

5 Traditional media and climate change in Russia



A case study of *Izvestiia*

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Introduction

Back in 2004, the attention of the global community was drawn to Russia's climate policy as never before, when Russia's delayed ratification of the Kyoto Protocol finally made it possible to bring the document into force. Russia's prominent position in the global climate regime was partly due to its sizable GHG emissions (fifth largest in the world) and by the withdrawal of the United States from the negotiations (Poberezhskaya, 2016). Whilst in the latest rounds of negotiations attention has moved away from Russia and towards more polluting actors such as China, the USA and India (Korppoo, 2016), it can be argued that a viable climate regime cannot be achieved without Russia's involvement and commitment (Gladun and Ahsan, 2016). Thus, it is important to look at various factors that contribute to and shape Russia's official climate change discourse.

This chapter, in its aim to explore the evolution of the discourse in Russia's traditional media, analyses 668 articles published in Russia's leading newspaper, *Izvestiia*, from 1992 until 2012. It is argued that as during this 20-year period Russia went through major political, economic and social modifications, the media served as a litmus test for understanding how these changes impacted climate change narratives in the country. Even though the number of articles covering climate change has increased over the years, the content of publications has become more polarised with scepticism and a lack of state criticism becoming more apparent. Furthermore, the analysis is not only important for understanding the perception of climate change but also the development of the media's role in modern Russian society.

Russia's climate policy

Russia's geographical characteristics pose a significant dilemma. On the one side, Russia's current political and economic regimes thrive on the

abundance of natural resources and in particular from the extensive extraction of fossil fuels. On the other hand, Russia's northern location and territorial spread makes it particularly vulnerable to climate change. According to a Roshydromet report (2017), in 2016 alone, there were 988 cases of extreme weather events in Russia with 380 causing significant economic losses. The report indicates that the increased frequency of these events could be attributed to climate change. Furthermore, it stresses that temperature increases in Russia happen 2.5 times faster than the global rise (temperatures have increased by 0.45°C in the last ten years, whilst in the polar part of the country, it is even worse, with 0.8°C over the same period) (see also Mokhov and Semenov, 2016). Apart from the surge in the frequency of extreme weather events, the negative effects of climate change have already been experienced or will be experienced in the near future throughout the country (Sharmina and Jones, 2015).

Despite its geographical vulnerability, over the years, Russian climate change policy has been conditioned by a range of political and economic factors. For example, economic development has been prioritised (Henry, 2010), with the state's support persistently being allocated to the polluting fossil fuel industry. Even Russia's infamous ratification of the Kyoto Protocol took place in the context of political bargaining and international negotiations (e.g. EU support of Russia's WTO membership). It should also be noted that agreement did not require Russia to make any economic sacrifices due to the industrial collapse experienced after the USSR's dissolution. This had resulted in Russia's GHG emissions drastically dropping by the late 1990s compared to the 1990 baseline year, meaning Russia would meet its Kyoto targets without any additional effort. However, this provided an opportunity for domestic political actors to present the country as an 'environmental hero', leading the way in the global fight against climate change (Poberezhskaya, 2016).

In fact, this narrative of Russia's great climate mitigation contribution has been persistently underlined by both Dmitry Medvedev and Vladimir Putin (despite the fact that the latter has, on a number of occasions, expressed his scepticism of the anthropogenic character of climate change or its negative effect on Russia) (ibid, see also Chapter 4). The political climate change narrative experienced a pronounced change in 2009, when Dmitry Medvedev attended the Copenhagen Conference, and a number of national documents were accepted (e.g. the Climate Doctrine and Climate Doctrine implementation plan). In 2013, Russia's national climate policy was strengthened by the Presidential Decree 'On the reduction of GHG emissions' and Putin's announcement at the COP-21 of Russia's commitments to cutting carbon emissions by 25 percent by 2030 (of the baseline year 1990). The latest

statement made by the Special Envoy of the President of Russia for Climate Affairs, Alexander Bedritsky reinforced these obligations, whilst the importance of counting the influence of Russia's boreal forest has been emphasised once again (Bedritsky, 2017). There also has been a tendency to emphasise the positive achievements in Russia's domestic climate policy, for example, 2017's Russian Climate Week, in which a number of Russian businesses took part, or the creation of the Climate Partnership of Russia, which in its own words, 'consolidates the efforts of Russian business to mitigate environmental impacts and help prevent climate change' (climatepartners.ru, 2017). The latter includes the world's second-largest aluminium company, Rusal.

More recently, as the conflict in the Eastern Ukraine unfolded, some positive advances in Russia's climate policy have been reversed, as budgets have had to be adjusted due to the economic crises that have followed (Davydova, 2015). Interestingly, the international tensions caused by the prolonged conflict in Ukraine have penetrated Russia's official discourse on climate change:

At the same time, we believe that the politicization of socio-economic cooperation, including its climatic aspects, the imposition of economic sanctions on a number of countries that are Parties to the UNFCCC, hinders the successful implementation of measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in these countries and their climate-resilient development. Further implementation of the sanctions policy with regard to a number of countries will call into question the joint achievement by the countries of the objectives of the Paris Agreement.

(Bedritsky, 2017)

Russia's positive advances in domestic climate policy have been met with a bit of scepticism. Both scholars and activists point out that such national documents as the Climate Doctrine or its Implementation Plan 'do not contain effective tools to reduce GHG emissions' (Gladun and Ahsan, 2016: 27), and Russia's 'ambitious' commitments to cut emissions by 25% to 1990 levels can result in only an 11% decrease if forestry is considered (climateactiontracker.org, 2017). Korppoo and Kokorin (2017) argue that Russia's domestic mitigation policies remain quite weak, handicapped by loopholes in the legislative documentation as well as numerous bureaucratic barriers. Furthermore, Russia's other economic and political strategies openly contradict its climate change-related policies (e.g. state support of the fossil fuel industry) (Sharmina and Jones, 2015). However, Russia's involvement in the Ukrainian conflict and the subsequent economic decline, mean that once again Russia's climate policy has unexpectedly benefitted as a result of the reduced rate of growth in its economy – which has led to a slowing down of GHG emissions increase (ibid).

A number of research studies have demonstrated that whilst Russia's climate policy has been influenced by a range of factors, the state's leaders (in particular Vladimir Putin) have been 'the most influential actor[s] in the decision-making process' (Korppoo, 2016: 644). Despite all the obvious downsides of this predicament, in theory, it has one potentially positive consequence which was pointed out by Sharmina et al. (2013: 389), who argue that 'the semi-authoritarian policy regime in Russia can more readily impose climate-related policies on the population, with a historically passive civil society further facilitating the top-down approach'. Finally, an overview of Russia's official climate discourse would be incomplete without mentioning its relatively low level of concern and awareness of climate change amongst the public (Sharmina et al., 2013). Even the population of the highly vulnerable geographical locations in the north of the country, who are able to observe and experience the adverse consequences of climate change directly, remain mostly sceptical of the anthropogenic nature of climate change (Graybill, 2013). Arguably, one of the reasons behind this is the restricted media coverage and close connections between media and political discourses, which will be explored further in this chapter.

Climate discourse and Russian media

Over the last couple of decades, Russian mass media went through substantial transformations. As Erzikova and Lowrey (2014: 36) eloquently summarise, 'a number of socio-political developments have led Russian mass media from being over-politicised in the 1990s to becoming politically apathetic in the 2000s'. Indeed, towards the end of the USSR's existence and during the emergence of the new Russian Federation, mass media came closest to becoming a 'fourth estate' and playing an important role in political processes (Grabel'nikov, 2001). However, in the following years some media outlets changed ownership meaning that instead of exercising power, they became a powerful tool in someone else's hands (Azhgikhina, 2007). In the early 2000s, Russia's political leadership changed and was accompanied by the centralisation of major media outlets, which coincided with Russian media being classed as 'unfree' by the Freedom House after enjoying years of 'partial freedom' (Toepfl, 2013). Whilst modern Russian journalism is facing a number of challenging barriers with certain topics being of a particularly sensitive nature and, therefore, they are either avoided by the media as a whole or cause various problems for specific media outlets (the degree of damage depends on the sensitivity of the topic), climate change (despite its controversy) has not caused extreme confrontation and censorship by the state (Poberezhskaya, 2016).

In fact, Russian media have followed some global patterns in climate communication where journalists are seen as a key channel in making complex

issues of climate change visible to the wider public and intentionally or unintentionally playing an important role in forming people's opinions about climate policies and affecting their behaviour by bridging scientific, political and environmentalist communities (e.g. Nelkin, 1987; Bell, 1994; Carvalho 2007; Boyce and Lewis, 2009; Olausson, 2009; Boykoff, 2012). There are also, of course, some country-specific particularities regarding climate change communication. For instance, scholars agree that in the Russian case, the state's influence over the media has also penetrated the climate change discourse. Whilst there are no documented cases of censoring the climate change topic, various media analyses have shown a correlation between changes in the state policy on climate change and the quality and quantity of media coverage on the topic (Wilson Rowe, 2009; Tynkkynen, 2010; Yagodin, 2010; Poberezhskaya, 2014).

One of the distinct features of climate change coverage in Russia is the relative absence and unpopularity of the topic, which can be referred to as 'climate science' (Poberezhskaya, 2016). Indeed, Russia falls far behind in its coverage of not only the major Western powers but also countries with similar or lower levels of economic and political development. Even social media, which could be seen as an alternative platform for advancing media discussion, have been mostly overlooked in Russia or often serve as a channel for re-enforcing conspiratorial and sceptical climate change-related discussion (Poberezhskaya, 2017). A more detailed and systematic analysis of media coverage conducted by Boussalis et al. (2016) also shows when climate change is more likely to appear on the pages of Russian newspapers and within what context. For instance, they determined the importance of economic conditions (which was measured by Russian inflation levels). When the economic situation worsens, Russian media have mostly ignored climate change or discussed it more within the context of geopolitical problems (e.g. what Russia needs to do not to lose a competitive advantage) and less in the context of science and international commitments. Building up on the existing body of literature, this chapter, by using the example of one leading newspaper, demonstrates what exactly is happening with climate coverage during its peaks and troughs.

Methodological considerations

This chapter concentrates on the coverage of climate change in one of the most popular and authoritative Russian newspapers *Izvestiia*. Whilst *Izvestiia* does not have the largest circulation in the country (Boussalis et al., 2016), it can be looked at as an interesting and rather typical example of how the role of the social-political newspaper has adapted throughout the decades after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. *Izvestiia* was founded in

1917 and for over seven decades served as one of the main media platforms of the Communist Party. However, it also developed popularity among Soviet intellectuals and academics. When the new state of Russia was created, *Izvestiia* went through a series of modifications by first showing its independence and playing important roles in the state's policy, but towards the end of the 1990s, *Izvestiia* had to sacrifice its freedom and accept financial support from an oil giant LUKoil (Votmer, 2000). Later, it was owned by Gazprom and then sold to another gas company SOGAZ and 'media baron' Yuri Koval'chuk.

For this analysis, the keyword search (all grammatical variations of climate change, global warming and greenhouse effect) was conducted throughout all publications by *Izvestiia* from 1992 until 2012. After the manual examination of the collected articles (making sure that articles with irrelevant use of climate were eliminated), 668 publications were identified. The goal of this research study is to explore the themes in the coverage of climate change in the traditional mass media in Russia. The methodology was inspired by the discourse analysis suggested by Maarten Hajer (1995), who looks at how various perceptions of environmental problems evolved over time and influenced environmental politics. Collecting articles over a 20-year period allowed the author to conduct a 'historical-diachronic' analysis of climate change discourse (Carvalho, 2008). Therefore, we can see how certain themes evolved and developed as Russia was going through changes in its political regime (the timeframe covers two of Yeltsin's presidential

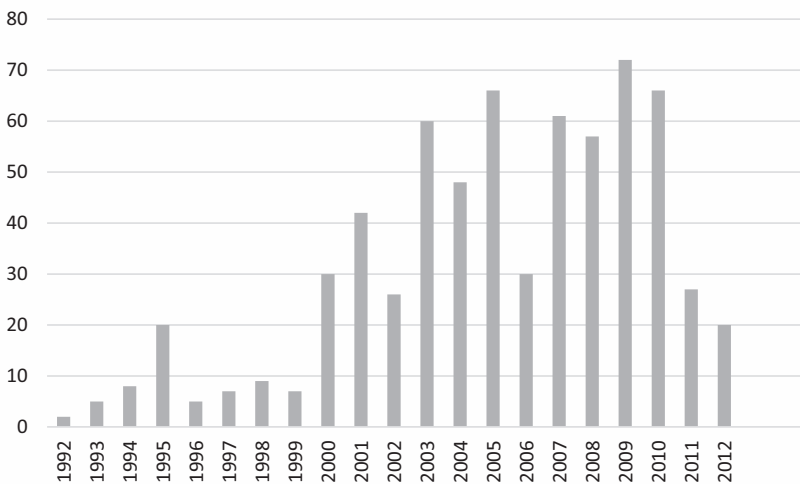


Figure 5.1 *Izvestiia* climate change coverage, 1992–2012

terms, two of Putin's and one of Medvedev's presidential terms) and economic situation (starting with the economic collapse of the early 1990s and then moving towards the more stable situation with the country's growing reliance on fossil fuel exports).

As can be seen from Figure 5.1, *Izvestiia* coverage followed similar patterns to other Russian media (see Boussalis et al., 2016). Whilst, relatively speaking, it has been quantitatively behind Western media, the peaks and downfalls in coverage seem to be impacted by external events (e.g. political and economic problems in the 1990s or various key climate change political events such as the Copenhagen Conference in 2009). However, a more detailed analysis is required in order to establish the evolution of certain topics and qualitative change in publications.

Exploring themes in *Izvestiia*'s coverage of climate change

The following analysis has been divided around four time periods (1992–1999; 2000–2004; 2005–2008 and 2009–2012). This delimitation has been motivated by the major changes in Russia's politics or economics (such as changes at the executive level). However, it should be admitted that there was some degree of arbitrary judgement. For instance, the first period is substantially longer and covers eight years due to a very low number of articles published during this time and a lack of substantial changes in the governance of the country. The next two periods reflect two terms of president Putin in office, whilst the last one covers Medvedev's reign.

1992–1999

In the eight years after Russian independence, *Izvestiia* published 63 articles with some discussion of climate change. The limited coverage is understandable as the country was in complete economic and political disarray with major official institutions (including the ones in charge of the environment) experiencing rapid and sometimes numerous changes of function and structure. As was mentioned above, media has been actively involved in the political process at the start of the 1990s and towards the end of that decade, many media found themselves in the hands of oligarchs (often with strong connections to the energy industry). *Izvestiia* was no exception to this dynamic (Voltmer, 2000).

Despite the very limited coverage, the quality of this now historic discussion is interesting as almost half of all publications (n=29) explicitly discuss the negative consequences of climate change. And the majority of publications (n=39) refer to the anthropogenic character of the observed climatic changes (whilst only five articles refer to natural climate change and others

do not specify the reason for the observed climatic changes). For example, the very first article describes the health threatening air pollution in Mexico caused by industrial GHG emissions, which are ‘a main culprit of global warming’ (Kovalev, 1992). The range of negative consequences of climate change includes threats to human health, a reduction in biodiversity and the undermining of national and economic security (the latter could be further impacted by increased numbers of environmental migrants or restrictions on the energy sector due to global mitigation policy) (for example, see Kovalev, 1993; Bovkun, 1995; Platkovskii, 1996).

The Kyoto Conference in 1997 provoked a new theme in climate change-related publications – discussion of international negotiations and how the global climate regime might affect Russia. Overall, these articles talk about Russia’s carbon advantage (its rapid drop in GHG emissions), which has the potential to translate into economic benefits. However, the articles do not blindly praise Russia’s position in the global climate regime but sometimes offer an acute critique of the politicians and bureaucrats involved. As an example, the article titled ‘Russia will become the largest air trader’ (Zhuravlev and Leskov, 1998) begins with a sensationalist statement about how Russia might earn \$3 billion from carbon trade. Further on the discussion turns quite critical of the global climate regime which, instead of actively reducing the emissions of developed countries, allows them to buy quotas and continue to pollute, whilst people in charge of the carbon trade in Russia do not care about the global rise in emissions stipulated by these transactions as for them ‘money has no smell’¹. Over this period, only two articles clearly express scepticism towards the nature and existence of climate change (e.g. Bateneva, 1997).

2000–2004

Over the next five years, a gradual increase in the newspaper’s climate change coverage can be observed. Trends which have been detected in the first period continued. Climate is more often discussed within the context of its negative influence on nature, human health or the national economy. Its anthropogenic nature is mentioned in half of the articles (n=97) and with only a small proportion of the articles discussing other causes of global warming (and the rest not referring to the causes).

This period is characterised by journalists’ attention to the intricacies of the Kyoto ratification process. The whole process was a perfect combination of diplomatic drama, economic controversy and an opportunity to critique Russia’s historical opponent – the US. A good example would be an article with a telling title ‘America does not care about the planet’ (Pimenov, 2001). After explaining how the US is stopping the Kyoto Protocol from coming into force, the author lists the opinions of politicians and

scientists from around the world with strong accusations directed towards the US: ‘Bush’s policy is called irresponsible and scandalous’, ‘with the US the Kyoto Protocol turns into a dead paper’, ‘these actions will lead to climate catastrophe’ (ibid). The author of the article shows his agreement with all these attributes and notices that this ‘unhappy story’ demonstrates the truthfulness of the proverb that ‘America is above everyone’.² It should be noted that the Kyoto discussion has also allowed journalists to mention the disagreements within the Russian scientific and political community. For example, a number of articles are dedicated to disputes involving Russia’s infamous antagonist of the Kyoto ratification, Andrey Illarionov, who was economic policy advisor to the president at that time, and who likened the document to a ‘plague’ (Leskov, 2004), meaning that it will be as destructive. However, what is interesting despite the high status of the Protocol’s antagonist is that the journalists did not shy away from questioning his credibility: ‘can one learn the whole [climate] science in six months?’ (Leskov, 2004). Furthermore, the journalists’ criticism did not spare the leader of the country [V. Putin], whose statement during the Moscow conference on climate change has surprised many with its ‘careless attitude to the problem of climate change’ (*Izvestiia*, 2003). Another interesting characteristic of the Kyoto coverage of that time concerns the birth or a re-establishment of Russia’s environmental leadership status. Perhaps the only time in the history of climate change global negotiations that Russia had a tangible justification for its importance in climate governance (e.g. ‘They cannot wait for us to join. The Kyoto Protocol’s fate depends on Russia’s decision’ (Valstrem, 2003)).

This period is also interesting because of a relative spike in coverage in 2003, which to some extent can be explained by an unprecedented event – the World Climate Change Conference in Moscow.³ The conference was initiated by Vladimir Putin, who presented it as an opportunity to gather information on the complicated subject in order to form a decision on the ratification of the Kyoto Protocol. The conference received mixed reviews from the international scientific community, and as mentioned above, Putin’s controversial opening remarks were criticised by both foreign and national media (e.g. *Izvestiia*, 2003). Nevertheless, from the environmental communication point of view, the event has created a good opportunity for initiating or stimulating public discussion.

2005–2008

The following timeframe saw a similar quantity of articles dedicated to the topic of climate change (n=214). Almost half of the publications had some references to or indications of the anthropogenic character of climate change (n=90), whilst the other half (n=114) did not make the nature of

climate change clear (with a small number of articles referring to the natural processes of climatic modifications). The topics of the publications remain quite diverse throughout the studied period. However, there are certain trends in the quality of the articles. For instance, as climate change becomes a regular item of international political summits, almost a quarter of all texts (n=43) mention it in passing as one of the items of negotiations or discussions. Whilst this does not provide an elaborate account of the problem, it shows its imminent importance and the level of its potential impact. The most popular theme remains the discussion of the negative consequences of climate change (n=61), which once again outlines a range of impacts, starting with the increased number of extreme weather events and finishing with the rising number of health problems.

What is interesting during this period is that we can see a slightly larger number of articles discussing the positive effect of climate change for Russia and also for the Arctic which is supposed to allow freer access to natural resources. For example, a publication titled ‘Great Arctic divide. Global warming opens up unprecedented economic opportunities’ (Krauss et al., 2005) lists all benefits which melting ice will bring to countries with access to the Arctic’s resources (energy resources, fishing, the Northern Sea Route). This discussion coincides with the renewed interest of the Russian state in Arctic affairs (Khrushcheva and Poberezhskaya, 2016). Similarly, as with the previous timeframe, this period also demonstrates a slow growth of scepticism in the coverage. If between 2000 and 2004, 12% of publications had some sceptical sentiments, in the 2005–2008 period, 14% (n=29) of articles either stated that the observable changes in weather patterns have nothing to do with global warming, or doubted the anthropogenic nature of climate change. For example, in the publication ‘There is no change on the atmospheric front’, the author, whilst outlining the conventional position of the ‘UN experts’, also provides an elaborate discussion on the potential use of the ‘climate weapon’ (Obraztsov, 2007).

2009–2012

In this period, two very significant climate-related events took place. Firstly, the Copenhagen Conference in 2009 witnessed a very clear statement from Russia’s head of state that confirmed Russia’s desire to participate in the global climate regime (see more in Poberezhskaya, 2016). Secondly, in 2010 Russia fell victim to extreme weather events (a heat wave which provoked violent fires and droughts throughout the country resulting in severe human and economic losses). However, despite the positive changes in Russia’s national climate policy and negative changes in its climate, *Izvestiia* started to more often refer to the sceptical frame in their coverage with almost 30% of articles in this period (n=50) doubting the nature of global warming, its



negative impact or its existence at all. The change in sceptical discussion was not only manifested through a quantitative increase but also by a move towards a more assertive tone for this type of publication. For instance, in 2009, *Izvestiia* published an article titled ‘Crisis has stopped financing of “global warming”’ (Obraztsov, 2009) which has taken the discussion to the next level. The publication begins with unapologetic statements that volcanoes and forest fires should be blamed for global warming which has been proved by two ‘large scale research projects’ with ‘sensationalist’ results. What is more interesting is that after this publication a number of other articles (on various climate-related topics) have referred to this debunking of the ‘climate change myth’ in *Izvestiia*. For instance, the publication about a new ‘environmental car’ project (made out of recycled materials and run on bio-fuel) does not just question how realistic this project is but also highlights that the ‘role of humans in global warming turned out to be a myth (which *Izvestiia* published about yesterday)’ (Streltsov, 2009). Then we can see the re-appearance of the casual mentioning of the absurd nature of the ‘global warming theory’. For example, in the discussion on real and pseudo-scientists, the author praises a late Soviet climatologist who ‘was not afraid to make a statement against another international scam named “global warming”’ (Melikhov, 2010).

Whilst a substantial number of articles (n=31) still report on the negative impacts of climate change (though it is not always linked with an anthropogenic contribution), we can see the continuation of the theme discussing the positive impact of climate change on Arctic development and how it will bring benefits to Russia’s economy. The analysis has also shown that now the climate change topic cements itself within political discourse with one third of all publications either discussing the global climate regime (conference, negotiations and agreements) or mention it among other political items or global threats.

Concluding remarks

In 1992, just a few months after the collapse of the USSR, at a time when the country had very little sense of its economic and political future, *Izvestiia*’s journalists wrote only two articles on climate change. But both publications firmly stated the anthropogenic character of climate change and its devastating impact on humans’ lives, where one journalist emotionally writes, ‘this way nature demanded: do not rape me’ (Kovalev, 1992) and another provides an elaborate explanation of ‘warming which makes you shiver’ (*Izvestiia*, 1992).

Two decades later, worldwide we are witnessing the advancement of the climate change discussion. The IPCC published its fourth Assessment Report in which it stressed that global warming is ‘unequivocal’ and that it is ‘very likely’ that the observed changes are due to human activity (IPCC, 2007). At the same time, Russia, after realising a range of economic benefits from the development of energy efficiency programmes and estimating losses from its climate vulnerability, managed to adopt a number of documents at the national level to mitigate the advancement of climate change. Even though many still doubt the usefulness of these national documents, it was seen as a certain change in official rhetoric. Furthermore, the global community has slowly moved towards a consensus on climate change mitigation and adaptation by hosting the 2012 United Nations Climate Change Conference in the Middle East (Doha, Qatar). *Izvestiia* started to mention and discuss climate change more often in the 2000s (with the number of publications peaking in 2009 – which was in line with the global trend provoked by the highly publicised Copenhagen conference), but in 2012 it published only 20 articles – the lowest number since 2000. Whereas numbers alone are quite interesting for our observations of the development of climate change discourse, a more striking pattern has been observed within the qualitative change.

Although the global scientific community (including their Russian colleagues) have become more confident in climate science, the discussion in *Izvestiia* becomes more sceptical. If in the 1990s and early 2000s, sceptical themes were practically absent, in the last four years of the studied period, almost one-third of all publications refute either the anthropogenic character of climate change or its negative impact. Moreover, if we look at all the published articles over the 20-year period, the sceptical sentiments are still marginal (n=109, 16%), however, the majority of articles do not have any references to the nature of observed climate change (60% of all publications). This means that the author can provide a very accurate account of climate change impacts and raise a number of important problems, but would fail to allocate the blame for it, leaving the reader with no choice but to accept natural abnormalities as something unavoidable. This evolution of scepticism could be seen as puzzling if one expects media discourse to follow scientific discourse, though, if we look at the arguments developed in other chapters of this book, Russia’s scepticism is rather predictable due to its political and economic interests. At the same time, Kokorin (2017) in his explanation of the roots of Russia’s climate scepticism explores people’s suspicion of information coming from scientific or political authorities as the country went through decades of open propaganda and adjustments of facts (when needed). Therefore, people tend to question any information

which comes from ‘above’ or as Kokorin states: ‘there is less faith and more scepticism’ (2017: 106). Besides, if we isolate the Russian scientific discussion from the global one, we can see that scepticism is still present there (arguably more than in Western countries). In this regard, it is interesting to look at the study conducted by Dronin and Bychkova (2017), who argue that present scepticism in the Russian scientific community is due to the Soviet heritage of a different approach to studying nature.

Of course, one can also look at the changes in the newspaper’s coverage, its ownership structure and the evolution or devolution of its political role in Russia. This links with another observed trend, which is that the first part of the analysed timeframe contains at least some criticism of the political regime and its approach to the environment and economy, yet after 2004 we can see only a couple of similar discussions. Instead, the newspaper reiterates the state’s expectation of economic benefits from taking part in international negotiations on climate change or utilising the ‘warmer’ Arctic. This again coincides with more general developments in Russia’s media sphere, which after a decade of relative freedom were gradually driven towards giving up their watchdog function (Lipman, 2009).

Climate change is still a relatively low-key problem in Russian official and public discourse, meaning that it does not monopolise the discussions or does not enter the list of politically sensitive topics. However, it seems to have fallen victim of the overall propensity to avoid questioning the state’s policy or initiating a discussion of Russia’s controversial economic and environmental policies.

Notes

- 1 This is a common Russian phrase which means regardless where money is coming from, they still have the same value.
- 2 This proverb refers to the Russia’s perception of US exceptionalism that goes hand in hand with its arrogance and little concern for anyone else’s well-being.
- 3 This should not be confused with the World Climate Conferences organised by the World Meteorological Organisation or the United Nations Climate Change Conferences (officially known as UNFCCC Conferences of the Parties).

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