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Protest in the Cathedral Square in Vilnius on June 14, 2022.

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**Embargo on Russian music in Lithuania during the Russo-Ukrainian war of 2022**

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Contents

[ABSTRACT 3](#_Toc107762545)

[INTRODUCTION 3](#_Toc107762546)

[GEOPOLITICAL-HISTORICAL FRAMEWORK 6](#_Toc107762547)

[THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: COLLECTIVE MEMORY, CULTURAL MEMORY, CULTURAL TRAUMA 10](#_Toc107762548)

[MEDIA DISCOURSE ANALYSIS 15](#_Toc107762549)

[2002-2012: WHAT IS RUSSIAN MUSIC AND WHAT DO YOU EAT IT WITH? 18](#_Toc107762550)

[2016 – 2021: PERSONAE NON GRATAE 22](#_Toc107762551)

[2022: RUSSIAN MUSIC – GO F\*\*K YOURSELF 26](#_Toc107762552)

[CONCLUSION: WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE? 31](#_Toc107762553)

[BIBLIOGRAPHY 34](#_Toc107762554)

[APPENDIX: TIMELINE OF LITHUANIAN MEDIA ARTICLES 43](#_Toc107762555)

# ABSTRACT

*The Russo-Ukrainian war of 2022 has spurred a widespread discussion about re-evaluating Russian culture in contemporary Lithuanian media. Russian music, which has been present in Lithuania since the Soviet occupation, is part of this discussion and is possibly facing a full cultural cancellation. Nearly fifty years of Soviet occupation have shaped the cultural and collective memory of Lithuania and with it, its attitude towards Russian music. Therefore this paper suggests that while an “embargo” on Russian music culture is considered a symbolic act of support towards Ukraine, the issue should be viewed in a wider framework that considers geopolitical and historical contexts from the perspective of memory studies. Based on a critical discourse analysis of Lithuanian media coverage on Russian music, this paper suggests that the embargo on Russian music in Lithuania entails distancing itself from the oppressor and from the cultural space that Lithuania and Russia once shared.*

***Keywords****: Russian music, 2022 Russo-Ukrainian war, critical discourse analysis, Lithuanian media, memory studies, collective memory, cultural memory, cultural trauma, musical diplomacy.*

# INTRODUCTION

On February 24, 2022, Ukraine woke up to the sounds of airstrikes and missiles launched by the Russian army. That same day Russia’s president, Vladimir Putin, declared his “special military operation” with the intention to de-militarize and de-nazify Ukraine.[[1]](#footnote-2) However, the rest of the world soon recognised it as an invasion of Ukraine and genocide against Ukrainians; especially after footage of the Bucha massacre emerged in the beginning of April. This war has invited all countries to reconsider their attitude towards Russia and its culture: is it moral to support the oppressor’s culture? Already on the second day of the war, February 25, Carnegie Hall decided to remove concerts by Russian conductor Valery Gergiev, who supports Vladimir Putin.[[2]](#footnote-3) Similarly, the Eurovision song contest decided to ban Russia’s participation after objections expressed by other countries.[[3]](#footnote-4) Other, perhaps even more interesting, cases on regulating Russian culture appear from the previous USSR constituents. Lithuania, one of the Baltic States that regained its independence on March 11, 1990, has been showing support for Ukraine and re-evaluating their engagement with Russian culture. An illustrative example of Lithuania’s prevalent attitude towards Russia, since the beginning of the war, is the approval from the Lithuanian Language Inspection for the public, uncensored use of the famous phrase uttered by Ukrainian soldiers on the Snake Island: “Russkij vojennyj korabl, idi nachuj!”[[4]](#footnote-5)\*[[5]](#footnote-6) Shocked by the Bucha massacre and applying this phrase to its practice, the Lithuanian Artists Association published an invitation to “close the sky” to Russian culture, claiming that its culture and art “identifies with these crimes against humanity.”[[6]](#footnote-7) The invitation was mentioned in a foreword of a free cultural newspaper, *370*, while discussions about the actual cultural embargo had moved on to Lithuanian mass media. However, the alarming situation of the influx of Russian culture, especially music, in Lithuania has been an issue years before the current war in Ukraine. Russian music has been associated with the past Soviet occupation that is still alive in Lithuanians’ collective memory, as well as Vladimir Putin’s political regime which is affiliated with the spread of Russian propaganda and Soviet glorification. Nevertheless, it is arguable to what extent such assumptions can be considered as legitimate because of the ambiguous nature of music: “music is perhaps one of the cultural expressions, as opposed to theater, literature or visual arts, which can be most easily void of any cultural symbolic value. (...) Music is also the one that can most easily pass for mere entertainment and mean nothing at all or may acquire multiple meanings consciously or unconsciously given by any social or political authority.”[[7]](#footnote-8)

 Thus, this paper aims to answer the following question: what are the reasons underlying the embargo of Russian music in Lithuania (based on local media discourses) and, consequently, what can they tell us about the Lithuanian identity? Due to the Soviet past that is still present in Lithuania’s memory, it is important to familiarize oneself with the geopolitical and historical framework (which will cover the timeframe from WWII until the 2000s) to understand this question. Since the research question juxtaposes Lithuania and Russian music, the chapter will also delve into the contemporary geopolitical interests of Russia in its former constituents. A theoretical framework of memory studies will act as a guide for looking at the past to understand the present. Here, the following concepts will be extensively discussed: collective memory as introduced by Maurice Halbwachs in 1920, cultural memory that was extensively discussed by Jan and Aleida Assmann in 1980, and cultural trauma and the role of intellectuals in its construction as discussed by Ron Eyerman. Furthermore, an extensive investigation entailing critical discourse analysis of Lithuanian news articles from 2002 until 2022 will be discussed in connection with the geopolitical-historical context and the theoretical framework. The Soviet past and political affiliations with Russia’s government that are frequently mentioned when discussing Russian music suggest that the embargo can be regarded as Lithuania’s disassociation not only from Russia as the current oppressor, but also from the once shared Soviet past thus clearly identifying the Lithuanian culture as different from the Russian. During the process of this research, an article by Emilija Pundziūtė-Gallois about the musical diplomacy of Russian artists in the Baltic States has been of a great assistance. In her work, Pundziūtė-Gallois also looks at some media coverings from Latvia and Lithuania that discuss and interpret the appearances of Russian music artists in these countries as representatives of musical diplomacy. She suggests that in a wider perspective this discussion rather asks about the identity of the Baltic public: “how do the Baltic societies see themselves?” In a certain way, Pundziūtė-Gallois question and the whole initiated work on the topic of Russian music in the Baltic States is continued with this research. Readers should be aware that throughout this paper, the term “Russian music” will be used in the same manner as it has been referred to in the Lithuanian media articles that will be analyzed here: music that comes from Russia. This generalizing notion of Russian music that has also been used by Pundziūtė-Gallois in her research, rarely appears in a specified manner, e.g. “Russian popular music” or “Russian classical music,” and thus shows the problematic nature of the topic. In order to portray the puzzling use of this term, the author has decided to use it as noted in the analyzed media articles.

# GEOPOLITICAL-HISTORICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter will provide a brief overview of the geopolitical-historical situation between Lithuania and Russia, which is crucial to bear in mind when discussing the embargo on Russian music in Lithuania. Even though these countries have a history that dates back to the 19th century when Lithuania belonged to the Empire of Russia and experienced russification,[[8]](#footnote-9)\* the timeframe that is relevant to this paper starts from the Second World War up until the 21st century. Memories from this period are still alive amongst the nation and have been experienced first-hand by grandparents of those who are currently in their 30s.

 Before the main historical overview begins, it is important to start with the end of the WWI, when Lithuania declared independence on February 16, 1918. The situation was favorable because Germany – who occupied Lithuania during the WW1 – was clearly losing and the Empire of Russia was going through several revolutions, a shift from the monarchy to a republic, and destabilization of the country caused by Bolsheviks. Lithuania’s act of independence not only declared the restoration of the state of Lithuania, but also the termination of any connections that Lithuania once had with other countries – mainly the aforementioned German occupation and previous dependence on the Empire of Russia. Unfortunately, the outbreak of World War II brought to Lithuania, as well as to the rest of the Baltic States, three successive occupations that aimed to destroy the Lithuanian identity and completely integrate the country into the Soviet Union.[[9]](#footnote-10) The Baltic States and Russia have different historical narratives in regards to World War II and the “inclusion” of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia in the USSR. The Russian historical narrative is based on the negation that Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany collaborated during WWII and claims that the Baltic States were “voluntarily incorporated into the USSR”, rather than occupied.[[10]](#footnote-11) Additionally, the celebration of the Victory Day on May 9 is described not only as the defeat of the Nazis, but as a liberation day of the smaller states like the Baltic region where the Soviet army is pictured as the savior. Contrastingly, the historical narrative of Lithuania and the rest of the Baltic States is based on collective victimhood: “[t]hey state that they suffered political, demographic, economic and social damages in the Soviet period when, at the end of WWII, the Nazi invasion into the Baltics was replaced by the Soviet occupation and accompanied by terror and deportation of ethnic Lithuanians, Latvians and Estonians to the Far East.”[[11]](#footnote-12) This claim is justified by the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact in 1939 which was a “friendly” division of countries between the Soviet Union and Germany. As a result, a dispute between Russia and Lithuania about their historical memory arises: while Russia is negating the collaboration between the Soviet Union and Germany, Lithuania argues that it did happen and that it led to the first occupation of Lithuania. In 1941 Lithuania was occupied by Nazi Germany which lasted until 1945. In 1944 the Soviet Union stepped back into Lithuania to push the Nazi army out of the country (hence the image of the USSR as the liberator) and, at the same time, re-occupy it for the second time. The second occupation brought with it terror, russification, a flow of Russian-speaking people to Lithuania, deportations to remote places in Russia (e.g. Siberia), and persecution of Lithuanian intelligentsia, just to name a few.[[12]](#footnote-13)

After the death of Stalin in 1953 the leadership was taken over by Nikita Khrushchev which brought “the opportunity for the development of the cultural life of the constituent republics of the Soviet Union.”[[13]](#footnote-14) The privatization that was implemented during Stalin’s reign was changed into centralization in economic, cultural and social life, which meant that national cultural and linguistic differences had to be replaced with the complete unity of the Soviet nations.[[14]](#footnote-15) This was achieved through the process of Sovietization:

“the imposition of a totalitarian system in politics, economics and social life, the extensive compulsory use of the Russian language at the expense of Lithuanian, the undermining of Lithuanian culture and national identity and the substitution of it with a superior ‘international’ culture, Russian, and finally the introduction of Russian and other non-Lithuanian personnel into Party, government and economic posts.”[[15]](#footnote-16)

During the ruling of the last USSR leader Mikhail Gorbachev new Soviet government policies were introduced: glasnost allowed “open discussion of political and social issues” as well as freer dissemination of information and critique on the government, and perestroika – restructuring of economic and political policy – resulted in “decentralized economic controls” and financial independence of enterprises.[[16]](#footnote-17) As a result, Lithuania started questioning “the very basis of Soviet rule and to seek political and cultural freedom” that was eventually gained on March 11, 1990, also known as the day of the restoration of independence of Lithuania.[[17]](#footnote-18) Pundziūtė-Gallois reflects on the restoration of independence as follows: “[t]hese countries [The Baltic States] did not simply ‘secede’ from the USSR, they claimed – and still do – that they had been illegally annexed. They restored their independence to come back to Europe, where they historically belonged.”[[18]](#footnote-19) Unfortunately this was not welcomed by the Soviet leaders and in January 1991 Mikhail Gorbachev sent an ultimatum to the Supreme Court of Lithuania with which he demanded immediate restoration of the Soviet Union and the Soviet Lithuania constitutions.[[19]](#footnote-20) The ultimatum was denied by the Supreme Court and Soviet troops were sent to Lithuania which resulted in the so-called “January events” between January 11 and 13, 1991 that have been commemorated in Lithuania ever since. During these events, 14 unarmed civilians died during violent encounters with the Soviet troops.

 After the fall of the USSR at the end of 1991, Lithuania saw a chance for a better future and started looking towards the West, which resulted in them becoming member of the NATO and the European Union in 2004. Contrastingly, Russia was not that optimistic about the fall of the USSR. It was even addressed by Vladimir Putin as the biggest geopolitical catastrophe of the twentieth century: “[i]t was a disaster for the Russian nation. Ten million citizens and compatriots were left out of the Russian territory. Moreover, the plight of disintegration is infecting the country.”[[20]](#footnote-21) One way that Russia aimed to maintain its dominance in the post-Soviet space was with the foundation of Russkiy Mir (“Russian World”, but – interestingly – “Mir” in Russian also means “peace”) which was established in 2007 “by a presidential decree as a joint project of the Russian foreign ministry and the ministry of education and Science”.[[21]](#footnote-22) With their official goal of spreading and promoting the Russian language worldwide, Russian experts compare the foundation to such organizations like the Goethe Institute or British council.[[22]](#footnote-23) However, scholars have noticed some critical points about Russkiy Mir. Michael Moser notices that “[t]he Russian language is a highly politicized issue in the post-Soviet context”[[23]](#footnote-24) and that it “is one of the most powerful instruments that has remained for Russia” as the USSR heritage and the factor for identification in the post-Soviet space.[[24]](#footnote-25) As noted by Moritz Pieper, the mission statement on the website of Russkiy Mir in 2017 stated its goal in reconnecting “the Russian community abroad with their homeland, forging new and stronger links through cultural and social programs, exchanges and assistance in relocation.”[[25]](#footnote-26) The Russian community that Pieper mentions exists mainly in the post-Soviet countries, one of them being Lithuania, where Russians are the second biggest minority after the Polish.[[26]](#footnote-27) In schools children can choose Russian as a second foreign language next to German and French. Therefore, as Van Herpen noted, while the foundation is operating worldwide with “the official goal of spreading and promoting the Russian language,” it simultaneously aims at “relaunching the idea of a common sphere unifying the former Soviet territories.”[[27]](#footnote-28) Pieper suggests that by preserving Russian cultural community, it distances itself from the Western world and thus creates a framework that binds together “identity politics and cultural diplomacy.”[[28]](#footnote-29) The language is what unifies people that belong in the Russian world which means that the Russian world extends as far as the Russian language is being used.[[29]](#footnote-30) The power that is given to the Russian language presents that it extends over the cultural exchanges and aims to build “the foundations of the new (nearer) Russian world” based on Russians living in post-Soviet countries.[[30]](#footnote-31) According to Pieper, “the Foundation’s focus on the Russian language is inseparable from a wider ‘soft power’ mission to further Russia’s influence to the extent that the promotion of language and culture is part and parcel of a country’s foreign cultural policy.”[[31]](#footnote-32)

 This chapter has reviewed the historical and geopolitical situation between Lithuania and Russia which dates back to WWII. It demonstrates that these two countries share starkly different historical narratives and future prospects. Lithuania had been exposed to hostile actions of the Soviet Union that aimed to weaken the Lithuanian nation and identity. Instead of seeing the USSR (and now Russia) as a savior, Lithuania considers the neighbor as a threat and the oppressor that imposed trauma on the nation through occupations, oppressions and other violent actions. The restoration of independence in Lithuania can be viewed in relation to the fall of the USSR and this connection is viewed differently by both countries: while Lithuania finds an opportunity to move westwards and further from its neighbor, Russia considers the fall as a catastrophe and is looking for a way to get back to the past. One of the ways is the Russkiy Mir foundation that aims to have cultural exchanges worldwide, but simultaneously is focused on the Russian influence through language in the post-Soviet countries.

# THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: COLLECTIVE MEMORY, CULTURAL MEMORY, CULTURAL TRAUMA

Having discussed the historical and geopolitical background of Lithuania and Russia, this chapter will focus on the theoretical framework of memory studies, particularly on the following concepts: collective memory, cultural memory and cultural trauma. Since the hypothesis of this research argues that the cancelling of Russian music culture in Lithuania is based on the past relations with the Soviet Union, the perspective of memory studies guides us into observing how the present is affected by the past.

 To understand the concept of cultural memory it is important to begin with the concept of collective memory. In 1920 Maurice Halbwachs introduced studies on *memoire collective* that serve as “the foundational texts of today’s memory studies.”[[32]](#footnote-33) According to Halbwachs, collective memory is a collection of individual memories that are dependent on the frameworks of social memory, that is: “the various groups that compose society are capable at every moment of reconstructing their past.”[[33]](#footnote-34) However, he warns that during the process of reconstruction, the past gets distorted.[[34]](#footnote-35) Halbwachs continues that people and events that retain pertinence even till the present day, become “transposed into a teaching, a notion, or a symbol and takes on a meaning. It becomes an element of the society’s system of ideas.”[[35]](#footnote-36) Mostly because of this reason the past cannot be separated from the present: “[i]n reality present-day ideas are also traditions, and both refer at the same time and with the same right to an ancient or recent social life from which they, in some way, took their point of departure.”[[36]](#footnote-37) In result, Halbwachs suggests that social ideas are basically a memory and “its entire content consists only of collective recollections or remembrances.”[[37]](#footnote-38) More specifically, only those recollections exist that a society could have reconstructed in every period according to the framework of that specific time.[[38]](#footnote-39) When reflecting on Halbwachs theory, Jan Assmann, who will be important in the following paragraphs, notices that no individual memory can either form or preserve itself without the social frame of reference.[[39]](#footnote-40) Memory of an individual is created collectively through social processes.[[40]](#footnote-41) Thus when it comes to remembering history, it is essential to understand that collective memory does not necessarily correspond with history. In his study on collective memory before and after Halbwachs, Nicolas Russell notes that Halbwachs treats collective memory and history as two separate notions, the former characterized by the lived past experiences of the group and the latter being more abstract as “knowing a list of dates (…) or abstract knowledge of the past”.[[41]](#footnote-42) In other words, it could be said that history is an abstract and broadly encompassing objective knowledge of the past, whereas collective memory has a stronger subjective feeling that each member of the specific group can relate to, which creates a sense of identity.

 In the 1980s collective memory experienced its revival “not only in the academic world, but also in the political arena, the mass media, and the arts.”[[42]](#footnote-43) Around that time major changes took places in political systems, such as the fall of the USSR, and such events brought back the importance of memory studies. Important recent authors in cultural memory are Jan Assmann and Aleida Assmann who took it a step further by distinguishing between communicative and cultural memory. The former relates closely to Halbwachs’ notion of collective memory, in that it is comprised of memories from the recent past that individuals can share with their contemporaries.[[43]](#footnote-44) On the other hand, cultural memory is focused on fixed points in the past that are remembered by “symbolic figures to which memory attaches itself (…) and that are celebrated in festivals and are used to explain current situations.”[[44]](#footnote-45) Jan Assmann notes that the distribution of cultural memory is controlled by gatekeepers, i.e. while it is obligatory for some to participate in the festivals that celebrate specific memory, others might be denied participation.[[45]](#footnote-46) The most important element in cultural memory is memory itself which is transferred through the process of socialization.[[46]](#footnote-47) Jan Assmann notes that “[d]espite the fact that it is always the individual who ‘has’ memory, it is created collectively.”[[47]](#footnote-48) Through the process of socialization, “[w]e recall not only what we have learned and heard from others but also how others respond to what we consider to be significant. All such experiences depend on intercourse, within the context of an existing social frame of reference and value. There is no memory without perception that is already conditioned by social frames of attention and interpretation.”[[48]](#footnote-49) Due to this reasoning, Jan Assmann considers cultural memory as one of the exterior dimensions rather than internal. He adds: “[H]owever, the contents of this memory, the ways in which they are organized, and the length of time they last are for the most part not a matter of internal storage or control but of the external conditions imposed by society and cultural contexts.”[[49]](#footnote-50) Accordingly, cultural memory encompasses “all such functional concepts as tradition forming, past reference, and political identity or imagination.”[[50]](#footnote-51) The ‘cultural’ aspect of cultural memory points to institutional and artificial realization whereas memory notes the relation to social communication which functions just like an individual memory does in relation to consciousness.[[51]](#footnote-52) To Jan Assmann, cultural memory is an “externalization of social tradition and communication”[[52]](#footnote-53): it is “a cultural sphere that combines tradition, awareness of history, myth in action, and self-definition, and that – a crucial point – is subject to the vast range of historically conditioned changes, including those brought about by the evolution of media technology.”[[53]](#footnote-54) Jan Assmann argues that there are no social groups that would not possess memory culture that “is concerned with a social obligation and is firmly linked to the group.”[[54]](#footnote-55) Because memory culture depends on various links with the past and thus contributes “to the formation of an identity, including the social construction of meaning and time,” the latter – time – is an important element in memory culture.[[55]](#footnote-56) Jan Assmann continues that it is important to bring the past into consciousness in order to be able to refer to it. This can only happen if the past has not completely disappeared and there is some kind of documentation that would denote something characteristically different from current times.[[56]](#footnote-57) Things from the past that still continue to live on in the present with the help of figures of memory like events, people or places, can be regarded as an act of resuscitation with the goal “to keep them as members of their community and to take them with them into their progressive present.”[[57]](#footnote-58) With this, Assmann takes the socio-constructivist perspective on the past embraced by Halbwachs which entails “[t]he past is not a natural growth but a cultural creation.”[[58]](#footnote-59)

 In the same vein, Aleida Assmann claims that in the framework of cultural memory, the past is not a passive relict that once happened and has been forgotten, but rather it is “a dimension of human experiences, memories, feelings, and questions of identity – all important and legitimate ties that intimately link the past with the present and the future.”[[59]](#footnote-60) In the introduction to *Is Time Out of Joint? On the Rise and Fall of the Modern Time Regime*, she argues that while “the future no longer serves as the Eldorado of our hopes and dreams,” there has been a remarkable comeback to the past, especially the past periods of extreme violence.[[60]](#footnote-61) She asserts that “the burden of the violent histories of the twentieth century weighs heavily on the present, demanding attention and recognition and forcing us to take responsibility and to develop new forms of remembrance and commemoration.”[[61]](#footnote-62) Aleida Assmann notices that since the 1980s, concepts of memory and trauma have (re-)entered Western consciousness which resulted in changes of insights, values and sensibility.[[62]](#footnote-63) The focus has shifted to the writing of history from the perspective of the victims, which means that the past is “recovered, reconstructed and reconnected to the present by various emotional, moral or legal ties as a response to past grievances and a form of taking responsibility.”[[63]](#footnote-64) Aleida Assmann notes that “the impossibility of separating past and present” that trauma is characteristic of, results in “new awareness of the long-term persistence of the past within the present.”[[64]](#footnote-65) By bringing the cases from past back to the present, claims about “unfinished business waiting to be addressed in the present” are being made.[[65]](#footnote-66)

 The concept of trauma that Aleida Assmann refers to when speaking of the periods of violence in the past has been analyzed in detail by Ron Eyerman under the notion of cultural trauma. Differently than a physical wound or psychological suffering experienced by an individual, cultural trauma stems from a horrendous event imposed on the collective – for example, a nation – “that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, making their memories forever and changing their future identities in fundamental and irrevocable ways.”[[66]](#footnote-67) When discussing the notion of cultural trauma, Eyerman also borrows a definition from Neil Smelser who defines it as “a memory accepted and publicly given credence by a relevant membership group and evoking an event or situation which is (a) laden with negative affect, (b) represented as indelible, and (c) regarded as threatening a society’s existence or violating one or more of its fundamental cultural presuppositions.”[[67]](#footnote-68) Since cultural trauma should be publicly accepted and believed in, its construction depends on social processes. In the chapter “Intellectuals and Cultural Trauma,” Eyerman discusses political assassinations as cultural traumas and their construction as such on mass media. He offers to look into the role of intellectuals – representative public figures that offer their opinion on the issues broadcasted through media – as their interpretation of an occurrence turns it into “an event, something not only meaningful, but also significant.”[[68]](#footnote-69) In the discursive process, intellectuals simultaneously play the role of mediator and translator – they enlighten the broader audience about the significance of the event rather than just a description of what happened.[[69]](#footnote-70)

 To conclude this chapter, the concept of collective memory can be regarded as a wider framework which describes how individual memories are created by social interactions and turned into social beliefs, which then offer members of the same collective a sense of identification. On the other hand, cultural memory is constructed institutionally and characterized by the use of figures of memory such as events, rites, commemorations, etc. Such a figure of memory, like the restoration of Lithuania’s independence, has been charged with different meanings framed by the changing social and historical context as well as how it has been perceived by others. Putin’s comment that the fall of the USSR was a catastrophe consequently considers the restoration of Lithuania’s independence as an insignificant event in Russia’s cultural memory. Relating to cultural memory, cultural trauma is a memory of a violent event that the collective has experienced and that has disturbed the foundation of its identity. Just like the other two concepts that are dependent on social processes, cultural trauma is framed as based on the interpretations that are applied to the specific event by spokespeople in mass media. In the following chapter which will delve into the analysis of Lithuanian media discourses on Russian music culture, all of the three notions will reappear.

# MEDIA DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

While this research aims to answer what the underlying reasons for the embargo on Russian music in Lithuania are, the hypothesis suggests that additionally to being a symbolic sign of support for Ukraine, the cancelling is also based on Lithuania’s historical and geopolitical relationship with Russia. Therefore, in this chapter, I will analyze media discourses based on a hand-picked selection of articles from Lithuanian news portals. This selection is made by searching for articles by using the following key phrases in Google search: “Russian music,” “Russian popmusic,” “Russian popculture”. Later, the search was complemented by searching for Russian artists that had toured in Lithuania until they got banned: “Filipp Kirkorov,” “Oleg Gazmanov,” “Gregoriy Leps”. The selection was finalized on May 9, 2022, with 29 articles from various Lithuanian news portals that were chosen simply based on the results by Google. The most articles – with a number of 13 – come from *Lrt.lt* which stands for Lithuanian’s National Radio and Television. It is the oldest news service that is owned by the state. It started with radio broadcasting already in 1926, television in 1957, and online news in 2000. Another portal that appears frequently is *Delfi.lt* with 7 articles. *Delfi* is one of the oldest and most popular solely online news portals that started in 1999. It functions throughout all the Baltic States and is owned by the Estonian media and publishing company “EkspressGrupp”. According to statistics by Gemius, *Delfi* had the most real users in May 2022 thus maintaining its position as the most popular news portals in Lithuania.[[70]](#footnote-71) The last news portal worth mentioning based on the found articles is *15min.lt* which started as a free daily newspaper in 2005 in the biggest Lithuanian cities – Vilnius, Kaunas, and Klaipėda –, and could be found in public places like public transportation or cafes, but in 2013 went fully digital. Nonetheless, in May 2022 it had the second biggest real users’ number after *Delfi*.[[71]](#footnote-72)

 The selection of media discourses will be studied by applying critical discourse analysis. This method helps to find out how the subject in question is represented in texts based on the use of linguistic choices such as vocabulary, argumentation, etc.[[72]](#footnote-73) Based on that, it will be easier to distinguish when authors are creating a collective idea of what Russian music culture is, within which context of cultural memory Russian music culture is framed in, and how past events are framed as cultural trauma and how they connect to Russian music culture. The analysis is divided into three subsections based on the following timeframe:

* 2002-2012: even though the mentioned news portals have been operating online since 1999, the earliest found result was from 2002. During this period, Lithuania became a member of NATO and EU in 2004. Meanwhile in Russia, Vladimir Putin was president from 2000 until 2008 and in 2007 the Russkiy Mir foundation was established. Finally, in August 2008, Russian forces began the invasion of Georgia[[73]](#footnote-74) that not only made it the first war in Europe in the 21st century, but also the first time after the fall of the USSR that the Russian military used “force against another sovereign country” that once belonged in the Soviet Union.[[74]](#footnote-75)
* 2016-2021: there were no results for articles from 2014, but the annexation of Crimea which happened in the same year is frequently mentioned. During this period the most significant political events in Russia were the presidential elections in 2018, the Moscow City Duma elections in 2019 and the constitutional referendum in 2020. Main actors here are journalist, “Putin‘s best-known critic,”[[75]](#footnote-76) civil rights and anti-corruption activist Alexei Navalny and Vladimir Putin. Even though the 2018 presidential election was won by Putin, it was accompanied by protests since Navalny was banned entry in the election in 2017. Protests also followed the Duma elections in 2019 that rejected the entry of independent candidates. Finally, the constitutional referendum in 2020 allowed “Putin to stay in power for two additional terms, until 2036.”[[76]](#footnote-77) Even though articles do not mention Navalny, Putin‘s name and support towards his politics frequently appear.
* 2022: on February 24 Russia invaded Ukraine. Pre-history of this war dates back to the annexation of Crimea and the war in Donbas in 2014. At the moment of writing this research, the war has been going for 4 months. In April, Lithuania decided to send out members of the Russian embassy, and in May the Lithuanian Seimas recognized Russia as a terror state.[[77]](#footnote-78) Since the beginning of the war Lithuania has been showing constant support for Ukraine in the form of protests and boycotts. Products of companies that have decided to stay in Russia are being boycotted, monuments that glorify the Soviet soldiers in WWII are being removed, people are writing “Russia” with a lowercase “r” and usually call them by a slur “russkis”, and Russian culture is being boycotted.

The analysis does not reference all the articles that have been found while conducting this research. However, the chronological overview of the articles that demonstrates the changing tone on Russian music can be found in the appendix. Titles of the articles are provided both in Lithuanian and English, whereas the quotes are directly translated to English by the author of this research.

## 2002-2012: WHAT IS RUSSIAN MUSIC AND WHAT DO YOU EAT IT WITH?

Articles in this period discuss the presence of Russian music in Lithuania as an issue. This period marks an uneasiness caused by “the increasing expression of the Russian post-Soviet identity” in Russia characterized by “restoration of Soviet symbols (the national anthem, for example), the Kremlin’s tighter grip on the interpretations of history, and general encouragement of Soviet nostalgia in which cultural symbols, especially those of popular culture, play a non-negligible role.”[[78]](#footnote-79) An interesting observation can be made that four out of seven articles were posted around commemorative days in Lithuania, namely Independence Day on February 16, the restoration of Independence Day on March 11, and victory day on May 9. The last date is a celebration of the Soviet victory in WWII that is usually celebrated in Russia with a massive parade in the Red Square and amongst the Russian community in Lithuania. However, as mentioned in the historical framework, Lithuania’s historical narrative does not consider May 9 as a celebration because the so-called liberation from Nazi Germany meant occupation by the Soviet Union.

 One of the ways that Russian music culture is addressed in these articles is as a consequence of the Soviet occupation. Based on the theoretical framework, Lithuania’s occupation can be considered a cultural trauma. Consequently, Russian music culture is charged with negative connotations that the occupation has left in Lithuania’s national memory. This statement is made by an artist and professor at Klaipėda University Steponas Januška in the article “Russian music popularity – Consequence of the Occupation”.[[79]](#footnote-80) Simultaneously, he argues that those who do not listen to Russian music associate it with the occupation which negates his previous point. While he also blames the flow of propaganda that came with the occupations, he says that “propaganda songs are aimed at the Russian market first and foremost.”[[80]](#footnote-81) While Januška provides a rather ambiguous answer, Gintaras Sičiūnas, president of hotels and restaurants association in Lithuanian seaside resort town Palanga, does not emphasize occupation as a terrible event. In the same article it is jokingly said that in Palanga during summertime it is easier to hear Russian music instead of Lithuanian. The first weekend in June of 2010 Palanga celebrated Russian culture days during which Russian flags were hanging and even more Russian music could be heard. Sičiūnas’ opinion on this matter is: “[t]his is how we honor people that come here from the neighboring country. It does not matter how we call them – occupants or not. 20 years have passed and we are free. At the end of the day, they are business partners.”[[81]](#footnote-82) What broadly seems to be a cultural trauma within Lithuania, here is disregarded by suggesting that the memory of the occupation should be forgotten since Lithuania is an independent country.

 Another framing of Russian music in Lithuania is based on the current geopolitical situation and information warfare. Arguments that authors are presenting are mainly focused on the concerts of Russian artists coinciding with Lithuania’s national days. Eugenijus Kiršblatas, author of an opinion piece “Nowadays Politics under the Mask of Pop Culture”, mentions the following dates: the Independence Day on February 16, the restoration of independence on March 11, the day of mourning and hope on June 14, the occupation and genocide day on June 15.[[82]](#footnote-83) Only the origin of the Independence Day does not date back to the Soviet Union occupation. The rest of the days mark the occupation that lasted over four decades during which Lithuania’s identity had been weakened through the acts of deportations, persecutions, and russification. The Russian historical narrative does not consider Lithuania’s national days as significant events, especially based on their narrative that Lithuania voluntarily entered the USSR. Therefore, concerts of Russian artists during the aforementioned national days are seen as not suitable in the Lithuanian cultural memory. On a similar note, the Lithuanian philosopher, intellectual, political theorist and commentator as well as a member of the European Parliament (2009-2014) Leonidas Donskis discusses the same issue. In 2005, a year after Lithuania became a member of NATO and the EU, Donskis published an article on March 14 titled “Information Warfare and the New Cultural Colonialism”.[[83]](#footnote-84) Here he also reminds us of the Russian band “Liube” and their tour in Lithuania that happened in March 2004, “almost during the festivities of March 11.”[[84]](#footnote-85) Donskis calls this coincidence “a mockery of Lithuania’s independence and freedom, disgrace and political scandal” since the band is described as chauvinistic and militaristic for its glorification of the Soviet war in Afghanistan and Russia’s war in Chechnya.[[85]](#footnote-86) Both authors agree on the fact that once the USSR dissolved, Russia needed to find a new strategy in order to keep their neighbors – previous constituents of the Soviet Union – close. In a way, the authors interpret concerts of Russian artists in Lithuania as “an invasion of Russian popsa,”[[86]](#footnote-87) the latter term used as a derogatory word for commercial Russian pop music of bad quality.[[87]](#footnote-88) Not to mention that Donskis chooses to call it an “invasion” that, first and foremost, describes forceful entering or attack of a foreign army.[[88]](#footnote-89) These militaristic and geopolitical frameworks that Russian popular music is situated in, contributes to the creation of Russian music – specifically “popsa” – as a hostile phenomenon in Lithuania’s collective memory. The attitude that Russian popular music artists are a part of Russia’s cultural invasion plan is reinforced by the titles of the following articles: “A. Valinskas: Russia’s Government Is Paying For the Russian Stars’ Concerts in Lithuania,”[[89]](#footnote-90) “A. Pugacheva Will Have a Concert in Lithuania on February 16”[[90]](#footnote-91) and “F. Kirkorov Will Go Through Fire and Water for Putin”.[[91]](#footnote-92) Mainly the titles of these articles repeat the same idea – Russian musicians are closely connected to the Russian government and their “royalties are distributed from a certain fund that is paid for by the Russian government.”[[92]](#footnote-93) It can be assumed that “the fund” is Russkiy Mir judging from the fact that this article was written in 2010 and Russkiy Mir was established in 2007. Irena Vaišvilaitė notes that the framing of Russian music as a “cultural invasion” is done by Lithuania’s political class.[[93]](#footnote-94) She continues: “We are truly between the East and the West. In the Soviet period orientation towards Western popular culture was the softest form of resistance.”[[94]](#footnote-95)

The discussion of the status of Russian music brings contrasting statements that can be found in the following articles: “Why Lithuanians Like Listening to Russian Music?” in December 2010 published by *15min.lt* and a quick follow-up on *Delfi* in February 2011 titled “Popularity of Russian Music – Consequence of the Occupation”. The latter article contains arguments provided by Steponas Januška quoted earlier in this segment. These articles can be read together not only because their titles seem to perfectly match, but also because they provide different voices describing Russian music, hence also providing specific connotations to the readers about Russian music. Lithuanian estrada[[95]](#footnote-96)\* singer Stasys Povilaitis argues that Lithuanians like Russian music because there is a handful of common features due to the neighboring with different Slavic nations like Poland and Belarus.[[96]](#footnote-97) Additionally, he describes Russian music as high class based on the concerts on Russian televisions: “Just look - what a script, what a scenography! We look like poor relatives with our televised options. When people go to Russian artists’ concerts, they believe that they will get a good product.”[[97]](#footnote-98) It is interesting that Povilaitis describes the high level of Russian music in juxtaposition of the humiliating attitude of Lithuanians who are, according to him, relatives of Russia. On a similar note, Januška also describes the popularity of Russian music amongst Lithuanians based on familiarity and, therefore, the appealing melodic aspect in Russian music.[[98]](#footnote-99) Additionally, he also mentions that “Lithuanian popmusic did not offer a serious alternative,” which, on a similar note like Povilaitis, considers Russian music to be of a higher value.[[99]](#footnote-100) Contrastingly, musicologist Viktoras Gerulaitis and tenor Virgilijus Noreika describe Russian music in derogatory terms under the subsection called “Lacks education”.[[100]](#footnote-101) Gerulaitis calls it “bumchik” – a jargon word for primitive, monotonous and loud music usually associated with people who wear tracksuits, use Russian curse words, and spend time in their cars to listen to it – and is amazed that “a countryside that saved Lithuania, plays only Russian ‘bumchik’.”[[101]](#footnote-102) Similarly, Noreika talks of Russian music as low quality pop music that is “forcefully” shown by the First Baltic Channel and played on “Russkoje Radio” (Russian radio in Lithuania).[[102]](#footnote-103) Interestingly, the First Baltic Channel was banned in Lithuania in 2022, as it was broadcasting Russian propaganda during the war in Ukraine. Finally, the article “Russian music popularity – Consequence of the Occupation” also characterizes Russian music in relation to low culture and education. First, it is connected with the image of taxis, which is allegedly based on the questionnaires filled out by the customers: “old, stinky cars, where they play Russian music.”[[103]](#footnote-104) Secondly, Irena Vaišvilaitė notices that a part of Lithuanians find popular Russian culture to be of a lower quality: “more primitive, oriented towards the people of primitive thinking.”[[104]](#footnote-105)

 Articles from this period serve as the base for how the discourse on Russian music culture has been built in the first decade of the 2000s. Russian music presence in Lithuania is considered to be linked to the previous occupation which can be viewed as, at least in the memory of Lithuanians, a cultural trauma. Therefore, the description on Russian music depends on one’s attitude towards the occupation. Consequently, it also hints at the politicization of Russian music since it is considered as a cultural invasion. The target of these articles is mainly Russian popular music that is addressed as “Russian music”. This results in generalization of Russian music as well as the simplification of it as “bumchik” and “popsa”, both of them regarded as commercial music broadcasted on Russian television and played in loathsome taxis and liked by audiences of low education contexts and primitive thinking.

## 2016 – 2021: PERSONAE NON GRATAE

Articles from the first decade of the 2000s have been discussing Russian music culture in a generalizing manner: they refer to it as “Russian music” while the focus is mainly aimed at Russian commercial popular music, and they argue that its presence in Lithuania is a consequence of the Soviet occupation. Based on the last argument, as well as comments about Russian artists’ concerts in Lithuania being financed by the Russian government as it was mentioned by Valinskas, arguments have been made to politicize Russian music culture in the coming years. Articles from 2016 until 2021 mainly target specific Russian artists and discuss the list of undesired people that is formed by the Lithuanian state institutions. Media discourses that frame specific Russian artists as “undesired people in Lithuania” based on their political background can be reflected from the perspective of musical diplomacy. Emilija Pundziūtė-Gallois in her article “Music that Divides: The Case of Russian Musical Diplomacy in the Baltic States” discusses the issue of Russian music in the Baltic States. She uses the concept of musical diplomacy, which is considered as such “when it [music] represents a cultural community and transmits a message, encoded in it, to other communities.”[[105]](#footnote-106) According to Pundziūtė-Gallois, “[t]he lists of undesired people are an especially illustrative example of how a private individual, a pop singer, can be attributed a representative (thus diplomatic) function.”[[106]](#footnote-107) By denying the entry of an artist, the state is labeling said artist “as a representative of a specific political view” when the reason for an artist’s arrival might not have been related to politics.[[107]](#footnote-108) Politicizing music means that the role of musician ceases to exist and they become “true political actors and even objects of bilateral Baltic-Russian diplomacy” because of the interpretation provided by “the influential public opinion formers”.[[108]](#footnote-109)

 This period starts off with the same tone that the previous subsection ended with, namely viewing concerts of Russian artists in Lithuania “like a planned attack of Russia’s popular culture.”[[109]](#footnote-110) An article that specifically tackles this issue is “Concerts by Russian Artists: Once They Start Spreading Propaganda, the Electricity Will Be Shut Down” from 2016. One of the spokespeople Ramūnas Trimakas, a historian, claims that touring Russian artists in Lithuania are a proof of Russia’s attempt to retain the neighboring countries in its area of interest.[[110]](#footnote-111) According to him, culture is Russia’s soft power tool that has not disappeared after the dissolution of the USSR: “[i]t is not a question of paranoia, but rather a question of healthy mind, that we would finally admit what our neighbors have been openly telling us for many years.”[[111]](#footnote-112) However, Trimakas disagrees on censorship of Russian music as people can sort out individually what to listen to. His opinion is supported by Lithuanian music journalist Ramūnas Zilnys who thinks that regulation of music export could be considered the most propagandistic action: “Russia itself would be happy about it, there would be TV coverings on this and people would talk about it for about half a year. It would be absurd.”[[112]](#footnote-113)

 Differently from articles between 2002 and 2012 that mostly generalized Russian music, articles in this period are discussing specific artists when they speak of Russian music. One of these is Russian rapper Timati who has been denied to hold a concert because of the following reasons: denial of Ukraine’s territorial integrity, justification of Russia’s aggression, glorification of Putin, support for Russia’s politics in Ukraine, and approval of Crimea’s annexation.[[113]](#footnote-114) Similar reasons have been provided in an article that discusses refusal of Oleg Gazmanov’s entry to Lithuania in 2016.[[114]](#footnote-115) The article also mentions Gazmanov’s song “Made in the USSR” that is performed in Russia during official commemorative events and that was performed during his concert in Lithuania in 2013. He explained that he “did everything so that the request to perform the song would come from the audience,” which made it sound like the Lithuanian audience did not find the reference to the period of the USSR offensive.[[115]](#footnote-116) Later, in 2019, an article on Gregoriy Leps appeared under the name of: “Arriving to Lithuania Gregoriy Leps – in the USA Blacklists: Why the Singer Is Liked by Russia’s Mafia.”[[116]](#footnote-117) In a way, the title warns readers about the artist who is coming to Lithuania and sets the USA as an example. The article explains that Leps acts as a courier of money in the criminal group “Bratskiy Krug” that is described as “one of the transnational organized crime groups that posed the greatest threat to American security.”[[117]](#footnote-118) Even though Leps has been denying these claims arguing that they are not proven and never will be, the article finishes by mentioning his sympathy to Putin and support during the elections.[[118]](#footnote-119) Lastly, Filipp Kirkorov, who was mentioned in the previous segment, has been included in the list of undesired people in Lithuania in 2021 based on the same reasons as mentioned in the article about Timati. Possibly, Kirkorov has also been included in the list because of his support to Putin which did not appear in 2021’s article, but was mentioned in the article from 2012. The inclusion of Kirkorov and Timati in the list of undesired people has been suggested by Lithuanian politicians. However, the ban of Kirkorov that was proposed by the Minister of Foreign Affairs Gabrielius Liandsbergis, received the following comment from Russia’s Minister of Foreign Affairs Maria Zakharova: “[w]e are very sorry that immoral Lithuania’s politicians are using culture to destroy a friendly attitude that Lithuanians have towards Russia. We would like to note that the repressive attitude towards the artists has become a real new signature of European democracies.”[[119]](#footnote-120) Her statement juxtaposes democracy with “repressive attitude” in order to bring out the lack of confidence towards Europe and trust towards Russia that she represents as friendly and apologetic for the actions of “immoral Lithuania’s politicians.”

 Lithuanian cultural memory re-appears in the articles from 2021 when discussing the ban on Russian artists. First of all, Lithuanian music journalist Ramūnas Zilnys emphasizes that Russian music artists should not be generalized because while some are openly supporting Putin’s regime, others are covertly mocking it.[[120]](#footnote-121) He argues: “it is important to notice that specific artists are being brought to our country during important or sensitive dates with the cover up that it is an accident, but we perfectly understand that it is not the case.”[[121]](#footnote-122) In another article from the same date, Lithuanian war historian and parliament member Valdas Rakutis reflects on the concerts coinciding on February 16 and March 11 as the following: “[t]he system is working against us, the system that encompasses culture, education, defense and others. If we do not create a similar system, we are constantly going to lose.”[[122]](#footnote-123) “A similar system” that Rakutis mentions is possibly the censorship of Russian music culture. However, the minister of culture Simonas Kairys in 2021 said that the ministry will not be censoring the list, but will consult concert halls and other institutions if they are unsure about the background of an artist.[[123]](#footnote-124) Provisions for banning an artist for possibly performing the role of Russia’s “soft power” include: “glorification of the Soviet past and Lithuania’s occupation, justification of the annexation of Crimea, projects that help forming historical consciousness and cultural identity that are close to the ideology of the Russian state, projects that bring people closer to Kremlin’s cultural and informational area.”[[124]](#footnote-125) Additionally, Kairys also adds to the list that it should be checked whether artists held concerts in the occupied territories in Ukraine, express homophobic or anti-Semitic views, or has been involved in sexual allegations.[[125]](#footnote-126)

 Articles from this period are aimed at specific Russian artists that have not been allowed to enter Lithuania based on their political views that correspond with Vladimir Putin’s political regime. The inclusion of Kirkorov and Gazmanov in the list of undesired people to enter Lithuania (interestingly, the inclusion of Timati and Leps has only been suggested) that is reflected upon in the articles refers to the case of musical diplomacy. Influential public opinion formers such as politicians or any other type of intellectuals that appear in media as spokespeople are interpreting the meaning of artists to a broader audience. Especially in the case of Kirkorov, involvement of the ministers of foreign affairs changes Kirkorov’s role from a musical performer into a political actor. Interestingly, artists that have been discussed in this period are associated with Russian commercial popular music. Such associations can also lead to generalization of all Russian commercial popular music artists as political actors of Russian music.

## 2022: RUSSIAN MUSIC – GO F\*\*K YOURSELF

The tone of media discourses on Russian music culture has been changing over the years as can be noticed from the previous subsections. While the first decade of the 2000s mostly discussed Russian music culture in regard to the social and historical context of Lithuania, the articles from 2016 until 2021 are framing Russian music culture within the contemporary political context. The politicization of Russian music culture has been growing gradually: a public opinion from 2002 and the piece by Donskis in 2005 considers Russian culture – thus including music – as Russia’s soft power, and in the period between 2016 and 2021 specific artists were banned entry to Lithuania based on their political affiliations. In 2022, with the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, the tone of articles discussing Russian music culture has reached the peak of politicization.

 Following the war in Ukraine, discussions on banning Russian culture which, naturally, also includes music, have been going on. The second day of the war, radio station “Raduga” in Klaipėda (city by the Baltic Sea coast that has the second highest population of Russians)[[126]](#footnote-127) announced that they will not be broadcasting “any type of production by the aggressor country.”[[127]](#footnote-128) Since the radio is aimed mainly at the Russian population, the language remains Russian, but contents will be providing information on events in Ukraine, Lithuania and the world while maintaining an objective and honest attitude as well as “following democratic European values.”[[128]](#footnote-129) According to the head of “Raduga”, Tadas Žemaitis, this change is meant to represent “the symbolic action of support for Ukraine and condemnation of Russia’s policies that violently breach international law norms and threaten the security of our country and Europe.”[[129]](#footnote-130) Following the war, Lithuania has been strongly supporting Ukraine in forms of weekly protests and boycotting products that are still selling in Russia. In the beginning of April, boycotts had moved on to the cultural level. Lithuanian journalist and public figure Andrius Tapinas invited Lithuanian towns to remove monuments that commemorate Soviet soldiers and celebrate victory of the Soviet Union in WWII.[[130]](#footnote-131) Likewise, on April 4, 2022, the Lithuanian Artist’s Association published an invitation to “close the sky” to Russian culture which was followed by “A Call to Close the Skies to Russian Arts and Culture” on May 3. While the invitation, also briefly discussed in *370*, a free newspaper which can be found in public spaces like museums or cafes, contains rather subtle and formal signs of attitude towards Russia, expressed by referring to it with the smaller case “r”, the call published in May expresses an attitude that is far from polite. According to the association, “[t]he dehumanized brutes, who with Russia’s accumulated aggression violated and violently slaughtered the innocent inhabitants of Bucha, Borodianka, Mariupol and other Ukrainian cities, present themselves to the world as being the descendants of the great Russian artists and as representatives of a nation which created global artistic values.”[[131]](#footnote-132) The call claims that Russia has used culture as a “soft power” tool for ages, even if artists did not agree with the government.[[132]](#footnote-133) With this “embargo” as the association calls it, they invite the public to think about the “colonialist ideas” that Russia has been spreading directly and indirectly up until now.[[133]](#footnote-134) The association suggests that no individual exceptions can be made “[i]n order to avoid the impression of censorship.”[[134]](#footnote-135) While they agree to collaborate with those Russian artists who have “unequivocally and immediately condemned Russia’s war against Ukraine,” the works will not be shown until the embargo is lifted, i.e. until the war in Ukraine has stopped.[[135]](#footnote-136) The call ends with a reminder that “[t]he Second World War was not a fitting time for the Allies to organize Beethoven concerts in the rear, and the present war is not the best time to put on the plays of Chekhov.”[[136]](#footnote-137) With this comparison, the Association presents Lithuania as Ukraine’s ally in this war, but most importantly it also calls a boycott on any Russian music despite its genre or artist’s political stance.

 While public people on social media platforms have been eager for the full cancellation of Russian culture (Ukrainian-born Lithuanian stand-up comedian Oleg Šurajev as the most prominent activist during the war), articles on news portals have been reflecting on the discussions spurred by this issue. One of the opinions is that there should be a division of popculture and high art. On April 6, 2022, Simonas Kairys, the Minister of Culture, has discussed the cancellation as following: “[w]e are solely talking about popculture and its representatives which does not have anything in common with some thinkers or other dissidents or protesters against Putin’s regime. We are not even talking about those artists whose lives are threatened and they could flee from Russia to Lithuania because of that reason.”[[137]](#footnote-138) On a similar note, Lithuanian playwright Marius Ivaškevičius argues that cancellation of the great classic Russian artists does not have as strong an impact on Lithuania as it could if it happened in Belarus, which is closely politically connected to Russia. In another article from April 5, director of Lithuania National Opera and Ballet Jonas Sakalauskas had a similar opinion when speaking of Tchaikovsky’s “Nutcracker”, but argued that the cancellation of “Swan Lake” had been done because “the ballet has become the symbol of the USSR.”[[138]](#footnote-139) On May 9, 2022, which is the victory day in Russia and is commemorated in Lithuania by the Russian community, *Lrt.lt* published an article titled: “Today More Inhabitants of Lithuania Are Condemning the Ribbon of St. George, But More People Are Lenient Towards Russia’s Artists.”[[139]](#footnote-140) The article shared two polls that presented the views on prohibition of St. George’s ribbon and prohibition of Russian artists having concerts, exhibitions or other events in Lithuania. Results for the former shows that out of 1009 correspondents the statement is supported by 67,3%: 68,9% of Lithuanians and 53,6% of other nationalities agree.[[140]](#footnote-141) Meanwhile, results for the latter poll argue that 58,3% support the statement and 25,3% are against.[[141]](#footnote-142) While 61,8% of Lithuanians agree that Russian artists should be banned from performing in Lithuania, only 29% of other nationalities agree.[[142]](#footnote-143) This shows that the prohibition has a higher support amongst Lithuanians than other nationalities which might be influenced by Lithuania’s historical narrative and the collective memory of Russian music as constructed by the public opinions in the articles from the years before. Associate professor of Vilnius University’s Communication Faculty, Mantas Martišius, argues that such an opinion is based on the belief that culture can be disconnected from politics, but, according to him, “life is holistic and politics equally influence culture, sports, and music. (…) singers and actors have massive audiences and their political stance – whether they agree or disagree – is a deciding factor on whether a part of people support or condemn the politics.”[[143]](#footnote-144) Another explanation of the result comes from professor Gintas Karalius, who thinks that “Russian popculture finds its audience in Lithuania because of the language and still familiar worldview and ideology.”[[144]](#footnote-145) Karalius explains the latter reasons as being “propagandistic histories of the Russian regime about the glorious Soviet past, traditional Christian or “macho” values in Russia, and the morally rotten West.”[[145]](#footnote-146)

 There are also two articles that comment on the cancellation of Russian culture from the perspective of Russian artists. Ivan Vyrypajev, who has been living in Poland for ten years and whose plays are now banned in Russia because of his criticism of Putin, has commented that “Putin destroyed Russia and its culture” and that Putin condemned himself to hell. Vyrypajev argues that “[s]eparation of culture and art has brought us to this horror and nightmare which is happening now.”[[146]](#footnote-147) He reflects that in Russia there has not been a time when there was no sort of censorship. He compares Russia to Germany after WWII when they had to bear the responsibility for the harm they did: “[t]hey [Germany] apologized, paid compensations, and Russia did not do that.”[[147]](#footnote-148) This could be understood that traumas experienced by the previous constituents of the USSR are still alive in their memories because the oppressor, i.e. Russia, refuses to address the wrongdoings as traumatic events. Vyrypajev places Putin next to Lenin and Stalin arguing that culture has always been used as propaganda and artists like Filipp Kirkorov and Nikolai Baskov singing in the background of the Russian flag cannot be considered as anything but propaganda.[[148]](#footnote-149) However, in a public letter from March, he asked not to generalize all Russian artists as bad Russians. He starts with the claim that

“there is no such thing as a ‘Russian nation’ in a social and political sense. 140 million people live in Russia’s territory – these are people of different nationalities and, most importantly, different ethnic and moral values. Such a unified concept as a ‘Russian nation’ does not exist. (…) To say that the Russian nation does nothing or that it supports Putin is equal to saying nothing at all.”[[149]](#footnote-150)

Furthermore, he asks: “what is ‘Russia’? Is it Putin? Is it his government? Those horrible people just cover themselves with Russia as a shield so that they could do those evil deeds that they are doing.”[[150]](#footnote-151) In this open letter he asks Lithuanians to remember the Soviet occupation in the light of the war in Ukraine – thus interpreting both events as cultural traumas for each nation – and therefore to not generalize Russians based on the war: “I ask you to not place under the same umbrella the communistic regime of the USSR, the Putinist government, and Russians who support the war in Ukraine together with those who have Russian nationality and speak Russian today and still stand just like you in the fight for liberation against the tyranny, evil and aggression.”[[151]](#footnote-152) The same he asks in regards to the classic and contemporary Russian writers and artists: “do not touch them with your justified anger (…) because they (we) all write and talk about the most important thing – the victory of Light against the Darkness.”[[152]](#footnote-153)

 The tone of the articles from the first half of 2022 are strongly influenced by the ongoing war in Ukraine that started on February 22 the same year. Three attitudes stand out of these articles: 1) call on a full embargo on Russian culture since it has always been a “soft power” tool that has been used by the dictators and their supporters to appear as a nation that has created global artistic values, 2) separation of the high art and culture with renowned classic artists from the commercial popular culture that is aimed at the masses, 3) reconsideration of what is meant with “Russian nation” and, consequently, separation of the culture that is created by “Putin’s Russia” from the culture that has been created by Russian speakers. As mentioned by the Russian radio station in Lithuania “Raduga”, restricting of Russian music is a symbolic action that shows support towards Ukraine. Consequently, it also means that Lithuania does not want to identify with Russia, a land remembered in Lithuania’s collective memory in connection to the cultural trauma of the Soviet occupation. Lithuania identifies with Ukraine which also left the Soviet Union in 1991 and has since been independent, and the war that the country is experiencing now and is going to be remembered as cultural trauma, reminds Lithuania of its own cultural traumas and past battles for independence.

# CONCLUSION: WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

This research has discussed the reasons for the embargo on Russian music in contemporary Lithuania during the current war in Ukraine. It shows that Lithuanian media has already been discussing the presence of Russian music in Lithuania for 20 years. The discursive field demonstrates how media has been contributing to the creation of a Russian music image in the Lithuanian collective memory. Interpretations on Russian music have been placed in a historical and political context. Described as “a consequence of the Soviet occupation,” Russian music has been construed as a contradictory topic in relation to the Lithuanian cultural memory. The Soviet occupation that is publicly accepted as cultural trauma for Lithuanians adds negative connotations to Russian music. Likewise, discourses around specific Russian artists as representatives of Russian music and their recognition as political actors given by their inclusion to the list of undesired people in Lithuania, has only confirmed the speculations of music as Russia‘s “soft power” tool in Lithuania. Therefore, the call for an embargo on Russian culture, including music, does not come as a surprise considering this progression. However, it does present the problematic aspect of the generalizing terms “Russian music” or “Russian culture”: is it regarded as high or low culture, is Russian commercial popular music placed as equal to Russian classical music, and is it Putin that represents Russia as a whole? Overall, what these articles have revealed is that Lithuania aims to disassociate itself from Russia. As noted by Emilija Pundziūtė-Gallois, differently from other Western countries, Russian culture in Lithuania was once a shared space “of which they [Baltic States] once were and of which they do not necessarily want to be any more. The possibility that Russian culture would not be seen as ‘foreign’ in the Baltic States, with all the consequences that this might entail, creates a sense of uneasiness.”[[153]](#footnote-154)

At the time of this research‘s finalization, Ukraine has entered the 5th month of war and the country has officially approved the censoring of Russian music that is “created or performed by those who are or were Russian citizens after 1991 (...), the year that Soviet rule in the country collapsed and Ukraine declared independence.”[[154]](#footnote-155) The discussed cultural embargo in Lithuania has not been put into practice, but widespread pictures on social media of destroyed buildings in Ukraine with the comment “great Russian culture” are daily reminders to stop appreciating Russian culture and start endorsing Ukrainian culture that has been underrecognized over the years. Even though this research did not discuss whether the term “Russian music” also can be applied to artists that stand against the war, it is an important issue that should be addressed in further studies, specifically in a discussion on the responsibilities and posssibilities of Russian artists in the highly controlled environment by the government. One of such bands, Shortparis, that has been praised for its critique on authorities in Russia with their music and imageries, has lately been receiving shaming comments under their pictures on social media such as “govnoedi” (shit eaters) and “Kolya made this song for himself, and not in support of Ukraine, and not as an action that will contribute to ending the war.” An insightful research could be done based on the audience and its interpretation and meaning-making of musicians like Shortparis: when does the image of an artist turn to opportunistic from previously regarded as criticizing? To what extent should an artist be regarded as the product of his/her/their country and government of origin? The answers lie in the ears and minds of their audiences that should be taken into account since that is where the process of music creation reaches its final destination.

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# APPENDIX: TIMELINE OF LITHUANIAN MEDIA ARTICLES

The analysis did not reference all articles that have been found. Therefore this list provides a chronological overview of the titles of all 29 articles that have been found on Russian music. The reader can observe how the tone of articles has been changing over the years.

**2002, March 12** (*Delfi.lt*): Šių dienų geopolitika – po pop kultūros kauke [Nowadays geopolitics under the mask of pop culture].

**2005, March 14** (*Delfi.lt*): Informacinis karas ir naujasis kultūrinis kolonializmas [Information warfare and the new cultural colonialism].

**2009, September 25** (*Delfi.lt*): A. Pugačiova Lietuvoje koncertuos Vasario 16-ąją [A. Pugacheva will have a concert in Lithuania on February 16].

**2010, May 7** (*Delfi.lt*): A. Valinskas: Rusijos žvaigždžių koncertus Lietuvoje apmoka Rusijos Vyriausybė [A. Valinskas: Russia’s government is paying for the Russian stars’ concerts in Lithuania].

**2010, December 10** (*15min.lt*): Kodėl lietuviams patinka klausytis rusiškos muzikos? [Why Lithuanians like listening to Russian music?].

**2012, January 6** (*Delfi.lt*): F. Kirkorovas už V. Putiną žengs į ugnį ir į vandenį [F. Kirkorov will go through fire and water for Putin].

**2011, February 20** (*Delfi.lt*): Rusiškos muzikos populiarumas – okupacijos pasekmė [Popularity of Russian music - consequence of the occupation].

**2016, January 26** (*Lrytas.lt*): Koncertų rengėjai: rusų atlikėjų vizitų Lietuvoje turėtų mažėti [Concerts organizers: visits of Russian artists in Lithuania should decrease].

**2016, July 1** (*15min.lt*): Rusų reperiui Timati Vilniuje užtrenktos durys: atlikėjas laikomas Kremliaus propagandos įrankiu [Vilnius shuts its doors for Russian rapper Timati: the artist is considered to be Kremlin's propaganda tool].

**2016, August 18** (*Lrt.lt*): Į Lietuvą neįleistas O. Gazmanovas vyko dainuoti privačiame vakarėlyje [O. Gazmanov was going to sing in a private party when he was refused to enter Lithuania].

**2016, December 6** (*Lrt.lt*): Rusijos atlikėjų koncertai: nuskambėjus propagandai jiems išjungtų elektrą [Concerts by Russian artists: once they start spreading propaganda, the electricity will be shut down].

**2018, August 13** (*15min.lt*): L. Kasčiūnas siūlo į nepageidaujamų asmenų sąrašą įtraukti dainininką iš Rusijos [L. Kasčiūnas suggests to include a singer from Russia to the list of undesired people in Lithuania].

**2018, September 27** (*Diena.lt*): A. Ramanauskas: rusiška muzika prilygsta viešam genitalijų eksponavimui [A. Ramanauskas: Russian music matches with a public exhibition of genitalia].

**2019, March 15** (*Lrt.lt*): Į Lietuvą atvykstantis Gregorijus Lepsas – juoduosiuose JAV sąrašuose: kodėl dainininką taip mėgsta Rusijos mafija [Arriving to Lithuania Gregoriy Leps – in the USA blacklists: why the singer is liked by Russia’s mafia].

**2019, June 2** (*Lrt.lt*): Rusijos galia – po pasaulį keliaujantys chorai ir muzikantai, kurių neįsileidžia vis daugiau šalių [Russia‘s power – around the world travelling choirs and musicians that are not allowed to enter more and more countries].

**2019, September 10** (*15min.lt*): Reperis Timati pašalino vaizdo įrašą, kuriame prieš rinkimus liaupsino Maskvos valdžią [Rapper Timati removed a video recording where he praised Moscow‘s government before the elections].

**2021, January 19** (*Lrt.lt*): Putino režimą šlovinantys Rusijos atlikėjai kelia aistras: vieni siūlo uždrausti jų koncertus Lietuvoje, kiti įžvelgia prisitaikymo poziciją [Russia‘s artists that are glorifying Putin‘s regime are causing stir: while ones suggest to ban their concerts in Lithuania, others see the position of adaptation].

**2021, January 19** (*Alfa.lt*): Seimas siūlo į Lietuvą neįsileisti beveik viso Rusijos scenos žvaigždyno [Lithuanian Seimas suggests to deny entry to Lithuania for almost all Russian stardom].

**2021, January 19** (*Lrt.lt*): Kirkorovas įtrauktas į nepageidaujamų asmenų sąrašą Lietuvoje [Kirkorov is included to the list of undesired people in Lithuania].

**2021, October 5** (*Verslo Žinios*): Kultūros ministerija kviečiamų atlikėjų sąrašo necenzūruos [The ministry of culture will not censor the list of invited artists].

**2022, January 24** (*Lrt.lt*): Viceministras: gyvename laisvoje šalyje ir institucijos neturėtų nurodinėti kokius atlikėjus kviesti į Lietuvą [Viceminister: we live in a free country and institutions should not give orders which artists should be invited to Lithuania].

**2022, February 25** (*Delfi.lt*): Radijo stotis „Raduga“ nebetransliuos rusų atlikėjų muzikos [Radiostation "Raduga" Will Not Be Broadcasting Music of Russian Artists].

**2022, March 5** (*Lrt.lt*): Atviras rusų dramaturgo laiškas: Putinas save pasiuntė į pragarą [Public letter by Russian dramaturg: Putin has sent himself to death].

**2022, March 19** (*Lrt.lt*): Iš Rusijos teatrų repertuarų skubiai braukiami spektakliai pagal Vyrypajevo pjeses, pastarasis teigia: „Putinas sunaikino Rusiją ir jos kultūrą“ [Russian theaters are quickly removing from their repertoires plays by Vyrypajev: “Putin has destroyed Russia and its culture”].

**2022, March 30** (*Lrt.lt*): Seimo narys siūlo Rusijos baleto šokėją Poluniną įtraukti į nepageidaujamų asmenų sąrašą [Member of the Lithuanian Seimas suggests to include ballet dancer Polunin to the list of undesired people in Lithuania].

**2022, April** (*370*): Rusijos kultūrai “dangus užsidarys” pats? [Will the sky ‘close itself’ for Russian culture?].

**2022, April 5** (*Lrt.lt*): Skirtingai vertinamas kvietimas “uždaryti dangų” rusiškai kultūrai: “Skeptiškai žiūriu į bandymus boikotuoti mirusius” [Differing opinions on an invitation to ‘close the sky’ for Russian culture: ‘I consider the attempts to boycott the dead with scepticism’].

**2022, April 6** (*Lrt.lt*): Ivaškevičius nepalaiko rusų klasikų spektaklių draudimo: palikit teisę žmonėms tą dangų virš savęs uždengti patiems [Ivaškevičius does not support the ban on the plays of Russian classics: leave the right to close that sky to the people].

**2022, May 9** (*Lrt.lt*): Georgijaus juosteles šiandien smerkia dauguma Lietuvos gyventojų, tačiau Rusijos atlikėjams yra atlaidesni [Today more inhabitants of Lithuania are condemning the ribbon of St. George, but are lenient towards Russia‘s artists].

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