

Representation of Image of the Republic of Tatarstan in Foreign Mass Media

By

Zhanna Georgievna Konovalova

Department of foreign languages in the sphere of international relations, Kazan Federal University, E-mail: zhanna.konovalova@gmail.com

Alsu Alexandrovna Khafizova

Department of foreign languages in the sphere of international relations, Kazan Federal University, E-mail: alsou-f@yandex.ru

Akhmadieva Rosa Shaikhaidarovna,

Doctor of Pedagogical Sciences, Professor, Honored Scientist of the Republic of Tatarstan, Rector of the Kazan State Institute of Culture

Abstract

This paper dwells upon the foreign mass media perception of the Republic of Tatarstan (Russia) by utilizing the content analysis of the major mass media outlets. The authors examine news reports and periodical articles from Internet versions of major national editions of Great Britain, France and Spain (BBC News, Le Monde, El Mundo) in order to make conclusions about the peculiarities of international media image of the Republic of Tatarstan.

Key words: The Republic of Tatarstan, media discourse, international relations, image of the region, nation branding, representation.

Introduction

Each region aims at creating its positive image that will help the authorities to promote the territory and attract foreign investments to favour intensification of economic development and stimulate external policy cooperation. As C.S. Browning argues on the examples of such countries as India, Iceland, Denmark, and Chile, “over the last 15–20 years, the concept of nation branding has gained considerable currency, with various countries initiating branding campaigns” (Browning, 2015). However, region or place branding remains a phenomenon difficult to define due to its cross-disciplinary nature (Van Hoose et al., 2021). Generally, the scholars treat nation branding as a multi-dimensional phenomenon which comprises the notions of image, identity, status, and recognition (Browning, 2015). The image of the region as a part of nation branding is usually formed by government institutions that focus on promoting its material and non-material assets, namely natural resources that the territory owns, means of production, industrial and recreational zones on the one hand and development strategies, technological resources, reputation, trademarks and cultural values on the other. In present global economic conditions, the image of the region is viewed through the prism of the “competition state”, which comprises the notion of making the state itself an increasingly attractive destination for global investment capital (Fougner, 2006). To increase the attractiveness of the region it is important to create its recognizable visual and verbal image. For this purpose, the authorities make a package of texts, create a logo, hold special events that aim at presenting the region at its best (Minaeva, 2019).

One of the productive communicative technologies that form the image of the territory

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includes various publications in mass media. As P. Bourdieu argues, “ethnic” or “regional” categories, like categories of kinship, institute a reality by using the power of revelation and construction exercised by objectification in discourse” (Bourdieu, 1991). Target groups may get information via various communication channels among which the Internet becomes one of the most affordable and flexible sources of information. The types of such sources may include official web sites of the region administration and the region itself, special portals on tourism and investments; accounts in social nets devoted to the administration of the region, city-managers, profile ministers, representatives of culture and sport and their blogs. Media outlets and news agencies that are highly involved in representation of this or that region in the context of events that happen on its territory may also contribute or vice versa disrupt to a certain degree in forming the positive image that the authorities strive for. If the information presented on official web sites is formed according to the desired image, it is carefully selected and processed, the media outlets and news agencies write about the facts that very often have nothing to do with positiveness. In this case the associations created under the influence of these facts are directly transformed to the perception of the whole region. It is the accessibility, credibility and wide distribution of mass media that helps it shape the vision of reality for their recipients (Ndiayea & Ndiayea, 2014).

The main focus of the present article is the image of the Republic of Tatarstan in foreign media. The studies of Tatarstan’s external perception might contribute to the assessment of the extent to which the global community shares its self-vision as “the third capital of Russia”. According to B. Ospanova, H. A. Sadri, R. Yelmurzayeva, research into external perception of the region or political unity can “offer significant insight into the relation between self-rhetoric and reality” (Ospanova et al., 2017). It is worth mentioning that although the Republic of Tatarstan is considered to be one of the most active among other subjects of the Russian Federation in the realm of constructing its public image (Makarova, 2018), the scientific works devoted to the its image are not so numerous. They either take into account Russian media and date back to the period that covers the early 2000s and are written in social science field; or focus on political psychology and view the peculiarities of perception of the Republic in Russia and abroad within the same period. The more recent works also focus on the image of Tatarstan in Russian media (Andreeva & Lipatova, 2018) and strategy of its branding in the views and judgments of the people of the region (Makarova, 2018). This paper seeks to expand the research into Tatarstan’s external perception by introducing foreign mass media depiction of the region’s image.

Materials and methods

The main aim of our research is to study representation of the Republic of Tatarstan in foreign mass media and find out how newsworthy events presented in these publications might influence the perception of the image of the named region by the world community. For this purpose, we have studied a number of English, French and Spanish media outlets in their Internet representation (BBC, Le Monde, El Mundo). BBC is the UK national broadcaster which covers the world news and events daily. Le Monde is a daily newspaper that publishes news in France and around the world. It is considered to be of left-liberal views and is one of the major news-papers with large circulation that was traditionally focused on offering analysis and opinion not being just a newspaper of record. El Mundo is a daily newspaper which is considered to be one of the most widely-read and authoritative newspapers in Spain. It is considered to be of liberal and centre-right views.

The articles were chosen randomly by continuous sampling method on the basis of the key word “Tatarstan” and conceptual lexemes connected with it, like the name of its capital Kazan, personalities who have ties with this territory, events that happen there and the like. The period under consideration includes the time frame starting from 2000 up to 2021. Alongside the choice of the content of the articles we focus our research interest on linguistic stylistic presentation of the material. Methods that were applied include traditional general scientific methods of content analysis, comparison, generalization, discourse analysis and [continuous sampling method](#). These methods allowed us to explore and emphasize different dimensions of Tatarstan’s image as viewed by world community.

Results

The main findings from the conducted research and its in-depth analysis helped to outline the peculiarities of representation of the image of the republic in various foreign media outlets and raise a question whether media images created by journalists exert influence on the formation of the opinion of the region in the minds of the foreign audience. The key word search resulted in 184 journalist materials where the name Tatarstan was mentioned in the context of various events both positive and negative. The journalist genres were restricted by informative and analytical articles, while interviews and expert surveys were almost not presented. The retrospective outlook on the earlier publications showed that the articles published within the period of 1991-1999 were mainly devoted to the problems of the autonomy of the republic, separatism tendencies and the issue of being a fully legitimate territorial subject. The Republic of Tatarstan was presented alongside other Russian republics as Chechnya, North Ossetia and Bashkortostan. Y. V. Andreeva and A. V. Lipatova in their article devoted to the historical glance at the image of Tatarstan and its leaders in the federal press also highlight such themes of the publications as separatism and dynamics of the struggle of national republics for sovereignty (Andreeva & Lipatova, 2018).

Within the period of 2000-2021, the image of the republic was most widely represented in French Le Monde (See Figure 1) and got least coverage by Spanish El Mundo.

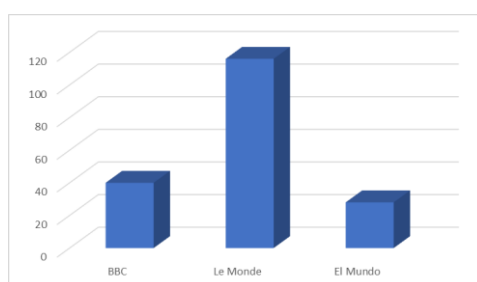


Fig.1. Qualitative representation of the Republic of Tatarstan in different media outlets

Tatarstan attracted the most media interest in years 2002, 2003, 2007, 2011, and 2012 (See Figure 2). In 2002 and 2003, Le Monde dedicated most pieces to the topic of internal relations of the entities of the Russian Federation. In 2007 Le Monde gave the most extensive coverage to Tatarstan’s participation in the elections of Russian President. In 2011, Tatarstan mostly appeared in all three media outlets in connection with the tragedy with cruise ship Bulgaria, which sank in the Kuybyshev Reservoir of the Volga River in the same year. In 2012, Tatarstan was mostly presented in the framework of extremism issues.

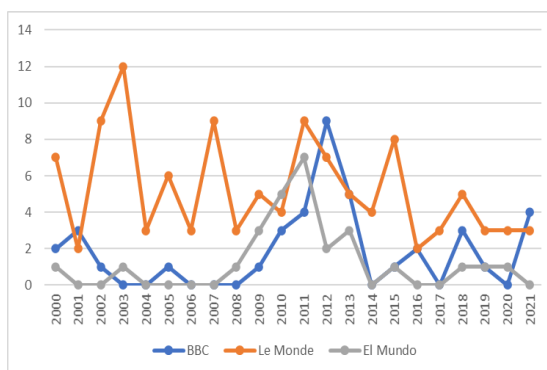


Fig.2. The coverage of the Republic of Tatarstan in different media outlets as represented by years 2000-2021

The news and entries connected with Tatarstan presented within the period of 2000-2021 in three media outlets can be classified according to the following sections: crimes and catastrophes, natural disasters, Islamism and extremism, political life (international and domestic issues), economics and industry, social and health issues, and culture and sport. BBC news represented the image of Tatarstan mostly negatively through its connection with the categories of “crimes and catastrophes” and “Islamism and extremism”, sport and culture being just the third most important sphere in which Tatarstan was presented (See Figure 3). El Mundo associated Tatarstan mostly with “culture and sport” and “crimes and catastrophes”, also much attention was paid to “Islamism and extremism” topic (See Figure 4). Le Monde generally focused on the political issues (both external and internal), connected with the republic, where both positive and negative contexts were represented, culture and sport being the second most common association (See Figure 5).

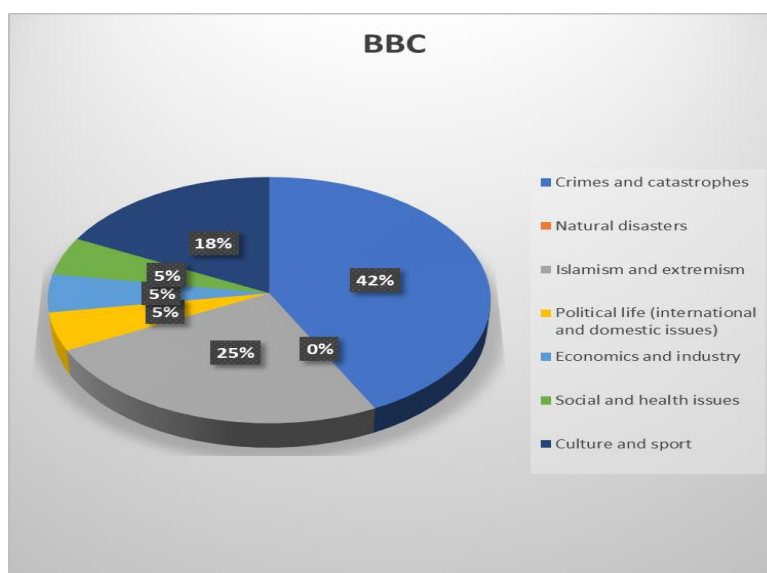


Fig.3 The categories through which the Republic of Tatarstan is represented by BBC

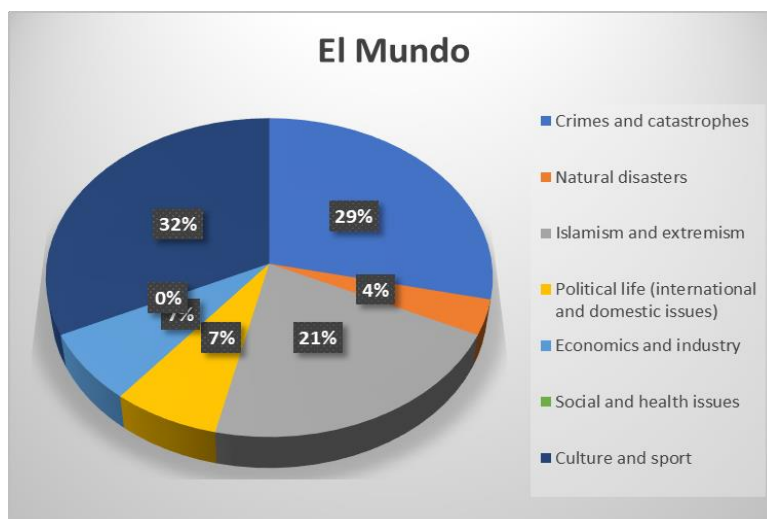


Fig.4 The categories through which the Republic of Tatarstan is represented by El Mundo

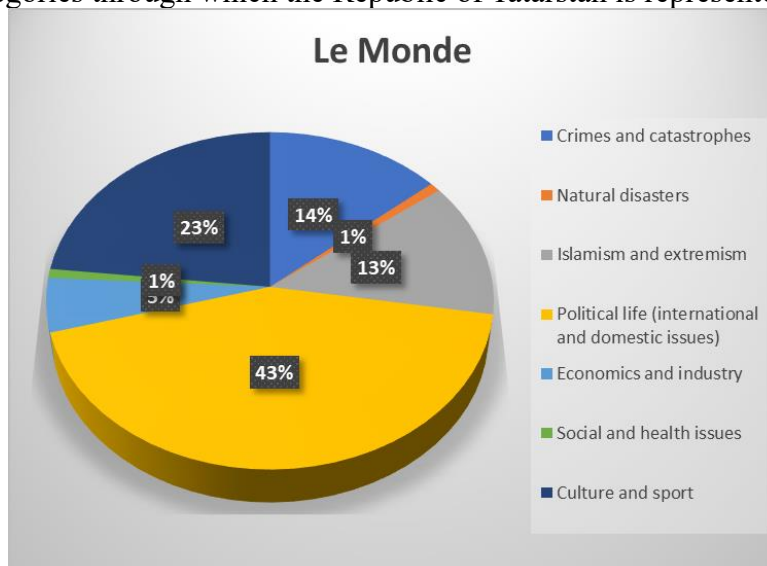


Fig.5 The categories through which the Republic of Tatarstan is represented by Le Monde

Discussion

Tatarstan as presented by BBC News

BBC in its representation of the Republic of Tatarstan most frequently connected the image of the republic with crimes and catastrophes. One of the prevailing events covered in BBC entries in 2021 was school shooting that happened in May, 2021 in the republic's capital city of Kazan where seven children, one teacher and one staff member were killed. The crime day was described rather emotionally as a “day of bloodshed” and the city of Kazan was presented as “struggling to come to terms with this tragedy” (<https://www.bbc.com>). BBC quoted the words of Tatarstan's leader R. Minnikhanov and the words of ordinary residents of Kazan about the tragedy. Two articles focused on the issue of gun control in Tatarstan and Russia, in general. The situation with guns ownership and usage was presented rather positively through the comparison with the US: “School shootings are relatively rare in Russia, partly because there are strict gun ownership regulations. There are far more private gun owners in the US than in Russia” (<https://www.bbc.com>). However, the authors express concern about the weakness of the system which came to light due to the tragedy in Kazan school.

Other catastrophes depicted by BBC News include the plane crash in the airport of Kazan in November 2013, sinking of the cruise ship Bulgaria that occurred in 2011 in the river Volga on the territory of the Republic, and fire at the shopping centre Admiral in Kazan in 2015. The articles dedicated to these events are mostly of informative character and are not as emotionally coloured as the ones referring to school shooting. Mostly, they present statistic data about the number of victims and an objective account of the events.

In this kind of articles, there can be traced a tendency of heroization of some Tatarstan residents, mostly victims of the happened catastrophes and violent acts. Thus, the image of the teacher Elvira Ignatieva, who died in the events of school shooting is presented through the eyes of people who knew her: “On Wednesday, about 100 people gathered at a traditional Muslim funeral for Elvira Ignatieva, an English teacher who was among those killed in the attack. “She was protecting her children,” Kazan resident Talgat Gumerov told Reuters news agency. “She was protecting [them] and didn't hide away” (<https://www.bbc.com>).

Other recurrent topics which appear in BBC news in connection with Tatarstan republic are Islamism and extremism. Several articles covered the car bomb that hit the Head of Islamic Theological Board of Tatarstan I. Faizov and assassination of his Deputy V. Yakupov in 2012. These events are treated as the proof of the process of “the region's radicalization” that dates back to the 1990s. This idea is illustrated also through the mention of Arab influence in Tatarstan that, according to BBC news, resulted in the fact that “there are now many young religious leaders in Tatarstan who were educated in Saudi Arabia and Egypt” (<https://www.bbc.com>).

In the articles connected with the issues of crimes, catastrophes, Islamism and extremism, BBC News introduces the republic to its readers through various means. Geographic pinpointing it on the map prevails and is often accompanied by commentaries characterizing its location within Russia: “Kazan lies about 720km (450 miles) east of Moscow” (<https://www.bbc.com>). Tatarstan in most publications is referred to as “autonomous republic of Tatarstan”, “Russian republic of Tatarstan” or “Muslim autonomous republic of Tatarstan”. The epithets “oil-rich” and “prosperous” are added in some of the articles. The image created by BBC reporters is constructed based on the leitmotif of Tatarstan's connection with Muslim traditions and culture, e.g. “Kazan is the capital of the Muslim-majority republic of Tatarstan” (<https://www.bbc.com>); “The Republic of Tatarstan is one of the biggest Muslim regions in the Russian Federation” (<https://www.bbc.com>). There are some positive expressions that are used to characterize the image of the region (“usually peaceful region”, “mufti's hard line against radical Islam”, “an example of religious tolerance in Russia”). However, the authors of the articles often introduce the idea of adverse impact of radical Islamism through negatively coloured expressions, such as “growing concerns”, “fear and mutual hatred”, “backlash from Muslims”, “Muslim sect”, “a violent campaign”. Generally, a two-fold association of Tatarstan with Muslim world is created: “Although Tatarstan wants to be seen as a bridge between the Muslim world and a more secular Europe, there are some young more radical-minded Tatars who see pragmatic Islamism as verging on the blasphemous” (<https://www.bbc.com>).

Other contexts, in which Tatarstan is presented, include international and domestic political issues, economics and industry, social and health issues, and culture and sport. The interest of BBC journalists in these topics in connection with the republic is distributed equally but these kinds of articles have much lower share in the media representation of Tatarstan. The articles connected with political issues generally present the image of Tatarstan rather

positively. “Tatarstan is a pre-dominantly Muslim republic, about an hour's flight east of Moscow. Thanks to an abundance of oil, it is one of the most developed parts of the Russian Federation” (<http://news.bbc.co.uk>). One of the leitmotifs of the articles is the special status of Tatarstan: “It has managed to peacefully secure unprecedented autonomy from Moscow. Located some 850km (528 miles) east of Moscow on the Volga river, Tatarstan is also home to a thriving economy” (<http://news.bbc.co.uk>). One of the tendencies is to contrast Tatarstan to general situation in Russia: “Russian officials do love their stamps and forms. Anyone who has lived or travelled in the country will be aware of their dedication to bureaucratic procedure. But in an aspiring republic on the Volga River, change is on the way” (<https://www.bbc.com>). The epithets “aspiring” and “thriving” create a positive image of the republic in comparison with the rest of the country. The articles outline Tatarstan’s significant oil reserves, developed agricultural sector, heavy industry as well as a strong sense of ethnic identity and appreciation of its unique history. Certain attention is paid also to Tatarstan leaders and other members of the government. One of the most widely mentioned figure is that of Tatarstan’s former president M. Shaimiyev “Its leader, Mintimer Shaimiyev, has secured autonomy without provoking Moscow into intervention with demands for independence” (<http://news.bbc.co.uk>). Generally, Tatarstan officials are characterized as progressive and efficient.

Economic BBC pieces also create the favourable image of the Republic: “Tatarstan is one of the biggest oil producers in Russia – with big ambitions. The state-owned oil company Tatneft is building the largest refinery complex in the whole country, part of a strategy to enlarge the domestic petrochemical industry” (<https://www.bbc.com>). The prevalence of superlative forms of adjectives creates the image of advanced and innovative economics and industry of the region. Attention is paid to international connections and economic cooperation of Tatarstan: “The majority of its inhabitants are Muslims. After the suppression of religion during the Soviet Union, Tatarstan is now rediscovering its Islamic roots – and seeking closer ties with other Muslim countries, in the Middle East or South East Asia” (<https://www.bbc.com>).

The image of Tatarstan is also represented through its culture and sport life. The authors of the articles covered major sport and cultural events that took place in the period of 2000-2001, such as World Cup-2018, Summer Universiade-2013, Tatar national midsummer festival, etc. The achievements of Tatarstan sport were emphasized in all the articles connected with sport. Although the main focus of the articles was football, in which respect much attention was paid to Kazan national football team Rubin, success of other sports in Kazan, namely basketball, volleyball and hockey, was also brought to life. Kazan infrastructure and facilities were also highlighted and characterized as “impressive” and “brand new”.

One of the leitmotifs in representing the region’s image is its closeness to the outer world”: “Less than 90 minutes from Moscow by plane and more than five hours from Barcelona and you are in Kazan – the most easterly point of this season's Champions League map” (<http://news.bbc.co.uk>). The journalists create an attractive image of the republic and its people, characterizing them through the metaphor “leaving and breathing sport”. Some of the articles are of humorous character and aim to create alive and attractive face of the capital city and the region itself. Thus, one of the articles shows the humorous twitter exchange between a football coach in Zimbabwe and Tatarstan’s state committee for tourism: “Walley visited Kazan, which is the capital of the republic of Tatarstan, for Spain’s group game against Iran. And on Wednesday, he said on his Twitter account: “is there any chance I can stay in Kazan after the World Cup and get a job in the city's tourism department? Please” ... Shortly after, he received

an invitation from the head of Tatarstan's state committee for tourism to meet and discuss his job prospects. There are always many jobs available "for passionate and hardworking people", a local tourism official said" (<https://www.bbc.com>). This kind of news story definitely shapes positive image of the region among the followers of the news service. The same positive effect is achieved by getting a closer look at Tatarsan authorities' attitude to sport. Mostly, the contribution of a former leader M. Shaimiyev to the development of national sport was emphasized: "He is interested in every little problem and always sets the highest standards. Especially the recruitment of club managers like Rubin's Kurban Berdyev, Zinetula Bilyaletdinov at Ak Bars and Vladimir Alekno at Zenit" (<http://news.bbc.co.uk>). The idea of the personal involvement of the leader of the republic in the smallest matters of national sport shapes the image of the region deeply interested in the health of the nation and upbringing and physical development of the youth.

Analysis of the articles connected with cultural aspects demonstrated that Tatarstan culture is viewed through the prism of its connection with Muslim traditions and attitude of the federal authorities. One of the events that attracted the attention of BBC news was the participation of the President of the Russian Federation V. Putin in national midsummer festival of Tatarstan, Sabantuy, which is held every summer. This event was treated by BBC as an opportunity to add new features to the image of the Russian president V. Putin and the attitude of the federal government to the republic: "Russian President Vladimir Putin showed the lighter side of his character when he attended a midsummer festival in the Tatarstan region. Donning a colourful local hat, he got into the spirit of the Sabantuy celebration, dancing and engaging in traditional games, as well as taking a drink with Second World War veterans" (<http://news.bbc.co.uk>). The choice of an epithet "lighter" attributed to the "side of the character" of V. Putin, which might be treated as a play on words, on the one hand, gives an opportunity to the readers to seek for implications connected with the side of the President's character as different from the other one, and, on the other, signifies the acceptance and support of the region by the federal authorities. Mentioning of the President of the RF "taking a drink" with veterans brings to light the idea of the support and respect expressed by the authorities, both federal and local, to the participants in the World War II, which again adds positive connotation to the image of the region. All in all, from the cultural side, Tatarstan in BBC news articles shows as an example of tolerance and mutual respect notwithstanding the mention of the implied "oppression" from the part of federal government: "Tatarstan, a mainly Muslim region with a proud history of opposition to Moscow rule, is now held up as a model of how Russia's various peoples can live together in peace" (<http://news.bbc.co.uk>). Another event that was covered by BBC was the dispute that was aroused by the release of the music video clip by Rezeda Ganiullina, one of the Tatarstan pop singers, which was filmed in front of the White Mosque in the town of Bolgar. The article introduced the multi-perspective view of the matter quoting all the sides of the dispute. The reaction of religious representatives of the Republic of Tatarstan was obviously presented as negative: "An imam at another mosque described the dance as a "desecration of the house of Allah" and called for the video to be removed, while the region's deputy mufti Rustam Batrov said: "Unfortunately, some representatives of Tatar pop culture have heads full of confusion. They do not understand what a mosque is and Islam in general" (<https://www.bbc.com>). The position of the singer was also introduced through outlining her reaction in social media: "Ms Ganiullina apologised on her VKontakte account, but began in defiant style: "Everyone perceives the situation depending on the level of their depravity... If this clip has insulted someone's feelings, I apologise. This is my stage image". The singer says she's Muslim and respects religious leaders, but notes: "A belly dance performed perfectly... isn't a striptease, it's a work of art" (<https://www.bbc.com>). The

objectivity of the account was provided by the introduction of the comments of the followers of the conflict: “A beautiful girl, a beautiful song, a beautiful dance! One shouldn't draw any parallels with Pussy Riot – these are different actions, as far apart as heaven and earth!” (<https://www.bbc.com>). The epithet “defiant” is the only evaluative remark from the author of the article, it is the impersonal compilation of the comments that involves the readers into making their own conclusions about the issue.

Health issues in the republic gained the least media attention, the articles mostly being just of informative character. Thus, in 2001 BBC once addressed to the outbreak of cholera in Kazan.

Tatarstan as presented in El Mundo

Spanish El Mundo represented Tatarstan most extensively in the categories of “culture and sport”, “crimes and catastrophes”, and “Islamism and extremism”.

The most multi-faceted image of Tatarstan was created in its connection with culture and sport matters. El Mundo paid great tribute to cultural events taking place in Tatarstan, among which was The Kazan Muslim film festival. Initially the festival was supposed to be mobile and take place in different Muslim cities of the Russian Federation. However, after Kazan being chosen as the first location, the decision was made to make it permanent hosting place for the festival, which has now become the culture brand of the Republic of Tatarstan. The festival is presented as “the only one of its kind in the world” (<https://www.elmundo.es>). The Republic of Tatarstan was also mentioned in reference to famous people who originated from there. Thus, the article entitled “Donan a un museo ruso el último retrato de Gala que hizo Dalí / Dalí's last portrait of Gala is donated to a Russian museum” was dedicated to the gift of the collector Alexander Shadrin to a museum in the Russian republic of Tatarstan. According to the article, “éste fue el último trabajo en el que aparece representada la musa del genio español, cuyo nombre real era Yelena Diákonova y que nació en Kazán, capital de Tatarstán / this was the last work in which the muse appears of the Spanish genius, whose real name was Yelena Diakonova and who was born in Kazan, capital of Tatarstan” (<https://www.elmundo.es>). Another example is mentioning of V. Axionov, who was born in Kazan in 1932. The article entitled “La pluma que combatió a la censura rusa / The pen that fought Russian censorship” introduced the negative image of Soviet regime which victimized many representatives of domestic culture: “Fue éste el caso de Vasili Axionov, que apenas contaba cinco años cuando su madre, la educadora y escritora Evguenia Guinzburg, fue arrestada, acusada de trotskista y condenada a 10 años de prisión en campos de trabajo forzado en Magadán, en la Siberia más remota. Su padre, un alto funcionario del comité local del Partido Comunista de Tatarstán, corrió la misma suerte. Era el año 1937 y el Padrecito Stalin había dejado huérfano a Vasili. / This was the case of Vasily Axionov, who was just five years old when his mother, the educator and writer Evguenia Guinzburg, was arrested, accused of Trotskyism and sentenced to 10 years in prison in forced labor camps in Magadan, in the most remote Siberia. His father, a senior official of the local committee of the Communist Party of Tatarstan, had the same fate. It was 1937 and Father Stalin had orphaned Vasily” (<https://www.elmundo.es>). Negative connotation is created by the images of arrests and imprisonments and negatively-coloured lexemes “fate” and “orphaned”. The tendency also worth mentioning is that many cultural are presented through the lenses of religious restrictions. Thus, the article, dedicated to the concert of Elton John, quoted the reactions of religious Muslim authorities that “urged” the fans not to attend the event: “Un castigo divino pesa sobre los fans de Elton John. Al menos, eso piensa un imán de Tatarstan -una república rusa de tradición musulmana – quien este jueves ha instado a los

fieles a no asistir a los conciertos en Rusia de la estrella británica, abiertamente gay, si no quieren recibir un “castigo divino” / A divine punishment weighs on Elton John fans. At least, that's what an imam from Tatarstan – a Russian republic with a Muslim tradition – thinks, who this Thursday has urged the faithful not to attend the concerts in Russia of the British star, openly gay, if they do not want to receive a “divine punishment” (<https://www.elmundo.es>). Thus, the image of strict religious limitations becomes central in the representation of the republic.

Kazan is very positively represented as the sports capital in many publications dedicated to football events held in the city. El Mundo introduced Kazan to its readers in 2009: “En esta segunda jornada, los focos del fútbol europeo alumbrarán también por primera vez a Kazan, capital de la provincia rusa de Tatarstan, donde el equipo local, el Rubin Kazan, recibirá al Inter de Milán, que, después de haberse estrenado con un empate ante el FC Barcelona, buscará su primera victoria / On this second day, the spotlight of European football will also illuminate for the first time Kazan, capital of the Russian province of Tatarstan, where the local team, Rubin Kazan, will receive Inter Milan, which, after having premiered with a draw against FC Barcelona, will seek its first victory” (<https://www.elmundo.es>).

As for “crimes and catastrophes” association, El Mundo reporters covered major catastrophic events, such as sinking of Bulgaria cruise ship in 2011, plane crash in 2013, the fire at the shopping centre Admiral in Kazan in 2015, which were generally referred to as “tragedies”. Some media attention was paid to less notoriously known explosion at the police station in Kukmor-region in 2020, the 2012 release of the 27 children that were kept underground by Muslim sect in Kazan, forest fires in Russia, which affected Tatarstan as well, in 2010. The tragedy with school shooting in Kazan, unlike in other analyzed editions, was not mentioned. At the same time, some attention is given to minor cases, where the republic is mentioned in the context of aggressive behaviour of the heavily drunk flight passenger (being stated as the place of the offender’s place of origin).

Generally, Tatarstan is referred to as “the Russian federated republic of Tatarstan”, “the Tatarstan region of central Russia”, “the rich oil region of Tatarstan”, “the Russian republic of Tatarstan”, the only emotionally-coloured characteristic being “rich”. Most often the region is represented through its Muslim connection: “Tatarstan, Bashkortostan [two republics whose main ethnic groups, Tatars and Bashkirs, are Muslims]” (<https://www.elmundo.es>). The focus of most articles is extremism and the effort that is paid by the government to combating it: “Extremism in Tatarstan has also had to be confronted” (<https://www.elmundo.es>). However, El Mundo, unlike BBC news, is more precise in reconstructing the image of Tatarstan as being multi-ethnic and multi-religious region. One of the articles gives the detailed characteristics of the location and peculiarities of the region: “Tatarstan is located in the eastern European part of Russia. The Tatars constitute 53 per cent of the population and belong to the Turkic peoples group, hence their affinity with the peoples of Turkey and Azerbaijan. Most Tatars profess Islam. Russians (39%) mostly identify with Orthodox Christianity. In the capital, Kazan, there is a unique Temple of all religions: an Orthodox church, a mosque, a synagogue and a Buddhist pagoda” (<https://www.elmundo.es>). Mentioning of the Temple of all religions alongside with the positively-coloured epithet “unique” highlights the peculiar character of the republic where different religions peacefully co-exist.

Economically, Tatarstan is presented in the context of its international cooperation. The reporters covered the joint ventures in automobile industry that exist in the region and the activities of the Investment and Venture Fund of the Republic of Tatarstan. The activities of

the latter were presented in the article called “Los grandes fondos piden ambición: “Que tu idea valga 1.000 millones” / Big funds demand ambition: “Make your idea worth 1,000 million”. The very title creates the association of the republic with high economic and investment ambitions. As for politics, El Mundo reporters focused on Russia – Turkey relations and XII biannual meeting of the Permanent Council of the European Union-Russia Association on Freedom, Security and Justice. In these respects, Tatarstan is represented as spokesmen for the policy of the Federal government.

Tatarstan as presented in Le Monde

Based on the quantitative analysis of the articles dedicated to the Republic of Tatarstan, French Le Monde mostly focused on political issues and matters of culture and sport. The articles that we united under the heading “political life” include the ones devoted to the special status of the autonomy of the republic of Tatarstan within the Russian Federation that was granted to this territory after the fall of the USSR and ended in 2017; presidential elections of 2018; the resignation of the first president of Tatarstan Mintimer Shaimiev in 2010; visit to Kazan by Hillary Clinton in 2009.

The image of a peculiar status that the republic located in the Volga region that Tatarstan enjoyed since 1991 is presented in the article about termination of a corresponding agreement: Cet été, le statut spécial de cette république à majorité musulmane de 3,8 millions d’habitants, installés dans le bassin de la Volga, à 900 kilomètres à l’est de Moscou, a pris fin au sein de la Fédération de Russie / This summer, the special status of this Muslim-majority republic of 3.8 million people, settled in the Volga Basin, 900 kilometers east of Moscow, ended within the Russian Federation (Mandraud, 2017). The local authorities tried to preserve this status that made it possible to manage resources and attract investors and jointly resolve issues related to economic, environmental, cultural and other features with the federal center. In this context the author of the article creates a feeling of sentiment comparing the so-called presidential country houses or dachas located in a prestigious place with lost expectations and hopes: Les “dachas présidentielles” situées dans le village de Borovoïé Matiouchino, à 25 kilomètres au sud-est de Kazan, la capitale du Tatarstan, surgissent comme un îlot des ambitions perdues. / The “presidential dachas” located in the village of Borovoye Matiushino, 25 kilometers southeast of Kazan, the capital of Tatarstan, arise as an island of lost ambitions (Mandraud, 2017). The author writes about Tatarstan as a subject of international law and contrasts it to Chechen Republic that refused to reach a compromise with Moscow: La Tchétchénie entrera en guerre; le Tatarstan, qui ne réclamait pas son indépendance, obtiendra un statut privilégié. / Chechnya will enter the war; Tatarstan, which did not demand independence, will get a privileged status (Mandraud, 2017). The image of religious tolerance and grandeur of its symbols is accentuated in the following example: Le premier “président” tatar, Mintimer Chaïmiev, au pouvoir de 1991 à 2005, s’était installé dans le Kremlin de Kazan, presque aussi vaste que son jumeau de Moscou, avec cette particularité cependant qu’une mosquée y côtoie la cathédrale orthodoxe. / The first Tatar “president”, Mintimer Shaimiev, in power from 1991 to 2005, had settled in the Kazan Kremlin, almost as vast as its Moscow twin, with this particularity, however, that a mosque is next to the Orthodox cathedral. The distinctive feature of Volga Tatars is emphasized in contrast to Crimean Tatars: Les Tatars de la Volga – distincts des Tatars de Crimée – ont toujours un gouvernement et un drapeau, vert, blanc, rouge. / The Volga Tatars – distinct from the Crimean Tatars – still have a government and a flag, green, white, red (Mandraud, 2017). The idea of considerably changing republic and its capital is expressed by the lexemes une rénovation historique de Kazan / the historic renovation of Kazan, “rafraîchi” / refreshed as well as the achievements in modernization of the capital are pointed up les tramways sont neufs

/ the trams are new, un embryon de métro fonctionne / an embryo of the underground functions (the first line comprised only five stations), un magasin IKEA a pris sa place dans les faubourgs industriels / the shop Ikea found its place in the industrial outskirts of the city as a sign of modern development. The city-planning is characterized by wonderful examples of architecture – the Kul Sharif Mosque and Kazan Kremlin: La capitale tatare s'est fait une beauté, une énorme mosquée trône à l'intérieur des murs blancs du kremlin de Kazan – chose unique parmi les kremlins des grandes villes de la Russie occidentale. / The Tatar capital has become a beauty; an enormous mosque stays like a throne within white walls of Kazan Kremlin – a unique thing among the kremlins of large cities of western Russia.

The above-mentioned characteristics appear as a sign of great achievements carried out by the first president of Tatarstan Mintimer Shaimiev. Le Monde calls him “le babai” (which is from Tatar grandfather) in the article devoted to the end of his tenure. The media outlet stresses his ability to administer the affairs of the republic successfully despite pressing centralization imposed by Moscow since 2000: Mintimer Chaïmieiev avait imaginé un statut unique d'Etat souverain associé à la Russie, qui permettait de n'envoyer à Moscou que le quart des taxes prélevées sur le pétrole, dont le Tatarstan est le second producteur du pays. / Mintimer Shaimiev devised a unique status of a sovereign state associated with Russia that permitted to envoyer to Moscow only a quarter of taxes collected from oil that Tatarstan is the second producer of. He also managed to find common language with national elites – under his presidency Tatar language was developing, new Tatar schools and mosques were built. In this way he succeeded in finding an optimal cultural balance between Muslim Tatars and Orthodox Russians. The long period of his political life that started from Leonid Brezhnev's times in 1969 and the present position of the State Adviser made Russian press call him “le Deng Xiaoping tatar” – Tatar Deng Xiaoping (<https://www.lemonde.fr>).

The same idea of peaceful co-existence of people inhabiting Tatarstan who belong to different confessions is expressed in the article devoted to the visit to Kazan of the Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in 2009. The author gives a very promising headline to the article: La solution pour une paix durable dans le monde se trouverait-elle au Tatarstan? / Has she found the solution for a durable peace in the world in Tatarstan? and gives a positive answer to this question. Tatarstan is presented as a large industrial region on the Volga river where 50% are Muslim Tatars and 40% Orthodox Russians live. The Secretary of State was inspired by the political course of the president Mintimer Shaimiev and his centrist views that helped to make the republic an example of co-existence and progress – un exemple de cohabitation et de progress (Billette, 2009).

Before the Russian presidential elections of 2018, the Republic of Tatarstan appeared in Le Monde as a region involved in fraudulent schemes alongside with Chechen Republic: S'il croit vraiment aux 85 % de popularité du chef, pourquoi doit-il contrôler le vote des étudiants, fonctionnaires et retraités, augmenter les salaires pour remonter la participation, et remplir les urnes à l'avance en Tchétchénie ou au Tatarstan? / If it (the Kremlin) really believes in 85% of popularity of the leader, why should it control the voting of students, state officials and pensioners, increase salaries to raise attendance or to fill ballot-boxes in advance in Chechnya or Tatarstan? (Mendras, 2018). The author of the article calls the electoral frauds in Russia a secret of Polichinelle – un secret de Polichinelle and raises the question about free elections. Thus, in this case a negative image of the republic is created.

In some articles the name of Tatarstan appeared alongside with such region as the Crimea. The President of the republic Rustam Minnikhanov paid visit to Simferopol in March
Res Militaris, vol.12, n°3, November issue 2022

2014 before the referendum of the peninsular and met there with the head of the unofficial representative body of the Crimean Tatars – the Mejlis. In this context the leader of the republic performed as a mediator of a dialogue and political maneuvers.

Cultural aspect was mainly represented through personalities whose names appeared in *Le Monde* and who are associated with Kazan and Tatarstan. In 2020 the article devoted to a composer Sofia Goubaidouline wrote about her path to religious self-identification and mentioned Kazan as a place of her origin (Gervasoni, 2020). The other personality is Rudolf Nureev whose name appeared in the media outlet with the release of a movie of the same name in 2019 among the must-watch films. The British film directed by Ralph Fiennes with the title role by Oleg Ivenko – the premier of Tatar Opera and Ballet Theatre and famous Russian actress who comes from Kazan Chulpan Khamatova as well as the actors Adèle Exarchopoulos and Raphael Personnaz. The film “ont construit un labyrinthe qui tourbillonne dans le temps et dans l’espace, entre le Tatarstan stalinien et le Paris gaulliste, en passant par le Leningrad du dégel, au temps de Khrouchtchev” / “constructs a labyrinth that swirls in time and space, between Stalinist Tatarstan and Gaullist Paris, passing through thaw Leningrad, in Khrushchev's time (Sotinel, 2019).

The main sport events presented in *Le Monde* where Tatarstan was mentioned were Swimming Championship in 2015, Football World Championship in 2018, Tour de France and others. One of the remarkable symbols of Kazan the Qul Sharif Mosque was introduced as sumptuous and one of the largest in Europe in the article devoted to Football World Championship. The material in a number of articles about competitions in swimming was presented in the form of a blog and there Tatarstan and its sport objects appear mainly as a location without evaluative vocabulary. The only remark that brings the republic to the forefront is the following: J'écris “bienvenue au Tatarstan”, et pas “en Russie”, parce qu'on vient de nous diffuser, comme chaque jour, la plutôt convaincante vidéo de promotion, ou de propagande, disons de propagomotion, ci-dessous, et que le mot “Tatarstan” y est prononcé 27 fois (j'ai compté). / I'm writing “Welcome to Tatarstan” not “to Russia” because we've been shown as every day a rather convincing promo video or we can even say a propagandistic video where the word “Tatarstan” appears 27 times (I've calculated) (Seckel, 2021). Since Kazan won the right to hold Summer Universiade in 2013 the republican authorities appealed to different international sport organizations to develop this tendency and hold other important and large world sport events. So, for the region it is extremely important to become recognizable and have its own image in the world. In Russia Kazan is already called the sports capital of the country.

Kazan football team “Rubin” appeared in the material devoted to the games of the European League some of which took place in Kazan in 2015. Ilnur Zakarin a cyclist of Tour de France is introduced as a man who comes from the Republic of Tatarstan near Moscow. Our material devoted to sport events shows that the journalists mainly focus on the event itself, the athletes and competition results rather giving any evaluative remarks about the place. These kinds of notes are quite rare and very fragmented. From this material the reader mainly gets the information about the geographical location of the republic.

Certain attention in *Le Monde* was also paid to crimes and catastrophes that occurred in Tatarstan. One of the recent newsbreaks in *Le Monde* has become the school shooting in Kazan. The incident was called by the paper la plus grave fusillade / the most serious shooting since 2018. In this context the name of Tatarstan was presented as the geographical location république du centre de la Fédération de Russie / central Republic of the Russian Federation.

The capital city of Kazan was also introduced through the numbers about its population and distance from Moscow: Kazan, qui compte plus de 1,2 million d'habitants, est située environ 700 kilomètres à l'est de la capitale russe. Une journée de deuil a été décrétée pour mercredi dans la petite république de la Fédération de Russie. / Kazan, with a population of more than 1.2 million, is located about 700 kilometers east of the Russian capital. A day of mourning was declared for Wednesday in the small republic of the Russian Federation. The only evaluative lexeme used in reference to the republic is the adjective "small". The news-paper calls Russia to be the country where such kind of drama is relatively rare and gun control is strict (<https://www.lemonde.fr>). Through the prism of generalization and reference to the name of the whole country the image of considerable level of safety is created and the more resonant the crime is seen in this context.

Describing the reaction of the society to the accident the author of another article writes le choc restait immense / the shock remained immense and des centaines d'anonymes continuaient d'apporter des fleurs près du parvis, jonché des débris, de l'école n° 175 de Kazan, capitale de cette République autonome de la Fédération de Russie / hundreds of people continue to bring flowers to the parvis covered by the debris at school number 175 of Kazan, the capital of this autonomous republic of the Russian federation (Vitkine, 2021). The author uses the lexeme parvis that denotes a court or enclosed space before a church and has got a religious connotation. He creates a contrast using the expression jonché des débris / covered by the debris describing the surrounding space.

A set of four articles was devoted to the plane crash in November 2013 in the airport of Kazan the victims of which became forty-four passengers and six crew members. The city of Kazan was presented as the capital city of the autonomous republic of Russian federation: Kazan, la capitale du Tatarstan, république autonome de la Fédération de Russie or just Kazan, en Russie / Kazan, Russia (En Russie, 50 morts dans le crash d'un Boeing 737). The news-paper focuses on the details of the catastrophe, speculates on the reasons for it, and gives a historical note about the airlines – former owners of the Boeing 737. These make foreign readers see the republic and its capital as a spot on the political map of Russia without any additional information about the place. At the same time its mentioning in the context of the accident might create rather negative associations though the media outlet avoids using evaluative vocabulary and presents facts and figures.

The same approach of presenting Kazan as the geographical place where something happens is peculiar to the report about the sinking of the Bulgaria ship in July, 2011 in the Volga river, the catastrophe that claimed the lives of 120 people. A Kazan, capitale du Tatarstan, des habitants ont allumé des cierges en hommage aux victimes de la pire catastrophe d'un bateau de croisière fluvial en Russie depuis l'époque soviétique. / In Kazan, the capital of Tatarstan, local residents lit candles in honor of the victims of the worst river cruise ship disaster in Russia since Soviet times (<https://www.lemonde.fr>). Le Monde refers to Russian news-papers to speculate about numerous violations in exploitation of the ship and organization of such kinds of tours. The further development of the accident gets its coverage in another article where the republic is again presented as a geographical spot: Deux personnes ont été mises en examen, mardi 12 juillet, à la suite du naufrage du bateau Boulgaria, dimanche 10 juillet, sur la Volga, dans la République du Tatarstan, à 800 kilomètres à l'est de Moscou. / Two people were indicted on Tuesday, 12 July, following the sinking of the ship Bulgaria on Sunday, 10 July, on the Volga River in the Republic of Tatarstan, 800 kilometers east of Moscow (<https://www.lemonde.fr>).

There was also some material devoted to natural disasters that led to ecological catastrophe. Forest fires in Siberia in summer 2019 attracted attention of many media outlets. Though Tatarstan is located quite far away from Siberian region it was mentioned as the place also affected by the consequences of a distant catastrophe: “Les principales villes de Sibérie, mais aussi d’autres situées à des milliers de kilomètres à l’ouest, dans l’Oural et jusqu’au Tatarstan, comme Perm ou Kazan, sont englouties par une épaisse fumée / The main cities of Siberia, but also others located thousands of kilometers to the west, in the Urals and up to Tatarstan, such as Perm or Kazan, are engulfed by thick smoke (Vitkine, 2021). In this sense the author shows the large scale of devastating effects of forest fires and mentions Tatarstan as an important large republic in Central Russia; at the same time the effect of presenting the situation worse than it is has been reached.

Being mainly an Islamic republic Tatarstan appeared in a number of articles devoted to the spreading of various radical streams in Russia. Sometimes it was presented as a contrast to radicalism: Le contraste demeure saisissant entre le nord du Caucase, livré aux violences, et l'ensemble formé par les républiques du Tatarstan et du Bachkortostan, dans le district de la Volga. A forte population musulmane, celles-ci sont vantées, depuis la chute de l'URSS, comme des modèles de tolérance et de multiculturalisme. / There still exists a striking contrast between North Caucasus subjected to violence and the ensemble formed by the republics of Tatarstan and Bashkortostan in the Volga region. Having large Muslim population, they have been praised since the collapse of the USSR as models of tolerance and multiculturalism (Smolar, 2014). Islam that is practiced in the republic corresponds to “un euro-islam, imperméable aux intégrismes” / Euro-Islam impermeable for fundamentalism. In the country that has long been under Soviet atheistic regime religion is mainly a cultural symbol and in 2010 only 5% of Tatar population called themselves practicing religion (Billette, 2010). The rise of religious extremism in 2011 and terroristic attacks in Volgograd in 2013 attracted thorough attention of Ministry of Internal Affairs and Federal Security Service. The articles that appeared in *Le Monde* from 2010 to 2014 mainly present Tatarstan as a model region where cases of radical extremism are quite unexpected and rare. Nevertheless, the republic was mentioned among the regions that are the target of radical Islamism in the Volga region where militant discourse gains ground: Les courants de l’islam radical (salafisme, wahhabisme) ne sont plus cantonnés au Daghestan ou à l’Ingouchie, ils ont le vent en poupe aussi au Tatarstan et en Bachkirie. / The currents of radical Islam (Salafism, Wahhabism) are no longer confined to Dagestan and Ingushetia – they flow towards Tatarstan and Bashkiria (<https://www.lemonde.fr>).

Conclusion

Our examination of the articles published in BBC News, *El Mundo* and *Le Monde* within the period of 2000-2021 helped to outline the news contexts through which the image of the Republic of Tatarstan is constructed. They can be categorized into several groups: crimes and catastrophes, natural disasters, Islamism and extremism, political life (international and domestic issues), economics and industry, social and health issues, and culture and sport. The prevalence of this or that context is one of the main means of shaping international public’s opinion about the region and its main features. It is necessary to mention that focus of British, Spanish and French media outlets differ. BBC News pays most attention to crimes and catastrophes, thus creating the image of disorder and religious tensions that are characteristic of the region. *El Mundo* and *Le Monde* primarily connect the image of Tatarstan with culture and sport which helps to shape more advanced and positive image. The most extensive coverage is that of *Le Monde*.

The journalists mainly focus on facts and figures related to the described events and rather seldom use evaluative vocabulary. In this sense the reader gets the idea of the region through the prism of the events happening on its territory. The material about crimes and catastrophes mainly presents Tatarstan as a geographical spot on the map located on the Volga River usually with regard to the distance to Moscow. Quite definitely is observed the idea of a model region of tolerance and multiculturalism, where two confessions of Muslim Tatars and Orthodox Russians co-exist peacefully. At the same time cases of extremism currents are emphasized in BBC News as something characteristic of the region and mentioned in El Mundo and Le Monde, but in these media outlets they are shown like something extraordinary and non-typical to the region and like something that state security service combat with. The articles about sporting events also mainly highlight the course of the competition. The articles related to the personalities of culture also focus on their story and mention Tatarstan as a place of their origin giving only some geographical details about its location. Many media sections emphasize negative cases that happen in the political life, transport communication and climate. So, we can say that the Republic of Tatarstan is not presented in its full scale in a western media outlets. The readers almost do not get the information about its economic development, people living there; the notes about culture are also quite fragmented.

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Zhanna Georgievna Konovalova – PhD in philological sciences, associate professor of the department of foreign languages in the sphere of international relations at Kazan Federal University. She is the author of 3 collective and individual monographs and more than 40 scientific articles. Primary research interests include political linguistics, media communication, international relations and American literary nonfiction.

Alsu Alexandrovna Khafizova – candidate of philological sciences, associate professor of the department of foreign languages in the sphere of international relations at Kazan Federal University. She is the author of more than 20 scientific articles and a collective monograph. Primary research interests include international relations, mass communication, political linguistics.

Rosa Shaikhaidarovna Akhmadieva, Doctor of Pedagogical Sciences, Professor, Honored Scientist of the Republic of Tatarstan, Rector of the Kazan State Institute of Culture. Graduated with honors from the Kazan State University of Culture and Arts, since 2005 she began working concurrently as a leading researcher at the State Institution "Scientific Center for the Safety of Children's Life". In 2012, R.S. Akhmadieva was awarded the degree of Doctor of Pedagogical Sciences. Participates in scientific conferences and symposiums. In 2008-2019,

R.S. Akhmadieva headed the State Institution "Scientific Center for the Safety of Children's Life". The results of scientific research by R.S. Akhmadieva are reflected in more than 130 scientific publications. In 2006 Akhmadieva R.S. was awarded the title of "Honored Scientist of the Republic of Tatarstan". Since 2009, Rector of the Kazan State Institute of Culture. Participates in the organization of the International Forum - Kazan Digital Week - 2020.