



RUSSIAN MEDIA STUDIES PROJECT

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Published in 2016 in the United States of America by
The Middle East Media Research Institute,
P.O. Box 27837, Washington, D.C., 20038-7837
www.memri.org

The MEMRI Russian Media Studies Project is made possible by the generous support of the Diana Davis Spencer Foundation.

PREFACE

Though MEMRI has dealt since its inception with the Arab and Muslim world, the concept on which it is based does not apply only to this arena. On the contrary, MEMRI's founding concept is that, wherever a conflict exists between nations, societies, cultures or religions, gaining a deep understanding of this conflict depends on access to a wide array of primary source materials. This includes materials from the media, to understand the current public discourse; from schoolbooks, to understand the future; and from religious texts, wherever religion plays a substantial role in the lives of individuals and of society.

This is why MEMRI's motto has always been "bridging the language gap." For years, MEMRI has realized this vision by publishing analysis and translations from Arabic, Farsi, Turkish, Urdu and Pashto into English and other languages, in order to inform the media, academia, legislatures and governments. We always hoped that the MEMRI model would also be applied to other arenas, especially to two countries that are important players in the global theatre and which have conflicts, both latent and overt, with their surroundings – namely Russia and China. However, as of now, nobody has picked up the gauntlet.

In January 2016, MEMRI began to undertake this challenging mission with respect to Russia, and this booklet presents the products of the project's first four months.

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Yigal Carmon
President and Founder
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INTRODUCTION

MEMRI's Russian Media Studies Project was launched in January 2016 with the primary goal of exploring Russia-West relations through Russian primary source material. The densely-populated areas of Russia are geographically part of Europe, but this country has never been integrated into Europe. From a cultural and religious point of view, Russia is certainly European, and its history is certainly interlinked with European history. However, Russia and Europe have never managed to form a non-confrontational relationship – and the fault lies with both sides.

On the European/Western side, there has been a fear that Russia is too big an entity to integrate, and that the attempt to incorporate it may bring about the disintegration of Europe and more specifically of the European Union. In addition, since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Europe has considered Russia a minor actor in the global arena. Conversely, Russia has never stopped regarding itself as a superpower. Therefore, a full integration with the West and eventually becoming a member of NATO or the European Union is somewhat moot, since Russia would likely not be willing to give up part of its sovereignty. In an article published by the Valdai Club think tank on April 12, 2016, famous Russian intellectual Fyodor Lukyanov wrote that “it has long been clear that Russia does not fit into the Western community.” Russia sees itself as a bridge between Europe and Asia, and throughout history it has felt the need to protect itself from both the West and the East. In reality, however, as much as Europe and the U.S. need to integrate Russia, especially in order to bring towards a process of democratization and avert its hegemonic temptations, Russia desperately needs Europe in order to avoid economic and political collapse.

With tensions between Russia and the West on the rise, understanding Russia has become vital. Bulgarian political scientist Ivan Krastev wrote in the *New York Times* (August 12, 2015) that “in the heady days of the Cold War, Americans tended to view Soviet decision making as a black box: You know what goes in, you know what comes out, but you are clueless about what is happening inside. Soviet policy was thus believed to be both enigmatic and strategic.” The MEMRI's Russian Media Studies Project has exactly the goal to inform the U.S. and Europe what is happening inside the “black box,” so as to make Russian policy clear and not enigmatic to Western decision makers and the public opinion.

Anna Mahjar-Barducci

Director of the MEMRI Russian Media Studies Project

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