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FALSIFICATION OF HISTORY AS A TOOL OF INFLUENCE

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INTRODUCTION: RUSSIA'S APPROACH TO (AB)USE OF HISTORY

Author: Dr. Ivo Juurvee

” Teaching history in Military Academies and briefing personnel before deployment to somewhere in which they might encounter Russia’s PSYOPS is vital.

ABOUT THIS REPORT

This study deals with the growing trend of Russia’s use of historical propaganda to further its foreign policy goals. It contains chapters written by experts in the field in the respective countries of Estonia, Finland, Latvia and Poland.

The methodological aspects of the project were discussed in detail during a seminar in Riga on 11 December 2018. It was agreed that, for the integrity of the compendium, at least the central theme should be commonly understood as Jowett and O’Donnell conceptualise it: *propaganda* is a deliberate and systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behaviour to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist. Its system-

atic nature requires the longitudinal study of its progress. Because the essence of propaganda is its deliberateness of purpose, considerable investigation is required to find out what this purpose is.¹

Russia’s particular approach to history has been pointed out by a number of researchers. British author Edward Crankshaw pointed out in 1977: ‘Like every other country in the world, she [Russia] is the prisoner of her own history, traditions, preconceptions, immemorial fears. Perhaps more than any other country, because Russia’s history has been so special to her, her traditions so ingrained, her preconceptions so deliberately exalted into articles of faith.’² These words remain valid today. As leading scholar in



Russian affairs, Keir Giles, wrote in his study, current Russian leadership has the power to 'redefine the past arbitrarily' and 'Russia wishes to ensure its historical narratives are unchallenged, but by doing so, it only underlines how so many of them do not stand up to objective scrutiny because they are based on fiction, distortion, or omission'.³ Of course, such an approach does not promote academic or public debate on history inside the country or internationally. Furthermore, such debate is seen as a threat - as articulated in the articles of the 2009 National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation: 'attempts to review the understanding of history of Russia and its role and position in the world's history have a negative influence on national security in the field of culture [...]'.⁴

In the same subchapter of this foundational document on Russia's security, the counter-measures the country should apply were also described, such as the 'the state should order more movie and print production' and 'the development of a common humanitarian and information and telecommunication environment in the space of the member states of the Commonwealth of Independent States and in neighbouring regions'.⁵ It seems that in the eleven years that have passed since signing the document by the President, Russia has followed its strategy.

Also created in 2009 was a 'Commission under the President of the Russian Federation on countering attempts to falsify history to the detriment of Russia's interests.' This was a high-level commission, including the head of the Presidential Administration, the chief of the General Staff, the permanent

secretary of the Joint Commission for Protecting State Secrets, and representatives of the SVR and FSB. Oddly enough, of the 28 commission members, 24 represented executive power, two were from the State Duma and only two were historians.⁶ However, the commission was short lived – it was quietly dissolved in February 2012.⁷

Since then there have been some noteworthy legislative initiatives. In 2014 the RF Criminal Code was amended with article 354-1 'Rehabilitation of Nazism'. In addition to that contained in the title, the article also prohibited 'public dissemination of knowingly false information about the activities of the USSR during the Second World War'⁸ The question of how the court would decide what is false and what is not remains open. One might wonder if information on atrocities conducted by the Red Army in the territory under its control at the end of the war – most infamously mass rape in Berlin⁹ – would be labelled as 'false' by Russian courts and would the maximum penalty of three years imprisonment also apply to foreign nationals. Oddly enough the central narrative – that the Soviet Union won World War II or the Great Patriotic War – is a universally recognised fact acknowledged by anybody with the slightest knowledge of history, and the importance of World War II in 20th century European and world history is also unquestionable. These things do not seem to need official protection through strategies or laws.

In January 2020 there was an initiative for new changes in the RF Criminal Code by the State Duma member Elena Yampolskaya



proposing to ban statements and publications „which contain equating aims, decisions and actions of USSR leadership, military command and soldiers with the aims, decisions and actions of Nazi Germany and European Axis countries“.¹⁰ The proposal was directed against Poland, whose Parliament had eleven days earlier passed a resolution stating that the war was caused by two totalitarian regimes, Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, after the signing of the “shameful” Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact. Furthermore, it stated: “It is not questioned that the nations of the Soviet Union made sacrifices in the struggle against the Third Reich, but it did not bring independence and sovereignty to the countries of Central-Eastern Europe”¹¹ (Similar views were expressed in the resolution agreed in September 2019 by the European Parliament.¹²) It took President Putin some ten months to give his opinion on Yampolskaya’s proposal. His wording was following: ‘I agree with your proposals, we need to be careful, of course, but do it. If in some countries criminal punishment is foreseen for denying the Armenian genocide, [then] God himself ordered us, probably, to include appropriate mechanisms to protect the very recent past.’¹³ It will take some time before the law comes into force, however, thereafter researchers in NATO and/or EU countries dealing with the secret protocol of Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact might justifiably have concerns about travelling to Russia (or theoretically even face international arrest warrants issued via Interpol).

When RF Constitution was amended in summer 2020, it contained an article 67-1 dedicated to history. Firstly, it stated that

RF appears to be a successor of USSR. Secondly, that RF is ‘united by a thousand-year history’. And thirdly, that ‘RF honours the memory of the defenders of the Fatherland and protects the historical truth. Diminishing the significance of the heroic deed of the people in defending the Fatherland is not allowed.’¹⁴ It is not fully clear, if e.g. Soviet security forces are included into the ranks of ‘defenders of the Fatherland’ whose commitment to crimes may ‘diminish’ their role and if research of Western aid to Soviet Union through Lend-Lease policy could also ‘diminish the heroic deed of the people’, however, it certainly does not provide fertile ground for academic research or any discussion.

As the current compendium of four case studies clearly shows, the historical narratives are meant not only for Russia’s internal target audiences, but also for foreigners, including those in NATO member countries.

THE CORE NARRATIVE – VICTORY IN THE GREAT PATRIOTIC WAR

Although it is a rather distant event, WWII has importance in the history of many countries. Its centrality in Russia, where military might has always been underlined, is logical. While building up a new national identity after the collapse of Soviet Union – in Putin’s



words, the 'major geopolitical disaster of the century'¹⁵ – there were not many positives to rely on. As Giles points out '[...] Russia looked at its own history during the 1990s and did not like what it saw [...]'.¹⁶ Russia's military record for the past century also left some things to be desired. Russia began the 20th century with a humiliating defeat to Japan in 1905 and the worst was to come in World War I, when the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk took German forces as far as Rostov-on-Don on Russian territory. In May of the same year, Russia could not avoid losing Bessarabia to Romania and, in military conflicts following the German defeat in World War I, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland secured their independence. The victory of the Reds in the Civil War in 1922, which was important to the Soviet narrative, could not be employed as a unifying event by the end of 20th century, and Soviet military involvement in Afghanistan ended in full retreat in 1989, as did the later Russian involvement in Chechnya in 1996. So, 1945 was Russia's shining glory in that century and especially since the victory was won in cooperation with the USA, Great Britain and France, which was what granted the Soviet Union, and later Russia, a permanent place in the United Nations Security Council. Victory also underpinned USSR's superpower status so craved for by Putin now.

Looking deeper, some problems with the above narrative emerge. First of all, although World War II and the Great Patriotic War are frequently used as synonymous terms in Russian media coverage and the term 'Great Patriotic War' is not used much outside Russia at all, these terms don't share exactly the same meaning. World War II started in Sep-

tember 1939 and ended in Europe on 8 May 1945 with the surrender of Germany and in the Pacific theatre in September 1945 with the surrender of Japan. The Great Patriotic War started on 22 June 1941 with the Nazi-German attack on the Soviet Union and ended with its surrender to the Soviet Union on 9 May 1945. This is a great example of the previously quoted Keir Giles, who mentioned omissions like this one – almost two years are unaccounted for from September 1939 to June 1941.

These 22 months were problematic to the creation of the narrative from the very beginning. While during the war the Allies did not draw much attention to it, as soon as the Cold War got into swing, the problems for the Soviet propaganda machine became apparent. In January 1948, the US State Department published a compendium of Nazi trophy documents on Soviet-German collaboration in 1939-1941 including the secret protocol of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of 23 August 1939 dividing Eastern Europe.¹⁷ As damage control, the Soviet Union instantly published a booklet entitled 'Falsifiers of History'.¹⁸ (Stalin was not satisfied with the draft and deleted, rewrote and added paragraphs himself throughout the text.¹⁹ The comparative analysis with the text on similar topic published under Putin's name in June 2020,²⁰ would be too long for this introduction.) However, although Western powers were blamed 'Munich Betrayal', there was no substantial narrative to explain the close cooperation with the Nazis; therefore, the existence of the secret protocol was plainly denied for four more decades – it was only acknowledged by the USSR Congress of People's Deputies in December 1989.





Soviet poster, 1948, in which a Soviet soldier defends the window of the USSR against an imperialist holding an atomic bomb with the book 'History of the Great Patriotic War'

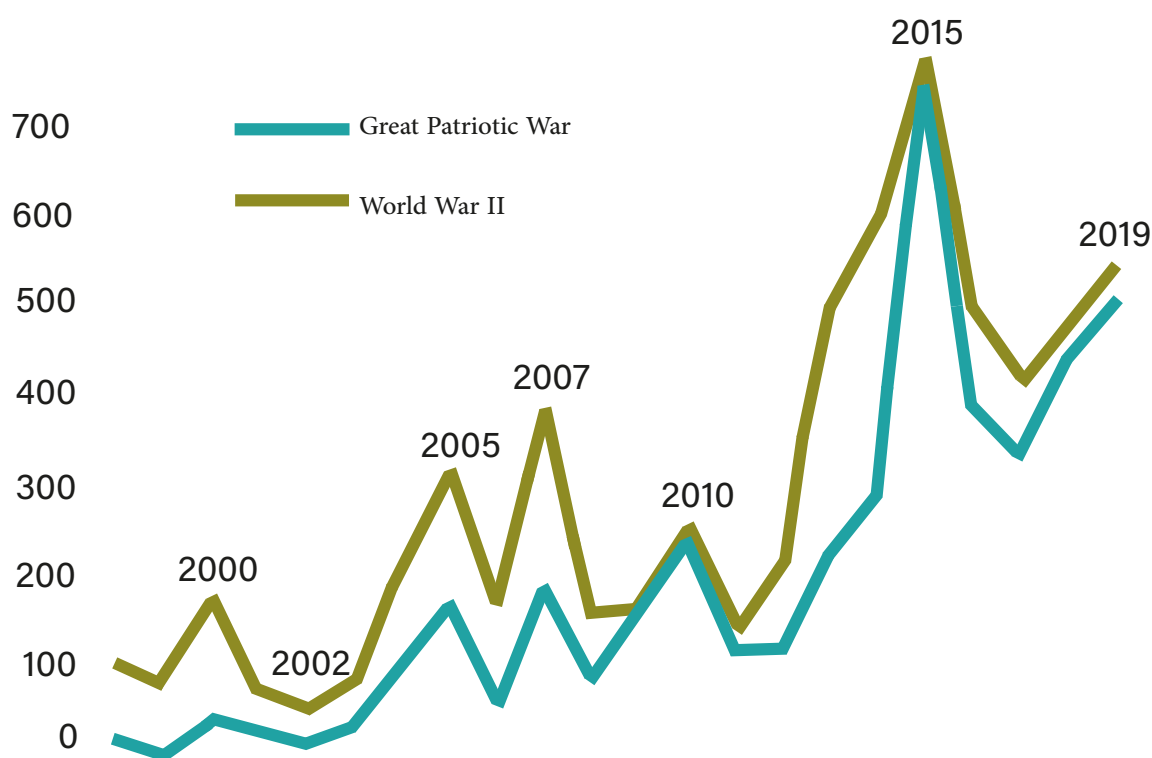
Since the Soviet attacks on Poland on 17 September 1939 and Finland on 30 November 1939 and the annexing of Bessarabia in June 1940 could not be erased completely from Soviet historiography, these were reframed as 'Liberation Raids'.²¹ The term 'Great Patriotic War' was coined by Stalin in his first radio address after the German attack on the Soviet Union, aired on 3 July 1941.²²

If the beginning of World War II was an embarrassment for the Soviet Union everywhere, its end raised some mixed feelings in Eastern Europe. When the initial euphoria over the end of hostilities was over, it was to discover that the liberating Red Army units had no intention of leaving. The most severe action was the repression in the Baltic States annexed by the USSR in summer 1940. Moscow still avoids the word occupation²³ in this context, although it has been used in a decision by the highest possible court authority adjudicating human right cases against signatories of the European Convention on Human Rights, the European Court of Human Rights.²⁴

Is the importance of the Great Patriotic War as a narrative in Russia on the rise? Although it may seem so for analysts monitoring Russia's media, the basis for long-term quantitative media analysis is rather weak. Although some Russian media outlets have sophisticated archives they are usually going back only several years and not decades, therefore not allowing observation of long term trends. Monitoring services – like BBC Monitoring or similar overviews conducted by foreign embassies in Moscow – are not designed for quantitative analysis. It was only possible to derive some data from the Baltic News Service archives, which has a partnership with one of the main Russian news agencies, Interfax (see on the next page).

Although it cannot be considered academically valid for all Russian media,²⁵ the graph still shows two things. There are peaks in mentioning the war in the years 2000, 2005, 2007, 2010 and 2015.





Frequency of the phrases 'Great Patriotic War' and 'World War II' in the Russian news agency Interfax reporting in subsection 'On Baltic [States]' between 1998 and 2019.²⁶

The peak in 2007 is the result of the fact that the basis for the statistics was the Interfax coverage of the Baltic region at the time, which is when the Bronze Soldier crisis took place in Estonia.²⁷ Other years indicate the commemoration of, respectively, 55, 60, 65 and 70-year anniversaries of the victory. This overall trend is on the rise, although possibly the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic first wave in May 2020 might have altered the coverage this year.

FROM NARRATIVE TO SYMBOLS - ST GEORGE RIBBON CAMPAIGN

Another campaign having had implications abroad is the promotion of black and orange²⁸ St George ribbons to be worn as a visual patriotic sign before and after 9 May.



Although the history of the colours of the Romanov dynasty dates back several centuries, it was launched in cooperation with news agency RIA Novosti and student organisation Student Community (Студенческая община) in spring 2005 prior to the 60th anniversary of the victory of the GPW (The Great Patriotic War). The campaign was a success and the following year, as many as 4 million St George ribbons were distributed in 900 cities across Russia as well as in Israel, US, Canada and some Arab and European countries. The meaning of it was widened to commemorate not only the GPW, but also Russian veterans of later military conflicts. The Patriarch of All Russia, Aleksey II, also blessed the campaign.²⁹

The history of the ribbon dates back to the 18th century. The Order of St George was established in 1769 for heroism shown in military action. Later in the 19th century, the use of the colours of St George was widened, including in the best-known military award, the Cross of St George.³⁰ After the October Revolution of 1917, the colours of St George fell out of favour by new Soviet authorities, but the colours were still used by White Russian units.³¹ In the Soviet Union, the colours rose to fame once again during the GPW when a boost in morale was needed. The former St George colours came to be known as a sign for guard units and were used for the ribbons of the Order of Fame³² (1943) and the order 'Victory over Germany'³³ (1945) and a number of less important military awards.³⁴ Use of the colours was continued at military festivities throughout the Soviet era. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Cross of

St George was re-established in 1992; however, the first 11 'new' crosses were not awarded until 15 August 2008, for the military campaign of aggression in Georgia.³⁵

Since then, the St George ribbon has enjoyed wide circulation both in Russia and abroad. The most controversial use of the ribbon has been in Ukraine, where it has come to symbolise separatism in Eastern regions since 2014.³⁶ This is where counter-measures have been the toughest, leading to the ban on its public use in 2017.³⁷ Elsewhere, the spread of the ribbon continued – according to Russian sources, it has been used in 90 countries around the world to commemorate victory in May 2017.³⁸ In 2019, the head of the news agency Rossiya Segodnya (Россия сегодня) Dmitry Kiselyev announced that the campaign was held in 'almost 90 countries'.³⁹

The St George ribbon campaign is synchronised with other campaigns. For example, according to organisers, in 2019, the ribbons were distributed to 23 cities in the US where Immortal Regiment commemorative events were taking place.⁴⁰

Evaluating the exact success of the St George ribbon campaign is a complicated task, since the measures of performance are primarily given by organisers who may have some temptation to inflate the numbers. However, the campaign has spread far beyond the borders of the Russian Federation. It is also no longer the only commemoration of the victory over Nazi Germany. The awarding of new Crosses of St George for the first time for military



accomplishments for the war in Georgia in 2008 and the wide use of the ribbon by separatists in Ukraine has made the issue much more controversial. The St George Ribbon was also used for the celebration of the annexation of Crimea on March 18, 2014 in the Kremlin,⁴¹ meaning it has openly become a symbol of Russia's aspirations for conquest.

NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

Although some of Russia's historical propaganda is directed toward domestic target audiences, it also has its implications abroad, including NATO and EU countries.

This is obvious in the cases of intentionally international campaigns such as those involving the wearing of the St George ribbon and the Immortal Regiment and can also be seen in case studies of various countries.

The most vulnerable target audiences are beyond Russia's borders and include ethnic Russians and other Russian speakers whether they are Russian Federation citizens or citizens of some other NATO or EU member state. They are most likely to consume Russian language media and film production and likely have less critical approach to their information sources (or what historians call 'source criticism'). The younger generation may be the most threatened because they have less previous knowledge of history.



Countries outside Russia where RT advertised distribution of St George ribbons in 2010. (source: content⁴² and map⁴³)



While advertising the St George ribbon campaign in 2010, Russia's state-owned foreign-language TV-channel RT (formerly Russia Today) provided a list of countries where the ribbons are distributed. There were only three CIS countries – Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan – and 37 other countries, including a number of EU and NATO member states: Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Czech Republic, Chile, China, Cyprus, Germany, Denmark, Egypt, Finland, France, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Macedonia, Morocco, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom and USA. Among the organisations involved in distribution were educational in-

stitutions and 'Russian compatriot' organisations.⁴⁴ It should also be mentioned that according to Russia's definition, compatriot doesn't mean RF citizen⁴⁵ and the term itself was coined by KGB in the 1960s.⁴⁶ In most cases, it was foreign nationals who were being targeted.

These campaigns are not only spread through online media, film and television – to some extent, they have managed to bring the Russian discourse into the public space outside Russia. This is done using the same symbol that was used to celebrate the annexing of Crimea to Russia in 2014 and later becoming a recognition mark of pro-Russian militants in Eastern-Ukraine (see below).



State Duma Speaker Sergei Naryshkin (right) and Crimean parliament speaker Vladimir Konstantinov wearing St. George ribbons in March 2014⁴⁷





Soldiers in Donetsk in 2018 with 300-metre long St George Ribbon⁴⁸

There are also other implications. As pointed out in case studies, Russia's historical propaganda deals not only with Russia and Russians, but it also aims to undermine the credibility of other nations on the international stage. This campaign will likely continue in the foreseeable future and if it can continue without countermeasures against it, in time, it will further penetrate the mainstream media and distort the understanding of history in general.

MILITARY RELEVANCE

History seems to be something far removed for many current political and military leaders, but, psychological operations (PSYOPS) are something that will always be present in cases of military or 'hybrid' conflict in the future. The usual way to predict the possible escalation of a situation is by looking at the peacetime training of a unit.



The exercises of Russia's PSYOPS units are usually covered by the media, but the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) exercise Cooperation 2016 – held in the vicinity of St Petersburg and Pskov in August 2016 was a rare exception. According to news coverage, the PSYOPS loudspeaker crews played a pre-recorded female voice repeating the following in Russian and 'several other languages':

*NATO soldiers! You are being lied to! You are not peacekeepers! Lay down your arms. Your treacherous attack is disturbing a peaceful country. You will suffer retribution and the anger of a people who have never suffered defeat in any war. Drop your weapons and stop being pawns for your leaders.*⁴⁹

The message seems to be rather realistic: it is kept short and simple, it has its point and calls for an action that might seem lucrative if morale fails – laying down arms. However, the message has some shortcomings. As shown previously, it is based on a lie – losing wars has been rather habitual for Russia in the 20th century, not to mention earlier times. Indeed, there have only been two large-scale aggressions against the Russian Empire/Soviet Union in the 20th century. The first of them was successful, although due to defeat to the Entente on the Western Front, the German troops had to be withdrawn only seven months later.

The second time, in WWII, it was a clear triumph for the Soviet Union, although not without Western aid in the war.

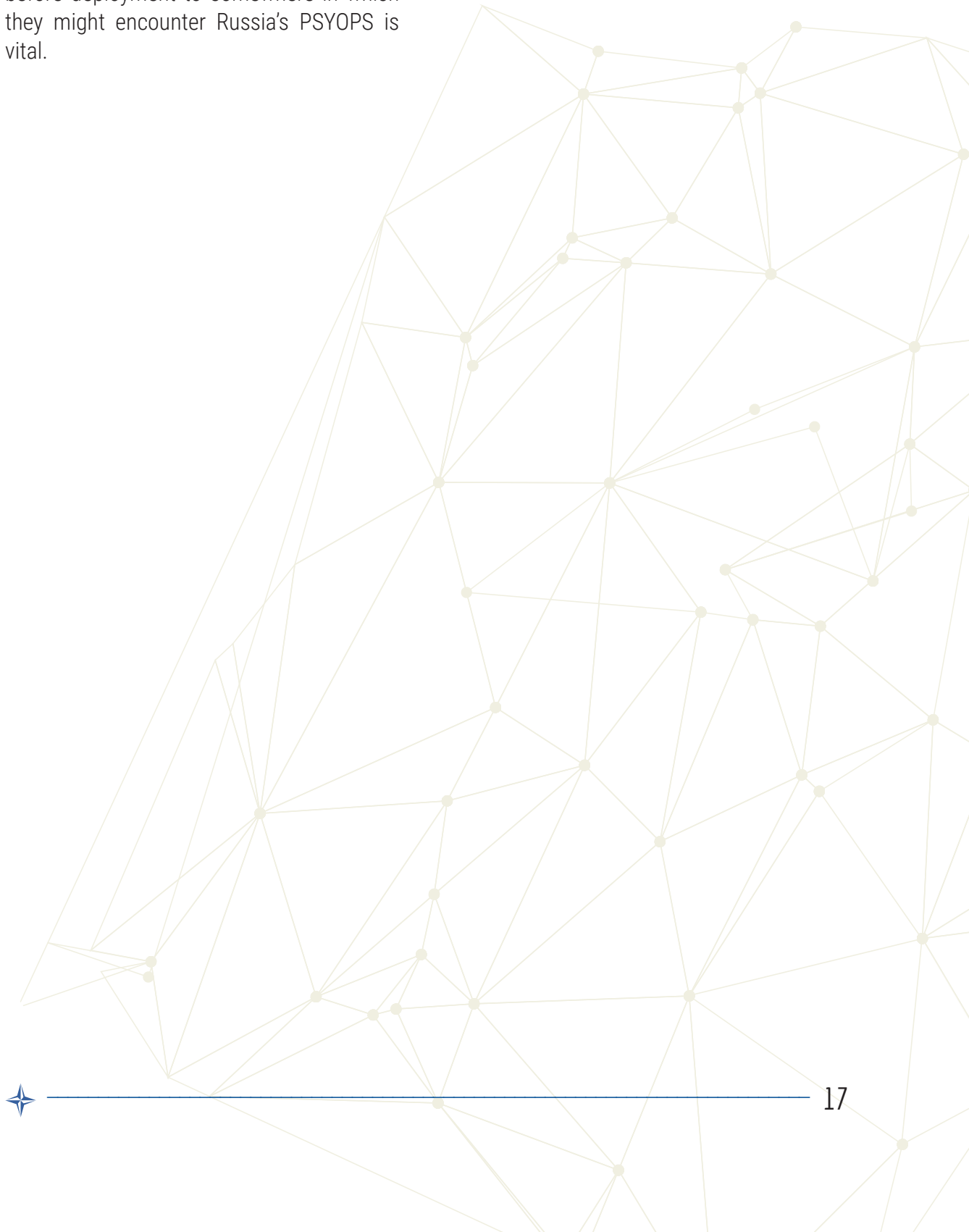


*Areas occupied by Central Powers between March and November 1918.*⁵⁰

However, nobody is even thinking about invading Russia now. But fending off Russian/Soviet aggression is not as impossible as Russia would like us to think. Even small countries like Estonia (1918-1920), Latvia (1919-1920) and Finland (1939-1940) have succeeded with some international support. Outside Europe, larger nations like Japan (1904-1905) have had successes, even on the offensive, and, with some external assistance, countries such as Afghanistan (1979-1989) and Chechnya (1994-1996), have managed to bring about a full retreat by Soviet/Russian troops. This knowledge would make NATO troops much more resilient to messages like the one quoted above.



Should there ever be a 'hybrid' situation or outbreak of hostilities, the NATO units influenced by Russia's PSYOPS use of historical messaging would be unable to build up the awareness necessary to resist this messaging overnight. Therefore, teaching history in Military Academies and briefing personnel before deployment to somewhere in which they might encounter Russia's PSYOPS is vital.



CASE STUDY: ESTONIA
MOLOTOV-RIBBENTROP PACT,
WORLD WAR II AND
SOVIET LEGACY

Author: Dr. Vladimir Sazonov

INTRODUCTION

History can be used as a tool of influence⁵¹ as was highlighted in *Annual Review 2014 of Estonian Internal Security Service*; “historical propaganda plays a key role in justifying the actions and conquests of Russia’s aggressive foreign policy”.⁵² Russia has its own historical policy, which the Kremlin uses for achieving its goals.⁵³ Various methods of using and (re)-interpreting or manipulation(s) historical facts and narratives are not a new phenomenon in the modern world, but in the 21st century they have become more significant in influencing target audiences.⁵⁴

Several modern pro-Kremlin oriented Russian historians⁵⁵ and even politicians⁵⁶ are manipulating historical facts. *Annual Review 2014 of Estonian Internal Security Service* briefly states:

*By hushing up the collaboration between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany from 23 August 1939 to 22 June 1941, and instead of recognising the annexations that started with the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact and the crimes of communism, Russia employs the tactics of attack, accusing its neighbours of Nazism. Attempts have been made to incriminate both Ukraine and the Baltic countries of collaboration with Nazi Germany. In parallel with labelling the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) fascist, Russia has continuously tried to disparage the armed struggle for freedom of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania after WWII and their resistance to Soviet occupation.*⁵⁷

Aims of the research

In this chapter several cases of manipulating (e.g. abusing) several historical events and narratives (the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact⁵⁸, the Second World War⁵⁹ and post-war period in Estonia or period of Soviet occupation⁶⁰)⁶¹ by Russian historians and opinion leaders, which took place between 2014⁶² and 2019, were examined.

Data sample and research methods

In this study analysis of different Russian sources (scientific works, popular-scientific articles in media etc) about Estonian history were examined. In order to achieve a useful outcome it is essential to use different combined methods of analysis (e.g. criticism of textual sources, historical critical analysis, qualitative content analysis), which I hope to have successfully applied in this chapter.

First, I have analysed several articles and statements of Russian historians, political figures, opinion leaders who accused Estonian historians of falsification of historical events related to the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, Second World War and following Soviet period.

Second, I have also analysed articles⁶³ which were published from 2014 to 2020 in Russian media outlets and news portals in the



Russian language: *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, *Ruskyi reportyor*, *REX Information Agency*⁶⁴, *Sputnik-news.ee*, *Ruposters.ru*, *RuBaltic.ru*⁶⁵ representing a wide spectrum of Russian media sources with various target audiences and impacts, including more marginal and less influential ones like *Ruposters.ru* and those which are well-known and influential sources for Russian-speaking audiences in Russia and abroad like *Komsomolskaya Pravda*.⁶⁶ Additionally, some article published by Estonian Russian language outlets also were taken also under consideration.⁶⁷ An article of Vladimir Putin published in *National Interest* was also analyzed.⁶⁸ For the analysis the author used qualitative content analysis⁶⁹ of articles published in Russian media and in pro-Kremlin oriented outlets.

Third, analysis of Russian scientific-popular works as well scientific works of several prominent Russian historians and political scientists such as (M. Gareev, A. Podberezkin, V. Simendey, A. Gasparyan, M. Y. Litvinov, I. Babin, N. Mezhevich and others) were examined.⁷⁰

Last but not least, to create a better picture semi-structured interviews with three experts from Estonia were conducted by the author in summer 2019 (June-August. All interviews were related to Russia's falsification of history and Russian influence activity in Estonia. Historian Dr. Igor Kopytin⁷¹, media expert Mr. Ilmar Raag⁷² and historian Dr. Jaak Valge⁷³ shared their insights.

Estonia, WWII and Soviet legacy: narratives and events in Estonian and Western historiography

The illegal annexation of the Estonian Republic by Soviet Union⁷⁴ and the subsequent occupation was a difficult period for Estonia and its people.

As is well known, the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact⁷⁵ between the USSR and the Third Reich led to the occupation of the Baltic States in 1940 by the Soviet Union. It was also the cause of the occupation of Poland by the Soviet and German forces in 1939 which brought about the beginning of the war.

The battle between Nazi Germany and the USSR on Estonian soil during the period 1941–1944 cost the lives of many Estonian people. This loss was exacerbated by oppressive Soviet rule, particularly in the 40s and early 50s (late Stalin-epoch) which was a period of deportations⁷⁶ and other mass repressions.⁷⁷



HISTORICAL EVENTS AND NARRATIVES IN PRO-KREMLIN ORIENTED DISCOURSE

Pro-Kremlin oriented historians and political figures interpret these above-mentioned events in the Baltic States in a different way to Estonian or Western historians and politicians. The manipulation of historical facts and narratives and twisting the truth is one of the crucial elements of modern Russian historical writing, which is supported by the highest Russian governmental and presidential levels.⁷⁸

History of Estonia (especially the period of occupation of Estonia by the USSR and WWII) has been a target for pro-Kremlin interpretation of Estonian history for decades and has been disseminated via several channels.⁷⁹ However, according to Jaak Valge's opinion, the '*professionalism of Russian historians who are dealing as propagandists should not be underestimated. They are strong in their knowledge*'.⁸⁰ Valge mentions that the spectrum of Russian historians is wide: there are historians who are pro-Kremlin based on their ideology and there are other historians whose views are not based only on the ideology.⁸¹

Some Russian professional and amateur historians abuse history by manipulating and reinterpreting historical narratives and known facts. Such behaviour has become a common practice and a significant part of pro-Kremlin experts' activities and as a means of combating the resurgence of Nazism.⁸² Many Russian historians and experts focus very often on 'the falsification of history' by Western scholars, particularly from Baltic countries. Russian historians D. V. Zagoskin, E.I. Chernyak and K. N. Shirko have pointed out:

*The need to resist the falsifications of history in historical science is now recognised as a national problem.*⁸³

One of the main topics discussed by Russian and pro-Kremlin minded historians often focuses on narratives related to 'the Great Patriotic War'. Russian historians usually underline the Soviet legacy and the occupation of the Baltic countries by the Soviet forces as justified and glorify/show this period in a positive light. It is intended to create the illusion that there was no occupation, but a voluntary incorporation into the USSR in 1940.⁸⁴

This issue was illustrated by the former president of the Russian Academy of Military Sciences – Russian Army General Mahmut Gareev. Being a recognised historian and scientist in Military studies he was considered to be the leading military historian in Russia. A notable fact – M. Gareev was the committee head of the scientific-editorial council of the journal *Informacionnyye voiny*⁸⁵ (Information Wars). In the context of mentioning 'Bronze night' in Estonia M. Gareev once claimed:



*The leadership of our country should first of all raise the question, including for the politicians of other states: 'Is it good or bad that we defeated fascism in Second World War?' In addition, a new multi-volume history of the Great Patriotic War should be created, which would provide a guide for textbook authors and researchers. It is also necessary to step up veteran and other associations of citizens so that they take the correct and principled position on these issues.*⁸⁶

M. Gareev dealt with historical questions and issues of the Great Patriotic War and actively participated in a number of discussions in Russia on historical issues focusing on the 'falsification of history of war'. According to his views, Western historical society is trying to dispute the victory of USSR over fascism and that this is part of a large Western propaganda campaign against Russia.⁸⁷ For example, in his article *'The Great Victory and modern interests of international security'*⁸⁸ M. Gareev described the Western conspiracy against Russian and Soviet history:

If G. K. Zhukov, D. Eisenhower, B. Montgomery, Ch. de Gaulle and other war veterans from different countries of Europe, Asia and the Americas would see the Assistant Secretary of State distributing sandwiches to people in Kiev on Maidan square, while the High Representative for the EU Foreign Affairs is showing kindness to the Nazis, they would turn over in

*their graves with disgust and shame for those who support the fascists today under the pretext of imposing 'freedom' and 'democracy'.*⁸⁹

General Gareev accentuates the crucial and decisive role of the USSR in achieving victory over fascism in Europe⁹⁰ 'abroad, the history of the war is falsified mainly due to the decisive role of the USSR in achieving victory over fascism and our country today should take the right place in the world, but certain forces in the West do not want allow this'.⁹¹

Propagation of Great Patriotic War narratives was clearly visible during Russian hybrid aggression against Ukraine in 2014⁹² and during the events of 'Bronze Night' in April 2007 in Tallinn.^{93 94}

The Russian historians and political analysts tend to show the Soviet period in a positive light. Even those whose works are more objective and unbiased; not dealing with abuse of history or with manipulation of facts, for example R. Simonyan:

*"Still, joining the Soviet Union was useful for Estonia: in the USSR, higher education was free, and representatives of the Union republics had privileges to enrol in leading Russian universities out of competition. In the post-war years, Estonia was able to train specialists in Leningrad and Moscow higher education institutions".*⁹⁵



OPINIONS ABOUT ESTONIAN HISTORY IN MEDIA

Putin's article in National Interest

Historical narratives and events have played a crucial role in modern Russian state ideology, politics and political rhetoric.⁹⁶ It is illustrated by statements of many prominent key Russian political figures. In June 2020 the President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin published an article "The Real Lessons of the 75th Anniversary of World War II"⁹⁷, where he discussed issues related to World War II and paid special attention to the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact.⁹⁸

I will only say that, in September 1939, the Soviet leadership had an opportunity to move the western borders of the USSR even farther west, all the way to Warsaw, but decided against it. The Germans suggested formalizing the new status quo. On September 28, 1939 Joachim von Ribbentrop and V. Molotov signed in Moscow the Boundary and Friendship Treaty between Germany and the Soviet Union, as well as the secret protocol on changing the state border, according to which the border was recognized at the demarcation line where the two armies de-facto stood.⁹⁹

Putin does not mention the occupation of the Baltic States at all, instead he uses the phrase "protocol on changing the state border, according to which the border was recognized at the demarcation line where the two armies de-facto stood".¹⁰⁰ Putin described the occupation and the annexation of the Baltic states as an "incorporation" and claimed that it was done legally with the support of local authorities and no international law was broken:

In autumn 1939, the Soviet Union, pursuing its strategic military and defensive goals, started the process of the incorporation of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia. Their accession to the USSR was implemented on a contractual basis, with the consent of the elected authorities. This was in line with international and state law of that time.¹⁰¹

The so-called "incorporation" into the USSR was a *de facto* occupation of Baltic States and, in legal terms, it was not at all in line with any international or national law, as was confirmed by much research.¹⁰²

Prominent Russian historians and political scientists in the media

Professor at Saint Petersburg State University and president of Russian Association for Baltic Studies¹⁰³ Nikolai Mezhevich has also presented his views and understandings of the events which took place in the Baltics in 1939:



In August 1939, a non-aggression pact was signed between Germany and the Soviet Union, known as the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. According to the protocol, the Baltic countries were attributed to the sphere of Soviet state interests. On September 28, 1939, Estonia signed a mutual assistance pact with the USSR. Later, similar documents were signed by Latvia and Lithuania. According to the protocols, the parties were to provide each other with all kinds of assistance, including military assistance, in the event of an attack on one of the parties. On July 21, 1940, the people's parliaments of Latvia and Lithuania, as well as the State Duma of Estonia, announced the establishment of Soviet power in their countries and the proclamation of the Soviet Socialist Republics. The time spent in the USSR is considered by the Baltic republics to be an occupation period. Russia insists that Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia became part of the Soviet Union in accordance with the norms of international law in force at that time.¹⁰⁴

Another Russian historian - A. Gasparyan - also argues that from 1941 to 1949 there were no atrocities against the local populations of the Baltic States:

Naturally, there was nothing like this in the Baltics. And before our very eyes there is disgusting political speculation. Because there is a loud word, there are screams, but according to the documents it was not at all the same as they say in Tallinn, Vilnius and Riga.¹⁰⁵

Accusing Estonia of the falsification of history

One common trick of Russia's information activities relating to history is to blame Western (among them Baltic) scholars, politicians and opinion leaders for the falsification of history, trying to show them to be incompetent and non-objective by presenting historical facts and narratives.¹⁰⁶ Several Russian historians and opinion leaders have accused Baltic countries, particularly Estonia, of falsifying history and have applied political pressure on the historians. For example Russian historian and political scientist Aleksey Podberezkin, prorector of the Moscow State Institute of International Relations between 2009-2015, member of the Russian Academy of Sciences and of the Russian Academy of Military Sciences, writes that Baltic countries have no democracies and *'the goal of local authorities is simple enough: it is necessary to keep the current undemocratic systems of Latvia and Estonia, which consider Russian people to be second-class citizens by many indicators (political, social, humanitarian, etc.), as they are'*.¹⁰⁷

A. Podberezkin pointed out:

Our goal, one might say, is the noble task of protecting historians in countries such as Ukraine, Poland, Latvia, Estonia, Georgia and several others. Protect them from the total political pressure and dictatorship under which they are held. Our task is to free the historical discussion in those countries where scientists are not given freedom.¹⁰⁸



Accusing Estonian historians of not being objective or scientific is another frequent Russian trick.¹⁰⁹ Denial of the occupation of the Baltic States usually comes with arguments that the 'Baltic States joined the Soviet Union'. Such claims are considered a lie and not based on historical facts.¹¹⁰

In accusing the Baltic States of falsification of history pro-Kremlin experts involve not only Russian scholars, but also students who studying history. For example, history student I. Ibragimova from the University of Tyumen expresses her opinion by accusing the Baltic countries of falsification of the historical events of the Second World War:

If we analyze, in detail, cases of the falsification of historical events of the Great Patriotic War, then we should start with he who was the aggressor or initiator of this war. For the older generation, the answer to this question is obvious; but even here, some historians disagree. The framework for falsification includes discussions related to the events of 1939–1940 in the Baltic States, as a result of which the Baltic republics joined to the Soviet Union. The authors of Baltic history textbooks unanimously view the events of 1940 as a fact of 'occupation'.¹¹¹

Pro-Kremlin oriented opinion leaders and media have also accused prominent Estonian politicians, including the president of Estonia, of the falsification of historical narratives and facts. *Baltnews.ee* published an article about the foundation 'Russkiy Mir'

(translates as *Russian World*) that is also involved in investigating processes of the falsification of history.

'Russkiy mir' organizes conferences and forums dedicated to this topic.¹¹² For example, in 2018 the 'Russkiy Mir' foundation organized a side event '*Together with Russia*' at the Moscow International forum. Its main goal was to discuss the most acute concerns of citizens of the Russian Federation permanently residing abroad as well as representatives of Russophone diasporas (among them in Estonia), to develop proposals for their active involvement in the socio-political life of Russia and to coordinate their participation in the election of the President of the Russian Federation. In the article on *Baltnews.ee* Russia's role in the fight against Nazism, Russia's actions against the falsification of history and the importance of the 'Immortal Regiment' are discussed:

Russia has always supported its compatriots, helping to strengthen their ties with their historical homeland. This is a fundamental issue of public policy. Today, it's also appropriate to ask what our compatriots in their countries of permanent residence can do to support Russia: to advocate for the ideas of the Russian world, to fight for the preservation of historical memory, to support the advancement of the truth about Russia and the role of the peoples of our country in the fight against Nazism in all its manifestations, counteract the falsification of history, participate in the actions of the 'Immortal Regiment', etc.¹¹³



Accusing Estonia of nationalism, fascism, and the justification of fascism

General M. Gareev declared:

The great liberation mission of the Red Army is increasingly being called into question. It is especially strange and insulting to hear statements by some historians, politicians, and journalists about the 'occupation of the Baltic states by Soviet troops'.¹¹⁴

M. Gareev and other Russian historians use several historical narratives with a pro-Kremlin interpretation of history – e.g. 'The great liberation mission of the Red Army in Europe'.¹¹⁵ M. Gareev claims that several Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian historians, politicians and journalists wrote about the occupation of the Baltic countries, which, in his opinion, is not what actually happened.¹¹⁶

The negation of occupation of the Baltic states by USSR in 1940 is one of M. Gareev's arguments. The same narratives – denying the occupation of Baltic countries by the Soviets in 1940 and accusing the Baltic states of sympathizing with Nazism - are heavily used and promoted by several pro-Kremlin media channels (TV, newspapers^{116B}). Some of them aimed at a Russophone Baltic audience, for example *Baltnews*:

The trend towards the rehabilitation of Nazism and the heroization of Nazi criminals is increasingly taking place in the Baltic states: processions of Waffen SS legionnaires and their sup-

porters regularly take place in Latvia, and annual rallies of SS veterans take place in Estonia, at which meeting participants lay wreaths at the monument to the fallen soldiers of the SS Grenadier Division.¹¹⁷

Many similar cases could be found where Russia was accusing Estonia of supporting and restoring Nazism as well as promoting nationalism¹¹⁸. These topics are also discussed in Russian scientific and popular-scientific books, articles, volumes, seminars and conferences. For example, a citation by I. E. Babin:

The Baltic States, as we know, gravitated towards National Socialist Germany, and to this day Russophobic and nationalist sentiments can be traced in Estonia and Latvia.¹¹⁹

The idea that fascism is flourishing in the Baltic states and that there are many Nazi sympathisers¹²⁰ trying to restore Nazism is propagated via several Russian TV channels and in newspapers, books and documentary films. These pro-Kremlin channels and persons accuse Estonia of changing historical narratives related to the Second World War and the Soviet Union and its victory over the Third Reich:

Neo-Nazi marches, the war for monuments, the ban on broadcasting of Russian television and radio stations, the strengthening of the presence of NATO and the advice to mine the border with Russia in general – all this happens in the immediate vicinity of our country. All this happens in the Baltic countries.¹²¹



Russian media channels aimed at Russo-
phone people in Estonia constantly publish
articles accusing the Estonian population
of collaborating with Nazis to kill Jewish
people.¹²² These articles attempt to demon-
strate that the Estonian civil population was
heavily involved in the genocide of Jewish
people during the Second World War and
that Estonia now holds up these Nazi crimi-
nals as local heroes.¹²³

Forest Brothers

Another issue that is related to Russia's
abuse of history is that of the 'Forest bro-
thers' in which Russia and pro-Russia histo-
rians, opinion leaders, journalists and pol-
iticians constantly show the partisans as
purely criminals, fascists and collaborators
with the Nazi regime. 'Forest brothers'¹²⁴ are
often represented in Russian media as mur-
derers, cowards and marauders.¹²⁵ This is a
narrative that Kremlin and pro-Soviet groups
have been pushing since the early twentieth
century.¹²⁶

Another common topic in Russian media
is idea that forest brothers were Nazis or
at least Nazi sympathizers. The subject of
the story is the narrative of 'history' in con-
nection with the Second World War and
the 1950s in the Baltic States when forest
brotherhood was prevalent in Estonia, Latvia
and Lithuania. These partisans were mainly
active against the Soviet occupation and So-
viet authorities. It is worth mentioning here
the opinion of pro-Kremlin Russian political
analyst M. Demurin who decries 'Forest
brothers' as 'bandits who operated in the
Baltic region after the Second World War'.

M. Demurin believes that it is necessary to
systematise the 'Forest brothers' terrorist
crimes.¹²⁷

Russophobic narratives and history

Russia and pro-Kremlin activists (including
in Estonia) are constantly blaming Estonia,
its government and the people for fascism,
xenophobia and Russophobia.¹²⁸ Russopho-
bia¹²⁹ is an old Russian narrative that dates
back to the 19th century.¹³⁰ Kremlin wants
to show Estonia to be a very Russophobic
country that is hostile to Russia, its lan-
guage, culture and history and to all that is
related to Russia.¹³¹ As Andreas Ventsel has
pointed out:

*In recent times, accusations of 'Rus-
sophobia' seem to form a constitutive
part of Russia's narratives that refer
to the conflict between Russia and the
West. This conflict is related to the en-
largement of NATO and the European
Union: these developments have been
interpreted in Russia as essentially
anti-Russian activities.*¹³²

Russia keeps using and promoting¹³³ the
Russophobia narrative¹³⁴ not only in relation
to historical events but also to the current
political climate, e.g. Russian-Estonian rela-
tions.¹³⁵



The Immortal Regiment March in pro-Kremlin media discourse

One topic related to history and the memory of the Second World War is the 'Immortal Regiment' movement founded in Russia in 2012¹³⁶. This is a large-scale parade which has been marked since 2012 in Russia's major cities and abroad every 9th of May when Russia celebrates Victory Day over Nazi Germany. Officially these parades are organized for remembrance of the fallen Soviet soldiers during the Second World War but in reality are used by Kremlin and pro-Kremlin proxies as a strong propaganda tool.

Baltnews, *Sputnik* and other pro-Kremlin news outlets often publish articles related to the 'Immortal regiment' targeting Estonia, showing that the Estonian government and local authorities are Russophobic and against the 'Immortal Regiment'.

Indeed, in Estonia this movement is popular among the Russophone people therefore the Kremlin uses it as a tool of manipulation and abuse of history, often by pro-Kremlin activists for provocations through various channels and methods.¹³⁷ What is interesting that some articles promoting the 'Immortal regiment' have appeared in the most prominent Estonian newspaper, *Postimees* (in its Russian version). In 2017 journalist Nikolai Karaiev published an article about the 'Immortal regiment' and the celebration of the 9th of May in Estonia.¹³⁸ N. Karaiev doubts that 'Immortal regiment' events held in Tallinn are actually influenced by the Kremlin.¹³⁹

N. Karaiev points out:

*The 'Immortal Regiment' – a short procession during which no laws of the Republic of Estonia are violated. War songs are heard: 'Katyusha', 'Dark Night', 'Our Tenth Airborne Battalion'. The loud 'Hurray!' is heard. It is difficult to believe what the critics of this action are convinced of: that all these people were brought here by politics. No politics here. There are the most ordinary people of all ages who brought photo portraits of relatives who took part in the fight against Nazism.*¹⁴⁰

SUMMARY

The main historical narratives and events from the history of Estonia which are presented in Russian pro-Kremlin ideological agenda and discourse are linked to the Second World War, fascism and the Soviet period.

The Kremlin uses several tools to influence target audiences in Russia and abroad to promote its own historical interpretations with the purpose of challenging the understanding of the history of Estonia and the Soviet Union.

The channels of influence which promote pro-Kremlin discourse are not only historical studies (articles, monographs), popular-scientific works, conferences and seminars but also TV, social media, books, articles, documentaries, historical journals, etc.



The main topics of historical revisionism are the Great Patriotic War or the Second World War, Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, occupation of the Baltic States and the post-war Soviet period. Kremlin pays, of course, attention to the whole history of Europe and the world, but the aforementioned periods are given special focus with respect to targeting Estonian audiences.



CASE STUDY: FINLAND
COMPETING NARRATIVES
OF WAR

Author: Dr. Kati Parppei

INTRODUCTION

Compared to many other East European countries, the issue of history – or the history politics – in relation to Russia has never been such a central or openly disputed one in Finland. This is the case for obvious historical reasons. Russians have not openly accused Finnish historians for falsifying history, either; however, this does not mean that Russian attempts to control or use the past have not been a concern in Finland. Rather, such attempts have been quite subtle, playing with strong mental images favourable to Russia and offering competing narratives, or ‘alternative truths’, to the Russian audience, which has been their main target (presumably including the Russian minority in Finland).

In this article, two recent or on-going cases of such falsifications of history, having taking place between 2016 and 2019, are briefly examined and contextualised. Both are connected to the Second World War and the hostilities between Russia and Finland. The first is the case of the shelling of Mainila. In this context, we are referring to the Russian attempts to challenge the established view of the Soviet Union having started the war against Finland on 30 November 1939, and arguing that, instead, it was a Finnish provocation, influenced and encouraged by Germany.

The second case is the dispute over the mass grave at Sandarmokh, which refers to the recent claims that the grave of the victims of Stalin’s Great Terror in Russian Karelia is also – or is primarily – the final resting

place of Soviet prisoners of war executed by Finns during the ‘Continuation War’ between 1941 and 1944.

The primary sources for examining the cases in this article consist of news and articles published in Russian and Finnish media. I will be looking at the competing narratives themselves rather than taking a stand on the issues as a historian (therefore, for instance, the author has not personally studied the archive material mentioned). For the sake of objectivity, the chapters presenting each case are quite descriptive in their approach. The concluding chapter consists of a brief analysis of the issue from a ‘metahistorical’ point of view and with the use of historical image studies.

THE SHELLING OF MAINILA

In November 1939, according to the established view, the Red Army shelled the small border village of Mainila. Before the incident, in order to protect Leningrad, the Soviet Union had tried to persuade Finland to move the border westward by offering some land in Eastern Karelia in exchange. Finland refused the deal and, as a result, the Soviet Union declared that a Finnish military provocation had taken place in Mainila.¹⁴¹

Based on this claim, Soviet Union withdrew from the nonaggression pact that had been signed in 1932 and declared war



against Finland on 30 November 1939. The war between the Soviet Union and Finland is known as the Winter War and it ended with the Moscow Peace Treaty in March 1940, after a Soviet breakthrough at the Karelian Isthmus. Finland suffered heavy territorial losses, exceeding the pre-war demands by the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, the resistance by Finland had taken the Red Army by surprise and the latter also suffered heavy losses.¹⁴²

After the fall of the Soviet Union, Russia virtually admitted that the shelling had been a false flag and that indeed, it was the Soviet Union that had started the war. Since then, there has been a kind of silent consensus on the matter. For instance, with some exceptions, the most recently printed Russian school textbooks are quite clear about Soviet Union having started the war against Finland to protect its interests.¹⁴³

A new claim: Finland tested the Red Army

However, recently, the issue of the shelling of Mainila has been occasionally brought forward once again, partly due to the 80th anniversary of the beginning of the Winter War was approaching. The innocence of Finland in the matter has been brought into question in numerous Russian articles and blogs. These texts have been authored by individuals, but in some cases, they seem to somehow be connected to the authorities.

For instance, an article on the issue was published on the *Zvezda*-channel website – run by the Russian Ministry of Defence – in

July 2017, written by Leonid Maslovskii. The article, entitled ‘The shame of Dunkirk: how Europe eagerly bowed to Hitler’, claimed that Finland had started the war, aiming to test the Red Army on behalf of the German forces:

*In order to ensure its safety, the Soviet Union asked Finland to move its border from Leningrad further towards Karelian Isthmus and offered Finland an area twice as large in exchange. Finland refused and reacted with a military provocation with strong support from Germany and fellow warmongers.*¹⁴⁴

Thus, the shelling of Mainila, according to the author, was linked to the presumed resentment and opportunistic attitude of the ‘West’ towards the Soviet Union:

*The war with Finland was a test of the Soviet Union’s Western forces. After the Finns encircled and defeated our 44th Infantry Division, W. Churchill stated in a radio appearance on January 20, 1940, that Finland ‘revealed to the world the weakness of the Red Army.’ This statement was made in order to accelerate Germany’s attack on the Soviet Union. The whole policy of the West was aimed at achieving one goal - an attack by Germany on the Soviet Union.*¹⁴⁵

It was also announced that any suggestion that the Soviet forces could somehow have been defeated by the Finnish in the Winter War was a falsification of history (this announcement refers to the fact that the amount of Soviet casualties was far greater than those of the Finnish and the ability of



Finland to defend itself had taken the Soviet Union by surprise).¹⁴⁶

Finland is also linked to the military aspirations of the 'West' in other writings concerning the shelling of Mainila. For instance, in December 2017, a site called *Politics and War*¹⁴⁷ published an article called 'Mainila, what really happened' by B. Rozhin. The author refers to documents (not properly cited) and claims that together, hold evidence that Finland was to blame for this event.

According to Rozhin, there were other attempts of sabotage taking place in the area of the Soviet Union by Finnish soldiers – dressed as border guards – around the time of the shelling. He says that the reason for this was to provoke the Soviet Union to start a war in which the 'West' would provide support to Finland; he asks why the Finnish government would behave 'to put it mildly: unwisely', and comments that 'the answer is self-evident: it is because they were promised serious support from the West in case of war with the Soviet Union!'¹⁴⁸ He continues by explaining that it was necessary to show the Soviet Union as a warmonger:

*Yes, support was promised, but for this it was necessary to show the Soviet Union as the aggressor, rather than the West, in order to justify the intervention. And so we come to understand that Finland was suddenly very interested in the event that would push the Soviet Union to take action.*¹⁴⁹

The author also mentioned that Tsar Alexander I made a mistake by joining the province of Vyborg with Finland in 1812, and that the nationalistic zeal of the Finns had been high

prior to the war. He concludes his text as follows:

*The lesson was learned by Finnish society and a high price was paid for the realisation of its real place in the world. Only in getting rid of the ulcer of nationalism did Finland manage to build amicable relations with its great neighbour.*¹⁵⁰

In both cases, the authors explicitly emphasize the role of Finland as a pawn in a game played by the 'West'; in Rozhin's article, this role is linked to the unrealistic nationalistic aspirations of Finns.

The response by Finns

In general, Finnish historians have not bothered to participate in any dispute concerning the issue of the shelling of Mainila in the context of these recent re-interpretations. When it comes to the media, Maslovskii's article was noted by Finnish journalist Arja Paananen, specialised in Russia, who wrote an article about it in the Finnish tabloid *Ilta-Sanomat* on 1 August, 2017: 'Russian TV channel distorts history: "Finland executed the shelling of Mainila and, through military provocation, started the Winter War as an ally with Germany"'.¹⁵¹ In her article, Paananen also recalls her recent conversation with a Russian navy officer, who was worried about the resurrection of fascism and Nazism in Europe and emphasised that Russia had never been the aggressor in military conflicts. Paananen contextualised both of the issues in Russian information warfare, which aims to emphasise the threat posed by Europe.¹⁵²



In January 2018, the Foreign Minister of Russia, Sergei Lavrov, suggested founding a Finnish-Russian historical committee to investigate certain controversial historical issues, one of which, according to him, was the beginning of the Winter War. The suggestion had been in answer to a question presented by a Russian journalist at a press conference of whether the shelling of Mainila had been executed by Finland or the Soviet Union (the journalist pointed out that views with which Finnish historians disagree had been presented on the issue recently). Lavrov also said that historians should resolve such matters.¹⁵³

To Lavrov's suggestion concerning the founding of a joint committee, the President of Finland, Sauli Niinistö, briefly replied that the question of the shelling of Mainila had already been adequately examined by both Finnish and Russian historians.¹⁵⁴

One should also note that the shelling of Mainila was brought into contemporary discussions on security policy by the Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the United Nations, Volodymyr Yelchenko. At the meeting of the UN Security Council on 26 November 2018, Yelchenko compared the Kerch Strait incident to the event that had started the Winter War in 1939 and, ultimately, led to the expelling of the Soviet Union from the League of Nations.¹⁵⁵

SANDARMOKH MASS GRAVES

Whilst the question of the shelling of Mainila has remained a relatively marginal one in the context of contemporary history politics – for instance, it has not been considered worth an academic dispute in Finland – the same cannot be said about the competing views on the mass graves at Sandarmokh.

Sandarmokh is the name of a forest area in the Republic of Karelia, Russia. In 1937-38, over 9000 victims of Stalinist terror were executed and buried in mass graves in the area, which consists of sandy, loose soil, easy to dig. The victims represent 58 nationalities altogether, including Finns, Karelians and Ukrainians. Allegedly, in 1997, after a strenuous search through the archives, human rights activist and local historian Yuri A. Dmitriev located the graves (along with another, similar burial place, Krasny Bor).¹⁵⁶

Later, Dmitriev and the Petrozavodsk-based Karelian branch of the International Memorial Society continued their work in the archives, managing to name some 6400 victims. There have now been hundreds of memorials erected in the area to commemorate them. Groups from various countries visit Sandarmokh and every 5th of August there is a commemorative event, in which both local officials and priests participate.



A new theory emerges: Soviet soldiers executed by Finns

In 2016, numerous new theories emerged related to the mass graves at Sandarmokh. First, in July, a historian from Petrozavodsk State University, Yuri Kilin, wrote an article that was published in the Finnish newspaper *Kaleva*. Kilin announced his view that not just victims of Stalin's terror, but also Russian prisoners of war (later referred to as POWs), executed by Finns from 1941-1944, had been buried at Sandarmokh.¹⁵⁷ During the Continuation War, in which Finland and Germany fought as co-belligerents against the Soviet Union, Finns took about 64 000 Soviet POWs, and about 22 000 of them died – mostly of hunger and disease, but also of violence and executions. The POWs were kept in prison camps in the occupied areas of Eastern Karelia – this is the group Kilin referred to – and many of them were used as work force in agriculture and forestry.¹⁵⁸

In August 2016, for the first time, no officials or representatives of the Orthodox Church participated in the annual commemorative event at Sandarmokh. Furthermore, Yuri Dmitriev – who was preparing a book on the victims of Stalin's terror at the time – was arrested in September, accused of child pornography. The initial arrest has led to a long and complicated series of releases, new accusations and arrests, along with psychiatric assessments. The process is still taking place. Both Dmitriev and his supporters have argued that the criminal cases

against him were only created in order to halt his efforts to memorialise the victims of Soviet political terror. In October 2016, the International Memorial Society was placed on the list of 'foreign agents' in Russia.¹⁵⁹

Since our topic is competing historical narratives, let us take a closer look at the claims concerning the issue of who is buried at Sandarmokh. As noted above, it was Yuri Kilin, together with his colleague Sergei Verigin, who first suggested that Russian POWs had been executed and buried on the spot. In his article, Kilin said it would have been 'natural' for the Finns to use the area for executions and mass burials and that it was 'likely' that Finns knew of the previous usage of the area with a sandy loose soil for similar purposes.¹⁶⁰

The news of the new theory soon spread amongst the Russian media. On 15 July 2016, *Izvestiia* published an article on the issue, entitled 'Memorial data on repression in Karelia may be revised'. In the article, Yuri Kilin announced the main reason for publishing the new theory was the 75-year anniversary marking the beginning of the Continuation War.¹⁶¹ In addition, Kilin wanted to add to the information concerning Finnish concentration camps:

*The second reason is that Finland knows very little about their own history of concentration camps, so the article was written in part to educate them about new data using the interrogation protocol of our prisoners of war who fled Finnish concentration camps.*¹⁶²



On 4 August, the *Zvezda* channel website published a long article by Viktor Sokirko entitled 'The second truth concerning the concentration camp at Sandarmokh: how Finns tortured thousands of our soldiers'.¹⁶³ The article was based on the claims of Kilin and Verigin, as well as 'new sources provided to the channel by Russian FSB' – mostly interrogation transcripts. The author describes Russian POWs and refers to the new theory as a proven historical fact:

*They were held in the same barracks as political prisoners and were killed or tortured in huge numbers (according to various reports, between 19,000 and 22,000 prisoners of war died here). We don't know whose bones of which there are more. It is likely that now, after the results of studies showing that thousands of remains belong to prisoners of war tortured by the Finnish occupiers have been published, historical justice will prevail.*¹⁶⁴

The article quotes letters from Russian POWs, emphasizing the cruelty of the 'fascist Finns.' It is also noted that some of the POWs became traitors, cooperating with the guards. Nevertheless, according to the author, most of the prisoners remained unaffected and should be remembered in Sandarmokh:

*But the bulk of the prisoners of war remained faithful to their oath and military duty. The Finns destroyed them and buried their bodies in the same place as the graves of political prisoners. And strangely enough, the Memorial divided the remains found at Sandarmokh into 'their own and others,' leaving the bones of prisoners of war unworthy of attention.*¹⁶⁵

In August 2018, new excavations took place in the area of Sandarmokh, carried out by the Russian Historical Society (later referred to as RHS) – chaired by the Cultural Minister – and funded by the Defence Ministry. The aim was to find the remains of Soviet soldiers executed by Finns. On the third day of the excavation efforts, the group found remains that were revealed to have been Soviet POWs. According to representatives of the RHS, this claim was based on the bullets and strips of overcoats found in the grave. The excavated remains were taken away for further investigation. So far, no more information about these investigations has been released.¹⁶⁶

In summer 2019, new excavations were carried out at Sandarmokh. According to a news item by *Rossia 24*, new remains were found, but it was still too early to tell to whom they belong; however, it was noted that the bodies were wearing boots made of Russian car tires.¹⁶⁷

Something especially interesting about these new excavations is that they were preceded by a letter sent by Sergei Solov'ev, Acting Minister of Culture for Karelia, to the head of the Russian Military History Society, Alexander Barkov, on 19 July 2019. The letter, the authenticity of which has not been confirmed nor denied, was allegedly shown to journalists by accident amongst other documents and a member of the Memorial society, who was observing the excavations, managed to take a photograph of it. In the letter, Solov'ev requests new excavations, and is quite explicit about the political significance of the issue:



*The Memorial Society has put forward the idea that the Sandarmokh area contains graves of victims of political repression from 1937-1938, which, with the support of interested Russian and foreign forces, has become the paradigm of public awareness both in Russia and abroad. According to their estimates, up to 9.500 people are buried here (which is seriously over-estimated). The idea of there being graves of victims of political repression at Sandarmokh is actively being used by a number of countries as destructive information and propaganda in the field of historical awareness.*¹⁶⁸

Solov'ev also mentions that the 'speculation around the events at Sandarmokh not only damages Russia's international image, but also strengthens an unwarranted sense of guilt in the public consciousness when faced with representatives of the foreign countries whose countrymen were supposedly executed there', and that the current status of Sandarmokh 'makes it possible to put forward unfounded claims against our country and serves as a consolidating factor for the anti-government forces in Russia.' Further, he emphasizes the academic importance of the new theory and mentions that it has caused distress in Finland about potential damage to the country's image.¹⁶⁹

Reception of the new claims in Russia

Kilin and Verigin's claims concerning Sandarmokh, and their concrete consequences, have caused confusion amongst Russian and Finnish historians, journalists and hu-

man rights activists. For instance, representatives of the Memorial Society have announced that the excavations by the RHS were carried out both illegally and unprofessionally and the research was not carried out in line with scientific practices.¹⁷⁰

When it comes to the new claims themselves, one of the most profound examinations of the issue was produced by Russian journalist Anna Yarovaya, who published an article in *Russian Reader*, in English, titled 'Rewriting Sandarmokh - Who Is Trying to Alter the History of Mass Executions and Burials in Karelia, and Why' on 13 December, 2017.¹⁷¹

According to her lengthy article, Yarovaya examined the sources referred to by Sokirko in his article¹⁷², announcing that the interrogation transcripts did not, in fact, offer any new information concerning the graves of Sandarmokh. She also interviewed Sergei Verigin, who explained to her why he and Kilin had deduced that there would be Soviet POWs buried in the graves:

*Why have we formulated this hypothesis? Because the camps were large. There were six camps, containing thousands of people. Hundreds of people died of hunger, cold and torture. But where are the graves? Clearly, a few could have been buried in the city, but where were the dozens and hundreds of men buried?*¹⁷³

So, according to Yarovaya's research, along with Verigin's statement, it seems like the theory, presented by Sokirko as a fact in his article, was based on assumptions and guesses, rather than revolutionary findings



in the archives that would explicitly point to Sandarmokh. Verigin admitted this himself: 'The numbers are there, but the burial site is not.'¹⁷⁴

During the interview, Verigin also called for the founding of an international working group that would investigate the Sandarmokh issue. His explicit reason was that it would make it possible to continue the excavations in the restricted area – and to find a proper location for a memorial to POWs killed by Finns:

We would be able to prove or disprove our hypothesis, but the hypothesis exists. The main idea is to pay tribute to the men who died in Finnish concentration camps during the Great Patriotic War [WWII] and erect a memorial of some kind, because as long we do not find a single [burial] site, there will be no monument for our POWs.¹⁷⁵

In 2016, Yarovaya also interviewed Russian historians, both professional and local amateurs, who did not agree with Kilin and Verigin's theory. They pointed out, for instance, that Finns could not have known about the existence of the mass graves and even if they had accidentally found them, they would have immediately informed the rest of the world about their existence. Also, even though there were Finnish concentration camps in the Medvezhyegorsk area, there is no evidence of any mass executions – and even if such events took place, it would not have made sense to transfer the POWs or their bodies almost 20 kilometres in order to bury them at Sandarmokh, which was located at the front line.¹⁷⁶ One of the historians, Irina Takala, has also mentioned that if re-

mains of Soviet POWs are found, the victims may well have been executed by Russians themselves after the war as traitors.¹⁷⁷

One should mention that one of Yarovaya's interviewees, who opposed the new theory, was Sergei Koltyrin, the director of the Medvezhyegorsk District Museum, who later on declined to participate in the excavations. In October 2018, he was arrested, accused of paedophilia and in May 2019, convicted to nine years in prison.¹⁷⁸

Reception of the new claims in Finland

Whilst the Mainila case has not received notable attention, the Sandarmokh case and its turns – including Yuri Dmitriev's judicial process – have been followed by the Finnish media quite closely. Simultaneously, Finnish experts (also interviewed by Yarovaya) have expressed their incredulity when it comes to the new theory.

Unlike Kilin argued, Finnish historians have quite profoundly studied the issue of Finnish concentration camps in Karelia. For instance, during its research project 'Finland, prisoners of war and extraditions 1939-1955,' the Finnish National Archives compiled a multilingual database containing detailed information on POW and civilian deaths in prison camps and civilian internee camps in Eastern Karelia.¹⁷⁹

Antti Kujala, who studied the unlawful killings of Soviet POWs during the Continuation War, has pointed out that post-war sentences for soldiers who committed such war crimes do



not tell the whole truth around the unlawful executions and shootings of POWs. According to him, there had to have been more of these deaths than the official reports reveal, and in any case, the mortality rate amongst POWs in prison camps was high due to hunger and disease.¹⁸⁰ But according to Kujala, as well as other Finnish historians specialised in POW issues and prison camps, no archival material supports the idea of mass executions, let alone any POWs executed by Finns having been buried in Sandarmokh. Instead, the Finns have agreed with their Russian colleagues opposing the new theory. They have also refused to take part in the current excavations.¹⁸¹

One could say that in Finland in general the Sandarmokh discourse is approached as something that only indirectly concerns Finns; rather, it has been seen as a reflection of the internal issues in Russia and Russian history politics. As the journalist Arja Paananen puts it in one of her articles concerning Sandarmokh: 'Russia wants its people to believe that even though Stalin was cruel, at least he was our own cruel one, whilst Finland was the enemy and therefore even more cruel [than Stalin].'¹⁸²

CONCLUSION

As noted in the beginning, when it comes to Finland, the Russian attempts to reinterpret history have been quite subtle. The competing narratives of war have not been openly directed towards Finnish historians, or Finnish society in general; instead, their target audience has largely been Russians.

In the case of the shelling of Mainila, the context for the alternative narrative has been the idea of Finland collaborating with fascist Germany (or the 'West' as opposed to the Soviet Union in general). The revisionist goals of Finland in the 1940s are also brought to light. Since it is commonly accepted historical knowledge – including in Russia – that the Soviet Union started the Winter War, these claims have remained somewhat marginal. In Finland, no historians have bothered to publicly take a stand against them. Nevertheless, the claims emphasize the idea of Russia having historically stood against a hostile Western front, and thus may well have some relevance in the contemporary political discourse.

The on-going case of Sandarmokh – with distant echoes of the Katyn massacre case in the 1940s – has been more prominent both in Russia and in Finland than that of the shelling of Mainila, with more implications and intertwined issues involved in the former. Most of these issues are difficult or impossible to pinpoint and prove. For instance, the connection between the competing views on Sandarmokh and the legal actions against those who have either worked to reveal the past atrocities of Stalin's era, or questioned the alternative theory about the deceased buried in the graves being Soviet prisoners of war killed by Finns. It seems obvious that the current project being carried out by the RHS has the full blessing and is likely being carried out by the Russian state authorities. It seems apparent, too, that the issue is linked to a certain reluctance in Russia to openly evaluate the legacy of Iosif Stalin and to steer attention towards the real or presumed deeds of the external enemy in-



stead, who, in this case, are represented by Finns during the Continuation War.¹⁸³

Both cases presented here can be contextualised in the formation and maintenance of enemy images in Russian history politics and contemporary political discussion. 'Fascism' has been resurrected to represent a threat from the West – for instance, the events in Ukraine have been labelled as Fascist undertakings.¹⁸⁴ Moreover, since the 19th century, there has been a tendency in Russian military discourse to emphasize the innocence of Russia; according to this claim, Russia is never the aggressor; it only defends itself and its interests. The attempts to reinterpret the beginning of the Winter War fit this picture as does the Sandarmokh case, in the sense that it shines the light on Finns as invaders leaving behind the problematic internal history associated with the mass graves. It is apparent – and clearly indicated by the letter from the Minister of Culture for Karelia – that local and state authorities find the civil activity around Sandarmokh somewhat unnerving and would prefer to replace it with an 'official' memorial and a remembrance ceremony for the heroes of the Great Patriotic War.

Nevertheless, the main point may not be whether some claim can be proven to be true or not. The alternative theories, once given adequate media coverage, affect image formation in the recipients' minds. It is possible that at some time in the future, due to this process, Sandarmokh will primarily be associated with Finns executing Soviet soldiers in the 1940s, rather than Stalin's troops executing Russians (amongst others) in the 1930s. From this viewpoint, whether something proving the new theory correct is actually found during

the excavations or not is of secondary importance. On the level of collective images, the result is nevertheless the same. The same holds true in the Mainila case: merely muddling the issue by suggesting alternative narratives may be enough to support the idea and image of the Soviet Union/Russia as a historic 'non-aggressor'.

It is possible that in the future similar issues will arise in the context of WWII; also, the deeply hostile attitudes towards Russians in Finland during the 1910s and especially 1920s may become something that Russia decides to use for information warfare. During the Civil War in Finland (1918) Russian soldiers were executed and later on, Russians were blamed for the whole conflict and it was brought out that they all, including refugees, should be expelled from Finland. In the 1920s, hatred towards Russians was actively propagated.¹⁸⁵ These kinds of issues might be used, especially, to affect the attitudes and opinions of the contemporary Russian minority in Finland.

There were 79 225 Russian-speakers residing in Finland in 2018. 28 747 of them were citizens of Russia, which made 11,2% of all the foreigners (for comparison, 20% were Estonians).¹⁸⁶ This group is potentially a target for information warfare, also concerning history. Russian media – also social media – is widely available and actively consumed by Russians living in Finland.¹⁸⁷ The most active and prominent actor spreading disinformation to the Russian minority of Finland (and Finns as well) has recently been "Russian- Finnish Society RUF1".



When it comes to education, the Russian-Finnish school (Helsinki) is owned and administered by the state, as is the School of Eastern Finland, which functions in three towns (Imatra, Lappeenranta, Joensuu). Both of them offer bilingual teaching for students of all backgrounds. The possibility of individual teachers promoting controversial or false views on the bilateral history of Russia and Finland cannot be ruled out, but in general this does not seem to be a serious threat due to the closely monitored educational system.



**CASE STUDY: LATVIA
(AB)USE OF HISTORY
AS A RUSSIAN TOOL OF
FOREIGN INFLUENCE**

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INTRODUCTION

Varying, controversial and incompatible narratives on Latvian history have developed in Latvia and in Russia for several decades. On an academic level, they always have been analysed as part of a historiographical analysis. Usually, this has been done from a historiographical perspective, without going beyond it – into political constructions or aims set for the creation of such a narrative. Simultaneously, accusations in the falsification of history have mostly been perceived as simply a form of political expression by the Russian authorities, while wider analysis of usage and abuse of history for political aims is quite new.¹⁸⁸

The aim of this paper is to show how Russian state policy abuses history to intervene in processes in Latvia by making accusations of the falsification of history. That will be done without going deeply into the research, either of the abuse of history by Russia to reach its foreign and domestic political goals in the broader sense, nor for domestic purposes, as in many cases, these are two outcomes that are both the aim of such abuse of history. The article is designed to illuminate, in author's opinion, the most important aspect of this abuse – the questioning of the legacy of the incorporation of Latvia into the USSR as, aside from historiographical discourse, it also provides a base for the restoration of the independence of Latvia in 1990 and thus, is inseparable from current constitutional and international legal realities.

Origins

The idea of the 'falsification of history' is not new. In Soviet historiography,¹⁸⁹ references to F. Engels's idea that the bourgeoisie turns everything, including history, into a commodity and falsifies history in favour of itself was widely used.¹⁹⁰ This statement was understood as an excuse for the fact that Soviet historical narratives differs from those in the West and programming readers that Western narratives are false – constructed in favour of the bourgeoisie rather than historical truth, instead the soviet narratives, which cover the true interests of the masses. These statements of 'false' and 'true' history as such have played a role in soviet ideology and were an ideological fee of the historiography, but wasn't central in ideological narratives and society-building. Nevertheless, various views on history between western and soviet historians played a notable role in the antagonisation of the soviet world towards the west as a whole – building an overall altered understanding of geopolitical reality, where the duty of the soviet historian was not only to research past, but also to engage in the perpetual struggle with 'bourgeois science' or 'bourgeois falsifiers'.¹⁹¹

Despite the condemnation of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact by the Supreme Council of USSR in a decree on September 23, 1989,¹⁹² controversy around the political evaluation of the history of Latvia emerged already



during the process of re-establishment of Latvia' state independence.

On May 4, 1990 the Supreme Council of Latvian SSR adopted the Declaration 'On the Restoration of Independence of the Republic of Latvia', which included an evaluation of Latvian history that was formulated in emigration and western historiography long before: the occupation of Latvia by the USSR on June 14 and 15, 1940, and political pressure and an ultimatum by USSR to change the government as well as military aggression of USSR on June 17, 1940 was declared an international crime which resulted in the occupation and the liquidation of independence and sovereignty of Latvia.

The fact that Latvian legislators chose to restore independence and not to develop a new statehood after seceding from USSR led not only to the re-establishment of pre-war legal bases, including citizenship criteria based on pre-war citizenship, but also to rehabilitation of people repressed by the soviet regime and the provision of compensation for real estate nationalised by communists. From adoption of the first constitutional acts in early 1990, Latvia developed its statehood grounded on the idea of continuity of state and the understanding that being within USSR had been the result of illegal occupation. Neither the decree of President of RSFSR B. Yeltzin of August 24, 1991¹⁹³ nor the decree of State Council of USSR of September 6, 1991 recognising Latvian state independence¹⁹⁴ repeated this formula, nor did they deny this formulation on the origins of Latvia's being within USSR. The Declaration on the Restoration of Independence of the Republic of Latvia

resulted in a much harsher reaction by local communist party members loyal to USSR, who, announced that the Declaration contained 'significant distortions of historical reality'.

It is necessary to remind also that, since 1917, Russia developed, both – ideologically and constitutionally, as a soviet (Bolshevistic) country and, after the collapse of USSR, as a post-soviet state. Latvia, as well as Estonia and Lithuania, on the other hand, were established as modern, democratic European countries and fought for their independence against Soviet Russia (as well as the Russian and German monarchies) in a War of Independence and could be marked as 'anti-Bolshevistic'. After the collapse of USSR, these countries constitutionally re-established their anti-Bolshevistic statehoods. Contrary to Latvia, in Russia, the collapse of USSR was perceived as a catastrophe and Russia made efforts to delay its collapse. As soon as it became possible, Latvian society broke away from the Soviet Union, restored independence and democracy and returned to European society.

Russian legislature

Despite all the controversies between historians and politicians on the evaluation of the history of Latvia in light of Russian – Latvian relations as well as in context of the history of Russia and the USSR, at the beginning these controversies were not a significant means of political influence by Russia. Up to 1998, during to the Russian



financial crisis, Latvia was closely tied to the Russian economy and Russia had not yet developed a strong history-based national identity. Thus, Russia's influence was not present in a visible form of historical propaganda. In 1999, Russia adopted a law in their state policy aimed at compatriots abroad, which defined that relations with compatriots abroad were an important direction of Russian foreign and domestic policy.¹⁹⁵ With Latvia's campaign to enter the EU and NATO and the strengthening of rule of V. Putin in Russia, a significant ideological-historical gap appeared between Russia and Latvia. In April 2005, the president of Russia, V. Putin, announced that in his view, the collapse of USSR was the biggest geopolitical catastrophe of the century,¹⁹⁶ but in May of the same year, he admitted that the fate of the Baltic States during WWII was determined by the Soviet – German agreement and the division of the spheres of influence between USSR and Allies at the peace conference in Yalta¹⁹⁷. The Russian National Security Strategy of 2009 says that '...attempts to revise the history of Russia, her role and place in world history...' have a negative influence on Russian national security.¹⁹⁸

Abuse of historical narratives was noted by European policy and opinion makers after the occupation of Crimea, when it was used as a pretext to legitimise and justify Russia's actions,¹⁹⁹ but still, at that moment it was designed to fight Russian domestic criticism of historically oriented state propaganda and to channel the disgrace of contemporary politics and social economical processes²⁰⁰. In May 2014, the purposeful distortion of

the Soviet Union's role in World War II was criminalised in Russia²⁰¹. This paragraph can easily be applied to historians who criticise Stalin's Great Terror and its decimation of military leadership in the years before the war or against those who 'wrongly' interpret the Hitler-Stalin pact, the huge casualties suffered by the Red Army, or the rape and plunder committed by Soviet troops as they marched toward Berlin, etc.²⁰² In Russia, people are stalked with the pretext of fighting extremism for historically related public statements on social media about USSR's role in the outbreak of WWII and its early collaboration with Nazi Germany.²⁰³ In a long term perspective, the building of Soviet sentiment in Russia has been realised through state supported media, TV series, documentaries²⁰⁴ and programs, films and cultural events, which form a distorted historical memory of Soviet disadvantages with idealised views of the past. One purpose of this idealisation, as is stressed by the director of the sociological center *Levada-Center*, Lev Gudkov – is legitimisation of the current regime in Russia.²⁰⁵

THE INSTITUTION- ALISATION OF 'HISTORICAL TRUTH'

The Foundation 'Historical Memory' was created at the end of 2008, and since then it's been focused also on the history of Latvia. Similar to the fund's work are publications²⁰⁶



of the Russian Academy of Sciences Institute for Sociopolitical Research, which declared aim is to fight historical falsifications about the incorporation of the Baltic States into the USSR.²⁰⁷

The highest level of political importance of the ideological fight over history was reached in 2009, when just a week after celebrations of the anniversary of Victory in the great Patriotic War, the Presidential Commission of the Russian Federation to Counter Attempts to Falsify History to the Detriment of Russia's Interests was created, whose purpose was to 'defend Russia against falsifiers of history and those who would deny Soviet contribution to victory in World War II'.²⁰⁸ This commission existed until the beginning of 2012. Formation of this commission opened a new page in the understanding of historical narratives as a means of political influence and in the understanding of historical perceptions among Russian policymakers *per se*. First, we are driven into debate on the falsification of history in general. Second, there is clear division between the falsification of history in the interests of Russia and against these interests. Third, there is a recognisable understanding that history is linked to the current international prestige of Russia. Despite this commission had been disbanded in February 2012, the fight against 'falsification' of history in Russia hasn't stopped. In 2016, a group of experts identified six topics from Russia's past that they claimed were being actively distorted as part of an anti-Russia strategy: the Soviet Union's ethnic policies, the Hitler-Stalin pact, the Soviet Union's conduct during World War II, the 1917 Russian Revolution, and the

Soviet Union's suppression of uprisings in Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and East Germany during the Cold War.²⁰⁹

In 2016, notable Russian historian Aleksandr Chubaryan²¹⁰ dismissed the need for a special commission or centre to combat historical 'falsification', noting that this was the responsibility of historians and universities,²¹¹ what was later reflected in the huge numbers of publications.

Since then, an important role in the 'explanation' of history has been played also by the Ministry of Defence of Russia,²¹² and in the name of the fight against falsification of history, an important role in spreading delusional historical narratives has been played the Russian Historical Society (re-founded in 2012 [1866-1917]) and the Russian Military-Historical Society (re-founded in March 2013 [it was originally founded in 1907 and was disbanded in 1917]). In 2016, the Russian Association for Baltic Studies was established which members now provide 'expertise' on themes connected with Latvian history, primarily developing delusional and pseudo-scientific narratives of WWII and Latvian history within USSR as well as on contemporary issues connected with Latvian politics,²¹³ which is later widely used for international and domestic ideological labelling and formation of negative public opinion about Latvia in the media.

Since historical research in Latvia on its Soviet past showed policies of the Soviet Union without the glorification and ideological *retouche* that had been so common in soviet historiography, these researches was mentioned to be among



the reasons for beginning the fight against rewriting and 'falsification' of history in Russia. It is important to note that the most important reason that Russian authorities pay so much attention to history-writing and the policies of history in Latvia is that the history of Latvia in Russia is perceived not as a part of European history or independent national history, but as a part of Russian history.²¹⁴

Putin's Russia's authorities are not eager to support studies of the history of soviet repression,²¹⁵ which has been one of the most demanded topics in the Latvian history of soviet occupation for most than 10 years and has received notable governmental support.²¹⁶ The lack of research and popularisation of ideologically unpleasant topics of soviet history in Russia creates historical blindness in society and the denial of the results of such researches elsewhere, which turns historiographical discourse into ideological counter-standing. Russia's struggle over a border agreement with Latvia, Estonia and Japan and fears from territorial claims and claims for compensation, which could rise from the idea of state continuity of Latvia from the pre-WWII period and acceptance of the fact that Latvia was occupied and annexed into the Soviet Union illegally should be mentioned among the reasons for clashes over interpretations of history.²¹⁷ Discourse on this issue has been raised from time to time in Latvia.²¹⁸

An important platform to accuse Latvia of the falsification of history is the State Duma of Russia (lower house of the parliament). The critical line adopted by the State Duma has been followed since the 1990s, reaching

a peak in 1998 and 1999. Russia was responding to commemorative events taking place in Latvia or to official statements or legislation adopted in Latvia. These responses usually included a request to the President of Russia to impose economic sanctions against Latvia.²¹⁹

Threats to Latvian state security made by the abuse of history by Russian state-controlled media and authorities, as well as compatriot groups and various organisations,²²⁰ in order to reach goals of foreign policy of Russia and propaganda in consolidation of compatriots living abroad, along with the discrediting of Latvia internationally since 2011 is noted in the annual reports by The Constitution Protection Bureau of Latvia²²¹. The Latvian State Security Service also regularly notes various activities of Russian compatriot organisations and activists, supported by Russian state agencies, in the spreading of Russian ideologically grounded delusional interpretations of the history of Latvia. These forms an integral unity within the Russian policy of compatriots for the creation of 'Russian historical memory', as a risk to the constitutional order of Latvia.²²²

Diplomacy

Attempts to discuss the Latvian history of relations with USSR on an international level have been recognised as important in order to raise understanding of the legal and constitutional situation (including issues of denationalisation of property taken by the soviet regime, rehabilitation of unjustly repressed people and the question



of status of non-citizens²²³) in Latvia after the regaining of independence. Post-Soviet transformations led to criticism of the Soviet regime not only during WWII and Stalin's era, but also later, and included restoration of justice through the prosecution of previous executors of Soviet repressions and those involved in war crimes. Russian authorities falsely perceived this criticism as an attack on Russian prestige and pride. In defence of Soviet veterans for their deeds during WWII, attacks were made on Latvian historians and authorities for interpretations of history from an anti-Soviet (ideological) perspective. Another topic that raised dissatisfaction, diplomatic protests and political attacks was the re-evaluation of the history of the Latvian Legion²²⁴, which led to the partly victimisation of this military formation, as it was discovered to have been formed mostly by conscripts who had been threatened with a war tribunal if they didn't join.²²⁵

In the context of the narrative of the Soviet Union as a liberator, Russian authorities have always reacted sharply to legal proceedings against veterans of the Red Army living in Latvia for war crimes committed during WWII²²⁶ or former KGB officials who were tried in Latvia for crimes against humanity in post-war repressions.²²⁷ Russia always shows support to soviet actors, not simply in keeping its version of the past headlined on Latvian and Russian media, but also in defending itself, its prestige, its ideological grounds and some of its 'heroes' from attacks at the European Court of Human Rights by becoming a third party to the legal proceedings.²²⁸

Rough analysis of public announcements of the Ministry of Foreign affairs of Russia shows an evolution from contentions for a 'review (re-evaluation) of results of WWII and the Nuremberg trials' (2005)²²⁹ to criticism for 'rewriting of history' (2007),²³⁰ 'review (re-evaluation) of history' (2009)²³¹ and accusations of 'falsification of history' (since 2009). Although the term 'falsification of history' in Russian diplomacy appears as early as in 2004, it has taken a more constant position in Russian diplomacy towards Latvia since 2009, when the Presidential Commission of the Russian Federation to Counter Attempts to Falsify History was formed. It is notable that expressions of accusations of the falsification of history were extremely high until 2012 – during the existence of this commission, with a new wave of accusations of the falsification of history by Latvia accelerating in 2016 (with a short pause in 2017). High politicisation of history is also marked by these accusations, as, since 2013, strong counteractions to the re-writing of history have taken place in the Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation.²³²

The promotion of discussions about Russians, Russia and Soviets in the history of Latvia in a pro-soviet framework is an important part of Russia's compatriot policy, which not only keeps part of Latvian society emotionally bound to Russia, but also encourages alienation and counters integration of Russian-speakers into Latvian society²³³. This alienation is used²³⁴ to unify Russian-speakers, and Victory Day itself is tried to link to the theme of the rights of ethnic minorities.²³⁵ The question of legality of incorporation of Latvia into USSR is



strongly linked with the Soviet sentiment of Russian-speakers in Latvia that has been developed as one of the most important cornerstones of nation building in Russia. As such, it is transferred into Russian compatriot policy, the construction of the 'Russian World' and the commitment to Russian culture: language, history, values of statehood and patriotism, the idea of a strong and great Russia and the uniqueness of the Russian civilisation²³⁶.

Questioning the historical facts of occupation also questions the legitimacy of the restoration of independence. For all Latvian political actors, occupation and re-establishment of independence are the basis of the current state. Therefore, the narratives that deny occupation are incompatible with this official position.²³⁷ On the other hand, recognising the fact that the Red Army simply occupied Latvia at the end of WWII means that, for many of Russian speakers, they 'have no morally and legally justifiable place in modern Latvia'²³⁸. The Ambassador of Russia to Latvia in 2016 announced that: *'Claims against the USSR for its aggression in and after World War II are falsifications of history [...] So you can get to the point that the Soviet Union was an absolute evil in World War II. This does not correspond to the content of the international documents of the Nuremberg trials. Therefore, we say that attempts to pose the question in this way are falsifications of the history of World War II'*.

Despite the fact that the Nuremberg trials have been widely criticised in western historiography²³⁹ and among legal scientists²⁴⁰ for unjust selectivity and ignorance of the war crimes committed by

the Soviet Union and the Allies, references to it plays an important role in the Kremlin's accusations of Latvia for the falsification of history, formation of anti-Russian propaganda and violation of international post-war order. The Nuremberg trials clearly stated, who was considered to have belonged to the criminal organisation of the SS and who – wasn't, namely, excluding those who were drafted by the State and who had committed no war crimes.²⁴¹ And it is clear that the Latvian Legion, by an overwhelming majority, was formed by drafted conscripts and as such is excluded from Nuremberg trials concept of criminal nature of SS organization,²⁴² Russia repeatedly spread falsehoods about the glorification of Nazi collaborators and the rebirth of fascism in Baltic countries. Russia spreads false narratives that Latvia (and all Baltic states) denies wrongdoings by their collaborators in Nazi crimes and behaves like the decisions of the Nuremberg trials do not apply to them,²⁴³ simultaneously hundreds of thousands of Russian origin Nazi collaborators just labelling as a traitors. With references to the Nuremberg trials in its accusations of the falsification of history, Russia is trying to limit a real scientific debate and to build an inextricable link between its false and politicised interpretation of the past with the existing international legal system.

The most recent example of the abuse of history in order to influence Latvia was the celebration of 'liberation' of non-Russian cities by the Red Army in the late stages of Nazi-Soviet War, including capitals of Baltic States.²⁴⁴ It is clear that the celebration was organised with a clear understanding that it would be painfully perceived²⁴⁵ in Baltic



countries for whom this 'liberation' marked the beginning of a half century long second soviet occupation that with wide repressions of the Baltic people. With the renewal of discussions in Latvia about the damage caused by the Soviet regime (the author does not find discussion on calculation of this damage to gain some compensations from Russia, to be a fruitful for all-inclusive framework for analysis and evaluation of history), Russia has renewed the propaganda campaign by spreading myths of 'willful and peaceful' incorporation of Latvia into USSR and the 'benefiting of Latvia from Soviet investments' (debunked recently by Latvian historian Gatis Krūmiņš²⁴⁶).²⁴⁷

Historical narratives are extremely important to the identity of Russian society as it is also closely linked to 'worshipping' the historical geopolitical role and might of Russia. Everything, that can lead to doubts about this, is considered a danger and has to be rejected by all means – including not only battles of discourse and narratives, but also the linking of historical understanding with current economic cooperation and sanctions.²⁴⁸ This includes the fight to legitimise the occupation and annexation of an independent state in the interests of USSR, which is leading toward the questioning of the legacy of the contemporary independence of Latvia.

Media Sphere

The most important and probably the only effective means to influence processes in Latvia for Russian policy makers are through

the public media. Despite the fact that it is hard to measure momentum impact of media on society in measurable volumes, it is possible to see changes in society from a long-term perspective, when we are looking at the set of values and geopolitical orientation, which are strongly affected by historical narratives. It is obvious that the relatively high (and even higher than average in Russia) amount of support (94.88%²⁴⁹) shown in Russian presidential elections in Latvia to the current Russian president is a direct result of this work. Although this does not show that in spite of the fact that the number of Russian citizens²⁵⁰ in Latvia has increased, reaching 41 894 in 2018²⁵¹ (beside that, in Latvia there are 214 206 or 11.1% of population, persons who holds non-citizens passports of Latvia - former citizens of USSR and their descendants²⁵², 141 232²⁵³ of which are ethnic Russians²⁵⁴), the total percentage of Russian citizens – residents of Latvia who have participated in Russian presidential elections has decreased from 59.25% in 2012 to 49.57% in 2018.²⁵⁵ This is clear evidence that Russian citizens living in Latvia show less interest and involvement in the political processes of Russia, but that those who do, show increasing (from 89.03% in 2012²⁵⁶ to 94.88% in 2018) support for the current holder of the post. The decrease in Russian citizens voting in Russia's presidential elections can also be linked to Russia's aggression in Ukraine, since Ukrainians form a significant share among the Russian-speaking inhabitants of Latvia. This brings up the parallels of abuse of history by Russia in order to influence Ukraine and to try to legitimise and justify the annexation of Crimea internationally. These efforts do not directly target Latvia, but still



have a notable impact on Latvian society, where attitude toward the war in Ukraine is a significant indicator of public support for the Kremlin's policy and, in the context of the European fight against disinformation, of Russia's struggle to spread 'alternative information' about current processes.²⁵⁷

Other recent cases of Russian's struggle against 'falsification' of Latvian history were linked with the release of a short documentary by NATO on Latvian guerrilla movement after WWII,²⁵⁸ the renovation of Salaspils memorial²⁵⁹ and a monograph dedicated to Nazi *police prison and labour correctional camp in Salaspils*, in which Latvian historians denounced soviet clichés. The most foreseeable case is of the commemoration practices of May 9 – Soviet Victory day and March 16 – unofficial remembrance of the Latvian Legion²⁶⁰. These events are meant to demonise Latvia and to disgrace Latvian international prestige. False accusations of Latvian Legion in commitment of war crimes, which have been committed even before its formation, seemingly are targeted to trigger counter-reaction of Latvian historians and policymakers to draw them into fake debate on history of the Second World War to accuse them in glorification of Nazism and crimes committed by it. Tactically, in internal debate that helps to explain to Russian society Latvian desires to break out of USSR, but in foreign affairs that is used for attempts to label Latvia as pro-Nazi and thus – not suitable for modern European community, and also drives attention from debate on war crimes committed by Soviets. Ultimately, the main theme for political clashes is the general attitude toward the actions of USSR during

WWII – is it perceived as an occupation as it is in Latvia and in the Baltic in general, or is it seen as liberation from the Nazis, without taking into account the period of Second World War before the so called Great Patriotic War²⁶¹, as it is perceived in (and by) Russia. Latvia, countering glorification of totalitarian regimes, recently has banned the usage of soviet (together with Nazi) banners, insignias and uniforms in public events²⁶² what is perceived by Russia, which identifies itself as a successor of USSR, as unacceptable all criticism of the historical actions of USSR, especially the comparison of Soviet crimes with those committed by the Nazis.²⁶³ Nevertheless, Latvian, Baltic and European²⁶⁴ political evaluation of the history of WWII is grounded in the understanding that both - Nazi and Soviet crimes have been similarly devastating to people and should be condemned equally.

At least since 1998, in order to spread their historical narratives in Latvia, the Russian authorities have been sending large consignments of textbooks almost annually, at least up to 2009, to schools in Latvia, where books in the social sciences and history²⁶⁵ contains idealised versions of history or current geopolitical affairs.²⁶⁶ These textbooks as well as films sponsored by foundation 'Russkiy Mir' glorifies Russian nation, victory of the Red Army in the Great Patriotic War and retouches what this "victory" meant to Latvia and its people.²⁶⁷

There is an obvious conflict of historical memory²⁶⁸ in the media space between the collective Latvian and Russian memories²⁶⁹ – narratives of liberation versus occupation; oppression and repressions versus the



positive influence of the USSR on Latvia's development.²⁷⁰ The evaluation of the incorporation of Latvia into USSR is at the core of this debate.

A recent study²⁷¹ showed that, aside from accusations of the falsification of history, an important role in spreading the official Russian interpretation of history and forming grounds for perception of these accusations is played by the presentation of Latvian history in a false light in media, what is accomplished by omitting important facts and setting chronological framework for narratives, which do not fully explain the course of events. Russia and the Russian language media spread narratives that operate with facts detached from the wider context and clearly meant to form a delusional understanding of Latvian history among the Russian language population in Latvia.²⁷² In addition, recent Russian propaganda has started to use the method of *whataboutism* to argue that the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, which has an important role in understanding the roots of WWII, was nothing more than a collection of non-aggression treaties that Germany has signed with other countries, including Latvia in the previous decade (ignoring the fact, that none of previously signed non-aggression treaties had secret protocols on expenses of other countries. Other recent researches²⁷³ also sets a light on some Russian medias involved in spreading falsehoods on Latvian history among Latvian audience – Latvian based newspaper *Vesti*, with its web platform www.vesti.lv, Russian multimedia platforms *Sputnik*, *RuBaltic*, and *RT*, Russian TV channels: *RTR*, *Channel 5*, *REN TV*, *TV Zvezda*, various Russian newspapers

and others. As availability of information in modern informational era is not restricted with territory, it is important to note not only media which broadcasts especially for Latvian auditory, but also media which are Russia oriented, are available for all Russian speakers and thus leaves impact on Latvian society. There are also numerous web platforms of NGO's, blogs and audio-visual materials, which are produced for the same purpose, but as their linkage with Russian state policy are less overseen able, they are not analysed in this research.

Accusations of Latvia in the falsification of history is an important part of attempts to impact Latvia's international prestige.²⁷⁴ There is a close link between narratives published in the Russian media and narratives spread by most Russian language media in Latvia and these narratives are designed to deny Latvian (and not only Latvian) historiography as 'something between a history textbook and anti-Soviet propaganda'.²⁷⁵ Everything that doesn't fit with Russian propaganda and its ideologically designed historiographical narratives is labelled an anti-Russian propaganda. This shows the development of Soviet sentiment in Russian society, which, in turn, can give root to further actions that can threaten Latvian national independence – there were already precedents set in 2014²⁷⁶ and 2016²⁷⁷ with demands for the re-evaluation of the collapse of USSR and recognition of the proclamations of restoration of independence of the Baltic States not from historical, but from a legal perspective.



CONCLUSIONS

The construction of an alternate understanding of history does not result in simply an alternate understanding of history – it is the purposely construction of an alternative reality, alternative ‘truth’; and anything that contradicts that delusional ‘truth’ is labelled as falsification and lies. The Russian modern revisionism of history not only leads to a return to the Stalinist ‘understanding’ of history, but also holds the purpose to re-evaluate of the Stalin era as a model of governance in general, as well as to the weakening of trust in democracy and the model of western society *per se*.

Fighting against the ‘falsification of history’ in and by Russia, since the establishment of Soviet sentiment as an element of national pride and identity, is a method of spreading official, ideological and extremely politicized and subjective interpretation of the past, which is an integral part of new political values and cornerstones of the ‘Russian world’. This fight with falsification should be recognized as a modern form of censorship, which holds more importance within Russia rather than abroad. Diplomatically Russia’s reaction within historical debates is determined by the fact that recognition of the soviet occupation of Latvia itself, undermines all narrative of the Soviet Union as a liberator of Eastern Europe and Latvia in particular from Nazism, which is one of the most important cornerstones of the newly developed Russian state ideology. The international recognition of crimes committed by USSR may, not only strip

Russia from the self-built image of liberator and strengthen the label of USSR as an aggressor, but also lead to the debate on compensation to victims, which is another red line for Russian state policy.

There is no direct border between Latvian history of the twentieth century and the history of Russia/USSR. Thus, all attempts by Latvian historians (and policy-makers) to develop national historical narratives that differ from Russian ones, have been, are and will continue to be considered a threat to ‘Russian’ historical narratives, which are strongly linked to domestic society building in Russia. Thus, the history of Latvia is not only a theme for Russian foreign affairs and the implementation of the ‘Russian’ view in Latvian society, but also a theme for Russian domestic historywriting and society building policies.

Divide ut regnes. Accusations of Latvian historians and state officials in the ‘falsification of history’ is widely used to promote alienation of the Russian speaking community in Latvia to keep Latvian society weak and non-integrated, what helps to build Russian domestic myths about the might of USSR and sorrows about its collapse and failure of the West. It also keeps the momentum of non-integration in the European Union and allows Russia to speak about imagined abuse of minority rights – an issue for which Russia itself is often criticised.

It is important to build an understanding of the political roots of various controversial identities and historical understandings. It is a well-known fact that history is often used for political purposes such as society-



building, setting of values and geopolitical orientations. This is why it is so critical for Russia to spread its narratives along and across its national borders and why it is so important to develop critical thinking within society and to build an understanding that Russia's historical narratives are closely linked with Russian political goals. We need to build an understanding that when historical discourse is politically formed, it is not a scholar discourse about history itself, but rather, a Cold-War-style propaganda campaign. Unfortunately, in Russia, the scholar community is widely politicised and rarely provides politically independent narratives on history, especially the twentieth century history. It is also widely involved in the political fight for one-sided delusional interpretations of the past. To avoid the politicisation of history, it is important to avoid 'good' and 'bad' categories in scholar evaluations of the past. The purpose of history is to research what happened and why it happened in the way it did, not to produce a political, moral or ethical evaluation of these actions.

The popularisation of Latvian history, including politically 'unpleasant' and complicated topics, is necessary to build a background on which false narratives cannot be designed from the outside. It is necessary to extend research and popularisation of Latvian history during soviet occupation, focusing not only on topics of repressions and period of Second World War, which are comparatively distant in the memories of living people, but also of later soviet and even post-soviet periods.

Writing about the wider regional history and history of Russia itself, including usage of rich archival materials available in Latvia (and elsewhere outside Russia) is necessary in order to shift the course of controversy between Russian and European historical narratives from reactive to proactive. There are still too many blank pages and unknown angles of the history of the Baltic Republics within the USSR and Baltic governorates within the Russian empire, which also serves as a bending point between Latvian and Russian histories. The Latvian archives provide plenty of material that should be researched for the sake of recording history, and not simply as a means of response to Russian propaganda, but also provides materials for extending research of Russian history itself in light which wouldn't been affected by aims of Russian propaganda.

Raise awareness of Latvian historical belonging in Europe, which can only be accomplished through the widening of exposure to the European context of historical processes that forms Latvian history, also going beyond the twentieth century. When we are looking at WWI, WWII or for example the Livonian or Great Northern war, or even the protestant Reformation or Enlightenment, it is crucially important for Latvian, European and even Russian societies do not to forget to shed the light on the links between processes in Latvia and elsewhere in Europe.



Provide narratives in Russian that will reach Latvian Russian speakers and also audience in the Russia. The availability of historical materials in the Russian language in the age of global information networks will also help to spread it throughout the Russian language informational environment. This environment is divided, especially after Russian aggression in Ukraine and the awakening of the civic movement in Russia itself, and larger and larger segment of this group do not share official Kremlin ideology, its set of values and its interpretations of history and this division can be used for spreading of historical evaluations which are alternative to Kremlins view.



CASE STUDY: **POLAND**
SOVIET INVASION OF
POLAND ON
17 SEPTEMBER 1939

Authors: Ieva Pałasz and
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INTRODUCTION

For the Russian Federation, the most important current issue in the scope of history is the strengthening of belief in the great victory of the USSR over Nazism and, as Jolanta Darczewska writes, a rehabilitation of the special services, as well as a change in the assessment of the deeds of Stalin. The issue of cooperation between the USSR and Hitler before 1941, which, in Russian historiography, is the beginning of the Great Patriotic War, has become quite a problematic question in this context. In this regard, we can observe a number of activities in Russia, the purpose of which is to relativise such events as the secret protocols to the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact or the Katyń Massacre (the murder of Polish officers, non-commissioned officers and other individuals in 1940); ethnic genocide as a part of the 'Polish Operation of the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs', i.e. NKVD (1937-38); the joint Soviet-German parade in Brest; and the NKVD–Gestapo methodological conferences (1939-1940). The same applies to 17 September 1939 – i.e. the aggression of the USSR against Poland. This text will be devoted to the methods of falsifying this event by the Russian Federation.

Methodology

Manipulation, propaganda, disinformation on historical issues are the subjects of the research of many Polish experts. The most comprehensive monograph on this subject is the National Security Bureau's report entitled: 'Russia's Historical Propaganda in 2004-



Soviet anti-Polish propaganda poster

2009'. This topic also appears in a publication by Jolanta Darczewska, in which the author demonstrates the use of historical issues to influence the image of both Soviet and Russian services. Other publications by this author are also devoted to the Russian information war.²⁷⁸ Another piece on this topic was delivered by Justyna Prus in the Polish Institute of Foreign Affairs.²⁷⁹

In addition to the review of the current literature on the subject, a qualitative analysis of the narratives of selected entities was conducted – from the official statements of Russian politicians, works of Russian historians and publicists, official historical portals like Histrf.ru, activities of diplomats and press articles, to the pro-Russian organisations in Poland. With the help of the InfoOps Polska Foundation a quantitative analysis was conducted. A number of expert interviews with Polish researchers were also carried out.



What happened on September 17, 1939

Ministers Ribbentrop and Molotov signed an agreement known as the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact on behalf of Hitler and Stalin. It contained the secret protocols under which the USSR would undertake, among other things, an armed attack on Poland if it was at war with the Third Reich. Stalin had previously tried to get permission for the Soviet army to march through Poland, but Polish authorities refused. This refusal was for good reason – the fear that the Soviet army would not leave the territory of the Second Polish Republic.

The Molotov-Ribbentrop agreement was implemented during the Soviet army's attack on eastern Poland without a declaration of war. The Soviet campaign began on 17 September 1939 and involved around 630,000 troops, 4700 tanks (more than Nazi Germany used to invade Poland) and 3300 airplanes. Due to the involvement on the Western front, only a few units of Border Protection Corps left on the Eastern territory of Poland were to resist the second aggressor.

The Soviet attack on Poland was accompanied by a diplomatic offensive and propaganda campaign – the Soviets reported the breakup of the Polish state, the liberation of the oppressed nations from 'bourgeois

power' and a need to protect the Ukrainians and Belarusians as the official reason for the attack. This was in spite of the fact that at the time Polish troops were still in defence mode. Today, to the scope of justifications for the invasion a narrative on protecting the Jewish population was added, even though historiographical materials on activities of the Soviet leadership are not supporting such claim.

Signing of the German-Soviet Frontier Treaty on 28 September 1939 marked an official end of the Soviet campaign. The Polish Second Republic was practically destroyed in the aftermath of Nazi-Soviet joint operation. Additionally, in the result of the invasion, Stalin seized 190,000 km² of land with around 13-million population (5 million of which were Poles, the rest – Belarusians, Ukrainians)²⁸⁰. According to prof. Andrzej Paczkowski, after the invasion around 1 million people (10 percent of the population of the eastern Poland) became direct victims of Soviet repressions (executions, imprisonments, deportations, forced labor), while "no fewer than 30,000 people were shot, and another 90,000 to 100,000 (8-10 percent of the deportees) died in the camps or *en route* in railway convoys"²⁸¹.



MANIPULATION AND WEAPONISED HISTORY AGAINST POLAND

The enhanced usage of weaponised historical narratives concurs with the change in Moscow's attitude towards including history in the realm of state policy in the 2000s.²⁸² American journalist Masha Gessen states, in her research concerning historical memory in post-Soviet Russia, that a comeback of Stalinist era narratives can be observed at the beginning of the 2000s. Their distinct features include systemic distortion of the truth in conjunction with the flexibility in creation of the past or the enemy image, as well as acclimating the audience to these exclusive messages.²⁸³ It allows simultaneous use of a narrative about common origins, culture and futures, while at the same time, portraying Poland as the black sheep of the 'Slavic family'.²⁸⁴

The most significant part of shaping the image of Poland in the historical narrative has two factors: the need to create a new Russian identity focused around the legacy of the myth of the Great Victory over the Nazis and rehabilitation of state services, which were primarily associated with the previous repressive regime.²⁸⁵ Russia also uses the historical narratives to achieve the goals of current foreign policy. By portraying Poland as a threat to good neighbour relations

between the West and Russia, the Kremlin strives to undermine the credibility of Poland in the international arena (especially in the EU, NATO and in Poland's neighbouring countries), resulting in obstacles to active policy towards Russia.²⁸⁶ For instance, Moscow effectively uses these historical arguments, mostly Volhynia massacre, to interfere with Polish-Ukrainian relations and escalate tensions.²⁸⁷

Most of the narratives mentioned in Annex 1 "Russian falsification and manipulations of history today: Poland" are by no means new. Most of them consist of recycled theses from the Soviet war propaganda and Bolshevik anti-Polish agitation (see illustration above) as well as the historiography of the Soviet domination era. In the case of the Katyń Massacre, narrative development went from the falsification of history to an attempt to discover the truth and then back to falsification and manipulation.²⁸⁸ This means that the current particular narratives around the events of 17 September 1939 are not so different from the falsifications used during communist times.

Annex 1 shows 20 of the most common misinterpretations and falsifications of Polish history in Russian or pro-Russian narratives.²⁸⁹



By no means is this list exhaustive; however, it is visible that the main scope of this list concerns the events of the middle of the twentieth century and post-war period.

Dissembling and distorting 17 September 1939

The current Russian narrative can be summarised as follows:

The USSR was the main victor of WWII/GPW, the conqueror of the Nazis and therefore the world's (and especially the Jews') saviour. Regarding these facts, Russia, as the USSR's inheritor, should be met with the world's respect and admiration, including commemoration in the public space outside Russia and recognition as a world leader.

It is for this statement that Russia heavily uses historical revisionism against Poland. In order to subdue the events of September 1939, the Kremlin has revived old Soviet propaganda messaging²⁹⁰; interestingly, only one new narrative has been forged. We have identified five strategies that Russia uses to present the invasion of Poland:

Dissembling. This strategy includes avoiding the topic of Soviet-Nazi cooperation and the 17th of September in general, or flooding the infosphere with information on different topics. In Vladimir Medinsky's (Russia's minister of culture) publications, the year 1939 seems only to cover the Winter War with Finland, while Poland is described as an aggressor in

the context of 1938,²⁹¹ namely of the seizure of Zaolzie (Teschen).²⁹² Skipping the Soviet invasion in post-war rhetoric is also a reflection of Soviet policy towards teaching history in the post-war period in the Polish People's Republic. According to quantitative analysis, in the second half of September, Russia tends to disseminate messages about the great sacrifice of the Red Army and Zaolzie rather than about the invasion.²⁹³ In reference to one of the interviewed specialists, Russia has not yet automated its spreading of historical narratives on social media. Instead, it strives for long-term, lasting influence and will likely focus on personal stories of Red Army soldiers, which can evoke much more empathy and sympathy.

Whataboutism. The second approach mentions the events of the 17th of September, but immediately switches to other events irrelevant to the case. The most common messages give equal weight to Soviet aggression during the war and the Polish ultimatum on Zaolzie in 1938, and the accusation that the Poles murdered the Jews.²⁹⁴ As this case is often mentioned in Russian historical propaganda, it is worth mentioning that, in spite of different conditions – Zaolzie was largely an ethnically Polish region and its annexation was not the result of agreed upon and coordinated cooperation with Hitler – president Lech Kaczyński apologised for the annexation of Zaolzie in 2009,²⁹⁵ while Russia still denies attacking Poland without even declaring war.

Context change. This strategy is useful for pre- and post-war events in order to justify the invasion or to ridicule the Polish accusation by pointing out their alleged benefits, such as acquiring land at the West at the expense



of Germany. On the other hand, the post-war Russia aims also at highlighting the strategic importance of the invasion of Poland as Stalin's premeditated move to push away the frontline from the Soviet Union. The reason behind this move, in such logic, was to allow soldiers to regroup and to defend Moscow in 1941. Another technique used in that approach is the strategy of 'normalisation' – presenting everyone as a victim of both the war and the foreign policies at the time. Alexander Dugin states that 'the logic of Russian history' has tried to justify Soviet actions against Poland in 1939. This logic says that these actions were the result of the eternal fluctuation of power between West and Eurasia.²⁹⁶

Propaganda and labelling. The original message, created by the Soviet Politbiuro in 1939, labelled the invasion a 'liberation campaign'. As Canadian historian David R. Marples states,

*Soviet propaganda stressed that the Polish government had fallen, and therefore it was incumbent upon the USSR to take measures to protect the 'blood brother' Ukrainian and Belarussian population. Oddly nothing was said about the need to protect the large Jewish population, perhaps in deference to the Germans.*²⁹⁷

Belief in the 'liberation campaign' has still been circulating up to today, later enriched by another post-factum Soviet propaganda message saying the invasion saved thousands of Jewish lives.²⁹⁸ The new narrative, however, tries to imply that 'the anti-Semitism and alliance with the Nazis affected their [the Pol-

ish people's] judgment' as they did not allow the Soviet troops to march through the Polish territory to combat the Germans²⁹⁹ before the war. Contemporarily, this strategy relies heavily on name-calling and labelling Poland as 'the bourgeois country',³⁰⁰ 'hyena' and simultaneously accusing it of repressions (for instance removing the memorials of gratitude to the Red Army) and incompetence.

Blaming others. This strategy aims at shifting the responsibility for the war onto others. Using various arguments, one narrative strives to paint Poland as Hitler's ally³⁰¹ and the culprit who started the war,³⁰² which is actually a repetition of the identical Nazi message. Another narrative is that the refusal of the Soviets passage through Central Europe actually provoked the war,³⁰³ or that the Poles deserved another war after winning the Polish-Bolshevik war. Finally, Russia uses an emotional narrative that depicts the United Kingdom and France as having betrayed Poland, having made bad decisions or having been unprepared for the war. For example, in widely disseminated article "The Phoney War: Why did France and Great Britain not stand in Poland's defence?" the authors not only quote an expert who claims that the war was Poland's fault, as "it was feeding itself on illusions that it was Germany's ally", but also state that "*in Polish society exists a hard belief that the another partition of their state in 1939 could have been avoided. French-British armies could have conducted a powerful strike on the Western Germany, forcing Hitler's army to return to their barracks. Having seen Western powers' determination, the Soviet Union would also abandon its 'aggressive plans.'*"³⁰⁴



Strategies	Narratives	Target audience
Dissembling	1939 concerns only the Winter War	Poland, West, Russia
	The lack of mention of 17 September 1939 and the NKVD – Gestapo methodological conferences as well as the joint Nazi-Soviet parade in Brest	
Whataboutism	Poland did the same thing in Zaolzie (Ger. <i>Olsa – Gebiet</i>)	Poland, West, Russia
	The Western States did the same thing in Munich (the Munich Collusion (Мюнхенский сговор), but the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact)	Poland, West, Russia
	'There were also Poles who murdered Jews'	West
	It was Poland that had a strong army, but it lost due to poor command	Russia
Context change	After all, Stalin offered to bring his troops to Poland and stop Hitler	West, Russia
	Poland succeeded in annexing Zaolzie and German land (after the war) so it turned out well for Poland	Poland, West, Russia
	The USSR had to protect its interests / move the front line westward	West, Russia
Propaganda - Trivialising	Stalin regained the western lands that had been lost as a result of the Treaty of Riga	Russia
	The use of Soviet narratives about the liberation mission and defence of the Slavs (Ukrainians, Belarusians and Poles)	West, Russia
	Many nations had been concluding agreements with Hitler	Poland, West, Russia
	The Polish state ceased to exist	West, Russia
	The encroachment of the USSR upon Poland did not change the course of fighting between Poland and Germany	Russia
	The encroachment of the USSR upon Poland saved the Jews in Poland, which was blinded with anti-Semitism	West, Russia
Blaming others - Dehumanisation - Strategy of normalisation	Poland was actually Hitler's ally	Poland, West, Russia
	Poland might have let Hitler through its territory	Poland, West, Russia
	The encroachment was in revenge for crimes against the war prisoners of the Polish-Bolshevik war	West, Russia
	England and France were at fault; they were not prepared for the war and so, made bad decisions	Poland, West, Russia

Strategies, narratives and target audiences related to the Soviet invasion of Poland on 17 September 1939



Apart from labelling, one of the most common techniques is the **no evidence policy**. As Jolanta Darczewska points out, Russian historiographers are aware of the little scope of arguments they have against Poland in 'the memory wars' – hence they primarily use accusations or axioms that do not require solid proof, such as 'Polish Russophobia', 'Poland is the West's tool against Russia' or 'Polish ingratitude'. Poland is also often depicted as the 'Judas of the Slavdom',³⁰⁵ 'the heretic of Europe'³⁰⁶ or 'Europe's hyena'.³⁰⁷ It should be highlighted that this method of labelling the Poles has been used to justify aggression and interference throughout Poland's existence using every period of Polish history – even the distant past or mythology. Highly emotional language is also found in the Armen Gasparyan's book *The Commonwealth of Lies*,³⁰⁸ devoted to Polish-Russian history. While referring to Poland he usually uses mocking expressions such as "for eternally humiliated Polish nobility", "the main thing here is to throw firewood in the fire of their own Russophobic convictions" etc. Gasparyan is a journalist, but he presents his numerous books as scientific works and is treated by the Russian media and society as a legitimate expert.

It is clear that the policy of manipulating Polish history is state-driven and orchestrated. First of all, most of the propaganda messages are somehow supported by government officials or the president himself. In 2014, President Putin stated:

People are still arguing about the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact today and they accuse the Soviet Union of carving up Poland.

But what did Poland itself do when the Germans occupied Czechoslovakia? They grabbed a piece of Czechoslovakia! (Laughs). They did that before the end of May [1939]! (Laughs) and then they got their pay-back'.³⁰⁹

Moreover, in 2016, Vladimir Luzgin from Perm was given a 200 000 RUB fine for writing about the joint Nazi-Soviet invasion of Poland, which was interpreted by the Russian court as breaking the law on the prohibition of the glorification of Nazism.³¹⁰

The main source of distortion of historical facts is the Russian Ministry of Culture. Vladimir Medinskiy, the minister, has been building anti-Polish historical policy for years. His activities cover both dissembling the 17th of September in his book *The War. The USSR's myths. 1939-1945* and Changes to the Katyń memorial, such as the construction of the Museum of Russian Polish relations with an exhibition entitled Russian-Polish Relations in the 20th century (even though the significant part of the exhibition is presenting current Polish historical policy, such as removing Soviet gratitude monuments).³¹¹ In his statements on the beginning of WWII, V. Medinskiy repeats a well-known thesis about the need of the Ukrainian and Belarussian people to be saved by the Red Army. Considering his position, it's even more interesting that he said '*He who controls history can control the future. [...] History determines the actions of people today, and for this reason, there is an international information war.*'³¹²



Even though the scientific competences of Mr. Medinskiy have been challenged by Russian scholars,³¹³ he produced several books³¹⁴ and novels, aspiring to be considered an academic. The plot of his most popular novel, *The Wall*, takes place during the siege of Smolensk by Poland in 1609-1611. The image of the Poles – heartless, brutal conquerors – was also included in the TV adaption.

Medinskiy is active in the field of historical policy. He was a Member of the Commission under the President of Russia on the counteraction of the falsification of history. Since 2013, he has also been the head of the Russian Military-Historical Society (RMHS, which is one of the main purveyors of the Kremlin's historical policy. The RMHS works as a typical GONGO³¹⁵ and its members widely distribute revisionist theses aimed at the besmirching of Poland. Examples of such individuals and their activities include honourable member of the RMHS and member of the scientific council of the RHMS Aleksandr Zdanovich, who justifies the USSR's policy (i.e. the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and denies USSR-Nazi collaboration,³¹⁶ member of the scientific council of the RMHS Mikhail Myagkov, who whitewashes the responsibility of the USSR in causing the Second World War,³¹⁷ or the journalist mentioned above, a member of the Central Committee of the RMHS, Armen Gasparyan, who wrote a whole series of historical essays printed in the form of books, in which he portrays such countries as Poland and Ukraine as the enemies of Russia, while whitewashing Soviet dictators and their repressive institutions.

Both the RHMS and the publishing houses put a specific genre of historical pamphlets in the spotlight. These works usually acquire a conspiratorial and sensational tone of unfolding secrets hidden by the West and their denial of the truth; then juxtaposing the alleged evil intentions of a given enemy with the good and reasonable motives of the Kremlin. Even though the circulation of paper exemplars is low, around 2000-3000 copies, it allows the authors to be lifted to the public discourse as respected experts.

It should be highlighted that among the RHMS boards' members there are also film makers and artists. Since it is much easier to reach a wide international audience with the help of films rather than through academic conferences, Russia puts more emphasis on producing films about the WWII period. Such movies are strongly supported by the government, such as in the case of *Sobibor* (the premiere was in Warsaw in 2018). Even though the film's only connection to Poland was the location of the titular Sobibór camp, V. Medinskiy and Sergey Naryshkin, chief of the SVR, delivered speeches in which they accused the Poles and Ukrainians of being responsible for the deaths of camp inmates and criticised their current political decisions.³¹⁸

Such synergy of various public intellectuals, military, businessmen and the state is possible due to the specific feature of the Russian political system in which success is an offshoot of the skill at guessing the wishes of the higher authorities.³¹⁹ Recognition of one's activities attracts people whose business depends on good relations with the authori-

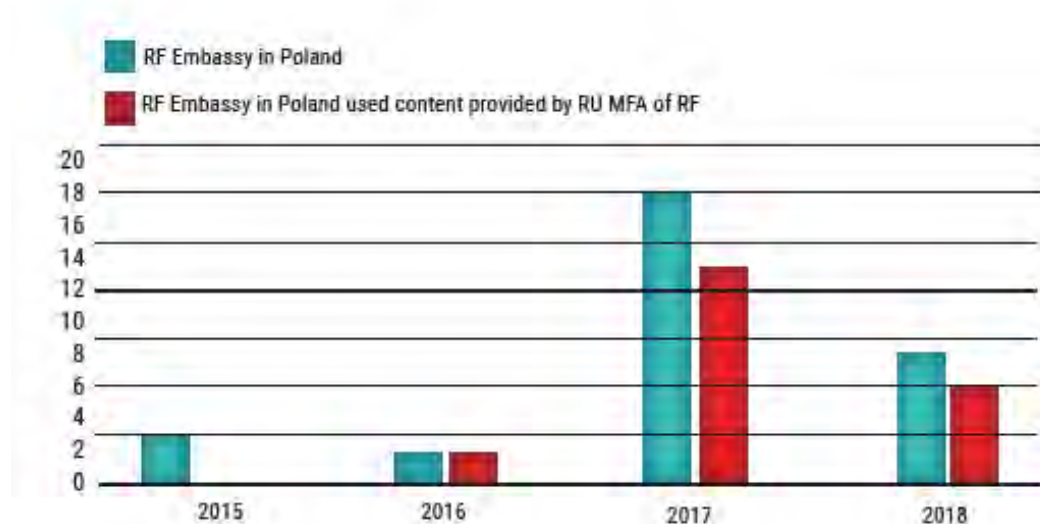


ties, artists who can then attend prestigious events, academicians, who gain the opportunity to receive additional funding and publications. The latter is extremely important, since Moscow attaches great significance to 'scientific conventions'.³²⁰

Russian diplomacy also participates in such campaigns. Historical issues – namely articles on the Kremlin's perception of WWII/GPW – cover approximately 1/3 of the published materials³²¹ and are the works of Vladimir Putin, patriarch Kirill, Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov, Vyacheslav Nikonov and Sergey Karaganov – therefore, they are ideological rather than scientific and objective in nature.³²² In Slovakia³²³ and the Czech Republic,³²⁴ history-related content does not make up a significant part of the official communication of Russian diplomatic institutions.

A diplomatic offensive was conducted in 2015. Russia's ambassador to Venezuela gave a controversial interview, in which he

claimed that the USSR did not invade Poland and, moreover, it was Poland that was Hitler's ally.³²⁵ Later, the ambassador of Russia to Poland, Sergey Andreev, gave an interview on Polish television and echoed the disinformation narrative about Poland being one of the initiators of the WWII.³²⁶ The diplomatic mission in Warsaw tends to omit the difficult topic of the 17 September; instead, it uses blaming others and whataboutism techniques, citing the Munich agreement³²⁷ (Figure below, from 2017, notably via social media) or repeats the Soviet narrative about 'uniting Western Belarus and Ukrainian lands'.³²⁸ The embassy uses the materials from either MFA or the RMHS for this purpose exclusively. That campaign was peculiarly intense in 2017 and 2019 (not including what is yet to come this year), promoted with English hashtags as well. While in the 2015 Russian MFA apologised for misinterpreting Andreev's interview, saying Poland should not have been accused, we can now observe that the rhetoric is becoming more confrontational and malign.



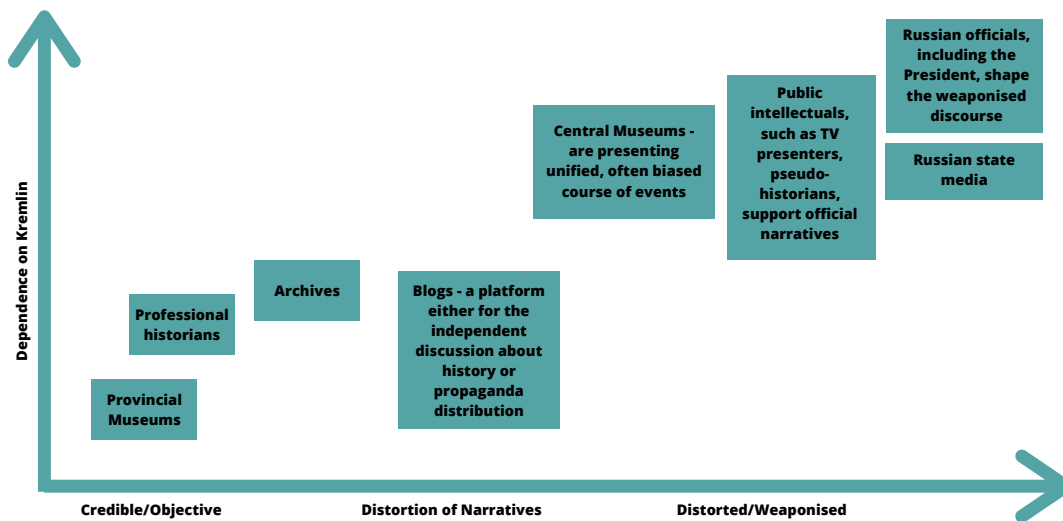
Number of publications on the Munich agreement on the official RF Embassy in Poland twitter account.²⁶



Another state apparatus actively creating and supporting false narratives and the Kremlin's interpretation of history is the Russian State Duma, which often initiates a vote on the various history-related declarations, supporting Kremlin narratives and blaming Poland or Ukraine for being hateful, revisionist and Russophobic. An example of such an activity is a comment made by the then head of the CIS commission, the chairman of the Russian Duma, Vyacheslav Volodin about the Polish-Ukrainian Declaration of Memory and Solidarity adopted in 2016. Mr. Volodin condemned the Declaration as, in his view, Russophobic attempt to rewrite the history, and warning that every recognition of this document by other countries would be perceived as a hostile action against Russia.³²⁹

The topic of the 17 September appears in the Russian state media according to their ongoing political agenda. Popular TV presenters and journalists – public intellectuals – have also been involved in the disinformation campaign. Prominent TV host Vladimir Solovyov, for example, denies that Poland was occupied by the USSR.³³⁰

Russian state media projects are the third source of these narratives, as they usually distribute the statements of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Defence. Both Sputnik and RT are used to disseminate Kremlin messages about the 17 of September, usually targeting English, French and – rarely – Polish speakers.



Sources and channels of propaganda on the 17th of September level of the narrative of history "weaponisation".



In general, manipulation of Polish history is well orchestrated. In expert interviews, Polish historians claimed that the farther from the highest authorities, the more objective the researcher. For instance, one of interlocutors (Polish researcher) told that during conducting historical research in Russian archives access to certain documents was not restricted by low-level employees, until a superior found out and intervened. Provincial museums are also less likely to present the distorted and propaganda-like version of history than central museums, probably due to less strict management. Politics of avoiding events which may “desecrate” the national victory³³¹ and the state’s narrative is present also in Russian history textbooks. In two of them, recommended by the Russian Historical Society, the invasion of Poland is either barely mentioned or followed by the narrative on “liberating Western Belarus and Ukraine”, no resistance from the Polish army³³² and Polish government.³³³

Target audiences and reactions

Contrary to other historical topics, until now the vast majority of materials on the 17 September is directed toward the Russian audience. The diversity and complexity of the narratives offers an average Russian citizen plenty of options to choose from, while avoiding the inconvenient period of Soviet-Nazi collaboration, which could undermine Russia’s fragile, constructed identity built on the great victory myth and the mentality of a sieged fortress.

We have encountered a relatively small number of materials in Polish. As far as Polish-Russian

relations are concerned, the penetration of the public infosphere is rather difficult for the Kremlin, as Poland has strong historical education at schools and an active policy of historical memory. Sputnik’s and RT’s content on the 17 of September is differentiated between three target audiences, i.e. Poland, the Central and East Europe (CEE) countries and the West. While the materials for Belarus and the Baltic States mostly get old, recycled propaganda narratives, while the content intended for the West is focused on changing the context, relativism and shifting the discussion away from inconvenient facts. The reactions of Poland’s neighbours have changed throughout the past few years. For instance, in 2009 the president of Belarus, Aleksandr Lukashenka, was a prominent supporter of the Russian interpretation of the 17 September,³³⁴ but since Belarusian society accepted the traditions of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, Belarusian reactions have evolved in the direction of positive official rhetoric focused on ‘uniting the Western Belarusian lands’; thus, the rhetoric on ‘the liberation campaign’ has significantly diminished.³³⁵ As the current regime struggle for maintaining its power, this rethoric may change if the need for external enemy rises.

It seems that Warsaw’s strongest tool is its own strong narrative about the outbreak of WWII. The invasion of Poland is unanimously treated and recognised as an act of aggression. On average, Polish society has a high level of resistance to Russian historical narratives.

Warsaw emphasises historical policy differently from the Kremlin’s official vision of WWII



events and the post-war period, which they label as 'Polish Russophobia' and 'Polish revisionism' and talk about the annexation of Zaolzie. The Kremlin's narratives are also directed to a Western audience. As mentioned above, a new narrative runs as follows 'Poland is driven by anti-Semitism'. History is usually more important to Central and Eastern Europe societies than for Western Europeans, which makes the latter much more vulnerable to sophisticated historical manipulations due to absence of this topic in public discussions and its lesser significance in the general education.

COUNTER-MEASURES

Within the Polish history-telling project, Poland acquired the most important international newspapers, including the actual covers from September 1939 and the articles about the war published in them.³³⁶

The main institution implementing Polish historical policy and promoting it abroad is the Institute of National Remembrance (IPN), responsible for conducting scientific research on the Polish history after the partitions (1795), with the main focus on the time frame between 1917 and 1990. Additionally, the IPN is organising conferences, as well as leading investigations of communist crimes and educational projects on the history of Poland between 1939 and 1989. The Institute manages some thematic portals, i.e. on the NKVD's Polish operation³³⁷ and the September campaign.³³⁸ In 2015, the IPN bought an ad-

vertisement in *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, calling on Russian citizens to provide information about 16 missing leaders of the Underground State abducted by the NKVD in 1945.³³⁹ Another countering activity of IPN is their social media activity, with the most noticeable examples being when they have released viral animations on YouTube (such as the extremely popular *The Unconquered*)³⁴⁰, along with documentary materials (for instance, *When they come*, which is about the September campaign).³⁴¹

Countermeasures to thwart the Kremlin's actions towards the Russian audience are most complicated, as we are facing increasing control over scientific research and the general decline of freedom of speech in Russia. Both the Polish MFA and the Centre for Polish-Russian Dialogue and Understanding (CPRDiP) have reached out to professional Russian historians, journalists, students and youth and organised study visits and exchanges. This quite effective tool may be limited in the future, as Moscow has adopted a law forcing all academicians to inform authorities about any meeting with a foreigner. Using public diplomacy, the MFA conducts active campaigns on social media and promotes Polish history in the public space abroad. CPRDiP manages a portal called *Novaya Polsha* (New Poland), which also contains materials on Polish history in Russian.³⁴²

The MFA is also attempting to confront the official claims by the Kremlin about Poland having destroyed Soviet graves. One of the steps taken was to publish an illustrated catalogue of Russian and Soviet cemeteries in Poland.³⁴³



Post Scriptum, February 2020

In December 2019 the Kremlin has started a strong hostile campaign against Poland using weaponized history. These narratives were first used by president Vladimir Putin, who accused Poland on several occasions of anti-Semitism (for instance, he called the Polish ambassador to Nazi Germany, Józef Lipski, “scum and an anti-Semitic pig”³⁴⁴), being Hitler’s loyal ally and contributing to the outbreak of WWII³⁴⁵. Political statements were followed by condemnation of Poland for not celebrating the anniversary of the “liberation” of Warsaw by the Red Army on 17 January.³⁴⁶

As the World Holocaust Forum (WHF) was taking place on 23 January 2020, organized by Moshe Kantor, a well-known Jewish activist and oligarch close to the Kremlin, Polish President Andrzej Duda was denied the possibility of delivering a speech during the event (in contrary to Mr. Putin) and therefore resigned from participation in it.

Below also is a chart of selected Russian actions and Polish countermeasures. As the Kremlin offensive is still on-going, this list is by no means complete and closed:

Actors echoing Putin’s narratives

- Vyacheslav Volodin, state Duma Speaker;
- Vladimir Zhirinovsky, leader of the Liberal Democratic Party group in the State Duma;
- Sergey Andreev, Russian Ambassador to Poland;
- Sergey Lavrov (Russian Minister of Foreign affairs) and Maria Zakharova (MFA’s spokeswoman);
- Margarita Simonyan, RT editor-in-chief;
- Public figures (i.e. Vladimir Solovyov, talk-show host; Armen Gasparyan, ‘public intellectual’);
- State media.



Actions taken by Russia	Counteractions and campaigns led by Poland
<p>Diplomatic offensive (narratives were used during official high-level meetings) and involvement of whole governmental apparatus to distribute the theses;</p> <p>Releasing selected archival materials concerning Soviet operations in 1944-45 in an attempt to prove Soviet soldiers were generally welcomed and cheered by the Polish population and saved it from the Nazis;</p> <p>Emotional media campaigns (articles in the press, talk-shows, etc.) in Russian and English on Polish alleged ungratefulness for “liberation”;</p> <p>The negative campaign in Polish Sputnik against president Duda for not taking part in the WHF, depicting his decision as a “PR failure”;</p> <p>Social media campaign #ВамНеСтыдно (Aren’t you ashamed) launched by Margarita Simonyan with an intention to remind Poles to be grateful for “liberation”;</p> <p>The instrumentalization of the World Holocaust Forum, including presentation of manipulated and false maps.</p>	<p>The wide distribution of the statement by the Prime Minister of Poland, Mateusz Morawiecki³⁴⁸;</p> <p>Polish Sejm (lower house of Parliament) adopted by acclamation a resolution on “provocative and untrue comments made by high Russian representatives trying to shift the responsibility for WWII outbreak onto Poland”;</p> <p>Review by the Institute of National Remembrance of the materials (they are mostly propaganda materials, selective and disclose no significant information)³⁴⁹;</p> <p>Polish MFA’s campaign #LiberationWithoutFreedom, recognizing the sacrifice of the Red Army soldiers but pointing out leaving Warsaw helpless during the uprising against Nazis in 1944 and the aftermaths of Soviet occupation of Poland;</p> <p>Long-term campaign of the New Media Institute and Polish National Foundation ‘The Truth Must Not DIE’, including publishing merits-based articles of Polish and foreign historians on the WWII and Russian historical revisionism;</p> <p>Internet community, predominantly Polish, hijacked hashtag #ВамНеСтыдно with rhetoric opposing the original intention. The hashtag was thus mostly used to expose Soviet and Russian crimes³⁵⁰;</p> <p>Multi-channel campaign on the 75th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz (i.a. official event, articles in the foreign press, Auschwitz Memorial Twitter account fact-checking activities).</p>



Disinformation as a double-edged sword

By using mostly distorted, brutal and emotional rhetoric, including swearing, the Russian narrative lost its credibility in the very beginning. Well-balanced, synergetic and based on facts messages from the Polish side proved to be far more effective and gained wider support in the international community. Not only was Poland supported by the vast majority of the Members of the European Parliament during the debate over Russia's manipulations of history³⁴⁷, but also the little known issue of Soviet cooperation with Hitler was brought into spotlight by foreign media – including BBC, Haaretz, The Washington Post, Foreign Policy, The Economist, etc. – while debunking President Putin's statement. The success of the Kremlin's actions was limited to Russia internally and to communities with either strong links to the Russian state or aligning interests.

We can expect further Russian attempts to weaponize historical revisionism and antisemitism against Poland and other Central and Eastern Europe countries in order to create a "common enemy" for Russia and Western European states or to invoke the impression that the truth lies "somewhere in the middle" rather than within the facts. Russian historical revisionism in general, in our opinion, will become one of the most important tools of shaping a particular mindset, for instance in the occupied areas like the Tskhinvali region (aka South Ossetia), Donbas, possibly also in the Middle East and the High North.

CONCLUSIONS

Activities in the field of historical policy in Russia are usually tied to current political policy. The most invasive campaign is directed at the Western audiences unfamiliar with the complexity of twentieth century history in the Central and East European region. This campaign is also connected with the indoctrination of the Russian audience, as well as subduing Russian scientists to the state agenda. In terms of Russia's internal policy, the "weaponization" of history is a tool for the creation of external enemy – in this case, it's both Poland and generally 'the West' – and enhancing the narrative of the 'sieged fortress'. History manipulations also serve to depict Poland and other Central and Eastern European countries as perpetrators, Hitler's allies and ungrateful anti-Semites. While it is doubtful such narratives would find fertile ground in the West, mostly because this audience is, in general, less familiar with nuances of the WWII history and not so interested in it, they aim at shaping bad image of the targeted country and invoking an impression of a brutal information war on both sides. Such usage of history distortions leads to the conclusion that if there is a need to get along with Poland, the aggressive rhetoric will be silenced.

The increasing use of weaponised popular culture (Sobibór), as well as depicting CEE countries as the anti-Semitic enemies of Russia, simultaneously presents the touching stories of Soviet soldiers and their great sacrifice,



while covering and dissembling Nazi-Soviet cooperation and the secret protocols of the secret Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact.

Soviet-Nazi cooperation is Kremlin's weak spot. This episode is completely omitted in both Russian public discourse, textbooks, official narratives etc., except for professional historians' scientific works.

Examples of anti-Polish narratives additionally show the **determination of the Russian government to rebuild the cult of Stalin**. The cult of Stalin is a significant part of the Great Victory narrative. It can be countered by popularising the truth about the crimes of the Soviet totalitarian regime.

Historical narratives are used to further radicalise and escalate ethnic animosities. This can be prevented through successful communication with the nations or ethnic minorities involved. Narrative arguments in the scope of the Kremlin's propaganda are built on emotions, but are presented as 'scientific'. Such a tactic needs to be exposed by pointing out the lack of logic.

There are a great number of high profile research institutions and professionals in Poland; the general historical education level is high and Polish people are still immune to Russian propaganda thanks to the memories of direct witnesses from their families. Still, there are some groups in Poland that are more vulnerable to Russian historical propaganda, so countermeasures aimed at such people to thwart the Kremlin's narrative should be intensified. Some of these people benefit directly from gaining support and rec-

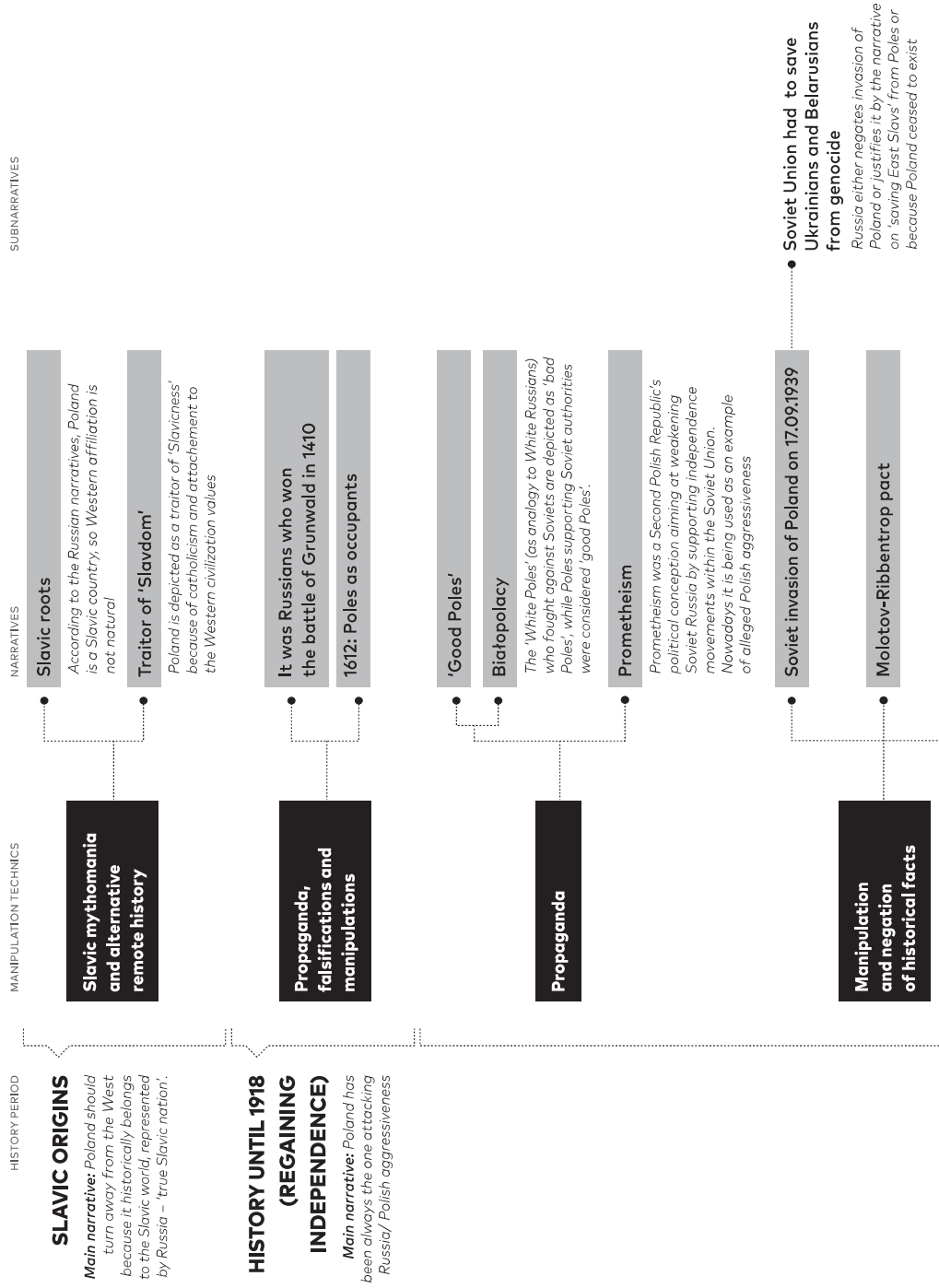
ognition from the Russian authorities; some, like Warsaw Pact veterans and former communist officials, feel sentimental towards the communist past; there are also some radicals, who are sensitive to anti-Ukrainian narratives, exploited by the Russian propaganda machine. Each of these groups, depending on their motivation, should be better educated or financially monitored.



Annex 1

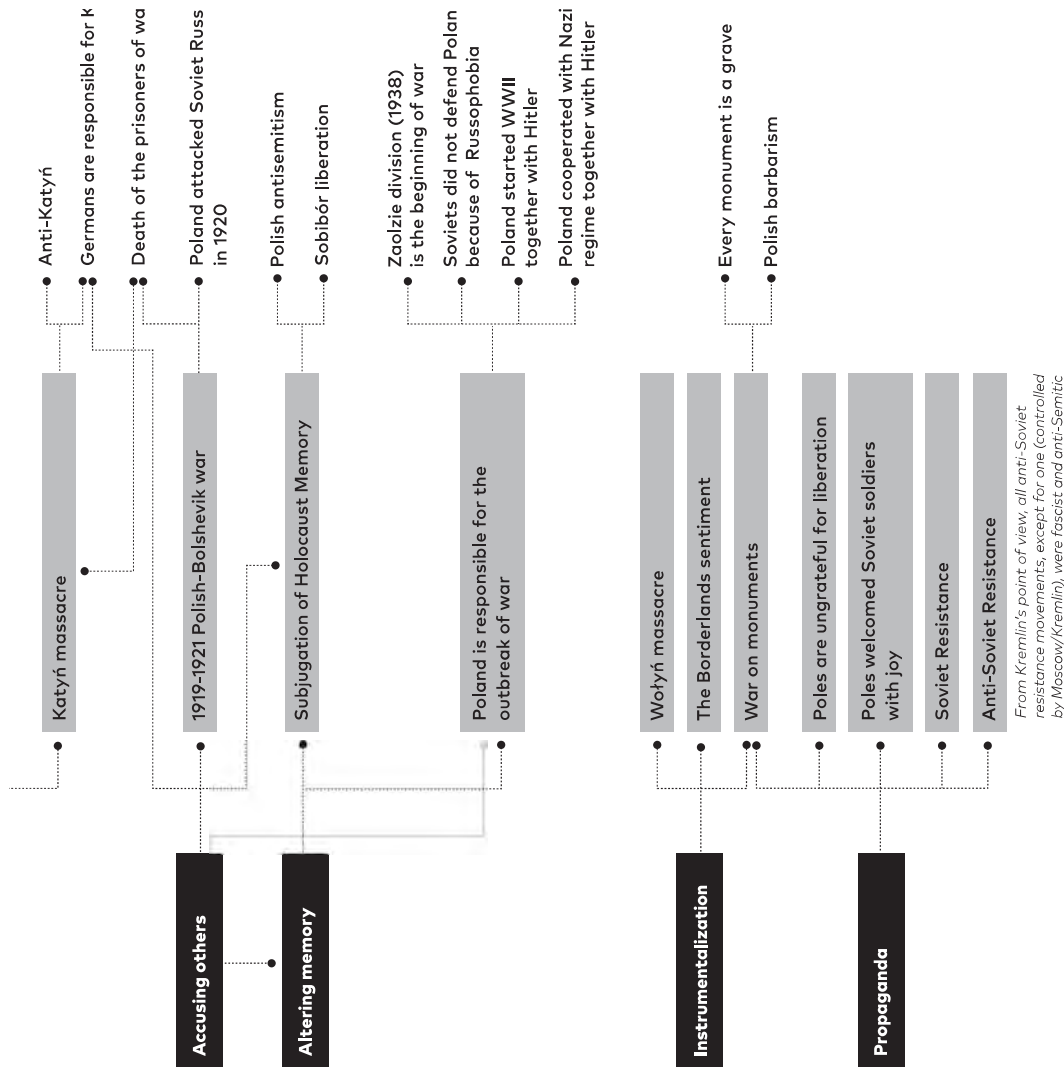
RUSSIAN FALSIFICATIONS AND MANIPULATIONS OF HISTORY TODAY: POLAND

Centre for Security Studies, War Studies University



SECOND POLISH REPUBLIC AND WORLD WAR II

Main narratives: Outbreak of WWII and Soviet intervention was the result of Polish and 'murdering' prisoners of war in 1919-1921.



POLAND AFTER 1944

Main narrative: Ungrateful Poles are destroying Soviet monuments/graves dedicated to the Red Army Soldiers that liberated Poland

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Author: Dr. Ivo Juurvee
with contributions from
case study authors.

As the previous chapters showed, Russia's abuse of history to back its current policies is not something present in only one country, but is taking place in numerous countries in Central and Eastern Europe and beyond. This is not a new phenomenon, although lately, there has been more emphasis put on its research. Since changing public perceptions takes time, we may not notice dangerous trends until they have already taken hold, thereby delaying the start of possible countermeasures. The authors have each made recommendations at the end of their respective chapters and these are summarised here.

Is there a problem at all, or could Russia's exploitation of historical narratives – especially if they are directed at domestic target audiences, as they frequently are – just be neglected? Unfortunately, there is a problem: in the current media sphere, there are no strict state boundaries, since such boundaries don't exist both on the Internet and on TV. Even the language barriers do not form a bulwark against hostile propaganda anymore, since content is frequently borrowed and translated. As long as the knowledge of history influences the overall understanding of political affairs, it will have indirect influence on public opinion and how people behave when casting their ballots. If such behaviour deviates from the norm, even to a small extent, due to faked information, manipulation of context or other historical distortions, this should be considered to be a problem. Cases in which such information or context is used to create hatred between peoples or ethnic groups is especially dangerous.

In democratic states, the national history of the country is usually best known inside the country itself (censorship in authoritarian regimes may cause deviations from this). Therefore, the public in these nations are rather resilient against the distortion of history of their own country. The knowledge of the history of other countries remains more limited. Therefore, the most fruitful target audiences for Russia's abuse of history, aside from the domestic target audience and Russian-speaking communities, are these third countries. The further away the third countries are, the less there is previous historical knowledge, e.g. Finns are probably more-or-less well acquainted with the history of the neighbouring Sweden and Estonia, but may have less knowledge about Poland and Romania. One definitely cannot count on the deep knowledge of East-European history in Western Europe or on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean.

The possible distortions in public opinion of history take time to form and, therefore, countering such distortions is also a time-consuming, even constant process. There is no silver-bullet, no instant fix. First, we should mention how not to approach the issue. A complete ban of propaganda is not an advisable solution and should only be used in extreme circumstances where there is clear use of hate-speech or agitation for violence or hooliganism (e.g. against monuments). Direct refutation is also not the best solution because it will unwillingly disseminate distorted or even faked information, which is something to avoid. Heated debates on talk shows may provide the upper hand to the best orator and not the one basing their argument on facts, which could be



counterproductive, resulting in separating, rather than uniting, the audience.

There are a number of measures listed below in no particular order, as it would be nearly impossible to list them in order of importance.

CONTINUATION OF HISTORICAL RESEARCH: Although historians have accumulated a large amount of knowledge on 20th century historical events most commonly used for the aims of Russia, work has to continue. This is for two reasons – academic knowledge is the basis for any measures that are to be taken and the influx of new and undiscovered information is necessary in order to keep interest in history alive for both professionals and societies.

HELPING HISTORIANS' VOICES TO BE BETTER HEARD: Among the general public, historians or people who have studied history in post-secondary education are the best-informed on history. Of course, there is no need to teach them history and especially not 'official' state history. In some cases, historians are opinion leaders; however, in many cases, they need some assistance to make their voices heard. Although these historians have virtually no possibility of being heard in Russia's public discourse, their opinions should be available abroad.

SPREAD OF KNOWLEDGE AMONG THE GENERAL PUBLIC AND IN THIRD COUNTRIES: Academic knowledge on history should extend beyond seminar rooms and academic journals. This is something historians are probably not capable of accomplishing on their own. Historical literacy is important, but is neither the only nor the

most important output. In order to reach beyond the historically literate, there is a need for education through social media, TV-series' and full-scale movies. If the market itself does not have enough demand for such productions, public subsidies are needed. Last but not least, such content should be made available in Russian for Russian speakers both inside and outside the Russian Federation.

EXPOSURE OF RUSSIA'S METHODS OF (AB)USING HISTORY: The deconstruction of Russian narratives and more detailed examination of their methodology in the distortion of history is not meant for the wider public. However, this would serve as an important tool for historians occupied within their specific field to grasp a wider picture. It would also be important for other opinion leaders, such as journalists, writers and movie directors and, perhaps most important, decision makers.

RAISING OR AT LEAST MAINTAINING THE QUALITY OF HISTORY EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS: The formation of the understanding of history is a long-lasting process. The majority of people don't study history any further than the mandatory classes in high school, therefore, the foundation for their knowledge begins there. This knowledge of one's own country's and regional history creates resilience to distortions of that history and enables peer-to-peer diplomacy.



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- ⁵¹ The interview with Dr. Igor Kopytin was conducted on 22 August 2019
- ⁵² Annual Review 2014 of Estonian Internal Security Service, Estonian Internal Security Service 2014. p. 10.
- ⁵³ Beğere K., Engizers E., Ivanauskas V., Kopõtin I. Die sanfte Geschichtspolitik Russlands. Anmerkungen zu einer internationalen Sommerschule in Zvenigorod 2013, Forschungen zur baltischen Geschichte, 2014, p.285-291.
- ⁵⁴ Vázquez Liñán, M. History as a propaganda tool in Putin’s Russia *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 43(2). (2010). p. 167-178; Morozov V. Protecting “Our” History: Politics, Memory, and the Russian State. *PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo*, 64 (2009). p.1-5.; Sinisalu A. Propaganda, Information War and the Estonian-Russian Treaty Relations: Some Aspects of International Law.(2008), p.154-162; Levchenko G. [How Russia prosecutes its own people for ‘falsifying history’](#). *Meduza* (2018).
- ⁵⁵ See Russian scientific sources and Russian interpretation of Molotov-Ribbentrop-Pact – Смирнов, В. П. 2009. Мюнхенская конференция и советскогерманский пакт о ненападении в дискуссиях российских историков. *Вестник МГИМО – Университета. Специальный выпуск к 70-летию начала Второй Мировой войны, 185-203*; Ионов Б. В.; Харитоновна. Н. И. 2013. Проблема фальсификации истории на постсоветском пространстве. *Вестн. Моск. ун-та. Сер. 21. Управление (государство и общество)*. № 4, 110-127; Симендей. В. В. 2015 (ed.). *Прибалтийские исследования в России. 2015. Сборник статей*. Москва, Издательский центр фонда «Историческая память».

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- ⁵⁶ Interfax. Путин согласился с Мединским по пакту Молотова Риббентропа. (10 May 2015). Дубровская Л. Путин напугал Запад своими заявлениями о пакте Молотова-Риббентропа. Московский Комсомолец. (7 November 2014); Putin V. 2020. *The Real Lessons of the 75th Anniversary of World War II*. National Interest. (18 June 2020).
- ⁵⁷ Annual Review 2014 of Estonian Internal Security Service, Estonian Internal Security Service 2014, www.kapo.ee, p.10.
- ⁵⁸ Lindpere H. 2009. *Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact: Challenging Soviet History*. Tallinn: Estonian Foreign Policy Institute; Kõresaar E., Müür K. & Kreegipuu T. 2013. *Journalistic Commemoration of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact in Estonia 1989-2009*. In: Harro-Loit H. & K. Kello (eds.). *The Curving Mirror of Time*. Tartu: Tartu University Press, pp.93-114.
- ⁵⁹ Lehti M., Jutila M. & Jokisipilä M. 2008. Never-Ending Second World War: Public Performances of National Dignity and the Drama of the Bronze Soldier, *Journal of Baltic Studies*, 39(4), 393-418.
- ⁶⁰ Especially Stalinist era 1940-1941 and 1944-1953.
- ⁶¹ See about post-war period Ventsel. A. 2010. The construction of the Stalinist post-war (1944–1953) 'Soviet people': A concept in the political rhetoric of Soviet Estonia, *Applied Semiotics* 25, 73–83.
- ⁶² Since Russian invasion in Crimea in early 2014.
- ⁶³ In total, 26 articles were analysed. The articles were published from 2008 until 2019, but I primarily focused on articles ranging from early 2014 until summer 2019 in Russian and Russian-speaking Estonian media outlets and news portals in the Russian language.
- ⁶⁴ See www.iarex.ru
- ⁶⁵ *Sputnik-news.ee*, *RuBaltic.ru* and *Baltnews.ee* are Russian channels aimed at the Russophone community in Estonia and more generally toward the Baltic region. Russian news portals *Baltnews.ee* and *RuBaltic.ru* are local 'Baltic' Kremlin-controlled media channels whose target audience is the Russophone people of the Baltic region.
- ⁶⁶ *Komsomolskaya Pravda* is a widely circulated Russian daily newspaper, which targets not only people living in the Russian Federation, but also all Russian-speaking people outside Russia: Baltic countries, Central Asian states, Caucasus, Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, etc.
- ⁶⁷ *Rus.Postimees.ee* is the Russian version of the major Estonian daily newspaper *Postimees.ee*. *Seti.ee* is the Russian-speaking internet portal of the Estonian City of Narva.
- ⁶⁸ Putin V. 2020. *The Real Lessons of the 75th Anniversary of World War II*. National Interest (18 June 2020). Retrieved 2 December 2019.
- ⁶⁹ Kracauer S. (1952–1953), 'The challenge of qualitative content analysis,' *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, Special Issue on International Communications Research, vol. 16, no. 4, 631–642.; Kuckartz, U., 2014. *Qualitative Text Analysis: A Guide to Methods. Practice & Using Software*. London: Sage Publications.
- ⁷⁰ In total, 13 scientific works were analysed.
- ⁷¹ The interview with Dr. Igor Kopytin was conducted on 22 August 2019. Dr. Igor Kopytin is Estonian military historian and opinion leader.
- ⁷² Interview with Ilmar Raag was conducted on 17 June 2019. Mr. Ilmar Raag is Estonian media expert and opinion leader
- ⁷³ Interview with Jaak Valge was conducted on 26 August 2019. Dr. Jaak Valge is Estonian historian, Associate Professor of University of Tartu.
- ⁷⁴ Mälksoo, L. 2003. *Illegal Annexation and State Continuity: The Case of the Incorporation of the Baltic States by the USSR. Study of the Tension between Normativity and Power in International Law*. London/Boston, Martinus Nijhoff Publishers. The Erik Castren Institute. *Monographs of International Law and Human Rights*. Vol. 5.
- ⁷⁵ Lindpere, H. 2009. *Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact: Challenging Soviet History*. Tallinn: Estonian Foreign Policy Institute. Kõresaar, E., Müür, K. & Kreegipuu, T. 2013. *Journalistic Commemoration of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact in Estonia 1989-2009*. Harro-Loit, H. & K. Kello (eds.). *The Curving Mirror of Time*. Tartu: Tartu University Press, 93-114; European Parliament 2008. Declaration of the European Parliament on the proclamation of 23 August as European Day of Remembrance for Victims of Stalinism and Nazism, 23 September 2008, P6_TA(2008)0439.
- ⁷⁶ For example mass deportation of Estonians in Sibiria which was organized by Soviet authorities in March 1949 – more than 20 000 Estonians were forcefully taken from their home and deported to Sibeia – see O. Luik, H. Tammela (eds.) 2009. *Uuemaid aspekte märtsiküüditamise uurimisest*. Eesti Ajaloomuuseumi teaduskonverentsi materjale. Eesti Ajaloomuuseum, *Varia historica IV*, Tallinn 2; Rahi-Tamm. A. 2007. *Deportations in Estonia, 1941–1951 in Soviet deportations in Estonia: impact and legacy : articles and life histories*, eds. K. Kukk & T. Raun, Tartu, 9–52; Kahar, A. 2007. *Eesti NSV Riikliku Julgeoleku Ministeeriumi tegevus 1949. a märtsiküüditamise ettevalmistamisel Saaremaa osakonna näitel: bakalaureusetöö* (The Role of the Ministry of State Security of the ESSR in the Preparation of March Deportations of 1949: the Case of the Saaremaa Department: Bachelor's Thesis), Tartu; Strods; H. Kott, M. 2002. *The File on Operation*

"Priboi: A Re-assessment of the mass deportations of 1949", *Quarterly Journal of Baltic Studies* 33/1, 1–36. Historians A. Rahi-Tamm and A. Kahar writes: „In total, 87,000 people were to be deported from Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania: 25,500 from Lithuania, 39,000 from Latvia and 22,500 from Estonia. They were sentenced to special exile in the Yakutian ASSR, the Krasnoyarsk and Habarovsk krays, and the oblasts of Omsk, Tomsk, Novosibirsk and Irkutsk. In order to implement the decision of the Council of Ministers of the USSR, the MGB had to guarantee the custody and transport of the deportees to railway stations. It was up to the MVD to escort and transport them further. They were also responsible for guarding the deportees en route, for administrative surveillance at their destinations„ (Rahi-Tamm, A.; Kahar, A. 2009. *Deportation Operation Priboi in 1949*. – In Hiio, T.; Maripuu, M.; Paavle, I. (eds.). *Estonia Since 1944: Report of the Estonian International Commission for the Investigation of Crimes Against Humanity*. Tallinn: Estonian International Commission for the Investigation of Crimes Against Humanity, 362).

⁷⁷ Tarvel E. 2018. *Eesti rahva lugu*, Varrak, Tallinn, 2018, 248-295; Arjakas K. (ed.) 2009. *Faatum. Eesti tee hävingule 1939-1940*. Riigikontrolör Karl Soonpää päevik Eesti Vabariigi saatusest 1939-1940. Molotov-Ribbentropi pakti tagamad. Dokument ja materjale. SE&JS, Tallinn.

⁷⁸ See e.g. 'О противодействии попыткам фальсификации истории' and 'О противодействии попыткам фальсификации истории народов в ущерб интересам России 2012'. Retrieved 2 December 2019.

⁷⁹ See e.g. Крысин М. Ю. Прибалтийский фашизм. История и современность, М.: Вече, 2007. By analysing Russian sources, we should take in consideration the current situation of Russian and pro-Russian sources which are represented in Estonia informational space and the most probably the target audience of these Russian sources are Russophone people of Estonia (Annual Review of Estonian Internal Security Service 2019/2020, 13, 14). Estonian opinion leader and historian I. Kopytin pointed out that the homogenous Russian diaspora in Estonia is a myth, because there are many opinions among Russophone community (Kopyrin 2019; see also Makarychev, A.; Sazonov, V. 2019. Populisms, popular geopolitics and the politics of belonging in Estonia. *European Politics and Society*, 20 (4), 450–469). According to Kopytin there are Russophone people in Estonia who have problems with integration into Estonian society and who are nostalgic about Soviet times. Moscow uses this to its advantage, especially in propaganda (Kopytin, 2019); Дюков, А. 2009. *Милость к падшим: Советские репрессии против нацистских пособников в Прибалтике*. Москва, 2009, 79-82.

⁸⁰ The interview with Dr. Jaak Valge was conducted on 26 August 2019.

⁸¹ The interview with Dr. Jaak Valge was conducted on 26 August 2019.

⁸² Kurilla I. 2014. The Implications of Russia's Law against the "Rehabilitation of Nazism". PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo, 331, p. 1-5.

⁸³ Загоскин Д.В.; Черняк Э.И.; Ширко К.Н. 2013. Музей – фальсификатор истории: субъект или инструмент? *Вестник Томского государственного университета* № 372, pp. 106–109.

⁸⁴ Гареев М.А. 2014. Великая Победа и современные интересы международной безопасности, *Военно-исторический журнал* 9, pp.30-34.

⁸⁵ See iwars.su/redkol

⁸⁶ Великовский Д. 2008. *7 вопросов Махмуту Гарееву, генералу армии*. - *Русский репортёр*, № 17 (47), 8 мая 2008.

⁸⁷ Гареев М.А. 2014. Великая Победа и современные интересы международной безопасности, *Военно-исторический журнал* 9, p.38.

⁸⁸ Note: this article was published in autumn 2014, in the same year when Russia occupied Crimea and invaded Eastern Ukraine.

⁸⁹ Гареев М.А. 2014. Великая Победа и современные интересы международной безопасности, *Военно-исторический журнал* 9, p.38.

⁹⁰ No doubt, the USSR played a big role in that victory, but he is ignoring other important issues and key factors of the Second World War: First: the USSR, along with its ally, Nazi Germany, invaded Poland in 1939. Second: Soviet military forces invaded Finland in 1939. Third: The Soviets occupied the Baltic countries in 1940 according to secret protocols of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact (through a deal with Nazi Germany). Fourth: the weight of the war from 1 September 1939 until 22 June 1941 was on the shoulders of Western and Eastern Europe, mainly Poland, England, and France, but also Belgium, etc. Fifth: Western allies began military actions against Fascism in Europe in 1939; they opened several fronts (e.g. in Italy in 1943, then later in June 1944 in France etc., and were participating in annihilation of Nazism in Germany in 1945, etc.).

⁹¹ Гареев М.А. 2014. Великая Победа и современные интересы международной безопасности, *Военно-исторический журнал* 9, p.31.

⁹² Копѳтин I., Sazonov V. 2016. Russian information war against Ukrainian Armed Forces in 2014–2015. *Sõjateadlane* 2, pp. 73-75.

⁹³ Bronze Night or April Unrest. This riots of pro-Russian minded groups of Russians speaking in Tallinn surrounding the 2007 relocation of the Bronze Soldier „Alyosha“ (located in the centre of Tallinn), which is the Soviet memorial of Second World War. In Estonia among Estonians it was symbol of Soviet occupation (Annual Review of the Estonian Internal Security Service 2007, 9-20). A brief description of Russia's involvement in the Bronze Night' events can be found in the *Annual Review of Estonian Internal Security Service of 2007*: "...the special services and power structures of Russia were behind the instigation of an over-emotional reflection of the Russian media in connection with the disturbance over the 'Bronze Soldier' (one of the reasons why the events escalated into mass riots) and opposed several high-ranking Russian public officials, who agreed under various considerations with the civilised relocation of the monument. As for the April riots, we can say that despite preceding visits of several Russian intelligence officers into Estonia, the role of Russian special services (both, the FSB and the SVR) during April 26-27, was to observe the course of events. The Security Police did not ascertain directing the violent events from the side of Russian special services. Secret meetings between Russian diplomats and local extremists (including the meeting in Tallinn Botanical Garden that was covered by the press) could not have initiated the hysterical outbreak. However, the SVR's good position in the circle of Russian journalists, whose participation in instigating hostility was outstanding, should be taken into account" (Annual Review of the Estonian Internal Security Service 2007, 9).

⁹⁴ These are only a few examples how Russia tried to destabilise the situation using Second World War narratives, among others. It was then that many pro-Russian activists took part in riots and disturbances surrounding the relocation of the Soviet Second World War Memorial. One can only guess what role the Russian security services played in that provocation. In any case, all the Russian media were, as were the Russian special services, immediately involved in the information campaigns against the Estonian state - Liik K. 2007. *The 'Bronze Year' of Estonia-Russia relations*, Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs Yearbook 2007, pp.71-76; pp.71-76; pp.29. Sinisalu A. 2008. *Propaganda, Information War and the Estonian-Russian Treaty Relations: Some Aspects of International Law*, pp.154-162. Retrieved 12 June 2019.

⁹⁵ Симонян Р.Х. 2016. Обретение второй независимости. Постсоветские и восточноевропейские исследования, МГИМО МИД России, «Аспект Пресс», pp.36.

⁹⁶ Teperik, D. 2020. *Kreml on alustanud võitlust ajaloomälu asendamiseks*. Eesti Päevaleht (10 February 2020).

⁹⁷ The Moscow Times. *Putin Publishes Essay on 'Real Lessons' of WWII*, (18 June 2020).

⁹⁸ Putin V. National Interest. *The Real Lessons of the 75th Anniversary of World War II*. (18 June 2020). Retrieved 2 December 2020.

⁹⁹ Ibid

¹⁰⁰ Ibid

¹⁰¹ Ibid

¹⁰² E.g., Riismanhel V.J. 2004. *Balti riikide annekteerimine ja rahvusvaheline õigus*, Estonian World Review, 23.12.2004; Mälksoo, L. 2003. *Illegal Annexation and State Continuity: The Case of the Incorporation of the Baltic States by the USSR. Study of the Tension between Normativity and Power in International Law*. London/Boston, Martinus Nijhoff Publishers. (The Erik Castren Institute. Monographs of International Law and Human Rights. Volume 5)

¹⁰³ Rus.err.ee. *Департамент информации: Российская ассоциация прибалтийских исследований – агент влияния Кремля*. (8 February 2017). Retrieved 2 December 2020.

¹⁰⁴ RuBaltic.ru. *О присоединении Прибалтики к СССР предложили снять мультфильм*. (23 June 2020). Retrieved 2 December 2020.

¹⁰⁵ RuBaltic.ru. *Гаспарян напомнил, кто в странах Балтии занимался «коммунистическим геноцидом»*. (22 June 2020). Retrieved 2 December 2020.

¹⁰⁶ See e.g., Литвинов М.Ю. 2015. *Фальсификация довоенной истории Прибалтики в исторической науке, Исторические науки и археология. Historical science and archaeology 93/94*, pp.58-60.

¹⁰⁷ Побдерезкин А. 2009. *Противодействие попыткам фальсификации истории в ущерб интересам России* Научно-практическая конференция МГИМО (У) МИД России Стенограммы выступлений.

¹⁰⁸ Побдерезкин А. 2009. *Противодействие попыткам фальсификации истории в ущерб интересам России* Научно-практическая конференция МГИМО (У) МИД России Стенограммы выступлений, p.75.

¹⁰⁹ Литвинов М.Ю. 2015. *Фальсификация довоенной истории Прибалтики в исторической науке, Исторические науки и археология. Historical science and archaeology 93/94*, p.59.

¹¹⁰ This is not true statement. The Soviet Union occupied the Baltic States in 1940 by using political pressure and supporting military forces. In 1944, the Soviet army invaded and re-occupied the Baltic States by military force again (Second World War).

¹¹¹ Ибрагимов Г.Ш. 2016. Проблема фальсификации событий Великой Отечественной Войны / Г. Ш. Ибрагимов. – Текст: непосредственный. Исторические исследования: материалы IV Междунар. науч. конф. (г. Казань, май 2016 г). Казань: Бук, 2016, р.61.

¹¹² Batnews. Международный форум «Вместе с Россией» пройдёт в Москве (27 February 2018).

¹¹³ Ibid

¹¹⁴ Gareev M.A. 1998. *If War Comes Tomorrow: The Contours of Future Armed Conflict* (Cass Series on Soviet Military Theory and Practice), Routledge, 1998. p.31.

¹¹⁵ There was no liberation of Baltic States by the Red Army. In fact, the Soviet Union replaced Nazi occupation with new Soviet Occupation in 1944. Also, the term 'Pribaltika', which is often used by Russian historians, is a propagandistic term invented and used as early as in the late 19th century in Russia and which was very popular and common in Soviet times (Propastop 2017).

¹¹⁶ Gareev, M. A. 1998. *If War Comes Tomorrow: The Contours of Future Armed Conflict* (Cass Series on Soviet Military Theory and Practice), Routledge, 1998, pp.30-34.

^{116b} Регада, С. 2015. По «оккупационному мифу» Прибалтики ударили архивными данными. Rubaltic.ru. 17.12.2015, (Accessed 11 December 2020).

¹¹⁷ Batnews. Международный форум «Вместе с Россией» пройдёт в Москве. (27 February 2018)

¹¹⁸ Носович А. RuBaltic.ru. Выстрел в Прибалтику: Белый дом назвал национализм идеологией неудачников. (18 August 2017)

¹¹⁹ Бабин И. Морально-психологические аспекты коллаборационизма, In: Исторические исследования: материалы IV Междунар. науч. конф. (г. Казань, май 2016 г.) Казань: Изд-во «Бук», 2016, pp.50-51.

¹²⁰ See e.g. Baltnews. „Эксперт: нацисты в НАТО – это враги, и их вновь придётся разбить” (2017); Симиндей, В.В. 2015. Огнем, штыком и лестью. Мировые войны и их националистическая интерпретация в Прибалтике. Москва: Фонд "Историческая память". Алгоритм

¹²¹ Баранов А., Афолина Е. Прибалтийская русофобия и её истоки. Комсомольская Правда. Северная Европа (8 April 2016)

¹²² There is no doubt that the Holocaust was a large-scale and terrible mass crime that took place on the whole territory controlled by the Third Reich. It was organised by Nazis everywhere, including on the territories of occupied Baltic States.

¹²³ Татарчук А. Baltnews.ee. Эстонцы на службе фюрера и Рейха: что говорят архивы. (18 February 2019).

¹²⁴ The Forest Brothers ('metsavennad' in Estonian), were active in 1940-1941 and in 1955-1956. They were partisans and fighters who used guerrilla warfare against Soviet occupation during and after The Second World War. The Soviet Army occupied Estonia in 1940-1941 and then after German occupation, Soviet Union again occupied in 1944 Estonia. Soviet propaganda machine labelled Forest Brothers as fascist and bandits, criminals, etc.

¹²⁵ Тихомиров В. Ruposers.ru. Труссы, убийцы, мародеры: чем занимались 'лесные братья' в Прибалтике. (2017)

¹²⁶ Evans, F. B. (ed.) (2007 [1955]). *Worldwide Communist Propaganda Activities*. New York: Macmillan.

¹²⁷ Baltnews.ee. „Эксперт: нацисты в НАТО – это враги, и их вновь придётся разбить”.

¹²⁸ Лавров – Postimees: договор о границе не ратифицирован из-за русофобской риторики Таллинна. Postimees, 15.1.2018; Rooda, V. 2017. 'Zapad 2017' – kingitus Baltimaade russofoobidele. Sputnik-news, 22.7.2017; Эксперт: доктрина «советской оккупации» стран Балтии служит оправданием дискриминации русских. – Baltnews.ee, 03.11.2017; Справочник «настоящего эстонца» учит общению с русскими «тиблами». – Baltnews.ee, 27.11.2017; Кузнецов, Д. 2017. Лукас – внук репрессированных хуторян, а потому русофобия у него в крови. – Stolitsa.ee; Велижанин, В. 2017. Предвыборный блог. Буйно расцвела ксенофобия. – Err.ru, 29.09.2017.

¹²⁹ Darczewska J.; Żochowski P. 2015. *Russophobia in the Kremlin's strategy. A weapon of mass destruction*. Point of View 56. Warsaw: Centre of East European Studies. December 22, 2016; Ventsel, A; Sazonov, V. 2018. *Russofobia mobiliseeriv jõud*. Postimees, 26.6.2018.

¹³⁰ Ventsel A.; Hansson S.; Madisson M.L.; Sazonov V. 2019. Discourse of fear in strategic narratives: The case of Russia's Zapad war games. *Media, War & Conflict*, p.11.

¹³¹ Баранов А.; Афолина Е. Прибалтийская русофобия и её истоки. Комсомольская Правда. Северная Европа. (8 April 2016). Retrieved 4 September 2019.

¹³² Ventsel A., Hansson S.; Madisson M.L.; Sazonov V. 2019. Discourse of fear in strategic narratives: The case of Russia's Zapad war games. *Media, War & Conflict*, p.12.

¹³³ Середенко С. RuBaltic.ru. Русофобия прибалтийская и украинская. (17 July 2017).

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- ¹³⁴ Кленский Д. REX Information Agency. Эстония: замест патриотизма с русофобией дает национализм. (2016)
- ¹³⁵ Postimees. Лавров – Postimees: договор о границе не ратифицирован из-за русофобской риторики Таллинна. (15 January 2018). Retrieved 8 July 2019; Середенко С. RuBaltic.ru. Русофобия прибалтийская и украинская. (17 July 2017). Retrieved 3 October 2019.
- ¹³⁶ See polkrf.ru; Baltnews. 'Бессмертный полк' в Эстонии: что подготовили организаторы акции? (2019)
- ¹³⁷ Копытин И. Vecherka. Организуемая Линтером акция 'Бессмертный полк' – это провокация. (4 May 2016). Retrieved 22 July 2019.
- ¹³⁸ Караев Н. Rus.postimees. «Бессмертный полк»: непрерывность истории. Rus.Postimees (9 May 2017) Retrieved 22 July 2019.
- ¹³⁹ Ibid
- ¹⁴⁰ Ibid
- ¹⁴¹ See, for instance, Bair Irincheev, *War of the White Death – Finland against the Soviet Union, 1939-40*. Mechanicsburg: Stackpole Books, 2001, 1-3.
- ¹⁴² Ibid. Philip Jowett and Brent Snodgrass, *Finland at War 1939-45*. Oxford: Osprey Publishing Ltd, 2006, 10. Pasi Tuunainen, *Finnish Military Effectiveness in the Winter War 1939-1940*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, passim.
- ¹⁴³ See, for instance, Arja Paananen's article 'IS selvitti: Näin Venäjä opettaa talvisodasta – yhdessä kirjassa varsin erikoisia tulkintoja' (This is what Russia teaches about the Winter War – quite extraordinary interpretations in one of the textbooks), *Ilta-Sanomat*, 30 November 2018. (Retrieved 24 July 2019).
- ¹⁴⁴ Leonid Maslovskii, 'Pozor Diunkerka: kak Evropa s gotovnost'iu preklonilas' pered Gitlerom' (The shame of Dunkirk: how Europe eagerly bowed to Hitler), *Zvezda*, 31 July 2017. (Retrieved 24 July 2019)
- ¹⁴⁵ Ibid.
- ¹⁴⁶ Ibid.
- ¹⁴⁷ The site seems to be run by several individuals, who proclaim their goals to be, for instance, to 'advance a reasonable civil society' in Russia, and to 'preserve and strengthen the independence and sovereignty, as well as the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation, as well as the spiritual and material development of the country's population.' The authors emphasise that 'the main priority for us is to counter the processes of colour revolutions in Russia initiated by external intervention, as well as the processes of new restructuring ('perestroika-2'), related to the struggle between the Kremlin clans.' (<http://politwar.ru/manifest>, Retrieved 24 July 2019)
- ¹⁴⁸ B. Rozhin, 'Mainila, kak eto bylo na samom dele' (Mainila, what really happened), *Politika & Voina*, December 2017, (Retrieved 24 July 2019)
- ¹⁴⁹ Ibid.
- ¹⁵⁰ Ibid.
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invaded and seized another part of Cieszyn Silesia. In return, Warsaw decided to conduct elections to the Sejm in the disputed areas, prompting Czechs to gain it by force. Czechoslovakia's offensive was halted by the Entente. The new demarcation line in favor of Czechoslovakia was established on 3 February 1919, on the eve of Polish-Bolshevik war. The final demarcation took place when Poland was still fighting the Bolshevik invasion, in July 1920, ceding the major part of the Cieszyn Silesia to Czechoslovakia with its substantial Polish minority. In 1938 Poland took the opportunity of re seizure of predominantly Polish-inhabited lands in Zaolzie, however, it was at no point in cooperation with Hitler. Currently, Zaolzie is not an issue in Polish-Czech relations due to mutual dialogue and public recognition of the past mistakes, for instance, apologies from then Polish president Lech Kaczyński, as well as the commemoration of soldiers and POWs fell during the 1919-1920 events.

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