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The international image of the state as an instrument of soft power



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Abstract. The international image of the state as an instrument of soft power is revealed on the example of Russia as one of the Arctic states. The analysis of the main aspects of the international image of Russia, a set of causes and factors that influence the perception of Russia abroad have been analyzed. The specific of the international image making of Russia is discussed.

Keywords: *Russia, international image of the state, the Arctic, soft power, the image of Russia in the world*

Introduction

Constructing and advancing the international image of the country has become an important issue. In an era of globalization, many states are engaged in purposeful creation of their positive image, its development and promotion both at home and abroad through “soft power” mechanisms. States authorities realize that it is an important tool to protect national interests, internal consolidation, strengthening of national pride, attracting foreign investment and increased influence in the world. Countries are trying to include “soft power” in their foreign policy strategies and expand its impact. Russia has significant resources of the “soft power” in the international arena, but is still strongly behind its partners and the countries of the Arctic region. The use of the cultural potential of the country as a toolkit of its image strategy is minimized now. Skilled use of this resource will allow Russia to activate hidden features that can have a serious impact on its internal development, and place in the system of international relations, including the Arctic. With a view to an integrated and comprehensive study of the topic, the author identifies and analyzes the formation of the international image of the Russian Federation abroad, in theory and in practice.

The methodology of research is based on theoretical implications discussed by Alexeeva T. [1] who wrote a lot on perception of Russia in the world; Galumov E.A. [2, 2003], one of the leading experts in the international image of the Russian Federation; Sulakshin S.S. and Hvylya-Olinter N.A. [3, 2015] employees of the Centre of political thought and ideology who made a report on perception of country in the world for the last year. In general, it could be concluded that the de-

gree of knowledge of the topic is sufficiently high. However, the international image of Russia as a tool of “soft power” is not in a focus of the modern researchers.

Source database for this article is represented by various international ratings, official data of the Russian research holding “Romir”, as well as the official Russian media sites and organizations engaged in advocating the positive image of Russia.

Perception of Russia abroad and within the country

Today Russia is perceived rather negatively in the world, and the attitude of the international community is getting worse. Our compatriots have recently become better respond on internal and external policy of Russia, but the current situation is that we cannot talk about the positive perception of the country abroad. Strengthening the position of Russia in the Arctic, the stabilization of the Russian situation in the future, the country's growing influence on the world energy market scares competitors and opponents. Over the past decades, the image of the new Russia in the eyes of the world community has repeatedly changed its evolution has come a long way. First, it was the image of “totalitarian empire” of evil supported in its “restructuring and transparency”. Then — the image of the “young democracy and a market economy”. Later — back to the “unpredictable, insidious, and therefore dangerous”. Now Russia is drawn as dangerous, not only militarily but also as an aggressive and strong economic competitor [1].

Researchers at the Centre of the problem analysis and public management design received an expert evaluation of the dynamics of global community attitude to Russia. The experts were asked to assess the attitudes to the country in specific periods. Then the resulting estimates were averaged.

In 2014 BBC World Service was conducted large-scale study to assess the nature of the influence of the sixteen largest states on the international affairs. 24.5 thousand people from 24 countries, including Russia, participated in the survey. It should be noted that the survey was conducted during the period December 17, 2013 — April 28, 2014, i.e. even before the Ukrainian crisis and partly coinciding with the Olympic Games in Sochi. The study found out that in half of the countries attitudes to Russia had become worse [3, p. 5].

According to the latest survey (August 2015), conducted by the Pew Research Center, neither Russia nor its President Vladimir Putin did not enjoy particular respect or support from abroad. On average only 30% of respondents from foreign countries are positive towards Russia. In 26 countries negative attitude towards Russia are dominating. Extremely negative are Poland and Jordan (in both cases, 80%). In the first case, this perception is the result of long-running tensions between the two countries.

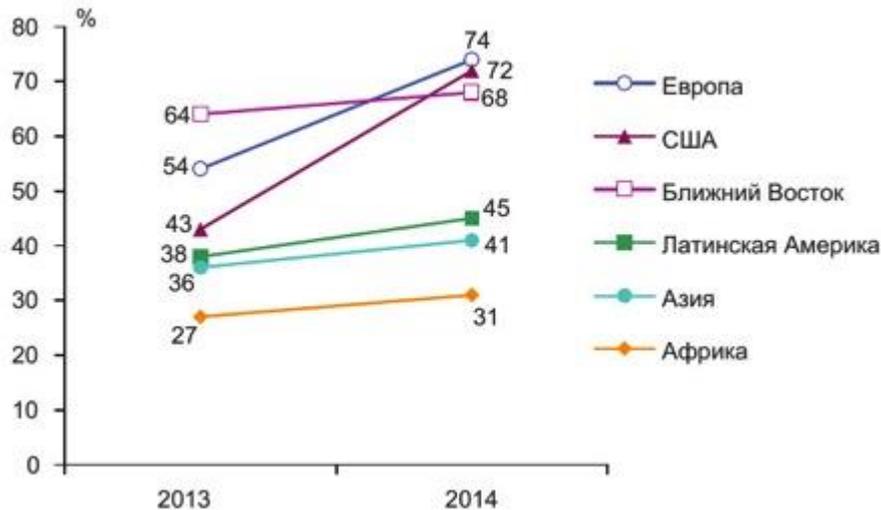


Figure 1. Negative attitude towards Russia in the world [2, p. 4]

Public opinion in Jordan is perhaps influenced by the fact that Moscow supports the regime of President Bashar Al-Assad in neighbouring Syria and Jordan has to accommodate hundreds of thousands of refugees. Anti-russian sentiments are also particularly pronounced in Israel (74%), Japan (73%), Germany (70%) and France (70%)¹.

The highest level of support towards Russia is celebrated in Vietnam (75%), but the countries where Russia is perceived positively by more than a half of the surveyed population are only Ghana (56%) and China (51%). In some countries, the population surveyed has no particular opinions about Russia. Such groups include more than half of the respondents in Ethiopia and about one-third of respondents in Pakistan, India, Burkina Faso, Tanzania, Senegal, Argentina and Peru².

In order to present the objective image of Russia in the world today, we should have a look at the relevant international ratings and indices for 2015. According to The World Competitiveness Yearbook, Russia has 45th place (out of 60) by competitiveness, being between Slovakia and India. The first places in this rating are occupied by Singapore, China, and United States³. Among Arctic countries, Russia occupies the last place (table 1). Annual ranking of global competitiveness is a rating of the global study of the world's countries in terms of economic competitiveness done by the Europe's leading management Institute (Institute of Management Development), based in Lausanne (Switzerland). The rating shows how states can create the conditions for effective development of companies and economic growth by controlling their economic and human resources.

¹ Main results of the poll conducted by the Pew Centre in 40 countries, March 25 — May 17 2015, 45 435 people participated.

² Ibid.

³ The 2015 IMD World Competitiveness Scoreboard. URL: <http://www.imd.org/uupload/imd.website/wcc/scoreboard.pdf> (Accessed: 24 November 2015).

Countries are estimated at 369 indicators divided into four groups: the overall efficiency of the economy, including macroeconomic indicators; governance, including corruption; business efficiency; development of infrastructure. The rankings take into account the official statistics and surveys of the experts.

Table 1

*Russia's place in the world competitiveness ranking
"The World Competitiveness Yearbook" among the Arctic countries*

Country	Place in world competitiveness ranking The World Competitiveness Yearbook
United States	1
Canada	5
Norway	7
Denmark	8
Sweden	9
Finland	20
Iceland	24
Russia	45

Press freedom Index " Global Press Freedom"(Freedom House) among 199 countries Russia gets 83 points (from 95), that is considered to be one of the least free⁴. Among the Arctic countries, the Russian Federation is the last on the index (table 2). Sweden and Norway have 10 points and they are characterized as States with the free press.

Table 2

Russia in the World press freedom index among the Arctic countries

Country	Press freedom index
Norway	10
Sweden	10
Finland	11
Denmark	12
Iceland	16
Canada	18
United States	22
Russia	83

⁴ Freedom of the Press 2015. URL: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/freedom-press-2015#.VkHmf5Cs1qM> (Accessed: 24 November 2015).

The World press freedom index is an annual survey. It is issued by international non-governmental organization "Reporters without Borders", which is a community for the protection of press freedom and journalists' rights. Conclusions are grounded on 43 key indicators, including such criteria as: the presence of various kinds of violations against journalists (murder, imprisonment, physical violence and threats) and the media (censorship, bans and confiscated editions of publications, closing editions); the level of selfcensorship; the degree of political and financial dependence; legal issues (fines, the state monopoly, the existence of a regulatory body, etc.); the possibility of free access to the Internet and so on. The index has scores ranging from zero (the best indicator, means the lack of any restrictions for media) and above (the worst).

Rating of insolvency of the state (Failed States Index, Fragile States Index) reflects the ability (and failure) of the authorities to monitor the integrity of the territory, as well as demographic, political and economic situation in the country. Among the 178 countries, Russia earned 90 points out of 120, along with Iran, Egypt, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan. The most stable and wealthy country is Finland⁵. Research and accompanying rankings are annually done by an independent public organization "The Fund for Peace" (specializes in the study of conditions causing wars and ways to prevent them), together with the scientific journal "Foreign Policy". During a year experts analyze countries and related information through a special system tool to assess conflict (Conflict Assessment System Tool). The analysis is based on 12 criteria — the so-called "indicators of vulnerability" that merged into three groups: social, economic and political (stable and permanent emigration from the country, uneven economic development, availability and quality of public services, etc.). Among the Arctic countries, Russia occupies the last place in this rating (table 3).

Table 3

*Russia's place in the ranking of the insolvency of the State
"Failed States Index" among the Arctic countries*

Country	Place in rating of insolvency States "Failed States Index"
Finland	18
Norway	20
Sweden	20
Denmark	22
Iceland	23
Canada	26
United States	35
Russia	80

⁵ Fragile States Index. URL: <http://fsi.fundforpeace.org/rankings-2015> (Accessed: 24 November 2015).

The Rule of Law Index examines the extent to which the countries follow the principles of law and protect human rights. Among 180 countries, Russian index is 0.47, along with Mexico, Ecuador, Zambia, Tanzania, Kyrgyzstan, which is the average value. The highest index has Norway (0.87)⁶. It is calculated by the methodology of international non-governmental organization "The World Justice Project" based on a combination of public statistics and the results of the global survey of experts. The index is composed of 47 variables that characterize the level of legal development and legislative practice in different countries around the world. All variables are divided into eight groups: limiting the powers of the institutions; absence of corruption; order and security; protection of fundamental rights; the transparency of the institutions; compliance with laws; civil justice; criminal justice. Among the Arctic countries, Russia occupies the last place (table 4).

Table 4

*Russia's place in "The Rule of Law Index"
among the Arctic countries*

Country	Place in the rule of law index «The Rule of Law Index»
Norway	0.87
Denmark	0.87
Finland	0.85
Sweden	0.85
Canada	0.78
United States	0.73
Russia	0.47

In accordance with ratings of the project "Political Atlas of modern times" ⁷ for 192 states, Russia compared with the Arctic countries (table 5) is:

- on the 7th place in the index of international influence (between Britain and India; the first place — United States). The index combines many important indicators and ratings: defence expenditure, the share in the authorized capital of the IMF, world exports, financing of the United Nations and the share in GDP, population and the size of the army, etc.;
- on the 27th place in the index of statehood (between Denmark and Iceland; the first are the United States, Japan, Switzerland). The index was designed to show the degree of independence of the state, its survival and independent development. Index shows whether the state itself decides its internal and external affairs or not; effectiveness of the use of natural resources and dependence from other countries;

⁶ The Rule of Law Index. URL: <http://data.worldjusticeproject.org/> (Accessed: 24 November 2015).

⁷ Politicheskij atlas sovremennosti. URL: <http://worldpolities.org/> (Accessed: 24 November 2015).

- at the 93th place in the index of institutional foundations of democracy (between Peru and South Africa; the first are Switzerland, Canada, Netherlands). The index takes into account factors that strengthen the foundations of democracy: the continuity of democratic traditions, unconstitutional power change; the involvement of citizens in the electoral process, etc.;
- at the 73rd place in quality of life rating (the first are Luxembourg, Ireland, Norway). The index includes GDP per capita, life expectancy, health care costs, education level, etc.;
- at the 81st place in the index of external and internal threats (most secure countries are Canada, France, Netherlands). Index of threats includes several indicators: attempts to coups, spontaneous disasters, epidemics, the presence of illegal movements, threats of aggression and terrorism, as well as the problems of water supply, the availability of territorial claims, unbalanced export etc.

Table 5

Russia's place in the rankings of the project "Political Atlas of modern times" among the Arctic countries

Country	Index capacity international influence	Place by index statehood	Index of the institutional foundations of democracy	Place on quality of life	Index external and internal threats
The USA	1	1	18	5	118
Canada	11	15	2	15	192
Norway	42	31	5	3	163
Denmark	44	26	4	16	176
Sweden	30	11	8	12	188
Finland	52	10	6	17	186
Iceland	137	28	12	7	147
Russia	7	27	93	73	81

We have just looked through the main official international ratings figures of Russia in other countries. It should be noted that they are not high, except for the international influence and security. This once again updates the theme of international image of Russia.

Galumov E.A. notes that the state image is directly related to the attitude towards it not only among the foreign public, but also among its own citizens [2, p. 107]. Today, every fifth Russian (21%) considers that despite the well-being of the people, the state should pay an increased attention to strengthening of Russia's prestige in the world. In 2003, such a response was given by

less than half of the respondents (12%). Strengthening the Russian state is one of the most important tasks today for 18 % of Russians and this problem worries people today more than 12 years ago, when this response was given by just 11%. According to the author, such a rise of interest to the image of Russia in the world is associated with the new global challenges and threats, military and political confrontation of our state and the western countries, changing geopolitical situation in the world not in Russia's favor. "Updating and enhancing the importance of the issues of Russia's prestige in the world and strengthening of the state means that the country's population today, more than ever, needs a global goal, the national idea" — explains President of the Research holding "Romir" A. Milekhin⁸.

In March 2015, The Research holding "Romir" and the ISPR RAS Centre of the case studies conducted nationwide poll on trust for various social institutions. Most similar study was conducted in November 2013. The obtained results demonstrate how attitudes of Russians have changed in the past year and a half. During this time, Russians strengthened their confidence in the original principle "for the faith, Tsar and fatherland". More than three quarters of those surveyed expressed confidence to the President, the army and the Orthodox Church and it was 11-16% higher than in 2013 (pic. 2)⁹. Feature of our culture is that the Russian mentality always was positive towards power as a gift of heaven. The people have certain expectations in relation to the power (caring, fairness, resolute struggle against the thieves, embezzlers of state property and other criminals, strengthening the power of Russia and the realization of its purpose in the world) [2, p. 11].



Figure 2. Dynamics of trust for social institutes (%) / «ROMIR», ISPI RAS, March 2015

⁸ Issledovaniya: Narod mechtaet o nacional'noj idee. URL: http://romir.ru/studies/724_1446498000/ (Accessed: 23 November 2015).

⁹ Doverie na patriotizme. URL: http://romir.ru/studies/664_1430254800/ (Accessed: 23 November 2015).

It should be noted that trust of the citizens has significantly increased: the Government of the Russian Federation (+20%), Council of Federation (+18%) and the State Duma (+17%). Apparently, the events of the past fifteen months: success at the Olympic Games in Sochi, joining of Crimea, sanctions against Russia, food embargo against a number of Western countries and the economic crisis rallied the nation, triggering a wave of patriotism. It is as high as it has never been before. President of “Romir” and Director of the Center for case studies ISPR RAS Andrey Milekhin explains the poll results with the “outstanding pride of Russians, fatigue from the anxiety and uncertainty, the need for values and objectives. Paradoxically sounds, but problems in politics and the economy shook the nation. The Russians saw the position of authorities and generously responded with a great credit of trust”¹⁰.

Considering how Russians perceive the Russian Federation, we can observe the rise of trust indicators towards state and increased national unity. It is well known that improving the situation in the country and a positive attitude to the internal and external policy of the state are an integral part of the international image of Russia. This lays the foundation for creating a successful image of the country.

Tools of international image of Russia

It cannot be said that Russia does not build its attractive image in foreign countries. In the author's opinion, the formation of the international image of the country is mainly due to the efforts of the state institutions and the media. One of the key institutions that forms the broadcasts and subsequently monitors the international image of Russia is the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA). The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation provision No 865 (approved by the President of the Russian Federation on the 11th of July 2004) set one of the most important missions of the MFA — coordination and dissemination of information about foreign and domestic policy of the Russian Federation, socio-economic and cultural life of the country. In the “National security strategy of the Russian Federation until the year 2020” (approved by the President of the Russian Federation May 12, 2009, Decree No 537) state's interests in the information sphere have been outlined. The importance of communication with internal and external audiences is identified in the “Doctrine of informational security of the Russian Federation”, approved by the President Vladimir Putin on the 9th of September 2000, Order No 1895.

Institutional structures responsible for establishing social and cultural connection and international cooperation have been designed and developed. The most significant is the Office for interregional and cultural relations with foreign countries under the administration of the Presi-

¹⁰ Ibid

dent. It was established in February 2005. The other important institution is the Commission of the Public Chamber of the Russian Federation on international cooperation and diplomacy, established in 2006, and Russian Center for international scientific and cultural cooperation under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. However, the formation of a positive image of the country abroad is not the primary and only function of the listed entities. Thus, there is no single state body that coordinates these activities in Russia. Developed government projects aimed at formation of a positive image of Russia in the world could be classified as follows:

Economic projects. One of the traditional forms — economic forums. The Russian business community plays an active role in these projects. Their objectives are: creating a favourable investment climate, the intensification of economic cooperation, shaping perceptions of Russia as a reliable and stable partner.

Cultural, scientific, educational projects. Russia traditionally occupies confident position in these sphere. In 2014 A Year of Culture was announced in Russia. 14-16 December 2015 the IV St. Petersburg International Cultural Forum was held. It was devoted to 70th anniversary of UNESCO. In 2016, in St. Petersburg will host International Cultural Forum. The “Russkiy Mir Foundation”, headed by V. Nikonovym, promotes the Russian language and culture.

Social projects. Russian state and non-governmental institutions focus on broad-based participation in various social international projects ranging from active participation in programmes to combat AIDS and drug abuse and ending with humanitarian assistance to the populations of countries affected by natural disasters. This is one of the most traditional, but at the same time efficient ways to improve the image of the country in the world.

Sports projects associated primarily with the attempts of Russia to become a center of sports events on a global scale. For example, the Winter Olympics in Sochi in 2014, and the World Cup in 2018. The role of the “hostess” for worldwide sporting events adds the popularity to the country and increases its international prestige.

The project “*Church diplomacy*” — the insistence of the traditional destination for Russian public policy may be quite productive in case of the increasing influence of the religious and ethnic factor in world politics. This kind of projects can be attributed to the world religious Summit held from 2006 to 2011. The Summit participants did not discuss religious issues but the most serious problems and challenges of the time: terrorism and extremism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, epidemics, drug addiction, poverty, the environment and education of youth. Historical event was a meeting of Patriarch of Moscow and all Russia Kirill and Pope Francis, which took place on the 12th of February 2016 in Havana, Cuba.

Project «*Festivals*» — celebrations to mark a particularly important historical dates, official status of the socio-political events and events within the framework of the informal meetings with the leaders of the world politics. Among the most important projects is 300-year anniversary celebration of St. Petersburg and 70-anniversary of the Victory.

Media projects. We cannot say that nothing is being done to inform foreign people about situation in Russia. In 2003 the Russian Government determined that the main tool for “managing” the country’s image was agency “RIA Novosti”. 10 years later, on the 9th of December 2013 the Decree of the President of the RF established an international information agency “Russia today”. It was the successor to all projects and property of the “RIA Novosti”. Its task is to highlight Russian public policy and life in the Russian Federation. The “Russia Today” manager is Dmitry Kiselyov, a journalist, ex-Deputy Chief of the VGTRK, host of the program “Vesti nedeli” on the TV channel “Russia”¹¹. The Agency Director is appointed and dismissed by the President of Russia. The Agency is included in the list of strategic enterprises and strategic joint-stock companies. Since 2004, it is actively developed and some large-scale media projects appeared. Among them: “Valdaysky Club”, “Russia Profile”, “Russia Today”. A pioneer in this area is a joint project of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and RIA Novosti “Open Russia”¹² (2003). The project is organized as press conferences and discussions of current events in the country and Russian foreign policy attended by MFA officials and leading newsmakers. A favorable international image means positive information about the country, which should attract foreign public. However, the sources listed do not always represent positive information. Negative informational aspects occupy a prominent position.

In 2004, “Valday discussion club”¹³ was established. The club annual meetings gather foreign experts and journalists to discuss various issues with the representatives of Russian authorities, political parties and non-governmental institutions. Since 2014, the club changed the format “story about Russia” to shaping the global image of the country, from the study of the situation in Russia to the skilled and objective assessment of the world's political and economic problems.

Since the beginning of 2005, a weekly journal in English “Russia Profile”¹⁴ is being issued. The journal presents an analysis of the political and economic processes in Russia. According to the Chairman of the Duma Committee on International Affairs, a member of the Board of Trustees Konstantin Kosachev: “the journal caused great interest in the United States”.

¹¹ Rossiya segodnya (Mezhdunarodnoe informacionnoe agentstvo) // Megaenciklopediya Kirilla i Mefodiya. URL: [http://megabook.ru/article/Rossiya%20segodnya%20\(Mezhdunarodnoe%20informacionnoe%20agentstvo\)](http://megabook.ru/article/Rossiya%20segodnya%20(Mezhdunarodnoe%20informacionnoe%20agentstvo)) (Accessed: 26 November 2015).

¹² Otkritaya Rossia. URL: <https://openrussia.org/> (Accessed: 25 November 2015).

¹³ Valdai Discussion Club. URL: <http://valdaiclub.com/> (Accessed: 25 November 2015).

¹⁴ Profile Russia. URL: <http://www.profilerussia.com/ru/> (Accessed: 25 November 2015).

In December 2005, a TV-channel "Russia Today"¹⁵ began broadcasting in English. Now "Russia Today" has several foreign offices in London, Washington, Paris and Jerusalem. Soon they plan to open News Bureau in Cairo and then in New York, and build up a network in the UIS. "Russia Today" aims to show Russian opinion on Russian and the world affairs. Many experts doubt whether the channel is able to cope with this task successfully, because the foreign people have quite a wide range of news channels such as BBC, CNN, Euronews, etc. They believe that "Russia Today" is unlikely to be able to make a real competition, and the "Russian view" on world events can hardly be interesting. Success of the channel depends on the image of Russia in the world¹⁶. December 10, 2015: the Russian broadcaster celebrated 10 years since its establishment. It has 24-hour broadcasting in more than 100 countries around the world. In addition, RT is a leader among news channels on YouTube: more than 3 billion people watch RT. It is more than CNN, BBC, Euronews and other information channels¹⁷. According to the author, this might give the prospect of improving the image of Russia in the world. Chances for that increase significantly every year.

Conclusion

In modern terms, the problem of positive image of Russia appears to be urgent and important. As it is well known, the Arctic is the most important geopolitical region, where national interest of leading foreign countries are clashing. So positioning of Russia, according to the considered ratings as the weakest among them could hardly contribute to our strategic interests in the Arctic region. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has subdivisions responsible for the improvement of the country's image in the world. However, Russia has no purposeful line while shaping its image abroad. There is a small number of Russian media in foreign countries, broadcasting in foreign languages. The activities of the various structures involved in this process, looks inconsistent and fragmented. They are not united by a common goal and theoretically elaborated action programme.

Modern image of Russia, according to many researchers, is very controversial. "Many people and organizations are observing our fight with the economic crisis with great sympathy, as well as the increase of Russian influence in international affairs. Not less and those who look at it suspiciously, negatively, rejecting promising and mutually beneficial projects just because they come from Russia or Russia is its active participant" [1]. Quite right is Professor T. Alekseeva who emphasised that "Russia was reproached in its attempts to play on imperial regulation. This was evi-

¹⁵ Russia Today. URL: <https://www.rt.com/> (Accessed: 25 November 2015).

¹⁶ Formirovanie obraza Rossii kak aspekt publichnoy vneshney politiki. URL: <http://hr-portal.ru/article/formirovanie-obraza-rossii-kak-aspekt-publichnoy-vneshney-politiki> (Accessed: 25 November 2015).

¹⁷ Khristenko A. Poka tolko 10: RT otmechaet yubilej. URL: <http://www.vesti7.ru/news?id=48802> (Accessed: 14 December 2015).

dent during the media campaign about the Russian expedition for the exploration of the Arctic shelf in summer 2007. "Washington Times", September 6, 2007: "aggressive Russia fully complies with its vengeful policies pursued by President Putin. He makes no secret of his desire to make Russia an influential and powerful state and to realize ambitions uses the resource the wealth of his country". Japanese newspaper "Asahi Shimbun" called the controversy between Russia, the United States, Norway, Denmark and Canada "a struggle to capture the Arctic" [1].

The main problem is that neither in Russian nor in Western public opinion have a clearly defined and adequate image of modern Russia. All views about our country are very fragmentary, contradictory and poorly decorated. Furthermore, the interest towards Russia in the world today is not so high. The lower is the interest to the country the greater are the stereotypes. It hardly can be good for the country's image. We also should remember that Russia is a target for a constant information warfare. Some media publish a lot on the current hybrid civil war inside Russia, when deliberately transcoding of national identities is carried out, a tension is injected in the sphere of inter-ethnic relations and a reassessment of national history is taking place¹⁸.

Therefore, effective shaping of a modern image of Russia, including the Russian Arctic are highly relevant. It requires legal regulation and direct state involvement in the development of Russian image in foreign countries.

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¹⁸ Vladimir Lepihin. V Rossii razvorachaetsya gibridnaya grazhdanskaya vojna. URL: <http://ria.ru/analytics/20160314/1389538763.html> (Accessed: 14 March 2016).