IVLP

Propaganda Tools
in Post-Soviet Bloc

Czech International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP) Alumni Club in cooperation with ENAM present this e-book from conference on

Propaganda and Its Tools in Ex-Soviet Bloc:

How to Fight It

MAY

22-24

2019

IN PRAGUE

CZECH
REPUBLIC

Welcome drink
at the U.S. Ambassador's
residence

Introduction

The Propaganda in *Ex-communist Countries Conference*, linking the views of journalists and media experts with a hint of legal insight, was a product of the vision of the Czech IVLP President Tereza Engelová and her interest in the considerations that led to the ban of a Russian TV channel in Lithuania.

It was at the 2018 Sardinia meeting of the European Network of American Alumni Associations (ENAM) that the seed for the idea of such a conference was planted. The idea was embraced by the representatives of Czech, Lithuanian, Georgian and Hungarian IVLPs. This included the invitation for experts to present the situation in the Balkans, namely in Serbia and North Macedonia. In this way, the less politically stable region of proud countries and nations between Berlin, Moscow and Istanbul could be encompassed in its entirety (albeit on six examples) and complemented with overall insights on propaganda from other speakers.

1) The value of freedom

The commemoration of the 30th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall by citizens of the former Soviet bloc countries was also part of this Prague conference symbolism. It made participants remember the times when people were extremely hungry for truthful information about the world behind the Iron Curtain. Access to many facts and unpleasant truths was censored and banned on a mass scale.

As everyday witnesses of totalitarian propaganda machines 30 years ago, many active citizens of today feel scared of the quite familiar approaches coming mainly from the capital of Russia, its more or less conscious allies inside their own countries and sometimes even from persuaded believers in the renewed attractiveness of certain less democratic solutions for some of today's problems and often legitimate frustrations in Europe.

However, the warning instincts from the communist era of those who put freedom first could not have been completely forgotten during the years when the democracies of Central and Eastern Europe have been flourishing for a uniquely long period. A period when almost all of the participating countries with populations from 2 to 10 million people were in a way given a fairly comfortable amount of time to slowly recover from the troublesome history each of the countries had to live through.

Putting freedom first means not only to avow vulnerability against the ruthless attacks on it from mighty neighboring powers. It means more: to accept responsibility for this vulnerability and the foresighted prevention of any attacks against freedom from whichever direction they may come. It requires also to resist being spoiled by the affluence and glitz of the materially successful capitalism project and to not become lulled into a false sense of security. Capitalism today has way too many colourful faces, not all of them based on the values of democracy and free society. From this perspective, disinformation in the digital age, linked with less physically visible (but by no means less dangerous) threats, must be taken as a challenge. The challenge for us is to always take free life in a democratic society seriously.

2) The value of dialogue

Another feature that was unique for the era of 30 years ago was the culture of dialogue between opposing forces, including between former political prisoners and communist autocrats. We could witness and learn how Ronald Reagan, the Great Communicator, started this era with his power of persuasion and often approached the opposing parties, including the one threatening with atomic weapons, in quite an untraditional way. Unfortunately, this part of his elegant legacy has not been emphasised enough in the last couple of years.

Even in today's (dis)information war(s), dialogue with those who might destroy with all possible propaganda means the values one regards as sacrosanct requires as much magnanimity, self-confidence, and optimistic faith as in the time of the Cold War.

Therefore, it was quite interesting seeing the negative reactions when the conference organisers decided to use the opportunity to invite for the Czech round table an American publisher living in the Czech Republic, with his history of studies of the Soviet Union in the eighties, whose statements have been found on propagandist webpages linked to the Russian propaganda machine.

In every era, there will be smart people whose different motivations, ambitions, or opinion changes are very hard to read and predict. The ability to live with this insecurity and to provide space even for less sincere dialogue has to be part of what one copes with in a pluralistic democracy even if endangered by everyday massive (dis)information war(s).

This is even more important in the current time where the in-person dialogue has been too easily replaced by virtual smashing and never-ending sarcastic, ironic, or humiliating chain of digital comments and meaningless barking on social media. This can of course never replace the more costly face to face encounter aimed at a dignified competition of different concepts, perceptions, and opinions – even with persons who have been labelled more or less convincingly as propagandists working for an enemy power, awakened intelligence agents after years of sleeping, useful idiots, or simply liars.

3) The value of proper balance

In our region, the conference organised with US government financial support through the embassy based in Prague could be seen from different angles. For the national IVLP organizations, it always meant and means support to the freedom of expression, including open discussion on possible weaknesses, grey areas and even black holes in this historically developed precious freedom. For the courage and generosity expressed both in material, organizational, and intellectual support to discuss what for every major world power are very delicate issues we should simply be grateful.

For the legal part, there will always be a tension between freedom of expression and other public interests, including within the concept of freedom of expression itself and its different parts like freedom of information.

The right to (truthful) information is extremely challenging to fulfill as it is harder and harder to find any reasonable meaning, let alone truth, in the influx of lies – whether they are called propaganda, fake news, disinformation, misinformation, deep fakes or even in more complex academic terms that are allegedly more precise for the description of today's situation.

It will also be difficult to find proper legal means to moderate this digital mess even if the majority of the judicial and legislative bodies find that exceptional limitations on freedom of expression should become more and more legitimate, such as before elections to prevent brutal ways of meddling or for small countries in risky security situations that could even involve instigation to war through media paid by a mighty neighbor.

Despite several rulings, soft law recommendations, and dozens of thick publications focused on this issue, be they from academics, think tanks, or EU institutions with hundreds of pages and even more footnotes, no satisfactory or comprehensive solution has been proposed so far.

Jiří Kopal —— Czech IVLP Club Board

Opening speeches:
30 Years On: Western Perspective

Scott Jasper

Dr. Scott Jasper, CAPT, USN (Ret) is a Lecturer at the National Security Affairs Department and the Institute for Security Governance at the Naval Postgraduate School (NPS) in Monterey, California. Captain Jasper retired from the United States Navy as a Captain in 2004 and earned his doctorate from the University of Reading in the United Kingdom.

Cyber-Enabled Information Operations

Dr. Scott Jasper informed the audience about Russian influence operations, which reached a new level with American 2016 presidential elections. Disinformation spreading through foreign propaganda, social media, cyber hacks and leaks became a serious problem. Social media, in particular, became an important channel for the distribution of disinformation. According to Dr. Jasper, the Democratic National Committee (DNC) hired a cybersecurity company, which figured out that Russian agents had infiltrated the DNC computers. Russian agents accessed the DNC network through a third party and then used that to gain access to the DNC.

The leaks of information from the influential American lobbyist Anthony Podesta influenced people during and after the election. Dr. Jasper ended with the question to what extent Russians could have really influenced the minds of American voters.

He summed up that the United States had a complicated response to Russian hacks because there were no clear crimes committed.

Benjamin Herman

Benjamin Herman is the General Counsel of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. He graduated from Brown University in 1991 with a degree in Russian Studies, earned a master's degree in Czech language and literature from UC Berkeley in 1994, and graduated from Stanford Law School in 1998.

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty and the Legal Issues We See in 2019
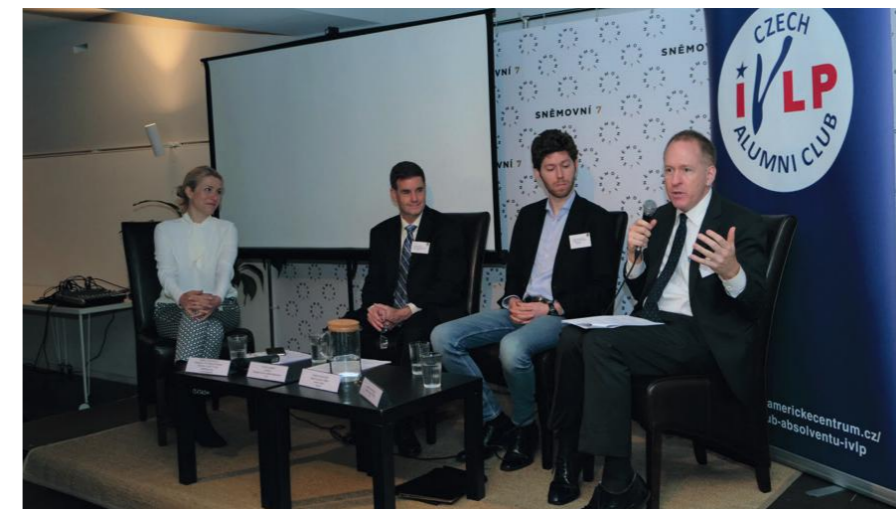
Tereza Engelová, Ben Herman, Mads Danielsen and Scott Jasper at the conference

We provide news to 22 countries, and within them there's a range of environments in terms of political freedom. Some countries, such as Iran and Turkmenistan, are so authoritarian that we don't have a physical presence there, and therefore legal issues rarely arise. It is in the countries that pretend to be free where legal problems arise.

Encounters with the legal systems of authoritarian countries are surreal. On the one hand, you see all the signs of a functioning system. There are laws. There are courts. There are lawyers for both sides. And yet the whole thing is a sham. Václav Havel described this situation perfectly in his 1978 essay *The Power of the Powerless*: "The legal code functions as an excuse. It wraps the base exercise of power in the noble apparel of the letter of the law; it creates the pleasing illusion that justice is done, society protected, and the exercise of power objectively regulated."

The country responsible for most of RFE/RL's legal problems, not surprisingly, is Russia. To start with, there's Roskomnadzor, the federal agency that oversees the media. At any time, they can cut off access to any web page available in Russia. Whenever I get an email with "Roskomnadzor" in the subject line I know it's going to be a bad day.

As journalist Peter Pomerantsev explained, one of the defining features of Putin's Russia is that everything in the political sphere is stage-managed, like a theater piece. The same is true of their legal system. RFE/RL's encounters with the Russian authorities are like a play, in which we pretend to believe that they will apply the law fairly and they pretend to do so.

Another big problem we face in Russia is that the laws are vague. In the United States, laws that are vague or overly broad are unconstitutional, so courts throw them out. After all, citizens have a right to know in advance what sorts of conduct could get them thrown in jail. But authoritarian regimes love vague laws, because they give the people in power the discretion to punish the people they want, whenever they want. That's why Russia has laws that prohibit "disrespect" toward the Russian government, "indecent" online posts, "offending the feelings of religious believers," "fake news," and "insulting a state official."

The consequences for failing to divine what qualifies as violations of these vague laws can be dire. One of our reporters in Crimea was recently convicted of the crime of "calling for the violation of Russia's territorial integrity" simply for publishing an opinion piece criticizing Russia's seizure of the Ukrainian territory. Think about that: in today's Russia, you can go to prison just for publishing the simple words "Crimea is Ukrainian."

But our legal headaches are not confined to the post-Soviet space. Western Europe can present problems as well. For example, as you may know, the United Kingdom's defamation laws are very plaintiff-friendly. So, when we publish a damaging report on a Russian oligarch, he won't threaten to sue us in Russia – he'll hire a British lawyer and threaten to sue us there.

If there is a common theme in our brushes with European law, it's this: In the United States, freedom of the press is the supreme value. Every child knows that the first amendment of the Bill of Rights guarantees freedom of speech and freedom of the press. But in Europe there's a value that can be superior: privacy. So European law has enshrined a "right to be forgotten," which means that under certain circumstances Google and other search engines can be required to delete personal information from their search results. And now, with the EU's new General Data Protection Regulation, even news media like RFE/RL could be required by a European court to delete personal information from their websites.

As an American lawyer for a company based in Europe, it's been fascinating to see this collision of values up close. And I'm not saying our way is better than yours; it's a genuinely vexing question for our Internet era: When should a person have the right to have information about him/her deleted from a factually accurate news article? The journalists in our newsroom would probably say: never. But perhaps we Americans give too little weight to privacy considerations. Anyway, I hope to meet lots of you as this conference unfolds, so when we meet bring me your best hypotheticals.

Mads Danielsen

Mads graduated from the University of Oslo (UiO) and UC Berkeley with MA in Political Science. He serves as senior executive officer at ARENA Center for European Studies, UiO. He is also the President of the Norwegian Labor Party Students and candidate for City Council in Oslo. Mads is an expert on the EU and Eastern Europe with deep interest in propaganda issues. He was awarded the European Commission's "European Youth Award".

30 Years On: Norwegian Perspective on Russia and Propaganda in Post-Soviet Bloc

Countering propaganda to prevent escalation

As former journalist and columnist in major Norwegian journals and newspapers, Mads also acted in the *Okkupert* political thriller TV series.

The Okkupert thriller was also the starting point of his picture-based, interactive presentation. In it, he successfully attempted to re-wind the course of events in this fictional, yet highly realistic drama depicting a Russian occupation of Norway. Going through the scenario, Mads identified the steps that culminated in invasion, highlighting the role of propaganda, collaboration and information war. In each step, he showed what should have been done in the field of countering propaganda to prevent the escalation.

We are all affected

Mads says that we are all affected by the information war between the West and Russia. For example, the war in Ukraine is not a conventional war but a war of information – the war about who controls the narrative. Russian propaganda is very influential and is done well. Russians started early and are currently a step ahead of the West. His basic policy recommendations to successfully counter it are as follows:

— Acknowledge problem
— Upgrade security systems
— Develop own narratives
— Support quality journalism
— Defend online battlefield
— Adapt education system
— Fix internal problems

Lithuania

Evaldas Klimas

Associate Professor at Mykolas Romeris University, Lithuania, specializing in defending the public interest.

Legal Steps and Ethical Dilemma of Banning Some Propaganda TV Channels

Lenka Kabrhelová, Evaldas Klimas and Mantas Martišius at the conference

Legal evaluation of the measures adopted against the television channel NTV Mir Lithuania by the Radio and Television Commission of Lithuania on 18 May 2016 and its compatibility with EU law.

Mr. Klimas pointed out that EU member states have the right to restrict certain freedoms in the public interest to shield the public from Russian propaganda.

He presented legal evaluation of the measures adopted against the television channel NTV Mir Lithuania by the Radio and Television Commission of Lithuania on 18 May 2016 and its compatibility with EU law.

NTV Mir Lithuania is a Russian cable and Internet TV channel registered in the UK as a Baltic Media Alliance (BMA) operator. On 18 May 2016, Lithuanian Radio and Television Commission (LRTK) imposed a temporary 12-month ban on NTV Mir Lithuania based on the fact that a program broadcast by NTV Mir Lithuania on April 15, 2016 "contained information inciting hostility to and hatred of the Baltic States on the grounds of nationality". The ban was supported by the EU Court of Justice in July 2019.

First, Mr. Klimas introduced the legal framework which made the ban possible even within strict EU laws ensuring freedom of speech. Mr. Klimas explained the basics of the freedom and the restrictions on the provision of information to the public by audiovisual media services in Lithuania.

1. In the Republic of Lithuania, free reception of public information from the audiovisual services of the European Union Member States, European Economic Area States and states parties to the Council of Europe is guaranteed by the Television without Frontiers Convention and Directive.

2. Radio and/or television programs and/or separate program units prepared abroad shall be allowed to be broadcast and retransmitted, distributed on the Internet or stored in catalogs in the Republic of Lithuania without prejudice to the provisions of the Law on the Provision of Information to the Public or any other laws.

3. The free reception in the Republic of Lithuania of television programs or individual program units, which are broadcast, retransmitted or distributed on the Internet in the Member States of the European Union and the European Economic Area, or stored in the catalogs of audiovisual media services, shall be temporarily suspended if:

1) such programs seriously and severely violate Article 19 of this law (incitement to hatred, ridicule, humiliation, instigation to discrimination, violence, physically violent treatment of a group of persons or a person belonging to it on the grounds of age, sex, sexual orientation, ethnicity, race, nationality, language, origin, social status, disability, belief, convictions or religion),

2) the requirements referred to in Article 341(4) or (5) have been infringed, all the following conditions being established:

(a) the infringement occurred at least twice during the last 12 months;

(b) the [Radio & Television] Commission has notified in writing the audiovisual media service provider, the competent authority of the Member State of the European Union or the State of the European Economic Area, and the European Commission of the suspected infringements and of the measures the Commission intends to take, should any such infringement occur again;

(c) the Commission has granted the audiovisual media service provider the right to be heard and to express its views on suspected infringements and the measures the Commission intends to take, should any such infringement occur again;

(d) consultations with the competent authority of the Member State of the European Union or State of the European Economic Area, and the European Commission, have failed to result in an agreement within one month of receipt of the notification referred to in point (b) by the European Commission.

On May 18, 2016, the Radio and Television Commission of Lithuania adopted, in accordance with the mentioned legislation, a measure imposing on operators broadcasting television channels via cable or Internet to Lithuanian consumers an obligation, for a period of 12 months, to no longer broadcast the television channel NTV Mir Lithuania other than as part of packages available for an additional fee. The decision was based on the fact that a program broadcast on 15 April 2016 on the channel in question contained information inciting hostility to and hatred of the Baltic states on grounds of nationality.

Lithuanian legal step complies with European Audiovisual Media Services Directive. Because even though it generally doesn't allow to restrict retransmissions of audiovisual media services of other EU states, there is an exception if an audiovisual service seriously presents a grave risk of prejudice to public health.
Mr. Klimas presented a table showing when retransmission restrictions are possible.

The derogation referred to in the first subparagraph shall be subject to the following conditions:

(a) during the previous 12 months, the media service provider has on at least two prior occasions already performed one or more instances of conduct described in the first subparagraph;

(b) the Member State concerned has notified the media service provider, the Member State having jurisdiction over that provider and the Commission in writing of the alleged infringements and of the proportionate measures it intends to take should any such infringement occur again;

(c) the Member State concerned has respected the right of defence of the media service provider and, in particular, has given that provider the opportunity to express its views on the alleged infringements; and

(d) consultations with the Member State having jurisdiction over the media service provider and the Commission have not resulted in an amicable settlement within one month of the Commission's receipt of the notification referred to in point (b).

What is Advocate General's opinion?

Moreover, the Advocate General is of the opinion that the measure adopted by the RTCL against the television channel NTV Mir Lithuania is compatible with the freedom to provide services enshrined in Article 56 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. The measure is justified and proportionate. In that regard, the Advocate General observes that the Republic of Lithuania has, by means of a reasonable measure, legitimately sought to protect the Lithuanian information area from Russian propaganda in the context of the information war to which the Baltic States are subject.

Conclusions

1. Functioning of the rule of law, democracy and freedom of speech should be ensured
2. Lithuanian information area is a target of Russian propaganda in the context of the information war to which the Baltic States are subject
3. Imposing the measures is a legitimate instrument
4. The imposed measures are used properly, if they are proportional, reasonable and legitimately sought

Mantas Martišius

Vice-chairman of the Radio and Television Commission of Lithuania. He is also an Associate Professor at the General J. Žemaitis Military Academy of Lithuania and Faculty of Communications of Vilnius University. His scientific and educational activity mainly consists of lecturing on information wars, propaganda, the impact of information in the global world, theories of propaganda, theories of communications, media, and commercial communications.

Kremlin-funded TV Broadcast in the EU Territory

Mr. Martišius explained how Russians exploited loopholes in the EU laws that allow them to establish propaganda channels in EU countries, which are much more difficult to get rid of. First, he mentioned some basic information about how media work within Russia.

— Kremlin directly or through affiliated groups controls the main media outlets within Russia

— TV dictates public agenda

— According to independent *Levada Center* surveys, television is the main source of information for ordinary Russians regardless of their education, social status or places of living

All big media companies belong to goverment

All major channels
with news programs are owned by state or proxy companies

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

Russians have a few narratives to preach to their people and people in the EU, for example, that Ukraine is a failed state which cannot exist independently, and that NATO military deployment is a direct threat to Russia.

According to Mr. Martišius, TV remains the most influential media in Russia. Three main federal channels reach 76% of Russians in a week and people trust TV much more than any other media. Foreign media have the lowest trust rating and the biggest anti-rating. Very few Russian citizens can speak English and all large channels with news programs are fully controlled by Kremlin and its proxy companies. This is a situation in which propaganda and disinformation can spread quite successfully.

In the EU, Russian channels exploit loops in the "Audiovisual Directive", formerly "Television without Frontiers" Directive. What helps them as well is the unequal competition in many ex-communist states where good-quality Russian entertainment keeps beating local programs.

The Focus of monitoring – Russian programmes licenced in the EU

- News
- "Today" (NTV Mir Lithuania)
- "Time" (PBK Lithuania)
- "News" (RTR Russia)
- Talk shows
- Evening with Vladimir Solovyov (RTR Russia)
- Norkin list (NTV Mir Lithuania)
- Documentaries
- Territory of unknown (Ren Lietuva)
- Project Ukraine (RTR Russia)

НТВ МИР ЛИЕТУВА	United Kingdom jurisdiction
REN ЛИЕТУВА	United Kingdom jurisdiction
РОССИЯ РТР	Swedish jurisdiction
1	Latvian jurisdiction

What helps Russian channels to spread even in the West is a cultural affinity.

People who know the Russian language are often stuck in the Russian information area. They keep following media in Russian. Russian propagandistic channels also receive targeted advertising subsidies.

Main narratives of Russian TV channels

- Baltic states are supporting and activating fascist movements;
- Ukraine is failed state and Government institutions in Ukraine are incapable of solving economic problems of their country;
- Ukraine is at fault that "Minsk accords" are not complied with;
- NATO military employment near the Russian borders is the direct threat to Russian security;
- "The West" will not solve the conflict in Syria without the help from Russia.
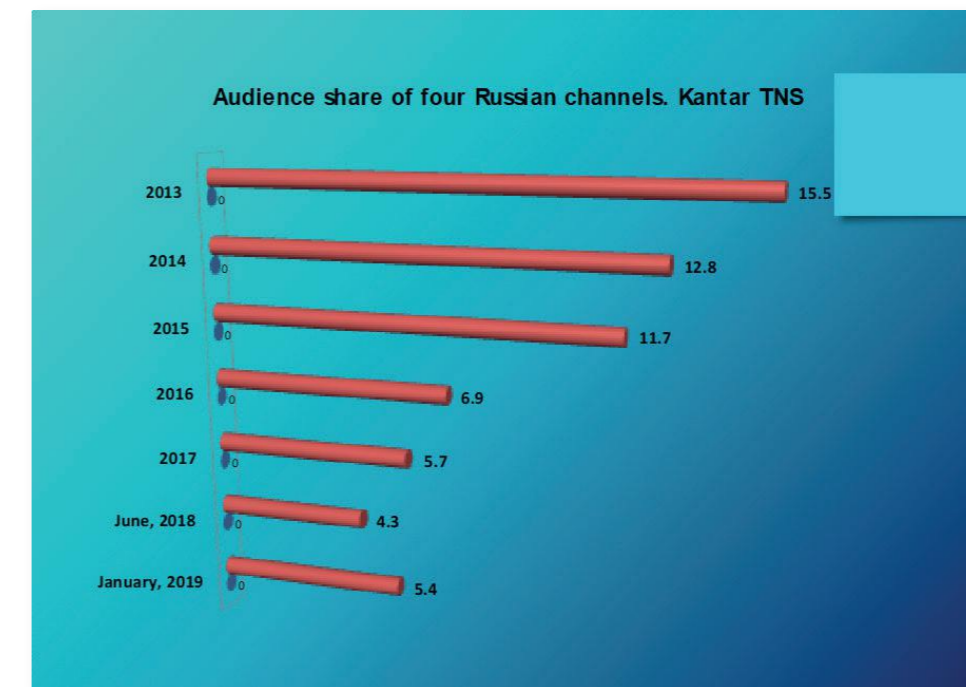
Image of the West in Russian TV

41 negative news daily on the top three TV channels

Coca Cola had
6 ADS DAILY
on the same top three channels

Russian channels' audience share was 17 % in Lithuania in 2013, but it has fallen significantly since then. In January 2019, four Russian channels were taking only 5.4% of Lithuanian audience share.

Audience share of four Russian channels. Kantar TNS

Year	Audience share
2013	15.5
2014	12.8
2015	11.7
2016	6.9
2017	5.7
June, 2018	4.3
January, 2019	5.4

How can states protect themselves legally against propaganda TV channels? They have a right to make legal charges at court for hate incitement and hate speech, slandering and disinformation.

Even though EU rules protect TV channels, the right to penalize belongs to institutions that issued transmission licenses. For example, the Lithuanian Radio and Television Commission (LRTC) had to identify and appeal to colleagues abroad.

Legal procedures provided in AVMS Directive

STEP 1 Infringements established	STEP 2 Notification	STEP 3 Consultation	STEP 4 The decision on free reception restriction
During 12 months broadcaster in the EU at least 2 times manifestly, seriously and gravely infringed Article 27 (1),(2) 1(Protection of minors) or Article 6. (Hatred) of the AVMSD.	European Commission and the broadcaster should be notifed about the measures to be taken if violations continue. The broadcaster should be asked to submit its comments (in writing) for the notification letter referred to the alleged violations and intend to impose sanctions	In 15 days the targeted State shall consult with the transmitting State (broadcaster and the relevant regulatory body) and the European Commission for a friendly solution.	After the notification of the ongoing violations European Commission should be informed about the decision. European Commission within 2 months assess whether the decision complies with EU law

Mr. Martišius then gave examples of Russian TV channels which had been charged by LRTC for incitement to hatred.
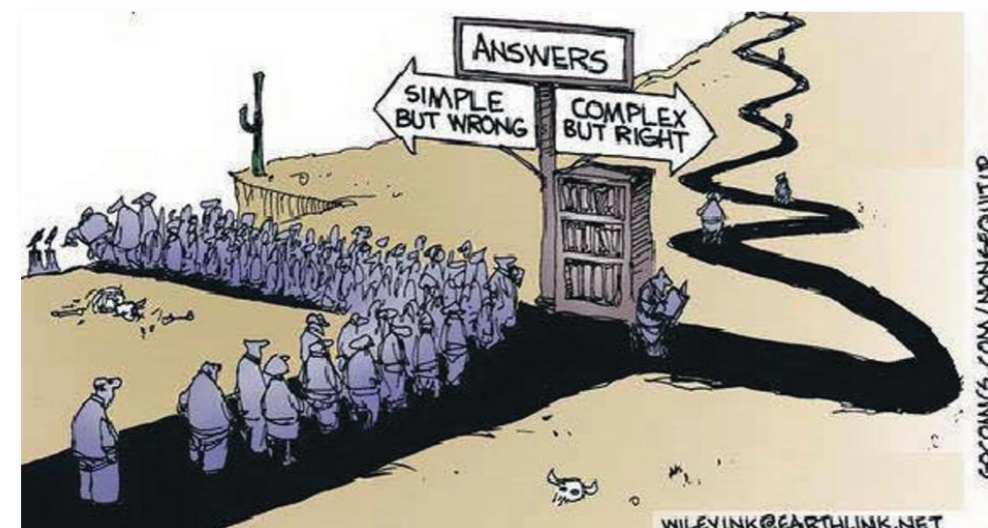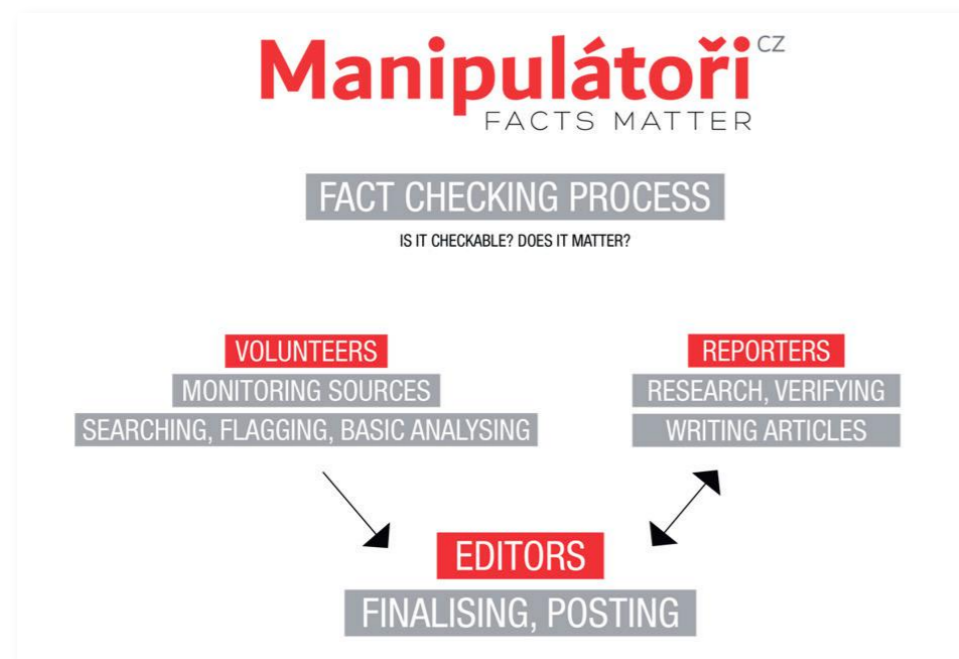
Czech Republic

Petr Nutil

Founder of Manipulátoři.cz - a project that debunks fake news and propaganda in the Czech media and social networks.

Czech Republic Debunking Fake News

Mr. Nutil presented practical information on how Manipulatori.cz works and guidance for starting similar projects in other countries.

Marek Wollner

Marek is the editor-in-chief of the main investigative program Reporters of the Czech TV. In his presentation, he talked about the growing attacks on public broadcasters in the Czech Republic. Through the current Czech media landscape analysis, Marek offered a '1984' kind of contradictory look on life where ignorance is strength and slavery is freedom.

Truth and Propaganda in Public Space

Postmodern banalization

In post-modern society, everybody had his own truth. The post-modern view on truth was that everyone had some part of the truth and ideologies and religions claimed to understand the entire truth of the world.

But in today's post-truth society, nobody is right and everybody lies. Everybody wags the dog. Delusion, conspiracy and propaganda are referred to as "opinions". Every day, we find many examples of such behavior – the Michaláková case, salmon as the most poisonous fish, "Hitler is Gentleman" article. But where are the facts? Journalists used to be seen as providing a different perspective on government but now the media are portrayed as the enemy responsible for decaying the belief in the existence of truth.

Don't trust, don't check

Approximately half of the Czech population doesn't have trust in the media. The most trusted media is radio, the least is print. Internet and tv enjoy about the same levels of trust. There is a difference in trust between young and older population in case of Internet but not tv. 61% of people listen to the radio but just 4% would miss it.

The current dominant position of television is being eroded in the field of acquiring information, with the Internet gradually replacing it as the primary source.

Circumstances influencing the news content

In a recent survey, 43% of the respondents answered that the most important factor for influencing the news is the publisher's interest, followed by the publisher's opinion. Other top reasons are the deadlines and the existence of video materials or pictures.

The survey participants also answered the question of how the Internet news portals are financed. More than half of the respondents think these portals get their money primarily from advertising, with whooping 40% having no idea at all.

The rise of "alternative" media

While 6 in 10 Czech respondents have more trust in the traditional media, 1 in 4 prefers the "alternative" ones. This figure is significantly worse than in Hungary or Slovakia but much better than in the United States.
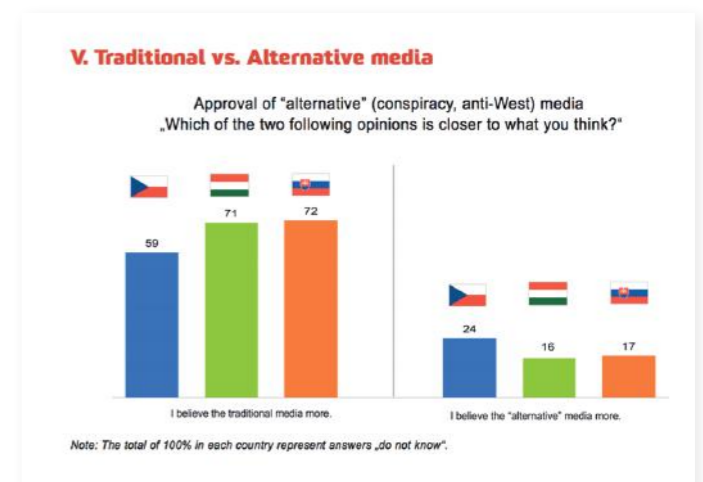
As we can see from the next chart, in the US, trust in the traditional media has been steadily declining over the past twenty years.

→

Americans' Trust in the Mass Media

In general, how much trust and confidence do you have in the mass media -- such as newspapers, TV and radio -- when it comes to reporting the news fully, accurately and fairly -- a great deal, a fair amount, not very much or none at all?

■ % Great deal/Fair amount

53 55 53 54 54 51 50 44 47 43 45 43 44 40 44 40 40 32

1997 1999 2001 2003 2005 2007 2009 2011 2013 2015

Propaganda: you don't have to trust us or anybody else

Social networks completely changed the perspective of information and truth. The Internet removed the filters of truth that journalism had in place. Now any idea can be expressed in the media by anyone without any kind of counterweight.

A fine example of the worst propaganda server in the Czech Republic is "Aeronet". The publisher is unknown, the author of the articles calls himself VK (abbreviation of "Director of Carousel"). Aeronet started publishing its propaganda with the onset of the Ukraine conflict. Consumers of its "news" can read that the Maidan was organized by fascists, Malaysia airlines flight was shot down by Ukrainians, or how the EU interferes in domestic affairs. There is staunch criticism of the NATO bases in Europe, a lot of praise for the annexation of Crimea etc.

In domestic news, US embassy is blamed for financing protests against the current pro-Russian president Miloš Zeman, while the "fully trained former US employees" are organizing it.

Conspiracies disseminated by politicians

Such lies are often being quoted not only by politicians of the extreme edges of the spectrum but also by some prominent figures of parliament parties, by the president's spokesman. Former president's chancellor is the publisher of one of such servers. And both, president Zeman and ex-president Klaus, are themselves keen on conspiracies, too. They attack public service media, namely the Czech Television. There was a 500-page "analysis" published about alleged systematic manipulation of facts in the Czech tv. The author is supposed to be a 25-year-old student.

Erik Best

Czech journalist of American origin. Publisher of the Fleet Sheet and Final Word bulletins. He often comments on political issues and is frequently quoted by "alternative" media.

What Should We Fear More: Fake News or Fake News Propaganda?

In his speech, he talked about the positions of Russia and China toward Czech Republic and the West and pointed out several points for discussion:

— Dmitri Symes: born in USSR, lived in the US, wrote Trump's first foreign policy speech. Named 100 times in the Mueller Report, friendly with Jared Kushner.

— Dangerous Liaisons by Symes. By trying to make the Russians pay for the 2016 election, we are making the Russians and the Chinese closer together.

— Trump sees Russia as a tool against China.

— Fake news hysteria is worse than fake news because we are taking our eyes off China, which is a much bigger threat militarily than Russia is.

Jiří Kopal

Lawyer; IVLP board member; European Values Think Tank – Chairman of Supervisory Board.

Minimalist Legal Approach Towards Propaganda

Marek Wollner, Petr Nutil, Erik Best and Jiří Kopal at the conference

Georgia

Etuna Tsotniashvili

Communications Manager at Civil Development Agency (CiDA), former newspaper editor, with a demonstrated history of working in the areas of public relations, communications in civil society, and media and corporate responsibility.

Countering Russia's Propaganda in Georgia – Disinformation in Practice

During the past few years, the Kremlin's information war has been very visible and is considered as a big problem requiring new solutions. Different countries and institutions targeted by the Kremlin have already come to this conclusion and are working on ways to counter the Kremlin propaganda and disinformation.

Georgia – a country that is especially vulnerable to influence from Russia – is not an exception in this regard, as pro-Russian forces are very active inside the country on every level; however at this point Georgian government has not recognized it as a growing danger and has not developed a strategy for countering the propaganda.

In Georgia, propaganda is a problem for several reasons. More precisely, recent surveys and observations show its impact on different levels of society. According to the policy paper of the IDFI (Institute for Development of Freedom of Information):
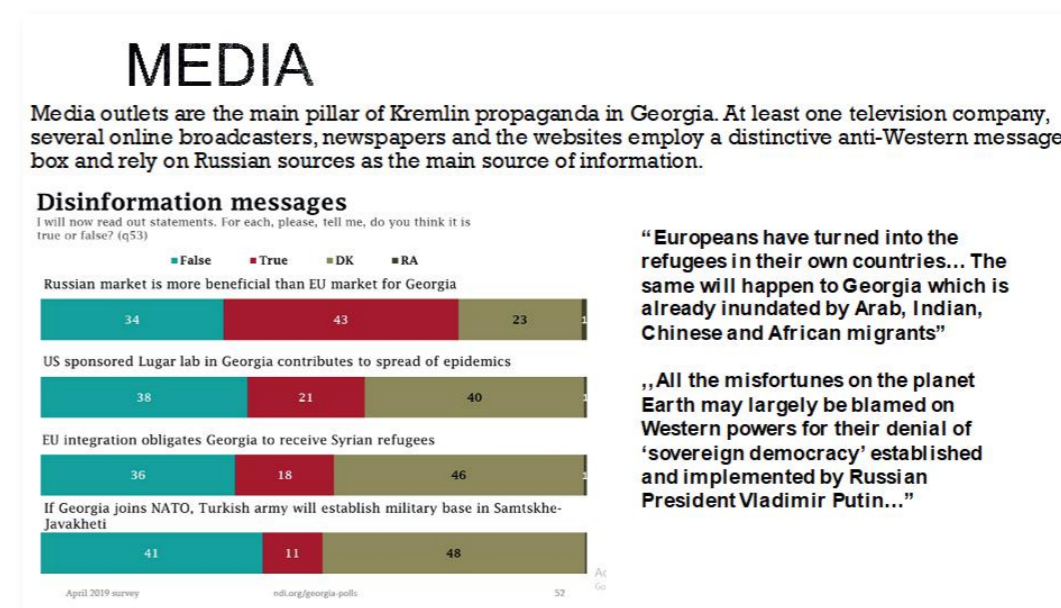
1. Public support in Georgia towards European and Euro-Atlantic integration weakens and the number of people supporting rapprochement with Russia increases. This will endanger Georgia's security and Euro-Atlantic integration.

2. A country with hostile intentions towards Georgia will have the ability to influence Georgia's political agenda. This will endanger Georgia's sovereignty.

3. As a result of disinformation, Georgian voters will become less informed. They will not have an opportunity to make decisions based on true facts, and this can affect the outcome of elections.

4. Xenophobia and hatred (ethnic and religious) will increase, civic unity will be undermined, and social and political integration of ethnic minorities will become more difficult.

CHARACTERISTICS OF KREMLIN PROPAGANDA

- **Volume and multiple channels of distribution** – Kremlin propaganda messages are being distributed through a variety of channels - internet, social media, public meetings, TV.
- **Disregard of objective reality** – Kremlin propaganda is based on fabricated events, distortion of facts or their interpretation.
- **Frequency and repetition** – Kremlin propaganda is being created rapidly and continuously. In many cases, old misinformation is being circulated anew.
- **Sowing of confusion** – rather than trying to present lies as truth, Kremlin propaganda aims to confuse its recipients by distorting facts.
- **Rejection of criticism** – Kremlin propaganda rejects all criticism aimed at the Russian Federation and portrays it as fabricated lies that are based on Western double standards.

Over the past few years Kremlin propaganda has become a subject of study by various international research organizations. Based on existing research, the Kremlin propaganda has certain characteristics.

For example: the news and stories released in different media outlets are mostly fabricated and the key facts are misleading, which in certain cases causes confusion among the readers and listeners; propaganda released by the Kremlin excludes any criticism of the Russian Federation and, in addition, they try to present the issue as fake news coming from the West.

MEDIA

Media outlets are the main pillar of Kremlin propaganda in Georgia. At least one television company, several online broadcasters, newspapers and the websites employ a distinctive anti-Western message box and rely on Russian sources as the main source of information.

Disinformation messages

I will now read out statements. For each, please, tell me, do you think it is true or false? (q53)

Legend: ■ False ■ True ■ DK ■ RA

Statement	False	True	DK/RA
Russian market is more beneficial than EU market for Georgia	34	43	23
US sponsored Lugar lab in Georgia contributes to spread of epidemics	38	21	40
EU integration obligates Georgia to receive Syrian refugees	36	18	46
If Georgia joins NATO, Turkish army will establish military base in Samtskhe-Javakheti	41	11	48

April 2019 survey   ndi.org/georgia-polls   52

> "Europeans have turned into the refugees in their own countries... The same will happen to Georgia which is already inundated by Arab, Indian, Chinese and African migrants"

> ,,All the misfortunes on the planet Earth may largely be blamed on Western powers for their denial of 'sovereign democracy' established and implemented by Russian President Vladimir Putin…"

In Georgia, anti-western messages come from almost any important side, including political parties, non-governmental organizations, the church and the media. Based on the frequency of such messages, donor organizations have begun to provide grants to programs to counter propaganda, and western-oriented NGOs are organizing public meetings to discuss EU-Georgia and NATO-Georgia relations; a number of video clips have been aired about anti-western propaganda, and webpages have been created where freelancers debunk fake news aired/printed in the Georgian media.

MAIN MESSAGES OF KREMLIN PROPAGANDA IN GEORGIA

- **Discrediting Georgia's European and Euro-Atlantic integration** – presenting the process of integration with the EU in a negative light; propagating false information about NATO.
- **Disparaging Western values** – portraying them as incompatible with Georgian culture and traditions. Especially noteworthy in this regard is the homophobic nature of Kremlin propaganda.
- **Inciting negative attitudes towards Georgia's strategic partners** – most notably the United States and Turkey.
- **Propagating conspiracy theories** – a combination of fabricated hypotheses that portray events as being a result of a conspiracy of Western governments and institutions.

GOALS OF KREMLIN PROPAGANDA IN GEORGIA

Kremlin propaganda has several goals in Georgia:

1. Incite anti-Western sentiments in Georgia. By discrediting Western institutions (such as the EU and NATO) and states the Kremlin is trying to disparage the values associated with them - democracy, rule of law, human rights, etc.

2. Disrupt Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspiration.

3. Popularize Kremlin's global policy.

4. Instill confusion, fear and hatred among the population by propagating conspiracy theories, half-truths and false information.

Levan Nanobashvili

Attorney, Visiting Lecturer at Georgian Institute of Public Affairs and the University of Georgia. Lawyer with experience in working on freedom of expression and media law issues.

Legal Problems Related to Disinformation and Fake News

Levan Nanobashvili, Kateřina Procházková and Etuna Tsotniashvili

The freedom of expression is guaranteed by the Constitution and laws of Georgia, both in the "off-line" world and in the on-line communication.

The Constitutional Court of Georgia has repeatedly held that free society consists of free individuals who think freely, hold independent and different opinions and participate in democratic processes, which entails exchange of opinions and information.

There is no specific provision in Georgian legislation regarding disinformation or Russian propaganda. In 2008, after Russia started the war against Georgia, Georgian cable TV operators stopped transit of all federally owned Russian TV channels in Georgia. According to the cable operators, this decision was made voluntarily, without any involvement or instruction from the Government of Georgia. However, Russian TV channels returned to Georgia after 2012. Currently, there is no specific legal norm which can be used to ban all Russian TV channels in Georgia.

Defamation was decriminalized in Georgia in 2004. This was a very important step in guaranteeing the freedom of expression. Today, only civil liability exists for defamation in Georgia.

Recently, some government officials proposed stricter responsibility for defamation in Georgia. They cited the law adopted in France in 2018 as an example of defamation regulation. However, the French law is aimed at combating the spreading of fake news during the pre-election period and, as such, this law has nothing to do with the regulation of defamation. It provides for the transparency obligation for digital platforms as well as the right of judges to stop the distribution of fake news during the pre-election period.

Time will show whether Georgia amends its legislation regulating the freedom of expression or adopts specific norms regarding Russian propaganda.

Kateřina Procházková

Journalist and analyst of Sinopsis. Project implemented by the non-profit association AcaMedia z.ú., in scholarly collaboration with the Department of Sinology at Charles University in Prague. It aims to present a regular overview of developments in China and its impacts on the outside world from the perspectives of Czech, Chinese and international observers

Chinese Propaganda in Georgia and the Czech Republic. Activities of CEFC in Both Countries and its Comparison

Kateřina Procházková introduced the activities of the Chinese company CEFC – the once high-flying Chinese conglomerate, which had dominated the Czech-Chinese relationship over the past couple of years before it collapsed under the political and financial pressure in several countries.

One of the former leaders of CEFC Mr. Ye Jianming became an advisor to the Czech president Miloš Zeman and still is an advisor even though he disappeared in China, presumably investigated by the Party's disciplinary machinery. The only direct mention of him since his disappearance has been a CCTV report accusing him of bribing the provincial Party Secretary in Gansu.

After the downfall in other parts of Europe, CEFC remained in Georgia and acted as if nothing had happened. They claim that they are investors but their activities in Georgia look much like the so-called Ponzi scheme – based on fictitious transactions among CEFC's many branches and affiliates in order to inflate trade volume and raise credit from Chinese banks. CEFC has been promising investment in hundreds of millions in Georgia for more than three years now. Expectations are kept high by frequent MoUs, but so far, the country has seen no real results and, given the company's current state, it is hard to imagine any forthcoming in the future.

Krisztina Nagy

Assistant Professor at the Budapest University of Technology and Economics, Department of Business Law.

Propaganda as a Tool of "Illiberal Media Policy"

Hungarian speakers
at the conference

According to Reporters Without Borders, Hungary currently ranks 87th in the World Press Freedom Index.[1] Hungary's position has fallen significantly in recent years: from the 56th place in 2013 to the 87th in 2019. The factors behind this poor ranking include the extreme ownership concentration in the government-friendly media outlets, which are used as a propaganda tool by the government.

The presentation described and structured the main elements of the Hungarian illiberal media policy, which has resulted in a steady decline of media freedom and media pluralism in Hungary. Since 2010, the government has systematically restructured the media market and set up its own propaganda media.

Propaganda is a part and a tool of the illiberal media policy, which is based on four pillars.[2]

First pillar: undermine the independence of organizations overseeing private and public media. All members of the Hungarian Media Authority are appointed and elected by the Fidesz Party. Other parties or the civil society have no representatives in the Authority. The public media are extremely centralized, and the supervisory system and the operation of the public media are non-transparent.[3]

Second pillar: constantly expand the role of the pro-government investors in all media market segments. The ownership of Hungary's media has continued to become increasingly concentrated in the hands of government-friendly oligarchs.[4]

Third pillar: manipulate access to the market resources necessary for media market activities. One of the most important market-distorting impacts is the skewed distribution of state advertising, which exerts a massive influence on market competition.[5]

Fourth pillar: manipulate the information environment by controlling the access to public information and the political agenda. Permanent political propaganda campaigns are run by government.[6]

Concrete cases (e.g. the role of the media authority in the permanent governmental political campaign; KESMA [Central European Press and Media Foundation], the extreme ownership concentration) were used to highlight how this media policy works in practice. These cases present the elements, measures and phenomena that support the government propaganda in Hungary.

---

[1] https://rsf.org/en/ranking#

[2] This approach and findings are based on research activity and publications of Mertek Media Monitor.
https://mertek.eu/en/

[3] Soft Censorship in Hungary in 2016: When Propaganda Rules Public Discourse
https://mertek.eu/en/2017/06/01/soft-censorship-hungary-2016-propaganda-rules-public-discourse/
Funding for public service media in Hungary – a form of unlawful state aid?
https://mertek.eu/en/2019/01/09/funding-for-public-service-media-in-hungary-a-form-of-unlawful-state-aid/

[4] Fidesz-friendly media dominate everywhere
https://mertek.eu/en/2019/05/02/fidesz-friendly-media-dominate-everywhere/

[5] State advertising spending in Hungary – an unlawful form of state aid
https://mertek.eu/en/2019/01/29/state-advertising-spending-in-hungary-an-unlawful-form-of-state-aid/

[6] Soft Censorship in Hungary in 2016: When Propaganda Rules Public Discourse
https://mertek.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/MertekFuzetek12.pdf

Ferenc Hammer

Associate Professor at Hungarian ELTE Institute for Media Studies. Ferenc Hammer teaches and conducts research in the fields of cultural sociology, media studies and the history of the Cold War.

Decline of Media Freedom in Hungary: Relationship Between Delegated Dictatorship, Social Polarization and the Digital Public Sphere

On September 12, 2018, Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) adopted a resolution asking the Council of the European Union to determine if the government of Hungary has initiated measures and engaged in activities that present "a clear risk of a serious breach" of the fundamental values of the EU.

The following areas were scrutinized:

— functioning of the constitutional and electoral system;
— independence of the judiciary and of other institutions and the rights of judges;
— corruption and conflicts of interests;
— privacy and data protection;
— freedom of expression;
— academic freedom;
— freedom of religion;
— freedom of association;
— right to equal treatment;
— rights of persons belonging to minorities, including Roma and Jews, and protection against hateful statements against such minorities;
— fundamental rights of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees;
— economic and social rights

Mr. Hammer introduced the situation of Hungarian media where the government controls 476 media outlets through which they relay their opinions and where government is able to manipulate the law using the spirit or the letter of the law. According to Mr. Hammer there is almost no legal way to stop it.

Mr. Hammer described the contemporary situation as a Hungarian bagel where legal principles, spirit and law are contested with a legalistic authoritarianism, and where society is being polarized by fake news and lack of debate, because 476 firms connected with state media pressure on the free media outlets. The Hungarian media has manipulated stories in clever ways, trying to downplay the opposition to the government.

How the state media adjust or rearrange the reality for its viewers and readers can be seen on an example of the huge protests which were taking place in January 2012 when thousands of people protested in streets against the change of the constitution.

SOURCE: NY Times

And the Hungarian TV was showing almost empty streets as in the picture on the right.

→

Propaganda is a strong tool of Hungarian government and it is being promoted not only by pro-governmental media outlets but also by "state-paid" posters, such as the one showing George Soros and his "aim" to destroy Christian culture.

←

György Kovács

Lawyer, member of the Board of the Hungarian Fulbright Association and ENAM

Freedom of Expression as Protected by the EU Fundamental Rights Charter: How Fake News and Propaganda Affect these Rights

The Hungarian problem becomes more complicated due to the fact that Hungary is part of the EU and falls within the jurisdiction of the European Court of Human Rights. The ECHR guarantees the freedom of the press and expression of opinions with few exceptions, which include national security and damage to others. The duty of the state in media is to inform the public about the opinions and encourage debates and discussions on issues.

Why is the case law of the ECHR relevant?	☐ our Countries are Member States of the European Convention on Human Rights, therefore national courts enforce the jurisprudence of the European Court of Human Rights as a common minimum level of guarantee; ☐ The Court of Justice of the European Union accepts the case law of the ECHR as binding

— According to Art.10 of theEuropean Convention on Human Rights, everyone has the right to freedom of expression. This right shall include freedom to hold opinions and to **receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority** and regardless of frontiers. This Article shall not prevent States from requiring the licensing of broadcasting, television or cinema enterprises.

— 2. The exercise of these freedoms, since it carries with it duties and responsibilities, may be subject to such formalities, conditions, restrictions or penalties as are prescribed by law and are **necessary in a democratic society**, in the interests of **national security, territorial integrity** or **public safety**, for the **prevention of disorder or crime**, for the protection of health or morals, for the protection of the **reputation or rights of others**, for preventing the disclosure of information received in confidence, or for maintaining the authority and impartiality of the judiciary.

There are few exceptions:

— Any limitation/exception has to be interpreted narrowly, especially when it comes to political opinion (*Observer and Guardian v UK case*);

— Any limitation/exception must be necessary and proportionate;

— Disinformation in bad faith is not protected (*Skalka v Poland case*)

Content provider is not liable, if violation of law is not sufficiently serious.

If the content is serious, and the intermediary does not eliminate the content, then the content provider will be liable for the infringing content.

It is not enough to act on the basis of a complaint: content providers need to "monitor" instantly and proactively the online content, and act if sufficiently serious violation of law is established.

Veronika Víchová

Veronika Víchová works for the Kremlin Watch, a non-governmental think tank, whose aim is to defend liberal democracy, the rule of law and the trans-Atlantic alignment of the Czech Republic.

How to Understand Russian State Capture Effort in Europe – the Prague Manual.

The Prague Manual is a comprehensive report attempting to explain how the European liberal democratic countries should respond to the Kremlin's ongoing subversive operations. More than four years after the annexation of Crimea, following several investigations conducted to understand the scope of the Kremlin's influence in Western countries and after a number of attempts to meddle in national elections, the European debate should finally move from questioning whether a threat exists to taking steps to effectively counter it. There have been numerous efforts to step up governmental and non-governmental activities focused on building resilience, analyzing or countering the Kremlin's disinformation campaigns and influence operations, with each of them differing in impact and number of successes. This report is an attempt to use the existing experience to provide a list of specific steps that should be taken in different political environments to be as efficient as possible.

Executive summary

The threat of Russian hostile subversion is increasingly relevant for all European countries. Some of the countries are starting to realize the gravity of the threat, but other governments still doubt whether any threat exists or even contribute to its spread. It is necessary for European liberal democracies to take action and to learn from the Central and Eastern European countries, which have direct experience with facing this challenge. Many initiatives and activities in the Central and Eastern European region, both governmental and non-governmental, have attempted to identify, analyze, expose and counter Russian subversion. Some of them have proved highly efficient while others have been inadequate, or their approach has been found not to fit in the local environment. The West has a unique opportunity to identify the lessons learned from these countries and use their best practices, as well as avoid their mistakes.

Lessons learned for European governments

One overarching lesson is the need for very thorough preparation and planning before launching any initiative. This especially applies to any governmental activities, which can intensively interfere with the cultural habits of a country, along with its political and media culture. Any new public institutions or legislative measures should be proportionate, designed to fill the gaps in the domestic system after a thorough threat and policy assessment. Quick and easy solutions in any area can cause a political backlash and end up being counterproductive, mostly because the topic of the hostile subversive operations is very sensitive.

When it comes to the strategic communication activities of the government, it proves more efficient to establish permanent bodies with clearly stated competences and goals. Ad hoc activities responding to single issues tend to be badly coordinated, chaotic and often add to the uncertainty of the situation. Stable strategic communication units with experience can do systematic long-term activities like training of public officials, monitoring or communicating state policies, while also responding more quickly and readily to crises.

No matter what solution the government decides to implement, most steps should be widely consulted with local civil society. Involvement of non-governmental organizations, experts in the community and the private sector in the preparation of countermeasures can help avoid some of the most obvious mistakes and make the initiative more acceptable to the public. Generally, cultivating long-term relationships with NGOs working on countering Russian subversion in any way can be very advantageous for both sides. Governmental support to civil society might enable more projects to be launched. This gives NGOs more expertise and specialty in the areas the government needs. As a result, these organizations can help the government in times of crisis with their knowledge and skills (for example in the area of cyber-security) or communicate with the public in more detail about issues which the government cannot and should not address itself.

In an ideal case, all the included actors – government officials, political parties, NGOs, journalists, and academia – should be able to occasionally meet, network and coordinate their activities. Discord, lack of support to each other and doubling the work is a common trait of the efforts in many countries, but that can be very easily avoided. The cooperation can be highly informal and does not have to go much further than exchanging information in the beginning, but it can go a long way for the participants.

Lessons learned for the non-governmental sector

All the countries under review still have significant gaps in research. In some of them, there have been attempts to map the pro-Kremlin actors in the country, which is highly needed in every region. Showing and analyzing different actors willingly or unknowingly helping the Kremlin to reach its goals and examining the links between them in a comprehensive way is important for being able to expose the scope of the threat. The goal is for the interested community to understand the problem and to be able to show it in a coherent way to the public and policymakers.

Secondly, there is no systematic and regular polling aimed at the level of public susceptibility to the messages of disinformation campaigns and the disinformation outlets. There have been individual attempts to get more data in that area, but none of them have been repeated with the same set of questions. This is one of the most troubling issues when it comes to showing clear evidence of the impact of disinformation campaigns. The same applies to Russian minority groups, which have not been the subject of almost any sociological research concerning their media consumption and political behavior. Such data, if it existed, could significantly contribute to designing and implementing more efficient strategies to counter the narratives of disinformation websites, providing quality media content to the minorities and eventually increase the public's trust in mainstream media and democratic institutions.

Finally, the results of any research, fact-checking activity or any other data and skills gained by civil society should be used for further expansion of public awareness and teaching. Fact-checking can never reach enough of an audience, but it can expand its outreach by being presented on TV, during public events or in any other interactive way. Research conclusions should be used for follow-up work, for example for comparative analysis with other countries. Fact-checkers should try their best to teach representatives of civil society, the wider public or even journalists how to fact-check by themselves.

How to understand the report

It is important to realize that none of the categories of initiatives are sufficient solutions by themselves. Some of the non-governmental initiatives, like fact-checking and research, are a necessary start for good understanding and exposure to the problem. Further cooperation between civil society, the government and the following outputs of the government initiatives are crucial for dealing with the threat effectively. Spreading media literacy and civic education is necessary for long-term resilience building and prevention. None of these steps should be skipped, they all complement each other, and together they represent the years-long effort to prepare and implement a comprehensive strategy to eliminate the Kremlin subversion from the country.

The Prague Manual can be found at:
https://www.europeanvalues.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Prague-Manual_b.pdf

# North Macedonia and Serbia

Ida Manton

Ida studied at Ss. Cyril & Methodius University in Skopje and holds a master's degree in diplomacy and international relations from Leiden University and Clingendael in The Netherlands. She currently teaches international negotiations, diplomacy and contemporary practice at various academies and universities in North Macedonia and abroad, including The Hague, Warsaw and Prague.

Propaganda Wars about the Change of the Name of the Country at the Time of NATO Accession: How the Propaganda Exploits and Deepens the Divisions of North Macedonian Society

With the Prespa Agreement, the Republic of Macedonia agreed to change its name to "Republic of North Macedonia," as requested by the Hellenic Republic, in order to start its accession negotiations for NATO and EU membership. There was a significant lack of trust in the system after the break-up of Yugoslavia. Two main political parties have evolved, together with too many insignificant parties. We've been witnessing a state capture in various degrees, but the link with the demos is broken. In the main parties' view, good governance equals to good PR before elections. After 10 years of VMRO-DPMNE rule, the so called political "bombs" changed the game. But just for a short time.

The contemporary history of (North) Macedonia is a history of 28 years of asymmetric, international yet bilateral conflict. We shall be asking, who was negotiating, why now, what should have been done better, how the media covered the negotiations, what mistakes are to be avoided in the post-agreement phase. And also, why this way of negotiations causes big societal rifts.

In her presentation, Ida explores propaganda wars about the change of the name of the country at the time of NATO accession and shows how the propaganda exploits and deepens the divisions of North Macedonian society.
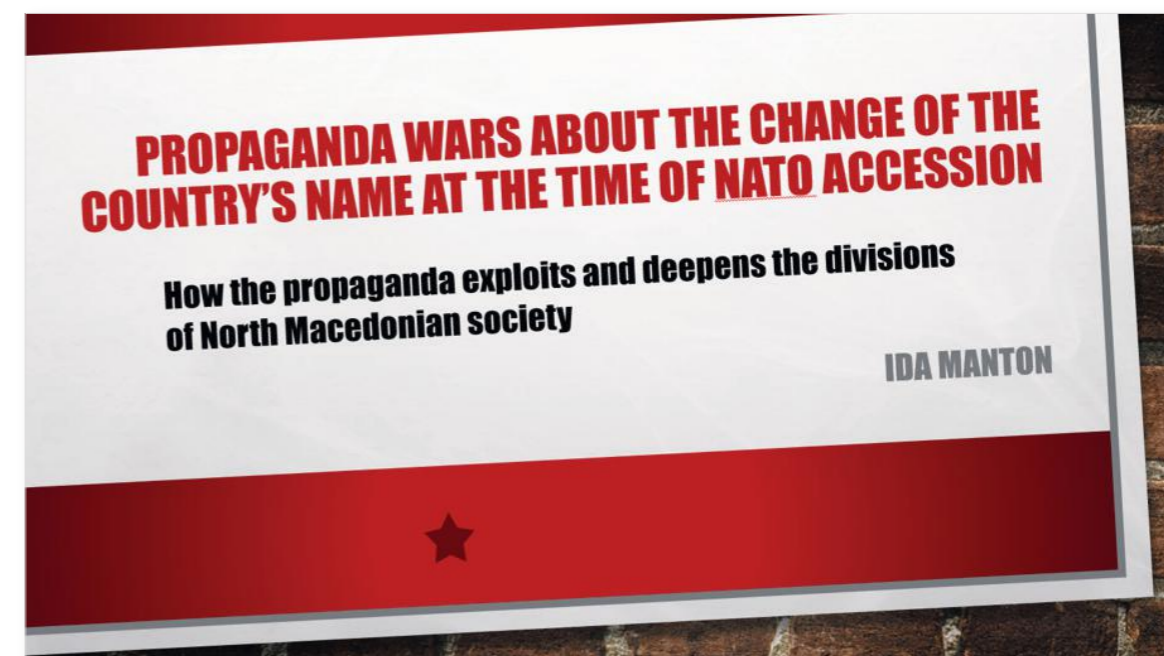
How bitter the pill is for Macedonia

February 2019 marked the beginning of the use of the new name "Republic of North Macedonia" for a country that had to change its constitution to allow for a change of name. The so-called Prespa Agreement was the outcome of a negotiation process between the two neighbors. On one side was the country whose name was negotiated. The name acceptable to its people and institutions was the one already found in the country's constitution, "Republic of Macedonia" (in the original Macedonian language, "Republika Makedonija" written in Cyrillic alphabet, "Република Македонија"), which was recognized and used by 134 countries – among them, all of the United Nations Security Council permanent members except France.

On the other side was the Hellenic Republic. Signed beside Lake Prespa, hence the name, and ratified by the parliaments of both countries, it came into force on February 12, 2019, when the two countries notified the UN by sending a joint letter to the secretary general – following the ratification of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization Accession Protocol on February 8. The Agreement replaces the 1995 UN Interim Accord and allows for the name change from the Republic of Macedonia to the Republic of North Macedonia. The national language continues to be called Macedonian, and the constitutional amendments reject any territorial claims by North Macedonia over the Greek region of Macedonia. In exchange, Greece will no longer be an obstacle on the path to accession talks between the European Union and North Macedonia, which is now closer to joining NATO as well. However, the price paid here is high, due to a flawed deal and to painful, dangerous compromises made to adjust the deal.

Short history of the contemporary conflict

Since the breakup of Yugoslavia, the Republic of Macedonia maintained the same naming pattern as all of the other constituent Federal Republics of Yugoslavia (the Republics of Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, and Montenegro) after declaring its independence in 1991. Its attempts at international recognition proved to be rather complicated. The Arbitration Commission of the Peace Conference on the Former Yugoslavia declared that the Republic of Macedonia met the conditions set by the European Community for international recognition, but Greece opposed the international community's recognition of Macedonian independence under its constitutional name. There were a number of objections raised about the country's name, flag, and constitution. The Greek government convinced the EC to adopt a common declaration setting conditions for recognition. The European Council issued a declaration in December 1992 expressing willingness "to recognize that republic within its existing borders […] under a name which does not include the term Macedonia" (European Council in Lisbon 1992). That was especially the case with admission to the UN. The new member joined the organization in April 1993, stating that: "[The] State [is] being provisionally referred to for all purposes within the United Nations as 'the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia' pending settlement of the difference that has arisen over the name of the State" (UN Documents 1993).

The name issue suddenly turned into an international dispute. Initially it was presented mainly as a security issue, since the region was surrounded by armed conflicts. In that context the "difference over the name" and its ramifications were seen as a serious matter, and Greece presented it that way to the UN too – claiming that its neighbor had territorial claims. The Republic of Macedonia, on the other hand, no longer had the protection of the Yugoslav Federation and after the breakup, it was more concerned about the possibility of the spillover of armed conflict from Serbia and Kosovo. It saw the hostile political discourse and the strong statements from its southern neighbor, Greece, as a threat in a very delicate moment. Serbia had no strength left to spread further south militarily, but if either Serbia or Bulgaria made a move Greece was prepared for such a scenario; it claimed: "Greece cannot remain indifferent, and stability in the Balkans will become a memory" (address of Foreign Minister Adonis Samaras in Lisbon, 17 January 1992, cited in Tziambiris 2000: 218–232).

So it was a security issue, but not because the new state had the appetite, strength, or aspiration for annexing additional territory – as claimed by Greece. Trouble was brewing in the whole neighborhood in fact, and both states defined their positions out of fear and an overall lack of trust. There were many internal as well as external fears, but also possibilities – ones which unfortunately were not identified or addressed by local politicians in the region. Throughout history the Balkan countries have promoted the idea that they are surrounded by deadly foes consumed with nationalistic appetites, because "the threat of an external enemy has always been one of the most effective ways to maintain internal cohesion" (Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov 2010: 383). That notion adds to this dispute the aspect of constructed collective perception versus reality. Many leaders used the momentum generated to progress with nationalistic rhetoric domestically, which created a bigger divide internationally – and making concessions became more difficult.

But what exactly is the issue?

It was said to be a matter of name. With the Prespa Agreement we discover there is more to the name, and all of the closely related topics required nineteen pages of text highly unusual for a bilateral agreement regarding an alternative view on the naming of one of the states involved. Monopolizing the name Macedonia by either of the sides should not be an issue because many other places share the same name and it is not a cause for longstanding dispute. There is an Ithaca in upstate New York (close to Syracuse), Troy (close to Albany), a few Corinths, Dovers, Olympias and the like. There are even at least four Athens(es) outside Greece (one in New York State near the Catskills, one in Pennsylvania, one in Alabama, and one in the US state of Georgia). Closer to home in Europe, the name "Luxembourg" has not become an issue for it and Belgium (which has a province with the same name bordering that country) the same way Macedonia has become for Greece and the Republic of (now North) Macedonia.

"So, there is something more in the name and its historical legacy, as the foundation of national identities."

Greece acquired the Northern Province of Macedonia as an integral part of its own territory only in 1913. And yet in the last twenty years, it has spent so much diplomatic energy on convincing the world that its northern neighbor has no right to use the name shared with its own province. Greece has been willing to make this issue relevant internationally, not because of the cultural heritage from the time before Christ, or because of Alexander the Great and his father Philip, but because of political decisions from the recent past that might have implications for contemporary Greece – like returning property to people it expelled in the first half of the twentieth century. The last twenty-eight years have proved that the security threat of the 1990s was ultimately exaggerated and contextual. Even back then it was not taken seriously by those who knew the actual military might of the newly created state.

The UN has agreed to accept any final agreement on a new name resulting from negotiations between the two countries. In their bilateral dealings a number of countries, including Russia, China, and Turkey, have been using Macedonia's constitutional name over the years. Greece's fellow EU members have complied with Greece's wishes on this issue, and the fact that the latter is a member state makes it difficult for the EU to contribute to a fair negotiation process and a compromise reached through diplomatic cooperation.

The UN-led process had dragged on for some twenty-eight years, with only rather incremental movement from the respective entrenched positions. Both countries instead unfurled well-prepared strategies for bilateral advancement and attaining third-parties' sympathy and support. The one thing, however, that was expressed on both sides was that the negotiation process – or the lack thereof – was over the name of the country that has Skopje as its capital. Many years after, the negotiations end in a "Final Agreement for the settlement of the differences as described in the United Nations Security Council Resolutions 817 (1993) and 845 (1993), the termination of the Interim Accord of 1995, and the establishment of a Strategic Partnership between the Parties."

Therefore, this agreement does not only solve the name issue of one of the countries involved, but many other things as well. Over the course, as noted, of nineteen pages it addresses state-building, challenges the notion of sovereignty, and goes much deeper still, touching upon and regulating culture, heritage, education, identity, language, and many other topics that do not belong in a document of this nature. The opposition party's (VMRODPMNE) proposed presidential candidate, Gordana Siljanovska-Davkova, comments in her opinion piece on the Prespa Agreement that: "The difference and the name negotiations have transformed into differences and negotiations in history, Macedonian identity, Macedonian language, culture and education, political and administrative system, the CONSTITUTION, civil freedoms, and human rights" (Siljanovska-Davkova 2018).

The supportive view on the deal is that for both Alexis Tsipras and Zoran Zaev it has taken political courage to get this far. "With the painstakingly negotiated Prespa Agreement, Alexis Tsipras and Zoran Zaev have brought to an end the decades-long dispute over the name of Macedonia. This success was made possible by two left-leaning governments, and the social democratic movement in Europe should use this to its advantage" (Ellereit 2019).

"Any disapproval of the way that the process was handled, with an outcome promoted as 'the best we could do under the circumstances,' or with the prerogatives of those who took upon themselves the claim of democratic legitimacy without acquiring the mandate, scope, or expertise for such negotiations were largely portrayed and undermined as nationalist – and as a discourse that belongs to the past."

Greece's main opposition leader at that time, and prime minister currently, Kyriakos Mitsotakis, denounced the deal, arguing that it amounted to Athens accepting the existence of a Macedonian language and nation. The nationalist Independent Greeks party, the junior partner in Tsipras' leftist-led coalition, pulled out of the government in protest over the agreement. The same happened with the opposition up north, too.

Supporters loyal to both prime ministers who negotiated this deal took exactly this dissatisfaction on the part of the opposition parties, the churches, and a significant group of nongovernmental organizations as a sign of success, arguing that if both sides are unhappy that means concessions were made equally and there is not only one winner. However, even a brief analysis reveals that the concessions on the Greek side are minimal and the created obligations are directed only toward the "other party." The Agreement has a demander and an implementer, who in its quest to join NATO and the EU claims that there were no other options available. "The asymmetric deal, with obligations only on the weaker side and all rights on the stronger one, reflected the power relations between the two neighbors. Consequently, the political rhetoric differed a lot: instead of a win-win situation, Tsipras overtly talked about his country/government achieving more than it could ever expect," writes Biljana Vankovska (2019: 120). She also mentions the very relevant point we should not exclude from a text that deals with this international negotiation process: the fact that while the Prespa Agreement cites many international documents in its preamble, it violates them and undermines the spirit of dialogue. "The key contradiction is in the reference to the international documents that acknowledge non-interference in the state's internal affairs and good neighborly relations, while at the same time the Agreement prescribes total restructuring and redesigning of the internal order of a sovereign state (starting with the constitution, change of the names of the state institutions, symbols, money, history, culture, trade codes, etc.)" (Vankovska 2019: 125).

The UN-led process took the form of United States-sponsored mediation, starting with that country's negotiator Cyrus Vance in the 1990s, who was later replaced by Bill Clinton's emissary Matthew Nimetz. Both of them kept the negotiation process up at the top political levels and did not manage to move the parties away from positional entrenchment for stated reasons of inflexibility. In almost three decades of mediation they had very limited success with their shuttle diplomacy, which while being effective in critical moments did not create

a constructive atmosphere of continued dialogue. It was not a surprise that the process concluded with very little support from the UN, or from any other supranational regime or organization indeed. The last round was mainly handled bilaterally, as recommended by the EU on a number of occasions.

However, some countries and their diplomats were more involved than others; this very flexible way of operating undermined the possibilities that a supranational – that is, multilateral – organized structure could provide, especially when it came to securing a framework and safeguards regarding what was even negotiable. It also deprived this last (unjustifiably bilateral) sequence of the possibility to involve expert mediators who would have been the guardians of the internationally regulating body of law, as part of attempts to identify the genuine space for possible agreement. Bilateral ambassadors and political officials have their individual interests and checklists, so they are more prone to short-term fixes in order to claim achievement while still in office. As such, they are not always willing to refute indecent proposals for the greater good and to reprimand parties for entrapment or a lack of ethics.

Consequently, the "bilateral" process was handled with ad hoc and uncoordinated foreign involvement. It was, in fact, only bilateral in appearance, and many international officials and political leaders – including Johannes Hahn, Donald Tusk, Federica Mogherini, Jens Stoltenberg, Jean Claude Juncker, Emmanuel Macron, Justin Trudeau, Theresa May, as well as the regional politicians Bojko Borisov, Edi Rama, and others, whose staff were informally involved throughout the process – congratulated the parties for what they called a "historic victory." Many of these leaders were part of the support campaign that the governments on both sides had prior to the referenda, which by parts of the population was seen as too aggressive and almost a violation of the right to vote freely and to be offered information on both pros and cons.

The campaign was one-sided, and supported by foreign officials who wanted to see closure on this process as well as to push this initiative through in the very narrow window of opportunity still available before the political balance potentially changed in Europe in mid-May 2019, when EU parliamentary elections were to be held – alongside elections in Greece (parliamentary ones in October) and Northern Macedonia (presidential ones in April, when this paper was written), which would have complicated ratification in the respective parliaments. However, political analysts think that local laws and international standards were violated in order to get to the gates of the EU and NATO, and they also note that some member states might find this problem-solving approach too shortsighted and problematic in the accession process – as they have higher expectations from a mature democracy that respects the acquis communautaire, regardless of the fact that it swallowed a bitter pill and renamed itself North Macedonia.

For numerous voters, the fact that Zaev linked the referendum on changing the country's name directly to the country's future within the EU and NATO, and even the way the question was formulated, were very problematic. The announcement that if the outcome was not satisfactory then it would be sent to parliament left constituents with a rather redundant role, as their votes meant nothing and they could easily be overruled. In addition to these prearranged safeguards (in case the demos spoilt a political deal designed to pass, and to declare the outcome a success notwithstanding any obstacles faced and resistance met with), numerous high-level political visits took place to support Zaev and his plan – something that many found to be intrusive.

> "...political analysts note that local laws and international standards were violated in order to get to the gates of the EU and NATO..."

According to Macedonian law, the two key conditions to consider a referendum successful were not met. Those are that: a majority of listed voters would come out to vote, and that the majority of those who voted did so in favor of the asked question. There was a lot of speculation about what led to the outcome of the referendum, but the numbers make it a failed attempt to acquire legitimacy through the votes of the constituency. The reasons for that are plenty and highly complex, but despite its many varying interpretations the Prespa Agreement did not ultimately obtain legitimacy from the demos. And yet it has already been implemented with unexpected vigor, including the violation of many international norms, thereby creating new practices that might be problematic later in time and in other parts of the world.

Since the referendum failed, there was no legal base for the constitutional changes in parliament. These were achieved by yet another highly suspicious process, that of changing the criminal code overnight in order to obtain the required backing of two-thirds of parliamentarians, i.e. eighty votes. The governing coalition could not acquire that number unless they found a way to persuade some parliamentarians from the opposition to acquiesce. Suddenly, eight parliamentarians (three of whom were freed from house arrest, while all of them faced serious charges in various court cases) voted for constitutional changes and in contradiction to their own statements from just a few days prior to the vote.

The way ahead may be long

The Agreement cannot be annulled but can be challenged and its implementation stalled – plans which have already been announced by many political entities in both countries. Apart from stretching far beyond the name change and dealing with identities, culture, history, education, archaeology, and similar, the Agreement is also a bitter pill that engraves local appetites and mistakes into a legally binding document that disregards long phases of history, injustices, and disrespect for human rights laws and standards. However, it is a way toward European and Euro-Atlantic integration. It is definitely not the only path to that aspired-to destination, but it was presented as such to constituents who largely failed to be fooled by a leading question in the referendum held. The difficulty with the Prespa Agreement, among others, is that it legitimizes practices that modern democratic states should not be proud of; it opens the door for continued nationalistic discourses of a prevailing and general disregard for good governance. On the other hand, it is promoted as an agreement that will close old wounds, allow for work on reconciliation, foster genuine friendship, and cultivate respect for human rights and international law.

PIN Steering Committee member Mark Anstey asked whether "a change in the nature and quality of relations between belligerents [can] be negotiated, and, if so, how do they use their power to achieve this; who does what at which stages in a conflict for effective reconciliation to occur?" (Anstey 2017: 52). To go deeper into these matters and attempt to answer this question, we would need more details on how the process unfolded,

who the driving actors were, and also what their underlying motives were. From this it would be possible to assess if this is indeed a reconciliation process, or rather one sequence in a competitive, zero-sum game. In the same book Valerie Rosoux reminds us that the critical question is not only "What happened?" but also – and above all – "What shall we do with the past?" She also notes that one of the most fundamental issues is not whether to remember or forget, but how to remember and forget in such a way as to move forward (Rosoux 2017a).

There are concerns that this agreement not only does not settle the ghosts of the recent past but might awake older ones too. It might even serve as a transgenerational affront, as grievances and humiliation on the Macedonian side will not be addressed by the proposed mechanism. The bitter taste left after the flagrant violation of democratic social structures so as to push through a badly negotiated agreement may continue to linger long in the mouth.

In order to convince the world that this is a successful instance of conflict resolution, there was a mention of Nobel Peace prize nominations for Tsipras and Zaev – a populist way of recognizing efforts to reestablish dialogue. However, better-informed analysts would simply disregard this initiative, as it is too early to claim victory and the writing on the wall does not promise a change of attitude or mindset. It appears more as just one more occasion on which the strongman was given a chance to collect the fruits of desperation handed over by the weaker party, and it will take time to weigh whether the end justified the means – and to what extent this sacrifice will be acceptable to those who refused to bestow those involved with the legitimacy to end this rushed process with short-term fixes instead of long-term visions based on cooperation and reconciliation. Future research should look into the transformation of the relationship that has occurred, and whether this evolution resulted "from a process of reciprocal adjustments in beliefs, attitudes, motivations and emotions" (Rosoux 2017b: 17). That is, whether the new relationship will use the deep change that reconciliation can offer if well-structured and paced to reach out to the majority of the population – who should then be the future carriers of attendant social change. Only then we can determine how bitter the Prespa Agreement pill really has been.

Dragan Stavljanin

Serbian journalist and reporter at Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. He is the author of radio and Internet series on frozen conflicts in the Caucasus.

The Situation in the Balkans and the Media Bedeviled and Belated Transition in Serbia

Václav Sochor,
Helena Langšádlová,
Tereza Engelová, Ida Manton
and Dragan Stavljanin
at the conference

According to Mr. Stavljanin, the situation in the Balkans is still volatile. Following the breakup of Yugoslavia and the wars of the 1990's not a single ethnic issue has yet been resolved. Every nation denies reckoning with its own past, fostering a strong sense of victimization.

The EU presence and influence

While the Balkans are technically closer to the EU, in essence there is further sliding away. The EU's influence has weakened due to the increasingly active policies of Russia and other non-Western actors. Illiberal elements of Balkan political regimes are tolerated by the EU.

At the EU summit in Thessaloniki in 2003, Balkan countries were promised EU membership upon fulfilling certain conditions. Sixteen years on, only Croatia has become an EU member. That causes rising Euroscepticism and challenges to stability in the region. Local elites are less inclined to speak about European integration as they no longer have the chance to offer their publics any spectacular success. Instead, they choose to channel public dissatisfaction by using nationalist slogans and generating tensions with their neighbors.

Situation in Serbia

Serbia was the last of the former communist countries to embark on transition following the toppling of Slobodan Milosevic in 2000. Post-Milosevic, pro-European authorities retain ambiguous attitudes towards tackling challenges.

Citizens' disappointment in the post-Milosevic era and the pro-European forces opened up a space for Aleksandar Vucic, Milosevic's information minister, to return to power in 2012. He promulgates a pro-European agenda formally but preserves old politics in practice.

The EU turns a blind eye on Vucic's democratic breaches and hopes it would be easier for Vucic, as a nationalist, to deliver on Kosovo than for liberals who risk being accused of national treason.

President Aleksandar Vucic's de-facto accumulation of power that contradicts his constitutional role: there is a deterioration in the conduct of elections and a strong inclination to undermine free press. Independent journalists are being targeted through legal harassment and smear campaigns.

Media and tabloidization of Serbian society

Part of the problem is that Serbian media are still tormented by the question of how to confront the legacy of their role during the wars in the 1990s. It hinders Serbian society in dealing with its recent past.

Media are facing serious challenges:

— Lack of independence of the media's regulatory bodies

— Non-transparent ownership

— Financially weak media outlets which struggle to stay afloat while the state serves as a key source of revenue for the media

— Politicization of media through economic influence. Opaque privatization of media led to a situation where the nouveau riche are offering services to politicians, seeking concessions in return. They use media to promote their various businesses and for pushing their own political agendas.

— Downfall of journalism as a profession. 60% of journalists remain jobless due to the global economic crisis, as well as changes in media technology itself. An average journalist's salary is just over 300 euros, lagging behind the country's overall average of 415 euros. As journalists take a "do not make waves" approach, their role very often boils down to "microphone holders".

— Quality niche reporting is still poor because all-purpose reporters or a Jack/Jane-of-all-trades-and-master-of-none type prevail.

— Rampant tabloidization od Serbian media market is a result.

— In order to stay financially afloat, the commercial media very often pander to the lowest instincts aimed at luring consumers. Tabloidization does not include only celebrities but politics in general. Strong tabloidization of Serbian society as a whole.

Influence of China in the Balkans

China is set to become the number one foreign investor in Serbia this year

Plans to build infrastructure in the Balkans as part of Chinese "one belt, one road" trade route between Asia and Europe. China offers investments not necessarily transparent and abiding by rules like in the case of the EU. Many suspect that China may exploit its economic heft for political gains.

Influence of Russia

"Russia is at work in the Balkans and we have kind of taken our eye off the area."

GEN. CURTIS SCAPARROTTI

The Balkans is central to the Russian narrative about the post-Cold War order being broken. For Vladimir Putin, Kosovo is a key part of the narrative concerning the West's humiliation of Russia by NATO air strike in 1999 against Serbia without the Security Council's approval and the recognition of Kosovo in 2008.

The Balkans is perceived as a place where Russia can take a revenge for "the West's constant efforts at undermining its international standing and security". A place where Russia can find evidence that corroborates its claim that the world is entering a post-Western moment.

The Balkans is only of secondary geostrategic importance for Russia, but Russia uses the Balkans in its global showdown with the West.

Russia's goal is to build influence in Balkan countries that are either part of Western clubs or are well on their way to joining them, and to use these countries as "door openers" for Russia or "Trojan horses" within the EU once Balkan countries join it.

This is most evident in Serbia whose population historically harbors pro-Russian sentiments. In Serbia there is a strong feeling that Russia is the only major power that supports it and Russia is also popular due to its image as a protector of conservative, traditional societal and family values.

Cultivating a narrative of the NATO bogeyman also serves Russia's purpose of keeping the Serbian armed forces dependent on it. Moscow provides "gifts" to Serbia like MIG 29, touted as donations but they come with expensive maintenance.

Serbia counts on the Russian veto in the Security Council to block the admission of Kosovo, thus opening an avenue for furthering Russian influence in Serbia. More than 80 per cent of gas to Serbia also comes from Russia.

Russian paramedia structures and organizations also play a special role of exploiting the complex Balkan situation to achieve the interests of the Kremlin. 109 Russian organizations work in Serbia, including 8 Internet portals, 16 pro-Kremlin media and 6 entirely Russian media. The Serbian edition of the Sputnik news agency was launched in 2015. Sputnik blames the Western countries for all the problems in the region. Sputnik in Serbia is widely used as an unquestionable and objective source of information that Serbian mainstream media regularly republish. Serbian president Tomislav Nikolic was even present at the celebration marking Sputnik's first anniversary.

Russian propaganda exclusively focuses on the hypocrisy and failures of the West, but it does not present an alternative. The audience in Serbia is receptive to Russian influence because the majority of people see it as "balancing the West's influence".

Propaganda and Cyber Security

Michael Myklín

Michael Myklín works for the strategic information and analysis department of the Czech National Cybersecurity Centre.

Transformation of Soviet Offline Propaganda Machine into Digital Powerhouse of Deception

The loss of ideology after the Soviet Union collapsed. Putin came to power in 1999 and surrounded himself with former KGB and Soviet Intelligence officers.

There is a growing paranoia in Russian leadership which leads to their erratic and defensive actions. The Internet has given new opportunities to Russia both offensively and defensively. We can call it a new Cold War.

It starts with Soviet legacy – Active Measures (AM: wide variety of deceptive techniques to promote Soviet foreign policy goals and to undermine those who oppose Soviet actions). AMs were used widely throughout Warsaw pact countries – a famous Czech practitioner, for example, was Ladislav Bittman. KGB ceased to exist, but AMs are still used by Russian Intel services.

Czech Information Security Services said as much in its 2008 annual report.

What are new AM tools? New Media + whole new domain – cyber

How did we get to the situation we have today?

Since 1991, Russia has gone through some radical changes. It lost its national ideology (communism) as an original source of legitimacy for the Kremlin, which somehow helped to maintain the unity of the USSR. There was nothing to replace it.

Putinism? Lacking an idea, too centered around Putin

Nationalism? Too right wing = too dangerous

Ethnic Nationalism? Too dangerous, with all the minorities

Religious Nationalism? Only 42% of Russians identify themselves as Orthodox Christians (census 2012)

Euroasianism? Too academic

Kremlin believes that lack of guiding principle/ideology makes population vulnerable to information influence. Vladimir Putin and the Siloviki – many former KGB men came with Putin.

Former security people bring and foster the atmosphere of permanent threat and enemies everywhere.

Ever-growing paranoia – nothing new in Russia

— Russia fosters this stereotype as an excuse for excessive behavior – reiterating about Mongols, Napoleon, WWI, Hitler... It is no matter that about 95% of Russian military campaigns were offensive. Paranoia is strong, though.

— Strong belief that color revolutions around the world were caused by the USA.

— Internet is being perceived as a whole new domain of warfare.

— Russians have become skilled operators in cyberspace, but they are also afraid of the subversive potential = they try to limit it as much as possible.

— Those aspects have led to the current situation = a new cold war, which is waged mostly by the tools of information warfare.

— Information warfare – Russian concept (informatsionnaya voina) – similar to the US or other western information warfare concepts, but more holistic.

— Conceptualized since mid-1990s, based on previous Soviet/Russian theories.

— Integrated by the military – Gerasimov, Kartapolov.

— Prioritization on the information warfare started after 2008, after unsatisfactory performance of Russian troops in Russo-Georgian war. In 2010 – Russian military doctrine – information warfare was embedded.

— Unlike AM, information warfare can be conducted by the military and intelligence.

— Information security doctrines – contain lots of very valuable data and provide framework for Russian Info warfare. There is an example of the 2000 doctrine.

— Chapter threats – foreshadowing Russian conduct in Estonia, Georgia and Ukraine

— Aims/objectives – foreshadow in information security laws.

— 2016 doctrine then updates, reflects new technologies.

— Russia will keep upgrading its information warfare forces and will neutralize information impact intended to erode Russian traditional values.

Lessons learned?

— Pay attention to Russian strategic documents

— Pay attention to internal discussion within Russian expert community

— Pay attention to Russian domestic politics

Conclusion

We could predict Crimea, but we could have predicted the methods that were used during the campaign and avoid the hogwash with hybrid warfare.

František Vrabel

CEO of Semantic Visions, a Prague-based data analytics and risk assessment firm whose clients include critical state institutions, leading corporations and renowned nonprofit organizations. Semantic Visions has developed and operates a ground-breaking complex Open Source Intelligence (OSINT) system, which delivers solutions for a new class of tasks like dealing with propaganda.

Data Analysis of the Russian Propaganda in the Wake of Conflicts or Elections

Semantic Visions (SV) is a data analytics and risk assessment firm based in Prague, Czech Republic. SV runs a proprietary military-grade Open Source Intelligence (OSINT) System, which is in a category of its own. Our team has over 14 years' experience in OSINT data collection and automatic understanding of textual information across the world's top 12 languages (incl. Russian, Chinese and Arabic).

SV is one of the very few organizations in the world able to see the big picture of the global online news sphere and has long-term practical experience in detecting hostile propaganda and disinformation. We deeply understand the media ecosystem and how it is being abused by adversaries, whose goal is to dismantle democracy in the West.

Semantic Visions collects and analyzes 90% of the world's online news content. Subsequently, we synthesize knowledge and actionable intelligence. In addition to risk detection, we identify trends and recognize their context.

Online media analysis harnessed to the power of Semantic Analysis, Big Data Semantics and Artificial Intelligence, provides the basis for a better understanding of reality. An indirect analysis of the world through online media Big Data affords previously unattainable insights. Our experience shows, among other things, that public opinion is basically nothing else but a mirror image of the critical mass of online media content.

There are forces in existence which aim to disrupt democracy by means of new technologies. Mastering new technologies gives them the leverage to carry out their disruptive information operations, which are aimed at dividing society, disorienting individuals and gaining control over their minds. Their ultimate goal is to dismantle democracy.

Therefore, we disagree with the definition of disinformation mentioned in the recently published "Action Plan against Disinformation" (European Commission, December 5, 2018):

"Disinformation is understood as verifiably false or misleading information that is created, presented and disseminated for economic gain or to intentionally deceive the public, and may cause public harm."

Correct definitions are critical for successful problem solving. Based on our extensive experience in this field, we have recommended that the European Commission use the following definition:

"Disinformation is false information spread deliberately to deceive. The English word disinformation is a loan translation of the Russian dezinformatsiya, derived from the title of a KGB black propaganda department." (Wikipedia and Garth Jowett; Victoria O'Donnell (2005), "What Is Propaganda, and How Does It Differ from Persuasion?", Propaganda and Persuasion, Sage Publications, pp. 21–23, ISBN 978-1-4129-0898-6).

The prevailing model is that disinformation starts on a news portal or blog, which is influenced by adversaries of democracy. This disinformation is then republished by affiliated online sources. Online social networks (or social media platforms if you like) come into play next. They perform a key role in disseminating and amplifying hostile disinformation.

"Social media platforms are a key conduit of disinformation campaigns that undermine democracies." (US Senate Report, January 10, 2018: Putin's Asymmetric Assault on Democracy in Russia and Europe: Implications for U.S. National Security)

But let us not forget, hostile propaganda and disinformation campaigns start on news portals and blogs. Therefore, SV focuses on these platforms, as early detection is critical in countering disinformation.

For that reason, we have developed and use highly sophisticated semantic categories optimized for Big Data analysis. Real-time detection based on Big Data is challenging; only those who do it know how difficult it is. By being able to successfully distinguish critical signals from irrelevant noise, we can derive knowledge from billions of reports. Given this enormous volume, the highest precision possible is imperative.

In our hands-on experience, Russia uses the following key narratives:

In uncovering Russian hostile information operations, our algorithms go after a wider spectrum of narratives than illustrated above.

Jakub Kalenský

Senior fellow at the Atlantic Council's Eurasia Center. Jakub helps to raise awareness about pro-Kremlin disinformation campaigns. Between 2015 and 2018, Mr. Kalenský worked for the European Union's East StratCom Task Force as the team lead for countering disinformation.

The Strategy and the Tactics Used by the pro-Kremlin Disinformation Campaign. Different Messages for Different Audiences.

Jakub Kalenský, Tereza Engelová and František Vrabel at the conference

The EU's East StratCom Task Force was set up by EU High Representative Federica Mogherini in 2015, in response to a request from all 28 EU Heads of Government to "address Russia's ongoing disinformation campaigns". It is a team of eleven communications and Russian language experts, who also seek to improve communication on EU policies towards the eastern neighborhood and to strengthen media plurality in the region, especially in the Russian language.

The Task Force's flagship products are its weekly Disinformation Review of pro-Kremlin disinformation stories and its social media accounts @EUvsDisinfo and EU vs Disinformation.

There is no doubt that the pro-Kremlin disinformation campaign is an orchestrated strategy, delivering the same disinformation stories in as many languages as possible, through as many channels as possible, and as often as possible. Our conclusion is based on 15 months of daily collection of data on disinformation: more than 2,500 examples in 18 languages of stories contradicting publicly available facts, multiplied in many languages and repeated on a daily basis.

This is also the conclusion of many experts in this field, such as journalists from StopFake, who regularly catalog fake news and expose how a particular piece of disinformation gets spread and multiplied via various channels and languages (see a case study of this phenomenon).

The disinformation campaign is a non-military measure for achieving political goals. Russian authorities are explicit about this, for example through the infamous Gerasimov doctrine as well as through statements by top Russian generals that the use of "false data" and "destabilizing propaganda" are legitimate tools in the tool kit. The Russian Minister of Defense describes information as "another type of armed forces". Russian journalists were awarded Presidential medals for misrepresenting events in Crimea.

The aim of this disinformation campaign is to weaken and destabilize the West, by exploiting existing divisions or creating artificial new ones. Those divisions can be on the strategic level: for example the EU versus NATO/

US (where NATO/US is frequently described as an occupying power in European countries), or differences between EU Member States (typically on the issue of Russian sanctions). They can also be on a local level, exploiting minority issues or the fear of refugees. Among the artificial divisions, a conflict between basic human rights and traditional values is often used.

Often, outright lies are deployed, aimed at denigrating a particular person, political group, government or intergovernmental organization, as well as NGOs, mainstream media, elites, experts, the "establishment", and those taking initiatives to counter disinformation.

Another strategy is to spread as many conflicting messages as possible, in order to persuade the audience that there are so many versions of events that it is impossible to find the truth. Particularly obvious examples include the clear obfuscation over the downing of flight MH17, Boris Nemtsov's assassination and the bombing of a humanitarian convoy in Syria.

What are the tools of disinformation? We do not have a complete overview, as there is still not enough systematic research. What we do know, thanks to our own Disinformation Review as well as local activities like StopFake and Kremlin Watch, is that not only big media outlets like RT or Sputnik are deployed, but also seemingly marginal sources, like fringe websites, blog sites and Facebook pages. Trolls are deployed not only to amplify disinformation messages but to bully those, like Finnish journalist Jessikka Aro, brave enough to oppose them. And the network goes wider: NGOs and "GONGOs" (government organized NGOs); Russian government representatives; and other pro-Kremlin mouthpieces in Europe, often on the far-right and far-left. In all, literally thousands of channels are used to spread pro-Kremlin disinformation, all creating an impression of seemingly independent sources confirming each other's message.

The impression we have – though again, more research is needed – is that different tools have a different degree of importance in different regions. Targeting the Russian speaking minority seems the most important tool in the Baltic states, whereas in Central Europe it seems to be the use of dozens of "alternative" websites, while trolling seems most prevalent in Scandinavia.

What is the influence of the disinformation campaign? Again, we cannot be sure, without looking inside the heads of individual citizens and voters and seeing what influenced their opinions and decisions. But a disinformation campaign, just like any other PR campaign, works overtime by building familiarity with and acceptance of its messages, through multiple channels; sowing mistrust in mainstream media, authorities, or any solid sources of information in general.

Looking ahead to 2017, both Germany and France are already warning of the threat of disinformation attacks on their elections, while several European security services have spoken openly about the threat of hostile Russian disinformation activities.

Is the disinformation campaign successful? Definitely yes. Just as the purpose of a campaign run by a car brand is not to make the consumer like their advertisement in this or that magazine, but to buy the car, similarly the purpose of a disinformation campaign is not to make consumers like the outlets but to buy the disinformation message as credible information. And many of us are buying. If we look at those few focused opinion polls measuring how many people accept an obvious disinformation planted in pro-Kremlin media, we have to conclude that the disinformation campaign is extremely successful. It's incumbent on us all to be more careful what we consume.

First day of the conference at Sněmovní 7 conference hall

Second day of the conference at the Parliament building

CONFERENCE

MAY
22-24
2019

IN PRAGUE

CZECH
REPUBLIC

Propaganda and Its Tools in Ex-Soviet Bloc:

How to Fight It