



**Master of Arts Thesis  
Euroculture**

**University of Uppsala (Home)  
Palacky University, Olomouc (Host)**

May 2010

**The problem of National Stereotyping in the Swedish-Russian mutual  
perceptions: problems and possible solutions**

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St. Petersburg, 06 May 2010

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## **Introduction**

Our perception of somebody or something is usually subjected to a certain framework of values, beliefs and stereotypes that are enrooted in our individual or collective mentality. Stereotypes, or formed images, of the “Other” play an important role in everyday communication, sometimes predefining it in a certain way, and serving as a basis for prejudices. Still, we should bear in mind, that “stereotype” is not a negative term, but neutral, even though it itself is much more often associated with focusing on some derogative features. That’s why a discourse on stereotype-thinking leads to an outburst among groups or individuals, suspected of it, trying to defend themselves from this “accusation”. The point is that stereotyping to a certain degree is a natural psychological reaction, which, nevertheless, either being positive or not, leads to a narrowed perception.

The issue of stereotyping is interesting in itself, but the issue of national stereotyping seems to raise even more questions, as relations between nations are formed historically, during a long period of time. Of course, they are built on various grounds, like economic and political needs for interaction, but popular perceptions within the societies still are significant, as a negative popular view can be hindering development of a closer cooperation in terms of investments, education, tourism, cultural exchange. This is even more important between the neighbouring countries, like Sweden and Russia. What is also significant, that their mutual perceptions represent those of Europe, or the West, and Russia, on the whole, making this research useful in terms of outlining and trying to explain them.

Sweden and Russia have a long history of interaction, which more frequently represented the state of war and rivalry for regional leadership in the Baltic Sea area. Thus, the stereotypes that were formed in their mutual perceptions to some point reflect the historic events, but also include certain cultural descriptions. Some of them are still there nowadays, and are reproduced by the mass media, printed press and television, through the linguistic clichés and expressions. That is why in this paper in order to obtain an idea of the widespread national stereotypes about Russia and Sweden, analysis of how the major newspapers in both countries (mis)represent “the Other” was regarded as an important element.

The major issue dwelled upon in the given paper is to try to provide an explanation for the phenomenon of stereotyping in the mutual Swedish-Russian perceptions, by tracing down the reasons of their emergence and comparing the present day popular discourse. What is also important as to find out how and if those stereotypes historically established evolved into something else or have been subject to any change, whether they still prevail in the image of a not so far away “neighbour”. Especially as crucial reforms took place ending in creation of a new world order after the Soviet Union collapse. Still, many Soviet times prejudices are there, which made a wide number of researches take a closer look at the problem.

The goals of the research are to distinguish the most common national stereotypes; to overview the evolution of the stereotypes and outline any changes; finally, to compare the main trends in mutual representations with a focus on most problematic fields, and try to assess their influence on Swedish-Russian mutual perceptions.

The contemporary discourse could be grasped from the mass media, periodic press, in particular, whereas the historical overview of the image construction and stereotype formation could be traced by looking upon memoirs, travelling notes, and as a consequence encyclopedic

articles, providing descriptions of the country, its people and national character. Thus, the research goals define the choice of bibliography.

It should be underlined, that the term *discourse* understood in a classical definition by Michel Foucault refers to a body of shared knowledge about a particular in the world, which could be expressed in a group of statements (Foucault 17). Throughout the discourse, stereotypes are referred to as a common notion that a group of people share.

When speaking about the literature for this work, three categories should be outlined. First of all, the theoretical part on the concept of stereotyping and, national stereotyping, in particular, is primary based on the founding work on stereotypes – *Public Opinion* by Walter Lippmann (Lippmann), who introduced the term “stereotype” into the academic discourse, the researches by Michael Pickering, *Stereotyping: the politics of representation* (Pickering) and Charles Stangor *Stereotypes and stereotyping* (Stangor et al.), which both provide comprehensive analysis of stereotypes and various approaches. I would also like to mention the article by Barbara Törnquist-Plewa *Speglar vi varandra? Några funderingar kring de nationella stereotypernas beskaffenhet. ("Do we reflect each other? Some reflections about creation of national stereotypes")*, in which she also gives a substantial insights into the problem.

The problem of national character as applied to the Swedish-Russian relations is however not very common in the Russian academic literature. And most articles and almanacs on Sweden and Scandinavia almost do not mention it in any kind. Perhaps, the issue of the perceptions of Sweden and its image in Russia appeared on the Russian academic agenda only in the late 1970s, with the famous historian and Scandinavist Alexander Kan books<sup>1</sup> on history

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<sup>1</sup> See for example, Kan, Alexander *Den ryska synen på Sverige från Ivan den förskräcklige till tzarrikets fall. In Från stormakt till smånation. Sveriges plats i Europa från 1600-tal till 1900-tal.* Stockholm, 1995; Kan, Alexander *Shvecia i Rossia v proshlom i nastoyashem.* Moscow, 1999; Kan, Alexander. *Shvedsko-rossiyskie kulturnye svyazi. Tzar Petr i korol' Karl. Dva pravatelya i ih narody.* Moscow, 1999

of Sweden and Swedish-Russian relations, including the issue of mutual perceptions. Still, the most prominent research in the field belongs to Olga Chernysheva, as her fundamental works *Shvedy I Russkie. Obraz sosedya*. (“*Swedes and Russians. The image of a neighbor*”) (Chernysheva a) and *Shvedskiy kharakter v russkom vospriyatii* (“*Swedish character in Russian perception*”) (Chernysheva b) comprise memoirs and letters of Russian and Swedish travelers and public figures upon their visits or long term stays in Sweden starting from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. However, it should be outlined that Chernysheva focuses first and foremost on travelling notes and impressions, which do provide insights into certain stereotypes, but are specific due to the aims of the present research, aimed at studying general public opinion and the perception of Sweden in the social discourse, which is subjected to stereotypes and hence is formed by average Russian people who have only randomly or never been to Sweden, and vice versa. Although it does not decrease the value of these informative and substantive works.

If less studied in Russia, in Sweden, on the contrary, the problem of negative Swedish stance towards Russia, has been rather actively researched. From the Swedish perspective Sture Nilsson provides the most substantive work on prejudices against Russia. In his book *Rysskräcken i Sverige. Fördomar och verklighet* (“*Russophobia in Sweden. Prejudices and reality*”) he describes historical reasons for the Swedish prejudices and fears. Another fundamental research is presented in Torsten Burgman’s *Rysslandsbilden i Sverige* (“*The image of Russia in Sweden*”), where the author traces back the timeline of the Swedish-Russian relations, focusing on the Swedish suspicions directed at Russia. In comparison to Nilsson, Burgman does not touch upon the question of perceptions of the Russian national character or individual notes on it, but provides a historical overview. Still, mostly the focus is made on the political and economic relations between the two countries, rather than the mutual perceptions

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existing in their societies. Finally, another Swedish researcher and publicist, definitely worth mentioning from the perspective of this paper, is Ebba Sävborg<sup>2</sup>, who presents the contemporary picture of the Swedish-Russian relations in the light of the social and political discourse.

The aim of the presented research thus is to try to outline the national stereotypes, existing in the Swedish and Russian social discourse about each other, how they are reflected in the media, mostly, the newspapers articles and commentaries, and their role in the mutual perceptions. In order to do so, several research questions are being studied.

First of all, and, perhaps, the most important in a research on stereotypes, is what are the criteria of its definition, that is what is to be regarded as a stereotype and what is not. The main point here is that as a shared belief or stance, a stereotype cannot be said something representing a private or individual opinion as long as it does not follow the mainstream connotations spread within a given cultural and linguistic community.

Consequently the goal of distinguishing stereotypes defines the methodology used for conducting of the research for the presented paper. The primary method applied, thus, was discursive or contextual analysis. Focusing on linguistic entities, as clichés, idioms, as well as a wider overall context and connotations, it helps outline the ways the national stereotypes are expressed conceptually and linguistically both explicitly and implicitly, as embedded in the text. As a result, a selection of articles was made following a method of key words search in the electronic copies and archives of the chosen newspapers. The titles themselves were selected

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<sup>2</sup> See Sävborg, Ebba. *Ryssland under Jeltsin*, Stockholm, 2000; Sävborg, Ebba. "Ryssland – buse eller bundsförvant?" in *Världspolitikens Dagsfrågor* (2007:1) Stockholm : Utrikespolitiska institutet, 2007

following their number of printed copies and hence their popularity nationwide. While in Sweden this could be clearly seen as the two major quality press titles of “Dagens Nyheter” and “Svenska Dagbladet”, as well as the tabloid “Aftonbladet” enjoy the widest spectre of readers. The chosen newspapers, especially the two quality press titles, are good and reliable sources for analysis as they turn to the cross section of the country’s population, thus representing Swedish public opinion. Besides, they actively participate in the Swedish social debates.

In Russia the selection process has been more problematic due to various competing titles. The national opinion poll on the readers’ preferences was conducted in 1999 and, thus, is quite outdated<sup>3</sup> – that is why a special survey conducted in support of the thesis research was helpful in outlining the most popular titles. I will discuss the survey itself below. On the whole, the analyzed newspapers are respectful and meaningful actors within the national media area and quite comprehensively represent Swedish and Russian press.

Due to a significant volume of the available media information, otherwise, too wide to grasp, a time span of 3 years seems relevant for the review. Besides, despite a brief period, it has been rich in Sweden and Russia related events and reactions from the both sides.

The process of the newspaper material selection was oriented on the most characteristic articles telling about a “national character”, which in itself is a stereotyped notion, presenting an image explicitly or providing implicit assessments of the nation in question. Then comparing the analyzed literature on the issue and retrospective research of the traditionally established connotations to the information obtained through mass media, a conclusion could be drawn whether it represents a stereotyped vision. Because, if those opinions or expressions could be

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<sup>3</sup> “Bolshe poloviny rossian gazet ne chitayut” public opinion poll 11.02.1999  
<[http://bd.fom.ru/report/cat/smi/smi\\_print/of19990605](http://bd.fom.ru/report/cat/smi/smi_print/of19990605)> Visited on 17.11.2009



supported by other sources, relevant in terms of historical and social discourse, then it is possible to talk about a stereotype, and not an individual opinion of the author.

As it follows from the above, besides the discursive analysis the methodology included the comparative and retrospective analyses. As in order to get a full picture of the mutual perceptions evolution, or at least as full as possible within the framework of the given paper, it is important to trace down the historically established patterns of perception, the repeating and common places, which later evolved into traditional stereotypes, widespread in the contemporary political and popular discourse. By their further comparison a conclusion could be made of the stereotyping stability or instability, of whether they have survived with a change of the political setting. Moreover, comparison of the prevailing stereotypes in the mutual perceptions is indicative of certain potential problems in the bilateral relations due to distorted or inadequate vision of the “Other”.

As a part of the media analysis for the paper, a video clip released by one of the Swedish music bands in the run-up to the annual Eurovision Song Contest, held in Moscow last year, was examined, as it was based on popular Swedish stereotypes about Russia, and seemed to be appropriate to analyze, along with a similar response from the Russian side, serving as an example of the national stereotypes influence in the public discourse.

It is noteworthy, that there is not much information to be found on the issue of popular perceptions, that is opinion polls designed to research the widespread notions on the nation in question – Russian polls about Sweden and Swedish polls on Russia accordingly. Even though there was a survey about Russians’ image of Sweden conducted in 2001 by the Russian Public opinion research agency “Public Opinion Fund” (“Фонд Общественное мнение”), which is rather informative and relevant, some additional and up-to-date information was lacking. Besides, no corresponding poll could be found in Sweden, at least easily accessible. As a

consequence I decided to conduct my own survey on the perceptions of Russia and Sweden oriented mostly at the younger people, as they are regarded as more proactive and reflective in terms of popular images, meaning that they are both the recipients and the reproducers of the perceived stereotypes to a greater degree, than the other age categories. Practically they were also more easily reached through the Internet means (e-mails, social networks, web-sites, designed for conducting online polls), which is very efficient both time and logistics wise. The survey was focused on the primary associations with Sweden and Russia, their personalities and trademarks. Moreover, a question on the preferred media was included in order to obtain a spectre of newspapers to analyze. Thus, sociological methods were also applied for the given research, as all stages of conducting the survey from designing the questions and selecting the respondents to the analysis of the results.

The paper consists of three chapters. The first one is a theoretical part devoted to the notion of a stereotype and further discusses national stereotyping as a universal phenomenon, which plays an important part in the national perceptions. The second part is dealing with the historical evolution of (mis)representations of the both nations in the social and political discourse. The Swedish-Russian relations are depicted, for many of the stereotypes commonly used now are enrooted in the past, most notably, “rysskräcken”, and the bilateral relations and historical development formed a basis for national stereotyping. Finally, in the third chapter as an empirical part, analyzes the cases of national stereotyping in Swedish and Russian contemporary popular discourse and media. Conclusions on about the the most prominent discourse practices in terms of stereotypical representations and their influence on the mutual perceptions are drawn.

## **Chapter 1.**

### **National Stereotyping: definition, origins, approaches and a social role.**

The research on stereotypes is growing steadily and has gained weight in various disciplines. The concept of stereotype is quite widespread and could be found in psychology, sociology, social linguistics, ethnic and cultural studies, intercultural communication theory. There are many theories and approaches, trying to explain the emergence of stereotypes, their social and political role, as well as their development and influence on the social discourse and even political processes.

It is the political perspective that first and foremost made the academic community and publicists take a closer look at national stereotyping, or creation of stereotypes about a given ethnic or national group, due to the potential threat that stereotypes, often mixed with prejudices, might imply. However, the notion of national stereotyping, as well as a broader one of a stereotype itself is much more complex and ambivalent.

#### **1.1. The concept of stereotype**

The first thing to do in order to analyze the concept of stereotype, is, perhaps, to look upon the term's etymology. Originally it comes from typography, where "*stereotypes*" (stemming from Greek *στερεός* "solid, firm" and *τύπος* "impression, engraved mark") were a technical term for typical printing shapes. In its contemporary meaning the term "stereotype" was introduced into the academic discourse by a journalist and sociologist Walter Lippmann in

1922 in his work “Public Opinion”, where he used it as a metaphor to describe “a pattern of perception, filtration and interpretation of information about the world, adopted in a social group”(Lippmann 78).

Most commonly stereotypes are regarded as simplified, standardized notions, evaluating certain social and other phenomena. (McGarty 159) However the debate continues on how those constructions emerge. Classically stereotypes were considered as stemming from the activities of either authoritarian (Adorno et al. 260) or prejudiced (Allport 340) personalities, though at the present moment the substantial diversity of the research on stereotypes could be divided into two major trends in describing stereotypes - a cognitive and a socio-cultural approaches.

The cognitive approach depicts the nature of stereotypes as lying in individual mental processes. Lippmann outlined stereotypes as certain “pictures in our heads”, mental structures that people create in order to analyze the overflow of information they get every day, and hence a human mind has a limited ability to deal with “the great blooming, buzzing confusion of the outer world” (Lippmann 80), some solid reference points are needed. Stereotypes provide such references, serving as energy saving cognitive elements, as without generalizing, people would be lost in a world filled with many unique things.

According to social psychology, stereotypes are an integral part of human life, forming preconceptions, based on social experience, that represent “stored knowledge structures”, which meaning is defined before activation (Hilton and von Hippel 240). Another similar explanation of the stereotypes’ origin is the “natural need” for categorization, which is not only energy saving, but psychologically necessary for constructing our view of the world (Pickering 9). Finally, as stereotypes represent a simplified image of reality, they provide an individual or a group with a feeling of “cognitive control over the world” (Törnquist-Plewa 5), and thus a sense of security. Thus, within the cognitive approach stereotyping is an objective

psychological process, playing a functional adaptive role in social perception by producing a set of associations.

The cognitive approach considers stereotypes rather as individual mental constructs, independent or not necessarily dependent on any social context or influences, but more psychologically driven. The socio-cultural approach, on the opposite, focuses on the collective side of stereotyping, depicting stereotypes as notions and social constructions, shared by a certain group, as a result of human interaction. This trend in stereotype studies seems more natural, for, as a rule, the concept of stereotype is rarely applied abstractly, but rather in reference to some group. Here it signifies “a set of associations as a relatively enduring system of interrelated concepts, linking a target group to a number of descriptive characteristics” (Stangor et al. 10). Besides, as personal experience allows to comprehend only a small part of all the phenomena that define a human life, reality is not as a much a world outside, but those “pictures in our heads” as a helpful means to deal with slipping reality, which are constructed primarily by a society (McGarty 130). To a certain degree, stereotypes could be said to represent a kind of a social myth, as it “does not conceal or show anything, but deforms, its tactics is neither lie or truth, but deviation” (Barthes 255). Stereotypes make these social myths a part of common knowledge, something taken for granted or “common sense”, which as a consequence becomes legitimized and expressed in a form of idioms or clichés (Bragina 349).

Still, it is worth to remark, that a choice of an approach and an explanation of the nature of stereotypes rather depends on a discipline and an object of the research, which sets a framework for the stereotype studies. Thus whether a goal is to study behavior of an individual within psychological research, the cognitive approach seems to be more relevant, while for social and political sciences, the socio-cultural one would be thought of as more appropriate. In the given paper the latter approach thus is suitable, as speaking about one group’s perceptions about another and the prevailing images spread in and by the media (and hence in the society),

is more of a social and cultural phenomenon than that of an individual level. On the other hand, as Barbara Törnquist-Plewa stresses, it is more fruitful to combine the two from the research perspective (Törnquist-Plewa 1). The “founding father” of stereotype research Walter Lippmann himself could not be said to belong to a certain trend either, as he speaks both of individual mental images and collective perceptions.

The use of the term “stereotype” is sometimes a dilemma, because of the common belief (or a stereotype in itself), that stereotypes are pejorative perceptions of the other group, and thus are negatively loaded. The problem of differentiation between the two concepts is quite prominent, as basically the research of stereotypes started as a consequence of the research of prejudices, and even now stereotypes are generally, sometimes even in academic circles, regarded as prejudices. This leads to stereotypes being depicted as false, confusing and therefore dangerous notions. Amossy and Herschberg-Pierrot also point out the conceptual difference between stereotypes and prejudices. A stereotype is a widespread collective image of a group, a set of characteristic features associated with it, whereas a tendency to judge unfavourably about a member of a group based only on a fact of their belonging to it, is a prejudice (Amossy and Herschberg-Pierrot 35). Thus a prejudice is first and foremost a negative and emotionally loaded category, whereas a stereotype is defined as roughly simplified and generalized notion of specific features adherent to all belonging to a certain group. Stereotypes thus could be negative (for example, “Russians are alcoholics”), positive (“Swedes are beautiful”) and neutral (“Swedes are blond”). Moreover, even prejudices, according to the Oxford Dictionary of Sociology, are defined as a preconceived opinions or biases, which could be positive as well as negative (Oxford Dictionary of Sociology 547). Negative stereotypes actually form a basis for prejudices, but on the whole they do not automatically transfer into prejudices.

Still the negative consequences of stereotype-thinking could be seen in the imbalanced images it creates. Stereotypes always have descriptive and informative components, but the presented information is often not reliable, as in fact stereotyping is a one-sided representation (Pickering 3), a reduced image of reality. So, described as outdated simplifications, generalizations, and distorted ideas, based on impressions instead of facts, stereotypes are generally viewed as essentially wrong and unfair. Besides, stereotypes have an assessment element, which is not only evaluates a phenomenon, but also indicates a certain “direction” of the evaluation. These features of stereotypes led to a commonly spread negative perceptions of stereotypes themselves and active discussions on attempts to overcome them (Romashko 223).

Nevertheless, it would be hardly right to say, that stereotyping is a process of attributing descriptions, completely non adherent to a group or phenomenon (Manis, Nelson et al. 30). According to Ageev, the process of stereotyping is even necessary and useful for intergroup communication, which does not contradict the negative view on stereotypes as hostile constructions, because there are both psychological and sociological levels of comprehending, and we should not forget about their cognitive function which helps understanding the world, and the adaptive one, helping to predict others’ behaviour (Ageev 19). Already Lippmann mentioned that, even though stereotypes do not present a complete picture, the one they do present is “a picture of a possible world to which we are adapted”, where everything is in a certain well-known order and meets expectations, so that people “know their way around” (Lippmann 95). Thus, even if stereotypes produce a distorted image, they contribute to faster comprehension of unknown cultures or phenomena. Besides, most often stereotypes are not correlated to personal experience, and at the present moment it is mostly the mass media that are the major source of stereotyping.

Another characteristic feature of stereotyping is their high endurance. As follows from the term's original meaning, stereotypes are meant to be stable and inflexible, which implies that these structures, already created, are supposed to be maintained (Pickering 27) and are hard to change.' It is important to bear in mind, that stereotypes have a verbal nature, meaning that they are first and foremost represented in a language as established phrases or notions. They could be either idiomatic expressions, widely known within the given linguistic or ethnic group, or notable historic dates. That verbal nature contributes to the stereotypes' continuity, for to a high degree they are imbedded in a language, which is actually structuring our thoughts, thus are being held in the group memory. As they are quite deeply enrooted in our mentality, stereotypes are not easy to eradicate. Names or "etiquettes" attributed to a social group automatically evoke negative or positive associations, linked to linguistic clichés, and this happens before we could even think about the content (Gilbert and Hixon 511). Such stereotypes tend to prevail even if confronted with personal experience (Gilbert and Hixon 517). As would be illustrated further this is very visible in the perceptions of Sweden in Russia, where a number of idioms with an epithet "Swedish" are quite widespread. Besides the essence of a stereotype as an element of cultural tradition – and language is in no doubt a great part of it - is its reproduction in social perception (Babushkin 24). Stereotypes penetrate the perceptions of a social group, being a kind of "background knowledge" (Dekinova 15), so that the person is not referring to them deliberately. They just always are there and are reflected in the behavior mode, in intercultural contacts and discourse, namely in the media.

Opposing to characterizing stereotypes as enduring, a number of researchers stress that stereotypes are "highly context-dependent and vary according to the frame of reference" (Reigrotski and Anderson 521), which is especially the case in national stereotyping, as the content of national stereotypes was different when the number and nature of the nations to be judged changed (Diab 36). In other words, if the emotional element of stereotyping do not



always stay stable, because the emotional assessments change more frequently, the descriptive, cognitive part remains for longer periods.

Nevertheless, though stereotypes partly disappear when a conflict situation ends, as they are very slow to change, those created under different circumstances and periods of time, could coexist side by side, despite the fact that sometimes there could appear an apparent contradiction (Törnquist-Plewa 9). Then in various situations people tend to refer to the stereotype which they think fits best, and other notions are not taken into account. This is the case with the image of Sweden in Russia, first being derogatory descriptions of the war rivals, Swedes now are commonly regarded very positively, though some implications to the past rivalries are made from time to time.

To sum up, the process of stereotyping, despite the attempts to regard it either as cognitive or socio-cultural alone, is more comprehensible when all the factors influencing it are taken into consideration. It is both a result of unconscious collective perception and individual socio-cultural environment. Though, in the case of social stereotypes, it is the latter factor that plays a central role, for psychological processes are merely mechanisms of stereotyping, whereas the content is determined by social factors (Nisbett and Wilson 240). Besides, as was already mentioned above, mass media now are having more and more impact on stereotyping, whether it is stereotypes' emergence (for example, as a consequence of deliberate ideological policy), reproducing or maintaining. Moreover, mass media contributes to the vividness of the image presented. As a rule, stereotypes could be said not only oversimplified, but also filtered through some subjective judgments and sometimes emotionally loaded (Törnquist-Plewa 2-3), established in the human mind. And it was Lippmann's concept major sociological advantage to stress the special role of emotional and irrational factors, that form public opinion (Nisbett and Wilson 251). Representing insider assessment models, rather than standardized notions

stereotypes are thus capable of transforming into prejudices and xenophobia (Devine 13). And the most prominent example for this is social stereotypes, especially those, directed against an ethnic group or a nation, that is national stereotypes.

### **1.2. The concept of national stereotyping.**

As it was already mentioned above, most stereotypes, though not all, have a social nature. They originate and are reproduced within a certain social group, for example an ethnic group or a nation, for certain biased perceptions about various kinds of groups (ethnic, social, professional or age ones) exist in every society.

Group stereotyping could be directed both inwards and outwards, presenting common beliefs about the group, one belongs to (autostereotypes), or one is somehow opposed (heterostereotypes). This kind of stereotyping plays a significant role in one nation's perceptions of the other ones. As a rule, they focus on other nation and its members' behaviour, generalizing it and approaching the group as a homogenous whole. Thus, national stereotypes are collective notions of one ethnic entity about another, which means that an individual perception or judgment of a nation or an ethnic group is not a national stereotype, as long as it is not widespread and reproduced in the society (Törnquist-Plewa 8).

It is noteworthy, that the importance of learning about national stereotypes can be said to be put on the agenda when UNESCO held its first research in 1948 as an attempt to study national stereotypes of the Germans and the French by themselves and other nations (Reigrotski and Anderson 516), followed by numerous attempts to describe and measure stereotypes, existing among the nations, especially the neighbouring ones.

Social psychological analyses of such perceptions often focus on the issue of contact and on whether this has positive or negative consequences. National stereotypes, as a rule, reflect cultural differences and the previous communication experience, and the closer and longer established the contacts are, the more complex is the system of stereotypes. The rise of stereotyping occurs either in competitive situations or in case of dominant or superior relations, for a dominant group then would try to keep its superior position over the subordinate (Salazar and Marin 16). A general assumption thus is that in a state of confrontation, the parties involved would try to depict each other in a deteriorating way. As a sense of threat releases defensive feelings, and the juxtaposition of “us” versus “them” becomes quite visible. Nevertheless, drastic conflicts are not a necessary prerequisite for stereotyping, as it could be caused by minor ones, like competition, interest or cultural conflicts, as well. This fits quite well in the mutual perceptions of Russia and Sweden, due to a long history of rivalry, both militant and “peaceful”.

On the other hand, it is not a conflict which is a reason, but rather a sense of belonging to a group, that the conflict produces, which can lead to unfavourable images of “the Other”. National stereotyping has a certain social function: it actually integrates the members of a group that shares these stereotypical beliefs the same way as common symbols, myths and ideologies. A member of a nation could demonstrate their national belonging by showing that they share those stereotypes and thus is accepted as “one of us”. (Törnquist-Plewa 7)

Within the neighbouring nations stereotyping could be caused by what Ivar Neumann has called a “formative antipode” concept: close neighbours tend to have a need to differentiate from one another by forming an opposite image of oneself (Neumann 315). Distinguishing “the Other”, however, does not necessarily imply a hostile stance, as it is the direction of relations between the nations, that defines the assessment of qualities adherent to different

nations. Often what is regarded as a positive feature of one group (most likely the group one belongs to) could be considered a vice of another. This reverse reflection of each other's qualities in the process of stereotyping serves as basis for different methods to study the emotional component of stereotypes and the progress of the intergroup relations (Shlyahin and Davidodov 138). Sociological functions of national stereotypes, implemented in raising a group's self esteem through comparing the self image to that of the neighbor, highly contribute to their endurance in mass mentality.

Mutual perceptions in a form of national stereotypes could be influenced by a number of factors, such as generalizations based on observations of the personality traits of individual members of the stereotyped group. However, focusing on social, physical, and mental characteristics, national stereotypes rather represent social constructions, than a result of accumulated empirical knowledge. As was discussed above, they could be formed by comparisons or contrasts with geographically close or competing cultures, referring to the national ethos, socioeconomic conditions, history, customs, myths, legends, or values. In a nation's perception of the other nation the most prominent and unusual features, visible in cultural, communicative and behavioural traditions, are highlighted. Thus, the unique features of the stereotyped group in comparison to one's own could be said a determinant for national stereotypes' component (Peabody 127). So, stereotypes about the others could tell a lot about the stereotyping nation itself, as they implicitly disclose the group's own "fears" and hidden national "complexes". In other words, autostereotypes formed as an outcome of one's own culture has an antithesis in form of a negative heterostereotype, or Neumann's "formative antipode". Folk culture is the brightest example, as it usually is not only ethnocentric, but even xenophobic (Shlyahin and Davidodov 140).

Inadequacy of mutual perception, miscomprehension of each other's behaviour and attributing of negative stereotypes to the members of other groups is one of the major problems

in relations between large social groups. National stereotypes usually highlight one or a set of features, leaving out the context, and extrapolate those on a community, presenting, or rather, misrepresenting it as a homogeneous. However, for interethnic or international relations to be steadily positive in various areas, there should be a realistic perception of each other. That is why a substantial amount of literature has been devoted to the issue of the stereotypes' accuracy and their correspondence to reality, or the lack of it. Do national stereotypes derive, at least partially, from the observations and experience or are some imaginary structures? According to the social psychology traditional view, national stereotypes lack accuracy. Quite often they are perceptions of a national group that has very few, if any, contacts with local population, and as imaginary constructions that do not or only to a small degree reflect the reality, stereotypes keep reappearing in the media (Amossy and Herschberg-Pierrot 37). Nevertheless, a direct observation is not enough to eliminate or confirm the existing stereotypes, as we already view "the Other" through the collective image prism, imbued in our mind. Quoting Lippmann,

"we pick out what our culture has already defined for us, and we tend to perceive that which we have picked out in the form stereotyped for us by our culture <...> these preconceptions, unless education has made us acutely aware, govern deeply the whole process of perception. They mark out certain objects as familiar or strange, emphasizing the difference, so that the slightly familiar is seen as very familiar, and the somewhat strange as sharply alien". (Lippmann 120).

Hence, we are looking at others within the framework of our own culture, somewhat a vicious circle is formed, as no new perception can overcome stereotypes, because the perceptions themselves are already defined by stereotypes. According to the Swedish ethnologist Åke Daun, the perceptions people get about other cultures are a mixture of surprise about the

differences between the own culture and the one in question and confirmation of the already established stereotypes (Daun 111).

On the whole, the stereotypes should not be regarded as correct or incorrect, but as a mere means of perception (Leyens et al. 28). Moreover, the very concept of reality itself could be seen as relative. For social constructivists partial knowledge about the world is all that could ever be achieved (Dyer 250), and thus the discussion of stereotypes relation to reality has little sense in it. Then there is nothing that could or should be done about stereotypes, because they simply will always be there, as people get so used to them that getting new information does not seem to be necessary.

Terracciano argues that the often traced inconsistency in perceptions of self and the other, auto – and heterostereotypes, is yet another proof of inaccuracy of national stereotypes. According to a report, prepared by a group of academics from all over the world, examining ratings of national character in 49 different cultures, on the average, there is no relation between national stereotypes and self descriptions (Terracciano et al. 96), even though the researchers analyzed only personality traits comprising the perception of a national character, not taking into account differences in values or beliefs.

Interconnection of autostereotypes and heterostereotypes is another property of national stereotyping, because sometimes autostereotypes are in a great part a reaction to the perceptions existing outside. The stereotypes others have about the group a person belongs to, could in a way and quite often influence the stereotypes this person or the group on a whole has about themselves. They could even be called “self-fulfilling prophecies” (Jussim and Fleming 154). The format of this paper does not allow to go into such a deep research on this quite interesting issue, neither is it a goal of the given paper. Still, a closer look upon heterostereotypes has yet another significant value, as obtaining an idea about what others think about us becomes important, as thus we also form an image of ourselves, and then at least could focus on the most

critical points and draw some conclusions to rethink or improve the situation. So, heterostereotypes are a kind of indicators that are worth drawing attention to. Besides, looking at the own nation first is more fruitful than starting to fight foreigners' prejudices at once.

However, even if national stereotypes, like all other types of stereotyping, are perceived as inaccurate, on the other hand, they could be regarded as at least partially correct depictions of existing phenomena, that is containing a "kernel of truth" (Allport 56). Group perceptions thus may be rather informative, despite their low accuracy. This means that national stereotypes should reflect the average emotional, cultural, and other specific features of the group members, though those reflections are exaggerated.

Exaggeration is also a specific property of stereotyping. As content of national stereotypes is dependant on how close the nations in question are in terms of religion, dominant ideology, political system, living standards (Törnquist-Plewa 9), heterostereotypes present real differences clearly exaggerated. The reason for that lies in the already mentioned tendency for differentiation between nations, and neighbouring nations, in particular. Hence in the more and more globalized where borders are becoming more and more transparent, nations have to struggle to preserve their unique image, exaggerated differences become one of the a solution. Interestingly enough, this applies both to heterostereotypes, and autostereotypes. Thus, the process of differentiation is closely linked to that of the national identity construction.

Still direct contact is the first thing to come to mind when thinking about the ways to deal with stereotypes, as theoretically coming from a distorted perception of reality, they could cede when confronted with reality itself. But more and more research shows that direct contacts with the stereotyped group or its representatives is useless as a way to fight against stereotypes and prejudices (Törnquist-Plewa 6). It could on the opposite lead to person's deeper conviction in the stereotyped perceptions. Not every type of interethnic communication would contribute

to the elimination of established negative stereotypes either. In a number of cases previous tensions between the groups, the lack of information about each other, negative orientation towards each other and other factors alike could only aggravate mutual negative perceptions and strengthen prejudices. According to Peabody this effect could rather be overcome when the competing nations are regarded as equal, open and trustworthy, share common, mutually significant, values and respect norms and life style of each other. Only then if all the conditions are met the contact between the members of the groups in question would be fruitful and provide a positive political and psychological effect (Peabody 139). Stereotypes thus are linked to some social stance which helps to maintain them without any changing. Following this logic a rather pessimistic conclusion could be drawn when applied to the relations and perceptions between Sweden and Russia. Even if all the conditions are met, which seems unrealistic, it would take quite a long time and much of political good will.

Moreover, the image of “the Other” is hardly a result of direct contact, but more likely is based on impressions obtained through literature and mass media. Then, the received information is being maintained through the media, which keeps on reproducing the same stereotypes over and over again. Following this logic, no contacts with the stereotyped group will suffice either, because the perception of it is already biased.

Mass media also play a significant role in the process of changes in stereotypes. Even if the relations between the nations change, it does not lead to a change in stereotypes, if they lack information about each other (Törnquist-Plewa 8). It is hard to say whether both countries regarded in this paper lack information about each other. Especially, if we look at the volume of information and attention devoted to Russia in the Swedish media. Still, it is more appropriate to talk about one-sided information, one angle prevailing in reproducing information about Russia in Sweden, than the actual lack of it, which would be shown further.



Nevertheless, as stereotypes on the whole, and national stereotypes, in particular, represent linguistic constructions, widespread within a certain nation and describing its perceptions about another one. As a rule, they focus on some features, which allows to make reference to them in the discourse. And that is why mass media could be said the most prominent actor of stereotyping. There is a common assumption that better educated people tend to be more critical towards stereotypical thinking and prejudices, as well as those acquainted with the country whether by having visited it, speaking the language or having friends or relatives there (Reigrotski and Anderson 520). Thus we can presume that in the higher quality press with a target audience of the higher educated people the stereotypes will not play the same part as in tabloids, which thus seems self-evident. Still, the high quality press is representing a certain degree of popular beliefs, and sometimes could be an active stereotypes' keeper, if not a creator, even if in a more neutral and "civilized" way.

The difficulty of national stereotyping process though is that there is no neutral stance by which all judgments of other nations could be made. Moreover any expressed opinion could be argued upon, claiming that the author is biased, as bases for other opinions could always be found. Thus relativity of national stereotypes should be taken into account in the analysis of their content (Dovidio et al. 184).

An interesting and quite fruitful way to deal with stereotype thinking is in fact nation-branding. Nation-branding experts point out that it is actually a "remedy against prejudice", because instead of fighting stereotypes, it reproduces and enhances them, but in such a way as to change the angle of perception, which then would also be less inclined to reproduce stereotypes (Widler 145). Due to globalization, people need to use "shortcuts" in order to comprehend the world (Anholt 117), and this is what nation-branding is basically providing by facilitating the confusing picture. Thus, even though nation branding is stereotyping in itself, it

could be directed so as to achieve certain results. According to Thomas Carlhed, a brand manager at the Swedish Institute, “prevailing stereotypes are often the starting point from which a national brand is developed”, and they could be regarded as “a bridge to people’s minds over which new information can be transmitted”. Besides, he acknowledged that the very fact that there exist at least some stereotypes about Sweden was reassuring, as even though they often might be incorrect, “at least there was something to build upon” (cited in Widler 148). Nation branding in other words is a way to overcome heterostereotypes by turning them into autostereotypes or introducing the most positive ones.

On the whole, methodologically, a problem of national stereotypes is quite complicated due to the lack of criteria of how a stereotype should be measured. For example, if, stereotyping implies ascribing certain characteristics to a target group, a measure of associative strength should serve as a measure of the content of a stereotype (Billig 7). Still, there is no clear understanding of what a stereotype actually is and how we mark it out, not mentioning, that this notion would be perceived differently inside and outside the stereotyped community. In most cases the major methods to analyze national stereotypes include direct opinion polls, that is explicit assessments of oneself or “the Other”. However, there could be also implicit perceptions, which are not easy to distinguish, as people are hardly even aware of them. One of the reasons is the above discussed verbal nature of stereotypes and them being enrooted in human mind. It is interesting, though, that the stereotypical preconceptions actually emerge at some point in history, which makes it necessary to look back to the story of their emergence, if possible, and only then are maintained in collective perceptions. Then the question of whether they stay fixed throughout the time is more than relevant. According to Oakes, stereotypes are not fixed entities, but “representations of the group-in-context” (Oakes et al. 192), where stereotype content is defined selectively so as to capture the meaning of one category in relation to the others constituting the comparative context (Gaertner and McLaughlin 27).

In this paper by a stereotype will be understood a common image of a group (or, in the given case, a nation) being reproduced multiple times in the mass media and social discourse. Research of stereotypes has generally started as a branch of studies on prejudices and out of the need to confront them and the possible negative consequences, like discrimination. This need is still more then relevant, which also makes the further research on stereotyping and national stereotyping, in particular, quite pressing. The “linguistic endurance” of stereotypes, that is their implicit presence in everyday life, in a form of cultural phenomenon, transmitted through media, personal communication, history, and jokes, presents another reason not only to study stereotypes, but at least be aware of their existence, so it would be possible to avoid taking such constructions for granted.

The point of view that national stereotyping is neither bad, nor good, but playing an objective psychological role, allowing to categorize and simplify closer and farther social environment rather fast and efficiently, presenting not a generalized perception of a nation, but a structured cognitive element (Ageev 27), and thus fighting against stereotypes as such does not really lead anywhere, is quite justified. Still, if stereotypes of national or ethnic groups are unfavorable, they can lead to prejudice, discrimination, or persecution, and analysis of stereotypes could help us understand the nature of such phenomena as nationalism and ethnocentrism.

The main questions whereas the relations between the given nations are the basis for stereotyping and how influential are those stereotypes on a group and individual level still remains. And we would try to trace it in the following chapters. Besides, as stereotypes can hardly exist outside language, being enrooted in the language and transferred by linguistic means, in order to get a full picture of the perceptions existing in a society it is important to look at linguistic constructions, clichés and idioms.

## **Chapter 2.**

### **Swedish-Russian relations as a source of stereotyping in the mutual perceptions.**

Due to historic development – a continuous story of struggle for territories and regional influence, some interpersonal complications between Swedish kings and Russian tsars, which was significant not only for relations between the countries, but also for forming a socio-political discourse - there were negative feelings on both sides. It should be noted, that the issue of the mutual perceptions of Russia and Sweden are to be also regarded in a wider context of the relations between Europe and Russia, and the overall deepening cleavage between the Western Christianity and the “Barbarians”, which was playing an important role in construction of antagonizing images.

The relations between Russia and Sweden, in particular, could be said to start from the early Middle Ages (the Viking age in Sweden) when Varyagi (the name given to the Vikings in Ancient Rus’) were supposedly summoned to Rus’ to found a state that later became known as Kiev Rus’. As a consequence, mutual Swedish-Russian perceptions have started being formed during the multiple contacts that took place ever since the Kiev Rus’ times. However, no or very little and quite vague data on how the neighbouring peoples saw each at the time is to be found. Nevertheless, later on as the two states started gaining weight as regional powers, a competition and struggle for dominance became more and more clear, leading to numerous wars during the 15-18<sup>th</sup> centuries. Not surprisingly a certain hostile image of the adversary was built on both sides.

In order to get a more detailed picture of the development of mutual perceptions in the two countries which apparently formed a basis for the contemporary discourse, as well as served a ground for stereotyping – and consequently could help explain the stereotypes themselves – it seems appropriate to take a closer look on the cases of each country and its image of another.

### **2.1. Evolution of the perceptions of Sweden in Russia.**

Among all of the Scandinavian countries Sweden is perhaps the most widely known in Russia. As Olga Chernysheva noted in her book on the image of the neighbouring nations of Russia and Sweden, the latter is one of the countries through which Russia actually “entered” into Europe (Chernysheva b 4), which shows the importance of understanding the Russo-Swedish relations and therefore perceptions in a general European context.

Not much is known on the image of Sweden at the period of the Swedish-Russian wars, but supposedly it could not be said highly positive. On the other hand, the most constructive information could be received from the travelling notes and memoirs of those making trips to Sweden, which became widespread in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Thus, at the time the major focus was made on Sweden and Scandinavia on the whole as a travelling destination, with many notes made on its geography and nature (Chernysheva a 6-7). It should be mentioned that to a certain and quite significant degree this tradition has remained until now, as many contemporary articles about Sweden still discuss its natural resources and places of interest.

In the image of people of Sweden also has not changed drastically in Russia since the time. In her truly fundamental research on the perceptions of Swedish character in Russia Olga Chernysheva has cited memoirs of Russian writers and public figures who have visited or lived

in Sweden. Most of them stressed the ultimate honesty of the Swedish people and their law-abidingness, modesty and tendency to simplicity (Chernysheva b 25-31). On the whole Swedes were characterized as honest, responsible, practical, respectful for traditions, fair, generous, good at technical inventions, nature loving. Besides, they were often seen as reserved in expressing their feelings, musical, and comfort seeking (see more in Chernysheva a and b). In the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the following description could be found in a geographic almanac: “Naturally Swedes are slim, strong and usually long-living. Their main features are frankness, braveness, freedom and honesty. <...> Though despite those positive qualities, overall severity and inhospitality could be observed in Sweden” (Noveyshaya vseobshaya geografia 39). Nevertheless, the fact that so many Russian observers marked out these features is also telling in terms of the Russian national character as perceived from inside. Taking into account that heterostereotypes are in fact reversed autostereotypes, honesty and law-abidingness could be said the properties lacking in the Russian self image and thus drawing more attention. However, trying to explain this phenomenon of the Swedish character, one of the Russian writers Evgeny Makarov, noted that it was not due to their natural generosity, but rather that Swedes are brought up to be honest and law-abiding, respecting the laws, independently of their social status (cited in Chernysheva b 38). Leo Tolstoy, junior, published his views on Sweden in “Peterburgskie vedomosti”, where he characterized Swedes as hard-working, honest, conscious, calm, friendly and tolerant. He specifically stressed the developments in the field of social equality (cited in Chernysheva a 51-55).

On the whole, the image of Swedes in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was very positive, though certain negative tones could also be heard. Sofia Kovalevskaya, a mathematician who has lived in Sweden for quite a long time, noted that as Swedes had a long “peaceful” history, meaning the lack of any drastic revolts or tyrant rulers they tended to be rather conservative and hard to change the established views (Kovalevskaya 298).

The end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was a period of remarkable “Scandinavomania” (Kan a 234). According to the famous Russian historian Alexander Kan, at the time it was not only a strong interest in Swedish, and generally Scandinavian, Nordic culture and history, but even a sort of admiration (Kan a 235). Economic and political relations were also quite intense, with 21 Russian diplomatic missions and consulates functioning in Sweden (Chernysheva b 58). Liberally oriented Russians regarded Scandinavian countries as ideal societies, with a notable healthcare and folk educational system, and modern technologies, which could serve as good models for introducing in Russia. Social well-being and prosperity, high morality and low criminal records were the features most often highlighted (Chernysheva a 59). Besides, Sweden was an attractive destination for Russian revolutionary emigration in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, as democracy was yet another element of the image of Sweden in Russia. At the turn of the centuries Sweden could not be said to represent that prosperous and democratic country as portrayed by Russian intellectuals though. There was a rather high level of poverty and as a result continuous mass emigration to the United States, the voting qualifications were quite strict as well (Kan b 405), still the idealized image pertained.

Interesting insights into the perception of Sweden in Russia in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century could be found in an article by a famous Russian translator Petr Hansen in the Encyclopedic dictionary from 1903. He describes Swedes as very tall, well-built, fair-haired and blue-eyed (Enciklopedichesky slovar 319). “The specific national features are humanism, friendliness, love to nature, curiosity, devotion to order and indisposition towards any arbitrariness” (Enciklopedichesky slovar 319). They tend to comfort, though “carles do not differ drastically from the bourgeois by their dress” (Enciklopedichesky slovar 320). Besides, women are becoming more and more equal to men in many areas (Enciklopedichesky slovar 327), and Sweden represents “an example of a highly developed constitutional rule” (Ibid 339). Among the few negative features outlined by Hansen were the mass emigration due to the poor

social conditions in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and “morality issues”: high rate of divorces, illegitimate births, suicides, and prostitution regulation in Stockholm and Göteborg (Ibid 320).

The rise in number of travelers to Sweden increased the quantity of publications and articles on it. There Swedes were depicted as honest and trustful, reasonable and religious, nature-loving and compassionate both to other nations and its own population. The country itself has been always admired as well-organised and crystal clean, whether that concerned Stockholm city centre or a small village (Chernysheva b 70). The fully positive picture however was also a source of certain critic, where the advantages became reasons for the negative features: law-abidingness was seen as leading to conservatism, pedantic behavior - to bureaucracy and patriotism - to self-complacency (Chernysheva b 79). One of the folk tales could provide an example here, even though the image of Swedes in Russian folklore has not been very common. In at least one folk tale that does exist in the Northern regions of Russia, a (“typical” or “stereotypical” as regarded) Swede, a Russian, a Tatar and a Moor are depicted when handling difficult situations. Characteristically enough a Swede had suffered from his excessive cautiousness by tying himself to a ceiling while waiting for a flood, and falling down from it (Razumova and Dubrovskaya 206).

Another prominent Swedish specialty which has attracted much attention from the Russian side is the so called “Swedish table”. The expression has established in Russian language and is widely used, now often not in any relation to Sweden. The first description of a “Swedish table” (or a self service buffet) was made in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century by Russian travelers, impressed with such organization. Especially so, because “people were supposed to tell themselves how much they ate and count the bill”, and no control applied, which also contributed to the image of the Swedish honesty and trust (Chernysheva a 33).



The observed differences also in “national temper” evoked an image of a too reserved and distant nation. Interestingly enough, in the newspapers of the time the Swedish national pride and references to the glorious past were often made. In 1916 “Russkie vedomosti” newspaper wrote about Sweden as a country with “an excessive sense of superiority and tendency to self boasting” (cited in Chernysheva b 91), in another one - “Den” from 1917 a focus was made on the fact that Russia was regarded in Sweden as a historical fiend (Ibid 97). It is also noteworthy, that even though there was a big flow of Russian emigrants to Sweden after the Revolution, only a few of them stayed there for living, as they mostly moved further to other countries of Europe. Those who did stay, however, often noted the antipathy towards Russia adherent to the Swedish society, independently of a political regime or state of the bilateral relations at the moment (Chernysheva a 102). Thus, in a way a defensive stance in the views on Sweden started becoming visible.

After the establishment of the Soviet regime, and introduction of ideological propaganda, focused on the new state’s superiority over the “West”, this stance transformed into an offensive one. Olga Chernysheva gives an example of such a trend citing the Soviet sailors’ impressions of their visit to Göteborg in 1920. They saw Sweden as grey and ugly, at the same time criticizing the Liseberg amusement park as too bright and sweet (Chernysheva a 105). On the whole, there was not much information on Sweden at that period, as well as on any other “Western” nation. Besides, even if it did show up, it was way too much ideologically loaded, which also contributed to stereotypes formation, for Sweden as a part of “the West” was to be described predominantly in negative tones.

However, the situation started to change slightly after the Second World War, in the late 1950s when first tourists were allowed to make short trips abroad. The articles devoted to Sweden were still filled with certain stereotypes of the Swedish social system and ideological

stamps, like “working class struggling for their rights” or “anti-Soviet aspersion ”, though even they mentioned the Swedes’ talent in rational management of life, high quality of products, and comfort (Melnikov 72). Later in the 1960-70s major Soviet newspapers “Pravda” and “Izvestia” published articles about Sweden quite regularly, though the depictions presented were distorted, as the focus was made more on social problems in Sweden (unemployment and drug abuse), than its positive developments (Chernysheva 126).

Still good features about Swedish national character were outlined, trying to overcome the stereotypes about Swedes as cold and reserved, like for example a writer Gennady Fisch did in his notes on Sweden, speaking about Swedes as hospitable and respectful (Fisch 18). Nevertheless, he also mentioned the Swedish sense of self-complacency, which he called a “Rudbeckian sin” - by the name of Swedish historian Olaf Rudbeck, who in his book “Atlantica” tried to prove that Sweden was the lost Atlantis and thus the cradle of civilization (Fisch 20).

Thus, during the 20<sup>th</sup> century the image of Sweden in Russia did not change drastically, despite the ideological orientations in presenting information. Throughout the period of bilateral communication, even marked with military conflicts, the perception of the Swedes and Sweden has been rather positive, constantly stressing the good qualities like hard working and accuracy, kindness, law-abidingness, rationality, democracy, honesty, technical advancement.

## **2.2. Evolution of the perceptions of Russia in Sweden.**

Unlike the image of Sweden in Russia, which evolved in a positive direction, the one in Sweden about Russia, perhaps, has been formed negatively from the very beginning and pertained ever since Ivan the Terrible rule and Swedish-Russian wars of the 17-18<sup>th</sup> centuries,

maintained by the fear of an unpredictable neighbouring power. These attitudes towards Russia in Sweden have even received a special name of “*rysskräcken*”, literally “fear of Russia” or “russophobia”.

Several factors contributed to the hostility towards Russia aggravation in Sweden. The most prominent one was the Swedish defeat in the Northern war 1700-1721 and most notably after the Poltava battle of 1709. In addition to the generally negative feelings because of the defeat in the Poltava battle, around 20000 Swedish soldiers were captured and sent to Siberia, which was also a fruitful basis for development of negative and fearful stances towards Russia (Nilsson 45). During the rule of Karl XII, and even before – in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, as Torsten Burgman notes, Russia became Sweden’s foe “number one” or “traditional foe” (Burgman 18).

Another irritating episode in the Swedish-Russian relations, which influenced Sweden’s perceptions of Russia, was the loss of Finland in 1809. On the one hand, this signified the establishment of Russia as the strongest regional power in the 19<sup>th</sup>, which became a source of a great concern in Sweden. Besides, the newly appeared common territorial border between Sweden and the Russian Empire aggravated the old sense of insecurity and espionage fears – as 34 Russian lumbermen in the North of Finland were disclosed as spies (Nilsson 45), as well as that of a possible Russian occupation of the Northern parts of the country. The unrest in Sweden concerning Russian aspirations was so significant, that certain military preparations - armored fleet construction - took place (Burgman 47).

In the citations of numerous sources, describing the Russian troupes going through the northern parts of Sweden, mainly the Kosacks, given in the Burgman’s book the image of a cruel and rude warriors is clearly seen, like in an episode when the Kosacks even did not hesitate to steal the silver hidden in a sick old woman’s bed in Umeå (Burgman 23).

On the other hand, the historical ties with Finland were also prominent, as the political circles in Sweden, especially those on the right wing, still were convinced in its “mission and responsibility” towards Finland (Melin et al. 79). The hard russification policy of Finland, thus, evoked yet another negative attitude. When the Russian Governor General in Finland Nikolay Bobrikov was killed in 1904, the Swedish press expressed more condemnation of his governance, as well as hard critic against the process of russification, than on the fact of the murder itself, which even caused the Russian embassy in Stockholm to emit a note of protest (Burgman 38).

During the period of the tensions between Sweden and Norway before the breakup of the Swedish-Norwegian union in 1905, the anti-Russian rhetoric was also widely used in Sweden as to show Norway the prospects of being invaded by the Russians after the separation from otherwise strong power, and a Swedish researcher Sven Hedin was the pioneer of the propaganda of the kind (Burgman 43-45).

However, certain objective interest in Russia was also noticeable. In the 18th century Russia, and St. Petersburg as its new capital just across the Baltic Sea, particularly aroused Swedish interest. At the time first articles in Swedish periodicals about St. Petersburg appeared and they were mainly devoted to opera and ballet, art exhibitions and the royal family (Chernysheva a 10). M. von Platten even suggested that the Swedes knew more about St. Petersburg in 1795 than in 1995 (von Platten 75). First of all, at that period quite many Swedes lived in Russia, especially after Finland became a part of the Russian Empire. The Swedish Diaspora consisted of craftsmen and men of arms. Besides since 1837 there was established a steam engine ferry between the two capitals (Jangfeldt 150). As a result of close relations between the countries many Swedish companies started business in Russia, most prominently,

the Nobel family. Later on - in 1910 - a “Swedish community in St. Petersburg” was even established (Jangfeldt 156).

Since the mid-1800s the following the pan-European trend of the time the image of Russia and Russians in Sweden became romanticized, seen as exotic, different (Sävborg a 5). As Russia was a very closed country for the Europeans, it was subject for romantic fantasies. Works by the Russian writers like Ivan Turgenev, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Leo Tolstoy and Anton Chekhov were translated into various Western European languages, thus allowing get some insights into the Russian culture. A certain rise in interest towards Russia was also observed in 1908 when the Swedish prince Vilhelm married a Russian princess Maria Pavlovna, with a number of ethnographic articles about Russians appearing in the newspapers (Chernysheva a 122).

The Russians in Sweden at the time were romantically seen as cheerful, hospitable, warm-hearted, which apparently collided with the perception of Russia as the major foe, and did not dominate the social discourse very long, as already at the turn of the centuries the fear of the Russian alleged spies aroused (Sävborg a 6). The famous Swedish writer and playwright August Strindberg in his essay “Vad är Ryssland?” (“What is Russia?”) wrote about Russia that is “a younger sister of the European nations with the mistakes of the youth and great youth qualities: faith, enthusiasm, hope and high aspirations. But it comes from the family, of good kin” (cited in Nilsson 222).

According to Olga Chernysheva already by the early 20<sup>th</sup> century a certain stereotype about Russians has been established in Sweden, which was overall negative (Chernysheva a 110). This could be said a continuation of a long held tradition of depicting Russians as a rude, uneducated nation, aspiring the dominance over the Baltic area, stemming from Ivan the Terrible time of militant rivalry. At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century even the school geography

textbooks mentioned Russia as a country of uneducated, heavily drinking, dishonest people (Svenska Dagbladet 25 Feb 1998). However, a need to build a constructive dialogue with Russia could also be traced in some written works, like in J. I. D. Nikeius's "Vi och Ryssland" ("We and Russia") the author wrote that "we cannot achieve full well-being without Russia and the comprehension of it should contribute to better understanding of the Russians"(Nikeius 3).

The first and foremost reason for this (mis)representation of Russia was the lack of information. A translator and Slavist Alfred Jensen noted in the beginning of the 20th century that "the knowledge of a so called educated audience about Russia is very insignificant and superficial and is not being filled by a somewhat serious will to comprehend" (cited in Chernysheva b 121). Poor presence of the Russian language in Sweden could be one of the reasons. At the period an average Swede with a university degree hardly knew more about Russia than Ivan the Terrible, Peter the Great, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Siberia and revolutions (Chernysheva b 122), and it is surprising how stable those perceptions are up till the present moment, which will be shown later.

Besides, very few Swedes travelled to Russia, though those who did, sometimes published their impressions in newspapers. In the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the authors along with the descriptions of the poor countryside life and lack of order, also mentioned some positive Russian features as hospitality, sincerity and simplicity. (Chernysheva b 140) Another interesting remark could be found in the "Aftontidningen newspaper" from the early 1900s, where the Russian people is described as pacifist, friendly, compassionate and democratic, but the ruling elite presents an absolutely different stance (cited in Chernysheva b 140).

Before the First World War yet another factor influenced the Swedish perceptions of Russia: with pro-German sentiments becoming more and more widespread in Sweden, a rise of distrust towards the Russian foreign policy reappeared. After the Russian defeat in the Russian-

Japanese war of 1904-1905, anticipation of a Russian threat has calmed down a little, but a fear of Russian spies, whether justified or not, became quite high profile in the social and political debate. In his book "Ryska problem" ("Russian problem") a Swedish diplomat Einar af Wirssen discussed the problem of inherited sentiments and fears towards Russia, that Swedes were traditionally brought up with, which often caused the exaggerated perception of danger of "the Russian devilish plans concerning Sweden" (Wirssen 70). On the eve of the First World War the anti-Russian feelings reached its climax, when in 1912 Sven Hedin published a leaflet "A Warning", where he wrote about an assumed menace of Russian occupation of Sweden. The leaflet was published in 1 million copies and was sent to every household for free (Chernysheva b 150). Next year one of the geopolitics founders Rudolf Kjellén published another leaflet called "The Russian danger". These two works and a number of other publications and articles influenced the Swedish public opinion to a great degree, however there was a significant pro-Russian lobby from the Swedish entrepreneurs, as about 28% of the Swedish machinery export was directed to Russia (Söderpalm 20).

With the establishment of the Soviet rule contacts between the two nations became even fewer, however the new regime awoke interest among the Social Democrats and other left-wing political parties in Sweden, though they did not approve of the dictatorship policies and "partly Asian" methods (Chernysheva b 190), that followed. Still, in the early Soviet years, before the country was internationally recognized, the very same Sven Hedin made a trip to the Soviet Russia and had rather favourable impressions of it (Chernysheva b 180-183). Later though the image of a Barbarian and cruel state became more common. In a geography schoolbook, spread in Sweden in the 1930-1940s an article about Russia put it that the Russian population is "rather low educated and the majority can neither read, nor write"; "the core is constituted by Russians and all other ethnic groups are held under a severe oppression <...> Peasants have bathhouses, but their clean habits leave much to be desired. <...> They like dancing, singing

and music. But on the whole are rather melancholic. Sentimental folk songs with their monotonous melodies are an example” (cited in Burgman 110).

During the Second World War Soviet Union was not positively regarded either because of the wars with Finland, and consequently, awakening of the old feelings of national solidarity. Besides in the bourgeois circles pro-German stances were still widespread. After the War Sweden took an officially neutral stance towards the Soviet Union, though, as Boris Grigoriev notes, it obviously remained pro-Western, and if “the USA was criticized, so was the USSR, but never vice versa” (Grigoriev 239). Besides, cases of disclosed espionage, mysterious – still unresolved - story of a famous Swedish diplomat and a renowned family member Raoul Wallenberg’s arrest by KGB and death in Moscow contributed greatly to tensions in the relations between the two countries.

Although Soviet Union’s domestic and foreign policy was widely criticized in Sweden, according to the Swedish ambassador to the Soviet Union in the 1960s Gunnar Jarring, it was still uncertain whether the Swedes wanted the Soviet regime to turn into a well-functioning system, as then it could evolve into a too dangerous neighbor (Burgman 75). “Rysskräcken” apparently still played an important role.

In the 1980s the “Whiskey on the rocks” scandal with the Soviet submarine in the Swedish territorial waters took place. The officially claimed as misnavigated, U137 boat caused a reaction huge in its scale in the media, and most of all, in the major Swedish newspapers “Dagens Nyheter” and “Svenska Dagbladet”. The incident was reported only as a rude border trespassing and provocation (Burgman 78), arousing panic among the Swedish population. Interesting though is a fact that in the biggest Soviet “Pravda” newspaper the case of the submarine was hardly even mentioned (Grigoriev 294), showing not only ideological filters



applied to the information presentation, but in a way the little importance Sweden had for the Soviet agenda.

A change in negative Swedish attitudes occurred as Mikhail Gorbachev's orientation on reforms and *glasnost*, especially after the Brezhnev rule, were rather positively received. Interest that the situation in the Soviet Union, and later Russia aroused at the time could be said rather high, as when Boris Yeltsin's memoirs "Recognition. The power play behind the Kremlin walls" were published in the early 1990s, the book was released in Sweden as a pocket size edition (Burgman 85), which could be considered as a sign of its popularity, as hopes for democratic changes and economic problems settlement were set quite high.

Moreover, in the 1990s after the fall of the Soviet Union when contacts between the two countries became more frequent and regular. Still, the image of Russia still was far from dramatic changes. Thus Herman Lindquist wrote in 1998 in "Aftonbladet" newspaper, that regimes might change, but "Russia remains our most significant and most dangerous neighbour. Everything that happens in Russia has an impact on us" (Lindquist, Aftonbladet 19 Aug 1998). The threat coming from Russia also started being perceived differently, now as it supposedly came not from the Russian strength, but from the Russian weakness, which might lead to uncontrolled migration, ecological catastrophes or organized crime proliferation (Hugemark 82). Though the military threat was no longer there, as in 2001 Riksdag criticized the Swedish Government for excessive army financing, as if "the Russians were coming" (Burgman 90).

According to Ebba Sävborg, Russia presents an "anti-image" for Sweden, "which needs to put its peaceful, normal and neat nation to contrast with something alien and dangerous" (Sävborg a 56). If the Swedes were afraid of a strong and uncontrollable military power in the East before, the same power falling apart caused anxiety because of the possible refugees flow

over the Swedish borders. “If it was not the tsarist Cosacks or Bolsheviks to fear, then there is the Russian mafia” (Sävborg a 57). Thus, the Russians could constitute a menace at any case, either as an uncontrolled mass of poor refugees or “billionaires capable to buy all the Swedish business” (Sävborg b 3).

With Vladimir Putin entering the Russian political arena in the late 1999, the Swedish interest in his policies and personality rose highly, as well as certain positive expectations. However, already in 2001 Adam Rotfeld, director of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) talked about the major menace from Russia, which consisted of its imperial ambitions, while no sufficient communication institutions between the people and the governing elite are established to be called democratic (Dagens Nyheter 21 Mar 2001). The present situation shows that Sweden is returning to the “rysskräcken” rhetoric, which in fact never ceased.

Summing up, the image of the Russians in Sweden has been more complex, than that of the Swedes in Russia, it tended to change throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, though certain features stayed the same during the whole period. A clear imbalance in mutual perceptions is easily observed: whereas the Swedish stance was on the whole negative and even biased, “a mix of fear and distaste” (Kan d 239), Russians have always been positive towards their neighbours, even during the heavily ideologically loaded Soviet period, a room for mentioning positive features of the Swedes was there. This could be also traced in linguistic forms: “Swedish” has always meant something better and new in Russia: matchsticks, gloves, gymnastic equipment, whereas “Russian” signified something simple or noxious: rude leather type, or a rude person, flu, power abuse. This trend was so stable as to have pertained both Russian revolutions and two world wars (Kan c 7).

There have been no wars between Sweden and Russia for more than two hundred years. Although in Russian-Swedish relations the conflict never actually stopped, as they transformed from open confrontation and warfare into high level suspicion, namely “rysskräcken” from the Swedish side, which both led to creation of new stereotypes and conservation of the old ones. Analysis of the contemporary discourse and perceptions will help understanding what role stereotypes play in the mutual image of both countries.

### **Chapter 3.**

#### **National stereotyping in the contemporary Swedish and Russian popular discourse.**

As shown in the previous chapter the pattern of mutual perceptions of Russia and Sweden has already been historically set, and if it even was subjected to certain slight changes, the overall stereotypical image of both nations remained the same. Sweden for Russians still and even more so symbolizes progress and high standards, whereas Russia is continuously perceived through the lens of “rysskräcken”, and the stereotypes are used in accordance to the envisaged threat (either “Russia is a military power with a mind set on occupation of the neighbouring territories” or “the Russians are so poor they tend to engulf Sweden as immigrants”). The main question though is how often those stereotypes are used in the present-day social and political discourse, and whether they are established in the popular perceptions.

If the historical overview of the image construction and stereotype formation was traced by looking upon memoirs, travelling notes, and, as a consequence, encyclopedic articles, providing descriptions of the country, its people and national character, the contemporary discourse could be grasped from the mass media and periodic press. It is noteworthy, that the given research is based on contextual analysis of representations of Sweden and Russia in contemporary press. In order to limit the amount of information, otherwise, too wide to grasp, the most popular thematic that could be found in articles concerning Russia and Sweden accordingly, written in the last five years, is reviewed.

Besides, the primary source of obtaining knowledge about modern stereotypes, or popular images, is, of course, studying public opinion polls. Unfortunately, this seems to be a little problematic, first and foremost, due to the lack of available surveys of the kind, or their being out of date. Thus, as was already mentioned, a survey about Russians’ image of Sweden

was conducted in 2001 by the Russian Public opinion research agency “Public Opinion Fund” (“Фонд Общественное мнение”), but there is nothing like that found in Sweden. That is why I opted to conduct my own small survey, mostly, among the young people from the Swedish and Russian side, as to get an updated picture of their perceptions of the countries and thus outline the common places, i.e. stereotypes.

On the whole, the question raised in the previous chapter, whether the stereotypes formed at the earlier stages and under different historical circumstances are maintained up till now, is there to be answered.

### **3.1. The image of Russia in Swedish media and popular discourse**

In an attempt to discern the image of Russia, regularly presented in Swedish printed media, the major papers were chosen. It is certainly not enough for a full picture, but a spectre of titles – two most significant national papers “Dagens Nyheter” and “Svenska Dagbladet”, two tabloids “Aftonbladet” - allows to get general insights into perceptions of Russia in Swedish public discourse. The reason for choosing tabloids is that presenting entertainment, they sometimes, become a source of information, more often referred to by general public, than more serious titles.

The first thing, important to mention, is that Russia occupies a considerable space in Swedish printed media, which also makes it impossible to make a content analysis of all the articles available, however an image of Russia can still be grasped quite easily by the assessment of the context the words “Russia” and “Russian” are mentioned in. The Swedish media present a good opportunity for analyzing the context mentioning of Russia and Russian, providing tables, counting the number of matches within sections, as well as most often named persons and organizations.

For instance, in “Dagens Nyheter” “Russia and Russian” (the research was done for a joint term of “Russia” and “Russian”, as to reduce the number of articles) in 2008 were mentioned 315 (2016 for “Russia” alone, 560 for “Russian” alone) times, which is more than in previous years – at around 150 in the years 2002-2006 and 237 in the year 2007. The sections that drew the most attention to “Russia” and “Russian” in 2008 were “News” (165), “Opinion” (31), “Sport”(29), “Culture and Leisure” (20), “Economy” (10). If compared to a situation, observed since 2002 till the beginning of 2010 after the “News” section (860 overall matches), “Sport” (178) and “Economy” (140) will lead, with “Opinion” (123) and “Culture” (99) following. Other sections like “Books”, “Travelling”, “Lifestyle”, etc. scarcely have 30-40 matches all together. Among the organizations mentioned Kremlin, GazProm, Yukos, Lukoil, FSB take the lead (Resultat för ”Ryssland & Rysk”, Dagens Nyheter<sup>4</sup>).

The most telling and interesting section as to draw the image and stereotyped representations of Russia, is the “Opinion”, as by the very title it is supposed to outline a certain degree of public opinion. According to the research, made in this field, the main topics, devoted to Russia, were political and economic developments, both within the country and in the world, the war in Georgia, and the question of energy supplies. Here, Russia is consistently linked to an association with a bear, as shown in some of the headlines. For example, “Russia sharpens claws” (“Ryssland vässar klorna”, Dagens Nyheter, 9 Aug 2008), or ”The bear is not sleeping” (“Björnen sover inte”, Ekdahl and Hedvall, Dagens Nyheter, 22 June 2008). Very often paralleling with the Soviet past is made, like in “The shadow of Stalin” (“Stalins skugga”, Ekdal, Dagens Nyheter, 31 Aug 2008) or even Russian Empire, making comparisons to the tzarist age. Turning to examples from the Swedish-Russian relations history on the whole is very prominent. Thus, in an article about the “Nordstream” gas pipeline project, headed as

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<sup>4</sup> “Dagens Nyheter” web-search for “Ryssland” and “Rysk” at the newspaper web-page [www.dn.se](http://www.dn.se)

“Soviet Union is still alive in Russia”, the construction of the “Nordstream” is compared to Russia’s occupation of Gotland in 1808 (“Sovjetunionen lever kvar i Ryssland”, Dagens Nyheter, 12 Aug 2008).

The image of Russia in another Swedish paper “Svenska Dagbladet” does not differ much from “Dagens Nyheter”. When looking upon the “Opinion” section, the same set of associations appear, namely, “Russian bear roars like before” (“Rysk björn ryter som för”, Svenska Dagbladet, 27 Sept 2007). Another notable thing is the attention towards Russian political figures, mostly leaders, and, in fact, a fusion of the country and its political leadership image. For instance, “Everything’s possible in Putinland” (“I Putinland är allt möjligt” Svenska Dagbladet, 11 Oct 2007).

The tabloid “Aftonbladet” repeats all the topics above. Inga-Lina Lindqvist, however in her review of Russian contemporary literature, translated in Sweden, brought up the issue of stereotyping by pointing out, that a general attitude to foreign literature in Sweden is to obtain a picture about the country or nation, which is already there, and thus in Russian books should be filled with circus bears in Cossacks’ hats (Lindqvist, Aftonbladet, 24 Apr 2009).

Perhaps, the most prominent example of Russia’s representation in the Swedish media, and “Dagens Nyheter”, in particular, is the “Nordstream” project, which has led to a rather heated discussion. Since 2007 the project has received much attention in the media, as in the late 2006 a joint Russian-German company presented their plans to build a gas pipe on the bottom of the Baltic sea, initially planned as a Russian gas source for Germany, and hence for the EU. The Swedish media, though, pictured “Nordstream” as a threat to the Swedish security system, providing Russia with an opportunity to establish intelligence bases close to Swedish seacoast. Reminiscences on the “Whiskey on the rocks” case and the general connotations of the Soviet Union were constantly referred to, with the energy export depicted as a means of

pressure, and economic aspect is mentioned only as a secondary one (like, for example in “Vinnarens vapen”, Dagens Nyheter 2 Dec 2007). The negative feelings about it in the Swedish society were shown in the survey, conducted in 2007, when 51% of respondents claimed to be against the gas pipe construction. (Jonsson, Dagens Nyheter, 15 Feb 2007). This tendency to explain every event happening in Russia or related to it from a perspective of some hidden motive or, even, conspiracy theory could be clearly viewed in the rhetoric on the “Nordstream”, in particular, and Russia, on the whole. Citing one of the articles on the project: “Foreign politicians have also admitted that the “Nordstream” is already fulfilling the function that Russia and president Putin have envisaged, namely to split and weaken the EU’s common policy” (Ahlin, Dagens Nyheter, 19 Jan 2007).

Thus, even though thematically Swedish media are generally more focused on delivering the pure facts, than assessments and commentaries (Mikhailov 86-87) and could be consequently regarded as more objective, as a rule in case of Russia, they are rather negatively loaded. The most often affiliated words along with a word “Russia” in the headings of Swedish newspapers, mainly, “Dagens Nyheter”, are those evoking rather pessimistic connotations, like “danger”, “threat”, “conflict”, “bombing”, etc. An average Swedish reader, as a result, receives an image of Russia as a country, where something bad is happening all the time, human life has no value and people die of cold. Besides, Russia is a permanent source of threat for other countries, as its politics is predefined as aggressive (“Kak shvedy vosprinimayut russkikh” 25). “Dagens Nyheter” is probably the most negatively oriented paper towards Russia, presenting it as Sweden’s major enemy, an isolated actor, following only its own interests, and a power which is impossible to influence.

The stereotyped image of Russia in the Sweden’s major printed media is that of a hostile and isolated power, which is impossible to influence. To a great degree it is created, and then reproduced and maintained by the mass media. On the whole, the popular rhetoric and



mass media representation of Russia in Sweden follows the historical trend described in the previous chapter, which can be outlined by the term of “rysskräcken”, or fear of Russia/Russian(s). According to Nilsson this rusophobia is “as old, as the Swedish history itself” and derives from the Viking and Crusades age. It comprised all the features, exclusively “inherent” to Russians: laziness, suspiciousness, corruption, power abuse, imperialism, incompetence, indecisiveness, passiveness (Nilsson 206). In the 19<sup>th</sup> century these feelings evolved into hatred with Swedish poets depicting “Russian bear” as the main foe (Nilsson 207). It is then that the stereotype of Russian spying ambitions comes from, as at that time the Russian Empire had a common border with Sweden. The notorious lumbermen disclosure as spies even contributed to enrichment of the Swedish vocabulary with a new meaning of “sågfilare” (“lumbermen”) as “spies” (mostly, Russian), which remained in the dictionaries up to the late 20<sup>th</sup> century (Burgman 95). The spying phobia, thus, is one of the most prominent “irritators” in the bilateral relations.

The figure of Vladimir Putin and his biography as of a former intelligence servant also contributed to strengthening of the popular cliché about Russia as a KGB governed country. In the nineties the general fear of Russian spies also partly transformed into a fear of Russian mafia. Still, the “spy issue” is high on the agenda, as the “Nordstream” case illustrated. Besides, even though it is hard to estimate, whether the media form or reflect public opinion, a survey conducted by SIDA<sup>5</sup> in 2006, showed that the primary associations with Russia and its societal conditions were those of crime rate (47%), poverty (41%) and environmental pollution (30%) (Dahlander 10), thus also proving an unfavourable perception of Russia in Sweden.

Stereotyping could occur not only within texts, but also in illustrations. As illustrations are a more effective tool of delivering information, often distorted, to a broader spectre of

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<sup>5</sup> SIDA – Swedish International Development cooperation Agency

readers. Photographic information delivery practice is also filled with certain propagandist stamps, aimed at emotional influence. Thus, in a children's book about Russia there is a note that the Russians keep themselves warm by fur coats and vodka with a corresponding picture above (Ryssland 20).

Interestingly enough, a report, published by the North Sweden European Office in 2002, discussing the favourable business opportunities for Swedish entrepreneurs in Russia, was entitled "Våga satsa på Ryssland!" (which is approximately "Dare to settle in Russia") presented the major myths and stereotypes about Russia, that are spread in Sweden: "if during the Cold War the major stereotypes were those of bears, vodka, and ballet, at the present it is mafia, criminal situation and alcoholism" (Harme 6). Russians are traditionally viewed as gloomy people with strange names, wearing fur coats and drinking vodka, but the author disclosed many of such stereotypes by providing substantive and realistic counter-arguments, like, for example that many Russian names are in fact the same as in Sweden (Harme 10), and the same goes for the other points.

The problem of perception of Russia and its relations with Sweden has been recently highlighted in the Swedish media and socio-political discourse. In 2009 with a 300 years anniversary of the Poltava battle and 200 years anniversary of the Swedish "loss" of Finland the issue seemed more than relevant. Thus, the Swedish Radio even released a series of programmes devoted to Russia, Putin and "rysskräcken" (SR, "Putin och Rysskräcken"). Moreover, on a Swedish website [www.voter.se](http://www.voter.se) a poll was published under the title of "Have Sweden and the Swedes overcome the rysskräcken?" Out of 536 respondents 44% voted for "yes", whereas 50% considered that Sweden has not gotten rid of it. ("Har Sverige och svenskarna överdriven rysskräcken?") The problem of analyzing this resource is that very little information is available on the author and even date of the voting, as well as the fact that not

only Swedes have most probably taken part in it. Nevertheless, as it is a Swedish website addressed to, at least, Swedish speaking audience, it gives an interesting insights in the discourse and its contemporary state.

Interesting enough is the reflection of stereotypes in linguistic perspective. Thus, in Swedish language “ryss” was in fact a swear word meaning “wild”, “immature”, “pointless”, “ruthless barbarian” (Nilsson 217). It derives from the 17<sup>th</sup> century Swedish chronicles, when Russia was the main Swedish military foe in the Baltic Sea region and was to be presented as treacherous. But with Russia turning into a regional superpower in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the derogative perception transformed into fear (Sävborg a 5).

A list of expressions having “rysk” (Russian) as a definitive adjective can also give insights into Swedish perceptions of Russia. For example, “rysk smällare” (Russian fire crackers, called “ryssar” for short), Russian alphabet (which can also be called a stereotype, as Cyrillic alphabet is used in a number of other countries), Russian fur (rysspäls), sometimes used in a derogative meaning as a description of Russians, rysskött (Russian meat) – horse meat, that allegedly was eaten by Russians, and never by Swedes, Rysslukt (Russian odour), an expression from the Swedish newspaper Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfarts- Tidning from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century: “This indeterminable Russian odour, that reminds of onion and spirit, sheepskin and rubber boots”(cited in Nilsson 219).

Another expression “kosackvalet” (“Kosack election”) entered the Swedish vocabulary since 1920s, when it was used during the election campaign to describe the threat of social democracy as compared to communism and a consequent kosack invasion in Sweden, ruining everything on the way (Chernysheva a 118). A word “moskovit” does not only have a historical meaning, but was also used to express certain negative feelings, and is still mentioned in the Swedish language dictionary as having a pejorative meaning (Svenska ordbok 771).

Finally, there is a rather characteristic expression - “Är du alldeles rysk?” (“Are you absolutely Russian?”), which implies “Are you absolutely mad?” (Svenska ordbok 1009). However, those are mostly historic expressions, and are not found in the present day media, even though the negative connotations are still there.

### **3.2. The image of Sweden in Russian press and popular discourse**

In order to outline the image of Sweden that appears in Russian press, three major papers were chosen as well. As in the case of Sweden, it is two high quality papers “Kommersant” (“Коммерсант”) and “Izvestia” (“Известия”), that represent serious business oriented (“Kommersant” mostly) press and a tabloid “Komsomolskaya pravda” (“Комсомольская правда”). The latter, having been one of the main Soviet papers once and evolved (or degraded) into a tabloid, is at the same time not that much low quality “yellow press”.

Analysis of the context, in which Sweden is mentioned, was based on a research through the articles. The search result in “Kommersant” for “Sweden” and “Swedish” produced mostly references to the Hockey World championship, “Volvo” car industry, European Union. Generally, the image of Sweden is positive, which is reflected in a trend to cite a commercial slogan of the Swedish company “Electrolux”, used for their advertising campaign in Russia, stating “Electrolux. Швеция. Сделано с умом.” (“Electrolux. Sweden. Smartly made”), that has become a common stable association of “smartly made” with Sweden. The expression, for example, was applied in “Kommersant” articles about “Volvo”.

Among other articles, related to Sweden in “Kommersant”, the focus is made on the importance of sport in Sweden by naming it “the most sport-loving country of Scandinavia”

(Kommersant, 15 Apr 2009), as well as one of the most popular destinations for political asylum seekers (Kommersant, 26 Mar 2009). On the whole, the paper holds a neutral and factual stance, and the only non-positive connotation “Sweden” can be related is its being critical towards Russian foreign policy (Kommersant, 7 May 2009).

The search in “Izvestia” gives a similar result. Mostly, it reflects the latest news, the word “Sweden” was mentioned as referring to the Eurovision Song Contest, Nordstream gas-pipeline project, Sweden as a part of the EU and as a participant in the Hockey World Championship. “Sweden” and “Swedish” combined are mentioned in a context of the economic crisis, fight against pirate downloading activity. The main problem with this kind of articles is that they are basically informative, neutral and are replicas from other news agencies, thus not representing neither author’s stance nor popular perceptions or stereotypes about Sweden.

Nevertheless, as a response to Swedish negative upheaval against Russian position on the War in Georgia, rather severe critics of the Swedish government and the foreign minister Carl Bildt, in particular, can be mentioned. Petr Inozemtsev wrote in his quite offensive article that the characteristic feature of Bildt’s policy in international relations was a “rejection of everything Russian” (Inozemtsev, Izvestia, 22 Aug 2008).

Another “hot” topic, visible in the paper in 2008, was the adoption of the Swedish law on FRA (Försvarets radioanstalt), The National Defence Radio Establishment, permitting Swedish authorities to carry out information intelligence in regard to the current IT threats. After the adoption of the law, headlines about Sweden’s plans to monitor Russian phone lines and internet traffic appeared, as about 80% of those go through the Swedish channels. But, despite the general concern about the fact, the image of Sweden, presented, could not be viewed as much negative (Izvestia, 10 July 2008). Thus, the political image, or rather the image of Swedish-Russian relations can be regarded as critical from the both sides. Even though the

perception of Sweden is much more positive, in the printed media, critic is also present, but almost always as a response to the Swedish media.

More stereotyped images of Sweden could be found in a less serious title of “Komsomolskaya pravda”. The first thing, that was striking: along with results for “Sweden” search, a number of online advertisements of hotel booking in Switzerland appeared. Confusing Sweden and Switzerland to a certain degree may be envisaged as a stereotype of its own, though it is not a typically Russian “tradition”, but rather a universal one, due to the similar sounding names.

The topics related to Sweden seemed to be the same in general, and, like in previous two searches, the country is only mentioned, without any “talking” adjectives or definitions that can serve as a basis for outlining national stereotypes. Nevertheless, it appears that in “Komsomolskaya pravda”, a broader perspective on Sweden is presented. It draws its readers’ attention to Swedish culture, mentioning the famous Swedish writer of books for children Astrid Lindgren and one of her most well-known characters in Russia - Karlsson, who lives on the roof (Karlsson på taket).

Interestingly enough, Karlsson is more popular in Russia, than in Sweden itself. This “mystery” has been studied by a number of philologists. Tatyana Chesnokova, for example, even devoted a chapter to the phenomenon of Karlsson’s popularity in Russia in her monograph on the Swedish-Russian cultural dialogue: Karlsson as the most favourite Swedish character, in Russia represents the image of Swedish literature and Sweden on the whole. He is so popular, that Swedish literature theorists suggest he should have some Russian features (Chesnokova 101). The Swedish Slavic languages researcher Magnus Uggren even called Karlsson a “Russian archetype” (Ibid). Another hypothesis has it that he is the first anti-hero of children literature in the USSR, he breaks the rules, established in a society, which made Karlsson

popular not only in the USSR, but in the Socialist block on the whole. This scenario does not seem probable enough as Karlsson was not the only Astrid Lindgren's personage to be a rebel (Chesnokova 102). Still, Karlsson's popularity in Russia presents a riddle. According to Kerstin Kvint, the most popular Lindgren's character in the world is Pippi Long Stocking (Pippi Långstrumpa) (Kvint 15), but in Russia in comparison to Karlsson, all other characters fade out, especially Emil, who is regarded as typically Swedish by Swedes themselves. This also poses a question of cultural miscomprehension, as for Russians Karlsson represents a symbol of Sweden. In every article about Astrid Lindgren or Sweden, Sweden is called "the homeland of Karlsson". Thus, Tatyana Chesnokova speaks about stereotyping with Karlsson becoming a "Russian stereotype", as in Russian translations the character is much nicer than in the original, as all his negative features have almost disappeared (Chesnokova 109).

Moreover, a very good Soviet animation film about Karlsson contributed greatly to Karlsson's "fame", as it made him and his phrases admired by the Russian audience. For example, a popular citation from "Karlsson" - "Calm, only calm" is often employed when portraying Sweden as a peaceful country and describing the so called "Nordic temper", supposedly inherent to the Swedes, that is being composed and reserved. (Komsomolskaya Pravda, 10 Oct 2008). Thus, Sweden is also pictured as a good destination for travelling with children, as it is perceived as a tranquil and safe country in terms of criminal situation. The paper also gives descriptions of some Swedish brands, operating in Russia, like "IKEA" and a cloths retail chain "H&M", recognizing them as "an example of democratic style with reasonable prices"(Komsomolskaya Pravda, 19 Mar 2009).

Thus, in comparison to Swedish papers' mentioning Russia, in the Russian ones news or reviews about Sweden do not appear that often. Usually, those are articles, reprinted from other news agencies, providing only neutral facts about pressing international, economic or sport events, and cannot be regarded as giving valuable insights into the stereotyped image of

Sweden. In more specific articles, related to Sweden, the image presented is clearly positive, and the associative row with a peaceful, progressive country, inhabited by beautiful, fair-haired people is strong. In a survey by the Public Opinion Fund, a little outdated, as conducted in 2001, the primary associations with Sweden in Russia were those of a welfare-state with high living standards (26%) and nature and skiing (6%). (“Geoproekt: Shvetsia” public opinion poll)

Still, the fact of Swedish critical stance on Russian domestic and foreign policy is also often highlighted, and a response to that can seem defensive, and sometimes even offensive, where the notion of Sweden as a historic rival is being regularly raised, as well as turning to the past victories over Sweden. Here, the battle of Poltava as a symbol of a full-fledged victory for Russia and complete defeat for Sweden is of a focal point, very often referred to in the sport competitions reviews. Though it is arguable whether this historic paralleling is that visible in the popular stereotypes about Sweden. Thus, only 10% of respondents in 2001 would call Sweden as a nation hostile to Russia, whereas 65% would regard it as friendly. The historic associations were mentioned only by 1%, and were always about the Northern war and Poltava. (“Geoproekt: Shvetsia” public opinion poll)

Finally, a look upon the most popular linguistic clichés, containing the adjective “Swedish”, and often used in press and named by the poll respondents, are “Swedish table” (“шведский стол”) and “Swedish family” (“шведская семья”). The first, having appeared in Sweden and raised much admiration from the Russian travelers in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as discussed above, has in fact nothing to do with Sweden any more, as it is applied for a buffet lunch in general (or what in Swedish is called “smårgosbord”). The expression “Swedish family” serves as a euphemism for non-ordinary sexual relations, stemming from the perception of the Swedes as a “dissolute nation” (“Geoproekt: Shvetsia” public opinion poll). Probably, the notion comes from the Soviet period view on Sweden as a country with a liberal stance on non-marital



relationships and one of the first in Europe to allow pornography (Chernysheva b 85). Still, in comparison to the Swedish clichés that include "Russian" definition, Russian expressions with an adjective "Swedish", like "Swedish matches" ("шведские спички"), basically meaning just matches, and "Swedish wall" ("шведская стенка") – a name for wall bars, called so because of the Swedish inventor, with an exception of the notorious "Swedish family", are neutral and bear more positive implications.

### **3.3. National stereotyping as presented in the contemporary Swedish - Russian mutual perceptions.**

Perhaps, the brightest and quite recent example of national stereotyping in Swedish-Russian mutual perceptions is the performance made by a Swedish comedian Henrik Dorsin and the "Grotesco" music band at the Swedish Melodifestivalen song contest in the beginning of spring 2009. Their song and video "Tingeling goes Russia", performed at the Melodifestivalen, a national selection competition for the annual Eurovision Song Contest that was held in Moscow this year, almost caused a diplomatic scandal with the Russian embassy protest and the Swedish Television sending it flowers as a sign of apology.

The video presented a story about two Swedish producers arriving in a cold, grey Moscow, covered with snow, to meet Russian music mafia, portrayed with all the attributes of it like golden chains, furs, black caviar, champagne, escorted by a beautiful girl and a group of scary-looking bodyguards, all wearing guns. The song, itself a set of hardly identified phrases in Russian, like "Na zdorovie, Lenin" ("Cheers, Lenin"), "S nastupayushchim" ("Happy New Year"), "Do svidania, Putin" ("Good-bye, Putin"), was accompanied by a live show, that involved a Russian Army choir, Russian dolls (matryoshki), red stars and traditional shawls on provocative dancers' outfit, Cossack dancers and a dancing bear. The mixture of stereotypes

was completed by an extract from the Soviet anthem, which happens to be the contemporary Russian anthem as well, and caused the main objection from the Russian embassy, claiming it an inappropriate use of national symbols.

But, it is not the song and the video that is interesting in the national stereotyping contest, but rather a discussion it led to in the media. The reaction of the Russian embassy was perceived as exaggerated and a debate on whether the Swedish Television should have apologized started in the Swedish papers. “Dagens Nyheter” wrote that one can’t take Russia’s accusations of Sweden’s stereotyped thinking seriously, as the whole protest was just “showing off claws publicly”, whereas a better PR management for Russia was advised (Bjurwald, Dagens Nyheter, 19 Mar 2009). The general attitude was to view the performance as a joke and nothing more, which according to one of the organizers, was rather aimed at mocking up Swedish prejudices about Russia, not about Russia itself. (Svenska Dagbladet, 17 mar 2009)

Interestingly enough, in Russian media the incident did not receive that high profile and was only briefly mentioned. Nevertheless, a Russian band “Plekhanovo” has released a parody response to the Swedish “Tingeling”. The “Russians’ response”, as it was called by “Svenska Dagbladet” (Svenska Dagbladet, 1 Apr 2009) focused on Sweden’s defeat at the “Euro 2008” football championship, at the Hockey 2008 World championship and in the Poltava battle. The lyrics suggested that the Swedes should remember Peter the Great, under whose rule the Poltava battle was won. The authors claimed that their end was to illustrate their stereotypes about Sweden as a “constantly losing nation, either on a football field or by Poltava”, still recognizing that their video has become widely known in Sweden, because even “old people are very active Internet users there” (Komsomolskaya Pravda, 18 Apr 2009). Thus, even in criticizing Sweden, the musicians have made a credit to its technologically developed society.

In order to get a more comprehensive information on the national stereotypes, widespread in the popular discourse of Russia and Sweden, and due to the lack of data on the public opinion concerning mutual perceptions of the two nations, as it was already mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, or need to supplement the results of the polls that are available, but still are a little outdated, a small survey was designed and conducted during the autumn of 2009. For this research a selection of Russian and Swedish respondents was made. The Russian selection included 71 people (24 (33%) male and 49 female (67%)), the Swedish one - 87 (47 female (54%) and 40 male (46%) respondents). As for the age groups representations I decided it would be fruitful to have three age categories. The first one included people from 18 to 25 years of age, representing students, that is the most active and communicative part of the population, at the same time forming a basis for a present-day and future actors in development of the bilateral relations between the countries, whether as key players at the political or economic scene, which is not as improbable as it might sound, or more likely as tourists and exchange students. Thus, the opinion and the vision of the other nation of this age group represents a good indicator of both the popular perceptions and stereotypes and certain problems that should be drawn attention to. That is why in both selections, Swedish as well as Russian, this group comprises 65% and 69% of respondents accordingly. The second age group – 26 to 40 years – is in fact more the public opinion formers, and thus the its reflectors. But the major reason for drawing a line between the two groups was an assumption that those aged under 25 have been actually brought up in a new world system with no longer Soviet Union existing and hence are freer in terms of ideologically based stereotypes, which could be also said about the Swedes, as a certain stereotype in itself or a tradition of perceptions of Russia could be embedded in the mind of the older people, having lived near to the Soviet Union. This category comprises 30% in both selections of respondents. As for the last age group of those over 40, theoretically they are even more subjected to the

stereotyped thinking of the past. However, as my survey and the research on the whole was focused more on the younger people, who, besides, were practically more available for the survey, there have been only single cases for this category. Concerning geographical representation, I tried to make the selection as diverse as possible, though, of course, the central regions of the both countries prevail. On the other hand, it is mostly the centre to provide information outwards and thus forming the core stereotypes in mutual perceptions, and the answers do not seem to vary drastically depending on the center/province status of the respondents.

The questionnaires have been spread traditionally by providing hard copies to the respondents, as well as using certain Internet resources like social networks and the most helpful and specialized website for conducting surveys “Survey Monkey” ([www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com))<sup>6</sup>.

As noted above, the aim of the survey was to find out the most common stereotypes, spread within Swedish and Russian society as seen through the prism of young people. The questionnaires consisted of 10 questions only so that they were not seen as great inconvenience for the respondents, with a focus on associations arising when mentioning “Sweden”/”Russia”, “Swedish”/”Russian”, naming Swedish/Russian brands and (well?)-known personalities. Besides, preferable newspapers and TV channels/programmes were mentioned in order to obtain the respondents’ sources of information.

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<sup>6</sup> The two questionnaires “Your perception of Sweden” and “Your perception of Russia” are designed in Russian and Swedish languages accordingly. For more detailed information, please, see:

“*Er meningar om Ryssland*”

[http://www.surveymonkey.com/MySurvey\\_EditorPage.aspx?sm=A8V%2fkHX91RIb%2beo4VNNQpRylrEJrAulCW55kWHev4zc%3d](http://www.surveymonkey.com/MySurvey_EditorPage.aspx?sm=A8V%2fkHX91RIb%2beo4VNNQpRylrEJrAulCW55kWHev4zc%3d)

“*Ваши представления о Швеции*”

[http://www.surveymonkey.com/MySurvey\\_EditorPage.aspx?sm=7WNP%2bWPP%2f7vNzgnSwQGRNFp0y3aEUsta3JcbH69EejY%3d](http://www.surveymonkey.com/MySurvey_EditorPage.aspx?sm=7WNP%2bWPP%2f7vNzgnSwQGRNFp0y3aEUsta3JcbH69EejY%3d)

The results of the survey as well as the process of its conduction itself turned out to be very interesting and somewhat unexpected. One of the first questions of the poll was whether a person had ever been to Sweden/Russia, and for how long. The answers on the associations and brands then were in several cases apparently dependant on the fact of visiting the country in question. Thus, most Swedes could not mention any Russian brand, except for “Gazprom”, “Vodka” or “Caviar” (without any particular further precision). Among those who have been to Russia some minor trademarks were named, mostly known within the country. Surprisingly though, that many Swedes spoke about the “VAZ” or “Lada” cars, which would have never been thought of as a prominent brand in Russia itself. On the opposite, the major Swedish brands like “Volvo”, “Saab”, “IKEA” and “H&M” were named by the vast majority of the Russian respondents. The little problem here, though, was that some of them confused Swedish brands with other Scandinavian or Finnish trademarks.

A telling result is that for the Swedes “Russian” was first of all associated with the language and its characteristic features, sometimes, quite contradictory, as it was seen as either soft or hard, beautiful or ugly. Anything else beside these connotations was rarely mentioned. For Russians, on the contrary, “Swedish” was more often an element of the linguistic clichés, like the “Swedish table”, which in fact had nothing to do with Sweden itself as it was already discussed.

Associations with the country names also show differences in the perceptions patterns. For the Swedes “Russia” was linked to something huge, cold (snowy, Siberian), alcohol-drinking, the Soviet Union and the Soviet past, also mentioning communism, KGB, working camps, etc. The answers for the personalities were also highly “politicized”, as mostly the political leaders of Russia and the Soviet Union were named, along with the “dead writers” (Russian literature classics like Tolstoy, Dostoevsky and Chekhov) and ice hockey players (that

is mostly by male respondents). For the Russians the political image of Sweden is limited mostly to bright historical personalities and events, like Karl XII or Olof Palme, or the present – day Royal family members (and it was rather surprising to see the respondents actually mention all (!) the members of the Swedish Royal family, which could be a consequence of their popularity in the tabloids). However, no other prominent political associations could be outlined, and only a few have named the Swedish Prime Minister. The ones to take the lead among the Swedish celebrities known in Russia were ABBA and Astrid Lindgren, which is hardly unexpected due to their recognition here as well as everywhere else. As for the country itself, the accent was shifted to the Swedish culture, high living standards and quality, the overall successfulness and stableness in terms of economy, politics, social life, ecology, culture, sport, that is in all major areas. Interestingly though is that the cold and Northern climate as well as alcohol (“Absolut” was one of the most popular answers) were also steadily associated with Sweden, thus presenting at least one common ground, as much as a stereotype, in mutual perceptions of Russia and Sweden.

On the whole, the survey serves as yet another proof of the much discussed imbalance in the Swedish-Russian mutual perceptions. The old stereotypes about the Soviet Union have actually been extrapolated on the contemporary Russia, which is primarily seen as a big unreliable political entity, and hence, rather negatively. I should remark, that some elements of Russian culture were mentioned, like Bolshoy Theatre or ballet, but the “political line” clearly prevails. Another thing is the apparent lack of any other information on Russia, as not many of the respondents travelled there. In case of Russians, at least half of the respondents did visit Sweden, if only for a few days, though their responses are also filled with stereotypes, even if to a slighter degree. Although, the problem is not in the actual visits and empirical knowledge, but in an efficient country promotion policy, which Russia obviously lacks. Moreover, the popular perceptions as shown in the survey reflect the media presentation of the information

analyzed. Finally, following Lippmann's concept, both nations are envisaged in comparison to the respondents' own national values and motives. Thus, due to the high value of democracy, the Swedes highlight the political regime, which is dramatically different from the own, whereas the Russians tend to stress the well-functioning economic and social situation.

According to Sävborg, discussions of the image of Russia in Sweden have been subjected to a certain degree of dualism: Russia has had to be regarded either as totally evil and dangerous, or absolutely normal with a flourishing economy, which Sweden should cooperate with. Any middle tones, on the contrary, are hard to attract the media attention (Sävborg a 4). The similar rhetoric pattern could be traced in the debates around the Nordstream, seen as either a hostile Russian intelligence project from the point of view of the political circles or as an effective tool of economic cooperation.

This asymmetry was also highlighted by the then Swedish ambassador to Russia Sven Hirdman at the conference on Swedish and Russian academic, political and economic relations, held in 2001:

“If we compare the image of Sweden in Russia and that of Russia in Sweden, they are drastically different. Sweden was always perceived as a country with a similar nature and spirit. People know “Volvo”, “IKEA”, “Ericsson” and are positive towards Swedish products. “Swedish model” is an example for the Russians, even though the Swedes themselves do not know what it is. <...> Russia is on the contrary never regarded as a close neighbour. It is a faraway, instable country, conducting wars and conflicts and ruled by strange leaders. Of course, there is a wonderful art, writers, the Russian language. But only a few would like to go to Russia, whereas many Russians go to Sweden” (Hirdman 19).

Thus, the historically established imbalance in the mutual perceptions has not shifted, but rather been preserved, following the new times and generally not taking into account

certain objective changes. Unfortunately, this perceptive pattern, to a great degree based on stereotypes, is also hard to change, and there are various reasons for it, starting from the specific features of stereotypes as fixed and stable entities to the fact that not much information could be either available or present interest to the general public, especially in the case of Russia's image in Sweden. Then objectively the most effective way to try to overcome this situation is a better image promotion policy, and the Swedish one could be taken as an example, even though, stereotypes as a means of world understanding are not something we should fight. Then, at least they could be used from a positive perspective.



## **Conclusion.**

Stereotyping as a stable habit of perception is a universally spread phenomenon. It is even more significant when analyzing the stereotypes existing in the mutual perceptions of nations, especially in the neighbouring countries, like it is the case with Russia and Sweden. The bilateral relations are playing a crucial role in the process of national stereotyping, as the historical setting serves as a ground for emergence of new stereotypes, which are later reproduced in the popular discourse and consequently are rather enduring, even if the pattern of interaction changes.

The analysis media and opinion polls, as well as historical overview of the Swedish-Russian mutual perceptions allowed distinguish the major stable assessments of natural-geographic, ethno-social, cultural, and political character of “the Other”. Primarily, Russians have a neutral and overall positive image of Sweden and Swedes, seen through the prism of a big nation that is not very closely, on a small country like Sweden. Those are traditional notions held during the long history of interaction (clean water, reindeers, IKEA, quality) and emotional assessment of a national character (calm, boring, sporty). History and culture of Sweden is concise to the mentioning Astrid Lindgren and a number of music performers, as well as the Royal family members. High living standard and social security system is also an outstanding feature of Sweden often stressed. Thus, an image of a somewhat ideal nation is presented.

For Sweden the image of Russia is also a little simplified and mostly with a negative inclination. Some of the stereotypes indicate the traditional perceptions of Russia widespread in Europe as a far, cold, huge and not very comprehensible country (fur, winter, cold, oil). The long story of rivalry in the Baltic Sea area between Sweden and Russia, the Northern war, the status of Finland were those focal points in the stereotypes creation. Even if there were short

periods of “rapprochement” in the mutual perceptions, like the one during the first years of the Soviet Union, after the Baltic States and Finland were liberated, and the newly established state was perceived much more positively, than the Russian Empire. It did not last long, though, as the following wars against Finland, the Wallenberg case, Soviet intervention in Central Europe and the Cold war developments on the whole, complicated the bilateral relations in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, also much aggravated by the case of the Soviet U-boat allegedly spying in the Swedish maritime area. The collapse of the Union and several years later Putin’s coming to power aroused certain expectations and hopes for change, but further political and economic developments in Russia caused hard critic of the Swedish media and hence public opinion. That is why despite the more widely spread contacts between the two countries, made possible after the fall of the Soviet Union, the perceptions of Russians in Sweden remained stereotyped and to a certain degree even biased. On the contrary to the Russian image of Sweden built around the nation, its economic and cultural achievements, Swedish media tend to portray Russian people through references to Russia’s political regime, constantly making comparisons to its imperial and Soviet past. None of the papers studied went beyond descriptions of political or social vicissitudes, never or rarely touching upon any other issues, except for sport. Even in the notorious “Tingeling” performance most stereotypes were based on Communist symbols.

As a result, the perception of Russia in Sweden and Sweden in Russia is imbalanced. Whereas Sweden is pictured as a wealthy and progressive society, and generally positively perceived, the image of Russia has always been distorted and subjected to severe critic, although, not always groundlessly. The “rysskräcken” seems to be very deeply enrooted in the Swedish mentality, and cannot be explained by the long historic rivalry only, as Sweden was engaged in wars with many other countries over times, and no direct conflicts in the Swedish-Russian relations took place for over than 200 years. The number of articles devoted to Russia in Swedish press proves that even if not a phobia, a certain concern about Russia is still there.

One of the possible reasons for this persistent imbalance could lie, as Burgman (2006) suggested, not in a higher degree of generosity and tolerance in Russians, but rather in the fact that Russians were less enlightened and had less to fear of Sweden. It is prominent, though, how the metaphor of the Poltava battle is often applied by both sides – by the Swedes to support their arguments for the “Russian threat”, and for Russians to use it as a means of defense against Swedish critic, as multiple examples show, even though it is not that frequently referred in the popular associations.

Interesting enough, the amount of research on the issue of the perception of Russia in Sweden is much bigger than that of Sweden in Russia. In my view this could be explained by several factors. First, even though Sweden is one of Russia’s closest neighbours, gradually it has lost its, so to say, primary significance in terms of bilateral relations to Russia, and previously, Soviet Union, and even the Russian Empire, as Europe on the whole, and Germany, in particular, and later the United States held the first place here and consequently drew the most attention. At the same time for Sweden Russia has always presented an immediate threat, either justified or not, and occupied the people’s mind and social discourse. Second, which could also stem from the former reason, the overall image of Sweden has been highly positive during most of the interaction period, and as a rule positive developments attract less attention either from media or general public. These comments did however emerge quite often in the travelers or diplomats notes, but also more as a contrast to domestic situation, which thus was perceived as negative. On the opposite, in Sweden almost all comments on Russia have been quite negative and thus the issue of relations to Russia and its state of affairs still are of a high profile.

I would consequently disagree, that the Swedish media rarely pay attention to Russia, after a short glimpse of interest in the early 1990s (Chernysheva a 124), as a number of articles

on Russia is overwhelming. On the other hand, their content is almost certainly negative and devoted to the conflicts, wars or extreme social situations and problems in Russia, rather than any events of cultural and social life. Thus, despite the seeming overflow of information, a lack of it, comprising many important components, that form a national image, could be observed. as a stereotype is a part of the social stance, then this perception is very hard to change.

And this seems to be the major problem. Then, if we also take into account the fact, that the authors tend to choose certain questions which are considered the most relevant and interesting to their mind as representing a nation, it is the same topics that are being reproduced over and over again as individual articles or along with others as commentaries. And as mass media is apparently the first source of stereotyping and its spread, this could be said a main mechanism of stereotypes preservation and endurance.

At the same time, if judged by frequency of its mentioning in the Russian media, Sweden is not playing that important role, which in part is also a traditional pattern. Perhaps, coming from the Soviet and even imperial times a somewhat condescending “official” stance was established in the Russian media towards all smaller countries, which is in fact, the major part of the world, and Sweden thus did not receive much attention. Nevertheless, the review of newspaper materials, has allowed outline certain issues that regularly appear when the nation in question is described. They form a sort of a reference for the readers, as they help to create an image and show the components it consists of.

Following Lippmann’s concept of the “cultural framework”, which predefines our vision of “the Other”, a conclusion could be drawn that even though there were travelers and residents from Russia in Sweden and from Sweden in Russia, which Olga Chernysheva gives a detailed description of, including their memoirs, impressions, letters – the direct contact on the whole did not drastically change the perception. Those features unusual and not common to the nation in question stayed highlighted, and thus contributed to the creation of the image of

Russia in Sweden and vice versa, forming certain stereotypes. Comparing and assessing the nature of stereotyping, those perceptions present more indicators of the national mentality and way of thinking, than of the stereotyped nation itself. Thus the created reference framework in the image of another nation can function also as linked to the own national identity and could be explained from that point of view.

This property of national stereotyping of being in fact reflections of an anti-image of oneself, means that they are specifically hard to change due to the difficult, if possible, process of changing a self image. Besides, representing the “Other” in a bad light allows create a more positive image of oneself in comparison. And this need to counterbalance and highlight the Swedish positive self-image could partly explain Swedes’ of Russia based upon fairly disguised inquietude and hostility. Although in Russian case the opposite trend takes place, where the prevailing positive image of Sweden could be regarded as an apparent or sublime self criticism.

Summing up, whatever might be an individual stance on stereotypes – to avoid them, fight them or take for granted – it is no doubt that stereotyping, and national stereotyping, in particular, occupies a significant role in creating and influencing mutual perceptions. They are most probably impossible to change even if a very effective campaign on their disclosure is carried out, because embedded in the human mind as a part of linguistic and cultural bases, stereotypes just will always be there, deliberately or not. Another thing is whether those stereotypes could be somehow engaged into national branding process, which is quite successfully being done by multiple Swedish national agencies. The problem of Russia is in the actual absence of any such institution, and the whole “Tingeling” case and Swedish public discourse around it, has only once again proved a need for good national branding of the country and promotion for Russia in general, and in Sweden, in particular, and leaves hope for Russian authorities to reevaluate their image in the Swedish society.

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