

The analysis of Russian strategic communication in years 2000-2024 using Natural Language Processing techniques

Project Proposal for NLP Course, Winter 2024

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Abstract

This project analyzes Russian strategic communication from 2000 to 2024, focusing on discourse about Poland and Europe. Using NLP techniques and pre-trained models like DistilBERT and Sentiment RoBERTa, we explored sentiment trends, topic evolution, and their alignment with historical events. Key findings reveal sentiment shifts linked to geopolitical events and recurring themes in the discourse. Despite the absence of labeled datasets, qualitative validation and contextual alignment were used to ensure reliability. Future work includes creating a task-specific gold standard for improved evaluation. Our collaboration with *Centrum Dialogu im. Juliusza Mieroszewskiego* ensured that our analysis was aligned with real-world research needs, demonstrating the value of NLP in political discourse analysis.

Introduction

The project aimed to check the hypothesis that with the use of Natural Language Processing (NLP) based methods we are able to do an in-depth, rigorous, and statistically sound analysis of Russian strategic communication addressed to and about a specific actors – Poland and whole Europe. We want to visualize the evolution of the Russian political language related to this states, to understand its statistical prominence in the corpus, to prepare topic modelling, and to examine prevailing sentiment and its evolution throughout the years. This study applies NLP techniques to key sources for analysis of the political language of Russian state: the speeches of Vladimir Putin, authoritarian leader who has been in power for the last 25 years (since 2000), as the president (2000-2008 and since 2012 until now) and prime

minister (2008-2012). Using NLP techniques we wanted to look back in order to put evolution of political language against the background of political changes and to explore its predictive value, namely to what extent are political speeches exposed reactions to events, and to what extent do they announce incoming actions. Our project is conducted in collaboration with *Centrum Dialogu im. Juliusza Mieroszewskiego*, which provides guidance and directions for analysis tailored to their research needs.

Related Work

In this section, we present an overview of the current state-of-the-art solutions relevant to the subject of our study. Our goal is to analyze sentiment trends regarding Poland in Russian political speeches and their evolution over time. Therefore, we emphasize reviewing articles and methodologies that highlight the most efficient techniques for sentiment analysis, document classification as well as strategies for conducting insightful analyses of political data.

Document Classification

The exponential growth of online text has made manual text analysis impractical, necessitating automated methods like document classification (Tsirmpas et al., 2024). It is a machine learning approach aimed at categorizing documents into predefined labels or categories based on their content. This technique is applicable in areas like spam detection, sentiment analysis, and topic modeling, enabling effective analysis and comprehension of textual data.

This task can be approached using various methods, ranging from baseline techniques, such as Naive Bayes, to more advanced models like LSTM, which often yield better performance in this context (Ranjan and Prasad, 2023). Additionally, modern architectures such as BERT (Devlin

et al., 2018) have demonstrated superior performance compared to simpler methods, albeit at the expense of significantly higher resource consumption (Taha et al., 2024).

Text Preprocessing

Humans are capable of extracting key information from texts to prepare insightful analyses, but machine learning (ML) models are less proficient at this task. To bridge this gap, raw texts require preprocessing before they can be effectively used for classification or other ML tasks. Fundamental preprocessing steps include transformations like lowercasing, removing stop words, and applying lemmatization or stemming (Siino et al., 2024).

Since ML models operate on numerical vectors rather than words, text must also be converted into this form using word or sentence embeddings. Approaches for this conversion range from basic techniques like Bag of Words (BOW) (Qader et al., 2019) to more advanced ones like Word2Vec (Mikolov et al., 2013). However, these methods face challenges with out-of-vocabulary (OOV) words, which can be addressed using techniques such as MorphoRNN (Wang et al., 2020), based on N-grams, or fastText (Joulin et al., 2016), which leverages a Continuous Bag of Words (Xia, 2023) (CBOW) framework.

Additionally, words often have multiple meanings depending on their context. To capture this nuance, advanced models like ELMo (Peters et al., 2018) and OpenAI GPT (Radford and Narasimhan, 2018) generate embeddings that are context-dependent, enabling a more accurate representation of the text's semantics.

Political Text Analysis

For many years, political text analysis depended on manual efforts, where humans examined speeches, policy documents, and other texts to uncover patterns, sentiments, and key themes. While this approach provided valuable insights, it was highly time-consuming and lacked scalability, particularly given the increasing volume of political discourse. With the integration of computational methods and natural language processing (NLP), this process can be greatly improved, enabling large-scale analysis and deeper insights into patterns and trends. Tools such as word clouds, lexical dispersion plots, and time series visualizations (Katre, 2019) can be used to track changes in narrative and keyword usage over time. Additionally,

machine learning models (Efat et al., 2023) can identify the context of political statements and the emotions they aim to evoke, offering understanding of political communication.

Sentiment Analysis

Sentiment analysis (Dudhabaware and Madankar, 2015) is an NLP task trying to determine whether the provided text is positive, negative or neutral. This task can be quite complicated, taking into account that sometimes humans themselves have a problem with distinguishing sentiment, and it is affected, among others, by such a detail as the order of the sentence used (Fang and Zhan, 2015). Therefore we can not expect any model to be 100% accurate with its responses, as the labels are subjective and dependent on the person who labelled the data.

One of the most intricate things to identify in the written text is the use of irony (Hernandez Farias et al., 2015). It is quite a subtle thing, as it could be impossible to determine if the irony was used for the sentence out of context. Also, the sentence might appear completely fine on paper, and only the manner of expression can betray the use of irony, which makes it even harder for textual data. Sometimes, the following sentences may indicate earlier use of irony by incorporating contradictory content.

The accepted types of sentiment labels may also vary. Instead of a three-point scale, there can be used a more detailed one. Beside the sentiment, we may also want to define the intensity of sentiment (strong or weak).

Named Entity Recognition

Named Entity Recognition (NER) is a fundamental task in NLP that focuses on identifying and classifying entities such as names, locations, and dates within a text. Earlier approaches to NER predominantly relied on rule-based systems and statistical methods like Hidden Markov Models (Eddy, 1996) and Conditional Random Fields (Sutton and McCallum, 2010), which required extensive feature engineering and linguistic expertise. With recent advancements in NLP, transformer-based models such as BERT (Devlin et al., 2018) and RoBERTa (Liu et al., 2019) have revolutionized the field. These models utilize contextual embeddings and self-attention mechanisms, significantly outperforming

traditional methods and achieving state-of-the-art accuracy across diverse applications.

Dataset

We utilize a dataset comprising transcripts of Vladimir Putin’s speeches, translated into English and publicly accessible via the official website of the Russian president¹. The dataset is structured as a list of JSON objects, where each JSON represents an individual speech along with its associated metadata. Key features available in the dataset include the date and place of the speech, tags, title, and both filtered and unfiltered transcripts. The dataset encompasses 9,838 speeches delivered between the years 2000 and 2024.

Proposed Solution

Our objective is to analyze the sentiment and its evolution in speeches that reference Poland, Europe or familiar entities identified using NER. Given the raw text nature of the dataset, initial preprocessing steps are necessary before the data can be used for modeling. Following preprocessing, we will conduct exploratory data analysis (EDA). Finally, we will vectorize the dataset and utilize several pretrained models, comparing their performance to determine the most effective approach for sentiment analysis.

Preprocessing

The data processing workflow begins by removing stop words using the list of English stop words provided by `nltk.corpus`, ensuring that common, non-informative words are excluded. For each speech, the date and filtered transcript are extracted for further analysis. Punctuation and unnecessary symbols, such as `#`, `...`, and `'`, are removed to maintain consistency and clarity in the text.

Next, the speeches are tokenized and lemmatized using `spaCy`, breaking the text into individual words and reducing them to their base forms for uniformity (e.g., “running” becomes “run”). The processed data is then organized into a dictionary where the keys represent each month in the format `YYYY-MM` (e.g., “2001-01”) and the values are lists of the processed speeches corresponding to that month.

¹kremlin.ru

Exploratory Data Analysis

As part of the exploratory data analysis, we computed basic text statistics following the preprocessing stage. The average length of the speeches, measured in token count, was found to be 489 tokens. Additionally, the average token length was calculated as 6.41 characters. We also analyzed the most common tokens in the speeches, as summarized in Table 1. The results highlight expected patterns, with the speeches predominantly focusing on Russians themselves and their relationships with other countries

Term	Count
russian	229
russia	227
relation	156
people	151
germany	128
minister	123
republic	119
romania	119
country	117
president	112

Table 1: Terms and their counts.

Next, we extended the analysis to examine the same statistics on a monthly basis and created an animation (sample frame shown in Figure 1) to visualize how the subjects of the speeches evolved over time. While terms like Russian or Russia dominate in most months, certain months stand out with other tokens, such as work or submarine, taking prominence. This provides valuable insights into the shifting focus of the speeches, potentially reflecting significant historical events. By comparing these trends with a timeline of important events, we can explore how the topics of the speeches change before and after key moments in Russian politics, offering a deeper understanding of the interplay between political discourse and historical context.

Given our focus on Poland and Europe, we prepared diagrams (Figure 2 for Poland and Figure 3 for Europe) showing the monthly occurrences of terms related to Poland (`poland`, `polish`) and Europe (`europe`, `eu`, `european`). In these visualizations, we highlighted the months with the highest peaks. By analyzing the fluctuations in these token counts, we can trace the varying im-

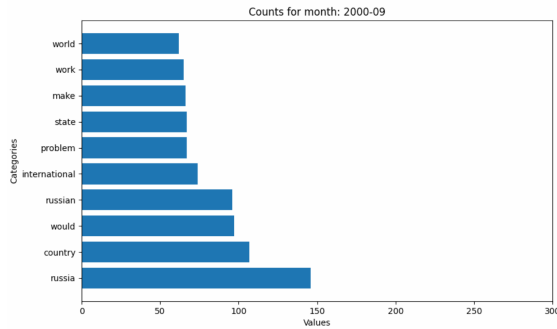


Figure 1: The most common terms in given month

portance of these two entities in Russian strategic communication over time, offering insights into their evolving roles in the discourse.

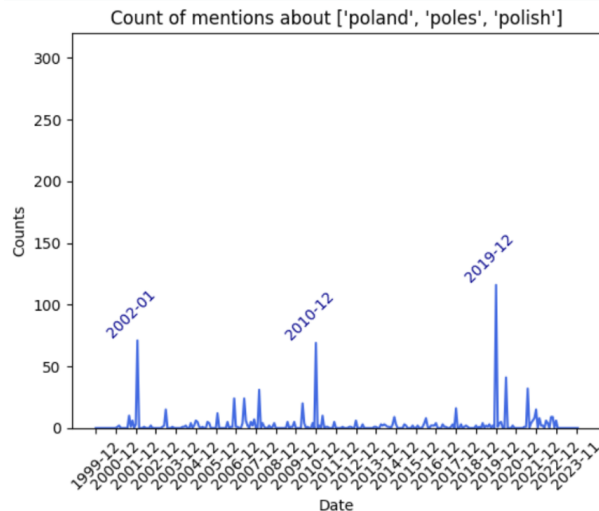


Figure 2: The most common terms in given month

Finally, we calculated the Term Frequency–Inverse Document Frequency (TF–IDF) for each token in the corpus, treating each speech as a single document. This allowed us to identify terms with the high scores as those were widely used within individual speeches but rare across the corpus. However, we filtered out highest–scoring terms as they were in majority meaningless and they appeared only in one or two speeches without contributing meaningful context. Among the remaining high–scoring terms were examples such as *disarmament*, *brussels*, and *sailor*. In addition, we want to analyze terms with low TF–IDF scores, which offer limited predictive value due to their prevalence across the corpus.

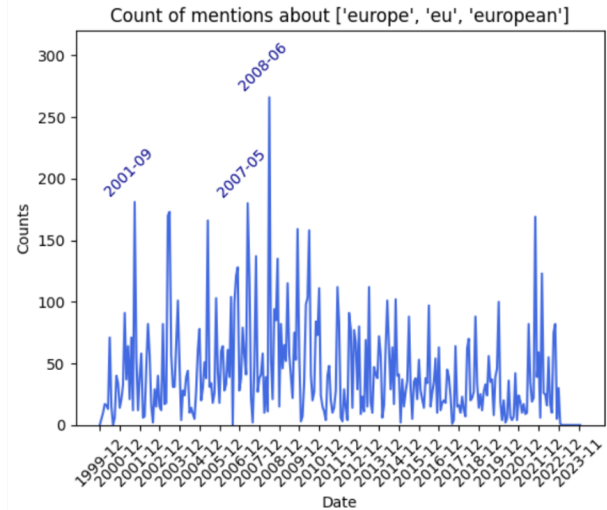


Figure 3: The most common terms in given month

Proof of Concept

In this section, we present the results of our work. We developed a Proof of Concept (PoC) that leverages pre-trained models to analyze and track basic sentiment changes within the speeches.

Models

To perform sentiment analysis on our unlabeled dataset, we will leverage pretrained, open-source models. Our first choice is the DistilBERT model (`distilbert/distilbert-base-uncased-finetuned-sst-2-english`²) which is a streamlined transformer equipped with a sequence classification/regression head. Fine-tuned on the SST-2 dataset, this lightweight model achieves an accuracy of 91.3% on the development set, performing slightly below the base BERT model, which reaches 92.7%.

The second model used for sentiment analysis task is the Sentiment RoBERTa model (`siebert/sentiment-roberta-large-english`³), a fine-tuned version of RoBERTa-large, which is trained and evaluated across 15 diverse datasets to ensure strong generalization. This approach enables it to significantly outperform a DistilBERT-based model trained solely on SST-2, achieving 93.2% accuracy compared to DistilBERT’s 78.1%, a margin exceeding 15 percentage points.. Finally, we will experiment with GPT-4o (OpenAI, 2024), leveraging manually created prompts to extract predicted sentiment from

²<https://huggingface.co/distilbert/distilbert-base-uncased-finetuned-sst-2-english>

³`siebert/sentiment-roberta-large-english`

predefined sentiment categories for each given text as in (Telejko, 2023).

Experiments

Sentiment change in speeches about Europe.

To track how the sentiment of speeches related to Europe evolved over time, we filtered speeches containing Europe-related terms. We then wanted to perform a binary classification of sentiment, categorizing the content as either positive or negative. Each speech was split into chunks of 256 tokens to ensure compatibility with the BERT model. For each speech, the final sentiment was determined by averaging the numeric scores for the classes across all its chunks and selecting the class with the higher average score. The model used for this analysis was `distilbert/distilbert-base-uncased-finetuned-sst-2-english`, along with its corresponding tokenizer, fine-tuned for optimal performance with this model. The results are shown in Figure 4.

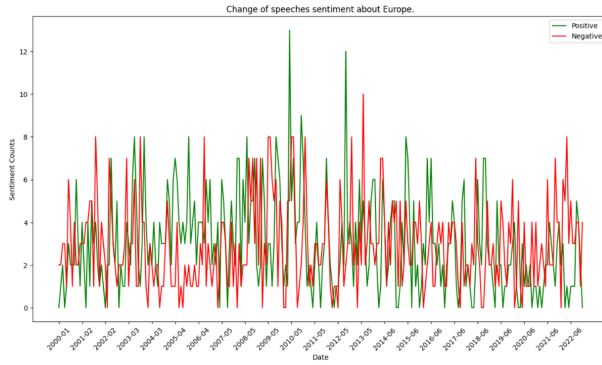


Figure 4: Sentiment evolution in speeches about Europe.

Sentiment change in fragments about Poland.

In the second experiment, we aimed to conduct a more detailed analysis of sentiment by implementing a naive Aspect-Based Sentiment Analysis (ABSA) to track how sentiment toward Poland evolved over time. For each occurrence of a Poland-related token, we extracted a sequence consisting of the token itself along with the five tokens preceding and five following it. These sequences were then fed into the model to predict whether the sentiment was positive or negative. For each month, we calculated the number of positive and negative phrases about Poland within the speeches (Figure 5).

Additionally, we computed the ratio of negative to positive sentiment for each quarter (Figure 6). The model used for this analysis was `siebert/sentiment-roberta-large-english`, paired with its dedicated tokenizer fine-tuned for optimal performance.

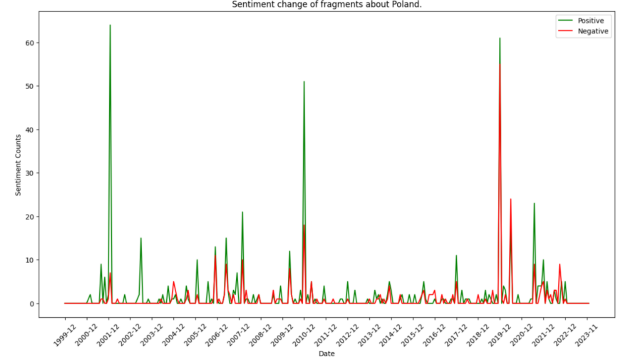


Figure 5: Sentiment evolution in fragments about Poland.

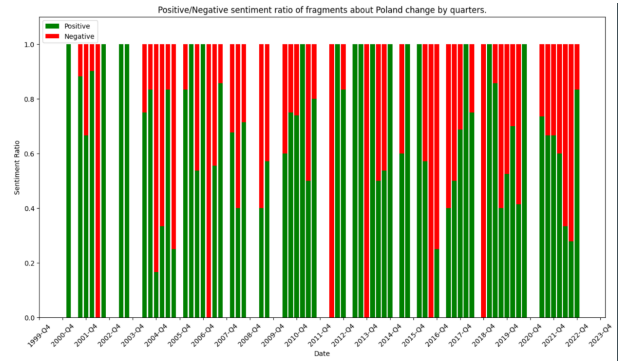


Figure 6: Negative/Positive Sentiment ration evolution in fragments about Poland.

ABSA Using Pretrained Models

In this experiment, we aimed to employ more advanced methods of aspect extraction rather than simply analyzing the vicinity of words associated with Poland. To achieve this, we utilized the `en_core_web_sm` model from the SpaCy library to extract noun chunks containing aspects related to Poland. Subsequently, we used the same `distilbert` model as in previous experiments to predict sentiment for these aspects within the given texts. Both operations were conducted using the `sentiment-analysis` pipeline from the `Transformers` library. Next, we identified aspects that appeared in the corpus more than once. The results included the following: relation Poland,

Russia Poland, Poles, Poland, Polish president, Polish territory, Polish people, Polish colleague, Russian-Polish relation, Polish friend, Polish government, Polish foreign minister, and Poland Romania. According to our models, all these aspects were mentioned positively. Additionally, we filtered out words directly linked to Poland, such as Poles or Poland, from the extracted aspects to explore commonly co-occurring words in either positive or negative contexts. These results were visualized as separate word clouds for positive (Figure 7) and negative (Figure 8) sentiments. This analysis revealed that in positive references, Russian political discourse often includes terms such as *relation*, *colleague*, or names of other European countries. Negative mentions frequently refer to historical figures like Hitler or historical topics such as Czechoslovakia.

Figure 7: Positive Sentiment Word Cloud.

Figure 8: Negative Sentiment Word Cloud.

As the last experiment we wanted to check whether it is possible to predict upcoming events by analyzing of the trends in the change of sentiment about Poland. We used the XGBoost Classifier model with `n_estimators=10`, `max_depth=2`, and

Positive events:

Negative events:

Furthermore, we predicted both positive and negative events for the entire period from 2000 to 2024 based on sentiment analysis of speeches in our dataset. The model predicted the following months for positive events: ['2004-09', '2010-12', '2012-01', '2019-06', '2020-05'], and the following months for negative events: ['2014-07', '2014-09', '2017-08', '2018-10', '2022-10']. To further evaluate the accuracy of these predictions, we used ChatGPT to check if any significant positive or negative events occurred during the predicted months. Some months from the years 2000–2015 overlapped with those used for training (2010–12 for positive events, and 2014–07 and 2014–09 for negative events). For the predicted positive events, the model did not identify any relevant incidents in the months 2004–09 and 2012–01. However, for all the predicted negative events, the model identified potential negative incidents.

Predicted negative events:

- 2014-07** • Crimea Annexation: Poland strongly condemns Russia's annexation of Crimea, contributing to a sharp deterioration of diplomatic relations. Poland calls for stronger European Union sanctions against Russia.
- 2014-07** • Russian Trade Ban: Russia bans Polish fruit and vegetable imports, citing sanitary concerns but widely viewed as retaliation for EU sanctions against Russia. Significant trade disruption and political retaliation in the aftermath of the Ukraine crisis.
- 2014-09** • Polish-US Missile Defense Agreement: Poland signs a deal with the U.S. for a missile defense system, angering Russia and escalating tensions in the region. Russia perceives this as a direct threat to its security interests.
- 2017-08** • Tensions over EU sanctions and historical disputes: Diplomatic tensions persist as Poland advocates for a hard-line stance against Russia's policies and historical actions, straining bilateral relations.
- 2018-10** • Military tensions and accusations of anti-Russian behavior: Poland faces increasing tensions regarding its defense policies, which are perceived as antagonistic by Russia, especially in the context of NATO actions.
- 2022-10** • Poland's support for Ukraine against Russia, economic sanctions, and energy disputes: Poland continues to support Ukraine amid Russia's aggression, imposing economic sanctions and participating in energy disputes related to Russia.

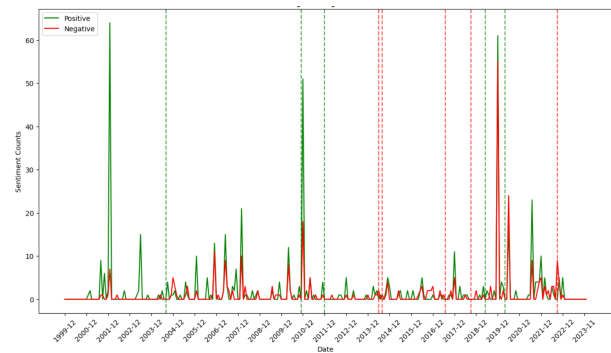


Figure 9: ABSA results; Predicted events assigned as positive are marked as vertical green lines and negative as red lines.

Predicted positive events:

- 2004-09** • No specific positive events found for this period.
- 2010-12** • Poland and Russia sign agreements to enhance co-operation in science and technology. Expanding areas of collaboration, reflecting growing bilateral ties.
- 2012-01** • No specific positive events found for this period.
- 2019-06** • No direct major positive political events between Poland and Russia. However, Poland hosted international discussions involving Russia, focusing on maintaining diplomatic relations despite tensions.
- 2020-05** • Poland provided humanitarian aid to Russia in the form of medical supplies to combat the COVID-19 pandemic.

Future Work

One of the primary limitations of our work was the lack of a labeled dataset tailored to our task. Developing such a dataset would enable more rigorous evaluation and benchmarking of models. Future efforts should also establish evaluation metrics specifically suited for political discourse, such as contextual sentiment accuracy or event alignment. Deeper analysis of temporal correlations between sentiment trends, historical events, and subsequent actions could add a predictive dimension. Addressing biases in translation and model interpretation remains critical to ensuring reliable insights that align with cultural and historical contexts. Expanding to other tasks like stance detection, propaganda analysis, or rhetorical studies could offer broader perspectives on political communication. Finally, collaboration with political scientists and linguists would deepen the analysis and improve interpretative accuracy through expert knowledge.

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A Addressing Feedback from Reviews

We have carefully reviewed the feedback provided and implemented several changes to enhance the quality and scope of our project. Below, we outline the primary areas of concern and how we addressed them:

Organizing Code

To ensure better clarity of code we refactored the jupyter notebook with our code by modularizing the code into distinct sections. We also standardized variable naming conventions and removed redundant code to improve readability and maintainability.

Ethical Consideration: Are the Translations Biased?

The dataset we utilized is derived from English translations of Vladimir Putin’s speeches. Recognizing potential biases in translation, we conducted a qualitative review of several samples, comparing them with the original Russian transcripts (where available) to verify the accuracy of critical statements. While this approach is not exhaustive, it provides initial validation. Addressing biases remains an area for future work.

Using Full Sentences for BERT

We tried the approach of using full sentences as input for BERT-based models, rather than individual tokens or fragments, however, we did not observe any significant improvements, therefore we decided to stick with the original solution.

Alignment with Historical Events

To enhance the interpretative value of our results, we aligned sentiment trends, and results of the predictive model with major historical and political events using the ChatGPT model.

Abstract

An abstract has been added to summarize the key objectives, methodology, and findings of the project.

Interpretation of Results

We expanded the discussion of results, providing a deeper interpretation of trends and model outputs. For instance, we now discuss potential reasons for sentiment fluctuations and their implications for understanding Russian political discourse.

Lack of Metrics: Examining Results Without a Golden Standard

We acknowledge the challenge of evaluating our models due to the absence of a labeled dataset specific to our task. As an initial solution, we focused on qualitative validation and alignment with historical events. Knowing how important it is to properly assess the performance of models in the context of such a task, in future work, we propose creating a labeled dataset to establish a gold standard for sentiment and aspect-based sentiment analysis in this context.

Conclusions

By addressing these points, we believe the project now better reflects the goals of insightful and transparent analysis of Russian strategic communication. We appreciate the valuable feedback that has significantly improved the quality of our work.

B Division of Work

Task	Contributor(s)
Topic Research	Izabela Telejko, Grzegorz Zbrzeźny
Preparing SOTA Overview	Izabela Telejko, Grzegorz Zbrzeźny
Designing Experiments	Izabela Telejko, Grzegorz Zbrzeźny
Exploratory Data Analysis	Izabela Telejko
Sentiment Analysis	Grzegorz Zbrzeźny
Aspect-based Sentiment Analysis	Izabela Telejko
Named Entity Recognition Task	Grzegorz Zbrzeźny
Report	Izabela Telejko, Grzegorz Zbrzeźny

Table 2: Division of Work for the Project

C Code Reproducibility

We included a Jupyter Notebook in the final solution, and our results can be reproduced by simply running it cell by cell.