

**YOUNG PEOPLE'S
TRAJECTORIES THROUGH
ANTI-ISLAM(IST) AND
EXTREME RIGHT MILIEUS:
COUNTRY LEVEL REPORT
RUSSIA**

**(Neo)Cossacks in
St. Petersburg, Russia**



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DARE: Dialogue about Radicalisation and Equality

Young people's trajectories through anti-Islam(ist) and extreme right milieus: Country level report

**(Neo)Cossacks in St. Petersburg,
Russia**

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This project has received funding from the European Union's H2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement no. 725349.



This publication reflects only the views of the author(s); the European Commission and Research Executive Agency are not responsible for any information it contains.

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Executive Summary

This report focuses on the case of the young (neo)Cossacks of St. Petersburg as a right-wing milieu. Originally Cossacks were free military formations that were formed in the late sixteenth century and were constituted as autonomous state-organised communities. After a series of Cossacks revolts by Bulavin, Rasin and Pugachev, the Russian Empire demanded cooperation and military service from the Cossacks. Following the suppression of Cossack revolts, all liberties and rights of the Cossacks' autonomy were abolished by the state and the Cossacks became an ethno-social community performing the function of protecting state and internal borders and defending the Russian Empire's (social and political) order. Following a process of 'Decossackisation' in the Soviet period (especially during the Stalinist period), the Cossack community enjoyed a revival when their activities were legally recognised and gained state support.

The case of (neo)Cossacks was chosen because the milieu is characterised by: militarisation, a rigid hierarchical structure within communities and a focus on 'policing', including the use of violence against the civilian population. Right-wing and extreme-right views are also common among the participants of this milieu; anti-migrant rhetoric and activities, in particular, are strongly pronounced. The attitude to Islam within this milieu remains quite ambivalent. Despite positive attitudes to Islam, as one of the world's major religions, Cossacks often consider Russian state discourse to favour representatives of other confessions – primarily Islam – while Cossacks see themselves as representatives and 'defenders' of Orthodox Christianity and see Orthodox Christianity as their ideological core. Although Orthodox Christianity is the dominant religion in the Russian Federation (according to both number of followers and support from the state), Cossacks believe that their community is discriminated against in terms of receiving state support and approval. This leads to a sense of perceived injustice, which serves as the foundation for the rationalisation and legitimisation of violence in order to seize back 'their' land, power or other resources.

This study explores the (neo)Cossack milieu in St Petersburg in the wider context of the emergence of 'new' right wing activists in response to a direct invitation from the Russian state, as it simultaneously clamped-down on the right-wing activist scene during the 2010s, in order to control right-wing and especially far-right communities, but also sought to foster a form of 'civil society' directed from above. The state envisaged new right-wing activists as representing the most conservative segments of the population and acting as 'independent' actors directed by, but not directly subordinate to, state structures. A further distinctive dimension of the Russian context is the militarisation of the state and society. Thus the wider context in which the (neo)Cossack milieu exists is itself 'radicalised'. This means that by choosing paths of non-radicalisation those (neo)Cossacks may distance themselves from others in the milieu and therefore processes of de-radicalisation are significantly complicated. Moreover, the Cossack milieu is not bound by a rigid ideological framework, not least because individuals have moved between ideologically different movements. It is held together rather by a set of shared values, most notably anti-migrant and xenophobic sentiments, Orthodoxy, and (neo)patriarchy, which become the basis not only for solidarity within the movement, but also for (subsequent) radicalisation. An equally important element in the process of (non)radicalisation is participation in paramilitary activities and inclusion in the rigid hierarchical structure of Cossacks, which forms a community of 'brothers in arms' and provides the emotional thrills that bond the group. The extra-ideological factors of radicalisation include romanticising activity 'at the edge' (e.g. use of violence, semi-legal and illegal activity), frustration due to socio-economic exclusion and barriers to entry into desired spaces and shared practices within the community. In contrast, the legitimisation of violence, which, for example, manifests in the

‘restoration of justice’ in a situation of subjectively perceived inequality, has both ideological and extra-ideological functions. Indeed, the (neo)Cossacks of St Petersburg, represent themselves as ‘fighters’ - for the existing social (and political) order and to establish a more rigid moral order and uphold ‘traditional values’.

A case study approach was adopted and the collected material consists of in-depth biographical interviews and participant observations. The collection of empirical data lasted for 6 months – from September 2018 to February 2019. In total, the database includes: 22 interviews (16 men, 6 women) including two expert interviews; and two participant observations. The collected interviews and observations were transcribed, anonymised and encoded in NVivo according to the coding tree common for all cases.

1. Introduction

The Cossacks constitute a specific phenomenon that has played an important part in Russian history and is also relevant in the modern Russian context. The history of the Cossacks can be traced over several centuries; most authors attribute the origins of the Cossacks, more exactly of Cossack troops, to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Matsievsky, 2014; Frolova, 1995). In the course of their development, the Cossacks have undergone several ‘waves’ of re-constitution and revival. In their early history, Cossacks constituted an independent and self-governing, armed population on the territory of modern Russia, Ukraine and Kazakhstan. They were formed as free, military formations, which were simultaneously autonomous state-organised communities. In the 17th to 18th centuries, the Russian Empire demanded military service and cooperation from the Cossacks, which led to many Cossack revolts (the most famous being the revolts by Bulavin, Rasin and Pugachev). However, from 1827 all liberties and rights to autonomy of the Cossacks were abolished and the Tsar was appointed ataman of all Cossack troops. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Cossacks had emerged as a separate estate, which guarded state and internal ethno-territorial borders, and participated in most military conflicts. Members of the Cossacks in modern day Russia are active in the revival of their cultural heritage as well as the pursuit of compensation for material and moral damage caused to the Cossacks during Soviet, mostly Stalinist, repressions (1917-1956) including the rehabilitation of members of Cossack families convicted on political charges. After the collapse of the USSR and the formation of the Russian Federation, Cossacks began to cooperate with the state authorities and receive state resources allocated, among other things, to activities designed to ‘restore order’ in society (including the right to organise private security activities). In so doing, they returned to the performance of traditional roles for the Cossacks – maintaining both military and social order – in the pre-Soviet period. As a result, a(neo)Cossack group identity began to form from the 1990s around militaristic beliefs and principles and the restoration of traditional roles and occupations of the pre-Soviet Cossacks.

As a potential object for study, the Cossacks came to our attention for two reasons. Firstly, because of their active involvement in countering the Russian protests for democratic rights and freedoms. Cossacks acted on the side of the security services to disperse oppositional mass events, especially in Moscow and St. Petersburg (for instance, during the protests of March 2017). Secondly, Cossack activities are often accompanied by anti-migrant rhetoric and actions.

Attitudes to Islam and Muslims among the Cossacks are diverse, and even contradictory. On the one hand, the Cossack position towards Muslims is not necessarily negative. At the level of official discourse, they declare support for Muslims and respect for the principles and theology of Islam, which is the second most common religion in Russia and constitutes one of the so-called ‘traditional’ Russian religions. On the other hand, their activities are based on the idea of protecting ‘their’ territory (city, country) from ‘outsiders’, interpreted by them to be natives of Central Asia professing Islam. ‘Foreign’ religion is certainly an irritant for Cossacks, who see mass labour migration as a threat, which is leading to the spread of foreign culture(s) in Russia.

Thus the Cossack milieu is not characterised primarily as an ‘anti-Islamist’ milieu. However, due to the range of, often radical, anti-immigrant and ‘outsider’ views found within it (Malthaner and Waldmann, 2014), as well as the combination of both oppositional and pro-Russian government stances it incorporates, the milieu provides a fascinating case study of (non)radicalisation in contemporary Russia.

Across the network of communities that make up the (neo)Cossacks of St. Petersburg and Leningrad region, some communities are more focused on public and cultural activities, whilst others have stricter entry barriers, are more militarised and are, thereby, less ‘public’. Unfortunately, our case was unable to

include two *stanitsas*¹ in Leningrad region and St. Petersburg, which were recognised as extremist in 2015 and dissolved. However, some of their members moved to other *stanitsas* and Cossack communities, which gave us an opportunity to analyse them ‘indirectly’.

Apart from the members themselves, it is important to pay attention to those social conditions that become the basis for structural (in)equalities or affect access to administrative, financial or reputational resources that modern Cossacks currently possess due to the legitimisation of their activities by the state and state actors. Social conditions include the general militarisation of the state, society, foreign and domestic policy, as well as the militarisation of modern Cossacks. Although the latter emerged in the 1990s as a project to restore cultural and historical heritage, they quickly became a new ally of the state in maintaining the current social and moral order. To a great extent, this was facilitated by the rigid hierarchical structure of the internal organisation of the Cossacks; this system consists of a hierarchy of subdominant structural units (several *hutors*² form a *stanitsa* and a number of *stanitsas* forms an army). The concentration of traditionalist attitudes in Cossack ideology is a further important social condition forming the basis of this case. These are attitudes that are more or less supported by the majority of the population of the Russian Federation, in particular, an orientation to a ‘strong’ political regime, maintaining the existing gender order and other ‘traditional values’.

Solidarity amongst the Cossacks is forged through a number of ‘internal’ events and occasions. These include: accompanying the Cross Procession³ as a demonstration of support for Orthodoxy; participation in the dispersal of oppositional protests to show opposition to liberal values; participation in cooperative raids with the police on places where drugs are sold or consumed, as a way to demonstrate the ‘correct’ moral order; and the dispersal of events dedicated to LGBTQIA activism to show support for the (neo)patriarchal gender order, heteronormativity and homophobia.

The attitudes and actions outlined above suggest that the modern-day Cossacks of St. Petersburg provide a suitable milieu for the study of ‘extreme right’ radicalisation within the DARE framework. Moreover, this case illuminates the effects of exposure to both external and internal radicalisation processes. The external processes are linked to the militarisation of the movement and the state, legitimisation of violence against ‘inconvenient’ groups in the population, which ideologically contradict the current political course as well as the social and moral order. The internal processes consist of: gaining access to administrative and reputational resources; ensuring isolation from communities and organisations with other ideological bases and principles; facilitating the influence of milieu participants who already have experience of using violence in the past (against migrants, ethnic groups, non-heterosexuals, etc.) and/or who have taken part in military activity. For these reasons, on the one hand, the Cossacks reflect modern militaristic and radical realities such as the rise of populist right-wing political parties and attitudes, as well as a rise of right-wing organisations and activities across the European space and Russian Federation, in particular, due to contemporary political regime. On the other hand, the Cossacks remain a group with a variety of individual views and attitudes despite the focus of the Cossack community on military activities and almost military subordination.

¹A *stanitsa* is an administrative Cossack unit (usually a rural settlement) that consists of one or more settlements (*hutor*) and is headed by an *ataman* (chieftain) of the *stanitsa*.

²A *hutor* is a Cossack settlement consisting of one or more households in which the members of several extended Cossack families live.

³*Cross Procession* is one of the most important sacral rituals in Orthodox and Eastern Catholic churches. It is a solemn church procession with a large cross, icons and banners around the church or from one church to another, which is dedicated to celebrate the most memorable dates and holidays like Easter, the day of the church patron of the city (Alexander Nevsky in St. Petersburg), etc.

In the next section, we will explain in detail the historical context of the emergence of modern Cossacks (Section 2.1). We will then analyse the landscape of the Russian and St. Petersburg right-wing⁴ scene (Section 2.2), and determine the place of the (neo)Cossacks in the Russian context and on the St. Petersburg right-wing scene (Section 2.3). This will enable us to expand the understanding of the Cossacks as a near-radical and radical milieu.

2. Setting the scene

2.1 Historical context

The phenomenon of the Cossacks is complex and ambiguous. Due to the long history of Cossack formation and several ‘rebirths’, many interpretations of who the Cossacks are, what this phenomenon is, and what role their members play in modern Russian society, exist in academic discourse. The Cossacks as a group has been mentioned since the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries although the more recent periods of Cossack revival are more significant in this case. These revivals took place during the late 1980s and 1990s when the Cossacks rekindled their identity as belonging to a part of society, which has a long and ‘heroic’ history, interrupted by the repressions of the Soviet period. During these revivals, people who considered themselves Cossacks mobilised to restore Cossackdom and to defend their rights as being a special part of society.

Along with the revival of the Cossacks, there emerged the question of their grounds for identification. Who are the Cossacks? A social class, an interest group, an ethnosocial group (sub ethnos) or a separate nation (Bredikhin, 2018: 9)? This question is not exclusively scientific or theoretical but is an important part of the intra-group discourse of the Cossacks. We might note here that ‘alternative interpretations of modern Cossacks resulted in numerous splits in the Cossack movement, radicalisation and marginalisation of separate groups, which developed into separatism and *kazakiystvo*’⁵ (see also: Bredikhin, 2018: 9; Nemensky, 2009).

The modern stage of the Cossacks’ revival started with several legislative documents, which defined the role of the Cossacks in the wider history of the country and rehabilitated the repressed representatives of the Cossacks. The main document is the Federal law No. 154-FZ of 5th December, 2005 ‘On Public Service of Russian Cossacks’. However, prior to that, the Cossacks, especially in regions that are considered native for the Cossacks (the Don, Kuban, etc.), had already started their fight ‘for order’ in the 1990s. For instance, Cossacks usurped the right to represent the ‘native population’ in the south of Russia (Verkhovsky, 2003: 182) and in Krasnodar region the Cossacks initiated and actively implemented an anti-immigrant policy (Markowitz and Peshkova, 2014). The Cossacks have collaborated with the Party of

⁴By right-wing organisations we mean nationalistic and right-oriented groups, which are not using violence against certain social groups (or violent activities are not widespread among group members), while by extreme right and/or far-right we mean mostly neo-Nazi organisations that declare hate speech against and commit hate crime(s) against certain social groups in Russian case. Thus, between the right-wing organisations and extreme right and/or far-right organisations main dividing line is the radicalism of beliefs and attitudes, the frequency of use of violence by its members. In addition to the use of ‘radical’ (e.g. beliefs, attitudes, groups, etc.), this report also contains ‘near-radical’ term, which is operationalised as ‘buffer zone’ between radical and non-radical (beliefs, attitudes, groups, etc.), boundaries between which are flexible and blurred and have a tendency to shift between.

⁵*Kazakiystvo* is a term that describes historically separatist Cossack organisations, which were not part of the Cossack army and did not obey it, which are mentioned in such historical events as the Pilsudski project ‘Prometheus’ (1920) and cooperation with the Nazis (second half of 1930 - second half of 1940). Currently it is used to describe those ‘autonomist’ and ‘separatist’ movements within the Cossacks, which stand for the ‘free-Cossack movement’, that is, recognition of the Cossacks as a separate ethnic group and legal and territorial detachment from Russia (with the provision of territories that are part of the Russian Federation for the residence of Cossacks).

Russian National Unity (RNU) formed in 1990, which imitates the structure of a military unit; all its members participate in drills, shooting exercises, marches and street patrols as members of a voluntary public order squad (sometimes accompanied by the police) (Sokolov, 2004: 303).

Cossacks also actively arrange military self-training activities, i.e. soldiership, including weapons training. The Cossacks explain such militarisation of the community through their historical background. Cossacks were formed as a military class with certain tasks of guarding and protecting the territories entrusted to them by the state. This concept has remained in Cossack ideology. The most visible result of the revival of the Cossacks in late 1990s became the Cossack patrols for public order enforcement⁶ (Osipov, 1996: 121; Laba, 1998) that existed for the protection of order on the cities' streets. At first they were formed only in the south of Russia (Krasnodar region, Rostov region) but now also exist in Moscow and St. Petersburg.

Military service, self-defence units, patrols and volunteer groups for ensuring security at mass events are activities that Cossacks have been able to carry out officially for more than 20 years (Darczewska, 2017: 19). Some researchers studying the 'Cossack issue' have expressed concern about the process and consequences of the revival of (neo)Cossacks including: the use of nationalist rhetoric; paramilitary activities of the Cossacks during the conflicts in Abkhazia and Moldova (1992-1993); and attacks on ethnic minority groups in Krasnodar region (Toje, 2006: 1058; Makhalkina, 2013). The Cossack revival in the early 1990s was considered by some researchers to be one of the triggers of the military conflict in the Caucasus (Lankina, 1996).

2.2 The contemporary context of the right and extreme right landscape in Russia

The right-wing scene in Russia is characterised by a 'wave-like' temporal dynamic that largely depends on the policy of the state – more specifically, on the approval or prohibition of the activities of right-wing and far-right organisations (Evans and Whitefield, 1998; Varga, 2008). Given the presence of greater political freedom after the collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1990s, and the emergence of right-wing (sub)cultures in Russia, right-wing organisations actively engaged in the formation of a new social order (Mudde, 2000: 17-18; McFarland and Ageyev, 1996: 213). They occupied not only urban spaces, but also political ones, with some – the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia, the National Bolshevik party, Russian National Unity, etc. – becoming officially registered as political parties (Umland, 2002: 2-4; Varga, 2008; Laryš and Mareš, 2011). The absence of state policy regulating ethno-national relations during the collapse of the Soviet Union created extra tension between the groups of right-wing and far-right activists and migrants from the North Caucasus (especially during the First and Second Chechen wars) and Central Asia. However, in the 1990s, right-wing and far-right political activists were not so visible on the streets of Russian cities as in the 2000s due to the general level of tension and violence in society (McAllister and White, 1995; Varga, 2008; Laryš and Mareš, 2011).

Following greater economic and political stabilisation in the 2000s, the authorities turned their attention to far-right radical organisations and activists, displacing them from the political arena of the Russian Federation (Umland, 2002; Laryš and Mareš, 2011). For the right-wing (especially the far-right) scene, the 2000s are marked by marginalisation and isolation at the state level. However, there was no permanent policy to de-radicalise right-wing organisations, while the opposition to them from state actors was rather situational and non-systemic (Zuev, 2010: 270-274). Consequently, the majority of right-wing organisations left the arena of public policy in search of new allies (for instance, skinheads). Having moved to a less legal and almost semi-underground space, right and far-right movements in Russia began to carry out 'flash' operations and actions against ethnic minority groups (from Central Asia and the North Caucasus) and LGBT+ activists. In the 2000s, 'new radicals' emerged such as Orthodox fundamentalists,

⁶Cossack patrols for public order enforcement patrol the city streets to maintain public order.

who adopted the ideology and programme of the (neo)Black-Hundredists⁷ of the pre-revolutionary period.

During the 2010s there was a significant clamp-down⁸ on the far-right scene in comparison to previous decades, largely due to the activities of the 'Centre for Countering Extremism', which was founded in 2008. Far-right and most right-wing organisations⁹ were officially designated as extremist and banned in Russia on the basis of claims by the state authorities that these organisations contributed to inciting ethnic hatred. This led to an end to their influencing public policy, albeit that political parties represented in the State Duma tend towards right-wing populism (Shekhovtsov, 2017: 113-114). Street actions were suppressed and had almost disappeared by the end of the 2010s, while individual activists (mostly, leaders of organisations) were either imprisoned, forced to stop their activities, or driven underground. During this period of clamp-down on far-right movements by the security services, less radical right-wing groups and movements with state support gained popularity (Enerud, 2013). The Cossacks as with other 'new right-wing' movements, such as 'Sorok Sorokov' and new Orthodox activists, began to interact with the state, while the Cossacks also officially 'entered' the state service and worked together with the police and Special Police Force ('Rosguard') during raids and dispersals of oppositional protests, even in other countries (Chupyra, 2015: 89). In addition, the Cossacks actively cooperated with the security services in training contract army and security service personnel in tactical combat skills in open, more rural, areas while, in turn, they learnt the skills of acting in the city, namely, how to perform in raids, dispersals and patrols. Furthermore, they recruited new members into their ranks, for example, from those who had served in the Donbass¹⁰. Their semi-isolated presence in their collaboration with the security services and the tactic of recruiting 'newcomers' with experience in real combat operations might engender radicalisation as their drift further away from the less radical and non-radical parts of their own

⁷The (neo)Black Hundredists represent a variety of reactionary and nationalist far-right organisations which originated in the early twentieth century (1905-1917) and promoted the strengthening of autocracy and nationalism by defining themselves as 'patriots' of the country. After Perestroika, the movement was revived. Despite the statements of the movement's leaders that there is no direct legacy from the traditional Black Hundredists, the neo Black Hundredists and other similar movements are ideologically very close to the programmes of Black Hundredists of the early twentieth century.

⁸ By clamping down on the scene of right-wing activists we mean that their access to any form of participation in public policy was blocked and (criminal) prosecution of the most 'public' activists and leaders of nationalist and neo-Nazi movements was implemented as well as the detention of ordinary participants.

⁹ In the late 2000s and beginning of the 2010s, the following right-wing and far-right parties were officially prohibited, in the territory of Russian Federation: 'National Bolshevik Party' (NBP) (prohibited in 2007), 'Russian National Unity' organisation (in 2008), 'National Socialist Society' neo-Nazi group (in 2010), 'Union of Slavs' organisation (in 2010), 'Russian elite squad' as a part of 'National Socialist Workers Party of Russia' (in 2010), interregional public association 'Format-18' (in 2010), interregional Association 'Russian National Union' (in 2011), interregional public organisation 'Movement Against Illegal Immigration' (in 2011), international association 'Blood and Honour' (in 2011). All these organisations were prohibited for committing of crimes (causing grievous bodily harm or murder) on the basis of racial, ethnic or religious grounds or because of their opposition to the state activity.

¹⁰It is important to note here that the annexation of Crimea (in March 2014) from the territory of Ukraine and the subsequent military conflict in Ukraine in the territories of the Donetsk People's Republic (from April 2014) and the Lugansk People's Republic (from May 2014), which includes a conflict between the Ukraine's military (Armed Forces of Ukraine, Security Service of Ukraine and volunteers) and the 'separatists' (the local population of these territories with the support of Russian military and Russian volunteers) are of crucial importance for nationalist organisations, right-wing movements, including Cossacks. The Cossacks not only went as 'volunteers' to fight on the territory of the LPR and the DPR (to join 'separatists'), but also organised the delivery of humanitarian and other aid to these territories.

communities is accompanied by the further legitimisation of violence amidst the wider and more general militarisation of Russian society and the state.

2.3 Locating the Cossack milieu

In this section we will present the structure of the Cossacks in St. Petersburg and describe the activities of the Cossacks in the city. Further, we will formulate the main arguments explaining why the Cossacks in this case can be considered as an anti-Islam radical milieu.

Historically, the Cossacks are a form of the military class that existed across different periods of time in the geographical area from Vladivostok to the territory of modern Ukraine. Groups of Cossacks made up special military units, which guarded the territories entrusted to them by the state against enemy forces. At particular periods of time, the Cossacks had a certain degree of sovereignty (for example, their own elected system of government, democratic principles, the right not to pay taxes to the state etc). The protection of territories was based on a mutually beneficial exchange; Cossacks provided protection in exchange for lands¹¹. This historical tradition of exchange is still a significant part of the historical memory and collective consciousness of the Cossacks. Thus, one of the motives for their revival was the return of land that was taken away by the Soviet government. The Cossacks are also trying to revive their culture, which was formed over several centuries of their relatively separate life (e.g. folklore, dances, songs, culinary traditions, myths). The restoration of their military glory is a third element of their revival; that is why an important part of the life of the Cossacks includes training in military tactics on rough terrain, handling weapons etc. This orientation of Cossacks towards military activities is used by state authorities as a 'tool' to 'defend' the current social order and political regime by organising joint training with the police and army to disperse protest rallies in order to construct cooperative relationships between Cossackdom and state. However, relations between the state and the Cossacks are not always favourable – relations with the state are forged depending on the decisions of the leadership of the *stanitsa*. State structures (and authorities) also, depending on the opportunities to receive bonuses from partnerships with the Cossacks, develop individual relations, usually with one or more of the *stanitsas*, which are most loyal and ready to cooperate, although at least declarative support for the state is generally required from the registered Cossackdom.

The structure of Cossack organisations comprises of *hutors* and *stanitsas*. Previously, '*hutor*' and '*stanitsa*' were territorial and administrative units on the territories of Cossack settlement, they originally referred to Cossack villages and townships. As settlements, *stanitsas*, remained mostly in the South of Russia, modern Cossacks in large cities arrange their activities not on a territorial but on an ideological basis and find other uses for the names '*stanitsa*' and '*hutor*'. As a rule, a '*hutor*' is a Cossack group including up to 100 people, while '*stanitsa*' comprises of several Cossack *hutors*. Under Federal law No. 154 'On Public Service of Russian Cossacks', any citizen who has reached the age of 18 can join the Cossack community. However, there is some resistance to the processes of institutionalisation from those who define themselves as 'ethnic' Cossacks and who see themselves as being in opposition to 'registered'¹² Cossacks. Many 'true' Cossacks do not join organisations, which are registered in the State Registry of Cossack organisations in the Russian Federation as they consider it an artificial superstructure.

¹¹ Now, 'keeping order' with the help of Cossacks at mass protests and other Cossack's military activities are exchanged for receiving presidential and other state grants for carrying out activities, while territories are provided on a common basis for all citizens of Russian Federation only in some sparsely populated regions.

¹²The Cossacks are divided into ethnic and registered Cossacks. The former are those who consider themselves descendants of the Cossacks and can prove this with documents. Registered (listed) Cossacks are those who can't prove their belonging to the Cossack family or recognise their non-belonging, but consider their ideology close and join the Cossack society (which anyone can join), which is registered in the registry of Cossack organisations.

The Church is at the centre of Cossack communities and is a place that they guard and where they participate in worship. The Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) has been, and remains, inextricably linked to the Cossacks. Many Cossack actions are explained through religion and the most common self-definition of a Cossack is as a ‘warrior of Christ’. In St. Petersburg, there are several churches that cooperate with the Cossacks. The Cossacks also have a main headquarters, where all the Cossack communities of St. Petersburg and Leningrad region gather to discuss topical Cossack issues, including the choice of the chief *ataman* (head of the *stanitsa/hutor*), initiation into the Cossacks etc. In addition, each Cossack society has its own places in the city, where people of that *stanitsa* or *hutor* gather. Such meetings are called a ‘circle’. Important issues are resolved there, although only men can attend. The term ‘circle’ is a reference to the democratic traditions of the early Cossacks, where everyone was able to express their opinion in a circle and any decision was made based on the opinions of all participants.

When defining Cossacks as a milieu, it is important to note that we are referring not only to the Cossacks of St. Petersburg, but also to the Cossacks as a movement, and to the social conditions and relationships that are formed in the public spaces of *stanitsas* and the city as a whole, which determine the daily life of the participants of the research (Malthaner and Waldmann, 2014). Studying the *stanitsa* life of the Cossacks, offers the opportunity to consider not only individual and group practices and (non)inclusion into the radical context and current events, but also to analyse everyday life, the emotional dimensions and thrills associated with spiritual and military activities as well as the meanings that are given to core and basic ideological values. It is difficult to define the Cossacks as a monolithic community with a certain social order and (non)formal rules and standards; the order is often contextually (re)defined, while the rhetoric differs according to practices. Thus, the network of Cossack communities forms a structure, the rules and norms of which vary considerably. That is the reason we define the Cossacks as a right-wing and traditionalist (yet radical) milieu that involves several levels of inclusion into its activities and, perhaps, but not necessarily, constitutes a site of radicalisation of attitudes and activities.

We chose St. Petersburg, which is an unusual settlement for the Cossacks, since historically the Cossacks were not represented in St. Petersburg (apart from special units for the protection of the Royal court). Therefore, most of our research participants have experiences of migration. This makes it possible to study the interregional social relations between the Cossack troops and individual biographical trajectories. The Cossacks of St. Petersburg, in contrast to the Moscow Cossacks and the Cossacks of the southern regions of Russia (Kuban, the Don, North Caucasus), are less involved in official state service and security activities of the local administration; they have less power and administrative resources. This forces the Cossacks of St. Petersburg to seek new partners for cooperation and areas of joint work to establish the ‘right’¹³ social order and makes it possible for them to be freer in their activities (for example, to gain access to more radical right groups that can become potential partners or a recruitment source).

Moreover, since the beginning of the 2010s the Cossacks have been one of the few, perhaps the only, legitimate player on the right-wing scene of the city and the country as a whole. The general clamp-down’ of the right-wing scene allowed the ‘new’ right (Cossacks and religious - Orthodox - fundamentalists) to occupy the vacated stage. At the same time, some of the ‘traditional’ right, being recruits of the Cossacks or other ‘new’ right movements, became a potential source of radicalisation for the milieu. Thus, the Cossacks and other ‘new’ right ‘absorbed’ the old members of St. Petersburg’s right-wing scene. In addition, the isolated position of the Cossacks on the right-wing stage may have contributed to the further radicalisation of its members or communities due to the lack of opposition from other right-wing or left-wing forces, as well as the state.

¹³ In Russian language word ‘правый’ (*pravii*) has several meanings, which could be ‘correct’ and ‘right-wing’. In this case by using ‘right’ social order’ we mean both ‘correct’ and ‘right-wing’ social order.

3. Field research

The collection of empirical data took place over a period of six months, from September 2018 to February 2019. Most of the collected data is from interviews. Access for observations was problematic due to the generally closed nature of community events related to military activities, as well as to the gender of the researchers (both researchers are women, while the Cossack community is characterised by a patriarchal order, which means that a number of events are inaccessible for women). A total of 22 interviews were collected, two of which are expert interviews (these are informants over 35 years of age who have a higher status within the community). As part of the ‘Cossacks’ case we carried out two participant observations. In addition, during the stage of finalising the selection of the case, we conducted several observations with other nationalist groups (neo-Nazis, nationalists and radical (neo)pagans), but these observations were not included in the present analysis.

3.1 Data collection

One of the observations took place on 14th October, 2018, as part of an annual Cossack event (on the day of the Orthodox feast of the Protection of the Blessed Virgin). During this event, the Cossacks of St. Petersburg and Leningrad region meet, services of worship are held, and a dedication ritual of new Cossacks takes place. Such a meeting is held annually in the Alexander Nevsky Monastery¹⁴. At the end of the event, new Cossacks take the oath. The event lasted for approximately five hours. The researcher was able to observe not only the official celebration and Church service, which anyone could attend, but was also able to attend the closed celebration, which was held in one of the rooms of the Alexander Nevsky Monastery.

The second observation took place during an open event for the annual sacred procession dedicated to the transfer of the Holy relics of Alexander Nevsky from Kazan Cathedral to the Alexander Nevsky Monastery on 12th September, 2018. The Cossacks traditionally have the role of ‘guard’ during this procession through the city.

Table 1: Data set

	Quantity	Total length or short description (if necessary)	Average duration
Respondent memos	22	n/a	n/a
Audio interviews	22	3,120 (52 hours)	142 mins (2 h 22 mins)
Video interviews	0	n/a	n/a
Field diary entries (total)	2	4,855 words	n/a
Still images	57	screenshots of posts in social networks	n/a

¹⁴The Alexander Nevsky Monastery is an Orthodox monastery in St. Petersburg.

Moving images	0	n/a	n/a
Other data [shot videos from field-observation]	8	287 seconds (4 minutes and 7 seconds)	35 sec
Media articles	189	n/a	n/a

3.2 Access and researcher-respondent relations

The data was collected using two strategies: through a ‘gatekeeper’; and by randomly searching for informants through thematic groups on the popular Russian social networking site VKontakte. By using these strategies we avoided a one-sided view of the community and balanced the disadvantages of each of the selected recruitment methods. The ‘gatekeeper’ was interested in research but wanted to create a ‘favourable image’ of the Cossacks. She gave us the contacts of those people who were more engaged in cultural activities, or who knew what it is better to omit in a conversation (for example, political activity, participation in military activities and conflicts between the local population and Cossack squads), and what it is better to discuss in detail (for example, religiosity, following of traditions, culture, etc.). Thus the second researcher decided not to use this tactic and recruited participants by sending personal messages in thematic groups and public pages on the social media VKontakte. Despite a significantly higher percentage of refusals while recruiting, this method made it possible to gain access to more ideologically-driven informants, as well as to those who took part in violent and military actions. The gatekeeper provided contacts for seven informants, 15 informants were recruited through VKontakte.

It is worth mentioning that the researchers’ gender (both researchers are female) may have influenced the amount of material collected and the number of observations. Due to the ‘demonstrative patriarchy’ which exists among the Cossacks, women are unable to participate in activities that are aimed at physical training (for example, rough terrain tactics, handling weapons, both blades and firearms, hand-to-hand combat) as well as other types of activities, for example, in the so-called ‘Circle’ (the main weekly meeting of Cossacks where they discuss important issues). Traditionally, only men take part in these events. However, we believe that gender was not the main reason for the high rate of refusals during the recruitment process, although it had a significant impact on the collection of field diaries and deeper immersion in the community. The high number of refusals during the recruitment process could be explained, rather, by the general closeness of the selected milieu, especially the more militaristic groups. However, it is also a result of the specifics of the hierarchy of the Cossack community according to which younger members must receive the approval of older and higher status members of the milieu on all actions that are connected with the community.

3.3 Ethical practice

The researchers from the Russian team did not collect written consent for interviews from informants. This decision was made due to the Centre for Youth Studies’ previous experience of conducting international research, which acknowledged the need to take into account the cultural specifics of Russia (that is, a sensitivity to and rejection of signing papers amongst the population). Therefore, it was decided to use a verbal form of consent in the study; this was included in the ethical approval received. The informants were asked to listen to their rights and to confirm they consented to the recording of the interview and any further research resulting from the interview by the researchers. As a result, questions about consent to the tape recording, anonymisation, and further work with the interview were discussed

at least three times: when the researchers met with informants and arranged an interview; at the beginning of the meeting without a recorder; and when reading the consent sheet with the recorder already on. In addition, an information sheet was brought to the meeting. All the informants were told about the Centre for Youth Studies' website, where there is information about the project in Russian, and everyone was given access to the DARE website. The contact details of the head of the Russian team were also provided.

It is important to note that, despite the presence of minors in the Cossack milieu, in the framework of the Russian context, it was suggested that a higher age range for (potential) participants should be set. This is due to the existence of rather strict regulations not only in relation to the behaviour of minors but also with respect to the topics that can be discussed with them. The lower age range of this case was therefore initially set at 18 in order to prevent the possibility of unsafe situations for both the study participants and the research team.

Another potentially unsafe area for study participants and researchers related to questions concerning the description of possible illegal actions that had been or were being committed by study participants. At the very beginning of every interview, the informants were asked not to describe the details of possible illegal actions that they may have committed in the past, so that the information told to the interviewer did not fall under Article 205.6¹⁵ of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation and other articles of this code that are not described in the above-mentioned article.

3.4 Data analysis

Data analysis conducted in this case corresponds to the commonly agreed data analysis strategy outlined in the General Introduction to this series of case study reports. However, for a more detailed analysis of the case, some additional nodes were added to the coding tree. For example, we included the 'family' node 'Cossacks', which includes five 'child' nodes: 'personal history' (history of entering the community), 'Cossack everyday life', 'personal community (stanitsa)', 'movement (of the Cossacks)', 'appearance and rituals'. This 'family' node allowed us to highlight separately the specifics of the case and the milieu, analyse both the individual life strategies of the participants and the history of this milieu, the values and beliefs of the community, ritual practices, and group activities.

In total, 27 'family' nodes were encoded and analysed in the NVivo programme, including 165 'child' nodes. The skeleton coding tree thus largely met the requirements for encoding and data analysis; the 'family' nodes were populated successfully with 'child' nodes based on the empirical data obtained, taking into account the specifics of the case.

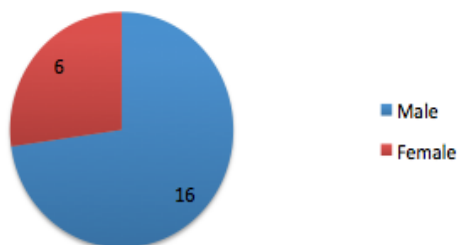
Due to the closeness of the community and its small number of active members, anonymisation procedures were carried out in several stages to protect the study participants from possible identification.

¹⁵The given article is defined as 'failure to report a crime' (205.6) of a past, ongoing or impending crime that falls under the articles 'Terrorist act' (art. 205), 'Assistance in a terrorist act' (205.1), 'Public calls to carry out terrorist activities, public justification of terrorism or propaganda of terrorism' (205.2), 'Training for the purpose of carrying out terrorist activities' (205.3), 'Organisation of a terrorist community and participation in it' (205.4), 'Arranging the activities of a terrorist organisation and participation in the activities of such an organisation' (205.5), as well as articles 'Hostage-taking' (article 206), etc. Failure to report these types of crimes that fall under the above articles is punishable by a fine of up to one hundred thousand rubles, correctional labour for a period of one year or imprisonment for the same period.

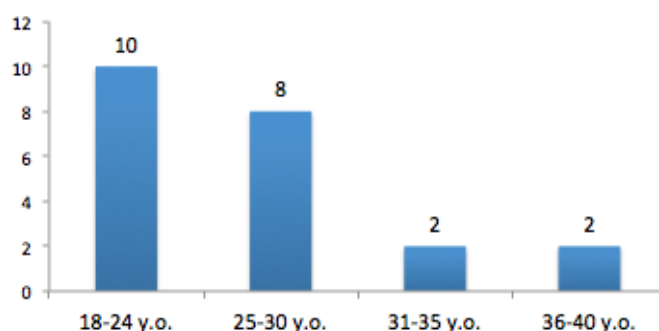
3.5 Socio-demographic portrait of the respondent set

Two of the twenty-two interviews collected were expert interviews. These informants are older than the established age limit of 35 and are in the range of 35 to 40 years. As it can be seen from the chart below, the age of most of the informants is within the range of 18-24 years (ten participants) and 25-30 years (eight participants). The two expert interviewees fall into the age group 31-35 years and 36-40 years (respectively). 16 interviews were conducted with men and six with women. Women belonged more often to the older age groups than the men, which may be due to differences in access for men and women to the Cossacks; the marital status of a woman is sometimes the only channel of access to the community.

Gender composition

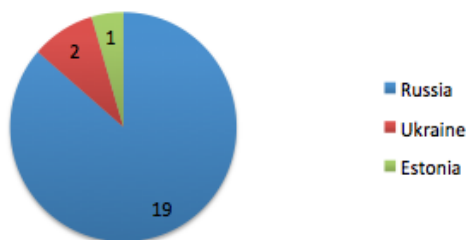


Age of participants (in range)

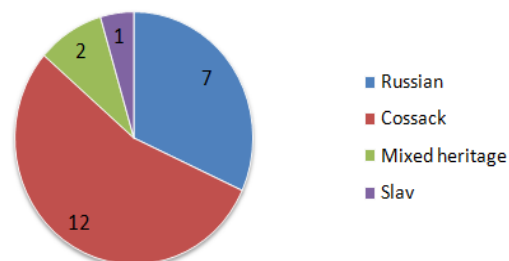


The majority of the interviewees – 19 participants – were born in the territory of Russia or a former Soviet Republic. Two participants were born in the territory of the Ukrainian SSR (territory of modern Ukraine) and one participant was born in the territory of the Estonian SSR (territory of modern Estonia). Most participants (12 interviewees) define themselves as ethnic Cossacks, and seven as ethnic Russians.

Country of birth



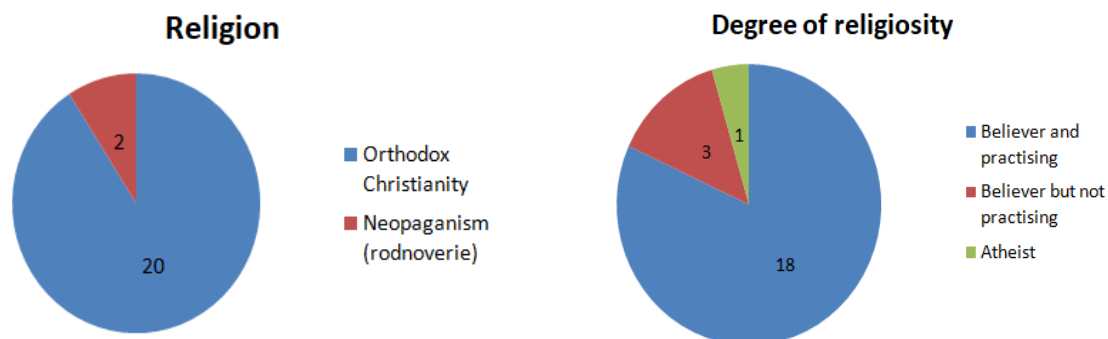
Self-determined ethnicity



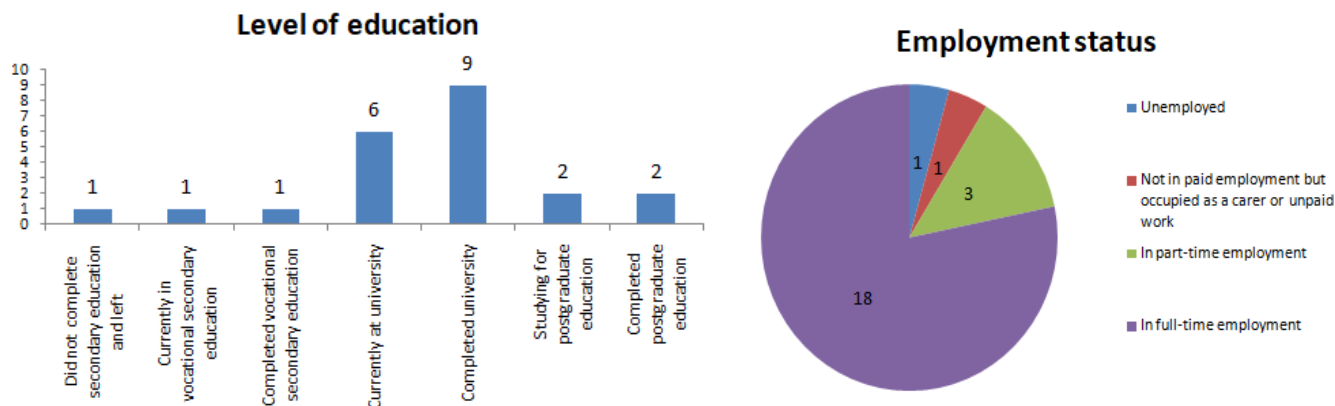
The majority of interviewees (20 participants) identified themselves as people belonging to the Russian Orthodox Church and only two participants identified as belonging to (neo)paganism, namely, to *Rodnoverie*¹⁶.

¹⁶*Rodnoverie* is a new religious movement, one of the varieties of (Slavic) neopaganism, aimed at restoring pre-Christian beliefs, customs and rituals on the territory of the CIS.

In terms of degree of religiosity, it is worth noting that one participant from those who declared a belonging to the Russian Orthodox Church is an atheist, one of the participants who is a *rodnover* (neopagan) does not take part in rituals, while the second participant is actively included in the *rodnover* community. Almost all Orthodox participants (19 participants) identified religion and faith as important values for the community; only two participants identified themselves as believers, but not practising members of the community.



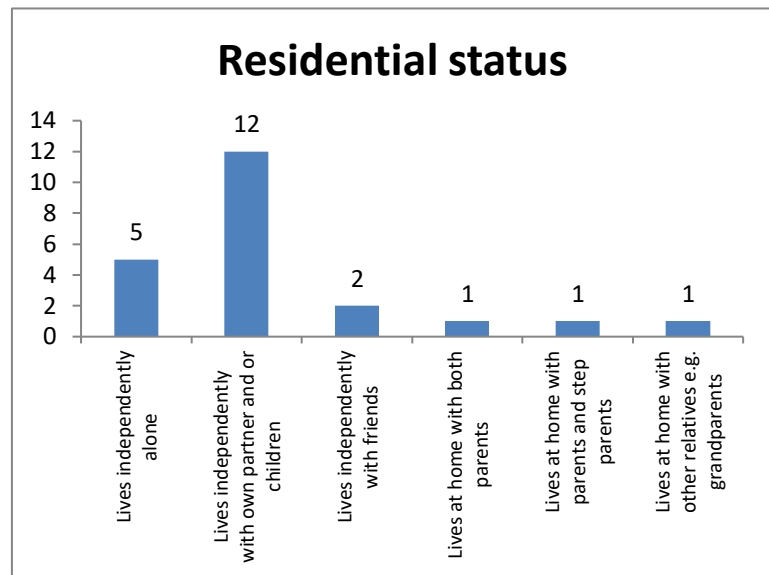
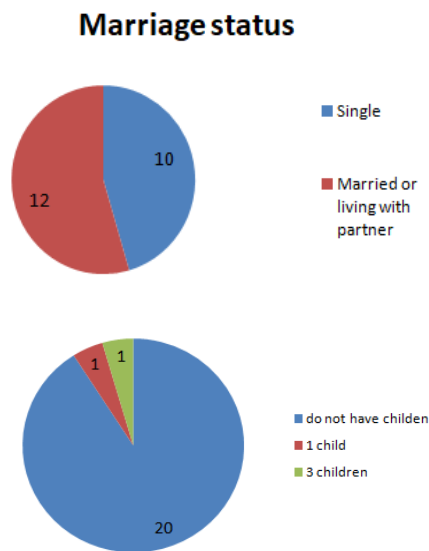
Nine participants had graduated from higher education; six participants are in the process of studying for it. Two participants are in the process of studying for a postgraduate degree (master's or other postgraduate studies), while working full-time, another two have completed postgraduate studies. So 20 participants were or are in the system of higher education.



One of the participants did not fully complete secondary school education and is currently unemployed. Two of the six participants, who are currently studying at university as well as the participant who is in secondary vocational education, work part-time. The remaining university students are employed. All interviewees who have higher education, as well as the participant who finished secondary vocational education, are employed full-time, except for one participant who works in an officially unpaid job in a family business.

In terms of marital status and children it is interesting that most participants are married (12 people), however, they don't have children: only two have children (one child and three children respectively). The participants who are married live with their partner and/or children, while out of the ten participants who identified themselves as not being married, five people live on their own, two people live with friends in

rented accommodation; one participant lives with two parents, another one lives with a parent and stepfather/stepmother, and another one lives with other relatives (in this case, with a brother).



13 participants are single children; four participants have either one brother (one person) or one sister (three people). This is despite the generally held idea of Cossack families as having many children. In families only five informants have two siblings (two participants) or three siblings (three participants). We assume that the mindset of not having many children is inherited from informants' own families, despite the declarative value of Cossack large families and narratives about carrying on the traditions of the family and the Cossack community, in general.

4. Key Findings

4.1 The militarisation of the state and society: creating a radicalised context

This section describes the wider radicalised social context in which the selected milieu, and the participants interviewed, is set. It analyses the militarisation of both state and public rhetoric, the sentiments and attitudes of the population, as well as specific policies and actions of Russian structures and actors. It is important to note that the Russian state and its agencies are formally committed to countering radicalisation through a range of programmes aimed at countering violent extremism and de-radicalisation. However, the actual role of the state in the Russian case may be more ambiguous – due to the militarisation of public discourse and the mythologisation of historical events, as well as the active role of the police and other law enforcement agencies in interacting with right-wing groups. Social media also plays an important part in creating and supporting more radicalised attitudes and beliefs; focused closed and public pages include content ranging from mildly nationalistic to (neo)Nazi.

Paradoxically while most of the state rhetoric is primarily related to countering extremism and terrorism, the level of tolerance to violence in Russia (including at the state level) and the level of militaristic attitudes among the population are consistently increasing (Kolesnikov, 2015: 7; Bouchet, 2016: 3-4). The militarisation of the country and society has reached such a high level that several theorists have seen this

as providing the grounds for defining the modern-day Russian Federation as a militocracy¹⁷ (Rivera and Rivera, 2014: 34).

The process of militarisation is based on a particular rhetoric of historicity. This is expressed through the idea of returning ‘historically Russian’ Crimea to Russia as a correction for Khrushchev’s ‘mistake’, when Crimea was given to Ukraine ‘as a present’, and in parallels between the war in the Donbass and the Great Patriotic War (World War II). Sometimes there is a complete ‘substitution’ and rollback of modern rhetoric to Soviet clichés of searching for an external and internal enemy (Saari, 2014: 56-57; Ambrosio, 2016: 33-35). This rhetoric can be traced in the narratives of informants: ‘And I asked him, being a senior soldier – “Well, why did you come?” – [and he replied]: “I came here to beat the Nazis [in the Donbass], like my grandfather”’ (Alexey, male, 28 y.o.)¹⁸.

One of the most significant topics that the study participants actively addressed when discussing the future of the country and the global future was that of expecting (international) war and/or conflict. The rationalisations and reasons given for future war or military conflict involving Russia were various including the possible violation of the political and/or territorial sovereignty of the Russian Federation, the struggle for border areas and spheres of influence in the international political arena, the deployment of anti-missile systems of NATO near the borders of the Russian Federation or possible involvement of Russia in a hybrid war¹⁹ with various ‘enemy’ countries (USA, China, EU), etc. Future military conflicts are seen in a global perspective, involving several major players in the global political arena, such as China, the United States and the European Union.

This resonates with the mood of the Russian population in general – according to the results of a survey carried out by the ‘Levada centre’ about the main fears and concerns of Russians, the proportion of those surveyed who fear a world war increased from 21% in 2017 to 42% in 2018²⁰. However, despite the variety of reasons given for potential future conflicts, our participants were united by the idea of a certain inevitability of upcoming events:

Where is everything leading now? To war – that is what it is all about now, this time it will be, a war [...] And how can we make a difference? Shall we go to Putin and say – ‘Don’t think about pressing the red button anymore’ or something else in secret...? This is not our level, you know. (Petr, male, 19 y.o.)

It is worth noting that the images of the external ‘enemy’, the main cause of future military conflict and the ‘aggressor’, are left undefined. This indistinctness evokes Bauman’s notion of ‘liquid fear’ (Bauman, 2013). It is indicative also of a high level of militarisation, unfocused on a specific object, and the existence of a certain level of apocalyptic thinking in the milieu (Bethea, 2014: 241).

The media, including state and pro-government media, is an important source for the militaristic and apocalyptic beliefs and views of this milieu. The rhetoric of Cossack VKontakte public pages is often associated with current military action, support for the government’s political course and is characterised by generally militaristic connotations. Despite the representation of Russia as the ‘last hope of the

¹⁷A militocracy is usually understood as the ‘power of the military’/‘military dictatorship’. It is a type of social structure with state power within it, the rotation of which happens mainly using people from the military and/or from other power structures.

¹⁸Here and henceforth in the text all quotes from interviews with study participants are referenced using pseudonyms given to participants due to process of pseudonymisation.

¹⁹Hybrid warfare is usually a type of action in which the attacking party does not resort to classical military intervention, but uses other methods of military action, namely, a combination of covert operations, sabotage on the territory of the country being attacked, cyber warfare, as well as supporting ‘rebels’ on enemy territory.

²⁰‘Sociologists named the top fears of Russians’, Internet resource of the ‘Levada-centre’ from 27.10.2019.URL:

<https://www.levada.ru/2019/10/29/sotsiologi-nazvali-glavnye-strahi-rossiyan/>

traditional world', there is a general 'apocalyptic' tone across the articles, which is based on the idea of the 'moral decomposition' of actors described as 'others' (for example, soldiers of the Ukrainian army²¹, the (liberal) opposition²², LGBTQ+ activists and the feminist movement). Even though specialised Cossack Internet sites have a rather limited audience, they are part of a wider range of right-wing and 'traditionalist' sites, which actively criticise liberalism, 'westernism', gender equality etc.

Although Internet sites, newspapers and magazines are being monitored for possible radical/discriminatory material, the thematic pages and groups in VKontakte and Telegram channels (especially closed ones), are almost never subjected to any moderation. Several nationalist Telegram channels, such as 'Sputnik and Pogrom', 'Russian nationalism', 'Right [wing] news', actively publish posts on the latest news from the Donbass, the situation in Syria, nationalist clashes in Russia.

Some of the posts from such closed groups make their way into open access groups which are dedicated to the activities of the Cossacks or, more often, general issues of assistance to the Donbass and other territories of Eastern Ukraine. The media, in this case, may have an ambivalent role in the process of radicalisation in the chosen milieu. On the one hand, we can say that some members of the Cossack milieu, through inclusion in militaristically oriented groups and social media publications, go through an individual process of media assisted self-radicalisation, which can then be extended to a wider circle of their comrades-in-arms. On the other hand, young people with radical attitudes, and sometimes with experience of participation in military operations, become more public due to their representation in social networks. Connected to this, they then get a (nationalist-oriented) audience and form networks, including of/with Cossacks. In this regard, it is not always possible to trace the role of the media – especially social media – in the process of (self)radicalisation. Whether it acts as a trigger, a source of (self)radicalisation or provides access to an audience for the (public) expression of views, is not clear.

With regard to the topic of cooperation between the Cossacks and law enforcement agencies, it is important to note that in this report we describe individual examples presented by the study participants. Thus they do not reflect the situation in Russia in general. Over the past decade, the Russian government has shown interest in finding new partners to support its political course at various levels – from political action to Internet resources²³ (Kiklewicz, 2015: 187-189; Martianov, 2016: 61-62). As a result, the state has become interested in new pro-government groups that are not directly accountable to state actors or structures. The unofficial involvement of the Cossacks in 'maintaining public order' during protests can lead to the radicalisation of some of the participants and groups of this milieu, and provides external and internal grounds for legitimising the use of violence: 'I come home, sit down at the computer and see [...] spontaneous protests of Navalny are all over the country [...] I mean how can we subdue such a crowd if not by force?' (Alexandr, male, 29 y.o.). Some Cossack *stanitsas* also form close alliances with certain police departments and military structures to conduct 'raids' on places that are defined as 'brothels' and 'drug dens' and also for joint cross-country training.

²¹'Looting, suicide and 120 deserters: the DPR presented a report on the moral decay of the UAF', Internet platform Tsargrad from 17.02.2019. URL: <https://tsargrad.tv/news/maroderstvo-suicid-i-120-dezertirov-v-lnr-predstavili-doklad-o-moralnom-razlozhenii-vsu> 184743

²²By the (liberal) opposition we mostly mean unorganised opposition, with moderate left and centrist views, not included in the existing State Government, but could be registered officially as a political movement, and organising unauthorised mass protests. Non-systemic liberal opposition includes such movements as 'Yabloko', 'Vesna', 'Parnassus', 'Other Russia', 'Left Front', 'Civic Platform', 'Progress Party', 'Navalny Foundation'. These organisations actively criticise the current political regime and leaders of the country, organise journalistic investigations of corruption and other misconduct by large officials, and are also harassed by security services and pro-government movements.

²³For instance, the creation of the 'Troll factory' – specialised organisations made to represent pro-government sentiment and attitudes in posts on Internet platforms – they are also known as 'political bots' (Kemal, 2017).

Some of the interviewed participants have conflicting *personal* relations with law enforcement agencies or hold ambiguous feelings towards their group activities with the police. This suggests a lack of a unified policy of interaction with the Cossacks on the part of law enforcement and security agencies.

The clamp-down on the right-wing and far-right scene in the late 2000s and early 2010s led to the formation of a new, more state-controlled, right-wing sector and the emergence of a new 'right'. The growing interest of the state in these new actors legitimises their right to use violence – in desired context(s) and toward certain social groups. The state also justifies its narratives of taking control of 'unacceptable' groups (mostly Antifa and other left-wing activists) as being radicalised. In this case, by failing to define right-wing groups as radical(s), the state indirectly contributes to the radicalisation of certain communities and groups, since they are rendered ideologically 'right'.

4.2 Trajectories of radicalisation and non-radicalisation in the Cossack milieu in St. Petersburg

Despite the idea of clear boundaries between radicalisation and non-radicalisation²⁴ (Cilluffo, Cardash and Whitehead, 2007; Kallis, 2013), the definition of radicalisation itself sometimes can be challenged due to the more blurred boundaries between shared radical beliefs and the willingness to use violence in the individual biographies (Schmid, 2013; Spalek, 2016). The (non)radicalisation could be presented as a spectrum from refuse of accepting radical beliefs and attitudes till use of violence against certain social groups, while between a 'buffer zone' is formed, which is presented by freer boundaries and (individual) choices. Moreover, participants can also move from one (near)radical organisation e.g. on the left-wing, to one on the other end of the ideological spectrum, e.g. on the right wing. This indicates that political ideology may not be the primary driver of radicalisation. Moreover, in relation to the radicalisation on the right-wing spectrum – from mainstream nationalist organisations to the far right – it is possible to identify shared beliefs and values that might facilitate the transition from one organisation to another (Rooduijn and Akkerman, 2017: 195-198).

In this section we describe the context(s) and experiences of radicalisation of the Cossacks of St. Petersburg, as well as non-radicalisation within the same milieu. Radicalisation trajectories are more frequently encountered due, we suggest, to the fact that the milieu exists in a radical context and they thus encounter choices that lead to radicalisation more frequently. Indeed, the use of violence or willingness to use it, allows participants to actively join more 'closed' groups within the community and take positions of higher status within it while paths of non- or de-radicalisation, can distance participants from their community.

It is difficult to distinguish, and determine the characteristics of, distinct types of radicalisation trajectories since the life choices and strategies of the study participants differ significantly. It is also not possible to distinguish 'pure types' of trajectories, since in almost every participant's biographical narrative we could mention both media-assisted (self)radicalisation, a recruitment process (Caiani, 2017: 5-10), a shift to extremum²⁵ (McCauley and Moskalenko, 2011: 103) and other mechanisms of

²⁴It is important to note here that refusing to use violence in one's (individual or group) social and political activities does not mean that a process of non-radicalisation takes place, since non-radicalisation means refusing (self)radicalising beliefs and values in a radicalised (or close to it) context. The transition to the use of violence or the willingness to use it is rather considered within the definition of radicalism and (violent) extremism.

²⁵Shift to extremum is a term, which was introduced by Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko in their paper, and refers to group-level mechanisms of radicalisation. Shift to extremum in like-minded groups (also known as group polarisation) could be defined through two ideas: 'increased agreement about the opinion at issue (mostly, risk taking or political opinion) and a shift in the average opinion of group members' (McCauley and Moskalenko, 2011), so if some participants were showing more radical ideas, after the discussion most of participants would be more

(self)radicalisation. In this regard, it is beneficial to highlight certain biographical episodes and experiences of the informants, which act as *staging posts* that can occur in any order and in different combinations, resulting in individualised pathways of (non)radicalisation. The term '*staging post*' is used in this report to indicate a certain 'point' that is a specific biographical episode that could lead to (non)radicalisation according to individual choices of participants, social contexts in which it occurs, etc. Such episodes are accumulated in biographical trajectories and allow movement to the 'next level' of radicalisation within the hierarchy of the radical milieu, personal beliefs and values, or to refusal in the case of non-radicalisation. However, it is not possible to assess the significance of each of these points within an individual life course, either in the case of radicalisation or in the case of non-radicalisation.

We defined the following *staging posts*, which facilitate movement towards radicalisation and non-radicalisation: the formation of socially conservative attitudes (on the basis of religion/belief, perceptions of (patriarchal) gender order, a high level of everyday racism); previous experience of a commitment to an ideology justifying violence and/or including the use of it; the presence of a trigger (usually a visual image); (self)justification and legitimisation of violence; familial or post-combat recruitment, mediated by status or position in the community; and, the general level of militarisation of society, which was discussed in more detail in paragraph 4.1.

Before proceeding to the description of each staging post, it is important to note that the main difference between the 'model' proposed in this report and the model of the 'staircase to terrorism' (Moghaddam, 2005) is that Moghaddam's model is represented as a six-floor, ever-narrowing direct stairway, where the order of each 'stage' is fixed and does not change according to the individual biography. Our model proposes, rather, a set of staging posts, each of which could be 'attained' in any order and in uneven amount in individual biographies. This means that the model has more flexibility although some ideas intersect with Moghaddam's model. For example, 'perception of injustice and relative deprivation' depicted at the 'ground level' (in the 'staircase to terrorism' model) is also identified as a 'staging post' here (see Section 4.3) while 'moral engagement that justifies terrorism' is close to what is termed (self)justification and legitimisation of violence in our model. In terms of the lack of a fixed order, the 'pyramid' model by McCauley and Moskalenko (McCauley and Moskalenko, 2011) is closer to the model proposed in this report; although in our model there is no division into several levels (individual, group and mass ones) and more focus on the individual level. Nevertheless, some ideas of the pyramid model are referenced in this report (e.g. group polarisation, condensation, status seeking, group isolation) in the process of forming our own model based on the analysis of empirical data. The 'two-pyramids' model proposed by McCauley and Moskalenko (McCauley and Moskalenko, 2017), which envisages a separate opinion pyramid (neutral-sympathisers-justifiers) and action pyramid (inert-activists-radicals-terrorists) - is of great interest for the study of group dynamics and the composition of radical organisations. However, it pays less attention to the flexibility of boundaries and choices in the context of various stages of radicalisation than the 'pyramid' model, since it assigns members of groups to generalised types at certain radicalisation stage(s).

In relation to the formation of socially conservative attitudes, it is important to note that the values shared are often broad ideological values related to a desired gender order, ideas about 'correct' national policies and 'correct' national order, and policies towards social minorities. The potential for solidarity around such broad ideological values is naturally greater and paves the way for members of the Cossack community to unite with various (right-wing) groups to conduct specific actions or a series of them (Hockenos, 2013: 143) and to form networks (including transitional) of groups and communities which are right-wing (Mareš, 2006: 10-11).

positive about radical ideas and/or actions (McCauley and Moskalenko, 2011: 103).

A declared negative attitude towards LGBTQ+ community and those who threaten the desired gender order is, for example, a significant focus for solidarity. The idea of the 'correct' gender order and gender roles is based on a biologised approach and is rationalised through the 'historicity' of such a distribution of roles:

Well, a woman must still be engaged in the family, well, not that she must, it's... she was created for this. And a man has... some other... tasks. And you when... well, one does one thing well, the other does another thing well, so let everyone do what he does best, as determined... by nature. (Alexey, male, 28 y.o.)

Thus, heteronormativity and (neo)patriarchy are the solidifying dimensions underlying the ideological basis of most right-wing communities (Maynard and Purvis, 2005). However, participants in this study also demonstrate more liberal views on gender roles. Although they support (neo)patriarchy on a declarative level, they indicate that their practice does not often correspond to it, since such views are difficult to apply in modern society:

Well, you know, when this Circle begins, one wants to say that they are all mad [...]. The patriarchy is 100% as soon as they come from this Circle [...] [But] towards their wives, yes, they start to have gender equality, so I'll put it here, so I mean they favour patriarchy, but they achieve patriarchy during these 'Cossack games'. (Alena, female, 36 y.o.)

When speaking about shared ideas about a 'correct' national policy, including ideas on 'correct' ethnic order, participants define themselves as belonging to the 'titular nation'. This is seen through the representation of 'others', ethnic minority citizens and people with a migrant background, from a position of power, control and 'neo-colonialism':

Well... to prevent them [*migrants*] from coming here [*to Russia*], to put it crudely... that is, the Soviet Union was, that is, there is a phrase: 'You're responsible for whom you have tamed' [...] but in this we [ethnically Russians] differ from other white people... that somehow we are not xenophobes... still, yeah (Alexey, male, 28 y.o.)

However, it is important to note that these narratives are articulated primarily by former members of nationalist and (neo)Nazi groups and organisations who were forced to leave these organisations by the police and other law enforcement agencies, but did not renounce their past ideological beliefs. This is the case with Alexey, for example, who is a former member of a neo-Nazi group and still supports neo-Nazi ideology despite having left the neo-Nazi organisation and joined the Cossack community.

Within this Cossack milieu ideology, as such, is not always the main reason for joining an organisation (community) and for subsequent radicalisation, including the use of violence. Moreover, it is difficult to clearly define the social and political background that can contribute to individuals joining the Cossacks. Participants in this study predominantly, but not exclusively, came to Cossack groups with right-wing attitudes and previous experience of involvement in right-wing organisations. However, examples of people moving from left-wing organisations, such as Antifa²⁶, were also identified: 'I joined the Antifa movement, well, i.e. we even distinguished there [...] we were anarcho-socialists, i.e. we followed the Kropotkin line' (Alexandr, male, 29 y.o.). However, experience of inclusion in organisations that used violence as a method of political struggle may be the reason for the subsequent search for new ideologically or value-related communities that also legitimise violence, such as Cossacks. Informants who previously had experience of using violence within other communities/organisations, express more

²⁶ Despite the fact that in the final selection we observed more often a shift from organisations of the right and far-right spectrum, no less important are the cases of transition from left-wing communities. The latter cases are of particular interest since they challenge existing academic literature, which suggests individuals rarely switch their ideological allegiance, especially so fundamentally.

radical attitudes in their narratives than participants without such experiences. They also call more actively for the use of violence against ‘others’ as expressed by Petr below talking about actions to disperse mass gatherings of ‘others’ that he does not approve of:

Depending on... what the pretext for the protest is again. If it’s against the government, against... (pause) well, something good – yes, it is worth *[dispersing the protest]*. Just like ***** *[expletive word for LGBTQ+ people]* should be dispersed, all this... for me, they are people of non-traditional orientation, so to speak, for me... I despise them. I... can’t tolerate them at all. (Petr, male, 19 y.o.)

Thus, previous experience of the use of violence becomes one of the staging posts of radicalisation, as the line of transition from radicalism to violent extremism is overcome in the prior biographical experiences of informants. Thus, transition from radicalism to violent extremism is not seen as problematic in narratives of participants where they became a member of the Cossack community after already experiencing the use of violence against certain social groups. Participants of the Cossack community, who did not have experience of using violence against other social group, in contrast, are likely to abandon radicalisation when they are faced with the choice of using violence, e.g. in the process of violent dispersal of an oppositional, feminist or LGBTQ+ mass event.

An equally important staging post for both radicalisation and non-radicalisation is the trigger (Francis, 2012: 2-3). It is not possible to make a definitive list of potential triggers from the narratives of informants. This confirms the conclusions of other researchers, who have mainly focused on Islamic radicalisation and identified a wide variety of, context dependent, potential triggers including visual, textual, auditory and spiritual images (Francis, 2012: 2-3; Schmid, 2013). In some cases, a specific spiritual/religious experience can act as a trigger for radicalisation. Alexandr, for example, who had previously been a member of the Antifa community, had a religious awakening during a tourist trip, turned to God, and became interested in receiving religious education and joining the Cossacks:

So we came to the monastery, I went to the chapel, and it so happened that I was left alone and, to quote Anthony of Sourozh²⁷, I understood that ‘Everything there is, is here’. And that was it *[i.e. this was the turning point for participant to leave Antifa community and search for community that would be on the same religious basis]*. And for many years of my life these feelings have not left me. This has become part of my already physical experience. (Alexandr, male, 29 y.o.)

Interestingly due to this ‘transition’ Alexandr left the anti-fascists to choose a no less ‘radical’ way in his opinion: ‘By the way, I will say that there is nothing more radical than Orthodoxy in life’ (Alexandr, male, 29 y.o.). In other cases, the trigger for radicalisation may be found in watching videos dedicated to fighting, which some informants interpret as recruitment tools – ‘*they say*’: “We were called by Zvezda²⁸ *[to fight on the territory of Ukraine]*, and we went”. Well, I mean, the TV channel. Well, they went there, because there’s fascism there, Bandera, and so on’ (Alexey, male, 28 y.o.). Thus, as triggers, we see a variety of textual, visual and sensory images associated with certain formats of ‘patriotism’ and the protection of ‘traditional values’ (including faith, religion, the country’s sovereignty, etc.) at different levels. The range of images allows the targeting of different groups and the recruitment of (future)

²⁷Anthony of Sourozh was a Metropolitan Bishop of the Russian Orthodox Church who served in Western Europe due to the family’s relocation from Russia after the Revolution. He wrote books and articles about spirituality, Orthodox values, and spiritual life in general.

²⁸‘Zvezda’ is a state television channel, defined as ‘socio-patriotic’, and overseen by the Russian Ministry of Defence. During the period of active hostilities in the Eastern regions of Ukraine, it was one of the main sources of information about the ongoing actions, as well as a media channel for recruiting recruits to the ‘militia’ of the Donetsk People’s Republic and Lugansk People’s Republic (regions in the southeast Ukraine).

participants from a range of socio-economic and biographical backgrounds. At the same time, videos dedicated to fighting that act as a trigger can also work as a non-radicalising mechanism, especially if it is communicated by a significant other. In the case of Arina, it was her brother's experience that was critical: 'That is, my brother who was in the militia, he says: "it is hell here [...] I don't know who is right, who is to blame. I know for sure that ordinary people are not to blame at all"' (Arina, female, 31 y.o.). In this case, even visual images, which are emotionally loaded and contain scenes of violence, become less significant and important for determining one's own (ideological) position than the more informal and seemingly more real narratives of 'eyewitnesses'.

The next staging post of radicalisation is the rationalisation (legitimisation) of violence (in the case of non-radicalisation – the rejection of it) at the individual level. The legitimisation and rationalisation of violence happens mainly through the rhetoric of violence as forced, important, or necessary in relation to groups of people or countries that 'deserve' aggression. The figure of the 'other' (a group, community, and country defined as an ideological and non-ideological enemy) is demonised and viewed as an aggressor and perpetrator of the violence. The aggressor-victim relationship is reversed (Varela-Rey, Rodríguez-Carballeira and Martín-Peña, 2013: 87-90) for (self)justification of the violence used. However, not all forms of violence become legitimate – violence becomes (self)justified when it is applied to the already mentioned 'others' (i.e. LGBT movement, the feminist movement, people with a migrant background, etc.), and when it is, in one way or another, sanctioned directly by the Cossack leadership or by the authorities' position which is broadcast through the media. The most striking example of the 'enemy' and 'other' is ISIS²⁹, whose image is actively broadcast by the media and is dehumanised as much as possible:

Well, they [*ISIS*] are enemies – they must be killed [...] Well, they are generally possessed by the devil without any... Because, yes, they are a threat, they declare it. Here generally... they are mad dogs. It's a pity, of course, but what can we do? (Nikolai, male, 29 y.o.)

In some cases, the Cossack authorities can play the role of a non-radicalising agent, for instance, when they impose sanctions on the use of violence, so that (self)justification of violence becomes impossible at least at the group level, and often at the individual level too. For example, in the case of one of the informants, the religious leader of the *stanitsa* did not give a blessing to the members of the *stanitsa* to join the militia, so none of them left to participate in military operations:

Our confessor³⁰ ... did not bless the *stanitsa* to go to the Donbass. Almost the entire *stanitsa*, almost in its entirety, wanted to go. But, for us, well, the word of the confessor, well, he has [*the power*]... (Alexandr, male, 29 y.o.)

In our case there were very few narratives about recruitment, except when the research participant(s) had joined the Cossacks as children (when he/she was brought to the Cossack organisation by relatives or significant others) or were recruited after participating in military combat. A number of studies note that recruitment at a younger age can lead to radicalisation due to the rejection of other, alternative ideological and political beliefs (Hellsten, 2016; Spalek, 2016). As we had few cases of childhood involvement in the Cossacks, we cannot draw unambiguous conclusions. However, it can be noted that recruitment can become a staging post of radicalisation at the individual level, when it happens at an early age through family members and family friends. In all cases of 'early' recruitment, the main attraction was learning the skills of (hand-to-hand) combat or the 'culture of handling' weapons. This is connected to Cossack ideas about the gender regime and gender roles where boys are 'future warriors':

As for education, my father, when I was 5 years old, he took me away from my mother [...] my mother no longer had any influence on my upbringing, because I was a man. At that

²⁹ This organisation is prohibited on the territory of the Russian Federation.

³⁰ The confessor is the priest who focuses on the acceptance of repentance and individual work with believers. Each Cossack organisation has its own confessor.

point, I already had an introduction to weapons, a culture of handling *[them]*. (Dima, male, 20 y.o.)

Recruitment to a community of people who have experience in combat may be another staging post of radicalisation at the group rather than individual level. This may increase the level of radicalisation of the whole community due to the emergence of participants with more radical beliefs about the use of violence (Ranstorp, 2010; Saltman, 2019). However, the position held within the community and the scope of activity within it can also be a non-radicalising staging post within the chosen milieu. Thus, the occupation of a lower status or position in the community and/or activity in cultural and social areas of Cossack public activity may mean that individuals participate in non-radical spaces within the milieu away from more radical participants/activities.

As was noted in Section 4.1. the state and other actors (e.g. media, community, etc.) can produce a militarised and radicalised context in which young people encounter radical messages. Among the radical contexts and challenges specific to Russia are aggressively oriented foreign policy directions (Mankoff, 2009: 28-29; Valdez, 2015: 87-88) – the Crimean case is an illustration of this, as is the war in Syria – and the challenges of domestic policy, which emphasises identifying ‘internal enemies’ and foreign agents (Pocheptsov, 2016: 5-8). Despite the declarative public support of the Cossacks as a socio-political group that is (politically) loyal and promotes ‘correct’ values in line with the state, we can nevertheless speak of condensation³¹ as a form of group radicalisation within our milieu (McCauley, Moskalenko, 2008: 425-426). This term refers to radicalisation at the group level and involves competition with the state and state actors as well as competition for support (ideological, financial, etc.) from the state. Members of right-wing and far-right communities, who have not received support from the state (or have even been prosecuted), choose more legitimate ways to express their views through joining Cossackdom in order to perform anti-migrant, anti-LGBTQ+ activities. These new right-wing communities share the same views and are ready to express violence, where the state allows it, – for example, during the dispersal of opposition protests, joint trainings with police, etc. As part of condensation, a milieu is radicalised in the process of conflict with other (political) groups and, to a lesser extent, with the state, as it struggles for resources – financial, administrative, power, etc. The existing state programmes for deradicalisation in the Russian Federation, as already noted in Section 4.1, are fairly ineffective, which only makes the situation worse (Dannreuther and March, 2010: 27-35). This general level of militarisation of the population and of a particular community can serve as a radicalising staging post for those milieu participants who were previously or are now involved in militarised activities, dispersals, and raids.

Thus the boundaries between radicalisation and non-radicalisation (also de-radicalisation) are much more flexible than how they are usually described in academic sources, which usually assume a clear ‘profile’ of the radical community and/or its participants (McCauley, Moskalenko, 2014: 76), and focus on determining (potential) paths of radicalisation and the path of de-radicalisation policies (Hutson, Long, Page, 2009: 21-23). Considering a specific empirical case, we conclude that the (radical) milieu can be extremely heterogeneous in its (non)inclusion of participants in the trajectory of (non)radicalisation. We can define a set of staging posts, by which (individual) trajectories are formed. For our milieu, such staging posts are: the formation of socially conservative attitudes; previous experience of adherence to an ideology that justifies violence and/or included its use; the presence of a trigger; (self)justification and legitimisation of violence; familial or post-combat recruitment, mediated by status or position in the community; and the general level of militarisation of society.

³¹This term was used in an article by McCauley and Moskalenko in 2008, where they proposed the analysis of the process of radicalisation at different levels – individual, group, and mass. Condensation refers to radicalisation at the group level and involves competition with state power and at the same time is connected with competition for support (ideological, financial, etc.).

4.3. Structural factors affecting radicalisation in the Cossack milieu

When identifying the root causes of radicalisation, many politicians and public figures, especially in the early 2000s (after the terrorist attack of 11th September, 2001), believed inequality (low social status, poverty, etc.) to be one of the key prerequisites for the spread of violence, including terrorism, radicalisation and extremism. As Pedersen et al. (2018: 63) put it, 'Intuitively, many consider radicalisation to be a response to poverty and unemployment'. However, series of studies and empirical investigations of this hypothesis, has suggested inequality in society (at the collective or individual level) is not the root cause of decisions to adopt a radical position (Schmid, 2013: 2). The research shows that people who are included in terrorist networks are in fact more likely not to be socio-economic outsiders. A series of studies on the 'third wave of terrorism' in the 1970s and the new wave of terrorism in the 1990s, show that participants in these actions were often privileged (at least, they did not belong to the poor) (Pedersen et al, 2018: 63). Lee claims that those likely to be affected by radical groups are 'those who are in the upper part of society, but not at the top, that is, the poorest members of the politically aware class' (Lee, 2011: 242). However, inequality, especially subjective inequality, remains an important factor in driving radicalisation or terrorism in contemporary understandings of the phenomenon (Doosje et al., 2013; Moghaddam, 2005; Webber and Kruglanski, 2018).

Some of the factors that were analysed in the context of the causes of radicalisation are factors of (structural) inequality and exclusion or restrictions on entering a desired space, economically and/or administratively, of (high) status, which could be seen as extra-ideological factors of radicalisation. The most obvious spaces of exclusion – economic ones – were less represented in the Russian case, although the gap between social groups may be the reason for the actualisation of awareness of structural inequality in the framework of general economic inequality (Gerber, 2012: 22-23). Within our milieu, the most important thing is not economic differences (the economic background of the family, salary level, access to economic benefits), but access to power and (administrative) power resources, which informants seek to gain by entering into the Cossacks, especially when occupying a higher status position in the community. Being a Cossack is seen as an opportunity to gain access to a quasi-state position and status, to increase one's reputation capital. The study participants from lower status positions or who had a low socio-economic background when they started their career in the Cossacks, have more radical attitudes than those participants who had a higher status.

In analysing findings from this study of the Cossack milieu, it is important to note that, in economic terms, the Cossacks largely belong to the middle class and thus objective inequality is an unlikely driver of radicalisation in their case. Most of the informants in this study have a university degree (or are currently studying for a degree). Informants have good jobs and salaries, and generally are focused on improving their social status (through a career or study) and material well-being. Some informants receive financial support from parents (mostly those who are students). In the rare cases where informants found themselves on the verge of poverty, this was related to the previous place of residence, where the average salary was quite low. This was one of the reasons why the informants had moved to another city where they found better job opportunities and salaries. Despite the asceticism inherent in Orthodox values, informants admit that it is not typical for them. Uniforms, weapons, the ability to train and learn to ride all require additional investment. Cossacks are ready to pay for this in order to demonstrate their social status. Thus, in material terms, Cossacks do not have economic problems or a visible lack of funds.

However, despite this objective well-being, the narratives of Cossacks are often laced with stories of subjective inequality (both economic and social). These stories are built around the idea of the Cossacks being oppressed and treated unfairly by the authorities. Informants see the roots of this oppression in the history of the Cossacks in the twentieth century when many became victims of Soviet terror; some informants used the term 'genocide' in their stories about the history of their ancestors. Feelings of such injustice and alienation often lead to the formation of radical coalitions within Cossack communities. In the

1980s this oppression narrative – especially during the period of repressions and a special programme of ‘decossackisation’ – create the ideological core around which Cossack organisations began to revive. Members of Cossack organisations wanted to restore the memory of the Cossacks and rehabilitate their relatives who had suffered from the repressions of the Soviet government. This same rhetoric is being cultivated now, taking the form of calls to prevent such genocide of their people, as well as the entire Russian population. Informants express the ideas of pride for the Cossacks and the exploits of their ancestors. They are also ready to defend these ideas, including with the use of radical methods (fighting those who doubt the truth of the existence of the Cossacks as a people/military class and who do not respect the modern Cossacks). Cossacks see as a threat both the actions of liberal forces in Russia and the actions of the existing government, which creates systemic injustice in the country (unequal access to material resources, access to power, etc.). All this forces the Cossacks to take radical measures, although the Cossacks themselves do not label their activities as radical. In this section we discuss what kind of injustice (inequality) the government and the opposition are perceived to create.

The main trigger for most Cossack organisations, including for their radical actions, can be defined as ‘Cossack land’ (Markowitz and Peshkova, 2014: 32). This is the idea of returning ‘their’ lands. Some Cossack organisations, especially in the south of Russia, were originally created to achieve this goal. Such narratives are also found in the case study.

Hmm, [...], is there any radicalism or extremism in the Cossack environment? In my opinion, it is expressed only in one aspect, as far as I can see. Modern radicalism is [...] separatism, i.e. it is a political movement that says the Cossacks are a people with its own historical areas of settlement and have the right to assert their ownership of those lands. We have the right to, and should separate from Russia and create our own state – the Cossack state. We could call it the Cossacks, Cossack Stan, Cossack Kuban, well, whatever. So on this issue I support such separatism, but I believe that the Cossacks should be at least in their homeland *[the interviewee thus does not support complete separation from the Russian Federation]*, in their historical lands: Don, Terek, Kuban, Yaik, Semirechye, Transbaikalia, Ussuriysk. [...] I see Cossack radicalism as Cossack separatism, I do not welcome it, but [I would welcome] some kind of cultural autonomy *[and independent activity]* in the form of *[Cossack]* public organisations. (Anton, male, 24 y.o.)

Within large cities, this rhetoric of ‘territoriality’ is expressed in the idea of the ‘right to the city’ (Lefebvre, 1996; Harvey, 2008) and its protection. The Cossacks maintain the independence and legitimacy of their activities, which include patrolling the streets against violations of order (when the Cossacks can independently determine the degree of offence and regulate the citizens’ rules of behaviour in public places), protecting rallies and other mass events, joint raids with the police to identify illegal migrants and raids on stores that illegally sell alcohol. All this activity can lead to conflicts and clashes between Cossacks and ‘violators’. It resembles the work of civil activists but it is distinguished, firstly, by its militarised nature (all Cossacks carry cold weapons), and second, by the greater legitimacy of their activities, due to cooperation with the police.

Interviewer: So, when did your relationship with the police go from quarrels to a fruitful communication, so to speak?

Vladimir: When I stopped being a football hooligan.

Interviewer: About seven years ago?

Vladimir: Yes.

Interviewer: How did this happen? Did you have acquaintances there at the time *[in the police]*?

Vladimir: Well, no. I stopped pushing... They [*the hooligans*] began to create all sorts of horrors and vandalism. I'm like, if you do nothing wrong, then nothing wrong will be done to you. That's how relations should be with the police. And then cooperation with the police was found, well, with respect to the Cossacks. [...] I found a way to pursue my ideas, which were born and developed back then, within the law. (Vladimir, male, 28 y.o.)

Thus, the Cossacks feel empowered to fight any type of 'injustice' – which is usually not aimed at them – they see around them and believe they have the moral superiority and the right to 'restore order to' the city. Through this, they seek to regain their historical purpose of protecting the state and gaining respect from the population.

The sense or moral authority and superiority described above stands in stark contrast to the competing narrative of the injustice and unfair treatment of the Cossacks by the state (based on their religious and ethnic affiliation). The Cossacks feel unequal compared to some other ethnic and religious groups in Russian society. According to the informants, Cossacks are seen as 'extremists' more often than those people who deserve this label (most often Muslims). Such a rhetoric of 'injustice' emerged after a number of precedents³² for the detention of nationalists who protested under the slogans of greater rights for Russians in Russia and their more privileged position in relation to other ethnic groups ('Russia for Russians').

So the problem again is that the rights of some... nationalities that I mention. This does not mean that I have anything against anyone, I have different friends myself, Jews and Buryats, and anyone. I'm fine with everyone. We will protect the rights of Tatars. We will protect the rights of Chechens, Buryats, I don't know, anyone... [...] ...for example... they say 'I'm French', everyone says 'Hooray, you're French', 'I'm Chechen' – 'Hooray, you're Chechen', 'I'm Tatar' – 'Hooray, you're Tatar', 'I'm Russian' – 'Ugh, you're an extremist, you're not a patriot', because you identify your nationality and yourself. What's wrong with me identifying myself in some way? No. But here on the contrary – 'You incite ethnic hatred, because you say that you are Russian'. I mean, in what way do I incite discord if I'm Russian? I have such blood. So what? Should I throw myself off a roof in despair because of that? This seems to me a big problem, and extremism, in my opinion... (Sonya, female, 22 y.o.)

Another informant recalled a case when Muslims occupied the streets (including the road) of the city on their religious holiday. Although this had not been agreed with the authorities, no sanctions were imposed. Moreover, some informants felt threatened because some statements about their nationality might be interpreted as nationalistic slogans and could lead to prosecution. Notwithstanding a number of genuine incidents, however, this remains very much a subjective sense of inequality. In practice, Cossack organisations are growing in number, the revival of the Cossacks is supported and scandals related to the Cossacks are still resolved in favour of the Cossacks. Therefore it is not possible to talk about the objective marginalisation of the Cossacks in terms of their ethnicity or religion.

Even though the Cossacks support the government, they also criticise it because they see the roots of some social inequalities in the incorrect policy of the current power elite. Thus, according to informants, the distribution of financial resources remains an important problem in society for several reasons. Firstly, there is injustice in the salaries of the country's population and a huge difference between the earnings of the 'middle' class in Russia (to which the Cossacks see themselves as belonging) and the Russian elite. Secondly, there is injustice in the distribution of the budget, where the state does not sufficiently finance medicine and, as a result, cannot provide its population with effective free medicine.

³²This refers to the cases of the arrest of six members of a nationalist organisation in Moscow and Vladimir cities in 2019, detention of the leader of the Nationalist Party Dmitry Demushkin and his ensuing conviction and sentencing to 30 months in prison, detention of Pavel Stogov, the leader of the youth nationalist group of Russia, etc.

Thirdly, at the meso-level, better funding for St. Petersburg and Moscow compared to the rest of Russia is perceived as unjust (for example, one of the informants is sure that all the country's financial resources are concentrated in the 'two capitals'). Finally, there is injustice in the distribution of income between the younger and older cohorts of the population. Informants note that elderly people in the country are not respected and not provided with a decent pension.

Differentiated access to security is an important indicator of subjective inequality. This is referred to in narratives about the danger of being in crowded places where terrorist attacks are possible. Cossacks perceive that using public transport, visiting large markets and other busy sites is not safe for the 'average' and poor parts of the population. The problem of insecurity in Russian society remains acute for the Cossacks, and if the Cossacks are not yet ready to fight economic inequality at the macro level, they are ready to solve the security issue with their own units.

Concern for the values of young people is a further argument of the Cossacks about the relative inequality in society that encourages their radicalisation (or rather, the struggle for their space). According to informants, 'correct' values are being replaced by 'incorrect' liberal values. This 'inequality of values' is harmful, as it leads to the creation of non-traditional families (and the deterioration of the gene pool), and the weakening of the state. Ultimately, it leads to negative consequences for the entire state (for example, a lack of preparedness to fight the 'enemy'). Informants see one of the most negative manifestations of this in the LGBT community; not so much the fact that they are in the city, as the promotion of their ideas (propaganda can manifest itself in small things – for example, public hugs or kisses).

In conclusion, we have identified several types of inequality that provoke Cossacks to have radical ideas and/or actions: economic inequality at the macro (national) level associated with the incorrect distribution of finances; subjectively perceived inequality, specifically a lack of opportunities to exercise ethnic and religious rights and freedoms; subjective inequality in security; and subjectively perceived inequality at the meso-level in relation to liberal groups of the population, which, according to the Cossacks, are more popular and suppress the interest of young people in the 'correct' values that the Cossacks promote.

4.4. Own perceptions / understandings about 'radicalisation' among the Cossacks in St. Petersburg

The concepts of 'radicalism' and 'extremism' are almost indistinguishable in modern Russian public discourse. Russian public discourse rather refers to violent extremism and terrorism, while radicalism and non-violent extremism are less frequently encountered. Radicalism, extremism (both violent and non-violent) and terrorism are used interchangeably in public discourse. At the same time, there is no dialogue in public discourse about understanding radicalism, radicalisation or extremism (Kubyakin, 2011: 126). We can find works devoted to the specifics of radicalism and radicalisation of the Islamic population of the Russian Federation in the academic sphere, but there are much less works exploring right-wing and far-right radicalism in Russia, most of which are dedicated to analysis of skinhead subculture (Varga, 2008). This may be due to a certain 'insensitivity' towards xenophobic and racist attitudes, given the overall high level of domestic racism in the Russian Federation (Mukomel, 2013: 43-44; Shnirelman, 2014: 77). The discussion on radicalisation in public discourse is to some extent 'privatised' by the security services. That is why young people often use established rhetoric presented in public discourse, without having the ability to re-define, supplement or change it personally: 'Well, [I know about radicalisation] only what the media covers... [...] if that someone tried to impose on me these extremist trends - no. So that even to discuss this issue, no [...] so it only comes from the TV, mostly' (Arina, female, 31 y.o.).

This makes it difficult to identify differences or dissonance between the public discourse of radicalisation, radicalism and extremism and the private (individual) rhetoric employed by our research participants.

Analysing the narratives of the participants, we noticed that the boundaries between the concepts of radicalism and extremism are almost non-existent. These two phenomena are presented as a single concept that connects radical attitudes, the use of violence and terrorism. Some participants, however, distinguished these concepts describing extremism as radicalism accompanied by violence, while radicalism can be expressed in attitudes but without resort to violence. At the same time, stages of radicalisation are not highlighted by informants – instead of describing radical transition and the range of (non)radical views and attitudes within which activists, communities and groups are located, the study participants draw a clear dividing line between radicals and non-radicals. Moreover, the presence of radical attitudes and views is not enough to classify someone as radical/extremist³³, since these concepts in the participants' narratives imply the use of violence against a social group. Thus, a focus on the use of violence is present, while other meanings remain unarticulated.

The most common example that is used to illustrate radicalism/extremism is the current military situation in Syria and the presence of ISIS, which is defined as extremist or radical – both in its beliefs and in the use of violence. However, informants rarely described the participants of ISIS through the categories of 'radical people'. They are usually imagined as being 'pulled' into the organisation through recruitment practices: 'Well, ISIS, in general, in my opinion – this is not... do not represent themselves... well, they were given an idea, and they are just manipulated' (Alexey, male, 28 y.o.).

Right-wing radicalism, moreover, is completely absent from the description of radicalism/extremism. Study participants in their narratives did not use even examples of nationalist or neo-Nazi communities as example of radicalism/extremism. This is especially interesting, given that some of the participants had or have experiences of participation in right-wing and far-right groups. Such groups are not defined by informants as 'radical' or 'extremist', despite the presence of radical attitudes and the use of violence against certain social groups, most often migrants, Muslims, LGBT activists etc. Their activity is described in the narratives as 'activist', 'patriotic', caused rather by actions on the part of the 'other', as defending – not attacking. Radicalism/extremism is marked as a negative phenomenon in almost all the cases described, thus, the previous activism of some informants, which is still endowed with positive connotations, is not associated with the understanding of radicalisation, radical ideas or radical actions. Perhaps, as noted above, since right-wing radicalism is rarely defined in terms of 'radicalism' or 'extremism' in public rhetoric defined by state programmes and law enforcement agencies, informants, who often relay public rhetoric in their narratives, do not make the link between nationalist and neo-Nazi groups and radicalism/extremism, since these groups are identified as 'patriotic', except for nationalist and neo-Nazi movements who were recognised as extremist organisations by state.

The study participants addressed the topic of (self)radicalisation and online radicalisation as something separate from the more traditional, in their view, illustrations of (offline) radicalism/extremism. In the case of ISIS, which could be considered as a 'classic' example of (offline) radicalism/extremism, interviewees tended to describe those who joined not in terms of individual motivations but as objects of a recruitment process, prone to 'zombification', etc. The description(s) of online radicalisation mainly referred to several recent cases of school shooting³⁴, so the personal and social background of the

³³This section will use these concepts of radicalism and extremism interchangeably, since the study participants almost did not separate these phenomena in their narratives, defining them as a single phenomenon, as already noted above.

³⁴The study participants used examples of school shooting in Kerch, Komsomolsk-on-Amur, Moscow (Otradnoye), in the Komi Republic, and other cases that occurred between 2014 and 2019 in their narratives as illustrations of online radicalisation (so-called 'singles').

perpetrators is forefronted. In addition to this, factors such as bullying in educational institutions, domestic violence, etc. become important:

Why the hell did he go shooting, huh? Well, I don't know why he was there, yes, but regarding this school oppression I can imagine what it was like: a closed person, yeah, well, he still has, of course, lots of things – mother – is a Jehovah's witness, dad is an alcoholic, everything [...] well, school cruelty – it's the most powerful [thing], I don't know, they poured glue into textbooks, and all this nonsense. (Alexandr, male, 29 y.o.)

Thus, while in the description of school shooting cases or other examples of radical 'lone actors' more factors affecting (self)radicalisation are included, even in this model participants in the described events are still denied subjectivity and rationalisation of radicalism/ extremism in interviewees' narratives.

Radicalism in the Cossack milieu is also absent from the description and narratives of the study participants; the practice of teaching tactical combat techniques, learning to use weapons or 'ensuring order' at public events are not defined as radical or containing violence. Moreover, they are seen as 'traditional', important for the community and the gender regime:

Well, first of all, it is to follow our religious laws. Perhaps the simplest thing is that a man should be a warrior both inside and outside. And the methodology of the warrior inside is Christianity, Orthodoxy. Well, the methodology of a warrior outside is military training [...] (Nikolai, male, 29 y.o.)

On the contrary the Russian political opposition and participants of public protest are described as radical. Some respondents see them as an opposition and serious threat to the social and moral order, the gender regime and the 'Fatherland' (in this case, the current political regime): 'I believe that it is permissible to use physical force against citizens, if you see a direct threat [...] to the Fatherland. That is something of a higher order [*than a threat to the political regime*]'. (Alexandr, male, 29 y.o.)

We can also note that being radical is not considered 'cool' or 'great', despite the fact that, for example, participation in military operations in the Donbass or in Syria is described as a heroic and important action for Cossacks, Orthodox believers and Russians, both as individuals and communities: 'Going there [to Syria] is scary, but it's a thing, it's a feat. This is a feat, it is worthy of praise, worthy of respect, public recognition, let's say' (Nikolai, male, 29 y.o.).

The study participants primarily identify the content of social networks and the mass media as sources of radicalism/extremism: 'Again they create some kind of conflict, again they want to set a precedent. Yes, this. But who is right and who is to blame [...] No. I am not a very frequent visitor to social networks where you could meet such [radical] topics' (Arina, female, 31 y.o.). The main topics that contain radical content were named as: military actions in the Donbass (both from the position of the UAF³⁵ and from the position of the 'militia') and in Syria; calls to join ISIS; and any open information about school shootings and mass murder, clashes, etc. Interestingly, the study participants did not rank or sort information by the degree of radicality or impact; all content that is defined as radical or extremist, as well as the phenomena of radicalism/extremism, are seen as a single entity to be avoided or ignored.

Thus, we can conclude that the informants often retransmit the main rhetoric about radicalism/extremism presented in public discourse through state programmes, other normative documents and narratives of law enforcement agencies, since they often do not have the ability to re-define this discourse. In this regard, right radicalism 'disappears' from the representation and description of radicalism due to its lack of presence in public rhetoric. Radicals are represented as individuals, often devoid of subjectivity, while their actions are not considered to be rationally motivated. In addition,

³⁵UAF – the Armed Forces of Ukraine, act as opponents of the 'militia' of the Donbass and other territories of Eastern Ukraine, which have become the object of territorial disputes between Ukraine and Russia.

radical and extremist narratives are presented as something that has exclusively negative connotations and cannot be 'cool' and/or important (for an individual or at the group level).

4.5. Online and offline communication and its influence on radicalisation

This section describes online and offline communication and its influence on the radicalisation of ideas and behaviour. The first part of the section describes the virtual interactions of milieu participants and possible 'irritants' (individuals, groups, individual social networks). The second part of the section is devoted to offline interactions. First, the principles of communication between different Cossack groups are described. This is followed by an explanation of the attitude of the Cossacks to the conflict in Ukraine (which began in 2014).

Self-radicalisation and radicalisation through media and personal contacts were mentioned in Section 4.2. This section will describe in more detail the groups and sources that contribute to the (self)radicalisation of ideas and behaviour. Informants in this study were identified, in part, through the social network VKontakte, which remains the most popular social network in Russia, especially among people aged between 23 and 35. The search was carried out through thematic groups that could be associated not only with the Cossacks, but also with various right-wing movements. Occasionally potential informants were identified by their comments on a post (of a nationalistic or radical type) or from group photos from various military training events (including those with weapons). These groups and other media content often transmitted radical ideas and evoked similar rhetoric among informants. This was the case with one informant in this study, Voldemar, who the researcher encountered in one of the more 'radical' VKontakte groups dedicated to helping the Donbass; it transpired during the interview that this informant almost went there to fight, despite his young age.

However, this does not constitute a form of recruitment, since the informants themselves were most often searching for these groups, and not the other way around. During such searches they found content that could influence their further radicalisation or non-radicalisation. Most often, the ideas broadcast in groups are related to the themes of pride for the Cossacks and the injustice faced by the Cossacks in the twentieth century. Therefore, we are talking more about the process of self-radicalisation and the further search for 'own' in thematic groups.

Self-radicalisation is often associated with an affective sense of belonging to a special group or community. Many informants insisted on the uniqueness and sometimes the exclusivity of their character, behaviour, and high moral values that makes them special people. This uniqueness is closely related to Cossack roots.

Marina: Well, somehow I always understood that I am a Cossack. I wanted to join my own people so that they would understand, because no one understood. 'Why are you so determined?' - I say: 'Well, why shouldn't I do it?' And then I started looking in 2013, so. I left him [boyfriend]. Rented a house, well, I worked anyway... [...] I rented a house; I think 'I need to change something'. I went to graduate school, immediately signed up for the Cossacks, the society of the Cossacks, well, and everything started. [...] When I began to be in the Cossack society, I realised, here it is exactly, here, and I think. Here's what...

Interviewer: What was missing?

Marina: What was missing, of course, I think that it is... [...] Sense of pride, belonging to the Cossack past. Here's what... When a person says 'Cossack', because the Cossack is all that was, all that history, all that heroic past. (Marina, female, 34 y.o.)

Even if we are talking about disparate or conflicting Cossack groups in the milieu, the ideas of the superiority and uniqueness of the Cossacks are constantly circulated. Moreover, the Cossacks are

confident in their solidarity and ability to unite, if necessary, especially in cases of military activity in the country, terrorist attacks or emergencies.

There are arguments everywhere. Well, these disputes, you know, always arise in all organisations that are located on such a small territory as Saint Petersburg. Yeah. But nevertheless, we are doing the same thing, just from different sides. Yeah. And I am more than sure that now we can dislike each other, I don't know – even hate each other fiercely – but when there's a real need... then they [Cossacks] will be the first who will come to us for help, and the first who will come to their aid is us. (Dima, male, 20 y.o.)

Another source of radicalisation is the mass media. Here, VKontakte is also the main link between the mass media and the Cossacks, since it is on this platform that the Cossacks follow the news that is selected from the right-wing Russian media, such as RIA Katyusha³⁶. VKontakte has almost replaced the 'classic' media. Among the Cossacks, there is a lack of trust in the state media, which has been losing a degree of trust in Russia over the past few years. Informants are more interested in right-wing media, for example, such channels as 'RIA Katyusha' or independent media, such as 'Medusa'. Informants see the effect of cumulative extremism (Eatwell, 2006), when coverage of various terrorist attacks in the mass media leads to their surge in society (so-called copycat attacks). Some practices that are seen by people on the streets may also lead to a surge, such as the mass gathering of Muslims in the centre of St. Petersburg for their religious holiday of Kurban Bayram or the ritual killing of an animal conducted by Muslims. Some of our informants saw both actions and suggested that this could be the cause of serious conflicts between Cossacks and Muslims, since such displays are not appropriate in this city. Informants also identify a policy of 'intimidation' (intentional misrepresentation of facts or situations to create moral panic or an incorrect image of some social group) of the population through the media and, moreover, feel it themselves.

Interviewer: Did you travel closer to your parents [*n.b. the girl's parents live on the border with Ukraine, she is describing the events of 2014*]?

Olga: Well, yes, I don't know, maybe also the media, because of the media. When we lived there everything was normal I guess. When I moved here [to St. Petersburg], I don't know what kind of feeling it is, [...], I'm not sure...

Interviewer: Panic?

Olga: Yes, that's it, exactly panic. That is, you sit – yes, it seems normal, you talk to your family, everything is normal and ok, and when it is like this every day [*news about shooting and explosions on the border with Ukraine, where the girl's relatives live*], you start to get nervous. I don't know really why, but I went back, lived there for a year; everything was normal and ok with them and I decided to return. (Olga, female, 27 y.o.)

When it came to spreading extremist or radical information in the media, the informants above all recalled Islamic radicalisation and events related to it. Interestingly, the informants were selective and mentioned only the terrorist attacks that took place in Russia. Even though their main associations of the terms extremist and radical were with Islam, they have a positive attitude to the religion itself (and informants emphasise this). They are not against Islam; they are against radical Islam and Islamisation, as well as the spread of these ideas.

Well, it is associated, of course, relatively speaking, with radical Islam, with Wahhabism, with what they say there – with Salafism. That the Salafis are Islamic radicals and the extreme

³⁶The media calls itself a patriotic online media, criticises the liberal forces on the political scene in Russia and strongly calls for the formation of 'correct' moral values among Russians, which are different from Western values positioned as dissolute and leading to the degradation of society.

degree is Wahhabis, that is, they are ready to kill people and give their lives, to be suicide bombers, this is already the Wahhabis. (Anton, male, 24 y.o.)

Another frequent and important topic in the narratives is Ukraine and the Donbass, although informants did not refer to it in terms of extremism. The topic of military actions in Ukraine is now a key one in the development of discussions (both in the Cossack media and among informants) about the need for military training of the Russian male population. Thus, while most Cossacks believe that everything related to the Islamic state – ‘is not our war’, some Cossacks, including our informants, did participate in the war in the Donbass. Based on the collected interviews, it can be stated that there is no consensus in the milieu about the situation in Ukraine. However, the military conflict there is considered a ‘war between brothers’ in which Russia has a direct interest and so too do the Cossacks, since many of them have relatives in Ukraine and consider the two countries to be closely connected through blood ties and similar cultural heritage. Thus, this conflict gave an impulse to the mobilisation of the Cossacks, and to active physical training and the spread of their values.

At the same time, the idea of the ‘future enemy’ is constantly reproduced in the rhetoric of the Cossacks although its exact form remains blurred. Cossacks actively spread their ideas and values not only among those who have already joined their ranks, but also among children, including children from non-Cossack families: through Sunday schools, special training programmes, sports clubs and societies, and Cossacks’ work in the Yunarmy³⁷.

4.6 Ideological and extra-ideological factors in radicalisation

The Cossacks as a milieu are ideologically very uneven. In general we can speak of the absence of a strong ideological basis (as a programme of the movement) (Derluguian, 2000; Popov 2012: 1749). This is partly due to the historical development of the modern (neo)Cossacks in Russia, which emerged in the 1990s as a nostalgic project for the revival and preservation of cultural and folk heritage (Skinner, 1994; Toje, 2006), although it was initially anti-migrant and xenophobic. However, the more obvious reason for the lack of a strict ideological base is the different social backgrounds of participants, some of whom have previous experience of participating in both right-wing and left-wing organisations while others do not. This leads to differences in terms of values. This allows us to conclude that the Cossacks as a milieu is more based on shared practices and meanings in forming and expressing Cossack identity than on the presence of a common ideology.

This section will highlight both ideological factors in (non)radicalisation and extra-ideological factors of (non)radicalisation, despite the fact that sometimes it is hard to clearly separate ideological and extra-ideological factors from each other. We highlight the following ideological factors: ‘traditional values’, ‘militant Orthodoxy’, ‘protection of borders’ (both physical and symbolic), and (neo)patriarchy. Extra-ideological factors include: romanticising the activity ‘at the edge’ (e.g. use of violence, semi-legal and illegal activity), frustration due to socio-economic exclusion and barriers to entry into desired spaces, and

³⁷‘YUNARMY’ is a Russian children's and youth movement, the main goal of which is the comprehensive development and patriotic education of Russians from eight years old. The main activities include: education of young people in high civil and social activity, patriotism and countering the ideology of extremism; study of the history of the country and the military and historical heritage of the Fatherland; the development of local history; expanding knowledge about the history and outstanding people of the ‘small’ homeland; development of responsibility, principles of collectivism and a system of moral attitudes of the individual in the youth environment on the basis of the system of values inherent in Russian society; formation of positive motivation among young people for military service and training of young men for service in the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation; strengthening of physical training and physical endurance; active involvement of young people in military-technical knowledge and technical creativity.

shared practices within the community. The justification of violence here could serve both ideological and extra-ideological functions in the observed milieu.

One of the important ideological factors used by the study participants as a rationalisation of (non)radicalisation is 'traditional values', which can act as a solidifying ideological basis for many traditionalist-minded communities and groups. These values include Orthodoxy, which will be discussed in more detail below, orientation towards heterosexual monogamous relationships, rejection of other gender and sexual identities, and the importance of mono-ethnic and mono-confessional relationships, support for local producers and inclusion of participants directly into agricultural production, followed by a transition to a lifestyle in isolated *stanitsas*, etc. The range of connotations of the label 'traditional values' is so variable that it allows us to individualise the concept, while maintaining the shared meanings embedded in the label.

Orthodoxy is one of the most important factors in the process of radicalisation, references to which occur within a variety of thematically different narratives. Despite the varying degrees of religiosity of the respondents, it can be noted that within the Russian anti-Islamist case, religion works as a driver, not an inhibitor in the process of radicalisation. Classical Orthodoxy, with its dogmas of 'humility' and 'love towards fellow human beings', in the case of 'Cossack' Orthodoxy is reinterpreted through the logics of 'protecting the faith and the Fatherland'. In this case, violence as one of the means of protection is rationalised and justified as part of the way of life and ideology of the Cossacks: 'The methodology of the inner warrior is Christianity, Orthodoxy [...] it would be better if [all Russians] of course became Orthodox' (Nikolai, male, 29 y.o.). Violence is also justified through the idea of 'protection' and 'being ready' for future conflict, the prerequisites of which are already seen by the study participants in current military conflicts and other events that construct the 'apocalyptic' view or worldview described in Section 4.1: 'That is, this is an Orthodox warrior, Orthodox enough such that you believe in God so much that you are ready to die at any moment' (Alexandr, male, 29 y.o.). It is important to note that this emphasis on Orthodoxy creates a certain inequality and exclusion of representatives of other faiths, which are defined as inferior in relation to Orthodoxy as the dominant religion.

Another ideological value that functions to rationalise the possibility of radicalisation is the 'protection of borders' understood both as physical borders (territorial borders of the country, sovereignty, defending the interests of the state, etc.), and as symbolic borders – the borders of the social order, gender regime, and moral order. Participants in the study use 'protective' rhetoric in a broad sense, while the most important factor is not the protection of physical borders, but rather symbolic ones; the most radical participants defended (ultra)patriarchy and 'purity of blood' as their main ideological values. Even participants who migrated to St. Petersburg from other regions have a negative attitude towards people with a migrant background and representatives of other ethnicities, seeing them as rivals for resources (power, economic, reputational, or even physical). It is seen as important not only to protect the territorial borders and sovereignty of the Russian Federation but also the interests of Russia as an international political player. This is expressed through the rhetoric of protecting the Orthodox faith: '[...] the only reason why the Russian Federation got involved in the war [on the territory of Syria] is because [the Christian civilian population] needed help, so that's it' (Petr, male, 19 y.o.).

The gender regime of the chosen milieu is described in greater detail below (see Section 4.7) but we see that the neo-patriarchal gender order repeatedly appears in the interviews as a basic ideological value that is postulated, approved and rationalised by the participants of the study. Moreover, even where, in practice male participants have much more liberally oriented partnerships, they nonetheless declare their support for the 'correct' gender regime and a clear division of gender roles based on the biologised concept of gender and gender order: 'No, no, it [gender equality] should not exist. These are some personal illnesses of some people. Another thing is that a man and a woman have different functions, it was created by nature like that' (Nikolai, male, 29 y.o.). It is important to stress that the declaration of

this rhetoric is important, while in practice – at a private (within the family and/or partnership relations) and group level (in Cossack communities) – this rhetoric is rarely implemented.

Some participants built strategies to increase their level of well-being outside of or before entering the Cossacks by participating in groups engaged in semi-criminal or criminal activity. The generally low economic level of well-being of the majority of Russian youth influences the popularisation and romanticisation of the aesthetics of ‘street culture’, which has declined somewhat since the peak of its popularity in the 1990s (e.g. participation in street gangs, racketeering, etc.). Several informants rationalised their participation in criminal and delinquent activity for economic reasons but more often they associated the activity with ‘coolness’ in terms ‘proving’ a certain model of masculinity in a male-dominated environment, which is concentrated on demonstrations of physical strength and aggression:

When we went to Tallinn to work, I started to drink alcohol more or less, but at that time... that is, I was not a fan of drinking in a company. Well, we went out there [...] and two Estonians, peacefully sitting on the bench... well, what's it called... [we] fleeced [robbed] them? Well, it also probably played a role... the social layer, kind of, because we did not just go to work, also, we have in [the informant's hometown] only a bit of work... but due to the fact that there is not much work, we did not live richly (Alexey, male, 28 y.o.).

No less important in this case are the common, shared practices of the community (milieu), which are often endowed with additional spiritual and moral meanings. The practice of learning to fight/fighting is one of the most crucial ones that contributes to both solidarity within the milieu and possible radicalisation. It normalises the use of weapons against ideological ‘others’, helps to create the solidarity of ‘male brotherhood’ and a ‘feeling of having been chosen’. Not all members of the community are invited on trips outside the city where military activities are taking place, for example, women are often completely excluded from such activities. In addition, the practice of fighting on rough terrain usually involves leaving the city, which brings the urban everyday life of the Cossacks to the ideal model of an ‘isolated’ *stanitsa* with the possibility of establishing their own social norms and rules within it. Women in the community traditionally did not participate in military training, and therefore they are not involved in such activities now, remaining within the city or other settlements. Such trips can also include joint training initiatives with the police and the contract army, which allows the Cossacks to integrate into the administrative hierarchy. Some participants become professionals in the field of physical activity:

They organised their fight club, called it [*the name of the fight club*], in the town of [*a town in the South of the Russian Federation*]. And this is the only school that has existed for a year and a half and has already trained five World Champions. And all of them are Cossacks. (Voldemar, male, 21 y.o.)

The public and social activities of the Cossacks are a separate issue. These activities include demonstration performances (horse riding with acrobatic elements, ‘flanking’ with cold weapons – so called ‘dance with a saber’, dance and vocal performances), and fairs and festivals, which can serve as a channel for recruiting new participants, perhaps with more radical attitudes and interests in the use of violence and weapons. Such activities also form a positive public image of the Cossacks as an open community engaged in restoring their cultural heritage, which allows them to receive state funding through grants for social projects.

Another factor that could play both an ideological and extra-ideological role is the legitimisation and justification of violence that quite clearly defines radicalisation and its degree within the milieu. Participants in the study who justified violence through a ‘protective’ or ‘guarding’ rhetoric were more likely to express more radical beliefs and attitudes on other issues, which allows us to conclude that the justification of violence occupies a core place in the process of defining (non)radicalisation and its stage. The legitimisation and justification of violence is most clearly manifested in narratives dedicated to

military actions, where the image of the ‘enemy’ (‘alien’) is most pronounced and separated from images of ‘ours’: ‘Well, they are the enemies – they [*ISIS*] must be killed’ (Nikolai, male, 29 y.o.). We can also note the absence of a critical perception of the ‘other’ in the narratives of the study participants – both in examples of ‘enemies’ in military operations, and of ‘other’ internal ones, which are defined as a threat to the established social and moral order within the country, city and community.

In conclusion it is important to note that the modern Cossacks see themselves as the ‘inheritor’ of the Cossack military class, which protected the external borders of the state. Therefore, when justifying the use of violence, they largely use the rhetoric, meanings and practices that are associated with the ideas of protecting the state and searching for its internal and external enemies. This is followed by a shared view of themselves and community members as ‘brothers in arms’ and ‘soldiers of Christ’, which meets the militaristic demands of the state and leads to further radicalisation: ‘I am a person who tries to make it [*the world*] better. With my brothers in arms. I have given my life to this and I am not going to leave it’ (Petr, male, 19 y.o.).

4.7. Gender: defining identity and designation

The gender order of the Cossacks is determined in many respects by their historical origins and the original values of the community, the reconstruction of which is an important part of the ideology of the modern (neo)Cossacks. This section presents an analysis of the ideal male and female images described in interviews. First, we provide a description of what it means to be a Cossack man, what characteristics are required in order to be called a Cossack and to be recognised by other members of the Cossack community. Next, we describe the image of the ideal woman in the understanding of Cossack men and women, as well as the image of a modern woman, which is often contrasted with the image of the ideal Cossack. At the end of the section we present an analysis of the relationship between Cossack men and women, as well as the opinions of the participants of the milieu about the family.

The Cossacks were formed in the 16th and 17th centuries as a class, the purpose of which was to protect the borders of the state. The period of their origin and their main role determined the patriarchal structure of the Cossack community. The neo-Cossack movement, originally built on the idea of ‘revival’, seeks to reproduce the gender patterns of the traditional Cossacks. This is manifested in the image of the Cossack as a warrior and defender who occupies a dominant position in the family and community. However, although this concept is reproduced at the level of rhetoric, it may not correspond to real practices (especially in a big city).

The ideal male image of a Cossack is the image of a warrior and defender. A ‘real’ Cossack shows strength and bravery in battle and possesses military honour. These qualities should be formed through a system of military and patriotic education, the main source of which should be a man (father or senior mentor):

As for education, when I was five years old, my father took me away from my mother; my mother lived in the same house, so my parents were not divorced... You could say he took me; my mother didn’t educate me at all, I don’t know, she had no influence on my upbringing, because I’m a man. At this point, I already had an introduction to weapons, a culture of handling. (Dima, male, 20 y.o.)

The glorification and legitimisation of participation in military conflicts, especially in the Donbass, becomes a part of the image of a ‘Cossack-warrior’. The latter is justified, according to informants, firstly, by the historical context (the territory of Don historically belonged to the Cossacks, therefore, they must protect it), and secondly, by the desire to take action to improve the world. A real Cossack cannot sit still and strives to make the world around him better.

The image of the 'defender warrior' is completed with the requirement for the appearance of the Cossack and the idea of the Cossack brotherhood. Informants share the opinion that a Cossack is not alone, a real Cossack should always be with his 'Cossack brothers', i.e. in a certain community of his people who share his values and attitudes. Having '*sprava*', that is, a set of things necessary for military service, is significant. This includes uniform (a coatee, a *papakha*) and weapons; in the past having a horse was also necessary. However, there are more general requirements in terms of appearance: a well-groomed appearance, having a beard, the rejection of modern fashion (for example, short jeans, new trends in hairstyles, etc.).

However, despite the patriarchal nature of Cossack culture, women occupy a significant place in it. A Cossack man was always accompanied by his companion – a Cossack woman ('*kazachka*' that is the wife or daughter of a Cossack). A woman is the keeper of the home, mother and housewife. Building a career for a Cossack woman was not typical historically, since she devoted all her time to her family, raising her children, looking after her husband and the home. However, the strictly subordinate position of the Cossack woman in the community was not so clear. Since the Cossacks formed entire *stanitsas* that were left without men during the war, the role of head of the house was assumed by a woman. The image of a '*kazachka*' - a strong, wilful woman – is often found in fiction. Both Cossack men and women have certain rights and duties. Yerokhin writes that 'Cossack women are warriors and are endowed with the same rights and duties as Cossack men' (Yerokhin, 2014: 58), since in the absence of Cossack men, they performed all duties at home, including protecting their territories.

Toje writes about another important function of women in the community – the transmission of the cultural heritage of the Cossacks (Toje, 2006: 1064), which was done through songs, dances, fairy tales, myths and stories. Shchuplenkov notes that women became a consolidating element in the economic, cultural, and spiritual life of the Cossacks (Shchuplenkov, 2016: 20). In the narratives we also see this:

Well, my mother used to say that yes, we come from Cossack people but nothing special... Except, perhaps, as for clothes, yes, she dressed me like that, for some reason. But I didn't know any history behind it. Songs! Yes, I guess, my mother sang Cossack songs, she dressed like a Cossack and dressed me as well [*as such*]. (Marina, female, 34 y.o.)

In contrast to narratives about men, women were less often identified as Cossack. The rhetoric is based on the comparison of 'a real woman' and 'a real Cossack woman'. A real woman is a mother, a housewife, who obeys her husband and stays loyal to him (in general, intimate relations should only take place within marriage). She is restrained in her dress and does not seek a career (the priority should always be the family and the husband). A real Cossack woman has all the above characteristics, and, in addition, she must be Orthodox. She must be ready to stand up for herself, respect her man and her elders. Thus, the image of the Cossack woman acts as an image of an improved version of the 'real woman'.

Informants present a contradictory rhetoric with regards to the patriarchal family. On the one hand, they promote the normativity of the traditional family, but, on the other, they criticised the definition of the patriarchal family that we offered them, namely: 'recognition of the natural superiority of men over women and the purpose of female existence as being a wife and mother'. The informants did not agree with the idea of 'superiority' because it contains the idea of subordination. The division of functions into male and female was seen as the difference in functions that are inherent in a man or woman and given by nature or God.

Nikolai: Here again the dichotomy is wrong; we do not have an understanding of the superiority of men over women.

Interviewer: You mean, it doesn't exist, but should?

Nikolai: No, no, it shouldn't exist [...] It is a different thing that men and women have different functions; it was created so by nature. (Nikolai, male, 29 y.o.)

However, the informants still insisted that men are stronger and more emotionally stable than women, and also confirmed the physical and emotional differences between men and women that determine functions in the family.

Informants stated that everything is decided collectively in Cossack families, but that the husband has the final word, and that the freedom of the wife depends on the husband (as far as he allows). As a result, the family model described by informants is a contradictory mix of ideas of democracy and patriarchy.

In analysing the interviews and observation diaries, we see that the patriarchal family model of (neo)Cossacks is rather declarative, but not implemented in practice. The patriarchal way of life often gives way to domestic necessity and the ideal woman as a wife, mother and housewife is, in reality, an equal partner in the family, who can resolve issues related to childbirth, career, and leisure herself.

The interview was interrupted once due to a call from the informant's partner, as Evgeniy turned off the phone and his girlfriend couldn't find him. After the interview, the informant said several times that he is excessively taken care of and even controlled if he is late home after work for more than half an hour. This was very different from the narratives about gender and relationships that the informant reproduced during the interview – I assume that there is a very serious difference between the declared values and ideals and the real-life embodiment in this case. (Field diary, interview with Evgeniy, 13.11.2018)

In conclusion, we would like to note that the role and image of men in the Cossack milieu have a clearly defined understanding, while the role of women is ambiguous. In informants' understandings, the main duties of a Cossack man are military duty and maintaining order in society. A Cossack woman supports home life and serves her husband and children. To both definitions we can add Orthodoxy, although the question of religion was not always clear (among the informants there were some who called themselves Rodnover, (neo)pagans or old believers as well as Orthodox believers). The figure of a Cossack woman is ambiguous, since, on the one hand, she is endowed with various strong-willed qualities; on the other hand, she is dependent on her husband and her family. We explain this contradiction by the declarative nature of the traditions. The woman is seen as the person who preserves and transmits Cossack culture, but has secondary roles in the wider Cossack community (Bergen, Schuster, Sterman, 2015: 6). It is Cossack men who reproduce the militarised character of this community.

5. Conclusions

(Non)radicalisation and the ways it is written into the individual biographical strategies of young men and women in the chosen milieu of Cossacks of Saint Petersburg, are much more varied and fluid than it was assumed before the study. In this report we have examined how state, social, and group factors influence (or not) individual practices and discourses about (non)radicalisation. In the Russian case, radicalised context is represented by the militarisation of the state and society, and the isolation and polarisation of right-wing groups. In this context, institutional support and the recognition of the state become important for the participants of the Cossack milieu. The clamp-down on the right and far-right scene in Russia led to the emergence of an attractive void, which began to be filled by the 'new' right, which received state approval due to some shared ideological positions and values. The 'new' right not only received support from the state and more conservative elements in society, but also began to define a new agenda, which sometimes turned out to be too radical even for the modern Russian militocracy.

This study suggests that attempts to define groups and communities by reference to clear right/left orientations or pro-government/pro-opposition sentiments are also problematic. Within the milieu of the (St. Petersburg) Cossacks, we see a spectrum of attitudes that range from near-left to far-right, making it difficult to typify their trajectories of (non)radicalisation and de-radicalisation. But the combination of

ideological (such as ‘traditional values’, ‘militant Orthodoxy’, ‘protection of borders’, and (neo)patriarchy) and extra-ideological (romanticising the activity ‘at the edge’, frustration due to socio-economic exclusion and barriers to entry into desired spaces, and shared practices within the community) elements that were listed above create a basis of shared values, which provides both solidarity between the Cossack communities within the milieu and the ideological foundations for cooperation with other right-wing and far-right communities. However, as in the case of modern youth communities, solidarities and scenes, we see how young participants could change their belonging to the community, moving from ideologically left-wing organisations to the right (e.g. from Antifa to Cossackdom) and building their careers outside of a strict ideological background. However, within individual communities in the milieu – either right-wing or left-wing – the specific social position of the participant remains important, his/her access to resources and administrative positions and whether the community is in isolation, ‘underground’ or persecuted. The lack of individual access to resources and resource positions and feelings of group discrimination or humiliation significantly affect the individual ‘radical’ careers of participants.

As noted in Section 4.6, clear, rigid ideological programmes are less important in forging solidarity within the milieu than broader shared values. This type of solidarity is more often temporary and has an aim at achieving specific actions. Anti-migrant and xenophobic attitudes, Orthodoxy (in some cases, traditional branches of (neo)paganism), traditional (neo)patriarchy and rejection of other gender and sexual identities and mono-ethnic and mono-confessional relations become such ‘dimensions’ of solidarisation in the Cossack milieu. Moreover, we see how restrictions on access for girls and women – especially for status and resource positions within the community – lead to more focus on military activities which leads to the radicalisation of certain communities within this milieu and further exclusion of women, since almost all of their activities began to focus on paramilitary and power activities (training with cold weapons and *nagaikas* [whips], military training on cross-country terrain, conducting raids). These activities are presented and perceived as ‘cool’, providing thrills and a sense of belonging to a group sharing common values, beliefs, and ideas about the ‘correct’ social order.

In this regard, it is difficult to describe clear pathways of radicalisation, since the boundaries between radicalisation and non-radicalisation can be blurred within a single milieu. However, we can talk about a certain set of ‘staging posts’ through which people pass on individual paths of radicalisation. These staging posts mark the attainment of key dimensions of ideological solidarity, which create a core set of shared attitudes within the community, construct the boundaries of ‘we-others’, and promote previous inclusion in groups and organisations that use violence to achieve their goals (the left/right-wing orientation is less important in this case). Like other researchers we emphasise the importance of a ‘trigger’ in the process of radicalisation, which we understand as an emotional and individual experience that often becomes the last ‘barrier’ before using and justifying violence. The rationalisation of violence is important in the narratives of the participants of the selected milieu, where violence becomes ‘protective’, necessary and justified by contextual and semantic images that become triggers or solidifying values. The image of the ‘other’ (enemy, opponent, rival) is demonised and turns into an ‘aggressor’ or ‘attacker’. We can also note that within the chosen milieu, as in other examples, recruitment at a young age may lead to more radical attitudes, as well as recruiting participants who have already had experience of using violence in previous organisations or in military operations. The inclusion of those with the latter experience may increase the overall ‘degree’ of radicalisation within the entire community or milieu.

We assume that socio-economic background influences (non)radicalisation indirectly. The general sense of social inequality and the gap between different social groups is important (confirmed by high indicators on the Theil and Gini indexes) and where young people find themselves in an unprivileged position in Russia. Due to this, there is a common sense of social inequality, an idea of the injustice of the modern social order, which creates a desire to (re)define it through the restructuring of public discourse, the moral order, the gender regime etc. The main trend for some right-wing organisations is a nostalgic desire to return to ‘traditional’ values and (social) norms. This leads to an increasing popularity of radical

communities in general, while the specific content of their ideologies becomes secondary. In this context, the Cossacks become a 'safer' choice, since their activities are partly legitimised by the current political course of the state and a number of state structures.

It is significant that it is hard to identify a specific view of radicalism and extremism among the chosen milieu, which is a consequence of the monopolisation of public discourse about this by state actors such as security and special services. Moreover, it was difficult for the study participants to draw the line between extremism and radicalism. The only differentiating marker is the use of violence. Informants use 'distant' examples to illustrate extremism/radicalism - ISIS, Syria, Kosovo – while events closer to home, such as the Donbass, the conflict in Georgia and the Chechen wars, as well as the activities of the Cossacks or state actors, do not appear in their narratives. The same applies to (ultra)right radicalism/extremism since it rarely figured in public discourse as radicalism. Such 'blindness' of the media influenced the construction of public discourse about radicalism/extremism initially as an Islamic phenomenon, while crimes against migrants, Muslims and ethnic minority citizens remained outside the definition of radicalism/extremism, thereby completely excluding right-wing radicalism from public discussion. Following the main public discourse, the informants give the concepts of 'radicalism' and 'radicalisation' exclusively negative connotations and associate them with the activities of 'distant' actors. They do not associate their activities with radicalism.

In summary, it is important to note that the boundaries between radicalism and non-radicalism are extremely fluid and sometimes contextual; while the process of (non)radicalisation is shaped by a plethora of factors, most of which are not easy to clarify due to the variety of (non)radical pathways. We also see a number of structural factors and (non)equalities that can influence the creation and maintenance of a radicalised context and even, potentially, shape the radicalisation of the milieu and its participants. As for the process of deradicalisation, in the context of the Russian militarisation of state policy and society, it becomes almost exclusively an individual project, depending on the biographical trajectories of the participants. Moreover, deradicalisation is manifested only in the rejection of violence, not in the rejection of radical beliefs and/or inclusion in (radical) groups and communities.

6. References

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8. Appendices

Appendix 8.1: Socio-demographic data of respondents

Name (pseudonym)	Age	Country of birth	Education	Employment	Ethnicity	Family status	Gender	Religion	Level of religiosity	Residential status	№
Alena	36	Russia	Completed university	In full-time employment	Russian	Married or living with partner	Female	Orthodox Christianity	Believer and practising	Lives independently with own partner and or children	9
Alexandr	29	Russia	Completed university	In full-time employment	Cossack	Married or living with partner	Male	Orthodox Christianity	Believer and practising	Lives independently with own partner and or children	2
Alexey	28	Estonia	Did not complete secondary education and left	Unemployed	Cossack	Single	Male	Neopaganism (rodnoverie)	Believer but not practising	Lives independently alone	1
Anton	24	Russia	Currently at university	In full-time employment	Cossack	Single	Male	Orthodox Christianity	Believer and practising	Lives independently with friends	10
Arina	31	Russia	Completed postgraduate education	In full-time employment	Russian	Single	Female	Orthodox Christianity	Believer and practising	Lives independently alone	1
Dima	20	Russia	Currently at university	In full-time employment	Russian	Single	Male	Orthodox Christianity	Believer and practising	Lives independently with friends	2
Evgeniy	26	Russia	Completed university	In full-time employment	Russian	Married or living with partner	Male	Orthodox Christianity	Atheist	Lives independently with own partner and or children	2
Kostya	30	Russia	Studying for postgraduate education	In full-time employment	Cossack	Married or living with partner	Male	Orthodox Christianity	Believer and practising	Lives independently with own partner and or children	2
Marina	34	Russia	Studying for postgraduate education	In full-time employment	Cossack	Married or living with partner	Female	Orthodox Christianity	Believer and practising	Lives independently with own partner and or children	2
Nikolai	29	Ukraine	Completed postgraduate education	In full-time employment	Cossack	Married or living with partner	Male	Orthodox Christianity	Believer and practising	Lives independently with own partner and or children	2

Nikolay	23	Russia	Completed vocational secondary education	In full-time employment	Cossack	Single	Male	Orthodox Christianity	Believer and practising	Lives at home with parents and step parents	5
Olga	27	Ukraine	Completed university	In full-time employment	Russian	Single	Female	Orthodox Christianity	Believer and practising	Lives independently alone	1
Oxana	19	Russia	Currently at university	In part-time employment	Mixed heritage	Married or living with partner	Female	Neopaganism (rodnoverie)	Believer and practising	Lives independently with own partner and or children	2
Petr	19	Russia	Currently in vocational secondary education	In part-time employment	Slav	Single	Male	Orthodox Christianity	Believer but not practising	Lives at home with both parents	4
Sasha	21	Russia	Currently at university	In full-time employment	Russian	Married or living with partner	Male	Orthodox Christianity	Believer and practising	Lives independently with own partner and or children	2
Sonya	22	Russia	Currently at university	In part-time employment	Cossack	Married or living with partner	Female	Orthodox Christianity	Believer and practising	Lives independently with own partner and or children	2
Stas	38	Russia	Completed university	In full-time employment	Cossack	Married or living with partner	Male	Orthodox Christianity	Believer and practising	Lives independently with own partner and or children	2
Svyatoslav	30	Russia	Completed university	In full-time employment	Mixed heritage	Single	Male	Orthodox Christianity	Believer and practising	Lives independently alone	1
Tihon	23	Russia	Completed university	Not in paid employment but occupied as a carer or unpaid work	Cossack	Married or living with partner	Male	Orthodox Christianity	Believer and practising	Lives independently with own partner and or children	4
Vladimir	28	Russia	Completed university	In full-time employment	Russian	Married or living with partner	Male	Orthodox Christianity	Believer and practising	Lives independently with own partner and or children	2
Voldemar	21	Russia	Currently at university	In full-time employment	Cossack	Single	Male	Orthodox Christianity	Believer but not practising	Lives at home with other relatives e.g. grandparents	2

Zahar	23	Russia	Completed university	In full-time employment	Cossack	Single	Male	Orthodox Christianity	Believer and practising	Lives independently alone	1
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