

NOVEMBER 2021 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 – NOVEMBER 2021

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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.



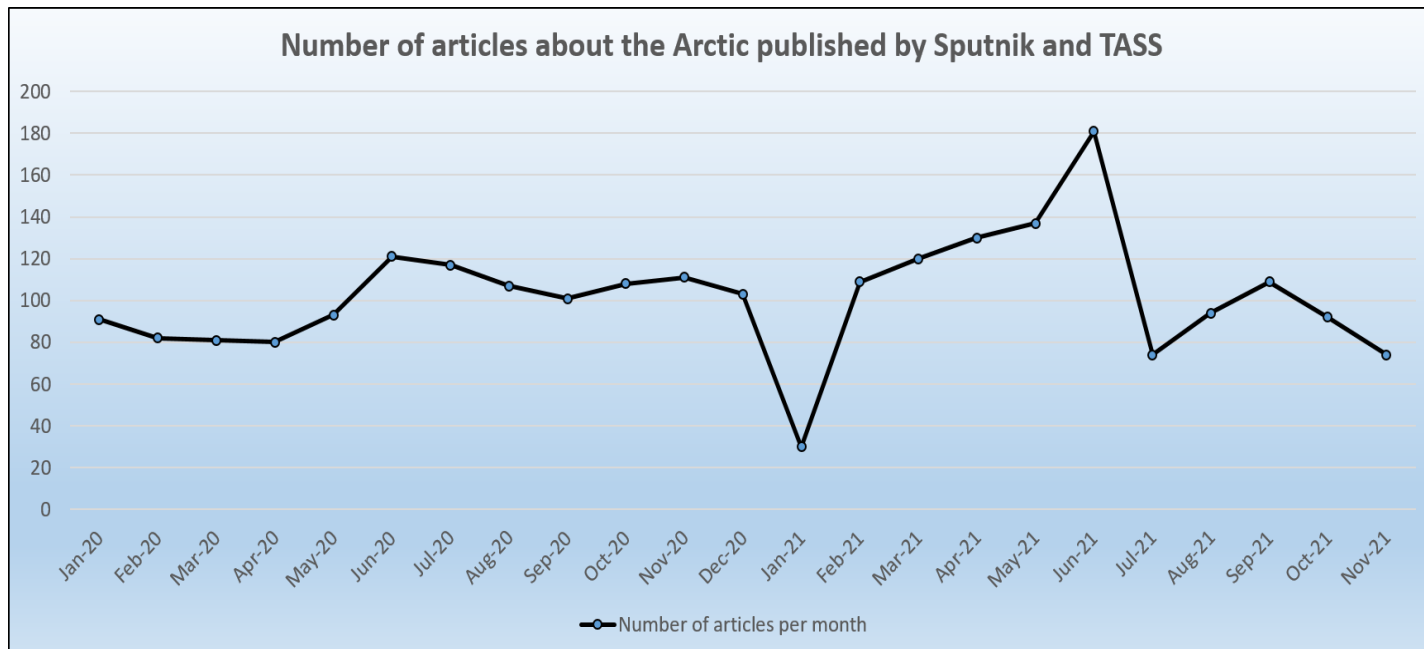
NOVEMBER ANALYSIS – RUSSIAN PRESS AGENCIES AND THE ARCTIC

Team members:

- Mathieu Landriault (Adjunct professor, École nationale d'administration publique)
- Jean-François Savard (Associate professor, ÉNAP)
- Isabelle Caron (Assistant professor, Dalhousie University)
- Gabrielle LaFortune (doctoral candidate, University of Ottawa)
- Alexandre Millette (Doctoral candidate, ÉNAP)

This analysis studied how Russian press agencies Sputnik and TASS covered Arctic issues during the month of November 2021. The intensity and nature of coverage will be put in perspective to capture trends since January 2020. This is the first of a series of monthly analyses concentrating on this dimension.

NUMBER OF ARCTIC MENTIONS: the increased popularity of the Arctic in Russian press agencies from February to June 2021 was mostly due to the preparation and the beginning (May 2021) of the Russian chairmanship of the Arctic Council. The high-level Putin-Biden meeting in Geneva also accounted for an uptick in Arctic mentions. Coverage decreased to more modest levels afterwards: November 2021 continued this trend, registering only 74 articles. A majority of articles was published in the second half of the month, focusing on economic initiatives.



THEMES: Since January 2020, articles on military and economic stories dominated news coverage. However, we noted an increase in the number of articles focusing on environmental themes from July to October 2021. This pattern was not observed in November 2021, even with the COP-26 conference being held in early November. This event was not tied to the Arctic in the articles, generating little coverage in our sample.

Political, military and economic issues dominated the coverage. Economic stories were the most prevalent, mostly focused on energy, transportation (development of the Northern Sea Route), trade and tourism. Politically, several bilateral meetings punctuated the coverage, either of a political (when rivals were concerned) or economic (when partners were involved) nature.

NOVEMBER 2021		
1- ECONOMIC (26)		
2- POLITICAL (18)		
3- MILITARY (17)		
OCTOBER 2021	SEPTEMBER 2021	AUGUST 2021
1- MILITARY/POLITICAL (28)	1- MILITARY (31)	1- MILITARY (37)
2- ECONOMIC (26)	2- ENVIRONMENTAL (25)	2- ENVIRONMENTAL (29)
3- ENVIRONMENTAL (21)	3- ECONOMIC (24)	3- ECONOMIC (16)
JULY 2021	JUNE 2021	MAY 2021
1- ENVIRONMENTAL (30)	1- POLITICAL (58)	1- POLITICAL (54)
2- MILITARY (19)	2- MILITARY (56)	2- MILITARY (41)
3- POL/SCIENT (11)	3- ECONOMIC (39)	3- ECONOMIC (27)
APRIL 2021	MARCH 2021	FEBRUARY 2021
1- MILITARY (52)	1- MILITARY (46)	1- MILITARY (44)
2- ECONOMIC (45)	2- ECONOMIC (40)	2- ECONOMIC (20)
3- POLITICAL (16)	3- SCIENTIFIC (14)	3- ENV/POL/SCIENT (17)
JANUARY 2021	DECEMBER 2020	NOVEMBER 2020
1- MILITARY (23)	1- MILITARY (38)	1- ECONOMIC (37)
2- ECONOMIC (22)	2- ECONOMIC (37)	2- MILITARY (36)
3- ENVIRONMENTAL/POL (7)	3- SOCIAL (12)	3- POLITICAL (19)
OCTOBER 2020	SEPTEMBER 2020	AUGUST 2020
1- MILITARY (44)	1- MILITARY (58)	1- MILITARY (52)
2- ECONOMIC (29)	2- ECONOMIC (25)	2- ECONOMIC (17)
3- ENVIRONMENTAL (15)	3- SCIENTIFIC (13)	3- SOCIAL (16)
JULY 2020	JUNE 2020	MAY 2020
1- ECONOMIC (43)	1- MILITARY (46)	1- MILITARY (43)
2- MILITARY (36)	2- ENVIRONMENTAL (35)	2- ECONOMIC (26)
3- ENVIRONMENTAL (14)	3- ECONOMIC (28)	3- POLITICAL (11)
APRIL 2020	MARCH 2020	FEBRUARY 2020
1- MILITARY (37)	1- MILITARY (37)	1- MILITARY (27)
2- ECONOMIC (22)	2- ECONOMIC (21)	2- ECONOMIC (19)
3- SOCIAL (13)	3- SOCIAL (15)	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: Coverage about the United States did not decline in November 2021. Articles focused both on the Russia-US relationship and possible pragmatic areas of cooperation (on energy and border management for example) than on questioning the nature of and intentions behind US Arctic cooperation with Nordic partners, Canada and the United Kingdom.

Norway was mentioned in the first half of the month, presenting speculations on possible changes to come brought about by the latest Norwegian election. This consideration was quickly eclipsed by bilateral cooperation between Russia and India, Israel and China. The latter monopolized media attention at the end of the month, touting close collaboration between the two countries on energy matters.

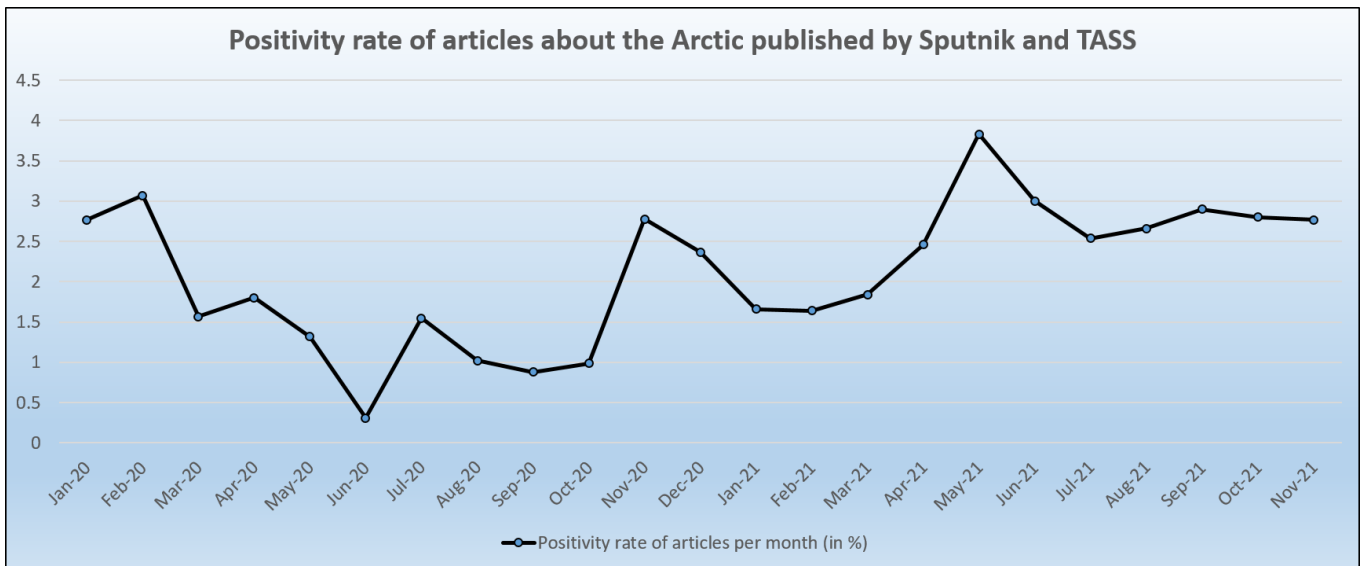
NOVEMBER 2021 1- UNITED STATES (14) 2- CHINA (7)		
OCTOBER 2021 1- NORWAY (8) 2- UNITED STATES (4)	SEPTEMBER 2021 1- UNITED STATES (10) 2- FINLAND (5)	AUGUST 2021 1- UNITED STATES (8) 2- UNITED KINGDOM (5)
JULY 2021 1- UNITED STATES (22) 2- UNITED KINGDOM, NORWAY, GERMANY (2)	JUNE 2021 1- UNITED STATES (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: coverage started to climb from the record low of June 2020, with a peak in May 2021, at which time Russia took the chairmanship of the Arctic Council. Positivity remained on a relatively high plateau in November 2021.

Two broad explanations can explain this outcome. First, several articles focused on existing initiatives (such as Novatek’s Arctic LNG 2 project and related Chinese investments) and plans for expanding cooperative ties with South Korea, India and Israel. These economic partnerships were casted in positive terms emphasizing the absolute gains that both partners will reap.

On the other hand, even bilateral relationships with traditional rival nations such as Norway, Canada, and the United States were framed positively, stressing the cooperative potential and areas of shared interests between Russia and these countries. Possible progress in the US-Russia relationship was presented, focusing on energy cooperation and follow-up consultations between the two countries to implement some of the promises of the June Putin-Biden Geneva summit. Potential improvements to the NATO-Russia relationship were also covered. This focalization on possible cooperation overshadowed articles criticizing rivals.



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 June2020. Hence, the closer you are to 0, the more negative the articles in a given month were.



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