Strategic narratives and public diplomacy in the Russian news media portrayal of Sweden: case of Russia Today

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# Table of Contents

Abstract ........................................................................................................................................ 4

Acknowledgments ........................................................................................................................ 5

1 Introduction ................................................................................................................................ 6

2 Background .................................................................................................................................. 7

3 Aim and research questions ........................................................................................................ 10

4 Delimitations ............................................................................................................................... 11

5 Relevance to Global Studies ....................................................................................................... 12

6 Previous research ......................................................................................................................... 12

7 Theoretical framework and Key concepts .................................................................................... 17

  7.1 Public Diplomacy ...................................................................................................................... 17

    7.1.1 Mediated Public Diplomacy ............................................................................................... 19

  7.2 Strategic narratives .................................................................................................................. 20

8 Methodology ............................................................................................................................... 22

  8.1 Research Design ....................................................................................................................... 22

  8.2 Data selection and Collection .................................................................................................. 23

  8.3 Coding and Data Analysis ....................................................................................................... 23

  8.4 Reliability and Validity ............................................................................................................ 25

  8.5 Ethical considerations .............................................................................................................. 26

9 Results and Analysis .................................................................................................................... 26

  9.1 Actors ...................................................................................................................................... 27

    9.1.1 Right-wing parties ............................................................................................................. 27

    9.1.2 The Swedish government .................................................................................................. 28

    9.1.3 Swedish police .................................................................................................................. 29

    9.1.4 Migrants/refugees .......................................................................................................... 29
Abstract

With the changes in the means and the scope of global communication, images and stories, promoted by political elites are gaining real influence not only on hearts and minds but also on the policy-making in the international setting. In the twenty-first century, the concern of “whose story wins” has started to dominate the field of public diplomacy. The purpose of this research was to explore the portrayal of Sweden by the international broadcasting network Russia Today or RT, supported by the Russian government and to trace strategic narratives within this depiction. RT is one of the most prominent instruments of the Russian public diplomacy, and it has gained popularity among certain audiences by positioning itself as an “underdog” and an alternative to the mainstream Western news. This thesis was meant to fulfil several purposes – to find out how an individual state is tackled in the context of Russian public diplomacy, to enrich the field of public diplomacy scholarship with empirical evidence about Sweden and RT and to contribute to the field of research on strategic narratives. Based on qualitative analysis of 112 articles, this research has found that Sweden was portrayed through three key themes: migration, security and identity/values. As for strategic narratives, using the three-level approach, two of those were identified – one of them was the international system narrative, and another – national system narrative. In conclusion, implications for Russian public diplomacy were drawn based on the findings of this thesis, and the work was grounded with the previous research.

Keywords: public diplomacy, mediated public diplomacy, international relations, Russia, Sweden, RT, strategic narrative, international system narrative, national narrative, international broadcasting
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1 Introduction

Since the 1990s, it is justified to say that the world is going through a process of transition, in which the way power operates and is distributed changes dramatically. While traditionally the great powers were tested in their strength in war, today with rapidly transforming information technology and methods of communication, the means of "hard power" are also giving place to the "soft power" approaches. It is fair to say that in the twenty-first-century power is passing from capital rich to the information rich, and the issues of communication, reputation and influence become a vital part of the equation (Simons 2011, 326-327).

This development in the nature of power and the way it is exercised has caused a change in the way how international relations are done, by whom and what it entails, and new media ecologies have played a significant role in it (Roselle et al. 2014, 78). In this context, stories and images, promoted by political actors have become weapons in the war for hearts and minds. Public diplomacy has adopted the mantra of whose story wins, and political actors have become increasingly involved in constructing narratives and analysing those of opponents (Zaharna 2016, 4408).

Another change in the global communications landscape is that news, information and entertainment no longer flow in one direction - from West to East and South - there has been a growing number of new multidirectional currents, coming from numerous sites around the world (Rawnsley 2015, 275). Today, CNN and BBC no longer dominate the global media environment - the world has witnessed proliferation of transnational and increasingly influential broadcasting networks of various states, such as Qatar’s Al Jazeera, Russia’s RT, China’s CCTV9 (Antoniades, O’Loughlin and Miskimmon 2010, 7). Moreover, these non-Western networks have made serious progress towards been accepted as legitimate news organisations. To achieve that, they often use the formats familiar to global audiences while claiming to give an alternative approach to the news, which not only reinforces their acceptability, but also makes viewers comfortable in their presence (Rawnsley 2015, 275).

The Russian case of using media broadcasts to achieve its foreign policy goals is particularly interesting. The Kremlin’s use of mass media in foreign policy became a matter of heightened Western concern after 2014 when a conflict broke out in Donbass, the region of Eastern Ukraine (Szostek 2017, 381). The efficiency of Russia’s annexation of Crimea in 2014 was partly attributed
to the rigorous and successful use of narratives, distributed through media: about Kyiv as operated by the West, specifically by US-NATO-led fascist junta, about criminal gangs threatening the territories of eastern Ukraine; and about the majority of citizens in Donetsk and Luhansk wish to join the Russian Federation (Kragh and Åsber 2017, 797). These narratives, and their success with some parts of the target populations in Eastern Ukraine have “legitimized” Russian actions for them and have made possible the subsequent steps within the "hard power" domain.

This example of the power that narratives had in the context of Ukrainian and Russian conflict further highlights the prominence of research of both the Russian case and the narratives in general. Studying strategic narratives is vital as the understandings of international relations are continually being challenged and re-established, and that’s why scholars should study how states and other actors that expose power project and contest strategic narratives about states and their characters, about the trajectory of history, and about the international system (Miskimmon, O’Loughlin and Roselle 2013, 20).

The purpose of this thesis is to fulfil several research gaps simultaneously: to contribute to a novel, yet a mushrooming field of studying strategic narratives, bring evidence of how a non-Western state does public diplomacy (in this case Russia) and take relatively under-researched case studies as sources of empirical material, i.e. Sweden and Russia Today or RT. This paper argues that RT constructs a general narrative about Sweden through three topics: migration, security and values/identity. The main actors within these topics are the Swedish government, Swedish police, right-wing parties, migrants/refugees and the European Union. Strategic narratives that RT promotes about Sweden belong to two types: a narrative about the international system and a national narrative. As a result, this study contributes to the theoretical discussion about Russian public diplomacy and about the types of narratives that exist within it.

2 Background

International images held by political elites play a significant role in foreign policymaking. Even though it is impossible to assume that a particular self-image, projected image or perceived image causes particular actions of the country, it can be argued that all these images shape the interpretation of national interests, and therefore the vision of the foreign policy (Feklyunina 2008, 626). The Cold War provided two ideological blocs with a chance to master their public diplomacy
instruments. Soviet public diplomacy actively promoted the communist ideology through several international news agencies, namely TASS (Telegrafnoe Agentstvo Sovetskogo Soiuza). However, the Soviet collapse and the rise of the 24-hour international channel CNN in 1991, which serves as an iconic example of a worldwide broadcasting network capable of influencing the opinions of international audiences, signaled the rapid change in the nature of international relations and in the place of international broadcasting occupied within it (Yablokov 2015, 303).

In the early 1990s, after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, in Russian society academics and politicians became concerned about improving Russia's image in the West, as negative perceptions of the country, held by Western political and business elites and reinforced by the mass media began to be seen as a severe security threat (Feklyunina 2008, 607). Despite that, the Russian political establishment's turn to active usage of international broadcasting as an instrument of public diplomacy occurred only in the 2000s. The Doctrine of Information Security adopted in September 2000 by the Kremlin emphasised the necessity to promote Russia abroad and to enlarge its influence. The Doctrine paved the way for several international broadcasting outlets that were intended to stem the flow of negative and "non-objective" information about Russia in the global information sphere. Therefore, it can be stated that Russia has been actively engaging within the field of public diplomacy starting from the 2000s when Kremlin began supporting media outlets, that were supposed to counterbalance the Western dominance in the media (Yablokov 2015, 304-305).

One of the major initiatives of Kremlin in the field of public diplomacy came in 2005 with the launch of the channel Russia Today, positioned as the first English-language news channel to bring Russian view on the global news (Avgerinos 2009, 122). Russia Today or as it was later renamed RT to downplay its straightforward affiliation with Russia (Yablokov 2015, 305) is a global 24-hour television network, available in English, Spanish, Arabic, which today allows 700 million people to watch the channel in more than 100 countries. Only in Europe, it is available to 120 million viewers. Also, there is a possibility to watch it online through the website www.rt.com ("Distribution" 2019). As claimed on the official RT website, the network is the top non-Anglo-Saxon news network in terms of traffic: in December 2018, collectively, RT websites had more than 190 million visits ("About RT" 2019). Even though RT is not operated by the Russian government directly, it is a brand of the principally state-funded TV-Novosti, which is, in turn, is
included in the list of the core organisations of the strategic importance of Russia by the Kremlin (Vitopoulus 2015, 12).

In the course of ten years, RT's budget increased tenfold - from US$30 million in 2005, when the channel was launched to over US$300 in 2013, and in 2015 government's investment into RT raised by 40% (from 11.87 rubles in 2014 to 15.38 billion rubles in 2015) (Rawnsley 2015, 278). The rapid expansion of RT demonstrates the level of investment that Russia has devoted to creating a voice in the over-crowded media space that amplifies its public diplomacy agenda (Rawnsley 2015, 276).

Another argument for RT to be regarded in the capacity of the Kremlin’s public diplomacy instrument is the fact that press freedom is an issue of great concern in Russia. This is confirmed by Russia being on the 148th place out of 180 according to the World Press Freedom Index 2018 (“World Press Freedom Index” 2018). The Kremlin is in the position to influence the coverage of the topic in the press, be that through direct interventions or journalist’s anticipatory obedience and self-censorship (Borchers 2011, 92).

The Ukrainian crisis which started in 2013 and especially the annexation of Crimea in 2014 have marked a new and more unstable stage of relations between Russia and the West. The Ukrainian crisis is much more complicated than Moscow’s discontent towards the prospect of Ukraine signing an association agreement with the EU. According to Mankoff (2014), there is an underlying change in Russia’s foreign policy in recent years, which has an impact on its public diplomacy as well (Mankoff 2014, 11). It appears that Putin strives not only to hinder the expansion of the Western sphere of influence but also to challenge the predominance of the established Western, liberal international system at both the European and the global levels (Vitopoulus 2015, 9). From my perspective, in a situation when a state is involved in serious diplomatic predicaments, and international crises as Russia is (Rawnsley 2015, 274), public diplomacy gains increased relevance and importance.

As for the relationship between Russia and Sweden, the Ukraine crisis has also caused its deterioration. Before it, the relationship between those two countries was best described with the term "cool neighbours". It meant that while having stable political relations and growing economic ties, it was at the same time complicated by historical distrust, conflicting values and divergent
views on some critical foreign policy issues. At the same time, arguably, Russia and Sweden saw each other as strategically important neighbours (Hagström and Oldberg 2009, 5).

In 2008 the political tension between Sweden and Russia reached a low point with the start of the war between Russia and Georgia. The most recent tension between Russia and Sweden was marked by the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014 (Lidqvist 2016, 8). As Lidqvist (2016) claims, it was during the Ukraine crisis that the Russian threat for the first time was looked upon as legitimate. To show support to Ukraine, Sweden has contributed with economic aid and support, and to further denounce Russia's actions, heavy sanctions were imposed on trade with Russia (Lidqvist 2016, 41). Moreover, with some exceptions, bilateral relations between Russia and Sweden were frozen on a ministerial level until 2017 (“Sweden. Bilateral relations” 2019). In my view, in regard to that, analysing Russian strategic narratives about Sweden transmitted through its international broadcasting channels is especially relevant, as even though some progress in achieved in restoring Russian-Swedish cooperation on the official level, mediated public diplomacy still is of high significance in potentially influencing decisions and opinions of the latter.

Kragh and Åsberg (2017) claim that in the aftermath of Crimea annexation, Swedish information landscape in the context of a deteriorated security situation in the wider Baltic region has faced an increasing amount of disinformation and fake news. They have also noticed that Russian politicians and diplomats have tried to intervene in Sweden’s domestic political affairs proactively, and Russian sources of public diplomacy and broadcasts to an international audience like RT have picked the themes related to disinformation on NATO and the European Union. Target groups in Sweden, in their turn, such as NGOs and newspapers, wittingly or unwittingly have performed a role as interlocutors of disinformation (Kragh and Åsberg 2017, 774)

3 Aim and research questions

As Kragh and Åsberg (2017) claim, in the field of public diplomacy Russia takes a differentiated approach towards individual European states, also in the Baltic Sea region. The discourses and narratives created in the Russian media about Sweden, Estonia, Finland are not necessarily the same; they are country specific (Kragh and Åsberg 2017, 3). And therefore, this research aims to investigate how Sweden is portrayed through the lens of international broadcasting RT, and to see what strategic narratives are used to frame it and how do those relate to the Russian public
diplomacy. This research is aiming to fill the gap in the literature both on the Swedish case, on Russian public diplomacy and on how Russia tackles individual states. In relation to that, research questions are the following:

**What are the dominant themes and actors through which RT portrays Sweden? What are the strategic narratives that RT promotes about Sweden?**

Sub-question:

**How do those contribute to Russian public diplomacy?**

### 4 Delimitations

This thesis deals with the concept of strategic narratives. According to Roselle (2017), to understand strategic narratives, it is necessary to trace their formation, projection and reception. The new media facilitates tracing narrative reception, e.g. through counting the likes and the times an article was shared on social media, as well as through reading the comments and analyzing their content. While acknowledging the importance of studying whether strategic narrative gets accepted or not and measuring its impact on the audiences, due to the limited scope and narrow focus of this research, this study only aims to focus on projection of strategic narratives. This thesis takes on the assumption that the projection of strategic narrative alone is worth studying as it allows us to understand the implications for the state's foreign policy and broad international agenda.

Also, one of the limitations of this research is related to data selection, as the material for this thesis is limited by the section “Sweden News” on the RT website. While originally, the idea was to trace the continuity and changes in how RT depicted Sweden between 2014 – 2018, the imperfections of RT website and the faults of its search engine, which only shows articles until approximately summer 2017 have limited the possible scope of this research. However, the solution to take the collection of articles, that the RT has assembled in the category "Sweden news" has proved to be beneficial due to it being potentially aimed to create consistent narratives.

Another limitation is that this thesis only focuses on the textual aspect of the RT sample collection, while not taking into consideration the message the images carry. This was done on purpose, in order to immerse more in-depth into the textual aspect of the RT reporting on Sweden and to uncover the rhetorical aspect of Russian mediated public diplomacy, which RT is a part of.
5 Relevance to Global Studies

In the past three decades, international interactions have intensified dramatically, from the financial transactions to the global dissemination of information and images through the media. The extraordinary range and depth of transnational interactions have led scientists and politicians to perceive them as a rupture with previous forms of cross-border communication, forming a new phenomenon called "globalization" (Santos 2006, 393).

With this increased interconnectivity of the world, the methods of conventional diplomacy and technology are giving place to the soft power and public diplomacy (Castells 2010, 383-384). And while Western countries have been engaging with the instruments of public diplomacy since the times of the Cold War, Russia is still in the process of their development as during the Soviet times its primary methods were mostly limited to propaganda. From this perspective, I believe that this work will enrich the knowledge in the field of global communications, bringing material on the strategies of how a non-Western country conducts public diplomacy. Also, this research aims to expand the knowledge on how Russia frames Sweden for international audiences, therefore trying to tackle how it contributes to Sweden's global narrative.

Taking Sweden as a case study and studying the strategic narratives about it in the Russian media outlet will illustrate the contours of the Russian geopolitical worldview. I believe it is vital to investigate as in today’s globalized environment, where NGOs and individuals progressively increase their influence in the field of public diplomacy, news and media outlets have become the main arena for public diplomacy attempt of the nations (Entman 2008).

Finally, through studying strategic narratives that Russia produces about Sweden, this research will expand the knowledge base on to what extent Russia selects a differentiated approach towards individual states in the broader geostrategic environment. This study is therefore also relevant for understanding geopolitical narratives that seem to be guiding Russian policy and the accompanying rhetoric towards and about Sweden and the West in general (Hinck, Kluver, and Cooley 2018, 21).

6 Previous research

Since the focus of this thesis is quite narrow, there is a limited number of works contributing directly to it. Having that in mind, in this section I will also incorporate relevant academic literature
that analyses Russian public diplomacy strategies and Russian soft power in the twenty-first century, how RT frames individual states and events and what strategic narratives Russia creates and promotes.

As for the Russian public diplomacy efforts directed specifically towards Sweden, the only study found is the work of Kragh and Åsberg (Kragh and Åsberg 2017). Even though some parts of this work have received criticism from some part of the Swedish academic community for being exaggerated and lacking proof, I believe that since it’s the only work directly connected with the topic of this thesis, it is necessary to discuss it in this section, yet taking into consideration the controversial character of it.

In their research, they claim that starting from 2014, Russia has begun to engage in covert influence activities towards Sweden, which is a part of geopolitically important European region (Kragh and Åsberg 2017, 774). Their research was based on the case study of the Swedish language version of the Russian newspaper Sputnik from 15th of April 2015 until it was terminated in spring 2016, in total 3963 articles (Kragh and Åsberg 2017, 782). According to their analysis, in the indicated period dominant metanarratives have converged to convey a few consistent messages: the framing of NATO as an aggressor and military threat, the EU as in terminal decline and Russia as under siege from hostile Western governments. In general, the timing, the narratives and the intensity of those has led the researchers to the conclusion that the critical goal of these campaigns was to influence Swedish decision makers and public opinion, and that it was explicitly directed towards Sweden, as in the Nordic region, non-aligned Finland is the only country which has registered a similar experience during the last 2 years (Kragh and Åsberg 2017, 806).

The report of the NATO Strategic Communications Center of Excellence on Russia’s footprint in the Nordic-Baltic Information Environment (Communications and Excellence, 2018) is another source directly connected with the topic of this thesis. In this report, based on the analysis of the Russian state-sponsored media (RT, Sputnik and Perviy Canal) key narratives that Russia is trying to promote about the Baltic and the Nordic countries were identified. Some region-specific narratives (e.g. the narrative of refugees and migrants as a destabilising factor in the Nordics) and country-specific narratives (e.g. a narrative of Sweden being responsible for the unjust persecution of Julian Assange) were determined (Communications and Excellence 2018, 4). Still, due to the brief character of the report and its clear political orientation, it can not serve as an exhaustive
study on the country-specific narratives that Russia promotes towards Sweden, and it only focused on the year 2017.

In general, the rise of Russian public diplomacy in the 2000s is often associated with the emergence of new media and the engagement of the world’s leading public relation’s agencies in the promotion of the positive image of Russia and its leaders (Fominykh 2016, 57). Simons (2018) in his work also sees efforts to develop Russia’s public diplomacy heavily relying on the use of mass communication with foreign audiences to explain official policies (Simons 2018, 148). This process has received significant attention from scholars in Russia and abroad. While some strands of the literature, according to Kiseleva (Kiseleva 2015, 316) are preoccupied with the use of Russian public diplomacy in the post-Soviet space (Saari 2014; Fominykh 2016), other focus on the assessment and effectiveness of it as a tool of its foreign policy (Simons, 2014). As the focus of this research is to analyse strategic narratives in the context of a broader public diplomacy strategy, the literature focusing on Russian public diplomacy will also be reviewed in the following paragraphs.

The works of Saari (Saari, 2014) and Kragh and Åsberg (Kragh and Åsberg 2017) in their analysis of the recent Russian public diplomacy developments find the traces of Soviet legacy incorporated into it. Likewise, Saari (2014) in his article claims that Russian public diplomacy has two separate strands, one of which is directed towards Western states and one of which is directed towards post-Soviet and Baltic states. In his conceptual framework, the Western strand attempts to attract and persuade, and the post-Soviet strand attempts to manipulate, drawing directly from the Soviet Public Diplomacy tradition (Saari 2014, 51). The Western strand is also slightly Soviet-like: although the instruments are sleek and modern, Russian public diplomacy in the West attempts to give a too bright, positive and unitary picture of the country and its people in the absence of compliance with the actual policies (Saari 2014, 56). Kragh and Åberg, in their turn, make a distinction between public policy and the continuity of the so-called Soviet “active measures” which include forgery, disinformation and military threats that are still present in behavioural patterns in Russian foreign affairs (Kragh and Åsberg 2017, 776).

The work of Tolz and Teper (2018), challenges the assumption that Russian state-controlled broadcasters engaged in public diplomacy employ a neo-Soviet model. According to them, after 2012 there was a significant change that occurred in Russia’s broadcasting strategy, the nature of
narratives promoted and the content of coverage. This change has got even more pronounced during and after the Ukrainian crisis (Tolz and Teper 2018, 216). These new features introduced since 2012 relate to a significant increase in airtime devoted to political issues and the intensity of ideological messaging. However, this rise in political and ideological messaging does not mean that the current approach can be explained in terms of a Soviet legacy, because of profound differences in representation and framing strategies deployed. Nowadays Russian broadcasters instead tend to frame the coverage through referencing “global risks” that provoke anxiety not only in Russia but in the world over (Tolz and Teper 2018, 223).

According to Rawnsley (2015), in the aftermath of the events of 2014, the idea of a Russian perspective in global communication flows is central in explaining the public diplomacy strategy Russia pursues and in understanding the mechanisms of its delivery through its international media (Rawsey 2015, 279). Today the line between Russian public diplomacy and propaganda is still blurred. This is due to not only content, style or motivation of broadcasts, but also because of the close relationship between international broadcasting stations and the state (Rawnsley 2015, 274). The motivation of the Russian public diplomacy strategy in the international broadcasting realm seems to be in challenging the alleged “cultural imperialism” of the Western media on global communications or in the words of Russia’s president Vladimir Putin “breaking the monopoly of the Anglo-Saxon Media” (Rawnsley 2015, 279).

According to Kiseleva (2015), Russian efforts in the field of public diplomacy are tightly connected with the necessity of Russia to establish itself as a state capable of using soft power. However, when Russia can not gain status through recognition of its soft power in the hegemonic West, it resorts to asserting “great power” on its own terms, in opposition to hegemon and its soft power “standards”. Russian soft power in this framework is put in geopolitical terms, meant as a counterforce to the West and its detrimental soft power (Kiseleva 2015, 325).

Talking about the research that analyses the international broadcasting network RT in the capacity of a public diplomacy instrument, some works that have done that already (Saari 2014, Simons 2014, Simons 2015, Simons 2018, Vitopoulos 2015). Still, as Borchers claims there is not much research done on the strategies it employs to persuade its viewers of the rightness in the Russian stance (Borchers 2011, 89).
In the research of Borchers (Borchers 2011), he discusses how Russian-Baltic relations are framed in the RT interview show Spotlight. He sees RT as a powerful tool of mediated public diplomacy that secures Kremlin's access to global and foreign national public spheres. The author points at RT’s potential in influencing public opinion and decision making of democratic governments and some transnational institutions like the European Union, which may result in achieving Russian foreign policies’ objectives (Borchers 2011, 93). Examining the show’s episodes through the prism of qualitative exploratory content analysis, he deconstructs how a grand narrative of Russia being good and just and Baltic states motivated by the will of revenge for the Soviet times is constructed (Borchers 2011, 104).

Rawsey (2015) in his work specifically focused on Russian and Chinese public diplomacy strategies, and how they are brought into life through RT (Russia) and CCTC-N (China). According to him, Russia's leading international broadcasting news station, RT, in fact, spends little time covering developments inside Russia, instead of putting a focus on global stories critical of the EU and the US (Rawsey 2015, 275). Therefore, Russia in his view has chosen an "oppositional" approach to soft power and public diplomacy, which means it does not aim to create a positive perception of Russia per se, but is instead seeking to improve Russia's image by undermining the narratives projected by the EU and the US (Rawsey 2015, 282).

In the same vein is the view of RT given in Yablokov’s research (Yablokov 2015) where he outlines the political agenda behind the RT channel and puts a particular focus on the conspirational aspect of the RT news’ agenda. RT’s coverage according to him is delivered from a particularly “Russian" perspective, which is criticised by foreign journalists and politicians and is accused of propaganda. RT, in its turn, presents itself as an “underdog” demanding that the truth be revealed through an open stance against the “mainstream media”, controlled by Western policy makers and business elites (Yablokov 2015, 306). RT’s management explains this peculiar angle of its coverage by the necessity to provide an alternative view of Russia and global affairs amid dominant and biased narrative of the Western media (Yablokov 2015, 309). As he mentions, RT managed to avoid marginalisation as the mouthpiece of Kremlin by delivering viewers alternative, yet meaningful news. And still, these ideas helped to carefully shape the news agenda such that it would challenge the American and the European governments. RT simultaneously adopts the left- and right-wing critics of the US and the EU, and that gives RT leeway to adapt its narratives in different audiences,
thereby expanding its global influence (Yablokov 2015, 306). RT, therefore, is understood as a peculiar instrument of Russian public diplomacy called upon to erode a positive message of the US and the West in the world and thus challenge the political potential of the latter (Yablokov 2015, 311).

Vitopoulus (2015) in his work has focused on how RT had framed the tension between Russia and the West that ensued from Ukrainian crisis from March until December 2014 in the news articles and op-eds (Vitopoulus 2015, 5). He used 97 articles uploaded on RT's international website that were found searching the keywords "Ukraine turmoil" and "Sanctions" (Vitopoulus 2015, 26). He identifies three major frames in the articles (economy, conflict and global security) and strategies that are aimed at presenting the pro-Russian narrative proposed by the RT to the audience credible. Those frames, produced by RT, according to the author constructed a discourse that justified the idea of the unprovoked Western intervention in Ukrainian affairs. Furthermore, the frames seemed to endorse the idea that emerging peripheral nations will play an essential role in the following years and that an alternative political order should be created, aimed at counteracting the predominant Western one (Vitopoulus 2015, 46).

7 Theoretical framework and Key concepts

7.1 Public Diplomacy

"Public diplomacy" is a relatively new term that has gained popularity among policymakers, academics, and mass media starting from the end of the Cold War. The scholars coined the term in 1965 to label the process of international actors seeking to accomplish their foreign policy goals through engaging with foreign publics (Averignos 2009, 117). There is a lack of agreement over the definition of public diplomacy, and at times it is used interchangeably or confused with propaganda or nation-branding (Szondi 2008, Snow and Taylor 2009). In this thesis, Snow's (2009) understanding of the public diplomacy concept will be taken as a point of departure. According to him, public diplomacy is a way of engaging foreign individuals, communities and governments in supporting national objectives and foreign policies of an international actor, stimulated by the development of global communication (Show 2009, 6).

In the twentieth century, public diplomacy was viewed as a state-based instrument, that foreign ministries and other government agencies used to engage and persuade foreign publics for
influencing their governments. Today it has come to mean an instrument used by states, associations of states and non-state actors to understand the culture, attitude and behaviours; to manage relationships; and to affect thoughts and initiate actions to advance their interests and values (Gregory 2011, 353). Contemporary approaches to public diplomacy have extended the types of practices and the nature of actors that can qualify as potentially diplomatic, even if some actors do not evidently have a "working relationship" with the state (Golan and Yang 2015, 337). Therefore, it can be claimed that through public diplomacy, international actors can establish a positive image among international communities, increasing global influence in the world (Yablokov 2015, 303).

According to Sevin’s (2015) study, public diplomacy can be defined through realist, liberalist and constructivist frameworks. Realist public diplomacy sees foreign publics as necessary exclusively due to the capacity of public opinion to change the state behaviour and not as an independent actor per se. A liberal approach to public diplomacy operates under the assumption that states are not the only important actors in world politics, and there are also non-state actors, e.g. the so-called transnational actors which are essential in foreign affairs and politics. Thus, public diplomacy is a platform to interact with the new non-state actors. The third theory, constructivism argues that international relations operate on structures and identities that are socially created, and material aspects are therefore not as important as the social meaning they carry. Constructivist public diplomacy is, therefore, based on the assumption that norms, values and identities are not defined by material power sources, but are social constructs. In regard to that, public diplomacy can manipulate these constructs by encouraging and influencing discussions and is thus a tool to shape the public debate in foreign countries (Sevin 2015, 563-564). What is in common between all these approaches is that public diplomacy is seen capable of changing discourse in a given country and that it serves as a tool in the foreign policy toolkit that makes it possible to reach a multitude of influential actors (Sevin 2015, 564).

As Shaefer and Gabay (2009) claim, with actors realising that sympathetic media coverage is a prerequisite for political influence, the fight to gain access to the media has become a central element in modern political conflicts (Shaefer and Gabay 2009, 447). Usage of media, as a result, is an important dimension of public diplomacy, as the creation of favourable news agenda underlines many public diplomacy strategies. It allows news events to be tailored to the country’s
strategic goals and creates news messages that reinforce the country’s agenda (Leonard, Stead and Smewing 2002, 10-11).

Cull (2008) has developed a simple taxonomy of public diplomacy, dividing its practices into five elements: listening, advocacy, cultural diplomacy, international broadcasting and exchange diplomacy (Cull 2008, 32). The efficiency of each form of public diplomacy hinges on credibility, but here the fields diverge radically. For example, international broadcasters know that the impression of an editorial connection to government runs counter to credibility (Cull 2008, 35).

Different states, according to Cull (2008) have emphasised a particular element of public diplomacy in their approach, while in the ideal structure there should be a balance between all of those and each aspect should be allowed space and funding to make its own necessary contribution to the whole (Cull 2008, 23). International broadcasting is an actor’s attempt to manage the international environment by using the technologies of radio and the Internet to engage with foreign publics. While international broadcasting as practiced by states can overlap with other public diplomacy functions mentioned above, the best reason for considering international broadcasting as a parallel practice apart from the rest of public diplomacy is the particular structural and ethical foundation of its key component: news (Cull 2008, 4). Judging from the steadily increasing level of investment in RT as well as its rapid expansion, in case of Russia’s public diplomacy, the main emphasis is arguably put on the international broadcasting (Rawnsley 2015, 276).

As Golan (2015) claims, while a variety of cultural and educational exchanges might be useful in highlighting nation’s public diplomacy success, the majority of foreign citizens will never be exposed to participate in them. Instead, as supported by previous studies, most people get their information from mass media outlets (Golan 2015, 419). International broadcasting tends to reflect the views of the sponsoring nation, either explicitly or implicitly via the selection, tone and phrasing of information content (Zaharna 2010, 143). Within the field of public diplomacy, mediated public diplomacy approach is focused on nation’s attempts to promote its agenda and frames, through strategically selected mass media efforts, in order to impact opinions of targeted foreign audiences (Golan and Yang 2015, 5).
7.1.1 Mediated Public Diplomacy

Mediated public diplomacy approach focuses on government-to-citizen engagement through the third-party mediators, and it is a strategic global communication effort (Golan and Yang 2015, 51). This field of scholarship, according to Golan and Yang (2015), is under-investigated by academics but is likely to gain much attention from both scholars and public diplomacy practitioners due to the powerful impact of such satellite broadcast channels, e.g. the influence Al Jazeera on political events around the world.

Mediated public diplomacy differs from public or media diplomacy as just defined in that it involves more targeted efforts using mass communication (including internet) (Entman 2008, 88). It is best suited for short-term and medium-term public diplomacy objectives as it deals with current issues that need immediate action and follow-ups (Kim 2014, 110). Often, mediated public diplomacy efforts occur in response to the international crisis, which also resonates with the case study of this thesis. In regard to that, the successful promotion of salient narratives will likely transfer to the saliency of issues and attributes in the foreign public agenda (Golan 2015, 420).

RT in this thesis is considered a tool for Russian mediated public diplomacy. According to Borchers (2011), it does not follow journalistic logic but instead promotes the Kremlin’s views. RT aims to become an influential actor in public debates, thus, to affect public opinion and eventually the decision making of democratic governments (Borchers 2011, 93).

7.2 Strategic narratives

Narratives are frameworks that allow humans to connect apparently unconnected phenomena around some casual transformation. A narrative entails an initial situation or order, a problem that disrupts that order and a resolution that re-establishes order, even though it might slightly alter from the initial situation (Miskimmon, O’Loughlin and Roselle 2013, 7). In general, narratives are essential to the structure of the communication process. A narrative can be a powerful resource, as many people may be drawn to certain actors, events and explanations that describe the history of the country, or the specifics of the policy for example (Roselle et al. 2014, 74). Narratives become strategic in a sense that compelling storylines which explain events can have the power to influence (Zaharna 2016, 4409)
Strategic narratives are defined as the representations of a sequence of events and identities; they are a communicative tool for political actors to extend their influence, manage expectations and transform the discursive environment in which they operate. Critically, strategic narratives integrate interests and goals – they articulate end states and suggest how to get there (Miskimmon, O’Loughlin and Roselle 2013, 8). In the short term, narratives are designed with the intention to structure the responses of others to developing events. In the long term, getting audiences abroad to buy in a strategic narrative can shape audience's interests and their understanding of how international relations works and where it is heading (Miskimmon, O’Loughlin and Roselle 2013, 3).

For a long time, the international relations' scholarship did not fully incorporate the communication of narratives into broader theoretical arguments about structure, agency and construction of order in the international system (Miskimmon, O’Loughlin and Roselle 2013, 1). The interest in strategic narratives has coincided with the ideas about new public diplomacy in the last decade. It was connected with both the arrival of social media and with the world's great powers investing in multilingual, transnational television in remarkably similar ways. China's CCTV, Al-Jazeera, the BBC, Russia Today and others all seek to provide both channels to communicate to audiences all around the world and online platforms for audiences to discuss content and events amongst themselves. This has raised a question of a possibility to expose the public to one's determined strategic narrative, convince them with the validity of it and even get them to become vehicles and proponents of it (Miskimmon, O’Loughlin and Roselle 2013, 5).

Roselle et al. (2014) state that strategic narratives generally fall into three categories or three levels of strategic narratives. These levels and narratives at them are closely linked. First are International System Narratives that describe how the world is structured, who are the players, and how it works. The examples include narratives such as the rise of China, the War on Terror or the Cold War. At a second level are National narratives that set out what the story of the state or nation is, what values and goals it has. Examples of national narratives include the US as peace-loving and committed to bringing freedom and democracy throughout all its history (in the US), and the US as world bully (in other parts of the world). Finally, there are Issue Narratives, that set governmental actions in context, with an explanation of who the important actors are, what the conflict or issue is and how a particular course of action will resolve the underlying issue (Roselle
et al. 2014, 76). In this thesis, this three-dimensional model will be used as a theoretical foundation for understanding what strategic narratives does Russia project towards Sweden through RT.

Usually, the research on mediated public diplomacy utilises the concept of framing. Framing is defined as selecting and highlighting some aspects of a situation to promote a particular interpretation (Entman 2008, 90). However, in this research, the concept of strategic narrative is preferred over the concept of framing. While in essence, these concepts are very similar, using the concept of a narrative as an analytical unit seems more appropriate in this work due to the temporal dimension and sense of movement that distinguishes it. Narratives orient audiences to a future. While a news report may frame an event in a certain way, it does not necessarily introduce past causes or future outcomes. Still, the various components of a narrative should be framed somehow; therefore, framing will also be taken into account in this research (Miskimmon, O’Loughlin and Roselle 2013, 10).

8 Methodology

8.1 Research Design

Public diplomacy scholars often use content analysis to investigate frames and agenda setting in international broadcasting materials (Klyueva 2017, 130). This study is not an exception. Content analysis is more often used as a quantitative research method, with data coded into specific categories and then described through the statistics. Qualitative content analysis is also done through systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns, but it is aimed at subjective interpretation of the context of text (Hsieh and Shannon 2005, 1278-1279). As one of the purposes of this thesis is to understand how RT frames Sweden, using qualitative content analysis for this study seems more feasible. It is both due to the empirical nature of the study that requires a detailed review of the material and to the fact that quantitative analysis usually investigates frequency and duration, while qualitative techniques deal with patterns (Vitopoulus 2015, 25).

Qualitative content analysis, being probably the most common approach to the qualitative analysis of the texts, comprises searching out of underlying themes in the materials being analysed. Research conducted in this thesis is close to what Hsieh and Shannon (2005) define as conventional content analysis, meaning that the aim of it is to describe phenomena. This type of research design
is appropriate when existing literature on the phenomenon is limited, which is also the case of this essay (Hsieh and Shannon 2005, 1279). Therefore, in order to approach the selected articles, qualitative content analysis, namely thematic analysis was be applied.

Thematic analysis, according to Braun and Clarke (2006) is a poorly demarcated and rarely acknowledged, yet widely used qualitative analytical method. This method is aimed at identifying, and reporting patterns or themes within data (Braun and Clarke 2006, 6). Usually, the process through which the themes are extracted is not specified in detail, and the extracted themes are illustrated with quotations (Bryman 2012, 557). However, this thesis followed the steps of thematic analysis, proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), which specify in detail what was done with the data and how themes and actors were identified. These steps are described in the Coding and Data analysis section.

8.2 Data selection and Collection
While sometimes the decision about the dates in content analysis is more or less dictated by the occurrence of the phenomenon, if a research question entails an ongoing phenomenon, the matter of dates is more open. As the focus of this thesis is on the issue that entails keeping track of representation as it happens, it is the case, according to Bryman (2012), when the researcher may begin any time, and the critical decision is when to stop (Bryman 2012, 293). The principle of selection of articles for this research is, therefore, less dependent on the timeframe. For gathering the data, articles from the special section “Sweden news” were retrieved from the English language version of RT’s website (https://www.rt.com/trends/sweden-northern-europe-stockholm/). While most of the articles in this section cover 2018 and onwards in chronological order, this section also has news dating back to 2016. This research, therefore, takes articles from the beginning of the section (January 2018 with an article from 2016) and stops in March 2019 as this is the last calendar month that is over by the time the data sample was formed. From my perspective, analysing articles gathered in a category dedicated to Sweden only is advantageous as I am taking articles pre-selected by the team of RT and articles in this collection are potentially aimed at creating a specific narrative about Sweden. Also, analysing articles that in total cover 15 months ensures that seasonal factors did not overly influence the findings (Bryman 2012, 294).

In total, the sampling includes 112 articles. The articles dedicated to sports and the World Cup, in total 7, were excluded on purpose as they describe the sports events and have a high level of
objectivity. Since RT does not possess a centralised database where it is possible to download materials found with the application of a specific keyword, I had to download every article manually.

**8.3 Coding and Data Analysis**

As Bryman (2012) claims, when the process of coding is thematic, a more interpretive approach needs to be taken. In this thesis, I also apply hermeneutic approach to analyzing the texts, as I try to take the context within which the texts are produced into consideration (Bryman 2012, 560). This comes in accordance with the qualitative methodology, chosen for this research. Analysis in this thesis is conducted in an inductive "bottom-up" way, which means that the themes identified are strongly linked to the data itself. In this research, inductive analysis indicates a process of coding the data without trying to fit it in a pre-existing coding frame or researcher's analytical preconceptions. In a sense this form of analysis is data-driven; yet, as researchers can not free themselves from their theoretical and epistemological commitments, the data is not coded in an epistemological vacuum (Braun and Clarke 2006, 12).

Following the chosen research design, I approached the data of the sample following the framework of thematic analysis, developed by Braun and Clarke (2006) for social science research. The analysis began with immersing in the articles to allow new insights to emerge. After familiarising with the data and generating an initial list of ideas based on what was interesting about the articles, initial codes were created, distinguishing the main striking features. The data was coded using the Excel programme with every article given an item number. One of the examples of the codes was the tone of the articles used to describe a theme, e.g. positive, negative, neutral. Then, codes were sorted into themes, sub-themes and underlying themes with the help of visual representations, i.e. mind-maps, in order to get a better understanding of relationships between those. Afterwards, the dominant themes that RT raises in relation to Sweden were defined, and for each theme, a detailed analysis was written (Hsieh and Shannon 2005, 1279). In addition to that, main actors and characteristics that RT attributes to them were identified, as understanding those is crucial in studying strategic narratives. The process of identifying themes and actors did not rely only on quantifiable measures, but also made sure that they captured something important in relation to the research questions (Braun and Clarke 2006, 82).
Media materials can serve as an excellent vehicle for strategic narrative delivery since narratives can be conveyed in different ways and through a variety of media and do not need a narrator (Abbott 2002). Keeping that in mind, the results of thematic analysis conducted in the thesis were integrated in the strategic narrative theoretical framework. As the concept of strategic narrative is relatively new, there is no established methodology of how to study them. According to Miskimmon, O’Loughlin and Roselle (2017), researchers are expected to mix methods in different ways, and develop patchwork, adaptive, broader methodologies (Miskimmon, O’Loughlin and Roselle 2017, 24). In case of this thesis, using the results of thematic analysis, I have interpreted them using strategic narrative theoretical framework.

In order to understand strategic narratives, they should be traced. Ideally, this involves identifying and analysing the formation, projection and reception of strategic narratives (Roselle 2017, 103). Within the case study, taken for this research, I have mainly focused on the second step, on analyzing the projection of strategic narratives that Russia promotes about Sweden. After identifying those, I scrutinized and defined to which types these narratives belong, utilizing the three-level framework of strategic narratives: International system Narratives, National Narratives and Issue Narratives (Roselle et al. 2014, 76). By doing that, the empirical results of the study were brought into the theoretical dimension of the field of strategic narratives and public diplomacy scholarship.

**8.4 Reliability and Validity**

In social sciences, validity pertains to the issue of whether a method investigates what it intends to investigate (Kvale 2007, 122). This thesis was based on a single case study. There is widespread criticism towards single case studies, based on the assumption that findings derived from it can not be generalised, and applying its findings to the other cases might be difficult (Bryman 2012, 71). I acknowledge this limitation, and since the material I analyse comes from a single platform (RT), it means that it is impossible to draw general conclusions about strategic narratives as a means to exercise public diplomacy. However, taking a single case study design for the subject of this thesis is justified from my point of view due to a narrow and highly specific nature of the research question and exploratory character of the study. As a result, the validity of the study seems high to me as the aim of the thesis is to look at the political phenomena, to describe it and to
integrate empirical evidence about it into theoretical perspective, and single case study fully allows that.

Qualitative methods, in general, are often being criticised for being unclear. As Bryman (2012) claims, it is often not obvious how the analysis was conducted; in other words, what was researcher doing with the data and how the study's conclusions were arrived at. In order to increase the transparency of this qualitative research, I intended to give as much detail about the methodology and the stages of analysis as it was possible.

Reliability pertains to consistency and trustworthiness of research findings; in other words, it is often treated concerning the issue of whether a finding is reproducible at other times and by other researchers (Kvale 2007, 122). While qualitative research is highly dependent on the researcher’s interpretation, in order to increase the reliability of this essay, the data from the sample was investigated several times by referring to the methodological tools and theoretical concepts.

8.5 Ethical considerations

For research not to violate the ethics, it is essential for the scholar to be transparent and honest, as well as accurate and not misleading the reader through exaggeration and inappropriate attribution. Moreover, research in media requires increased objectivity as the researcher already deals with the content, influenced on multiple levels: ideology, external factors, organisational influence, journalistic routine and individual level (Vitopoulus 2015, 29). Even though researchers are subject to certain pre-suppositions and beliefs, this should not affect the research process or the outcomes of the analysis. In order to ensure the transparency of this thesis, I have applied a self-reflexive approach. Outside that, from my perspective, no major ethical concerns should arise from the proposed questions or the chosen research methods as I do not deal with the interviews.

9 Results and Analysis

In this chapter, I will present empirical findings of the research, and merge both the description of the results and analytical approach to them. This chapter is divided into three parts. In the first part, I will focus on the most prominent actors and the way they are framed. In the second part, I will analyze the dominant themes through which Sweden is framed by RT. In the third part, I will discuss strategic narratives that were traced in the RT data set about Sweden. While the first two parts of this chapter present the results of the thematic analysis, conducted in this thesis, in the
third part elements of those are integrated in the theoretical framework, namely they are grouped in strategic narratives.

In general, the lion share of the analyzed articles were written from a seemingly neutral position – presuming that various opinions on the matter were acknowledged and theoretically it was up to the reader to decide which one is right. However, through indirect strategies, the reader was persuaded to take the opinion, favored by RT as the right one. One of the most often used strategies to achieve this effect in this sample was category entitlement. Category entitlement is one of the fundamental processes for assessing constructed narrative. Through it, a person, an issue or a group is attributed with a positive or a negative signifier, therefore getting an indirect evaluation (Vitopoulus 2015, 34). Another strategy that was used to convince the reader in the rightness of RT’s view was latent evaluation when the author of the article does not openly evaluate the topic, but instead makes an assertion that implies an indirect judgement (Vitopoulus 2015, 33).

While I do not claim that there is a unitary reality, transmitted through these articles, there are definitely strategic narratives that are constructed through presenting different dimensions of the recurrent themes and actors. Intertextuality has proven crucial in conducting analysis of the media sample that is aimed at engaging in public diplomacy activities. Within the theory of intertextuality, meaning is something that exists between a text and other texts to which it refers and connects with, moving out from independent text into a network of textual relations (Allen 2011, 1). For identifying strategic narratives about Sweden that RT transmits it was necessary to go through a selection of texts as their elements were scattered across different articles. Also, these narratives could not be understood fully if studied separately from each other – they are closely intervened and dependent on one another.

9.1 Actors

Through narratives, actors are given meaning to themselves and others. Actors behave in particular ways not entirely due to their power capabilities, but also due to identities that are related to actors' characteristics within narratives. And in relation to that, actors seek to use narratives to trap, coerce and undermine other actors in order to maneuver their behaviors (Miskimmon, O’Loughlin and Roselle 2013, 51). Due to the importance of actors in constructing narratives, and specifically in strategic narratives, this part is dedicated to analyzing the actors within the themes that RT raises in relation Sweden. Based on the frequency of the times being mentioned in the sample, I have
identified five key actors that were continuously addressed and discussed by RT: Right-wing parties, the Swedish Government, police, migrants/refugees, the European Union. Another important dimension of analyzing actors for this thesis is the fact that category entitlement is often done through giving certain actors voice and agency to assess the issue. In case of RT, it often gave indirect evaluation of events, by bringing the words of the person or an organization that it presumably sees as credible.

9.1.1 Right-wing parties

While RT does not limit Swedish right-wing politicians to Sweden Democrats or SD, they are still most often brought up in this capacity. One significant characteristic of portraying right-wing parties and especially SD in RT is that the words of the party members and its leaders are taken as credible opinions, most often in the articles that discuss Swedish migration policies or Swedish security situation. Right-wing parties and SD are presented as telling the truth in comparison to their opponents, based on the assumption that “right-wing politicians... are not hesitant to say that crime and immigration do have a connection” (item 37). As it was summed up further: “Once unpalatable to the mainstream, the Sweden Democrats have presented themselves as the only honest and effective alternative to the mainstream parties, promising to curb migration, enforce integration, and tackle rising violent and sexual crime” (item 62).

In another news report, through the words of political analyst Charles Ortel, SD is described as “unfairly painted by the mainstream media” and that “from an American perspective, even Sweden Democrats is a left-leaning economic policy”, noting that “the party favors a welfare state and advocates socialist economic policies” (item 64). SD is also repetitively positioned as the party that is gaining success and significant support from the ordinary Swedish people, and before the elections, it is ascribed that SD are “among the favorites in September 9 elections” (item 43). It is continuously underlined that SD in future “would have significant influence” (item 51), but that it will take time. Even though negative opinions about SD are also brought up in the articles, they are often dismissed as unfair. After the elections, there was a certain victimization of the party as it seemed to be gaining less success than it should have, according to the RT’s narrative created before. RT frames it as caused by the Swedish establishment’s “aim and “moral duty... to exclude the anti-migrant Sweden Democrats from power” (item 63).
9.1.2 The Swedish government

On the contrary, the way the Swedish government is framed in RT is generally unfavorable. It is portrayed as unreactive and losing power to other political forces, e.g. as “being blind to the problems that many say the wave of migration has caused”. In the same vein, it is further highlighted in this article that the government’s “unwillingness to listen to those who express genuine concerns has now led to increasing number of people turning towards right-wing politicians” (item 38). Also, the government is described as indecisive when it comes to tackling the crime: “amid public doubts over what action the government has been taking to tackle crime. Yet, the government doesn’t seem to have matched its words with deeds” (item 59). In accordance with this description, Stefan Löfven, Swedish PM is portrayed as a person who uses strong language but who never takes action: “Löfven appears to be living quite a tempestuous existence. In the past two years alone he felt “a great anger” over reports of Afghan refugees attacking women at music festivals, “outraged” about an attack on a synagogue in Gothenburg, and “furious” about sharia patrols on Swedish streets. If only there was a productive outlet for this man’s emotions “(item 50). It is further framed that the centrist party and the government are rapidly losing the support of people and legitimacy but still as RT predicts they “will continue to wield power while invisibly losing it, as their growing lack of legitimacy threatens the entire political firmament” (item 76).

9.1.3 Swedish police

Following the RT’s depiction of the Swedish government as unable to protect its citizens, police is also portrayed as incapable of defending Swedish citizens and losing control over the situation. In item 31, it is claimed that “The police lacks adequate resources to combat the scourge of crime that is sweeping parts of the country”. RT further characterises Swedish police as unwilling to take action to stop the crimes, as in item 49: “Youths have vandalized Swedish cities unhindered overnight, setting fire to dozens of cars in what are believed to be coordinated acts of arson. However, the police decided not to take action on the spot, and no arrests were reported” (item 49). To further develop the assumption that neither the state, neither the police are willing to protect the people, RT brings the element of conspiracy in its depiction of police. Likewise, it is implied that police together with the media are hiding the truth from the people, not to provoke the rise of the right-wing parties as for example in the following news report: “The wave of assaults in 2014-
2016 became particularly controversial after media reports said police were aware of groups of immigrant youths allegedly harassing women at the festivals but “self-censored” the information on festival attacks in their report. A local newspaper was also accused of withholding a tip-off on police investigating attacks by migrants, allegedly for the fear it would benefit anti-migrant parties” (item 33).

9.1.4 Migrants/refugees

Migrants through the lens of RT are mostly depicted in the negative light and as indispensably connected with crime related activities. Across the articles, it was implied that migrants are an ultimate threat for Sweden’s security situation, i.e. “Gang-related gun murders –overwhelmingly carried out by men with migrant backgrounds– have surged from around four per-year in the early 1990s to 40 last year. Rapes and anti-Semitic attacks by Muslim immigrants have also surged” (item 30).

Moreover, migrants were dehumanized and portrayed as an the Other for the Swedish population, based on the religious and cultural grounds. Likewise, in item 53 migrants were attributed with “inability to accept European values”. Another example is found in item 41, which claimed that “In the municipality of Boras, officials report that some children will refuse to drink “Christian” water from the taps, and will wash themselves off in the mosque after spending a day in contact with non-Muslims.; In Vasteras, teenage criminals have been known to justify stealing from shops with non-veiled cashiers, shouting out “kufir” (non-believer) and “Swedish whore” as they raided a store; In Gothenburg, which has supplied more recruits from Sweden to Islamic State (IS, formerly ISIS) than any other city, Salafists informed their followers that voting in secular Swedish elections was “haram” – forbidden”. Another proof of RT’s dehumanisation of migrants and refugees is that they are almost never given voice and agency in the analysed articles, and presented as homogenous community, deeply involved in committing crimes.

9.1.5 The European Union

The European Union (the EU) is portrayed by RT as an entity, that was severely weakened by the refugee crisis in 2015, and that is still unable to overcome it. Through Swedish example, the way the EU deals with the member states was articulated, e.g. one of the articles states that Sweden was “forced to accommodate thousands of people” (item 43). To further develop the idea of the EU taking one-sided decisions and to support the idea of discontent it is causing in Sweden, RT
brings the opinions of SD members and presents them as reflecting the opinion of the majority. At the same time, the rise of the parties critical towards the EU in Sweden was often discussed across the articles in the context of general deterioration of the union. Likewise, the articles contained statements as “The EU is not the way to cooperate in Europe,” and even more, “The Sweden Democrats want to leave the European Union,” wrote Kristina Winberg and Peter Lundgren. “We do not want to have some unelected EU Commission, which together with the court and the parliament can bulldoze over member states even if they say ‘no’ the whole way” (item 51).

The EU even though not explicitly criticized was portrayed as losing support from Swedish population, and the future membership of Sweden in the EU was presented as a subject of debate. One of the examples that confirms it is item 43, where RT discusses the idea of the Nordic Union as preferable for more than a half of the Swedes, according to the research, while the EU is labelled as possessing “low trust” from the Swedish population (item 43).

9.2 Themes

9.2.1 Migration

The coverage of this theme, according to the analysis of the articles in the sample contained more negative judgements and more negative assumptions, than articles related to the other two topics. Interestingly, RT published the most articles about migration and the negative impact it has on Sweden in the period between June and September 2018, right before the Swedish general election, that took place on the 9th of September 2018.

Through the lens of RT, migration is probably the important theme in describing Sweden today. Two other topics, security and values and identity, are inseparably linked with migration as RT often attributes it as the root for the issues that arise within two remaining topics, and it is in relation to migration that many actors are given direct or indirect assessment by RT.

A statement that is repeated continuously is that Sweden “has welcomed more asylum seekers than any other European country in relation to its population” (item 22). However, the numbers, given about the migrants arriving to Sweden were a subject of constant change throughout the sample. Likewise, the figures given tend to grow the closer it got to the Swedish general elections. In February 2018, in an article it was stated that “Sweden accepted as many as 163 000 people at the
height of the refugee crisis, becoming one of the European countries with the largest share of refugees per capita, alongside Austria” (item 11). Then, in July 2018 the article takes a different timeline and a different number of migrants to describe the situation: “Sweden has accepted more migrants per capita than any other European Union member state, welcoming nearly 250,000 people between 2014 and 2015” (item 38). Same month, RT claims that “Sweden, which is home to 800,000 people born outside of Europe, primarily in Syria and Iraq, and hundreds of thousands more second and third-generation migrants” (item 41). In August, one of the articles assumes “as estimated, 400 000 people filed for asylum in Sweden since 2012” (item 59), and then, in an article issued on the day of elections, on the 9th of September, the largest number is given: “Sweden has welcomed 1.7 million foreigners since 2000, taking in more refugees per capita in the last four years than any other EU state, and nearly one-in-five residents was born outside the country” (item 61).

Credibility of international broadcasting as a public diplomacy tool hinges on providing a professional and trustworthy news service (Rawnsley 2015, 274). In the case, described above RT seems to put data forward in order to show that reality is interpreted objectively, without analytical interference. Numbers always tell the truth and providing exact numbers implies an accurate representation of undeniable reality (Vitopoulos 2015, 35). However, as it is visible from the case of the number of migrants, the data is used in a way to persuade the reader to accept the stance of RT that Sweden has accepted too many migrants. While the figures RT bring are true and accurate, by expanding the timeframe, RT brings bigger numbers into play, therefore making the number of migrants in Sweden look more and more dramatic the closer to the elections.

Besides, RT is not consistent whether the migration crisis is over in Sweden or not: in one article it quotes the words of the representative of a right-wing think tank about the “continuing high level of immigration” (item 61), while in the other news reports it is acknowledged that the authorities adopted “a new restrictive policy, which resulted in less than 30,000 people coming to Sweden in 2016, and even smaller number in 2017” (item 11), and in a later article adding that “in the first half of 2018, the country received around 10,000 applications” (item 46). This example is brought up to show that RT brings contradicting statements in relation to migration, depending on the statement it defends.
According to the frame that RT provides, migration is portrayed as the main reason for societal and economic challenges that Sweden faces today, e.g. “immigration is the most pressing issue facing Sweden” (item 22), or as described in detail in item 61 “The rising level of violent crime has been attributed to migrant ghettos and foreign gangs, the falling performance of schools put down to having to accommodate so many non-native speakers, the housing crisis in major cities partly blamed on the fast-rising population, while healthcare and police are also stretched beyond intended capacity”.

Arguably, the most prominent frame that RT constructs in relation to migration is the link of migration and crime, i.e. through giving the descriptions as “country’s open-door migration policy, which has been accompanied by a crime wave” (item 30), “links have been consistently drawn by politicians, the media and many ordinary Swedes themselves between migration and the increasing levels of certain kinds of crime” (item 38), “with migrants believed by many to be contributing to the rise in crime and social tension” (item 43), etc. The right-wing politicians, namely Sweden Democrats are portrayed by RT as honest and credible through their stance on migration. RT definitely advocates for the voters to support the right-wing parties as having a potential to bring a change. For example, in the quotation from the following news report, the Swedish government’s “Unwillingness to listen to those who express genuine concerns has now led to increasing numbers of people turning towards right-wing politicians who are not shy about expressing their anti-immigrant sentiments and inflaming the situation further” (item 38).

Also, RT often brings up the topic of integration in relation to migration and implies that Sweden is unable to do that effectively. According to the frame, constructed by RT, migrants are considered as possessing “inability to accept European values” (item 53) and Sweden, in its turn, is described as a state with an “inability ... to integrate the arriving migrants” (item 54) or as described by Magdalena Andersson, the Swedish Finance Minister, whose words are cited by RT repetitively concerning Sweden: “Integration is not working properly. It didn’t work before the autumn of 2015 either” (item 22). “The lack of integration” is attributed to “a host of reasons including lack of education and jobs, inability to speak the local language, hostility from the natives” (item 38). Decision of Sweden to accept the migrants is depicted not as a voluntary action, but rather as pressed by the EU. In line with that are the depictions of Swedish people, that are portrayed
somewhat unwilling to accept the migrants, but deprived from a possibility to influence the
government.

9.2.2 Identity and Values

The topic of identity and values in Swedish society and the process of change that occurs within those is another recurring theme in the sample of RT articles. While it was not often explicitly brought up, as an underlying theme it occurred in more than a half of the articles analysed. The change that occurs in the Swedish values is attributed to migration, and the overall prognosis that RT makes is about the potential extinction of Swedish nation and Swedish identity, due to the number of migrants accepted.

Sweden in the past is described as a “sleepy and homogenous protestant country” (item 8) and a “country with a democratic history” (item 75). Talking about the present, RT at first labels Sweden as a country with “fundamental values about equality and human rights” (item 14), “fortress of liberal values” (item 63), “hyper-progressive country” (item 87), but only to later bring doubt and even challenge these assumptions about Sweden’s democratic stance.

Within the frame, constructed by RT, Swedish values and identity and the way they are exercised are questioned, which comes in line with RT’s opposition to the narratives from the “mainstream media”. In relation to democracy, it is stated that “throughout the last century, the country has prided itself first on its welfare state and democracy, then on its tolerance and welcoming attitude to migrants, then on its ability to combine economic success with its social values” however to conclude later that “the welfare state is collapsing, nothing works as it should” (item 61). In item 48, Sweden is portrayed not as democratic as readers could have thought: “Sweden may not be the bastion of democracy that the world seems to think it is...a new poll revealed that a large portion of Swedish youths would prefer experts to run the country in lieu of democratically elected politicians”. Sweden’s identity narrative and ability to live up to this identity were also framed as something questionable: Sweden “is a state that unironically labels itself as a “humanitarian superpower” and sees itself as a moral example, particularly in the age of Donald Trump. But can you be a superpower if you cannot stop grenade attacks or mass car-burnings?” (item 61). All these examples demonstrate how RT tries to contradict the general or “mainstream” assumptions about Sweden as of a welfare state and as of a country that lives up to its democratic principles.
RT pays much attention portraying the "change" that occurred and keeps occurring in the general understanding what Swedish identity and Swedish values are and whether they are necessary for the Swedish people. In case 61, it is assumed that “Both the insiders and the outsiders say that they are custodians of the country’s values. The socialists claim that it would be a betrayal of its values to drop its endlessly tolerant internationalism, while the right insists that a loss of social cohesion augurs a breakdown of everything that made Sweden more than a Scandinavian backwater”. In another article, it is argued that the price that Sweden pays for keeping up to the democratic ideals is too high for the ordinary people who pay it: “Before Olof Palme, who is stated as Löfven’s predecessor and the godfather of Sweden’s welcoming stance on modern migration, who is basically seen as the one who espoused ideals that later have forced his native countryman to pay an expensive price and that future members of his party give almost everything at stake of the ideals he promoted” (item 8). Addressing the outcomes and the future of Sweden if keeps up with its values in the same way, RT brings the words of NRM leader, who claimed in his interview for RT that “the Swedes are soon to become a minority” (item 57).

Throughout the articles, the idea of Sweden’s fundamental values coming from the politicians, but not from the common people was constantly brought up as well. When addressing Swedish values in detail, particularly gender equality and sustainability, RT tends to bring controversial and even radical examples, describing how these values are enacted in Sweden. It is another illustration of how RT contradicts “mainstream” narratives about Sweden.

Likewise, through the lens of RT, the topic of gender equality in Sweden is described through the cases as “Feminists in Sweden taking on alphabet, specifically the phonetic alphabet used in military to spell out letters over the radio” (item 68) and through discussing the “male free musical festival” (case 80), that received mixed reactions in Sweden itself. RT characterises its vision of feminist initiatives in Sweden by bringing the words of Ann Heberlein and giving it credibility as in item 68, who claimed that “the war on Swedish men continues” (item 68). Also, when discussing gender equality in Sweden RT refers to the phenomenon of “the Nordic paradox” as it also affects Sweden’s closest neighbors Norway, Finland, and Denmark. All countries have excellent gender equality ratings, but high rates of domestic violence against women” (item 71). Therefore, a lot of controversy is suggested by RT both towards what feminism is about in Sweden and both whether it is effective or not.
In relation to sustainability and the efforts that Sweden puts into it, one of the examples is the article that discusses an aviation tax, introduced to limit the impact of air travel on environment. However, straight in the beginning of the article, it is stated that "the country's Environmental Protection Agency says that it won’t have a big effect on emissions" (item 19). Or, another example was an article, where a professor Sigrid Agenäs was advocating for vegetarian diet for dogs, and it was framed by RT as “Hyper-progressive Sweden is a bastion of environmentalism and veganism, but a Swedish professor is now drawing ridicule for suggesting that pet owners should feed their dogs a vegetarian diet, all in the name of saving the planet”. As a result of RT’s framing and choice of articles, Sweden’s measures aimed at bringing more sustainability and gender equality look at least not as efficient as they aim to be, and in some cases even controversial and extreme.

Summing up, the idea behind RT’s criticizing and ridiculing common narratives about Sweden’s values and identity and what is now happening to them is about the “necessary” change that RT advocates for, visibly connected with the alternatives that the Swedish right-wing parties are offering, however telling that this change is “not necessarily a voluntary one” (item 50).

9.2.3 Security
RT’s approach to the theme of Sweden’s security situation is two-fold – it discusses the internal and external threats, putting a significantly greater focus to the former one. The challenges to the internal security situation are repeatedly attributed to migration, as for example illustrated by item 54: “Vandalism, rape, murder and other crimes have spiked in the country in recent years, and this has been linked by some to the European migrant crisis in 2015”. Also, it is underlined that there is a significant change in Sweden’s security landscape and that it occurred just recently because of migration: “Three decades ago gun crime was front page-worthy in a country with restrictive firearms ownership laws. Now, with nearly-daily media headlines about “turf wars,” “revenge killings” and “grenade crime,” attention has turned to the disadvantaged areas where they occur” (item 8). Throughout the sample, it is continuously implied that Sweden has become a dangerous country to live in. A phrase that in 2017 in Sweden «there were a total of 306 shooting incidents last year, resulting in 41 deaths” was repeated at least 8 times throughout the articles’ sample. In order to make the situation seem even more dramatic, RT brings ordinary people's reflections, like in the item 5 which is a news report about an explosion at the police station in
Malmo and a man shares that his children “became terrified. Such things only happen on television and in other countries”. In contrast to that, the words of the government that RT brings in item 26 that “Sweden is safer than many other countries, but threats exist” seem to reinforce the frame of RT in which the Swedish government is ambivalent, and its statements do not accurately reflect the reality.

Developing the narrative of the unstable internal security situation in Sweden, RT pays a lot of attention to describing the so-called “no-go zones” in Sweden, which are labelled as places that are “starkly different, culturally, from the areas in their surrounds. This creates both social alienation and resentment on behalf of those living in the areas — and those on the outside who feel threatened by newcomers and their lack of social integration” and where “officers of the law may not be safe” (item 36). While the existence of such zones is a matter of debate, and RT acknowledges that by bringing the viewpoint of the Swedish government that it “has consistently rejected using the term, admitting that while there are difficulties in certain neighborhoods, they are not places in which police and other agencies cannot effectively work”, RT definitely favors a position that they exist in Sweden. It is further implied that these zones exist by bringing in the arguments in item 99 that states that “In 2017, the Swedish ambulance union said first responders need military-grade protective gear to withstand the dangers of such areas. Later that year, the government-run postal service, PostNord, halted mail delivery to some addresses near the troubled Stockholm suburb of Rinkeby, where large-scale riots were taking place”.

As for the external threat to the Swedish security situation, almost all of the measures the Swedish government does are portrayed as deeply unnecessary in the light of internal security state. For example, one of the article brings these two together in stark contrast, framing the external threat as “the head of the Swedish intelligence called Russia “the biggest threat to our security,” earlier this year” and internal as “on the other hand, hundreds of burning cars are not a threat to national security, or political stability (perhaps not having them set on fire would be one way of taming those unruly nativists)” (item 50). A lot of efforts are put into presenting a Russian threat towards Sweden as highly irrelevant and hyperbolized. Likewise, despite the fact that “The Swedish armed forces have called for military spending to combat future challenges, with Russia listed as the main one”, the words of the Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov are brought further in the article, who criticizes “the irrational myth about almighty Russian threat” and states that “only an
inflamed imagination” could come up with the idea that Moscow was about to attack the Baltic or Poland, but Russophobic rhetoric in the West never seems to abate” (item 12).

The idea of Russian meddling into the Swedish elections is visibly ridiculed, by framing it through the rhetorical question that the item 50 poses “Is Russia firebombing cars to help the anti-EU Sweden Democrats?” (item 50). To develop it further and to present the Swedish government and media’s statements less credible, in item 92 RT frames Sweden’s attitude towards Russia as “Russian ‘invasion’ hysteria in Sweden kicked off in 2014 when the country’s navy carried out a fruitless search for a Russian submarine, which had allegedly been spotted off the Swedish coast, until it later turned out that the vessel was a work boat. When a television mast came down in Sweden in 2016, some media immediately jumped to the conclusion that Russia could be the culprit”. Finally, issuing a reprint of the brochure “If crisis or war comes” is called “another Cold War era relic” (item 28), highlighting that Russian threat thought belongs to the past.

As a final point to cementing that Russia does not pose danger to Sweden, the report of Sapo is brought in item 107, which has found “‘no extensive influence campaigns aiming at influencing the Swedish elections,” in 2018, it provided no evidence of or allusions to any attempts either”. Moreover, in the same news report it is stated that “Islamism ... poses the biggest threat to Swedish national security”, and that “adherents of the radical ideology are still plotting to carry out attacks in Sweden” and that white nationalists on the far right and members of the radical autonomous movement on the left pose a more long-term threat through the systematic use of violence and intimidation to overthrow Sweden’s current form of democratic government” (item 107). From my perspective, it serves as a case of RT’s ambivalent use of information when it takes the information that is convenient for its purpose regardless of the source - generally portraying the Swedish government as not worth the trust, the government’ report is presented as a trustworthy source of information in this case.

9.3 Strategic Narratives
The general strategic narrative that Russia promotes about Sweden can be summarised in the following way. Sweden, which holds to its democratic values and the liberal system is severely hit by the EU migration crisis, just like other Western countries, which causes crime waves and the rise of the right-wing parties inside the country, and the government can not stop either of the processes. The parts of this overall narrative fall into two levels of the three-level framework,
closely intertwined with each other – these are strategic narratives about International System and National Narrative. Both strategic narratives share similar “end states”, which are not explicitly stated but implied. RT predicts decline and in extreme case the extinction of Swedish nation and the West, in case a change, attributed by RT to the measures, proposed by right-wing parties, does not occur.

9.3.1 International System Narrative

International system narrative promoted by RT through the selection of articles about Sweden fits well with the claims of Miskimmon and O’Loughlin (2017) about the themes in Russia’s strategic narrative of global and regional order. According to them, starting from the 2000s these themes stress of the emergence of a new world order, where West plays a diminished role, and the emerging powers take the lead (Miskimmon and O’Loughlin 2017, 113). In this thesis, it is confirmed by RT describing Sweden as losing its status as a humanitarian superpower as it no longer can control the situation at home. It also corresponds well with the international system narrative, which is a part of Russian public diplomacy described by Shekhovtsov (2017) – the explicit message of it is about the West in decline and failing, and the implicit message is about the stability of conservative, traditionalist Russia in comparison with the disorderly liberal West (Shekhovtsov 2017, 153).

On the international system narrative level, Sweden is assessed through the prism of being a vital part of the EU. RT positions Sweden as one of best embodiments of the liberal and democratic values or as it was called in item 61 "the shining beacon of the European values". Moreover, when talking about the international system, RT uses Sweden in this capacity to further highlight the severity of the crisis that the West is going through. By continually questioning the ability of Sweden and its policymakers to keep up with these values in the light of migration influx and in the light of the growing popularity of the right-wing parties, RT tried to capitalise on particular soft spots of the EU, like the cohesion of the Eurozone or migration, to prove the alleged failure and integration agenda of the EU (Shekhovtsov 2017, 139).

This international system narrative, promoted by RT about Sweden, also fits the frame of strategic narrative aimed at undermining the entity, described by Roselle (2017). According to her, when an outside state (in this case Russia) wants to disrupt an alliance (the EU), a strategy would be to use narratives that suggest a fear of entrapment of a state (Sweden), highlighting that the “interests”
might be ignored or restrained within the alliance. In this case, system narrative would suggest that
the alliance is outdated or insufficient for the current international system (Roselle 2017, 102).
According to the analysis, conducted in this thesis, RT repetitively described the EU as losing
support and legitimacy through portraying the Eurosceptic governments coming into power as a
sign of the dissolution of the union in the future and as a sign of its inefficiency. In Sweden,
growing parts of population were described as skeptical of the EU and willing to cooperate in a
different way, e.g. by establishing the Nordic Union. Moreover, it was underlined that the EU
forced Sweden to adopt its migration policy, and it was in the interest of the former. And further,
through the words of the right-wing party members, doubts were brought about the feasibility of
staying in the EU for Sweden, as concerns about decision making and whether these decisions are
beneficial for Sweden were brought up.

Finally, the findings of this thesis about the international system strategic narrative in the Swedish
case partly correspond with the conclusions of Kragh and Åsberg (2017) about Sweden. They also
spotted that the Swedish version of Sputnik promoted the vision of the EU as of an organisation in
terminal decline, caused by major crises such as the influx of migrants to Europe from the Middle
East and Africa and that the European bureaucrats and decision makers were described as
incompetent (Kragh and Åsberg 2017, 782). According to their article, that could be the dominant
narrative that Russia wants to communicate to the Swedish target audience (Kragh and Åsberg
2017, 784). From my perspective, it is the case of RT as well. However, what differs in RT’s
depiction of the international system narrative from the Kragh and Åsberg’s findings is that RT,
unlike Sputnik, rarely mentioned NATO in the articles, rather putting a greater emphasis on the
EU.

9.3.2 National Narrative
The national strategic narrative about Sweden, transmitted by RT largely overlaps with the
international system narrative. However, it possesses country-specific characteristics. Likewise,
Sweden is mostly assessed as a country that accepted most of the migrants in relation to the
population, which confirms the statement of Kragh and Åsberg (2017), who also pointed in their
analysis that Sweden was referenced mostly in relation to migration (Kragh and Åsberg 2017,
784).
In how RT framed national strategic narrative about Sweden, I have found that it is best explained through the theory of Yablokov (2015), who claimed that RT widely uses conspiracy theories in constructing its narratives. In the case of RT portraying Sweden, there is a conspiratorial narrative present about the Swedish government taking decisions about migration against the will of the Swedish people, who do not support those and covering the criminals of immigrant origin, further deteriorating security situation. Also, Swedish police and Swedish media are presented as partners-in-crime in helping the government to cover up the information about the crimes, committed by migrants, as item 33 claims doing that "allegedly for the fear it would benefit anti-migrant parties". As an example of RT bringing “evidence” to advocate this conspiracy theory, it compares item 47, when Stockholm police was investigated for misconduct after “officers fatally shot a young man carrying a plastic toy gun” and item 50, when “the three synagogue attackers that so "outraged" Lofven were sentenced to between 15 months and 2 years in prison. Despite none of them being Swedish citizens, two had their refugee residence permits extended, and were allowed to stay in the country”. These articles go one after another, and by providing contrast between the attitude of the police towards a helpless Swedish citizen who got murdered and a group of “migrants”, RT justifies the claims that the government, media and police work for the favor of the migrants, not Swedish citizens. According to Yablokov (2015), the adoption of conspirational narratives allows RT to infuse the current social and economic inequalities of Western societies with conspirational allegations, thereby generating a distinctly anti-elitist message and winning the attention of domestic audiences (Yablokov 2015, 307).

Another element of RT’s Sweden-specific narrative, which was used to undermine the credibility of Swedish authorities and their statements was a discussion about the “submarine-mania”. As it was noted by Kragh and Åsberg (2017) and confirmed by the analysis of this thesis, two or three instances of ambiguities entering Swedish media on the suspected intrusion of foreign submarines were exploited by RT in order to castigate Swedish “submarine mania” to an international audience. In other words, this conventional Swedish media reporting has appeared through Russian mediated public diplomacy tools in order to bring doubt and confusion about the quality of the Swedish Armed forces and at the same time to frame Swedish politicians and media as “Russophobic” and lessen the credibility of their words (Kragh and Åsberg 2017, 801).
10 Discussion

In general, the results of the case study of Sweden and RT in this thesis confirm the trend that Shekhovtsov (2016) has pointed at in regard to Russian mediated public diplomacy. According to him, starting from 2013-2014, Russian public diplomacy has started to rely on engaging with the Western far-right, right-wing, anti-establishment figures and conspiracy theorists, critical of the EU, Eurozone, liberal democracy, multiculturalism, human rights, etc. They stopped being simple newsmakers for the Russian media but started to appear as valuable commentators and opinion makers (Shekhovtsov 2017, 153). In case of this thesis and RT portraying Sweden, representatives of Alternative for Sweden and Sweden Democrats were often brought to give their commentary on the variety of issues, e.g. migration, security, membership in the EU, elections, the future of Sweden. Shekhovtsov explains, that these out-of-balance reports – prioritising right-wing and far-right and generally fringe commentators over the mainstream or established ones aimed at presenting views sceptical of, and even antagonistic towards the EU as a project as of equal value with sober analyses of the problematic issues, associated with it (Shekhovtsov 2017, 153). For the Russian audiences, Western far-right commentators successfully play a role of European “experts” and help create a feeling that Russia is not a “lonely” state and that it has allies in Europe and in the West. For international audiences, RT bringing far-right “opinion-makers” contributes to the image of a provocative supplier of “alternative news”, that run counter mainstream narratives (Shekhovtsov 2017, 153).

Another theory that the case study of this thesis found common points with was the “nudge propaganda”. “Nudge propaganda” works by finding parties, politicians and points of view that are already sure of their world view and giving them a nudge – as long as these views are usefully anti-systemic (Shekhovtsov 2017, 135). In the Swedish case, for example, RT is not the only one to frame migration in terms of securitisation. RT simply gave voice to those who promote it as their views resonated with the aims of Russian mediated public diplomacy, at the same time undermining or eroding the mainstream political and social narratives about Sweden and the West (Shekhovtsov 2017, 137).

Also, from my perspective, there is another dimension of understanding the strategic narratives that RT promotes through the articles about Sweden in the context of public diplomacy. As Zaharna (2016) claims, identity is a major concept in strategic narratives. Actors attribute meaning to
themselves and others through narratives, and narratives, in turn, have the capacity to shape identity, knowledge and actions (Zaharna 2016, 4409). In RT’s strategic narratives about Sweden, there is a constant juxtaposition of the Swedish “people” whose concern is the preservation of the state against the “Other”, which seeks to undermine the integrity of the nation (Yablokov 2018, 12). While Russia was for a long time regarded as the “Other” for the Western countries and specifically for Sweden (Lidqvist 2016, 10), RT tries to shift the focus to portray the migrants as the “Other”. RT puts a significant focus on the validity of the internal threat which migrants pose through the frame it promotes, while portraying the external threat to Sweden, usually associated with Russia, as irrelevant and ridiculous.

To understand why Russian mediated public diplomacy employs these kinds of narratives and why RT depicted Sweden in this light, it is essential to bring the discussion about soft power and Russian public diplomacy to this chapter.

Much of the current discussion on public diplomacy is linked to the concept of “soft power”. According to Joseph Nye, who coined the concept, soft power is “ability to affect others to obtain the outcomes one wants through attraction rather than coercion or payment” (Nye 2008, 94). Therefore, the state’s abilities to have soft power stems from culture, values and policies that can attract and persuade other actors. Public diplomacy is an instrument that governments and other actors utilise in order to mobilise soft power resources and attract the public of other countries (Saari 2014, 52). Russia, in its turn, according to Walker (2016) has “hijacked” soft power, and the way RT depicts Sweden confirms this vision. It implies that rather than persuading and attracting, Russian public diplomacy and soft power aim at increasing polarising and undermining democratic debate, creating so much confusion that people conclude that “nothing is true” and “everything is possible” (Szostek 2017, 381). However, in case of the Russian mediated public diplomacy, the audiences are not persuaded to become nihilistic, but rather to see “mainstream” news and narratives, produced by the Western media and governments as unreliable and debatable.

As Shekhovtsov (2017) adds in the same vein, the main goal of Russian international media in general and RT in particular is not about convincing the international audience of the alleged legitimacy of Russian foreign policy. As he claims, the Russian government realised after its international media failed to convince Western audiences in the alleged legitimacy of Russia’s actions in Georgia that the whole approach of Russian public diplomacy, based on the traditional
soft power concept of presenting an “attractive image” had failed. In other words, the message that “Russia is good” proved itself inefficient (Shekhovtsov 2017, 134). Russian public diplomacy has turned to a new approach that did not aim at justifying Kremlin’s domestic and foreign policies, but rather at undermining the confidence of international audiences in the legitimacy of their own governments and, in more general terms in the liberal and democratic consensus (Shekhovtsov 2017, 153).

11 Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to explore the dimensions of Russian mediated public diplomacy and strategic narratives within it, taking RT and its collection of articles about Sweden as a case study. This thesis was guided by the following research questions “What are the dominant themes and actors through which RT portrays Sweden? What are the strategic narratives that RT promotes about Sweden?” and the sub-question “How do those contribute to the Russian public diplomacy?”

As a result of the conducted analysis, it was found that RT most often portrayed Sweden through three themes: migration, values and identity, security. Within the topic of migration, Sweden was portrayed as a country that accepted most refugees in Europe and is in the midst of severe crisis due to that. Migration was repetitively tied to crime in the frame RT created, and Sweden was described as unable to integrate the newcomers. RT approached the theme of Swedish identity and values by showing that Swedish commitment to its core values about equality and human rights has resulted in the near collapse of the welfare state. It was further developed as claiming that Sweden is losing its status of a humanitarian superpower and that the price that the ordinary people in Sweden pay for keeping up with these values that the government promotes is too high and might result in further deterioration of the situation, and even extinction of the Swedish nation. Also, the Sweden’s efforts to promote sustainability and gender equality were portrayed as rather inefficient and sometimes radical. Finally, the Swedish security situation was approached by RT from two angles – from external and internal threat perspectives. The internal threat was associated with the influx of migrants, and the emergence of the so-called "no-go zones", rapidly appearing throughout Sweden, where different laws are applied and where government services have difficulties getting access. The internal threat to Swedish security is portrayed by RT in an alarmist light, as demanding immediate and definitive measures. The external threat to Swedish security,
after 2014 frequently associated with Russia is on the contrary portrayed as hyperbolised and having no serious grounds, in other words as a phantom of the imagination of the Russophobic Swedish leaders.

Also, in order to gain a better grasp of the strategic narratives, underlying in between the themes, through which RT describes Sweden, actors and their depiction in the articles were also investigated. As a result of the analysis, five actors that received the most attention of RT were identified. These are right-wing parties, the Swedish government, police, migrants/refugees, the European Union. Right-wing parties’ politicians and their opinions received most trust and credibility in the frame of RT, while the Swedish government and police received most criticism and were mainly portrayed in the negative light, as they were blamed for inefficiency and unwillingness to listen to the opinions of the ordinary Swedish people. Migrants and refugees were depicted as profoundly corrupt and inseparably connected with criminal activities, and at the same time unwilling to become a part of Swedish society. Finally, the EU was characterised through the opinions of Swedish figures unfavourable to the EU as an entity, and it was portrayed as inefficient, outdated and guilty together with the Swedish leaders of all the situation with migration and crime in the country.

As for the strategic narratives, detected through the collection of RT articles about Sweden, an international system narrative and a national narrative were identified.

Within the international system narrative, Sweden, the EU and the West are framed as in the state of terminal decline, caused by the actions of their politicians and leaders. Also, Sweden, in this case, is portrayed as a vital part of the EU and one of the most excellent examples of the European nations in terms of commitment to the liberal values and human rights, and on its example the change and the crisis, which can be applied for the whole entity, is demonstrated. Within this narrative, RT advocates for turning to the right-wing parties, who are implied to be an honest alternative to the current government both in terms of migration and membership in the EU, that would not hesitate to apply measures to stop the crisis that Sweden is going through. Inexplicitly, within this narrative the faultiness of the whole system of liberal values is asserted, by indirectly contrasting the chaos in terms of migration and crime that is depicted in Sweden and the stability of the other, alternative systems can offer, for example Russia and its traditional values. While this international system strategic narrative is not Sweden-specific, and scholars discussed it before
(Walker 2016, Szostek 2017, Miskimmon and O’Loughlin 2017, Shekhovtsov 2017), this thesis brings more empirical evidence of RT employing it and about it being present in the Swedish case.

The national strategic narrative about Sweden, and the way RT framed it corresponds with the theory of Yablokov (2015), who suggested that RT uses conspiracy theories to frame actors and events. In the Swedish case, RT has constructed a conspiracy narrative, within which the Swedish government together with police and media covered the crimes committed by the people of immigrant origin and did not give full information to the ordinary Swedish people, fearing the rise of the right-wing parties. Another element of Sweden-specific narrative was bringing in the frame of the “submarine mania” in order to further bring doubt in the words and actions of the Swedish government and Swedish Armed Forces, and therefore raise a question whether the claims about the “Russian threat” are legitimate.

In order to persuade the audience in the rightness of the created narrative, RT used different methods to frame the information – likewise, in the case of migration, it took a bigger timeframe to illustrate the migration influx in more dramatic numbers. The most widely used strategies of persuasion in the articles were category entitlement and indirect evaluation.

The findings of this research have several implications for the knowledge about Russian mediated public diplomacy today and how it is conducted. First, the overall negative depiction of Sweden, the EU and the West and all associated with them confirms the assumption of Walker (2016) that Russian public diplomacy does not rely on soft power anymore. Instead of relying on traditional soft power strategies and promoting an attractive image of Russia through the international broadcasts, Russian mediated public diplomacy today instead puts a focus on assailing and challenging the Western mainstream social and political narratives, undermining liberal-democratic consensus and bringing forward the argument that the “West is bad”. Second, the scope and the frequency of RT giving voice to the Swedish right-wing politicians confirm Shekhovtsov’s (2017) statement about Russian public diplomacy turning towards engaging with the European far-right activists. This choice of RT giving agency to conspiracy theorists and right-wing parties’ members also comes in line with the theory that Russian mediated public diplomacy is using the methods of nudge propaganda. Within it, the figures who are given agency already possess their own established worldviews and they are simply given voice as credible opinion-makers because this worldview resonates with the aims of the actor, in this case with the vision of RT or Kremlin. Likewise,
the frame through which RT portrays migration was not invented by RT, and it fits the narratives in which migration is securitised. However, RT gives voice to those who believe in its rightness and presents their opinions as credible and honest.

Finally, from my perspective, this case study has implications for identity theory. Russia has for a long time being regarded as the “Other” for the West, and after 2014 Russia has been regarded in Sweden as posing a threat. RT in its narrative tried to shift the focus from Russia being the “Other” to migrants as being the “Other” for Sweden. However, this assumption of mine cannot be regarded as a characteristic of Russian public diplomacy in general and is relevant only for this specific case, and for the way RT directs its public diplomacy efforts towards Sweden.

All in all, while a single case study has proved to be sufficient for answering the questions, posed in this thesis, I believe that for future research comparative research design would be even more beneficial. In the course of analysis, I have found some conclusions of this essay matching with the findings of Kragh and Åsberg (2017), who inspected the Swedish version of Sputnik. From my view, taking more international broadcasting outlets that serve as instruments of Russian mediated public diplomacy and comparing how they frame Sweden and what kind of narratives they advocate for could bring more clarity about how Russia conducts its public diplomacy towards Sweden and in general towards the West. Other option would be taking RT and comparing the framing of Sweden and another country, for example, one of the Nordic countries in order to grasp a better understanding of the Sweden-specific and Nordic-specific narratives.
12 References


### 13 Appendix – Articles of the Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Year/Month</th>
<th>Name of the article</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Jan-16</td>
<td>Swedes no longer want to join NATO – poll</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Jan-18</td>
<td>Clashes, arrests as police break up ‘unauthorized’ neo-Nazi protest in Sweden</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Jan-18</td>
<td>Sweden to issue updated 1940s 'war guide' amid threats of terrorism &amp; climate change</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Jan-18</td>
<td>Military response to gang violence an option – Swedish PM</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Jan-18</td>
<td>Huge explosion ‘directly targeting police’ rocks police station in Malmo, Sweden</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Jan-18</td>
<td>2nd explosion rocks Malmo, Sweden in less than a week</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Jan-18</td>
<td>Record levels of radiation found in Swedish wild boar 32yrs after Chernobyl</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Jan-18</td>
<td>Army in Swedish ghettos? How Europe tries to adapt to migration instead of solving it</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Feb-18</td>
<td>Switzerland &amp; United States are the world’s most corrupt nations – report</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Feb-18</td>
<td>Sweden’s 8,000yo skulls were brutally smashed and mounted on stakes – study</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>Feb-18</td>
<td>Suicide rate among unaccompanied underage refugees alarms Sweden</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>Feb-18</td>
<td>Sweden eyes doubling military budget by 2035, citing Russian bogeyman</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>Mar-18</td>
<td>Zoo death threats: Swedish wildlife park exposed for destroying 163 healthy animals</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>Mar-18</td>
<td>Sweden cracking down on Islamic schools that don’t support gender equality</td>
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<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Mar-18</td>
<td>UK, Slovakia, Sweden, Czech Republic among most probable sources of ‘Novichok’ – Moscow</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>Mar-18</td>
<td>‘Sex must be voluntary’: Sweden bolsters rape, sexual abuse laws</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>Mar-18</td>
<td>Sweden arrests record number of smugglers with nearly 1.5 tons of drugs</td>
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<td>18</td>
<td>Mar-18</td>
<td>Child marriage brochure prompts outrage in Sweden</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>Apr-18</td>
<td>Sweden introduces aviation tax in effort to help climate</td>
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<td>20</td>
<td>Apr-18</td>
<td>Outrage as giant blue penis painted along building in Sweden (PHOTOS)</td>
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<td>21</td>
<td>Apr-18</td>
<td>‘Discarded like rubbish’: Swedish zoo kills hundreds of rescued lizards with liquid nitrogen</td>
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<td>22</td>
<td>Apr-18</td>
<td>End of multiculturalism? Swedes say immigration is top issue ahead of election</td>
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<td>23</td>
<td>May-18</td>
<td>Extremely urgent’: Sweden makes sex education films for migrants</td>
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<td>24</td>
<td>May-18</td>
<td>Fancy Bears leak: Hackers release documents on Swedish asthma treatment</td>
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<td>25</td>
<td>May-18</td>
<td>Invading Russia would become ‘military nightmare,’ Swedish paper warns</td>
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<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>May-18</td>
<td>‘Everyone has duty to defend Sweden’: 4.8mn homes to get war prepper manual</td>
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<td>27</td>
<td>May-18</td>
<td>Swedish brewery premiers ‘crystal clear pilsner’ brewed from sewage</td>
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<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Jun-18</td>
<td>War cry: Sweden mobilizes all its reservists for 1st time in 40 years (PHOTOS)</td>
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<td>29</td>
<td>Jun-18</td>
<td>Sweden 'begrudgingly' approves construction of Russia’s second gas pipeline to Northern Europe</td>
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<td>30</td>
<td>Jun-18</td>
<td>Anti-immigrant Sweden Democrats party surges in polls amid EU’s Eurosceptic wave</td>
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<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>Jun-18</td>
<td>Two killed &amp; 4 injured in mass shooting in Malmo, Sweden</td>
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<td>32</td>
<td>Jun-18</td>
<td>‘Big as cats’: Huge rats flood Swedish city as authorities urge people to keep children indoors</td>
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<td>33</td>
<td>Jun-18</td>
<td>‘Social problem’? Sexual assaults shut down Sweden’s largest music festival for good</td>
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<td>34</td>
<td>Jul-18</td>
<td>4 injured in shooting &amp; stabbing in Sweden’s Helsingborg (VIDEO)</td>
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<td>35</td>
<td>Jul-18</td>
<td>Swedish law equating sex without explicit consent to rape comes into force</td>
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<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>Jul-18</td>
<td>Testing tolerance: Sweden’s ultra liberal migration policy gets a reality check</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>Jul-18</td>
<td>Sweden’s war prepper manual slammed for… leaving pets behind</td>
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<td>38</td>
<td>Jul-18</td>
<td>Gang shootings, rapes and no-go zones? Government blamed as Sweden battles crime wave</td>
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<td>39</td>
<td>Jul-18</td>
<td>‘80% were grown-ups’: Swedish dentist fired for exposing migrant ‘kids’ as adults talks to RT</td>
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<td>40</td>
<td>Jul-18</td>
<td>Traces of chemical weapons agent found in shrimp in Sweden</td>
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<td>41</td>
<td>Jul-18</td>
<td>‘After day with Christians, Muslim teens wash in mosque’: Study charts rise of Salafism in Sweden</td>
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<td>42</td>
<td>Jul-18</td>
<td>Deportation drama: Student stand-off on Swedish airliner scuppers Afghan expulsion (VIDEO)</td>
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<td>43</td>
<td>Jul-18</td>
<td>Almost half of Swedes &amp; Danes reject EU, prefer their own ‘Nordic Union’ – poll</td>
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<td>44</td>
<td>Jul-18</td>
<td>Flooded train station? Just swim on ducky float and ignore traffic chaos (VIDEOS)</td>
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<td>45</td>
<td>Aug-18</td>
<td>Priceless royal crowns stolen in Sweden, thieves get away on motor boat</td>
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<td>46</td>
<td>Aug-18</td>
<td>Twisted truth? ‘Hero’ Swede stopped deportation of migrant who was allegedly sentenced for assault</td>
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<td>47</td>
<td>Aug-18</td>
<td>Swedish police kill man with Down syndrome carrying toy gun</td>
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<td>48</td>
<td>Aug-18</td>
<td>Democracy v meritocracy: Study reveals young Swedes want experts instead of elected govt officials</td>
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<td>49</td>
<td>Aug-18</td>
<td>Swedish PM ‘pissed off’ as masked youths set scores of cars on fire across country</td>
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<td>Aug-18</td>
<td>Feign outrage, act surprised, accuse Russia: How Sweden reacts every time after mass car firebombing</td>
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<td>51</td>
<td>1-Aug</td>
<td>Sweden needs a vote on EU membership, says nationalist politician</td>
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<tr>
<td>52</td>
<td>Aug-18</td>
<td>Europe’s handshake rows: Sweden says Muslims have a right to refuse, Switzerland says they don’t</td>
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<td>53</td>
<td>Aug-18</td>
<td>More than half of Swedish rape convicts came from abroad, TV research claims</td>
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<td>54</td>
<td>Aug-18</td>
<td>Buildings, 7 cars &amp; pizzeria torched in Sweden overnight as arson attacks continue</td>
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<td>55</td>
<td>Aug-18</td>
<td>‘Press E to destroy press’: Swedish MP in hot water over gun pics &amp; declaring ‘war’ on media</td>
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<td>56</td>
<td>Aug-18</td>
<td>‘Misinformed’ v ‘braindead’? Swedish neo-Nazi rally &amp; counter-protesters call each other out (VIDEO)</td>
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<td>57</td>
<td>Aug-18</td>
<td>Swedish nationalist party leader says Hitler is ‘a good person surrounded by lies’ during interview</td>
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<td>58</td>
<td>Aug-18</td>
<td>Swedish right-wing parliamentary candidate attacked by ‘immigrant’ during campaign meeting</td>
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<td>59</td>
<td>Aug-18</td>
<td>22 cars burned in Sweden as country rocked by rising crime</td>
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<td>60</td>
<td>Sep-18</td>
<td>Immigrants, neo-Nazis &amp; ‘bull-dykes’: Controversial Swedish Twitter account to close</td>
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<td>61</td>
<td>Sep-18</td>
<td>Will Sweden Democrats demolish Europe’s model ‘humanitarian superpower’ tonight?</td>
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<td>62</td>
<td>Sep-18</td>
<td>Sweden Democrats break through in parliamentary election, socialists remain biggest party</td>
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<td>63</td>
<td>Sep-18</td>
<td>‘Nothing is decided’: Sweden’s socialist PM clings on, as opposition smells blood after election tie</td>
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<td>64</td>
<td>Sep-18</td>
<td>‘Tipping point passed’: Swedes waking up to reject liberal globalists, says political analyst</td>
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<td>65</td>
<td>Sep-18</td>
<td>Swedish court outrages pro-Jewish groups by nixing deportation of Palestinian arsonist</td>
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<td>Sep-18 ‘Distracted boyfriend’ meme is sexist, say Swedish authorities</td>
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<td>67</td>
<td>Sep-18 ‘Insincere’: Beijing rejects second apology from Swedish show over Chinese tourist ‘poop’ jokes</td>
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<td>68</td>
<td>Sep-18 Does Sweden’s military alphabet need to get woke? Swedish women’s association ridiculed online</td>
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<td>69</td>
<td>Oct-18 ‘It’s abuse’: Sweden Democrats Party makes move to ban baby circumcision</td>
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<td>70</td>
<td>Oct-18 Sweden declares ‘hand grenade amnesty’ in attempt to curb deadly gang crimes</td>
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<td>71</td>
<td>Oct-18 Sweden will set up a crisis hotline for people who beat and abuse their partners</td>
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<td>72</td>
<td>Nov-18 And again not the Russians: Mystery vessel in Swedish waters wasn’t ‘foreign sub’, military says</td>
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<td>73</td>
<td>Nov-18 Crawl back under your rock,’ Swedish FM tells anti-PC academic Jordan Peterson</td>
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<td>74</td>
<td>Nov-18 Canadian psychologist Jordan Peterson’s book is a hit in Sweden – even though FM loathes him</td>
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<td>Nov-18 Swedish Parliament rejects center-right PM candidate, no end in sight to political deadlock</td>
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<td>Nov-18 Will old Swedish parties destroy their political system just to stop anti-migrant Sweden Democrats?</td>
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<td>77</td>
<td>Dec-18 Swedish journalist blasted for saying tribesmen were right to kill white missionary</td>
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<td>78</td>
<td>Dec-18 Christmas is canceled? Swedish newspaper blasted for renaming Xmas ‘winter celebrations’</td>
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<td>Dec-18 ‘Real Mr. Bean’: WATCH waiter’s hilarious reaction as he drops food on academic at Nobel banquet</td>
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<td>Dec-18 ‘Male-free’ music festival ruled discriminatory by Swedish authorities</td>
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<td>Dec-18 Pipe-laying for Russia's Nord Stream 2 begins in Finland and Sweden</td>
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<td>82</td>
<td>Dec-18</td>
<td>‘Mary, has someone else emptied their sack into you?’ Jesus nativity sketch on Swedish TV draws ire</td>
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<td>83</td>
<td>Dec-18</td>
<td>Swedish media blasted for playing down horrific details of hikers’ IS-inspired murders in Morocco</td>
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<td>84</td>
<td>Jan-19</td>
<td>Hungary’s FM blasts Sweden’s ‘arrogant’ claim that Budapest endangers EU unity</td>
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<td>85</td>
<td>Jan-19</td>
<td>Swedish hospital on lockdown after report of suspected Ebola case</td>
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<td>86</td>
<td>Jan-19</td>
<td>WATCH Swedish SPY PLANE intercepted by Russian Su-27 over Baltic Sea</td>
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<td>87</td>
<td>Jan-19</td>
<td>‘Climate-smart eating’? Swedish professor calls for ‘vegetarian pets,’ gets blasted online</td>
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<td>88</td>
<td>Jan-19</td>
<td>‘F****ing migration agency’: Callers to Swedish govt service baffled by ‘rude’ greeting</td>
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<td>89</td>
<td>Feb-19</td>
<td>Outrage as pregnant woman manhandled off train over unpaid ticket (VIDEO)</td>
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<td>90</td>
<td>Feb-19</td>
<td>Migrants’ children in Swedish schools are increasingly segregated – survey</td>
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<td>91</td>
<td>Feb-19</td>
<td>Chorus of EU states, incl UK, Spain, Austria recognize Guaido as Venezuela’s interim leader</td>
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<tr>
<td>92</td>
<td>Feb-19</td>
<td>Russia about to invade Sweden? UK newspaper seems to think so</td>
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<tr>
<td>93</td>
<td>Feb-19</td>
<td>‘Furious’ Apple quits Stockholm after city rejects ambitious flagship store</td>
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<td>94</td>
<td>Feb-19</td>
<td>‘Symbol of oppression’: Swedish swimming chief steps down after criticizing Muslim headscarf</td>
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<td>95</td>
<td>Feb-19</td>
<td>Documentary about dark-skinned ‘first Swedes’ sparks horror on Twitter</td>
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<td>96</td>
<td>Feb-19</td>
<td>Swedish feminists up in arms over ‘dangerous’ sex robot brothels</td>
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<td>97</td>
<td>Feb-19</td>
<td>Sweden has become for jihadis ‘what Argentina was for Nazis’: MP slams govt over ISIS inaction</td>
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<td>98</td>
<td>Feb-19</td>
<td>Rage and puzzlement over Muslim woman in hijab chosen for Swedish municipality’s welcome sign</td>
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<td>Mar-19</td>
<td>UPS stops delivering to Swedish neighborhood as drivers get attacked in ‘no-go zone’ – report</td>
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<td>Mar-19</td>
<td>North Korea becomes largest debtor to Sweden, owing $300+ million – report</td>
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<td>101</td>
<td>Mar-19</td>
<td>Food of the future? Sweden to test 3D-printed meals on the elderly</td>
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<td>102</td>
<td>Mar-19</td>
<td>Swedish govt ‘art project’ will pay 1 person $2,320/month to do nothing for the rest of their life</td>
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<tr>
<td>103</td>
<td>Mar-19</td>
<td>Bus EXPLODES in central Stockholm after ‘accident’ (PHOTO, VIDEO)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>104</td>
<td>Mar-19</td>
<td>Racist forest? Sweden sparks PC debate over plans to take ‘N-word’ out of woodland name</td>
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<td>105</td>
<td>Mar-19</td>
<td>Swedes who fought in Waffen-SS during WWII still receive 'Hitler pensions' – media</td>
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<td>106</td>
<td>Mar-19</td>
<td>‘Absolutely sickened’: PewDiePie responds to shout-out on NZ mosque killer’s livestream</td>
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<tr>
<td>107</td>
<td>Mar-19</td>
<td>Islamism still biggest threat to Swedish national security, domestic spy agency says</td>
</tr>
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<td>108</td>
<td>Mar-19</td>
<td>Swedish right-wing MP proposes… building mosque &amp; Muslim center to draw immigrants</td>
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<td>109</td>
<td>Mar-19</td>
<td>Sweden’s first hijab-wearing MP grilled for proposing RACE–based nationwide register</td>
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<td>110</td>
<td>Mar-19</td>
<td>‘Hasn’t it gone too far now?’ TV ad in migrant’s native language enrages Swedish social media</td>
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<td>111</td>
<td>Mar-19</td>
<td>Strong blast hits Stockholm, several people reportedly wounded</td>
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<tr>
<td>112</td>
<td>Mar-19</td>
<td>‘We are everywhere’: Naked cop arrests nude fugitive in Swedish sauna</td>
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