

УДК 327.8:355.16[(470+571):100]
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.17721/1728-2292.2025/2-61/85-90>

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MODERN COMMEMORATIVE PRACTICES AS AN INSTRUMENT FOR SHAPING THE FOREIGN POLICY IDENTITY OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION

Background. *The 2025 "victory parade" on Red Square in Moscow was a practical embodiment of Russia's commemorative practices, as it brought together numerous foreign leaders from different regions for the first time since the start of the aggression against Ukraine, demonstrating a shift in geopolitical balances and the mechanism of constructing foreign policy identities from Russia and EU countries to the "Global South".*

Methods. *The constructivist analysis method was used to reveal how collective memory practices influence the formation of the Russian Federation's foreign policy identity. The main method is the analysis of the discourse of official rituals, commemorative dates, mass celebrations with the participation of representatives of other states, and symbolic acts. In addition, a comparative analysis of commemoration in different countries is used to identify the unique characteristics of Russian state practices. The method of content analysis of official events, speeches, and news about places and actions of remembrance provides insight into the mechanism of legitimising the external positioning of the Russian Federation.*

Results. *Commemoration has become a tool for Russia to promote its image as a "liberator from neo-Nazism" and overcome international isolation. For this purpose, Russia is involving China, North Korea and countries of the Global South in its anti-Western narrative. The participation of European leaders from Slovakia and Serbia, which are involved in the integration process, highlights pragmatic motives related to economic benefits or historical memory, but does not form a cohesive alliance. Despite managing to reestablish a certain international presence at the 2025 parade compared to previous years, Russia has been unable to change the global discourse on its aggression against Ukraine. The diplomatic opposition of Ukraine and the EU contributes to this.*

Conclusions. *The 2025 "victory parade" was not an expression of broad support for Russia, but rather a tool for selective norm-setting and the formation of foreign policy identity, underscoring the fragmentation of the international order and the limitations of Russian normative power.*

Keywords: *commemorative practices, constructivism, foreign policy identity, international subjectivity, Russian Federation, Ukraine, European Union.*

Background

The "victory parade 2025" on Red Square in Moscow brought together numerous foreign leaders from different regions of the world for the first time since the start of the aggressive war against Ukraine. This not only confirms the shift in geopolitical balances but also demonstrates the active mechanism of constructing the foreign policy identities of the parade participants. During this event, Russia, EU countries, representatives of the Global South and quasi-state entities, through a combination of rituals of remembrance, polemical discourses ("denazification", "anti-hegemony", "multipolarity") and diplomatic gestures, seek not only to legitimise their own foreign policy narratives, but also to redefine international norms and structures. Based on constructivist theory, this article explores how participation in commemorative practices shapes perceptions of acceptable behaviour, forming foreign policy identities and influencing the dynamics of the international order.

The purpose of this article is to explore how the "victory parade 2025" on Red Square serves as a platform for the constitutive practices of all participants (the Russian Federation, EU countries, the Global South, and quasi-state entities) through a combination of rituals of memory, polemical discourses, and diplomatic acts, as well as to determine how this affects state actions, the reformatting of international norms, and foreign policy identities.

Literature review. The theoretical basis of Alexander Wendt's article "Anarchy is what states make of it: A Social Construction of Politics of Power" and Jeffrey Chekel's section "Methods in the Constructivist Approach" in "The Oxford Handbook of International Relations" open opportunities for researching the social construction of state identities, interests, and international norms through symbolic practices such as parades. Martha Finnemore

and Catherine Sikink, in their article "International Dynamics of Norms and Political Change" provide methodological tools for analysing norms and the process of their formation. Ted Hopff, in his article "Perspectives on Constructivism in International Relations Theory" explains how states act in their own perception and construct the image of other states through norms and practices.

The analysis of Slovakia's foreign policy identity draws on the work of scholars V. Gulay and V. Maksymets, while the study of the militarisation of the 'victory parade' in the international arena draws on research by the Robert Lansing Institute and secondary sources by M. Kucheryavets and Akimova Yu. on the European Union's reaction to the events surrounding the 'parade' were used. To analyse Serbia's Euro-Atlantic positioning, an article by Kryuchkova D. was used. Besty R. wrote about the intensification of joint criticism of the United States by China and Russia. Furthering the idea of cooperation, the aspect of the Global South was exposed by Mikovich N. Kalchenko, Oliynyk, and Fursova, as well as Anisov O. and Prykhnenko M., contribute to the analysis of the economic rationale for China's search for new partnership benchmarks. Lu Yong provides an analysis of countermeasures to the tariff war. Analytical sources from Reuters reveal aspects of the deepening cooperation between China and Russia. The analytical article by Vishnik E., which explains the actions and positioning of China and North Korea during the 2025 'victory parade,' deserves special attention. An analysis of North Korea's participation is also an important part of the article, researched by Gang V., who emphasises the commercial nature of cooperation with North Korea. Fedrigo L. assessed the consequences of deepening cooperation and signing agreements.

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The specific sources on the official websites of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, interviews with Volodymyr Zelenskyi and Andrii Sibiha, statements by the head of European diplomacy Kaia Kaplans, the Russian Federation's presidential aide on foreign policy Yuri Ushakov, and Vladimir Putin with Chinese President Xi Jinping.

Methods

Methods of constructivist analysis of identities, processes, actions and decisions of states were used to analyse the impact of the 2025 "victory parade" on Red Square in Moscow on international relations, in particular on the position, identity, interests and diplomatic activities of the Russian Federation and its participants.

Results

In 2025, 29 state leaders of various levels participated in the celebrations dedicated to the 80th anniversary of "victory" in World War II on Red Square in the Russian Federation (Ushakov, 2025). For comparison, in 2024 and 2023, there were 9 and 7 representatives, respectively, and in 2022, due to the unprecedented condemnation of the Kremlin's actions by the international community, nobody was present (RBK, 2024; Russian service "Voice of America", 2023). The increase in the quantitative and qualitative level of representation of other states shows, at first glance, progress in Russia's positioning and construction of the international system. The 2025 "parade" in Moscow brought together the leaders of Brazil, Burkina Faso (represented by the youngest leader in Africa, symbolising a geopolitical shift from post-colonial France to Russia), China, Cuba, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mongolia, Myanmar, Palestine, the Republic of Congo, Serbia, Slovakia, Venezuela, Vietnam, Zimbabwe, as well as quasi-state entities such as Abkhazia and South Ossetia, while India downgraded its delegation due to the conflict with Pakistan, and Azerbaijan and Laos cancelled their participation at the last minute (Ubaydullaeva, 2025).

The Red Square parade isn't just a reflection of the political environment. It's actually an active norm-setting process, where countries participating in memorial events is part of the Russian Federation's national strategy. To analyse the potential international impact of the event, it is significant to consider the constructivist argument that norms do not appear out of nowhere, but are created by agents who have clear ideas about appropriate or desirable behaviour in their community (Finnemore, & Sikkink, 1998, p. 896). Meanwhile, norms are social rules that guide how people act in the international system and shape identity and interests in international politics (Wendt, 1999, p. 165). Actors develop their relationships with others and their perceptions of them through norms and practices (Hopf, 1998, p. 163). We believe that the acts of holding and attending the "victory parade" on Red Square are norm-setting, fuelling the legitimacy of the Russian Federation's aggressive war against Ukraine and the unity of the European Union, Russia's breakthrough from political isolation, and the strengthening of China's leadership and the role of the Global South.

To explain the actions of the Russian Federation, we will use Alexander Wendt's views on the organisation of international systems, according to which there are three types of anarchy: Hobbesian, Lockean and Kantian, each characterised by different levels of cooperation, trust, and conflict (Wendt, 1992, p. 395). We argue that the "cult of victory on 9 May" reflects Hobbesian-type commemoration in international relations, as the narrative creates an image of "neo-Nazi forces" for Western countries. Official Russian rhetoric appeals to "denazification" as a justification for war

against the West and Ukraine as existential enemies, which is a key feature of aggressive anarchy (National Institute for Strategic Studies, 2022). This assertion is also supported by the concept of the "decisive role" of the Russian people as a colonial instrument to justify the prerogatives of a "great power" (Lysenko, & Pastushenko, 2025, p. 65). Another Hobbesian characteristic is the exogenous nature of Russian militarism, with its constant threats of "we can repeat" (Yas, 2024, p. 41; Vandenko, 2020).

Garrett Brown, researching the connection between Immanuel Kant's views and the formation of the European Union, determines that the memory of war is the basis for integration and the prevention of new conflicts (Brown, 2013, p. 676). We believe that the European Union is pursuing a Kantian model of commemoration in international relations, which aims to support EU unity, the values of peace, the unification of peoples, compassion, learning from past mistakes and the formation of a European identity. The European narrative appeals not only to the end of World War II, but also to the establishment of a single community, the promotion of the values of peace, freedom, and democracy within the framework of the "never again" affirmation (Narriillos, & Kleiner, 2025).

The presence of Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico and Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić contrasts sharply with the general position of the European Union, as most European countries celebrate Victory Day over Nazism on 8 May. Slovakia, a member of the EU and NATO, is reviving its historical identity linked to the country's liberation by the Red Army during World War II (Robert Lansing Institute, 2025). Serbia formally supports integration with the European Union, but it retains an identity based on Slavic and Orthodox solidarity with Russia (Robert Lansing Institute, 2025). This reveals normative tensions within the EU's political solidarity, particularly regarding sanctions, Russia's isolation, and alternative narratives based on Slavic memory. Visits by European representatives to Moscow provoked a barrage of criticism from the European Union, which claimed that they had chosen the wrong side of history (Kucheriavets, & Akymova, 2025). The EU considers participation in the parade a sign of support for Russia and a violation of European solidarity with Ukraine. Fico's peculiarity lies in his positive attitude towards Russia and scepticism towards EU policy (Radio Svoboda, 2025). For Slovakia's opposition representative to the EU, participation in the parade reflects the narratives with which he came to power, namely defending Slovakia's sovereignty against European pressure. These views were further fuelled by the rejection of Ukraine's membership in NATO and significant obstacles to EU membership (Hulai, & Maksymets, 2024, p. 31). Serbia's position also reflects a normative balancing act between European integration and friendship with Russia. Russia's efforts to shape the identity of the Serbian population may signal to the European Union its ineffectiveness and inability to achieve the same (Kriuchkova, 2024, p. 88). Another important factor for both countries is privileged access to Russian energy resources, placing cheap gas in the history of political autonomy. The 2025 parade allowed the state elites of Serbia and Slovakia to present the purchase of energy resources from the aggressor as part of a legitimate, value-based friendship with Russia, rather than merely economic pragmatism. The repeated, performative affirmation of "special relations" through joint celebrations helps to construct conditions in which privileged access to gas is expected and acceptable. Ritual and economic relations are intertwined: the parade justifies

and helps create a social and political context in which cheap Russian gas is desirable and seen as a marker of autonomy from the EU.

Authoritarian states and states with an anti-Western bias perceive their participation in the "parade" as part of normative interaction with Russia, because they consider it appropriate behaviour for an ally, or a symmetrical step in memory diplomacy. States either do not reject norms that institutionalise new ideas of countering Western countries and Ukraine, or avoid conflict with Russia through participation. It seems that the participation of leaders from the Global South does not indicate approval of Russia's war against Ukraine; rather, the "parade" has become a centre of consolidation around the idea of a multipolar future (Ubaydullaeva, 2025).

On the eve of the military parade, China and Russia strengthened their "boundless" partnership, emphasising the importance of maintaining the "correct view" of the history of World War II (Reed, 2025). The event on Red Square on 9 May was honoured by the presence of the guest of honour, Chinese leader Xi Jinping, which reflects not only the deepening cooperation between the countries, but also signals their intention to work more closely together in shaping a multilateral world order (Mikovic, 2025). To explain this convergence, it is worth considering the tariff escalation between China and the United States, which occurred at a time when China is going through a rather difficult phase of searching for new strategic guidelines and development priorities (Kalchenko, Oliinyk, & Fursova, 2025, p. 45). We argue that participation in the "parade" is a symbolic practice that legitimises the forced rapprochement between China and the Russian Federation as key partners in the context of the conflict with the United States. In this light, China reflects Locke's type of commemoration in international relations, as it focuses on the parallel development of an alternative structure of cooperation within the Global South. However, unlike the Russian Federation, China does not use the "parade" on Red Square as a tool to create a hostile image against Ukraine and the European Union. This is also the normative justification for the economic vector of increased cooperation with the EU and ASEAN within the framework of the "One Belt, One Road" initiative (Lou, 2025, p. 5). During Xi's visit, Russia and China issued a joint statement on countering Western hegemony (Reuters, 2025). By supporting Russia, China undermines Western efforts to isolate and sanction it for its aggression against Ukraine, thereby positioning itself as the leader of the Global South. China is constructing a role for itself as the defender of the interests of countries that remain outside the orbit of the traditional West. By offering favourable loans, investment projects, political support and other norm-setting discourses, the PRC is effectively forming loyal coalitions in the Southern Hemisphere (Anisov, & Prykhnenko, 2024, p. 41).

The meeting between Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin on the eve of the 2025 "victory parade" although with little progress in the field of wildlife protection (pandas, Amur tigers, snow leopards, snub-nosed monkeys), passed without serious results (Wishnick, 2025). Efforts to conclude an agreement on the construction of the "Power of Siberia 2" gas pipeline through Mongolia have once again been unsuccessful, resulting in a modest official statement that Russia "continues to meet the wishes of its Chinese colleagues" (President of Russia, 2025). China's position is understandable, as the availability of alternative sources from Turkmenistan with the D line project strengthens its negotiating position (Aizhu, & Gurt, 2023).

Equally important is the presence of North Korean military personnel at the parade, which is indicative of the evolution of relations between the Russian Federation and the DPRK (The Moscow Times, 2025). We argue that it is important for both countries to fuel a shared norm of hostility towards "the liberal world order", under which they are subject to sanctions. The absence of North Korean Supreme Leader Kim Jong-un at the "parade" is consistent with his policy of not attending public events, but his parallel visit to artillery shell factories is no less powerful a signal for closer technological cooperation with Russia (Da-gyum, 2025). It is expected that North Korea and Russia will jointly form the identity of "armed defenders of a multipolar world order". An important context is the DPRK's entry into the war against Ukraine. It is believed that Russian money in exchange for North Korea sending troops provides capital for domestic economic development (Vu, 2025). However, we believe that the presence of DPRK representatives at the "victory parade" in 2025 is an attempt to go beyond the status of a "client state", which fuels military value beyond simple economic gain. Participation in the "parade" will demonstrate equality with other representatives of the Global South, such as Brazil or China, destroying yet another status of a "rogue state".

After signing a military cooperation agreement in 2024, North Korean troops were deployed directly to the Kursk region, deepening the military interdependence between the two countries (Fedrigo, 2025). We argue that the conditional absence of DPRK representative's risks turning the alliance into a transactional rather than an ideological one. In the beginning, North Korea concealed the participation of its military (Kakissis, & Solohub, 2025). Compared to later official recognition, there is a normative conflict between secret actions and desired recognition. However, the hidden position contradicts the goal of both states in creating a legitimate anti-Western coalition. Later, Pyongyang attempted to resolve this dissonance through additional discourse, part of which was participation in the "parade", reinterpreting the deployment of its troops as voluntary international solidarity.

An important point is the use of the "victory parade" to project a foreign policy identity based on a great power narrative (Yas, 2024, p. 42). The Soviet-Russian myth of the "Great Patriotic War" is being perpetuated in the present day in the form of absurd ideologemes about "Ukrainian neo-Nazis" the "Kyiv fascist regime" and its "Western accomplices". (Yas, 2024, p. 42). We believe that by presenting Ukraine as a "fascist state", Russia is attempting to frame its aggression as a legitimate continuation of its historical mission against fascism for all participants in the parade and the rest of the international community, thereby delegitimising Ukraine's sovereignty. Another important aspect of the "victory parade" was the manipulation of the announcement of a "parade ceasefire" (Sybiha, 2025). This move by Russia can be explained by its desire to construct an image of itself as a peacemaker, contrasting itself with Ukraine, which it portrays as intransigent. By declaring a unilateral ceasefire without Ukraine's consent, Russia has once again asserted its dominance over the trajectory of the conflict. We argue that this was intended to change the intersubjective context of potential negotiations, presenting Ukraine as an obstacle to peace and Russia as the main arbiter. Ukraine responded with a diplomatic manoeuvre, stating that it could not guarantee the safety of foreign leaders at the parade (Zelenskyi, 2025). This statement created a counter-narrative, calling into question Russia's control over the

peacekeeping process and the symbolic event itself. Russia's interests lay in creating an image of international support, particularly from countries in the Global South. Ukraine, understanding the diplomatic goals of the parade, called for non-participation, as this would directly violate its declared neutrality and appear as support for the aggressor state (Ministerstvo zakordonykh sprav Ukrainy, 2025). However, the reaction of the Global South countries was unclear and uncoordinated. We believe that the presence of representatives is due to various geopolitical motives, economic ties, historical kinship, strategic balancing, but by no means solely support for the Russian Federation. Russia's diplomatic failure also highlights the limitations of the Russian narrative and statements during the "parade" (Wishnick, 2025).

Jeffrey Chekel's emphasis on process in constructivist analysis shows that Russia's actions as an actor in international relations occurred in a contradictory process (Checkel, 2018, p. 212). The "parade" and ceasefire were part of a broader strategy to influence peace negotiations by changing perceptions, but Ukraine and the international community actively resisted. This is reflected in statements by European representatives, Ukraine itself, and the fact that most countries around the world ignored the event (Kucheriavets, & Akymova, 2025; Zelenskyi, 2025). We claim that the Russian Federation has failed to shape an intersubjective reality and the desired attitude of the international community towards its aggression against Ukraine. The narrative of war against Ukraine has not gained traction against the backdrop of equally powerful Western interpretations.

Discussion and conclusions

The 29 participants in the 2025 "victory parade" in Moscow were merely a means of constructing the idea of the Russian Federation's emergence from international isolation. Restoring symbolic legitimacy and promoting the Hobbesian image of a "liberator from neo-Nazism" is only a tool in this. A constructivist analysis shows that attending or ignoring the "parade" is a norm-setting action for states and their representatives. By increasing its international presence, Russia is trying to reinforce the idea of justice war against Ukraine. China and the countries of the Global South have gained a much greater platform for influence, attending the event and supporting the anti-Western and multipolar narrative. The visits of Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico and Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić, who appeal to the historical memory of the "liberation" by the Red Army and the use of cheap energy sources, demonstrate how local elites integrate Russian mythology into the foreign policy identity of states, challenging the solidarity of the European Union.

Russia's narrative as an international "peacemaker-arbitrator" at the 2025 "victory parade" faced diplomatic opposition from Ukraine and the EU, while the ambivalence of the Global South countries prevented international support from rallying. This reflects Alexander Wendt's view that identities and interests arise from interaction rather than unilateral imposition (Wendt, 1992, p. 394). Despite the grandiose image of a united front in Moscow and the presence of a "coalition" of leaders at the parade, their meeting should not be perceived as a cohesive alliance. The participants' motivations vary, and their relations with Russia are often pragmatic rather than ideological. Some seek to exchange military technology, others economic agreements or discounts on energy resources. For most countries of the Global South, participation in the summit is a demonstration that they will not submit to Western

sanctions and policies, the "liberal regime". This does not mean that these states simultaneously endorse Russia's worldview. China's high-level visit also underscores the symbolic confirmation of China's "unlimited partnership". In other words, these states are acting in their own national interests, as they understand and interpret them. North Korea and Russia have been able to change their own normative discourse by successfully constructing a shared identity as armed defenders of the "anti-Western order". The formalisation of military cooperation and the DPRK's symbolic participation in the event signal a transition from a shadow alliance to a public ideological partnership based on shared norms and political interdependence.

Despite the quantitative growth of countries participating in the 2025 "victory parade", the Russian Federation has been unable to change the global discourse on its unjustified aggression against Ukraine. Most countries still ignore the "parade", while Ukrainian and European diplomacy engage in normative confrontation with Russian messages. In summary, the "parade" remained a one-sided spectacle that strengthens the positions of close allies but attracts almost no new allies. The normative process of confrontation between Russia's Hobbesian memory and the EU's Kantian commemoration is fighting for a convincing vision of the international system. Ukraine and its allies need to strengthen their own normative narratives and engage in the deconstruction of the Russian Federation's "great power mission".

The prospect for further research will be an in-depth study of normative processes that derive from commemorative practices.

Authors' contributions: Bohdan Khmelnytskyi – conceptualisation; methodology; analysis of sources, preparation of literature review and theoretical foundations of the study.

Sources of funding. This study did not receive any grant from a funding institution in the public, commercial, or non-commercial sectors.

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Отримано редакцією журналу / Received: 23.08.25

Прорецензовано / Revised: 05.09.25

Схвалено до друку / Accepted: 23.12.25

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НОВІТНІ КОМЕМОРАТИВНІ ПРАКТИКИ ЯК ІНСТРУМЕНТ ФОРМУВАННЯ ЗОВНІШНЬОПОЛІТИЧНОЇ ІДЕНТИЧНОСТІ РОСІЙСЬКОЇ ФЕДЕРАЦІЇ

Вступ. "Парад перемоги" 2025 на Красній площі в Москві став практичним утіленням комеморативних практик Росії, адже вперше з початку агресії проти України зібрав велику кількість іноземних лідерів із різних регіонів, що засвідчує зміну геополітичних балансів і дію механізму конструювання зовнішньополітичних ідентичностей від Росії та країн ЄС до "Глобального Півдня".

Методи. Було використано метод конструктивістського аналізу, що дозволяє розкрити, як практики колективної пам'яті впливають на формування зовнішньополітичної ідентичності Російської Федерації. Основним методом є аналіз дискурсу офіційних ритуалів, пам'ятних дат, масових святкування за участі представників інших держав та символічних актів. Додатково застосується порівняльний аналіз комеморації в пострадянських країнах для виявлення унікальних характеристик російських державницьких практик. Метод контент-аналізу офіційних заходів, промов, новин щодо місць та дій ушанування пам'яті дозволяє простежити механізм легітимації зовнішнього позиціонування РФ.

Результати. Комеморація стала інструментом Росії для просування образу "визволителя від неонацизму" та подолання міжнародної ізоляції. З цієї метою Росія залучає Китай, КНДР і країни Глобального Півдня до антизахідного нарративу. Участь європейських лідерів Словаччини та Сербії, яка залучена в інтеграційний процес, підкреслює прагматичні мотиви, пов'язані з економічними вигодами чи історичною пам'яттю, але не формує цілісного альянсу. Зважаючи на те, що вдалось відновити певну міжнародну присутність на параді 2025 р., порівняно з минулими роками, Росія не змогла змінити глобальний дискурс про агресію проти України. Цьому сприяє дипломатична протидія України та ЄС.

Висновки. "Парад перемоги" 2025 р. був не вираженням широкої підтримки Росії, а інструментом вибіркового нормоутворення та формування зовнішньополітичної ідентичності, що підкреслює фрагментарність міжнародного порядку й обмеженість російської нормативної сили.

Ключові слова: комеморативні практики, конструктивізм, зовнішньополітична ідентичність, міжнародна суб'єктність, Російська Федерація, Україна, Європейський Союз.

Автор заявляє про відсутність конфлікту інтересів. Спонсори не брали участі в розробленні дослідження; у зборі, аналізі чи інтерпретації даних; у написанні рукопису; в рішенні про публікацію результатів.

The author declares no conflicts of interest. The funders had no role in the design of the study; in the collection, analyses, or interpretation of data; in the writing of the manuscript; or in the decision to publish the results.