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REPORT:
DISINFORMATION IN CEE

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# Dear Readers,

Meeting the challenges of the present day, the Warsaw Institute has prepared a special issue of our quarterly, dedicated to disinformation. ***The Warsaw Institute Review Special Edition: Disinformation*** includes a report on organized and planned disinformation in Central and Eastern Europe, with particular focus on Visegrád Group (V4) countries, Ukraine and the Baltic states.

Organized disinformation has in recent years increasingly influenced the policies of states and the mentality of societies. The ease of publishing on the Internet and widespread access to the web eases the spread of "fake news" and shapes the attitudes and behavior of both ordinary citizens and political decision makers. Its targets are also traditional media and institutions of the state. Used on a wide scale it is a tool for aggressive state policies, and even a component of hybrid warfare. This phenomenon occurs regularly in the Visegrád Group countries, and with particular intensity in areas of key importance to certain states, such as energy and defense. This special edition presents, in the form of analytical articles, the essence of disinformation and the resulting threats to private and public entities. Examples of information warfare are also described in each country, including Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Ukraine, as well as in the Baltic States. These analyses pay special attention to the Russian Federation's activity

in this area and its influence on the information sphere of other countries. An attempt was also made to identify the dangers posed by disinformation to government administration, business and society. Also, the Warsaw Institute has tried to present recommendations for the aforementioned groups threatened by disinformation. The study was prepared by Warsaw Institute experts, as well as by analysts working with the think tanks: European Values (Czech Republic) and Political Capital (Hungary).

I also encourage you to confirm your desire to continue receiving your free copy of *The Warsaw Institute Review* quarterly through the registration form at www.WarsawInstitute.Review

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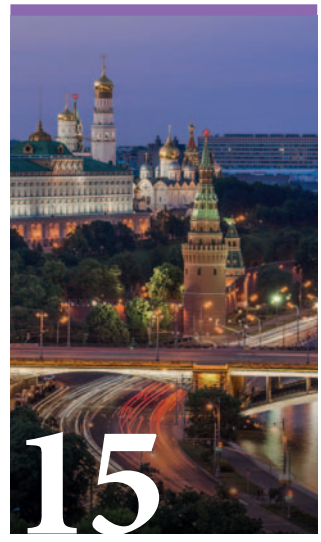

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# DISINFORMATION AS A THREAT TO PRIVATE AND STATE-OWNED BUSINESS

Jacek Borecki

From the spread of the Internet to the takeover of the world by smartphones, the technological revolution has redefined the notion of disinformation and propaganda, a tool widely used by Russia and other threat actors. How can coordinated disinformation operations affect society, business, and government?

After the Information Age (1990s) and the "age of the citizen" (2000s), a new era has begun. It is called many things by experts: the post--truth era, or a world where personal beliefs and emotions are more important than facts; the age of the customer, where customers, through popular opinion and review culture have an edge over entrepreneurs, the state, and reputable experts;[1] and, finally, the death of expertise, and the elevation of one's own, often weak, Wikipedia-supplemented knowledge, over professional research. In addition, methods of communication have completely

[1] G. Osbourne, *Strategic Communications: Insights from the commercial sector*, NATO Stratcom CoE, April 26, 2017, http://www.stratcomcoe.org/strategic-communications-insights-commercial-sector.

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transformed: a glut of messages can reach a mass audience instantaneously and through many channels. The speed of their transmission and the lack of critical thinking upon those who receive them legitimizes unverified information when users share it on social networking sites. This is the mechanism of modern disinformation.

### WHAT PURPOSE DOES DISINFORMATION SERVE?

In the case of Russia, generally speaking, disinformation is one of the instruments for pursuing the strategic foreign policy interests of the Russian Federation. The main objective is to strengthen Russia's international position and extend its reach at the expense of the West, especially in the areas perceived by the Kremlin to constitute Russia's sphere of influence (i.e. the post-Soviet states). The protection of its economic interests is also fundamental to Russia, including lobbying and manipulation in order to lift sanctions, as well as maintaining Gazprom's monopoly in East-Central Europe. It's a priority to weaken or eliminate competition, prevent the implementation of local and international projects (especially when they bypass Russia), which would decrease dependence on the Kremlin and would deprive them of a tool of economic pressure. Russia's economic interests also include ensuring a market for its energy resources. Russia is interested in taking over (by hostile

## Disinformation as a Threat to Private and State-Owned Businesses

**A)** Disinformation – deliberately prepared information, crafted with the intention to create misleading images of reality for the recipient, on the basis of which they make decisions beneficial to the disinforming party. The broader idea of disinformation encompasses a range of deceptive actions: inspiration, subterfuge, propaganda, manipulation, bluffing, camouflage, mystification, defamation.

**B)** Spec-propaganda, or special propaganda, deals with the narrative and information flow one country to another by official and camouflaged channels, with the intention of causing the target to make moves that weaken, disorganize, and consequently overthrow the existing political order.

**C)** Agent of influence – a person inspired by foreign special services who transmits, propagates, and implements narratives beneficial to another state. This is especially true of people in opinion-shaping environments (political, journalistic, academic, religious, social) and with access to important resources (business, special services). The unaware agent of influence is often known as a "useful idiot." They are usually held in low esteem by their case officers.

**D)** Active measures – covert operations of an offensive character, leading to the creation of friendly political, intellectual, economic, social, religious and ethnic conditions, in pursuit of the foreign policy objectives of another country. They include an entire arsenal of instruments, from propaganda and disinformation, through agents of influence, front organizations and falsifications, to physically liquidating an opponent.

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or conventional means) companies of strategic value for a given country's economy, at the lowest possible price – and thus, through disinformation and propaganda, Russia attempts to reduce the market value of such companies. With the help of specially-tailored narratives[2] in the information space, including traditional media, new media and cyberspace, attempts are made to manipulate virtually every community in target countries. Is the threat real? According to a CitizenLab analysis, of 218 investigated attacks on unauthorized access to private computers, 21% of attacks were business-related and 24% targeted government representatives.[3] Experience and history teach us, however, that propaganda and the accompanying disinformation have far greater reach and with much worse effects.

## AREAS OF DISINFORMATION INFLUENCE ON BUSINESS

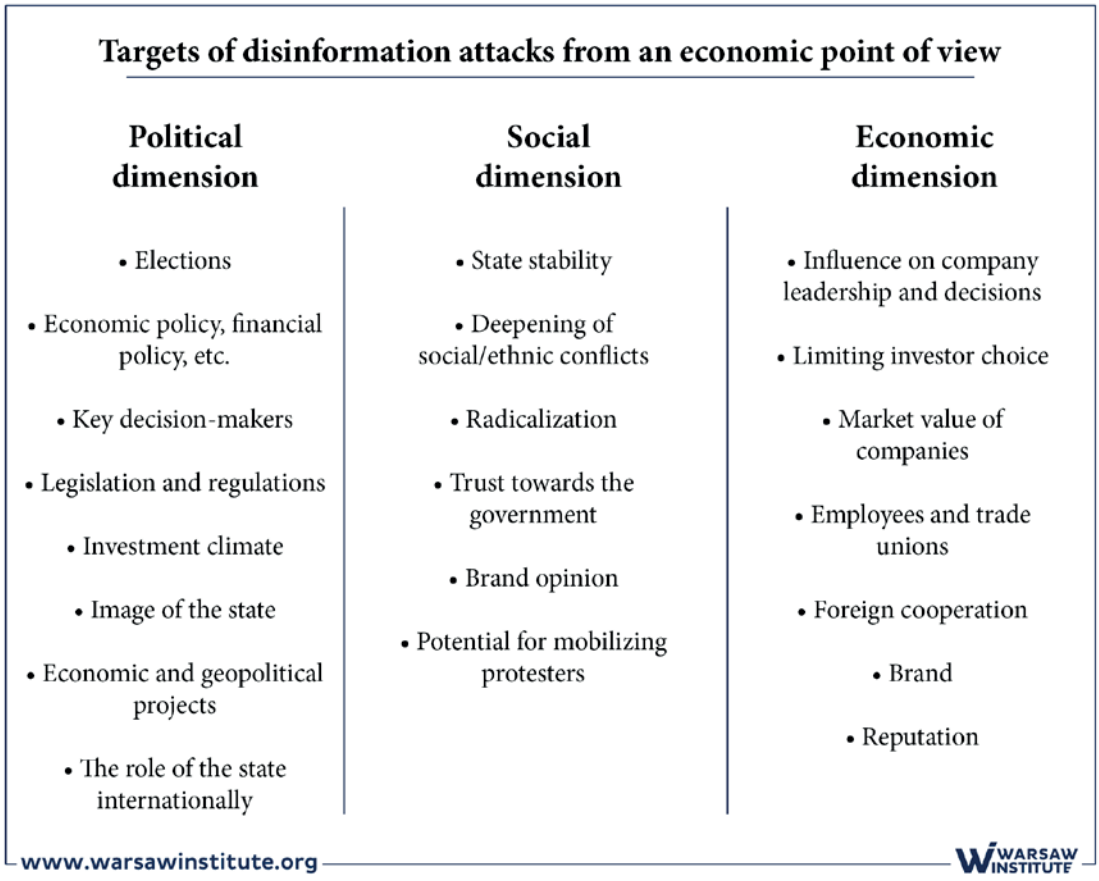
Disinformation is another challenge that must be faced by both private and public entrepreneurs. The first purpose of disinformation is to have a detrimental effect on the reputation and brand of an institution or company. An important element of creating a bad image is a mass campaign of baseless criticism online (trolling), and attributing negative actions to a company for which it is not responsible, causing an exceptionally strong emotional response from society. These accusations may include: breaking the law, environmental damage, corruption, etc., with the goal of inducing a wave of criticism. Damaging a company's reputation is also achieved by ridiculing, denigrating or compromising the people at the top, perhaps by linking them to institutions, media and people who act as agents of influence. For this reason, the most sensitive area is marketing and PR: sponsoring the wrong events, awarding a scholarship or grant to individuals or organizations involved in extremist activity, or *de facto* financing disinformation activities online through advertising buys, are just some examples of disinformation operations.

> The protection of its economic interests is also fundamental to Russia, including lobbying and manipulation in order to lift sanctions, as well as maintaining Gazprom's monopoly in East-Central Europe.

Hostile actions in the information space are also intended to steer the leadership of government institutions towards making decisions that are conducive to the Kremlin's foreign policy. These may be company-level decisions, such as withdrawing from a project under the influence of false information, but political decisions, such as influencing a given

[2] See: *Poland Through Eurasian Eyes*, page 70.

[3] A. Hulcoop, J. Scott-Railton, P. Tanchak, M. Brooks, and R. Deibert, *TAINTED LEAKS Disinformation and Phishing With a Russian Nexus*, The CitizenLab, May 25, 2017, https://citizenlab.ca/2017/05/tainted-leaks-disinformation-phish/.




False information favors confrontational and radical attitudes, and the manipulation of social attitudes.

country's regulations and legislation (or international regulations, such as in the EU). Because Russia's main export commodities are gas and oil, disinformation often targets projects that diversify the supply of these raw materials. For example, the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline is presented as a German project, while criticism of it from Central Europe is cast as Russophobic hysteria. On the other hand, attacks are aimed at decisions that could limit Gazprom's monopoly in the region.

Finally, the target audience most vulnerable to propaganda and disinformation is society itself. False information favors confrontational and radical attitudes, and the manipulation of social attitudes. These factors in turn have an impact on the stability of the state and the potential for the mobilization of society, for example: on protests against economic projects[4]. Society also has a direct influence on the direction of state policy as voters and participants in referendums. Disinformation campaigns could be seen during

[4] See: *Information Warfare against Strategic Investments in the Baltic States and Poland*, page 62.

the presidential elections in the U.S. and France, as well as during the referendum in the Netherlands (on the Ukraine-European Union Association Agreement) and the United Kingdom (on leaving the European Union). On a smaller scale, targeted disinformation can hit specific companies and institutions, which may result in strikes (for example, corporate documents that are published, suggesting massive layoffs) or consumer boycotts. Of course, it should be noted that not every criticism, black PR action or strike is caused by hostile information operations. However, it is quite possible to determine whether something is an organized action or an independent opinion, by analyzing the messages accompanying negative reviews, their time of publication and the tools used.

## Distribution channels for Kremlin propaganda and disinformation

| Official (white propaganda) | Semi-official (gray propaganda) | Unofficial (black propaganda) |
|---|---|---|
| • Official institutions and officials of the Russian Federation (the president, embassies, deputies, etc.);<br>• Agreements with unrecognized countries, "border signs" along occupation lines (e.g. South Ossetia). | • Political parties and politicians openly tied to the Kremlin (French National Front, Austrian Freedom Party, etc.);<br>• Communist parties;<br>• International organizations (Eurasian Observatory For Democracy and Elections). | • Political groups without overt links to the Kremlin, in particular the radical right and radical left;<br>• Agents of influence. |
| • Russian media (RIA Novosti, Regnum.ru Komsomolskaya Pravda) and media targeted at foreign recipients (RT – formerly Russia Today, Sputnik) | • Pro-Russian media and outlets established by partners of Russian intelligence services or people tied to the Kremlin | • Foreign media (unconscious influence);<br>• Foreign media (conscious influence);<br>• Trolls;<br>• Hacked or fake accounts on social media;<br>• Groups on social media;<br>• Agents of influence;<br>• Wikipedia edits; |
| • GONGO (Russkiy mir, Rossotrudnichestvo, Gorchakov Fund, etc.);<br>• Diaspora organizations;<br>• Cultural organizations. | • Religious organizations | • Front organizations;<br>• Social movements (anti-vaccination, environmental, pacifist, anti-abortion, etc.);<br>• "Humanitarian" missions. |
| • Russian political science books, primary school and academic textbooks (Aleksandr Dugin's works, Conservative Revolution, Postmodern Geopolitics), Igor Panarin, The Crash of the Dollar and the Disintegration of the USA, Information Warfare for the Future of Russia, etc.;<br>• International forums (Valdai Discussion Club);<br>• Historical societies. | • Academic organizations (Nauchnoe obschestvo kavkazovedov), conferences in Russia;<br>• Certain representatives of the Russian academic world. | • Pseudoscience publications;<br>• Camouflaged pro-Russian outlets;<br>• Agents of influence. |
| • Clubs (Club of Friends of the Gorchakov Fund) | • Russian Orthodox Church;<br>• Separatists. | • Inspired protests;<br>• Agents of influence;<br>• Useful idiots. |

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## DISINFORMATION WEAPONS – DECEPTION, MANIPULATION, AND FAKE NEWS

Disinformation, as part of the information war, has a number of tools at its disposal that take advantage of common cognitive defects and the specificity of the modern information environment. Techniques used on a case-by-case basis will vary depending on the target group and distribution channel. It should also be mentioned that Russian intelligence on the way a given country operates, issues important for its citizens, culture, stereotypes and internal divisions, is extremely extensive.

## TOOLS BASED ON DECEPTION

The task of media deception provokes desired events that are later exploited by media distribution channels. There are standard forgeries, such as the fabricated letter of Ukraine's Minister of Finance Natalie Jaresko to U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Victoria Nuland, which requested a postponement of the Dutch referendum on the association agreement with Ukraine.[5] But deception is also created by controlled leaks. These leaks are primarily based on the acquisition of documents through legitimate (official) or illegal (by phishing, cyber espionage or manipulation) sources and then the manipulation of their content by cutting out certain parts of the text and substituting others – or publishing only part of the content without context. An example of a controlled leak was the illegal acquisition of the emails of journalist and Kremlin critic David Satter, and then their publication on the website of the Russian hacker group CyberBerkut, after falsifying the e-mails to persuade the public of Western funding for the Russian opposition, including Alexei Navalny.[6] An example of military camouflaging is the introduction of regular troops under the guise of peacekeepers, as in the case of Abkhazia or South Ossetia (the occupied region of Georgia), as well as "humanitarian convoys" for separatists in eastern Ukraine. This category includes all kinds of fake institutions, such as the "consulate" of the so-called Donetsk People's Republic in Ostrava in the Czech Republic.[7]

## SOCIAL ENGINEERING TOOLS

Such instruments are based primarily on knowledge of the human psyche and the influence of modern technologies on how people process information. The main tool in this category is propaganda: long-term, intrusive interaction, combined with manipulation. A specific variation of disinformation is historical revisionism[8], targeted primarily at states located in the former Soviet sphere of influence in countries such as Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Poland, Georgia and Ukraine. As a tool of misinformation, trolling is also used. The task of trolls is to attract attention to a particular topic which their client wants to highlight and bring it into the social or political discussion,

[5] G. Kobzaru, *Ukraine struntar and Nederländernas opinion*, Pressbladet, April 1, 2016, http://www.svenskpress.se/papers/pressbladet/articles/view/ukraina-struntar-i-nederlandernas-opinion. The article now reads *Probably fake news*.

[6] A. Hulcoop, J. Scott-Railton, P. Tanchak, M. Brooks, and R. Deibert, *TAINTED LEAKS Disinformation and Phishing With a Russian Nexus*, The CitizenLab, May 25, 2017, https://citizenlab.ca/2017/05/tainted-leaks-disinformation-phish/.

[7] M. Lebduška, L. Tysyachna, *The EU entry has been detrimental to Czechia, the fake 'DPR consul' Lisková says*, StopFake, November 21, 2016, http://www.stopfake.org/en/the-eu-entry -has-been-detrimental-to-the-czechia-dpr-consul-Liskova-says/.

[8] See: *Russian Information Warfare in the Baltic States*, page 54.

## Recommendations for private businesses, state-owned enterprises and government administrations

1) Carry out security audits and identify areas and key individuals that are sensitive to disinformation, particularly those vulnerable to disinformation attacks. Security audits should also designate a list of organizations, media, companies and outlets, the financial support (e.g. through purchase of advertising, grants) patronage of, or cooperation with, may damage the image or reputation of the institution due to their spreading of disinformation or participation in information warfare.

2) Develop a communications strategy. The message should be positive, open, coherent, interesting for the recipient and tailored to the time when they are active, and have a non-propaganda character. After conducting a security audit, particular attention should be paid to the systematic, open and skillful communication from representatives of projects exposed to attacks.

3) A key to fighting disinformation is the speed of the response and the ability to determine which false information should be left unanswered, as it can be easily identified by people as trolling. The speed of the response can also be increased by shortening the decision-making process, i.e. by granting more power to managers or lower level supervisors.

4) Develop procedures for dealing with controversial information that influence strategic decisions, as well as a list of proven news sources. In the case of crisis-generating information, one should wait until an official statement from the government before making a decision.

5) Trolls, the blocking of which would generate a negative response from other users, should be fought against with facts and satire.

6) Ensure coordination and information flow between the various institutions as well as between government institutions, government leaders and society.

7) Rapidly provide information from analysts, researchers and managers to decision makers. A good first step is to limit bureaucracy and protect the flow of information through legislation.

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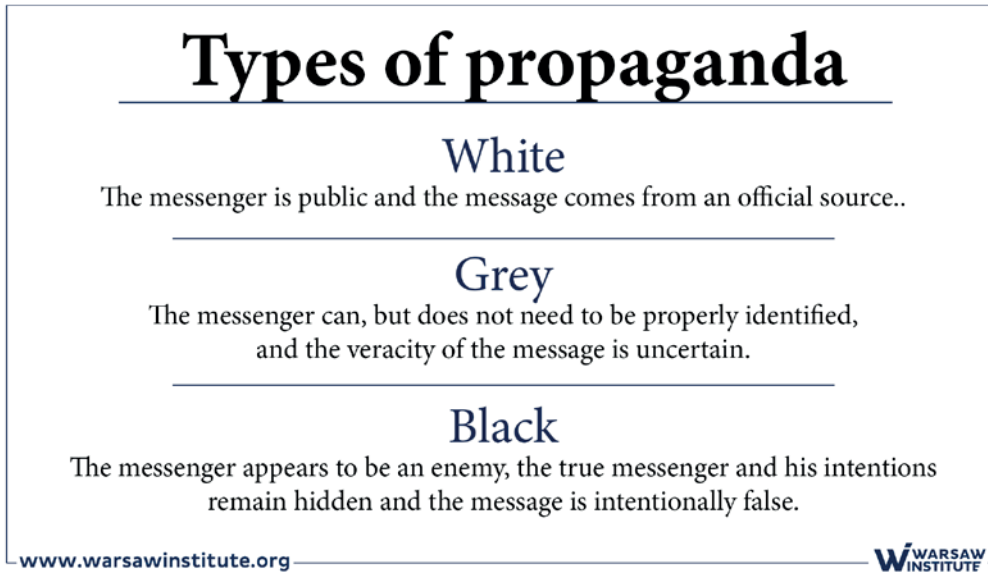
manipulating it and promoting narratives beneficial to Russia. In addition to trolling, the popularity of the topic is also enhanced with Internet bots. The volume of messaging creates a bandwagon effect – the more people that are able to support a given idea, the more they are convinced that the majority has accepted it. An interesting case are the "bikini trolls" whose profiles contain pictures of young, attractive, scantily-clad women.[9] Their task is to soften the image of Russia, spread conspiracy theories and distract the "target" from work. It is another social engineering tool, taking advantage of the halo effect, that is, adding credibility to a messenger who is physically attractive, clean and neat.

### FAKE NEWS

Fake news is a synthesis of the two above categories, because it both deceives and influences. It usually also

[9] More on trolls, *Internet Trolling as a hybrid warfare tool: the case of Latvia*, NATO StratCom CoE, January 25, 2016, http://www.stratcomcoe.org/internet-trolling-hybrid-warfare-tool-case- Latvia-0/.




Nowadays it is the most common form of disinformation because of the low costs and the large payoff.

includes elements of truth, because familiar facts facilitate the acceptance of the message. Nowadays it is the most common form of disinformation because of the low costs and the large payoff. One of the examples: the case of Lisa, a German woman of Russian descent who was supposedly raped by migrants. The Russian media widely covered Lisa's case. Following broadcasts in social media groups and right-wing media, demonstrations were organized, mobilizing extremists and the Russian-German minority. The Lisa case was also commented upon by Sergey Lavrov, the Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation, who pointed out that the German police were slow to react due to political correctness.[10] This example shows how easy it is to unify specific environments and mobilize them to take anti-government action.

While often downplayed, disinformation and propaganda tend to strike at the weakest point in the functioning of every business – the human element. The problem is also the frenetic pace of technological development, which legislation can't keep up with, and whose gains can quickly be transformed into tools for further influence. Nevertheless, the effects of disinformation attacks can be reduced by developing counter strategies.

**Jacek Borecki**
July 25, 2017

[10] S. Meister, *The 'Lisa' case: Germany as a target of Russian disinformation,* NATO Review magazine, July 25, 2016, http://www.nato.int/docu/review/2016/Also-in-2016/ lisa-case-germany-target-russian-disinformation / EN / index.htm.

# IN THE AGE OF POST-TRUTH: BEST PRACTICES IN FIGHTING DISINFORMATION

Maria Zielińska

The post-truth world is one in which emotions are more important than facts. This relationship is absolutely exploited by propagandists and disinformation agents. The good news is that many effective instruments for fighting disinformation and propaganda already exist.

For many years, East-Central European countries have warned against placing excessive trust in the Kremlin by neglecting the activities of Russia's quasi non-governmental organizations and the influx of Russian capital into Europe, especially from Gazprom. Back then, those misgivings were attributed to hysteria and alleged Russophobia, stemming from historical events. Today, after the Kremlin's intervention in key democratic processes, such as elections (USA, France) and referendums (Great Britain, the Netherlands), the Western community seeks appropriate measures to safeguard its societies from foreign influence, not only in a military context, but in the information sphere.

The problem has also been noticed by the European Parliament, which in its resolution on June 10, 2016, in addition to mentioning areas subject to propaganda (e.g. falsification of history), pointed to the need for

creating a group to tackle deceptive information about the European Union spread by media tied to Russia.[1] In 2016, thanks in part to the report of MEP Anna Fotyga, former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Poland, EEAS East StratCom started regular operations. This and other means are included in the following six steps for combating the harmful effects of Russian messaging in the information war.

### FIRST OF ALL: RULE OF LAW AND GOOD GOVERNANCE

The law is a great instrument for fighting propaganda distribution channels. On the one hand, it allows the blocking of broadcasts or online publishing and the imposition of high fines. The real possibility of imposing financial penalties on entities that rebroadcast Kremlin propaganda content significantly increases the cost of such activities, and discourages other outlets from working with agencies like Sputnik.

In the context of information warfare, however, media regulations are paramount. Latvia in 2014 and Lithuania in 2015 temporarily blocked the Russian RTR-Planeta channel due to their incitement of hatred against Ukrainians. On several occasions, the British communications regulator Ofcom officially identified RT (previously Russia Today) material as being biased, manipulative, tendentious and in violation of the broadcasting code, ordering RT to broadcast a correction.[2] Another method used by Radio Sputnik was to buy airtime on radio stations that had the appropriate broadcaster's license. This was the case with Radio Hobby

In the context of information warfare, however, media regulations are paramount.

from Legionowo in Poland, as well as R-Radio and Radio Monte-Carlo in Georgia. Because the station managers did not contribute to the production of the broadcasts, this meant the illegal ceding of their frequency to another entity, which resulted in the cancellation of their broadcast licenses and financial penalties. Moreover, the rebroadcast of Sputnik's material by these stations was also met with strong public criticism.[3]

Another way to limit attacks in the information war is to introduce changes to legislation and include them in official documents. For example, in the Czech National Security Audit, two important chapters were included: "Influence of Foreign Powers" and "Hybrid

[1] *European Parliament resolution of 10 June 2015 on the state of EU-Russia relations,* European Parliament, Strasbourg, June 10, 2015, http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P8-TA-2015-0225+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN.

[2] *RT sanctioned by Ofcom over series of misleading and biased articles*, The Guardian, September 21, 2015, https://www.theguardian.com/media/2015/sep/21/rt-sanctioned-over-series-of-misleading-articles-by-media-watchdog and John Plunkett, *Russia Today threatened with Ofcom sanctions due to bias,* The Guardian, November 10, 2014, https://www.theguardian.com/media/2014/nov/10/russia-today-ofcom-sanctions-impartiality-ukraine-coverage.

[3] *Threats of Russian Hard and Soft Power in Georgia*, ed. L.Tughushi, European Initiative Liberal Academy Tbilisi, Tbilisi, 2016, http://www.ei-lat.ge/images/doc/threats%20of%20russian%20soft%20and%20hard%20power.pdf.

**MOSCOW, RUSSIA. VIEW OF MOSCOW KREMLIN AND CENTER OF MOSCOW FROM THE CATHEDRAL OF CHRIST THE SAVIOUR.**

© Konstantin Kokoshkin (PAP/RUSSIAN LOOK)

Threats."[4] The presence of these chapters allowed for the undertaking of more advanced measures to combat disinformation. One of the recommendations was to create an official unit responsible for information security, which resulted in the establishment of the Center Against Terrorism and Hybrid Threats.[5]

## SECOND: INFORM, INFORM, INFORM

The problem for countries that currently face the information war is their past neglect in communicating with the public in a broad context, and improperly communicating official government decisions. The biggest challenge for East-Central Europe is to reach out to Russian-speaking minorities, traditionally well-oriented in information from Russian television and publications. As a good practice in this area, we can see the increasingly frequent launches of official services in Russian, based on the example of the European Union and NATO, and above all, the creation of domestic media. It is worth mentioning the program "Nastoyaschee Vremya" (Current Time), which was created by Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) and Voice of America (VOA). In fact, RFE/RL itself strives to reach its audience in more than twenty languages. Estonia also launched a Russian-language public television channel. Ukraine, having the most significant experience in the information war being led by Russia, besides excellent citizenship initiatives such as StopFake, through the Ministry of Information, also publishes very well-produced brochures on facts and evidence denied by Russia.

Another important issue faced by Western countries is the reluctance to openly call things by name and identify the aggressor. Hence, the aforementioned European Parliament resolution is extremely important as it highlights the specific source of propaganda. While at the bureaucratic level, it takes a great deal of time to push such a strategy, new media, namely social media, is faster. In Poland, reporting on the Kremlin ties of the organizers of anti-Ukrainian activities as well as the actions of other disinformers, propagandists and instigators is done on the Facebook page "Rosyjska V Kolumna w Polsce" (The Russian Fifth Column in Poland),[6] run by Marcin Rey. On Polish Twitter, a leading profile is @Disinfo_Digest,[7] run by the Cyber Security Foundation. Disinfo Digest is more focused on current fake news and falsifications from Russia, and also collects material on identifying falsehoods and the mechanisms of disinformation.

Another interesting project is the Integrity Initiative[8] of The Institute for Statecraft in the UK. The Integrity Initiative accumulates knowledge from other organizations that deal with the subject of Russian influence, and connects people – at the civil society level – working on

[4] *Policy shift overview: How the Czech Republic is one of the leaders in countering Russian disinformation*, Kremlin Watch (European Values), Prague, May 10, 2017, http://www.europeanvalues.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Policy-shift-overview-How-the-Czech-Republic-became-one-of-the-European-leaders-in-countering- Russian-disinformation-1.pdf.

[5] Center Against Terrorism and Hybrid Threats, http://www.mvcr.cz/cthh/clanek/centre-against-terrorism-and-hybrid-threats.aspx.

[6] Profile of *The Russian Fifth Column* in Poland on Facebook, https://www.facebook.com/RosyjskaVKolumnawPolsce/.

[7] *Disinfo_Digest* profile on Twitter, https://twitter.com/Disinfo_Digest.

[8] *Integrity Initiative Project Website*, http://www.integrityinitiative.net/about.

the same issues. Another think tank seriously analyzing propaganda and disinformation in East-Central Europe, is the Center for European Policy Analysis (CEPA), headed by Edward Lucas, a journalist and expert in the methods of the Russian special services. Another success is the Slovakian project conspiratori.sk (Conspirators) and the French CrossCheck project,[9] joint projects of First Draft and Google News Lab.

A relatively new strategy is to provide the public with some of the information collected by the security services. The security agencies of the Baltic republics publish some of their reports where they share their accumulated knowledge with the public. The dissemination of concrete information about the Kremlin's agents of influence shows the actions of many pro-Russian activists in a new light and undermines their future activities.

**THIRD: DEBUNK AND PREVENT**

Many institutions and organizations engage in the policy of revealing false information, simultaneously juxtaposing it with facts. Work of massive proportions is being done by the previously mentioned East StratCom team, which regularly reports on incidents of disinformation in Europe and anti-Western narratives imposed by Russia, in the *Disinformation Review*, and through their Facebook and Twitter profile (EU Mythbusters). A positive sign on the battlefield against disinformation are the training videos prepared by NATO and the EU, which have the chance to reach younger generations who use the Internet as their sole source of information.

The largest initiative, run in several languages, is StopFake, as well as two Georgian projects: Myth Detector/ Euro Communicator of the Media Development Foundation (MDF) and FactCheck, which also checks the veracity of politicians' statements. In the Baltic countries, where it is easy

KONŠPIRÁTORI.sk

The Konšpirátori project collects data on Czech and Slovak propaganda websites, falsehoods, and manipulated news calculated for a wide public audience, politicians, and fraudsters, for example: selling fake drugs or encouraging people to discontinue necessary medical treatment. This site lists those pages with ratings and reviews.

The project encourages businesspeople not to buy advertising on such sites and thus deprive them of their main source of income. At the same time, companies protect their reputation and brand by avoiding associating themselves with suspicious entities.

www.warsawinstitute.org

WARSAW INSTITUTE

[9] *CrossCheck* project site, https://crosscheck.firstdraftnews.com/france-en/.

In deconstructing disinformation, a quick reaction and co-operation with government institutions is key.

to mobilize the online community, groups against online trolls are growing in popularity. "Elves" are groups of Internet users fighting false accounts through which disinformation is spread on social media. Journalists, including Jessikka Aro from Finland, who studied troll factories and their operations in St. Petersburg, and German journalist Julian Röpcke, who was one of the first to reveal the full force of Russia's engagement in triggering armed conflict in Ukraine, deserve great credit for revealing the mechanisms of disinformation. At present, Röpcke studies Russian influence in Germany, including the links between German politicians and Russian capital, e.g. Gazprom. Similarly, the Czech think tank European Values also runs the Kremlin Watch program. This program aims to investigate and disclose disinformation and influence the operations of the Russian Federation.

In deconstructing disinformation, a quick reaction and co-operation with government institutions is key. An example of coordinated, appropriate action, was the quashing of speculation by the Finnish police about the murder of three women in 2016. After the murders, information began to appear in several sources that this was an ethnically motivated murder, that the women were shot because they were Russians, and that the killer was a former soldier. This was a typical example of disinformation, as all three victims were Finns, and the killer had no connection with the army. In this case, a quick official statement stopped the circulation of disinformation.

### FOURTH: ANALYZE, EDUCATE, AND INVESTIGATE

In recent years, many reports, analyses and articles have been written about modern propaganda and disinformation. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning papers developed by practitioners, experienced researchers, and cross--sectional research (produced through international cooperation). They present examples of the coordination of information operations, the recycling of propaganda messages and fake news, as well as the mechanism of introducing propaganda messages into the media through various channels.

Solid pieces of work worth mentioning are from StopFake in Ukraine and European Values in the Czech Republic as practical recommendations for action. Their value is in the presentation of propaganda messages, documented with the source material. StopFake has prepared, among other things, materials on identifying fake news, and a report called European Values — a cross-sectional report on defending against disinformation in EU countries, as well as the fundamentals of protecting elections from hostile interference.
The Georgian MDF (Municipal Development Fund) and Transparency International Georgia, are preparing

reports analyzing anti-Western and anti-Turkish propaganda in Georgia and distribution channels for disinformation, as well as the financing of media and political parties. Whereas the Hungarian think tank, Political Capital, in cooperation with other European organizations, has prepared reports on the weaponization of culture by Russia and the activities of pro-Russian extremist groups in Central Europe.[10]

Important institutions dealing with foreign affairs in NATO and EU countries are the Centers of Excellence (CoE), specialized centers accredited by NATO.
The Strategic Communications CoE in Riga, Latvia has published a series of online publications on the tools and mechanisms used by the Kremlin to influence its Western neighbors and their own population. The Center of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats, created in Finland, is an example of successful cooperation between the European Union and NATO, which is best illustrated by the attempts of Finnish agents of influence in the Kremlin to create an organization patterned after the Center. In terms of research and analysis, the Strategic Communications CoE is the leader, having released more than a dozen practical studies of examples of influence operations.
In addition, Alliance countries such as Denmark have decided to train their soldiers in combating disinformation before they are posted to NATO service.[11] Other Nordic countries, especially Sweden and Finland, place great emphasis on media literacy in schools already, which is shaping good habits in using the media and the ability to determine their credibility. The Czech NGO People In Need, through the One World in Schools project, supports teachers who want to tackle the subject of disinformation

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**HELSINKI, FINLAND, OCTOBER 2, 2017. JENS STOLTENBERG, NATO SECRETARY GENERAL, SPEAKS AT THE OPENING OF THE EUROPEAN CENTER OF EXCELLENCE FOR COUNTERING HYBRID THREAT IN HELSINKI. CENTER IS ONLY OPEN TO EU AND NATO COUNTRIES. THE TWELVE COUNTRIES THAT HAVE JOINED SO FAR ARE ESTONIA, FINLAND, FRANCE, GERMANY, LATVIA, LITHUANIA, NORWAY, POLAND, SPAIN, SWEDEN, GREAT BRITAIN AND THE UNITED STATES.**

[10] *The activity of pro-Russian extremist groups in Central-Eastern Europe*, Political Capital, April 28, 2017, http://www.politicalcapital.hu/news.php?article_read=1&article_id=933.

[11] *Denmark to train NATO soldiers to fight Russian misinformation*, Reuters, July 17, 2017, http://mobile.reuters.com/article/amp/idUSKBN1A21FU.

FRAME FROM THE PROGRAM OF THE LITHUANIAN JOURNALIST ANDRIUS TAPINAS "DERZHITES' TAM!". THE NAME IS A PARAPHRASE OF DMITRY MEDVEDEV'S RESPONSE TO COMPLAINTS FROM CRIMEAN PENSIONERS, WHO POINTED TO HUGE PRICE INCREASES.

campaigns with their students.[12] The failure of critical thinking is pointed out by experts as one of the main causes of the popularity of "alternative media." First Draft, the co-creator of CrossCheck, is a platform dedicated to raising the standards of online journalism and information sharing online, but its activities are especially important because it brought in Google, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and other popular news sites as partners in its network.

### FIFTH: SHAME AND RIDICULE

Awareness of the origins of some outlets allows this knowledge to be appropriately used in such a way as to protect one's employees or citizens from unwanted contacts. Once again, using an Estonian example: the Internal Security Police of Estonia discouraged government officials from contact with employees of Sputnik. Concerned about the use of their image in Sputnik propaganda campaigns, they didn't even want to be photographed in the company of Sputnik employees. On May 9, 2016, Olga Ivanov, one of the members of the ruling Estonian Center Party, gave an interview with the "Bronze Soldier" (a monument of a Soviet soldier in Tallinn) as a backdrop, and even this appearance was met with sharp criticism from Prime Minister Jüri Ratas.[13]

In addition to the powerful weapon of social ostracism, it is possible to use the slightly smaller caliber of

[12] One World in Schools website, https://www.jsns.cz/cz/article/111/What_is_jsns.html?id=243.

[13] Р. Болотская, Как не стать *полезными идиотами* Кремля: стратегия медиавойн, Ukrinform, May 30, 2017, https://www.ukrinform.ru/rubric-polytics/2237142-kak-ne-stat-poleznymi-idiotami-kremla-strategia-mediavojn.html.

humor and satire. Caricatures that ridicule certain social phenomena or politicians are certainly not new, but are nevertheless remain a useful tool for laughing at the absurdity of Kremlin propaganda or the inconsistency between the image of Russia painted by the Russian elites and the reality. An example of the humorous approach is a crowdfunded Lithuanian, satirical--informative program "Derżites' tam!" (Hang In There!). While the European Values think tank presents the "Putin's Champion Award," which "indicates the amount of friendliness and appeasement of Western public figures to the Russian Federation's policies which are set to undermine its neighborhood and the West."[14] It is also easier to show the user the unreliability of a given source if, apart from information that discredits Ukraine and glorifies Russia, it also publishes articles about lizard people, Illuminati or the allegedly harmful effects of vaccines.

It is worth noting that a good portion of Internet users are a perfect target for humor and satire. Reaching them by this route is the most effective way. Just look at the popularity of Twitter star Darth Putin, commenting on current events related to the Kremlin and the U.S. One of Darth Putin's pieces of advice is: "Do not believe *anything* until the Kremlin denies it."[15] On his blog, Darth Putin also writes: "The one thing the Kremlin cannot take is being laughed at. If the public cannot tell the Kremlin's message apart from a so-called parody, it tells you something..."[16]

Information attacks are not only limited to disinformation, but also threaten all projects, processes and reforms that strengthen a given country.

### SIXTH: HAVE A STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

Europe will always be ready for dialogue with Russian society. However, the Russian authorities take advantage of the values that the West gained with great difficulty over the centuries, such as freedom of speech and tolerance. By taking any steps that limit the spread of lies on the web, you must count on the alarm being raised and the invocation of exactly the same values by agents of influence – often people ignorant of whose interests they are really defending. It is therefore important to be able to explain your actions and to have support in research, evidence and in the law.

Information attacks are not only limited to disinformation, but also threaten all projects, processes and reforms that strengthen a given country. That is why it is important to bear in mind the potential weak points

[14] *Think Tank* Website European Values First Putin's Champion of the Week, http://www.europeanvalues.net/kremlinwatch/putins-champion-of-the-week-en/.

[15] Tweet of user @DarthPutinKGB, July 20, 2017, https://twitter.com/DarthPutinKGB/status/888002533331017728.

[16] Crowd Fund, Darth Putin blog, January 25, 2017, https://darthputinkgb.blogspot.com/2017/01/crowd-fund.html.

Strategic communication therefore takes into account not only the diversity of one's own society and the international community, but also the changes in media usage and the use of the Internet.

that are susceptible to information attack, especially in the case of international projects, where it is enough to block the implementation of a project in one country. When implementing new reforms, an appropriate strategy for informing the public should be prepared (which in no way can be synonymous with deception).

Strategic communication therefore takes into account not only the diversity of one's own society and the international community, but also the changes in media usage and the use of the Internet. Therefore, in communicating with the public, with customers, with foreign partners and their recipients, it must be done in a way that people will want to hear and that maintains trust in official sources of information. Hence, there is a high level of online activity by EU actors and a movement away from stiff, bureaucratic language, focusing instead on presenting information in the form of infographics or video content. This is also part of a broader concept of one's own positive narrative – NATO and the EU representatives often say that they are always ready for dialogue with Russian society – it's not necessary to blame all Russian citizens for the faults of their corrupt elites. Of course, we can discuss the appropriateness and effectiveness of the measures mentioned above to combat disinformation. Nevertheless, the multitude of these tools and their different origins – international, administrative or non-governmental – allow us to gauge how far we've come in a relatively short period of time. Not all treatments will be effective everywhere; but exchanges of knowledge and cooperation are important, both among nations, and between government administrations and non-governmental organizations. Our societies should respect different opinions, however, as Lithuanian Foreign Minister Linas Linkevičus said, "[a] lie is not an alternative point of view. Propaganda is not a legitimate form of public diplomacy. It's our naivety which is preventing us from taking appropriate action, even as the other side advances its undeclared info-war."[17] It cannot be expected that the Russian Federation, a state based on its intelligence services, will give up using its most well-developed tools and active measures, and stop interfering in the internal affairs of the countries it considers its opponents. But if it uses lies as weapons, everyone has the right to defend against them.

**Maria Zielińska**
July 25, 2017

[17] L. Linkevicus, *No freedom to lie*, EUobserver, September 10, 2015; https://euobserver.com/opinion/130188.

# THE KREMLIN'S HOSTILE INFLUENCE IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC: THE STATE OF PLAY

Jakub Janda, Veronika Víchová

This is a brief report on the state of play of the Kremlin's hostile influence in the Czech Republic as of July 2017, and on what is being done to counter it.

It consists of four basic responses to questions, put together from the reports and papers authored or co-authored by the European Values Think-Tank and complemented by open sources in order to make the report as current as possible. The goal of this report is to present the situation in the Czech Republic, to introduce the main channels of the Kremlin's hostile influence, their effectiveness, and the most relevant responses from the government and the civil society.

### WHAT IS THE GENERAL CHARACTER OF CZECH-RUSSIAN RELATIONS?

The relations between the Czech Republic and the Russian Federation have always been marked by the legacy Czechs carry from the communist era and the invasion of the Warsaw Pact military into Czechoslovakia in 1968. However, there is still a considerable part of the population that shares pro-Kremlin sentiments, especially amongst voters of the Communist Party of

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PRAGUE, CZECH REPUBLIC, MAY 9, 2016. EMBASSY OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION.

Bohemia and Moravia (KSČM), the third-most popular party in the country. Generally, Czechs have acted pragmatically when dealing with Russia in the past, focusing mostly on economic and energy interests, but repeatedly expressing concerns about democracy and human rights issues. According to the 2012 Czech Export Strategy, Russia was among twelve priority countries.

Generally, Czechs have acted pragmatically when dealing with Russia in the past, focusing mostly on economic and energy interests, but repeatedly expressing concerns about democracy and human rights issues.

Energy security is possibly the most sensitive topic in the Czech-Russian relations, with the Czech Republic being slightly dependent on Russia and the Russian nuclear energy giant Rosatom being an exclusive supplier of fuel for the Temelin nuclear plant. The reputation of Russia as a reliable supplier was damaged after turmoil accompanying the previous efforts of the United States to allocate anti-missile defence systems in the

Czech Republic and in Poland, to which Russia reacted by curtailing oil supplies via the Druzhba pipeline in the Czech Republic by 50%. Since then, the Czech Republic has been a vocal supporter of projects reducing the negative impacts of energy dependency on Russia. The Czech energy sector is still of interest to Russian business, especially Gazprom, as well as espionage.

The economic exchange has been declining recently following the devaluation of rouble, the recession of Russian economy, and economic sanctions. The Czech Security Information Service (BIS) warned in its Annual Report against the penetration of Russian capital connected to the grey zone economy in the Czech environment, and the strengthening of the Kremlin's political influence in the Czech Republic. But the Czech foreign policy continues being active in the Eastern partnership region.[1]

After the start of the conflict in Ukraine and the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula by Russia, the Czech Republic shifted its views on the political level. By now, the Czech Republic is well aware of the threats posed by the Kremlin, even though the Czech President Miloš Zeman works on maintaining relations between the two countries, denies the presence of Russian troops in Ukraine and has repeatedly criticised the EU sanctions against Russia.

[1] J. Janda, *Policy Shift Overview: How the Czech Republic became one of the European leaders in countering Russian disinformation,* European Values Think-Tank, May 10, 2017; http://www.europeanvalues.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Policy-shift-overview-How-the-Czech-Republic-became-one-of-the-European-leaders-in-countering-Russian-disinformation-1.pdf.

## WHAT TOOLS OF KREMLIN'S INFLUENCE ARE MOST ACTIVE IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC?

### ACTIVE MEASURES

Prague, the Capital of the Czech Republic, has always been a fruitful soil for Kremlin's active measures and clandestine operations, partly because of its convenient geographical position in the centre of Europe. According to the Annual Report[2] of the BIS, the Russian intelligence services were the most active ones in the Czech Republic in 2015. Russian intelligence officers often operate under diplomatic cover of the Russian Embassy which has more employees than embassies of other states, including the United States and China, the report says.

As of 2017, the Russian Embassy in Prague consists of 48 members of diplomatic personnel and 81 members of administration and technical personnel. These numbers are still higher than the ones of the United States (40 diplomats) and China (25 diplomats).[3]

According to anonymous sources from the Czech counter-intelligence services, there is a base of Soviet espionage from the 1969 in Prague which never left and revived its contacts after the Velvet revolution. These former Soviet agents are now operating within the circles of organized crime and make an effort to influence high politics and enhance the dependency of the Czech Republic on Russia.[4]

[2] *Annual Report of the Security Information Service for 2015*, Security Information Service (BIS), 2016, https://www.bis.cz/vyrocni-zpravaEN890a.html?ArticleID=1104.

[3] R. Břešťan, *Ruské velvyslanectví v Praze je stale při síle,. Působí na něm nejvíce lidí ze všech ambasád*, Info.cz, June 14, 2017; http://www.info.cz/cesko/ruske-velvyslanectvi-v-praze-je-stale-pri-sile-pusobi-na-nem-nejvice-lidi-ze-vsech-ambasad-11275.html.

[4] J. Janda, O. Kundra, *Schéma fungování vlivu Ruské federace v České republice,* European Values Think-Tank, September 16, 2016; http://www.

It is not an easy task for the Czech Republic to respond to the state of overpopulation at the Russian Embassy in Prague. The number of Czech diplomats in Moscow is lower than the size of Russian spy community in the Czech Republic. Therefore, expulsion of Russian diplomatic employees might soon result in an empty Czech Embassy in the Russian Federation.

## DISINFORMATION OPERATIONS

The Czech media space has problems of its own, primarily the conflict of interest due to the ownership of several media outlets by the former Deputy Prime Minister and a hot candidate for the Prime Minister's seat after the general elections in October 2017. Despite these issues, it is important to note that the mainstream and public media manage to inform the Czechs objectively and responsibly, for the most part. The few cases of bias were mostly connected to the TV Prima channel which applied a policy of only broadcasting negative reports about Syrian refugees.[5]

There is only one official Russian quasi-media project in Czech language, the website Sputnik. But there are also many subjects and personalities which, directly or indirectly serve the interests of the Kremlin. Furthermore, there are around 40 Czech-language websites without known links to the Russian government, which repeatedly publish false reports and spread manipulative narratives, often motivated by adoration of Russia or economic interests. Most of these disinformation and manipulation websites are largely non-transparent, they do not disclose the names of the authors of the content, financial resources or owners. In cases where the people behind the websites are known, they are often widely personally interconnected. Several websites are owned by only one person and the authors of opinion articles and commentaries publish on many of them at the same time as well. The same characteristics apply also to social media campaigns, which are more often than not focused not only on supporting Russia, but on stirring emotions about the refugee crisis in Europe.

But there are also many subjects and personalities which, directly or indirectly serve the interests of the Kremlin.

The disinformation spread in the Czech-language online outlets and social networks often originate from foreign servers, mostly either Kremlin's official channels or conspiracy websites in English language, like Global Research or Southfront. Many of the websites do not even produce their own content, only translate foreign articles, with a very low quality. What the articles lack in quality, they gain in quantity – the number of reports per week is very high and is reinforced by sharing on social networks, especially Facebook. The Czech President Miloš Zeman plays a crucial role in the Czech

evropskehodnoty.cz/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/SCH%C3%89MA-FUNGOV%C3%81N%C3%8D-VLIVU-RUSK%C3%89-FEDERACE-V-%C4%8CESK%C3%89-REPUBLICE1.pdf.

[5] *Skandál TV Prima: nařídila redaktorům negativně informovat o uprchlících,* ECHO24, May 30, 2016; http://echo24.cz/a/iSwfA/skandal-tv-prima-naridila-redaktorum-negativne-informovat-o-uprchlicich.

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**THE STRATCOM SUMMIT 2017 IN PRAGUE, ORGANIZED BY THE CZECH THINK-TANK EUROPEAN VALUES, IS AN EXCELLENT EXAMPLE OF THE COOPERATION BETWEEN ADMINISTRATION, BUSINESS AND NGOS WHICH IS CRUCIAL FOR THE FIGHT AGAINST DISINFORMATION.**

disinformation scene. He repeats the disinformation and narratives supported by these websites (for example, he repeated the statements about the alleged Banders in Ukraine[6] or the non-truths about the alleged Ukrainian language law[7]), and these outlets also come to his aid and support when he needs it. His statements and opinions are regularly repeated by disinformation outlets and he is generally presented as the only person in the Czech Republic who actually cares about its citizens. But there are also other politicians who help the disinformation ecosystem grow, either intentionally or because of their ignorance. Across the political spectrum, there are individuals

## The disinformation spread in the Czech-language online outlets and social networks often originate from foreign servers.

who tend to share articles from these websites on their social media accounts and sometimes they even let themselves get caught while trusting reports which are not based on facts.[8]

Two of the most popular disinformation stories of 2017 so far[9] come from a notorious

[6] *Nepoužívejte termín banderovci, kárají vědci Zemana. A nabízejí radu,* Lidovky.cz, August 28, 2014; http://www.lidovky.cz/nepouzivejte-termin-banderovci-karaji-vedci-zemana-nabizeji-radu-p90-/zpravy-svet.aspx?c=A140828_145147_ln_zahranici_msl.

[7] K. Hendrychová, *Český prezident užívá nepravdivá tvrzení podle linie Kremlu,* European Values Think-Tank, November 11, 2014; http://www.evropskehodnoty.cz/cesky-prezident-uziva-nepravdiva-tvrzeni-podle-linie-kremlu/.

[8] V. Víchová, *Kdo sdílí prokremelské weby na facebooku?*, European Values Think-Tank, June 30, 2016; http://www.evropskehodnoty.cz/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Kdo-sd%C3%ADl%C3%AD-prokremelsk%C3%A9-weby-na-facebooku4.pdf.

[9] *Radioaktivní mrak, arabština na úřadech i CIA útočí v Sýrii. Sestavili jsme nový žebříček falešných zpráv*, iROZHLAS, 2017, https://www.irozhlas.cz/zpravy-

website Aeronet, which provides no information about its personal structures whatsoever. The first informed about an alleged radioactive cloud above Europe[10] coming from a "strange explosion in the French nuclear plant", accusing European governments from keeping it secret and recommending that Czech citizens buy Iodine tablets and dosimeters. In reality, the slightly increased levels of radioactive Iodine in the air were possibly coming from a different source more to the East and were not dangerous for human health in any way, unlike the Iodine tablets people were recommended to digest.[11]

> But there are also other politicians who help the disinformation ecosystem grow, either intentionally or because of their ignorance.

The second example represents very well a typical reaction of disinformation websites after any natural disaster or terrorist attack – accusing someone from a false flag operation. After the recent tragic chemical attacks in Syria, Aeronet reported that there is evidence confirming that the attacks in Idlib were staged by the White Helmets and the CIA.[12]

### SUPPORT OF POLITICAL ALLIES

In many European countries, there are politicians with significant influence, who are sympathetic towards the behaviour of the Russian Federation. They often advocate for Kremlin's interpretation of the Ukrainian conflict or oppose the sanctions policies of the EU and the United States. They can get aid from the Russian Federation, which can be either ideological and political, for example by regular invitations for ceremonial visits in Moscow or Crimea, or financial, as we saw in the case of the French National Front. These politicians can later help the Kremlin with legitimization in front of domestic audiences.

The Czech Republic is no exception. Amongst the key political allies of the Kremlin, there are the President Miloš Zeman, most of the representatives of the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia, a few of the representatives of the Czech Social Democratic Party and some representatives of the extreme right.

domov/nasli-jsme-nejsdilenejsi-falesne-zpravy-uplynuleho-pulroku_1705240600_zlo.

[10] VK, *Nad Evropou se valí radioaktivní mrak pocházející zřejmě z podivné exploze ve francouzské jaderné elektrárně. Vlády mlčí, Francie se snaží bagatelizovat celý incident slovy o neškodnosti radionuklidů a my doporučujeme okamžitě nakoupit jódové tablety a dozimetry!*, Aeronet.cz, February 22, 2017; http://aeronet.cz/news/nad-evropou-se-vali-radioaktivni-mrak-pochazejici-zrejme-z-podivne-exploze-ve-francouzske-jaderne-elektrarne-vlady-mlci-francie-se-snazi-bagatelizovat-cely-incident-slovy-o-neskodnosti-radionuklidu/#!parentId=88471.

[11] *Hoax, Radiační mrak nad Evropu z utajené exploze ve francouzské elektrárně*, Manipulátoři.cz, February 22, 2017; http://manipulatori.cz/hoax-radiacni-mrak-nad-evropou-utajene-exploze-ve-francouzske-elektrarne/.

[12] VK, *"A je to venku! Důkazy a fotografie potvrdily, že chemický útok v Idlíbu byl zinscenovaný Bílými přilbami a americkou CIA. Syrská opozice na Twitteru informovala o chemickém útoku den předem! Trump má vážný problém, má kolem sebe zrádce, lháře a nekontroluje silové složky USA stejně, jako je nekontroloval Obama!"*, Aeronet.cz, April 7, 2017; http://aeronet.cz/news/a-je-to-venku-dukazy-a-fotografie-potvrdily-ze-chemicky-utok-v-idlibu-byl-zinscenovany-bilymi-prilbami-a-americkou-cia-syrska-opozice-na-twitteru-informovala-o-chemickem-utoku-den-predem/.

President Zeman is used by the Kremlin's hostile influence operations for domestic reasons inside Russia as much as for disrupting the Czech society from the inside. He undermines the Czech membership in NATO and the EU,[13] he denies organized Russian military presence in Ukraine,[14] and he also calls for lifting sanctions against the Russian Federation.[15] Russian state media portray him as a European ally of Vladimir Putin,[16] a critic of the Russian opposition and a fighter against the United States.[17]

Besides President Zeman's behaviour and proclamations, there are also the advisors surrounding him, often with very dubious backgrounds. The chief economic adviser of the president worked as an executive of an energy company with close links to the Kremlin for many years[18] and the company even payed a fine for him when he was convicted of selling aviation oil from strategic reserves.[19] The chief of Zeman's office did not get security clearance[20] at all and the chief of the President's military office did not get his clearance prolonged.[21]

## HOW SUCCESSFUL THE KREMLIN IS IN INFLUENCING THE CZECH REPUBLIC?

The unfortunate truth is that the data calculating the exact impact of the Kremlin's disinformation operations on the Czech society are missing. We can find out whether Czechs believe the Kremlin-friendly narratives and the Kremlin's interpretation of international and domestic events. To some extent, we can even measure whether the main goal of the Russian Federation is being fulfilled – the level of trust of citizens towards democratic institutions and mainstream media. But what we cannot do is to attribute these results to a specific disinformation campaign or report, to the activity of a group of websites, etc.

In 2016, the public polls conducted in cooperation with the STEM agency showed that over 25% of the Czech population believes disinformation and over 24% of people trust disinformation and manipulation media outlets more than mainstream media. These people perceive threats and the role of Russia differently from the rest.

When we look at specific narratives, over half of Czech citizens think that

[13] *Referendu o odchodu z Unie by Zeman nebránil. Vláda je proti*, Česká televize, July 1, 2016; http://www.ceskatelevize.cz/ct24/domaci/1834439-referendu-o-odchodu-z-unie-zeman-nebranil-vlada-je-proti.

[14] J. Wirnitzer, *Žádná invaze, zbytečné sankce, tvrdil Zeman. Ve Walesu mluvil jinak,* iDnes.cz, September 5, 2014; http://zpravy.idnes.cz/zeman-o-rusech-na-ukrajine-09h-/domaci.aspx?c=A140905_114819_domaci_jw.

[15] *Czech President Claims Number of Anti-Russian Sanctions Opponents Growing*, Sputnik News, May 11, 2015; http://sputniknews.com/politics/20150511/1022003662.html#ixzz42neEqqf4.

[16] T. Lindner, *Economist: Rusko považuje Zemana za svého spojence*, Respekt, April 2, 2015; https://www.respekt.cz/denni-menu/economist-rusko-povazuje-zemana-za-sveho-spojence.

[17] R. Máca, *Analýza: Mediální obraz Miloše Zemana v ruských médiích*, Neovlivní.cz, October 6, 2015; http://neovlivni.cz/analyza-medialni-obraz-milose-zemana-v-ruskych-mediich/.

[18] *Lukoil Zemanova poradce Nejedlého po obří pokutě skončil v likvidaci*, iDNES.cz, June 29, 2015; http://zpravy.idnes.cz/nejedleho-lukoil-je-v-likvidaci-dmx-/domaci.aspx?c=A150629_115548_domaci_cen.

[19] V. Srnka, *Milionovou pokutu za Nejedlého zaplatil Lukoil, sám nedal ani korunu*, iDNES.cz, November 4, 2016; http://zpravy.idnes.cz/prazsky-hrad-lukoil-martin-nejedly-dub-/domaci.aspx?c=A161103_202521_domaci_fer.

[20] *Mynář nedostal prověrku i proto, že NBÚ zamlčel 30 let starou nehodu v opilosti*, Lidovky.cz, October 7, 2015; http://www.lidovky.cz/mynar-nedostal-proverku-i-proto-ze-nbu-zamlcel-30-let-starou-nehodu-v-opilosti-1xc-/zpravy-domov.aspx?c=A151007_133040_ln_domov_ele.

[21] K. Hrubeš, *Generálův pád: Pilc nedostal prověrku kvůli ženám a vazbám na Rusko*, iDNES.cz, December 14, 2015; http://zpravy.idnes.cz/okolnosti-neudeleni-proverky-generalu-pilcovi-fr9-/domaci.aspx?c=A151213_214528_domaci_rych.

Czech people are the most Eurosceptic within the Visegrad region, but NATO still has strong support, with the exception of locating NATO facilities on Czech soil.

the United States is responsible for the hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees coming to Europe, while over 28% of the Czech public believes that Russian military intervention in Syria helps solve the refugee crisis. Almost 3 out of 10 people also blamed the United States for the Ukrainian crisis, even though it is the Russian military occupying part of the Ukrainian territory. On the other hand, only 1/5 of respondents stated to believe the lie that there are no organized Russian military forces in Ukraine, despite the repetition of these claims by the President Miloš Zeman. Czech people are the most Eurosceptic within the Visegrad region, but NATO still has strong support, with the exception of locating NATO facilities on Czech soil.

Slovak think-tank GLOBSEC repeated similar polling in 2017, confirming that Czechs think they should geopolitically stand somewhere between the West and the East and remain as neutral as possible. According to this survey, 30% of Czech also believes that autocracy would be the best political system for our country and 49% of them does not believe the mainstream media.

When we speak about the impact of the Kremlin's hostile influence, it is also important to note that despite the efforts of reporting tubes of the Kremlin in the Czech politics, the general direction of the Czech foreign policy stays unchanged. The Czech Foreign Ministry continuously supports the integrity of Ukraine,[22] considers it a priority country for transformation cooperation, and recently also published a statement highlighting the fact that the Czech Republic considers the so-called "people's republics" in the Eastern part of Ukraine non-legitimate and the Russian military presence in Ukraine to be a gross violation of international law[23].

### WHAT IS THE CZECH REPUBLIC DOING TO COUNTER THE INFLUENCE OF THE KREMLIN?

The Czech government conducted the National Security Audit[24] last year, within which it evaluated all the strengths and weaknesses of the Czech defence and security policies, including in the area of resilience against foreign powers' influence. The Audit included a set of specific recommendations in order to enhance the resilience of the Czech Republic, based on which an action plan was created. Several of these recommendations are already being implemented.

Within the National Security Audit framework, the Centre against

[22] *Česká podpora Ukrajině*, Velvyslanectví České republiky v Kyjevě, 2017; http://www.mzv.cz/kiev/cz/vzajemne_vztahy/ceska_podpora_ukrajine/index.html.

[23] *Prohlášení MZV k tzv. „lidovým republikám"*, Ministerstvo zahraničních věcí České republiky, 18.7.2017; http://www.mzv.cz/jnp/cz/udalosti_a_media/prohlaseni_a_stanoviska/x2017_07_18_prohlaseni_mzv_k_tzv_lidovym_republikam.html.

[24] *National Security Audit*, Ministestvo vnitra České republiky, 2016; http://www.mvcr.cz/cthh/clanek/audit-narodni-bezpecnosti.aspx.

Terrorism and Hybrid Threats has been established. It has been operational since January 2017 and amongst other things, it is supposed to monitor the disinformation community in the Czech Republic, respond to disinformation stories which pose danger to internal security, and keep track of the most important narratives spread by foreign powers. Its job is also to coordinate the efforts within different ministries to counter hostile influence and to train and educate civil servants. The first trainings already began in cooperation with Czech intelligence services, with the main goal to better prepare civil servants for defence against foreign efforts to get sensitive information.[25]

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KREMLIN WATCH IS A STRATEGIC PROGRAM OF THE EUROPEAN VALUES THINK-TANK, WHICH AIMS TO EXPOSE AND CONFRONT INSTRUMENTS OF RUSSIAN INFLUENCE AND DISINFORMATION OPERATIONS FOCUSED AGAINST WESTERN DEMOCRACIES.

There are also several civil society initiatives which try to tackle some of the tools used by the Kremlin to spread its influence in the Czech Republic. The European Values Think-Tank has a Kremlin Watch Program focusing on monitoring the disinformation operations in the Czech Republic, and also regular briefings and policy development on the European level. The Association for International Affairs launched a Czech-language version of the Ukrainian website Stopfake.org fact--checking news about the situation in Ukraine. The People in Need organization provides teachers with education material on the Kremlin's disinformation campaign and organizes workshops and lectures on media literacy.

Academia is also active, with the researchers from the Masaryk University taking the lead, dedicating their work to manipulation techniques of disinformation websites. Also, the Zvol si info initiative originated by the students of the university, shows young people how to confirm their sources and choose objective and reliable news. Last but not least, individual journalists are conducting investigations from time to time, in order to reveal the origins and connections of the people behind the disinformation projects in the Czech Republic. A good example would be the work of Ondřej Kundra from the Respekt magazine who inquired about the Aeronet website[26].

**Jakub Janda, Veronika Víchová**
July 25, 2017

[25] https://www.bis.cz/clanek54a5.html?ArticleID=1129&utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=kremlin_watch_monitor_russian_influence_means_more_than_cyber_attacks_and_fake_news&utm_term=2017-07-28.

[26] *Kremlin Influence Index*, Media Sapiens, 2017; http://osvita.mediasapiens.ua/content/files/dm_iik_engl_pravka-compressed.pdf; July 18, 2017; *Vulnerability Index*, GLOBSEC Policy Institute, 2017; http://www.globsec.org/upload/documents/vulnerability-index/globsec-vulnerability-index.pdf, July 18, 2017.

# RUSSIAN DISINFORMATION AND EXTREMISM IN HUNGARY

Lóránt Győri, Péter Krekó

## Their relationship with Russia is one of the most divisive issues among V4 countries.

These divisions are also manifested in their vulnerability to the Russian influence. Among the V4, Hungary is the most exposed to subversive Russian influence in the areas of political leadership, civil society, public perception and state countermeasures.[1] On the other hand, Poland is the most resilient

[1] *How Vulnerable Are the Visegrad Four Societies?*, GLOBSEC, April 11, 2017, https://www.globsec.org/news/vulnerable-visegrad-four-societies/, accessed October 16, 2017.

BUDAPEST, HUNGARY, FEBRUARY 17, 2015. RUSSIAN PRESIDENT VLADIMIR PUTIN STANDS ON THE TERRACE OF THE PRESIDENTIAL ALEXANDER PALACE IN BUDAPEST.

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to Russian power projection due to the high political and societal consciousness of the Kremlin's actions, especially after the annexation of Crimea. The Czech Republic and Slovakia are slotted in between Poland and Hungary. The latter's situation is strongly paradoxical: despite Hungarians' pro-Western orientation and the government's adherence to its obligations in EU and NATO structures, the political elite's "Eastern Opening" foreign policy pursuing strong political and energetic alignment with the Kremlin also opens the door for political corruption. This influence is composed of three main layers: the political mainstream (current and former), far-right actors and radical extremists – mainly on the right, since the radical left is very weak in Hungary. In the following, we will provide you with an overview of the examples of Russian influence exerted through these groups.

Among the V4, Hungary is the most exposed to subversive Russian influence in the areas of political leadership, civil society, public perception and state countermeasures.

## SLEEPER AGENTS OF DISINFORMATION

It came as a surprise on the sleepy summer day of August 15, 2014 that in its official communique, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation's (MFA) accused the Hungarian government (its most important ally in Central Eastern Europe) of selling T-72 tanks to Ukraine illegally to escalate the Eastern Ukrainian conflict following the Crimean annexation.

This accusation followed the old Kremlin playbook: blame your enemy for what you are doing. In this case, the enemy was not Hungary of course, but the EU – the puppet of the US in the Russian state's narrative. As the statement said: "Weapons supplies to Ukraine by the EU member-countries… violate legally binding obligations – the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT)."[2]

The interesting and rather new aspect of the story, at least in Hungary, was the uninhibited use of active measures in this foreign policy manoeuvre.

The Russian MFA relied on an article published by an "alternative" extreme right site called Hídfő.net ("Bridgehead" in English) that published fake photos of the tanks and claimed that the "USA had asked" NATO members in possession of former Soviet military hardware to deliver weapons to Ukraine.[3]

This Russian mouthpiece, totally unknown to the broader public at that time, was founded by the neo-Nazi paramilitary group Hungarian National Front (Magyar Nemzeti Arcvonal – MNA) at the end of 2012.However, it was quickly transformed into the Kremlin's geopolitical platform primarily used as a "Russian secret service messaging board", as evidenced by the form and content of articles.[4] To blow away any clouds of doubt about its real source and function, the website was put on a Russian server shortly after serving as the source of the Russian Foreign Ministry – and its current domain name is Hídfő.ru.

> Disinformation strategy in Central Eastern Europe based on locally operated pro-Russian new media platforms embedded into extremist political subcultures, usually espousing extreme right and extreme left ideologies.

The above-mentioned T-72 tank scandal constitutes a classical "active measure" utilizing a "sleeper" disinformation cell, that is Hídfő.net, and a paramilitary organization, the MNA, which have most probably been

[2] *Russia Says Weapons Supplies to Ukraine by EU Countries Violate Arms Trade Treaty*, Sputnik International, August 15, 2014, https://sputniknews.com/politics/20140815192053875-Russia-Says-Weapons-Supplies-to-Ukraine-by-EU-Countries-Violate/, accessed October 16, 2017.

[3] *Külföld - Moszkva Ukrajnai Fegyverszállítással Vádolja Magyarországot*, Index, August 15, 2014, http://index.hu/kulfold/2014/08/15/moszkva_fegyverszallitassal_vadolja_magyarorszagot/, accessed October 16, 2017.

[4] A. Juhász, L. Győri, P. Krekó, A. Dezső, *I Am Eurasian The Kremlin Connections of the Hungarian Far-Right*, Political Capital, March 2015, http://www.politicalcapital.hu/wp-content/uploads/PC_SDI_Boll_study_IamEurasian.pdf, accessed October 16, 2017.

infiltrated well before the Crimean crisis, in 2012.

Two years later, on October 26, 2016, a police officer was tragically shot in the head by István Győrkös – the leader of the MNA and founder of the above mentioned website – when the police raided his house in search for illegal arms and ammunition.[5] Subsequently, investigative journalists revealed that the paramilitary MNA had been conducting airsoft drills with so-called "Russian diplomats," – in fact, members of the Russian military intelligence (GRU).[6] This kind of evolving liaison between the neo-Nazi MNA, its media and Kremlin figures fits perfectly into the Kremlin's increasingly decentralized post-Crimea disinformation strategy in Central Eastern Europe based on locally operated pro-Russian new media platforms embedded into extremist political subcultures, usually espousing extreme right and extreme left ideologies, their numbers running in the hundreds in the region and around 100 in Hungary alone.[7] Some of these websites, blogs and Facebook pages are new, while some of them, such as Hídfő, have simply been "occupied" and taken over. The more extreme and marginal the website is, the easier it is to influence it from the outside.

Not only does this story of the MNA reveal the striking banality of Russian secret service intelligence operations in Hungary exploiting the extreme right, but it also presents the role of the mainstream. While this tragic event was followed by arrests and investigations, the law enforcement agencies and government politicians only focused on the extremist part of the story, and seemed to totally ignore any connections with Russia. Hídfő.ru is alive and well, spreading pro-Kremlin propaganda amplified by social media sites spreading conspiracy theories, Russian propaganda and nationalist messages.

## POLITICAL MAINSTREAM: GENERAL VULNERABILITY TOWARDS RUSSIA

When Viktor Orbán returned to power in 2010, one of his main and openly expressed goals was to establish "friendly" ties with Moscow that was quite understandable on a practical economic policy level given Hungary's continuous energy dependence on Russian gas, oil, and nuclear fuel imports even after the transition in 1989. While the Kremlin established strong and institutionalized connections with the post-communist Hungarian Socialist Party (Magyar Szocialista Párt – MSZP), enjoying its benefits when the socialists were in government (mainly 2002-2010), the right-wing political elite's pro-Russian geopolitical turn after 2010 has provided the Kremlin with further inroads into the mainstream of the Hungarian political system when it comes to the export of energy, illiberal values, policies and disinformation. According to the Globsec Trends 2017 data on Hungary, compiled by the Political Capital Institute, this resulted in a seemingly paradoxical situation: the mainstream media overwhelmingly controlled by the ruling Fidesz-KDNP pursues an outright pro-

[5] *Far-Right Murder of Hungarian Police Officer: Pro-Russian Radicalization in the CEE*, Political Capital, November 4, 2016, http://www.politicalcapital.hu/news.php?article_read=1&article_id=320, accessed October 16, 2017.

[6] D. András, P. Szabolcs, *Orosz Diplomaták Gyakorlatoztak a Rendőrgyilkos Brigádjával*, Index, October 27, 2016, http://index.hu/belfold/2016/10/27/orosz_hirszerzok_gyakorlatoztak_a_rendorgyilkos_harcosaival/, accessed October 16, 2017.

[7] A. Bátorfy, Z. Szánthó, *Bivalybasznádi Álhírvállalkozók És Oroszország Magyar Hangjai*, VS, April 7, 2016, https://vs.hu/kozelet/osszes/bivalybasznadi-alhirvallalkozok-es-oroszorszag-magyar-hangjai-0407, accessed October 16, 2017.

Pro-Russian geopolitical turn after 2010 has provided the Kremlin with further inroads into the mainstream of the Hungarian political system when it comes to the export of energy, illiberal values, policies and disinformation.

Russian geopolitical platform despite their electorate and the Hungarian majority's pro-Western, pro-NATO attitude. The data shows (see figure 1) that 39% of Hungarians think that Hungary should exclusively be a part of the West, while only 5% supported the country's Eastern affiliation. 53% put Hungary between the East and the West in a geopolitical and cultural sense.[8] In Hungary, it is not the people who are trying to replace the pro-Western elite, but a pro-Russian elite is trying to replace the pro-Western public.[9] To achieve this goal, the Hungarian government has not only formulated a pro-Kremlin stance, it tries to change the Hungarian populace's geopolitical attitude by opening towards Russian disinformation through disseminating pro-Kremlin messages in the media controlled by or close to the government. Figure 1. The Hungarian population's geopolitical orientation in 2017

The Hungarian political mainstream's pro-Russian media activity is crucial, since Russian state-owned media is not capable of influencing the Hungarian public deeply and directly. There is no direct Russian media presence on the Hungarian media market, since the Hungarian-speaking Voice of Russia was shut down and transformed into Sputnik in December 2014,[10] and the Hungarian audience does not speak Russian to directly access Russian media online or via satellite. Hungary also lacks a significant Russian diaspora or Orthodox community. Fidesz announced its so-called "Eastern Opening" foreign policy after 2010 that manifested itself visibly in the bilateral deal struck in January 2014 between Russia and Hungary on the Paks II project.[11] The two governments' foreign policy cooperation has expanded to the point where Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and Vladimir Putin have held bilateral meetings every year since 2013, which is a unique performance among European leaders, especially after the Russian invasion of Crimea. The government's centralized media

[8] *GLOBSEC Trends 2017: Mixed Messages and Signs of Hope from Central and Eastern Europe*, GLOBSEC, August 1, 2017, https://www.globsec.org/publications/globsec-trends-2017-mixed-messages-signs-hope-central-eastern-europe-2/, accessed October 16, 2017.

[9] P. Krekó, *A Magyar Szakadék*, HVG, June 28, 2017, http://hvg.hu/hetilap/2017.26/201726_a_magyar_szakadek, accessed October 16, 2017.

[10] For defunct Hungarian Voice of Russia see, *Oroszország Hangja*, http://hungarian.ruvr.ru/, accessed October 12, 2017; http://hungarian.ruvr.ru/, accessed October 16, 2017.

[11] The Paks II nuclear project is about building a new nuclear power plant to substitute the the Paks I nuclear bloc that was originally constructed with the assistance of the USSR back in 1982. The Paks II plant's construction is set to begin in January 2017 by Rosatom and it is funded by a Russian loan worth EUR 10 billion. C. Keszthelyi, *PM's Office Declares Paks II Deal Classified,* The Budapest Business Journal, January 8, 2015, https://bbj.hu/economy/pms-office-declares-paks-ii-deal-classified_90486, accessed October 16, 2017.

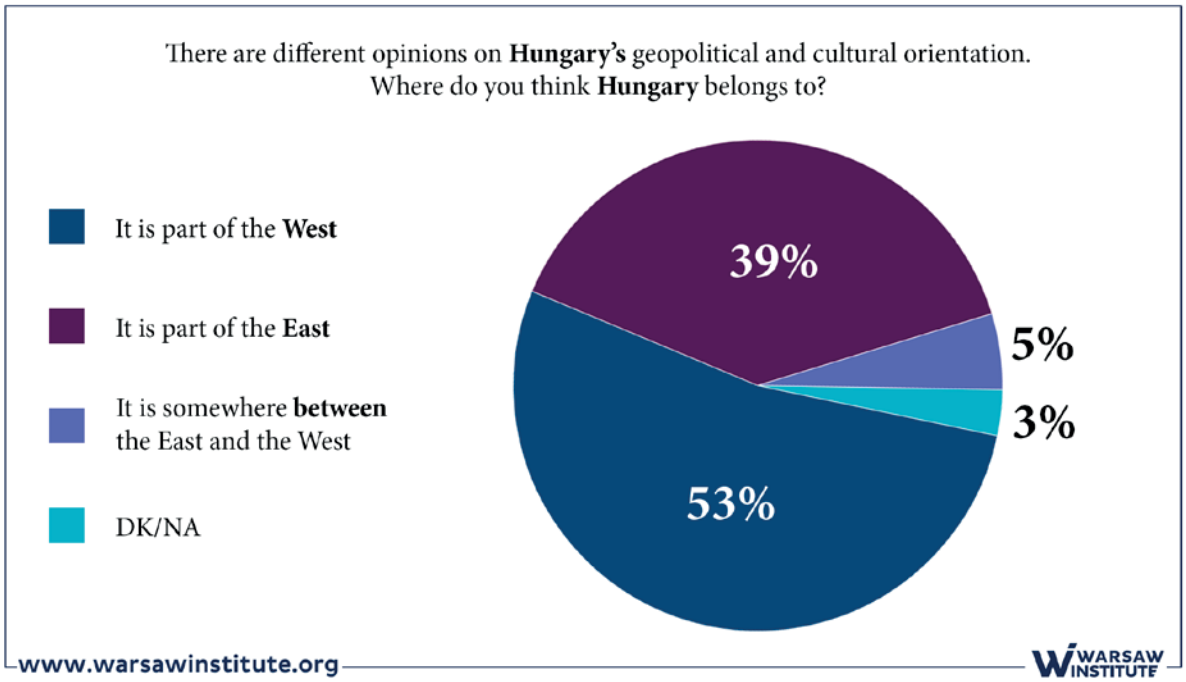


FIG. 1. HUNGARY'S GEOPOLITICAL BELONGING (2017)

production, which represented the government's position for 95% of the time in the anti-migration quota referendum in 2016,[12] paired with the censorship of the news programmes of the Public Broadcaster (PBS) led to the pro-Russian foreign policy of Fidesz-KDNP and other anti--Western, pro-Kremlin narratives being disseminated freely in the Hungarian public discourse.[13] There are a few examples accurately illustrating the degree of pro-Russian bias in the public and pro-government media. For instance, at the beginning of the Maidan conflict, the Hungarian public media, echoing the Kremlin's voice, labelled the Maidan protesters merely as "terrorists."[14] Furthermore, the Hungarian state-owned media, as a gesture to Moscow, is running a Russian language news programme – despite the fact that there are only a few thousand Russian speakers living in Hungary and most of them speak Hungarian fluently. But the real power of Russian disinformation in the Hungarian mainstream media is best demonstrated by the pro-Kremlin conspiracy theories disseminated by pro-government outlets about,[15]

[12] *Media Bias in Hungary During the Referendum, Campaign on EU Refugee Quotas*, Mertek Media Monitor, October 4, 2016, http://mertek.eu/en/2016/10/04/dri-mertek-study-media-bias-hungary-durning-referendu-campaign-eu-refugee-quotas/, accessed October 16, 2017.

[13] *Belső szerkesztői utasításra nem szerepelhetnek gyerekek a köztévé menekültes anyagaiban*, 444, August 25, 2015, https://444.hu/2015/08/25/belso-szerkesztoi-utasitasra-nem-szerepelhetnek-gyerekek-a-kozszolgalati-teve-menekultes-anyagaiban/, accessed March 31, 2017.

[14] K. Pynnöniemi, A. Rácz, *Report - Fog of Falsehood: Russian Strategy of Deception and the Conflict in Ukraine*, The Finnish institute of International Affairs, May 10, 2016, http://www.fiia.fi/en/publication/588/fog_of_falsehood/, accessed October 16, 2017.

[15] *A Legnépszerűbb Orosz Összeesküvés-Elméletek a Magyar Kormánypárti Sajtóban*, PC blog, July 13, 2016, https://pcblog.atlatszo.hu/2016/07/13/a-legnepszerubb-orosz-osszeeskuves-elmeletek-a-magyar-kormanyparti-sajtoban/, accessed October 16, 2017.

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for example, the Maidan revolution having beenbinitiated by a US- or NATO-led coup,[16] [17] Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 having been "prepared" by the secret services before take-off and the crash,[18] or Boris Nemtsov having been killed by Western intelligence agencies to cast a shadow on Putin with the aid of a "Russian fake-Kennedy" figure capable of mobilizing the opposition.[19] The importance of these theories is more borne out of the

[16] L. Tóth Gy., *A Magára Hagyott Ukrajna*, Magyar Idők, March 29, 2016, http://magyaridok.hu/velemeny/a-magara-hagyott-ukrajna-524623/, accessed October 16, 2017.

[17] G. Máté T., *Moszkvai Jalta,* Magyar Hírlap, February 6, 2015, http://magyarhirlap.hu/cikk/16617/Moszkvai_Jalta, accessed October 16, 2017.

[18] *Ma Reggel*, M1, October 27, 2014, http://nava.hu/id/1991378/, accessed October 16, 2017.

[19] G. Máté T., *Lövések És Köd*, Magyar Hírlap, March 2, 2015, http://magyarhirlap.hu/cikk/18641/Lovesek_es_kod, accessed October 16, 2017.

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Kremlin's geopolitical needs and has only indirect implications or functions in Hungarian domestic politics, they highlight the Hungarian government's political dependence on the Kremlin instead.[20]

The Hungarian government also follows the illiberal legal and political example of the Russian regime. On June 13, 2017, the Fidesz-KDNP parliamentary group adopted the Hungarian version of the "foreign agents act" forcing Hungarian NGOs to declare themselves "foreign funded organisations" in case they receive over HUF 7.2 million (around EUR 23.000) from foreign entities, including funds received directly from the European Union's institutions.[21] Further, Hungarian Chief Prosecutor Péter Polt met with his Russian counterpart in January to discuss cooperation on corruption and money-laundering.[22] As for the cultural issues, the government announced the renovation of several old Orthodox churches, for which Patriarch Kirill of Moscow was officially invited to Budapest, and he is expected to attend inauguration ceremonies in 2017.[23] Furthermore, the Hungarian government hosted the pro-Russian ultra-conservative World Congress of Families at the end of May, where representatives of several Russian orthodox oligarchs were present, such as Natalia V. Yakunina (Sanity of Motherhood Program) or Alexey Komov.[24] So it is no surprise that PM Orbán frequently praises the Putin regime's success openly, as he did in a speech in January 2017: "Here is Russia, which – let's be frank –

[20] *A Legnépszerűbb Orosz Összeesküvés-Elméletek a Magyar Kormánypárti Sajtóban.*

[21] *Elfogadták a Civiltörvényt, a Célba Vett Szervezetek Ellenállást Hirdetnek*, HVG, June 13, 2017, http://hvg.hu/itthon/20170613_Megszavaztak_a_civiltorvenyt_Orbannal_tiltakozott_Szabo_Timea, accessed October 16, 2017.

[22] M. Herczeg, *Polt Péter Legfőbb Ügyész Az Orosz Kollégájával Tárgyalt Moszkvában*, 444, January 18, 2017, http://444.hu/2017/01/18/polt-peter-legfobb-ugyesz-az-orosz-kollegajaval-targyalt-moszkvaban, accessed October 16, 2017.

[23] G. Medvegy, *Nem Csak Putyin, Az Orosz Pátriárka Is Budapestre Jön*, 24, January 8, 2017, http://24.hu/belfold/2017/01/08/nem-csak-putyin-az-orosz-patriarka-is-budapestre-jon/, accessed October 16, 2017.

[24] *World Congress of Families XI,* Budapest Family Summit, May 27, 2017, https://www.budapestfamilysummit.com/en/may-26-friday/, accessed October 16, 2017.

has survived Western attempts to isolate and overthrow the regime, the low price of oil, sanctions, and the internal activity of independent, impartial, allegedly non-governmental organisations void of any outside interference. She has survived all of this, so she is here, and therefore it is not very reasonable – especially in Europe – to disregard the force and opportunity presented by Russia."[25]

## THE POLITICAL FAR RIGHT: JOBBIK

The more we go to the margins, the stronger Russian influence becomes. The far-right Jobbik party, founded in 2003, followed a very obvious pro-Russian line almost from its inception, and especially after Béla Kovács, nicknamed "KGBéla" even by his own comrades within the party because of his extensive Russian ties, joined the party in 2005.[26] He immediately became the head of Jobbik's Foreign Policy Cabinet after, and thus turned the party towards Russia.[27] Kovács, who was also the single biggest donor of the party in the early years, started to organize high-level meetings with Russian politicians and stakeholders for party chairman Gábor Vona, largely thanks to the relations he accumulated as a former businessman in Russia (see below for more details). The pro--Russian stance of the party was more than strange in light of the Hungarian far-right's traditional vehement and widespread anti-communist stance. From Jobbik's obvious pro-Russian shift in during 2007-2008, the party supported and legitimized Russian issues on all levels in the domestic and international political arena. Jobbik's 2009 party programme already mentioned the construction of the Paks II nuclear reactor,[28] and the party organized an energy conference together with Gazprom in 2013.[29] The same year, Gábor Vona and Béla Kovács gave a joint lecture on "traditional values" during which they accused the EU of "being the traitor" of Europe at Lomonosov University on the invitation of Alexander Dugin.[30] Vona later praised the advantages of the Eurasian Economic Union in the following way:

"For me Eurasianism means that Hungary may become a bridge between Europe and Asia. […] The advantage of Eurasianism comes from the fact that, in contrast to EU-integration, it preserves the independence of regions engaged in continental cooperation."[31]

The more we go to the margins, the stronger Russian influence becomes.

[25] V. Orbán, *Orbán Viktor Beszéde Lámfalussy Lectures Szakmai Konferencián,* Miniszterelnok.Hu, January 23, 2017, miniszterelnok.hu/orban-viktor-beszede-lamfalussy-lectures-szakmai-konferencian/, accessed October 16, 2017.

[26] A. Juhász, L. Győri, P. Krekó, A. Dezső, *I Am Eurasian, The Kremlin Connections of the Hungarian Far-Right.*

[27] B. Kovács, Jobbik, May 13, 2009, https://jobbik.hu/rovatok/ep-lista/7_kovacs_bela, accessed October 16, 2017.

[28] *Az országnak szüksége van Paks bővítésére*, Jobbik, January 21, 2014, https://jobbik.hu/hireink/az-orszagnak-szuksege-van-paks-bovitesere, accessed October 16, 2017.

[29] I. Marnitz, *Jobbik-Gázkonferencia a Gazprommal*, NOL, November 15, 2013, http://nol.hu/gazdasag/jobbik-gazkonferencia_a_gazprommal-1426445, accessed October 16, 2017.

[30] *Vona Gábor a Lomonoszov Egyetemen tartott előadást*, Jobbik, May 21, 2013, https://jobbik.hu/hireink/vona-gabor-lomonoszov-egyetemen-tartott-eloadast, accessed October 16, 2017.

[31] *The Russian Connection, The Spread of pro-Russian Policies on the European Far Right*,

Béla Kovács participated in the illegal Crimean secession referendum as an "independent European observer" alongside of Mateusz Piskorski,[32] the founder and leader of the Polish Zmiana party.[33] Jobbik worked strongly on the territorial disintegration of Ukraine as well, asking for the support of Duma lawmakers to establish Hungarian--Russian autonomy in the Trans--Carpathian region of Western Ukraine.[34] After Béla Kovács was accused by the Hungarian authorities of spying against the European Union in favour of Russia,[35] Márton Gyöngyösi, Vice Chairman of the Committee on Foreign Affairs in the National Assembly, Deputy Leader of the Jobbik parliamentary group stepped into his shoes to monitor the illegal Donetsk People's Republic's referendum in 2014 and "parliamentary election" in 2015, also accompanied by Mr. Piskorski.[36] In his open letter to the peoples of Ukraine Gábor Vona underlined the importance of "national self-determination" and accused the Ukrainian government of committing crimes against humanity after coming to power with a bloody coup financed by the USA.[37] Moreover, Jobbik has long agreed with Russian disinformation claiming that Ukraine's territorial integrity is just an "illusion" and Hungary should refrain from supporting Kiev to remain "neutral" in the conflict.[38] It does not do so in the case of the Syrian conflict, though. Media close to Jobbik supported the Russian military intervention on the side of Bashar al-Assad and the Russian anti-terrorism narrative in general.[39] [40] Finally, the Belarusian activist Alexander Usovsky's files revealed Jobbik and the paramilitary and revisionist The Sixty-Four Counties Youth Movement (Hatvannégy Vármegye Ifjúsági Mozgalom – HVIM) may have been part of Russian active or disinformation measures for years, and might have been paid by Russian stakeholders to stage anti-Ukrainian protests.[41]

Political Capital, March 14, 2014, http://www.riskandforecast.com/useruploads/files/pc_flash_report_russian_connection.pdf, accessed October 16, 2017.

[32] *Europejska Mieszanka Lewacko-Nazistowska w Służbie Kremla. Wśród Nich Polacy*, Niezależna.pl, March 17, 2014, http://niezalezna.pl/52986-europejska-mieszanka-lewacko-nazistowska-w-sluzbie-kremla-wsrod-nich-polacy, accessed October 16, 2017.

[33] A. Shekhovtsov, *Pro-Russian Extremists Observe the Illegitimate Crimean 'Referendum,* Anton Shekhovtsov's Blog, March 17, 2014, http://anton-shekhovtsov.blogspot.com/2014/03/pro-russian-extremists-observe.html, accessed October 16, 2017.

[34] *Moszkvába ment az autonómiáról tárgyalni Vona Gábor*, Jobbik, June 19, 2014, https://jobbik.hu/hireink/moszkvaba-ment-az-autonomiarol-targyalni-vona-gabor, accessed October 16, 2017.

[35] *Moszkvába ment az autonómiáról tárgyalni Vona Gábor*.

[36] Piskorski himself is currently under arrest by the Polish authorities allegedly on spying charges. See,*Keleten Senki Nem Bízik Orbánban*, 444, March 30, 2015, http://444.hu/2015/03/30/jobbik-kulpol-gyongyosi, accessed October 16, 2017.

[37] G. Vona, *Nyílt Levél Ukrajna Népeihez*, Mandiner, February 7, 2015, http://mandiner.hu/cikk/20150207_vona_gabor_nyilt_level_ukrajna_nepeihez, accessed October 16, 2017.

[38] *Határozott, kemény program, nyugodt, higgadt erő,* Jobbik, February 2, 2015, https://jobbik.hu/hireink/hatarozott-kemeny-program-nyugodt-higgadt-ero, accessed October 16, 2017.

[39] *Orosz Gépekkel Is Támadja Mától a Szíriai Hadsereg Az Iszlám Államot*, Kuruc.Info Hírportál, September 24, 2015, https://kuruc.info/r/4/148829/, accessed October 16, 2017.

[40] A. Dezső, S. Panyi, *Jobbikos Politikusnak Fedte Fel Magát Az Orosz Propagandaoldal Újságírója,* Index, November 3, 2016, http://index.hu/belfold/2016/11/03/azt_sem_kepes_megvarni_hogy_hatalomra_kerulunk/, accessed October 16, 2017.

[41] P. Krekó, L. Győri, E. Zgut, *From Russia with Hate*, Political Capital, April 28, 2017, http://www.politicalcapital.hu/pc-admin/source/documents/PC_NED_summary_analysis_EN_20170428.pdf, accessed October 16, 2017.

## BEYOND THE POLITICAL: FAR-RIGHT EXTREMISM

Political Capital Institute's analyses highlighted that the Kremlin has systematically reached out to far-right, extremist, paramilitary political actors in Hungary and the region. The role of extremist organizations became much more important after the Crimean annexation.[42]

The Kremlin is fuelling the narrative that some old historical grievances between Central-Eastern-European states can be revived, and national borders can be redrawn based on those "historical claims" dating back to two world wars – on the premise of Ukraine's territorial dissolution or transformation into somewhat of a commonwealth entity. Radical organizations usually fulfil three basic functions for the Kremlin:

1. Destabilization of the EU, its member states, the vulnerable regions and the transatlantic relations;
2. Legitimization of the Russian regime and its policies;
3. Gathering information and spreading disinformation.

These efforts are nothing new. For example, the Hungarian People's Welfare Alliance (Magyar Népjóléti Szövetség – MNSZ), led by a well-known far-right figure, Albert Szabó, used every public appearance after 1994 to campaign against Hungary's future NATO and EU accession, and endorsing the "Euro-Asian" alliance. Even back then, there were strong suspicions about his relations with Russian secret services. These suspicions were amplified a few years ago, when he popped up among a group of pro-Russian propagandists aiming to organize a welcome march for Vladimir Putin's visit in Hungary in 2015.[43]

An interesting element of the Hungarian scene is that the political far-right and the extreme right organizations frequently cooperated in their attempts to destabilize Ukraine, reviving old cross-border historical tensions, chauvinism, territorial claims dating back to two world wars. Jobbik and its satellite organization, the Sixty-Four Counties Youth Movement (Hatvannégy Vármegye Ifjúsági Mozgalom – HVIM) organised a protest in front of the Ukrainian Embassy in Budapest to demand autonomy for Transcarpathia and the federalisation of Ukraine in August 2014.[44]

The Kremlin is fuelling the narrative that some old historical grievances between Central-Eastern-European states can be revived, and national borders can be redrawn based on those "historical claims" dating back to two world wars.

[42] *Az Oroszbarát Szélsőséges Csoportok Aktivitása Közép-Kelet-Európában,* Political Capital, April 28, 2017, http://www.politicalcapital.hu/hireink.php?article_read=1&article_id=934, accessed October 16, 2017.

[43] A. Dezső, *Putyin Érkezése, Szabó Albert Újra Aktív*, Index, February 10, 2015, http://index.hu/belfold/2015/02/10/putyin_erkezese_szabo_albert_ujra_aktiv/, accessed October 16, 2017.

[44] "Ez a háború nem a magyarság háborúja, Jobbik, August 9, 2014, https://jobbik.hu/hireink/ez-haboru-nem-magyarsag-haboruja, accessed October 16, 2017.

The HVIM is such an important player in Russian disinformation activities supporting the territorial disintegration of Ukraine that the Ukrainian paramilitary organisation Karpatska Sich threatened Jobbik and HVIM activists operating in Western Ukraine with murder, which was also discussed in the Committee on National Security of the Hungarian National Assembly.[45] During the gathering on the Heroes Square in Budapest, the HVIM thanked „Donetsk People's Republic" leader Alexander Zakharchenko for releasing ethnic Hungarian POWs serving in the Ukrainian army.[46] Moreover, Zsolt Dér, the leader of the paramilitary organisation Wolves (Farkasok) and a member of the neo-Nazi Army of Outlaws (Betyársereg), was called upon by the separatists to fight alongside them in Eastern Ukraine. The organisations are all closely connected and funded by Jobbik, so their pro-Russian stance is partly a consequence of the party's geopolitical orientation. Ideologically, they support Russia as the great Eastern power promising territorial revision and denouncing all the geopolitical foes they stand against like the liberal world order, American or Brussels' dominance, Zionist conspiracies, etc. The leader of the Army of Outlaws, Zsolt Tyirityán, who is currently building a new extreme right movement, clearly linked the neo-Nazi and the Russian nationalist, imperial agenda in his statement:

"At times like these, we see how it is impossible to define what it means to be a Nazi these days. The skinheads who are currently fighting for Ukraine, ideologically speaking, may be opposing against Russian aggression, but they are also sacrificing their lives in the interest of advancing U.S. geopolitical aims. (…) And then you have Russian rebels, who are fighting viciously against the advancement of Zionist and U.S. geopolitical aims, and while they do this under a sickle-and-hammer flag, they may still find themselves in a far more symbiotic relationship with national socialist principles, because these directions and efforts were originally its greatest enemy."[47]

## COUNTERMEASURES

Official countermeasures against the Kremlin-led disinformation (or the Russian influence) in Hungary are practically non-existent, given the government's pro-Russian stance and the part it plays in the Russian propaganda activities. When it comes to the official documents, both Governmental Decree 1035/2012 on Hungary's National Security Strategy[48] and Governmental Decree 1139/2013 on Hungary's Cyber Security Strategy[49] mention the threat posed by information warfare as a national

[45] *Fegyveres Ukrán Szervezet Fenyegette Meg a Jobbikot És a HVIM-Et*, Alfahír, April 24, 2015, https://alfahir.hu/fegyveres_ukran_szervezet_fenyegette_meg_a_jobbikot_es_a_hvim_et, accessed October 16, 2017.

[46] *Far-Right Murder of Hungarian Police Officer: Pro-Russian Radicalization in the CEE*, Political Capital, November 4, 2016, http://www.politicalcapital.hu/news.php?article_read=1&article_id=320, accessed October 16, 2017.

[47] R.Tóth, S. Jászberényi, *Tyirityán: Nem Tartjuk Orbánt Közellenségnek*, *24*, November 23, 2016, http://24.hu/kozelet/2016/11/23/tyirityan-nem-tartjuk-orbant-kozellensegnek/, accessed October 16, 2017.

[48] *A Kormány 1035/2012. (II. 21.) Korm. Határozata Magyarország Nemzeti Biztonsági Stratégiájáról,* Magyar Közlöny, 2012/19 edition, accessed October 16, 2017, http://2010-2014.kormany.hu/download/f/49/70000/1035_2012_korm_hatarozat.pdf, accessed October 16, 2017.

[49] *Government Decision No. 1139/2013 (21 March) on the National Cyber Security Strategy of Hungary*, The European Union Agency for Network and Information Security, March 21, 2013, https://www.enisa.europa.eu/topics/national-cyber-security-strategies/ncss-map/HU_NCSS.pdf, accessed October 16, 2017.

The government have recently expelled some pro-Russian right-wing extremists from Hungary without any justification – most likely responding to pressure exerted by NATO allies.

security challenge to the country, however, no measures have been enacted to counter such threat or name Russia as a primary problem in this respect. The government have recently expelled some pro-Russian right-wing extremists from Hungary without any justification – most likely responding to pressure exerted by NATO allies.[50]
The MNA scandal revealed that there is not political will to put up a fight against Russian activities threatening Hungarian national security in individual cases. Although the Committee on National Security of the Hungarian parliament put the MNA's connections to the GRU on its agenda, the Hungarian police is apparently closing down the investigation without raising a word about the issue of interference by foreign intelligence agencies.[51]

The case of Béla Kovács case is also being prolonged and the Hungarian authorities seem to be surprisingly slow in the matter. Unlike Mateusz Piskorski, Kovács[52] has not been arrested since being indicted in 2014 and he has been operating in Brussels and Hungary freely despite the EP having lifted his immunity – and despite having obvious links to Russian secret services.[53] As a cherry on top, the same investigative journalist has revealed the MNA was not only in contact with the GRU, but Béla Kovács, and his Russian wife Svetlana was on good personal terms with the family of the group's leader.[54]

**Lóránt Győri, Péter Krekó**
July 25, 2017

[50] C. Keszthelyi, *Ex-BNP Extremist Expelled from Hungary,* Budapest Business Journal, May 26, 2017, https://bbj.hu/politics/ex-bnp-extremist-expelled-from-hungary_133451, accessed October 16, 2017.

[51] J.S. László, *Lezárult a Nyomozás a Bőnyi Rendőrgyilkosság Ügyében,* Magyar Idők, July 19, 2017, http://magyaridok.hu/belfold/lezarult-nyomozas-bonyi-rendorgyilkossag-ugyeben-1967407/, accessed October 16, 2017.

[52] A. Dezső, *A Glorious Match Made in Russia*, Index, September 28, 2014, http://index.hu/belfold/2014/09/28/a_glorious_match_made_in_russia/, accessed October 16, 2017.

[53] *European Parliament Lifts Immunity of Jobbik MEP Béla Kovács*, Politics, July 2, 2017, http://www.politics.hu/20170602/european-parliament-lifts-immunity-of-jobbik-mep-bela-kovacs/, accessed October 16, 2017; *A Kémügyről Nem Is Kérdezték Kovács Bélát Az Ügyészségen*, HVG, July 19, 2017, http://hvg.hu/itthon/20170719_A_kemugyrol_nem_is_kerdeztek_Kovacs_Belat_az_ugyeszsegen, accessed October 16, 2017.

[54] *The great escape of 'KGBéla', Hungarian MEP Accused of Spying for Russia*, Vsquare, October 4, 2017, https://vsquare.org/the-great-escape-of-kgb/, accessed October 16, 2017.

# DEFENDING THE INFORMATION SPACE: THE LITHUANIAN, LATVIAN AND ESTONIAN EXAMPLE

Aleksander Król

The Baltic States are among the most experienced at developing tools for protecting against disinformation and propaganda. Their practices, related to counteracting the Kremlin's information war, are very valuable and may provide a good example for the Western world, which must join efforts to combat the phenomenon of fake news.

Among the various approaches to combatting hostile disinformation operations, the most important ones fall into three areas: limiting access to the Russian information space, counteractions by administrative and legal systems, and citizen activism online. Only part of the above arsenal of actions has short-term effects — most of them are calculated for the long run. The most difficult ventures to carry out are strategic ones, such as building appealing Russian-language media domestically or fighting Russian messaging at the state level. It is therefore worth looking at the various forms of anti-propaganda measures and their effectiveness, to evaluate examples of best practices.

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## LIMITING DIRECT ACCESS TO THE RUSSIAN INFORMATION SPACE

In the Baltic states, television has the greatest impact on the majority of the population, which consists of Russian-speaking minorities. This is the result of the widespread knowledge of Russian and access to Russian channels from cable TV subscriptions offered by local service providers. Both Latvia and Lithuania have tried to solve this problem. Faced with charges of breaking local laws – broadcasting unauthorized political advertising or inciting ethnic hatred – state authorities have imposed months-long broadcast bans for specific television channels. Although opinion polls in Latvia have shown that this idea is not universally supported by society,[1] the data collected in Lithuania are more optimistic. Thanks to the temporary bans, the popularity of Russian channels is steadily decreasing. In 2013, Russian programs were watched by 16% of viewers in Lithuania, and in 2016, according to a study conducted after the ban was lifted, the audience was reduced to 7%.[2]

[1] A. Rožukalne, *Jautājums - ko darīt ar krievu TV kanāliem? Atbilde - Neko!* Neko?, LSM.lv, March 16, 2015, http://www.lsm.lv/raksts/arpus-etera/arpus-etera/anda-rozukalne-jautajums-ko-darit-ar-krievu-tv-kanaliem-atbilde-neko-neko.a121678/.

[2] R. Jasiulionis, *Rusiškų kanalų Lietuvoje ribojimo pasekmės: per 3 m. Žiūrimumas krito dvigubai*, Ziuniuradijas.lt, November 16, 2016, http://www.

The disadvantage of such a solution is the time-consuming and complicated administrative procedure that suspends the broadcast of a particular foreign channel. This difficulty might be further aggravated after Brexit, as some companies rebroadcasting these Russian channels are registered in the United Kingdom. Legal actions against these companies during the "transition period" will require an even more complicated legal procedure than now. But even if the broadcaster moves to the EU, the Baltic states will still have to conduct complex legal battles with Russian television rebroadcasters.[3] The refusal to register the Latvian version of Sputnik on the.*lv* domain was symbolic and demonstrative. Sputnik's Latvian website still works, but with the.*com* ending. Among journalists in the Baltic States, there was no illusion about the real purpose of the Sputnik project. The difficulties encountered by the creators of Estonian Sputnik prove this. Journalists who have been offered work there have usually turned it down.[4]

The refusal to register the Latvian version of Sputnik on the.lv domain was symbolic and demonstrative.

## COUNTERACTIONS BY STATE INSTITUTIONS

Involvement of state security institutions in long-term and planned counter-disinformation activities seems much more effective and less controversial. One of the key initiatives taken at the government level is the establishment of a special center under the auspices of NATO. The NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence (NATO StratCom CoE), established in 2014, is a supra-regional analytical center aimed at addressing the latest challenges in information security. Not only the Baltic States, but also Poland, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom, participate in this initiative. One of the main activities of StratCom CoE is to monitor Russian activity in the information sphere. The center analyzes the messages and directions of Kremlin propaganda, and also studies the latest technological developments used for spreading disinformation.

## NON-GOVERNMENTAL INITIATIVES TO FIGHT DISINFORMATION

The main method of fighting Russian media disinformation is the active and responsible attitude of civil society. Spontaneously formed groups of volunteers, composed of pundits, journalists and ordinary citizens, are much more effective than formal structures set up by state institutions. The most famous group of Baltic Internet activists is a Lithuanian group, which refers to itself as the "elves." This is a group of volunteers

ziniuradijas.lt/laidos/aktualioji-valanda/rusisku-kanalu-lietuvoje-ribojimo-pasekmes-per-3-m-ziurimumas-krito-dvigubai?video=1.

[3] A. Mellkauls, *The Audiovisual Media Services Directive and Propaganda*, in: *Resisting Foreign State Propaganda in the New Information Enviroment: The Case of the European Union, Russia, and the Eastern Partnership Countries*, Foundation for European Progresive Studies, 2016, http://appc.lv/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Propoganda_petijums.pdf.

[4] Krievijas propagandas kanāls 'Sputnik' cenšas pārvilināt igauņu žurnālistus, delfi.lv, February 18, 2015, http://www.delfi.lv/news/arzemes/krievijas-propagandas-kanals-sputnik-censas-parvilinat-igaunu-zurnalistus.d?id=45594180.

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**RIGA, LATIVIA, AUGUST 20, 2015. LITHUANIAN PRESIDENT DALIA GRYBAUSKAITĖ, LATVIAN PRESIDENT RAIMONDS VEJONIS AND U.S. SENATOR JOHN MCCAIN DURING NATO STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE OPENING CEREMONY. THE NATO STRATCOM COE, CONTRIBUTES TO IMPROVED STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS CAPABILITIES WITHIN THE ALLIANCE AND ALLIED NATIONS.**

who conduct activities online in their free time. Their work is a direct response to the actions of the lowest level, professional Russian propagandists, commonly referred to as "trolls." The media spokesperson of the Lithuanian elves is Ričardas Savukynas,[5] a 43-year-old blogger and business consultant.

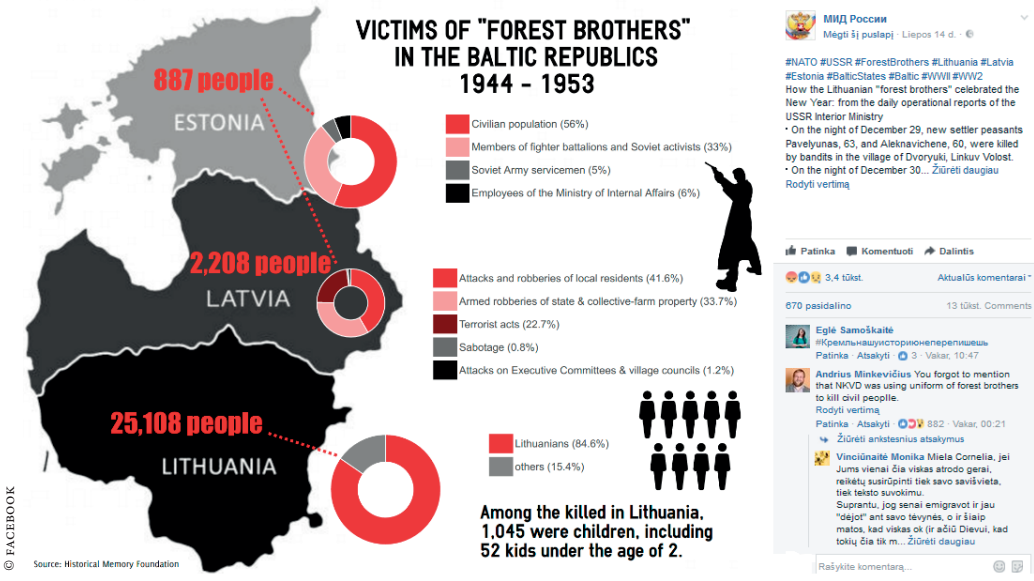
Elves primarily engage in reporting fraudulent accounts to forum and social media administrators. They are successful in discovering them by monitoring comments on information portals.[6] The activities of the Lithuanian elves gained popularity last fall, after they were given the spotlight by the (mostly Western) media. New groups of elves are being organized in other countries. Latvia also took up the initiative, where in March 2017, recruitment began to the local elven group.[7]

The effectiveness of grassroots initiatives in the fight against disinformation is illustrated by an online campaign launched by a

[5] *Elves vs Trolls – fighting disinformation in Lithuania,* youtube.com; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KDsrwSX7piw.

[6] M. Weiss, *The Baltic Elves Taking on Pro-Russian Trolls*, thedailybeast.com, March 20, 2016, http://www.thedailybeast.com/the-baltic-elves-taking-on-pro-russian-trolls.

[7] Aicinājums iestāties Latvijas internet elfu vienībā, cīņai pret dezinformāciju un meliem Latvijas internet vidē, appc.lv, February 27, 2017, http://appc.lv/blog/aicinajums-iestaties-latvijas-interneta-elfu-vieniba-cinai-pret-dezinformaciju-un-meliem-latvijas-interneta-vide.




**RESPONSE OF LITHUANIAN INTERNET USERS AGAINST THE MANIPULATION OF THE RUSSIAN MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS PUBLISHED ON FACEBOOK. AMONG ACTIVISTS WERE PEOPLE WITH A HIGH LEVEL OF INFLUENCE.**

Lithuanian publicist and journalist, Andrius Tapinas. In response to Russian distortions about the Baltic underground resistance to the Soviet Union in the 1940s, Tapinas launched the hashtag campaign #Кремльнашуисториюнеперепишешь (#Kremlin you will not falsify our history), which went viral among Lithuanian Internet users in a matter of hours. Both ordinary Lithuanians and well-known public figures took part. The involvement of popular journalists, actors and social activists attracted even more average Internet users. Lithuanians flooded the Facebook page of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, where one of the propaganda infographics that set off the campaign had been uploaded, and more than 13,000 comments were posted, exposing the falsehoods it presented. In addition, as a result of the coordinated mass action on Facebook, the rating of the Russian ministry's page dropped from 4.2 out of 5 stars, to just 1 star. At present, ratings for the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs page are blocked.

> The main method of fighting Russian media disinformation is the active and responsible attitude of civil society.

### JOURNALIST ORGANIZATIONS EDUCATING NEWS CONSUMERS

Increasing media literacy is cited as one of the ways to counter hostile information operations. Baltic journalists, united in The Baltic Center for Media Excellence, are working on projects aimed at improving the qualifications of journalists, promoting the media environment in the Eastern Partnership countries

by sharing their experiences and examples of best practices, and reinforcing critical thinking in media

SUBJECT SECTION OF THE DELFI.LT WEBSITE EXPOSING RUSSIAN FAKE NEWS.

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consumers and users.[8] Workshops are also organized in libraries, where easy-going public lectures by journalists stimulate and develop media literacy in citizens.

Latvian journalists are also involved in global projects aimed at combating fake news. The Re:Baltica web portal and Toneboard, an IT start-up, received a grant from Google to create a platform to verify the credibility of news.[9] A considerable need for such tools in Latvia is evidenced by a 2017 study, where 80% of participants reported that they had contact with fake news, but it turned out that those surveyed overestimated their ability to recognize false information.[10] Some websites in the Baltic countries highlight news about hostile information operations. The editorial board of Delfi in Lithuania, the largest news portal in the region, even launched a special section titled "Unmasking". Lithuanian journalists publish analyses debunking fake news produced by the Russian media. This initiative is also open to readers of the Delfi portal. There is a form on the main subpage of the site where readers can suggest topics or report fake news to journalists.

## CREATING AN ALTERNATIVE FOR RUSSIAN-SPEAKERS IN THE INFORMATION SPACE

Since Russian-speaking consumers in the Baltic States are the ones most exposed to the information war, Estonia and Latvia have decided to create an alternative to the better-

[8] S. van Zundert, *"Strengthening pluralistic media and information environment through journalism training, literacy and knowledge-sharing across Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, the EU Eastern Partnership and beyond", in: Resisting Foreign Propaganda in the New Information Enviroment: The case of the European Union*, Russia, and the Countries of the European Union, Foundation for European Progresive Studies, 2016, http://appc.lv/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Propoganda_petijums.pdf.

[9] S. van Zundert, *Strengthening pluralistic media and information environment through journalism training, literacy and knowledge-sharing across Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, the EU Eastern Partnership and beyond*, in: *Resisting Foreign Propaganda in the New Information Enviroment: The case of the European Union, Russia, and the Countries of the European Union*, Foundation for European Progresive Studies, 2016, http://appc.lv/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Propoganda_petijums.pdf.

[10] *Re: Baltica un Toneboardsaņem 50 000 no Google jauna rīka izstrādei*, Re: Baltica, July 6, 2017, http://rebaltica.lv/2017/07/rebaltica-un-toneboard-sanem-50-000-no-google-jauna-rika-izstradei/.

Creating a Russian-language television channel was an idea developed by the Estonians a decade ago.

funded Russian media space. The decision to increase Russian-language informational programming was made at the governmental level. Creating a Russian-language television channel was an idea developed by the Estonians a decade ago. The impulse for the introduction of such a project by Estonian State Television were the events in Tallinn in 2007, when Russian-speaking residents began riots in the streets of the capital, sparked by the transfer of a Soviet monument from the center of the city to the military cemetery. The riots were accompanied by attacks by pro-Kremlin youths on the Estonian Embassy in Moscow and cyberattacks on the digital infrastructure of Estonia that lasted several months.

The Russian information campaign which was taking place at the time, undoubtedly influenced the radicalization of the mood. This situation clearly revealed the need to create a Russian-language information channel, independent of Russian influence. Voices of support for this project spoke out after the Russian invasion of Georgia in 2008, and the project was launched a few years later. In the autumn of 2015, after the start of the conflict in Ukraine, ETV+, the Estonian channel in Russian, began broadcasting.[11] Nevertheless, the process of gaining viewership and significant market position is complex and time consuming. The popularity of ETV+ among Estonian-speaking Russians has gradually increased, though only marginally. Programs produced in Russia still dominate.

In Latvia, the Russian-speaking minority is more numerous than in Estonia, but no separate channel has been created on public television. However, on the LT7 state channel, there are blocks of programming in Russian. There is also the Russian-language state radio station Program 4 (Latvijas Radio 4). The station is quite popular among listeners.

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The specificity of defending the information space in the Baltic States involves the parallel use of state institutions, non-governmental organizations and grassroots social initiatives. At the same time, the sources must reach different groups of society – not all projects addressed to ethnic Lithuanians, Latvians and Estonians will be effective in Russian-speaking communities and vice versa. Moreover, they require constant funding, and their effectiveness can often only be assessed after a longer period of time. This, of course, requires a proper and coherent message directed to one's own citizens – as well as to the outside, meaning the international community in which these countries operate.

**Aleksander Król**
July 26, 2017

[11] M. Klūga, *Kārlis Roķis Aptauja: 80% ir saskārušies ar viltus ziņām*, LSM.lv, May 19, 2017, http://www.lsm.lv/raksts/zinas/latvija/aptauja-80-ir-saskarusies-ar-viltus-zinam.a236992/.

# RUSSIAN INFORMATION WARFARE IN THE BALTIC STATES – RESOURCES AND AIMS

Aleksander Król

A resurgence of fascism, rampant Russophobia, the ethnic cleansing of local Russian populations, drunk NATO soldiers – this is how Russia portrays and slanders the societies of the Baltic States.

The Russian offensive in the information sphere isn't just a stream of buzzwords, invented by sensationalist journalists and bored political scientists. It is a strategically planned onslaught of disinformation and propaganda designed to manipulate public opinion. In the long run, its aim is to capture the hearts and minds of the Baltic peoples.

The Kremlin's aggressive rhetoric directed toward the Baltic states is not a new phenomenon. TV programs, websites and magazines, the channels of Russian disinformation, have been overtaken the Baltic media market.

© YURY KOCHETKOV (PAP/EPA)

**MOSCOW, RUSSIA, MAY 9, 2017. RUSSIAN MILITARY SERVICEMEN MARCH ALONG THE RED SQUARE DURING THE VICTORY DAY MILITARY PARADE.**

The outbreak of conflict in Ukraine in 2014 was a decisive moment: western analysts became aware of the security deficiencies in the Baltic states region, particularly the threats directed at the information sphere. In addition to the aggressive narratives circulating there, the Russian Federation's activities included intelligence activities and military provocations.[1]

Since that conflict began, we've witnessed Russia's transition into an aggressive, comprehensive policy in the information sphere, coordinated by state institutions and financed through their budgets, often filtered through the medium of allegedly non-governmental organizations and foundations. Their activity consists of disseminating lies in the form of propaganda and disinformation on internal political issues, the economy and the security of the Baltic States.

[1] An example of such activities are the movements of the Russian fleet near the coastal waters of the Baltic states and the notorious violation of their airspace.

We've witnessed Russia's transition into an aggressive, comprehensive policy in the information sphere, coordinated by state institutions and financed through their budgets.

There were also cases of cyber-attacks to which local media outlets fell victim.

## NATIONAL MINORITIES IN THE CROSSHAIRS

Russian information operations in the Baltic States are directed mainly at Russian-speaking minority communities. These communities consist of not only residents of the region, who identify as ethnic Russians, but also other minorities

– Ukrainians, Belarussians, Poles – who speak Russian in everyday life. For the Kremlin, this is the core group of recipients for the messages of the information war and a tool for influencing public opinion in Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia.

Russian-speaking minorities constitute a significant proportion of the populations of Latvia and Estonia, and to a lesser extent, Lithuania. The largest percentage of this minority is in Latvia, where about 35% of the population are Russophones. The situation is shaping up similarly in Estonia where 29% of the population can be counted as part of the Russian-language community. These groups usually live in cities where industry was well-developed during the Soviet occupation. In Latvia, the main centers inhabited by the Russian-speaking population are Riga (about 50% of the population) and the eastern part of the country (Latgale) with the largest, post--industrial city, Daugavpils, which is an important transportation hub. Likewise, in Estonia, Russian--speakers outside of Tallinn inhabit the highly industrialized Ida-Virumaa region, where Narva, the town with the highest percentage of Russian--speaking inhabitants in the country, is located. In the case of Lithuania, this issue is much less important than in the other two countries. Ethnic Russians in Lithuania account for only 6% of the population, and the percentage of all nationalities susceptible to the influence of Russian media is estimated at 14–16%. Areas in Lithuania inhabited in large part by national minorities are Vilnius, Visaginas (a city built near a now inoperative nuclear power plant), and Klaipeda (a port city)[2]. With such an ethnic structure, the Russian language becomes a natural cultural link through which Russia can easily reach the people of the three Baltic states. Apart from these Russian-speaking populations, a working knowledge of Russian is still quite common among the older generation of ethnic Lithuanians, Latvians and Estonians.

With such an ethnic structure, the Russian language becomes a natural cultural link through which Russia can easily reach the people of the three Baltic states.

### CONTROL THE MEDIA, RULE THE WORLD

As the main platform of the Russian information war is Kremlin--controlled media operating in the Baltic information space, the tools used to spread propaganda include the popular, formally local or EU-registered TV stations, a series of websites, and a network of magazines. Both the biggest influence and threat is television, which remains the most popular source of information in the region. In 2005, the Russians launched a powerful television platform broadcasting to the entire region – the Baltic Media Alliance (BMA). The company is officially registered in the UK and retransmits specially modified content produced by Russian television. The flagship product of the company owned by

[2] Data according to Population and Housing Censuses in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania issued by Statistics Lithuania in 2015; http://osp.stat.gov.lt/services-portlet/pub-edition-file?id=19698.

**RIGA, LATIVIA, OCTOBER 15, 2017. THE RUSSIAN RIGA PUBLIC ORGANIZATION SEEKS AN OFFICIAL TRANSFER OF THE DATE OF LIBERATION OF RIGA FROM THE NAZIS.**

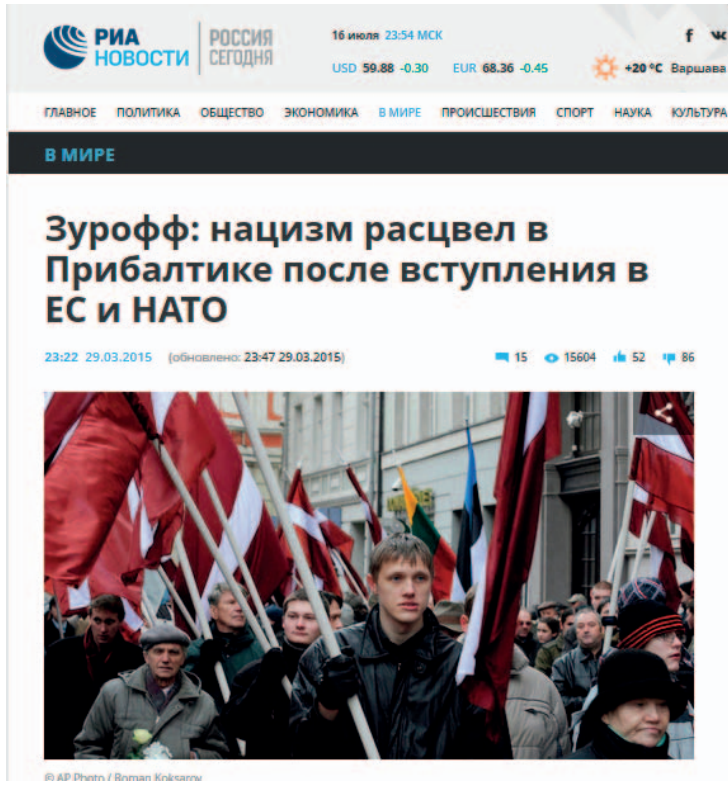
© Victor Lisitsyn (PAP/RUSSIAN LOOK)

Latvian entrepreneur Oleg Solodovs, is First Baltic Channel (PBK). Within this channel there are three national editorial boards (Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian) which prepare country--specific programs.[3] The importance of local news editors is vividly illustrated by the fact that the daily news program only covers local news; accordingly called: Latvian, Estonian or Lithuanian Vremya (Time). On the other hand, PBK viewers get their world news from the Russian program Vremya. In addition, PBK broadcasts include talk shows and entertainment programs from the Russian Channel One. Thanks to the presence of BMA, channels produced on the basis of Russian REN TV, NTV-MIR and a number of entertainment channels, are available in the Baltic states.

The tools used to spread propaganda include the popular, formally local or EU-registered TV stations, a series of websites, and a network of magazines.

The most important focus of Russian information activities, however, is the virtual space. There are dozens of Russian-language information portals on the Internet, addressed specifically to the Baltic audience, presenting themselves as either

[3] S. Jemberga, *Жизнь в тумане*, Re: Baltica, October 24, 2015; https://ru.rebaltica.lv/2015/10/136/.




© Ria.ru, accessed: July 19, 2017.

**ONE OF THE HEADLINES ON THE RIA NOVOSTI WEBSITE: "NAZISM HAS DEVELOPED IN THE BALTIC STATES AFTER THEIR ACCESSION INTO THE EU AND NATO".**

The two largest platforms of this type, editorialized according to the Kremlin's vision, are local versions of Sputnik and Baltnews.

analytical or "infotainment." The two largest platforms of this type, editorialized according to the Kremlin's vision, are local versions of Sputnik and Baltnews. While Sputnik is openly associated with the Kremlin and serves as the official pro-Russian propaganda instrument, the Baltnews editorial board has avoided publicly disclosing links to the Kremlin. Launched in 2014, in reaction to the events in Ukraine, the portal was aimed at strengthening the resources of Russian information warfare in the region. Officially, three editions of the portal (dedicated separately to Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia) are registered by a number of foreign companies located in the Netherlands and Russia, whose ownership structure leads back to the Russian state media company Rossiya Segodnya.[4] The editors of these portals are people closely associated with the Russian diplomatic missions in Riga, Vilnius and Tallinn. Unlike openly pro-Russian websites in the region, the headlines at Baltnews[5] are more

[4] Annual Report of the Lithuanian Special Forces 2016, Vilnius 2017; https://www.vsd.lt/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/2016-gr%C4%97smi%C5%B3-vertinimas.pdf.

[5] I. Springe, S. Jemberga, *Sputnik's Unknown Brother*, Re: Baltica, April 6, 2017; http://en.rebaltica.lv/2017/04/sputniks-unknown-brother/.

subtle, but the information on the site comes mostly from the Russian media. Baltnews occasionally provides space on its website to Russian publicists, well-known for their anti-Western views, such as the Russian journalist for *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, Galina Sapoznikova, who received the status of *persona non grata* in Lithuania. The actions of Baltnews does not escape the attention of local authorities – in August 2016, the head of the Estonian Baltnews was arrested on charges of financial fraud and tax evasion.[6] Some of the websites, being distribution channels for the Kremlin narrative, are devoted exclusively to local markets, e.g. *Vesti.lv*, but most of them are Baltic-wide (if not broader). One such site is Rubaltic, registered in Kaliningrad, which publishes information on the countries of the Baltic Sea region.[7]

The Baltic security services point to the growing importance of blogging platforms.

The targets for propaganda and disinformation aren't always specific ethnic groups, but rather an audience of people seeking information from "alternative" sources to the mainstream media. The Baltic security services point to the growing importance of blogging platforms, in which extremely pro-Russian activists can easily popularize their views and gain potential followers. One such form of information warfare is the blog network (mostly Russian-speaking) IHMO Club. This project, officially owned by radical pro-Kremlin activist Yuri Alexeyev of Latvia, has been in operation since April 2011. Building on its success in Latvia since September 2015, IMHO Club has expanded its activities to Belarus and is planning to continue its expansion into Ukraine and other countries.[8]

## NARRATIVES MOST WIDESPREAD IN THE MEDIA

The most important and universal dimension of Russian propaganda in the Baltic states is the proliferation of a negative image of the West – the European Union and NATO. Entire series of articles on this subject appear in Sputnik and Baltnews, while Rubaltic even has separate sections entitled: "Baltic States in NATO" and "Russophobia". These broad subjects are then broken down into smaller narratives, supported by one-sided "analyses" and statements by "experts," often containing transparent lies. They usually refer to the political system and economic situation of EU countries, and the main objective is to convince the public that EU and NATO membership does them more harm than good. These manipulations are used to influence public opinion, cause fear and social dissatisfaction.

The oldest Kremlin lie spread about the Baltic states is concerned with deep-seated national minority problems in the region. Russia exaggerates existing problems by

[6] D. Cavegan, *Police arrest Kremlin propagandist,* news.err.ee, August 17, 2016; http://news.err.ee/118794/police-arrest-kremlin-propagandist.

[7] Official website of Rubaltic portal, http://www.rubaltic.ru/edition/.

[8] Blogging platform https://imhoclub.lv/ru/page/62.

organizing various conferences and using PR agency support, and is attempting to create an anti-European image of the Baltic States as violators of fundamental human rights. Some publicists have even described the Baltic States as neo-fascist creations.

The argument of the economic or demographic decline of the Baltic States is largely based on internal perspectives in Russia.

History has also been manipulated for a long time, especially by glorifying the Soviet past of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia.[9] These representations often focus on the economy, for example presenting the region as a "Soviet Silicon Valley", which, in the process of integration with the West, lost its "highly developed" industry.[10] In reality, the post-Soviet industrial plants in question were outdated and without significant technological investment, and would never have been able to compete with the West. After breaking economic ties with their eastern neighbors, a lot of these companies became useless as they had been an integral part of the Soviet planned economy. Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia abandoned some branches of the economy inherited from the USSR, investing in new, more growth-oriented sectors.

The argument of the economic or demographic decline of the Baltic States is largely based on internal perspectives in Russia. As the Estonian journalist Argo Ideon describes it, "since Estonia succeeded in achieving what was unsuccessful in Russia, then the message of Estonia's success can't be allowed to spread, and because of this, Estonia will remain the target of attacks in Russian propaganda for a long time to come."[11] Typically, articles and books promoting the Russian narrative describe the period of Soviet occupation positively, and whitewash Stalinist crimes against the inhabitants of the Baltic states.

The third way in which history is manipulated to compromise the Baltic States is to portray the struggle for Baltic independence not as the rightful pursuit of nations to regain their sovereignty, but merely as the result of the intrigues of Western politicians in their scheming against Russia. For years, the Kremlin used similar tactics against Ukraine, addressing a specially crafted message for the Russian-speaking part of society, when, by manipulating history, it undermined the achievements of Ukraine's independent statehood and created a vision of exaggerated economic difficulties.[12]

[9] Annual report of the Latvian Bureau of Constitutional Protection 2011, sab.gov.lv, http://www.sab.gov.lv/?a=s&id=17&pgoffset=4&jid=10.

[10] А. Носович, Как Беларусь и Прибалтика распорядились промышленным наследием СССР, rubaltic.ru, July 10, 2017; http: //www.rubaltic.ru/article/ekonomika-i-biznes/10072017-kak-belarus-i-pribaltika -rasporyadilis-promyshlennym-Nasledie-SSSR /.

[11] D. Cavegin, *Opinion digest: The beginning of the end for the Baltic states*, news.err.ee, July 18, 2017, http://news.err.ee/608070/opinion-digest-the-beginning-of-the-end-for-the-baltic-states.

[12] Analysis of Russia's information campaign against Ukraine, StratCom CoE, http://www.stratcomcoe.org/analysis-russias-information-campaign-against-ukraine.

The Russian information manipulation that poses the greatest threat concerns security issues – not only military but also economic, at the regional and European level. Examples of this are the Russian information attacks on NATO contingents in the Baltic states. The Russian media write about the alleged irresponsibility of NATO soldiers and their propensity to start alcohol-fueled fights. One of the most glaring cases was the alleged rape of Lithuanian women by German soldiers, which turned out to be a lie.[13] The purpose of this type of deception is to arouse the opposition of the local population against the presence of NATO forces in the region. At the same time, Russian propaganda presents allied military forces as inept or even as a threat to the functioning of the state. In disinformation activities against NATO soldiers, Russia not only uses media channels it has under its control, but also uses cyber attacks, trying to attribute its propaganda to respected regional and national media. As a result of one such attack on the Baltic BNS information agency, false information was published about the poisoning of NATO troops in Latvia by mustard gas, the kind used in World War I. Such hybrid operations show that Russia is also capable of actively manipulating societies.[14]

The military cooperation of Baltic countries with the West is not the only target of Russian propaganda. Attacks are directed at regional projects of a strategic, economic nature.[15] Baltic researchers on the subject of Russian propaganda and disinformation emphasize that the effectiveness of propaganda does not depend solely on the ethnic origin of the recipient, but also on their social status and income. The greatest influence of the Kremlin's information warfare is achieved in the regions where there is both a large concentration of Russian-speakers as well as the poorest populations. This results in a deeper intensification of the process where growing frustration within society increases the propensity for pro-Russian attitudes. From their perspective, Vladimir Putin and the Russian Federation appear to be the only hope for a chance to improve their own situations, which they themselves cannot change.[16]

Attacks are directed at regional projects of a strategic, economic nature.

**Aleksander Król**
July 20, 2017

[13] *Lithuania looking for source of false accusation of German troops*, reuters.com, January 17, 2017, http://www.reuters.com/article/us-lithuania-nato-idUSKBN15W1JO.

[14] BNS, Įsilaužimas: į BNS sistemą įkelta melaginga žinia, delfi.lt, April 12, 2017; http://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/demaskuok/isilauzimas-i-bns-sistema-ikelta-melaginga-zinia.d?id=74346612.

[15] Attacks in the information space for infrastructure projects or investments in energy projects are more broadly approximated in the text, *Information Warfare against Strategic Investments in the Baltic States and Poland*.

[16] J. Dougherty, R. Kaljurand, *Estonia's Virtual Russian World: The Influence of Russian Media on Estonia's Russian Speakers*, icds.ee, October 2015, https://www.icds.ee/fileadmin/media/icds.ee/ failid / Jill_Dougherty__Riina_Kaljurand _-_ Estonia_s__ Virtual_Russian_World_.pdf.

# INFORMATION WARFARE AGAINST STRATEGIC INVESTMENTS IN THE BALTIC STATES AND POLAND

Aleksander Król

The Soviet Union's cooperation with environmental organizations in the West has a long tradition going back to the Cold War, when young, often unwitting enthusiasts, were used by the USSR as a tool against other countries.[1]

In the Baltic States, environmental movements were created in the late 1980s, during the Soviet occupation, as a force meant to support the reformist wing of the Communist Party.[2] In the second half of the 1980s, environmental movements were able to effectively mobilize the part of society which did not want to directly associate with the Communists, around the slogans of perestroika.

Although today's Russia does not seem to be a country seeking the most environmentally-friendly solutions in the international arena,[3] Russian media, however,

[1] *Soviet Active Measures Forgery, Disinformation*, Political Operations United States Department of State Bureau of Public Affairs, Washington, D.C. August 1987; http://insidethecoldwar.org/sites/default/files/documents/Soviet%20Active%20Measures%20Forgery,%20Disinformation,%20Political%20Operations%20October%201981.pdf, July 19, 2017.

[2] J. Targalski, *Służby specjalne i pierestrojka*, t.1, Wydawnictwo Antyk, Warszawa 2017, s. 264–268.

[3] *Działaczka ekologiczna uciekła z Rosji bojąc się o swoje dzieci*, wp.pl, April 20, 2015, https://wiadomosci.wp.pl/dzialaczka-ekologiczna-uciekla-z-rosji-bojac-sie-o-swoje-dzieci-6025269108454529a.

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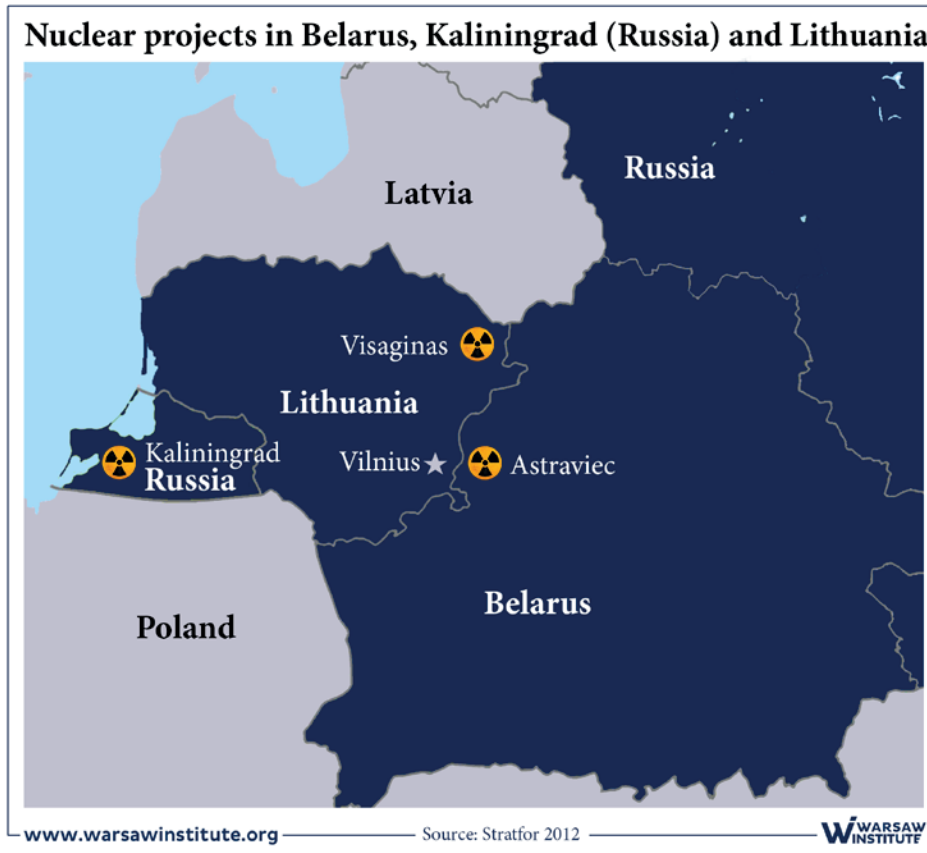
**RIGA, LATIVIA, JANUARY 13, 2012. A PROTESTOR IN WHITE 'PROTECTIVE' CLOTHING STANDS ALONGSIDE BARRELS WITH THE NUCLEAR SYMBOL OUTSIDE THE HOUSE OF THE CABINET OF MINISTERS IN RIGA AS PART OF A PROTEST AGAINST LATVIA'S INVOLVEMENT IN LITHUANIA'S NUCLEAR POWER PLANT (NPP) PROJECT.**

appears to be exceptionally active on environmental issues in neighboring countries. Their level of "concern" is increasing, specifically targeting the strategic infrastructure projects that are aimed at strengthening the Baltic region's integration with the rest of the European Union, or which could provide the Baltic countries with alternative sources of energy.
In the last decade, several major investments in the region drew the attention of both environmental activists and the Russian-manipulated media. It's worth looking at the most prominent cases linking Russian strategic interests with the activities of environmental movements.

## BLOCKING THE LITHUANIAN NUCLEAR POWER PLANT PROJECT

The idea of building a new nuclear power plant in Lithuania has been in the works since 2004, when Unit 1 of the Ignalina Nuclear Power Plant was closed. The decision to close the power plant was one of the conditions for Lithuania's accession into the European Union. In deciding to meet EU expectations, Lithuania thus ceased to be an exporter of electricity and instead became an importer.

From 2009–2012, international negotiations took place between Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Poland and Japan's Hitachi Group. Although the negotiations on the construction of the power plant were already in advanced stages, the project was blocked. As a result of numerous protests by environmentalists in Lithuania, a referendum was held in which 65% of voters came out against the investment. Although the referendum was only advisory and non-binding, the project was suspended.
Environmental organizations and "green" groups from the whole region protested against the creation of the Baltic nuclear power plant in Lithuania. In addition to representatives of local organizations, groups from the Russian Federation and Belarus came to Vilnius. Protests were jointly organized by the two Lithuanian green parties, the Lietuvos Žaliųjų Sąjūdis (Lithuanian Green




Party, currently Lietuvos Žaliųjų Partija) and the Lietuvos Valstiečių ir Žaliųjų Sąjunga (Lithuanian Peasants' and Green Union), the social organization Atgaja, the ŽALI. LT (Greens.LT) association and the social organization Žaliosios Politikos Institutas (Institute of Green Policy). The Belarusian organization EkoDom (EcoHome),[4] and EkoZaszczita (EcoDefense)[5] from the Kaliningrad Oblast of Russia, also participated in the protests. Each of these groups has been historically active against nuclear power in the region. It's worth noting that in their countries of origin — Belarus and Russia — these organizations have been unsuccessful in opposing nuclear power projects.[6] Environmental groups were not the only organizations who fought against the Baltic nuclear power plant project. Russian activity in the information space associated with the Lithuanian nuclear project was also noticed in Latvia by the Latvian special services. Energy and infrastructure projects were already objects of interest to Russian intelligence, while in the case of the new nuclear power

[4] See EkoDom website: http://ecohome-ngo.by/; *Gytis Kapsevičius, Diskusijoje apie atominę energetiją regione aiškintasi, kiet Lietuvoje yra Baltarusijos*, bernardinai.lt, October 4, 2012, http://www.bernardinai.lt/straipsnis/2012-10-04-gytis-kapsevicius-diskusijoje-apie-atomine-energetika-regione-aiskintasi-kiek-lietuvoje-yra-baltarusijos/88874 and T. Novikova, *Lietuva neįleisti Baltarusių aktyvistai ketina skųstis teismui*, alfa.lt, October 3, 2012, http://www.alfa.lt/straipsnis/15059445/i-lietuva-neileisti-baltarusiu-aktyvistai-ketina-skustis-teismui.

[5] *ELTA, Protestuota prieš naujų černobylių kūrimą Lietuvoje ir greta jos*, delfi.lt, April 26, 2010, http://www.delfi.lt/verslas/energetika/protestuota-pries-nauju-cernobyliu-kurima-lietuvoje-ir-greta-jos.d?id=31533829.

[6] See website: https://ecodefense.ru/page/3/.

plant in Lithuania in 2011–2012, an information offensive was suspected. In the annual report of the Latvian Constitution Protection Bureau (Satversmes Aizsardzības Birojs) an active disinformation campaign from 2011 was described, when the Russian media presented the project of the Lithuanian Visaginas Nuclear Power Plant negatively, in contrast to the much-praised, parallel project to build a reactor in Kaliningrad. Particularly active in this field was (and remains) the Russian REGNUM News Agency, which before Sputnik, was the main Internet channel of Russian information policy in the Baltic region.

The way in which this type of operation works is to lay the appropriate information foundation by selecting a group of "experts" who advocate views that match the current message.[7] One of the organizations that persistently organized protests against the Lithuanian nuclear plant construction project was the Russo-Baltic Media Center, a public relations agency. The director of this agency, Igor Pavlovski, was on the list of people forbidden from entering Latvia.[8] According to Lithuanian state television (LRT) sources, actions against Visaginas in Latvia were coordinated by neo-communist Algirdas Paleckis, members of the Latvian organization Kislorod (Oxygen), city councilman Daugavpils

Energy and infrastructure projects were already objects of interest to Russian intelligence, while in the case of the new nuclear power plant in Lithuania in 2011–2012, an information offensive was suspected.

Jurijs Zaicevs, who worked with the then editor of REGNUM, and Modest Kolerov, also recognized as a *persona non grata* in Latvia.[9]

The account of the activities of environmentalists and pro-Russian circles in Lithuania around the nuclear project was very skillfully tied to other world events, creating the perception in the media desired by the Kremlin. The referendum on the construction of a nuclear plant in Lithuania was held against the backdrop of the Japanese nuclear power plant disaster in Fukushima in 2011, which was the most notorious environmental crisis of its kind in recent years. In Lithuania, Russian media published articles which showed the economic baselessness of building a new nuclear power plant.[10] Another narrative promoted by Russian media was the

[7] Report of the Constitution Protection Bureau: *SAB 2011. GADA DARBĪBAS PĀRSKATS*, sab.gov.lv, http://www.sab.gov.lv/?a=s&id=17&pgoffset=4&jid=10 and Проект Белорусской АЭС более безопасен, чем проект Висагинской АЭС: эксперт, regnum.ru, November 11, 2011, https://regnum.ru/news/economy/1466373.html.

[8] *SAB: Vienna no Krievijas specdienestu mērķauditorijām ir Latvijas jaunieši*, delfi.lv, June 9, 2014,http://www.delfi.lv/news/national/politics/sab-viena-no-krievijas-specdienestu-merkauditorijam-ir-latvijas-jauniesi.d?id=44596606.

[9] *Tikslas - paralyžiuoti valdžią Baltijos šalyse*, lrt.lt, November 3, 2013, http://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/lietuvoje/2/28677.

[10] А. Емельяненков, *Когда политика превыше экономики, Российская газета - Федеральный выпуск №5833 (160)* rg.ru, July 16, 2012, https://rg.ru/2012/07/15/voprosy-site.html.

THE RAILWAY STATION OF TALLINN, ESTONIA.

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threat that Visaginas might pose. The structural similarity of the reactor to Fukushima's and the risk of transporting its components to Lithuania was used as a scare tactic.[11]

## PROTESTS AGAINST THE CONSTRUCTION OF RAIL BALTICA

Creating large strategic infrastructure projects not only requires huge financial resources, but also a consistent political determination in partner countries. In such a huge and complex undertaking, the role of politicians is crucial, as they must adequately justify to their citizens the need for them to bear the costs when such projects involve a heavy burden on the budgets of the countries involved. Rail Baltica is undoubtedly such a strategic project, a railway connection with a European track gauge (1435 mm), originally planned from Tallinn to Warsaw, and ultimately, from Berlin to Helsinki. The implementation of this project will be crucial for the economies of the region: the investment will significantly accelerate the flow of people and goods, thus improving the logistical integration of the northeastern EU countries with the rest of the Union.

For this reason, the project has been criticized in Russian media for years. The Sputnik platform is closely following the project, publishing negative articles, not only in Russian, but in many other languages.[12] The rail construction is presented as economically unviable and only intended to meet NATO's military needs.[13] In 2015, the Latvian Security

[11] Российские СМИ уверены, *Висагинская АЭС экономически невыгодна, а референдум бы провалился*, 15min.lt, July 16, 2012, https://www.15min.lt/ru/article/vesti/rossijskie-smi-uvereny-visaginskaja-aes-ekonomicheski-nevygodna-a-referendum-by-provalilsja-504-234129 and Висагинская АЭС в Литве будет иметь кипящий ядерный реактор типа реактора японской АЭС *Фукусима-1* energobelarus.by, November 10, 2011. https://energobelarus.by/news/V_mire/visaginskaya_aes_v_litve_budet_imet_kipyashchiy_yadernyy_reaktor_tipa_reaktora_yaponskoy_aes_quot_fukusima_1_quot_/.

[12] *Polska sabotuje projekt Rail Baltica*, Sputnik Poland, October 22, 2015, https://pl.sputniknews.com/polska/201510221278555/ and *Kaslaukia ūkininkų 'RailBaltica' statybų metu*, Sputnik Lietuva, February 13, 2017, http://sputniknews.lt/economics/20170213/2202421/zemes-ukinikai-rupinasi-del-rail-baltica-statybos.html.

[13] А. Куркин, *Rail Baltica: военная железная дорога НАТО ведёт прямо к Санкт-Петербургу,*

Police determined that topics related to the construction of Rail Baltica in the Latvian media had been targeted by Russian "troll factories."[14] Due to the great distrust of people in the Baltic countries towards openly pro-Russian broadcasts, aimed at blocking or delaying the project, an effective method of inducing strong opposition was sought in one of the countries participating in this international project. As favorable circumstances would have it, the Rail Baltica project had created the largest social debate in Estonia, which was they were able to exploit. Strong opposition groups in the partner countries were created, which allowed the media to present the protests as "international". This was also the case for the Lithuanian and Latvian social organizations that were formed in the summer of 2016, solely to support the message of Estonian activists.[15] Meanwhile in Estonia, environmental organizations managed to mobilize local Estonian-speaking communities for sizeable protests. An event organized by the organization Avalikult Rail Balticust (For an Open Rail Baltic) in January 2017, was attended by about 300 participants. For comparison, it should be noted that anti-NATO protests in Tallinn usually total from 5 to 10 people. Interestingly, the organizers of rallies and publishers of information about the alleged environmental and economic harmfulness of the project, did not disclose to the public details of their funding sources, claiming that the campaign was financed solely by volunteer forces, or, as one of the leading activists, Maarja Lõhmus put it, "with the help of 101 friends."[16] Protests were also spurred on in both the Estonian and Russian versions of Sputnik, where information on planned rallies and reporting on events was provided. In both language versions of Sputnik Estonia, articles on Rail Baltica topics are published under a special heading, "Tracks of Discord."[17]

> The implementation of this project will be crucial for the economies of the region: the investment will significantly accelerate the flow of people and goods, thus improving the logistical integration of the northeastern EU countries with the rest of the Union.

11.07.2016; https://regnum.ru/news/polit/2155345.html.

[14] L. Barisa-Sermule, *Interneta «troļļus» interesē arī «Rail Baltica»*, lsm.lv, August 9, 2015, http://www.lsm.lv/lv/raksts/latvija/zinas/interneta-trollus-interese-ari-rail-baltica.a140851/.

[15] *Baltijas valstu nevalstiskās organizācijas vāc parakstus petīcijai pret sasteigtu Rail Baltica līguma parakstīšanu*, diena.lv, January 26, 2016, http://www.diena.lv/raksts/pasaule/baltijas-valstis/baltijas-valstu-nevalstiskas-organizacijas-vac-parakstus-peticijai-pret-sasteigtu-_rail-baltica_-liguma-parakstisanu-14164658.

[16] See website of the association: avalikeesti.ee, http://www.avalikeesti.ee/.

[17] RailBaltic – рельсы раздора, https://ru.sputnik-news.ee/trend/rail_baltic/.

### INFORMATION WAR AGAINST THE POLISH CHANNEL CONSTRUCTION PROJECT ACROSS THE VISTULA SPIT

Another infrastructure project that sparked a sharp and coordinated response in the main Russian media outlets distributing propaganda in the northeastern Baltic region, is the Polish plan to create a canal through the Vistula Spit. This topic has been present in the mainstream media since 2004.[18] However, a broader campaign began in 2016, after Poland declared its intent to return to the canal construction plans. Sputnik again became the main transmission belt for the dissemination of ideas on the allegedly ecologically--harmful, economically-unviable, and militarily-aggressive project. This information was passed on to vesti.lv,[19] a site known for its radically pro-Russian views, addressed to the Russian-speaking minority in Latvia, and also appeared on the pro--Russian blogging platform in Belarus, imhoclub.by.[20] The most commonly disseminated arguments are, as in the case of Rail Baltica, the high-cost and lack of economic justification for the project, the possibility of environmental catastrophe as a result of the excavation of the Vistula Spit, the threat of losses incurred by Poles ("concern" for the Krynica Morska population) and Russian fishermen, and, the main argument — that the whole project is created "to spite Russia."

As in previous cases, to make the message credible, the international character of protests and critical opinions was emphasized. For example, the "expert" opinions of an activist were used from the Latvian Green Cross,[21] which has been registered since 2002, but has thus far engaged in no activity. Interestingly, the Lithuanian government in Vilnius does not oppose the initiative of the Polish government, and in the Lithuanian media there are no strong negative narratives about the plans for the excavation. Among the "experts" expressing indignation, there are no Lithuanians. Even the Lithuanian--language version of Sputnik has devoted only one item to the subject — an infographic showing the canal route.[22]

The main argument – that the whole project is created "to spite Russia".

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Examples of coordinated information activities, directed against key energy security and economic development projects, show that Russia is making good use of all its resources and channels of misinformation in the countries in its orbit of interests.

[18] А. Рябушев Остров невезени, я, ng.ru, August 16, 2004, http://www.ng.ru/events/2004-08-16/7_kaliningrad.html.

[19] Т. Пушкарев, Поляки будут рыть канал через косу «назло» России, vesti.lv, April 19, 2017, http://vesti.lv/news/polyaki-budut-ryty-kanal-cherez-kosu-nazlo-rossii.

[20] А. Шпаковский, Зачем Польша разрубает Балтийскую косу?, imhoclub.by, April 28, 2017, https://imhoclub.by/ru/material/zachem_polsha_razrubaet_baltijskuju_kosu.

[21] *Polijaspolitiskā reitinga celšana uz ekoloģijas rēķina*, Sputnik latvija, March 6, 2017, https://sputniknewslv.com/world/20170306/4086544/polija-kanls-baltijas-strele.html.

[22] Infographics from the Lithuanian-language version of the Sputnik platform http://sputniknews.lt/infographics/20170308/2391761/kanalas-per-aitsmares.html.

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**ELBLĄG, POLAND, OCTOBER 12, 2016. RESIDENTS OF KRYNICA MORSKA PROTEST AGAINST THE DIGGING OF THE VISTULA SPIT IN THE ELBLĄG PORT, NEAR A SHIP OF POLITICIANS AND OFFICIALS WHICH WAS SAILING INTO THE VISTULA LAGOON, OCTOBER 12. EARLIER ON THIS DAY, A PROJECT FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF A SHIPPING CHANNEL THROUGH THE VISTULA SPIT WAS PRESENTED. THE 1.3 KM LONG CHANNEL WILL LINK GDAŃSK BAY TO THE VISTULA LAGOON. ITS CONSTRUCTION IS SET TO COST 880 MILLION PLN.**

The manipulation techniques used by the Kremlin date back to the Soviet era, as exemplified by the instrumentalization of ideologically active organizations — in this case those fighting for the environment. On the side that is under attack, there is still a lack of a common front operating in the information space — there is no force distinguishing between legitimate media and information warfare tools.[23] Increased media literacy could prevent media consumers from becoming casualties of information campaigns conducted by Russia.

Based on these examples, it can be determined that the people operating in the economic and political spheres of our region need to be aware that projects crucial for industrial development can be effectively sabotaged by skillfully coordinated information attacks. The protection of information related to strategic businesses and industries becomes highly relevant. Care must be taken to ensure that European companies do not become victims of disinformation, for example through financial involvement in projects inspired by the Kremlin, which may be devastating to their brands and reputations. In this situation, it is necessary to work at the point of contact between state and business, in order to protect the interests of both parties and ensure an adequate flow of accurate information to the public. It is also important to have a high level of training and an appropriate civic attitude among those working in the media.

**Aleksander Król**
July 19, 2017

[23] L. Sigan, *Marszałek Struk: kanał przez Mierzeję Wiślaną to nonsensowny projekt*, Sputnik Polska, October 26, 2016, https://pl.sputniknews.com/polska/201610264135923-kanal-mierzeja-wislana/.

# POLAND THROUGH EURASIAN EYES: RUSSIAN PROPAGANDA MESSAGES IN THE MEDIA

Joanna Kwiecień

## CHARACTERISTICS OF RUSSIAN ACTIVITIES AND THEIR OBJECTIVES

Contrary to the popular belief that Russia witnessed an ideological vacuum in the wake of the fall of the Soviet Union, there was a conscious decision by elites to redefine the "Russian idea." It appeals to universal key concepts and codes, and is based on emotions, which, depending on current political needs, can be endowed with the right narrative. These are:

- geopolitics justifying the continuity of imperial Russia (Holy Russia – Russian Empire – USSR – Russian Federation) and
- conservatism, which "anoints" Orthodox Russia as an alternative to the modern world, a country resisting Western unification, one that is peaceful, democratic, and ready for dialogue between civilizations.

Against this backdrop, Eurasian theories find fertile ground, which serve as convenient propaganda tools aimed at both Russians and Western societies, including Poland. They legitimize Russia's place in the new geopolitical order. They promote an aversion to U.S. domination in the world and to the Western model of democracy and liberal values, and affirm imperial Russian aspirations. The direct promoters of Eurasian views are pseudo-analytical research centers, where personal connections support their contacts with the Kremlin. The Russian Institute for Strategic Studies serves the needs of the Russian presidential administration

WARSAW, POLAND, EMBASSY OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION. © Leszek Szymanski (PAP)

and other governmental institutions. It is headed by Mikhail Fradkov, previously associated with the Foreign Intelligence Service of Russia. The Katehon think tank is directed by Alexander Dugin, also an important figure of the international Eurasian movement. The center was founded by Konstantin Malofeev, the chief lobbyist for Russian interests in the West's nationalist and conservative circles. Leonid Sawin, a member of the Eurasian Youth Union, cooperates with Alexander Dugin as the main editor of the Geopolitica.ru opinion outlet.

A characteristic feature of Russian activities in Europe is the ability to adapt propaganda and its tools to the specific character of a country. They reach their audience through a variety of channels. These are the mass media, international peace and charitable

**Russia** exerts influence through specific messages that are aimed at causing conflict and dividing people, or alternatively, by combining forces in the name of common interests and views. In Poland, the following lines of action can be identified:

- conservatism (anti-liberalism, anti-feminism, pro-life, traditional values),
- anti-Ukrainian sentiment,
- Euroscepticism,
- anti-NATO sentiment,
- anti-government sentiment.

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**ŻAGAŃ, POLAND, SEPTEMBER 29, 2017. CELEBRATION OF THE FIRST EXCHANGE OF ABCT UNITS ON SEPTEMBER 29 IN ŻAGAŃ, AS PART OF THE ROTATIONAL STAY OF U.S. TROOPS IN POLAND.**

activities, the pro-life movement, and initiatives to defend traditional value systems. These are supported by governmental and non-governmental organizations, think tanks, the Orthodox Church, part of the Russian and Russian-speaking communities living abroad, and far right-wing or extremist groups who see Vladimir Putin, Russian Eurasianism and Orthodoxy, as the salvation for Europe. The perception of Russia in Europe is also influenced by "Trojan horses" — agents of influence or "useful idiots," i.e. intellectuals, academics, journalists, artists, politicians and businessmen who shape public opinion and the attitude of societies towards Russia.

## PROPAGANDISTIC VISION OF POLAND PRESENTED BY EURASIANS

The integral element of the Eurasian concept is the constant emphasis that Poland is under the heavy influence of the United States of America and is its "Trojan horse" in Europe. Poland is therefore used to counter Germany in the European Union. With the help of the Visegrad Group, it is building an anti-German bloc to create antagonism between the New Europe and Old Europe. It sabotages all the European Union's aspirations to deepen continental integration, with consideration for Russia. It supports a transatlantic vision. The concept of "Intermarium," popular in Poland, is a counterpoint to the political concept of the European Union. Poland's goal is to gather up the lands from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea, including Ukrainian territory, and, in agreement with the United States, allow for the placement of American military bases. This will allow the U.S. to dictate its EU policy.

## A SET OF PROPAGANDA MESSAGES AIMED AT INFLUENCING POLES AND FOREIGN AUDIENCES:

### 1. Poland – USA

- Poland is under the influence of the United States.
- Washington wants to use Poland as its agent in the EU and as cannon fodder in conflict with Russia.[1]

[1] See: https://www.geopolitica.ru/en/article/poland-us-trojan-horse.

**2. Poland – EU**

- Poland is against further EU integration. As a pro-American ally, it opposes the creation of European armed forces.
- Poland is a buffer between the EU and Russia. Its purpose is to hinder EU cooperation with Russia in support of American interests.
- Poland strikes at the German--Francophone core to kindle internal conflicts within the EU to weaken it, so that it does not grow into a geopolitical rival of the U.S.

**3. Poland is baselessly Russophobic by nature**

- Poles have an anti-Russian complex. Without Russia there would be no Polish patriotism, which is based on anti-Russian uprisings from the nineteenth century.
- Russia is a useful litmus test in Poland. The ruling class uses it to scare Poles to cover up internal struggles and to play with their emotions.
- Poland, together with the United Kingdom, the Baltic States and Sweden, is creating a "sect" in favor of sanctions against Russia.
- Poland is ungrateful and cannot appreciate "fraternal" help – Russia's contribution to "liberating" it from the German occupation during World War II (which in fact meant the political subjugation of Poland by the USSR and a battle against the anti-communist underground – *author's note*). There is a distinction between Russophobic decision makers, who make the laws decommunizing street names and removing monuments – and the Polish people, distanced from these activities.

**4. Poland – NATO**

- Membership in NATO raises questions about national sovereignty, represents voluntary colonization and draws Poland into its struggles and conflicts.
- Poland supports all aggressive NATO initiatives, especially against Russia.
- Poland has adopted a law authorizing the stationing of foreign troops on Polish territory and demands the growth of NATO forces.
- Poland wants to put elements of a missile defense system on its territory that can be used not only for nuclear attack protection, but also to deploy nuclear-tipped missiles.
- Subversion techniques against Russia are ongoing in Poland. Training camps for radical nationalists from Germany and Ukraine prepare them to be sent to the Donbass region.
- Poles are victimizing NATO's enemies – Mateusz Piskorski is being held as a political prisoner (a member of the pro-Russian "Change" party, who was arrested in 2016 by the Polish Internal Security Agency under suspicion of spying – *author's note*).

**5. Poland – Ukraine**

Appealing to historical and economic issues, resentments, and the current political situation. It's a two-pronged narrative that aims to antagonize Poles and Ukrainians.

On the one hand, it deprecates the Ukrainians and uses them to scare Poles:

- Ukraine disavows the massacres of Poles in Volhynia during World War II, appealing to the symbolism of the Banderivstsi (followers

of Ukrainian nationalist Stepan Bandera) and does not want to commemorate the victims.
- Ukrainians take Polish jobs, do not integrate into society, take things for granted, and their numbers lead them to create closed communities. What happened in Volhynia could happen again in the future.

On the other hand, Poles are presented as despising Ukraine, and wanting to take advantage of Ukraine's status as a fallen state:
- Poland treats Ukrainians as inferior people. It indifferently uses them as a cheap labor force.
- Ukraine is a pawn in the Polish concept of the Intermarium, which aims to create Great Poland "from sea to sea." The goal of Poland is to recover assets in western Ukraine (houses, land), which Poland will claim the moment Ukraine collapses.
- Poland will utilize its national minority to increase its influence in Ukraine (using the Polish Card, confirming allegiance to "the Polish Nation"). Poland is also ready to sacrifice its minority (it does not care about persecuted Poles) for American interests in this part of Europe.

**6. Poland – its internal affairs**
- Polish authorities have autocratic impulses.
- Law and Justice is a Eurosceptic party, typical of national-populist, East European parties. Polish Euroscepticism is part of the trend of hostility towards European unity in the name of American interests, unlike continental Euroscepticism, which seeks to achieve Europe's independence from the U.S. in the name of a multipolar order.
- Poland does not have a Western European democratic tradition.
- Poland's active eastern policy is being pursued in order to intensify the conflict with Russia.

## THE SPECIFICS OF POLAND

The hermetic nature of the Polish media space, traumatic historical experiences and the relatively high resistance of Polish society to Russian disinformation, means that classic media in the form of a nationwide television channel or Internet portal, have no need to exist based on Russian pressure. Sputnik is a marginal outlet in Poland, influencing a narrow audience. That is why the goal is to reach the individual recipient, and influence small, ideological groups and closed environments. New followers of Eurasian theories are gained through the use of websites and blogs publishing "alternative information" based on conspiracy theories, anti-Ukrainian sentiment, anti-Semitism, anti-globalism, Euroscepticism and anti-Americanism, on fear and phobias, or conversely – by appealing to goodwill, concern for the common good, patriotism and the desire to fight for Christian values. In Poland, we can point out several groups of recipients:

- Communities interested in alternative spirituality, paranormal activity, healthy lifestyle, a return to nature, extreme survivalism. Propaganda of this type presents an alternative reality, suggests a monopoly on truth, and undermines commonly accepted beliefs. Following the trail of conspiracy theories arouses distrust in the reader and encourages their questioning of everything. This is the "Epimenides paradox." The goal is to confuse the recipient and show that nothing in this world is true.

**WARSAW, APRIL 13, 2017. HEAD OF THE ARMED FORCES OF POLAND, PRESIDENT ANDRZEJ DUDA (R) AND SUPREME ALLIED COMMANDER EUROPE OF NATO ALLIED COMMAND OPERATIONS, GENERAL CURTIS M. SCAPARROTTI (L) AT A PRESS CONFERENCE DURING A MEETING AT THE PRESIDENTIAL PALACE.**

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- Slavophile and Neopagan groups. The propaganda appeals to a common Slavic heritage. Slavicity is unique and cannot be subject to any other culture-forming matrix. The aim is to unite the Slavs and to oppose aggressive and alien Westernization. Poland and other representatives of the Western Slavs (Czechs, Slovaks), should feel the need to work with Russia – the representative of the Eastern Slavs.

- Conservative circles. Propaganda appeals to the global fight for universal values (family, the right to life, opposition to abortion, gender ideology, and homosexuality) in opposition to the liberal West. Polish society, attached to a traditional value system, seeing Western European nihilism, legitimization of same-sex marriage, the fiasco of multiculturalism, and ignoring the rights of the majority, naturally seeks allies. Alexander Dugin is tempting the conservatives to a joint offensive against the liberal West, where Russia is ready to confront the current secularization and dechristianization of Europe.
- Far right-wing, nationalist, anti-Semitic and borderland groups.

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Propaganda is based on fear of other nations. Poland's alliances and membership in the EU

In Poland, the outlets most vulnerable to propaganda are of a conservative-nationalist character, propagating "new economics," alternative sources of energy, esotericism, and debunking conspiracy theories.

and NATO are questioned and presented as a form of dependence and subordination. It is based on chauvinism, Euroscepticism, anti-Americanism, anti-Ukrainian sentiment and anti-Semitism. The aim is to challenge existing alliances, to build a confrontational approach to the international environment (especially against Lithuania, Latvia and Ukraine), to treat Russia and the Eurasian Union as an alternative geopolitical alliance. The Polish right is tempted by a common mission against liberals, globalists, transnational corporations and postmodernists. Poland, with the support of Russia, will again be the bulwark of Europe and will stop Islamic immigration.

- Liberal circles.
  Propaganda refers to the internal situation in the country, especially the political divisions of PiS--PO (Law and Justice vs. Civic Platform). The aim is to present Poland as a lawless country, where the principles of democracy and tripartite separation of powers are disregarded. The alleged Euroscepticism of the ruling class and the failure to meet EU requirements (the question of the Constitutional Tribunal and the opposition to accepting migrants) will cause Poland to become an outcast of the European community. On the other hand, propaganda presents the rulers as a Russophobic, national-conservative party that wants to introduce a complete ban on abortion.

## RESONANCE OF RUSSIAN PROPAGANDA MESSAGES IN POLAND

The environment most susceptible to disinformation is the Internet. The "snowball effect" prevails there, relying on rapidly flooding the consciousness of the user with "fake news." In Poland, the outlets most vulnerable to propaganda are of a conservative-nationalist character, propagating "new economics," alternative sources of energy, esotericism, and debunking conspiracy theories. A characteristic of such sites, from the very beginning of the presentation of the information, is the title, often an appeal to independence and truth that was deliberately hidden from society by the ruling elites and a world conspiracy (Jews, Masons, globalists, big corporations). These sites are either a Polish-language version of foreign disinformation pages or native creations. Blogs are also important, aimed at mocking, ridiculing, criticizing and repeating convenient arguments depending on the situation. Propaganda messages are spread not only by users with fanatical views, but also by "ordinary users" who are searching

for the truth online. Disinformation is simple in its message, often triggering extreme emotions and simplifying contexts, making it easily digestible and very effective.

## CONCLUSIONS

Russia is ably playing its game on the awareness of Western societies, basing it on deficits, conflicts and animosities in communities, while on the other hand, on the good will and the desire to build an alternative, peaceful world. Its effectiveness is due to the fact that in many Western countries, the strength of Russian statehood is often mistakenly judged by the degree of its economic development, on utilitarian economic benefits, based on the assessment of the armed forces or its peripheral location. Meanwhile, Russia is not standing in place and uses every opportunity to shake the balance of power in Europe to its advantage. Such actions are foreseen as long-term operations and are aimed at undermining the Euro-Atlantic value system and Euro-Atlantic cooperation, fueling conflicts between EU states and justifying Russia's right to build its own sphere of influence in Europe.

On a smaller, local scale, relating to Polish realities, the purpose of disinformation is to divide Polish society. The North Atlantic Alliance and EU membership, which are of great strategic importance to Poland, could be subject to attack by attempts to organize a social movement of the discontented. Causing conflict on the Polish right, whose factions will drift in different directions (pro-life movement, pro-national movement), could lead to the paralysis of the government. Creating chaos, playing on emotions, especially feelings of injustice (after each election a part of society feels omitted and excluded, depending on the winning coalition), results in the general undermining of trust in society towards its leaders, striking at the legitimacy of the governing authorities.

Its effectiveness is due to the fact that in many Western countries, the strength of Russian statehood is often mistakenly judged by the degree of its economic development, on utilitarian economic benefits, based on the assessment of the armed forces or its peripheral location.

Worldviews become another battlefield. In Poland, this opens the door to Russian action through the tactics of a common front in defense of values. The goal is to divide society by exacerbating narratives and actions that, for example, are aimed at defending life at conception and traditional values, and that will simultaneously discredit the community of believers as uncompromising fundamentalists, imposing their vision on the country. As a consequence, such actions favor the creation of radical opposition to the government, which is seen as an advocate of extremists, legitimizing attacks by liberals and leftists.

**Joanna Kwiecień**
June 18, 2017

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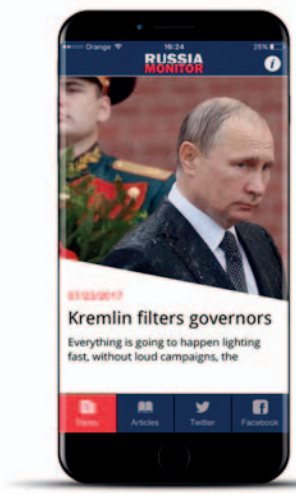


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