

The Black Sea Trust for Regional Cooperation
and Ukraine Crisis Media Center Report
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HOW RUSSIAN MEDIA FOMENTS HOSTILITY TOWARD THE WEST

HOW **RUSSIAN** **MEDIA** FOMENTS HOSTILITY TOWARD THE WEST

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The ruling elite of the Russian Federation and other key figures in politics and business were mostly born and shaped during Soviet times and thus have a tendency to agree with Vladimir Putin's statement: «The collapse of the Soviet Union was the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century.» Despite the downfall of the USSR, a Soviet tradition of looking for internal and external enemies lingers on. Modern Russia imposes necessary worldview upon its citizens through media the same way the USSR did. The image of an enemy is a key aspect of totalitarian consciousness, inspired by the Soviet ideology. It entails other elements like a relativistic morality that justifies any crimes of the insiders against the outsiders and hatred towards the latter, restrictions of personal rights and freedoms, justifies economic mobilization, etc. It received a fresh impetus in 2014 after the Ukrainian Revolution of Dignity, which Russian declared was a US-inspired coup. Kremlin's approach has a solid demographic reason as 59% of the current Russian population with the right to vote was already 16 years old or older when the USSR collapsed (1). To a significant extent the worldview of this demographic and their attitude towards media were formed through the ideology of the USSR.

This research is studying the methods, instruments and messages utilized and conveyed by Russian mass media in order to produce Threat Narratives about the West for Russian domestic audience. We believe that Russian domestic audience is of greatest importance to Kremlin, thus it is crucial to understand how Moscow works to seize and hold the attention of its subjects.

The research is based on quantitative content analysis with the analytical part written by the experts in the field of Russian propaganda. The quantitative part of the research covers the period of July 1, 2014 – December 31, 2017. The raw data consisted of all news broadcasts and selected political talk-shows on the top three Russian TV channels, and news articles on 10 popular websites. This data has been converted into text format, which was then transformed into a database. Our conclusions are based on roughly 574,000 news pieces.

Federal television is, by far, the most frequently used news source for Russians. At the same time foreign media is the least frequently used source. The latter is not surprising, if one considers that only 5% (2) of Russians speak English. The top three channels (Channel One, Russia 1, NTV) have

a total weekly reach of 76% of all Russians older than 18 (3). Therefore, these three channels are at the core of our research.

After analyzing of all researched TV news and talk-shows we can conclude that Threat Narratives are the main tool of Kremlin propaganda. The core worldview, imposed by the Russian media, is fairly simple – Russia is stable and peaceful, while the West is unstable and aggressive. There is, however, a differentiation in describing the degree of instability of the western powers. Thus, the United States are depicted as the only equal foe of Russia (in relation to geopolitical strength), so they are pictured as dangerous and insidious. Europeans are depicted as immoral, unstable, weaker than Russians, but also manipulated by the USA (or “anglo-saxons” as Russian media put it) to hate Russia. Hence, the threat coming from Europe is described more in terms of being “toxic” and not existential. The United States are portrayed as the Enemy Number One, showing a significant increase in negative mentions starting from 2014. The two other enemies created by Kremlin-controlled media are Ukraine and the aforementioned countries of the European Union.

Such worldview, which we would call Threat Narratives throughout this paper, was not a novel creation, but a deeply rooted phenomenon, based on Russian imperial history. It is based on the narrative of repetitive invasions of Russia. According to its primary message external enemies cause the greatest damage to Russia, but they are always defeated in the end due to the heroic efforts of Russian people, inspired by their unique spiritual heritage.

We can confirm that media coverage does not correlate with real events, especially the news pieces on TV. Putin made a stake on military narratives to serve as a tool to mobilize his electorate. As for the online news, they tend to generally duplicate TV trends, but are less controlled and thus can be more objective.

The biggest challenge from our perspective is that Russians use Western values, such as free speech, to attack the West. It seems fair to say that Moscow-owned TV stations cannot be considered independent media and are an instrument of hybrid warfare.

**“To search for the enemies – is the way of a
totalitarian power”**

Svetlana Alexievich,

Belarusian writer and Nobel Literature Prize winner (4)

INTRODUCTION

In 2009, Lt Col Daniel T. Lasica of the United States Air Force wrote in his monograph for School of Advanced Military Studies that: “While the nature of war does not change, the conduct and methods available to wage and win wars does. This appears to be the case with respect to hybrid war, an evolving type of war that the United States may soon face. The definition of hybrid war is the merging of different methods and theories of war and warfare at different levels of war, in different realms and domains, especially the cognitive and moral domains, by a blend of actors, arranged in time and space to achieve objectives at all levels of war. Hybrid war poses a novel threat to the United States for many reasons, including undue U.S. attention on irregular warfare as the «war of the future,» as well as hybrid war’s blending of modes at different levels of war using different theories of war and warfare.”(5)

This forecast appeared to be incredibly acute, except that the author's focus was not Russia, but Iran, which was an initiator of the hybrid war in his scenario. Now, in 2018, it is widely known that Russia has embraced the concept of global hybrid warfare and remains its leading actor, which allows it to outperform Western countries with significantly better resources and effectively employ Russia's non-transparent and non-democratic structure as a winning factor in hybrid warfare. As observed by Admiral Stavridis (16th Supreme Allied Commander at NATO): "It is the dictators, from Moscow to Damascus, who have been more agile and effective in using these tools, spying on opponents at home and abroad and deploying propaganda in devious new ways. Russia has invested heavily in undermining objective reality by relentlessly sowing doubts online about basic facts." (6)

Russia has created and significantly contributed to instability in many regions, including military intervention in Georgia and annexation of Crimea, alleged meddling in the U.S. elections, cyber-attacks against Baltic States, Ukraine and other countries, usage of chemical weapons in the 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 extensive evidence.

Russian General Gerasimov, Chief of General Staff, proclaimed in his February 2013 report that "In the 21st century there is a trend for erasing differences between the states of war and peace. Wars are no longer declared... Indirect and asymmetric methods of waging hybrid wars allow de facto depriving the opposing side of sovereignty without seizing the state's territory...Their [methods] are about achieving political aims with a minimum impact of the army on the enemy. Mostly,[this is done] by undermining the military and economic potential, producing informational and psychological pressure, actively supporting domestic opposition. Falsifying the events, limiting the work of mass media became one of the most effective asymmetric methods of waging wars." (7)

The pivotal part of the hybrid warfare is misinformation or any kind of information manipulations. This research is studying the methods, instruments and messages utilized and conveyed by the Russian mass media in order to illustrate the Threat Narratives about the West for the Russian domestic audience. We believe that domestic audience is of the greatest

importance to Kremlin, thus it is crucial to understand how Moscow works to seize and hold the attention of its subjects.

To gain a better understanding of Russia's potential to continue to dominate and heavily influence the international media sector with the purpose of undermining democracies worldwide, we examined the current information exchange between Kremlin and domestic Russian audience. We analyzed in-depth what Russian leadership had to say about the western countries to the Russian audience on its top TV channels and top web sites. Our content analysis of Russian Threat Narratives encompasses three and a half years and 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 certain way, which is meant not to inform, but to challenge the reality of something that has happened. The reports, news and TV-programs are composed specifically to distract and interpret objective reality without giving the audience a chance to think for itself.

HOW **RUSSIAN** **MEDIA** FOMENTS HOSTILITY TOWARD THE WEST

On screen: The Incinerator



METHODOLOGY

The research is based on quantitative content analysis with the analytical part written by the experts in the field of Russian propaganda. The quantitative part of the research covers the period of July 1, 2014 – December 31, 2017. The raw data consisted of all news broadcasts, selected political talk-shows on the top three Russian TV channels and news articles on 10 popular websites. This data has been converted into text format and then transformed into a database. Technical support was provided by Kwendi Group (<http://www.kwendi.net/en/>).

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The TV channels that were analyzed within the period of July 2014 to December 2017 are the top three Russian TV channels (by audience share) and as such, provide the most precise demonstration of Kremlin's official perspective of events both in Russia and abroad. The scope of the research does not include entertainment programs, regional channels or secondary national channels. The channels and the TV-programs that were analyzed are the following:

1. Channel One / «Первый канал»: News (Новости), Sunday Time (Воскресное время), Time (Время);
2. NTV / “НТВ”: Today (Сегодня), The Majority (Большинство).
3. Russia 1 / “Россия 1”: News (Вести), Weekly News (Вести недели), Saturday News (Вести в субботу), Evening with Vladimir Solovyov (Вечер с Владимиром Соловьевым);

The web sites that were analyzed are the following:

www.ria.ru
www.lenta.ru
www.rbc.ru
www.gazeta.ru
www.vesti.ru
www.kp.ru
www.life.ru
www.rg.ru
www.tass.ru
www.kommersant.ru

The database with the above-mentioned content was first automatically sorted by the geographical keywords — country names and related demonyms: European Union, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Austria, Belarus, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Moldova, Montenegro, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, UK, Ukraine and USA. All news pieces were converted into text, which then was automatically filtered by keyword mentions related to the researched countries. The filtered

data was categorized by automated algorithm for negative/neutral/positive tones. Only news pieces with a negative tone were chosen for analysis.

All of the data with negative tonality on TV was reviewed by experts and each was coded by hand in order to add such attributes as topic and subtopic. Unless otherwise indicated the report draws its conclusions based on these negative news only. There are two main measurement levels in the research: news and mentions. News or news piece are defined as one TV video or online article, which contains at least one negative reference to any of the analyzed countries. In turn, mention is an appearance of any of the analyzed countries in the news. In order for the mention of a country to be counted as valid it would have to appear at least twice in analyzed text. One news piece may contain mentions of one or more countries.

Additionally, the following filtering and counting methods were applied:

Semantic filter: filtering of the articles by special query language to collect the news, which contain certain words and phrases. Query language allows to setting all necessary grammatical forms of the

analyzed words and count them together. For example, one can unify these forms of the Russian word “война” (war)

Война (war) — noun

Военный (military), Воюющий (belligerent) —
adjective

Воевать (to fight a war) — verb

Stemming – another instrument used for semantic analysis. Stemming is an automatic counting method to establish the quantity of researched words contained in articles regardless of their grammatical forms.

Throughout the process of our research we assessed as “negative” any news with a distinct negative tone and/or negative expressive rhetoric about the subject in question. When assessing the tone, we considered the opinion of the author of the message and that of other commentators.

Our full monitoring database (TV & Internet) has around 270,000 items identified as negative news, i.e., items which fit the criteria described in the Methodology section, while total amount of times the selected countries were mentioned in these items is roughly 574,000.

MEDIA LANDSCAPE OF RUSSIA

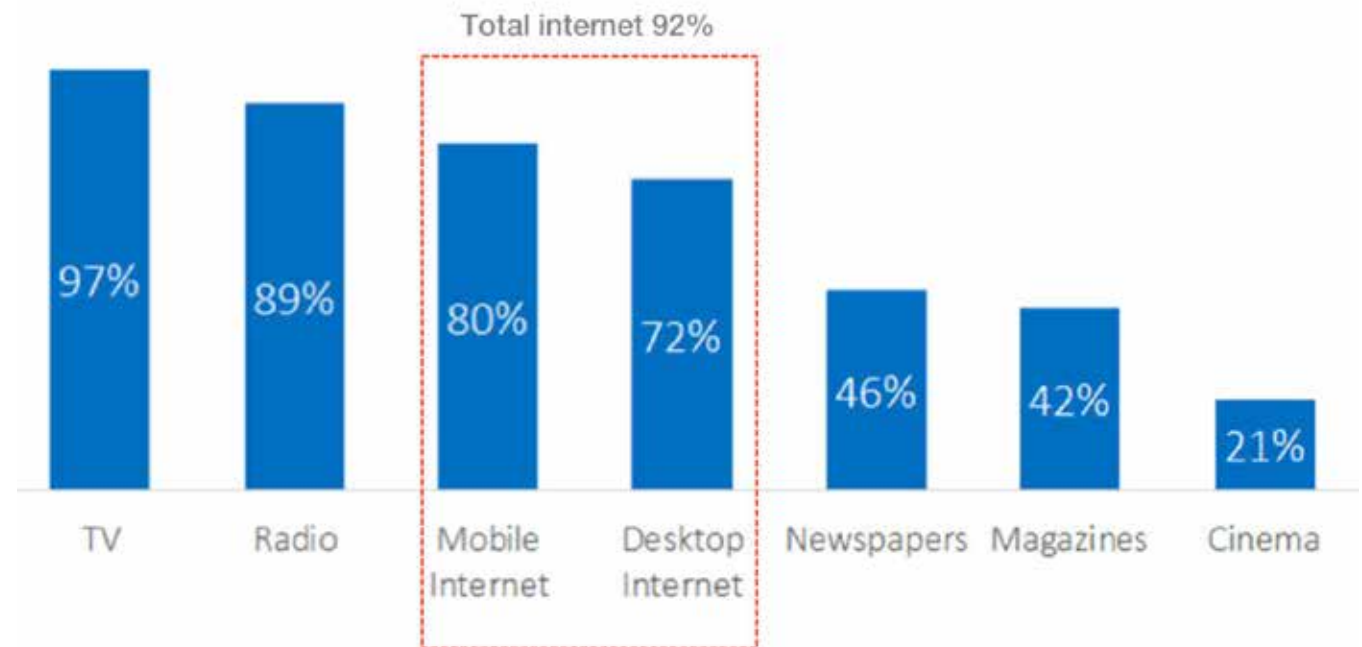
Traditionally, since the Soviet time, media and television in particular have held a significant place in the lives of ordinary Russian citizens. For many of them, especially those of low social status and lacking higher education, life presented via TV had, in a way, replaced their own. According to a recent survey «The Pursuit of Leisure», conducted by the Russian Levada Center, watching TV is the main source of entertainment for Russians, with 34% of respondents choosing this kind of pastime from a proposed list (8). Moreover, “watching TV” surpassed such activities as «having a good meal» (24%), «spending time with children» (24%), «earning good money» (26%), «sex» (12%).

Chart #1

TV has the highest penetration in Russia among all media. See Chart #1.

An average Russian citizen over the age of 18 watches TV 4,5 hours per day. In comparison, people specifically within the 18-54 age bracket spend less than 2 hours online per day. Respectively, this index would be even lower for the younger audience.

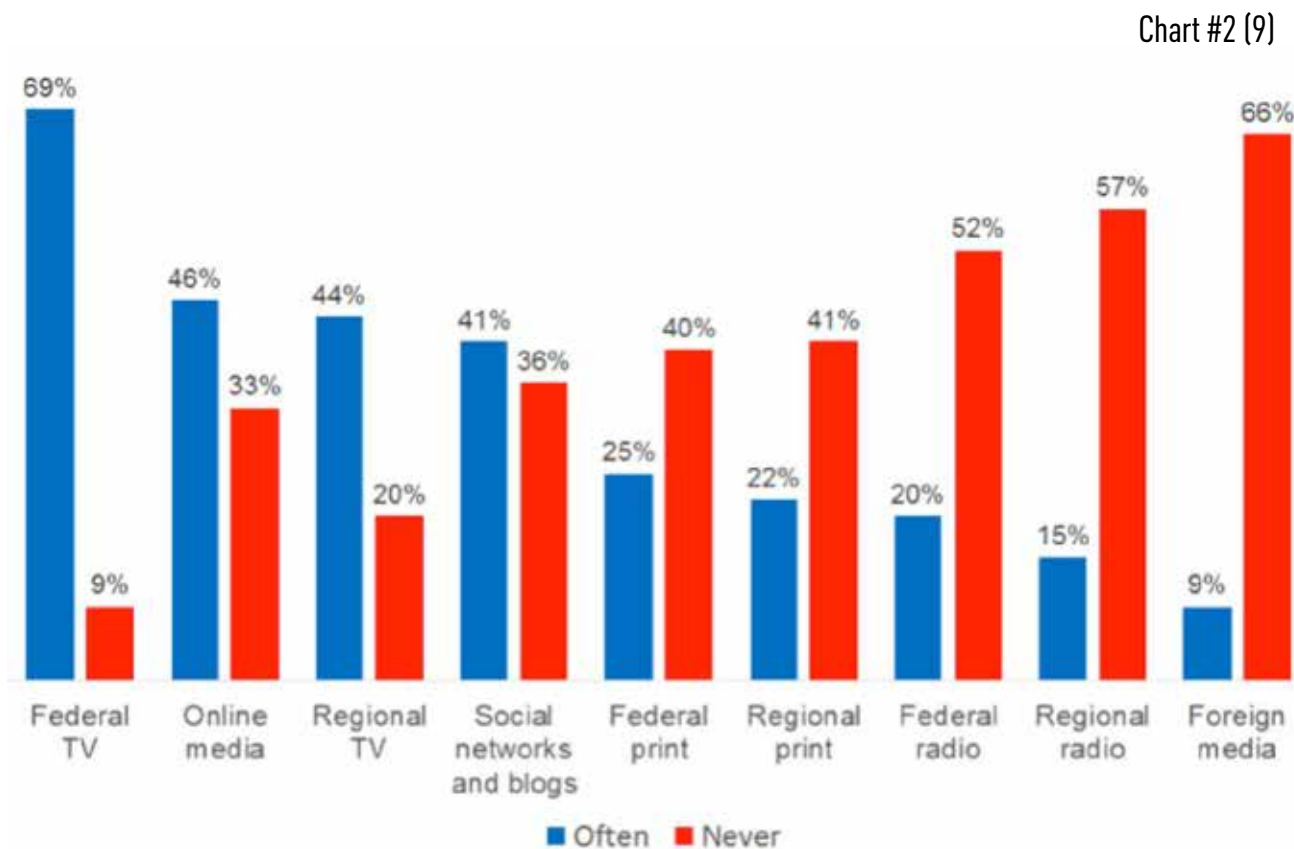
Chart #1. TV index Russia. Total weekly reach: Channel One, Russia 1, NTV." Mediascope database. 2017 (3)



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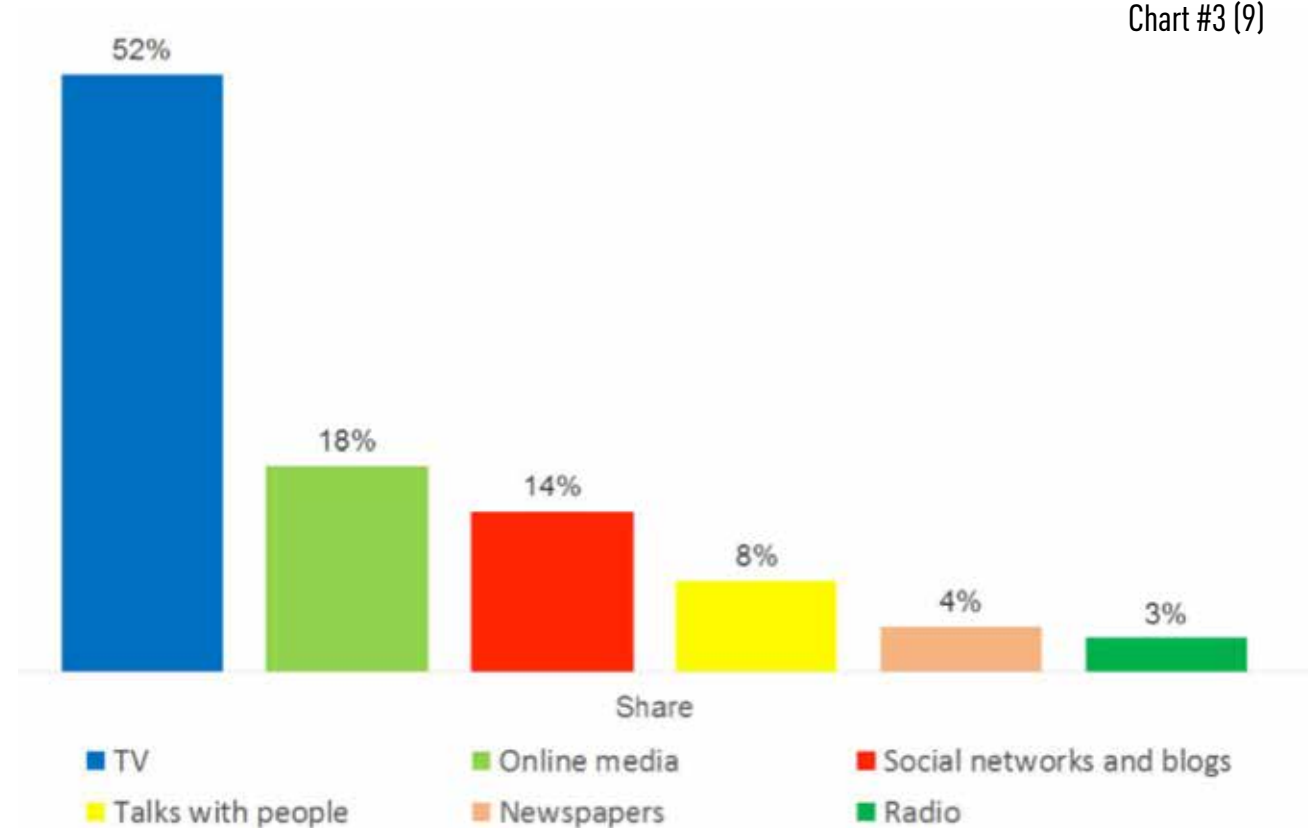
Federal television is, by far, the most frequently used news source by Russians. At the same time foreign media is the least frequently used source of news. The latter is not surprising, if one considers that only 5% (2) of Russians speak English.

Chart #2 illustrates which mediums Russians use more often as a news source.



It becomes even more indicative when figures from Chart #2 are compared to similar figures from American statistics. In 2016, people in the US stated that their frequently used sources for news were: 46% local TV, 38% online media, 31% cable TV, 30% national TV (10).

However, in Russia the leading role of TV becomes even more obvious, when Russians are asked which information source they consider to be the primary one. (see Chart #3)



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Russian strategists and intellectuals teach students, that «The Russian Empire, the USSR and the Russian Federation are one and the same participant in the interstate relations, the same subject of international law that has never ceased to exist.»(11)

Federal TV in Russia also has the highest level of trust among all media. This can be difficult to grasp for a foreign observer without reviewing the history of the subject. Modern Russia considers itself a successor of both the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union. Kremlin makes considerable efforts to maintain a sense of belonging to the imperial identity among Russians via propaganda. Namely, this imperial identity enables the coexistence of such different and even opposing elements as Tsar Nicholas II and Stalin, the Annexation of Crimea and the Olympic Games, Nuclear Weapons and the Russian Ballet, and Communism and the Orthodox Church. Everything that supports neo-imperialism is cherished by Kremlin.

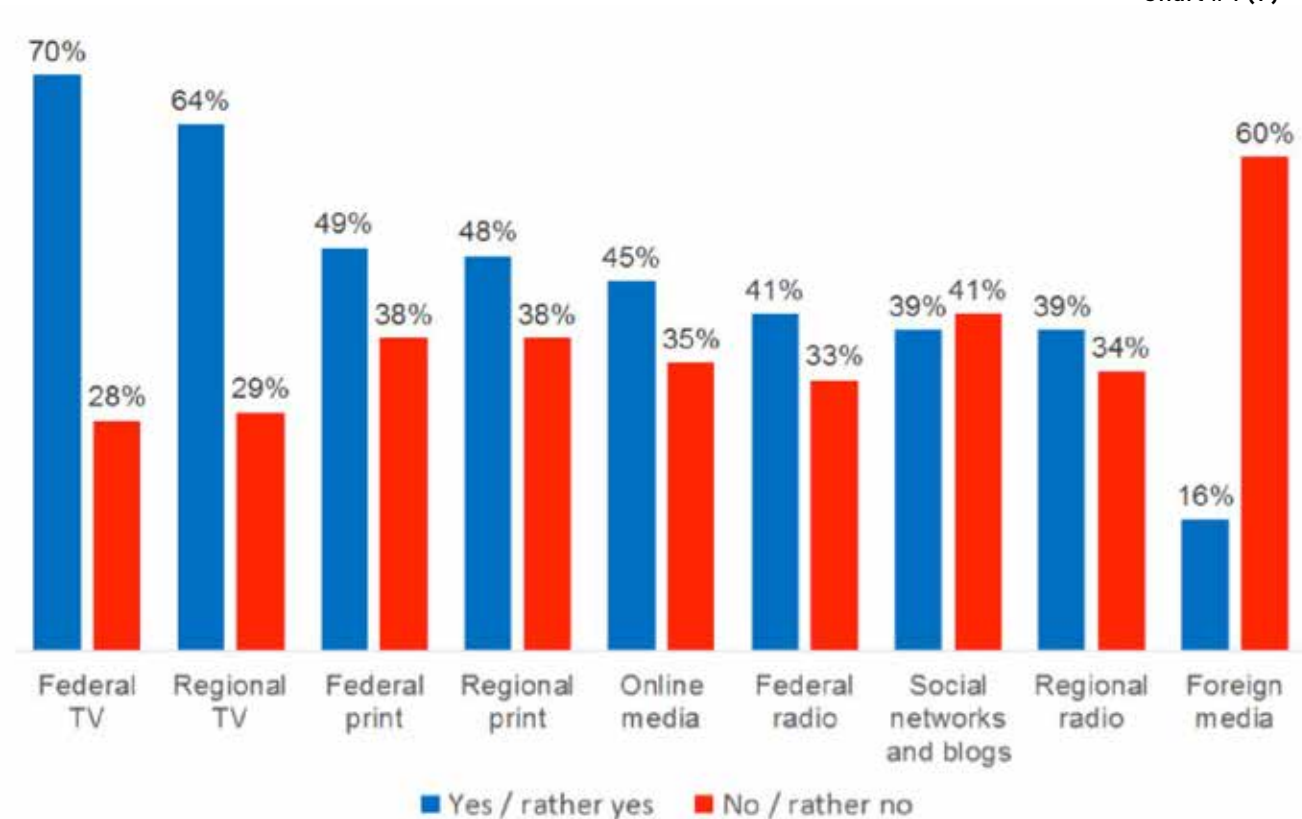
Television propaganda in programs other than the news does not lag behind either. Over half of the television series that appeared on the Russian TV-screens in 2015-2018 were devoted to historical topics relating to the period of the Russian Empire or the USSR. This fact speaks volumes. TV series, scientific and educational TV programs, such as “The Trial of Time”(12) and “Red Project” (13) are intended not only to popularize Russian history, but also to rehabilitate totalitarian and highly controversial Soviet practices in the minds of Russians. Such approach has solid demographic explanation. 59% of the Russian population with the right to vote was already 16 years old or older when the USSR collapsed. To a significant extent the worldview of these people and their attitude towards the media were formed by the Soviet ideology (1) . It was critically important for people in the USSR to know Kremlin’s opinion on what was happening

in the world. Not only was it important for their general awareness, which was considered synonymous with civic consciousness at the time, but also their personal security depended on it as well. Many Soviet citizens were aware of the lies and viciousness of the Soviet system, but fear of severe reprisals kept them on a tight leash.

From the Soviet Union era Russians inherited the culture of watching TV shows and then discussing what they saw. Political information events in schools, universities and workplaces, thematic meetings in «Lenin’s rooms» and «red corners» were a part of regular obligatory practices of discussing collectively the «international situation» from the Moscow’s standpoint. A lot of Soviet families had a ritual of watching the evening news “en famille”. This was how Soviet citizens coordinated their worldview not only with the «party line» but also with their family and closest friends. The programs like «Vremya (Time)» and «International Panorama» formed the patriotic Soviet citizens’ view of what was happening in the country and, most importantly, abroad, where ordinary Soviet people had no opportunity to travel.

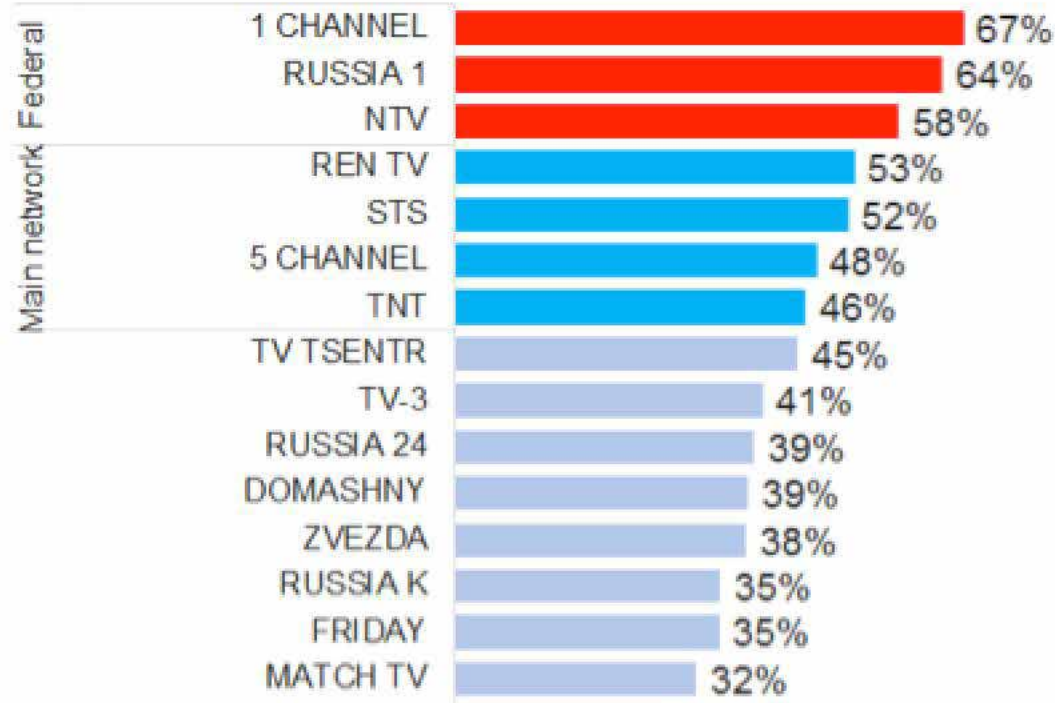
Chart #4 (9)

Eventually, the times have changed. The Iron Curtain disappeared, alternative sources of information, like the Internet, started to appear as well as the opportunity to travel abroad and to personally form one's worldview. However, the majority of Russians still apparently feel the need to know and understand what the federal Russian TV channels say about certain issues. This feature is further conditioned by the post-Soviet character of Russian society. The role of media in lives of Russians is not limited to entertainment and information. As in the Soviet Union, television in modern Russia is the most trusted opinion-maker. Chart #4 shows the most trusted sources of information for the Russians.



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Chart #5



The TV market in Russia is rather competitive, but mostly dominated by big federal channels (see Chart #5).

Chart #5. TV index Russia. Total weekly reach by channel (3).

Chart #6

Note: TOP-10 regular programs on TOP-3 channels (except films, TV series and programs broadcasted less than 10 times/2017 year)

No	Program	Channel	GRPs, people 18+ in cities 100+
1	News	Russia 1	6 989
2	Local time	Russia 1	5 394
3	News	Channel One	4 910
4	"Today" news	NTV	3 022
5	TV channel "Good morning"	Channel One	2 780
6	Morning of the Russia	Russia 1	2 623
7	Time	Channel One	1 831
8	Weather	NTV	1 408
9	Evening news	Channel One	1 307
10	Time will show	Channel One	1 255

The top three channels (Channel One, Russia 1, NTV) have a total weekly reach of 76% of all Russians older than 18. Therefore these three channels are at the focus of our research. News programs are the most demanded content on these channels. Chart #6 depicts the top 10 programs.

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Holding	Owner (share)	Audience share (18+ 100K+)	News in prime time	Channels
VGTRK	Government (100%)	18,7	YES	
Gazprom-Media	Gazprombank (100%)	17,2	YES	
1 Channel	Government (75%), NMG (25%)	12,1	YES	
NMG	NMG (100%)	11,3	YES	
TV Center	Moscow Government (100%)	3,0	YES	
Zvezda	Ministry of Defense (100%)	2,6	YES	
CTC-Media	UTV (75%)	9,4		
Prof-Media	Gazprombank (100%)	5,0		
UTV	UTV (100%)	2,4		
	UTV (80%), Walt Disney (20%)			

Chart #7

Kremlin's financial and political control over the three main channels, as well as over the majority of other media can be easily traced. "Russia 1" is owned by the Russian Government. The other two channels belong to Yuriy Kovalchuk, shareholder and chairman of the Board of Directors of the Central Bank of the Russian Federation, and close ally of Vladimir Putin's inner circle (see Charts #7 and #8).

Chart #7. Major Russian channels by ownership and audience share.



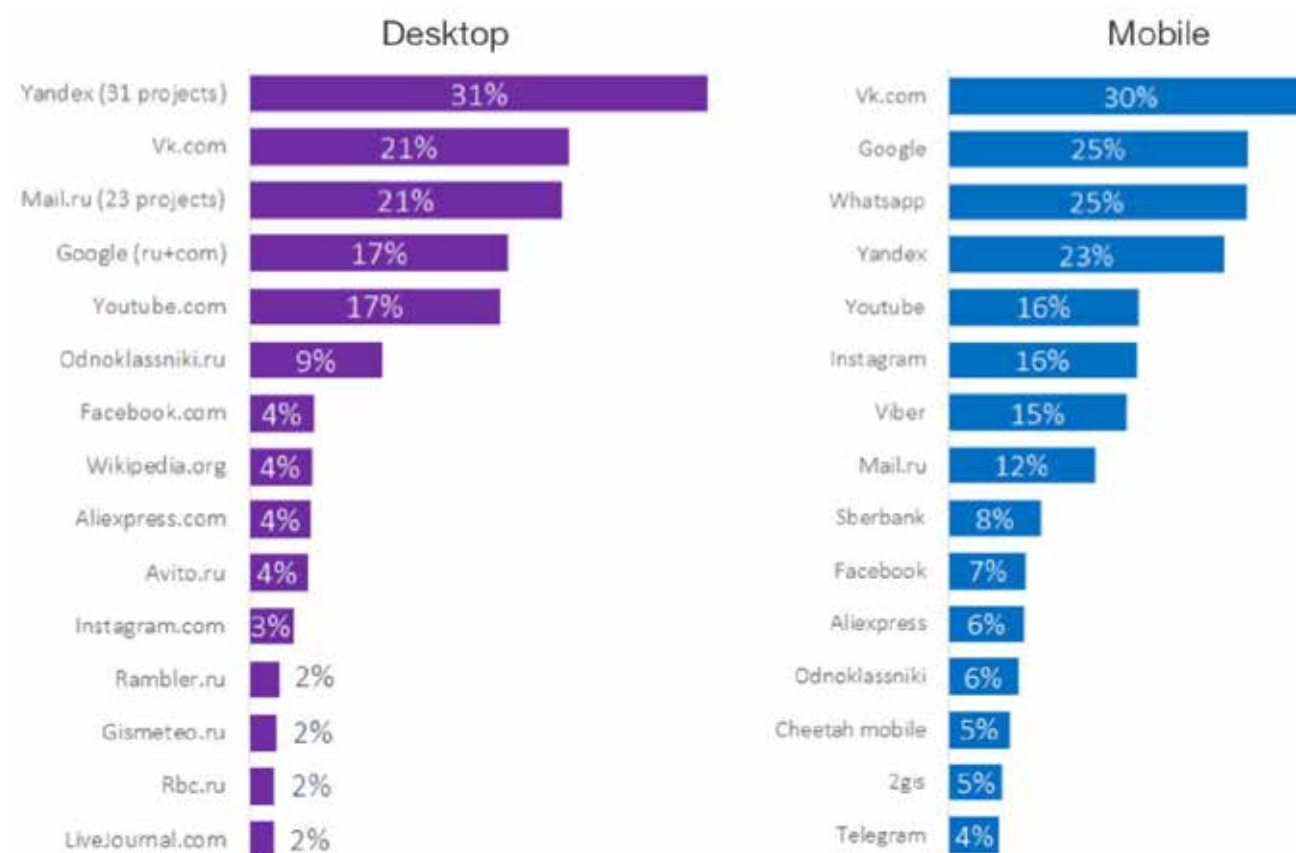
Holding	Owner (share)	Audience share (18+ 100K+)	News in prime time
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1 Channel	Government (75%), NMG (25%)	12,1	YES
NMG	NMG (100%)	11,3	YES
TV Center	Moscow Government (100%)	3,0	YES
Zvezda	Ministry of Defense (100%)	2,6	YES

Chart #8

All major channels with news programs are owned by the Kremlin or its proxy companies (see Chart #8).

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Chart #9



Online news media does not have the same reach as the main TV channels.

Chart #9 shows the top 20 websites by daily average reach.

Chart #9. Web index Russia. Total weekly reach by website. Mediascope database 2017 (3).

To summarize, below are the key conclusions with regards to the Russian media landscape:

- TV news remains the most influential medium in Russia;
- Three main federal channels reach 76% of Russians in a week;
- People trust TV news much more than any other media;
- Foreign media has the lowest trust rating and the highest negative rating. In addition to that, very few Russians speak English;
- All large channels with news programs are fully controlled either by Kremlin or its proxy companies.

This state of affairs, in combination with the unprecedented public trust toward the state-controlled media, leads to an informational isolation of society and results in a high loyalty towards Kremlin's policy and inability to critically analyze its actions or think independently.

**TV & INTERNET:
TOOLS FOR
BUILDING AND
SPREADING
NARRATIVES**

The ruling elite of the Russian Federation and other key figures in politics and business were mostly born and shaped during Soviet times and thus have a tendency to agree with Vladimir Putin's statement: «The collapse of the Soviet Union was the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century.» In the same speech in 2005, Putin clarified what he considered to be a geopolitical catastrophe: «For the Russian people, it [the collapse of the Soviet Union] was a real drama. Tens of millions of our fellow citizens and compatriots found themselves outside the Russian territory!» (From the Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly in 2005) (14)

Despite the downfall of the USSR, a Soviet tradition of looking for internal and external enemies lingers on. Modern Russia imposes necessary worldview upon its citizens through media the same way the USSR did. The image of an enemy is a key aspect of totalitarian consciousness, inspired by the Soviet ideology. It entails other elements like a relativistic morality that justifies any crimes of the insiders against the outsiders and hatred towards the latter, restrictions of personal rights and freedoms, justifying economic mobilization, etc. It received a fresh impetus in 2014 after the Ukrainian Revolution of Dignity, which Russians consider a US-inspired coup.

It is not surprising that when Ukraine, which Putin by his own admission never viewed as a country, overthrew an embezzler and dictator Viktor Yanukovich during the Revolution of Dignity, Kremlin leadership considered it a convenient time to return «tens of millions of compatriots» under its authority. They justified this, on one hand, with the rhetoric of restoration of "historical justice" (Crimea), and on the other, by allegedly defending the Russians from Washington and Brussels-managed «Kyiv fascists» (Donbas).

With Crimea annexation and military aggression in Donbas, the Russians have returned to their usual understanding of the West as their major historical enemy. Several months of intensive propaganda against the backdrop of armed conflict and casualties have returned the narrative to the old animosity towards western countries. "US imperialism" and "the aggressive NATO bloc" became key topics on Russian agenda once again.

For the internal audience the results of propaganda campaigns for the internal audience are reflected in the dynamics of Moscow Levada Center opinion polls (15). As of September 2013, before the beginning of the Euromaidan protests in Kyiv, 41% of Russians

felt a positive attitude, and 49% - a negative one regarding the United States, whereas 56% felt positively and 29% negatively about the EU. But in August 2014, after the hostilities in Eastern Ukraine had begun, this picture changed drastically. Only 17% felt positively about the USA while 74% were feeling negatively; 27% felt positively about the EU and 60% - negatively. A few more months of hysteria on TV and in January 2015 sociologists recorded a peak of negative attitudes toward the US (12% positive, 81% negative) and the EU (20% positive, 71% negative).

Why do the Russians believe propaganda so easily? There are several factors which we are examining in this research. One of them is that modern media enabled Kremlin to effectively reach its citizens with the help of an already established information control system, which was elaborated during the Soviet Union and has never been completely disbanded ever since. Such system provides an almost instantaneous change in the attitudes due to the dominating worldview among the Russians that eliminates critical understanding of the objective reality.

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The studio dialogue in the talk show «Time Will Tell» on Russian Channel One on August 3, 2018 may serve as an example. In response to a renowned film director Karen Shakhnazarov's remark that "All that Soviet journalism and Soviet propaganda said about the West was true." the show's host answered: "It just could have been said better!" (16)

To make propaganda messages interesting, modern and fascinating is one of Kremlin's principal tasks today. There is a constant search for new ideas and forms on Russian television. Old Soviet-type programs are revived. Previously used propaganda formats are modernized and filled with new content. It must be admitted that Kremlin is very effective in its propaganda via mass media. Despite the fact that Russia's real state of economy is quite mediocre and has been on the decline in recent years, a popular joke says that TV is still more important than a refrigerator for the average Russian citizen. While in the USSR the main tool of propaganda was to block all channels of incoming information, nowadays Kremlin is much more creative in its methods. Some of those key methods can be categorized the following way:

- Repetition of the same message on the massive scale via different sources, which forms a perception of a narrative that is shared by many people;
- Positioning each event inside a specific narrative, which provides "explanations and reasons" of "hostile intentions" thus making the narrative more plausible. This inevitably leads to simplifications and flourishing conspiracy theories;
- Launching many contradictory versions of an event in order to promote the idea that there are many versions of the truth ("alternative truths") for the part of Russian audience which tends to think critically. (A recent notorious example – there were 20 versions of Skripal poisoning case in the UK) (17);
- Referring to "useful idiots" from abroad (certain foreigners, who will replicate Kremlin's views on the matter), amplifying their messages by controlled network of internet "contributors" (aka "trolls") through websites and mainstream government media, thus depicting their opinion as dominating;
- Establishment and support for the Threat Narratives. Since security is a basic need for all, constant feeling of being threatened is one of the few incentives that can unite people of very different social and demographic profiles. At the same time, fear can be spread much more effortlessly than constructive narratives.



Example of using the same actress in different pro-Russian media events

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After analyzing all of monitored data, it was found that on the three TV channels and ten websites, selected for the research, USA, Europe, Ukraine were mentioned negatively 211 times per day, including 41 daily mentions on the three TV channels. Chart #10 shows the ratio of negative to positive mentions.

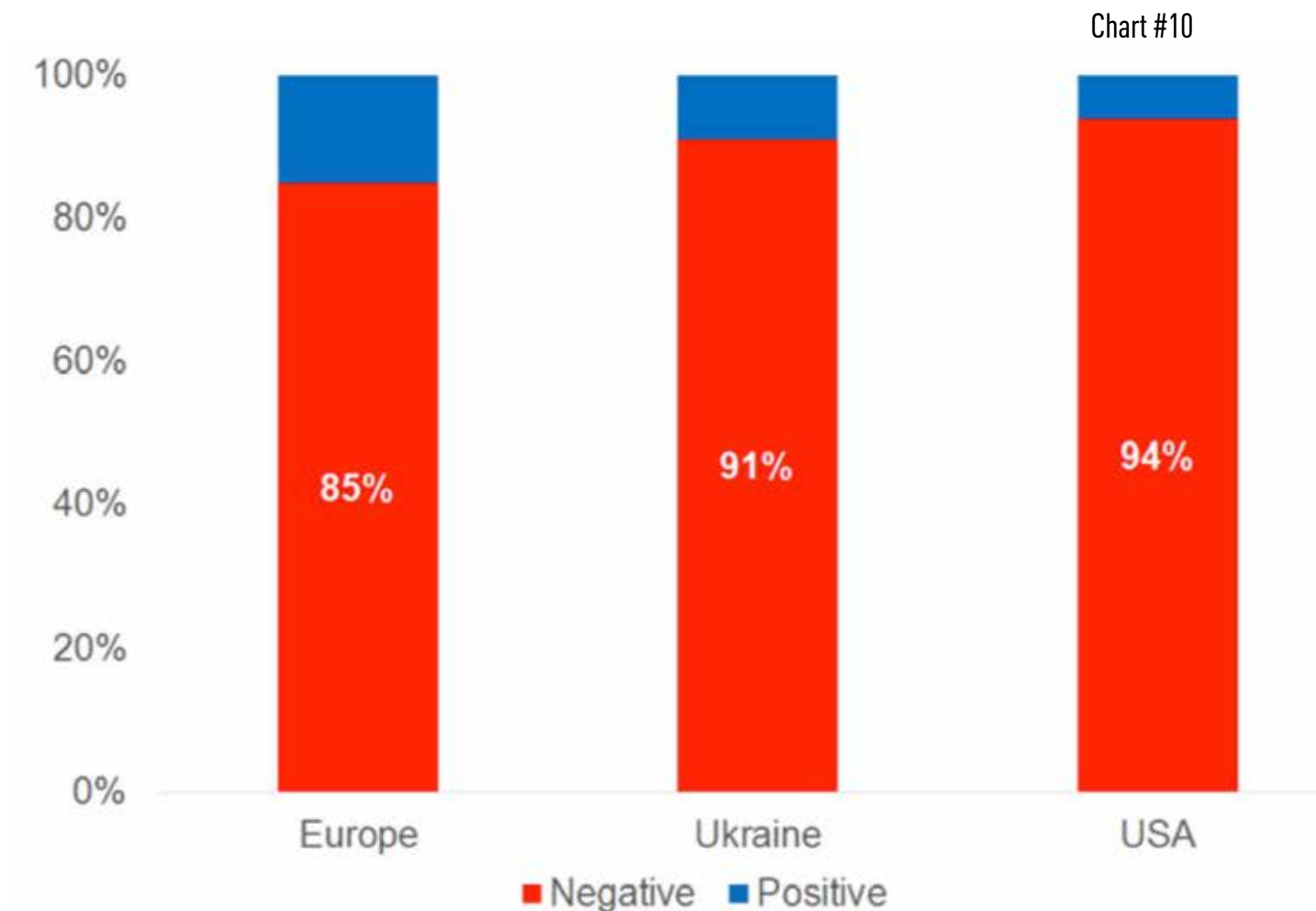
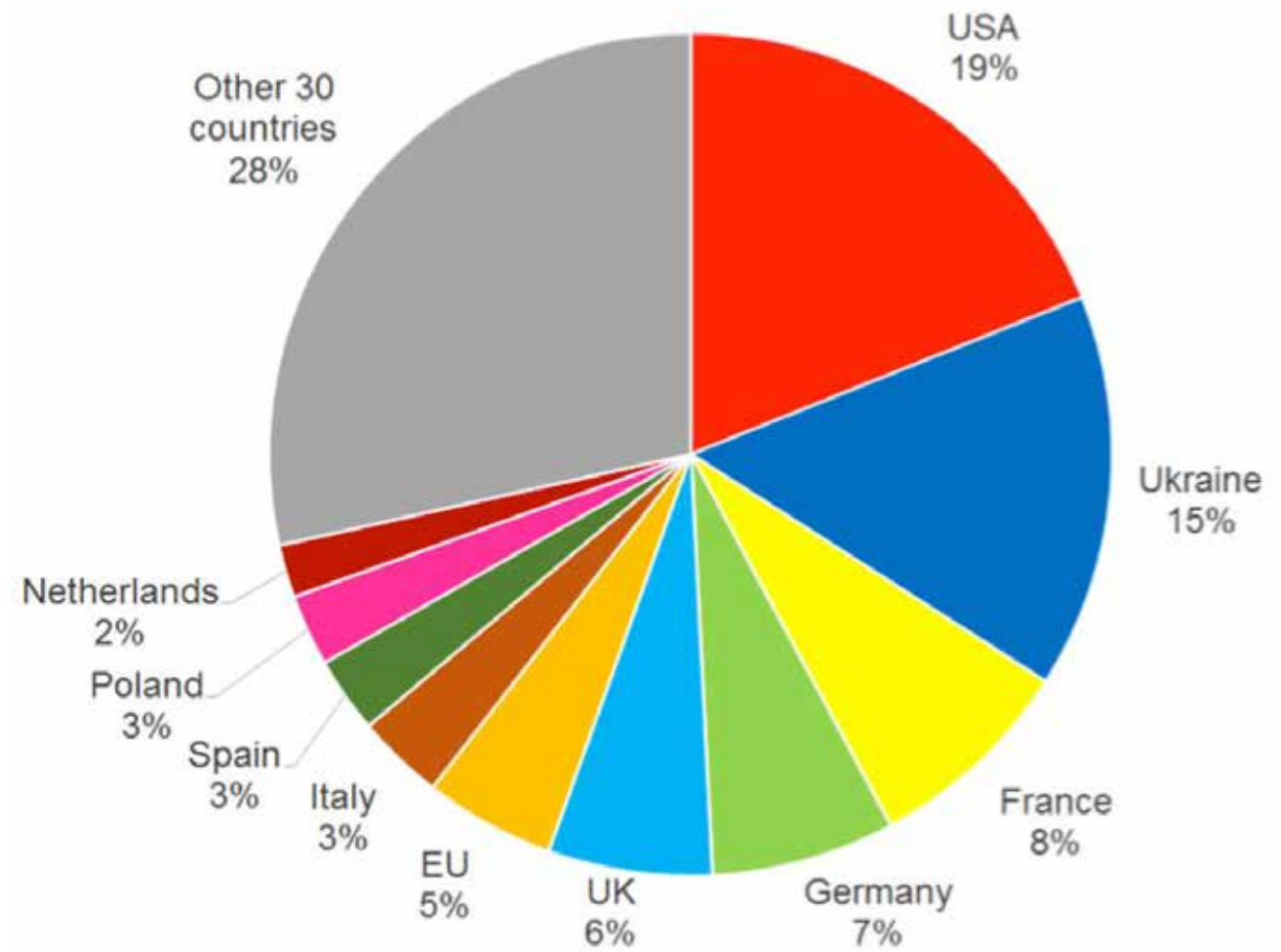


Chart #11



Although the ratio already tends to be very negative for each case, the total share of negative mentions of the USA is even more of than that of Ukraine. The share of top ten countries is presented in chart #11.

HOW **RUSSIAN MEDIA** FOMENTS HOSTILITY TOWARD THE WEST

Unlike the Russian media channels “RT” and “Sputnik”, which broadcast for the western audiences, target group for propaganda on Russian federal channels is Russian citizens and Russian speakers from the countries of the former USSR and Eastern Europe. The broadcast of the Russian federal television channels in these countries is managed through satellite dishes and cable networks.

Usually, the audience for these channels consists of people brought up in Soviet culture and tradition, and therefore they intuitively understand Russian messages, even if they are directed against the government of their countries of residence. The purpose of propaganda is to misinform the local population, create the so-called “fifth column” and justify the future expansion of the so-called “Russian world” on the moral grounds.

Let us illustrate this model with a real example. In the spring of 2014, immediately after Ukraine’s Revolution of Dignity and Russia’s annexation of Crimea, an anti-government insurgency broke out in Donbas, in Eastern Ukraine. The driving force of this “coup” was Russian citizens who flooded across the border into the region, together with

local separatists - both having been subverted by extensive and overwhelming Russian propaganda which declared that fascists and neo-Nazis had overthrown the legitimate government in Kyiv and were seeking to kill Russians and Russian-speakers in Ukraine . Taking advantage of the momentary confusion in the capital, the “rebels” quickly seized power in the region and proclaimed the «Donetsk People’s Republic» (DPR) and the «Luhansk People’s Republic» (LPR).

They captured television centers and towers, disconnected Ukrainian TV channels and switched to the frequencies of Russian federal channels. Soon the «republics» acquired Russian military equipment and staffed their «self-defense units» with Russian military personnel. Then Russian propagandists supported the actions of Russian military: writers, actors and showmen.

The programming on Donetsk television is a perfect illustration of the views prevailing in this region. On 21 July 2015, the Donetsk television studio hosted a show with the first «Information Minister of the DPR» Elena Nikitina (2014-2017) and «Director of the Information Policy Department of the DPR» Maya Pirogova, as well as guests from Moscow: the

writer and head of the Great Russia party Nikolai Starikov and his colleague, writer Aleksandr Prokhanov. Both are popular ideologists of Russian imperial greatness, Kremlin’s propagandists and regulars at Moscow’s political talk shows. Here is what they said in the studio:

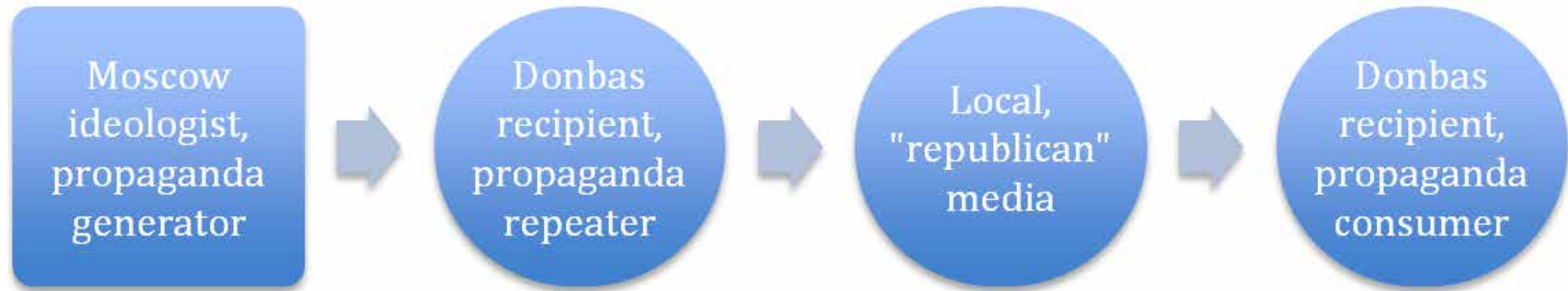
Elena Nikitina: **“I knew exactly what was happening in Donbas thanks to Nikolai Starikov’s books. This is a geopolitics guide.... Having come serve in the government during an information war, I realized that this was my front line.**

Knowing what geopolitical war we are in, I did not have any illusions. But I was sure that the «Russian World» had come to Donbas!”

Maya Pirogova: **“How can I explain to people [in Ukraine] that if it were not for Donbas, we would be in for a slow, painful and cynical death from the external management of America, the Anglo-Saxons, the Anglo-Saxon world!”**

¹ Russian World is an ideological concept that is not limited by the geographical boundaries of Russia, but also claims that there are many other regions that share the same spiritual values with Russia, its language and culture. The concept also implies the exclusive right of the Russian Federation to influence the policies of these regions even if they are a part of other sovereign states.

This is a case of a successful hybrid operation of Kremlin. Presented in a following propaganda model:



The content of propaganda is a constantly repeated message. They were briefly announced by the aforementioned Nikolai Starikov in the studio of the propaganda talk show «60 Minutes»: “The Kyiv coup was backed by the US. Their goal was Russia. The Crimea was chosen as a point of entry. Then a Maidan in Moscow.”

For Kremlin, TV is the main medium that helps to shape and disseminate narratives. Kremlin has two main instruments: news programs and talk-

shows, both controlled from one center. Television talk-shows became a real godsend for the Russian disinformation machine. The political talk show format allows Kremlin to launch necessary messages in the informational field and avoid accusations of misinformation and propaganda. Continually repeated, these messages become part of public discourse. The talk-show format also allows to give voice to the most radical messages without taking responsibility. For example, on “Time Will Tell” talk-show from 13 August 2018 at Channel One, invited

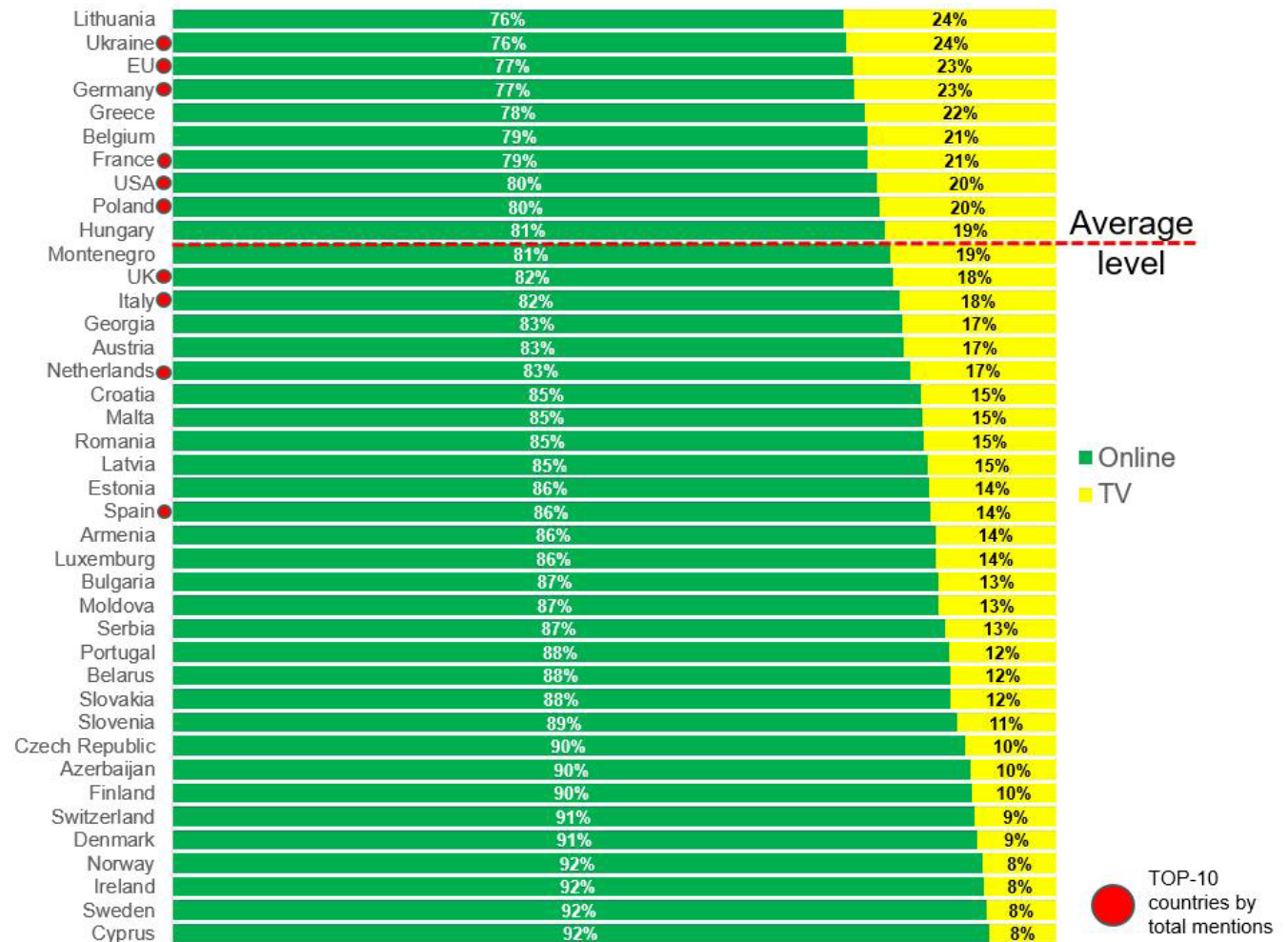
guest Mikhail Delyagin (academician and famous public figure) said “The USA is the largest terrorist state! NATO is the largest terrorist organization!” and his inflammatory comments enjoyed the full support of the host, other speakers and the audience. The opposing opinion was presented nominally, almost as an afterthought. The discussion in the studio was fully controlled and driven by the host and pro-Kremlin speakers. All in all, it created a misleading emotional impression that the argument was shared by the majority, thus making it acceptable.

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Chart #12

Another function of Russia’s talk shows is to “prove” that there is freedom of speech in Russia, to create the illusion of free discussion and at the same time show multifaceted opinions all beneficial to Kremlin. The more purposefully Kremlin builds a narrative related to a country, the greater the number of mentions that narrative receives on TV (see Chart #12).

Today, due simply to human physiological limitations, there is such an excess of information available that a single person cannot process, or certainly can’t verify, what he hears, let alone digest it. Given that fact, information from opinion leaders - i.e. from popular sources – is received with greater confidence than information from lesser known sources. Clearly this creates a natural advantage for the big, well-known TV channels. Due to its less controlled nature the role of the Internet is different in Kremlin’s propaganda apparatus. It is mainly used by Kremlin as a tool for the following purposes:

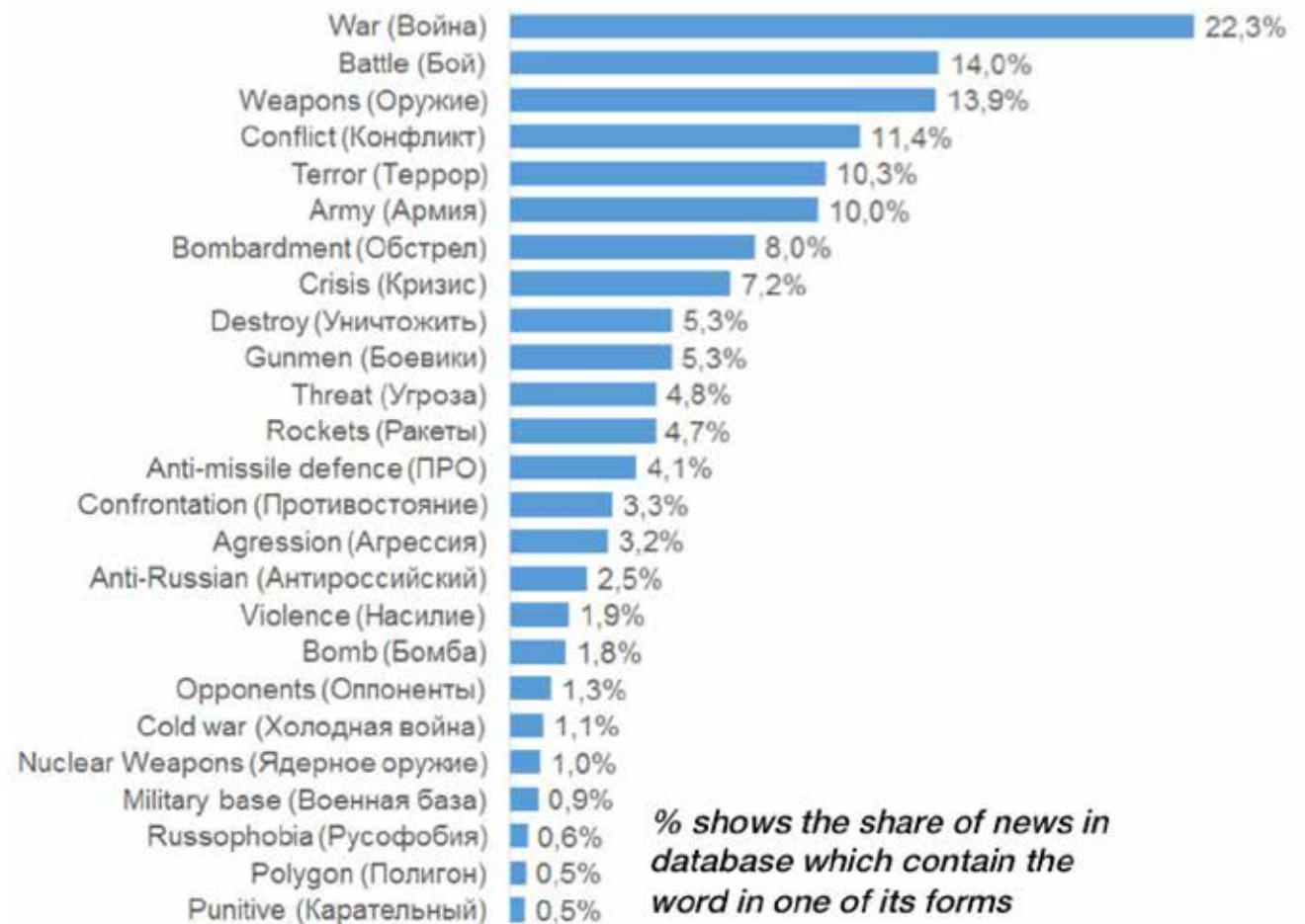


1. To generate contradictory versions of certain events in order to label truth as just one of the versions
2. To launch more radical messages and then use the Internet as the reference source on its TV news programs and talk shows...as in, "I read on the Internet that (such-and-such) happened..."
3. To reverse the attribution and amplify key narratives derived from the TV shows

Kremlin's messages on the Internet are also orchestrated from a single center. This results in systemic influence that is perceived like natural news distribution. For a user it looks as if it is coming from different sources, and what comes from different sources is more likely to be embraced as truth.

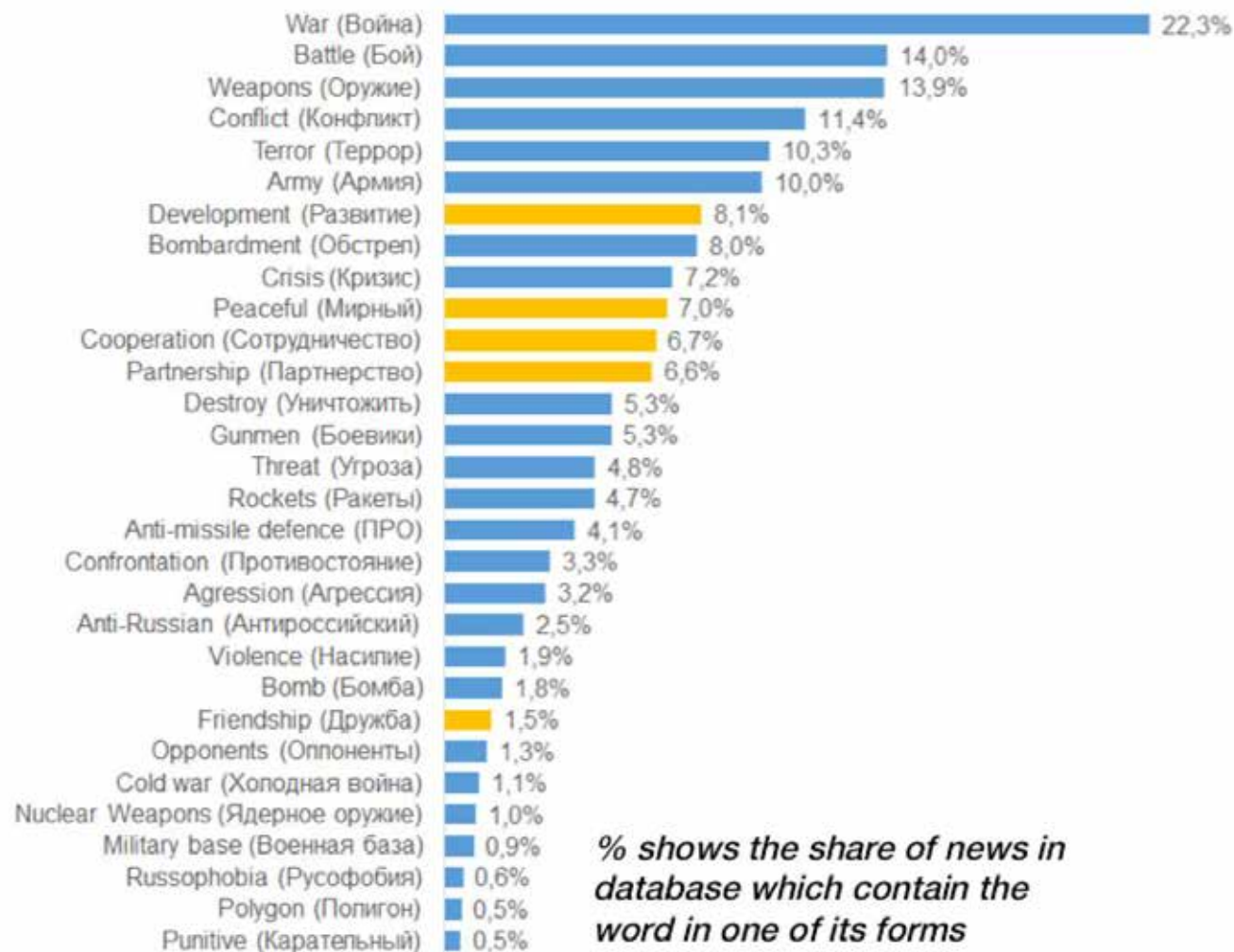
Since Threat Narratives are the ones most widely used by Kremlin, let's look at the content analysis of military vocabulary in TV and online news pieces for the entire research period. (see Chart #13)

Chart #13



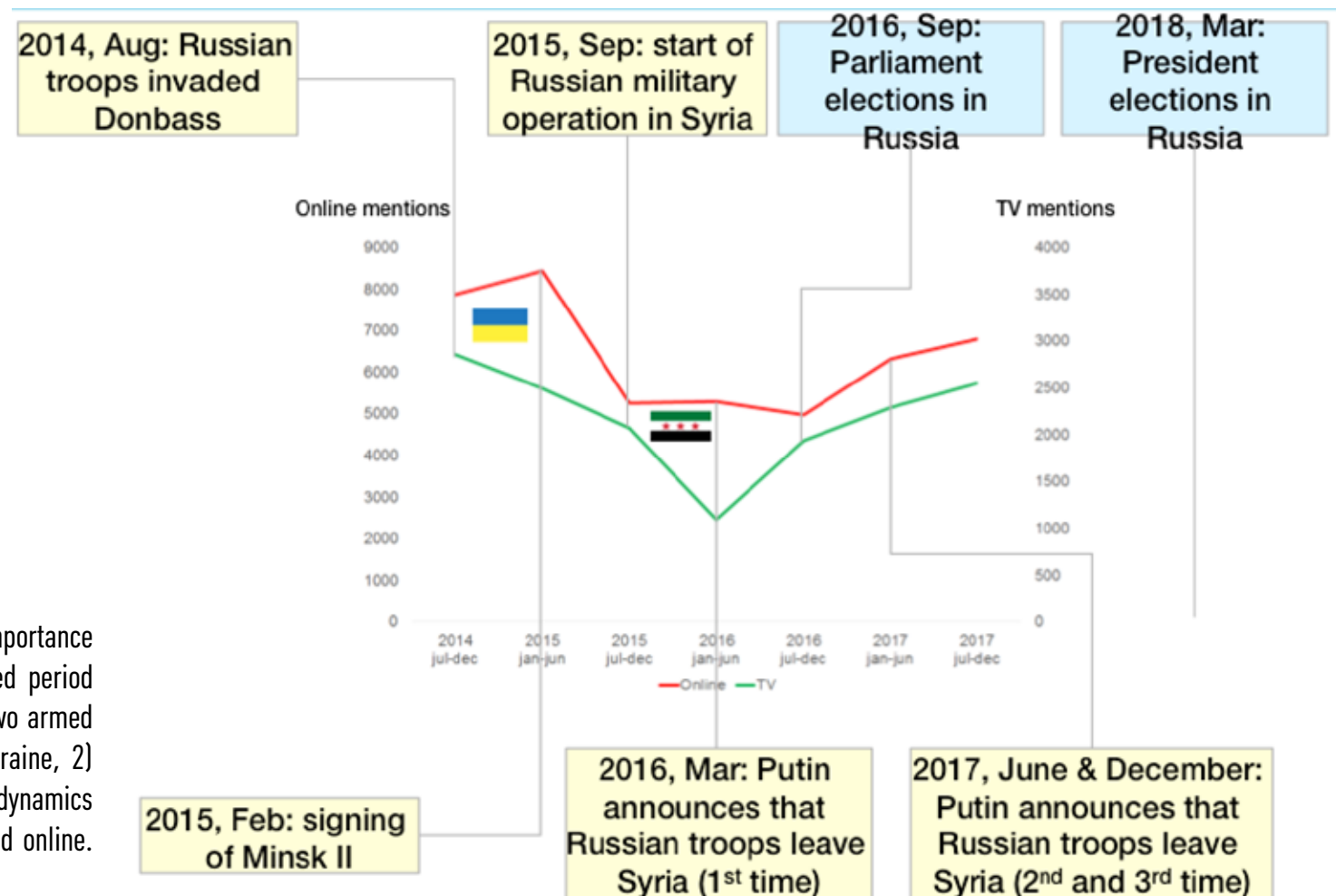
HOW **RUSSIAN MEDIA** FOMENTS HOSTILITY TOWARD THE WEST

Chart #14



22% of all negative news contains the word “war” in different forms. The words “battle” and “weapons” are twice as popular as “crisis”, though the latter is widely used in broader context than just a military term. If we compare positive words with military-related ones, then we can see that “development,” “peaceful” and “cooperation” are present in Russian news roughly 3 times less often than “war”. (see Chart #14)

Chart #15



As we see the topic of war is of highest importance in Russian media. During the researched period (2014-2017) Russia was taking part in two armed conflicts: 1) invasion in the Eastern Ukraine, 2) military campaign in Syria. However, the dynamics of their coverage was different on TV and online. (see Chart #15)

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We can see that high percentage of media activity related to “war” during the active phase of Russian-Ukrainian war in the Eastern Ukraine, though Kremlin did not admit the presence of its troops there. After the debut of Russian military campaign in Syria there was a stable level of “war” online, but a huge decrease on TV (the green line). After Russia announced that its troops are to leave Syria twice, the “war” dynamics strongly increased on TV. So, firstly, we can conclude that coverage in media does not correlate with real events, especially when TV is considered. The most obvious explanation of the increase of war-related narratives in 2017 were parliamentary and presidential elections. As we could observe later in the research, Putin made a stake on military narratives as a tool to mobilize his electorate. Secondly, though generally online news repeat the trends from TV, they are less controlled and thus can be regarded as more objective. Therefore, for the purpose of analyzing Kremlin’s narratives it is reasonable to focus on their TV representation. Largest Federal TV channels are the trendsetters for all Kremlin’s narratives.

KEY THREAT NARRATIVES ON RUSSIAN TV

After the analysis of all researched TV news and talk-shows we can conclude that Threat Narratives are the main tool of Kremlin's propaganda. After analyzing of all researched TV news and talk-shows we can conclude that Threat Narratives are the main tool of Kremlin propaganda. The core worldview, imposed by the Russian media, is fairly simple – Russia is stable and peaceful, while the West is unstable and aggressive. There is, however, a differentiation in describing the degree of instability of the western powers. Thus, the United States are depicted as the only equal foe of Russia (in relation to geopolitical strength), so they are pictured as dangerous and insidious. Europeans are depicted as immoral, unstable, weaker than Russians, but also manipulated by the USA (or "anglo-saxons" as Russian media put it) to hate Russia. Hence, the threat coming from Europe is described more in terms of "toxic" than existential.

Such worldview, which we would call Threat Narratives throughout this paper, was not a novel creation, but a deeply rooted phenomenon, based on Russian imperial history. It is based on the narrative of repetitive invasions of Russia. According to its primary message external enemies cause the greatest damage to Russia, but they are always defeated in the end due to the heroic efforts

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of Russian people, inspired by their unique spiritual heritage.. Russia is targeted by enemies, because it is the biggest country in the world, but this very fact is also used to prove that Russia is unconquerable. For example, this narrative plays a major role in the the cult around WW2, but for Russians this episode is just one of many previous narrative templates. For them, the same story was repeatedly played out over the centuries, with antagonists like Mongols and «Germans» (Teutonic knights) in the XIIIth century, Poles in the XVIIth century, Swedes in the XVIIIth century, French in the XIXth century and Germans again in the XXth century. James V. Wertsch outlined this narrative template as “Expulsion-of-Alien-Enemies” (Chapter 10, pg. 238-240, 18):

1. During the “initial situation,” Russia is peaceful and is not interfering with the others.
2. “Troubles” arrive, meaning a foreign enemy viciously attacks the unprovoking Russia.
3. Russia comes under the existential threat and nearly loses everything in total defeat as it suffers from the enemy’s attempts to destroy it as a civilization.
4. Through heroism and exceptionalism, against all odds and acting alone, Russia triumphs and succeeds in expelling the foreign enemy.

Wertsch explains “This underlying code has been used repeatedly by the Russian mnemonic community to make sense of events from the past, and it is also employed when interpreting current events such as those in Crimea in 2014. Rather than seeing their action as an aggressive expansionism and annexation of others’ territory, Putin and probably the majority of Russians took Russian action in Crimea to be a reasonable response to an external threat. From their perspective, European and American actors were clearly encouraging Ukrainian nationalist groups to break away from Russia, and the resulting outcome would be having NATO, or at least NATO-friendly forces, at the border of yet another part of Russia. Similar interpretations prevailed in Russia in interpreting its war with Georgia in 2008. It was not Georgia itself that was at issue from the Russian perspective; instead, Georgia was taken to be just the point of a NATO spear pointed at Russia’s southern flank.”

One could say that each nation has its own narratives. However, such narratives are not supposed to be present in the news, because there is an underlying difference between them. A narrative is always told from the perspective, where the resolution or ending is already known. It is the ending of any narrative

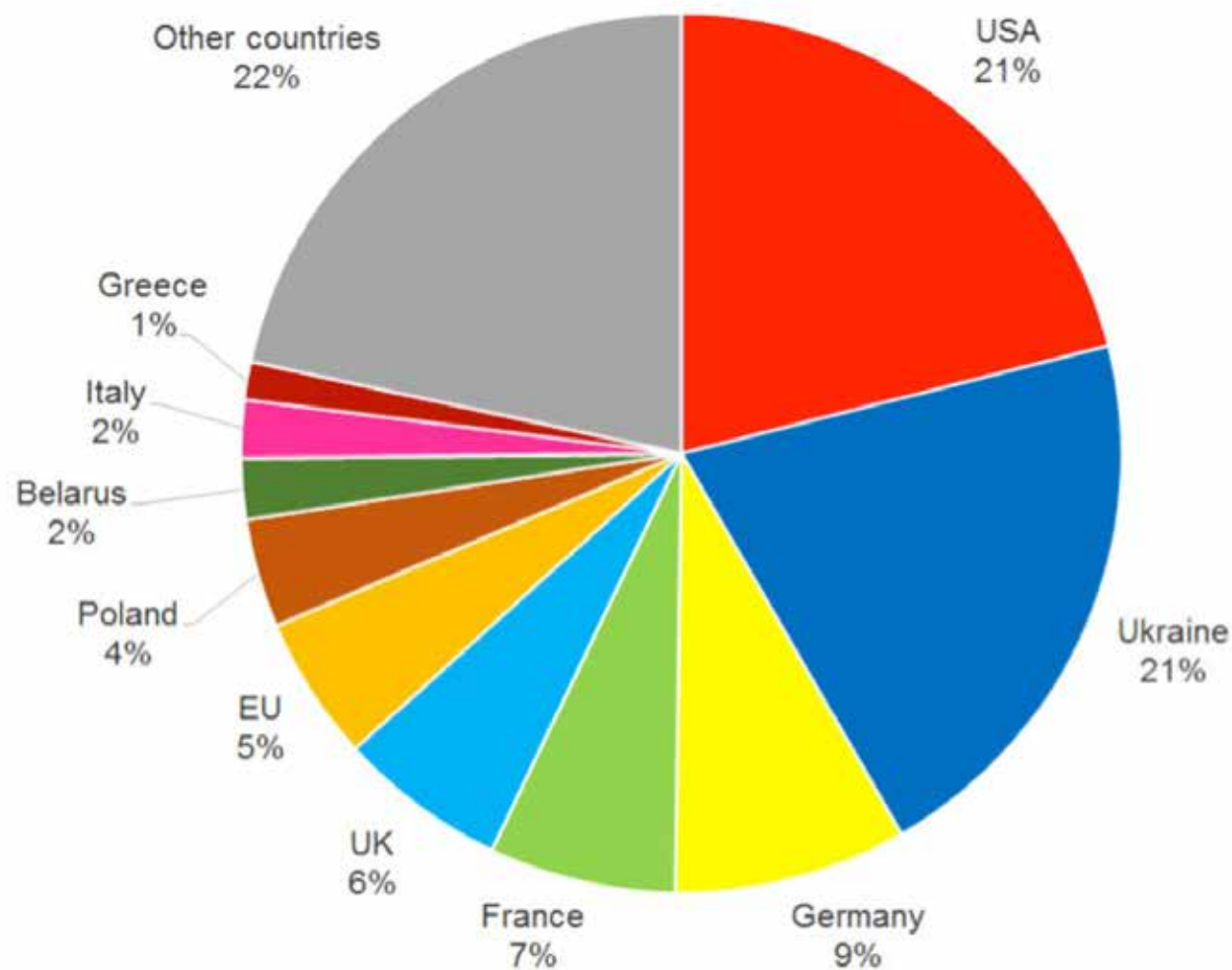
that makes all its parts coherent, solid and strong. Moreover, since the creator of a narrative is aware of how it should end, this enables him to shape the story to unfold perfectly, leading to the premeditated ending. However, unlike narratives, news stories by definition have not yet ended and thus are supposed to be told with the understanding that we don’t know what will happen next. Kremlin is acting in precisely the opposite way. Those controlling Russian “news” already know which conclusion they want to achieve; hence, certain events are retrospectively selected in order to lead the audience to such conclusion. Therefore, when Putin talks about the annexation of Crimea he only gives the selected facts, while omitting others in order to maintain the logic of his narrative. Such approach enables Kremlin to arbitrarily create the image of an enemy for the selected countries in order to mobilize audiences and fully control the dynamics of this image. To illustrate this, let us review the figures below. This is an annual survey that has been conducted by Levada Centre since 2006 (19). The question asked is – which are the top five hostile countries towards Russia. (see Chart #16)

Chart #16

	2006	2007	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
USA	37	35	45	26	33	35	38	69	73	72	69	78
Ukraine	27	23	41	13	20	15	11	30	37	48	50	49
UK	5	3	8	6	8	7	9	18	21	18	15	38
Latvia	46	36	35	36	35	26	21	23	25	23	24	26
Poland	7	20	10	14	20	8	8	12	22	24	21	24
Lithuania	42	32	35	35	34	25	17	24	25	23	24	23
Germany	2	2	3	1	4	3	3	18	19	19	24	17
Estonia	28	60	30	28	30	23	16	21	19	16	16	15
Georgia	44	46	62	57	50	41	33	19	11	10	9	8
France	1	1	1	<1	1	1	2	5	7	4	8	8
Canada	1	<1	1	<1	1	1	1	7	8	6	3	8
Israel	4	3	3	2	3	3	3	2	2	2	1	5
Syria	<1	<1	<1	<1	1	2	3	1	1	3	4	4
Iraq	9	8	5	9	9	8	7	3	2	2	3	4
Turkey	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	29	8	3

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Chart #17



The United States are portrayed as the enemy number one, showing a significant increase in negative mentions starting from 2014. The two other enemies created by Kremlin-controlled media are Ukraine and the countries of the European Union. The following chapters of this report will examine in detail top narratives about these three foreign entities from the perspective of Russian propaganda.

It is instructive that our media content analysis of the amount of times the word "war" was mentioned in conjunction with the country name shows that there is a correlation with selected main alleged enemies of Russia (see Chart #17).

TOP NARRATIVES ABOUT THE USA

According to Kremlin's narratives, the US has an image of being Russia's primary enemy. Russian media anchors often use expressions such as «rotten Americanism» or «false American values» and describe this in such a way that it's Russia's great mission to defeat this "poisonous" phenomenon. America is described as the world's most aggressive, unfair power and Russia is its only real rival. In Kremlin's narrative, that is why the US uses all known methods, including illegal ones to prevent Russia from achieving equal economic power. Chart #18 shows the top narratives based on the monitoring data, obtained from researching selected TV programs.

HOW **RUSSIAN** **MEDIA** FOMENTS HOSTILITY TOWARD THE WEST

Chart #18

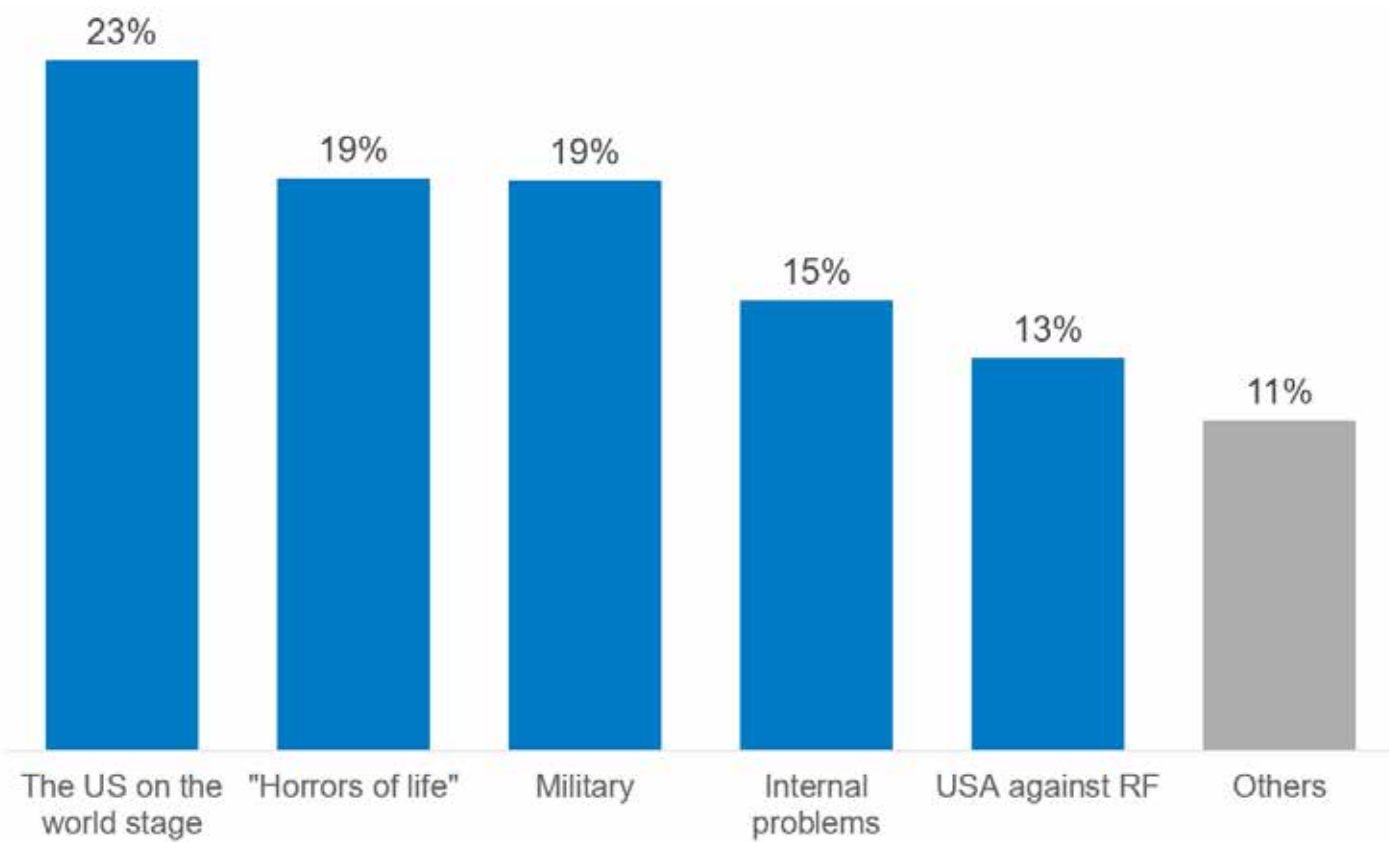
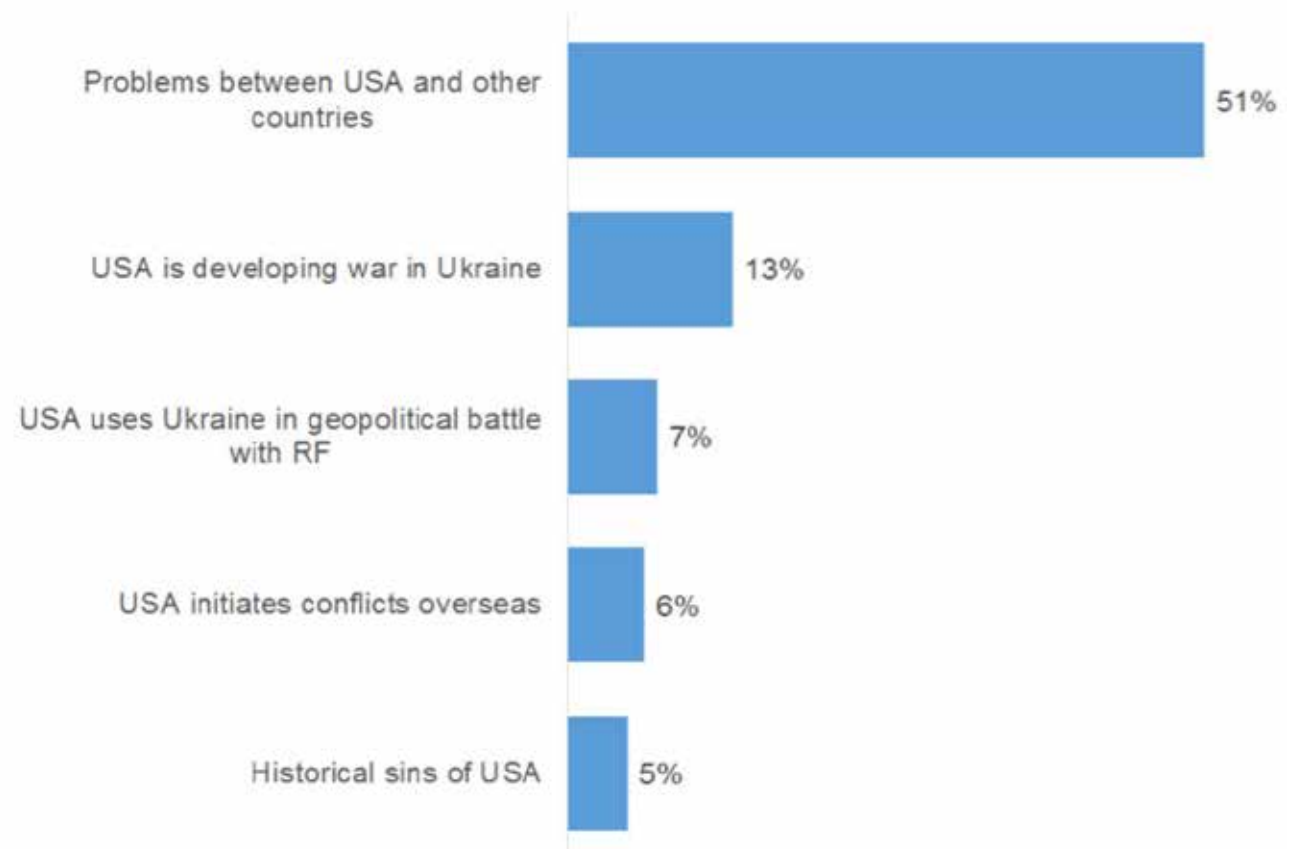


Chart #19



The first narrative, called “The US on the world stage” is based primarily on problems that the United States allegedly incite in other countries. This includes: political conflicts of the US and other countries (except for Russia); criticism of actions of the US that comes from different countries and politicians; and spy scandals. See Chart #19 with the breakdown of the first narrative.

HOW **RUSSIAN MEDIA** FOMENTS HOSTILITY TOWARD THE WEST

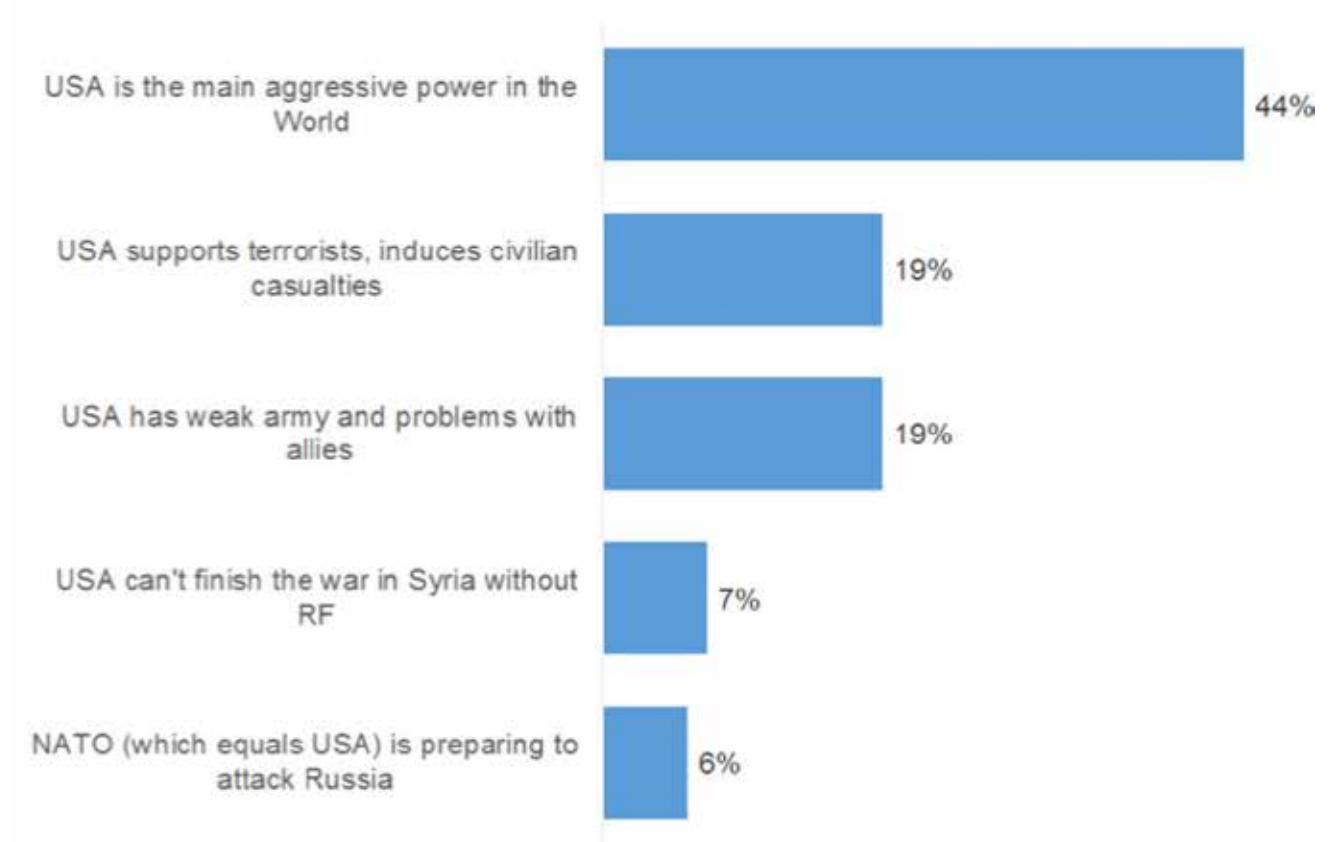
Ukraine plays a special role in this narrative, as Russian media shifts the responsibility for the war in Ukraine to the US. Ukraine itself is only seen as a “puppet state”, executing orders from Washington. We named the second most popular narrative about the US on Russian TV “Horrors of Life.” It is built on continuous reports about natural and technological accidents, usually on a very local scale. Every 1 of 5 negative news about the US is dedicated to this topic. Europe gets similar coverage, where this narrative gets 22% of total negative news. The aim is to persuade Russian audience that life outside Russia is very unstable and to depict America as a land that is “cursed by nature” and managed by unprofessional authorities.

The third most popular narrative is the “Military” (see Chart #20). According to it, America is waging wars without taking any rules (i.e. Geneva Convention) into account and thus harming other peaceful nations. Further, the United States initiate new military conflicts and create wars for economic gains. Most importantly, the US is described as being very aggressive. Renowned guests and hosts of major talk-shows accept and normalize extremely harsh language used to describe the US and its actions. For example:

SOLOVYOV (hosts of the show): “We all have dreamed of visiting the ruins of the Pentagon with the red flag!” TV Channel, Russia 1, “Evening with Vladimir Solovyov”.26 June 2017,

ZHIRINOVSKY (member of parliament, leader of LDPR party): “I see our planes flying to the West! I see thousands of paratroopers flying to the West!” TV Channel, Russia 1, “60 minutes. The US is tired of the «eye for an eye» policy”. 8 September 2017.

Chart #20



HOW **RUSSIAN MEDIA** FOMENTS HOSTILITY TOWARD THE WEST

Unlike Ukraine and European countries, the United States are described as the only real military threat to Russia. Russian media says, that USA is a proactive world aggressor that is constantly pushing its economic and political interests without taking into account any legal or moral considerations.

The fourth most popular narrative is devoted to internal problems of the US, which are shown in more vivid details than any news on Russian domestic issues. On Russia TV there are three big topics about American internal problems, according to Russian TV:

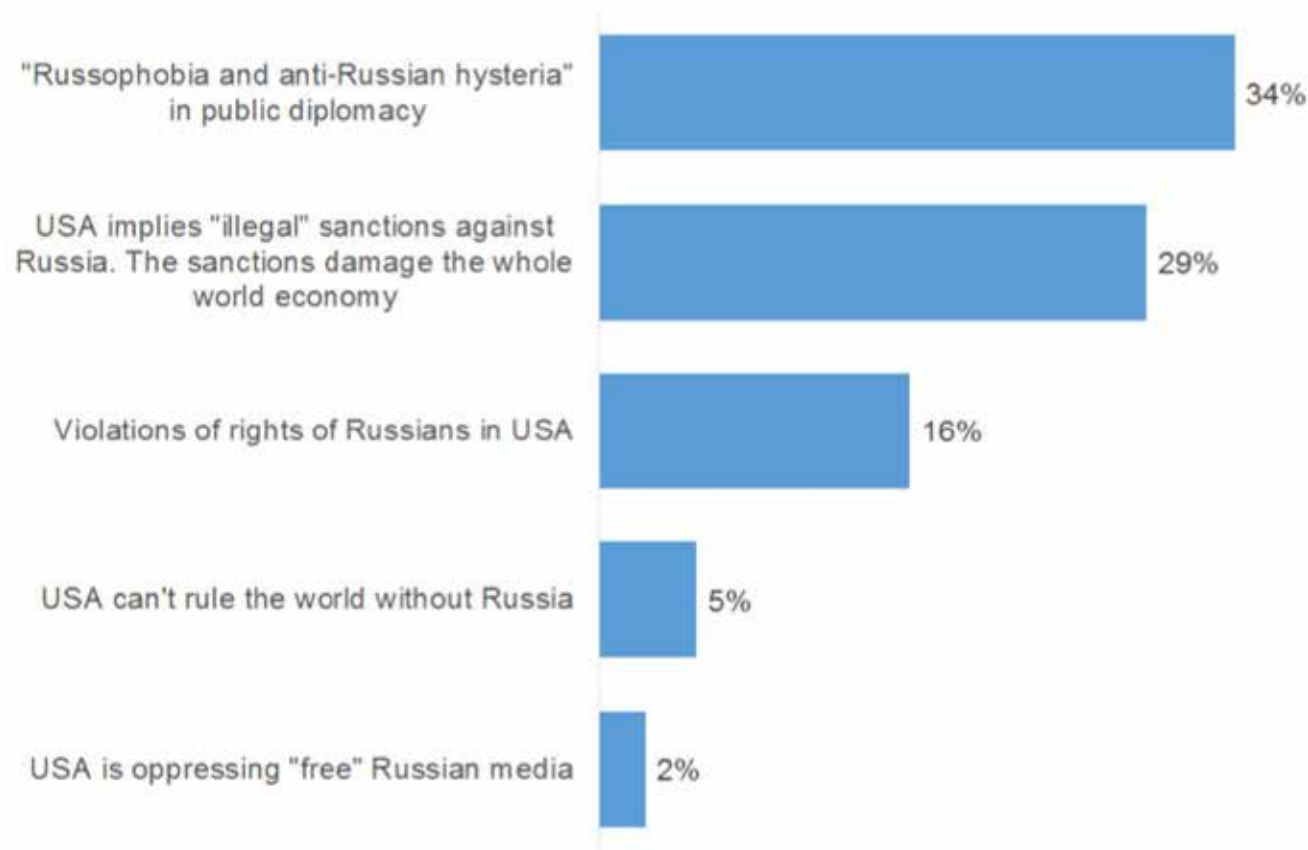
1. Racism and police brutality
2. Crime
3. Political protests

However, one would never see news reports on these kinds of problems in Russia on Russian TV itself.

Since 2014, Russian propaganda has consistently maintained the notion that Russia is not only the most powerful military power in the world, but also has the most intelligent president with whom, according to Kremlin's favorite propagandist Dmitry Kiselyov, «the West cannot simply cope.»

The fifth most popular narrative is “America against Russia.” It consists of the following topics (see Chart #21).

Chart #21



In this narrative, Russia is portrayed as a victim that needs to defend itself from the aggressive and greedy United States. After the collapse of the USSR, Kremlin started to lose territories to the US and NATO, but, thanks to Putin, this has now stopped. The annexation of Crimea became a first step towards getting the revenge on the western powers. A “free market” and “liberal democracy” are labeled as secondary instruments of the US and thus Putin’s authoritarianism requires justification from the majority of the population. In turn, all crises related to the economy result from the hostile actions of the US which controls the dollar.

To illustrate a typical opinion about the US, here is the quote from Russian academician and acting Advisor to President Putin Sergei Glaziev, made at a youth forum in Crimea in 2016 “The USA has been long waging a war against Russia for a long time. The aim of this war is the same as in 1941-1945 – to destroy Russia as a country and Russian people as a nation. [This is done] so that nothing remains of Russia in history. This is the point of American aggression.”

Moreover, Channel One talk-show host Artem Sheynin and leader of DPR (2014-2018) Alexander

Zakharchenko enjoyed reciting a poem to great applause from the audience. The poem was about a Russian soldier standing on the ruins of Washington. A prominent medal on his chest read “For the Capture of Washington.”

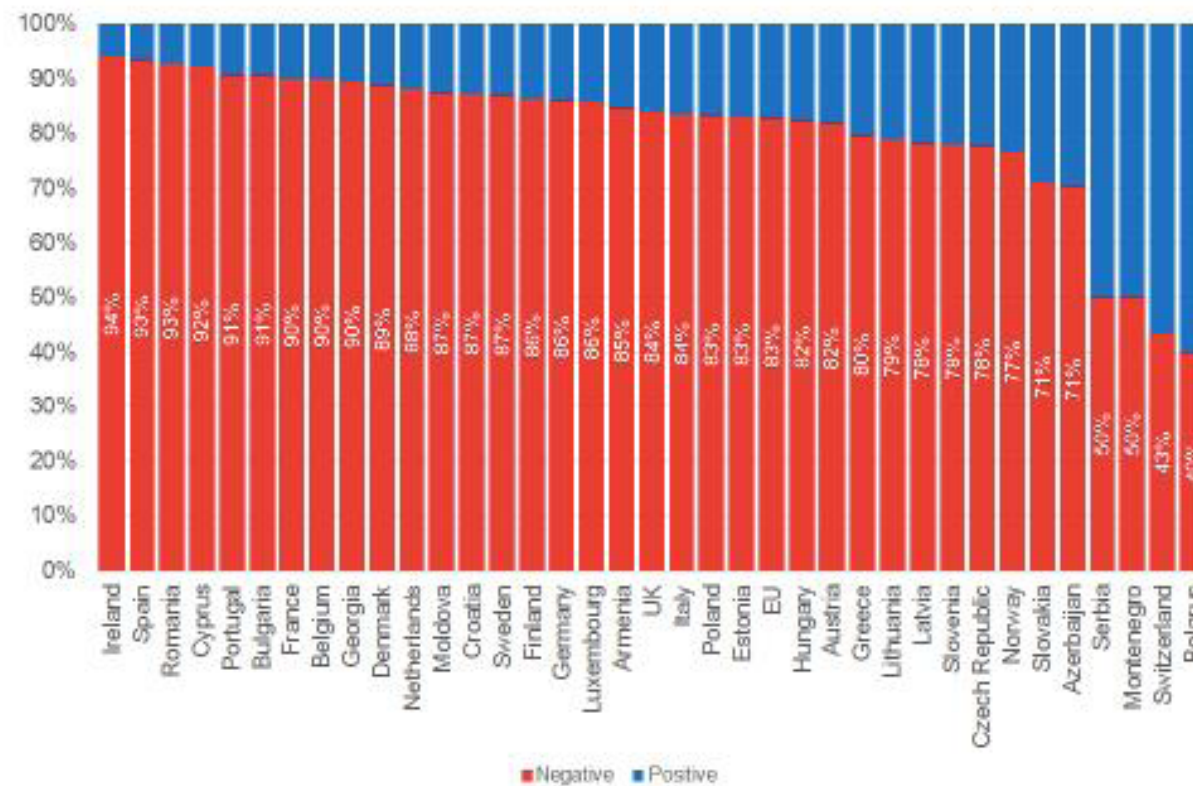
Step by step, Russian propaganda is removing moral taboos and establishing a norm in public discourse for topics and notions that were considered impossible just yesterday. Russian media is mobilizing its audience to create a sentiment of revenge.

TOP NARRATIVES ABOUT THE EU

The EU countries with their extensive freedoms and quality of life are very attractive to Russians. It is difficult to convince most Russians that Europe is failing, but apparently this is exactly what is going on. Russian television is Kremlin's number one channel for communicating extremely negative information about the EU countries to the internal audience.

Europeans are depicted as spineless, morally degraded and prone to aggressively attacking Russians with their faulty values. It is understood that Russians should rise up to defend themselves, their compatriots and supporters in Europe.

Positive to negative news ratio



The average ratio of negative to positive news is 85%/15%

However there are two countries that Russian TV covers positively: Belarus and Switzerland

Not surprisingly, most European countries receive a very negative coverage on Russian TV, with only four countries having a more balanced image (20). (see Chart #22)

Chart #22

HOW **RUSSIAN MEDIA** FOMENTS HOSTILITY TOWARD THE WEST

It is also important to note that all European countries seem to receive well organized and disciplined communication campaigns. 90% of all negative news about Europeans can be classified in 6 primary narratives that, when combined, tell quite a grim story.

A large number of modern Russian messages about Western countries draw inspiration from a popular critical column «Their Manners» on Soviet TV. The content of such messages is rather unoriginal and portrays dissoluteness and moral decay, for example, a “normalization” of sexual perversions and other vices it claims are common in Europe and the United States.

Some of the most bizarre quotations include: «Pedophilia is common in all countries that follow American and European policies: Latin America, Canada, Australia... The articles that request equality for pedophiles are printed in Oxford and Cambridge.” TV channel TV Center, «Postscriptum with Aleksey Pushkov”

ABOUTTHEMACRONS(Frenchpresident): “pedophilia has developed into great and pure love” Another strategy of Ukraine. Time will tell. August 29, 2017.

KISELYOV: **“The EU is degrading. Poverty and corruption”** Vesti Nedeli with Dmitry Kiselyov, February 5, 2017.

KISELYOV: **“Everything is so hypocritical that sorting out this European abomination becomes uncomfortable and gives a feeling of disgust!”** Vesti Nedeli with Dmitry Kiselyov, December 4, 2017.

SOLOVYOV: **“All of you, Anglo-Saxons, are liars!”** Evening with Vladimir Solovyov, March 22, 2018.

SOLOVYOV: **“For this we do not respect position of the West! Because it does not have any moral principles!”** Evening with Vladimir Solovyov, June 28, 2018

KISELYOV: **“Puigdemont (Spanish politician) is a standard Brussels politician. Weak, tricky, cowardly! Avoids responsibility. Short-sighted. Dressed neatly. His eyes are clear and shifty.”** Vesti Nedeli with Dmitry Kiselyov, November 5, 2017.

In parallel with the idea of the «decay» of Europe and western powers in general, Russian propaganda is actively introducing the idea of Russia’s unique spirituality. By consciously pitting the fallen West

against spiritually rich Russia, Kremlin suggests that there is a special mission called «Russian world.»

KISELYOV: **“Russia is strength. The island in the world.”** Vesti Nedeli with Dmitry Kiselyov, April 16, 2017

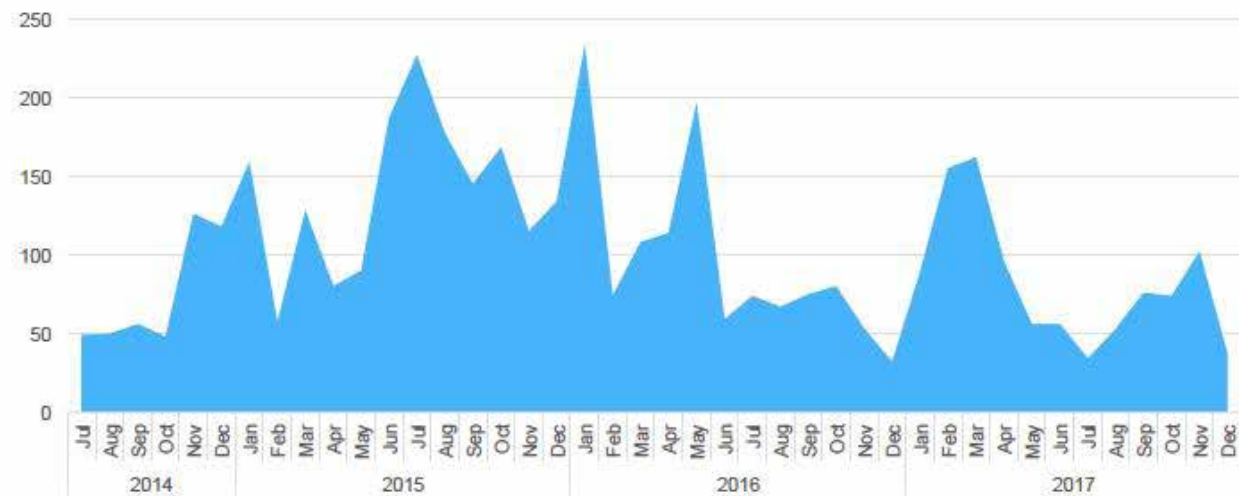
KISELYOV: **“All countries pin hopes on Moscow for peace and prosperity!”** Vesti Nedeli with Dmitry Kiselyov, (HD), October 8, 2017

SOLOVYOV: **“Russia can only exist as an Empire! The Third Rome. However, there will be no fourth Rome!”** The Duel. Zhirinovskiy VS Zlobin, March 16, 2017

Chart #23

“Protests in Europe” by months

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

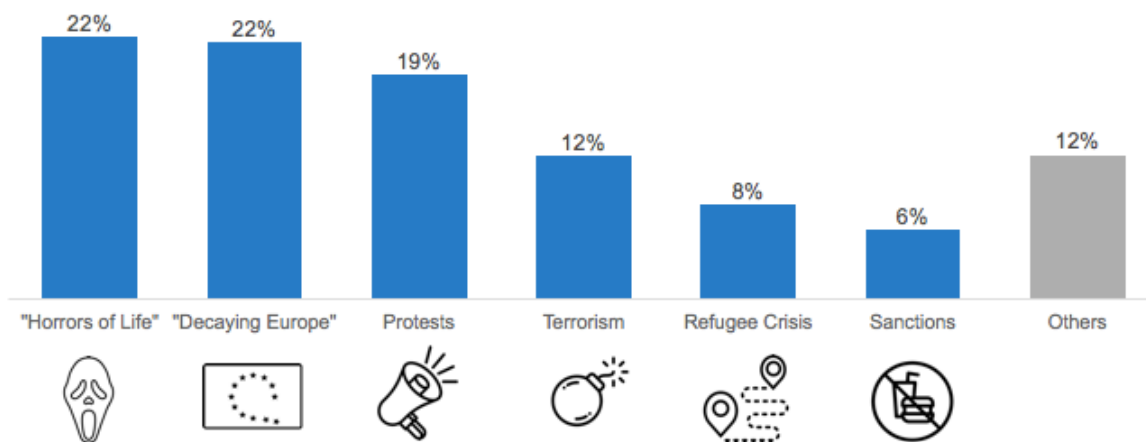


On Russian TV, It appears that Europe is in decay: migrants, terrorist attacks, horrible daily life and as a result – constant non-stop protests. There was not a single week within the research timeframe that didn't cover protests in the EU, creating an illusion of non-stop protests in Europe. (see Chart #23)

Chart #24

6 main narratives about EU on RU TV

- 88% of all negative coverage may be divided into six main narratives



Russian media puts tremendous effort into these narratives, in order to:

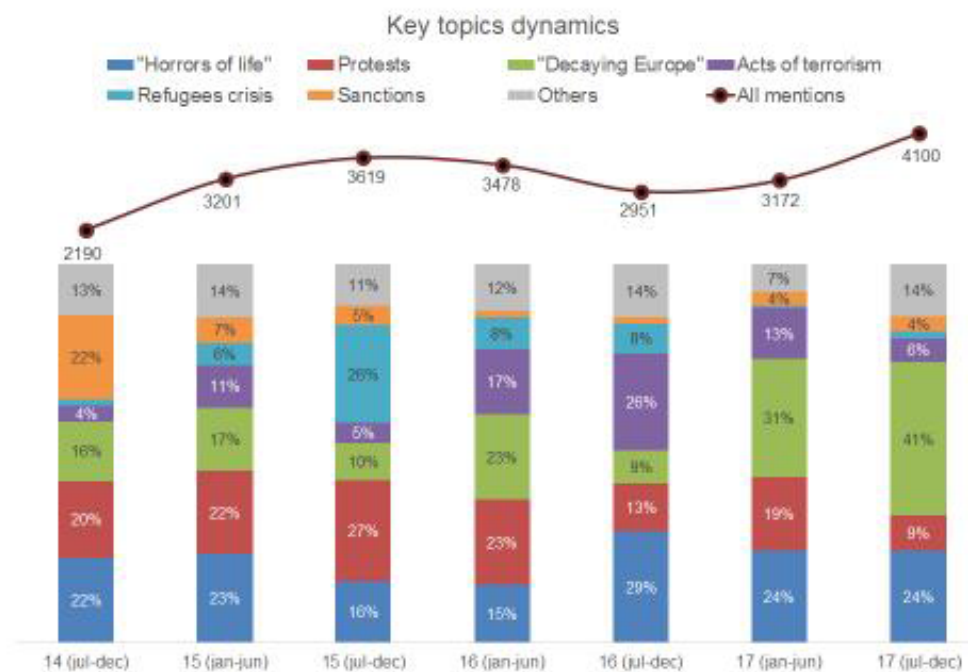
1. Convince Russian population never to accept European liberal values, not today nor tomorrow;
2. Prepare Russian population for potential conflicts with the West and motivate its citizens to take over weak and divided Europe;
3. Increase the awareness that if Russia would not resist, Europe will impose its "toxic" values.

There is an emphasis in Russian news programs on dehumanizing the average European. He/She is depicted as a strange, depraved, unfair human being. Therefore, the European way of life comes as a threat to Russians and public opinion is fine-tuned to embrace the idea that Russia has the right to bring order to Europe in the name of self-preservation.

Chart #25

Let us look at these narratives in more detail (20).

Key narratives' dynamics by half-year periods



Quantity of negative news has increased by 87% from July'14 to December'17

"Decaying Europe" was the most growing narrative in 2HY 2017

A big share of the "Horrors of Life" narrative in order to support a perception of a "dangerous" life in Europe

Total amount of negative news, share

1. “HORRORS OF LIFE”.

The most widespread narrative in Russian news is about daily life in Europe. This narrative attempts to persuade Russian citizens that life in Europe is unstable, insecure and full of dangers, thus an average European’s safety is constantly under a threat. The majority of such news pieces are stories about natural and industrial disasters, accidents and crimes. The peculiarity of this narrative is that it is usually based on insignificant events, each shown as something large-scale or even common occurrence. An example of such narrative can be news about a family fight in a small provincial town of Italy or closure of roads due to the snowstorms in a number of European states, even if these roads have no particular importance. At the same time there might be a lot of similar events in Russia, but they are not mentioned. As an example, it is worth analyzing of how the tragic fire at Kemerovo, which killed 60+ people, was covered by the Russian media. While this was covered by all major international media, Russian news focused on Sergei Lavrov (Minister of Foreign Affairs) celebrating his birthday.

The aforementioned techniques of avoiding certain information and, especially direct foreign and domestic comparisons, are employed in order to spread the belief that Europe is very unstable, full of disasters and dangerous to live in. Eventually this creates a story of a hard, fragile and dangerous life in Europe with struggles on daily basis, and a conclusion that 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 Levada Center (January 2016), 70% of Russians avoid traveling abroad for security reasons.

Local authorities in Europe are usually depicted as weak and unable to provide an adequate response to the challenges or using double standards to favor of the rich and powerful. The same refers to the police and armed forces of the European countries: if they are mentioned, they are usually shown by Russian TV as weak and inefficient. This narrative predominantly concerns 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, a medic, took out his gun when arguing with his brother’s wife about where the washed

clothes should dry. He killed her first, then opened fire from the balcony and shot his brother, a neighbor and a policeman who tried to intervene.”
— News, Channel One, 16 May 2015. Same story on NTV channel.

The fact that such a 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 and otherwise would avoid the duplication of content, but since Russian TV is under Kremlin’s control, the same pre-selected by messages appear across all channels.

2. “THE DECAYING EUROPE”.

Such wording was consciously chosen as a title for this narrative, because this exact phrase is extremely widespread in Russian media. The term itself emerged during the Soviet era. The narrative is built mainly on affirmations about lack of unity and total decline of moral values in European countries, by 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 a United Europe to preserve itself.” — Sunday Time: Half-life period, 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 also important to note that Russian media classifies LGBT rights and gender equality advocates as the same “problematic” Europeans who practice bestiality, pedophilia and incest. Russians, on the contrary, are positioned vis-a-vis the decadent Europeans as “bearers of spirituality and real values” and thus have to fight to preserve these values, sometimes aggressively, because the virus of the “The Decaying Europe” can erode and ruin Russia as well.

For example, one of the widespread myths is the narrative about the removal of Russian children from their parents in Scandinavian countries. There are dozens of examples of coverages telling how child protection authorities seize children from the Russian families living in these countries

“without any investigation 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 Russian audience.

The tools of the “The Decaying Europe” narrative are fanciful stories about “rewriting history” and “renaissance of fascism.” The former is usually applied to a number of countries of the former USSR – the Baltic countries, Ukraine and Poland. According to Russian TV, these countries try to wipe out a memory of common victories and “impose a myth” on young generations that the USSR was a horrible country. Kremlin’s TV channels persuade the audience that a 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 the “renaissance of Nazism” and ensure order in Europe – even by force if necessary. This narrative even gave birth to a very popular meme in the Russian informational space – “We Can Repeat That” (“We can come back to Europe as the USSR did during the WWII and restore order as we see fit”).

Russia actively uses this narrative when talking about Ukraine and Europe. Arguments that the Ukrainian far-right parties in total had 1.85% in the parliamentary elections and have no seats in the current parliament are ignored in the flow of Russian propaganda. In Europe, on the other hand, not many people 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 “Vesty” program on one of Russians state TV channels.

Another citation of this kind comes from Vladimir Solovyov, “Evening with Vladimir Solovyov” program from 1 June 2017:

“The historical triumph of Europe ended with a union under the Nazi flag, and after this, it got bashed in the face with 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 domains: politics, economy, judicial and moral values. The idea for the united Europe, based on shared values, is depicted as unrealistic

(Catalonia and Brexit are used as proof). According to Russian media, there are strong European countries that infringe upon other weak countries. “The Decaying Europe” narrative exhibited the most significant growth dynamic during July-December 2017, mainly due to a number of news from Catalonia crisis in Spain.

3. PROTESTS.

According to Russian TV, there are strikes and protests happening every day in European countries: janitors, health workers, farmers, stewards, staff of the Eiffel Tower etc. demonstrate their disagreement with government’s 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. Moreover, there are plenty of deep-seated flaws in economy, national and security policies that leave an average European no choice but to protest.

“Paris is turning into a big dump, while janitors, who have announced their strike, are storming governmental offices.” Vremya, 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 of a dialogue with the authorities and are a characteristic of free speech – something that exists at the core of all democracies. In contrast, in Russia protests are portrayed as useless and as a sign of weakness. Protests in Russia usually lead to dozens or hundreds of protesters being taken into custody with little effect on public opinion regarding the protested issue.

4. TERRORISM.

All media worldwide cover terrorist attacks, but Russian media do it in a specific way by trying to create the impression that Europe is under constant attack. Sometimes, even crimes that had no terrorist motives, are shown as terrorist attacks. Such story is almost always accompanied by comments about the weakness of the police and security services. The tragedies are often depicted as a “pay-off”, a “punishment” of European countries for inadequate policies, their inability to cope with migration crisis and unwillingness to cooperate with Russia on different matters.

“The police allowed the man from the suburbs of Rouen, who cut the throat of an 84-year-old French priest in the church, to leave the house only once a day in the mornings. This indicates that he was under “strict”, in quotation marks [sic], 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, [already] knew the dream of a 19-year-old Adel Kermisch – to go to Syria and fight for the terrorists.” Vremya, 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 own fault,” because Europe supported the US when the latter became involved in the war in Syria. The overall picture shown to the Russian audience is rather grim: thousands of hungry and dangerous immigrants are filling European towns

day by day, pushing out the locals, committing crimes and terrorist attacks.

“Indeed, the very first blow of the migration wave brought all the deep-seated contradictions inside the European Union to the surface.”

Channel One, 09 June 2015.

This narrative is mainly associated with Germany and the EU. Additionally, Russian media blame Europe for its “hypocrisy”: that it inspired Syrian people to immigrate, but later realized that refugees were a burden. According to 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 Nazis kept the Jews.” Vesty, Russia 1, 24 September 2015.

6. SANCTIONS IMPOSED ON RUSSIA.

Key message of this narrative is about sanctions imposed against Russia together with the Russian

counter-sanctions and them hurting the EU so much that the growing amount of countries wish to remove them in order to survive. This narrative also puts blame on the US, specifying that it refuses to allow the EU to lift sanctions against Russia. It is stated as a common knowledge that the EU is inferior and is under the direct control of the US:

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

The “Sanctions” narrative is used to highlight the strength of Russia. It is often supported by very dubious examples from history, all of them depicting Europe as a cruel power that tried to conquer Russia for centuries, but had always failed. Russians are also described as people who do not need European welfare, because they have a higher moral compass, which does not depend on economic factors. World War II is often used as an example of Russia’s superiority despite the technological advancement of Europe.

A distinct feature of Russian news is that the viewer virtually never gets an unaltered fact about an event,

but an interpretation, an already formed opinion. The head of Russian news agency, Mr. Kiselyov openly declares that “Time for neutral journalism has gone” (from a speech at International Media Forum 2016).

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

General emphasis on top national channels has a consistently expressed emotional tone color – aggressiveness, contempt and preaching doom to Europeans.

TOP NARRATIVES ABOUT UKRAINE

Russia represents Ukraine to its citizens through a rather simple narrative – Russophobic fascists and radicals illegally gained power in Ukraine and started a civil war; Ukraine is now a failed state that is being used by the West against Russia, while Russia is only trying to help the Russian-speaking people of Donbas (21).

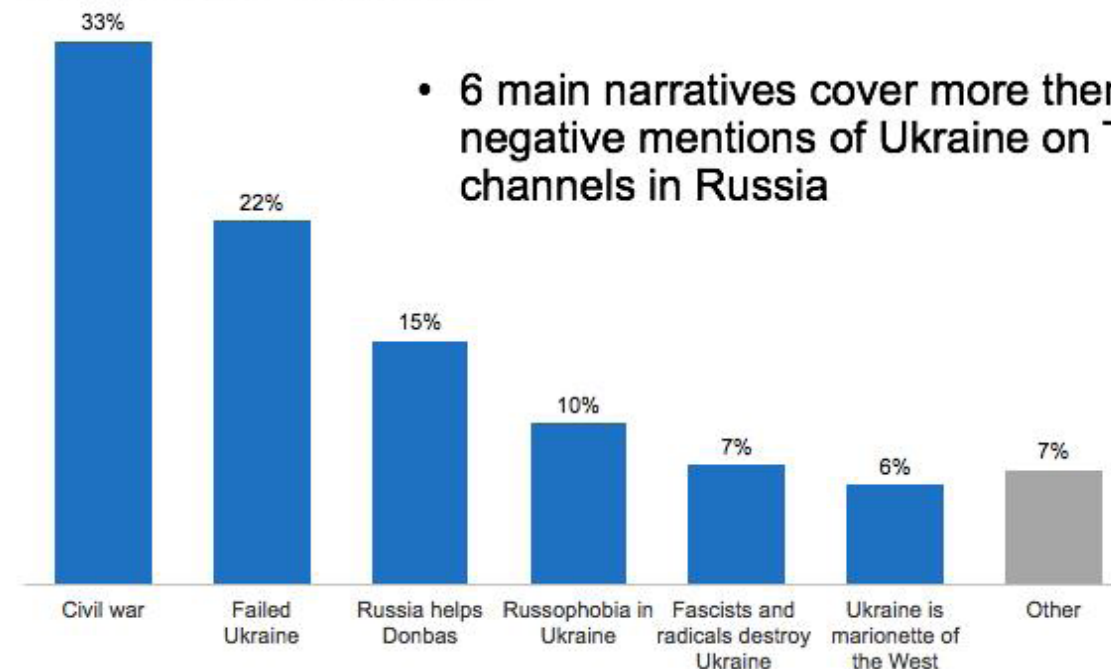
We understand that this narrative occupies 30% on TOP-3 Russian TV channels of total negative international news. Main attention is kept on the Ukrainian Government, institutions, delegitimizing Ukrainian Armed Forces in eyes of Russian citizens

Narrative #1: Civil war in Ukraine is mainly delegitimizing central Government institutions, especially Armed Forces of Ukraine, who according to Russians:

1. Kill civilians
2. Are breaching the peace treaty
3. Sustain tremendous military losses

Chart #26

Main narratives



• 6 main narratives cover more than 90% of negative mentions of Ukraine on TOP-3 TV channels in Russia

It is also important to note that the fourth biggest focus is to justify that Russia did not attack Ukraine.

Narrative #2: Ukraine is a failed state. This narrative is designed to delegitimize the Government of Ukraine – the second institutional source of the fight against Russia.

Narrative #3: Russia helps Donbas in every way possible with (1) political support; (2) helping refugees; (3) hostage exchanges; (4) hosting events to support Donbas; (5) providing humanitarian and cultural support.

Narrative #4: Russophobia. “Anti-Russian sentiments” and not Russian aggression is the declared reason for creating a negative perception of Ukrainians. Hence, as the narrative goes, Russians have the right to be righteously angry for being betrayed by Russophobic Ukrainians.

Narrative #5: Fascists and radicals are destroying Ukraine. In this narrative we see how a “righteous obligation” is cultivated to do whatever is necessary to stop the destruction of Ukraine by fascists and radicals.

Narrative #6: Ukraine is a puppet of the West. Any of Ukraine’s successes within the European and Euro-Atlantic directions are explained to Russian population as a result of being a model master-servant. Russians are trying to undermine positive achievements of Ukraine and present Westernization of Ukraine as lack of independence that ultimately targets Russia (21).

Russian propaganda makes considerable efforts to give a positive definition of military aggression in the Ukrainian Donbas and thus to justify the unlawful actions of the Russian occupation administrations. They use the following main narrative: “DPR and LPR are the anti-fascist states, the territories of equality, freedom and justice, where volunteers, representatives of different peoples together with the «people of Donbas» defend themselves against the American offensive.” Here is an example from a news story at TV channel Russia 1:

Author Alexandr SLADKOV: “**Donbas turned out to be the territory of Equality, Justice and true values for the foreign volunteers fighting there.**”

American «TEXAS»: “**Russian troops act for the benefit of the people, whereas the US occupies**

other countries for the benefit of oligarchs and corporations. The most important thing is morality in the heart. Americans lack morality, whereas Russians have it in abundance.”(22)

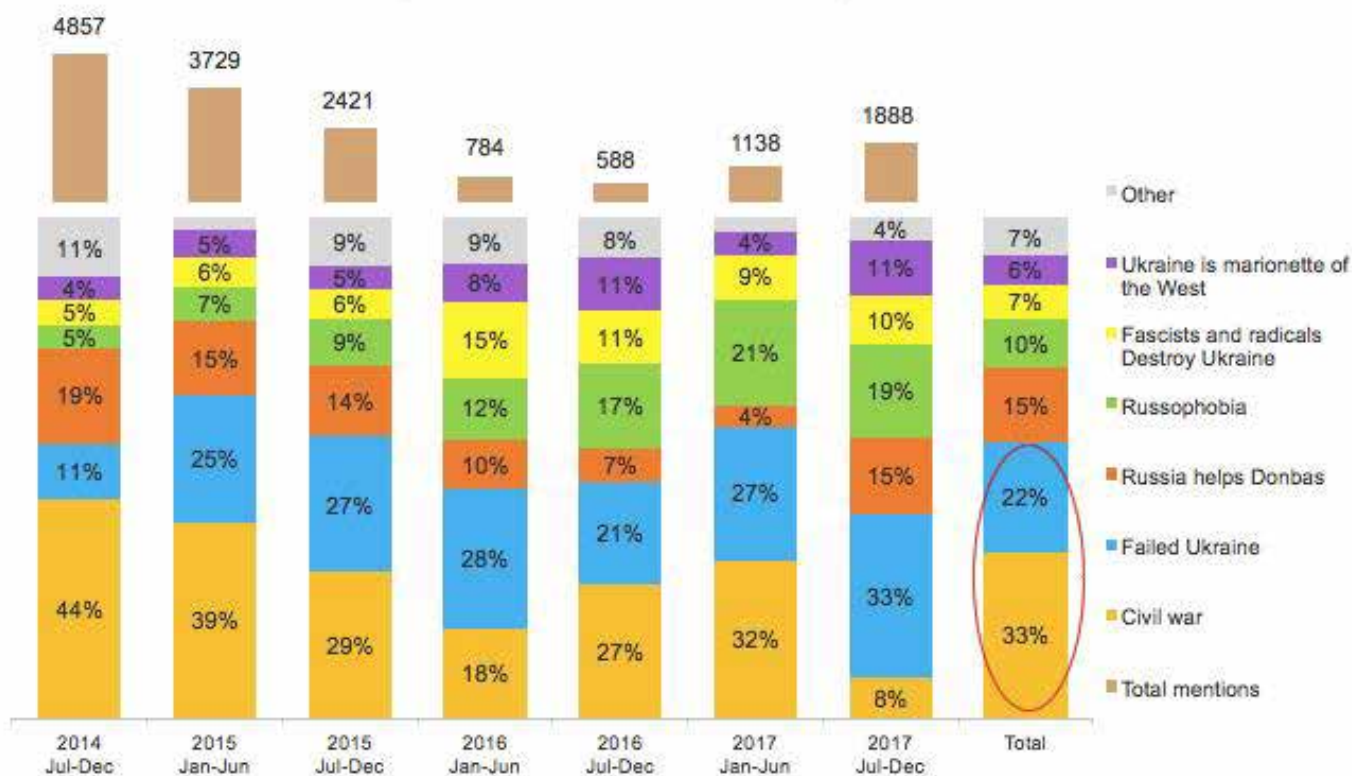
International events get a large share of time on Russian news programs. Events in Ukraine, Europe and the U.S. may occupy up to 90% of the entire airtime in some cases. This draws public attention from internal issues and unites population against the West as an enemy. Formally independent channels, which are supposed to compete for the content have the same news agenda. They regularly present news on different minor events in similar wording. Therefore, there is little doubt in the supervision from the top.

At present, it also seems important for the narrative to point out that not all Ukrainians are fascists. Kremlin media communicate that “In Ukraine there’s a radical totalitarian minority in power that brings chaos and humiliates Russian-speaking population”. In Russian TV reports there’s often a hidden plea to bring Ukraine back to normal order. It also attempts to demonstrate to Russian population that road to the West chosen by Ukrainians does not lead to success.

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Chart #27

Mentions dynamics every 6 months



This communication is emotionally targeted at humiliating and mocking Ukrainians. It uses the same common notion since the times of the USSR. In many Soviet jokes, Ukrainians were often depicted as the internal enemy of Russian people. An average Ukrainian would be shown as someone who secretly opposes Russians and is willing to support the Western enemy instead (23). The role of Ukrainians in WWII was twisted and fighters for independence were disposed as fascist supporters. This folklore played a role in helping Kremlin propaganda to bring the Russian viewer to believe in Ukrainian fascists who serve the West instead of their Moscow brethren. This understanding is rooted in Ukraine constantly fighting for independence against the Soviets during Russian Revolution in Central and Southern Ukraine, and during and post-WWII in 1940s-1950s in Western Ukraine.

The speculative nature of Russian political talk shows is well illustrated in the following example. On August 6, 2018 the «60 Minutes» program discussed a Facebook post made by the President of Ukraine Petro Poroshenko in which he discussed his agreement with the Western leaders on the joint restoration of the war-ravaged Donbas:

“At the EU-Ukraine summit, we agreed on launching my initiative for the interested EU member states’ to take «patronage» over selected cities and areas of these territories in order to implement targeted assistance projects for infrastructure restoration, economic development, and ensuring normal life within communities.”

The initiative of the president of Ukraine aroused a storm of indignation among Russians.

Presenter Yevgeny Popov expressed the main message of the discussion in the studio:

“Under the palm trees of Marbella Poroshenko decided to distribute the lands of Donbas!”

Typical remarks expressed in the studio:

The DPR writer- gunman Zakhar PRILEPIN:
“Poroshenko has sold everything in Ukraine:

wood, soil! Poroshenko wants to trade off Donbas!”

POPOV: **“We are discussing the distribution of land”**

60 minutes, Russia 1, 6 August 2018.

On the same day, in the same studio, the same problem was discussed on air in the evening: the restoration and reconstruction of the war-ravaged region. But this time, the proposal for cooperation came from the Russian General Staff and was addressed to the Americans, and concerned not Ukraine, but Syria. It is not difficult to guess that the connotation of speeches and comments were exactly the opposite. The aforementioned presenter Yevgeny Popov expressed the general message:

POPOV: **“An ordinary message: Let’s restore Syria together.”**

Typical remarks:

POPOV: **“This point is very important: any war comes to an end and we need to restore [infrastructure]”**

Movie director Karen SHAHNAZAROV: **“Here (in**

General Gerasimov’s proposal) there is nothing unusual. This is a common offer of humanitarian action”

60 minutes. Ukraine and new sanctions: results of closed Russia-US talks, August 6, 2018

Sometimes, to inspire a conflict it is enough to simply gather opponents in the same room, to time the meeting to the date of another historical tragedy in a long European history or to organize a broadcast on a controversial topic without delay. The NTV talk show «Meeting point.» Who made them speak up?! (October 12, 2017) was organized exactly that way. They discussed the reaction of the Hungarian Foreign Ministry to the language norms in the Ukrainian law «On Education.» Watching the successful provocation (the Hungarians quarrelling with the Ukrainians) to an ovation from the crowd in the studio, the Russians did not hide their pleasure. As presenter Olga Belova said: “Haircut has just begun!”

If there is no confrontation, presenters and experts from the Russian side begin to systematically escalate the situation around the controversial topic. According to Olga Belova: «Now we will feed the flames of the Ukrainian-Polish friendship»

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«Meeting point.» Total disconnect?! November 8, 2017

Often the talk show's presenters raise the degree of the talks in studio with frankly provocative statements. This was the case with the NTV program dedicated to the adoption of a law providing for criminal liability for the denial of the «Volyn massacre» in Poland.

At some point, apparently being unsatisfied with the degree of conflict between Ukrainian and Polish participants, Olga Belova reacted angrily

BELOVA to the Polish guest: "They spit on your law!" « Meeting point.» More noise and for what?! February 2, 2018

However, foreign participants do not always succumb to provocations and then the situation reaches the boiling point of absurdity. On March 29, 2017, in the «60 Minutes» studio they discussed a news story of a hooligan who shot at the Polish consulate in Ukrainian Lutsk from a grenade launcher. 60 Minutes. New provocations of Ukraine. NTV. 29 March 2017.

Presenter Olga Skobeeva gave guidance to the discussion, saying: «In fact, Ukraine has attacked Poland today!» Other Russians did not restrain themselves in the assessments either. For example, STARIKOV: «The Ukrainian radicals declared war on Poland!»

When the turn came to the Polish expert, experienced journalist Zygmunt Dzenalovsky remained adamant: «We (Poland) do not need war! We are friends with Ukraine!» Then Russian expert ABZALOV immediately commented: «You (Poland) do not make friends with Ukraine. You know nothing about the Ukrainian-Polish relations».

This dialogue quite accurately reflects the absurdity of the situation. Russian propaganda creates a new reality, leading to such conclusions as:

- Russia is not a country with a backward economy, but an «energy superpower» that claims its own part in the world as a zone of its geopolitical interests;
- The Ukrainian Revolution of Dignity was not a popular uprising against a dictator who was caught stealing, but a coup d'état inspired and directed by the West;

- The experienced journalist Zygmunt Dzenalovsky knows nothing about Ukrainian-Polish relations, etc.

According to Russia's agenda, Ukraine is not on friendly terms with Poland, neither is it with other European neighbors. The goal of this agenda is achieved methodically, by creating scandalous situations, forging information and engaging in sabotage. They pit Ukrainians against their neighbors and vice versa. The technology is simple and elaborated. To disseminate their propaganda, Russia claims that the radical views of politically marginal groups in Ukraine, Poland and in other countries are mainstream. It frequently inspires provocations, arranging vandalism acts by hired thugs in military cemeteries or burial places of victims of mass repressions. It incites marginal anti-government actions with the help of the mass media, then encourages greater public participation by presenting these actions as political mainstream. For Russians, the result is important: a quarrel between neighbors. The provokers descend to any means to achieve what they want.

KEY NARRATIVES ABOUT NATO

Traditionally, since the Soviet era NATO posed as a major and crucial subject for Russian propaganda. Below are some of the old and new narratives on NATO and inevitably the US, developed by contemporary Russian propaganda including some examples of the most vivid quotes.



NATO KILLS RUSSIAN PEOPLE IN DONBAS

Presenter Artem SHEININ: **“This cemetery in Dnepropetrovsk is the result of the fact that America wanted to attack Russia.”** Rezhym tishyny (Ceasefire). Time will tell. Channel One. September 16, 2016

Galina Zaporozhtseva “Mothers of Ukraine”: 100 American subversives entered the DPR (East Ukraine) territory” “Meeting Point”: New February Revolution?. NTV. February 8, 2017.

Politician Elena BONDARENKO: **“Do you not see mercenaries with the US passports in Izyum [East Ukraine]?!”** First Studio: American-Ukrainian diplomacy. Channel One. 20 June 2017.

GUEST: **“I’m from Luhansk! NATO troops are in Popasna [East Ukraine]. It’s not a secret!”** News: authorities in Kyiv and the people of Ukraine. Channel One. 26 June 2017

THE WEST SEEKS RUSSIA’S DEATH IN GEOPOLITICAL GAME

Yevgeny SATANOVSKY (President of the “Middle East Institute” research center): **“The only goal that Civilized World has in relations with the Russian Federation is to cut Russia’s throat.”** Sunday Night with Vladimir Solovyov. Russia 1. 28 May 2017.

Nikolai STARIKOV (head of the Great Russia party): **“The US is a serial killer who comes after our wealth and the souls of our children. He has just killed Ukraine”.** Zaslou Zapadu:Pravo golosa. TVC. June 2017.

“NATO’s goal is to occupy Russia.” — «Postscriptum» with Alexei Pushkov. TVC. 17 June 2017.

THEY WANTED TO TURN CRIMEA INTO A BASE FOR NATO FLEET. THEY PLANNED TO SLAUGHTER THE “RUSSIAN CRIMEA” IN ORDER TO ACHIEVE THIS.

DEPUTY CHAIRMAN OF THE DEFENSE COMMITTEE A. KONDRATYEV: **“The Americans wanted to place their base there long before the operation in Crimea.”** Sunday Night with Vladimir Solovyov. Russia 1. 15 July 2017.

SENATOR KLINTSEVICH: **“The Americans in Crimea have already planned a place for each submarine. They have already concluded construction contracts! They have already planned kindergartens for the NATO children”** 60 Minutes: Trump is dangerous for the US. Russia 1. 20 December 2016.

“The Ukrainian Maidan started with the only goal - to deprive us [Russia] of Crimea” Time will tell: How to keep Russia? Channel One. 27 November 2017.

RUSSIAN OFFICER: “The Americans showed us a map with a military base in Crimea back in 1989”

Journalist KNYRIK: **“Americans planned an ethnic conflict in Crimea so that they could come under the guise of peacekeepers”** Time will tell: The Russian Crimea. Channel One. March 16, 2018.

NEW/OLD TRENDS

In addition to numerous one-day fake horror stories Russian propaganda is also developing long-running stories about military-owned biological laboratories in Ukraine where “viruses are produced under the auspices of the Pentagon” – Olga BELOVA «Meeting Point»:Nothing Personal?!. NTV. 30 August 2017, or laboratories, where they are creating «Russian AIDS,» i.e. a virus capable of selectively damaging only Russians. This virus will be used to blackmail the Kremlin:

“They will give something to our delegations and order them to return Crimea in exchange of the antidote!”

Political scientist Sergey MARKOV «Meeting Point.» Invisible invasion?!. NTV. November 3, 2017.

Among the latest developments on the NATO subject we should note the know-hows aimed at destroying Euro-Atlantic solidarity and dividing the Alliance. Russians make use of the current political agenda 24 hours a day, 7 days a week in their talk shows to address both the ongoing conflicts within the bloc and emerging conflicts between its individual members. In doing so, Russian television mostly envisions negative scenarios which should often lead to a disaster.

If the current political agenda does not provide enough supply of ideas for numerous programs, Russian political technologists look back through history and dig up the contingencies of interethnic, religious and other conflicts. So, for example, there was a whole series of broadcasts dedicated to the «Volyn Massacre.» During these broadcasts Ukrainians and Poles turned on each other publicly to the joy of Russians.

For the most part, Russian TV studio analysis of both the current and historical events is exceptionally biased and, in fact, is a reiteration of historical, ideological and propaganda cliches. In these cases the arguments of opponents (if they are at all invited to participate in the discussion) are ignored and they themselves are subject to heckling, psychological pressure, defamation and trivial intimidation.

In general, Russian television tries to instill in their viewers a sense of the near demise or «decay» of the West in every possible way, as well as notion of instability and ephemerality of the EU, NATO and other forms of Western solidarity in their viewers.

NATO COUNTRIES ARE THE VASSALS OF THE UNITED STATES. THEY HAVE LOST THEIR SOVEREIGNTY AND ARE UNDER EXTERNAL CONTROL OR OCCUPATION (GERMANY IS USED AS AN EXAMPLE)

SENATOR SERGEY RYBAKOV: **“America has worked so hard for its hegemony. First it massacred Europe during the First and Second World Wars.”**

Time will tell: The Syrian conflict. Channel One. 30 September 2017.

TV presenter GURNOV: **“Trump said: I’m cool! I’m coming from my vassals to talk with Putin!”**

«Meeting point. NTV. May 29, 2017.

“France is getting lower and lower... France is not the same.” Vesti Nedeli with Dmitry Kiselyov. Russia 1. 5 March 2017.

THE NATO BLOC CONSISTS OF COUNTRIES THAT ARE AT WAR WITH EACH OTHER AND THEREFORE IT HAS NO PROSPECTS

Igor KOROTCHENKO (editor-in-chief of the National Defence, director of the Center for Analysis of World Arms Trade, member of the Public Council at the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation): **“NATO is a military cancer on the body of Europe”**

“Americans planned to kill Erdogan” Vesti Nedeli with Dmitry Kiselyov. Russia 1. 26 November 2017.

Americans wanted to **“seize a piece of territory from Turkey”** Vesti Nedeli with Dmitry Kiselyov. Russia 1. 21 January 2018.

TURKISH GUEST: **“With «allies» in quotes [sic] like the US, one needs no enemies! They are**

killing and terrorizing us. America is putting pressure on Turkey with acts of terrorism, murders and agents!”

TV presenter Anatoly KUZICHEV: **“What is the purpose of Americans in Greece?”**

Expert Mikhail DELYAGIN: **“The purpose of Americans in Greece is chaos. First, they seek to start a fight between Russia and Greece and then between Greece and Turkey so that Russia cannot intervene. They want to make the world pay for them again and buy their stocks and securities! And thus local currencies will be brought down!”** Time will tell: The US – conflict policy? Channel One. 13 August 2018.

Sometimes Russian television tries to intensify existing civil conflicts by prompting extreme commentaries.

“The idea of Independence of Catalonia needs martyrs rather than leaders!” Vesti Nedeli with Dmitry Kiselyov. Russia 1. 5 November 2017.

AT THE FOREFRONT OF INFORMATION WAR

Russian propaganda is a creative space responsive to changes in the political world. In that space, new myths are constantly being born. The talk show format enables the simulation of an extremely important situation by introducing drama or dramatic elements. The directors use all sorts of methods to achieve the effect of inclusion. The main trick is to reconstruct an interethnic or interstate conflict within the talk show.

One of the main roles in the Russian stage direction is played by invited Western experts. Their task is to support a version beneficial to Russian propaganda while speaking on behalf of the Western world. With few exceptions the position of the invited Western experts is characterized by obvious subjectivism and open bias.

Let us use the specific cases to illustrate the way it works:

May 25, 2017 Channel One. Talk-show «The First Studio.» Topic: Is Russia a threat to NATO? At some

point in the discussion, the Polish expert begins to aggressively interrupt the Russian side. Quote:

Polish expert Jakub KOREJBA: **We will seize Belarus from Russia anyway!**

The presenter responds instantly to the Polish guest's remark.

Artem SHEININ: **"Against the backdrop of Trump's aggressive speech we see how the representative of the NATO Alliance threatens the Russian Federation: We will seize Belarus from Russia anyway! My question is: Where does the threat come from?!"** - As the reader can see, the host presents a private person (a commentator hired by the TV channel) as «the representative of the NATO Alliance.»

As a result of such manipulation the domestic viewer is convinced that NATO is a real threat to Russia.

Another example is when a Russian presenter and a Western expert working in duos. Popular talk show "Evening with Vladimir Solovyov" begins with the presenter's statement:

SOLOVYOV: **"The West is trying to deceive Russia and this is nothing new!"**

After a while, Solovyov returns to his thesis,

hurling accusations at the Polish expert: «[in the 90s] you [the West] took all the money and military secrets out of Russia and corrupted everyone you could!"

In response, the Polish expert makes a helpless gesture: "But we are not to blame for the fact that your officials and politicians sold themselves!" as if confirming all that has been said. Evening with Vladimir Solovyov. Russia 1. June 26, 2018

The favorite strategy of the Kremlin is defaming the Western world — to make Russians feel antipathy toward Western civilization. To do this they present the policy of the West as devoid of moral principles and the representatives of the West as completely cynical. Yet again making the presence of «Western experts» to be essential.

Here are few vivid examples:

Polish expert Tomasz MACIEJCZUK: **"We [the West] will use everything against you [RF]! Even fakes. Get used to it!"** Time will tell: Reaction to poisoning. Channel One. 12 April 2018.

In a similar manner Russians discredit the Maidan

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with the help of «suitable» Western experts.

Jakub KOREJBA: **“We are building a fortress out of feces [sic]. There is no other substance! Neither there are any other people!”** Time will tell: Football – political context. Channel One. 9 July 2018.

Additionally, they are also spreading fake news stories:

Jakub KOREJBA: **“We have never concealed that Polish private military companies are fighting in Ukraine!”** Evening with Vladimir Solovyov. Russia 1. 22 May 2018.

Often Russian talk shows play out a situation in which Ukraine is merely a bargaining chip the West is cynically using to negotiate with Moscow, with no respect for the lives of Ukrainians.

Jakub KOREJBA: **“The developed world will let Ukrainians to stay cold just to make sure Russia does not get the money!”** Time will tell: Ukraine without gas. Channel One. 2 March 2018.

Jakub KOREJBA: **“Ukrainians have no choice ... Either Ukrainians will do as we say or we will**

give them to Russians!” Time will tell: Polish-Ukrainian dispute. Channel One. 2 February 2018.
Jakub KOREJBA: **“Ukraine is our zone of influence! And the RF will get nothing!”** Time will tell: Poland vs Khmelnytsky. Channel One. 15 February 2018.

The so-called “controlled” conflict is known to be one of the most common hybrid war strategies used by Russia. An imperious deputy of the State Duma V. Zhirinovskiy has openly mentioned this fact multiple times:

ZHIRINOVSKY: **“Now there are wonderful opportunities! All these small countries are pugs, mutts! They should be pitted against each other! Let them bite each other! America will roll back over the ocean and we will bury the dead Europe.”** Evening with Vladimir Solovyov. Russia 1. 14 March 2017.

ZHIRINOVSKY: **“Poles should be pitted against the Germans! Germans - against the Chinese!”** Evening with Vladimir Solovyov. Russia 1. 25 October 2017.

It is the controlled technology of conflict with the participation of false experts that Russian television

uses when it constructs a confrontation between Ukraine and such NATO member states as Poland, Hungary and Romania. At the same time, the main task of the show directors is to transfer the atmosphere of geopolitical confrontation to the studio and to immerse the viewer in it.

It can be stated that the Kremlin has studied and harnessed the laws of how information society functions.

“Terrorists no longer need organizational structures. They can act alone, autonomously. It is enough to motivate them ideologically and direct at the enemy” (From Vladimir Putin’s speech at a meeting of the Valdai Discussion Club, October 2016). The obvious example of Russian volunteers who believe that in Donbas they fight against the «fascist West» clearly illustrates how and whom Russian propaganda motivates.

RUSSIAN PRESIDENTIAL NARRATIVES

On March 1, 2018 Vladimir Putin addressed the Russian Parliament (24). It was his 14th annual speech as President. Yet this one was different. Not only because it had been moved closer to the election date, but also due to the message Mr. Putin chose to send to his countrymen and to the audience abroad, in which he presented newly developed weapon systems that could overcome the National Missile Defense of the United States of America (NMD).

During his address Mr. Putin mentioned NMD 19 times. He also said “nuclear” 25 times and “rockets” 18 times. These three words were included in top-50 most used words of the speech. Curiously, in his previous address to the Russian Parliament back in 2016 Mr. Putin did not use these words at all.

Mr. Putin also mentioned the United States 13 times, compared to only 2 times a year before. It appears as though the language of this 14th annual presidential speech indeed was very different. In the course of the research top-15 military/hostility-related words of this speech were compared with all previous starting with 2014 and annexation of Crimea. The analysis shows that this event can be considered as the definitive turn in relations between Russia and western countries.

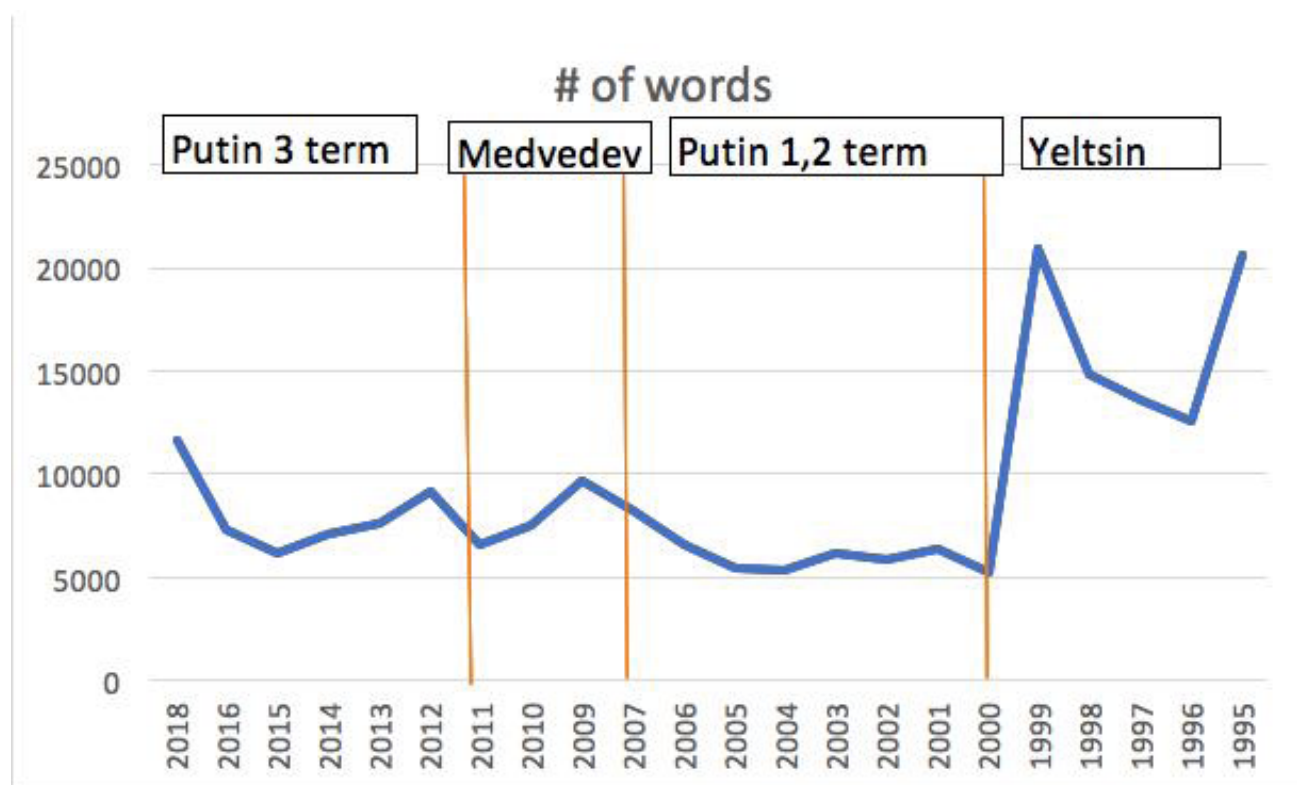
Mr. Putin didn’t use such strong rhetoric even during more intense years of active participation of Russian Armed Forces in the wars in Ukraine and Syria. So even chose to look at an even longer period of the annual presidential speeches by Mr. Putin and two other presidents of Russian Federation – Boris Yeltsin and Dmitri Medvedev.

In general there is a lot in common if we look at the words used all Russian presidents. They usually use: “we/Russia must”, “we/Russia should.” President Yeltsin however didn’t use these phrases as much as Putin and Medvedev. He was the only Russian president who used words “law” and “right” very often until economic crisis of 1998-1999. Afterwards these words got substituted by “economic” and “growth” instead.

Yearly breakdown of military/hostility-related words used in by Vladimir Putin annual address to the Parliament

	2018	2016	2015	2014
Missiles	29	0	0	1
Nuclear	25	0	0	0
Armed	22	5	5	3
NMD	19	0	0	1
Military	15	0	3	1
Defense	14	1	1	4
USA	13	2	0	4
Fighting	10	0	2	1
Cruise missile	9	0	0	0
Soviet	8	2	0	0
Unmanned aerial vehicle	7	0	1	0
Intercontinenta l	6	0	0	0
Hyper-sound missiles	6	0	0	0
USSR	5	0	0	1
Ballistic	5	0	0	0

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Number of words per annual address to the Parliament for each of the Russian presidents

Mr. Yeltsin, the first democratically elected president of Russian Federation after the collapse of Soviet Union, was famous for his strong and colorful language. As such, his speeches were 3 to 4 times longer than those of his successor Mr. Putin. In the table below you can notice that Mr. Yeltsin used military words a lot during the first Chechen War. Then after Mr. Putin came to power the rhetoric changed dramatically, avoiding all strong words for years even despite the inception of Second Chechen War. He also didn't mention the US until his third term in 2013.

	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Missiles	3	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Nuclear	8	3	4	0	6	0	0	0	2	1	0
Armed	48	11	23	7	8	0	0	1	9	5	0
Military	43	19	20	14	12	1	1	3	5	5	0
Defense	18	4	3	10	5	0	2	1	2	2	1
USA	3	1	2	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
Fighting	3	1	4	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Soviet	2	8	0	0	4	0	0	0	2	1	0
USSR	7	16	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	1
War	5	5	3	0	5	1	0	3	0	0	0

Yearly breakdown of military/hostility-related words used in by Russian president in an annual address to the Parliament

THE ROLE OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR NARRATIVE IN MODERN RUSSIA

World War II seems to be one of the biggest communication topics in Russian media and has been so for decades. Hundreds and thousands of movies, TV series, songs and festivals are created to communicate the key message that Russia won the big war against an evil enemy nation from the West. The existence of other allies of the Soviet Union in WWII is never recalled. Even other Soviet republics are not mentioned much. The basic idea of the message is that Russians won the war alone. And this is despite the fact that at least 20% of Soviet Armed Forces consisted of Ukrainians (25).

It is remarkable how the celebration of the WWII victory changed over time. Or, to be precise, the Great Patriotic War – a concept that omits the actual start of the war in 1939 as well as Soviet invasion of Poland and shifts it to the start of the invasion of the Soviet Union by Nazi Germany in 1941. That date was first announced as a holiday soon after the end of the war

with Germany on 9 May 1945. The date was deliberately set to be different from the date celebrated in the US and UK.

However, in 1948 the holiday was cancelled due to the fact that memory of the horrific experience of the war (tremendous loses, barrier troops tasked with shooting own fleeing soldiers, mass raping and killings of civilians) was still fresh. Real war veterans still carried profound and painful recollections. It was too much for even Stalin and later Khrushchev to declare that date as victory day.

Celebrations as well as the narrative building of the Big Victory commenced again only 20 years after the war in 1965 under the new leader Mr. Brezhnev. It was on that parade in 1965 that intercontinental missiles were first shown to the world.



Bezsmertnyi Polk on the Red Square during May 9th celebrations

Since the end of 1990s the WWII narrative got fine-tuned and grew to match new generation's understanding of the war and why the Soviet Union is good and the West is not.

After the collapse of the USSR Moscow continued to use the Big Victory narrative to justify its "special" way of development even in the last 15 years by creating brand new symbols for the celebration and stating every time that these developments have long-standing tradition. Like Georgievskaya lenta (literally "George's ribbon") and Bezsmertnyi polk (from Rus. "immortal regiment"). The first being a small token in the form of orange-black ribbon to be pinned during commemoration events and dates back to military insignias from the imperial time, while the latter is a rather new invention with no historical practice and implies the use of the portraits of the deceased or living relatives who participated in the Great Patriotic War by the Russian public during mass rallies in May 9th celebrations.



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In the Soviet Union the V-Day celebration was considered to be secondary. The number one national holiday was the anniversary of the October 1917 Revolution. This was the main narrative of USSR – about the Revolution that changed the world, with Vladimir Lenin as its legendary leader.

During Yeltsin’s term, Russian Independence Day became the number one holiday. But in Putin’s Russia the main holiday was quickly shifted to the Great Victory Day. As the Revolution in USSR, the Great Victory became the main narrative of new Russian history and Vladimir Putin – as a symbolic hero of this story the president who brought Moscow back to its post-WWII importance and glory (26).

It is important to note that constructing a sacred image for the leader is a longstanding tradition in Russia. We looked at many communication aspects of the construction of this leadership myth. In this regard it is worth to mention the banquet toast of Vladislav Surkov, current Assistant to Vladimir Putin: “To making the authorities divine!” (27) The formula is the following “If there is Putin – there is Russia. If there’s no Putin – no Russia exists” (28) and is part of the same narrative.

The same instruments used by official propaganda to promote Stalin as Soviet leader are now employed to promote Putin. Even though Stalin wasn’t the leader of the 1917 Revolution he was still linked to it in order to fit the overall internal narrative of the Soviet Union. Similar to this Putin is portrayed as the main figure in WWII narrative despite having no direct affiliation with the war itself, being born in 1952, 7 years after it ended.

Soviet and post-Soviet main narrative matrixes (26)

	Event № 1	Leader № 1
USSR	October Revolution	Stalin
Russia	The Great Victory in WWII	Putin

Kremlin’s work to link the past Soviet narratives with new stories and explainers has modified and changed the war perception from being a terrible experience that should never repeat to something heroic and even attractive, finalizing it with a new slogan: “We can do it again!”

The WWII narratives are now used by Kremlin to justify its aggressive external policy and all external aggression in Europe starts with labeling the other side as “fascists” – Baltic States, Ukraine, Poland and others.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Russian TV is used as an instrument by Kremlin to shape public opinion on world affairs in the country as well as to correct and influence historical notions in accordance with its agenda.

The content of daily information flow depends on the current political task and not on what is actually happening. Topics change in accordance to changes occurring within the political landscape. As could be observed during Russian-Turkish diplomatic conflict in 2016, Russia is capable of turning its public opinion 180 degrees overnight. The scale of communication campaigns is also linked to designated tasks. Fake news are used mainly to support a particular narrative. Despite popular opinion, Kremlin's communication machine prefers to use selected real events to support its story.

In Russian internal narrative, the United States of America are depicted as the only global power that can compete with Russia. In turn, Europeans depend on the US and are usually bound to the role of obedient partners. Russians seem to believe that without American control, Europeans would quickly fall under Russian rule and won't be a significant problem. A perception of Ukraine is also linked to the US influence. Basically, Russian understanding, which comes from their TV, is that it is manipulation of the US that compels Ukraine to engage in war with Russia and it is in the US best interest of Americans to see two of the strongest former USSR republics fight each other. Hence, aggressive Ukraine is a result of US aggression and Moscow should proactively protect itself and Russian-speaking minorities in other countries as well.

The aggressive rhetoric used by Kremlin and its media is directly linked to mobilization during election periods. Both information in media and even presidents' speeches demonstrate this clearly, also during election periods usage of aggressive words grows exponentially.

The internal Russian audience is of the utmost importance to Kremlin. Obedience and reciprocal

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support, which is received from the audience is the cornerstone of Kremlin's success. It allows to a better hold on the power and maintaining ways of making money. External enemies are apparently the most efficient way to mobilize the audience during electoral years. This could be seen from the aggressive rhetoric in both the speeches of Russian president and from TV programming by comparing coverage during military actions in Ukraine and Syria in 2014-2015 versus "enemy" narrative during the election in 2017 (as presented in Chart 5).

TV plays a key role in the internal communication between Moscow and its primary audience. The consensus of this research is that in Russia TV is more influential than internet. This is due to the long-term tradition of Soviet era viewership that still exists today, but also due to the dramatic consolidation of all TV channels with popular news programs under the direct control of Kremlin.

Moscow created a new national myth, built upon WWII victory and around the storylines, described by James Wertsch as "Expulsion-of-Alien-Enemies" narrative template:

1. During the "initial situation," Russia is peaceful and is not interfering with the others.
2. "Troubles" arrive, meaning a foreign enemy viciously attacks the unprovoking Russia.
3. Russia comes under the existential threat and nearly loses everything in total defeat as it suffers from the enemy's attempts to destroy it as a civilization.
4. Through heroism and exceptionalism, against all odds and acting alone, Russia triumphs and succeeds in expelling the foreign enemy.

Within the WWII topic there is an evolving narrative about Moscow defeating evil Western nation – Nazi Germany. It is projected exceptionally well even today:

In this research it was observed how Kremlin communicates with its primary audience by transmitting a clearly defined hierarchy of enemies as follows: the United States of America manipulates the weak and fractured EU along with smaller betrayers of Russia like Baltic states, Ukraine and Georgia. Meanwhile, Moscow stands on its own with no true allies and will win again by being smarter, more proactive and by not being afraid to break some boundaries where needed.

In the heart of this fight is a higher mission of a "Russian World" (Pan-Slavic and orthodox) – a sphere of influence, broken by the western powers after Moscow lost the Cold War by being "tricked and

	Event № 1	Leader № 1
USSR	October Revolution	Stalin
Russia	The Great Victory in WWII	Putin

fooled”. Western stories of piece led to humiliation, defeat and thus Russian people have been divided between the number of countries, where they are now persecuted and humiliated minorities. These countries are previously subordinate allies, who have betrayed Moscow – like Estonia or Latvia, Ukraine or former Yugoslavia nations (with the exception of Serbia). This “injustice” should and will be fixed by the new Russia that has grown strong enough to challenge its existential enemy – Washington and its puppets in Europe.

USA is depicted as the world’s most aggressive and unfair power on top Russian TV channels. As could be seen from analyzing the coverage within the selected timeframe, main narratives about the US on Russian TV, on one hand, are focused on America’s role in creating problems for other countries and military actions abroad, and news about day-to-day problems and “horrors” of Americans on the other. Hence, for an average Russian there is only one aggressive and evil meddler in the affairs of the Russian neighborhood. This fact alone calls for action to protect their own nation against it.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The biggest challenge from our perspective is that Kremlin uses an inherently Western value of free speech to attack the West. It seems fair to say that Moscow-owned TV cannot be considered free media and is more of an instrument of hybrid warfare. As Russian Chief of Staff, general Gerasimov puts it: “To achieve political aims with a minimum armed interference. Mostly, by undermining the enemy’s military and economic potential, by introducing informational and psychological pressure and active support of domestic opposition. Falsifying events and limiting the work of mass media became one of the most effective asymmetric methods of waging wars.”

As a result, it is critical to define Russian TV as hybrid warfare instrument and to treat it that way, so that propaganda tools don’t enjoy same rights and freedoms as legitimate media. Moscow is clearly aware of how to take advantage from the freedom of speech. This creates a significant problem for Western politicians as these problems should be admitted and addressed on legislative level.

The opponent’s mindset of a peaceful cooperation is perceived by Kremlin as a signal to for attack. When western allies demonstrate good will to seek peaceful solutions, Moscow uses this opportunity to stab them in the back. On the contrary, when the West fights back, Kremlin tries to negotiates peace. Thus, being consistent in leveling up sanctions is the most effective way of negotiating with Kremlin.

It also seems important to underline that Kremlin does not equal Russian people. It is a wide known fact that Kremlin elites and oligarchs close to them use corrupt schemes to steal from Russian people, but by using TV (among other instruments) Kremlin keeps popular opinions of Russian citizens under control and directs their anger at the West by depicting it as an ultimate enemy. Kremlin is making enormous efforts to persuade domestic audience that western civilization is degrading, eroding and falling apart, undermining allies of the West and its values. Also, Kremlin communicates to its own population that western countries are even more corrupt than Russia, because they are

willingly accepting “dirty” billions from Russian oligarchs. What is not being said is that any big business is dependent on Kremlin. Kremlin has already successfully mastered manipulation of public opinion during election periods, thus there is a tiny chance that it will change its policies through the mechanism of democratic elections. Therefore, the richest and most powerful people in Russia are the ones capable of influencing the country’s policy and thus should be the primary focus of Western sanctions and pressure.

Though modern narratives, produced by Kremlin, are deeply rooted in the USSR’s heritage and noticeably use its expansionism and totalitarianism as a benchmark, there is at least one principal difference between them. Unlike the USSR, Kremlin has no ideology, which is different from western capitalism. Moreover, the majority of Russian elite is deeply attached to the luxuries of western welfare: bank accounts, real estate, children studying and living abroad, thirst for top western vanity brands etc. So western should use this fact as leverage to put pressure on Kremlin.

To sum up, we believe the following steps are especially important:

1. Raising awareness of policy makers, national governments and international institutions that the West and its values is the object of disinformation in Russian domestic media, in particular:
 - The US and the EU are depicted as enemies
 - Western (liberal) values, including democracy, freedom of expression and the rule of law are deprived of their meaning and shown as false ideals.
2. Adjusting bilateral policy accordingly – energy, financing, soft power influence etc. Currently, the EU remains an absolutely open and vulnerable to the influence of Russian soft “diplomacy” on energy without any reciprocity or ability to influence Russian domestic audience in return.
 - The implementation of Nord Stream 2 would be a significant victory over the West for Kremlin
3. Comparing and assessing the differences between Kremlin’s rhetoric aimed at the West, consumed by the domestic audience and official Russian diplomatic messages communicated to the West. Officially, Russia is aiming “for peace in the whole world”, but in the meantime it is preparing its population to “teach those foreigners a lesson and conquer them all”. In perspective, considering the implications of such double-standards for international affairs and 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 mutual understanding with Western democracies and make any improvement in relations conditional with Russia’s changing its internal news agenda in accordance with the image of a civilized nation it is trying to project in the domain of international relations.

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5. Russian media should be labeled for what they are – official mouthpieces and press offices of Kremlin. They should not enjoy the preferences of the free media in the West, since they are not free. The budgeting of RT, Sputnik and Ruptly should be scrutinized and their operations banned.
6. Consistently continuing sanction policies against Russia. Leveling them up, unless there is no progress from Russia. Sanctions should primary target Russia’s top officials, state companies and business.
 - a Preventing Russia from coming back to PACE, as it would be the first step to lift sanctions without Russia making any of the required changes in their policy.
7. Matching Russia in spending to counter its disinformation. Currently the budget of RT and Sputnik is more than 1 bn USD.

It is also important to track the influence of Russian Threat Narratives towards particular countries in European media. Since Kremlin resources allow the establishment of all kinds of contacts with various media, think tanks, NGOs, it is significant to be

able to distinguish freedom of expression from the well-thought-out narrative or full-blown discourse orchestrated by Kremlin throughout Europe. A good example of such a discourse is «fascism in Ukraine.» Applying one of its most widespread methods – magnifying small events or phenomena to extraordinary scales, Russian media in Europe is able to sow doubt about the democratic nature of the political system in Ukraine in the heads of many Europeans.

One could work with traditional Western media, explaining the impossibility of cooperation on any level with Russian state television channels, as well as using them as a trustworthy source of information and quoting them, since they cannot be called independent mass media. Such cooperation undermines the credibility of respectful journalists, their methods and sources, generating a harmful general impression of «eroded borders» in journalism.

Another sep would be to name and shame politicians, civil activists, who publicly support and spread Threat Narratives. Kremlin is known for its support of the far right and far left movements in Europe.

Average Europeans voting for these parties often do not notice their rhetoric about Russian actions in international politics. This requires an additional explanation on the sources of their financing and ties with Russia.

Moreover, a ban broadcasting Russian news, military or political programs that have been produced by Russian state-funded media outlets is very needed. This is particularly important for the countries of the former USSR, in which Russia has had a strong influence for many years. Ukraine and Moldova have successfully passed laws addressing this issue and protected their citizens from Kremlin’s informational aggression.

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This research was backed and financed by the Black Sea Trust of the German Marshall Fund. It was conducted by the Hybrid Warfare Analytical Group that is part of the non-governmental organization Ukraine Crisis Media Center (UCMC), which was created in March of 2014. UCMC has become one of the first civil society organizations in the post-Revolution-of-DignityUkrainethatstartedidentifying and drawing public attention to the distortion of information, misrepresentations against Ukraine, revealing the cases of deliberate misinformation that were produced and disseminated both nationally and abroad. Serving as an independent media platform for the journalists, public activists, key opinion leaders, civil servants and volunteers UCMC has had a unique opportunity to analyze in-depth the intricacies of miscommunication between the actors and vulnerabilities that were professionally exploited by the anti-Ukrainian forces. UCMC started producing its own content including visuals, infographics, Op-Eds, etc., for international as well as national audience to better explain what was happening in Ukraine and Crimea at the time. The system of fake news, troll attacks and propaganda disseminated by Russia was so massive that conventional means of only countering them were ineffective. We understood that this

challenge requires a comprehensive response and approach from Ukraine, one that would address the day-to-day information crises, but also be able to enhance the role and responsibility of journalists and social media users, improve communications on behalf of the government institutions, provide training opportunities on strategic communications to government agencies and civil society, and advise on both information policy and national resilience-building strategies.

UCMC was able to engage international donors in successfully implementing many of the above-mentioned efforts that were only possible due to Ukraine being a democracy. The most profound success has been achieved in building the national identity and resilience, as well as establishing and streamlining communications efforts in the security and defense sector of Ukraine.

UCMC operates through a number of teams and taskforces, including the press center, international and national outreach, Hybrid Warfare Analytical Group (HWAG) and others. UCMC is a non-governmental and a non-profit organization, which is not linked to any political party. It maintains an independent editorial policy on the topics of

research and analysis, work of its units 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 to benefit 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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