

APRIL 2022 ANALYSIS –
RUSSIAN PRESS AGENCIES
AND THE ARCTIC

OBSERVATOIRE DE LA POLITIQUE ET LA SÉCURITÉ DE L'ARCTIQUE (OPSA) and
OBSERVATOIRE DES ADMINISTRATIONS PUBLIQUES AUTOCHTONES (OAPA)



OBSERVATOIRE DE LA POLITIQUE
ET LA SÉCURITÉ DE L'ARCTIQUE



OAPA
Observatoire des administrations
publiques autochtones

RUSSIAN PRESS AGENCIES AND THE ARCTIC – APRIL 2022

This report is under the license *Creative Commons* CC-BY-NC. This means that you must give appropriate credit, provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made. You may do so in any reasonable manner, but not in any way that suggests the licensor endorses you or your use. You may not use the material for commercial purposes.

OPSA and OAPA would like to acknowledge the financial support of the Ministère des Relations internationales et de la Francophonie of the Government of Quebec and the Department of National Defence through its MINDS program.



APRIL 2022 ANALYSIS – RUSSIAN PRESS AGENCIES AND THE ARCTIC

Team members:

Mathieu Landriault (Adjunct professor, École nationale d'administration publique)

Jean-François Savard (Associate professor, ÉNAP)

Isabelle Caron (Assistant professor, Dalhousie University)

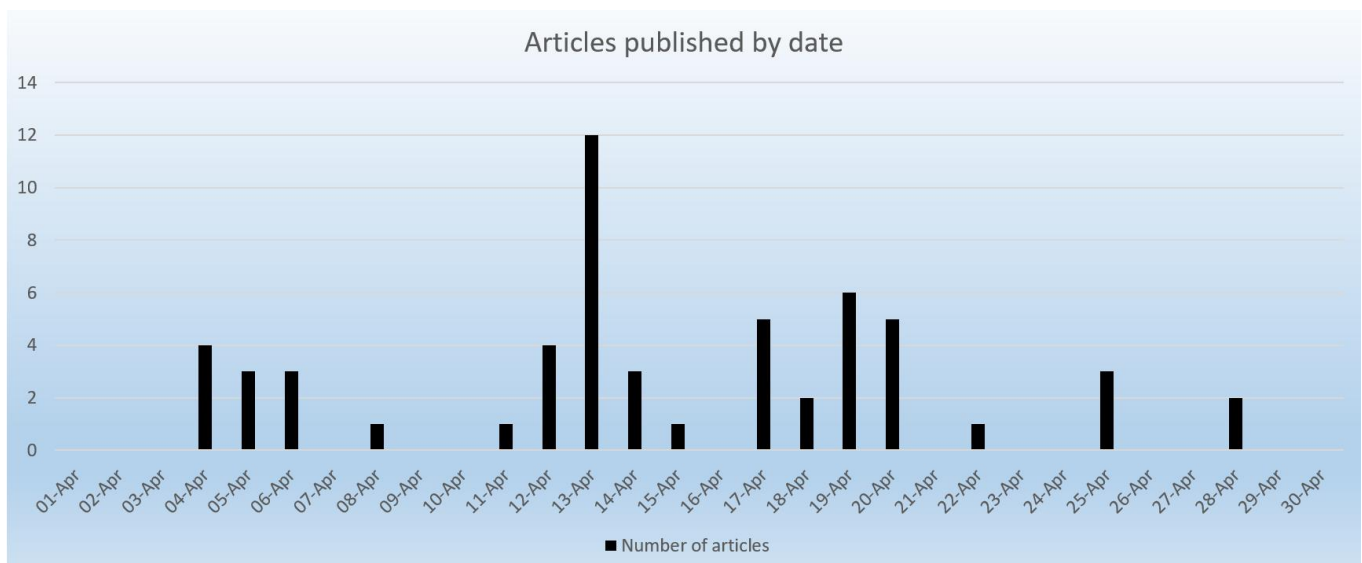
Louis Poulin-Langlois (Master's student, ÉNAP)

Alexandre Millette (Doctoral candidate, ÉNAP)

This analysis studied how Russian press agencies Sputnik and TASS covered Arctic issues during the month of April 2022. The intensity and nature of coverage will be put in perspective to capture trends since January 2020.

NUMBER OF ARCTIC MENTIONS: most of the attention on the Arctic was concentrated in April 12 to 13 and April 17 to 20. On April 12, TASS set the table for the day after by presenting Western sanctions on Russia as irrational and politicized, while stressing that the sanctions would not stop Russia from developing alternative energy projects. The attention on the 13th was on Putin's remarks on the Arctic, emphasizing that Arctic development projects in Russia must go ahead despite sanctions. Putin reasserted often repeated tropes about the Arctic being a territory of dialogue and cooperation and Russia's willingness to cooperate with all, claiming that sanctions will only backfire on Western countries. On the same day, a flurry of positive news was published, reporting significant corporate investments, economic development and potential for shipping and port infrastructure in the Russian Arctic.

On April 17, it was the turn of Russia's representative on Arctic Affairs, Nikolay Korchunov, to make comments criticizing the suspension of Arctic Council activities and warning that the suspension will only add security risks. The tone was also on framing other Western initiatives as security threats, including Norway's military exercise and the possible accession of Finland and Sweden to NATO. Korchunov also presented Russia as a necessary partner to ensure sustainable development in the Arctic, something that the West could not accomplish on its own. The minister of Defence Sergey Shoigu then presented plans on April 19 to beef Russian military capabilities in the North.



THEMES: Economic has been the most recurring theme in April, followed by political and military stories. Similar to results shown in the previous months, news related to private investments, infrastructures and projects linked to the Northern Sea route are the most common themes covered. Stories linked to politics are mainly oriented toward Russian will for international cooperation in the Arctic Region and subjects linked with the current political situation with Ukraine.

APRIL 2022 1- ECONOMIC (33) 2- POLITICAL (17) 3- MILITARY (16)		
MARCH 2022 1- ECONOMIC (21) 2- ENVIRONMENTAL (12) 3- POLITICAL (11)	FEBRUARY 2022 1- ECONOMIC (24) 2- MILITARY (20) 3- POLITICAL (17)	JANUARY 2022 1- MILITARY (34) 2- ECONOMIC (23) 3- SOCIAL (7)
DECEMBER 2021 1- MILITARY (42) 2- ECONOMIC (39) 3- POLITICAL (13)	NOVEMBER 2021 1- ECONOMIC (26) 2- POLITICAL (18) 3- MILITARY (17)	OCTOBER 2021 1- MILITARY/POLITICAL (28) 2- ECONOMIC (26) 3- ENVIRONMENTAL (21)
SEPTEMBER 2021 1- MILITARY (31) 2- ENVIRONMENTAL (25) 3- ECONOMIC (24)	AUGUST 2021 1- MILITARY (37) 2- ENVIRONMENTAL (29) 3- ECONOMIC (16)	JULY 2021 1- ENVIRONMENTAL (30) 2- MILITARY (19) 3- POL/SCIENT (11)
JUNE 2021 1- POLITICAL (58) 2- MILITARY (56) 3- ECONOMIC (39)	MAY 2021 1- POLITICAL (54) 2- MILITARY (41) 3- ECONOMIC (27)	APRIL 2021 1- MILITARY (52) 2- ECONOMIC (45) 3- POLITICAL (16)
MARCH 2021 1- MILITARY (46) 2- ECONOMIC (40) 3- SCIENTIFIC (14)	FEBRUARY 2021 1- MILITARY (44) 2- ECONOMIC (20) 3- ENV/POL/SCIENT (17)	JANUARY 2021 1- MILITARY (23) 2- ECONOMIC (22) 3- ENVIRONMENTAL/POL (7)
DECEMBER 2020 1- MILITARY (38) 2- ECONOMIC (37) 3- SOCIAL (12)	NOVEMBER 2020 1- ECONOMIC (37) 2- MILITARY (36) 3- POLITICAL (19)	OCTOBER 2020 1- MILITARY (44) 2- ECONOMIC (29) 3- ENVIRONMENTAL (15)
SEPTEMBER 2020 1- MILITARY (58) 2- ECONOMIC (25) 3- SCIENTIFIC (13)	AUGUST 2020 1- MILITARY (52) 2- ECONOMIC (17) 3- SOCIAL (16)	JULY 2020 1- ECONOMIC (43) 2- MILITARY (36) 3- ENVIRONMENTAL (14)
JUNE 2020 1- MILITARY (46) 2- ENVIRONMENTAL (35) 3- ECONOMIC (28)	MAY 2020 1- MILITARY (43) 2- ECONOMIC (26) 3- POLITICAL (11)	APRIL 2020 1- MILITARY (37) 2- ECONOMIC (22) 3- SOCIAL (13)
MARCH 2020 1- MILITARY (37) 2- ECONOMIC (21) 3- SOCIAL (15)	FEBRUARY 2020 1- MILITARY (27) 2- ECONOMIC (19) 3- ENVIRONMENTAL (16)	JANUARY 2020 4- ECONOMIC (33) 5- MILITARY (28) 3- POLITICAL (26)

Table 1: most popular themes per month (number of mentions is in parenthesis).

COUNTRIES: The United States was the most discussed country with 10 mentions. Sweden and Finland were also mentioned 8 times. US is mainly mentioned in regards to the Arctic Council and the Russian war in Ukraine. The current suspension of the Arctic Council is reported as a security threat and TASS reports the Russian government sees an opportunity to cooperate with the US.

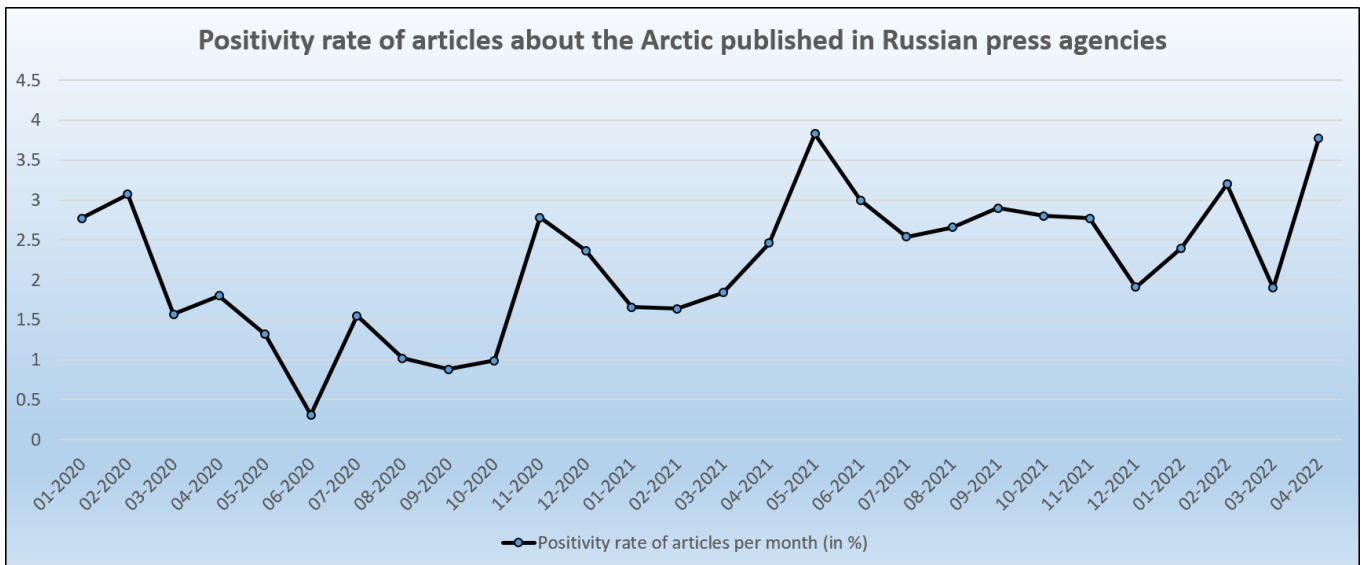
Sweden and Finland are also mentioned with issues linked to the Arctic Council but also the possible accession of these two countries to NATO. Western states are typically presented as responsible for the break of diplomatic activities in the Arctic region and accused of creating insecurity in the circumpolar North. This frame is in just line with the Kremlin's propaganda to deflect Russian responsibility over their actions in Ukraine.

APRIL 2022		
1- UNITED STATES (10) 2- FINLAND, SWEDEN (8)		
MARCH 2022 1- UNITED STATES, UKRAINE (6) 2- FRANCE, CANADA, DENMARK, FINLAND, ICELAND, NORWAY, SWEDEN (3)	FEBRUARY 2022 1- CHINA (6) 2- UNITED KINGDOM (5)	JANUARY 2022 1- UNITED STATES, CHINA (3) 2- NORWAY (2)
DECEMBER 2021 1- UNITED STATES (11) 2- UNITED KINGDOM (4)	NOVEMBER 2021 1- UNITED STATES (14) 2- CHINA (7)	OCTOBER 2021 1- NORWAY (8) 2- UNITED STATES (4)
SEPTEMBER 2021 1- UNITED STATES (10) 2- FINLAND (5)	AUGUST 2021 1- UNITED STATES (8) 2- UNITED KINGDOM (5)	JULY 2021 1- UNITED STATES (22) 2- UNITED KINGDOM, NORWAY, GERMANY (2)
JUNE 2021 1- UNITED STATES (57) 2- CHINA (14)	MAY 2021 1- UNITED STATES (50) 2- CHINA (9)	APRIL 2021 1- UNITED STATES (24) 2- CHINA, FINLAND (7)
MARCH 2021 1- UNITED STATES (16) 2- CHINA (9)	FEBRUARY 2021 1- UNITED STATES (24) 2- NORWAY (8)	JANUARY 2021 1- UNITED STATES (8) 2- CHINA, SWEDEN (3)
DECEMBER 2020 1- UNITED STATES (21) 2- CHINA (4)	NOVEMBER 2020 1- UNITED STATES (18) 2- NORWAY (6)	OCTOBER 2020 1- UNITED STATES (16) 2- NORWAY (6)
SEPTEMBER 2020 1- UNITED STATES (11) 2- UNITED KINGDOM (6)	AUGUST 2020 1- UNITED STATES (17) 2- CHINA (4)	JULY 2020 1- UNITED STATES (14) 2- CHINA (6)
JUNE 2020 1- UNITED STATES (10) 2- CHINA (5)	MAY 2020 1- UNITED STATES (15) 2- UNITED KINGDOM (11)	APRIL 2020 1- DENMARK (6) 2- NORWAY (5)
MARCH 2020 1- UNITED STATES (9) 2- JAPAN (3)	FEBRUARY 2020 1- NORWAY (11) 2- UNITED STATES (10)	JANUARY 2020 1- UNITED STATES (12) 2- INDIA (9)

Table 2: foreign countries mentioned per month in Russian press agencies (number of mentions is in parenthesis).

SENTIMENT ANALYSIS: the positivity rate jumped from March to April 2022. We noticed an upswing of articles pushing the narrative that the Arctic region should be depoliticized and that a return to normal was desirable. This frame was often repeated by key Russian decision-makers, including President Putin, ambassador Korchunov and Minister Shoigu. The Arctic region was presented in rosy descriptions about potential for cooperation, dialogue and partnerships in order dissociate the region from the invasion of Ukraine.

The higher positivity rate can also be explained by reports of substantial investments and shipping numbers in the Russian Arctic. This effort also contributed to try to present great opportunities in the Russian North, unaffected by Western sanctions and the fallout from the invasion of Ukraine. This is part of a concerted effort to present a business-as-usual front of a cooperative Russia always open to work with other countries even when other events suggest otherwise.



METHODOLOGICAL NOTES

Sputnik and TASS articles were retrieved using the Factiva database from January 2020 to March 2022. Due to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Sputnik articles were no longer accessible: only TASS articles were gathered from April 2022 onwards. All articles containing the keyword “Arctic” were included in the sample. We manually removed articles that were duplicates from the same outlet as well as stories included in “news digest” articles that were not related to our keyword.

Themes present in these articles were manually coded. We looked for dominant themes in each article: more than one theme could be detected per article. For example, an article about a scientific study on the evolution of climate change was coded as both environmental and scientific. The six themes that emerged were: military, economic, political, social, environmental and scientific.

As for foreign countries mentioned, we only focus on sovereign states and did not include regional ensembles or international organisations. Hence, references to NATO, the EU, the Barents Euro-Arctic Region or the Nordic Council were not accounted for.

The sentiment analysis was conducted using the Lexicoder Sentiment Dictionary, as discussed by Stuart Soroka (see the following link for details: <http://www.snsoroka.com/data-lexicoder/>). The R package Quanteda was used to generate the analysis. On a month-to month basis, the number of positive words was subtracted to the number of negative words and then divided by the number of words in total; the output is referred to as the positivity rate. For example, the positivity rate for the month of June 2021 was 3% while it was 0.31% for June 2020. Hence, the closer you are to 0, the more negative the articles in a given month were.



**MONTHLY ANALYSIS –
RUSSIAN PRESS AGENCIES
AND THE ARCTIC**

OBSERVATOIRE DE LA POLITIQUE ET LA SÉCURITÉ DE
L'ARCTIQUE (OPSA) ET OBSERVATOIRE DES
ADMINISTRATIONS PUBLIQUES AUTOCHTONES (OAPA)

FOR MORE INFORMATION : CIRRICQ.ORG/OPSA ET
OBSAPA.ORG