

MAY 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 – MAY 2022

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# MAY 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 May 2022. The intensity and nature of coverage will be put in perspective to capture trends since January 2020.

**NUMBER OF ARCTIC MENTIONS:** mentions in May were not as concentrated as in April. This could be explained by the fact that officials, especially President Putin, did few sweeping announcements or press conferences related to the Arctic. Rather, measures announced were targeted and limited in scope. The cluster from May 16 to May 20 represents the only salient moment of increased interest, again spurred by declarations from Foreign Affairs minister Lavrov, Arctic ambassador Korchunov and Defence minister Shoigu criticising NATO, the EU and Finland/Sweden.

The beginning of warmer temperature also meant that media coverage focused on efforts by Russian organisation to clean up the Arctic environment, notably through Clean Arctic initiative. The initiative is often presented in Russian coverage to present a green façade to Russian Arctic development.



**THEMES:** Economic issues have been the most recurring theme in May, followed by political and environmental stories. From a political standpoint, a consequential number of articles covered the possible integration of Finland and Sweden into NATO. Linked to economic news, information related to private, public and international investments, infrastructures and the continued developments of the Northern Sea Route were an important aspect of the news released in May. Finally, many initiatives linked to cleaning operations, waste management and ecological endeavours were mentioned in the press releases for the month of May.

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

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

**COUNTRIES:** Sweden and Finland were the two most mentioned countries with 9 occurrences. The United States is also mentioned 7 times. References to Sweden and Finland are mostly oriented towards their bid to gain NATO membership. The United States are mostly mentioned when Arctic Council activities are covered by the news agency or when the eventual NATO status of Sweden and Finland is mentioned.

<b>MAY 2022</b>		
1- FINLAND, SWEDEN (9) 2- UNITED STATES (7)		
<b>APRIL 2022</b> 1- UNITED STATES (10) 2- FINLAND, SWEDEN (8)	<b>MARCH 2022</b> 1- UNITED STATES, UKRAINE (6) 2- FRANCE, CANADA, DENMARK, FINLAND, ICELAND, NORWAY, SWEDEN (3)	<b>FEBRUARY 2022</b> 1- CHINA (6) 2- UNITED KINGDOM (5)
<b>JANUARY 2022</b> 1- UNITED STATES, CHINA (3) 2- NORWAY (2)	<b>DECEMBER 2021</b> 1- UNITED STATES (11) 2- UNITED KINGDOM (4)	<b>NOVEMBER 2021</b> 1- UNITED STATES (14) 2- CHINA (7)
<b>OCTOBER 2021</b> 1- NORWAY (8) 2- UNITED STATES (4)	<b>SEPTEMBER 2021</b> 1- UNITED STATES (10) 2- FINLAND (5)	<b>AUGUST 2021</b> 1- UNITED STATES (8) 2- UNITED KINGDOM (5)
<b>JULY 2021</b> 1- UNITED STATES (22) 2- UNITED KINGDOM, NORWAY, GERMANY (2)	<b>JUNE 2021</b> 1- UNITED STATES (57) 2- CHINA (14)	<b>MAY 2021</b> 1- UNITED STATES (50) 2- CHINA (9)
<b>APRIL 2021</b> 1- UNITED STATES (24) 2- CHINA, FINLAND (7)	<b>MARCH 2021</b> 1- UNITED STATES (16) 2- CHINA (9)	<b>FEBRUARY 2021</b> 1- UNITED STATES (24) 2- NORWAY (8)
<b>JANUARY 2021</b> 1- UNITED STATES (8) 2- CHINA, SWEDEN (3)	<b>DECEMBER 2020</b> 1- UNITED STATES (21) 2- CHINA (4)	<b>NOVEMBER 2020</b> 1- UNITED STATES (18) 2- NORWAY (6)
<b>OCTOBER 2020</b> 1- UNITED STATES (16) 2- NORWAY (6)	<b>SEPTEMBER 2020</b> 1- UNITED STATES (11) 2- UNITED KINGDOM (6)	<b>AUGUST 2020</b> 1- UNITED STATES (17) 2- CHINA (4)
<b>JULY 2020</b> 1- UNITED STATES (14) 2- CHINA (6)	<b>JUNE 2020</b> 1- UNITED STATES (10) 2- CHINA (5)	<b>MAY 2020</b> 1- UNITED STATES (15) 2- UNITED KINGDOM (11)
<b>APRIL 2020</b> 1- DENMARK (6) 2- NORWAY (5)	<b>MARCH 2020</b> 1- UNITED STATES (9) 2- JAPAN (3)	<b>FEBRUARY 2020</b> 1- NORWAY (11) 2- UNITED STATES (10)
<b>JANUARY 2020</b> 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 decreased in May compared to April but remained relatively high. Finland and Sweden declarations that they would seek accession to NATO as well as Western states support for Ukraine against Russian aggression explain this decrease. The West was accused of militarizing the Arctic and the areas near Western Russia, calling for a necessary reaction by Russia. This is a common frame in Russian official discourse and was found in TASS coverage.

The positivity rate remained relatively high nonetheless due to focus on scientific discoveries by Russian scientists and coverage of environmental cleanup initiatives by Clean Arctic. Russia continued to also trumpet partnerships with non-Western states, especially China. Chinese firms were presented as partner in energy projects, food supplier for the Russian Arctic and potential users of the Northern Sea Route. China is instrumental in this rhetoric to push the point of the Russian state that Western sanctions will not affect Russia's Arctic development. This pattern is likely to continue during the summer months when the plight of Western sanctions will accentuate for the Russian economy.



## 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.



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