

UNIVERSITY OF BELGRADE

Faculty of Political Science

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At the meeting of the Department of International Studies, held on 24 June 2024, the Master Thesis Defense Commission (hereby the Commission) for the candidate Ieva Lemežonaitė was formed. The Commission, consisting of the following members: prof. dr Filip Ejđus, prof. dr Nemanja Džuverović, and doc. dr Goran Tepšić, was accepted by the Council for the Second and Third Cycle of Studies based on the proposal made by the Department. The Commission is responsible for overseeing the defence of the master thesis.

After a review of Ieva Lemežonaitė's master thesis, the Commission is submitting the following comprehensive report.

REPORT

Ieva Lemežonaitė's master's thesis, "Eurasianism in Pro-Russian Media in Lithuania: Discourses Surrounding Russia's War in Ukraine," seeks to explore the prevalent narratives within a marginal, pro-Russian media outlet (*Būkime vieningi*) in Lithuania concerning Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The thesis entails a comprehensive discourse analysis of the outlet's content discussing Russia's war in Ukraine, aiming to ascertain the primary messages conveyed and the media's perspective on the war, as well as to evaluate its alignment with the Eurasianist worldview. The discourse analysis encompasses three key themes: 1) Lithuania's role in the context of Russia's war in Ukraine; 2) the Russia–Ukraine relationship; and 3) the role and response of the wider Western community, particularly NATO and the European Union. The thesis endeavours to answer the question of whether marginal pro-Kremlin media in Lithuania reflects the soft power-driven geopolitical vision of Russia advocated by the Eurasianist school of thought. The significance of this thesis lies in the imperative to discern the potential impact of marginal media in endorsing narratives consonant with the Eurasianist worldview, and the associated implications for national security. It comprises four chapters, excluding the introduction, conclusion, and reference list.

The introductory section of the thesis provides a concise overview of the repercussions of the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine on the Baltic States, with a specific focus on Lithuania. Since reclaiming independence in 1991, Lithuania has endeavoured to distance itself from Russian influence and interference. Despite its membership in Western institutions such as NATO and the European Union, Lithuania is regarded as a region of particular interest by Russia, which adopts a supranational Eurasianist approach towards it. While Lithuania is not engaged in direct military conflict with Russia, it serves as an arena for information and soft power struggles, characterized by the prevalence of discourses promoting Eurasianism.

The second chapter provides an in-depth analysis of the relevant literature, focusing on Eurasianism as an integral component of the broader New Right ideology. This chapter aims to elucidate the ideological underpinnings of Eurasianism within the context of a reactionary response to the prevailing liberal world order. In particular, the European New Right advocates for a Europe-centric approach that emphasizes the role of “Christianity-as-culture” as a unifying force in defining Europe’s distinct cultural identity and traditions, which are perceived to be under threat from globalist Western liberalism. While advocating for a degree of participation in global affairs, the movement seeks to minimize external interference, especially concerning normative issues, from international organisations and institutions, such as the European Union.

From a conservative perspective on Russia’s global positioning, Eurasianism espouses an anti-Western sentiment with a focus on civilisationist imagery, portraying Russia as a former superpower that was stripped of its prominence following the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Furthermore, Eurasianism extends the conceptualisation of Russia’s identity beyond its current geopolitical boundaries, particularly to territories it historically controlled and where Russian communities are presently situated. Utilising historical, cultural, and religious frames of reference, Eurasianism contends that individuals of Russian ethnicity or those who express affinity for Russian culture and language are unfairly detached from Russia.

The third chapter delves into the principles of discourse analysis, which involves identifying the underlying meanings conveyed by the subject. These stable meanings, also known as narratives, can shape the recipients’ identities and how they perceive themselves and others. To identify the presence of Eurasianist discourse, the analysis includes three main categories: (1) representation of Lithuania; (2) representation of the Russia-Ukraine relationship; and (3) the role and response of the collective West, mainly NATO and the European Union.

This chapter also provides examples of narratives aligned with the Eurasianist perspective on these topics. Furthermore, it explains why the chosen subject of analysis is considered marginal and outlines the limitations of the study.

Chapter four goes into more detail about why Russia and pro-Russian actors in Lithuania are seen as problematic in the first place. Through the theory of securitisation, it is illustrated how Russia and the actors who represent its interests in Lithuania have been securitised and, eventually, established as a legitimate threat.

Chapter five provides a detailed overview of the narratives presented by *Būkime vieningi* regarding the themes mentioned earlier. In the first segment, the narratives mainly question Lithuania's sovereignty by denying its independent decision-making, the functionality of its democratic institutions, and its Western integration. When discussing Russia's war in Ukraine, the narratives focus on portraying Lithuanians as supporters of the war who lack understanding about the need to cooperate with their neighbours. Overall, liberalism is depicted as a danger for Lithuania and the reason behind the degradation in Russia, which denies traditional values, especially those related to the traditional family. These narratives promote the Eurasianist view of the West as corrupt and immoral, while genuine Russian virtue is portrayed as spiritual and, therefore, superior. In the second category, the relationship between Ukraine and Russia, based on their Slavic origin, is often highlighted. This point is consistently emphasised as the tragedy of brotherly nations that was caused by the West. Ukrainian statehood is denied, while Russian problems are attributed to Western influence. In the third category, the West is presented as a threat to Russia and is depicted as being in charge of affairs in states that belong to Russia's perceived zone of privileged interest, such as the Baltic States, Poland, and Ukraine.

The conclusion discusses how the established narratives are in line with Eurasianist thought. While there are some small differences that can be attributed to the flexibility of Eurasianist concepts, it's clear that the *Būkime vieningi* discourse aligns with Eurasianist ideas, adapted to the local context. In addition, it demonstrates how *Būkime vieningi* challenges the narratives promoted by security-focused actors, which aim to portray Russia and pro-Russian actors as threats in the country. These efforts include creating doubts about the democratic system, exploiting social divisions, and undermining the rule-based order.

Based on the report, the Commission concludes that Ieva Lemežonaitė's master thesis, "Eurasianism in Pro-Russian Media in Lithuania: Discourses Surrounding Russia's War in Ukraine," meets all the formal criteria for public defence.

The Commission:

prof. dr Filip Ejđus

prof. dr Nemanja Džuverović

doc. dr Goran Tepšić