

From Offense to Defense: The Political Discourse and Use of Sports in Putin's Russia from a Historical Perspective

Master Thesis European Studies

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Abstract

This thesis looks into the political discourse surrounding the doping scandal that has developed in Russian sport over the last two years. The paper hypothesizes that because of the importance of nationalism and Russia's great power status, the Putin regime has, despite publicly stating the opposite, actively contributed to the further politicization of sport by returning to a sport discourse closely resembling that of the Soviet Union during the Cold War.

By taking a historical perspective, comparing the narrative of the Soviet Union surrounding sports during the Cold War and that of the Putin administration in the aftermath of the McLaren reports, the paper will try to establish the similarities and differences to be found in the two narratives. It will do so by using the existing academic knowledge regarding propaganda and discourse of the Soviet period regarding sport, and publications, interviews and news articles by the Russian government in the last few years. These sources will be examined through political discourse analysis, a methodology from the social sciences. It is very compatible with the historical perspective this paper uses to contextualize the current climate of sports discourse in the field of politics.

This paper will highlight the importance of sport for the legitimacy of the Putin administration, linking nationalism, national pride and the "Russia as a great power" narrative as conceptualized by Bo Petersson, to show that the Putin regime has backed itself into a corner, where reinforcing its Soviet-inspired discourse on sport has become important in order to retain its legitimacy.

Appendix 1: List of Abbreviations

ARAF	Russian Athletics Federation
EU	European Union
FIFA	Fédération Internationale de Football Association
FSB	Russian Federal Security Service
GDR	German Democratic Republic
IAAF	International Association of Athletics Federation
IOC	International Olympic Committee
NKVD	Narodny Komissariat Vnutrennih Del (People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs, Secret Police under Stalin)
NOC	National Olympic Committee
PDA	Political Discourse Analysis
RFU	Russian Football Union
ROC	Russian Olympic Committee
RUSADA	Russian Anti-Doping Agency
SED	Socialist Unity Party of Germany
TASS	Informatsionnoye agentstvo Rossii TASS
UEFA	Union of European Football Associations
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
WADA	World Anti-Doping Agency

Introduction and Structure of the Thesis

The run up to the 2016 Rio Summer Olympics witnessed a major scandal that shocked the sporting world. An independent investigation, sanctioned by the World Anti-Doping Agency (known as WADA), and written by Canadian lawyer Richard H McLaren, reported of a large-scale, government sponsored doping program that had been taking place in Russia since roughly 2010. This report proved only to be the tip of the proverbial iceberg: A second report, published in November 2016, further substantiated the allegations made towards the Russian government and sporting bodies.

It is certainly not the first major doping scandal in elite sports. In an attempt to show the supposed ‘superiority’ of socialism over Capitalism through success in international top-level sport, the former German Democratic Republic (GDR) established a clandestine doping program in 1974-75, authorized by top officials in the Socialist Unity Party (SED) and top government bodies.¹ All possible state organs, including the countries’ respective secret services were involved in misleading the international sporting community. Accusations of clandestine doping programs have also been raised against the Soviet Union as well as other members of its satellite system in Eastern Europe, albeit perhaps more modest in scale than was the case with the GDR.² In the 1990s it was China which was under suspicion for state-run doping practices.³ One might conclude from this list of examples that it was mostly (former-) communist countries who were suspected of doping programs or even caught in the act, but this does not paint the full picture: A number of western sports authorities (including ones from the United States) turned a blind eye to potential transgressors on their own team, justified by an argument along the lines of “they are doing it so we can too!”.⁴

The point of this short summary of known or alleged doping scandals is not to criticize the cleanliness of sport or an alleged failure of doping control (in the end, athletes were caught). What this list does show, is that, especially since WWII, sport has often been a very politicized area. States have often seen sports as a means for achieving certain policy goals.

¹ Mike Dennis, "Securing the Sports ‘Miracle’: The Stasi and East German Elite Sport," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 29, no. 18 (2012). 2557

² V. Møller, I. Waddington, and J.M. Hoberman, *Routledge Handbook of Drugs and Sport* (Taylor & Francis, 2015). 212

³ *Ibid.* 223

⁴ *Ibid.* 212

Historian John Wilson states that sport can be seen as a tool, “available for use for a variety of purposes such as competition for educational resources, combating juvenile delinquency, enhancing military preparedness, boosting civic pride, and achieving diplomatic goals”.⁵ As social scientists Mike Dennis and Jonathan Grix claim, sport has been used as a political resource for centuries, often as a part of an attempt to create a sense of statehood among citizens.⁶ Sporting ‘mega-events’ are most certainly a part of this equation as well. Calculations by host cities/nations for holding a sporting mega-event (such as the Sochi 2014 winter Olympics or the planned 2018 FIFA World Cup in Russia) are often based on the perceived international prestige and credibility that can be gained. Thus, both external and internal policy goals can be achieved through sports.

With regards to the recent doping scandal, Russian officials immediately countered the McLaren report, questioning its validity, and the Russian foreign ministry even called it “a part of Washington’s ongoing effort to isolate Russia and to build opposition to Putin inside Russia”.⁷ Regardless of whether the accusations of WADA are in fact true and the doping use in Russia was government-steered or controlled, the McLaren report has once again led to a highly politicized sports climate in the last year. In fact, a high-level ‘war of words’, or perhaps a ‘discursive war’, is being fought out between Russia on the one hand, and International sport organizations, such as the IOC and WADA, and even government officials of other countries, on the other. Russian officials have accused these organizations, as well as other countries, of ‘politicizing sport’ for their own gain. The refusal of the Putin regime to accept the conclusions of the McLaren report has led to a major upheaval in the sporting world. When examining more closely, the rhetoric expressed by this regime seems to show remarkable similarities with the Cold War period, where accusations of doping were quite common on either side of the ‘iron curtain’, and the West (or the US and its European allies) were pitted against the East (the Soviet Union and their Communist allies).

This paper will attempt to answer the following questions: How has Russia responded to the accusations in the McLaren Reports, and what are the deeper, underlying reasons for this response?

Structure

⁵ J. Wilson, *Playing by the Rules: Sport, Society, and the State* (Wayne State University Press, 1994). 18

⁶ Mike Dennis and Jonathan Grix, *Sport under Communism : Behind the East German 'Miracle'* (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012., 2012). 14

⁷ TASS, "Foreign Ministry Says Campagin against Russian Athletes Strikes Blow on Olympic Movement," 21-07-2016, <http://tass.com/politics/889856>.

The thesis will begin by explaining the central concepts and theoretical framework used in this research. We will investigate the discourse surrounding the Russian doping scandal through a multidisciplinary approach, combining concepts from history, political science, and social sciences, including linguistics to provide an extensive answer to the research question. Since we are looking specifically at discourse, the main methodology used for thesis will be that of political discourse analysis, as interpreted by linguists Isabela and Norman Fairclough in *Political Discourse Analysis: A method for advanced students*. This framework is used to analyze the potential underlying reasoning for the discourse chosen by the Putin regime. This discourse will then be contextualized by putting it in a historical perspective.

Once the methodology of the thesis has been explained, the paper will continue with a thorough analysis of sports in the Soviet Union. As historian Robert Edelman argues, multi-sport festivals, of which the Olympics were the most visible example, “allowed the Soviet regime to ascribe an array of changing symbols, slogans and meaning to sport”.⁸ Until World War II, the USSR boycotted the Olympic games (despite Russia being a founding member of the IOC) which were characterized as “designed to deflect the workers from the class struggle while training them for imperialist wars”.⁹ Therefore, this historical analysis starts by providing an overview of the USSR’s sport policy goals from 1945 onwards, when the Soviet Union sought to establish itself a world power, including in the field of sports. Besides policy goals, the political discourse surrounding these goals will also be described. The discourse used around the Olympic boycotts of the Moscow Olympic Games in 1980 and the reciprocal boycott by the Soviet Union and its allies of the Los Angeles Olympic Games in 1984 are of particular importance in this regard.

Once the sporting paradigm of the USSR has been discussed, a brief overview will also have to be given of sport policy during the turbulent 1990s. This turbulent period, where sport was not considered a priority in Russian politics, provides a stark contrast to the Soviet period. This chapter will then follow the timeline leading up to the establishment of the Vladimir Putin regime that has now been in charge in Russia for more than a decade. In various ways, political scientist Andrey Makarychev argues that the main facets of the political narrative presented by Putin’s current regime are ‘sovereignty’ and Russia as a great power.¹⁰ Political

⁸ S. Wagg and D.L. Andrews, *East Plays West: Sport and the Cold War* (New York: Routledge, 2007). xii

⁹ Ibidem

¹⁰ Andrej Stanislavovič Makarychev, "From Sochi – 2014 to Fifa – 2018: The Crisis of Sovereignty and the Challenges of Globalization," in *Mega Events in Post-Soviet Eurasia : Shifting Borderlines of Inclusion and*

scientists Derek Hutcheson and Bo Petersson make a similar case, pointing out that, Putin's legitimacy, defined as "a popular belief that a rule, institution, or leader has the right to govern", rests on three pillars: "the maintenance of economic growth; the creation of domestic order; and the skillful use of myth to project the president as the bulwark against chaos and foreign threat, in the process reinforcing Russia's status as an unequivocal 'Great Power'".¹¹ This paper will try to show the importance of these policy goals and their consequences for sports in modern day Russia compared to the USSR. What are the biggest similarities and differences? And, most importantly for answering the main question of this thesis, what are the similarities and differences in political discourse? After a period in which Russia shied away from sports, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, more funds and attention have been given to sports again during the 2000s. This process will be described, including the role of the Soviet sports legacy during this development. This chapter will also focus on the Sochi 2014 Winter Olympic Games, since they provide an excellent moment to gain insight in the official Russian narrative surrounding sports, and the importance attached to it.

In chapter 4, this paper will discuss the recent crisis surrounding Russian sports, which does not only include the still developing doping scandal, but will also include an explanation of the 2015 FIFA corruption scandal in the difficulties Russia is currently facing in maintaining a steady course regarding its sports policy and discourse. The doping scandal, beginning in 2015 but escalating in 2016, will be discussed extensively, with particular emphasis on the responses of Russian government officials to the accusations made in the various reports commissioned by WADA, as well as the reports of 'whistleblowers' whose confessions led to further investigations. It is these responses by Russian leaders that showcase the resemblance in discourse and tactics between the Soviet Union sport discourse and that of modern day Russia.

Finally, in the conclusion, the paper will be summarized and analyzed. This last part of the paper will discuss whether Russia has indeed returned to practices and policies previously established by the USSR, or if this hypothesis has been proven untrue, based on potentially significant differences found during review of the available information. It will also discuss the most likely reasoning underlying the Putin regime's discourse, and what potential consequences this discourse has for both Russia and the International sporting community.

Exclusion, ed. Andrej Stanislavovič Makarychev and Alexandra Yatsyk (New York : Palgrave Macmillan, 2016). 198

¹¹ Derek S. Hutcheson and Bo Petersson, "Shortcut to Legitimacy: Popularity in Putin's Russia," *Europe-Asia Studies* 68, no. 7 (2016). 1107

With the information presented, it will be possible to place the current political course followed by the Kremlin in a larger perspective, and explain its origins. By looking at the usage of sport in Russia through the lens of history, it will hopefully become easier to understand how we reached the current climate.

Chapter 1: Concepts and Methodology

The concept of political narratives, or ‘political myths’, is of particular importance for understanding investment in sports in Russia. A political myth in this paper is defined along the lines of Bo Petersson, as a “narrative that is believed to be true or acted on as if they were believed to be true by a substantial group of people”.¹² In the context of Russia, the political myth that Russia had, has and always will have a great power status plays a particularly large role in the political climate.¹³ This viewpoint makes international prestige incredibly important, and this is where sports come into play. In the last decade, sport has become an important component of the Putin regime in an attempt to gain international prestige and boosting national pride. It is the hypothesis of this paper that the Putin regime has tried to do so by returning to a political discourse surrounding sports closely resembling that of the Soviet Union, and that the 2016 doping scandal has only led to an intensification of this discourse.

This thesis will try to show that in order to retain its domestic power, it is of vital importance to the Putin administration to discredit the findings of the McLaren Report. As political scientist Andrey Makarychev notes in “Sporting Mega-Events in Post-Soviet Eurasia”, Russia faces a “severe crisis of Sovereignty”.¹⁴ This crisis, according to Makarychev, stems partly from the Ukraine conflict, which made Russia subject to international economic and financial sanctions, as well as diplomatic isolation. Makarychev further focuses on the crisis present in the Russian football industry and the crisis in legitimacy that FIFA still faces, but it is another point that he makes that is relevant to this thesis. His key argument is that “the long term repercussions of this triple crisis stretch far beyond sport and elucidates the inherent weakness of the Kremlin’s project of boosting Russia’s role and status in the world through hosting exorbitantly costly and pretentious world-scale performances”.¹⁵ While Makarychev refers to the 2014 Sochi Olympics and 2018 FIFA World Cup in Russia, one could easily put the doping scandal in the same category: If one takes the McLaren Report at face value, it is not hard to find the link between boosting prestige and elite-sports performances that win medals. The McLaren Reports have done the exact opposite of boosting prestige; in order to save face

¹² Bo Petersson, "The Eternal Great Power Meets the Recurring Times of Troubles: Twin Political Myths in Contemporary Russian Politics," in *European Cultural Memory Post-89* (Brill, 2013). 304

¹³ Ibid. 302

¹⁴ Andrej Stanislavovič Makarychev, "From Sochi – 2014 to Fifa – 2018: The Crisis of Sovereignty and the Challenges of Globalization," in *Mega Events in Post-Soviet Eurasia : Shifting Borderlines of Inclusion and Exclusion*, ed. Andrej Stanislavovič Makarychev and Alexandra Yatsyk (New York : Palgrave Macmillan, 2016). 196

¹⁵ Ibidem, 197

and maintain the narrative of Russia as a great power, with Putin as its strong leader, Russian officials had very little other options than discrediting the research and findings on its alleged state-run doping program, and present the findings as a larger conspiracy against Russia. This paper will try to show convincingly that this is indeed the case, while also noting potential unintentional consequences of this policy.

This thesis will investigate the discourse surrounding the Russian doping scandal through a multidisciplinary approach, combining concepts from history, political science, and social sciences, including linguistics to provide an extensive answer to the research question. Since we are looking at discourse, the main method used for thesis will be that of political discourse analysis. According to social scientists Teun van Dijk, political discourse analysis (PDA), can be understood as “the analysis of political discourse from a critical perspective, a perspective which focuses on the reproduction and contestation of political power through political discourse”.¹⁶ This definition, also characterizes political discourse as attached to political actors – individuals, political institutions and organizations, engaged in political processes and events. As linguists Isabela and Norman Fairclough note, PDA “needs to incorporate an explanatory viewpoint, the point of view of an explanatory critique, in assessing how actual discursive practices contribute to maintaining or transforming a given social order, including existing power relations”.¹⁷ Discourse, in this view, is seen as “social use of language in social contexts”, or in the case of politics, “the language associated with a particular social field or practice”.¹⁸ Furthermore, discourses are “ways of representing reality”, a particular paradigm through which to see the world.

In the social sciences and in PDA in particular, social life can be conceptualized as the interplay between three levels of social reality: social structures, practices and events. Social events are concrete individual instances of things happening (e.g. a doping scandal being discovered), people behaving in certain ways, or people acting (including by means of language). Social structures are a more abstract concept, which is defined by Fairclough and Fairclough as “structures, systems and mechanisms which social scientists postulate as causal forces in terms of which events and practices can be explained”.¹⁹ In the particular case investigated in this study, the main social structure in focus is the Russian “great power

¹⁶ Teun Van Dijk, “What is political discourse analysis?” in *Belgian journal of linguistics* 11.1 (1997): 11-52.

¹⁷ Isabela Fairclough and Norman Fairclough, *Political Discourse Analysis: A method for advanced students* (New York: Routledge, 2012). 12

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, 81

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, 82

narrative”, the political myth described by Bo Petterson as vital to Putin’s legitimacy. Although the relationship between structures, practices and events is quite complex, one can safely argue that social structures such as these can directly influence practices, which consequently shape events.

At the core of PDA, is the idea of practical reasoning. While political decision-making and action is not always determined by the force of the better argument, but perhaps by power interests, this does not mean that argumentation and reason is not at the heart of politics. As Fairclough and Fairclough note, “reasons for favoring certain lines of action rather than others may include such goals as holding on to power or increasing it, so power can be and often is itself a reason for action. Even if this is an unreasonable argument in the eyes of some, it is still an argument”.²⁰ Decision-making processes are thus argumentative in nature. Fairclough and Fairclough define argumentation as a verbal social activity, in which people attempt to criticize or justify claims. In this case, through challenging the conclusions and findings in the McLaren report, the Putin regime has made these findings the claims central to the debate. Following this line of thinking, the main question in this paper thus tries to lay bare the discourse expressed in public statements by Russian top officials, and the underlying argumentation for this discourse. To come to a conclusion on a line of action (in this, the use of a particular discourse), agents operate with hierarchies of goals and hierarchies of values.²¹ In the case of the doping scandal, I argue that the reasoning on which this discourse is based, values the legitimization of the Putin regime, and thus its consolidation of power, higher than any potential consequences this might have for the sporting world. This requires Russia’s great power status to be expressed through sporting successes and mega-events, and not being tainted by accusations of a state-run doping program.

Fairclough and Fairclough argue that textual analysis in critical discourse analysis, comprises both interdiscursive analysis, and language analysis.²² Interdiscursive analysis of a text identifies the genres, discourse and styles that are drawn upon. This can show how previous discourses, such as the political discourse regarding sport in the USSR, play a role in shaping the discourse of today:

“Texts are shaped but not determined by existing orders of discourse in which genres, discourses and styles are articulated together in relatively established and conventional ways;

²⁰ Ibidem, 15

²¹ Ibidem, 44

²² Ibidem, 85

social agents in producing texts may combine genres and/or discourses and/or styles in unconventional ways; and such innovative combinations can be semiotic aspects of social changes taking place in behavior and action, which may ultimately be established as changes in social practices and in orders of discourse”

This paper will emphasize the clear connection between the central components of the discourse used in the Soviet period, and the current discourse of the Putin regime. It will be argued that the discourse used by the Soviet Union, is now mirrored in the current discourse, albeit with one major change: the central tenet is no longer the superiority of communism as an ideology, but instead the superiority of Russia and its administration. Thus, nationalism has replaced communism. This change in sports discourse is also reflected in a general change of social practices, and these two processes feed into each other. A quote, often attributed to Mark Twaine (although sources for this are lacking), sums up the situation hypothesized here: “history does not repeat itself, but it often rhymes”.²³

To assess this discourse, public statements from President Vladimir Putin and other officials such as Current Vice-Premier Mutko, previously minister of Sport, will be analyzed. These can be found on the English web pages of Russian government institutions and officials, but also on English speaking news websites such as TASS, a Russian state-owned news agency, that is at least in theory independent. While it is not within this scope of this thesis to do extensive research towards the truth regarding the ‘independence’ of TASS, it will be made clear in this paper that the narrative presented on TASS closely resembles the official line followed by the Putin regime, and therefore provides excellent insight in the narrative that the regime is attempting to establish. Ample research has already been done towards the sport in Russia and the political discourse surrounding it in previous eras, such as the Soviet period. Emphasis will be placed on the narrative and argumentation used by Soviet leaders for their heavy investments in sport. The importance of propaganda surrounding sports and the Olympic Games for Soviet policy goals both domestically and internationally will be described, using the body of academic work available.

As the author of this thesis does not read or write Russian, the scope of the paper will be limited to English publications. Although this limits the ability of this paper to make definitive statements on the consequences of the doping scandal and the following discourse

²³ Unknown Author, “History Does Not Repeat Itself, But It Rhymes” on <http://quoteinvestigator.com/2014/01/12/history-rhymes/> (accessed 15-05-2017)

in Russia itself, it does not limit the ability of this research to show the clear red thread running through political discourse surrounding sport that the Putin regime is trying to establish, in particular when it comes to discrediting the research of the McLaren reports in the international sports and political arena. Due to time constraints, the cut-off point of the paper is January 2017. Although the doping scandal and its consequences are still developing, by then, the political discourse in response to this scandal had been well established, and is unlikely to change in direction or tone in the months that follow.

Chapter 2: The Rise of Sport as a Political Tool in the Soviet Union

This chapter will describe the current academic knowledge available regarding the use of sport in politics and propaganda in the USSR, starting after the Second World War, when the Soviet Union joined the Olympic movement and sports became an important ideological ‘battlefield’. It will focus mainly on the narratives presented by the Soviet Union, but also describe the narratives present in Western media during the Cold War era. The connection between doping usage and the propagandistic narratives will be dissected as well. This will provide us with the basis for a comparison of the current strategy used by the Putin administration in regards to the 2014 Sochi Olympics and subsequent doping scandals leading up to the 2016 Rio Summer Olympic Games.

The link between sport and politics

Despite the enormous growth in importance of sports and sporting events during the last century, one thing has remained the same: The position of the IOC that “sport is above politics”, and that sport’s moral purity should be guarded.²⁴ In 2015, the IOC Executive Board approved the latest revision of the Code of Ethics, which it describes as “an integral part of the Olympic Charter”.²⁵ Within this charter, the second ‘universal fundamental ethical principle’, the foundation of Olympism, is the following: “respect of the principle of the universality and political neutrality of the Olympic Movement”.²⁶ It is interesting to note that this narrative can also be found in the discourse of the Putin administration: “Don’t Politicize sports”, says Vitaly Mutko, while Alexander Zhukov, former president of the Russian Olympic Committee, stated that “sports is beyond politics”.²⁷

However, if one takes a good look at professional sports in current times, it is nearly impossible to uphold this position. This stance has, in fact, led to international sports organizations turning a blind eye to abuses of Olympic ideals, which in itself is a political

²⁴ Keys, *Globalizing Sport: National Rivalry and International Community in the 1930s*. 61

²⁵ International Olympic Committee, "Code of Ethics," <https://www.olympic.org/code-of-ethics>.

²⁶ "Ioc Code of Ethics," <https://stillmed.olympic.org/media/Document%20Library/OlympicOrg/IOC/What-We-Do/Leading-the-Olympic-Movement/Code-of-Ethics/EN-IOC-Code-of-Ethics-2016.pdf>. (Accessed 11-01-2017)

²⁷ Andrej Stanislavovič Makarychev, "From Sochi – 2014 to Fifa – 2018: The Crisis of Sovereignty and the Challenges of Globalization," in *Mega Events in Post-Soviet Eurasia : Shifting Borderlines of Inclusion and Exclusion*, ed. Andrej Stanislavovič Makarychev and Alexandra Yatsyk (New York : Palgrave Macmillan, 2016). 198

statement.²⁸ It is easy to find examples of this: Already in the 1930s the Japanese invasion in Manchuria did not stop the IOC from awarding the 1940s Olympics to Tokyo, nor did the actions of Nazi Germany lead to exclusion.²⁹ One could make a comparison here to the annexation of Crimea by Russia, where this did not seem to cause any doubt among FIFA officials about the planned World Cup of 2018 in Russia. Of course, if political neutrality was not mentioned in its charters, this would undoubtedly only further complicate things. If the IOC or other sporting organizations started taking sides in political or military struggles, this would automatically exclude certain parties from partaking in sporting events, making them even more political than is the case when trying to maintain neutrality. It is important to note however, that neutrality itself is also a political statement. Sports have always been intertwined with politics. As John Wilson argues in *Playing by the Rules: Sport, Society and the State*: “Without rules to define access to decision making and authority – the stuff of politics – sport would not exist”.³⁰

The USSR’s political goals through sports

As sports historian James Riordan notes in *Sports in Soviet Society*, widely recognized as the first academic book about sport in the Soviet Union, sport took a central place in the Soviet Social system.³¹ It was useful to the Soviet regime because of its inherent qualities of being easily understood and enjoyed, being capable of developing mass enthusiasm, being superficially apolitical, and permitting safe self-expression. Riordan states that “Especially in a society which, in a short span of time, experienced three revolutions, a civil war, rapid industrialization, forced collectivization of agriculture, purges, mass terror, and two world wars, sports has been important as a broad channel for the discharge of emotional tensions.”³²

According to this seminal work, the roots of Soviet sport in part lie deep in Russian history, the people’s habits and traditions, the climate, state’s preoccupation with external and internal enemies, and the intellectual ferment of Russian society in the latter part of the 19th and early 20th centuries. After the Second World War, the USSR set a new national target: to catch up and overtake the most advanced industrial powers, including in sport.³³ The pre-war

²⁸ Keys, *Globalizing Sport: National Rivalry and International Community in the 1930s*. 61

²⁹ Ibid. 62

³⁰ Wilson, *Playing by the Rules: Sport, Society, and the State*. 13

³¹ J. Riordan, *Sport in Soviet Society: Development of Sport and Physical Education in Russia and the Ussr* (Cambridge University Press, 1980). 6

³² Ibid. 8

³³ Ibid. 162

pyramidal structure of sports administration was re-established and refashioned to suit the new circumstances, and incentives such as cash prizes and the allocation of scarce commodities were installed for setting records and winning championships. Athletes were even to receive salaries and bonuses, further encouraging the formation of an elite of sports stars.³⁴ All of this despite the fact that ‘amateur’ athletes were still the norm according to the rules of international sport federations. This meant there was a big difference between the appearance projected to the outside world and the reality of the Soviet sport system, which already at this time started to professionalize.³⁵ Accompanying the new focus on sports was also a purge of famous sportsmen who had contacts with foreigners prior to the war, in order to ensure it was the central government that could control the information coming in and out of the sports world regarding Soviet practices.³⁶

The Party Central Committee outlined new targets in December 1948, entailing reinforcement of the organization sports collectives, and ensuring the all-round expansion of all sports, but with particular attention given to sports that featured prominently in the Olympic Games. The Committee also attempted to improve the sports amenities available to collectives and societies, as well as heightening the responsibility of coaches and instructors for the performances of their charges, and extensively utilizing the press, radio and cinema for popularizing sport among the public. Dr. Matveyev, a former medical advisor to the pre-war All-Union Physical Culture Council, said: “Sport in the Soviet Union has two objectives: propaganda for abroad, and the physical training of the Red Army and NKVD (Security Police). The victories abroad make excellent domestic propaganda. People have little to be proud of otherwise... the average Russian thinks ‘If Dinamo can beat a French team, obviously the French have even less bread and meat than we do’. This is exactly what the Soviets wish people to think, as a sort of justification for their hunger and consolation for the evils of the system”.³⁷

The USSR in the Olympics

Before the USSR joined the Olympic movement, the Soviet Sports Committee, led by chairman Nikolai Romanov, had to balance demands from the international sporting organizations and the IOC (ascribing to amateurism of athletes, founding a National Olympic

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid. 167

Committee that was supposed to be independent of its government) with conditions placed upon them by the Soviet leadership: To gain permission to go to international tournaments, Romanov had to “guarantee victory, otherwise the ‘free’ bourgeois press would fling mud at the whole nation”.³⁸ The fact that the USSR leadership was not willing to send athletes abroad without a guarantee for victory clearly shows the importance of sport as a political tool. In the end, as historian Jenifer Parks describes, the questions over the amateur status of Soviet athletes and the threat of state interference in the IOC proved less significant when the matter of accepting a Soviet NOC and a Soviet member to the IOC came to a vote. The IOC, wanting to live up to its ideals of internationalism and to maintain its prestige, voted to recognize the Soviet NOC in May 1951, partly based on the argument that since they didn’t ask this of other nations, they shouldn’t investigate Soviet sports regulations either.³⁹

In addition to logistics and training, the Soviet Sports Committee also had the image of the Soviet Union to consider. From the very beginning of the USSR’s Olympic participation, propaganda and imagery was considered of equal importance: All information related to international sport to be released by TASS (the Soviet news agency), would solely be released with the agreement of the Central Committee Department for Propaganda and Agitation.⁴⁰ Control of the Soviet Union’s image had to rest with the Central Committee, not with Western journalists. As Jenifer Parks shows, in general, the Soviet Union only sporadically opened up to foreign press regarding sports affairs, and when it did, this was through “well organized, strategically timed displays of hospitality designed to further increase the Soviet Union’s international prestige”.⁴¹ In the end, the first Olympic participation of the USSR at the 1952 Olympic Games of Helsinki was declared a success by the Politburo, since they had tied the US at the games in terms of results, according to an unofficial points system used by the international press.⁴²

Soviet propaganda used its participation in the Olympic movement to justify the political acceptability of the Soviet Union at international level, while, interestingly enough, criticizing “the reactionary policy of the imperialistic West” exploiting international sports for their

³⁸ "Sport after the Cold War," in *East Plays West: Sport and the Cold War*, ed. S. Wagg and D.L. Andrews (New York: Routledge, 2007). 277

³⁹ Jenifer Parks, "Verbal Gymnastics: Sports, Bureacracy, and the Soviet Union's Entrance into the Olympic Games, 1946-1952," *ibid.* 34

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 38

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.* 40

political means and goals.⁴³ It also presented the Soviet Union as a model participant, supporting the Olympic goals of peace, friendship and international understanding.

The political usage of sport continued in the following decades, for example with the biggest domestic sporting event of the 1950s, the first ‘Spartakiad of the People of the USSR’, held in Moscow between 6 and 16 August 1956. It was intended to be an event of political and social significance in the lives of Soviet people, and its importance was marked by the presence of all prominent Party leaders and a number of eminent foreign guests, such as the then president of the Olympic Committee, Avery Brundage. This event was even meant to be a culturally unifying force, with various communist slogans worked into the various displays and performances accompanying the games.⁴⁴

Sports now became a means of continuing the war against the remaining enemy, the bourgeois-democratic states of the world. Sports success was intended to be a morale booster to assuage doubts about the superiority of the Soviet system, to provide a justification for all the efforts and sacrifice made to attain a strong state and higher standard of living. Strict control of the sports movement through functionaries of the security forces, including warnings to players that they too, were subject to political conformity and to coercion, made sure Soviet athletes kept to themselves, not engaging in contacts with foreign sportsmen, nor communicating information about foreign societies to Soviet citizens. It is important to note though, as Parks does, that “The Soviet Union did not introduce a highly nationalistic atmosphere into IOC debates, but rather, the Soviet Union’s entrance in the early years of the Cold War took this already present trend to a new ideological level”.⁴⁵

Propaganda and Doping Use

In a total of eighteen Olympic appearances, when counting both summer and winter Games, the Soviet Union ranked first in the medal count a staggering thirteen times, finishing second on all its other occasions. Despite ceasing to exist for over twenty years ago now, it still currently ranks second in the all-time medal count, with only the US outscoring it.⁴⁶ It was a

⁴³ Evelyn Mertin, "The Soviet Union and the Olympic Games of 1980 and 1984: Explaining the Boycotts to Their Own People," in *East Plays West: Sport and the Cold War*, ed. S. Wagg and D.L. Andrews (New York: Routledge, 2007). 237

⁴⁴ Riordan, *Sport in Soviet Society: Development of Sport and Physical Education in Russia and the Ussr*. 175

⁴⁵ Parks, "Verbal Gymnastics: Sports, Bureacracy, and the Soviet Union's Entrance into the Olympic Games, 1946-1952." 33

⁴⁶ Tyler Benson, "The Role of Sports in the Soviet Union," <http://blogs.bu.edu/guidedhistory/russia-and-its-empires/tyler-benson/>. (Accessed 07-01-2017)

main focus for many propaganda schemes by the Soviet Union. This should not be surprising: As James Riordan mentions, “apart from the early years of space exploration, sport was the *only area* in which the Soviet Union could demonstrate superiority over the leading capitalist states – in the full flare of the world’s media”.⁴⁷

Already from the beginning of the USSR’s participation, rumors spread in Western media and academic journals about Soviet athletes’ steroid use. As Sociologists Rob Beame and Ian Ritchie show, researchers like Dr. Nicholas Wade, Robert Windsor and Daniel Dumitru claimed a direct link between Nazi “steroid-fueled soldiers” in Eastern Europe and to Soviet ambition with sporting success.⁴⁸ These claims, as unsubstantiated as they were, transformed rumor into an apparent medical fact, and they still continue to appear in scholarly publications, medical periodicals, medical conference presentations, and newspapers.⁴⁹ This scary image of linking the Soviet Union to the horrors of the Nazi regime was of course very useful for anti-Soviet propaganda, in particular in Britain and the US, who had specific ‘information’ activities set up to spread stories about atrocities and problems within the Soviet Union.⁵⁰ The Soviet Union answered with an equal amount of propaganda from their side, as described above.

Beyond the propaganda, the actual use of doping, in particular anabolic steroids, was on the rise both in the West and the Socialist states. Sports Sociologist Paul Dimeo has conducted in depth research that illustrates how widespread doping use was for a significant period.⁵¹ In the US, Dr. Robert Zeigler, a coach with the US Olympic Committee, helped develop an anabolic steroid known as ‘Dianabol’, with the full knowledge of the US sporting authorities. In the USSR, on the other hand, James Riordan argued convincingly, there had been “long-term state production, testing, monitoring and administering of performance-enhancing drugs in regard to athletes as young as seven to eight”.⁵² The list of positive tests and the assumption of widespread usage during the 1970s and 1980s is well documented.⁵³ It is interesting to note, that the USSR and GDR have come to bare the bulk of the blame for sports doping, with Western governments pointing the finger at these now no longer existing communist states as

⁴⁷ Riordan, "Sport after the Cold War." 275

⁴⁸ Rob Beamish and Ian Ritchie, "Totalitarian Regimes and Cold War Sport: Steroid "Urbarmenschen" and "Ball-Bearing Females", " *ibid.* 15

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Paul Dimeo, "Good Versus Evil? Drugs, Sport and the Cold War," *ibid.* 153

⁵¹ *Ibid.* 157

⁵² Jim Riordan, "Rewriting Soviet Sports History," *Journal of Sports History* 20, no. no. 3 (1993). 256

⁵³ B. Houlihan, *Dying to Win: Doping in Sport and the Development of Anti-Doping Policy* (Council of Europe Publishing, 1999).

the main culprits. Dimeo explains the reason for this has less to do with the actual amount of doping use, but more so with “first, the complicity and abuses of the state [while Western states denied any involvement in doping use of its athletes] and second, a combination of primary source evidence and changing political circumstances [the fall of the GDR and USSR regimes]”.⁵⁴

A point that is very important to make in this context, is that drug use for performance enhancement only became taboo during the 1960s and 1970s. As Ian Ritchie notes, various forms of drug use have been used in sporting contexts for thousands of years, and “the condemnation and moral panic about drugs would come much later in time, under a very specific set of social and political circumstances”.⁵⁵ A first statement of principle, with anti-doping as a subset of the ‘amateur values’ mentioned in the Olympic Charter, first became important shortly before the Second World War, and with both sides of the ‘Iron Curtain’ now committed to the use of anabolic steroids to improve performance and win medals, the IOC tried to get a grip on the situation.⁵⁶ The current historiography of modern sport does not really provide an answer as to why the acceptance of drug use gave way relatively sudden to an ethos of anti-doping, but is very well possible that the Cold War and its political climate played a role.

The Height of Sport Propaganda: The 1980 and 1984 Olympic Games

Increasing political tensions between the US and the USSR turned the Olympic Games of 1980 in Moscow and of 1984 in Los Angeles into, as historian Evelyn Mertin puts it, “victims of the Cold War”.⁵⁷ On both sides political campaigners, sport officials and journalists were involved in heavy Public Relations campaigns trying to influence public opinion and foreign decision makers, leading ultimately to a US-led boycott of the 1980 Moscow Games, and subsequently to the 1984 boycott of the Los Angeles Games by all Socialist athletes. After the successful bid for the Olympic Summer Games in 1980, the Soviet Union immediately proclaimed this choice as an “unconditional acknowledgement of the Soviet athletes’ leading

⁵⁴ Dimeo, "Good Versus Evil? Drugs, Sport and the Cold War." 156

⁵⁵ Ian Ritchie, "Understanding Performance-Enhancing Substances and Sanctions against Their Use from the Perspective of History," in *Routledge Handbook of Drugs and Sport*, ed. V. Møller, I. Waddington, and J. M. Hoberman (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2015). 22

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* 26

⁵⁷ Mertin, "The Soviet Union and the Olympic Games of 1980 and 1984: Explaining the Boycotts to Their Own People." 235

performances” and as proof that “the world sports leaders basically approved the peace loving foreign political course of the Soviet government”.⁵⁸

The extremely strong link between sports and government propaganda in the Soviet Union becomes obvious once more if one looks at the role of the organizing Committee for the Moscow Games, “Olimpiada-80”. Aside from being responsible for preparing the actual Olympics, it was also instructed to increase their international sporting contacts, and report on foreign press activities concerning the Olympic preparations in Moscow. The aim was to ensure that the Soviet propagandists could monitor foreign reactions and if necessary, control the narrative by presenting their own publications.⁵⁹ As Mertin shows, a large publicity campaign was staged, not just towards the socialist bloc and its inhabitants, but also with special emphasis on an international component.⁶⁰ The eventual boycott, which was part of the response of US President Jim Carter to the invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union in 1979, was in Soviet propaganda countered by publications presenting the US as the villain, with American athletes as the victims: The invasion of Afghanistan was never mentioned as the real reason for the boycott campaign, while it was emphasized that the Kremlin had guaranteed that the games would be staged according to the Olympic Charter.⁶¹ An important thread in the Soviet response to the boycott, as well as in the responses of various Olympic officials, was that the US was violating one of the most important tenets of the Olympic movement: the separation of politics and sport.⁶²

Four years later, it was the USSR itself that decided to boycott the Olympic Games. According to Mertin, this was more of a last minute decision than a planned retaliation for the American absence during the previous games. Several leadership changes within the Soviet Union (from Brezhnev to Andropov to Chernenko between 1982 and 1984) in the years leading up to the 1984 Los Angeles Games saw different attitudes to Olympic participation. However, ultimately, rising tensions between the US and the Soviet Union following the shooting down of a South Korean plane in September 1983, led to a declaration on 9 May 1984, stating that the Soviet Union would not attend the Olympics.⁶³ M.V. Gramov took over

⁵⁸ Ibid. 238

⁵⁹ Ibid. 239

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid. 242

⁶² Anthony Moretti, "The Interference of Politics in the Olympic Games, and How the U.S. Media Contribute to It," *Global Media Journal: Canadian Edition* 6, no. 2 (2013).

⁶³ Mertin, "The Soviet Union and the Olympic Games of 1980 and 1984: Explaining the Boycotts to Their Own People." 246

the role of head of Soviet sport in late 1983, coming directly from the propaganda department of the Central Committee, once again showing the clear link between these departments. The media campaign leading up to the Soviet boycott this time focused on critique of the LA games' capitalist funding (the first Olympic Games to be funded privately), failure to comply to the Olympic Charter again, and reports of LA as a "center of anti-Soviet organizations", which they argued meant there was a need for extra assurances regarding Soviet athletes' safety that were not given by the host city.⁶⁴

Key Points

During the Cold War, sports and propaganda became inextricably linked, if they weren't already since the infamous 1936 Berlin Olympic Games. It is clear that the Soviet Union saw the Olympic Games as an excellent way to promote itself both domestically and internationally, with sport being one of the few areas through which it could argue for the supposed superiority of the communist ideology. The Committees and departments in charge of sport were closely linked to those involved in Propaganda for over thirty years. Of course, the ideological component of the political discourse in the field of sport will no longer present, now that Russia has transitioned into 'state capitalism'. However, the narrative of showing the greatness of Russia through sporting achievements, mentioned in the introduction, could still show remarkable similarities with the narrative presented in the Soviet Union. Doping, and more specifically doping accusations, played a major role in the propaganda from both sides of the Cold War. It seems to have been a state-run affair in the USSR, but they were not the only country where doping was used on a large scale. In fact, this seems to have been the case all around the globe, with the difference being that in cases like the GDR and the USSR the state was more clearly involved. This should not be a surprise, with the Soviet NOC being much less independent as its counterparts, and with the clear importance of sporting success for the Soviet's narrative of ideological superiority. It is this discourse of the superiority of the USSR that will be compared to the discourse used by the Putin regime.

⁶⁴ Ibid. 245

Chapter 3: Interruption and Continuation: Sport in the Post-Soviet era and the Beginning of the Putin Regime

This chapter will first briefly discuss the transitional period between the Soviet Union and the Putin administration in Russia and its implications for Russian sports policy, in order to establish whether the current regime's approach to sports is a direct continuation of previous policy or perhaps a second round of institutional change since the demise of the USSR. This will be followed by an analysis of the political usage of sport by the Putin government, in which nationalism plays a big role and will therefore also be given attention. This chapter specifically looks at the language and discourse surrounding the Sochi 2014 Winter Olympics.

From Soviet Union to Russia: Sports from 1985 to the 2000s

It becomes nearly impossible to argue that the Putin's period in power (including the Medvedev presidency) is a direct continuation of the USSR's sport policy when looking at the devastating impact the fall of communism has had on Eastern Europe in its entirety. As Riordan notes, one of the major legacies of the European communist era is a transitional period that in many places led not democracy, but to what has been called "post-Marxist kleptocracy".⁶⁵ Russia underwent a brief period of 'illusory freedom' before robber-baron capitalism took over for almost the entire 1990s. In this period, under Boris Yeltsin, the first post-Soviet president (1991-1999), various mafia gangs, run on ethnic lines, bought up Russia's key strategic assets at around 20 per cent of their actual market value.⁶⁶ When Vladimir Putin succeeded Yeltsin as Russian president, some of these shady figures repositioned themselves as oligarchs, now operating within boundaries set by the regime. Putin started to operate as a neo-authoritarian dictator over Russia, with state capitalism as the primary objective. Before we move on to the Putin period, a brief overview of changes in the Russian sport sphere will be given from the rise to power of Mikhail Gorbachov until the beginning of the Putin administration.

In 1985, one year after the Los Angeles boycott and five years after the Moscow games, Mikhail Gorbachov presented the radically new policies of *perestroika* (restructuring) and *glasnost* (openness) to the Soviet Union. Glasnost meant, among many other consequences, the exposure of the old system of sport to public scrutiny. Victims of repression began to

⁶⁵ Riordan, "Sport after the Cold War." 272

⁶⁶ Ibid.

publish their memoirs, including former sports stars whom the public had idolized.⁶⁷ While the Olympics were a diversion from the realities of living under communism and an ideological tool for the regime before, the rapid political change that occurred showed, to many people, that elite sport was associated with “privilege, paramilitary coercion (the two largest and best-endowed sport clubs in all communist states were the armed forces clubs and the security forces club – Dinamo), hypocrisy (having to pretend that communist athletes were amateur when they were being paid by the state and given either army officer sinecures or fictitious employment) and distorted priorities (the huge sums of money that were lavished on sports stars and the Moscow Olympics, while sport facilities for the masses – not to mention hospitals, schools, housing and consumer goods for the public generally – were poor and minimal)”.⁶⁸ Further revelations were the confessions that the Soviet NOC was a government-run institution and that its chairman had to be a member of the Communist Party. Additionally, the Soviet state manufactured, tested and administered performance-enhancing drugs to its athletes (while condemning bourgeois states for encouraging drug-taking).⁶⁹ Statistics by previous Soviet leadership about millions of regular active participants in sports were declared fraudulent, and only eight per cent of men and two per cent of women were actually engaged in sport regularly.

Riordan even goes so far as to argue the Olympics played a crucial role in the changes that occurred, by opening up the country to other countries and cultures. He quotes Eric Hobsbawm, who stated that “the assent to communism of the masses depended not on their ideological or other convictions, but on how they judged what life under communist regimes did for them, and how they compared their situation with others. Once it ceased to be possible to insulate populations from contact with, or even knowledge about, other countries, these judgements were skeptical”.⁷⁰ The argument that authoritarian hosts expose themselves to outside influences through a mega-event such as the Olympics, is not new, but has in fact only gained more prominence with the rise of globalization in recent times.⁷¹ This is therefore good to keep in mind when this paper goes on to discuss the most recent mega-events in Russia. It is also clear that the political discourse of supposed superiority was impossible to uphold in

⁶⁷ Ibid. 277

⁶⁸ Ibid. 275

⁶⁹ Ibid. 278

⁷⁰ Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes. The Short Twentieth Century* (London: Michael Joseph, 1994). 496

⁷¹ Andrej Stanislavovič Makarychev and Alexandra Yatsyk, "Introduction: Sports, Politics and Boundaries: Playing the Inclusion/Exclusion Games," in *Mega Events in Post-Soviet Eurasia: Shifting Borderlines of Inclusion and Exclusion*, ed. Andrej Stanislavovič Makarychev and Alexandra Yatsyk (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016). 9

the post-soviet era, and even more importantly, this imagery and discourse was no longer a priority in a time of major upheaval of Russian society.

Major Changes in Sports and Sports Policy

The worst aspect of the old system was considered to be the misplaced priorities, and in the post-Gorbachov era these priorities radically changed. Sport and every other aid and subsidy came to an end. The sinecures of an army commission and “eternal” studenthood for top athletes were removed, and the forty-two sports boarding schools were dismantled.⁷² This, in turn, led to a massive “brain and muscle drain” of top athletes, coaches, sport medics and scientists, who without communist incentives, turned to market incentives elsewhere to make their living. By 1995, more than 300 soccer, 700 hockey and 100 Russian basketball players were working in North America, Asia, as well as Western and Eastern Europe.⁷³ This new and subordinate status of Russia’s sports was of course a blow to Russian nationalism, underscoring its decline as a world power.

The new political elite, so called ‘New Russians’, together with the ‘nomenklatura’ companies (bought far beneath their market value) became very influential in sports during the 1990s. Sport sponsorship was seen as a way to put a “healthy gloss” on their public image.⁷⁴ No expense was spared in order to achieve sporting success. The take-over by Roman Abramovich (whose company also happens to own Moscow’s army football team CSKA Moscow) of English Premier League club Chelsea is the typical example of this attitude: Chelsea’s wage bill during the 2003-2005 seasons was by far the highest of any football team in the world.⁷⁵ The methods introduced by this new elite to promote commercial sport were often primitive to the extreme. It included the fixing of results, bribing of referees, and even “hit” killings of those who stand in their way or expose their nefarious operations.⁷⁶ One could argue that this situation resembled that of football in Colombia, when drug barons took over the football scene in the country with similar appalling methods, with politics and national pride also playing a huge role.⁷⁷ National pride in Russia however, took a serious blow during the 1990s and early 2000s. The Russian football team’s performance at the 1994,

⁷² Riordan, "Sport after the Cold War." 281

⁷³ Robert Edelman, "There Are No Rules on Planet Russia: Post-Soviet Spectator Sport," in *Consuming Russia: Popular Culture, Sex and Society since Gorbachov*, ed. Adele Barker (Duke University Press, 1999). 221

⁷⁴ Riordan, "Sport after the Cold War." 282

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid. 283

⁷⁷ Jeff Zimbalist and Michael Zimbalist, "The Two Escobars," (USA: All Rise Films, 2010).

1998 and 2002 World Cups were at best mediocre, while the once-dominant ice hockey team was eliminated in the semi-finals of the sport's inaugural World Cup in 1996, and the basketball team failing to qualify for the 1996 Atlanta Olympics.⁷⁸

It was not just the financial and political situation that worked against Russia gaining any big sporting successes. Starting with the Winter Olympics in Lillehammer 1994, the program of the Games was expanded considerably, with most of the new additions being in sports that Soviet and Russian athletes were not traditionally strong in. As a result of all these circumstances, Russia dropped from a last overall first place in 1994 all the way down to eleventh place in the medal rankings in Vancouver 2010, where according to minister of sport Mutko, Russia competed intensely in only thirty out of eighty-six medal disciplines, and in five sports out of fifteen.⁷⁹

Nationalism continued to be heavily intertwined with sports. Already since 1926, football riots were part of the Soviet sports scene: As sport historian Robert Edelman mentions, rooting for local teams provided a safe cover for national sentiment.⁸⁰ After the breakup of the USSR, which was followed by the breaking up of All-Union leagues, this nationalist sentiment disappeared temporarily during the 1990s. However, football as an arena for nationalism still remained. This was highlighted to the extreme when in mid-December 2010, Moscow was disrupted by the biggest riots in recent years, when thousands gathered at Manezhnaia Square to protest against the death of a Russian football supporter killed during a brawl with youth from North Caucasus. Rioters were seen shouting nationalistic and anti-Caucasian slogans.⁸¹

To summarize the period between the fall of the Soviet Union and the beginning of the Putin regime, it was clear that a coordinated, political narrative was absent in the field of sport for this time. Sport was simply not a priority, and there were less successes to feed into a 'great power' or superiority narrative. Nationalism however did continue to play a major role in the sports environment.

Putin and Nationalism

⁷⁸ Riordan, "Sport after the Cold War." 285

⁷⁹ V. A. Gorokhov, "Forward Russia! Sports Mega-Events as a Venue for Building National Identity," *Nationalities Papers* 43, no. 2 (2015). 276

⁸⁰ Edelman, "There Are No Rules on Planet Russia: Post-Soviet Spectator Sport." 218

⁸¹ Pal Kolstø and Helge Blakkisrud, *The New Russian Nationalism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016).

Sport does not operate in a vacuum. Developments in the field of sport will of course be influenced by developments in the political situation of a country. As Pål Kolstø, professor in Russian Studies, points out, the break-up of the Soviet Union also meant that the share of ethnic Russians rose from just above 50 per cent in the USSR, to 81 per cent in the Russian Federation.⁸² The Putin regime not only condoned strong nationalism, including xenophobic attitudes and expressions, but actively encouraged it, trying to exploit it for their own purposes.⁸³

While some hardline nationalists have ended up in the anti-Putin administration, feeling betrayed by Putin's welcoming of immigrant laborers, the Putin regime continues to use nationalism as a major political tool. Putin's national model, presented for example in an article published before the 2012 elections, combines ethno-nationalistic sentiments regarding the "mission" of ethnically Russian people and a state-centered orientation that still includes the notion of a strong "Russian empire", including ethnic minorities.⁸⁴ This can for example be seen during the annexation of the Crimea, which was sold to the Russian people in starkly nationalist language: It was presented both as an ingathering of Russian lands in a strong Russian state and as a defense of ethnic Russians abroad. As a result, Putin's popularity, which had dropped significantly, partly due to the financial crisis, reached its former heights of 85-87 per cent.⁸⁵

Intertwined with this stronger focus on nationalism, is a narrative that focuses on the 'great power' status of Russia. As political scientists Derek Hutcheson and Bo Petersson point out, Putin's popularity rests on three pillars: "the maintenance of economic growth; the creation of domestic order; and the skillful use of myth to project the President as the bulwark against chaos and foreign threat, in the process reinforcing Russia's status as an unequivocal 'Great Power'".⁸⁶ Putin's legitimacy is largely centered on his ability to 'deliver the goods', based among other reasons on the reputation he managed to establish during his first two, economically successful presidential tenures. The economic difficulties that have piled on

⁸² Pal Kolstø, "Introduction: Russian Nationalism Is Back: But Precisely What Does That Mean?," in *The New Russian Nationalism*, ed. Pal Kolstø and Helge Blakkisrud (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016). 3

⁸³ Ibid. 5

⁸⁴ Ibid. 6

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Hutcheson and Petersson, "Shortcut to Legitimacy: Popularity in Putin's Russia." 1107

since sanctions were put in place against Russia (in response to the Ukrainian crisis), make it necessary for Putin to look for other ways to bolster his regime.⁸⁷

Political myths, defined as “a common narrative that comes with an emotional attachment that motivates political action”, are an important tool for the Putin regime. As Hutcheson and Petersson argue, the claim to be recognized as a great power is closely intertwined with Russian national identity.⁸⁸ Another important myth for Putin’s legitimacy describes Russia as cyclically experiencing ‘Times of Troubles’, which can only come to an end by hard efforts from the Russian people, united under a great leader who rescues the country from disaster.⁸⁹ These myths will be important now that we focus our attention on sports again.

The arena in which Putin was still regarded as having achieved most by 2014 was in restoring Russia’s international pride.⁹⁰ Russians also overwhelmingly share Putin’s famous declaration that the collapse of the USSR was “the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the twentieth century”. Recent Putin rhetoric has focused on the perception of external threat, most notably from the US and its allies.⁹¹ The Soviet Union and the Cold War are thus still a part of the rhetoric of the current regime. The next section will show how sports and the official discourse around sports played a significant role in these aspects.

Sporting Nationalism and the development of Sport under Putin

As political scientist Vitalii Gorokhov notes, and as explained in chapter two, “Sporting rhetoric in politics and sports policy as a national issue are integral parts of the legacy that Russia inherited from the Soviet period”.⁹² Political scientist Alan Bairner states, “Sport is still far more likely to contribute to the perpetuation of strongly held local, regional and national identities than to the construction and consolidation of a homogeneous global culture”.⁹³ It is precisely for this reason the Putin regime has attempted to harness the power of sport, in a similar fashion to its USSR predecessor. Gorokhov mentions the term “sporting nationalism”, meaning a nation’s aspiration to display excellence in sport.⁹⁴ This can lead to a ‘spillover effect’, where the nationalist sentiment or ideology configured and promoted

⁸⁷ Ibid. 1109

⁸⁸ Ibid. 1110

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Gorokhov, "Forward Russia! Sports Mega-Events as a Venue for Building National Identity." 267

⁹³ A. Bairner, *Sport, Nationalism, and Globalization: European and North American Perspectives* (State University of New York Press, 2001). 163

⁹⁴ Gorokhov, "Forward Russia! Sports Mega-Events as a Venue for Building National Identity." 270

through sports affects non-sporting political processes. If we consider the three pillars that the Putin regime's legitimacy is based on, this is precisely how this administration is attempting to use sport as a political tool.

In Putin's own words, 2002 was "really the year when we started paying permanent attention to sports and fitness, and their funding- or was it a bit earlier?"⁹⁵ It was also in 2002 that the Federal Agency for Sports and Body Culture was created to replace the State Committee for Sports and Physical Education of Russia, which had been created in 1991 after the major political changes that took place with the collapse of the Soviet Union. The importance of sport for the Putin regime can be seen in the establishment of a Sport TV Channel, with the main aim of "promoting a healthy lifestyle, sports and Russia's achievements in sports".⁹⁶ When congratulating the TV Channel for existing for five years, Putin stated that thanks to this channel "all of us will celebrate the successes of our athletes and will feel proud of our country's achievements".⁹⁷ In the years that followed, the Russian government invested significant amounts of money into federal sports programs. A special federal program – called the 'Strategy for Development of Physical Education and Sports in the Russian Federation' – was implemented in 2006, with a project budget of more than 100 billion rubles (\$4.07 billion).⁹⁸ Giving sports even more prominence, the Ministry of Sport, Tourism and Youth Policy was established in 2008. When discussing the disappointing results in the Vancouver 2010 Olympics, Putin mentioned that in the 1990s, "hardly anything was invested in our sports infrastructure during that time, and much of the Soviet infrastructure had become worn out".⁹⁹ It is clear Putin sees a clear distinction between this period and his administration, which, according to him, "has not neglected sports over the past eight or ten years. In fact, we have spent serious money on sports.... Almost 3.5 billion rubles were spent to prepare our national team for the Vancouver Olympics between 2006 and 2009".¹⁰⁰

⁹⁵ "Prime Minister Vladimir Putin Met with Minister of Sport, Tourism and Youth Policy, Vitaly Mutko," 04-07-2008, <http://archive.government.ru/eng/docs/1543/> (Accessed: 07-01-2017)

⁹⁶ "Prime Minister Vladimir Putin Congratulated the Sport Tv Channel on Its 5th Anniversary," 12-06-2008, <http://archive.government.ru/eng/docs/1462/> (Accessed 06-01-2017)

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ "Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin Gave an Interview to the Chinese State News Agency Xinhua and to the Renmin Ribao Newspaper," 6-08-2008, <http://archive.government.ru/eng/docs/1640/> (Accessed 07-01-2017)

⁹⁹ "Prime Minister Vladimir Putin Chairs a Meeting to Discuss the Performance of the Russian Team at the Xxi Winter Olympic Games in Vancouver," 05-03-2010, <http://archive.government.ru/eng/docs/9633/> (Accessed 07-01-2017)

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

The political use of sports definitely shows a resemblance to the approach used during the Soviet period. Firstly, similar to the Soviet approach, the policies implemented set targets regarding mass sport participation, with a final goal of involving up to 40 million people in sports by 2020.¹⁰¹ Simultaneously, there is a clear prominence of elite sport goals in the policies implemented. Olympic results are considered vital for national prestige. Leading athletes, according to Putin, “should be paid a substantial monthly allowance”.¹⁰² It should be noted though, that the last 20 to 30 years have seen a convergence in national sporting programs, with most developed countries rewarding athletes financially for their results. Secondly, in interviews and public statements, the Putin administration, while clearly pursuing political goals such as boosting national pride and prestige through sports itself, criticizes other countries for turning sports into a ‘political issue’. In an interview preceding the 2008 Beijing Olympics, Putin said that “attempts to turn the Olympics into a political issue are an attack on the Olympic spirit itself”.¹⁰³ As mentioned in the introduction, Vitaly Mutko, Sports Minister of Russia, also stated “Don’t politicize sports”, while Alexander Zhukov, president of the Russian Olympic Committee, even went so far as to state that “Sport is beyond politics”.¹⁰⁴ Thirdly, Russia is continuously presented as a leading sports nation, partly using the Soviet legacy to do so. As an example, Putin said Russian sport educators are “considered to be the best in the world in many sports”.¹⁰⁵ Before the 2008 Olympics, Putin bragged proudly that “between 1996 and 2004 the Russian team has won a total of 243 medals – eighty-five gold, seventy-six silver and eighty-two bronze medals. We are in a strong position among the three leaders in the unofficial medal standing together with China and the US”.¹⁰⁶ During the celebration of the 100th anniversary of the Russian Olympic Committee, Putin stated that Russian athletes “have attained prestige for their country and built up the glory of a world-class sports nation”.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰¹ "Prime Minister Vladimir Putin Meets with Vitaly Mutko, Minister of Sport, Tourism and Youth Policy," 07-06-2010, <http://archive.government.ru/eng/docs/10887/> (Accessed 07-01-2017)

¹⁰² "Prime Minister Vladimir Putin Chairs a Meeting to Discuss the Performance of the Russian Team at the Xxi Winter Olympic Games in Vancouver".

¹⁰³ "Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin Gave an Interview to the Chinese State News Agency Xinhua and to the Renmin Ribao Newspaper".

¹⁰⁴ Makarychev, "From Sochi – 2014 to Fifa – 2018: The Crisis of Sovereignty and the Challenges of Globalization." 197

¹⁰⁵ "Prime Minister Vladimir Putin Holds a Presidium Meeting of the President’s Council on Physical Fitness and Sports in Krasnodar," 06-05-2011, <http://archive.government.ru/eng/docs/15193/> (Accessed 07-01-2017)

¹⁰⁶ "Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin Gave an Interview to the Chinese State News Agency Xinhua and to the Renmin Ribao Newspaper".

¹⁰⁷ "Prime Minister Vladimir Putin Takes Part in a Ceremony Dedicated to the 100th Anniversary of the Russian Olympic Committee," 25-11-2011, <http://archive.government.ru/eng/docs/17232/> (Accessed 07-01-2017)

The Sochi 2014 Olympics and its Preparations

In recent times, Russia has mostly attempted nation building through so called sporting ‘mega-events’, defined by Maurice Roche as “large-scale events which have a dramatic character, mass popular appeal and international significance”.¹⁰⁸ Gorokhov adds to this that hosting mega-events demand political will. Hosting a sports mega-event gives a host nation sufficient resources for reaching a global audience, giving the opportunity to enhance international recognition, boosting the prestige of the nation (Russia as a great power), and securing the legitimacy of the existing political regime. For the domestic audience, which is not likely to see direct economic benefits, the national government is likely to highlight non-material values such as belonging to the nation, national honor, and patriotism.¹⁰⁹ The more successful the event is, measured mostly by sporting success but also by not having too many headline-making news that could shift the focus away from the sporting agenda (boycotts, scandals, etc.), the stronger the effects for the regime. Strength in sport can then be used as a display of national power. This effect is especially strong when a good result is achieved in a “national sport”, which the domestic crowd identifies with.¹¹⁰ The 2014 Olympic winter Games in Sochi thus provided an excellent chance for Putin to achieve political goals through sport. As Bo Petersson and Karina Vamling argue, the Sochi Winter Games were “a welcome opportunity for Putin to display strength and resolve and demonstrate that his is still a much needed strong hand at the helm”.¹¹¹

The Putin regime is actively trying to enforce their idea of a Russian national identity through sports. As Philipp Casula shows, this was clearly visible in the bid book of the 2014 Sochi Olympics, which shows how the Games were designed and intended by its organizers.¹¹² Similarly to the discourse surrounding the 1980 Moscow Olympics, Russian officials argue that in this bid book that Russia is a modern democracy, easily fulfilling political criteria (criteria to which, as Casula notes, the IOC has never paid much attention). This put Russia in a position to use the successful bid for the Olympics as a means to legitimize its institutions and regime. The brand of nationalism the Putin regime aspires to is also clearly present in the

¹⁰⁸ Maurice Roche, *Megaevents and Modernity: Olympics and Expos in the Growth of Global Culture* (Routledge, 2002). 1

¹⁰⁹ Gorokhov, "Forward Russia! Sports Mega-Events as a Venue for Building National Identity." 271

¹¹⁰ Bairner, *Sport, Nationalism, and Globalization: European and North American Perspectives*. 18-19

¹¹¹ Bo Author Petersson et al., "Display Window or Tripwire? : The Sochi Winter Games, the Russian Great Power Ideal and the Legitimacy of Vladimir Putin," *Euxeinos*;12 (2013). 7

¹¹² Philipp Casula, "The 2014 Winter Olympics Bid Book as Site of National Identity Constitution," in *Mega Events in Post-Soviet Eurasia: Shifting Borderlines of Inclusion and Exclusion*, ed. Andrej Stanislavovič Makarychev and Alexandra Yatsyk (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016). 40

bid book: ethnic diversity is hailed as an asset, but it is also made clear diversity has to stay within its limits, politically silent, controlled, and is presented as a security risk.¹¹³ This mirrors Putin's views, who has emphasized that "ethnic Russians are the group that drives our nation's development", while adding that "Russia's strength lies in the fact that it is a multi-ethnic and multi-faith nation".¹¹⁴ The bid book also mentions that Sochi 2014 will "galvanize" the nation, helping to achieve national pride and national purpose.¹¹⁵

During the preparations, Putin tried to project an image of being closely involved in all possible ways, inspecting Olympic sites in February 2013, but also going so far as to deliver thinly veiled threats regarding potential delays: "After the journalists leave, I will tell you what failures to meet the deadlines will amount to. I do not want to frighten anyone, but I will speak to you as people I have known for many years now".¹¹⁶

Since a victory in the overall medal count was less certain in Sochi compared to the Universiade, Russian officials sought a balance between confidence and caution in their messages concerning the expected results. Mutko was the first official to publicly announce the objective of winning in overall medal ranking, but Zhukov and Putin also mentioned that Russia should aim for the highest spot.¹¹⁷ This objective led to several new strategies to ensure a good result: both naturalization of international high-profile athletes, as well as headhunting for world-class coaches and other professionals now become a top priority within Russian sports. This recruitment was positioned as a sign of strength: "Russia is strong not because foreigners join it, but foreigners join it because Russia is strong".¹¹⁸ Although one can never be sure about the accuracy of surveys from a country with strictly controlled media, a public survey related to Sochi seems to confirm that the Russian public bought into this message.¹¹⁹ Thus, one can conclude that in this sense, the goal (presenting national strength through winning the home Olympics) justifies the means, when it comes to the naturalization of foreign athletes. Although by now almost all countries make this connection, one can draw parallels with sport in the USSR, where the Olympics was similarly seen as a means to show superiority and strength. The importance of the event can also be seen in the enormous costs

¹¹³ Ibid. 55

¹¹⁴ Ibid. 46

¹¹⁵ Ibid. 48

¹¹⁶ Petersson et al., "Display Window or Tripwire? : The Sochi Winter Games, the Russian Great Power Ideal and the Legitimacy of Vladimir Putin." 7

¹¹⁷ Gorokhov, "Forward Russia! Sports Mega-Events as a Venue for Building National Identity." 277

¹¹⁸ Ibid. 278

¹¹⁹ Ibid. 277

of the event: Sochi in the end became the most expensive Olympics (both Winter and Summer) of all time with an estimated cost of around 51 billion (!) dollars.¹²⁰

Already during the XXVII Summer Universiade, held in 2013 in Kazan, Russian top public officials attempted to turn this event into a display of national excellence, by continuous media coverage in state-sponsored national media, and with Putin participating in the opening ceremony, followed by an appearance by Medvedev in the closing ceremony.¹²¹ Russian athletes won a sheer unbelievable amount of 292 medals, of which 155 were gold medals, but most likely due to the absence of any real rivaling competitors (China was second in the medal standing with twenty-nine gold medals), this result did not gain a clear-cut, positive appreciation among the domestic audience; instead, critics pointed out the large amount of top professional athletes that Russia had entered into the “student” competition that the Universiade is supposed to be (a sort of ‘medal engineering’).¹²² From the government administration, this led to Minister of Sport Mutko and President Putin both responding in public to critics, with Putin going so far as to calling these critics “Ill-natured people” and suggesting prescriptions of Viagra to cure their grievances.¹²³

Where the Russian government positioned the Universiade as a sort of “prologue”, the Winter Olympics in Sochi 2014 were supposed to be the main course. It is interesting to note that under the Putin regime, the set-up of Russian sports organizations shows a certain resemblance with that under Soviet times. For example, Gorokhov mentions that recruitment for all key public positions related to Sochi 2014 was based “exclusively on the ground of personal loyalty to president Putin and not on the ground of professionalism, experience, or past success in the field”.¹²⁴ Already when the USSR joined the Olympic movement, a concern of the IOC was that a Soviet Olympic Committee would not be an independent organization, but attached to the government. Now, for the Sochi Olympics, Aleksandr Zhukov, member of the supreme council of the pro-president party United Russia, who held several government positions, became the head of the Russian Olympic Committee (ROC), while Vladimir Kozhin, head of the Department of Presidential Affairs since 2000, held an

¹²⁰ Richard Arnold, "Mega Events as Agents of State Socialization: Human Rights Protests in Beijing, 2008, and Sochi, 2014," in *Mega Events in Post-Soviet Eurasia: Shifting Borderlines of Inclusion and Exclusion*, ed. Andrej Stanislavovič Makarychev and Alexandra Yatsyk (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016). 16

¹²¹ Gorokhov, "Forward Russia! Sports Mega-Events as a Venue for Building National Identity." 274

¹²² Ibid. 275

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid. 276

appointment as an ROC vice-president and simultaneously became the President of the Russian Winter Sports Association.¹²⁵ It is quite easy to see the resemblance.

Was Sochi a Success?

If one looks purely at sporting achievements, Sochi can absolutely be considered a success for Russia. Russia finished on top of the medal table, with four more gold medals than the USA.¹²⁶ . In the end, the Russian team won thirteen gold medals, with naturalized athletes winning five individual medals and three gold medals as part of Russian teams, and foreign coaches contributing to seven out of thirteen Russian gold medals and nineteen out of thirty-three medals in total.¹²⁷

As mentioned above however, the success of such a mega-event, in particular one with such clear political goals attached to it, cannot be measured solely in terms of medals. As Andrey Makarychev notes, the opening ceremony of the Sochi Olympics was meant to deliver a narrative of Russia as a great power and autonomous pole in the world, coupled with an imagery in which the Soviet Union has not disappeared, while bound together in an explicit Putin-centrism sovereignist discourse.¹²⁸ Unfortunately, only fourty world leaders attended the opening ceremony. In terms of achieving international prestige, one could argue that this signals a failure to gain respect from the international community, despite attempts by the regime to improve Russia's image, for example by declaring amnesty for certain prisoners on 23 December 2013, or releasing Greenpeace activists who had stormed a Russian oil rig in September 2013.¹²⁹ These moves did however ensure that criticism of Russia's human rights record in Western newspapers such as the Guardian and New York Times was eased prior to the Olympics taking place.¹³⁰ Other criticized areas were the construction of so called "White elephants", infrastructural investments costing a lot of money but not actually being of any

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ "Olympic Medal Count - 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics," <http://www.espn.com/olympics/winter/2014/medals>. (Accessed 07-01-2017)

¹²⁷ "Forward Russia! Sports Mega-Events as a Venue for Building National Identity."

¹²⁸ Makarychev, "From Sochi – 2014 to Fifa – 2018: The Crisis of Sovereignty and the Challenges of Globalization." 199

¹²⁹ Arnold, "Mega Events as Agents of State Socialization: Human Rights Protests in Beijing, 2008, and Sochi, 2014." 20

¹³⁰ Ibid. 33

use post-Olympics, environmental degradation in the area, and the marginalization of the local Circassian population.¹³¹

Political scientist Richard Arnold argues that the failure of the Sochi Olympics to result in “soft power gains” has direct ramifications for the events that followed in Ukraine and Crimea directly after Olympics: “Had the human rights situation in Russia been less heavily criticized before the Games (so affecting a bigger ‘boost’ to the nation’s soft power), Putin may have faced more resistance to turning Russia into an international pariah”.¹³² The earlier description of Hutcheson and Petersson regarding the three pillars of Putin’s legitimacy, points in the same direction: If Russia’s status of great power had been confirmed more strongly by the Olympic Games, with less criticism, this could have also had the potential to bolster Putin’s popularity without the need for a new crisis or external enemy. Petersson and Vamling also argue that the developments in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine have led to the a complete disappearance of the earlier criticized issues from the international agenda or interest.¹³³

Key Points

It is clear that the transitional period between the Soviet Union and Russia under the Putin administration does not show a lot of similarities to the political discourse surrounding sport, but by adding contrast, it actually highlights the clear resemblance of sport propaganda in the periods surrounding it. Although nationalism and national pride have taken the place of communism as a central ideology, the equally crucial concept of ‘great power status’, now for Russia instead of the Soviet Union and Communism, has been copied almost identically into the narrative presented by the Putin regime, which both implicitly and explicitly looks at the Soviet Union narratives for a model to base its own discourse on. The final chapter, looking at the doping scandal in Russian sports, will be an excellent event through which an analysis of this discourse can be further substantiated.

¹³¹ Bo Petersson and Karina Vamling, "Vanished in the Haze: White Elephants, Environmental Degradation and Circassian Marginalization in Post-Olympics Sochi," *ibid.* 60

¹³² Richard Arnold, "Mega Events as Agents of State Socialization: Human Rights Protests in Beijing, 2008, and Sochi, 2014," *ibid.*

¹³³ Bo Petersson and Karina Vamling, "Vanished in the Haze: White Elephants, Environmental Degradation and Circassian Marginalization in Post-Olympics Sochi," *ibid.* 72

Chapter 4: Russia on the Defensive

This final chapter will discuss the most recent developments in sports in Russia, mentioning the continuation of Russian sports policy under the Putin regime. In the last two years, several scandals have arisen in the Russian sports environment: an external one with accusations of bribery towards FIFA and its selection procedures that led to the FIFA 2018 World Cup being planned in Russia, and an internal scandal in the form of accusations of wide-spread, potentially state-sponsored doping usage by Russian athletes. The responses by government officials in attempts to control the narrative surrounding these scandals are of particular importance for establishing the Russian sports narrative and its importance to the Putin regime.

Outside influence on the Russian sports environment

Since the Sochi Olympics, political developments have followed each other in rapid succession. As a consequence of its Ukraine policy, the Putin regime has been hit by international economic and financial sanctions, as well as diplomatic isolation. This of course also has significant consequences for the sports environment in Russia. As Makarychev mentions, never before has a football World Championship been held in country “under international sanctions and in a state of de facto military conflict with its neighbor”.¹³⁴ The annexation of Crimea left the Russian Football Union (RFU) with a very political decision to make; whether to include the Crimean clubs into the Russian championship or not. The discussions that followed give a great insight into the decision-making processes of Russian sports. The RFU members adjourned the voting to clarify the Kremlin’s position first: “If we are tasked with getting adjusted [to the Kremlin-approved policy] we’ll certainly do so. Anyway we’ll choose the motherland over all the rest. If there is a direct instruction [to vote for including Crimean clubs] – then it’s ok”.¹³⁵ The RFU was however also constrained by international sports institutions, such as the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA), since they threatened with sanctions if the RFU incorporated the Crimean teams.¹³⁶ The 2018 World Cup thus indirectly undermines Putin’s sovereign power, by ensuring that Russian football organizations have to adhere to the standards and decisions made by international sports institutions. As Makarychev successfully points out, this leads to the paradox that

¹³⁴ Makarychev, "From Sochi – 2014 to Fifa – 2018: The Crisis of Sovereignty and the Challenges of Globalization." 196

¹³⁵ Ibid. 202

¹³⁶ Ibid.

sports, used to legitimize Putin's regime and present a top-down narrative of Russia as a self-sufficient 'great power' and a particular brand of nationalism, now undermines this same regime by forcing it to accept certain limitations on its influence.¹³⁷

Sanctions on individuals and companies that are crucial for the FIFA World Cup have made preparations increasingly difficult, leading to cuts in the budget for the event. Sports minister Mutko dubbed the World-Cup an element of the anti-crisis plan to combat the economic crisis in Russia, but the facts that a 10 per cent budget cut was also announced and that Russia has asked FIFA for permission to reduce the occupancy of two stadiums, clearly show the difficulties Russia currently has to maintain its current course regarding sports.¹³⁸ These difficulties have also led to more top-down mobilization, such as administrative pressure over corporate business or enforced street cleaning by state employees.¹³⁹ This reinforces the problem of Russia attempting to increase its standing in the world through sports while preparing for sports events with practices that only widen the gap between Russia and the West.

These problems are further exacerbated by the crisis of legitimacy that the FIFA currently faces. FIFA, one of the few global institutions to fully legitimize the Putin rule, became the subject of widespread corruption charges in 2015. Several top officials were arrested on charge for corruption and bribes totaling more than \$100 million.¹⁴⁰ A part of the criminal proceedings that followed were related to the awarding of the 2018 and 2022 World Cups, meaning that Russian officials were forced to react. Some of the accusations made in the international media directly linked corrupt FIFA officials with the Russian government and its business associates, such as Gazprom, the Russian energy company sponsoring FIFA.¹⁴¹ Besides that, Sepp Blatter, the then FIFA president, had even gone so far as to say that opponents of the Russian World Cup should better "stay home", thereby expressing strong support, disregarding appeals for boycotts in the light of Russia's Ukraine policy.¹⁴² It should thus not come as a surprise that Russian officials defended the FIFA top officials strongly when the scandal broke out. Putin accused the US of "Meddling outside its jurisdiction" by

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

¹³⁸ *Ibid.* 203

¹³⁹ *Ibid.* 204

¹⁴⁰ ESPN Staff, "Fifa Timeline: Blatter and Platini Banned, More Arrested," 21-12-2015, <http://www.espnfc.com/blog/fifa/243/post/2630853/fifa-timeline-blatter-and-platini-banned-more-arrested>. (Accessed 07-01-2017)

¹⁴¹ Makarychev, "From Sochi – 2014 to Fifa – 2018: The Crisis of Sovereignty and the Challenges of Globalization." 205

¹⁴² *Ibid.* 206

arresting FIFA officials, calling it an attempt to stop Blatter's re-election.¹⁴³ This was complemented by even stronger reactions by Russian officials, explaining the arrests of FIFA functionaries as a US-led operation to attempt to deprive Russia of the World Cup, even claiming Blatter was under fire because "he has good connections with Russia".¹⁴⁴ Putin even stated later that Blatter should be in the running for a Noble prize, since people like him "foster mechanisms of cooperation between countries".¹⁴⁵ As Makarychev points out, this straightforward defense of Blatter and his associates reveal a major problem with the image of an independent strong sovereign Russia: this image requires legitimation by international sports organizations if sports are being used for creating and fostering this image. If the legitimacy of these organizations becomes questioned, then this directly affects Russia.¹⁴⁶ This problem also points out a difference in the effectiveness of the political discourse surrounding sports now and that of the Soviet Union. During the Cold War, the effectiveness of the political discourse was mostly important for internal policy goals, and less so for international legitimacy. Now, this discourse has become vital for both internal and external imagery. Through this increased importance, the fragility of this line of practical reasoning can also be shown. With FIFA's legitimacy put into question, this also puts the legitimacy of the Putin administration under threat. The legitimacy of international sports organization was never really questioned in the decades following World War II, so this potential flaw was perhaps never considered in the decision-making process surrounding the political discourse.

The Problems pile up: The Russian Doping Scandal

The Putin administration's use of sports for its political purposes became even more problematic in the period between Sochi 2014 and the 2016 Rio Olympics. A documentary by German public broadcaster ARD called *Secret doping – How Russia makes its winners*, aired 3 December, 2014 results in WADA commissioning an investigation into the allegations against Russia.¹⁴⁷ While the investigations also accused other organizations and figures, such as the then president of the International Association of Athletics Federation (IAAF), Lamine Diack, the main findings of the first WADA independent commission included "criminal

¹⁴³ The Guardian, "Russia's Vladimir Putin Accuses United States of 'Meddling' over Fifa Arrests," 28-5-2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2015/may/28/vladimir-putin-fifa-united-states-meddling> (Accessed 07-01-2017)

¹⁴⁴ Makarychev, "From Sochi – 2014 to Fifa – 2018: The Crisis of Sovereignty and the Challenges of Globalization." 206

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.* 207

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ Deutsche Welle, "Timeline: Doping in Russia," 09-12-2016, <http://www.dw.com/en/timeline-doping-in-russia/a-19409797> (Accessed 07-01-2017)

conduct on the part of certain individuals and organizations”, “systemic failures within the IAAF and Russia that prevent or diminish the possibility of an effective anti-doping program”, and the recommendation that WADA withdraw its accreditation of the Moscow laboratory as soon as possible, since it was deemed unable to act independently.¹⁴⁸ This report led to the suspension of both the Russian Anti-Doping Agency (RUSADA) and the Russian Athletics Federation (ARAF), but is only the tip of the iceberg. A follow-up report published in January 2016 also links Russian state-controlled bank VTB with corruption regarding its sponsorship of the IAAF and buying TV-broadcasting rights for the 2013 IAAF Moscow World Championships.¹⁴⁹ The response of Andrey Kostin, head of the bank, was very much in line with the Kremlin line that was followed during the outbreak of the doping scandal: Kostin commented on the accusations stating “This is certainly an outrageous lie”, and “We do see coming constantly from the West, I would say, such sophisticated approaches”.¹⁵⁰

In the beginning of 2016 several Russian athletes were banned from participating in their sports for the use of meldonium, a substance newly added to the banned substances list of WADA. Minister of sport Mutko assured the press that these violations were likely to have been done “unwillingly”, and as usual in Russian official statements, instead pointed at the US, were according to him “nobody does doping tests at those (U.S.) leagues and boxing associations”.¹⁵¹ Over the course of 2016, more and more accusations of doping usage are made regarding Russia. First, another German documentary claims even more breaching of IAAF and WADA rules has taken place.¹⁵² Second, and more severe, the former director of the Russian antidoping laboratory Grigory Rodchenkov, on 12 May 2016, admitted in a long interview with the New York Times that he helped facilitate an elaborate state-run doping program.¹⁵³ The program, according to Rodchenkov, included Russian anti-doping experts and members of the intelligence service who “replaced urine samples tainted by performance-

¹⁴⁸ Richard Pound, Richard H. McLaren, and Gunter Younger, "Independent Commission Investigation Report 1," WADA, https://wada-main-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/resources/files/wada_independent_commission_report_1_en.pdf, 9 (Accessed 07-01-2017)

¹⁴⁹ TASS, "Iaaf Says to Stay Clear of Russian Vtb Bank's Intended Lawsuits against Wada," 22-1-2016 <http://tass.com/world/851692>, (Accessed 07-01-2017)

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ "Situation with Doping in Russia Very Much Politicized — Sports Minister," TASS Russia News Agency, 26-03-2016, <http://tass.com/sport/865350>. (Accessed 07-01-2017)

¹⁵² Welle, "Timeline: Doping in Russia",

¹⁵³ Rebecca R. Ruiz and Michael Schwartz, "Russian Insider Says State-Run Doping Fueled Olympic Gold," 12-05-2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/13/sports/russia-doping-sochi-olympics-2014.html>. (Accessed 07-01-2017)

enhancing drugs with clean urine collected months earlier”.¹⁵⁴ This interview leads to further investigation in the US, by the IOC, and WADA. WADA continues with more serious allegations, while stating that its investigators were impeded by athletes and “intimidated by Russia’s FSB secret service”.¹⁵⁵

The strongest accusations to be presented in 2016 were published in July in the first independent person report by sports lawyer Richard McLaren, which presented that it “uncovered a system within Russia for doping athletes directed by senior coaching officials of Russian athletics”.¹⁵⁶ It added to the previous reports that “the WADA accredited laboratory was controlled by the state and acted as the failsafe mechanism to cover up doping”.¹⁵⁷ Russian officials immediately went on the counteroffensive: on July 20, four days after the presentation of the McLaren Report, the state-owned TASS news agency published an article arguing that specialists, such as anti-doping expert Professor Nikolai Durmanov, had serious doubts regarding certain “technical details” of the report, also stating that “the doping problem in Russian sports is very acute, although not any severer than in other countries.”¹⁵⁸ It denied any state program and also accused the report of “zombifying” the distinguished public by “blaring ominous abbreviations, such as the FSB and KGB. All this very much looks like a disinformation campaign”.¹⁵⁹

Putin’s Response

The main response to the report, however, came from President Putin himself. In a statement, he argued that recent events “involuntary recall the situation in the early 1980s”.¹⁶⁰ It is interesting to note he concedes that the Soviet Union used “the pretext of an allegedly insufficient level of security for the Soviet team”, thus in a sense admitting that the SU had other reasons than those presented in the official discourse at the time. He does however continue the narrative that athletes were the victims of the reciprocal boycotts, becoming “hostages of political confrontation”.¹⁶¹ The statement by Putin shows that the Kremlin did

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Welle, "Timeline: Doping in Russia", 3-01-2017.

¹⁵⁶ Richard H. McLaren, "The Independent Person Report," https://wada-main-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/resources/files/20160718_ip_report_newfinal.pdf. 8

¹⁵⁷ Ibid. 9

¹⁵⁸ TASS, "Expert Suspicious of McLaren’s Report on Doping in Russian Sport," 20-07-2016, <http://tass.com/sport/889531>. (Accessed 07-01-2017)

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Vladimir Putin, "Statement in Response to the Report by the World Anti-Doping Agency," 18-07-2016, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/52537>. (Accessed 07-01-2017)

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

not alter their discourse surrounding sports following the doping accusations. Again, the accusation is made that it is others who are “letting politics interfere with sports”, making sports “an instrument for geopolitical pressure”. Putin discredits the report as being based on “information given by one single person, an individual with a notorious reputation”, while claiming that USADA is trying to “again dictate its will to the entire world sports community” by asking for a ban by the entire Russian team from the 2016 Rio Olympics.¹⁶² The statement ends with the promise that Russia “shares in full the Olympic movement’s values of mutual respect, solidarity, fairness, and the spirit of friendship and cooperation”.¹⁶³ If one analyzes the entire text and the image it tries to create, the resemblance to the discourse surrounding sports in the Soviet Union is almost uncanny. The commitment of Russia to Olympic values, the accusations regarding the US politicizing sports, and even the remarks that innocent clean athletes are the real victims, could all be placed in the context of the Olympics during the 1980s, which he even recalls himself (!), and wouldn’t even be noticed as stemming from a different time. Representatives from the Russian foreign ministry, TASS and the minister of sport all weighed in with similar statements, calling the report “a blow not only on us but also on global sports”, and arguing that the “doping scandal’ is part of Washington’s ongoing effort to isolate Russia and to build opposition to Putin inside Russia”.¹⁶⁴

In the end, the IOC decided to not ban the Russian team from the 2016 Rio Olympics, but did establish a set of special conditions for all Russian athletes wishing to compete in the Games. These included letting international federations have the final say for each sport (the IAAF banned all Russian athletes), and requiring that all Russian athletes had undergone adequate international doping tests in the period prior to the Olympics, and not being implicated in any possible way in the McLaren report.¹⁶⁵ The International Paralympic Committee (IPC) did however issue a blanket ban on Russian athletes from competing at the Rio Paralympic Games.¹⁶⁶ While the decision regarding the Olympics was met with a grateful response by then minister of sport Mutko, the ban of Russian athletes from the Paralympics was met with an extremely harsh response by Putin, who said the IPC “is humiliating itself”, saying the decision “is beyond all boundaries of legal norms, moral principles and humanity”, while

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ TASS, "Foreign Ministry Says Campaign against Russian Athletes Strikes Blow on Olympic Movement".

¹⁶⁵ International Olympic Committee, "Decision of the IOC Executive Board Concerning the Participation of Russian Athletes in the Olympic Games Rio 2016," 24-07-2016, <https://www.olympic.org/news/decision-of-the-ioc-executive-board-concerning-the-participation-of-russian-athletes-in-the-olympic-games-rio-2016>. (Accessed 07-01-2017)

¹⁶⁶ Welle, "Timeline: Doping in Russia", 3-01-2017.

again arguing that the ban was solely based on political reasons.¹⁶⁷¹⁶⁸ The Russians that were allowed to compete in the Olympics in the end reached 4th place in the overall standing, with fifty-six medals, which was the worst result for a Russian team in twenty years.

Protecting Russian Prestige

From the outset, the response has been to discredit the reports on doping abuse. Most importantly, Russian officials have upheld that the doping issues in Russia were in no way state-facilitated: Instead, minister of sport Mutko stated “I very much regret that many coaches and athletes themselves are convinced that you can’t win without doping”.¹⁶⁹ This tactic should not come as a surprise. By shifting the blame away from the state as a whole, to certain individuals, it becomes possible to dismiss these individuals with national prestige remaining unblemished (at least in the official narrative). In fact, Russia went on the offensive, with Mutko announcing to the world that Russia’s Ministry of Sports will file lawsuits to civil courts against any author claiming Russia has state support for doping.¹⁷⁰ Whether the conclusions of the McLaren report are accurate or not, the Putin regime has done everything within its power to attempt to establish a different narrative. This also included setting up a Russian investigative committee to scrutinize the McLaren report, as well as an independent Anti-Doping Commission through the ROC. This Commission, first proposed directly by President Putin, is led by Vitaly Smirnov, an honorary member of the IOC as well as president emeritus of the ROC.¹⁷¹ Smirnov stated when starting his mission that “we should find out why some international sport organizations have been unjust to Russia”, adding that “we are going to look into what caused such a mass phenomenon that a large group of athletes violated the doping rules”.¹⁷²

In general, the discourse surrounding sports has in no way changed since the doping scandal. The accusations have been brushed aside as a politically motivated move by the west (more specifically the US), whereas Russia continues to be the great sporting nation it has always

¹⁶⁷ TASS, "Sports Ministry Thankful to Ioc for Not Banning Russia from Olympics," 24-07-2016, <http://tass.com/sport/890289>. (Accessed 07-01-2017)

¹⁶⁸ "Putin: Ipc Humiliates Itself by Barring Russian Paralympians from Rio Games," 25-08-2016, <http://tass.com/sport/895887>. (Accessed 07-01-2017)

¹⁶⁹ "Russian Sports Minister Praises National Team’s Performance at Olympics," 22-08-2016, <http://tass.com/sport/895277>. (Accessed 07-01-2017)

¹⁷⁰ "Russia to File Civil Lawsuits against Those Claiming It Supported Doping — Minister," 27-08-2016, <http://tass.com/sport/896256>. (Accessed 07-01-2017)

¹⁷¹ "Smirnov Hopeful Roc Anti-Doping Commission's Mission to Be Accomplished by 2018 Olympics," 05-08-2016, <http://tass.com/sport/892580>. (Accessed 07-01-2017)

¹⁷² Ibid.

been. The public in Russia seems to buy into this messaging as well: Two-thirds of Russians (63 per cent) see the Paralympics ban and accusations towards Russia as politically motivated, according to an opinion poll by the Russian Public Opinion Research Center.¹⁷³ 53 Per cent of those surveyed also stated they felt pride when watching Russian athletes perform, showing once again the clear correlation between national prestige and sports that not just the Putin regime, but many countries across the world are trying to capitalize on.¹⁷⁴ Putin, speaking at an international sports forum tellingly called ‘Russia – Country of Sports’, continued along the same lines earlier established in his regime, arguing that “We must do everything possible together to ensure the cleanliness of sport so that it can become absolutely open and be outside politics so that its ideas and values unite countries and peoples”.¹⁷⁵ Then, almost as a sidenote, he added, that “when we speak about the cleanliness of sport, we mean not only politics”, making doping use sounds as a secondary issue, with the politicization of sports as a much larger threat.¹⁷⁶ In the official discourse, the doping scandal has not affected the greatness of Russia as a sport nation, in fact, it has almost enhanced it. President of the ROC Alexander Zhukov interpreted the results of the 2016 Olympics so that despite the difficulties of the “constant doping scandals”, “our athletes performed brilliantly in Rio and proved that our successes do not depend on any ‘magical cocktails,’ made up by certain schemers”.¹⁷⁷

A Russian Counteroffensive?

Sport has in no way lost its prominent position in the Putin administration. On October 19 2016, despite the suspicions raised against Minister of Sport Mutko in the McLaren report, he was appointed as a vice-premier in the Russian cabinet, with Deputy Sports Minister Pavel Kolobkov taking charge of the ministry.¹⁷⁸ As prime-minister Medvedev stated, this was done in order for sport, “which is one of the most important spheres of social activities” to get a larger representation in the cabinet.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷³ "Two-Thirds of Russians Surveyed Slam Ban on Paralympics as Political Tool," 18-08-2016, <http://tass.com/society/894895>. (Accessed 07-01-2017)

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ "Putin Says World Anti-Doping System Must Be Open," 11-10-2016, <http://tass.com/sport/905724>. (Accessed 07-01-2017)

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ "Russians Proved in Rio They Need No Doping to Win - Russian Olympic Chief," 28-12-2016, <http://tass.com/sport/922892>. (Accessed 07-01-2017)

¹⁷⁸ "Putin Agrees to Appoint Sports Minister Russia's Vice Premier," 19-10-2016, <http://tass.com/politics/907416>. (Accessed 07-01-2017)

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

When the second McLaren report was published on December 9 2016, the previously established Independent Public Anti-Doping Commission immediately countered with Vitaly Smirnov stating that “despite the presented accusations I would like to point out that there has never been an organized system in Russia for the falsification (of doping samples)”.¹⁸⁰ Another component of Russia’s response has been to point out that it is not only Russian athletes who are caught using performance-enhancing substances. Putin stated that “As we have come to know – and the World Anti-Doping Agency is not denying that – dozens or hundreds of athletes are taking these (banned) substances. Does anybody know that? No one does. Everything is done secretly”.¹⁸¹ Interestingly enough, the new Minister of Sports Kolobkov, condemned the definition McLaren gave in his second report of an “institutional conspiracy”, stating “There has not been and could not have been any conspiracy”.¹⁸² The image presented here is that of widespread secretive doping abuse, while on the other side Russia is dealing with violations, clearing itself of doping, dismissing everyone involved in the doping scandals. Kolobkov even says “It could be great if other states investigate anti-doping violations as steadfastly as we do”.¹⁸³

ROC president Zhukov declared in November that Russia had cleaned up its doping program and should be allowed to return to all international competitions, and during the last few months, Russian officials have focused their public statements on pointing to other potential doping abuses.¹⁸⁴ A hacking collective operating under the name of ‘Tsar Team’, also known as Fancy Bear, illegally gained access to WADA’s database, releasing athlete medical data. WADA stated that according to law enforcement authorities, “these attacks are originating out of Russia”.¹⁸⁵ While the Kremlin denied any involvement in the hacking, Vladimir Putin was quick to use the leaked data to point out “double standards” in anti-doping policy: “Healthy athletes take medications outlawed for others, while people, who obviously suffer from grave illnesses and disabilities, are barred from participation in Paralympic Games on sheer

¹⁸⁰ "Russian Sports Ministry Urges Investigation into Facts Stated in McLaren Report," 09-12-2016, <http://tass.com/sport/918172>. (Accessed 07-01-2017)

¹⁸¹ "Putin Says World Anti-Doping System Must Be Open", 06-01-2017.

¹⁸² "Russian Sports Minister: McLaren’s Words on "Institutional Conspiracy" Erroneous," 09-12-2016, <http://tass.com/sport/918196>. (Accessed 07-01-2017)

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Welle, "Timeline: Doping in Russia".

¹⁸⁵ WADA, "Wada Confirms Attack by Russian Cyber Espionage Group," 13-09-2016, <https://www.wada-ama.org/en/media/news/2016-09/wada-confirms-attack-by-russian-cyber-espionage-group>. (Accessed 07-01-2017)

suspicion”, referring back to the IPC’s ban for Russian Paralympians.¹⁸⁶ While it is not within the scope of this paper to determine whether the Russian government was involved in the hacking of WADA’s database or not, it is certainly interesting to note that the lists published by Fancy Bear, detailing a large amount of athletes who gained so called Therapeutic Use Exemptions for otherwise banned substances, contained several US star athletes and only one Russian athlete.¹⁸⁷ Regardless of how the data became public, it is clear it provides Russian officials with more ammunition for their counteraccusations regarding doping use in the sports world.

The latest developments in the Russian discourse surrounding the doping scandal seemed to indicate a change in tone by Russian officials. According to an interview in the New York Times, current head of RUSADA, Anna Antseliovich, admitted that in fact “it was an institutional conspiracy”, and that Russian officials said they longer disputed a damning set of facts that detailed a doping program “with few, if any, historical precedents”.¹⁸⁸ This was however immediately countered by Russian officials: RUSADA stated that “the words of acting General Director Antselovich were distorted and taken out of the context”.¹⁸⁹ In fact, the remark of Antselovich was meant to prove the opposite point, saying that McLaren had given up using the phrase “state-sponsored doping system” and used the words institutional conspiracy instead, “thus excluding the involvement of the country’s top leadership”.¹⁹⁰ This was followed by a warning of Deputy Prime Minister Vitaly Mutko that “Russian officials must carefully comb through their statements regarding doping abuse issues when communicating with foreign media outlets and should also request personal authorization prior to such interview’s final issuance”.¹⁹¹ In the end, this small hick-up thus only confirmed the current tightly controlled official narrative surrounding Russian sports, and a change of direction does not seem likely.

Key points

¹⁸⁶ TASS, "Putin: Wada Data Exposed by Hackers Raise Many Questions," 16-09-2016, <http://tass.com/sport/900207>. (Accessed 07-01-2017)

¹⁸⁷ "Serbian Basketball Player, Swiss Road Bicycle Racer on New List Revealed by Fancy Bears," 23-09-2016, <http://tass.com/sport/901870>. (Accessed 07-01-2017)

¹⁸⁸
¹⁸⁹ TASS, "Rusada Blasts New York Times for 'Distorting' Acting Chief's Doping Remarks," 28-12-2016, <http://tass.com/sport/922973>. (Accessed 07-01-2017)

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ "Deputy Pm Urges Russian Sports Officials to Be Careful When Speaking to Foreign Media," 28-12-2016, <http://tass.com/sport/923038>. (Accessed 07-01-2017)

Although the discourse surrounding the Russian doping scandal is very much still underway, it is clear that, by the cut-off point of this paper (January 2017), certain patterns are clearly discernable. The discourse based on nationalism and Russian pride, described in the previous chapter, are prominent in the responses of state officials to the accusations made in the independent reports sanctioned by WADA. The conclusions of these reports are seen as an attack on Russia as a great sporting nation. Any claims of institutionalized doping use are flat-out rejected. Sport and nationalism are heavily intertwined, and because of this and the relation of these components to the legitimacy of the Putin regime, there is too much at stake for the Putin administration to accept the conclusions of the McLaren report at face value. This has led to a contestation of the facts on which debate and dialogue could be based. One could argue that this is a very common phenomenon in the current political climate: ‘alternative facts’ and ‘fake news’ are everywhere, and regardless of the validity of the conclusions of the McLaren report, Russia is ensuring that the sports world is now also engulfed in this global trend.

Conclusion

Sports has risen to prominence more and more in the last decades, and this trend does not seem likely to change. This is likely to be accompanied by even more political interest and influence on sports, especially with regards to mega-events such as the Olympics or the FIFA World Cup. Russia has been in the spotlight of Western news sources for various reasons in the last few years, and sports played a major role in this development. The corruption scandal surrounding FIFA had direct consequences for the legitimacy of having a World Cup in Russia, and the Sochi Olympics of 2014 have been tainted by strong accusations of systemic doping abuse with aid from within the government by Russian athletes. Regardless of whether these accusations are completely accurate, or that there's truth to the Russian response denying government involvement, these events have had direct consequences for the political usage of sport under the Putin regime.

The main question of this thesis was aimed at explaining the response of the Putin regime to the McLaren report and subsequent developments. In order to do so, analyzing the history of sports in Russia is crucial. If one places the statements and policies of Russian government officials about sport in a historical perspective, a number of remarkable similarities can be pointed out between the last decade and the discourse put forward by USSR officials during the period of 1950-1985. After the period following the collapse of the Soviet Union, in which sports understandably lost some its importance in turbulent times, sports has been placed high on the political agenda again. Firstly, both USSR officials and the current Russian regime insist that sport should not be "politicized". According to this narrative, sport should not be used for any political messaging, and Russia is presented as a loyal and exemplary member of the Olympic movement. Secondly, although this narrative argues that sport is outside of politics, it is clear that the Putin regime is attempting to gain prestige, a form of soft power, by investing heavily in sports in general, and elite sports in particular. Similar to the USSR, targets have been set for mass participation in sports (with numbers that might be more accurate than the inflated numbers of the Soviet period), and elite athletes are supported by the state. With the great power status of Russia being central to the legitimacy and popularity of the Putin regime, it makes sense that international prestige through sports becomes an important policy area. Putin has on many occasions personally intervened in sports policy. The fact that Minister of Sport Mutko was recently promoted to Vice-premier despite the current crisis that Russian sports find itself in, also attest to this importance. Thirdly, Russia

has continuously been presented as a great sporting nation. In interviews, international sport forums, and any type of public event, Russian officials have emphasized that Russia has always been a greatly successful nation in the Olympics, making the USSR legacy its own. Thus, although communism as a central component of the sports discourse has been replaced with nationalism as an ideology, the idea of Russia as a great sporting nation, with a great power status, has been copied almost directly into the discourse used by the Putin regime.

This narrative could have been considered problematic with the recent doping scandal and the accusations of corruption surrounding the election of the FIFA 2018 World Cup to Russia, but these scandals have in fact led to an even more rigidly structured political discourse surrounding sport in Russia. The scandals have helped to make the narrative even more similar to that of the Cold War period, with Russian officials describing both the accusations of the independent WADA report as well as the corruption accusations aimed at FIFA officials as an American-led “anti-Russia campaign”. The scandals have helped to fit sports into a narrative that can be found in other aspects of the current Kremlin discourse, with the Russian government protecting its citizens, in this case its athletes, from unjust behavior by outside parties. These outside parties, usually describes as the West in general, but sometimes pointing to the US specifically, are using sports for their own gains, while Russia continues to be the exemplary member of the Olympic movement. Despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary, the Russian narrative remains that of certain individual doping mistakes, and certainly no worse than any other country’s athletes. The recent data released by hackers (Russian government steered or not), helps to portray Russia as a victim, where athletes are not presented with the same opportunities of being granted exemptions for certain substances, even if those substances are not similar to those that Russian athletes tested positive for. Instead of accepting the legitimacy and arbitrary power of independent international organizations, Russia established its own investigative commissions, possibly to create further doubt surrounding the accusations.

The explanation for this rigid approach, with a narrative that seems set in stone, not be strayed away from, seems to lie in the close correlation between nationalism, sport, and the legitimacy of Putin’s administration. With the Ukraine crisis and the following economic sanctions causing difficulties regarding the other two pillars of legitimacy for Putin, it becomes understandable to choose this narrative as the outcome of of rational, practical reasoning underlying the decision-making process. Accepting any other narrative, or choosing to change course in their own narrative, could have ramifications for Putin’s powerbase at home. Thus,

the chosen discourse most likely stems from argumentation that puts consolidation of power above all else. As noted in the title of this thesis, one could argue that while the discourse of the Putin regime is strongly influenced by that of the Soviet era, a major difference is that it is now being used as a defense against the McLaren report, which through its accusations also threatens the legitimacy of the Putin regime as a whole, instead of as an 'attack', to show the superiority of the Soviet Union to the world.

The developments of the last two years could have serious consequences for the coming years. As Putin pointed out himself, the 1980s led to a political situation that made athletes and Olympic tournaments 'victims' of the Cold War. By not accepting the judgement and decisions of international organizations that at least attempt to be completely neutral and independent of politics, there is a significant chance that sporting events will become extremely politicized again, leading to boycotts, international scandals and athletes who become the 'play puppets' of their respective political regimes. Despite the claim that Russia is trying to "keep politics out of sport", it is clear that Russia is escalating the situation by not accepting the judgement or narrative of WADA, the IOC, Interpol (in the case of the FIFA scandal) and others but instead sticks to its own narrative, which seems to have direct links to Soviet times.

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