

Aim of the project

The ongoing project covering Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Latvia, Lithuania and Sweden monitors Russia's information activities in the Nordic-Baltic region (NB8) and analyses their impact. The report covering the period of 2016/2017 looks at the aims of Russia's information activities and the narratives used; discusses the compatriot

policy as a tool of influence; provides an insight into the use and varying level of trust in the information provided by Russian state-funded media and the public opinion on particular narrative themes promoted by Russia. The main findings are structured around the following research questions. ■

Aims of Russia's information activities in the region



Political dimension: Russia aims to become one of the great powers in the polycentric world order, to become an equal player in the international system and to challenge the unipolar world order. The purpose of its political messaging strategy is to counter post-Cold War interventions of the West, challenge Western liberal democracy as a universal value, call for the revival of the Westphalian sovereignty and in doing so subvert the unity of the Western states.



Information dimension: Russia aims to develop its own global media system that promotes its worldview and Russia's distinct place within it. Its information strategy is designed to support compatriots abroad and to develop the so called "Russian World" that exceeds the territorial boundaries of Russia and promotes its own perspective on Russian and world history.



Military dimension: Russia claims to be countering alleged NATO's expansion towards its borders. Russia combines military force with other instruments of power.



Economic dimension: The Arctic is seen as a priority region for Russia. It is also keen on maintaining economic interdependence with the NB8 countries.

Main tools to achieve Russia's aims

-  Russia's domestic and international media system
-  The internet and social media
-  Government-organised non-governmental organisations (GONGOs)
-  Compatriot policy
-  Pipeline diplomacy
-  Economic interdependency
-  Encouragement of political radicalisation and polarisation of the Western societies
-  Intelligence operations
-  Military force demonstration

Use of and trust in Russian state-funded media

The research focused on the **Baltic States, Finland** and **Sweden**, looking at **RT, Sputnik** and **Perviy Kanal**. Russia is not a trusted source of information in the Baltic States, Finland and Sweden, except among Russian speaking audiences in the Baltic States.

The majority of respondents in the Baltic States **are aware** of RT and *Sputnik*, **but do not use** them (more than 60%), whereas societies in Finland and Sweden **are not familiar with these media** at all (more than 50%).

Out of the three, *Perviy Kanal* is the **most popular**, albeit there are regional differences due to knowledge of Russian language: 38% watch it on TV in the Baltic States but the majority of respondents in Finland (83%) and Sweden (67%) are not aware of such media outlet.

Russia's compatriot policy - a tool of influence

Regional coordination of Russia's compatriot policy began in 2015 with the establishment of the **Regional Coordination Council of the Northern Europe and the Baltic Sea** countries. The concept of Russia's compatriots abroad is rather ambiguous and ill-defined. This has allowed Russia to present its interference in internal matters of sovereign states, use of military force and violations of territorial integrity of neighbouring states (as seen during the five day war with Georgia and the ongoing crisis in Eastern Ukraine) as a justified defence and **protection of its compatriots rights**. In the region, Latvia and Estonia are the most vulnerable to this narrative.

Russia's narratives used to achieve its aims

Regional differences and variations in narratives were identified in RT, *Sputnik* and *Perviy Kanal* in 2016.

Baltic States: Russian media was most concerned with military issues. The two most prevalent narratives were “NATO is a threat to Russia” and “The idea of a Russian threat to the West is ridiculous”. There was more concern with NATO and its activities close to Russia’s borders, rather than the specific issues within the Baltic States.

Latvia specific: The second most prevalent narrative was “Discrimination against minorities”. Estonia and Latvia have similar issues with Russian ethnic minorities, nevertheless, this narrative was promoted for Estonia 3 times versus 20 times for Latvia.

Nordic countries: The most used narrative was “Refugees and immigrants are a destabilising factor” and other narratives that are related to this problem, such as “Radical Islam as a destabilising factor” and “Rise of far-right nationalists” – an attempt to amplify destructive processes caused by the refugee crisis in Europe. Another common narrative was “Arctic is a territory of dialogue” emphasising on Russia’s intentions to solve overlapping interests through peaceful negotiation.

Norway and Iceland specific: These countries were used as the role models in the context of the Brexit referendum, giving evidence that countries may do better without the EU, thus strengthening the narrative of a “Diminishing unity in the EU”.

Finland specific: The second most used narrative was “Finland and Russia are good partners, no matter what” which promotes the idea of special bilateral relationship.

Sweden specific: The promotion of the narrative “Sweden is part of unjust persecution of Julian Assange” stood out.

Public opinion on Russia’s promoted narratives

The public opinion was surveyed in the **Baltic States, Finland** and **Sweden**. No overarching trend was found in the overlap of the views of the respondents with the narrative themes promoted by RT, *Sputnik* and *Perviy Kanal*. However, there are other determinants of public opinion that were not researched in this study.

Attitudes towards NATO are strongly polarised between Russian speakers and titular nationals of the Baltic States. The general trend is that titular nations are more supportive to NATO presence in their countries.

Public opinion about Russia's promoted narratives in numbers

