[DEZ]INFORMAȚIA CA ARMĂ ÎN RĂZBOIUL RUSIEI ÎMPOTRIVA UCRAINEI: DIMENSIUNEA EUROPEANĂ

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Abstract: *În lumea contemporană informația a devenit o armă, pe care Rusia o folosește în războiul împotriva democrației. Anexarea Republicii Autonome Krimea și ocuparea temporară a regiunilor Donețk și Lugansk de către Rusia în anul 2014 au stat la inițierea războiului ruso-ucrainean, în care fiecare stat din lume ocupă o poziție, susținând-o prin diverse mijloace. Uniunea Europeană din primele zile ale războiului a susținut Ucraina, integritatea ei teritorială și independența. Anume din acest motiv Rusia activ desfășoară războiul informațional împotriva statelor europene. Autorul analizează nivelurile războiului informațional al Rusiei împotriva lumii democratice, reprezentând keisuri separate, particularități a politicii informaționale a Uniunii Europene, de asemenea, posibilități de consolidare a eforturilor Uniunii Europene și a statelor transfrontaliere cu ea în lupta cu războiul hibrid al Rusiei.*

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[DIS]INFORMATION AS THE WEAPON IN RUSIAN WAR AGAINST UKRAINE: EUROPEAN DIMENSION

Abstract: *In the contemporary world, information has become a weapon that Russia uses in the war against democracy. The annexation of the Ukrainian Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the temporary occupation of certain areas of the Donetsk and Lugansk regions by Russia in 2014 became the beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian war, in which every state in the world takes its side, supporting it with all possible means. Since the first days of the war, the European Union has supported Ukraine, its territorial integrity and independence. That is why Russia is actively conducting an information war against European countries. The author analyzes the levels of Russia's information war against the democratic world, presenting individual cases, features of the EU's information policy, as well as the possibility of consolidating the efforts of the EU and neighboring countries in the fight against Russia's information hydra.*

Keywords: information policy, disinformation, hybrid warfare, EU, security

2014 – 1914: one hundred years passed. Two world wars took place in this historical period. Millions of people were killed and murdered. The geopolitical situation has been changed at least three times: in 1918, 1945, 1991. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, it seemed that the long way from traditional imperialism to democracy mainly has been taken. But those who didn't learn history well has been started the fight for the world leadership again. In best traditions of previous centuries but the using the contemporary weapon and digital capabilities. 2014 became a starting point for contemporary geopolitical transformations like 1914 in previous century. Though the political background and circumstances are completely different.

The start of Russian military aggression toward Ukraine in 2014 was precepted by many intellectuals, social and political experts as the huge ge-

opolitical challenge. For them Russian militarism and the war against Ukraine meant the future ruining the existing system of international relations at least. Between them was a Russian historian Andrei Zubov, professor of the Department of Philosophy of MSIIR (МГИМО). He wrote: "We are on the verge of complete destruction of the system of international treaties, economic chaos and political dictatorship. We are on the verge of a war with our closest, related people of Ukraine, a sharp deterioration in relations with Europe and America, on the verge of a cold and, possibly, a hot war with them"[1] . His article was the first attempt of open scientific answer by Russian scientist to Russian authorities concerning the contemporary Russian politics. And the most important for all is that it was done in times when the whole world wasn't ready to witness the Russian real politics, which Ukrainian professor Anatoliy Kruglashov named as retro-imperialism[2] .

In the following years a seemingly stable system of international relations turned into a systemic turbulence condition, caused by Russia's active actions in all directions: from political to economic, including energy and information as the weapon in this fight for leadership. This article is the attempt to analyze the changes in European political environment caused after the start of Russian-Ukrainian war in 2014. The author will try to determine the purpose of Russian disinformation activities all over Europe in the context of the strategic goals of the Russian leadership regarding the geopolitical position of Russia. Special attention will be focused on different levels of Russian disinformation and propaganda and its influence to European politics of supporting Ukraine.

The problem of propaganda and disinformation became the special subject of public and expert discussion, special concern within the EU. After 2014 the EU member-states like France, Great Britain, Spain etc. suffered from the completely open intervention of Russia into their internal affairs through media manipulation, propaganda and disinformation. The weakest in its resistance to outside influence was (and still is) digital sphere,

[1] Профессора Андрея Зубова увольняют из МГИМО за статью об Украине, в которой он сравнил Россию с нацистской Германией. URL: https://www.newsru.com/russia/04mar2014/zubov.html

[2] Kruglashov A. *Eastern Partnership vis-à-vis challenges and doubts*. STUDIA I ANALIZY NAUK O POLITYCE. 2020. №1. P.65-78.

especially social networks. And the European Union in a whole as well as national governments of member-states of it has taken systematic actions aimed to protect European space from propaganda, disinformation and fakes. During last years the EU created Code of Practice on Disinformation, the Action Plan Against Disinformation, the East StratCom Task Force, and the Rapid Alert System for dealing with this problem[1].

At the same time, it is necessary to remind that "Universal Declaration of Human Rights" (UDHR)[2], the main human rights document, was adopted before the digital era. Another one, the "International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights" (ICCPR) was adopted as well as UDHR before digital epoch, on December 16, 1966. Its article 9 fixes "the right to liberty and security of person" and article 18-19 the right "to freedom of thought, conscience and religion", "to hold opinions without interference", "the freedom of expression", "for respect of the rights of reputations of others" etc.[3]

Within the EU the "Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union" (ECHR) is clarifying the EU citizens' rights and freedoms. "Charter of Fundamental Rights" was adopted in 2000 and entered into force in 2009. Its article 6 to 19 are concerned with freedoms: right to liberty and security, respect for private and family life, protection of personal data, freedom of thoughts, conscience and religion, freedom of expression and information etc.[4] .

The basic principles of fundamental human rights protection are the topic of hot discussions from the times of their adoption. They are discussing by experts, politicians, scientists etc. Spreading of disinformation is perceived as the threat to human rights, from one side. To protect a human from new digital threats it's necessary to implement new instruments and

[1] Pamment J. The EU's Role in Fighting Disinformation: Taking Back the Initiative. July 15, 2020. URL: https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/07/15/eu-s-role-in-fighting-disinformation-taking-back-initiative-pub-82286

[2] Universal Declaration of Human Rights. URL: https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/2021/03/udhr.pdf

[3] International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. URL: https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-rights

[4] Charter of Fundamental Rights. URL: https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/government-in-ireland/european-government/eu-law/charter-of-fundamental-rights/

policies. But from another side, these new instruments and policies can be perceived as the threat to human rights. Especially in a sphere of privacy, right to share the information etc. And this antimony is used by Russian propagandist machine for discreditation of democracy and its fundamental principles.

In 2014 world witnessed the repetition of events of the interwar period: the annexation of Ukrainian Crimea looked completely the same as anschluss of Austria in 1938[1]. The main question was: how will events develop? Will the Third World War start or everything will end with this annexation? Almost 10 years passed after the annexation. There is no world war in meaning of XX century. On authors opinion we have completely another format of world war, which is going on right now. If we are talking about the traditional military dimension, it can be state as Russian-Ukrainian war, which is conducting on the territory of Ukraine. The modern war waged by Russia has informational, economical, ecological, etc. dimensions. And in these planes, on our opinion, the war is global. It is influencing on various spheres of life in various parts of the world right now. And all states are involved in it, mostly indirectly in military sense, but directly in the information sense at least.

In 2014 the world was faced with seemingly unprecedent in XXI century actions: open intervention into domestic affairs of independent state with further capture and rejection of its territories. Russia demonstratively started a war for a world leadership and Ukraine became its stumbling block on this path. In order to achieve the set goal Russia has chosen various instruments and tools. And modern information technologies turned into an important tool of Russia's influence on decision-making process all over the world, especially in Ukraine and the EU.

Ukraine wasn't prepared to such dimension of war. As Volodymyr Gorbulin, Ukrainian politician, the Secretary of the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine emphasized, the legal unpreparedness for new threats, "information occupation" of certain territories of Ukraine by Rus-

[1] Video: Poles alarmed by 'Crimean Anschluss'. URL: https://www.france24.com/en/20140325-video-poles-alarmed-crimean-anschluss-ukraine-russia; Зубов А. Это уже было. Ведомости. 01 марта 2014. URL: https://www.vedomosti.ru/opinion/articles/2014/03/01/andrej-zubov-eto-uzhe-bylo.

sian military forces were between main challenges to Ukrainian informational politics in 2014[1]. But the EU also wasn't prepared to this innovative technological approach to warfare. And Russia used it for disorientation of the world community (on our point, first of all European and American) and shaking of the foundations of world order. The avalanche of disinformation that hit the world after the Ukrainian Euromaidan (2013-2014) became a cold shower for European politicians. In fact, it prompted the development of effective tools for countering information aggression.

Since 2014 we are dealing at least with two interrelated processes:

1) The growing amount of disinformation and propaganda;

2) The growing attention to the problem of disinformation from the EU officials and appearing of new policies and practices in this sphere.

A hyperactivity of Russia in spreading disinformation and propaganda during and after Euromaidan common with its active interference in internal affairs of EU member-states demonstrated the seriousness of the security threat to Europe in case of ignoring the problem. To illustrate the dangerousness of the situation it's necessary to return back to the events before the Russian wide-scaled invasion to Ukraine.

From the collapse of the USSR the character of Russian-Ukrainian relations testifies to Russia's undisguised desire to restore the empire. It's hard to find a period after 1991 when Russia didn't intervene Ukrainian affairs, either domestic, or foreign. And informational warfare was and still is on the first place in contemporary Russia's imperial policy. Vladimir Putin who is right now the most odious figure in world politics came to the power on the verge of millennia. And Russia's active attempts to regain leadership on the world political stage began with his appointment as acting president of Russia on New Year's Eve 2000. In March, 2000, he won presidential elections and after that he is the unchanging leader of Russia. Even in the period of presidency of Dmitrii Medvedev he remained de facto the ruler of Russia. Under his rule Russia became definitely authoritarian state with the strong desire for world leadership.

The course on EU-integration, proclaimed by Ukraine, wasn't appropriate to Moscow. Euromaidan and Revolution of Dignity demonstrated

[1] Світова гібридна війна: український фронт / за загальною редакцією В.П.Горбуліна. К., 2017. С.384-385.

the readiness of Ukrainian society to radical changes and open movement toward united Europe. And unreadiness of Russian political elite to perceive the new geopolitical reality. After 2014 the democratic world found itself under the crosshairs of Russian authoritarianism, and Ukraine became the first bastion which Russia needs to destroy before conquering the world. To do it Russia started the new – hybrid – war against democracy as the biggest threat to Russia's state existing. It is provided on several levels. The first one is the discreditation of democratic revolutions on post-Soviet space (in Ukraine and Georgia first of all). For example, Russian propagandists created a fake narrative "which argued that Yushchenko sought to classify and rank Ukrainians into three categories in accordance to the region they are from with Ukrainians from the east of the country allegedly ranked as third and those from the western part of the country as first"[1]. For better perception by population even the special map (integrated in the text)[2] was created to illustrate this idea. For our point of view that step had strategic consequences for further Ukrainian development, but that is the topic for special research. It influenced on perception of Ukraine and new Ukrainian authority both inside and outside of country. To strengthen the negative perception of new Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko Russia used the visual comparison with Nazi leader Adolf Hitler[3] .



Russia continued the tradition of discreditation of Ukrainian political elite with Petro Po-

[1] The 2004 Orange Revolution through the eyes of Russian propaganda. URL: https://www.weareukraine.info/the-2004-orange-revolution-through-the-eyes-of-russian-propaganda/

[2] Кравчук О. Політична реклама в Україні: президентські вибори-2004 – три сорти українців, розкол та «нашизм». URL: https://24tv.ua/politichna_reklama_v_ukrayini_prezidentski_vibori_2004__tri_sorti_ukrayintsiv_rozkol_ta_nashizm_n1029351

[3] The 2004 Orange Revolution through the eyes of Russian propaganda. URL: https://www.weareukraine.info/the-2004-orange-revolution-through-the-eyes-of-russian-propaganda/

roshenko[1] who became the President of Ukraine after the Revolution of Dignity, and Volodymyr Zelenskyi, contemporary President of Ukraine[2]. In addition to comparisons with Nazism, the Russian authorities constantly produce and disseminate information about the so-called "crimes of the Ukrainian authorities". Russian occupation of separate territories of Donetsk and Luhansk oblast in 2014 led to creation new myths about Ukraine. They were partly presented during photo exhibitions dedicated to the Ukrainian events in 2014 in Moscow (Russia), Terracina (Italy), London (Great Britain). The Russian occupation was presented there as the civic war in Ukraine and tragedy of Ukrainian people as the "crime" of Ukrainian authority. In 2015 the exhibition "The Physical Evidence. Donbass. 365 days" was held in Moscow. The exhibition consisted of two projects – a traditional photo exhibition and interactive exposition with real things from Donbas, armaments, children's toys, etc.[3] . To strengthen the impression about the horrors of the situation in the eastern part of Ukraine the organizers transformed the part of the hall into the "destroyed Donbass". The organizers tried to create the atmosphere of war spread with accents so that everyone present could see "the evidence of crimes Ukrainian authorities"[4] . The expected result was a mobilization of the minds of the viewers of the exhibition to the rejection of democratic choice of Ukrainian people, to present Russia as the state – protector the rights of people and to discredit the Ukrainian authorities and Ukrainian state after the changes of the Revolution of Dignity. Not all people trusted to it, but it had its ruining impact on minds and vision of Ukraine by Russian society at least. In 2017

[1] Порошенко как Гитлер с порванными носками – украинский эксперт. URL: https://tvzvezda.ru/news/201702021339-6wx1.htm

[2] No, Volodymyr Zelensky isn't publishing his own 'Mein Kampf'. URL: https://www.france24.com/en/tv-shows/truth-or-fake/20221104-no-volodymyr-zelensky-isn-t-publishing-his-own-mein-kampf

[3] Nechayeva-Yuriychuk N. *Information Warfare Against Ukraine: Security Challenges for the European Union*. The European Union and the Eastern Partnership: Security Challenges: April 26-27, 2018, Moldova / Vasile Cucerescu, Carlos E. Pacheco Amaral, Gaga Gabrichidze, Ioan Horga, Anatoliy Kruglashov, Ewa Latoszek, Marta Pachocka; sci. com.: Francisco Aldecoa Luzárraga [et al.]. Chișinău : ECSA Moldova, Cernăuți : S. n., Tbilisi : S. n., 2018 (Tipogr. "Print-Caro"). P.530.

[4] Тушин А. *В Москве представлены «Вещдоки»: выставка 365 дней «АТО» на Донбассе.* URL: http://www.ridus.ru/news/182581.

Levada Center provided the sociological investigation by the result of which 29% of respondents called Ukraine as the second after the USA enemy of Russia[1]. To compare in February, 2023 69% of respondents had a negative attitude toward Ukraine[2]. So, systematic propaganda and disinformation prove their effectiveness in today's authoritarian state.

The next level is intervention into domestic affairs of other states through media and social networks. After 2014 the European community felt the strong and systematic influence of Russian information weapon. The policy of "controlled chaos" which is providing by Russian government is directed to destabilize the political order through shaking of socio-political stability from within state. As far as Margarita Jaitner, the author of the book "Russian Information Warfare: Lessons from Ukraine", wrote, the "information can be used to disorganise governance, organize anti-government protests, delude adversaries, influence public opinion, and reduce an opponent's will to resist"[3]. This tactic was used by the Soviet authorities in 1920s, 1930s and after the Second World war for establishing socialism and further including them into Moscow sphere of influence.

Within the EU the first state where Russia after Crimea annexation tried to influence on political choice of the population was Scotland. In September, 2014 the Scottish referendum on independence was held. Before that a number of fake accounts in different social networks were opened for sharing false information about the situation in Great Britain, Scotland and the EU in a whole. As an analyst for the US think-tank the Atlantic Council Ben Nimmo stressed, "pro-Russian propagandists used Twitter, fake news on YouTube and Facebook accounts to make and then spread false allegations that votes were interfered with to ensure victory for pro-

[1] Дергачев В., Атасунцев А., *Россияне назвали главных врагов страны*. URL: https://www.rbc.ru/politics/10/01/2018/5a549d4b9a79476120fe5065.

[2] Кузнецова К. *Як не дивно, але не українців: кого росіяни вважають найбільшим ворогом (свіже соцопитування)*. URL: https://tsn.ua/svit/yak-ne-divno-ale-ne-ukrayinciv-kogo-rosiyani-vvazhayut-naybilshim-vorogom-svizhe-socopituvannya-2283289.html

[3] Jaitner M. "Russian Informationa Warfare: Lessons from Ukraine", in *Cyber War in Perspective: Russian Agression against Ukraine,* ed. Kenneth Geers, 89 (Tallinn, NATO CCD COE Publications, 2015).

UK campaigners"[1].

In 2017 Spain felt political consequences of Russian disinformation campaign directed to strengthen the ideas of Catalonia's independence. After the state investigation of the situation in region before the referendum-2017, the Spain defense and foreign minister said that "they had evidence that state and private-sector Russian groups, as well as groups in Venezuela, used Twitter, Facebook and other Internet sites to massively publicize the separatist cause and swing public opinion behind it in the run-up to the Oct. 1 referendum"[2].

Such "support" of "independence" movement in Europe from Russia was and still is aimed to legitimize the annexation of Crimea (2014[3]) and temporarily occupied territories of Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson regions (oblast) of Ukraine (2022[4]). Propaganda and disinformation accompany all actions of Moscow, especially actively during the seizure of Ukrainian territories, processes of making important political decisions at the international (European Commission, UN, for example) or national levels, etc. In our opinion, the policy of "controlled chaos" implemented by Moscow is transforming now into a policy of non-Moscow-controlled resistance to Russian aggression by both Ukraine and the EU states.

The third level of Russian information warfare is the financial support of European radical left and right leaders, parties, groups. The most famous example: National Rally (previously National Front) in France founded by Marie Le Pen. It confirmed to receive Russian financial input into the election campaign. Though Mari Le Pen lost presidential elections, her party got 25% of the vote to the European parliament. As the result, Marie

[1] Carrell S. *Russian cyber-activists 'tried to discredit Scottish independence vote'*. URL: https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2017/dec/13/russian-cyber-activists-tried-to-discredit-scottish-independence-vote-says-analyst.

[2] Emmott R. *Spain sees Russian interference in Catalonia separatist vote.* URL: https://www.reuters.com/article/us-spain-politics-catalonia-russia/spain-sees-russian-interference-in-catalonia-separatist-vote-idUSKBN1DD20Y.

[3] *Держдума проголосувала за включення Криму до РФ*. URL: https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/politics/2014/03/140320_crimea_vote_russia_it

[4] Богданьок О. *Путін підписав закони про «приєднання» тимчасово окупованих територій України до Росії*. URL: https://suspilne.media/288682-putin-pidpisav-zakon-pro-priednanna-timcasovo-okupovanih-teritorij-ukraini-do-rosii/.

Le Pen got 25 new members of the European Parliament and Russia got pro-Russian bloc inside the EU Parliament[1]. During parliament election in 2022 party got 89 places. The last allowed to form the parliament group. On authors point of view, Mari Le Pen and National Rally can be considered as Russian agents of influence in France and European structures in a whole. And one of the purposes of their activity is the destabilizing the situation with the EU.

"Alternative for Germany" (AfD) is another right-wing party which has contacts with Russia. During last years it earned more support in German society and due to sociological data of August, 2023 its rating is 21%[2]. The party opposes the EU, the support to Ukraine and is against sanctions toward Russia. By common journalists' investigation by German "Spigel", Russian Insider and Bellingtcat there are proves that it collaborates with Moscow[3] . The Russian financial support of radicalism in Europe, on authors point of view, is directed to ruining existing political order from inside and to settle the Russian order all over the Europe.

The fourth level of Russian information warfare against Ukraine and European democracy is energy dependence of European states from Russian gas and oil supplies, especially from "Gasprom". The last is not only the energy company, but also media owner, which spreads Russian disinformation and propaganda all over the world. After the start of wide-scaled military invasion of Russia into Ukraine the European states started to reduce their dependence from Russian gas[4] . But there are still some states which have a high level of dependency from Russian gas and they are influencing on deci-

[1] Harding L. *We should beware Russia's links with Europe's right,* https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/dec/08/russia-europe-right-putin-front-national-eu.

[2] Опитування: У Німеччині ультраправа AfD вперше за кілька місяців втратила підтримку. URL: https://usp-ltd.org/opytuvannia-u-nimechchyni-ultraprava-afd-vpershe-za-kilka-misiatsiv-vtratyla-pidtrymku/

[3] Baumgärtner M., Grozev C., Höfner R., Dobrokhotov R., Lehberger R., Müller A.-K., Schmid F. and Wiedmann-Schmidt W. *Secret Messages Document Moscow Contacts with Staffer of Far-Right AfD*. Spigel International. URL: https://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/germany-secret-messages-document-moscow-contacts-with-staffer-of-far-right-afd-a-0040e526-39d7-4f22-8bc1-6772bc2d840a

[4] Богданьок О. У *МВФ розповіли, на скільки скоротилася залежність Європи від російського газу.* URL: https://suspilne.media/446415-u-mvf-rozpovili-na-skilki-skorotilasa-zaleznist-evropi-vid-rosijskogo-gazu/

sion-making process in the EU (like Hungary, for example).

Russia provides its information warfare against Ukraine and democracy on different levels and only several were presented in this article. But as more Russia is spreading disinformation the more European states and societies are supporting Ukraine and its fight against aggressive authoritarianism. The paradox of the situation lies in the fact that, despite the increase in disinformation activity of Russia regarding Ukraine, Moscow has not managed to form a positive attitude towards its military-political aggression towards Ukraine. Moreover, the EU strengthen support Ukraine on all levels: from humanitarian aid to supply of weapons. And strengthening cooperation in confronting informational threats is part of the joint struggle of the EU together with non-EU states (for example, Ukraine and Moldova) against the Russian aggressor.