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Propaganda

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NATO IN THE NEW HYBRID WARFARE ENVIRONMENT¹

Barbora Maronkova

NATO Information and Documentation Centre

The new security environment is amongst others experiencing asymmetric security threats that are often referred to as hybrid warfare or deployment of grey-zone tactics. Whilst such tactics were observed to be used by various non-state actors in the past decade, the actions carried out by the Russian Federation in the spring of 2014 against its neighbour Ukraine have brought a new era to the international order. This chapter examines the actions and decisions undertaken by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in the aftermath of the illegal and illegitimate annexation of Crimea in 2014 and NATO's response to the newly changed environment in the Euro-Atlantic area. From strengthening its regular defence posture and beefing up its deterrence to improving the resilience of its individual allies and adopting measures to strengthen its cyber defence capabilities, NATO continues to adapt to the new challenges to Euro-Atlantic security.

NATO in the Hybrid Warfare Environment

Hybrid warfare is nothing new. The military strategist Colin Gray argues that this modern warfare is not new and that mankind has always used asymmetric approaches to exploit the enemy's weakness. New technologies, such as cyber-attacks, are in fact not changing the nature of asymmetry and warfare. They just add a new dimension.²

In the history of humanity, we can find many examples of deliberate twisting of

information to mislead the enemy: One of the oldest examples is the Trojan horse offered to the city of Troy by the Greeks. The point of the gift was pure deception to gain a strategic advantage. In their encyclopaedia of the history of propaganda and persuasion, leading authors in public diplomacy provide dozens of case studies, from the 1500s up until today, with illustrative examples of the use of propaganda, disinformation, and deception during the Reformation period in Europe, the French Revolution, the First and Second World Wars, and the infamous Nazi and Soviet propaganda tactics.³

¹ Disclaimer: The opinions expressed by the author of this article are her own. They do not necessarily reflect NATO's official policy.

² D. Van Puyvelde, *Hybrid War – Does It Even Exist?*, "NATO Review", 2015, [www.nato.int/docu/review/2015/Also-in-2015/hybrid-modern-future-warfare-russia-ukraine/EN/ access: 08 March 2018].

³ N. J. Cull, D. Culbert, D. Welch, *Propaganda and Mass Persuasion: A Historical Encyclopedia: 1500 to the Present*, ABC-CLIO: 2003.

Diego Ruiz Palmer from NATO writes in his article for NATO Defence College:

While the fog of war is inherent to warfare, hostilities in this new age of asymmetry have exhibited, nearly universally, complex combinations of actors, narratives, tactics and technologies – as well as ambiguous interaction between the local, regional and international contexts in which they take place.⁴



actors of asymmetric warfare resort to the use of so-called grey-zone tactics

And whilst aspects of asymmetric warfare were used already by the Taliban in Afghanistan, Hezbollah in Lebanon, and ISIL in Iraq and Syria⁵, these were carried out by non-state actors, using asymmetric tactics to make up for their weakness vis-a-vis a greater military power.

Some experts argue that actors of asymmetric warfare resort to the use of so-called grey-zone tactics. Grey-zone tactics are to be sufficiently ambiguous to leave targets unaware of how to respond, writes the Economist in its special edition The Next War⁶. Hal Brands from Foreign Policy Research Institute in Philadelphia states that grey-zone tactics are frequently shrouded in misinformation and deception and are often conducted in a way that is meant to make proper attribution of the responsible party difficult to nail down.

Grey zone success depends on patience and an ability to blend together all the instruments of state power in ways that pluralistic, democratic societies find harder to achieve.⁷

The proliferation of terminology to respond to the current asymmetric warfare environment suggests the seriousness of the issue, necessity of further expert research as well as appropriate adoption of policies and strategies by state actors and institutions such as NATO.

New Awakening

A new moment in the hybrid warfare era emerged when a state actor engaged in a well planned and executed hybrid warfare in the winter and spring of 2014 towards its neighbour, Ukraine. From the moment of the illegal annexation of Crimea by the “little green men”, experts and military strategists have all agreed that the new hybrid warfare has arrived and is here to stay for an indefinite period of time until a new form of warfare arises.

The tactics used by the Russian Federation were intrusion of the “little green men” (i.e. Russian troops without insignia) into the Crimean peninsula, a bogus referendum on the annexation of Crimea to Russia combined with wide-spread propaganda and disinformation about attacks of Ukrainian nationalists on Russian-speaking citizens in both Crimea and Donbas, a bogus distortion of modern history, and cyber-attacks combined with energy blackmail.

⁴ D. Ruiz Palmer, *Back to the Future – Russia's Hybrid Warfare, Revolutions in Military Affairs and Cold War Comparisons*, “NATO Defence College Research Paper”, No. 120, October 2015.

⁵ F. G. Hoffman, *Hybrid Warfare and Challenges*, “JFQ”, Issue 52, first quarter, 2009.

⁶ *Shades of Grey*, “The Economist”, 27 January 2018.

⁷ *Shades of Grey*, “The Economist”, 27 January 2018.

⁸ Gen. V. Gerasimov, “*Military-Industrial Kurier*”, 27 February 2013.

As early as February 2013, the Russian Chief of the General Staff, General Gerasimov had proclaimed that the role of non-military means of achieving political and strategic goals has grown and that new methods of conflict include a broad use of political, economic, informational, humanitarian, and other non-military measures.⁸

In February 2017, the Russian Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu announced that he had created units within the army to wage an information war: “Essentially, the information conflict is a component of general conflict. Deriving from that, Russia has made an effort to form structures that are engaged in this matter.” He added that these were far more effective than anything Russia had used before for “counter-propaganda” purposes.⁹ According to Ruiz Palmer, Russia’s adoption of hybrid warfare is a combination of a strategic opportunity and necessity, tailored to today’s environment of high connectivity and thus vulnerability, allowing the usage of mixed, mostly non-military means to achieve its goal without resorting to destructive military power that could prove ultimately unachievable.¹⁰

The events in Ukraine in spring 2014 have been an awakening to many in the West and confirmation of what Russia’s neighbours have been trying to say for several years already – be in Georgia or the Baltic states, that the Kremlin conducts confrontational policy and violates international law, destroys the global and regional security

architecture, and seeks to divide Europe and weaken trans-Atlantic structures. The Lithuanian President Dalia Grybauskaitė has long been vocal about her country’s vulnerability to its neighbour: “Lithuania is ‘already under attack’ from Kremlin propaganda and disinformation”, a targeted campaign she considers a possible curtain-raiser to an invasion of her country.”¹¹

The former NATO Deputy Secretary General, Ambassador Alexander Vershbow argued on 01 May 2014 to a group of journalists in Washington DC that Russia’s annexation of Crimea and its apparent manipulation of unrest in eastern Ukraine have fundamentally changed the NATO-Russia relationship.¹² In February 2015, he developed the arguments further: “To the East, Russia has torn up the international rule book. It has returned to a strategy of power politics, threatening Ukraine and European and global security more generally.”¹³

NATO’s Response to Hybrid Warfare

In its Wales Summit declaration dated 05 September 2014, NATO describes hybrid warfare as a wide range of overt and covert military, paramilitary, and civilian measures employed in a highly integrated design.¹⁴

NATO’s heads of states and governments have identified the organization’s response to hybrid warfare in urging the alliance to develop:

⁹ My Truth against Yours, “The Economist”, 27 January 2018.

¹⁰ D. Ruiz Palmer, *Back to the Future – Russia’s Hybrid Warfare, Revolutions in Military Affairs and Cold War Comparisons*, “NATO Defence College Research Paper”, No. 120, October 2015.

¹¹ M. Weiss, *The President Who Dared to Call Putin’s Russia What It Is: A Terrorist State*, “Daily Beast”, 18 March 2016, [www.thedailybeast.com/the-president-who-dared-to-call-putins-russia-what-it-is-a-terrorist-state access: 09 March 2018].

¹² *Russia Now an Adversary, NATO Official Says*, “CBS News”, 01 May 2014, [https://www.cbsnews.com/news/russia-now-an-adversary-nato-official-says access: 08 March 2018].

¹³ A. Vershbow, *Meeting the Strategic Communication Challenge*, “NATO Website”, 11 February 2015, [www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_117556.htm?selectedLocale=en access: 09 March 2018].

¹⁴ *Wales Summit Declaration*, “NATO Website”, 05 September 2014, [www.nato.int/cps/ic/natohq/official_texts_112964.htm access: 07 March 2018].

*The necessary tools and procedures required to deter and respond effectively to hybrid warfare threats, and the capabilities to reinforce national forces. This will also include enhancing strategic communications, developing exercise scenarios in light of hybrid threats, and strengthening coordination between NATO and other organizations, in line with relevant decisions taken, with a view to improving information sharing, political consultations, and staff-to-staff coordination.*¹⁵

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg asserted that:

*NATO must be ready to deal with every aspect of this new reality from wherever it comes. And that means we must look closely at how we prepare for; deter; and if necessary defend against hybrid warfare. To be prepared, NATO must be able to see and analyse correctly what is happening; to see the patterns behind events which appear isolated and random; and quickly identify who is behind and why.*¹⁶

At the Warsaw Summit in July 2016, NATO adopted a strategy and actionable implementation plans on NATO's role in countering hybrid warfare. The primary responsibility to respond to hybrid threats or attacks rests with the targeted nation. NATO is prepared to assist an ally at any stage of a hybrid campaign. The alliance and allies will be prepared to counter hybrid warfare as part of collective defence. The Council could decide to invoke Article 5 of the Washington Treaty.¹⁷

Several important steps were adopted by NATO since the Warsaw Summit in NATO's response to hybrid warfare:

1) NATO undertook the biggest reinforcements of its collective defence since the Cold War through a set of measures to strengthen its defence and deterrence.

2) NATO has taken steps to improve its situational awareness and sharpen its early warning system. This is about intelligence, expert knowledge, and analytical capacity. NATO has strengthened its intelligence coordination by creating a dedicated division in NATO Headquarters in 2016.

3) In the area of cyberspace, several important decisions and initiatives have been undertaken. At the Warsaw Summit, cyberspace was recognised as the fifth operational domain for NATO, alongside sea, air, land, and special forces. Cyber defence will continue to be integrated into operational planning and the alliance's operations and missions. NATO continues to implement NATO's Enhanced Policy on Cyber Defence and to strengthen NATO's cyber defence capabilities, benefiting from the latest cutting-edge technologies. NATO allies have also adopted the Cyber Defence Pledge. This commits the member states to enhance the cyber defences of their national networks and infrastructures as a matter of priority. Each ally will honour its responsibility to improve its resilience and ability to respond quickly and effectively to cyber-attacks, including in hybrid contexts. During the February 2018 NATO defence ministers' meeting, the decision was taken to set up a new Cyber Operations Centre at the military headquarters in SHAPE to further strengthen NATO's cyber defences.

4) A joint NATO-EU declaration adopted at the Warsaw Summit with further

¹⁵ *Wales Summit Declaration*, "NATO Website", 05 September 2014, [www.nato.int/cps/ic/natohq/official_texts_112964.htm access: 07 March 2018].

¹⁶ J. Stoltenberg, *Keynote Speech at Allied Command Transformation Seminar*, 25 March 2015, [www.nato.int/cps/ic/natohq/opinions_118435.htm access: 07 March 2018].

¹⁷ *Warsaw Summit Communiqué*, "NATO Website", 09 July 2016, [www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_133169.htm?selectedLocale=en access: 07 March 2018].

adoption of concrete 42 joint measures between NATO and the EU was announced at the NATO foreign ministers' meeting in December 2016. These include cooperation in the area of cyberspace, exercises, and strategic communications, and other.

5) In the area of exercises, NATO military planners regularly include hybrid warfare scenarios. Cyber-attacks, disabling of critical infrastructure, and spread of disinformation are woven into the exercise scenario.

6) Enhanced allied resilience through civil preparedness is a central pillar of allies' resilience and a critical enabler for the alliance's collective defence. While this remains a national responsibility, NATO can support allies in assessing and, upon request, enhancing their civil preparedness. NATO adopted its baseline requirements for national resilience, which focus on continuity of government, continuity of essential services, security of critical civilian infrastructure, and support to military forces with civilian means.

7) NATO has developed its own robust strategic communications system – implemented inside NATO and used in daily advancement of its political and operational priorities. In addition to NATO's strategic communications, individual allies have established their own national systems and processes that reflect their national realities and priorities. A robust and well-functioning strategic communications is an important element in the fight against propaganda and disinformation. NATO does not fight propaganda with propaganda but with facts and information. It undertakes serious efforts to communicate proactively NATO's decisions and policies to a wide range of actors, including journalists, academics, opinion formers, representatives of the civil society, and the wider public. Furthermore, NATO engages on a regular basis with Russian media, including on the occasion of important NATO events, such as for



***Countering hybrid threats
cannot be done in isolation but in
cooperation with other partners***

instance NATO summits and meetings of NATO foreign affairs and defence ministers. In the wake of Russia's destabilizing actions in Ukraine and elsewhere, NATO set up a dedicated webpage called "Setting the Record Straight." This is a public document, available on the NATO website, aimed at debunking a series of long-standing Russian myths about NATO.

8) Countering hybrid threats cannot be done in isolation but in cooperation with other partners. That is why NATO has undertaken additional initiatives with other international organisations and actors in improving its situational awareness, sharing knowledge and best practices. Besides the joint set of measures stemming from the Joint NATO-EU Declaration signed at the mentioned NATO Summit in Warsaw in July 2016, NATO also works closely with the NATO Centre of Excellence on Strategic Communications located in Riga, Latvia, and the NATO Centre of Excellence on Cyber Defence located in Tallinn, Estonia. Furthermore, NATO is a member of the European Centre of Excellence on Countering Hybrid Warfare recently established in Helsinki, Finland. NATO provides assistance and carries consultations with a number of partner countries that are particularly affected by Russian hybrid warfare and disinformation such as Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova and partners who have experience with building strong resilience, such as Finland and Sweden. It provides platforms enabling practical exchanges of information and best practices in countering Russian propaganda such as the Hybrid Warfare Platform established between NATO and Ukraine.

9) Countering hybrid warfare features also in the framework of NATO-Ukraine cooperation. In June 2017, a NATO-Ukraine Platform on Countering Hybrid Warfare was established with a two-fold rationale: to increase the ability for NATO and Ukraine to identify hybrid threats; and to build capacity of state institutions to be better prepared to counter hybrid threats and to strengthen their resilience in the areas of civil preparedness, critical infrastructure protection, strategic communications, the protection of civilians, cyber defence, and counter-terrorism. A crisis management seminar was conducted in Poland this past October. It featured the participation of more than 100 representatives from 22 allied countries and the deputy director of the mentioned European Centre of Excellence on Countering Hybrid Warfare. A new seminar has been scheduled for this year.

As NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg stated at the NATO Allied Transformation

Seminar in Budapest on 25 March 2015: "Hybrid warfare is a probe, a test of our resolve to resist and to defend ourselves. And it can be a prelude to a more serious attack; because behind every hybrid strategy, there are conventional forces, increasing the pressure and ready to exploit any opening. NATO and its partners need to demonstrate that we can and will act promptly whenever and wherever necessary".

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FACING THE RUSSIAN SCHOOL OF SOFT POWER

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This article addresses the nature of the use of influence operations by the federal government of the Russian Federation's as well as ways for detecting and countering such operations. This has been done via a qualitative study of the concept, the Russian government's use, and principles for countering influence operations. The article concludes that the operations appear to be guided by a coercive reimagining of the concept of soft power. It also argues for the need to address the operations on multiple interconnected levels that include the promotion of transparent and responsive communication.

Introduction

Information is the core knowledge that actors can use to interpret an issue. In order to not fall prey to pitfalls such as misinformation and disinformation (inadvertently spread false information and deliberately spread false information, respectively), actors attempt to digest information before accepting it as a part of their perceptions. However, even if information is deemed to be correct, using it as a basis for one's decisions can still be detrimental to the actor's interests. This is because decisions are commonly made without all the facts related to any given issue. By selectively presenting information, foreign actors can therefore tip the scale in another party's decision-making process towards something that the influencing actor (IA) prefers.¹

These aspects are common occurrences in influence operations, but the latter, the selective presenting of information, has oftentimes been overlooked in discussions regarding the concept. This is despite the prominence that influence operations hold in current debates. While many attempts to influence foreign audiences have been discussed, many others have been left out. Instead, most discussions on the subject simply focus on what they are instead of what an actor can do about it. This, in turn, suggests a need to broaden the debate and focus on how actors can understand, detect, and counter influence operations. Due to the prominence that the federal government of the Russian Federation's (FGRF) actions hold in the contemporary discourse, this article explores the FGRF's use of influence operations, these operations' nature, as

¹ B. Whaley, J. Busby, *Detecting Deception: Practice, Practitioners, and Theory*, "Trends in Organized Crime", Fall 2000, p. 83.

M. Bennet, E. Waltz, *Counterdeception Principles and Applications for National Security*, Artech House: Norwood - Massachusetts 2007, p. 63.

R.H. Stolfi, *Barbarossa: German Grand Deception and the Achievement of Strategic and Tactical Surprise against the Soviet Union, 1940-1941*, [in:] D.C. Daniel, K.L. Herbig (eds.), *Strategic Military Deception*, Pergamon Press: New York - New York 1981, p. 197.

well as ways to detect and counter them. The questions the article sought to answer are:

- What is the nature of the FGRF's use of influence operations?
- How can actors detect and counter the FGRF's influence operations?

These questions have been addressed via a summary of general aspects of information operations, followed by a presentation of principles for countering such operations as well as the FGRF's use of influence operations. These principles have been used to guide the analysis of how the FGRF's influence operations can be countered both proactively as well as after the fact.

Influence Operations

Influence operations are commonly defined by the manner of an actor's coordinated use of resources in order to promote its interests by altering the attitudes, actions, and decisions of a target audience (TA).² These

attitudes, actions, and decisions in turn are the product of how an actor perceives and reacts to the information environments in which it and its dependencies operate. By utilising one's diplomatic, cultural, military, informational, and economic capabilities to alter these environments, an influencing actor may alter the perceptions of a TA and its dependencies, thereby reshaping how they interpret and address a given situation.³

For these efforts to be successful, the operations need to penetrate the target audience's filters: barriers such as previous knowledge and perceptions.⁴ To penetrate these filters, alterations of the information environment commonly need to be, at least in part, based on truth. Doing so increases both the alterations' persuasive qualities and their ability to pass scrutiny.⁵ By factoring in trust, time constraints, power dynamics, playing on prior knowledge, biases, and exploiting prolonged exposures to similar information as aspects of the operations, the IA can further increase the odds for the alterations to pass scrutiny.⁶

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- 2 E.V. Larson (ed.), *Foundations of Effective Influence Operations: A Framework for Enhancing Army Capabilities*, Rand Arroyo Center: Santa Monica - California 2009, p. 2.
 - 3 M. Bennet, E. Waltz, *Counterdeception Principles and Applications for National Security*, Artech House: Norwood - Massachusetts 2007, p. 55.
 - 4 T.L. Thomas, *Russia's Reflexive Control Theory and the Military*, "Journal of Slavic Military Studies", June 2004, p. 241.
 - 5 M. Bennet, E. Waltz, *Counterdeception Principles and Applications for National Security*, Artech House: Norwood - Massachusetts 2007, p. 59.
 - 6 Armed Forces Headquarters, *PM Vilseledning, kortversion av AL studie 6: Ett sätt att dölja det sanna och framhäva det falska: En öppen sammanfattning av studien VILSELEDNING (Memorandum Deception, A Short Version of Army Command's Study 6: A Way to Mask the Truth and Emphasise What Is False: A Open Summary of the DECEPTION Study)*, Swedish Armed Forces: Stockholm 1997, p. 19.
- M.I. Handel, *Intelligence and Deception*, "Journal of Strategic Studies", March 1982, p. 139.
- M.L. Jaitner, H. Kantola, *Applying Principles of Reflexive Control in Information and Cyber Operations*, "Journal of Information Warfare", Fall 2016, p. 29.
- J.B. Bruce, M. Bennett, *Foreign Denial and Deception: Analytical Imperatives*, [in:] R.Z. George, J.B. Bruce (eds.), *Analyzing Intelligence: Origins, Obstacles, and Innovations*, Georgetown University Press: Washington - District of Columbia, pp. 127-128.
- R.J. Heuer Jr., *Strategic Deception and Counterdeception: A Cognitive Process Approach*, "International Studies Quarterly", June 1981, p. 298.
- S. Macdonald, *Propaganda and Information Warfare in the Twenty-first Century: Altered Images and Deception Operations*, Routledge: London 2006, p. 84.
- U.K. Ecker, S. Lewandowsky, O. Fenton, K. Martin, *Do People Keep Believing because They Want to? Preexisting Attitudes and the Continued Influence of Misinformation*, "Memory & Cognition", February 2014, p. 303.

The trust aspect is connected to both the communication channel used to deliver the alterations as well as the source that is perceived to be delivering them. If the TA trusts the perceived source and the communication channels, the TA is more likely to accept the alterations.⁷

The prime target audience for a state actor's operations tends to be another state's decision makers.⁸ This is because influencing them is commonly synonymous with the greatest potential payoff. As decision makers are inclined to seek both the approval and input of others as part of their decision making process, IAs may use these as attack vectors in their operations.⁹ Approval may be sought from a state's population while input is typically gathered from bureaucrats that serve in the government. By acting upon these lesser TAs, the IAs may separate themselves from their primary TA but still act upon them.¹⁰ This in turn grants them another way to mask the source of the alterations and thereby minimise the prime target audience's ability to discover the IAs' involvement and intentions.

An example of how this can be achieved can be seen in how an IA may use media outlets in order to affect public opinion and the opinion of bureaucrats. These outlets do not necessarily have to be controlled by the IA or be under its direct influence. Instead, they may become unwitting agents of the IA of their own will. This can be achieved by exploiting journalists' dependence on outside expertise, the need of many journalists to present what is perceived as the other sides of an issue, or their ideological inclinations.¹¹ The former allows the IA to directly shape and reinforce the message if the IA holds influence over the consulted expert.¹² In turn, information transmitted by the IA or its proxies is not necessarily complete or truthful in its entirety. What is important is that the information is convincing enough to pass through the respective recipients' filters and for them to appropriate it.

If all of this is done correctly, the influencing actor should be able to transmit both the motives and the reasons that cause the target audience to act, or not, in a manner that goes against the TA's interests but is in

⁷ D. Lerner, *Is International Persuasion Sociologically Feasible*, [in:] D.C. Pollock (ed.), *The Art and Science of Psychological Operations: Case Studies of Military Application*. Vol. I, American Institutes for Research: Washington - District of Columbia 1976, p. 48.

M. Cohn, *Getting Psyched: Putting Psychology to Work to Shorten Conflicts and Save Lives*, [in:] M.J. Weller (ed.), *Strategic Influence: Public Diplomacy, Counterpropaganda, and Political Warfare*, Institute of World Politics Press: Washington - District of Columbia 2008, 231.

⁸ R.J. Heuer Jr., *Strategic Deception and Counterdeception: A Cognitive Process Approach*, "International Studies Quarterly", June 1981, p. 294.

E.V. Larson (ed.), *Foundations of Effective Influence Operations: A Framework for Enhancing Army Capabilities*, Rand Arroyo Center: Santa Monica - California 2009, pp. 44-45.

⁹ M. Bennet, E. Waltz, *Counterdeception Principles and Applications for National Security*, Artech House: Norwood - Massachusetts 2007, p. 96.

¹⁰ G. Sjöstedt, *Desinformation, vilseledning och nationell säkerhet: en problembeskrivning (Disinformation, Deception and National Security: A Problem Description)*, Board for Psychological Defence: Stockholm 1988, pp. 9-10.

L. Bittman, *The KGB and Soviet Disinformation: An Insider's View*, Pergamon-Brassey's: Washington - District of Columbia 1985, p. 52.

¹¹ L. Bittman, *The Use of Disinformation by Democracies*, "International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence", Summer 1990, p. 248.

E.S. Herman, N. Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*, Pantheon Books: New York 2002, p. 2.

¹² S. Macdonald, *Propaganda and Information Warfare in the Twenty-first Century: Altered Images and Deception Operations*, Routledge: London 2006, pp. 35-36.

accordance with the interests of the IA.¹³ This is commonly referred to as reflexive control and can be seen as the highest level of success of an influence operation. Lesser results, such as making the TA act on the altered information (but not in the desired way) and conditioning the TA, can still be considered a success.¹⁴ Examples of lesser results include further polarisation of a state's political climate or casting doubts on the state's institutions.

Principles for Countering Influence Operations

In order for an actor to detect and counter influence operations, he/she needs to possess at least two things: a mental awareness for the possibility of him/her or others becoming a target audience, as well as the structural capabilities to expose and understand these operations.¹⁵ The former acts as the actor's first line of defence by permitting influence operations to be recognised. If the actor lacks the awareness of the possibility that it may become affected, its susceptibility to influence operations is greatly increased.¹⁶ Awareness, however, only offers some protection and may, at worst, even be a burden by creating overly cautious attitudes.¹⁷ It therefore needs to be coupled with means of evaluating changes in the information environment. Once suspected influence operations have been identified, the actor can, via intelligence

collection and analysis, expose them. The actor can, through the exposing process, discern what the IA wants to make the TA believe as well as what action the influencing actor desires the target audience to take. The same tools can also allow the actor to gain an understanding of the aims of the operations as well as capabilities of the IA.¹⁸

For this to work, actors and their dependencies should possess knowledge of how a potential IA may act and how their respective weaknesses may be exploited. The actor should also understand potential weaknesses associated with the information environment they operate in and the communication channels they use.

By knowing what kind of expectations target audience has, how these expectations came about, what the influencing actor knows and does not know, and what the actor expects to see, an actor can further its understanding of why the actor has these perceptions and how they can be exploited.¹⁹ This can include making the actor aware of how their biases can be exploited and reinforced by the IA.²⁰ As notions based on an actor's biases are resistant to change, even if they are proven false,²¹ actors need to constantly evaluate why they hold a certain perception.²² Doing so can increase their ability to act even if they have been influenced by another party.

¹³ T.L. Thomas, *Recasting the Red Star: Russia Forges Tradition and Technology through Toughness*, Foreign Military Studies Office: Fort Leavenworth - Kansas 2011, p. 132.

¹⁴ D.C. Daniel, K.L. Herbig, *Propositions on Military Deception*, "Journal of Strategic Studies", March 1982, p. 157.

¹⁵ M. Bennet, E. Waltz, *Counterdeception Principles and Applications for National Security*, Artech House: Norwood - Massachusetts 2007, p. 144.

¹⁶ B. Whaley, *Stratagem: Deception and Surprise in War*, Artech House: Boston 2007, pp. 74-75.

¹⁷ R.J. Heuer Jr., *Strategic Deception and Counterdeception: A Cognitive Process Approach*, "International Studies Quarterly", June 1981, pp. 319-320.

¹⁸ M. Bennet, E. Waltz, *Counterdeception Principles and Applications for National Security*, p. 144.

¹⁹ M. Bennet, E. Waltz, *Counterdeception Principles and Applications for National Security*, p. 176.

²⁰ R.J. Heuer Jr., *Strategic Deception and Counterdeception: A Cognitive Process Approach*, "International Studies Quarterly", June 1981, p. 315.

²¹ U.K. Ecker, S. Lewandowsky, O. Fenton, K. Martin, *Do People Keep Believing because They Want to? Preexisting Attitudes and the Continued Influence of Misinformation*, "Memory & Cognition", February 2014, p. 293.

²² M. Bennet, E. Waltz, *Counterdeception Principles and Applications for National Security*, p. 175.

Since the information environment acts as the primary base for an actor's perceptions, actors should strive to understand how the environment develops. To do this, the actor has to continuously monitor and analyse the information environment for changes to the environment as well as changes in the conduct of other actors. An important aspect in such commitments includes efforts that seek answers to why these changes have come about. To do this, the actor needs to be able to see an event from the perspective of others. Being able to do so can allow the actor to see why other actors act the way they do and what their intentions may be.²³ This in turn requires understanding other actors' doctrines, resources, capabilities, and general aims as well as an awareness of the changing nature of these factors.²⁴ No actor lives in a bubble or is frozen in time.

For example, an influencing actor may decide to posture and exaggerate their capabilities and intentions in order to deter a TA from acting in a certain manner.²⁵ This reaction may come about as a reaction to a change in the target audience's goals and interests. If the TA in such a situation knows the IA's true capabilities and motives, then the TA may still be able to act. This is because the target audience then has the means to accurately assess the consequences of acting and can determine if the costs outweigh the benefits.

To accurately do this, actors have to consider the sources of the information they receive as well as the risks associated with the communications channels they use. This is because most of the information that an actor receives tends to come from outside actors as well as the actor's

dependencies. Since actors have less control over the information that is delivered and produced by secondary or third parties, but nonetheless rely on them to understand the information environment, the actors need be on guard for notions that may act against their interests. Actors should therefore question and rigorously scrutinize information that reaches them before accepting it.²⁶



Since the information environment acts as the primary base for an actor's perceptions, actors should strive to understand how the environment develops

The Federal Government of the Russian Federation's Use of Influence Operations

A number of developments of note have occurred in the FGFR since the mid-2000s and early 2010s that affect how it conducts its foreign policy. Prominent ones include the notion of being trapped in a permanent conflict with outside actors, the use of information warfare as one of the primary means to achieve the FGFR's interests, and the expansion and reinterpretation of the concept of soft power.

The former two are reflected in contemporary Russian military thought. Aspects of it include the holistic and simultaneous use of all of the state's available means in an information and culture war that is transitional – existing through times of both peace and conflict with the ability to achieve the state's goals independently

²³ M. Bennet, E. Waltz, *Counterdeception Principles and Applications for National Security*, p. 178 & 179.

²⁴ M. Bennet, E. Waltz, *Counterdeception Principles and Applications for National Security*, p. 177.

²⁵ M.I. Handel, *War, Strategy and Intelligence*, Cass: London 1989, p. 314.

²⁶ M. Bennet, E. Waltz, *Counterdeception Principles and Applications for National Security*, p. 180.

or in coordination with the state's other efforts.²⁷ The open use of force has been relegated to the later stages of a conflict.²⁸ Instead, conflicts are to be dominated by information and psychological warfare.²⁹ These approaches aim to break down actors, thereby limiting their ability to function and granting the FGRF a strategic advantage.³⁰

These changes in the Russian military thought have also come to be reflected in the FGRF's views on the concept of soft power: from being a concept that emphasises the attraction of other actors as a means to gain influence over them,³¹ to a concept that includes the use of coercion as a way to gain the same influence. Soft power has as such evolved into something that can be used to interfere with a state's internal affairs and destabilise its political environment in order to promote a foreign actor's interests.³²

These notions are largely reflected in many of the FGRF's attempts to influence other actors. As a prelude to what later

became the FGRF's invasion of Ukraine and continued intervention in the same, both Estonia and Georgia became targets of influence campaigns from the FGRF. This included, in the case of the former, the exploitation of grievances that members of the Russian minority in Estonia held with regards to the Estonian government,³³ thereby destabilising the political situation in Estonia and placing pressure on the Estonian government. The operations also included a negative portrayal of the Estonian government in Russophone media outlets (both in Estonia and in Russia)³⁴ and aggressive demonstrations outside of the Estonian embassy in Moscow by members of a Russian non-governmental organisation promoted by the FGRF (commonly referred to as Nashi, "Ours").³⁵ These were followed by riots in Tallinn (with rioters consisting in part of members of Nashi),³⁶ as well as large scale cyber-attacks against Estonian institutions.³⁷ While many sources of the cyber-attacks could be traced to Russia, the Estonian government could not definitively say that the FGRF was behind them.³⁸

²⁷ P.A. Mattson, *Russian Military Thinking – A New Generation of Warfare*, "Journal on Baltic Security", June 2015, p.66.

U. Franke, *War by Non-military Means: Understanding Russian Information Warfare*, Swedish Defence Research Agency: Stockholm 2015, p. 40.

²⁸ V. Gerisimov, *Ценность науки в предвидении (The Value of Science Is in Foresight)*, "Military-Industrial Courier", February 2013, p. 2.

²⁹ S. Chekinov, S. Bogdanov, *The Nature and Content of a New-Generation War*, "Military Thought", April 2013, p.16.

³⁰ J. Bērziņš, *Russia's New Generation Warfare in Ukraine: Implications for Latvian Defense Policy*, National Defence Academy of Latvia: Riga 2014, p. 5.

³¹ J.S. Nye Jr., *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, Public Affairs: New York - New York 2004, p. x.

³² *Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation*, "Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation", 18 February 2013 [http://www.mid.ru access: 20 February 2018].

³³ *Annual Review 2007*, Estonian Internal Security Service: Tallinn 2008, p. 13.

³⁴ E. Lucas, P. Pomerantsev, *Winning the Information War: Techniques and Counter-Strategies in Russian Propaganda*, Center for European Policy Analysis/Legatum Institute: London/Washington - District of Columbia 2016, p. 22.

³⁵ M. van Herpen, *Putin's Wars: The Rise of Russia's New Imperialism*, Rowman & Littlefield: Lanham - Maryland 2014, Chapter 8 (E-book).

³⁶ M. van Herpen, *Putin's Wars: The Rise of Russia's New Imperialism*, Rowman & Littlefield: Lanham - Maryland 2014, Chapter 8 (E-book).

³⁷ E. Lucas, P. Pomerantsev, *Winning the Information War: Techniques and Counter-Strategies in Russian Propaganda*, Center for European Policy Analysis/Legatum Institute: London/Washington - District of Columbia 2016, p. 23.

³⁸ A. Soldatov, I. Borogan, *The New Nobility: The Restoration of Russia's Security State and the Enduring Legacy of the KGB*, PublicAffairs: New York - New York 2010, Chapter 18 (E-book).

A.J. Selhorst, *Russia's Perception Warfare: The Development of Gerasimov's Doctrine in Estonia and Georgia and Its Application in Ukraine*, "Militaire Spectator", April 2016, pp. 154-155.

Following the riots, a delegation consisting of parliamentarians from the ruling party in Russia travelled to Tallinn. Before arriving, they made calls for the resignation of the Estonian government.³⁹

The Estonian Internal Security Service attributed much of the polarisation of the political climate in Estonia to the differences in the country's ethnic communities' information environment.⁴⁰ The Estonian Internal Security Service also identified attempts by the Russian media outlets to distort the presentation of events, as well as attempts by the members of the FGRF's diplomatic corps and intelligence services to influence the Russian minority in Estonia.⁴¹

These influence campaigns resulted in the creation of a new concept, that of the Russian world. It officially started as a concept for promoting the Russian language and culture abroad but later it came to be intertwined with the FGRF's claimed right to intervene in other states in order to protect compatriots and citizens of the Russian Federation living abroad.⁴² People considered to be compatriots are to a large extent former citizens of the Soviet Union who are in favour of spiritual and

cultural ties with the Russian Federation.⁴³ This policy was put into full effect during the FGRF's occupation of the Crimean peninsula, but, just as forms of the policy can be traced to the events in Estonia, it can also be traced to the Russo-Georgian War. The FGRF had prior to its conflict with Georgia eased the citizenship requirements for Abkhazians and South Ossetians, thereby creating a majority "Russian" community in their respective regions.⁴⁴ Their protection was cited as one of the reasons for the FGRF's intervention in Georgia.⁴⁵

Prior to the FGRF's intervention, the prime minister of Russia directly approached the president of Georgia whereby the latter was informed of the FGRF's intention to intervene in Georgia. The reasons cited then were Tbilisi's NATO aspirations as well as the newly declared independence of Kosovo.⁴⁶ This was later followed by a build-up of the FGRF's armed forces both inside Georgia and along its border, minor clashes between Georgian, Abkhaz, and South Ossetian forces, distortions of events in Russian media outlets, and cyber-attacks against infrastructure that limited the Georgian government's ability to communicate and to coordinate its efforts.⁴⁷

³⁹ Николай Ковалев: эстонское правительство должно уйти в отставку (Nikolai Kovalev: *The Estonian Government Should Resign*), "RIA Novosti", 7 June 2008 [http://www.ria.ru access: 20 February 2018].

⁴⁰ *Annual Review 2007*, Estonian Internal Security Service: Tallinn 2008, p. 13.

⁴¹ *Annual Review 2007*, Estonian Internal Security Service: Tallinn 2008, pp. 8, 13, 15.

⁴² *Conference of Russian Ambassadors and Permanent Representatives*, "Official Internet Resources of the President of Russia", 1 July 2014 [http://www.en.kremlin.ru access: 20 February 2018].

K. Pynnöniemi, A. Rácz, *Fog of Falsehood: Russian Strategy of Deception and the Conflict in Ukraine*, Finnish Institute of International Affairs: Helsinki 2016, p. 94.

⁴³ *О государственной политике Российской Федерации в отношении соотечественников за рубежом (On the Russian Federation's State Policy Toward Compatriots Living Abroad)*, "Официальный интернет-портал правовой информации" (Official Internet Portal for Legal Information), 10 July 2013 [http://www.pravo.gov.ru access: 20 February 2018].

⁴⁴ K. Natoli, *Weaponizing Nationality: An Analysis of Russia's Passport Policy in Georgia*, "Boston University International Law Journal", Summer 2010, pp. 391-392.

⁴⁵ M. van Herpen, *Putin's Wars: The Rise of Russia's New Imperialism*, Rowman & Littlefield: Lanham - Maryland 2014, Chapter 13 (E-book).

⁴⁶ R.D. Asmus, *A Little War that Shook the World: Georgia, Russia, and the Future of the West*, Palgrave Macmillan: Basingstoke 2010, pp. 105-107.

⁴⁷ A.J. Selhorst, *Russia's Perception Warfare: The Development of Gerasimov's Doctrine in Estonia and Georgia and Its Application in Ukraine*, "Militaire Spectator", April 2016, pp. 155-156.



Efforts in the electronic and information realms, including the use of social media, appear to have grown in salience as means for the FGRF to spread its alterations.

This, combined with Tbilisi's diplomatic options going from bad to worse, convinced the Georgian government that they needed to pre-empt the FGRF's coming actions. Doing otherwise was perceived by the government as something that would end their ability to rule Georgia.⁴⁸ By initiating the armed conflict, the FGRF would claim that the Georgian government was the aggressor in the conflict.

The Russia's use of power pressure, distortion of the media coverage of events, and use of ethno-cultural arguments have largely, with some tweaks, continued throughout its conflict with Ukraine and the related influence operations. The largest differences, however, can be traced to how the FGRF attempted to, and with some success been able to, steer the narrative regarding its involvement in the conflict. Examples of this can be seen in how many foreign media outlets came to repeat, at least in part, the FGRF's and its proxies' description of the conflict's development,

thereby casting doubt on what actually transpired and resulting in the promotion of the FGRF's interests.⁴⁹

Efforts in the electronic and information realms, including the use of social media, appear to have grown in salience as means for the FGRF to spread its alterations. While the extent and effects of the FGRF's involvement in the United States presidential election is still under investigation, government intelligence agencies have determined that the FGRF did indeed attempt to steer the election via a mixed overt-covert influence campaign. These efforts appear to have included the support of the FGRF's preferred presidential candidate, the release of unlawfully acquired internal documents, and attempts to polarise the political climate by the online promotion of controversial or divisive organisations and topics.⁵⁰ Similar trends can be seen in other countries as well. Examples include attempts to infiltrate foreign media outlets as well as the support of foreign parties and groups whose interests align with the FGRF's.⁵¹

Analysis and Recommendations

The nature of the FGRF's use of influence operations seems largely to be defined by their holistic, coordinated, and coercive use of soft power. The use of soft power

⁴⁸ R.D. Asmus, *A Little War that Shook the World: Georgia, Russia, and the Future of the West*, Palgrave Macmillan: Basingstoke 2010, p. 50.

⁴⁹ K. Pynnöniemi, A. Rác, *Fog of Falsehood: Russian Strategy of Deception and the Conflict in Ukraine*, Finnish Institute of International Affairs: Helsinki 2016, pp. 137, 171 196.

⁵⁰ *Assessing Russian Activities and Intentions in Recent US Elections*, Office of the Director of National Intelligence: Washington - District of Columbia 2017, p. ii.

An Ex St. Petersburg 'Troll' Speaks out: Russian Independent TV Network Interviews Former Troll at the Internet Research Agency, "Meduza", 15 October 2017 [http://www.meduza.io access: 20 February 2018].

V. Sauter, *Video and Transcript: Press Conference by Senators Richard Burr and Mark Warner of SSCI on the Russia Probe*, "Lawfare", 4 October 2017 [http://www.lawfareblog.com access: 20 February 2018].

⁵¹ A. Polyakova, M. Laruelle, S. Meister, N. Barnett, *The Kremlin's Trojan Horses: Russian Influence in France, Germany, and the United Kingdom*, The Atlantic Council: Washington - District of Columbia 2016, pp. 3-4.

S. Meister, J. Puglierin, *Perception and Exploitation: Russia's Non-Military Influence in Europe*, "German Council on Foreign Relations", October 2015, p. 5.

Annual Report of the Security Information Service for 2015, Security Information Service: Prague 2016, p. 9.

resources is then, when necessary, complemented by capabilities that traditionally fall outside of the concept of soft power. These include the threat of the use of armed force in order to put power pressure on the TA and its dependencies. Direct use of force is discouraged in the Russian military thought in favour of information and psychological warfare.

The Russian influence operations are conducted both before and during a conflict as well as in times of peace. Their focus often seems to be on the exploiting of divisions in foreign states, the promotion of groups and parties whose policies align with the FGRF's, and the steering of the narrative towards what is deemed beneficial to the FGRF's interests. Prominent means to achieve these goals include traditional media outlets controlled by the FGRF as well as ones over which the FGRF can gain influence. The use of social media has, in turn, come to gain prominence.

Due to the FGRF's influence operations' holistic nature, any response to them needs to be equally comprehensive. As the operations act on multiple target audiences, both primary and lesser ones, any actor must prepare all of its dependencies for the possibility of them being targets of influence operations. This is necessary in order to increase the actor's general ability to detect the operations and also in order to increase the actor's ability to resist to them.

By promoting healthy scepticism and a code of good conduct amongst citizens, private corporations, and government agencies, an actor can achieve much of this. Such a conduct should include transparent and responsive delivery of information – in particular concerning sourcing. This is in order to combat the spread of inaccuracies, uncertainty, as well as foster trust between parties. This promotion of awareness, good conduct, and scepticism should come natural and occur at all levels. Examples

for implementing such solutions include adding them to school curriculums and training new employees especially in targeted fields.

Special attention should be placed on the creation of trust and cooperation among the media outlets, the government, and government institutions. The reasoning for this is threefold: these outlets can aid in the detection of falsehoods and correct them, they constitute a large part of the information environment and act as some of its more prominent communication channels, and they are some of the most interesting targets for an IA. If one can foster trust and cooperation, approaching outlets in cases where they may have been compromised should be made easier. A healthy relationship can also increase a government's ability to penetrate influence operations that limit the information environment or saturate it.

As a part of the private-public cooperation effort and promotion of good conduct, governments could encourage the use and creation of fact-checking organisations and special fact-checking editors or ombudsmen. Such fact-checking organisations may in part be run, or supported, by the government, as governments already possess much of the needed infrastructure to provide such organisations with relevant information through their agencies.

Governments should furthermore strive to lessen the divisions and grievances that exist within the state. This is not only good policy, but given the FGRF's history of exploiting their existence, efforts to reduce these divisions and grievances should be made a priority. In cases where groups already have been compromised, as was seen in the case of Estonia where groups had entirely different information environments, governments need to go even further in their integration efforts. This can include the creation of media outlets

tailored specifically to the compromised group, working directly with civil society, and working directly with prominent groups in these communities.

Most governments already have the infrastructure that monitors and analyses developments in various information environments and their respective channels. However, few possess the infrastructure and command structures needed for coordinating and reviewing the above mentioned endeavours. Most of them more or less need to be decentralised. This is because centralised organisations tend to have a hard time to fully grasp the problems of the periphery. But, if all of these efforts were decentralised, the risk would increase for wasting resources as the same issue might be addressed multiple times. Centralised institutions for coordinating and reviewing counter influence efforts,

as well as creating new ways to address developments in the field, should therefore be preferred and encouraged. Additionally, such organisations offer the ability to collect information and spread it quickly to relevant parties. However, in doing so, one should take a number of precautions so that one does not grant an audience to what otherwise would see little to no penetration.

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IMAGE OF EUROPE IN RUSSIAN MEDIA: JOURNALISM OR CREATION OF ENEMY IMAGE?

Liubov Tsybulska

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The article presents a short analysis of the research “Image of Europe in Russian Media” done by the Hybrid Warfare Analytical Group of the Ukraine Crisis Media Center. Analysis of the Russian media context demonstrated that the way in which the Russian TV shows the Europeans to its own population has impact not only on the relations between Russia and other countries, but also on the Russians’ readiness to support the policy of their president. Six narratives (Horrors of Life, “The Declining West”, Protests, Terrorism, Refugee Crisis, Sanctions Imposed on Russia) are presented to confirm the propaganda agenda and manipulation aiming to form public opinion in Russia.

The Context

The launch of the official portal www.euvdisinfo.eu in September 2017 has been hailed as a big victory in the fight against Russian propaganda. Its creators, experts of East StratCom Task Force, analyse content produced by the Kremlin’s sources of information and provide recommendations directly to policy makers in European institutions. However, already in March 2018, the majority of MPs in the Netherlands’ Tweede Kamer, House of Representatives, call for closing the EU website, which is countering the Kremlin’s propaganda, saying that “civil servants should not be in charge of checking on journalists”¹.

The very possibility that this resource will be closed is worrying and demoralizing news. What is even more unexpected, this

proposal comes from the Netherlands, a country that has repeatedly become target of the Russian disinformation campaigns.

Is it true that Europe sees no threat in the Russian propaganda machine? Or does democracy harm itself, unable to counter new methods, undermining its cornerstone?

Four years ago, it was extremely difficult to talk about the Kremlin disinformation worldwide. Hybrid warfare and its toolkits yet needed to be exposed. Only few actors dared to call Russia an aggressor and social media were believed to be safe and free of propaganda. It seems a lot has changed since that time.

First of all, in the global politics. Mr. Trump’s victory in the 2016 US presidential elections

¹ Dutch MPs Want EU to Shut Anti-disinformation Site, “EUOBSERVER”, 06 March 2018, [<https://euobserver.com/tickers/141216> access: 12 March 2018].



the way in which the Russian state shows the Europeans to its own population has impact not only on the international and intercultural relations between Russia and other countries, but also on the Russians' readiness to support the policy of their president

and the uncompromising position of French President Macron brought conversations about threats of information warfare back to public discussion. American experts have gone even further, calling Russian operations in Ukraine a new, 21st-century form of conflict – *Fifth Generation Warfare*², when the full spectrum operations is being used (“running from low-level information operations, through economic pressure, peacekeeping, insurgency and conventional military intervention”) and the main aim is to create the situation of a permanent chaos, which is the best environment for achieving aggressor’s goals.

It would seem we should already have moved from revealing and collecting facts of disinformation to counteraction, and developed a mechanism for response, or, at least, to a wide public discussion about where the dividing line is between freedom of speech and informational aggression. On the contrary, we have to prove once again why at least these platforms for denouncing disinformation are necessary.

In Search of Arguments

Ukraine, undoubtedly, has been and remains the main “training field” where Russia

tests its information warfare technologies. But very few experts are raising concerns about the fact that the Kremlin’s biggest “test laboratory” is its own country with 150-million-strong population, and these experiments are a threat not only for Russians, but for other countries as well.

During the last six months, Ukraine Crisis Media Center (UCMC) experts, who have been at the forefront of the information war with Russia since 2014, have been analysing internal Russian propaganda within the Hybrid Warfare Analytical Group (HWAG). To prove that Russian propaganda has a much wider scope than the information war between the two countries in conflict, UCMC initiated a project aiming to illustrate to the Europeans how Russian state-controlled media show Europe to Russian people.

The topic of the first research was the “Image of Europe in Russian Media”. It is obvious that the way in which the Russian state shows the Europeans to its own population has impact not only on the international and intercultural relations between Russia and other countries, but also on the Russians’ readiness to support the policy of their president. For instance, if Russian TV channels were not regularly demonizing Ukraine and Ukrainians, there would be far fewer Russian volunteers willing to join the ranks of the so-called LPR and DPR.

To understand why the issue is worth the attention of European countries, it is important to take into account the vulnerability of the Russian population to propagandistic content. According to a Russian social survey³:

² Modern War, “Strategy and Tactics Press”, No. 29, May 2017, [<https://shop.strategyandtacticspress.com/ProductDetails.asp?ProductCode=MW29M>].

³ *Media consumption in Russia survey by Deloitte, 2017*; Russian population census 2010; “Wikipedia”; “Kommersant.ru”.

- Only 5% of Russians can speak a foreign language (usually English);
- 6% watch/read news from foreign media;
- 7% sometimes travel farther than the countries of the former USSR.

This state of affairs, in combination with unprecedented public trust toward state-controlled media, leads to informational isolation of the society and results in high loyalty to the Russian president's policy and inability to analyse his actions critically.

According to the survey of the Russia Public Opinion Research Centre in 2015,⁴ the majority of Russians get news from TV channels. Among the channels which they trust most of all, the majority of respondents mentioned federal and regional channels. For this reason, we focused our research on the mass media that have the biggest share on the media market and are under the Kremlin's financial and political control. These are the three main Russian TV channels – *First Channel* (“Первый канал”), *Russia 1* (“Россия 1”), and *NTV* (HTB). *Russia 1* is under the direct control of the Russian Government. The other two belong to Yuriy Kovalchuk, shareholder and chairman of the directors council of the “Russia” bank, a man from the “inner circle” of Vladimir Putin.

The research focused on news and key political talk shows of these channels, because they are the most precise demonstration of the Kremlin's political vision of events both in Russia and abroad. We analysed the content of a total of eight programs on the three TV channels in the period between July 2014 and December 2017:

Russia 1 – News (Вести), News of the week (Вести недели), News on Saturday (Вести в субботу), Evening with Vladimir Solovyov (Вечер с Владимиром Соловьевым);

First Channel: News (Новости), Sunday Time (Воскресное время), Time (Время);

NTV – Today (Сегодня), Majority (Большинство).

The research did not include entertainment programs, because their rhetoric about the Europeans is far more emotional and harsh. Take for instance the entertainment political program “International Sawmill” on NTV by Tigran Keosayan (husband of Margarita Simonyan, director of Russia Today), where the host allows himself to laugh at almost all Western countries, call Emmanuel Macron “a gay-gerontophile”, or threaten Estonia with military attack. That is why a selection was made in favour of programs that at least try to comply with standards of journalism.

In order to prevent accusations of political bias, it was important for us to make both qualitative and quantitative analysis of collected data, because only figures can prove that Russian propaganda is systemic and state-controlled.

The data was collected by a specialized Russian agency⁵ that provides services of media monitoring and analysis. News stories were collected automatically, searched by keywords that they contain (names of European countries and their leaders), and then manually categorized by the experts according to the topic they addressed. As a result, the experts received a collection of news about 28 EU member-states, as well as Norway, Switzerland, and countries of the Eastern Partnership.

⁴ *Mass Media in Russia: Popularity and Trust*, Russian Public Opinion Research Center, Press release No. 1730, 07 May 2015, [https://www.wciom.com/index.php?id=61&uid=1087].

⁵ The name of the agency cannot be given due to security reasons.

The Hybrid Warfare Analytical Group research revealed that during the analysed period in 2014-2017, the Russian mainstream channels demonstrated more than 45,000 pieces of negative news about Europe, the US, Ukraine, and countries of the Eastern Partnership. The biggest share of these is composed of news stories about European countries. Europe is mentioned in a negative context on average 18 times daily. By comparison, the Coca-Cola brand has only six advertisement videos a day on the same TV channels.



Europe is mentioned in a negative context on average 18 times daily

We assessed as “negative” the news with a distinct negative tone and expressive rhetoric about the object in question. Assessing the tone, we took into account the opinion of the author of the message and that of other commentators, but the author’s opinion prevailed.

In total, the average proportion of negative to positive/neutral news about European countries is 85% to 15%. One could object that this is a worldwide tendency of TV news, which usually focuses on negative stories. However, the HWAG figures prove that there is something more specific with the Russian channels than the general focus on the negative. Only two countries are shown in positive or neutral tone more often than others: These are Belarus (40% neutral/positive, 60% negative) and Switzerland (43% neutral/positive, 57% negative). According to the Russian TV channels’ agenda, only these two countries are more safe and stable. The reason is

rather obvious: Belarus is Russia’s old friend and a political ally, while Switzerland is neutral and, very likely, is home to banks where the Russian elite keeps its money.

Narratives

The HWAG categorized the collected pieces of negative news into six main narratives. These narratives form the Russians’ general beliefs about what Europe and European life look like.

Here they are:

1) **Horrors of Life.** The most widespread narrative of the Russian news is about life in Europe. This narrative tries to persuade Russian citizens that the life in European countries is insecure and full of dangers. The majority of such news items are stories about natural and industrial disasters, accidents, and crimes.

The peculiarity of this narrative is that it is usually based on insignificant events, which are shown as something large-scale, or even as a tendency. For example, this may be news about family fights in small provincial towns, or roads closed because of snowstorms, even if these roads have no strategic importance. There might be a lot of similar events in Russia as well, but they are not mentioned. It is done to form a belief that Europe is unstable, full of disasters, and dangerous to live in. It is remarkable in this context that according to a social survey by Levada Center (January 2016), 70% of Russians prefer avoiding travels abroad for security reasons.⁶

Local authorities in Europe are usually depicted as weak and unable to provide adequate response to challenges. The same refers to the police or armed forces of the

⁶ *Поездки за границу (Travels Abroad)*, Левада-Центр, 20 January 2016, [<https://www.levada.ru/2016/01/20/poezdki-za-granitsu-2/>].

European countries: If they are mentioned, they are usually shown by Russian TV as weak and inefficient.

This narrative mentions predominantly France (16%), Italy (13%), Germany (10%), United Kingdom (9%), and Spain (7%).

2) “The Declining West”. We consciously chose this combination of words as a title for the narrative, because it is very widespread in the Russian media. The phrase itself emerged still in the Soviet era. This narrative is built mainly on affirmations about lack of unity and decline of moral values in European countries, using expressions such as “Europe is going to break apart”, “the EU is an artificial formation”, and “European values do not exist”. Example:

All the talks about Europe in different gears will immediately turn out to be what they really are – a vain attempt to hide the total incapability of the United Europe of self-preservation. (First Channel, 19 March 2017)

The Europeans are depicted as persons with weak moral values: Hypocrisy among political elites, neo-Nazism, paedophilia, and incest are shown as if they were widespread, ordinary cases. What is strange, the Russian media in the same context mention the problem of LGBT rights and gender equality. The Russians, on the contrary, are opposed to the Europeans as “bearers of spirituality and real values” and those who have to fight for these values, sometimes aggressively, because the virus of the “declining West” can erode and ruin Russia as well.

Among very widespread types of such stories, there is a myth about “removal of Russian children from their parents in

Scandinavian countries”. There are dozens of examples of the coverage telling how child protection authorities seize children from Russian families living in these countries, “without any investigations and trial”. These and similar invented stories (creation of the Party of Paedophiles in the Netherlands, legalization of incest in Sweden) evoke a very strong emotional reaction, and, for this reason, spread very quickly.⁷

The constituent parts of the “declining West” narrative are stories about “rewriting history” and “renaissance of fascism”. The first is usually said about other countries of the former USSR – the Baltic countries and Ukraine, as well as Poland. According to the Russian TV, they try to sponge out the memory of common victories and “impose a myth” on young generations that the USSR was a horrible state. The Kremlin’s TV channels persuade the audience that the triumph of far-right forces throughout Europe is a direct consequence of the “inability to learn lessons from history”, and Russia in this situation has “a moral duty” to prevent a “renaissance of Nazism” and ensure order in Europe – even by force, if necessary. This narrative gave birth to a very popular meme in the Russian information space – “We Can Repeat That” (“We can come back to Europe as the USSR did during the WWII and restore order as we see it”).

Russia actively uses this narrative when talking about Ukraine in Europe. The arguments that Ukrainian far-right parties had not crossed the 5% barrier in the previous parliamentary elections and have no places in the acting parliament at all disappear in the flow of propaganda. Nevertheless, few Europeans notice that the same narrative is used against their

⁷ *Педофилия расцветает в Европе (Paedophilia Flourishes in Europe)*, “1TV.ru”, 10 November 2013, [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lc8Lpi5ViNI>].

own countries. "It seems, soon Europe will start behaving in the same way as if we were in 1938 and there was 'Cristal Night' in Hitler's Germany", says the host of program "Vesti" on one of the mainstream Russian state TV channels. Example:

The historical triumph of Europe ended by a union under the Nazi flag, and after this, it got a bash in the face by the Russian boot. (Vladimir Solovyov, program "Evening with Vladimir Solovyov, 01 June 2017)

3) Protests. According to the Russian TV, there are strikes and protests every day in European countries: yard-keepers, health workers, farmers, stewards, staff of the Eiffel Tower, etc. demonstrate their disagreement with government policy. Inefficient and weak management leads to discontent; voices of the people are not heard, and so they have to go to the streets to protect their rights. Example:

Paris is turning into a big dump, while janitors who announced the strike are storming the offices of the officials. (First Channel, 10 September 2015)

It is obvious that protests are not something extraordinary in a democratic country: They are one of the efficient tools in a dialogue with the authorities. In Russia, in contrast, protests are not multiple, usually useless, and after each of them hundreds of protesters are taken into custody.

The HWAG team created a chart displaying when there were protests in Europe, according to the Russian media. It turned out that there was no day during the research period when the Russian TV said nothing about strikes and protests in the European cities.

4) Terrorism is the fourth of the top narratives used by the Russian TV. Terrorist attacks are covered by all media worldwide, but the Russian media do it in a particular

way, trying to create the impression that for Europe, terrorism is a permanent impending threat. Sometimes even crimes that had no terrorist motives are shown as terrorist attacks. The story is almost always accompanied by comments about the weakness of the police and security services. The tragedies are often depicted as a "pay-off", a "punishment" of European countries for wrong policy, inability to cope with migration crisis, and unwillingness to cooperate with Russia. Example:

The police allowed the man, who in the church cut the throat of an 84-year-old French priest from the suburbs of Rouen, to leave the house only once a day, in the mornings. This indicates that he was under "strict", in quotes, observation – he even wore an electronic bracelet on his leg. Consequently, his movements were monitored. So he killed while being "under control". French authorities, in fact, knew the dream of 19-year-old Adel Kermisch – to go to Syria and fight for the terrorists. (First Channel, 31 July 2016)

5) Refugee crisis is yet another of the top narratives used by the Russian media. The refugee crisis is interpreted as "a result of Europe's fault", because Europe supported the USA when the latter became involved in the war in Syria. The overall picture shown to the audience is rather doom-and-gloom: Thousands of hungry and dangerous immigrants fill European towns, pushing out local people, committing crimes and terrorist attacks. Examples:

Indeed, the very first blow of the migration wave brought to the surface all the deep-seated contradictions inside the European Union. (First Channel, 09 June 2015)

At a time when the European Union struggles to remain a space of freedom, security, and justice, dozens of people are settling down in the barracks where the Nazis kept the Jews. (Russia 1, 24 September 2015)

6) Sanctions Imposed on Russia. The Russian media promote the message that sanctions imposed on Russia seriously harm the EU itself, and more and more countries would like to cancel them in order to survive.

The second part of the message is aimed to demonstrate Russia's strength and independence from trade with Europe. Russians are often depicted as people who do not need the famous European well-being, because they have a more valuable moral compass. It is remarkable that, according to our observations, this topic accounts for the highest number of coincidences in the content of various TV channels: Two mainstream channels may use literally the same phrases talking about the same events or phenomenon. Example:

Europe made an estimate of the economic damage from their own sanctions imposed on Russia. Their restrictions together with retaliatory actions of Moscow cost the EU more than 17 billion euros. (NTV, 01 June 2017; similar news on First Channel, 01 June 2017)

These topics and narratives encompass almost all European countries. However, there are narratives targeting particular countries. For example: "Baltic countries are a training field for NATO", "Britain is the US's puppet", and Denmark is "a centre of European zoo-sex tourism".

It is worth mentioning how the "opposing point of view" is presented in Russian TV programs. Formally, it exists. There are experts invited to defend the Ukrainian, or European, or American point of view. At the same time, they usually look repugnant and ridiculous. It is "normal" to shout at

them during the discussions and offence, often done by the host or other guests in the studio, is commonplace. There were a number of cases when opposition experts were physically attacked during a live broadcast. This is a sort of "playing democracy": The opposing point of view is formally present, but always weak, because usually it is imitated.

There are no people on any TV channel who would call things with their real names, who would call a crime "a crime", and a murder "a murder". It is worth mentioning the words of Hannah Arendt from her book "Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil":


Among the worst epithets attributed to Hitler by his high-morale opponents were the terms "cheater", "dabbler", "a madman" (note that this was already on the final stage of war), and, from time to time, "demon" and "epitome of evil" – usually in Germany, these words are often used to depict a criminal. But no one called him a murderer. His crimes were that he "sacrificed with armies, ignoring advice of professionals", someone mentioned German concentration camps for political opponents, but the death camps and Einsatzgruppen were not recalled almost at all.⁸

This story has a lot in common with modern Russia. In the fourth year of war in eastern Ukraine with 10,000 victims, including passengers of MH17 of Malaysian Airlines shot down by Russian "Buk", and millions of displaced persons, after the destruction of Syrian Aleppo and thousands of civilian casualties, Alexei Navalny, the most famous politician of the Russian opposition, continues to call Putin "a cheater and a thief".

⁸ H. Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, 2006.

Conclusion

Russian media create an impression that Europe is a dangerous place to live and depict the Europeans as spoiled people without moral values. Watching this kind of news on a regular basis (and the share of international news constitutes up to 80%-90% of Russian TV newscasts), the audience can hardly doubt that Russia is a stable, safe, and prosperous country.



Europeans are 'the others', they are amoral and dangerous, so should we treat them as our equal?" Russian TV says

The Russian media changed the very paradigm of news: The audience of Russia's biggest media platforms has practically no possibility to receive news as pure facts about an event. TV channels offer a ready opinion on the issue, with ready assessment and comments, and this is visible even from the tone and general manner: The host of a Russian TV channel usually talks to his or her audience as a mentor.

One of the key conclusions of the UCNC HWAG research is that the Russian media actively dehumanize an average European in the eyes of their audience. "Europeans are 'the others', they are amoral and dangerous, so should we treat them as our equal?" Russian TV says. The history of the 20th century has multiple examples when dehumanization of one nation by another nation had horrible consequences. Finally, this tool was successfully used in recent history, and it was used against the Ukrainians during the last four years.

Permanent humiliation and mockery, depicting them as stupid, messy, and good-for-nothing in Russian TV programs resulted in Ukraine being in the "honourable" 2nd place in the rating of "Russia's worst enemies" (after the US), according to a social survey by Levada Center⁹. The situation is additionally complicated by the fact that there is practically no political opposition in Russia at present.

The Russian domestic policy is exclusively Russia's internal issue only at the first sight. While Europe attacks those few platforms that counter Russian propaganda, the Kremlin-controlled media continue to create the image of an enemy for Russian citizens. And this "enemy" is not only Ukraine, Georgia, or the US, which have always had strained relations with Russia – now this refers to all European countries. And, perhaps, this is the answer to the sceptical question that some Europeans still ask: What has this war to do with me?

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⁹ *Врагу России (Enemies of Russia)*, Левада-Центр, 10 January 2018, [<https://www.levada.ru/2018/01/10/vragi-rossii/>].

THE KREMLIN'S INFORMATION WARS IN THE 21ST CENTURY: ESTONIA, GEORGIA, UKRAINE

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The article deals with the use of information warfare during the so-called "Bronze Night" events in Estonia in 2007, the Russian-Georgian war in 2008, and the Russian aggression against Ukraine since 2014. The events in Estonia are described as the first large-scale usage of cyber warfare combined with disinformation against a sovereign state. The war against Georgia is presented as the very first usage of military actions together with cyber-attacks and disinformation. And the ongoing Russian aggression against Ukraine is described as an example of combining of the most effective information warfare tactics applied in Estonia and Georgia together with new information warfare tools. All three examples are presented as the cornerstones for understanding the main peculiarities of the Kremlin's modern information warfare.

In memoriam of my father, Professor and Member of the Parliament of Ukraine Taras Kyiak.

The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation (December 2014) stated a significant role of information, which was confirmed by the attempted annexation of Crimea, the Kremlin's aggression in Donbas, and events in Syria. Moreover, the Kremlin views the information sphere as a key domain for modern military conflict.¹ The new version of the Doctrine of Information


Security signed by the Russian president V. Putin in December 2016 addresses the important status of information technologies during conflicts between states. According to the doctrine, one of the main threats to Russia is "the scale of the use of information-psychological influences by the special services of certain states".² One of the main goals of the Russian government in the new doctrine is the strengthening of the vertical management and the centralization of information security at all levels.³

¹ Russia Military Power 2017, "Defence Intelligence Agency", 28 June 2017, [http://www.dia.mil access: 05 August 2017].

² Доктрина информационной безопасности Российской Федерации (The Doctrine of Information Security of the Russian Federation), "RG.ru", December 2016, [https://rg.ru/2016/12/06/doktrina-infobezobasnost-site-dok.html access: 07 January 2017].

³ N. Nikolaichuk, Стратегическая информационная операция может быть скоротечной, а может длиться годами (Strategic Information Operation Can Be Fast or Can Last for Years), "Столетие", 22 October 2014 [http://www.stoletie.ru/politika/igor_nikolajchuk_strategicheskaja_informacionnaja_operacija_mozhet_byt_skorotechnoj_a_mozhet_dlitsja_godami_185.htm access: 12 October 2017].

The Kremlin actively used information warfare during the events in Estonia in 2007 regarding the so-called “Bronze Soldier” monument, in the Russian-Georgian war in 2008, and also has been doing so during the Russian aggression against Ukraine since 2014. Those three cases are the cornerstones for understanding the Kremlin’s modern information warfare, which has improved with every next conflict. Despite the fact that the experience of these countries is often neglected, they have become not only a testing ground but also a demonstration ground for the Kremlin’s information warfare capabilities. At the same time, those states have experienced much more information warfare used against them than the majority of the Western countries have.



The Kremlin actively used information warfare during the events in Estonia in 2007 regarding the so-called “Bronze Soldier” monument, in the Russian-Georgian war in 2008, and also has been doing so during the Russian aggression against Ukraine since 2014

The Kremlin’s Information Warfare and “Bronze Night” in Estonia, 2007: The First Move

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Baltic states have been perceived as a part of the Russian geopolitical interests. As a result, the Baltic countries have been portrayed by

the Kremlin’s media as xenophobic, hostile, and different from the rest of Europe. The best-known usage of disinformation techniques and the factor of ethnic Russians in the Baltics occurred in Estonia in 2007 during the so-called “Bronze Night” or the “Bronze Soldier” event. On 26-27 April 2007, Estonia experienced one of the most tragic days in its modern history. The trigger was the relocation of the memorial for the Soviet soldier from the center of Tallinn to the military cemetery.

The monument was erected in 1947 by the Soviet authorities, but remained in place during the collapse of the Soviet Union and no serious attempts were made to remove it until 2006. It has to be mentioned that there is a fundamentally different perception of the role of Soviet soldiers in Estonia during and after World War II. For ethnic Russian Estonian citizens, they were liberators. And for ethnic Estonians, they were unwelcome occupiers.

The debates initiated by the ethnic Estonians to remove the monument became more prominent in 2006.⁴ In January 2007, the Estonian government announced that the monument would be moved from the center of Tallinn to a military cemetery on the outskirts of the city. On 26 April 2007, the monument area was fenced off and a day later, immediately after an emergency meeting of the Estonian government, the monument was relocated. It provoked riots in the center of Tallinn, accompanied by cyber-attacks against Estonian government agencies and by diplomatic pressure from the Russian Federation.⁵

⁴ M. Ehala, *The Bronze Soldier: Identity, Threat and Maintenance in Estonia*, “Journal of Baltic Studies”, 2009, [<http://lepo.it.da.ut.ee/~ehalam/pdf/Identity%20threat.pdf> access: 03 March 2017].

⁵ K. Liik, *The ‘Bronze Year’ of Estonia-Russia Relations*, International Centre for Defence and Security, 2007, [https://www.icds.ee/fileadmin/media/icds.ee/failid/Kadri_Liik_Bronze_Year.pdf access: 10 June 2017].

⁶ G. Gigitashvili, *Russia’s Hybrid Warfare at Work in Estonia*, “New East Platform”, 05 October 2015, [https://www.academia.edu/23006907/Russian_Hybrid_war_at_work_in_Estonia access: 09 November 2017].

The riots resulted in 153 injuries and 800 arrests.⁶ Dmitri Ganin, a Russian who was killed with a knife during the protests, was portrayed by the Russian media as a victim of police actions, though this incident happened about 500 meters from the monument. The Russian media were producing fake news and spreading rumors about the number of people killed and claiming that the Estonian police were torturing ethnic Russians in “secret prisons”.⁷ The Kremlin’s disinformation portrayed the Estonians as fascists and stated that they were discriminating against the Russians. At the same time, those protestors who took part in riots and smashed windows and stole merchandise from the shops were labeled as “peaceful demonstrators” by the Russian media.⁸

As it was already mentioned, together with disinformation and fake news, cyber warfare was used. Most of the cyber-attacks were DDoS (Distributed Denial of Service) using networks of bots or robots to send out massive numbers of signals to specific addresses to overload servers until they finally shut down.⁹ The primary target of the first wave of such attacks, which was relatively simple and lasted from 27 April to 29 April, was the Estonian prime minister’s website. The official website of the Estonian government was not available for eight hours in the afternoon of 28 April.¹⁰ The Estonian news

outlet “Postimees Online” also became a target of two DDoS attacks on its servers, which limited the chances for Estonia to be heard abroad.¹¹ Many attacks were implemented with the help of computer servers and networks located in Russia. Furthermore, instructions on Russian websites in the Russian language showed on how, when, and what to attack on websites, in forums, and in chat spaces.¹²

The intensity and sophistication of cyber-attacks increased during the second wave (30 April-18 May 2007). They became more complex, varied, and focused on different targets. Between 3 May and 17 May, there were 128 separate DDoS attacks on Estonian websites. Out of these, 106 attacks were concentrated on three websites – the Ministry of Finance, the Police and Border Guard, and the websites of the Estonian government and prime minister.¹³ Among other targets were the websites of the Estonian presidency and parliament, almost all government ministries, political parties, three of the country’s biggest news organizations, two of the biggest banks, and also firms specializing in communications. The Estonian minister of defense stated that the cyber-attacks on the state servers were a military aggression and some of the attacks originated in Russian state institutions. Moreover, the leader of the pro-Kremlin youth movement “Nashi” admitted launching some of the cyber-attacks.¹⁴

⁷ *Таллинский расчёт (Tallinn’s Reckoning)*, “HTB (NTV)”, 2011, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m8cpFAMoJGQ access: April 2017].

⁸ M. Kyiak, *Countering Kremlin’s Disinformation in Baltic and Eastern Europe*, “Baltic Worlds”, 01 December 2016, [http://balticworlds.com/countering-kremlins-disinformation-in-baltic-and-eastern-europe access: December 2017].

⁹ *Prepared Testimony and Statement for Record of Toomas Hendrik Ilves*, 09 March 2017, [http://docs.house.gov access: 10 March 2017].

¹⁰ A. Schmidt, *The Estonian Cyberattacks*, 2013, [http://www.researchgate.net access: 09 April 2017].

¹¹ A. Schmidt, *The Estonian Cyberattacks*, 2013, [http://www.researchgate.net access: 09 April 2017].

¹² A. Schmidt, *The Estonian Cyberattacks*, 2013, [http://www.researchgate.net access: 09 April 2017].

¹³ A. Radin, *Hybrid Warfare in the Baltics*, “RAND”, 2017, [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1577.html access: July 2017].

¹⁴ D. Denning, *Tracing the Sources of Today’s Russian Cyber Threat*, “Scientific American”, 18 August 2017, [https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/tracing-the-sources-of-today-s-russian-cyberthreat access: 25 August 2017].

War against Georgia, 2008: Kremlin Steps out of the Shadow

The war against Georgia lasted for only five days, but the implications of what had happened were far more enduring.¹⁵ It was caused by many complex factors: geopolitical, legal, cultural, and economic. The 1992 South Ossetia War and the 1993 Abkhazian War led to Georgia's loss of these regions to unrecognized pro-Russian local governments. In 2003-2004, a pro-Western government came to power in Georgia following the Rose Revolution. In 2006, four employees of the Russian GRU (Chief Intelligence Service) were accused



One of the Kremlin's main goals during this war was to discredit and isolate the Georgian government inside Georgia and in front of foreign countries

of spying and were arrested in Georgia. The Kremlin's reaction was the deportation of three thousand Georgians from the Russian Federation. Then the banning of Georgian wine and mineral water followed. During 2007-2008, several articles about the necessity of a military operation against Georgia appeared.¹⁶ Moreover, in June-July 2008, Russian railroad troops made

repairs of 54 kilometers of the railroad track in Abkhazia. Those railway links were important to the deployment of mechanized Russian units. In July 2008, the military exercise "Caucasus 2008" took place. Some of the units involved in this exercise later took part in the military operation against Georgia.

Although Georgia lost this short war, it still managed not to lose the information front. Almost immediately after the start of the war, the Georgian government stopped broadcasting Russian TV channels and blocked access to Russian websites. In August 2008, there was a vacuum of information in the media while many foreign reporters were on holiday.¹⁷ Consequently, Georgia was successful in convincing the international community that the big Russia was attacking a small state.

The Georgian government set up a media center in a hotel lobby in central Tbilisi. Journalists had access to updated military maps posted with troop movements. Foreign journalists in Tbilisi were briefed several times a day. Within hours after the beginning of the war, the Georgian government began issuing hourly e-mail updates for foreign journalists.¹⁸ Government officials conducted international telephone conferences with reporters who were outside Georgia.¹⁹ Georgia had a media staff of 60 volunteers, who were organized into teams. All information collected during

¹⁵ A. Jugaste, *Communicating Georgia: Georgia's Information Campaign in the 2008 War with Russia*, Tartu University, 2011, [http://ut.ee access: April 2017].

¹⁶ O. Panfilov, *Как Россия не смогла захватить Грузию в 2008 (How Russia Couldn't Conquer Georgia in 2008)*, "Inforesist", 03 January 2017, [https://inforesist.org/kak-rossiya-tak-i-ne-smogla-zahvatit-gruziyu-v-2008-godu access: 04 May 2017].

¹⁷ A. Jugaste, *Communicating Georgia: Georgia's Information Campaign in the 2008 War with Russia*, Tartu University, 2011, [http://ut.ee access: April 2017].

¹⁸ C. King, *The Five-Day War: Managing Moscow after the Georgia Crisis*, "Foreign Affairs", 01 January 2008, [http://foreignaffairs.com access: 10 March 2017].

¹⁹ A. Jugaste, *Communicating Georgia: Georgia's Information Campaign in the 2008 War with Russia*, Tartu University, 2011, [http://ut.ee access: April 2017].

the day was distributed the next day in the form of Georgia Update, the government's newsletter that existed before the war. Georgia Update also included international media coverage of the war to show the Western support.

One of the Kremlin's main goals during this war was to discredit and isolate the Georgian government inside Georgia and in front of foreign countries. Georgia was presented as a puppet aggressor, which had violated both international law and human rights.²⁰ Another target of the Kremlin's information war was the Georgian army. The Kremlin hoped to induce panic and demoralization among inexperienced Georgian soldiers.

According to the Kremlin's frame, the reason behind "Georgia's aggression" was its nationalist and violent government. This message appeared in 41% of the statements issued by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Moscow explained its presence on the territory of Georgia as "a peacekeeping mission" and as historical guarantees for the "people of Caucasus".²¹ Russian senior officials used such international legal and emotional terms as "genocide", "ethnic cleansing in South Ossetia", and "humanitarian catastrophe in Ossetia". The Kremlin argued that Russia was forced to use its military because of the sudden actions of the Georgian army. The Russian media even attempted to prove

the existence of US citizens in the Georgian army to discredit it.²²

Unlike the cyber-attacks against Estonia in 2007, cyber-attacks against Georgia were accompanied by military combat. When tanks, airplanes, and troops were crossing the border, Georgian citizens were not able to access websites for information and instructions. Cyber-attacks also degraded the ability of the Georgian government to communicate, both internally and with the outside world. News and local government websites became targets for cyber warfare exactly in the areas the Russian military was going to attack. Consequently, the federal and local Georgian governments, military, local news agencies were not able to communicate with Georgian citizens.²³

Moreover, Georgian authorities were temporarily unable to communicate their story to the rest of the world. Once Russia successfully moved troops into Georgia, the second phase of cyber-attacks began. The target list expanded to include financial institutions, businesses, educational institutions, Western media (BBC and CNN), and a Georgian hacker website. Hackers were mobilizing themselves through various websites such as StopGeorgia.ru, which went online on 9 August 2008.²⁴ However, when Georgian websites were disabled, they were moved to the blogosphere under the Google.com shield and the website of the president of

²⁰ J. Rogoza, A. Dubas, *Russian Propaganda War: Media as a Long- and Short-range Weapon*, Centre for Eastern Studies, September 2008, [https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/91705/commentary_09.pdf access: 07 June 2017].

²¹ A. Jugaste, *Communicating Georgia: Georgia's Information Campaign in the 2008 War with Russia*, Tartu University, 2011, [http://ut.ee access: April 2017].

²² *U.S. Citizen Was among Georgian Commandos - Russian Military*, "RT.com", 28 August 2008, [https://www.rt.com/news/us-citizen-was-among-georgian-commandos-russian-military access: 01 February 2017].

²³ D. Hollis, *Cyberwar Case Study: Georgia 2008*, "Small Wars Journal", 2011 [http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/cyberwar-case-study-georgia-2008 access: 10 March 2017].

²⁴ *Kremlin's Information War: Why Georgia Should Develop State Policy in Countering Propaganda*, Institute for for Development of Freedom of Information, 01 September 2016, [https://idfi.ge/en/informational-war-of-kremlin-against-georgia-the-necessity-of-having-state-policy-against-propaganda access: 23 March 2017].

Poland, which allowed Georgia to continue operating their websites and helped their communications with the world. Georgians transferred cyber assets and websites to servers in countries such as the United States, Estonia, and Poland.²⁵ The Georgian government also contacted Estonian officials to share their knowledge after the 2007 cyber-attacks in Estonia.



Same as with the Georgian army, one of the most important targets for the Kremlin were Ukrainian soldiers. Mobile operators were used as tools for spreading panic and fear among the Ukrainian soldiers, especially during significant battles

The war against Georgia in 2008 revealed weaknesses in the Kremlin's information warfare, which made the Kremlin rethink and improve its information capabilities. Some experts (including Russian) are convinced that Russia lost the information war against Georgia and was not prepared to fight it.²⁶ Shortly after the war ended, at that time the Russian prime minister V. Putin "congratulated" the organizers of what he called "the Western propaganda machine".²⁷ The war against Georgia became a significant trigger for the Kremlin's information warfare upgrade.²⁸

The Kremlin's Aggression against Ukraine, 2014-Current Days: A Lethal Medley

Unlike Estonia in 2007 and Georgia in 2008, where the events lasted for a much shorter period, an active use of information warfare by the Kremlin against Ukraine has been already ongoing for four years. Here we describe just a few examples of the disinformation and fake news around the Ukrainian events.

The Kremlin's information war against Ukraine began at least in 2005, after the so-called Orange Revolution, when Russian politicians used such words as a "failed state" towards Ukraine. Symbolism played a significant role in the Russian disinformation campaigns and creation of perceptions for both Russian citizens and outsiders. Consequently, during and after the Revolution of Dignity (2013-2014), the Kremlin has vividly used World War II terminology such as "fascists", "Nazi", "banderovtsi" against the Ukrainian authorities, so as to create a specific image. For instance, on 28 April 2014, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs referred to rumors of a construction of "fascist concentration camps" in Ukraine.²⁹ The representatives of the Ukrainian Armed Forces were often labeled as "punishers", "fascists", and "execution squads under the command of the Kyiv junta".

Same as with the Georgian army, one of the most important targets for the Kremlin

²⁵ D. Barker, *The Russo-Georgia War of 2008: Information Operations Case Study Analysis*, "Information Operations", 24 February 2013, [https://www.academia.edu/11903525/The_Russia-Georgia_War_of_2008_Information_Operations_Case_Study_Analysis access: 15 March 2017].

²⁶ N. Nikolaichuk, *Стратегическая информационная операция может быть скоротечной, а может длиться годами (Strategic Information Operation Can Be Fast or Can Last for Years)*, "Столетие", 2014 [http://www.stoletie.ru/politika/igor_nikolajchuk_strategicheskaja_informacionnaja_operacija_mozhet_byt_skorotechnoj_a_mozhet_dlitsa_godami_185.htm access: 12 October 2017].

²⁷ A. Jugaste, *Communicating Georgia: Georgia's Information Campaign in the 2008 War with Russia*, Tartu University, 2011, [<http://ut.ee> access: April 2017].

²⁸ M. Kyiak, *Countering Kremlin's Disinformation in Baltic and Eastern Europe*, "Baltic Worlds", 01 December 2016, [<http://balticworlds.com/countering-kremlins-disinformation-in-baltic-and-eastern-europe> access: December 2016].

were Ukrainian soldiers. Mobile operators were used as tools for spreading panic and fear among the Ukrainian soldiers, especially during significant battles such as the one near Debaltseve (January 2015).

The Russian state media produced plenty of fake news. The most profound example here is the downing of Malaysia Airlines Flight MH17 on July 2014. The main idea was to confuse the public with as many different rumors and fake news as possible, even contradicting one another, so as to obfuscate this tragic event. There were several statements from Russia about the plane, for example, that the plane was loaded with dead bodies and purposely flown overhead.³⁰ Other versions were that the Ukrainian air defense hit the MH17, or a Ukrainian ground attack airplane SU-25 brought down the Boeing. To “prove” the version of the SU-25 airplane, a “quote” from the Twitter account of an “air controller” at the Ukrainian international Boryspil airport named “Carlos” was provided. This was contravened by the fact that this person has never worked there and that foreign citizens are not allowed to work as air controllers in Ukraine.³¹ A Joint Investigation Team composed of representatives of the Netherlands,

Ukraine, Belgium, Malaysia, and Australia was set up to investigate the incident. The Kremlin-controlled media have offered at least nine different versions of what happened to MH17 and none of those versions correspond to the conclusion reached by the Joint Investigation Team in 2016.³²

It may seem that the Kremlin was not using cyber warfare against Ukraine, but concentrated more on disinformation, diplomatic tools, and military actions.³³ No doubt if cyber-attacks were raised to the effectiveness of the attacks against Estonia in 2007 and Georgia in 2008, the consequences of this could be more severe.³⁴ Nevertheless, in 2014-2017, the Kremlin made more than 7,000 different cyber-attacks against Ukraine, according to the minister of defense of Ukraine S. Poltorak.³⁵ For example, just several minutes before the polls were closed during the May 2014 presidential election, the pro-Kremlin “hacktivist” group “Cyberberkut” posted false election results on the election commission’s website, and Russia’s TV “Channel One” aired those results. In December 2015, a huge cyber-attack was launched against Western Ukrainian energy provider

²⁹ K. Pynnoenimmi, A. Racz, *Fog of Falsehood: Russian Strategy of Deception and the Conflict in Ukraine*, Finnish Institute for International Affairs Report, May 2016, p. 79.

³⁰ A. Polunin, *Мертвый самолет или самолет мертвых? (A Dead Plane or a Plane with the Dead?)*, “Свободная Пресса”, 03 August 2014, [http://svpressa.ru/war21/article/94297/ access: February 2017].

³¹ T. Nazarchuk, *Збитий Бойнз Malaysia Airlines: що придумала російська пропаганда (The Downed Boeing of Malaysia Airlines: What Has Russian Propaganda Invented)*, “Mediasapiens”, 18 July 2014, [http://osvita.mediasapiens.ua/ethics/manipulation/zbitiy_boeing_malaysia_airlines_scho_pridumala_rosiyska_propaganda access: 10 June 2017].

³² F. Hensen, *Russian Hybrid Warfare: A Study of Disinformation*, Center for Security Studies, 08 September 2017, [http://www.css.ethz.ch/en/services/digital-library/publications/publication.html/330e6a04-b2d4-4946-b296-5f39dae3044a access: 10 October 2017].

³³ J. Hsu, *Why There’s No Real Cyberwar in Ukraine Conflict*, “IEEE Spectrum”, 14 March 2014, [https://www.spectrum.ieee.org/tech-talk/computing/networks/why-theres-no-real-cyberwar-in-the-ukraine-conflict access: 02 May 2017].

³⁴ P. Pernik, *Is All Quiet on the Cyber Front in the Ukrainian Crisis?* International Centre for Defence and Security, 07 March 2014, [https://www.icds.ee/et/blogi/artikkel/is-all-quiet-on-the-cyber-front-in-the-ukrainian-crisis access: 07 April 2017].

³⁵ *Росія здійснила понад 7 тисяч кібератак проти України – Полторак (Russia Has Made More Than 7 Thousand Cyberattacks against Ukraine – Poltorak)*, “Українська Правда”, 05 April 2017, [https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2017/04/5/7140280 access: 06 April 2017].

“Prykarpattiaoblenergo”, which caused problems with energy delivery throughout the whole region. It led to a blackout that affected 200,000 consumers.³⁶ In June 2017, the computer virus “NotPetya” in a single day attacked about 2,000 organizations and two thirds of them were located in Ukraine.³⁷

During the Kremlin’s information war against Ukraine not only cyber warfare, but first and foremost, media and social networks were used. Almost immediately after the attempted annexation of Crimea and aggression in Donbas region in 2014, Ukrainian authorities stopped the transmission of the main Russian TV channels³⁸ in Ukraine. Later, on 25 February 2017, President of Ukraine P. Poroshenko signed the Doctrine of Information Security of Ukraine. According to the recent decision of the National Security and Defense Council signed by the president, any access to the Russian social networks such as Odnoklassniki.ru and V Kontakte.ru as well as Internet services Mail.ru and Yandex.ru was prohibited for a period of three years.

Conclusion

The so-called “Bronze Soldier” events in Estonia in 2007 were the first examples of a large-scale usage of cyber warfare against a sovereign country and a NATO member. During the Russian-Georgian war in August 2008, a combination of military actions, disinformation, and cyber warfare were used together. The ongoing aggression against Ukraine combines both strategies

used in a much improved way. These three cases provide the possibility for posing conclusions that will go beyond this article:

- The Kremlin is skillful in understanding foreign audiences, as well as in using and increasing ethnic, linguistic, and ideological differences within other states. Both in Georgia and in Ukraine, one of the Kremlin’s main information warfare goals has been to separate governments and citizens of these countries. The Kremlin is also applying and monopolizing World War II narratives, which have been widely used against Estonia, Georgia, and Ukraine.
- Usually, the information warfare of the Kremlin is not applied separately, but in combination with other tools (diplomatic, kinetic, economic, intelligence, political, etc.). Still, the Kremlin never repeats the same consequence and same proportions of those tools while exercising aggression against another state. Its information warfare is vertically constructed, very centralized, and most likely has one core decision center.
- Estonia was the first case of cyber warfare used by Russia against another country’s infrastructure. Cyber-attacks have been used against Ukraine on a lesser scale than in Georgia, which could be explained by different goals of the Kremlin in those two states and by the peculiarities of the undeclared war against Ukraine. Most likely, the Kremlin has not used all of its cyber warfare potential yet.

³⁶ Y. Lapayev, A. Holub, *The Other Front*, “The Ukrainian Week: Cyber Insecurity”, January 2017, N1 (107), p. 37.

³⁷ A. Soshnikov, *Он вам не Пetya: был ли доказан российский след вируса (He Is not Petya for You: Was Russian Trace of the Virus Proved)*, “Русская Служба BBC”, 17 July 2017, [http://www.bbc.com/russian/features-40525776 access: 07 February 2018].

³⁸ V. Sazonov, K. Muur, H. Moelder, *Russian Information Campaign against Ukrainian State and Defence Forces*, 08 February 2017, [http://www.ksk.edu.ee/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Report_infoops_08.02.2017.pdf access: 03 March 2017].

- The Russian aggression against Ukraine has demonstrated that information attacks are most effective in their early phases, when an emotional reaction is needed. The Ukrainian case has shown that the Kremlin is much weaker in keeping up and managing a long-term strategic information war. In this sense, the Russian information warfare looks more like a sum of wavelike information attacks than a complete strategy. Nevertheless, for now the Kremlin has all the needed capabilities to apply efficiently against any other Western state.

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RUSSIAN PROPAGANDA IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA: A BIG WAR FOR A SMALL AUDIENCE

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The article analyzes the techniques and tools of Russian propaganda against the vulnerabilities of the local authorities of the Republic of Moldova. Russian propaganda's messages are mostly absorbed by Russian-speaking citizens who do not have access to alternative media. Some local authorities are sabotaging the government's efforts, so citizens are vulnerable to informational manipulation. The refusal of Irina Vlah, Bashkan (governor) of Gagauzia, to ban Russian political-analytical and military broadcasts, as requested by Parliament's amendments to the Audiovisual Code is an eloquent example.

Introduction

With the outbreak of the conflict in Ukraine and occupation of Crimea, the editorial policy of the main TV channels in Moscow has changed a lot. More and more studies show that the media from the Russian Federation have started an informational war. The Republic of Moldova faces a series of internal vulnerabilities that facilitate the destructive effect of Russian propaganda.

Regrettably, we conclude that the population of the Republic of Moldova is exposed massively to Russian television programs, radio broadcasts, and Russian-language movies. The efforts to secure information space often fail because of both lack of national legislation's efficiency and refusal of the local authorities to cooperate with the central authorities.

The media become vulnerable when the confidence of the consumer is destroyed. Thus, we can associate the insecurity of the media space with the following sources of vulnerability:

1. The media space is built on principles other than press freedom and freedom of expression;
2. The media space is limited in any kind of resources (economic, technological, professional, etc.) necessary for development and adaptation to the opportunities of the information society's conditions of loyal competition;
3. There is no encouraging legal and deontological framework for the free development of the media sector;
4. The media institutions are pressured by the political, ideological, or economic factors, including through partisanism and political mercenarism, through excessive concentration and monopolization of the media and the advertising market;
5. The media diversity is missing or is insufficient, with regards to the social and demographic structure, as well as the political pluralism;

6. The sector is characterized by a low level of technical opportunities to access information on different platforms, including the absence or insignificant presence of network journalism as an expression of the information society and the development of new media;

7. Regional media coverage is incomplete or selective, and there are regions with low density of media;

8. There is no media culture, including media literacy skills.

Illegal Referendum and the Domination of the Russian Language in the Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia

The Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia is the first example to be discussed in detail. Gagauzia is fully absorbed both mediatically and culturally by the Russian Federation's communication channels. Through the lenses of this Russian domination, we can look at the results of the illegal referendum in Gagauzia on 02 February 2014¹. Some 98.47% of the citizens have indicated their willingness for the Republic of Moldova to join the Eurasian Economic Union of Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan, while the remaining tiny percentage have voted for the accession to the European Union (EU). The referendum was attended by 70,777 voters, which means 70.4%, even though it was declared illegal by the judiciary and the authorities in Chisinau urged the population not to participate. Thus, we see that the Gagauz ethnicities are not on Chisinau's pro-European politics side, but rather have been strongly influenced by the Russian media and cultural sources.

A Romanian researcher in geopolitics, Dan Dungaciu, considers that the media russification in Gagauzia is stronger today than it was under the USSR². Dungaciu argues that the Gagauz ethnicities are the prisoners of a disastrous situation, suffering from the lack of alternative TV/radio channels. Moreover, the linguistic and educational policy should combine effectively with the media policy, but this cohesion is totally missing. Finally, the Romanian expert believes that the blame for this deplorable situation lies with the government in Chisinau rather than with the Kremlin's policy.

However, we should not underestimate the interference of the Russian Federation into the affairs of the local authorities in the Republic of Moldova. The Russian embassy in the Republic of Moldova is very active in this small territorial unit – Gagauzia, starting with massive donations of books in Russian and ending with direct involvement in the internal political processes.

If we look at a study published in 2016, "Moldova between the East and the West: Perspectives from Gagauzia and Taraclia", conducted by the Institute for Public Policy of Moldova, there is no doubt about the Russian influence in Gagauzia. A poll published in this study shows that about 64% of the respondents consider that the Republic of Moldova belongs to the "Russian World" and about 35% of the respondents see the future of the Republic of Moldova "alongside Russia". About 85% would have voted in a referendum in favor of Moldova's joining the Eurasian Economic Union.

It is alarming that around 70% of the interviewees believe that "after the Maidan,

¹ C. Marchievici, *Referendumul din Găgăuzia: plan de destabilizare orchestrat de Moscova și pionii ei* (*The Referendum in Gagauzia: The Destabilizing Plan of Moscow and Its Pawns*), "Cotidianul", 04 February 2014, [http://www.cotidianul.ro access: 02 February 2018].

² D. Dungaciu, V. Iuga, M. Stoian, *7 teme fundamentale pentru Romania 2014* (*7 Fundamental Themes for Romania 2014*), Rao Books: Bucharest 2014, p. 124.



No government or political party has been able to promote population consolidation policies based on the spirit of citizenship by a conscious detachment from the Soviet past

the fascists came to power in Ukraine” and over 80% support “the annexation of Crimea by Russia”. The information space of the respondents contains almost exclusively Russian content. Regardless of information sources, nine out of 10 inhabitants of the mentioned regions are consuming information in Russian, compared with 42%-43% of the media average in the Republic of Moldova or 14%-15% in Europe. Thus, Russian propaganda might have formed a public opinion in Gagauzia in favor of the Kremlin’s interests with the cost of keeping the Gagauz people in a fictional world. Restriction of access to the Russian media in Moldova will not have the desired effect in Gagauzia, because there is a local audiovisual legislation that offers unlimited opportunities for the retransmission of Russian programs by the local media in the Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia.

Another clear gesture that Gagauzia is not following the Moldovan Parliament is the declaration of the Bashkan (governor) of the region, Irina Vlah, regarding the amendments made by the Parliament to the Broadcasting Code, dated 07 December 2017, which aims to combat Russian propaganda in the Republic of Moldova³.

The Bashkan of Gagauzia said that the Russian informational and analytical broadcasts would be retransmitted on the territory of the Gagauzia despite the Law on

Combating Russian Propaganda. In essence, Irina Vlah thinks that the fight against Russian propaganda directly violates the rights of the Russian-speaking public and of the inhabitants of Gagauzia and aggravates the relations between the Republic of Moldova and the Russian Federation. The Bashkan of Gagauzia vigorously contests the notion of “informational threat” that would be in fact a “mythical slogan” and the main purpose of the initiative would be the fight against the Russian language and against “the high prestige of the Russian Federation” in the Republic of Moldova.

Considering the above-mentioned, the Russian Federation has a strong arsenal of “soft power” levers or techniques in the Republic of Moldova. The current Moldovan political elite as well as the previous one has a considerable blame for the lack of national consolidation and for the tolerance of failure of some local authorities.

No government or political party has been able to promote population consolidation policies based on the spirit of citizenship by a conscious detachment from the Soviet past, with the conscious overcoming of the ethno-linguistic cleavages inherited from the USSR.

Balti Municipality – Tendencies of Separatism

Balti municipality is another point on the map of the Republic of Moldova that has demonstrated separatism tendencies against the central authorities. In 2015, local authorities in Balti (the second largest city in the Republic of Moldova) decided to organize a consultative referendum on local autonomy. At that time, the decision to arrange the plebiscite was put forward by the communist councilors and the

³ I. Liubec, Vlah anunță că în Găgăuzia nu va fi respectată Legea anti-propagandă. Reacția președintelui CCA (Vlah Announces that the Anti-propaganda Law Will not Be Respected in Gagauzia. The Reaction of the BCC President), 08 December 2017, [<http://www.dechisde.md> access: 20 December 2017].

opposition did not vote for this decision. The referendum in Balti was not held, as the 2014 precedent in Gagauzia resulted in cancelling the plebiscite attempt by the Moldovan police.

These seemingly quiet attempts to consult the population on sensitive subjects, such as the foreign policy option, are actually the first signs of separatism, of capturing locally the power by some political parties, despite the constitutional prohibitions. At the national level, the main risk is the drop of the interest in the European integration and the promotion of the Eastern vector of foreign policy, which means the proximity to the Customs Union. The mayor of Balti, businessman Renato Usatii, who is now hiding in the Russian Federation, had a permanent conflict with the central authorities, so it is impossible to promote actively the European vector in Balti.

In this context, Russian propaganda finds much easier levers to expand its communication strategies with the Russian-speaking population. The Orthodox Church has played an important role in the transmission of political messages, especially during the presidential election campaign in 2016. The Bishop of Balti and Falesti, Marchel, with a group of priests, encouraged the parishioners not to vote for Maia Sandu, a pro-European candidate, saying that she is a “danger to the Church”⁴. Instead, the priests said that the people should support a “morally healthy” and a Christian candidate, such as Igor Dodon. This involvement in the electoral campaign shows that the Russian factor can influence locally the opinion leaders, such as Bishop

Marchel, so that the propaganda messages find their desired audience.

Transnistria – The Most Vulnerable Point of the Republic of Moldova

Beyond the worrying situation in Gagauzia and Balti municipality, Transnistria is the main lever of control and propaganda dominance of the Russian Federation in the Republic of Moldova. In 2006, a referendum in Transnistria was organized, where voters were asked if they approve of the possibility of giving up the so-called independence and of integrating with the Republic of Moldova or, alternatively, if they approve of the “independence” and a possible integration with the Russian Federation. The results are more than suggestive: 96.61% voted against the renunciation of the independence and potential future integration with the Republic of Moldova, whereas 98.07% were for the independence and potential integration with Russia⁵.

The voter turnout rate was 78.6%. The authorities of the Republic of Moldova obviously did not recognize the referendum, but the alarm was heard. Researcher Dungaciu thinks that at least theoretically, Chisinau could make Moscow’s levers ineffective by blocking any possibility of “transnistrianization” of the republic through federalist formulas to solve the Transnistrian conflict, which could move the strategic decision from Chisinau to Tiraspol⁶. However, at this stage, no such favorable change has occurred and it seems that Chisinau maintains the strategy according to which it is better to keep the Transnistrian conflict frozen than to have a

⁴ I. Liubec, *Episcopul Marchel îndeamnă creștinii să nu o susțină pe Maia Sandu (Bishop Marchel Urges Christians not to Support Maia Sandu)*, 04 November 2017, [http://www.dechisde.md access: 20 December 2017].

⁵ M. Draghici, *Transnistria vota în 2006 pentru unirea cu Rusia, dar Moscova cerea continuarea negocierilor (Transnistria Voted in 2006 to Join Russia, but Moscow Called for Further Talks)*, “Mediafax.ro”, 16 April 2014, [http://www.mediafax.ro access: 15 January 2018].

⁶ D. Dungaciu, V. Iuga, M. Stoian, *7 teme fundamentale pentru Romania 2014 (7 Fundamental Themes for Romania 2014)*, Rao Books: Bucharest 2014, p. 127.

deal that will not be in favor of the Republic of Moldova. In other words, the current situation in Transnistria is acceptable in comparison with the scenario of the definitive loss of this territory.

The Euromaidan in Kiev during 2013-2014 also had some effects on the Transnistrian region. After the occupation of the Crimean Peninsula by Russia, the so-called president of the Tiraspol Supreme Soviet, Mihail Burla, sent a letter to the State Duma asking Moscow to examine the possibility of annexing the Transnistrian region as well. The initiative was categorically rejected by the authorities in Chisinau, and Moscow assured that it did not intend to recognize the separatist region. Such initiatives demonstrate how much the so-called government in Tiraspol wants to move away from the Republic of Moldova and to move closer to Moscow.

However, we cannot overlook the recent improvements in the relationship between Chisinau and Tiraspol. Four protocol decisions that are expected to simplify the lives of citizens on both sides of the Dniester were signed on 25 November 2017 by the political representatives of Chisinau and Tiraspol, George Balan and Vitali Ignatiev, in Tighina.

The documents guarantee the normal functioning of the Moldovan schools with the teaching in Romanian in the Transnistrian region, the access of the peasants to their own agricultural lands along the Dubasari-Tiraspol route, the apostille of the diplomas issued by the Transnistrian universities, the restoration of fixed and mobile telephony between the two sides of the Dniester. If we refer to schools with the teaching in Romanian in the Transnistrian region, the heads of the educational institutions are

very skeptical of these stipulations and they do not think that the documents will be implemented any time soon⁷. It is necessary to note that the Romanian schools on the left bank of the Dniester River have been ignored for years by the authorities in Chisinau, while the Tiraspol regime, according to the teachers, refuses to pass through the "Transnistrian customs" any teaching materials in Romanian. The signing of these four protocol decisions on 25 November was rather a diplomatic step on the eve of the official meeting in the "5 + 2" format of the negotiations in Vienna. However, the trust between Prime Minister Pavel Filip and the so-called leader of Tiraspol, V. Krasnoselski, is very limited and the great progress is only on paper.

The vulnerabilities and the weaknesses of the Transnistrian region are rooted in the depth of the ideology, indoctrination, and the Russian media domination over the past 25 years. The distortion of the historical memory is one of the ideological priorities of the so-called government in Tiraspol, so Transnistria develops a personal historiography and the study of history.

In this context, a group of researchers at the Research Laboratory "History of Transnistria" at the University of Tiraspol laid the foundations for the historiography of Transnistria. It is important to note that the history of Transnistria has never been an object of research. However, the laboratory at the University of Tiraspol has completed several scientific works, just a few of them: "The History of the Transnistrian Moldavian Republic" (in three volumes), the series of brochures titled "Lecture Course on the History of Moldova", the collection of documents called "The Basarabian Question and the Creation of the Transnistrian Moldovan Republic", and others.

⁷ D. Stimpovschii, *Ce spun directorii școlilor românești din Transnistria despre protocolul Bălan-Ignatie (What Say the Directors of the Romanian Schools in Transnistria about the Bălan-Ignatie Protocol)*, "MoldNova", 01 December 2017.

The main purpose of all these papers is to prove the existence of the “Transnistrian statehood” as a result of the “war of independence” in 1992. The history schoolbooks – “The History of the Native Place” for pupils in the 4th to 9th grades as well as the “History of the Transnistrian Moldovan Republic” for pupils in the 10th and 11th grades – transmit a completely different history than in the schoolbooks in the Republic of Moldova. Their purpose is to form historical memory, such as commemoration, which includes visiting memorials and monuments or attending public holidays. There is a memorial of the Transnistria War defenders in every town of the region and the main holiday of Transnistria is celebrated on 02 September when international sports competitions are held in the memory of the fallen defenders.

The Russian media dominance is absolute in the Transnistrian region. There are 276 media outlets compared to 294 in 2015, but apparently, the large number of newspapers, television channels, or news websites is eclipsed by the ubiquity of censorship, state control, and lack of a modern school of journalism. Almost all the audiovisual and written content depends on the political elites, the press functions in a closed space, and there is almost no contact between the journalists on both sides of the Dniester.

One of the largest television channels is Pervii Pridnestrovschi, a public channel that has an audience of 600,000 viewers. For comparison, another important television channel, TSV, owned by Sheriff company, has an audience of around 500,000 viewers. Opposition media have no chances to survive in the region. There were newspapers, sites, platforms, social networks where critical

materials were published. Their fate was predictable – they were closed. In spite of censorship, the citizens on the left bank of the Dniester River can freely access the Internet and the Moldovan media resources to get informed about the life in Moldova and around the world.

A major factor of concern and vulnerability for the authorities in Chisinau is the presence of the Operational Group of Russian Forces (OGRF) in Transnistria. The OGRF was created on 01 July 1995 on the basis of the former Soviet 14th Army. It has no legal status on the territory of the Republic of Moldova and thus constitutes an eminent threat to national security. In 2016, the OGRF soldiers marched at the military parade on 09 May in Tiraspol, thus violating commitments assumed by Russia according to the norms of the international law. Thirty-six military units equipped with weapons went to Suvorov Square in Tiraspol, including armored vehicles from the Russian Federation and rocket launchers, as well as a column of T-34 tanks. The diplomatic requests of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration (MFAEI) of the Republic of Moldova for explanations from the Embassy of the Russian Federation to the Republic of Moldova did not succeed⁸.

Associate expert on security at IDIS “Viitorul”, Rosian Vasilei, thinks that Russia is the main destabilizing factor in the Republic of Moldova in terms of security and defense risks through the presence of the OGRF. The proof is the doubling in number of military exercises in 2017 compared to 2016. Thus, the Russian and Transnistrian militaries participated in 2017 in 128 military exercises, including large-scale ones, where the forcing of

⁸ V. Călugăreanu, *Rusia sfidează Chișinăul și răspunde SUA cu militari la parada separatistilor (Russia Defies Chisinau and Responds with US Troops to the Separatist Parade)*, “Deutsche Welle”, 11 May 2016, [http://www.dw.com access: 02 December 2017].



Gagauzia, Balti municipality, and Transnistria are those vulnerable points on the map of the Republic of Moldova that offer a room for maneuver to the Russian propaganda

Dniester was staged. The OGRF also conducted military exercises of snipers who learned camouflage skills and ways to use modern reconnaissance and surveillance devices, navigation systems, and secure communication means⁹.

Vasiloi also mentions that the authorities in Chisinau must be concerned about the lessons of patriotic education “for glorifying the Russian army” and “for the reconstruction of the struggles for liberation of Tiraspol by the German-Romanian troops”¹⁰. The MFAEI constantly expresses its “perplexity and indignation towards the provocative behavior of the Russian troops that were illegally deployed in the Transnistrian region, which, despite the protests that were repeatedly expressed by the Moldovan authorities, continues military activities with dubious objectives”¹¹. Regretfully, these diplomatic releases do not have the expected effects and the actual ability to stop the OGRF military maneuvers, which continue in 2018. The military trainings in the Transnistrian region are far from the political-military reality that was built in Chisinau, but it is alarming that this keeps the risk of escalating a conflict at the border with Ukraine.

Conclusions

Gagauzia, Balti municipality, and Transnistria are those vulnerable points on the map of the Republic of Moldova that offer a room for maneuver to the Russian propaganda. The Russian media dominance cannot be eliminated as long as the central authorities in Chisinau do not impose a real control over the information space throughout the country. It is paradoxical that the Republic of Moldova, with a predominant population of Moldovans and Romanian speakers, is taken over by the Russian media and culture, while the Russian speakers constitute only 13.5% of the population (according to the Population and Housing Census in the Republic of Moldova in 2014). Separatist tendencies, ideological indoctrination, distortion of history, illegal military stationing of the OGRF in Transnistria are the challenges that can be solved or improved by the government in Chisinau only through political will and the consolidation of the geopolitical efforts in the interests of the Republic of Moldova.

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⁹ В Приднестровье прошли учения российских снайперов (Transnistria Hosted Exercises of Russian Snipers), “Publika”, 16 September 2016, [https://ru.publika.md access: 20 December 2017].

¹⁰ R. Vasiloi, *Federația Rusă principalul factor destabilizator în Republica Moldova din punct de vedere a riscurilor de securitate și apărare (Russia's Main Destabilizing Factor in the Republic of Moldova in terms of Security and Defense Risks)*, 20 December 2017, [https://rosianvasiloi.blogspot.md access: 12 January 2018].

¹¹ *Cu privire la exercițiile militare desfășurate în regiunea transnistreană de către trupele ruse și structurile de forță ale regimului de la Tiraspol (On the Military Exercises Carried out in the Transnistrian Region by the Russian Troops and the Force Structures of the Tiraspol Regime)*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration of Moldova, [http://www.mfa.gov.md access: 12 January 2018].

STOKING THE FLAMES: RUSSIAN INFORMATION OPERATIONS IN TURKEY

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Russian propaganda and information operations, or more accurately political warfare, in the West and near abroad have been covered extensively. Neither is it a new phenomenon, having a century-long history going back to the Bolsheviks in the early 20th century. However, Russian operations outside these areas received little attention. Therefore, in this paper Russian propaganda and information operations in and against Turkey will be examined. This paper argues that Russia is winning the propaganda war in Turkey and that does not bode well for the future of international order and the transatlantic alliance.

Russian propaganda and information operations, or more accurately political warfare, in the West and near abroad have been covered extensively.¹ Neither is it a new phenomenon, having a century-long history going back to the Bolsheviks in the early 20th century.² However, Russian operations outside these geographic areas received little attention.³ Therefore, in this paper, I look at Russian propaganda and information

operations in and against Turkey. Russia's relations with Turkey have a complicated history – they have fought 12 wars since the 16th century and were on the opposite sides in the Cold War. Nevertheless, Turkey remains important to Russia for geopolitical reasons – in terms of both Black Sea security and access to the Mediterranean via the Turkish Straits – and increasingly for economic reasons, especially as a consumer

¹ There are now several reports and in-depth studies of various aspects of Kremlin's political warfare. They are too numerous to list here, but among others see M. Galeotti, *Controlling Chaos: How Russia Manages Its Political War in Europe*, "European Council on Foreign Relations", September 2017, [http://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/controlling_chaos_how_russia_manages_its_political_war_in_europe]; M. Weiss, P. Pomerantsev, *The Menace of Unreality: How the Kremlin Weaponizes Information, Culture, and Money*, "The Interpreter", 22 November 2014, [http://www.interpretermag.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/The_Menace_of_Unreality_Final.pdf]; O. Lutsevych, *Agents of the Russian World: Proxy Groups in the Contested Neighbourhood*, "Chatham House", April 2016, [<https://www.chathamhouse.org/publication/agents-russian-world-proxy-groups-contested-neighbourhood>]; H.A. Conley et al., *The Kremlin Playbook: Understanding Russian Influence in Central and Eastern Europe*, "CSIS", October 2016, [<https://www.csis.org/analysis/kremlin-playbook>]; C.S. Chivvis, *Hybrid War: Russian Contemporary Political Warfare*, "Bulletin of Atomic Scientists", Vol. 73(5), 2017, pp. 316-321; K. Giles, *Handbook of Russian Information Warfare*, "NATO Defense College", November 2016, [<http://www.ndc.nato.int/download/downloads.php?icode=506>].

² "Active measures" or subversion as it was called during the Cold War. See R. H. Schultz, R. Godson, *Dezinformatsia: Active Measures in Soviet Strategy*, Pergamon-Brassey's: London, 1984.

³ For a recent project regarding the global reach of Russia's political warfare, see *The Return of Global Russia*, "Carnegie Endowment for International Peace", [<http://carnegieendowment.org/publications/interactive/global-russia/>]. For the Turkish case, the reporting and op-eds by M. Bahadırhan Dincaslan for *Kırım Haber Ajansı* (Crimea News Agency) [<http://qha.com.ua/tr/authors/m-bahadirhan-dincaslan/>] and for Euromaidan Press [<http://euromaidanpress.com/author/bahadirhan/>] are notable exceptions.

and transit hub for Russian natural gas. The increasing Russian influence in Turkey that might look like a “marriage of convenience”⁴ right now has the potential to further weaken and undermine NATO and the transatlantic alliance by driving a wedge between allies at a time when Russia is engaging in a sustained political warfare against the West.



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Despite using a variety of tools (from “fake news” and cyber-attacks to corruption, covert operations, and subversion) and adopting/tuning its message according to the particular politico-historical context of the target country/society, the current manifestation of Russian political warfare has a fundamental goal – to undermine and weaken the Western liberal democratic order and the Transatlantic institutions.⁵ The Turkish case, apart from the immediate geopolitical concerns, should be seen as a part of this broader attempt to weaken the liberal international order and reassert Russia as a global power on its own terms.

There are three main episodes of Russian information operations in Turkey:

- during and immediately after the Russian invasion in Crimea in 2014,

- from the downing of a Russian fighter jet that violated Turkish airspace in November 2015 to June 2016, when the relations started to normalize,
- and finally since the failed coup attempt by the Gulenists in July 2016 in Turkey.

Russian Propaganda in Turkey about the Conflict in Ukraine

The first episode is about presenting the Russian invasion and the illegal annexation of Crimea and the continuing conflict in eastern Ukraine in a pro-Russian way in the Turkish media. Apart from the “official” propaganda by the Turkish language service of Sputnik News, this is generally carried out using socialist, communist, left-nationalist, and Eurasianist media sources in Turkey that are inherently suspicious of pro-Western and pro-American governments abroad. Primary among them are the newspapers Sol, Aydınlık, Oda TV, and Birgün. Using the usual tropes of Russian propaganda, these outlets reflect the Kremlin’s versions of the events surrounding Crimea’s invasion and annexation by Russia as well as the ongoing conflict in Ukraine.⁶ They tend to tie the developments in Ukraine and the Russian actions there to a broader struggle against the so-called imperialist West, and hence portray Russia as an anti-imperialist force that stands up to the “imperialist Americans and Europeans”.

This version of pro-Kremlin propaganda found fertile ground in Turkey in 2014 and early 2015 due to the presence of latent anti-Americanism among both the right

⁴ D. Triantaphyllou, quoted in *Should the West Fear a Turkey-Russia Convergence?*, “Center on Global Interests”, 08 August 2016, [<http://globalinterests.org/2016/08/08/should-the-west-fear-a-turkey-russia-convergence/>].

⁵ On the Russian challenge to the international order, see B. Devlen, *Russia’s Challenge to International Order*, [in:] A. Sprüds, K. Bukovskis (eds.), *Riga Conference Papers 2015: Towards Reassurance and Solidarity in the Euro-Atlantic Community*, Latvian Institute of International Affairs: Latvia, 2015.

⁶ For a detailed study of Russian propaganda tropes, see *A Guide to Russian Propaganda*, “Euromaidan Press”, May 2016, [<http://euromaidanpress.com/2016/05/05/a-guide-to-russian-propaganda-part-1-propaganda-prepares-russia-for-war/>].

and the left in Turkish politics.⁷ Using that anti-Americanism as a useful tool to push a Kremlin line about the developments in Ukraine, the Russian propaganda machine replicated stories that they used in the West in Turkish news media as well. Turkish “fellow travellers” on the left followed along, motivated by a combination of pro-Soviet nostalgia, anti-Americanism, and a self-professed “anti-imperialism” that sees Euromaidan as another “Coloured Revolution” and an example of American meddling in the region.

Sol (which literally means “Left” in Turkish), the extreme left-wing newspaper closely affiliated with the Turkish Communist Party (TKP), was especially active. For example, it created and maintained an interactive website titled “Civil War in Ukraine” and was and is a very willing conduit of Russian propaganda regarding Ukraine.⁸ The newspaper published 398 items (reporting or op-eds) in 2014 and 507 in 2015 on Ukraine.⁹ Almost all of them are related to the conflict. Such “fellow travellers” tended to promulgate the Kremlin propaganda about an “American coup” being carried out against the then Ukrainian President Yanukovych in 2014 and the so-called “neo-Nazis” taking over in Kyiv. The headline from Sol on 02 August 2014 that reads “Neo-Nazis in Ukraine: ‘Our goal is fascist dictatorship’” is typical of this type of “reporting”.¹⁰ Left-nationalist and Eurasianist groups (more on them below) linked the developments in Ukraine (which



the impact of such propaganda activities has been to neutralize the effects of sympathy of the Turkish public towards the plight of Crimean Tatars as a result of the invasion and annexation of Crimea by Russia

they call a “coup by a neo-Nazi junta”) to a conspiracy by the West against Turkey, warning, “Turkey will be next”.¹¹

Left-wing political movements, as well as extreme left-wing websites and news sources that are cited in this article, have limited political influence in Turkey. However, the impact of such propaganda activities has been to neutralize the effects of sympathy of the Turkish public towards the plight of Crimean Tatars as a result of the invasion and annexation of Crimea by Russia. Attempts to craft a counter-narrative to the Russian propaganda, mostly by Kırım Haber Ajansı (QHA; Crimea News Agency) and a few young journalists such as M. Bahadırhan Dincaslan had limited success.¹²

Russian Propaganda Targets Turkey

The second episode of the Russian disinformation operations targeting Turkey started after the Turkish air force shot down a Russian jet that violated the

⁷ On anti-Americanism in Turkey, see B. Kadercan, *Turkey's Anti-Americanism Isn't New*, “The National Interest”, 23 August 2016, [http://nationalinterest.org/feature/turkeys-anti-americanism-isnt-new-17448?page=show].

⁸ *Ukrayna İç Savaşı (Ukrainian Civil War)*, “Sol”, [http://interaktif.sol.org.tr/ukrayna/index.html].

⁹ *Keyword Search: Ukrayna*, “Sol”, [http://haber.sol.org.tr/arama?metin=ukrayna].

¹⁰ *Neo-Nazi'ler Ukrayna'da: 'Hedefimiz faşist diktatörlük' (Neo-Nazis in Ukraine: "Our Goal Is Fascist Dictatorship")*, “Sol”, 02 August 2014, [http://haber.sol.org.tr/dunyadan/neo-naziler-ukraynada-hedefimiz-fasist-diktatorluk-haberi-95408].

¹¹ *Ukrayna'dan sonra sıra Türkiye'de (After Ukraine, It's Turkey's Turn)*, “OdaTV”, 08 March 2014, [https://odatv.com/ukrayna-kardes-olarak-gormuyorsa...-0803141200.html].

¹² See for example, M.B. Dincaslan, *Kremlin trollerinin temel özellikleri (The Basic Characteristics of the Kremlin Trolls)*, “QHA”, 10 September 2016, [http://qha.com.ua/tr/fikir-yazilari/kremlin-trollerinin-temel-ozellikleri/148910/].

Turkish airspace near the Syrian border in November 2015.¹³ The same Russian media that had pumped pro-Kremlin lines regarding the conflict in Ukraine, promoted Turkey as a vacation and holiday spot for Russians, and tended to avoid criticizing Turkey in general, did a rapid 180-degree turn and start producing news and propaganda material that targeted Turkey directly.

This campaign was mostly directed towards domestic Russian public as well as the international community. The main modus operandi was to manufacture “fake news” about Turkey and Turkish foreign policy, such as claiming Turkey was supporting ISIS¹⁴, that Turkey was about to be kicked out of NATO¹⁵, or that Turkey was violating international law¹⁶ and committed war crimes¹⁷. Russians and Westerners have been warned about traveling to Turkey, portraying it as an unsafe country in which you could get in trouble all the time.¹⁸

What is remarkable is that right after the crisis started, the Kremlin propaganda machine shifted gears and started to

spit out anti-Turkish propaganda at an alarmingly sustainable rate. This rapid and agile reaction to a crisis suggests at least two features of the Russian propaganda apparatus. First, it is an adaptable and versatile instrument that can be wielded in a relatively efficient manner against friends and foes alike. Second, it is likely that there exist “dossiers” for even friendly countries and regimes that can be used to launch a rapid, sustained, and well-targeted propaganda campaign at an immediate notice from the Kremlin.

Nevertheless, by summer 2016, the relations with Russia were largely normalized and this torrent of anti-Turkish Russian propaganda in the Russian media almost disappeared overnight. The Russian tourists started to return to Turkey once again when Putin lifted the tourism ban.¹⁹ The talk of a new natural gas pipeline from Russia to Turkey bypassing Ukraine, the Turkish Stream, was back.²⁰ The Turkish government started negotiations with Russia to purchase S-400 air defence systems, which resulted in a \$2.5-billion deal, signed in September 2017.²¹

¹³ For Turkish policy towards Russia prior to this incident, see B. Devlen, “Don’t Poke the Russian Bear”: *Turkish Policy in the Ukrainian Crisis*, “Norwegian Centre for Conflict Resolution”, June 2014, [https://noref.no/Publications/Themes/Emerging-powers/Don-t-poke-the-Russian-bear-Turkish-policy-in-the-Ukrainian-crisis].

¹⁴ Beril Dedeoğlu: *Propaganda wars*, “Stop Fake”, 15 December 2015, [https://www.stopfake.org/en/beril-dedeoglu-propaganda-wars/] and *Ankara Defends ISIS, Turkish Officials Have Financial Interest in Oil Trade with Group - PM Medvedev*, “RT”, 25 November 2015, [https://www.rt.com/news/323373-ankara-defends-isis-medvedev/].

¹⁵ *Fake: Turkey to Be Thrown out of NATO*, “StopFake.org”, 28 November 2015, [https://www.stopfake.org/en/fake-turkey-to-be-thrown-out-of-nato/]; *France Condemned Turkey’s Downing of Russian Su-24 During NATO Council*, “SputnikNews.com”, 27 November 2015, [https://sputniknews.com/world/201511271030880392-nato-downing-su-france-council/].

¹⁶ *Fake: Turkey Closes the Bosphorus and Dardanelles for Russia*, “StopFake.org”, 01 December 2015, [https://www.stopfake.org/en/fake-turkey-closes-the-bosphorus-and-dardanelles-for-russia/].

¹⁷ *Murder of Su-24 Pilot: Are Turkey, NATO ‘Responsible for War Crime’?*, “SputnikNews.com”, 27 November 2015, [https://sputniknews.com/politics/201511271030873929-turkey-syria-nato-russia-provocation-international-law/].

¹⁸ *Turkey-Russia Jet Downing: Moscow Announces Sanctions*, “BBC News”, 28 November 2015, [http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34954575].

¹⁹ *Putin Lifts Turkey Tourism Ban*, “RT”, 30 June 2016 [https://www.rt.com/news/349041-putin-lifts-turkey-sanctions/].

²⁰ M.B. Dincaslan, *Turkish Stream or Russian Stream?*, “Euromaidan Press”, 20 October 2016, [http://euromaidanpress.com/2016/10/20/turkish-stream-or-russian-stream/].

²¹ *Turkey Signs Deal to Get Russian S-400 Air Defence Missiles*, “BBC”, 12 September 2017, [http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-41237812].

Wooing Turkey and Sowing Discord within the Transatlantic Community

As Turkey and Russia were developing a *modus vivendi* regarding Syria, the third episode of the Russian information operations started. This phase aimed to portray Russia as an ally of Turkey in Syria, aimed to increase suspicion and create resentment and animosity towards the US and European partners. This period of Russian propaganda found a much broader audience as well as more willing participants due to the presence and increasing salience of anti-Americanism in Turkey.²² This is carried out via two mediums: the Russian propaganda channels and their “fellow travellers” in the Turkish media and politics.

On the one hand, there are Russian “official” propaganda channels such as Sputnik News and RT.²³ They focus on highlighting the overlap/concurrence between Turkey and Russia on the one hand, while emphasizing and exaggerating the differences between the US and Turkey on the other.²⁴ A few recent examples will be sufficient to illustrate this point. On 03 March 2018, Sputnik News ran

a story titled “Analyst Explains Why Turkey ‘Can Calmly Withdraw from NATO’ after Putin’s Speech”.²⁵ Quoting a retired general from the Turkish Air Force, the article hammers home the message that Turkey will be more safe outside NATO rather than inside in the face of a conflict between Russia and the US. The article is littered with such quotes as “Moscow underscores that Turkey can calmly withdraw from NATO, and after doing so Ankara will have guarantees that it will not face any threat in terms of ensuring its own security.”²⁶

Just two days before this article, again Sputnik News ran an opinion piece on a supposed secret plan to carve up the Middle East by the US, UK, France, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan, quoting at length a former Turkish ambassador to France and Libya.²⁷ In August 2017, Sputnik News ran a story with the core message of “Russia, Turkey, Iran, and Syria need to team up in order to clear terrorists from Syria”.²⁸ This media outlet repeatedly claimed that the US is helping ISIS in Syria.²⁹ The message to the Turkish audience is clear: Russia is your friend and you should be weary and suspicious of the West as they are plotting behind your back.

²² M.B. Dincaslan, *NATO Losing War of Narratives while Russia Emerges as Leader of Nationalist Bloc*, “Euromaidan Press”, 08 August 2016, [http://euromaidanpress.com/2016/08/10/nato-losing-war-of-narratives-while-russia-emerges-as-leader-of-nationalist-bloc/] and M.B. Dincaslan, Soner Yalçın: FSB’nin Türk Tetikçisi (Soner Yalçın: FSB’s Turkish Hitman), [http://mbdincaslan.com/index.php/koseyazilari/item/509-soneryalcintetikci].

²³ L. Dearden, *Nato Accuses Sputnik News of Distributing Misinformation as Part of ‘Kremlin Propaganda Machine’*, “The Independent”, 11 February 2017, [http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/sputnik-news-russian-government-owned-controlled-nato-accuses-kremlin-propaganda-machine-a7574721.html].

²⁴ This does not mean that there are no real differences between Turkey and its allies regarding Syria but that Russian propaganda focuses on enlarging such differences and encouraging Turkey to move away from the West.

²⁵ *Analyst Explains Why Turkey ‘Can Calmly Withdraw from NATO’ after Putin’s Speech*, “Sputnik News”, 03 March 2018, [https://sputniknews.com/analysis/201803031062188502-russia-turkey-nato-deterrence/].

²⁶ *Analyst Explains Why Turkey ‘Can Calmly Withdraw from NATO’ after Putin’s Speech*, “Sputnik News”, 03 March 2018, [https://sputniknews.com/analysis/201803031062188502-russia-turkey-nato-deterrence/].

²⁷ *Five Countries Decide to Carve up the Middle East – Ex-Envoy*, “Sputnik News”, 01 March 2018, [https://sputniknews.com/analysis/201803011062105491-turkey-envoy-plan/].

²⁸ *How US Military Presence in Middle East Driving Together Turkey, Iran, Russia*, “Sputnik News”, 24 August 2017, [https://sputniknews.com/politics/201708241056756352-us-military-iraq-syria/].

²⁹ *US Helicopters Spotted in Al-Hasakah Reportedly Evacuating Daesh Members*, “Sputnik News”, 21 February 2018, [https://sputniknews.com/middleeast/201802211061871761-us-helicopters-transporting-daesh/]; *US Reportedly Evacuates Daesh Leaders from Syria’s Deir ez-Zor Again*, “Sputnik News”, 29 December 2017, [https://sputniknews.com/middleeast/201712291060410421-us-continues-daesh-evacuation-syria-reports/].



One of the most prominent examples of such pro-Russian “fellow travellers” are the Turkish supporters of so-called Eurasianism

This message is further amplified not only by the second medium – “fellow travellers” in the Turkish media and politics – but this time also by the mainstream media.³⁰ The rapprochement between Turkey and Russia has made the mainstream media, which take their cue from the government, more receptive to Russian propaganda.

One of the most prominent examples of such pro-Russian “fellow travellers” are the Turkish supporters of so-called Eurasianism, an ideology that was developed and promoted by the Russian political theorist Aleksandr Dugin.³¹ Turkish Eurasianists see the closer relations and coordination between Russia and Turkey regarding Syria as an opportunity to push for a more pro-Russian orientation in Turkey and aim to exacerbate anti-American and anti-Western sentiments in the country.³² Their most prominent leader is Dogu Perincek, the chairman of Vatan Partisi (VP; Homeland Party), a rebranding of his previous political party İşçi Partisi (Workers Party).³³

Perincek was once a Maoist but has been promoting a version of Dugin’s Eurasianism in the past 20 years. Despite the limited appeal of VP as a political party (it got 0.3% of the vote in the last general elections in 2015), Eurasianism has a significant, albeit generally exaggerated, following among the Turkish military officers, both active and retired.

The failed coup attempt by the Gulenists in the Turkish Armed Forces in July 2016 and the following purge of the Gulenist coup-plotters from the military provided an opportunity for the Eurasianist faction to be more influential than they have been before.³⁴ *Aydınlık* is a newspaper of VP and therefore of the Turkish Eurasianists. A couple of examples from its recent reporting will illustrate how closely they follow the Moscow line. Reporting on a roundtable organised in Russia on Syria, *Aydınlık* quoted Russian experts arguing that the US “lost” Turkey and that Russia understands Turkish concerns regarding Northern Syria.³⁵ Writing in February 2018, Dogu Perincek argued that the real enemy and the target of the US is Turkey, and not Russia, Iran, or Syria.³⁶ In a recent press conference, Perincek argued that “the Atlantic age is over” and that “Turkey and Russia will determine the future of the world”.³⁷ Finally, not to be outdone by

³⁰ M.B. Dincaslan, *Türk Medyasında Rusçu Rüzgar (Pro-Russian Winds in Turkish Media)*, “Kırım Haber Ajansı”, 10 February 2017, [http://qha.com.ua/tr/analiz-haber/turk-medyasinda-ruscu-ruzgar/152657/].

³¹ On Turkish Eurasianists, see O. Tufekci, *The Foreign Policy of Modern Turkey: Power and the Ideology of Eurasianism*, IB Tauris: London, 2017.

³² On the pro-Russian nature of Eurasianism, see M.B. Dincaslan, *Avrasyacılık Tehlikesi ve Neo-Sovyetizm (Eurasianism Danger and Neo-Sovietism)*, [http://mbdincaslan.com/index.php/koseyazilari/item/440-avrasyacilik].

³³ See this Wikipedia entry of Perincek for a brief intro to this complicated and somewhat shadowy politician: *Doğu Perinçek*, “Wikipedia.org”, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Do%C4%9Fu_Perin%C3%A7ek].

³⁴ M.B. Dincaslan, *Yeni paraleller Avrasyacılar mı olacak? (Will the Eurasianists Be the New Parallels?)*, “QHA”, 28 September 2016, [http://qha.com.ua/tr/fikir-yazilari/yeni-paraleller-avrasyacilar-mi-olacak/149245/].

³⁵ *Rus Uzmanlar: ABD Türkiye’yi Kaybetti (Russian Experts: USA Lost Turkey)*, “Aydınlık”, 21 January 2018, [https://www.aydinlik.com.tr/rus-uzmanlar-abd-turkiye-yi-kaybetti-dunya-ocak-2018].

³⁶ D. Perincek, *ABD-Rusya Kışması mı? (US-Russia Fight?)*, “Aydınlık”, 07 February 2018, [https://www.aydinlik.com.tr/abd-rusya-kapismasi-mi-dogu-perincek-kose-yazilari-subat-2018].

³⁷ *Türkiye ve Rusya dünyanın geleceğinde belirleyici olacak (Turkey and Russia Will Be Determinants of the Future of the World)*, “Aydınlık”, 28 February 2018, [https://www.aydinlik.com.tr/turkiye-ve-rusya-dunyanin-geleceginde-belirleyici-olacak-politika-subat-2018-3].

Sputnik News, *Aydınlık* also claimed that the US has a five-step plan to divide Syria in the near future.³⁸

In short, there is a clear overlap, almost coordination, between the messages coming out of the official Russian propaganda outlets and the ones that various “fellow travellers”, especially the Eurasianists, promote in the media and politics in Turkey. The existing differences between Turkey and its allies on Syria provide a fertile ground for the pro-Russian propaganda to be effective among both the public and the policymakers.³⁹ This phase of the Russian information operations is still ongoing and seems to be more successful than the first two phases that this article discusses.

Conclusion

There is now a sizeable literature on Russian political warfare including hybrid warfare, propaganda, and information operations. However, most of it focuses on the US, the EU, and the former Soviet countries. In this brief paper, a short overview of Russian propaganda and information operations in and against Turkey since 2014 was presented. One can identify three clusters of Russian propaganda activities in Turkey. From the early 2014 to November 2015, it focused on promoting a pro-Russian narrative regarding the conflict in Ukraine. The downing of a Russian jet by the Turkish Air Force in November 2015 radically changed the tone and target of the Russian propaganda, placing Turkey firmly in the bull’s-eye. Turkish-

Russian relations improved dramatically after June 2016, and the failed coup attempt on 15 July 2016 provided even further impetus for mending the relations.

Once again, the Russian propaganda did a 180-degree turn and started to hammer home the message that Russia is Turkey’s true friend and its NATO allies are plotting against her in Syria and elsewhere. Given the actual policy differences between Turkey and its allies on Syria, this last episode of the Russian propaganda seems to be more successful as it is not only being promoted by Russian outlets and pro-Russian elements in Turkey such as Perincek-led Eurasianists but also increasingly being picked up and used by the mainstream media. This radically amplifies the reach and effectiveness of the Russian propaganda in Turkey. As Turkey and its Western allies drift further apart, it puts a strain on the transatlantic institutions. It is Russia that benefits the most from this discord, and Russia gets closer to its goal of weakening and undermining the liberal international order.

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³⁸ *ABD’nin beş aşamalı Suriye’yi bölme planı (USA’s Five-step Plan to Divide Syria)*, “*Aydınlık*”, 03 March 2018, [<https://www.aydinlik.com.tr/abd-nin-bes-asamali-suriye-yi-bolme-planı-dunya-mart-2018-1>].

³⁹ A recent survey carried out by Kadir Has University in 2017 found that most Turks (65% of respondents) identify the US as the biggest security threat to Turkey. Russia is ranked as the biggest threat only by 18% of the respondents: H. Hacıoğlu, *Türkiye’de ABD Algısı Giderek Kötüleşiyor (In Turkey, Perception of the US Continues to Worsen)*, “*Amerika’nın Sesi*” (VoA Turkish Service), 21 July 2017, [<https://www.amerikanin sesi.com/a/turkiye-de-abd-algisi-gitgide-zayifliyor/3953895.html>].

CARNIVALISATION OF CARNIVAL

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The article presents a historical overview of political satire shows from the USSR period (both TV and print) and contemporary political satire TV shows. Particular concern was given to the existing Russian TV shows and Russian-language political satire shows popular on Facebook and YouTube (Derzhites' Tam, Laisvės TV, Lithuania, and Zapovednik, DW, Germany). Bakhtin's idea of the carnivalesque was used to exemplify the reproduction of the Soviet narratives in the modern political satire selected for the analysis ("carnivalisation of carnival").

The Idea of the Carnavalesque

In 1966, Julia Kristeva, a Bulgarian-French philosopher, introduced to the humanitarian science a Russian linguist previously not known to the Western countries. His name was Mikhail Bakhtin. Right after Kristeva's speech at the conference, Bakhtin's ideas made a good start, resulting in a new school of thought called *Bakhtin School* or *Bakhtiniada*. There were two main books – *Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics*¹ and *Rabelais and Folk Culture of the Middle Ages and Renaissance*² – that introduced, among others, the concepts of *great time* (as an enigmatic and idealistic time of great ideas and meanings), *chronotope* (a "time-space" theory of synergy between language and discourse), *Mennippean satire* (as the power to satirize images and situations),

and *carnavalesque* (as the idea of influence of a medieval carnival on culture and contemporary society).

This article explores modern mainstream political satire shows on TV and in social networks in Russia and Ukraine that make mockery of the political regimes and ridicule prominent people in politics and culture, but at the same time contribute to the reproduction of the Soviet narratives. This is the *carnivalisation of carnival* (counter-carnivalisation)^{3 4} phenomenon. The term *carnivalisation of carnival* was used for the first time by a LiveJournal user with the name of *cautious_man*; the author explores in two LiveJournal posts the evolution of post-perestroika carnival, exemplifying it by the phenomenon of an alternative voice-over satiric and humorous

¹ М. Бахтин, *Проблемы поэтики Достоевского*. 1963. Работы 1960-х-1970-х. (*Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics*. 1963. *Works of the 1960s-1970s*.), Русские словари. Языки славянской культуры: Москва 2002, Vol. 6.

² М. Бахтин, *Франсуа Рабле в истории реализма*. 1940. Материалы к книге о Рабле. 1930-1950-е гг. *Комментарии и приложения* (*François Rabelais in the History of Realism*. 1940. *Materials to the Book about Rabelais*. 1930-1950s. *Comments and Appendices*), Языки славянских культур: Москва 2008, Vol. 4(1).

³ cautious_man, *Карнавализация карнавала, часть 1* (*Carnivalisation of Carnival, Part 1*), "LiveJournal", 2013, [<https://eot-su.livejournal.com/865442.html>].

⁴ cautious_man, *Карнавализация карнавала, часть 2* (*Carnivalisation of Carnival, Part 2*), "LiveJournal", 2013, [<http://cautious-man.livejournal.com/41906.html>].

translation of popular Hollywood movies (known as Goblin translations), activities of a popular Russian rock band “Leningrad” led by Sergey Shnurov (known as Shnur), and a satirical fictional Russian blogger who parodies a former Soviet dissident (Natan Sharanski), named Lev Natanovich Sharanski. All those examples have the features of the *carnavalesque*, introduced by Bakhtin, but in a reverse sense. The idea of *carnivalisation of carnival* in political satire TV shows is underlined in the article.

Characteristics of the Carnavalesque

The nature of the *carnavalesque* is multidimensional; it is mostly introduced in literature, aesthetics, cultural anthropology, and semiotics. Analysing the writings of Fyodor Dostoyevsky and François Rabelais, Bakhtin pointed out a dichotomy – tragic events stand alongside with fun and joy; death goes together with life, war with peace, and heavens with hell.

Historically, carnival opens the festive season before the liturgical season of Lent and involves all kinds of celebrations to give the sense of social unity (street parades, fashion and music shows, public performances, colourful decorations, costumes, dancing, body paintings, masquerades, circus, mockeries, confetti, etc.). Carnivals are traditionally popular in counties with a large Catholic, Evangelical Lutheran, Protestant, Methodist, Anglican, and Orthodox presence. From religious point of view, carnivals precede Lent (*Quadragesima*) with fasting (strict food and behavioural restrictions) and time “quietness” in which believers “replicate the sacrifice of Jesus Christ’s journey into the desert for 40 days”.

The anthropological explanation that carnival is a reverse ritual assisted by colours, sounds, emotions to welcome the spring and a new fertility season. Carnivals are usually celebrated in winter when

peasants are experiencing food shortage and this is the last opportunity to eat enough to survive before new food grows. Bakhtin characterizes carnival as an “upside-down world” where laugh conquered fear and the previous year’s fears are burned in carnival fires. Laugh plays the core element because it helps to release those fears (from the religious perspective – for the committed sins and not be released from them; and from anthropological – that there will be not enough food to survive, the fertile season will not come, the weather will be bad, etc.). Bakhtin concludes with two main elements of the concept of the *carnavalesque* – *spectacularity* (it should be an eye-catching show, attracting the attention of public) and the use of *special language* (usually it is a folksy language with vulgar and foul expressions). Political satire is intended to play the same role – upside-down political arena and society, pointing to the societal weakness and provoking the societal moral reform.



Political satire is intended to play the same role – upside-down political arena and society, pointing to the societal weakness and provoking the societal moral reform

During the Soviet time, political satire was strictly censored. It was prohibited to publish media cartoons presenting political leaders and the Party itself negatively, which might have destroyed their “sacral” image. The same rule was applicable to the TV when it became massively available for the “average Soviet household”. Satirical novels such as *The Twelve Chairs* (1928) and *The Little Golden Calf* (1932) by Ilya Ilf and Yevgeni Petrov, *Three Fat Men* (1927) by Yuri Olesha were a completely new genre for the Soviet people and presented more societal satire. Later the Soviet dictatorship eliminated any public manifestation of

satire, even “toothless” and tolerant of the political regime. Social satire, involving any metaphors or allusions to criticize political leaders or the ruling regime, was a crime.

The political print cartoons by a famous Soviet art-band *Kukryniksy* published in the Soviet satirical magazine *Krokodil* were extremely popular. The band was composed of professional artists and graphic designers, lately distinguished by high governmental recognition awards. Their works mostly attacked foreign leaders – Adolf Hitler, Benito Mussolini, Heinrich Himmler, Joseph Goebbels, and Francisco Franco, and their caricatures were “sanctioned” by the party.

Extremely popular, then and now, *Klub vesyolykh i nakhodchivyykh* (KVN – *Club of the Funny and Inventive*) for the first time was aired in 1961, during the Khrushchev Thaw. KVN is the Russian TV satirical show in the form of competition among different teams. Each team is evaluated for sketches prepared in advance and funny answers to the host’s questions. Another example is a *Fitil*, a Soviet satirical TV show in the form of short movies, was aired for the first time in 1962. *Fitil* was popularly known as the “official anecdotes from the Soviet government”, meaning that all jokes went through censorship. Both – KVN and *Fitil* – satirized in a very soft manner the Khrushchev time, societal issues, and with more affection the “decaying West” and “international imperialism”.

The NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence published in March 2017 the policy report titled *StratCom Laughs: In Search of an Analytical Framework*⁵ where KVN sketches were analysed closely. The scholars concluded that the KVN series was used as the targeted

instrument of population manipulation in virtue of using the techniques such as *groups’ victimization; conservative, sexist, and ethnically-biased stereotypes; in-group and out-group messages* (Russia vs. the others), and *glorification of “Father of the State” image* (represented by the Russian president in power).

In the mid-1980s, political satire on TV got some freedom in comparison with the previous years. KVN turned more open in their political jokes and mocking, but it was not a peppery satire in comparison with *Spitting Image* (the UK, 1984-1996), *That Was the Week That Was* (the UK, 1962-1963), *Extra 3* (Germany, 1973 – present), *Hurra Deutschland* (Germany, 1989-1991), or *Le Bébête Show* (France, 1982-1995). The first Soviet stand-up comedians were Arkady Raikin, Roman Kartsev, Viktor Il’chenko, and Mikhail Zhvanetsky, who started careers in the 1960s and by the beginning of the 1980s became widely popular in the USSR. Mikhail Zadornov started his comedian career at this time. Satirical sketches by individual comedians or group performances were characterized by soft satirization of societal and political issues. Domestic politics was criticized cautiously. At the same time, their humour was in such high demand that they sold out concert halls and became extremely popular in the late Perestroika and early period of the newly independent states. Politicians used to attend their concerts; they were highly welcome on TV and had generous tours around post-USSR countries and abroad (mainly in the countries with a prominent number of Russian-speaking emigrants, such as the Baltic States, Israel, or the US). Some of them were distinguished by the governments and became “court jesters”, entertaining politicians during corporate celebrations. Mikhail Zadornov

⁵ Ž. Ozoliņa, I. Austers, S. Denisa-Liepniece, J. Šķilters, S. Struberga, M. Kyiak, *StratCom Laughs: In Search of an Analytical Framework*, NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence (NATO StratCom COE): Riga 2017.

left many strongly chauvinist and anti-Semitic aphorisms, and became famous by his monologues starting from “Americans are really stupid...”

To sum up, there is an absence of a longstanding tradition of real political satire in the former Soviet countries. The Soviet satire was rather the “continuation” of the Party program, aimed to “send out” messages acceptable by the Party.

Contemporary Political Satire on Russian TV

It may seem that the collapse of the USSR brought media and political environment to a new era of political satire. In fact, it did not. Comedians who were popular during the late Perestroika period became even more valued. There were some new political satire TV shows, but their humour repeated the same old Soviet time’s pattern – do not touch domestic politics or treat gently home politicians, and put the satirical focus on attacking foreign leaders and countries.

The first widely known weekly political satire TV show was *Kukly* aired on the Russian NTV channel from 1994 to 2002, then closed because of the Kremlin’s pressure (the famous NTV case took place in 2000-2003 and symbolized the end of independent media in Russia). *Kukly* was inspired by the British TV show *Spitting Image*, the satirical puppet show, caricaturing politicians and celebrities. Victor Shenderovich, a popular Russian comedian and writer, was writing the scripts for *Kukly*. The scripts were full of folk jokes and parallels with mass culture, both current and Soviet. Shenderovich says that after Putin took office, the presidential administration



their humour repeated the same old Soviet time’s pattern – do not touch domestic politics or treat gently home politicians, and put the satirical focus on attacking foreign leaders and countries

met with NTV’s team and required from the channel’s administration: (1) to stop discussing political corruption; (2) to change the information politics about the Chechen war; and (3) to remove “the first person” (meaning President Putin) from *Kukly* show⁶. After several episodes without “the first person”, but about “the first person”, the show was closed.

In 2002-2003, *Kremlevskiy Kontsert* had been transmitted on the Russian TVS channel, a private network that was shut down by the Russian Press Ministry in 2003. The editor-in-chief Evgeny Kiselyov announced the lack of funding and the channel suspended broadcasting. *Kontsert* was an animated satirical and comic TV music show making fun of Russian domestic and international politics. The show’s heroes – mostly Russian politicians – sang the old war, Soviet, and modern pop songs with changed texts. Their song texts recalled events and political developments of that time. The texts were rather toothless in comparison with the highly politicized content of *Kukly* and the show rather did not make any difference in the media space and social attitude. Russian journalist Kachkaeva in a radio program on Radio Svoboda in 2002 assessed *Kontsert* as a “less satirical, but more trivial show”⁷ and said there is not so much satire in “mocking Lukashenko.

⁶ Д. Гордон, Шендерович о причинах закрытия программы “Куклы” (*Shenderovich on the Reasons behind Closure of “Kukly” Show*), 2007, [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=97zeajCyGS4>].

⁷ А. Качкаева, Как телевидение подсказывает нам, какие проблемы считать острыми, а какие - не стоящими внимания? (*How TV Suggests to Us Which Problems to Consider Important and Which – Unworthy of Attention?*), “Радио Свобода,” 2002, [<https://www.svoboda.org/a/24204081.html>].

Mult Lichnosti is a Russian animated mocking TV show aired on *Perviy Kanal* (First Channel) from 2009 to 2013. The episodes were about 3-4 minutes each and usually involved up to four main characters. The list of characters was rather extensive and included domestic and foreign politicians, sports stars, celebrities, businessmen, artists, public figures, as well as fictional characters such as the secretary of former president Barak Obama or personal guardians of Queen Elizabeth. The episodes were not always connected with a particular political event and satirically depicted rather made-up situations. *Mult Lichnosti* was a more engaging version of *Kremlevskiy Kontsert*. Victor Shenderovich commented⁸ that *Mult Lichnosti* was not a “satire show” because it did not “touch any political pressure points”; moreover, it was rather “a direct PR” of the ruling regime. Shenderovich said that *Mult Lichnosti* was only “technically” satire – there are the features of satire, but it is not political satire as a form of societal protest. Such satire is created to glorify domestic characters (Russian politicians) and satirize international politicians, with particular attention to the Ukrainian and Belarusian heads of states.

The Russian version of **Comedy Club** – a stand-up comedy show – has been broadcasted since 2005 by the Russian TNT channel, one of the most popular channels in Russia and owned by Gazprom media group. There are political satirical vignettes about the current domestic and international state of affairs and political

leaders, but as Shenderovich said it is only “technically” a satire. For example, in one of the episodes released in September 2017, the comedians presented a vignette that the majority of the international world leaders (such as Angela Merkel and Kim Jong-un) are Russian security services agents like the former KGB agent President Putin⁹. It should be noted, Russian President Putin is known as a fan of the actor Dmitry Grachev, who used to impersonate President Putin himself; even more so, President Putin “has been seen on television howling with laughter at his performances”.¹⁰

Prozhektorperiskhilton is a Russian satirical TV talk show aired on *Perviy Kanal* since 2008. There are four hosts who invite one guest every show to discuss current political, economic, and societal issues from newspapers, magazines, and the Internet. The talk show is half improvised. The humour is strictly censored and does not touch on serious political issues. The analysis of the latest episode (released on 23 December 2017)¹¹ shows that the hosts, in the company of the comedian and TV presenter Maksim Galkin, discussed rather apolitical issues that will not have “political consequences” such as the internationally growing demand for Russian inflatable tanks, the new logo of the World Chess Championship, and the rules of conduct in Moscow. The show ends with the adaptation of the song *Pjat' Minut*, which first appeared in *Carnival Night* (1956) movie and became popular. This shows the cultural bonds, non-intentionally or intentionally, that bind the show viewers with the Soviet cultural

⁸ Т. Фельгенгауэр, *Особое мнение с Виктором Шендеровичем* (*Dissenting Opinion with Viktor Shenderovich*), “Радио Эхо Москвы”, 2010, [https://echo.msk.ru/programs/personalno/646853-echo/].

⁹ Камеди Клуб, *Гарик Харламов, Дмитрий Грачев – Путин, Ким Чен Ын и Ангела Меркель* (выпуск 13, серия 31), 2017, [https://rutube.ru/video/997e4afbbf36e2625034a8362b36a03a/].

¹⁰ A. Ferris-Rotman, *Primetime Politics: How the Kremlin Shapes Russian Television*, “Foreign Affairs”, 12 October 2017, [https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russian-federation/2017-10-12/primetime-politics?cid=int-lea&pctype=hpg].

¹¹ *Прожекторперисхилтон* (выпуск 2, серия 9), 2017, “Первый канал”, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Rfx-Ap_88E].

heritage. At the same time, the hosts comply with the societal request for such kind of songs.

Moscow-based journalist and analyst of modern Russian youth culture and media, Yuri Saprykin, noted that “there is no political satire in Russia. If you ask me to remember any names, I can hardly do this”.¹²

Russian-speaking Political Satire outside of Russia

Each of the Baltic countries has a substantial Russian-speaking minority since Soviet time. The Russian speakers who are not linguistically proficient enough to watch national Lithuanian, Latvian, or Estonian TV tend to watch the Russian TV channels that used to be retranslated in those countries. The Kremlin-backed TV channels such as the most popular ones – *Russia 24*, *RT*, *Perviy Kanal*, *REN TV*, *TNT*, *NTV* – tend to violate the international code of journalism standards, using techniques of manipulation and physiological influence (Ukraine¹³, the Baltic States¹⁴). To prevent the influence of the Russian TV narratives (such as “the Balts are fascists”, etc.) from fuelling tensions among the supporters of the pro-Kremlin narratives and those who support liberal agenda (both citizens or residents) in those countries, each country found its own way to communicate with the Russian speakers and engage them in public life.

A Russian language channel called *ETV+* was established in Estonia as “the independent public information and entertainment TV channel”¹⁵. Some 25% of the airtime of the public TV in Latvia (*LTV7*¹⁶, the channel that replaced Russian TV channel *RTR*) is in the Russian language; financially they cannot allow being on air longer than several hours per day. The public TV in Lithuania went the same way as the Finnish public national broadcaster *YLE*, who also have to broadcast in the Russian language, but in the very beginning their international content was mostly re-produced from international media and press agencies. Lithuanian public broadcaster – *LRT Televizija* – has Russian content, but it is mostly retranslating¹⁷ from international media, such as *Deutsche Welle*, *BBC*, *Radio Polsha*, *Radio Svoboda*, etc. The deputy director of *LRT Televizija* Rimvydas Paleckis says that there are “no plans to extend Russian language broadcasting”.¹⁸

Derzhites’ Tam is a “satirical show with the Baltic accent” made in Lithuania. The first video was released in February 2017 on YouTube and shared on Facebook (31K views as of 10 January 2018). The show is produced by *Laisvės TV*, the “first independent and live viewer-based online television in Lithuania”¹⁹. Andrius Tapinas, the anchor of *Derzhites’ Tam* show, explains that it is the first entirely crowdfunded TV channel whose viewership is almost equal

¹² Э. Ибрагимова, *Есть ли политическая сатира в России, или чем запомнился Михаил Задорнов* (*Is There Political Satire in Russia, or What Is Mikhail Zadornov Memorable for*), “Deutsche Welle”, 2017, [https://goo.gl/9jq].

¹³ D. Dutsyk, R. Shutov, P. Burkovskiy, S. Chernenko, *Counteraction to Russian Information Aggression: Joint Action to Protect Democracy*, Telekritika: Kyiv 2015.

¹⁴ *Fortress Russia: Political, Economic, and Security Development in Russia Following the Annexation of Crimea and Its Consequences for the Baltic States*, The Centre for East European Policy Studies: Riga 2016.

¹⁵ *О нас* (*About Us*), “ETV+”, 2018, [https://etvpluss.err.ee/l/moi_etvpluss].

¹⁶ *Русское вещание* (*Russian Broadcasting*), “LTV7”, 2018, [https://ltv.lsm.lv/lv/ltv7_ru/].

¹⁷ *Novosti*, “LRT”, 2018, [http://www.lrt.lt/ru/novosti].

¹⁸ О. Антоненко, *Литва: прибалты, которые снова любят русских* (*Lithuania: The Balts Who Like Russians Again*), “BBC”, 09 January 2018, [http://www.bbc.com/russian/features-42607671].

¹⁹ *Laisvės TV is creating TV Show*, 2018, [https://www.patreon.com/laisvestv].

to that of a state TV channel (currently *Laisvės TV* is at the 4th position in the Lithuanian media market). The Russian-language *Derzhites' Tam* show targets both the local population and Russian speakers living in the Baltic states and in countries where the Russian language is popular. The average TV show lasts about half an hour and has at least 20K viewers on YouTube. The show widely uses references to the Soviet jokes, movies, and visuals, and, rarely, vulgar expressions.

The analysis of the latest episode (released on 28 December 2017²⁰) of the show demonstrates the visuals of the Soviet animated fairy tale by Alexander Rou, mixed with Putin's old statements, the old Soviet song *Uchat v shkole* (Taught at school, 1973) by Soviet songwriter M. Plyatskovsky that used to be sung during the Knowledge Day; *Cheburaška* cartoon (1969), etc. The anchor of *Derzhites' Tam* presents the state of affairs (if there is something particular happening) in all post-Soviet countries. In the case of this episode – in Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine, and a small piece about the US president Donald Trump. The show presents the post-Soviet countries as still unified, satirizing particular events or persons.

On 01 January 2018, Andrius Tapinas presented a mock New Year's presidential speech²¹ to the Russian speakers in Estonia on the Russian-language TV channel *ETV+*. In the address, Tapinas satirized the societal issues of the Russian speakers in Estonia, referring to the left-behind compatriots who live in the industrial cities of Sillamäe, Kohtla-Järve, Jõhvi, and grouped in the historically Russian-speaking districts of

Tallinn – Lasnamäe and Kopli. The humour targets very specific issues, understandable only to Russian speakers or Russians who live in Estonia and recall the Soviet past. For example, Tapinas says, "Let's make a wish now and make it true, but before let's drink some Soviet sparkling wine, to add something even stronger, chase it down with tangerines and try not to fall asleep in Russian salad"²². This was the most typical scenario of celebrating the New Year's Eve during the Soviet and early post-Soviet period.

Germany's public international broadcaster – *Deutsche Welle* – in November 2017 presented a new satirical show *Zapovednik*, available in Russian and Georgian languages. The show is released on YouTube and shared on Facebook. As of 10 January 2018, eight episodes have been released. Each episode lasts up to 13 minutes and involves conversations in a magic forest between the politically involved animals – Veronika the Crow, Seva the Hare, Garik the Wolf, and an Owl. The average viewership of each episode is about 40K-50K; the first episode, released on 05 November 2017, was watched by almost 90K of people. The characters of the episodes are usually international political leaders, most frequent among them – Vladimir Putin, Donald Trump, Angela Merkel, Teresa May, Petro Poroshenko, Aleksander Lukashenko, Emmanuel Macron, and Kim Jong-un. The scriptwriters use a lot of vulgar expressions (particularly depicting the Russian minister of foreign affairs, Sergei Lavrov) and constant recollections of the best and widely recognized Soviet movies, cartoons, songs, jokes, and anecdotes. For example,

²⁰ *Итоги года и универсальное поздравление (Year's Results and Universal Congratulations)*, "Держитесь там", 2017, Season 2, Episode 17, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TE7s-iA71u8&feature=youtu.be].

²¹ *Новогоднее обращение "Президента России В.В. Путина". Андриус Тапинас (New Year's Address of the "Russian President V.V. Putin": Andrius Tapinas)*, "ETV+", 2018, [https://etvpluss.err.ee/v/meelelahutus/elkapluss/b467fa01-a607-4b89-89a8-266034c1cdfa/novogodnee-obrashchenie-prezidenta-rossii].

²² Ibid.

the latest episode, released on 24 December 2017²³, brings back the memories of *Carnival Night* (1956), *White Sun of the Desert* (1970), *Three from Prostokvashino* (1978), and *Charodei* (1982) – all famous and high popular Soviet movies.

Supposedly, the Internet creates unlimited opportunities for diversified political satire. *Derzhites' Tam* and *Zapovednik* are non-Russian political satire shows in the Russian language and they are Internet-based. Moreover, *Derzhites' Tam* is created by a team of people who are entirely crowdfunded. That means that there is the demand for their entertainment product in the form they produce it. The secondary audience for *Zapovednik* is the Russian language speakers residing abroad. The quality of satire, use of language and visuals, constant reproduction of the Soviet movies and songs make them target either the Russians residing in Russia or the Soviet generation who remember those artefacts. The young and middle-aged generation (20+/45+ years old), either those residing in Russia or Russian speakers residing abroad, require more witty political satire; they do not have the positive or negative recollections.

Conclusion

James Ballardie, a BBC journalist, in the article *Are We Living in a Golden Age of Satire?*²⁴ advocates that the current political turmoil in the US and UK fuelled the development of political satire at the all-time high. The most interesting satirical TV shows are made in the US and satirizing American domestic politics. The most popular ones are: *Last Week Tonight with John Oliver* (5.7M YouTube subscribers),

The Daily Show with Trevor Noah (2.7M), *Saturday Night Live*, where Alec Baldwin mocks president Donald Trump (each episode has from 2M to 14M of views), *The Colbert Report* (viewership varies from 4K to 2M), and *Real Time with Bill Maher* (1.3M YouTube subscribers).



In fact, there is an absence of sharp political satire in the Russian language either on TV or over the Internet

The original article that became a prerequisite of this analysis, published in LiveJournal and mentioned above, introducing the concept of *carnivalisation of carnival*, argued that the post-Soviet politics created the conditions for “spontaneous carnivalisation that naturally opposed to the liberal western values”. The author (*cautious_man*) characterizes *counter-carnivalisation* through abandoning the Soviet past, but at the same time, re-thinking and re-framing those who are in the opposition, the oligarchs, and the way to perceive the West.

In fact, there is an absence of sharp political satire in the Russian language either on TV or over the Internet. The analysed satirical TV shows are either contributing to the “good” (“we” – barbaric Russians or civilized Europeans) vs. “bad” (“the others” – the West, professional/non-qualified politicians, etc.) discourse or reproducing the “good, old, known” Soviet jokes and anecdotes. *Derzhites' Tam* and *Zapovednik* were meant to satirize the political regime in Russia with its deficiencies, such as

²³ Новогодние ремейки с Путиным, Трампом, Меркель и другими (New Year's Re-makes with Putin, Trump, Merkel, and Others), “Заповедник”, Episode 8, 2017, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FagEgHtRNv4].

²⁴ J. Ballardie, *Are We Living in a Golden Age of Satire?*, “BBC”, 10 March 2017, [http://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-39217855].

corruption, propaganda, numerous human rights violations, etc. Quite the opposite, these shows play the same role as the shows during Perestroika such as *Fitil* or early stand-ups by Zadornov. Keen satire attracts attention and provokes critical thinking; therefore, this is *carnivalisation of carnival* and not a carnival itself.

The article presents just an overview of the existing Russian-language political satire shows in the region; further research needs to be done using the methods of semiotic interpretation and coding to identify the narratives and messages presented in the shows. The production and reproduction of messages that heavily relay the nostalgia motives could have a dangerous effect. It can be hypothesized that the results of a detailed narrative research and discourse analysis might reveal that such

political satire TV shows are used as a strategic communication tool to construct the required image of a country, brand it in a defined way, and legitimize the governmental policy.

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COUNTERING RUSSIAN DISINFORMATION: UKRAINIAN NGOS ON THE FRONTLINE

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Fighting fake news and propaganda is what Ukrainian NGOs have been doing years before it became a trend around the world. Response to threats of Russian propaganda requires a complex strategy, and Ukrainian experts from civil society are already making important steps forward in this direction. This article represents the description of existing NGOs that opposed the information warfare started by Russia, analysis and description of the main Kremlin narratives, transformation of the Kremlin propaganda since the Euromaidan, and the main ways to fight against it. The author states that the role of the Ukrainian NGOs in countering Russian disinformation is crucial.

Russia's attempts to manipulate people's consciousness, to dominate the Ukrainian information space are not a new threat for Ukraine. Whether it was the prohibition of Ukrainian books in 1876 by the Ems Ukaz, forced russification of Ukrainians during the times of the Russian Empire, or the Soviet propaganda, all these measures had a common goal to control people's decisions and opinions, to govern neighbouring territories as its own. Numerous historical myths about significant events and personalities, a national inferiority complex, stable patterns in the perception of some events are some of the consequences of the Russian disinformation campaign during all these years. The attempted annexation of Crimea and the war on the territories of Donetsk and Lugansk regions have once more shown how far this campaign could go if not provided with an appropriate answer.

Before the Revolution of Dignity, there were no such spheres of activity in Ukraine as confrontation propaganda and disinformation directed against the state. However, during the Euromaidan, the threat of propaganda became clear when the Kremlin's narratives influenced how Ukrainians in the regions with high popularity of Russian media and pro-Russian views perceived the Revolution of Dignity and its participants. The NATO *StratCom Centre of Excellence (COE) Report* noted that the information campaign was central in Russia's operations against Ukraine. The annexation of Crimea was one of the results of it. "Crimea may be considered a test-case for Russia in trying out this new form of warfare where hybrid, asymmetric warfare, combining an intensive information campaign, cyber warfare and the use of highly trained Special Operation Forces, play a key role" (p.4).¹

¹ *Analysis of Russia's Information Campaign against Ukraine. Examining Non-military Aspects of the Crisis in Ukraine from a Strategic Communications Perspectives*, "NATO StratCom Centre of Excellence (COE) Report", 2015 [https://www.stratcomcoe.org/download/file/fid/3213 access: 01 February 2018].

The impact of Russian media on the information space of Ukraine is still quite disturbing. For example, according to a study that was provided through the USAID “U-Media” project in 2017, in Ukraine, trust in Russian news websites has increased from 7% in 2016 to 10% in 2017, trust in Russian print media and radio has increased from 2% in 2016 to 6% in 2017.²



Ukrainian experience shows that civil society could perform important functions of the state as it happened with the resistance in the information warfare

Ukrainian Arms in the Information Warfare

Such obvious threats to the information space of Ukraine lead to the stepping up of civil society. When the state was not yet ready to answer to those threats, activists offered their help. Ukrainian experience shows that civil society could perform important functions of the state as it happened with the resistance in the information warfare. It was the NGOs that in March 2014 started checking the articles of Russian media, defined what is fake news and how to debunk them before the state began to make the first steps for the protection of its information space. Still, the activity of these organisations remains significant and their experience is useful for countries where the influence of the Kremlin narratives is present. Despite the establishment in December 2014 and

activity of the Ministry of Information Policy of Ukraine, such NGOs remain an important voice of civil society in this struggle.

The *StopFake* project was one of the first launched against the backdrop of the Russian disinformation and propaganda in Ukraine. Faculty, students, and alumni of the Kyiv-Mohyla School of Journalism founded this project in March 2014. The main website informs that “we not only look at how propaganda influences Ukraine, we also try to investigate how propaganda impacts on other countries and regions, from the European Union to countries which once made up the Soviet Union.”³

StopFake is positioning itself as a fact-checking organisation that checks and refutes propaganda, disinformation about events in Ukraine in Russian media. Moreover, the founders of the project consider it as an information hub, whose materials can be helpful in analysis of different aspects of the Kremlin’s propaganda in further research. Besides debunking of fakes, the project monitors other studies dedicated to the impact of propaganda and fake news, conducts its own surveys, and organises trainings about fact-checking, media literacy, verification of the different types of data. Information on the website is translated into 11 languages. There are various formats of debunking and information sharing: a video digest with the main fake news of the week, an audio podcast, social media accounts, and a newspaper “Your Right to Know” that is distributed on the territories of Donetsk and Lugansk regions.

² *InMind: довіра українців до російських ЗМІ виросла на тлі зниження їх популярності (InMind: Ukrainians’ Trust in Russian Mass Media Has Grown against the Background of Declining Popularity)*, “mResearcher”, 27 September 2017, [https://mresearcher.com/2017/09/inmind-dovira-ukraintsiv-do-rosijskih-zmi-virosla-na-tli-znizhennya-ih-populyarnosti.html access: 01 March 2018].

³ “StopFake.org”, [https://www.stopfake.org/en/about-us/ access: 30 January 2018].

Consequently, *StopFake* has grown from a volunteer project into an organisation that is performing numerous important functions in combating Russian disinformation, and its activity is recognised on international level. It is worth noting that this project is sponsored by different international donors and it stays away from the support of the state in order to be objective in its work.

Another project that is considered “a unique example of official institutions and NGO joining forces to strengthen communication capacities of the state” is the Ukrainian Crisis Media Centre. As well as *StopFake*, the Ukrainian Crisis Media Centre was launched in March 2014 by efforts of leading Ukrainian experts in the sphere of international relations, communications, and public relations. The main goal of the project is “to help Ukraine amplify its voice on the international arena about the events connected to annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation”.⁴ The organisation consists of several departments:

- a press centre, where civil activists, experts, national politicians, and representatives of the government are given the opportunity to inform society about the events that take place in Ukraine and around it;
- a department that is working with foreign audience and disseminating information about Ukraine abroad, assisting foreign journalists;
- a department that is working with national audience, which aims to integrate different Ukrainian regions into one Ukrainian context;

- an arts and culture department that uses art as a tool to boost the dialogue between residents of East and West Ukraine and so on.

Improvement of the dialogue between Ukrainians, raising important issues, and discussing difficult topics are no less important than fighting against fake news. Besides that, at some period of time the Ukrainian Crisis Media Centre supported the information resource “Ukraine under Attack” that gathered evidence about Russia’s military aggression, the annexation of Crimea, etc.

Another similar project, *InformNapalm*, was created “as a response to the Russian aggression in Ukraine in March 2014”. The core purpose of the project is “to inform about the real role of the Russian government in ongoing hybrid conflicts in Ukraine, Georgia, other countries of Eastern and Central Europe, and in the Middle East”.⁵ Volunteers of the project are not only debunking different fakes of Russian propaganda, but also exposing facts of Russia’s illegal weapon and military equipment exports, collecting evidence that confirms the participation of the Russian government officials and public figures in planning subversive operations and waging wars in other countries, etc. Materials of the project are translated into more than 20 languages.

Information Resistance is yet another similar project, trying “to counteract external threats to the informational space of Ukraine”.⁶ This project was also launched in March 2014 as an initiative of the NGO called Center for Military and Political


⁴ A. Jackson, *It May Not Be a Real War (Yet), but Don't Tell That to the Propagandists in Russia and Ukraine*, “PRI”, 13 March 2014, [https://www.pri.org/stories/2014-03-13/it-may-not-be-real-war-yet-dont-tell-propagandists-russia-and-ukraine access: 29 January 2018].

⁵ “InformNapalm”, [http://informnapalm.rocks access: 30 January 2018].

⁶ “Information Resistance”, [http://sprotyv.info/en/about-us access: 30 January 2018].

Studies. It positions itself as an organisation that provides analytical materials about the situation in Donbas, transfer of military equipment, receipt of Russian weapons by the militants, internal situation in the so-called DNR and LNR. *Information Resistance* involves Ukrainians and foreign experts from non-governmental and governmental agencies, international organisations, etc.

An inseparable part of the Russian disinformation campaign is the spreading of certain historical myths and fakes. Ukrainian volunteers and professional historians have also intensified their work in this sphere by creating the project *ЛИКБЕЗ: The Historical Front*. The main purpose of the project is to popularise Ukraine's history in different formats, to debunk different historical fakes, etc. According to the founders of *ЛИКБЕЗ*, "an



with the increasing number of various fact-checking projects, Russian fake news has become more difficult to refute

adequate vision of the past is the basis of the Ukrainian identity and the key to unity of the country".⁷ The main motivation to create this project was to counter Russian propaganda, especially its historical rhetoric.

Thus, as we see, the main Ukrainian NGOs that oppose Russia in the information

warfare were created during the same period, after the attempted annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation. Different in their activities and angles, these NGOs became the response of an active society to the challenges faced by Ukraine during the hybrid warfare. However, taking into account Russia's efforts in this war, the consequences of propaganda and manipulation of public opinion, Ukraine should be active and persistent at different levels: from state institutions to public organisations.

Faces of Russian Propaganda

Since the Euromaidan, Russian propaganda has incredibly transformed in terms of different formats, types, and ways of spreading its pieces through various channels. The number of narratives about Ukraine has expanded as well. The collection of fakes that was gathered and debunked by a *StopFake* team is helpful here as it could show the broader picture of how Russian propaganda has changed over time.

Russian media have not been afraid to use more simple ways to mislead their audience in recent years: for example, to present protests in Kyiv as protests in Simferopol⁸, to affirm that the Russian language will be banned in Ukraine and that there will be criminal prosecution of Russian-speaking people⁹, to use the same people in pro-Russian protests across Ukraine¹⁰, etc. The usage of false photos, video, actors who played different kinds of victims was popular. The audience was not

⁷ "ЛИКБЕЗ", [http://likbez.org.ua/ua/meta-proektu access: 30 January 2018].

⁸ Вести24 показали бои в Киеве как Симферополь (Vesti24 Shows Fights in Kyiv As If It Was in Simferopol), "StopFake", 03 March 2014, [https://www.stopfake.org/vesti24-pokazali-boi-v-kieve-kak-simferopol/ access: 30 January 2018].

⁹ "Утка" российского ТВ – Тягнибок призывает запретить русский язык в Украине (Fake of Russian TV – Tyahnybok Calls to Ban Russian Language in Ukraine), "StopFake", 05 March 2014, [https://www.stopfake.org/utka-rossijskogo-tv-tyagnibok-prizyvaet-zapretit-russkij-yazyk-na-ukraine/ access: 30 January 2018].

¹⁰ The Same People Are Participating in Pro-Russian Protests across Ukraine, "StopFake", 04 March 2014, [https://www.stopfake.org/en/the-same-people-are-participating-in-pro-russian-protests-across-ukraine/ access: 30 January 2018].

ready to read and watch news critically, so the flow of propaganda was endless, and its methods were very simple.

Over time and with the increasing number of various fact-checking projects, Russian fake news has become more difficult to refute. The narratives are remaining the same, but the methods of disinformation have changed from false photos, video, or audio, false quotes and comments to exaggeration, manipulative representation of different kinds of data, using the most popular stereotypes and myths, false conclusions. One of the most popular kinds of misinformation has become a story with real facts and quotes but with a manipulative and misleading headline. Since Internet users mostly read only headlines and subtitles and pay little attention to the text, this method is also playing an important role in spreading propaganda.

Channels considered to be a part of the disinformation campaign are numerous. For example, the most popular Russian news websites create separate sections dedicated to events in Ukraine with the titles “Crisis in Ukraine”, “Situation in Ukraine”. Russian TV shows, such as *60 Minutes* on the TV channel *Russia-1*, everyday put on air such topics as “Who and why called Ukraine a ‘village toilet’?”, “How Kyiv authorities remove high-ranking officials by the order of American politicians”, “The US is preparing for war on the borders with Russia”, and so on. From August 2017, *60 Minutes* has been going on air twice a day. Methods of disinformation did change, but the number of propaganda materials is not decreasing.

The narratives of Russian propaganda are reflecting the agenda setting of the day, but there are some “eternal topics” that are still used by Russian propagandists and are worth to remember. The most popular Kremlin narratives about Ukraine are:

- Ukraine as a failed state (statements that Ukraine as a state does not exist, that the existence of this country is impossible because of history and economic reasons, that all attempts to change, reform the country are not worth it);
- Ukraine is the one to blame in the downing of MH17 (new and new evidences fabricated by Russian media appeared despite objective international investigations);
- Anti-Russian sanctions are not efficient (statements of pro-Russian European politicians with financial support from Moscow, false statistics, mistranslation of articles from foreign media);
- Ukrainian authorities are fascists;
- Crimea is not part of Ukraine and never was; global community supports the Crimean referendum; European countries recognise Crimea as part of Russia;
- Euromaidan was organised by the United States, the EU, the West in general;
- Ukrainian army is weak, incapable of fighting;
- Ukrainian soldiers are “punishers” who committed murders of civic citizens;
- Russian language is under threat in Ukraine.

Therefore, Russian propaganda has many faces, arms, and legs, but the fight against it is worth fighting. As Russian media are trying to shake people’s beliefs, perception of what is the truth and what is a lie, Ukrainian NGOs should continue to expose outright lies, teach the audience how to discover manipulation, find new narratives and patterns of the disinformation campaign.

Ways of Combating Russian Propaganda

The diversity of functions, aspects, goals of the existing projects that are countering Russian propaganda in Ukraine shows how complex this strategy of combating disinformation should be. The other important point is that the representatives of the state and representatives of civil society must work together on this complex information strategy. Ukrainian experience in fighting against Russian propaganda is unique, so the creation of such a strategy could serve as an example for other countries.

The Information Security Doctrine of Ukraine was signed by President P. Poroshenko in February 2017. As it was stated, the main goal of the doctrine is "to clarify principles of formation and implementation of the state information policy, first of all, with a view to counter the destructive information impact of Russia in conditions of hybrid war unleashed by it".¹¹ Obviously, the information space of Ukraine needed such a doctrine, which clearly defines national interests in the information sphere, the roles of departments in the realisation of this document, priorities in the information security, etc. Nevertheless, it was confirmed that there were just a few representatives of civil society participating in the discussion of the project of the doctrine.¹² Protection of the information space is followed by other important issues such as freedom of speech, the danger of censorship by the

government, access to public information. Therefore, it is important to devise such legislation under the close control of civil society. If we talk about what the government should do, it is also necessary to enhance communication between the authorities and citizens, clearly explain reforms and steps of the government, so that Russian disinformation could not have room to mislead Ukrainians about what is happening in their own country.

Besides special laws and doctrines, steps of the Ukrainian NGOs against the Russian disinformation campaign are worth noting here. First, debunking fake news and the main Kremlin narratives by using solid facts is still one of the important tools in fighting against numerous types of propaganda in the media. People form their beliefs according to their vision of the world. Russian propaganda forms this special vision of the world in people's mind for a long period of time. Therefore, it is hard not only to refute some lie, but also persuade the other side that this news story is not true, total nonsense, fake.

To shake faith in one or another piece of fake news, it is important to provide as many arguments as possible. The fact-checkers must be transparent in their work, submit links to all sources used in an article. Moreover, the logic of refutation should be accessible and understandable to the audience, so that anyone who has doubts can go through the same way of refutation as the fact-checker. Thus, *StopFake* uses the following principles in its work. First of all, to provide a context, broad explanations to

¹¹ Глава держави затвердив Доктрину інформаційної безпеки України (*The Head of State Approved the Doctrine of Information Security of Ukraine*), "President.gov.ua", 25 February 2017, [http://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/glava-derzhavi-zatverdiv-doktrinu-informacijnoi-bezpeki-ukr-40190 access: 01 February 2018].

¹² Впровадження Доктрини інформаційної безпеки не має бути спрямоване на боротьбу з політичним інакомисленням усередині країни. Опитування експертів (*The Introduction of the Doctrine of Information Security Should Not Be Aimed at Combating Political Dissent within the Country: Interview of Experts*), "Detector media", 27 February 2017, [http://detector.media/infospace/article/123603/2017-02-27-vprovadzheniya-doktrini-informatsiinoi-bezpeki-ne-mae-buti-spryamovane-na-borotbu-z-politichnim-inakomislenyamy-useredini-kraini-opituvannya-ekspertiv/ access: 02 February 2018].


some stories are important as well, as often it could not be an outright lie, but it could be some manipulation, distorted figures, misleading quotes, which leads to false conclusions. Second, tools of verification and debunking fakes should also be various: from official sources, experts' opinion to the latest online applications.

Debunking fakes is always a tip of the iceberg in the fight against the Russian disinformation campaign. Countering propaganda requires an integrated approach. Increasing the media literacy level of the population, promoting critical thinking skills to perceive media messages are the other important components of confronting this threat. Most experts point out that educational programs should already be implemented in schools. One of such projects has already been launched in Ukraine by the *StopFake* project and the Academy of Ukrainian Press with funding by the U.S. Embassy in Ukraine and the British Embassy Kyiv. The project "Learn to Discern – Schools" will be integrated into the existing curricula at 50 secondary schools across four cities with special educational materials.¹³

Strengthening media literacy among the adult population also should be conducted. Learning how to use information in the social media should be a part of such trainings. Information about media ownership and media interests of different business and political circles should also be included in these trainings. According to *StopFake* materials, Russian disinformation could be disseminated through Ukrainian media with pro-Russian views and interests as well.

Fact-checking materials should include all possible formats to persuade the audience. For example, the percentage of Internet

penetration in Ukraine depends on the region, socio-demographic factors. Access to different sources of information is not equal all over the country. This is important to keep in mind when genre and format is determined. As we talk about historical fakes, fact-checker should provide more original sources, documents, maps, use all possible data and expert opinion of professional historians. That is what the *LIKBE3* project is using in their work.



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Professional journalists should be aware too. Even more important is to promote journalism ethics and standards, increase the professionalism of journalists, provide special trainings about verification data and fact-checking in the "post-truth" era. Unfortunately, "bad journalism" is one of the reasons why propaganda is still effective.

Conclusions

The threat of the Russian disinformation campaign led to the consolidation of many non-governmental organisations in Ukraine. These organisations have taken on an important role in confronting information attacks, which is no less important for a country that is in a state of hybrid war. They appeared on the frontline at the same time, in March 2014, and since that time are performing important functions of fact-checking, refuting the Kremlin narratives, raising the level of media literacy among Ukrainians, revealing

¹³ *StopFake Helps Schools to Teach Media Literacy*, "StopFake", 04 February 2018, [<https://www.stopfake.org/en/stopfake-helps-schools-to-teach-media-literacy/> access: 02 February 2018].

the facts of the presence of the Russian army in Donbas, and so on. Thus, their work could be used for defining the many faces of Russian propaganda, measures for countering it, as well as for studying the steps that Ukrainian NGOs are taking every day to resist the Russian hydra. The most efficient measures can serve as an algorithm of actions for other countries where the threat of Russian disinformation is no less imminent.

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