

A war of words. The representation of the war in Ukraine in the sports media of Latvia

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Abstract

Latvia is an ex-Soviet country with Latvian and ethnically Russian population and a history of uneasy relationship with Russia, including the love and hate relationship with Russian sports. Many athletes and trainers working in Latvia have competed and were trained in Russia, using Russian facilities, or, for the older generation, the Soviet Union. However, Russia and Russian-speaking Latvian residents, including the citizens of Latvia, have been long viewed with suspicion and have been the subject of discrimination at times of crisis.

This paper examines the representation of the war in Ukraine in the sporting media of Latvia from February to early October 2022. The material is sourced from the main news portal of Latvia, Delfi, which has a Latvian-language and a Russian-language versions. It is found that the two versions have significant differences in the way they refer to the war in sport-related news items.

Keywords: war in Ukraine; Latvia; sports media; sport; sport and politics

1. Introduction. Sports as propaganda?

On 11 February 2022, during the winter Olympic Games in Beijing, Ukrainian skeleton athlete Vladyslav Heraskevych posed with the poster “No war in Ukraine.” On 6 March 2022, Russian artistic gymnast Ivan Kuljak entered the podium a bronze medal in the World Cup with letter “Z” displayed on his uniform. Less than three weeks separate the two instances of athletes taking political stances. However, these events take place in two different worlds: the worlds “before” and “after” the beginning of the war in Ukraine. The intervening weeks saw what for many was totally unexpected: a sudden incursion of Russia into the territory of Ukraine, which soon escalated to full-blown war, with the western world taking the side of Ukraine and leaving Russia in total isolation (from the West).

The consequences of the war for the history of sport and physical culture surely pale beyond the humanitarian impact of the disaster, nevertheless, it can be argued that collateral damage from the war can possibly be far reaching and persistent and will have repercussions for people physically remote from the war arena. Sport culture, the way people view athletes and their sporting achievements is being currently changed, as sanctions against Russia encompass not only economic restrictions, but such areas as education, health and culture, including sports culture. In fact, Goretti has convincingly demonstrated that the war and its consequences have dispelled the notion of “sports neutrality” (Goretti, 2022), which was one of the central values of Olympism. This development is neither new nor unexpected, as Casini has noted that “with the growing importance (political, social, and economic) of sports events, the level of political pressure on sports regimes has increased apace” (Casini, 2009: 2). The political and military crisis caused by the Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, did not so much accelerate the politicization of sports as highlight the current political bias of professional sport. When Vladyslav Heraskevych carried the poster “No war in Ukraine,” the International Olympic Committee explained the athlete’s action as a “general call for peace” (Porterfield, 2022), and thus not a violation of Rule 50, which is informed by the idea that “Racism or any form of discrimination has no place in sport” (Athlete Expression: Rule 50). Thus, Heraskevych was not subject to sanction, albeit the IOC asked the athlete not to reiterate the message if he wanted to avoid sanctions in future (Porterfield, 2022). According to Rule 50:2 of the Olympic Charter, “No kind of demonstration or political, religious or racial propaganda is permitted in any Olympic sites, venues or other areas” (Athlete Expression: Rule 50). It is remarkable that the guidelines on Rule 50 for Beijing 2022 Winter Olympic Games specified acceptable venues for athletes’ expression during the Games, including mixed zones (among them meetings with the media), press conferences, interviews, and “on the field of play prior to the start of the competition,” whereas it was prohibited in other instances, including ceremonies, during the competition and in the Olympic Village (The IOC Athletes’ Commission, 2021: 3). This decision was based on a qualitative and quantitative study involving 3,500 athletes from 185 National Olympic Committees, which was carried out by the International Olympic Committee; according to the study, “a clear majority of athletes said that it is not appropriate to demonstrate or express their views on the field of play (70% of respondents), at official ceremonies (70% of respondents) or on the podium (67% of respondents)” (Coventry, 2021). The Guidelines specified that “any behaviour and/or expression that constitutes or signals discrimination, hatred, hostility or the potential for violence on any basis whatsoever is contrary to the Fundamental Principles of Olympism” (The IOC Athletes’ Commission, 2021: 3). The unifying concept for the Games was to be “peace.” The Guidelines on Rule 50 are prepared specifically for each of the Games, and they provide guidance to athletes and spectators on how Rule 50 is to be interpreted on each occasion, and national Olympic Committees can send letters and opinions to the current Guidelines. For Beijing 2022, the Athletes’ Commission of the Russian Olympic Committee (ROC) sent a letter the chair of the IOC Athletes’ Commission Kirsty Coventry, signed by Sofia Velikaya, chair of the ROC Athletes’ Commission, stating firmly that “The Olympic Games should remain a

sports festival, a place where athletes are able to demonstrate their sporting achievements and successes, and does not become a platform for protest movements, political statements, making money and false popularity” (The ROC Athletes Commission, 2021). Her statement is somewhat dubious, given the oft-expressed view that sport is a form of nationalism in Russia (Arnold, 2018; Arnold, 2021), with Olympic sport in particular being a form of political propaganda (Grix & Brannagan, 2016: 255). The Latvian Olympic Committee did not submit an official letter, but the National Olympic Committee (NOC) of Lithuania submitted a terse three-sentence letter, stating that “Olympic Games must remain on athletes’ performances, sport and the international unity and harmony. No kind of demonstration or political, religious or racial propaganda should be permitted in any Olympic sites, venues or other areas” (National Olympic Committee of Lithuania, 2021). Compared to the more effusive, but also vaguer ROC letter, the Lithuanian NOC specifically mentioned Olympic sites and stated that any demonstration [sic] should be prohibited. The NOC of Lithuania thus offered a much stricter interpretations than the one that made it into the Beijing Guidelines, which stipulated acceptable and non-acceptable times and places for athletes to demonstrate their views.

Heraskevych’s demonstration effectively falls into the grey area of the Guidelines: it did not take place on the field or prior to the start of the competition, but after he has completed his course. Neither did Heraskevych’s poster call for hostility, or at least not explicitly, so it was interpreted as peace because it called for the rejection of war. Whether the rejection of war automatically and unambiguously amounts to the values of “Peace, Respect, Solidarity, Inclusion and Equality” proposed for the Games in Beijing (Coventry, 2021) is an open question. By contrast, Kuljak’s expression, albeit it did not take place during an Olympic event but during an international championship is seemingly more straightforward. The demonstration took place during an award ceremony, which the IOC strictly condemns. It also has clear associations with military aggression, as it uses the iconic identification mark born by the Russian military forces in Ukraine. Against this backdrop of increased politicisation in sport, further fuelled by the war in Ukraine, this study investigates the use of sport as a propaganda tool in Latvian media, in light of the history and ethnic composition of the country.

2. Sports and politics in Latvia

In response to the invasion of February 24, multiple international sports organization, among them the International Olympic Committee, as well as FIFA, World Athletics, and others, condemned the war and “imposed bans and sanctions on Russian and Belarussian sports bodies and athletes” (Heerd & Battaglia, 2022). Latvia, one of the countries sharing borders with both Russia and Belarus, was among the first to denounce the war, and, alongside the other Baltic countries, Lithuania and Estonia, Latvia continues to provide support to Ukraine. Likewise, the Latvian Olympic Committee and several sports federations reacted early on, expressing their disapproval of the aggression and urging international sports organizations to ban Russian and Belarussian athletes from competitions. In particular, the Latvian paralympic

team was among the teams which refused to compete against Russian athletes in Beijing, leading to the expulsion of the Russian parathletes on the eve of the Games. Likewise, numerous Latvian athletes and sports officials denounced the war early on and refused to compete against and work in international committees and federations that included Russian representatives.

To better contextualize the prompt and unambiguous response of the Latvian officials and athletes regarding the war, it is useful to take a brief look at the history of Latvia and its recent political stance towards Russia as a country as well as towards Russian culture and sport.

Latvia, like Estonia, Lithuania, Ukraine, Belarus and numerous other ex-Soviet countries gained its independence in 1990, following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Unlike Ukraine and Belarus, however, the Baltic countries gained independence for the second time in their history, as the three republics already existed prior to the Second World War, when they were annexed by the Soviet Union. At the time of its occupation by the Soviet army, Latvia, while officially a republic, was an autocracy, its then president Karlis Ulmanis consolidating his power as a result of a military coup-d'état, a fact acknowledged by Latvian historians.¹ The period of the Soviet occupation is widely viewed in Latvia as “Russian occupation,” despite the facts that the then head of the USSR I. V. Stalin was an ethnic Georgian and the Soviet government was ethnically diverse, including ethnic Latvians who occupied important positions in Moscow. Numerous Russian-speaking specialists settled on the territory of Latvia between the 1940s and the 1990s, supplementing the Russian minority that had been there prior to the occupation.

The history of Olympic and international sports on the territory of Latvia goes back to the time of the Russian Empire. The first sports association established on the territory of Latvia was the Riga Gymnastics Association (1862). Other sports, including cycling, swimming and rowing were also developing since the beginning of the nineteenth century. In fact, when the national team of the Russian Empire for the first time participated in the Olympic Games in Stockholm in 1912, it included 31 Latvian athletes out of the total of 169 athletes (Apine, 2003: 19). Sports and physical culture were actively developing in Latvia already during the first republic (1918-1939) and under the regime of Karlis Ulmanis (1939-1940), and this development continued after the end of the Second World War, when Latvia became part of the Soviet Union. The Latvian Olympic Committee was established in 1922, presided over by Janis Dikmanis, who was elected to the IOC. The athletes of the Latvian Republic participated in the first Winter Olympic Games in Chamonix in 1924, where two athletes, the speed skater Alberts Rumba and the skier Roberts Plume represented the young country. After WW2, physical culture and exercise were part of the Soviet state priorities, and certain sports, including sport games (soccer, hockey, basketball and volleyball) as well as biathlon, track and field athletics and rhythmic gymnastics, continued to develop, enabling athletes from Latvia to perform successfully as part of the Soviet team (Gravitis, 2018).

¹ This is the position of the historians who contributed several articles to part 2 of the edited volume *Latvia and Latvians*, 2018, issued in honor of the centenary of Latvia in three languages (Latvian, English and Russian) by the Latvian Academy of Sciences.

After the independence, Latvia adopted a strict anti-Russian stance, both towards Russia as a country and towards its own residents of Russian ethnicity. Thus, Latvian residents who entered the country under the occupiers (after 1940) were denied citizenship and were issued “non-citizen” passports, though they were allowed to apply for citizenship following regular procedure for foreigners. Still, Latvian sport kept close ties with Russia. Prior to the February 2022, numerous Latvian athletes and coaches were part of Russian teams (particularly in hockey and soccer teams), trained, coached and competed in Russia, etc. Visits from Russian coaches were frequent, especially in rhythmic gymnastics, dance sports, chess, fire sport and others. The war made numerous Latvian athletes, of Latvian, Russian and mixed ethnicities face the choice of breaking all ties with Russia or of maintaining these ties. Neutrality was not an option.

The ethnic divisions between Latvian speaking and Russian speaking populations have been one of the key factors in Latvian politics (Muižnieks, 2006), though under the circumstances of Covid-19 pandemic the national discourse has lost some of its vibrancy. With the beginning of the war in Ukraine, nationalist discourses reemerged, particularly in view of the Latvian parliamentary election that took place on 1 October 2022. Political discourse pervaded all areas, including sports, and it is in this context that athletic bodies became perceived not as physical entities but as political. This is unsurprising, as sport has been revealed as one of “soft power” levers used by states that, as Grix and Brannagan stated, are “seeking to acquire various forms of cultural and political attraction” (Grix & Brannagan, 2016: 251). Sanctions, in particular sanctions on sporting events, have been conceptualized as “psychological” tools, albeit their efficiency may differ in each case (Williams, 2022); as with economic sanctions, cultural sanctions can be theorized as a game of survival, as they can potentially harm the side imposing the sanctions as well as the one against which sanctions are imposed (Enrico, 2017).

In the case of Latvia and its sanctions against Russia, one needs to bear in mind that the nation has regained independence only three decades ago and which remains internally divided along ethnic lines, with politicians using the ethnic heterogeneity of the country’s population to downplay strong economic divisions within the country. Under these circumstances, after the events of February 24, Latvian athletes were pushed to take political stances, choosing their allegiances and making their views public.

3. Materials and methods

The present study looked at a selection of news items published on the largest news website of Latvia, Delfi. The news website has both Latvian (www.delfi.lv) and Russian versions (<https://rus.delfi.lv>), which share the same main categories and offer the same services, but do not always reprint identical news items. The target audience of the Latvian version mainly consist of Latvian speakers, although Russian speakers would visit the Latvian website to check information, or, alternatively, to access information in Latvia, whether as language practice or to be more integrated in the culture. The Russian version is used almost solely by Russian

speakers. Both versions have an option for leaving comments to every article, as well as liking or disliking previous comments. Delfi administration warns of its right to delete comments deemed inappropriate, and, as the present study found, comments on sport news items older than five to six months are permanently deleted, whether to save space or because they are considered inappropriate.

The news website publishes original stories, reprints from foreign news, including BBC news, etc., as well as stories supplied by LETA, Latvian official news agency. It also runs “opinion” articles and interviews, which are available to paid subscribers. For the purposes of the present study, selected sport news articles were examined irrespectively of their source.

190 sport news in Latvian and Russian published between 23 February and 4 October 2022 have been considered, and 65 of them have been selected for closer semantic analysis. The articles retained for analysis all addressed the war in Ukraine and the issues it posed for sport. As an additional part of the study, 61 comments to articles published from 7 August 2022 onwards were subjected to linguistic and semantic analysis. Where possible, both Latvian and Russian versions of the same news articles and comments thereto have been examined, but it was found that many news articles were peculiar to the Latvian version. The selected “opinion” articles were only available in Latvian, even though the Russian website also has a subscriber-only category. The most likely reason why the Latvian “opinion” pieces have not been translated into Russian is that all the “opinion” articles in the corpus take a very firm, often aggressive stance against Russia, which could have been perceived as unattractive to the Russian-speaking paying subscribers. On the other hand, short items on news of local importance, such as the story of the Latvian-Russian gymnast Jelizaveta Polstyanaya, are available on both Latvian and Russian websites.

In this study, semantic analysis was used to group words related to the war into categories with similar meaning and different connotation, as well as to discuss words from the same word families used in the text to provide emotional colouring and evaluation of the war while reporting sports news. Another method used for the study was the creation of word clouds using Semantic Word Cloud Visualization. The limitations of the usage of word clouds for semantic analysis have been long recognized, including the fact that semantic word clouds can break up collocations and take words out of context (Medelyan; Temple, 2019). At the same time, word clouds are a powerful tool for analysing the emotional connotations of a text (Heimerl, 2014; Arnal, 2020), so, with this caveat, two word clouds was created out of single articles in Latvian and Russian. Both groups of articles were used untranslated, with the commentary explaining the placement of the words that appear in the visualizations.

4. Results and discussion. “Aggression” or “military incursion”?

The semantic and linguistic analysis of the news items and comments concentrated on the ways in which the journalists, interviewees and readers referred to the war in Ukraine, the sanctions

and the rationale therefore, with a particular focus on the language relating to bodies physical and metaphorical and the uneasy relation between sports and politics.

It was found that Russian announcements are less likely to use affective, judgmental language when discussing Russia and its invasion of Ukraine. Sanctions in sport are reported matter-of-factly. Some politically coloured news items only appear in the .lv version (emigration of A. Davydova, described as “flight” from Russia in the .lv version, (Appendix 1, item 1) and are not replicated on the Russian website. This is particularly the case of the “opinion” pieces, which tend to be emotional to the point of nationalism and xenophobia.

Relating short news, the Latvian-language texts are more likely to use set phrases, terms and collocations, such as “occupiers” (Appendix 1, item 2), “aggression” (Appendix 1, item 3), “aggressive and unprovoked invasion of Ukraine” (Appendix 1, items 4 & 5), and “aggressor state” (Appendix 1, item 5). The word “occupier” and its cognates (“occupation,” “occupational,” “to occupy”) are particularly frequent and can be used in several places within the same article, which can be explained by reference to Latvia’s traumatic experience of having been an occupied country for fifty years. In Latvian political and popular historical discourse, the word “occupation” and its cognates are frequently used as well. In turn, the references to “aggressor state” and the set phrase “aggressive and unprovoked invasion of Ukraine” appear to be borrowed from foreign-language sources, including the statements of international organizations. Thus, the official statement of the U.S. Department of State, “Statement on Russia’s War on Ukraine & International Sport,” dated March 8, 2022, refers to “Russia’s unprovoked and unjustifiable war of choice against Ukraine” (U.S. Department of State, 2022). This tendency can be seen by analysing the article relating to Ivan Kuliak’s wearing of letter “Z” in Latvian press (Appendix 1, item 6), made using Semantic Word Cloud Visualization (Fig. 1). It can be seen that the words for the countries (“Krievija(s)” – Russia, “Ukraina” – Ukraine) are as prominent as the name of the gymnast, the reference to the war (“karu”) is the next in terms of font, and the words belonging to the field of sports (“sacensibas” – competitions; “vingrotajs” – gymnast; “kausa” – Cup) are given in smaller font, in the same font as the words related to war. It should be noted that the word cloud generator does not have localization for the Latvian language, which would have slightly influenced the visualization results.



Figure 1. Visualization of the Latvian news article on the Russian gymnast Ivan Kuliak wearing letter "Z" at the awarding ceremony

Russian-language news items tend to use neutral and at times even euphemistic language in describing the war, though none of them adopted the euphemism “special military operation” used by the officials of the Russian Federation. The words used to describe the events in Ukraine include “large-scale incursion” (Appendix 2, item 1) or simply “military incursion” (Appendix 2, items 2 & 3), as well as the evasive “serious escalation of the situation” (Appendix 2, item 4) and the euphemistic “in view of the events” (Appendix 2, item 5). It is also common for the Russian-language texts of Delfi news items to refer simply to “the war in Ukraine,” avoiding any epithets.

The emphasis on the war theme is evident from visualization of the Russian article related to the decision to exclude Russian athletes from international competitions (Appendix 2, item): the graphic shows that the most prominent words, in red and green, designate the countries Russia and Ukraine, with the word “International” next to them in prominence (Fig. 2). The other prominent word, “вторжение” can be translated as either “invasion” or “incursion,” and, while it is not neutral, it is less emotional when compared to the lexicon used by the Latvian website. Sport-related words, such as “tournaments,” “soccer,” “sport,” “clubs,” “FIG” and others, are secondary to the words that relate to the international situation and the war. While this article concerns the situation in sports in general, rather than touching on its outcome for individual athletes, as is the case for some gymnasts, the overall impression is of the political situation and the war being more important than sports culture.

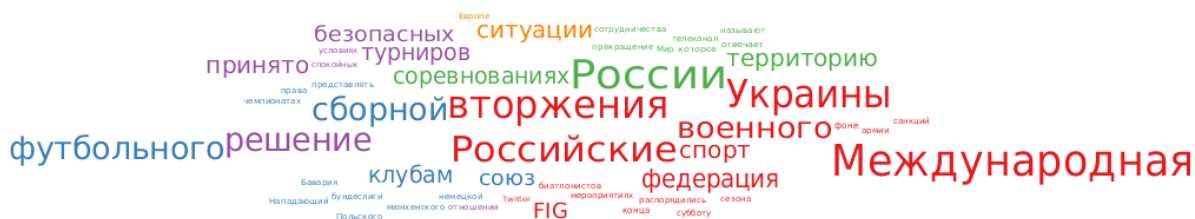


Figure 2. Visualization of the Russian article regarding the banning of the Russian athletes from international competitions

Another gymnastics-related story that received dramatic coverage in Delfi concerned a Latvian-Russian gymnast Jelizaveta Polstyanaya. The story of Polstyanaya was covered intensively and emotionally in the Russian press (Appendix 2, items 5 & 6), the Latvian press coverage matter-of-factly following the Russian texts (Appendix 1, items 10 & 11). The gymnast, who had Latvian-Russian citizenship (a rare occurrence in itself, as noted by a Russian-language commentator, Appendix 2, item 5), was offered a choice of refusing the Russian citizenship or seeing financial assistance for competition participation withdrawn in summer 2022. According to the gymnast, she was pressurized by the Latvian Olympic Committee (LOC) to reject Russian citizenship, but she decided to retain it, as her family resided in Russia. The LOC later denied having put pressure on the gymnast but confirmed that as a Russian citizen she was not eligible for funding to cover competition expenses. The comments to the news items related to Polstyanaya show that Russian citizens are often perceived as a threat to the Latvian society, and, indeed, they have been accused of espionage in the past, while the 2023 legislation was designed not only to prevent Russian citizens from getting residence permit in Latvia, but also to deny the holders of residence permits, many of whom are senior citizens, further extension, unless they pass a language test that would “prove [their] loyalty” (Anon., Russian Citizens Take Language Tests to Avoid Expulsion, June 13, 2023).

Comments in both .lv and .ru versions tend to be emotional, with discussions and heated arguments taking place. The Russian version commentators seem to be more active, producing 40 comments as compared to 11 comments by Latvian commentators, though this may reflect Delfi’s work on deleting comments rather than the readers’ activity. It is noteworthy that the Russian-language comments are also more effusive but tending towards a defensive-accusative stance (e.g., referring to the US invasion of Iraq, when no sanctions were imposed on the aggressor state), whereas Latvian-language commentators are more outspoken, often using pejorative language to refer to Russia and its representatives.

Other tendencies of note are the use of language that refer to bodies, physicality and bodily processes. In fact, the Latvian language news items include the only instance of swear language use in corpus, reporting the reaction of Ukrainian boxer Oleksander Usik to the Russian forces occupying the boxer’s home. Usik wrote a Twitter post (in Russian), where he used swear words to refer to the Russian forces, and the post image was used in the respective Latvian news items, with a translation of the swear language (Appendix 1, item 1).

The metaphor used by journalists and adopted by readers to refer to Latvian athletes and their political stance vis-à-vis the war is “spineless” as opposed to “spined” individuals (Appendix 2, item 7 & comments to item 5). Remarkably, those athletes who strongly condemned the invasion and Russians as a nation were described as “spined,” whereas the athletes who refrained from such express condemnation or suggested that sanctions may not have been the optimal response were tagged “spineless,” ignoring the fact that refusing to go with the majority or even going against it requires more courage than going with the stream. Accordingly, the Latvian boxer Maris Briedis, who on February 28, 2022, refused to “take sides” was condemned in media (Appendix 1, items 8 & 9). The semantic field of courage, valour and physical ability is particularly rich in the Latvian corpus, which tends to use more emotional expression, but also occasionally appears in Russian news, especially when reporting athletes’ actual words, and in comments. Professional injuries, the effort and discipline that goes into professional sports training, the disappointments of a disturbed or terminated career in sport because of the events and the sanctions are also mentioned regularly, with athletes showing awareness of their bodies becoming weighted pieces in the game of international politics.

5. Conclusion

The comparison of news items presented on the two interfaces, which are not identical, and analysis of the readers’ comments to them, shows that the Latvian-language media uses emotionally charged vocabulary, which is mirrored in readers’ comments. Neutral vocabulary is avoided or kept to the minimum. By contrast, the Russian-language version uses neutral or euphemistic vocabulary when alluding to the war or avoids the topic altogether. The readers’ comments to the Russian-language article tend to either be “on the defensive,” e.g., alluding to the war in Iraq and other analogous situations, or to circumvent the issue of war by arguing that sport should be beyond politics. This strategy for up-playing the Russian-Latvian conflict busts the myth of sports neutrality, with Russian-speaking citizens and resident non-citizens of Latvia identified as potential threat, as the story of Latvian-Russian gymnast Jelizaveta Polstyanaya, a Russian-Latvian gymnast who performed for Latvia prior to the war, exemplifies.

The theme emerging consistently in Latvian and Russian articles and comments is the appropriateness of the connection between sports and politics and the role of sport in political propaganda. It is a known fact that Russia uses sport as part of its state propaganda, and this fact is stressed in Latvian-language articles and comments. Russian-language commentators tend to argue in favour of separating sports and politics and allowing athletes to be first and foremost athletes, which goes hand in hand with some international sports organizations allowing Russian and Belorussian athletes to compete under the neutral flag.

Overall, seems that the war in Ukraine consolidated the identification between the body athletic and the body political.

In Latvian-language sports media, notably the Delfi articles in the corpus under discussion, Ukrainian athletes, as well as those Latvian athletes who take firm stance against the war are foregrounded as champions and models. Journalists, the heroes of their stories (professional athletes, sports officials) and most .lv version commentators view the politicization of (Russian and Byelorussian) athletes' bodies as state-induced, autocratic and undesirable, whereas the politicization of Ukrainian and Latvian sports is viewed as a democratic and positive tendency. Whatever the outcome of the war, it appears that the physicality of professional athletes' bodies and the phenomenon of sport as a cultural physical activity is henceforth likely to be eclipsed by the body's potential to become a tool of political expression, whether for promoting peace and democracy or for more sinister purposes.

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Appendix 1. List of articles in Latvian under discussion

Nr	Translated title	Date	Hyperlink
1	The general secretary of the local Olympic Committee flees from Russia	September 29, 2022	https://www.delfi.lv/sports/news/other_kinds/other/no-krievijas-aizbegusi-vietejas-olimpiskas-komitejas-generalsekretare.d?id=54794302
2	The house of Ukrainian boxer Usik in the vicinity of Kyiv taken by the occupiers	March 28, 2022	https://www.delfi.lv/sports/news/3-puslaiks/ukrainu-boksera-usika-maju-kijivas-apkartne-ienemusi-okupanti.d?id=54189622

3	The Latvian U21 soccer team coach Basov on the tragedy of the war in Ukraine and his denial of Russian citizenship	March 23, 2022	https://www.delfi.lv/sports/news/futbols/latvijas-u-21-izlases-treneris-basovs-par-ukrainas-kara-tragediju-un-atteiksanos-no-krievijas-pilsonibas.d?id=54175164
4	When Russian and Byelorussian hockey teams return, they will not be put under the lower divisions by the IIHF	September 30, 2022	https://www.delfi.lv/sports/news/hokejs/atgriezoties-krievijas-un-baltkrievijas-hokeja-izlase-i-hf-tas-nepazeminas-uz-zemakam-divizijam.d?id=54796104
5	“We shall not work with the occupiers.” Ekmanis and Kotans withdraw participation in the IBSF committees	September 28, 2022	https://www.delfi.lv/sports/news/winter_sports/bobsleigh/ar-okupantie-m-kopa-nestradasim-ekmanis-un-kotans-atsauc-dalibu-ibsf-komitejas.d?id=54788962
6	The sympathizer of aggressor Putin Kulak competes using a sign supporting the war	March 6, 2022	https://www.delfi.lv/sports/news/other_kinds/other/agresora-putina-pie-kritejs-vingrotajs-kulaks-sacensibas-starte-ar-karu-atbalstosu-zimi.d?id=54124142
7	Matryoshkas, populism and fears. The war in Ukraine as an exam to Latvian sport	March 15, 2022	https://www.delfi.lv/mvp/sedies-pieci/matrjoskas-populisms-un-bailes-ukrainas-kara-eksamens-latvijas-sportam?id=54149818
8	Briedis at last speaks on the war: “I shall not join either side.”	February 28, 2022	https://www.delfi.lv/sports/news/other_kinds/other/briedis-beidzot-izsak-par-karu-nenostasos-neviena-puse.d?id=54106222
9	Kristaps Zutis: “Currently I view Maris Briedis as a traitor”	March 25, 2022	https://www.delfi.lv/sports/news/3-puslaiks/kristaps-zutis-mairi-briedi-so-brid-redzu-ka-nodeveju.d?id=54183854

10	The Latvian Female Gymnast Polstyanaya was allowed to participate in the World Championship at her own expense	August 9, 2022	https://www.delfi.lv/sports/news/other_kinds/other/makslas-vingrotajai-polstjanajai-lauj-piedalities-pasaules-cempionata-par-personigajiem-lidzekliem.d?id=54624262
11	The LOC did not demand from the gymnast Polstyanaya to reject Russian citizenship	August 6, 2022	https://www.delfi.lv/sports/news/other_kinds/athletics/lok-vingrotajai-polstjanajai-netika-izvirzita-prasiba-atteikties-no-krievijas-pilsonibas.d?id=54615206

Appendix 2. List of articles in Russian under discussion

Nr	Title	Date	Hyperlink
1	A 15-year-old Ukrainian female gymnast refused to mount the podium with Russians	March 8, 2022	https://rus.delfi.lv/sport/worldsport/15-letnyaya-ukrainskaya-gimnastka-otkazalas-podnimatsya-na-odin-pedestal-s-rossiyankami?id=54128866
2	International sport federations banned the use of the Russian flag and hymn at competitions	February 27, 2022	https://rus.delfi.lv/sport/worldsport/mezhdunarodnye-sportivnye-federacii-zapretili-flag-i-gimn-rossii-na-sorevnovaniyah?id=54101590
3	Russian gymnasts were allowed to participate in the World Cup in Qatar despite the Ukrainian ban	March 2, 2022	https://rus.delfi.lv/sport/worldsport/rossijskim-gimnastam-razreshili-vystupit-na-kubke-mira-v-katare-vopreki-zapretu-ukrainy?id=541116409
4	Russia as person <i>non grata</i> in sport	March 1, 2022	https://rus.delfi.lv/sport/worldsport/rossiya-persona-non-grata-v-sporte?id=54107518

5	The Latvian Female Gymnast Polstyanaya was allowed to participate in the World Championship at her own expense	August 10, 2022	https://rus.delfi.lv/sport/latviansport/latvijskoj-gimnastke-polstyanoj-ra-zreshili-vystupit-na-chempionate-mira-za-svoj-schet?id=54625550
6	The LOC did not demand from the gymnast Polstyanaya to reject Russian citizenship	August 7, 2022	https://rus.delfi.lv/sport/latviansport/lok-ne-trebovali-ot-gimnastki-polstyanoj-otkazyvatsya-ot-grazhdanstva-rossii?id=54616510