



# **RESISTING FOREIGN STATE PROPAGANDA IN THE NEW INFORMATION ENVIRONMENT: THE CASE OF THE EU, RUSSIA, AND THE EASTERN PARTNERSHIP COUNTRIES**



ISBN 978-9934-8536-9-2

UDK 32.019.5  
Re708

This publication is a part of the project “Resisting state propaganda in the new information environment: The case of EU member states and EU Eastern Partnership states vis-à-vis the Russian Federation publication/research” organised by the Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS) with the support of Brīvības un Solidaritātes Fonds (BSF).

This book is produced with the financial support of the European Parliament.

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COUNTRIES**

FOUNDATION FOR EUROPEAN  
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D'ÉTUDES PROGRESSISTES



BRĪVĪBAS UN SOLIDARITĀTES FONDS

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## FOREWORD



**Dr. Ernst Stetter**, Secretary General,  
*Foundation for European  
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The specifics and tactics of propaganda have always been the subject of intense examination among experts and policymakers alike, both as theoretical concept and actionable practice. Much like a fight on a battlefield, the battle for hearts and minds has also been tremendously important and consequential on numerous occasions. A country's stature in the world, the outcome of a war, a government's longevity, and an action's legitimacy have often been good examples of when politics are dependent on the effective or ineffective employment of biased communication strategies and tactics.

Given the powerful impact propaganda has in bending subjectivity, enhancing inaccuracy, and distorting reality

has given rise to a toolkit for countering adversarial misinformation campaigns of equal importance. In today's fiercely contested information environment, whereby rapid technological advancements and an exponential multiplication of news sources have rendered old message manipulation techniques almost obsolete, the rules for how to use propaganda and how to protect ourselves from it have evolved considerably.

Indeed, in an era where having a smartphone can render anyone a media aggregator and a media broadcaster, it follows that the proliferation of methods and platforms through which misinformation campaigns can affect a country's public sphere have upgraded hostile propaganda to a technique that has much greater potential to do damage. Using this new information machinery and the sprawling misinformation networks it inhabits, hostile propaganda can now more easily succeed in blocking, filtering, altering, or misrepresenting information. What's more, because it is far less reliant on indoctrinating people, this new genre of propaganda can be much more efficient in blurring the boundaries between fact and fiction, and preventing people from understanding what is actually happening.

In those cases where information warfare is conducted between democratic states and illiberal democratic states, or states with authoritarian tendencies, the negative repercussions of propaganda are not constrained to promoting or demoting certain views, perceptions, or agendas. They also extend to subverting the value system—freedom of expression, media freedom, respect for pluralism, and political accountability—that forms an integral part of democracies and democratic institutions.

Through a collection of important articles, this book unfolds an interesting analysis of these rapidly emerging themes in the *problematique* of modern propaganda. It

does so by primarily looking at how the European Union (EU) and some of its member states have acted to resist foreign propaganda efforts, and in so doing, tried to protect their democratic ethos and values.

To inform this discussion with additional specificity, a number of information initiatives undertaken by the Russian Federation towards the Baltic EU member states and some of the Eastern Neighbourhood states are used as an illustrative example. Indeed, within the newly emergent information environment of the past decade, and in parallel to a series of critical negative trends in Russian domestic politics, Russia has increasingly engaged in the systematic use of a wide range of non-military tools so as to influence both the perception and the behaviour of the inhabitants of many countries. This new, resource-intensive mode of disinformation, information manipulation, and media propaganda strategies have been most acutely exhibited during the 2014-15 conflict in Ukraine, but, as shown at various points in this publication, concerns a much wider number of countries as well.

Modern Russian information operations draw on tactics and strategies employed during the past decades, but make full use of the aforementioned and available new toolkit—Radio, TV, newspapers, print, and digital commentary, as well as the internet as a whole, have all been used to influence the public sphere of neighbouring countries. This has been a high-stakes operation, with a long-term strategic rationale behind it, aimed at justifying Russian interests and strengthening pro-Moscow sentiments in the region.

By reviewing policy responses against these and similar propaganda efforts, both at EU level and within various national contexts, this book provides an in-depth overview of the challenges and opportunities that exist in defending core democratic values from hostile

propaganda campaigns in our digital age. It also touches upon the methodology and the impact that these campaigns have had, not only on promoting or demoting certain information, but also on reinforcing certain messages and imagery, and ultimately on undermining the democratic foundations and *modus operandi* of each the countries under examination.

Yet, the ensuing analysis throughout the chapters of this book is not intended merely to assess policy responses vis-à-vis the situation on the ground. It is also crucially interested in discussing and proposing policy recommendations as to how the EU as a whole, and individual state in particular, can increase their efficacy in countering external attempts to influence their media space and undermine their democratic customs and processes. These recommendations concern the need for patient, tolerant, forward-leaning policy answers, as for example the highly significant and meticulous study on improving media literacy in Latvia reveals. The continuing tensions between Russia and the EU illustrate this need even further, but the polemic situation on the ground shows the necessity for continued critical engagement and dialogue with the Russian Federation equally powerfully, so as to ensure that we can make the most of our mutual interests without compromising the European standards and values that underwrite the Union and its relations with the world.

As a closing note, it is worth underlining that the book in your hands constitutes the end result of long and copious research on the subjects under examination. It also stands as a testament to the meaningful relationship between the Foundation for European Progressive Studies and the Freedom and Solidarity Foundation, without which this book would not have been possible. Especially at this time, when the EU finds itself in a complex

situation, this book can aid our shared understanding of the intensity and extensity of the problem at hand, and of the need for robust progressive responses.





## FOREWORD



**Ervins Labanovskis**  
*Director, Freedom and  
Solidarity Foundation*

Democracies are facing one of the biggest challenges to their security and fundamental values since the Second World War. Although NATO militarily ensures the safety of the great proponents of democratic and liberal values—the European Union and the United States, a different kind of war has been fought on another front for some time now. The new battlefield is the world of media and information. With well-organised and far-reaching weapons of information Russia has succeeded in sowing doubt about the need for democratic values and is therefore also undermining faith in democratic countries, weakening it. Russia government uses lies, concealment, and the manipulation of anything that can serve their

purpose—to turn citizens toward the ‘preferred’ direction. We are now faced with new and cunning forms of propaganda; a go-to source of information may turn out to be a false news outlet or a false Facebook ‘friend’. In the new information age, where borders between media fact and fiction are blurred, agents of propaganda seek to access citizens with messages presented in formats that discourage critical thinking. The main objectives of such attacks are to undermine democratic values—tolerance, minority rights, freedom of expression, the rule of law, and also loyalty to one’s country. In this war, democratic states are faced with unprecedented difficulties; in order to protect themselves they cannot fight the enemy using the same weapons the enemy uses, because then democracy would be no different than authoritarian rule. Democracies must choose mechanisms to counter hostile propaganda that comply with the rule of law and our fundamental values. This is difficult, but not impossible. In this publication, we have collected a number of expert opinions on what national governments, the EU, relevant institutions, and the media can do to win this war for the hearts and minds of the people.

PART I

**INCREASING  
RESISTANCE  
TO PROPAGANDA  
WITHIN THE EU**



## COUNTERING PROPAGANDA IN EUROPE: RESPONSES AND OPTIONS



**Ben Nimmo,**  
*Senior Fellow,  
The Institute for Statecraft*

The period since the Russian annexation of Crimea in March 2014 has seen a rapid growth in awareness of the danger of disinformation in Europe.

In the words of Dunja Mijatović, Representative on Freedom of the Media for the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, 'In the context of the conflict in and around Ukraine, propaganda, counter-propaganda, information wars and hybrid wars are terms that have become part of our daily discourse'.<sup>1</sup>

In the two years since the Crimean annexation, governments, international institutions and non-governmental actors have launched a variety of projects aimed at analysing and countering such disinformation.

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<sup>1</sup> *Propaganda and Freedom of the Media*, non-paper of the OSCE Office of the Representative on Freedom of the Media, Vienna 2015, p. 5.



The purpose of this paper is to provide a brief overview of the main projects that have been launched or proposed to respond to the disinformation, and to discuss the options for further work.

It is based on the concept that the best defence against disinformation is information: that is, that disinformation is least effective in countries and communities that have access to a range of independent news and information sources.<sup>2</sup> Counter-measures should therefore focus on enhancing the public's access to accurate and balanced information.

The paper examines the range of actors already tackling disinformation by various means. It argues that further initiatives should aim to complement such existing projects, and should be scalable, affordable, and credible.

In particular, the international institutions should leverage their ability to coordinate and pool national efforts, especially when it comes to generating Russian-language TV content. National governments should look to support independent analysis and projects which expose disinformation, rather than engaging in counter-messaging. They should also consider making time series satellite imagery available, as a resource for researchers. Non-governmental actors should seek to expand their current networks, and work with the public and the media on educational programmes designed to raise awareness of disinformation and its techniques.

### **Current responses: the international organisations**

On the level of the international organisations, both NATO and the European Union have launched relatively small-scale, low-budget initiatives to tackle the challenge

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<sup>2</sup> This argument is based on the author's earlier paper, *The case for information defence*, Legatum Institute, September 2015 See <http://www.li.com/activities/publications/information-at-war-from-china-s-three-war-fares-to-nato-s-narratives>

of disinformation. Chronologically speaking, NATO was the first to do so, with its web page on 'NATO-Russia relations: the facts'.<sup>3</sup>

The strengths of this portal are the relative speed with which it was created—in mid-2014—and its simplicity. It lists 32 of the most common allegations made by Russian officials and media against NATO, and provides the NATO response in English, French, Russian, and Ukrainian. However, as it primarily deals with NATO-Russia relations in the strict sense, rather than individual cases of disinformation affecting individual member states, it challenges only a small segment of the overall spectrum of disinformation. It is also an essentially passive resource: it is featured on the NATO homepage, but is not routinely advertised to media and the public by other channels. It is managed by the NATO press office, but does not have a dedicated staff allocated to it.

The EU's East StratCom Team, by contrast, does have a small staff. As such, it is more active, and deals with a broader spectrum of disinformation. This group was created within the External Action Service by mandate of the European Council, and it has three purposes: to explain EU policies in the Eastern Partnership countries (Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan), to support journalism and civil society, and to expose disinformation.<sup>4</sup>

It carries out the latter task with two weekly bulletins: a Disinformation Review every Tuesday, collecting cases of disinformation submitted by observers across the EU, and a Disinformation Digest every Friday, identifying key

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<sup>3</sup> *NATO-Russia relations: the facts*, last updated December 2015, [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_111767.htm?](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_111767.htm?)

For full disclosure, the author of this paper worked as a NATO press officer until September 2014, and contributed to the original entries.

<sup>4</sup> The Council conclusions are online at <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2015/03/conclusions-russia-ukraine-europe-an-council-march-2015/>; the team's terms of reference, at <http://eap-csf.eu/assets/files/Action%20Plan.pdf>

trends. These are distributed to subscribers via email and Twitter. Established in September 2015, the initiative has already gained a significant following, with almost 7,000 Twitter followers by mid-May 2016.

However, its scale and scope appear inadequate to the challenge presented by the sheer volume of disinformation in the European space. The East StratCom Team as a whole is 'budget neutral', which means, in effect, that its desk officers are all paid for by their home governments, rather than the EU itself. Moreover, the fact that countering disinformation is the third of its tasks means that only two staff members have been allocated to it. They therefore rely on a network of voluntary monitors across Europe to provide them with material, and a gap in the pattern of volunteers quickly translates into a gap in knowledge.

It is unclear why the EAS has hitherto committed so few resources to the issue, when the European Council of 19 March 2015 'stressed the need to challenge Russia's ongoing disinformation campaigns'. The disinformation reviews and digests are a successful measure; providing them with sufficient funding to expand and systematise their work seems an overdue step.

The European Parliament has been slower to take action, although the legislature approved a resolution in June 2015 calling on the European Commission to ' earmark without delay adequate funding for concrete projects aimed at countering Russian propaganda and misinformation within the EU and abroad'.<sup>5</sup> However, recent indications are that it is seeking a more active role. On 19 April this year, the parliament's foreign affairs committee held a hearing on 'EU strategic communication to counter propaganda against it by third parties', and its

<sup>5</sup> The text is online at <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P8-TA-2015-0225+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN>

rapporteur, former Polish foreign minister Anna Fotyga, is preparing a series of recommendations to the Parliament. A draft posted online by the Parliament in mid-May included calls for the East StratCom Team to be properly funded, and for funding to be made available for independent media, among other issues.<sup>6</sup>

However, what action may follow is, as yet, unclear. Eight days after the hearing, Finnish Green MEP Heidi Hautala hosted the screening in the Parliament of a Russian film alleging that lawyer Sergei Magnitsky, who died in Russian custody in 2009, was a criminal. The event was attended by two Russian officials who are on a parliamentary list that calls for them to be sanctioned.<sup>7</sup> The screening was cancelled at the eleventh hour, and was subsequently condemned by a number of other party leaders,<sup>8</sup> but the scandal indicates the problems the Parliament faces in coming to an agreed position.

## National responses

On a national level, responses have been widely varied. Estonia, for example, established in September 2015 a national Russian-language TV station that broadcasts local news to local Russian-speaking populations. This initiative is designed to answer the lack of news programming in Russian, which is not controlled by the Kremlin; as such, it merits close attention. Initial indications are that the channel has not captured a wide audience, but

<sup>6</sup> The draft can be viewed online at <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-%2f%2fEP%2f%2fNONSGML%2bCOM-PARL%2bPE-582.060%2b02%2bDOC%2bPDF%2bV0%2f%2fEN>

<sup>7</sup> *MEPs dragged into Russia film row*, POLITICO, 29 April 2016, <http://www.politico.eu/article/meps-dragged-into-russia-film-row-lawyer-whistleblower-sergei-magnitsky-act-andrei-nekrasov-documentary/>

<sup>8</sup> *Protest against Kremlin propaganda*, Alliance for Liberals and Democrats in Europe Group, 2 May 2016, <http://www.alde.eu/nc/press/press-and-release-news/press-release/article/protest-against-kremlin-propaganda-47150/>

is a first step into an information space, which is, at present, uncontested.

The question of TV content is central to the debate. Russian-language TV is overwhelmingly dominated by the Russian government; it is the primary source of information for the tens of thousands of Russian-speakers living in the EU. At the same time, challenging the current situation will require significant investment not just in news, but in content more generally. The European Endowment for Democracy argued in June 2015 that EU states should create a joint ‘content factory’;<sup>9</sup> a number of nations, including the Netherlands and Poland, have offered to support a Russian-language ‘news exchange’ within this context.<sup>10</sup>

Such plans are both complex and costly. A number of other countries have therefore taken a lower-budget approach. Latvia, for example, announced at the end of March that it was revoking the internet registration of the Latvian-language edition of disinformation channel *Sputnik*, after the foreign ministry reportedly argued that the outlet was managed by Dmitry Kiselyov, sanctioned by the EU as the ‘central figure of the government propaganda supporting the deployment of Russian forces in Ukraine’. The result was an end to *Sputnik*’s registration in the .lv domain. A week later, on 7 April, the national telecom regulator announced that it had ordered a six-month ban on Russian TV station *RTR Planeta*, following what it judged to be violations of the broadcasting code’s restrictions on hate speech and incitement to conflict.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> *Bringing Plurality & Balance to Russian Language Media - Final Recommendations*, European Endowment for Democracy, 25, June, 2015, <https://www.democracyendowment.eu/news/bringing-plurality-1/>

<sup>10</sup> *Russian-language news exchange supports independent media*, Free Press Unlimited, <https://www.freepressunlimited.org/en/projects/russian-language-news-exchange-supports-independent-media>

<sup>11</sup> *Par programmas “Rossija RTR” izplatīšanas ierobežošanu Latvijas*

It is worth considering these two actions, as they represent two distinct responses to disinformation. The decision to block *Sputnik Latvia*’s .lv domain proved ineffective: the portal very quickly established a .com domain address, and kept producing its content. Legally speaking, it appears to have been based on somewhat tenuous grounds, as *Sputnik* itself is not on the EU sanctions list. It also provoked a response from Mijatović, who announced that she was ‘concerned that the actions by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs might set a dangerous precedent in a take-down policy related to media websites in Latvia’.<sup>12</sup> As such, it neither achieved its presumed goal of blocking the Latvian-language site, nor garnered international support.

The decision to block *RTR Planeta*, on the contrary, was based on clear legal grounds and on publicly available evidence, including transcripts of the exact phrases that were ruled to constitute hate speech and incitement. Other than a predictable accusation of censorship from the Russian government, the move appears to have passed without a significant international response. As such, it appears to have been more effective, and less controversial.

In the UK, the national communications regulator, Ofcom, has also been invoked as a response to Russian disinformation—in this case, by TV viewers. Ofcom is an unusual institution among European regulators, because its broadcasting standards go beyond a general prohibition of hate speech and incitement to violence, and include an obligation to ensure ‘due impartiality’ in reporting on politically sensitive issues. ‘Due impartiality’

*teritorijā*, Latvijas Vēstnesis, 7 April, 2016, <https://www.vestnesis.lv/op/2016/69.10?search=on>

<sup>12</sup> *OSCE Representative concerned about precedent in take-down policy related to media websites in Latvia*, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, 31 March 2016, <http://www.osce.org/fom/230866>

is a flexible term, but in essence obliges broadcasters to demonstrate that they have made an effort to represent both sides in any debate. Violations can be met with a reprimand, a fine or, in extreme cases, a broadcast ban.<sup>13</sup>

In September 2015, following complaints from viewers, Ofcom ruled that the Russian state-owned broadcaster *RT* had committed a 'serious violation' of the due impartiality code in three separate reports on the fighting in Ukraine.<sup>14</sup> The sanction it imposed was symbolic rather than practical; however, the regulator announced on 25 April 2016 that it was investigating one of *RT*'s talk shows, *Going Underground*, for possible breaches of the code.<sup>15</sup> No information on the nature of the complaint is available. At the time of writing, the investigation was still ongoing; however, it merits attention, as a possible indication of the extent to which genuinely open media markets can tackle disinformation themselves.

Germany has taken a different approach again. According to a report in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* in April 2016, the government ordered intelligence agencies to investigate whether the Russian government was attempting to destabilise Germany.<sup>16</sup> The immediate trigger was the so-called 'Lisa' case, in which case Russian media and the Russian foreign ministry reported and commented on

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<sup>13</sup> Licence revocations by Ofcom have been rare, and have generally concerned breaches of advertising standards or administrative rules. An exception is Iran's Press TV, whose licence was revoked in January 2012 after Ofcom ruled that its London bureau, which held the licence, did not have editorial control of its content.

<sup>14</sup> The bulletin announcing Ofcom's finding can be accessed via <http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/enforcement/broadcast-bulletins/obb288/>

<sup>15</sup> The announcement was included in the fortnightly bulletin, page 79: [http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/binaries/enforcement/broadcast-bulletins/obb303/Issue\\_303.pdf](http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/binaries/enforcement/broadcast-bulletins/obb303/Issue_303.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> *Aufklärung nach Moskauer Art*, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 18 February 2016, <http://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/2.220/russland-aufklaerung-nach-moskauer-art-1.2869744>

the alleged gang-rape of an ethnic Russian girl in Germany by Muslim immigrants, even after the German police had identified the story as a hoax. At the time of writing, however, no report had been published on the outcome of the probe.

## Non-governmental projects

Where governments have largely been slow to act, the non-governmental sector has stepped in. A large number of initiatives have been launched across Europe, aimed at identifying, quantifying, analysing, and countering disinformation.

One of the first of these, and still one of the most influential, is the website *StopFake.org*, which was set up in Ukraine on 2 March 2014, immediately after the Russian occupation of Crimea. Founded by journalism professor Yevhen Fedchenko and colleagues, the website is non-partisan and says that it does not accept Ukrainian government funding. It focuses its efforts on exposing faked news, whatever its source, and explaining the nature and origin of the fake.

*StopFake* serves three purposes in the information space. First, it debunks individual cases of disinformation: for example, on 13 May 2016 it analysed a report in Russian state newspaper *Rossiiskaya Gazeta*, which claimed that the Washington Post had called for an end to foreign aid to Ukraine, and demonstrated that the report actually quoted a blog linked to the newspaper which identified a freeze on aid as one option open to donors.<sup>17</sup> Second, it serves as an archive of disinformation cases, which can be used to develop further analysis. Third, it offers online advice on how to identify and

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<sup>17</sup> *Fake: Washington Post Calls for Ukraine Aid Cut*, *StopFake.org*, 13 May 2016, <http://www.stopfake.org/en/fake-washington-post-calls-for-ukraine-aid-cut/>



expose fakes, thereby helping expand the pool of voluntary observers who can contribute material.

Another early and successful web-based project is run by the BellingCat group of investigative journalists (bellingcat.com). This is an atypical project, in the sense that it is not focused on combating disinformation directly, but rather on identifying genuine information available online from social-media sources. It initially focused on the Syrian conflict, but turned its attention to Ukraine in the wake of the Russian intervention.

The value of the BellingCat project has been its ability to identify and publish primary evidence on key issues, including the use of chemical weapons in Syria and the presence of Russian troops in Ukraine. For example, on May 3 this year the group published a series of images gathered from social media which appeared to allow a positive identification of the Russian BUK missile launcher suspected of having shot down Malaysian Airlines flight MH-17. The detailed post listed seven identifying features of the vehicle in question, and included the original photos allowing readers to verify the investigators' conclusions.<sup>18</sup>

A number of think tanks have also launched counter-disinformation initiatives. For example, the Washington-based Center for European Policy Analysis has begun publishing weekly reviews of disinformation in the Baltic States and Poland;<sup>19</sup> the European Values think tank in Prague publishes a weekly 'Kremlin Watch' of developments on and in the information space;<sup>20</sup> the Institute for Statecraft in London has commissioned a series of papers on aspects of Russian influence and

<sup>18</sup> *The Lost Digit: Buk 3x2*, BellingCat, 3 May 2016, [https://www.bellingcat.com/news/uk-and-europe/2016/05/03/the\\_lost\\_digit/](https://www.bellingcat.com/news/uk-and-europe/2016/05/03/the_lost_digit/)

<sup>19</sup> Information Warfare Initiative, Center for European Policy Analysis, <http://infowar.cepa.org/index/>

<sup>20</sup> Kremlin Watch, European Values, <http://www.europeanvalues.net>

disinformation;<sup>21</sup> and the International Republican Institute has launched a project called 'Beacon' to analyse patterns of Russian influence, including through disinformation.<sup>22</sup>

Like StopFake, these initiatives perform three main functions: they identify individual cases of disinformation, they provide a time series of such cases, and they contribute to a broader awareness of the problem of disinformation. It is, however, too early to judge their effect. Most of these initiatives began in early 2016, and the results of their work are not yet clear.

## Responses and recommendations

These cases show that the response to Russia's disinformation has been haphazard, local, and un-coordinated. A number of the initiatives appear to overlap, such as the various disinformation reviews published by the EEAS and NGOs; others have the potential to do so, such as the various efforts to create appealing Russian-language TV content and news.

This diversity is generally a positive factor, in that the various projects and initiatives tend to be mutually reinforcing rather than contradictory. However, it carries the risk of a dilution of effort, which could be damaging, especially to high-cost projects such as the creation of a Russian-language TV 'content factory'.

It is therefore important that any future projects—both governmental and non-governmental—are designed to be **complementary, scalable, affordable, and credible**. They should be crafted to work with current projects, rather than duplicating them; they should be

<sup>21</sup> The Institute for Statecraft, <http://www.statecraft.org.uk/statecraft-papers>

<sup>22</sup> *Beacon*, International Republican Institute, <http://www.iri.org/web-story/beacon-project-hosts-second-transatlantic-roundtable-looking-russia's-soft-power-campaign>

capable of beginning operations with minimal staff and funding, so that they do not represent too great an ask for potential sponsors; they should take into account existing financial constraints; and they should establish systems of governance that are sufficiently robust that they cannot credibly be accused of committing disinformation themselves.

With those principles in mind, there are a number of initiatives that **international institutions** could usefully take to strengthen the overall effort against disinformation.

One area in which international coordination is highly desirable is the creation of Russian-language TV content, to challenge the Kremlin's current monopoly on information in the Russian-language space. This is because the issue of Russian-language information is common to a number of EU states, and because the cost of creating TV content capable of competing with big-budget Russian productions would be in the millions of euros.

However, it should be remembered that Europe is home to thousands of TV production companies, and millions of Russian speakers. Thus it should not be necessary to create from scratch a stand-alone broadcasting facility; rather, governments and the international organisations should encourage existing companies to produce Russian-language content.

The EU should therefore consider establishing a trust fund for Russian-language TV content. The trust fund would pool contributions from interested countries, and make funding available to producers of Russian-language content through a bidding process. EU institutions could also offer funding from the EU budget. Taken together, the various national funding streams would be able to generate more content than any one national contribution could alone.

There are other steps, which the EU should take rapidly. First, it should allocate meaningful funding to the

East StratCom team, and establish a parallel South StratCom team to analyse disinformation issues from states and non-state actors to the EU's south, especially Da'esh. This is a decision which could be taken rapidly and implemented quickly, and would serve to strengthen the flow of knowledge on disinformation issues. The credibility of the teams could be ensured by mandating them to focus on incoming disinformation, rather than on communicating EU policies.

Second, both the EU and NATO should establish disinformation working groups of member states to share knowledge, identify common themes, and exchange effective practices; if the EU and NATO groups could have shared meetings, this would further reinforce the effort.

Third, both the EU and NATO should consider establishing trust funds to support non-governmental initiatives that expose disinformation. These should operate according to an 'arm's length' policy which demands financial transparency from the organisations bidding for funding, but leaves editorial decisions in their hands. Unlike the proposed trust fund for content creation, these could be relatively small-scale, and focus on filling gaps in the overall pattern of knowledge.

In many ways, the actions to be taken by **national governments** are similar to those recommended for the EU and NATO. They should make funding available for the creation of Russian-language TV content; they should support independent groups that expose disinformation; they should exchange experience and intelligence on issues of disinformation.

However, there is also a case to be made for reviewing their legislative frameworks. The examples of Latvia and the UK's Ofcom mentioned above demonstrate that there is a role for legal action against particularly egregious cases of disinformation; however, as Latvia's

banning of the local *Sputnik* website shows, such action must be conducted with the greatest care. The regulatory framework should be demonstrably independent, and any attempt to tighten the legislation framework should set clear and detailed standards, and be evidence-based and proportionate.

Standards should be defined and communicated clearly to broadcasters: as an example, section five of the Ofcom broadcasting code, which deals with issues of accuracy and due impartiality,<sup>23</sup> provides five pages of rules and definitions, and a further sixteen pages of guidance to broadcasters on how to interpret them.<sup>24</sup> The basis for action should be specific incidents and broadcasts, and the level of detail in evidence should go down to the exact form of words or images that were deemed to have violated broadcasting norms. Sanctions should be proportionate and graduated. Outright bans should only ever be the last resort.

A final area in which governments could play a role is the provision of open-source imagery, especially from satellites. BellingCat has shown that satellite pictures and street view pictures, such as Google Earth provides, can be used to deduce the exact location of security incidents, such as air strikes or military incursions, from the combination of landmarks visible in footage of the incidents. This technique has been used to prove the presence of Russian military camps on the Ukrainian border and the real nature of alleged 'terrorist infrastructure' hit by air strikes in Syria. In the South China Sea, the Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative has used time series

<sup>23</sup> The Ofcom Broadcasting Code is online at [http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/binaries/broadcast/code-may16/Ofcom\\_Broadcast\\_Code\\_May\\_2016.pdf](http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/binaries/broadcast/code-may16/Ofcom_Broadcast_Code_May_2016.pdf), Section Five, which covers the rules on accuracy and due impartiality, begins on p.27

<sup>24</sup> Section Five guidance notes, <http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/binaries/broadcast/guidance/831193/section5.pdf>

satellite imagery to provide public proof of China's island-building activities.

Governments should consider whether, and to what extent, they could use existing satellite capacity to provide regular imagery of areas of concern—such as, for example, Syria, Libya, or the border between the Baltic States and Russia. The objective should be to establish a baseline of imagery against which any changes on the ground can then be measured—for example, the establishment of military camps in formerly deserted areas. Such baseline imagery, catalogued and placed online, would provide a significant resource for independent researchers.

Finally, the next step for **non-governmental** actors should be to focus on expanding and connecting their existing projects and offering education to officials, the public, and the media on how disinformation is conducted.

The current projects, and other initiatives which are under discussion, are developing methods for identifying and exposing disinformation. However, they are geographically limited, and tend to focus on Central and Eastern Europe. There is therefore an urgent need to expand their coverage to Western and Southern Europe. At the same time, the different groups involved should consider establishing a formal network through which they could share ideas and amplify one another's work. In each country, they should offer dedicated briefings to policy-makers and the media, who are showing an increasing interest in the subject (witness, for example, the hearings held by the European Parliament and the UK parliament in the spring of 2016). These briefings should focus on explaining how disinformation works, and how widespread the problem is; they should draw on existing research and case studies, and indicate where the gaps in knowledge lie.



## Conclusion

Disinformation is a threat to the democratic integrity of the state. At worst, it can delay decision-making, distort policy, and undermine faith in the democratic process itself.

However, democracy is not defenceless. Many actors in the democratic state have an interest in promoting accurate information, and some among them are now taking action.

The challenge is therefore to empower those actors. The state should aim to support them, not control them; it should aim to amplify their findings, not steer their research. Information is, in fact, the best antidote to disinformation. Policies that are geared towards enabling the provision of accurate information have the greatest potential to succeed.

## THE ROLE OF NATIONAL STRATEGIC NARRATIVE IN RAISING RESILIENCE TO HOSTILE FOREIGN PROPAGANDA IN EUROPEAN SOCIETIES



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## Introduction

For the past two years, the term propaganda is again being widely used in Europe and the Western world. Thanks to Russia's actions in Ukraine and active campaign promoting its foreign policy goals, the former super power has reignited the discussion about the influence of propaganda on societies and created the necessity for limiting its negative impact. This article examines national strategic narratives as one of the instruments that can increase the capacity of societies and states to resist propaganda campaigns. The article combines ideas from communications, political science, and military studies to analyze the concept of narrative and its functions, and

examines their role of strategic narrative and strategic communication in increasing the resilience of European societies.

### The narrative and its functions

The Oxford dictionary defines narrative as ‘a spoken or written account of connected events’.<sup>1</sup> Although a very simple definition, it provides the fundamental idea of what narrative is—a story. Narrative is a story used to explain events in a manner the listener can understand.

Why are stories so important? Manuel Castells writes that the most effective communication protocol our brain understands is the metaphors. ‘Our brain thinks in metaphors, which can be accessed by language but are physical structures in the brain’.<sup>2</sup> Metaphors work as translators that interpret language in a way our brains can understand. Metaphors frame communication using specific associations between language and our experience.<sup>3</sup> So metaphors work like specific frames. ‘Frames are neural networks of association that can be accessed from the language through metaphorical connections.’<sup>4</sup> Castells argues that frames are the basic building blocks of narrative. Frederick W. Mayer elaborates by arguing ‘our “normal” experience of reality is so deeply narrativized that when we enter a story, we are substituting one narrative reality for another’.<sup>5</sup>

In social and political contexts narratives can be described as frameworks that allow us to connect apparently unconnected phenomena around some casual

<sup>1</sup> Oxford Dictionaries. <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/narrative>

<sup>2</sup> Manuel Castells, *Communication Power*, Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2009, pg. 142.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

transformation.<sup>6</sup> Narratives provide a way of understanding the events and processes that happen around us. Why are narratives important for political actors and states? First of all, stories or narratives are at the heart of politics. As Mayer writes, narratives provide solutions to one of the central problems in politics—the problem of collective action—how to engage a community to cooperate in the pursuit of public goods.<sup>7</sup> For communities to function fully collective action is necessary. If each individual in a community would choose to pursue only his own personal interests, this could render the community nonexistent. States can be seen as one example of a community, where individuals not only care for their own interest, but also perform acts that benefit the whole state and the whole community. Actions such as paying taxes, participating in elections, or doing military service can be seen as acts that increase the public good.

In the political context, narrative can be used as an instrument for persuasion. We may be persuaded by new information or by reasoned argumentation, but this is less effective than using narratives. We are more persuaded by narrative than by facts, by stories that capture our minds and ‘can alter our attitudes, transform our beliefs and construct our interests’.<sup>8</sup>

Let’s examine these three functions of narrative, beginning with altering *attitudes*. ‘Attitude is a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favor or disfavor.’<sup>9</sup> Attitude gives a specific identity to events or characters. In this manner narratives are suited to the creation of specific attitudes

<sup>6</sup> Frederick W. Mayer, *Narrative Politics. Stories and Collective Action*, Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2014, pg. 82.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., pg. 83.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

toward characters. In politics, narratives can be used to create negative attitudes toward political opponents or increase support for a specific actor, institution, or political initiative.

The second function of narrative is connected to *beliefs*. Narratives construct our beliefs indirectly through our attitudes. However, this can also be done directly. Studies show that exposure to narratives containing implicit messages about the world have an impact on our beliefs and the deeper the level of engrossment in a narrative, the greater the impact that narrative has on our beliefs.<sup>10</sup> The impact of narrative on our beliefs also can have negative consequences. In her study *Security as Practice. Discourse Analysis and the Bosnian War*, Lene Hansen shows how the beliefs of western policymakers were influenced by Robert D. Kaplan's book *Balkan Ghosts* and Rebecca West's *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*. These books helped to form the narrative policymakers used to develop specific policies.<sup>11</sup> So narratives can influence beliefs even at the highest levels of decision-making.

The third function of narratives is related to *interests*. Mayer argues, that narratives can construct our interests. Narrative influences interests through beliefs. If we believe that ecological food is good for our health, then it is in our interests to access it more easily; we may come to be interested in policies that support ecological farmers. However, narratives are even more important for the construction of non-egoistic interests. Narratives provide an explanation why it is in our interests to pursue something, which at first glance isn't directly connected to us. In this way narratives help create three types of interests—altruistic, ideological, and patriotic.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., pg. 85.

<sup>11</sup> See Lena Hansen, *Security as Practice. Discourse Analysis and the Bosnian War*, London, New York: Routledge, 2006.

Narrative constructs *altruistic interests* by stimulating feelings of empathy for characters in a specific story.<sup>12</sup> Stories of victims of natural disasters, or dogs and cats living in animal shelters, impact on us by stimulating an empathic reaction and motivating us to feel that it is in our interests to help the victims or abandoned pets. The stimulation of altruistic interests can also be used in conflicts to create empathy for a specific group. For example, during events in Ukraine in 2014-2015, Russian TV channels showed stories about the suffering of ethnic Russians—especially women and children suffering in the hands of the official Ukrainian military. These stories were meant to stimulate empathy towards Russians and those who support their positions, while simultaneously evoking negative feelings toward the Ukrainian military.

*Ideological interests* involve preferences for certain state of the world, for example liberal democracy, freedom of travel, or sustainable development.<sup>13</sup> Political parties use ideological interests to gain support for their political agendas; this is done by telling stories of the bright future that will come if a specific party gets the necessary support to realize its vision. The bright future in these stories will only come about if specific policies are adopted. The Cold War was an environment of narratives that included ideological interests—both the democratic free-market western countries and the communist bloc tried to show that their model of development was better than that of its opponents. Similar rivalries are taking place today; in Eastern Europe, for example, there is competition between the visions promoted by the European Union and by Russia with its Eurasian Economic Union project.

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<sup>12</sup> Mayer, *Narrative Politics*, pg. 89.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

The third type of interests, *patriotic interests*, involves the fate of one's community. Patriotic interests are similar to altruistic interests, but refer to interest in the welfare of a specific group. In the context of states, patriotic interests are high-value interests because of their focus on the group or community. Almost every state has narrative that influences the patriotic interests of its citizens. These can be stories of success, a grand military victory or an economic miracle, or stories of the defense of a state in decline. These stories, or narratives, create a link between the individual and the collective. There are many examples of countries trying to construct specific communities based on shared communalities and then using narratives that are oriented towards patriotic interests. For instance, Russia today is working to create a new type of community that includes not only Russian living in Russia, but also Russian-speaking groups living in other countries, they are 'compatriots' who are a part of the 'Russian World'. Having constructed the idea of the 'Russian World', the state can then use the patriotic interests of this virtual community to gain support for specific Russian policies.

Narrative is an extremely useful tool for states that can be used to motivate various communities to become involved in actions that benefit the entire society. However, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century information environment there is increased competition between state and non-state actors. Multiple actors compete for our attention in order to shape our attitudes, beliefs, and interests. When nondemocratic actors join in the competition for influence, gaining support becomes much more difficult for democratic states.

When facing an authoritarian adversary that uses the openness of democratic states to spread its narratives and other means of influence, democracies face a serious

dilemma—should they increase regulation and control in the hope of limiting negative influences or should they try to strengthen their democratic institutions and practices and let the 'invisible hand of democracy' counter the negative effects. In the case of European states and societies, they should probably seek a middle way—invest in strengthening their democratic institutions, but also develop the capacity to secure the basic structures and values that are at the core of their states and societies. European states should look towards becoming 'militant-democracies'—states that value and support the democratic system, but are prepared to counter threats directed against democratic structures and values.

### Strategic narrative and strategic communication

At their core, narratives are modes of structuring information, but have purpose only in context. Narratives are used in commercials to promote specific products, or in literary works to captivate and entertain readers. In the context of states, we speak of *strategic narratives*, because all states use narratives to advance their policy goals.

There are several definitions of strategic narrative. Strategic narratives can be defined as 'representations of sequences of events and identities, a communicative tool through which political actors—usually elites—attempt to give determined meaning to past, present and future in order to achieve political objectives'.<sup>14</sup> Emilie Simpson gives a more operational definition of strategic narrative. She defines strategic narrative as an explanation of action that relates action to policy.<sup>15</sup> Strategic narrative can

<sup>14</sup> Alister Miskimmon, Ben O'Loughlin, and Laura Roselle, *Strategic Narrative: A new means to understand soft power*, New York, London: Routledge, 2013, pg. 5.

<sup>15</sup> Emilie Simpson, *War from the Ground Up. Twenty First Century Combat as Politics*, Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2013, pg. 431.

be understood as an instrument that helps policymakers explain their actions in the context of specific policies. The narrative form helps achieve this goal, by providing an explanation in a form that the intended audience will understand.

Strategic narrative is one of the instruments used in the implementation of strategy. It can tell the story of the grand strategy of an organization or military operation, but for states it usually explains the origins of the state and society, its institutions, and form of governance. It also provides explanation about current events and decisions, as well as giving indications about the future of the state. *Branch narratives*, narratives that explain state policy for discrete operations, such as security, economics, or welfare are derived from each state's strategic narrative.

Thus, strategic narrative is a form of information that describes actions and links them to specific policies. In some instances these narratives may only be known in limited circles, such as the political elite. In order for state strategy to be effective in democratic states, elites must find an instrument of effectively distributing their strategic narratives to wider audiences. This can be done with the help of strategic communication.

Derina R. Holtzhausen and Ansgar Zerfass define *strategic communication* as 'the practice of deliberate and purposive communication that a communication agent enacts in the public sphere on behalf of a communicative entity to reach set goals'.<sup>16</sup> A more state-oriented definition describes strategic communication as the 'alignment of multiple lines of operation (e.g. policy implementation,

public affairs, force movement, information operations etc.) that together generate effects to support national objectives. Strategic communication essentially means sharing meaning (i.e. communicating) in support of national objectives (i.e. strategically). This involves listening as much as transmitting and applies not only to information, but also physical communication—action that conveys meaning'.<sup>17</sup>

As in the case of strategic narrative, strategic communication includes purposeful action; in this case—communication. Strategic communication is a mechanism that helps disseminate strategic narratives among target groups. The concept of strategic communication puts emphasis on the coordination of communication efforts, not only between involved communicators but also through the coordination of messages and other types of actions. Actions are as significant in strategic communication as other types of communication. In some instances a specific action, can have an even better communicative impact than a written or spoken statement.

Strategic communication is about the coordination of different communicative tools for a specific goal. Strategic communication also involves target group analysis for the purpose of choosing most effective tools and designing messages that are best understood by the members of these groups. The primary target audiences of strategic communication are not members of society, but those working in state institutions. Strategic communication can be seen as the relationship between different levels of governance: the first level is made up of leaders or actors at the heart of the government who devise policy and strategy; the second level consists of communicators exploiting various media to communicate and

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<sup>16</sup> Derina Holtzhausen, Ansgar Zerfass, *Strategic Communication. Opportunities and Challenges of the Research Area in The Routledge Handbook of Strategic Communication*, ed. Holtzhausen and Zerfass, New York, London: Routledge, 2015, pg. 4.

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<sup>17</sup> US Department of Defense, *Strategic Communication: Joint Integrating Concept*, Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2009, pg. ii.



articulate government strategy; the third is made up of agents whose actions enable and enact strategy and strategic communications; the fourth consists of advocates or stakeholders beyond government who, although they do not directly participate in developing national strategy and its accompanying narratives, are integral to its realization, whether consciously or otherwise.<sup>18</sup> If these four groups of actors understand the national strategy, as well as the national strategic narrative and principles of strategic communication, then the overall communication of the state will be more successful because communication will take place through multiple channels. The involvement of additional actors in strategic communication not only increases the effectiveness of the communication, but is also an investment in the creation of better policies.

When the actors responsible for creating and implementing policy understand and believe in the national strategy, they can design better policies and approaches to implementation. In this way state policies support the overall national strategy. In addition, since strategic communication in democratic societies is also about listening, audience feedback can be used to further improve policies.

In democratic societies not only state institutions or politicians work for the benefit of state. A state's citizens play the largest role in progress of the state. Democratic states are built around the societies they serve, therefore one of their main functions is to improve the lives of their citizens by accumulating resources and using them for the benefit of society. Strategic communication and strategic narratives can

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<sup>18</sup> Paul Cornish, Julian Lindley-French, Claire Yorke, *Strategic Communication and National Strategy*. A Chatham House Report, Chatham house: 2011, pg. 17.

facilitate the involvement of members of society in actions that increase the public good. As in the case of political and institutional actors, if members of society understand and believe in the national strategy, they become more interested in actions that support this strategy. In this way strategic communication and strategic narratives can help limit the negative influence of foreign actors who want to influence the state and society for their own ends.

Strategic narrative and propaganda: increasing the resilience of European societies.

'This will always remain one of the best jokes of democracy, that it gave its deadly enemies the means by which it was destroyed.' This quote is attributed to Joseph Goebbels, Nazi Germany's Reich Minister of Propaganda. Although Goebbels operated more than 70 years ago, his observation on the vulnerabilities of democracy is still valid. The democratic principle also contains the instrument of its own destruction. Liberal democracy rests on the openness of the democratic system to encourage participation and discussion on politics and other issues. But hostile actors can exploit this openness to influence societies in democratic states. One of influence tools is propaganda.

Over the past few years the issue of *propaganda* has grown in importance in European societies. This is mainly related to Russia's active information and propaganda campaigns, especially visible during 2014. Russia's information operations have particularly created challenges to those EU member-states that share a common border with Russia, and have had a relatively short time to develop their democracies. This makes them more vulnerable to the influence of other states.

Propaganda can be defined as 'Information, especially of a biased or misleading nature, used to promote a

political cause or point of view'.<sup>19</sup> Propaganda includes 'information, ideas, doctrines, or special appeals disseminated to influence the opinions, emotions, attitudes, or behavior of any specific group in order to benefit the sponsor either directly or indirectly.'<sup>20</sup> So propaganda is a term used to describe any type of information that is used for political purposes. Propaganda can be used in peacetime, but currently European societies are living in a time of information warfare. They are facing two different propaganda campaigns, one orchestrated by Daesh and the other by Russia. Each of these actors has its specific military and political goals.

Propaganda shares certain characteristics with narrative. Narrative also includes information or ideas. Propaganda and narrative can both describe true or fictional events. The difference is that narrative has no political objective. It is just an instrument, a form of information. Propaganda, however, has specific objectives and uses information designed for reaching these objectives.

Strategic narratives also have some similarities with propaganda. Definitions differ, but overall both propaganda and strategic narrative have political objectives and use selected information to acquire those objectives. In the case of propaganda, the information is biased and misleading, but the content of strategic narratives must be seen in the context of the state and its political regime. The main difference between propaganda and strategic narrative is the way each of them interacts with its audiences. Propaganda works to persuade audiences by limiting the flow of information. Strategic narratives are integrated into the system of strategic communication in two-way communication

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<sup>19</sup> MNIOE White Paper. *Narrative Development in Coalition Operations*. Draft v 0.96. (2014), pg. 38.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

with audiences. In addition, as strategic communication largely rests on the internal support of material actions and other types of communication, there is no room for misleading information.

In democratic states where society has control over the political elite through the election process and other mechanisms of political participation, political elites face larger risks if they choose to spread false information. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century it has become much easier to check the information provided by political actors. In addition, the element of political competition that exists in developed democracies means that political actors are more interested in caching out competitors who spread false information for political purposes.

So, how can state strategic narratives assist in countering hostile foreign propaganda? The first step is not to counter propaganda. Hostile propaganda usually includes specific information and narratives that build on the strengths of the sponsor and the weakness of the target. If a state focuses on countering propaganda by debunking myths or proving information to be misleading or wrong, it will involve the state in a conflict where the 'aggressor' has the initiative. The sponsor of the propaganda decides which information and channels to use, but the targeted state must use its resources for countering false information. These most probably would be the same resources that are already being used to pursue the national strategy.

Strategic narratives can help by explaining the national strategy to wider audiences, so they can become more resistant to hostile propaganda, especial if it falsely portrays the state. If a foreign state uses propaganda to undermine the political elite, actions, policies, and overall functions of another state, then a national strategic narrative can provide the necessary vaccine, providing

members of a society with the information they need to have a true understanding of their own state, its functions, and its policies.

Another function of the national strategic narrative plays out at the international level. Most European states today exist in strong cooperation with their partners. A partnership is either based on economics or values, as in the case of the European Union, or it is based on common security concerns, like NATO. European states depended upon each other. Most European states are small or medium sized, so cooperation is essential for their development.

Hostile propaganda can be used to drive a wedge between allies, making them less interested in cooperation. This is done by spreading false information about state policies and actions. To limit the effectiveness of hostile propaganda, a state can use the instruments of public diplomacy to communicate with the societies of allied states and communicate its strategic narrative. Ideally, the strategic narrative of a specific state is linked to the values and strategic narratives of allied states, and to cooperative organizations such as the EU and NATO. If the strategic narrative of a state includes elements of the strategic narrative of allied international organizations, then that cooperation will be much harder to brake.

## **Conclusion**

In political science, the concept of narrative offers an innovative approach to the analysis of states and politics. From the perspective of state security, narratives, especially strategic narratives integrated into mechanisms of strategic communication, can provide solutions for limiting the negative impact of hostile foreign propaganda. Strategic narratives and strategic communication are tools democratic states can use to promote the national

strategy of the state and society. Strategic narratives provide understandable explanations of national strategy and in so doing also support their implementation. Since democratic states depend on the involvement of the societies they serve, strategic narratives and strategic communication can provide the necessary mechanisms for involving all levels of society in the implementation of the national strategy. Unlike propaganda, strategic communication is also about listening to audiences; this means that policies and strategies can be adjusted to better suit their intended audiences. The set of tools that includes national strategy, strategic narrative, and strategic communication can increase the resistance of societies to hostile foreign propaganda by explaining how the path chosen by European democracies is beneficial to them.



## INCREASING THE RESISTANCE OF DEMOCRATIC STATES TO HOSTILE FOREIGN PROPAGANDA—WHAT IS THE RIGHT RECIPE?



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In order to discuss whether there is an effective recipe for increasing the resistance of democratic states to hostile foreign propaganda, it is important to consider the different forms that propaganda can take, the routes through which it can be channelled to its target audiences, and the purposes propaganda can serve.

This article examines the often-unappreciated route of channelling grey and black propaganda through the prism of social and religious issues in order to promote political goals. The cases of Latvia, an EU member state, and Georgia, an Eastern Partnership country, will be discussed in this article.

### 1. What is propaganda?

In Russia, a poll carried out by the Public Opinion Foundation revealed that 31% of respondents could neither provide a definition of propaganda nor their attitude towards it.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, as political scientist Aleksey Makarin (Алексей Макаркин) told the Russian daily business newspaper *Kommersant*,<sup>2</sup> Russians associate the word 'propaganda' with the West and with something bad, but do not realise that they are under the influence of propaganda from the Russian mass media when the information provided is consistent with their worldview.

One is likely to find a similar lack of awareness about propaganda among the general public of the EU and Eastern Partnership countries for two reasons: audiences do not tend to challenge views that affirm their own convictions and they lack of awareness of the diverse manipulative techniques which are used by propagandists.<sup>3</sup> If the issue at hand resonates with an audience's existing beliefs or concerns, the audience will likely take an uncritical approach to consuming the information provided, regardless of the source.

We are conditioned to detect hostile foreign propaganda when looking at issues we consider important for state security and believe to be likely targets for propaganda activities. But we are often blind to less obvious propaganda attempts that may be hidden under 'innocent' or 'noble' topics with a moral flavour, or human-interest stories concerning topics that affect us all, such as fighting child abuse.

All of the reasons stated above contribute to the challenge of building resistance to hostile foreign

<sup>1</sup> <http://fom.ru/SMI-i-internet/12302>

<sup>2</sup> <http://kommersant.ru/doc/2800302>

<sup>3</sup> For some examples of manipulative techniques, see <http://www.stratcomcoe.org/manipulative-techniques-russian-information-campaign-against-ukraine>

propaganda. How can this be done without an overall awareness of what exactly it is we must resist and the various misleading forms it can take?

### Three types of propaganda

One should remember that propaganda can be white, grey, or black. White propaganda clearly identifies its source/author and normally presents true and factual information, albeit one-sided. White propagandists will withhold undesirable information, while promoting information that supports their cause. Practitioners of white propaganda normally employ standard public relations techniques and rely heavily on soft power in order to persuade audiences.

Grey propaganda is variously defined. Some authors state that practitioners of grey propaganda do not hide their sources; they simply avoid determining the validity of the information they spread because it serves their interests. Other authors say that for something to be called grey propaganda, the source must be obscured or unattributable, and one can only guess who is behind it by trying to analyse what particular interest is being promoted. A bold example of grey propaganda are the posters which appeared in Crimea prior to the 16 March 2014 referendum, anonymously urging voters to choose between grim 'Nazi occupation' represented by the Kyiv government or a bright future with the Russian Federation.<sup>4</sup>

Last but not least, practitioners of black propaganda falsely attribute their sources/authors, and are usually promoting a subversive goal. By creating bits of information that would cause the alleged author embarrassment, black propagandists often resort to falsified document leaks, gossip and rumours, inappropriate humour,

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-26552066>

and offensive visual symbols. For example, the stories spread by the Russian media concerning the cruel treatment and even executions of children by the Ukrainian Army in east Ukraine can be classified as black propaganda, especially since the eyewitness reports presenting this information were later proven to be false. But let's not forget that this kind of propaganda spreads like wildfire on social networks, precisely because it is made up of human-interest stories.

### NGOs as 'agents of influence'

Hostile foreign propaganda is often channelled into a target country through the so-called network of 'agents of influence'; NGOs can play an active role in this. An NGO established, lead-by, or mobilised by a foreign government's agent of influence becomes part of a covert operation to conceal the identity of, or permit the plausible denial of the real 'sponsor'.

As during the Cold War, when influence was exerted on target audiences through seemingly apolitical organisations and events such as youth conventions, cultural or religious societies, environmental movements and the like, today we can also observe the creation of various NGOs or movements whose goals and activities seem to have nothing to do with the politics or promotion of interests of a foreign government at first glance. However 'innocent' or 'noble' the cause, the organization promoting it may well be serving as a tool for disinformation. Subversive NGOs attack the core values of a society in order to create confusion and distrust, either in the government, between societal groups, or even between countries. Their tactics include discrediting particular individuals, political forces, or the country at large. Moreover, if such NGOs have partners among legislative decision-makers (for example, Parliamentarians), they can

introduce desired legislative changes or at least disrupt the political process.

If the 'innocent' or 'noble' cause the NGO stands for contains a human-interest story with highly emotional content, it provides an additional advantage: the mass media are likely to give it coverage. Unfortunately, those media outlets lacking professionalism and resources will do so uncritically, without verifying facts or analysing statements, let alone the people behind the NGO. Thus they unwittingly become a platform for promoting a hidden party's interests, e.g. those of a foreign and competing government.

## **2. Using social and religious issues as vehicles of influence**

Social issues are convenient topics for propaganda. For example, most everyone is concerned with the well-being of children, so related topics easily draw attention and can mobilise various segments of society to action, despite their differences. Religion and morality are also convenient topics, especially in predominantly conservative societies. These topics become hot buttons when a society is facing some form of crisis or insecurity. Today, the European idea is being called into question by political actors positioning themselves as 'whistle blowers' shining a light on the perversion, decadence, or immorality allegedly enforced or supported by Western governments. Moral issues are exploited to polarize Western society around competing understandings of core European values.

### **The Refugee Crisis and Propaganda**

Europe has experienced considerable turmoil over the past few years, including financial austerity, the ongoing refugee crisis, and the recent terrorist attacks. For many

Europeans these upheavals have increased the feeling of instability, this creates fertile ground for populism and propaganda. A society that is facing a crisis is more susceptible to manipulation as it seeks to find a way out. By providing black and white physical or moral binary choices, propaganda peddlers stir up emotion, trivialise the issues at hand, and push their target audiences toward voluntary acceptance of the solution that works to their favour.

The refugee crisis has caused a significant outburst of propaganda. In this context the key messages have been about loosing European identity, lack of trust in governments' ability to guarantee security, and, importantly, the religious and moral issues associated with an influx of Muslims into areas where they might affect the local sense of identity. Russia has played its role in the anti-refugee propaganda campaign in Europe, the most well-known case being about the underage girl Lisa supposedly kidnapped by Muslim migrants. Apart from the notorious propaganda story spread by the Russian state-owned TV *Perviy Kanal*, it is important to remember the protest meetings organised in Berlin. The organiser was 'The International Convention of Russian Germans' which has a significant history of cooperation with far-right German political forces. As reported by Meduza.io,<sup>5</sup> during the protest 'Against Violence' (An innocent and noble slogan!) held near Angela Merkel's residence on 23 January, the chairman of this NGO accused the German police of not defending society's interests, called Merkel's government 'fascist puppets', suggested the organisation of 'international self-defence units' (deja vu from Crimea and east Ukraine), and demanded Merkel's resignation. The same NGO was also the most cited source for reports aired on Russian TV. Their posters hit

<sup>5</sup> <https://meduza.io/feature/2016/01/25/russkiy-mir-prishel-v-berlin>

key propaganda messages (1) increase the feeling of insecurity, (2) stimulate distrust in the government and law-enforcement bodies, (3) appeal to human interest:<sup>6</sup> ‘Today it’s my child—tomorrow it’s yours!’ (human-interest), ‘Our children are in danger!’ (insecurity), ‘There is no such thing as somebody else’s child!’ (human-interest), ‘We have reason to doubt the objectivity of the police!’ (distrust in government and police).

### **The cases of Latvia and Georgia**

Against a backdrop of the events in Ukraine and the refugee crisis during the past two years, both Latvia and Georgia have seen an increase in anti-European propaganda from a number of sources, including local actors, such as NGOs that successfully engage with local political forces, the mass media, and in some cases turn to religious leaders for support.

There has been a rise in NGOs that present themselves as the ‘moral guardians’ of society. Both Latvia and Georgia have ethnically diverse populations, which often disagree on their interpretations of history and on political issues. However, there are many other topics on which they hold the same or similar views; these normally concern welfare, social issues, and moral or religious issues. This is important because the propagandists who hope to manipulate these societies have recognised that success lies in their ability to unite and mobilise diverse groups for the same cause.

It is also important to consider that Latvians and Georgians tend to be conservative, which affects how a society approaches issues of morality and religion, although the people themselves do not always recognise it.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> <http://m.dw.com/ru/случай-русской-девочки-в-берлине-использовали-антиимигрантские-движения/a-19000842>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.diena.lv/sodien-laikraksta/latvijas-sabiedriba-ir-vairak-kreis-konservativa-neka-labeja-13942008>

Last but not least, the current trend toward traditionalism and protecting moral values in Latvia and Georgia has encouraged religious leaders to become more involved. This sometimes results in attempts to influence political decision-making. When it comes to a choice between Europe and Russia, it is important to remember that the idea of the Russian World (discussed in the next paragraph) is closely tied to religion, and, more importantly, to the acceptance of a ‘symbiosis’ between the secular state powers and the church. This is contrary to the principles of the democratic West where church and state are clearly separated; religious leaders should not influence a democratically elected government.

### **The choice between Europe and Russia**

Although at first glance the increase of anti-European propaganda has nothing to do with promoting Russian interests in Latvia and Georgia, it has a more dangerous dimension.

The choice between Europe and Russia is not necessarily based on economic choices, or military and political alliances.<sup>8</sup> It starts with identity. Identity is closely linked to values and beliefs—the prism through which we perceive the world around us. In the case of Russia this prism is defined through the notion of the Russian World. As O. Lutsevych writes: ‘Russia wanted an ideological tool of its own to counter the Western narrative of democracy promotion. Thus the concept of the Russian World became an operational matrix for building up Russian legitimacy and influence in the region, and a key framework for its proxy groups. The current narrative of the Russian World encompasses language, culture, history, shared heritage, economic links, religion

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<sup>8</sup> In the case of Georgia, between the Moscow-lead Eurasian Economic Union and the EU

and conservative values.<sup>9</sup> In the context of the current discussion, the key words here are religion and conservatism.

Already in 2013, at the Valdai meeting, President Putin said: 'We can see how many of the Euro-Atlantic countries are actually rejecting their roots, including the Christian values that constitute the basis of Western civilisation. They are denying moral principles and all traditional identities: national, cultural, religious and even sexual. They are implementing policies that equate large families with same-sex partnerships, belief in God with the belief in Satan. The excesses of political correctness have reached the point where people are seriously talking about registering political parties whose aim is to promote paedophilia.'<sup>10</sup> Since Russia cannot compete with the West on a Global scale in terms of foreign policy influence, military strength, or economic development, recent examples show that pro-Russian sentiment is being cultivated through a different prism—through social and religious issues, appeals to morality, and to saving the future of our children/for human kind. In the current circumstances, when some segments of European society feel that their way of life is being threatened by an outside force (such as terrorists or migrants) and their governments are unable to fully protect their interests, appeals to moral values—the cornerstone of a decent life—can prove extremely effective.

## The case of Latvia

During the past few years pro-family, pro-church, children's rights activists, and other similarly minded NGOs

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/files/chathamhouse/publications/research/2016-04-14-agents-russian-world-lutsevych.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/19243>

have become increasingly vocal in Latvia. At first glance one might consider this to be a healthy expression of democracy. However, the Latvian investigative journalism project Re:Baltica offers a different perspective. Re:Baltica has investigated Russian financial support for local NGOs that defend Russian policies in Latvia.<sup>11</sup> Of course, proving direct links can be difficult, but the network of people involved in supporting various initiatives is often the same and closely linked to activists and politicians who openly support Putin's foreign policy goals.

Whilst fighting for their 'noble' causes, these organisations also work to achieve three other important objectives:

- to discredit democracy in the Baltic States by supporting the introduction of backward or undemocratic policies (e.g. in Latvia an amendment to the law on school materials was proposed, introducing censorship under the veil of virtue and morality)
- to create a crisis in values by promoting the idea that European values are detrimental to the development of a healthy society
- to cause a rift between Latvian society and its historic European allies, such as Scandinavia and Germany, by spreading black propaganda about those countries.<sup>12</sup>

Known pro-Kremlin activists, who previously have not shown concern for the issues they now are championing, have founded some of these NGOs. For instance, the 'Let's Protect Our Children' Facebook page contains biased anti-EU, anti-American, anti-Ukrainian, and anti-Latvian content based on pro-Kremlin sources or

<sup>11</sup> [http://www.rebaltica.lv/en/investigations/money\\_from\\_russia/a/1257/kremlins\\_millions.html](http://www.rebaltica.lv/en/investigations/money_from_russia/a/1257/kremlins_millions.html)

<sup>12</sup> For more insight see the investigation by Re:Baltica on the smear campaign against Norway: [http://www.rebaltica.lv/en/investigations/russia\\_and\\_family\\_values/a/1297/putin's\\_children.html](http://www.rebaltica.lv/en/investigations/russia_and_family_values/a/1297/putin's_children.html)



sources that are unverifiable.<sup>13</sup> One of the recent posts claims that Ukraine is due to legalise the adoption of children by pederasts. The source quoted is the webpage of late author Oles Buzina. Buzina openly supported the idea of the Russian World, the federalisation of Ukraine, and Russian as the second official language in Ukraine; he claimed that Ukrainians are destroying Russian culture and affirmed his dislike of the Orange Revolution.<sup>14</sup> Vadim Gilis, one of the founders of this NGO, is the author of a draft law on the autonomous status to the Latvian border region Latgale where many Russians live.<sup>15</sup> The name of the real leader of the organisation, former National Bolshevik leader Vladimir Linderman, is not found in the organisation's documents. He explained to Re:Baltica that this was a conscious decision, so there wouldn't be problems with registering the organisation.<sup>16</sup> Linderman, a Latvian non-citizen, organised a failed referendum on Russian as a second official language in Latvia. He is often seen as a proxy for Russia by the Latvian authorities. 'Let's Protect Our Children' claims that people who support their anti-LGTB initiatives, namely parents of 'traditional families', are being persecuted by the Latvian juvenile justice system.

The critique of the juvenile justice system in Latvia has been particularly prevalent as of late, including accusations of an illegal trade in children to the West. For example, Re:Baltica reports that pro-Russian activist Alexander Gaponenko, who had previously specialised in discrimination against non-citizens, the rights of Russian-speakers in Latvia, and the fight against 'resurgent

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/norma.tradicija>

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.buzina.org/about-avtor.html>

<sup>15</sup> [http://imhoclub.lv/ru/material/zakon\\_ob\\_osobom\\_pravovom\\_statuse\\_latgalii](http://imhoclub.lv/ru/material/zakon_ob_osobom_pravovom_statuse_latgalii)

<sup>16</sup> [http://www.rebaltica.lv/en/investigations/russia\\_and\\_family\\_values/a/1298/the\\_rise\\_of\\_latvias\\_moral\\_guardians.html](http://www.rebaltica.lv/en/investigations/russia_and_family_values/a/1298/the_rise_of_latvias_moral_guardians.html)

fascism', has broadened his focus to include the juvenile justice system.<sup>17</sup> He recently finished a documentary on the topic, claiming that the problem has 'a European dimension', and that there is 'an international power struggle for the reduction of humans on Earth'. Gaponenko refused to say who finances him. He was also the one who called for a Maidan in Riga—an event opposing the pro-European EuroMaidan movement in Kyiv—to 'show what local Russians are capable of'.<sup>18</sup> The Security Police of Latvia forbade the event.

Why have so many pro-Kremlin activists simultaneously begun focusing on child protection, juvenile justice, and Christian morality? Clearly there is a pattern. It is an attempt to mobilise society beyond ethnic and other lines of division, with the ultimate goal to undermine the European idea and label it as dangerous for the future development of Latvia.

## The case of Georgia

A very recent example of the promotion of Moscow's interests in Georgia, which has mostly gone undetected, was the 10th World Congress of Families (WCF) that took place in Tbilisi in May. The chairman of the Georgian committee of the WCF, Levan Vasadze, said at the event on 16 May that the 'Western Project' in Georgia has turned out to be a flop, and he calls for Western institutions to stop meddling in Georgia's internal matters and for Georgia to block sources financing the promotion of Western liberalism.<sup>19</sup> He also said, 'As one of the oldest Christian nations on earth, we think this

<sup>17</sup> [http://www.rebaltica.lv/en/investigations/russia\\_and\\_family\\_values/a/1297/putin's\\_children.html](http://www.rebaltica.lv/en/investigations/russia_and_family_values/a/1297/putin's_children.html)

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.delfi.lv/news/national/politics/gaponenko-riga-piesaka-vietejo-maidanu.d?id=44413605>

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.ipress.ge/new/32318-levan-vasadze-saqartveloshi-dasavlu-ri-proeqti-daemkho>

[WCF] will be a refreshing opportunity for me and my fellow Georgians to meet Westerners, unlike those sent to Tbilisi by George Soros, who affirm human rights for all persons from conception to natural death, but also defend the Truth, Beauty, and Goodness found in the Natural Family as the fundamental and only sustainable unit of society'.<sup>20</sup> According to Larry Jacobs, Managing Director of WCF, 'despite the lies and attacks from the sexual radicals and neo-liberal elites, WCF leaders and Georgians together will show that true equality, fairness, diversity, justice and authentic freedom can only arise from God-centred and family-centred civilizations'.<sup>21</sup> Such statements are clearly biased towards undermining the European idea and democratic values, but are in line with a conservative and Orthodox-centred worldview.

According to the report by the Human Rights Campaign Foundation,<sup>22</sup> the organisation has been most active in Russia where billionaire oligarchs and extremist members of the Russian Orthodox Church support the group, although it is registered in the United States. It works closely with members of the Russian Duma and Putin's regime, and has encouraged the passage of anti-LGBT laws in Russia, most notably the 2013 ban on 'gay propaganda'. WCF's backers include Russian officials who were sanctioned by the United States government following Russia's annexation of Crimea. Indeed, WCF staff members continued to praise Putin's actions in Ukraine after the Russian incursion. WCF spokesman Don Feder continued to defend Putin, calling him 'a power player who cares more about Russia's national interests, and

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.christiannewswire.com/news/37076974.html>

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> <http://hrc-assets.s3-website-us-east-1.amazonaws.com//files/assets/resources/WorldCongressOfFamilies.pdf>

Russian minorities in his "near abroad", than in that mythical force known as world opinion'.<sup>23</sup>

In December 2014, the organization Shaltai Boltai published a collection of leaked emails between WCF and senior conservative Russian officials such as Konstantin Malofeev and Alexey Komov (WCF's Russian representative), some of whom are tied to the Ukraine separatists.<sup>24</sup> According to BuzzFeed, the emails show WCF working together with Russians 'to promote Russia's geopolitical agenda'.<sup>25</sup>

In this regard, Konstantin Malofeev is a particularly interesting figure. He is the founder of the investment firm Marshall Capital, which at one point was the largest minority shareholder in the Russian telephone company Rostelecom. Marshall Capital supports the Saint Basil the Great Charitable Foundation, which Malofeev personally established in 2007. This foundation finances the WCF.

Malofeev was placed on the European Union's sanctions list on 30 July 2014 for his role in supporting the armed separatist movements in Ukraine and was added to Canada's sanctions list a month later.<sup>26</sup> The *Financial Times* reported Malofeev has emerged as a key figure linking pro-Russian forces on the ground in Ukraine (including direct ties with Alexander Borodai, the PM of the self-declared Donetsk People's Republic, and Igor Girkin, aka Strelkov, the commander of pro-Russian military operations in the east of Ukraine) and the political

<sup>23</sup> [http://www.americanthinker.com/2014/03/putin\\_doesnt\\_threaten\\_our\\_national\\_security\\_obama\\_does.html](http://www.americanthinker.com/2014/03/putin_doesnt_threaten_our_national_security_obama_does.html)

<sup>24</sup> [https://www.buzzfeed.com/lesterfeder/emails-show-pro-family-activists-feeding-contacts-to-russian?utm\\_term=.hg5yrnqbR#.uxy9d5Ro8](https://www.buzzfeed.com/lesterfeder/emails-show-pro-family-activists-feeding-contacts-to-russian?utm_term=.hg5yrnqbR#.uxy9d5Ro8)

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.buzzfeed.com/lesterfeder/emails-show-pro-family-activists-feeding-contacts-to-russian#.qtwwN26wl>

<sup>26</sup> <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:L:2014:226:-FULL&from=EN#page25>

establishment in Moscow.<sup>27</sup> In addition, he has repeatedly stated that he wishes to see the Russian Empire re-established. According to *Bloomberg*, Malofeev is quoted as saying: 'I'm sorry for my lack of political correctness, but Ukraine is part of Russia. I can't consider the Ukrainian people as non-Russian.'<sup>28</sup> Konstantin Zatulin, a former lawmaker in the ruling United Russia party who was an official observer during Crimea's referendum on joining Russia, said by phone to *Bloomberg* that Malofeev has given 'some help' to the rebels in Donetsk, without providing details.

Clearly, Malofeev is closely tied with promoting President Putin's interests and does not waste words or money on projects that do not bring Russia closer to the 'restoration of the Empire'. So what interest does he have in sponsoring WCF? Clearly, it is believed that the WCF is helpful to the current regime in Russia for exerting its influence in the 'near abroad' like Georgia, and in strengthening the position of the Russian World in this country under the slogan of support to Christian values which is a sensitive topic for most of the Georgian society.<sup>29</sup>

### 3. What can be the recipe?

**Building resistance to hostile propaganda must start with a serious effort to raise awareness** among senior level decision-makers—members of Cabinet and Parliament, and journalists, focusing on the following issues:

- understanding and recognising the different types and techniques of propaganda
- learning about the various channels of spreading propaganda

<sup>27</sup> <https://next.ft.com/content/84481538-1103-11e4-94f3-00144feabdc0>

<sup>28</sup> <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2014-06-15/putin-s-soros-dreams-of-empire-as-allies-wage-ukraine-revolt>

<sup>29</sup> <http://georgiatoday.ge/news/3614/Poll-Shows-Georgians-Reject-Parties-Critical-of-Church,-Traditional-Values>

- grasping the variety of ways how hostile foreign propaganda may target the cornerstones of democratic systems, including through seemingly 'innocent' and 'morally right' topics like social issues and religion.

Such awareness raising should be followed by a social advertising campaign for the general public. It does not necessarily have to give real-life examples of hostile foreign propaganda, but must clearly explain the propaganda techniques against the background of attempts to re-define or disfigure European values. That would also serve as a myth-busting activity.

**The second step** could be support and encouragement for investigative activities (e.g. Re:Baltica in the Latvian case) to track and expose different agents of influence working to spread hostile foreign propaganda that contradicts the principles of democratic society and the European idea. It is important to note that all such investigations should be presented in a language and manner that is accessible and interesting to society at large, rather than for 'elite' circles, as it still regrettably the case more often than not.

**The third step** could be increased funding for responsible media regulators to monitor media content activities to prevent different actors from spreading disinformation. Due to lack of resources, current monitoring activities seems sporadic and can be interpreted as politically motivated, rather than corresponding to legal requirements. This should go hand-in-hand with a significant public diplomacy effort to explain to the allies the current problem and the legal, democratic means of dealing with it.

**The fourth step** could be ensuring the exposure of all segments of society to information sources of European origin by making them more widely accessible than Russian state-controlled media sources. That would also



include either increased knowledge of foreign languages among certain audiences, or increased allocation of resources for translation, since lack of language knowledge prevents certain segments of society from accessing or crosschecking information.

**Last but not least**, more effective strategic communication on the behalf of the EU would be of significant value. In the case of Georgia, there is a clear sense of fatigue from Euro-Atlantic integration due to the lack of tangible deliverables with immediate benefits for the society. As in Latvia, there is dissonance between the current European narrative, weakened due to political and economic turbulence, and the conservative worldview of a society looking for a sense of stability and safety.

## THE AUDIOVISUAL MEDIA SERVICES DIRECTIVE AND PROPAGANDA<sup>1</sup>



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<sup>1</sup> This paper is partly based on the discussion paper *Future European Audiovisual Policy in the framework of Digital Single Market: The functioning of the Audiovisual Media Services Directive in the context of the current geopolitical situation* presented by the Latvian Presidency of the Council of the European Union for a policy debate at the Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council meeting on 19 May 2015. Doc 8351/15 available at <http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-8351-2015-INIT/en/pdf>, accessed 25 March 2016 and Latvia's contribution to the European Commission's Public consultation on Directive 2010/13/EU. The results of the consultation are available at <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/news/contributions-and-preliminary-trends-public-consultation-audiovisual-media-services-avmsd>, accessed 25 March 2016

<sup>2</sup> All the views expressed are the author's own and not necessarily those of the Ministry of Culture.

## Introduction

During its presidency of the Council of the European Union, Latvia asked EU ministers to offer answers to the following question: 'In the context of the Audiovisual Media Services Directive, how can we balance freedom of expression with the public interest objectives of security and stability, while at the same time maintaining a culturally diverse and high quality European audio-visual landscape?'<sup>3</sup> The intention was to generate serious reflection on how the directive could be improved in the light of the geopolitical situation in Ukraine and the information war being waged by the Russian Federation against the European Union and the Baltic states in particular.

The Audiovisual Media Services Directive (AVMSD),<sup>4</sup> as did its predecessor, the Television Without Frontiers Directive, regulates the reception and retransmission of television broadcasts between the 28 Member States of the European Union (EU).<sup>5</sup> It lays down a minimum set of rules on, among other things, the content and amount of advertising, sponsorship, protection of minors, prevention of hate speech and discrimination and the promotion of European audiovisual works. Member States

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<sup>3</sup> Discussion paper *Future European Audiovisual Policy in the framework of Digital Single Market* Annex p. 8

<sup>4</sup> Directive 2010/13/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 10 March 2010 on the coordination of certain legal provisions, regulations, or administrative actions of Member States concerning the provision of audiovisual media services (Audiovisual Media Services Directive). Available at: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32010L0013&qid=1458919877232&from=EN>, accessed 25 March 2016

<sup>5</sup> The Directive also applies to Iceland, Liechtenstein, and Norway by virtue of the Agreement on the European Economic Area (EEA) and in part also to Switzerland by way of a bilateral agreement with the EU. See: <http://www.efta.int/legal-texts/eea> and <http://eurlex.europa.eu/legalcontent/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:22011D0193&qid=1458918599286&from=EN>, accessed 25 March 2016

may choose to adopt stricter national rules if they so desire however, they can only be applied to media service providers in their jurisdiction. Because the directive is intended to promote the free transmission of television broadcasts across the borders of the EU member States, restrictions on transmission can only be applied in exceptional circumstances.<sup>6</sup>

The AVMSD was not devised with today's geopolitical situation in Europe in mind. It did not foresee a situation whereby the media are no longer there to inform, educate, and entertain but are employed as tools for the achievement of political goals such as the weakening of European unity and social cohesion in the Member States through the manipulation of public opinion. As has been pointed out by many media experts, journalists, and academics, by exploiting the freedom to impart information, the media—particularly television, the Internet, and social media are being used 'to inject disinformation into society. The effect is not to persuade (as in classic public diplomacy) or earn credibility but to sow confusion via conspiracy theories and proliferate falsehoods.'<sup>7</sup>

Propaganda, understood as biased or misleading information for political aims, is not illegal *per se* and one can choose to believe it or not. (Media literacy has a crucial role here.) However, when it is war propaganda or used to incite hatred and discrimination against certain groups in society or even whole nations, as in the case of Ukraine, this is a different matter and clearly contravenes

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<sup>6</sup> Article 3 of the AVMSD states: *Member States shall ensure freedom of reception and shall not restrict retransmissions on their territory of audiovisual media services from other Member States for reasons which fall within the fields coordinated by this Directive.*

<sup>7</sup> Peter Pomerantsev and Michael Weiss, *The Menace of Unreality: How the Kremlin Weaponizes Information, Culture and Money*. Institute of Modern Russia, 2014, p. 6. Available at: <http://www.interpretermag.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/PW-31.pdf>, accessed 25 March 2016

fundamental principles of international law.<sup>8</sup> Although the AVMSD does not make any reference to propaganda as such (it does not even require television news broadcasts to be accurate and impartial), there are provisions within the directive that Member States can rely on to tackle propaganda when it takes on an extreme character. This paper will endeavour to outline the AVMSD provisions that apply in those cases where Member States deem content retransmitted from other Member States to be unacceptable. Using recent cases from Latvia and Lithuania, I will show how these provisions work in practice and what the stumbling blocks are. Finally, I offer some suggestions as to how the directive could be improved to enable Member States to protect their information space without challenging its core principles.

### AVMSD main principles

The scope of the directive covers television broadcasting and on-demand services but not private websites or ‘the provision or distribution of audiovisual content generated by private users for the purposes of sharing and exchange within communities of interest’<sup>9</sup> or electronic versions of newspapers and magazines.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Article 20 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights prohibits propaganda for war, incitement to hatred, and discrimination. Available at: <http://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx>, accessed 25 March 2016.

<sup>9</sup> Recital 21 AVMSD. Recital 22 further limits the scope by excluding ‘all services the principal purpose of which is not the provision of programmes, i.e. where any audiovisual content is merely incidental to the service and not its principal purpose. Examples include websites that contain audiovisual elements only in an ancillary manner.’ For an analysis of the application of the definition of an audiovisual media service, i.e. when online services become subject to the rules of the AVMSD, see the preliminary ruling of the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) in *New Media Online GmbH vs. Bundeskommunikationssenat*, Case C-347/14.

<sup>10</sup> Recital 28 AVMSD

In the preamble to the AVMSD, it states clearly that ‘the country of origin principle should be regarded as the core of this Directive, as it is essential for the creation of an internal market’.<sup>11</sup> Put simply, it means that each provider of audiovisual media services comes under the jurisdiction of one and only one EU Member State. This is intended to ensure the free flow of information and audiovisual programmes in the internal market and the legal certainty needed for service providers to be able to develop new business models for cross-border services. Crucial to the implementation of the country of origin principle is the correct determination of which Member State has jurisdiction. The directive provides a hierarchy of criteria for jurisdiction beginning with who has editorial control, i.e. where the major editorial decisions are made and where the majority of the workforce is located, and ending with where the satellite uplink is located and who has control over the satellite capacity being used.<sup>12</sup>

Content transmitted from one Member State to other Member States is deemed to comply with the national standards of the originating Member State and should not be subject to secondary control on the same grounds in the receiving Member States. In exceptional cases, under specific conditions, and following a specific procedure<sup>13</sup> Member States may provisionally suspend the

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<sup>11</sup> Recital 33 AVMSD

<sup>12</sup> Article 2 AVMSD. In its Guidance notes for licence applicants, the UK regulatory authority Ofcom provides a tool for determining jurisdiction. Available at [http://licensing.ofcom.org.uk/binaries/tv/tlcs/tlcs\\_guidance.pdf](http://licensing.ofcom.org.uk/binaries/tv/tlcs/tlcs_guidance.pdf), (p. 14), accessed 25 March 2016

<sup>13</sup> a) the broadcaster must have infringed the rules on at least two prior occasions during the previous 12 months;  
b) the Member State concerned has notified the broadcaster and the European Commission in writing of the alleged infringements and of the measures it intends to take should any such infringement occur again;  
c) consultations with the transmitting Member State and the Commission

retransmission of televised broadcasts coming from another Member State if they ‘manifestly, seriously and gravely’ infringe upon the rules regarding the protection of minors and incitement to hatred.<sup>14</sup> It should be noted that the grounds for suspending a service are not the same for broadcasting and video-on-demand services in that there is no provision for derogation in the case of television broadcasting on grounds of ‘public security, including the safeguarding of national security and defence’.<sup>15</sup> This can have a direct bearing on the ability of a regulatory authority to react in cases of hostile propaganda deemed threatening to national security and public order.

### Tackling propaganda in practice

By looking at examples from the UK, Sweden, Latvia, and Lithuania, we can see how the provisions of the AVMSD, as transposed into the national legislation of the Member States, have or have not been used to counteract the hostile propaganda, misinformation, hate speech and not uncommonly, fabricated news stories carried by television channels originating in the Russian Federation, licensed in one Member State yet targeting the audience in another. These examples show where the directive is ‘fit for purpose’ and where improvements are needed.<sup>16</sup>

have not produced an amicable settlement within 15 days of being notified and the alleged infringement persists.

If no settlement has been reached, the Commission has up to two months to decide on whether the measures taken by a Member State are compatible with EU law and if they are not, they must be ended as soon as possible.

<sup>14</sup> Articles 3 and 4 AVMSD

<sup>15</sup> Article 3.4 AVMSD. This disparity seems to have been an oversight introduced by copying the rule from Article 3.4 of the Directive on Electronic Commerce (2000/31/EC).

<sup>16</sup> Because of the limits on the length of this paper, it is not possible to go into the details of each case.

As mentioned earlier, the directive does not refer to propaganda and, unlike the European Convention on Transfrontier Television,<sup>17</sup> it does not require objectivity in news reports.<sup>18</sup> In this aspect the UK regulator Ofcom has applied its Broadcasting Code rules on harm and offence, fairness and impartiality.<sup>19</sup> For example, licensees must observe the rule that ‘news, in whatever form, must be reported with due accuracy and presented with due impartiality’. In particular ‘due impartiality on matters of political or industrial controversy and matters relating to current public policy must be preserved on the part of any person providing a service.’<sup>20</sup>

An examination of Ofcom’s fortnightly Broadcast and On Demand Bulletin (OBB)<sup>21</sup> shows that since 2011, the Baltic versions of the Russian language channel *NTV Mir* has been found to be in breach of the rules on seven occasions to date. The most recent breach, published on 7 March 2015, prompted Ofcom to conclude that ‘this breach of Rule 5.1 followed two previous breaches of the rules in Section Five of the Code recorded against

<sup>17</sup> European Convention on Transfrontier Television (ETS 132) available at <http://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/search-on-treaties/-/conventions/rms/090000168007b0d8>, accessed 25 March 2016

<sup>18</sup> Article 7.3 of the Convention states: *The broadcaster shall ensure that news fairly presents facts and events and encourages the free formation of opinions.*

<sup>19</sup> The Ofcom Broadcasting Code, July 2015, available at [http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/binaries/broadcast/code-july-15/Ofcom\\_Broadcast\\_Code\\_July\\_2015.pdf](http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/binaries/broadcast/code-july-15/Ofcom_Broadcast_Code_July_2015.pdf), accessed 25 March 2016

<sup>20</sup> Ofcom Broadcasting Code Section Five: Due Impartiality and Due Accuracy and Undue Prominence of Views and Opinions available at <http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/broadcasting/broadcast-codes/broadcast-code/impartiality/>, accessed 25 March 2016

<sup>21</sup> *The Broadcast and On Demand Bulletin reports on the outcome of investigations into potential breaches of those Ofcom codes and rules below, as well as licence conditions with which broadcasters regulated by Ofcom are required to comply.* Available at <http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/enforcement/broadcast-bulletins/?a=0>, accessed 25 March 2016

the Licensee in relation to programmes on *NTV Mir Lithuania*. [...] Ofcom is concerned that in its representations in the present case, BMAL (i.e. Baltic Media Alliance Ltd., the licensee) appears to continue to misunderstand fundamental aspects concerning the application of the due impartiality rules in the Code.<sup>22</sup>

Following two complaints, one from the Latvian Central Electoral Commission (the CVK), both *NTV Mir Baltic* and *REN TV Baltic* (versions of Russian channels targeting Latvia) were found in breach of the rules when in November 2011 at various dates and times they transmitted what the licensee called ‘self-promotion’ but which was, in fact, political advertising and thus prohibited in the UK. At the time a petition had been raised calling for a referendum to establish Russian as an official state language and the item in question urged viewers to sign the petition. To quote from the Broadcast Bulletin: ‘Visit [www.cvk.lv](http://www.cvk.lv), to find the nearest place to you where you can sign a petition in support of Russian as the second Official Language, and add your vote. You think you’re saving time – but you’re losing your right to speak in your native language. Deadline: 30 November!’<sup>23</sup>

Ofcom found that there had been breaches of several rules including those on fairness, misleading the audience (by implying the approval of the Electoral Commission) and unjust treatment of individuals or organisations. In effect this was a deliberate and direct attempt by two foreign television channels to influence the Latvian constitutional order. It should be noted that although the offending item was broadcast in November and the deadline for signing the petition was 30 November, the relevant Ofcom decisions were published on

<sup>22</sup> OBB No. 300, 7 March 2016, pp. 41-53

<sup>23</sup> See OBB No. 214, 24 September 2012, pp. 4-12 and No. 220, 17 December 2012, pp. 66-79

24 September and 17 December 2012, the latter over a year after the event.

The situation is similar with the UK licensed English language channel *RT*, formerly *Russia Today*, the Licensee being *TV Novosti*. Between 2012 and 2015, the channel has been found in breach of the Broadcasting Code on no less than 9 occasions including 5 for lack of due accuracy and impartiality. The Broadcast Bulletin of 10 November 2014 is particularly telling.<sup>24</sup> It informs of the Ofcom decisions regarding 4 news broadcasts covering the events in Ukraine during early March 2014. Without going into detail, suffice it to say that these broadcasts contained statements such as, ‘When this putsch government came to power—with the help of the violent mobs of the Maidan, this vanguard of ultra-nationalists and neo-Nazis with the Right Sector; and it should be said with the support of Western funding and political backing...’ and ‘World War two veterans in Sevastopol fear fascism could be returning, as hard-line nationalists and neo-Nazis thrive in post-coup Ukraine.’ and ‘The money that we can’t use to feed the poor and the hungry in the United States and in Europe, that money is going to support Nazis in Ukraine with nuclear ambitions, who are looking to destabilise the region and whose sole goal is the destruction of Russia.’

In its conclusion, Ofcom stated: ‘It is also legitimate for news on a licensed service to be presented in broad terms from the viewpoint of a particular nation-state. We recognise that *TV Novosti*, providing a service with a Russian background, will want to present the news from a Russian perspective. However, all news must be presented with due impartiality: that is with impartiality adequate or appropriate to the subject and nature of

<sup>24</sup> See OBB No. 266, 10 November 2014, pp. 5-44 and No. 288, 21 September 2015, pp. 5-60



the programme.’ The regulator found that ‘the Licensee failed to preserve due impartiality as required by Section Five of the Code’.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, it noted that ‘this Decision followed three previous published decisions in which Ofcom found that *TV Novosti* breached Section Five of the Code. As a result of the most recent of those decisions, we requested that the Licensee attend a meeting to discuss compliance with regard to its due impartiality. Therefore, as a result of the current case, we are putting *TV Novosti* on notice that any future breaches of the due impartiality rules may result in further regulatory action, including consideration of a statutory sanction.’<sup>26</sup> One common element stands out in Ofcom’s decisions regarding coverage of the events in Ukraine, none of the grounds given for finding a breach of its Broadcasting Code relate to the rules of the AVMSD—they all concern the requirement for due impartiality, not the prohibition of incitement to hatred.

The Russian language channel *Rossiya RTR*, which is retransmitted via satellite from Sweden to the Baltic States is registered with the Swedish Broadcasting authority.<sup>27</sup> In 2014 both Latvia and Lithuania temporarily suspended retransmission of the channel in their territory.

The Latvian regulatory authority found that several *Rossiya RTR* programmes infringed on the Law on Electronic Mass Media that prohibits encouragement of the incitement of hatred or calls for discrimination against any person or group of persons on grounds of gender, race or ethnic origin, nationality, religious affiliation or beliefs, disability, age or other circumstance and

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. p. 43

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. pp. 43-44

<sup>27</sup> See the presentation by the Lithuanian Radio and Television Commission *Overview of programmes targeting Lithuania—ratings, etc.* available at <http://neppladome.lv/lv/sakums/starptautiska-sadarbiba/baltijas-valstu-regulatoru-sadarbiba.html>, accessed 25 March 2016

incitement to provoke war or military conflict.<sup>28</sup> Lithuania’s arguments were similar in that the content of some programmes was ‘biased, of propaganda nature, deliberately misleading and in addition, it instigate[d] discord and a military climate, and would be contrary to Articles 3(3), 19(1)(3) and 19(2) of the Law’.<sup>29</sup> The decisions to suspend retransmission were taken unilaterally without following the procedure foreseen in the directive. As the Commission has noted, ‘The Lithuanian authorities did not notify the broadcaster and the Commission in writing of the alleged infringements and of the measures they intended to take, as would have been required by Article 3. As far as Latvia is concerned, they did not follow the “circumvention” procedure under Article 4. The regulator did not first contact Sweden with a view to achieving a mutually satisfactory solution.’<sup>30</sup>

These cases highlight what seems to be a contradiction between the assumption in the AVMSD that ‘the requirement that the originating Member State should verify that broadcasts comply with national law as coordinated by this Directive is sufficient under Union Law to ensure free movement of broadcasts without secondary control on the same grounds in the receiving Member States’ and Sweden’s Radio and Television Act.<sup>31</sup> The latter requires media service providers to ensure their services ‘reflect the fundamental concepts of a democratic society, the principle that all persons are of equal value,

<sup>28</sup> Articles 26.3 and 26.4 of the Law on Electronic Mass Media available at <http://neppl.lv/en/assets/documents/anglu/Electronic%20Mass%20Media%20Law%2012.2014.pdf>, accessed 25 March 2016.

<sup>29</sup> Discussion Paper on the Application of Articles 3 and 4 AVMSD Case study: Suspension of some Russian-language channels in Latvia and Lithuania. Doc CC AVMSD (2014) 4, p. 2, available at [https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/sites/digital-agenda/files/40\\_discussion\\_paper\\_4\\_rev\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/sites/digital-agenda/files/40_discussion_paper_4_rev_en.pdf), accessed 25 March 2016

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. p. 5

<sup>31</sup> Recital 36 AVMSD

and the freedom and dignity of the individual’.<sup>32</sup> Sweden’s Broadcasting Commission is required to monitor ‘through post-broadcast review whether programmes that have been broadcast on TV or radio or provided through on-demand TV comply with this Act and the programme-related conditions that can apply to those services’. However, ‘broadcasts that are provided under a retransmission licence [...] should not be reviewed by the Broadcasting Commission’,<sup>33</sup> which appears to apply in the case of *Rossiya RTR*. On the other hand, the same law states: ‘If a competent regulatory authority in another EEA State has submitted a justified request, a competent Swedish authority should request a broadcaster under Swedish jurisdiction to comply with the provisions of the other EEA State’ if the service ‘wholly or primarily directed to the other EEA State’ and there has been ‘a violation of a provision in the public interest that is stricter than the provisions of the AV Directive’.<sup>34</sup> It would seem that in this case, the onus of monitoring the content of third country channels targeting the Baltic States falls upon the receiving states.

## Stumbling blocks

### *Jurisdiction*

The UK regulator Ofcom has licensed several Russian language television channels targeting Latvia and the other Baltic states to Baltic Media Alliance Ltd.<sup>35</sup> A search of the Internet in September 2015 revealed that this

<sup>32</sup> Chapter 5 Section 1 Radio and Television Act, available at <http://www.radioochtv.se/documents/styrdokument/radio%20and%20television%20act.pdf>, accessed 25 March 2016

<sup>33</sup> Chapter 16 Section 2 Radio and Television Act

<sup>34</sup> Chapter 16 Section 16 Radio and Television Act

<sup>35</sup> Five of these channels are ‘Baltic’ versions of the major domestic Russian channels *NTV* and *REN TV*—*NTV Mir Baltic* and *NTV Mir Lithuania*, *REN TV Baltic*, *REN TV Estonia* and *REN TV Lietuva*.

company shared the same address with over 200 other companies.<sup>36</sup> Given that it is highly unlikely that the central administration of any of these major Russian language channels is based in London and that London is where management decisions are taken on programming or selection of content, it would seem reasonable to ask whether Baltic Media Alliance Ltd. is a ‘letter-box’ company registered in the UK with the purpose of circumventing the legislation of the targeted Member States. At a meeting of the Baltic, Swedish and UK regulatory authorities and the European Commission in Vilnius in February 2015 at which the author was present, Ofcom confirmed that no transmission of the signals of these channels targeting the Baltic States was carried out in the UK or using satellite capacity appertaining to the UK. Article 3 of the directive states: ‘Member States shall ensure freedom of reception and shall not restrict retransmissions on their territory of audiovisual media services from other Member States for reasons which fall within the fields coordinated by this Directive.’ The question, therefore, arises, if there is no transmission of the signals of these Russian language channels from the UK, does the directive even apply?

### *Derogation*

The disparity between permissible derogations i.e. the imposition of restrictions on the retransmission of services from other Member States has come into sharper focus since the annexation of Crimea and Russian backed aggression in Ukraine. The Baltic States have long been the target of Russian propaganda, lies and disinformation in the media, yet there is no provision for derogation in the case of television broadcasting on grounds

<sup>36</sup> <http://www.endole.co.uk/company-by-postcode/w1t-7pdf>, accessed 4 Sep. 2015

of ‘public security, including the safeguarding of national security and defence’.

Of course, it could be argued that Article 52 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union provides for exceptions to the freedom to provide services based on public policy and national security.<sup>37</sup> The European Commission discussion paper concerning the suspension of Russian language channels points out that, ‘Under the Court’s case-law, reasons of public policy and public security may be invoked in the event of a “genuine and sufficiently serious threat affecting one of the fundamental interests of society. Like all derogations from a fundamental principle of the Treaty, the public policy exception must be interpreted restrictively.” However, according to the Court, public interest considerations cannot be called upon where measures protecting similar interests are harmonised at Community level.’<sup>38</sup> This disparity needs to be addressed because it is axiomatic that EU Member States have the right to protect their democratic order.

### ***Lengthiness of derogation procedures***

The European Commission recognises that ‘the procedures provided in Articles 3(2) and 4 do not allow for a quick reaction in case of emergency. The shortest possible reaction time would be 15 days in the case of Article 3(2)(d) and 2 months in the case of Article 4(2). The

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<sup>37</sup> Article 52 TFEU. 1. *The provisions of this Chapter and measures taken in pursuance thereof shall not prejudice the applicability of provisions laid down by law, regulation or administrative action providing for special treatment for foreign nationals on grounds of public policy, public security or public health.* Available at <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:12012E/TXT&from=EN>, accessed 25 March 2016

<sup>38</sup> Discussion Paper on the Application of Articles 3 and 4 AVMSD. Op cit. p. 4

situation is different for on-demand services, as Article 3(4) foresees an “emergency procedure”. Member States may indeed derogate, in urgent cases, from the standard procedure as long as the measures taken are notified as soon as possible to the Commission and to the Member States that hold jurisdiction.<sup>39</sup> In the case of the UK registered channels *NTV Mir Baltic* and *REN TV Baltic* broadcasting political advertising, we can only speculate on what effect this had. However, the time taken for the regulatory authority to publish its decision that a breach had occurred is cause for concern.

### **Recommendations**

The European Commission is currently reviewing the AVMSD, and a report on the results is tentatively scheduled for 1 June 2016. Most of the following recommendations have already been submitted to the Commission by Latvia and other Member States through consultations, Contact Committee meetings, and other fora.<sup>40</sup>

### ***Jurisdiction***

The review of the AVMS directive should aim to achieve flexible and predictable regulation that prevents deliberate circumvention of national rules in cases where third country services are registered in one Member State but are targeted at the audience in another Member State. It is important that when audiovisual media services are registered or licensed, the jurisdiction criteria are honest and fair and that they are applied correctly.

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<sup>39</sup> Discussion Paper on the Application of Articles 3 and 4 AVMSD. Op cit. pp. 5-6

<sup>40</sup> Article 29 AVMSD envisages a Contact Committee composed of representatives of the competent authorities of the Member States ‘to facilitate effective implementation of this Directive through regular consultation on any practical problems arising from its application’.

### **Cooperation**

Cooperation between regulators and the European Commission should be strengthened in order to prevent the abuse of the directive's rules and to avoid any unnecessary conflict that may arise between regulators if third country services are registered without consulting the target states. When registering services in one Member State that are intended for the audience in another Member State, it is important to give due consideration to the national policy of the receiving states. This is especially true in those cases where the receiving states have stricter rules.

### **Disparity between linear and non-linear services**

As discussed above, the difference in the grounds for derogation from the country of origin principle between television broadcasting and on-demand services prevents Member States from taking emergency action where national security is threatened. In light of the current aggressive information campaign being waged against European democracies, this anomaly should be corrected.

### **Transparency**

Democracy can only function properly if citizens can make informed decisions and in order to make these decisions, citizens must be aware of the sources of information they base their decisions on. In the case of the AVMSD, consumers, i.e. television viewers, are given the right to a bare minimum of information on who is addressing them.

As recently as 2014, the EU Council adopted *Conclusions on media freedom and pluralism in the digital environment*, which recognised that 'information about the ownership of a given media outlet and about other

entities or persons benefiting from this ownership must be easily accessible to citizens so they can make an informed judgment about the information provided'.<sup>41</sup>

A corollary to the making of informed decisions is that the information they are based on is trustworthy. (This is especially important in the present geopolitical context when information is being 'weaponised'.) Unlike the AVMSD, the European Convention of Transfrontier Television has recognised this in Paragraph 3 of Article 7, which requires broadcasters to 'ensure that news fairly presents facts and events and encourages the free formation of opinions'. A revision of the directive should give citizens the right to know who the ultimate beneficiaries of audiovisual media services are i.e. who is trying to influence their decisions.

### **Journalistic standards**

The directive requires Member States and the Commission to develop codes of conduct regarding the advertising of 'unhealthy' food accompanying or included in children's programmes.<sup>42</sup> It should be possible to extend this to a requirement to develop and make publicly accessible on the media service provider's website, a code of conduct that includes adherence to generally accepted journalistic standards. Special mention should be made of the requirement for news and current affairs programmes to be presented with due impartiality and accuracy, notions that could be explained in additional recitals. This could have several beneficial effects, for example, raising the standard of journalism and increasing citizens' trust in the media.

It remains to be seen which of these suggestions the European Commission will have taken on board when

<sup>41</sup> Official Journal 2014/C 32/04

<sup>42</sup> Article 9.2 AVMSD

the legislative proposal is finally on the table. It will then be up to the Member States to fight their corners, either individually or by forming alliances of common interests.



## KEY FINDINGS OF THE EED'S FEASIBILITY STUDY ON INDEPENDENT RUSSIAN-LANGUAGE MEDIA INITIATIVES IN THE EASTERN PARTNERSHIP AND BEYOND



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### Context

The dominance of Kremlin-aligned voices in the media space, both in the East and in the West, has been growing for over a decade. Polarisation, distortion, and misinformation dominate the Kremlin-aligned media, which reach millions of Russian speakers across Europe and beyond. Media and political experts repeatedly warned about this trend, yet the West chose not to see it. The tipping point came with the annexation of Crimea and the conflict in eastern Ukraine, when Kremlin-aligned TV channels spread disinformation and the language of

hatred, encouraging Russian-speakers to side with Russia and engage in the conflict. This brought the divisive role of media into sharp focus for European leaders and the public, and thus made Europe recognise the degrading effect of Russian state propaganda. A feeling of urgency to deliver an ‘adequate response’ has entered the political discourse—this sometimes appears in the form of counter-propaganda.

The political impulse to launch a wider discussion in the EU came from four EU Member States in January 2015. In a non-paper by Denmark, Estonia, Lithuania, and the United Kingdom,<sup>1</sup> the EU was called on to boost its strategic communications activities in response to Russia’s active propaganda campaign. The European Council subsequently acknowledged the problem during a meeting in Brussels on 19 and 20 March 2015. The published conclusions stated that, ‘The European Council stressed the need to challenge Russia’s ongoing disinformation campaigns and invited the High Representative, in cooperation with Member States and EU institutions, to prepare by June an action plan on strategic communication’.<sup>2</sup>

In parallel to the political track on strategic communication, the governments and EU institutions were also prompted to look for an efficient media response that would provide Russian-speakers with access to alternative viewpoints. It was in this context that the government of the Netherlands tasked the European Endowment for Democracy (EED) to prepare a feasibility study on Russian-language TV channels or other media initiatives that would address the problem.

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<sup>1</sup> For more information, see, for instance, <https://euobserver.com/foreign/127155>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2015/03/20-conclusions-european-council/>

Consequently, the EED launched a *Feasibility Study on Russian Language Media Initiatives (RLMIs) in the Eastern Partnership and beyond* in January 2015. The aim was to identify a range of practical solutions to support and strengthen democratic, independent, and diverse Russian-language media in the countries of the Eastern Partnership<sup>3</sup> (EaP) and beyond.<sup>4</sup>

The premise that governed the study was that accurate news and information, which enable fuller participation in public life, hold the powerful to account, and protect the rights of the individual are a cornerstone of democracy; this is threatened when the choice of media and voices is limited. The Russian language should not be deployed to divide societies.

## Methodology

The methodology applied to the process of consolidation and analysis for the study focused on three parallel tracks: media experts, Russian-language media initiatives, and a political dimension. Each work stream consisted of two layers: analysis—the development of written inputs included in the study, and a clearing-house of ideas—discussion and development of ideas on how to optimise cooperation and achieve synergies in the field.

Between February and April 2015, media experts, professionals, and NGOs, as well as donor representatives, provided their expertise during a series of roundtable discussions. Overall, the EED consulted more than 150 media experts and professionals to examine the existing and future prospects for Russian-language media in the EU’s EaP countries and beyond.

Further qualitative data was collected by the authors of the study through a range of in-depth interviews with

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<sup>3</sup> Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine

<sup>4</sup> Primarily the Baltic States and Russia

experts and representatives of media outlets. Existing datasets and original research were also procured from a number of research consultancies with established expertise in the sector and/or the region. The study thus harnessed the collective knowledge of a wide network of contributors possessing both thematic and geographical expertise on this broad and complex subject.

The study applied a comprehensive approach to the topic. It analysed the audiences, content, markets, laws, and security environments in which the media operate. Given the distribution of Russian-language populations across most countries of the former Soviet Union, the study identified the key 'shared characteristics' of the media audiences across the region. Identifying these characteristics was crucial for understanding the mechanisms of Kremlin-aligned media and their influence on Russian-speakers.

The report focused on television and online media platforms, including mobile platforms, in view of their collective dominance of the market and the opportunities they present for RLMI of all sizes. This was not to ignore the enduring significance of radio and print media, but rather to recognise that most newspapers and radio stations are increasingly looking to digital platforms to consolidate and grow their audiences.

## **Key Findings**

### ***A Breakdown of Trust***

Much of the television news broadcast from Russia has exhibited a growing tendency to sensationalise, simplify, distort, co-opt, and marginalise issues in ways that run counter to the universal values of fair and accurate journalism. Yet, both state-run and independent media outside Russia have not managed to provide an effective counter-weight to this, and there are numerous

examples of what may be considered 'counter-propaganda' rather than fair and accurate news. One of the strongest themes to emerge from our audience research is **a consistent lack of trust in most media outlets** regardless of genre or affiliation.

This calls for solutions that promote the values associated with independent and watchdog journalism, as well as news that addresses issues at the local, national, and international levels.

### ***Fragmented and Captive Audiences***

The Russian-language audiences are as diverse as the varied cultural, social, and political environments they inhabit. This suggests that a single pan-regional solution on its own would not be sufficient to address the different needs and demands of these audiences.

Much of the Kremlin-aligned media offer is inherently commercial. Audiences are attracted to their high production values and persuasive emotional narratives, which in turn lead them to news bulletins. Among older audiences, a deep sense of nostalgia for the Soviet past drives engagement with these media. 'Historic' films and documentaries create a mythic past and a sense of 'victimisation' among Russian-speaking audiences, especially outside Russia.

Despite the significant pull of Kremlin-aligned television, there is evidence of demand for alternatives, especially in the online sphere.

### ***Building Audiences***

The critical challenge is both to cultivate potential demand for independent media and respond to existing demand among those segments of the audience that are already predisposed to, or actively seeking, alternatives. This suggests the need for **innovative content strategies**

**and formats including cutting-edge documentary and satire**, which are largely absent from the television menu offered to Russian-language audiences.

On the one hand, it calls for strategies that **promote independent media exposure, access, and literacy** among the wider audience. On the other hand, the study highlights the need to **help RLMIs target the ‘leading edge’ of audiences** as a way into the market, and to ensure that their stories are not only told, but adequately heard.

This also requires more in-depth and ongoing collection of market and media consumption data than is currently available for the Russian-language audience.

### ***The Local Gap***

In many markets more content that engages audiences on both a domestic and a local (city or regional) level is needed. News and current affairs programming from Russian federal television channels and state-run Internet sites is focused on international stories, with the Kremlin at their centre. At the same time, national and local programming outside Russia offers scarce coverage of domestic and local issues.

This suggests placing greater emphasis on support to media outlets that produce and distribute locally relevant content, both in news and non-news formats. This would help to build trust in independent media outlets, and also fill crucial gaps in the offer of Kremlin-aligned media.

### ***The Survival Challenge***

Although independent media exist throughout the region, many struggle due to extremely limited resources. This prevents them from acquiring or producing high-quality content and reaching the critical mass need for a stable viewership. Commercial opportunities for

new or existing independent media initiatives are limited at all market levels and across all platforms. In some countries, markets are distorted by restrictive government policies towards independent media.

This does not mean that new initiatives should dismiss commercial opportunities altogether. But the conditions for sustainable, exclusively commercial operations are relatively under-developed in most regions and contexts. Furthermore, foreign investment in media across the region has declined over recent years. Although several donors support independent media directly or via media development NGOs, this support lacks consistency. The study therefore identifies a need for **better co-ordination and a longer-term approach in support for independent media across the region**.

### ***Ensuring Security***

Some states, including Russia, exert significant and increasing control over all media; independent journalists are under daily threat of harassment, intimidation, and imprisonment, as well as cyber and violent physical attacks. The study identified measures that could be taken to enhance protection for journalists through specialised training and the development of security protocols. Above all, the report pointed to the need for the **development of a network that can, in various ways, resist targeted attacks and foster greater international solidarity in exposing repression**. This would make it considerably harder for authorities to ‘silence’ independent media through repressive measures.

### ***Connecting the Dots***

Past experience suggests that large-scale investments in standalone channels pose significant risks in light of market constraints and political instability. However,



**piecemeal approaches are unlikely to deliver the kind of pluralism that would be sustainable over the long term.**

For this reason, the report's recommendations were geared towards greater co-operation between existing and emerging Russian-language media initiatives. The suggested collaborative solutions could operate across markets and platforms, supporting high-quality content production and distribution for both global and local audiences.

While it has been evident that recommendations would not provide an immediate or 'total' solution to the problems identified, they would have a significant impact on reconnecting with audiences and rebuilding their trust. This is best achieved by providing fair and accurate information and balanced perspectives through engaging and accessible formats.

It is equally important to pursue innovative mechanisms of distribution that can get to audiences beyond the reach of existing RLMIs; to develop the critical thinking skills of media audiences through media literacy and education initiatives; and to enhance training, infrastructural, and financial support for both new and existing RLMIs from the ground up.

## **Recommendations**

The expert teams proposed five 'plurality building blocks', each of which can stand-alone and/or serve a more ambitious and integrated structure and vision. These 'blocks' are necessary—and collectively have the potential to be sufficient—to stem and reverse the tide of repression and propaganda that is stifling pluralism in Russian-language media today.

**A regional news hub** for the Russian language **that embodies the values of fairness, accuracy, and watchdog**

**reporting**, and builds a network of partners to leverage high-quality news content to wider audiences across platforms. This would fill an important gap left by the effective closure of the Russian news agency *RIA Novosti* in 2013.

As well as facilitating and encouraging the sharing of news content, such a regional news hub could play an integral role in supporting collaborative investigations, rights clearance, and access to new video library material, as well as fact checking and translation. It could also act as a proto-news-agency in the collection of citizen journalism and stringer material. It should work with other existing news agencies and independent media—on a membership or affiliate basis—to deliver and exchange local and international news stories.

**A content sharing platform, or 'content factory'**, to encourage the production and distribution of high quality programming on television and online, with particular emphasis on **content that reflects local issues and local lives**.

Like the news hub, it should function primarily as a cooperative, enabling the sharing and co-production of content, but with a focus on documentary and factual entertainment formats, as well as film, drama, and social reality programmes. It should also engage in both commissioning and acquisition, and help to facilitate a content market for the Russian-language media space.

**A centre for media excellence** in the Russian language that co-ordinates the work of governments, NGOs, and educational institutions in ongoing market research and media monitoring, media literacy programmes, professional training, and peer-to-peer exchanges.

Alongside the three main building blocks, a **basket fund** should be established to provide a critical mass of funding for the building blocks. With a mix of governmental and non-governmental sources, it should ensure

a collaborative approach among donors and NGOs working in the region. However, it would not have to limit its support to new initiatives.

In addition to the three main building blocks should sit a **multimedia distribution platform** that guarantees a degree of ‘buy in’ and ensures content generated by the news exchange and content factory reaches the widest possible audience. It should consist of a pan-regional brand that fronts both a **linear channel** of television output across various platforms, as well as **content segments** that would be available for consumption on demand.

From an audience perspective, the ‘multimedia distribution platform’ will look like a **pan-regional television plus Internet brand**. Built on co-operative partnerships between existing players, it will not require the scale of investment usually needed to set up a conventional television channel. The brand will be available to consumers on many different digital platforms, applying the cost-efficiency, market logic, and co-operative principles that digital technologies allow. In other words, programmes would be made available wherever there is a potential ‘new’ audience—be it **via mobile apps, streaming, broadcasting or partner outlets**—with a view to building a brand that can ultimately compete alongside existing Kremlin-aligned channels.

The model proposed in the study addresses the concerns of both sceptics and supporters of a pan-regional channel solution. In particular, a range of co-operative measures would be adopted to ensure that the brand associated with the ‘multimedia distribution platform’ does not compete, but rather complements existing outlets by creating added value through co-operation, cross promotion, and brand association at various levels.

Although maximum impact would likely be achieved by co-ordinated, multilateral action aimed at launching

the building blocks in concert, each element of the strategy can also be developed gradually and organically—the news hub would grow into a news agency; the content factory into a commissioning and acquisition platform; and both elements together into a multimedia distribution platform and pan-regional channel. In the meantime, these elements can collectively supply funds and content across platforms, regions, and genres.

The report thus recommended a solution that works for and with existing Russian-language media organisations by developing collaborative regional initiatives. This two-track approach to the Russian-language media space—strengthening existing local media outlets by enhancing their capacity to enter into cost-effective regional partnerships driven by cooperation among local media was central to the proposed solution. Mutually re-enforcing, complementary, and with the efficient coordination of donor support, such an approach can maximise the impact of media through economies of scale. Co-ordinated action could fill widening gaps in the availability and accessibility of pluralistic and balanced news, as well as high-quality non-news content, such as drama, documentaries, entertainment, and satire. This in turn would help strengthen quality journalism and bring much needed plurality and balance to the Russian-language media space.

## Implementation

The final results of the feasibility study entitled ‘Bringing Plurality and Balance to the Russian Language Media Space’ were launched by the EED in Brussels on 25 June 2015.<sup>5</sup> The report was received with high interest by

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<sup>5</sup> Preliminary findings and recommendations of the report were presented in the margins of the Riga Eastern Partnership Summit on 19 May 2015 in Riga.

the broader community of practice and described as the most ‘comprehensive, intelligent, and focused’ to date.<sup>6</sup> The EED was commended by EU Member States and other like-minded states for its excellent work and engagement, and, subsequently, requested to continue monitoring and facilitating the process of following up the report. This includes support for the mobilisation of funding to ensure the implementation of the recommendations in a timely manner and thus contribute to the sustainability of the action.

The launch of the implementation phase of the study recommendations was marked by a high-level donor coordination meeting convened by Poland and the Netherlands, with expert advice from the EED, in Warsaw in September 2015. The meeting took stock of donor commitments for the support to RLMI and agreed the next steps to turn the study’s recommendations into a reality.<sup>7</sup>

The joint efforts by the EED and other donors yielded tangible results. In less than a year since the launch of the study, the implementation of key recommendations is making significant progress. Of the key actions proposed in the report the following three are under way:

A Russian-language information agency is implemented through a cooperative news hub called the ‘Russian Language News Exchange’ fostered by the Free Press Unlimited, a non-for-profit foundation based in Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

The news exchange is aimed at improving the quality of information available in the Russian-speaking media

<sup>6</sup> Anne Applebaum, one of the reviewers of the Study.

<sup>7</sup> During the conference Poland announced its €1m pledge to the EED, and the Netherlands pledged €1.3m for a news exchange to help develop a Russian language news agency. Latvia declared funding for a media excellence centre that could serve as a media clearinghouse in the Eastern Partnership countries and beyond. Declarations of support were also made in regard to a ‘content factory’.

space, including greater pluralism and free expression, by providing trustworthy, fact-based and balanced news and analysis in Russian. The partnership is made up of seven media partners from the EaP and Russia that will share and exchange their existing content, as well as produce new stories. A central news desk, which will coordinate the news agenda and manage commissioning of new articles, is based in Prague.

The Baltic Media Centre of Excellence (BCME) was established in Riga in November 2015.

The BCME mandate spans the media from the Baltic States to the EaP and beyond. The Russian-language media space is framed under a dedicated Programme for the EaP and beyond. The Programme will serve as a unique added value resource for independent and quality Russian-language media in the region. It will act as a clearinghouse for knowledge and expertise, media skills, and training, as well as facilitate professional dialogue and peer-to-peer exchange in the Russian language media sphere.

A content production and sharing mechanism for non-news content, the ‘Content Factory’, continues to be under development.

Although implemented separately, these actions seek synergies, mutual support, and reinforcement from each other to ensure long-term sustainability, maximise the impact of their actions, as well as advance broader donor coordination through a donor coordination mechanism in place for each of these initiatives.

Given the short passage of time since the presentation of the EED report in June last year, the speed of implementation and action to this end is without precedent. This demonstrates the success of the methodology applied in the report; through the inclusive and innovative process of the three parallel activity streams is proving

to be highly efficient in producing the results that were endorsed by all key stakeholders. The wide consensus regarding the report's recommendations generated positive dynamics among donors and has served as a catalyst for implementation as presented above.

## Assessment

The Russian-language media space continues to be dominated by the propaganda spread by Kremlin-aligned TV channels. However, a qualitative change has taken place. The report laid grounds for facilitating and navigating the process of the development of RLMIIs that will reach out to the Russian-speaking populations of the EaP countries, as well as the Baltic States and Russia. The wide scope of the project ensured that its results are applicable to all target groups and beneficiaries.

The study identified and decoded key problems within the Russian language media space, and also generated a much broader discussion regarding the state of media in the Eastern Neighbourhood, including the mobilisation of discussions regarding the direction of possible actions, especially in the context of the ongoing political debate about the (dis)information campaign led and controlled by Russia's media tools. The study led to the intensification of important processes concerning support for independent media in the East—by EU institutions, state and non-state donors, as well as in the media community, all of which contributed to the report.

On a political level, the study was recognised by the EU and made it to EU policy documents. The EEAS Action Plan on Strategic Communication,<sup>8</sup> presented to the

General Affairs Council in June 2015, referenced the *Feasibility Study*, and called for an appropriate follow-up.

To date, the wider political momentum has been maintained. As a follow up to the Warsaw meeting, the Netherlands convened a conference devoted to independent Russian-language media in Amsterdam in April 2016. Another major conference devoted to this issue will be organised by the UK in cooperation with Wilton Park in late 2016 highlighting the importance of freedom of the press in the Russian-speaking media space.

On the whole, the study brought about greater awareness and a better understanding of the gravity of media manipulations and social engineering by the Russian-state information machine. It led to the realisation that Europe can no longer have the luxury of ignoring these processes; otherwise the Kremlin-controlled media will operate freely for many years to come. Finally, the report served to realise that the only effective way to address the region's challenges is a long-term approach investing in balanced, trustworthy, independent, and diverse media working for Russian-language audiences. The return for such an investment would provide Russian-speakers with opportunities for pluralistic, informed debate and freedom of expression. If the Western world commits to this course of action, the Russian language will no longer be used to divide people according to their values and political views.

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<sup>8</sup> [http://www.eeas.europa.eu/top\\_stories/2015/261115\\_stratcom-east\\_qanda\\_en.htm](http://www.eeas.europa.eu/top_stories/2015/261115_stratcom-east_qanda_en.htm). For the full text see <http://eap-csf.eu/assets/files/Action%20Plan.pdf> THIS LINK SEEMS TO BE FAULTY

PART II

**THE VIEW FROM  
THE BALTIC STATES**



**STRENGTHENING A PLURALISTIC  
MEDIA AND INFORMATION ENVIRON-  
MENT THROUGH JOURNALISM TRAINING,  
MEDIA LITERACY, AND KNOWLEDGE-  
SHARING ACROSS ESTONIA, LATVIA,  
LITHUANIA, THE EU EASTERN PARTNER-  
SHIP AND BEYOND:  
*THE BALTIC CENTRE FOR MEDIA  
EXCELLENCE***



***Signe van Zundert***

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Institute in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania*

**Changing media landscapes, changing reali-  
ties: the state of Russian-language media after  
Maidan/Crimea**

To understand the concept behind the Baltic Centre for Media Excellence, it is necessary to take a leap backwards

in time to 2014 when the crisis in Ukraine escalated. These events, which had their roots in the Maidan and the annexation of Crimea, brought attention to the way the media and information environment in Russia, the EU Eastern Partnership, and the former Soviet Republics were—and still are—being shaped by Kremlin-controlled media outlets in Russia. They use the power of language and information to saturate the information-environment with false media content. However, the state of this media-confrontation is not new-news, as the American journalist, author, and Eastern European expert Anne Applebaum stated during a conference on how to build balanced and pluralistic Russian-language media initiatives in June last year.<sup>1</sup>

In retrospect, the turning point manifested by the abovementioned events is that Kremlin-controlled Russian-language media now function as instruments in creating and maintaining false realities to a much greater extent than before the crisis, by putting effort into causing either bewilderedness or falsifying information. Furthermore, this highlights how media once again is clearly a part of an extensive ‘nation-building’ strategy from within Russia creating a ‘sense-of-belonging’ narrative aimed at Russian-speaking media users throughout the post-Soviet territories through Kremlin-controlled media outlets. This has also led to an information-discrepancy between Russia and Europe/the West that underlines the crucial need for independent media outlets that serve the citizens and are capable of creating trustworthy and comprehensible analyses of the conflict-zones as well as the internal and external processes related to the crisis.

Independent media are imperative for building a vibrant and sustainable democracy, and this is the core

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<sup>1</sup> Read the news-bulletin here: <https://www.democracyendowment.eu/news/bringing-plurality-1/>

value of the Baltic Centre for Media Excellence (BCME). Regrettably, there are multiple downsides to the crisis in Ukraine, but in contrast it has also generated a renewed interest in launching surveys that have led to recommendations, new initiatives, and taskforces—all actively participating and cooperating in a wide international network to provide the vitality needed to develop both Russian-language media alternatives and unravel the false information and narratives promoted by the Kremlin. This article intends to outline the role that the BCME plays in topics such as journalism training, media literacy, and cooperation with the EU Eastern Partnership countries, as well as how the EU can support the BCME and what the key challenges are in a future perspective.

### **Contextualising Russian-language media in the Baltic States**

A variety of international recommendations and feasibility studies were carried out in 2014 and 2015. For instance, Michael Weiss and Peter Pomerantsev published their study *The Menace of Reality* in (2014).<sup>2</sup> Others were carried out within the framework of the NB8 countries, by the European Endowment for Democracy, and the NATO StratCom Centre of Excellence in Riga. Such studies were backed by political support from the European Council, and various governments and NGOs that all pointed to the need for strengthening the independent objective and professional media and to boost ‘the professional skills of media outlets and/or individual journalists, including those who cater to national minorities’.

This need stems from the current geo-political situation in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania—the former two

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<sup>2</sup> Read the full publication online: [http://imrussia.org/media/pdf/Research/Michael\\_Weiss\\_and\\_Peter\\_Pomerantsev\\_\\_The\\_Menace\\_of\\_Unreality.pdf](http://imrussia.org/media/pdf/Research/Michael_Weiss_and_Peter_Pomerantsev__The_Menace_of_Unreality.pdf)

are countries with large ethnic Russian minorities, and all three are heavily exposed to disinformation flooding their information space. A number of academic publications, as well as in the findings of the NATO StratCom Centre of Excellence concerning Russia's information campaign, have documented the fact that the political and military aspects of the crisis in Ukraine continue to be accompanied by what is being called an 'information war'. Kremlin-controlled Russian media platforms maintain the government line and frequently employ biased or even clearly falsified information to deliver their messages. Such programming is freely available and enjoy large audiences in many Eastern European countries on the same Russian channels that are retransmitted via cable, e.g. the top three choices among the available TV channels for 'non-Latvians' in Latvia are all Russian channels, not local channels.<sup>3</sup> The Russian language is widely used to acquire information, particularly in smaller local media outlets. Myriad government-controlled Russian-language online resources, disguised as news outlets, also serve propaganda purposes. Internet trolling is widespread and local media in the Baltics regularly, albeit at times unwittingly, serve as multipliers of misleading messages by using Kremlin-backed sources in their own reporting.

The Baltic Centre for Media Excellence was established in November 2015. It is an independent non-profit organization registered in Latvia comprising members from Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania. Among the founding members are leading media and academic institutions in the Baltics—the public broadcasters ERR (Estonia) and LTV (Latvia), the Estonian Publishers' Association, the Lithuanian Online Media Association, the Baltic Centre for Investigative Journalism RE:Baltica, the Latvian Journalists

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<sup>3</sup> according to TNS data, Baltic Centre for Media Excellence December 2015

Association, the Latvian Association of Broadcasting Organisations, the Rīga Stradiņš University, and the Baltic Film, Media, Arts, and Communication School of Tallinn University. Other members include the Stockholm School of Economics and the Lithuanian Public Broadcaster. The initial donors for the project are the Nordic Council of Ministers and the Danish Cultural Institute. Other donors include the Latvian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The BCME was founded to gather resources, strengthen existing knowledge, and, most importantly, to identify knowledge-gaps in journalism training in the Baltic States and Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries.<sup>4</sup> The BCME aims to reinvigorate and promote the existing core values of journalism such as awareness, responsibility, and quality supplemented with the skills and methods needed by media-professionals working with Russian-speaking minorities. The primary goal of the centre is to serve as a clearing-house for journalism training and facilitate a professional dialogue about journalism training needs in the Baltics and EaP countries through the continuous development, assessment, and delivery of needs-based training modules. This will foster the much-needed professional conversation among media professionals, promoting media literacy and research into media trends concerning freedom of the press, freedom of expression, and the role of the media in serving the public. The BCME will serve to facilitate peer-to-peer exchanges around issues pertaining to quality journalism and to current media environment in the region.

### ***Assessing the role of media in a democracy: journalism and citizen education***

The often-discussed question of 'what is to be done' has a many answers. Building an information-wall or

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<sup>4</sup> The Eastern Partnership includes Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, and Ukraine.



actively participating in the ‘information war’ are neither possible nor constructive long-term approaches to facing the challenges of Kremlin-based disinformation campaigns. More focused educational measures must be taken to ensure that we achieve positive long-term results. The path to creating spheres of information that are characterized by quality, accountability, and genuine interest in the surrounding communities and citizens should not be derailed by attempts to counter disinformation. The BCME focuses its efforts on education and knowledge-exchange, striving to offer multiplatform journalism with the goal of fostering trusted alternatives to the disinformation coming from Russian media platforms. These are the values on which the BCME is built, and in this way it continually ensures engagement in, interaction with, and the development of existing and new media initiatives. The BCME will also educate professionals and consumers about Russian-language media in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. ‘Long-term educational objectives’ are the buzzwords here. By improving and update journalism training, it is possible to create better-equipped journalists, securing a high level of quality, and setting new standards for reporting and journalism in the Baltic States.

***Rethinking journalism skills: creating quality, tech-savvy, and responsible journalism***

If media is perceived as an ‘information tool’, then augmenting the awareness of media-professionals must include continuous updates of their professional ‘toolbox’ in the form of training-courses on topics such as the assessment of fundamental values audience engagement in content-creation. The contemporary information sphere is competitive in every way. From the point of view of the user, the aesthetics and accessibility of Kremlin-controlled

media outlets win out over quality and content, especially in comparison to local/regional Russian-language media outlets in the Baltic States in most cases. It is clear that education is vital for raising awareness among media professionals and media consumers and strengthening their resilience in the face of hostile propaganda. However, there is great value in locally produced media that can reach the Russian-speaking minorities in the Baltic States and EU Eastern Partnership countries. The BCME works to equip the media-professionals and their audiences with constructive ‘toolboxes’, fostering and expanding civic participation in an information sphere where the media serve a democratic and pluralistic purpose.

Media is not only content—media shapes reality and fosters a sense of belonging to a community. If the average media-user in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania does not find a locally produced media outlet that satisfies, then the likelihood of turning to Russian media is large. Today, both TV and online audiences are continuously exposed to biased information from Russia. A stronger local media that attends to local community issues, the welfare, and daily lives of its people would also be able to provide balanced information on world events, but this means improving skills in attracting tech-savvy audiences. Local relevance is the strongest point that media in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania can offer as an alternative to disinformation disseminated by Kremlin-controlled media platforms. However, in order to become an influential alternative, competing media platforms need to acquire tools for efficient and contemporary content production, compelling presentation, and audience interaction. Local media outlets, particularly smaller operations in the outlying regions, have had little, if any, opportunity to acquire the needed skills, due to lean budgets and limited access to available training. Focused training in all areas

of content production and content communication, performed by a group of highly qualified trainers will enable local media providers to deal with these challenges and position themselves among the top providers for local audiences.

### ***Making media literacy a priority: why citizens' education is needed***

Media processes are based on a classic provider/consumer relationship; it is therefore also necessary to improve media literacy among consumers. Media literacy plays an important role in navigating the info-sphere and developing the skills needed to critically appraise the information they are consuming. To support the creation of sustainable and critical media, users should be invigorated at an early stage by e.g. introducing media literacy initiatives in school curricula. A media consumer equipped with media-literacy and critical thinking skills will be much less susceptible to biased messaging and manipulation. Concentrated efforts in promoting media literacy among school teachers and helping them include it into existing curricula would help address the challenges facing younger audiences, while organizing media literacy workshops, producing relevant multi-media content, and organizing public events featuring leading speakers from both new and established democracies will assist in boosting critical thinking among the general public. The BCME plan is based on a three-fold approach—teaching people to be active and critical media consumers who understand the role of the media in civil society, navigate the information-sphere, and identify disinformation.

### **How can the EU support the work of the BCME?**

State-level public diplomacy responses are being initiated in both the EU and the US to face these challenges

and strengthen media initiatives for Russian-speakers inside and outside of Russia. Furthermore, an EU initiative—the EU StratCom Taskforce in Brussels—has been launched to monitor, treat, and inform about the on-going disinformation campaign. Furthermore, significant support is given to media in the EaP countries via Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (DG Neighbour) of the European Commission.

The EU already actively supports media policy-making, so a more hands-on project could be to join forces in implementing a media literacy campaign in the post-Soviet spaces of Central and Eastern European countries and beyond. The BCME could fulfil its mandate in a broader European context with the EU acting as a key-player in introducing media literacy into school curricula—a viable way of educating media-consumers in how to interact critically with their information sources. EU policies need to ensure productive dialogue and encourage the development of journalism in Eastern Europe and the EaP, and can support the work of the BCME in knowledge-sharing, developing initiatives to create trusted alternatives to disinformation coming from the Kremlin-controlled media outlets across the region, and providing tools to strengthen awareness and media literacy.

As a *de lege ferenda* suggestion, one could also imagine that the EU and its member states recognize the challenges faced by Estonia and Latvia especially, and create a funding mechanism to support solutions in the Baltic countries and other affected member-states. Of course, such actions would be politically sensitive, but the idea should be given some thought, as it seems difficult for Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania to find and commit the funds necessary to protect themselves against hostile propaganda. The establishment of the BCME and ETV+

should be welcomed as positive initiatives that can form the foundation for such support.

### **Reaching beyond the Baltic States: the BCME and the EaP countries**

As a result of several studies compiling data and recommendations it has become clear that the core efforts of the BCME in the Baltic States can serve as a point of departure for strengthening the Russian-language media in EaP.<sup>5</sup> The BCME will conduct surveys to collect information concerning the content production, communication, and business skills of independent Russian-language media; the centre will identify gaps in media skill set, and use existing expertise in the Eastern Partnership, the Baltics and beyond, to deliver professional training programmes and media literacy modules, as well as facilitate peer-to-peer knowledge exchange and dialogue between journalists and governmental and non-governmental actors engaged in media development. The cooperation also aims at mapping the landscape of independent media in Russia and building a wider community of public-interest-oriented media outlets operating in the Russian language. Kremlin-controlled Russian TV channels are freely available in most EaP countries and enjoy large audience shares, particularly *Pervyi Kanal* and *Rossyia*. These channels have massive resources and, consequently, high production values that make them attractive to media consumers, but they frequently broadcast biased or even clearly falsified information. Independent media outside Russia have not managed to

<sup>5</sup> Final Recommendations of the Feasibility Study on Russian Language Media Initiatives in the Eastern Partnership Region and Beyond conducted by the European Endowment of Democracy, as well as the conclusions of the NB8 Workshop on Balanced Russian Language Media in January 2015 in Riga, and the discussions of the First Eastern Partnership Media Conference in Riga in May 2015.

provide an effective counterweight to this, and there are numerous examples of what may be considered “count-propaganda” rather than fair and accurate news.

In comparison to the Baltic States, in EaP countries the overall environment for independent media can be characterized as mildly unreceptive to outright hostile. The highest-ranking EaP countries in the World Press Freedom Index 2015 are Georgia (69th), Moldova (72nd), and Armenia (78th), but even they are far below the top fifty. Half of the group is among the bottom fifty - Ukraine (129th), Belarus (157th), Azerbaijan (162nd).<sup>6</sup> Reporters Without Borders refers to Azerbaijan as ‘Europe’s biggest prison for news providers. Belarus comes close in terms of hostility to journalists, and the government uses legislation harassment and intimidation to silence the critics.’<sup>7</sup> Georgia and Moldova, the only countries with public service broadcasters (PSB), do better in the rankings, but lack appropriate safeguards for PSB independence from political pressure.<sup>8</sup>

### **Final words: filling gaps and defining the future challenges**

In the first quarter of its existence the BCME has successfully held a number events based on need assessments and qualitative studies by editors and media managers. The seminars covered topics such as ‘storytelling in journalism’, ‘studio interview techniques’, and ‘investigative journalism’. Such seminars serve to build capacity in modern visual techniques, and creating compelling narratives, and making news more constructive within the framework of public broadcasting. The centre also

<sup>6</sup> 2015 World Press Freedom Index; Reporters Without Borders; <http://index.rsrf.org/#!/index-details>

<sup>7</sup> Reporters Without Borders, country profile, Belarus; <http://en.rsrf.org/belarus,93.html>

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.



held public lectures on constructive journalism. These examples highlight the potential of the BCME to stimulate development in the media landscape by educating both the media-professionals and media-audiences.

The challenges for the future are to ensure a positive dialogue, encourage cooperation, and secure developments in the field of Russian-language media where the BCME is active. Financial support also plays a vital role for the life of the centre. The BCME has already received a donation from the European Endowment for Democracy to carry out the EaP programme and has secured funds from the Latvian Ministry of Foreign Affairs for projects to be carried out during 2016; the BCME has also received financial support from the Nordic Council of Ministers, and several European governments, including the Germans and the Danish.

In the final analysis, when democratic values are constantly changing and being challenged in the media landscape, the most important challenge will be to follow through on the necessary changes, ensuring that the training and support that the BCME offers is sustainable, intelligent, and responsive to the needs of the target-groups, while being open to new ideas and collaboration that will ensure a vigorous platform for media excellence.

## COMMUNICATION AT TIMES OF HOSTILE PROPAGANDA: CASE OF ESTONIA



**Liis Lipre-Järma,**  
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The 21<sup>st</sup> century is seeing a new intensity and scale of media manipulation and psychological war. Today technology enables governments, businesses, NGOs, and individuals to instantly reach audiences on an unprecedented scale. There are also changes in how we define the concept of 'security'; it has become more ambiguous in our rapidly globalising, increasingly IT-based world, where countries are using non-state measures more and more and non-state actors are trying to act as states.<sup>1</sup>

These trends mean that the government, the media, and in fact the whole of society need to learn new skills. For example, social media presents new challenges to

<sup>1</sup> International Security and Estonia, Estonian Information Board, 2016, p.7. <https://www.teabeamet.ee/pdf/2016-en.pdf>

governments; they must scale their online communications to meet the needs and expectations of their constituents. Everyone must learn how to cope with vast amounts of information, how to separate noise from facts, and Internet trolls from journalists, i.e. professional journalism from hostile information-operations.

These changes in the information sphere and beyond our broader political environment demand renewed strategies in the field of government communication, be it psychological defence or public diplomacy—both aspects of what we now refer to as ‘strategic communication’.

### The Estonian Approach

Throughout its recent history, Estonia has become used to being the target of hostile propaganda and is aware of the dangers it poses.

The concept of ‘psychological defence’ has been part of the Estonian military defence strategy since 2001, and since 2010 has been included in the Estonian policy for a comprehensive approach to security and defence.

Discussions about the role and scope of strategic communication in Estonia are ongoing and in constant evolution. So far, much of the focus in Estonia has been on the military aspects of strategic communication, reflected by the term ‘psychological defence’, and reactive—identifying hostile influences and neutralizing them. The current debate about strategic communication asks whether the Estonian strategy should adopt a more proactive approach, e.g. should one of the aims be to influence the perceptions of the population within as well as outside of Estonia? How can this small state use all of the constituent pillars of Government, including diplomacy and development cooperation, to achieve its strategic communication goals more efficiently? This would necessitate

an approach that encompasses the whole-of-government and society—in practice a step towards a mind-set of shared strategic communication, integral to every department of state and every level of national policy. For that purpose they wider term, ‘strategic communication’, might be adopted and defined in governmental strategy documents in the future. This would mean that the concept of ‘psychological defence’ would become one of the sub-categories of the strategic communication concept.

### The guiding principles and goals of the strategic communication

‘Statehood is a constant search for balance between personal liberty and the state that is created to warrant personal liberty.’<sup>2</sup> As much as each government policy must be in line with the Estonian Constitution and its spirit, the same applies to the communication strategies and activities of the State.

The overarching aim of strategic communication in Estonia is to contribute to safeguarding the fundamental principles of the Constitution of Estonia—primarily the democratic principles, rights, freedoms, and duties set out by the Constitution of Estonia and its preamble. These fundamental principles arise from the spirit of the Constitution and correspond to the principles of human dignity, social justice, and democratic government founded on the rule of law.<sup>3</sup>

The Constitution of Estonia explicitly says that there can be no censorship. It also ensures freedom of

<sup>2</sup> Mr Märt Rask, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, cited in Raul Narits, *About the Principles of the Constitution of the Republic of Estonia from the Perspective of Independent Statehood in Estonia*, Juridica International, XVI 2009, <http://www.juridicainternational.eu/?id=14186>

<sup>3</sup> Madis Ernits, *Põhiseaduse aluspõhimõtted*, Riigikogu Toimetised, RiTo 32, 2015. <http://www.riigikogu.ee/rito/index.php?id=16010>

expression (Paragraph 45).<sup>4</sup> Thus, in a democratic society the governmental voice would always be just one among many, and would contribute to a free and diverse information landscape.

According to the Strategic Communication Adviser to the Government of Estonia Mr Ilmar Raag, one of the main aims of peacetime strategic communication is to solve disputes and disagreements in society without resorting to violence. Internally this requires a cohesive society with a low level of social tensions.

Another set of aims and activities lie in the international domain. Estonia should work to secure close and trustworthy relationships with our friends and allies, and work towards the continued success of the NATO, the EU, and strong transatlantic relations.

The impact of any strategic communication activity comes not only from coordinated messages, but first and foremost from actual policy results in the fields of social, economic, cultural, foreign, or security and defence policy. It is not only important to explain our security concerns to our friends, allies, and the public in a clear and convincing manner, but we also need to show that we are willing and capable of doing our share. In addition to speaking aloud about the need to have more allies in the region, we must also present a convincing case of our achievements, resolve, and resilience. In parallel we must show that we understand and care about the threats our friends and allies face. Moreover, we must prove by real acts that we will come to their aid now, in the future, or whenever such need arises.

**The role of governments is to keep the public informed.** In an era of growing disinformation campaigns, combined with rising populism and decreasing trust in mainstream political parties, it is ever more important

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/530102013003/consolide>

that governmental officials, including diplomats, remain trustworthy and neutral sources of information.

Estonian Head of State Mr Toomas Hendrik Ilves has pointed out that ‘we must be more open with our domestic public about what we are trying to do and how it impacts their lives. We must explain the current crises, the security environment and the utility of defence in meeting present and future threats without resort to scare tactics or demagoguery’.<sup>5</sup>

One example of openness is a first-ever public analysis, *International Security and Estonia 2016*, by the Estonian Information Board—the Estonian foreign intelligence service. The importance of this report lies both in the fact that it informs the Estonian public, but it also ensures that our friends and their domestic audiences have access to a balanced set of facts for evaluation in these times of crises and increasing hostile disinformation campaigns.

The necessity to share more military-strategic information with the public and strengthen the nation’s psychological defence was explicitly argued by the Director General in the foreword of the report:

‘The idea [...] first occurred as a response to Russia’s aggression in Ukraine. Not a day went by in the wake of the annexation of Crimea and conflict escalation in eastern Ukraine without the Estonian or foreign press asking: ‘Is Narva next?’ Not to mention the numerous attempts to analyse the Kremlin’s hidden agenda with regard to the Baltics. Yet public officials remained laconic or altogether silent in their statements, resulting in burying the few competent messages that existed under

<sup>5</sup> From a speech given by President Ilves for the graduation ceremony at the School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University on 20 May 2016. <https://www.president.ee/en/official-duties/speeches/12257-president-ilves-at-the-georgetown-school-of-foreign-service-graduation-20-may-2016/index.html#sthash.Cv95LFd5.dpuf>

an avalanche of inadequate information. This, in return, led to the public space being filled by doomsday scenarios and half-truths, with a hunger for sensation. Without a doubt, such developments have a negative effect on a nation's psychological defence.'

In addition, the Defence Forces of Estonia and the Estonian Internal Security Service or Kaitsepolitseiamet (KAPO) play an important role in informing public through their annual analyses.<sup>6</sup> KAPO has published annual reviews about the internal security situation of Estonia since 1999, arguing that informing the public is one of the most efficient means to defend the constitutional order. It explains that as Russia's influence operations continue, 'the Internal Security Service has to untangle and reveal to the public this mess of blatant lies, pseudo NGOs, and half-truths as much as possible [...]'. In its recent report the security service also openly weighs various risks against each other, saying that 'it is as important as ever to acknowledge that the security threat arising from a weaker European Union or weaker bond between Europe and the North-America is many times greater than that arising from the refugees settling to our region'.<sup>7</sup>

## Solutions

Countering hostile propaganda by responding to blatant lies and rebutting false charges is important, although it is hardly enough. It is more important that governments create and defend the conditions for accurate information to circulate freely, ideally in the same time frame as disinformation is taking place. This requires

<sup>6</sup> Annual Review by KAPO is available in English: <https://kapo.ee/en/content/annual-reviews.html>; the Estonian Defence Forces Annual Report is published only in Estonian: <http://www.mil.ee/et/pressiruum/kaitsevae-aastaraamat>

<sup>7</sup> KAPO Annual Review 2015, p. 6.

credible sources that discover and quickly report what has actually happened.<sup>8</sup> For this to happen we need to strengthen the 'teamwork' between governments, politicians, media, academia, and NGOs. And we need to build trust between these different actors and, most importantly, keep it.

<sup>8</sup> Ben Nimmo has argued for similar concept, calling it 'information defence' in *Information at War: From China's Three Warfares to NATO's Narratives*, Legatum Institute, September 2015. <https://lif.blob.core.windows.net/lif/docs/default-source/publications/information-at-war-from-china-s-three-warfares-to-nato-s-narratives-pdf.pdf?sfvrsn=2>



## TREND BREAKER: THE IMPACT OF THE LAUNCH OF RUSSIAN-LANGUAGE TELEVISION CHANNEL ETV+ ON ESTONIAN PUBLIC BROADCASTING'S VIEWING TRENDS



**Andres Jõesaar**  
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At a time when many public broadcasters are closing down channels, Eesti Rahvusringhääling (ERR)—the Estonian government's public broadcasting organisation, launched a new channel on 28 September 2015. The aim of this study is to see how ERR's recently launched Russian-language television channel *ETV+* changed the competitive environment. The *Estonian Public Broadcasting Act* of 2007 established nine goals for ERR. Two of these focus on increasing social cohesion in society and promoting democratic government and, as much as

possible, meeting the information needs of all segments of the population, including minorities. This article uses two indicators for analysing changes in ERR viewership between January 2006 and May 2016—weekly audience reach and share of general viewing time (data from TNS Emor TV-audience surveys). Using these indicators, it is possible to discern the trends that have taken place on a timeline, and predict the ability of ERR to fulfil the goals required by law by extrapolating these trends into the future. The article focuses on the TV viewing trends of the Russian-speaking audience and assesses how effectively ERR TV channels have fulfilled the goals and functions required by law related to meeting the information needs of the population, especially the Russian-speaking population.

### Language communities in Estonia

Before World War II, Estonia was a relatively homogenous nation-state. Estonians made up 88.1% of the population; the larger minorities included Russians and Germans. Estonian was the national language and was used in all of the country's major spheres of activity (political leadership and management, education, science, and culture). The war resulted in drastic changes. After being incorporated into the Soviet Union in the 1940s, Estonia lost nearly one-fifth of its population due to the war, mass repressions, and political exile. As a result of mass immigration from the other Soviet Republics, but especially from the Russia, Estonia's population turned multinational in only a few decades. The newcomers were mostly Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians who spoke Russian. In the Soviet Union, the Russian language was the language of communication between and within nations; this meant that in practice Russian was the



official language. The majority of Russians who moved to Estonia after WWII never learned the local language or became part of the Estonian community; rather, they formed their own Russian-speaking community, which, by the late 1980s, accounted for 35.2% of Estonia's population<sup>1</sup>. The restoration of Estonia's independence in 1992 again caused large-scale political and economic transformations. Most of the large All-Union industries lost their markets and collapsed. The Soviet Army was withdrawn from Estonia in 1994. A large percentage of the Russian-speaking population lost their jobs and moved elsewhere. During the last two decades, there has been a significant decrease in Estonia's population and a change in the nationality ratio. In 1990, the total population was 1.57 million, 61.5% of which were Estonians. In 2015, Estonia's total population was 1.31 million, of which 69.1% were Estonians (Estonian Statistics 2016). Of non-Estonians living in Estonia, half were born in Estonia and one-third in other former Soviet Republics. From the language perspective, at least 93% of the non-Estonians are Russian speakers, and in Estonia, these people are referred to as Russians. Today, Russian is the native language of 27.9% of Estonia's population<sup>2</sup>. Of the Russian-speaking people, 16% claim they do not understand any Estonian<sup>3</sup>.

### TV programming for Russian speakers

Until the early 1990s, the main TV channels broadcasting in Estonian territory included *Estonian Television*

<sup>1</sup> Estonian Statistics (1997). *Rahvaloendus Eestis: 1881, 1897, 1922, 1934, 1959, 1970, 1979, 1989* (Population Censuses in Estonia). Statistikaamet. <https://www.econbiz.de/Record/rahvaloendus-ees-tis-1881-1897-1922-1934-1959-1970-1979-1989/10000972577>

<sup>2</sup> Estonian Statistics (2016). <https://www.stat.ee/34267>

<sup>3</sup> Lauristin, M. (Ed.) (2011). *Estonian Human Development Report 2010/2011*. Tallinn: Eesti Koostöö Kogu

(ETV, broadcasting mainly in Estonian) and three Russian-language TV channels retransmitted from Russia: *Ostankino TV*, *Russia TV*, and *Leningrad TV*. The retransmission of Russian television and radio channels was terminated between 1993 and 1994. The frequencies they had occupied were licensed to private Estonian broadcasters that had been recently established.

For the Russian-speaking audience, the changes taking place in the early 1990s were dramatic and the number of program-hours broadcast terrestrially in Russian decreased substantially. No national TV channels targeting Russian speakers were established. Cable operators met the market demand for Russian-language programming. They rapidly expanded their networks and started retransmitting the Russian channels available on satellite. Two sets of television channels—one in Estonian and other in Russian—divided the Estonian audience. Figure 1 shows the polarization of the audiences by language preference as of 2014.

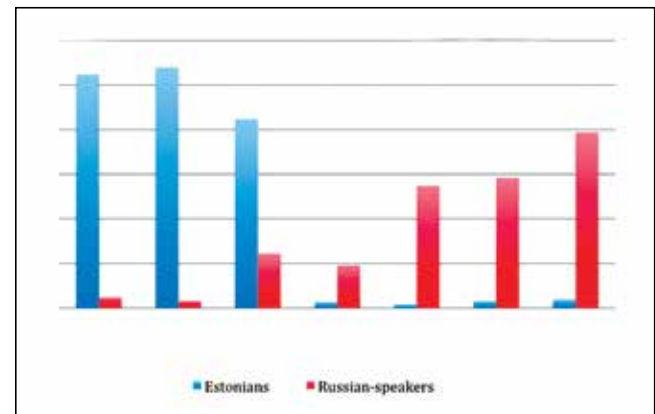


Figure 1 Share of viewing of main TV channels in Estonia in 2014.  
Source: TNS Emor

TV has been considered one of the most important sources of information. This assumption was confirmed by research conducted by Saar Poll<sup>4</sup>, which found out that for 72% of the Russian-speaking audience the most important sources of information are the Russian (state) television channels (*PBK, RTR Planeta Baltic, NTV Mir, and Ren TV Estonia*). In 2014, the four main Russian channels mentioned above garnered more than 50% of the viewing time of the Russian speakers.<sup>5</sup> The programming of the Estonian private broadcasters (*Kanal2 AS and TV3 AS*) and ERR were not popular among Russian speakers, but were watched mostly by Estonians. For Estonians, public service broadcasting (PSB) on Estonian Television is their main source of information, with 81% of the respondents considering it to be very important or rather important. The reasons behind these statistics are both economic and political.

### The challenges of a small market

A small market size also plays an important role in development<sup>6</sup>. This has been an advantage in the building of Estonia's e-state<sup>8</sup>, but a disadvantage when it comes to national journalism.

Market size determines available resources. In smaller

<sup>4</sup> Saar Poll (2014). *Current events and different sources of information*. Tallinn [http://oef.org.ee/fileadmin/user\\_upload/Current\\_events\\_and\\_different\\_sources\\_of\\_information\\_ED\\_\\_1\\_.pdf](http://oef.org.ee/fileadmin/user_upload/Current_events_and_different_sources_of_information_ED__1_.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> In total more than 100 Russian-language TV channels are available on Estonian cable networks. Source: STV, Starman, Telia.

<sup>6</sup> Puppis, M. (2009). *Media Regulation in Small States*. International Communication Gazette 71, 7, 7-17.

<sup>7</sup> Lowe, G. F. & Nissen, C. (eds.) (2011). *Small Among Giants. Television Broadcasting in Smaller Countries*. Nordicom, University of Gothenburg.

<sup>8</sup> Charles, A. (2009). *New media, new Europe: Estonia's e-mediated state*. In Charles, Alec, ed. *Media in the Enlarged Europe: Politics, Policy and Industry*, 207-221. Bristol and Chicago: Intellect Books.

states there are fewer available resources<sup>9 10 11</sup>. If the market is large enough to sustain profitable businesses and the resources are available, the general media tasks (variety, pluralism etc.) are fulfilled and the launch of niche media outlets soon follow. On the other hand, restricted market entry and global concentration of ownership encourage a common denominator provision for the mass market. The assumption is that material processed for a mass audience is inevitably trivialized and sensationalized in order to cater for mass taste. A market-based media system is incapable of presenting a full range of political and economic interests in the public domain and finding expression in popular fiction<sup>12</sup>.

Due to the market limitations, it is unprofitable to launch a wide range of media products in smaller markets. There will be less diversity of content in smaller and less wealthy states than in large and richer markets. Estonia with its population of about 1.31 million people and a GDP of \$25.9 billion is a small country.<sup>13</sup> GDP per capita in Estonia is almost 30% below the EU-28 average.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, the ability of the Estonian media market to offer a wide variety of media products is strictly limited. And this is why only two major private broadcasters operate in

<sup>9</sup> Doyle, G. (2013). *Understanding Media Economics*. Sage Publications.

<sup>10</sup> Jõesaar, A. (2011). *EU Media Policy and Survival of Public Service Broadcasting in Estonia 1994-2010*. Tartu Ülikooli Kirjastus.

<sup>11</sup> Lowe, G. F. & Nissen, C. (eds.) (2011). *Small Among Giants. Television Broadcasting in Smaller Countries*. Nordicom, University of Gothenburg.

<sup>12</sup> Curran, J. (1997). *Rethinking the media as a public sphere*. In P. Golding & G. Murdock (eds), *The Political Economy of the Media. Communication and the Common Good*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.

<sup>13</sup> The World Bank (2015) Data. Estonia <http://data.worldbank.org/country/estonia>. Retrieved on 28 August 2015.

<sup>14</sup> Eurostat (2015). GDP per capita, consumption per capita and price level indices. [http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/GDP\\_per\\_capita\\_consumption\\_per\\_capita\\_and\\_price\\_level\\_indices#Relative\\_volumes\\_of\\_GDP\\_per\\_capita](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/GDP_per_capita_consumption_per_capita_and_price_level_indices#Relative_volumes_of_GDP_per_capita). Retrieved on 28 August 2015.

Estonia broadcasting a total of five national Estonian-language free-to-air TV channels. But if the market is too small for the private sector to deliver a variety of media products in the national language, how can the interests of minority groups be served? Minority language groups in small countries comprise a tiny unprofitable niche market. Estonia's Russian-speaking community is a specific niche market, especially from the PSB perspective. It is logical to assume that, if the domestic services for Russian-language audiences are limited or do not exist at all, the audience will turn to offerings provided from abroad. In case of the Russian-speakers in Estonia, their Russian-language TV programming comes from Russia.

When talking about the economic background of multilingual markets, Hesmondhalgh<sup>15</sup> alludes to the tastes of different ethnic groups. Does it make sense to talk about a common culture in Estonia or should we be talking about geo-cultural markets as defined by Hesmondhalgh? Even if there is shared history, the main ethnic groups can and do interpret this history very differently. It is more relevant to talk about geo-linguistics and diasporic media. There are definitely some positive examples of the cross-border television progressive with cultural consequences, but the separation of the Russian-speaking audience from the Estonian information field caused by foreign Russian channels has created many challenges for the society. Gitlin<sup>16</sup> argues that democracy requires a public or a set of publics, a public sphere or 'separate public sphericules.' This may be true, but according to the Habermasian theory related to the public sphere, these sphericules must have a space or

higher sphere where they communicate; otherwise, isolated 'islands of different groups' will exist in the society. It has been argued that if ongoing negotiations among members of different groups do not exist, the media can provide help. If this is true, how can media policy support these processes?

### A brief survey of Estonian media policy

The *Broadcasting Act*<sup>17</sup> drawn up with help from experts from the Council of Europe and the European Broadcasting Union, reflected the expectations of the politicians and Estonian broadcasting experts in the 1990s. The European policy papers that strongly influenced the drafting of the *Broadcasting Act* were the *European Convention on Transfrontier Television*<sup>18</sup> and the *Television Without Frontiers Directive*<sup>19</sup>. The primary objective of the *Broadcasting Act*, which was passed by the Estonian parliament in 1994, was to establish a dual media system: i.e. the co-existence of PSB and a commercial sector. Licenses for private broadcasters were issued through public tenders. The economic conflict caused by the small size of the broadcasting market had not yet been perceived when the *Broadcasting Act* was prepared and passed. The passage of the new legislation was a big step forward in the formation of the broadcasting landscape in Estonia. The law was intended to create a new broadcasting order suitable for a young democratic state and secure freedom of speech and the development of a free market economy. In the mid-90s there were

<sup>15</sup> Hesmondhalgh, D. (2013). *The Cultural Industries*, Third Edition, Sage Publications Ltd.

<sup>16</sup> Gitlin, T. (1999). *Public sphere or public sphericules?* In J. Curran & T. Liebes (eds), *Media, Ritual and Identity*. London: Routledge.

<sup>17</sup> Ringhäälinguseadus RT I 1994, 42, 680 <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/831359>

<sup>18</sup> European Convention on Transfrontier Television <https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=090000168007b0d8>

<sup>19</sup> Television without Frontiers Directive <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/leg-content/EN/TXT/?uri=URISERV%3A124101>

41 private radio stations broadcasting in Estonian and only two in Russian; public broadcaster Estonian Radio had three channels in Estonian and one, *Raadio 4*, in Russian. During the subsequent decades, *Raadio 4* became the most popular radio channel among Russian-speakers. The domestic TV channels with nationwide coverage were all broadcast in Estonian. There were no serious attempts to launch a commercial Russian-language TV channel. The possible opening of a Russian-language public service TV channel was thwarted by the following assumptions held by those making media policy:

1. Domestic Russian-language media does not need national support because the Russian population will decrease as the result of emigration, and those who remain will acquire sufficient language skills to satisfy their information needs from Estonian-language media.
2. Free market principles in media will provide a solution for informing and integrating language minorities without specific state-initiated regulations.

In reality, only some of these assumptions turned out to be true. The Russian-speaking population is decreasing and their Estonian language skills are improving, but only 14% prefer Estonian media. Domestic Russian-language media is preferred by 21% of the non-Estonians<sup>20</sup>.

The broad offering of Russian-language TV channels via satellite and cable networks and the decrease of Russian-language programming on *ETV* and *ETV2* are the main explanation for the continuing decline in Russian-speaking viewers for ERR programming. During the last ten years, the weekly reach of ERR programming has dropped from 18% in 2006 to 10% on 2015 (Figure 2).

<sup>20</sup> Vihalemm, P. (2011). *Meedia ja Infoväli [Media and the information field]*. In *Integratsiooni Monitooring [Integration monitoring report]*. Tallinn: SA Poliitikauuringute Keskus Praxis.

Even knowing all of this, it was difficult for the ruling political parties to accept that fact that the media policy needed to be changed.

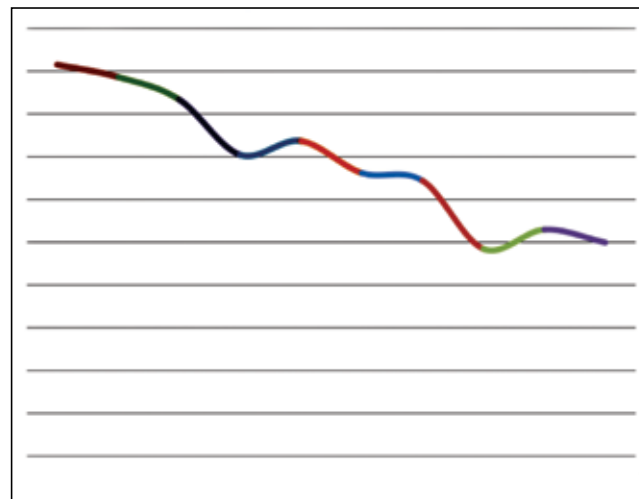


Figure 2 Weekly reach of ERR programs among Russian-speaking audiences in 2006-2015. Source: TNS Emor

The discussion related to the launch of the PSB Russian-language channel has continued for more than two decades. It has been the subject of parliamentary debate and included in several PSB development plans<sup>21</sup>. Until 2014 all these debates at the governmental and parliamentary level ended without supportive action being taken. It could be said that the media policymakers were guided by the will of the people, as defined in the Constitution, to guarantee the preservation of the Estonian nation and language. Therefore the idea of launching a Russian-language public service TV channel

<sup>21</sup> ERR (2016). *Seadus ja Arengukavad [The Law and Development Plans]* <http://info.err.ee/1/avalikteave/seadusjaarengukavad>.

was met with criticism from the ruling political powers, which said that such a channel could undermine the Estonian language and open the way for Russian to acquire the status of second official state language. This was not the only argument against the launch of a Russian-language public service TV channel. In the debate, the arguments against launching a Russian-language PSB channel included:

- (Super) high quality programming is needed to attract a Russian-language audience
- It is too expensive; sufficient additional financial resources are unavailable
- Whatever the programming, it is unrealistic to expect it to attract the local Russian audience, because of the great competition from abroad
- There is a lack of professional journalists/hosts and other staff required for high-quality TV production
- There is no need for such a channel—in the long run everyone will understand Estonian and will therefore watch Estonian programs
- It will decrease the motivation to learn Estonian
- If state-financed propaganda is needed, these programs should be ordered from, and aired on the *First Baltic Channel* (PBK).

During the debates, the list of arguments in support of the channel was shorter, including:

- The channel would support the enhancement, development, and servicing of social, political, and cultural citizenship
- It would provide adequate and reliable information to everyone
- It would alleviate tensions between the two ethnic groups
- It would serve to balance the influence of Moscow thereby lowering national security risks.

The fourth argument was added to the list for the first time after the events of the Bronze Night in 2007.<sup>22</sup> The topic increased in importance during the crisis in Ukraine in 2014. As mentioned above, the findings of the 2014 Saar Poll survey indicated that two radically different information fields exist in Estonia: an Estonian-language information field promoting European values and a Russian-language information field promoting 'Putin's values'. To overcome that challenge, the Estonian Government decided to financially support the launch of a Russian-language PSB channel in late 2014. Additional funding totalling € 2.53 million were added to the Estonian Public Broadcasting's budget for 2015.<sup>23</sup> In November 2014, the Estonian parliament approved the additional funding for a Russian-language TV channel as a subsidiary of the public broadcaster. A historic decision had been made. The new channel was called *ETV+*. The *ETV+* programming team was faced with a challenging task: if it focused too much on politics it might not attract the interest of the target audience; if it did not deal with critical political questions in a highly professional journalistic manner, it would not meet PSB's remit. Lurking in the background were the challenges posed by ratings that could force it to air infotainment and entertainment programs.

The core vision for *ETV+* can be described as follows:

- The uniqueness of the *ETV+* is that it is local—the shows talk about and with local people about the lives they live, the issues they care about
- *ETV+* provides a voice for all those who consider

<sup>22</sup> In 27 April 2007 violence was sparked by the removal of the Bronze Soldier, a World War II memorial, from Tallinn's city centre to a military cemetery.

<sup>23</sup> Ülevaade Vabariigi valitsuse tegevusprogrammi täitmisest 2014.a. [Overview of the Government's action plan implementation in 2014] [https://valitsus.ee/sites/default/files/valitsuse\\_aruanne\\_2014.pdf](https://valitsus.ee/sites/default/files/valitsuse_aruanne_2014.pdf)

Estonia to be their home and wish to contribute to the development of the country

- *ETV+* is a multimedia channel that allows viewers to actively participate in its television and radio programs, website, video blogs, social media, apps and events (*ETV+* 2016).

Along with its own productions (more than 20 hours per week), the network broadcasts many films and documentaries produced both in Estonia and abroad. More than ten original programs are aired on *ETV+*. These include weekday morning and evening shows, discussion and entertainment shows, as well as news and analysis programs. Sports news and broadcasts include Russian-language commentary. Most of the programs have Estonian-language subtitles, thereby making the content available to everyone living in Estonia.

*ETV+*, which is meant to appeal to a Russian-speaking audience, has been on the air since 28 September 2015. Analysis of the first months of operation shows that *ETV+*'s weekly reach among Russian speakers is steadily increasing and attained 17% in May 2016. Approximately 10% of Estonians also watch *ETV+* each week. The share of viewing time is 0.4% and 1.5% respectively. Thus it can be said that *ETV+* has been of interest to both communities, and a relatively large part of the Russian audience has begun watching *ETV+*. In addition, the weekly reach of *ETV+* among young Russian-speakers is higher than among their Estonian-speaking peers. When we compare the numbers of viewers during the period between 28 September and 31 May 2016 with the same period in 2015, we see that a positive change has occurred in the viewing of all the ERR TV channels (Figure 3). It can be said that the downward trend of ERR's TV channels from 1 January 2006 to 27 September 2015 was reversed after *ETV+* was launched and it probably also had a positive impact on the viewing of *ETV* and *ETV2*.

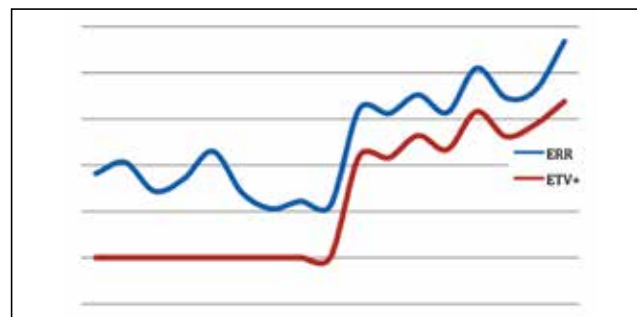


Figure 3 Weekly reach of all ERR channels (*ETV*, *ETV2* and *ETV+*) compared with *ETV+* among the Russian-speaking audience January 2015 – May 2016. Source: TNS Emor

The weekly reach is considered to be important criteria for calculating the potential of a TV channel to engage its audience. The second criterion is the share of viewing time. ERR's share of viewing time among audiences aged 4+ is above 18%, among Estonians the number is as high as 26%, but, before the launch of *ETV+*, it attracted only 0.5% of Russian-speakers. *ETV+* has been successful—in May 2016 it gained 1.5% share of viewing time and all the ERR TV channels reached 2.2% (Figure 4).

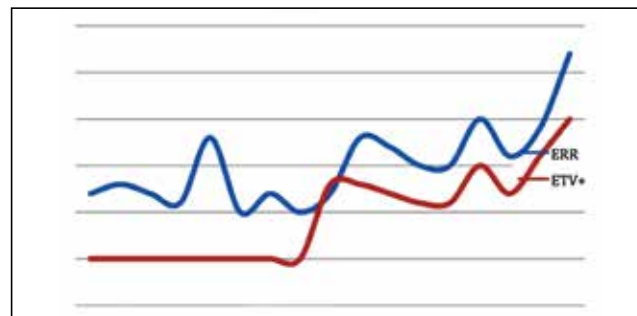


Figure 4. Share of viewing of ERR programs (*ETV*, *ETV2* and *ETV+*) compared with *ETV+* in January 2015 – May 2016. Source: TNS Emor



At the same time, the share of the five main Russian TV channels has declined from 57% in the 2014-2015 season to 52% in May 2016<sup>24</sup>.

## Conclusion

ETV+ has only been on the air for a few months, but it has already acquired a noteworthy audience. Therefore, it can be said that after 28 September 2015, an important step was taken to more effectively fulfil the obligation of meeting the information needs of all segments of the population as required by the *Estonian Public Broadcasting Act*.

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<sup>24</sup> TNS Emor (2016). *Teleauditooriumi monitooring 2016 [TV audience monitoring 2016]*.

## LATVIAN MEDIA POLICY RESPONSES TO THE FOREIGN INFORMATION THREAT



**Roberts Putnis,**  
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Ministry of Culture, Latvia*

Let's begin with a fictional construct. Imagine a country in the European Union. In this country journalism is a respectable profession and journalists seek to report the truth as precisely as possible. Clear professional quality and ethical standards are observed. The media tend toward the ideal of reflecting all opinions, and strive to be neutral and objective. Journalists subject themselves to the national legislative framework, which reserves the right to require journalists to claim responsibility for any errors or possible manipulation. This country's journalists have taken it upon themselves to comply with the same ethical standards and the self-regulatory recommendations and criticisms that their organisation follows.

And now, let's suppose that a new television station has been founded, one that is not bound by any standards of quality or professional ethics. It does not respect the legal rules of the game and operates beyond the impact of any national judicial system. No one can sue the station for violations of dignity or require it to publish corrections of false information. Letters concerning ethics violations remain unanswered. What's more, this television station has absolutely unlimited financial resources—the sky's the limit for television expenditures, and always will be compared with other market participants. The station also has unrestricted access to the entire entertainment industry—every singer and TV host wants to appear on their screen. This station dominates pop culture. While these circumstances continue, the station is bound to be the market leader, and soon won't have any competitors left.

Now, let's develop this story: the new television station serves a particular radical nationalist ideology, whose aim is to destabilise society and sow discord among the people of your country. The station owners want your country to leave the European Union and quit NATO. These TV 'editors' and 'journalists', as they call themselves, don't seek the truth. On the contrary: they want to construct your thoughts and opinions to create the impression that there is no truth, only little lies and big lies. They want you to fear refugees, mistrust your national institutions, believe your government is being manipulated by the other EU member states and the US President makes the other governments do whatever he wants. Every day, through news and commentary, the station repeats the message that you are God's only chosen nation. Only your nation has retained true traditional values and is able to protect the world from the horrors of modern cor-

ruption, such as homosexuality and feminism, among other dangers. The same ideas also flow from entertainment programs that feature your country's most famous TV stars and stage artists. And, your country's religious leaders support it all.

How long will it take for this television station to fundamentally change the society you live in? Which issues appear on the public agenda? How does it affect your public policy?

In Latvia, this is not fictitious scenario. Russia and its locally broadcast national television stations are creating that reality here. Approximately one third of the Latvian public consumes Russian television products. This is correlated with Russian as the language of communication at home or in the family, although the correlation is not absolute. Many Latvians, particularly those of the older generation, have a good knowledge of Russian and are comparatively happy to consume Russian state television products. These programmes offer traditional entertainment with a large dose of post-Soviet nostalgia. The entertainment content is intertwined with conspiracy theories; the news is convincingly presented, yet riddled with lies and hate speech; political shows are saturated with nationalist superiority. The Latvian national authorities must find solutions to protect the social order and resist these hostile external influences.

In light of these considerations, the National Electronic Media Council, an independent media watchdog, adopted a decision on 7 April 2016 to prohibit the distribution of the Russian state TV channel *Rossija RTR* in Latvia for a period of six months. The regulator based its decision on instances of hate speech. Indeed, heinous words were broadcast in a media space that protects rights and freedom of speech in a united Europe. The Lithuanian



authorities have also been forced to adopt similar decisions. If the national authorities of countries that managed to restore their democratic rights and freedoms with such great struggle and difficulty are forced to take such decisions, it shows how difficult the situation has become. The decision of the Latvian authorities indicates that it sees this step as absolutely necessary, rather than as a trivial decision. Democratic national governments have a duty to act when a threat is posed to the national democratic order.

At the same time, it is clear that Latvian media policy makers consider restrictive and prohibitive measures in the media environment to be extraordinary steps. The only proper method in the fight against hazards in the national information space is establishing an active media policy focused on strengthening the local information area and facilitating media pluralism. This is the ultimate mission described in the policy guidelines for Latvian media 2016-20, which the Latvian Cabinet of Ministers began reviewing in June 2016. The policy planning document sets out the following objectives: the creation of a viable information space with diverse, vital, professional, and transparent democratic media environment that makes it possible for a civil and media literate society to respond effectively to the uncertainties of the information space, and develop a common public opinion.

The Latvian government plans activities in five areas. First, state policy will focus on strengthening diversity in the media environment. Decisions that focus on organising the media market are at the centre of this activity. In the near future, public radio broadcasters will no longer participate in the advertising market; by instigating this new policy Latvia wishes to increase the competitiveness of local market participants with cross-border products. In the light of technology- and globalisation-

driven market developments, the best way to enhance the competitiveness of a media outlet is to strengthen local competence in content creation. Latvian media policy places the greatest emphasis on the development of the public service broadcasters, who are at the centre of the spectrum in terms of media diversity. Media policy guidelines foresee a gradual increase in public media funding and significant improvements in the public media legal framework. At the moment, a legislative proposal has been submitted for public discussion calling for the creation of a new public broadcasting institute to regulate editorial independence and organisational accountability, significantly strengthening its autonomy. A new management model is simultaneously being created that would ensure that public media oversight would be less dependent on political decisions. There are plans for a new type of state aid to support local and regional media.

The second idea is to promote quality and accountability in the media environment in general. Latvia is one of the few countries that have not formed a single media ethics council or Ombudsman capable of escalating media accountability. The absence of such an institution can be explained by the very specific conditions in which the media environment developed since the restoration of independence. Foreign media investors did not assume leadership in setting standards for the media environment beyond the requirements of their companies, and local capital media organisations often had no interest in the existence of media professionalism and ethical standards. The discussions held by the policy planning group demonstrate that the lack of an ethics council has led to significant divisions between the various public and media sectors, as well as the relatively low confidence that Latvians have in the media and the

profession of journalism. Accordingly, the state is planning to take action to support industry efforts to create a unified, self-regulating body that sets ethical and professional standards. The state predicts that such an institution would ease the burden of the media and individual journalists in legal proceedings.

The third course of action is aimed at improving the education of media industry professionals. Professional education in the field of communications in Latvia is segmented. Competition provides the advantage of program diversity, however local resources do not ensure the high level of quality in media education required to meet the growing challenges within the media environment that arise from rapid changes in the market. Improved cooperation between educational institutions has been indicated in the media policy planning process so as to increase the quality of the media education programme. Meanwhile, the dynamics of the media profession makes continuous education necessary. The Latvian government has adopted a series of measures that will be available to journalism professionals. One of the most recent examples is the Baltic Centre for Media Excellence founded in Riga last year. The centre houses the national public service broadcasters, professional associations, and an academic environment all under one roof. This non-governmental organisation will offer continuing education programs for professionals living and working in the Baltic States and Eastern Partnership countries.

A qualitative media space is not possible without a critical audience that makes demands on media content. The fourth media policy direction comprises initiatives to develop critical thinking and improve public knowledge of media literacy. Media literacy material will be included in the Latvian general education programme and special attention will be given to university content. In 2015, a

UNESCO Department of Media Literacy was created at the University of Latvia; this is the central academic institution for media literacy research. Alongside the work of the education institutions, the Latvian National Library will play an essential role in stimulating media literacy. It will serve as an education and service centre for questions concerning media literacy, and as a broad-spectrum multiplier of media literacy throughout Latvia. The public broadcasters will play a no less important role in the promotion of media literacy. Special programmes regarding these issues are in development, as is media criticism of the genre.

Finally, the Latvian media policy plan calls for substantial improvements in the legal framework to promote the security of the media environment. On the one hand, this means strengthening the legal framework for the public service broadcasters, as previously mentioned. On the other hand, a new set of rules is intended to replace the current Press Law, which was written in 1990 when Latvia was still caught up in the emotions of regaining independence. Other rules regulating the media environment will also be updated in accordance with its dynamic development. In this respect, Latvia may soon have one of the most advanced legislative frameworks for media activities.

As you can see from this quick overview into the comprehensive policy planning document, the Latvian state clearly responding this challenge—on the one hand we must contend with rapid development and global change, but on the other hand, foreign powers are using the freedoms and rights our society provides against the democratic structure of the state; there is no single easy answer to the extremely complex situation we are facing. A number of quick fixes promoting seemingly simple solutions to the threat of hostile foreign information

activities have been placed on the Latvian social and political agenda, and proposed at the European level.

One widely discussed idea was the creation of a new channel for the Russian-speaking segments of the Latvian audience. The two large language communities in Latvia are very sensitive to the issue of language use. Because of the extensive Russification operations, which discriminated against Latvians during the Soviet occupation, and the continuing consequences, Latvians still feel that their language is threatened. Latvians are the largest ethnic group in the capital city of Riga making up 46% of the population, but they are still in the minority. In Daugavpils, the second largest city, Latvians make up only 18% of the population and are an absolute ethnic minority. In the remaining major cities, Latvians account for about half or slightly more than half of the population. In Estonia, which in other respects is similar to Latvia, the Russian minority groups are concentrated in the capital and in the town of Narva in the north-eastern region; this is a significant difference in terms of linguistic security. A dual linguistic environment exists throughout the entire territory of Latvia; the Latvian language is slowly regaining its historic position, but this is not possible without the use of national instruments and support for the project.

In 2012, this general sense of endangerment was significantly increased by the populist promotion of a referendum on Russian as the second official language. 70% of the citizens participated in the referendum, resulting in one of the highest political participation experienced in the history of renewed Latvia. An overwhelming majority, 75%, rejected giving the Russian language official status in Latvia. The authors of the political initiative were the Harmony party, political actors calling themselves social democrats, but in contradiction to

social democratic tradition, that party looks out for the interests of only one ethnic minority in Latvia. Despite the burdens of inter-governmental cooperation, these political actors are still working in close cooperation with Russian President Vladimir Putin's nationalist party, United Russia. They have not considered it necessary to review this cooperation after the annexation of Crimea and Russia's incursion into Ukraine in 2014.

In this historical-political context, there is no need to further justify the lack of public and political support for the creation of a new Russian media platform. Professional and media market experts also believe that it would not have been possible to implement the initiative for a number of reasons: Latvian public television has been in a comparatively poor financial situation for some time now, largely due to the global economic crisis, which had a particularly strong impact on the Latvian economy. Accordingly, Latvian TV is faced with the challenge of retaining its place among Latvian audiences—an average of 10% viewing share for the LTV two channels together. This has caused questions about the capacity of LTV to effectively address a new audience. Public television has not offered an integrated strategy for attracting minorities to the Latvian language. Public integration policy requires such strategies to be implemented in Latvian, conceptually blocking policy initiatives that could strengthen or promote bilingualism in Latvia. Public television gave no assessment of the potential influence of a new Russian-language channel on the societal challenges described above.

Returning to the original fictional scenario, let's recall that there are three keys to the success of the Russian state media. In addition to the ability to defy Latvian regulations concerning freedom of speech, Russia has unlimited financial resources compared with market

participants of any scale in the Latvian market, e.g. the total volume of their advertising market in 2015 was 77 million EUR. If we count both the total public financing and operating income Latvian public service broadcasters spend less than 30 million EUR/year on content creation. The Latvian media market will never have the resources available to the Russian media operating the Latvian media market. One reply to this dilemma was that Latvian media has a competitive advantage in terms of local content, which could provide some balance to Moscow's huge financial investments. It might even be possible to agree with this suggestion if it weren't for the fact that one of the most important features of the television business is that entertaining content attracts audience attention. And here Latvian market realities deal a fatal blow to the initial idea. Any new media initiative in Russian will never have access to Russian entertainment products, which ensure audiences for their programming as a whole.

One additional argument against a 'central solution' in the form of a new TV channel was its potentially negative impact on the local media environment. Every major Latvian city, as well as many smaller settlements, has a bilingual press that enjoys high media user confidence. Electronic media are also available throughout Latvia in both Latvian and Russian. The public Russian-language LR4 radio channel is a success story. But these media are subject to the same negative influences that affect the media environment in this country. A new public media channel could potentially have a negative impact on these actors. For these reasons, Latvian media policy makers decided to carry out a media policy guidelines project, which would provide a complex response at the national level to the complex problems the country faces, systemically strengthening and improving the media

environment and public media literacy. In parallel to the political consultation process, the national authorities are already actively implementing the first initiatives aimed at the promotion of legal certainty in the Latvian media market, creating a legal framework that corresponds to market developments.

The Latvian approach is clear: the only proper instruments to develop the country's security in the context of external information risk are those that substantially strengthen and promote local media market, ensure the independence of journalists and their ability to carry out their democratic function. But this does not solve the problem of what to do with those players who use the status and associated freedoms and privileges of the journalist against democratic institutions. The author has personally experienced the 'information' methods used by Russia to exploit the rights and freedoms available in a united Europe. At a conference in Helsinki dedicated to World Freedom of the Press Day, during a panel discussion on the hazards of propaganda, a representative of the Russian Ministry of Defence TV channel *Zvezda* asked a question as an 'independent journalist'. All of the techniques of Russian State television were later used—quotes were taken out of context and the speaker was personally discredited. After that the Internet 'did its work'.

As things stand today, the European market has failed to formulate a definition of media that works for the new media environment. How far should hostile media outlets be considered instruments of foreign intelligence, and what privileges and rights they might enjoy? The Audiovisual Media Services Directive, which is currently being reviewed, plays a major role in this area. Existing initiatives do not justify much hope for advancing the issues addressed in this article. However, by joining forces



at the European level we should be able to eradicate 'mailbox media' in third countries that follow the path of least resistance; according to the regulations of the unified EU media market, these companies are free to register in any EU country, even if it is not necessarily the country where their target market is based. The second question that can be answered at the European level is how to ensure at least some minimal requirements for media independence in creating the news and how can we ensure that news content reflects high journalistic quality and professional ethical standards? Dealing successfully with these issues would have a positive impact on increasing the quality of the media environment in the European media market.

However, we must continue to work at developing a framework at the national level that will ensure compliance with all new media market trends, whether they be technological development, content distribution and production platform convergence, or other trends stemming from globalisation. Latvian media policy makers have a clear ambition to offer a modern legal framework within the next two years, updating existing legislation and redefining the legal language of the media environment. Latvia is not alone in this challenge. The search for answers to these questions is on the agenda in almost all neighbouring countries, but that is another story.

## ANATOMY OF THE USE OF HUMOUR IN POLITICAL PROPAGANDA CAMPAIGNS



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### Introduction

The analysis of humour has always had a place in the humanities and social sciences, but not the first place. Fields such as linguistics, history, communication, literary history, psychology, semantics, philosophy, and others do not ignore humour; certainly not! But, researchers' attention and dedication to this topic is fragmentary. Thanks to the increasing role of strategic communications in recent years, the field of humour studies could become a home for interdisciplinary research projects that could facilitate our understanding of the role of humour in international public space, as well as the objectives and methods used, not for entertainment, but to influence public opinion. The ability to recognise the wider messages contained in humour, which could be

called humour literacy, could become a part of information literacy in general.

The goal of this paper is to identify the main characteristics of humour, its functions, and methodologies for the possible implementation of the objectives of propaganda. The paper will also explore new opportunities for the use of humour that are ensured by modern technologies, mobility, and a number of other aspects of modern society.<sup>1</sup> To illustrate, we will use the Club of the Funny and Quick-witted (CFQ, or *Klub vesjoli h i nahodčevih*—KVN in Russian) as an example. The CFQ is a long-standing Russian pop culture classic used to disseminate specific messages and influence public opinion in Russia, and in other countries with large Russian-speaking populations.

### Humour—a step-by-step introduction

Significant numbers of research papers have been written on the various aspects of humour, and they all share two important characteristics that might be evaluated both positively and critically. First, humour research is normally limited to a narrow scientific field. This makes comprehensive research of the subject, as well as the practical application of results, difficult. The fields of psychology and semantics have achieved visible results; the first showing how the use of humour can alleviate both fear and stress, the second has shown the importance of composition, structure, and linguistic characteristics in the construction and perception of humour. Second, the use of humour in hybrid war has not been evaluated or sufficiently researched, when even the smallest nuances—irony, satire, jokes—can be used as ‘weapons’ for influencing people’s minds under current circumstances.

<sup>1</sup> See Lillian Boxman-Shabtai and Limor Shifman. *When ethnic humor goes digital*, New media & society, Vol. 17(4), 2015

This thesis is not an exercise in paranoia, just the opposite, it is an invitation to explore one of the many aspects of humour—humour as an instrument of propaganda.

For the purposes of this article we will use George Vaillant’s definition of humour; he identifies the main characteristics of humour as well as which of them play a significant role for propaganda activities. In Vaillant’s definition, humour consists of three experiences—the intellectual (wit), the emotional (fun), and the psychological (laughter or smiling). Each of these aspects may be experienced individually, but only together do they constitute humour. The opportunity to combine the intellectual in different proportions with the emotional and the psychological allows humour to effectively influence public opinion; its success depends on the ability to establish the right combination of these three aspects that corresponds to the character of the target group and the nature of the objective.

Since we want to explore the use of humour for propaganda purposes, it is not enough to wish our readers to accept *a priori* that the empirical case of CFQ serves as an illustration of propaganda, therefore we offer first a methodological framework that makes it possible to avoid the reproduction of bias, stereotypes, and prejudices. We will ‘prepare’ our sample of humour as it can be used for propaganda step by step, creating a to-do list that we can use to record our progress—in this case the identification of recognised and unrecognised elements of humour.

**Step 1. Contextual awareness.** Humour is a social phenomenon and, therefore, it will be affected by the historical memory of the audience or target group, its cultural heritage and experience, existing socio-political conditions, and traditions regarding joking about past events, as well as the existing political regime and its

traditions regarding joking about politicians, the political system, and political decisions or, to the contrary, the exclusion or lack of humour in political practice. Context is one of the most important conditions for determining the effect of humour.

**Step 2. Target audience analysis.** If humour is used as a propaganda tool, there will always be a recipient. Therefore, the second step begins with an analysis of the target audience. What is known about the individuals, groups, whole societies, or even transnational communities who are the intended audience? If humour is just for entertainment, then the target group is irrelevant, because how a joke is perceived will depend on an individual's sense of humour and personal social experience. On the other hand, if humour is used for propaganda purposes, then gathering knowledge about the target group is of great importance—developing a social and psychological portrait, preparing counter-messages, and designing all of the elements of an event as a whole. Differences may also arise depending on whether the audience is domestic or international.

**Step 3. The characteristics of the target group's perception of humour.** This step is closely linked to the first two and is based on the creation of group psychological portraits. Before the allocation of resources and development of an action-plan, an evidence-based study of the target group must be carried out.

**Step 4. Language as the bearer of humour.**<sup>2</sup> Optimists will argue that it is possible to transfer the sense and construction of a joke to another language with

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<sup>2</sup> Many authors have written about the semantic aspects of humour, such as Victor Raskin, *Semantic Mechanism of Humor*, Synthese language library, Vol. 24, Dordrecht: Boston, 1985; and Attardo Salvatore, *Linguistic theories of humor: Humor research*, Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1994.

the help of a good translator. While pessimists will say the opposite, that humour gets lost in translation, and, therefore, it is difficult to comprehend the many ways in which a piece of humour can be perceived. Both camps have convincing arguments, however, for a joke to be successfully 'transferred', good knowledge of both languages is necessary; relying on automated translation programmes may have the opposite effect. However, there is no reason to dismiss the help of various experts and disciplines in our semantic understanding of humour.

**Step 5. Identification of the functions of humour.** All of the functions of humour will almost never appear at once. But having a good grasp of what humour can do allows you to select the most appropriate target groups to address and the best tools to use. Approximately twenty separate functions for humour functions have been identified in various literary sources, depending on the purpose of the study and the author's discipline. For example, Avner Ziv speaks of the five main functions of humour: (1) aggression, to achieve dominance and reduce frustration; (2) sexual; (3) social; (4) defensive and (5) intellectual.<sup>3</sup> However, it is not sufficient to give only the five most important functions, because they don't reflect fully the diversity of humour. The broader our knowledge of the potential expressions and actions of humour, the easier it is to identify for what purpose and in which way humour is being used. So, without in-depth analysis, which the format of the article does not permit, here are the most commonly described functions of humour:

- 1) humour as a defence mechanism, often used to

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<sup>3</sup> Avner Ziv, *Personality and Sense of Humor*, New York: Springer, 1984, pp. 2-3.

deal with crisis situations, war;<sup>4</sup> 2) self-discovery; 3) control—of oneself, others, and processes; 4) building and maintaining social relationship; 5) social capital building; 6) confidence-building;<sup>5</sup> 7) building social skills; 8) cultural maintenance; 9) aggression; 10) education;<sup>6</sup> 11) exit strategy building / resignation / problem resolution; 12) the deterrence of potential opponents and relieving stress in mutual relationships; 13) stress reduction; 14) creativity; 15) persuasion; 16) image creation—positive, negative, self-image; 17) assertion of freedom—this is mentioned by a number of authors and can have several forms of expression. For example, during the darkest years of stagnation in the USSR humour blossomed; people laughed about their worries and even at the political elite. But this was sanctioned humour—only certain actors and those in their set allowed themselves to joke about certain subjects. Social anecdotes were an assertion of freedom of expression, but could result in intimidation by the KGB or imprisonment; 18) support for creating an agenda—political, social, or group agenda; 19) legitimization of the establishment, as well as an expression of individual superiority; and 20) the acquisition or ensuring of social status.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Chaya Ostrower, *Humor as a Defense Mechanism during the Holocaust*, *A Journal of Bible and Theology*. Vol. 69(2), 2015, pp. 183-195; Anna Sheftel, *Monument to the international community, from the grateful citizens of Sarajevo: Dark humor as counter-memory in post-conflict Bosnia-Herzegovina*, *Memory Studies*. Vol. 5(2), 2011, pp. 145-164; Peter McGraw, Lawrence E. Williams, and Caleb Warren, *The Rise and Fall of Humor: Psychological Distance Modulates Humorous Responses to Tragedy*, *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, Vol. 5(5), 2014, pp. 566-572

<sup>5</sup> For more about the social functions of humour see: John B. Nezlek and Peter Derks. *Use of humor as a coping mechanism, psychological adjustment, and social interaction*, *Humor*. Vol. 14, 2001, pp. 395-413

<sup>6</sup> Many textbooks for various disciplines are written in the humour genre, e.g. *International Relations for Zombies* or the *Idiots Guide to...* series.

<sup>7</sup> Allen Pace Nilsen, *Living Language, Reading, Thinking and Writing*, Longman, 1998; Robert L. Latta, *The Basic Humor Process*, Berlin, New York: Morton de Gruyter, 1999; Victor Raskin (ed.), *The Primer of Humor Re-*

The functions of humour do not all operate simultaneously, but it is necessary to identify them in order to take the next step.

**Step 6. The target audience and the selection of the most appropriate function for the chosen message.** Depending on the target group, the message, and the context, the functions of humour can be combined into various groups and various proportions. To illustrate the next step, we can use a situation in which false information is disseminated through the Internet for the purposes of propaganda and with the help of humour. In order to develop warning or 'deterrence' activities for young people, the best combination of functions would be—control; social relationship building and maintenance; education; exit strategy building / resignation / problem resolution; creativity; and persuasion.

**Step 7. Identification and application of relevant resources depending on selected features.** The scheme proposed here is only a preliminary sketch for the analysis of the phenomenon of humour; further trials would take place to test its usefulness and application. However, this small insight into one case study demonstrates the usefulness of identifying the elements of propaganda. Therefore, in the second part of the article we provide an illustration of how it is possible to build a comprehensive social and political network with the help of a humorous TV broadcast, which has outgrown national borders and enjoys international resonance.

## **The Club of the Funny and Quick-witted— a Russian Humour Factory**

'Мы начинаем КВН!' or 'We begin CFQ!' One of Russia's most popular entertainment programs,

*search*, Routledge, 2008; Salvatore Attardo, *Encyclopedia of Humor Studies*, Sage, 2014.



broadcast over the main Russian Federal channel, the official YouTube website, and through countless unofficial video copies, begins with these words. Over the past thirty years CFQ—a Soviet era television programme—became a multifunctional humour factory that, along with its other functions, is involved in promoting state propaganda, which has a major impact in Russia and in other countries with Russian-speaking communities. We will analyse CFQ as an instrument of propaganda based on the step-by-step procedure offered above.

**Step 1. Context.** The roots of what is CFA today can be found in post-Stalinist television. Soviet TV began a new era of entertainment shows on 8 November 1961, the same year that Yuri Gagarin began a new era for ‘space acquisition’.<sup>8</sup> But after ten short years this project, which had become very popular among young people, was shut down. No official explanation was ever given, but unofficially it was thought that the shut down was the result of too many open jokes about the Soviet regime. Only certain people were allowed to make jokes about irregularities in the Soviet system, and only to a certain extent. Crossing that border led to unpleasant consequences. The host, Alexander Maslyakov, and a number of participants suffered repressions.<sup>9</sup>

Even then the CFQ was used as an instrument that was presented and received as the voice of youth in post-Stalinist USSR. The television project was restored only after fifteen years. The CFQ returned along with *perestroika* and *glasnost* and became popular throughout the Soviet Union.<sup>10</sup> But the return of this entertaining TV

<sup>8</sup> Эстрада на телевидении. В кн: Уварова, Е(сост.). *Эстрада России XX век. Энциклопедия*. Москва: Олимпа-Пресс, 2004.

<sup>9</sup> Aleksander Maslyakov was arrested, convicted and imprisoned on charges of illegal operations with foreign currency in 1974.

<sup>10</sup> Хотног, В. *25 лет в плену веселых и находчивых*. Москва: Центриполиграф, 2014.

project, on the air now for at least thirty years, became a huge network for information and communication in the post-Soviet Russian-speaking space, uniting countries and continents. The role of the CFQ will only increase in the future; on June 1 2016, Gazprom Media will launch a new CFA TV channel that will serve as an ongoing platform for the creation and transmission of various messages and programmes.

Former and current ‘KVN-shiki’ (the CFQ players), including not only those who participated at the federal level, but also players from school and university leagues, today hold positions in politics and business; many of them have also continued to work in the culture and entertainment industries. They use their experience and renown, successfully creating new TV products (‘Наша RUSSIA’,<sup>11</sup> ‘Comedy Club’,<sup>12</sup> ‘ВЕЧЕРНИЙ УРГАНТ’,<sup>13</sup> and others) transferring similar methods of influence to other programmes.

Over the last twenty years CFQ also became a strong network outside of Russia, creating official leagues involving local TV networks and local politicians. For example, Harmony Party leader Nil Ushakov took part in the panel, and the annual competition at the local level is named after him—the Riga Mayor’s Cup (‘Кубок мэра Риги’).

**Step 2. The target audience.** Traditionally, it is the older generation in post-Soviet Russia that consumes TV products. Year after year this trend grows more evident. However, the entertaining content of the CFQ has the

<sup>11</sup> For more information about ‘Наша RUSSIA’ see: <http://tnt-online.ru/NashaRussia/s01e01>

<sup>12</sup> For more information about ‘Comedy Club’ see: <http://comedyclub.tnt-online.ru>

<sup>13</sup> Evening Urgant is a Russian late-night talk show hosted by Ivan Urgant. For more information about ‘ВЕЧЕРНИЙ УРГАНТ’ see: [http://www.1tv.ru/video\\_archive/projects/nightshow/r250](http://www.1tv.ru/video_archive/projects/nightshow/r250)

potential to address the important, but more difficult to reach, youth audience.

Young people are increasingly dismissive in their answers to the question, 'Do you watch TV?', but they consume TV content using other audio-visual platforms. CFQ clips and fragments are popular on social networks; this gives the show longevity. Fan groups and platforms for specific teams have also been created in parallel. These groups are known for the mash-ups they create that are dedicated to a specific topic, such as a holiday—CFQ mash up for March 8th—tailoring the jokes to the event.

But addressing young people doesn't mean excluding other age groups from the audience. CFA occupies a prime-time spot in the audio-visual programming hierarchy; this indicates its strong ratings in the face of popular programming from *Perviy kanal* (Channel One Russia) competitors—channels such as *Rossiya (Russia-1)*, *NTV*, and other less familiar channels.

CFQ is intended for both local and foreign audiences who choose Russian-language products. This mainly relates to Russian compatriots (соотечественники). In today's digital era, it is difficult to determine accurately the total number of viewers for a particular programme. Programmes produced by *Perviy kanal*, including CFQ, are available to Internet users both as 'live programming' and after the show has aired. Network channels are also available on YouTube. Occasionally CFQ has teams that attract a larger audience—both young and old viewers.

We will leave out **Steps 3 and 4** in this article, because they do not apply this case—Russia is quite familiar with the characteristics of perception for its own audiences and language is not a problem within the Russian-speaking community, although it should be noted that the younger viewers may not understand all of the jokes due to historical context.

**Steps 5 and 6.** In the CFQ case study we wish to highlight only some of the functions of humour—those that are important in the context of propaganda and can be set into motion and adapted, thanks to the format. Functions such as building and maintaining social relationships are visible in the demarcation of post-Soviet nations; support for agenda development; social capital formation and networking used in the search for new leaders and identifying new talent; image development.

**Social relationship building and maintenance functions** are implemented through the assistance of the so-called 'Planeta KVN' or special CFQ 'community'. By using the humour show, communities of viewers and participants are highlighted, not only in the territory of the former USSR, but also in other countries where 'выходцы' or 'Russian nationals' are living. What is, in fact, happening, is the mapping of the zones of influence and propaganda activities in 'post-Soviet nations'. Here a distinction should be made between those who are passive—TV-viewers or audio-visual product consumers—and those who participate in local leagues and are actively involved in the CFQ network.

The inclusion of local opinion leaders and politicians in the judges' panels of the various leagues is also of great value. It signals the 'quality' of leaders, marking their special place within the community. CFQ organisers often involve local communities, and Russian properties are often used as concert or game venues, thus supporting and reinforcing social relationships within the community.

A special CFQ world map appears during festivals when a global 'survey' of teams is conducted; they exhibit national, ethnic, and racial diversity, as well as diversity along the centre-periphery axis. The obvious uniting factor for active participants is language. But the

'invisible' attribute that plays a leading role in the context of humour research is the socio-cultural experience that allows for certain 'codes' to be used that 'implant' particular emotions when decoded. This emotional programming is intended essentially for passive users—the potential audience. Signals and codes are created for an imagined target audience. By choosing to watch the audio-visual product, the audience is not only entertained, but also receives cues that signal their inclusion/exclusion in the special CFQ world, which, to a great extent, is also political inclusion/exclusion. The use of the word 'world' allows the creators to emphasise belonging to a community that is socialised with the help of the Planet CFQ programme cycle.

Humour is widely used to support the creation, amplification, definition, or prevention of a political agenda in CFQ skits and programmes.

With the help of CFQ, the agenda of politicians and the media becomes a controlled public agenda that can include multiple results. If CFQ teams are 'representatives of the people', then CFQ's chief influence is in shaping public opinion. For example, teams from multiple Russian-speaking countries and regions of Russia play in the CFQ league games shown on *Perviy kanal*. Thus agenda formation is supported not only by local representatives, but also by representatives of the international [Russian-speaking] community.

A study of the thematic range of CFQ jokes has resulted in the definition of four main groups: the first is a universal group that includes jokes about male/female, parent/child relationships; the second group requires specific pop-cultural experience that includes a knowledge of history and heroes; the third group contains jokes about current events; and the fourth group is the most difficult, because it requires specific knowledge

of past events that are no longer current general knowledge (references to previous CFQ teams or specific political events, etc.).

Setting a foreign policy agenda clearly integral to the content of the third group. Simply joking about Russia and other countries in the geopolitical context elicits a dual effect. On the one hand, this encourages audience members to follow foreign policy, on the other hand, the officially presented news stories are already flavoured by the narrative frame created by the CFQ—the US dictating to the world, Ukrainian/Georgian subjugation to US interests. Tracking foreign policy is important for CFQ players at all levels, since world events are used for creating jokes. It is also important for viewers, because they want to belong CFQ community. With the help of jokes important international issues are made funny and can create the impression that these events are unimportant—US and EU sanctions against Russia in the context of the Ukrainian crisis are mocked and renamed '**импортозамещение**' (or 'import substitution', an economic policy that advocates the use of domestic products instead of imports). Humour is used to undermine the authority of Western and the reputations of international organisations *vis a vis* the power potential of local leaders.

**Social capital formation and networking function as a talent search and in the identification of new leaders** is extensively used in the case of CFQ countries with large Russian-speaking populations. School activities play a large role in the CFQ hierarchy. Schools with Russian-language education programmes hold inter-class and inter-school competitions. These after school activities form a kind of 'elite' group within a school, thus gradually helping children develop aspects of leadership in their personalities. While interest in CFQ, engendered with the help of teachers, encourages students to begin

keeping track of the CFQ network and network elites (the CFQ champions league, which is shown by *Perviy kanal*), and to think of themselves as members of the larger CFQ network. The leading former and current CFQ-players function as role models the students want to emulate. The Russian popular culture industry also uses CFQ players as media personalities in interviews, celebrity surveys, and social network overviews. So, through early and gradual networking and socialisation, CFQ recruits new leaders who will become members of the industry and of the Russian political establishment. The same practice is transferred from schools to institutions of higher education.

**Image creation is colourfully demonstrated at various levels.** CFQ team names are chosen to polish a good image or replace an uninspiring one. At the start, CFQ games were held at universities, but teams associated with organisations and regions were also quickly formed. They began to use CFQ to create their own images. For example, the MGIMO (Московский государственный институт международных отношений or Moscow State Institute of International Relations) team image is linked to the promotion of diplomats. The same also applies to the army. For example, a prison administration team joined during the last season. And in the previous season a team calling itself 'Радио Свободы' or an 'updated image' of the world famous radio broadcast 'Radio Liberty'.<sup>14</sup> Their slogan was: '**Юмор основанный на реальных событиях**' or 'Humour based on actual events'.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> During the Cold War, Radio Liberty targeted the Soviet Union, just as Radio Free Europe targeted Soviet satellite countries, broadcasting news, information, and analysis to places 'where the free flow of information is either banned by government authorities or not fully developed'.

<sup>15</sup> See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ykAWWFnlfw0>

CFQ activities also demonstrate the function of humour in legitimising the existing regime and individual superiority. Russian national leaders are 'humanised' through entertainment programmes, and simultaneously their authority and specific community belonging is strengthened. President Vladimir Putin and Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev play a special role for CFQ, and it doesn't matter who plays which role. They were and are not only prototypical heroes and the 'heros'<sup>16</sup> of many jokes, but are also spectators sitting in the front row with their people, responding as members of the audience.

From the point of view of the propaganda, CFQ is one of the few places that enable people to identify with the country's leaders in the *soft* media genre, where the viewer is in a comfort-entertainment zone. One does not usually see a smiling, understanding, and responsive leader in a camera close-up on the front pages and in the TV news; more often the same faces are filmed Kremlin offices or in the context of *hard news*.<sup>17</sup>

Another feature that is associated with the opportunity to laugh/smile about national leaders is the comparison with the Soviet era, when it was not allowed, or sometimes allowed under certain conditions. Joking about the President or Prime Minister is an integral part of the CFQ and creates a feeling of freedom of expression. It should be noted, however, that all jokes go through an 'editorial reading' before going on the air.

Here our analysis should take us to **Step 7**, which calls for the identification of the means by which functions are implemented and the target audience is reached. But

<sup>16</sup> See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zqpv0vDLMvo>; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WpH5ZjriNUs>; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y8LX-GZax6Kk>; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sycie8aXhmc>

<sup>17</sup> See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZxAK3uZwuul>; <http://www.1tv.ru/news/social/288628>  
videos unavailable??

that step needs an empirical study, which has not been carried out in the context of this article.

### **Some Recommendations in place of Conclusions**

We have offered our readers one of the possible methods for analysing and identifying the use of humour for propaganda. Not many would doubt the power of humour to influence our hearts and minds, perhaps only those devoid of humour. But to say that humour belongs only to the entertainment genre would be foolish, even naive in this day and age when the information space has become an idiosyncratic 'battlefield'. Therefore, policy makers who make decisions about questions that are significant for safeguarding the quality of our information space must take into consideration the fact that humour can be used for the promotion of a political agenda. It is important that we have knowledge about methods that can be used to differentiate humour from propaganda that aims to deceive and cause doubt.

Based on this single case, we can name a few conclusions that would be worth thinking about. First, the humour industry has grown to an impressive size. Therefore it is necessary to use an analytical approach in evaluating this genre, making it possible to understand the many functions of the industry and to recognise the signs of deception, manipulation, and lies. Second, humour and politically significant messages in the guise of humour are broadcast using the most modern technological resources; this both increases the size of the potential audience, and makes it more difficult to deliver other messages that could balance already publicised positions. Third, humour can play an important role in addressing an audience if 'common language' is used for communication—here socio-political aspects play a greater role than linguistic aspects. Fourth, thanks to technological

mobility, 'territorially coloured humour' can be received in a borderless world where mutually overlapping contextual fields of humour are created making the creation and spread of humour much more politically significant than it has been in the past.

PART III

**THE VIEW FROM  
THE EASTERN  
PARTNERSHIP  
COUNTRIES**



## FURTHER FROM 'RUSSKIY MIR', CLOSER TO THE WEST



**Tamar Kintsurashvili**

*Chair of the Board,*

*Media Development Foundation, Georgia*

'Democracy is the only thing I like about the West', said a young man during an emotional discussion on Russian propaganda in the town of Dmanisi in one of the regions of Georgia where the first Europeans originated. What he and his likeminded Georgian friends dislike about the Western world is that democracy provides free space for people with different beliefs and identities.

In post-Soviet countries fear is being sown that the price of integration into the European family will be the loss of national, religious, and sexual identity; the premise being that action should be taken to defend the notion of 'honour'. This popular narrative, stemming from the concept of 'Russkiy mir',<sup>1</sup> is the most powerful

<sup>1</sup> Nicolai N. Petro, *Russia's Orthodox Soft Power*, Carnegie Council, 2015, [https://www.carnegiecouncil.org/publications/articles\\_papers\\_reports/727](https://www.carnegiecouncil.org/publications/articles_papers_reports/727)

message defining values-based discourse in the Georgian media landscape. Unlike in other Eastern European countries, Russian propaganda in Georgia is of a complex nature. Alongside Russian propaganda platforms, some Georgian-language media outlets incite hatred towards ethnic and religious minorities, and LGBT groups; these media platforms are a major source of anti-Western sentiment.

This paper describes the recent trends showing a decline in support for Euro-Atlantic integration and an increase in access to Russian-language media outlets over the past few years; it then provides an overview of the major communication channels, key messages, and propaganda tools used by Georgian-language media when directly referring to Russian sources or presenting Russian narratives in an ethno-nationalistic context.

A public opinion survey commissioned by the National Democratic Institute (NDI) in August 2015, showed a drop of 17 points from 78% in support for EU integration since August 2014.<sup>2</sup> However, the most recent NDI survey from April 2016 indicates popular support for integration rebounding to 77%. At the same time, support in favour of NATO integration has declined by 12% compared to 2013 when 80% of the population was in favour. These sharp fluctuations in public attitudes over short periods of time indicate the fragility of the situation and the persistence of Russian soft power in Georgia.

Although Russian media sources are neither popular nor widespread in Georgia, an increase in access to previously limited Russian-language media platforms has been observed in recent years. According to an NDI opinion poll from April 2015, respondents stated that

<sup>2</sup> Laura Thornton and Koba Trumanidze, *Public Attitudes in Georgia*, National Democratic Institute, August 2015, pg. ??, [https://www.ndi.org/files/NDI\\_August\\_2015\\_Survey\\_public%20Political\\_ENG\\_vf.pdf](https://www.ndi.org/files/NDI_August_2015_Survey_public%20Political_ENG_vf.pdf)

TV channels are the major source of information about Georgian politics and current affairs for 87% of respondents, and only 20% watch news coverage and current affairs on foreign channels.<sup>3</sup> Among the 20% of Georgians who rely on foreign sources, *Russian Channel One* (38%), *RTR* (30%), *Russia 1* (18%), and *REN TV* (16%) dominate over English-language and other networks. The language barrier in the regions densely populated by ethnic Armenians (Samtskhe-Javaketi) and Azeri (Kvemo Kartli) leaves no option for local populations to integrate into the Georgian information space, thus making a significant percentage of Georgian citizens fully dependent on foreign media sources. The information vacuum in these regions is manifested in public attitudes, which have been more constant among minorities during the last years. A survey by the Eurasia Foundation from November 2015 shows that Georgia's membership in the EU is not greatly favoured by ethnic minorities—only 35% would vote for membership, opposed to 9% who would not.<sup>4</sup>

Political changes in the country that led to the first democratic transfer of power have also impacted the media landscape in Georgia. International organizations observed an improved level of media plurality after the 2012 parliamentary elections; this improvement brought a variety of platforms, including the return of Russian-language channels. After the conflict between Russia and Georgia in August 2008, cable TV operators terminated the broadcast of federally owned Russian TV channels in the country. This decision was presented as voluntary, without an order from the government, and was not enforced by an

<sup>3</sup> Laura Thornton and Davit Sichinada, *Public Attitudes in Georgia*, National Democratic Institute, April 2015, pg. ??, [https://www.ndi.org/files/NDI%20Georgia\\_April%202015%20Poll\\_Public%20Issues\\_ENG\\_VF\\_0.pdf](https://www.ndi.org/files/NDI%20Georgia_April%202015%20Poll_Public%20Issues_ENG_VF_0.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> *Knowledge and Attitudes towards EU in Georgia: Trends and Variations 2009-2015*, Eurasia Partnership Foundation, 2015, [http://www.epfound.ge/files/eu\\_attitudes\\_survey\\_eng\\_nov\\_24\\_1.pdf](http://www.epfound.ge/files/eu_attitudes_survey_eng_nov_24_1.pdf)



official legal act. However, the return of Russian TV channels after the 2012 parliamentary elections indicates that the initial decision was not far from being political interference. The Georgian Public Broadcaster, owned by the Georgian authorities, launched the Georgian-language TV channel *Perviy Informatsionniy Kavkazsky* (PIK) or the First Caucasus News in January 2010; it was intended to counter pro-Moscow reporting, but was also closed down after the 2012 parliamentary elections. The Russian-language PIK channel was broadcast throughout the Caucasus and the European part of Russia, becoming a popular Russian-language alternative to Russian propaganda platforms. In a setting where EU member countries are discussing the possibility of creating a common Russian-language channel, reopening PIK might be an effective measure in countering Russian propaganda and meeting the demands of viewers who depend on Russian-language sources or habitually watch such media.

While the impact of the Russian media is more explicit and visible in minority-populated areas, the picture in other parts of the country is blurred and fragmented. Russia's propaganda network involves Russian-language platforms and Georgian tabloid media, but also political parties, orthodox clergy, NGOs, and the so-called intelligentsia or Soviet elite, who still largely shape public opinion.

## Sources of Anti-Western propaganda

**Georgian Language Media.** The Pro-Kremlin channel Sputnik-Georgia, which operates as an online platform in the local language, is less popular in Georgia than other ethno-nationalistic media outlets pursuing the same goals.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> *Media Profiles: Sputnik-Georgia*, MediaMeter web portal supported by the Media Development Foundation, 2016, <http://mediameter.ge/en/media-profiles/sputnik-georgia>

Even those politicians who openly support pro-Kremlin politics shun being publicly labelled as pro-Russian and claim that their agenda is pro-Georgian. The same ethno-nationalistic concept—neither Russian nor Western—is fundamental in mobilizing Georgians against anti-Western causes via media platforms. Patriotic language is a major tool used to appeal to people's national pride. Flagrant Russian propaganda is less common than denouncing the West.

Marked anti-Western attitudes and pro-Russian narratives can be found on the TV channel *Obiektivi*,<sup>6</sup> which is linked to the pro-Russian political party Alliance of Patriots, and in several tabloid newspapers—*Asaval-Dasavali*, *Alia*, and *Kviris Chronika*. According to the report on Georgia carried out by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), the editorial policies of all of the above-mentioned media outlets are either xenophobic or homophobic.<sup>7</sup> ECRI also criticized the Georgian government for providing service contracts for these media outlets since they incite hate speech, which is against the spirit of anti-discriminative policies and ECRI regulations.

An attempt on the part of the Georgian government to bring a number of anti-Western and xenophobic tabloids into the mainstream and legitimize them is another problem manifested through financial relationships and the public statements of high political figures speaking in their favour. For instance, while still in office, former Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili repeatedly praised *Asaval-Dasavali* as a 'patriotic' publication;

<sup>6</sup> *Media Profiles: Obiektivi*, MediaMeter, MediaMeter web portal supported by the Media Development Foundation, 2016, <http://mediameter.ge/en/media-profiles/obiektivi>

<sup>7</sup> *ECRI report on Georgia* (fifth monitoring cycle), European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, 2016, <http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/ecri/Country-by-country/Georgia/GEO-CbC-V-2016-002-ENG.pdf>

*Asaval-Dasavali* is a newspaper with a distinctly homophobic and xenophobic editorial policy.<sup>8</sup>

In addition to the ethno-nationalistic media platforms, a study by the Media Development Foundation (MDF) found several online media outlets that have declared their pro-Russian editorial policies, namely saqinform.ge and geworld.ge.<sup>9</sup> Saqinform.ge engages in the fabrication of information based on Russian media sources (i.e. *Regnum*, *RT*, *warfiles.ru*, *nakanune.ru*, *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, and others).<sup>10</sup> The news agency is known for its xenophobic and homophobic content, similar to that of geworld.ge, which was founded by the pro-Russian NGO Historical Heritage.

Lack of transparency in funding is another key challenge characteristic of the Georgian media landscape. Despite a scarcity of financial resources in the media market, numerous new online and TV platforms with anti-Western editorial policies have emerged during past few years. In the recent study 'Who owns Georgia's media', Transparency International Georgia draws attention to the ownership of several cable and Internet outlets by anti-Western and religious organizations.<sup>11</sup> 'Their declared revenue is rather small, making it unclear what resources these channels have been using to be able to broadcast', the report says.

**Mixed messages from *Georgian Dream*.** Though the current Georgian government has declared its goal to

join NATO and the EU, individual members of the ruling coalition, *Georgian Dream* (GD), give mixed messages about the country's pro-Western orientation, creating ambiguity among citizens. According to a survey conducted among youth by the Media Development Foundation (MDF), only 10.6% of respondents regard messages from various branches of power regarding Euro-Atlantic integration as consistent, whereas 40.2% believe that these messages are conflicting and that various government representatives make contradictory statements.<sup>12</sup>

The messages by individual members of the ruling coalition concern different topics and fully coincide with the rhetoric of radical extremist pro-Russian political groups and anti-Western media outlets:

- **North-Atlantic Integration:** 'We need neither NATO, nor the EU.' (Gogi Topadze, MP, *Georgian Dream-Entrepreneurs*)<sup>13</sup>
- **NATO = a threat of losing territorial integrity:** 'If the close cooperation with any political or military alliance damages the interests or territorial integrity of our country, I will say no to this cooperation without hesitation.' (Tamaz Mechiauri, MP, *Georgian Dream*)<sup>14</sup>
- **EU/NATO = pederasty:** 'If pederasty is needed for Georgia to join the EU and NATO, then I, Dima Jaiani, will never want to join NATO.' (Dima Jaiani, Minister of Education and Culture of Abkhazia in exile)<sup>15</sup>
- **The West cannot protect us against threat:** 'Russia

<sup>8</sup> Interview with Bidzina Ivanishvili, *Asaval-Dasavali* 06.02.2012

<sup>9</sup> Tamar Kintsurashvili, *Anti-Western Propaganda* Media Monitoring Report, Media Development Foundation, 2015, <http://mdfgeorgia.ge/uploads/library/15/file/eng/Antidasavluri-ENG-web.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> *Media Profiles: Sakinformi*, MediaMeter, MediaMeter web portal supported by the Media Development Foundation, 2016, <http://mediameter.ge/en/media-profiles/sakinformi>

<sup>11</sup> *Who owns Georgia's media*, Transparency International Georgia, 2015, [http://www.transparency.ge/sites/default/files/post\\_attachments/who\\_owns\\_georgias\\_media.pdf](http://www.transparency.ge/sites/default/files/post_attachments/who_owns_georgias_media.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> Youth Attitudes towards European Integration, Media Development Foundation, 2015, <http://mdfgeorgia.ge/uploads/library/27/file/eng/Research-Publication-ENG.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> Geworld.ge, 12 March 2015. <http://bit.ly/1MGN0ql>

<sup>14</sup> *Tamaz Mechiauri does not rule out the rejection from NATO* Rustavi 2 station, *Kurieiri* news program, 8 April 2016. <http://rustavi2.com/en/news/43848>

<sup>15</sup> Prime Time newspaper, 31 March 2014

is our eternal neighbour... We only got worries, water, and diapers from the West.' [during the 2008 Russo-Georgian War] (Zaza Papuashvili, MP, *Georgian Dream*)<sup>16</sup>

- **Russia and the Eurasian Union is an alternative to the West:** 'NATO is an aggressive military block... the Eurasian Union is the opportunity of being much better.' (Gogi Topadze, MP, *Georgian Dream-Entrepreneurs*);<sup>17</sup> 'We should take steps to talk with Russia without mediators, we have no other option.' (Soso Jachvliani, MP, *Georgian Dream*)<sup>18</sup>

- **Primacy of economic relations with Russia:** 'Why should we throw away everything that has been achieved over the last three years while the Europeans do everything they can to return to the Russian market? It is going to be much more difficult to sell our products on the European market. It is not as easy as it seems to be—they have excess [agricultural] production and do not know where to put their own [products].' (Zurab Chekurishvili, Advisor to the Minister of Agriculture of Georgia)<sup>19</sup>

- **EU imposes reforms:** 'Frankly speaking, my hand was trembling when we were adopting the law. But we also have to compromise sometimes in order to save the country, to save it from "Ukrainization".' (Omar Nishnianidze, MP, *Georgian Dream*)<sup>20</sup>

- **Events in Ukraine inspired by US:** 'There are great interests there [in Ukraine] of Russia, also Europe and

<sup>16</sup> Geworld.ge, 25 March 2015

<sup>17</sup> *Kviris Palitra* newspaper, 19 March 2015

<sup>18</sup> IPN, 22 July 2015.

<sup>19</sup> *Myth Detector: Representative of the Ministry of Agriculture in Georgia Made False Statements Regarding the EU Market in an Interview with Sputnik-Georgia*, Euro Communicator, Media Development Foundation and US Aid, 2016, [http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view\\_myth/301](http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view_myth/301)

<sup>20</sup> Geworld.ge, 4 June 2014

America...When you go there and clearly take sides, it indicates that you are not right... [I mean] that American diplomats [Victoria Nuland] who go there and give out sweet loaves and something. If someone supports me in such a way, I will overthrow any government.' (Soso Jachvliani, MP, *Georgian Dream*)<sup>21</sup>

- **EU forces to surrender traditions:** 'We have signed the Association Agreement [with the EU], but we do not see what the EU is doing, what it imposes on us. We ourselves have yielded many things that do not suit Georgian traditions. For instance LGBT issues, genetically modified food. It was forbidden there, but we are exporting it.' (Gogi Topadze, MP, *Georgian Dream-Entrepreneurs*)<sup>22</sup>

- **Foreign funded NGOs should be forbidden:** 'Many countries have banned NGOs, blocked their bank accounts, where they receive funding from abroad. When you shake the ground off of your own state, your country, because you receive grants from abroad, you should be held responsible for that, of course. This needs to be forbidden, this is how Americans have overthrown [the governments of] many countries, this is how tragedies happened in Arab countries, in Iraq, Yugoslavia, Libya, Egypt, and now in Syria we witness the same, and they are destroying this country under the pretext of establishing democracy.' (Gogi Topadze, MP, *Georgian Dream-Entrepreneurs*)<sup>23</sup>

Other members of the ruling coalition portray NGOs as betraying Georgian national interests and the Orthodox Church. Similarities can be found with Russia's newly updated Security Concept for 2015 where 'colour

<sup>21</sup> Prime Time, 24 February 2014

<sup>22</sup> IPN, 1 July 2015

<sup>23</sup> Geworld.ge, 6 March 2015

revolutions' and NGOs are listed among the key threats to Russia's security.<sup>24</sup>

**Pro-Kremlin political parties** According to the MDF's media monitoring, the political parties most frequently expressing anti-Western attitudes are Nino Burjanadze's *Democratic Movement* (DM) and the parties that set up the election bloc with her party for the 2014 local elections, as well as *Public Assembly*, a movement affiliated with DM, and the *Alliance of Patriots*.<sup>25</sup>

*Alliance of Patriots*, which employs its own media platform, the media-union Obiektivi, received seats (5.37%) in the self-government bodies in the local elections for the first time ever in 2014. The political party gained support through mobilizing the electorate with its homophobic attitudes and Turkophobic and Islamophobic statements, and leveraging Turkophobia in an anti-Western context. The message '**If Russia is an occupier, why isn't Turkey seen the same way?**' refers to the historical occupation of Georgian territory by the Ottoman Empire. In the modern context, Georgia's integration into NATO is considered a direct threat of a Turkish invasion into the country's Samtske-Javaketi region, which is densely populated by Armenian minorities. This message found fertile ground among the population in that region.

Euro-Atlantic integration is seen as a threat; the key messages delivered by Burjanadze's *Democratic Movement* and the affiliated *Public Assembly* concerned the prospect of **losing territorial integrity** and an attempt by the West to **impose incest**.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Стратегия национальной безопасности Российской Федерации, #683, 31 декабря 2015, <http://kremlin.ru/acts/bank/40391/page/1>

<sup>25</sup> *Anti-Western Attitudes in Georgian Media*, Media Development Foundation, 2015, <http://mdfgeorgia.ge/uploads/library/15/file/eng/Antidasavlu-ri-ENG-web.pdf>

<sup>26</sup> *Myth Detector: The Myth About Legalization of Incest in the West is Misleading*, Euro Communicator, Media Development Foundation and US Aid, 2014, [http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view\\_myth/1](http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view_myth/1)

The Freedom House report *Nations in Transition 2016* states that 'Pro-Russian political parties in Georgia are widely seen as being funded by Moscow and part of Russia's efforts to extend its influence over Georgia and destabilize the country'.<sup>27</sup> Lack of transparency in political party financing, as well as the financing of other pro-Kremlin channels (the media, NGOs), is one of the challenges facing the country. Despite legal restrictions to receiving donations from abroad, political actors find covert ways to avoid direct identifying their foreign financial sources. This problem has intensified ahead of the 2016 parliamentary elections; some observers do not discount the possibility of changes to the foreign orientation of the country resulting from election outcomes.<sup>28</sup>

**The Orthodox clergy.** Another source of anti-Western sentiments is the Georgian Orthodox Church; prominent figures regularly preach about the harm done by Western civilization to the Georgian Orthodox identity and make similar public statements in the media. The Orthodox Church remains the most trusted institution in the country and still maintains ties with Moscow. The Church's ambiguous position towards Russia was expressed in the Georgian-language Church magazine in 2008. The magazine wrote that the Russians bombing Georgia during the Russo-Georgian War in August 2008 were carrying out 'God's punishment', and 'God thus prevented Georgia from getting too close to Western countries and gave His blessing to coming under Russia's protection'.<sup>29</sup>

**Pro-Kremlin NGOs.** Multiple pro-Kremlin organizations have emerged in the past few years, campaigning in

<sup>27</sup> *Nations in Transit 2016: Georgia*, Freedom House, 2016, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit/2016/georgia>

<sup>28</sup> Michael Cecire, *The Kremlin Pulls on Georgia*, FP Magazine, 9 March 2015, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/03/09/the-kremlin-pulls-on-georgia/>

<sup>29</sup> ??? <http://church.ge/index.php?showtopic=8865>

favour of Georgia's integration into the Eurasian Union. With the exception of two key actors, the Eurasian Institute and Eurasian Choice, numerous interlinked organizations and media platforms operate in a non-transparent manner.

**Intelligentsia.** The intelligentsia or the so-called Soviet elite, comprising well-known writers, actors, and other privileged members of society, continues to influence public opinion. This group of disseminators is mainly involved in value-based judgments about the honour of the nation and alien values imposed from the Western world.

### Key messages and propaganda tools

**Messages.** Key messages disseminated by the above-mentioned actors can be grouped into three major categories—topics related to **values and human rights**; policy issues related to Georgia's integration into the Western community and foreign affairs; and issues related to non-governmental institutions and international organizations.

Value-based judgments are mainly focused on the following topics:

- **The West is against the Georgian Orthodox Church.**

This type of message is intended to emphasize the spiritual unity of the orthodox world and the special role of Russia in defending orthodoxy from aliens. At certain times such messages are showcased as opposition to orthodox Russia.

- **The West seeks to undermine Georgian national identity, traditions, culture, religion, and values.**

and

- **The West imposes homosexuality, paedophilia, incest, and a perverse mode of life.**

Issues of gender and sexual identity are portrayed as an attack on family values and traditions.

- **The idea of 'minority rights' is code for Western-inspired separatism.**

Topics such as the ratification of Council of Europe's charter for regional or minority languages and the repatriation of Georgian citizens deported from the Meskheta region during Stalin's regime were discussed in relation to the Association agreement.

Messages concerning international cooperation and foreign political processes mainly revolve around the following themes:

- The Association Agreement with the EU is interpreted as a tool for the subjugation of Georgia and the destruction of its economy.

- Georgia will not benefit from the Association Agreement and the only way for the Georgian economy to survive is by joining the Russian market.

- The US and the West in general are offenders and strategically encourage coups in various countries to benefit the West.

- Events in Ukraine are portrayed as actions undertaken by the west against Russia.

- Euro-Atlantic integration is associated with the expansion of Turkey and the loss of Georgian territories.

- Messages conveying the opinion that 'NATO and the EU are not the choice of Georgian people' question the legitimacy of the plebiscite conducted in 2008 in support of NATO integration and show that public opinion polls in favour of EU integration lacked legitimization on the part of people.

- Russia is portrayed as a counterweight to the West.

- The Richard G. Lugar Center for Public Health Research, which is part of the Georgian National Center for Disease Control and Public Health, is portrayed by Russian sources as a threat aimed to destroy Georgian genes.

The third group was dominated by two types of messages concerning institutions supporting open society, namely, non-governmental organizations, which were portrayed as the hired spies of foreign countries, while international organizations were portrayed as branches of special services. The founder of the Open Society Georgia Foundation, George Soros, is commonly portrayed as attacking Georgian identity, and is the most demonized public person in this context.

**Propaganda tools.** The most popular propaganda tool used by a number of sources is the FALSE DILEMMA or 'black-and-white thinking' technique in which only two choices are presenting and one is clearly the better option. Examples of this approach is predominantly expressed through the following formulas:

- If the West stands for a perverted lifestyle and the legalization of homosexuality, we do not need the West!
- If the West imposes homosexuality, the Georgian people prefer Russia to the West!
- If integration into NATO is tantamount to the loss of territorial integrity, we do not need NATO.
- Hussein, Kaddafi, and Assad were no angels, but they did not kill people.

After the US arrived, many people who lived peacefully in the Middle East were killed.

The AD NAUSEUM approach, or the tireless repetition of an idea until people begin to take it as the truth, is another technique used to propagate a number of similar messages, or even messages with identical wording:

- 'The West cannot protect us against threats.' was also stated as 'The US and Western countries only assisted us with water and diapers during 2008 Russo-Georgian war.'
- 'Events in Ukraine are inspired by the US.' was also

stated as 'Victoria Nuland was distributing sweet loaves to the opposition in the centre of Kiev in 2013 during the Maidan protest.'

DEMONIZATION is a technique that is widely used to portray opponents as inhumane beings through false accusations and unjustified generalization. The most commonly encountered instances combined the demonization of the US and the EU with the fabrication of information in an attempt to create an artificial reality.

FABRICATED INFORMATION in relation to Ukraine was mainly based on Russian media sources. In some cases Georgian media outlets either literally repeat or very much resemble the pattern of reporting on domestic political events of Georgia set by Russian media sources:

- Georgian website **sakinform.ge** published news concerning the construction of an EU concentration camp in Ukraine. The Russian source of this fabricated information was **politikus.ru**.
- Georgian website **sakinform.ge** and **ambebi.ge**, as well as the newspaper **Asaval-dasavali** published news concerning the trade in human organs in Ukraine and Georgia. The Ukrainian Russian source of this fabricated information was **slovo.net.ua**.
- Georgian website **sakinform.ge** published news concerning black US instructors arriving in Ukraine as mercenaries. The Russian source of this fabricated information was **warfiles.ru**.
- Georgian website **sakinform.ge** published news concerning the import of US-manufactured bacteriological weapons to Ukraine. The Russian source of this fabricated information was the news portal **REGNUM**.

## Response to Anti-Western Propaganda

Although the openness, transparency, and insistence on allowing multiple voices to be heard that are the

hallmarks of democracy allow Russia to misuse democratic institutions, such as the media, restricting propaganda platforms is not a solution. What targeted countries can do is prevent the penetration of Russian funds by introducing efficient transparency rules and responding to instances of money laundering within the legal framework.

Efforts to undermine pro-Western public opinion in Georgia have been considerably stepped up during last several years and may well become even more damaging during the pre-election period. The temptation to win over voters with emotional appeals to save the nation from loss of identity is strong, even among representatives of the ruling coalition. According to a recent NDI survey, support for the coalition (15%) dropped significantly over the last year. Inconsistent and mixed messages from individual members of the ruling *Georgian Dream* coalition, both in parliament and government, play a negative role in burgeoning Western-sceptic attitudes. It is crucial for the Georgian government to maintain clear and consistent messages with a unified approach regarding the Westernization agenda and advancing Georgia towards the West. The government's communication strategy should be focused on delivering messages about the practical benefits of EU integration along with rapid response mechanisms to minimise the spread of disinformation.

Greater efforts should be undertaken by media watchdog organizations to track the flow of disinformation and to develop reactive response mechanisms that can challenge factual errors, while taking a proactive approach towards the misrepresentation of Western values in local contexts.

A shortage of research and human resources in media newsrooms and, in some cases, the poor qualifications

of journalists should be addressed, not only by short-term training programmes, but through permanent co-operation between the media, think tanks, and watchdog groups so that they are better able to make a use of their accumulated experience, expertise, and findings. Local and international donor organizations should support this type cooperation to ensure that project activities reach their target groups in the most effective manner possible. In this regard, special emphasis should be placed on those media outlets that reach larger audiences and have a stronger influence on society.

One final, but no less important factor to be taken into consideration is the significance of religion in post-Soviet communities. Since the concept of *Russkiy Mir* relies on the effectiveness of Moscow's mechanisms for disseminating messages via the Russian Orthodox Church worldwide, the role of the clergy in anti-Western discourse should not be overlooked. In addition to improving mechanisms for responding to disinformation, e.g. quickly dispelling such rumour as 'the ECHR has placed a ban on the baptism of new born children', teaching critical thinking in schools is essential, even though it is a long-term project.<sup>30</sup> Distancing Georgia from *Russkiy Mir* and its integration into the Western community must be based on shared values and attitudes and can be influenced by public diplomacy efforts.

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<sup>30</sup> *Myth Detector: Information that European Court Bans Infant Baptism is False*, Euro Communicator, Media Development Foundation and US Aid, 2016, [http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view\\_myth/245](http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view_myth/245)



## **RUSSIAN PROPAGANDA IN UKRAINIAN INFORMATION SPACE: ITS DIVERSE FORMS, CHANNELS, AND AUDIENCES. WHAT CAN BE DONE TO COUNTER OR MINIMISE ITS IMPACT? WHAT BEST PRAC- TICES COULD GOVERNMENT STRUCTURES ADOPT FROM THE PRIVATE SECTOR?**



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*'Russia is waging the most amazing information warfare blitzkrieg we have ever seen in the history of information warfare.'*

Gen Philip Breedlove,  
17<sup>th</sup> Supreme Allied Commander Europe  
NATO Summit, Wales, 5 September 2015

Hybrid war has become the most popular topic at international conferences, workshops, and expert discussions. By now, we have come to understand that the elements of hybrid war are not unique and have been used many times before. This, however, is the first time we are faced with the situation where information and cyber components do not merely support war, but are the main focus of war, and, since they do not belong to what is traditionally understood to be a military arsenal, aggressive activities can take place without a formal declaration of war.

At the general meeting of the Academy of Military Sciences in January of 2013, Chief of General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces and First Deputy Defence Minister General Valery Gerasimov summarised the long-term developments and considerations of Russian military analytics and actually outlined the Russian approach to modern warfare. In his speech, he stated that non-military components shall exceed military components by a factor of four, and that the influence of information now cuts across all stages of warfare. Gerasimov also advocated for an 'asymmetric' approach, simultaneously taking place in both 'material and informational space', as well as for a general command for all efforts in a unified informational space<sup>1</sup>. We can now observe the implementation of the declared approach in Ukraine, as well as in all other Russian military operations.

Several lines of the invisible information front in Ukraine can be identified, including the creation of a false reality for the Russian population and the populations of the Russian-occupied territories in Crimea and parts of Donetsk and Lugansk, and actions taken to use information to influence target audiences in Ukraine and Europe, as well as

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<sup>1</sup> Gerasimov, V. (2013). *Importance of science is in foresight. Military and industrial courier*. Accessed 11 Apr. 2016 [http://vpk-news.ru/sites/default/files/pdf/VPK\\_08\\_476.pdf](http://vpk-news.ru/sites/default/files/pdf/VPK_08_476.pdf)



other segments of the international community. The Russian warfare machine uses various approaches in targeting audiences, but the goal is the same—to instigate global chaos. In his analytical paper on hybrid war Mr Volodymyr Horbulin, Director of the National Institute for Strategic Studies, a think-tank established under the President of Ukraine, stated that ‘For the first time in a long time Russia has turned its tactical approach in strategic culture (tactical discrimination with minimal strategic planning and no forecast of the long-term consequences of its actions) into a true strategic benefit (Russia’s de-facto global goal is ‘global anarchy’, which the Russian leadership considers to be the ideal status for the world geopolitical space)’<sup>2</sup>.

Although we are now focusing on the Ukrainian experience, the same approach is clearly being used in other regions where Russia has an interest, such as Syria, the Baltic States, and Azerbaijan. Military and guerrilla operations are preceded by certain actions that constitute a pattern—the identification of an ‘enemy’ and the formulation of reasons for operations against that enemy, the mobilisation of internal audiences, and the creation of a feeling of being in a fortress surrounded by evil.

State-owned media and private media outlets loyal to the state control the content of the information space identified by Gerasimov; both persistently disseminate Kremlin-designed narratives. Thanks to this, attitudes can quickly be manipulated. That is why the first action taken by the so-called ‘green men’ or ‘polite people’<sup>3</sup> in

<sup>2</sup> Horbulin, V. (2016). *Hybrid war, everything just begins*. ZN.UA. Accessed 14 Apr. 2016 [http://gazeta.zn.ua/internal/gibridnaya-voyna-vse-tolko-nachinaetsya\\_.html](http://gazeta.zn.ua/internal/gibridnaya-voyna-vse-tolko-nachinaetsya_.html)

<sup>3</sup> Little green men, also known as Polite People, refers to masked soldiers in unmarked green army uniforms and carrying modern Russian military weapons and equipment that appeared during the Ukrainian crisis of 2014. The term was first used during the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation, when those soldiers occupied and blockaded the Simferopol International Airport, most military bases in Crimea, and the parliament in Simferopol.

the occupied territories was to switch off Ukrainian TV channels and switch on Russian channels. Crimea is in a state of total informational occupation. The repressions we have recently observed against Crimean-Tatar journalists are simply new evidence in long line of similar actions targeted at the elimination of alternative information sources.

But Russia could not reach its military goals in other parts of Ukraine in such a short period. Russian strategists overestimated the loyalty of the Ukrainian population to the Russian Federation. Influence tactics were therefore modified from the use of direct propaganda and false news to softer, more surreptitious methods. An analysis of the two-year period (2014-2015) demonstrates the following methods used by Russia in the hybrid war:

1. Efforts to destabilise internal social cohesion in Ukraine by provoking encounters between different social groups (Eastern vs. Western Ukraine, Russian-speakers vs. Ukrainian-speakers, etc.) to provide evidence for the Kremlin-supported narrative that Ukraine is a failed state.
2. Efforts to influence key stakeholders—military personnel, their relatives, social activists, etc. Several visible examples of direct influence can be cited: the organisation of soldiers’ mothers in protest against the Ukrainian government, bulk SMS campaigns to front line military units calling on them to go home and not to protect ‘a government that doesn’t care about you’, hashtag and other social media campaigns against the mobilisation of Ukrainian troops.
3. The elaboration and dissemination of a social and political vision for Ukrainian society, psychologically necessary for Russia to achieve its territorial goals.
4. Attempts to [mis]use local traditions and habits to

weaken the opposition and channel its energy into a mood of protest against the Ukrainian authorities, calling it 'illegitimate', 'junta', etc.

5. The creation and promotion of false identity for the occupied regions to provide a reason for the so-called 'federalisation'—in reality an attempt to place the region under the constant control of Russia to make it possible to manipulate and influence the political decision-making process in the state.

Russia uses both direct and indirect methods to boost its influence in Ukraine. They use all channels of influence: traditional media, social media, politicians, opinion leaders, civil movements, and other authorities. Extremely pro-Russian media and social media groups continue to operate in the Ukrainian info-space. But the biggest threat does not come from direct influence, rather from the Kremlin's hidden agenda. Ukrainian media and society often do not understand that it is not necessary to repeat directly Russian propaganda; it is enough to support the myths and stereotypes they are spreading.

Here we arrive at the main question that Ukraine must answer to defend itself in this undeclared war—what are the roles of media, civil society, and the state in securing national interests.

After the Revolution of Dignity—the civil protests of 2013-14, which lead to the ousting of ex-president Yanukovich and a power reboot, the new Ukrainian authorities faced the necessity to balance between defending democratic values and freedoms and the protection of our own informational sovereignty; the threat to which was actually a threat to the existence of the state. Taking into consideration the absence of existing practices and traditions, this balancing act became one of Ukraine's main challenges.

Ukraine, weakened economically and politically, was not ready to face military and information warfare. For the entire period of Ukrainian independence (now 25 years), the authorities have never taken the issue of information security seriously. As a result, Ukraine has no theoretical, academic, or legal basis for building its own information strategy (or 'information policy'). The country has no existing think tanks or theoretical base concerning the issue; existing research is far from reality and is not practically applicable. This has led to a lack of qualified civil servants and governmental specialists who could deal systemically with these challenges.

In states with developed democracies, the media community can perform a buffering function. Such a community provides expertise, state service professionals, mechanisms of regulation and ethical behaviour (watchdogs). Ukraine happens to be weak in this sphere as well. For decades, the Ukrainian media environment has been developed as a tool to facilitate and promote political and business interests, not as a professional business model. Oligarchs own most media outlets, giving small independent or regional media channels no opportunities to compete. Editorial policy was to serve the owners' political or business interests, be they state or private. This situation did not promote the development of professional journalism standards. Public trust in the media is extremely low. A 2014 study by the Institute of Sociology of the Academy of Sciences of Ukraine puts the level of trust in 2013-2014 at 25% and distrust at 45%; the lowest rating since 1992<sup>4</sup>.

All these factors make Ukraine extremely vulnerable

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<sup>4</sup> UNIAN, (2014). *First time in 20 years level of mistrust to media prevails over level of trust - sociologists*. Accessed 15 Apr. 2016. <http://www.unian.net/society/996948-vpervyie-za-20-let-uroven-nedoveriya-k-smi-v-ukraine-prevyisil-uroven-doveriya-sotsiolog.html>

in a crisis, but at the same time have created a unique situation. When the state was incapable of carrying out its functions, civil society was mobilised. An unprecedented volunteer movement was generated—more than 20% of the population participated or actively supported protests during the Revolution of Dignity,<sup>5</sup> and more than 13% dealt with volunteer movement in 2015.<sup>6</sup> A substantial part of this movement is dedicated to information security.

Some of these initiatives are: *StopFake* — a website daily countering Russian misinformation in the media with digital and video reviews; *InformNapalm* — a project dedicated to the collection of evidence from publicly available sources, or ‘open source intelligence’ (OSINT) investigations, concerning the presence of Russian armed forces in Ukraine; *Mirotvorets* (Peacekeeper) — an online database of Russian military personnel and guerrillas participating in military conflicts around the world with evidence based on OSINT technology; the Maidan of Foreign Affairs — an NGO specialising in expert and analytical support for foreign policy and public diplomacy, and many others.

Most of these initiatives began spontaneously and are lead by small groups of activists, but the work they are doing is impressive. All of them are multilingual (e.g. *InformNapalm* operates in 16 languages), updated almost daily, and have become trusted media sources for both the Ukrainian public and foreign audiences. Regional media initiatives, from ad-hoc journalists’ communities

<sup>5</sup> Democratic Initiatives Foundation named after Il’ko Kucheriv, (2014). *First year anniversary of Maidan: public opinion polling*. Accessed 12 Apr. 2016 [http://www.dif.org.ua/ua/polls/2014\\_polls/hethrtjhrrhthrtt.htm](http://www.dif.org.ua/ua/polls/2014_polls/hethrtjhrrhthrtt.htm)

<sup>6</sup> Democratic Initiatives Foundation named after Il’ko Kucheriv, (2016). *Post-Maidan charity and volunteer movement in 2015: research results*. Accessed 15 Apr. 2016. <http://www.dif.org.ua/ua/publications/press-relezy/hbbuhnygrs.htm>

to streamers and street journalists, have been the only source of information for many people in the most critical situations. At first, some activists started to report on events or topics of high public interests, then they began posting their own opinions; later many of them transformed into bloggers, currently among the most popular authors even for traditional media. Finally, as reported by numerous polls conducted by sociological organizations and the media, volunteers have been the most trusted power in society for the past two years.

The following factors contribute to the success of the above-mentioned projects:

**1. Motivation.** These initiatives were not about money or careers (although now their activities have given a social lift to many activists). The people involved really believe in what they are doing. They are defending their state and their families from the aggressor. It was value-based work, in service of the highest goals.

**2. ‘Passionarians’.** The initiators of movements are active, creative, broad-minded, and dedicated to entrepreneurship. They look into all possible options for reaching their goals. The projects are all based on advanced contemporary approaches, such as crowdsourcing, crowdfunding, OSINT methods, distributed work and responsibility, the absence of strong leadership and the involvement of a broad community of experts.

**3. An absence of financing.** Lack of financing in the initial stages necessitated building very flexible models of operation. It also meant that projects/initiatives did not need to meet the expectations or policies of others (owners). These circumstances gave absolute freedom of speech and initiated a community of self-regulating mechanisms.

**4. No state controls or regulations.** Weakness of the state and the media meant absolute freedom of action

and expression, even in spheres previously closed to most citizens. No limits, no traditional approaches, no need to adhere to set rules produced absolutely new problem-solving methods.

**5. A high level of trust.** Due to the absence of financial interest or interconnection with power and business interests, these initiatives gained the support of many citizens. Many people dedicated their efforts or donated money to realise these goals.

Could all of these tasks be accomplished by the state? It is doubtful. Government always limited by formalities, is not so flexible and free in its reaction. However, the current situation has demonstrated that government can benefit from stimulating and supporting the activities of civil society. Security agencies in Ukraine now actively use the results of volunteers in their work: the evidence and OSINT information collected by activists is routinely integrated into the official investigations of state authorities; many civil activists have become members of supervising or expert committees for official bodies and help develop strategies and action plans; at least half of the Ukrainian delegation participating in international conferences is likely to be made up of volunteers or civil activists.

This unique situation has led to a simple, but perhaps optimal decision: a state may be most effective in the role of regulator or facilitator in the sphere of national information security, letting community members and professionals play the active role. Therefore, the concept of national informational security may now change from identifying and reacting to threats to the creation of a social and informational space that is able to develop and self-regulate, i.e. is invulnerable to such threats.

Let us come back to the media issue. Ukraine situation is somehow unique now, however many similar

challenges can be found in the European context. Although Russian propagandists produce fakes and false statements daily, they seldom meet with any consequences. For instance, Ivan Bely, the Russian TV journalist and author of story about 'raped Russian girl', continues to avoid charges in Germany. Currently there is no legal mechanism with the strength to protect Europe from information threats to national security and freedom of speech. Without the proper mechanisms, law enforcement and security agencies cannot operate in this field.

So, we return to the issue of defining a new model for national information security, where the development of StratCom capacities and the information space of the state shall become a key pillar of governmental policy. The Ukrainian state began work on this concept slowly, but systematically in early 2015:

- Ukraine adopted a Strategy of National Security that includes paragraphs dedicated to threats to the information security of the state; information and psychological warfare conducted by the Russian Federation against Ukraine and cyber security threats are listed<sup>7</sup>.
- The National Security and Defence Council (NSDC) of Ukraine adopted a Cyber Security Strategy in January 2016<sup>8</sup>.
- Ministry of Information Policy (MIP) has developed an Informational Security Concept that is under consideration now. This white paper creates a framework for the identification of security issues, as well as the basic principles of information space development for the state. Once the document is accepted, it should become the basis for the adoption of a Doctrine on

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<sup>7</sup> NSDC, (2015). *National Security Strategy of Ukraine*. p.<http://www.rnbo.gov.ua/documents/396.html>

<sup>8</sup> NSDC, (2016). *Cyber security strategy of Ukraine*. p.<http://www.rnbo.gov.ua/documents/417.html>

National Information Security and Concept of Informational Space Development.

The National Security Strategy has named a number of factors that delay the development of a unified policy. It states: 'The inability of state bodies and authorities to develop a comprehensive approach to strategic communications is still a problem; there is a lack of coordination concerning the protection of national information space, as well as the search for balance between freedom of speech and the controls needed for the protection of national interests.'

To overcome the above-mentioned difficulties, a comprehensive StratCom Capacity Building project was initiated under NSDC leadership. It is targeted at the introduction of Strategic Communications culture at the institutional level and facilitating cross-governmental cooperation to communicate strategically in Ukraine's national interests. In October 2015, a Strategic Communications Partnership Road Map between Ukraine and NATO<sup>9</sup> was signed to facilitate such efforts.

In 2015, the MIP also initiated a reform of governmental communications as an ongoing project. Its main task is to separate the political and professional components in communications, to create a strong professional approach to communications, to activate two-way communication between governmental bodies and society, and to create mechanisms of active public participation in decision-making processes<sup>10</sup>.

The Ukrainian Ministry for Foreign Affairs has become

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<sup>9</sup> *Strategic Communications Partnership Road Map between the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine and the NATO International Staff*. (2015) p.[http://mfa.gov.ua/mediafiles/sites/nato/files/Roadmap\\_Eng.pdf](http://mfa.gov.ua/mediafiles/sites/nato/files/Roadmap_Eng.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> The Communication Reform Group, (2016). *Concept of reform of governmental communications*. Accessed 8 Apr. 2016. [http://www.slideshare.net/CommReformGroup?utm\\_campaign=profiletracking&utm\\_medium=sssite&utm\\_source=ssslideview](http://www.slideshare.net/CommReformGroup?utm_campaign=profiletracking&utm_medium=sssite&utm_source=ssslideview)

a leader in public diplomacy development. During last two years, the Ministry has stimulated and supported many initiatives based on state-public partnerships, and it has created a Public Diplomacy department to support such activities in 2016.

These efforts are all targeted at the formation of an information ecosystem where the state should be an efficient, but not the main player. Civil society and professional communities should play key roles. In this regard, the professionalization of the media has become a crucial issue for state security.

As stated in the executive summary produced by the NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence,<sup>11</sup> 'Countries need to foster free, editorially independent and pluralistic media following highest professional standards of journalism.'

To improve media standards and stimulate media development, the MIP initiated a discussion on media reform within the professional community<sup>12</sup>. As the process takes off, the government sees its role as helping the community to work out the principles and rules that shall enable the rapid development of the media sphere, to increase transparency and independence in editorial policy, and to protect the rights of journalists to freedom of speech and expression. Such principles later shall become the basis for legal acts regulating the media sphere in Ukraine.

So, what can be done to counter or minimise the impact of propaganda? What best practices can government structures adopt from the private sector? Summarising the facts and considerations presented here we can say the following:

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<sup>11</sup> Analysis of Russia's Information Campaign against Ukraine, COE, 2014

<sup>12</sup> MIP, (2016). *Decree on establishment of working group on freedom of speech legislation improvement*. pp.<http://mip.gov.ua/files/documents/29.02.2016.pdf>

Russia uses a dictatorial approach and strict subordination to manage its information warfare. Combined with substantial financial resources, the army-format approach to the implementation of an information policy gives advantages in hybrid warfare. A democracy can never be as effective in mobilising resources. But that is a tactical or short-term perspective.

An army of trolls, thousands of fakes, and a constant stream of false narratives can only be effective in isolation. If a state and the society it serves are successful in developing a freethinking, multi-actor, and viable informational space, it will be able to protect itself and its interests. As the Ukrainian case has shown, the army of trolls is faced with an army of elves, which turn out to be more successful and trustworthy in the long-term. For example, the iArmy<sup>13</sup> crowdsourcing initiative by the MIP to counter and refute Russian fakes in the digital space has activated more than 100,000 users in less than a month. The soldiers in this army are unpaid and motivated only by their desire to protect their own country.

Actually, the recipe for countering propaganda turns out to be a classic. The first wave of fear has passed and logical analysis of situation shows national security to be an issue that concerns all citizens. Therefore, to be effective in a crisis, the state needs to support and cooperate with society, but should not try to monopolise the right to manage it.

Russian information aggression and the violation of existing traditions and rules in the international information space has greatly influenced the present reconsideration of instruments and methods that can and should be used by governments to protect themselves. The Baltic States are taking action to counter the negative influence of Russian TV, the UK is setting an example

in dealing with RT fakes through regulation, and the EU has established an East StratCom Team. Ukraine is also searching for the best ways to deal the threats it faces.

Information and influence have become central to contemporary warfare, and both Ukraine and Europe still need to find the best approaches, mechanisms, and tools for strengthening their information security. The Ukrainian example of combating Russian information aggression demonstrates that only the development of comprehensive StratCom approach, a strong independent media and self-regulated information space can make a difference in the long-term perspective.

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<sup>13</sup> <http://i-army.org/>



## RUSSIAN PROPAGANDA IN MOLDOVAN INFORMATION SPACE: ITS DIVERSE FORMS, CHANNELS, AND AUDIENCES. WHAT CAN BE DONE TO COUNTER IT OR MINIMISE ITS IMPACT?



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The information war and Russian propaganda through media content rebroadcast from Russia is an issue that has been constantly on the agenda of local politicians, civil society, and the media in Moldova in recent years.

Divided along language lines and in terms of political orientation, most Moldovan media published in the Russian language has traditionally been pro-Russian, while the Russian-speaking population is predominantly exposed to the Russian-language content produced in Russia, which dominates the Moldovan media market.

According to the Barometer of Public Opinion published in November 2015, about 40% of the population gets its information from Russian media, 73% from Moldovan media, and 10% from Romania and the EU.<sup>1</sup>

The Moldovan public is used to watching Russian channels, since Russian media never left the country. After the Soviet Union collapsed, the federal channel ORT continued to air its programs in Moldova using state frequencies. Gradually, after the expansion of cable transmissions, the Russian media presence expanded too. A number of Russian TV stations are rebroadcast in the Republic of Moldova; among the most important are *Pervyi Kanal*, *NTV*, *Ren TV*, *RTR*, *CTC*, and *TNT*. *Pervyi Kanal's* content is included in the programming of *Prime TV*, a Moldovan TV station with nation-wide coverage. *Prime TV* mostly broadcasts programs of local origin in the morning and evening hours, while content produced in Russia represents about 65% of *Prime TV* content. Such content is purchased from Russian companies or offered free of charge based on legal agreements with these companies. *NTV*, *Ren TV Moldova*, *RTR Moldova*, *TNT*, *CTC* etc. are included in cable packages offered by a series of service providers. It should be noted that *Prime TV*, which rebroadcasts the Russian *Perviy Kanal*, has the highest audience rating—51%, while two other channels—*RTR Moldova* and *REN TV Moldova*—also have relatively high audience figures ratings—18% and 10%, respectively.<sup>2</sup>

It is also worth mentioning that currently most TV channels are included in cable packages broadcast in

<sup>1</sup> Barometer of Public Opinion. Institute for Public Policies. November, 2015. [http://ipp.md/public/files/Barometru/Brosura\\_BOP\\_11.2015-prima\\_parte\\_final.pdf](http://ipp.md/public/files/Barometru/Brosura_BOP_11.2015-prima_parte_final.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Nadine Gogu, *Who really rules the airwaves in Moldova?*, openDemocracy website, March 2016, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/nadine-gogu/who-really-rules-airwaves-in-moldova>

Russian, even those produced originally in English or other languages. Most media consumers residing outside the capital do not speak English or French, consequently they prefer to watch TV programs in Russian, this language being familiar to them.

The high proportion of Russian-based news programs strengthens the penetration of information available in Russian: of the fifteen most popular television channels, eleven air their newscasts in both Russian and Romanian.<sup>3</sup>

The trust in Russian media is high. According to the latest Barometer of Public Opinion, published in April 2016, approximately 49% of respondents trust the Russian media they watch, while Moldovan media only received a trust rating of 40%.<sup>4</sup>

A national qualitative and quantitative study conducted by the Independent Journalism Centre in October/November 2015 has shown that the Russian media were trusted by 46% of the respondents; however, Russian media was also thought to have more severe professional problems and to be the second most manipulative (after the Moldovan media).<sup>5</sup> Most of the participants in the focus groups—men and women from rural and urban areas—believed that the Russian media uses manipulation and propaganda techniques more often compared to US, EU, and Romanian media; however, some participants believed that US media outlets use these

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<sup>3</sup> *Measuring the perceptions of sociopolitical news by the media audience in the Republic of Moldova*, Independent Journalism Center, November 2015, <http://media-azi.md/en/measuring-perceptions-sociopolitical-news-media-audience-republic-moldova>

<sup>4</sup> Barometer of Public Opinion. Institute for Public Policies. April, 2016. [http://ipp.md/public/files/Barometru/BOP\\_04.2016\\_prima\\_parte\\_finale-r.pdf](http://ipp.md/public/files/Barometru/BOP_04.2016_prima_parte_finale-r.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> *Measuring the perceptions of sociopolitical news...*

tools as frequently as the Russian media, only less aggressively. Manipulation and propaganda were defined by participants as information that is not impartial and is used primarily to influence an audience and further an agenda, often by presenting facts selectively to encourage a particular synthesis or by using messages to produce an emotional rather than a rational response to the information presented.

The results of opinion polls show that media produced in Russia has a huge impact on shaping public opinion in Moldova. The percentage of the population that supports a change in the political orientation of Moldova towards the Russia has increased and Kremlin leader Vladimir Putin is the most popular politician among Moldovans; 62% of Moldovans say that they trust this politician.<sup>6</sup> The Russian media influenced the results of the 2014 parliamentary election. The Socialist Party and its leader, Igor Dodon, pointedly exploited the image of Russian leaders, assuring voters that the relationship with Russia would improve substantially if the socialists were to win. In the autonomous region of Gagauzia, the pro-Russian candidate Irina Vlah won the election for Bashkan [local governor] in March 2015. Russian TV stations gave Vlah's campaign positive coverage, achieving the desired effect.<sup>7</sup>

The impact of the media on making up people's minds is shown by answers to several questions aimed at assessing the people's perceptions regarding the role of specific countries in maintaining world stability based on knowledge they had gathered through various means. Russia was seen as playing the role of guarantor of peace

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<sup>6</sup> Barometer of Public Opinion. Institute for Public Policies. April, 2015. [http://www.ipp.md/public/files/Barometru/BOP\\_04.2015\\_prima\\_parte\\_finale.pdf](http://www.ipp.md/public/files/Barometru/BOP_04.2015_prima_parte_finale.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Gogu, *Who really rules the airwaves in Moldova?*



and a factor in stability by 40% of the population, compared to 21% who believed this country was a destabilizing factor. It should be noted that 80% of those who saw Russia as a peacekeeper and about 58% of those who saw the US as a destabilizing factor were from ethnic minorities.<sup>8</sup>

As the study's authors noted, some respondents reflected on whether media coverage, in particular Russian media coverage, was appealing because it corresponded to their own ideologies, perceptions, and understanding of the world in general, rather than following professional criteria for coverage, particularly when assessing the overall satisfaction and trust in the media of the respective countries.

So what one can be done to counter or minimise the impact of propaganda?

Taking into account the impact the media have on the minds of the people, the Moldovan authorities started undertaking steps to fight propaganda and protect the country's information space. Two draft laws to tackle this issue were developed in the spring of 2015. The amendments referred to the broadcasting and rebroadcasting of foreign programs, to domestic shares of news and analytical programs, and to sanctions applied for non-compliance with legal provisions. Specifically, two provisions addressed protecting the information space through restricting/prohibiting informative and analytical programs, as well as TV channels that come from countries other than the EU and states that have ratified the European Convention on Transborder Television. These draft laws were seen as controversial because they contained provisions for regulating the content of broadcasting in a manner that might interfere with editorial freedom and threaten freedom of expression. The draft law that received the most criticism

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<sup>8</sup> *Measuring the perceptions of sociopolitical news...*

contained provisions aimed at regulating the behaviour of TV talk show moderators, as well as depriving public companies of commercial advertising. The claims about countering Russian TV propaganda were considered a trap by representatives of civil society that would result in creating obstacles for journalists covering Moldovan government activities.

Some experts argued that propaganda should be counteracted through high-quality programs produced in Moldova, which is currently seen as 'mission impossible'. Media content produced in Moldova is seen as unable to compete with entertainment programs produced in Russia, mainly due to financial restrictions.<sup>9</sup> Also, interdiction of certain programs can lead to censorship and it is not clear how efficient such disruptions can be at a time when there is free access to the Internet and the public has the ability to access diverse sources of information.

The OSCE and the Council of Europe found the both draft laws should be reviewed so as to comply with the basic principles of human rights. The CoE analysis of the draft laws found that vague and unclear provisions could be employed for censorship, while hate speech and fake statements can be counteracted more easily through better communication, pluralism of opinion, and open debates.<sup>10</sup> Specifically, the CoE expert found it worrisome that amendments to Article 9 regarding the prohibition of rebroadcasting TV and radio channels that contain programs and analytical and political shows not produced in EU states and states that did not ratify the European Convention. According to Article 10, prohibitions/restrictions of freedom of broadcasting should

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<sup>9</sup> Gogu, *Who really rules the airwaves in Moldova?*

<sup>10</sup> Based on research of CoE independent expert Dr Bissera Zankova on the draft law proposing changes to the Broadcasting Code of Moldova nr. 260-XVI of July 27, 2006.

have legitimate goals and be necessary into a democratic society in line with ECHR standards, concluded the CoE expert.

Also, the expertise provided by OSCE stated that prohibition seemed excessive and, possibly, inefficient; is not a good idea to solve the propaganda issues through prohibition. Propaganda should be fought through communication and providing information, although this process may be lengthy and frustrating.<sup>11</sup>

It should be noted that decisions on suspending the translation of channels in Moldova are made by the Broadcasting Coordinating Council (BCC), which is the regulatory agency in the broadcasting field. No other state authorities may take steps to restrict the activity of broadcasters that broadcast programs inciting violence, inter-ethnic hatred, etc. The Broadcasting Code does not include any provisions specifically referring to inter-ethnic hatred, appeals to overthrow the constitutional order, the propaganda of exclusivity, dominance, or the inferiority of others by reason of ideology, ethnicity, race, physical state, or social status.<sup>12</sup> The only provision that somehow refers to these issues is included in Article 7 regarding ensuring socio-political balance and pluralism. It specifies that the transmission and retransmission of programs should ensure social and political pluralism, cultural, linguistic, and religious diversity, as well as information, education, and entertainment.

Article 40 of the Broadcasting Code states that programs may be monitored by the Broadcasting Coordinating Council (BCC), whenever the council considers it necessary, in order to establish whether broadcasters and service providers/distributors are complying with the legal provisions, normative

<sup>11</sup> Legal analysis of the amendments proposed to the Broadcasting Code, OSCE, 2015, was done by Prof Dr Katrin Nyman Metcalf, an independent expert in Communications Law, Human Rights School at Tallinn, Technological University of Tallinn.

<sup>12</sup> <http://cca.md/files/Codul%20Audiovizualului.pdf> PAGE NOT FOUND

acts, and obligations included in the license. The BCC may apply sanctions to local broadcasters monitoring shows violations of the provisions of the Code. Sanctions are applied gradually, and can result in suspension of license.

The national regulatory body may apply local legislation, specifically provisions related to ensuring pluralism of opinion, in order to sanction foreign broadcasters rebroadcast in Moldova. According to Article 29 of the Code, any company that receives the authorization to rebroadcast programs from countries that are not in the EU or members of the European Convention is responsible for compliance of the content with the provisions of the Code! Article 10 states that broadcasters are obliged to ensure objectivity of information and the right of citizens to receive true and objective information.

Starting in 2014, the BCC has been monitoring TV stations that rebroadcast content from Russia and, based on the monitoring data, has sanctioned certain broadcasters. In June 2014, after monitoring five media channels that rebroadcast content from Russia, the BCC decided to suspend the retransmission of *Rossiya 24*, a company that had been authorized for retransmission by the BCC until the end of 2014. The decision was made based on the monitoring report entitled 'Regarding compliance with socio-political balance, with objectivity and equidistance within informative shows (Время, Сегодня, Вести, Новости 24 și Вести), rebroadcast from the Russian Federation by local broadcasters *Prime TV/Pervyi Kanal*, *TV7/NTV*, *RTR Moldova*, *Ren Moldova*, and *Rossiya 24*'. The report noted that aggressive propaganda techniques promoting and intensifying rumours and manipulation through text and images had been noticed in Russian media programs. Also, labels were used to discredit the Kiev administration and present it in a negative light, and the information used to misinform and manipulate the public regarding events in Ukraine was being disseminated.

The report also highlighted several instances of instigation to violence and inter-ethnic hatred, as well as discrimination on the grounds of belonging to pro-Ukrainian and pro-European forces. In four other cases—*Prime/Pervyi Kanal*, *Ren TV Moldova*, *TV 7/NTV*, and *RTR Moldova*, gradual sanctions, including public warnings and fines, were applied for non-compliance with BC provisions to ensure pluralism of opinion and the obligation to inform the public in a correct and balanced way. The difference between *Rossiya 24* and the four other channels is that the former had been authorization to retransmit, while the others were local companies that inserted Russian content into their programming and presented it as their own product, either purchased or received, based on legal agreement.

In May 2015, the BCC made a decision to discontinue *Rossiya 24* broadcasting, after having established the infringement of Article 34, Paragraph 3 of the Constitution (Right to Information) specifying that public, state, and private media are obliged to ensure correct information of the public. The maximum fine of 5,800 lei was imposed on a number of other TV channels, including *Ren Moldova*, for repeated breaches of the provisions of their licensing conditions and national broadcasting legislation.<sup>13</sup>

On March 29, 2016, the *Ren Moldova* TV channel was sanctioned by the Broadcasting Coordinating Council with the suspension of its right to broadcast advertisement for 72 hours after the monitoring of its program 'Военная тайна' ('The military secret') which was aired in late January 2016 and dealt with the political situation in the Republic of Moldova. BCC members established

<sup>13</sup> 'Ren TV Moldova' penalised again for the 'Dissemination of False Information' MEDIA AZI Independent Journalism Center, 30 March 2016, <http://media-azi.md/en/stiri/%E2%80%9Eren-tv-moldova%E2%80%9D-penalised-again-%E2%80%9EDissemination-false-information%E2%80%9D>

that the show contained multiple deviations from professional standards, such as 'presenting opinions as facts, disseminating truncated information taken out of context, promoting a single point of view on controversial issues, misinformation by the assertion false facts, by disseminating false information, and by inciting ethnic and language-group hatred and intolerance'.<sup>14</sup>

In order to contribute to diminishing the impact of propaganda, a number of research papers and policy papers containing recommendations were developed by local media experts and international researchers, and sent to the local authorities. Most of the papers stated that actions undertaken should not restrict basic rights, but should make a difference in fighting propaganda and manipulation.

According to recommendations made by the authors of the study *Measuring perceptions of sociopolitical news by the media audience in the Republic of Moldova*,<sup>15</sup> authorities should strengthen their protection of the national airways against propaganda inciting war and hatred. Media regulators should monitor broadcasters' compliance with legislation and contractual licensing conditions, and should apply appropriate sanctions in cases of non-compliance. Sanctions should be clearly defined and commensurate with the gravity of the violation committed. The establishment of systematic media monitoring based on a credible methodology would assist regulators in identifying legal violations, including hate speech and propaganda, and taking prompt and adequate corrective action. If applied, restrictions on

<sup>14</sup> Ren TV Moldova Penalized by the Coordinating Council for Broadcasting for Using the Logo of the Russian TV Station Ren-TV, bearing the Saint George's Black-and-Orange Ribbon', MEDIA AZI Independent Journalism Center, 8 May 2015, <http://media-azi.md/en/stiri/ren-tv-moldova-penalized-coordinating-council-broadcasting-using-logo-russian-tv-station-ren>

<sup>15</sup> *Measuring the perceptions of sociopolitical news...*

freedom of expression should not be disproportional in scope, nor should they be arbitrary or politically motivated to limit the expression of alternative positions.

The best way of fighting propaganda is to uncover the truth through as many means as possible. The media environment should be strengthened through creating alternative Russian-language broadcasting media to provide an alternative narrative to the one coming from Russian state-controlled media. Experts believe that current programming models, e.g. the insertion of alternative Russian language programs into blocks of time on national language channels, are unsuccessful because they do not leverage existing viewing habits. Broadcasting high-quality news in Russian, as well as facilitating collaborative investigations, fact checking, and translations, would be another step to counteracting propaganda. In addition to news production, commissioning and buying content, such as quality documentaries and entertainment programs, including film, drama, social reality shows, and reporting on local issues, could be a 'market-place' of programming for Russian-language media.<sup>16</sup> Consideration should also be given to promoting a direct exchange of high-quality media content among broadcasters within certain closer frameworks based on mutual links such as history, language, or territorial proximity, for example within the Eastern Partnership countries, with Romania, or with Ukraine.<sup>17</sup>

Most researchers and media experts share the opinion that the best response to Russian information influence

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<sup>16</sup> Recommendations for policy makers in the Baltic States, Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova in response to Russia's weaponization of information: This policy brief builds on the results of the workshop 'Mass Media—Competing for People's Hearts and Minds in Russia's Neighbourhood' held in Riga, Latvia on September 12, 2014 as an initiative by the Baltic to Black Sea Alliance.

<sup>17</sup> *Measuring the perceptions of sociopolitical news...*

is cultivating a strong, professional media. However, the weakened media and the drop in professional standards, including the lack of high-quality reporting, make this a challenge. Therefore consideration should be given to supporting activities that are aimed at raising professional standards, including adherence to internationally recognized ethical codes and standards for balanced and objective reporting and news presentation. Projects aimed at increasing the ability of media outlets to meet high professional standards, professional training, investigative reporting, watchdog activities, improvements in audience reach, and efforts to create new revenue models should be supported.

At the same time, the media should pay attention to self-regulation and refuse all blatant or veiled expressions of intolerance. They should consider thoughtfully if publishing such expressions is conducive to defamation or ridicule based on sex, race, colour, language, faith and religion, affiliation with a national or ethnic minority or ethnic group, social differences, or political or other opinions.<sup>18</sup>

And, last but not least, local and international experts mention increasing the media literacy and critical thinking of media consumers as one of the most important steps. Local civil society organizations should play a meaningful role in exposing misinformation, raising media literacy, monitoring journalistic standards, and providing media analysis.

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

PART IV

**MEDIA LITERACY  
IN LATVIA:  
REALITY CHECK**



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study gives an overview of media literacy in Latvia. It is focused on analysing the activities of the following actors: the Latvian government and education professionals, the media regulator, and the media. In addition to the recommendations and findings provided in this study, the research outlines the potential risks of introducing and implementing media literacy activities at various levels.

Despite the efforts of certain individuals and some positive developments over the years, only the dramatic events in Ukraine provided the impetus necessary to consciously begin shaping the Latvia media sphere. Since early 2014 much more effort has been invested into improving media literacy at the levels of government, the media regulator, and the media itself, which are at the core of this study. However, given the opinions of those interviewed, it is crucial not to let the situation to return to the pre-Crimean level.

Several risks should be taken into account regarding media literacy issues. First of all, the connection between attending to media literacy and events in Ukraine is noticeable and unavoidable. If relations between Russia and Ukraine normalize and improvement in EU-Russia/Latvia-Russia relations follows, the pressure to improve the media sphere may diminish. Such positive changes



would put the resources currently devoted to media literacy and the understanding of its importance at risk. Some people are already concerned that interest is decreasing. The security of the information sphere is not as popular now in mid-2016 as it was in the middle of 2014 and in the beginning of 2015. In public discourse and the speeches of Latvian politicians media literacy is framed as a question of security, not as a necessary tool for democracy.

The first risk is that in general, the level media literacy in Latvia is linked the financial support, or lack thereof, provided for ongoing and new initiatives. Even now, politicians pay lip service to information security, but this is not reflected in government spending, notably in the area of defence, where the issue is receiving attention. The defence of information space does not have a powerful lobby in Latvia and in the EU. Physical or military defence is still more important at the national level and is better funded than defence of information space.

Second, there is a risk of a one-sided reading of media literacy as mainly a 'technical problem'. In other words, there is greater emphasis on the creation and use of media outlets and media content over analysis and critical thinking. And there is a significant risk that the generation gap is growing rapidly where media literacy is concerned.

Third, there is a need to study and regularly evaluate the media use experience of Latvian pupils. Their needs could be further researched. Previous studies conducted in the Baltic countries shows that the situation in the outlying regions of Latvia is different than the situation in the capital city. Introduce flexibility into school curriculums is very important because of diversity of Latvian schools in terms of pupils and resources. Moreover, engaging pre-schools in media literacy activities is also

recommended. And enhancing media literacy support for Russian-language teachers is seen as necessary for this language community will not connect media literacy issues solely with propaganda and counterpropaganda frame in the context of Latvia against Russia.

Fourth, media professionals are ready to engage in the activities of stakeholders; they are ready to be educated and to educate. For such training activities to be effective, it is worth keeping in mind that newsroom personnel have a high turnover rate. Professional organizations must be open to newcomers with regard to media literacy courses, especially for those who have no specific education in media or communication sciences.

Another risk is connected with the use of the term 'media literacy'. Latvian translations tend to indicate a technical understanding of the term that leaves out the critical thinking that is an inseparable aspect of media literacy. The Finns had a similar experience and chose to establish a more appropriate local synonym with the potential to lead practitioners toward critical-thinking oriented content.

And finally, media literacy is a new endeavour for Latvia. Projects such as 'Safe Internet' and the librarians project of helping senior citizens to use internet are only a tiny part of the pre-Crimean era legacy. New challenges include integrating the critical aspect of media literacy and preparing a competent media audience that can navigate audio-visual and printed content in their daily lives, starting from cartoons and other audio-visual materials that pre-school age children consume.

For better domestic results, it would be useful to promote engagement of Latvian actors in international organizations and international networks, such as the Second European Media literacy conference organized by UNESCO, with the support of the Ministry of Culture and



the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. For a more secure media environment in our region, it would be necessary to support media literacy initiatives in Russian, providing the physical and virtual space for discussions and networking by growing and empowering media literacy specialists.

## THE CASE OF LATVIA, AN EU MEMBER STATE AT THE BORDER WITH RUSSIA



*Dr. Solvita Denisa-Liepniece*

### Introduction

This study is part of the project *‘Resisting state propaganda in the new information environment: The case of EU member states and EU eastern partnership states vis-a-vis the Russian Federation’*. The goal of this study was to do a reality check on media literacy in Latvia and to show how different European and national initiatives in this area are affecting the Latvian public sphere. This paper outlines the main projects, practices, and initiatives aimed at increasing the media competence of Latvian citizens and provides a map of media literacy in Latvia—variously constructed definitions, changes in scope, recent activities, and the opinions of the main stakeholders. The study also presents the activities of the main stakeholders and activists in Latvia, the ways in which they do and don’t cooperate, and the gaps that still remain between what is and what could be.



Media literacy in Latvia became a prominent theme only after the recent events in Ukraine. Those events, combined with significant growth in the production and impact of the Russian propaganda machine, finally brought media literacy into the public eye. Promoting media literacy has become a popular topic in subject-related conferences, official recommendations, and activity guidelines.

One of the shortcomings of the Latvian approach to media literacy is 'that the issues concerning the development of an information society and information literacy in Latvia are examined in a technical and not in a social, cultural, and political (development of democracy) context'.<sup>1</sup> While studies concerning the use of digital technologies play an important part in media literacy, they do not address the subject in a comprehensive way.

Although media literacy gained prominence in Eastern Europe only after events in Ukraine in 2014, the importance of the subject has been known for some time. In 1982 UNESCO published the *Grünwald Declaration on Media Education*, a worldwide initiative to teach media literacy. 25 years later UNESCO presented its *Paris Agenda*—twelve recommendations on media education, which included digital media. UNESCO continues to prepare programs for teachers, provides training spaces, and is proactive at the global level.

European governments have also been paying more attention to media literacy, but at differing levels of quality and competence. For instance, the explanato-

<sup>1</sup> Brikse, Freibergs, and Spurava, *Media and Information Literacy Policies in Latvia*, University of Latvia, 2014, as a part of the Action "Transforming Audiences, Transforming Societies", a network funded by the European COST programme (European Cooperation in Science and Technology), available online at [http://ppemi.ens-cachan.fr/data/media/colloque140528/rapports/LATVIA\\_2014.pdf](http://ppemi.ens-cachan.fr/data/media/colloque140528/rapports/LATVIA_2014.pdf)

ry section of a report made to the European Parliament on media literacy in a digital world in November 2008 stated: 'Western and eastern European curricula differ greatly as far as media education is concerned. Whereas the subject is given varying degrees of prominence in the EU-15 Member States, it does not exist in any of the central and eastern European countries except Hungary and Slovenia.'<sup>2</sup> The report's description of the situation in eastern European countries also largely reflects the current state of affairs in Latvia eight years later.

### The practical value of this research

There is a lack of cooperation among media literacy stakeholders in Latvia. If in some countries special governmental or NGO bodies act as the leading institutions for discussions and as hubs for initiatives, ideas, and resources, no one is acting this capacity in Latvia. The growing political interest in this issue may decrease with the normalization of relations between Russia and Ukraine. If nothing is done to consolidate efforts to strengthen media literacy it may disappear from the agenda...until the next event demonstrating the importance of critical thinking in politics.

Latvia is one of the eastern European countries whose information space is vulnerable, mainly due to the popularity of imported media products from non-democratic regimes. The practical value of this study is to demonstrate the current state of attitudes and activities in different sectors connected to media literacy—schools, NGOs, the media, media regulators, ministries, and

<sup>2</sup> European Parliament resolution of 16 December 2008 on media literacy in a digital world (2008/2129(INI)), 'Media literacy in a digital world', Available online at <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX-%3A52008IP0598>

regional institutions. The results of this research may be used as reference material for follow-up discussions and policy proposals on improving media competence in Latvia, as well as in other member states of the EU.

### **The structure of the research**

This research is organised in the following way. The paper begins with an executive summary of key findings and recommendations. The summary is followed by a detailed description of the way in which the research was designed, including information about the types of data and methods used. The second chapter describes the theoretical framework for the research. The third chapter comprises the main documents regulating/addressing media literacy; newly introduced EU initiatives are outlined and examined in this chapter. The fourth chapter addresses responses to Russian propaganda at different levels of government. The next chapter is devoted to the situation in Latvia, where media literacy is discussed in a number of contexts including the government, the media regulator, TV and radio, and education. The paper ends with concluding remarks.

To sum up, this study first suggests a framework for media literacy as an academic topic, outlining challenges and identifying opportunities. It then presents the political framing of media literacy nationally in Latvia at the level of the EU. And finally, the paper aims to describe the elements of practical media literacy as a political ‘to-do list’ of activities that should be undertaken to support democracy in Latvia in today’s information climate.

### **Executive summary—key findings and recommendations**

This summary contains findings at the levels of government, the media, education, and the EU. The separation

of these levels is optional, however some of the findings are related to more than one level. Each finding contains at least one research based recommendation.

### **The European Union**

**Finding:** Local experts and actors do not interact with their counterparts from other EU member states and they are unaware of the Latvians representatives participating in the Media Literacy Expert Group, an initiative launched by the European Commission. EU knowledge is not shared with key stakeholders at the local level.

#### **Recommendation**

- Promote the exchange of expertise, to invite local experts to participate in activities in other EU countries, and to promote local experts engaged at EU-level activities through organizing conferences, seminars, and workshops.

**Finding:** The concept of media literacy remains foggy, even for stakeholders and the participants of this study who are engaged in media literacy activities in Latvia. The large number of definitions and broad landscape of interpretations used in the European Union and in Latvia lead to misunderstandings not only within the general public, but also among practitioners.

#### **Recommendations**

- Support cooperation between researchers, encouraging the standardization of definitions and approaches.
- Promote the terminology used and provide different levels of definitions.
- Use graphically illustrated definitions—identified as one of the best options for clearly explaining the variety of definitions used.
- Localize and standardize translations, including basic terms in Russian, especially for those stakeholders

working in Russian, such as teachers, journalists, etc.

- Collect new definitions used to replace the term ‘media literacy’, especially at the educational level, i.e. the Estonian example.

**Finding:** Media literacy, both as a concept and as a policy initiative, is connected to structures at the level of Europe; this top-down perspective results in a lack of initiatives at the local level.

#### **Recommendations**

- Encourage local politicians, actors, and NGOs to familiarize themselves with the best practices of other countries to provide bottom-up approach initiatives. For instance, Safe Internet is a successful project, which was proposed and implemented by NGOs and local actors.
- Improve the exchange of information and experience between teachers and to promote ongoing EU programs for Teachers, Scholars, and researchers.

**Finding:** Some stakeholders understand media literacy mainly as activities for the general public managed by the education system, without assessing the media literacy skills needed by specific groups, such as politicians, media actors, film makers, museums, etc.

#### **Recommendations**

- Promote networking, engagement, and cooperation between stakeholders at both the national and EU levels for sharing best practices in media literacy.
- Support international NGOs working with media literacy to becoming more actively involved at the EU level, making their work more impactful.
- Address a more comprehensive set of the aspects of media literacy, such as critical thinking, instead of focusing solely on digital literacy.

**Finding:** Better use could be made of the potential of the Audiovisual Media Services Directive. The

development of new standards should be seen as an ongoing process that takes into account the recommendations of media literacy experts, including the High-Level Group on Media Freedom and Pluralism. Improvements are needed.

#### **Recommendations**

- Promote the Directive, to engage different actors, including media literacy experts, to improve the implementation of the Directive.
- Make changes/improvements to the Directive according to the recommendations of local and national experts based on recent cases of hostile propaganda.

### **Latvian National Policy**

**Finding:** There is a lack of clear legislation and division of responsibilities concerning media literacy in Latvia. Stakeholders are mixing initiatives and are pointing at each other as the leading institution. However, recently there have been some changes indicating the growing role of the Ministry of Culture.

#### **Recommendations**

- Clarify who is responsible for which aspect of media literacy in Latvia and to promote those responsible.
- Provide a clear structure in the media literacy policy and to update/improve aspects of existing national legislation having to do with media literacy.
- Consider the establishment of an organizational body dealing with media literacy.

**Finding:** There is no common understanding of the definition of media literacy as an inter-agency process among the ministries. It is not considered an area in need of a whole-government approach. This leads to hesitation in introducing new initiatives.

#### **Recommendations**

- Increase cooperation among responsible ministries

in establishing working groups and organizing regular meetings to share ideas and policies.

- Strengthen the position of the leading institution to better coordinate activities among different state institutions.

**Finding:** Leading figures, with more than twenty years experience in different leading positions of the Russian language media in Latvia, were not properly engaged in the process of formulating and implementing media politics, and did not participate in the process of discussing the needs of this media (*LR4/LTV7*).

#### **Recommendations**

- Facilitate better representation of Russian language media interests in the Latvian Association of Journalists.
- Better engage the Latvian Association of Journalists to discuss the most problematic issues, to formulate and implement necessary policies.

**Finding:** It is problematic to find appropriate data on media literacy in Latvia. Although this problem has also been identified at the EU level, Latvian scholars should have better access to collected data, and be willing to share their findings. Some scholars also shared concerns about the currency and reliability of the data due to rapid developments in this area. Information becomes irrelevant faster than it can be shared by the twenty-eight EU member states.

#### **Recommendations**

- Initiate and strengthen the collection of measurable data in the area of media literacy at the national level.
- Consider publishing the data of each respective country (country profiles) faster.
- Enhance scholars' international cooperation by involving them in ongoing EU programs.

## **Latvian Media**

**Finding:** There is a lack of media projects on media literacy available on public media platforms; this is the case for both Latvian-language media and in Russian-language media.

#### **Recommendations**

- Consider a long-term approach in supporting prospective initiatives/projects, as well as cross-border journalism projects.
- Successful EU and national projects should be shared or localized.
- Support an EU-content-hub on media literacy. It is relevant for both traditional and new media.
- Use media literacy project conferences for motivation and networking.

**Finding:** Though the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Latvia does not figure among the stakeholders, a number of experts mentioned this ministry as being among the active players, providing networking, introducing local journalists to foreign initiatives (and example of regional cooperation); engaging and encouraging experts to participate in regional and EU level media-literacy projects and activities.

#### **Recommendation**

- Include the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the list of key players, given its role as a forum for donors, local NGOs, and professional activists, including groups on media literacy.
- Consider the use of public diplomacy tools for revealing hostile propaganda, defining the problem of strategic communication for the wider public.

**Finding:** The authors of any given project decide whether or not it is related to media literacy. Some actors did not recognize their projects as media literacy projects. Assessment criteria are very flexible.

### **Recommendation**

- Additional labelling and popularization of media literacy projects would be an asset.

**Finding:** The fast turnover of journalists is a traditional aspect of journalism in Latvia. Many journalists have no professional education. Junior editorial staff is more open to new knowledge-based opportunities. The senior editorial staff is less likely to participate in workshops with subordinate staff members. Both Latvian and non-Latvian senior staff members frequently have problems with English. Editors and top-management expressed an interest in participating in courses and seminars to increase their own media literacy.

### **Recommendation**

- Organize and support focused courses and seminars for editors and top-managers; such activities would be short-term and narrow in scope to accommodate the pressures of top-management.

**Finding:** Media actors are open to increasing their knowledge of media literacy and are ready to participate in training activities. Many young professionals express their desire to participate in courses or internships abroad. Only a very few journalists have been offered and have used such opportunities. However, national initiatives for new-staff have been organized, but editors are not willing to let junior staff members participate in long-term seminars. In current conditions editors cannot afford to replace a journalist engaged in training,

### **Recommendations**

- Provide both long-term and short-term programmes to increase the media literacy of journalists.
- Provide a place for networking and engagement based on media literacy issues.
- Enhance and support existing organizations dealing with media literacy, e.g. the Baltic Centre for Media Excellence.

- Consider the paying journalists to participate in training activities.

**Finding:** Active professionals with relevant media literacy experience, such as research activities, teaching experience, and advanced fact-checking activities are ready to be involved in projects with students, pupils, and other professionals.

### **Recommendation**

- Provide opportunities for the exchange of knowledge on media literacy by supporting local and international conferences and other networking activities.

## **The Latvian Education System**

**Finding:** Libraries are mentioned as active participants in media literacy projects and other initiatives. They are involved in long-life education by working with seniors on becoming more competent in the sphere of media-literacy. According to self-assessment, the main role of the library is in advancing digital literacy; this does not include analysis or the critical thinking aspect of media literacy.

### **Recommendations**

- Organize conferences/workshops for librarians in order to improve their media literacy competence.
- Consider the use of the strong network, so that regional libraries in regions can promote critical thinking as well as improving digital literacy.
- Enhance the ongoing initiatives of National Library of Latvia.

**Finding:** The Ministry of Education and Science and the Public Broadcasters have made attempts at sharing their archives and engaging professional journalists and educators in their work. The Latvian Radio has a media education centre, but its potential is not fully used.

### **Recommendation**

- Assess the need for and support the creation of an

expanded media centre based on the existing resources of Latvian Public Broadcasters LTV and LR. This should not be seen as an alternative to academic infrastructure, but rather as support for universities and other institutions of higher education.

**Finding:** The media regulator has an education centre. Its potential is not fully used.

#### **Recommendation**

- Inform involved actors about library and other opportunities provided by the regulator.

**Finding:** Teachers demonstrated a lack of knowledge about media literacy. They share concerns that new ideas may overload existing courses. Restructuring the education process is not assessed as a positive option.

#### **Recommendation**

- Motivate teachers to increase their media competence and to engage in open discussion.
- Engage representatives of the Ministry of Education in a conversation about changing the current authoritarian approach to education, which provokes silence instead of raising issues for discussion.

**Finding:** Because of their job-specific work schedules, teachers express the willingness to attend summer courses and programmes close to where they live and work.

#### **Recommendation**

- Support national and regional summer programmes and networking opportunities for improving the media literacy of teachers.
- Support inter-disciplinary cooperation among teachers.

**Finding:** According to school curriculum development plans, media literacy will not be taught as a separate subject. However, a difference between teachers' knowledge and their willingness to introduce new materials was recognized in surveys, e.g. the Estonian case.

#### **Recommendation**

- Consider including questions on media literacy in exams to motivate teachers and students.

**Finding:** Teachers need to have didactic and school materials for pupils, including audio-visual materials. They would like to be informed about the availability of new materials on a regular basis.

#### **Recommendation**

- Provide financial and other support for experts to creating books for teachers and students, including audio-visual materials in both Latvian and Russian.
- Publish a regular bulletin about new initiatives, conferences, and projects.

**Finding:** Teachers are ready to engage pupils and to use international opportunities. They want to know about new opportunities.

#### **Recommendation**

- Enhance and encourage regional and international cooperation by engaging both teachers and pupils.

**Finding:** Museums possess infrastructure to facilitate connecting experts with their audiences. This potential is not used in Latvia. In policy papers museums are not listed among the actors that could help increase media competence. The potential of museums is also not being used by the education system.

#### **Recommendations**

- Assess the possible engagement of museums at both the national and regional levels.
- Promote media literacy among regional museums.
- Facilitate museums in making their infrastructure available for lectures, workshops, specific exhibitions, and to promote media literacy and increase media competence.

**Finding:** Pre-schools teachers are not mentioned in priority groups. Pre-school activities on media literacy

are not on the agenda of stakeholders. Yet, it should be underlined that in Latvia many children attend pre-school until the age of 7, which is the starting age for active media use according to recent research on media use patterns among children.

### Recommendations

- Consider moving pre-school to priority area.
- Support and manage activities aimed at increasing the media competence of pre-school teachers.
- Create didactic material for pre-school teachers.
- Support special early-childhood-friendly content, taking into account the importance of audio-visual content.

### Data and Methodology

The *Study on the Current Trends and Approaches to Media Literacy in Europe*, published in 2007, distinguishes between the following elements of media literacy: contexts, actors, competences, processes, and areas. Contexts are further divided into personal, family, education, media, and civil contexts. This particular study is focused on activities connected with education, media, and civil contexts.<sup>3</sup>

The authors of the *Current Trends and Approaches*<sup>4</sup> report suggest the following categories of actors, who are stakeholders in questions of media literacy: In the educational context the actors are authorities, teachers and educators, tutors, and students. In the media context the actors are authorities, businesses, professionals, and audiences. In the civil context the actors are associations and communities.

For the purposes of this study relevant actors in Latvia were identified and consulted. Authorities include

ministries, national institutions, and media regulators; representatives were interviewed and key documents were analysed. Educators, media students, and journalists were consulted through organised focus groups. Representatives of media professional organizations and media professionals working in TV and radio, especially those producing Russian language products, were consulted. In real life the relevant contexts mix and intertwine, stakeholders are engaged in and appear in multiple contexts, and actors can be further segmented into various interest and alignment groups. What constitutes civil society in today's (post-Soviet) Latvia is a question in the process of being answered.

The analytical process employed for this study involved six steps:

1. identifying local actors working in the mentioned areas
2. making a preliminary analysis of activities/documents concerning media literacy and selecting candidates for the semi-structured interviews and for the focus-group interviews
3. preparing interview guidelines for each context
4. conducting interviews
5. analysing the interviews
6. making conclusions and recommendations for all selected and analysed groups

When speaking about media literacy, it is common to distinguish between individual competences and environmental factors. Some authors organize their discussions of the subject in the following categories: governmental (or related) policy activities; regulatory activities; civic participation activities; educational and training activities; media activities; professional and business activities.

Interviews were conducted over a period of three months from February 2016 to May 2016. Almost all of

<sup>3</sup> Potter, J., *Theory of Media Literacy: A Cognitive Approach*, Sage, 2004.

<sup>4</sup> Kellner, D., Share, J., *Toward Critical Media Literacy: Core concepts, debates, organizations, and policy*, published in *Discourse: studies in the cultural politics of education*, 26(3), Routledge, 2005, pp. 369-386.

the thirteen interviews were face-to-face. With the exception of one, the interviews were not recorded and quotes are not used in this study. The journalist focus group was conducted in Riga. The media student focus group was conducted in Valmiera.

Two main questions were at the centre of this study:

- What has been done to improve media literacy in Latvia?
- What has to be done to increase media literacy in Latvia?

The main tasks of this study were:

- to get information about political initiatives and the implementation of political initiatives in Latvia (from the Ministry of Culture and other government-related bodies);
- to investigate the needs of Latvian teachers;
- to investigate the needs of Latvian officials;
- to investigate the needs of the media sector focusing on Russian-language media;
- to find gaps that negatively influence the development of media literacy in the view of experts.

Research activities:

The following activities were completed to fulfil the tasks and goals of the study: relevant EU-level documents were analysed; relevant Latvian state-level documents, including national development strategies, were analysed; representatives of the Ministry of Culture and other related institutions were interviewed; teachers and school administrators from pre-schools, primary schools, and secondary schools were interviewed; and other experts and stakeholders were interviewed.

## Theoretical Framework

Experts from various fields concerned with media literacy, i.e. the media, communications, pedagogy, anthropology,

and others have not agreed on a single definition of media competence or of media literacy. Since a consensus has not been reached, the variety of interpretations of 'media literacy' made by scholars, educators, policy makers, and journalists make understanding the subject difficult.

Potter, who examined a large number of definitions, found three main questions at the core of the disagreements that provide space for confrontation.<sup>5</sup> The first question is 'What are the media?' The second question is 'What do we mean by literacy?' And the third question is 'What should be the purpose of media literacy?'

It is also possible to find arguments at the level of EU initiatives supportive of Hobbs' idea that media literacy lies in the use of digital technology.<sup>6</sup> According to T. Koltay, 'media literacy', 'informational literacy', and 'digital literacy' are the most common search phrases related to the topic and are used broadly as synonyms.<sup>7</sup> This list of different types of literacies could easily be continued.

In this paper, the term **media literacy** is understood as an umbrella concept that corresponds to definitions used in the EU and at the national level in Latvia. There are many approaches to defining the skills that constitute media literacy, e.g. the 'cognitive approach to media literacy' proposed by Potter elaborates seven main skills—analysis, evaluation, grouping, induction, deduction, synthesis, and abstracting.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Potter, J. *The State of Media Literacy*, in the Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media. 54(4), 2010, pp. 675–696. Available online <http://mysite.dlsu.edu.ph/faculty/marianog/publish/potter.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Hobbs, R., Jensen, A., *The Past, The Present and The Future of Media Literacy Education*, in the Journal of Media Literacy Education, 11(1), 2009, pp. ?? Retrieved from: <http://digitalcommons.uri.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1000&context=jmle>

<sup>7</sup> Koltay, T., *The media and the literacies: media literacy, information literacy, digital literacy*, Tibor Koltay Szent István University, Jászberény, Hungary, Media, Culture & Society 33(2), 2011, pp. 211–221.

<sup>8</sup> Potter, *Theory of Media Literacy*



In Latvia the situation is similar; definitions differ in official documents, research papers, and the views shared by stakeholders in the interviews made for this study. The differences do not only reflect differences between theoretical schools, but also between political trends that emphasize a particular level of involvement, or even trends or tastes that dictate a certain understanding of some element or elements in a suggested definition.

This study builds on D. Kellner and J. Share's definition of literacy: 'Literacy involves gaining the skills and knowledge to read, interpret, and produce certain types of texts and artefacts and to gain the intellectual tools and capacities to fully participate in one's culture and society.'<sup>9</sup>

The *Center for Media Literacy* has created a MediaLit Kit to provide 'an accessible, integrated, research-based teaching strategy needed to assist schools and districts in organizing and structuring teaching activities using a media literacy lens'. Their definition reads: 'Media Literacy is a 21<sup>st</sup> century approach to education. It provides a framework to access, analyse, evaluate and create messages in a variety of forms – from print to video to the Internet. Media literacy builds an understanding of the role of media in society as well as essential skills of inquiry and self-expression necessary for citizens of a democracy.'<sup>10</sup>

For this paper the term **media competence** is understood according to Dieter Baacke's model that defines media competence as an ability to use the media and their contents in a goal-oriented and needs-oriented way. According to this model, skills and knowledge are important for media competence.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Kellner, Share, *Toward Critical Media Literacy*, pp. 369-386.

<sup>10</sup> Thoman E., Jolls, T., *Literacy for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. An Overview & Orientation Guide To Media Literacy Education*, Center for Media Literacy, 2005.

<sup>11</sup> Baacke, D., 'Medienkompetenz als zentrales Operationsfeld von Projekten', in D. Baacke, S. Kornblum, J. Lauffer, L. Mikos, & G. A. Thiele (Eds.), *Handbuch Medien: Medienkompetenz – Modelle und Projekte*, Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 1999, pp. 31–35.

To round off this section of the study and to show how the openness of debate on framing and reframing the sphere of media literacy could be defined, we have answered Hobbs' questionnaire with the definition of media literacy provided in the mandate for the EU Media Literacy expert group:

Hobbs questions*	EU Expert group**
1) Should media literacy education aim to protect children and young people from negative media influences? 2) Should media production be an essential feature of media literacy education? 3) Should media literacy focus on popular culture texts? 4) Should media literacy have a more explicit political and/or ideological agenda? 5) Should media literacy be focused on school-based K-12 educational environments? 6) Should media literacy be taught as a specialist subject or integrated within the context of existing subjects? 7) Should media literacy initiatives be supported financially by media organizations?	'Media literacy' is an umbrella expression that includes all the technical, cognitive, social, civic and creative capacities that allow a citizen to access, have a critical understanding of the media and interact with it. These capacities allow the citizen to participate in the economic, social and cultural aspects of society as well as to play an active role in the democratic process. It refers to all kinds of media (broadcasting, radio, press), through all kinds of channels (traditional, internet, social media) and to all ages. 'Media literacy' means different things for different countries and stakeholders. It is also a dynamic concept that evolves at the same time as technology and society. However, a keystone in all possible definitions of media literacy is the development of critical thinking by the user.

\* Hobbs, Jensen, *The Past, The Present and The Future of Media Literacy Education*

\*\* From a meeting of the Media Literacy Expert Group, Available online at <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/news/meeting-media-literacy-expert-group>

The definition provided in the mandate gives an example of the framework and also indicates a trend in seeking to define media literacy—the main elements are the critical thinking skills of the user and attempts to specify main themes.

## The Role of the EU

This section examines the role of the EU at the institutional level and what these institutions do to increase media literacy in EU member states. It provides an overview of the current initiatives and practises, analyses successes and failures, and gives recommendations to improve media literacy at the EU level.

The EU plays an important role in developing media literacy as an aspect of formal education, lifelong learning, and a knowledge instrument for use in democratic society. Europe itself, as a centre of philosophical and political ideas, is a place for the exchange and development of thoughts. Media literacy is on its way to becoming a discipline in the EU; media literacy training can be implemented at different levels in the lives of ordinary people.

## Key EU documents regulating media literacy

Three documents hold keys to understanding EU-level activities for improving media literacy—*A European approach to media literacy in the digital environment*, a **Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions** published in 2007; ‘Media Literacy in a Digital World’, a European Parliament Resolution from 16 December 2008; and the *Audiovisual Media Services Directive*, the key piece of EU legislation for audio-visual policy that entered into force in December 2007. Relevant sections of these documents will be discussed below.

The core issues, which are also important for auditing media literacy activities in Latvia, focus on democracy and critical attitudes. The European Commission uses the following tools to engage the public in developing media literacy: the Expert Group on Media Literacy, direct communication (Twitter @EU\_MedLit, Newsletter), support for conferences, the publication of best practice compilations, and the implementation of pilot projects.

One of the documents defining and introducing media literacy to the EU was published 12 December 2007 and entitled *A European approach to media literacy in the digital environment*.<sup>12</sup> In this document, media literacy is not only defined in a theoretical framework of functional perspectives, involving access and creation, and critical perspectives, involving evaluation and creation. The document also calls for member states to search for new methods in measuring levels of media literacy in the EU:

- encourage the authorities in charge of audio-visual and electronic communication regulation to get more involved and to cooperate in the improvement of the various levels of media literacy defined above;
- promote systematic research into and regular observation of and reporting on the different aspects and dimensions of media literacy;
- develop and implement codes of conduct and, as appropriate, co-regulatory frameworks in conjunction with all interested parties at the national level, and promote self-regulatory initiatives.

One year later the European parliament voted for European Parliament Resolution of 16 December 2008 on ‘Media Literacy in a Digital World’. The resolution

12 Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions - A European approach to media literacy in the digital environment (COM/2007/0833 final) Available online at <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52007DC0833>

contained the following recommendation to create a special group of experts.

The commission hereby recommends that:

- I. The Member States, in cooperation with the authorities in charge of audio-visual and electronic communication regulation and in collaboration with supervisory data protection authorities where appropriate:
  1. Develop and implement co-regulatory initiatives leading to the adoption of codes of conduct by the main stakeholders and promote self-regulatory initiatives and guidelines, on the subjects identified for the Media Industry under part II below;
  2. following on from the current Commission's study on assessment criteria for media literacy levels in Europe, promote systematic research through studies and projects on the different aspects and dimensions of media literacy in the digital environment and monitor and measure the progress of media literacy levels;
  3. open a debate in conferences and other public events on the inclusion of media literacy in the compulsory education curriculum, and as part of the provision of key competences for lifelong learning, set out in the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning;
  4. enhance their efforts to improve awareness of national and European audio-visual heritage through national awareness-raising campaigns aimed at citizens;
  5. raise awareness through trainings, information days and distribution of information packs of the risks involved in processing personal data through information and communication networks and educate users, especially young people, parents and teachers, in this field.
- II. The Media Industry increases its commitment to

provide the necessary tools to improve their level of media literacy by:

1. systematically spreading knowledge through information campaigns on how information and creative content are produced, edited and distributed in the digital world, including on how search engines work and how to better use them;
2. providing citizens with clear, user-friendly information, by organising awareness-raising campaigns, about techniques used for commercial communication purpose, notably about product placement, on-line advertising, and with means to better identify the boundaries between marketing and content;
3. providing citizens with information, creating information packs especially aimed at young people, on how their personal data are processed in the context of tailored offers, notably interactive advertising, in the full respect of existing legal provisions. The Directive 2010/13/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 10 March 2010 on the coordination of certain provisions laid down by law, regulation or administrative action in Member States concerning the provision of audio-visual media services (Audio-visual Media Services Directive) states: 'Media literacy' refers to skills, knowledge and understanding that allow consumers to use media effectively and safely. Media-literate people are able to exercise informed choices, understand the nature of content and services and take advantage of the full range of opportunities offered by new communications technologies. They are better able to protect themselves and their families from harmful or offensive material. Therefore the development of media literacy in all sections of society should be promoted and its progress followed closely. The Recommendation of the European

Parliament and of the Council of 20 December 2006 on the protection of minors and human dignity and on the right of reply in relation to the competitiveness of the European audio-visual and on-line information services industry already contains a series of possible measures for promoting media literacy such as, for example, continuing education of teachers and trainers, specific Internet training aimed at children from a very early age, including sessions open to parents, or organisation of national campaigns aimed at citizens, involving all communications media, to provide information on using the Internet responsibly.

The programme Safer Internet was launched in 1999 and is used as a platform to connect national actors with European actors.

The creation of the Media Literacy Expert Group was among the informal initiatives at the EU-level:

Latvia is represented by Sandra Falka (State Education Curriculum Centre) and Jolanta Klišāne (the Centre of Art Education and Intangible Heritage);

actively informing citizens by organising information days, of how the creative economy works, including the role of copyright in that respect.<sup>13</sup>

One of the most well known documents containing a media literacy angle is the Audiovisual Media Services Directive (AMSD).<sup>14</sup> The AMSD is a modernised version of the older Television Without Frontiers directive

designed to provide for the free movement of European television programs within the internal market, establish 'broadcasting quotas' for the transmission of European works, and to safeguard important public interest objectives such as cultural diversity, the protection of minors, and the right of reply. The current version of the directive provides a regulatory framework for media activities in the EU, funds programs that strengthen cross-border cooperation between creative sectors in Europe and beyond, and supports other measures such as media pluralism and media literacy. The need to update the AMSD was discussed in Riga during the conference 'Strengthening the European Audiovisual Media Market for the Development of the European Identity'.<sup>15</sup>

According to the European Commission, media literacy itself is a tool that supports democracy. EU countries are not the only targets, audiences from the Eastern Partnership countries and the Mediterranean region also are important for the European Commission. Researcher Maria Sol Perez Guevara has an ongoing project mapping media literacy practices and actions in the EU-28. Results are expected in December 2016. Her study will include data on Latvia as well.

In addition, there is an on-going EU initiative called *Media Literacy For All*. It is a pilot project with the potential to become a big program: 'The main goal of the pilot project is to transform people into critical media citizens and committed media fairness advocates, who can deconstruct media communication and information media policy.'<sup>16</sup> Proposals are to be published in 2016, but the project itself will be extended for one more year.

<sup>13</sup> European Parliament resolution of 16 December 2008 on 'Media literacy in a digital world', (2008/2129(INI)), Available online at <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P6-TA-2008-0598+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN>

<sup>14</sup> DIRECTIVE 2010/13/EU OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 10 March 2010 on the coordination of certain provisions laid down by law, regulation or administrative action in Member States concerning the provision of audio-visual media services (Audiovisual Media Services Directive). Available online at <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32010L0013>

<sup>15</sup> Resisting Foreign State Propaganda in the New Information Environment: the case of the EU, Russia, and the Eastern Partnership countries, Andris Mellakauls, *The Audiovisual Media Services Directive and propaganda*, 71-88 p.

<sup>16</sup> Perez-Guevara, M., *Media literacy*, presentation for the European Commission, 2016, Available online at [http://www.eli-net.eu/fileadmin/ELINET/Redaktion/user\\_upload/Digital\\_Literacy\\_-\\_Beyond\\_Digital\\_Competence2.pdf](http://www.eli-net.eu/fileadmin/ELINET/Redaktion/user_upload/Digital_Literacy_-_Beyond_Digital_Competence2.pdf)

Among other initiatives, the High Level Group on Media Freedom and Pluralism made the following recommendation in 2013: 'Media literacy should be taught in schools starting at the high-school level. The role media plays in a functioning democracy should be critically assessed as part of national curricula, integrated either with civics or social studies.'<sup>17</sup> More research on media consumption was requested.

### The EU response to Russian propaganda

This section provides an overview of the main EU initiatives recently undertaken to deal with Russian propaganda that are directly or indirectly connected to the issue of media literacy with a focus on critical thinking. Current initiatives and practises are listed and their connection with Latvia is examined within the scope of this research.

The European Union's diplomatic service, the European External Action Service (EEAS), launched a tiny EU task force with only eight members that later became known as the East StratCom Task Force. This group officially started its work on 1 September 2015. The task force was the result of a European Council meeting that discussed the need to challenge Russia's ongoing disinformation campaigns. However, the mandate of the task force was limited, focusing on critical thinking oriented activities, e.g. myth busting. The projected outcomes of the task force were wide ranging and included EU strategic communication itself. At the same time, the task force was oriented to produce its own content. Latvia

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<sup>17</sup> Vike-Freiberga, V., Dauber-Gmelin, H., Hammersley, B., Maduro, L., *A free and pluralistic media to sustain European Democracy*, Report of the High Level Group on Media Freedom and Pluralism, 2013, Available online at <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/sites/digital-agenda/files/HLG%20Final%20Report.pdf>

sent a representative to this team and is currently funding that person's work.

The task force became a visible actor, working also in the Russian language since March 2016. Among the most important initiatives of this group became the promotion of the so-called **disinformation/myth-busting network**: 'The network is comprised of more than 400 experts, journalists, officials, NGOs and think-tanks in over thirty countries reporting disinformation articles to the task force.'<sup>18</sup> It is possible to join this network.

Currently the group publishes a disinformation review and disinformation digests every week. The digests mainly do fact checking and present the narratives of some media. However, these products fall short of monitoring, as they do not study specific sources or issues. It rather comprises a random-cases based letter, which also contains links to original products. It is relevant and important that this group includes audio-visual content; having precise time codes for these video materials would also be an asset.

The main advantages of the East StratCom Task Force are quick reaction time to falsifications found in the information space, including hard and soft content; communication in Russian for specific Russian-language audiences, both professional and general; a creative approach to messaging and channels, such as activity on social networks that is easy to like and share; and providing a place for researchers and experts to share 'examples' of Russian propaganda.

Based on the views of experts and team members, the main deficiencies are low funding; lack of political support at the level of EU; lack of participants from Member

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<sup>18</sup> 'Questions and Answers about the East StratCom Task Force', EEAS. Available online at [http://eeas.europa.eu/top\\_stories/2015/261115\\_stratcom-east\\_qanda\\_en.htm](http://eeas.europa.eu/top_stories/2015/261115_stratcom-east_qanda_en.htm)

States; too broad a mandate, which also includes the popularization of the EU, for a small group of experts; a social media orientation that does not take into account intercultural aspects/trends; and the lack of personnel in general.<sup>19</sup> A small number of activities carried out by the East StratCom team can provoke huge reactions from Russia's state-governed media in both Russian and English.<sup>20</sup> For example, the task force was held up as an example showing the readiness of the EU to create its own propaganda.<sup>21</sup> The theme itself was used to show that the Western media (as a construction 'they') were not following the values of democratic journalism.

The *Eastern Partnership Summit*, organized under the Latvian Presidency of the Council of the European Union in Riga in the spring of 2015, provided a special side event for the media.<sup>22</sup> This was the first time that media literacy was prioritized as a theme. Media competence and critical thinking were not only discussed, but also included as goals in the action plan.

The UNESCO tradition of World Press Freedom Day, organised in Riga in 2015, served as a platform for networking and providing media literacy opportunities for journalism professionals. Cooperation with UNESCO, the world's leading organization on media literacy issues, resulted in the Second European Media and Information

<sup>19</sup> Panichi, J., *EU splits in Russian media war*, Politico, 17 September 2015. Available online at <http://www.politico.eu/article/eu-russia-propaganda-kremlin-media/>

<sup>20</sup> Lasis, I. *Eastern Partnership Media Conference in Riga agrees on support for free and independent media*, 20 May 2015 Media release by the Latvian Presidency of the Council of the European Union. Available online at <https://eu2015.lv/news/media-releases/1802-eastern-partnership-media-conference-in-riga-agrees-on-support-for-free-and-independent-media>

<sup>21</sup> Op-Ed, *There's something strange in the neighborhood: StratCom East's ghostly targets* RT.com, 13 November 2015. Available online at <https://www.rt.com/op-edge/321848-rt-west-media-propaganda/>

<sup>22</sup> Lasis, Media release

Literacy (MIL) Forum, which took place from 27-29 June 2016 in Riga. This forum gathered leading experts from all over Europe bringing media and information literacy to the domestic agenda.

The main advantages of this event included the implementation of a narrowed approach underlining the importance of an independent media in the region; the launch of cross-border cooperation within the EU; the articulation of the need for a centre for media excellence, a media factory, and other initiatives as recommended by the *European Endowment for Democracy*.

The main deficiencies include the risks common to short-term projects with a long-term orientation, i.e. lack of developmental stages, minimal feedback, shifting agenda. After the end of the Latvian term for the EU Presidency, the experience gained was integrated into practice to some extent, but lacked broader political support. After the Presidency the main focus was on analysing the country's financial data, although the media has taken steps to create media literacy-based content.

## Regional and national responses to Russian propaganda

There is a growing trend towards cross-border cooperation among EU and NATO member states in dealing with the media literacy, among other activities. This section provides an overview on the main organizations/projects currently linked to the question of media competence through providing research and training. Only bodies with strong cooperative ties to Latvia and a recognized interest in media literacy will be mentioned here: the NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence (*NATO StratCom CoE*), the European Endowment for Democracy, and the Baltic Centre for Media Excellence. All of these initiatives are connected with media literacy

that is aimed at narrowly targeted audiences: 1) media actors 2) politicians 3) researchers 4) students.

The *NATO StratCom CoE* is one of the most visible recently launched projects. The establishment of the centre was supported by Estonia, Germany, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, and the UK.<sup>23</sup> Among voluntary contributors are the Netherlands, Finland, and the US. However, the creation of this centre was planned before recent changes in relations with Russia. Today Russia is high on the centre's research agenda.<sup>24</sup> However, Russian media sources consumed by Russian-speaking audiences in Latvia clearly see the activities of the centre as being 'anti-Russian'.<sup>25</sup>

Recent research papers published by the centre address both social networks and traditional electronic media. These studies might serve as a basis for the localization of a framework for media literacy. Local, well-known, and otherwise significant examples could be prepared for use by coaches and lecturers in formal education and lifelong learning platforms in order to provoke critical thinking.

However, the *NATO StratCom CoE* takes an elite approach; the centre's experts cooperate with governmental actors, participate in and organise high-level workshops. In regard to media literacy, the work of the centre revolves around critical thinking and information safety.

<sup>23</sup> NATO StratCom CoE, Latvian Ministry of Defense, AFP, *Seven Allies Establish NATO's Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence in Latvia*, Atlantic Council, 7 July 2014. Available online at <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/natosource/seven-allies-establish-nato-s-strategic-communications-center-of-excellence-in-latvia>

<sup>24</sup> See the NATO StratCom CoE website at <http://www.stratcomcoe.org/publications>

<sup>25</sup> Петров, А., Чирикова и Троицкий пугают прибалтов кремлевской пропагандой и милитаризмом, *Вести*, 23 August 2015. Available online at <http://www.vesti.ru/doc.html?id=2655739>

Advantages	Disadvantages
Access to summaries for interested, proactive members of the public; local media activity, openness to journalists, and the use of both the Latvian and Russian languages, which is very important for Russian-speaking media and audiences, especially electronic; cooperation with educators (participation in workshops for teachers); the Centre serves as a repository of knowledge for regional experts;	The military nature of the organization, which, in terms of Russian propaganda is defined as an enemy; the general public has limited access; risk of the politicization of topics and the transmission of topics into the local political field (Director, J. Sarts criticized local politicians, used as examples). Latvia is only one NATO member state—it is problematic to use common resources for one country; as a NATO-affiliated body, the centre does not have a strong ties to EU bodies.

*The European Endowment for Democracy* (EED) is an NGO created and supported by the Polish government. It serves as a leader providing research on the current state of affairs in the field; a place to cooperate and exchange views; and an organization empowering other stakeholders in reaction to the new political landscape after Russia's activities in Ukraine. The EED organized and conducted a study paper in Russian language media initiative, which resulted in a paper with limited access for a wider public. The EED also provides funding and expertise to other NGOs in the region.

In addition to its other activities, the EED published an important study about current affairs in the Russian-language media space outside of Russia entitled *Bringing Plurality and Balance to Russian Language Media*. The study provides recommendations on the improvement of Russian language media in European countries, including

Latvia.<sup>26</sup> Analysis of the large amount of data and opinions collected resulted in five suggestions: '1. A regional Russian language **news hub** to share high-quality news, on a membership of affiliate basis. As a 'proto' news agency, it could also collect citizen journalist and stringer material, as well as facilitate collaborative investigations, fact checking and translations. 2. The above-mentioned '**content factory**' of quality documentaries and entertainment, including film, drama and social realities of programming for the Russian-language media. 3. A **centre for media excellence** that coordinates market research, specialised professional training, media monitoring, media literacy programmes, and peer-to-peer exchange. 4. A **basket fund** bringing together government and nongovernmental funding. 5. And bringing all blocks together: the future **multimedia distribution platform**, with a global brand, to ensure that the produced content reaches the widest possible audience.'

This report was presented in June 2015, and some of the recommendations found international support and have already resulted in several working organizations. The best current example is the Baltic Centre for Media Excellence, which was also recommended as a body for working with media literacy predominantly for media professionals as discussed below.

<sup>26</sup> *Bringing Plurality & Balance to Russian Language Media – Final Recommendations*, European Endowment for Democracy, 2015. Available online at <https://www.democracyendowment.eu/news/bringing-plurality-1/>

Advantages	Disadvantages
Overall study of the current situation in the region brings new expertise; EED experts also use Russian to communicate with Russian media (audiences); created a network for media professionals and media experts.	Strong connection of the organization with Polish soft power; its practical, non academic approach; its focus on EaP countries, instead of EU/ MS countries; donor-oriented approach to information sharing;

The *Baltic Centre for Media Excellence* is a newly founded initiative for media excellence with media literacy at its core.<sup>27</sup> A number of projects have been launched to increase media literacy among media professionals and within the general public, e.g. a media literacy textbook for teachers and pupils.

The activities of the BCME are intended for Baltic journalists, including journalists working in the outlying regions. The centre works to provoke critical thinking and develop critical thinking skills among junior and senior media professionals, media owners, and politicians. In addition, the centre provides expertise and is proactive in cooperating with actors involved in media literacy, e.g. holding lectures in universities and schools, sharing expertise.

Latvian politicians are also invited to take part in lectures organized by the centre. The media incompetence of politicians has been underlined during the discussions about the Russian media in Latvia, Russian propaganda and the creation of the Russian-language channel in Latvia. Moreover, the discussions on media policy in Latvia

<sup>27</sup> *Latvia takes over from Denmark the coordination of Baltic-Nordic cooperation*, Press release, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 11 December 2015, Available online at <http://www.mfa.gov.lv/en/news/latest-news/49116-latvia-takes-over-from-denmark-the-coordination-of-baltic-nordic-cooperation>



are ongoing. BCME experts are proactive in taking part in conferences not only at the local, but also at regional and international level. At the same time, these workshops provide the platform for networking and informal communication among different actors and stakeholders.

The other target audience is journalists and media professionals from Eastern partnership countries. The project is aimed at studying the situation in media sphere in each country and proposing specially designed programs for each country. Russian-language media journalists from Eastern partnership countries will be a special target group of the research. Among gains of this projects is also networking and establishing professional connections, which are important in assessing critically international news as soon as they become publicly available. This will be relevant and useful also for Latvian journalists, who underlined the lack of links with counterparts in other countries of this region.

Advantages	Disadvantages
Media literacy activities (training, seminars, workshops) for media (actors); media seminars for stakeholders; support for schools and institutions of higher education; communication in both Latvian and Russian.	lack of financial resources; accessible to the media, not to media audiences; low visibility; unused potential for engaging in domestic activities on media literacy.

Other initiatives and platforms include the *Friends of Ukraine Network*—a platform for interested parties such as MS officials, experts, think-tanks (egalitarian approach), and on the other side it serves as a place for critical information on propaganda issues (mass approach); the *Russian Language News Exchange*; the EU *Open Neighbourhood* regional communication and

information programs that work to boost awareness of the EU to the south and to the east, and others.

## Conclusions

In the ongoing process targeted at improving media literacy in the region the Baltic States take a proactive role in developing organizational, regional, and local centres. Among the main supporters and contributors are Denmark, the Netherlands, Germany, Poland, Finland, and Baltic countries themselves.

The newest body to begin working with media literacy is the *Baltic Centre for Media Literacy*; its activities are mainly aimed at educating media professionals. However, its ongoing and planned activities are oriented toward a number of different audiences within that remit, and include providing critical assistance to other stakeholders working on media literacy issues in Latvia. The experts and expertise of this centre will not only be used by EU member states; BCML resources will also be made available to the Eastern Partnership countries—Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine—that have a growing relationship with the EU based on ‘a commitment to the principles of international law and fundamental values’.

It should be underlined that the most interested stakeholders cooperate in several projects. This shows their political will and deep engagement in securitizing information space. At the same time these activities lack a ‘unified approach’ to improving the EU information space. All in all, this situation demonstrates divisions within the EU and the lack of shared responsibility.

## Latvia in Focus

This section will provide an overview of media literacy-related activities in three areas. First the paper will

look at government policy and related activities including official definitions of media literacy, an analysis of documents concerning Latvian strategic development, and the activities of the Latvian Ministry of Culture and the Latvian Media Regulator. This is followed by an overview of activities and initiatives at the level of professional media focusing on *LTV7* and *LR4*, public broadcasters working in the Russian language. Finally, we will turn our attention to education including an overview of the actions, initiatives, and plans concerning media literacy education at the governmental level, as well as how these initiatives are perceived by teachers and students, including former pupils who have chosen to work in media. A gap analysis is provided for each level based on self-evaluations (e.g. the Regulator evaluates the Regulator) and peer evaluations (e.g. the Regulator evaluates the Ministry of Culture).

## Government Policy and Related Activities

### An overview of relevant national strategic documents in Latvia

Media literacy was not included in the national policy document, *Sustainable Development Strategy of Latvia until 2030*, developed by a group of experts in 2010. The issue of media literacy appeared on the Latvian government's agenda only after the recent events in Ukraine. However, media literacy was mentioned in the *Amendments to the Guidelines on National Identity, Civil Society and Integration Policy for 2012–2018*. As Brikse, Spurava and Freibergs mentioned, media education was not described as a goal.<sup>28</sup> The modest aim was to introduce

<sup>28</sup> Brikse, Freibergs, Spurava, *Media and Information Literacy Policies in Latvia*

media literacy into the ongoing programme without adding a specific course on the topic, i.e. by providing one pedagogical seminar/year. Lack of financial support and a defined action plan undermined this process. The Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Education and Science, and the National Electronic Mass Media Council (NEPLP or the Media Regulator) were the main actors mentioned in the document.

No separate governmental institution deals with media literacy issues. Today, after creating a special division to work with media policy, the Ministry of Culture plays the leading role in the field of media literacy. The other actors/stakeholders engaged in the issue recognize the leadership of the Ministry of Culture. Before the implementation of this new approach, the leading actor in this area was the NEPLP.

Another national policy document that emphasizes the dominant understanding of media literacy as 'technical literacy' is the *Information Society Development Guidelines 2014-2020*.<sup>29</sup> According to this document, a long-term educational strategy is needed to develop the skills of the general public, including formal and life long education. This strategy is mainly concerned with the technical and not the critical aspects of information literacy as defined in this document.

### Defining media literacy at the governmental level

There is no common definition of media literacy in the legal documents in Latvia. Even in Latvian different words are used to refer to 'media literacy', such as

<sup>29</sup> Ministru kabineta rīkojums Nr.468. Rīgā 2013.gada 14.oktobrī (prot. Nr.51 55.§), 'Par Informācijas sabiedrības attīstības pamatnostādņēm 2014.-2020.gadam', likumi.lv. Available online at <http://likumi.lv/doc.php?id=260931>

‘mediju lietotprasmē’ and ‘mediju lietpratība,’ as well as ‘mediju pratība’. This may be due to the lack of a standard translation of the English term, and it shows that media literacy is new to the language and to Latvian governmental institutions. An analysis of the official Latvia documents shows that different definitions have been used to describe media literacy since the issue appeared on the government’s agenda. However, the general line implied in the definitions contains both functional and critical dimensions of media literacy.

The Ministry of Culture defines media literacy as ‘1) The ability to access information and analyse it, adequately assessing image, sound and the impact and importance of information; 2) the skills to use the media, including to participate in communication among the media users, as well as interacting with media outlets, including on creating the content; 3) the understanding, which ensures effective and safe use of the media and utilization of their services.’

Remarkably, the main reference points for policy development are at the level of the EU, and not national regulations or documents, as we can see from the Ministry of Culture’s ‘media literacy’ web-page. At the EU-level, media literacy is discussed in the Audiovisual Media Services Directive,<sup>30</sup> and a single mention of a UN level document, UNESCO’s Paris Agenda.<sup>31</sup>

The Ministry of Education and Science does not define media literacy on its website at all. Moreover, the word

<sup>30</sup> See the Council Conclusions of 27 November 2009 on media literacy in the digital environment (2009/C 301/09) [http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52009XG1211\(03\)&rid=6](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52009XG1211(03)&rid=6) and Council Conclusions of 22 May 2008 on the European approach to media literacy in the digital environment (2008/C 140/08) <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52013IP0215&rid=7>.

<sup>31</sup> See [http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/IMG/pdf/Parisagendafin\\_en.pdf](http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/IMG/pdf/Parisagendafin_en.pdf) (NESTRĀDĀ)

combination does not appear in a local site search. However, definitions are provided in Ministry documents. Three government ministries are involved in media literacy—the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Education and Science, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs supports European and local initiatives and enhances international cooperation. The government-related body is NEPLP, which is also included in this section of the research.

## The Ministry of Culture

According to the Head of the Media Policy Division of the Ministry of Culture Roberts Putnis, the Ministry of Culture is merely a coordinating body and not the state institution responsible for media literacy. Officially those duties belong to the Media Regulator. However, a representative of the Media Regulator stated that the Ministry of Culture is the main body since it established the media policy division.

The activities of the Ministry of Culture in the sphere of media literacy are listed in government guidelines *Mediju politikas pamatnostādnes*, a policy paper outlining government’s role regarding media policy. Although the implementation of these guidelines was planned to start in 2015, they are still under development. These guidelines cover the period until 2020 and include media literacy.

One of the five parts of the document is dedicated to media literacy, and the introduction provides an alternative but related definition: ‘An audience’s skill in using media, finding and analysing information, and critically assessing media messages facilitates society’s communicative integration. These skills contribute to an individual’s creative activities and decrease the one-way communication impact of the media, thus ensuring better

awareness and the ability to preclude the spreading of one-sided information. A knowledgeable audience can identify the media that support and represent qualitative and credible principles of journalism.<sup>32</sup>

Among the plans listed are research into media literacy (as one of the main institutions UNESCO Chair), by the responsible ministries—the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Education and Science. These activities are planned for 2016, 2017, and 2020. Media-user-targeted activities are also planned in order to educate the wider public outside of the school system. These activities are planned from 2017 to 2020 and organized by the Ministry of Culture. Among the other institutions tasked with implementing these activities are the Latvian National Library, the Technical University of Latvia, various NGOs, and the Association of Latvian Journalists. The second group of activities also include media content on media literacy to begin in 2017 under the authority of the Ministry of Culture. And the last cluster of activities is connected with schools and will include the introduction and implementation of media literacy training in the school curriculum (starting from 2016), special programmes for teachers, and special methodological guidelines and books for teachers. The main actors for the educational activities are the UNESCO Chair, the State Education and Content Centre (VISC), and several NGOs.

However, when stakeholders discussed this plan, media literacy was not at the centre of their discussions. The core of this plan is to focus on the division of responsibility between the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Education and Science. Media professionals were

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<sup>32</sup> *Latvijas mediju politikas pamatnostādņu 2016. – 2020.gadam īstenošanas plāns*, Latvian Ministry of Culture, Available online at [http://www.km.gov.lv/lv/starpnozares/lidzdaliba/pazMedPol\\_plan\\_Pamatnost.html](http://www.km.gov.lv/lv/starpnozares/lidzdaliba/pazMedPol_plan_Pamatnost.html)

excluded from the early versions of the plan, but after a public deliberation, one organization was included—The Association of Latvian Journalists. However, more than one organization represents journalists in Latvia and the differences between them are quite significant. (See the section on the Media Level below.)

Only four officials from the Ministry of Culture are working on media issues. Media literacy is only a side topic, because the main focus of the Media Division is on media policy and regulation in the sphere of public and commercial media. Naturally, media literacy is only one among many issues the Ministry of Culture is responsible for.

## Libraries

The Latvian National Library (LNB) is another institution featured in the government's guidelines. Librarians in Latvia are proactive in digital literacy. However, their main function is to collect and to provide access to literature. Latvian libraries are also among the various places both researchers and the public can access the Internet.

For example, Uldis Zariņš, Director of the LNB strategic development department, spoke at the UNESCO media literacy conference in Riga on 10 March 2016 about digital media literacy. Although his talk focused on how to use the Internet, not about aspects of critical thinking, he emphasised that the unique network of libraries could be used as an asset to promote media literacy.

A similarly positive approach is presented at international conferences, e.g. in Lithuania Zariņš spoke about the Role of Libraries in Media and Information Literacy. In other countries the role of libraries in the process of educating the public in media literacy is also assessed positively, e.g. Alexandru D. Xenopol from Arad County Library on App Libraries in Romania.

## Museums

International experience shows that both libraries and museums are well-established institutions in the field of raising different kinds of literacy. Some Canadian libraries have simply introduced a shelf with books on media literacy; this could easily be applied in schools and public libraries in Latvia as a best practice example. Another, more involved course of action would be the introduction of special classes and workshops on analysing media texts and using audio-visual materials. Special networks connecting museums and libraries would also be a valuable asset. For a positive example see the project 'Museums, Libraries and 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills'.<sup>33</sup>

According to policy papers, there are currently no plans in Latvia to support museums in terms of media literacy. Yet, museums could also become an institution for increasing media competence in Latvia as well. Museums have a strong network of local and international cooperation, and 'small' museums in less populated areas can also invite lecturers, host exhibitions, and create their own examples. The Žanis Lipke Memorial Museum sets a positive example in Latvia by holding public lectures on different subjects of interest.

Local museums should also be open for youth activities, competitions on media literacy related activities, including showrooms. It is important to fully use the potential of museums and to open them for civic actors.

## Conclusions

There is a lack of visibility, an all-inclusive resource provider, and a single stakeholder leading media literacy activities in Latvia. In Finland, where Culture and

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<sup>33</sup> *Museums, Libraries and 21st Century Skills*, Institute of Museum and Library Services, Available online at <https://www.ims.gov/issues/national-initiatives/museums-libraries-and-21st-century-skills>

Education are united under one ministry, there are special policy papers on media literacy that are updated annually. Moreover, there is a governmental media education authority (KAVI—the National Audiovisual Institute, created in 2014). Germany also supports research on media competence through the German Institute for International Educational Research, the DIPF.<sup>34</sup>

By studying speeches and interviews of public authorities and media experts in Latvia it is clear that media literacy is referred to mainly in the context of propaganda, the 'hybrid war', and the recent events in Ukraine. However, the EU and Western dominant discourse on media literacy is linked to 'democracy'. For instance, during UNESCO World's Press Days in 2016, Mari Sol Perez Guevara, the European Commission legal officer in charge of media literacy, said that media literacy is a tool for supporting democracy, it is important to fight against radicalisation, to promote Fundamental Rights, and also to counteract to political propaganda.

It has to be mentioned that opinion leaders and academics promote critical thinking. (See the LU project 'LU Open Minded'). There are already several positive initiatives in Latvia, such as the lectures at the Lipke Memorial and the conversation festival LAMPA. If we consider the spheres of interests of potential actors listed by the Ministry of Culture, such as public libraries and the UNESCO Chair, there seems to be a risk of focusing narrowly on digital literacy without considering the importance of critical thinking. Because of this imbalance, more attention should be devoted to critical thinking side of the media literacy.

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<sup>34</sup> See <http://www.dipf.de/en/dipf-news/news>

## Gaps

Self-evaluation	Peer evaluation
This is just the early stage of processes and it is too early to assess (the Ministry of Culture); Lack of resources (both human and financial)	Lack of interest in media literacy, other issues are set as priorities; Lack of professionals in the sphere of media literacy; Media literacy as plans, not actions; Media literacy is not promoted enough.

Future plans	Peer evaluation	Recommended practices
To act according to the policy plan; To make a separate agency; To support different actors; To enhance and coordinate international cooperation.	Media literacy in the plan on media literacy is side-lined by other topics; A risk of media content projects not receiving enough attention; It is not clear if media-literacy projects will be financed for public broadcast or for commercial media.	To include librarians as a target group to be educated about media literacy; To have courses for media specialists (also without professional media education); To enhance and support museums to participate in media literacy activities.

Government related activities—the media regulator

**Overview:** The media regulation body in Latvia is the NEPLP. The NEPLP is composed of five members elected by the Latvian Parliament or Saeima. Media literacy promotion is one of the functions of NEPLP regulated by Law.<sup>1</sup> The NEPLP gathered experts to form a special media literacy group in 2012. The main idea was to provide a unique place to exchange views and activities among the spheres dealing with media literacy. Then, as professor A. Dimants, director of the NEPLP when it was

launched in 2012, stated that no one had the responsibility for media literacy in the country.<sup>2</sup> The list of individual regulators has not been published, but participating institutions are mentioned: the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Education, Riga Stradiņš University, the University of Latvia, Turība University, Vidzeme University of Applied Science, the NGO *‘Ētikas Tilts Latvijā’* (‘Ethical Bridge in Latvia’) and the NGO *‘Iespējamā misija’* (‘Mission Possible’).

Among the main goals of the social media literacy group were 1) to change the standards of formal education to reflect an emphasis on critical thinking, referencing the Estonian example 2) to educate teachers—the NEPLP had invited experts from abroad to share their knowledge and experience. In parallel, the idea of establishing a Department of Media Literacy at the University of Latvia was floated.

After this active start, the regulator minimised its activities, but the newly established media policy department within the Ministry of Culture became more active with new media policy initiatives. This role of the NEPLP as it was understood in 2012 not prolonged or reshaped. According to prof. Dimants, the achievements of this group were: 1) an improved understanding of media literacy 2) the launch of several media literacy projects and the production of films by D. Rietuma and S. Falka 3) co-operation among universities around questions of media literacy was established 4) and regular communication took place among group members. One initiative that was not implemented was to make Latvian TV and radio archives available for the use of the Ministry of Education. As a result, media literacy has not become part of a formal education or of the lifelong learning programme.

Another function of the NEPLP was to serve as an information centre, which was also discontinued. However,

the NEPLP continues to support research on media competence in society and the competence of the media itself. And the NEPLP follows and assesses the quality of journalism in Latvia, and gives out awards for excellent journalism.

After the annexation of Crimea in the beginning of 2014, the NEPLP became more active in strengthening local broadcasting in Latvian. In the shadow of the events in Ukraine, both organizations received additional financial support to improve their content. From March to May of 2014, 682 399 EUR in additional financial support from the state budget was specially allocated for Latvian Public TV and Latvian Radio to improve their Russian language content. The NEPLP initiated this idea.<sup>4</sup> Three main points were at the centre of the request for additional funds: technical support for LR4 in the Latgale region, introducing and enhancing Russian language support for the Internet portal LSM.lv, and improving news content, analytical programming, and marketing for LTV. These initiatives laid the foundation for pursuing the idea of a Russian-language channel on Latvian Public Television.

Latvian Public Television developed the concept of the 'third channel' for Russian language programming. In parallel to the discussion about increasing financial support to LR and especially for LTV, the NEPLP introduced the idea of a new channel together with the representatives of the Latvian Television. First came the idea of Pan-Baltic channel, then the idea of a public Latvian television channel for the Russian-speaking audience. As a result of these discussions, the NEPLP requested the development of a concept for establishing such a channel. The concept was presented to the main stakeholders and the general public.

For some time this new idea was high on the political, media, and public agendas. Local politicians, who mostly

reacted negatively, discussed the 'third channel', but also assessed the Russian-language content that was already being produced by the public broadcasters.<sup>35</sup>

There was some news about potential cooperation between the Latvian and Estonian public broadcasters. In December 2014 Estonian parliament voted to allocate financial means to launch an Estonian TV channel in Russian that eventually resulted in ETV+.

Unfortunately, the most common words used in the discussion about the 'third channel' were **propaganda** and **counter-propaganda**. Opponents to this idea considered the introduction of more Russian language media as a threat to the position of the Latvian language as the only state language in Latvia. The idea was met with resistance from various political forces, and the debate on this subject was itself shaping public perception about the characteristics of media literacy in Latvia. Based on observations and examples from Russian-language media originating in Russia, the driving force behind media literacy proposals was to understand the threat of propaganda.

Several pieces of research were presented to strengthen the 'third channel' initiative, yet nothing was written in response to the public demand—itself an instrument allowing the state to promote the production of certain media content.

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<sup>35</sup> *Latvijas un Igaunijas televīzijas sadarbības kopīga kanāla izveidē krievu valodā*, TVnet.lv, 1 April 2015. Available online at [http://www.tvnet.lv/zinas/latvija/554217-latvijas\\_un\\_igaunijas\\_televizijas\\_sadarbiosies\\_kopiga\\_kanala\\_izvide\\_krievu\\_valoda](http://www.tvnet.lv/zinas/latvija/554217-latvijas_un_igaunijas_televizijas_sadarbiosies_kopiga_kanala_izvide_krievu_valoda)

## Gaps

Self-evaluation	Peer evaluation
<p>Very positive cooperation with the Ministry of Culture in the beginning (2012) of the programme;</p> <p>Lack of a single approach agreed upon by the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Education;</p> <p>The idea for a media training centre was not accepted at the political level was meant to be a place for continuing education for teachers;</p> <p>Textbooks have not been written, but have been discussed;</p> <p>The full potential of NEPLP as an information centre is not being used. There is a library, but it is not being used. The NEPLP are ready to provide place for seminars organized by others;</p> <p>The NEPLP consider themselves partners, not organizers.</p>	<p>The EU's obligation for Public Broadcasters to be engaged in the subject of media literacy (in terms of content and in cooperation with educators);</p> <p>The Regulator is still the leading body on media literacy, media literacy is still written into law;</p> <p>The Regulator mainly monitors content, but does not influence the demand for media literacy;</p> <p>The Regulator should promote the necessity of increasing media competence by showing results of their monitoring and publishing cases of hostile propaganda.</p>

Future plans	Peer evaluation	Recommended practices
<p>Cooperation with the ministry of Culture, align practices with the new guidelines;</p> <p>Make use of the educational centre;</p> <p>Promote cooperation among stakeholders.</p>	<p>Work out a request for media literacy projects for public broadcasters;</p> <p>Develop criteria for media-literacy content, including labelling;</p> <p>Use the full potential of the study centre.</p>	<p>Ofcom, the UK regulator, has a statutory duty to promote media literacy, including research; the main elements are: 'Providing an evidence base of UK adults' and children's understanding and use of electronic media; Sharing the evidence base with a wide range of stakeholders internally and externally and supporting their work via research.'</p>

The Media—Latvian public broadcasting in the Russian language

*Overview:* This section addresses only the activities of the public media broadcasters. There are two main actors: Latvian Television (LTV) and Latvian Radio (LR). Both organizations have special broadcasting audience in Russian language (or mixed). In this section, firstly, the main political changes after the annexation of Crimea will be mentioned. Then a particular product on media literacy will be presented, followed by a description of the state of media literacy among journalists.

In the process of this research, none of the cross-evaluators (from other media literacy spheres involved) had mentioned any media literacy oriented content in Russian language by these (or any other) media in Latvia. Yet, as we know, in reality both media are producing programs, which are (referring to self-evaluation) working with media literacy issues.



## LTV7

Additional financial support allocated after the annexation of Crimea was used to strengthen news program and to create new products/programs in the Russian interview style—round-table discussions and analytical programs. A new morning show was on the air only for one season, after the summer break it was transformed into an evening talk show with a local social agenda that was scheduled before the news program.

Changing formats and the lack of significant changes in ratings were used as an excuse to remind stakeholders about inappropriateness of creating a ‘third channel’; the potential audience had proven unresponsive—lack of demand. At the same time, public surveys showed that specific audiences did find this product attractive. According to TNS data, LTV7 has stable numbers—2-3% share of viewers. For example, the highest indicators reached by ETV+, the Estonian channel broadcasting in Russian, was only a 0,6 % share.<sup>36</sup>

Traditionally, rating peaks are connected with sports broadcasts; for some time LTV7 was positioned as a sports and entertainment channel. The content block in Russian and the share of Russian programmes was bigger than the average share of the channel in general, excluding Olympic games or popular sports championships.

After LTV7 began broadcasting its new programmes a special media literacy project was submitted for the 2015/2016 season, but did not get financial support due to lack of resources. However, media literacy segments were partly included in new programs as topical themes. O. Proskurova, editor-in-chief of Russian news at LTV7, has stated that media literacy remains among priorities for the channel.

<sup>36</sup> Teleauditooriumi ülevaade aprillikuus 2016, TNS, 10 May 2016. Available online at <http://www.emor.ee/teleauditooriumi-ulevaade-aprillikuus-2016/>

Currently, the main programs that are aimed at increasing viewers’ media competence, including critical thinking, are ‘Без обид’ (‘No offence’) and ‘Точки над i’ (‘Dotting the i’), both weekly programs. The format of *Без обид* is one-to-one interviews with media experts, researchers, and journalists including guests from Russia, traditionally interesting to Russian-speaking audience and also to the international Internet audience. *Точки над i* takes place in the form of a discussion with invited guests and experts, focusing on media topics by analysing the main news stories and providing a critical viewpoint on the media as such.

There are some plans to strengthen content by creating a special shared program to harness the potential of all of the Baltic public broadcasters. And this plan corresponds to the need of highly qualified content for the Russian-speaking audience to be able to compete with the programs being rebroadcast from Russian federal channels. The *European Endowment for Democracy* recommended the creation of a Baltic media hub to exchange news and other stories; it is a must to strengthen media content and would have the potential for bringing media plurality to local Russian-speaking audiences and might also be used for media literacy projects.

In conversation about activities meant to provide media education for professionals and increase the media literacy of the editorial staff, Editor-in-chief O. Proskurova mentioned the global TechHub network, which also has offices in the Baltic States, as a good resource for media managers and senior staff. However, she underlined the lack of similar opportunities for junior staff. She also admitted that the number of seminars and workshops available has been increasing, but they are often on specific EU topics of promoting EU work and it is quite hard to consider these activities as ‘increasing media competence’ of media staff.

Many of the journalists working for LTV7 Russian-language programmes have completed a Communication Sciences degree from the University of Latvia. Some have started, but have not yet finished their studies, while others have more than one advanced degree. Yet, the activity of journalists in professional journalism organizations is extremely low. None of the journalists working for Russian-language programs belongs to any of the Latvian associations for media professionals. However, some are members of academic organizations for media studies.

To conclude, no organization connected with public broadcasting has requested specific media programs on media literacy in the Russian language. Moreover, bottom-up ideas do not often receive financial support. Public discussions on strengthening media content in Russian have resulted in a wave of accusations on *Perviy Kanal* news programmes and Internet resources consumed by local Russian-speaking audiences of promoting counter-propaganda strategies. As a result, even after the Russian annexation of Crimea and other aggressive actions against Ukraine, efforts to strengthen media content in Latvia have not been very successful.

Self-evaluation	Peer evaluation
There are plans to create programs, the staff is educated and experienced enough to make a meaningful contribution; Media-literacy topics are already included in existing formats;	The potential of the EBU as an European network is not used (to educate journalists and to invite other actors); Products (media literacy) are not visible (the lack of marketing and PR); Ratings are low, we are loosing the battle with entertaining/highly-funded Russian media products.

Future plans	Peer evaluation	Recommended practices
Project on media literacy is ready and awaits the green light for finances; New themes/topics/guests on media literacy will be included in the ongoing projects.	Maximize content dealing with media-literacy; Label media literacy content; Cultivate media criticism; Share archives making media literacy content available for teachers.	' <i>Melu detectors</i> ' or 'Lie Detector'— segment on Latvian Radio 5 ' <i>Oranžā kaste</i> ' or 'The Orange Box'— segment in the Latvian broadcast <i>Krustpunkts</i> ; <i>Vice News</i> documentaries—online news org; <i>Stopfake</i> —Ukrainian fact-checking website; <i>Hromadske TV</i> —Ukrainian civil society initiative

## LR 4

*Latvian Radio 4* is the only Latvian radio channel to broadcast in Russian. For a long of time Latvian Radio has been the main 'talk radio' station in Latvia. Traditionally, public broadcasters have played the dominant role in Latvian radio. If *LTV* is losing the Russian-speaking Latvian audience to commercial channels such as *Perviy Kanal* and other rebroadcast channels that primarily show programs from Russia, *Latvijas Radio 4* is number one in terms of popularity. In the winter of 2016 *LR4* was the fifth most popular radio channel with a 5,7% share after *LR2*; *Radio Skonto*; *LR1*, and *Radio SWH*, all of which broadcast in Latvian. *Baltkom*, another talk-oriented Russian-language radio station, only placed 21<sup>st</sup>.

After the annexation of Crimea, political discussions on propaganda, counter-propaganda, and the role of public broadcasting media influenced the number of

listeners. If in winter 2014 the share was 6,7%, in summer 2015 the rating had fallen to 4,2%. LR4's audience share eventually returned to 7%, but only in the winter of 2015. Changes were noticed the leadership of the Latvian Radio, and new programmes and new programme formats were introduced.

When the government allocated additional funding 'from unforeseen expenses', LR4 also received money to strengthen its infrastructure. In territories where Latvia shares a border with Russia and Belarus, transmission signals were extremely weak and it was not possible to hear LR4 original products in Russian. Therefore, currently the Latvian Radio is increasing its presence in Latgale, the eastern region of Latvia. A new multimedia studio is being built and professionals are being head hunted. In parallel Latvian Radio, including LR4 actively participates in local Latgalian events and festivals.

I. Modesova, director of LR4, mentioned several projects her station is broadcasting that are aimed at increasing the media literacy of their listeners in the sense of critical thinking: *'Действующие лица'* ('Operating Persons'), *'Открытый вопрос'* ('Open Question'), *'Александр студия'* ('Aleksandr Studio'), and special series of programs for outlying regions *'Портрет времени'* ('Portrait in Time'), including a program on digital technologies providing a information about the digital aspects of modern life for seniors.

Radio can also be formally considered an education portal, where experts are invited to speak. For probably obvious reasons, experts in Latvia have remained almost the same for the past ten to fifteen years. As ordered by top radio managers, these experts also participate in the regular evaluation of programs; several interviewed LR professionals mentioned that some have 'personal attitudes' that influence their re-

ports. There are complains that the process of evaluation is not transparent; they leave the impression that programmes are simply seen on a 'like/dislike' basis. Therefore, the courses and expertise sharing provided by Latvian Radio could not be assessed as medial competence increasing activities.

However, Modesova said that no activities have been offered to increase qualifications for managers and leading staff. Modesova has been an insider for twenty years with a unique opportunity for observation and she does not see any improvement in this sphere. As for the requests from other institutions – to order educational programmes for professionals from LR4 – it is quite problematic from the point of view of salaries/income. If a journalist misses work for a week or longer, be it due to study-visits or illness, there is no system to financially support them, so they lose income. Finding replacement journalists with the appropriate skill set is complicated.

LR4 journalists have recently participated in a number of activities for journalists at home and abroad. However, none of these activities was specifically aimed at increasing media literacy. For LR4 journalists, regularly scheduled lecturers or workshops focused on media literacy and easily accessible to those who live and work in Riga would be ideal.

Another topic that was mentioned was the option of visualising radio content, through a special multimedia studio. However, such a project would be challenging; giving journalists additional duties decreases their ability to improve the content. Modesova said that Russian language media professionals, i.e. her colleagues from LR4, are not involved in discussions on how to improve media space and media competence. Lack of funding for new projects is an eternal issue.

Self-evaluation	Peer evaluation
Problems with internal communication concerning content and training (Latvian level); Financial difficulties in allowing journalists to attend workshops and seminars; Journalists work primarily in one language, but must be aware of the media environment in multiple languages; Media-literacy content is implemented in the ongoing formats and programs.	Unused potential of the EBU as an European network that can educate journalists and to invite other actors; Special programs/projects.

Future plans	Peer evaluation	Recommended practices
Address the challenges of multimedia studio/broadcasting.	Might be used as a centre to educate teachers (by using resources); Maximize content dealing with media-literacy Cultivate better media criticism. Share archival materials.	'Melu detectors' or 'Lie Detector' — segment on Latvian Radio 5

### Cooperation with professional organizations

As previously mentioned, journalists working on Russian-language broadcasts are not likely to be engaged in professional associations or centres. As a result they do not have information or access to initiatives from these centres. The main reason for Russian-language journalists not joining professional association is the lack of benefits: The protection of their rights by professional associations is not significant. For example, among members of LZA (Association of Latvia Journalists) only few of

123 members work for the media in Russian Language in Latvia.<sup>37</sup> In its statements, LZA members protect international journalists/professionals, but cases of influence on Russian-language media stay without any reaction.

A list of members of the Union of Latvian Journalists (*Latvijas Žurnālistu savienība*) is not publicly available. However, informal sources report that there are more Russian-language journalists working in the union.<sup>38</sup> The potential of professional organization is not fully used. The organisation is not a forum and does not provide a platform for increasing media competence or to facilitate criticism.

However, the organization supports media competence by awarding annual prizes, though this competition process is not positive for journalists working in Russian. Journalists living in Latvia, but working in Russian feel like outsiders. Media products created in Russian are rarely nominated for prizes and Russian-language journalists are given top positions even less often. This in/out group perception divides the media sphere, and the perception of political favouritism plays a role in professional recognition. The Russian Embassy in Latvia annually awards the '*Янтарное перо*' or '*Amber feather*' prize for excellence in Russian-language journalism.

The Russian government strives to create international forums that can serve to unite Russian language media by redefining its virtual territory according to linguistic reach and disregarding national borders. Select invitations are extended to junior staff members of various Russian media outlets outside of Russia to attend courses and workshops to increase their professional

<sup>37</sup> Biedri. Latvijas žurnālistu asociācija, [Members. Latvian Journalists' Association] Available online at <http://www.latvijaszurnalisti.lv/biedri/>

<sup>38</sup> Latvijas žurnālistu savienība [Latvian Journalists' Union] Available online at <http://www.zurnalistusavieniba.lv/index.php?p=3519&lang=923&pp=3713>

journalism qualifications and bring these individuals into the Russian media sphere.

### **Pro-Kremlin initiatives**

The idea of the so-called 'Russkiy mir' also includes media activities in Russian. The Russian-language press in Latvia actively participates in congresses and other events organised here in Latvia or in Russia. Traditionally the Embassy of Russia is engaged in the professional life of Latvian journalists working in Russian by supporting the journalism competition '*Янтарное перо*' ('Amber Feather'); providing networking; supporting education; and providing information concerning the international public diplomacy activities of the Russian Federation.

*Янтарное перо* is an annual competition to identify the best material about Russia in the local media. The selection committee mainly consists of Latvian journalists from different media outlets. Yet, some professionals from other fields are also often invited. Sometimes journalists from Russian channels join the selection committee. In recent years the Head and the Deputy Head of the Journalists Union have participated in the selection committee for the competition.

The 'World Russian-Language Press Congress' is also a place where journalists from Latvia meet. Journalists from Latvian public broadcasters do not participate in these events. Editors and young journalists are approached differently; young journalists are offered opportunities to improve their qualifications abroad or in Latvia, e.g. at the Baltic International Academy, which traditionally invites experts from Russia, but editors are invited to special events in Russia.

### **Other initiatives from Russia**

During the past two years, many journalists and media managers from Russia have moved to Latvia. Many

of them were forced to leave Russia for political reasons and their criticism of the Kremlin. These journalists do not work for the Latvian media (at least not for public broadcasters), but they are often guests on local programs.

Journalists and managers share their views about their profession and critical attitudes to the informational sphere; they participate in conferences and informal meetings with local journalists and media experts. Riga is a central place for Baltic journalists to meet and to discuss current issues.

The most visible immigration of Russian journalists to Latvia was connected with establishing of new media outlet Meduza founded by former Lenta.ru editor-in-chief G. Timchenko. Her colleagues come mainly from Russia. If in the beginning interest in Latvian journalism from the Russian side was minimal, later communication became more intensive. The journalists have established initiatives aimed at increasing critical thinking, such as the "Otrkritic lekcii" (Open lectures), meant for journalists, but also for thinkers, writers, and filmmakers.

Moreover, Meduza journalists are organizing summer schools in Riga to educate journalists from other post-Soviet countries. To be eligible, applicants must be either journalists or media managers; special lectures and workshops will be organized for the second group.

### **Improving the Quality of Journalism in Latvia: targeted education programmes**

There are a number of schools providing higher education in media, however state and commercial schools have different curriculums for future journalists. It is a well-known fact that only some journalists have a professional education. Since different academic and professional backgrounds meet in newsrooms, specially

organised workshops would be an asset enhancing the media literacy of media professionals.

Another key element that should be taken into account is the quick rate of personnel turnover in newsrooms. Journalists move between media outlets looking for better positions, move into public relations, or leave the profession for another sphere entirely. In Latvia it is common practice not to close doors between journalism and public relations. The same person may work as a journalist and as a PR specialist simultaneously. The same can be said about journalists moving to politics. They work in both areas. This is among the striking examples of the lack of media literacy and competence.

The Media Centre at the Stockholm School of Economics in Riga (SSE) provides opportunities to improve professional qualifications for its students, but also for Latvian journalists. The centre's mission is defined as 'helping to ensure that the Baltic countries have well-trained, committed and motivated journalists; to support the development of new business models in media by providing guidance for international practise and non-governmental organizations; to bring out discussions on media structure, economics and ownership; to pursue discussion on issues of journalistic quality and ethics'.<sup>39</sup>

SSE courses on investigative journalism have a good reputation and can be considered a resource for studying critical analysis itself; Latvian journalists are invited to take part in workshops and to attend lectures. However, all SSE lectures take place in English and the senior staff in Latvian newsrooms often do not have good English language skills. English is the language of the younger generation. The main advantage is that not only junior, but also senior staff members attend workshops and lectures.

<sup>39</sup> About the Centre for Media Studies, Stockholm School of Economics. Available online at <http://www.sseriga.edu/en/centres/media-centre/>

Travel grants can provide support for journalists from regional media outlets who want to improve their skills. Journalists working in Russian also travel from their home cities to attend classes and take part in activities. This provides a good opportunity for networking. However, such cases are rare. The system for inviting journalists from outlying regions to such courses has not been well established.

### State Education in Media Literacy

The Ministry of Education has delegated activities concerning school curriculums to the Latvian National Centre for Education or Valsts Izglītības Satura Centrs (VISC). Media literacy is mentioned among the main tasks for extra-curricular education (*interestu izglītība*) in the annual report: 'to improve the media literacy skills of pupils, focusing on Internet security, as well as copyright issues' (*'pilnveidot skolēnu mediju lietotprasmes, akcentējot drošības jautājumus interneta lietošanā, kā arī autortiesību ievērošanu'*).<sup>40</sup> One of the elements in the course *Datorika* is aimed at solving the question of media literacy. The implementation of other issues is planned to take place through the implementation of new standards for Latvian schools.<sup>41</sup>

However, an analysis of the projects created for grades 1-3, 4-6, and 7-9 shows mainly 'functional' and 'creative' dimensions with less focus on critical meaning of the media literacy. The new standards are being developed. At the moment of conducting the research, a representative of the NGO *Iespējama misija* (Mission Possible) said

<sup>40</sup> For more information see *Digitālā kompetence izglītības procesā*, NE-PLP, Ministry of Education and Science, 11 May 2015, Available online at [http://www.izm.gov.lv/images/sabiedriskais\\_lidzdaliba/aktualitates/NE-PLP\\_110515\\_ppt.pdf](http://www.izm.gov.lv/images/sabiedriskais_lidzdaliba/aktualitates/NE-PLP_110515_ppt.pdf); Gada publiskais pārskats, VISC, 2014. Available online at <http://visc.gov.lv/visc/dokumenti/gadp2014.pdf>

<sup>41</sup> *Digitālā kompetence izglītības procesā*

that the working group on media literacy was in the process of completing its work.

They considered engaging partners from different institutions as well. This was also presented to teachers during the workshop: 'Media and information literacy for sustainable development—from concept to practice' (*'Mediju un informācijas pratība ilgtspējīgai attīstībai – no koncepta līdz praksei'*) organized by UNESCO. From the perspective of this study, this workshop was a valuable case study. Representatives from the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Education, UNESCO, the Latvian National Library, and the Faculty of Pedagogy from the University of Latvia took part in this workshop.

VISC director Mr G. Catlaks promoted the idea of an active user-creator of the content, focussing on digital literacy. For him the main goal of media literacy is the ability to create content from both perspectives—technical and informational. The VISC attempts to predict trends in media literacy and the use of media, but they lack information about the new media-use habits of the younger generation, a problem regularly repeated at the EU-level. The VISC also reported that it is difficult to find competent teachers of media literacy; this problem is also shared by some other EU member states.

According to data collected by the Ministry of Education, a significant percentage of Latvian teachers are aged 50+. The generational turnover is very slow. Young professionals do not see the work as prestigious and well paid. They look for jobs in other fields, even after graduating from specific teaching programs. Also, the frequently changing plans to reorganize education are not inspiring for newcomers. Young people try to find better-paid jobs or go abroad to work.

This problem is especially urgent with regard to IT specialists, as it is easier to find a well-paid job in the

IT sphere than in education. This results in a situation where teachers are able to use the latest devices, but cannot afford to buy them for themselves. The technical base in schools rapidly becomes out-dated.

In the pilot project organised in Latvian schools, the main focus is on the use and creation of digital environment, critical thinking, almost in all programmes, is not at the core. It might put the idea of 'understanding and analysing' of media content under the question. This pilot project partly corresponds to the new standard introduced in Estonian schools.

Another popular idea, articulated by the head of the VISC and other actors interviewed, is to implement the themes and ideas of media literacy as a part of other courses, changing the program and changing school standards. According to a recent study by an Estonian researcher K. Ugur on implementing media literacy in Estonian schools, there are significant problems with teachers.<sup>42</sup> The generation gap plays crucial role. Ugur underlined that teacher competence and the will of the school are essential, and that teacher understanding about media varies greatly. There is the significant risk of overloading an already full curriculum, making it less likely that teachers and students can increase their abilities. In addition, hierarchical traditions in education and, often, a school's internal culture work against instilling a positive attitude toward critical thinking. This also is important on connecting media with language (not a social themes). Ugur also mentioned the textbook problem—due to the rapid progress and changes constantly taking place in the field of media textbooks become out-dated very quickly.

Ugur suggested engaging media professionals in teaching media literacy, providing the possibility of free

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<sup>42</sup> Ugur, K. *Media education in Estonia: reasons of a failure and success*, Presentation, 2014

lessons on media topics. Experts suggested taking into account the needs and media experiences of the students as the basis for teaching, instead of using teachers' experience and competence.

European education programs, such as Erasmus+, can also provide teachers with the opportunity to be engaged in projects on media literacy. The question has been raised if the Erasmus+ participants are the best 'target audience' for media literacy training. However, a recent report from a school in Daugavpils, Latvia shows that the opportunity to improve media literacy was used by one English teacher, one visual arts teacher, and three IT teachers.<sup>43</sup>

In the interviews they gave for this study, teachers from Latvian regional schools named the media competence of teachers and the role of media competence in the teaching process as essential. With regard to process, the main focus of the teachers is to prepare their students to successfully complete year-end exams. If questions on media literacy become part of the exams, the subject will become more important.

The teachers discussed additional ideas for improving the level of media literacy in schools around the country: A regularly upgraded information base, such as an Internet portal. Audio-visual materials that could save teachers time when preparing their lessons. Specially designed examples corresponding to the themes from the curriculum, e.g. stories on migration for geography lessons or articles from authoritarian inter-war Latvia for history lessons that could be used to analyse sources, video, quotes, experts, etc.

Well-known individuals who promote critical thinking could be portrayed as 'role models' for students.

<sup>43</sup> *Mūsu skolotāji apguva mediju mācību Turcijā*, VSK15, 23. September 2015. Available online at <http://www.vsk15.lv/zi%C5%86as/m%C5%AB-su-skolot%C4%81ji-apguva-mediju-m%C4%81c%C4%ABbu-turcij%C4%81>

Teachers see the potential for cooperation with public and commercial broadcasters and, according to the focus group discussions and interviews, would be likely to use special materials that they provided they are easy to use, attractive, and topical for the younger generation. There is an urgent need for well-equipped schools and for digitally literate teachers.

The first step in Textbooks and methodological guidelines must be clear, precise, and provide teachers with themselves to start with. Teachers prefer local seminars in Latvian and/or Russian in the regions where they live and work. Some recommended mixing ages in seminars/groups. However, some teachers are open for international cooperation (Erasmus + and other similar programs). Seminars and workshops for teachers should be short and well structured, and continuous follow-up courses would be an indispensable asset.

Active teachers from Latvian regional schools are sceptical about the motivation of senior teachers to make attitudinal changes in the subjects they have taught for decades. Even a 'forced mechanism', such as integrating media literacy questions into annual exams and centralized tests, will not provide enough motivation. The younger teaching staff should take on the role of 'media literacy ambassadors' in their schools.

The tendency to politicise media literacy, setting off Russia as a clear enemy, is disturbing. Older teachers and teachers from Russian schools were concerned that a media literacy course should not be a repetition of 'political information', mirroring the Soviet experience of the older generation. However, all teachers agreed that parents are too passive. They are seen as the tragedy of today's schools, especially secondary schools; therefore there is little interest in creating special media literacy programs for children and parents.



In general, teachers assess parents' interest in school processes as very low.

A focus group with first and second year students at the Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences showed that they operate with the definition of media literacy without major problems. According to this group, critical thinking is one of the main elements of media literacy. They are not focused on only digital literacy or on the process of creation. Journalism students generally shared the view that journalists are the main actors and stakeholders in media literacy. This focus group was valuable for the study because these current students interested in communication science graduated from school in 2014 or 2015 and can reflect on the quality of the secondary education they received.

They were not able to mention any audio-visual product fully dealing with media literacy. However, they mentioned projects dealing with investigative journalism. They were not able to mention any media critics or media analysis projects. Their examples were mainly oriented toward hard news and information and not on soft content and entertainment.

The focus group participants were not able to remember any positive examples of media literacy from their school days. They did, however, mention positive examples from their courses at the university. According to participants, the most impressive exercises had to do with media analysis. Including media analysis in the syllabus creates the will to analyse the flow of information, which is not currently a common part of the learning process.

This focus group was also important because determination these students expressed to play the role of media literacy ambassadors. They see increasing media competence as part of their duties. The Department of

Communication Science of the University of Latvia will be introducing a new course on Media Literacy for its students in the near future.

To sum up, the process introducing new standards is under development and media literacy is on the agenda of the institutions involved. Financial support is being provided and the education of school personnel has already begun. Teachers express their desire to prepare themselves and pupils for media literacy, provided they have the proper support and materials. However, it is important to understand that in informal conversations teachers from Russian-language schools connect media-literacy activities with the notion of counter-propaganda and the anti-Kremlin discourse.

The risk of minimizing the importance of critical thinking and moving the focus away from the creation of media content still exists. Given the similarities in generational social experience, the Estonian case that describes the culture of insecure teacher with critically thinking pupils might also be applicable to Latvia.

The audio-visual experience of pupils is important and should be regularly studied for all age groups. This will help to minimise the gaps between teachers' experience and pupils' experience. Moreover, it is important to have a place access current materials and examples.

The notion of media literacy is politicized in Latvia; media outlets frequently mention media literacy in the same news stories with propaganda. This tendency is detrimental for improving media literacy since it diverts attention from teaching real skills and stirs up political tensions.

## Gaps

Self-evaluation	Peer evaluation
<p>The process is complicated because of changes related not only to implementing one course, but also standards.</p> <p>Different actors will be involved, including professionals (plans).</p> <p>Best practices from neighbours are taken into account.</p> <p>No plans for pre-school groups were found.</p>	<p>The Ministry of Education had a more narrow understanding; the Ministry of Culture did not have a single position.</p> <p>An overall focus on the digital aspects of media literacy is expected.</p> <p>The support of books and textbooks on media literacy is expected.</p> <p>S. Falka un D. Rietuma successfully cooperated on their media literacy project about films.</p>

Future plans	Peer evaluation	Recommended practices
<p>Create new standards</p> <p>Cooperate with stakeholders</p>	<p>Just as schools educate their pupils about the political system, they should also educate them about the way that media operate and influence the public.</p> <p>Avoid a narrow focus on digital literacy; implement the concept of critical thinking.</p> <p>Engage the public broadcasters.</p> <p>Support a neutral environment for media literacy; introduce economic and cultural aspects to dilute the current concentration on political aspects.</p>	<p>Promote media literacy without the context of propaganda.</p> <p>Include media literacy in programmes for pre-school age children.</p> <p>Look to Estonia as a good example in the Baltic States and Eastern Europe—Tartu University provides lessons and special programmes in media literacy.</p> <p>Look to Finnish schools.</p> <p>Look to the Lithuanian media literacy initiatives in Lithuanian schools, e.g. the Media and Information Literacy Education project. (Norden)</p>

## The UNESCO Chair at the University of Latvia

The UNESCO Chair on Media and Information Literacy (MIL) at the University of Latvia was established in January 2016, following UNESCO's Paris Open Educational Resources Declaration concerning media literacy activities. The implementation of the UNESCO chair initiative is integrated into media policy guidelines.

Guna Spurava, Head of the UNESCO MIL Chair, said that the idea to implement this recommendation came from Prof Inta Brikse, who was Dean of Social Sciences at the University of Latvia until her death in 2014. Two large projects served to prepare the ground for the UNESCO chair— 'current estate' and EU Kids Online. In a recent interview, Spurava said that she intends to focus on digital literacy in the foreseeable future. The next project to be implemented will be phase two of EU Kids Online.

The main focus of the MIL programme will be to enhance digital competence and engage in longitudinal research activities to measure said competences. Other activities will include a special course on media literacy for Social Science students and special activities for teachers, such as workshops and seminars in media literacy. The Head of UNESCO MIL Chair also participates in meetings and public events to popularize the concept of media literacy as such.

## Gaps

Self-evaluation	Peer evaluation
It takes time to get results from research activities, such data can hardly be used for quick reactions and policy activities. The UNESCO Chair was not established in an information vacuum. There are multidisciplinary clashes about definitions and there is the lack of unity in society about the purpose of media literacy.	'Digital literacy' does not provide a wide enough focus to address current problems. Critical thinking is only a small part of analysis. There is a lack of information about the UNESCO Chair.

Future plans	Peer evaluation	Recommended practices
Research activities Courses for SZF students Courses for teachers	To be open to teachers (finance policy); To provide greater expertise in all areas, esp. media criticism;	Finland and Norway were mentioned as positive examples that model good cooperation between leaders.

## Concluding remarks

In Latvia, conferences on media issues and book presentations about political communication, often begin with the phrase 'of course it is a tragedy, but thanks to Putin...', followed by outlining the local initiatives that have become possible only after the events in Ukraine, e.g. strengthening Russian language content on LTV7. Russia's aggression against Ukraine changed political priorities in Latvia. However, the importance of safeguarding the Latvian information space might fade and the tools we are now beginning to use to strengthen the media space in Latvia are not set in stone and can come under risk again. Given the opinions of those interviewed for this study, it is crucial not to let the situation to go back to the pre-Crimean level.

Several risks should be taken into account regarding media literacy issues. The connection between an increased interest in media literacy and events in Ukraine is remarkable and unavoidable. If relations between Russia and Ukraine normalize, tension will diminish. Such, otherwise positive changes would put the importance of media literacy and the willingness to devote resources to it at risk. Some people are already concerned that the interest in this issue is decreasing. The security of the information sphere is less popular at the time of writing in mid- 2016 as it was 18 months ago.

This is generally connected with the lack of financial support for new and ongoing initiatives. And even now information security is often mentioned in speeches, but is not considered when budgeting defence spending. The defence of information space does not have powerful lobby in Latvia or in the EU. At the local level, tangible physical military defence is still more important and more extensively subsidized than defence of information space.

There is also the risk of seeing media literacy as a 'technical skill' only. In other words—the extensive use and rapid creation of media platforms are winning in the race with analysis and critical thinking. All of these aspects of media literacy and informational defence must be considered together. And there is a significant risk that the generation gap on these issues is growing rapidly.

Third, there is a need to study and regularly check pupils' experience of using media. The needs of pupils could be further researched only after this study. As can be seen from the previous research done in the Baltic countries, the situation differs from region to region. It is very important to introduce flexibility into school curricula, due to the diversity among Latvian schools. Russian-language teachers must also be supported, so

that they do not connect media literacy issues with propaganda and counter-propaganda in terms of Latvia vs. Russia.

Fourth, media professionals are ready engaged in the activities of other stakeholders; they are ready to be educated and to educate. When making generalization about media professionals, it is important to remember that newsroom personnel frequently changes; professional organizations must be open to organising courses for newcomers, especially those who do not have education and experience in media or the communication sciences.

Another risk is connected with the use of the term 'media literacy' itself. When translated into Latvian, the words used tend toward a technical understanding of the term. Here, we can look to the Finnish experience of using another more appropriate synonym with the potential to indicate critical-thinking oriented content.

And finally, media literacy is still a new sphere for Latvia. For better domestic results it would be useful to promote the engagement of Latvian actors in international organizations and international networks. Support media literacy initiatives in Russian, providing places for discussions and networking, and training and supporting media literacy specialists will lead to a more secure information environment in our region.

This book represents not the collective views of FEPS or BSF, but only the opinions of the respective authors. The responsibility of FEPS and BSF is limited to approving the publication as worthy of consideration within the global progressive movement.

This publication is a part of the project “Resisting state propaganda in the new information environment: The case of EU member states and EU Eastern Partnership states vis-à-vis the Russian Federation publication/research” organised by the Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS) with the support of Brīvības un Solidaritātes Fonds (BSF).