

MARCH 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 – MARCH 2022

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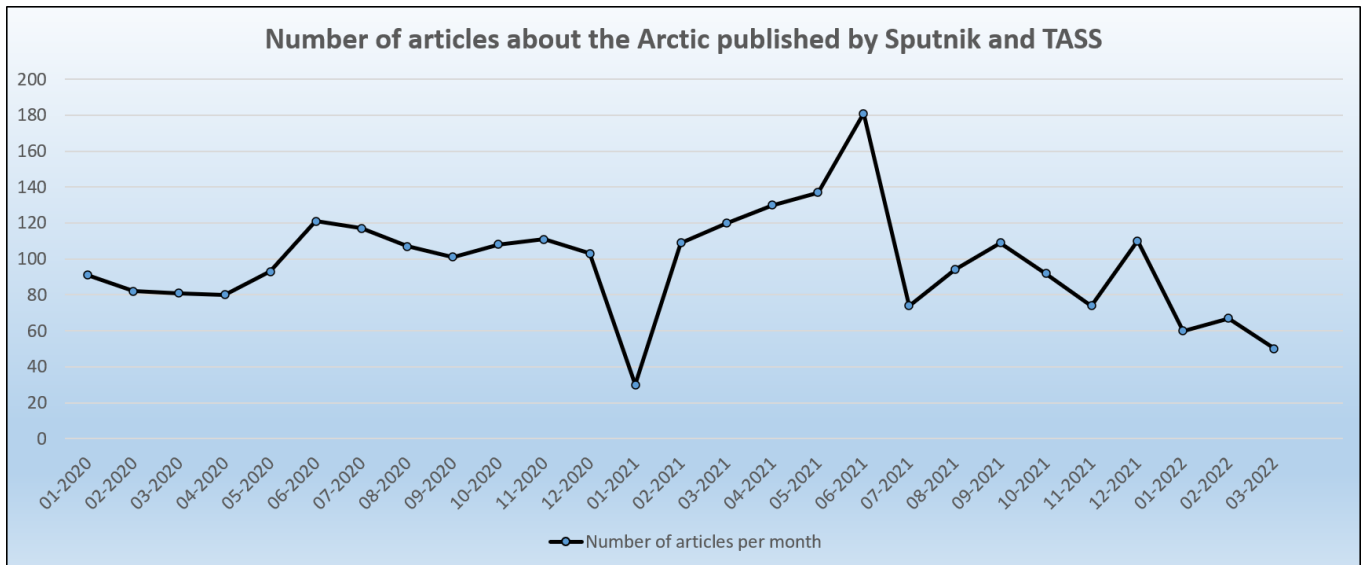
MARCH 2022 ANALYSIS – RUSSIAN PRESS AGENCIES AND THE ARCTIC

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

NUMBER OF ARCTIC MENTIONS: The overall number of mentions in March 2022 was 50, down from 67 in February. March marked the third month with a relatively low number of articles. For March 2022, this was largely the result of a reduction in military-focused stories (down from 20 to 7). Notably, while military-focused stories regarding Northern Fleet drills and escorted bomber flights have been regular occurrences in prior months, none appeared in March, contributing in part to this decrease. This change can be attributed to regular military manoeuvres not taking place due to the invasion of Ukraine. To a lesser extent, there was also a reduction in political stories (down from 17 to 11). 30 of the 50 stories were published in the first half of the month.



THEMES: The primary focus of coverage was economic, followed by stories about the environment and politics. While the economic focus is consistent with previous months, this is the first time military developments have not been one of the top three themes since at least January 2020 (the beginning of the data set). One third of the economics articles reference international reactions to the invasion of Ukraine, including sanctions and decreased international cooperation, while the remainder show no particular trend. Environment-focused articles are largely about research and monitoring (for example, of polar bears or permafrost).

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 1- ECONOMIC (33) 2- MILITARY (28) 3- POLITICAL (26)	

Table 1: most popular themes per month (with number of articles published in parentheses).

COUNTRIES: Two countries tied for the most-discussed: the United States and Ukraine, both with 6 mentions. The US is commonly in one of the top two spots, while this is the first time Ukraine has been in this position. The US is mentioned in relation to the Arctic Council, having paused its participation in the Council’s events, but also in relation to sanctions and potential escalation in Ukraine. Ukraine is usually mentioned as being the cause of others countries’ behaviour. The second-most discussed countries are: Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, and France, all with three mentions. The first six of these are mentioned in relation to the Arctic Council, also because they have paused their participation. Two stories about France relate to Russian specialists returning from the Guiana Space Center, while a third refers to French energy company TotalEnergies’ decision to stop purchasing Russian oil and petroleum products.

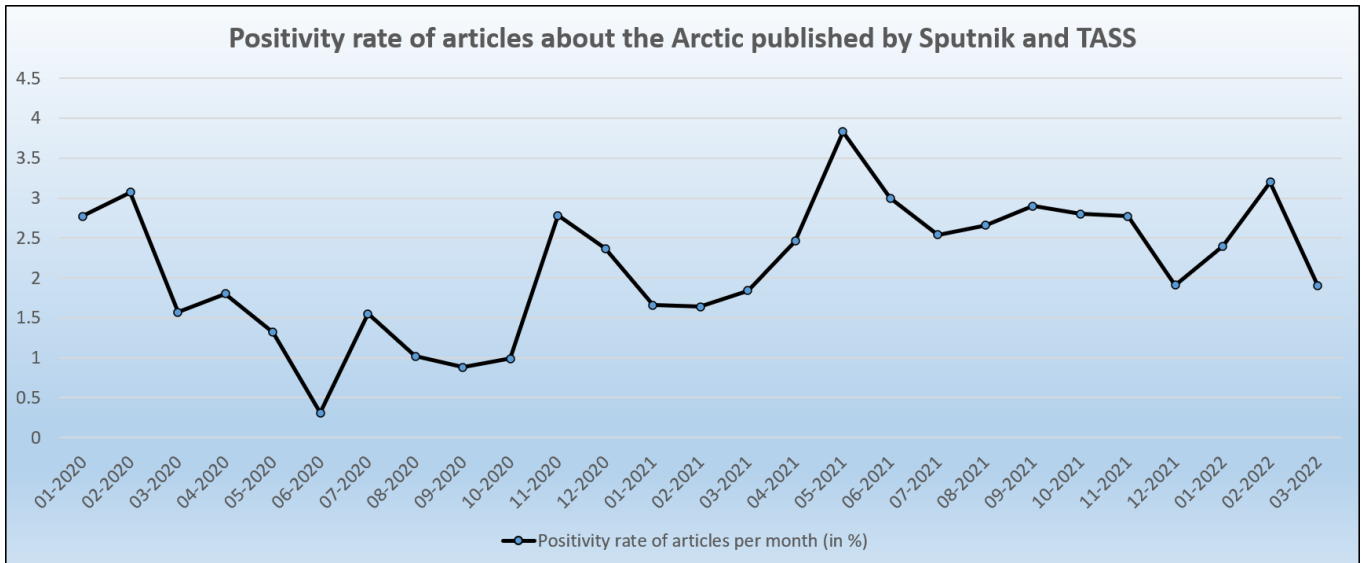
MARCH 2022		
1- UNITED STATES, UKRAINE (6) 2- FRANCE, CANADA, DENMARK, FINLAND, ICELAND, NORWAY, SWEDEN (3)		
FEBRUARY 2022 1- CHINA (6) 2- UNITED KINGDOM (5)	JANUARY 2022 1- UNITED STATES, CHINA (3) 2- NORWAY (2)	DECEMBER 2021 1- UNITED STATES (11) 2- UNITED KINGDOM (4)
NOVEMBER 2021 1- UNITED STATES (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.

SENTIMENT ANALYSIS: the positivity rate substantially decreased in March after 2 months of increases. The second half of February 2022 was also lower, a reflection of the Russian invasion of Ukraine and its aftermath.

Russian press agencies continued to try dissociating sanctions imposed as a result of the invasion of Ukraine from Arctic developments. The articles prominently featured Russian officials calling to keep Arctic cooperation business as usual in the areas of energy, shipping and climate research for example. Numerous mentions of sanctions impacting Russian corporations were published in the domains of satellite imaging as well as in the oil and gas industry.

By contrast, the promotion of joint ventures and new partnerships with non-Western countries were limited, probably due to the uncertainty around new investments and collaboration with Russia in light of the sanctions. Only 2 articles focused on such cooperative ties, with China (twice), South Korea (once) and India (once).



METHODOLOGICAL NOTES

Sputnik and TASS articles were retrieved using the Factiva database. 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.



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