

ПОЛІТИЧНІ НАУКИ

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THE SCALE OF RUSSIAN INFORMATIONAL INFLUENCE AND COUNTERMEASURES IN THE POST-SOVIET SPACE: COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF LATVIA AND GEORGIA

Summary. The paper aims to evaluate the features and implementation channels of Russian informational influence in Georgia and Latvia. The research also intends to explore the defense mechanisms Georgia and Latvia use against Russian propaganda. Based on the qualitative research methodology, the paper investigated primary and secondary sources. In the first part of the paper, there are reviewed the main characteristics and messages of Russian informational influence. In the second part of the study, the main channels of Russian informational influence in both countries are presented. Finally, the paper examines countermeasures taken by Georgia and Latvia against Russian informational influence. The study has identified that there are some similarities in terms of characteristics and implementation channels of Russian propaganda in both countries. The research has shown that Latvian and Georgian countermeasure policies are relatively different.

Keywords: Russia, Latvia, Georgia, Informational influence, Propaganda, Counter-measures.

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МАСШТАБ РОСІЙСЬКОГО ІНФОРМАЦІЙНОГО ВПЛИВУ І КОНТРЗАХОДИ НА ПОСТРАДЯНСЬКОМУ ПРОСТОРИ: ПОРІВНЯЛЬНИЙ АНАЛІЗ ЛАТВІЇ І ГРУЗІЇ

Анотація. Метою роботи є оцінка особливостей та каналів реалізації російського інформаційного впливу в Грузії і Латвії. Дослідження також направлено на вивчення механізмів захисту, які Грузія і Латвія використовують проти російської пропаганди. На основі якісної методології дослідження досліджувалися первинні та вторинні джерела. У першій частині статті розглядаються основні характеристики та повідомлення російського інформаційного впливу. У другій частині дослідження представлені основні канали інформаційного впливу Росії в обох країнах. Нарешті, у статті розглядаються контрзаходи, які Грузія та Латвія вживають проти російського інформаційного впливу. Дослідження виявило, що існують деякі подібності з точки зору характеристик і каналів реалізації російської пропаганди в обох країнах. Дослідження показало, що контрзаходи Латвії та Грузії щодо різні.

Ключові слова: Росія, Латвія, Грузія, інформаційний вплив, пропаганда, контрзаходи.

Research. The Russian Federation's use of "Soft Power and propaganda for the purpose of realizing foreign policy objectives has become increasingly noticeable in different parts of the world" including in its neighborhood [Panchulidze, 2017]. Russia is likely to have adopted a new "form of 'hybrid warfare', reflected" in "the Gerasimov doctrine" [Monaghan, 2016]. Russian general Valery Gerasimov wrote in 2013 that "the very 'rules of war' have changed. The role of nonmilitary means of achieving political and strategic goals has grown, and, in many cases, they have exceeded the power of force of weapons in their effectiveness" [Mckew, 2017].

The annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014 had a negative impact on the Baltic States as well. These countries began facing more serious security challenges [Otskivi, 2016, pp. 6, 9]. Moreover, Russia's soft power actions remain the prevalent challenge for modern Georgian foreign policy [Khatishvili, 2018, p. 9]. Naturally, the experience of the Baltic States and Georgia which are actively troubled with Russian propaganda must be very interesting. Within the scope of this research, there is selected Latvia from the Baltic States because it is the most vulnerable to the lethal influence of Russian propaganda from them [Westbrook, 2018]. At the same time, as we see below, Latvia has quite effective countermeasures.

The nature and characteristics of Russia's non-military tactics – propaganda and disinformation in the post-Soviet space, particularly in Latvia and Georgia have been separately explored in previous studies [Otskivi, 2016; Kaprāns; Rozukalne, 2016; Avalishvili, Lomtadze & Kevkhishvili, 2016; Liberali, 2016; Kuczyńska-Zonik, 2016; Kuczyńska-Zonik, 2017; Kanashvili, 2017; Khatishvili, 2018] and articles [Civil, 2016; LSM & Re:Baltica, 2017; Kupreishvili, 2017; Westbrook, 2018; Vakhtangashvili, 2018; Goginashvili, 2018]. However, there is a lack of knowledge in a scientific area in terms of analyzing the following: What kind of informational influence does Russia have in Latvia – the EU and NATO member country, and Georgia – which aims to become the member of both organizations? How is this influence spread in these countries? And, what are their defense mechanisms against Russian informational influence?

This research is the first attempt to use comparative analysis of Georgian and Latvian cases regarding Russian informational influence and provide a more or less overall explanation of characteristics and implementation channels of Russian propaganda and counter-measures in both states.

The research intends to investigate the scale of Russian informational influence in Latvia and Georgia and their major defense mechanisms.

Therefore, the most favorable option is to divide the research in three directions and accordingly, set three research questions: What kind of features does Russian informational influence have in Latvia and Georgia? What are the channels of Russian informational influence in both states? And, what kind of countermeasures do these states oppose to Russian informational influence?

The research strategy is case study through which qualitative method, particularly document analysis is adopted. The paper is based on primary and secondary sources, i.e. previous studies linked to these issues, online journal articles, official documents, specialists' opinions, and journalistic researches.

It has been said that "while propaganda and the manipulation of the public via falsehoods is a tactic as old as the human race, ... the speed, reach and low cost of online communication plus continuously emerging innovations will magnify the threat level significantly" [Anderson & Rainie, 2017]. Propaganda presents "broad and positive" narratives "in simple and familiar language" and conceals "another side to the question". Hitler, for example, demonized the Jews as people who "sold out the German people" and stabbed them "in the back" in World War I [AHA]. The Russian propagandistic machine seems to be based on the same methods. What is worse, sometimes disinformation is covered "in a story that otherwise seems quite logical and fact-based" [Bogle, 2018]. A part of a society whose understanding of media literacy is not high might believe such disinformation easily.

Latvia and the Baltic states as a whole are the only post-Soviet republics that became the members of both the EU and NATO in 2004 [Burke, 2014]. According to the dominant paradigm of International Relations – Realism, the "self-help" remains one of the most important determinants in terms of state security in the international system [Walt, 2017]. Indeed, if the military security is guaranteed by the NATO and ensuring economic safety is attempted, these countries still have to hope for the abovementioned "self-help" in social, political, and most of all, in informational sphere [Westbrook, 2018]. The same happens in Georgia, a country which is not a member of either NATO or the European Union, especially on the background of occupied territories and Russia's ongoing creeping occupation. As the Kremlin understands well that it cannot change the "strategic priorities" of the countries which are "politically integrated into the European space, and can't turn them into a buffer zone (as Armenia and Belarus), it uses information tools for creation of internal problems" [Ibid.].

Features of Russian Informational influence in Latvia

Russia uses any kind of weakness, for example, "if society is divided into ethnic grounds", it is a fertile ground for Russia's informational campaign [Ibid.].

Latvia has 276 km border with Russia and 25.6% of Latvia's approximately 2 million population – slightly more than a quarter, are Russians [IndexMundi, 2016-2017], which is an important tool for the Kremlin. It is known that Latvia suffered most of the Soviet influence from the Baltic States, and it was also encouraged by the fact

that the Baltic Military headquarters was located in Riga [Westbrook, 2018]. Latvia has long been fighting against Russian disinformation. Mārtiņš Kaprāns, an employee of the European Policy Research Center (CEPA), has analyzed three biggest narratives proliferated by Russia against Latvia since the 1990s. The first is that Latvia "systematically discriminates against its ethnic Russians". The Second narrative suggests that "fascism is on the rise" in Latvia; And the third one is that "Latvia is a failed state" [Kaprāns]. Nowadays, Russia is using the conservative values of Russians living in Latvia, which in turn contradict the country's western liberal values. In addition, the Russian propaganda benefits from language as political leverage. In this regard, linguistic ground in Latvia is very "desirable" for Russia – most of Latvians, especially in Riga, have no problem in communicating in Russian [Westbrook, 2018].

All this is added to the promotion of anti-Western views: as Minister for Foreign Affairs of Latvia, Edgars Rinkēvičs says Russian disinformation and others types of meddling aim "to get extreme opinions clashing to undermine the fabric of Western society and institutions" [Dorell, 2018]. According to Aleksandra Kuczyńska-Zonik Russia tries to maintain "the control of society" in order to "keep the status quo" and "ensure power". She adds that "the ideological component is a key feature – opposing the EU and US informative aggression, Russia defends its values and culture which become an alternative for other countries" [Kuczyńska-Zonik, 2016, p. 46]. Except this, Russia is using conspiracy theories which are supposed to have a significant influence [LSM, 2016a].

In 2016, when NATO allocated battalions in Poland and the Baltic countries in the wake of increasing Russian threat, Russia was not only limited to protesting and activating military demonstrations but it started dissemination a new stream of disinformation in all of these countries, including Latvia. According to Ben Nimmo, senior fellow at the Atlantic Council's Digital Forensic Research Lab, this disinformation had eight main directions and suggested that the Baltic states were "Rusophobes," and NATO forces were "occupants"; That the Alliance "cannot defend the Baltic States"; that NATO supports "nazism" and "terrorism", while Russia is not a threat; In case of NATO-Russia war Baltic states will be damaged most of all and etc. [Kupreishvili, 2017].

Apart from that, Russia propagandizes the image of the desirable Russian regime for Russian minorities in the Baltic states including Latvia. Thus, these minorities "are starting to feel anxious about the countries and yearning for the Russian Federation without moving there" [Otskivi, 2016, p. 31]. It is logical, in case the scale of such aspirations grows, Latvia might get the ethnopolitical situation similar to Crimea, which can become a serious threat to state security.

Features of Russian Informational influence in Georgia

In 2017, Russia's soft power was named as a major threat to the country's security in Georgia's Strategic Defence Review document for the first time [Kanashvili, 2017]. We read in the document that "Russia's willingness to disregard internation-

al law, violate the sovereignty of its neighboring countries through open military aggression and the use of hybrid warfare, remain key challenges” [MOD, 2017-2020, p. 54].

It should be noted that, unlike Latvia, the amount of Russian population in Georgia is quite low. Russians constitute 0.7% of Georgia's 3.718 million population [MRDI, 2018-2021, pp. 24, 25]. Nevertheless, in Georgia, as in a post-Soviet state, quite a lot of people know Russian: 43% of Georgia's population knows Russian at an average level, while 24% – at a high level [NDI, 2018, p. q60]. In addition, except Russians, major ethnic minorities, i.e. Azerbaijanis and Armenians which in total comprise almost 11% of Georgia's population [MRDI, 2018-2021, p. 25], are likely to be especially vulnerable to Russian propaganda. 46% of ethnic minorities know Russian at an average level and 14% – at a high level, whereas only 26% of them know Georgian at an average level and 4% – at a high level [NDI, 2018, p. q60].

The Russian propaganda in Georgia, like Latvia, kindles anti-Western sentiments and creates negative attitudes towards Western institutions. According to Natalia Vakhtangashvili's journalistic research, three main directions of Russian propaganda can be distinguished: 1. "Creating conflict points and dividing a country" which aim to manipulate the population; 2. Transformation of domestic and foreign policy: "a reversal from the Western course" and stay "under Russian influence"; 3. "focusing on common history, faith and value" [Vakhtangashvili, 2018].

Russian disinformation agitates the potential benefits of having relations with co-religionist Russia, while the West is represented in the LGBT colors. "Especially noticeable is the spread of anti-American and anti-Turkish messages": demonizing the U.S. as "a source of global destabilization" and Turkey as a capturer of the ascendants' lands and threat for Georgia. Spreading of conspiracy theories has a distinctive place, too. The perversion of the U.S. Lugar Center for Public Health Research as a producer of biological weapons is a good example of such theories [Avalishvili, Lomtadze & Kevkhishvili, 2016, p. 10].

Russian propaganda in Georgia aims to provoke "distrust towards partners and Western institutions, disseminate "a belief that Russia is the only option in fighting against the threats". It also induces "anti-Western sentiments" and tries to "disrupt Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspiration, popularize the Kremlin's global policy and instill confusion, fear and hatred" [Khatiashvili, 2018, p. 13].

Features of Russian Informational influence in Latvia and Georgia: Comparative Analysis

Based on the comparative analysis, it can be concluded that the propaganda and disinformation used by Russia in Latvia and Georgia has a quite similar character. In both countries, Russian informational influence includes spreading the criticism of Western institutions, representing "threats," proliferation of conspiracy theories, anti-Western and pro-Russian sentiments.

Nevertheless, as we have seen, the differences in the Russian informational campaign in both countries are obvious. In Latvia focus is made on the

oppression of the Russian population and fascism's rise. In Georgia there are highlighted the importance of the normalization of relations with "co-believer neighbor"; emphasized messages against Georgia's main strategic partners – the U.S. and Turkey; In addition, in comparison with Georgia, it seems that the major target audience of propaganda in Latvia is mostly Russian population.

Implementation Channels of Russian Informational Activities in Latvia

Russia's informational influence is based on various channels and sources in Latvia. First of all, the main distributor of Russian disinformation is Russian and Russian-sponsored local media. In this respect, the Russian-language First Baltic Channel (PBK) is actively working in Latvia which has even become the most popular TV channel throughout the country in September 2016 [LSM, 2016b]. PBK has been blamed for "having ties to pro-Russian political figures" and is supposed to be pro-Russian biased [Sarlo, 2017].

According to SKDS survey, 79% of the Latvian population "gets their news and current events from television". In addition, TNS research points out that 8 out of 22 TV channels in Latvia are Russian-language – PBK (First Baltic Channel), RTR Planeta Baltija, NTV Mir Baltic, REN TV Baltic, 1BM, CTC Baltic States, TV3 +, TV5. Only two of them are based in Latvia itself: TV5 and TV3+[Rozukalne, 2016, p. 112].

It is important that 43% of Latvian population trust PBK, 35% trust RTR Rossiya, 31% trust NTV Mir Baltic and 28% trust Ren TV [Ibid.].

Whereas, 77% of Russian Latvians trust PBK, 66% trust RTR Rossiya, 61% – TV5, 55% - NTV Mir Baltic and 46% – Ren TV Baltic [Ibid.].

Generally, the most popular Russian-language TV channels in Latvia seem to be 3+ Latvia (TV3+) and PBK [Ranker]. Kremlin-funded Sputnik also operates in Latvia. However, it "remains quite unpopular" [LSM, 2018]. One of the most interesting stations of Russian informational influence in Latvia is "Segodnya", which, as it states, is "the only Russian-language daily newspaper in the EU". Its online platform functions on the site – vesti.lv. Baltic Centre for Investigative Journalism "Re:Baltica" conducted "an in-depth study on the newspaper" in 2017 and made significant results [EUvsDisinfo, 2017].

The study showed that Russian journalists working in Segodnya who have lower salaries than their Latvian counterparts do not even have a right to convey their opinions. It is even more shocking that the newspaper just dismissed one of the Russian-speaking journalists – Yelena Slyusareva, who accused Russia of aggression against Ukraine in 2014 in her publication. Elena also criticized the Russian population of Latvia, saying they were not thinking with "their own heads", were enslaved to Russian television and "closed their eyes as though they didn't understand what was happening". Crimea's annexation was met as "a happy reunification" from Segodnya [Springe, 2017]. Moreover, when the official owner of the newspaper, 23-year-old Ivan Khreskin, living in Ukraine, was enquired, he did not even know what he owned: Khreskin only mentioned that according to his information "he was the owner of some media outlet in Latvia, but that was all" [LSM & Re:Baltica, 2017]. There is an assumption that the

real owner of the non-profit newspaper is millionaire Eduard Yanakov – a former member of the Russian Duma [EUvsDisinfo, 2017].

Apart from media, a number of political parties [Parties-and-Elections-in-Europe] might be supposed as the agents of Russian informational influence and propaganda in Latvia. The most famous pro-Russian party "Harmony" even got a 19.8% victory in the parliamentary election in Latvia in October 2018 and took 23 out of 100 places in the Saeima [BBC, 2018]. The leader of the left-centrist "harmony" – Nils Ušakovs who is also Mayor of the capital, and the party's prime ministerial candidate Vyacheslav Dombrovsky are both Russians. "Harmony" broke off cooperation agreement with Putin's "United Russia" only in 2017 [Bershidsky, 2018]. Therefore, we cannot assume that the party refused to have links with the Kremlin. It should be noted that local Russians have long preferred "Harmony" over other parties because it promises them to easier get education in the Russian language and keep a close economic relationship with Russia [Ibid.]. Nevertheless, if the party does not bind a coalition, and probably it will not manage to do that, too, it will not have an opportunity to form a majority government [Aljazeera, 2018].

In Latvia, as well as in the whole Baltic, other channels of Russian propaganda are pro-Russian NGOs [Kuczyńska-Zonik, 2017]. They are financed by the Kremlin and their mission is to have an influence on the political processes, introduce anti-Western and pro-Russian sentiments. They often represent themselves as groups, who, as they claim, confront with "fascism" emerging in the Baltics. According to Re:Baltica, "there are seven major organizations receiving Russian funds" in Latvia and hundreds of thousands of Euros are flowing to them from Russia [Goble, 2015]. Online trolls are also used to destabilize Latvia's population and socio-political structures [Gerdziunas, 2017].

Implementation Channels of Russian Informational Activities in Georgia

As for the channels of implementation of Russian informational activities in Georgia, the media plays an important role in this respect.

According to the NDI research of 2018, 72% of Georgian population names television as a "main source of information for receiving news about Georgian politics and current events". 18% of the population also watches "coverage of news and current affairs on non-Georgian TV channels" and the most popular non-Georgian TV channels are: Russia Channel One (ORT), RTR and Russia 1. Ren TV and Russia 24 are also favored. As for the online media, apart from the abovementioned 72%, 18% of the surveyed names internet/Facebook as the "main source of information for receiving news about Georgian politics and current events" [NDI, 2018, pp. q49, q50, q51, q52]. Besides media, the distributors of Russian disinformation and propaganda in Georgia are also political parties that can be divided into two parts: one part is openly pro-Russian, while the second part presents itself as pro-Georgian, but in fact, they pursue politics eligible to Russia's interest. Both categories work on the spread of Euroscepticism [Avalishvili, Lomtadze, & Kevkhishvili, 2016, p. 14]. For instance, we can distinguish party "Centrists" which was dis-

missed from the 2016 Parliamentary Elections, but to everyone's surprise, because of "procedural violations," and not because of the electoral clip where the party was promising "Russian pensions" and legitimization of Russian military bases to Georgian society [Civil, 2016].

As a result of this election, 6 representatives of the "Alliance of Patriots" took place in the Parliament. The activities of this party, though, it is not openly pro-Russian, gives rise to a lot of doubts. "The parties which are loyal to Russia prefer to openly promote anti-Western propaganda or admit that Georgia's Euro-Atlantic integration is desirable but unfeasible and unrealistic", and therefore, the best option is to "have a relationship with Russia," says research conducted by "Liberal Academy Tbilisi". This study also emphasizes that there are figures in the Georgian Dream Coalition whose rhetoric does not serve the interests of Georgia, for instance, the leader of the party "Industry Will Save Georgia" – Gogi Topadze. Nino Burjanadze's party "Democratic Movement – United Georgia" is considered as the main agent of Russian influence [Liberali, 2016]. Such politicians "often visit the Kremlin," meet Russian officials and the only way to solve the problems of conflict regions they see in direct dialogue with the Kremlin." However, this approach is "doomed from them on and looks like scoring a goal in your own door" [Vakhtangashvili, 2018].

Another implementation channels of Russian informational activities and propaganda are pro-Russian NGOs, such as Gulbaat Rtskhiladze's "Eurasian Institute", which is still very active and is a partner to the "International Eurasian Movement" – the organization owned by Alexander Dugin – "the ideologist of the Russian expansionism" [Media, 2015].

"Eurasian Institute" itself founded "Young Political Scientists' Club" and "People's Movement for Russian-Georgian Dialogue and Cooperation". Rtskhiladze with Nana Devdariani is also co-founder of "Caucasian Cooperation" and Nana Devdariani established "Global Research Center" and "People's Orthodox Movement". Apart from the Eurasian Institute, the anti-Western and pro-Russian narratives are spread by Archil Chkoidze's non-governmental organization "Eurasian Choice," which has its own internet television – Patrioti TV. Chkoidze is also an administration member of the Society of Erekle II, [Avalishvili, Lomtadze, & Kevkhishvili, 2016, p. 13] which aims to promote Russian culture in Georgia and contribute to the rapprochement of Georgia and Russia [Myth-Detector].

"Ethno-nationalist organizations" like "Georgian March" are also active in Georgia [Vakhtangashvili, 2018]. Unfortunately, instead of making an accent on a real enemy, such unions are believed to be creating the enemy icon of all the people (Turks, Iranians...) who are not or at least at this stage are not dangerous at all, and as a result, they seem to be doing the Russian work. In addition, organizations like "Samegrelo" (which is financed by a businessman Aleksandre Chachia who is "close to Putin") promote separatism [Ibid.]. Except all these, internet trolleys are actively being used in Georgia and the aforementioned disinformation about Lugar Laboratory is a good example of this [Goginashvili, 2018].

Comparative Analysis of Implementation Channels of Russian informational activities on the example of Latvia and Georgia

The similarity has been seen between the propaganda spread channels, too. In both countries, media outlets, political parties, NGOs and trolleys are spreading anti-Western attitudes and pro-Russian narratives. It is noteworthy that different media outlets are dominant in Latvia and Georgia. It is also clear that in terms of Russian and pro-Russian media popularity and in the wake of pro-Russian party's victory in elections, Latvia faces greater Russian influence. However, if the influence and authority of pro-Russian orientation politicians in Georgia are very low, the issue of Russian media and occupied territories are very acute and the agenda of the organizations like "Georgian March" and "Samegrelo" is alarming.

Latvia's Countermeasures against Russian Informational Campaign

It is interesting to know what kind of countermeasures Latvia uses towards Russian informational campaign. First of all, although Latvia "rejects" conscription, the country conducts the concept of "total/comprehensive defense" and draws attention to the role of the population in strengthening national security [Nikers, 2017].

According to Alexandra Sarlo "The main techniques Baltic states have used to counter disinformation from Russian media sources involve fining or suspending channels that display overt biases." In only 2014 Latvia fined three times and in 2015 again fined (with less than \$5000 each time) Baltic First Channel (PBK). In 2014 Latvia also "temporarily suspended" RTR Planeta "for alleged incitement to war" [Sarlo, 2017]. Latvia's broadcast authority, the National Electronic Mass Media Council banned the Rossiya RTR for six months in 2016. In the same year "Latvia's domain registrar shut down the Latvian domain name(.lv)" [LSM, 2018].

In the article wrote by Russkiy Mir in 2018 we read that "The Latvian authorities keep looking for ways to banish the Russian mass media and to strengthen media environment of the Republic" and "besides, the National Media Council is to broaden its functions to be able to block some internet resources spreading illegal TV content" [RusskiyMir, 2018].

Meduza, an independent online platform which is operating in Russian has been given "a space for the work". Meduza was "founded by journalists fired from Russian news site Lenta.ru over their coverage of the war in Ukraine" [Sarlo, 2017]. Edgars Rinkēvičs admits that Russian journalists who left Russia and established their own media outlets in Latvia are helpful in the fight against Russian propaganda [Schearf, 2017]. We read in Meduza's about page that it brings "the most important news and feature stories from hundreds of sources in Russia and across the former Soviet Union" [Meduza]. Meduza's tactics include using humor "to point out absurd politics and alleged corruption" Meduza has also created many online games on its website. In one of them, players can compete with Dmitry Medvedev in terms of buying more shoes and shirts. The game responds to the "investigation of alleged corruption linked to Medvedev" which "started by tracing who paid for a pair of Medvedev's sneakers and ended asking the same

question about a massive villa estate in Tuscany" that is claimed to be Medvedev's [Schearf, 2017].

In addition to this, a multinational international organization – NATO Strategic Communications Center of Excellence, founded in Riga in 2014, "contributes to improved strategic communications capabilities within the Alliance and Allied nations" [StratCom]. The NATO Stratcom COE "identifies – and seeks ways to counter – Moscow-manufactured narratives against the Latvian government and society" [Schultz, 2017].

Re:Baltica employee Sanita Yamburg notes that her colleague, founder and director of the Baltic Centre for Investigative Journalism (Re:Baltica), Inga Springe plans to create a virtual editorial for journalists and public activists on the basis of the experience obtained in the United States. The editorial will analyze who disseminates information in the media space and then this data will be handed over to Latvian media participating in the initiative: "we will communicate their findings to them, and they will be able to develop them" [Codziennic, 2018]. It is clear that the role of the organizations like Re:Baltica and journalistic researches some of which have been used in this paper are important, too.

Georgia's Countermeasures against Russian Informational Campaign

It is interesting to explore the countermeasures Georgia uses against Russian informational campaign.

According to Georgia's Strategic Defence Review: "Effective defence planning must be based on the "Total Defence" approach, which implies ensuring the defence of the entire territory with full national efforts, using both military and civilian resources" [MOD, 2017-2020, p. 48]. Nonetheless, as Georgian journalist Vakhtangashvili notes, "unfortunately, the Georgian government ... has not taken any effective step yet and there has not been any strategic change concerning fighting against Russian propaganda at the legislative level" [Vakhtangashvili, 2018]. However, meetings are held with western partners and Georgian side tries to share their experiences. A researcher of Atlantic Council – Ariel Cohen suggests that "the implementation of the overall government approach and relevant legislation, conducting regular inter-agency training, as well as public information and psychological sustainability are important for implementing the total defence concept in practice" [MOD, 2018].

Former President of Georgia Mikheil Saakashvili created a Russian-language channel "PIK", which has not been broadcasting since 2013 [Tsiklauri, 2012]. In my opinion, the termination of its financing was a non-profit move, as the channel was bringing information to the ethnic minorities who know poorly or do not know at all Georgian. Since then, the only alternative to the Kremlin-funded Russian-language channels was lost.

Another example of the fighting against Russian propaganda is the prohibition of Broadcasting of Georgian LLC "R.B.J" for "violation of regulation rules" and fining it with 2500 GEL by Georgian National Communications Commission (GNCC) in 2015. "R.B.J" had been retransmitting OPT in Georgia [Diasamidze, 2016].

To my mind, the role of the Information Center on NATO and EU, FactCheck, Media Development Fund, Netgazeti, Institute for Development

of Freedom of Information (IDFI), and many other organizations, journalists and individuals is likely to be the highest in tackling with Russian propaganda and disinformation.

Comparative Analysis of Countermeasures Taken by Latvia and Georgia against Russian Informational Campaign

If there were some similarities between the characteristics and channels of Russian informational activities in Latvia and Georgia, in terms of the countermeasures there are more differences among these countries. It seems that Latvia focuses more on limiting pro-Russian media outlets, does not evade from temporarily blocking them and cooperates with the NATO Strategic Communications Center of Excellence. It is also planned to introduce a new online platform for journalists and public activists. It should be noted that "Meduza" effectively works in Latvia, and a partial reason for that might be the abovementioned "humorous approach", while "PIK" in Georgia failed. The policy of restricting Russian channels here seems to have less priority. The main locomotives of fighting against Russian propaganda seem to be still non-governmental organizations, journalists and individuals in Georgia, whereas the legislative base for the "Total Defence" has not yet been prepared.

Conclusion. The research has shown that Russian informational activities in Latvia and Georgia are aimed to disseminate anti-Western and pro-Russian attitudes, belittle Western institutions and create fears and conspiracy theories. As for the differences, Russian propaganda in Latvia is focusing more on the oppression of Russians, the rise of fascism, while in Georgia it stresses on common re-

ligious values and makes enemy icons of strategic partners.

The channels of Russian informational activities are generally similar in both countries as they include media outlets, political parties, NGOs and trolleys. However, the situation in Latvia because of Russian-language media popularity and the success of "Harmony" seems to be harder. On the other hand, Russian media and different pro-Russian organizations have a negative role in Georgia's informational security.

Research has shown that Latvia is using broader endeavor and tools against Russian propaganda than Georgia. However, NGOs and other actors still contribute a lot to fighting Russian disinformation in the latter.

In conclusion, analyzing the Russian informational campaign's characteristics and implementation channels, as well as countermeasures used by Latvia and Georgia, clearly showed that Russia is pursuing a purposeful hybrid war against both countries, for which it neither spares resources nor avoids violations. Although the content of the informational influence differs between the countries considering the target audience and the socio-political situation, in both cases the goal is the same: weakening society, dismantling independent political institutions and dissemination anti-Western and pro-Russian attitudes through disinformation, lies, and manipulation. However, Latvia and Georgia struggle to deal with all these and work hard to improve methods in order to fight more and more effectively. In the end, it is clear that the issue of Russian informational influence and countermeasures in both countries is quite serious and might change from time to time.

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