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THE USE OF SPORT AS AN ELEMENT IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF “Z-IDEOLOGY” IN THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION²

“PUTIN’S ZWASTIK”

The letters “Z,” “V,” “O” were not used for propaganda purposes in Russia until February 24, 2022. From the first days of the “SVO” (spetsyalnaya voyenaya operatsiya (special military operation in Russian)), the letters “Z” and “V” became its visual symbol. At first, they were noticed on tanks, military equipment and vehicles that participated in military operations. Then they were recorded on the social networks of the Russian Ministry of Defense, on billboards in cities, and on civilian clothing. Gradually, by the second week of the war, these Latin letters acquired the meaning of official symbols of the invasion of Ukraine. A special emphasis was placed on the letter “Z.”³ A large-scale information campaign was “built” around it, thanks to which it became a universal symbol of support for the Russian authorities and the combat operations of its army. The Russian Ministry of Defense promoted the following slogans such as “*Za pobedu*” (“For Victory”), “*Za mir*” (“For Peace”), “*Za patsanoV*” (“For fellows”), “*Kogda Rossiia poZvala*” (“When Russia calls”), “*Za detei Donbassa*” (“For children of Donbass”⁴) (Gessen; Yushkov). The Russian state TV channels call the Russian war in Ukraine a special operation “*Spetsoperatsiya Z.*”

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³ The authors of the article understand “Z” as a letter and a symbol.

⁴ From the translator: In 2022, the Russian Ministry of Defence used the Latin letters “Z,” “O,” “V” on military vehicles. Subsequently, the Latin letter “Z” was used instead of the Russian letter “Z,” the lowercase letter “v” instead of the Russian “V,” and the letter “O” instead of the Russian “O” in propaganda posters, banners, and leaflets. Therefore, the spelling became widely used in the

Russian philologist S. Levina believes that the use of the letter “Z” happened by accident, without any propaganda intentions. In particular, because it is easy to write and goes well with the St. George ribbon – another propaganda symbol of the Russian Federation (*Where did...*).

The most popular versions of the interpretation of the letter Z in Russian society are given in Table 1.

Table 1

Possible interpretations of the letter “Z”*

Meaning	Interpretation
Army traditions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) The name of the tactical groups of the Russian Federation armed forces, which moved from different directions of the Russian Federation to Ukraine: “Z” – “Zapad” (“west”), and V – “Vostok” (“east”). 2) The sign V – “Pobeda” (“Victory”), or “Pobednaya gryppirovka” (“Victory Group”). 3) Military equipment with the letter “O” was planned to be used for the <i>Okruzheniya</i> / Encirclement of Ukrainian cities and fortifications of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. 4) On the eve of the start of hostilities, Russian vehicles arrived at the border with Ukraine with long white stripes already painted on their sides. For convenience, they were replaced with letters.
Writing Russian words in Latin	<p>From the words: “Zabiraem” (“return”) – “we return Ukraine as part of our common Motherland”; “Zahodim” (“enter”), “to cleanse Ukraine of the Nazi infection”; “Zavershenie” (“completion”) – the final phase of restoring order; “Zabotlivye i Vezhlivye” (“caring and polite”) and other variants.</p> <p>Writing Russian in Latin: “Zdes’” (“here”), “My zdes’ est’” (“we are here”).</p>
Memes about the President of Ukraine	The letters on the Russian military equipment of the SVO in Ukraine can be deciphered as the surname of the President of Ukraine – (V)Volodymyr (O)Olexandrovych (Z)Zelensky.
77 years	Many postcards and billboards depicted: a Russian soldier, a St. George ribbon in the shape of the letter Z, the slogan “ <i>Russian soldier liberates Europe from fascism again</i> ” and the years “1945–2022.” That is, 77 years with the help of two letters “Z” were supposed to visually resemble these numbers, and as if to unite two victories – over German fascism in 1945 and “Ukrainian” in 2022.
Nazi traces	During World War II the letter Z was used to designate a building in the Sachsenhausen concentration camp. Station Z housed a crematorium with four ovens, where prisoners’ bodies were burned. In 1943 a gas chamber was added. The use of the last letter of the German alphabet was a cynical reference to the last station in a prisoner’s life.

Compiled by the authors according to: *Brandenburg Memorials...*; “Nazi Sign”...; Orlov; Shcherbakova; Smartpress.by news service).

The Russian authorities attach great importance to symbols. Thus, a symbolic date was chosen for the invasion of Georgia such as 08.08.08 (August 8, 2008). The date of the invasion of Ukraine – 22.02.22 (February 22, 2022) was to be the same. However, “the military leadership convinced V. Putin to move it to February 24 to allow for the celebration of Soviet Army Day” (Morenchuk 2022:52). Therefore “Z” can be interpreted as the number “2” in the variation 22.2.22. On this day, the Russian Federation ratified an agreement on “friendship, cooperation and mutual assistance” with the self-proclaimed “DPR” and “LPR.” Russia’s intention to attack Ukraine was also

ideology of the “Russian world” and in everyday life. Instead, after Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the words “Russia, Putin” in Ukraine are now written with a lowercase letter as a sign of contempt for the enemy.

confirmed by the Secretary of the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine O. Danilov (*Russia Planned...*). Z can also be associated with the number 77, which is the date that was to be celebrated in 2022 as the anniversary of the Soviet Union's victory over Nazi Germany (May 9, 1945). In this context, the symbol "Z" is a continuation of the tradition of "victory mania" that has been widespread in Russia in recent years. In addition, the letter "Z" goes well with another symbol widely used by the Russian authorities namely the St. George ribbon. Therefore, we can assume that the opportunity to play on the mentioned elements such as Z, 22, 77, and the St. George ribbon on Victory Day 2022 was an important factor when the Kremlin decided to push the letter "Z" as a symbol of the SVO.

At the same time, an important task for Putin's regime is to establish ideological symbols in society in order to create a sense of unity and chosen status. In his book "A Hospital Ward for Russia: The History of Russians in the Age of Putinism" Polish expert on Russia K. Benedychak compares the system of power in the Russian Federation to cocaine addiction and a drug high. He argues that the Kremlin regularly gives Russians doses of "imperialist cocaine" to keep them excited and blindly accepting of its conquest policy, which still lets the state keep up the illusion of power. This reflects Russia's dependence on aggression, expansion, and the search for external threats to its greatness. Therefore, the start of a full-scale war with Ukraine is an injection of imperial cocaine for Russians, a temporary compensation for the fact that one in five citizens does not have a toilet at home (Benedychak, 2024).

According to Polish reporter M. Wolna, the Russians consider the war with Ukraine as a part of a war against the West in which they contrast the "moral strength of Russia" with the "degenerate West." At the same time, most of society is indifferent to the war itself and dreams of a strong and great Russia, for which it is necessary to fight. They remember their country in a state of conflict. Therefore, it is quite natural for them to accept further wars and relatively normal functioning in wartime conditions (Wolna, 2023).

The Opponents of the Russian invasion of Ukraine compare Z to a fascist swastika. The Western media even coined the term "Putin's swastika," *zwastika*. Political scientist T. Stanova believes that the "Z" symbol was needed by the system to mark "their own" and "alien" and is "a proof of the people's love and support for the SVO and personally for V. Putin." M. Hessen, a columnist for the "New Yorker" magazine, expressed the opinion that "graphically letter 'Z' is clearly closer to the swastika than to any other well-known Soviet symbol, such as the five-pointed star, the hammer and sickle, or the red flag." "Z" is a series of strokes that are easy to depict which instantly creates "visual violence" and "a symbol of the new Russian totalitarianism" (Gessen). R. Leibov, philologist, lecturer at the University of Tartu, founder of the semiotics school states that: The visual connection with the swastika is obvious. "Z" is in the words *naZi* and *naZism*. In Russian, there is the word "ziga" which means a Nazi salute. Most experts believe that the letter "Z" is an unfortunate and random choice. It is unclear how "a country that speaks of the '*Russkij mir*' ('Russian world') uses the Latin alphabet because it is part of the Western world with which they are at war" (*Z is a sick...*). Russian political scientist T. Stanovaya believes that the Z symbol was needed by the system to mark "friends" and "foes" and is a "proof of the people's love and support for the SVO and Putin personally" (Kolezev).

We have not found any information about the specific individuals who developed the symbol. We assume that it was finally approved by the high military command and/or V. Putin himself. The only thing that can be said for certain is that Russian state television reported that “Z” is a common marking for Russian military equipment. In turn, the use of the letter “Z” by the Russian authorities was one of the ways to subjugate and unite Russian society. The “Z-ideology” envisaged a new form of Russian state patriotism, the “normalization” of the perception of war and militarization.

SPORT AS A POLITICAL WEAPON OF THE USSR AND THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Sport has always been an important part of any country’s international image, a means of “soft power.” In totalitarian and authoritarian regimes, it has been turned into an element of propaganda for their own ideology. For example, the 1934 World Cup and the 1936 Summer Olympics played an important role in the propaganda of Italian fascists and German Nazis. A. Hitler and B. Mussolini organized and conducted these sporting events in an exemplary manner and showed the whole world the victorious results and “superiority” of their nations and political regimes over their competitors (Rokita, 2018). The Soviet Union also used sports to promote communist ideology and fight the “capitalist bloc” during the Cold War. The most famous example of this is the 1980 Summer Olympics in Moscow. They were boycotted by 65 countries in protest against the presence of Soviet troops in Afghanistan. In response, 14 countries of the “Soviet bloc” boycotted the next Summer Olympics, held in Los Angeles in 1984. In the USSR, the entire sports system was controlled by the state and served its interests. There was a system of so-called sports societies each of which operated within a specific sector of the “national economy,” with the largest and most powerful ones operating within the security forces: “CSKA/SKA” (army) and “Dynamo” (internal affairs agencies). Most leading athletes were also officers in the Soviet army, police, and special services. Their achievements were associated with the achievements of the state and its army.

However, A. Podleśny notes that the indisputable sporting power of the USSR did not survive the fall of that state and the situation with sport in modern Russia only improved after V. Putin came to power (Podlesnyi, 2019). The Winter Olympics in subtropical Sochi in 2014 were one of the key events for Putin’s propaganda in the field of sports. More than \$50 billion was spent on preparations for the Games. Putin partially achieved his goal since the Russian team won the unofficial Olympic medal count with great effort. However, the increase in spending on sports and the organization of large-scale sporting events in 2014 and 2018 was accompanied by doping scandals that raised reasonable doubts about the achievements of Russian athletes. The central figure in the state doping program, which allowed Russian athletes to use doping and conceal it with a complex system of urine sample substitution, was the head of the Moscow Anti-Doping Laboratory, G. Rodchenkov. After he realized the scale of the conspiracy and began cooperating with WADA (World Anti-Doping Agency), his actions caused dissatisfaction on the part of the Russian authorities, which put him in

danger. Therefore, he emigrated to the United States and began a series of exposés of the participants in this program (Stazicker).

WADA launched an investigation after the release of the documentary film *Icarus* (2017). The organization’s report and the report by R. H. McLaren proved that the Russian Federation replaced and manipulated samples and test results, concealed the use of doping by the Russian Anti-Doping Agency (RUSADA), and sponsored these actions by state authorities. The Court of Arbitration for Sport in Lausanne (CAS) ruled to suspend Russia from international competitions until 2022 (Luchak, 2018). Many Russian athletes and teams from various sports have been disqualified from international competitions and stripped of their medals.

The Russian authorities actively use sport as a propaganda tool to increase the loyalty of their own population. Many current and former Russian athletes and coaches, sports officials and civil servants are members of the ruling United Russia party, deputies of the State Duma, and have found their place in the Russian power structure. Sports representatives have publicly supported Russia’s armed aggression against Ukraine and systematically participate in propaganda events organized by Putin’s regime. With the exception of hockey players and soccer players who play in the US and European countries, all other athletes and coaches are directly or indirectly financially dependent on the state, or more precisely, on the ruling regime. Therefore, they are mouthpieces for its propaganda. Those athletes who openly condemn Putin’s regime and the war and support Ukraine have been forced to leave Russia due to political persecution. In the Russian Federation, sport is mainly supported by direct or indirect state funding. For example, “Gazprom,” which sponsors many sporting events including international ones, is only 50.23% owned by the Russian state. Sports are also often financed by Russian oligarchs controlled by the president. In general, the triad of “power – business – sport” in the Russian Federation is mutually supportive and aimed at legitimizing Putin’s power and ‘whitewashing’ the authorities through sport. Its peculiarity lies in the fact that it is “effective” only in the conditions of total corruption in modern Russia.

After Russia launched a full-scale war against Ukraine in 2022, most international sports institutions either completely banned Russian and Belarusian athletes from participating in competitions or offered them to compete in a neutral status: without flags, anthems, and on condition of publicly condemning the aggression against Ukraine. Russian propaganda, however, claimed “double standards,” “politicization of sport,” and “Russophobia.”

FEATURES OF THE “Z-IDEOLOGY” FORMATION

The formation of the state “Z-ideology” is taking place in the Russian Federation. The ideology has acquired a clear association with the armed invasion of the Russian Federation into the territory of Ukraine in 2022 through the efforts of the top military and political leadership of Russia. It is viewed as a manifestation of the latest Russian patriotism. “Z-ideology,” along with other modern ideologemes such as “racism,” “*pobedobesy’e*” (“victory madness”), is part of their totality namely the “*Russkij mir*”

(“Russian world”). The authors consider ideology as a set of representations, beliefs and ideas focused on the relations of people in societies and designed to justify or change such relations by uniting people for collective action (Lisovyi, 2011).

Russian philologist S. Levina, a specialist in modern vocabulary, has counted 502 words in the Russian language beginning with “Z”: *Z-patriot* (Z-patriot), *Z-operation* (Z-operation), *Z-channels* (Z-channels), etc. She considers this a negative phenomenon, because “the authorities are starting to speak not in words, but in letters, and not in Russian” (*Where did*). In the article we use the words “Z-athletes,” “Z-coaches” to refer to the public figures primarily citizens of the Russian Federation, who publicly or covertly promote and support the “Z-ideology” at sports competitions, in public and private life.

At the same time, ideology is inseparable from the sign, because the sign has specific forms of social communication that transmit it through a system of socially adapted and approving practices. The letter “Z” creates an intuitive and emotional picture of the world. Thus, it relates ideology to art, aestheticizes it, resembles the rituality of religious rites. Physical culture and sports are one of such mass-accessible practices through which the “Z-ideology” is openly promoted through visual effects.

During the large-scale military invasion of the Russian Federation into the territory of Ukraine, sports and athletes of various levels were massively involved in the construction of the “Z-ideology” in Russian society. The following prerequisites existed for this:

- 1) In recent decades, the Russian Federation has been dominated by the sports mainstream. The country has successfully hosted a number of large-scale events, namely: the Universiade in Kazan’ (2013), the Olympic Games in Sochi (2014), the FINA World Aquatics Championships (2015), the FIFA Confederations Cup (2017) and the FIFA World Cup (2018). The successful performances of the national teams, clubs, and athletes in many sports should be mentioned. All this demonstrated to the world community the capabilities of Russia as a sports state. Thus, the issues of holding sports competitions and the need to win were relevant for the authorities and population of the Russian Federation and were on the agenda of the country’s top political leadership. Sport was used to mobilize society, its militarization, and sports tournaments were turned into mass national holidays. Sport and athletes in the Russian Federation were maximally politicized, supported (with the exception of individual athletes) the actions of the authorities and their leader and, therefore, became an integral part of the ideology of the “*Russkij mir*” (“Russian world”).
- 2) The image of an athlete as a citizen-hero was entrenched in both the cultural tradition of the USSR and later the Russian Federation. Therefore, athletes are the subject of national cheering, respect and adoration. American scientist R. Cialdini explains the psychological attachment of fans to their idols by the fact that sport is something “serious and very personal, it is their personal self,” and fans identify themselves with the winning team (Robert B. Cialdini). Also, in order to legitimize the modern Russian government, famous athletes, sports functionaries and organizations are actively incorporated into politics. Celebrities of Russian sports are public media figures, many of them are deputies of various levels, and their profiles on social networks have millions of subscribers. For example, A. Kabaeva, M. Valuev, S. Zhurova, V. Tretyak, I. Rodnina, D. Svishchev. The vast majority of

Russian society perceives them as undisputed moral authorities, leaders of public opinion, experts on any current issues.

- 3) Sport is a fast, low-cost, effective, and therefore effective means of propaganda of the “Z-ideology.” Low-cost in the sense that the production of banners, application of the letter “Z” or inscriptions with it on sports uniforms, stands, use of them in sports halls, on playgrounds is relatively cheap. Fast because there are numerous sports leagues, federations, and championships operating in the Russian Federation, so sporting events occur frequently, many of which are broadcast by the media. Effective because, taken together, it makes a strong impression on the perception and behavior of viewers and the media audience.
- 4) In the conditions of the information society, sports competitions form a stable open system: athletes – participants of competitions – fans – supporters – commentators – media. Sports broadcasts, programs make up a significant percentage in the broadcasting network of radio, television, online channels, materials in the printed press. Therefore, the “correct” media picture covers a significant audience of all ages citizens in the Russian Federation.
- 5) Since the occupation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine by Russia, Russian propaganda has constantly spread fakes, disinformation about Ukrainian athletes, the leadership of sports federations, the state of Ukrainian sports in general.

Thus, the modern Russian authorities consider Russian sports and athletes as “conductors” of “Z-ideology” to the broad masses of society in the Russian Federation and abroad.

At the same time, it is important to emphasize that the “Z-ideology” aimed at justifying and supporting aggression against Ukraine has not acquired any logical meaning. It has not been possible to transform it into a system of views and beliefs. It has remained a PR move by the Russian authorities, who have used these symbols for propaganda and propaganda design. The letter “Z” was given the meaning of supporting the war and the Kremlin’s aggressive policy, but it did not answer the question: why is all this being done? Why are hundreds of thousands of citizens dying on both sides of the front line? Why are cities and villages being destroyed? Russians, who have lived under totalitarianism for decades, are accustomed to looking for a certain ideology behind symbols, which, in reality, is not there.

This fundamentally distinguishes “Z-ideology” from, for example, fascist or communist ideology. During World War II, both Red Army soldiers and Wehrmacht soldiers had a clear understanding of the ideological goals of the war, what they were fighting for, and what victory or defeat meant to them. For most modern Russian soldiers involved in the so-called SVO, their motivation boils down to making money (in the words of K. Benedychak, “death has become part of the Russian economy”) or getting the chance to be quickly released from prison and fully rehabilitated legally. Ideologically charged militants were more inspired by the mythologems of the “Russian world” generated by the Russian authorities at the beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian war in 2014 than by the amorphous postulates of “Z-ideology,” reflected in the theses on “denazification,” “demilitarization” of Ukraine; opposition to the “Kiev fascist regime;” “NATO biological laboratories;” that “Russia cannot avoid war with NATO;”

protection of “Donbas residents;” the struggle for “traditional values,” etc. However, the Russian authorities failed to turn this into a coherent ideology.

Putin’s regime is authoritarian, not totalitarian. There is a fundamental difference between totalitarian and authoritarian regimes in terms of the role of ideology. In totalitarian regimes, official state ideology is their cornerstone. It serves to mobilize the masses (creating a “new man” and a new society); justify control over all spheres of life; and legitimize power as “historically necessary.” Examples include Marxism-Leninism in the USSR, National Socialism in Germany, and Maoism in the PRC. Totalitarian ideology not only justifies power, but also claims to explain all spheres of life, from economics to morality.

In contrast, authoritarian regimes do not have a clearly defined official ideology. Their main task is to maintain power and political control, rather than to transform society according to a “grand design.” Instead of ideology, they often rely on pragmatic discourse (“stability,” “order,” “economic development”); traditionalism (religion, national values, appeals to history); and charismatic leaders (a cult of personality without a clear doctrine). This can be called a “set of legitimizing narratives” rather than ideology in the strict sense. The absence of a clear ideology in authoritarian regimes is due to a number of factors.

Yes, from a functional point of view, it is more important for them not to “convince” but to intimidate and buy loyalty (through patronage, control of resources, repression). They also strive to remain flexible. Therefore, the absence of a rigid ideology allows them to adapt to changing conditions and change their rhetoric. They have low mobilization needs – unlike totalitarian systems, authoritarian ones do not seek full participation of society in politics, passive consent (“as long as they don’t touch us”) is enough for them. Authoritarianism often appeals to national, religious, or cultural foundations that replace complex doctrine. Totalitarianism aims at total mobilization and persuasion, while authoritarianism aims at retention and control. Hence the difference in the need for official ideology. As M. Bankowich noted: “Authoritarianism is not motivated by totalitarian ideology, and such a state does not seek to spread a particular system of political ideas” (Bankowich, 2010).

Therefore, we have placed “Z-ideology” in quotation marks. In reality, it is a pseudo-ideology, a smokescreen with no real substance behind it. The more vague the context, the easier it is for the authorities to maneuver in this field, playing on the expectations of their citizens. Yes, athletes were involved in promoting “Z-ideology,” they stuck Z stickers on themselves, but they could not convincingly argue what it meant and why they did it, what this war is for, what its meaning is. Russian society, including the sports community, bears collective guilt for the war.

INTEGRATION OF THE LETTER Z INTO MASS AND PROFESSIONAL SPORTS IN THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION

Kremlin propaganda widely uses the letter “Z” during mass patriotic sports events and official sports performances in order to construct the “Z-ideology.” We present a brief summary of such facts.

- 1) The use of hashtags #*ZaRossiyu* (For Russia), *ZaNashih* (For ours), *ZaPutina* (For Putin), *SvoihNeBrosaem* (Never leave ours)# by famous athletes on social networks. For example, the popular athlete posts patriotic publications, photos with the letter “Z” on clothes in his Telegram channel “*Karyakin. Za cnopm!*.” Thus, the letter “Z” is a kind of symbol of the athlete’s pro-government position.
- 2) The release of sportswear. Since 2012, the company “ZA SPORT,” which with the beginning of the so-called “special operation” changed its name to *ZASPORT* (“*Ya Zasport! Ty Zasport! My Zasport!* (I am for sport! You are for sport! We are for sport!).” It has been developing and producing uniforms for Russian sports teams, federations and corporations. Since 2017 the company became the official outfitter of the Russian Olympic team (*ZASPORT*). A designer A. Zadorina is its founder. She is a daughter of Colonel-General M. Shekin, the president of the Dynamo sports club and the head of the activity support service of Russia’s FSB. A. Zadorina is known for organizing a campaign in 2014 in front of the circus on Tsvetny Boulevard in Moscow to exchange imported clothing for the T-shirts with the inscriptions “*V grobu ya videl vashi sankcii*” (“I saw your sanctions in the grave”), “*Topol sankcij ne boitsya*” (“Topol” is not afraid of sanctions”), “*Sankcii? Ne smeshite moi ‘Iskandery’*” (Sanctions? Don’t make laugh my “Iskanders”) (Ishcenko). Since February 26, 2022, the products with the letter “Z” (stylized as a crudely painted white paint on the side of an armored vehicle) have been sold in the online store “RT,” as well as in one of the largest Internet platforms in the Russian Federation “Wildberries.” The most popular among them are T-shirts and stickers: the letter “Z” in white and the words # *SvoihNeBrosaem* (Never leave ours) # *Mne ne stydno* (I am not ashamed) # *Ya russkij* (I am Russian)# on a khaki background.
- 3) Organizing sports competitions using the letter Z. On December 25, 2022 the All-Russian Kyokushinkai Festival was held at the Martial Arts Center on Varshavskoye Shosse (Moscow). Children aged 10–15 participated in it. All participants of the tournament were awarded medals with the symbols V and Z, on which it was written that they were “*izgotovleni kuznecami Donecka s oblomkov NATOvskih boyepripasov*” (“made by blacksmiths of Donetsk from fragments of NATO ammunition”) (Zhirenko).
- 4) Banners with the letter Z on sports grounds. During matches of Russian teams, fans repeatedly unfurled banners with various meanings: “*Za Rubin*” (March 14, 2022, Kazan, Russian Premier League match FC “Rubin” – “Rostov” (Kolezev), “*Putin – nash prezidentZ*” (“Putin is our presidentZ”) (Moscow, “CSKA-Arena NA,” KHL match “CSKA” – “Spartak” (*At a Hockey...*)). As part of the Russian volleyball championship in the “Tula-Arena” hall: “*Za mir!*” (For peace!), “*Za budushchee!*” (For the future!), “*Za Rossiyu!*” (For Russia!) (Kolodrubskiy). Such matches are regularly broadcast and featured on the pages of local and federal media.
- 5) Placing the letter Z on large sports buildings. On March 24, 2022, it appeared in Buryatia on the doors of the Physical Culture and Sports Complex, the Regional Archery Center, the Central Stadium, and the Regional Martial Arts Center (*In Buryatia...*); on April 30 – at the “Nadezhda” Sports Palace, Chelyabinsk (*The Letter Z...*). Thus, the visualization of the letter Z is the most accessible way to consolidate it in the minds of citizens.

- 6) Holding Z-flash mobs among the population by state institutions. For this purpose, technical tasks were sent to the regions of the Russian Federation for the organization of rallies and concerts. Their participants were to demonstrate “the consolidation of all segments of society concerning the president and his policy of denazification of Ukraine” (*Regional...*). For example, before the semi-final match (March 10, 2022, Arena Erofey stadium, Khabarovsk) of the Russian Men’s Super League Bandy Hockey Championship, the teams “SKA-Neftevik” (Khabarovsk) and “Dynamo” (Moscow) lined up in the letter “Z” in the center of the field. In 2022 to support the Russian army and Russian President V. Putin, the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia organised the All-Russian rally “Za Mir! Za Trud! For Mai!” (“For Peace! For labour! For May!”) Its route is from Vlodivostok to Moscow lasting from April, 12 to May, 1 covered 9,985 km. All federal districts and the so-called “people’s republics” LPR and DPR (*Ulan-Ude...*) were participants of the rally who pasted Z-symbols on their cars and displayed them in the shape of this letter.
- 7) Z-actions by foreign athletes in support of Russian policy. Former world champion in Brazilian jiu-jitsu, American fighter J. Monson⁵ got a Z on his neck (September 2022). He dedicated this tattoo to the Russian special operation in Ukraine (*American...*).

So, the beginning of the active use of the letter “Z” in mass and professional sports takes place during the winter-spring of 2022. Actions in support of the “Z-ideology” occurred at the regional (including the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine), federal and international levels. They covered different segments of society and all these actions were actively replicated by the Russian media.

SPORTSMEN-SYMBOLS OF RUSSIA AS PROPAGANDISTS OF THE “Z-IDEOLOGY”

The most characteristic cases of the promotion of “Z-ideology” by representatives of Russian sports are the following:

- 1) On February 27, 2022, Russian grandmaster S. Karyakin⁶ who was a native of the temporarily occupied Simferopol and a former champion in rapid chess wrote an open letter to Russian President V. Putin in support of “special military operation” against Ukraine (Telegram channel “*Karyakin. Za sport!*”). He supported “the struggle for the demilitarization and denazification of Ukraine with its ruling regime, which has put the security of all of Europe and the Russian Federation at risk for its political goals and ambitions” (*Chess Player Karjakin Supported...*). On February 28, 2022, the International Chess Federation condemned S. Karyakin for

⁵ In 2016, the athlete received a passport of the LPR. On May 28, 2018, Russian President V. Putin signed a decree according to which J. Monson became a citizen of Russia. In November 2021, he spoke about plans to make a film about how people in the DPR and LPR live in the conditions of the conflict in Donbass triggered by Kyiv. He has also repeatedly spoken out in support of Russia.

⁶ In 2009, he took Russian citizenship. Among the reasons he gave was that he had always considered himself a Russian.

publicly declaring such a political position. On March 21, FIDE unanimously decided to disqualify him for six months: “S. Karyakin’s statements harm the reputation of the game of chess and/or FIDE” (*FIDE Ethics*). To this S. Karyakin reacted as follows: “First of all, I am a patriot of my country and only then an athlete” (*FIDE Disqualified a Russian...*). He also stated about “Russophobic sentiments” in FIDE. He was supported by D. Peskov, press secretary of V. Putin, A. Karpov, world chess champion, State Duma deputy.

Such a position is typical of many well-known Russian athletes. The sanctions imposed on them by international sports organisations and the ban on their participation in international competitions have strengthened the support of Z-athletes by the Russian authorities, increased their popularity among Russians, and fuelled anti-Western policy.

- 2) On March 18, 2022, a propaganda concert-rally was held at the Luzhniki Stadium in Moscow on the occasion of the “eighth anniversary of the reunification of Crimea and Sevastopol with Russia” and in support of the Russian Federation’s war against Ukraine. The slogans of this concert were: “*Za mir bez nazizma*” (“For Peace without Nazism”), “*Za Rossiyu*” (“For Russia”). V. Putin spoke at it. Among the participants in the concert were athletes who marched through the stadium in jackets with the letter “Z” made of the tricolor: skier O. Bolshunov, swimmer E. Rylov, rhythmic gymnasts – sisters D. Averina and A. Averina,⁷ gymnast V. Lis-tunova, gymnast I. Kulyak, figure skaters E. Tarasova and V. Morozov, V. Sinitsyna and M. Katsalapov, wrestler M. Yevloev (*Chess Player Karjakin was...*). E. Rylov,⁸ dressed in clothes with the letter “Z,” went on stage and sang the anthem of the Russian Federation.

On April 21, the International Swimming Federation “due to the presence and behavior” of E. Rylov at this event suspended him from all competitions under the auspices of the federation for nine months. After the concert, the British company – the manufacturer of swimming equipment “Speedo” – terminated the contract with him (Avdokhin. *Rylov*). In response, the athlete stated that “he simply supported his country, his president.” D. Svishchev called “this attitude towards E. Rylov for his position and for his Russian passport with Russophobia bordering on Nazism” (*Rylov received...*) and V. Putin called the decision an absurd.

- 3) During the online tournament in the computer game Dota 2 “Dota Pro Circuit 2021/2022: Season 2 – Eastern Europe” (rating tournament) on April 29, 2022. I. Moskalenko under the nickname “Pure” is a player of the most famous Russian esports team “Virtus.pro” drew the letter “Z” on the mini-map during a pause at the beginning of the first semi-final game. Within a few seconds, the letter was shaded. After the game ended, the player called himself an “apolitical person,” apologized and stated that these were “random drawings and lines,” it “came out completely unconsciously” and he did not want to offend anyone. E-sportsmen, commentators namely D. Chumachenko Droog (Moroz) and fans noted the complete lack

⁷ Diana Averina is the silver medalist at the 2022 Tokyo Olympics. Her sister Arina took 4th place.

⁸ Yevgeny Rylov, two-time champion of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games in backstroke (100 and 200 metres).

of meaning in his actions (Inshakov). The tournament organizers disqualified the “Outsiders” team from participating in the tournament. Instead, I. Moskalenko was supported by deputies of the State Duma of the Russian Federation, former athletes: S. Zhurova, M. Valuev, Dm. Svishchev (Badyanov).

- 4) The case of Russian gymnast I. Kulyak gained the greatest resonance related to the use of the letter Z by Russian athletes. He became the third athlete from the Russian Federation on the list to whom personal sanctions related to politics were imposed. I. Kulyak is the Russian Junior Champion (2019), a two-time bronze medalist at the World Championships, and in 2021 served in the Russian Armed Forces. At the Artistic Gymnastics World Cup in Qatar (Doha, March 2–5, 2022), Ukrainian I. Kovtun won the parallel bars exercises, and the Russian gymnast took third place. Therefore, I. Kulyak came to the medal ceremony with the letter “Z,” made of adhesive tape, on his chest. He explained his action as follows: “We were told to stick up the flag – I stuck it up. We were already forbidden from doing everything possible. I just wanted to show where I came from. I wasn’t afraid of the consequences. I didn’t wish anyone harm. The sign ‘Z’ means ‘*Za pobedu*’ (‘For Victory’), ‘*Za mir*’ (‘For Peace’).” After the disqualification, he refused to give official comments. Representatives of the Russian delegation supported the behavior of a member of their team (Yushkov). In turn, the International Gymnastics Federation (FIG) considered I. Kulyak’s behavior “shocking.” The disciplinary commission suspended the gymnast from competitions for the demonstration of the letter for one year. The commission concluded that the athlete violated its statute, disciplinary and ethical codes, and technical regulations. I. Kulyak must also return the bronze medal, prize money and pay court costs (*Russian Gymnast...*). The Russian Gymnastics Federation (RFG) supported I. Kulyak (Balakirev) and filed an appeal with a demand to lift the sanctions the same year. The head of the FSGR, considered the demand to return the medal to be absolutely unfair (Barinova) and stated that the FSGR should sever relations with the International Federation in connection with the suspension of I. Kulyak. The athlete howled that he would not return the medal until he received the results of the appeal.

Russian athletes’ support for athlete I. Kulyak has turned into a demonstration of their support for “Z-ideology” and Z-patriotism. For example, S. Khorkina, two-time Olympic champion in gymnastics, O. Nemov, four-time Olympic champion in gymnastics, D. Marinov, two-time Russian champion and winner of the Russian Cup in gymnastics, S. Karjakin, the chairman of the State Duma Committee on Physical Culture and Sports, Dm. Svishchev. In January 2023 the governor of the Kaluga region paid the legal costs of his fellow athlete from his personal funds.

One of the first athletes who openly supported V. Putin and the special operation in Ukraine was former two-time champion and two-time Olympic silver medalist Evgeni Plushenko. He publicly supported Russia’s attack on Ukraine, calling “the need to conduct a special operation inevitable” (Boiko). During a concert at “Luzhniki” Stadium in 2022, E. Plushenko expressed his support for Russian soldiers participating in the special military operation in Ukraine. The athlete noted, “We must unite and support our army. But we will win” (*Plushenko...*). At the same time, he announced his desire to hold a free ice show in the so-called Donetsk People’s Republic (DPR). Rus-

sian Minister of Sport O. Matitsin fully supported the initiative and stated that it was part of state policy and that this was how Russia demonstrated its openness, because there are no territorial boundaries in sport (Chekanov). Y. Plushenko’s initiative was supported by members of the State Duma. However, even Russian fans ridiculed the skater’s “charity” in their comments on social media, noting that Y. Plushenko was only interested in money. The reason for this was that earlier, for the production of the show “Union of Champions,” in which famous Russian figure skaters performed, individual entrepreneur Evgeni (this is how he applied for the competition) received a grant of 50.5 million rubles (874,000 euros) from the Presidential Fund for Cultural Initiatives in the Field of Culture, Arts, and Creative Industries as part of its support for “cultural figures who have become targets of sanctions for their patriotism and devotion to their country” (*Presidential Propaganda...*). In his project application, Putin supporter Evgeni Plushenko argued that the project had a social focus and a distinctly patriotic character (Avdokhin, *Viewers...*). As a result, in April 2022, the show was staged in seven Russian cities. Thus, E. Plushenko consciously became part of the Russian propaganda machine.

Y. Plushenko’s show in Tula was part of the propaganda event “*Za mir! Ya Rossiyu! Za budushcheye!*” (“For Peace! For Russia! For the Future!”). Three thousand spectators were present in the hall. With the support of the regional government, public figures, volunteers, students, and representatives of the figure skating federation were invited to the ice palace. The chairperson of the Tula Regional Duma spoke at the opening, and the show was broadcast on local television. The letter “Z” was printed on invitations to the event, used to decorate the stands, and displayed on stands where guests wrote “letters to Russian soldiers fighting in Ukraine.” Y. Rudkovskaya, Y. Plushenko’s wife and one of the show’s hosts, said that “our tour is in support of our athletes who were disqualified due to sanctions and did not make it to the world championships. Our show is apolitical; we support our athletes” (Sambur).

Thus, Russia’s titled athletes, who have consistently and actively supported Putin in previous years, have used “Z-ideology” to further convince the Russian dictator of their loyalty. In response to such “reciprocity,” the regime generously finances their projects from the state budget, promotes their businesses, and facilitates their personal enrichment. This is how the Russian “triangle” of power, business, and sports has been “effectively” functioning in Russia’s domestic and foreign policy for many years. From a political point of view, we interpret this as “whitewashing” the personal image of V. Putin and the Russian state as a whole through sport.

Analyzing the actions of Russian Z-athletes, we will highlight the following features of their behavior and the reaction to it of representatives of the Russian authorities and the public: 1) They tried to create the impression that they did not know what this letter could not be applied to sports uniforms (which is an obvious violation of the competition regulations – the authors). 2) Propaganda by the “*russkij sport*” (“Russian sport”) authorities as a component of the ideology of the “Russian world.” Emphasis on narratives about the sports heritage and exploits of predecessors (the USSR). 3) Excessive activity of Russian media in covering such Z-events. Such news was replicated in every issue not only by specialized sports publications. For example, the online media outlet “Soyuznoye Veche” in the report “*Bukva Z na grudi u nego*” (“The letter

Z on his chest”) approved the “unusual, but very patriotic act” of the athlete I. Kuliak. At the same time, the author of the publication notes that “new heroes appear not necessarily in military uniform” (Balobin). 4) The athletes personally emphasize that they did it voluntarily, consciously, and would gladly repeat it again. 5) The actions and statements of Z-athletes are actively supported by their colleagues, coaches from other sports as well as legends and veterans of Russian sports, State Duma deputies. They call the international sport organizations decisions and sanctions “hysteria,” “delusional,” accuse the leadership and members of sports organizations of “Russophobia” and arbitrariness. Russian sports officials interpreted this as an attack on human and civil rights, depriving Russian citizens of the right to express their position on events in their homeland. 6) Russian athletes, with the support of the authorities, “shake up” the situation in international sports. They accuse the IOC and leading sports federations of trying to “mix sports and politics;” they officially refuse to go to international competitions as a sign of protest against political interference in sports; they threaten that Russia will withdraw from international federations, recall its members and judges, create its own Federations or change the “sports citizenship of its federations from Europe to Asia.” Thus, they try in every way to discredit the international sports movement, reduce the authority of sports organizations, and cause reputational damage to famous athletes.

BAN ON THE SYMBOL “Z” IN COUNTRIES AROUND THE WORLD

International sports associations and sports federations did not accept the use of “Z” symbols in sports. Therefore, developed democracies, such as EU member states, banned its use in their information space.

On April 1, 2022, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine adopted a draft law prohibiting, among other things, symbols (the letters “Z,” “V,” and “O”) used by armed and other military formations of the Russian Federation in the war against Ukraine. The bill proposed amendments to the Criminal Code and other regulatory acts, and could result in up to five years in prison (*Ban...*). Also, after the start of full-scale war with Russia, Ukraine stopped issuing license plates for electric vehicles with Latin alphabet combinations beginning with the letter “Z” (meaning “Zero emission”) and with the letter “V.” The relevant decision was made by the Ministry of Internal Affairs. There is no direct ban on their use, and at the owner’s request, the license plate can be replaced with another combination without using symbols of Russia’s aggression against Ukraine (*Electric...*).

In March–April 2022, a number of European countries banned the use of Russian military symbols, including the letter Z and St. George’s ribbon, at the legislative level. Poland became the first EU country to ban the symbol of Russian aggression at the state level. The law of April 13, 2022, “On Special Measures to Counter Support for Aggression Against Ukraine and Protect National Security” introduced a new type of crime: “1. It is prohibited to use, exploit, or promote symbols or names that support the Russian Federation’s aggression against Ukraine. 2. A person who violates the ban is subject to a fine, restriction of liberty, or imprisonment for up to two years” (*Act...*). The authors

of this initiative were MPs from the Left, M. Kopec and M. Rutka. On March 31, 2022, the Lithuanian Seimas supported amendments to the Law on the Safety of Public Entertainment and Celebrations in the second and final reading. They prohibit the use of symbols associated with military aggression and war crimes at public events (*The use of symbols...*). The law stipulated that during public events, it is prohibited to promote and glorify events that contain the ideology of the Nazi and Communist regimes.

On April 19, 2022, in the context of Russia's military aggression against Ukraine, Moldovan President M. Sandu signed a law banning the display of the symbols “Z” and “V.” Fines range from 4,500 to 9,000 lei for individuals and up to 30,000 lei for legal entities (*Parliament...*). The German federal states of Bavaria, Lower Saxony, North Rhine-Westphalia, and the Berlin city government have criminalized the use of the Russian military symbol (Becker).

Private companies have also changed the letter “Z” in their names for political and marketing reasons. To avoid misunderstandings, the Swiss insurance company “Zurich Group changed” its logo (which uses a minimalist “Z” as its trademark) on social media (*Insurer Zurich...*). The tallest multifunctional real estate project in Riga and Latvia, “Z-Towers,” changed its name to “Zunda Towers” in response to the negative symbolism of the letter “Z” (*«Z-Towers»...*).

Thus, in the context of Russia's armed aggression against Ukraine, the ban by European countries on depicting and using the letter “Z” within their national borders was a swift response to the spread of “Z-ideology.”

CONCLUSIONS

In the conditions of the anti-democratic political regime, the Russian authorities deprived sport of the humanistic paradigm and gradually turned it into a mobilization practice of militant patriotism, aggression and a means of military training of the individual. From the beginning of the SVO in Ukraine, the authorities of the aggressor country did not envisage the use of the letter “Z” as a brand. To promote the “Z-ideology,” the Russian authorities actively involved mass and professional sports. With the help of the media and social networks, the actions of Z-patriot athletes and their comments were perceived as a manifestation of support for the war and its public approval. Thus, the “Z-ideology” managed to reach different segments of the population. The authorities did this purposefully and systematically at the international, national, and regional levels. The provocative behavior and statements of Z-athletes and coaches at international competitions also caused a wide information resonance. The Russian media interpreted it in a positive sense in favor of the actions of the authorities, the growth of the personal image of athletes, and domestic sports in general. The appearances of Z-athletes in support of the authorities have had clear external visual effects; for example, celebrities on social media are also adding the capital letter “Z” to their names. Thanks to this, sports competitions created a “picture” of general popular support for the Russian Federation's war in Ukraine and personally for V. Putin.

Within the “Z-ideology,” sport is presented as a symbol of power, unity and national identity. It is a means of opposing “internal cohesion” to external threats, which

creates a feeling of “siege of a fortress” among the citizens of the Russian Federation. Further excessive politicization of sport in the Russian Federation will lead to negative consequences, for example, increasing tension in international relations or a decline in trust in sports institutions. In the context of the “Z-ideology,” Russian sport risks losing its autonomy, turning into an exclusively political tool. The construction of the “Z-ideology” through sport contributes to the strengthening of social control and the formation of a certain model of behavior focused on loyalty to the authorities and the inviolability of the idealization of state values.

The active use of the letter “Z” in mass and professional sports began in the winter and spring of 2022. Actions in support of the “Z-ideology” took place at the regional (including the temporarily occupied territories of Donetsk and Luhansk regions and the Autonomous Republic of Crimea), federal, and international levels. They covered various segments of society. In some cases, they were initiated or supported by foreign athletes. All Z-campaigns and flash mobs were deliberately replicated by the Russian media for their audience. Therefore, in many European countries, the symbol “Z” was legally equated with the ideology or swastika of the Nazi and Communist regimes.

We believe that the letter “Z” was originally conceived as a temporary identification mark for official use marking military equipment for the invasion of Ukraine, the “SVO.” In other words, it was just an identification mark with no particular hidden meaning. After all, none of the numerous military aggressions of the Russian Federation against neighboring countries (Chechnya, Transnistria, Georgia) had a special letter or symbol designation. Therefore, within a short period of time, the Russian authorities were forced to come up with several options for its patriotic interpretation, and thanks to a significant number of centralized measures involving the mass participation of the country’s citizens, they managed to give it a deeper meaning. Thus, it acquired the meaning of a symbol of the power of the Russian armed forces and the correct actions of V. Putin and Russia on the international arena. This symbol is intended for domestic consumption, as it is not officially used during UN General Assembly meetings, the work of other international organizations, conferences, or international meetings. Since Russia has failed to achieve quick positive results in the war with Ukraine, and given the authoritarian nature of the system that has formed there, these symbols will not have the same meaning for Russians in the future as, for example, the hammer and sickle. This determines the prospects for further research.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study is to find out the peculiarities of the Russian Federation's use of Mass and Professional Sports to Construct the "Z-ideology." The Hypothesis and Objectives of the Study are to Analyze the Propaganda of the "Z-ideology" by the Russian Federation at the International, National and Local Levels with the involvement of various actors; to trace the reaction of the world sports community to the demonstration of the Letter "Z" by Russian Athletes and their Public support for the Actions of the Russian Federation in Ukraine and Putin personally.

The following methods were used in the study such as historical (to provide adherence to the "Z-ideology" development chronology; identification of its links with old and modern Russian Federation) and systematic (to carry out analysis of "Z-ideology" as a coherent system) approaches. The methods of induction and deduction were also applied (to research "Z-ideology" as a component of the "Russian world" ideology and the combination of other modern ideologies of "Rashism" and "victory worship" in it); analogies (to examine the key features of the formation and spread of "Z-ideology" based on its similarity to other totalitarian ideologies such as Nazism and communism). Also, structural and functional analysis (to study the interaction of the functional links of "Z-ideology" with other elements of the political system); content analysis (to ensure the study of documents of the central and local government bodies regarding the spread and formation of "Z-ideology"); event analysis (to investigate the dynamics of sports competitions in the field of sports artificially initiated and organized by the Russian Federation authorities with the aim of integrating the letter Z into mass and professional sports); comparative analysis (to show the adoption by countries around the world of laws restricting or prohibiting the use of the symbol "Z"); behavioral (to enable analysis of the Russian athletes, coaches, and fans behavior at domestic and international competitions as well as Russian politicians in their defense); prognostic method (to define the meaning of the symbol "Z" for Russians in the future). Interdisciplinary methods were also used (to give a description of the name, origin, and how the "Z ideology" is visually and linguistically defined in the public sphere).

The behavior and statements of Z-athletes and Z-Coaches at Russian and International Competitions also caused a wide information resonance. The performances of Russian athletes in support of the country's authorities have acquired clear external and demonstrative and visual effects. The construction of "Z-ideology" through sports contributes to the strengthening of social control and the formation of citizens' behavior oriented towards loyalty to the authorities.

Keywords: special military operation, Letter "Z", Z-slogans, Z-vocabulary, flash mobs, Z-athletes, I. Kulyak, mass media

WYKORZYSTANIE SPORTU JAKO ELEMENTU BUDOWY „IDEOLOGII Z” W FEDERACJI ROSYJSKIEJ

STRESZCZENIE

Celem badania jest wyjaśnienie specyfiki wykorzystania przez Federację Rosyjską sportu masowego i zawodowego do budowania „Z-ideologii.” Hipoteza i zadania badania polegają na analizie propagowania „Z-ideologii” przez Federację Rosyjską na szczeblu międzynarodowym, krajowym i lokalnym z udziałem różnych podmiotów; śledzeniu reakcji światowej społeczności sportowej na demonstrowanie litery „Z” przez rosyjskich sportowców oraz ich publiczne poparcie dla działań Federacji Rosyjskiej na Ukrainie i osobiście Putina.

W badaniu wykorzystano następujące metody: podejście historyczne (zachowanie chronologii rozwoju „Z-ideologii”; ujawnienie jej powiązań ze starymi i nowoczesnymi formami Federacji Rosyjskiej) oraz systemowe (analiza „Z-ideologii” jako spójnego systemu). Zastosowano również metody indukcji i dedukcji (badanie „Z-ideologii” jako składnika ideologii „ruskiego miru” oraz połączenia w niej innych współczesnych ideologii – „rasyzmu”, „pobiedobiesie”); analogii (cechy kształtowania i rozpowszechniania „Z-ideologii” na podstawie jej podobieństwa do innych totalitarnych ideologii – nazizmu i komunizmu). Ponadto wykorzystano analizę strukturalno-funkcjonalną (wzajemne oddziaływanie powiązań funkcjonalnych „Z-ideologii” z innymi elementami systemu politycznego); analizę treści (badanie dokumentów organów władzy centralnej i samorządowej dotyczących rozpowszechniania i kształtowania „Z-ideologii”); analizę wydarzeń (dynamika sztucznie inicjowanych i organizowanych przez władze Federacji Rosyjskiej zawodów sportowych w celu integracji litery „Z” w sporcie masowym i zawodowym); podejście komparatystyczne (uchwalanie przez państwa świata ustaw ograniczających lub zakazujących używania symbolu „Z”); behawioralne (analiza zachowań rosyjskich sportowców, trenerów i kibiców podczas zawodów krajowych i międzynarodowych, a także rosyjskich polityków w ich obronie); metodę prognostyczną (znaczenie symbolu „Z” dla Rosjan w perspektywie). Wykorzystano także metody interdyscyplinarne (opis nazwy, genezy oraz sposobu wizualnego i językowego oznaczania «Z-ideologii» w przestrzeni publicznej).

Zachowanie i wypowiedzi sportowców i trenerów kategorii „Z” na zawodach rosyjskich i międzynarodowych wywołały szeroki rezonans informacyjny. Występy rosyjskich sportowców wspierające władze kraju zyskały wyraźne zewnętrzne efekty demonstracyjne i wizualne. Konstruowanie „Z-ideologii” poprzez sport przyczynia się do wzmocnienia kontroli społecznej i kształtowania zachowań obywateli ukierunkowanych na lojalność wobec władzy.

Słowa kluczowe: specjalna operacja wojskowa (SOW), litera „Z”, Z-hasła, Z-słownictwo, flash moby, Z-sportowcy, I. Kulyak, media masowego przekazu

