Theory behind Russian Quest for Totalitarianism. Analysis of Discursive Swing in Putin’s Speeches

ABSTRACT Before 2014 Putin used semantic structures characteristic of authoritarianism and façade democracy to shape Russian political discourse. After the annexation of Crimea, we identify the decrease of authoritarian discursive elements, the occurrence of references to democratic values, and the prevalence of totalitarian discursive elements. This quantitative alteration co-occurred with a qualitative change of the intensity of totalitarian gnosic that increased from the low to the moderate extent. This paper aims to examine the extent of the intensity of totalitarian political gnosic in Putin’s most influential speeches: the annual Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly, and the president’s annual news conference.

KEYWORDS totalitarianism, political gnosic, Russia, Putin

PRELIMINARY METHODOLOGICAL AND THEORETICAL ASSUMPTIONS FOR THE RESEARCH

The research aims to identify and account for the extent of the intensity of totalitarian political gnosic in Vladimir Putin’s most important and influential speeches: the annual Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly and the president’s annual news conference. The annual Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly (in Russian: Послание Президента России Федеральному собранию) is a speech delivered by the Russian president to introduce the state and condition in which Russia is in and to determine the guidelines of Russian internal and foreign policy. Its particular communicational status is a result of being given in front of a joint meeting of the two houses of the Russian Parliament—the Russian Duma and the Federation Council—members of the government, leaders of the Constitutional Court and Supreme Court, governors, speakers of the legislatures of the constituent entities of the Russian Federation, the leaders of traditional religions, public figures, including the heads of regional civic chambers, as well as the leaders of major media outlets (de Pury, 2018; Ambrosio & Vandrovec, 2013). In turn, the annual news conferences are held for Russian and foreign journalists accredited in Russia. The gathered reporters, other people in the studio, and spectators from across the country are allowed to question the Russian president. In these two communicational situations, the Russian president produces, distributes, and redistributes an official political discourse about Russian political, economic, and social standing and directions of the country’s future development (Gavrilova, 2013;
This article solves the three research problems coherent with the goals: Did totalitarian gnosia appear in Putin’s speeches? If so, what was its intensity? And what does it indicate for the trajectory of the continuance of Russian political regime? Before 2014 the intensity of totalitarian gnosia was relatively low (Bäcker, 2007; Hutcheson & Petersson, 2016; Kotevko & Ryazanova-Clarke, 2009; Moses, 2017; Rak, 2017a; Rak 2017c; Roberts, 2017; Ryakin, 2007; Tsygoanov, 2016), and Putin used semantic structures characteristic of authoritarianism and façade democracy as a dominant means for shaping political discourse. The discourse changed, however, after the annexation of Crimea. A discursive swing consisted in the decrease of a number of authoritarian discursive elements, the occurrence of references to democratic values, and the prevalence of totalitarian discursive elements. This quantitative alteration co-occurred with a qualitative change of the intensity of totalitarian gnosia that increased from the low to the moderate extent (Rak, 2017b; Hanson, 2011, pp. 32–48; Motyl, 2016; Teper, 2016, pp. 378–396).

The first hypothesis assumes that Putin might have consistently proceeded with the discursive line adopted in 2016. Totalitarian gnosia might have been used in 2017–18, and the extent of its intensity might have risen from the moderate to the high extent (Bäcker, 2016, p. 10; Prozorov, 2005, pp. 121–143). According to the next hypothesis, the drift toward the intensification of totalitarian gnosia might have been one of the indicators of changes in the political regime. Apart from the types of political sovereignty and social activity, the semantic structures created, distributed, and redistributed through political discourse contribute to the nature of political regimes.

As this study strives to identify a discursive swing after 2016, 26 March 2017 is its initial caesura. On 26 March 2017, the first massive wave of protests against the ruling political elites and alleged corruption, during Putin’s rule, began. It was a substantial incentive to alter discursive strategies in Russia (Samokhvalov, 2017; van Dijk, 2006, pp. 115–140; Kiseleva, 2015, pp. 316–329). The closing caesura is 1 March 2018, when the 14th Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly turned out to be considerably different from 13 previous addresses. Then, the president repeatedly highlighted Russia’s prepotency: “It is invincible against all existing and prospective missile defense and counter-air defense systems” (Putin, 2018). It was a vivid manifestation of power since Putin showed the images of cruise missiles, intercontinental ballistic missiles, underwater drones, and supersonic jets (Rosenberg, 2018). This type of semantic creation is frequently visible in military authoritarianism and typical of totalitarian regimes.

The research employs a method of sources analysis that draws upon the quantitative and qualitative comparative relational content analyses of Putin’s annual conference held on 14 December 2017 and the Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly given on 1 March 2018 (Putin, 2017; 2018). The speeches are thought through with a categorization key to identify their totalitarian elements. The semantic structures of totalitarianism are unpacked with a tool for measuring the intensity of totalitarian gnosia. The tool is the set of three essential features of totalitarian gnosia. Every feature takes on three values that range from the high, through moderate, to the low extent of the intensity. They typify hard, moderate,
and soft gnosis, respectively. The next sections of the article introduce the research device applicable to measure gradable totalitarian gnosis and then employ this device to the empirical analysis of Putin’s speeches to solve the research problems.

**THE THEORETICAL CATEGORY OF GRADABLE TOTALITARIAN GNOSIS**

This article adopts a simple approach toward a core theoretical category of the study by defining totalitarian gnosis as a set of beliefs determining the interpretation of political reality. The creator, distributor, and redistributor of the beliefs considers them “knowledge or knowing” (Bäcker, 2016; Rak, 2017b).

Eric Voegelin (1987) and Alain Besançon (1994) were the first researchers who used the category of political gnosis to explain the nature of political regimes, including totalitarianism. Their theoretical frameworks are still applied to examine political regimes, especially those being influenced by Islam (Milopoulos, 2013; Todorov, 2001, pp. 28–42). Sometimes these theoretical frameworks do double duty as the analytical tools for identifying relations between political gnosis and possible scenarios for the changes in political structures (Germino, 1998). The theoretical literature lacks, however, both research on the types of political gnosis that would account for various scenarios and empirical tests of such typologies. This article is supposed to fill these gaps in the literature.

Totalitarian gnosis consists of three essential features that are the content of the beliefs. They take on the values indicating the intensity of totalitarian gnosis. Values are qualitative quantities assigned to the indicators of totalitarian gnosis or their essential features (Bäcker, 2011, p. 189; Rak, 2017b, p. 100). The essential features of totalitarian gnosis are (i) splitting the universe into the good internal world occupied by “we-insiders” and the evil external world occupied by “they-outsiders,” (ii) dealing with the created total enemy (also called an objective enemy), and (iii) fallacious immanentization of the eschaton. The features are sufficient and necessary to put a discursive creation into the category of totalitarian gnosis. The expressions of features or their values may occur individually, but only the co-occurrence of all the features implies totalitarian gnosis. The following section defines and operationalizes the three features of totalitarian gnosis (indicators), including their values (hard, moderate, and soft intensity).

(i) Splitting the Gnostic Universe

The first essential feature of totalitarian gnosis is confirmed if an attitude toward either one or two worlds appears in an entity of discourse (Shorten, 2015, p. 716). In totalitarianism, ontological dualism is used to shape the existing political reality. The expressions of this feature differ in the positive valorization of the native world of the good and the negative valorization of the foreign world of the evil (Prince, 2018, p. 104). This set of two homogeneous criteria enables us to grade the intensity of totalitarian gnosis.

Three major values are taken on by the first essential feature. The extreme value of the splitting typifies hard totalitarian gnosis. It means that the high extent of the intensity of totalitarian gnosis emerges when its utterer sacralizes the good internal world as well as devilizes the evil external world (Kneuer, 2017, p. 182). Let us emphasize, the gnostic sanctifies his or her own world so much that it becomes the sacred, the greatest thing in the
political reality. Under the rule of ontological dualism, he or she makes the foreign world into a semantic universe. The gnostic impregnates it so much that everything that does not belong to his or her world is an extremely infernal evil (Diesen, 2017, p. 179). Verbal instruments employed to form the images of the worlds in a discourse are adjectives in a superlative degree and their descriptive equivalents, for example, “the best/the worst thing in the world.”

The middle value of the splitting is a hallmark of moderate totalitarian gnosis. The moderate extent of totalitarian gnosis occurs when its utterer attaches positive meanings to the good internal world and negative meanings to the evil external world and its occupants (Abulof, 2016, p. 371). The gnostic produces the discourse about the political reality with enthusiastically positive or negative assessment of own and foreign things respectively. The semantic creation manifests sentimental and frenetic allegiance to the worlds under dual valorization (Šram and Dulić, 2015, p. 37). The verbal instruments to shape the structure of the universe’s image are adjectives in a positive degree and their descriptive equivalents, for example, “a good/bad thing.” In contrast to sacralization and devilization, here the valorization of a discursive creation does not take on an extreme value.

The second extreme value of the splitting is a characteristic of soft totalitarian gnosis. This value determines a qualitative line between political gnosis and diagnosis. Political diagnosis is not a value-laden pure description (or explanation) of political reality (Williams, 2017, p. 1). The low extent of totalitarian gnosis appears when its utterer defensively relativizes the good internal world or offensively relativizes the evil external world. If the universe is introduced with no distinction between the two worlds or the worlds have both advantages and disadvantages, there is no totalitarian gnosis. In using defensive relativization, the gnostic builds into a discourse the image of the good internal world that is not as evil as others. When he or she balances their own world against the things that do not belong to it, the native things appear quite acceptable in the glaringly unblessed universe (Shlapentokh, 2017, p. 141). This internal world is a good stronghold. Comparisons are in use to convince people that they are better against the background of others (Langdon & Tismaneanu, 2019, p. 97). The antinomic valorization to defensive relativization is offensive relativization of the evil external world. The utterer of totalitarian gnosis presents positive elements of the foreign world as being not as positive as others. In doing so, the gnostic depreciates the components of the external world (Wignell, Tan & O’Halloran, 2017, p. 2). The verbal instruments to produce the relationships between the worlds are adjectives in a comparative form and their descriptive equivalents (e.g., “a better/worse thing than others,” “not as good/bad as others”).

(ii) Dealing with the Created Total Enemy

The second essential feature of totalitarian gnosis is a discursive creation of the way of dealing with the total enemy. This research adopts Mikkel Thorup’s (2015, p. x) definition of the total enemy as the one whose identity and deeds are substituted for analogies and being, whose only objective in life is to destroy the world, especially “our world,” and perpetrate violence; who is present even if not apparent; whose enmity comes from a being rather than an action; and with whom coexistence is impossible due to the fact that the total enemy will never let go and allow peace and prosperity to become the order of the day. In totalitarianism, the creator, distributor, and redistributor of gnosis
make either the individual or collective political subject responsible for any wrongdoing and bringing about of death and destruction (Akopov, 2010, p. 98).

The total enemy makes it impossible for the imagined subject (usually a gnostic society) to create a “new brave world.” According to the gnostic, as long as the total enemy exists, the whole world is in danger. It is the only justification for why it has to be incapacitated and immolated.

Also, dealing with the created total enemy may take on three main values characteristic of the different extents of the intensity of totalitarian gnosis. The homogeneous criterion for their distinction is the way around approaching the total enemy.

The extreme value of the creation typifies hard political gnosis. The high extent of the intensity of totalitarian gnosis emerges when the utterer calls upon his or her supporters to annihilate the total enemy and introduces measures to do so. The moderate extent of the intensity of totalitarian gnosis appears if the utterer concentrates on how to isolate from the total enemy. Finally, the low extent of the intensity of totalitarian gnosis takes place when the utterer opts for escapism as a way to avoid the enemy’s influence.

(iii) Fallacious Immanentization of the Eschaton

The third essential feature of totalitarian gnosis is the fallacious immanentization of the eschaton. The immanentization is fallacious because the projects of the native populace’s eternal salvation are political rather than religious (Voegelin, 1987, p. 120; Gray, 2014). The eternal salvation is a promise of the creation of the world of political perfection. So, whereas the previous features concerned the current state of political reality, this one deals with the future.

In totalitarianism, the utterer assumes the need for reconstruction of the existing universe and produces the image of the prospective state. The process of immanentization is the indicator of how the gnostic alters the ontological status of the existing universe by ravaging it and then forming a new one at least verbally (Pellicani, 2003, p. 11; Miras Boronat, 2016, pp. 310–324). It consists in projecting eschatological visions for the future and imposing a policy to perform them (Voegelin, 1987, p. 166).

The application of the homogeneous criterion of the “eschaton accomplishment” allows us to differentiate across the types of totalitarian gnosis. When the utterer draws upon active mysticism to immanentize the eschaton, the high extent of totalitarian gnosis emerges. In active mysticism, the discourse contains a completely unrealistic vision of the eschaton achievable with equally unrealistic means. The moderate extent of totalitarian gnosis is indicated by utopianism. Just like the hard type of gnosis, the moderate one is marked with the creation of a fully unrealistic vision of the eschaton.

It assumes, however, the use of available means to accomplish the vision. In contrast to the previous values, the low extent of totalitarian gnosis builds upon an accomplishable image of the eschaton. The utterer of the soft totalitarian gnosis discursively reestablishes the universe with the available means.

According to this simple set of three continua, the three essential features of totalitarian gnosis take on three values that indicate its extent of the intensity (table 1). When the three features simultaneously appear in a discourse, the appearance of totalitarian gnosis is
confirmed. The expressions of the gnosis may be diversified in terms of the intensity depending on the values of the features.

This section has introduced the research tool for verifying the occurrence of totalitarian gnosis in a political discourse and measuring its intensity. The next section applies the tool to test it, delve analytically into the semantic structures of Putin’s speeches, and verify the hypotheses.

**COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF PUTIN’S SPEECHES**

The application of the research tool to analyze the president’s news conference and the Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly confirmed the occurrence of totalitarian gnosis in the political utterances. The quantitative difference in the number of the essential features’ expressions between the speeches may be the result of the texts’ length. Whereas the Presidential Address consists of 13,858 words, the news conference contains 30,056 words.

The first essential feature of totalitarian gnosis under scrutiny is splitting the universe into the good internal world occupied by “we-insiders” and the evil external world occupied by “they-outsiders.” Putin built the splitting on the references to Russia—“we,” “our” state, country, people, Russians—and weighted them against the things that did not belong to the exclusively determined state community. In most cases, the references to the outer world remained general. Rarely did Putin determine the “they-insiders” as the United States (11 references in the Address and 27 in the conference), the European Union (1 reference in the Address and no references in the conference), Europe (2 references in the Address and 4 in the conference), and NATO (3 references in the Address and no references in the conference).
While the president’s annual news conference offered 667 discursive acts of the splitting, the annual Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly contained just 484. The moderate extent of the intensity was a dominant value for the splitting in the speeches (Table 2). In the conference, 73% expressions of this value indicated the occurrence of moderate totalitarian gnosis; 17%, soft totalitarian gnosis; and 8%, hard totalitarian gnosis. Similarly, in the Address, 74% manifestations indicated moderate totalitarian gnosis; 17%, soft totalitarian gnosis; and 7%, hard totalitarian gnosis.

In using hard totalitarian gnosis, Putin strived to convince the audience to believe in Russian military power:

During all these years since the unilateral US withdrawal from the ABM Treaty, we have been working intensively on advanced equipment and arms, which allowed us to make a breakthrough in developing new models of strategic weapons. Let me recall that the United States is creating a global missile defense system primarily for countering strategic arms that follow ballistic trajectories. These weapons form the backbone of our nuclear deterrence forces, just as of other members of the nuclear club. As such, Russia has developed, and works continuously to perfect, highly effective but modestly priced systems to overcome missile defense. They are installed on all of our intercontinental ballistic missile complexes. (Putin, 2018)

On the one hand, this extract was designed to show that Russian military power was on a par with that of the USA. On the other, it offered the image of American power that was set to destroy Russia and the portrayal of Russia that had to stand up for itself out of necessity. Putin rehearsed the post-Stalinist calque “the imperialistic West and our state that cherishes peace” (Khapava, 2016; Sherlock, 2016) by using changed phrases to give credit for the use of the army to establish relations between the states.

Moderate totalitarian gnosis was the most frequent type in Putin’s speeches:

And what is written is that this strategy can be put into action in response to conventional arms attacks and even to a cyber-threat. I should note that our military doctrine says Russia reserves the right to use nuclear weapons solely in response to a nuclear attack, or an attack with other weapons of mass destruction against the country or its allies, or an act of aggression against us with the use of conventional weapons that threaten the very existence of the state. This all is very clear and specific. As such, I see it is my duty to announce the following. Any use of nuclear weapons against Russia or its allies, weapons

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 2. The measurement of totalitarian gnosis in the splitting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Splitting the universe into the good internal world occupied by “we-insiders” and the evil external world occupied by “they-outsiders”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>President’s annual news conference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: own study.
of short, medium or any range at all, will be considered as a nuclear attack on this country. Retaliation will be immediate, with all the attendant consequences. (Putin, 2018)

The president determined the doctrine of nuclear deterrence, promised nuclear protection to a few allies, and underlined the sovereignty of Russia. As the speeches showed, the Kremlin would obey neither other powers nor external influences (Chadayev, 2006; Poljakov, 2007). The expandable definition of nuclear deterrence revealed the nature of Putin’s gnosis that drew upon the dual image of our good world and other powers’ immanently bad world constantly threatening Russia and its allies.

In the least frequent type of manifestations, the soft totalitarian gnosis, the contrast between the worlds was not so sharp:

The idea of establishing the Eurasian Economic Union belongs to President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev and it emerged long before our economic difficulties with other countries began, long before any sanctions. This is due to the domestic need to ensure advanced economic and social development in our countries and the wish to use the absolute competitive advantages that we inherited from the past: a shared infrastructure and energy system, an opportunity to communicate in Russian, and so on. Each of our countries has a lot of competitive advantages if we pool our efforts and use these opportunities. So the direction we have taken is absolutely right. (Putin, 2017)

According to Putin, however, the configuration of the worlds called for action. On the one hand, the president depicted the external world as causing problems, imposing sanctions, and thus being unjust and evil. On the other hand, Putin maintained that the measures he took were absolutely right because they stemmed from the necessity to survive in an unfavorable external environment.

The second essential feature of totalitarian gnosis considered in the research is dealing with the created total enemy. While the word “enemy” did not appear in the conference, it was used twice in the Address. The first enemy is falling behind:

It is high time we make a number of tough decisions that are long overdue. We need to get rid of anything that stands in the way of our development and prevents people from fully unleashing their potential. It is our obligation to focus all resources and summon all our strength and willpower in this daring effort that must yield results. Otherwise, there will be no future for us, our children or our country. It is not a question of someone conquering or devastating our land. No, that is not the danger. The main threat and our main enemy is the fact that we are falling behind. If we are unable to reverse this trend, we will fall even further behind. This is like a serious chronic disease that steadily saps the energy from the body and destroys it from within step by step. Quite often, this destructive process goes unnoticed by the body. We need to master creative power and boost development so that no obstacles prevent us from moving forward with confidence and independently. We must take ownership of our destiny. (Putin, 2018)

This quotation is a characteristic example of how Putin justified and accounted for annihilatory activities against other political subjects considered the enemy. When the president brought political subjects under an inclination to annihilate “us,” he had no choice but to
annihilate the subject because this was the condition that “we” would survive. This way of thinking was the “annihilation trap.”

The second direct reference to the enemy was the expression of own superiority and being unbeatable:

Now, we all know that the design and development of unmanned weapon systems is another common trend in the world. As concerns Russia, we have developed unmanned submersible vehicles that can move at great depths (I would say extreme depths) intercontinentally, at a speed multiple times higher than the speed of submarines, cutting-edge torpedoes and all kinds of surface vessels, including some of the fastest. It is really fantastic. They are quiet, highly maneuverable and have hardly any vulnerabilities for the enemy to exploit. There is simply nothing in the world capable of withstanding them. (Putin, 2018)

Not only the cited passage but also the vast part of the second half of the Address indicate that Putin strived to create the illusion of the impossibility of beating Russia over armed conflict as well as Russian technological military advantage over the United States. As this way of thinking showed, if Russia is the worldwide military superpower, everyone who ignores this fact hurts themselves. Thereby, the ignorant are simultaneously the objective enemy because they are not able to comply with the omnipotent power and are the “useful idiot” (in Russian: полезный идиот) as long as they facilitate control of the political reality under construction.

Apart from the literal naming of the enemy, the conference and the Address encompassed discursive constructions of enemies and modes of handling them. Importantly to the nature of the political discourse, Putin avoided using separatist and escapist strategies symptomatic of moderate and soft totalitarian gnosia, respectively. Instead, the president pointed out annihilation typical of hard totalitarian gnosia as the only means of coping with the created total enemy (table 3). It means that the high extent of totalitarian gnosia occurred in the speeches in the form of 143 expressions in the conference and 161 in the Address.

Let us illustrate this discursive creation with the following example:

Despite our numerous protests and pleas, the American machine has been set into motion, the conveyer belt is moving forward. There are new missile defense systems installed in Alaska and California; as a result of NATO’s expansion to the east, two new missile defense areas were created in Western Europe: one has already been

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dealing with the created total enemy</th>
<th>Hard totalitarian gnosia</th>
<th>Moderate totalitarian gnosia</th>
<th>Soft totalitarian gnosia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>President’s annual news conference</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: own study.
created in Romania, while the deployment of the system in Poland is now almost complete. Their range will keep increasing; new launching areas are to be created in Japan and South Korea. The US global missile defense system also includes five cruisers and 30 destroyers, which, as far as we know, have been deployed to regions in close proximity to Russia’s borders. I am not exaggerating in the least; and this work proceeds apace. So, what have we done, apart from protesting and warning? How will Russia respond to this challenge? (Putin, 2018)

Although Putin introduced the missile defense system, he pointed out that NATO systems’ appearance in close proximity to Russia was the challenge (“вызов”) for the state (Diesen & Keane, 2018). According to the president, the United States and its allies created their systems not because of the fear of Russia, but rather to incapacitate Russia and thereby to make it powerless and subservient to the West. This was to produce a total enemy, the basic semantic structure that contributed to the spiral of hatred and arms race.

The last essential feature of totalitarian gnosis taken into consideration in the analysis is fallacious immanentization of the eschaton. Although the semantic structures characteristic of hard, moderate, and soft totalitarian gnosis appeared in the speeches, the former was dominant (table 4). In the conference, 43% of the references to fallaciously immanentizing the eschaton expressed active mysticism; 30%, utopianism; and 27%, eutopianism. Similarly, in the Address, 50% of the references were the manifestations of active mysticism; 25%, utopianism; and 25%, eutopianism.

The use of hard political gnosis was the attempt to actively mysticize Russia:

Colleagues, today knowledge, technology and expertise make the most important competitive advantages. They are the key to a real breakthrough and improved quality of life. As soon as possible, we need to develop a progressive legal framework and eliminate all barriers for the development and wide use of robotic equipment, artificial intelligence, unmanned vehicles, e-commerce and Big Data processing technology. And this legal framework must be continuously reviewed and be based on a flexible approach to each area and technology. We have all the resources to promptly implement 5G and Internet of Things technologies. (Putin, 2018)

Putin strengthened the confidence in the state’s general development by expressing confidence in the development of information technology that is subordinate to Russia’s goals. As the president claimed, the creation of the new wonderful world had begun, and he was,

| TABLE 4. The measurement of totalitarian gnosis in fallacious immanentization of the eschaton |
|---------------------------------|---------------|-------------|--------------|
| Fallacious immanentization of the eschaton | Hard totalitarian gnosis | Moderate totalitarian gnosis | Soft totalitarian gnosis |
| President’s annual news conference | 412 | 283 | 262 |
| Annual Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly | 398 | 201 | 198 |

Source: own study.
as he proved by using technical terms, the one who could skilfully contribute to its development.

The expressions of moderate totalitarian gnosis produce a utopian vision of the role of Russia in the world:

We will gladly support high-speed traffic from China to Western Europe through Russia. We will thus increase the speed of railway freight carriage many times over. Both freight and passenger carriage. We have large-scale projects in high-tech sectors, space, aviation and so on. By and large, we are confident that we are moving absolutely in the right direction and we are determined to keep moving forward along this path. (Putin, 2017)

Whereas the use of hard totalitarian gnosis shed light on the existing process, the moderate showed Putin’s course of action. According to the president, this course was the one and absolutely right.

Finally, Putin used soft totalitarian gnosis to create a eutopia by presenting social and economic conditions, for example, “I said that Russia’s GDP grew by 1.6 percent, and the aggregate GDP of the Eurasian Union, by 1.8. This is a good sign. We are changing the structure of mutual trade for the better” (Putin, 2017). In using the terms like “good sign” and “development of living conditions,” the president produced discursively the conditions that were not the goal of its own but, instead, were to enable him to accomplish the final purpose, which is to create the great and powerful Russia.

CONCLUSION

Totalitarian political gnosis was undoubtedly a constant element of Putin’s statements in 2017–18. It was not, however, as spectacularly visible as in his Crimean Speech in March 2014, when the annexation of Crimea was voted down. Then, the expressions that were simply taken from the Stalinist newspeak appeared, for example, “the enemy of the nation” and “the fifth column.” After March 2014, there were still many phrases in Putin’s political statements, both spoken and written, considered the expressions of totalitarian political gnosis. As the research showed, the level of articulation of the division of the world into “our-good” and “foreign-bad” indicated the dominance of moderate totalitarian gnosis which coexisted with hard totalitarian gnosis. Meanwhile, the image of the created total enemy pointed out the occurrence of hard totalitarian gnosis, and this kind of reference was extremely coherent. There were no expressions of moderate and soft totalitarian gnosis. The fallacious immanentization of the eschaton revealed the high extent of hard and the low extent of moderate totalitarian gnosis. These features of Putin’s speeches were the result of intentional semantic measures taken by many politicians not only in nondemocratic regimes. For a variety of different reasons, it was necessary for the president to establish the relatively moderate definitions of “foreign” political and social actors, mainly because of their possible reactions and the possibilities of tactical cooperation. Thus, one may assume, the inconsistency between the research results for the criteria is not the outcome of the incoherence of Putin’s discourse.
The research claims that Putin meets some of the essential criteria characteristic of a totalitarian leader, but also evinces the features of an authoritarian leader. Undoubtedly, nevertheless, it can be said that a totalitarian political gnosia is a significant part of his discursive creation of the political reality.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This paper is a result of the research project “Contemporary Russia: Between Authoritarianism and Totalitarianism” funded by National Science Centre, Poland. The research grant number: 2015/19/B/HS5/02516. When working on the article, Joanna Rak was supported by the Foundation for Polish Science (FNP) in the form of START Scholarship and Barbara Skarga Scholarship.

REFERENCES


