Estonian Center of Eastern Partnership and Ukraine Crisis Media Center Report Nataliya Popovych, Oleksiy Makukhin, Liubov Tsybulska, Ruslan Kavatsiuk |May 2018

IMAGE OF EUROPEAN COUNTRIES ON RUSSIAN

HYBRID WARFARE ANALYTICAL GROUP

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FOREWORD

In 1991, while the West was celebrating the breakup of the Soviet Union, political scientist Samuel Huntington warned that the expectation of the newly-free countries in the former Soviet space to quickly become sustainable liberal democracies was too optimistic. He predicted a reverse wave of authoritarianism if "new authoritarian powers could demonstrate the continued viability of the non-democratic rule" or if people around the world stopped seeing the United States as a beacon of democracy. The article issued a warning that "a strong, non-democratic Russia would pose problems for the liberal democracies of eastern Europe."¹

The years 2016-2018 have seriously challenged the USA's standing as the symbol and leader of the free

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world. At the same time, the reelection of Vladimir Putin for yet another - now undefined - term, as the ruler of Russia in March 2018, demonstrated that over the last two decades, authoritarianism has grounded itself in Russia and may not be "leaving" any time soon. Consequently, Kremlin's policies of geopolitical expansion, adventurism in trespassing the international law and sovereignties of other countries have proved to be capable of undermining democratic developments in Europe, Middle East and even in the USA.

Since the beginning of Putin's rule 18 years ago, both Europe and the USA found themselves under the threat of a major well-resourced player interested in turning back the course of history. The appearance of the so-called "illiberal democracies" on the European continent recently - Hungary as an example, and Poland, Czech Republic, possibly others, to follow - is not coincidental either. It is very much connected both to Huntington's earlier prediction, as well as to the maneuvering of the Russian Federation to divide and conquer the EU.

For those who care about the future of democracy and the preserving of the European liberal values and way of living, it is important to take appropriate measures. There is a need for a better understanding of the potential of autocratic states, like Russia, to gain full control of the physical and social space of Europe. UCMC's recent study of European countries through the lens of the Russian TV contributes to the current knowledge of Russian media narratives and sheds light on the role which the autocratic regime of the Russian Kremlin plans to play vis-a-vis with Europe and its liberal values.

Ukraine Crisis Media Center was founded in 2014 with a purpose of countering the spread of Russian misinformation in and about Ukraine. As a major crisis communications hub during the investigation of the MH17 tragedy and over the past four years of information operations, we have monitored, refuted, debunked and strategized against a number of Russian influence campaigns. Being on the frontline of an informational war against Ukraine, we had a chance to analyze and experience a whole spectrum of Russian techniques and their development - from promoting the Russian World (Russkiy Mir) narrative to presenting myths as facts to the millions of people living in Russia.

To gain a better understanding of Russia's potential to continue to dominate and heavily influence the international media arena with the purpose of undermining democracies worldwide, we examined the messaging current running between the Kremlin and the Russian domestic audience. the very Russian people who during elections are endorsing the bold strides being taken by their leadership against democracy at home and abroad. We analyzed in-depth what the Russian leadership had to say about Europe and European countries to the Russian viewers of its top three TV channels. Our content analysis of the Russian narratives of Europe on TV over the span of the past three and a half years provides a unique perspective on the systemic framing techniques and the broader Russian strategy that underpins tactical propaganda and its messaging.

The study reveals that Russian narratives are structured in a way that is meant not to inform, but to challenge the reality of something that has happened. They are not to educate - they are there to distract and interpret, without giving the audience the chance to think for itself.

Understanding that the democracies and institutions of the West are based on liberal values and beliefs -Russian narratives undermine them. If this effort is successful and the Russian people will believe that liberal values are toxic, there will be no chance for liberal democracy to even flourish in Russia. The autocracy has a chance to win for good.

While the motto of RT, Russia's major information offensive against the West under the disguise of a free media, happens to be "question more", for the domestic audience the Kremlin focuses on "If we don't, then they will... us" framework. Russia is no longer promoting communist or Soviet ideology or any other particular positive perspective of its leadership to its people - instead, it is systematically destroying everything that the Russian people had a chance to believe or learn from in terms of the Western and liberal values, making it even more dangerous.

To succeed in convincing others, one has to start from within: studying of the "domestic" messaging is essential to gain an understanding of the psyche of a political system, one that is hostile to liberal democracy in the long term.

Kremlin's goal is to convince its domestic audience, first and foremost, that democracy as such has failed and that liberal values are toxic

and decadent. That freedom is not really a value, because freedom to protest, for example, leads to instability, while stability, in turn, can only be found in Russia through "consistent political leadership" - read, Putin's regime. According to the Kremlin, in a mode of "dividing and conquering" the continent, Europe is represented as decadent, and therefore the European states are said to be better off each on their own. The viewers are told that the world has become "Rusophobic" lately, but the reflection of why it has become so appears to be irrelevant to the Russian mainstream media. The analysis that perhaps it is because Russia is trespassing the borders of other sovereign countries in the heart of Europe, like Georgia or Ukraine, or helping dictators in the Middle East, as in Syria, is not shared with the Russian audience. There are no signs of any internal self-criticism or critical thinking, reflection, sense or causality in the domestic narratives. The narratives serve to satisfy Kremlin's mission to undermine the unity of Europe and democratic thinking. What they are promoting very clearly is the view that the European audience needs to question its democratic way of life, the professionalism of its police, the integrity of its politicians or courts, and that all of European way of life is flawed and Russians have the right and mission to "fix" it.



Our content analysis of the three and a half years of Russian TV coverage between 2014 and 2018 demonstrates that radical politicians like Le Pen in France do get positive mentions by the TV hosts while the non-populistic politicians and leaders in Europe are almost always under harsh, even brutal, often very personally targeted, criticism. An average European is described as decadent and is dehumanized to the extent that an average Russian feels compelled to "save" Europe again, as Russia "did in 1945." Based on the systemic threat, we recommend to not only thoroughly study the Russian narratives, but also to build a system of countermeasures to them. Among the multidisciplinary proposed solutions, there is further investigation of the financing of radical political parties in Europe, development of liberal Russian-language TV content online, deeper analysis of the Russian infiltration of the Western economies and information spaces, ceasing the treatment of Russian media as free media and many other actions. The bottom line is to preserve the liberal democracy as a way of living, there is a need to put on a seatbelt and prepare for a bumpy ride ahead. Before Russia fixes it all.

Non-governmental organization Ukraine Crisis Media Center (UCMC) has been working to address the issue of Russian misinformation since the beginning of the Russian invasion of Eastern Ukraine in 2014. Based on the extensive practical experience of revealing cases of deliberate misinformation by Russia against Ukraine, the EU, Eastern Partnership countries and the US, UCMC has learned that even when obvious fakes are exposed, it usually does not alter the overall judgement of the target audience.

That understanding led UCMC to study the methodology of the Russian state propaganda machine more in-depth, starting with the analysis of the portrayal of the EU and Eastern Partnership countries in the Russian media. UCMC's Hybrid Warfare Analytical Group (HWAG) has conducted a massive content analysis of all newscasts and political talk-shows on the three biggest Russian national TV channels, all of which are under Kremlin's control - Channel One, Russia 1, NTV - for the period of 3,5 years: July 1, 2014 - December 31, 2017. All mentions of European countries or the EU as an entity have been analyzed and categorized respectively.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Our conclusions reveal that Russian propaganda method is based on narratives, supported by a combination of news, lies, manipulation of facts and a number of "useful idiots" — experts who support and pretend to oppose the narrative as well as the teams of TV hosts, promoted by Kremlin. The narratives act as key structural elements of Russian disinformation campaigns - overarching, basic and emotional. They provide easy to comprehend frameworks and alleged motives of real events, which make the latter more meaningful and thus, digestible to an average Russian news viewer. Once established, the narratives prove to be very resistant

When the sources of narratives are confronted – as was in the recent case of the Novichok chemical use on the sovereign UK territory and an attack on the former Russian spy Sergey Skripal, they can always use the model of "deny, distract, destroy" and counter all accusations by making counter-accusations which are well received by the previously indoctrinated (in case of the Russian audience) or confused (in the case of the European) audience.

to any fact-checking.

In total, 22,711 negative mentions of European countries were discovered throughout the period of

investigation. The average ratio of negative to positive news about Europe is 85% to 15%. Europe is mentioned negatively on average 18 times a day on the researched channels. In other words, according to the Russian media, life in Europe is very difficult - a rhetoric that is constantly enforced through the countless passing of myths as facts. However, there are two countries which are depicted positively: Belarus and Switzerland.

To understand the pressure that is experienced by the Russian viewer in terms of the amount of information about Europe that the viewer is exposed to on a daily basis, Coca-Cola, on average, has "only" 6 ads per day on Russian TV.

Moreover, Russian misinformation is very focused and disciplined. 88% of all negative news can be categorized into six narratives. Once established, narratives are supported by fake news in small part, but mainly by the deliberately manipulated interpretation of real events. These narratives keep attention of the target audience in a desired framework and are more sustainable compared to just fake news, because even when countered by arguments, they do not fail.

They are the following in the descending order of share of voice:

- 1. "Horrors of Life" everyday life in Europe is unstable, dangerous and unfair.
- "Decaying Europe" Europe is not united and falls apart, as result of the erosion of moral values.
- 3. Protests there are never-ending protests in Europe, because its institutions are weak and unstable.
- 4. Terrorism Europe is unsafe, because it is under constant attack which it deserves.
- 5. Refugee Crisis Europe has provoked it and fails to manage it.
- 6. Sanctions Sanctions hurt EU much more than they hurt Russia, but the U.S. doesn't allow EU to remove sanctions.

In order to back up the above mentioned narratives, minor, insignificant problems of European countries are exaggerated out of proportion, while the coverage of relevant events - whether local or international - is manipulated. This allows Kremlin to draw comparisons between said "instability" of the West and the EU and the "stability" of Russia, which has to be cherished.

It is important to understand that the tremendous resources being employed by the Kremlin to pursue





these narratives create serious long-term threats for Europe in the following ways:

- Russian audience is being convinced not to accept European liberal values, neither today or tomorrow.
- Russian audience is being prepared for potential conflicts with the West and is trained to feel right and motivated to take over the "decadent, weak and divided" Europe.

 An average European is being dehumanized. They are depicted as strange, corrupt and unfair. It is assumed that Russians have ethical superiority over Europeans.

Although this misinformation is targeted at the Russian domestic audience, it is important for Europeans to be aware of the external nature of threats emerging from the efforts of the Russian media. Top Russian TV channels are deliberately depicting European (liberal) values as "toxic" and thus, convincing Russians that they have the right to be aggressive toward Europe, as means of "fixing" it. Therefore, the European way of life comes as a threat, and public opinion is being prepared for Russia to ensure its right to bring order in Europe. This study aims to provide the reader with appropriate facts and figures about the ways in which the Russian media controls and manipulates the beliefs of its viewers.



Vladimir Putin, the longest serving Russian leader since Stalin, said in an April 2005 state of the nation address to the country's top politicians and parliament, that "...the collapse of the Soviet Union was a major geopolitical disaster of the century."² 13 years later, on 1 March 2018, in the same state of the nation address, Putin devoted 45 minutes to saber-rattling of new super-weapons that would finally make the West heed the views of Russia³. The audience replied with standing ovations.

INTRODUCTION

In-between these two speeches Russia has created and significantly contributed to instability in many regions, including military intervention in Georgia and Ukraine, annexation of Crimea, meddling in the U.S. elections, cyber attacks against Ukraine, the Baltic States and other countries, usage of chemical weapons in UK and massive manipulation of public opinion in media and social networks across the globe. Most of the hostile activities were covert and have never been admitted by Kremlin despite the existence of mounds of evidence. Such nature of the warfare is now known as hybrid. Russia has incepted it and remains its proactive leading actor, which allows Russia to overplay significantly betterresourced western countries and effectively employ Russia's non-transparent and non-democratic structure as a winning factor in hybrid warfare. The pivotal part of the latter is misinformation and information operations. This research is studying the methods, instruments and messages utilised and conveyed by the Russian mass media in order to circulate misinformation about Europe among the Russian domestic audience.

There are many different models of strategies of informational interventions. We believe that one of the most descriptive models is the one suggested by M.C. Libicki⁴ comprising of two major strategies: "Castle" and "Market". "Castle" puts all efforts into not letting anything foreign in, while "Market" is fundamentally open to anything foreign and progresses by embracing and processing new information. It is easy to sort the key world states as "castle" or "market" on a rhetorical level through narratives of "Stability" vs. "Progress". That is to say, closed (stable) states assess winning as failure of opponents, while open (progressive) states assess wins as cooperation. Russia is an example of a "castle" society, in which the state prevails over the individual, stability is treasured more than progress and a win-win approach is not acceptable. If Russia does not win, it loses, and losing is not an option to the current leadership of Russia, nor to its people.

One also has to take into account that according to RAND research by Rand Waltzman⁵, overall, Russia has a very different view of Information Operations (IO) than the West. For example, a glossary of key information security terms produced by the Russian Military Academy of the General Staff contrasts the fundamental Western concepts of IO by explaining that, for Russians IO are a continuous activity, regardless of the state of relations with any government, while the Westerners see IO as a limited, tactical activity only appropriate during hostilities. In other words, Russia considers itself in a perpetual state of information warfare, while the West does not. This makes the West vulnerable to systemic influence from Russia, as we have seen in the elections of the US President, the French elections and the Brexit campaign.

In February 2017, Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu openly acknowledged the formation of an Information Army within the Russian military: "Established information operation forces are expected to be a far more effective tool than all we've previously used for counter-propaganda purposes." The current chief of the Russian General Staff, General Valery Gerasimov, concluded that war is now conducted by a roughly 4:1 ratio of nonmilitary to military measures. In the Russian view, these non-military measures of warfare include economic sanctions, disruption of diplomatic ties, and political and diplomatic pressure. Russians see information operations as a critical part of nonmilitary measures. They have adapted from well-established Soviet techniques of subversion and destabilization as means of staying relevant in the age of the Internet and social media. Statesponsored propaganda and disinformation have been in existence for as long as there have been states. The major difference in the 21st century is the ease, efficiency, and low cost of such efforts. Because audiences worldwide rely on the Internet and social media as primary sources of news and information, they have emerged as an ideal vector of information attack. R. Waltzman argues that Russian IO techniques, tactics and procedures are developing constantly and are very cheap compared to the costs of any kinetic weapon system which could potentially be a lot more effective.

The tactics of offensive disinformation campaigns can be broken down to the following stages:

- Identify major target groups by the most basic and rooted characteristics (nationality, age, sex, church, race, language, income): for example, in Ukraine among such target groups there are all Soviet, often Russianlanguage native migrants into Ukraine, especially with predominant place of living in the South and East of Ukraine, Russian Orthodox Church parishioners, LGBT community or foreigners living in Ukraine, who may be manipulated by Russia-backed provocations. Senior people and pensioners as a vulnerable category to economic conditions and poverty may be manipulated as well etc.
- Design maps of distribution channels and plan to ensure superiority there: an example being, the concept of the Russian World/ "Russkiy Mir" promoted since 2006 by PR companies and information campaigns for both internal and external Russian-speaking

audiences through mass media, social media, popular and scientific literature, such historical, political, economic journals and so on. Additionally, two massive international media channels "RT" and "Sputnik", as well as Ruptly, were launched.

- 3. Design and distribute overarching narratives that "explain" fundamental reasons of the conflict: for example, Russia and Ukraine are positioned in the minds of the audience as one nation separated by the West in an attempt to weaken Russia, or Russia is said to be attacked by the West because it fights for multipolar world order.
- 4. Design and distribute more specific local narratives: for example, the narrative defaming the leadership of the Ukrainian army which was said to betray the Ukrainian soldiers was used on Russian TV, calls to the military personnel and their families were made to not even try to fight against the Russian army, because it is much bigger.
- Support narratives with emotion, image/ picture and "proofs" or explanations doesn't matter if all are false or manipulated (when using deliberate falsehood make sure that information is outsourced).

- 6. Leverage local opinion leaders, also known as "useful idiots" among the local academia, think thanks, politicians, community leaders to advance the narratives and make them feel as their own.
- 7. Monitor, measure the result and adjust the messages

Negative news are spreading much faster and reaching a wider audience than positive news. Recent study⁶ by Reuters Institute and University of Oxford on measuring the "reach" of fake news concluded that despite clear differences in terms of website access, the level of Facebook interaction (defined as the total number of comments, shares, and reactions) generated by a small number of false news outlets matched or exceeded those produced by the most popular news brands. Fake news can be compared to junk food, as they are much easier (and cheaper) to take and go. They need to fit into a powerful narrative and fall onto a weak or unprepared ground in order to be impactful - and they have been successful in achieving just that.

Over the last four years, Ukraine has experienced the undermining effects of massive foreignbased disinformation attacks that were aimed at destabilizing and manipulating public opinion, at home and internationally, and weakening of the national dialogue within the Ukrainian society firsthand.

Since the Russian direct military intervention in Ukraine in 2014, Ukraine has been actively fighting against Russian disinformation, informational operations, various fakes, hostile narratives, as well as military, economic, diplomatic and political actions defined under the term of hybrid warfare. Although hybrid warfare against Ukraine (by the Soviet and then post-Soviet Russia) started decades before, in 2006 Russian President Vladimir Putin officially introduced a new ideological platform, now known as "Russkiy mir" (the Russian World or Pax Russica) which greatly differed in effectiveness and power from disinformation campaigns launched previously. It's greatest ambition was the recreation or re-establishment of the Russian Empire in accordance with the borders of the former USSR, hidden under the rhetoric of protecting Russian-speaking people, at home and abroad, who really are compatriots of "Russkiy mir". In April 2007 Putin said that the Russian language not only preserves an entire layer of truly global achievements, but is also the living space for the many millions of people in the Russian-speaking

world, a community that goes far beyond Russia itself. Although most of the world leaders back at the time reckoned that Putin implied harmless cultural diplomacy, the ensuing military aggression in Georgia in 2008 and in Ukraine in 2014 proved they underestimated the threat.

The attack on Ukraine's sovereignty in 2014 served as a wake up call for millions of Ukrainians and strengthened their resilience over the last four years. Ukrainians have also contributed greatly to the global efforts to defend the values of the free world - those of individual dignity and freedom, values the Ukrainian people died for during the Revolution of Dignity and during the war with Russia. It soon became clear that to influence Ukraine - just as every other country - the Kremlin was ready to use all, even the smallest dividing issues, like language issues, religion and history, as their main pretext for informational (and, subsequently, military) attacks. As formulated by a Soviet historian M. Pokrovskiy "History is politics targeted at the past".

Ukraine has been and remains the main "training field" for Russia to test its information warfare technologies. Yet, very few experts are raising concerns about the fact that the Kremlin's biggest "test laboratory" is its own country with 150-millionstrong population, and these experiments are a threat not only to Russians, but to other countries as well. It is obvious that the way in which the Russian state portrays Europeans has impact not only on the international and intercultural relations between Russia and other countries, but also on the Russians' readiness to support the policy of their leadership.



METHODOLOGY

The research is based on a quantitative content analysis interpreted by experts. The quantitative part of the research covers the period of July 1, 2014 – December 31, 2017. The content of all news sources and selected political talk-shows on top three Russian TV channels (see below) over those three and a half years has been converted into text format, which then was transformed into a database. Technical support by KWENDI.⁷ The TV channels that have been analyzed in the period between July 2014 and December 2017 are the top three Russian TV channels by the share of the audience and are considered to be the most precise demonstration of Kremlin's perspective of events both in Russia and abroad. The research did not include entertainment programs, regional channels or second league national channels, because their rhetoric about Europeans is far more emotional and harsh. The channels that have been analyzed are the following:

- Channel One / «Первый канал» News (Новости), Sunday Time (Воскресное время), Time (Время);
- NTV / "НТВ" Тоday (Сегодня), Majority (Большинство).
- Russia 1 / "Россия 1" News (Вести), News of the week (Вести недели), News on Saturday (Вести в субботу), Evening with Vladimir Solovyov (Вечер с Владимиром Соловьевым);

The database with the above mentioned content was first automatically sorted by the presence of the following keywords — names of countries and their peoples: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, UK, Montenegro, Norway, Serbia, Switzerland, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and European Union as a separate entity.

All pieces of news that contained aforementioned keywords in any linguistic form were analyzed by text structural application that sorted news into negative, positive and neutral mentions. The application program considered the context in which the keyword was used. In particular, but not limited to, it considered:

- Participation of an object in actions condemned by the society, such as bankruptcy, losses, a decrease in activity, various kinds of conflicts, failure to fulfill previous commitments and other negative events
- Negative assessments, sarcasm or irony in relation to the object in the journalist's tone of voice, as well as if the report contained negative feedback from the experts or partners of the object
- Decrease or elimination of the object's capabilities and assets

All negative mentions (i.e. news) were verified by experts and each one was coded by hand in order to add attributes, such as topic and subtopic. The report is drawing its conclusions based on these negative news only, unless otherwise indicated.

Throughout the process of our investigation, we assessed "negative" news with a distinct negative tone and expressive rhetoric about the object in question. When assessing the tone, we took into account the opinion of the author of the message and that of other commentators, with a focus on the author's opinion only.





On screen: "If we don't, then they will… us" Dmitry Kiselyov,TV host and head of state news agency. "Vesti Nedeli" program, Russia 1

THE AUDIENCE AND TV LANDSCAPE IN RUSSIA

To understand why the issue of the image of the European countries on the Russian TV is worth the attention of European countries, it is important to take into account the vulnerability of the Russian population to propagandistic content. According to different social surveys:⁸

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



9





What form of media is your main news source?

Do you trust the following media (% of «Yes»)

Consequently, Russia remains a very closed society with only a very limited number of Russians having a chance to experience a first-hand contact with the Western liberal democracies and form an independent judgment of it.

TV is by far the most influential media in Russia and primary source of news and opinion for the majority of its population.



The figures speak for themselves: 90% of Russians watch news programs on TV, while 57% consider the TV to be their main news source.¹⁰ Average daily time of watching TV in Russia is 4.2 hours.¹¹ As far as the Russian audience is concerned, majority of Russians trust their federal and regional TV channels (see graph above). The three channels we have focused our research on - Channel One, Russia 1 and NTV - share more than 40% of audience and broadcast the most popular news programs and political talk-shows.¹² Interestingly enough, the Russian Ministry of Defence TV Channel "Zvezda" is among the top ten TV channels in Russia with more than 3% audience share.





There is no surprise, that all three main TV channels, as almost all other media in Russia, are under the Kremlin's financial and political control. "Russia 1" is under the direct control of the Russian Government. The other two channels belong to Yuriy Kovalchuk, shareholder and chairman of the directors council of the Central Bank of the Russian Federation, an ally from Vladimir Putin's inner circle. This state of affairs, in combination with the unprecedented public trust toward the statecontrolled media, leads to an informational isolation of the society and results in the high loyalty to Kremlin's policy and inability to analyze its actions critically or think independently.



Vladimir Putin and Vladimir Soloviev (famous TV host)



KEY FINDINGS OF THE RESEARCH

The research revealed that during the analyzed period of 2014-2017, the Russian mainstream channels demonstrated 22,711 pieces of negative news about the European countries, excluding Ukraine. Europe is mentioned in a negative context on average 18 times daily. By comparison, such top of mind brand as Coca-Cola had "only" six advertisement videos a day on the same TV channels for the same period of time.

The ratio of negative to positive news about the European states is 85% to 15%, and while one could object that there is a worldwide tendency of TV news

generally focusing on negative stories, figures prove that in Russia's case, there is something more to the general focus on the negative sentiment. There are two countries that are discussed in a positive tone more often than negative: Belarus and Switzerland (Montenegro and Serbia are have 50/50 ratio of negative to positive news). According to Russian TV channels' agenda, only these two countries are the safest and most stable in Europe. The reason is rather obvious: Belarus is Russia's old political ally and is seen by Russia as virtually an extension of its territory, while Switzerland is neutral and, very likely, a home to banks where the Russian elite preserves its wealth. One can reasonably infer that Russian TV is easily controlling and allocating the volume of negativity per each state depending on the Kremlin's agenda.

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	Ireland	Spain	Romania	Cyprus	Portugal	Bulgaria	France	Belgium	Georgia	Denmark	Netherlands	Moldova	Croatia	Sweden	Finland	Germany	Luxembourg	Armenia	N	Italy	Poland	Estonia	B	Hungary	Austria	Greece	Lithuania	Latvia	Slovenia	Czech Republic	Norway	Slovakia	Azerbaijan	Serbia	Montenegro	Switzerland	Belarus

Negative Positive

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Negative coverage of Europe appears to concentrate around countries with the biggest population. Below are the top ten countries by negative coverage. EU - though not a country - is included in this report in the capacity of a country unit.

Those who are familiar with the Russian media discourse will not be surprised to see the UK in the top three of countries with negative mentions since it has always been portrayed as a natural enemy to Russia. However, it might be confusing for an unprepared reader to see France and Germany on the list. In the external communications targeted for European audience, various Russian officials emphasize on the special connection Russia has with France and Germany in culture, economy and history. Millions of dollars are spent by the Kremlin to promote Russian culture and history in the leading cultural institutions of France and Germany, which unlike their Russian counterparts, are open to embrace the soft power of the adversary. Nevertheless, the Kremlin itself puts a systematic effort to form the most negative image of France and Germany among the Russian audience.



Title on photo: A death trap



DESCRIPTION OF SIX NARRATIVES

The Hybrid Warfare Analytical Group (HWAG) has previously identified that 88% of all negative news may be categorized into six main narratives. These narratives shape an average Russian's perspective about what Europe and European life look like.



1. "Horrors of Life".

The most widespread narrative of the Russian news is about daily life in Europe. This narrative tries to persuade Russian citizens that life in the European countries is unstable, insecure and full of dangers, thus an average European's safety is constantly under threat. The majority of such news items are stories about natural and industrial disasters, accidents, and crimes. The peculiarity of this narrative is that it is usually based on insignificant events, which are shown as something large-scale, or even as a tendency. An instance of such narrative may be news about a family fight in a small provincial town of Italy, or closure of roads because of snowstorms in a number of European states, even if these roads have no strategic importance. There might be a lot of similar events in Russia as well, but they are not mentioned. Below is an example of how the tragic fire at Kemerovo, which killed 60+ people, was covered in the Russian media. While





BBC Breaking News 2 @B... · 24 ~ A shopping centre blaze in the Russian city of Kemerovo kills at least 37, with dozens missing, including children



Russia shopping mall blaze kills dozens

bbc.co.uk



The Associated Press 2 · 14 The death toll in a shopping center fire in a Siberian city has risen to 37 people and 69 others are missing.



37 dead, 69 missing in Russian shopping center fire apnews.com



NBC News @ @NBCNews · 14 Massive fire kills 37 at Siberian mall; dozens more still missing nbcnews.to/2GqFQg4





Вести.Ru @ @vesti_news · 1ч Россия призвала ОЗХО происпектировать закрытый британский исследовательский центр vesti.ru/t?2999288

Translation: "Lavrov played football to celebrate his birthday" Photo by @Alexey_Kovalev ¹³ all of the leading international media were covering Kemerovo, the Russian news resource focused its coverage on the case of the minister of foreign affairs Lavrov celebrating his birthday.

The aforementioned techniques are employed in order to spread the belief that Europe is very unstable, full of disasters, and dangerous to live in. In the end, that creates a story of a hard, fragile and dangerous life in Europe on a daily basis, because Europe «deserves it». Even reports of "endless" natural disasters in Europe prompt Russian viewers to assume that Mother Nature does not like Europe: according to a social survey by Levada¹⁴ Center (January 2016), 70% of Russians avoid traveling abroad for security reasons.

The local authorities in Europe are usually depicted as weak and unable to provide adequate response to the challenges or as the ones who use double standards in favor of the rich & powerful. The same refers to the police or the armed forces of the European countries: if they are mentioned, they are usually shown by Russian TV as weak and inefficient. This narrative mentions predominantly France (16%), Italy (13%), Germany (10%), United Kingdom (9%), and Spain (7%). "This morning in Naples, Italy. A simple quarrel over a clothes dryer led to a tragedy. A 48-year-old man, who is a medic, took his gun when arguing with his brother's wife as to where the washed clothes should dry. He killed her first, then opened fire from the balcony and shot his brother, a neighbour and a policeman who tried to intervene." — Channel One, 16 May 2015 and same story on NTV channel. The fact that such minor, local event gains attention in the prime time news of two major Russian TV channels is peculiar in itself. Normally, TV programs are highly competitive but the Russian TV is controlled, and therefore occupied by the same pre-selected by Kremlin news items, which are repeatedly broadcasted on all channels.

2. "Decaying Europe".

We consciously chose this wording as a title for the narrative, because it is very widespread in the Russian media. The phrase itself emerged during the Soviet era. This narrative is built mainly on affirmations about the lack of unity and the total decline of moral values in European countries, using expressions such as "Europe is going to break apart", "the EU is an artificial formation", and "European values do not exist". "All the talks about Europe in different gears will immediately turn out to be what they really are — a vain attempt to hide the total incapability of the United Europe to preserve itself ." — Channel One, 19 March 2017

Europeans are depicted as individuals with weak moral values: hypocrisy among political elites, neo-Nazism, pedophilia, and incest are shown as if they were common, ordinary cases. It is important to note, that the Russian media classify LGBT rights and gender equality advocates among the same "problematic" Europeans as those who practice zoophilia, pedophilia and incest. Russians, on the contrary, are positioned vis-a-vis with the decadent Europeans as "bearers of spirituality and real values" and those who have to fight for these values, sometimes aggressively, because the virus of the "Decaying Europe" can erode and ruin Russia as well.

For example, one of the widespread myths is the narrative about "removal of Russian children from their parents in Scandinavian countries"¹⁵. There are dozens of examples of the coverage telling how the child protection authorities seize children from the Russian families living in these countries, "without any investigations and trial". These and similar invented stories (creation of the Party of

Pedophiles in the Netherlands, legalization of incest in Sweden) evoke a very strong emotional reaction, and, for this reason, spread very quickly among the Russian audience.

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

Russia actively uses this narrative when talking about Ukraine and Europe. The arguments that

the Ukrainian far-right parties had 1.85% in the parliamentary elections and have no places in the current parliament disappear in the flow of the Russian propaganda. In Europe, on the other hand, not many notice that the same narrative is used against their own countries. "It appears that soon, Europe will start behaving in the same way as if we were in 1938 and there was 'Crystal Night' in Hitler's Germany", says the host of "Vesti" program on one of the mainstream Russian state TV channels. Another citation of this kind comes from Vladimir Solovyov, "Evening with Vladimir Solovyov" program of 1 June 2017: "The historical triumph of Europe ended by a union under the Nazi flag, and after this, it got a bash in the face by the Russian boot."

More than 70% of this narrative is built around the message that Europe falls apart and is full of internal conflicts in all spheres: policy, economy, justice, moral values. The idea of a united Europe based on shared values is depicted as unrealistic (Catalonia and Brexit are used as proof). In the Russian media, there are strong and important European countries that infringe upon other weak countries. "Decaying Europe" narrative exhibited the most significant dynamics of growth during July-December 2017, mainly due to a number of news from the Catalonia crisis.

3. Protests.

According to the Russian TV, there are strikes and protests every day in the European countries: yard-keepers, health workers, farmers, stewards, staff of the Eiffel Tower, etc. demonstrate their disagreement with government policy. Inefficient and weak management leads to discontent; voices of the people are not heard, and so they have to go to the streets to defend their rights. According to the Russian TV, there are plenty of chronic flaws in economy, policy and security, which leave common Europeans no choice but to protest.

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

It is obvious that protests are not something extraordinary in a democratic country. They are one of the efficient tools in a dialogue with the authorities and are a characteristic of free speech - something that is at the core of all democracies. In Russia, in contrast, protests are portrayed as useless and as sign of weakness. Usually after the



The narrative of "Protests in Europe" never disappear from top Russian TV channels

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protests in Russia dozens to hundreds of protesters are taken into custody.

4. Terrorism is the fourth of the top narratives used by the Russian TV.

All media worldwide cover terrorist attacks, but the Russian media do it in a particular way, trying to create the impression that Europe is under a never-ending attack. Sometimes even crimes that had no terrorist motives are shown as terrorist attacks. The story is almost always accompanied by comments about the weakness of the police and security services. The tragedies are often depicted as a "pay-off", a "punishment" of the European countries for inadequate policies, their inability to cope with migration crisis, and unwillingness to cooperate with Russia on different matters.

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

5. Refugee crisis is yet another of the top narratives used by the Russian media.

The refugee crisis is interpreted as "a result of Europe's fault", because Europe supported the U.S. when the latter became involved in the war in Syria. The overall picture demonstrated to the Russian audience is rather doom-and-gloom: thousands of hungry and dangerous immigrants are filling European towns day by day, pushing out the local people, committing crimes and terrorist attacks.

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

This narrative is mainly associated with Germany and the EU. Additionally, the Russian media blame Europe for its "hypocrisy": that it inspired Syrian people to immigrate, but later realized that refugees were a burden. According to the Russian media, the way refugees have been handled in the EU had created an unprecedented crisis; refugees are kept in horrible, inhumane conditions in the EU countries. "At a time when the European Union struggles to remain a space of freedom, security, and justice, dozens of people are settling down in the barracks where the Nazis kept the Jews." Russia 1, 24 September 2015.

6. Sanctions imposed on Russia.

The key message of this narrative is that sanctions imposed against Russia together with the Russian counter-sanctions hurt the EU so much, that more and more countries wish to remove them to give themselves a chance to survive.

This narrative also puts blame on the U.S., specifying that it doesn't allow EU to lift sanctions against Russia. It is stated as a common knowledge that all EU is inferior, as it is under the direct control of the U.S.

«Even Angela Merkel recently confessed that it was hard for Germany to prolong the sanctions. The EU is facing a serious conflict of interest. But opponents were convinced to vote in solidarity with partners from the United States." Russia 1, 21 July 2015.

The "Sanctions" narrative is used to highlight the strength of Russia. Often it is supported by very

IMAGE OF EUROPEAN COUNTRIES ON RUSSIAN TV



disputable examples from history, all depicting Europe as a cruel power that for centuries tried to seize Russia, but always failed. Russians are also described as people who do not need all that European welfare, because they have a higher moral compass that does not depend on economic factors. World War Two is often used as an example of Russia's superiority despite the technological advancement of Europe.

"Europe made an estimate of the economic damage from their own sanctions imposed on Russia. Their restrictions together with retaliatory actions of Moscow cost the EU more than 17 billion euros." NTV, 01 June 2017; similar news on Channel One, 01 June 2017 Dynamics of the key six narratives by half-year periods over the last three and a half years show that quantity of negative news has increased by 87% from July 2014 to December 2017. There is a stable big share of the "Horrors of Life" narrative to support the perception of "dangerous" and "unstable" life in Europe. Together with "Protests", it creates an image of Europe as a very troubled and distracted place. Needless to say, through the lens of such context, Russia's lack of democracy, if questioned by anybody, is sold to the domestic audience, as small, inevitable and reasonable compensation for a stable and secure life.

Below are the top five countries by each narrative. France is depicted as incapable to deal with terrorism, protests and, generally, as a dangerous place to live, while Germany and EU are mainly associated with the "Refugee crisis» and «Sanctions».



IMAGE OF EUROPEAN COUNTRIES ON RUSSIAN TV







Although there are six main narratives about Europe, there are also more tailor-made narratives targeting particular countries. They are featured depending on timing and context. For example: "Baltic countries are a training field for NATO", "Britain is the US's puppet", and Denmark is "the center of the European zoo-sex tourism" and many more.



CONCLUSIONS

Russian propaganda method is based on narratives that are key structural elements of their disinformation campaigns. These narratives are overarching, basic and emotional. They interpret real events to form public opinion according to Kremlin's agenda. News and talk-shows on TV are the most powerful channel of forming public opinion in Russia. The TV channels we analyzed have the broadest coverage of the Russian audience and are under full control of Kremlin. These three main Russian TV channels exploit tremendous resources within these narratives to:

- Convince the Russian population not to share European liberal values, neither today or tomorrow;
- 2. Prepare the Russian population for potential conflicts with the West and feel right and motivated to take over the weak, divided and decadent Europe;
- 3. Increase the awareness that if Russia isn't aggressive, Europe will impose its "toxic" values on Russia.

The Russian media have changed the very paradigm of news. A distinct feature of the Russian news is that a viewer virtually never receives a true fact about an event, but rather an interpretation and an already formed opinion. The head of the Russian news agency Mr. Kiselyov openly declares that "The time for neutral journalism has gone". He and his Russian colleagues state that all western media are doing the same and one can never get impartial facts. Thus, it is normal and justified, they say, that the Russian TV channels offer a ready opinion on different issues with ready-made assessments and comments. The host of a Russian TV channel usually talks to his or her audience as a mentor.

The opposing point of view on the Russian talk shows is usually imitated or represented nominally. This function is often performed by the same people who are regularly humiliated, ridiculed, and sometimes even physically assaulted in the studio. The task of these people is to showcase the other side as stupid, unfair, ridiculous. In such context, the Russian mainstream narratives look more convincing, consistent and meaningful.

International events in the Russian news programs have an abnormally significant share. Events in Europe, the U.S. and Ukraine may occupy up to 90% of the entire program in some TV releases. This draws public attention from the internal issues in Russia and mobilizes the Russian population against the West, as an enemy.

Formally independent channels, which are supposed to compete for the content, have the

same news agenda. They regularly present news on different minor events in a similar wording and with the same tonality. Therefore, there is little doubt in the supervision from the top.

Russian news programs are aired with the purpose of dehumanizing an average European. The European way of life is depicted as a threat and the public is convinced that Russia has the right to "bring order" in Europe. The history of the 20th century has multiple examples when dehumanization of one nation by another nation had horrible consequences. Today, it is successfully being used by Russia against Ukraine.

In conclusion, there is an urgent need for the international community to understand the potential of the Russian media to act as the most powerful tool in Russia's current efforts to influence the politics, economy and societies of the West. This report serves as further evidence, reason and a call for appropriate measures to be taken in order to save European values and democracies from outside influence [of Russia].

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RECOMMENDATIONS

The content and tone being used to describe the European community on Russia's top TV channels alone is enough for a strong call for a number of potential actions to be taken in order to counter Russian propaganda. It is important to note that the reach of Russian TV is not limited to the audience living in the Russian Federation, but effectively influences every Russian-language household across the globe - be it in the United Kingdom, the USA, France and Germany or the Baltic states. Should Russia continue to enforce and encourage hostility towards European countries, against the liberal values and the free and democratic way of living - on a country-to-country level, as well as in regards to the EU, NATO and other organizations, the following responses will be needed:

- Raising the awareness of policy makers, national governments and international institutions about the objects and goals of disinformation campaigns in the Russian domestic media, in particular:
 - Identifying who is depicted as the potential enemy / the ally
 - Studying of the way different European countries are portrayed in the media and analyze the differences of those portrayals

- Learning lessons from the Balkans, Georgia, Ukraine, Moldova, Baltic states
- Paying attention to the dehumanization of Western (liberal) values, including democracy, freedom of expression and the rule of law.
- 2. Adjust bilateral policy accordingly energy, financing, soft power influence. Currently, the EU remains open and vulnerable to the influence of the Russian soft and energy power "diplomacy", without any reciprocity or ability to influence the Russian domestic audience in advance. While key European cultural institutions continue to accept donations and programs glorifying the Russian cultural legacy, European organizations in Russia are labeled as foreign agents and their activities, exchange programs, abilities to influence and educate the Russian population are very limited.
- 3. Compare and assess the differences between the Kremlin's portrayal of the West for its domestic audience according to this study visa-vis the Russian official diplomatic messages communicated to the West. Officially, Russia is "for peace in the whole world", but in the meantime it is preparing its population to

"teach them all a lesson and conquer them all". Consider the implications of such doublestandards for international affairs and the sustainable future of democracy and security in different regions around the world.

- 4. Develop national and EU policies that would explicitly name Russia's manipulations as a threat to bilateral long-term potential understanding with Western democracies, and make any improvement in relations conditional on Russia's bringing its internal communications in accordance with the image of a civilized nation it is trying to project in the international relations domain.
- 5. Formulate / update the definition of misinformation (propaganda) and hostile language. Make it adequate to the challenges of the ever more creative Kremlin's efforts.
- 6. The establishment of more effective mechanisms to analyze and counter Russian information influence in European countries. Formats such as EAS East STRATCOM Task Force exposing disinformation must be strengthened, not dismantled.¹³
- The Russian media must be labeled for what they are at the moment — the official mouthpieces and press offices of Kremlin.

They should not enjoy the preferences of the free media in the West, since they are not. The budgeting of RT, Sputnik and Ruptly should be scrutinized and their operations banned.

- Citizens of European countries should be informed and educated about the manipulations of information by Russian TV channels. It is only fair for them to know and understand what the Russian TV host is saying about them to the Russian-speaking audience. The resilience of the European and European countries' information markets should be strengthened. Russian propaganda should be highlighted and blocked.
- Every European country should adopt its own version of the Magnitsky Act. Profits from deals with Russia have cost lives already.
- 10. The EU needs to find way into the hearts and minds of the Russian-speaking audience. Whether through the creation of a TV channel in Russian language promoting liberal values or targeted social media campaigns.
- 11. Ensure the continuous analysis of the "resonance of the Russian narratives within the local information spaces of the European states and course-correct the strategy accordingly."¹⁷



ABOUT THE AUTHORS

This research was initiated by Ukraine Crisis Media Center (UCMC) and financed in part by the Estonian Center of Eastern partnership. It was conducted by Hybrid Warfare Analytical Group unit of UCMC. UCMC has become one of the first civil society organizations in the post-Revolutionof-Dignity Ukraine that started identifying and drawing public attention to information distortions, misrepresentations against Ukraine revealing the cases of deliberate misinformation that were produced and disseminated both nationally and abroad by the Russian Federation. For the last four years, UCMC served as an independent media and communications platform for the journalists, public activists, key opinion leaders, civil servants and volunteers, as well as initiated and in cooperation with a number of state agencies in Ukraine organized a number of resilience building campaigns.



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UCMC operates through a number of teams and taskforces, including the press center, international and national outreach, hybrid warfare and security analytical group and others. UCMC is a nongovernmental and a non-profitable organization, which is not linked to any political party. It maintains an independent editorial policy on the topics of research or analysis its units work on or the experts it promotes via press briefings, seminars, conferences or roundtables, etc. UCMC develops its own content and provides a platform for analysis and communications of its partner organizations benefiting both the experts and the wider public. Its events provide a platform for dialogue amongst politicians, experts, journalists, businesspeople and students.



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