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### **Manipulative use of *RISK* as a stance in political communication**

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#### **Abstract**

As in many other areas of life, the notion of *risk* has recently become central to discourses related to politics. This research paper shows how political and media representatives use the notion of *risk* in their rhetoric, making it an important part of and a powerful resource for manipulation. It is demonstrated how stances taken by speakers on different political issues reflect their social, political and moral views, showing that *risk* has become a common construct around which a political situation in the modern world is described, organized and practiced. In most general terms *stance* is understood here as the way of expression one's viewpoint concerning the object of interaction, which in this study is *risk*. The theoretical background of the research is situated within socially constructivist approaches to discourse analysis. We argue that *risk* has become one of the defining social and cultural characteristics of modern society. The research focuses on the ways stances on risks are constructed at the linguistic level, by means of certain structural and formal qualities, and on how these linguistic features are related to social interaction under the conditions of political, moral, economic and social crisis in Ukraine.

Key notions: stance, stancetaking, risk, political discourse, media discourse, risk discourse situation, manipulation, metaphor, framing, metaphoric framing, Frame Semantics, FrameNet.

Bio note:

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## 1. Introduction

Although linguistic research of risk and risk communication (Fillmore, Atkins 1992; Zinn 2010, 2015) is a fairly new sphere of investigation, “the practice of it can be considered as old as human culture itself” (Plough and Sheldon 1993: 224). Throughout the centuries of human history individuals and communities have had to face various risks in the fight for their physical survival and moral well-being. However, at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with all the challenges of new technologies as well as growing political and economic crises in different parts of the world and globally, humanity has faced new risks and become a ‘world risk society’ (Beck 1999), making the notion of risk “central to modern attempts of social control” (Altheide 2002: 17). As a result, risk communication is now embedded in wide social and political contexts, being no longer about risk *per se*, but about responsibility, accountability and manipulation, because in the era of Internet any individual decision on risk may have considerable social, political and economic ramifications world-wide.

The theoretical starting point of this research is the assumption that risks may include not just real but also hypothesized accidents and problems which depend upon the decisions of collective and individual risk agents. According to the ‘world risk society’ perspective, risk has two dimensions: a real risk (as objective reality, or something that can be measured or calculated) and a social construction of possible risk (as (inter-)subjective framing in discourse, or something that is perceived, imagined or discussed by language users) (Beck 1999; Giddens 1991; Lupton 1999). A subjective view of risk makes language an indispensable source of explanation why human perception and communication of risk has become an important issue in modern world. Thus, “a risk is never fully objective or knowable outside of belief systems and moral positions: what we measure, identify and manage as risks are always constituted via pre-existing knowledge and discourse” (Lupton 1999: 29). The experience of risk, therefore, is not only an experience of physical harm but also the result of processes by which groups and individuals learn to acquire or create interpretations of risk (Kasperson and Kasperson 2005: 203).

I propose that risks and risky events are described in discourse interaction through various *risk communication signals* – both verbal (language) and non-verbal (images and symbols) – in order to promote the desired views on social, political and cultural events in society. This research focuses on the ways stances on risks are constructed at the linguistic level, by means of certain structural and formal qualities, and how these linguistic features are related to social interaction. One of the objectives of this study is to describe how

different stances on one and the same problem (namely, the risks of important political choices) are discursively constructed by speakers under different communicative conditions.

In the next part of this paper the short description of the situational context for the discourse stancetaking will be given, after what the main notions of the research will be explained. Then I shall present the model of stancetaking in the risk discourse situation, which served a basis for the further analysis.

## **2. The Ukrainian context**

In 2014 Ukraine became a popular topic in the world news. Never before had it received such intensive attention from the media all over the world. This overall interest in Ukraine may be explained by the assumption that “the risk portfolios of individual countries and places are becoming progressively more global” (Kasperson and Kasperson 2005: 2). If this is so, then the political, cultural and economic crisis in certain countries, such as Ukraine or Syria, may likely cause problems and dangers for many other nations. This point has been made by Victoria Nuland, Assistant Secretary of the US Department of State, who said in her keynote address at the U.S. – Central Europe Strategy Forum on October 2, 2014:

Russia’s aggression in Ukraine threatens to take us back to the days when large countries could trample small ones at will. Because the countries of Central Europe understand the danger better than most, almost all of them have been among the strongest and most generous in support of Ukraine’s right to choose its own future, and live in a more democratic, clean, free and prosperous country. [...] Even as we stand against Russia’s threat to Ukraine’s European choice, we must recognize that ISIL’s threat to our security, prosperity and values is also real, also immediate. Even in the Euro-Atlantic space, nobody’s immune.

(<http://www.state.gov/p/eur/rls/rm/2014/oct/232444.htm>)

The present research project, named “Stancetaking on Risk: Political and Social Perspectives”, was initiated by myself in September 2013 and had been carried out in cooperation with my colleagues and students at the English Philology Department of the Lesya Ukrainka Eastern European National University (Lutsk, Ukraine) up till March 2015. When the project had just started, our attention was primarily focused on the ways the representatives of different Ukrainian political parties (e.g. Party of Regions,

Batkivshchyna, People's Front, Svoboda) manipulated the notion of *risk* while discussing the pros and cons of Ukraine's association with the European Union. Our main assumption was (Ushchyna 2014, 2015a, 2015b) that in the situation where a choice is to be made, people often face different risks associated with their 'right' or 'wrong' decisions. Thus, it was presumed that in the moments of important collective choices (such as presidential or parliamentary elections, or, as in this case, the choice of the country's strategic development in the future), political actors actively engage the notion of *risk* in their rhetoric. They try to influence each individual decision-maker's choice in order to achieve their specific political goals. Moreover, it was further observed that they would rather mention risks and dangers in the discussions concerning discordant views and decisions (Ushchyna 2015a, 2015c).

The point is, if and when potential personal harm is concerned, the credibility of information provided by media and political actors greatly depends on the degree of trust and confidence in the 'risk' communicator. As it happened in Ukraine, all the efforts of politicians and media, represented by them (as risk communicators) have split the country into two protesting camps: those who believed them and those who protested against them. As a result, in the lexical stock of the Ukrainian language there appeared two neologisms: *maidan* (the group of people who protested against ex-president Yanukovich and his administration) and *antimaidan* (the group of people who supported the old power and protested against the *maidan*). Although the risks debated in public Ukrainian discourses have changed, one thing remains unchangeable – Ukrainian political discourse continues to be the **discourse on risk**.

### 3. Theoretical framework

The framework chosen for this analysis draws from key research done on *stance* and *risk* in a number of analytical traditions, in particular sociolinguistic (Brown, Yule 1983; Bucholtz, Hall 2005; Jaffe 2009; Johnstone 2009), cognitive (Fillmore 1982; Fillmore and Atkins 1992; Fillmore et al. 2003), socio-cognitive (Dijk 2008) and Critical Discourse Analytical (Fairclough 1998, 1999; Wodak, Meyer 2009) perspectives.

The general theoretical background is situated within socially constructivist approaches to discourse analysis, consisting of Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough 1998, 1999), poststructuralist studies on discourse (Chiuliaraki, Fairclough 1999; Harré 2003) and discourse psychology (Billig 2001; Potter and Wetherell 1987). In the socio-constructionist model of discourse analysis, speakers use discourse to construct versions of

the world which are variable, functional and consequential. Similarly, the fundamental assumption of psychological discourse analysis is that language is inseparable from the processes of thinking and reasoning (Potter and Wetherell 1987). People use language to construct their unique versions of the world using words that are culturally, ideologically and historically available to them (Billig 2001).

Living in the world that we ourselves build in discourse and by discourse, we invent new risks and create new dangers. Looking at how language is used today, especially in the field of politics, one can argue that language gives people the power not only to judge, evaluate or persuade, but also to coerce and manipulate, making communication of risk “a part of a political struggle” (Kasperson and Kasperson 2005: 21). More importantly, while language can exist without politics, “political activity does not exist without the use of language” (Chilton and Schäffner 2002: 3).

### **3.1. Political discourse and manipulation**

According to Chilton’s (2008: 226) definition, political discourse is “the use of language to do the business of politics”, that includes “persuasive rhetoric, the use of implied meanings, the use of euphemisms, the exclusion of references to undesirable reality, the use of language to arouse political emotions” and the like. Though all the above-mentioned linguistic instruments, routinely used for political communication, directly point to manipulation as an inherent feature of political discourse, to define manipulation and to distinguish it from persuasion is not an easy task.

It was Orwell (1969: 225) who was the first to pay attention to the manipulative nature of political discourse, stating that “political speech and writing are largely the defense of indefensible”. Maillat and Oswald (2009) suggest that the following criteria are important for a communicative act to be considered manipulative: truth, covertness, social conditions and intent. And it is an intent that underlies the speaker’s various ethical presuppositions: the same utterance may be manipulative or justified, depending on his or her ethical premise. According to Maillat and Oswald, “manipulative communication is foremost about exploiting the inherently fallible and heuristic-based ways in which the human mind processes information” (2011: 66).

Politics oftentimes deals with choices or “decision making” (Tversky, Kahneman 1981), i.e. political elections, referendums, revolutions etc. *Risk* becomes a vehicle of manipulation, by which political actors create resources whereby they can

bargain with people in the process of achieving their political goals. “There exists a disposition towards the expectation of adverse outcomes, which is then engaged by the mass media” (Furedi 1997: 52), so politicians and newsmakers constantly warn people about the risks and dangers of wrong choices, predominantly associated with their political opponents.

Whereas the notion of *risk* presupposes uncertain results of subjective choices or decisions, it is inseparably connected with the notion of *fear*, actively researched lately in politics- and media-related literature (e.g. “creating fear” (Altheide 2002), “culture of fear” (Glassner 1999) or “politics of fear” (Wodak 2015)). David Altheide righteously argues that “the discourse of fear refers to the persuasive communication, symbolic awareness, and expectation that danger and risk are central features of the effective environment” (2002: 2). Similarly, in the present study fear is particularly associated with the lack of control over people’s lives and future, inevitably leading to a preoccupation with the problems of safety and possible risks. My basic argument is that *risk* has become a dominant issue in political and social discourse. Whenever some important public decision is to be made, an army of newsmakers, experts and politicians make their claims in an attempt to manipulate collective views and choices.

### **3.2 Risk**

The change in the nature of risk perception and risk communication in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century has been linked to the transformation from modernity to late modernity or post-modernity – concepts that are integral to debates about the contemporary nature of risk (Giddens 1991, Beck 1999). In general, post-modernity is characterized by cultural and social transformations on the one hand, and by global risks and uncertainty over the future on the other. It is thus seen as “the end of certainty” (Leonard 1997: 12).

In post-modernity an individual is confronted with countless risks: from personal risks (such as diseases, life-styles or eating habits) to public risks (such as political and economic crises or genetically-modified food); from voluntary risks (such as smoking, drug or Internet addiction) to involuntary risks (such as environmental pollution or climate change). “Risk, once it appears, has a tendency to proliferate” – states François Ewald (1993: 221). “We are all each other’s risks” he further concludes. “There are risks everywhere and in everything, from the most individual to the social and international

levels” (Ewald 1993: 227). Risk is, then, a complex phenomenon, which is increasingly recognized to be highly politicized and value-laden (Douglas 1992). As Lupton (1999: 59) puts it, “[d]ebates and conflicts over risk have begun to dominate public, political and private arenas”.

While there is a growing amount of literature on risk and the media (e.g. Jacobs 1996; Kitzinger and Reilly 1997; Stallings 1990), as well as on risk and politics (e.g. Gardner 2009; Harrison and Hoberg 1994), there are few publications which cross the disciplinary boundaries of risk sociology and linguistics to take advantage of new developments in linguistics for the analysis of risk frames, semantics and discourses. The relevance of such interdisciplinary research perspective is postulated by e.g. Wyatt and Henwood (2006), who argue for a shift toward studying risk discourses in order to show how people refer to ‘risk’ and construct ‘risk’ in their speech.

In this work the speech behavior of the risk communicators is seen as a product of their discourse interaction, pertaining to decision-discussion, decision-making and, as a result, stancetaking processes. Understanding of the dynamics of interactive processes of risk perception and conceptualization, as well as the dynamics of communication in risk-related discourse situations, remain under-developed. In this article I examine the process of discourse stancetaking on risk, as the rhetorically persuasive instrument of political manipulation.

### **3.3. Stance**

The term *stance* has been used in a number of different ways in the literature related to discourse. As a result, there is no unanimity among scholars in terms of approach to the investigation of *stance* in the linguistic literature, but many of them focus on the study of resources available to language users to express their thoughts and feelings in the course of interaction with other individuals. For example, Douglas Biber, one of the most influential contributors to the topic, researched the lexical and grammatical means used by speakers for expression of their personal views (Biber 2004). The 2004 study follows his earlier work with Finegan (Biber and Finegan 1989: 124), where *stance* is defined as “the lexical and grammatical expression of attitudes, feelings, judgements, or commitment concerning the propositional content of a message”. These lexical expressions of stance signify evaluation, affect, certainty, doubt, hedges, emphasis, possibility, necessity and prediction.



By contrast, Ochs (1990; 1993) identifies *stance* as one of four dimensions that organize the relation between language and culture. She defines *stance* as “a socially recognized disposition”, making a distinction between *epistemic stance*, that is “a socially recognized way of knowing a proposition, such as direct (experiential) and indirect knowledge, degrees of certainty and specificity,” and *affective stance*, that is a “socially recognized feeling, attitude, mood, or degree of emotional intensity” (Ochs 1990: 2).

In yet another definition Johnstone (2009: 30) states that *stance* “has to do with the methods, linguistic and other, by which interactants create and signal relationships with the propositions they utter and with the people they interact with”.

Similarly, Irvine (2009: 55) claims that *stance* is the speaker’s point of view and evaluation of utterances, objects, and interlocutors, and *stancetaking* is a social act performed in speaking and located within an interaction whose course it influences”.

As can be seen, all the above definitions of *stance* differ from one another with respect to which mental phenomena are considered to be involved in *stancetaking*. Some of them include attitudes (e.g. *I like it* etc.), feelings (e.g. *I’m happy* etc.), and judgments (e.g. *it’s stupid* etc.), whereas others include commitments and assessments (e.g. *You are wrong, I agree* etc.) of the proposition; still, all the above-mentioned approaches focus on the expression of individual speakers or writers rather than on interactive relations. To summarise, there are two important components of *stance* – epistemic, associated with knowledge of the speaker about the object of speaking, and affective, expressing his/her feelings and emotions towards it.

Nevertheless, it is interaction that should be seen as a starting point for taking a *stance*, given the fact that *stance* can be treated as “an articulated form of social action” (Du Bois 2007: 137), or as “the act of positioning oneself in the social act of discourse” (Precht 2003: 240). My view of *stance* is close to that of Du Bois (2007: 163), who sees *stance* as

a public act by a social actor, achieved dialogically through overt communicative means (language, gesture and other symbolic forms), through which social actors simultaneously evaluate objects, position subjects (themselves and others), and align with other subjects, with respect to any salient dimension of the socio-cultural field.

(Du Bois 2007: 163)

In the discourse situations that have been analyzed as a part of this project, the notion of *risk* is an important part of *stancetaking*. The latter is approached here as an interactive and dynamic discursive phenomenon, which appears as a decision-making

process in risk situations. Consequently, in the present study risk receives a subjective interpretation, and therefore 'positive' or 'negative' connotations of taking risks directly depend on the stances of communication participants.

The way that stances on risks are constructed linguistically is analyzed with a semantic approach, with regard to semantic categories of risk such as 'danger', 'hazard', 'choice', 'chance', 'harm', 'possibility', 'victim', 'risky situation', 'beneficiary' etc., grounded in various lexicographical resources. Of relevance is also Fillmore and Atkins' (1992) analysis of the *risk frame*, which explains different aspects of theoretical approaches to risk as the object of human interaction.

## **4. Data and methodology**

### **4.1 Data**

The analysis is based on political rhetorical texts (advertisements, TV news programmes, newspapers, Internet publications) from the period between August and December 2013, devoted to the failed Ukraine-EU Association agreement, which triggered mass protests in Ukraine. The materials (122 newspaper articles and 56 fragments of transcripts of TV news programmes and talk shows totaling 218 817 words) were gathered by searching for combined keywords "Україна + Асоціація з ЄС", "Україна + ризик" in Ukrainian (85 articles and 40 fragments of TV programmes and shows), "Украина + Ассоциация с ЕС", "Украина + риск" in Russian (37 articles and 16 fragments of TV programmes and shows respectively) and "Ukraine + EU Association", "Ukraine + risk" in English (22 articles) in the "1+1" (<http://1plus1.ua/online>), "Inter" (<http://inter.ua/uk/live>) and "Rossiya" (<https://russia.tv/>) TV channels, as well as "Day" (<https://day.kyiv.ua/uk>, <https://day.kyiv.ua/en>) and "Izvestia" (<http://izvestia.ru/>) newspapers database search engines.

In the analysis two stages of the events are distinguished: (1) preparation for signing the European Union's Association Agreement with Ukraine; (2) political crisis in Ukraine caused by the refusal to enter into the Association Agreement.

For reasons of space I do not discuss the present-day situation in Ukraine nor consider all the related risks that have been discussed in political discourse in other parts of the world at the time. The research was narrowed down to displaying a selected number

of discourse examples presenting verbal stancetaking on risk. As one of the most representative examples for this article, illustrating the manipulative potential of using the risk frame for political stancetaking, a discourse excerpt was used, entitled “Euthanasia of Ukraine”, taken from a news programme “Vesti”, broadcast on the central Russian TV channel “Rossiya 1” and hosted by a popular Russian journalist Dmitriy Kiseliiov ([https://russia.tv/brand/show/brand\\_id/5206/](https://russia.tv/brand/show/brand_id/5206/)).

A discourse analysis of the interrelations between stance and the notion of *risk* in the process of political manipulation is presented in section 5. The analysis was undertaken with the following assumptions in mind: the act of signing/not signing the Association Agreement is seen here as ‘a risky situation’, the speaker and the recipients as ‘decision makers’, while their roles are also treated as those of ‘the affected’ party (either ‘victims’ or ‘the beneficiaries’ of the risky choice).

## **4.2. Method of analysis**

The assumption about the situated nature of stance implies the necessity of identifying certain discourse situations as situations of risk. In order to achieve this end, it was essential to devise a prototypical conceptual model of the risk situation, which would provide a basis for further stages of analysis.

The model of the risk situation was adopted from FrameNet (see section 4.2.1), itself based on the frame semantics theory of meaning and deriving from the work of Fillmore et al. (2003). This model served as a conceptual foundation for the analysis of stance, framed by the situational context of risk. In agreement with the objectives of the research, the FrameNet model of the risk situation was further elaborated by introducing a meta-communicative level to it, viz. one representing the risk situation from the position of an outside participant, who can be a politician or a journalist, addressing a mass audience.

### **4.2.1. Modeling the risk situation**

The linguistic analysis of the phenomenology of risk has a multidisciplinary character and is realized in the paradigm of socio-cognitive discourse analysis (Dijk 2008), which allows for the conceptualization of this phenomenon as an important part of reality representation

by a subject. According to this approach, the image of an object or an event is a subjective attitude of an individual towards it rather than a reality (ibid.), including epistemic (i.e. knowledge about the discussed object, expressed as linguistic modality and evidentiality) and affective (i.e. emotions and evaluations) stancetaking of the utterance / text producer. Hence, the present analysis was based on the ways the concept of RISK was verbalized in the English, Russian and Ukrainian languages, which allowed for determining the content of its interpretive sphere and distinguishing the ways of framing discourse situations as the situations of risk.

Our understanding of situational framing in social and political discourse derives from Frame Semantics (Fillmore 1982), in which *frame* corresponds to a scenario that involves interaction and participants, and where participants play certain roles. Frame Semantics enables tracing how conceptual framing works through language. Initially stating that each verb in a sentence has its own grammar associated with a certain semantics, Charles Fillmore later (1992) observed that not only verbs, but any “individual word senses, relationships among the senses of polysemous words, and relationships between (senses of) semantically related words are linked with the cognitive structures (or “frames”), knowledge of which is presupposed for the concepts encoded by the words” (Fillmore 1992: 75). In other words, according to Fillmore, we think in terms of conceptual frames – mental structures that organize our thoughts and speech, and each of the specific parts or aspects of the frame can be activated by particular lexical meanings or lexico-syntactic patterns. Consequently, groups of related words (e.g. *risk*, *danger*, *threat*, *peril*, *hazard*, *chance* etc.) are mentally organized in terms of frame structures, based on common knowledge, beliefs or experience.

As has been mentioned above, it is FrameNet (<https://framenet.icsi.berkeley.edu>) that provided the knowledge basis needed to frame the discourse situations as the situations of risk, identifying the RISK frame and semantic roles in it. The frame structure catalogued in FrameNet is derived from the analysis of the semantic valence of frame-evoking items (including derivatives of “risk words”, such as *venturesome*, *risky*, *perilously* etc.). Each lexical item or idiomatic expression of the risk frame is associated with the context construal of the situation of risk. Since the frames here are those of FrameNet, information on frame relations can be found on the FrameNet website, where the risk scenario is defined as follows:

“**An Asset** (= something judged to be desirable or valuable which might be lost or damaged) is in a particular **Situation** (= the situation under which the Asset is safe or unsafe), which has the likelihood of

leading to or inviting a **Harmful Event** (= an event that may occur or a state which could result in the loss or damage of the Asset)” ([https://framenet2.icsi.berkeley.edu/fnReports/data/frameIndex.xml?frame=Risk\\_scenario](https://framenet2.icsi.berkeley.edu/fnReports/data/frameIndex.xml?frame=Risk_scenario)).

The research procedure followed certain stages. Firstly, a list of lexical units denoting the risk situation was created. The words *риск* (Russian), *ризик* (Ukrainian), *risk* (English) served as the root form for the search, as their semantic structure correlates with the conceptual nucleus of the RISK frame. Nominations of *risk* in English, as well as in Ukrainian or Russian, were treated as the verbal markers of the nuclear zone of this concept. In the semantics of the word *risk* there is a reference to the possibility of some undesirable consequences as a result of the risk subject’s behaviour. Though not very numerous, they are represented by different parts of speech: the noun *risk* (*риск* (Rus), *ризик* (Ukr)), the verb *to risk* (*рисковать*, *ризувати*), the adjective *risky* (*рисковый* (Rus), *ризиковий* (Ukr)) and its antonyms: *riskfree* and *riskless* (there are no equivalents in Russian or Ukrainian) and the adverb *riskily* (*рискованно* (Rus), *ризиковано* (Ukr)). The pool of relevant nominations has been increased by adding lexemes with a similar meaning, the so-called *semantic neighbors* (Fillmore 1992: 80), in particular for the noun *risk*: 1) *chance* (*шанс* (Rus), *шанс* (Ukr)), *possibility* (*возможность* (Rus), *можливість* (Ukr)); 2) *danger*, *peril*, *jeopardy* (*опасность* (Rus), *небезпека* (Ukr)); 3) *chance*, *hazard*, *uncertainty*, *speculation*, *venture* (*неопределенность*, *предположение*, *рискованное предприятие* (Rus); *невизначеність*, *припущення*, *непевна справа* (Ukr)); for the verb *to risk*: 1) *put at risk*, *endanger*, *imperil*, *jeopardize* (*подвергать риску* (Rus); *наражати на небезпеку* (Ukr)); 2) *take the risk of*, *chance*, *venture* (*идти на риск* (Rus); *йти на ризик* (Ukr)); informal *grin and bear*; 3) *gamble*, *hazard*, *chance*, *venture* (*авантюра*; *приключение* (Rus); *авантюра*, *пригода* (Ukr)); for the adjective *risky*: *dangerous*, *fraught with danger*, *hazardous*, *perilous*, *unsafe*, *precarious*, *touch-and-go*, *tricky*, *uncertain* (*рискованный*, *опасный*, *неопределенный*, *ненадежный* (Rus); *ризикований*, *небезпечний*, *невизначений*, *ненадійний* (Ukr)); informal *chancy*, *dodgy*, *dicey* (Oxford Thesaurus: 703).

In the next stage the grammatical structure of the clauses where a *risk* word appeared was analyzed, with the focus on the valence of the lexeme *risk*, its combinability and frequency as well as its phraseology. Based upon FrameNet, a model of the situation of RISK relevant for public stancetaking in political or media discourse was designed (Fig. 1). The FrameNet model was expanded by introducing a meta-communicative element to it, which made it possible not to just analyze the specific characteristics of the risk situation (such as *uncertainty*, *probability*, *possibility*, *choice*, *chance*, *danger*, *loss*,

gain), but also to align them with the subjective attitudes of the stance-takers as well as with a broader social context.

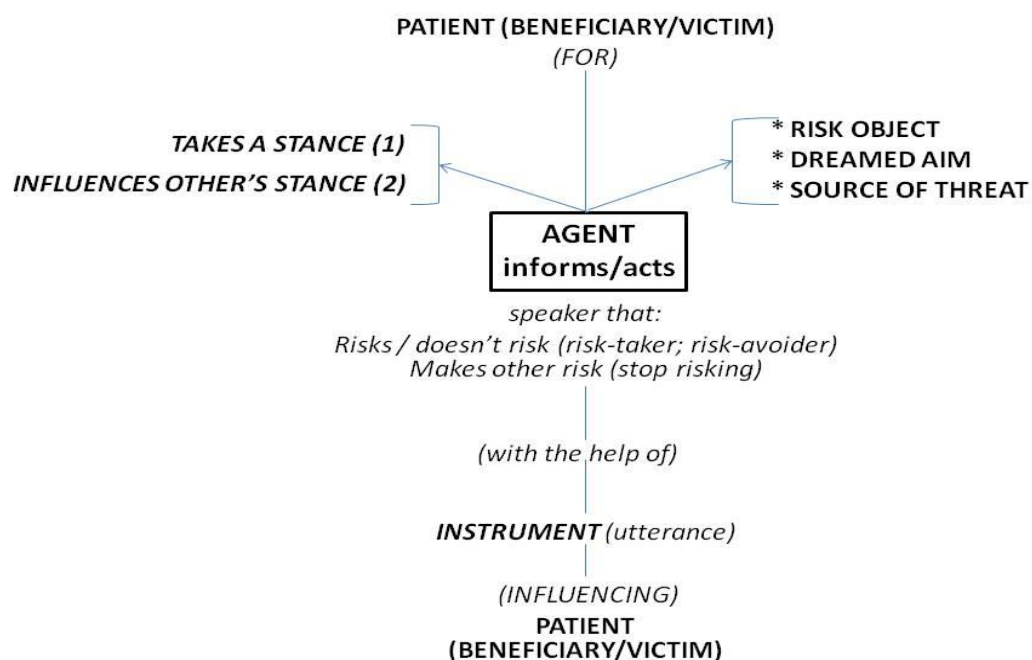


Fig. 1. Model of a meta-communicative RISK situation

The model consists of a system of interdependent components, uniting different abstract notions in the verb frame, called *semantic roles* that are treated as the basic constituents of a frame (Fillmore 1982): AGENT, PATIENT, BENEFICIARY / VICTIM, INSTRUMENT, DREAMED AIM, RISK OBJECT, SOURCE OF THREAT. The active role in the meta-communicative risk event belongs to the AGENT, who is the source of actions and a stance-taker. He / she produces an utterance (INSTRUMENT), by which he/she indicates his / her stance or tries to influence the stance of the PATIENT in a risk discourse situation. Manifesting his or her stance on the discussed risk/choice/decision, AGENT also outlines RISK OBJECT, DREAMED AIM, SOURCE OF THREAT and RISK SUBJECT, which may be himself / herself, a PATIENT (VICTIM or BENEFICIARY) of a risky choice or the third party, e.g.:

*“Minpromtorg Rossiyi izuchit negativnyie posledstviya dlya oboronno-promyshlennoy otrasli v sluchaye podpisaniya Ukrainoy soglasheniya ob assotsiatsiyi s Yevrosoyuzom. [...] Pri etom, [...], prekrashcheniye sotrudnichestva bylo by nevygodno obeyim storonam. I Ukraina poteryaiet mnogo bol'she”* [Russia's Minpromtorg will study the negative consequences for the military-industrial complex, in case Ukraine signs the

*Association agreement with EU. [...] Then, [...], collaboration suspension would be disadvantageous for both sides. And Ukraine will lose much more*] (Krivoruchek 2014).

In the example, taken from the Russian newspaper *Izvestiya* (<http://iz.ru/news/563714>), the author or a stance-taker, speaks on behalf of the AGENT – in this case Russia’s Minpromtorg (*Ministry of Industry and Trade*) announcing its plans to measure risks – “*izuchit negativnyie posledstviya*” [will study the negative consequences]. The verb “*izuchat*” [to study], used in the form of future tense, as well as the prepositional phrase “*v sluchaye, yesli*” [in case of] indicate that there exists a possibility that the AGENT may take some action, but it is not certain. Though the consequences of this possible action are described as explicitly negative (“*negativnyie posledstviya*”), they are unclear too, depending upon the decision of a PATIENT (= Ukraine), which is a RISK-SUBJECT, going to sign the Association Agreement with EU. Later, these “negative consequences” are explicated as “collaboration termination” (*prekrasdkihcheniye sotrudnichestva*) between Russia (here: = the third party) and Ukraine. In this context, EU-Ukraine Association Agreement is seen as a SOURCE OF THREAT, while both countries (“*obe storony*” [both sides] – Russia and Ukraine) are treated as the VICTIMS of Ukraine’s risky decision. Moreover, according to the author, these consequences are more harmful for Ukraine: as a PATIENT and a RISK-SUBJECT, it is said “to lose much more” (“*I Ukraina poteryaiet mnogo bol’she*”).

Using the RISK frame for the linguistic analysis of stancetaking in political and media discourse allowed for assuming that risks have always something to do with the choices and decisions made by a single subject or a group of subjects as a social entity. The political choices and decisions, in turn, may have socially significant consequences.

#### **4.2.2. Metaphoric Framing in Risk Discourse**

As “political discourse is saturated with messages that frame sociopolitical issues using metaphor” (Landau and Keefer 2015: 130), I found it interesting to see how the RISK situation frame is deployed in what Landau and Keefer call “metaphoric framing” (ibid.) of public discourse, surrounding such sociopolitical events as presidential elections, referendums, revolutions or changing the country’s geopolitical development course.

The idea to apply Frame Semantics to politics and metaphoric framing seems to be fruitful, as it helps to trace how conceptual framing works through language. Fillmore’s semantic frames have always been understood to structure metaphor mappings in Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff and Johnson 1980), essential to which is the

principle of “experiential motivation”” In accordance with this principle, correlations in experience within the source frame of a metaphor motivate conceptualization of the target frame. Source concepts are often experientially concrete and possess some kind of ‘bodily basis’ (ibid.), while target concepts are often abstract and cannot be directly experienced or perceived. For instance, in sentences “*A fork in the road*” and “*Between two stools*” (= the choice of Ukraine’s civilization course) experientially concrete concepts of a *fork in the road* in a source frame of ROAD TRIP metaphor and *sitting between two chairs* in a SITTING metaphor respectively, motivate conceptualization of an abstract concept of *choice* in the target frame RISK. As any choice, in its turn, implies the possibility of different (often opposite) results, new competing frames could be construed: one presupposing positive consequences of the choice, while another – negative ones.

Following Lakoff (2014), we strongly believe that such “competing frames are used everywhere in political and social issues and who wins depends on which frame dominates”. Thus, metaphorical framing becomes a strong instrument for political manipulation. In their attempts to influence the Ukrainians’ collective decision in 2014, politicians and journalists actively employed the metaphorical RISK frames, where signing association with EU was framed either as a DREAMED AIM or as a HARMFUL EVENT. In the example, analyzed in 5.2, the speaker uses an AIRPLANE metaphor to construe the HARMFUL EVENT frame, which may be metonymically evoked by reference to a dangerous entity (a concrete or abstract entity, which may cause damage or losses. Here: *air crash*) of a risky air trip on an uncontrolled plane, navigated by deceitful and inexperienced pilots.

## **5. Analysis and discussion: Ukraine between EU Association and the Eurasian Union**

The following section consists of two parts. In part 5.1. the two predominant ways of representing information on Ukraine-EU Association choice in Ukrainian, European and Russian media are outlined, while part 5.2. offers a detailed discourse analysis of metaphoric framing of the mentioned event as a manipulative stancetaking on risk in one of the Russian TV news programmes.

### **5.1. A fork in the road: Risky choice**



There has been an extensive debate in Ukrainian and world media over Ukraine's possible integration routes. Where to go? What Union to join – European or Eurasian? These are the questions that Ukraine had been managing to avoid for about twenty years. The critical moment came about in November 2013, when the final choice had to be made in Vilnius, Lithuania. By the day the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement was to be signed at the Eastern Partnership summit, scheduled for November 29-30 in Vilnius, the dramatic discussion of possible integration risks had accelerated in Europe, Ukraine and Russia.

The representatives of all the three sides fairly often built their stances in the conceptual frame of RISK, although they were filling the same frame slots with different constituents. On the basis of the discourse analysis of various mass media sources (Ukrainian, Russian and Western), the following semantic scenario was discovered: the PATIENT (= Ukraine as a risk-taker) has to make a RISKY CHOICE (= decision) to be integrated in one of the international Unions – either the European Union or the Eurasian Union. Linguistically, the CHOICE in a RISK frame presupposes a certain lexico-grammatical structure of the utterance: “*either/or*”, “*if/when*”, “*in case of*”, e.g.: “*We all are soon to face a bleak choice*”. “*We can choose to surrender any responsibility we have to protect Ukraine from further Russian incursion. Or we can mount a last-ditch attempt to deter Russia from furthering its imperial ambitions*” (Lucas 2014), “*A fork in the road*” (Sushko 2013), “*Vyprobuvannya, yaki syohodni vypaly na plechi Ukrainy taki, shcho vybir u nas ody: abo my stanemo normalnoyu krayinoyu, abo ne vyzhyvemo*” [*The ordeal lying on the shoulders of Ukraine presupposes only one choice: either we stand it or will not survive*] (Dubrovik 2014).

The following ways of representing the problem in the RISK frame were established in the analyzed corpus:

- (1) **the speaker/author of the written publication supports European integration** of Ukraine (Fig. 2). In this case the PATIENT (= Ukraine as a risk-taker) is described as a BENEFICIARY if it chooses EU, and as a VICTIM in case of choosing the Eurasian Union. The speaker's stance can thus be formulated as “**in favor of integration with the EU**”, which he/she sees as a GAIN for Ukraine, in contrast to the Customs Union, which is seen as a LOSS, e.g.: *increased inflow of foreign investment, modernizations of Ukrainian economy, restructuring of enterprises, creation of new jobs, harmonization of regulatory and institutional standards, improvement of*

*the business environment and rule of law* Conversely, the Eurasian Union is presented as *smaller, technologically backward, less competitive, and not offering Ukrainians significant institutional benefits* (Aslund 2013; Lukas 2014), e.g. *“Pryv’yazuyuchy vlasnu ekonomiku do posiyiskoyi, Ukraina bere na sebe j seryoznu chastynu ryzykiv. Vony holovnym chymon polyahayut u vidstalosti i syrovynnomu kharakteri ekonomiky Rosiyi”* (*Tying its economy to the Russian one, Ukraine takes also serious risks. They mainly consist in backward and commodity-based economy of Russia*) (Kapitonenko 2013)

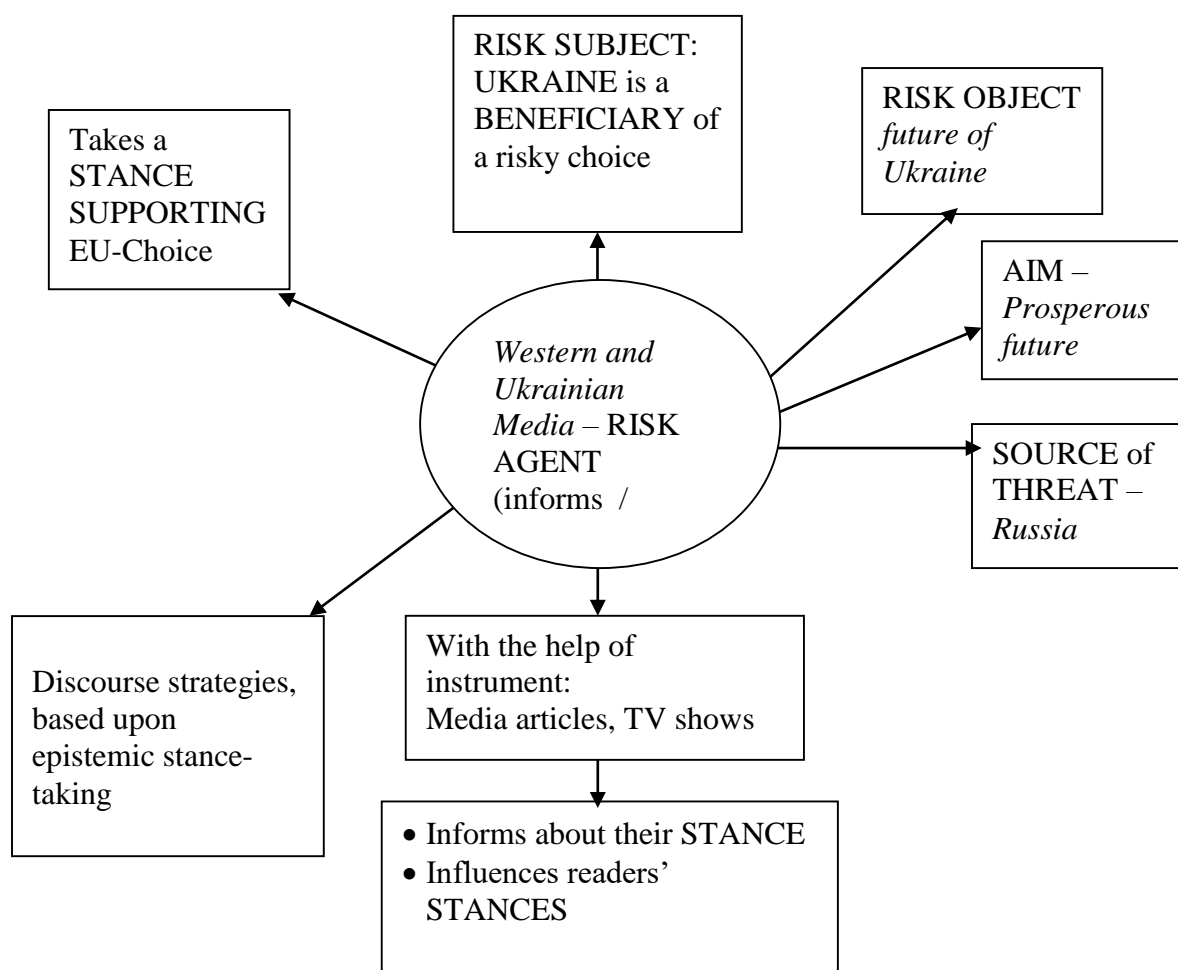


Fig. 2 Stance, supporting EU integration of Ukraine, represented in the RISK frame

(2) **the speaker/author supports further integration of Ukraine with the Eurasian Union** (Fig. 3). Here, the PATIENT (= Ukraine) is shown as a BENEFICIARY if it joins the Eurasian Union and as a VICTIM if it integrates with the EU. This stance can be referred to as **“in favor of integration with the Eurasian Union”**. Proponents of such a choice verbalize their stances using rather rhetoric of threats than “decision-making” argumentation. They do not

offer any choice to Ukraine in this risky situation. The only possible way out for Ukrainians according to the subjects of this stance is returning to the orbit of former Soviet Union (“russkiy mir” – [Russian world]). It’s a “death or dare” choice, e.g.: “*European choice is euthanasia for Ukraine*”, “*In reality – just ahead, lies the economic collapse of the whole country. Ukraine is flying towards this on a calculated path. Passengers will be hurt. Not all will survive*” (Kiseliov, September 2013). e. g.: “*My gotovimsya k uzhestochenyu tamozhennyh protsedur, yesli Ukraina poodyot na samoubiystvennyj shag I podpishet assotsiatyiu s ES*” (“*We are preparing to tighten customs procedures if Ukraine makes the suicidal step to sign the association agreement with the EU*”) (Glazyev, 2013).

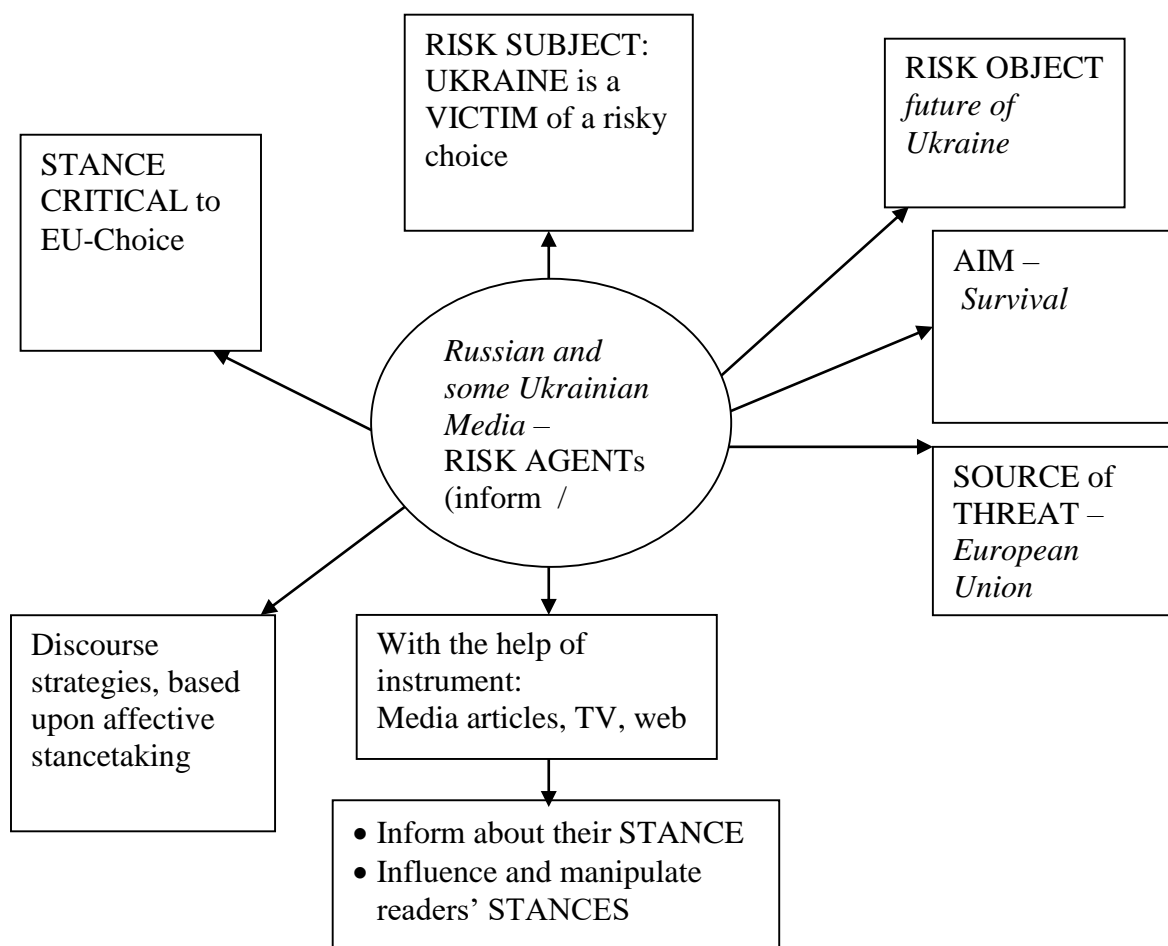


Fig. 3 Stance, criticizing EU integration of Ukraine, represented in the RISK

In the next section a stancetaking in the Ukrainian political situation, metaphorically framed as a situation of risk, will be illustrated by the discourse analysis of one of the Russian news programmes’ textual organization.

## 5.2 Is EU-Ukraine Association “Euthanasia for Ukraine”?

Unwilling to ‘lose’ Ukraine to the European Union, Russia launched a substantial informational campaign against the Association Agreement. President Putin’s adviser Sergey Glazyev puts it candidly: “*We are preparing to tighten customs procedures if Ukraine makes the suicidal step (emphasis is mine) to sign the association agreement with the EU*” (Sterkin et al. 2013). He emphatically calls the risk of signing the Agreement a “suicidal step”. Another well-known Russian, the TV commentator/presenter Dmitry Kiseliiov, calls these aspirations of the Ukrainians even more dramatically – *Эвтаназия по-украински* [Ukrainian-style Euthanasia].

Below I offer a detailed analysis of the above-mentioned TV storyline, which represents the journalist Dmitry Kiseliiov’s stancetaking in the RISK frame. The fragment was taken from the news programme on the state Russian TV channel *Rossiya 1*, issued on September 22, 2013<sup>1</sup>.

In order to fully understand the context of the story it should be mentioned that at that moment president Yanukovich was still in power and together with his administration he had been actively promoting the idea of signing the Association Agreement with the EU. However, after some time they unexpectedly reviewed their decision and announced the withdrawal of their intent to sign the Agreement. It is unknown whether it was done under pressure from the outside or because of internal political reasons. Nevertheless, the truth is that manipulations from both sides, i.e. the EU-Association proponents and opponents, stimulated the polarization of Ukrainian society. It should also be admitted that the Russian media have always been and still are taking a leading part in forming the informational space in Ukraine. For many years all the Ukrainian TV channels have been filled with numerous Russian media products, not to mention the fact that Russia’s central channels were being broadcast on the territory of Ukraine until they were prohibited in 2014 due to Crimea annexation and the Ukraine-Russia conflict at the East of Ukraine.

In the analyzed fragment of the news programme “*Vesti s Dmitriyem Kiseliiovym*” [*News with Dmitry Kiseliiovym*], the stance-taker (or AGENT) is Dmitriy Kiseliiov, who is very eloquent in verbalizing his stance on Ukraine’s signing the Association Agreement with the EU. In the RISK frame presented by him, Ukraine is the RISK SUBJECT appearing as

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<sup>1</sup> The transcript and the English translation are mine.

a VICTIM. In his words, by promoting the intentions to sign the agreement with the EU, Ukraine risks its very existence. Thus, according to Kiseliiov, Ukraine's DREAMED AIM (= EU-Ukraine Association) becomes a SOURCE OF THREAT (= economic and political turmoil, cf. *widespread poverty, brain drain, social tension and aggravation of separatism*). Thus, the speaker's stance is to warn Ukraine about this risky action and to persuade the Ukrainians to change their decision.

Specifically, in excerpts (1) and (2) of the transcript Kiseliiov exploits different RISK metaphors describing possible dangers awaiting Ukraine in the case of signing the agreement. Ukraine is compared to “*an airliner, which is losing power and starting to go into a nose dive*”. In line with this metaphor the Ukrainian Government is called “*the crew*”, which takes the risky decision “*to shut down the engines*”. Then the speaker himself gives an explanation of what was meant by this metaphor – “*factories and whole sectors of the Ukrainian economy*”) “*instead of restoring power and taking hold of the helm*”. He definitely implies here that the Eurasian Customs Union and Ukraine's integration with Russia may help Ukraine “*to restore power and take hold of the future*”):

(1) Украина напоминает лайнер, который сорвался в штопор. Экипаж, вместо того, чтобы взять штурвал на себя и жать на газ, один за одним глушат моторы – заводы и целые отрасли украинской экономики. Пассажиров при этом успокаивая, что Европа уже близко, осталось чуть-чуть.  
*Ukraine resembles an airliner, which is losing power and starting to go into a nose dive. The crew, instead of restoring power and taking hold of the helm, are one by one shutting down the power of the engines – factories and whole sectors of the Ukrainian economy. Passengers are being comforted with the notion that Europe is near, only a little way off.*

By contrast, in excerpt (2) the risky actions of the Ukrainian Government are metaphorically represented as the irresponsible actions of the pilot crew (= Ukrainian Government) that “*comforted the passengers with the notion that Europe is near*”. At the same time, however, “*the engines were shutting down*”. The speaker again resorts to the AIRPLANE metaphor, already used in the first paragraph (see excerpt 1): “*Ukraine is flying towards this on a calculated path*”. He warns “*the passengers*” (= Ukrainians) about the risks of pain and death waiting for them ahead (*Passengers will be hurt. Not all will survive*). At the time of broadcasting the programme nobody could have imagined that *pain and death* would soon become a terrible reality.

(2) В реальности – впереди экономический крах целой страны. Украина летит к нему по расчетной траектории. Пассажирам будет больно. Выживут не все. Говорю это с уверенностью, потому что помню кошмар дефолта у нас в 98. Россия оплатила его резким скачком смертности, растянувшимся на годы. Нечто похожее сейчас впереди у соседей. Нахалав долгов, Украина уже перезанимает лишь для того, чтобы покрыть проценты по ранее взятым займам. На обычных условиях ей уже не дают. [...]

*In reality - just ahead, lies the economic collapse of the whole country. Ukraine is flying towards this on a calculated path. Passengers will be hurt. Not all will survive. I say this with confidence because I remember the nightmare we experienced in the default in of 98. Russian paid for this with a sharp spike in mortality, which stretched on for years. Something similar is now ahead for our neighbor. Having acquired huge debts, Ukraine has to borrow once again just to cover the interest on loans taken out earlier. And the previous rates no longer apply. [...]*

Another point worth noting in excerpt (2) is the speaker's epistemic stance constructed with a high degree of confidence in what is being said. He explicitly states his certainty ("I say this with confidence"), grounding the verbalized assumption in "eyewitness evidentiality" (Aikhenvald 2003: 3): "because I remember the nightmare we experienced in the default in of 98".

In the third paragraph (excerpt 3) the stance-taker intensifies the credibility of his suppositions by offering factual information about the economical failure of Ukraine ("Ukraine carries one of the lowest ratings and a very negative prognosis. Investments there are not recommended"), which data, according to him, is based upon expert research ("Ukraine drops to 84<sup>th</sup> place, just ahead of Uruguay"). Kiseliiov also refers to "international news agencies" to make his stance sound more objective:

(3) В международных информагентствах у Украины нижайший рейтинг и негативный прогноз. Инвестиции туда не рекомендуются. Украина опускается до 84 места и за ней уже Уругвай.

*In international news agencies, Ukraine carries one of the lowest ratings and a very negative prognosis. Investments there are not recommended. Ukraine drops to 84<sup>th</sup> place, just ahead of Uruguay.*

In the fourth paragraph (excerpt 4), Russia is pictured as an AGENT of not just stancetaking in a meta-communicative situation of risk, but also as an AGENT of actively provided help. Consequently, Russia is not only warning Ukraine (= PATIENT-VICTIM role) about possible dangers, but also offers its assistance to overcome them.

(4) В этих условиях Россия протягивает Украине руку помощи. В среду на этой неделе становится известно, что Москва выделяет Киеву кредит в 750 миллионов долларов на два года под щадящий процент. (...) Любопытно, что решение Путина дать Украине еще кредиты не было обставлено никакими дополнительными требованиями. По-моему, у Путина был глубоко внутренний мотив. Он звучал так: «Киевская Русь началась как основа будущего огромного Российского государства. У нас общая традиция, общая ментальность, общая история, общая культура. У нас очень близкие языки. В этом смысле я еще раз хочу повторить, - мы один народ»

*In these circumstances, Russia is stretching out to Ukraine a helping hand. On Wednesday this week it became known that Moscow wants to allocate Kiev a loan of 750 million dollars for two years under a gentle interest. (...) It is interesting that Putin's decision to give Ukraine more credits was not designated with any additional requirements. In my opinion, Putin has a deeper inner motive. He sounded like this: "Kievan Rus began as the foundation for the future of the Russian Empire. We have a common tradition, a common mentality, a common history and culture. We are very similar in our languages. In this sense, once again I want to reiterate - we are one people".*

In excerpt (4) the speaker again openly expresses his subjective view of the situation (“*In my opinion*”), failing to keep to the unbiased journalistic stance. Also, in an effort to sound more authoritative, Kiseliiov quotes president Putin, who speaks of the closeness of two countries – Russia and Ukraine.

In the 5<sup>th</sup> paragraph (excerpt 5), the speaker develops the AIRPLANE metaphor into an ‘airplane story’, reminding his audience that Kiev (used as metonymy of Ukraine) risks its well-being by the Association with the EU: “*Kiev takes an even sharper turn towards the West, as if purposely cutting themselves off its core markets and opportunities with its neighbor in the East*”:

(5) Но в ту же среду как раз в день выделения Россией кредита, Киев еще круче берет курс на Запад, словно нарочно лишая себя своих основных рынков и возможностей у соседей на Востоке. Правительство Украины одобряет соглашение об ассоциации и свободной торговле с Евросоюзом. Премьер Азаров комментирует соглашение, которое якобы продвигает страну к европейскому качеству жизни. Но это звучит как мантра. Экономические новости из Украины говорят о другом: моторы глохнут. (...)

*But on Wednesday, the day when Russia was prepared to offer this loan, Kiev takes an even sharper turn towards the West, as if purposely cutting*

*themselves off its core markets and opportunities with its neighbour in the East. The Government of Ukraine approves the agreement of association and free trade with the EU. Prime Minister Azarov says the agreement allegedly moves the country towards a European quality of life. But it sounds like a mantra. Economic news from Ukraine tells of a different story: the engines are dying. (...)*

Further on, the stance-taker mentions that the former Ukrainian Prime Minister Azarov sees the ‘risky’ Agreement as a GAIN for Ukrainians; consequently, Ukrainians, in Azarov’s view, are not VICTIMS, but BENEFICIARIES of their own decision, because this Agreement is meant to “*allegedly move the country towards a European quality of life*”. Azarov’s stance is further interpreted by Kiseliiov as contradicting the reality: “*Economic news from Ukraine tells of a different story: the engines are dying*”.

The sixth paragraph (excerpt 6) may be seen as a climax of Kiseliiov’s story. It is here that the author uses the key-word of his speech, *euthanasia*, which, from his stance, is what Ukraine is doing by taking the ‘risky’ course. Moreover, he states that the process is even worse than euthanasia, as Ukrainians do not actually choose to join the EU by themselves, for they are deceived by their authorities:

*(6) Отказ от российских рынков для Украины – ну, как бы это помягче сказать? Эвтаназия. Впрочем, и эвтаназия не совсем точное слово. Эвтаназия – это сознательный и добровольный уход из жизни.*  
*Refusal of the Russian markets for Ukraine – well, how to put it mildly? Euthanasia. However, euthanasia is not quite the right word. Euthanasia – is a conscious and voluntary withdrawal from life.*

In the next paragraph (see excerpt 7) an interactive stancetaking is found. The speaker employs various synonyms to describe his negative attitude towards the Ukrainian Government’s pro-European stance, which he considers to be purposefully deceiving: “*Ukrainians continue to be deceived*”, “*a treacherous betrayal*”. An eponym “*neo-mazepism*” is used to imply that the Ukrainian Government is as deceitful and cunning as one of the historical personalities from the Peter the First’s times – Ivan Mazepa. However, such an interpretation of Ukrainian history is ambiguous and manipulative in itself. We can also observe a humiliating reference to Ukraine as some sort of ‘goods’ which the “*Ukrainian leadership seeks to deliver to the West*”.



(7) Украинцев же продолжают обманывать: «От соглашения с ЕС всем будет лучше, и с Россией зона свободной торговли сохранится». Но это предательское лукавство: нео-мазепизм. Так же, как Мазепа, который пришел к власти на союзе с Петром, так и нынешнее украинское руководство, широко использовав российскую поддержку, стремится сдать Украину Западу.

*Ukrainians continue to be deceived: "From all the agreements with the EU, things will be better for everyone and free trade with Russia will continue." But this is a treacherous betrayal: neo-mazepism. Just as Mazepa, who came to power in alliance with Peter, so, the current Ukrainian leadership, having widely benefited from Russian support, seeks to deliver Ukraine to the West.*

In the 8<sup>th</sup> paragraph (see excerpt 8), the friendly ‘warning’ is verbalized through the phrase “v sluchaye” (*in case of*), which is considered to be fulfilling a pragma-cognitive function of a RISK frame space-builder, containing information about possible CHOICES and about the opportunity to avoid risk. In the given situation this warning may be seen as a THREAT, though the reasons for this threat are explained as a compulsory defense:

(8) В Москве это прекрасно понимают и видят без иллюзий. Россия неоднократно, причем на самом высоком уровне, предостерегала, что в случае открытия Украины для товаров из ЕС, мы, страны из уже действующего Таможенного Союза, будем вынуждены защитить себя.

*In Moscow, this is perfectly clear and seen without illusions. Russia has repeatedly, and at the highest level, warned that in the case of opening Ukraine for goods from the EU, we, the countries with an already existing Customs Union, will be forced to defend ourselves.*

In the excerpt (9) the speaker explicitly specifies the incorrigible consequences (= LOSSES) generated by a risky CHOICE of the Association:

(9) В результате неминуемо деградируют все высокотехнологичные отрасли промышленности Украины [...]. Произойдет архаизация экономики страны, и, как следствие, снижение жизненного уровня со всеми вытекающими отсюда последствиями: обнищанием людей, оттоком мозгов, социальной напряженности и обострением сепаратизма.

*The result of this will be the inevitable degradation of all the high-tech industries of Ukraine [...]. All of this will promote archaism of the economy, and as a result, lowering the standard of living, with all the ensuing consequences: widespread poverty, brain drain, social tension and aggravation of separatism).*

In the final part of the analyzed fragment the speaker again resorts to the AIRPLANE metaphor of Ukraine, likening it to “*the jet-liner as it proceeds on a collision course*”, and Ukrainians to “*the passengers sitting in the cabin*”. He emphasizes his stance by using a metonymical reference to the *Ode of Joy* by Beethoven, meaning that the European Union is an illusion for Ukrainian citizens:

*(10) Впрочем, обо всем этом пассажирам лайнера не сообщают, зато в салоне звучат немецкие гимны Евросоюза – Ода к Радости Бетховена на текст Шиллера. [...] Украинские реалии, между тем, другие..*

*However, all of this is not being announced to the passengers of the jet liner as it proceeds on a collision course. Instead, in the cabin, sound German hymns of the European Union – “Ode to Joy” by Beethoven on the text of Schiller. [...] Ukrainian realities, meanwhile, are so different.*

## **6. Conclusion**

Unlike the objective parameters of the situation (context) such as time, place and participants of the interaction, the speaker’s stance belongs to its subjective part, including his / her attitude, emotions, evaluations and knowledge about the object of discussion as well as about other interlocutors and their stances. One of the political realities of the modern world is that political actors tend to use stancetaking in discourse as a means for framing, assigning and controlling risks, and thus for manipulating large audiences. The reality we live in and the reality constructed in and by political discourse are sometimes mismatched. Political communication often becomes communication in risk discourse situations, presupposing making personal and collective decisions or taking stances on risk. By verbal manifestations of their stances, interaction partners try to make the unpredictable consequences of civilian decisions predictable and controllable. A risk society (Beck 1999) then becomes “a stage” where “risk thinking” (= the intentions to calculate and control future events) produces even more risks.

The sad reality of the latest events in Ukraine demonstrates that it is possible to control wide audiences, influence the country’s course of development and even start wars by publicly formulating stances on risks. If this is true, then one might venture the claim that the present Russia-Ukraine conflict is based on massive semantic manipulations,

making the notion of risk central for political communication in the conditions of vital and responsible choices Ukrainians have been facing lately.

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