i>guilty</i> Media (corrupt journalists) writing falsification against the authorities (6); Civic and professional D. of journalists to contribute to the spiritual revival of Russia (7) <b>Outside:</b> third world countries financial D. to Russia (8)



1996 (BE)	3	<b>Inside:</b> moral D. to strengthen the guarantees of social and economic rights of citizens (1-2) <b>Outside:</b> need to pay of external debt (3)
1997 (BE)	6	<b>Inside:</b> D. to bring order into power relations (1); D. to bring order to budget deficit and pay state debts (2-5); official ( <i>slugebnii</i> ) D. to fight corruption (6)
1998 (BE)	14	<b>Inside:</b> D. to cover budget deficit (1), return D. to pensioners (2), Army (3); D. of the military industry to federal budget (4); D. of state to stop irresponsible “economics of debt” (5-12) <b>Outside:</b> more effective management of external D. is needed (13-14)
1999 (BE)	15	<b>Inside:</b> D. to pensioners (1); internal D. (2-5) and in relation to “the financial turmoil of August 1998”; D. to give flats to military (6); D. to save Russia’s cultural heritage (7); <b>Outside:</b> external D. as a threat of S. loss (7-14); our common duty is to preserve positive experience that has been accumulated between Russia and US in recent years (15).
2000(V P)	10	<b>Inside:</b> the weakness of the state and D. to fight the (Media) oligarchs (1); ensuring equality of economic competition (2); Constitutional D. (duty) to ensure the strength of the executive power vertical (3); Everyone who is at the service ( <i>na sludge</i> ) to the state regardless of position is indebted to people and their country (4-6) <b>Outside:</b> external D. as a threat of S. loss (7-10)
2001 (VP)	3	<b>Outside:</b> “in future we should borrow money responsibly (1-2) so as not to shift the debt burden upon our children and grandchildren (3)
2002 (VP)	1	<b>Outside:</b> we are ahead of the schedule to pay external debt (1)
2003 (VP)	4	<b>Inside:</b> gratitude to those who at the price of their lives fulfilled D., did not allow “to tear our country apart” (1); protection of compatriots abroad, including those who served in our army (2) <b>Outside:</b> we are ahead of the schedule to pay external debt (3); we managed to reduce our external D. by a quarter (4)
2004 (VP)	0	
2005 (VP)	0	
2006 (VP)	0	
2007 (VP)	1	<b>Inside:</b> redistribution of “Yukos” assets to help common people in poor conditions
2008 (DM)	1	<b>Inside:</b> “it’s my D. to warn: ...we will not allow incitement of social and ethnic strife, we will not allow to deceive people and involve them in unlawful actions”
2009 (DM)	1	<b>Inside:</b> the volume of Russia’s overdue debts have stabilized

2010 (DM)	2	<b>Inside:</b> the moral D. of the society is intolerance towards cruel treatment of children (1) <b>Outside:</b> the size of sovereign debt is minimal (2)
2011 (DM)	2	<b>Inside:</b> our economy is growing; state debt has been minimized (1). We must maintain a low level of budget deficit and public debt (2)
2012 (VP)	2	<b>Outside:</b> overall state D. and external Russian debt... decreased almost tenfold (1-2)
2013 (VP)	1	<b>Inside:</b> our moral D. duty is to build up people's trust
2014 (VP)	2	<b>Inside:</b> we will support <i>moral</i> D. of the doctors (1) and <i>civic</i> duty of our charity NGO's (2)
2015 (VP)	2	<b>Inside:</b> "I ask you to pay tribute to the memory of the fallen soldiers who sacrificed their lives, fulfilling their moral D, ...those who died from the hands of terrorists (1); Many institutions unfortunately, have become a real "cesspool for bad debts". It is necessary to fix that (2)
2016 (VP)	0	
2018 (VP)	3	<b>Inside:</b> our moral D. is to fully support the older generation (1) "Russia was in huge debt, without credits from the IMF and the World Bank, the economy did not work, and many decided that soon it will not even be able to maintain its nuclear arsenal (2); In this regard, I consider my duty to state the following: we will consider any use of nuclear weapons against Russia or its allies... as a nuclear attack on our country. The answer will be immediate and with all the ensuing consequences." (3)

### Key representations of Moral Duty (86 times)

#### 1) "The Defender of Common People" Being Victimized - 15

- [2 times] Moral D. to strengthen the guarantees of social and economic rights of citizens (1995)
- D. to pensioners (1999)
- [4 times] Internal D. to citizens in relation to "the financial turmoil of August 1998" (1999)
- D. to build and give flats to military (1999)
- D. to save cultural heritage (1999)
- [3 times] "in future we should borrow money responsibly so as not to shift the debt burden upon our children and grandchildren" (2001)
- Redistribution of "Yukos" assets to help people in poor conditions (2007)
- "It's my D. to warn: ...we will not allow incitement of social and ethnic strife, we will not allow to deceive people and involve them in unlawful actions" (2008)
- Our moral D. is to fully support the older generation (2018)

#### 2) "The Spiritual Ties" of Russia - 12

- [3 times] moral D. (duty) of defence of the Fatherland moral D. to seniors and veterans of WWII (1995)

- Civil and professional D. of journalists to contribute to the spiritual and moral revival of Russia (1995)
- [3 times] Everyone who is at the service (*na sluzbe*) to the state regardless of position is indebted to people and their country (2000)
- Gratitude to those who at the price of their lives fulfilled D., did not allow “to tear our country apart” (2003)
- Our moral D. duty is to build up people's trust (2013)
- [2 times] we will support moral D. of the doctors and civic duty of our charity NGO's (2014)
- I ask you to pay tribute to the memory of the fallen soldiers who sacrificed their lives, fulfilling their D, ...those who died from the hands of terrorists (2015)

### **3) The Need to “Keep Our House in Order” - 33**

- Our D. is to use the chance for renewal and stability in Russia (1994)
- [2 times] Need to pay of domestic financial debt (1994)
- [2 times] State moral D. to citizens for lack of effective judicial protection and D. help reforms in the regions (1995)
- D. to fight against the guilty Media (corrupt journalists) writing falsification against the authorities (1995)
- D. to bring order to power relations (1997)
- [4 times] D. to bring order to budget deficit and pay state debts (1997)
- Official (*slugebnii*) D. to fight corruption (1997)
- [3 times] D. to cover budget deficit (1998)
- Return (financial) D. to pensioners (1998)
- Return (financial) D. to Russian Army (1998)
- D. of the military industry to federal budget (1998)
- [7 times] D. of state to destroy “economics of debt” and financial irresponsibility (1998)
- The weakness of the state and D. to fight the (Media) oligarchs (2000)
- D. to ensure equality of economic competition (2000)
- Constitutional D. (duty) to ensure the strength of the executive power vertical (2000)
- The volume of Russia's overdue debts have stabilized (2009)
- The moral D. of the society is the intolerance towards cruel treatment of children (2010)
- Our economy is growing and our state debt has been minimized (2011)
- We must maintain a low level of budget deficit and public debt (2011)
- Many institutions unfortunately, have become a real “cesspool for bad debts”. It is necessary to fix that (2015)

### **4) Others - 0**

### **5) The “Sack of Potatoes” as Russian Diaspora Abroad - 1**

- Protection of compatriots abroad, including those who served in the Soviet army (2003)

### **6) The “Elastic Spring” of Russian Resistance - 23**

- Need for paying off external debt as financial burden and economic constraint (1994)
- Urgent need to pay of external debt (1996);
- [7 times] external D. as a threat of S. loss (1999)
- “We are ahead of the schedule to pay external debt” (2004)
- We managed to reduce External D. which by a quarter (2004)
- [2 times] More effective management of external D. is needed (1998)
- [4 times] External D. as a threat of S. loss (2000)
- We are ahead of the schedule to pay external debt (2002)

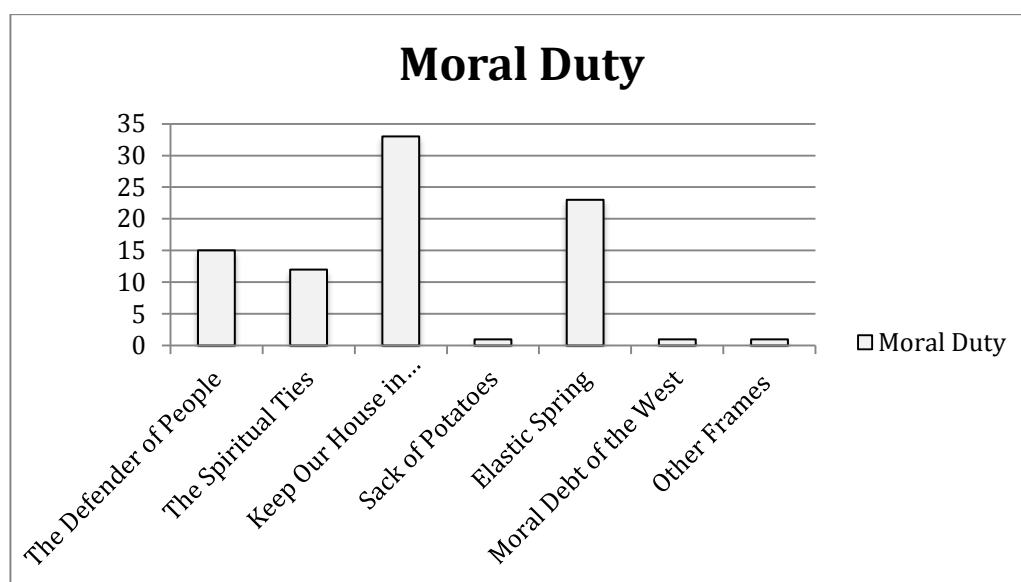
- The size of our “sovereign debt” is minimal (2010)
- Overall state D. and external Russian D. in Russia decreased almost tenfold (2012)
- Russia was in huge D., without credits from the IMF and the World Bank, the economy did not work, and many decided that soon it will not even be able to maintain its nuclear arsenal (2018)
- I consider my D. (duty) to state: we will consider any use of nuclear weapons against Russia or its allies... as a nuclear attack on our country. The answer will be immediate and with all the consequences. (2018)

## 7) Moral Debt of the Ungrateful West - 1

- Our common duty is to preserve all the positive experience that has been accumulated between Russia and US in recent years, regardless of USA mistakes in Kosovo (1999)

## 8) Others - 1

- Third world countries financial D. to Russia (1995)



**Fig. 3. “Moral duty” in 1994 – 2018 Addresses of Russian presidents to parliament attributed to frames of symbolic representation**

As we can see from our empirical analysis reflected on Graph 3, 33 out of 86 of symbolic representations of Moral Duty ended up inside the frame “**Keep Our House in Order**” with principal accent on maintenance of stability, taming of oligarchs and bringing order (*poryadok*) to power relations and state budget. “**The Elastic Spring**” scored 23 mentioning most of which include getting ride of external debt which is perceived as both financial and moral obstacle for Russian sovereignty. Already in 1999 B.Yeltsin in respect to the idea of a full or partial write-off of the debts of the former USSR accentuated that the speculation about someone's “outstretched hand” (*protyanutaya ruka*) is unacceptable (see Table 4). Vladimir Putin has clearly summarized this idea in 2018: “For a certain time, the question was not whether we would be able to develop a strategic weapon system – some wondered if our country would even be able to safely store and maintain the nuclear weapons that we inherited after the collapse of the USSR. Russia had

*outstanding debts*, its economy could not function without loans from the IMF and the World Bank; the social sphere was impossible to sustain” (Poslanie... 2018).

15 times “duty” was mentioned under the frame of the **“The Defender of Common People”** becoming particularly sounding after “the financial turmoil of August 1998” and idea of the redistribution of “Yukos” assets: “...Many of our fellow citizens, who have found themselves in very difficult circumstances, are unable to resolve this issue without support from the state. ... Of course, the question arises, where will the money come from? ... I have a concrete proposal, namely, to allocate considerable additional revenue to these tasks, including revenue obtained through improved tax collection, from the privatisation of state assets and also, perhaps, from the sale of assets belonging to Yukos in payment of its debts to the state” (Poslanie... 2007). **“The Spiritual Ties of Russia”** scored 12, particularly high on ties with seniors and veterans of WWII (whose money savings were greatly devalued as a result of reforms in early 1990’s). Considerable accent was also made on spiritual ties with army soldiers killed in Chechnya, but “did not allow to tear our country apart” (2003). Rather interesting are variations of “duty” that we find in the text – “moral duty”, “civic duty” and even “official duty” (*slugednii dolg*). “Moral duty” ties president and people of Russia together as they stand “at the forefront of the fight against terrorism” and “for the future of the entire civilisation”. As Putin noted: “...I would like to begin my Address with words of gratitude to the Russian servicemen who are fighting international terrorism. Today here in the St. George’s Hall, a historic hall of Russian military glory, we have combat pilots and representatives of the Armed Forces who are taking part in the anti-terrorist operation in Syria. ... My deepest respect to you and the parents of our heroes. I would like us all to honour the memory of the soldiers who gave their lives while doing their duty, and the memory of all Russian citizens who fell at the hands of terrorists. (Moment of silence)” (Poslanie... 2015). Symbolic in this performative discourse of sovereignty is everything: space - “a historic hall of Russian military glory”, time - “moment of silence” and myth of “our heroes”. Certainly fight for the future of the entire civilisation draws bridge to another frame of **“Moral Debt of the Ungrateful West”**, which should be thankful for Russia’s fight against terrorism. Last but not least **“The Sack of Potatoes”** frame targets towards protection of compatriots abroad, particularly those who served “in our army” (Poslanie... 2003).

We now proceeded to coding of “blame” presented in Table 5.

**Tab. 5. Employment of “blame” in 1994 – 2018 Addresses of Russian presidents to parliament (25 times total)**

	<b>№</b>	Representation of “blame” / “guilt” (B./G.) inside and outside Russia
1994 (BE)	0	
1995 (BE)	5	<b>Inside:</b> “It is difficult to determine who is to be blamed for all that we didn’t manage to complete...(1)”; And it is not only the peasants guilt that agriculture is economically unstable (2); Residents of the depressed areas do not bear blame for the decline of their territory (3); The inability of the authorities to bring to justice those responsible for ethnic riots (4); Accusing others of violating the rule of law, the Media often itself goes beyond the legal framework (5)
1996 (BE)	1	<b>Inside:</b> the work of The Federal Assembly is still far from being perfect. Its reckless to blame it only on the deputies, because we are just learning the culture of parliamentary system
1997 (BE)	5	<b>Inside:</b> the G. of the state that it assumes obligations that is not in a position to fulfil (1); The government is obliged to hold accountable those responsible for execution of its laws (2); The G. of industry directors who oppose its employees and a state (3); G. of federal power for not paying attention to municipal level (4); G. of federal power for the destruction of economic federalism in Russia (5)
1998 (BE)	1	<b>Inside:</b> impossibility of punishing state officials blamed for causing damage as a result of them issuing an illegal act
1999 (BE)	3	<b>Inside:</b> recognition of the state's guilt for the collapse of the Russian rouble and 1998 crisis (1); It is not the market economy that has to be blamed for the difficulties experienced by Russia, but the ugly transitional system that we have developed, stuck halfway between the planned economy and the market economy (2); We should not give grounds to be accused of “bargaining” between the authorities “behind the back of the people” (3)
2000(V P)	1	<b>Inside:</b> state officials guilty of limiting economic freedom must be punished
2001 (VP)	2	<b>Inside:</b> “I understand why people are afraid of reforms, they are afraid that after the reforms we will be searching again for those <i>guilty</i> ...” (1); “I am convinced that the fault of the current state of affairs is... that the system protects its rights to receive... bribes and compensation. This way of power practice is a threat to society, and also to the state” (2)
2002 (VP)	0	
2003 (VP)	0	
2004 (VP)	0	
2005 (VP)	0	

2006 (VP)	0	
2007 (VP)	0	
2008 (DM)	2	<b>Inside:</b> we do not blame only the global crisis outside Russia for what happened during the economic recession inside the country (1); officials guilty of charging payments on grounds that are not directly provided in the law should be subject to administrative penalties (2)
2009 (DM)	0	
2010 (DM)	0	
2011 (DM)	0	
2012 (VP)	1	<b>Inside:</b> it is necessary to once and forever reject the accusatory bias in law enforcement and judicial practice in Russia
2013 (VP)	0	
2014 (VP)	1	<b>Inside:</b> “the accusatory bias in law enforcement still exists... and it creates problems for thousands of law-obedient and initiative citizens”
2015 (VP)	1	<b>Inside:</b> today the prosecutor's office has such tools as the cancellation of the decision to initiate criminal proceedings or even not to support the prosecution in court
2016 (VP)	1	<b>Inside:</b> it is necessary to fight corruption, but before a court decision, no one has the right to pass a verdict on the guilt or innocence of a person
2018 (VP)	1	<b>Inside:</b> we have to blame ourselves, that the US has ceased to be reckoned with us and our military might

### Key representations of Guilt (25 times mentioned)

#### 1) “The Defender of Common People” Being Victimized - 9

- Residents of the depressed areas do not bear guilt for the decline of their territories (1995)
- It is not only the peasants guilt that Russian agriculture is economically unstable (1995)
- The G. of the state that it assumes obligations for people that it is not in a position to fulfil (1997)
- Recognition of the state's guilt for the collapse of the Russian rouble after 1998 crisis (1999)
- “We should not give grounds to be accused of “bargaining” between the state authorities “behind the back of the people” (1999)
- “I understand why people are afraid of reforms, they are afraid that after the reforms we will be searching again for those *guilty*...” (2001)
- It is necessary to once and forever reject the accusatory bias in law enforcement and judicial practice of Russia (2012)
- “The accusatory bias in law enforcement still exists... and it creates problems for thousands of law-obedient and initiative citizens” (2014)



- Today the prosecutor's office has such tools as the cancellation of the decision to initiate criminal proceedings or even not to support the prosecution in court (2015)

## 2) “The Spiritual Ties” of Russia - 1

- The guilt of industry directors who oppose its employees and a state at the same time (1997)

## 3) The Need to “Keep Our House in Order” - 13

- “It is difficult to determine who is guilty for all that we didn’t manage to complete...” (1995)
- The inability of the authorities to bring to justice those responsible for ethnic riots (1995)
- Guilt of federal power for not paying attention to municipal level (1995)
- Accusing others of violating the rule of law, the Media often itself goes beyond the legal framework (1995)
- Guilt of federal power for the destruction of economic federalism (1997)
- The government is obliged to hold accountable those state executives responsible for execution of laws (1997)
- Impossibility of punishing state officials guilty for causing damage as a result of passing illegal act (1998)
- It is not the market economy that has to be blamed for the difficulties experienced by Russia, but the ugly transitional system that we have developed, having got stuck halfway between the planned economy and the market economy (1999)
- Officials guilty of limiting economic freedom must be punished (2000)
- “I am convinced that the *fault* of the current state of affairs is... that the system protects its rights to receive... bribes and compensation. This way of power practice is a threat to society, and also to the state” (2001)
- We do not blame only the global crisis outside Russia for what happened during the economic recession inside the country (2008)
- “Officials guilty of... charging payments on grounds that are not directly provided in the law should be subject to administrative penalties” (2008);
- “It is necessary to fight corruption, but before a court decision, no one has the right to pass a verdict on the guilt or innocence of a person” (2016)

## 4) Others - 1

- The work of The Federal Assembly is still far from being perfect. Its reckless to blame it only on the deputies, because we are just learning the culture of parliamentary system (1996)

## 5) “The Sack of Potatoes” as Russian Diaspora Abroad - 0

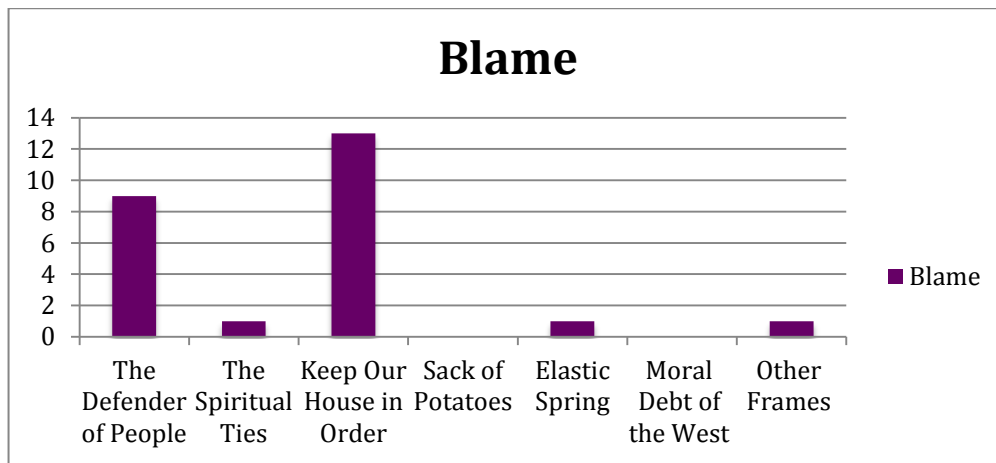
## 6) “The Elastic Spring” of Russian Resistance – 1

- We have to blame ourselves, that the US has ceased to be reckoned with us and our military might (2018)

## 7) Moral Debt of the Ungrateful West - 0

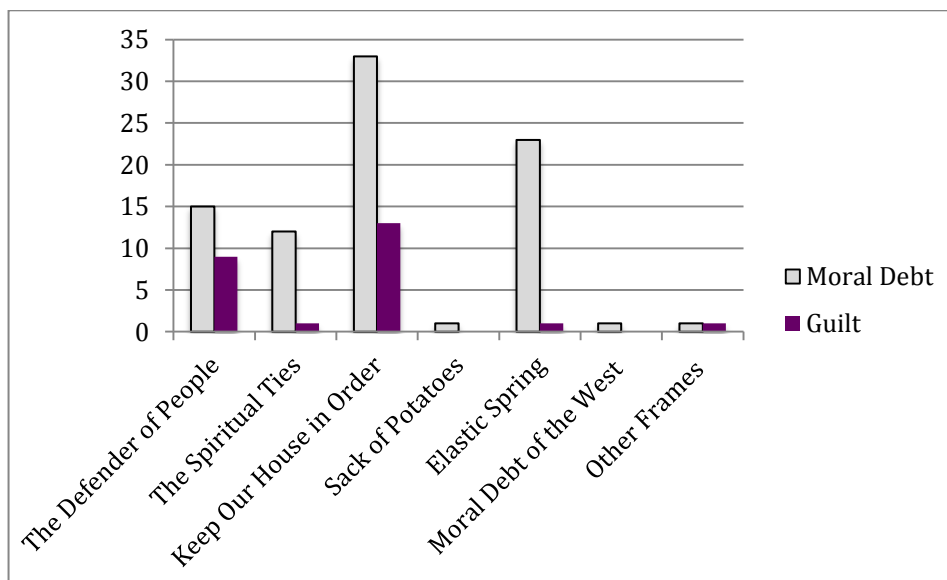
## 8) Others – 0





**Fig. 5. “Blame” in 1994 – 2018 Addresses of Russian presidents to parliament attributed to frames of symbolic representation**

As we can see from Graph 5 most of the “blame” (13 out of 25) falls under the frame **“Keep Our House in Order”**. It scores particularly high under president B.Yeltsin who often blamed federal power for the destruction of economic federalism in Russia, inability to fight separatism and nationalism. Within the frame **“The Defender of Common People”** (9) Yeltsin produced a lot of rhetoric blaming the state for the collapse of the Russian rouble in 1998 and responsibility to protect common people (1999). V.Putin reframed that by repeatedly signalling to his own officials the need to protect law-obedient and initiative citizens from accusatory bias of Russian system of persecution (see Table 5).

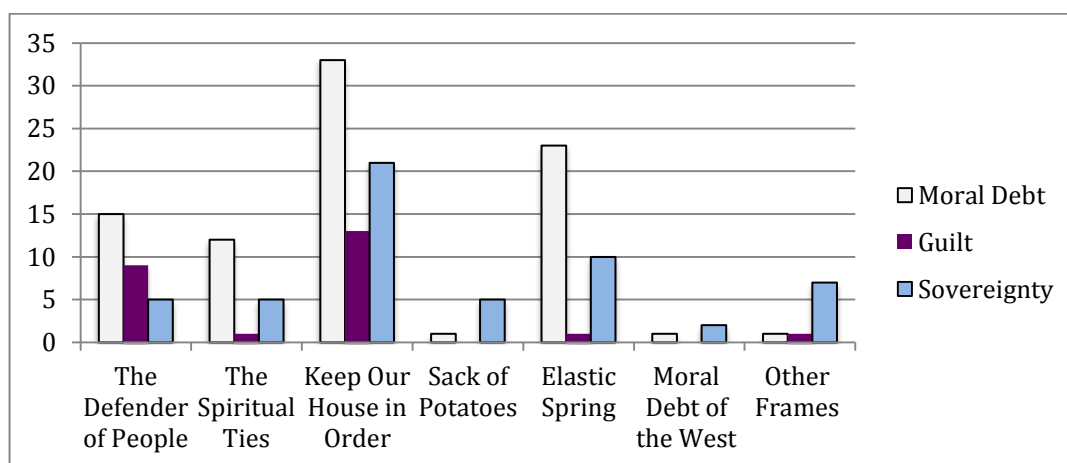


**Fig. 6. “Moral duty” and “Blame” in 1994 – 2018 Addresses of Russian presidents to parliament attributed to frames of symbolic representation**

Graph 6 also shows significant correlations between symbolic frames **“Keep Our House in Order”** and **“The Defender of Common People”**, both in “moral duty” and “blame” dimensions. Surprisingly, we did not find many mentioning of “blame” as opposition to the West or within the “spiritual ties” dimensions and we are going to discuss this in the conclusion.

## Discussion and Conclusion

In this article we explored symbolic representations of “moral duty” and “blame” in official discourse on sovereignty by Russian Presidents in their 1994-2018 Annual Addresses to Federal Assembly. After empirical analysis we distinguished 6 frames of symbolic representations of sovereignty, most popular of which turned out to be four frames: **“Keep Our House in Order”** (21 mentioning); **“The Elastic Spring of Russian Resistance”** (10), as well as **“The Defender of Common People”** and **“The Spiritual Ties of Russia”** which both scored 5 out of total 55. On Graph 7 below we have finally combined distribution of employments of word “sovereignty”, “moral duty” and “blame”.



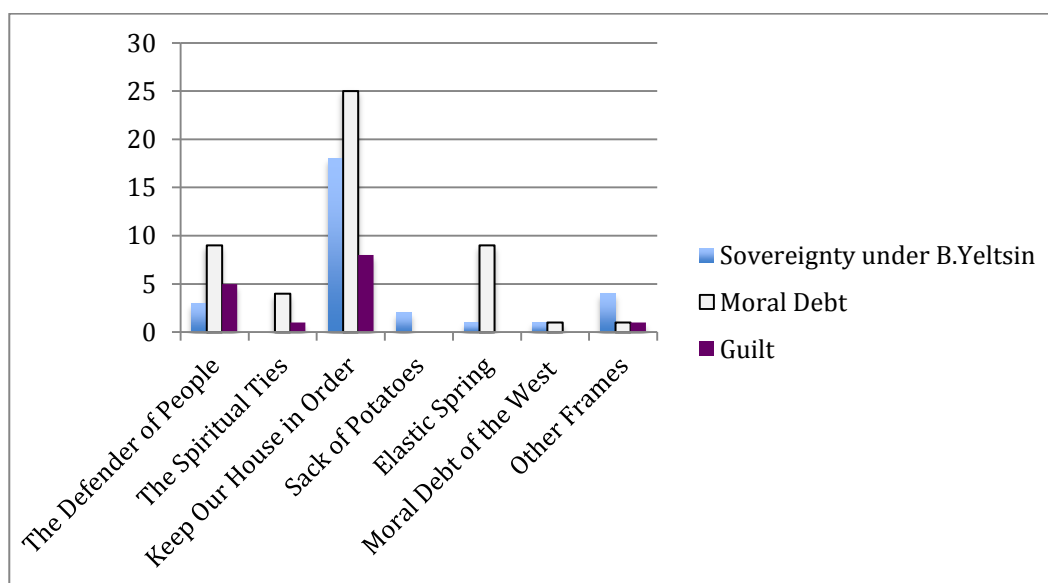
**Fig. 7. “Sovereignty” “moral duty” and “blame” in 1994 – 2018 Addresses of Russian presidents to parliament attributed to frames of symbolic representation**

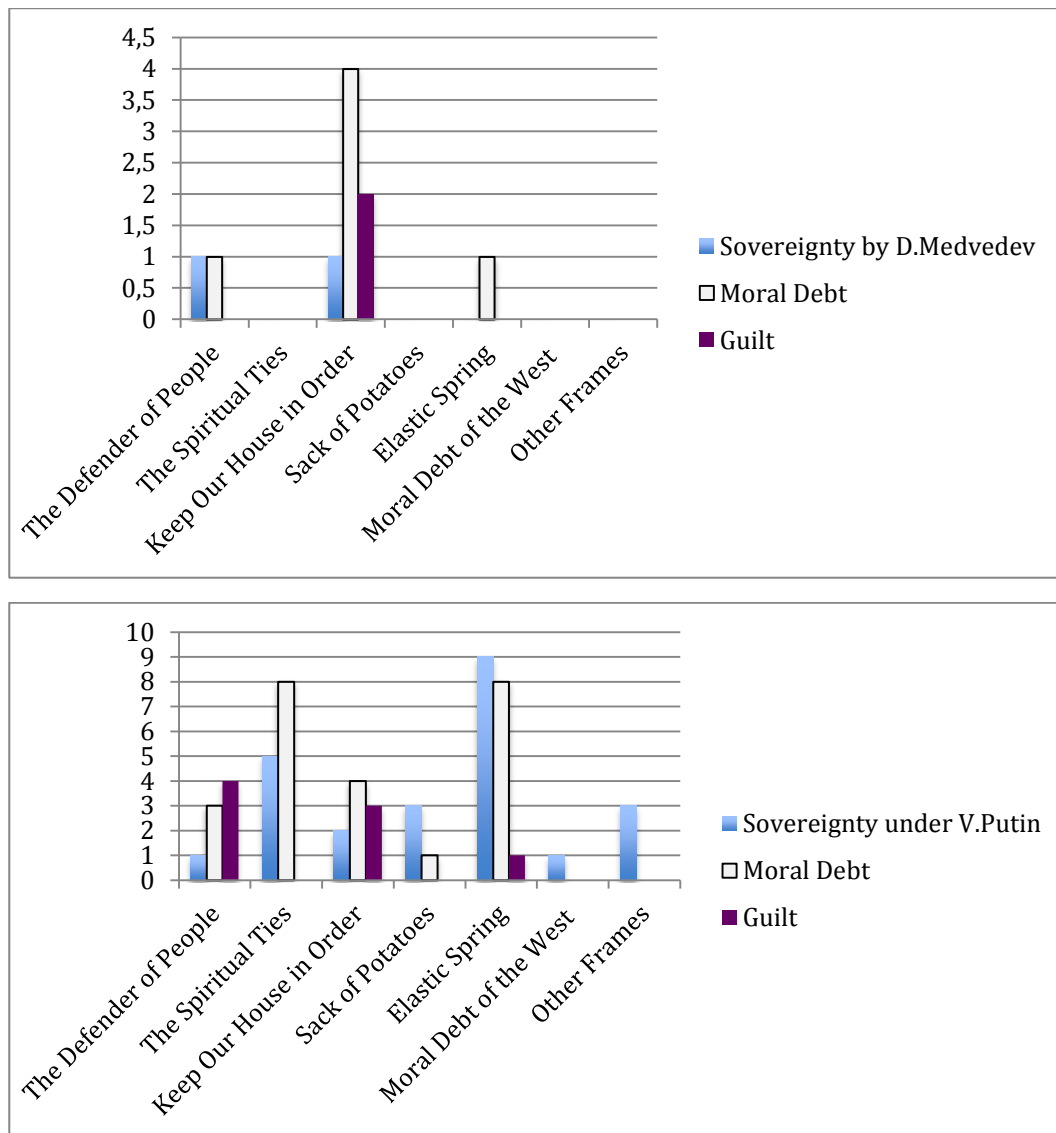
On Graph 7 we can observe that most significant correlation between “sovereignty” “moral duty” and “blame” fall under frame **“Keep Our House in Order”**. Yet, it remains unclear why, for example, we do not see much correlation between “sovereignty” and “moral duty” or “sovereignty” and “blame” within the **“The Elastic Spring”** frame given that V.Putin (since his 2007 speech at Munich) actively blamed USA for hyper use of military force: According him, “one state and, of course, first and foremost the United States, has overstepped its national borders in every way. This is visible in the economic, political, cultural and educational policies it imposes on other nations. Well, who likes this? Who is happy about this? (Putin 2007).

Russian president also imposed on USA a moral responsibility for stimulating arms race (including in the Middle East):

In international relations we increasingly see the desire to resolve a given question according to so-called issues of political expediency, based on the current political climate. And of course this is extremely dangerous. It results in the fact that *no one feels safe*. I want to emphasize this – *no one feels safe!* Because no one can feel that international law is like a stonewall that will protect them. Of course such a policy stimulates an arms race... inevitably encourages a number of countries to acquire weapons of mass destruction (Ibid)".

Praising Russia's role in reunification of Germany and how that was undermined by the West Putin also imposes moral duty upon Germans who "should not forget that the fall of the Berlin Wall was possible thanks to a historic choice – one that was also made by our people, the people of Russia" (Ibid). However why don't we find that many mentioning of "sovereignty" inside the "**The Elastic Spring**" frame in the texts of Annual addresses of Russian president to the parliament? To explore that puzzle we at least need to draft special graphs for different Russian presidents.





**Fig. 8. “Sovereignty”, “moral duty” and “blame” in 1994 – 2018 Addresses to Russian parliament by B.Yeltsin, V.Putin and D.Medvedev attributed to frames of symbolic representation**

Fig. 8 could demonstrate that B.Yeltsin’s main concern on building sovereignty discourse was inside the frame of “keeping domestic order in Russia” and defending its people from hardships of economic and political turmoil of 1990’s (also see Table 1). At the same time now we can see much clearer correlations between “sovereignty” and “moral duty” within building up “spiritual ties” and strengthening “spring” frames under V.Putin. Those two frames were evidently much weaker on B.Yeltsin’s diagram. Under B.Yeltsin “moral duty” was usually contextualized as an inseparable mixture of financial and moral obligations to impoverished Russian masses. Yeltsin’s appeal to “moral duty” is often focused inside the country. For example, we can see that at his 1995 call for civil and professional duty of Russia journalists who must contribute to the spiritual and moral revival of Russia. In that sense theme of “moral

duty and responsibility” was utilized by Yeltsin even before Putin put mostly “for domestic market”. When we look at Putin’s diagram we can see that he re-contextualized both “moral duty” and “sovereignty” into two different frames of symbolic representations.

We can suggest that when in 2000’s Putin (assisted by high oil prices) brought financial stability to masses of Russian voters, then a need to “order inside the house” transferred into the need to have “order outside the Russian house”, into Russia’s demand for global international order and security in a multipolar world (see Putin’s 2007 “Munich speech” above). The theme of weakness of Russian state, earlier regretted by B.Yeltsin, is turned by Putin into an idea of strengthening vertical of power inside state and building up spiritual ties with common Russians including by redistributing in their favor money of several former oligarchs (see the “Yukos” case in Table 4).

Concerning the “blame” issue we can see much more negative rhetoric under B.Yeltsin then V.Putin’s years. Primarily we find multiple examples of self-blaming the Russian state, which should not have hidden itself “behind the back of the people”, but hold responsibility for the collapse of the Russian rouble after the crisis in August of 1998 (see Table 5). At the same time in relation to “blame” we come across another interesting performative practice – practice of public remorse. “Self blame” is often accompanied with presidents publically talk repentance, publically “releasing sins of Russian state” in front of the people. People’s representative’s usually publically accept the remorse of their president which even strengthens their spiritual ties and gives *carte blanche* for further centralization of power against the political opponents inside and outside Russia: “I am convinced that the *fault* of the current state of affairs is... that the system protects its rights to receive... bribes and compensation. This way of power practice is a threat to society...”, - notes V.Putin (Poslanie... 2001). Similar performative practice of remorse and, eventually, “competitive victimization” of president and his people were delivered during the 2018 Winter Olympic Games in PyeongChang after the punishment of Russian athletes as a result of the 2017 doping scandal. An idea of symbolic self-sacrifice of skipping the Olympic Games turned into practice by one of the member of Russian Olympic team is just one of the episodes in this competition for being most “victimized”. It might be that these acts of mutual remorse, forgiveness and recognition allow Russian leaders to maintain control over how they symbolize its people and contribute to create simulacra of sovereignty. We can remember another observation made by C.Weber in this respect:

“If a state loses its control to symbolize its people in believable ways, then it risks losing its source of sovereign authority. It therefore risks losing the legitimacy attached to its claim to represent its source of sovereign authority. Only by maintaining control over the *depiction of its people can the state authoritatively claim to be the agent of its people*. Without the ability to make credible its claims to both political and symbolic

representation, the state risks forfeiting its presumed ability of representations *and ultimately its sovereignty*” (Weber, 1992: 216).

Yet, if “moral duty” and “blame” are among the tools that allow Russian state to *authoritatively claim to be the agent of its people*, then one might wonder why don’t we see V.Putin “blaming” the West in his domestic speeches (see on Graph 8) as much he does in his talks for the “foreign market”? We remember anti Western outshoots in “Munich speech” and “Crimea speech” of V.Putin. However within the 1994-2018 annual addresses to parliament it seems like the **“Elastic Spring”** was redirected towards Russia, saying that Russia actually has to blame itself, that the US ceased to be reckoned with Russian military might (see Poslanie... 2018). There could be several explanations of that, starting from a Russian tradition of self-blame, up to suggestion that V.Putin substitutes “blame the West” for “moral duty of Russia’s assertiveness”. The latter argument as well as Putin’s insistence on bringing the positive, unifying agenda for “home consumption” could explain Graph 8.

And what about D.Medvedev? His speeches to Russian parliament were relatively short and that is one of reasons why he scored the least on every symbolic frame. His other speeches also often look more like “falsifiers” or “outliers” in our picture. Such an “outlier” would be the case of joint News Conference following Russian-American Talks at the White House, June 24, 2010 – the year when Dmitry Medvedev and Barack Obama tried to “reload” Russian-American relations:

“...Today I have managed to have a lunch with President Barack Obama at a very interesting place which is typically American. Probably it’s not quite healthy, but it’s very tasty, and you can feel the spirit of America. (Joint News Conference..., 2010)

Medvedev’s *“feeling the spirit of America”* does not correlate with an idea of “spiritual ties” inside Russia. Neither it correlates with Putin’s stronger narrative of the ungratefulness of the West. We can consider Medvedev’s symbolic representation of Russian sovereignty in cooperation with the West as an alternative, perhaps a competing attempt to speak on behalf of the sovereign authority of a Russian state. Yet to the present moment this competitive claim either “died as an embryo”, or, so to say, “went to hell” together with “Ray’s Hell Burger” shut down. After, according to C.Weber, “competing claims to speak on behalf of the sovereign authority of a state often ‘write’ or invent the foundational authorities of states:

“If, for example, a state experiencing domestic turmoil can no longer ‘represent’ or write its ‘people’, then another sovereign state may claim to speak for the sovereign authority within this divided state. This is what President Wilson did in both the Mexican and

Bolshevik revolutions. Making distinctions between governments and peoples, Wilson claimed to speak for and act on behalf of the Mexican and Russian peoples and against their respective governments. Furthermore, Wilson maintained that in the case of Mexico these practices did not constitute intervention. In so doing, Wilson redrew the boundaries of sovereign authority of Mexico and the newly-forming Soviet Union (Weber 1992, 216)".

Could Russia go back to Medvedev's more Europe and US friendly model of symbolic representations of sovereignty? On one hand, we can say, yes. From Iver Neumann's recent book we know that there is no reason to believe that Russia's cyclical approach to Europe and the West has yet been broken (Neumann, 2017). On the other hand, V.Putin winning on March 1, 2018 almost 77% of Russian votes leaves very little illusions about which claim to speak on behalf of the sovereign authority in Russia finds more emotional resonance with Russian mainstream electoral base. What if Ted Hopf is right and new Russia understands itself not inferior, but already as equal to the West in many respects and superior in some (Hopf 2016, 242)? What if "flirting with China" (Neumann) will soon produce many more "Eurasianists" who will outnumber "Russian Europeans" (or the latter will not wait for the end of sanctions and migrate to the West)? By the end of the day, with Crimea and East Ukraine conflict remain unlikely to be solved in the recent future, and new Russia – UK scandals escalate, economic sanctions will remain and they will keep pushing Russia towards China, because China continues to be the main beneficiary of the anti-Russian sanctions regime since 2014 (see Rutland 2014). In any case, even if the discursive preconditions for a tight social alignment of Russia with (China? Iran? Turkey?) – according to I.Neumann – are not there yet, the discursive preconditions for a tight social realignment of Russia with USA, EU, and particularly UK are rapidly fading away.

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Author:

Sergei V. Akopov

National Research University Higher School of Economics (St.Petersburg, Russia).

Professor of Departement of Applied Political Science.

E-mail: sakopov@hse.ru

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<sup>i</sup> Here and further italics is mine.

<sup>ii</sup> Here and below numbers in brackets, for example (16\*) will mark numbers of one of the 20 initially detected codes provided in Tab. 1.

<sup>iii</sup> I have decided that “duty” and “blame” can be better English language translations of Russian words *moralnii dolg* and *vina* then, for example “moral debt” or “guilt”, because to make a “blame” is to claim someone’s responsibility for negative actions, regardless of the fact that this person or even state might not necessarily acknowledge or feel their guilt. Therefore to “make blame” against someone can be enough for justifying intervention of someone’s sovereignty. However this can be a subject of special linguistic discussion.