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THE DYNAMICS OF RUSSIA'S INFORMATION ACTIVITIES **AGAINST UKRAINE** DURING THE SYRIA CAMPAIGN

STUDY RESULTS

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INTRODUCTION

Two major geopolitical conflicts are at the core of this research. Military conflict in Syria and the related rise of terrorism carried out by Daesh, in both the region and beyond, pose an enormous policy challenge for the governments of the United States of America (US) and Europe. Simultaneously, Russia faces sanctions after it annexed Crimea – the biggest and most serious geopolitical violation of national borders in the 21st century so far. This paper provides an analysis of the dynamics and changes in the level of Russia's information activities against Ukraine before and after the commencement of the Syrian campaign. The analysis proves that, despite the geographical distance between them, both conflicts share mutually coordinated strategic narratives promoted by Russia. This report argues that the strategic goals of the Russian government's propaganda are the following:

- to promote Russia as a crucial player in the polycentric world in the process of international peace;
- to claim Russia's superiority over the US;
- to prevent Ukraine's transformation into being part of the external border of NATO and the European Union (EU);
- to soften and, in the nearest future, achieve the lifting of the sanctions regime against Russia.

From the ideological point of view, the information activities executed by Russia during the Syria campaign must be observed in the broader context of Russia's foreign policy strategy. Since November 2013, when the uprising of the Ukrainian nation set a wide spectrum of events and processes in motion, researchers and policy makers have been questioning the reasoning, consequences and international implications of those political processes, as well as their impact on the future of the international environment at large. Russia's international ambitions are based not only on conquering new territories (the Crimea case) but also on creating mental landscapes that are favourable for influence and political manipulation. Russia's foreign policy goals regarding the West are can be defined in the following way - "to weaken the West economically, to split it politically, and to establish Russia as the hegemonic power on the European continent"¹. For this reason, this research puts the parallel

¹ A. J. Motyl, 'The West Should Arm Ukraine. Here's Why— And How', Foreign Affairs (10.02.2015), available at <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/143056/alexander-j-motyl/the-west-should-arm-ukraine>.

agendas for Ukraine and Syria together, because this approach can be considered as a recent strategic propaganda manoeuvre by the Kremlin.

The research on the dynamics of Russia's propaganda against Ukraine during the Syria campaign covers a time period that is divided into two parts:

- 1) the pre-Syria campaign period (partial ceasefire [26th February 2015] - military engagement of Russia in Syria [30th September 2015]);
- 2) the Syria campaign period (military engagement of Russia in Syria [30th September 2015] - announcement about the withdrawal of Russian forces; [15th March 2016]).

The selected time periods are analysed using the case study approach, i.e. selecting historically and politically significant dates and carrying out critical content analysis and narrative analysis. Forty-four cases were analysed in regard to the pre-Syria campaign period, and fifty-four cases were analysed in regard to the Syria campaign period.

This approach provides a valid overview of Russia's information activities and allows for the measurement of the intensity of Russia's information activities and their content, comparing two main audiences:

- 1) Russia's neighbourhood countries (information broadcasted via Russian language information channels);

- 2) Western Europe and the US (information broadcasted via English language information channels).

This study covers analysis of the following selected audio-visual platforms: RT (previously known as Russia Today)², Pervy kanal³, Sputniknews⁴, and information provided by EEAS Disinformation Review⁵.

Although television is not the only source of news, which RT demonstrates clearly by putting its biggest emphasis on the distribution of its propaganda via YouTube, it should be underscored that television is one of the most powerful tools of propaganda for conveying messages linguistically, as narratives, visually and with special audio editions. In addition, all of the analysed audio-visual platforms have well-developed social media networks, which significantly increases their socio-political impact.

Quantitative and qualitative analyses of Russia's information activities have been carried out, leading to an understanding of the content of propaganda and the effect of propaganda in the media, on the mass audience during the selected time period.

² RT is a TV channel with a relatively low number of viewers in Western countries but has bigger potential.

³ Pervy kanal is the leader among the top-viewed channels. In this study, the channel's archive (www.1tv.ru) was monitored, which covers news programs with a wide reach, including Russia, Ukraine, the Baltic states and Europe.

⁴ The project 'Sputniknews' has been recently launched; therefore, it's important to research it in order to draw conclusions about its possible future influence.

⁵ This information product of the European External Action Service collects examples of Russian disinformation attacks in real time. Its objective is to show the European public the high number of such disinformation attacks that target European audiences every single day, to expose the number of countries targeted and, thus, to explain to the European audience the breadth of this problem. See more:

http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/ukraine/documents/disinformation_review_02-11-15_en.pdf

The analyses were carried out using the mass communication procedure of content analysis, critical discourse analysis and narrative analysis, taking into account the frequency with which certain symbols (e.g. enemy, ally, peace, democracy, morality, superiority, weakness, security, suffering et al.) appear in a message, the direction in which the symbols try to direct the audience's opinion and the intensity of the symbols used. The dynamics of narratives were analysed through the agenda setting perspective.⁶ These are revealed in the timeline, demonstrating how certain strategic narratives⁷ evolve while others are omitted.

6 S. Y. Park, K. J. Holody, X. Zhang, 'Race in Media Coverage of School Shootings: A Parallel Application of Framing Theory and Attribute Agenda Setting', *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, 89(3), (2012), pp. 475-494.

7 Strategic narratives are tools for political actors to articulate a position on a specific issue and to shape perceptions and actions of domestic and international audiences (I. Khaldarova, M. Pantti, 'Fake News: The narrative battle over the Ukrainian conflict', *Journalism Practice*, [2016], pp. 1-11; A. Miskimmon, B. O'Loughlin, L. Roselle, *Strategic Narratives: Communication Power and the New World Order*, [New York, Routledge, 2014]). The overarching strategies in all propaganda are positive self-presentation and negative presentation of the 'other' (T. van Dijk, 'Discourse and manipulation', *Discourse and Society*, 17[2], [2006], pp. 359-383.) The typical "West versus Russia" narrative in Russian foreign policy has been recently widely analysed in academic literature (see, for example, C. Cottiero, K. Kucharski, E. Olimpiva, R. W. Orttung, 'War of Words: The Impact of Russian State Television on the Russian Internet', *Nationalities Papers: The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity* 43 [4], [2015], pp. 533-555; O. Malinova, "'Spiritual Bonds" as State Ideology', *Russia in Global Affairs*, [18 December 2014]). A strategic propaganda narrative is future-oriented, and propaganda always has certain goals.

LEVELS OF THE PROPAGANDA DYNAMICS: MESSAGING, SIGNALLING, ENGAGEMENT

The ultimate goal of the propaganda is a constant and unrelenting stream of managed narrative and discourse, while the interim goals are smaller steps towards achieving this goal. The overall assumption is that the ultimate goal of Russian propaganda in the media is to achieve a situation where the US and other Western countries accept Russian strategy as its own, and to denigrate the West through parallel and managed dynamics of media news about events in Ukraine and Syria.

The interim goals are coordinated and non-conflicting, and they manifest themselves in the following levels of dynamics⁸:

- 1) Messaging;
- 2) Signalling;
- 3) Engagement.

All interim propaganda goals, which run through different levels of propaganda, can be described as “the organized attempt through communication to affect belief or action or inculcate attitudes in a large audience in ways that circumvent

or suppress an individual’s adequately informed, rational, reflective judgment.”⁹

Messaging is the lowest level of propaganda, and it involves “the whole range of traditional communication media, to include pictures, text, and video, and all messaging technology: print, radio television, mobile phone, portable digital assistant, two-way pager, and so forth.”¹⁰ This propaganda level differs from the next two by one-way communication (without response and responding, without long-term relationships and activities that back the communication).

Signalling is the next level of propaganda, and it is characterised by actions that also send messages. “It is easier to keep in mind that certain aspects of manoeuvres, such as a ship cruising off-shore or a patrol traversing a street, unavoidably signals something to those witnessing it.”¹¹ Therefore, signalling includes non-verbal messages that transmit signals about the intended course of action or attitude towards a particular issue or event.

⁸ See C. Paul, *Strategic Communication. Origins, Concepts, and Current Debates. Contemporary Military, Strategic, and Security Issues*, (Praeger, 2011), pp. 17-71.

⁹ R. Marlin, *Propaganda & the Ethics of Persuasion*, (Peterborough, ON, Canada: Broadview Press, 2002), p. 22.

¹⁰ C. Paul, *Strategic Communication. Origins, Concepts, and Current Debates. Contemporary Military, Strategic, and Security Issues*, (Praeger, 2011), p. 47.

¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 46.

Engagement is the highest level of propaganda, and it shows a clear action that demonstrates a strong determination to achieve certain goals to make an impact on those who are being imposed on, in order to be influenced. Engagement is characterised by complex interactions and reaction by other parties. It also includes cultural context and “assumptions made by and about various parties communicating”¹². As the highest level of propaganda, engagement includes both previous levels – messaging and signalling.

Russia’s information activities are analysed by indicating low (1), medium (2), or high (3) intensity of a particular level of propaganda in each case during the selected time-period.

The case analysis shows massive signalling activity in English-speaking audio-visual platforms, whilst a much lower level of propaganda can be observed in Russian-speaking media that is aimed at Russia, Ukraine and regions with Russian language proficiency, including the Baltic countries. The most intensive level of anti-Ukraine propaganda in both – English-speaking and Russian-speaking – audiences was aired during September - October 2015. This time period corresponds to Russia’s involvement in the Syria conflict, and the propaganda machine was busy in all information areas at that time (see Chart 1 and Chart 2).

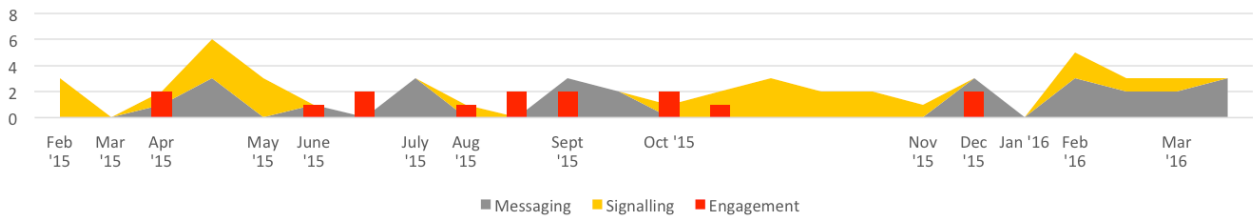
The main aim of the signalling activities has been the promotion of Russia as a superior state provoked by Western efforts to escalate friction. In order to narrate these storylines and fulfil the interim goals of showing the pro-Russian forces as superior, along with the ideas of a failed Ukrainian

state and a superior Russia, a variety of tools have been used in the RT stories. These goals of propaganda serve as further building blocks towards denigrating the image of Ukraine and building a positive image of Russia in order to achieve the lifting of both US and EU imposed economic sanctions and hostility towards the state. It must be stressed that the news about the EU extending its sanctions against Russia (17th June 2015) was not covered in the Russian-speaking audio-visual platforms at all, while in the English-speaking media, it reached the highest level of signalling.

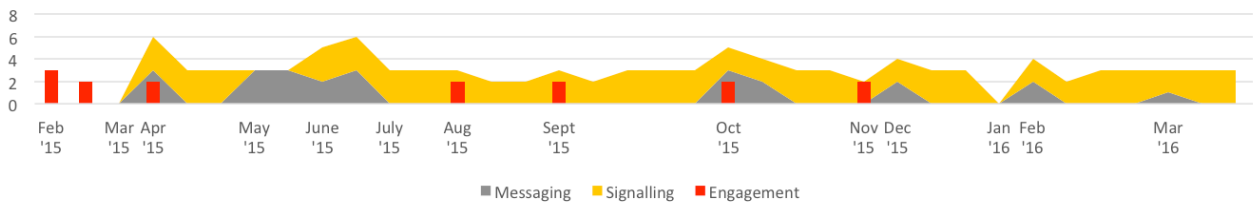
The example of the 26th of February 2015, when Ukraine began withdrawal of heavy weaponry as per the terms of the Minsk Agreement, serves as a good illustration of the afore-mentioned propaganda levels. In regard to this event, the pro-Russian forces were portrayed as more compliant and superior through their neutrality towards the withdrawal of both pro-government and anti-government forces. At the same time, Ukraine was shown as a failed state incapable of full cooperation with the Western guidelines and, therefore, not being a worthy partner. In addition, images of military training in Latvia were added and described as “the flexing of military muscle on Russia’s doorstep”. The propaganda signal was sent that the pro-Russia forces, who are perceived unfavourably by the West and the Ukrainian government, are complying with the agreement, while the Western forces are still building their military operations against Russia on different fronts. (See Picture 1.) In this way, the idea of the hypocrisy of the West was imparted.

12 C. Paul, Strategic Communication. Origins, Concepts, and Current Debates. Contemporary Military, Strategic, and Security Issues, (Praeger, 2011), p. 46.

**Chart 1. Level of Russia's propaganda against Ukraine.
Media in Russian language. 15th February 2015 – 15th March 2016 ***



**Chart 2. Level of Russia's propaganda against Ukraine.
Media in English. 15th February 2015 – 15th March 2016 ***



* The chart shows aggregated data of the levels of Russia's propaganda appearing in the news during every month within the selected time period.

On the 30th of September 2015, Russia began air strikes in Syria, and this event reached the highest level of engagement activity in both audiences. RT propaganda portrayed Russia as a concerned nation that is thinking about the security of its citizens, who are being exposed to all the returning Russian and ex-Soviet terrorists. The smaller news headline read: "Decision aims to protect Russia's national interests as home-born militants would return to Russia", thereby indicating that the main interest is not the change of the political landscape in Syria but is rather an outcry against potential security threats inside Russia. This propaganda line is neither coincidental, nor innovative. Rather, it comes from the old propaganda arsenal, which can be traced back to the First World War. Lasswell wrote that "the nation as a whole, is divisible into an almost infinite number of constituent groups, which are in possession of special aspirations of their own. The war ought to be interpreted to them as something in which they have a stake, not only as members of the general group.

The war ought to be fought to save business, family and church, and to add to prosperity, security and faith. Each interest should be encouraged to formulate war aims which point to the enemy of all who is, in fact, quite as much the enemy of each."¹³ Therefore, Russia pictures the engagement "against terrorism" in Syria as one where Russian people also have a stake. Bearing in mind that Russian propaganda portrays anti-Russian forces in Ukraine as terrorist, this message also alludes to the Russian people's stake in Ukraine.

It must be emphasised that the narrative of protecting Russia's interests in Syria was used only by RT; Pervy Kanal promoted Russia as a strong world player without which terrorism cannot be defeated and peace cannot be achieved. This proves that the idea of protecting Russia's citizens against terrorists was aimed exclusively at the Western audience, thus finding

¹³ H. D. Lasswell, *Propaganda Technique in the World War*, (Martino Publishing, 2013; originally published in New York, 1938), p. 70.

Picture 1. Ukraine begins withdrawal of heavy weaponry

Source: RT, 26th February 2015.



Picture 2. Ukraine announces not to repay 3 billion dollars of debt to Russia

Source: RT, 18th December 2015.

arrears become more protracted, which could culminate in a suspension of the member's voting and representation rights and eventually in the compulsory withdrawal of the member from the IMF if the member is deemed to be non-cooperating with the IMF and remains non-cooperating. Technical assistance is also suspended once the member is declared non-cooperating.

To address the burden of overdue obligations to the IMF, the Fund has put in place a "burden-sharing" mechanism. Under this mechanism, the financial consequences for the IMF stemming from overdue financial obligations of members are shared equally between debtor and creditor member countries, with

arrears to private creditors by non-sovereign borrowers. Lending into sovereign arrears to private

Zimbabwe, has protracted arrears to the PRGF Trust.

Lending into Arrears

While the IMF is concerned with all forms of arrears (whether domestic or external, private or sovereign), arrears to external creditors have a distinctive place in IMF policies. The IMF has acknowledged that the incurrence of external payments arrears is perhaps the most disorderly way of responding to balance of payments pressures, as they undermine relations with creditors and damage the international trade and payments system. For these reasons, the IMF has

The IMF does not lend to countries that are not making a good-faith effort to eliminate their arrears with creditors.

27

Ukrainian Prime Minister Arseny Yatseniuk (R, front) and Finance Minister Natalia Yaresko (C, front). © Andrew Kravchenko / Reuters

a pseudo-argument for military involvement in Syria and demonstrating Russia's high-level moral and physical care about its nation.

Another event - Ukraine's announcement not to repay 3 billion dollars of debt to Russia on the 18th of December 2015 - was strongly used to send clear signals about Ukraine as a bankrupt and failed state and Russia's readiness to prolong the repayment term of the debt (but only if international players provide guarantees), thus promoting the image of Russia as a trustable and internationally stable partner. These signals are a part of a larger objective - to prevent Ukraine's integration into NATO and the EU and to picture it as an overall unreliable partner that has a poor economic situation and is unable to fulfil international commitments.

For the Western audience, the propaganda signalling was even stronger in this case. RT portrayed the IMF as a mysterious organisation with plans to take over the world and make small, struggling countries like Greece their puppets - indicating that Ukraine is one of these puppets. (See Picture 2. on page 10)

Instead of making Ukraine out to be the villain that isn't repaying its debts, the image was portrayed of a useless state in the face of a grave tragedy - economic collapse and being controlled by the Western powers who only care about money. The other alternative is Russia, who "understands" and asks for their position to be understood, thereby gaining support and eventually having sanctions lifted.

The most important conclusion about the levels of the dynamics of Russia's propaganda against Ukraine is the observation that

there are noticeable differences of total propaganda activities in the two main audiences. The most disturbing trend is the decrease in propaganda activities, sticking to rather neutral and formal news broadcasting for the regional audience (Russian-language audio-visual platforms). It clearly shows that Russia regards this audience as already won over, and that the highest level propaganda activities are no longer necessary for this region.

THE DYNAMICS OF RUSSIA'S STRATEGIC NARRATIVES

Although propaganda goals usually are non-conflicting and consistent for those who carry out the propaganda, these narratives sometimes do not aim to make a rational point. In Russia's case, it is important to emphasize, that "the power of strategic narratives is (..) to appeal to emotions and to 'blur' the border between what is real and what is not: in other words, to form a context in which other messages can be communicated with greater ease."¹⁴ Therefore, it is important to distinguish analytical categories – discursive strategies – that serve the main goal and reveal themselves in the interim goals.

In regard to this study, it's possible to talk about two main propaganda discursive strategies: endarkenment of the audience and goals-oriented propaganda strategies. A strategy of endarkenment of the audience serves as a destructive strategy. "Media endarkenment is a process of media influence (intended or unintended) by which both the intellectual level of the viewers and the number of informed citizens decrease."¹⁵ Drawing on the concept of propaganda

by Ellul¹⁶, Lazitski lists the following media endarkenment techniques¹⁷:

- 1) fake news;
- 2) misinformation;
- 3) censorship;
- 4) omission;
- 5) spinning and twisting;
- 6) construction of a false reality;
- 7) intimidation;
- 8) entertainment;
- 9) simplification;
- 10) lowering/marginalizing of content's quality.

All of the above mentioned media endarkenment techniques were detected in Russia's propaganda in this study.

In the construing, justifying, shifting and destructive strategies¹⁸, apparently unrelated strategies could take place. However, they serve as interim goals for the main goal of propaganda, as listed below. Besides, popularity ratings are of paramount importance for Putin, and

14 I. Khaldarova, M. Pantti, 'Fake News: The narrative battle over the Ukrainian conflict', *Journalism Practice*, (2016), pp. 1-11.

15 O. Lazitski, O. 'Media Endarkenment', *American Behavioral Scientist*, 58(7) (2014), pp. 898-927.

16 J. Ellul, *Propaganda: The formation of men's attitudes*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1973).

17 O. Lazitski, O. 'Media Endarkenment', *American Behavioral Scientist*, 58(7) (2014), pp. 898-927.

18 R. Wodak et al, *The discursive construction of national identity*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999).

diverse strategies and genres serve the goal of approaching diverse audiences who appropriate media messages.¹⁹ Apparently conflicting discussions, propaganda contra-propaganda, the carousel of interpretations and factions of facts and falsifications add heat and work for geostrategic interests. These strategies are characterised by:

- 1) discourses and images of strength, victory and wisdom;
- 2) moral justification of superiority;
- 3) naming the enemy;
- 4) naming who is weak and who is strong in the given circumstances;
- 5) naming who is a “moral evil”, “deconstructing” the “hypocrisy” of the West, e.g. by launching war in Syria, and in relation to the refugee crisis;
- 6) naming the “sacred values”.

Russia is involved at a high military and informational level in the conflicts in Ukraine and Syria. Therefore, it's worthwhile to assess propaganda activities by looking at both conflicts simultaneously. Analysis proves that Russia develops parallel strategic narratives that nurture Russia's common propaganda in different situations. In this way, Russia masters its international image, which is later useful for achieving its foreign policy and geopolitical goals.

Five assumptions that underpin the strategic goals of the Russian government's propaganda were tested, and the frequency of their appearance in news coverage was monitored in this research:

- 1) to regain Russia's status as one of the main players in the world peace process (no one can afford to manage global processes without Russia, Russia is the only country that can ensure the progress of the peace process in Ukraine and Syria);
- 2) to claim Russia's superiority (moral, military, rule of law, organisation, control over processes, etc.) over the US;
- 3) to prevent Ukraine's transformation into being a part of the external border of NATO and the EU (promoting the narrative of Ukraine as a failed state and an unreliable partner);
- 4) to promote Ukraine as a bargaining object and within Russia's sphere of influence at the expense of eventual peace in Syria;
- 5) to soften and, in the nearest future, achieve the lifting of the sanctions regime imposed against Russia.

19 O. Matthews, 'Vladimir Putin's Secret Weapon', *Newsweek* (15 June 2016),

RUSSIA'S PROPAGANDA ON UKRAINE

In general, the analysis of Russia's propaganda against Ukraine shows significantly higher dynamics of strategic narratives towards the Western audience (English-speaking media analysed) than towards the regional audience (Russian-speaking audience analysed).

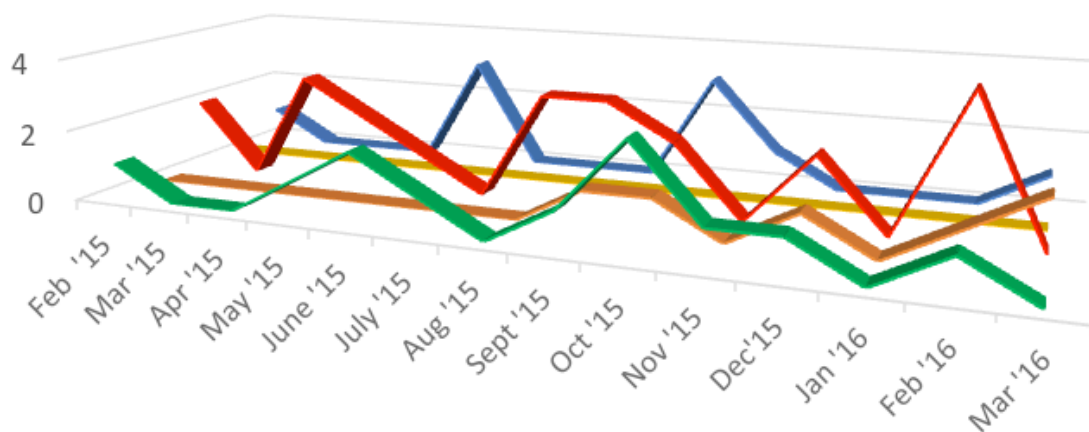
In the Russian-speaking media, news programmes have become relatively formal and informative. High-level propaganda cases are rarely detected there. In regard to Ukraine, only one main strategic narrative dominates the Russian-speaking media: Ukraine is a weak, unsuccessful and

dependent state. Moreover, the idea of Russia as a global superpower is also being developed, although at a lower level. (See Chart 3 and Chart 4.)

This leads to the conclusion that the image of Ukraine as a failed state and as an unreliable partner is already considered to be well rooted in the Russian-speaking population of the region and that the active phase of anti-Ukraine propaganda has ended there. On the contrary, English-speaking audio-visual platforms continue to actively promote the ideas of the disastrous state of Ukraine, the hypocrisy of the West and moral superiority of Russia, thus continuing to mobilise Western societies towards an anti-Western political attitude and splitting the unity of the West. (See Chart 5 and Chart 6.)

Chart 3. Russia's propaganda on Ukraine. Regional audience. Frequency of propaganda narratives.*

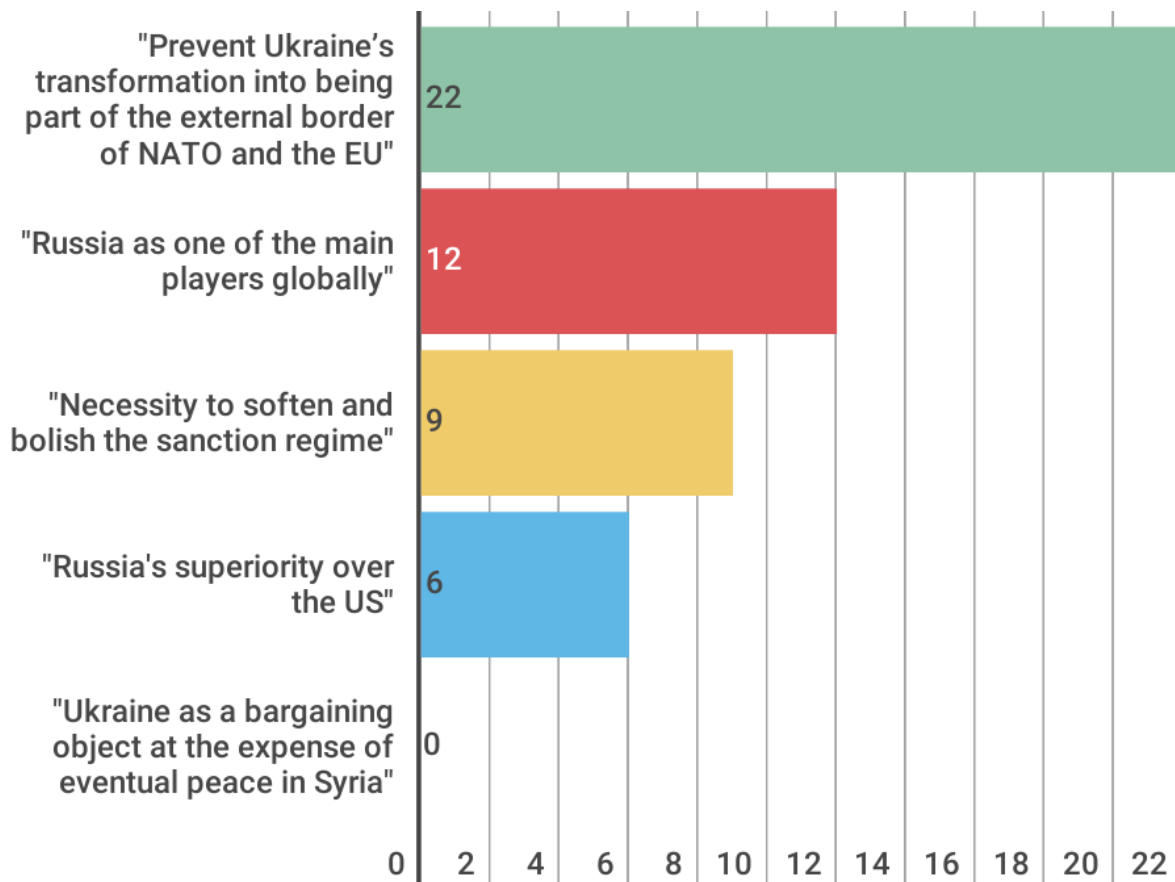
* Russian-speaking media was monitored. The chart shows the frequency of the five strategic narratives of Russia's propaganda appearing in news during each month in the selected time period.



- "Russia as one of the main players globally"
- "Russia's superiority over the US"
- "Prevent Ukraine's transformation into being part of the external border of NATO and the EU"
- "Ukraine as a bargaining object at the expense of eventual peace in Syria"
- "Necessity to soften and abolish the sanction regime"

Chart 4. Russia's propaganda on Ukraine. Regional audience
Frequency of Russia's strategic narratives (Feb 2015 - Mar 2016)*

* Russian-speaking media was monitored. The chart shows aggregated data of the frequency of the five strategic narratives of Russia's propaganda appearing in the selected time period.



Russia's aim to use propaganda to gain control over the conflict in Ukraine and the mind-set of Western societies must be taken very seriously. Lasswell wrote: "Another sustaining force against which sapping operations must be directed is the confidence of the people in their government's honesty. If a suspicion can be engendered against the propaganda of the government and the war party, a potent weapon of disintegration is created."²⁰ In other words, dissatisfaction with the ruling elite leads to political behavioural changes in society. "Divide and rule" is an old principle of Russian (Soviet) geopolitical strategy, and there is no need to search far for examples nowadays: Brexit, the Polish Constitutional Court crisis, far-

20 H. D. Lasswell, *Propaganda Technique in the World War*, (Martino Publishing, 2013; originally published in New York, 1938), p. 164.

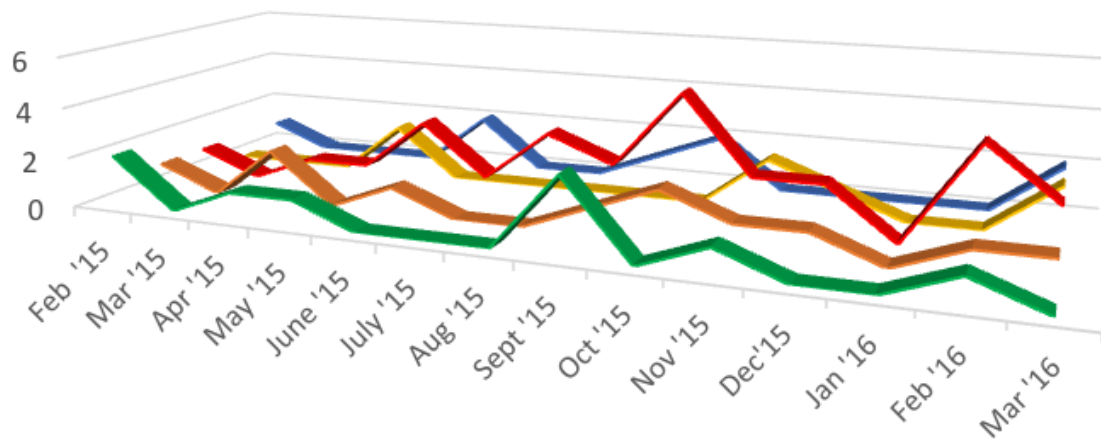
right movements in France, Hungary, etc. These also suit Russian politics very well. Russia spends much of its propaganda force to aggravate societies' frustrations about the political courses of actions of Western governments and leaders.

For example, on the 7th of June 2015, when reporting on the G7 summit, RT portrayed the G7 summit members, especially the US and Germany, as being hated locally. Germany was presented as hypocritical: deploying military and armed police to control peaceful protesters while being against Russia's standing up for "their" people in eastern Ukraine. The G7 summit members were shown as hated figures who "soak away their worries" at an expensive resort while hundreds of peaceful protesters

Chart 5. Russia's propaganda on Ukraine. Western audience.

Frequency of propaganda narratives.*

* English-speaking media was monitored. The chart shows aggregated data of the frequency of the five strategic narratives of Russia's propaganda appearing in the selected time period.



- "Russia as one of the main players globally"
- "Russia's superiority over the US"
- "Prevent Ukraine's transformation into being part of the external border of NATO and the EU"
- "Ukraine as a bargaining object at the expense of eventual peace in Syria"
- "Necessity to soften and abolish the sanction regime"

are being targeted by 200 million euros' worth of security forces. RT portrayed the G7 summit members as useless and incapable of making important decisions. They perpetrated this by focussing on a clip from Obama's speech where he jokes about wishing it was October and the Oktoberfest (famous for drinking) was going on, reporting on the number of restaurants, SPA facilities and other amenities at the \$3000+ resort, and quoting the resort's motto of "Doing nothing while dwelling on possibility".

At the same time, Ukraine was portrayed as a failed and manipulative state that is capable of killing innocent civilians in the east for their own political advancement. Moreover, directly following the reporting of Obama's speech that urges the need to

continue the sanctions against Russia, RT directed attention to the intensified fighting in eastern Ukraine and criticized Obama for not mentioning this fact during his speech. After the vox populi interviews with protesters who were there to protest the summit, RT showed images of state leaders drinking beer and laughing. (See picture 3.)

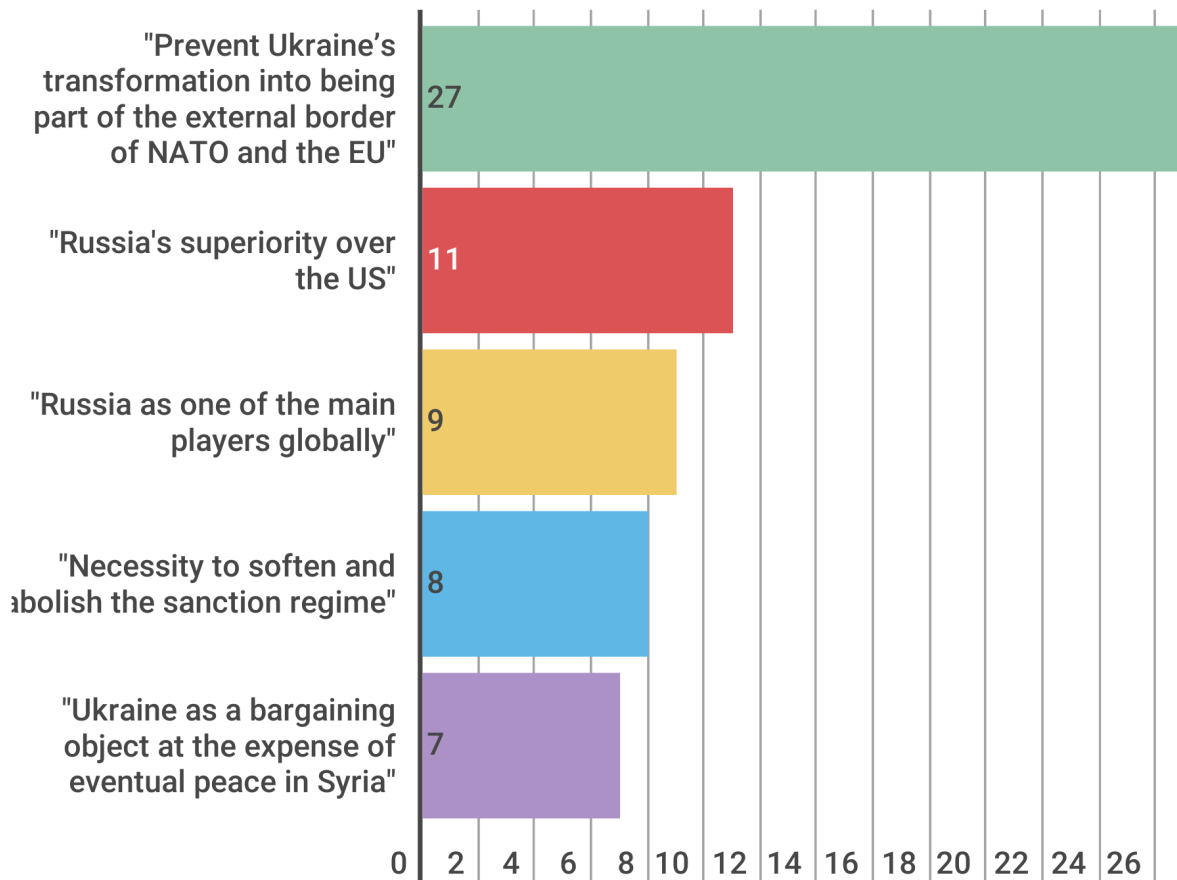
The mobilisation of hatred against Western leaders is not being done without reason: "If the ruling person, clique or class can be made sufficiently obnoxious, Revolution comes, and in Revolution there is little remaining capacity for active hatred of the external enemy."²¹

21 H. D. Lasswell, *Propaganda Technique in the World War*, (Martino Publishing, 2013; originally published in New York, 1938), p. 169.

Chart 6. Russia's propaganda on Ukraine. Western audience.

Frequency of Russia's strategic narratives (Feb 2015 - Mar 2016)*

* English-speaking media was monitored. The chart shows aggregated data of the frequency of the five strategic narratives of Russia's propaganda appearing in the selected time period.



In regard to the Western audience, the anti-Ukrainian narrative dominates with the aim to prevent Ukraine's transformation into being part of the external border of NATO and the EU (see Chart 4). For example, on the 16th of August 2015, RT reported that, following weeks of intense fighting, shelling was moving closer to Mariupol and again portrayed Ukraine as a failed state that is incapable of adhering to the Minsk II agreement and does not care about civilian suffering. The situation in Donetsk was portrayed as hopeless by presenting distressed, crying civilians talking about their lost homes and injured families while standing in front of rubble and destruction, and Ukrainian civilians were shown as angry for being reportedly attacked by the government forces (see picture 4).

Another good example of anti-Ukrainian propaganda is the RT news video of the 31st of August 2015, about the Rada's vote on Poroshenko's decentralisation proposal, which wasn't passed. The image of Ukraine as an unimportant and unreliable partner in the ceasefire commitments was nurtured in order to prevent the strengthening of Ukraine's external border. Meanwhile, the propaganda signal that Russia is the main player, even in the Ukrainian decentralisation vote, was transmitted. RT focussed on a particular member of the Rada - Oleg Lyansko, a far-right opponent to the decentralisation attempts who is facing criminal charges of kidnapping and embezzlement. Thereby, it was indicated that Ukraine is dangerous as a partner because decentralisation was mainly opposed by criminals.

Picture 3. At the G7 Summit, President Obama says that it is in the interests of the US and the EU to address Russian aggression

Source: RT, 7TH June 2015



Picture 4. Shelling moves closer to Mariupol

Source: RT, 16TH August 2015



Picture 5. Shelling moves closer to Mariupol

Source: Pervy Kanal, 16TH August 2015



Russia uses anti-war propaganda as a war propaganda tool, and this method is nothing new. During the first half of the 20th century, Lasswell wrote: “For the preponderating majority in any community the business of beating the enemy in the name of security and peace suffices. This is the great war aim, and in single-hearted devotion to its achievement they find that ‘peacefulness of being at war’ [...]”²²

For example, when covering the shelling moving closer to the city of Mariupol on the 16th of August 2015, Pervy Kanal intended to mobilise hatred against Ukraine while showing that the Ukrainian army must be stopped in order to save innocent civilian lives and that it is the main enemy in the fight to regain peace. The news story suggested that Ukraine had broken the fragile truce and continued to shell the Donbass region, that

²² H. D. Lasswell, *Propaganda Technique in the World War*, (Martino Publishing, 2013; originally published in New York, 1938), p. 57.

the Ukrainian army was destroying civilian infrastructure (homes, hospitals, schools) and that there were civilian casualties (including elderly people) (see Picture 5).

Although this story was very rich in visual propaganda tools, the videos and images were possibly from other events as there were no dates or other information indicating which event they were associated with. “Independent witnesses” (the so-called “second screen”), who were actually some YouTube channel users, were also referenced. They showed ruined houses and debris that were supposedly connected to what was called “the massive attack by Ukraine’s army”. A violation of “sacred values” during war – attacks on the elderly and children – was indirectly presented by showing destroyed homes attributed to elderly people and debris in which children’s items (dolls, books) could be identified.

This representation of Ukraine corresponds with the classic methods of propaganda: “To mobilize the hatred of the people against the enemy, represent the opposing nation as a menacing, murderous aggressor. Represent the enemy as an obstacle to the realization of the cherished ideals and dreams of the nation as a whole, and of each constituent unit. [...] Represent opposing nation as satanic; it violates all the moral standards (*mores*) of the group, and insults its self-esteem.”²³ In this case, Ukraine was portrayed as a cruel enemy without any morals, while Russia was allocated the role of the fighter for peace with high moral standards.

Although the sanction regime imposed on Russia by the US and the EU hits the Russian economy hard, it is important to mention that a massive spreading of the narrative of lifting the sanction regime was not observed during the analysis of strategic narratives (see Charts 3-6). This can be explained by the discursive tool of silence. Namely, the stories that lie outside propaganda strategy are strategically omitted. In these cases, the distinction should be made between “being silenced” and “being silent”. “When being silenced is contrasted with having a voice, it is conceptualised as imposed, and it signifies a loss of power and self. But silence can also be conceptualised as being silent, a shared understanding that need not be voiced.”²⁴ This study shows that the direct narrative on economic sanctions is avoided in Russia’s propaganda as not to distribute further propaganda messages regarding the disastrous economic situation

23 H. D. Lasswell, *Propaganda Technique in the World War*, (Martino Publishing, 2013; originally published in New York, 1938), p. 195.

24 R. Fivush, ‘Speaking silence: The social construction of silence in autobiographical and cultural narratives’, *Memory*, 18 (2), (2010), pp. 88-98.

in Russia, which could spread fear and hatred in society. Nevertheless, the lifting of economic sanctions can still be considered as a strategic goal of Russia’s propaganda, because all other strategic narratives are directed towards upgrading Russia’s international image and involving Russia as an equal ally in Western alliances against terrorism.

RUSSIA’S PROPAGANDA ON SYRIA

In turn, looking at Russian propaganda from the perspective of Ukraine’s and Syria’s conflicts, the leading motif is Russia’s superiority, which manifests in the name of peace (see Charts 7-10).

The strategic narrative of Russia’s moral superiority and its role as a global super power was massively promoted in the news on the 14th of March 2016, when Russia announced its withdrawal from Syria. It is important to pay close attention to this case, since gaining influence in Syria is closely linked to Russia’s aim of increasing control over the situation in Ukraine.

For the regional audience, the strategic messages encoded in this story were related to Russia as the leading military and political power and the most effective global peacemaker (as testified by the Syria conflict) and to Russia’s superiority (military, political) over the great Western powers, especially the United States. Russia’s increased and central role in the global peace process was displayed by naming achievements in Syria – stopping the expansion of terrorists, destroying their bases and infrastructure, being the top negotiator and organiser in the peace process in Syria and bringing back

political stability there. This was described as something that other parties involved in the Syria conflict were not able to achieve in years. Russia's military and political superiority over the US was explained by the fact that, over a longer period of time, the US had not been able to achieve the same results as Russia. The narrative lines were distorted by the message that Russia had demonstrated unprecedented military skills and the withdrawal of troops was empirical evidence of a successfully completed mission.

For the Western audience, the Russian propaganda was even slightly more dynamic. It showed Russia as a saint without whom the current peace process would not have been possible, and further portrayed the image of the West's failed policy in Syria by

indicating that Russia had achieved success where the US led coalition had failed in all the years prior. It showed that Russia is able to bring "peace and prosperity" to a completely failed state like Syria, and, therefore, the failed state of Ukraine could also succeed under their guidance. Various propaganda tools were used in order to push forward the interim goals of showing the Western policy in Syria not only as a failure but also its indifference towards reaching real, lasting peace that values the sovereignty of Syria as a country. Russian success on the ground was reported to be so great that they have been able to liberate more than "200 localities" upon withdrawal. It was underlined that Russia has been so successful in Syria that various previously anti-Assad groups and personalities have effectively changed their minds about

Chart 7. Russia's propaganda on Syria. Western audience.

Frequency of propaganda narratives.*

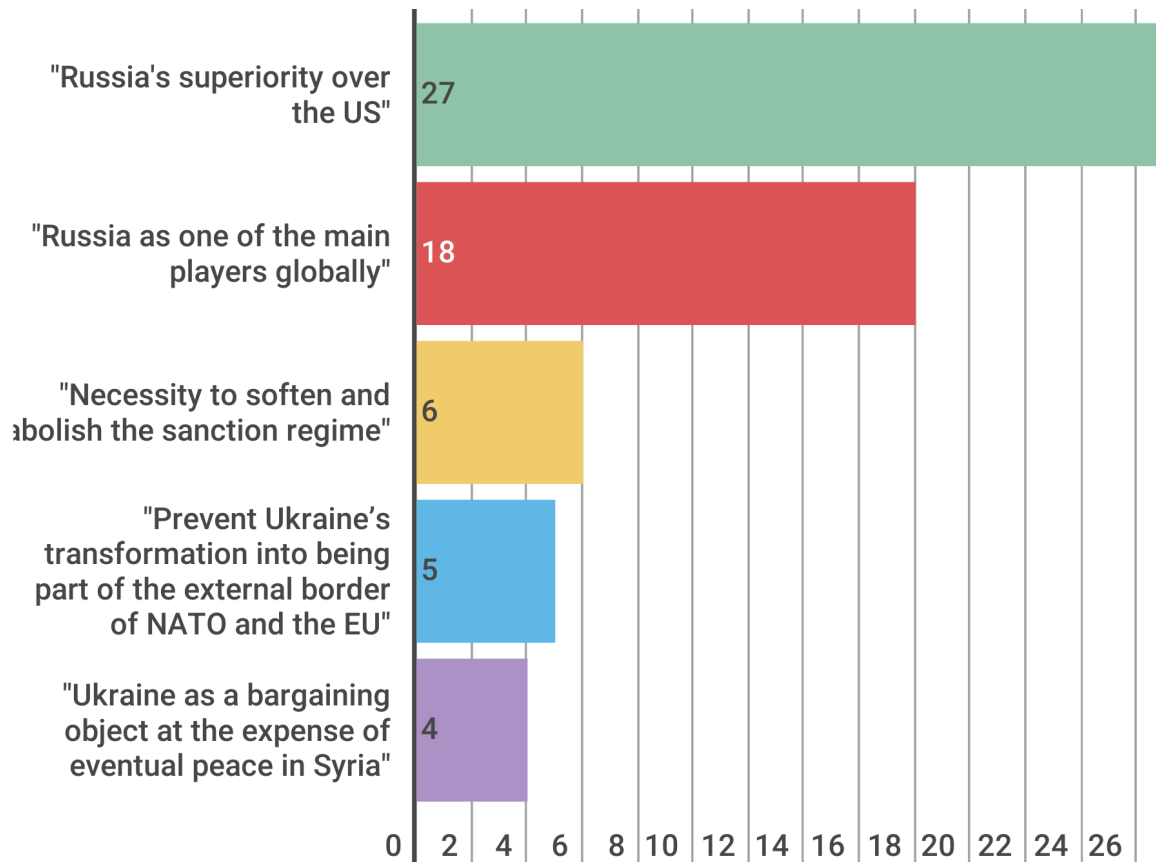
* English-speaking audio-visual platforms were monitored. The chart shows the frequency of the five strategic narratives of Russia's propaganda appearing in news during each month in the selected time period.



Chart 8. Russia's propaganda on Syria. Western audience

Frequency of Russia's strategic narratives (Feb 2015 - Mar 2016)*

* English-speaking media was monitored. The chart shows aggregated data of the frequency of the five strategic narratives of Russia's propaganda appearing in the selected time period.



the Syrian regime. This reporting thereby pushes the belief that Russia has done the unimaginable - bringing together those who were previously deeply divided.

The fact that Russian troops did not in fact leave Syria was also explained in the name of peace: despite Putin's proposed peace process that has begun in Syria, Russia wants to administer the on-going process. Despite the positive messages of groups joining Assad and peace being only a step away, the background images showed complete destruction that was mostly attributed to the US led coalition, indicating that Russia and the Syrian president could deal with the situation without Western interference (see Picture 6). These interim goals work towards legitimising Russian efforts in Syria and subsequently legitimising their unofficial

presence in Ukraine. Therefore, especially for the Western audience, Russia masters its image as a peace-loving and highly effective military country with high moral standards. It is in line with propaganda basics: "So great are the psychological resistances to war in modern nations that every war must appear to be a war of defence against a menacing, murderous aggressor."²⁵

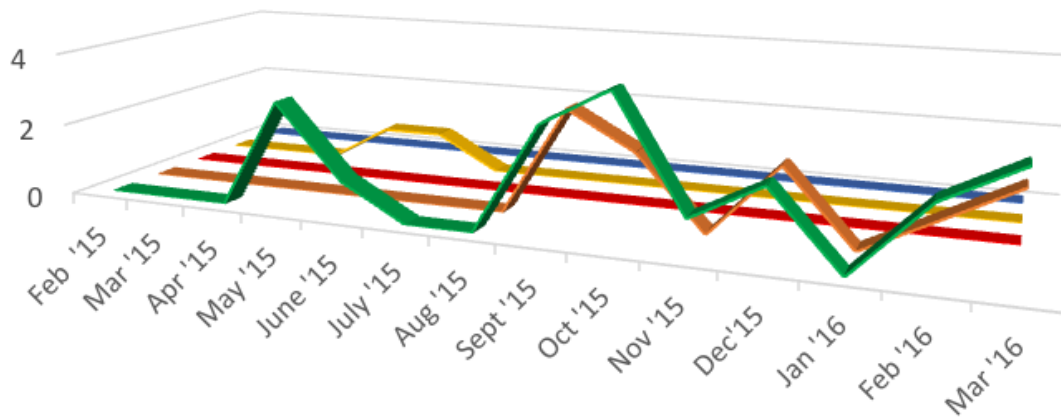
Therefore, especially for the Western audience, Russia masters its image as a peace-loving and highly effective military country with high moral standards. It is in line with propaganda basics: "So great are the psychological resistances to war in modern nations that every war must appear

²⁵ H. D. Lasswell, *Propaganda Technique in the World War*, (Martino Publishing, 2013; originally published in New York, 1938), p. 47.

Chart 9. Russia's propaganda on Syria. Regional audience.

Frequency of propaganda narratives.*

* Russian-speaking audio-visual platforms were monitored. The chart shows the frequency of the five strategic narratives of Russia's propaganda appearing in news during each month in the selected time period.



- "Russia as one of the main players globally"
- "Russia's superiority over the US"
- "Prevent Ukraine's transformation into being part of the external border of NATO and the EU"
- "Ukraine as a bargaining object at the expense of eventual peace in Syria"
- "Necessity to soften and abolish the sanction regime"

Picture 6. Russia announces withdrawal from Syria.

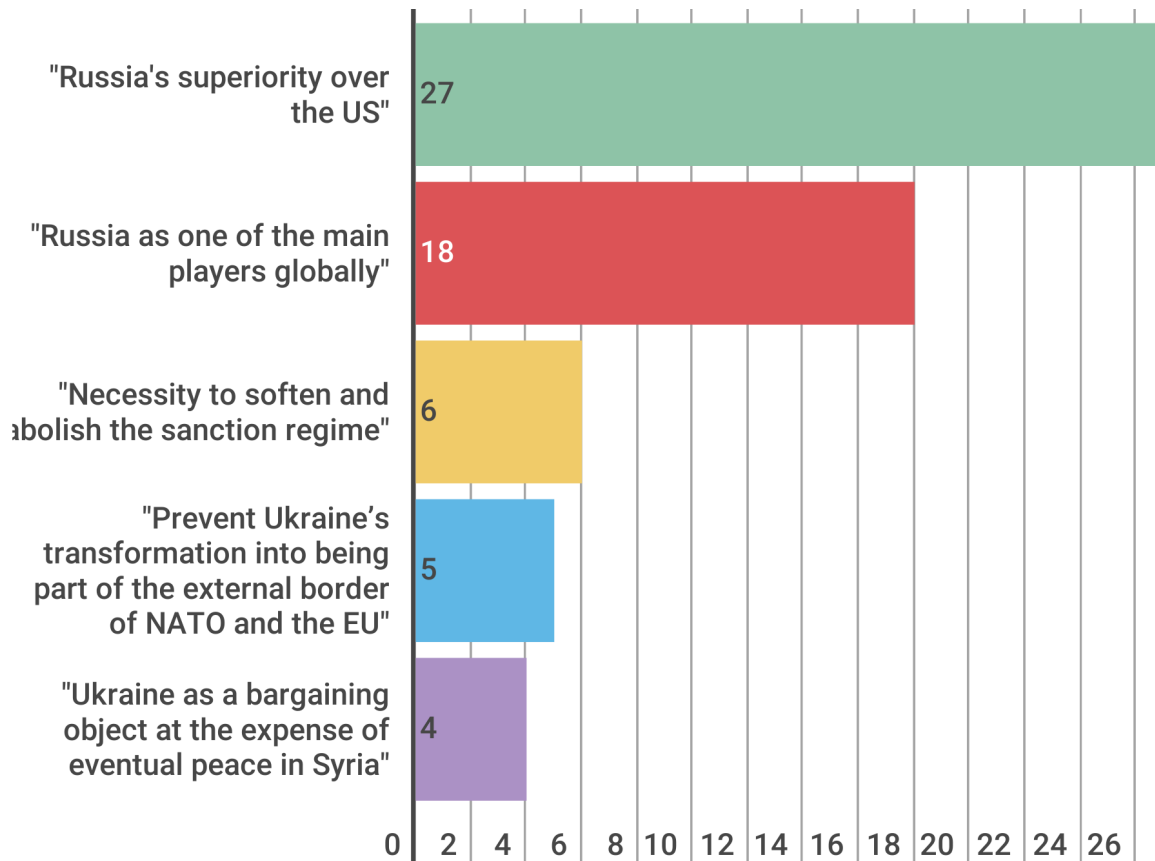
Source: RT, 14TH March 2016



Chart 10. Russia's propaganda on Syria. Regional audience.

Frequency of Russia's strategic narratives (Feb 2015 - Mar 2016)*

* Russian-speaking media was monitored. The chart shows aggregated data of the frequency of the five strategic narratives of Russia's propaganda appearing in the selected time period.



to be a war of defence against a menacing, murderous aggressor."²⁶ The aggressors in Syria's case are various: all kinds of anti-Assad forces, as well as the US and EU countries, which have aggravated the Syrian conflict to violent and uncontrollable levels due to their military clumsiness, incapability to play the role of conflict mediator and strategic failures. Using different propaganda tools, Russia justifies both its involvement in the conflict and its "partial" withdrawal from Syria and claims that it acts in the name of lasting peace. As Lasswell clearly put it, "The war must not be due to a world system of conducting international affairs, nor to the stupidity or malevolence of all governing

classes, but to the rapacity of the enemy. Guilt and guilelessness must be assessed geographically, and all the guilt must be on the other side of the frontier."²⁷

26 H. D. Lasswell, *Propaganda Technique in the World War*, (Martino Publishing, 2013; originally published in New York, 1938), p. 47.

27 Ibid.

COALITION DELIRIUM: TEARING DOWN CLEAR LINES BETWEEN ALLIES, ENEMIES AND NEUTRALS

In conventional crises and wars, there are clear lines between allies, enemies and neutrals. Nevertheless, and not without reason, we assess the current conflicts in Ukraine and Syria as “hybrid”; this is also reflected in the classic understanding of coalitions. Speaking about hostile situations, propaganda has “four major objectives:

1. To mobilize hatred against the enemy;
2. To preserve the friendship of allies;
3. To preserve the friendship and, if possible, to procure the co-operation of neutrals;
4. To demoralize the enemy.”²⁸

This is the classic yet out-dated understanding of war coalitions. However, under the conditions of “hybrid” threats, the West still seems to stick to it. In turn, Russia plays with the West by dividing it into “good boys” and “bad boys”, and the “good boys” are those who are “peace loving”, as the Charter of the United Nations defines it. In other words, with the help of its political and psychological propaganda, Russia tears down the classic understanding of blocks and alliances in international relations and

splits the West by allocating different roles to countries depending on their behaviour and contextual situation, thus creating enormous uncertainty and deadlocks. The Western countries are susceptible to these propaganda manoeuvres and hybrid warfare because of the deeply ingrained culture of peace and a desperate wish to solve conflicts fast and by peaceful means.

In order to achieve the objective of the mobilisation of hatred against the enemy, Russian propaganda has developed the following types of messages:

- enemy - those who impose economic sanctions against Russia;
- enemy - those who make Russia a victim of the aggressive West;
- defeating the enemy is necessary in the name of security and peace; the enemy is an obstacle to the realisation of the cherished ideals and dreams of the nation as a whole and of each constituent unit;
- the struggle is between a good and a bad collective person;
- the enemy imposes military pressure (the coercive power of the land, sea and air forces);

²⁸ H. D. Lasswell, *Propaganda Technique in the World War*, (Martino Publishing, 2013; originally published in New York, 1938), p. 195.

- the enemy imposes economic pressure (interference with access to sources of material, markets, capital and labour power);
- the enemy uses hostile propaganda;
- the power of the enemy must be diminished to save business, family and church, and to add to prosperity, security and faith;
- individuals on whom to pin the hate.

In order to achieve the objective of the demoralisation of the enemy, Russian propaganda has developed the following types of messages:

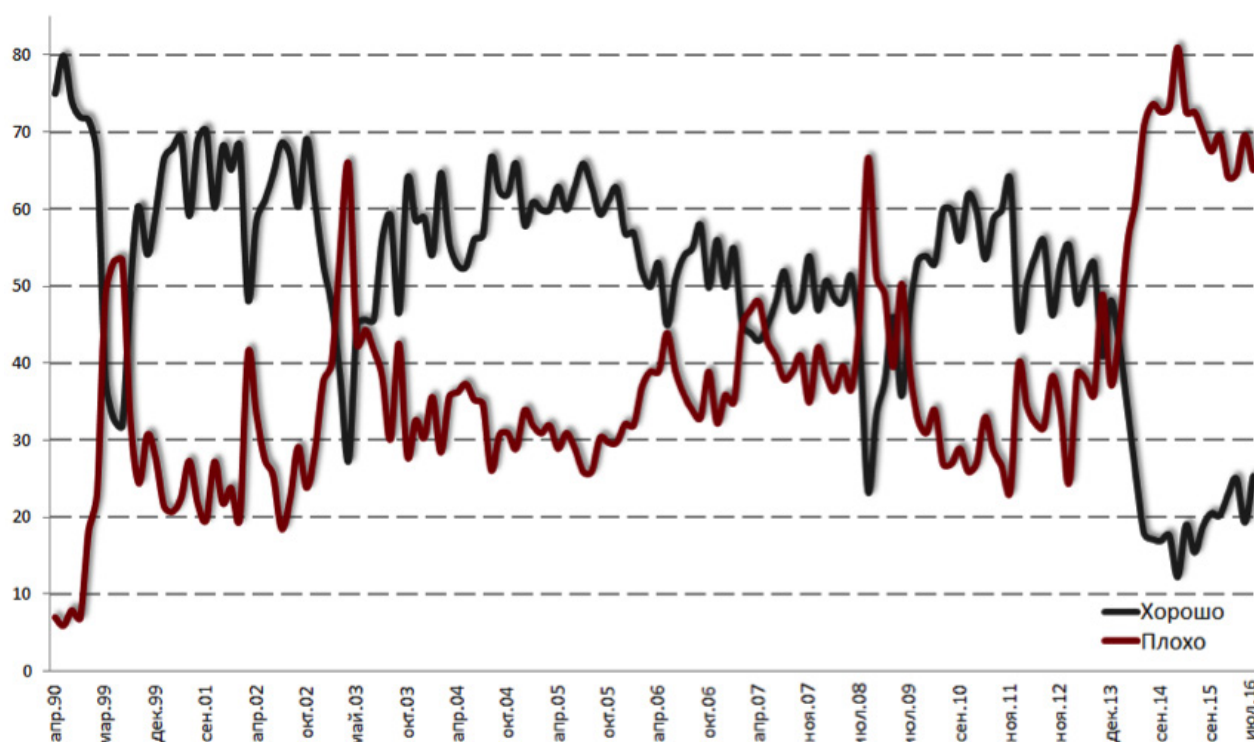
- the opposing nation is satanic; it violates all moral standards. The satanic one is the guilty one. The opposing nation is nearly always demonstrably overbearing and contemptuous;
- the enemy's cause is hopeless. The enemy's blood is spilt in vain;
- the impossibility of victory on the enemy's side;
- public anxiety, nervousness, irritability, unrest, discontent or strain triggers were addressed;
- the enemy uses lying propaganda;
- any nation who began the conflict and blocks peace is incorrigible, wicked and perverse;
- the potency of Russian leaders versus caricatures of the "weakness" of Western leaders;
- Russia's moral superiority; "sacred" Russian values versus "hypocritical" Western values;
- confidence in the honesty of Western governments is diminishing;
- bad news and unwanted criticism may be nullified by distracting the public's attention away from it. A distraction can be created by springing a sensation.

To achieve the strategic objective of preserving the friendship of allies and, if possible, to procure the co-operation of neutrals, Russian propaganda developed the following types of strategic messages:

- negotiation is a method of influencing foreign states with which one is not in active conflict with;
- divide and rule – unsteady Western countries must be engaged as neutral supporters of Russia, i.e. bilaterally;
- Russia as the most effective and decisive player to settle the conflict in Syria;
- unlike the US, NATO or the EU, Russia has direct access to the Assad regime and is respected by the Assad regime;
- granting Russia the status of the most efficient player will be a 'win-win' situation for all, as long as others play according to Russia's rules;
- transmission of suggestions to the enemy;
- the allies agree with Russia that, for example, they are failing in Syria, Russia has the right to control its neighbourhood, or its neighbouring country is unreliable and a mess (Ukraine);
- the importance of official visits.

Chart 11. What is your overall attitude towards the US? Russia.

Source: Levada Center, July 2016



There are significant differences between the image of the US that Russia's propaganda spreads to the Western audience and the one it spreads to the Russian-speaking population in Russia and in the region. Namely, Russian propaganda predominantly portrays the US to the Western audience as an enemy. This image is being spread extensively, and, taking into account the dominant role of the US in NATO and in military matters of the EU, Russia is trying to weaken the Western countries and to disconnect the US from Europe.

In turn, for the Russian-speaking audience, the US is broadcast as a neutral country that potentially can become an ally to resolve new global issues - the conflicts in Ukraine and Syria. This unusual situation can be explained by the fact that the propaganda no longer needs to nourish the perception

of threat coming from the US. In Russia, the majority of Russians (72%) believe that the US is Russia's greatest enemy in the world right now. The US is followed by Ukraine (48% think Ukraine is hostile towards Russia) and Turkey (29% regard this country as Russia's enemy).²⁹ In Russia, the overall attitude towards the US, the EU and Ukraine drastically changed in 2014 after Russia annexed Crimea (see Charts 11-13). The peak was reached at the end of 2015, but a pronounced negative attitude still remains in 2016.

The same mind-set prevails in the Russian-speaking audience in Latvia. After 2014, when Russia annexed Crimea and the negative propaganda regarding Ukraine and the US referred to them as an "enemy",

²⁹ Yearly public opinion survey, 2015, (Levada Centre, 2016).

Chart 12. What is your overall attitude towards the EU? Russia.

Source: Levada Center, July 2016

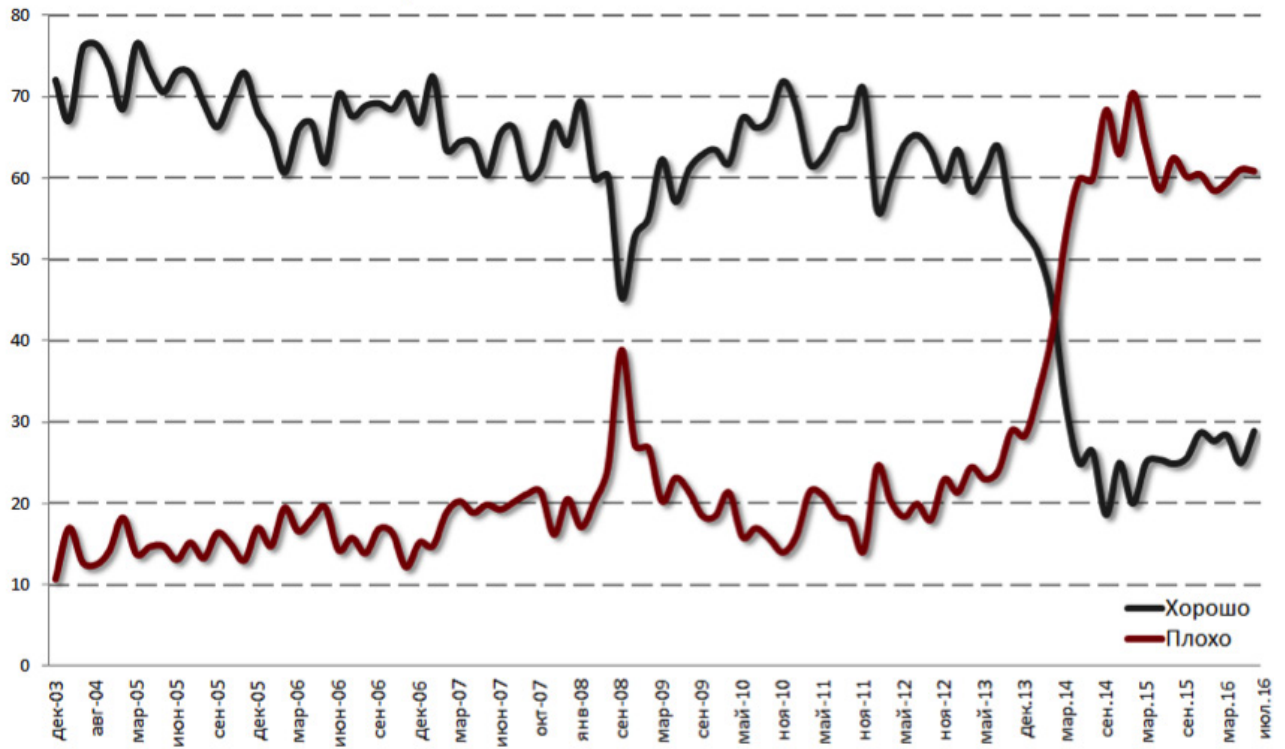
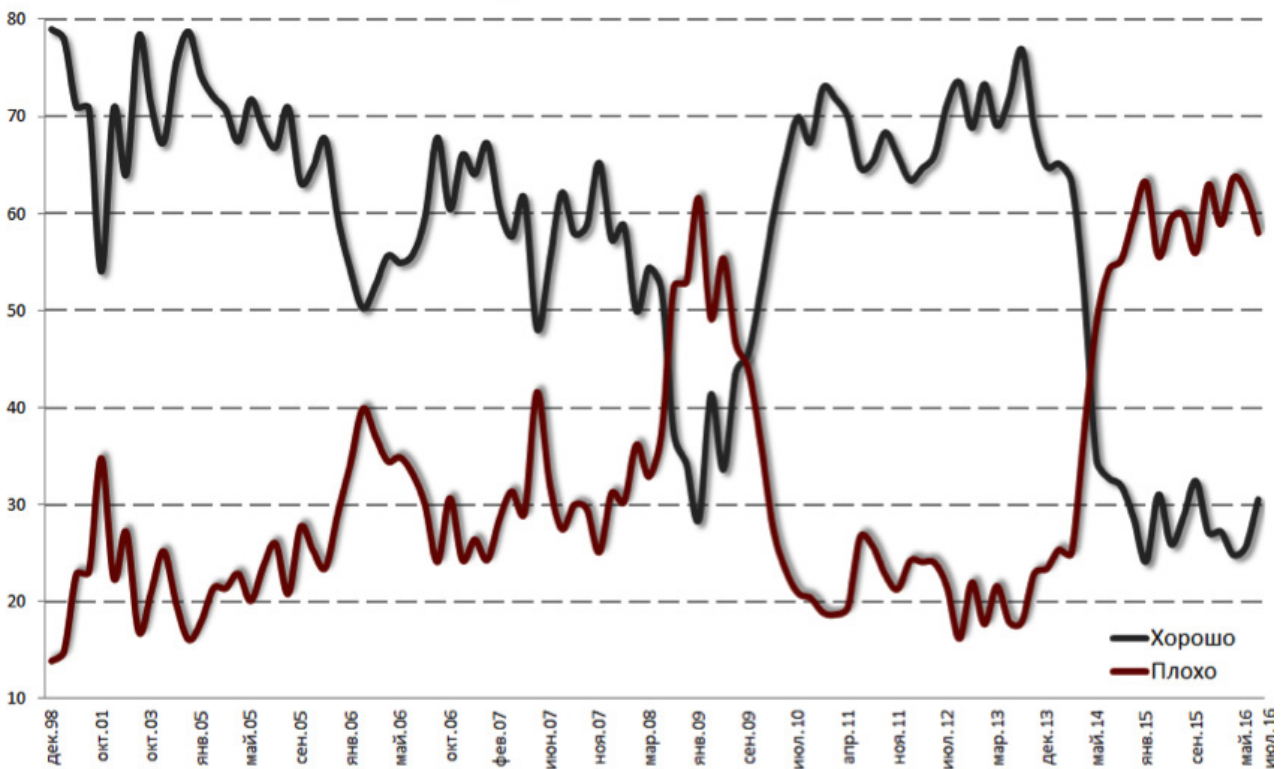


Chart 13. What is your overall attitude towards Ukraine? Russia.

Source: Levada Center, July 2016



the negative attitude towards the US in the Russian-speaking audience in Latvia skyrocketed and reached 64 percent in 2015.³⁰

This data proves that the image of the US as Russia's enemy in both Russia and the Russian-speaking audience in the region is entrenched. Now, portraying the US as a potential ally in Russia's attempts to resolve the violent crises in Syria and Ukraine, Russia works on its image as a peaceful superpower that is superior to the US.

Nevertheless, the US's roles as an ally for the Western audience and as a neutral for the regional audience are not stable. Especially in the English-speaking media, a pattern of strategic signalling can be spotted in regard to the US, which generally appears as an enemy in Russia's propaganda. Under certain circumstances, Russia sends signals about possibilities and conditions under which the US could hope for closer cooperation with Russia by being allocated with a better, more peaceful role and thus receiving a better image in the eyes of Russian propaganda. So, for example, on the 23rd of October 2015, Russia's Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov announced Russia's readiness to help the US and the Free Syrian Army, and RT pictured the US as a neutral country in this case. Thus, Russia portrayed itself as a leading peacemaker and sent a signal that those who consider Assad's government as an ally worthy of cooperation are more likely to hope for an improvement in relations with Russia and to facilitate a resolution of the crisis, which the US wishes so desperately.

In the same manner, a signal of possible cooperation with the US and portrayal of the US in a neutral light was broadcast on the 11th of May 2015 in RT, when US State Secretary John Kerry met with the Russian Foreign Affairs Minister Sergey Lavrov and President Putin to discuss the Syrian crisis. Emphasis was put on the warm welcome from the Russian side, "despite tense relations" between both countries. Both meetings were covered as "important meetings" and as a possibility to "sit down for high stakes talks", while also indicating that much hope is put on Kerry "to suggest a new view on the Ukrainian conflict." This example clearly shows the close relationship between the Syrian and Ukrainian conflicts in Russian propaganda.

Even more complex blurring of the boundaries between allies, neutrals and enemies is to be observed in regard to European countries. So, for example, France was pictured as a neutral country, leaning towards the role of Russia's ally, when France launched air strikes in Syria on the 16th of November 2015. We must be reminded that these came after the deadly terrorist attack on Paris, which Daesh claimed responsibility for. Thus, Russia signalled that it appreciated France's course of action in Syria, whilst accusing the US of being responsible for the Paris terrorist attacks because they "might never have happened if the US had 'listened' to officials who opposed the 2003 invasion of Iraq".³¹ The same country – France – was addressed as an enemy a few months before this event, when Russia began its air strikes in Syria against opponents of the Syrian

³⁰ SKDS public opinion survey, (SKDS, 07.2008-08.2015).

³¹ P. Engel, 'Paris might never have happened if the US had "listened" to officials who opposed the 2003 invasion of Iraq', Business Insider, (11.01.2016), <http://www.businessinsider.com/putin-us-paris-attacks-2016-1>.

regime in order to hit rebel controlled areas in the Homs and Hama provinces on the 30th of September 2015.

In the Russian propaganda aimed towards the Western audience, Belgium and the Netherlands are traditionally pictured as neutral countries. When the EU governments agreed to extend sanctions against Russia on the 17th of June 2015, France, Italy, Spain and Greece were reported as neutral countries or even allies in light of their negative position on the sanctions. Although Germany is generally portrayed as an enemy in Russian propaganda, even this country received a signal on “good boy behaviour”. Namely, when Russia, Ukraine, Germany and France agreed that a ceasefire would go into effect on the 15th of February 2016 in Ukraine, Prime Minister Merkel and President Hollande were pictured as neutral partners, thus signalling that cooperation with Russia tears down hostilities.

It must also be emphasised that Russian propaganda allocates the role of enemy differently in regard to Ukraine in English-speaking and Russian-speaking audiences. For the English-speaking audience, the enemy is the Ukrainian government and pro-governmental forces. For the Russian-speaking audience, the situation is different. In Russian-speaking audio-visual platforms, the Ukrainian government is portrayed as a neutral party. The enemy and aggressor is the Ukrainian army and Ukrainian nationalists (“banderovcy”). For example, when the U.S. training mission of Ukrainian soldiers “Operation Fearless Guardian” was launched, involving the US Army’s 173rd Airborne Brigade and 900 Ukrainian soldiers on the 20th of April 2016, the Ukrainian army was pictured as

an aggressive, immoral and demoralised force. The news reported several serious incidents involving drunken Ukrainian soldiers and showed shots of soldiers behaving inappropriately (see Picture 7). At the same time, the violation of the Minsk agreement was reported, showing soldiers in action (see Picture 8). It was claimed that this action was taking place in Mariupol and that the soldiers are proud of their behaviour since they had posted this video on YouTube.

In addition, for the regional audience, the Ukrainian government is portrayed by the Russian propaganda in a neutral light, while separatists are mistakenly accused, victims and often – Russian allies.

Such signalling creates enormous ambiguity in international relations because it has “multiple, often competing, meanings, or [...] can have multiple possible outcomes.”³² In turn, ambiguity drastically increases the amount of information and the complexity of analysis and decision making required. A classical cognitive strategy for how to deal with ambiguity is to find so-called “shortcuts” in order to simplify the decision making process and minimise the amount of information to be analysed. Under such conditions, “tunnel vision” switches on, which is characterised by considering only a part of a situation and holding a single opinion rather than having a more general understanding.³³

32 A. Mintz, K. Jr. DeReouen, *Understanding Foreign Policy Decision Making*, (Cambridge University Press, 2010), p.27.

33 For more about the meaning of the idiom “tunnel vision” in thinking, see Cambridge Dictionary. <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/tunnel-vision>

Picture 7. US troops start training Ukrainian infantry.

Source: Pervy Kanal, 20TH April 2015



Picture 8. US troops start training Ukrainian infantry.

Source: Pervy Kanal, 20TH April 2015



This leads to the conclusion that the temptation to be “a good boy” or a peacefully ally is a powerful tool in international relations and that flattery (or the good old “carrots and sticks” strategy) works. Although there are signs that Putin has neither the intention and willingness nor

ability to put heavy pressure on Assad, the West’s desire to achieve the resolution of conflicts fast and peacefully is so strong that they follow Russia’s rules of bargaining in this coalition game.

CONCLUSION

The dynamics of Russia's information activities against Ukraine during the Syria campaign reveal that propaganda activities in relation to both conflicts share mutually coordinated strategic narratives promoted by Russia. The conclusions are based on an analysis of media news during the pre-Syria campaign period (partial ceasefire [26th February 2015] - military engagement of Russia in Syria [30th September 2015]) and the Syria campaign period (military engagement of Russia in Syria [30th September 2015] - announcement about the withdrawal of Russian forces; [15th March 2016])

Two main information channels have separate target audiences: Russian and English speaking audiences. In this research, RT (previously known as Russia Today), Pervij kanal, Sputniknews and information provided by EEAS Disinformation Review was analysed.

The analysis reveals intensive propaganda signalling activity in English-speaking audio-visual platforms and a much lower level of propaganda in Russian-speaking media. Furthermore, the research found that the news about the EU extending its sanctions against Russia (17th June 2015) was not covered in the Russian-speaking audio-visual platforms at all, while English-speaking media reached the highest level of signalling.

The narrative of protecting Russia's interests in Syria was used only by RT (English

language); Pervy Kanal promoted Russia as a strong world player without which terrorism couldn't be defeated and peace achieved. In addition, the research traced remarkable differences in total propaganda activities for Russian and English speaking audiences. The finding that propaganda activities have decreased for the users of Russian-language audio-visual platforms is significant. It indicates that Russia regards this audience as already won over, and that the highest level propaganda activities are no longer necessary for this region.

With regard to the dynamics of strategic narratives, two main discursive strategies were traced: endarkenment of the audience and goal-oriented propaganda strategies. These strategies reveal a conflation of apparently conflicting facts, falsifications and repeated statements on geostrategic interests. The analysis reveals increased dynamics of strategic narratives towards the English-speaking audience. In regard to Ukraine, the main strategic narrative is related to the image of Ukraine as a weak, unsuccessful and dependent state.

The propaganda strategies reveal the classic understanding of blocks and alliances being deconstructed by Russia in international relations. It splits the West by allocating different roles to countries depending on their behaviour and contextual situation, thus creating enormous uncertainty. Russian

propaganda predominantly portrays the US to the Western audience as an enemy. However, for the Russian-speaking audience, the US is portrayed as a neutral country that potentially can become an ally to resolve new global issues – the conflicts in Ukraine and Syria. An even more complex blurring of the boundaries between allies, neutrals and enemies was observed with regard to European countries, e.g., France.

To place the findings of this research in a broader context, the Russian government has consistently emphasised that Ukraine and other neighbouring countries belong to the “national interests” of Russia, while NATO and the US government reject this menacing strategy of threatening independent countries. However, there is also a long-held and different view in the West. According to this view, which is promoted by some politicians and analysts, Russia is portrayed as a benign power. Bugajski has explained it in this way: “In the benign interpretation, Russia is a semi-democratic large power (..) living on past glories, (..) but cooperative and helpful to the US and the EU, especially in the anti-terrorist campaign, and ultimately benign for American and European interests.”³⁴

This view is highly beneficial to the Kremlin’s current geo-strategic interests, and a large part of the propaganda is devoted to construing this view. If Putin’s regime “helps” to fight terrorism in the world, the West should not object to Putin’s regime’s efforts to “stabilize the regions bordering Russia”.³⁵ Referring to Carothers (a distinguished expert on democracy), Stern

and Berg remind us that the policy dilemma for the US is very serious: “The imperative to degrade terrorist capacities tempts policy makers to put aside democratic scruples and seek closer ties with autocracies willing to join the war on terrorism.”³⁶ This is precisely why the Kremlin’s propaganda sets parallel agendas on Ukraine and Syria. If the Russian government succeeds in its propaganda on Syria, its strategy in marginalisation and threatening neighbouring regions would continue with less barriers. And Russia invests such enormous efforts in the propaganda that it is already reminiscent “of the period preceding a new war”.³⁷

This study about concurrent Russian propaganda campaigns also shed light on further research avenues:

Since the level of Russian propaganda activities is much lower for the Russian-speaking audience than for the English-speaking audience, an inattentive observer could conclude that Russia had failed to achieve its goals in Ukraine, that the stalemate in the separatist territories would no longer make headlines, and that the resilience of the Ukrainian establishment and society had proved to be too difficult to overcome.

Notwithstanding, it would be a great mistake to look upon Ukraine as if it were no longer the prime target of Russia’s information activities in the framework of its global foreign policy strat

36 J. Stern, J. M. Berg, *ISIS. The state of terror*, (New York, HarperCollins Publishers, 2016), p. 155.

37 C. Neef, *Russian Foreign Policy, 'We Are Smarter, Stronger and More Determined'*, an interview with Kremlin foreign policy advisor Sergey Karaganov, *Spiegel online, International*, (13 July 2016), Retrieved from <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/interview-with-putin-foreign-policy-advisor-sergey-karaganov-a-1102629.html#spRedirectedFrom=www&referrrrer=http://m.facebook.com>

34 J. Bugajski, ‘Isolation and Marginalization: Russia’s Offensive in the Baltic Region’, *Lithuanian Foreign Policy Review*, 19 (2007), pp. 162-166.

35 J. Bugajski, ‘Isolation and Marginalization: Russia’s Offensive in the Baltic Region’, *Lithuanian Foreign Policy Review*, 19 (2007), pp. 162-166.

The decreasing activity of strategic narratives spread by Russia to the Russian-speaking population in the region rather proves that it considers this part of society as won, and the propaganda struggle of the highest level continues for the Western audience.

For the regional Russian-speaking audience, the image of the US, the EU and Ukraine as an enemy is already entrenched, and it ideologically splits the EU and non-EU societies. These processes are nurtured by the desperate wish of the West to quickly and peacefully solve the conflicts in Syria and Ukraine, because Russia uses this wish as a tool in its propaganda and global foreign strategy.

In regard to the Western strategy, it is of the highest importance to have a political movement in Crimea and Donbass, because the greatest mistake would be to leave these territories in a state of a frozen conflict. It is in the interests of the West to have Ukraine whole, free and on the side of the West. Moreover, if Crimea and Donbass are left in the hands of Russia (even in the form of specific autonomy), then the West loses its buffer zone at the borders of the EU and NATO, and creates a precedent that can have further implications, for example, in regard to the eastern borders of the Baltic countries.

Moreover, Crimea is the most crucial geopolitical test for the whole region, calling into question further democratisation in Belarus as well as how freedom and peace can be guaranteed in the Baltics and other central and eastern European countries.

Russia's information campaign has created direct and immediate consequences for Ukraine.

Ukraine finds itself in a very difficult and complex situation both politically and economically. To help itself and its Western partners, Ukraine must implement reforms in the governance sector and the judicial system and undertake serious anti-corruption and anti-oligarch measures.

The real situation in Ukraine needs a much stronger narrative in order to resist the consolidation of Ukraine's image as a failed state.

The lessons that the Western political powers can draw in regard to Ukraine's future are basically of a geopolitical nature.

The West must understand that the struggle will be long and painful in Ukraine because of both internal and external factors. Ukraine must fulfil obligations, but the West should not turn away.

Despite the temptation to gain control over the conflict in Syria with the help of Russia, collusion with a non-democratic, aggressive and totalitarian power is dangerous. It's not about the calculation of pros and cons or advantages and disadvantages; it's about global geopolitics. In the conflicts in Ukraine and Syria, democracy and the basic principles of Western values and societies are at stake.

Finally, in regard to the Western course of action, it must be emphasised that coordination and united efforts in the information war are crucial. This is the reason why unity becomes one of the main targets of the hostile propaganda.