United States Department of State

Washington, D.C.   20520

December 29, 2023

Case No. FL-2023-00013

Reed Rubinstein
America First Legal Foundation
611 Pennsylvania Avenue, SE, #231
Washington, DC 20003

Dear Mr. Rubinstein:

As we noted in our letter dated November 30, 2023, we are processing your request for material under the Freedom of Information Act ("FOIA"), 5 U.S.C. § 552. The Department of State ("Department") has identified five additional responsive records subject to the FOIA. Upon review, we have determined that three records may be released in full and two records may be released in part.

An enclosure explains the FOIA exemptions and other grounds for withholding material. Where we have made redactions, the applicable FOIA exemptions are marked on each record. Where applicable, the Department has considered the foreseeable harm standard when reviewing these records and applying FOIA exemptions. All non-exempt material that is reasonably segregable from the exempt material has been released and is enclosed.

We will keep you informed as your case progresses. If you have any questions, your attorney may contact Pardis Gheibi, U.S. Department of Justice Trial Attorney, at pardis.gheibi@usdoj.gov and (202) 305-3246. Please refer to the case number, FL-2023-00013, and the civil action number, 22-cv-03386, in all correspondence about this case.

Sincerely,

Diamonece Hickson
Chief, Litigation and Appeals Branch
Office of Information Programs and Services

Enclosures: As stated.

The Freedom of Information Act (5 USC 552)

FOIA Exemptions

(b)(1)   Information specifically authorized by an executive order to be kept secret in the interest of national defense or foreign policy. Executive Order 13526 includes the following classification categories:

    1.4(a) Military plans, systems, or operations
    1.4(b) Foreign government information
    1.4(c) Intelligence activities, sources or methods, or cryptology
    1.4(d) Foreign relations or foreign activities of the US, including confidential sources
    1.4(e) Scientific, technological, or economic matters relating to national security, including defense against transnational terrorism
    1.4(f) U.S. Government programs for safeguarding nuclear materials or facilities
    1.4(g) Vulnerabilities or capabilities of systems, installations, infrastructures, projects, plans, or protection services relating to US national security, including defense against transnational terrorism
    1.4(h) Weapons of mass destruction

(b)(2)   Related solely to the internal personnel rules and practices of an agency

(b)(3)   Specifically exempted from disclosure by statute (other than 5 USC 552), for example:

ARMSEXP	Arms Export Control Act, 50a USC 2411(c)
CIA PERS/ORG	Central Intelligence Agency Act of 1949, 50 USC 403(g)
EXPORT CONTROL	Export Administration Act of 1979, 50 USC App. Sec. 2411(c)
FS ACT	Foreign Service Act of 1980, 22 USC 4004
INA	Immigration and Nationality Act, 8 USC 1202(f), Sec. 222(f)
IRAN	Iran Claims Settlement Act, Public Law 99-99, Sec. 505

(b)(4)   Trade secrets and confidential commercial or financial information

(b)(5)   Interagency or intra-agency communications forming part of the deliberative process, attorney-client privilege, or attorney work product

(b)(6)   Personal privacy information

(b)(7)   Law enforcement information whose disclosure would:
    (A) interfere with enforcement proceedings
    (B) deprive a person of a fair trial
    (C) constitute an unwarranted invasion of personal privacy
    (D) disclose confidential sources
    (E) disclose investigation techniques
    (F) endanger life or physical safety of an individual

(b)(8)   Prepared by or for a government agency regulating or supervising financial institutions

(b)(9)   Geological and geophysical information and data, including maps, concerning wells

Other Grounds for Withholding

NR   Material not responsive to a FOIA request excised with the agreement of the requester

Center for
Global Studies
Strategy XXI

SYNERGING ENERGIES

RUSSIAN OCTOPUS IN ACTION

CASE "UKRAINE"

Russian Octopus in Action. Case "Ukraine"

On the basis of expert group research under the aegis
of the Centre for Global Studies Strategy XXI and with the support
of the International Renaissance Foundation

INTERNATIONAL
RENAISSANCE
FOUNDATION

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The research discloses the Russian influences, lobbying and subversive activities in
Ukraine in the conditions of the hybrid aggression unleashed by Russia, which has
been going on for the seventh year.

It covers a wide range of issues related to informational influences, propaganda, sys-
tematic long-term activities aimed at creating informal groups of influence, non-gov-
ernmental organizations, the media, and other elements of Russia's extensive network
of influence in society and governmental bodies. The problem of creation and func-
tioning of business structures, which feed the relevant networks and covertly contrib-
ute to the spread of Russian influence in various spheres of public life and at different
levels of the power, is considered.

The publication is intended for a wide range of experts and journalists who study
the topic of nonlinear influences in society and politics.

SYNERGING ENERGIES
Centre for Global Studies / Центр Глобалістики

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– 2020 –

| CONTENTS |

1. RUSSIA'S CRYPTO WAR AGAINST UKRAINE AND EUROPE

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the establishment of independence of the former Soviet Republics, Russia has developed a doctrine of "zones of influence"—similar to the Soviet doctrine of limited sovereignty for the countries of the Communist Camp. According to this doctrine, Ukraine should remain in the zone of influence of the Russian Federation. During the presidency of B. Yeltsin, the implementation of this doctrine was relatively mild, mainly via economic pressure and debt blackmail. Low oil prices and two Chechen campaigns in the North Caucasus narrowed Russia's ability to reincorporate Ukraine and other new independent states in the USSR 2.0, as a continuation of the CIS. With the coming of Vladimir Putin to power and the increase in oil prices and revenues from hydrocarbon exports, the actions in this direction became systematic and severe. New projects for the reintegration of the post-Soviet space—the Common Economic Space, the Eurasian Economic Union and the Customs Union—were only new facades for a USSR 2.0. Attempts to choose a different geopolitical vector—integration into NATO and the EU, were forcefully obstructed. Two examples of such obstruction are Russian aggression against Georgia in 2008 and the ongoing aggression against Ukraine since 2014.

The pinnacle of the art of hybrid war is to launch the mechanism of self-destruction of the country from within, using massive propaganda from outside, and the agents of influence and subversion from within. The life-giving energy in this case is both an existing and additionally created in the course of hybrid aggression conflictogenic potential.

The sector-wide external management network (EMN), created with the involvement of various types of agents and lobbyists shall be specifically mentioned. Their essence and purpose are to create a mechanism for influence and manipulating the highest state leadership, first of all, the Supreme Commander-in-Chief. In the presence of such a mechanism, behaviour that will lead to surrender of the positions without fighting will be imposed on the enemy. According to the Chinese military treatise Sun Tzu – war is a way of trickery and deception. In the case of Ukraine, the contours of external governance were formed along the lines of administrative, energy and special services resources, and proved to be quite efficient.

Russian influence on the situation in Ukraine tends to be comprehensive and monopolistic. Therefore, it is no stranger to any of the socially significant spheres – not only political, financial or energy, but also sports, movies, television, and social networks. And the key strategic goal of this impact is to establish control over the Ukrainian state as a system of the Ukrainian society or the Ukrainian nation organization.

And the defence and security subsystem of the Ukrainian state is the key to such control. After all, if the state does not have the physical ability to resist aggression both from outside and from within, one can dictate any conditions of its own existence: from restrictions on independent foreign policy to requirements on the internal territorial structure fragmentation.

The operational task of the current period, which started in 2019 after the Presidential elections in Ukraine and being solved by the Russian special services, propaganda and the fifth column is a perversely targeted programming of the top state leadership on the peace-making course, creating for such leadership an appropriate informational field and world vision blocking the channels of access to alternative information. The words of the President of Ukraine, heard on the side-lines of the Munich Security Conference 2020 – in my mentality, in my personal culture and in my brain, the war is finished indicate that the enemy is able to achieve this operational goal. This is the result of long-term use of crypto-warfare technologies.

1.1. Crypto-war as it is

In fact, the hybrid war of the Russian Federation against Ukraine was not waged in 2014, but much earlier and it took the form of a crypto-war[1]—a hidden war with the use of non-military tools. On February 20, 2014, this war entered a «hot phase» with the use of a force component, the occupation of Crimea by «green men.»

Before that, a crypto-war coordinated from a single center was waged against Ukraine, the main tools of which were:

- the dependence of Ukrainian strategic enterprises on Russian raw materials or components for production;
- introduction of production technologies with mandatory binding to Russian suppliers;
- the dependence of some enterprises on Russian capital through the provision of loans and other financial instruments;
- the entry of Russian capital into Ukrainian enterprises of strategic importance with their subsequent purchase;
- implementation of Russian software and/or corporate IT services with cloud technologies;

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[1] Crypto-war is a hiden form of gradual, systematic and long term task of harming the enemy in order to maximize the depletion of its potential by the time, when a decision on aggression of the classical or hybrid type is made (Wars XXI: Russia's Polyhybression. Centre for Global Studies Strategy XXI. Kyiv. 2017. P. 38. URL: https://geostrategy.org.ua/en/component/k2/item/1561-kniga-viyni-xxi-poligibresiya-rosiyi).

- purchase of Ukrainian debt securities and concentration of the Ukrainian governmental debts in the Russian entities;
- obtaining commercial and other types of confidential information about the activities of enterprises;
- actions targeted to bring strategic and budget-forming enterprises to bankruptcy;
- introduction of sanctions and restrictions on Ukrainian enterprises in the Russian market;
- introduction of direct and indirect agents of influence in the governing bodies of the Ukrainian strategic state-owned companies, central executive authorities, and the national security and defense sector.

The last listed aspect of crypto-war has been the most typical Russian action towards Ukraine during the entire period since the collapse of the USSR. The goal of this activity is to indirectly transform corporate and state strategies in a particular sector of the economy, security and defense, for the benefit of Russia, through the domestic efforts of the agents of influence. At the present stage, after the change of power in Ukraine in 2019, like in the early 2010s with the coming of V. Yanukovych to power, Russia is mobilizing resistance from within Ukraine to the course of its integration into NATO, using agents of influence.

By definition of Volodymyr Palyvoda[2], **agents of influence are persons who use their position in society, opportunities, power and authority to promote the interests of a foreign state but without unmasking this state**.

Their actions determine the unwillingness of a victim state to organize an external protection against direct aggression at a

> **…agents of influence are persons who use their position in society, opportunities, power and authority to promote the interests of a foreign state but without unmasking this state**.

critical moment and to provide systemic resistance to various types of hybrid aggression as if from within a country. **The tasks of the Russian agents of influence in Ukraine are to create a hidden system of "management" of the power and transform public opinion and attitudes in Russia's favour.**

It should be noted that Russian intelligence services paid special attention to members of the Armed Forces and other law enforcement agencies of Ukraine. The collection

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[2] https://niss.gov.ua/news/statti/agentura-vplivu-yak-instrument-dosyagnennya-geopolitichnikh-ciley-retrospektivniy

of information on military personnel of the Ukrainian Navy, Army and Air Forces of the Armed Forces of Ukraine stationed in Crimea began in 1992. "The Appeal to the people's deputies of Ukraine made by the Parliamentary Group "Derzhavnist" in connection with the consideration of the bills concerning the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, defense and security of Ukraine by the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine" in 1996 stressed: *"The main method of agent work of the GRU and FSB was to infiltrate their agents in the ranks of officers who returned to Ukraine after the collapse of the Soviet Army, and recruiting military personnel who stayed and stay to serve in the Ukrainian territory <...> The most favorable conditions for the work of Russian secret services' agents have developed on the territory of the Crimean Peninsula. This region turned out to be the only place outside Russia where the GRU was able to work openly on a legal basis, relying on the intelligence structures of the Black Sea Fleet, which was allegedly in joint Russian-Ukrainian subordination <...> In General, the work of the Russian special services in Crimea was greatly facilitated by the presence of the agents of the KGB Central apparatus, which, due to the specifics of the region (the presence of a large number of party and state summer houses, sanatoriums, rest homes, etc.), was not subject to and was not known to local state security agencies, which later came under the jurisdiction of Ukraine."*

In parallel, the formation of a powerful network of agents of influence at the highest levels of power was carried out. That culminated in Viktor Yanukovych coming to power. His personnel policy contributed to the movement of agents of influence to the power Olympus. In the context of its crypto-war against Ukraine, the Russian Federation benefits granting preferences through existing or specially initiated business projects to high-level politicians who covertly promote ideas and patronize projects. This has become Russia's mechanism for forming a 'fifth column'.

As the experience of Ukraine and Europe shows, corruption schemes are the most effective in forming agents of influence. Russian opposition leader Harry Kasparov gave an apt description

The tasks of the Russian agents of influence in Ukraine are to create a hidden system of "management" of the power and transform public opinion and attitudes in Russia's favour.

of the Kremlin's modern policy: "Europe failed to export democracy to Russia. But Putin managed to export corruption to Europe"; "Russia's biggest export is not gas or oil, but corruption." And this corruption contributes to the formation of agents of influence. In Europe, the projects of Russian gas streams - Nord Stream and Nord Stream 2 – serve this purpose. Opaque corruption schemes such as Eural Trans Gas and RosUkrEnergo were successfully implemented by the Kremlin in Ukraine in

the early 2000s in exchange for Kyiv's rejection of the course for membership in NATO and the EU. However, that worked only to a certain extent. The 2004 Orange Revolution made its own adjustments, and the course for membership in NATO and the EU was restored. It was interrupted again in 2010 after the Yanukovych came to power. However, in 2014, the Revolution of Dignity restored the status quo.

Russian researcher of Russia's subversive activities abroad, emigrant Dmitry Khmelnitsky points out that an abrupt surge in Russian agents' activity occurred in 2014. Back then, in addition to existing ones, fictitious public organizations with Moscow roots started to massively multiply around the world. "Their goal was absolutely utilitarian: propaganda support for Russia's annexation of Crimea. And since then, it has been growing and growing", he said[3].

After the 2019 elections and the coming of Volodymyr Zelenskyy to power with his politically amorphous group of populist-servile types, Russia is making another attempt to destroy Ukraine by crypto-war methods. This time, the Kremlin is using both Russian special service agents, who were barely touched by the counterintelligence activities of 2014-2019, and agents of influence.

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[3] Khmelnytsky's uprising against Russian agents in the West. Oleg Kudrin. 09.10.2019. URL: https://www.ukrinform.ru/rubric-world/2796302-vosstanie-hmelnickogo-protiv-razrastausejsa-rossijskoj-agentury-na-zapade.html.

1.2. Agents of Russian influence

Agents of influence are among the most effective and stealthiest ways to influence an enemy. In their environment and within society, an agent of influence is perceived as a loyal citizen. The fact that his/her views, which are expressed in private or in public, are sometimes in line with the propaganda efforts of a foreign state is usually mistaken for coincidence. But the harm caused by an agent of influence can be significant, especially if he/she is an official or a recognized authority.

Due to the turbulent events at the beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian war and the complete change of leadership in the national security and defense sector, reasonable conclusions can be made about the high probability of widespread involvement of Russian agents of influence in the state leadership's top ranks. This influence may have rendered Ukraine unable to resist aggression.

Operations using agents of influence are strategic measures designed for years or even decades after the formation of a society's collective consciousness, and sometimes require the extinction of an entire generation. In particular, there were three Russian special operations at the strategic level: "Non-Bloc," "Federalization," and "Democracy". The special operation "Non-Bloc" succeeded in 2010 under President Yanukovych, with the adoption of the Law of Ukraine "On Basic Principles of Foreign and Domestic Policy". It proclaimed and consolidated the non-aligned status of Ukraine. Based on that, the steps were taken to destroy Ukraine's defense potential and disorganize the Armed Forces along with the entire security sector.

Long before the beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian war, the idea that Russians are a "fraternal people" was propagated in Ukraine, and it followed that war with the Russian Federation is impossible because of the common values and special relations between the countries. Historically, in the armies of both countries there were officers who studied together in the same military schools. They were friends and even relatives. At the beginning of the power stage of the conflict, among the personnel of the Armed Forces of Ukraine there was no psychological readiness to use weapons. The perception of the Russian Army as a hostile army that killed Ukrainians came only after the direct attacks on the positions of the Armed Forces of Ukraine from the territory of the Russian Federation in the summer of 2014. Therefore, it is clear that Russian agents of influence achieved their results.

Also, the escape of the leaders of the defense and security sectors of Yanukovych's team to Russia actually unmasked their previous activities, and Russia itself. Partially, the information about their activities was made public during the litigation against former President Viktor Yanukovych, who was convicted of absentia of high treason.

A partial list of key officials of law enforcement structures and departments who have been an engine for the interests of Russia and, assumed by some media, its agents in the government and law enforcement agencies of Ukraine, includes:

-   Head of the Presidential Administration of Ukraine Andrii Kliuyev (during the presidency of Yanukovych, he was Secretary of the National Security and Defence Council of Ukraine, First Deputy Prime Minister of Ukraine, and escaped from Ukraine after the Revolution of Dignity)[4];

-   First Deputy Head of the Presidential Administration of Ukraine Andrii Portnov (from April 2010 to the end of February 2014, he held positions in the Administration of President Viktor Yanukovych, and fled Ukraine, but returned after the elections of 2019)[5] [6];

-   Deputy Secretary of the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine Volodymyr Sivkovych (from October 2010 to December 2013, fled Ukraine)[7];

-   Chairman of the State Security Service of Ukraine, member of the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine, Major-General Oleksandr Yakymenko (January 9, 2013-February 24, 2014; he is hiding in Russia)[8];

-   Counsellor to the President of Ukraine, Colonel-General Igor Kalinin (from January 9, 2013 till February 24, 2014, before that he held the positions of the Chairman of the State Security Service of Ukraine, the Head of the State Security Department of Ukraine; he fled to Russia)[9];

-   First Deputy Chairman of the SSU, Head of the SSU Anti-Terrorist Centre, Major-General Volodymyr Totsky (January 2013-February 2014; he fled to Russia)[10];

-   Chairman of the Foreign Intelligence Service of Ukraine Hryhoriy Illyashov (June 18, 2010-February 27, 2014; he escaped from Ukraine)[11];

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[4] https://censor.net.ua/news/441963/azarov_i_klyuev_ne_agenty_rf_a_raby_sobstvennost_fsb_pashinskiyi

[5] https://myrotvorets.center/criminal/portnov-andrej-vladimirovich/

[6] https://glavcom.ua/country/society/truba-i-portnov-vistupayut-agentami-vplivu-kremlya-advokat-poroshenka-611145.html

[7] https://genshtab.info/%D0%A1%D0%B8%D0%B2%D0%BA%D0%BE%D0%B2%D0%B8%D1%87,_
%D0%92%D0%BB%D0%B0%D0%B4%D0%B8%D0%BC%D0%B8%D1%80_%D0%9B%D0%B5%
D0%BE%D0%BD%D0%B8%D0%B4%D0%BE%D0%B2%D0%B8%D1%87

[8] https://gordonua.com/news/politics/eks-glava-luganskoy-sbu-petrulevich-v-2000-h-godah-byli-pryamye-perevody-iz-fsb-rf-v-sbu-180250.html

[9] https://focus.ua/politics/332609

[10] https://myrotvorets.center/criminal/?cf%5Bname%5D=%D0%A2%D0%BE%D1%86%D1%8C%D0%
BA%D0%B8%D0%B9+%D0%92%D0%BE%D0%BB%D0%BE%D0%B4%D0%B8%D0%BC%D0%
B8%D1%80&cf%5Bcountry%5D=&cf%5Baddress%5D=&cf%5Bphone%5D=&cf%5Bdesc%5D=

[11] https://myrotvorets.center/criminal/?cf%5Bname%5D=%D0%98%D0%BB%D1%8C%D1%8F%D1%8
8%D0%BE%D0%B2+%D0%93%D1%80%D0%B8%D0%B3%D0%BE%D1%80%D0%B8%D0%B9&
cf%5Bcountry%5D=&cf%5Baddress%5D=&cf%5Bphone%5D=&cf%5Bdesc%5D=

-    Minister of Defense, Member of the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine, Member of the Parliament of Ukraine of 3 convocations, Pavlo Lebedev (December 24, 2012-February 27, 2014; he fled to Russia)[12];

-    Ukraine's Ambassador to Belarus, Vice Admiral Mykhailo Yezhel (2013-2015; before that, when V. Yanukovych was a President, he served as a Counsellor to the President of Ukraine from February 2012 till April 2013, and the Minister of Defense of Ukraine from March 2010 till February 8, 2012)[13];

-    Counsellor to the President of Ukraine Dmytro Salamatin (from December 2012 till February 2014; before that he was Minister of Defense of Ukraine, Director General of the Concern Ukroboronprom; he is hiding in Russia)[14];

-    Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, Admiral Yurii Ilyin (February 2014; before that he was Commander of the Ukrainian Navy in 2012-2014; as a deserter and collaborator he defected to Russia, and resides in the occupied Crimea now)[15];

-    Commander of the Ukrainian Navy Rear Admiral Denys Berezovsky (March 2014, before that he held a position of the Deputy Commander of the Navy for combat training - Head of the Combat Training Department; as a deserter and collaborator he defected to Russia, was appointed Deputy Commander of the Black Sea Fleet of the Russian Federation; since 2018, he has served Deputy Commander of the Pacific Fleet of the Russian Federation)[16] [17];

-    First Deputy Commander of the Navy – Chief of Staff Rear Admiral Dmytro Shakuro (as a collaborator he defected to Russia and was appointed Deputy Commander of the Caspian Flotilla of the Russian Navy in July 2014)[18];

-    First Deputy Commander of the Ukrainian Navy, Chief of the Sevastopol Garrison Vice Admiral Sergii Yeliseyev (as a collaborator he defected to the Russian side after the illegal annexation of Crimea, was appointed Deputy

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[12] https://myrotvorets.center/criminal/lebedev-pavel-valentinovich/

[13] https://svoboda-news.com/svwp/%D0%92%D0%BE%D1%94%D0%BD%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D1%8 0%D0%BE%D0%B7%D0%B2%D1%96%D0%B4%D0%BA%D0%B0-%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D1%81 %D0%BB%D1%83%D0%B6%D0%B1%D1%96-%D0%A3%D0%BA%D1%80%D0%B0%D1%97% D0%BD%D1%96/.

[14] https://svoboda-news.com/svwp/%D0%92%D0%BE%D1%94%D0%BD%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D1%8 0%D0%BE%D0%B7%D0%B2%D1%96%D0%B4%D0%BA%D0%B0-%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D1%81 %D0%BB%D1%83%D0%B6%D0%B1%D1%96-%D0%A3%D0%BA%D1%80%D0%B0%D1%97% D0%BD%D1%96/.

[15] https://glavcom.ua/publications/123977-janukovich-kinuv-armiju-proti-narodu-dokumenti-dlja-tribunalu.html

[16] https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/25358689.html.

[17] https://ua.krymr.com/a/yak-u-krymu-zakhoplyuvaly-ostanniy-ukrayinskyy-korabel/30449756.html

[18] https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/news/29027655.html

Commander of the Baltic Fleet of the Russian Navy in the summer of 2014)[19];

- Minister of Internal Affairs, Member of the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine General Vitaliy Zakharchenko (he was in office between November 7, 2011 and February 21, 2014; since February 2014, he has been hiding in Russia)[20];

- Deputy Minister of the Internal Affairs, Chief of the Public Security Police Lieutenant-General Viktor Ratushniak (from March 2010 till March 2014; he escaped to Russia)[21];

- Deputy Chief of Main Department and Chief of Public Safety Militia of the Main Directorate of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine in Kyiv, Police Colonel Petro Fedchuk (from July 2013 till January 2014; he fled to Russia; now he is in the Russian Police)[22].

As the media informed[23], a significant number of individuals from this list have been criminally convicted as organizers of the Maidan shootings. **The attack on Maidan in February 2014 was a FSB operation to further wreak havoc in Ukraine and to distract the public and authorities y from operation to occupy Crimea and Sevastopol.** This was proved when in April 2020, at the request of Western intelligence services, the SBU detained the former head of the SBU Special Operations Center Major General V. Shaitanov, whose name appeared in two episodes of the events in 2014 in Kiev - arson of the House of Trade Unions and shootings on the Maidan on February 20, and who turned out to be an agent of the FSB of the Russian Federation under the pseudonym "Bobyl", the curator of whom was the FSB colonel Igor Yegorov[24].

The level of government positions held by the above-mentioned individuals leads to the conclusion that, **while preparing for aggression against Ukraine, Russia had a near-critical mass of agents of influence, whose activities caused a tempo-**

> **The attack on Maidan in February 2014 was a FSB operation to further wreak havoc in Ukraine and to distract the public and authorities y from operation to occupy Crimea and Sevastopol.**

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[19] https://milnavigator.com.ua/ 2017/07/25/%D1%87%D0%BE%D0%BC%D1%83-%D1%83%D0%B A%D1%80%D0%B0%D1%97% D0%BD%D1%81%D1%8C%D0%BA%D0%B0-%D0%B0%D1 %80%D0%BC%D1%96%D1%8F-%D0%B2 %D1%96%D0%B4%D0%B4%D0%B0%D0%BB%D0 %B0 -%D0%BA%D1%80%D0%B8 %D0%BC-%D0%B1%D0%B5/

[20] https://myrotvorets.center/criminal/zaxarchenko-vitalij-yurevich/

[21] https://tyzhden.ua/News/209358

[22] Ibid.

[23] https://glavcom.ua/publications/123977-janukovich-kinuv-armiju-proti-narodu-dokumenti-dlja-tribunalu.html

[24] https://glavcom.ua/columns/genn_moskal/ganbi-z-agentom-fsb-yakiy-pracyuvav-u-samomu-serci-sbu-moglo-b-i-ne-buti-673527.html

rary power paralysis. This proved insufficient in conquering Ukraine, but managed to seize part of its territory—Crimea, Sevastopol, and parts of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions.

1.3. Destruction of Ukraine's defence potential and undermining its defence capability

According to the testimony of the participants in the litigation in ex-President Yanukovych's case of high treason, the destruction of the Ukrainian Navy began after his election as President. According to the testimony of Commander of the Navy Admiral Igor Teniukh, when Yanukovych came to power in 2010, a personnel sweep was launched in the Armed Forces of Ukraine starting with the Commander of the Navy, the position he held at that time. A month after the dismissal of Admiral Teniukh, the Deputy Commander of the Ukrainian Navy in charge of the coastal defense forces Major-General Oleksandr Ostrovsky was also dismissed. He refused to sign an order to liquidate separate elite units of the Navy Coastal Defense Forces stationed in Crimea. After that, there were replace-

While preparing for aggression against Ukraine, Russia had a near-critical mass of agents of influence, whose activities caused a temporary power paralysis. This proved insufficient in conquering Ukraine, but managed to seize part of its territory – Crimea, Sevastopol, and parts of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions.

ments of battalion commanders of the coastal defense forces and commanders of the Navy ships. It was not a coincidence that all of this happened in Crimea and Sevastopol. Pro-Ukrainian officers and commanders were replaced by Pro-Russian ones. The personnel of the Ukrainian Armed Forces in Crimea was also changed. On October 14, 2013, the Navy already reported that there were no conscripts, and the ships and vessels were completed by contractors, who were mainly from Crimea. Commander of the Ukrainian Navy in 2014-2016 Vice Admiral Serhii Haiduk noted that 80% of the Navy personnel were natives of Sevastopol and the ARC at the beginning of the period of Crimean occupation. Given the prevalence of Russian disinformation and propaganda in Crimea, such a decision led to the loss of Crimea, since it weakened Ukraine's ability to counteract the hybrid threat.

The aforementioned long-term system developments of Russian special services and its local agents were used effectively by Russia in 2014 when the Zero Hour came. Vice Admiral Serhii Haiduk stated: "...There were many examples when the unit commanders, for example, the Commander of the Feodosia Marine Battalion, were told in plain text: "You live at that address, you've got a wife at home, and your child goes to that school. Aren't you afraid for your family? Make the right decision." "The right decision" meant going over to Russia's side. Only 3,991 of 13,468 soldiers in Crimea remained loyal to their oath and did not go over to the enemy.

In 2017, Member of the Parliament of Ukraine and Coordinator of the Information Resistance Group Dmytro Tymchuk (already deceased) published statistics on the number of Ukrainian law enforcement employees who defected to the Russian Federation during the occupation of Crimea, and those who remained loyal to Ukraine and went to the mainland after the annexation of the Peninsula by Russia.

On March 1, 2014, the Internal Troops of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine numbered 2,489 military personnel in Crimea. 1,398 military personnel came to the mainland. That is, the percentage of those who defected to Russia was 44%.

As of March 1, 2014, there were 13,468 military personnel (4,637 officers, 8,831 soldiers and sergeants) in the Ukrainian Armed Forces stationed on the territory of the Crimean Peninsula. Only 3,991 (1,649 officers, 2,342 soldiers and sergeants) of them went to the mainland. Thus, 70.4% of the personnel of the Armed Forces of Ukraine actually defected to the side of the aggressor-country.

As of March 1, 2014, the Security Service of Ukraine in Crimea and Sevastopol counted 1,619 military personnel, including 1,235 officers and 384 contractors in all divisions, agencies and institutions. 217 of them went to the mainland, including

210 officers and 7 contractors. The percentage of traitors in the SSU was the highest among all law enforcement agencies – 86.4%.

These figures are largely the result of HR policies implemented at the level of the Central government, the long-term work of Russian agents in Crimea, and the agents of influence in Kyiv. The Former Representative of the President of Ukraine in the ARC, PhD in law Borys Babin also points out the little-known decision of the Ukrainian authorities of the time of Viktor Yanukovych regarding the functioning of separate SSU divisions. This decision in October-November 2013, before the Revolution of Dignity, terminated the existence of the interregional Directorate of Military Counterintelligence of the SSU in the ARC and the city of Sevastopol, stationed therein. It is obvious that this Department was responsible for the state of the Armed Forces of Ukraine in the Crimea and, accordingly, for their ability to counteract the Russian bribery and provocation.

The personnel sweep in the Armed Forces of Ukraine and, especially, in the Navy, was performed personally by Defense Minister Mykhaylo Yezhel, former Commander of the Ukrainian Navy. Two other former Defense Ministers Pavlo Lebedev and Dmytro Salamatin unreasonably reduced the Armed Forces of Ukraine from 180 thousand to 160 thousand people. In 2012, Lebedev announced reduction plans under which the Armed Forces of Ukraine had to be reduced to 60 thousand people by the end of 2015. At the same time, the same Chairs of the Defense Ministry liquidated the military commissariats (recruiting centers).

Another Russian agent Dmytro Salamatin specialized in undermining the position of the Ukrainian defense industry in the world markets of armament and military techniques. In 2010-2012, he was Director-General of the State Concern Ukroboronprom and Minister of Defense from February 8, 2012 till December 24, 2012. According to the message of the Prosecutor General of Ukraine Yurii Lutsenko dated January 14, 2019, "former Minister of Defense of Ukraine D. A. Salamatin was under the suspicion of the Department of International Legal Cooperation of the GPOU for participation in a criminal organization of Viktor Yanukovych, misappropriation of other property in especially large sizes by abuse of his office and committing treason in the interests of the Russian Federation, undermining the defense capabilities, state and economic security of Ukraine by committing intentional actions aimed at ousting of Ukraine with the world armament markets in favor of Russia. Only the deliberate actions of Salamatin to break the contract between the state-owned enterprise A.A. Morozov Kharkiv Design Bureau for Mechanical Engineering, the State Enterprise Antonov and the state enterprise Progress, from one side, and the Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Iraq, from another side, for the supply, repair and maintenance of military equipment led to losses of 560 million USD for Ukraine."

The agents of Russian influence in the defense and security sector of the state have been accused of high treason and can be considered not only agents of influence, but also direct agents of Russian special services. If the state security system functioned in normal conditions, none of them would have been placed into key positions, and some of them would not even receive Ukrainian citizenship. But all this was made possible by a decision at the political level. Agents of influence among politicians deliberately promoted and appointed direct agents of the Russian Federation to key positions and did not interfere with their activities, which were destructive to the national interests of Ukraine. Therefore, the destruction of the state's security and defense systems was the result of the long-term interactions between the already exposed agents of the aggressor-state and new agents of influence, who acted or continued to act under the cover of legal political and social activity in Ukraine.

A lot of important information was made public during the work of the Temporary Investigative Commission of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine to investigate theft in the Ukrainian Armed Forces and the undermining of the state's defense capabilities in 2004-2017. The striking period of the presidency of V. Yanukovych (2010-2014) was one of the most difficult periods in the Ukrainian Armed Forces' functioning. The Heads of the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine and the Command of the Armed Forces of Ukraine ignored basic provisions in the theory of military art and the experience of previously achieved reforms in the Armed Forces of Ukraine.

The first stage of that period (2010-2011) was characterized by the disbanding of the Joint Operational Command (JOC) and The Command of the Ukrainian Support Forces. It was proved that the disbanding of the JOC almost destroyed the operational and strategic level of the Armed Forces of Ukraine's structure and disorganized management of the state defense at the operational and strategic level. The absence of the JOC became one of the main issues of the organization of defense of the territorial integrity of Ukraine in 2014. As a result of the disbanding of the JOC, the Armed Forces of Ukraine were deprived of a military management body that would be able to form joint groups of troops (forces), organize training, plan and successfully conduct operations of the specified groups.

The research found that in early 2014, the mobility of military groups of the Armed Forces at the strategic and operational levels was completely paralysed. In 2014, the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine had to hastily form the so-called Anti-Terrorist Operation Headquarters on the territory of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions (to some extent it was an analogue of the Joint Operational Command), which acquired operational capabilities to manage a multi-service and interdepartmental grouping of troops already in the course of hostilities.

The Expert Commission concluded that the disbandment of the Command of the Support Forces of the Ukrainian Armed Forces led to the loss of centralized management of the system of comprehensive support and supply for the Armed Forces of Ukraine in peacetime and during preparation and conduct of operations. The lack of the centralized management of the system of logistics and operational support in the future led to disorganization of the provision of troops. This prompted the spontaneous development of a volunteer movement in the initial period of the use of the Armed Forces against illegal armed formations in Donetsk and Luhansk and against the Russian forces in 2014.

The second stage (2012) is characterized by the disorganization of the state's air defense system of, the revision of the military-administrative division of Ukraine, and groundless changes in the system of mobilization and planning for the transfer of the Armed Forces of Ukraine to the so-called "three-level management system"—which in fact created conditions for a critical imbalance of the control system of the forces during operations. The actions were planned and carried out without considering the requirements of the laws of Ukraine, resolutions of the Cabinet of Ministers and other legislative acts. Currently, the structural units of the Ministry of Defense, General Staff, military research institutions and commands of the Armed Forces started a gradual transition to the development of specific interim guidelines for the so-called "legalization" of the decisions of the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine and the Armed Forces Command, which did not conform to the laws of Ukraine, the theory of the military art and the experience of wars and military conflicts. These decisions, made by the Chairs of the Ministry of Defense and the General Staff in 2012, subsequently adversely affected the organization of counteraction to the occupation of Crimea and the Eastern territories of Ukraine.

The creation of a separate operational command in Crimea, which resulted in the transfer of all military units stationed on its territory to the command of the Navy, was disorganizing in nature. That disrupted the functioning of the unified air defense, territorial defense and mobilization control systems, and deprived the commanders of the armed forces of Ukraine of the option to influence the implementation of target tasks for groups of troops (forces) of the Armed Forces of Ukraine on the territory of Crimea.

*The third stage* (2013-2014) is characterized by the completion of the disbandment of the army corps, as the basis for the tactical-level structure of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, disruption of command and control system at all levels - from the brigades to the entire Armed Forces of Ukraine (except for the Air Forces of Ukraine). The third stage of the military system "development" is characterized by an attempt to

artificially distribute the Armed Forces of Ukraine in peacetime into three separate commands made by the organizers of defense planning. They had to be formed according to the interdepartmental and territorial principle, under the leadership of the respective commanders.

In fact, the leadership of the Ministry of Defense during Yanukovych's Presidency and the leadership of the General Staff adopted and implemented decisions that made a single command center weak. The southern control zone was in Crimea, and in fact, the forces on the territory of the Crimean Peninsula were not subordinate to the Command of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, but were under the Navy Command. The Eastern zone coincides with what Russian propaganda called "Novorossiya" and was cleared of the main Ukrainian military units in the second half of the 2000s. That zone became easy prey for illegal armed groups, and then for regular units of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation. Two formations (in Lubny and Artemivsk (Bakhmut) were disbanded, and three brigades were located at a distance of 200 to 500 km from each other (in Chernihiv, Kharkiv and Dnipropetrovsk regions). This did not allow organizing at least some defence in the Eastern direction. Against the background of such demilitarization, the military storages in Artemivsk (Bakhmut) contained a large number of weapons and military equipment. According to the Kremlin's plan, they had to be a source of weapons for Russian intelligence and sabotage groups and illegal armed formations to prove the Russian narrative of the "civil war". The Western zone covered the territory of Western and Central Ukraine.

As a result of Russian agents' long-term influence both in Kyiv and in Crimea, at the beginning of the Crimean campaign Moscow was confident that Ukraine would not dare to resist the interventionists. To prevent such resistance, a set of measures was carried out, starting from open psychological pressure on the top state leaders to inside actions through various channels of influence on primarily top politicians. This influenced decision-making and led to a virtual paralysis of power.

Published verbatim at the meeting of the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine on February 28, 2014, is an eloquent confirmation that the leadership of Ukraine and the leaders of political forces, which were in power after Yanukovych's escape, held the position of avoiding resistance to the aggressor. That was most clearly shown in the speech of the leader of the parliamentary faction "Batkivshchyna" led by Yulia Tymoshenko, who was present at the meeting of the National Security and Defense Council: "No tank should leave the barracks; no soldier should raise their weapons, because this will mean losing. No martial law and activation of our troops! We must become the most peaceful nation on the planet, and just behave like the doves of peace…"
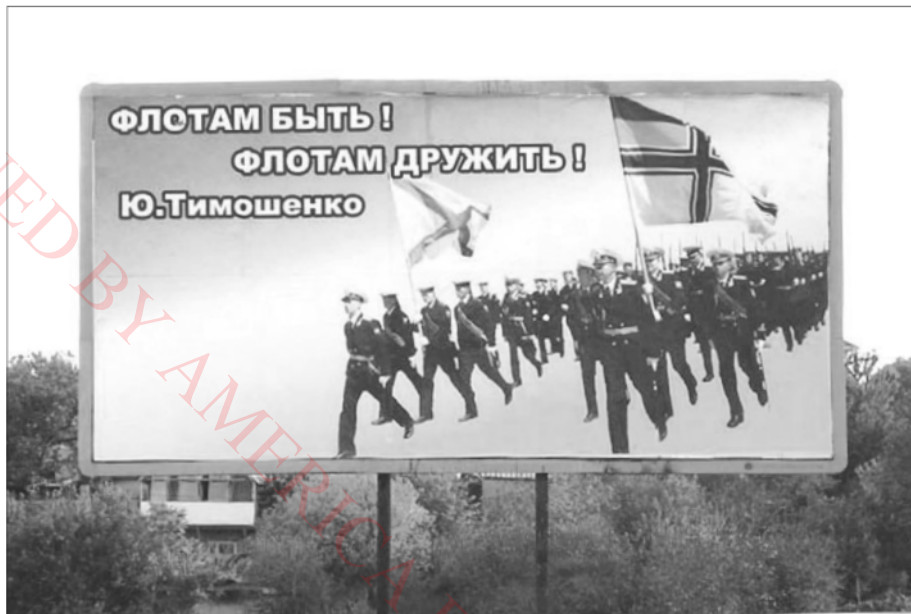
The phrase on the poster: "The fleets must exist! The fleets must cooperate!" – Y. Tymoshenko.

Former Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine Colonel-General Volodymyr Zamana, in his reflections on February 29, 2020, noted: "If the SSU declassified all agents of influence of the FSB in Ukraine, and especially among those who held the highest state positions, we would see a reason why the NSDC made that decision then."

1.4. Relegalization of agents of influence

The lustration mechanism introduced during the presidency of Petro Poroshenko was extremely imperfect and it was criticized from different sides. According to the Law of Ukraine "On Lustration", meant the prevention of participation in governance for those who, by their decisions, actions, or omissions contributed to the implementation of measures aimed at the usurpation of power by Viktor Yanukovych, blasting bases of national security and defense of Ukraine, and the unlawful violation of the rights and freedoms of individuals. The law introduced a ban on holding certain positions for 10 years by persons who, in the period from February 25, 2010 (the beginning of the presidency of Yanukovych) until February 22, 2014, held certain public positions for a period of a year or more. The application of this imperfect law did not lead to a significant cleansing of power.

After the presidential and parliamentary elections in 2019, when a new power configuration was formed in Ukraine with an extremely low level of professionalism, loss of institutional memory, and favoritism in the selection of personnel, the conditions were set for the re-legalization of agents of influence and their penetration into the authorities. A certain number of fugitives of the Yanukovych regime returned to Ukraine. Persons who held responsible positions and lost them due to lustration were appointed to new positions in state agencies. A striking example is the appointment of

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a new Head of Economic Crime Combating Department in the SSU (must generally be eliminated in the reform of the SSU)—Major-General Anatoly Kaluzhniak, who among other heads of the Security Service was accused of involvement in the FSB-guided Maidan shootings in February 2014. The former Chair of the Security Service of Ukraine Valentin Nalyvaichenko noted that there were grounds to believe that groups of Russian FSB employees participated in the planning and implementation of the so-called "anti-terrorist operation" in Kyiv during mass protests in February 2014. The FSB of the Russian Federation admitted that its employee Major-General Sergei Beseda was in Kyiv on February 20-21. Kaluzhniak denies the charges. However, the fact that a person with a poor reputation and an unclear past was appointed to a responsible position in the SSU when he did not have to be appointed is indicative. According to media reports, he "coincidentally" turned out to be a long-time friend of Zelenskyy from school. Therefore, he was appointed to the SSU.

The former Secretary of the National Security Council of Ukraine, Academician Volodymyr Horbulin warned about it in 2019, shortly before the start of the election campaigns, clearly fully justifies. "**The danger is that among potential candidates for a President and future candidates for MPs there are obvious or latent agents of Russian influence, for whom Russia is trying to create the required conditions for victory,**" he noted in his article.

This is reflected in the post-electoral public activation of some politicians and officials of the Pro-Russian regime at the time of Yanukovych. According to the authors, former Deputy Head of the APU A. Portnov, ex-Minister of Justice O. Lucash and a former MP O. Bondarenko symbolize a Pro-Russian and anti-Western policy, disguised as concern for national interests and an attempt to influence the administration of V. Zelenskyy to persuade him to capitulate to Russia and turn Ukraine

geopolitically to Russia. As a rule, the media and political activity of Pro-Russian activists are carried out under the aegis of the Opposition Platform, headed by Yuri Boyko, Minister in M. Azarov's Government, and the proxy platform "Ukrainskyi Vybir", chaired by Viktor Medvedchuk. The Ukrainsky Vybir promotes the idea of the "real people power" through the adoption of the lobbied by them Law On All-Ukrainian and Local Referendums on People's Initiative, the federal structure of Ukraine, changing the vector of foreign economic integration and the resumption of trade and economic cooperation with the Russian Federation and the CIS countries.

The immutability of the Russian priorities in the crypto-war against Ukraine within the country is also evidenced by the fact that the idea of direct democracy continued to advance after the change of the

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leadership in Ukraine in 2019. Only its provider has changed. Now it is the leadership of the Parliament, forming a corresponding package of the bills. In other words, all their tasks are included in the system of the above-mentioned three Russian special operations at the strategic level – "Non-Bloc", "Federalization" and "People's Power", the purpose of which is to dilute Ukraine, the dysfunction of its power, and transformation of the country into a zone of chaos in Europe, and this has been actualized and pushed through by the agents of influence in the Parliament. Only the sequence of actions has been changed. At the time of President Yanukovych, the law "On the basics of internal and foreign policy" was adopted in the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, and the law fixed the non-bloc status of Ukraine. On the contrary, when Poroshenko was a President, Russia tried to federalize Ukraine. Later, while Zelenskyy is a President, the bet was made on pushing "direct people power" to solve positively for Russia the issue of Ukraine's rejection of the European and Euro-Atlantic integration courses, and the transformation of the country from a unitary to a federal one, and in fact an amorphous confederation. A number of political and public organizations and associations represent the public roof of the activities of agents of influence, and media resources controlled by certain Russian oligarchic groups serve as a platform for mass misinformation and manipulation of the proposed major changes in legislation that can lead to the dismantling of the Ukrainian state.

1.5. Some conclusions

The best way to protect the state from the activities of agents of influence is a consistent and systematic unmasking of any detected manipulation, and providing citizens constant access to reliable information. Agents of influence do not steal state secrets like intelligence agencies, but instead they influence public opinion and consequently impact political decisions. Therefore it is difficult for counterintelligence agencies to collect evidence that could be presented in a court. An agent of influence can also impact political decision-making in the role of counsellor, expert, public activist or accuser journalist. In all these cases, he/she acts indirectly. And it is also possible to indirectly counteract its activities (counterintelligence) through public unmasking and refutation by other representatives of the professional environment, state or non-state organizations.

It is much more difficult to counteract the destructive activities of direct agents. They make managerial decisions on their own behalf, but usually under opaque political cover, and sometimes under direct political guidance. Therefore, counterintelligence work against them is rather complicated because of political influences. Mature states with strong counterintelligence agencies virtually do not allow direct foreign agents, especially from hostile states, to penetrate the political level. In Ukraine the situation is different. We've witnessed a whole galaxy of direct Russian agents and its gradual penetration, first in Ukrainian society, then in public space and the parliamentary hall, and finally in top government positions in national security and defense. But such operations are not fast; they require time for implementation and deployment, they demand means and resources. Recovering mass consciousness from aggression also does not happen quickly; it is also an inertial system. Such strategic-level operations are initiated at the moment of a democratic change of power in the victim country. It is at this time that both Russian agents of influence and direct agents of the special services of the aggressor-country can appear through the mechanism of elections and waves of appointments at the political level. Therefore, it is necessary to carefully monitor the appointments in the field of national security and defense, and remember that all agents will not show themselves immediately. It is important that they appear ahead of the game because this would destroy the strategic plans of the special services to use them. A good method of de-masking can be an open game on the part of the civil society: direct questions, maximum truth, and an unbiased presentation of facts. When an agent of Russian influence realizes that he is unmasked, he either curtails all activities or openly switches to the pro-Russian political camp.

Ideally, a broad information campaign must be launched to protect society from Russian influence through public awareness of Russian agents' activities. **Civil society organizations should develop and implement internal ethical rules and procedures for their activities aimed at preventing the aggressor's agents from using them to increase internal influence in Ukraine or destabilize the situation.**

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2. FEEDING BUSINESS SCHEMES OF RUSSIAN INFLUENCE IN UKRAINE

2.1. Energy doping

2.1.1. RUE Group

As already noted, the most typical actions in forming a systemic long-term influence on the country's policy are the explicit or implicit preferences in business granted to those politicians who promote ideas beneficial to the leadership of the Russian Federation. In 2005-2012, the most striking example was the Group of Firtash-Boyko-Lyovochkin – RosUkrEnergo Group. It gained control over the gas market, a significant part of the chemical industry, the titanium industry, and the assets in the media. Corruption of top state officials in energy resources supply schemes is an effective mechanism for influencing them. It creates appropriate dependencies, through which the adoption of certain decisions at the state level to form the country's foreign and internal policy can be influenced.

After 2014, when Dmytro Firtash came to the focus of attention of the American justice system and was restricted in freedom of movement in Austria, and after Ukraine stopped Russian gas imports in November 2015, the channels of RUE influence ceased to be effective in promoting Russian influence on the top state leadership of Ukraine. However, Firtash's group still has a significant business potential. His Group DF consolidated the assets in the gas distribution sector, buying regional gas distribution companies in Ukraine. They operate under the Regional Gas Company LLC (RGC) brand. However, the key role belongs to Gaztech PJSC, a private joint-stock company established in 2005. Five legal entities own five or more per cent of shares in Gaztech: four Cypriots companies include Porala Venchers Limited (24%), Pasler Enterprises Limited (15%), Nesiba Venchers Limited (24%), and Krezer Holdings Limited (24%). The fifth one is Amset LLC (9%) from Kyiv. Gaztech's main activities are business management and business and management consulting.

Gaztech PJSC owns the stakes in Lvivgaz PJSC, Mykolaivgaz PJSC, Ivano-Frankivskgaz PJSC, Sevastopolgaz PJSC, Dnipropetrovskgaz PJSC, Zaporizhgaz PJSC, Luhanskgaz PJSC, Vinnytsiagaz PJSC, Chernivtsigaz PJSC, Volyngaz PJSC, Zhytomyrgaz PJSC, Tysmenytsiagaz PJSC, Sumygaz PJSC, Krymgaz PJSC, and Khmelnytskygaz PJSC[25].

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[25] http://gaztek.prat.ua/
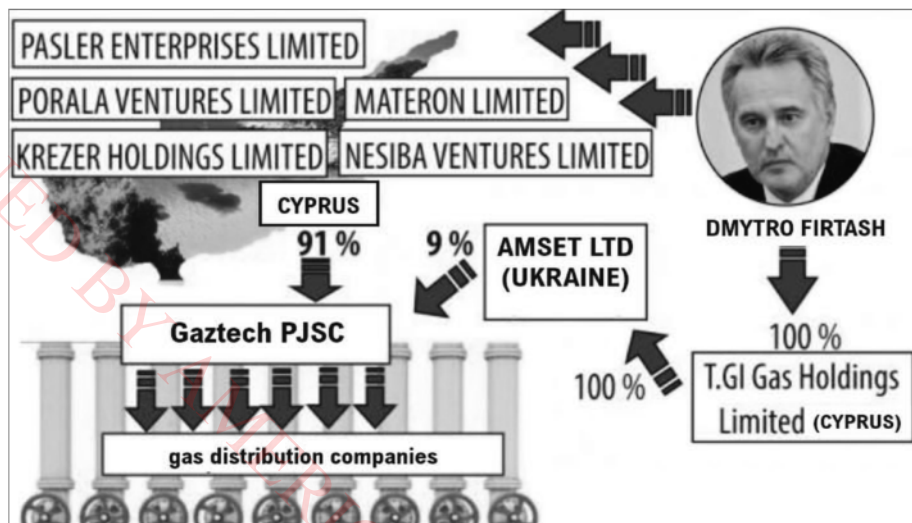
Fig. 1. Offshore scheme of the Gaztech's property.

Gaztech had three employees. The Regional Gas Company (RGC) is engaged in management consulting in the gas distribution sector. Twenty gas distribution companies operate under the RGC brand[26]. The ultimate beneficiary of both companies is D. Firtash[27].

He also has dominant position in the chemical industry of Ukraine. His lobbying potential has allowed him maintaining a scheme of supplying strategically important for the Russian defence industry ilmenite raw materials from Ukrainian sources through primary processing facilities and production of titanium dioxide in occupied Crimea. It is despite Russian aggression and bypassing sanctions. Due to this, the largest Russian producer of titanium products, the metallurgical VSMPO-AVISMA, continued supplies to the leading manufacturer of armaments and military equipment of the Russian Federation – Rostech Corporation.

2.1.2. MedvedChekists

Viktor Medvedchuk and his entourage receive the primary attention from Russia. These political and business groups are gradually gaining influence in the largest opposition force and have increased their media assets. Because of the sanctions

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[26] https://104.ua

[27] https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2017/05/25/7144986/, https://zn.ua/energy_market/kak-v-ukrainegazom-torguyut-_.html.https://www.epravda.com.ua/rus/publications/2016/04/5/588187/

imposed against him by the United States V.Medvedchuk almost does not own any business personally. His wife Oksana Marchenko and long-time partner Taras Kozak have a fairly powerful business, which would be impossible without the assistance of the Russian leadership.

The authorized capital of the companies, which are directly or indirectly associated with the family circle of V. Medvedchuk, today amounts to about UAH 3 billion. According to the media, this circle includes Ukrcapital, Sport-tour, Terra-Invest, Harmony, Galician Agricultural Company, Landras-Agro, Galagrobusiness MZ, Galychyna-Organic and PSP Oscar, MBK Agrotechnika and others. The activities of half a dozen companies are questionable. A number of agricultural firms, in particular Galician Agricultural Company, Landras-Agro, Galagrobusiness MZ, Galichina-Organic and PSP Oscar have the signs of fictitious and seem established for the sake of tax evasion. It is important that these companies "swallowed" significant amounts from other business structures of the family circle.

To create a business chain for funding of the Pro-Russian forces in Ukraine, Moscow decided to use the supply of petroleum products, since 4/5 of their consumption is provided by imports from Russia and Belarus. Therefore, since 2014, the shares of five Russian companies, including Novoshakhtinsky Petroleum Plant, Trade Oil Refinery, South Energo, NZNP Trading House and Rosewood Shipping are owned by the Cyprus offshore Ventolor Investment Limited. The final beneficiary is hidden behind a chain of offshore companies. According to media conclusions, the final beneficiary is Oksana Marchenko, the wife of V. Medvedchuk.

Novoshakhtinsky Petroleum Plant in the Rostov region cannot be called the largest player in the industry, but its revenues have grown steadily in the last few years. For example, at the end of 2017, net profit increased by 3.6 times. In that year, all five companies, co-owned by offshore companies close to Medvedchuk and Kazak, earned 6 billion rubles in total. The plant also received subsidies from the local authorities of the Rostov region.

O. Marchenko is the sole owner of the Cyprus-based Tumillon Investments ltd., which through other Cypriot companies owns 51.1% stake in the Russian NZNP Trade. The latter won a competition for the right to produce oil at the Gavrikovske field in the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous District. Its estimated reserves exceeded 40 million tons. It is important that in the competition for oil production at this field, the private NZNP Trade bypassed the state Rosneft due to its conditions. According to them, only companies from the Rostov region could participate in the competition. And in this area, there was only one firm - NZNP Trade. It is unlikely that such a competition could take place without approval from the top leadership of the Russian Federation. The co-founder of NZNP Trade is Natalia Lavreniuk, who is considered a civil wife of Deputy of the Verkhovna Rada Taras Kozak.

In 2015, the Swiss International Trading Partners AG obtained control over PrykarpatZakhidTrans oil product pipeline for the least expensive and most commercially profitable pipeline supply of diesel fuel to Ukraine. The acquisition of the asset could not be carried out without approval at the highest level in Moscow, as its owner was a Russian state-owned operator of the oil transportation system - Transneft. At the time, Transneft gained control over the Ukrainian asset, which was acquired after the collapse of the USSR. Back in 2014, the PrykarpatZakhidTrans pipeline was the property of the state of Ukraine. However, in 2015, Transneft obtained control over the pipeline through the court. The Antimonopoly Committee approved the acquisition. In the fall of 2016, the pipeline was commissioned. For this, the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine bought old and low-quality diesel fuel in the pipe, so that the owners of the pipeline could transport new fuel from Russia via the pipeline. Immediately after the purchase of the oil pipeline, Russia lifted the embargo on the supply of diesel fuel to Ukraine. Later in 2019, PrykarpatZakhidTrans came under the control of the Belarusian Neftebitumen Plant, which became the owner of 51% of the shares of PrykarpatZakhidTrans. The remaining 49% were held by the Swiss International Trading Partners (48%) and 1% - by Anatoly Schaefer, who manages it.

In 2016, the Swiss company Glusco Energy S. A. bought Rosneft's network of gasoline stations in Ukraine. Rosneft owned a network of 141 gasoline stations in 12 regions of Ukraine that previously belonged to TNK-BP. Glusco Energy S. A. was

affiliated to the Swiss oil trader Proton Energy Group. The Director of Proton Energy Group S. A. and Glusco Energy S. A. is the same person - Nisan Moiseev. Information about the final beneficiaries of these companies is not disclosed. However, given the friendly relations between Moiseev and Medvedchuk, one can assume that they come from the latter's surrounding. Glusco Energy was created specifically for retail. It registered a subsidiary company in Ukraine, Glusco Energy Ukraine, which entered the domestic market a year later. Deliveries from Russia in 2018 provided 40% of the Ukrainian diesel fuel market - 2.6 million tons.

Taras Kozak is also a minority owner of the scandalous tobacco monopoly in the distribution of cigarettes - Tedis Ukraine (previously called Megapolis). Control over the shares in Tedis was provided through a chain of two Cypriot firms - Havanor Management Limited and Turul Investments Limited. According to public data, Tedis Ukraine is known not only by the fact that during Yanukovych times it acquired a monopoly on the supply of cigarettes in Ukraine, but also by the fact that one of the majority owners from Russia is Igor Kesaev, who simultaneously owns a small arms plant in Kovrov and is a supplier for the Russian Armed Forces.

Medvedchuk's encirclement is also present in the supply of coal from the occupied territories. Thus, in 2014, the list of coal suppliers from the occupied areas of Donbas to the TPPs of Centrenergo PJSC included the Hong Kong-registered company Arida Global Ltd., which is associated with Medvedchuk.

Additionally, an important business segment was the sale of liquefied natural gas, becoming increasingly popular in Ukraine. At the end of 2016, traditional importers of liquefied gas started to experience problems. Due to the actions of the SSU, the Ministry of Economic Development and the Customs, its import was stopped. At the same time, there were firms that started the import of large volumes of liquefied gas from Russia. Experts note that the actions of the SSU were synchronized with the actions of the Russian control authorities. The Customs Service together with the SSU put pressure on liquefied gas importers. In Russia, the Federal Export Control Service has identified Proton, a subsidiary of Glusco, as a single exporter of Rosneft's resources. After that, LNG shipments from 4 companies, which had not previously been seen importing large volumes of liquefied gas, were placed on the Ukrainian Energy Exchange. They were Glusco Ukraine, Creative Trading, Wexler Global LP (UK) and Gikka Limited (British Virgin Islands). All four companies offered liquefied gas produced by Rosneft to Ukrainian consumers.

Despite strong political and media support from Moscow, in 2019, attempts to restore gas business with Gazprom and simultaneous imposition of the Russian vision of the transit contract and the future of Ukraine's GTS ended by the failure of Kremlin's and Medvedchuk-Boyko puppet political tandem.

Visits of the leadership of the political party Opposition Platform - For Life (Ukr: Опозиційна платформа - За життя) to Russia, meetings with A. Miller, D. Medvedev and V. Putin and the fake "gas talks"[28], even not authorized, could have a completely different purpose. It was possible that they tried to help Gazprom to save the funds, which it had to pay to Naftogaz according to the decisions of the Stockholm Arbitration, and convert them into gas supplies to Ukraine under a profitable business scheme that should have become a legal basis for long-term funding of political forces.

If we analyze the creation and development of the Opposition Platform – For Life (OPZZh), we can reasonably assume that a significant part of the resources, obtained under the schemes described above, were used for the activities of this particular political force. In addition, the implementation of the abovementioned schemes, besides direct economic damage, significantly undermines the economic potential of Ukraine itself, from the economic security standpoint.

The less noticeable, but persistent activity of another MP of several convocations of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine – Andrii Derkach, a graduate of the Academy of the Ministry of Security of the Russian Federation in 1993 and the author of a thesis "Organizing and conducting meetings with secret agents" – is also striking. His activity in Ukraine at various times was associated with both the armament business and

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[28] https://www.facebook.com/yuriy.vitrenko/posts/10156706175123458.http://zagittya.com.ua/news/ novosti/lidery_oppozicionnoj_platformy_l_za_zhizn_proveli_vstrechu_s_premerlministrom_rf_ dmitriem_medvedevym_i_rukovodstvom__edinoj_rosssii__.html

the media sphere. It has also been related to the energy sector, starting with the oil transshipment in Odesa and ending with Energoatom NNEC and Ukratomprom State Concern, which he chaired in 2006-2007, combining the duties in the company with parliamentary activities.

The political trajectory of A. Derkach has passed through various political forces. However, at one or another level, they were connected with the "parties at power." This once again indicates the intention to influence the certain decisions. Energoatom NNEC is now the focus of attention for A. Derkach's group in terms of delegating people from his inner circle to the company. According to the algorithm of the agents' work, they must ensure the necessary transformation of the state-owned company towards its cooperation with Russia. In particular, this is done to minimize the procurement of nuclear fuel from an alternative supplier (Westinghouse Company) and restore the status quo of a monopoly supplier for Russian TVEL company.

Now there is an increased activity of MPs' group, seeking to change the legislation of Ukraine and restrict the participation of the foreign citizens in the supervisory boards. First of all, this relates to Naftogaz of Ukraine NJSC, which has painfully stricken the Russian Gazprom in the International Arbitration in Stockholm, demanding from the Russian company almost 3 billion USD. In fact, this achievement of the Ukrainian company became possible due to the change in the corporate governance system and the emergence of a Supervisory Board with independent Directors. The bill "On

amendments to certain legislative acts on ensuring equal rights and opportunities for citizens in regard to representation in supervisory boards and management bodies of the state unitary enterprises, companies and state banks and fair formation and effective operation of such supervisory boards taking into account the national interests of Ukraine" appeared in March 2020 in the Ukrainian Parliament upon submission of A. Derkach and O. Dubinsky. The appearance of such bill can probably be seen as a reaction of the pro-Russian parliamentary lobby to the February statements of the Naftogaz management on the preparation of new multi-billion-dollar lawsuits against Gazprom, which, among other, includes compensation for losses of Naftogaz due to Gazprom actions in the RosUkrEnergo scheme. All this reflects the desire of both the Russian monopolist and its Ukrainian lobbyists (the RUE Group) to strike Naftogaz from within with the hands of the agents of influence and at least to block the appearance of the new claims in the Stockholm Arbitration. At most it aims to completely change the management of the state company to be loyal to Gazprom, as it was before the reform in the gas sector in 2015, which became possible only after the Revolution of Dignity.

Thus, one can conclude that a revanchist attack on the state-owned enterprises aimed at restoration of control over them by pro-Russian groups and the dependence of the Ukrainian energy industry on Russia, as well as isolation of the national companies from cooperation with American and European partners, is currently seen in the national energy sector.

2.2. Financial injector

2.2.1. Direct Russian investment in Ukraine after the Revolution of Dignity

The activity of Russian capital in Ukraine during 2014-2019 occurred in conditions of high political risks, which abruptly increased after the occupation and annexation of Crimea by Russia and Russian invasion in Donbas. In this regard, political lobbying has become an integral element of the management strategy of Russian capital in Ukraine seeking to hold positions, minimize damages and pushing its interests forward.

In General, the presence of Russian capital in Ukraine has significantly reduced in the five years

> *…a revanchist attack on the state-owned enterprises aimed at restoration of control over them by pro-Russian groups and the dependence of the Ukrainian energy industry on Russia, as well as isolation of the national companies from cooperation with American and European partners, is currently seen in the national energy sector.*

that passed after the Revolution of Dignity. At the same time, this retreat was accompanied by a strategic regrouping into positions that allow more or less successful manoeuvring, especially based on the lobbying opportunities in Ukraine. In addition to the classical lobbying tools, the deficiencies of the political and legislative field of Ukraine (including lobbying sphere itself) allow Russian entities getting the maximum benefits and influences with limited resources. Thriving corruption and incompetence at many levels of the state power, especially after the presidential and parliamentary elections of 2019, forms an especially favourable ground for this.

The influence of Russian financial interests on the Ukrainian banking and financial sphere today is determined not so much by their specific weight in the economic system of Ukraine, but by the direction of their application. The effect of financial activity is multiplied by its connection with politics and its organizational capabilities. The financial influence of Russia on the Ukrainian banking and financial system is carried out, in particular, through:

- the channels of influential Ukrainian industry lobbies, which additionally benefit from the specifics of the industry distribution of financial transactions of Russian entities in Ukraine, including the financial sector;
- the balancing policies of financial institutions, in particular the concentration of assets in the currency and interbank segments of the financial market;
- combination of financial and political capital, and stimulation of political activity of the main beneficiaries of pro-Russian financial and economic institutions of Ukraine;
- pressure on the financial authorities due to the expanded presence in the financial and investment sphere of Ukraine.

In the first quarter of 2019, at the peak of the presidential campaign in Ukraine, Russia dramatically strengthened its positions as one of the leading investors in the financial and insurance sector of Ukraine, after only Austria and Cyprus. According to the State Statistics Service of Ukraine, the volume of Russian investment in this sector reached USD 403.5 million before 01.04.2019. It amounted to about 10.4% of all foreign investment in this sector. In the Q1 2019, the share of Russian investments in the finance and insurance sector in Ukraine increased from 48.8% to 58.1% of the total investments of Russian entities in Ukraine (Fig. 2).
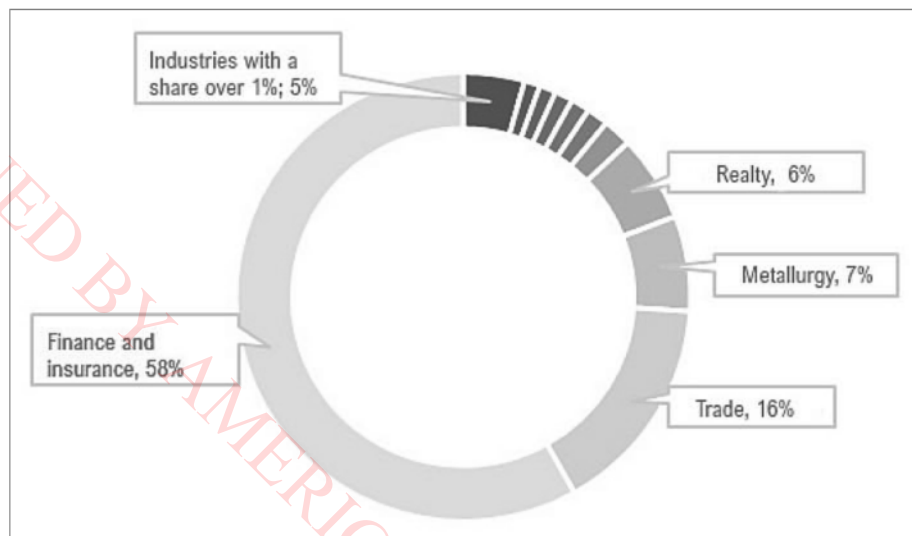
Fig. 2. Focus of Russian investments in Ukraine as of 01.04.2019.
Source: State Statistics Service of Ukraine

Due to the strict regulation of capital withdrawal from Ukraine by the National Bank of Ukraine, the focus was on the impact of foreign investment in Ukraine. However, the specifics of capital withdrawal from Ukraine through the direct investment channel attract special attention. In this regard, the predominant areas of Ukrainian investment capital withdrawal were, first of all, Cyprus, then Russia. Additionally, there is a certain correlation between the withdrawal of investment funds from Ukraine to Cyprus, the volume of funds withdrawal from the Donetsk region, and the volume of funds withdrawal from the professional scientific and technical sphere (science, research and development), which can be clearly seen in the Table 1.

Table 1. Direct investment from Ukraine at the beginning of the period, billion USD

Direction	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	01.04.19
Total from Ukraine	**5,8**	**6,4**	**6,4**	**6,6**	**6,7**	**6,5**	**6,3**	**6,3**	**6,3**	**6,3**	**6,3**
To Cyprus	5,3	5,9	5,9	5,9	5,9	5,9	5,9	5,9	5,9	5,9	5,9
To Russia	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,3	0,4	0,2	0,1	0,1	0,2	0,1	0,1
From the Donetsk region	5,4	6,0	5,9	6,0	6,0	5,9	5,9	5,9	5,9	0,0	5,9
From the sphere of NDD	5,3	5,9	5,9	5,9	6,0	6,0	6,0	6,0	6,0	6,0	6,0

Source: State Statistic Service of Ukraine.

2.2.2. Russian investments in the financial sector of Ukraine

In general, the events of 2014 marked the beginning of a long-term trend of the Russian capital reduction in the financial sector of Ukraine. Russian direct investment in this sector decreased from USD 2.7 billion in early 2014 to about USD 300 million in early 2019 (Fig. 3). Accordingly, Russia's share of total foreign investment in this sector decreased from 22.3% to 8.0%.
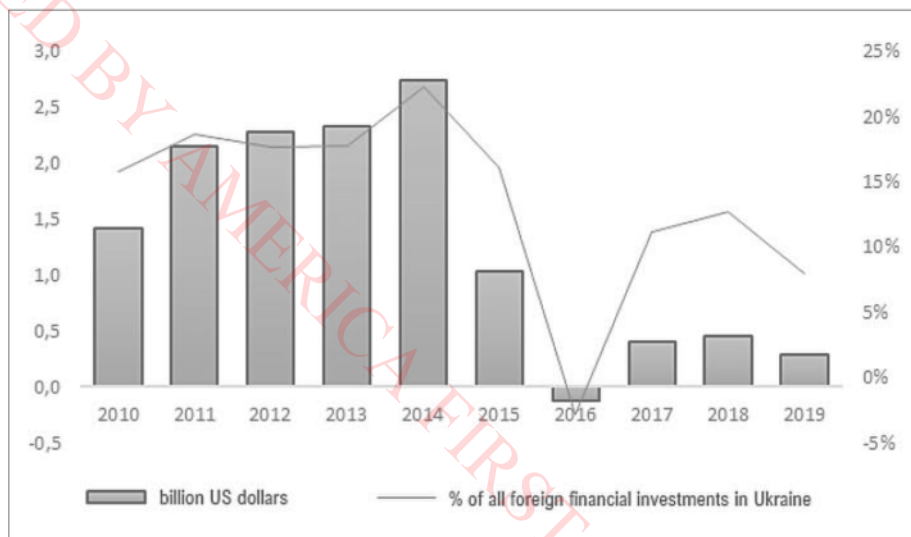
Fig. 3. Share of Russian capital in foreign investments in the financial sector of Ukraine, at the beginning of the period.
Source: State Statistics Service of Ukraine

Despite this long-term trend, investment in the financial sector remained an important priority for Russian capital in Ukraine. From 2010 to 2014, investments in the financial sector of Ukraine exceeded 77% of all direct investments of Russian companies in the country. After 2014, with the exception of 2015, despite the rapid withdrawal from Ukraine, Russian financial capital still levelled to above 55% of all Russian direct investment in Ukraine, and remained the most organized sector of Russian capital in Ukraine. This trend continued in 2019 and even increased. Russian capital operations have become even more concentrated in the banking and financial sector. Due to this its share among all Russian investments in the Ukrainian economy grew from 48.7% at the beginning of the year to 62.6% at the end of 2019 year (Fig. 4).

Fig. 4. Share of the Russian direct investments in the financial sector of Ukraine, $ bln.
Source: State Statistics Service of Ukraine

According to the State Statistics Service of Ukraine, at the end of the Q1 2019, Russian investment has already accounted for almost 10.4% of all foreign investment in the financial sector, increasing by 2% in the Q1 of 2019. On 01.04.2019, 58.1% of all Russian investments in Ukraine in the amount of USD 403.5 million were concentrated in this segment.

It should be noted that as of 31.12.2018, according to the State Statistics Service, Russian investments in the financial and insurance sector of Ukraine amounted to USD 690.2 million, which was almost 20% of all foreign investments in this sector. **Thus, during the presidential campaign in Ukraine, starting in early 2019, Russian players withdrew about USD 280 million from the banking and financial sector of Ukraine. Given the frozen transfers to Russia or transfers to the parent companies during the election campaign in Ukraine, the probability of these funds conversion into political funding lobbying Russian interests was high. In other words, the withdrawn capital could have become a political investment. An indirect confirmation of this assumption was the short-term dynamics of Russia's financial investments in Ukraine at the start of the election period. Just before the presidential race in Ukraine, in the Q4 2018, the volume of direct Russian investment in the banking and insurance sector of Ukraine increased by about USD 250 million.**

The volume of investments withdrawn from the financial sphere in January 2019 almost coincided with the mentioned figure. These funds could have been safely dissolved in the Ukrainian market during the election campaign. After a short-term surge in the Q4 2018, the volume of Russian direct investment in this area returns to its previous level at the end of Q1 2019 before the end of the presidential marathon (Fig. 5)**.**
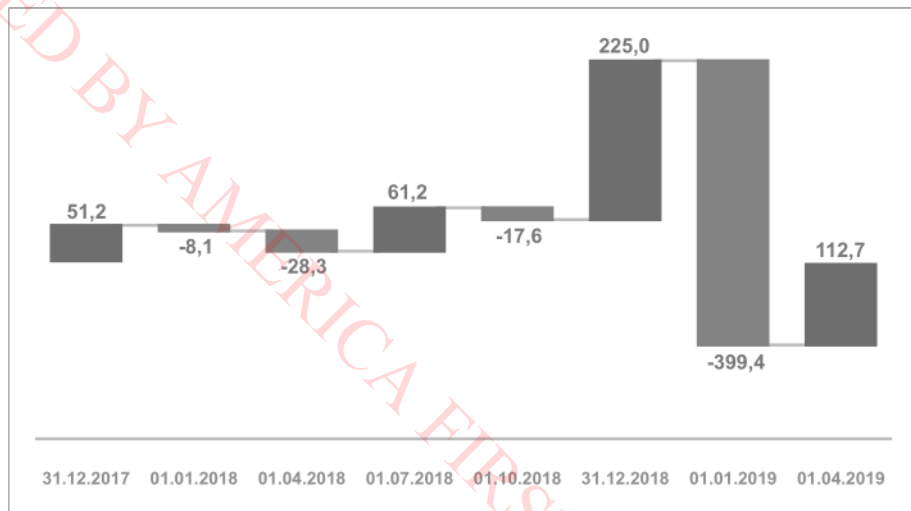
Fig. 5. Changes in the dynamics of Russian investments in the financial sector of Ukraine during the presidential campaign, 01.01.2018-01.04.2019, $ million.
Source: State Statistics Service of Ukraine

Notes:
01.07.2018: actual start of the main forces' mobilization before elections
01.10.2018: completion of mobilization and preparation of participants to elections
01.01.2019: official start of the presidential campaign

2.2.3. Activities of Russian banks in Ukraine

After 2014, half of the banks with Russian capital left the Ukrainian market, including the Russian state-owned VTB Bank (with a total asset of UAH 26 billion) in December 2018. As of 01.04.2019, seven banks operating in Ukraine had the end beneficiaries who, in one or another way, are citizens or subjects of the Russian Federation. Two of these banks have state funding – a subsidiary of Sberbank of the Russian Federation and Prominvestbank PJSC (Vnesheconombank of Russia). One – Alfa-Bank – is a private multinational Corporation. There is also a First In-

vestment Bank in Ukraine, which is 88% owned by a Russian citizen. However, the National Bank of Ukraine does not classify it as a Bank of foreign groups. Finally, this analysis includes UNEX Bank. Despite the Ukrainian citizenship of its beneficiary, the oligarch and Deputy of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine Vadym Novinsky, it could still be classified as a Russian agent, due to his active pro-Russian position and his recent Russian citizenship.

Today, Alfa-Bank Ukraine (excluding Ukrsotsbank) is the absolute asset leader among the banks with Russian capital in Ukraine. Combined assets of Alfa-Bank and Ukrsotsbank put this group on the fourth place in terms of assets in the banking system of Ukraine, and on the first, with a large margin, place among non-state banks and banks with foreign capital in the country. Alfa-Bank, despite an active information campaign aimed at separating itself from Russian geopolitics, is still deeply intertwined with Russia. Moreover, the Bank's PR positioning ultimately looks like misinformation: due to the concealment of Russian citizenship behind the screen of dual citizenship, only about 30% of the institution's shares are attributed to Russian capital in the Bank's messages, instead of almost 90% of real control by "the citizens of the aggressor state". Exactly the same manipulation occurs for Ukrsotsbank, acquired by Alfa-Bank in 2016.

The specific positions of some Ukrainian banks, which ultimate beneficiaries actively promote Russian interests in Ukraine under the guise of Ukrainian citizenship, are also worth noting. The most striking expression of this strategy of the Russian lobby is demonstrated by the sole shareholder of UNEX Bank, a former citizen of Russia, and now a Deputy of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine – Vadym Novinsky. This businessman actively sponsors the activities of the contraversive Russian Orthodox Church in Ukraine and the pro-Russian Opposition Bloc. This double position is especially spread in the activities of small banks with a regional bias in Ukraine.

At the end of 2018, five out of fifteen loss-making banks registered in Ukraine had Russian capital (Table 2). The total losses of the banking system amounted to UAH 18.3 billion, of which UAH 12.3 billion were incurred by banking institutions with

Russian capital. Thus, almost 70% of the losses of the Ukrainian banking system were of Russian origin. They were generated by three large banks with Russian capital:

- Sberbank of Russia – UAH 7.6 billion;
- Prominvestbank – UAH 3.3 billion;
- Ukrsotsbank – UAH 1.2 billion.

The negative results of Russian banks dramatically contrast the effective performance of almost all foreign banks operating in Ukraine (with the exception of PRAVEX Bank), which average return on operations was 36%. It should be noted that such an exceptional loss is actually equivalent to a hidden subsidy or bribery of clients, who are beneficiaries of Russian banks' services.

Table 2. The main representatives of Russian capital in the banking sector of Ukraine, mln UAH, as on May 01, 2019

Bank	Assets	Deposits	Credits	Financial results
«Alfa-Bank»	70180	52019	31554	1310
Sberbank of Russia	63163	7329	14453	-7614
Prominvestbank	46100	3779	5801	-3340
Ukrsotsbank	34006	1217	7654	-1195
«Forward Bank»	2610	1470	1093	-165
«First Investment Bank»	1793	1318	514	60
«Unex Bank»	1013	560	295	-11
TOTAL	**218866**	**67692**	**61365**	**-10955**

Source: National Bank of Ukraine.

In General, since the beginning of 2015, the assets of these banks with Russian capital, as of May 1, 2019, have fallen from 14.4% of the assets of the entire banking system of Ukraine to 11.5%. However, behind the external retreat of these banks there is a rather serious systemic risk for the financial system of Ukraine. The structure of these assets of the Russian banks changed towards reducing assets in national currency by 1%, and increasing assets in foreign currency by 26%. At the same time, for the entire banking system, the volume of assets in national currency increased by 2.5 times, and assets in foreign currency by 27%. As of 01.05.2019, foreign currency funds accounted for almost 70% of the assets of the banks with Russian capital, with an average of 40% for the entire banking system of Ukraine. Foreign currency assets of banks with Russian capital account for over 20% of all foreign currency assets of Ukrainian banks, equating to 27% of the official foreign currency reserves of the

National Bank of Ukraine. This concentration of foreign currency funds in the hands of Russian banks provides bargaining chips putting pressure on the monetary authorities, and successful lobbying of their interests in the banking and financial sector of Ukraine.

Changes in the share of industries in the turnover of banks with Russian capital also reflect a change in the priorities of Russian capital in Ukraine. In general, there is a shift in focus from the basic commodity and services sectors (including financial services and trade) to the technology industries (Fig. 6). The four priority sectors of Russian capital investment in 2014 were energy, metallurgy, trade and services. They were replaced by a new four: mechanical engineering, agriculture and food processing, transport and communications, and construction. This shift in the Russian capital positioning can provide it a voice in shaping the new Ukrainian economy, especially in the strategic areas of integration with European markets.
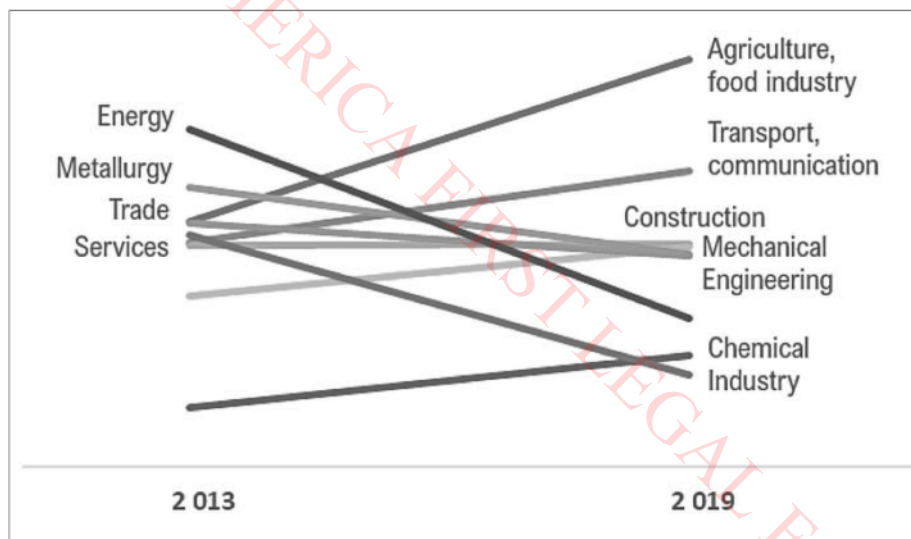
Fig. 6. Changes in the priorities Russian capital banks after 2013 (Ranking).
Source: Banks' financial statements

2.2.4. Lobbying of Russian interests in the banking and financial sphere

Due to an open political-military and trade-economic war between the two countries, the Ukrainian business climate became increasingly toxic for Russian capital. Operations of Russian capital lost their meaning, became marginal or even unprofitable. Due to these circumstances, staying in Ukraine required not only business, but also

political astuteness. Lobbying plays a leading role in these strategic games aiming at holding positions in terms of weak market opportunities. It should be noted that the corruption environment has a multiplier effect on the possibility of lobbying the financial interests of Russian entities in Ukraine.

The main parameters of Russian capital's banking and financial operations described above allow us outlining the main channels for lobbying its interests in Ukraine. They, in particular, include:

1. Personal relations channel. We are talking primarily about the personal connections or insider contractors. Russian capital effectively uses this tool in the context of a poorly developed system of regulating in Ukraine the lobbying activities and high corruption compliance of the Ukrainian state system. The most striking implementation of this strategy is to provide former government officials with high-level functions, making them responsible for relations with the state and regulatory authorities. Russian banks have recruited people with significant experience in power, who preserved networks of connections due to their past service in government positions. At the same time, the possibility of turning people who came to power after working in Russian or partially Russian companies into agents of influence is also used. This strategy is also associated with the promotion of former or current representatives of the companies into public areas interesting for an institution. For example, at the time of entering Ukraine in 2008, Sberbank of Russia recruited former Ukrainian Minister of Finance Igor Yushko a Chairman of the Board of the newly established representative office in Ukraine. It was a person well-versed in the work of the Ukrainian financial system and the bureaucratic machine. He had deep connections at the highest levels. Another well-known fact is the work of businessman Timur Khromaev in Sberbank of Russia in Ukraine in 2002 (according to the NBU[29]), as a Deputy Chairman of the Board. At the time of his appointment, Khromaev had experience in the Ministry of Finance of Ukraine and was a liaison between the Ministry, the National Bank of Ukraine and the State Treasury of Ukraine in managing the national debt of Ukraine. Later in 2015, as known, Khromaev became the Head of the National Commission on Securities and Stock Market.

2. Industry lobbying channel. The investment and business advantages of Russian capital are distributed mainly in favour of economic sectors that have a strong industry lobby in Ukraine – agriculture, transport, engineering, etc. Partnership in these industries allows using their communication resources and lobbying to push specific interests. It is known, for example, that the industrial lobby was one of the decisive

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[29] Most likely, we are talking about the function of Deputy Chairman of the Board of the Russian Bank NRB-Ukraine, which eventually became the basis for the formation of a subsidiary Sberbank of Russia in Ukraine.

forces that disrupted the signing of the Association Agreement with the EU by the former President V. Yanukovych in 2013. The focus of the Russian capital in such areas of economy as construction, metallurgy, finance and trade opens the opportunities of effective promoting of their interests in the highest state authorities – at the level of the President, the Cabinet of Ministers and the Parliament – by using the levers of influence of these industries on the country's economy, and most importantly, their developed lobbying infrastructure.

3. Specialized financial lobby. Membership in specialized banking and financial associations of Ukraine, and the attempts to establish control over exchange and other stock organizations in Ukraine, provides for Russian financial institutions direct access to financial power and an effective tool for influencing it.

4. Direct political influence is at the expense of businessmen-politicians and their own financial lobby in the Parliament and in the Goverment. In addition to friendly bank owners and financiers, who have turned into politicians and parliamentarians, Russian capital has its own group of sympathies at various levels of government, including in various state, expert, advisory bodies and commissions.

5. Influence on public opinion through friendly market analysts, journalists and experts, specialists of non-governmental, information and research centers.

3. ANALYSIS OF THE ACTIVITIES OF PRO-RUSSIAN NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS IN UKRAINE

3.1. Donor assistance

One of the directions of Russia's activities in preparation for aggression against Ukraine was to work with the Ukrainian population to establish a basis and a favourable for the Russian Federation environment among Ukrainian citizens. The plan was implemented in the framework of the ''Russky Mir'' and support to compatriots concepts, which, among other things, provided the creation and development of a wide network of pro-Russian non-governmental and political organizations in Ukraine.

A wide network of pro-Russian non-governmental organizations, both registered in Ukraine and Ukrainian representative offices of Russian public organizations, operated on the territory of Ukraine. A large number of these organizations have stopped or suspended their work due to the achievement of their goals or the adoption of appropriate measures of counteraction by the state bodies of Ukraine and the Ukrainian society. Some of them still exist.

The main officially declared activities of pro-Russian non-governmental organizations:

- protection of the rights and freedoms of the Russian-speaking population of Ukraine;
- assistance in strengthening and developing the Russian language on the territory of Ukraine;
- development of Russian culture and Russian Orthodoxy in Ukraine;
- informing the population of Ukraine about the state and prospects of the development of the Ukrainian-Russian relations'.

In fact, pro-Russian public organizations directly and indirectly *promoted the national interests of the Russian Federation in Ukraine.* In this direction they *performed a number of tasks*:

- informing the Ukrainian society about the foreign policy priorities of the Russian Federation in the post-Soviet area, imposing pro-Russian views;
- promotion of the ideas of unity of the East Slavic peoples, by using historical means to promote Russian foreign policy priorities;
- spreading of an atmosphere of dissatisfaction with the Ukrainian state policy among the Russian-speaking population of Ukraine and, in this way, creation of instability prerequisites in the regions of its compact residence – in the East and South of the country;

- forming the public opinion in the interests of Russia and a negative attitude to Ukraine's integration into NATO and the EU;

- hindering the implementation of state programs and plans aimed at the European and Euro-Atlantic integration of Ukraine, by holding among other the public actions;

- demonstration of Russia in the light of a world center of power, a patron state of the Russian-speaking population of Ukraine, a guarantor of stability and security;

- expansion of the range of Russian-language media and other printed publications;

- studying the socio-political situation in the country, the situation with the Russian-speaking population to inform the political circles of the Russian Federation.

To be more reasoned in convincing the Russian-speaking population, the pro-Russian organizations often manipulated the concept of "Russian", which in the Ukrainian language has two translations and two meanings: "Rusky" – the one that originated from the time of the Rus existence (with Kyiv as a capital of that state); "Rosiysky" – the one of the origin of Russia (Rosiya in Ukrainian or Rossiya in Russian). First of all, this related to language and nationality. Using exclusively Russian language, pro-Russian organizations actively help Russia to strengthen its narrative of Rus origin, aimed at undermining Ukrainian statehood.

For financial and institutional support of these activities the Russian resources and Ukrainian pro-Russian organizations are used. The first group includes:

- Russian World Foundation (Russkiy Mir Foundation);
- Alexander Gorchakov Public Diplomacy Fund;
- Federal Agency "Rossotrudnichestvo" (Fig. 7)

Fig. 7. Russian sources of NGO funding in Ukraine.

The **Russian World Foundation** carries out anti-Ukrainian activities, disguising it as language promotion, support for compatriots, historical, cultural, scientific, educational and other events. Financial support is provided in the form of projects or events grants. In addition, the Foundation provides permanent financial support to certain organizations, including those in Ukraine.

Russian National Cultural Society, headed by Yevgeny Baklanov, was established in Kyiv in April 2016[30]. The organization was created with the support of the Russian World Foundation and "Rossotrudnichestvo". Among recent events, on July 5-7, 2019 in the Poltava region, with the support of the Russian World Foundation, the Association held events on the occasion of the 310th anniversary of the Battle of Poltava, which brought together dozens of Ukrainian participants from different regions[31]. On October 19, 2019 in Lviv, in cooperation with the Lviv City public organizations Zemlattsvo Leningrazhtsev in Lviv "Peter club" and Women's Club "Lada", the XIV regional literary and historical competition of high school students from 6 schools in Lviv and Ternopil, named "I Love you, Peter's creation...", was held. The organiza-

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[30] http://www.bfro.be/ru/v-kieve-sozdano-russkoe-nacional-no-kul-turnoe-obschestvo.html?cmp_id=108&news_id=18957

[31] https://russkiymir.ru/news/259154/

tion actively encouraged Ukrainians to join the Russian online propaganda campaign "Immortal Regiment – without borders!" through its resources. Young people were encouraged to apply to Russian Universities on a special quota.

Since September 2015, the Centre for Legal Advice for Compatriots has been operating in Kyiv[32]. The Centre was founded by the State Organization "Association of Compatriots "Peace Initiatives – Razvitiye", with the support of "Rossotrudnichestvo" and the Russian World Foundation. Yevgeny Baklanov is also the Head of the Centre. The danger of this Centre is that it actively works with internally displaced persons from Donetsk and Luhansk regions. In its news line on the legal decisions in Ukraine, the Association posted a greeting to Putin on the 75th Anniversary of the Victory in the Great Patriotic War.

In 2011, the Slavic Values Foundation was established in Kyiv. Headed by Oleksandr Gudilov, it was re-registered in 2014 with the active participation of the same Yevgeny Baklanov[33]. The Foundation works on the entire territory of Ukraine, holds events, and supports various initiatives, in particular, in Chernihiv, Kharkiv, Zhytomyr, Poltava, and other cities. The events supported by the Russian World Foundation.

Russian centers are practically absent in Ukraine, with the exception of temporarily occupied territories – in Luhansk, Donetsk and Horlivka. The Russian Centre for Science and Culture in Kyiv is a partner of the Russian World Foundation[34]. This center, in particular, promotes studying of Ukrainian students in Russian Universities. At the same time, offices of Russian World, according to information from the website of this Foundation as of July 2019, were opened outside the occupied territories – in the cities of Mykolaiv, Kherson and Kharkiv region – in Balakliya, Valky, Volchansk, Zlochiv, Izium and Krasnohrad. It is not surprising that the Kharkiv region in 2014 was a step away from becoming the so-called "KhPR" (Kharkiv People's Republic). The question remains whether the presence of the office of the Russian World in Balakliya and the explosions at military warehouses in March 2017 are a coincidence. However, as of May 2020, Ukraine was not included in the published list of offices of the Russian World.

Russian World Foundation named 155 organizations in Ukraine as its partners in Ukraine [35], including[35]:

- All-Ukrainian National Cultural and Educational Society "Russkoye Sobraniye" (Kyiv) with a branch in Vinnytsia;

- All-Ukrainian Society of Russian Culture "Rus" (Kyiv) with offices in Vinnytsia, Mykolaiv, Odesa, Kherson, Zaporizhzhya, Kharkiv and Khmelnitsky;

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[32] http://mir-in-razvitie.ru/

[33] http://scfond.ru/

[34] http://ukr.rs.gov.ru

[35] https://russkiymir.ru/catalogue/catalog.php?country=72

- NGO "Russian School" (Kyiv, there are its offices in 20 regions);
- Dnipropetrovsk Regional Charity Organization "Dobrodar" (Dnipropetrovsk);
- Russian House Transcarpathian Society of Russian Culture (Mukachevo);
- Izmail Pushkin Society (IPS) (Izmail);
- Kiev City National and Cultural Society of Old Believers-Lipovans (Kyiv);
- Kiev Society of Russian Compatriots "Rodina" (Kyiv);
- Novograd-Volyn Cossack Society of the International Public Organization (Novograd-Volynsky);
- Society of Buryat Culture (SBC) of Kyiv and Kyiv region (Kyiv);
- The Society of the Don Cossacks in Luhansk region (Ukraine);
- Russian Culture Society "Russky Mir" (v. Minai);
- NGO "Luhansk District of Don Cossacks";
- Russian National Community "Rusich-Mykolaiv" (Mykolaiv);
- Russian Community of Kyiv (Kyiv);
- Russian National Cultural Society of the Kharkiv Region (Kharkiv);
- Russian A.S. Pushkin Society (Lviv);
- Kharkiv Union of Groups and Masters of Russian Folk Art (Kharkiv).

Most of these organizations are "on hold", or are involved in one-time promotions. However, there are organizations that are still active today.

The Gorchakov Foundation currently operates mainly in the occupied territories of Ukraine. For example, in August 2019, it supported the youth camp-forum "Donuzlav", attended among others by the representatives of ORDLO (temporary occupied and uncontrolled territories of Ukraine). Among the projects that are financially supported by the Foundation is the "Telemost "Peace Dialogue of Russia and Ukraine" project. In October 2018, in Yalta, the Foundation, in cooperation with the Integration Committee "Russia – Donbas", held an international Conference "Russian-Ukrainian Relations: Problems and Prospects". Some Ukrainian experts (e.g. political scientist Pavlo Rudyakov) also participated in the event.

Attracting Ukrainian experts to Russian events to demonstrate the "other pro-Russian Ukraine" became one of the most important activities of the Foundation. On June 13, 2017 in Moscow, the Gorchakov Foundation held an expert discussion "The Ukrainian Issue. Scenarios for the Development of the Ukrainian Crisis", where the representative of the Russian-centric Kyiv Centre for Political and Conflict Research headed by M. Pohrebinsky (Denis Kiriukhin) spoke.

Federal Agency (FA) **"Rossotrudnichestvo"** (http://rs.gov.ru/ru/about) has its official representative office in Ukraine – Russian Centre of Science and Culture in Kyiv (Kyiv, 2 Borysohlibska Str.). It is chaired by Lidia Diachenko. FA "Rossotrudnichestvo" works, among other, with certain organizations in Ukraine including:

- NGO "Centre of National Cultures" (Kyiv): holding public events, in particular, the International Peace Day on 21.09.2019;
- P. A. Stolypin International Association of Slavic Unity (Kyiv): conducting public events, in particular, in the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra in cooperation with the Russian Embassy in Ukraine;
- International Pedagogical Club (Kyiv): conducting events promoting the Russian language and culture;
- NGO "Kharkiv Society of the Eastern Slavs" (Kharkiv): conducting historical readings;
- NGO "Veterans of the Great Patriotic War, Labour and Military Service»;
- NGO "Rusich Mykolaiv" (Mykolaiv): conducting cultural events;
- Youth Club "Kyivan" (Kyiv);
- NGO "Leningrad Community in Lviv "Peter-Club" (Lviv);
- Kiev Society of Russian Compatriots "Rodina" (city of Kyiv): conducting cultural events.

"Rossotrudnichestvo" also cooperates with other public organizations in Ukraine on a one-time basis, including children and cultural organizations. "Rossotrudnichestvo" organizes and supports language (the spread of the Russian language), cultural, historical, and humanitarian events. The Agency pays special attention to cooperation with organizations of socially vulnerable population segments, since it is easier to establish partnerships with them at relatively small financial costs. Ukrainian children are also in the Foundation's focus. Thus, in the spring of 2020, "Rossotrudnichestvo" executed the project called "Memory of Generations: Ukrainian Children About the War"[36], in the framework of which children were attracted to readings about the Great Patriotic War and participated in the "Immortal Regiment" event (see pictures below).

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[36]   http://ukr.rs.gov.ru/ru/news/68139

Source: http://ukr.rs.gov.ru/ru/news/68334

In 2008-2009, the co-author of this publication performed a study of pro-Russian organizations in Ukraine that represented a dangerous network, which posed a threat to the state security of Ukraine from such organizations' functioning. The results of the study were presented in the National Security and Defence Council. The work was updated in 2015 and published[37]. Some of the public organizations identified at that time were functioning in temporarily occupied Crimea and ORDLO, and therefore their current analysis is not appropriate. The analysis includes organizations currently active or being on "stand-by", but still registered.

In addition to the above-mentioned organizations, which are the direct counterparts of the above-mentioned Russian foundations, the main pro-Russian non-governmental organizations in Ukraine established before 2014 but still registered today, include[38]:

- All-Ukrainian Public Organization "Russian Movement of Ukraine" (Kyiv, apt. 112, 21A Malyshko Str.): has 10 divisions, including in the cities of Lviv, Zaporizhzhya, Odesa, Uzhhorod, Bila Tserkva, and Donetsk and Luhansk regions;

- All-Ukrainian Public Organization "Union of the Russian People";

- All-Ukrainian Public Scientific Organization "Ukrainian Academy of Russian Studies": has its Luhansk division. Back in 2008, the organization issued 25

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[37] http://irbis-nbuv.gov.ua/cgi-bin/irbis_nbuv/cgiirbis_64.exe?C21COM=2&I21DBN=UJRN&P21DBN= UJRN&IMAGE_FILE_DOWNLOAD=1&Image_file_name=PDF/pubpolpr_2016_1_10.pdf

[38] http://www.materik.ru/nationals/database/migrants/index.php?country=34

thousand textbooks "Country Studies. Russia" for the 5th grade and textbooks "Reunification of Russia" for the re-qualification of the teachers. They were distributed in Crimea, the Donetsk and Luhansk regions and can still be found in the libraries there[39];

- All-Ukrainian Public Organization "Human Rights Public Movement "Russian-Speaking Ukraine" (*Kyiv, office 2, 8 E. Chavdar Street. Its Chairman is Vadym V. Kolesnichenko*): the division of this organization is located in occupied Donetsk;

- All-Ukrainian Public Association "For Ukraine, Belarus and Russia" (*ZUBR, Kyiv, apt. 68, 44-b Revutsky Str. Its Chairman is Olena Mazur*): has divisions in Kropyvnytsky, Zaporizhzhya and Transcarpathian region;

- Public Organization "Union of Loyal Cossacks" (Kyiv): the specified head of the organization is also O. A. Mazur, Deputy of the III Convocation, and Deputy of the NAS "Centre for Scientific Initiatives". She is put on the sanctions list of Ukraine, the EU, the US, the UK, Canada and Japan. In Odesa, a related organization – NGO "O. Suvorov Union of Loyal Black Sea Cossacks" has functioned since 2009 (Odesa, 14/17 Heroes of Stalingrad Str.);

- All-Ukrainian Public Organization "Russian-Ukrainian Integration Forum" (*Kyiv, 45 Bortnytska Str.*): co-founder of the "Russian-Ukrainian Investment and Commercial Centre" (*Kyiv, 20 Liuteranska Str*. Its Director is Lyubov Sobchishina), Russian NGO "Russian Union of Commodity Producers", "Russian Media Centre" and Individual Enterprises;

- NGO "Russian Community of Ukraine" (Kyiv, apt. 218, 9 Obolonsky Avenue): has branches in Odesa, Kherson and Dnipro;

- All-Ukrainian Public and Pedagogical Organization "Russian School" (*city of Kyiv*): it was re-registered in 2015 (http://schoolru.com.ua/about/);

- NGO "Cultural and Linguistic Equality", Kharkiv (*Chairman is Gennady Makarov*): it is absent in the register, but the organization's website is supported and has an openly pro-Russian content. Makarov is the Chairman of the "Russian Council (Veche)";

- International public organization "World Russian Council (Sobor)" (*Kyiv, apt. 354, 5 Drahomanov Str*. Its registered Chairman is G. V. Mokiyenko*);

- Slavic Committee of Ukraine (*Kyiv, suite 7, 21A Lesi Ukrainky Str*. Its Chairman is Mykola F. Lavrinenko): it has seven regional offices;

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[39] http://texty.org.ua/pg/article/textynewseditor/read/75230/Cherez_apatiju_miscevoji_vlady_na_skhodi_Ukrajiny

- Kharkiv Regional Public Organization "Triune Rus" (*Kharkiv region, Chuhuiv district, the settlement of Malynivska, apt. 18, 4 Bohdan Khmelnitsky Str.*): is under termination procedure.

In addition, de jure, there is a Ukrainian Branch of the Institute of CIS Countries (*Kyiv, 119 Saksahanskoho Str.* Its Director is Denis O. Denisov). However, its activity has almost ceased.

3.2. Producers of social activity

It is worth paying attention to activities of some pro-Russian organizations. Thus, the Transcarpathian Russian Culture Society "**Rus**" took over the activity of its predecessors – the Russian culture societies of Uzhhorod and Mukachevo. For several years, the "Rus" Society includes: the office in the Irshavsky district, Uzhhorod "Zastava", the Scout Federation "Galician Rus," and "New Family" Charity Fund. The company operates in Mukachevo, Khust, and Uzhhorod district, village of Pushkinevo in the Vinogradivsky district. The Society unites about a thousand people, including the collective members. "Rus" is a member of the All-Ukrainian Union of Civil Society Organizations "Russian Commonwealth" and the All-Ukrainian Coordinating Council of Organizations of Russian Compatriots. Members of the Society represented Ukraine and Transcarpathia in Russia at the II and III World Congresses of Russian Compatriots.

The All-Ukrainian Civil Society Association "For Ukraine, Belarus and Russia" (ZUBR), established in April 2001, is fighting for the reunification of the three Slavic states of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus, "the restoration of political, economic and cultural ties of the three fraternal countries, the revival of Orthodox and Slavic culture in contrast to Western ideology and culture." Since September 2001, ZUBR has been dealing with the problems of Ukrainians in Transnistria, creating a Ukrainian Consulate in Tiraspol. The organization acted as a co-founder of the newspaper "Slavic People" and "ZaZUBRina". On May 9, 2014 in Kyiv, ZUBR representatives participated in the events commemorating the Victory in the GPW together with the Communist Party of Ukraine, and wore the St. George's ribbons.

The Slavic Committee of Ukraine (SCU) was registered by the Ministry of Justice of Ukraine on 23.09.1999 as a public organization. Its registration number is 1227. The initiator of its creation was I. Kyrpel. The idea was supported by the Communist Party of Ukraine, Socialist Party of Ukraine, Peasant Party of Ukraine and representatives of other parties and non-party citizens. The Organization publishes the "Slavic Nyva" magazine and "Slavic Vector" newspaper. The goal of its activity was to promote the strengthening of friendship between peoples close in origin

and culture, which have Slavic roots, the fight against the Americanization of the society, which "spoils the young generation, deprives it of the future, and incites interethnic and international conflicts." The Declaration of the V Congress of the SCU on November 19, 2014, among other things, stated that "*due to the obvious interference of the U.S. Department of State and top officials of the European Union, an armed coup and mockery of the Communist Party of Ukraine were carried out in the country (Ukraine). It officially announced a course to destruction of everything related to the Soviet period, primarily the symbols and monuments. Vandalism is moving all over Ukraine with the consent of the top state officials*." The phrase from the resolution that "*the country will propagandize Russophobe moods, oppress the Russian language and emasculate Ukrainian culture through its orientation to Western models and standards*" generally corresponds to the main theses of pro-Russian propaganda.

The Public Organization "Union of Loyal Cossacks", which emerged from the International Association "Loyal Cossacks," was established in 2004, and registered in 2005. The Chieftain of "Loyal Cossacks" is Oleksiy Selivanov. It is a part of the Union of Cossack Troops of Russia and Abroad (Fig. 8).
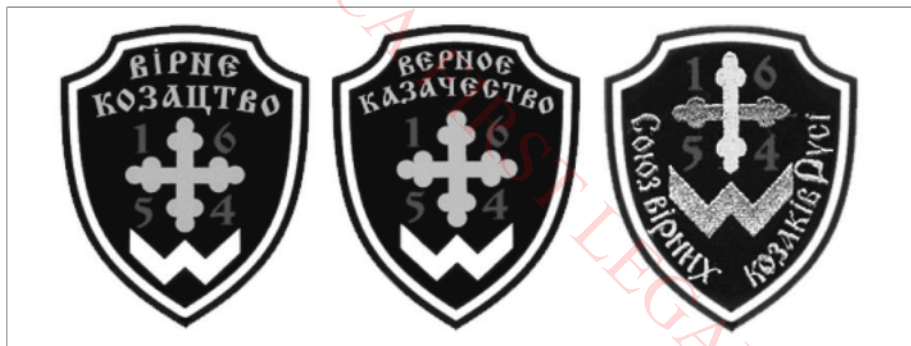
Fig. 8. Symbols of the "Union of Loyal Cossacks".

The main declared goal of the Union activities is protection of the Orthodox faith. In fact, it aims to protect the interests of the Russian Orthodox Church; Patriotic Orthodox education of young people and "restoration of historical truth". In Ukraine, the organization extended its activities to the territories of Donetsk, Luhansk, Kharkiv and Dnipropetrovsk regions. A rapid action team was created to protect churches from switching to the UOC (KP). Members of the NGO actively agitated Ukrainian citizens to avoid mobilization.

The key Ukrainian pro-Russian organization that provides financial support to others is the Public Movement **"Ukrainian Choice – the Right of the People"** (http://vybor.ua/), created in December 2011 by Viktor Medvedchuk, who is the Chairman

of the Organization. The organization declares that its goals are abandonment of the course of European integration but joining to the Russian integration associations. The Organization also conducts anti-Ukrainian events. Thus, representatives of the organization participated in events promoting Russian aggression against Ukraine. In particular, in March 2014, during the occupation of Crimea by Russia, representatives of the Organization blocked the passage of Ukrainian military near the city of Mykolaiv.

"Ukrainian Choice" has an extensive network of regional centers, represented in almost all regions of Ukraine[40] and closely cooperates with about five hundred public organizations, including[41]:

- All-Ukrainian Public Movement "Ukrainian Choice"(Chairman is V. Medvedchuk, Deputy Chairman is Colonel-General of Justice, former judge of the Constitutional Court of Ukraine V. I. Nimchenko);
- All-Ukrainian public movement "New Ukraine" (Chairman is V. P. Seminozhenko);
- NGO "Association of Leaders of Territorial Communities" (chaired by L.S. Porechkin);
- NGO "Union of Orthodox Fraternities" (V. B. Lukianyk);
- NGO "All-Ukrainian Centre "Public Initiative and Legal Protection" (I. F. Potapov);
- the All-Ukrainian Political Association "Slavic Party" (O.V. Luzan);
- NGO "Association of Slavic Activists" (A.G. Bezugly).

"Ukrainian Choice" actively supports the political party "Opposition Bloc Za Zhyttia", which passed to the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine of the IX Convocation. The organization implements a number of projects aimed at the federalization of Ukraine, the introduction of direct democracy through referendums, the introduction of dual citizenship, and change of the foreign policy course from European and Euro-Atlantic integration to integration with Russia.

Thus, by 2014, Ukraine had an extensive network of pro-Russian non-governmental organizations that promoted pro-Russian ideology aimed at destroying the Ukrainian state. Most of them were established in 2009-2010, on the eve of the presidential elections, won by V. Yanukovych. In other words, these pro-Russian public organizations actually contributed to the revenge of pro-Russian forces after the "Orange Revolution" of 2004.

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[40] http://vybor.ua/office/
[41] http://vybor.ua/documents/novaja_konstitucia/21.html

After 2014, some pro-Russian public organizations stopped their functioning, but most of them still exist de jure, although de facto they do not show much activity, or at least, do not advertise it. Such organizations are mainly concentrated in Donetsk, Luhansk, Dnipropetrovsk, Zaporizhzhya, Transcarpathian, Chernihiv, Kherson and Odesa regions, which requires additional attention to these regions.

The lack of reaction to the pro-Russian organizations in 2008-2009 and the sluggish response after the start of Russian aggression threaten revenge of the "Russky Mir" based on pro-Russian non-governmental organizations, whose activities are not suspended and can be re-activated at any time. All Russia needs is define the tasks and provide funding for them.

3.3. Russian influences: Religious aspect

The Russian Federation traditionally uses the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) as a means of political influence on other states. Statements of Russian President Vladimir Putin that Orthodoxy and the nuclear shield strengthen Russia's security[42] have been illustrated by the situation in the Balkans[43], Central Europe and Ukraine for more than a decade. But, in fact, the ROC is not a protective shield in Russia's geopolitics, but an offensive weapon, a tool for implementing Russian interests.

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The example of Church relations between Ukraine and Russia demonstrates quite clearly how aggressive and consistent the Russian Church policy is, how the ROC is state-controlled and linked to the special services of the Russian Federation, and how the tools for influencing the society are rich. The long-term influence of official Moscow through on Ukraine the ROC reaches its apogee, starting in 2012. It was most dramatically manifested during the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2014, the acquisition of autocephaly in 2018, and its behaviour during the coronavirus pandemic in 2020.

The tools that Russia uses through the ROC are being changed, supplemented, and enriched. They, in particular, include:

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[42] http://www.pravoslavie.ru/20667.html

[43] https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-world/2545092-rosijski-oligarhi-v-evropi-futbol-cerkva-i-robota-na-kreml.html

- promoting the activities of pro-Russian politicians and political forces that support the ROC (represented by the UOC-MP) in Ukraine, and the ROC supports them;

- creation of diverse pro-Russian organizations: unions and centers of Orthodox citizens, Orthodox fraternities, unions of Orthodox lawyers, Orthodox women, unity of Orthodox peoples, Orthodox hosts, support for canonical Orthodoxy;

- creation of a combat wing of dioceses under the guise of "Cossack" organizations[44];

- financial support of local bishops – the "Generalitat" of the UOC-MP;

- the spread of fundamentalist thinking (so-called spiritual tools);

- infiltration into the power structures of the "Confessors," who work closely with Moscow[45];

- formation of thinking and moods that lead to crimes.

The ROC (read official Russia) exercises its influence through the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate, which is actually its proxy agent in Ukraine. In turn, it actively interacts with pro-Russian political forces – "Ukrainian Choice", "Opposition Bloc", and previously with the now-banned Communist Party of Ukraine of P. Simonenko, the Progressive Socialist Party of N. Vitrenko, the Party of Regions of V. Yanukovych.

Published by Ukrainian activists from "Cyber Alliance" archive[46] (its authenticity was confirmed by specialists of the SSU, Belingcat and the Atlantic Council) of "Church expert" from Russia, Kirill Frolov gives a picture of how the influence on the Ukrainian Church and politics has been forming[47]. Frolov kept extensive correspondence on Ukrainian topics with a manager of the Presidential Administration of the Russian Federation, Boris Lukichov, relying on Ukrainian informants. He writes about the organization of anti-autocephalous and anti-Western actions in Ukraine: "the UOC-MP network is perfect for mass propaganda against NATO." We are talking about transferring money for the Orthodox movement to the Crimean parishes of the UOC-MP, and organizing a meeting of Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovych (at that time) with

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[44] This and the previous points are described in detail in the book by Tatiana Derkach "Moscow Patriarchate in Ukraine. Anatomy of betrayal".

[45] We will dwell further in details. This paragraph illustrates the investigation of the group of Ukrainian hacktivists "Ukrainian Cyberalliance", described in details on the web-pages of "Infonapalm" and "Petr and Mazepa".

[46] https://ua.112.ua/golovni-novyni/sbu-provodyt-ekspertyzu-nibyto-lystuvannia-surkova-bilshist-dokumentiv-pidtverdzheni-348159.html

[47] FrolovLeaks: the church's expert on influence in Ukraine. Episode. URL: https://informnapalm. org/30705-frolovleaks-votserkovlennye-eksperty-kremlya-epizod1/ https://informnapalm.org/30831-frolovleaks-part3/.

Patriarch Kirill. The question of search and assignment of a spiritual adviser for Ya-nukovych is discussed. According to the Russian ascetic tradition, a spiritual adviser or confessor has a very great influence on his ward.

It is significant that Frolov's letters mention a confessor of the head of the General staff of the armed forces of Ukraine, Gregory Pedchenko, and Andrii Novikov – a priest with black hundred views, secretary of the head of the Odesa diocese, Met-ropolitan Agathangel (now serving in Moscow). He lobbied for the appointment of Pedchenko to the post of Minister of defence of Ukraine. That is, the confes-sor of the head of the General Staff, who is devoted to the ROC and Moscow, not only knows all its secrets but also influences his ward, promotes him to the post of head of the Defence department[48]. It is significant that Gregory Pedchenko, who was the head of the General Staff of the AFU from 2010 to 2012, sought to con-solidate the change in the security of landmarks and the geopolitical orientation of Ukraine, which was carried out during Yanukovych presidency. The key indicator is an increase in the number of joint exercises with the RF armed forces: "We have significantly expanded the scope of our military cooperation. If last year there were 40 such events, this year there will be 81. This is a powerful step forward. There are a lot of trained officers and specialists in Russia who have completed practical training, and this is very important for us."

The letters discuss in detail the situation in the UOC-MP in connection with the ill-ness of its head, Metropolitan Volodymyr (Sabodan), in order to put a protégé of the ROC in charge when he'll pass away. Frolov transmits information about Ukraine to the Russian power Olympus through Adviser of the President Sergey Glazyev, Director of the Institute of CIS countries Konstantin Zatulin. Several letters to the assistant of the President of the Russian Federation Vladislav Surkov were also found. Frolov also carries on correspondence with the most radical opponent of Ukrainian autocephaly, clericus Vsevolod Chaplin. It is noticeable how a pool of pro-Russian politicians who were supposed to be "defenders of Orthodoxy" is been formed. There are bishops of "Kremlin lobby" singled out, who would later be the headliners of the separatist actions in the South, the East and the Transcarpathian region. The outlines of a future debacle of Ukraine, plans of division, anti-Western media campaigns, and contrasting of the Orthodoxy and another immoral and de-structive path of development are being formed.

The reliability of a hacked archive is well demonstrated by the chain of events. Thus, plans to replace Metropolitan Volodymyr became a reality. In 2013, Metro-politan Volodymyr was removed from the cathedra, and his Secretary, who repre-

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[48] FrolovLeaks: Goebbels Patriarch, the recruitment of Ukrainian generals and the baptism by fire in Syria. Episode IV. URL: https://informnapalm.org/31142-frolovleaks-4/.

sented pro-Ukrainian forces, was taken under arrest, under which he was until the victory of the Maidan[49]. We should note that active influence on the election Onuphrius (Orest Berezovsky), protégé of the Russian Orthodox Church Metropolitan of Chernivtsi and Bukovyna, a Primate of the UOC-MP was exercised by the "church-going" oligarch, MP, Russian citizen (until recently) Vadym Novinsky, who can be seen as an analogue of the Russian "Orthodox oligarch" Konstantin Malofeyev and a key provider of the interests of the ROC in Ukraine, not only in the context of church affairs.

Interestingly, in November 2013, Moscow hosts a Congress of "Cossack" confessors, which is convened by Patriarch Kirill. According to Nikolai Mitrokhin, a religious scholar far from sympathizing Ukraine, "there was actually coordination between the priests and the leaders of the Cossack detachments who were part of the delegation just before the invasion to Ukraine. Kirill personally ordered that the "Gifts of the Magi" – a Shrine kept on mount Athos – go first to Kyiv, and then to Simferopol and Sevastopol, although these two cities were not on the program at all. A Russian delegation arrived with them to persuade the Crimean elite to join Russia. This was more than a month before the invasion. Girkin accompanied this delegation as the chief security guard, and it was then when he met [Serhii] Aksionov. This, according to many sources, was the starting point for the formation of his unit, which two months later captured Sloviansk and started the war in Donbas"[50].

Then the terrorist Igor Girkin arrived at the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra under the guise of a pilgrimage, accompanying the Athos Shrine "Gifts of the Magi". A retired officer of the Russian special services, in fact – one of the terrorists, an active participant and co-organizer of events in Crimea and Donbas, came to Kyiv before the annexation, ostensibly to accompany the Orthodox Shrine, and then visited a number of dioceses, where soon Russian saboteur killed Ukrainian patriots and seize the power[51]. He is closely associated with the Russian "Orthodox" oligarch Konstantin Malofeyev, who was entrusted by the Russian administration with the mission of complicity in the annexation of Crimea.

Later, a citizen of the Russian Federation, Commander-In-Chief of the so-called "army of Novorossiya", Igor Girkin recognized: "All my personal security service consisted of spiritual sons, monks, and hieromonks of the Svyatogirska Lavra.

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[49] https://tsn.ua/politika/yanukovich-i-ko-dovodili-do-smerti-mitropolita-volodimira-za-nakazom-patriarha-kirila-355824.html?fbclid=IwAR01RUppEYjwPb6zO4885rIplXISqxNq90Osai-SUa3DGw39lulqvN45xiw https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-polytics/2125407-oleksandr-drabinko-mitropolit-upc-mp.html.

[50] https://meduza.io/feature/2019/02/01/vzglyadam-patriarha-kirilla-otvechaet-katolicheskaya-model-ustroystva-tserkvi.

[51] https://tyzhden.ua/News/108627.

Completely. To the last man. It was not numerous, but nevertheless, they were...One of our units in the Sloviansk brigade was commanded by a noviciate of the Svyatogirska Lavra. Moreover, that noviciate held a rather high position, but a logistic one, in the Lavra"[52].

After the Revolution of Dignity, Russia started a war against Ukraine. The ROC and its branch in Ukraine, the UOC-MP, took a very clear position in this war. Describing it, famous religious expert Viktor Yelenskyi said: "It has never been so hostile (the rhetoric of the UOC MP – ed.). For many years, they have had resources that spoke the language of disdain against the Kyiv Patriarchate, but they did not dare to speak so against the Ukrainian state and in general – against the Ukrainian idea. Now there are several resources that have completely switched to the side of the enemy"[53].

Valerii Otstavnykh, who was the Deputy Head of the missionary department of the Tula diocese of the ROC, a member of the Association of Orthodox experts, gave a succinct description of the work of the Kremlin – FSB – ROC – UOC-MP chain in conducting the hybrid war against Ukraine in an interview with Radio Svoboda: "The ROC, in conjunction with the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate, took part in attempts to suppress the events on the Maidan. When they brought "titushkas" from the East of Ukraine, they were placed in the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra. There are photos where there are buses with Russian numbers; "titushkas" were brought in from Russia. While "titushkas" were eating and having rest there, the doors of the Lavra were closed, services were stopped for technical reasons. Then "titushkas" were taken somewhere to the Maidan, to the Mariinsky Park, where they punched the heads of supporters of reforms, opponents of Yanukovych. The Church took an active part in intelligence operations. This is clearly evidenced by Strelkov-Girkin. He says that it was a special operation called "Gifts of the Magi". In 2013, the so-called "Gifts of the Magi", such an ark, were brought to Kyiv and Crimea, all under the patronage of a person connected with the presidential administration, the Orthodox patron Malofeyev. Girkin also was in his environ"[54].

In the period 2014-2019, after the death of Metropolitan Volodymyr, the pro-Ukrainian part of his entourage was expelled from the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra and the official structures of the UOC-MP. The official sponsor of the Metropolitan became a Russian citizen who received Ukrainian citizenship and a Deputy position in the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, Orthodox oligarch Vadym Novinsky.

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[52] https://gordonua.com/news/war/terrorist-girkin-vsya-moya-lichnaya-ohrana-sostoyala-iz-duhovnyh-synovey-monahov-ieromonahov-svyatogorskoy-lavry-426390.html.

[53] https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-society/2310449-viktor-elenskij-narodnij-deputat-ukraini.html.

[54] https://www.svoboda.org/a/29086933.html.

In the period 2014-2019, after the death of Metropolitan Volodymyr, the pro-Ukrainian part of his entourage was expelled from the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra and the official structures of the UOC-MP. The official sponsor of the Metropolitan became a Russian citizen who received Ukrainian citizenship and a Deputy position in the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, Orthodox oligarch Vadym Novinsky. The UOC-MP has become, in the words of theologian Kyrylo Govorun, the most loyal diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church and has completely moved into the mainstream of Russian official policy.

Everything that was put in place by the Russian government, the Russian secret services, and the Russian Orthodox Church in previous years began to be actively used during the revolution, the war, and the acquisition of autocephaly by Ukraine.

In dozens of dioceses of the UOC-MP as of 2014, a pro-Russian infrastructure in the form of pro-Russian non-governmental organizations of "Cossack" unions, prepared some bright speakers and providers of the ideas of exclusive "god-blessedness of triune Rus" and hatred for the post-Maidan power was formed. For example, the Kyiv diocese consists of more than two dozen pro-Russian public organizations and a number of priests and church activists who delivered anti-state sermons. In the Zhytomyr diocese, there is a Church built by the so-called "Faithful Cossacks", where there are cadet classes and the "sisterhood of mercy". In the Chernivtsi diocese, the monastery of Bishop Longin Zhar who called to disrupt the mobilization and is an adept of the triune Rus was strengthened under the Russians' support. Moreover, he called the Ukrainian state anti-Christian and said that Bukovyna was the Romanian land. In Transcarpathia, the Russians supported the separatist priest of the "Rusyn movement," Dmytro Sydor. It is known that the separatist movement "Subcarpathian Rusyns" was funded by Moscow. The main representative of the Kremlin lobby in the UOC-MP, Metropolitan Agathangel, managed the Odesa diocese. In the Odesa diocese, according to some estimates, there were more than a dozen "Cossack" organizations, among which the most famous were "Army of the loyal Black Sea Cossacks named after Hetman Bohdan Khmelnitsky", "Union of troops of the loyal Black Sea Cossacks named after Alexander Suvorov". The public position of the UOC-MP is that "Cossack" structures exist, they say, only for the protection of churches, metropolitans, actions like processions. In fact, these groups would have played the role of active distributors of Putin's "Russian spring" if it had not been stopped in Odesa in May 2014. There is a reason to believe that Metropolitan Agathangel had special plans for them. For example, as a result of hacking Frolov's mail, such a letter was published: "Metropolitan Agathangel called from a Czech phone number and said: "Let

Putin know that I and the entire Odesa diocese are waiting for decisive action on Odesa. The diocese supports me and is ready to fight. I am ready to lead the uprising spiritually and ideologically" (new Martyrs Foundation, 24.11.2014)"[55].

One of the authors of these lines managed to record at this time an interview with a priest of the Moscow patriarchate at that time, which soon left it, about Ovruch diocese of the UOC-MP, in Polissya. For example, when giving the cross to be kissed after the Liturgy, the priests repeated the same phrase to the parishioners: "There is no salvation in Europe". Over the next year, the ROC would impose the opinion that the proponents of the holy orthodoxy are fighting against the European Sodom and Ukrainian fascists. The idea that the post-Maidan government is ungodly was imposed by many priests both from the pulpit and in non-public communication with the faithful. At that time, there were even public scandals at sermons in Kyiv, when some of the faithful left the churches, accusing the priests that they were betraying the Motherland by public preaching.

Bishops and clergy of the UOC-Moscow Patriarchate began to be called Commissars of the hybrid war, in which they sided with Russia.

Guerilla in the Donbas was represented by the Russian military, mercenaries from the North Caucasus and Cossacks. It is known that the priests of the Russian Orthodox Church, contrary to canonical prescriptions about the impossibility of serving in the territory that belongs to another diocese, were sent as spiritual guardians for the "Cossack", and in fact — terrorist groups to Donbas[56]. The clergy of the UOC-MP serve as "confessors" of illegal armed groups, consecrate weapons, baptise, marry, and cooperate with the occupation authorities. Moreover, on the territory of the Svyatogirska Lavra and individual churches of the UOC-MP in Donbas, terrorists were hiding. There were places where weapons were stored[57] (see the photo below with armed militants with Igor Girkin at the head of the Orthodox Church of Moscow Patriarchy).

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[55] https://informnapalm.org/ua/frolovleaks-viii/.

[56] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Krr1-DBuyJU.

[57] https://www.religion.in.ua/news/vazhlivo/38658-general-rasskazal-ob-opyte-razoruzheniya-band-terroristov-kotoryx-na-donbasse-pokryvali-svyashhenniki-upc.html.

And some near-spiritual practices are clearly anti-Ukrainian in nature. For example, some of them consecrated banners for the army of Novorossiya[58], icons with the name "Militia"[59], blessed Girkin publicly[60], met Russian tanks with bread and salt, and discredited the army[61], consecrated the new so-called "authorities" in pseudo-republics, treated the war as a war of Ukraine against God[62], and the Ukrainian government and army – as "castigators and junta". At the time when the UOC-MP in Donbas consecrated the presence of Russian troops there, the Kyiv Metropolia used a different method of fighting against statehood. The Church authorities of the UOC-MP formed a discourse of persecution in society, claiming that the UOC-MP is a "Martyr Church".

At a time when representatives of the Ukrainian state at the OSCE meetings talk about the need for solidarity with Ukraine, which is resisting aggression of the Kremlin, the ROC and the UOC-MP spread fake information about church persecution in Ukraine. A well-known fact of 2014, when Angela Merkel made claims to the Prime Minister of Ukraine Arseniy Yatsenyuk, based on information received personally from Putin[63], which turned out to be absolutely false.

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[58] Tatiana Derkach "Moscow Patriarchate in Ukraine. Anatomy of betrayal". P. 203, 215.

[59] Tatiana Derkach "Moscow Patriarchate in Ukraine. Anatomy of betrayal". P. 216.

[60] Tatiana Derkach "Moscow Patriarchate in Ukraine. Anatomy of betrayal". P. 216.

[61] Kramatorsk. Priest Sergey Mironov. URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RKlulHJGLXc.

[62] Rats of the Antichrist on the Russian ship. URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I4aVoSWD1Ec.

[63] https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-society/2310449-viktor-elenskij-narodnij-deputat-ukraini.html .

In 2014, Metropolitan Onuphrius, a representative of the conditional party of "prayers and monks" of the Pochaiv "school", which provides for extreme conservatism and unconditional loyalty to Moscow, was elected a head of the UOC-MP. Metropolitan Anthony Pakanich became a Chancellor (de facto head). Actually, this duumvirate ensured the rapid transformation of the UOC-MP into a department of the ROC without its own opinion and position. It is significant in this regard that the UOC-MP, which seems to declare its independence from Moscow, did not express any reaction to the fact that it was planned to place mosaics with Vladimir Putin and Joseph Stalin, as well as the expression "Crimea is ours" in the main church of the Russian Ministry of defence.

There is a department of external Church relations in the ROC apparatus, which is a kind of Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Its head Metropolitan **Hilarion (Alfeyev)**, and his first Deputy Archpriest **Nikolai (Balashov)** are connected with the Russian special services (the Foreign intelligence service and the Federal security service). Both compete with each other and both are responsible for the "Ukrainian issue". Until recently, the curator of the "Church Foreign Ministry" was Vladislav Surkov.

According to the available information, it can be assumed that the remote operational management of the UOC-MP is carried out by Nikolay (Balashov). On the spot, the MP of Ukraine Vadym Novinsky keeps his finger on the pulse and controls it. He is the organizer of processions designed to demonstrate the strength and power of canonical Orthodoxy, the main speaker who voices the version of church persecution in Ukraine. Before the Revolution of Dignity, it had a major impact on Yanukovych and Minister of Internal Affairs Zakharchenko. He remained in Ukraine after Yanukovych's flight and continues to lead the Church. However, project financing falls on the shoulders of not only Novinsky. For example, the funding of the anti-Autocephalous "Union of Orthodox Journalists" is provided by Ukrainian businessman, multi-millionaire Viktor Vyshnevetsky, founder of the coal company Coal Energy, whose coal enterprises are being investigated for financing terrorism in Donbas[64]. It is interesting that both sponsors finance anti-Autocephalous PR, pay for flights to Moscow for hierarchs, but do not help much, for example, seminaries, temple construction, and the maintenance of ordinary priests. The UOJ website is not the only one; there are several other similar publications.

The goals of public and media activity of the UOC-MP are:

- creating the illusion of oppression of "canonical Orthodoxy" in the public mind;

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[64] https://www.religion.in.ua/zmi/ukrainian_zmi/31481-oberezhno-spilka-pravoslavnix-zhurnalistiv.html

- representation of Ukraine in the world as an arena of a religious war;

- formation of a negative image of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU) and receipt of Tomos by it;

- inciting conflict between the UOC-MP and the OCU;

- deformation of the information space to create an image of Russian invaders as friends, but compatriots loyal to the OCU as "ungracious dissenters".

For this purpose, the UOC-MP created a special institution of the Commissioner for the protection of the rights of the believers. In fact, this is a mechanism for creating managed conflicts on religious grounds. Technology is an exclusively "special services" style: provoke a scandal with a media release – transform it into a conflict – create a crisis situation – solve the crisis. The latter is done with the participation of the Institute of the Commissioner for the protection of the rights of the believers in favour of the UOC-MP.

In addition, another task of the institution is to suppress the pro-Ukrainian sentiments of the clergy of the UOC-MP, imposing an opinion about the inevitability of "persecution" and the fear of losing their church property. The obstructionist position of the UOC-MP regarding quarantine measures in the context of the coronavirus epidemic proves that it is being made a tool for creating a crisis situation for a special operation on "protection of canonical Orthodoxy from persecution".

Moscow does not stop its war against Ukrainian autocephaly after OCU received Tomos. In the first days after Tomos granting, through its adherents it made the attempts to seize the churches of two bishops of the UOC-MP who took part in the unification Council. These encroachments were repelled. Now, through its supporters in local churches, it sometimes comes out with a proposal to convene a pan-Orthodox Council to consider the Ukrainian issue. Then it voices a message that the Orthodox Church of Ukraine will be "re-established" with the help of Moscow and, as they say to elect a new Primate, who will be Onuphrius.

In General, Russia is officially interested not only in the influence on the Ukrainian Church. Its geopolitical ambitions are much broader. The media published news about the 300-page strategy for the development of Sergiev Posad (the Lavra of the Moscow region), as part of the initiative to transform the city into the "capital of Orthodoxy" or "Orthodox Vatican"[65]. The project provides for the construction of a cultural and representative center around the Trinity-Sergius Lavra, which will include a Museum of Orthodox art, a youth Orthodox cultural center, a Patriarchal library, a reception

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[65] https://meduza.io/news/2019/06/27/podgotovlena-strategiya-prevrascheniya-sergieva-posada-v-pravoslavnyy-vatikan-proekt-otsenivayut-v-140-milliardov-rubley?utm_source=facebook&utm_medium=main&fbclid=IwAR14a418ZKaju-VCBt_ByE2jNvrxiiq-0GAtG96URBCVE0eICneoua561aw

house, a high Church court, representative offices of Autocephalous churches, an Orthodox media center, a hotel, and so on. But it is clear that this is an attempt to win over the primacy in the Orthodox world. It should be recalled that in 2013 there was a discussion between Constantinople and Moscow on whether the ROC can claim the primacy[66]. In 2014, the intellectual victory of the Ecumenical throne was obvious. But Moscow continues its attempts to increase its influence, including by increasing the scope of temple construction, cultural and artistic expansion. **"Just as the Kremlin has an obvious goal of the Empire restoration, the ROC is in tune with it - the transformation into the "second Vatican", that is, the global religious and political center of attraction for the "Orthodox peoples" and for the "conservative pro-Putin international,"** Archbishop Eustratius Zorya commented on this news on his account. Let me remind you that in 1947 (then 1948), the ROC, with Stalin's permission, was going to hold the "Eighth Ecumenical Council" in Moscow, where the Patriarch of Moscow was planned to be called "Ecumenical". That would formally make him the "first". That plan was discovered in time and thwarted by the Greek Churches led by the Patriarch of Constantinople Athenagoras. The "Council" turned into a "celebration of the 500th anniversary of autocephaly" and a "meeting of primates and representatives". What they couldn't do then, they want to do now…

> **"Just as the Kremlin has an obvious goal of the Empire restoration, the ROC is in tune with it – the transformation to the "second Vatican", that is, the global religious and political center of attraction for the "Orthodox peoples" and for the "conservative pro-Putin international"**

Moscow is also actively using legal mechanisms. The law, according to which the UOC-MP in Ukraine had to indicate in the name of the affiliation to the Moscow Patriarchate, that is, to show that the governing center of the Church is located in the aggressor country, is suspended. This is a kind of masking operation that disorients Orthodox believers.

In the UOC-MP initiated criminal proceedings against the heads of Chernivtsi and Rivne regional state administrations for allegedly forced re-registration of its religious communities in the community of the OCU. This means that it questions the veracity of the transition of parishes and blocks their lives. Moreover, some adherents of the UOC-MP involve lawyers and write complaints to the SIB against SSU employees who are simply trying to fulfil their duties and restrain individual priests from going beyond the constitutional limits[67].

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[66] https://www.religion.in.ua/main/bogoslovya/24468-pervyj-bez-ravnyx-otvet-konstantinopolskogo-patriarxata-na-dokument-o-pervenstve-prinyatyj-v-moskovskom-patriarxate.html
[67] https://www.religion.in.ua/news/vazhlivo/43519-v-upc-mp-iniciyuvali-kriminalni-provadzhennya-proti-goliv-cherniveckoyi-ta-rivnenskoyi-oblderzhadministracij.html

In the Vinnytsia region, where the transition of parishes to the UOC was particularly active since the reputable Bishop of the UOC-MP Simeon took part in the Unification Council, the head of the Department for Nationalities and Religions of the Vinnytsia Regional State Administration Igor Saletsky had to participate in almost forty trials related to the transition of religious communities to the Orthodox Church of Ukraine and was subject to four criminal proceedings inspired against him[68]. Director of the Legal Department of the Ukrainian Centre Of International Humanitarian Programs, PhD, the author of the first in Ukraine thesis on religious security, Julia Fisun, believes that the plaintiffs chose an official from VinRSA to demonstrate to all managers, what could happen to them if they comply with the Law of Ukraine "On freedom of conscience and religious organizations" and promote establishment of the OCU[69]. It is notable that the instrument of response from the UOC-MP to a public servant in the performance of his duties was the General Directorate of the National Police of Ukraine in Vinnytsia region, which in agreement with the procedural head of Prosecutor's office of the region declared suspicion under article 356 of the criminal code – the arbitrariness and began to investigate[70].

Special attention should be paid to the activities of political and business conglomerates of the Russian-clerical direction with their own media resources, which are encouraged and controlled by Moscow. They are formed both at the regional level, forming an alliance with the local diocese, and at the central level. The goal is to create a long-term system of influence on both state authorities and the electorate, manipulating the feelings of believers, attracting them to their side by providing small financial assistance from time to time by piggybacking on regional business. The most illustrative examples are the Orthodox Deputy and businessman V. Novinsky in Kyiv, in the Mykolaiv and Kherson regions and a graduate of the FSB Academy, a member of the Inter-Council presence of the ROC A. Derkach in the Sumy region.

The characteristic of f. Oleksandr (Drabynko) in relation to the UOC-MP is comprehensive: "Russian political scientists do not accidentally consider the UOC-MP as the most "Russian party" in Ukraine... Novinsky is, so to speak, an unofficial "Russian Ambassador" to Ukraine. But Vadym Novinsky is not just a Deputy and a Pro-Russian political figure. He is also the "main patron" of the UOC-MP, as he himself defined his role in the modern church"[71].

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[68] https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-society/2818472-igor-saleckij-nacalnik-upravlinna-u-spravah-nacionalnostej-ta-religij-vinnickoi-oda.html

[69] Ibid.

[70] Ibid.

[71] https://lb.ua/news/2017/01/07/355419_aleksandr_drabinko_upts.html

In the photo from left to right: Metropolitan Onuphrius, Patriarch Kirill and Vadym Novinsky

The behaviour of the UOC-MP during the quarantine period with demonstrative disregard for quarantine measures and participation in the celebration of the 75th anniversary of the end of World War II under the slogans of the Russian official propaganda "Victory in the Great Patriotic war" finally damasked the UOC-MP as a branch of the ROC. The latter, in turn, finally dissolved itself in the Kremlin's neo-Imperial policy. The opinion of the religious expert Dmytro Gorevoy is remarkable: "Due to the coronavirus, religious figures very rarely appear in public now. Patriarch Kirill disappeared after Easter, and his subordinate, Metropolitan Onuphrius, even sooner. There is not even a photo or video report from his Easter service. However, both hierarchs came to the eternal fire to honour the Victory day. To be absent during religious holidays – such as Easter, Saint George the Victor, or the Myrrhophores, but to come to the eternal fire is the priority of the highest hierarchs of the Moscow Patriarchate."

Having subordinated the ROC in the times of Putin, Kremlin relies on the UOC-MP as an agent of Russian-Imperial memory and traditions in Ukraine. Moscow understands that this church still retains a certain trust in Ukrainian society, especially in the East and South. Therefore, according to the conclusion of D. Gorevoy, because Pro-Russian politicians and activists have largely discredited themselves in Ukraine, those who do not believe Medvedchuk and Boyko will believe Metropolitan Onuphrius and Pavel. Of course, the media from the Russian Federation and Pro-Russian media will

convey the "word of truth" to Ukrainian voters in the next election so that they make a "right choice".

Also, the focus is on the impact through the chain of the FSB – ROC – UOC-MP on the highest state leadership through faithful dignitaries who are already incorporated into the system of power, holding high positions in the SBU, the Office of the President of Ukraine. The change of the power team in Ukraine intensified attempts to shake the position of the new Church. For example, the first Deputy of the Office of the President of Ukraine Serhii Trofimov (a parishioner of the UOC-MP) looks like a performer of personnel claims of the hierarchs of the UOC-MP, although he refutes this.

In the photo: in the second row, Sergii Trofimov is on the right of m. Onuphrius, Vadym Novinsky – to the left[72]

"Trofimov is an ardent parishioner of the Moscow Patriarchate, so to speak, an affiliate who maintains friendly relations and is in constant contact with Metropolitan Anthony (Pakanych) of the Moscow Church. It is rumoured that Trofimov consults with the Metropolitan even on political and personnel issues, in particular regarding

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[72] Source: http://religionpravda.com.ua/2020/04/05/%D0%A3-%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%B0%D0%BD %D0%B4%D0%B0%D0%BB%D1%8C%D0%BD%D0%BE%D0%B3%D0%BE-%D0%BD%D0% B0%D1%81%D1%82%D0%BE%D1%8F%D1%82%D0%B5%D0%BB%D1%8F-%D0%9B%D0% B0%D0%B2%D1%80%D0%B8-%D0%BC%D0%B8%D1%82%D1%80/.

the appointment of key leaders in regional administrations. And during Trofimov's visits to the regions, Metropolitan Anthony organizes meetings with local bishops of his church" – this is the characteristic of the official of the Office of the President of Ukraine given by the News Agency Glavcom[73].

Indicative of the "neutrality" of the government in inter-church relations was the attack of the ROC- UOC-MP against the Head of the Department for Religious Affairs and national minorities Andrii Yurash – one of the participants in the work on Tomos. Due to his efforts, the Department of the Ministry of Culture should be transformed into a State Service of ethnic policy and freedom of conscience. Twice the competition for the head of the new service was won by Andrii Yurash. However, the first time the results of the competition were reset, and the second time, despite the highest score, A. Yurash was simply not approved for the position. According to the available insider information, the Cabinet of Ministers, which approves the candidate, was pressured by the Office of the President.

Thus, it can be summed up that **Russia, through the ROC and its branch in Ukraine – the UOC-MP, as well as agents of influence at various levels of power, conducts lawfare (using the term of American experts) against the UOC and the state of Ukraine, that is, exploits the internal legislation of the enemy state to its detriment**[74].

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[73] https://glavcom.ua/country/society/mizhcerkovnu-politiku-pisatimut-scenaristi-95-kvartalu-660913.html.

[74] https://tyzhden.ua/World/223054

4. RUSSIA'S INFORMATION INFLUENCE ON UKRAINE

4.1. Goals of Russia's informational influence on Ukraine

The future of the Ukrainian state should be built by the political elite with an understanding of the fact that information is a resource of the power fight in the modern world. The state, which strives to preserve its sovereignty and independence, should pay attention to strengthening all four power components – economic, military, diplomatic, and informational[75].

At the strategic level, information warfare is carried out to destroy the enemy's values, including replacing them with its own, destroy its resistance potential, and subordinate resources for their use in its own interests.

Information warfare is the toughest type of information struggle. There are no universally recognized legal and moral norms and restrictions on the ways and means of information warfare. They are limited by considerations of efficiency only. In information warfare, the entire spectrum of means is used, from the "dirtiest", direct lies, to "subtle" ways of presenting information with truthful content. A common feature to the means of attack in information warfare is that they manipulate the mind[76].

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[75] https://delo.ua/opinions/informacionnaja-vojna-rossii-protiv-ukrainy-uroki-dlja-evropy-291526

[76] https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D0%98%D0%BD%D1%84%D0%BE%D1%80%D0%BC%D0%B0%D1%86%D0%B8%D0%BE%D0%BD%D0%BD%D0%B0%D1%8F_%D0%B2%D0%BE%D0%B9%D0%BD%D0%B0

One of the main goals of any information war is to influence the enemy so that it makes decisions independently and without compulsion that benefit the other side[77]. The main goal of the information war of Russia against Ukraine is the same as the entire Russian hybression is to return Ukraine into a zone of Russia's geopolitical influence. For this, it needs to prevent cooperation and rapprochement of Ukraine with Western democracies and the latter's entry into the European Union and NATO.

According to the competent authorities of Ukraine, **information operations (IO) against our country are carried out by:**

- Information Security Centre of the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation (on the territory of Ukraine);
- Division of the special measures of influence of the Main Intelligence Directorate of the General Staff of the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation (in the ORDLO territory and areas adjacent to the demarcation line in Ukraine);
- Division of the special measures of influence of the Foreign Intelligence Service of the Russian Federation (through third states).

The main tactical goals of the information operations of the FSB of the Russian Federation on the territory of Ukraine, according to the SSU counterintelligence, **are**:

- formation of a feeling of disillusionment and disbelief in the patriotic strata of the population, lack of prospects for the path chosen in 2004 and 2014 to Western democracy;
- strengthening of the pro-Russian population's desire to resume dialogue with the Russian Federation on the terms imposed by the Kremlin;
- return of the territories occupied by the Russian Federation (except Crimea) to Ukraine on the terms imposed by the Kremlin and granting them the right to block any rapprochement of Ukraine with the EU and NATO;
- Ukraine's refusal to return Crimea;
- change of the current Ukrainian government and political elite to a pro-Russian one.

The tactical goals of the information operations of Russian Military Intelligence Service in the occupied territories of Ukraine are as follows:

- formation of the population's feeling that it is impossible to return to Ukraine under the current pro-Western course;
- formation of hatred towards the current Ukrainian government;
- formation of hatred towards the EU, NATO and the West as a whole;
- putting the blame for socio-economic issues on Ukraine;

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[77] https://dt.ua/internal/sprava-vishinskogo-yak-dzerkalo-viyni-317290_.html

- creating a positive image of the Russian Federation and its leadership;
- promoting the integration of the occupied territories into the language, information and cultural space of Russia;
- **creating prerequisites for returning to Ukraine after the change of power to a pro-Russian one**[78].

The results of early parliamentary elections in Ukraine can serve a definite proof of the efficiency of Russian and pro-Russian propaganda. If you look at the detailed map of voting results for a multi-member electoral district[79], you can clearly see that even in those regions of Ukraine **where the Party "Sluha Narodu" (Servant of the People) won**, in many voting stations located near the border with the Russian Federation, and occupied by Russia Crimea or Moldova (where Russian propaganda is strong), **the openly pro-Russian Opposition Platform – For Life**, which was actively supported by the Russian media, won. Residents of the **border areas** of Sumy, Kharkiv, Kherson, and Odesa regions are in the zone of particularly active Russian information influence, where Russian TV channels and radio stations often prefer over Ukrainian ones.

4.2. Information special operations with the use of the mass media

In the seventh year of the Russian Federation's aggression against Ukraine, it is already quite obvious that its information component is no less dangerous for the future of our country than Russian tanks. Information attacks do not take lives, but poison the minds of the citizens and distort public opinion. On the part of the Russian Federation, there is a large-scale information campaign aimed at establishing (restoring) control over Ukraine, keeping it in the zone of Russian influence, dispersion of Ukrainian statehood and preventing the actual liquidation of the Russian imperial project in this way. A number of informational special operations can be identified within the campaign.

A. Operation to blur Ukrainian identity

A1. Single people, one language, one culture

Language is the most indicative indicator of a person's identity. Therefore, to prevent the formation/restoration of own identity in Ukraine, Russian makes fierce pressure to block the Ukrainization of the Ukrainian society. Former adviser to the President of Russia Andrey Illarionov claims that Vladimir Putin started the current war against Ukraine half a year before the occupation of Crimea. **The war began with language aggression during Putin's visit to Kyiv on July 27, 2013. It was then that the Russian President, who used to say "in Ukraine", switched to the**

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[78] Personal interview with an SSU officer on condition of anonymity.
[79] https://elections.dekoder.org/ukraine/ua.

grammatical form "on Ukraine." Soon, after Putin, Moscow Patriarch Kirill, the Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergei Lavrov and other Russian dignitaries and officials switched to using the "on Ukraine" form. This transition was to emphasize that Ukraine was just a geographical part of the Russian territory, where "Ukrainians" live, i.e. those who live "near the edge."

The paradigm of activity in this direction was defined during numerous speeches made by V. Putin, in which he argued that the Ukrainians are an artificially created nation, which never existed historically, that the Ukrainian language is a dialect of Russian, and that Ukrainian culture is a part of the Russian culture. In this direction, information materials were actively distributed, events were held, and pro-Russian Ukrainian politicians made speeches. The most odious in that was Vadym Novinsky. As an example of such activity, he, along with 50 other people's deputies of Ukraine (mainly representatives of the Opposition Bloc), made a submission to the Constitutional Court of Ukraine regarding the determination of the constitutionality of the law of Ukraine "On ensuring the functioning of the Ukrainian language as the state language."

A2. Common history

For the successful existence of the Russian imperial project, the beliefs about its own greatness and significance shall be created. Due to absence in the modern history of Russia of the facts and events that could be interpreted in this way and identify Russia as a superpower (the low standard of living of the vast majority of the population compared to the leading countries of the world, the low technological level, its economy based mainly on primary resources, dependence on prices and volumes of oil and gas supplies abroad), the victory in World War II was chosen to create an image of greatness and pride of Russians for their country (in Russia it is the victory in the Great Patriotic War). The cult of the "Great Victory" is strongly spread by Russia to all countries of the former USSR, including Ukraine, and the departure from the paradigm of coverage of the events of the World War II is interpreted as "fascism" and condemned. Thus, the Russian Federation is trying to pre-

> **The war began with language aggression during Putin's visit to Kyiv on July 27, 2013. It was then that the Russian President, who used to say "in Ukraine", switched to the grammatical form "on Ukraine." Soon, after Putin, Moscow Patriarch Kirill, the Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergei Lavrov and other Russian dignitaries and officials switched to using the "on Ukraine" form. This transition emphasizes that Ukraine is just a geographical part of the Russian territory, where "Ukráinians" live, i.e. those who live "near the edge."**

vent Ukraine from creating its own national view of historical events, and forming a national vision of history as the basis for Ukrainian national identity.

In Ukraine, following the example of Russian events, Soviet films on military themes are shown, festive concerts with the performance of Soviet war and songs of later periods (Inter TV Channel, NTN, Inter-Film), "immortal regiment" actions and so on are carried out.

A3. Orthodox unity

According to the results of a number of studies, it can be argued that Ukrainians are one of the most religious nations in Europe – more than 75% of the population of Ukraine consider themselves believers, more than 90% of whom consider themselves Christians. Although there are far fewer active parishioners, the Church enjoys a much higher level of trust among the population than any other institutions in the country. For the formation of national identity, the existence of a recognized canonical national Church is of fundamental importance, and the conduct of services in the Ukrainian language rather ensures its introduction into all spheres of life in the country.

Therefore, the issue of discrediting the idea of creating a national Autocephalous Church in Ukraine and its recognition by other churches is very important for the Russian Federation in terms of preventing the formation of Ukrainian identity.

Russia has never stopped its opposition to the creation of the OCU. A significant role in this was played by R. Akhmetov's partner V. Novinsky, who acts both as a channel for publishing biased and manipulative information, and a sponsor of certain events (processions, foreign visits, etc.).

These processes are actively covered by the News Agency "Union of Orthodox Journalists" (UOJ), established in 2015. This organization on its own website posts engaged and openly fake messages aimed at discrediting the OCU, inflating the confrontation between believers of different faiths, and it is actually the mouthpiece of the Ukrainian Exarchate of the ROC (UOC-MP). It also has its own channel on the YouTube, where the number of official supporters is about 34.5 thousand users, although some materials posted there have over 130 thousand views.

The background for the successful conduct of these special operations is created through the expansion of the Russian mass culture, primarily television production. Before the Revolution of Dignity, the production of high-quality television product in Ukraine was under full control of Russia. Now Ukrainian TV series are shot in small numbers. Most of them are actually copies of the Russian product and many Ukrainian TV series are produced in Russian, so that it is actually

difficult to determine the country of origin and the place where the film takes place. This way the borders between the countries are blurred and the Russian way of life and thinking is imposed, and a non-Ukrainian identity is formed.

Through the series, the target audience gets a sense of second-rate Ukraine and its subordination to Russia. Separately, we should define the Star Media company, founded in 2006 by a former producer of the Inter TV Channel Vlad Ryashin in Russia (the movies company also has its headquarters in Ukraine and the UK). The company produces about 600 hours of series, TV movies and feature films annually. In General, the Company's library exceeds 5,000 hours of product with high-quality videos and voice acting, which attracts the viewer's attention. The company has an official channel on YouTube where the number of official supporters exceeded 1 million users. Almost every Ukrainian Internet user can easily get acquainted with the content of this company.

The actual direction of the company's activity is to create a favourable interpretation of the Russian history, first of all, the post-Soviet countries, and the formation of Russian (Soviet) identity in the former USSR countries. For this purpose, a large number of "historical" TV movies are being made on the subject of the history of the Russian state, Kyivan Rus, the World War II, and so on. It produces TV series about the life of historical figures of the Soviet era combined with the exponential forms of Soviet life, and this forms a favourable for the current Russian leadership attitude to the Soviet past, in which there was no deficit, queues, punitive psychiatry and other negative aspects of life. They show only that version of reality, which makes the older generation nostalgic and forms the idealistic view of the Soviet era for the younger. It forms post-Soviet (Russian) identity, complicates (makes impossible) the formation of national identity, and creates the prerequisites for further dissemination of the ideas of Russian World (Russky Mir).

B. Creation of the image of Ukraine as a failed state

As part of this operation, measures are being taken to discredit the top military and political leadership of Ukraine, accuse them in corruption, and demonstrate inability of governmental institutions to solve urgent problems of their own people. Ukraine is presented as an unreliable international partner that does not fulfil its obligations. Ukrainian politicians are shown as dependent on external influence, etc.

C. Provoking mass riots

As part of this operation, by using created pro-Russian networks (mainly social networks in different regions of Ukraine), which act according to the common idea and the plan of their RF curators, information materials of a destructive nature are

distributed, mass actions of disobedience (including under patriotic slogans) are provoked, and new supporters are actively attracted.

Another direction in this operation can be defined as instigating regional separatism in Ukraine. As an example, the attempts to create the so-called "Bessarabia People's Republic" in 2015 on the territory of several districts of the Odesa region can be cited. Due to the timely actions of the SSU, those attempts were stopped, and the persons who were most active in those actions were either convicted or expelled from the country.

D. Disinformation operation concerning crimes committed by the Russian Federation in the territory of Ukraine

As part of this operation, information campaigns are being conducted aimed at creating a stable belief both in Ukraine, Russia and the world community regarding the Russian Federation's non-involvement in unleashing armed aggression against Ukraine, presenting it as a purely internal conflict, and evading responsibility for crimes against humanity committed by the Russian troops. There are several informational actions: "ikhtamnet" (they are not there) - there are no Russian troops in the territory of Ukraine, the destruction of MH-17 flight – as a crime of the Ukrainian military, and objections to the illegality of Russia's actions to attack and capture Ukrainian boats in the Black Sea near the Kerch Strait on November 25, 2018.

The main goal of the actions in this operation is to create a belief, first of all among the population of Russia and Ukraine, in the non-involvement of the Russian Federation in military aggression against Ukraine, to present it as a "civil war," to influence the international community to deprive Ukraine of international support, prevent international organizations and courts from making decisions accusing the Russian Federation of unleashing armed aggression and committing war crimes.

E. Charges of war crimes against Ukraine.

Every day, information resources of quasi-state entities in the occupied territories of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions (the so-called "L/DPR") publish information materials, in which the Armed Forces of Ukraine are accused of violating the Minsk agreements, using heavy weapon systems, firing at civilians and using ammunition prohibited by international agreements and conventions (for example, "phosphorus" ammunition, although such types of ammunition were not used by the Armed Forces of Ukraine, and the facts of their use by the Russian occupation troops on the positions of the Armed Forces of Ukraine were recorded). After posting such messages on the "L/DPR" information resources, they are distributed on the Central channels of the Russian Federation with the corresponding links, in the publics in

social networks. They are brought into the information space of Ukraine when pro-Russian media distribute such information or links to Russian media, or publish them as own content. In fact, such content does not differ from the one fabricated by the occupiers.

F. Operation of information coercion to make the decisions necessary for Russia.

As part of this operation, information campaigns and actions are constantly carried out, in the course of which the narratives, fake news, contradictory research or expert opinions are thrown into the information space. They are aimed at changing public opinion in general and changing the opinion of persons authorized to make certain decisions to one beneficial to Russia. Usually, such actions are carried out on the eve of international visits, consideration of cases in the international courts, where the Russian Federation is the defendant, the conclusion of interstate or trade agreements that, in the opinion of the Russian Federation, pose a threat to its interests, etc. For example, we can consider an information campaign to promote Russian interests in the gas sector.

On March 22, 2019, the contract of the Chairman of Naftogaz of Ukraine NJSC Andriy Kobolyev ended. On the same day, Viktor Medvedchuk and Yuri Boyko visited Moscow, where they met Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev and Gazprom's CEO Alexey Miller. During the meeting, the issues of resuming direct supplies of Russian gas to Ukraine and the price for it were discussed. This meeting was covered by pro-Russian TV Channels in Ukraine. Through manipulation, the opinion was formed that it was not economically feasible for Ukraine to buy gas at European prices and that the price offered by Gazprom was much lower, which in fact did not correspond to the real state of things. But with a link to the message of the TV Channel 112 Ukraine, information with the above narratives was replicated by a number of resources in Ukraine and the Russian Federation to form public opinion in favour of resuming cooperation with Gazprom.

The goals of these informational events within the framework of such promotion could be defined as follows:

1. To create support among the pro-Russian electorate in Ukraine for Yurii Boyko, whose election as President of Ukraine would reduce the price of gas and utility tariffs in Ukraine.

2. To use disagreements in the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine regarding the extension of the contract with the CEO of Naftogaz of Ukraine and lobby the appointment of the person who would accept the agreement with the Russian

Federation announced during the above mentioned meeting to preserve gas transit through Ukraine after January 1, 2020 and receive the "discount" for gas announced by Dmitry Medvedev.

3. To persuade Ukraine and Naftogaz refuse legal claims against Gazprom in the international courts. On June 5, the information space of Ukraine and the Russian Federation actively disseminated the statement of Prime Minister of the Russian Federation Dmitry Medvedev, made after talks with the Prime Minister of Slovakia, Peter Pellegrini, that one of the conditions for continuing gas transit through Ukraine is Kyiv's refusal from legal disputes over gas.

Thus, it is possible to observe the active information of the Russian Federation on formation of the necessary to Russia behaviours of Ukrainian officials, public opinion in Ukraine (the Ukrainians overpay for gas by half – Boyko and Medvedchuk can negotiate a lower price – Russia is ready to sell cheap gas – we have to agree – the current government does not care about the people). Due to pressure of the Ukrainian society on the one hand and the EU officials on the other hand (the impression that Russia is ready to make concessions, but the unwavering position of Ukraine will lead to another gas crisis in Europe – pressure shall be put on Ukraine and Nord Stream 2 shall be started) Ukraine shall be forced to accept the RF disadvantageous offers.

It should be noted that the Russian side eventually managed to achieve partial success, although much later. During a meeting in the Normandy format in Paris on December 9, 2019, the Ukrainian side agreed to the lifting of Naftogaz's legal claims against Gazprom for USD 12.2 billion.

The case of Kirill Vyshynsky, head of the Russian News Media Agency's Division in Ukraine, is indicative both from the point of view of how the Russian propaganda machine works from inside Ukraine, and from the point of view of material and financial support. He was arrested by the SSU in May 2018 on charges of creating a subversive pro-Russian information network in Ukraine and treason. In September 2019, he was exchanged for Ukrainian political prisoners from the "Sentsov List." His services to Russia and work in Russia are eloquently proven by the state awards of the Russian Federation, handed him by the secret decrees of the Russian President in 2014 – the Medal of the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation "For the Return of Crimea" and the order "For Merits to the Fatherland." According to the assessment of Viktor Kononenko, ex-Deputy Head of the SSU, it was established and documented that in the spring of 2014 Vyshynsky was assigned to the Autonomous Republic of Crimea to conduct subversive information actions. It was he and the journalists under his control who produced materials that justified

the annexation of Crimea and the unification of Crimea with Russia"[80]. Ensuring the large-scale activities of the Ukrainian branch of the main propaganda mouthpiece of the Kremlin was carried out according to the scheme below (Fig. 9).
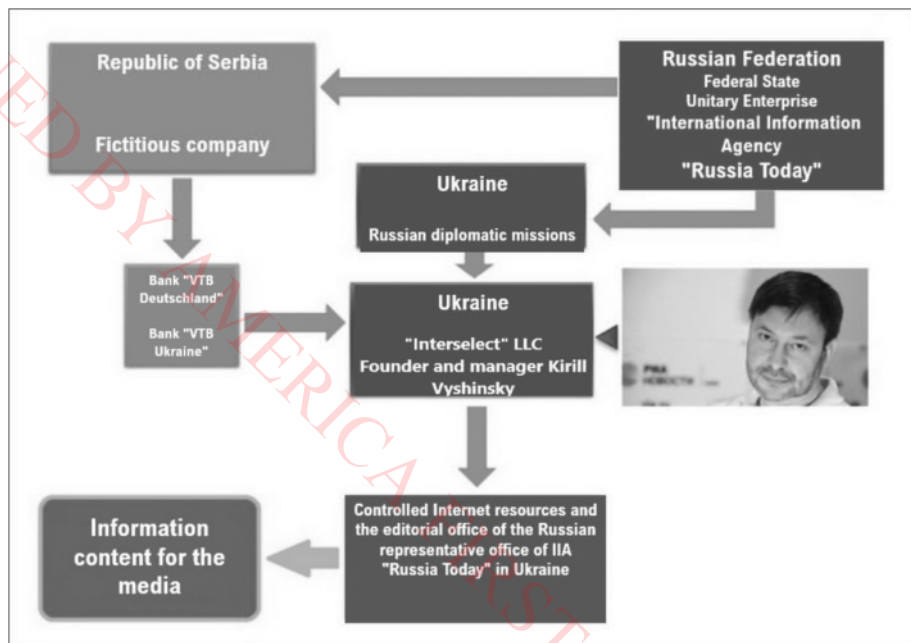
Fig. 9. Work algorithm of the Russian Propaganda Agency MIA "News" in Ukraine under the leadership of K. Vyshynsky[81].

Every month, the Serbian firm SPN Media Solutions sent 53 thousand Euros to Vyshynsky's company «Interselect.» According to the SSU, that money was of Russian origin and was used for the activities of RIA Novosti-Ukraine. For 3 years – from February 2014 to April 2018, almost 2,135 million Euros were received from the Serbian company[82]. The peculiarity of the scheme is the use of fictitious companies and branches of Russian banks for transferring funds. The banks have European registration and, according to the plan, should not arouse suspicion from the Ukrainian special services. This is a common pattern of Russian intelligence agencies working with the agents outside of Russia.

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[80] https://ms.detector.media/manipulyatsii/post/23424/2019-09-01-khto-takii-kirilo-vishinskii-za-yakogo-rosiya-viddala-sentsova/

[81] Ibid.

[82] Ibid.

4.3. Narratives of pro-Russian information flows

Through the controlled media, Internet resources, individual journalists, politicians, bloggers and trolls, the security services of the aggressor country are persistently trying to impose to the Ukrainians **the main message – the "Ukraine" project did not occur**, Ukraine is a failed state, and Ukrainians can survive only through rapprochement with Russia and close cooperation with it.

According to the estimates of the relevant SSU structures, the Russian special services, with the help of their Ukrainian henchmen, create a virtual reality in the information space of Ukraine, in which:

-   Ukraine does not have its own history. Kyivan Rus is the beginning of the Russian state, not the Ukrainian one;
-   the Ukrainian people is a part of Russia, and Russians love their Ukrainian brothers very much;
-   unity with Russia is the only chance for the survival of the Slavic peoples, whose destruction and enslavement are sought by the Anglo-Saxons and world Freemasonry;
-   all Western neighbours of Ukraine – Romania, Poland, Hungary and even Slovakia are hatching insidious plans to seize Ukrainian territories and dismember our state;
-   Europe is rotting and dying because of political correctness, tolerance and the spread of LGBT;
-   Ukrainians are lost sheep, the modern Ukrainian political elite, which chose the Western path, is simply "sick", being infected by the Western special services with the viruses of westernization and nationalism;
-   the project named "Ukraine" is nearing completion[83].

These topics, beloved by Russian "knights of fakes and provocations", should be added by the following:

-   power in Ukraine was seized by "fascists" and "nationalists";
-   **a civil war continues in Ukraine;**
-   Russia is providing huge assistance to the victims of "Kyiv fascist junta" in Donbas;
-   absolute Russophobia reigns in Ukraine and the Russian-speaking minority is being persecuted;
-   there is an attack on freedom of speech and persecution of opposition journalists in Ukraine;

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[83] Personal interview with an SSU officer on condition of anonymity.

- in Europe, "no one is waiting for Ukraine", "Europe is tired of Ukraine", and the signed Association Agreement between Ukraine and the EU is not just unprofitable, but destructive one for the Ukrainian economy;
- the creation of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine with the receipt of autocephaly and Tomos is a split of Orthodoxy in favour of the "overseas owners" of the Kyiv authorities and the creation of a "Turkish Protectorate" in Ukraine;
- Ukraine is a place where secret biological laboratories of the USA are located, where dangerous experiments with viruses are conducted.

As a rule, most of the thematic variations of Russian narratives fit into the above-listed ones. In the published by the Ministry of Information Policy in 2018 "The White Book of Special Information Operations against Ukraine 2014-2018", it is proposed to consider them as a kind of series[84]. This model was chosen by analysts for the obvious high degree of efficiency of the Russian narratives and disinformation techniques due to their repetition in the media: objects of disinformation are constantly told the same stories, making them more interesting and more "exotic" each time.

It seems that, like the characters of TV series, there are always people on TV channels who, due to their appearance on pro-Russian channels and citing in the Russian media, represent the main lobbying potential of the Russian Federation in Ukraine: ex-Deputy Head of the Presidential Administration of the fugitive President V. Yanukovych A. Portnov, ex-Minister of Justice of the Yanukovych's times O. Lukash, ex-Minister of Transport Y. Chervonenko, representatives of the top of OPZZh V. Medvedchuk, Y. Boyko, S. Lyovochkin, V. Rabinovych, N. Korolevska, N. Shufrych, Y. Pavlenko, O. Voloshyn and others. "Expert" support is provided by a number of marginal political scientists and those who have been in the service of pro-Russian owners of the media groups for a long time. To give them "European solidity" and create the illusion of authority in the European political circles, to increase the confidence of Ukrainians in both pro-Russian politicians from OPZZh and the Russian vision of the Ukraine's future, three European MPs were appointed to the "International Editorial Boards" of 112 Ukraine and NewsOne TV Channels. Nathan Gill, David Coburn and Arne Gericke are not only well-known euro-sceptics, but also long-time fans of Putin's Russia, who transfer its messages to Europe, and now to Ukraine.

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[84] The book of special information operations of Ukraine 2014–2018. URL:http://mip.gov.ua/files/pdf/ white_book_2018_mip.pdf.

4.4. Conclusions

The efficiency of Russian information influences and the effectiveness of the Kremlin's information and political lobby in Ukraine are evidenced by the growing number of Ukrainians who believe that Ukraine started the war in Donbas, and those who believe that ethnic Russians and Russian-speaking citizens are being persecuted in Ukraine, and the results of extraordinary parliamentary elections, during which pro-Russian forces in total gained 18.3% of the votes[85], and the party, which is openly oriented towards Moscow – Opposition Platform – For Life, received the second-largest faction in the Parliament of Ukraine.

To spread its narratives in the Ukrainian information space, Russia actively uses Ukrainian and Western politicians, political scientists, journalists and social activists. Currently, the most active promoters of Kremlin ideas in the Ukrainian information space are pro-Russian politicians – "front men" of two political forces – the Opposition Platform – For Life and the Opposition Bloc – Party for Peace and Development.

In addition to Ukrainian agents of influence and public opinion leaders, the Russian Federation actively attracts European politicians, especially the members of the European Parliament, to spread its propaganda in Ukraine. The main task of the use of European MPs by Moscow is to introduce Kremlin ideas in Ukraine through Europe, which is much more trusted by a large part of the population of our country than in Russia.

Currently, one of the main tasks of the Kremlin is to impose on Kyiv its "peace plan" for the settlement in the Donbas, published by Putin's good man Medvedchuk. Russia has formed a pool of MPs who participated in its information dumping and operations. Comments from European politicians who are sympathetic to Russia help Ukrainian pro-Russian media manipulate information and present to viewers the statements of **individual** European speakers as the opinion of **the entire** European Parliament, the European Union, Europe, or even the West as a whole.

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[85] https://www.cvk.gov.ua/pls/vnd2019/wp300pt001f01=919.html

The main message of the Kremlin in the information war against our country is the "failure of the project named "Ukraine", the failure of the state of Ukraine, and the possibility of Ukrainians' survival only through rapprochement with Russia and close cooperation with it."

Central Ukrainian TV channels remain the top source of information for the absolute majority of our country's citizens: 74% of Ukrainians receive information about events in Ukraine and the world mainly from national TV channels. The Russian Federation communicates its numerous fakes and anti-Ukrainian narratives to Ukrainian citizens through both Russian and Ukrainian-registered mass media, and through social networks.

Ukrainian TV platform for transmission of Kremlin's narratives is quite impressive: two of the three national TV channels – the leaders of audience sympathy – *Ukraine* and *Inter* belong to major businessmen (R. Akhmetov and the Firtash-Lyovochkin tandem, respectively), who do not hide their loyal attitude to the Russian Federation and support the idea of bringing our country closer to Russia. The years of 2018-2019 were marked by the "medvedchukization" of Ukrainian television. Three leading news channels – NewsOne, 112 Ukraine and ZIK – were acquired by T. Kozak, a close associate of Viktor Medvedchuk, Putin's good man and the most prominent and influential conductor of Kremlin ideas in Ukraine.

The most frequent guests of the studios of these channels are the politicians from the pro-Russian OPZZh and the Opposition Bloc, which messages and the massages of a pool of "scientists" and "experts" often duplicate or are variations of the main narratives the Russian propaganda in the information war against Ukraine. These TV channels often manipulate information, distorting even the meaning of the publications from Western media and analytical centers they quote.

Although the popularity of radio is inferior to television, its influence on the average Ukrainian should not be underestimated. Millions of drivers and public transport passengers listen to the radio every day. Although there are no openly pro-Russian radio stations in Ukraine, unlike television, pro-Russian content is present on both music and entertainment radio stations and informative and varied-speech ones.

In the Ukrainian information space, *Vesti* newspaper is the only national periodical, which media experts' position as the main distributor of pro-Russian messages in Ukrainian print media. Nevertheless, elements of this content are found in other publications. At the regional level, print media have not been seen actively spreading pro-Russian narratives. However, during the parliamentary and presidential election campaigns, these publications increased the citation of politicians, whose statements are often in tune with the messages of the Russian propaganda.

According to the data of the March 2019 poll[86], social networks are the top source of information for 23.5% of Ukrainians. 74% of active Ukrainian social network users choose Facebook. Since the beginning of the Russian hybrid aggression, the activities of Russian special services in the Ukrainian segment of this social network have become more sophisticated and deeper. Russian trolls, who grew fake accounts several years deep, are already infiltrating into closed thematic Ukrainian groups, masquerading as Ukrainian citizens, creating allegedly patriotic groups, which later begin to publish content of narratives of the Russian propaganda. During the two election campaigns of 2019, Russians actively rented Ukrainian Facebook accounts for political advertising and promotion of anti-Ukrainian content. According to the

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[86] https://detector.media/infospace/article/164308/2019-03-21-dzherela-informatsii-mediagramotnist-i-rosiiska-propaganda-rezultati-vseukrainskogo-opituvannya-gromadskoi-dumki/

plan of the Russian special services, involving the residents of Ukraine in the distribution of destructive materials allows them adapting such for the citizens of our country and creating the illusion of "truthfulness" of the messages.

Passive perception of information makes YouTube video hosting popular in Ukraine, and among users around the world. The domestic segment of the service significantly grew due to the activity of both the audience and content creators. Both in the countries of Europe, America and Asia, and Ukraine, the Russian Federation seeks to influence public opinion and impose its vision of the situation in our country through YouTube. The influence of YouTube on the minds of Ukrainians can be evidenced by the unexpected relative success in the parliamentary elections of a registered 1.5 months before the voting day pseudo-party of Ukraine-phobic blogger A. Shariy, who has been living abroad for several years.

Unlike Facebook and YouTube, other social networks, including Google+, Tumblr, Twitter, Telegram, Instagram, LiveJournal, LinkedIn, etc. are less popular in Ukraine. However, in the last year in Ukraine, anonymous Telegram channels have become popular (Resident, DarkKnight, Legitimate, Scout, Whisperer, Onion, Bearded Grandmother, Shadow Anonymous, and other). They often spread pro-Russian narratives, and some of them are associated with the Deputy Head of the Office of the President Kyrylo Tymoshenko. It is, in particular, the Resident Telegram channel.

After Kyiv's decision in 2017 to block VKontakte and Odnoklassniki, Ukrainian users are gradually leaving these Russian online platforms. However, their Ukrainian segment still has millions of participants. Therefore, Moscow actively uses these and other social networks to conduct information and psychological operations to undermine the situation in Ukraine.

The data of the March 2019 opinion poll shows that Internet sites are the main source of information for 27.5% of Ukrainian citizens and rank second after television. However, in terms of coverage and popularity, they are significantly inferior to the top TV channels. At the same time, there are quite a large number of pro-Russian media in the Ukrainian segment of the Internet.

Among the top ten Ukrainian sites, the most visited by Ukrainians, some to various degrees can be considered as distributors of Russian narratives. These are Strana. UA, Gordonua.com, Korrespondent.net and Znaj.UA. These sites often use Russian Internet resources and news agencies as sources of primary information, in particular about international and even Ukrainian news. Also, these sites often publish information about internal events in Russia, imposing the Russian agenda on their readers, and thus the consumer of such information is constantly in the Russian information field.

The resonant interviews of the owner of Gordon.ua with Natalia Poklonskaya and Igor Girkin became a clear confirmation of Russia's use of Ukrainian media resources to provoke conflict situations in the society and distort the information space. Well-known Ukrainian journalist Vitaliy Portnikov gave a clear description of this phenomenon: "This is a common reformatting of the information space in Ukraine. And I must say that Dmytro Gordon is not a player in this reformatting, but its tool. He may not even understand this, because not everyone can understand his/her role in certain events" [87]. The Russian secret services work exactly according to this method. They use people who will not fully understand their role in certain processes.

In an effort to shake the situation in Ukraine, Moscow actively uses ethnic minorities - Hungarians, Poles, Romanians, Bulgarians, Greeks, and other to destabilize it. Russian special services also manipulate the situation with national minorities in our country to discredit Kyiv in the eyes of the international community.

The differences in mentality, religious specifics and historical development of various peoples inhabiting Ukraine, Kyiv's minimal attention to their socio-economic and national problems, and the low level of trust of national minorities in the Central authorities provide Russian special services and pro-Russian politicians with ample opportunities for manipulation and disinformation, creating a constant zone of turbulence. One of the areas of work on rocking the situation is the strengthening of separatist sentiments.

Civil society responds most quickly to threats in the Ukrainian information space. In 2014, the volunteers were the first to engage in an informational confrontation with the Kremlin, launching independent to the state projects to counter Russian propaganda and inform Ukrainian citizens and the international community about the Russian-Ukrainian war, tracking Russian propaganda, exposing fakes, blocking websites of pro-Russian separatists and their accounts.

The state is also taking measures to protect the information space approving the "Information Security Doctrine", partially restoring Ukrainian broadcasting along the demarcation line in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, as well as the Kherson regions on the border with Crimea, setting quotas for the Ukrainian language on radio and television, limiting the broadcast of a dozen of Russian TV channels, blocking some Russian websites and social networks.

Introduced in 2017 and 2018 by presidential decrees, the NSDC's decisions to block Russian social networks, TV channels and websites caused a mixed reaction in Ukrainian society. The bans provoked criticism from media organizations. Two years after the start of the implementation of the decision of the National Security and Defence Council to block Russian sites, we can only state their partial effec-

tiveness due to the use of VPN programs by Ukrainians to gain access to blocked resources and abundant quoting by Ukrainian pro-Russian media of the content of Russian resources, which are under sanctions. Despite the insufficient effectiveness of the restrictive measures against Russian Internet resources, introduced during the presidency of P. Poroshenko, the government elected in 2019 is not going to cancel them yet, as per May 2020. Zelenskyy extended the ban on Russian social networks and Internet services.

To effectively counter the threats from Russia in the information sphere, it is important to constantly review legislation, adapting it to new conditions. To date, the security of the information space of Ukraine is not sufficiently covered by law. The Information Security Doctrine, developed with the participation of the Ministry of Information Policy of Ukraine (MIP), is extremely necessary under conditions of a hybrid war, but has not become a guide to action through the weak institutional capacity of the Ministry for the formation and implementation of state information policy. Reorganization of MIP to the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy has not led to changes in the work in the information field.

The National Council for Television and Radio Broadcasting has legally limited opportunities to protect the information space of Ukraine: the current legislation does not allow the National Council depriving broadcasters of licenses. Only the court has the right to do so, and the Regulator itself can issue a warning or impose a fine.

Another legislative problem in the field of information security is the lack of transparency in the ownership of Ukrainian media. Adopted in 2015, a law requiring broadcasting companies to publish on their websites and provide the information about their owners to the National Council on Television and Broadcasting does not solve this problem.

Ukrainian legislation does not sufficiently prescribe the rules that determine which elements of the work of mass media pose a threat to national security. In the context of Russia's hybrid war against Ukraine, this must be done while addressing the problem facing any democratic society – how to achieve a balance between respecting freedom of speech and protecting national security.

One of the main features of information operations of Russian special services in Ukraine is their conduct, mainly within the framework of Ukrainian legislation. Russia uses the achievements of democracy as its weaknesses in the democratic states where it conducts information operations. If Ukraine begins to significantly change its legislation, making it more stringent in the sphere of rights and freedoms, there is a great danger of sliding into authoritarianism or even dictatorship.

Not only legislative but also a number of technical problems weaken the information security of Ukraine. After a significant part of the telecommunications infrastructure in ORDLO and Crimea was captured by the occupier, Ukraine has been able to launch only four TV towers for 6 years of Russian aggression. To this day, Ukrainian television and radio broadcasting has not been restored in a significant part of the territory of Donetsk and Luhansk regions.

Despite the existence of technical capabilities and the creation by Ukrainian specialists of a unique system for jamming hostile ether "Serpanok", Ukraine has not yet managed to completely mute the "voices" of the aggressor country in its bordering areas.

According to experts, **Ukraine has already information-wise lost Crimea, the "DPR" and "LPR", which watch and listen to Russia and live its agenda. Moreover, today our country seriously risks informationally losing its residents in the border area on the territory controlled by Ukraine, if it does not urgently and seriously address the problem of insufficient coverage of these territories by the Ukrainian signal.**

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5. AFTERWORD

The processes, which we are witnessing now in Ukraine, are the result of the formation of a close to critical mass of agents of the Russian influence in the state institutions and that the top state leadership follows the Russian algorithm for solving the problem of the "war in Donbas." Direct contacts between the President and his close circles and the Russian leadership at the meeting in the "Normandy Format" (N4) in December 2019 in Paris and unofficial contacts in Oman in January 2020 allowed the Russians to reprogram Ukraine's "leadership module" for the "peaceful" solution in Donbas.

The main destructive processes for Ukraine are caused by Russia's intensification of old and creation of new contours of external governance of the country, the activities of which lead to growing chaos, uncertainty and tensions in the society, as well as dysfunction of power in Ukraine, which is intensified in the conditions of the quarantine measures and post-quarantine political activity. The shock for the society was the resumption of electricity imports from Russia and Belarus on July 1, 2019. Immediately after the presidential elections in Ukraine, under the influence of the oligarchic group's lobbying efforts, the import of cheaper electricity from Russia and Belarus was lobbied by the newly elected Deputies of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine. The phenomenon of "gerusification" took place at the time when the movement had to take place in the opposite direction, both in the context of the impossibility of imports from the aggressor country and in the context of energy security and the movement towards full independence from the post-Soviet energy system and integration to the European one.

Activities, which have been happening since the beginning of 2020, correspond to the basic 4-step algorithm of non-linear processes, used for hybrid technologies of waging wars, which is described by the Centre for Global Studies Strategy XXI in the work "Wars XXI: Russia's Polyhybression" (https://geostrategy.org.ua/en/component/k2/item/1561-kniga-viyni-xxi-poligibresiya-rosiyi), published in 2017. That algorithm was effectively tested during the Crimean special operation of the Russian Federation from February 20 to March 28, 2014.

Now the template of the 4-step algorithm is used again, but no longer in relation to a particular region, but in relation to the whole country with a longer period of time. Once again, Russia uses a template of creating a critical mass of personnel through promotion of various agents to key positions in the system of the top state leadership, the national security and defense sphere, law enforcement agencies and the information sphere. This template proved its effectiveness when Yanukovych was in power.

1st step: False-target programming of the enemy through the "cooperation model", under cover of which a program of its cryptodestruction is realized. Politically, Zelenskyy was imposed an election platform in the forms of viral formulas - "we did not start this war, but we have to end it", "we just need to stop shooting", "meet in the middle", "remove people of war from power", which formed his position before and after the elections and dictated his personnel policy.

These formulas are advantageous in terms of targeted programming in the struggle for votes, because there are no people in Ukraine who do not want peace. But few people would agree to the peace on the terms of capitulation to the aggressor and are ready to accept the peace in exchange for Ukraine's loss of statehood. Falseness of the targeted programming lies here. **By considering the achievement of peace that is desired by the whole society as a goal, the chosen way to achieve this is absolutely supposedly simple and obvious, but wrong. The goal of achieving peace was subtly replaced by the goal of unilaterally ceasefire. This technology of the false-targeted programming was laid down by the aggressor's political technologists through agents of influence.**

As a result, this has led to questionable staff appointments, which have resulted in incompetent people who are either completely loyal to the President or ready to follow all his instructions, or committed to restoring "fraternal" relations with Russia. Both are used by Russia to promote the agents of influence, gradually transforming the Ukrainian power into a power that will later have to give birth to the UkrSSR 2.0.

All this leads to disorientation of the society and foreign partners regarding the further policy of Ukraine in counteracting Russian aggression. Now we are witnessing how Russia transferred the special operation against Ukraine to the second step of the algorithm. This happened after V. Zelenskyy's secret visit to Oman in January 2020 and, as the media suggested, his meetings with unknown Kremlin envoys there.

2nd step: Transformation of certainties and statuses into a cluster of uncertainties, destruction, chaotization. Erosion of the certainty of state policy and the acquisition of uncertainty are formed in several directions – internal policy, economy, foreign policy.

1. There is a sharp increase in the dynamics of the Russian side after the Munich Security Conference on February 15, 2020. The "12 Steps toward Greater Security in Ukraine and the Euro-Atlantic Region" were announced in Munich, stating that "a new, inclusive national dialogue across Ukraine is desirable and could be launched as soon as possible." Indicative points are several of these 12 steps, which reveal Russia's authorship of this plan, hidden behind the international circle of signatories, in which, among other things, there are a free trade zone between Ukraine and Russia, a possibility of gradual lifting of sanctions against Russia and launching an all-Ukrainian nationwide dialogue on Ukraine's new identity, which takes into account the views of Ukraine's neighbors, including Russia.

The purpose of this document is to transfer international efforts from resolution of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict into a format of resolving an "internal civil conflict in Ukraine" and to blur Russia's image as an aggressor country. It is logical that after that the idea of the so-called National Platform for Reconciliation and Unity could become relevant in Ukraine. It is worth recalling that it was supposed to be presented immediately after the Munich Security Conference on February 19, 2020, but was postponed, and the idea finally failed under the public pressure.

2. On March 6, 2020, newly appointed Prime Minister D. Shmygal made contradictory statements about the resumption of water supply from the Dnipro River to occupied Crimea (practically repeating the theses of the leader of the parliamentary faction "Sluha Narodu" D. Arahamia) that blurred Ukraine's clear state position on impossibility of water supply till complete de-occupation of the peninsula.

3. On March 10, 2020, in the absence of reaction from the leadership of the state, the group of deputies of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine headed by Putin's crony V. Medvedchuk paid a visit to Moscow to form a "parliamentary dimension of the Normandy format" to assist heads of state in "peaceful conflict resolution in Ukraine". In this way, the status of Russia as an aggressor country is eroded through the parliamentary format, giving it the status of a peace mediator.

4. On March 11, 2020, a number of events took place simultaneously. The Council of the Federation of the Russian Federation approved a law recognizing the citizens of Belarus and Ukraine as native speakers of the Russian language. This status gives them the opportunity to obtain Russian citizenship in a simplified manner. In other words, this means an additional erosion of Ukrainian identity with the imposition of a dual Russian-Ukrainian identity that follows Putin's vision of "one nation."

On the same day in Minsk, the protocol of Kozak-Yermak was signed at a meeting of the Trilateral Contact Group (TCG) that creates preconditions for recognizing the subjectivity of the "DNR / LNR" and erodes the previous five-year state position on non-recognition of the Russian proxies. According to Alyona Getmanchuk, Director of the New Europe Center, the agreements, signed on March 11 in Minsk, are very similar to what Kozak tested in Moldova in 2003 on the Transnistrian settlement. Former representative of Ukraine in the TCG political subgroup Roman Bezsmertnyi points out that in the legal sense this is the recognition of the exclusive sides of the conflict - ORDLO, on the one hand, and Ukraine, on the other hand, with the automatic removal of Russia from the conflict. Therefore, if such a decision is approved, it finally erodes the status of the Russian Federation as an aggressor country, gives it a status of a mediator, and puts it on a par with France and Germany. So, in Minsk, a kind of co-creation of Kozak and Yermak was launched, where Kozak plays a leading role, and Yermak - a role of subcontractor. Application of the "formula KozYermak" with an advisory board, which includes Russian proxies, is simply an upgrade of Kozak's Moldovan experience. The goal is obvious - "make a Transnistria in Ukraine" with further "Bosnianization" if the Rubicon is crossed by Zelenskyy at the next N4 meeting or in the Minsk process.

5. If the Munich document is aimed primarily at an international audience, the "Sivokho platform", presented on March 12, was in fact organizationally aimed at the Ukrainian domestic audience. The purpose of its creation is not only assistance to Russia's propaganda, and political and diplomatic transformation of the fact of Russia's aggression against Ukraine into a "civil war in Ukraine" in order to fix the Russian version of events of 2014 in the public consciousness of Ukrainians. The Kremlin's legend of the events in Ukraine is well known: "the Maidan uprising in Kyiv — a *coup d'etat* with a shift of legitimate power — disagreement of the "people of Donbas" with the insurgents — the proclamation of people's republics — a military operation of Kyiv authorities against the region — a protracted civil conflict."

6. In March 2020, Head of the Prosecutor General's Office was replaced by a person who was not independent but loyal to the Office of the President. That became an indicator of the tendency of the state leadership to fabricate politically motivated cases. The investigation of the "Biden case", which both Trump and the Kremlin wanted, was resumed in May 2020 due to the impetus of the "Derkach records", whose activities have been focused on this case for the last six months. Since 2019, it has been promoting cases in the public domain, which, in its opinion, testify to the facts of corruption of the top leadership of Ukraine and the United States. The cases concern money transfers of oligarch V. Pinchuk in the amount of USD 29 million in favor of the Clinton Foundation and the scandal around the Burisma Holdings as a corruption deal of the previous leadership of the United States (Joe Biden) and Ukraine (Petro Poroshenko).

The template of Russian propaganda provides also hysteria around Soros and "sorosiata", the greedy IMF, which wants the Ukrainian land, and the supervisory boards of state-owned companies, which are run by foreigners who want to "get their hands on" Ukrainian assets. The purpose of these campaigns is to undermine Ukraine's relations with the United States, the EU and the IMF in order to restore relations with Russia on the basis of de facto capitulation under the guise of "Donbas peace" rhetoric and de facto consent to the occupation and illegal annexation of Crimea. An attempt to strike at the EU-Ukraine cooperation in the field of the gas sector reforms was made on May 28, 2020, when 47 deputies of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine submitted to the Constitutional Court a request on the constitutionality of the law on the unbundling of Naftogaz and the separation of GTS into a separate company. Such a step is entirely in Russia's interests - to destroy the main achievements of sectoral cooperation between Ukraine and the EU in the post-revolutionary period and to create conditions for the resumption of Naftogaz's non-transparent business with Gazprom according to the patterns of the past.

3rd step: Chaos management through fast decisions, initiated actions and preventive measures towards other actors.

A vision of Serhii Markov, one of the apologists for Putin's regime, is indicative: "I think that the situation with the coronavirus could lead to the collapse of the political regime in Ukraine, because it has obviously led the country to catastrophe." "We need to be prepared to the time when the regime collapses at all, and then a short-time, for several days, struggle for power in Ukraine will begin. It is necessary to be ready for it…," Markov considers.

If the catastrophe of the power, expected in Russia, does not happen in Ukraine, then Surkov's "algorithm" of February 26, 2020 may be launched: "Coercion by force into fraternal relations is the only method that has historically proved to be effective in the Ukrainian direction. I don't think any other will be invented."

4th step: Putting chaos to order, re-engineering of space, gaining new reality - Ukraine in the status of the UkrSSR 2.0.

The success that Russia has achieved so far in carrying out a special operation to undermine the Ukrainian government is the created competition between two contours of external governance controlled by the Kremlin - the old Medvedchuk-Boyko contour and the newly formed Kozak-Yermak one, forced work of which is manifested in turbo regime of the authorities. The strategic line of influence, on which the Kremlin relies, is as follows: Kozak-Yermak-Zelenskyy, and then, after the collapse of the current ruling team, the old tested persons from the OPZZh will be pushed to the Pechersk Hills. They will be designed to ensure the creation of a new reality - the UkrSSR 2.0 and Pereyaslav Rada 2.0.

Now the reformatted public authorities are being saturated with agents of influence. The novelty is that some of the newly appointed officials have a good Western background – they have not only studied, but also worked in American and European companies and organizations. But either because of their further cooperation with "Russian partners", or because of the inability to work in responsible government positions, they can fit into the algorithms launched by the intelligence services of the Russian Federation.

The general method of destructive actions today is as follows: chaos of management decisions is generated from the center, at the national level. The heads of regional administrations, appointed by President V. Zelenskyy, are mostly random people who are not able to respond to chaos in an adequate manner. Inactive incompetence of personnel turns into paralysis of the executive branch and practical uncontrollability of the country.

At the same time, Russia has intensified its messages to the West about the expediency of lifting sanctions, justifying this by the coronavirus pandemic, although the real reason is another - Russia entries into a severe economic crisis due to falling oil and gas prices, collapse of the Russian ruble, rapid depletion of the National Welfare Fund, and then the coronavirus pandemic. Russia hides the real state of affairs. Instead, the Kremlin is betting on diverting the international attention to the pandemic and pushing the Ukrainian leadership to negotiate on Russian terms with its proxies in Donetsk and Luhansk. Russia sees a pause in Ukrainian-American contacts, as the White House is increasingly burdened both in overcoming the coronavirus pandemic and in domestic problems in the context of the coming presidential elections.

Both Ukrainians and Ukraine's foreign partners are aware of the fact that the top state leadership does not react to the intensification of Russian shelling of Ukrainian positions and the death of Ukrainian soldiers. V. Zelenskyy also avoids raising the issue of the de-occupation of the Crimean peninsula and indirectly plays along the Russian diplomacy in its offstage, informal informing of Western colleagues about the Ukrainian President's readiness to recognize the de facto Russian status of Crimea. Zelenskyy also does not respond to ongoing repressions against Crimean Tatars in occupied Crimea.

The top art of hybrid aggression is to activate the pathology in the state body of the enemy, acting from within through the created contours of external governance and forcing it to act on the four-step algorithm of the aggressor at an appropriate moment. In effect, the Ukrainian inexperienced and weak government plays the role of generators of chaos, while its authors and directors are in the Kremlin offices and are completing, like in 2014, preparations for a new stage of aggression against Ukraine. Suddenly, the authorities in Ukraine began to ignore the well-known facts that the two army corps in ORDLO were under the command of Russian officers and generals. These corps are part of the 8th Army of the Southern Military District of the Russian Federation. In the occupied territory of Donbas, there is no governing body to which they are subordinated. And it is the Russian command from the District headquarters in Rostov that orders the shelling of the positions of the Ukrainian Armed Forces.

Given the current circumstances - the coronavirus pandemic and the oil and financial collapse in Russia, it is hardly appropriate to force any negotiations with the aggressor according to its algorithm. On the contrary, additional strict requirements should be set, in particular for the inclusion of the issue of Crimea into the agenda of the "Normandy format". Despite the unfavorable circumstances of the coronavirus pandemic, however, the society and the state must use this to strengthen their positions and not lose them.

As it can be seen from the above mentioned, Russia's war against Ukraine is generally progressing in accordance with the way, formed by the Russian theorists before it began. After receiving a rebuff in the East in 2014-2015, the aggressor is transforming the Ukrainian power from within so that it ceases to consider Russia as an enemy. The goal of the Russian Federation at the present stage is to consolidate the achieved intermediate results of this war, persuading the transformed Ukrainian power to surrender under the guise of peace, disguising the defeat of Ukraine as a "victory of common sense."

> **The top art of hybrid aggression is to activate the pathology in the state body of the enemy, acting from within through the created contours of external governance and forcing it to act on the four-step algorithm of the aggressor at an appropriate moment. In effect, the Ukrainian inexperienced and weak government plays the role of generators of chaos, while its authors and directors are in the Kremlin offices and are completing, like in 2014, preparations for a new stage of aggression against Ukraine.**

6. GENERAL CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The effectiveness of Russian direct and covert influences on the Ukrainian government is evidenced by V. Zelenskyy's publication in The New York Times newspaper on May 20, 2020. Professor Igor Eisenberg gave an accurate assessment of this publication: "There is no mention of Crimea in it. None. The word Crimea is not in the article. Crimea is not on the list of challenges for Ukraine. In the article published two days after the anniversary of the deportation of the Crimean Tatar people. The article signed by the head of state, which territory is partly annexed, does not mention this annexed territory, or the Russian aggression, which resulted in this annexation, or the human rights violations by the occupiers in the annexed territory. The article makes no mention of Ukraine's aspirations to join NATO and the EU. Nothing." This case, as described above, testifies to the success of the false-target programming of the country's leadership under the strategic vision and interests of Russia as an aggressor.

It can be stated that **the financing of Russian geopolitical revanchism and military aggression, including subversive activities through the agents within Ukraine and the EU, is carried out mainly through the export of energy resources, which provides the income to the Putin regime. In this regard, it can be concluded that, if the EU had the political will, it could block Russian expansionism and aggression by restricting energy imports from Russia**. Especially since the long period of low hydrocarbon prices and their surplus in the market contributes to this.

The lack of a comprehensive system of policies to counter the aggressor's influence from within Ukraine through lobbying in the course of hybrid war and the lack of a system of state institutions capable of implementing it, threatens catastrophic consequences for the statehood. In order to counteract the use of the aggressor state's resources to strengthen economic and, consequently, political influences, systematic comprehensive actions by the state authorities and civil society, in general, are needed. These should be actions of an institutional, policy-and-law and socio-political nature.

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□ **Institutional:**

○ Establishment of a body for coordinating the activities of special services in the system of the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine.

○ Reforming the Security Service of Ukraine in terms of reorienting economic security units from the combat against "*corruption and organized crime in the field of management and economy and other illegal actions*" to combat activities related to the risks of increasing external negative influences (primarily from the aggressor country) in the field of public administration and economy, as well as to neutralize any actions related to attempts to indirectly finance anti-Ukrainian and pro-Russian political and social activities.

○ Creation of a special state agency for economic security and sanctions regimes with such an algorithm:

• **data collection and analysis**: on the basis of data from the special services, expert research, public and journalistic investigations, to analyze risks and threats to economic and energy security of the country both in terms of macroeconomic stability and independence, and in terms of growth of the local or sectoral (as in cases of liquefied natural gas or diesel fuel) internal influences;

• **preparation of draft government decisions**: to prepare, in accordance with the analysis, the necessary decisions of state institutions aimed at counteracting and minimizing risks and threats, including proposing the introduction of sanctions against both entities originating from the aggressor country and companies operating covertly in Ukraine and abroad, ensuring resource and energy independence, preventing the use of Ukrainian resources to strengthen the military potential of the aggressor country, etc. ;

• **support of decisions and control**: to coordinate the activities of state institutions for the implementation of decisions;

• **preventive measures**: to reduce the risks to national economic interests from the actions of the aggressor country, primarily through the application of sanctions and their synchronization with the sanctions regimes of partner countries, including the United States and the EU.

○ Strengthening counterintelligence activities, intensification of intelligence services in the areas of neutralizing the covert agent activities of the aggressor state.

□ **Policy-and-law:**

• The practice of political appointments to senior positions in law enforcement agencies and special services (except for civilian ministers of defense and interior affairs) should be abandoned. They should be candidates with appropriate qualifications and work experience, preferably opponents to Russian hybrid aggression.

• At the legislative level (in the National Security Strategy and the Law of Ukraine "On National Security of Ukraine"), it is necessary to clearly define the actions of individuals and legal entities that may pose a threat to national security, as well as actions that can be assessed as collaboration with the aggressor, introduce (and further apply) criminal liability for such actions.

• It is necessary to comprehensively implement the relevant legal restrictions on the activities of the media, on the above issues, and the dissemination of information and cultural products that may have an impact in the interests of the aggressor.

• Further reform of law enforcement and anti-corruption bodies is needed in order to prevent corruption and the use of corruption levers, as well as to effectively counter the activities of the aggressor's agents.

• Further harmonization of the legislative field of Ukraine on lobbying with the accepted practice in the EU should become a key task for counteracting subversive, illegitimate activities of lobbyists from the aggressor country. In particular, the adoption of a law on lobbying is urgently needed, which will regulate, inter alia, the interaction between civil servants, representatives of the legislative and the executive power, on the one hand, and non-governmental interests, on the other hand, in the process of developing and making public decisions, implementation of laws and regulations of the Government, President, Parliament and other public authorities. It is necessary to adopt legislation with the introduction of lobbying in the legal framework in order to narrow the field of quasi-legal actions of the agents of influence.

□ **Public:**

• Civil society organizations should develop and implement internal ethical rules and procedures to prevent their possible use by aggressor state's agents in order to increase internal influence in Ukraine or destabilize the situation.

• On each of the fronts of hybression, there are relevant expert and public best practices to counter the aggressor.

☐ **Economic direction:**

- Protection of vulnerable spheres of socio-economic life requires the development and implementation of separate or specialized investment regimes, adapted to each area, which is of strategic importance for the development and security of the country. This applies, in particular, to such areas as banking and financial systems, energy, research and development, media, agriculture, transport, state-owned companies and others. Moreover, some regions of the country may also need such special regimes. Such rules should clearly regulate the activities of participants and interaction between them, in particular, the government and state-owned companies, national capital, foreign investors, international financial and donor organizations, the public, etc.

- As long as the Russian aggression against Ukraine continues, nobody can speak about resuming economic cooperation with the aggressor country, especially with regard to the procurement of energy resources and, in particular, natural gas. It is necessary to legislate a moratorium on the import of natural gas from the state that is not a party to the Energy Community Treaty and is recognized by Ukraine as an aggressor or state occupant, for the period until the completion of national security and defense measures, as well as repulsion and deterrence of the armed aggression of the Russian Federation in Donetsk and Luhansk regions against Ukraine, restoration of control over the state border, carried out through the Joint Forces Operation (JFO). Also, this should be done until restoration of organizational and technological integrity of the oil and gas complex, damaged after seizure of production and pipeline infrastructure of Naftogaz of Ukraine and its subsidiaries in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, in the exclusive maritime economic zone of Ukraine in the Black Sea and in some Donetsk and Luhansk regions.

- The period of low prices for oil and oil products on the world market and excess supply create a unique opportunity to get rid of dependence on oil supplies from Russia, carried out through one of the pro-Russian groups, which provides a financial basis for subversive activities within Ukraine.

☐ **Information direction:**

In the information direction, under the conditions of the war of the Russian Federation against Ukraine, we consider it necessary to take such measures:

- To make it mandatory to register as a legal entity and the media all online media (multimedia platforms, Internet television, radio, newspapers, news agencies, etc.), at the legislative level;

- To adopt laws that require all media, not just broadcasters, to disclose funding sources and ownership structure, including the provision of reliable data on the final beneficiary. To prohibit media funding by the aggressor country.

- To prescribe clearly in Ukrainian legislation the rules that determine which elements of the work of the media pose a threat to national security.

- To adopt a law on collaboration, which would, among other things, clearly set out the rules governing the media in the Russian-Ukrainian war. To introduce legal restrictions on the cooperation of Ukrainian media with the media and information resources of the aggressor country.

- To develop a Humanitarian Strategy instead of the Information Security Doctrine, which should become the basis of state policy in combating Russian hybrid aggression in the humanitarian sphere in general and in the information sphere in particular.

- To continue blocking Russian sites and social networks. To prepare a regulation that contains clear criteria on the basis of which it will be possible to block a particular Internet resource.

- Given the shortcomings of the withdrawn bill No. 6688 "On Amendments to Certain Legislative Acts of Ukraine Concerning Counteraction to Threats to National Security in the Information Sphere," to develop a law providing for monitoring of international telecommunication channels and traffic filtering, introduction of temporary blocking of access to a certain information resource (service) in data and telecom networks. To take into account the national legislation and international obligations of Ukraine in the field of civil rights and freedoms.

- To extend the powers of the National Council on Television and Radio Broadcasting and give it the right to suspend or revoke licenses in case of media violations of Article 6 of the Law on Television and Radio Broadcasting, including calls for violent constitutional change, incitement

of hatred and enmity, television broadcasts containing the promotion or propaganda of the aggressor state's bodies and their individual actions that justify or recognize the occupation of the territory of Ukraine as lawful.

- To intensify the work of media self-regulatory organizations (Commission on Journalistic Ethics, Independent Media Council, etc.), make it more public, communicate the decisions and recommendations of these organizations to a wide range of viewers, listeners and readers not only on their own sites but also in the most popular media (on TV, in the Internet media, social networks).

- To create a specialized independent body to conduct forensic examinations of media content. To involve experts from both governmental and non-governmental sectors in its work.

- To extend the powers of the National Commission for State Regulation of Communications and Informatization (NCSRCI) in terms of checking the activities of telecommunications operators. To empower the Security Service of Ukraine with the right to inspect the activities of the operator in case of reasonable suspicion of violation of the legislation under which sanctions were imposed against the subjects of the aggressor country.

- To create a legal framework for the restoration and effective operation of the military media in the face of Russian aggression.

- To improve the Serpanok comprehensive system of information counteraction and ensure its most effective work for the complete blocking of analog and digital television and radio broadcasted from Russian territory and from the occupied by Russia territory of Ukraine. To create a legal basis for the application of these broadcasting systems.

- To increase the number of transmitter towers in the areas near the demarcation line and occupied Crimea to cover not only the territory of Ukraine but also the border areas of Russia with the Ukrainian signal. To improve signal quality and increase the range of towers (in particular, on Karachun).

- To provide broadcasting of at least 20 Ukrainian TV channels in the territory where the enemy signals (Russian + "DPR / LPR") is jammed.

- To remove the coding of the TV signal of Ukrainian channels for the regions bordering the Russian Federation, as their coding does not lead to the purchase of decoders, but stimulates the population to watch Russian TV channels.

- To obtain accurate data on the area covered by the Ukrainian signal to ensure effective cooperation of the RRT concern, in particular, its Donetsk branch, with the Ukrainian State Centre of Radio Frequencies (UCRF). For UCRF, to complete work on measurements of the coverage area by the Ukrainian signal, to put the obtained results on the map.

- Given the extremely low interest of Ukrainian citizens to the issues of media literacy, "information hygiene" and the fight against fakes, to ensure creation and broadcasting on TV and social networks of small social advertising promos understandable to a wide range of users.

- To expand the work started by the Security Service of Ukraine in schools to teach children the basic rules of media literacy and information security. To involve volunteers and experts from media organizations in this work. To develop a curriculum and implement a compulsory course in schools (or make it part of other subjects, such as computer science or life safety basic rules).

□ **Religious direction:**

In the religious domain, which has become a springboard for the aggressor's penetration into the spiritual life of society in order to transform it under the Russian formula of "Orthodox unity", it is necessary to take the following measures to counteract the destructive influences of Russia and the ROC:

- To promote the legal protection of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine from attacks by the ROC and its affiliated UOC-MP, including litigation for slander and insulting remarks about Tomos, as well as for fake news programs.

- To initiate and promote a broad information and educational campaign that would tell about the history of Ukrainian Orthodoxy, autocephaly.

- In connection with the transition of the UOC-MP to the position of orthodox clericalism, with anti-state position, ignoring quarantine measures, violation of the use of national and cultural monuments, terminate the lease agreement for the use of Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra and Pochaiv Lavra, restore their status solely as national, historical and cultural reserves.

- To recommend the Orthodox Church of Ukraine to support inter-church cooperation with the UGCC and inter-confessional cooperation with the Muftiate of the Crimean Tatar people.

- For the Security Service of Ukraine, to study issues and take measures against illegal financial transactions between the ROC and the UOC-MP, as well as church bribery and corruption by the UOC-MP of representatives of state authorities and local self-government.

In general, it can be argued that only the internal mobilization of Ukrainian society, raising public awareness, critical perception of information and thinking, together with the creation of an effective system of government and control can neutralize hostile influences, defeat the aggressor in a hybrid war and strengthen Ukraine's sovereignty.

The authoritative non-partisan Initiative Group "December 1" in its address "Time to make responsible decisions" on May 7, 2020 clearly stated: "…**those who have repeatedly demonstrated their involvement in the Kremlin's subversive plans or put their selfish interests above the interests of the state should be resolutely ousted. In particular, the President of Ukraine should realize that his probable choice in favor of the anti-Maidan "personnel reserve", which seeks revenge, will not save him or the country.**"

The words of Winston Churchill - "victory at all costs, victory in spite of all terror, victory however long and hard the road may be; for without victory, there is no survival", should become a guide for both the state and society.

> **…those who have repeatedly demonstrated their involvement in the Kremlin's subversive plans or put their selfish interests above the interests of the state should be resolutely ousted. In particular, the President of Ukraine should realize that his probable choice in favor of the anti-Maidan "personnel reserve", which seeks revenge, will not save him or the country.**

**The expert group of the project
"Russian lobbying in Ukraine in the context of the 2019 elections:
Power supplies, penetration channels, prevention mechanisms"
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Natalia Lygachova, editor-in-chief of the online publication
Detector Media,

Diana Dutsyk, Executive Director of the Ukrainian Media
and Communications Institute,

Svitlana Yeremenko, Executive Director of the Pylyp Orlyk Institute
of Democracy,

Serhii Savchenko, Major General, National Security Expert,
a Veteran of the Ukrainian-Russian war,

Oleksandr Malynovskyi, lawyer and expert in international law,

Serhii Diachenko, Head of the Bureau of Complex Analysis
and Forecasts,

Alya Shandra, editor-in-chief of the English-language platform
Euromaidan Press.

Russian Octopus in Action. Case "Ukraine"

On the basis of expert group research under the aegis
of the Centre for Global Studies Strategy XXI and with the support
of the International Renaissance Foundation

INTERNATIONAL
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FOUNDATION

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Yaroslava Mishchenko, Tanteli Ratuvuheri, Tetiana Sylina, Igor Stukalenko.

The information and conclusions presented in this publication represent the exercise of freedom of speech by the authors (guaranteed by Article 34 of the Constitution of Ukraine and Article 10 of the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms), which is one of the basic foundations of a democratic society, one of the fundamental preconditions of its development. This publication does not contain information presented in a brutal, derogatory or obscene manner.

The conclusions and statements made in this publication constitute the evaluative judgments of its authors. The judgments of the authors of the publication, although evaluative, are based, on the one hand, on previously published information that the authors of this publication consider true and reliable, and, on the other hand, on a systematic analysis of relevant information and activities of legal entities and individuals mentioned in this publication, as well as public organizations. Herewith, according to the authors of the publication, they had a sufficient basis for the conclusions and statements.

This publication is made for a legitimate purpose and pursues a legitimate aim, as it is not intended to discredit the activities of legal and natural persons mentioned in this publication, as well as public organizations, but is aimed at assisting the state authorities of Ukraine, its citizens, governmental and non-governmental institutions ensuring the national security of Ukraine in the conditions of aggression against it, including by counteracting - by available legal means and from the standpoint of civil society - agents of influence of the aggressor.

**The opinions and assessments expressed in the publication reflect
the position of the authors and is not the official position
of the International Renaissance Foundation**

2020

From:	(b)(6) @state.gov>
To:	@state.gov>
CC:	(b)(6) @state.gov>
Subject:	RE: Request: information regarding the 4S Model
Date:	Fri, 30 Oct 2020 14:36:41 +0000

Hi (b)(6)

For about 20 minutes, I was convinced that I have read the paper you were looking for, but after searching through my files, I can't find it. I think I just was having some echoes of the many other similar papers and I hope the library will come through for you. (b)(5)

(b)(5)

(b)(6)

Also, the GEC has a nice regularly updated library <u>here.</u> I would also recommend getting acquainted with
(b)(6)

(b)(6)   is our Academic Liaison. (b)(6) is basically a research librarian that is completely zeroed in on our mission and also works to stimulate new research to fill gaps.   is usually faster than Bunche and typically has what I want at the ready.

And apologies if   already told you all of this and you have read all of these papers. I am sure you are pulling together a lot of stuff that I need to read myself.

(b)(6)

Happy Friday!

Best,

(b)(6)

(b)(6)
Senior Evaluation Specialist
Global Engagement Center
Alutiiq - Contractor
Office:
            @state.gov

(b)(6)

(b)(6)   (b)(6)

From: @state.gov>
Sent: Friday, October 30, 2020 9:42 AM
To: Library, Ralph Bunche <Library@state.gov>
Cc: @state.gov>;   @state.gov>
Subject: Request: information regarding the 4S Model

Hi Bunche,

I'm wondering if you guys can help. (b)(5)
specifically page 8:

(b)(5)

Is that something that Bunche can track down for me? (b)(5)
(b)(5)
(b)(5)   As always, thank you for your excellent work.

(b)(6)

Best,

(b)(6)

Senior Evaluation Specialist
Global Engagement Center
U.S. Department of State
Contractor for Alutiiq, LLC

Sender:	state.gov>
Recipient:	state.gov>; @state.gov>

From:	(b)(6) @state.gov>
To:	NEA-ChinaWatchers <NEA-ChinaWatchers@state.gov>
Subject:	FW: EUR's Virtual China Watcher's Workshop: Resources and Survey
Date:	Fri, 18 Dec 2020 20:56:35 +0000

FYI

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED

From: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Sent: Friday, December 18, 2020 2:09 PM
To: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Cc: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Subject: EUR's Virtual China Watcher's Workshop: Resources and Survey

Colleagues,

Thank you so much for participating in EUR's Virtual China Watcher's Workshop, hope you found it useful! Please see attached the slides from the presentations as well as additional resources that were mentioned by some of our speakers.

Also can I ask that you please click this link and complete a brief survey. We would really appreciate your feedback so we can improve the next training and ensure the next agenda reflects your topics of interest.

 Wish you all a great holiday season!

(b)(6)
EUR/PGI

Sender:	(b)(6) @state.gov>
Recipient:	NEA-ChinaWatchers <NEA-ChinaWatchers@state.gov>

DRI

DISINFORMATION RESILIENCE IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

ARMENIA
AZERBAIJAN
BELARUS
CZECH REPUBLIC
ESTONIA
GEORGIA
HUNGARY
LATVIA
LITHUANIA
MOLDOVA
POLAND
ROMANIA
SLOVAKIA
UKRAINE

KYIV, 2018

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DISINFORMATION RESILIENCE IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

This research is aimed at assessing national vulnerabilities and preparedness to counteract foreign-led disinformation in 14 countries of Eastern and Central Europe. The Visegrad states (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia), Eastern Partnership countries (Azerbaijan, Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine), the Baltic countries (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania) and Romania are covered.

An integral part of the research is the Disinformation Resilience Index, which is quantitative assessment of exposure to Kremlin-led disinformation and the level of national resilience to disinformation campaigns.

KYIV, 2018

CONTENT

VOLHA
DAMARAD,

ANDREI
YELISEYEU

*Eurasian States in Transition
research center*

FOREWORD

Recently, the notion of resilience has been extensively researched and discussed in relation to information warfare,[1] a comprehensive concept incorporating far-reaching varieties of actions, from planned and coordinated information operations in times of war and peace by a wide range of state or state-affiliated and non-state actors to sporadic actions centred on information influence, attempting to affect societal and political processes. The most recent examples of the use of such warfare include the Lisa case in Germany (2016),[2] US presidential elections (2016),[3] activity of Kremlin media and bots during the UK referendum (2016)[4], and the French presidential elections (2017).[5]

The NATO Summit in Warsaw in 2016 highlighted the issue of 'resilience as a core element of collective defence'[6], which has become a progressing mode of security and strategic communication studies. The European Commission in its Communication 'A Strategic Approach to Resilience in the EU's External Action' (2017) defines resilience in a broader sense as 'the adaptability of states, societies, communities and individuals to political, economic, environmental, demographic or societal pressures, in order to sustain progress towards national development goals'.[7]

For this research, the definition of 'disinformation' proposed by Bennett and Livingston is applied, understood as 'intentional falsehoods spread as news stories or simulated documentary formats to advance political goals.'[8] Accordingly, **'disinformation resilience' is the adaptability of states, societies, and individuals to political, economic, and societal**

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[1]   For this paper, the term 'information warfare' should be understood as 'coordinated and deniable activities that are initiated by a state actor and which are aimed at influencing the decisions, perceptions, and behaviour of political leaders, the population, or particular target groups (such as experts and media) with the objective of achieving the state actor's security policy objectives, mainly through the dissemination of misleading or incorrect information, often complemented with other actions tailored for the purpose that is being pursued.' – Adopted from Čižik, Tomáš, ed. 2017. Information Warfare: New Security Challenge for Europe. Centre for European and North Atlantic Affairs. http://www.cenaa.org/data/databaza/Information%20Warfare%20+%20cover.pdf, cited in Pernik, Piret. 2018. "Hacking for Influence: Foreign Influence Activities and Cyber-Attacks." International Centre for Defence and Security. https://www.icds.ee/fileadmin/media/IMG/2018/Publications/ICDS_Analysis_Hacking_for_Influence_Piret_Pernik_February_2018.pdf.

[2]   Janda, Jakub. 2016. "The Lisa Case. STRATCOM Lessons for European States." Berlin: Federal Academy for Security Policy.

[3]   "Assessing Russian Activities and Intentions in Recent US Elections." 2017. National Intelligence Council. https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/ICA_2017_01.pdf.

[4]   "Putin's Brexit? The Influence of Kremlin Media & Bots during the 2016 UK EU Referendum." 2018. 89up. https://www.slideshare.net/89up/putins-brexit-the-influence-of-kremlin-media-bots-during-the-2016-uk-eu-referendum.

[5]   "Patterns of Disinformation in the 2017 French Presidential Elections." 2017. Bakamo. http://bit.ly/2IRSHFU.

[6]   Shea, Jamie. "Resilience: A Core Element of Collective Defense," 2016. http://www.nato.int/docu/review/2016/Also-in-2016/nato-defence-cyber-resilience/EN/index.htm

[7]   Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council 'A Strategic Approach to Resilience in the EU's External Action'. 2017. https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/join_2017_21_f1_communication_from_commission_to_inst_en_v7_p1_916039.pdf.

[8]   Bennett, W Lance, and Steven Livingston. 2018. "The Disinformation Order: Disruptive Communication and the Decline of Democratic Institutions." European Journal of Communication, 2018.

intentional pressure and falsehood spread in various formats of media, including TV, radio, print and online media, (and) social media, to influence political and economic decisions, including thought-targeting particular vulnerable groups'.

The aim of this research is to assess the level of resilience to foreign, foremost Kremlin-led, disinformation in 14 countries of Eastern and Central Europe, including the Visegrad states (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia), Eastern Partnership countries (Azerbaijan, Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine), Baltic states, and Romania.

Based on an analysis of data collected by the EU's East StratCom Task Force in its Disinformation Reviews, four basic categories of disinformation were singled out, namely:

a) unsourced or falsified claims;

b) non-credible claims with sources;

c) claims based on earlier unsourced or non-credible claims; and,

d) conspiracy theories.[9]

Consequently, scholars argue that Kremlin disinformation is effective thanks to a variety of methods, which all can be classified within three categories, namely, exploiting differences in media systems (*strategic asymmetry*), targeting of disenfranchised or vulnerable audiences (*tactical flexibility*), and having the ability to mask the sources of disinformation (*plausible deniability*).[10]

It follows that a national digital containment strategy is able to undermine Kremlin efforts to weaponise information if it is effective in three key components, namely closing the strategic asymmetry gap, obstructing tactical flexibility, and denying deniability. The country chapters' and DRI indicators' design partly reflects these considerations.

The *exploratory research design*[11] is based on desk research, in-depth expert interviews, and online expert surveys. Such triangulation serves as *confirmation* to overcome any potential problems with validity and bias and *completeness* in clarifying and justifying the obtained

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[9]   Bjola, Corneliu, and James Pamment. 2016. "Digital Containment: Revisiting Containment Strategy in the Digital Age." Global Affairs 2 (2): 131–42.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Kothari, C.R. 2004. Research Methodology. Methods and Techniques. New Delhi: New Age International (P) Limited, Publishers.

data.[12] The country *desk research* is aimed at giving a systemic analysis of a country's media landscape, legal and institutional framework, as well as a statistical overview and data on the existing fact-checking, digital-debunking initiatives, and media literacy programmes and projects. *In-depth interviews* are aimed at providing insight to information 'to understand the sense that actors give their actions',[13] and for a 'naturalist vision'[14] of a particular issue. Country experts conducted at least 10 in-depth interviews with representatives of the media community (media experts, editors of national media outlets, renowned journalists), specialised NGOs (fact-checking initiatives, national associations of journalists, NGOs working in the field of media literacy, etc.) and officials of relevant state bodies. The names and affiliation of the quoted individuals are mentioned in the chapters if they granted their informed consent to country experts to be mentioned. *Online expert surveys* were conducted with the aim to construct a quantitative Disinformation Resilience Index (DRI) across the CEE countries.

All country chapters follow the same structure and include the following sections: Introduction, Vulnerable Groups, Media Landscape, Legal Regulations, Institutional Setup, Digital Debunking Teams, and Media Literacy Projects. Conclusions and Country Recommendations are proposed per country. Furthermore, chapters are enriched with specific country cases describing illustrative examples of disinformation activities targeting some country or successful countermeasures to such activities. Country chapters (a) *identify* risks and risk events based on analysis of a country's historical, societal and economic background, and media environment; (b) *detect* existing structures and practices aimed at counteracting foreign-backed disinformation activities, such as digital-debunking teams, media-literacy projects, and fact-checking initiatives; (c) *propose* to state bodies, national journalist and civil-society communities measures to combat and prevent disinformation.

The *Introduction* section provides a concise overview of a country's affinities (or lack of) for Russia, be they historic, political, economic, cultural, religious or ethno-linguistic. They give an understanding of the context that facilitates the spread of pro-Kremlin discourse or are used to influence a country's specific groups. Scholar Christopher S. Chivvis argues

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[12]   Arksey, Hilary, and Peter Knight. 1999. Interviewing for Social Scientists. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

[13]   Della Porta, Donatella. 2014. Methodological Practices in Social Movement Research. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[14]   Ibid.

that '[c]ultural affinities may also make some nations more open to the Russian point of view, as may historical affinities, even where cultural affinities are more limited'.[15] For a number of objective reasons (historical, political, linguistic, etc.), the state of things in different Central and Eastern European countries in this regard varies substantially. Different levels of availability and popularity of Russian state-sponsored media content among the countries' populations define their conditions for fighting disinformation.

When a linguistic factor prevents large parts of a population of a given Central European country from finding themselves in the Russian media orbit, Russia aims to transmit its messages to the audience by abusing media structures in the given state by means of misleading and biased articles. To spread specific narratives in counties with a very low number of Russian-speakers, the Kremlin exploits loopholes in regulation of the media market throughout the EU.

The *Vulnerable Groups* section gives an overview of population groups detached from mainstream media and more susceptible to pro-Kremlin media content than the population in general. As put in recent research, 'of particular importance … is the vulnerability of specific audience groups due to their disenfranchisement from mainstream media or lack of access to balanced information sources'.[16] This allows contextualised messages to the specific profile of the target audience, be it an ethnic or linguistic minority, specific social or professional groups of a population in a given country. Consequently, elaborated coherent narratives towards vulnerable groups of a population and the existence of media literacy programmes are important components of countermeasures to Kremlin-led information involvement.

Media Landscape reviews a country's most popular media (TV, radio, print, online, social media) and analyses the media regulatory framework, answering the question of if there are any regulations in place to effectively observe compliance of local media with journalism ethics codes, which is an important tool to combat the spread of disinformation.

Without an effective institutional structure and comprehensive legislation in place, misinformation channels cannot be duly scrutinised by the relevant regulatory agencies for their compliance with national

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[15]   Chivvis, Christopher S. 2017. "Hybrid War: Russian Contemporary Political Warfare." Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists.

[16]   Bjola, Corneliu, and James Pamment. Ibid.

legislation. Institutional capacity and relevant legal mechanisms of a state to resist, recover and adapt from unlawful practices, sometimes called 'normative resilience'[17]. It means the ability to introduce or improve legislation concerning information security and to set up effective institutions able to operate within the established institutional and legal frameworks. Part of the scholarship prefers calling it 'organisational resilience', meaning 'a management system that is designed to assist an organisation to deal with adverse, disruptive or surprising events that cannot be prevented'[18]. National information security strategies are the first level of preparedness to any acts of information infringement, whereas the existing specific legal acts and regulations make the legislation accomplishable and realistic for the institutions. *Legal Regulations* and *Institutional Setup* analyse national laws pertinent to information security and institutional framework including how effective an intra-agency cooperation is.

Bjola and Pamment name plausible deniability as one of three most-important methods of Russian disinformation, defining it as 'the ability to mask one's digital identity or to decline responsibility for actions involving deliberate deception or disinformation (and) could be a valuable asset when engaging in digital warfare.'[19] Digital debunking teams can use a variety of techniques (cluster analysis, diffusion mapping or anomaly detection) to expose online nodes of propaganda dissemination, which may be subsequently blocked or restricted. This way they 'can deprive these nodes of an important communicational advantage (i.e., promoting one-sided views without challenge), increase the costs of the other side for sustaining their message and disrupt the communication lines'.[20] The *Digital Debunking Teams* sections review existing fact-checking, myth- and hoax-busting initiatives, and analyse how effective they are in exposing and combating disinformation, including in social media / online forums, etc. by anonymous users or botnets.

Media Literacy Projects sections within country chapters examine existing media literacy programmes as part of formal or non-formal education,

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[17]   Heldeweg, Michiel A. Normative Alignment, Institutional Resilience and Shifts in Legal Governance of the Energy Transition, Sustainability, 2017. *https://doi.org/10.3390/su9071273*

[18]   McLellan, Alex B., and Meir Elran, eds. The International Symposium on Societal Resilience. Proceedings of the First International Symposium on Societal Resilience. Homeland Security Studies and Analysis Institute, 2011. *https://www.sintef.no/globalassets/project/nexus/2010-the-internal-symposium-on-societal-resilience-social_resilience_book.pdf*

[19]   Bjola, Corneliu, and James Pamment. Ibid.

[20]   Ibid.

including analysis of school curricula and civil-society vocational training. For this research, a broader definition of 'media literacy'[21] was taken while a distinction needs to be drawn between 'digital literacy', 'social media literacy', and other approaches to literacy related to media and internet.[22] It should be admitted that critical media-literacy skills have become a 'prerequisite for people to participate effectively in society'.[23] Media literacy consists of many components, including instrumental skills (such as the ability to manipulate with technology), operational skills, internet skills, structural and strategic skills (ability to proactively look for information and make information-based decisions), and basic content-analysis skills.[24]

On March 3, 2017, the United Nations Special Rapporteur of Opinion and Expression, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Organisation of American States and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights adopted the Joint Declaration on Freedom of Expression and 'Fake News', Disinformation, and Propaganda.[25] The Declaration, among other issues, highlighted the importance of the promotion of critical media literacy education for all stakeholders, including intermediaries, media outlets, civil society and academia.

Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in the country chapters reflect only the position of the respective authors.

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[21] Media literacy is the ability to access, analyse, evaluate and create messages across a variety of contexts. Definition from: Livingston, Sonia. 2004. "Media Literacy and the Challenge of New Information and Communication Technologies." The Communication Review 7 (3): 3–14.

[22] Bauer, Alfred Thomas, and Ebrahim Mohseni Ahooei. 2018. "Rearticulating Internet Literacy." Journal of Cyberspace Studies, 2018.

[23] Givskov, Cecilie, and Mark Deuze. 2018. "Researching New Media and Social Diversity in Later Life." New Media & Society 20 (1): 399–412.

[24] Bauer, Alfred Thomas, and Ebrahim Mohseni Ahooei. Ibid.

[25] "Joint Declaration on Freedom of Expression and 'Fake News,' Disinformation, and Propaganda." 2017. the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. *https://www.osce.org/fom/302796?download=true*.

*   *Methodology is elaborated by the research team*
    under the leadership of Volha Damarad and Andrei Yeliseyeu

DRI
METHODOLOGY

Resilience is a complex concept, being in a constant process of refinement and redefinition. Disciplines like the humanities, environmental science, ecology, and information technology employ different definitions of resilience and develop different indices of resilience and vulnerabilities, which are constructed using dissimilar variables.[1]

An index is a way of simplifying the complexity of the resilience phenomenon. Indeed, many components of resilience are hard to assess and an index is only a proximal representation of the actual subject of assessment. For this reason, most indices, including the Disinformation Resilience Index, only yield a relative measure rather than an absolute measure.[2]

Although measuring resilience, including foreign-led disinformation, is certainly a complicated endeavour, there are several reasons why it is worth doing. Indices are useful in identifying trends and drawing attention to particular issues, including to the need for greater resilience as in this case. They can also be helpful in setting policy priorities and in benchmarking or monitoring performance of policy designed to build resilience. Easier interpretation than a battery of many separate indicators and the ability to assess the progress of countries over time are additional important pros of composite indicators.[3]

While consulting the Disinformation Resilience Index is instrumental for these purposes, drawing simplistic analytical or policy conclusions based on 'big picture' results should be avoided. Composite indicators must first be seen as a means of initiating discussion and stimulating public interest.[4] The DRI may not explain a lot about the actual state of national vulnerability and resilience to disinformation. Instead, the respective country chapters are indispensable for a comprehensive review of vulnerable groups of the population, the specifics of the media landscape, which facilitates the spread of foreign disinformation, the respective institutions and legal regulations, and other issues related to information security.

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[1]   Tim Prior and Jonas Hangmann. 2012.
       "Measuring Resilience: Benefits and Limitations of Resilience Indices." Center for Security Studies, ETH Zurich,.
       https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/173644/Focal-Report_-8-Measuring_Resilience_2013.pdf

[2]   Ibid.

[3]   Handbook on Constructing Composite Indicators. Methodology and User Guide. OECD 2008.
       https://www.oecd.org/std/42495745.pdf

[4]   Ibid.

DRI STRUCTURE
VARIABLES
AND INDICATORS

A *variable* is 'a characteristic of a unit being observed that may assume more than one of a set of values to which a numerical measure or a category from a classification can be assigned'.[5] *Indicator* is a quantitative or qualitative measure derived from a series of observed facts that can reveal relational positions (e.g., of a country) in a given area.[6] A *composite indicator* is formed when individual indicators/variables are compiled into a single index on the basis of an underlying model. The composite indicator should ideally measure multidimensional concepts that cannot be captured by a single indicator.[7]

The DRI is presented in the form of the three following composite indicators, each combining several variables:

• Population exposure to Kremlin-backed media;

• Quality of systemic responses;

• Vulnerability to digital warfare.

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[5]   "UN Glossary of Classification Terms." 2018. United Nations Statistics Division. 2018.
       https://unstats.un.org/unsd/class/family/glossary_short.asp#V

[6]   Handbook on Constructing Composite Indicators. Op.cit.

[7]   Ibid.

Disinformation
Resilience
Index

Indicator A

**Population exposure
to Kremlin-led media**

- Cultural, historical,
  and other affinities

- Russian media
  popularity

- Trust ratings
  of Russian media

- Popularity
  of national media
  transmitting pro-
  Kremlin narratives

- Vulnerable groups

Indicator B

**Quality of systematic
responses**

- Institutional
  development

- Legal
  regulations

- Long-term
  approach

- Countermeasures
  in relation
  to vulnerable
  groups

- Civil society
  response

- Media community
  regulations

Indicator C

**Vulnerability
to digital warfare**

- Popularity of Russian
  social media

- National online
  platforms spreading
  pro-Kremlin content

- Digital legislation

- Presence
  of debunking
  initiatives

Figure: The DRI structure

The multifaceted framework is chosen to analyse a country's vulnerability
to Kremlin-led disinformation from various perspectives. The presented
set of indicators has a ***descriptive*** (describing a situation or trend)
and ***performance*** (providing an assessment of progress) character.
This model has certain limitations due to various factors, notably
opinion, and not evidence-based scoring decisions on many variables.

Three composite indicators are measured on a 5-point scale from 0 to 4,
the higher the worse. Each is built as a simple average of all its aggregated

variables, which are treated as interval variables. Variable numerical values are the online survey response options provided by at least 20 respondents in each of the 14 CEE countries. Respondents were selected based on their substantive knowledge and professional experience. They represent government service, analytical, consulting and research institutions, media, NGOs, pressure groups, or quangos. Expert judgments ensure comparability across time. A five-point rating scale is proposed in the survey, where each variable is allotted a score of 0 to 4 depending on the answer choice, along with an "uncertain" option.

A simplistic way of calculating the composite indicators and assigning weight to each of the variables would be to consider each of the variables equal. This is appropriate if each variable is equal in importance. However, because different variables contribute differently to resilience or vulnerability, their values require assigned weightings based on its relative importance. The existing literature offers a variety of alternative weighting and aggregation methods.[8] As in the case of many other indices, from a theoretical point of view, the ideal weighting scheme would be based on impact analysis.[9] The problem with such a choice lies in the absence of a statistical or an empirical basis for precise impact estimates of certain variables to be made. Mindful of these considerations, the proposed model opts for a simplistic way, i.e., all variables within a given composite indicator are considered to be of equal weight.

INDICATOR A

POPULATION EXPOSURE TO KREMLIN-LED MEDIA

This indicator partly determines a country's vulnerability to disinformation and propaganda. The heavier the exposure of a country's population to a specific set of media narratives and disinformation, the wider the opportunities to influence societal processes and decisions of state bodies. Substantial consumption of Kremlin-led TV channels or webpages by a country population per se limits national resilience to disinformation attacks, even with good quality systemic responses in place. This is even

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[8]   Handbook on Constructing Composite Indicators. Op.cit.

[9]   Massimo Geloso Grosso, Frederic Gonzales, Anna Jankowska, Rainer Lanz, Molly Lesher, Sébastien Miroudot, Hildegunn Kyvik Nordås, and Alexandros Ragoussis. 2009. "Methodology for Deriving the STRI. OECD Experts Meeting on the Services Trade Restrictiveness Index (STRI)." OECD. http://www.oecd.org/trade/services-trade/42935959.pdf

more true if the Russian government-supported media enjoy a high level of trust among a country's population. In other words, the more Kremlin-led media consumed and the more they are popular among the population of a given country, the lower its ability to withstand hypothetical Kremlin-led disinformation campaigns.

This indicator is assessed based on such variables as Russian media popularity and trust ratings among the country's population, the popularity of national media (not affiliated with Russian media) which transmits and spreads pro-Kremlin narratives, the presence of vulnerable/targeted groups of the population susceptible to Russian disinformation, as well the country's cultural, historical, and other affinities for Russia. It is worth mentioning that resilience is closely linked with the notion of vulnerability. Resilience and vulnerability are often thought to be converse to each other, which is nevertheless not always the case.[10]

The indicator's unit of measurement is a rating on a 5-point scale from 0 to 4, **the higher the more exposure**, i.e., a higher level of vulnerability due to more significant exposure and susceptibility to Kremlin-led media by a country's population. The indicator is the combined mean score of variables relative to the following questions:

1.1 *Do Russian media exploit the country's (1) economic, (2) historic, (3) societal, (4) ethnolinguistic, and (5) religious context to spread its narratives? (Examples: references to a large share of mutual trade, common past, big numbers of labour migrants working in Russia; similarity of languages, popularity of the Christian Orthodox church, etc.) as a background for targeting your country's audience with the pro-Kremlin messages)? If so, how many of these are exploited?*

Numerical values: from (0) if one or none of the contexts is exploited by Russian media to (5) in the case of all five contexts.

1.2 *What is the general level of Russian media popularity in your country?*

Numerical values: Rate from (0) if very low to (4) in case their popularity is assessed as very high.

1.3 *How high are the trust ratings of Russian media among your country's population?*

Numerical values: Rate from (0) if very low to (4) in case the trust ratings are very high.

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[10]   Tim Prior and Jonas Hangmann. Op.cit.

1.4   *How popular are national media (not affiliated with Russian media) which transmit and spread pro-Kremlin narratives?*

Numerical values: Rate from (0) if very low to (4) in case their popularity is assessed as very high.

1.5   *How many vulnerable targeted groups are exploited by the Kremlin-backed media (e.g., religious, ethnic, business, political, regional, families of labour migrants, Russian passport holders residing in the country)?*

Numerical values: (0) if none or one, (1) two (2) three to four (3) five (4) more than five.

INDICATOR B
QUALITY OF SYSTEMIC RESPONSES

The quality of systemic responses to disinformation defines a state's preparedness to counteract Kremlin-led disinformation. Systemic responses include the level of institutional development in the sphere of information security, legal framework comprehensiveness, existence of a state's long-term approach to information security as well the quality of countermeasures by the media community and civil society.

As the recent report rightly points out, 'the challenge of disinformation should be viewed as a systemic challenge and the search for possible solutions should therefore focus on systemic responses'.[11] Furthermore, key elements of a country's preparedness for Kremlin-led narratives and disinformation are coherent narratives towards vulnerable groups of the population and the existence of media literacy programmes and initiatives.

The indicator's unit of measurement is a rating on a 5-point scale from 0 to 4, where (0) stands for the best level of development, i.e., the higher the lower the quality of systemic responses. This composite indicator is built from the average of six variables, which are based on the answer choices to the following questions:

2.1   *What is the level of institutional development in the sphere of information security in your country?*

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[11]   Flemming Splidsboel Hansen. 2017. "Russian Disinformation." Copenhagen: Danish Institute for International Studies, *https://www.diis.dk/en/research/russian-disinformation*

2.2 *What is the level of comprehensiveness of the legal framework in terms of detection, prevention, and disruption of information threats and vulnerabilities?*

2.3 *Please estimate the level of effectiveness of your state's long-term approach to information security.*

2.4 *How effective are your country's long-term countermeasures applied in relation to vulnerable/targeted groups?*

2.5 *How effective are media community regulations as pertain to compliance with existing journalistic codes and standards?*

2.6 *Please estimate the effectiveness of countermeasures to disinformation and propaganda as introduced by the country's civil-society organisations and initiatives.*

INDICATOR C

VULNERABILITY TO DIGITAL WARFARE

The vulnerability to digital warfare concerns the prevalence and counteraction to masked sources of disinformation. While television remains the main source of obtaining information and entertainment throughout Central and Eastern Europe, the role of social media and the internet is constantly rising. The popularity of online media, social media, and various types of communication on the internet makes the country's ability to withstand digital warfare an important component in assessing national resilience to Kremlin-led disinformation.

In the past few years, investigative journalists have shed light on different forms of government-sponsored or organised activity on a variety of social networks. Adrian Chen most notably investigated a Russian operation in St. Petersburg that was alleged to be where hundreds of employees were paid to post comments on articles, write blog posts, and attempt to influence political debates on social media in a variety of ways.[12] A recent study reports, 'The Russian authorities are reported to be operating "troll factories", where hundreds of

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[12] Robert Gorwa, "Computational Propaganda in Poland: False Amplifiers and the Digital Public Sphere." Samuel Woolley and Philip N. Howard, Eds. Working Paper 2017. Oxford, UK: Project on Computational Propaganda. *http://comprop.oii.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/89/2017/06/Comprop-Poland.pdf*

state-employed cyber commentators praise the Russian government and criticise its opponents, domestic as well as international. The messaging is amplified through the use of automated botnets, which serve to disseminate the comments and posts still further with the aim of overwhelming the debate and achieving maximum reach'.[13]

The indicator's unit of measurement is a rating on a 5-point scale from 0 to 4, the higher the rating the higher the country's vulnerability to masked sources of disinformation. The indicator is constructed as an average of the variables measured as response options to the following questions:

3.1 *Please estimate the level of popularity of Russian social media (VKontakte, Odnoklassniki), which are used by botnets and anonymous users to spread pro-Kremlin and Kremlin-produced falsified and manipulative content.*[14]

Numerical values: Rate from (0) if very low to (4) in case their popularity is assessed as very high.

3.2 *Please estimate the level of popularity of national online platforms (forums, commentary sections), message boards outside social media actively used for spreading pro-Kremlin falsified and manipulative content.*

Numerical values: Rate from (0) if very low to (4) in case their popularity is assessed as very high.

3.3 *Please estimate the level of effectiveness of your country's procedures and regulations in countering the Kremlin-produced falsified and manipulative content on websites and social media accounts.*

Numerical values: Rate from 0 to 4 on a 5-point scale, in which (0) stands for the greatest level of effectiveness.

3.4 *How many digital debunking teams/fact-checking websites or social media accounts in your country do you know are aimed at identifying misinformation and debunking fake stories?*

Numerical values: (0) five or more (1) four (2) three (3) two (4) one or none.

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[13]   Flemming Splidsboel Hansen. Op cit.

[14]   In some CEE countries (e.g., Azerbaijan, Belarus, Estonia, Latvia, Moldova) the Russian social media (VKontakte and Odnoklassniki) are popular due to linguistic and other factors, while in other countries (e.g., Armenia, Czech Republic, Georgia, Hungary, Poland) Facebook—as the online social communication platform—is more popular. Therefore, for those countries where Facebook is more popular the question was asked as "Please estimate the level of popularity of public groups/pages in Facebook and other social media which are used by botnets and anonymous user to spread pro-Kremlin falsified and manipulative content".

DISINFORMATION RESILIENCE INDEX

Disinformation Resilience Index

A

Population exposure and susceptibility to Kremlin-led media, the higher the larger vulnerability due to more significant exposure and susceptibility to Kremlin-led media by a country's population.

B

Quality of systemic responses, the higher the worse quality of systemic responses (the level of institutional development in the sphere of information security, legal framework comprehensiveness, existence of state long-term approach to information security as well the quality of countermeasures by media community and civil society).

C

Digital warfare vulnerability, the higher the larger a country's vulnerability to masked sources of disinformation.

* The **hither** indicator the **darker** color on the map

Country		Value
Armenia	A	2.2
	B	2.3
	C	2.1
Azerbaijan	A	2.0
	B	2.8
	C	2.2
Belarus	A	2.9
	B	2.7
	C	2.8
Czech Republic	A	2.0
	B	2.5
	C	2.1
Estonia	A	2.1
	B	1.6
	C	2.6
Georgia	A	2.1
	B	2.8
	C	2.4
Hungary	A	1.3
	B	2.8
	C	2.4
Latvia	A	2.9
	B	2.6
	C	2.6
Lithuania	A	2.0
	B	2.1
	C	1.8
Moldova	A	3.2
	B	3.0
	C	2.6
Poland	A	1.3
	B	2.7
	C	2.3
Romania	A	1.3
	B	2.5
	C	2.3
Slovakia	A	2.5
	B	2.9
	C	2.5
Ukraine	A	2.6
	B	2.5
	C	2.2
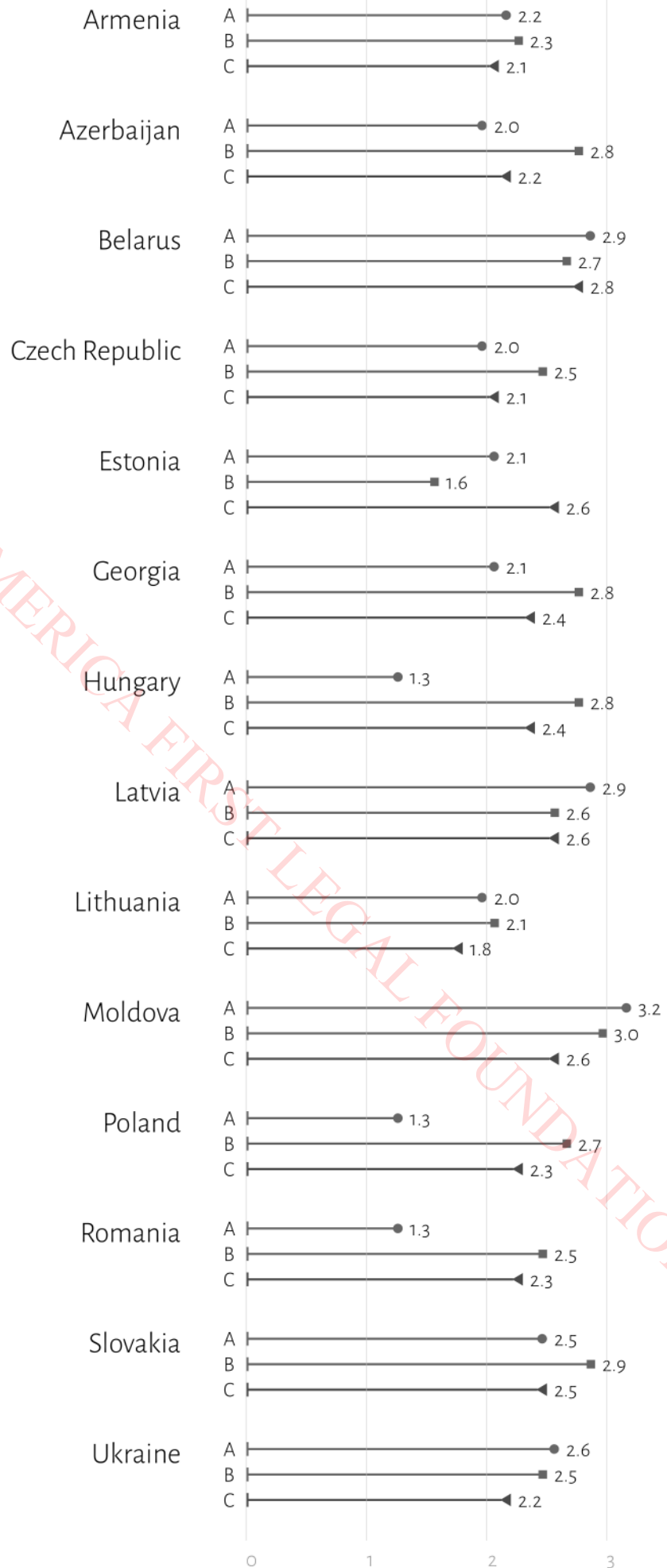
A

Hungary
Poland
Romania

Armenia
Azerbaijan
Czech Rupublic
Estonia
Georgia
Lithuania
Slovakia

Belarus
Latvia
Ukraine

Moldova
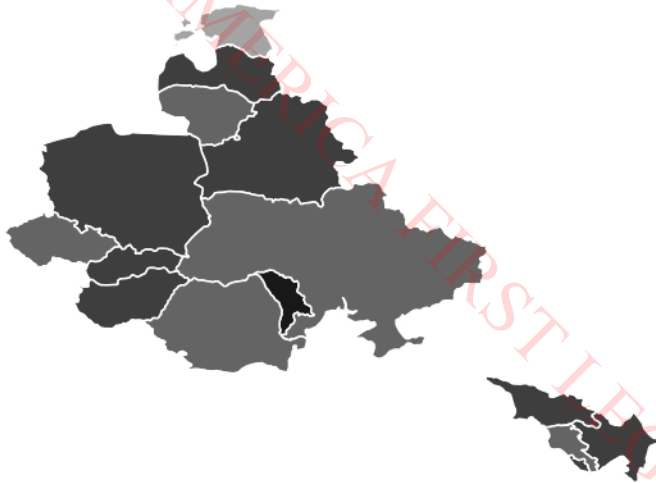
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RICHARD
GIRAGOSIAN

Regional Studies Center

ARMENIA

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INTRODUCTION

For Armenia, the onset of independence in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union came as an abrupt shock. Even prior to independence, Armenia faced the dual and daunting challenges of outright war over Nagorno-Karabakh with neighbouring Azerbaijan that erupted in February 1988, and was struggling to recover from a devastating earthquake in December 1989. While each factor tended to distort democratisation and economic development, they also significantly reinforced the country's dependence on the Soviet Union, and then deepened its reliance on Russia. And that reliance on Moscow was also matched by a fairly entrenched pro-Russian feeling among much of the population, further driven by Armenia's historical fear of Turkey, which was only exacerbated by Turkish support for Azerbaijan during the Karabakh war.

Despite this initial combination of pro-Russian sympathy, however, independent Armenia never had any significant Russian minority, with even a marginal presence of some 51 000 Russians in Armenia in 1989 being reduced to a mere 12 500, although even that figure includes Russian military personnel at the military base in Armenia. Therefore, in the absence of any significant Russian presence, Moscow's policy of seeking influence in Armenia has largely centered on a reliance on 'hard power', defined by the Armenian insecurity from the unresolved Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. In practice, this led to the emergence of Armenia as Russia's foothold in the region, as demonstrated by the fact that Armenia is the only country in the region to host a Russian base and to be a member of both the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and (under Russian pressure) the Russian-dominated Eurasian Economic Union (EEU).[1]

Despite the stereotype of Armenia as a country fully loyal if not totally subordinate to Russia, there has been a deepening crisis in Armenian-Russian relations in recent years. The foundation for the crisis is rooted in years of a steady mortgaging of the country's national security and complicity in the Russian acquisition of key sectors of the economy by previous Armenian governments over the past two decades. Such a deepening crisis in Armenian-Russian relations suggests, however, that Moscow may be tempted to shift policy and adopt a more assertive

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[1]   Giragosian, Richard. 2014. 'Armenia's Strategic U-Turn.' European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR) Policy Memo. ECFR/99. 2014. *www.ecfr.eu/page/-/ECFR99_ARMENIA_MEMO_AW.pdf*

stance toward Armenia, with a likely application of 'soft power' tools and disinformation techniques.

Although disinformation can only work if there is a natural and receptive audience, this is present in Armenia, as roughly 70 % of the population can speak Russian.[2] Despite this natural audience, the efficacy of Russian disinformation is not guaranteed, as knowing the language does not necessarily make the Armenian population inclined to easily accept the disinformation script. Even Russian language proficiency is a more complex factor, as less than 1 % of the population speaks Russian as a first language and less than 53 % of Armenians speak Russian as a second language, according to official census data.[3] Moreover, English is more popular in Armenia, with about 40 % of the population having a basic working knowledge of English. As demonstrated by the 2012 data, over 50 % of Armenians favour English-language instruction in secondary schools while only 44 % preferred Russian instruction.[4]

VULNERABLE GROUPS

Armenia has neither any significant ethnic Russian minority nor any serious pro-Russian groups. Moreover, there are no pro-Russian parties or Moscow-directed politicians in Armenia. This is largely due to the Russian strategy of relying not on parties or individuals, but on leveraging pressure and influence over the Armenian government. This policy stems from the Russian control over key sectors of the economy (especially energy), the Armenian dependence on subsidised Russian gas, and the reliance on remittances from Russia for many Armenian families.

This is also reflected in the recent emergence of Russia as the country's largest trading partner, with bilateral trade in 2017 of over 26 % (1.7 billion USD), and as the primary source of remittances to Armenia. The latter factor of remittances is particularly significant, which for January – November 2017 reached 1.56 billion USD, an 18 % increase from the same period in 2016, and accounts for roughly 15 % of Armenian

[2]   'МИД России о борьбе и гибели русских СМИ в странах бывшего СССР: Армения.' 2010. Regnum. 2010

[3]   Republic of Armenia State Census. 2011. *http://armstat.am/file/article/sv_03_13a_520.pdf*

[4]   "The South Caucasus between the EU and The Eurasian Union.' 2013. Caucasus Analytical Digest (CAD). Number 51 – 52. 2013. *https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/166585/CAD-51-52.pdf*

Gross Domestic Product (GDP), with over 60 % of total remittances coming from the approximately 125 000 Armenians working in Russia.[5]

Nevertheless, aside from the economic leverage, in terms of the paucity of vulnerable groups in Armenia, Russia has limited capacity for implementing effective disinformation campaigns. For example, the Armenian Apostolic Church has vehemently prevented past attempts of influence by the Russian Orthodox Church and remains independent.

A second limiting factor stems from the influence of the (largely Western) Armenian diaspora and the strong sense of Armenian nationalism. The separation and marginalisation of isolated pro-Russian groups (cultural foundations and dubious NGOs) has also created a vicious circle for Moscow. The lack of direct Russian patronage has left these groups small, fragmented, and divided, but their very weakness and marginalisation has discouraged Moscow from more actively financing or supporting them in any significant way.

Nevertheless, in the event of any possible change in Moscow's approach, there is still potential for reverting to Russian soft-power influence and pressure within Armenia. And there are both willing and unwitting individual political figures that may welcome such Russian backing and support. In this context, the past experience of defending the Armenian president's decision to join the EEU has revealed that a few pro-Russian groups and some marginal organisations were utilised in a subtle Russian disinformation campaign aimed to promote the EEU in Armenia and by downplaying the costs of abandoning the Association Agreement with the EU. As one noted analyst observed,

'the EU should make greater efforts to communicate the benefits of cooperation with the EU as widely as possible to the Armenian people, in part to counter Russian-led disinformation campaigns, citing these groups, and including the Integration and Development or Eurasian Expert Club'.[6]

Although these groups were eager to curry favor with the Armenian government and were able to play a supportive role coinciding with the defensive reaction by the Armenian government, which was eager

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[5]   Anonymous officials, Armenian Central Bank, February 13, 2018.

Danielyan, Emil. 2018. 'Migrant Remittances to Armenia Soar.'
Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's (RFE/RL) Armenian Service. 2018. www.azatutyun.am/a/28954720.html

[6]   B. Poghosyan, Armenian Political Science Association, February 19 and March 12, 2018, In-depth interviews. Poghosyan, Benyamin. 2008. 'Tailor-made cooperation? Armenia's new partnership agreement with the EU.'
European Policy Centre (EPC) Policy Brief. 2008. http://www.epc.eu/pub_details.php?cat_id=3&pub_id=8275

to defend its decision, this was a temporary 'marriage of convenience' and these groups remain marginal and isolated within Armenia.[7] Another potentially important element of leverage for use in any future Russian disinformation campaign is the threat perception rooted in the last several years of 'netwar' and cyberattacks between Azerbaijan and Armenia. Yet, even on its own, according to a prominent expert,

'the information war between Armenia and Azerbaijan is going to continue. Both sides acknowledge that information is becoming more influential in the context of modern armed conflicts. This suggests that more substantial means and measures, as well as professionals and specialists, are going to be involved. It is already obvious that not only propaganda but also cyberattacks and hacking operations are going to play larger roles'.

And although neither side has an 'official cyber army', the expert warns that:

'nevertheless, the increase both in the quantity and quality of cyberattacks and intrusions already attests to the fact that both sides are preparing for an even greater cyber war'.[8]

MEDIA LANDSCAPE

In order for any disinformation campaign to be effective, there needs to be at least a minimum degree of receptivity, with a natural 'audience' capable of being influenced. In the case of Armenia, for example, one 'lesson learned' from the 2015 surprise decision by President Serge Sarkisian to sacrifice the Association Agreement with the EU was the clear lack of any effective communications strategy. In that case, the population generally was unaware and not very well informed of the concrete benefits of the Association Agreement.[9] Additionally, practical advantages for the ordinary consumer and citizen from such an alignment with the EU were never articulated until an information campaign undertaken by the Armenian government in defence of its about-face, with inspiration if not support from Russia. This transformed the lack of information into

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[7]   S. Grigoryan, S. Safaryan and H. Danielyan, Analysts, March 12 and 13, 2018, In-depth interviews.

[8]   Martirosyan, Samvel. 2017. 'Armenia, Azerbaijan and the War on Information.' EVN Report. 2017. *https://www.evnreport.com/raw-unfiltered/armenia-azerbaijan-and-the-war-on-information*; *http://panarmenian.net/eng/news/58235*

[9]   Anonymous informant, EU Delegation to Armenia, March 14, 2018. Personal conversation.

disinformation, even distorting the fundamental EU values into an 'attack on traditional Armenian values'.[10]

More recent assessments of public opinion in Armenia have found the reverse, and confirmed an increase in positive perceptions of the EU. For example, according to the '2017 Annual Survey of Perceptions of the European Union, Public Opinion in Armenia', an overall positive perception of the EU increased from 44 % in 2016 to 48 % in 2017. There was also a dramatic fall in negative responses, from 13 % to 5 % in the same period. A clear majority also held positive perceptions of the EU in terms of human rights, freedoms, and civil liberties, and a high level of trust.[11] Against that backdrop, however, the long-term sustainability of such positive perceptions also depends on measures capable of countering and combating future disinformation campaigns that will rely on a compliant or at least conducive closed media landscape.

For the overwhelming majority of Armenians, television remains the dominant source of news.[12] With two main public television networks and Russian channels widely available,[13] there is a near total lack of objective news coverage, especially in terms of domestic politics and international affairs. This is directly attributable to the fact that the main Armenian state channels are solidly pro-government in their coverage and editorial position, with a total absence of any neutral or opposition television stations and due to the much weaker influence from the country's 25 private stations, which have much more limited reach, as their signals do not reach national audience.

The two main public networks (H1 and Ararat), as well as the private, but generally government-subservient Armenia TV and Shant networks, have a combined reach and penetration of more than 85 % nationally.[14] There are also five Russian channels, two of which (Channel One Russia and RTR) have full retransmission rights throughout territory of Armenia, while the other three (RTR-Planeta, Kultura, and Mir) are limited to the

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[10]   G. Abrahamyan, freelance journalist, February 12, 2018. Personal conversation.

[11]   See: *https://www.euneighbours.eu//sites/default/files/publications/2017-10/EU%20NEIGHBOURS%20east_AS%202017_Factsheets_Armenia_EN_0.pdf*

[12]   More than 80 % of Armenians have estimated to rely on TV as their primary source of news, current events and information.

[13]   Russian TV channels available in Armenia include ORT and RTR with full retransmission, as well as Kultura and Mir, and the Russian-language version of EuroNews.

[14]   Cable TV in Armenia has a very limited range, while satellite TV is widespread but only in Yerevan and major cities, as well as being costly for most of the rural population.

capital Yerevan.[15] In addition, ownership of the main TV networks is also a problem, as the leading networks beyond the two state-affiliated public stations are either directly linked or owned outright by government-connected individuals or pro-government political parties. For example, as the Open Society Foundation (OSF) – Armenia found in an October 2017 assessment,

'media ownership is still not transparent; the law does not require disclosing media ownership. The main shareholders of television companies are either representatives of political elites or large businesses, which leads to full control of broadcast media. The broadcast legislation does not guarantee independence of the national regulator'.[16]

In terms of popularity, as measured in Yerevan by AGB Nielsen Media ratings,[17] the top ten most popular TV stations, ranked in descending order, are: Armenian Public TV (H 1), Shant TV, Armenia TV, H2 TV (second public broadcaster), 'Dar 21' TV, Yerkir Media TV, Kentron TV, Arm News (Euro News), ATV, and Yerevan TV.[18] Most significantly, each of the top ten TV stations are Armenian, with no foreign, or Russian, TV stations listed. This may be at least partially explained by the fact that Russian TV and Russian-language programming is only available in Armenia for cable and satellite TV users, with no presence on regular (free) digital TV.

Moreover, according to the respected 'Caucasus Barometer' public opinion survey conducted in October 2017, despite access to the Russian RTR Planeta and Russian 1st/ORT stations, to which 84 % and 75 %, respectively, of respondents indicated that they had access, only 38 % stated they regularly watch Russian 1st/ORT and 37 % said that they watched RTR Planeta on a regular basis.[19] The same survey found higher numbers for respondents indicating that they use Russian TV channels as a daily source of news, but with 51 % stating that Russian TV was their source for daily news and current events compared to 87 % of respondents saying the same for Armenian TV channels.[20]

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[15]   Melikyan, Anais. 'Media Landscape. Armenia.' European Journalism Centre (EJC). *http://ejc.net/media_landscapes/armenia*

[16]   'Monitoring report on implementation of ENP in Armenia in 2015-2017.' 2017. Open Society Foundations (OSF)-Armenia. 2017. *http://www.osf.am/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/ENP_report_20.10.pdf*

[17]   For Armenia, AGB Nielsen Media utilizes the TAM (Television Audience Measurement) methodology, which is a specialized branch of media research, dedicated to quantifying (size) and qualifying (characteristics) this detailed television audience information. *http://www.agbnielsen.com/aboutus/whatistam.asp*

[18]   According to non-published information from the local Armenian staff of the AGB Nielsen Media group in Yerevan.

[19]   'Caucasus Barometer' is an annual household survey about social economic issues and political attitudes conducted by CRRC; See 'Caucasus Barometer.' 2017. CRRC, 2017. *www.caucasusbarometer.org/en/cb2017am/codebook*

[20]   Ibid

Far behind television, but the second source of news and information, is radio, which has widespread reach. There are six Russian-language radio stations, ranging from re-broadcasters of Russian stations, such as Russkoye Radio. There is also a small, but growing audience for the Russian-language Radio Sputnik (with content tailored to Armenia, including local reporting), as well as for music in Russian from Auto Radio FM 89.7 and programmes on Кавказ FM/Кавказ ФМ.

Russian-language radio is neither very popular nor widespread in Armenia. Instead, for news and information, the most popular radio outlets by far are local Armenian programmes and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's (RFE/RL) Armenian service. The latter broadcasts on air for over 20 hours a week and reaches much of the country as a result of re-broadcasting arrangements with local and regional radio stations. Additionally, French-language programming on Radio France Internationale (RFI) has also been growing in popularity, but is limited to Yerevan.

In terms of newspapers, public consumption has been steadily declining, as reflected by low circulation (with about 2 000 – 3 000 daily copies the average), and they are not available outside the capital Yerevan and the major cities. Newspapers are further constrained by financial vulnerability, with little advertising revenue and occasional state pressure on prospective advertisers during election campaigns. Due to the lack of audience and limited influence of the country's print media, there is an ironic degree of press freedom, although a more dangerous trend of violence against journalists has been a serious concern for several years.[21] This in turn has fostered an environment of fear and intimidation, leading to some cases of journalistic self-censorship. There is also a widespread perception that professional conduct and journalistic capacity are seriously under-developed throughout much of Armenian media, which is also matched by a documented degree of mistrust and a lack of reliability in much of the media's coverage and news reporting.

There is a significant degree of freedom regarding the internet as a source for news and information, with matching popularity of electronic news agencies and sites.[22] Internet access in Armenia continues to grow and as of 2017 there are an estimated two million or more Armenians online. This accounts for over 73 % of the population. Social media are also popular

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[21]   'Armenia: RSF calls for end to impunity for police violence against journalists.' 2016. Reporters Without Borders. 2016.
        https://rsf.org/en/news/armenia-rsf-calls-end-impunity-police-violence-against-journalists

[22]   Popular electronic news agencies and sites include Hetq online, A1+ online, PanArmenian Network, News.am, Armenia Today, Panorama.am, and Tert.am.

and relatively free from restraint, with many users accessing social media and the internet via mobile devices. In fact, although national internet penetration from home or office computers is only about 62 %, the availability of mobile phone internet access has contributed to a dramatic expansion of users, with the mobile 3G service widely available, covering 90 % of the country.[23]

While the Russian-language Odnoklassniki platform is widely used, Facebook is one of the most popular social media platforms for news and commentary, and Twitter is not yet a serious factor in Armenia. Overall, the option to freely launch an online publication without a license and with largely basic regulatory requirements has also fostered limited state control or pressure. This has encouraged the startup of many independent online media outlets in Armenia.

Originally a radio station, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's (RFE/RL) Armenian Service, made impressive gains in the areas of internet-based TV and video news coverage. This further expanded its influence and popularity in the Armenian media sector beyond radio transmission, and website-based news and commentary. As the only objective news source with online video coverage, RFE/RL also stands out for its impressive live coverage. This live coverage goes beyond traditional elections or events, such as the July 2016 hostage crisis at a police station in Yerevan. For RFE/RL's Armenian service, the audience has grown dramatically. Since 2016, it has seen a record number of website visitors (5 633 588), YouTube views (18 million), and Facebook users (17.7 million views). Such efforts have been followed by others, including the smaller *CivilNet* (https://www.civilnet.am), etc.

An interesting observation of the Armenian media landscape by Manana Aslamazyan, the head of 'Alternative Resources in Media', argued that,

'for Armenia, the problem of the quality (of TV media) is aggravated here by some other elements',

including that,

'the number of media outlets in Armenia exceeds its needs and possibilities from the point of view of the content'.

In this context, she stressed that,

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[23]   'Freedom on the Net 2017.' 2017. Freedom House. 2017. *https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-net/2017/armenia*

'young journalists are not motivated to improve the quality of their work as they realize they won't be paid more. And as far as these media don't possess much money and have a small staff, they have to manage to do a lot of things during the day, and this is one of the reasons for the low quality of their work: the journalists are running from one news conference to another, hurry to their offices, they write with mistakes, which are later copied by many other websites. On the whole, today, Armenian journalism is based on news from press conferences without personal analysis, without attempts to gather various opinions, tell the story from various viewpoints. There are a few serious columns and analytical articles'.

Aslamazyan went on to add,

'the second serious problem affecting media quality is responsibility. Today, the opposition media outlets in Armenia use the term 'responsible media' only in a negative context, which can be justified to some extent. Though, you know very well that the term 'responsible reporting' is widespread in the West and is one of the basics of good journalism. Generally speaking, one edition may write tomorrow that during our interview you got mad and left, slamming the door, and if no one refutes it, the author of that 'item' will remain in full confidence that next time he can get away with it. There is an atmosphere when journalists sinisterly believe they have the right to lie. On the other hand, there are debates in Armenia over the law on defamation, which seems to fail to resolve the problem either'.

It is clear that in countries with closed or limited media freedoms, there is a related tendency for 'conspiracy theories' or other cases of unreliable information and rumours. In such cases, the impact of disinformation can be especially serious, as the lack of reliable information only promotes misinformation and disinformation. For Armenia, this is a problem, as demonstrated in Freedom House's recent report, 'Freedom on the Net 2017'. This report found that, 'Internet freedom declined in Armenia after users experienced temporary restrictions on Facebook while [24]online manipulation increased in the lead-up to parliamentary elections'.

Beyond the impact on internet freedom, this survey also revealed Armenia's relative cyber insecurity, exposing the vulnerabilities to both internal interference and external manipulation. In the case of 'temporary

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[24]   Ibid.

restrictions on Facebook', the Armenian authorities were suspected of interfering with the social media platform. This made it 'unavailable for almost an hour on several ISPs during protests' related to the two-week hostage situation in Yerevan in July 2016.[25] This is significant, not in terms of the duration of the outage or even in the fact of the interference, rather, this is the first demonstrated display by the Armenian authorities of the capacity to intervene and interfere with Facebook users within Armenia.[26] Unlike an earlier, and much more crude or primitive episode in 2008, when the authorities were able to block online content.[27]

A deeper and related problem is media freedom and the vulnerability that stems from a lack of public trust or confidence. In October 2017, the well-regarded 'Caucasus Barometer' public opinion survey aimed to gauge TV news as a source of information and in terms of 'informing the population.' This survey indicated that 39 % of respondents stated that TV does a very poor or quite poor job while only 13 % said they did quite well or a very good job.[28] Additionally, in terms of 'trust in the media', overall it revealed that another 39 % of respondents either fully distrust or rather distrust the media, with only 23 % indicating that they fully trust or rather trust the media.[29]

IN FOCUS

Russia Picks Fight with Armenia over Nazi Collaboration

Armenians responded with a vigorous defence that mostly glossed over the liberation hero's alliance with the Third Reich.

A historical dispute between Armenia and Russia over Armenia's liberation-hero-turned-Nazi-collaborator has reignited, injecting tendentious World War II politics into the two allies' uneasy relationship.

A senior Russian lawmaker wrote a piece in the newspaper *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, published on February 6, 2018, headlined '*The Return of Nazism*

[25]   Solis, Steph. 2016. 'Armed men seize police station, hostages in Armenia, reports say.' USA Today. 2016. *https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2016/07/17/armed-men-seize-police-station-hostages-armenia/87216734/* and 'Freedom on the Net 2017.' 2017 Freedom House. 2017. *https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-net/2017/armenia*

[26]   A. Papyan, RFE/RL's Armenian Service, February 13, 2018, Personal conversation.

[27]   Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE). 2008. 'Observation of the Presidential Election in Armenia.' 2008.

[28]   See 'Caucasus Barometer.' 2017. CRRC. 2017. *www.caucasusbarometer.org/en/cb2017am/codebook*

[29]   Ibid.

from the Baltics to Armenia'. The theme is not a new one for Russia, which in recent years has made great efforts to delegitimise nationalist fighters who collaborated with Germany in World War II in the cause of liberating their countries from Soviet rule.

But while that has become an old story in the Baltics and Ukraine, it's a new one in Armenia. Armenia, unlike those other states, is a close ally of Russia and until recently has been spared criticism for its heroes' dabbling in Nazi collaboration.

That may now be changing. 'Armenia, a strategic ally of Russia, has erected a monument in the center of Yerevan to the Third Reich collaborationist Garegin Nzhdeh', the lawmaker, Lyudmila Kozlova, wrote. Nzhdeh, she wrote, 'has the blood of thousands of our grandfathers and great grandfathers on his hands'. That followed an event in January in Russia's Duma, in a roundtable discussion on '*The Fight Against Valorisation of Nazism and the Return of Neo-Nazism: Legislative Aspects*', at which the participants called on Armenia to take down the statue of Nzhdeh, which was put up in 2016.

These salvoes reopened a battle that appeared to have resulted in a ceasefire last year, when a Russian military television station aired a programme making many of the same allegations against Nzhdeh. After Armenia vociferously complained that time, Russia quickly backed down, removed the programme from the TV station's website and issued an apology. This time, though, the accusations are coming from higher up in the power structure, and Russia has not apologised.

LEGAL REGULATIONS

Officially, Armenia has constitutional guarantees of freedom of speech and of the press. Legally, the constitution also guarantees that the 'freedom of mass media and other means of mass information shall be guaranteed' and that 'the state shall guarantee the existence and activities of an independent and public radio and television service'. The constitution also extends guarantees that prohibit 'incitement to national, racial, and religious hatred, propaganda of violence'. Yet as with the shortcomings of the country's judicial system there is a serious gap between the legal and constitutional guarantees, and their fair and compete application.

The real vulnerability for Armenia, in terms of disinformation campaigns, stems from the fundamental lack of policy awareness and institutional preparedness. For example, despite gains in both legislation and regulatory, as well as monitoring of money laundering and cybercrime,[30] there are serious deficiencies in other key areas. This includes data protection and the safeguarding of critical infrastructure from cyber-assault.[31] Moreover, despite progress in developing and passing new legislation in the field of information security over the past decade, the absence of any clear understanding of the difference between information security and cybersecurity remains a basic and lingering impediment. Even more of an obstacle for a more robust defence against cyberattack and intrusion is the inactivity of relevant state bodies and entities. For example, an interdepartmental working group on information security that was established has neither sufficient resources nor the policy influence that it requires.

Similar to such inactivity, where the interagency body rarely meets, the Armenian National Security Council (NSC) is a marginal and ineffective body. This lack of institutionalised national security can be rooted in the infrequency of NSC meetings, although there has been a marked increase in the role of parliamentary committees with jurisdiction over defence and security policy in recent years. However, the sheer dominance of the executive branch in general, and the defence minister in particular, over all aspects of security has only meant that the dysfunctional nature of the national security process remains uncorrected. The first problem is structural. The Armenian NSC is rarely convened as a full consultative body, and even when it convenes, the deliberations are largely focused on the implementation of a decision already made.[32]

Overall, despite some gains in the legal framework and regulatory oversight, Armenia is generally far behind other countries in the field of cybersecurity. According to the Global Cybersecurity Index 2017, Armenia is ranked only 111th out of 165 nations in a global index that measures the commitment of nations across the world to cybersecurity.[33]

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[30]   Anonymous officials, Armenian Central Bank, February 8 and 9, 2018. Personal conversations.

[31]   Anonymous officials, Armenian National Security Service (NSS) and Ministry of Defence, February 21 and march 1, 2018. Personal conversations. Giragosian, Richard. https://nanopdf.com/download/giragosian-cyber-security-powerpoint-presentation_pdf.

[32]   Giragosian, Richard. 2006. 'Redefining Armenian National Security.' Demokratizatsiya. Volume 14 Number 2. 2006. https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/cc52/5bfaea8c5a1273838b2c2ab0bbb576920ac8.pdf

[33]   The Global Cybersecurity Index 2017 (GCI-2017) is published by ITU, the United Nations specialized agency for information and communication technology, and is a multi-stakeholder initiative to measure the commitment of countries to cyber-security. https://www.itu.int/dms_pub/itu-d/opb/str/D-STR-GCI.01-2017-R1-PDF-E.pdf

That ranking placed Armenia as the second-worst performing country in terms of cybersecurity throughout the former Soviet Union, ranked only above Turkmenistan. This also places the country behind all of its neighbours (Georgia is ranked 8th and Azerbaijan is 48th) despite the seemingly obvious motivation from 'the hype about Armenia's booming IT industry, as well as constant threats from Azerbaijani hackers'.[34]

However, Armenian officials routinely argue that the country is committed to cybersecurity, as demonstrated by its National Security Strategy. The strategy includes such platitudes as 'ensuring the reliability, security and safety of communication infrastructure', but reflects no specific recognition of either the nature of evolving cyberthreats nor the necessity to safeguard critical infrastructure and networks from cyberattack.[35] Thus, the 18-page National Security Strategy is largely a missed opportunity for presenting a guiding framework for security in a difficult and dynamic new threat environment, further reflected in the fact that the strategy has not been updated or modified since its adoption in January 2007.[36]

Beyond the National Security Strategy, there was a more focused attempt to address cybersecurity through the formulation of the country's 'Information Security Concept'. This attempt, through the development of Armenia's 'Concept of Information Security' in June 2009, reflected an emphasis on the formal recognition that,

'the national security of the Republic of Armenia depends considerably on information security, which encompasses components such as information, communication, and telecommunication systems. The concept also includes a general assessment of the problems of information security of the Republic of Armenia, current challenges and threats, and their root causes and peculiarities, as well as methods to address them in different spheres of public life'.

Yet this too was a flawed document and has been criticized by observers, including a recognized expert, Albert Nerzetyan, who has recently argued that the concept is

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[34]   According to Artur Papyan, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's (RFE/RL) Armenian Service staff.

[35]   Republic of Armenia National Security Strategy, *http://www.mfa.am/u_files/file/doctrine/Doctrineeng.pdf*

[36]   Anonymous informant, former Armenian Minister of National Security, February 8 and 9, 2018. Personal conversations.

'a rather lengthy document, with no clear assignment of duties and responsibilities. More importantly, it was a copy-paste of Russia's 2000 'Information Security Doctrine'.[37]

The implementation of the concept was reliant on the formation of an intergovernmental committee that was created to coordinate all programmes related to the concept of information security. In causation, the effort quickly stalled, similar to the National Security Council, due to its flaws in a lack of authority, absence of activity, and infrequent and inconclusive meetings. The Armenian government also sought to address the issue by developing a 'concept' on the 'Formation of Cyber Society', which was approved in February 2010. The adoption of the concept also ordered the formation of a new 'Council of Electronic Governance,' to be tasked with carrying out activities for ensuring the cybersecurity of the state through yet another state committee and a group of experts.

More recently, there have been some achievements, mainly due to the initiative of the Armenian National Defence Research University. In this instance, the University worked on a new and more innovative 'National Cybersecurity Strategy' in close cooperation with the U.S. National Defense University (NDU) and Harvard University, with a final version completed in 2017. Also in 2017, the Armenian National Security Council adopted the 'Information Security and Information Policy Concept', whose provisions envision the development of a national strategy (including specified roles, responsibilities, etc.)'.[38]

Although criminal liability for defamation was eliminated in 2010, the civil code of Armenia imposes high monetary penalties of up to 2 000 times the minimum salary. Additional criticism centres on the 2010 'Law on Television and Radio', which was negatively assessed for failing to promote media pluralism in the digital age. Its shortcomings included 'a limit to the number of broadcast channels; a lack of clear rules for the licensing of satellite, mobile telephone and online broadcasting; the placement of all forms of broadcasting under a regime of licensing or permission by the Regulator; the granting of authority to the courts to terminate broadcast licenses based on provisions in the law that contain undue limitations on freedom of the media; and a lack of procedures and terms for the establishment of private digital channels'.

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[37]   Nerzetyan, Albert. 2018. 'Information Security or Cybersecurity? Armenia at a Juncture Again.' EVN Report. 2018. *https://www.evnreport.com/economy/information-security-or-cybersecurity-armenia-at-a-juncture-again*

[38]   Ibid.

For the country's broadcast media, there is a legal and regulatory requirement of state-issued licenses from the National Commission on Television and Radio (NCTR). This has been widely seen as an obstacle to media freedom and diversity. Additionally, the NCTR is discredited by several cases of state interference and pressure over licensing, although print and online media are exempt from licenses. The two most glaring cases involved the independent Gyumri-based GALA TV and the opposition A1+ TV station, which in 2002 and 2015 were forced off the air after their licenses were revoked or not approved. A1+, however, was able to forge a unique agreement for broadcasting some limited hours of programming with the ArmNews broadcaster, supplemented by online video coverage.

Furthermore, in 2010, the Armenian government passed a set of controversial amendments to the Armenian law on broadcasting that enabled the government regulators to grant or revoke licenses with little or no explanation, and to impose programming restrictions that would confine some stations to narrow themes. This included culture, education, and sports.

INSTITUTIONAL SETUP

Armenia's Public Services Regulatory Commission (PSRC) is an independent regulatory authority whose legal and regulatory jurisdiction over the telecommunications sector is derived from the 2006 'Law on Electronic Communication' (revised and updated in 2014), and supplemented by the 2003 'Law on State Commission for the Regulation of Public Services'. Despite the possibility of concern over the presidentially appointed nature of the PSRC commissioners, most independent evaluations have found that the commission's performance in overseeing the telecommunications sector,

'are transparent and have generally been perceived as fair'.[39]

In terms of combating cases of disinformation, there are few effective institutional safeguards in Armenia. This is because of the absence of any consistent evidence of cases of disinformation, as the lack of any effective Russian soft power in Armenia to date and Moscow's preference

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[39]   'Freedom on the Net 2017.' 2017. Freedom House. 2017. *https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-net/2017/armenia*

to pressure a submissive Armenian government rather than to invest directly in politics or to back individual parties or politicians. Also, there is a structural vulnerability in the face of future disinformation campaigns. But, the transformation to a new parliamentary form of government in Armenia has created a unique opportunity for initiatives related to parliamentary oversight and safeguarding against disinformation.

DIGITAL DEBUNKING TEAMS

The Media Initiatives Center (MIC), which has been working in the media sector of Armenia for more than 20 years, supports the freedom of expression and the development of independent media. MIC is involved in the improvement of media legislation and the protection of journalists' rights, and aims to support current and future journalists to develop their skills in information verification and fact-checking by promoting more accurate information dissemination. Most notably, it has implemented the project '*Debunking Disinformation*'.

The main component of the project is the *International School of Information Verification*. A project that includes international experts and is organised for 16 participants from Armenia and Georgia who are presented with best practices, learn to apply different tools and methods for information verification, and produce journalistic material. In parallel, the MIC staff also work with several Armenian universities helping professors to develop and implement new modules of information verification during the teaching process.[40]

A second related effort is carried out by *Sut.am*, which is an independent fact-checking media founded by the 'Union of Informed Citizens', a consulting NGO. This group, whose project is an independent effort that does not represent the interests of any political party or other group, specifically seeks to prevent the spread of obvious disinformation.[41]

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[40]   For more details, see: *http://mediainitiatives.am/en/projects/debunking-disinformation-en/#*

[41]   See: *https://sut.am/en/*

IN
FOCUS

Disinformation on Twitter before elections

In April 2017, a series of Russian-linked moves that seemingly sought to influence the coverage of the Armenian parliamentary election were seen as a coordinated campaign of outright disinformation. This case was different, however, as it involved external interference in real-time coverage of the elections, 'possibly automated accounts spread misinformation' about the vote via Twitter and 'independent media accounts' were hacked or disabled. This was especially egregious at the onset of the Armenian elections when, 'beginning two days prior to the vote and escalating through election day itself, a steady stream of disinformation and trolls by Russian-based and Russian-language Twitter and Facebook accounts besieged coverage and commentary of the election on the internet.'

This flurry of electronic disinformation was largely focused on the dissemination of a fraudulent and crudely faked 'letter' purporting to be an official document from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) instructing voters to elect the opposition in Armenia.

That email document was immediately refuted by the U.S. Embassy in Yerevan, which pointed out grammatical and spelling mistakes in the text and stressed that any genuine USAID email would not be sent from a private Gmail account.

And as quick and effective refutation, the U.S. Embassy's response also reiterated the need for such vigilance by the Armenian authorities. As media reports noted at the time, 'although the text accompanying the image varied, at least 43 accounts that shared the image used 'НПО готовятся сорвать выборы в Армении', which translates to 'NGOs prepare to disrupt elections in Armenia'. And the accounts were also found to have a number of features which gave them the appearance of a network of automated 'bot' accounts, rather than genuine users, with one featuring an avatar image copied from a stock online photo of actress Barbara Mori'.[42] And in addition, the original fake USAID post was shared by a set of Russian accounts[43].

[42]   DFR Lab. 2017. 'Fakes, bots, and blockings in Armenia.' 2017.
        https://medium.com/dfrlab/fakes-bots-and-blockings-in-armenia-44a4c87ebc46.

[43]   'Manipulating elections via Twitter in Armenia.' 2017. Coda Story. 2017.
        https://codastory.com/disinformation-crisis/information-war/in-armenia-a-snapshot-of-digital-manipulation-ahead-of-the-election.

As the Armenian media and analytical community learned, this is unlikely to be the last such exercise in Russian disinformation targeting Armenia.[44] A second, related development occurred less than 12 hours before the start of voting, when several leading independent Armenia Twitter accounts that serve as regular sources of objective news and information were suspiciously 'suspended'. After a strong protest was lodged with Twitter, the accounts were re-activated in the early morning hours. Most notably, the affected Twitter accounts included analyst Stepan Grigorian (*@StepanGrig*), the *CivilNet* online news portal (*@CivilNetTV*), the *Hetq* online news agency (*@Hetq_Trace*), and independent journalist Gegham Vardanyan (*@Reporteram*)'. [45]

MEDIA LITERACY PROJECTS

There have been some small and fairly sporadic media literacy projects in the recent past. The most significant effort was undertaken by *MIC*. This effort was 'aimed at developing and deepening the concept of media education development in Armenia with a view of clarifying the steps and further actions directed towards the increase of the level of media literacy jointly with the state authorities, schools, higher education institutions, training centers, media, and other interested stakeholders'. It also includes a series of workshops and specifically targets the broader need for 'public education', consisting of training for teachers, the development of a manual and related computer game for classroom use, and collaborating with media, libraries, and other relevant groups.[46]

CONCLUSIONS

Despite the limitations and impediments to Russian disinformation and the application of 'soft power' in Armenia, there are some worrisome developments of note. What we have seen, moreover, is a steady yet subtle increase in the application of Russian 'soft power' in Armenia. An increase

[44]   Stepanyan, Suren. 'Bots, Blockades and Blackouts: How Armenia's Media Copes.' Chai Khana. *https://chai-khana.org/en/bots-blockades-and-blackouts-how-armenia-media-copes#.WUpsOm7-TYc.twitter*

[45]   Vardanyan, Gegham. 2017. 'Russian trolls hijack #armvote2017 hashtag.' Media.am. 2017. *https://media.am/en/russian-trolls-armvote17* and Giragosian, Richard. 2017. 'Assessing the Outcome of Armenia's Election.' Vocal Europe. 2017. *www.vocaleurope.eu/assessing-outcome-armenias-election/*

[46]   Information provided by Media Initiatives Centre staff in Yerevan, and from the Yerevan Press Club (YPC), February 16, 2018 and March 7, 2018. Personal conversations.

driven by efforts to promote the Russian language (as an official second language),[47] the proposed renaming of streets, and erection of monuments glorifying the Soviet past, and defined by a more effective assault on 'European values' that argues that Russian 'family values' are closer to the (more conservative) traditional Armenian culture than the alien 'European values' (even arguing there is a threat from same-sex marriage, LGBT rights, and other elements to the Church and to the Armenian family unit). Although this effort has largely failed, it is again seen in the recent debate over the government-backed legislation deepening the criminalisation of domestic abuse.

Beyond the limited returns of these efforts to leverage Russian soft power, there has also been a more active economic-centred effort to maximise Russian capital and investment. This activity is aimed at both strengthening the prime minister personally and bolstering the Russian image politically in Armenia. Yet, this has still been only marginally effective, as real investment has continued to be significantly less than promised or expected, and has been limited in the face of the harsh reality of declining remittances from Russia and the loss of jobs for many Armenian labourers in the Russian construction sector. Moreover, the so-called 'Russian investment club', a pilot project of the prime minister as an attempt to channel ethnic Armenian capital from Russia into several flagship projects in Armenia, has also been damaged by media reports exposing criminal links and dubious backgrounds of so-called 'businessmen'.[48]

Yet most distressing, as a crisis or at a least a problem in Armenian-Russian relations only continues to fester. Moscow may be tempted to adopt a more assertive stance toward Armenia, with a likely application of 'soft power' tools and disinformation techniques. And in that case, Moscow lacks a dependable and natural partner on the ground. But Armenia's vulnerability, and the absence of either effective safeguards or a robust response to earlier attempts at Russian disinformation, will only continue to limit and weaken efforts at forging real resiliency in Armenia.

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[47] Ishkhanyan, Vahan. 2016. 'Foreign Language Yerevan: Capitalism Speaks English.' Hetq online. 2016. http://hetq.am/eng/news/73087/foreign-language-yerevan-capitalism-speaks-english.html/

[48] Muradian, Anush. 2017. 'Armenia Confirms Issuing Diplomatic Passport to Alleged Crime Figure.' Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's (RFE/RL) Armenian Service. 2017. www.azatutyun.am/a/28493464.htm

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is fairly clear that with the crisis in Armenian-Russian relations, the possibility of a new Russian campaign of disinformation and a related investment in Russian 'soft power' may be a logical, and expected response by Moscow. In light of such a scenario, and despite the natural partners and instruments for Moscow to use in Armenia, the country's vulnerability and absence of effective safeguards against disinformation will undermine attempts at forging resiliency.

Therefore, the following recommendations are essential:

First, a move towards a new and unprecedented parliamentary form of government. Parliament should assume oversight responsibilities to enforce measures aimed at combating especially negative aspects of disinformation, including hate speech, but also broaden it to cover bias and subjective 'fake news' reporting.

A second measure would be a more comprehensive but legally sound monitoring of Russian media outlets in Armenia. A measure that includes the capacity to impose punitive moves when and if the coverage was found to be an example of disinformation.

And legislatively, a third recommendation would be for a fresh review of problems with prior legislation, such as the laws on mass media and on the freedom of information, which are each plagued by poor enforcement and implementation, and for a strengthened defence of reining in the inordinate regulation on 'new media' (electronic media especially). This is important because a more even 'playing field' for an open and transparent media environment is one of the more basic defences against disinformation.

Additional measures are also necessary for the Armenian parliament, which highlight the imperativeness of legislative changes to the following areas:

Regarding the transition to digital broadcasting:

- Offering a financial assistance package for needy families to afford the transition to digital TV.

- A comprehensive information campaign explaining the new standards and parameters for digital broadcasting in Armenia.

Regarding broadcasting regulators:

- Introducing and safeguarding a higher level of independence of members of regulatory bodies.

- Reduction of licensing procedures to decisions of purely technical or commercial character.

- Armenia's sole independent regulatory authority for telecommunications, the Public Services Regulatory Commission (PSRC), is in need of reform in two key areas: with an absence of term limits, the presidentially appointed PSRC commissioners enjoy unchallenged authority and can only be dismissed in unusual or difficult-to-document cases of crime or blatant incompetence.

Defence of intellectual property (copyright):

- Implementation of corporate mechanisms for action.

- Even before these mechanisms begin, intensive practical application of updated legislation, including the harmonisation of intellectual property protection principles and the rights of citizens to obtain information.

Improving the protection of civil rights in conjunction with the guarantees of freedom of expression:

- The introduction of the concept of moral damage compensation in cases involving libel or slander, privacy protection, the safeguarding of sources and whistleblowers, and the presumption of innocence.

- Promoting methods of solving information disputes through media self-regulation bodies and arbitration in Armenia.

General reforms in existing media legislation:

- The progressive liberalisation of legislation, approximation of the principles governing the media industry to those areas of economic activity that do not require special regulation.

- Harmonisation of communication and media legislation to make the regulation of traditional and new media more uniform and fair.

Develop media as a business model:

- The formation of industrial committees, with regular consultations with representatives of the media industry, to discuss the situation on the basis of objective data and research.

- The creation of funds (both by government, donors, and alternative means) designated for the ordering (through tenders) of media production important to the public. Aimed at creating competition in this field for the Public Broadcaster of Armenia, both to ensure quality consumer demand and to overcome the monopoly of PTRC on government orders.

- Increase the depth of media measurement methodology with the prospect of targeting advertisements, while promoting the fragmentation and segmentation of the advertising market, using progressive technologies of measuring the audience of the new media, and the implementation of special trainings for the introduction of modern methods of attractive advertising.

VICTORIA
BITTNER,

KHAGANI
GASIMOV (IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS)

*Center for Economic
and Social Development*

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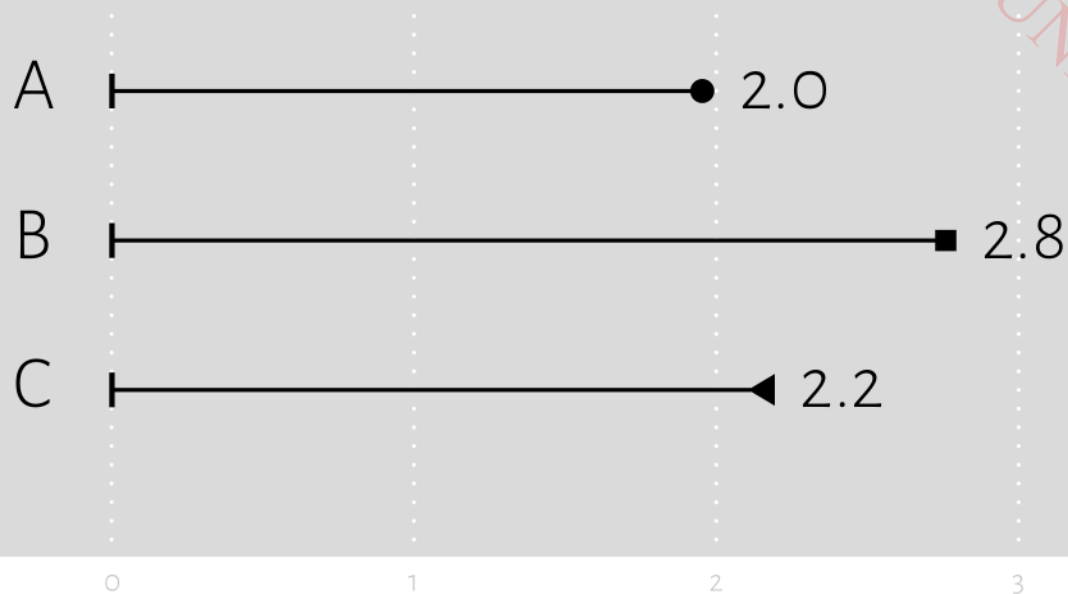
INTRODUCTION

The geopolitical location of Azerbaijan, the only route for the Caspian oil and gas resources to reach the world markets avoiding both Russia and Iran, makes it an alluring destination for Kremlin-inspired propaganda. This is because the Kremlin tries to monopolise all energy and transit routes to and from Europe, hence making it essential to hold an advantage over Azerbaijan.

Azerbaijan used to be a central piece of the Soviet Union's Middle East policy. Its shared borders with both Iran and Turkey, the large number of the Azerbaijanis living in Iran (where they are the second largest ethnic group after the Persians), and historical and linguistic ties with Turkey were all vital for the Soviet decision-makers.

During the Second World War, the Red Army was stationed in northern Iran, in the area inhabited by the Azerbaijanis. At some stages of history, including modern times, Azerbaijani elements were used against both Iran and Turkey. Russia used a variety of means to maintain its influence.

In the 1990s, Russia tried to keep Azerbaijan from joining the Western economic and political projects. At that time, Azerbaijan tried to attract some foreign investments in the region, and to build platforms for cooperation with the EU countries and the United States.

In response, Russia attempted to use the existing media institutions in Azerbaijan and, in some cases, to create new media institutions to increase its impact on society. However, Russia was not successful in this. There was a very negative public perception of Russia and its role in the South Caucasus. Russian support for Armenia during its war with Azerbaijan, in addition to other factors, created an unfavourable environment for the Russian media influence.

A significant majority of the Azerbaijani public perceives Russia as an aggressor due to its activities in the region in the early 1990s. The public image of Russia deteriorated even further after its invasion of Georgia.[1] According to a 2016 survey, only 16 % of the population supported Azerbaijan's integration into the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union, whereas the accession to NATO and the EU were supported by 72 %

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[1]   Canada: Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Azerbaijan: Treatment of ethnic Russians in Azerbaijan (1998−2002). (2002) http://www.refworld.org/docid/3df4be0f28.html

of respondents.[2] According to a 2017 nationwide survey, 32 % and 51 % of the Azerbaijan population respectively tend to trust NATO and the EU, while 26 % favour the Eurasian Economic Union.[3]

The statement made by Russian President Vladimir Putin, that Russia's border does not end anywhere', raised particular concerns in Azerbaijan, as Russian military activity in the Caucasus was on the rise.[4] Azerbaijan sided with neither the EU nor NATO, but neither was it connected to any Russian-led organisations (the Eurasian Economic Union or the CSTO), leaving the country susceptible to Russian political and economic pressure, as it was experts interviewed at the time mentioned. So far, Azerbaijan has pursued a balanced policy, which has helped to establish friendly and effective relations with regional and international powers.

Azerbaijan also plays a significant role in the North−South transit corridor between Russia and Iran, as these three countries recently held a forum. There are some beliefs among Azerbaijan's expert community that Russia wants to see Azerbaijan in the Eurasian Economic Union.[5] The issue of the Azerbaijan's membership of the Russian-led organisations was raised several times by Russian officials, including Sergey Lavrov, Minister of Foreign Affairs.[6] [7]

On the other hand, Russia is a vital economic partner for Azerbaijan. While oil and gas dominate Azerbaijan's exports (around 90 % of the total) and the main buyers of carbohydrates from Azerbaijan are Italy (the EU) and Israel,[8] Russia is the major importer of the Azerbaijani non-oil products. According to the Centre for Economic Reforms and Communication and Committee of Customs, Russia was the main destination for Azerbaijan's non-oil export in 2017 (553 million USD). The second country, Turkey, imported only 292 million USD worth.[9]

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[2]   İsmayılov, Sədrəddin. 2016. ""Atlas" Araşdırmalar Mərkəzi:
        'Vətəndaşlar 5 Dövləti Azərbaycanın Dostu Sayırlar.'" (Atlas Research Center 2016 Surveys) Report.Az.
        https://report.az/xarici-siyaset/atlas-arasdirmalar-merkezi-vetendaslar-5-dovleti-azerbaycanin-dostu-sayirlar.

[3]   Annual Survey Report: Regional Overview (2017). OPEN Neighbourhood−Communication for a Stronger Partnership: Connecting
        With Citizens Across the Eastern Neighbourhood.

[4]   Utiashvili, Shota. 2017. "New Russian Weaponry in the Caucasus and Its Impact on Georgia's NATO Aspiration."
        https://www.gfsis.org/blog/view/668.

[5]   "Rusiya Azərbaycanı Aİİ-Yə Dəvət Etdi." 2017.
        https://sputnik.az/azerbaijan/20171120/412829984/rusiya-azerbaycani-aii-de-gormek-isteyir.html.

[6]   "Ереван назвал условие для вступления Азербайджана в ЕАЭС." 2017. ИА REGNUM. https://regnum.ru/news/2348851.html.

[7]   Ibid.

[8]   State Customs Committee. Statistical Bulletins. http://customs.gov.az/az/faydali/gomruk-statistikasi/statistics-bulletin/

[9]   Center for Economic Reforms and Communication. Export Summary Report for January, 2018 Vol 1 (10).

To sum up, despite its negative image as Armenia's strategic partner, Russia tries to maintain its influence in Azerbaijan, focusing specifically on several groups with which it may be able to hold sway.

VULNERABLE GROUPS

There are certain groups inside and outside Azerbaijan that are particularly vulnerable to the Russia's state-run propaganda machine. Basically, these are the Russian community in Azerbaijan and the Azerbaijanis living and working in Russia. In addition, Russian is the second most spoken language in Azerbaijan, and although it does not have official status, it remains the *lingua franca* for several groups in Azerbaijani society, including members of the local political, economic, and cultural elite.

In the early 1990s, the Russian language lost its status as an official language in Azerbaijan. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the atrocities committed by the Red (Soviet) Army involving the death of the civilians, known as 'Black January' in Baku, and Russia's position regarding the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in general, created a public outcry amongst the people. These events drastically diminished the prominent role of the Russian language in Azerbaijan, especially in urban areas. Due to a national awakening among Azerbaijanis and the mass emigration of ethnic Russians, the popularity of the Russian language deteriorated to a great extent and it lost its status as a language of communication in Baku.

However, Russian remains the most popular second language in Azerbaijan; 72 % of the population speak at least basic Russian, while 7 %, particularly concentrated in the urban areas,[10] have advanced skills. The language is preserved and allowed to develop further due to the government's current state policies, as it is widely taught in schools and at universities.[11]

According to data published by the Ministry of Education of Azerbaijan, there are 15 Russian language secondary schools and 314 secondary schools that provide education both in Russian and Azerbaijani. Within the Azerbaijan independence period, not a single Russian language school

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[10]   Ramazanova, Aynur. 2014. "Social Science in the Caucasus: Knowledge of Russian in Azerbaijan." Caucasus Research Resource Centers. *http://crrc-caucasus.blogspot.com/2014/04/knowledge-of-russian-in-azerbaijan.html*.

[11]   "Russian Language in Azerbaijan: Intensive Training." 2017. Vestnik Kavkaza. *http://vestnikkavkaza.net/articles/Russian-language-in-Azerbaijan-intensive-training.html*.

was shut down; however, a decrease in the enrolment was observed. Overall, 82 535 pupils[12] chose Russian as their language of instruction. Additionally, more than 450 000 pupils study Russian as a second language.[13]

Due to its public image, Russia was unsuccessful in consolidating its influence among the larger social groups. Nevertheless, there are very specific groups that did fall under Russian influence.

There were 119 300 (1.35 % of the total population) ethnic Russians living in Azerbaijan as of 2009, making them the third largest ethnic minority in the country. Experts interviewed for this research project believe that this group remains very susceptible to Russian propaganda, due to its continued use of the Russian language.

The latest official statistical figures put the number of Russians at 119 000, while the other major ethnic minorities, Lazgins and Talishes, comprise 112 000 people. Among ethnic-Russian Azerbaijanis, 98.9 % consider Russian to be their mother tongue, and only 42.6 % can speak Azerbaijani.[14]

Several institutions reinforce the position of the Russian language in Azerbaijan. The Russian Orthodox Church is among those religious institutions which receive sympathy from the local authorities and the community at large. Russian speakers currently enjoy great availability of Russian-language literature and schools. Additionally, most universities in the country offer higher education programmes in Russian alongside Azerbaijani.

There are no special media tools or public influence mechanisms designed for Russian speakers living in Azerbaijan. Nevertheless, the role of this group in the formation of public opinion in the Azerbaijani and Russian media is obvious. In many cases, they try to display the reputation of Azerbaijan as a 'country non-threatening to Russia', and normalise relations between the two. According to interviews, many local media experts believe that, in many ways, Russia's influence is very subtle and not openly traceable, as relies on diplomatic channels and other mechanisms to build

[12]   Mirzəyev, Fərid. 2016. "'Azərbaycanda 90 Min Şagird Rus Dilində Təhsil Alır.'" APA—Nazir. https://apa.az/sosial_xeberler/nazir-azerbaycanda-90-min-sagird-rus-dilinde-tehsil-alir.html.

[13]   "Rus Dili Azərbaycanın Ikinci Dilidir." 2016. Sputnik. https://sputnik.az/life/20160303/404009856.html.

[14]   AzeriStat. (2017). Demographic indicators. Retrieved from http://www.stat.gov.az/source/demography/az/001_11-12.xls

contacts and deliver a message to the wider public through groups such as the ethnic-Russian minority in Azerbaijan.

The Azerbaijani government is somewhat concerned about pro-Russian sentiment among the Caucasian ethnic minorities. There are large numbers of Lazgi communities living in the regions straddling northern Azerbaijan and the Russian Caucasus. Russia was also relatively hospitable towards the nationalist members of the Talish communities. Many such nationalists reside in Moscow and other Russian cities. These two non-ethnic Russian groups are among the most vulnerable to Kremlin-led misinformation, influenced by Russia's position.[15] [16]

Today, the Azerbaijani community residing in Russia consists of the ethnic Azerbaijani Russian citizens and the Azerbaijani economic migrants (long-term, short-term, and seasonal). According to the 2010 Russian Census, there are 603 070 Azerbaijanis residing in Russia, making it one of the top ten most numerous ethnic groups in the country. As pointed out by an expert consulted on the topic:

'There are some social classes that are more vulnerable to Russian disinformation. Particularly, considering that some Azerbaijani citizens live in Russia, and Russia has a greater ability to influence them'.[17]

The Azerbaijanis in Russia are well integrated in society and moderately active on the political scene; they have strong ties with the political establishment in Russia. The political discourse between Azerbaijan and Russia directly affected the lives of the Azerbaijanis living in Russia. From time to time, the group faced persecution from the Russian authorities,[18] and there is evidence that the Azerbaijani community in Russia was used as a tool to influence decision-making in Azerbaijan.

The annulment of the registration of the *All-Russian Azerbaijani Congress* by the Russian Supreme Court caused a great concern for the Azerbaijani authorities.[19] The organisation played a major role in strengthening

[15]   Shafee F. (2008) Inspired from Abroad: The external sources of Separatism in Azerbaijan. Caucasian Review of International Affairs. Vol 2(4).

[16]   Noonan, Joshua. 2015. "The Danger of Russia Plotting More Ethnic Separatism in Azerbaijan." The Hill. *http://thehill.com/blogs/congress-blog/foreign-policy/235547-the-danger-of-russia-plotting-more-ethnic-separatism-in*.

[17]   Anonymous Informant, January-February, 2018. In-depth interview.

[18]   Braux, Adeline. 2013. "Azerbaijani Migrants in Russia." No. 57. Caucasus Analytical Digest. *http://www.css.ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/special-interest/gess/cis/center-for-securities-studies/pdfs/CAD-57-5-7.pdf*.

[19]   Ismail, Alman Mir. 2017. "Why the Sharp Downturn in Russian-Azerbaijani Relations?" The Central Asia-Caucasus Institute and Silk Road Studies Program Joint Center. *https://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/13456-why-the-sharp-downturn-in-russian-azerbaijani-relations?.html*.

socio-economic ties between the two nations, and its shutdown provoked several negative responses from the Azerbaijani government, which was known for its close association with the Congress.

The Azerbaijani community in Russia is heavily influenced by Kremlin-backed propaganda. As pointed out by an international relations expert:

'The Azerbaijanis working in Russia are becoming the mediators of the disinformation exchange'.[20]

The Azerbaijanis in Russia contribute quite a hefty sum to the economy of Azerbaijan. The ethnic Azerbaijanis in Russia are influential in building economic ties between the two countries. More than 80 % of agricultural products originating in Azerbaijan are exported to Russia.[21] The above-mentioned group established influential business contacts in Azerbaijan.

According to the World Bank, remittances to Azerbaijan are largely sent from Russia and total 2.2 billion USD. For the present, Russia hosts the largest workforce of Azerbaijani migrant labourers. Thus, the ethnic Azerbaijanis in Russia form a group which can have a significant impact on the domestic Azerbaijani situation.

Many Azerbaijani migrants working in Russia come from the country's rural areas, and send their remittances to the rural areas of Azerbaijan, accounting for 1.8 % of Azerbaijan's GDP. Due to the petroleum price decrease, trade between those countries also shrank from $4 billion USD in 2014 to $2.8 billion USD in 2015.

Today, 600 Russian companies operate in Azerbaijan, 200 of them backed by 100 % Russian investments.[22] One of the interviewed economic experts mentioned this factor, pointing out the vulnerability of these social groups to Kremlin-led narratives[23] and their subsequent prominent position from which they are able to influence Azerbaijan's domestic developments.

There has been some increase in cooperation between Azerbaijan and Russia in education, characterised by intensive Russian courses financed by the Azerbaijani government and Moscow-funded educational

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[20] Anonymous Informant, January–February, 2018. In-depth interview.

[21] Nazarli, Amina. 2016. "Azerbaijan's Major Exporters of Agricultural Products Named." AzerNews. https://www.azernews.az/business/106769.html.

[22] "Relations between Russia and Azerbaijan Are Those of Strategic Partnership." 2016. AzerNews. https://www.azernews.az/nation/100441.html.

[23] Anonymous Informant, January -February, 2018. In-depth interview.

and professional exchange programmes.[24] The Azerbaijani students in Russia make up one of the largest foreign student groups in the country: while there are 72 000 foreign students in Russia, 20 % of them, or roughly 14 000,[25] are from Azerbaijan.

In many cases, the Azerbaijanis who got their education in Russia are members of the current cultural, economic and political elite in Azerbaijan. The Russian language actually became a cementing element for some of them. The new generation representatives who join the Russian-language schools or other educational programmes are mainly influenced to do so by this community. Hence, despite having no ethnic or other ties to Russia, the use of Russian as a language of the Azerbaijani elite makes those who pursue such a path vulnerable to Russian cultural and even political influence, through the media content to which they are exposed.[26]

MEDIA LANDSCAPE

In the second half of the 1990s, due to the Azerbaijan's pro-Western stance, a decrease in the number of students using Russian, the emigration of ethnic Russians and strict media control, Russia was able to exert some limited influence on the Azerbaijani media.

In the early 2000s, with the increasing popularity of news portals on the Internet, the local government started sponsoring several Russian-language websites. Their main aim was to disseminate pro-Azerbaijani narratives in the post-Soviet countries where the Russian language still held prominence. Nevertheless, this development led to intensified contacts with Russian media outlets, and allowed Russian disinformation to spread in the Azerbaijani media.[27]

After 2012, Russia changed its strategy towards Azerbaijan, supporting several media outlets operating in Azerbaijan. For example, in 2015, the Russian-sponsored media channel *Sputnik Azerbaijan* started to operate

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[24]   Grove, Jack. 2017. "Russia Focuses on Soft Power in Its International Student Strategy." Inside Higher Ed. *https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2017/03/16/russia-focuses-soft-power-its-international-student-strategy*.

[25]   Shirinov, Rashid. 2016. "Baku Hosts Discussions on Azerbaijani-Russian Cooperation in Education, Science." AzerNews. *https://www.azernews.az/nation/105724.html*.

[26]   Shiriyev, Zaur. 2017. "Betwixt and between: The Reality of Russian Soft-Power in Azerbaijan." Böll South Caucasus. *https://ge.boell.org/en/2017/10/16/betwixt-and-between-reality-russian-soft-power-azerbaijan*.

[27]   Ibid.

in both Azerbaijani and Russian. Overall, the main goal of the Russian media outlets in Azerbaijan is to create a positive image of Russia among the public.

According to *Alexa.com*, Sputnik.az does not rank among the Top 50 websites in Azerbaijan. Only the following Russian-language news sites are in that listing:

- Oxu.az

- Milli.az

- Big.az

- Musavat.com (opposition party newspaper website)

- Haqqin.az (in Russian, pro-governmental)

- Yenicag.az

- Qafqazinfo.az

- Day.az (in mixed languages, but mainly Russian, independent)

- Axar.az

- Lent.az

- Sonxeber.az[28]

Sputnik.az is ranked as 94th in Azerbaijan.[29] The Russian 'Sputnik' news agency is gaining momentum, but not yet among the most influential sources.

The country enjoys free access to the social networks. However, some members of parliament have recently called for limits on access to social media platforms to avoid a 'foreign-sponsored uprising of a kind similar to the Arab Spring'. Nevertheless, in May, 2017, the authorities limited access to websites such as RFRL, Meydan TV, and other online TV channels. In 2017, the Reporters without Borders Press Freedom Index placed Azerbaijan 162th out of 180 in its ranking. In 2017, Freedom House ranked Azerbaijan as '*partly free*', granting it an overall Internet freedom score of 58 out of 100.

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[28]   Alexa. Top Sites in Azerbaijan. 2017.. *https://www.alexa.com/topsites/countries/AZ*

[29]   Alexa. Sputnik.az. Traffic Statistics. 2017. *https://www.alexa.com/siteinfo/sputnik.az*

According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, 10 reporters are currently imprisoned in Azerbaijan. In previous years, there were several high ranking cases involving journalists being arrested, namely connected to Eynulla Fatullayev, Avaz Zeynalov, and Mehman Aliyev. All were later freed. According to government officials, the reasons for these journalists arrests were not related to their media activity. Officially, they were charged under articles of the Criminal Code, including in relation to tax evasion.

The majority of the news agencies and online sites also publish information in Russian (and English).

Alongside the state-owned broadcasting company AzTV and public broadcasting company Ictimai TV, several other TV broadcasting companies exist:

- 14 district TV broadcasting companies

- Five national non-state TV broadcasting companies

In addition, ATV International is a private satellite broadcasting company, while Idman-Azerbaijan and Medeniyyet-Azerbaijan are TV channels specialising in sport and culture, respectively. There are also about 30 Internet TV channels in Azerbaijan.

The prominent print media outlets are the following:

- Ekho (in Russian)

- Azerbaycan (a government newspaper)

- Yeni Azerbaycan (the ruling party's newspaper)

- Azadliq (grouped around opposition parties)

- Yeni Musavat (grouped around opposition parties)

Basically, all major Azerbaijani information agencies have a page for publications in Russian:

- Azertac (official state news agency)

- APA

- Turan

- Trend

- APA

Additionally, all major Russian TV channels are available through cable TV in Azerbaijan.

The main problem for the pro-Russian media outlets is the generally negative image of Russia. Even a cursory review of the daily media reveals that the Azerbaijani media openly view Russia as the main international force to help Armenia to gain control over Nagorno-Karabakh. Hence, there is little public favour towards Russia, and Russia cannot be influential in the Azerbaijani media simply by spreading pro-Russian news.

There are several factors which may work in favour of Russia to get Kremlin-backed messages to the public more successfully. One important point in this regard is that the living standards of journalists and media workers in Azerbaijan is low. According to some NGO and trade union reports, a print media journalist earns about 400 AZN per month (450 EUR before devaluation, and 350 EUR currently). The average salary for a broadcast media journalist is around 600 AZN (840 EUR before devaluation, 520 EUR currently). Given the high cost of living in Azerbaijan, these salaries place reporters in the lower middle class.[30]

The underlying reason for such low salaries is that media management advertising practices are not yet fully mature. This makes media companies financially weak, with rather low salaries for their employees. As a result, the majority of media outlets employ semi-professionals, and thus investigative journalism is weak and fact-checking desks are largely absent.

Due to the lack of the social security programmes (except the government-funded housing projects for a limited number of media professionals) targeting journalists and improving their living standards, journalists tend to seek external financial sources. This creates an opportunity for them to be recruited by external interest groups, including Russian ones.

The media trade union in Azerbaijan is also relatively weak. The legacy of the Soviet-era trade unions still persists, even though current understandings of their purpose and functions are not the same. Thus, journalists lack the skills to obtain fair job contracts that could ameliorate their work and living conditions. This is why the quality of journalism in Azerbaijan is poor.

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[30]   "Azərbaycanda Jurnalistlər Nə Qədər Maaş Alır?" 2016. Femida.Az. *http://femida.az/az/news/16625*.

Even though media in Azerbaijan is quite diverse, it is in fact highly politicised. The media bodies grouped around the government and opposition parties set the media agenda in the country. As a result, editors-in-chief completely dominate the tone and content of the print media entities, and lack any interest in actual news reporting, while the political process results in media being highly biased and strongly focused on special interests.

LEGAL REGULATIONS

In 1998, the official media censorship left over from the Soviet era was revoked by presidential decree. This became a turning point for the independent media in Azerbaijan. From then on, media content was mainly in the hands of the media outlets' editorial offices. In most cases, the legal media owner in Azerbaijan is also its editor-in-chief. In other words, this person is both a news reporter and an entrepreneur. The Azerbaijani ownership model does not follow the standards of European countries, in which ownership/business matters should be separated from editorial policies.

Currently, independent media bodies (see Institutional Setup) consist of professional journalists and managers regulating media.

The main legal regulatory documents for the media are the following:

For the broadcasting media:

- Law on Radio and TV Broadcasting (N 345-IIQ), adopted in 2002[31]

- Law on Public TV and Radio Broadcasting (N 767-IIQ), adopted in 2004[32]

For the print and online media:

- Law on Mass Media (N-231), adopted in 1992[33]

One of the legal problems regarding media in Azerbaijan is the lack of media ownership transparency. According to the law on the state

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[31]   "345-IIQ—Televiziya və Radio Yayımı Haqqında." 2018. Azərbaycan Respublikası Ədliyyə Nazirliyinin Qanunvericilik Baş Idarəsi. (Electronic portal for legislative acts of Azerbaijan) *http://e-qanun.az/framework/1125*.

[32]   "767-IIQ—İctimai Televiziya və Radio Yayımı Haqqında." 2018. Azərbaycan Respublikası Ədliyyə Nazirliyinin Qanunvericilik Baş Idarəsi. (Electronic portal for legislative acts of Azerbaijan) *http://e-qanun.az/framework/5546*.

[33]   "231—Kütləvi Informasiya Vasitələri Haqqında." 2018. Azərbaycan Respublikası Ədliyyə Nazirliyinin Qanunvericilik Baş Idarəsi. (Electronic portal for legislative acts of Azerbaijan) *http://www.e-qanun.az/framework/7512*.

registration of legal entities, ownership information can only be disclosed with the owner's approval. This makes it extremely difficult to publish a list of owners of media entities. Hence, it is not clear if there are any media organisations in Azerbaijan owned by foreign groups.

In spite of that, the country tries to protect its media sphere from foreign influence and, especially, from foreign funding. In 2014, the Azerbaijani parliament passed a law restricting the financing of non-governmental and civil society organisations and, subsequently, largely limiting their influence on individuals and the public. The incentives targeting foreign influence (including Russian) in the country came directly from the government. Russian influence in the media of Azerbaijan is limited mainly due to the high level of state control.

Nevertheless, despite the state control of media, some experts believe that there is much more to deal with:

'There is a need for a national strategy. I do not think we have any effective counter-influencing measures. There is a need for programmes to improve the professionalism of journalists, and the first initiative should come from the government. There is also a need to identify the short-term targets. Some counter-influencing measures should be implemented as well'. [34]

Another expert mentions the late response of the government institutions to the information challenge:

'The operative response of state agencies is a problem. When the event occurs, the social media is very quick to react. During that time, after half an hour, one day, half a day, while public authorities do not provide any information on the issue, people start to panic'. [35]

The Law on Information Security was adopted in 1998 (N-432-IQ), and is generally considered to be inadequate. Expert opinions differ in some cases, and rather than seeing the overall legislative base as being inadequate, they criticise its implementation and the technology behind it:

'According to the mass media law, the establishment and dissemination of information through investments from abroad is prohibited. The media budget cannot have more than 30 % of funds from abroad... the attacks

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[34]   Anonymous Informant, January–February, 2018. In-depth interview.

[35]   Anonymous Informant, January–February, 2018. In-depth interview.

cannot be technologically avoided. From a technological point of view, the safety of our information space has never been provided for.[36]

In 2017, following parliamentary amendments to the law, the online media were considered equal to the print media, with the same regulation for content.

INSTITUTIONAL SETUP

Since Soviet censorship was abolished, two self-regulatory bodies have been established:

- the Press Council for the print-media

- the National Broadcasting Council for broadcasting companies

The main objective of the Press Council is to execute the 'Ethical Code of Azerbaijani Journalists', adopted by the First Congress of Azerbaijani journalists in 2003. At a later stage, a joint working group was established by the OSCE Baku Office and the Press Council, where the latter's role was to promote and enforce the Code. The chair of the Press Council of Azerbaijan has since 2015 been a member of parliament.

The National Television and Radio Council was established in 2002 'to provide the implementation of state policy in the field of television and radio broadcasting, and to regulate this activity'. Its board members are appointed by presidential decree, but the president cannot dismiss them. The Council is fully funded by the state budget, but declares itself independent in its activity. The Council is responsible for providing broadcasting licences. Hence, this limits the options for foreign-funded broadcasting companies, including those from Russia, to operate in Azerbaijan. However, it is also worth mentioning that the major Russian TV programmes are available via several cable television companies in Azerbaijan.

There is also the State Fund for Support of Mass Media Development under the Azerbaijani President (KIVDF). This is designed to improve the financial stability of media entities in Azerbaijan. One of the main aims

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[36]   Anonymous Informant, January–February, 2018. In-depth interview.

of the Fund is to limit the activity of foreign influence groups in the media sector by providing some alternative funding options.

MEDIA LITERACY PROJECTS AND DIGITAL DEBUNKING TEAMS

The overall civil society environment in Azerbaijan severely restricts the capability of local NGOs to function and implement various projects, including media literacy projects. Since there are very limited options (mainly for non-political issues) for foreign funding, the media NGOs are not capable of carrying out full-scale media literacy projects.

Due to the limitations imposed on civil society institutions, there is barely any source of information on non-governmental organisations, research institutions or digital debunking teams that openly counter Kremlin-backed propaganda in the country. Some experts interviewed for this research pointed out the importance of striking a balance between media freedom and the information security.

Previously, several projects implemented within the framework of the UN and the Council of Europe, and addressed the need to increase media literacy among the general population. Nowadays, such programmes are harder to come by. In previous years, some organisations (including the Journalists' Trade Union and Press Council) also implemented projects on ethical journalism standards and an ethical code for the journalists, increasing the professionalism of journalism and the capacity to withstand the foreign propaganda pressure.

In terms of digital debunking, a 2016 event hosted in Tbilisi (involving some young politicians from Azerbaijan) included two-day training provided by *StopFake* project members, on the detection and confrontation of foreign propaganda and the political fact-checking.[37] The StopFake project periodically includes information relevant to Azerbaijan on its website. Another initiative from 2017 came on the part of the U.S. Embassy, providing scholarships allowing Azerbaijani journalists to take an e-course to help them improve their skills in recognising fake news and exposing

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[37]   "StopFake Trainers Told Journalists in Kazakhstan, Politicians from Georgia and Azerbaijan about Fact-Checking, Combating Propaganda." 2016. StopFake.Org (blog). 2016. *https://www.stopfake.org/en/stopfake-trainers-told-journalists-in-kazakhstan-politicians-from-georgia-and-azerbaijan-about-fact-checking-combating-propaganda/*.

inaccuracies, and to study best practices in debunking and communicating the truth around the misinformation.[38]

Despite the aforementioned sporadic initiatives, organised efforts and systematic debunking are hard to implement. There are several news sites and forums which report the wrong statistics, such as the *Azerbaijani Language Forum* on *disput.az*, where there are examples of users presenting dubious information and debating its veracity.[39]

CONCLUSION

While Azerbaijan did not align itself with either the EU or NATO, neither did it join any Russian led-projects. Without protection from NATO yet cooperating with the EU, particularly on the energy market, Azerbaijan has become a hot spot for Russian interests.

Up until now, Azerbaijan's balanced politics have helped it to build neutral and friendly relations with all regional and global powers. Azerbaijan did not choose sides, and continues to be a part of strategic energy projects, providing alternative gas routes to the global market, and irritating Moscow.

In Azerbaijan, Russia is largely considered to be a power that meddles in regional conflicts, and its role in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is not viewed as neutral. Hence, there is relatively low public support for the Russia-led Eurasian Economic Union, and Russia's image in Azerbaijan is rather negative in general.

Civil society has taken a strong hit in Azerbaijan in recent years. The role of NGOs and the influence of think-tanks in the society has been seriously degraded. Hence, the majority of incentives for limiting the Russian influence in Azerbaijan come from the government, and not from civil society members.

Tight state control over broadcasters and limited foreign funding have helped the government to balance out Russia's direct influence in Azerbaijan.

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[38] "TOL Education | Online Course: Become An Expert Fact Checker and Hoax Buster." 2018. http://toleducation.org/courses/online-course-become-an-expert-fact-checker-and-hoax-buster/.

[39] "Azərbaycanda Işsizlərin Sayı Açıqlandı." (Azerbaijani Language Forum) 2016. Disput.az. https://www.disput.az/index.php?app=forums&module=forums&controller=topic&id=979807

There is no legal document imposing censorship on the mass media in Azerbaijan, and, as it is declared, it is regulated by the reportedly independent bodies:

- National Television and Radio Broadcasting Council (for the broadcasting companies)

- Press Council (for the print and online media)

The State Support Fund for the Mass Media Development (KIVDF) also plays an important role in regulating media in Azerbaijan.

The media is diverse, but camped around the political parties and highly marginalised. Since there is no political force openly supporting Russian politics, the media outlets dependant on these political parties do not express any sympathy toward Kremlin.

The use of the Russian language (alongside other foreign languages, including Turkish and Persian) is prohibited on nationwide and regional television and radio channels. The Azerbaijani language predominates in the mass media. Many newspapers are published in Russian, and in many cases, they are on the top of the rating lists, shadowing the Russian sponsored agencies such as 'Sputnik'.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **To increase the effectiveness of the state agencies and their work with the media and public agents.**

   In many cases, the operative responses of the media outlets addressing some social and political issues are provided very late, creating room for speculation. Such speculation is shared and discussed by the 'yellow pages' and social network users. This gives some opportunities for foreign influence groups to take over the information sphere in Azerbaijan and feed it with the fake news, to effectively advertise their own values.

2. **To develop journalists' professionalism.**

   Journalists' professionalism and adherence to ethical rules of remain low. Many reporters are inadequately trained and lack professional experience. Unprofessionalism damages public confidence in local media bodies, as pointed out by interviewees taking part in this study. This also increases the opportunities for foreign players to spread 'catchy' but fake news.

3. **To strengthen the social security of media workers.**

   According to reports of the journalists' trade union organisations, media workers' salaries remain rather low. Due to social security issues and low living standards, media workers tend to fall under the influence of foreign groups.

4. **To prepare a long-term strategy for tackling Kremlin-led propaganda.**

   Despite the existence of media regulatory bodies (both print and broadcasting) several pieces of legislation relating to online and print media, and the ethical codes for journalists, Azerbaijan still lacks a comprehensive information warfare strategy designed to counter Kremlin-led messages and narratives in Azerbaijan.

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BELARUS
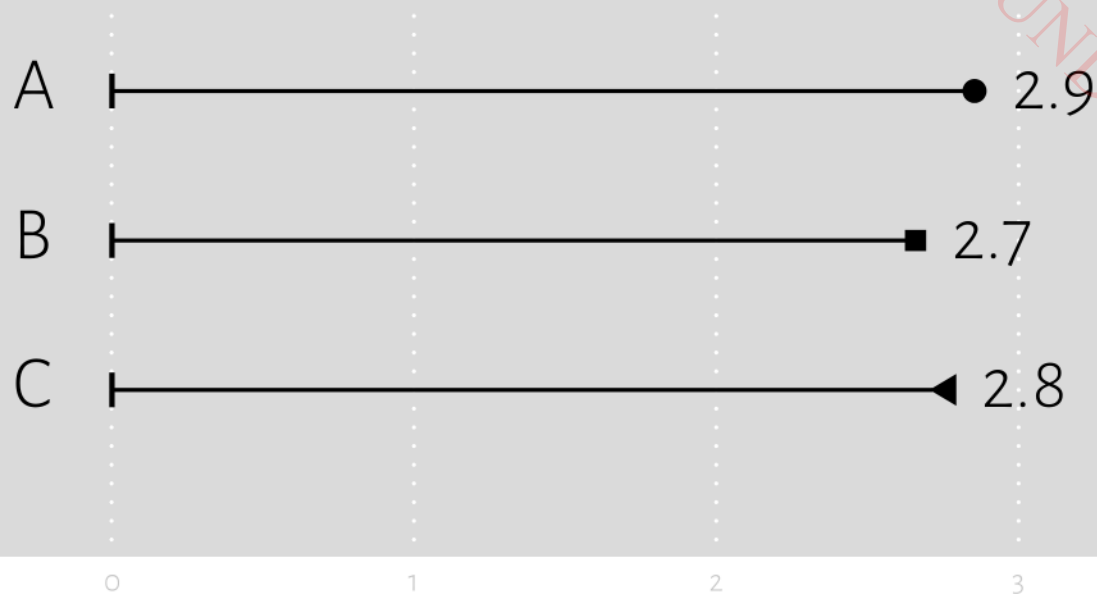
INTRODUCTION

Belarus gained independence in 1991 after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The Nations in Transit 2017 report defines the political regime in Belarus as consolidated authoritarianism.[1] The president of the country, Alexander Lukashenka, has ruled since 1994. Belarus is heavily dependent on Russia economically, politically, militarily, culturally, and ideologically. However, a well-functioning bureaucracy, the relatively low level of corruption and high degree of centralisation allow Belarusian authorities to adapt to the changing economic situation and geopolitical environment.

In 1996−2000, the Belarusian authorities strived for political, military, and economic integration with Russia with a declared goal of establishing a union state. This integration process was put on hold in the early 2000s. However, the two countries maintain close ties. According to the Belarusian Statistical Committee,[2] the country's export and import shares to Russia in 2016 amounted to 46.5 % and 55.4 %, respectively. Belarus is a member of the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) together with Russia, Kazakhstan, Armenia, and Kyrgyzstan, as well as a member of the-Moscow-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) military alliance.

The Russian language is prevalent in the country because of Russification carried out in the days of the Russian Empire, the Soviet period, and continued by the Belarusian government after the referendum of 1995. The referendum secured the official status of the Russian language in addition to Belarusian. In reality, the Russian language occupied a clearly dominant position in public life. In the 2009 census, more than 70 % of Belarusians declared that they speak Russian at home. However, these figures may be much higher in reality.[3] In the 2016/2017 school year, 86.6 % of pupils in Belarusian secondary schools had Russian as the language of instruction, an increase from 80.9 % in 2010/2011.[4] According to the SATIO 2015 survey, more than 57 % of Belarusians

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[1]   Kazakevich, Andrei. 2017. "Belarus. Nations in Transit Ratings and Averaged Scores". *https://freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit/2017/belarus*.

[2]   Национальный статистический комитет Республики Беларусь. 2017. Распределение экспорта товаров по странам—основным торговым партнерам в 2016 году. *http://bit.ly/2kY3ovP*. *http://bit.ly/2u81u3x*.

[3]   "По официальным данным, белорусский язык использует 23 % населения страны" 2012. Naviny.by. *http://naviny.by/rubrics/society/2012/02/21/ic_news_116_387459*.

[4]   Марціновіч, Ягор. 2017. "Моўная катастрофа: за 10 гадоў колькасць беларускамоўных школьнікаў скарацілася ўдвая." Наша Ніва. *https://nn.by/?c=ar&i=191559*.

prefer to receive information exclusively in Russian. The number of Belarusians willing to receive communication exclusively in Belarusian is only 4 %. The share of the population preferring the Russian language is significantly higher among people aged 18 – 45. Therefore, the linguistic factor facilitates the frequent usage of Russian media by Belarusians.

The cultural influence of Russia in Belarus is reinforced through religion. More than two-thirds of Belarusians declare themselves Orthodox Christians of the Moscow Patriarchate.[5] About 60 % of Belarusians subscribe to the Russophile ideology of the pan-Russian nation,[6] which considers the three branches of Rus' people, namely Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians, a single ethnicity. This concept was propagated by the Russian Orthodox Church and Moscow's rulers for centuries. Finally, the ideology of Lukashenka's political regime for a long time was rooted in the Soviet legacy, the ideas of "Slavic brotherhood", and opposition towards Western democracies. Recent national polls show that 65 % of Belarusians prefer integration with Russia as opposed to EU accession, which is supported by 19 %. The preferred mode of integration with Russia for most Belarusian citizens means having amicable political relations between the two states as well as the absence of border and customs controls. A negligible share of Belarusians (1.7 %) supports Belarus' full accession to Russia, meaning it would lose its sovereignty.[7]

The economic crisis in Belarus and Russia's aggressive stance towards Georgia and Ukraine have made the Belarusian government more open to the West. Worried about resurgent Russian nationalism, Belarus started cautiously implementing a very limited policy of promoting Belarusian culture and strengthening national identity. But the current language situation and cultural, historical, and religious affinity to Russia provide Russian media with considerable influence on the Belarusian population, which makes Belarus very susceptible to Kremlin propaganda.

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[5]   "Religious Belief and National Belonging in Central and Eastern Europe." 2017. Pew Research Center. 2017. http://www.pewforum.org/2017/05/10/religious-belief-and-national-belonging-in-central-and-eastern-europe/.

[6]   Drakokhrust, Yuri. 2015. "Paradoxes of the 'Russian World' in Belarus." Independent Institute of Socio-Economic and Political Studies. http://www.iiseps.org/?p=846&lang=en.

[7]   "Опрос: 65 % белорусов за союз с Россией, 19 % – за вступление в Евросоюз." 2017. TUT.by. https://news.tut.by/economics/532361.html.

VULNERABLE
GROUPS

The economic, linguistic, and cultural policies of the Belarusian authorities in the last two decades have made Belarusian society receptive to information narratives spread by the Kremlin-supported media. As the deputy editor-in-chief of *Naša Niva* newspaper, Zmicier Pankaviec, explains,[8] the domination of the Russian cultural framework in Belarus makes Belarusians very susceptible to Kremlin-produced narratives:

'In Belarus they do not translate films to the Belarusian language; they do not make local Belarusian versions of world-known magazines, like Cosmopolitan or Forbes. And it doesn't matter whether they are in the Russian or Belarusian language—such local versions simply do not exist. Films we watch are made in Russia or dubbed, books we read are also printed in Russia. Only a small number of them are translated locally. There is no Belarusian version of the BBC or EuroSport TV channels. We lack the whole layer of people making cultural products'.[9]

There is a deficit of empirical data and scientific research on this topic, but the results of national surveys and our analysis as social scholars allow us to define a number of socio-economic, professional, and cultural groups that are the most susceptible to the Kremlin's narratives. Various surveys conducted in recent decades show that the idea of integration with Russia finds the strongest support among the people who find it difficult to adapt to the market economy, are afraid of market reforms, and therefore want to preserve the existing Belarusian economic model based on strong links with Russia. These are people older than 40, with relatively low income and education, residing in small towns and rural areas.[10]

Surveys relating to the media preferences of Belarusians partially correlate with these findings. Russian TV channels and websites enjoy more

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[8]   Within this research, 17 in-depth interviews were conducted with experts in media fields in August-November 2017. The list of respondents comprises 12 journalists of national media (including four editors and deputy editors), two heads of specialised NGOs and professional associations, two media consultants, and one director of a sociological research centre.

[9]   Zmicier Pankaviec, Naša Niva Newspaper. August 26, 2017. In-depth interview.

[10]   Коровенкова, Татьяна. 2017. "Белорусы предпочитают любить Россию на расстоянии." БелаПАН. http://naviny.by/article/20170527/1495871256-belorusy-predpochitayut-lyubit-rossiyu-na-rasstoyanii.

        Melyantsou, Dzianis. 2015. "REFORUM: Geopolitics and Reforms: Who Do Reformers Have to Rely On?" Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies. http://belinstitute.eu/en/node/2530.

        "Belarus and the World: Geopolitical Choice and Security in the Light of Economy and Culture." 2010. Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies. http://belinstitute.eu/en/node/835.

popularity among the inhabitants of small towns (population between 10 000 and 50 000 people) and regional centres. The popularity of Russian media is higher in the east of Belarus bordering Russia — Vitebsk, Homiel and Mahiliou regions.[11] This might be explained by the larger labour migration to Russia in these areas as compared to other Belarusian regions and stronger family ties of the local inhabitants to Russia.

It seems pertinent to suggest that Kremlin-led propaganda finds fertile ground among individuals who are culturally predisposed to it, actively consume Russian media, and do not believe that their individual efforts may improve their economic situation while assuming that Russia is capable of bringing positive change to their life.

The first group particularly vulnerable to Russian government propaganda is the *Belarusian Armed Forces and internal troops* (e.g., the militarised forces of the Ministry of Internal Affairs). In terms of the organisational structure, ideology, and culture, the Belarusian Armed Forces are the continuation of the Soviet military. The Belarusian army officers remain nostalgic about the Soviet Union, where the military was a much more prestigious social group. Army ideology is still based on the idea that Russians and Belarusians are "the same nation".[12] Military officers still perceive the West as the main common enemy of both countries.[13] They often have a hostile attitude towards the Belarusian language.

The second group receptive to Russian government propaganda is *retired people*. Many of them are heavy consumers of Russian TV channels, nostalgic for Soviet times, and find themselves in a difficult economic situation, making them more reliant on government assistance. According to the director of the Belarusian Analytical Workroom, Prof. Andrei Vardomatski, the Belarusian elderly possess a unique set of values evolved during USSR times. They are vulnerable to Kremlin-supported messages, not because of media techniques but rather due to self-identification with such narratives, reinforcing their beliefs and fears.

The third very diverse and vulnerable group consists of people who have recently *lost a stable income and job* due to the economic crisis. This group includes small business owners, workers of the nearly bankrupt state-owned enterprises, and individuals laid off from industry or public

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[11]   Белорусские средства массовой информации: количественный анализ.

[12]   Канявец, Зміцер. 2017. "Беларускі рэзервіст: 12 урокаў войска." Наша Ніва. *https://nn.by/?c=ar&i=144528*.

[13]   Ларчанка, Міхаіл. 2014. "У нашай арміі не любяць Лукашэнку." Charter97.org. *https://charter97.org/be/news/2014/5/4/97313/*.

administration. These people are particularly present in regional centres. Some of those who find themselves unable to find a new job put their hopes of advancement on Russia.

Finally, messages spread by Russian media are particularly popular among *active Russian Orthodox Church believers*. In recent years, there were numerous reports about several Russian Orthodox parishes helping pro-Russian nationalists organise military training sessions for Belarusian youth[14] or meetings with known propagandists of Russophile ideas.[15]

In addition to these groups, Prof. Vardomatski pointed out that younger Belarusians display lower critical thinking skills compared to people of middle age and therefore are more susceptible to disinformation and propaganda disseminated by the Kremlin.[16] Education is not a key factor in this case and often has no influence on the opinions of young people.

MEDIA LANDSCAPE

According to opinion polls conducted by the Belarusian Analytical Workroom in April 2017, the primary source of news for Belarusians is state-owned TV channels (71.3 %). Russian TV channels come in third (43.8 %), after relatives and friends (62.1 %) as a source of information. Social networks and blogs (42.4 %) is yet another important news source. Independent media online are positioned sixth (27.4 %) after state-owned newspapers (28.6 %).[17]

Sociological studies show that the Russian outlets enjoy a high level of trust among Belarusians. In April 2017, 75 % of respondents either fully or partially trusted Russian media. At the same time, the degree of confidence in domestic independent media and state-owned sources stood at 73 % and 67 %, respectively.[18] The influence of the Russian outlets in Belarus is strengthened by the relatively weak national identity and the precarious status of the Belarusian language. In Belarus, there are

[14]   Гарбацэвіч, Арцём. 2016. "Беларускіх школьнікаў адпраўлялі ў Расію ў трэніровачныя лагеры пад кіраўніцтвам неанацыстаў." Наша Ніва. *https://nn.by/?c=ar&i=170171*.

[15]   "Прысутныя тут мужчыны возьмуць удзел у вайне за Святую Русь». «Падпалкоўнік ГРУ» выступіў у мінскім праваслаўным манастыры." 2017. Наша Ніва. *https://nn.by/?c=ar&i=197200*.

[16]   Andrei Vardomatski, Belarusian Analytical Workroom7. November 2017. In-depth interview.

[17]   "Соцопрос: Белорусы все меньше доверяют госСМИ." 2017. TUT.by. *https://news.tut.by/economics/544272.html*.

[18]   Ibid.

only 32 broadcasters and publications in the Belarusian language, while 837 use solely the Russian language. Another 526 media outlets publish materials both in Russian and Belarusian.[19]

The most popular media in Belarus are TV or internet-based. The impact of all other types of media outlets is significantly lower. Television in Belarus is still first, although its popularity is steadily decreasing, especially among the younger, better educated, and wealthier population. According to surveys by the sociological company SATIO in September 2015, the TV audience in Belarus equalled 84.7 % of the adult population. The internet was second with 63.8 %. Newspapers had a share of 40.9 %, while radio attracted the attention of only 36.6 %. The share of internet media in Belarus continues to increase while the audience of all the others is rapidly shrinking.[20]

Freedom of speech in Belarus is severely restricted. In 2017, the World Press Freedom Index placed Belarus 153rd out of 180 countries. According to the Ministry of Information, almost 1 600 periodicals were registered in the country in 2016, and only 437 were state-owned. However, according to the Belarusian Association of journalists, there are only 30 independent journals and newspapers in Belarus covering socioeconomic and political issues. The rest are entertainment-oriented, dealing with advertising, crosswords, fashion and social life, etc.[21]

The situation with radio and TV is even more striking. Out of 273 radio stations, 190 of them and all TV channels are state-owned. The independent outlets are limited to foreign media broadcasting in Belarus: Czech-based *Radio Svaboda* (RFE/RL) as well as the *Radyjo Racyja*, the European Radio for Belarus, and Belsat TV, based in Poland.

The internet remains the only environment where independent Belarusian media (e.g., *TUT.by*, *Onliner.by*, *Charter97.org* portals) are dominant. However, the Belarusian authorities have developed a large set of legal and technical tools allowing them to block any critical media, including online ones (see the section *Legal Regulation* below for details).

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[19]   "Масмедыя ў Беларусі № 3(49). СМІ ў перыяд выбараў у палату прадстаўнікоў. (Ліпень—Верасень 2016 г.)." 2016. Беларуская асацыяцыя журналістаў. *https://baj.by/be/analytics/masmedyya-u-belarusi-no-349-smi-u-peryyad-vybarau-u-palatu-pradstaunikou-lipen-verasen*.

[20]   Белорусские средства массовой информации: количественный анализ.

[21]   "Массмедиа в Беларуси №2(48). СМИ в преддверии выборов—2016. (Апрель—Июнь 2016 г.)." 2016. Беларуская асацыяцыя журналістаў. *https://baj.by/ru/analytics/massmedia-v-belarusi-no248-smi-v-preddverii-vyborov-2016-aprel-iyun-2016-g*.

As our interviewees explained, state-owned and independent media function according to different logic. State-owned media are non-pluralistic and hierarchy-based. Journalists spread messages designed by the authorities and represent an official point of view. Publications on political and economic matters require the permission of editors-in-chief. Hierarchy and dependence on official sources significantly reduces their speed of reaction to events, as one of the state media employees explains:

'If something happens, we do not question witnesses, because different witnesses may have different points of view. They are emotional and not objective. We are waiting for the confirmation from official sources. Of course, we would like to get this confirmation faster than we get it now'.[22]

The independent media are more autonomous regarding their information policy. Their news feed is not as selective and is closer to real-time, providing a voice and tribune for different social groups in comparison with state-owned media. However, they experience pressure from the authorities and have difficulty in accessing official information.

'The situation has improved a lot in the last couple of years, but many institutions still perceive their press offices as tools to protect state officials from journalists. In some cases, they react days and weeks after an inquiry. For a Belarusian journalist, it is easier to get information from a foreign government institution than from a domestic one'.[23]

As has been already mentioned, in Belarus there is no independent local TV and radio broadcaster. State-owned Belarusian TV and radio outlets transmit predominantly Russia-originated news and entertainment content.[24] In 2016, the deputy head of the presidential administration, Ihar Buzouski, acknowledged that the share of this content reaches 65%.[25] State-owned Belarusian TV channels do not only show Russian movies, TV series, and other entertainment

[22]   Anonymous informant, a state-owned media outlet. August 2017. In-depth interview.

[23]   Anton Trafimovič, Radyjo Svaboda (RFE/RL). October 2017. In-depth interview.

[24]   "Media Sustainability Index 2017. The Development of Sustainable and Independent Media in Europe and Eurasia." 2017. https://www.irex.org/sites/default/files/pdf/media-sustainability-index-europe-eurasia-2017-full.pdf.

[25]   "65% контента в белорусских СМИ — российский." 2016. Marketing.by. http://marketing.by/novosti-rynka/65-kontenta-v-belorusskikh-smi-rossiyskiy/.

programmes, they also broadcast prime-time news services and political talk shows produced by Kremlin-controlled media.

The Belarusian experts we spoke to openly declared that the worldview of the average Belarusian is formed by Moscow, not Minsk:

'*The opinion of Belarusians on the most important topics of international affairs, geopolitics, conflicts in the region, and even the most important issues related to Belarusian national identity is formed by Russian TV. Opinion polls suggest that 60%–65% of Belarusians look at the world through the prism of Russian TV networks. I think even [President] Lukashenka is worried about it, because he realizes that he does not have control over the information disseminated in his own land*".[26]

The majority of our interviewees stated that the Belarusian government is aware of the possible information threats coming from the east. However, the Belarusian authorities seem to refrain from open censorship of Russian media. They monitor and eliminate messages directly attacking the Belarusian regime. At the same time, they allow Russian mass media to distribute their products and spread the Kremlin's point of view.

Both the Belarusian Association of Journalists, an associate member of the European Federation of Journalists, and the pro-government Belarusian Union of Journalists have Commissions on Ethics designed to fight manipulation and maintain professional standards. However, as our experts confessed, journalists and media largely do not respect the decisions of either commission and therefore these bodies do not play any regulatory role. This duty could to some extent be performed by the Civic Coordination Council of the Media established in 2008 by resolution of the Council of Ministers.[27] The Council was supposed to meet at least once a quarter and to coordinate the activities of government bodies, NGOs and other media-related organisations.[28] However, in practice it has met only a few times and exists only on paper.

[26]   Valer Karbalevič, Radio Svaboda (RFE/RL). August 2017. In-depth interview.

[27]   Постановление Совета Министров Республики Беларусь от 29.10.2008 №1625 "О создании общественного координационного совета в сфере массовой информации". *http://pravo.newsby.org/belarus/postanovsm4/sovm488.htm*

[28]   Ibid

Based on the SATIO survey,[29] the most popular TV channels among Belarusian viewers are presented below.[30]

Belarusian state-owned channels

Belarus-1 — 65.6
Belarus-2 — 34.0

Russian government-controlled channels

NTV — 21.7
TNT — 20.1
Rossiya-1 — 20.1

"Hybrid" channels

ONT — 65.6
NTV-Belarus — 48.2
RTR-Belarus — 40.4
STV — 24.7

Western channels

Euronews — 20.5
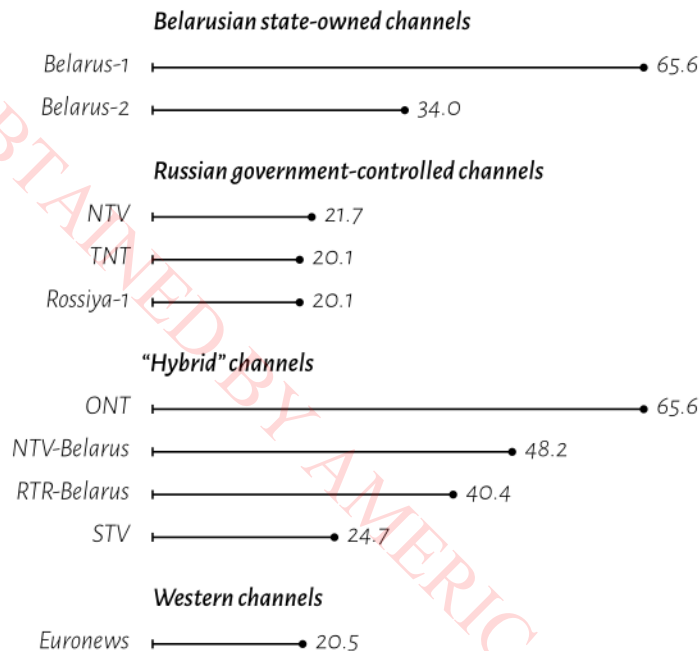
Top 10 most popular TV channels

Audience — % of the population · September 2015

The so-called 'hybrid' channels are a Belarusian media phenomenon. These networks are registered as Belarusian legal entities and combine Russian content with domestically produced programmes. They emerged in Belarus in the early 2000s. One of the goals of the Belarusian authorities when they established them was to pre-moderate the content and eliminate messages criticizing the Belarusian regime. The censorship relates only to information about Belarus. All the entertainment and information on international and domestic Russian issues are not subject to restriction. As several experts interviewed argued, a large part of the Belarusian population does not distinguish between genuine Russian TV channels and those modified by the Belarusian authorities.

In the package of nine generally accessible TV channels broadcast in Belarus, four networks (*ONT*, *NTV-Belarus*, *RTR-Belarus*, and

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[29]   Белорусские средства массовой информации: количественный анализ.

[30]   The audience of media outlets is understood here as the share of population which used each particular source of information at least once in 30 days preceding the survey.

STV) broadcast news and political talk shows produced in Russia. The uncensored Russian channels in Belarus are broadcast by cable television providers; they are also accessible via satellite. Their total audience is about 43 % of the population.[31] It is important to note that often around 90 % of the content in the packages offered by all cable TV providers in Belarus consists of Russia-originated channels. The Russian-language versions of *Euronews*, *Viasat Nature*, and *Viasat History* or the Israeli Russian-language *RTVI* are some of the notable exceptions. Ukrainian, Lithuanian, or Polish TV is absent from the Belarusian cable networks.

Since 2014, the Belarusian authorities have been trying to limit political content on the "hybrid" channels more actively than before. For instance, they moved TV shows with strong propaganda, such as Russian journalist Vladimir Solovyev's programme on *RTR-Belarus* and *Vremia pokazhet* (Time Will Tell), a talk show on ONT, from prime time to late night. Nevertheless, Russian content clearly dominates Belarusian media. Almost all of the most popular TV programmes in Belarus are Russia-produced.[32]

According to *gemiusAudience* data, in January 2017, the number of internet users aged 15 years and older in Belarus exceeded 5 million people.[33] The level of internet penetration reached 70 %. The share of internet users in Belarus is higher than in Hungary, Ukraine, Slovakia, Romania, Serbia, Croatia, and Latvia.[34] Among the Belarusian population aged 15 to 39 years, the proportion of internet users already exceeds the audience for television.[35]

The share of the Belarusian internet audience that uses the internet at least once a day has reached 91 %.[36] The internet audience is young (although penetration among older social groups is growing) and largely apolitical. Political news is of interest to 46 % of the internet audience. It is important

[31]   Белорусские средства массовой информации: количественный анализ.

[32]   Литвинович, В.М., В.В. Аржиник, В.И. Ермак, И.В. Пинчук, О.Ф. Шеремет, Н.Н. Сухотский, И.О. Метелица, and Д.В. Савотеев. 2014. "Медиа сфера Беларуси: Социологический аспект." Минск: Информационно-аналитический центр при Администрации Президента Республики Беларусь. *http://iac.gov.by/sbornik/Mediasfera_Belarusi.pdf*.

[33]   "Анализ Рынка IT в Беларуси." 2017. Агентство интернет-маркетинга «Кропас». *http://cropas.by/content-marketing/analiz-rynka-it-v-belarusi/*.

[34]   Ibid.

[35]   "ТВ vs Интернет: Агентство Optimum BY исследовало частоту просмотра телевизора и интернет-активности среди белорусов." 2017. Marketing.by *http://bit.ly/2GoSgaT./*.

[36]   Белорусские средства массовой информации: количественный анализ.

to note that this kind of information is more popular among older people (and particularly among those aged 60 years and older).[37]

According to the survey conducted by SATIO, the most popular news website in Belarus is a Belarusian privately-owned portal, *TUT.by*, with 39 % of respondents having declared they use it as a source of information. It is followed by the privately-owned Belarusian portal *Onliner.by* (21.9 %) and Russian portals *News.mail.ru* (18.5 %) and *News.yandex.by* (14 %).[38] The SATIO survey heavily underestimates the popularity of the Belarusian independent portal *Charter97.org*, whose editorial staff relocated abroad in 2010 due to repression by the Belarusian authorities. According to this survey, *Charter97*'s audience equals 2.2 % of the population. This data contradicts information from other sources. According to the figures provided by the SimilarWeb.com platform, Charter97's popularity exceeds that of the abovementioned Russian portals.[39] Therefore, Charter97 should also be listed among the top five news websites in Belarus. Although the majority of Belarusian respondents did not mention independent national websites (*TUT.by*, *Onliner.by*, Charter97.org, *NN.by* and others) as a primary source of information, their combined audience in Belarus is close to 50 % of the population.[40]

The presence of Russian media in Belarusian internet usage is below that of TV. They are represented mainly by the Belarusian versions of *Yandex.ru* and *Mail.ru* portals, which aggregate news from Belarusian and Russian media sources. The participants of the SATIO survey mention the *Lenta.ru* portal among other popular Russian media outlets in Belarus.[41] It covers events in the West and Russia's 'near abroad' from a pro-Kremlin position.

The Lenta.ru audience in Belarus is several times smaller than that of the *TUT.by* or *Onliner.by* portals, but is far from being insignificant. In October 2017, this website had 5 million visits from Belarus,[42] which exceeds the popularity of the independent online newspaper *Naša Niva* (NN.by) and the state-owned news agency *BelTA* (Belta.by), listed among the three top-10 Belarusian news websites.[43] Another Russian media source, *Sputnik.*

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[37] Медиасфера Беларуси: Социологический аспект.

[38] Белорусские средства массовой информации: количественный анализ.

[39] SimilarWeb statistics. *https://www.similarweb.com/website/charter97.org*.

[40] Белорусские средства массовой информации: количественный анализ.

[41] Ibid.

[42] SimilarWeb statistics. *https://www.similarweb.com/website/lenta.ru*.

[43] "Рэйтынг наведвальнасці беларускіх інфармацыйных сайтаў у кастрычніку." 2017. Наша Ніва. *https://nn.by/?c=ar&i=200153*.

by, launched at the end of 2014, is actively promoted by the *Yandex.by* and *News.mail.ru* portals. Thanks to referrals from these portals, in October 2017, *Sputnik.by* reached 1.5 million visits from Belarus. However, with 2.78 million page views per month, it has not yet reached the top 10 most popular Belarusian news websites.[44]

Some experts we have spoken to are worried about the growing popularity of this portal. One of the respondents stated the following:

'*Currently, Sputnik operates as a news agency. Belarusian authorities invite its journalists to official events. At the same time, they do not extend such invitations to, for instance, the Belarusian independent agency BelaPAN. Sometimes, Sputnik is the only source of government information(!). Its journalists attend an even bigger number of official events than BelTA [Belarusian Telegraph Agency]. I have the impression that some official institutions give Sputnik more exclusive information than they provide to any genuine Belarusian media outlet*'.[45]

The Russian information presence in Belarusian internet consumption is far from negligible due to the high popularity of Russian social networks. About 2.8 million Belarusians (56 % of all internet users in the country) use social networks at least once a day.[46] At the end of 2015, the most popular social networks in Belarus were Russian *Vkontakte* (vk.com) and *Odnoklassniki* (ok.ru), with 32.3 % and 30.2 %, respectively, of adult users. The Facebook audience in Belarus was half that(14.9 %).[47]

Vkontakte is more popular among the young male population (aged 16–30) living in cities while *Odnoklassniki* is preferred by an older audience, especially women residing in small towns and rural areas.[48] However, in recent years the usage of *Odnoklassniki* in Belarus has grown among younger social groups and people living in big cities.[49]

In Belarus, there have been no academic studies focused on the groups disseminating pro-Kremlin messages on social networks. Some of these groups on Vkontakte, for instance, *Slavianskiy virtualnyi klub* (Slavic Virtual

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[44]   SimilarWeb statistics. *https://www.similarweb.com/website/sputnik.by#overview*.

[45]   Anonymous informant, a Belarusian radio station. August 2017. In-depth interview.

[46]   "Анализ рынка IT в Беларуси." 2017. Агентство интернет-маркетинга «Кропас». *http://cropas.by/content-marketing/analiz-rynka-it-v-belarusi/*.

[47]   Белорусские средства массовой информации: количественный анализ.

[48]   Медиасфера Беларуси: Социологический аспект.

[49]   "Чего ждать от «Одноклассников»? Особенности белорусской аудитории в цифрах и графиках." 2017. Marketing.by.*http://bit.ly/2GouYlq/.*

Club), *Za nravstvennost i sotsialnuyu spravedlivost* (For Morality and Social Justice), and *Etu stranu ne pobedit* (This Country is Invincible), have between 7 000 and 70 000 members from Belarus. According to calculations made by Belarusian bloggers, these groups are more popular in the eastern regions of the country. [50]

Then there is the activity of so-called "Kremlin trolls" on online message boards. The chief moderator of the *talks.by* forums for the largest Belarusian web portal, *TUT.by*, recently stated that coordinated groups of politically engaged commentators from Russia are permanently present on their forum.[51] The increased activity of "Kremlin trolls" in Belarus was also noted by Freedom House in its latest "Freedom of the Net" report.[52] Therefore, one should not underestimate the capacity of the Russian government to spread misleading information in Belarus via social media and online message boards.

The role of print media in the Belarusian information space is continuously decreasing. This source is in demand among people older than 45 with a lower income and living in rural areas.[53] The most popular print media in Belarus are Belarusian versions of large Russian newspapers *Komsomolskaya Pravda v Belarusi* (readership is 15.1 % of the population) and *Argumenty i Fakty* (10.2 %),[54] as well as the Belarusian state-owned newspapers *SB-Belarus Segodnia* (14.9 %), *Respublika* (4.5 %), and *Narodnaja Hazieta* (2.7 %).[55] The interviewees did not perceive the Belarusian versions of Russian periodicals as actively transmitting Kremlin political narratives. They argue that the editorial staff of *Komsomolskaya Pravda* and *Argumenty i Fakty* have large autonomy in creating content. For instance, *Komsomolskaya Pravda v Belarusi*, while covering the war in Donbas, uses publications from *Komsomolskaya Pravda v Ukraine*. Argumenty i Fakty abstains from publishing the most biased articles from the Russian version of the newspaper and supports projects promoting the use of Belarusian language.

Public institutions in Belarus (schools, hospitals, police, army, etc.) as well as their employees are mandated to purchase subscriptions to Belarusian

[50]   MaksimStefanov1 .Twitter. *https://twitter.com/maksimstefanov1/status/906492788291895297*.

[51]   Дракахруст, Юры. 2017. "Як форумцы TUT.BY перавыхавалі «ольгінскіх» троляў."
Радыё Свабода. *https://www.svaboda.org/a/28856122.html*.

[52]   Freedom House. (2017). Freedom on the Net. Belarus Country Profile. *https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-net/2017/belarus*.

[53]   Белорусские средства массовой информации: количественный анализ.

[54]   Ibid.

[55]   Ibid.

state-owned periodicals. Such periodicals include both specialised branch newspapers and journals (e.g., *Meditsinskaya Gazeta* (Medical Newspaper) for medical staff and *Nastaunickaja Hazieta* (Teacher's Newspaper) for school teachers) as well as the main state-owned political newspapers. Hence, the large subscription volume to state-owned periodicals does not reflect their popularity. The figures provided by social surveys seem to give a much more useful picture of the influence of print media on Belarusian society.

Radio is the least popular media source, with about 30 % of Belarusians tuned in. However, the number of listeners may vary significantly depending on the locality. Nationwide, the most popular radio stations include the state-owned *Radius-FM* (10.3 %) and the *First National Channel of Belarusian Radio* (7.6 %), as well as the private *Radio Roks* (10.7 %), *Pilot FM* (5.7 %), and *Russkoye Radio* (5.3 %). Only one of these radio broadcasters (First National Channel) covers political, social, and economic topics. The rest are focused on entertainment. It is important to note that Belarusian FM radio stations in their news programmes are supposed to distribute information provided by the state-owned news agencies and are not allowed to broadcast information published by independent media. In 2015, it was reported that a *Radio Unistar* presenter was fired for occasionally airing news from the privately owned news agency *BelaPAN*.[56]

LEGAL REGULATIONS

Belarus' Mass Media Law does not mention the concept of information security. The main legal document providing the definition of this notion is the National Security Concept of the Republic of Belarus adopted on November 9, 2010.[57] Chapter 1 Article 4 of the document specifies various types of security, including information security, which is "the condition when balanced interests of an individual, society, and state are safe from external and internal threats in the information sphere". Chapter 2 Article 14 states that the main national interests in the field of information security are:

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[56]   "Вядоўцу радыё Unistar звольнілі за навіны з незалежнага інфармагенцтва." 2015. ЕЎРАРАДЫЁ. *https://euroradio.fm/vyadoucu-radyyo-unistar-zvolnili-za-naviny-z-nezalezhnaga-infarmagenctva.*

[57]   Концепция национальной безопасности Республики Беларусь, Указ Президента Республики Беларусь 9 ноября 2010 г. №575. *http://mvd.gov.by/ru/main.aspx?guid=14961.*

- Realization of the constitutional rights of citizens to receive, store and disseminate complete, credible, and timely information;

- formation and gradual evolvement of an information society;

- equal participation of the Republic of Belarus in the world's information affairs;

- transformation of the information industry into an export-oriented branch of the economy;

- efficient information support of state policy; and,

- securing the credibility and reliability of crucial information objects.

  Chapter 4 Article 27 of the concept mentions the destructive impact of information on the individual, society, and state institutions among the main threats to national security.

  In addition, Articles 34 and 42 of the concept also recite internal and external sources of threats to information security as follows:

- Dependence of the Republic of Belarus on the import of information technologies, means of relaying information and information security, and uncontrolled usage in the systems' destruction or failure, which may harm national security (Article 34);

- the quality of national information content falls short of global standards (Article 34);

- ineffective maintenance of information about state policy (Article 34);

- openness and vulnerability of the Belarusian information space to external influence (Article 42);

- domination of the leading foreign states in the global information space, monopolisation of key segments of information markets by foreign information structures (Article 42);

- information activities of foreign states, international or other organisations, and persons who undermine the national interest of the Republic of Belarus; targeted development of information aiming at discrediting the state(Article 42);

- intensification of confrontation over information between leading foreign actors, preparation for and the conduct of information warfare (Article 42); and,

- the development of technologies on information manipulation (Article 42).

The very fact that the regulations on information security are an integral part of one of the key legal documents of the Republic of Belarus – the National Security Concept – stresses its importance in the internal and external policy of the Belarusian state. Other binding legal documents in Belarus specify different aspects of the freedom of speech and the functioning of mass media in the country.

Article 33 of the Belarusian constitution guarantees the freedom of thought and belief and free expression. In addition, Art. 33 proclaims that 'no one shall be forced to express one's beliefs or to deny them. No monopolisation of mass media by the state, public associations or individual citizens, and no censorship shall be permitted'.[58]

Despite that, the Belarusian legal framework challenges freedom of expression and press and does little to prevent the monopolisation of media in Belarus. Thus, Article 6 of the Mass Media Law does not define real anti-monopolisation mechanisms in the mass-media sphere.[59] The Belarusian Criminal Code contains provisions on insult, defamation, and libel.[60] Since 2014, online media in Belarus have the same obligations and restrictions as traditional media, except for mandatory registration.

In addition, the Ministry of Information enjoys wide discretionary powers to limit access to internet outlets without a court decision.[61] For instance, in January 2017, the ministry limited access to the Russian web portal Sputnik i Pogrom in Belarus, arguing that the materials published there contained extremist views and aimed at stirring up national hatred, which is forbidden according to Article 38 of the Mass Media Law.

However, such practices are especially popular during periods of mass protest[62] and are often aimed against independent media. The ministry can also issue warnings to internet blogs and demand authors delete

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[58]   "Civic Freedom Monitor: Belarus." 2017. The International Center for Non-for-Profit Law. http://www.icnl.org/research/monitor/belarus.html.

[59]   Агеев, Олег, Андрей Бастунец, Павел Быковский, Александр Жук, Алексей Криволап, Ольга Сехович, and Михаил Янчук. 2016. "Модернизация медийного законодательства Республики Беларуси в сфере защиты национального информационного пространства." Минск: Беларуский институт стратегических исследований. http://belinstitute.eu/sites/biss.newmediahost.info/files/attached-files/BISS_SA05_2016ru.pdf.

[60]   OSCE/ODIHR (2016). 2016 Parliamentary Elections in Belarus. Final Report. http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/287486.

[61]   Ibid.

[62]   Закон Республики Беларусь "О средствах массовой информации," 17 июля 2008 г. № 427-3. http://www.pravo.by/document/?guid=3871&p0=H10800427 . Most recent instances occurred during social protests in spring 2017 when Charter-97 and Belarusian Partisan were blocked: http://spring96.org/be/news/86301.

specific information, including comments containing alleged false information and can eventually block web pages or blogs.[63]

Another common practice is to replace certain Russian TV channel programmes with Belarusian content (see 'Media Landscape' for additional details on 'hybrid' channels) depending on the current censorship needs. For example, an infamous TV report, "A Call to a Friend", which was shown to discredit those accused in Patriots' Case'—former members of the dissolved 'White Legion' patriotic organisation—was broadcast instead of a very popular humour TV show KVN (Club of Funny and Inventive People, in English).

A recent dispute between Belarusian journalist Hleb Labadzienka and a petrol station operator in the Minsk region, where the Rossiya-24 channel was being broadcast,[64] revealed important facts concerning television regulation in Belarus. The Ministry of Information is in charge of a special register of foreign channels (204 channels as of December 12, 2017)[65] that can be broadcast in public spaces in Belarus. But to have the right to show one of these channels in public, the legal entity has to be among those included in the special register.[66] Therefore, businesses like cafeterias or petrol stations are only allowed to show nine compulsory, generally available TV channels defined in the Council of Ministers Resolution adopted on May 13, 2015.[67] It also turned out that channels such as Rossiya-24 or REN-TV, known for their pro-Kremlin stance, are not among the foreign channels allowed in public spaces in Belarus. However they can be watched at home on satellite.

According to earlier research, legal regulation of the media sphere allows the Belarusian authorities to limit the spread of any undesirable information. They enumerate a dozen measures that allow the government to isolate the national information space. These instruments include:

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[63]   См. Заявление Министерства информации относительно блокировки сайтов: Информационные сайты приравняли к СМИ. Депутаты в двух чтениях приняли поправки в закон о СМИ. 2014. *https://news.tut.by/society/428267.html*.

[64]   Паварот у канфлікце Лабадзенкі і ўладальніка АЗС: тэлеканал «Россия 24» увогуле нельга трансляваць у Беларусі. 2016. *https://baj.by/be/content/pavarot-u-kanflikce-labadzenki-i-uladalnika-azs-telekanal-rossiya-24-uvogule-nelga*.

[65]   Список иностранных средств массовой информации, получивших разрешение. 2017. (The list of licensed foreign media). *http://www.mininform.gov.by/ru/channels-ru/*.

[66]   Паварот у канфлікце Лабадзенкі і ўладальніка АЗС.

[67]   Перечень телепрограмм, входящих в обязательный общедоступный пакет телепрограмм, Постановление Совета Министров Республики Беларусь 13.05.2015 № 407. *http://www.pravo.by/upload/docs/op/C21500407_1431723600.pdf*.

- a requirement to register both domestic and foreign media outlets to obtain broadcasting licenses from the Ministry of Information;

- prohibition on foreigners establishing media outlets in the country (only possible in cooperation with Belarusian entities);

- prohibition on Belarusian and foreign citizens working for foreign media without accreditation from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; and,

- the right of the Ministry of Information to request a court close down a print media outlet following two official warnings.[68]

As the head of the Belarusian Association of Journalists, Andrei Bastuniec, stressed:

'Belarusian laws allow for the silencing of any media and for jamming any flow of information, both from within the country and abroad. These regulations are used very arbitrarily. They are applied only when the government wants to punish its opponents. Usually those are media that promote pro-European democratic values. We do not see many cases when they are applied against broadly understood pro-Kremlin forces'.[69]

In the past 20 years, the Belarusian authorities have used these tools mainly against domestic mass media critical of the government. However, the execution of such measures against major foreign media companies may cause significant political problems. Furthermore, the experts believe that shutting down foreign TV channels and blocking websites will not protect Belarusian society from the influence of foreign propaganda and disinformation.

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[68] Агеев, О., Бастунец, А., Быковский, П., Жук, А., Криволап, А., Сехович, О., Янчук, М. 2016.

[69] Andrei Bastuniec, Belarusian Association of Journalists. August 28, 2017. In-depth interview.

INSTITUTIONAL SETUP

According to one of the experts we spoke to, there are three main state bodies responsible for interaction with Belarusian media: the Operational Analytical Centre[70] the Presidential Administration,[71] and the Ministry of Information.[72]

In April 2008, President Lukashenka decreed the establishment of the Operational Analytical Centre (OAC) affiliated to the Belarusian president.[73] It superseded the State Centre for Information Security, also affiliated to the president and charged with the protection of classified information and the registration of websites to the by top-level domain.

OAC activities include the elaboration of standards in information security, monitoring of new developments in the field, control of crucial spheres of public life, and informing the president about its findings on a regular basis with a special emphasis on information security. As Lukashenka acknowledged in 2013, the fact that the centre was controlled by his eldest son, Viktar Lukashenka, demonstrated the significance of this state body.[74] In practice, one of the centre's main tasks is monitoring the Belarusian internet, including online media. In collaboration with the Ministry of Information, the OAC regularly drafts laws and regulations restricting access to various internet sources.[75]

As one of the experts we spoke to stated, the Presidential Administration also plays an informal role in controlling and monitoring Belarusian state media. This state organ embodies three main functions related to state-owned mass media:

1. implementation of personnel policy, thus directly influencing the allocation of key job positions within state media;

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[70]   Оперативно-аналитический центр при президенте Республики Беларусь. *http://oac.gov.by/*.

[71]   Администрация Президента Республики Беларусь. *http://president.gov.by/ru/administration_ru*

[72]   Министерство информации Республики Беларусь. *http://www.mininform.gov.by/ru/*.

[73]   Оперативно-аналитический центр при президенте Республики Беларусь. История. 2018. *http://oac.gov.by/info/history.html*.

[74]   "Лукашенко: ОАЦ контролирует мой старший сын. И по закону ему подконтрольна верхушка спецслужб" 2013. TUT.by. *https://news.tut.by/politics/353683.html*.

[75]   Агеев, О., Бастунец, А., Быковский, П., Жук, А., Криволап, А., Сехович, О., Янчук, М. 2016.

2. realisation of ideological policy through weekly meetings with the editors of the main state media outlets; and,

3. direct subordination of chief editors to the Presidential Administration on an ad hoc basis.

Finally, the main duties of the Ministry of Information include the direct oversight of several state-owned media outlets and the monitoring of the rest of the national media. The ministry applies punitive actions against media deemed too critical of the authorities. This state body rarely takes the initiative on its own but rather executes orders given by the Presidential Administration, and thus primarily carries out the role of a supervisor.

On November 16, 2017, Lukashenka signed Decree No. 413 "On the Inter-Agency Commission on Security in the Information Field".[76] The official commentary to the decree stated that the commission was established to increase the effectiveness of the subjects dealing with the provision of security in the information field and will enable the Belarusian state to elaborate legislation on information security in a more timely manner.[77] State Secretary of the Belarusian Security Council Stanislau Zas was appointed the chair of the Commission. He was joined by other security officials and representatives of the Presidential Administration and state-run media, and the Minister of Information.[78]

The creation of an inter-agency state body dealing with information security and composed of high-ranking officials shows that the Belarusian authorities take the issue of information security very seriously. The fact that only a few people representing media were included (none from independent outlets) revealed the reluctance of the Belarusian government to share the responsibilities in the information security sphere with mass media and the lack of understanding regarding how important cooperation between mass media and the state apparatus is on this matter.

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[76] Положение "О Межведомственной комиссии по безопасности в информационной сфере," № 413 Указ Президента Республики Беларусь.2017. https://nn.by/?c=ar&i=200736.

[77] Комментарий к Указу № 413 от 16 ноября 2017 г. 2017. [Официальный интернет-портал Президента Республики Беларусь]. http://president.gov.by/ru/news_ru/view/kommentarij-k-ukazu-413-ot-16-nojabrja-2017-g-17483/.

[78] Namely, two deputy heads of the Security Council, Uladzimir Archakau and Aleh Makarau, Maksim Ryzhankou from the Presidential Administration, the president's press secretary Natallia Eysmant, director of the Ideological Department of the Presidential Administration Aliaksandr Iliasevich, head of Belarusian KGB Valery Vakulchyk, Defence Minister Andrei Raukou, Minister of Internal Affairs Ihar Shunevich, Investigation Committee deputy head Siarhei Azemsha, editor-in-chief of the editorial board of the official state-run newspapers Pavel Yakubovich, ONT head Marat Markau, and Minister of Information Aliaksandr Karliukevich.

Hence, information security remains a sphere monopolised by the state where no external actors, such as independent journalists or associations, are welcome. Thus, together with the restrictive measures specified in Belarusian legislation, state bodies in Belarus play a rather restrictive role when monitoring and controlling the local media landscape. The declared partnership is putative and demonstrates the reluctance for cooperation.

DIGITAL DEBUNKING TEAMS

A Belarusian media expert interviewed by us listed media analyses conducted by the EAST Center[79] and the recent series of articles on the *1863x.com* website headed by Eduard Palchys[80] as the main resources for information debunking. In 2016–2017, the EAST Center also contributed to the EU Strategic communication project *euvsdisinfo.eu* covering Belarus.

In addition to that, Belarusian media such as *Naša Niva* (e.g., debunked the alleged rape of a girl by Russian soldiers in Homiel during the *Zapad 2017* military exercises)[81] and Belarusian *Radyjo Svaboda* (RFE/RL) occasionally publish investigative reports aimed at demystifying Kremlin-produced disinformation, thus partially filling the fact-checking niche in Belarus.

The Belarusian version of the *InformNapalm* initiative lead by Dzianis Ivašyn[82] is rather part of the 'International Intelligence Community' as they call themselves than a debunking service, and is focused mainly on Ukraine. The quality of fact-checking depends on the qualifications of the journalists. Even some employees of large independent media outlets do not possess a deep understanding of politics and believe Kremlin propaganda. Some independent media may voluntarily spread fake news if it is aligned with their ideological views or helps them to gain more clicks, i.e., popularity and ratings. In such a way, they

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[79]   Yeliseyeu, Andrei, and Veranika Laputska. 2016. "Anti-Belarus Disinformation Campaign in Russian Media: Trends, Features, Countermeasures." EAST Center. Eurasian States in Transition. *http://east-center.org/media-analysis/*.

[80]   1863x. *http://1863x.com/*.

[81]   "Міліцыя: Мы праводзім праверку па факце фэйкавых паведамленняў ад імя гомельскага УУС." 2017. Наша Ніва. *https://nn.by/?c=ar&i=197600*.

[82]   InformNapalm. *https://informnapalm.org/by/*

may assist the Kremlin in spreading panic (e.g., a recent report that armed Russian soldiers without insignia were spotted in a tram in Vitebsk).[83]

MEDIA LITERACY PROJECTS

Although international and foreign foundations and organisations carry out sporadic training on media literacy for various population groups, only a few Belarusian associations conduct regular systematic workshops or professional courses focused on journalists.

According to one of our interviewees, there are two main Belarusian initiatives that fulfill such a role on a regular basis. First, the Belarusian Association of Journalists organises regular workshops on fact-checking practices for journalists. They also have projects aimed at the development of data journalism. Second, Press Club Belarus runs the *School of Digital Management* for journalists, which combines offline and online courses.[84] In addition to that, the Press Club often holds various ad hoc meetings on topics related to media literacy and the development of high-quality reporting skills.[85] These two projects have served to increase media literacy, but only among the independent journalist community. This leaves not only journalists of state-run media outlets but the vast majority of Belarusian society prone to disinformation and distorted news.

A number of foreign institutions also have schools or offer training promoting media literacy and related skills among Belarusian journalists. One of them is *Transitions Online*, based in the Czech Republic, which organises regular training in media literacy in collaboration with the *Linking Media* foundation registered in Poland. They carry out numerous projects for transition countries, including Belarus, aimed at promoting data-verification skills among journalists as well as courses on infographics.

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[83] "Фотафакт: „Зялёныя чалавечкі" ў Віцебску." 2017. *https://www.racyja.com/hramadstva/fotafakt-zyalyonyya-chalavechki-u-vitsebs/*.

[84] "Digital Journalism Course for Eastern Europe Journalists." 2016. Press Club Belarus. *https://press-club.by/magchymasci/digital-journalism-course-for-eastern-europe-journalists*.

[85] Канспекты. 2018. Retrieved from: https://press-club.by/kanspekty.

The Centre for Media Studies at the Stockholm School of Economics in Riga and the Human Rights House in Vilnius carry out occasional training sessions for Belarusian journalists. In addition to that, European and American funds, as well as international organisations that focus on Belarus in their various projects, organise workshops covering media literacy projects on an ad hoc basis.

In 2016, the most popular Belarusian online news portal, *TUT. by*, in collaboration with a portal for professional journalism, *mediakritika.by*, translated a Ukrainian version of the game *Mediaznayka*.[86] The game was initially created by the Armenian Media Initiatives Centre and then distributed in Ukraine. It explains basic topics related to mass media such as what is news, types of mass media, freedom of speech, and others in a form of game and was designed as a media-education initiative for youth. *Mediaznayka* is a unique initiative, as the Belarusian state has not initiated any media literacy education programmes for the younger population.

The authorities do not seem to be willing to educate the population in the media sphere, which can be proved by the fact that they often spread fake news themselves, as in the so-called 'Patriots' Case'[87] and a series of related 'reports' and a 'documentary' by the state-run networks and publications aimed at discrediting ex-members of the 'White Legion' organisation.

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[86]   "Попробуй себя в роли журналиста. TUT.BY и 'Медиакритика' представляют обучающую онлайн-игру", 2016. TUT.by. *https://news.tut.by/society/505540.html*.

[87]   The so-called "Patriots' case" involved charges against 35 people who had been active in the "White Legion" organisation (which conducted sports activities and paramilitary boot camps in the 1990s and had ceased activities in the 2000s) and the "Young Front" organisation. Some of them were released by the beginning of May 2017, while others were charged with the organisation of an illegal armed formation. The remaining suspects were released from custody before July 1, 2017, with a ban on leaving the country until the trial had ended.

The case was initiated at the time of large social unrest in winter-spring 2017 caused by the so-called "tax for social parasites" that spread all over Belarus. One of the reasons to set up the case was to blame the protests on "young radicals" instead of a general public dissatisfied with the economic situation in the country.

Additionally, several people who had organised a protest against the construction of an office building near Kurapaty (a Stalin-era mass execution and burial site of victims of the regime) were arrested, too. In this way, the Belarusian regime tried to solve two issues with the same method. The case was suspended at the end of November 2017. See Laputska, V. The condition of NGOs and civil society in Belarus. Policy Brief. 2017. Bertelsmann Stiftung / Institute of Public Affairs. *https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/en/publications/publication/did/ngos-and-civil-society-in-belarus*.

Справа «Белага легіёну» спыненая, – Сьледчы камітэт. 2017. Радыё Свабода. *https://www.svaboda.org/a/28887815.html*.

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In the materials were shown weapons allegedly confiscated from the accused. State-owned mass media assured the audience that the case involving the military group had been solved. For instance, one of BelTA's articles was titled "Terrorists staging a provocation detained in Belarus",[88] while the newspaper SB-Belarus Segodnia stated that 'the investigation is establishing facts which point to a very secret organisation with a rigid hierarchy, strict discipline, members united on the basis of ideology, and possessing weapons'.[89] Later, investigators found no evidence to confirm these accusations and the criminal prosecution of all those arrested in relation to the case was stopped on November 27, 2017. Nevertheless, no refutation or apology by state media followed.

One more interesting case of a questionable message reported by Belarusian state-owned media was about an alleged attempt of by people with weapons in an SUV to break through the Ukrainian-Belarusian border on March 20, 2017. Two individuals present in the car were allegedly detained. The Ukrainian border control did not confirm this information and Belarusian officials did not reveal any further details, including the names of the detainees or any other details pertinent to the case.[90]

Thus, the Belarusian state might not be interested in the promotion of media literacy among the Belarusian general public as long as it serves its own interests.

CONCLUSIONS

Our research shows that Belarus is highly vulnerable to messages spread by Kremlin-controlled media, whether through traditional or digital outlets. Most of the experts we interviewed argue that Belarus is "totally dependent" on Russia in this sphere. Russian TV channels are the main source of information for more than 40 % of the Belarusian population. Around two-thirds of all the content, including entertainment, news,

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[88] Матвеев, В. В Беларуси задержали готовивших провокацию с оружием боевиков. 2017. БелТА. http://www.belta.by/president/view/v-belarusi-zaderzhali-gotovivshih-provokatsiju-s-oruzhiem-boevikov-238543-2017/.

[89] Имя им—легион. 2017. СБ-Беларусь Сегодня. https://www.sb.by/articles/imya-im-legion-11042017.html.

[90] Пилецкий, А. 2017. Куда девался джип с оружием, который прорывался на белорусской границе Еврорадио. https://euroradio.fm/ru/kuda-devalsya-dzhip-s-oruzhiem-kotoryy-proryvalsya-na-belorusskoy-granice.

and political shows, broadcast by Belarusian radio stations and TV channels are produced in Russia. Furthermore, around three-quarters of Belarusians at least partially trust Russian media.

The national mass media, which could potentially act as a counterweight to the influence of Russian information, face numerous obstacles. Independent outlets are constrained by limitations on freedom of speech and confronted with various obstacles in access to information. The interviewed experts also stress that Belarusian independent media lack commentators and journalists specialised in a variety of issues (e.g., on trade, the energy market, military, etc.). Consequently, Belarusian journalists are unable to quickly react to information produced by Russian media. Experts from academia, official institutions, and even private firms are reluctant to talk to independent reporters due to political concerns, whereas experts from civil society often lack relevant expertise.

Belarusian media outlets are far from functioning as self-sustaining enterprises. While state-owned media rely on government subsidies, the financing of independent outlets is often based on foreign grants, which have somewhat diminished in recent years due to geopolitical changes in Eastern Europe. Private businesses, however, remain reluctant to invest in media due to the uncertainty of profit and affiliated political risks.

The Belarusian authorities have developed a range of regulation restricting freedom of the press. They have built a centralised hierarchical system of institutions headed by the Presidential Administration, which secure state propaganda and control over the media sphere. For many years, this system has efficiently served the interests of the current political regime. Recently, the Belarusian authorities realized the high level of Russia-related information threats and have turned to a gradual reduction of the share of Kremlin-produced political content in the national media sphere. However, the proportion of Russian media content in the Belarusian media remains enormous.

The share of Russia-originated publications is lower in the internet. However, Russian news aggregators *Yandex* and *Mail.ru* play a significant agenda-setting role for more than 30 % of Belarusian internet users. Moreover, Belarusian portals are primarily focused on domestic issues. When they cover international events, they largely rely on Russian sources. A substantial population exposure to the online information warfare also comes from social

media. The audience of each of the Russian social networks in Belarus (*Vkontakte* and *Odnoklassniki*) is more than twice that of Facebook.

Economic, linguistic, and cultural policies carried out by the Belarusian authorities in the last two decades have made all of Belarusian society very vulnerable to the messages spread by Russian media. However, particular attention should be paid to groups that consume Russian information products more actively, are culturally predisposed to the messages spread by the Kremlin, and whose economic situation has worsened in recent years. Such groups include the military, the retired, unemployed, workers in economically depressed state-owned enterprises, and small business owners or entrepreneurs struggling with financial difficulties, as well as active Russian Orthodox Church believers. The influence of Russian media is also higher in the eastern regions of Belarus bordering Russia.

There are three main state bodies responsible for interaction with Belarusian media: the Operational Analytical Centre, Presidential Administration, and the Belarusian Ministry of Information. The latter has wide authority to punish media outlets for spreading supposedly misleading messages. However, this ministry is primarily focused not on fighting foreign disinformation but on controlling domestic ideological opponents, i.e., non-government-controlled traditional and digital media. Experts interviewed by us questioned the ability of the Belarusian state apparatus to react quickly to present-day information threats from abroad. Interestingly and very recently, in mid-November 2017 the inter-agency state body dealing with information security was created. It remains to be seen how effective it will face the challenges in this respective field.

Belarusian media self-regulation mechanisms are rather ineffective in countering disinformation. There are two associations of journalists, one is state-supported and the other affiliated with the European Federation of Journalists, but neither of their Commissions on Ethics play a significant regulatory role. Media literacy projects are rather infrequent and fact-checking initiatives are in their early stages of formation in Belarus.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is not an easy task to make recommendations on how to become more resilient to Kremlin-led disinformation for a country like Belarus, where the freedoms of press and speech are restricted and the influence of Russian media is high. Nevertheless, the study proposes the following recommendations.

To the Belarusian authorities and relevant state bodies:

1. To considerably diversify and broaden the sources of media products available to the Belarusian population. This can be achieved through a comprehensive set of measures including:

a) to amend the Council of Ministers' resolution regarding the register of mandatory public television program packaging. TV channels originating in neighbouring countries other than Russia should be added, either unmodified or as new 'hybrid' TV channels, which would include domestically produced content combined with original content. In its current form, the list of nine generally available channels is largely predisposed towards one foreign state. Three out of nine publicly accessible networks clearly belong to the category of so-called 'hybrids' (ONT, RTR-Belarus, and NTV-Belarus) with a prevalence of Russian content, both entertainment and news. Yet another channel on the list (STV), although nominally a national one, can also be regarded as a 'hybrid' considering the large share of Russian REN-TV content re-broadcast by STV on a daily basis. Furthermore, the Mir TV channel was jointly set up by ten post-Soviet countries to cover the events in the CIS states;

b) to introduce regulations instructing all cable TV providers to offer in their packages a minimum percentage of TV channels (for instance, at least 30 %) that do not originate in Russia. Furthermore, these TV channels should not broadcast solely entertainment content. Currently, around 90 % of TV channels offered by the Belarusian cable TV providers originate in Russia. There are many foreign TV stations licensed for broadcasting in Belarus but they are normally not included in the cable packages. In addition to that, some of this programming can be broadcast in the original language, thus facilitating the development of foreign language skills among Belarusians;

c) to systematically revise the Ministry of Information's register of foreign channels allowed to broadcast in Belarus, which would imply the removal of channels frequently disseminating unreliable, biased information and increasing the number of TV channels originating in neighbouring countries other than Russia (Ukraine, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia). For this purpose, transparent benchmarks identifying foreign channels as transmitters of unreliable information should be established by the authorities in cooperation with local journalists (see Point 5 below);

d) to expand the share of Belarusian as well as non-Russia originated content in the programming of Belarusian TV channels. To become more appealing to the domestic audience and competitive, Belarusian TV needs larger investments, both in resources allocated to the creation of high-quality domestic content, purchasing, and dubbing of Western movies and TV series, or acquiring franchises for popular foreign entertainment programmes. This investment can be secured both by providing more public finances and from private sources (see Point 6).

2. To consider imposing limits on the broadcasting of foreign news programmes produced by the so-called 'hybrid' TV channels. The current process of 'hybrid' networks (ONT, NTV Belarus, RTR Belarus) is to follow the Russian news programmes with local Belarusian versions. The approach exercised by the 'hybrid' channels puts Belarusian domestic news in a situation where they are assigned lower priority by the viewers than the Russian ones. This already sends the domestic audience the wrong political message, not to mention contributes to the spread of Kremlin-led narratives and disinformation. State-owned TV channels have already attempted to limit Russia-originated politicised content (i.e., replacing the show of Russian journalist Vladimir Solovyev on RTR-Belarus and the Vremya pokazhet talk show on ONT), but further steps are needed.

3. To scrutinise the content of the national TV channels to prevent them from retransmitting dubious content from foreign channels not included in the registry of foreign TV stations. Otherwise, the very rationale for the existence of this document is compromised. For example, the register of foreign TV channels allowed for broadcasting in Belarus does not contain *REN-TV*. At the same time, a large share of the programming of the national STV channel is currently composed of REN-TV content,

including such TV shows as *Military Secret with Igor Prokopenko, Chapman's Secrets, Russians Do Not Surrender: Special-Purpose Weapons, Driving the Russian Way*, etc. This legal loophole should be immediately closed.

4. To increase efforts to promote Belarusian national identity and culture to serve as a shield against ubiquitous foreign narratives in national media. Although almost 60% of the Belarusian population has a very reluctant attitude towards the national language, the rest of society displays interest in Belarusian-language media content. Currently, the Belarus 3 TV network broadcasts mostly in Belarusian but its content is almost exclusively dedicated to culture. Broadcasting diverse programmes in Belarusian, be it national news, sports, fashion, health, or dubbed versions of popular foreign movies, should be expanded to all other national TV channels.

    A larger share of appealing entertainment content in Belarusian would increase this language social status. For these reasons, as proposed by some experts interviewed during this research, a Belarusian-language TV channel for children could be set up and Belarusian franchises of world-known print and electronic media (National Geographic, Discovery Channel, Eurosport, etc.) can be developed.

5. To have a permanent genuine dialogue with the journalist community on the topic of information policy and related legislation in this field. This would increase the resilience of Belarusian society to hypothetical foreign information warfare. A number of experts we spoke to within this research advised to revitalise the Civic Coordination Council on the Media. Although the Council of Ministers 2008 decree says that the Council on the Media should convene at least once every quarter, it has met only a few times. The council should include more independent experts and representatives of non-state-controlled media, conduct regular meetings as stipulated in the legislation, and its activities should be reported by the Ministry of Information.

6. To liberalise the media market to make it more attractive for private investors. The development of advertising and media markets as such will increase the sustainability of Belarusian media outlets. If the authorities perceive deregulation and (at least partial) privatisation of the media market problematic for political reasons, they should at least promote competition between the state-owned and private media as well as between the various state-owned outlets. It will make Belarusian journalists more dynamic, professional, responsive to the demands

of the audience, and able to quickly react to the information threats coming from abroad.

7. To raise public awareness about the phenomenon of disinformation and increase media literacy among the Belarusian population. Fake news and disinformation is a serious public policy concern and should be addressed by a set of various measures, including:

a) creation of obligatory course for secondary schools and adding it to the school curriculum;

b) supporting discussions and training on the topic of media literacy given by specialised NGOs;

c) conducting educational seminars dedicated to media for state officials, including those working in regional administrations.

To the Belarusian journalist community:

1. To develop fact-checking initiatives. Civic activists together with professional journalists should permanently monitor social networks and public groups in social media as well as message boards belonging to the largest national portals, such as TUT.by. With the help of special tools, debunking teams will identify trolls and coordinated efforts to spread unreliable and provocative materials on the web. An aggregated database of fake information should be created and the most important cases presented to the existing media and via channels on social media or YouTube.

2. To cover the dissemination of fake news to help address the issue. It is important for media to report on the most illustrative examples discovered by themselves or presented by fact-checking initiatives to increase societal awareness about this phenomenon.

3. To organise professional training sessions for individuals involved with media, to increase the awareness of Belarusian opinion-makers and society in general of the issues of fake news, trolls, bots, and propaganda. Media literacy classes for journalists should be organised by specialised NGOs where the effective ways of identification and debunking fake or unreliable information will be presented and relevant skills are trained. It is important to organise such training not only in Minsk but throughout the country to provide

access to this knowledge for regional journalists. Media literacy courses should be also conducted by NGO activists, especially those who regularly communicate through social networks.

4. To develop effective self-regulatory mechanisms and to promote initiatives aimed at raising professional standards. Several interviewees proposed to engage Belarusian journalists in peer review of their work and that of their colleagues and to evaluate their professional standards monthly using a special methodology and a ranking system. Such rankings will help readers and journalists to distinguish reliable and reputable media from unreliable ones. The rankings may be established in cooperation with existing media community platforms such as *Mediakritika.by*.

To the international organizations:

1. To support Belarusian civic fact-checking initiatives and promotion of media-literacy programmes. Organisations such as the EU or UNDP could also engage Belarus in celebrating Safer Internet Day, which raises citizens' awareness about threats emanating from social networks.

2. To continue the support of independent media in Belarus. Otherwise, Belarus will find itself more vulnerable to the information threats of foreign origin. More funding should be directed to support investigative journalism and projects promoting Belarusian national culture and identity.

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CZECH REPUBLIC

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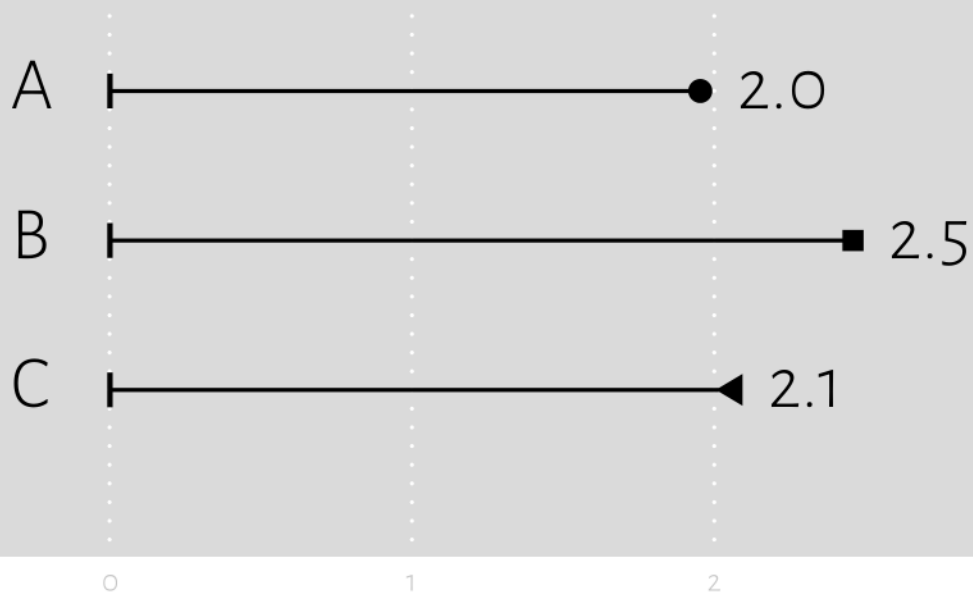
INTRODUCTION

After the fall of the communist regime in 1989, Czechoslovak officials started the process of orienting the country's foreign policy towards the West. The stress was on building good relations with neighbouring countries, those in the EU and NATO. On January 1, 1993, the federation split, and the Czech Republic was established. During the 1990s and in the first decade of new millennium, official relations with Russia were mostly limited to declarations about the development of the relationship in the area of common interests between the two countries. Special attention has always been paid to bilateral relations in energy security policy, since Russia is the biggest supplier of gas to the Czech Republic.

There is a point of view that the act of the annexation of Crimea brought a certain dynamic to these mutual relations. A resolution approved by 121 out of 200 Czech deputies stated that the annexation of Crimea was recognised as an act of violence by the Russian Federation, breaching international law. This resulted in the Czech government's absolute refusal to officially recognise the Crimean referendum. The Czech Republic also officially supports the EU's sanctions policy towards Russia. This international security issue provoked debates and disputes in the Czech Republic. The position of parliament and government is clear. That is, to criticise the Agrarian Chamber businessmen and representatives in agriculture by pointing out that Czech companies have been dealing with complications due to decreasing prices and loss of access to foreign markets, as well as loss of investments spent on entering the Russian market before 2014.[1] Even though imports from and exports to Russia have decreased since the sanctions were imposed, statistics show that Czech foreign trade has risen overall, with Czech companies turning towards other markets.[2]

However, the pro-sanction policy has been undermined by Czech President Miloš Zeman. His official statements are considered contradictory, as he mentions that the economic sanctions are harming the economic interests of the Czech Republic. Another example is Zeman's position towards the annexation of Crimea. According to the president, although Russia violated international

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[1]   ČTK. 2016. "Českým Zemědělcům Se Nelíbí Prodloužení Protiruských Sankcí". *http://www.investicniweb.cz/news-2016-6-21-komora-prodlouzenim-sankci-budou-postizeni-zemedelci/*.

[2]   Český statistický úřad, "Database of Foreign Trade". *http://apl.czso.cz/pll/stazo/STAZO.STAZO*.

law, the return of Crimea to Ukraine is impossible.[3] In October 2017, Zeman repeated this statement at the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, proposing that Russia compensate Ukraine for Crimea, either financially or with oil and gas.[4]

Since 2015, Russia has taken central place in Czech security debates. In the new Czech Security Strategy of 2015, it is mentioned that the Czech Republic is aware of the threat to security posed by some states seeking to change the existing international order. These states are ready to achieve their goals by using hybrid warfare strategies combining conventional and unconventional military means with non-military tools.[5] The Russian Federation is directly mentioned in the 2016 report as a state to be watched regarding the national security situation. The Russian propaganda and disinformation campaign is recognised as one of the top 10 threats to Czech internal security.[6] The intelligence services monitor attempts to build networks of like-minded people among politicians, state officers, and lobbyists. The Czech Counter-Intelligence Agency BIS (Bezpečnostní a informační služba) claims in its 2015 annual report that Russian information operations in the Czech Republic are focused on weakening the strength of Czech media, strengthening the pro-Russian opposition, weakening society's resistance, and promoting inter-societal and inter-political tensions.[7]

All in all, the Czech Republic has become a target for Russian geopolitically-driven hybrid warfare, and has experienced various influences on different scales. These include disinformation campaigns, economical activities, the presence of a wide group of agents influencing decision-makers, and newly introduced cyberattacks.[8]

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[3]   Echo24. 2016. "Zeman: Rusko Je Součástí Euroamerické Civilizace, Krym Už Vrátit Nelze—Echo24.cz". http://echo24.cz/a/iLmiJ/zeman-rusko-je-soucasti-euroamericke-civilizace-krym-uz-vratit-nelze.

[4]   Interfax Ukraine. 2017. „Zeman's speech in PACE contradicts foreign policy of Czech government—Czech PM". http://en.interfax.com.ua/news/general/454204.html.

[5]   Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic. 2015. "Bezpečnostní Strategie České Republiky". https://www.vlada.cz/assets/ppov/brs/dokumenty/bezpecnostni-strategie-2015.pdf.

[6]   Ministry of Interior of the Czech Republic. 2016. "Audit Národní Bezpečnosti". https://www.vlada.cz/assets/media-centrum/aktualne/Audit-narodni-bezpecnosti-20161201.pdf.

[7]   Czech Counter-Intelligence Agency BIS. 2015. "Security Information Service (BIS)". https://www.bis.cz/vyrocni-zpravaEN890a.html?ArticleID=1104.

[8]   Anonymous informant from the Czech security community, February 14, 2018. In-depth interview.

VULNERABLE GROUPS

 A number of interviewed experts agree that any group among the Czech population is susceptible to disinformation. It is almost impossible that one campaign could influence society as a whole, but a well-aimed campaign can be very powerful when targeting a specific group of people. It depends on tailoring the tools of the narrative. Considering pro-Kremlin narratives, it is worth mentioning that there is a susceptible Russian minority population living in the Czech Republic. The number of people among the Russian ethnic community has been rising in recent years. Official statistics indicate that there are 36 000 Russians in the Czech Republic (0.4 % of the Czech population). According to the Government Council for National Minorities, this group is considered to be the target of pro-Kremlin propaganda. The annexation of Crimea and other policies implemented by Russia are the reasons for intra-ethnic disputes. It is estimated that the majority of the Czech Republic's Russian population criticises Russian policy, but recent Russians arrivals who do not respect the system of the Czech Republic and aggressively lobby their own interests have been the main cause of recent disputes.[9]

Nevertheless, the majority of experts interviewed within the framework of this research confirm that there is no need to prioritise potentially vulnerable groups in the Czech Republic, because pro-Kremlin disinformation campaigns can influence a wide range of target groups among the general public. Pro-Kremlin ideology can potentially influence those people who trust neither national political institutions nor European and international organisations. Their criticism of pro-Kremlin statements, and of Russia, can serve as a geopolitical alternative in terms of ensuring the security of Europe. Data from 2017 show that only half of Czech society (48 %) trusts the European Union, and another half (47 %) does not. In the case of the NATO, 58 % of respondents trust this institution and 33 % do not. While comparing the data in a timeline, it is certain that there has been no big shift, and the level of (dis)trust appears to be stable.[10]

[9]   Government Council for National Minorities. 2017. "Annual report about the situation of national minorities in the Czech Republic in 2016". https://www.vlada.cz/assets/ppov/rnm/dokumenty/dokumenty-rady/zprava_2016_tiskarna_definitivni.pdf.

[10]   CVVM. 2017. Tisková zpráva. Důvěra v evropské instituce a mezinárodní instituce – duben 2017. https://cvvm.soc.cas.cz/media/com_form2content/documents/c2/a4330/f9/pm170524b.pdf.

Concerning the Czech constitutional institutions, only 21 % of Czechs trust the Chamber of Deputies (the lower house of parliament), 25 % trust the Senate and 28 % trust the government. It should be mentioned that the data comes from September 2017, and that a parliamentary election was held in October 2017. Zeman is the most trusted element of the Czech machinery of state (51 % support).[11] Low trust in political representatives can create an explosive combination of conservative attitudes and traditionalist values, such as pro-Kremlin statements favouring conservative social attitudes mostly in the context of homosexuality, family and children. Those views stress the decadence, corruption and moral decline of Western civilisation. On the other hand, religious framing of those traditional views and statements does not work in the Czech Republic.

Although some measures have been taken in order to prevent the potential susceptibility of Czech society as a whole, the two target groups that are most affected are youngsters and older generations. Each group can be influenced for different reasons. Youngsters, even though very skilled in ICT, are still in the process of building up their critical thinking faculties and acquiring experiences, so they can easily fall into the trap of disinformation. On the other hand, older people`s vulnerability is caused by their insufficient ICT skills and lack of knowledge on the diversification of potential sources of information in virtual space. For both target groups, high trust in information from a close person or via email is of great significance. In the case of youngsters, this takes the form of sharing information via social networks, mostly Facebook. Among respondents aged between 55 and 64, 35 % forward fake emails warning against danger (such as migration or Islam). Among those over 65, 47 % forwarded such emails (four times more often than those age 35).[12] This issue drew attention in the Czech Republic after the presidential election in January 2018, when email hoaxes with political and social content started to circulate in virtual space in order to support Zeman and Jiří Drahoš.

We should also mention that a certain number security force personnel, both at the educational level (i.e. professionals responsible for the education of security forces), and executive level (i.e. professionals on duty)

[11]   CVVM. 2017. Tisková zpráva. Důvěra ústavním institucím v září 2017.
       https://cvvm.soc.cas.cz/media/com_form2content/documents/c2/a4423/f9/pi171003.pdf.

[12]   Univerzita Palackého v Olomouci, Seznam.cz. 2018. Starci na netu. Výzkumná zpráva.
       (Elder people at the internet. Research report.)

are exposed to pro-Kremlin ideology, and some of them follow it, which implies direct risks for the Czech Republic's national interests.

MEDIA LANDSCAPE

The Czech media landscape can be divided in two categories: public media (public television and public radio) and private media. Dominant is commercial television, which attracts about half of the total advertising spend, whereas newspapers are in the hands of local business tycoons. Online media (often online versions of TV, radio or printed newspapers) occupies a big part of the media space. Based on data from a 2016 Digital News Report about the Czech Republic, television has weekly access to 81 % of respondents, radio reaches 35 %, print media 34 %, social media 51 %, and online media in general 91 %.[13]

The level of trust in media is generally very low. According to an October 2017 survey, media in the Czech Republic are among the least trusted institutions in public life (30−35 % depending on the type of media). A relatively steady decline in trust has been recorded in the last five to six years. The survey is conducted twice per year, and shows a visible decline in trust. Print media is in the worst position, with a level of trust at its lowest level since data started to be collected in 1995.[14]

This low level of trust can be partially explained by the changes in ownership which affect major parts of the Czech print media sector. Local billionaires owning media are suspected of influencing the content, including using media for their own political career. One such is Andrej Babiš, prime minister at the time of writing (February 2018). According to Reporters Without Borders, the concentration of media ownership has reached critical level in the Czech Republic.[15] In reaction to the situation, a law designed to combat conflicts of interest and prevent political players from owning media outlets was adopted in 2016. In the World Press Freedom Index, the Czech Republic takes 23rd position. In 2016, the country climbed two places, and in 2015

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[13]   Digital News Report 2016. Czech Republic. *http://www.digitalnewsreport.org/survey/2016/czech-republic-2016/*.

[14]   Centrum pro výzkum veřejného mínění. 2017. Tisková zpráva. Důvěra k vybraným institucím veřejného života−říjen 2017. *https://cvvm.soc.cas.cz/media/com_form2content/documents/c2/a4460/f9/po171127.pdf*.

[15]   Reporters Without Borders. Rise of the Oligarchs. *https://rsf.org/en/czech-republic*.

the country took the 13th place.[16] A part of Czech society does not trust traditional/mainstream media because of the belief that they lie and manipulate public opinion (this is a common reason for declining trust in media across European countries). All in all, it is necessary to state that those media do not transmit pro-Kremlin ideas and propaganda.

However, experts agree that the level of trust in misinforming news outlets and channels has risen. In 2017, the Slovak non-governmental organization GLOBSEC Policy Institute carried out research on whether Czechs consider misinforming websites to be a relevant source of information, and how strongly the citizens trust them. The survey showed that 9 % of Czechs do trust such media, while 49 % of respondents do not believe the mainstream media.[17] It is necessary to add that it is not obvious what the term 'mainstream media' means. According to the survey and in-depth interviews for the purposes of this research, it was identified that Russian media (RT and Sputnik, both with Czech language content) have very little popularity. Although RT has very low impact, Sputnik managed to influence public debates at the beginning of the conflict in Ukraine. Even in 2016, Sputnik was among the four most readable misinforming online media.

The most dangerous misinforming online media are believed to be conspiracy webpages which support Russian geopolitical views, pro-Kremlin ideas and propaganda, and threaten Czech security interests as defined in the Security Strategy of the Czech Republic. These are not directly linked to the Russian media landscape, and have no definable owner or financial structure. Such media provide a mix of factual and fake news, often anti-EU, anti-U.S., but pro-Russian only in very limited scope, all mixed with lifestyle reports. Such media provide political views and fuel the political emotions of those disappointed with the EU. With some exceptions, these websites do not have large audiences. Most relevant are *AC24.cz*, with 11 500 unique readers per day and *Svět kolem nás* (World around us) with 4 500 unique users per day. Online media outlet *Parlamentní listy* (Parliamentary sheets) exists in the grey zone. It does not spread pro-Kremlin disinformation on purpose. Without any editorial standards or control over authorship, everyone can publish their comments regardless of their factual basis. Parlamentní listy has around 150 000 readers each. For context, the most read media outlets have 1.5 million

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[16]   World Press Freedom Index by Reporters Without Borders. *https://rsf.org/en/ranking*.

[17]   GLOBSEC. 2017. Globsec Trends 2017. *https://www.globsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/globsec_trends_2017.pdf*.

unique users per day.[18] Although there is a limited number of users, these media outlets have great impact on readers who share the articles in social networks such as Facebook. Facebook campaigns are often based on misinforming links.

The danger of such media outlets can be illustrated with the recent and ongoing case of lithium. Shortly before the parliamentary election of 2017, pro-Kremlin media outlet *Aeronet* published fake news accusing Social Democrats of attempts to capitalise personally on lithium mining in the Czech Republic by selling it to an Australian company. Aeronet called for action in elections: do not vote for this party, but for far right and pro-Russian party Freedom and Direct Democracy. Within 24 hours, the article had been spread via 100 Facebook profiles. The topic became central to the serious political debate of Babiš, Zeman, Communists and Freedom, and Direct Democracy. A special parliamentary session was convened. The result of the election was also influenced. Every tenth voter to decide who to support in last month before the election changed their party preference under the influence of this case (and not in favour of the Social Democrats). The story about attempts to steal Czech national wealth did work.

IN FOCUS

Radio station Proglas

In the media sector, the private Christian radio station Proglas deserves attention as a good example. Even though it is a medium-sized radio station with limited budget from contributors, Proglas is aware of changes within media space. It notes the threat of disinformation and actively reacts to it. One of the ways to counteract it is to offer space to local editors and journalists for self-education, such as internships. As a reaction to the growing influence of disinformation, the radio station has employed two new editors for the news section. Proglas, as a member of the association of Christian media, also shares capacities and recorded material with associated media. Last but not the least, since Proglas possesses some webpages where news services can be found and comments of external collaborators are published, it is possible to evaluate the profiles of authors internally. This is a stricter process which enables online trolls to be identified.

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[18]   Numbers of unique users come from the metric of the project Netmonitor (netmonitor.cz).

LEGAL REGULATIONS

The Crisis Law, based on the Cybersecurity Act, exists in order to ensure the protection of the Czech Republic's critical information infrastructure. There is also the Law on the Protection of Classified Information. These laws serve to provide the infrastructure of information security. The Cybersecurity Act, the National Strategy on Cybersecurity, and the Action Plan provide a very good legal and implementation framework. The Czech Republic realises certain needs in this area, which are developed into the National Strategy and Action Plan. This is legal framework to enforce the implementation of the Action Plan.[19]

The Cybersecurity Act regulates the rights and obligations of all players involved in cybersecurity in order to protect the functionality of cyberspace (i.e. providers and administrators of electronic communication, as well as state authorities) in general. The National Strategy on Cybersecurity focuses on the formulation of strategic goals and tasks to deepen and advance assurances of cybersecurity for the years 2015 to 2020. The stress is on cooperation between national players, international cooperation, cooperation with the private sector, and public education about cybersecurity. The Action Plan defines practical steps in order to reach the goals. For example, in the area of cooperation on the national level, the Action Plan defines such tasks as the development of a unified methodology of crisis management in the event of cyberattacks, and the development of a communication matrix for all involved. There is also ongoing preparation of legislation relevant for cyberdefence, which is in the competence of Military Intelligence under the auspices of the Ministry of Defence.

Otherwise, the legal environment for the state authorities is framed by laws defining competences for ministries and other executive players. According to experts interviewed in the course of this study, the definition of these competences is sufficient. On the other hand, it is obvious that the legal framework does not cover all aspects of information security, failing in areas such as disinformation and propaganda. Protection against and reaction to disinformation is in the competence of all executive players, based on the content and target group of a given

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[19]   Daniel Bagge, NUKIB, February 7, 2018. In-depth interview.

campaign. Disinformation campaigns are therefore not directly covered by the Czech Penal Code. But, for the experts who took part in this study, it is questionable whether it is necessary to further regulate the sensitive area of freedom of speech and expression:

'We can very easily get in conflict between freedom of speech and protection against abusing freedom of speech'.[20]

Repression is generally understood as a last possible resort. In relation to disinformation campaigns, there is no existing legislation.

As for the regulatory framework for media, prohibition of harmful content, typically racism, is relevant. For radio and TV broadcasting, the Council of the Czech Republic for Radio and TV Broadcasting is the regulatory and executive body. The Council decides who will get broadcasting licences, and is responsible for monitoring broadcast content. If principles and regulations are broken, the Council can decide about fines and other sanctions. The Council is more focused on monitoring balance in broadcasting, and it is not known whether it has any measures in place to deal with disinformation in the media.

For print media, the Syndicate of Journalists binds its members to follow a code of ethics, but there are no tools to enforce this code. A member who does break it can be expelled from the Syndicate.

INSTITUTIONAL SETUP

Generally speaking, the lead body in this respect is the Office of the Government of the Czech Republic which holds the position as a result of its constitutional position as the highest executive body. The government manages, controls and unifies the activities of the ministries, the competences of which are defined by law.

The National Cyber and Information Security Agency (NCISA) serves as the national authority for ensuring the protection of information systems. As the national authority, it provides cybersecurity, consisting of integrity, availability and protection of information in the critical information infrastructure. NCISA's activities are governed by the National Cybersecurity Strategy of the Czech Republic for the period

[20]   Miroslav Feix, Ministry of Defence of the Czech Republic, February 11, 2018. In-depth interview.

2015 to 2020 and the Action Plan on the National Cybersecurity Strategy of the Czech Republic. NCISA is also responsible for fulfilment of the Action Plan (together with the ministries of the interior and foreign affairs, and the intelligence services), and is obliged to report annually on the state of the Action Plan.

'The Czech Republic is intensively engaged in ensuring the protection of critical information infrastructure with the right tools in place. The level of critical information infrastructure protection is at a high level. However, given that it is a very progressive environment in terms of the development and transformation of threats, it is necessary to develop constantly, so the Czech Republic will be able to respond to any new threats'.[21]

The protection of information itself partly stems from the Security Strategy of the Czech Republic and from the National Security Audit and its action plan.

'The National Security Audit was initiated in 2015, in context of events in Ukraine, and with the emerging awareness that the Czech Republic has also been facing hybrid threats'.[22]

The audit identifies 10 threats to the security of the Czech Republic, including hybrid threats, threats in cyberspace and the influence of foreign powers. The audit also identifies competent players, and evaluates relevant strategies and legislation. The Action Plan, reflecting the findings of the audit, contains tasks to be fulfilled. One of them is to establish teams/units at all relevant institutions which will be responsible for evaluating misinformation campaigns and other forms of influence from foreign powers. This is followed up by the principle that each ministry is responsible for its own reaction to misinformation campaigns, depending on the interests promoted or obstructed by the campaign in question. Thus, the Ministry of Interior Affairs established the Centre against Terrorism and Hybrid Threats.

The Centre against Terrorism and Hybrid Threats started to operate from January 1, 2017. It serves as a specialised analytical and communication unit. It monitors threats directly related to internal security, including those related to terrorism, soft target attacks, security aspects of migration, extremism, public gatherings, violations of public order, and misinformation campaigns related to internal security. Its task is also

[21]   Daniel Bagge, NUKIB, February 7, 2018. In-depth interview.

[22]   Anonymous informant from the Czech security community, February 14, 2018. In-depth interview.

to disseminate information and spread awareness about the relevant issues among the general and professional public.[23]

Other ministries should also establish units responsible for analysing hybrid threats and misinformation campaigns, but this is still a work process. At the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, there is a unit responsible for strategic communication. The Ministry of Defence is currently the national authority in charge of countering hybrid threats and their influence on the security of the Czech Republic. Based on an interview with experts, it may be said that information security is currently limited to technical protection of the information itself,[24] even though the Ministry of Defence is responsible for the protection of the country against external threats including those arising from foreign influence via misinformation.

The experts interviewed as part of this study agree that there are big gaps in Czech information security policy. First is the poor quality of strategic communication of the country. The Czech Republic is aware of what kind of infrastructure needs to be protected, but it is not active or effective in the formulation of its own national interpretation of history and ideology. Strategic communication is missing, is not related to content, and is very often incorrectly understood as public relations. A functional coordinating mechanism between relevant players is also absent, as reflected in the current Action Plan of the National Strategy of Cybersecurity, which defines the requirement for the development of a communication matrix for the relevant players. To fill this gap, it is also necessary to build a government-level functional coordination group to collect relevant information from all areas and issue decisions and recommendations.

DIGITAL DEBUNKING TEAMS

In the last couple of years, a few projects and initiatives have been established in reaction to threats to information security and the resilience of Czech society in the context of misinformation campaigns. In the area of fact-checking initiatives, it is necessary to mention the leading project '*Demagog*'. This project is not focused on dealing with misinformation campaigns in the sense of orchestrated influence from abroad, rather

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[23]   Centre Against Terrorism and Hybrid Threats. *http://www.mvcr.cz/cthh/clanek/centre-against-terrorism-and-hybrid-threats.aspx*

[24]   Miroslav Feix, Ministry of Defence of the Czech Republic, February 11, 2018. In-depth interview.

its primary goal is to debunk false statements of politicians and other public figures. 'Demagog' teaches the public to think critically about information provided by anybody, and helps to raise awareness about the fact that misinformation can be used in public space.[25]

The project *StopFake.org* offers a Czech version of an internationally recognised initiative. The main goal is to debunk myths and fact-check information related to events in Ukraine. Journalists help to uncover fake news and explain the real situation. Lots of texts are translated from foreign StopFake.org branches, but the website also serves as a platform for analysis of pro-Kremlin propaganda in all its aspects and manifestations. The influence of propaganda in terms of Ukraine is also monitored because of its impact on policies in Turkey and EU countries.[26]

Hoax.cz focuses only on hoaxes circulating in virtual space. The aim of the project is to inform about something that has become an everyday part of Czech people's lives. The website has a database of the most common hoaxes and is regularly updated. Any hoax is always followed by an expert explanation of what is wrong with the content.[27]

Manipulátoři.cz (Manipulators) is also focused on hoaxes. The webpage is dedicated to publishing articles which cover issues from such areas as political marketing, public relations, and communication. Some sections are dedicated to the issue of hoaxes. There is a database of hoaxes with debunking and factual explanations. The initiative places stress on correct work with data, and shows that informing society can be based on quality articles. So, it is not only about debunking; the greater part of the initiative is focused on media literacy and support for critical thinking.[28]

IN FOCUS

Stop fake hackathon

An interesting attempt to involve the private sector in countering disinformation and fake news happened in January 2018, when the private IT company *Ackee*, together with the Endowment Fund for Independent Journalism and the Open Society Fund, organised a hackathon named

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[25]   Demagog. *www.demagog.cz*.

[26]   *StopFake.org*. Czech version, *www.stopfake.cz*.

[27]   Hoax.cz. *www.hoax.cz*.

[28]   Manipulátoři.cz.. *www.manipulatori.cz*.

FakeHacks.[29] During the 24-hour event, IT developers in cooperation with data analysts, designers, and journalists worked in teams to develop applications which would help deal with disinformation. The competitors were able to develop applications which could verify and support the validity of information and sources, and those to identify Twitter bots and fake social network profiles.

MEDIA LITERACY PROJECTS

With the rise in disinformation campaigns, the need for media literacy programmes and the reflection of such issues in education in general have have also grown.

'*During the survey of 2016, we have found out that three quarters of respondents between the ages of 15 and 19 obtain information from articles shared by friends on Facebook. Almost 20 % of them do not think about the real source of such information*'.

That's according to one of the experts interviewed in the course of this research.[30] Radka Pudilová, from the Open Society Fund, understands the importance of media literacy and education in general as a means of increasing society's resilience. On the other hand, she points out that, unfortunately, non-governmental organisations use the same tools and ideas. They also mostly work with people in bigger cities and do not go to regions.[31]

The Project *Zvol si info (Choose for the information)* was initiated by students of Masaryk University in 2016, and is aimed mainly at high school students. During workshops, lecturers talk with students about techniques of manipulation and propaganda, show examples, and train students in media literacy.

'*Our strategy is based on neutrality. We focus on the technical aspect of manipulation in order not to lose contact with some parts of society*'.[32]

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[29]   Fakehacks. *www.fakehacks.cz*.

[30]   Vojtěch Bruk, Zvol si info, February 12, 2018. In-depth interview.

[31]   Radka Pudilová, Open Society Fund, February 12, 2018. In-depth interview.

[32]   Vojtěch Bruk, Zvol si info, February 12, 2018. In-depth interview.

One of the outcomes of the project is the Surfer`s Guide to the Internet, which serves as simple educational toolkit with five basic rules for recognising manipulation. At the beginning of 2018, the 'The best book about fake news, misinformation, and manipulation' was published; it is aimed at the general public and intends to show how disinformation works and why.[33]

Another important project is Jeden svět na školách (One world in schools), which is run by the non-governmental organisation People in Need. Since 2001, this project has been providing educational materials to teachers, mostly covering issues of civic education. One part is also dedicated to media literacy. Teachers can use more than 20 audio-visual, ready to use lessons prepared by project lecturers. These lessons are tailored for pupils and students of elementary and secondary/high schools. Analysis of media literacy at Czech high schools was introduced as a part of the project.[34]

IN FOCUS

An association of education professionals

Compulsory education professionals have organised themselves into an association called Občankáři in order to change the way media literacy education is provided. They express dissatisfaction with the way state educational concepts and strategies deal with education in the Czech Republic. The association was founded as a reaction to a reduction in national self-consciousness and the ability to orientate to contemporary social events among students of all types of schools. The association focuses on empowering teachers, on their professional development, and on opening cooperation between schools and teachers. There is a website where teachers can find a broad range of educational materials, including media literacy.[35]

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[33] Zvol si info. *www.zvolsi.info*.

[34] Jeden svět na školách. *www.jsns.cz*.

[35] Občankáři. *www.obcankari.cz*.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on analysis of the situation and in-depth interviews, several recommendations for the state authorities and media community can be made:

1. The Action Plan of the Audit of national security should be fulfilled. Each ministry should create an analytical team/unit responsible for hybrid threats relevant for the area of their competences. At the same time, it is necessary to set up a functional coordination mechanism at the governmental level. The state/government needs to see hybrid threats as a complex issue. Orchestrated misinformation campaigns and operations aimed to influence society are the business of all ministries. Without having a complex picture, counter-measures will never be sufficient.

2. Relevant state bodies should create strategic communication and separate this from public relations. A positive Czech national ideology should be developed.

3. State authorities should involve the private sector in fostering society's resilience information security, e.g. through private bodies and professionals from the IT and marketing sectors.

4. Public figures (politicians and cultural/media icons) should take up the theme of resilience and information security, and work on it with devotion. Then it will truly resonate in society.

5. All involved players and activists should prevent deepening polarisation of Czech society. Issues related to information security should be communicated and explained. Labelling and stereotyping should be excluded from public discussions. Discussions often end with a false dilemma, putting the issue in a black and white perspective of 'us' versus them, and 'them' are labelled with a simplifying sticker which only deepens polarisation. But many issues grow from misunderstanding and lack of information. Media literacy was long absent from the education system of the Czech Republic, so it is wrong to only criticise those orienting themselves to pro-Kremlin ideology. Attitudes and opinions should be deconstructed in order to avoid clichés.

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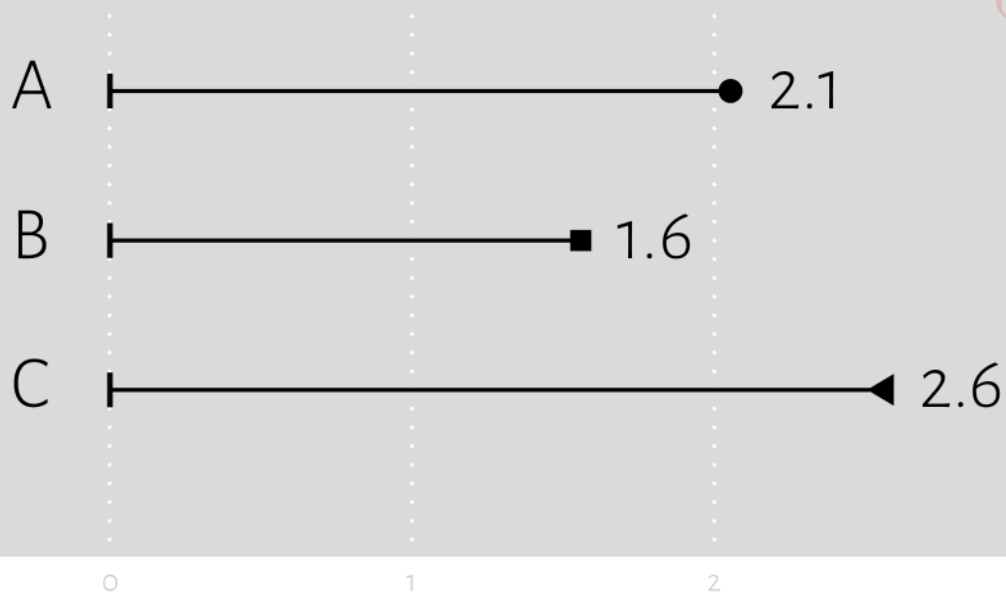
INTRODUCTION

Estonia has been in the orbit of Russia's strategic interests for many years and for many complex historical reasons. As a result, Estonia has experienced various types of influence activities on different scales. Since regaining independence in 1991, Russia's so-called 'soft power' in Estonia is both traceable and observable in several domains, such as the economy, public diplomacy, political life, and culture.[1] To pursue Russia's geopolitical goals, it has been using various tools towards Estonia: media influence, cyberattack, compatriot policy, energy dependence, espionage activities, etc.[2] In 1998, a comprehensive overview of Russia's attempts to influence economic, societal, and political processes in Estonia was published in the annual reviews of the Estonian Internal Security Service.[3]

A classic example is the Kremlin's support and funding of people (e.g., representatives of the Legal Information Centre for Human Rights and the Russian School in Estonia) who actively promote anti-Estonian propaganda narratives at international events abroad. Moreover, counter-intelligence provides evidence about ongoing violent activities against Estonia and the preparation of computer-related crime.[4] There is also an acknowledgment of threats posed by activities of pro-Russian GONGOs which focus on the negative impacts on Estonia's internal security.[5] Additionally, monitoring of similar attempts has been included in the Estonian Foreign Intelligence Service's annual reports on security environment assessments beginning in 2016,[6] and the Estonian Information System Authority annual assessments highlighting cybersecurity events.[7]

The International Centre for Defence and Security, one of the leading think tanks in the Nordic-Baltic area, has also produced numerous studies and analyses dedicated to the assessment

[1]   Juhan Kivirähk, 2010. "How to Address the 'Humanitarian Dimension' of Russian Foreign Policy?" Retrieved from https://www.icds.ee/publications/article/how-to-address-the-humanitarian-dimension-of-russian-foreign-policy/.

[2]   Marko Mihkelson, 2017. "Disinformation: Russia's Old but Effective Weapon of Influence". Retrieved from https://www.diplomaatia.ee/en/article/disinformation-russias-old-but-effective-weapon-of-influence/.

[3]   Annual reviews of the Estonian Internal Security Service. Retrieved from https://www.kapo.ee/en/content/annual-reviews.html.

[4]   Estonia's Internal Security Service arrests FSB agent at border in Narva. Retrieved from http://news.err.ee/641144/estonia-s-internal-security-service-arrests-fsb-agent-at-border-in-narva.

[5]   Aleksandr Gontšarenko, 2017. "GONGO's negative impact on the Estonian internal security". Retrieved from http://bit.ly/2ptUDg1.

[6]   Annual reports of the Estonian Foreign Intelligence Service. Retrieved from https://www.valisluureamet.ee/security_environment.html.

[7]   Annual Cyber Security Assessment 2017 by the Estonian Information System Authority. Retrieved from https://www.ria.ee/public/Kuberturvalisus/RIA_CSA_2017.PDF.

of Russian strategic interests in Estonia.[8] Among such interests, experts highlight the creation of tensions, sowing confusion and mistrust within the society, rewriting recent history, and amplifying discrediting lies about Estonia on the international stage. Russia retains a diverse toolbox of influence activities whose intentions are far from friendly. As one of the interviewed experts pointed out,

'During the last two decades, Russia's activities towards Estonia have been either chilly, neutral, or openly hostile, quite often with a hidden agenda to undermine the essence of Estonian statehood, to rewrite our history, to corrupt our politics, and make it in the end more similar to and dependable on Russia'.[9]

There is a general consensus that Russia's increased military activity and aggressive behaviour is mirroring its hostile influence activities. This can pose immediate threats to Estonia's security, as it primarily depends on the Euro-Atlantic region's security situation, relations between its neighbouring countries, and public resilience.

VULNERABLE GROUPS

It is widely recognised that the Russian regime is extremely opportunistic.[10] Therefore, it exploits the weakest points and the most vulnerable groups of the targeted societies and countries when planning and executing influence activities.[11] This broadly sets the context in which Russia operates. It should be noted that 17 of the 24 surveyed experts agreed that Russian media tend to exploit Estonia's economic, historic, societal, and ethnolinguistic contexts in an attempt to spread its hostile narratives.

In Estonia, one of the most obvious groups to be targeted and influenced by Russia is the Russian-speaking population, which makes up about 28 % of the general population of Estonia.[12] Besides other groups,

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[8]   Publications of the International Centre for Defence and Security. Retrieved from *https://www.icds.ee/publications/*.

[9]   Extract from the in-depth interviews conducted in August-September 2017 (an expert from the Estonian Internal Security Service). Here and further, the cited quotes are presented anonymously, as requested by the interviewed experts in order to encourage openness and the sharing of their views and opinions.

[10]   Andrew Radin, 2017. "Hybrid Warfare in the Baltics. Threats and Potential Responses". Retrieved from *https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/.../RAND_RR1577.pdf*.

[11]   Joanna Hyndle-Hussein, 2015. "The Baltic states on the conflict in Ukraine". Retrieved from *https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/osw-commentary/2015-01-23/baltic-states-conflict-ukraine*.

[12]   Eesti statistika 2017. Retrieved from *https://www.stat.ee/34267*.

the interviewed experts considered this group particularly vulnerable to Kremlin-backed influence activities. Nevertheless, some ethnic Estonians might be clustered around other small and rather uninfluential groups, which can be considered as a possible target for Russia's activities, with a reference to some business people whose commercial interests are strongly linked with Russia.[13] This may also include a small percentage of pacification-minded people who think NATO is just provoking or even irritating Russia. Some other pro-Kremlin narratives might seem to be somewhat appealing to those ethnic Estonians who are strongly nostalgic for their Soviet past, are socio-economically disadvantaged, and/or support xenophobic rhetoric.[14]

Still, as pointed out by one interviewed expert, ethnicity provides a cognitive shield of protection:

'There is a strong sense that, because of a brutal history and fresh memories of the Soviet occupation, because strong anti-Russian narratives remain in many families, almost all ethnic Estonians have a kind of immunity against the totalitarian lies and disinformation campaigns delivered nowadays by the Kremlin. Unfortunately, it is not the case for many local Russians, whose historical background is different. They should start learning and accepting the truth, not a Kremlin version of it'.[15]

For a dozen years, Russian-speakers have been portrayed as quite monolithic and a rather inactive part of Estonia's society. Although, clustered exclusively according to language, this group is indeed very heterogeneous and multidimensional in terms of its ethno-cultural background, citizenship, political activity and preferences, educational and socio-economic parameters, proficiency in the Estonian language, media consumption, etc. The Russian-speaking population of Estonia is one of the most researched groups within the society mainly because of the state-supported and state-directed integration process. Some recent studies give an exhaustive overview on its various descriptive parameters as well as highlight major challenges to the integration process.[16] According to one of the interviewed experts,

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[13]   Andres Reimer, 2016. "Tiit Vähi: anti-Russia torch of war damaging to business". Retrieved from
       https://news.postimees.ee/3752779/tiit-vahi-anti-russia-torch-of-war-damaging-to-business.

[14]   Estonian Human Development Report 2016/2017. Estonia at the Age of Migration. Retrieved from
       https://inimareng.ee/en/estonia-at-the-age-of-migration.

[15]   Anonymous independent media expert, August-September 2017, In-depth interview.

[16]   Integration Monitoring of the Estonian Society 2017. Retrieved from
       http://www.kul.ee/en/integration-monitoring-estonian-society-2017.

'Approximately 15 % of Russian-speakers have very weak state identity, they do not affiliate themselves with the Estonian state or society, they do not honour our national symbols, and they prefer to live mentally in the Russian space'.[17]

According to the results of the integration study,[18] five main patterns of Russian-speaker integration emerge: (A) successfully integrated (21 %), (B) Russian-speaking patriots of Estonia (16 %), (C) critically minded people (13 %), (D) little integrated (29 %), and (E) unintegrated passive (22 %). Another recent study suggests distinguishing four main clusters of Estonia's Russian-speakers in the following terms: assimilation (23 %), separation (34 %), integration (22 %) and ignorance (19 %).[19] Evidently, one of Russia's goals is to obstruct or diminish societal cohesion, because there are such divisions in Estonia.

Until the provocative events of April 2007,[20] relations between ethnic Estonians and local Russian-speakers had been remarkably peaceful.[21] The next peak of noticeable polarisation between the two groups began in 2013 and was caused by the developments in Ukraine. The crisis, followed by the war, revealed the sizeable influence of ethnic heterogeneity, and the power of minorities to cause severe political unrest when feeling oppressed and underprivileged.[22] Until then, many Estonian politicians and policymakers did not fully realize that formal indicators of integration, such as language proficiency or citizenship, are indeed poor indicators of a meaningful sense of belonging among local Russian-speakers or their perceptions of the state and national security.

At the same time, the issues of native language in regards to citizenship or the teaching of the native language at school have been irresponsibly over politicised in almost every election since regaining independence. The recent municipal elections on October 24, 2017, once more demonstrated the trend of the Russian card being widely played

[17]   Anonymous expert, International Centre for Defence and Security, August-September 2017. In-depth interview.

[18]   Marju Lauristin, 2011, "The effectiveness of integration process and the target groups: Cluster analysis". Retrieved from http://praxis.ee/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/2011-Loimumisprotsessi-tulemuslikkus-ja-sihtruhmad.pdf.

[19]   Political and socio-psychological determinants of inclusive integration context and their interdependencies. Retrieved from http://www.tlu.ee/dima and https://news.postimees.ee/4306719/joint-project-reveals-fears-of-russians-in-estonia.

[20]   Provocations and riots took place on the streets of Tallinn in a well-coordinated (and arguably pro-Kremlin) response to the moving of the Soviet monument called 'Bronze Soldier'. At the same time, Estonian government agencies and private banks experienced many cyberattacks (mainly DoS, DDoS, defacement of websites, attacks on DNS). There were also physical attacks on the Estonian embassy in Moscow as well as against the Estonian ambassador. Read more from the overview by the ICDS, 2007, "Russia's Involvement in the Tallinn Disturbances". https://www.icds.ee/publications/article/russias-involvement-in-the-tallinn-disturbances.

[21]   Raivo Vetik, 2011. Citizenship, statelessness and belonging in Estonia. Retrieved from https://ecpr.eu/filestore/paperproposal/3e77f4ab-9a20-4440-b23c-0746c8bce314.pdf.

[22]   Thomas Schneider 2015, "Russian Minority in Estonia". Retrieved from http://www.kas.de/wf/en/33.40778.

by several Estonian political parties. The crisis in Ukraine added another dangerous dimension to an already complicated situation. Beginning in 2014, the position and perceptions of local Russian-speakers in Estonia have been publicly discussed and presented through the prism of security both on a national and international scale.[23]

The question, "Will Narva be next?"[24] suddenly became displeasingly popular. The securitisation of one particular group within the society might raise some unjust concerns about its loyalty and consequently lead to a deepening distrust among other members of society. One of the interviewed experts rightfully noted that Russia makes both visible and hidden efforts to consolidate the Russian-speaking population outside of the mainstream Estonian society. The effects raise the social and political salience of cultural issues, leading to linguistic and ideological confrontation.[25] Among the most active means for that is pushing Russia's compatriot policy[26] as well as ensuring Russian media domination and its attractiveness. To quote an expert,

'Russian television invites Estonia's Russian-speakers to join a virtual 'Russian World', the same mental universe in which many Russian citizens live, a world united by language, culture, religion, history, and blood'.[27]

MEDIA LANDSCAPE

In general, three main media segments can be distinguished in Estonia: national Estonian-language media, local Russian-language media and foreign media (including Russian-language media in Russia). Several indicators lead to the conclusion that in Estonia the media enjoy a high degree of freedom. According

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[23] David J. Trimbach and Shannon O'Lear, 2015. "Russians in Estonia: Is Narva the next Crimea?". Retrieved from *http://bit.ly/2lEwPoY*.

Hans von der Brelie, 2015. "Concerns over Ukraine in Estonia's Russian speaking community". Retrieved from *http://www.euronews.com/2015/03/06/concerns-over-ukraine-in-estonia-s-russian-speaking-community*.

[24] Estonia's main Russian-speaking regions are county of Ida-Viru in north-eastern Estonia (including town of Narva) and Tallinn's suburb of Lasnamäe.

[25] Anonymous expert, Government Office, August-September 2017. In-depth interview.

[26] Kristiina Kallas, 2016. "Claiming the diaspora: Russia's compatriot policy and its reception by Estonian-Russian population," Retrieved from *http://dspace.ut.ee/handle/10062/58022*.

[27] Jill Dougherty and Riina Kaljurand, 2015. "Estonia's "Virtual Russian World": The Influence of Russian Media on Estonia's Russian Speakers." Retrieved from *http://bit.ly/2GogFNA*.

to the World Press Freedom Index, Estonia ranks 12th as of 2017.[28] This is the highest ranking among the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Estonia shares first place with Iceland on the global list "Freedom on the Net 2017".[29] There have been no documented cases of violent government interference into media policy, and freedom of the press is generally perceived as an absolute right. Naturally, freedom of expression and freedom of speech are protected by Estonia's constitution and by the country's obligations as a member state of the European Union.

While there is a general awareness of Russian information campaigns designed to manipulate public opinion, there have not been any incidents of banning content from Russia. On the other hand, since the Russian-language media are considered by several information-security experts to be a tool for spreading disinformation and hostile propaganda in and against Estonia, it is necessary to take a deeper look at the patterns of media consumption.

In October 2017, data from Estonian media monitoring demonstrated that the most popular TV channels (daily share) among Russian-speakers were: PBK (First Baltic Channel) (15.9 %), RTR Planeta (14.1 %), and NTV Mir (11.4 %).[30] The listed TV channels can be reached through normal cable television. Naturally, Russian-speakers also prefer Russian-language radio stations (as of summer 2017): Radio 4 (13.5 %), Russkoje Radio (12.6 %), and Narodnoje Radio (11.5 %).[31] In 2014, more than 70 % of local Russian-speakers claimed that an important source of news information was Russian-language TV channels.[32]

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[28]   2017 World Press Freedom Index. Reporters Without Borders. (2017). Retrieved from *https://rsf.org/en/ranking*.

[29]   Freedom House, Freedom on the Net 2017. Retrieved from *https://freedomhouse.org/report/table-country-scores-fotn-2017*.

[30]   Kantar Emor. Retrieved from *http://www.emor.ee/teleauditooriumi-ulevaade-oktoobrikuus-2017/*.

[31]   Ibid.

[32]   Open Estonia Foundation & Saar Poll, 2014 "Päevakajalised sündmused ja erinevad infokanalid". Retrieved from *www.saarpoll.ee/UserFiles/File/AEF_aruanne__1_.pdf*.

TV channel	Share %	
ETV		14.1
Kanal 2		12.4
TV 3		11.4
PBK (First Baltic Channel)		5.5
RTR Planeta		4.8
NTV Mir		4.2
ETV 2		2.1
Kanal 11		2
REN TV Estonia		1.8
TV 6		1.7
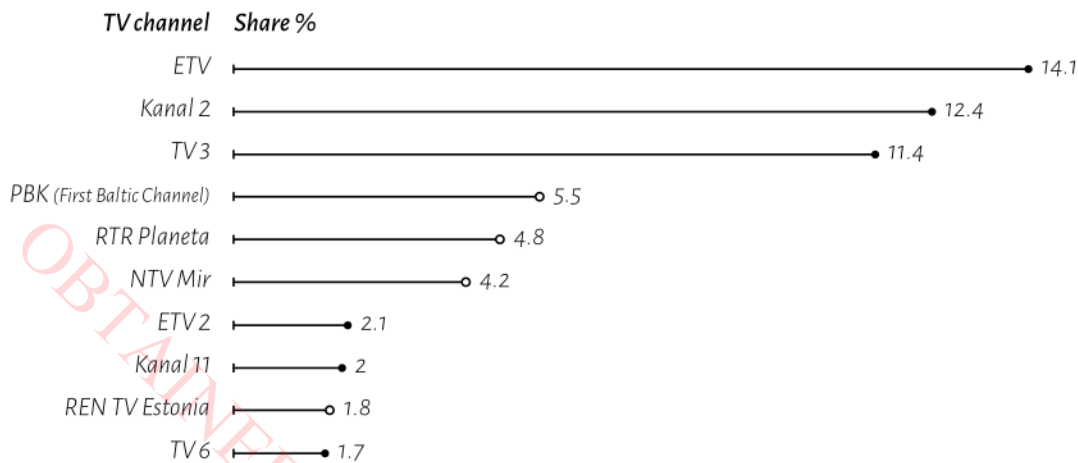
Most popular TV channels in Estonia

Source: ... (October, 2017),

channels transmitting pro-Kremlin narratives narratives ──○

The web-portal *rus.delfi.ee* is the most visited by Estonia's Russian-speakers. Other popular websites in Russian include: *seti.ee*, *vecherka.ee*, *ria.ru*, *kinozal.tv*, *mke.ee*, and *kinopoisk.ru*.[33] Interestingly, social media networks are a more important source of information for young Russian speakers than for young Estonian speakers.[34] Another study indicates that local Russian-speakers write comments to online articles more than ethnic Estonians.[35] Overall, there are still some big differences in the patterns of media consumption between ethnic Estonians and Russian-speakers in Estonia.[36] For instance, the main conclusion of one recent study is that Russian-language social media networks are being actively used for generating and distributing hostile narratives and toxic disinformation.[37]

One of the interviewed experts suggested that the consumption of Russian-language media might prove that the vast majority of local

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[33]   Combination of data from Alexa and Gemius Audience.
Retrieved from *https://www.alexa.com/topsites/countries/EE* and *https://opa.gemius.ee/*.

[34]   Estonian Society Monitoring, 2015. Media and information space. Retrieved from
http://www.kul.ee/et/eesti-uhiskonna-loimumismonitooring-2015.

[35]   Kantar Emor. Online-kommentaaride mõjusfääris elab pool miljonit Eesti inimest. Retrieved from
http://www.emor.ee/online-kommentaaride-mojusfaaris-elab-pool-miljonit-eesti-inimest.

[36]   Integration Monitoring of the Estonian Society, 2017. Media use and information fields. Retrieved from
https://wwwkul.rik.ee/sites/kulminn/files/6_meedia_eng.pdf.

[37]   Dmitri Teperik and Grigori Senkiv, 2017 "Analysis of Russian-language public posts and profiles in social media in Estonia" (A forthcoming publication). The main results of the analysis were presented and discussed at the adversarial intent symposium "Putin's Russia: The weaponization of society", held in Kingston, Canada on 10–12 October 2017.

Russian-speakers live in Russia's mental space, and therefore, could be influenced by hostile narratives:

'*They are extremely accustomed to obtaining news from, enjoying entertainment, and watching movies on the Russian channels, or spending their time on social media networks like VK or OK, where the content is usually charged with uniquely toxic views and has extremely huge lies or weird versions of the truth. Very often, the picture does not correspond to reality at all*'.[38]

Fourteen of the 24 surveyed experts shared the opinion that Russian media is generally trusted among local Russian-speakers in Estonia. Similar assumptions have been made in other studies of media.[39] The result of this is that multiple recommendations also have been made focusing on how Estonian society can defend itself from Russia's orchestrated disinformation.[40] Some scholars argue that the deregulation of media undervalues the potential of Russian disinformation and fails to fully equip Russian-speakers with the necessary protection against hostile propaganda.[41]

LEGAL REGULATIONS

In general, the Ministry of Culture is responsible for Estonia's broadcasting policy.[42] The role of independent media service controller is given to the Estonian Technical Surveillance Authority under the administration of the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications.

The applicable EU legislation includes the AudioVisual Media Services Directive.[43] There is also a set of specific regulations in Estonia, which along with the code of ethics, affects local media. The broadcasting sector is regulated directly by the 'Media Services Act'[44] and 'Estonian Public Broadcasting Act'. These set quite strict regulations on broadcasters

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[38]   Anonymous media expert, Estonian Public Broadcasting, August-September 2017. In-depth interview.

[39]   Open Estonia Foundation & Saar Poll, 2014 "Päevakajalised sündmused ja erinevad infokanalid." Retrieved from *www.saarpoll.ee/UserFiles/File/AEF_aruanne__1_.pdf*.

[40]   Edward Lucas and Peter Pomeranzev, 2016. "Winning the Information War." Retrieved from *http://cepa.org/reports/winning-the-Information-War*.

[41]   Silviu Kondan and Mridvika Sahajpal, 2017. "Integration Policy and Outcomes for the Russian-Speaking Minority in Estonia." Retrieved from *http://scholarship.claremont.edu/urceu/vol2017/iss1/10/*.

[42]   Estonian Ministry of Culture. Retrieved from *http://www.kul.ee/en/activities/audiovisual-field/broadcasting*.

[43]   Audio-visual Media Services Directive. Retrieved from *http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:32010L0013*.

[44]   Estonian Media Services Act. Retrieved from *https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/506112013019/consolide*.

and guarantee freedom of operation, protection of information sources, and the right to reply, etc.[45] Media self-regulation consists of the Estonian Press Council.[46] In 1998, a Code of Ethics for the Estonian press was adopted, and it is used as the main instrument for media accountability.[47]

According to interviewed experts, the current legal foundation provides a solid base for media activities in Estonia; however, there might be some unregulated issues to be potentially exploited by disinformation campaigns:

'As fake news spreads very quickly and can bring along reputational damage, not just for persons but also institutions and organisations, we might see in the future some regulatory gaps and consequent delays in responding to that'.[48]

Moreover, there are other laws that indirectly regulate the media landscape. Namely, the Estonian Penal Code provides protection from activities that publicly incite hatred, violence, or discrimination based on nationality, race, sex, language, origin, religion, sexual orientation, political opinion, or financial or social status, if the activity results in danger to the life, health, or property of a person.[49] Defamation was decriminalised in 2002 and civil defamation cases are regulated by the 'Law of Obligations Act'.[50] The 'Personal Data Protection Act' restricts the collection and public dissemination of an individual's personal data. No personal information that is considered sensitive—such as political opinions, ethnic or racial origin, religious or philosophical beliefs, health, sexual behaviour, or criminal convictions—can be processed without the consent of the individual.[51]

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[45]   Estonian Public Broadcasting Act. Retrieved from *https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/ee/530102013075/consolide*.

[46]   Estonian Press Council. Retrieved from *http://www.eall.ee/pressinoukogu/index-eng.html*.

[47]   Estonia passes Code of Press Ethics. Retrieved from *http://www.eall.ee/news/29_01_1998.html*.

[48]   Anonymous official, Estonian Parliament, August-September 2017. In-depth interview.

[49]   Estonian Penal Code. Retrieved from *https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/ee/519012017002/consolide/current*.

[50]   Estonian Law of Obligations Act. Retrieved from *https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/524012017002/consolide*.

[51]   Estonian Personal Data Protection Act. Retrieved from *https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/ee/Riigikogu/act/507032016001/consolide*.

INSTITUTIONAL SETUP

Today, there is broad political consensus on and wide societal acknowledgement of the threats imposed by Russia's hostile activities against Estonia. Many Estonian experts agree on the need to have an adequate and clear understanding of the challenges and current vulnerabilities. A course of action has been stipulated in the Estonian security policy, 'National Security Concept 2017', based on shared views and results of analytical studies.[52]

This document addresses the current security environment while framing national diplomacy, military defence, protection of constitutional order and law enforcement, conflict prevention, and crisis management. It also specifically addresses the issues of economic security and the supporting infrastructure, cybersecurity, protection of people, resilience, and cohesion of society. Explicitly, it provides definitions of strategic communication and psychological defence as well as highlighting the importance of generating reliable information and general awareness aimed at strengthening national resilience.

As previously noted, the situation is being continuously monitored by the security services. The same services are informed by the public about the most sophisticated and imminent threats to information and psychological security. According to several of the interviewed experts, the societal resonance to this threat helps to calibrate some countermeasures:

'We trust our citizens and their feedback provides us assurances for open communication, which is crucial for strengthening national resilience'.[53]

Respective activities are coordinated across the Estonian government's ministries and agencies through the National Security and Defence Coordination Unit. This unit advises the prime minister on national security and defence matters, and coordinates the management of national security and defence. While communicating to the public, each state institution coordinates its actions with the main principles

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[52]   National Security Concept 2017. Retrieved from
https://riigikantselei.ee/sites/default/files/content-editors/Failid/national_security_concept_2017.pdf.

[53]   Extract from the in-depth interviews conducted in August-September 2017 (An official from the Estonian Ministry of Interior)

listed in the Government Communication Handbook.[54] Almost all interviewed experts expressed the confidence that they observe a high level of institutional development in the sphere of information security in Estonia. The same applies to the level of comprehensiveness of the legal frameworks in terms of detection, prevention, and disruption of informational threats and vulnerabilities.[55]

IN
FOCUS

In 2011, the National Centre for Defence and Security Awareness (NCDSA) established an Estonian non-governmental expert platform for strengthening national resilience by means of applied research, strategic communication, and social interactions. NCDSA's long-term vision is a secure society that is psychologically resilient, socially cohesive, and resistant to hostile influence. The NCDSA runs a state-supported training programme called Sinu Riigi Kaitse. The programme's aim is to inform Russian-speaking communities of Estonian national defence and security issues by initiating and organising public events. It also strives to induce discussions that promote awareness of the Estonian, NATO, and EU security and defence policies among Russian-speakers in Estonia.[56] Additionally, the NCDSA monitors and analyses security- and defence-related perceptions of Russian-speakers in Estonia.[57] NCDSA's most recent study is an analysis of Russian-language public posts and profiles on social media in Estonia. Among other activities, the NCDSA produces Russian-language materials aimed at inspiring and empowering young Russian-speakers by highlighting personal success stories in Estonia's security and defence sector.

Among other state institutions and in addition to military means, the Estonian Ministry of Defence plays a vital role by supporting and strengthening the bond between citizens and the state. The ministry has a long-standing tradition of conducting public opinion surveys on national defence, the results of which are also analysed through

[54]   Government Communication Handbook. Retrieved from https://riigikantselei.ee/en/supporting-government/government-communication

[55]   Extract from the in-depth interviews conducted in August-September 2017 (An official from the Government Office)

[56]   National Centre of Defence & Security Awareness, training programme Sinu Riigi Kaitse, Retrieved from http://kaitsen.ee/programm-2.

[57]   Riigikaitseteemaline arvamusuuring 2017. Retrieved from http://kaitsen.ee/uuringud/russian-sotsiologicheskoe-issledovanie-obshhestvennogo-mneniya-2017.

the prism of the native language.[58] These results reveal not only the dynamics of public opinion over the last 17 years but also worrying differences between societal groups.

According to the interviewed experts, the major gaps in security perceptions of ethnic Estonians and local Russian-speakers are mainly related to NATO's enhanced forward presence in Estonia as well as relations with Russia.[59] For instance, 67 % of local Russian-speakers and just 23 % of ethnic Estonians support stronger security cooperation between Estonia and Russia. At the same time, 73 % of ethnic Estonians and 23 % of local Russian-speakers agree that NATO is the best bet for Estonia's security. Proponents of Estonia's membership in NATO amount to 31 % of local Russian-speakers and 91 % of ethnic Estonians—a threefold difference. Predictably, 89 % of ethnic Estonians and just 27 % of local Russian-speakers approve of NATO's military presence in Estonia.[60]

There are also big differences in the views of the two groups regarding the war in Ukraine, with 68 % of local Russian-speakers and just 2 % of ethnic Estonians reporting they think Ukraine bears the most responsibility for the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Meanwhile, 6 % of local Russian-speakers and 78 % of ethnic Estonians viewed Russia as being responsible for the conflict.

There is arguably no coincidence that these are also the topics around which a higher degree of Russian disinformation can be observed.[61] As discussed previously, it could be suggested that Estonia's national security-related opinions are largely shaped by pro-Kremlin media channels, taking into account the trust-based receptiveness of many local Russian-speakers in Estonia towards Russian propaganda.

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[58]   Estonian Ministry of Defence, Public opinion survey on national defence 2017. Retrieved from
       www.kaitseministeerium.ee/sites/default/files/elfinder/article_files/public_opinion_and_national_defence_2017_march.pdf.

[59]   Anonymous official, Estonian Ministry of Defence, August-September 2017. In-depth interview.

[60]   Estonian Ministry of Defence, Public opinion survey on national defence 2017. Retrieved from
       www.kaitseministeerium.ee/sites/default/files/elfinder/article_files/public_opinion_and_national_defence_2017_march.pdf.

[61]   Urve Eslas, 2017. "How a social media joke became anti-NATO propaganda in Estonia." Retrieved from
       http://www.infowar.cepa.org/Briefs/Est/How-a-social-media-joke-became-anti-NATO-prop-Estonia.

       Russian Narratives on NATO's Deployment. How Russian-language media in Poland and the Baltic States portray NATO's
       reinforcements 2017. Retrieved from https://medium.com/dfrlab/russian-narratives-on-natos-deployment-616e19c3d194.

       Baltics battle Russia in online disinformation war. Retrieved from
       http://www.dw.com/en/baltics-battle-russia-in-online-disinformation-war/a-40828834.

DIGITAL DEBUNKING TEAMS AND MEDIA LITERACY PROJECTS

All interviewed experts share the view that the independence and secured freedom of Estonia is strengthened by involving active citizens in the national security conversation. Several initiatives have been adopted and refined across all levels of government and civil society. Non-profit organisations and citizens' voluntary initiatives have an important role to play in reinforcing national resilience. As an interviewed official of the voluntary national defence organisation Estonian Defence League stated:[62]

'Being very creative and flexible, motivated volunteers can achieve some tangible results in supporting the state activities in the field of defence and security. Our contribution plays a vital role in diversifying activities that minimise the harmful effects of pro-Kremlin propaganda'

The wider dissemination of knowledge and skills related to national security is regularly supported from the state budget. For example, it is coordinated and organised through the *National Defence Course* at schools nationwide.[63] Although such training courses are primarily focused on security and defence, there are at least several lessons within the curriculum dedicated to hybrid threats, hostile activities, and the use of information as a weapon. This was (emotive not academic) spotted by an interviewed national defence teacher:

'My students ask me all the time about some fake news and even about manipulation in social media. Of course, I teach them the basics of media literacy and also present some good examples of debunked myths. It works better when you as a teacher explain it thoroughly, not just suggest boring reading from the internet'.[64]

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[62]   Anonymous official, Estonian Defence League, August-September 2017. In-depth interview.

[63]   Riigikaitseõpetus, Retrieved from *https://www.kra.ee/riigikaitseopetus*.

[64]   Anonymous national defence teacher, Narva, August-September 2017. In-depth interview.

Additionally, *Senior Courses in National Defence* are held twice per year in both the Estonian and Russian languages for adult audiences of politicians, senior state officials, military officers, local government officials, top economic and opinion leaders, cultural and educational practitioners, journalists and NGO representatives.[65]

IN FOCUS

An international cooperation platform, Resilience League, was established to train young professionals and experts in practical skills and tools for promoting the transatlantic security and defence agenda as well as strengthening national resilience against hybrid threats.[66] This programme is supported by the Estonian Ministry of Defence, NATO Public Diplomacy Division and Friedrich Ebert Foundation. It unites experts into a professional network with the goal of developing and implementing innovative methods against hostile ideologies and harmful influence. Additionally, it regularly organises various training events and conducts studies. The format of the international schools includes lectures and interactive seminars based on educational discussions and interactions. This format is led by experienced specialists and recognised practitioners from NATO, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Denmark, Georgia, Finland, Ukraine, and other countries.

Remarkable support is provided to several non-profit organisations that deal with the development of national defence and informational security. For instance, the trilingual (Estonian, Russian, English) blog of *Propastop* is aimed at contributing to Estonia's information space security.[67] The blog is run by a group of volunteers, many belonging to the *Estonian Defence League*. Propastop brings to the public deliberately disseminated lies, biased or dis-information in media and other cases of manipulating information. Propastop compares lies with real facts, shows the motives behind the actions and identifies the people interested in manipulating information. Propastop mediates information related to blog topics from state agencies, current media, and literature. Propastop restricts itself

[65]   Estonian National Defence Course. Retrieved from *http://krkk.icds.ee/en/*.

[66]   Resilience League. Retrieved from *www.kaitsen.ee/resilience-league*.

[67]   Propastop. Retrieved from *www.propastop.org*.

only to exposing propaganda, but does have the ambition to become a web site that contains a compendium on propaganda. The flagship and oldest daily newspaper of the Estonian press, *Postimees*, regularly re-publishes interesting stories from Propastop.[68]

Being part of the Estonian Public Broadcasting, Radio 4, one of the most listened to radio channels among local Russian-speakers, recently started a new rubric dedicated to increasing general media literacy and discussing with experts various topics related to disinformation campaigns and fake news.[69] The rubric is supported by the Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Estonian Ministry of Defence. The CEPA StratCom programme, joined by an Estonian media expert, produces regular briefs and reports on the situation in Estonia. These are often cited in the local press because they are translated into Russian and Estonian.[70]

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Almost all experts contributing to this research share the common opinion that Estonian society is remarkably resilient because of vivid historic memories and close interactions between the government and civil society. Nevertheless, special attention should be paid to vulnerable societal groups, such as local Russian-speakers, whose informational and psychological resilience might be attacked by disinformation campaigns through hostile narratives or active measures coordinated by Russia or its proxies. Among the realistically applicable recommendations suggested by the experts in this report, the following three deserve particular attention:

1. The Estonian government should continue to involve active members of civil society in practical activities that strengthen national resilience. Different formats of involvement should be supported to capitalise on the synergetic contributions from respective NGOs and volunteers. This should not only be reinforced in national defence but also in areas of internal security, cybersecurity,

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[68]   Postimees. Retrieved from *https://www.postimees.ee/search?query=propastop*.

[69]   Raadio 4. Retrieved from *http://r4.err.ee/l/mediagramotnost*.

[70]   CEPA StratCom programme. Retrieved from *http://infowar.cepa.org/Countries/Estonia*.

information security, and psychological security. These activities should be perceived as a long-term investment into national security and their effectiveness should be measured in 7−10 years retrospectively .

2. The promotion of national security-related values and virtues within the society should be regularly stated by political leaders and active citizens throughout different levels and on various platforms. These formats should include peer-to-peer, formal education, informal training, embedded in local events and everyday life, community-based approach, tangible presence in social media, recognition of active volunteers in different areas, etc. Such activities should encourage all members of civil society to contribute toward strengthening national resilience.

3. A diverse ecosystem of and continuing symbiosis between state institutions, the private sector, and civil society should be promoted and financially supported as a key element to national resilience. Its reinforcement should be based on eliminating obvious internal and external vulnerabilities, providing qualitative and quantitative situational awareness to the decision-makers, adequately informing the general public about current threat assessments, and preparations for and success stories from minimizing the harmful impact of influence activities against Estonia. The characteristic keywords of the ecosystems must be flexibility, networking, complementary, consciousness, and professional dedication.

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GEORGIA

A ├──────────────● 2.1

B ├──────────────● 2.8

C ├────────────────◄ 2.4

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INTRODUCTION

After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the proclamation of independence by Georgia, the Kremlin continued to actively meddle with the domestic politics of the country. Russia supported separatist forces in the regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. In 2008, Russia undertook military intervention on the territory of Georgia, followed by war with Georgia. The Kremlin recognised the self-proclaimed sovereignty of the regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia; concluded agreements with the *de facto* governments, by which it strengthened its military, political, and economic positions in the occupied territories.

The occupied territories give Russia major political leverage over Georgia. Russian bases in the regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia pose serious problem in terms of security of the population. One base is just 20 km away from Tbilisi, in the Akhalgori region. The military units from this base provide major support to the illegal separatist authorities in the regions. Provocations continue periodically, such as the so-called 'borderisation', abductions of local people by the Russian troops, etc.

Following the 2012 parliamentary elections, a new political force came to power that actually started 'to reset' relations between the Kremlin and Tbilisi. This brought a partial restoration of economic relations, as well as trade between the two countries. According to data from 2017, Russia is Georgia's largest export destination, with 14.1% (274 million USD) of Georgian products exported to the country, compared to 2016, when Russia came in third (132 million USD) after Turkey and China.[1] Despite an increase in export to Russia, the largest share (24%) of Georgian export goes to EU countries.[2] Russia comes second as the largest importer of Georgian goods, following Turkey (532 million USD). Most imports come from the EU (28%).

According to data published in 2012, there are up to 800 000 Georgians living in the Russian Federation.[3] Whereas, in the same period, Georgia's

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[1]   "Foreign Trade." 2018. Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia. *http://www.economy. ge/?page=ecoreview&s=20&lang=en*. "Foreign Trade." 2018. Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia. *http://www.economy.ge/?page=ecoreview&s=20&lang=en*.

[2]   "Export-Import Information." 2018. Ministry of Finance of Georgia. *http://mof.ge/images/File/outlook/Georgia-The-Outlook_GEO_Oct-2017.pdf*

[3]   Economic Policy Research Center. 2013. Georgian Diaspora Study. *http://eprc.ge/admin/editor/uploads/files/GIZ_Georgian_Diaspora_Study_A4_Book_Print.pdf*

population was 4.498 million.[4] Seasonal migration is also regular among ethnic minorities.

'Every year, once they finish cultivation of their land, men leave for Russia to work and return to harvest the crops. It is significant income for their families'.[5]

The number of emigrants is reflected by money transfers: according to NBG data from 2017, the largest number of transfers to Georgia were made from Russia; we get the same picture based on statistics for the last 10 years, e.g., in May 2017, 115.4 million USD were transferred to Georgia, of which 37.8 million USD came from Russia (33.4 %), 12.1 million USD came from the US (11.6 %) and 11.7 million USD from Greece (10.6 %).[6]

Similar to Russia, the majority of Georgia's population practices Russian Orthodoxy. In 1917, the Georgian Church regained its independence, which was originally taken from it by the Russian Empire back in 1881. Considering the common religious beliefs, the Georgian population is supportive of nations practising the same religion, including Russians.

The Russian language factor should also be taken into account. In most cases, Russian is the main foreign language for the elderly population in Georgia. Overall, 72 % of citizens report their knowledge of Russian language as high. Although the number of those who can speak English is steadily rising (2008, 12 %; 2017, 20 %),[7] especially among the youth, the difference between Russian- and English-speaking skills is still quite visible in the society. Proficiency in Russian increases the dependence on Russian media and contributes to the threat of disinformation from Russian-language media.

VULNERABLE GROUPS

The population of age 50 and older has spent a significant part of their life in the Soviet era. They speak Russian, have people-to-people contacts within society in Russia and many feel nostalgic about the

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[4]   National Statistics Office of Georgia. 2018. Summary Vital Statistics 2007–2017.
       http://www.geostat.ge/?action=page&p_id=151&lang=geo

[5]   Alexandra Kalatozishvili, Public Movement "Multinational Georgia", February 8, 2018. In-depth interview.

[6]   "სტატისტიკური მონაცემები." [Money Transfers by Countries] 2018. საქართველოს ეროვნული ბანკი. 2018. National Bank of Georgia. *https://www.nbg.gov.ge/index.php?m=304*.

[7]   "Caucasus Barometer 2017 Georgia." 2018. Caucasusbarometer.org. *http://caucasusbarometer.org/en/cb2017ge/codebook/*.

Soviet past. In addition, the mentality they built in the Cold War period offers good grounds to cultivate anti-Western feelings and to strengthen loyal attitudes towards Russia as the legal successor of the USSR and an opponent of the West. The majority of the experts interviewed believe that one of the main goals of the Kremlin's disinformation policy in Georgia is to instigate a sense of nihilism about European integration.

Another vulnerable group to pro-Kremlin propaganda in Georgia is ethnic minorities (Armenians, 4.5%; Azerbaijanis, 6.3%).[8] A lack of knowledge of the Georgian language among the Armenian and Azerbaijani populations, living in the southern and south-eastern parts of the country, is a serious barrier to their integration into Georgian society. As a result, it is difficult to keep this population informed through Georgian sources and leaves space for foreign, including Kremlin-governed disinformation to fill the void. As one of the interviewed state officials put it,

'for years, the state did not pay enough attention to these people, which distanced them from the process taking place in Georgia. Now we are trying to fill this gap with state programmes. The language barrier is another obstacle and we are working on this too'.[9]

For these reasons, ethnic minorities as well as the Russian, Armenian, Azerbaijani, and Turkish populations prefer watching programmes where the language is familiar and the content more interesting, this works against Georgia's efforts to counter disinformation.

Economic factors make other groups vulnerable to pro-Kremlin disinformation policy. Of the Georgian workforce, 52% is employed in the agriculture sector, of which 98% are self-employed.[10] The Russian market, with its size and lower quality standards, plays an important role when it comes to selling products from this sector. As the openness of the Russian market to foreign goods is determined mainly by the Kremlin's political agenda, Georgian entrepreneurs who are dependent on the Russian market have become extremely vulnerable to the pro-Kremlin propaganda.

The large Georgian diaspora and their economic and other links with their families in Georgia provide the Kremlin with favourable means

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[8]   "2014 General Population Census Main Results. General Information." 2016. National Statistics Office of Georgia (Geostat). http://census.ge/files/results/Census_release_ENG.pdf.

[9]   Archil Kharaulashvili, Office of the State Minister of Georgia on European & Euro-Atlantic Integration, February 6, 2018. In-depth interview.

[10]   "Strategy for Agricultural Development in Georgia 2015—2020." 2018. The European Union of Georgia. http://enpard.ge/en/strategy-for-agricultural-development-in-georgia-2015-2020/.

of provocations in terms of disinformation and exerting other kinds of influence.

We may also consider the conservative portion of active believers belonging to the Georgian Orthodox Church as vulnerable to Kremlin disinformation. The anti-western context is topical for them and a pro-Kremlin narrative is often heard as the alternative. This narrative is often revealed in the preaching of particular clerics.[11] But as Metropolitan Andria notes, the Patriarchate of Georgia supports the choice of the Georgian people about the integration into the European and Euro-Atlantic space.[12] One of the frequent myths concerns the concept of Moscow as a Third Rome, which gives Russia special religious importance in the Orthodox world.

Although the majority of Georgia's population supports the integration of the country into Western geopolitical structures (according to 2017 data, 80 % and 68 % of the Georgian population is supportive of integration with the EU and NATO membership, respectively),[13] and that the relevant foreign policy obligation has been encoded in the country's constitution,[14] yet a part of the society does not agree with it. Individuals who represent mainly the radical part of the nationalist community are major targets of pro-Kremlin propaganda. This group is divided into two sub-groups. There are political and social forces, who overtly conduct pro-Kremlin policy.

'He put Russia on its feet, … to tell you the truth, I would wish the same president for my country as Vladimir Putin',

Nino Burjanadze, former Speaker of parliament and the leader of the Democratic Movement – United Georgia told Deutsche Welle.[15]

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[11]   "Threats of Russia's Soft and Hard Power Policy in Georgia." 2016. European Initiative – Liberal Academy Tbilisi. *http://www.ei-lat.ge/images/doc/policy%20document.pdf*.

[12]   ლიკლიკაძე კობა (Koba Liklikadze). 2016. "მეუფე ანდრია: საქართველოს ეკლესია მხარს უჭერს ევროატლანტიკურ არჩევანს." [Metropolitan Andria: The Georgian church supports Euro-Atlantic Choice] რადიო თავისუფლება. *https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/sakartvelos-eklesia-mkhars-uchers-natos/28106488.html*.

[13]   Thornton, Laura, and Koba Turmanidze. 2017. "Results of December 2017 Survey Carried out for NDI by CRRC Georgia." CRRC Georgia, National Democratic Institution, UKAid, British Embassy Tbilisi. *https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/NDI%20poll_December%202017_ISSUES_ENG_vf.pdf*.

[14]   "საკონსტიტუციო ცვლილებების პროექტით შემოთავაზებული სიახლეების შეფასება." [Assessment of Proposed Initiatives by the Draft of the Constitutional Amendments] 2017. ინფორმაციის თავისუფლების განვითარების ინსტიტუტი. Institute for Development of Freedom of Information. *https://idfi.ge/public/upload/IDFI_Photos_2017/rule_of_law/constitutional_changes_idfi.pdf*.

[15]   Немцова, Жанна. 2017. "Нино Бурджанадзе: Грузии Нужен Такой Президент, Как Путин." Deutsche Welle. 2017. http://p. dw.com/p/2nCA1

The other part of the radical nationalists stays aloof from clear pro-Russia policy, although they cultivate Euroscepticism and anti-Western feelings. They regard themselves as pro-Georgia forces.[16]

'These radical right-wing forces are anti-globalists and against Georgia's European and Euro-Atlantic integration. Their aspirations coincide inadvertently in some issues with the goals of the pro-Kremlin propaganda',[17]

Malkhaz Gagua, editor of the newspaper Rezonansi said. Given this factor, these groups are the most susceptible to pro-Kremlin narratives.

MEDIA LANDSCAPE

Georgia has a broad and diversified media landscape and the most liberal media laws in the entire Southern Caucasus region. There is virtually no direct state censorship, although in some cases, private media reflect the political orientation of media company owners, on whom they depend both financially and politically.

Georgia's media landscape continues to face major challenges that have only grown since the country signed the EU Association Agreement in June 2014. In that agreement, the Georgian government committed to maintaining European standards of media freedom as well as media law, but neither journalists nor legal experts yet have the ability and experience to ensure that the necessary changes laid out in the agreement have been implemented.[18]

Media ownership in Georgia is transparent. None of the major media outlets are directly owned by any political force. Several cable and internet broadcasters are owned by anti-Western organisations. Their declared income is quite small, so it is unclear what kind of resources these channels have for broadcasting.[19]

Regarding online media, the transparency requirements of ownership do not apply, therefore citizens do not have information about the majority

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[16]   European Initiative Liberal Academy Tbilisi. (2016). Threats of Russia's Soft and Hard Power Policy in Georgia. Analytical research, p. 39—40. Retrieved from: *http://www.ei-lat.ge/images/doc/policy%20document.pdf*

[17]   Malkhaz Gagua, Rezonansi, February 17, 2018. In-depth interview.

[18]   Deutsche Welle. 2015. "DW Akademie in Georgia." *http://p.dw.com/p/1Fb01*.

[19]   საერთაშორისო გამჭვირვალობა საქართველო. 2014. ვის ეკუთვნის ქართული მედია. Transparency International Georgia. Who owns Georgia's media. *https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B2mc2XAkbw2tdUFEQWJWWl9OWms/view*

of websites. Interviews carried out by Transparency International Georgia and systematic observations on information websites have shown that during the last few years, there have appeared media outlets online that are based on political preferences. These groups intensively use social networks to disseminate information. Given their existence, providing audiences with fact-checked and high-quality journalistic information is becoming more difficult.[20]

Over the past few years, some news websites have been actively involved in anti-Western propaganda and their rhetoric is often expressed in a xenophobic and homophobic context.

TV channel	Share %
Imedi	28.08
Rustavi	26.76
GDS	5.61
Comedy Arkhi	3.86
1 TV — Public Broadcaster	3.63
Marao	2.19
Maestro	2.06
TV Pirveli	1.83
Adjara	1.14
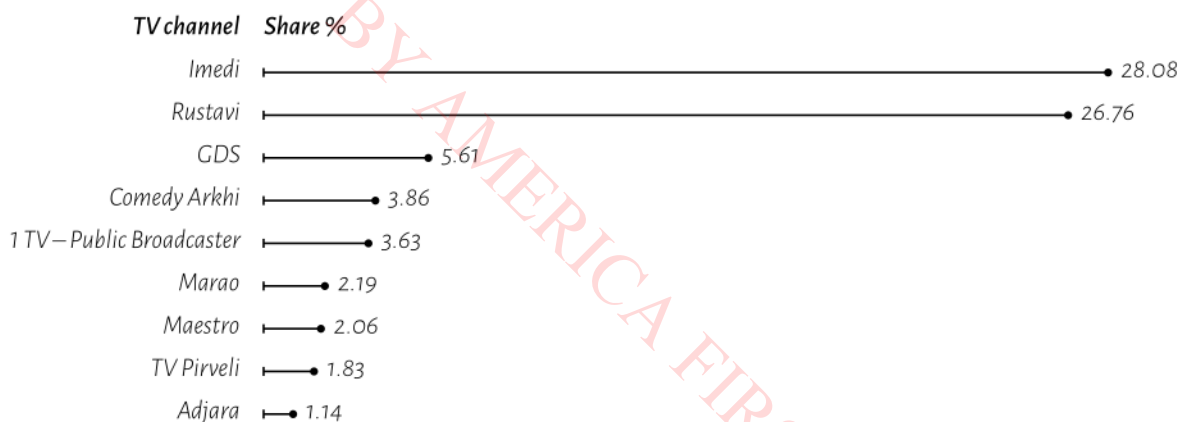
Top rated TV channels in Georgia

Source: TVMR Georgia (2017)

Chart 1 shows the top-rated TV channels in Georgia according to data from in 2017 compiled by the television Audience Measurement official licensee company TVMR Georgia. These channels are less likely to be influenced by Kremlin disinformation. Most of the respondents note that Kremlin propaganda does not spread on the popular TV channels. However, they mention media outlets that often spread Kremlin propaganda. The TV station Obiektivi is one of the most frequently mentioned television broadcasters carrying out a pro-Kremlin, Turkophobic, xenophobic, and homophobic editorial policy. According to the mentioned data (TVMR GE), Obiektivi is not among the country's popular channels.

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[20]   Ibid.

Anti-liberal, ethno-nationalistic, and pro-Kremlin propaganda is also spread by print and online media. In this regard, it is important to note the newspapers Asaval-Dasavali, Alia-Holding and online editions Georgia and the World and Saqinform. According to the Media Development Fund's (MDF) Media Monitoring Report 2016, anti-Western messages are spread by the following media outlets: 1) Georgia and the World; 2) Asaval-Dasavali; 3) Saqinform; 4) Obiektivi; 5) Alia-Holding. They publish concepts such as Georgian society, in cooperation with Orthodox Russia, is the guarantee for a better future for Georgia; that by entering NATO, Georgia will be reluctant to live under Turkish dictate; that the US is completely powerless against Russia's military actions; and so on.[21]

Since 2012, Georgian media has experienced significant changes to become much more pluralistic, as confirmed by respective international rankings. In the summer of 2015, Georgia fully switched to digital broadcasting, which should definitely be regarded as a positive development for the Georgian media environment. Furthermore, several new TV stations were launched and some old ones resumed broadcasting. The new TV Pirveli emerged in the Georgian television space, while the TV company Iberia resumed broadcasting.[22]

There are non-profit organisations in Georgia that fight disinformation, propaganda, and the dissemination of myths through media monitoring. One of the organisations that conducts ongoing media monitoring is the Georgian Charter of Journalist Ethics (GCJE), established on December 4, 2009. GCJE's mission is to increase media social responsibility by observing professional and ethical standards and creating self-regulating mechanisms.[23] Representatives of media organisations from the regions and the capital signed on to 11 principles within the scope of the GCJE.

The GCJE allows citizens to appeal cases of journalists' ethical violations. In addition, GCJE conducts surveys in the media space, as well as monitors the usage of hate speech, disinformation, and propaganda. Because of this activity, it became a member of the Consultation Committee established to fight propaganda. The Committee is composed of representatives of

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[21]   მედიის განვითარების ფონდი. ანტიდასავლური პროპაგანდა. [Anti-Western propaganda] 2016. Media Monitoring Report. Retrieved from: http://mdfgeorgia.ge/uploads/library/65/file/Antidasavluri-GEO-web_(1).pdf

[22]   "Georgian Media Environment from 2012 Parliamentary Elections till Present." 2016. Transparency International-Georgia. http://www.transparency.ge/sites/default/files/post_attachments/georgian_media_environment_from_2012_parliamentary_elections_till_present.pdf.

[23]   Nata Dzvelishvili, Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics, February 9, 2018. In-depth interview.

the self-regulation councils of the following countries: Georgia, Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus, Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Russia. The committee was set up to fight propaganda.

The GCJE reviews reported cases of a violation of professional standards on request, although it does not impose any sanctions on the offender. Since 2010, the GCJE has reviewed 163 cases by different media outlets.[24]

Since 2008, surveys on local media have been carried out by MDF, which, among other issues, supports freedom of expression, ethical journalism, accountability, media knowledge, and diversity.[25] Its 'Myths Detector' format, which the MDF created in the framework of the EWMI project, works on identifying myths disseminated in the media and verifying fake information.

The legal, political, and economic environment in the country has a key impact on media. In a democracy with an orderly legislative base, free from state interference in the economy, and with freedom of expression actually practiced, media enjoy true independence. Freedom House is an international organisation that studies these factors and publishes annual reports on the level of freedom of media in many countries.

According to the 2017 media freedom report by Freedom House, Georgia received 50 points and is among the countries where media is partly free, whereas in terms of legislation, Georgia received 13 points out of 30, in the political environment, 21 points out of 40, and in the economic environment, 16 points out of 30. Georgia has been placed among the partly free countries in terms of media freedom for several years now, with the following press freedom indexes: 47 in 2014, 48 in 2015, 49 in 2016, and then 50 in 2017.[26] Considering the results of the Freedom House survey of 2017, Georgia has the best indicators of the freedom of press in the post-Soviet space.

Freedom House publishes annual reports on freedom of the internet as well. According to the results for 2017, Georgia received 24 points out of 100 and was assessed as free. In access to the internet, the results have improved compared to 2016. According to the report, 50 % of the

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[24]   "Examined Cases." 2018. The Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics. http://qartia.ge/en/complaints.

[25]   Media Development Foundation Georgia. *http://mdfgeorgia.ge/eng/home/*

[26]   "Freedom of the Press 2017: Georgia." 2017. Freedom House. https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2017/georgia.

population in Georgia has access to the internet.[27] This may be the result of constitutional amendments adopted by parliament on September 26, 2017, which incorporate access to the internet as a basic human right.[28]

The main source of information on political processes and of the current news in Georgia comes from television and the internet. According to the NDI survey, the percentage of information received from traditional media is significantly high compared to the amount of information obtained from internet sources. Nevertheless, according to data from 2017, the share of information obtained from the internet has increased, maybe at the expense of television. While, according to data from 2016, 77 % of the population regarded television as the primary source of information,[29] in 2017 this indicator decreased to 72 %, and usage of the internet increased from 14 % to 21 %.[30]

Georgian law on broadcasting obliges the public broadcaster, a state-funded television station, to promote the main foreign policy goals of the country, including its European and Euro-Atlantic integration.[31] However, it should be noted that the public broadcaster has not done enough to meet this obligation. This is proved by the decision of the public broadcaster's management to close its bureau in Europe, blamed on a lack of financial resources. The bureau was covering important visits in the countries of Europe, broadcasting live from different hot spots, and prepared feature stories on the EU and NATO. This proves that the national media operates in its financial interest.

Natia Kuprashvili, head of the Journalism Resource Centre, believes it is vitally important for the Georgian audience to have access to European media products and that covering issues related to European integration and European values in the Georgian media space is of primary importance for the country.[32]

[27] "Freedom House: საქართველოს ქულა ინტერნეტის თავისუფლების რეიტინგში გაუმჯობესდა." [Georgia's Score of Internet Freedom has Improved] 2017. *https://idfi.ge:443/ge/freedom_house_georgias_score_in_internet_freedom_ranking_has_improved*.

[28] "საკონსტიტუციო ცვლილებების პროექტით შემოთავაზებული სიახლეების შეფასება." [Assessment of Proposed Initiatives by the Draft of the Constitutional Amendments] 2017. Institute for Development of Freedom of Information. ინფორმაციის თავისუფლების განვითარების ინსტიტუტი. *https://idfi.ge/public/upload/IDFI_Photos_2017/rule_of_law/constitutional_changes_idfi.pdf*.

[29] Thornton, Laura, and Koba Turmanidze. 2017. Ibid.

[30] Thornton, Laura, and Koba Turmanidze. 2017. Ibid.

[31] "საქართველოს კანონი მაუწყებლობის შესახებ." [Law of Georgia on Broadcasting] 2005. საქართველოს პარლამენტი. https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/32866.

[32] Natia Kuprashvili, Journalism Resource Center, February 14, 2018. In-depth interview.

The public broadcaster is also obliged to broadcast programmes in minority languages and about minorities, as well as programmes prepared by minorities in respective proportions. Apart from this, the Georgian government has adopted the 'State Strategy of Civic Equality and Integration', which among other goals highlights the importance of increasing access to media and information as a step towards promoting full and equal engagement of ethnic minorities in the civic and political life of the country. The strategy states that 'media plays a special role in successful progress of the integration process both through its coverage of topics related to ethnic minorities and their involvement'.[33] The strategy also envisages improving ethnic minorities' access to information in their native ethnic languages and their inclusion in the common information space as a part of the integration process.[34] The strategy places the leading role on the public broadcaster in this process. Despite all this, there is no clear-cut state policy at this point that would prompt ethnic minorities' interest in the foreign language-based content. The results of the NDI public survey depicts the popularity of non-Georgian TV channels among the ethnic minority populated regions at 52%, mostly Russian news programmes. Satellite dishes are used to get information in these regions. However, these regions are gradually switching to digital broadcasting.

It should be noted that after the 2008 war, Georgian cable TV companies stopped transmitting Russian channels upon a verbal directive from the government. All Russian channels were also removed from cable TV packages. However, after the change of government in 2012, broadcasting of Russian channels resumed. For example, nowadays, more than 50 Russian-language channels are available in the 119-channel package offered by the digital TV company Global TV. Also, about 90 Russian-language channels are included in the 222-channel package offered by operator Silknet.

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[33] "სამოქალაქო თანასწორობისა და ინტეგრაციის სახელმწიფო სტრატეგიისა და 2015–2020 წწ. სამოქმედო გეგმის დამტკიცების შესახებ." [State Strategy for Civil Equality and Integration and 2015-2020 Approval of the Action Plan] 2015. Government of Georgia. *https://matsne.gov.ge/en/document/view/2958879*.

[34] "სამოქალაქო თანასწორობისა და ინტეგრაციის სახელმწიფო სტრატეგიისა და 2015-2020 წწ. სამოქმედო გეგმის დამტკიცების შესახებ." [State Strategy for Civil Equality and Integration and 2015-2020 Approval of the Action Plan] 2015. Government of Georgia. *https://matsne.gov.ge/en/document/view/2958879*.

LEGAL
REGULATIONS

The democratic form of government implies that the population makes the decision independently, which is impossible without an accurate, fact-based, balanced, ethical, and responsible media environment. There is no significant problem in Georgia in this regard at the legislative level, as the 'Law on Broadcasting' in force since 2004 is liberal. The law provided for the creation of a public broadcaster independent from state interference and builds on the freedom of expression and thought.[35] This makes it difficult to fight disinformation and propaganda in the country using legal leverage.

Broadcasting activities are regulated by the National Regulatory Commission, which is independent from any state agency. The legal status of the commission is determined by the law of Georgia on electronic communications, adopted in 2005.[36]

Pursuant to the broadcasting law, the Georgian National Communications Commission (GNCC) adopted a 'Code of Conduct for Broadcasters', which aims to ensure that all broadcasters have an equal responsibility to observe professional ethical norms and accountability to society. The code helps journalists, publishers, and broadcasters resolve issues related to ethics and also obliges them to provide reliable, accurate, and fact-based information to their audiences. Based on Article 7 of the code, broadcasters are instructed to establish an effective self-regulation mechanism: 'Broadcasters have the right to choose an effective self-regulation mechanism, in accordance with this Code, which meets high professional standards and provides for transparent and effective complaints handling procedure and ensures timely and substantiated response to them'.[37]

The interviewed experts and civil servants unanimously agree that establishing stricter rules in this field will be counterproductive.

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[35] "საქართველოს კანონი მაუწყებლობის შესახებ." [Law of Georgia on Broadcasting] 2004. საქართველოს პარლამენტი. https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/32866.

[36] "საქართველოს კანონი ელექტრონული კომუნიკაციების შესახებ." [Law of Georgia on Digital Communications.] 2005. საქართველოს პარლამენტი. 2005. https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/29620.

[37] "„საქართველოს კომუნიკაციების ეროვნული კომისიის დადგენილება „მაუწყებელთა ქცევის კოდექსის" დამტკიცების თაობაზე"." [Decree of the Georgian National Communications Commission on Approval of the Code of Conduct of Broadcasters] 2009. საქართველოს კომუნიკაციების ეროვნული კომისია. https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/82792.

However, Sulkhan Saladze, GYLA Chairman, notes general shortcomings in the constitutional legislative base:

'in terms of the security of information, the legislative base needs substantial improvement. A holistic government vision and the taking into account public opinion are the most important for such improvements'.[38]

The Personal Data Protection Inspector of Georgia believes that analysis of the law on 'Security of Information', identification of shortcomings and assessment of its implementation is possible. She believes it is important to increase the introduction of standards of security of information and to increase the financing of the relevant agencies to this end.[39]

According to media representatives, the media regulations in Georgia are liberal, which promotes media pluralism. They regard the implementation part as the most problematic.

'I do not see the necessity to change the law, but I think that the state through the regulation commission should monitor those media means, which contribute to hate speech and controversy',

Khatia Jinjikhadze, the deputy executive director of the Open Society Georgia Foundation (OSGF) said.[40]

IN FOCUS

Photos used when disseminating propaganda often do not relate to the article in question but are often misrepresented, either by being used out of context or by being doctored, e.g., in 2017 www.digest.pia.ge and Georgia and the World published a statement by Jondi Baghaturia, the leader of Kartuli Dasi, which spoke about raids against Orthodox Christian churches and cathedrals in Ukraine, as well as about physical violence against clergy and congregation. Together with the statement, Jondi Baghaturia had uploaded a photo on social networks, which the news agencies used. *The Myths Detector* revealed that the photo was not related to the raid on the Orthodox church, but an explosion in a church in the town of Zaporizhia, which resulted in the arrest of three criminals.[41] Apart from this type of debunking, the Myths Detector

[38]   Sulkhan Saladze, Georgian Young Lawyers Association, February 25, 2018. In-depth interview.

[39]   Tamar Kaldani, Personal Data Protection Inspector, February 20, 2018. In-depth interview.

[40]   Khatia Jinjikhadze, Open Society Georgia Foundation, February 17, 2018. In-depth interview.

[41]   Tamar Kintsurashvili, Media Development Foundation, February 19, 2018. In-depth interview.

works to reveal how Kremlin forces try to spread Turkophobic attitudes in Georgia.

Another example of photo manipulation is from May 29, 2017, when the publication Asaval-Dasavali spread information that NATO had received a new uniform for transgender military service personnel. This information included photos the newspaper claimed were of transgender service personnel from NATO. However, the people in the photo were actually representatives of the American Civil Liberties Union, and not NATO troops.[42]

Mediachecker.ge published an article titled 'Trade in Organs and pro-Kremlin Propaganda' which reported on an article by *Sakinform* on September 12, titled 'Lonely persons are abducted in Kyiv, ripped into pieces and buried secretly—the underground hiding place of Mikheil Saakashvili's wife was found!' The news agency asserts that lonely people were being abducted in Kyiv, ripped apart and then buried secretly, and a well full of human bodies was found near Kyiv. But, this information was not confirmed and similar articles relating to the same story can only be found in Kremlin propagandistic publications—rusgambit.ru, Pravda.ru, news.sputnik.ru, etc.[43]

On January 27, 2018, the TV Obiektivi broadcasted a news report prepared by Channel 1 of the Russian State television service. According to the programme's host, Valeri Kvaratskhelia, the coverage depicts the downing of an American 'invisible' aircraft by Soviet weapons, to emphasize US military weakness. Although the Myths Detector found out that the video material provided by TV Obiektivi was not related to the case at all, rather it depicted an air show event in the US state of Maryland in 1997. In fact, the reason for the downing of the so-called 'invisible' American aircraft—presumably an F-117 stealth fighter that crashed in the former Yugoslavia—is still unknown..

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[42]   მეხტიევ მანოვრუზ (Meadveev Manovruz). 2017. "ასავალ-დასავალის" განმეორებითი ფოტომანიპულაცია NATO-ს შესახებ." [Asaval-Dasavali's Repeat Photomapping About NATO] მითების დეტექტორი. *http://mythdetector.ge/ka/myth/asaval-dasavalis-ganmeorebiti-potomanipulatsia-nato-s-shesakheb-0*

[43]   "ორგანოებით ვაჭრობა და რუსული პროპაგანდა." [Organic trade and Russian propaganda] 2016. Mediachecker. *http://mediachecker.ge/mediacritics/detail/207.*

INSTITUTIONAL SETUP

A large percentage (45 %) of the experts surveyed within this research project believe that the level of institutional development in the field of information security is low.There is a law in Georgia protecting the security of information,[44] which establishes rights and obligations, as well as state border-control mechanisms in this area.

Regarding government bodies, there is the 'Communications Strategy of the Government of Georgia on EU and NATO Membership 2017–2020', in which the Kremlin's information war is considered a significant threat to Georgia. According to the government's 2014–2017 strategy, different structural units were established in various departments with the goal to coordinate EU and NATO integration processes.

There is the National Security Council of Georgia, whose obligation is to deepen cooperation in different areas. However, according to amendments to the constitution, in 2018, following the presidential elections, the National Security Council will be abolished. During peacetime, the functions of the Security Council will be distributed to the executive branch of government, led by the prime minister, and during war-time, responsibility will pass to the Defence Council, which will be subordinated to the president. According to the Secretary of the National Security Council, Davit Rakviashvili,

'the abolition of the Security Council is a big mistake because there will be no institution where the president, the prime minister, and the speaker of parliament will meet each other to discuss security issues'.[45]

There is a Cyber Security Bureau in the Ministry of Defence of Georgia. Under the umbrella of interagency cooperation, the Cyber Security Bureau cooperates with the Data Exchange Agency, Cybercrime Division of the Central Police Department, State Security Service, State Security, and Crises Management Council, etc. In 2015–2016, within the framework of interagency cooperation, the cyber-exercise Cyber Exe was held

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[44] "ინფორმაციული უსაფრთხოების შესახებ." [Information Security] 2012. საქართველოს პარლამენტი. *https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/1679424*.

[45] საჯაია ნანა (Sajaia Nana). 2018. "დავით რაქვიაშვილი: 'ეროვნული უსაფრთხოების სისტემა მორღვეულია.'" [Davit Rakviashvili: 'The national security system is broken] VOA. *https://www.amerikiskhma.com/a/interview-david-rakviashvili/4242321.html*.

at the national level with the involvement of IT specialists from the state and private sector.

Concerning the development of strategic communications, in 2018, the US embassy in Tbilisi began financing the Strategic Communication Programme in Georgia, which is an important mechanism for strengthening cooperation between the US and Georgia.

As the conversation with the interviewed civil servants revealed, the state bodies try to counter challenges related to the security of information on their own, without the assistance of other state agencies.

'There is no permanent interagency cooperation set up in this field, (and) cooperation may take place only on a specific issue',

Tengiz Pkhaladze, an adviser to the president of Georgia, said.[46]

David Usupashvili, the former Speaker of the Parliament, sees another barrier to the lack of cooperation in the decision to dissolve the Security Council:

'to counter a major challenge such as the security of information, we need to permanently update methods and develop a common state policy. The Security Council could play an important role, including in terms of cooperation'.[47]

Cooperation between governmental and non-governmental organisations is more intense in the area of information security. Joint campaigns have been implemented mainly on issues related to European and Euro-Atlantic integration to provide accurate information to the public. According to Tamar Kintsurashvili,

'we cooperate with the information centres of NATO and the EU and we share the results of our daily monitoring'.[48]

There is a different picture when it comes to cooperation within the non-governmental sector. Almost all the interviewed representatives of NGOs confirm they cooperate with other civil-society organisations within various non-governmental alliances and campaigns. Such formats include the Eastern Partnership platform, Alliance of Regional Broadcasters, and the Coalition for Euro-Atlantic Georgia. There are also small-scale partnerships between two or three organisations aimed at identifying

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[46]   Tengiz Pkhaladze, Advisor of the President of Georgia – Foreign Relations Secretary, February 6, 2018. In-depth interview.

[47]   David Usupashvili, Development Movement, February 16, 2018. In-depth interview.

[48]   Tamar Kintsurashvili, Media Development Foundation, February 19, 2018. In-depth interview.

disinformation, strengthening regional media, and implementing objective information campaigns to counter the propaganda activities.

DIGITAL DEBUNKING TEAMS

Despite active cooperation among civil-society organisations and legal regulations being in place, fake and inaccurate information is still disseminated in the Georgian media space. Chapter 3 of the 'Code of Conduct for Broadcasters' refers to the protection of due accuracy—the broadcaster is obliged to take all reasonable measures to ensure that facts are accurate and sources of information are reliable, while Article 5 stipulates that broadcasters should refrain from staging and restaging events in news and programmes in order not to mislead the audience.[49] Kremlin disinformation and myths are spread in Georgia in different ways—some of the myths help to disseminate the Kremlin narrative and to cultivate an understanding among society that Russia is the only solution for Georgians; another part attempts to change public opinion and to increase support for the pro-Kremlin narrative by disseminating anti-Western messages. Also, Russian myths often relate to the sense of national identity.

'*Pro-Kremlin propaganda is spreading in Georgia under the guise of anti-Western propaganda. No one has yet measured the effect of such propaganda, but it is a fact that some part of the population shares such propaganda. We find in certain media anti-Western narratives*",

Jinjikhadze, OSGF's deputy executive director noted.[50] For instance, on December 27, 2017, the online edition of Georgia and the World published an interview with a cleric in which the journalist says that incest is recognised as a norm in Europe.[51]

Another myth, which the Kremlin supports as its main focus of propaganda, is the idea of a neutral Georgia, viewing as a risk its joining NATO. Pro-Kremlin forces actively try to generate scepticism

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[49] "საქართველოს კომუნიკაციების ეროვნული კომისიის დადგენილება „მაუწყებელთა ქცევის კოდექსის" დამტკიცების თაობაზე"." [Decree of the Georgian National Communications Commission on Approval of the Code of Conduct of Broadcasters] 2009. საქართველოს კომუნიკაციების ეროვნული კომისია. *https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/82792*.

[50] Khatia Jinjikhadze, Deputy Executive Director of Open Society Georgia Foundation, February 17, 2018. In-depth interview.

[51] "დეზინფორმაცია, თითქოს ევროპა ინცესტს ნორმად აღიარებს. მითების დეტექტორი." [Disinformation as if Europe is Acknowledged as an Inspector.] 2018. *http://mythdetector.ge/ka/myth/dezinpormatsia-titkos-evropa-intsests-normad-aghiarebs*

in Georgian society and destroy all expectations related to the country's integration into NATO.

Apart from legislative regulation, monitoring and analysis of journalistic products in Georgian TV stations, online, and print media is done by other means as well. Representatives of media organisations undertake daily analysis of broadcasters, online media (social networks), and print media. OSGF is actively involved in this process. One of the priority areas of the foundation's activity is strengthening and supporting media organisations that operate with accuracy, objectivity, and good quality information.

'We are not building a counter narrative; we are constructing a correct narrative and helping local media cover the real situation",

Jinjikhadze explained.[52]

The *MDF* fights the dissemination of fake news and myths in the Georgian media space through its *'Myths Detector'* format. The aim of the organisation's members is to react to disinformation and myths and provide the public with accurate, fact-based information.[53]

The website *mediachecker.ge* is a platform for media critics in Georgia. The project is funded by the OSGF and implemented by the GCJE. The webpage actively disseminates information about materials containing disinformation and pro-Kremlin propaganda and highlights fake news and inaccuracies used to influence public opinion.[54]

The 2017 NDI public poll confirmed that Kremlin propaganda regarding Russia's military power has had a significant impact on Georgian society. According to the NDI survey, 41% of those interviewed believe that Russia's military power is greater than that of the US, while 36% believe the US to be stronger militarily than Russia. Such a difference between these numbers is significantly influenced by regions populated with ethnic minorities. In these regions, 55% of those interviewed believe that militarily, Russia is stronger than the US.[55]

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[52]   Khatia Jinjikhadze, Deputy Executive Director of Open Society Georgia Foundation, February 17, 2018. In-depth interview.

[53]   Tamar Kintsurashvili, Media Development Foundation, February 19, 2018. In-depth interview.

[54]   Platform of Media Criticism — Media Checker. *http://mediachecker.ge/*

[55]   Thornton, Laura, and Koba Turmanidze. 2017. Ibid.

MEDIA LITERACY PROJECTS

Representatives of NGOs believe that enhanced media literacy is closely linked with education, as society should be able to use it as an instrument to filter information and develop critical thinking.

'I do not think that media literacy is an important factor, rather I believe the problem is in the level of education; media literacy can be one of its elements. In general, it is more important to raise the level of education and promote critical thinking",

Levan Avalishvili, programme director of Institute for Development of Freedom of Information (IDFI), said.[56]

Experts believe that media literacy should start in school and should be taught to pupils as a separate subject or in combination with others.

'If media literacy is taught at schools, this will help the country's development, especially vulnerable groups',

the MDF director said.[57]

There is no state programme supporting the development of media literacy in Georgia today, but there are media organisations working on this issue, e.g., on the margins of the media literacy programme with MDF elaborated guidelines that aim at assisting media consumers to check fake information and handle disinformation. The organisation, through the support of Deutsche Welle offers courses in media literacy, which include theoretical and practical instruction in the methods of countering propaganda.[58]

On August 4, 2017, the Public Affairs Section of the U.S. embassy in Tbilisi invited Georgian non-profit/non-governmental organisations to submit proposals for a project lasting up to 24 months to improve media literacy skills among young Georgians between the ages of 16 and 24 that includes ethnic minorities and people at risk of being socially marginalised. Expected results included an increase of at least 20% in program participants' ability to distinguish trustworthy news from fake news

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[56]   Levan Avalishvili, Programs Director — Institute for Development of Freedom of Information, February 9, 2018. In-depth interview.

[57]   Tamar Kintsurashvili, Media Development Foundation, February 19, 2018. In-depth interview.

[58]   Myth Detector Lab. *http://mythdetector.ge/ka/laboratory*

and an increase of at least 20 % of those who cross-check information from the news.[59]

On September 9, 2016, Georgian, Moldovan, and Ukrainian students participated in media literacy camps, which formed part of the *Strengthening Independent Media* project in Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. While aiming to increase citizens' access to reliable information about local, regional, and international issues of public importance through supporting the independent media sector, the project included components exclusively concerning young people: a media literacy camp and the 'European Café'discussion club, organised at different venues all around Moldova, Georgia, and Ukraine. In total, 100 participants attended media literacy camps in the three countries, and feedback about the events was mostly positive. Programmes included topics such as: the basics of media literacy, how to develop critical thinking, practical mobile journalism, investigation of media effects, social media and blogging, and verification and fact-checking.[60]

On March 12-13, 2017, as part of the EU funded project '*Promoting freedom, professionalism and pluralism of the media*', the Council of Europe (CoE), in cooperation with the GNCC, organised a series of training seminars for the members of the GNCC based on CoE/European Court of Human Rights standards concerning the regulation of 'TV products having detrimental effects on children' and of 'TV-like services'. During the training seminars, the CoE experts working at the European national communications commission, respectively in Poland and Bosnia-Herzegovina, reviewed the best European standards on how to ensure the protection of minors through legislation and self-regulatory mechanisms as well as specified programme labelling and age-rating practices. The experience of setting up the media-literacy networks and the role of the communications commission were also actively discussed during the events.[61]

[59]   "Media Literacy Program. U.S. Embassy in Georgia." 2018.
https://ge.usembassy.gov/education-culture/grant-programs-2/media-literacy-program/.

[60]   Gugunishvili, Nino. 2018. "Combating Fake News: Training Students in Media Literacy in Georgia, Ukraine, Moldova."
Georgia Today. http://bit.ly/2HbAxz3

[61]   "Trainings for Members of Georgian National Communications Commission." 2017. Council of Europe Office in Georgia.
http://bit.ly/2q3S1VD

CONCLUSIONS

Based on our analysis, it seems right to say, in parallel to traditional military power, Russia resorts to the use of soft-power tools more and more often to support its foreign policy interests. These tools are being effectively used to spread the ideology and values of the Kremlin.

The Kremlin information machine influences media, political organisations, and civil society. The main source of Russia's soft-power policy is the propagandistic, aggressive, anti-Western information campaign. In contrast to the pro-Kremlin propaganda, unbiased news agencies operating in the pluralistic media environment in Georgia with comparatively small resources cannot properly counter the massive disinformation flow. Kremlin propaganda has several pillars in Georgia. One of them comprises ultra-nationalistic movements, which are influenced by the Kremlin by manipulating issues of national identity. Russian disinformation has had a significant impact on the population of middle-aged and older people who lived in the Soviet era, can speak good Russian, and have economic and other links with people living in Russia. There are also serious challenges with regard to ethnic minorities. There is a need to strengthen and broaden existing policies and to optimise relevant mechanisms to fight disinformation. The language barrier is a serious factor in the regions, populated with ethnic minorities, as it exposes their vulnerability to disinformation and to their integration with the rest of Georgia.

A shortage of resources within regional NGOs and media also poses a problem. A lack of media literacy stands out as one of the main reasons pro-Kremlin propaganda spreads among the population. There is a serious problem developing the media skills of the population; however, the lack of media skills among journalists working in Georgia is far more important.

The majority of the population in Georgia supports the country's European and Euro-Atlantic integration and the necessary reforms to achieve these goals. However, it should be noted that lately there has been a slight rise in anti-NATO feelings (2014, 15 %; 2017, 21 %).[62] One of the main reasons for this trend could be the spread of pro-Kremlin propaganda.

The survey shows that the state lacks a clear vision to counter disinformation, proved by the fact that there is no national strategy to

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[62]   Thornton, Laura, and Koba Turmanidze. 2017. Ibid.

fight such threats. Pro-Kremlin disinformation has not been officially identified as a significant threat, which leads to suspicion that the threat is not duly assessed. Another problem is the ineffectiveness of cooperation between state bodies on this issue.

It is evident that myths are successfully spread in Georgian society. The types and form of these myths have been identified. They have been proven to be effective and efficient in spreading disinformation by delivering results. There are several non-governmental groups in Georgia that try to identify and decipher these myths. However, in an environment of asymmetric resistance, they are unable to tackle the problem fully.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Recognise disinformation as a threat and develop a common vision—a strategy, to counter it.

- Increase cooperation between state bodies and support disseminating objective information (regarding the strategy).

- Introduce measures in the education system aimed at promoting media literacy. Media literacy skills should be taught at educational institutions, be they schools or higher education establishments, in combination with other subjects.

- Intensify coverage of issues related to European and Euro-Atlantic integration in the Georgian media space. The benefits to Georgia from this process should be explained in a way that is understandable to the population.

- Intensify Georgian and English language courses in regions populated with ethnic minorities.

- Support media organisations fighting disinformation and myths in order to expand the scope of their activities.

- Expand EU-related information campaigns targeted to ethnic minorities, e.g., meetings with small entrepreneurs who export their products to the EU market.

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EDIT INOTAI (IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS),
ANDRÁS DEÁK (IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS)

*Centre for Euro-Atlantic
Integration and Democracy*

HUNGARY

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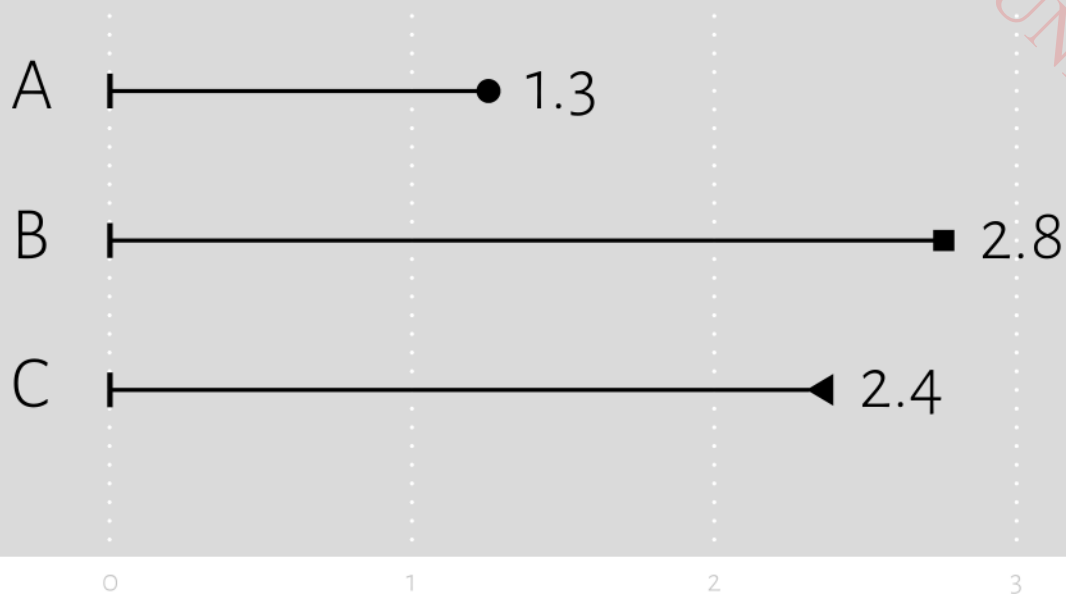
INTRODUCTION

Historically, the presence of Russian culture in Hungary was strengthened by the state during the years of communism. Russian was introduced as an obligatory foreign language, and politically acceptable pieces of Russian literature were widely read. Youth exchange and other forms of day-to-day cooperation existed for four decades. At the same time, Russian cultural rapprochement immediately disappeared after the fall of the Iron Curtain. What remained was mostly a mindset of fragmented models of individual behaviour. In the 2011 census, only 159 947 Hungarian citizens declared that they spoke Russian. Out of these, 28 000 used Russian as their first language, while the majority of the rest studied Russian in the communist era and their language skills were unknown.[1] The aggregate number of Russian speaking citizens is equivalent to 1.6 % of the Hungarian population.

Russia's enhanced intention to influence Hungarian media rose after 2012, as the Kremlin tried to influence European policymakers linked to the Nord Stream and South Stream pipelines. This effort evolved with the crisis in Ukraine, and the recent migratory pressure which has posed significant challenges for the European Union. Russia also tried to legitimate its Syrian intervention, by suggesting that the principal goal was to counter the Islamic State. Attempts to contact, infiltrate, and influence individuals and organisations that shape Hungarian public opinion were clear signs of the Russian presence. By 2015, the region's media and politicians were speaking openly about 'hybrid warfare'.

Within Hungary, sentiments towards Russia vary considerably, depending on context. In the latest poll, two-thirds of respondents supported the strengthening of economic ties, but only one-third wished for more political engagement. General openness towards Russia increased significantly between 2006 and 2012, but has since fallen off.[2] There are many reasons for this, and Russia was a hotly debated domestic policy issue both between 2007 and 2009 and following 2014. Sentiments overall are more and more related to political preferences, influenced, for example, by meetings between President Vladimir Putin and Prime Minister Viktor Orban, and the Russian-financed Paks Nuclear Power

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[1]   "Census 2011: Data on Spoken Languages." 2018. Central Statistical Office (KSH).
        http://www.ksh.hu/nepszamlalas/docs/tablak/teruleti/00/00_1_1_4_2.xls

[2]   Gábor, Stier. 2017. "Nem Mélyítenék a Kapcsolatokat Moszkvával — Magyar Nemzet."
        https://mno.hu/kulfold/nem-melyitenek-a-kapcsolatokat-moszkvaval-1383889.

Plant development,[3] which is the single largest development project in modern Hungarian history with a 12 billion EUR budget. The bilateral agreements and contracts are not public, as the government has declared the information to be sensitive, leading the opposition to believe the lack of transparency is due to corruption behind the development. *The Russian Cultural Centre in Budapest* is open to the public. While Russian soft power organisations in Hungary are not competitive in terms of film, exhibitions and performance art when compared to such institutions in the West, they do offer programmes for Russians living in Budapest.[4]

The Russkiy Mir foundation has become more active in Hungary during recent years. Beyond Budapest, it opened Russian Cultural and Educational Centres in Pecs, and in Debrecen in April 2017. Since the opening of the Russian Consulate General in Debrecen, relationships between Russia and eastern Hungary have intensified rapidly. Beyond political and business relations, the Russian Studies Department of the University of Debrecen is an important partner in these developments, co-organising conferences and hosting the Centre financed by Russkiy Mir.[5]

The Russian Orthodox Church is present in Hungary, and the last meeting between Putin and Orban, head of the ruling party Fidesz, gave a significant boost to the reconstruction of the Church, as the Hungarian government adopted a decree supporting the initiative with 7.7 million EUR. Politically speaking, though, it is not active and contains very few members in Hungary.

Political relations are on an extremely high level. Orban met Putin on four occasions in the last three years, and a fifth meeting is planned for the summer of 2018, following Orban's re-election on April 8. The main issue to be discussed is the planned extension of the nuclear power plant in Paks.

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[3]   Péter, Magyari. 2018. "A Fideszesek Nagyon Megszerették Putyint És Oroszországot." *https://444.hu/2018/03/14/a-fideszesek-nagyon-megszerettek-putyint-es-oroszorszagot*.

[4]   Russian Cultural Institute in Hungary. *http://www.ruscenter.hu/beta/ru/*

[5]   Debreceni Egyetem Orosz Központ (Russian Center at University of Debrecen). Facebook page. *https://www.facebook.com/oroszkozpontdebrecen/*

VULNERABLE GROUPS

Pro-Kremlin disinformation channels have occasionally supported Hungarian government-controlled media in spreading anti-migration ideas and news, and they resonate well among the Hungarian population. When it comes to migration and the Soros network, such channels are mostly in the form of Facebook pages or webpages that could be linked to administrators with strong pro-Russian attitudes. When it comes to broader European issues, Sputnik and RT often serve as sources of pro-government media. An RT crew was present on the border between Hungary and Serbia during the most tense moments of the migration crisis, and broadcast from Budapest on refugees camping at the city's central train station.

In terms of content, pro-Kremlin and anti-Hungarian sources of disinformation produced surprisingly little content tailored specifically to the Hungarian audience. Disinformers missed the opportunity to play off the anti-Romanian, anti-Slovak, nationalist-revisionist attitudes present in certain layers of Hungarian society. Neither have they focused on inducing or heightening tensions between the Hungarian and Roma parts of the population. We have to note that, as tensions increased between Ukraine and Hungary, following the passage of an education bill that includes restrictions on teaching in minority languages,[6] there were a number of articles on potential threats to the Hungarian minority. It is unclear how much of this content were homegrown and taken over by disinformation and pro-Kremlin websites as they served their interest, and how much was created by these sites. Based on this description, we believe the following groups are most vulnerable to pro-Kremlin disinformation:

1. The rural population that access almost exclusively pro-government media. Therefore they can more easily become subjects of pro-Kremlin narratives spread by government channels via traditional media.

2. Voters with anti-establishment attitudes, with limited media literacy and increased distrust in mainstream media are more vulnerable

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[6]   As mentioned with the interview with Mr.Gábor Horváth (conducted on February 27, 2018), editor in chief of the Hungarian daily Népszava, Hungarians seemingly have the same interest as Russians on minority issues. However even prime minister Orbán mentioned a number of times that Hungary's interest is a strong Ukraine, which is a buffer between Hungary and Russia.

to alternative news channels on the Internet, which are the main sources of disinformation in Hungary.

3. Fidesz voters accessing information mainly from pro-government sources, because news on Russian disinformation, hybrid warfare, and Russian influence in Hungary is exclusively covered by opposition media. This trend was verified in the latest opinion polls.[7]

4. Hungarians living outside Hungary. There are about 2.2 million Hungarians in neighbouring states consuming Hungarian language media, mainly from pro-government sources (1.25 million in Romania, 500 000 in Slovakia, 250 000 in Serbia, and 150 000 in Ukraine).

MEDIA LANDSCAPE

According to Freedom House's Freedom of the Press Report, Hungary's constitution protects freedoms of speech and the press, but complex and extensive media legislation enacted under Orban's government has undermined these guarantees. Public broadcasters favour Fidesz and its policy goals, and are often used to discredit the party's political opponents, as could be seen in 2018 parliamentary election campaign. The country's media freedom is ranked as the worst in the European Union.

We also have to highlight the shrinking space for independent journalists. There are fewer positions and workplaces for them, and less demand for the job they do. The oligarchic financing of Hungarian media and the vulnerability of advertisers also limit independent media. Therefore, there have been cases of journalists deciding not to publish a story, being afraid of the consequences.[8] While in Poland, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, and the majority of the EU countries, radio is the most trusted media channel, the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) says that television plays that role in Hungary.

There are currently two big commercial television broadcasters with national coverage in Hungary. *RTL Klub* is independent and critical of the government, while *TV2* is owned by an oligarch who also works as a government commissioner in the Orban government. Their average

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[7]   Péter, Magyari. 2018. Ibid.

[8]   András Szabó, Direkt-36, March 9, 2018. In-depth interview.

daily news viewing figures are 850 000 (RTL) and 750 000 (TV2).[9] Out of the two, only TV2 occasionally spreads pro-Kremlin narratives. The news channel of public television (M1) provides news 24 hours a day, but only has a couple of thousand viewers. There are Chinese and Russian language news hours, but the target group in unknown. Public TV's national sports channel news is the most viewed, with one-minute newsflashes in the breaks of sporting events.[10]

Hungary is characterised by a specific phenomenon regarding Russian disinformation channels, namely that the Russian narrative often appears in the mainstream media. This is prevalent primarily on TV channels and in newspapers that are either state-owned or influenced by the government.

Within mainstream media channels, the state news agency *MTI* is the most important, as it is the primary source of news for every Hungarian media outlet. The reason for this is that, in 2011, the Orban government decided to provide MTI content for free, which killed the competition, and led to the closure of alternative news agencies.[11] In terms of content, MTI does not publish fake or fabricated news. However, it does give room for Russian opinions, either of leading politicians or influential newspapers, which serve as channels of disinformation on multiple levels. For some reason, statements from *Ria Novosti*, *Interfax* , and even *Russia Today* are published in large numbers without any critical remark or content control in Hungarian.[12] This ranges from referring to separatists in eastern Ukraine as if they were a legitimate state to blaming the United States for the civilian death toll in Syria.

A number of major daily political newspapers also contain articles that may qualify as Russian disinformation. However, we should note that readership of print editions of these newspapers varies between 5 000 and 25 000. None of them could operate under market rules, and they are used primarily as political tools of the Hungarian oligarchs who own them. Their importance comes from their online readership and the fact that their articles are shared by the biggest online media. Therefore their impact goes beyond their primary audience.

One of them is *Magyar Hírlap*, a pro-government (almost far-right) outlet belonging to a controversial pro-government oligarch. However,

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[9]   "Ratings of top TVs of Hungary". Brand Trend. March, 2011. *http://brandtrend.hu/media/2018/03/RATINGS_2018_w11.pdf*

[10]   Gábor Horváth, Népszava, February 27, 2018. In-depth interview.

[11]   Sándor Léderer, K-Monitor, March 6, 2018. In-depth interview.

[12]   Anita Kőműves, atlatszo.hu, March 1, 2018. In-depth interview.

it is a relatively marginal newspaper, with a print-run of around 7 000 to 10 000 copies. There are numerous authors (such as Istvan Lovas and Gyula Mate T.) on the staff who regularly publish pieces of outright disinformation, anti-NATO, and anti-EU propaganda. The background of these journalists is well-known, and many of them have close connections to Russia and Russian ideologies; moreover, the whole editorial staff shares the same political views.

The staff of the other conservative and independent daily newspaper, *Magyar Nemzet* (Hungarian Nation), is often critical of the government and employs few journalists who are well known for their pro-Kremlin sentiments. The outlet's leading foreign policy journalist, Gabor Stier, can be characterised as pro-Russian (though not necessarily pro-Kremlin), and was an informed expert on Russia well before Moscow began its coordinated disinformation operations.[13] His publications are a perfect example of how hard it is to distinguish between honest convictions and intentional disinformation operations. The owner of Magyar Nemzet announced the closure of the paper following the elections. The last issue was published on April 11, 2018, but negotiations with possible investors are ongoing.

In addition, the semi-official, but extremely marginal government newspaper *Magyar Idők* (Hungarian Time) has published several pro-Russian articles recently.

Fidesz-linked oligarchs also recently bought the biggest tabloids. These publications have better readership and, although they have changed their attitude, they mostly publish MTI materials when it comes to news. Still, the number of articles with Russia-friendly themes is growing fast. According to Stier, this demonstrates the tabloids' loyalty to Orban.[14]

We have to highlight that the readership of tabloids is under 100 000, while political daily newspapers have circulations of between 8 000 and 25 000, so traditional print media might be less important than other channels.[15]

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[13]   As Mr.Stier stated in his interview:
       "Prior to 2010 I was almost the only one who was sympathetic to Russia, and now there is a large group of colleagues"

[14]   Gábor Stier, Magyar Nemzet, March 1, 2018. In-depth interview.

[15]   Spriņģe, Inga. 2017. "Small Time Propagandists." Re:Baltica (blog). 2017. *https://en.rebaltica.lv/2017/04/small-time-propagandists/*.

Regarding other channels for pro-Russian disinformation, there are currently about 80 to 100 websites in Hungary spreading the Kremlin's narratives. However, the clear majority of them do not seem to have a serious impact. Among them are here are around six to 10 propaganda websites which have real influence, such as the *Hídfő.ru*, *Oroszhírek.hu*, *Napimigráns.com*, and *Kuruc.info*. Not all of these are active in the social media sphere, at least not directly. Due to the lack of Twitter culture, only Facebook has significant pro-Russian pages and groups in Hungarian.

Russian-inspired websites have an indirect, yet important, impact on the security risk in the region. For example, many predicted that the Ukrainian conflict would spread to Hungary, and claim that the world is run by obscure societies. *The Sputnik News Agency*, a Russian media outlet for foreigners, shows a distorted image of Hungarian official politics. The country's historical experience with the Soviet Union looms large in the public psyche. Russia-linked websites are not new in Central Europe, but the intensity and amount of propaganda increased after the annexation of Crimea in early 2014. The aim seems to be to legitimise the annexation and undermine Ukraine.

LEGAL REGULATIONS

The Act on Electronic Public Service of 2009[16] and the Information Security Act of 2013[17] are the two most important regulations linked to information security. The Act on Electronic Public Service highlights the requirement of information security as a basic principle. As a general rule, all public administration bodies have to provide their electronic public services through the Central Electronic Service System, and communicate with their clients through the same system in public administrative proceedings. Hungary's National Security Strategy aims to strengthen the security of electronic information systems, enhance the protection of critical national information infrastructure, and develop adequate cyberdefence.

Furthermore, the government adopted the National Cybersecurity Strategy of Hungary and the National Cybersecurity Act in 2013. In line

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[16]   Act on Electronic Public Service of 2009. *http://bit.ly/2HWgq80*

[17]   Information Security Act of 2013. *https://net.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=a1300050.tv*

with its goals, a National Cybersecurity Coordination Council was created to oversee the developments.

Both the Cybersecurity Act and the Strategy focus mainly on cybersecurity issues such as processing data of national data assets, European critical infrastructure elements, and national critical infrastructure elements. The law prescribes the essential items known in the information security field as the CIA triad (confidentiality, integrity, and availability of information security requirements in electronic information systems and data).[18] However, it is important to highlight that the threat of information warfare and the need for development to counter this threat effectively were already included in the 2013 Strategy.

Cyberwarfare is present in Hungary. In 2016, government computer servers and a number of state institutions were blocked for a couple of hours, when 62 000 cyberattacks took place in a single day.[19] Global ransomware and cyberattacks also have an impact in Hungary, as was the case when *WannaCry* attacks took place all over Europe.[20] The pro-Russian *Ukrainian CyberBerkut*, and the globally operating anarchist *Anonymous hacker groups*, are well known in the country as well.[21]

Although the government decrees 1035/2012 on National Security Strategy and 1139/2013 on Cybersecurity Strategy mentioned threats related to information warfare, we have to highlight they do not mention Russia at all, and contain no information about countering these threats.[22] It is also important to note that there were no major adaptations in the strategy, nor in the act, despite massive changes in the international environment.

At the end of 2010, the Hungarian parliament passed legislation to tighten government control over news.[23] It deteriorated slightly in 2014, as the government continued to exert pressure on private owners to influence coverage, and a new advertising tax disproportionately affected a major private television station. However, in the same year, a proposed tax

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[18]   Szádeczky, Tamás. 2015. " Information Security Law and Strategy in Hungary." AARMS, Vol. 14, No. 4. 2015: 281–289. http://real.mtak.hu/50004/7/information_security_law.pdf

[19]   "Hungary Experiences 62,000 Cyber Attacks in One Day." ITV News. 2016. http://www.itv.com/news/update/2016-04-02/hungary-experiences-62-000-cyber-attacks-in-one-day/.

[20]   "Government Incident Response Team Issues Alert on Global Ransomware Attack." 2017. Daily News Hungary (blog). https://dailynewshungary.com/government-incident-response-team-issues-alert-global-ransomware-attack/.

[21]   Barabás, János T. 2017. "Information Warfare in Hungary." Institute for Foreign Affairs and Trade. http://kki.hu/assets/upload/02_KKI_Policy_Brief_HUN_Barabas_20170109.pdf

[22]   Lóránt Győri, Political Capital, March 9, 2018. In-depth interview.

[23]   "Hungary Passes Law Boosting Government Control over Media." 2010. Reuters. https://uk.reuters.com/article/oukin-uk-hungary-media/hungary-passes-law-boosting-government-control-over-media-idUKTRE6BK1A220101221.

on Internet data traffic was withdrawn after opponents mounted large demonstrations.[24]

Fidesz has used its majority in parliament to amend the constitution at will, at times doing so to enact legislation that had previously been rejected by the Constitutional Court. In 2013, changes adopted in this manner included a rule that political advertising during campaign periods may only be placed in media outlets free of charge. Critics argued that private outlets would have little incentive to carry such material, further limiting media access for opposition parties in particular.

INSTITUTIONAL SETUP

Hungary has no special units for dealing with information warfare. Although the government acknowledges the existence of information warfare, it downplay its role in hybrid warfare.

As one member of staff at the Hungarian Ministry of Defence said while being interviewed for this study:

'Disinformation actions are appearing in various fields of the media as part of hybrid warfare. Therefore, detection and identification of the players (states) is carried out by the local national security services and law enforcement bodies, who share the information continuously'. [25]

Indeed, this was the standard answer when the biggest Hungarian online news portal tried to investigate who is responsible for countering information warfare.[26] Our source added that cooperation among the different agencies has been more effective since 2016, which marked the founding of the Hungarian Information Fusion System (Centre for Anti-terrorism, Information and Criminal Analysis—TIBEK). Nonetheless, there is still not a single special task force dealing with the issue.

Existing government agencies such as GovCERT, the National Cybersecurity Centre and others focus exclusively on the cybersecurity aspect of the threat and gave no response to questions about information warfare.

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[24]   "Hungary Scraps Controversial Web Tax." 2014. BBC News. *http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-29846285*.

[25]   Anonymous informant, Ministry of Defence of Hungary, March 11, 2018. In-depth interview.

[26]   Hanula, Zsolt. 2017. "Gyűlöletből És Rettegésből Építik Az Alternatív Univerzumot." Index. *https://index.hu/tech/2017/01/25/gyuloletbol_es_rettegesbol_epitik_az_alternativ_univerzumot/*.

Other professional bodies overseeing media, such as the National Media and Infocommunications Authority, claim they do not have the authority to investigate whether news articles are fake or not.

Whenever MPs from the opposition raise the problem, government representatives downplay the threat and respond that this issue is among the standard operational competences of the national security services. This was also referred to by our sources (including from the MoD) in a number of interviews.

DIGITAL DEBUNKING TEAMS

There are a number of non-governmental organisations dealing with digital debunking, among which *Political Capital* is the most influential. Unfortunately, thematic debunking sites don't exist in Hungary, so journalists and NGOs (including Political Capital and *CEID*) have focused on countering Russian disinformation in recent years. Investigative journalists largely work on exposing governmental disinformation, but their work is only present on critical opposition websites. The most important media organisations dealing with Russian disinformation are:

- Index (index.hu)

- 444.hu

- Átlátszó (atlatszo.hu)

- Direkt36 (direkt36.hu)

K-Monitor has some IT projects to identify and track fake news, and automatically search for patterns and specifics. These are developed for tracking corruption, but are also applicable in the fake news field.[27]

One of the closed Facebook groups includes all major stakeholders dealing with counteracting Kremlin-led disinformation in Hungary. These stakeholders are Russia-focused NGOs, experts on transparency, opposition politicians, investigative journalists, and foreign policy journalists. The group currently consists of 25 individuals.

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[27]   Sándor Léderer, K-Monitor, March 6, 2018. In-depth interview.

MEDIA LITERACY PROJECTS

In December 2015, the Hungarian government adopted the 2012/2015 Government Decree on the *Digital Success Programme*,[28] based on which three strategies were defined, two of which affect media literacy. These are the Digital Child Protection Strategy of Hungary and the Digital Education Strategy of Hungary. Both strategies include media literacy elements, primarily through complex programmes targeting students, parents and teachers.

The professional implementation of the Digital Education Strategy is supported by the *Digital Pedagogical Methodology Center*, which provides methodology, a professional background and expert base, and deals with the professional supervision of applications and projects related to the implementation of the Strategy.

With regard to media literacy and online security, the *National Core* contains elements by school grades. It defines when and to what extent it is necessary to deal with issues of media literacy and online safety. Under this theme, students discuss the role of media, the role and issue of advertisements, media addiction, norm violations, and media influence. In practical classes, they also create and publish their own content. The *Accreditation Department of the Educational Authority* organises several media literacy training sessions for educators.

Promoting media literacy and online safety through non-formal and informal learning is also supported by the state. For example, in the framework of an EU Programme Future Conscious Media Consumers—Media Literacy and Media Awareness dissemination', the National Media and Infocommunications Authority (NMHH) established the *Magic Valley* media education training centre, which aims to support the development of media awareness among young people. The first centre was opened in Budapest in 2014, and another in Debrecen in 2017.

The *Media Union*, the association of Hungarian media and advertisement companies, aims to identify and publish research on significant social issues every year, and sets out to support and promote them in the media. The goal is to involve as many media outlets as possible, in order to raise

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[28]   "Digital Success Programme." 2017. Cabinet Office of the Prime Minister.
http://www.kormany.hu/en/cabinet-office-of-the-prime-minister/hu/digital-success-programme.

social awareness to the maximum in an effective, unified, and widely accessible manner. The Media Union Foundation's 2014 *'Don't you mind?'* campaign addressed the issue and the importance of responsible media use. From May 2015, the campaign shifted its focus to one of the most pressing challenges of social media: cyberbullying.

Other EU media literacy programmes are also accessible in Hungary, but it is worth noting that neither the Hungarian government nor the EU have extensive programmes available for the older generations. Therefore, the vast majority of Hungary's politically active citizens have never encountered media literacy programmes.

CONCLUSIONS

Hungary has not developed an immune system to protect itself from Russian information pressure. Although the direct Russian presence is very limited in the country in terms of Hungarian specific content, like-minded individuals and pro-government media often use pro-Kremlin content in support of their own agenda.

Meanwhile pro-government channels are the primary source of the dissemination of pro-Kremlin narratives and disinformation in Hungary. Obviously, this means that these outlets' users are the most vulnerable to disinformation.

Although the government has developed and launched a large number of media literacy programmes, their focus is limited to the younger generation.

Thus far, no steps have been made to set up any special units dealing with information warfare. This is because the Hungarian government is often inspired by pro-Kremlin disinformation narratives, and gives no space at all to debunking teams of NGOs or investigative journalists.

That also means that authorities do nothing to limit the spread of pro-Kremlin disinformation. Even when Hungary's vulnerability was revealed, no political steps were taken to limit or reduce exposure. There is not a single institution or special unit responsible for monitoring and countering disinformation, and we are not aware of any case when the prosecutor general called for a special investigation.

In addition to this, attacks against Hungary also lead to the assumption that the government's increasingly Russia-friendly policy line is apparently unable to defend the country from Russian information pressure.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. As long as government interests coincide with the interest of the Kremlin, no policy recommendation targeting Hungarian authorities will succeed, and no country-wide programme leading to increased immunity can be implemented successfully.

2. Hungary should be targeted through regional programmes to counter Kremlin-led disinformation.

3. In this process, possible U.S. and Polish initiatives have the greatest chance of gaining government support, bearing in mind the state of bilateral and multilateral relations. As the U.S. State Department is launching new funding programmes to counter Russian disinformation, the involvement of pro-government think tanks in Hungary is probably the best way to access decision-makers. We are aware of ongoing programme developments focusing on information warfare in Central Europe at the Atlantic Council, CEPA and the International Republican Institute (among others).

4. Launching Visegrad Group policy discussions and creating regional teams to counter disinformation has a less professionally-focused but politically logical element. As the core of an institutional framework could be developed in Hungary, the government would be bound to deal with the problem.

5. External funding for projects focusing on countering information warfare should be developed, by expanding both content and funding.

6. Best practices among civilian projects in the region should be transferred to the few active Hungarian organisations in this field.

7. Media literacy toolkits should be developed independently of administrative bodies, to reveal government exposure and responsibility.

8. As the government refuses to deal with the problem, special programmes focusing on raising awareness of the opposition MPs should be launched. In this way, the problem could be kept on the political agenda.

ANDIS
KUDORS

*Centre for East European
Policy Studies*

LATVIA

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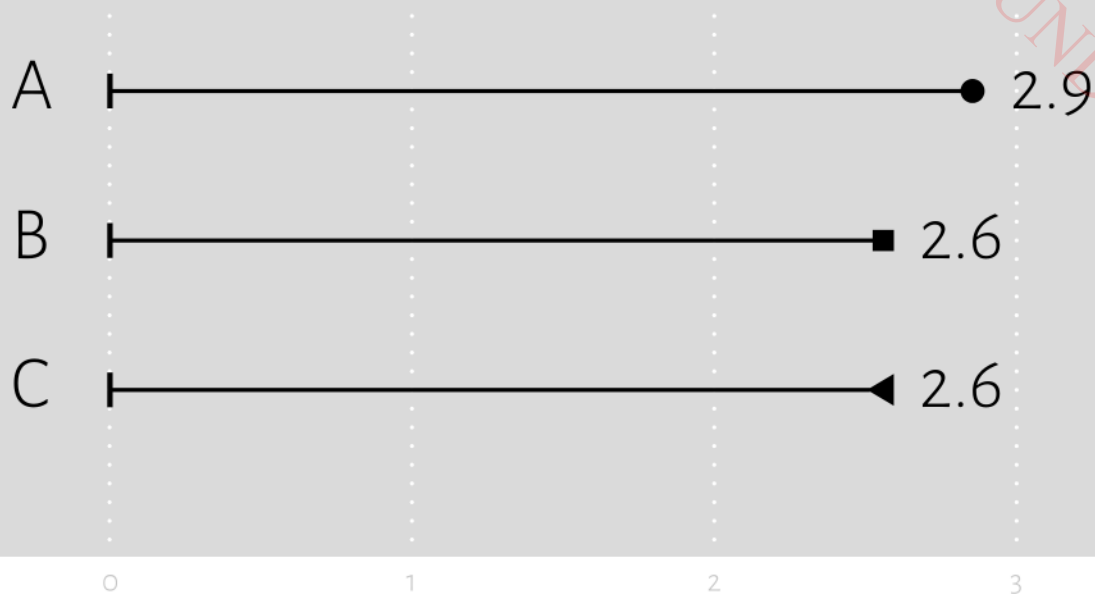
INTRODUCTION

Since the restoration of independence and statehood, Latvia has achieved remarkable results in democracy-building and overcoming its Soviet legacy. However, problems rooted in the Soviet era persist, making Latvia vulnerable and providing a path for the dissemination of Kremlin-led disinformation and propaganda.

Latvia, along with the other Baltic states, can be regarded as a success story in the transition to a liberal democracy, yet the consequences of Soviet occupation continue to be observed in almost all areas related to the national economy and the development of society. Since the restoration of independence in 1991, Latvia has been aiming to strengthen freedom of media and expression. Article 100 of the Satversme (Constitution) defines the foundations of Latvia's media policy:

'Everyone has the right to freedom of expression, which includes the right to freely acquire, retain, and distribute information, and express his or her views. Censorship is prohibited'.[1]

According to the estimate by Freedom House in its *'Nations in Transit'*, Latvia consistently is third best among the 29 countries tracked in their consolidation of democracy. This puts the country ahead of others, including Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary, and only lagging behind Slovenia and Estonia.[2]

Accession to the EU and NATO in 2004 contributed to Latvia's consolidation of democracy and diminished Russian economic and political influence in the country. However, one of the remaining problems is the ethnically divided political environment, which diverts attention from other important issues and increases Russia's influence in Latvia. There are other issues within the context of Russia's informational influence to be addressed too, including the divided media space, segregated education system, and unequal regional development. For instance, Latvia's eastern region of Latgale has more economic and social problems than other parts of the country.

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[1]   Latvijas Republikas Satversme. Accessed March 19, 2018. *https://likumi.lv/doc.php?id=57980*.

[2]   Nations in Transit 2017. FreedomHouse. Accessed September 19, 2017. *https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/NIT2017_booklet_FINAL_0.pdf*.

VULNERABLE GROUPS

Russia's information campaigns in Latvia target and spread individualised content to specific groups in society. Among the major ethnic groups in Latvia, 61.8 % are Latvian, 25.6 % Russian, 3.3 % Belarusian, and 2.3 % Ukrainian.[3] The highest proportion of Latvians is in the Kurzeme and Vidzeme regions and lowest in Riga and Latgale. It should be noted that the Russian compatriots' policymakers try to cluster all Russian-speaking people into one. Thus, the executives of Russia's information influence policy aim at a large part of the population of Latvia. This includes not only ethnic Russians, but Ukrainians, Belarusians, and others.

Russians living in Latvia are not a homogeneous group in terms of political opinions and values. Since the annexation of Crimea in 2014, several public surveys about general attitudes towards foreign and domestic policies in Latvia indicate significant differences between ethnic Russians in Latvia.[4] Based on the data of these surveys, this part of the population can be roughly divided into three large groups: European-minded Russian-language speakers loyal to the Latvian state and the idea of its existence, 'neutral' Russians who are not sufficiently integrated into Latvian society but at the same time are not pro-Kremlin, and those who consider themselves Russian compatriots and support the ideas to construct a 'Russian World'.

The Kremlin-led propaganda efforts are predominantly aimed at 'neutral' Russians (including Ukrainians and Belarusians), whose dissent over domestic policy and the economic situation in Latvia is used by Russia's public diplomacy agents. However, it must be emphasised that this division is conditional. People may agree on one issue but differ on others, thus not falling into any of the three groups. The main point to remember is that Russia deliberately exaggerates the personification that the entire Russian-speaking population of Latvia always supports Russian foreign policy.

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[3]   Centrālais statistikas birojs. Accessed September 17, 2017.
http://www.csb.gov.lv/sites/default/files/skoleniem/iedzivotaji/etniskais_sastavs.pdf.

[4]   "Mazākumtautību līdzdalība demokrātiskajos procesos Latvijā", nodibinājums "Baltic Institute of Social Sciences" pēc KM pasūtījuma (2015). Accessed September 19, 2017. http://bit.ly/2IDgq62; See more "Latvijas iedzīvotāju viedoklis par valsts aizsardzības jautājumiem". Latvijas iedzīvotāju aptauja, (2016), SKDS, Accessed September 19, 2017. http://www.mod.gov.lv/~/media/AM/Ministrija/Sab_doma/2016/SKDS_aptauja_2016.ashx.

MEDIA LANDSCAPE

According to the international organisation Reporters Without Borders' '2017 World Press Freedom Index', Latvia is ranked as the 28th most liberal among the 180 nations surveyed.[5] This indicator can be considered a good achievement, but there are several problems on closer inspection. One that has been mentioned by several Latvian media and information-security experts is the disproportionately large presence of Russian media in Latvia.[6] Māris Cepurītis, a researcher at the Centre for East European Policy Studies, and Rita Ruduša, director of the Baltic Media Centre of Excellence, mentioned in their interviews that the disproportionally large presence of Russian and Russian-language media that attempts to ensure Russia's political influence in Latvia is one of the country's major challenges to its information security.[7]

This is especially noticeable in the package offers by cable TV providers. Russian radio stations are also represented in large numbers on FM radio. *'Asymmetry'* is a keyword when talking about the entrenchment of Russian information channels in Latvia. Latvian public media in Russian—*Latvian Radio 4, the United Latvian Public Media internet portal lsm.lv, and the LTV 7 channel*, which broadcasts segments in the Russian language—cannot play the counterweight role to the well-funded and attractive Russian TV channels, such as *RTR Planeta*, *NTV Mir*, *First Channel*, *REN TV Baltija*, and others present in the information space. One of the major problems is the enormous difference between the funding of the Latvian and Russian TV channels. This contest is largely won by the Moscow channels (at least in primarily Russian-speaking markets).

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[5]   "2017 World Press Freedom Index. Reporters Without Borders." RSF. Accessed September 17, 2017. *https://rsf.org/en/ranking*.

[6]   A. Rožukalne, Dr. - prof., Riga Stradins University, September 2017. In-depth interview.
        M. Cepurītis, researcher, the Centre for East European Policy Studies, September 2017. In-depth interview.
        O. Ozols, publicist, writer, September 2017. In-depth interview.
        A. Dimants, former director, NEPLP, September 2017. In-depth interview.
        M. Kaprāns, researcher, University of Latvia, September 2017. In-depth interview.
        R. Ruduša, director, Baltic Media Centre of Excellence, September 2017. In-depth interview.

        Roberts Putnis, former director, Media Policy Division at Ministry of Culture, September 2017. In-depth interview.
        Inga Spriņģe, editor, Re:Baltica, September 2017. In-depth interview.

        Sanita Jemberga, executive director, Re:Baltica, chairman, Latvian Association of Journalists, September 2017. In-depth interview.

        S. Denisa-Liepniece, expert, Baltic Media Centre of Excellence, September 2017. In-depth interview.

        Anonymous high-ranking employee, Ministry of Defence of Latvia, September 2017. In-depth interview.

        Anonymous high-ranking employee, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Latvia, September 2017. In-depth interview.

[7]   Ibid.

Russian TV and radio channels are quasi media because the providers can only be partially monitored for compliance with Latvian legislation. Russian TV channels are provided by the authorised representatives of the Russian TV companies, who consist of Russian and Latvian entrepreneurs cooperating with the Russian channels. They receive permission from various channels to retransmit and attract sponsorship from Latvian advertisers. Within this context, the most significant in the Baltic states are the *SIA Baltic Media Alliance* and *SIA Baltic Media Union*.[8]

TV Channel	Share, %
TV 3	10.2
LTV 1	9.0
PBK (First Baltic Channel)	8.1
LNT	7.8
NTV Mir Baltic	7.2
RTR Planeta Baltija	6.7
TV 6	3.1
TV 3+	2.9
LTV 7	2.9
REN TV Baltic	2.8
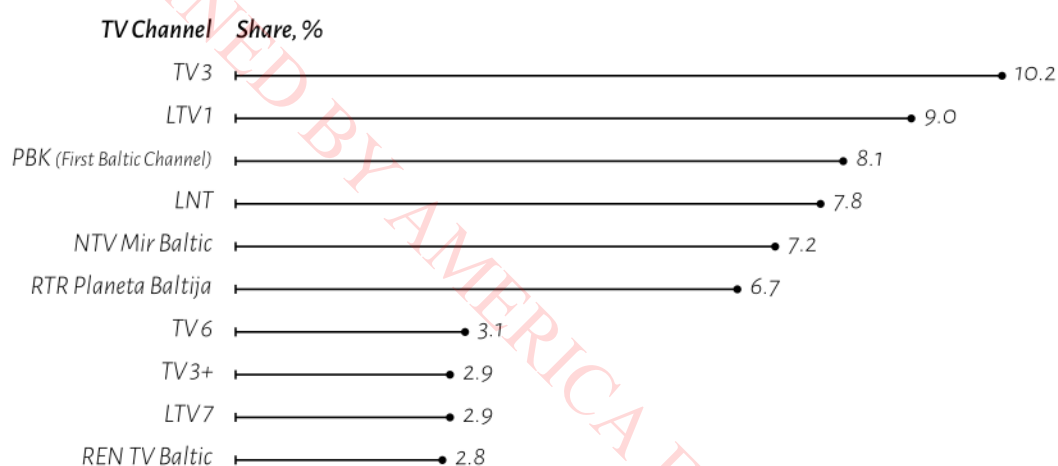
Most popular TV channels in Latvia[9]

Source: TNS.lv · August, 2017

Chart No. 1 shows that the most popular TV channel in Latvia in August of 2017 was *TV3* (a commercial TV channel belonging to the MTG group) with 10.2 % of the market. The second most-visible channel was *LTV1* (Latvian public media), with 9 % of the total viewership. The third most-viewed channel was *PBK*, which accounted for 8.1 % of the market.[10] An important note, PBK is broadcast in Russian and about 70 % of its footage is made in Russia (retransmission of *First Russian Channel ORT*) and presents a position favourable to the Kremlin. However, the local Latvian PBK news programs are politically more neutral than the channel's news broadcasts created in Moscow studios.

[8]   Anda Rožukalne, "Krievijas mediji Latvijā: īpašnieki, regulācija, ietekme" in Andis Kudors (ed.) Krievijas publiskā diplomātija Latvijā: mediji un nevalstiskais sektors, Rīga: APPC, LU Apgāds, 2014, p.85.

[9]   "Konsolidētās TV skatītākais kanāls augustā — TV 3". TNS. 12.09.2017. Accessed March 19, 2018.

[10]   Ibid.

LTV 7 channel is the Latvian national broadcaster and parts of its programmes are in the Russian language. However, its 8th−9th place in the ratings indicates it is incapable of competing with the Russian channels *NTV Mir Baltic* and *RTR Planeta Baltija*, which are ranked fifth and sixth, respectively, among the most popular channels. Another important note, TV channels NTV Mir Baltic and RTR Planeta Baltija are the most active distributors of official Kremlin-backed propaganda in Latvia. PBK and REN TV Baltic have more entertaining programmes. Nevertheless, the content of their news and political discussion demonstrates they are not far behind the other two channels. Consequently, we can conclude that among the 10 most popular TV channels in Latvia, four spread Russian propaganda and disinformation. It can also be established that Russians and Russian speakers living in Latvia (Ukrainians, Belarusians, etc.) prefer PBK.[11]

Commercial channels *TV 3*, *LNT*, *TV 6*, and *TV3+* are ranked among the 10 most popular channels and are part of the MTG group. These channels enrich the Latvian media environment through their news broadcasts and entertainment programmes. However, the control of these channels by a single owner decreases competition on the media market.

This situation distorts the domestic policy process because, in part, constituents live within the disinformation and propaganda space of Russia. This leads to influence on Latvian citizens' formation of their political views and preferences when supporting particular political parties. A 2014 poll showed that PBK Latvia's news is very popular among the Russian-speaking population in Latvia. More importantly, this audience trusts it. The data showed that this news is mostly viewed by non-Latvians living in Latvia, and in comparison with other news channels available on Latvian TV channels, the majority of its viewers are non-citizens.[12] In contrast, a survey carried out in 2016 concluded that the Latvian-speaking audience showed a lot of trust in LTV and Radio Latvia. The trust index of LTV reaches 72 % (regular LTV viewers). The trust index for Radio Latvia is 82 % (regular Radio Latvia audience).[13]

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[11] "Pētījums: Mazāk nekā puse Latvijas iedzīvotāju spēj atpazīt uzticamu informāciju". 18.07.2017. Accessed September 17, 2017. *http://bit.ly/2FQDvv7*.

[12] Anda Rožukalne, "*Kurām TV ziņām uzticas auditorija. Kāpēc?*". Accessed September 17, 2017. *https://lv.ejo-online.eu/2888/etika-un-kvalitate/kuram-tv-zinam-uzticas-auditorija-kapec*.

[13] "Sabiedriskā labuma tests: saglabājas augsta auditorijas apmierinātība un uzticēšanās LTV un LR saturam". 13.05.2016. Accessed September 17, 2017 *http://bit.ly/2ptQGYSl*.

A relatively large number of radio channels operate in Latvia. This includes Latvian commercial and public radio available throughout the country as well as several regional radio stations. Latvian public media, *Latvijas Radio 1* (news radio broadcasting in Latvian), and *Latvijas Radio 2* (Latvian music radio), were ranked among the three most popular radio channels in spring 2017. This was a remarkable result considering the strong competition.

Radio Channel   Share %

Radio Channel	Share %
Latvijas Radio 2	19.7
Radio Skonto	11.5
Latvijas Radio 1	9.6
Radio SWH	5.5
HER (Eiropas hitu radio)	5.2
Star FM	4.4
SWH+	4.4
Radio TEV	4.1
Latvijas Radio 4	4.0
TOP Radio	3.2
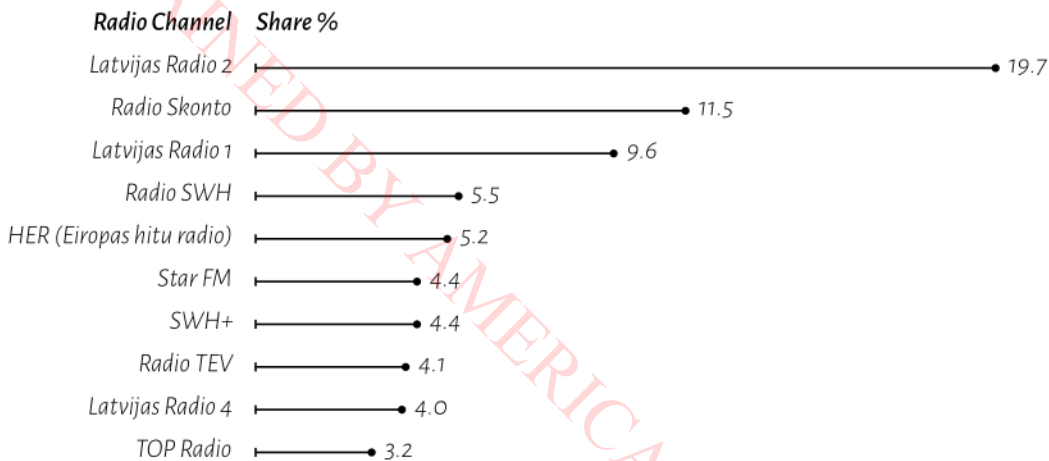
Most popular Radio channels in Latvia[14]

Source: TNS.lv · Spring 2017

Three out of the 10 most popular radio channels in Latvia (*SWH+*, *Latvijas Radio 4*, and *TOP Radio*) broadcast in Russian. Latvijas Radio 4 is a public channel that attracts a significant segment of the Russian-speaking audience in Latvia, which is a positive phenomenon in the context of decreasing Russian influence on the airwaves.

The internet is regularly used by 65 % of the population in Latvia.[15] According to 2017 figures, the top three websites based on a one-day average were: *Delfi.lv* (a news portal in Latvian and Russian), *Inbox.lv* (in Latvian and Russian), and *TVnet.lv/Apollo.lv* (news portal in Latvian and Russian). [16]

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[14] "Pavasarī radio vismaz reizi nedēļā klausījušies 78 % Latvijas iedzīvotāju". TNS.lv. Accessed October 16, 2017.
http://www.tns.lv/?lang=lv&fullarticle=true&category=showuid&id=5144.

[15] "Regulāri internetu lieto jau 68 per cent Latvijas iedzīvotāju". TNS.lv. Accessed September 17, 2017.
http://tns.lv/?lang=lv&fullarticle=true&category=showuid&id=4797&mark=interneta.

[16] "Interneta lapu Top 25 janvārī", GEMIUS, 23.02.2017. Accessed September 17, 2017.
http://www.gemius.lv/all-reader-news/interneta-lapu-top-25-janvari.html.

Website	One-day average audience	
Delfi.lv		927 696
Inbox.lv		909 834
TVnet.lv / Apollo.lv		896 846
Draugiem.lv		563 986
Kasjauns.lv		497 500
Skaties.lv		490 863
Salidzini.lv		435 803
Lsm.lv		397 058
La.lv		389 097
1188.lv		343 541
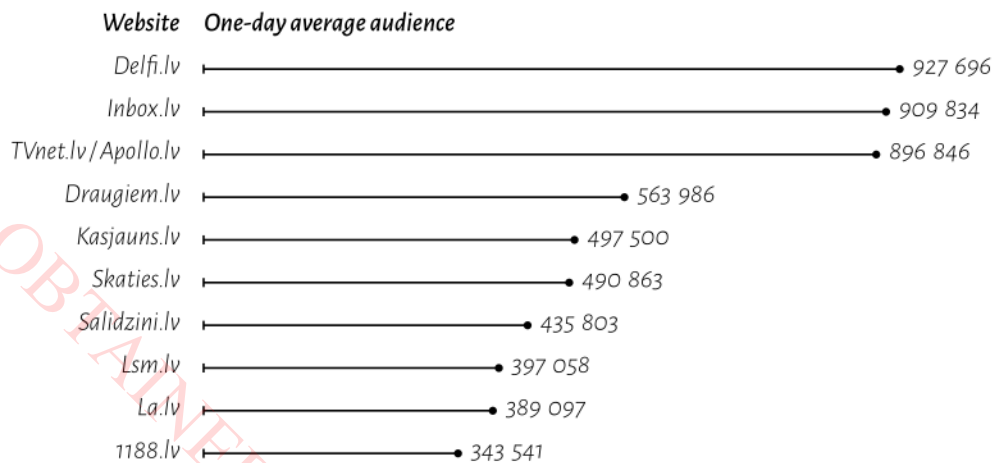
Most popular Websites in Latvia[17]

Source: GEMIUS.lv · January 2017

It is essential to highlight the most popular news portals in Latvia were Delfi and TVnet, which make different content in Latvian and Russian. Such an approach does not necessarily contribute to the consolidation of society, because Latvians and Russians living in the same country encounter different reports and interpretations, even within the same media outlet. Both of these portals have a robust comment sections. Part of the comments are rather aggressive and verge on hatred. However, the web pages' comment sections are not visited as intensely as 10 years ago. Many active commenters have moved to Twitter, Facebook, and Draugiem.lv (Latvian analogue). In part, Twitter comments have been automated. In its 2017 research, the Riga based *NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence* drew a significant conclusion that 'Russian-language bots' created roughly 84 % of all Russian messages about NATO in the Baltic states and Poland on Twitter.[18]

In 2017, a survey conducted by *Latvijas fakti* (Latvian Facts) showed that Delfi.lv is the county's most popular news source, followed by two other internet sites (Tvnet.lv and Apollo.lv). Next are the TV channels, Latvian public television LTV 1 programme *'Panorāma'* as well as the first channel of Latvian Television, and then the commercial channels (LNT, PBK and TV3).[19] The Russian-speaking residents indicated their favourite portal

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[17]   Ibid.

[18]   "Robotrolling 2017/1". NATO StartCom COE. Accessed October 17, 2017. http://www.stratcomcoe.org/robotrolling-20171.

[19]   "Pētījums: Mazāk nekā puse Latvijas iedzīvotāju spēj atpazīt uzticamu informāciju." September 17, 2017. http://bit.ly/2FQDvv7.

was the Russian version of Delfi followed by PBK's, and also the LTV 1 news programme Panorāma, among others. About a third of the respondents indicated they used media in Russian.[20] Thus, the overlap between the sources of information used by the Latvian- and Russian-speaking audiences is minimal. The divided information space continues to maintain the split in the political environment among the population and facilitates the dissemination of Kremlin-backed fake news and propaganda in Latvia.

Self-regulation of the media environment in Latvia is aggravated by the existence of two professional journalist associations, the *Latvian Association of Journalists* (LŽA) and the *Latvian Journalists' Union* (LŽS). LŽA was founded in 2010 and has more than 100 members affiliated with newspapers, magazines, radio, TV and internet media. There are also university lecturers among the members.[21] Besides the these two, there are other media-related associations in Latvia, including the *Association of Press Publishers of Latvia, the Latvian Association of Broadcasting Organisations and the Latvian Internet Association*. Speaking about safeguarding ethical principles of journalism and supporting the professional growth of journalists, the most active and prominent is LŽA, currently headed by Rita Ruduša. She is also the executive director of the *Baltic Media Excellence Centre*. In general, it has to be concluded that the efforts of professional organisations alone are not enough to counteract the consequences of the massive Russian disinformation in Latvia.

The problem is that LŽS acts rather as a journalists' trade union, not paying much attention to the ethics of its members. In turn, the Rita Ruduša-lead LŽA maintains a higher standard of professional ethics through its Ethics Commission, but not all Latvian journalists are members. The existence of two organisations rather hampers the process of effective self-regulation within Latvia's media sphere.

[20]   Ibid.

[21]   Latvijas Žurnālistu asociācija. Accessed September 17, 2017. http://www.latvijaszurnalisti.lv/par-asociaciju/.

LEGAL REGULATIONS AND INSTITUTIONAL SETUP

Media regulation in Latvia mainly concerns the financing, monitoring, and management of broadcasting media (especially public media). According to media expert Anda Rožukalne, the press is poorly regulated and regulatory norms for internet media have not been developed.[22] The regulatory framework of Latvian media is based on outdated normative acts: the 'Law on the Press and Other Mass Media',[23] the 'Advertisement Law' adopted on December 20, 1990, and the 'Law on Electronic Media', adopted on July 12, 2010, which establishes the arrangements and rules for electronic media under the jurisdiction of Latvia. Control of compliance with this law is entrusted to the *National Electronic Mass Media Council* (NEPLP). The former director of NEPLP, Ainārs Dimants, has indicated in an interview that the Latvian internet media environment is not controlled sufficiently by the state authorities even though it has become an important part of the information space. Dimants also mentioned that it is necessary to raise the NEPLP's legal capacity to allow it to react effectively to infringements in media activities.[24]

Latvia is subject to Directive 2010/13/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council. This directive coordinates the provision of audiovisual services in EU countries.[25] Unfortunately, the Audiovisual Media Services Directive allows media to be registered in any EU country as long as one of the company's board members resides in one of these countries. This complicates the regulation of particular organisations within a single country because media is regulated in accordance with the legal acts of the country of registration. This means that channels and media companies working inside Latvia but formally established outside the country may not be subject to the Latvian regulator.[26]

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[22]   Anda Rožukalne, "Krievijas mediji Latvijā: īpašnieki, regulācija, ietekme" in Andis Kudors (ed.)
        Krievijas publiskā diplomātija Latvijā: mediji un nevalstiskais sektors, Rīga: APPC, LU Apgāds, 2014, p.91.

[23]   Latvijas Republikas Satversme. Accessed October 17, 2017. *https://likumi.lv/doc.php?id=57980*.

[24]   Ibid.

[25]   "Eiropas Parlamenta un Padomes direktīva, 2010/13/ES (2010)", skatīts 05.07.2014. Accessed September 17, 2017
        http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2010:095:0001:0024:LV:PDF.

[26]   Anda Rožukalne, "Krievijas mediji Latvijā: īpašnieki, regulācija, ietekme" in Andis Kudors (ed.)
        Krievijas publiskā diplomātija Latvijā: mediji un nevalstiskais sektors, Rīga: APPC, LU Apgāds, 2014, p.93.

NEPLP adopted the 'National Strategy for the Development of the Electronic Media Sector for 2012–2017' following consultations with industry stakeholders.[27] Among the strategic goals are the following: (a) strengthening and reforming public media by increasing their role in bolstering national culture and identity, and (b) providing information space in the Latvian language and the broadcasting of national electronic media throughout the whole territory of Latvia, especially in the eastern border area.[28] In 2017, the NEPLP elaborated the 'National Strategy for the Development of the Electronic Media Sector for 2018–2022'.[29] One of the most important documents defining state media policy was mentioned in the 2016 'Cabinet of Ministers decree No. 667', which adopted the 'Latvian Media Policy Guidelines for 2016–2020'.[30]

There is no distinct information-security doctrine in Latvia. Therefore, all of these concept documents both directly and indirectly affect the security of the information space. The 'National Security Concept of Latvia' (2011) also focuses on threats to the information space. For example, the concept concluded that,

'Latvian as a state language and a unifying element of society has not been rooted in several areas, for example, in business and the information environment. Separate information spaces diminish the capabilities of the state to address all of society equally effectively; therefore, a certain part does not form a sense of belonging to Latvia'.[31]

The following task is quoted among the array of solutions,

'The state must ensure that obstacles are eliminated so that the national information space is accessible to the largest possible part of Latvian society that will take it in everyday use to obtain the necessary information'.[32]

The activities by the NEPLP cover only part of the information-space issues. The ongoing events in the Latvian information space should be regarded in a wider strategic approach. The order by the Cabinet of Ministers

[27]   "Elektronisko plašsaziņas līdzekļu nozares attīstības nacionālā stratēģija 2012.-2017". Accessed September 17, 2017. *http://neplpadome.lv/lv/sakums/normativie-akti/nacionala-strategija.html*.

[28]   Nacionālā stratēģija. Accessed September 21, 2017. *http://neplpadome.lv/lv/sakums/normativie-akti/nacionala-strategija.html*.

[29]   "Aptauja par Elektronisko plašsaziņas līdzekļu nozares attīstības nacionālo stratēģiju 2018–2022". Accessed October 16, 2017. *http://bit.ly/2FQe5hs*.

[30]   "Par Latvijas mediju politikas pamatnostādnēm 2016.-2020". Gadam. Accessed September 19, 2017. *https://likumi.lv/doc.php?id=286455*.

[31]   National Security Concept. Accessed September 12, 2017. *http://bit.ly/2IDlpe1*.

[32]   Ibid.

of Latvia in the 'Guidelines for Latvian Media Policy 2016−2020' designates the Ministry of Culture as the institution responsible for the implementation of the guidelines. In 2015, the ministry established the *Division of Media Policy*, whose task is to develop media policy but not to monitor media activity in practice. However, according to most of the interviewed experts,[33] Latvia lacks a serious national strategy for information-security policy. This is partly due to a lack of understanding among the political elite about the democratic importance of free media and high-quality journalism. For example, Executive Director of *Re:Baltica* Sanita Jemberga indicates that

'*Latvian politicians are hardly declaring in public all the high-quality, free, pluralistic activities of media as a value*'.

Jemberga adds that Latvia lacks empirical knowledge on the impact of Russian media on the practical actions of various groups of society.[34]

DIGITAL DEBUNKING TEAMS

There are several projects in Latvia debunking deception by Russian and local media, but given the massive presence of Russian media, one could not say such projects are sufficient. One successful example in news-checking is the '*Lie detector*' section of the Latvian news portal lsm.lv, which checks whether Latvian politicians and officials are telling the truth. They select statements and examine the facts contained in the interpretative text.[35] However, this is not a project related to Russia's campaign of deception and lies but contributes to the maintenance of critical thinking of the audience, which becomes accustomed to the idea that facts should be verified.

Latvian media expert Mārtiņš Kaprāns regularly reveals Russian disinformation about Latvia, the Baltic states, and NATO on the website of the *Centre for European Policy Analysis* (CEPA, www.cepa.org).[36] Kaprāns both illuminates the lies of Russian media and analyses the methods used by Russian propagandists. Once a month, an analyst with the *Centre for*

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[33]   Ibid.

[34]   Ibid.

[35]   "Melu detektors". http://www.lsm.lv/temas/melu-detektors/.

[36]   CEPA Stratcom Program. Accessed September 17, 2017. http://infowar.cepa.org/Countries/Latvia.

East European Policy Studies (CEEPS), Arnis Latišenko, gives a few examples of deception from the most popular news portal in Latvia, Delfi.lv.[37] Latišenko selects the most striking and typical instances of deception created by Russia while dispelling the lies.

IN FOCUS

One of Latvia's success stories was the creation of investigative journalism centre Re:Baltica. For several years, Re:Baltica has been studying various issues of public interest. This includes the social and educational spheres as they relate to media. In the context of Russia's information influence, Re:Baltica's research on the influence of Russian media and compatriots as well as the channels used for it in Latvia—such as the study 'Kremlin's Millions' on Russia's support for radical Russian activists in Latvia and 'Russkiy Mir' about Russian media influence in Latvia—are particularly valuable. Another example of an investigation is the article 'Sputnik's Unknown Brother', revealing the three Baltic Russian-language news sites known collectively as 'Baltnews' that are secretly linked to the Kremlin's global propaganda network. 'Small-time propagandists' is one of the most recent investigative reports about the disseminators of fake news on the internet.

On Facebook, '*Elves Unit*', led by the former Latvian diplomat Ingmars Bisenieks, started operating in 2017.[38] The task of the unit is to uncover internet trolling (messages, fake accounts) that spread fake news on social networks. Volunteer 'elves' communicate with each other about trolls and suspicious news sites on a Facebook group exchange and post relevant publications on their Facebook pages. The 'elves' also hold informative seminars and invite communications and policy experts to share their knowledge. Another example of propaganda illumination is media expert Jānis Polis' project '*Internet propaganda in Latvia*' at the website *ardomu.lv*.[39] Polis highlights examples of propaganda in Latvia mostly related to pro-Kremlin political forces. This list can be concluded with one example from the most popular Latvian newspaper, *Latvijas Avīze*, where a separate

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[37]   "APPC: Maldināšana—Latvijas gadījums Nr.3". DELFI. Accessed September 1, 2017. *http://www.delfi.lv/a/49196239*.

[38]   "Elfu vienība". Accessed September 19, 2017. *https://www.facebook.com/groups/374768412896666/*.

[39]   "Interneta Propaganda Latvijā. 4. Daļa. Lembergs Un…—Ardomu". Ar domu. Accessed September 19, 2017. *http://ardomu.lv/post/161081315121/propaganda4*.

section, '*LA Atmasko (LA Unveils)*', regularly reviews instances of deception and misrepresentation in Russian media.[40]

IN
FOCUS

Another success story is the creation of the Baltic Media Centre of Excellence in 2015, which is a platform for the development of smart journalism in the Baltics, Eastern Partnership countries, and other regions. The aim of the centre is to promote the professional development of journalists and strengthen the competence of media users and critical thinking. The centre collects and generates knowledge about media environments and audiences in the Baltic and other regions. This is also the region's most important player in the field of media literacy.

A successful project in the detection of Russia's lies is the TV3 program series, '*Melu teorija*' (Theory of Lies), which once a week analyses current examples of defamation in Latvia by interviewing communications and policy experts on Russia's disinformation tactics. Understanding Russia's informative influence methods is also enhanced by the NATO Strategic Communication Centre of Excellence, located in Riga. The centre is headed by an experienced Latvian defence and information-security expert, Jānis Sārts, who previously worked at the Latvian Ministry of Defence. The centre accumulates knowledge of Russian communication strategies and shares it with NATO member state governments.

Awareness of Russia's use of trolls to influence Latvian media and the consequences of its compatriot policy is also enhanced by Latvian think tanks the Centre for International Studies, the Latvian Institute of International Affairs, and Centre for Eastern European Policy Studies. The creation of the *Information Technology Security Incident Prevention Authority* (CERT), which helps reduce risks from cyberspace in Latvia, has been of paramount importance in increasing internet security.

These examples illustrate Latvian civil society activity with the aim of decreasing the impact and spread of fake news and propaganda organised by the Kremlin. These projects are grassroots initiatives that include journalists, communications and political science researchers,

[40]   "Saakašvili - politiskais bomzis' un citi Krievijā pieprasīti Mamikina jociņi". LA.lv.
Accessed September 19, 2017. *http://www.la.lv/mamikina-jocini-pieprasiti/*.

and NGO activists. It should be noted that the experts and non-governmental sector have reacted to the problem faster than the state institutions, thereby demonstrating the very advantages and effectiveness of civil society.

MEDIA LITERACY PROJECTS

Awareness of the need to improve media literacy has grown in Latvia in recent years. In February 2017, the Baltic Media Centre of Excellence launched the new *'Full Thought'* initiative, aimed at promoting media literacy among Latvia's 10th–12th grade high-school students and their teachers. The following is the training content created for the 'Full Thought' internet platform: six video presentations on various topics of journalism with examples and exercises for better understanding are provided by leading Latvian journalists and media experts free of charge.[41]

In April 2017, the Ministry of Culture, in cooperation with Latvian universities and the British Council, organised a conference cycle on media literacy entitled *'The Power of Media Literacy: How to Obtain and Use It'*. It took place in Latvia's biggest cities (Riga, Valmiera, Rezekne, and Liepaja) where domestic and British media practitioners and researchers outlined their vision while simultaneously analysing how to strengthen the media literacy of each individual and the public as a whole. In the summer of 2017, the Ministry of Culture presented the results of the research on media literacy to the Latvian population. They showed that about half the population of Latvia lacked understanding about how to properly evaluate media information.

The *Office of the Nordic Council of Ministers* in Latvia, in cooperation with the Safer internet centre of the Latvian Internet Association, hosted a seminar on media education for student capacity-building on October 3, 2017, at Rezekne Technology Academy. Guest speakers included Kadri Ugur, an expert on media education in Estonia, and Klinta Ločmele, an expert on media policy at the Latvian Ministry of Culture.

As can be seen from these few examples, projects promoting media literacy have been launched in Latvia at state institutions and expert levels.

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[41]   "Uzsāk jaunu mediju pratības iniciatīvu vidusskolēniem un viņu pedagogiem". Accessed September 19, 2017. *http://bit.ly/2FRthL9*.

At the same time, it should be noted that media literacy has not yet been put into formal education programmes.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The experts interviewed most frequently mentioned the poor capacity of state institutions related to the media sector. This is partly because of a lack of funding, which makes Latvian information space vulnerable.[42] Ruduša, the director of the Baltic Media Centre of Excellence, and Roberts Putnis, the former director of the Media Policy Division at the Ministry of Culture of Latvia, pointed out that one of the reasons for insufficient public funding is the lack of understanding among the Latvian political elite of the special role played by independent and professional media in protecting democracy.[43] The same circumstance was mentioned as the reason for the absence of a security strategy regarding the information space in Latvia.

The rejection of new media regulation aimed at putting more stringent standards of professional ethics on their activities as well as on the transparency of their actions and ownership by requiring the re-registration of all media working in Latvia was exposed as a legal impediment to this problem. Some experts pointed to the ethnically divided political environment as a factor in Latvia's vulnerability vis-a-vis Russia's information campaigns. On a narrower scale it was pointed out that the Latvian government was not sufficiently supportive of public and regional media.[44] Also, among the still-unresolved issues is the disproportionately small use of the Latvian language in the national electronic media environment, which does not correspond to the ethnic composition of the population. Due to the unregulated free media market, there are two different information spaces that have developed in Latvia in terms of linguistic, geopolitical, and democratic traditions.[45]

The most frequent recommendations made by Latvian media and communications science experts are to increase the capacity and authority of supervisory institutions while also improving regulation of the

[42]   Ibid.
[43]   Ibid.
[44]   Ibid.
[45]   Ibid.

media sphere. The quality of content in the Latvian media space would be facilitated by regulation of internet media, which at present does not occur at all. Improvements in the regulation of the television and radio spheres should take place not only at the national but also the EU level. In 2017, the Baltic states prepared recommendations for changes to the EU 'Audiovisual Services Directive' to allow better monitoring and control of Russian television channels registered in the EU (such as those in the United Kingdom or Sweden) but which do business in another country such as Latvia. Another recommendation for the Latvian government is to extend support for media literacy projects through integration into the education system.

There are numerous good examples of how Kremlin-supported misinformation and disinformation campaigns can be undermined at the civil-society level in Latvia and in the actions of some state institutions, but generally there is still a lot to be done at the level of government strategy.

This strategy must apply to several Latvian political spheres: foreign policy, public diplomacy, defence, development of education, and media. Latvian foreign policymakers and implementers should be aware that the activities of Latvian media under Russian control are part of Russia's official foreign policy, so , reaction to it is permissible and necessary. An assessment of Russia's information influence in the context of national security is the responsibility of defence and security institutions. Such assessments and analysis are already ongoing. However, Latvia's leading politicians and officials must take practical steps on education and media policies. In the education sphere, reform of the segregated (Latvian and Russian) system, inherited from the USSR, should be continued to strengthen the position of the Latvian language. This would promote the integration of minorities, thereby decreasing Latvia's vulnerability to Kremlin-led disinformation. Latvian higher-level officials should make announcements on the crucial role of independent, professional and well-sponsored media in a functioning democracy. But the statement should be followed by practical steps to increase support for Latvian public media as well as for the legal and human resources capacity of monitoring institutions.

VIKTOR
DENISENKO

Vilnius University

LITHUANIA

A ● 2.0

B ■ 2.1

C ◀ 1.8

0   1   2   3   4

INTRODUCTION

Lithuania was the first Soviet republic to declare the re-establishment of its independence on March 11, 1990. Sometimes Russian media refer to this fact, claiming that Lithuania (and the other Baltic States) 'destroyed the Soviet Union'.

The national diasporas in Lithuania are quite small. Unlike in Latvia and Estonia, Russians (5.8 %, or 176 900 people)[1] are not the largest minority group in Lithuania, and are outranked by Poles (6.6 %, or 200 300 people). Other national diasporas in Lithuania include Belarusians (1.2 %, or 36 200), Ukrainians (0.5 %, or 1 400) and Jews (0.1 %, or 3 000). Unlike in Latvia or Estonia, almost all Lithuanian residents were given the right to acquire citizenship after the Soviet Union collapsed. Nearly 90 % of members of the national diasporas[2] chose to do so.

Lithuania has seen one of the EU's sharpest population decreases. By 2011, the census indicated that the population had decreased to 3 million from 3.6 million in 1989.[3] The size of the national diasporas has also changed considerably since then. In 1989, the share of ethnic Russians stood at 9.4 %, while Poles, Belarusians, Ukrainians and Jews accounted for 7 %, 1.7 %, 1.2 % and 0.3 % of the population, respectively.

There are some regions in which ethnic minorities are concentrated. These include the Salcininkai and Vilnius districts with a sizable Polish minority, and the city of Visaginas (Russians).

The main challenges confronting Lithuania in the field of information security are:

- The Kremlin's disinformation and information influence campaigns. Russia is trying to spread its propaganda narratives in Lithuanian information space.

- Cyberattacks can be used with intent to destroy information channels (e. g. via DDoS attacks), or to intervene in information systems and the activity of trolls. In April 2017, a cyberattack used for the purpose of spreading fake news in Lithuania was detected.

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[1]   Statistika. (2011). Retrieved from *https://tmde.lrv.lt/lt/tautines-bendrijos/statistika*

[2]   V. Sinkevuus. Teisinės Lietuvos Respublikos pilietybės pagrindai. In Politologija, 2000, vol. 4. P. 36.

[3]   Lithuania's population decrease is also used in Kremlin propaganda as confirmation of Lithuania's economical and political 'failure'. For example, in 2015 President Vladimir Putin provided in a public speech fake information that 'in Lithuania there are only 1.4 million inhabitants left' (Retrieved from *https://www.golos-ameriki.ru/a/ai-putin-lithuania-comments/2881531.html*).

Furthermore, experts point to a number of domestic challenges
to Lithuania's information security:

- Unsustainable media landscape. Most media channels are dependent
on some groups of interests or business within Lithuania's small media
market. This could negatively affect professional standards of mass media.

- Insufficient media literacy among Lithuanian society.

- The Lithuanian authorities' insufficient attention to the problems facing
national minorities.

VULNERABLE GROUPS

On the one hand, Lithuanian society is well aware of the Kremlin
propaganda and disinformation activities.

As one of the experts interviewed in the framework of this research said:[4]

*'We are rather sensitive to the threats due to understanding of our geopolitical
situation. This understanding was much lower before the Ukrainian events'.*

On the other hand, there are some groups in Lithuanian society which
are more vulnerable to Kremlin-led narratives and disinformation than
the population on average. In the first place, these are Russian and Polish-
speaking national minorities, especially those who live in a Kremlin-
backed information bubble, i.e. who regularly follow pro-Kremlin media.

The Kremlin tries to attack Lithuanian society in general and by using
different kinds of narratives which could affect different parts of society.

Another expert interviewed said:[5]

*'One of the common narratives of Kremlin propaganda against Lithuania is that
'our things go bad', 'all people leave Lithuania', and everything develops in wrong
direction'.,*

Sometimes Russian media presents Lithuania as a 'failed state'
or as a country which lost independence to an occupying NATO and EU
influence. Some information attacks against Lithuania can be largely

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[4]   L. Kojala, Eastern Europe Studies Centre, July 20, 2017. In-depth interview.

[5]   O. Erofeev, Delfi.lt, July 7, 2017. In-depth interview.

viewed in the context of information attacks against the 'Western world decay' and the discrediting of its values. Noteworthy, identical narratives are used by Lithuanian nationalists ('*Patikrinta 15min*'). They align themselves with the Kremlin's anti-gay and anti-same sex marriages policies, as well as with the Kremlin's 'wrong European values' narrative.

IN FOCUS

Attack against BNS

On April 12, 2017, unknown computers hacked the systems of the main Lithuanian information agency in the Baltic region, the BNS (Baltic News Service). The cyberattack published fake news in the system saying that 'American soldiers were poisoned by sulphur (or as it is commonly known mustard gas), the gas used in the production of chemical weapons in Latvia'. This cyberattack was technically successful, but the fake news stories were identified and removed from BNS on the day of publication.

The possible aim of this action was to damage NATO's image in the Baltic States by showing that NATO uses mustard gas. This propaganda narrative could also be used later in a different context, for example to help Moscow support Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, who used the mustard gas against the Syrian people. This fake news was supposed to back the Russian narrative that it was U.S. who conducted the chemical attack, not Assad..

In Lithuania, no political parties which openly support narratives of Kremlin-backed propaganda operate. As the only exception, the Socialist People's Front (former leader Algirdas Paleckis) can be mentioned, but it received just 1.21 % of votes in the 2012 parliamentary election.

Kremlin propaganda often attacks Lithuania's version of history. The USSR's occupation of the Baltic States in 1940 is rebutted, claiming instead that Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia voluntarily joined the 'big Soviet family'. Furthermore, Kremlin propaganda often calls members of the Lithuanian resistance movement 'fascists' or 'Nazis'.

As suggested by another interviewed expert:[6]

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[6]   M. Martisius, The Radio and Television Commission of Lithuania, July 19, 2017. In-depth interview.

'The main point is discourse on the Second World War. Kremlin propaganda uses many different topics in this regard — from resistance movements in the Baltic States and Ukraine to the role of Stalin in 'The Great Victory'. It is Soviet-style propaganda when everything was clear: Hitler was an 'absolute evil' and the Soviet Union along with the Allies upset him. If you try to analyse the mentioned historical events deeply, it is actually a rewriting of history'.

Some of the interviewed experts draw attention to the fact that Kremlin-supported propaganda often uses Soviet nostalgia in its communication as a tool of soft power. Public opinion research[7] commissioned by the Eastern Europe Studies Centre in the summer of 2016 showed that today in Lithuania only 26 % of respondents agree that life in the Soviet Union was better than it is now. On the other hand, the research showed that Soviet nostalgia is often felt by representatives of the 46+ age group, and especially by pensioners. Among the latter group, 45.8 % agree that life in the Soviet Union was better.

As one of interviewed Lithuanian chief editors stated boldly:[8]

'If we talk about 50 — 60 years old people and the situation where they live in the Russian information sphere, we can do nothing. They are lost'.

Among the Russian national minority, 62.2 % miss the Soviet times.

. It should be mentioned that the target group for Russian TV in Lithuania is not only national minorities.

One communication specialist said:[9]

'Russian television is watched not only by Russian-speaking or Polish-speaking people. Some ethnic Lithuanians who like Russian TV due to its attractive entertainment content also watch it'.

Indeed, Lithuanian commercial TV channels also transmit Russian media products, although they do not necessarily contain any disinformation or propaganda narratives. For example, Russian media products occupied 35.5 % of airtime per week on BTV and more than 7 % at TV6 in March 2017.[10]

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[7]   Davidonytė, Birutė. Tyrimas parodė: ar lietuviams prie ruso gyventi buvo geraiu. Delfi.lt, (2016). Retrieved from *https://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/tyrimas-parode-ar-lietuviams-prie-ruso-gyventi-buvo-geriau.d?id=71898770*

[8]   R. Irzikevicius, The Lithuanian Tribune, July 12, 2017. In-depth interview.

[9]   A. Suminas, Faculty of Communication of Vilnius University, August 28, 2017. In-depth interview.

[10]   Lietuvos televizijos programų struktūra pagal laidų kilmės šalis, (2017). Retrieved from *http://www.rtk.lt/pranesimai-spaudai/lietuvos-televizijos-programu-struktura-pagal-laidu-kilmes-sali/*

Therefore, the following groups can be viewed as more vulnerable to Kremlin propaganda and disinformation than the population on average:

- Members of national diasporas, Russian and Polish-speaking people

- Citizens with far-right political views

- Older people, aged 46+ and especially pensioners (60+)

- People who watch only Russian TV.

Some experts believe that Russia does not have a specific media strategy for Lithuania. A media expert interviewed for this study said:[11]

'Although we often say that the Kremlin spreads propaganda against Lithuania, in fact, a very small number of [propaganda] 'products' are designed especially for Lithuania. The Kremlin often spreads propaganda in general against the Baltic States or the EU'.

Nevertheless, there are some specific 'Lithuanian narratives' in Russian propaganda, such as the accusation that, on January 13, 1991, peaceful civilians near the TV and Radio centre in Vilnius were killed or injured not by Soviet soldiers, but by unknown snipers connected to the Lithuanian movement for independence; or that Vilnius and Klaipeda should not belong to Lithuania because Moscow unjustifiably 'gave these cities' to Lithuania (Vilnius before the Second World War and Klaipeda afterwards).

MEDIA LANDSCAPE

Lithuania is a democratic country with a high level of media freedom. In 2017, the World Press Freedom Index placed Lithuania 36th (35th in 2016) out of 180 countries.[12] Reporters Without Borders reports that 'the media in Lithuania are reputedly independent and free to criticise the government, but not always the big business interests'.[13]

An expert interviewed for this study agreed:[14]

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[11] M. Martisius, The Radio and Television Commission of Lithuania, July 19, 2017. In-depth interview.

[12] 2017 World Press Freedom Index. Reporters Without Borders. (2017). Retrieved from *https://rsf.org/en/ranking*

[13] Ibid.

[14] D. Radzevicius, Lithuanian Journalists Union, July 7, 2017. In-depth interview.

'The traditional mechanisms of media financing and self-financing were destroyed by digitisation'.

There are some laws regulating Lithuanian media space. For example, the Law on the Provision of Information to the Public[15] and the Law on National Radio and Television.[16] The principles of freedom of speech and media freedom are also enshrined in Articles 25 and 44 of The Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania.[17] As stated in Article 25, 'the freedom to express convictions, as well as to receive and impart information, may not be limited otherwise than by law when this is necessary to protect human health, honour or dignity, private life, or morals, or to defend the constitutional order'. It's also mentioned in Article 44 that 'censorship of mass information shall be prohibited'.

Media in Lithuania also has tools of self-regulation. An example of this is the Commission of Ethics in the Provision of Information to the Public. Commission members are representatives of different journalism and media associations, including the Lithuanian Radio and Television Association, the Association of Regional Television, the Lithuanian Journalists Union, and so on. The functions of The Commission are laid down in the Law on the Provision of Information to the Public:

- Take care of fostering the ethics of producers and disseminators of public information.

- Examine violations of professional ethics by producers or disseminators of public information when providing information to the public.

- Examine complaints with regard to activities of producers and disseminators of public information who have allegedly infringed the provisions of the Code, and examine disputes between producers and disseminators of public information regarding violations of the Code.

- Ensure the development of mass literacy in cooperation with state agencies and institutions, dissemination of the principles of critical assessment and analysis of information.

- Organise events in regard to issues related to professional ethics in the field of the provision of information to the public, and participate

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[15]   Law on the Provision of Information to the Public (1996, 2015). Retrieved from
       https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/2865241206f511e687e0fbad81d55a7c?jfwid=1clcwosx33

[16]   Law on the National Radio and Television (1996). Retrieved from
       https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/TAIS.55469?jfwid=-n126u3s9b

[17]   The Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania (1992). Retrieved from *http://www3.lrs.lt/home/Konstitucija/Constitution.htm*

in the implementation of strategic planning programmes and action plans of state institutions (Article 46).

The Commission cannot fine media, but outlets which fail to follow ethical standards (as ruled by the Commission) may not get any funding or support from the state.

The Lithuanian government also established The Office of the Inspector of Journalism Ethics. The mission of the Office is 'to ensure that public information is respectful of human rights and freedoms, to develop the civil society and critical approach to the public information processes, to raise public legal awareness and the awareness of human rights, to foster sustainable relationship between the public information producers and disseminators and the general public and to promote the public information producers' and disseminators' responsibility'.[18]

The main goals of the Office are to examine complaints (applications) from individuals and violations of regulatory laws governing the provision of information to the public, to monitor and analyse public information, to provide expertise in public information, to cooperate with other institutions, and to undertake public education, consulting, and drafting provisions of proposals for laws and other legal acts.[19]

The main document of media self-regulation is The Codex of the Ethics of Provision of Information to the Public of Lithuania[20] (known as the The Codex of Ethics of Lithuanian Journalists and Publishers until 2016). It regulates the standards of journalists' professional work.

The media market in Lithuania is quite small. Statistics show[21] that TV remains the most popular media segment. There are four major media groups in the Lithuanian television market. The two leaders are commercial giants LNK group (channels: LNK, BTV, TV 1, Info TV and Liuks!) with 27.4 % of the market share, and MTG group (TV 3, TV 6 and TV 8) with 20.9 % of the market share. The third position is taken by the Lithuanian public broadcaster LRT group (LRT Televizija and LRT Kultura) with 9.8 % of the market share.

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[18] The Office of the Inspector of Journalist Ethic. (2017). Retrieved from http://www.zeit.lt/en/the-office-of-the-inspector-of-journalist-ethics/262

[19] Ibid.

[20] Lietuvos visuomenės informavimo etikos kodeksas. (2016). Retrieved from http://www.etikoskomisija.lt/teisine-informacija/etikos-kodeksas

[21] Žiniasklaidos tyrimų apžvalga. (2016). Retrieved from http://www.tns.lt/data/files/Metines_apzvalgos/Kantar_TNS_Metin%C4%97_%C5%BEiniasklaidos_tyrim%C5%B3_ap%C5%BEvalga_2016m.pdf

TV channel   **Share %**

TV 3 ├─────────────────────────────────● 16.2

LNK ├──────────────────────────────● 14.9

LRT Televizija ├────────────────────● 10.8

BTV ├─────────● 5.7

Lietyvos rytas TV ├─────────● 5.2

TV 1 ├──────● 4.0

Info TV ├────● 3.2

TV 6 ├───● 2.9

TV 8 ├─● 2.1

PBK (First Baltic Channel) ├○ 1.7
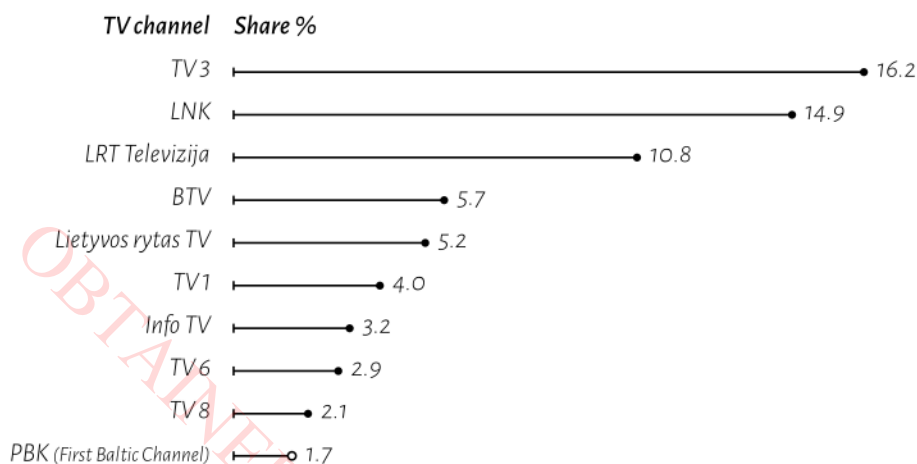
Most popular TV channels in Lithuania

Source: Žiniasklaidos tyrimų apžvalga (2016)

channels transmitting pro-Kremlin narratives narratives ──○

Special attention should be paid to the BMA group, which holds the fourth position. It broadcasts channels related to Russian state media (or are under indirect Russian state control) which is adjusted for the Lithuanian audience. Their three channels are NTV Mir Lietuva (2.5 % market share), PBK (Pervyj Baltijskij Kanal, 2.3 %) and REN Lietuva (1.1 %). This gives BMA a total market share of 5.9 %. In fact, these channels are the main TV providers of narratives of the Kremlin's propaganda.

There are no such popular broadcasters of pro-Kremlin narratives in other segments of the media market. The radio market is quite depoliticised. There are also two local commercial radio stations for national minorities, RUSRADIO LT (for the Russian-speaking minority) with 10.5 % of the market share, and Znad Wilii (2 % of). However, no cases of deliberate disinformation by these stations have been reported.

In fact, there are just a few media outlets which the State Security Department of Lithuania marked in a 2014 public report as 'tools of Russia's information and ideological influence'.[22] These are TV channel PBK and local weekly newspapers in the Russian language, namely Ekspress nedelia (4.2 % market share), Obzor (2.2 % market share) and Litovskij kurjer (no data).

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[22]   Grėsmių nacionaliniam saugumui vertinimas. (2014). Retrieved from
https://www.vsd.lt/senoji/Files/Documents/635306548879220000.pdf

There are some Internet sources which also try to provide Russian propaganda narratives to the Lithuanian audience. In 2017, the State Security Department of Lithuania and Second Department of Lithuanian Ministry of Defence published a joint report naming Internet media Baltnews.lt and Sputniknews.lt in this respect.[23] Both sources are connected to the Russian state information agency *Rossiya Segodnia*.

Baltnews.lt tries to hide its connection to Russia in order to be seen as 'independent media'. However, it is not popular in Lithuania. In August 2017, *Baltnews.lt* had only about 700 daily readers from Lithuania.[24] The State Security Department of Lithuania evaluates its influence as 'not significant'.

Sputniknews.lt is also unpopular. The report rightly stated that Sputnik, in Lithuanian and Russian, 'has not many readers yet, its account on the Facebook social network is not popular either'. In August 2017, it had approximately 900 daily readers (Gemius data). As of October 20, 2017, its account on Facebook had 660 likes.

The experts agree that local media outlets which provide Kremlin propaganda reach quite a small percentage of Lithuanian society. In fact, this media category could be referred to as 'marginal' in Lithuanian markets, but it could have a big influence in some information bubbles or among some local communities (mostly Russians and Poles).

One expert interviewed for this study said:[25]

'*We see that the audience of local pro-Kremlin media is quite small and that's kind of a reason to not worry about it. But we should always look at the dynamics of processes. The elements of information warfare are spread via different channels. To look at traditional media only would be a mistake*'.

The experts' concerns are that, under some circumstances, the popularity of such 'information sources' could grow. This could be dependent on growing Kremlin interest in influencing the Lithuanian information space, which could spark new investment in propaganda outlets in Lithuania.

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[23]   Grėsmių nacionaliniam saugumui vertinimas. (2017). Retrieved from https://kam.lt/download/57113/akatskt_final_beta.pdf

[24]   https://opa.gemius.lt/

[25]   V. Jurkonys, Freedom House, July 14, 2017, In-depth interview.

LEGAL REGULATIONS

Lithuania does not have special legislation in the field of information security. However, interviewed experts generally believe that the existing legal environment is adequate for protecting Lithuania's information sphere from potential threats.

Nevertheless, the country doesn't have a special strategy for information security. This topic is mentioned in different official documents, such as the revised National Security Strategy[26] and the renewed Military Strategy of the Republic of Lithuania.[27]

The National Security Strategy gives a list of information threats, including 'military propaganda spread by certain states and non-state players, warmongering, incitements of hatred, attempts to distort history as well as other unsubstantiated and misleading information directed against the national security interests of the Republic of Lithuania which leads to the distrust of and dissatisfaction with the State of Lithuania and its institutions, democracy, national defence, seeks to widen national and cultural divides and to weaken national identity and active citizenship, attempts to discredit Lithuania's membership of NATO, NATO capabilities, and the commitment to defend its Allies, to undermine citizens' will to defend their state... information activities that are aimed at influencing the country's democratic or electoral processes or the party system, or that are targeted at the societies and policy makers of other Member States of the EU and NATO, seeking unfavourable decisions for the Republic of Lithuania'.

Informational attacks are mentioned among other conventional threats in the Military Strategy, which states: Russia and some other states and non-state players have been aggressively disseminating unfounded and misleading information with the aim of shaping Lithuanian public opinion on national security. Such attacks are used to generate distrust and discontent with the democratic order and the national defence system, to discredit the Alliance, its capabilities and commitments to defend the Allies, as well as to weaken the unity among citizens, undermine their

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[26]   National Security Strategy. (2016). Retrieved from
https://kam.lt/en/defence_policy_1053/important_documents/strategical_documents.html

[27]   Military Strategy of the Republic of Lithuania. (2017). Retrieved from
https://kam.lt/en/defence_policy_1053/important_documents/strategical_documents.html

patriotism, and their will to defend the country. The spread of information and communications technologies is likely to cause even more information attacks, especially those directed towards specific target groups, in the future'.

The Radio and Television Commission of Lithuania can order channels to be blocked temporarily to stop the spread of propaganda narratives. Such sanctions have been imposed on a number of Russian channels on commercial cable networks. The Commission made every decision after an investigation. The transmission of a channel can be blocked if its content breaks (in the opinion of the Commission) Lithuanian law. The Law on the Provision of Information to the Public under which the Commission functions allows it to block media which spreads war propaganda, instigates war or hatred, ridicule, humiliation, instigates discrimination, violence, physical violent treatment of a group of people or a person belonging on grounds of age, sex, sexual orientation, ethnic origin, race, nationality, citizenship, language, origin, social status, belief, convictions, views or religion'. The decision about temporarily blocking a channel is made through the courts following application by the Commission.

In 2013, sanctions were first implemented in relation to the PBK TV channel. The Commission ruled that, for three months, this channel could not broadcast on Lithuanian territory any media products made in countries that had not signed up to the Television Without Frontiers Convention. It should be mentioned that Russia did not sign up to this Convention.

In 2014, transmission of RTR-Planeta and NTV Mir Lietuva was restricted for three months.[28] RTR-Planeta's transmission was repeatedly blocked for three months at a time in 2015 and 2016. Finally, in 2017, yet another Russian channel, TVCI, was blocked twice, once for a month and later for six months.

According to the interviewed experts, the issue of information security does not only belong in the area of national law. Moscow uses 'information offshores' to extend its information influence. For instance, the PBK channel is registered in Latvia, not Russia. In this situation, national legislation is not helpful in protecting a country's information space.

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[28]   In November 2014, Vilnius County Court ruled that The Radio and Television Commission of Lithuania had the right to suppress re-transmission of TV channels.

For this reason, the problem of information security should be addressed in EU legislation as well.

Mantas Martisius, Deputy Chief of The Radio and Television Commission of Lithuania, argues that an understanding the threat of propaganda has finally spread across a united Europe:

'For example, some years ago colleagues from Great Britain or Sweden did not understand our fears. Now they do'.[29]

Similar views are shared by Skirmantas Malinauskas, an advisor of the Lithuanian prime minister:

'Lithuania is one of the first states which began to form practice about how to react to propaganda but, in fact, we need European level regulation of the mentioned sphere'.[30]

Experts also warn that decisions on banning and restricting propaganda should be implemented very carefully. Every decision should be based on sound justification because such practice could violate the democratic principles related to freedom of the speech and expression.

As one communication expert warned:[31]

'I'm not a fan of interdictions. We should use them very carefully. In the fight against propaganda there always is a danger of violating the freedom of speech or restricting the possibility of thinking differently'.

In short, Lithuania is quite active in using its national legislation to restrict Russian disinformation. It is wrong to talk about a national sphere of information as something localised. It is evident in the case of Lithuania that the loopholes used by the Kremlin media can be closed only if the issues are addressed at EU level.

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[29]   M. Martisius, The Radio and Television Commission of Lithuania, July 19, 2017. In-depth interview.

[30]   S. Malinauskas. Office of Prime Minister of Lithuania, July 17, 2017. In-depth interview.

[31]   G. Aleknonis, Mykolas Romeris University, August 10, 2017. In-depth interview.

INSTITUTIONAL SETUP

The resistance to propaganda's influence is one of the priorities of Lithuania's political agenda. President Dalia Grybauskaite mentioned this in her interview with 'Foreign Policy' magazine,

'After Crimea, the investment in propaganda and information warfare was massively increased by the Kremlin. We are already in a non-conventional war because of the [constant] cyberattacks, TV propaganda, and information attacks from Russia. We see this all the time. They try to invest in some politicians. They plant fake news stories'.[32]

As mentioned, some problems are connected to the fact that Lithuania doesn't have a separate strategy for how react to information threats. Experts think that it is not enough to just name challenges in such documents as the National Security Strategy or the Military Strategy of the Republic of Lithuania. They contend that this will not improve the effective institutional framework.

The problem is a general lack of long-term view.

Evaldas Labanauskas, chief editor of the Internet edition of one of the oldest Lithuanian newspapers, Lietuvos zinios', said:[33]

'*I don't see any clear strategy, especially if we are talking about long-term strategy. Only ad hoc reactions'.*

According to Lina Kojalas, speaking during an in-depth interview with the Eastern European Studies Centre on July 20, 2017, the strategy is 'under construction' and the biggest problem is that 'we still don't know exactly what our ultimate purpose is'.

The experts also mentioned that different governmental institutions work to increase the level of resilience towards threats of propaganda and information warfare, but that efforts are not strongly coordinated between them.

One expert noted:

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[32]   Weymouth, Lally. "Russia Is a Threat... To All of Europe" (2017). Retrieved from
http://foreignpolicy.com/2017/03/24/russia-lithuania-nato-grybauskaite-putin-trump-interview/#_=_

[33]   E. Labanauskas. Lietuvos zinios, August 9, 2017. In-depth interview

'*We still have a lack of integrity, lack of clear priorities, lack of pursuance of the main purpose*'.[34]

The governmental institutions clearly see threats of possible communication influence to Lithuania's society from the Kremlin.

Tomas Ceponis, a representative of the Lithuanian military's department of strategic communication, said"[35]

'*If we lose the information war today, tomorrow we may be fighting with weapons*'.

Raimundas Karoblis, Lithuania's defence minister, added: 'Russia is a threat'.[36]

In fact, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania has a Department of Strategical Communication and Strategic a Communication Group, the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Lithuania has a Department of Policy of the Provision of Information to the Public, the Ministry of National Defence of the Republic of Lithuania has the Department of Strategic Communication and Public Affairs, and the Lithuanian Armed Forces has the Department of Strategic Communications. All these work separately. The experts think that the current situation is not a rational response to the threat.

Some of the mentioned departments have interesting initiatives. For example, the Strategic Communication Group of the Lithuanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has a Twitter account.[37] The messages from the account are in English, and mostly aim to challenge the Kremlin's disinformation.

The existence of these institutions shows that Lithuanian government units have the strategic and creative potential to find answers to the challenge of the influence of Kremlin-backed propaganda, and a well-coordinated institutional framework could inspire such actions.

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[34]   L. Kojala, Eastern Europe Studies Centre, July 20, 2017. In-depth interview.

[35]   Graham-Harrison, Emma. Boffey, Daniel. Lithuania fears Russian propaganda is prelude to eventual invasion (2017). Retrieved from *https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/apr/03/lithuania-fears-russian-propaganda-is-prelude-to-eventual-invasion*

[36]   Ibid.

[37]   *https://twitter.com/lt_mfa_stratcom?lang=en*

DIGITAL DEBUNKING TEAMS

The first fact-checking initiatives emerged in Lithuania a few years ago. The news portal 15min.lt runs a fact-checking initiative named '*Patikrinta 15min*' ('Checked by 15min'). This initiative was launched in 2016 by a journalist Liepa Zelniene. This media outlet also established its own Department of Investigations in 2015. At 15min.lt, fact-checking staff and investigative journalists unmasked not only lies of Lithuanian politicians but also identified Kremlin disinformation. In August 2016, 15min.lt and the International Digital Communication Network organised a conference in Vilnius called '*Truth Matters*', focusing on fact checking.

There are some other similar initiatives in Lithuania. For example, in the summer of 2017 the biggest news portal Delfi.lt announced that it is going to create a tool against 'false news'[38] in cooperation with Google (in the framework of the 'Digital News Initiative'). However, this tool is still under construction. Since 2016, Delfi.lt has also allowed readers to inform journalists of unusual information they see in the public sphere, via *Demaskuok.lt*.[39] Journalists investigate these reports, then write about them if fake news is uncoveredSuch articles are marked by the word 'demaskuota' ('unmasked').

These examples show that the initiative of fact-checking in Lithuania is in the hands of journalists.

A representative of Lithuania's Journalists Union interviewed for this study said:[40]

'*Our media are pro-active. They try to analyse how propaganda works, carry out special projects against fake news and explain where the fake news came from*'.

But, in general, fact-checking activities are still quite new in Lithuania. Only a few media groups have enough resources to attempt the development of fact-checking as a separate genre of journalism.

In the summer of 2017, NATO shared a short video on its social media accounts about anti-Soviet resistance in the Baltic States after the end

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[38]   DELFI kuriamas kovos prieš melagingas naujienas įrankis gavo „Google" finansavimą. (2017). Retrieved from
https://www.delfi.lt/verslas/verslas/delfi-kuriamas-kovos-pries-melagingas-naujienas-irankis-gavo-google-finansavima.d?id=75155378

[39]   https://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/demaskuok/

[40]   D. Radzevicius, Lithuanian Journalists Union, July 7, 2017. In-depth interview

of the Second World War.[41] The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs reacted hysterically to the movie and published information about the 'Forest Brothers Crimes' from 1947, based on reports of the Interior Affairs Ministry of the USSR.[42] RF Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova branded Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian Forest Brothers 'Fascists' and 'Nazis', and accused them of killing peaceful civilians.[43]

IN FOCUS

Flash mob against propaganda

The well-known Lithuanian journalist Andrius Tapinas, engaged users of Lithuanian segments of the Internet with an online flashmob. The participants were supposed to leave comments with the hashtag #KremliauMūsųIstorijosNeperrašysi (#KremlinYouWillNotRewriteOurHistory) on the Facebook page of the Russian Federation Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Furthermore, Lithuanian users were invited to rate the Facebook page of the Russian Federation Ministry of Foreign Affairs with one star to make its ranking lower. This event was joined by thousands of Lithuanian Internet users. The Russian Federation Ministry of Foreign Affairs had to remove the option to recover the rating of its Facebook page.

MEDIA LITERACY PROJECTS

Media literacy is a hot topic in Lithuania. The sphere of 'media literacy and critical thinking' was mentioned as a priority in a government programme.[44] The basis of the national strategy '*Lithuania 2030*' is societal input and ideas for success, contributed by communities, non-governmental organisations and proactive citizens. This strategy aims 'to introduce media literacy programmes in all education institutions'.[45]

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[41]   Forest Brothers – Fight for the Baltics. (2017). Retrieved from *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h5rQFp7FF9c&t=2s*

[42]   Source: *https://www.facebook.com/MIDRussia/posts/1087506378015469:0?pnref=story*

[43]   Source: *https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10214029522081798&set=a.4365446944032.176170.1523648416&type=1&theater*

[44]   Programme of the Government. (2016). Retrieved from *https://lrv.lt/en/about-government/programme-of-the-government*

[45]   Lithuania's progress strategy "Lithuania 2030". (2012). Retrieved from *https://lrv.lt/uploads/main/documents/files/EN_version/Useful_information/lithuania2030.pdf*

Neringa Jurciukonyte, director of the National Institute of Social Integration and coordinator of the journalists education programme '*Media 4 Change*', said:[46]

'*Consistent activities should be carried out in order to cultivate critical thinking, starting from nursery schools. Some methods allow doing this in the form of games*'.

In 2014 to 2015, the biggest project connected to media literacy was conducted by the Education Development Centre in affiliation with the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania. The project was also realised with the support of Nordic Council of Ministers Office in Lithuania.[47] The aim of the project was to create centralised national media literacy projects and initiatives in order to integrate elements of media literacy into regular subjects in the primary school system.

In 2016 to 2017, the National Institute of Social Integration developed special critical thinking and media literacy programmes. Organisers said: 'The programmes ran for one year and brought together 90 students from 45 schools across Lithuania. The programmes consisted of two periods of five-day training and then the much anticipated '*Critical Thinking Festival*'.[48]

Other 2016 activities directly or indirectly related to media literacy included a national education project '*Learning from Film*', a gaming culture festival 'GameOn' and the national research project '*News Literacy Education: How to Understand Media (NEWSLIT)*'.[49]

Recently, the Education Development Centre announced a number of new media literacy programmes such as the educational programme for primary schools '*Media (s)kills*' and the initiative 'Specifics of Multimedia Journalism, Ethics and Tendencies', in partnership with NGO 'Dokumedia' and 12 primary schools.[50]

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[46]   N. Jurciukonyte, National institute of social integration, August 16, 2017. In-depth interview.

[47]   Media and Information Literacy Education Project in Lithuania. (2015). Retrieved from
http://www.norden.lt/projects/336#media-and-information-literacy-education-project-in-lithuania_element_845

[48]   Lithuania: Critical Thinking and Media Literacy Programs (2016–2017). (2017). Retrieved from
http://blog.nohatespeechmovement.org/lithuania-critical-thinking-and-media-literacy-programs-2016-2017/

[49]   Mapping of media literacy practices and actions in EU-28. Annex 3 – Summaries of 145 "case-study" projects, (2016).
Retrieved from http://bit.ly/2oc9zgC.

[50]   Source: https://duomenys.ugdome.lt/?/mm/dry/med=2

Interviewed experts say the development of media literacy should be aimed at youths because it will make the biggest impact. An expert stated in a recent interview:

'We should teach pupils at school that, in order to get information, they should use at least two, better three sources'.[51]

By some experts are of the opinion that a system of warnings, aimed at older people, would be better than educational programmes. One solution could be to mark the content of Russian television programmes on Lithuanian cable networks as untrustworthy. An expert from Freedom House stated:

'Adults should also get the knowledge on how to find alternative sources of information'.[52]

The issues of foreign propaganda are discussed in the Lithuanian public sphere rather often, including by experts. Some recent examples include a conference at the Lithuanian National Library (*'Literacy in the Digital Age'*), a discussion at the Energy and Technology Museum ('How to transcribe the Soviet Lithuania chronicles?'), and the series of public discussions at Vilnius University about 'elements of propaganda in animation', organised by the Students Scientific Fellowship under the authority of the university's Communications Department. The organisers of such discussions, which contribute to raising media conscience in Lithuanian society, are various NGOs, think tanks and public sector institutions (for example, libraries and museums).

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[51]   E. Labanauskas, Lietuvos zinios, August 9, 2017. In-depth interview.

[52]   V. Jurkonys, Freedom House, July 14, 2017, In-depth interview.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Understanding of the threat posed by propaganda is quite high in Lithuania. But the country's media protection system is inadequate and potentially vulnerable. On the state level, information security is high priority. At the same time, cooperation between the different state agencies and institutions in this sphere is quite low. Below are recommendations focused on increasing national resilience to foreign disinformation, based on analysis and interviews with experts:

1. To create a National Strategy of Information Security, with clear steps about how to improve information safety in Lithuanian society. This should be separate from The National Security Strategy and The Military Strategy of the Republic of Lithuania.

2. To intensify coordination between the different institutions in the area of information security through regular meetings of its heads and/or representatives.

3. To develop Lithuania's media quality by organising courses and extra studies for professional journalists, aimed at improving their knowledge and establishing a 'Quality Media Rescue Fund' in support of professional media in difficult financial situations.

4. To integrate the subject of media literacy into the curriculum of years 9 to 12 at schools.

5. To mark Russian-backed television channels that are directly or indirectly connected to the Kremlin and broadcast on the Lithuanian cable network as untrustworthy sources of information to warn viewers. This could be done by showing a special warning in the corner of the TV screen.

6. To develop social dialogue and further integrate national minorities into society. The message that national minorities are an important part of society should be improved in the public speeches of political leaders and in media discourse.

7. To coordinate activities in the area of information security with other Baltic States (primarily Latvia and Estonia). It would be important to establish a joint coordination centre with expert representatives from Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia.

ANDREI
CURARARU

Watchdog.MD Think tank

MOLDOVA

A |————————————————● 3.2

B |————————————————■ 3.0

C |————————————◄ 2.6

0   1   2   3   4
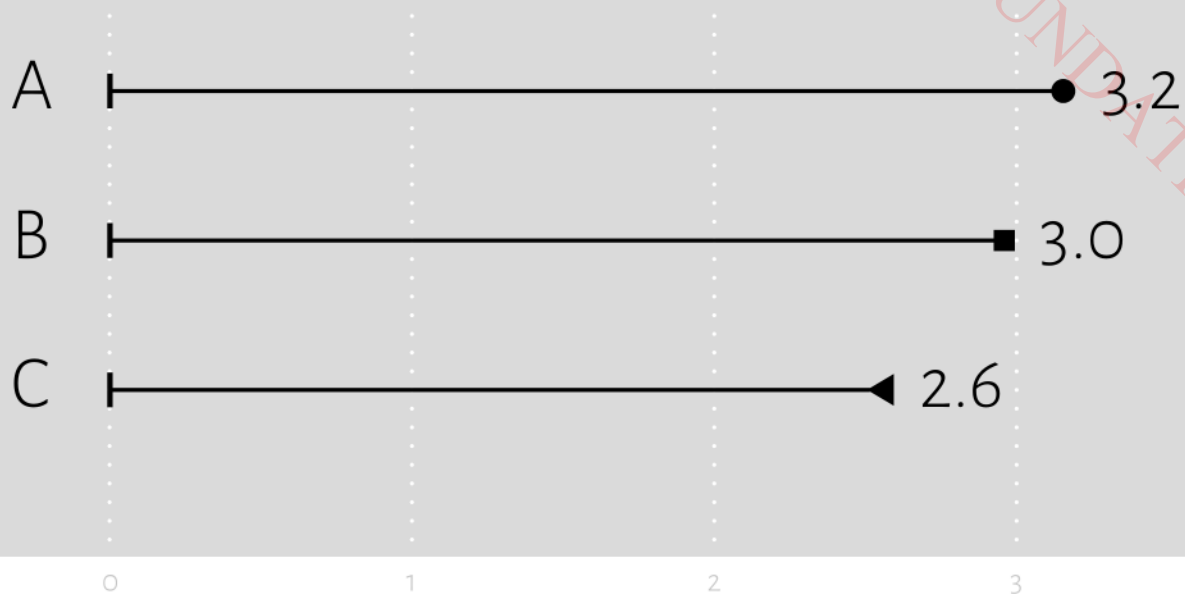
INTRODUCTION

The Republic of Moldova declared its independence from the USSR on August 27, 1991. However, Russian forces have remained on Moldovan territory east of the Dniester River supporting the breakaway region of Transnistria, composed of a Slavic majority population (mostly Ukrainians and Russians), but with a sizable ethnic Moldovan minority. According to the 1989 census, the population of Transnistria was composed of about 40 % ethnic Moldovans, 28 % Ukrainians, and 25 % Russians. In 2004, the authorities of the breakaway region took another census, but the results are disputed due to a lack of transparency of the process. At the current time, we can assess that the breakaway region strives not to be part of Moldovan media space. The broadcasts from the right bank of the Dniester are jammed, and the frequencies of Moldova TV broadcasters have been redistributed to rebroadcast Russian content.

This report does not cover the breakaway region of Transnistria, as it presents a different model and structure of the media landscape, oriented towards pro-Kremlin narratives and direct 'state' support of controlled media outlets. Also, there is a lack of reliable data on media consumption trends as well as a real connection to the Moldovan media market.

Regarding the social structure of Moldova, data from the last census states that over 82 % of the population is Moldovan/Romanian speakers.[1] The other ethnic groups are categorised under the artificial ethnolinguistic term 'Russian speakers'. This is reminiscent of the Soviet period when the interaction between different ethnic groups was through the Russian language. This makes them more vulnerable towards manipulation, as they are prone to consume media products coming from the Russian Federation as well as local products aimed at them. For example, the *Sputnik.md* website, a satellite website with connections to Russian power structures, publishes most of its content in Russian and some in Romanian.

A high level of trust in the church is a constant of Moldovan society. According to the Opinion Barometer, over 70 % of the population trusts the church, this being the highest level of trust in any social organisation. The Moldovan Metropolitanate has close ideological and economic

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[1]   "Recensamant 2014: 75 % Dintre Cetaţenii R. Moldova Se Declara Moldoveni Şi Doar 7 %—Romani," realitatea.md, March 31, 2017, *http://www.realitatea.md/recensamant-2014-75prc-dintre-ceta-enii-r-moldova-se-declara-moldoveni-i-doar-7prc-romani_54929.html*

relations with the Russian Federation, developing lucrative business models based on its exemption from income taxes. A recent investigation uncovered business ties to Russian companies selling votive candles at dumping prices to the Moldovan church.[2] These ties, as well as the political activism of the church, makes it an active player that may be promoting foreign interests in Moldova. One of the experts interviewed within the research explains:

'*Since the declaration of independence of Moldova, the church has backed numerous candidates at every election in the parliament. Be it the Socialist Party or a former Secret Service director turned politician. The church had close ties with the Communist Party when it was in power and ... is promoting interests close to the Russian Federation*'.[3]

The country signed and ratified an Association Agreement with the EU in 2014, which fully entered into force in July 2016 after ratification by all EU member states. Currently, the parliament of the Republic of Moldova is dominated by an alliance of the Democrat Party and the European People's Party of Moldova, the government is composed almost exclusively from representatives of the Democrats. In November 2016, Igor Dodon, the leader of the pro-Kremlin Socialists Party, became the president of the Republic of Moldova and promotes closer ties with the Russian Federation and the revision of the Association Agreement with the EU. According to one of the experts, the very existence of the Socialists Party poses risks to national information security:

'*Compared to Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova presents a worse political situation in the relationship with pro-Kremlin propaganda. The Ukrainians have banned the pro-Russia Regions Party, and we still have the Socialists Party. Together with President Igor Dodon and the affiliated media holding they represent the key threat to our information security*'.[4]

From an economic standpoint, Moldova remains Europe's most impoverished economy. In 2014, 1 billion USD was stolen from three Moldovan banks: Banca de Economii, Unibank, and Banca Sociala. The theft had a political component with the implication of the former prime minister, Vlad Filat, who was sentenced in the case, as well as other high-level officials. As one of our anonymous respondents put it,

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[2]   "Mitropolia Lumânărilor: Rise Moldova," accessed December 15, 2017, *https://www.rise.md/articol/mitropolia-lumanarilor/*.

[3]   Alla Rosca, Tulane University, December 8, 2017. In-depth interview via Skype.

[4]   Mihai Cernencu, Free International University of Moldova, December 9, 2017. In-depth interview via Skype.

'poverty is an important factor in the sensitivity to propaganda, as a person striving to feed oneself will not have the time to consume media content, and if one does, it will not be quality content'.[5]

In 2015, protests erupted in the capital Chisinau with participants claiming that all the governing parties had been involved in the theft of the 1 billion USD, asking for early elections. The left pro-Kremlin parties, as well as right extra-parliamentary opposition, have used this narrative both in national and local elections since that period.

While the EU has become the most significant trading partner of Moldova, with over 3.5 billion USD in overall trade, Russia remains one of the most significant destinations for Moldovan economic migrants.[6] Also, the Russian market is the second biggest export destination for Moldovan goods with over 11 % of total exports for the first quarter of 2017.[7] Another big issue is the country's energy dependency on Russian energy resources and over 6 billion USD of debt accumulated by the country, including the Transnistrian region.[8]

VULNERABLE GROUPS

The groups which are more susceptible to manipulation through mass media than the population in general are ethnic minorities that must consume Russian media products, Orthodox churchgoers, and the elderly. These groups have limited access to alternative media to check facts and they trust media channels that can be used for manipulation.

The Republic of Moldova presents an ethnic diversity common in most post-Soviet countries, with some local peculiarities. According to the last census in 2014, 75.1 % of the population was declared Moldovan, Romanians were 7.0 %, Ukrainians, 6.6 %, Gagauz people, 4.6 %, Russians, 4.1 %, Bulgarians, 1.9 %, Roma, 0.3 %, and other ethnicities, 0.5 %.

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[5]   Anonymous informant, Civil society organization, December 7, 2017. In-depth interview via Skype.

[6]   "Moldova Between Russia and the West: A Delicate Balance—Carnegie Endowment for International Peace," accessed September 26, 2017, *http://carnegieendowment.org/2017/05/23/moldova-between-russia-and-west-delicate-balance-pub-70056*.

[7]   Biroul Naţional de Statistică, "Comerţ exterior," accessed December 15, 2017, *http://www.statistica.md/category.php?l=ro&idc=336&*.

[8]   "Dependenţa Energetică a Republicii Moldova / E-Democracy.md," accessed December 15, 2017, *http://www.e-democracy.md/monitoring/economy/comments/200409031/*.

Compared to the last census, the share of the population that identify themselves as Moldovans decreased by 10 percentage points (pp), and those who declared themselves Romanian rose by 4.8 pp. In the last 10 years, the percentage of those with Russian and Ukrainian ethnicity decreased by 1.9 and 1.8 pp, respectively, and the percentage of ethnic Bulgarian, Gagauz people, and Roma people did not change.

There is still an ideological differentiation between the ethnopolitical terms Moldovan and Romanian. The 'two' languages are the same, a fact confirmed even by the Constitutional Court of Moldova, but some politicians use the 'Moldovan' narrative as an argument against closer relationships with Romania, NATO, and the EU. Another issue with ethnic diversity policies in the Republic of Moldova is that for an extended period all of the minority ethnic groups have been treated as 'Russian speakers' in the educational system and media outreach. Rather than translating legislation into all the minority languages, the state has decided to present it to the public in only Romanian and Russian. At the same time, all the minority language schools in the Republic of Moldova have Russian as the primary language and the minority language as the secondary one.

The language question is a painful one in most ex-Soviet countries, and legislators avoid regulating it outright to prevent provoking a social backlash. At the same time, this has created a situation in which most of the ethnic minority representatives speak their native language and Russian equally, rather than the state language. Moreover, final exams in the Moldovan/Romanian language have in the past caused conflict, for example, between the Moldovan authorities and the leadership of the Gagauz Autonomous Region, which threatened to issue parallel high school diplomas for those who failed them. Thus, by choosing not to deal with the issue of promoting minority languages but rather adopt Russian as a proxy language, the state has led most ethnic minorities to consume media mostly in Russian. This is reflected in voting options as well. The northern districts, densely populated by Ukrainians and people in the Gagauz Autonomous Region, seem to favour pro-Kremlin candidates, both in local and national elections. Based on these factors, we can safely conclude that the Ukrainians and Gagauz people are highly vulnerable to pro-Kremlin propaganda.

Another group sensitive to pro-Kremlin propaganda is the close followers of the Moldovan Orthodox Church, which is under the authority of the

Russian Orthodox Church. Hundreds of zealots protested[9] against an equal rights law in 2013, claiming it was the first step to legalising same-sex marriages. The law merely guaranteed protection against discrimination in working relationships. Most of the protesters declared that they were blessed by the head of the Church to participate and would do it again if asked. While 90.13 % of the population of the Republic of Moldova claim to be Orthodox, most are not ardent followers. At the same time, a significant number of frequent churchgoers can be influenced by narratives promoted by the Church.

A third group sensitive to media manipulation is the elderly. According to official data, more than 718 000 Moldovans are retired. The media literacy of this category of people is more limited than the general population, as are their internet skills. They rely on traditional sources of information and informal communication to get news. Also, their limited income does not allow them to buy newspapers or magazines. This is exploited by parties that produce papers and distribute them free of charge. Often these publications promote fake news, such as a story about 30 000 Syrian refugees who were supposed to come to Moldova if the pro-Western candidate, Maia Sandu, was elected president. This type of media is hard to track, as many of them do not indicate the number of issues or the authors of the articles they print. One of the interviewed experts stresses the vulnerability of the elderly to media propaganda and disinformation this way:

'The elderly, especially in rural regions, have a tougher time distinguishing between propaganda and actual information. While the younger generation may use alternative sources from the web, the older people are "bombarded" by Russian and local propaganda. The media education projects should target them for sure'.[10]

According to the last Opinion Barometer (April 2017),[11] over 60 % of people older than 60 would vote for joining the Russia-led Eurasian Economic Union. For comparison, from the 18—29 age group, only 36 % would vote for the same. One explanation for this situation could be Soviet nostalgia, widely present among older people.

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[9]   PUBLIKA.MD, "Protest Bisericesc Împotriva Homosexualilor. Sute de Enoriaşi Şi Preoţi Cer Anularea Legii Egalităţii de Şanse VIDEO/FOTO," PUBLIKA.MD, May 19, 2013, *http://bit.ly/2FKFIUN*

[10] Petru Macovei, Independent Press Association, December 11, 2017. In-depth interview via Skype.

[11] *Institutul de Politici Publice, "Barometrul Opiniei publice" April 27, 2017, http://ipp.md/old/libview.php?l=ro&idc=156&id=820.*

MEDIA LANDSCAPE

According to the 2016 Freedom of the Press Index,[12] Moldova is partly free. In March 2015, parliament provided the legal background to require TV and radio companies to disclose their final beneficiaries, as well as board members, managers, broadcasters, and producers. The national authorities have also used national-security reasons to bar several Russian journalists from entering Moldova, declaring them 'undesirable persons'.

In the Reporters without Borders ranking,[13] Moldova in the 2017 World Press Freedom Index ranked 80th, falling four places compared to 2016. The organisation assesses the Moldovan media market to be diversified but also incredibly polarised. It points out that the editorial positions of the media outlets depend on the interests of their owners or affiliated politicians. An important issue in the media climate is the lack of independence of the broadcasting regulatory authority.

The IREX Media Sustainability Index[14] gave Moldova a 2.3 (out of 4) in 2017, comparable to the 2016 score and placing it at the 'near sustainability level'. The index emphasizes problems with the independence of the Broadcasting Coordination Council (BCC), media ownership, and access to information for journalists. These problems persist, especially in the justice system, which tries to anonymise decisions based on data-protection principles while looking to make it harder to investigate corruption cases.

The EU-funded Media Freedom Watchproject's ranking[15] of the Eastern Partnership countries (Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan) states that Moldova has made significant progress regarding guaranteeing media freedom. This leads to the conclusion that the press in Moldova is relatively free by most accepted standards.

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[12]   "Moldova FPI," March 10, 2016, https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2016/moldova.

[13]   "Moldova: Media as Weapons. Reporters without Borders," RSF, accessed December 15, 2017, https://rsf.org/en/moldova.

[14]   Leon Morse, "Media Sustainability Index Europe 2016" (Washington DC: IREX, 2016), https://www.irex.org/sites/default/files/pdf/media-sustainability-index-europe-eurasia-2016-full.pdf.pdf.

[15]   "Media Freedom in Moldova, Balkanmedia, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung," Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, accessed November 23, 2017, http://www.kas.de/wf/en/71.13614/.

The BCC register includes 126 programme services, including:

70 television stations:

- 32 broadcast via terrestrial channels, including four satellite channels,

- 31 distributed only via cable networks; and,

- 7 broadcast exclusively on satellite.

56 radio stations:

- 55 broadcast via terrestrial frequencies, including one through satellite;

- 1 through wired diffusion.

According to the list published by the BCC on its website, of the 70 television stations, five have national coverage: *Moldova 1*, *Prime*, *Canal 2*, *Canal 3*, and *Publika TV*. Of the 56 radio stations, eight have national coverage: *Radio Moldova*, *FM Radio*, *Publika FM*, *Radio Plai*, *Hit FM*, *Vocea Basarabiei*, *Fresh FM*, and *Noroc Radio*.

An audience measurement of television stations in the Republic of Moldova was carried out under the aegis of AGB Nielsen Media Research by TV MR MLD. Some broadcasters and NGOs have questioned the independence and objectivity of the research and development of the results.

According to AGB data, in November 2017, Prime had the highest average daily audience, with a rating of 2.85 %. RTR Moldova ranked second with 1.52 %, while Canal 2 was ranked third with 0.87 %. Four channels—Moldova 1, N4, NTV Moldova and JurnalTV—have average ratings ranging from 0.78 % to 0.50 %, and the other eight stations have less than half a percentage point each in their respective rankings.[16]

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[16]   AGB Nielsen Media Research, "Обзор Телевизионной Аудитории" (Chisinau, November 2017), *http://bit.ly/2DwKx24*.

TV Broadcaster   Rating assesment %

TV Broadcaster	Rating
Prime	2.85
RTR Moldova	1.52
Canal 2	0.87
Moldova 1	0.78
NTV Moldova	0.70
N4	0.59
Jurnal TV	0.50
THT Exclusiv TV	0.39
Canal 3	0.39
PRO TV	0.36
RenTV	0.26
Publika TV	0.25
CTC	0.20
Familia Domashniy	0.12
TV8	0.10
Moldova 2	0.05
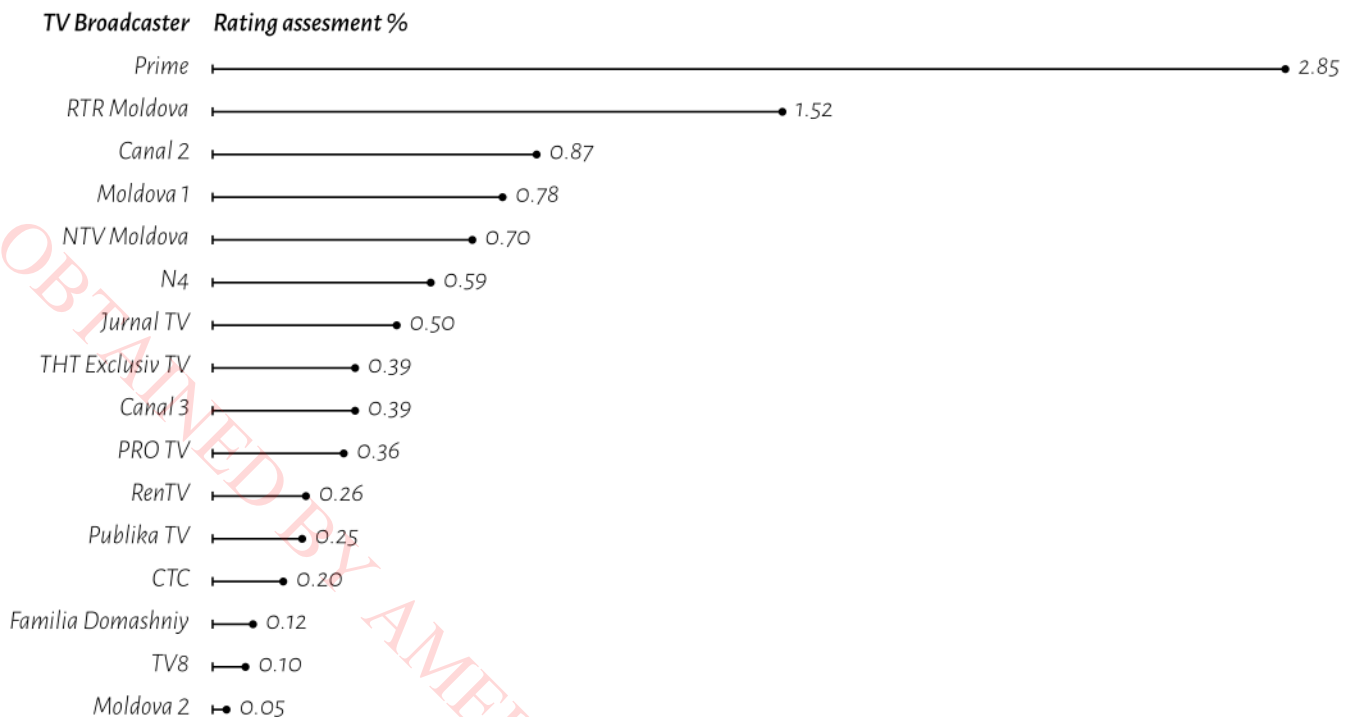
Figure 1 AGB NIELSEN Ratings Assessment

Source: agb.md (November 2017)

At least seven TV stations, including five of the top 10, rebroadcast Russian TV channels. These include Prime (ORT), RTR Moldova (RTR), NTV Moldova (NTV), TNT Bravo (TNT), Ren TV Moldova (REN TV), STS Mega (STC), and RenTV.

Experts point to the monopolisation of the media market as one of its challenges:

'One of the biggest issues of the Moldovan media landscape is the monopolisation of the market ... There are two main media "holdings", one representing the government and governing party and another the president and the Socialists that promote manipulative content, both local and foreign ... This multiplies the external factors' effects tenfold'.[17]

In general, Russian broadcasts dominate most of the top 15 TV channels, as shown by AGB measurement data for November 2017. Basically, for two-thirds of the top television channels (10 out of 15), the most watched are mostly broadcasts and programmes in Russian. They usually originate

[17]   Anonymous informant, Civil society organization, December 7, 2017. In-depth interview via Skype.

from Russian channels, Soviet-era production films, or TV series produced in Russia. The few exceptions are Moldova 1, Pro TV Chisinau, Publika TV, Realitatea TV, and, partly, Channel 2. Yet another concern is the specifics of the broadcasters' business:

'One of the biggest issues that promotes manipulative content is the business model of the broadcasters. Most of them are not profitable, but rather rely on obscure models of receiving money for promoting such narratives'.[18]

An eight month study carried out in 2014 by the Electronic Press Association's monitoring of eight television stations (Canal 2, Canal 3, JurnalTV, Moldova 1, Prime, Pro TV Chisinau, Publika TV, and TV7) also confirms the prevalence of Russian TV content.[19]

Thus, two of the four private national broadcasters at peak hours transmitted Russian media products (other than artistic films) in a proportion of over 50 % (Canal 3, 50 %; Prime, 77 %). At the same time, if we exclude movies, the programmes broadcast in Russian (including rebroadcasts) from the two television stations varies between 76 % (Canal 3) and 80 % (Prime).

News sites	Reach %
point.md	19.33
sputnik.md	12.52
protv.md	11.79
kp.md	9.53
noi.md	9.24
diez.md	8.86
timpul.md	7.59
ria.ru	6.17
realitatea.md	4.95
agora.md	4.83
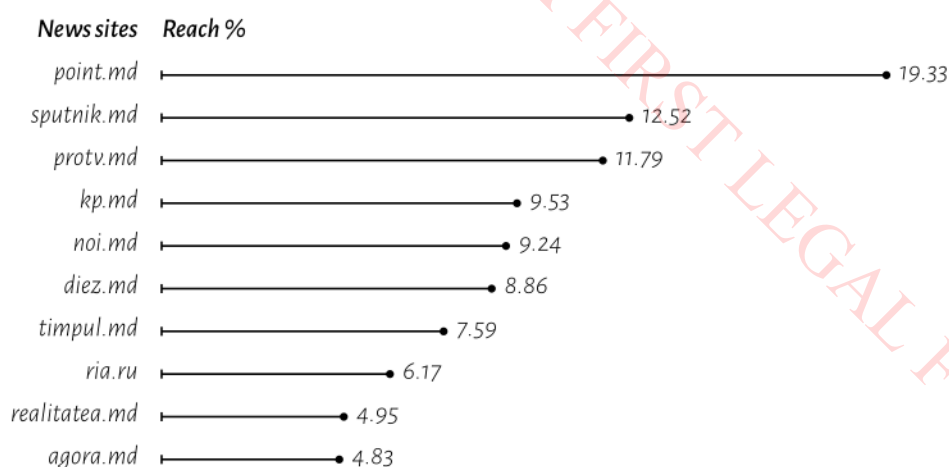
Figure 2 News sites reach BATI measurement

Source: Biroul de Audit Al Tirajelor Si Internetului (November 2017)

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[18]   Dumitru Alaiba, Centre for Policy and Reforms, December 12, 2017. In-depth interview via Skype.

[19]   Aneta Gonta et al., "Pluralismul Intern Al Mass-Mediei Din Republica Moldova: Oportunitate şi Realitate" (Chisinau: Asociatia Presei Electronice, 2014).

In relation to online media, the Audit Bureau of Circulations Moldova (BATI) issued the ratings shown in Figure 2 for October 2017. The ratings show that four out of the 10 most viewed news websites in Moldova, including the most popular site, *Point.md*, promote pro-Kremlin positions. Furthermore, another top site also includes the Russian site *Ria.ru*, which has a reach of over 6 % of the population. The sister website of Sputnik.ru, backed by the Russian government, Sputnik.md, has both Russian and Romanian versions to reach a bigger audience. Most of these sites were found to promote fake or manipulative news, according to local debunking initiatives.

Social media networks	*Users*
Odnoklassniki.ru	1 160 000
Facebook	760 000
Vkontakte	250 000
Instagram	250 000
LinkedIn	141 800
Twitter	25 000
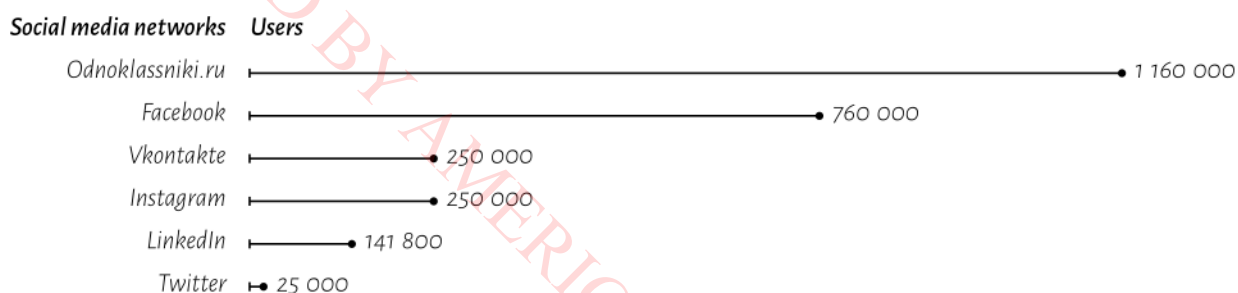
Figure 3 Social media users by network Source

Source: Gramatic.md (January 2017)

According to a report published by the digital communications agency Gramatic.md, the most popular social media network in Moldova is the Russian website Odnoklassniki.ru, with more than a million users.[20] The Russian social media network Vkontakte ranks third, with more than 250 000 active users. The average profile of an Odnoklassniki user is a high school graduate (over 37 %), who lives in the centre of the country (over 54 %) and is 20 – 29 years old (over 31 %).

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[20]   "Gramatic Social Media Report – Ianuarie 2017" (Chisinau, January 2017), *http://gramatic.md/socialmediareport/*.

Newspapers	Copies distributed in Moldova BATI
Komsomolskaya Pravda	106 158
Makler	43 054
Antenna	27 911
Timpul de dimineata	25 251
Makler Balti	20 395
Trud 7 Moldova	3 192
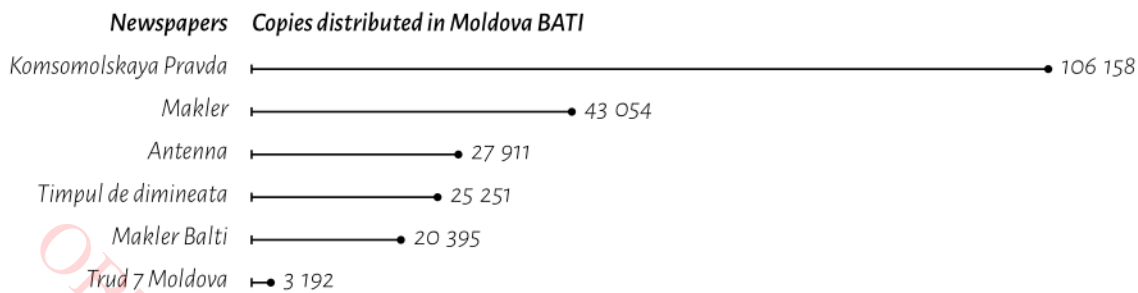
Figure 4 Newspapers copies distributed in Moldova

Source: Biroul de Audit Al Tirajelor Si Internetulu (June 2017)

The newspaper business in the Republic of Moldova, as in most post-Soviet countries, is in decline, since many of the former consumers have switched to online versions of the same newspapers. The BATI statistics for June 2017 show there currently is only one daily newspaper, *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, which distributed more than 106 000 copies. The weekly publications' statistics include two personal adverts newspapers, *Makler and Makler* Balti. There are also data on three other semi-major newspapers, *Timpul de dimineață*, with over 25 000 copies, *Antenna*, almost 28 000 copies, and *Trud 7* Moldova, more than 3 000 copies. Only one of the newspapers on this list is published in Romanian. Two of the others, Komsomolskaya Pravda and Trud 7 Moldova, are known to take a position favourable to Kremlin narratives. Also, we must acknowledge that these distribution figures are voluntary and do not include local and party newspapers.

In the Republic of Moldova, the broadcasting domain began to be regulated in 1995, more than four years after the declaration of independence (1991), when the first 'Law on broadcasting' came into force, creating the BCC and empowering it with regulatory control and licensing functions.[21] In the early years of the BCC, it approved numerous licenses for TV and radio broadcast without any limitations on content, including the language and provenance of materials.

In 2006, after the adoption of the new 'Broadcasting Code', the BCC elaborated a 'National Territorial Coverage Strategy'[22] that has set some objectives for the promotion of national content and broadcasts

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[21]   Parlamentul Republicii Moldova, "Codul Audiovizualului," Pub. L. No. 260 (2006), http://lex.justice.md/document_rom.php?id=041D82D8:3A07C731.

[22]   Consiliul Coordonator al Audiovizualului, "Strategia de Acoperire a Teritoriului Naţional Cu Servicii de Programe Audiovizuale (2011 – 2015)," 100 § (2011), http://lex.justice.md/index.php?action=view&view=doc&lang=1&id=339368.

in Romanian, which were significantly lagging the Russian-language content. According to one of the interviewed experts,

'the adoption of the new "Broadcasting Code" has been in question since 2010. It was one of the issues stated in the Association Agenda with the EU. In order to have a strategic approach to fighting propaganda, this agreement should be fulfilled and translated into actions'.[23]

Although the strategy was revised in 2011, its objectives of reaching 70% of broadcasts in the national language have yet to be met. So, from the analysis by AGB Nielsen Media Research, four out of the five most popular TV stations in the Republic of Moldova do not comply with the legal requirements. The schedules of Prime TV, RTR Moldova, NTV Moldova, and Channel 2 are widely dominated by Russian programmes and TV shows. Some of these present programmes acquired from Russian TV stations as 'own productions' due to the exclusive rights to rebroadcast on the territory of the Republic of Moldova. This loophole has not been closed by the BCC and is widely used to mask foreign media products as nationally produced while promoting the Russian propaganda agenda. Even entertainment products directly or subliminally support the interests of the Russian propaganda machine. This makes their domination over the Moldovan broadcasting market an avenue for disinformation and outright propaganda.

The Moldovan journalist community's Press Council adopted the latest version of its deontological code in 2011.[24] The document includes a series of rules for obtaining and processing information, as well as ensuring the accuracy and verifiability of the facts presented. Journalists must receive information from a minimum of two sources, quoting them when possible. The implementation of the code is the responsibility of the signatories. The journalists' professional ethics committee is responsible for monitoring the implementation of the code. Nevertheless, the last published press release by this committee dates from 2008, and the website of the NGO community has been under reconstruction for a long time. This seems to be due to a lack of resources to continue the activity at even the low level of compliance within the code itself. Experts believe that the significance of the deontological code should be increased:

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[23]   Anonymous informant, Civil society organization, December 7, 2017. In-depth interview via Skype.

[24]   "Codul Deontologic Al Jurnalistului Din Republica Moldova" (Chisinau: Consiliul de Presa, 2011), *http://consiliuldepresa.md/fileadmin/fisiere/fisiere/Cod_deontologic_al_jurnalistului_din_Republica_final.pdf*.

'If you have local journalists who join international circles in promoting manipulative narratives, the community should step up and respond to it. While the fact-checking initiatives haven't had it as easy as the "sexy" well-rounded arguments of fake stories, they should continue, as there is a clear need to debunk them'.[25]

According to yet another expert,

'I would compare the journalists to doctors who swear the Hippocratic oath and then ask for 'gifts' or money after the operations. We are a product of a society where moral rules without sanctions have little bearing. This is the problem with the deontological code'.[26]

An adequate, sustainable system of self-monitoring in the media community relies on the availability of members who comply with the legal codes as well as the importance of ethical rules in the broader social context. Due to the structure of the Moldovan media landscape, it is unlikely that self-monitoring will have a high rate of compliance. A possible role for the application of the deontological code would be through 'public shaming' rather than implying a of journalist's compliance with the respective norms. Nevertheless, the code has other positive functions, for example, the one made within the 'Stop Fals!' campaign, which refers to the code as upholding the standards of 'good journalism'. Strengthening mechanisms monitoring the implementation of the deontological code could possibly enhance the capabilities to deal with propaganda and media manipulation.

LEGAL REGULATIONS

The primary document that defines information security in the media dimension is the 'National Security Strategy of the Republic of Moldova', adopted by the Parliamentary Decision No.153 of July 15, 2011.[27] Paragraph 47 states that challenges in the media sphere are part of the national security threats to the Republic of Moldova. In this respect, the strategy reported that the normative framework should be

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[25]   Andrei Lutenco, Center for Policy and Reforms, December 11, 2017. In-depth interview via Skype.

[26]   Elena Robu, Unimedia, December 11, 2017. In-depth interview via Skype.

[27]   Parlamentul Republicii Moldova, "Strategia Securității Naționale a Republicii Moldova," 153 § (2011), *http://lex.justice.md/md/340510/.*

adjusted by the introduction of appropriate, active monitoring, control, and implementation mechanisms to protect Moldovan society from misinformation attempts and manipulative information from the outside. While capturing the essence of the issue, the strategy does not provide actionable and measurable outcomes and is limited to declarations of intent.

The law regarding the Information and Security Service (ISS)[28] does not provide a clear framework for dealing with information security. The primary objectives of the agency are to deal with espionage, diversions, and other criminal offences from being attempted against national security. At the same time, most pro-Kremlin propaganda does not fall under the penal code and cannot be criminalised. The tools to monitor and limit foreign media influence are provided in Article 8 of the law, which states that the service can perform both information and counter-information activities. While the fight against foreign propaganda can fall under these two activities, it is not clear whether the service deals with these issues. According to the head of the Independent Press Association, Petru Macovei,

'we should have a useful Information and Security Service able to monitor the financing of politicians and broadcasters. During the last presidential campaign, investigative journalists found schemes of offshore financing of broadcasters through the Bahamas, but the service chose not to act on it and "not to be effective"'.[29]

An interesting initiative is the draft law No. 189 of June 13, 2017,[30] proposed by the ruling Democrat Party. It puts forward a definition of information security that limits it to all measures to protect individuals, society, and the state from any attempts to propagate misinformation and manipulation from the outside. This definition describes with a reasonably high degree of accuracy two types of propagandistic activities, but it adds some uncertainty and contradicts the terms used in the 'Information Security Concept'[31] drafted by the ISS and adopted by parliament.

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[28]   Parlamentul Republicii Moldova, "Legea Privind Serviciul de Informaţii Şi Securitate Al Republicii Moldova," 753 § (1999), http://lex.justice.md/md/311721/.

[29]   Petru Macovei, Independent Press Association, December 11, 2017. In-depth interview via Skype.

[30]   Dumitru Diacov et al., "Lege Cu Privire La Modificarea Si Completarea Codului Audiovizualului Nr 260/2006," Pub. L. No. 189 (2017), http://bit.ly/2phpFXD.

[31]   "Conceptia Securitatii Informationale," Pub. L. No. 396 (2017), http://parlament.md/LegislationDocument.aspx?Id=dda2e662-c948-49c9-950b-724c4b01627d.

Initially, it is worth mentioning that the set of measures described by project No. 189 refers to the state's reaction to a range of potential security risks. Although useful, this concept cannot be considered 'information security', but instead, state policy to ensure information security. Further, by analysing the elements of hostile information activities described by the project, we note that two essential elements are reviewed: misinformation and manipulative information, which in the context of the definition, results in propaganda. In fact, researchers also distinguish between misinformation and misleading information, the latter being unintentional and, as a result, less prejudicial.

At the same time, this definition does not include propaganda activities that do not necessarily involve the output of erroneous information but the promotion of values and visions hostile to the Republic of Moldova, so-called 'hostile narratives'. Also, there is the situation when two legislative drafts give an alternative definition to the term 'information security', so referring to the 'Information Security Concept' and the legislative draft No. 189 is not advisable.

In the Information and Security Service-promoted document, 'information security' is the state of protection of a person, the society, and country, which determines the ability to resist threats to confidentiality, integrity, and availability in the information space. This concept is used in the West to define cybersecurity and is part of a broader information-security umbrella. The problem is acknowledged by the interviewed experts:

'There is a lack of consensus on the notion of "information security" and what the state should do about it. Moreover, I would say there is a lack of political will to effectively deal with this issue'. [32]

There seems to be a lack of communication between the principal actors in national security policy in the Republic of Moldova and the non-alignment of draft normative acts in the same field. Also, both projects interpret 'information security' in a way limited to its sectoral aspects.

The only measure provided by draft law No. 189 is the introduction of a ban on the transmission of informational, informative, analytical, military, and political broadcasts from countries that have not ratified the European Convention on Transfrontier Television, except for the EU, the US, and Canada. One of the legal experts interviewed within this research says:

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[32]   Anonymous, Personal interview with a representative of the Administration of the President of Moldova, live, July 10, 2017.

'I have a more liberal view of the media market. There should be serious grounds on banning the rebroadcasting of some political views and they were not presented yet. If we are to fight propaganda, we should not use similar tools, but go after the final beneficiaries of media companies and ensuring transparency. The broadcasters should take their own obligations under the law more seriously'. [33]

This measure, although easy to monitor, has several apparent shortcomings. Media agents may be re-registered in states that are signatories to the convention, or messages released in the broadcasts concerned may be modified for use in local broadcasts for formal compliance with the legal provisions. Also, the envisaged measures only affect broadcasting media and do not interfere with other media (print and online media, as well as the informal communication environment). In the case of developed propagandistic networks, the expected effect of the legislative changes will be short-term and will not affect the transmission of messages hostile to Moldova.

Another expert that we spoke to says the following:

'This flagship initiative was speeded through a parliament's hearing and adopted on the first and second reading during one day without respecting the norms on transparency and participation ... Still, I consider that banning a TV broadcast should come through a court decision with respect for human rights'. [34]

Another essential element of the legislative framework is the ability of the BCC to fight media manipulation. According to the 'Broadcasting Code', [35] the BCC can license, suspend, or withdraw the licences of TV and radio stations, as well as fine them. Also, it can punish media outlets that promote propaganda narratives in cases when the information comprising the news is not accurate. Reality is distorted through montage tricks, comments, or titles. In some conflicts, the media outlet did not respect the principle of information from several sources.

While the three cases do not cover all the possible types of media manipulation, even these are used sparingly. Most of the circumstances found media outlets do not reflect reality. Instead, they use public warnings. A legal expert explains one of the reasons for the country's vulnerability to foreign propaganda:

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[33]   Andrei Lutenco, Center for Policy and Reforms, December 11, 2017. In-depth interview via Skype.

[34]   Petru Macovei, Independent Press Association, December 11, 2017. In-depth interview via Skype.

[35]   Parlamentul Republicii Moldova, Codul Audiovizualului.

'We have a public regulator of the media market that chronically fails to do its job. The situation with the Moldovan mass media is not a recent development. It functions just formally. It has become sterile. This is one of the causes of the fact that Moldova is one of the weakest states within the Eastern Partnership in terms of propaganda'.[36]

For example, the monitoring of the campaign for the local referendum dismissing the mayor of Chisinau, Dorin Chirtoaca, caused the BCC to find irregularities in the news broadcast of five of the monitored TV stations.[37] All received public warnings. This 'slap on the wrist' practice makes the existing mechanisms inefficient and favours impunity for media outlets promoting 'fake news'.

Another issue with the current 'Broadcasting Code' is that the BCC does not have a clear mandate for monitoring broadcasts except during electoral periods. This can contribute to using it as a tool to 'control' the opposition press, as there is no certainty and predictability in the monitoring process:

'The first problem of the BCC is that the nominations are highly politicised. It does not provide transparency in the decision-making process and does not require public hearings with the participation of civil society. This leads to politically motivated decisions like, for example, suspending the licence of the opposition TV station Jurnal TV'.[38]

Another essential legislative act relevant to propaganda vulnerability is the 'Law about the Press No. 243', adopted on October 26, 1994.[39] While it requests news agencies register with the Ministry of Justice, it does not make it compulsory and does not provide sanctions for failing to do so. The ministry could be, according to a representative of the Association of the Independent Press, a critical threshold for limiting the creation of 'cloned' news sites and deceiving 'satire' sites that promote propagandistic messages:

'Many Russian entertainment TV shows and publications subtly promote pro-Kremlin narratives. This makes the efforts taken by the government less useful, as they target mostly political and military TV broadcasts'.[40]

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[36]   Dumitru Alaiba, Centre for Policy and Reforms, December 12, 2017. In-depth interview via Skype.

[37]   "Raport referendum local 27.10–05.11.2017" (Consiliul Coordonator al Audiovizualului, 2017), *http://cca.md/files/Raport%20referendum%20local%2027.10-05.11.2017.pdf.*

[38]   Valeriu Pasa, Watchdog.md NGO, September 10, 2017. In-depth interview.

[39]   Parlamentul Republicii Moldova, "Legea Presei," 243 § (1994), *http://lex.justice.md/index.php?action=view&view=doc&lang=1&id=311633.*

[40]   Alla Rosca, Tulane University, December 8, 2017. In-depth interview via Skype.

In principle, in the Republic of Moldova, there is no mandatory registration for the online press and any site owner can pose as representing mass media. In recent years, there has been a massive build-up of bloggers whose messages promote pro-Kremlin themes and favour the governing parties. Sometimes they are the sources of fake news or 'leaks' against the opposition:

'Anyone with a limited amount of money could open up a website to promote fake news and get away with it. The legislation has no limits on it and no sanctions. I consider that there should be fines or other types of penalties for those who make it a profitable activity'. [41]

The legislative framework of the Republic of Moldova is outdated and needs to be adjusted to the emerging threats to information security. But these efforts need to take a systemic approach, shaped by the updated 'National Security Strategy' to avoid legislative conflicts and provide sufficient mechanisms of control to ensure both adequate countermeasures and respect of freedom of the press.

INSTITUTIONAL SETUP

The main actors dealing with media vulnerability in Moldova can be divided into three categories: state actors, civil society, and media outlets. Concerning the state actors, the following are critical players:

- Parliament, the representative of legislative power;

- The BCC, the primary regulator of the TV and radio markets;

- Ministry of Justice, the registrar of news agencies and newspapers;

- President, guarantor of national security; and

- The ISS, the body dealing with hostile information activities on the territory of the Republic of Moldova.

The reporting system in place has limited capacity for parliament to monitor the developments in media resilience effectively. Both the ISS and BCC report annually to parliament on general issues. They do not provide detailed sectoral reports and, for example, the BCC report is only

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[41]   Elena Robu, Unimedia, December 11, 2017. In-depth interview via Skype.

discussed by the Commission on Culture, Education, Research, Youth, and Mass Media before being presented to parliament. This limits the capacity to focus on the issues in the report and does not provide sufficient access to relevant information to foster media resilience. At the same time, parliament could establish an inquiry committee to investigate hostile media activities on the country's territory, but this does not seem to be the course of actions chosen by the political leadership.

On July 17, 2017, a working group focused on the improvement of mass media legislation was created to deal with a range of issues, including information security. According to the published agenda, the group aims to draft a 'National Information Security Strategy' as well as update legislation on mass media, targeting, amongst other issues, information security. This ambitious agenda, though, must contend with a series of issues. Civil society considers the BCC to be politically dependent, so extending its powers without ensuring its independence may not lead to a better media landscape, rather to undue political control over broadcasters.

Drafting the 'National Information Security Strategy' would be an essential step in promoting a better level of media resilience, but it must stem from the NSS, which needs to be updated since 2015 according to its own requirements. The adoption of this umbrella policy document though seems problematic due to the complex political landscape of the country. President Dodon is openly pro-Kremlin and he has made it clear that he will not accept the NSS because it would antagonise the Russian Federation. He has withdrawn the draft NSS proposed by the former president, Nicolae Timofti, claiming that its contents no longer correspond to the substantial changes that have taken place in the national, regional, and international security environment.[42]

The position of the Administration of the President was made clear to us by one of its representatives:

'The NSS must be geopolitically neutral to be approved by the president. At the same time, the adoption of an Information Security Strategy is a crisis waiting to happen. If it is going to be adopted as law, it must be approved by the president. He will likely reject a bill that will target the rebroadcasting of Russian media outlets. If he proposes a new NSS project that will not comply with the pro-European orientation of the current parliament, it will most likely

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[42]   "Republica Moldova: Igor Dodon a Dispus Retragerea Proiectului Strategiei Securității Naționale—AGERPRES," accessed November 22, 2017, http://bit.ly/2DwUj4p.

be rejected as well. This stalemate is going to affect the process of the formulation of effective policies granting a better media resilience level.[43]

A third option is to adopt the 'Information Security Strategy' based on the existing 'Information Security Concept'. This document only deals with cybersecurity and the integrity of confidential information. While the Ukrainian example shows that protecting critical information infrastructure is an imperative for the state, such decisions would represent a missed opportunity for parliament to promote a more comprehensive information-security policy:

'One of the issues with the government implementing measures to protect information security is that they are not transparent. Earlier this year, some Russian diplomats and journalists were declared persona non-grata. At the same time, the ISS, as well as the government "failed to convince us" why that was needed or useful … If you declare yourself pro-European, you should act accordingly".[44]

The incentive policy proposed by parliament to promote national content represents a novel way to foster media resilience against the prominence of Russian content. At the same time, as we have pointed out earlier, the most essential broadcasters on the Moldovan market are closely linked to politicians. Most notable are the four most popular TV channels owned by the leader of the Democrat Party, Vladimir Plahotniuc, and people affiliated to him. The tax incentives might prove to be a way to maximise profits for the broadcasters without affecting the media resilience of the country:

'The implementation of the ban on rebroadcasting Russian TV might stumble on economic interests. The Russian TV channels are popular and bring profit through advertising to some politicians. Politicians responsible for making decisions are unlikely to take decisions against their own business interests'.[45]

As described above, the institutional cooperation on issues of promoting information security in Moldova is dependent on political aspects and fails to provide genuinely independent agencies to regulate the media market. This affects the prospects of improving the national policy on enhancing media resilience towards hostile activities.

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[43]   Anonymous informant, Administration of the President of Moldova. In-depth interview.

[44]   Ion Vasilica, Sic.md, December 11, 2017. In-depth interview via Skype.

[45]   Mihai Cernencu, Free International University of Moldova, December 9, 2017. In-depth interview via Skype.

DIGITAL DEBUNKING TEAMS

In the Republic of Moldova, there are three major initiatives to expose and combat disinformation, including one that deals with reporting fake social media accounts used for promoting hostile narratives. The number of initiatives is not very impressive but the situation will change in time once Moldova will be able to access the Countering Russian Influence Fund (CRIF), estimated at 250 million USD for the fiscal years 2018–2019. The core issues for the local initiatives are essential funding and resources to monitor and efficiently report on 'fake news' and promote different narratives.

One of the first and the most significant initiative is the *'Stop Fals!'* campaign initiated by the Association of Independent Press (API). Through this project, API aims to build the capacities of independent media and its network of member-constituents through specialised service provision. It also plans to develop a media campaign against fake and tendentious information (in partnership with the Independent Journalism Centre (IJC) and the Association of Independent TV-journalists in the Republic of Moldova (AITVJ). Among the activities to promote these goals, API supports writing and publishing journalistic materials revealing false and tendentious information. It has also produced several videos and audio investigations about propaganda and publishes a monthly newspaper supplement about propaganda.

As a strange sign of the project's success, we can point to a fake (imitation) site called stopfals.com that appeared, promoting false debunking stories on the web under the real project's brand. It is important to mention that 'Stop False' has chosen not to limit itself to the web and disseminates its findings to local newspapers to reach a broader audience that does not necessarily have the access or skills to use the internet.

Unfortunately, the campaign only deals with local content. This limits the capability of the campaign to fight against all the pro-Kremlin narratives concerning the Republic of Moldova that come from original Russian sources, and sometimes even Western media. This project can be best described as a useful tool to monitor local media and promote 'fake news' awareness culture in the country.

The *Sic.md* project has ambitious goals to identify lies, inaccuracies and manipulations in public impact statements and inform citizens in a simple and accessible way. Sic.md also deals with monitoring the public promises of politicians as well as notifying breaches of ethics in media and public declarations.

The website has a very user-friendly interface. The team strives to have daily posts that represent a synthesis of the day and long reads on complex issues linked to media manipulation. The website also has a report section for a user to email the debunking team. As one of the team members explains,

'it's really hard to convince someone in fact-checking messages with opposite views, if not impossible. Our goal is to equip our readers with arguments for personal interactions based on facts that might make a difference'.[46]

Among the limitations of this initiative is that it is limited to one website, compared to 'Stop Fals!', which publishes its articles on several websites and newspapers. Additionally, it does not have a developed communications component, most likely because of a lack of resources.

Sic.md also can be considered a tool for political accountability, including for pro-Kremlin politicians' declarations, which expands its coverage compared to the 'Stop Fals!' campaign.

The *TROLLESS* project was developed during the 2nd Media Hackathon 'The Fifth Power', organised by the Centre for Independent Journalism and Deutsche Welle Akademie. The primary purpose of the project, a browser extension, is to identify the sources of manipulation in new social media spaces and to isolate them.

The extension helps track false profiles or those who display suspicious or trolling activity on Facebook and other platforms. Users can report them for promoting interests, parties, ideas, causes, misinformation, manipulation, and distraction. This does not affect the availability of the fake accounts, but the people using the extension can see that those accounts have been reported and can analyse the situation accordingly. The Trolless community has more than 800 users on the Chrome platform, and the authors are considering extending it to other platforms like Mozilla or Safari. This project deals exclusively with social media

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[46]   Ion Vasilica, Sic.md, December 11, 2017. In-depth interview via Skype.

and is only available to users who have installed the extension in Google Chrome.

The number of digital-debunking teams in Moldova is insufficient because of the limited resources available for this type of activity. All depend on foreign financial support and may not be sustainable for the long term if this support stops. According to the authors of the projects, the state has not shown interest in developing such initiatives and generally ignores the results of their activity.

MEDIA LITERACY PROJECTS

Media literacy projects are also quite limited in Moldova. In analysing the last three years, we can emphasise the following three developments.

In 2014−2017, the *Centre for Independent Journalism* organised 71 media education lessons, training nearly 2 000 students and teachers from all over the Republic of Moldova. During the activities, the participants learned how media works, what the role of the press is in society, what rules should be observed when writing a news story, how to distinguish false news, and how to avoid propaganda and manipulation in media. Visits were conducted in schools, high schools, universities, and youth centres.

Novateca is a network of more than 1 000 public libraries in each of Moldova's 35 administrative regions, providing the public with 21st-century technology tools, digital literacy learning resources, and community services that address local needs.[47] It has reached more than 450 000 visitors by improving their internet skills and accessing public services online.

The '*Media Education*' course was developed and implemented by the Youth Media Centre in partnership with Deutsche Welle Akademie and the Ministry of Education in November 2015. It has included 63 young people aged 14 to 20 from four educational institutions (three high schools in Chisinau, Drochia, and Cahul, and the 'Alexe Mateevici' Pedagogical College in Chisinau). Among the topics addressed within the course were journalism ethics, use of social media and social networks, and

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[47]   "Novateca − Global Libraries Moldova," IREX, accessed November 23, 2017,
        http://www.irex.org/project/novateca-global-libraries-moldova.

manipulation in mass media. This course was also promoted by the TV show 'Abrasive', broadcast by public TV station Moldova 1 in 2015.

During the inaugural Mass Media Forum that took place on October 27–28, 2015, in Chisinau, former Minister of Education Corina Fusu declared that the institution was considering introducing several media education classes within the civic education discipline. This was based on the concept of integrating media literacy into school and university curricula as developed the Center for Independent Journalism. Fusu saw it as a priority to educate young citizens to distinguish sources of information and develop a critical attitude towards mass media. However, this initiative has not come to fruition yet. At present, the Centre for Independent Journalism is piloting some elective media education classes for primary school. The head of the centre believes that the courses should be mandatory and should target high schools more than primary schools.

CONCLUSIONS

The Moldovan media resilience profile presents a fragmented and uneven landscape. The governing party has declared repeatedly that it prioritises the fight against propaganda but this has yet to transfer into clear policy measures. Some of the prior decisions in dealing with linguistic issues, as well as the lack of political will to implement the requirements of the 'Broadcasting Code' have led to a media market dominated by Russian media. The structure of media ownership suggests that this situation favours a series of political actors who allegedly control some of the most popular TV channels in the country.

At the same time, the implementation of more active measures to counter foreign propaganda may give the regulators means to limit the freedom of the press. Therefore, a prerequisite for implementation of sound policy against media manipulation should be ensuring the independence of the BCC and broad civil-society participation in the process of the selection of its members.

This study has also established a series of other recommendations for enhancing media resilience in the Republic of Moldova in the legal framework, policy measures, and civil society.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Legal framework enhancement:

1. Review the 'Law on the press' to reflect the realities of the digital age and develop a registration system for news agencies and newspapers. This system should include nudging measures, such as rating media outlets that perform their roles without using manipulation techniques, as well as mechanisms to sanction media outlets that openly promote propaganda. Due to the sensitive nature of this review, it should take place in cooperation with the media community and use the standards of the deontological code promoted by the community. A balanced system would gain legitimacy and trust from the population, as well as discourage local actors who help promote propaganda.

2. Close the loopholes in analysing 'local media products' and ensure the application of existing norms of the 'Broadcasting Code'. This measure might be painful to implement in a short period and might require the BCC to give a grace period to broadcasters to adjust to the legal requirements.

3. Clarify the role of the ISS in fighting foreign propaganda under close parliamentary scrutiny. The ISS can be instrumental in establishing who the ultimate beneficiaries of local media outlets are and monitoring the activities of foreign agents who give aid to local actors in promoting pro-Kremlin propaganda.

To the government and competent state bodies:

4. The National Security Strategy should be revised per legal requirement to reflect the new security environment, which has shifted since 2011. Information security should not be limited to cybersecurity, as it is in the Information Security Concept adopted by parliament.

5. A better reporting system should be created for the BCC, the ISS, and the Ministry of Justice to coordinate their efforts in ensuring information security. Parliament, as the primary democratic supervisor, could take a leading role in the operationalisation of the gathered information into policy decisions.

6. The initiative to ban broadcasts from countries that have not signed the European Transfrontier Television Convention represents a 'quick fix' approach and will not lead to positive long-term effects. Media outlets can choose to register in signatory countries or to adapt media content with the help of national broadcasters. National authorities should promote their narratives to counter propaganda by using both official and unofficial channels, including the national public broadcaster.

7. The Ministry of Education should restart the initiative to include media literacy in the school and university curricula, drawing on the success of existing projects in civil society.

To civil society:

8. The media community should reactivate the Ethics Committee to analyse the results of monitoring of national media. The Press Council should promote signing the deontological code through a visible brand that the signatories of the code could use.

9. Debunking initiatives should report current findings through official channels to the BCC. Although the sanctions applied by the agencies rarely represent an impediment to the media outlets that promote propaganda, they contribute to the dissemination of the results of the debunking teams and the news behind the false narratives.

10. Media literacy initiatives should expand to include ethnic minorities and the elderly as communities susceptible to media manipulation and who may lack the necessary skills to analyse information critically.

ŁUKASZ
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*Eurasian States in Transition
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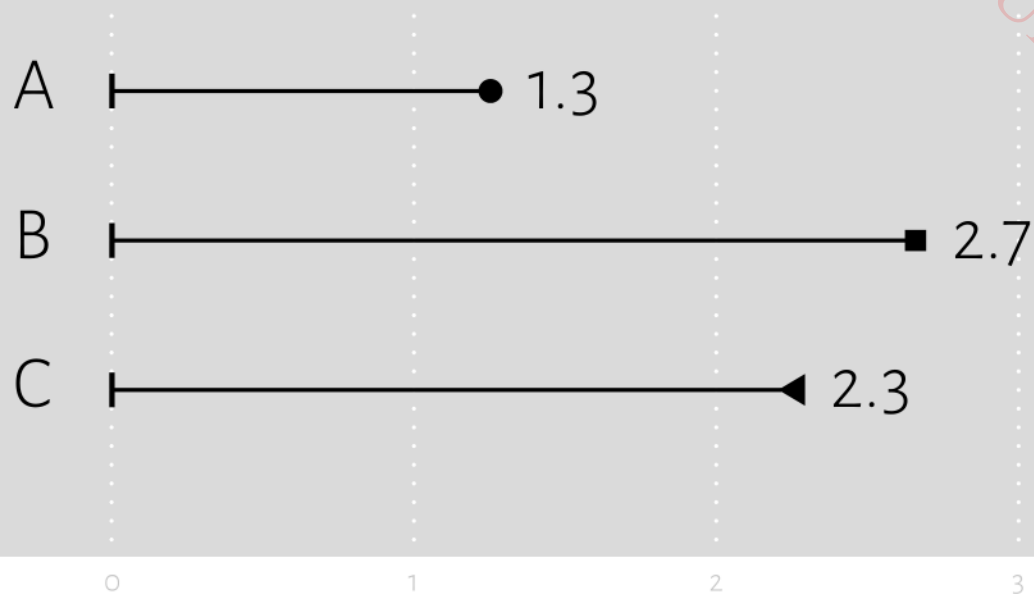
INTRODUCTION

Poland's foreign policy and the political discourse after 1989 was built upon two fundamental goals: European and Atlantic integration (in the EU and NATO) and support for the independence and democratisation of its post-Soviet neighbours (Belarus, Lithuania, and Ukraine). The tensions between Poland and Russia in the 1990s were mostly based on Russia strongly opposing Poland's membership in NATO. Despite this, Poland joined the alliance in 1999 and the European Union in 2004.

Since 2007, the government of Civic Platform tried its own 'reset policy' towards Russia with the launch of the 'Kaliningrad triangle', i.e., meetings between the foreign ministers of Poland, Germany, and Russia, and starting visa-free local border traffic (LBT) between two Polish voivodeships and the Kaliningrad region in 2012. However, the Polish 'reset' was later abandoned because of two main factors: the Russian aggression against Ukraine in 2014 and the long-term consequences and disagreements between the countries after the plane crash in Smolensk, Russia, in April 2010 that killed Polish President Lech Kaczyński and almost one hundred other high-ranking Polish officials, dignitaries, their family members, and crew.[1]

The change of policy affected various areas. A year celebrating Polish culture in Russia in 2015 was canceled. When it comes to the military sphere, Poland strengthened its efforts to attract more NATO attention, as well as the deployment of U.S. troops to Central Europe. Mutual cooperation between Russia and Poland ceased once both the 'Kaliningrad triangle' meetings and the LBT agreement were suspended. Finally, economic cooperation also suffered because the sanctions on Russia and its counter-sanctions affected trade.[2]

Polish officials and intelligence agencies acknowledged the role of Kremlin propaganda in Poland and Russian secret service activities in Europe. Back in 2015, the Polish Internal Security Agency published a report stating that the Russian intelligence services remained

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[1]   J. Kucharczyk, A. Fuksiewicz, The long shadow of the Kremlin: Polish domestic reactions to the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, [in:] Diverging Voices, Converging Policies: The Visegrad States' Reactions to the Russia-Ukraine conflict, J. Kucharczyk, G. Meseznikov (eds.), Prague/Warsaw 2016.

[2]   M. Kacewicz, Ł. Wenerski, Russian soft power in Poland. The Kremlin and pro-Russian organizations, Political Capital, Budapest 2017

very active in Poland.[3] In 2016, two events within the country were recognized as especially vulnerable to Russian secret service activity and internet trolls. One was the Warsaw NATO Summit. The other event was World Youth Day, a meeting of Catholics from across the world who came to see Pope Francis and celebrate their faith.[4]

In 2017, the political situation in Poland was very tense. The judiciary reforms introduced by the government of Law and Justice (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, PiS) were found to breach the rule of law by the European Commission and opposed by part of Polish society. What is more, Polish diplomacy had some problems finding a common language with its counterparts from Germany and Ukraine, and with representatives of the EU Commission and the European Parliament. In early 2018, Polish-Israeli relations also grew tense. Considering the Kremlin's mechanisms, one may argue that political and diplomatic controversies inside and outside of Poland in 2017 became and still are fertile ground for manipulation and other disinformation activities.

VULNERABLE GROUPS

Experts who follow and analyse the Kremlin's strategy to influence and shape people's opinions in various countries do not have a solid and unified explanation on whom to consider vulnerable to disinformation in Poland. The problem of a Russian-speaking minority, discussed as a vulnerable group in several other countries, for instance, in Latvia, Estonia, or some Eastern Partnership states, does not exist in Poland.

Russian TV is not popular in Poland since it is unavailable and most Polish people do not speak Russian at all or only at a very low level, so cannot be influenced by Russian-language media. This makes the potential threat of Kremlin manipulation much more blurred. Yet, one may distinguish some groups of people that for various reasons fall under this category.

One group seems to be vulnerable to direct Kremlin propaganda and consists primarily of older people nostalgic about the pre-1989 period when Poland was a satellite country of the Soviet Union.

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[3] Raport z działalności Agencji Bezpieczeństwo Wewnętrznego w 2014 r. *http://infolupki.pgi.gov.pl/sites/default/files/czytelnia_pliki/1/raport_2015_int.pdf*

[4] M. Kacewicz, Ł. Wenerski, Russian soft power in Poland...Ibid.

'This people often were well established in a previous system, working, for instance, in the security services'.[5]

The group is a recent phenomenon on the Polish internet, and its late arrival is explained by two factors:

'Those people are older than the average internet user and it took some time for them to learn how to use social media' and *'they stopped hiding their political views'.*[6]

In the past, the members of this group felt alienated, but once the low level of the political debate helped them to discover that other people may have similar political views, they started to be more open. The members of the group are disgusted with the weak West and praise a strong Russia. They hate the 'fascist' government in Ukraine, but admire the strong hand of President Putin. They also see anti-Polish conspiracies coming from the EU side, the Jewish community, and Germany.

Another vulnerable group consists of those whose beliefs are located at the extremes of the political spectrum, i.e., far-right and far-left. In Poland, the far-right is considered nowadays a much stronger and influencing position than the far-left. The main traits of far-right groups with regard to their vulnerability are closely interlinked with some key characteristics of the first group analysed in this chapter.

The anti-Ukrainian, anti-German, and anti-European attitude is a common thing among this group. They find the West (defined as the EU and the U.S.) as a place of moral decay and view refugees as an existential threat to traditional European values, a 'Trojan horse' of the Islamic revolution sent to Europe. It is worth a mention that this group consists not only of people who live in Poland but also Poles who live abroad, for instance, in the UK.

Although in opposition to the West, the members of the far-right movement do not seek any partnership with Russia. They may favour some aspects of the Kremlin's internal politics (for instance, their imaginary perception of Russia protecting traditional values), but at the same time they often view Russia as a military threat to Poland. This group remains immune to direct pro-Kremlin propaganda, aimed at opposing a 'good Russia' with a 'bad West'. But at the same time, this group remains

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[5]   Anonymous informant, Independent journalist/ election observer, January 23, 2018. In-depth interview.

[6]   Anonymous informant, Independent journalist/ election observer, January 23, 2018. In-depth interview.

susceptible to an indirect Kremlin narrative, whose goal is not to create a positive image of Russia in Poland but only to seek results beneficial to Moscow.

Finally, we should point out there are people who are prone to believe that politics is based on conflict and mistrust, rather than on mutual trust and compromise. In this category we could find a group that is vulnerable to anti-Ukrainian and anti-German propaganda or any other actions aimed to raise the tension between Poles and some other nations or institutions by presenting them as a threat to Poland, Polish interests, or as Polonophobes in general. This raising of tensions results in Poland's losing its position internationally and slipping into self-imposed isolation. The antagonism was especially noticeable in regard to Polish-Ukrainian relations.[7] Once on the fringes, the anti-Ukrainian agenda reached the mainstream of political discourse. Similar developments could be noticed recently with regard to Germany[8] or the European Union.[9]

It has to be acknowledged that the vulnerability of a certain group of people to the mentioned manipulation is not used solely by the Kremlin. The Polish political authorities (especially the government) stoke these tensions (willingly or not) in Polish society and try to take advantage of it. External actors, such as the Kremlin, are only secondary contributors or beneficiaries of the conflict.

MEDIA LANDSCAPE

Freedom House in 2017 ranked Poland as '*partially free*', according to the Press Freedom Report, though a decade prior Poland had the status of '*free*'. This status changed with the political developments in the country after the right-wing PiS came to power in 2015 and, among some other changes, weakened Polish democracy, limited journalists' access

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[7]   The tensions between Poles and Ukrainians are based on two areas of dispute. One is their tragic common history. Many Poles claim that the current Ukrainian national narrative is based on anti-Polonism and accuse Ukrainians of choosing as their national heroes people who were responsible for killing Poles during the Second World War. The second is Ukrainian migration to Poland, seen as the 'ukrainisation' in Poland. Ukrainians are also accused of taking away jobs from Poles and causing wages to stagnate.

[8]   Germans are accused of forcing the Polish authorities to accept refugees in Poland and of imposing on the EU a negative perception of the PiS government as introducing anti-democratic changes in Poland.

[9]   EU institutions, especially the European Commission, but also the European Parliament are accused of interfering in Polish domestic issues by criticizing the current legal changes implemented in Poland by the PiS government.

to lawmakers in parliament, and appointed government-acceptable media managers to Polish public TV and radio broadcasters.

The 'Media Pluralism Report',[10] a project co-funded by the EU and implemented by the Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom at the European University Institute, assessed four dimensions and presented the main risk areas for media pluralism and media freedom: basic protection, market plurality, political independence, and social inclusiveness.

The scholars revealed that the following indicators are at high risk of violation in Poland: (a) media ownership concentration; (b) cross-media concentration of ownership and competition enforcement; (c) commercial and owner influence over editorial content; (d) political control of media outlets; (e) independence of public state media governance and funding; and (i) access to media for women. The report assessed the situation in the country after PiS came to power.

Once PiS took control in October 2015, a new law was passed terminating the contracts of the heads of public television and radio broadcasters. Journalists with state media (TV channels and radio) who criticized the new government and the political course it had chosen were either asked to resign or dismissed. There were also some journalists who resigned due to political reasons in protest against the political changes. As of February 10, 2018, according to the Journalism Society, 234 journalists had lost their jobs.[11]

There are two main journalist associations in the country: the *Association of Polish Journalists*[12] and the *Journalism Society*.[13] As one expert said, they 'produce statements'[14] about misconduct in media and concerning media regulation rather than focus on the defence and protection of freedom of information and open government.

On October 27, 2017, amendments to the *Press Act* were introduced almost unanimously. They obliged journalists to obtain the interviewees'

[10]   Klimkiewicz, Beata. 2016. "Media Pluralism Monitor 2016 – Results: Poland" Florence: European University Institute. *http://cmpf.eui.eu/media-pluralism-monitor/mpm-2016-results/poland/*

[11]   "Dobra Zmiana' w Mediach" 2018. Towarzystwo Dziennikarskie. 2018. *http://towarzystwodziennikarskie.org/*

[12]   Stowarzyszenie Dziennikarzy Polskich. *http://www.sdp.pl/*

[13]   Towarzystwo Dziennikarskie. *https://towarzystwodziennikarskie.org/*

[14]   Krzysztof Izdebski, ePaństwo Foundation, February 23, 2018. In-depth interview.

approval to publish their responses.[15] That made it impossible to publish an interview in Poland without the advance consent of an interviewee. The European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, in its decision regarding Wizerkaniuk v. Poland[16] in early 2011, condemned the provisions requiring the authorisation of interview responses and found them to be a violation of the right to freedom of expression.

Grzegorz Piechota, a research associate at Harvard Business School, warned that the current government, driven by anti-German sentiment, might change regulations on foreign investment in the media field (so-called 're-Polonization').[17] This could affect the 'investments of Ringier Axel Springer [the owner of the largest internet portal, *Onet*, and the largest tabloid, *Fakt*], and Verlagsruppe Passau [the publisher of the majority of the regional newspapers and web portals across Poland via its subsidiary Polska Press]".[18]

At the same time, investigative journalism in Poland is underdeveloped. One of the experts informed that there are just six or seven professional investigative journalists in the country and they are mostly concentrated in Warsaw, while there is almost no investigative reports from the regions. The media outlets have no additional budgets to allow investigative reporters to spend months working on a piece. There are two kinds of investigative initiatives created by journalists in Poland: the *Reporters Foundation* (Fundacja Reporterów)[19] and *OKO.press*.[20] Both mostly rely on foreign funding and crowdfunding.

Meanwhile, it is worth mentioning that the British government 'is ready to improve the UK-Poland cooperation to counter the Russian disinformation *in the region* [emphasis by the author], including some new joint strategic communications projects'.[21] The production cooperation between the BBC and Belsat TV (a Polish state-funded TV channel broadcasting in Belarus) is one such

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[15]   Ustawa z dnia 27 października 2017 r. o zmianie ustawy – Prawo Prasowe. 2017.
      http://orka.sejm.gov.pl/opinie8.nsf/nazwa/1604_u/$file/1604_u.pdf

[16]   Case of Wizerkaniuk v. Poland. Final Judgement of the European Court of Human Rights. 2011. Application No.18990/05.
      https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng#{"itemid":["001-105557"]}

[17]   "Reuters Institute Digital News Report – 2017" 2018. Reuters Institute.
      https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/Digital%20News%20Report%202017%20web_0.pdf

[18]   Ibid.

[19]   Fundacja Reporterów. *http://fundacjareporterow.org/*

[20]   OKO.press. *https://oko.press/*

[21]   "UK Govt to Support Belsat TV Combating Russian Disinformation in Region" 2017. Belsat.eu.
      http://belsat.eu/en/news/uk-govt-to-support-belsat-tv-combating-russian-disinformation-in-region/

initiative. The overall sum of the cooperation equals 10 million GBP, with the UK side contributing 5 million GBP and Poland expected to provide a matching amount.[22]

To sum it up, the media environment in Poland is highly politicised and divided. The significant change happened after the presidential elections in 2015, and the situation in media now is deteriorating. The national level of political propaganda and disinformation appears to be a threat and a topic for public discussion more often than any foreign state or party influence.

However, none of the Polish media outlets (TV, radio, print, or digital) obviously relay Kremlin-influenced narratives or messages, unlike those found to be published by individuals in some closed or public groups of special interest on Facebook or by thematic GONGOs, such as the Warsaw Institute Foundation.

According to the Public Opinion Research Centre, 'the Poles usually get the inland and world news and other information from TV (64 %) and then from the internet (about a third of them – 21 % – as frequently as from TV)'.[23] Only 8 % of the respondents use radio as the first source of information and 4 % of them use print media.

The public survey recently conducted in Poland by the International Republican Institute[24] shows that the population uses public and commercial TV (36 % and 32 %, respectively) to get political news while only a quarter of the respondents (21 %) use online media. The senior group (60+) prefers public (55 %) and commercial (29 %) TV, while younger people (18 – 29) frequently use some online sources (43 %). A third of Poles uses social media as a source of daily news and almost half never uses any alternative source of information, only leading media outlets.

It is interesting to note that the *2018 Edelman Trust Barometer,* assessing the level of trust in traditional and online-only media compared to search engines and social media platforms in Poland, says that Poles trust them almost equally (54 % vs. 51 %

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[22] "PM Announces Landmark New Package of Defence and Security Cooperation with Poland" 2017.
https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-announces-landmark-new-package-of-defence-and-security-cooperation-with-poland

[23] "Polish Public Opinion 5/2017" 2017. Public Opinion Research Centre.
http://www.cbos.pl/PL/publikacje/public_opinion/2017/05_2017.pdf

[24] "Public Opinion Poll. March, 8 – 14, 2017" 2017. International Republican Institute.
http://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/wysiwyg/poland_2017_final_edits.pdf

comparatively)[25]. Basically, it means that people equally trust online media (published by journalists) and social media (the opinion of a particular person, usually not a journalist). During an in-depth interview, it was said that the growing number of closed groups on Facebook might be a source of manipulation and disinformation dissemination, where it is more difficult to confirm the identities of accounts holders or the initiators of such groups.

The *2017 Reuters Institute Digital News Report* underlines, nevertheless, that the media environment in Poland is 'polarised and increasingly partisan, (while) the news media in Poland continue to be trusted by the public'.[26] According to the 2017 Digital News Report, 53 % of the population uses Facebook as a source of information; 32 % prefers YouTube, and 10 % chooses Facebook Messenger for getting news. One of the interviewed experts[27] also highlighted this tendency as one of the 'pitfalls' on the way to critical thinking development, and the daily need for diverse sources of objective information.

The Polish TV market is divided between the leading three conglomerates: the public broadcaster *TVP*, the private broadcaster *POLSAT*, and the International Trading and Investments Holding SA Luxembourg Group *ITI*. There are also some minor TV channels that work as joint ventures: Canal+, HBO, EuroSport, Discovery, MTV Poland, and others.

The leading web portal about media and media monitoring is *WirtualneMedia.pl*. It assessed the 150 most popular TV channels in 2017 in Poland. TVP1, TVP2, and TVP Info belong to the public broadcaster (TVP); Polsat and TV4 belong to the private broadcaster (POLSAT); TV Plus and Puls2 are owned by Telewizja Puls, a Polish private commercial channel mostly broadcasting entertainment, series, and documentaries; and TVN, TVN24, and TVN7, owned by the ITI Group (since March 6, 2018, TVN group is owned by Discovery Communications, a U.S. company).[28]

[25]   "2018 Edelman Trust Barometer. Global Report" 2018.
        http://cms.edelman.com/sites/default/files/2018-02/2018_Edelman_Trust_Barometer_Global_Report_FEB.pdf

[26]   "Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2017" 2018. Reuters Institute.
        https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/Digital%20News%20Report%202017%20web_0.pdf

[27]   Beata Biel, Fundacja Reporterów, March, 5, 2018. In-depth interview.

[28]   "Discovery Finalizuje Przejęcie Scripps Networks Interactive, Właściciela TVN" 2018. TVN24.pl.
        https://www.tvn24.pl/discovery-finalizuje-przejecie-scripps-networks-interactive,820317,s.html

TV channel   *AMR, average minute rating*

TV channel	AMR
TVP1	775 912
POLSAT	754 513
TVN	699 498
TVP2	630 188
TV4	272 390
TVN24	248 740
TVP INFO	248 379
TV PULS	242 133
TTV	147 516
Puls 2	128 315
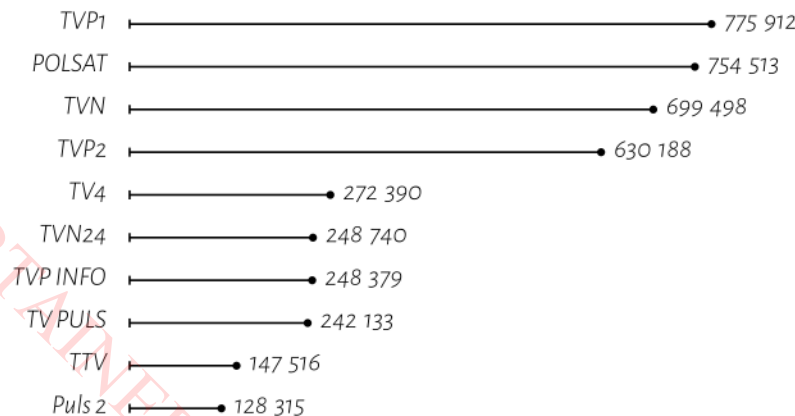
Top-10 TV channels in Poland in February, 2018
Source: WirtualneMedia.pl [29]

The Polish Institute of Media Monitoring ranked the most opinion-forming TV channels in Poland. Of these, TVN24 and TVN are owned by the ITI Group and appeared in the top-10 TV channels list, TVP Info belongs to the public broadcaster (TVP), POLSAT News to the commercial broadcaster Polsat, and TV TRWAM is a regional TV channel owned by the Lux Veritatis Foundation and broadcasts social, religious and musical programmes.

TV channel   *AMR, average minute rating*

TV channel	AMR
TVN24	3 840
TVP INFO	2 195
TV TRWAM	1 706
POLSAT News	1 442
TVN	1 292

Top-5 of opinion-making TV channels in Poland
Source: Institute of Media Monitoring (2017) [30]

The Polish radio stations are split across ownership. Among those that belong to *public radio* broadcasters is Polskie Radio (both FM and digital), *commercial broadcasters*, including the leading ones

[29]   Kurdupski, Michał. 2018. "TVP1 Wyprzedziła Polsat w Lutym, TVN Liderem w 16−49. "M Jak Miłość" i Skoki Na ZIO Ratingowymi Hitami" Wirtualnemedia.pl. 2018. http://www.wirtualnemedia.pl/artykul/ogladalnosc-telewizji-w-lutym-tvp1-wyprzedzila-polsat-hity

[30]   "Najbardziej Opiniotwórcze Polskie Media w 2017 Roku" 2017. Instytut Monitorowania Mediów. https://www.imm.com.pl/sites/default/files/raporty/najbardziej_opiniotworcze_media_w_2017.pdf

from the Bauer Media Group, Lagardere (Eurozet), Grupa ZPR Media, Time Group, and Agora, and *non-commercial stations*, such as the 20 or so regional Catholic stations, including the biggest, Radio Maryja.

The top-10 radio stations include mostly commercial stations (ESKA, RMF MAXXX, Złote Przeboje, Radio Plus, Radio WAWA, Meloradio, Radio Pogoda, Rock Radio, and ChiliZet), and A17, online radio stations. It is important to emphasize that the popularity of Polish media stations varies depending on the region.

Radio station   ATSL, average time spent listening, %

Radio station	%
Radio RMF FM	26.5
Radio ZET	12.2
Jedynka	7.3
ESKA	7.1
Trójka	5.9
A17	5.3
VOX	3.7
RMF MAXXX	3.2
Złote Przeboje	2.9
Radio PLUS	2.3
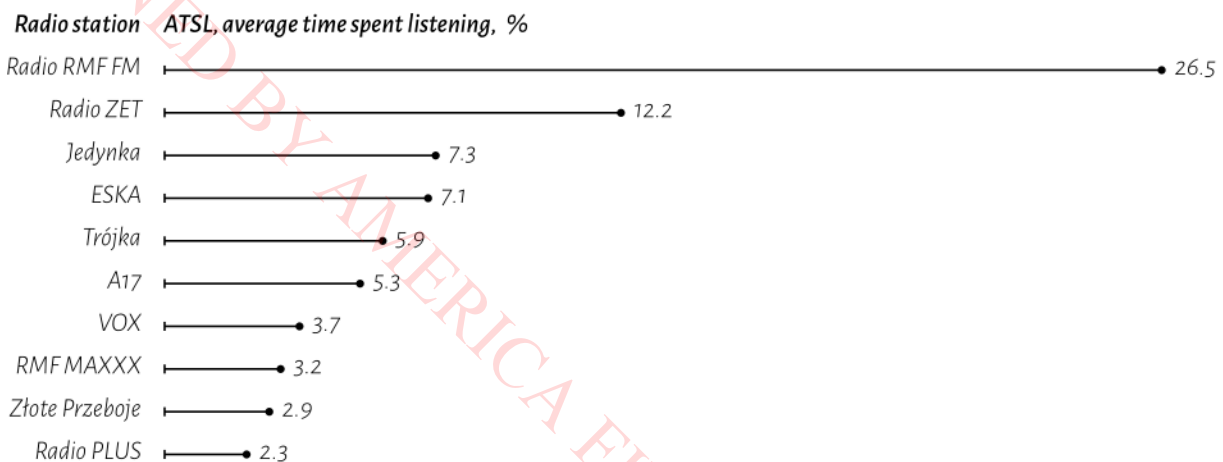
Top-10 radio stations in Poland

Source: WirtualneMedia.pl[31]

Online media is a growing segment in Poland, with two types of media identified. There are web portals that offer some news services together with a web-hosting service, email, search engine, and online chats. This is a hybrid model of media, combining both online and news services. According to the 'Online Advertising in Poland: Development Perspectives 2016/2017' report, spending on online media maintenance nearly doubled from 2011 to 2017 (from 16 % to 30 %).[32]

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[31]   Kurdupski, Michał. 2018. "Słuchalność Radia ZET Spadła Do 12,2 Proc., Trójki Poniżej 6 Proc. 'Wyciągniemy Wnioski'" Wirtualnemedia.pl. *http://www.wirtualnemedia.pl/artykul/trojka-i-radio-zet-z-rekordowo-niska-sluchalnoscia-traci-tez-jedynka*.

[32]   "Reklamy Online w Polsce. Perspektywy Rozwojowe. 2016/2017" 2017. Polska. *https://www.iab.org.pl/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Raport-IAB_20162017_Perspektywy-rozwojowe-reklamy-online-w-Polsce.pdf*.

Site	Daily time spent on site	Daily page views per visitor	Traffic from search, %	Total sites linking in
Onet.pl	6:50	3.95	18.60	32,890
Wp.pl	7:36	4.58	12.70	14,949
Interia.pl	6:45	4.26	15.80	15,345
Wykop.pl	14:43	8.88	13.00	7,995
Gazeta.pl	5:41	3.56	11.70	18,485
O2.pl	3:30	2.49	8.90	2,362
TVN24.pl	6:05	2.78	12.80	5,285

Top web pages in Poland

Source: Alexa Internet. 2018[33]

The second type of digital media is subscriptions to print media websites. This is a promising alternative for traditional media losing readership from vending. The largest print media editions provide online subscriptions (with the content identical in print and online), as well as *.mobi* (for MobiPocket Readers and Amazon Kindle Readers) and *.epub* (for smartphones, tablets, computers and e-readers) versions. The top-5 media editions leading in online subscriptions in 2017 were Rzeczpospolita (11 300 online subscriptions), Dziennik Gazeta Prawna (10 722), Puls Biznesu (3 373), Parkiet Gazeta Giełdy (1 729), and Gazeta Wyborcza (1 661).[34]

IN FOCUS

Radio Hobby

Radio Hobby has been broadcasting since the end of 2008 in Warsaw and its closest suburbs[35] — Bialoleka, Targowek, Praga Polnoc, Tarchomin, Legionowo, Secock, Wolomin, and Radzymin (as the 'Foreigners in Warsaw' report[36] revealed, these areas are inhabited by immigrants from neighboring countries to the east: Belarus, Ukraine, Russia. The target

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[33] "Top Sites in Poland" 2018. Alexa Internet. 2018. *https://www.alexa.com/topsites/countries/PL*

[34] Kurdupski, Michał. 2018. "Rzeczpospolita" i vending Głos Wielkopolski Liderami Sprzedaży e-Wydań Dzienników w 2017 Roku" 2018. *http://www.wirtualnemedia.pl/artykul/rzeczpospolita-i-glos-wielkopolski-liderami-sprzedazy-e-wydan-dziennikow-w-2017-roku_1*

[35] "O nas" 2018. Hobby.pl. *http://hobby.pl/o-nas/*

[36] Dudkiewicz, Magdalena. 2016. "Cudoziemcy w Warszawie, Czyli Jak Zmierzyć Się z Nieuniknionzm" Fundację Obserwatorium & Stowarzyszenie Vox Humana. *https://cudzoziemcywaw.files.wordpress.com/2016/06/raport1.pdf*

audience is described as men aged 25—50.[37] The radio transmits contemporary music, local business (e.g., how to start your own business and became an entrepreneur), share job vacancies from the regional employment department, promotes an eco-friendly and sustainable lifestyle, and has a special programme for drivers. Every day at 9 p.m., the station transmits a Russian cultural and information programme prepared by Radio Sputnik, promoting the Kremlin interpretation of world events. The editor of the station declined to comment.

Source:
Polskie fejki, rosyjska dezinformacja. OKO.
Press tropi tych, którzy je produkują.[38]

LEGAL REGULATIONS

There is a deficiency in the specified legal acts about information security and information threats in Poland. Several corresponding provisions can be found in some legal acts and regulations about particular government offices. It should be noted that in the security documents, 'information security' is frequently understood as 'cybersecurity'. There are two key security documents that require more attention to the information security issue.

The '*Concept of Defence of the Republic of Poland*' (published in May 2017) finds the 'aggressive policy of the Russian Federation', 'including the use of such tools as disinformation campaigns against other countries'[39] as one of the main threats and challenges. The Concept does not contain any precise developments or tasks regarding information security.

The '*National Security Strategy*' (published in November 2014) interprets information security as part of cybersecurity efforts (for example, article 84 describes cybersecurity as including 'the information fight in cyberspace'; article 85 explains 'information security' as the 'security of classified information (...), ensuring the information security of the

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[37]   "Ruszyło Radio Skierowane Do Hobbystów" 2008. Wirtualnemedia.pl. 2008.
        http://www.wirtualnemedia.pl/artykul/ruszylo-radio-skierowane-do-hobbystow#

[38]   Szczepaniak, Patryk, and Konrad Szczygieł. 2017. Ibid.

[39]   "Koncepcja Obronna Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej" 2017. Ministerstwo Obrony Narodowej. *http://www.mon.gov.pl/d/pliki/rozne/2017/05/KORP_DRUK_v03_mn2.pdf*.

state by preventing unauthorised access to the classified information, and its disclosure').[40]

The Strategy underlines that the Polish Armed Forces (Siły Zbrojne RP) are responsible for 'the development of the operational capabilities of the Polish Armed Forces' including the raising of the 'level of training and the ability to use professionally advanced (...) information tools'[41] (article 117). The *Parliamentary Commission of National Defence* pointed out in February 2015 that the National Security Strategy should be coordinated 'between the Ministry of Digital Affairs and the military structures'.[42] It seems that no further suggestions were made. The new National Security Strategy is now being drafted by the *National Security Bureau (BBN)*. As the head of the BBN, Paweł Soloch, said, 'there is a need for system changes'[43] now since the Strategy was drafted before Russia's annexation of Crimea, when some new challenges emerged, including hybrid warfare, cyberattack, information warfare, as well as asymmetric terroristic threats'.[44] Soloch highlighted that all these menaces are to be included in the new draft.

The '*Doctrine of Information Security*'[45] was started as a draft in 2015 by the BBN as a response to the increase in hybrid threats, propaganda, disinformation, and psychological influence operation by foreign states and non-state actors. The Doctrine is supposed to be the key document clarifying the scope of responsibilities and the mode of cooperation and coordination between the government, private institutions, and citizens. The Doctrine is still in the drafting phase. According to the draft, the Polish strategy in information security, among other things, should include the 'creation of compatible media (radio and TV)'[46] for minorities in Poland that can be a match for Russian media targeting those groups, as well as the facilitation and support of broadcasting efforts in Belarus (article 31).

[40] "Strategia Bezpieczeństwa Narodowego Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej" 2014. Biuro Bezpieczeństwa Narodowego. *https://www.bbn.gov.pl/ftp/SBN%20RP.pdf*.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Dura, Maksymilian. 2015. "Sejm Ocenił Zatwierdzoną w Listopadzie 2014 r. "Strategię Bezpieczeństwa RP" Defence24.pl. 2015. *http://www.defence24.pl/sejm-ocenil-zatwierdzona-w-listopadzie-2014-r-strategie-bezpieczenstwa-rp*

[43] Florencka, Katarzyna. "Soloch: Trwają Prace Nad Nową Strategią Bezpieczeństwa Narodowego" 2018. *http://www.pap.pl/aktualnosci/debaty/news,1236509,soloch-trwaja-prace-nad-nowa-strategia-bezpieczenstwa-narodowego.html*

[44] Szef BBN zadowolony z awansów generalskich: "To jest krok w kierunku wzmocnienia sił zbrojnych, to porządkuje strukturę wojska" 2018. WPolityce.pl. *https://wpolityce.pl/polityka/383920-szef-bbn-zadowolony-z-awansow-generalskich-to-jest-krok-w-kierunku-wzmocnienia-sil-zbrojnych-to-porzadkuje-strukture-wojska*

[45] Doktryna Bezpieczeństwa Informacyjnego RP. 2015. *https://www.bbn.gov.pl/ftp/dok/01/Projekt_Doktryny_Bezpieczenstwa_Informacyjnego_RP.pdf*

[46] Ibid.

The document says that the detailed tasks will be developed in the 'Political and Strategic Defence Directive', the 'Strategy of National Security Development', and some other tactical regulations.

INSTITUTIONAL SETUP

The expert said that the

'*Polish government does not openly communicate on the information security issue*'.[47]

While working on this report, six government institutions (listed below) were contacted by with an in-depth interview request, but no communication or response was received. Therefore, the information provided in this section is based on the LEX Omega (by Wolters Kluwer Polska) and open sources.

The *Ministry of Foreign Affairs* ensures the 'efficient and continuous circulation of the critical information in the ministry and its foreign branches, in particular, a) acquires the critical information from all available sources, including the constantly monitored media; b) verifies and processes the critical information for the purposes of the recipients' competence; and c) immediately relays the critical information to the competent addresses in the ministry and its foreign branches, as well as, if necessary, in other public administration institutions' (and the *Consular Department* is responsible for this, article 40).[48] The Polish MFA is under internal political attack nowadays, first of all being criticized for the politically questionable policies towards many countries, with the most burning ones towards Ukraine ('we are experiencing the biggest crisis in the relationships from the Khmelnytski Uprising',[49] said Paweł Kowal, the former Vice-Minister of the MFA) and Israel ('the relations are broken, wasted', commented Bogdan Borusewisz,[50] the deputy speaker of the Senate). The recently published

[47]   Anonymous Informant, February, 28, 2018. Personal conversation.

[48]   Zarządzenie Nr 31 Ministra Spraw Zagranicznych z dnia 30 września 2015 r. w sprawie nadania regulaminu organizacyjnego ministerstwu spraw zagranicznych.

[49]   "Mamy największy kryzys w relacjach polsko-ukraińskich od czasów powstania Chmielnickiego" 2017. TOK.FM. *http://www.tokfm.pl/Tokfm/7,103454,22672956,mamy-najwiekszy-kryzys-w-relacjach-polsko-ukrainskich-od-czasow.html*

[50]   "Borusewicz: Konsekwencje Tej Ustawy Będziemy Odczuwać Bardzo Długo" 2018. TVN24.pl. *https://www.tvn24.pl/wiadomosci-z-kraju,3/borusewicz-ustawa-o-ipn-juz-zmienila-stosunki-polsko-izraelskie,811548.html*

article in Polityka magazine's print version, titled 'Zaginione ministerstwo', says that 'barely 40–50 among 2 500 MFA servants graduated from Russian universities'.[51]

The scope of the responsibilities[52] of the *Ministry of National Defence* does not put any special emphasis on information security. The Department of Strategy and Defence Planning is, among others, responsible for the 'non-military defence preparations programming, and organising of the operational planning process in the public administration bodies for the external security threat and wartime.[53]

The *BBN* (Biuro Bezpieczeństwa Narodowego, or National Security Bureau) is the government agency working under the president of Poland regarding national security issues and providing research and organisational support to the National Security Council, the constitutional advisory body of the president on internal and external state security. The BBN , among other tasks, is responsible for 'monitoring and analysing the strategic environment of national security (both internal and external)', and 'developing and reviewing the strategic documents (concepts, directives, plans, and programmes) in the field of national security (...)'.[54]

It is important to note that the BBN defines 'information security' as a 'trans-sectoral security area, the content of which refers to the information environment (including cyberspace) of the state; a process aimed to ensure the safe functioning of the state in information space through the domination of its own internal domestic infosphere and effective protection of the national interests in the external (foreign) infosphere. This is accomplished through the implementation of such tasks as: ensuring the adequate protection of information resources, and protection against *hostile disinformation and propaganda activities* (in the defence dimension) [author's emphasis] while maintaining the ability to conduct offensive actions in the area against potential opponents (states or other entities). These tasks are laid out in the strategy (doctrine) of information security (operational and preparatory), and for

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[51] Wójcik, Łukasz. 2018. "Zaginione Ministerstwo" Polityka, 02–27.02.2018.

[52] Rozporządzenie Rady Ministrów z dnia 9 lipca 1996 r. w sprawie szczegółowego zakresu działania Ministra Obrony Narodowej.

[53] "Departament Strategii i Planowania Obronnego" 2018. Ministerstwo Obrony Narodowej.
http://www.mon.gov.pl/ministerstwo/artykul/departamenty/departament-strategii-i-planowania-obronnego-032698/

[54] "Zarządzenie Nr. 2 Prezydenta Rzeczpospolitej Polskiej z dnia 11 sierpnia 2010 r. w sprawie organizacji oraz zakresu działania Biura Bezpieczeństwa Narodowego" 2010. Biuro Bezpieczeństwa Narodowego.
https://www.bbn.gov.pl/ftp/dok/Zarzadzenie_PRP_11_sierpnia_2010.pdf.

them to be implemented, the appropriate information security system is maintained and developed'.[55]

The Internal Security Agency is responsible for the 'recognition, prevention and detection of threats to security essential from the point of view of the continuity of the state, functioning of ICT systems of public administration bodies, or ICT network systems covered by a unified list of facilities, installations, devices, and services included in the critical infrastructure' (para 2a, article 5) and 'obtaining, analysing, processing, and transferring to the competent authorities information that may be essential for the protection of the internal security of the state and its constitutional order' (article 5, para 4).[56]

The *Foreign Intelligence Service*, a Polish secret agency tasked with gathering public and secret information abroad, is responsible for 'obtaining, analysing, processing and transferring to competent authorities information that may be essential for the protection of the internal security of the state and its constitutional order' (article 6, para 1).[57]

The *Ministry of Internal Affairs and Administration (MSWiA)* is the public administration body responsible for the public administration and internal issues, as well as issues connected with national and ethnic minorities. The Department of Public Order[58] [59] is responsible, among others, for the supervision of activities connected with the protection of people and public safety. This is the only department that might be responsible for information security in the ministry.

The *State Protection Service (SOP)* was created on February 1, 2018, in compliance with the 'Law on State Protection Service',[60] introduced on December 8, 2017, and reporting to the MSWiA. The SOP restructured the Office of Government Protection, which was deemed to be ineffective in many issues.[61] The service is responsible (article 3),

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[55] "(Mini) Glossary BBN. Proposals of New Safety Terms" 2018. Biuro Bezpieczeństwa Narodowego. *https://www.bbn.gov.pl/pl/ bezpieczenstwo-narodowe/minislownik-bbn-propozy/6035,MINISLOWNIK-BBN-Propozycje-nowych-terminow-z-dziedziny-bezpieczenstwa. html*

[56] Ustawa z dnia 24 maja 2002 r. o Agencji Bezpieczeństwa Wewnętrznego oraz Agencji Wywiadu.

[57] Ustawa z dnia 24 maja 2002 r. o Agencji Bezpieczeństwa Wewnętrznego oraz Agencji Wywiadu.

[58] Zarządzenie Nr 152 Prezesa Rady Ministrów z dnia 28 grudnia 2015 r. w sprawie nadania statutu Ministerstwu Spraw Wewnętrznych i Administracji.

[59] "Departament Porządku Publicznego" 2018. Ministerstwo Spraw Wewnętrznych i Administracji. *https://bip.mswia.gov.pl/bip/organizacja/20643,Departament-Porzadku-Publicznego.html*

[60] Ustawa z dnia 8 grudnia 2017 r. o Służbie Ochrony Państwa. 2018 *http://orka.sejm.gov.pl/proc8.nsf/ustawy/1916_u.htm*

[61] Brudzińsk, Joachim. 2018. "Służba Ochrony Państwa Zastąpiła BOR" Ministerstwo Spraw Wewnętrznych i Administracji. 2018. *https://www.mswia.gov.pl/pl/aktualnosci/16932,Sluzba-Ochrony-Panstwa-zastapila-BOR.html?search=4660223.*

among other tasks, for dealing with crimes against security, *crimes against communications security*, offenses against freedom, crimes against honour and physical integrity, crimes against the public order, attacks and active assault against persons, the recognition, prevention, and detection of crimes committed by SOP officers, and conducting pyrotechnic and radiological reconnaissance of the premises of the Sejm and Senate. According to the law, the SOP can use secret cooperation, among others, with an editor-in-chief, journalists, and other people involved in publishing while implementing their goals and objectives (article 66). This cooperation is possible after obtaining the consent of the head of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Administration.

The *Institute of Information Activities*[62] at the Academy of War in Warsaw. The institute is responsible for academic and analytical research activities in the field of information security for the purposes of the academy, the Ministry of National Defence, and the Polish Armed Forces, including training for operational, tactical, and strategic specialists and experts in the field of the military and public administration institutions. The institute conducts regular meetings and training, including some guest lectures on the issues, such as a recent one by Dr Sergey Pakhomenko (Mariupol State University, Ukraine)[63] or the conference called 'Russian resources in the Intermarium and the Possibilities of their Employment in the Infowars Against Countries in the Region'.[64]

There are also some special bodies that focus on strategic communication: the *Government Information Centrum*,[65] which is responsible for online and other media communications of the highest government institutions; the *Interministerial Team for the Promotion of Poland Abroad* at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which 'coordinates tasks of the respective ministries regarding such issues as the protection of the good name of Poland [...] (and) drafting a coherent and comprehensive strategy for the promotion of Poland abroad',[66] as well as the Chancellery of the President. The scope

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[62]   Instytut Działań Informacyjnych,
       http://www.wwoj.akademia.mil.pl/instytut-dzialan-informacyjnych/instytut-dzialan-informacyjnych.html

[63]   "Wykład: Czynniki konfliktu w Donbasie" 2018.
       http://www.cbb.akademia.mil.pl/aktualnosci-cbb/wyklad-czynniki-konfliktu-w-donbasie.html

[64]   "Konferencja: Rosyjska dezinformacja na obszarze Trójmorza" 2017.
       http://www.cbb.akademia.mil.pl/aktualnosci-cbb/konferencja-rosyjska-dezinformacja.html

[65]   Centrum Informacyjne Rządu.
       https://bip.kprm.gov.pl/kpr/bip-kancelarii-prezesa/organizacja-kprm/sekretariaty-departamen/1787,Centrum-Informacyjne-Rzadu.html

[66]   "Special Team Set up to Coordinate Promotion of Poland Abroad" 2016. PAP. 2016. *http://www.pap.pl/en/news/news,521077,special-team-set-up-to-coordinate-promotion-of-poland-abroad.html*.

of the responsibilities of the government spokespersons are defined by a special regulation.[67]

To sum up, information security in Poland is a rather legally and institutionally underdeveloped issue. Poland might be categorised as poorly resilient and highly vulnerable to information threats. The developed, ostensibly institutional system lacks clear coordination in the field of information security. More attention was given to cybersecurity rather than to information security. There are two main cybersecurity documents that support this argument: the draft 'Cybersecurity Strategy for 2016–2022', and the 'Cyberspace Protection Policy of the Republic of Poland'.[68] The draft document also introduces the establishment of the Cybersecurity College and a Government Representative for Cybersecurity. In March 2018, the Polish prime minister established a new position of Government Representative on Cybersecurity, who will report to the Ministry of National Defence.[69]

DIGITAL DEBUNKING TEAMS

Poland is only at the beginning of the road in the process of developing initiatives that will be primary focused on fact-checking. Arguably, the most recognizable one is *OKO.press*,[70] an internet portal gathering journalists whose job is mostly to verify the statements made by politicians and other public figures. OKO.press journalists prepare both short comments and longer analyses regarding the current political situation in Poland and try to cover all important topics, including internal developments and international relations between Poland and other countries and institutions. *OKO.press* was started by five journalists and is financially supported by Agora Holding (whose most well-known liberal media outlets are *Gazeta Wyborcza* and *Radio TOK FM*), *Polityka* (the leading liberal weekly in Poland), and private donors.

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[67]   Rozporządzenie Rady Ministrów z Dnia 8 Stycznia 2002 r. w Sprawie Organizacji i Zadań Rzeczników Prasowych w Urzędach Organów Administracji Rządowej.
https://bip.kprm.gov.pl/kpr/bip-rady-ministrow/organy-pomocnicze/organy-pomocnicze-preze/198,Rzecznik-prasowy-rzadu.html

[68]   Świątkowska, Joanna, Izabela Albrycht, and Dominik Skokowski. 2017. "National Cyber Security Organization: POLAND" Tallinn: NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence. https://ccdcoe.org/sites/default/files/multimedia/pdf/NCSO_Poland_2017_0.pdf.

[69]   Rozporządzenie Rady Ministrów z dnia 16 marca 2018 r. w sprawie ustanowienia pełnomocnika rządu do spraw cyberbezpieczeństwa. https://bip.kprm.gov.pl/kpr/bip-rady-ministrow/organy-pomocnicze/pelnomocnicy-rzadu-i-pr/4796,Pelnomocnika-Rzadu-do-spraw-Cyberbezpieczenstwa.html.

[70]   https://oko.press/

Currently, the project runs on donations and is published by the Centrum of Government Control 'OKO' Foundation (Fundacja Ośrodek Kontroli Obywatelskiej 'Oko'). All the content, including the analyses, investigative reports, and fact-checks, produced by OKO.press is available to its readers for free and is visited by around 2 000 visitors daily (93% from Polish IP addresses), with 46% of the visitors being redirected from social media and 30% being direct traffic.[71]

Another fact-checking initiative is **Demagog**.[72] Its journalists work as volunteers and their job is solely to verify Polish politicians' statements. By comparing their speech with factual information, Demagog's journalists verify whether the politician has told the truth or misled the audience (intentionally or unintentionally). The initial idea for the project came from U.S. platforms FactCheck.org and PolitiFact.com. The students from Masaryk University in Brno (Slovakia) first launched a similar platform called 'Demagog' in 2010, and later others were started in the Czech Republic, Hungary, and in 2014, in Poland. Demagog Poland launched a media-literacy project called 'Fact-Checking Academy'. The academy, supported by the U.S. embassy in Poland, aims to raise media literacy in schools and among young people through workshops and lectures.

The Observatory of Media Freedom is a programme launched by the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights and Article 19 in 2008. Currently, the Observatory is running a project called 'Monitoring of Threats to Free Media in Poland and Strengthening of Local Media Control Function'. The project is supported by the University of Warsaw (Law and Administration Department) and Maria Curie-Skłodowska University (Political Science Department). Its programme aims to raise awareness about media freedom and independence in Poland, including stimulation of public debate on the issue, some educational activities (citizen journalism), and media monitoring, including media-regulation monitoring as well.

Poland, however, does not have a well-developed market of fact-checking initiatives and debunking teams that deals with Kremlin disinformation. There are some initiatives implementing activities aimed at understanding how Kremlin influence actually works in Poland, and the actions of these initiatives are also worth mentioning.

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[71]   "OKO. Press. January 2018 Overview" 2018. SimilarWeb.com. 2018.
        https://www.similarweb.com/website/oko.press.

[72]   http://demagog.org.pl/

The famous *Stopfake*[73] initiative, responsible for debunking fake news about Ukraine has a version in Polish. Stopfake in Poland works to provide the Polish audience with examples of fake or manipulated news published by pro-Kremlin media outlets in Russia or in Russian-language media in other countries, such as Ukraine. Poland—Ukraine relations also happen to be a subject of such manipulated stories, with fake news coming mostly from the Russian media outlets and very rarely from Polish sources.

Another initiative, the *Infoops*,[74] researches manipulation of information about Poland in foreign propaganda. That is a project initiated by the Polish Cybersecurity Foundation. One of its goals is to use social media while communicating about disinformation cases in Poland. The Cybersecurity Foundation launched a Twitter account, *@Disinfo_Digest*, aimed at providing daily reporting on the fake news produced by the Kremlin and other sources. The reports are not limited to Poland but also include some fake news spread in other countries.

The *Russian Fifth Column in Poland*[75] is a Facebook platform whose authors regularly post information about the connections between Polish activists, politicians, and members of academia with some people from Russia and other countries who spread a pro-Kremlin narrative. The editors of Russian Fifth Column in Poland gather and reveal evidence showing examples of promoting anti-Ukrainian, anti-NATO, and anti-EU attitudes and explain their connections to the pro-Kremlin surroundings.

The *Centre for Propaganda and Disinformation Analysis*[76] is an NGO aimed at raising awareness about manipulation and propaganda mechanisms, and explaining the threats of propaganda to national security. The centre already has published some analysis on information security and disinformation, including the report 'Russian Disinformation War Against Poland', and a policy paper, 'How to Build Information Resilience of Society in Cyberspace while Countering Propaganda and Disinformation'.

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[73]   *https://www.stopfake.org/pl/tag/polska/*

[74]   *https://www.cybsecurity.org/pl/infoops/*

[75]   *https://www.facebook.com/RosyjskaVKolumnawPolsce/*

[76]   *https://capd.pl/pl/*

Besides the described initiatives, one should mention the individual reports and analysis prepared by Polish experts or journalists aimed at debunking Kremlin disinformation in Poland, such as the reports 'Threat of Russian Disinformation in Poland and Ways to Counteract it'[77] 'Russian Soft Power in Poland. The Kremlin and Pro-Russian Organisations'[78] or 'Information Warfare in the Internet'.[79]

IN FOCUS

Adam Kamiński's Fake Facebook account

A person who called himself Adam Kamiński created a Facebook account, stating that he was the editor of Niezależny Dziennik Polityczny (Independent Political Magazine). He had 1 624 Facebook friends, and the deputy minister of National Defence was among them. This person used to publish and share articles from Niezależny Dziennik Polityczny but also some fake information or disinformation about the Ministry of Defence as well. In fact, Niezależny Dziennik Polityczny, in a comment to journalists, said that the person named Adam Kamiński did not work for the magazine and it had no record of him. The Facebook friends of Kamiński reached by the journalists told them they had never seen this person. When the journalists contacted Kamiński, he rejected to meet in person or have a Skype talk and responded only electronically. This case was revealed and investigated by Patryk Szczepaniak and Konrad Szczygieł, journalists of Oko.press, who found out that the profile picture of Adam Kamiński was stolen from a Lithuanian orthopaedist named Andrius Žukauskas.

Source:
Polskie fejki, rosyjska dezinformacja. OKO.
Press tropi tych, którzy je produkują.[80]

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[77]   http://bit.ly/2JOvIfO

[78]   http://www.politicalcapital.hu/pc-admin/source/documents/PC_NED_country_study_PL_20170428.pdf

[79]   http://bit.ly/2K5wbKR

[80]   Szczepaniak, Patryk, and Konrad Szczygieł. 2017. "Polskie Fejki, Rosyjska Dezinformacja. OKO.Press Tropi Tych, Którzy Je Produkują. Niektórzy z Nich Nie Istnieją" OKO.press. 2017. https://oko.press/polskie-fejki-rosyjska-dezinformacja/

MEDIA LITERACY PROJECTS

The interviewed experts[81] [82] confirmed the alarming low level of critical-thinking skills among young people. The primary and higher education curricula demonstrate a lack of special blocs on critical thinking and media literacy, as well as a lack of qualified teachers who can teach those skills. The introduction of such courses is mostly bottom up from civil-society organisations. Such programmes are divided according to the age of the target audience: from schoolchildren to young activists, and from those who do not have any previous knowledge and experience to those who would like to enhance their skills and share the expertise.

Olimpiada Cyfrowa[83] is a project launched in 2002 by the Modern Poland Foundation (Fundacja Nowoczesna Polska) and funded by the Ministry of Education and Sport and Ministry of Culture and National Heritage. The project targets secondary school pupils to raise their awareness about media skills and literacy, including critical analysis of information, media ethics, the language of media, and internet security. The project also motivates teachers to discuss security issues, the internet, media, and digital education in social media.

The *Cybernauci* project[84] is aimed at training skills to be safe and secure on the internet. The project was launched by the Modern Poland Foundation in cooperation with Collegium Civitas. Its target audience is described as schoolchildren, their parents, and teachers. The project's team organises various workshops to develop the pupils' skills and competences on the safe use of online sources, soft skills for parents on how to talk with their children about rules on internet usage, and how to use digital resources in education for teachers.

The *Orange Foundation* (Fundacja Orange) is a non-profit organisation created in 2005 by the Polish telecommunications provider. The foundation aims to develop digital education, including children and youth's media skills development. The educational competition

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[81]   Krzysztof Izdebski, ePaństwo Foundation, February, 23, 2018. In-depth Interview.

[82]   Paweł Terpiłowski, Demagog, February, 22, 2018. In-depth Interview.

[83]   *http://olimpiadacyfrowa.pl/*

[84]   *https://cybernauci.edu.pl*

'Safe Here and There' (*Bezpiecznie Tu i Tam*)[85] was launched by the foundation in 2016 to popularise safe behaviour on the internet and new media. This online course is available for free online.

The *Cogito 21* project[86] was launched in 2016 by the Centrum of Innovative Education to strengthen schoolchildren and teachers' critical-thinking skills. The project was in the form of a competition. Any school could register a representative (a teacher) to form a club of pupils. Every competition participant received a handbook, could attend two webinars, and have mentor support. The club had to plan and implement an information campaign in media and make a short video. These materials could be awarded with a prize for the best performance.

In 2018, Facebook will open a new *digital media hub* in Poland. The hub will offer 'training in digital skills, media literacy and online safety to groups with limited access to technology, including older people, the young, and refugees'.[87] Similar hubs were opened in Nigeria and Brazil.

On February 16-18, 2018, a hackathon was held for the development of a 'natural shield when it comes to common manipulation techniques on the internet, such as fake news, phishing, clickbait, cyber-extortion scams, etc'.[88] Its participants were educators and activists who in 48 hours had the challenge of developing several 'apps, games and quizzes' in groups composed of 3−5 people, including a programmer, an educator, some journalists, a media expert, a copywriter, and an activist. A similar initiative by the *Warsaw Legal Hackers*, under the theme 'Fake News. How to Catch Electronic War Dogs by the Tail?' was held on March 14, 2018.

CONCLUSIONS

The conducted analysis of the societal vulnerability and government resilience to Kremlin disinformation in Poland revealed the complexity and multifacetedness of the situation. The interviewed experts and national politicians confirm that the Kremlin's influence in Poland is rather 'intangible' and cannot be described as a mere production of 'fake news' or any 'manipulated content'. In many

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[85]   https://fundacja.orange.pl/kurs/

[86]   http://navigo.org.pl/szczegoly-o-cogito/

[87]   Fioretti, Julia. 2018. "Facebook to Open Digital Training Hubs in Europe" Reuters. 2018. https://www.reuters.com/article/us-facebook-europe/facebook-to-open-digital-training-hubs-in-europe-idUSKBN1FA179.

[88]   https://edukaton.com/#hackathon

ways, the Kremlin takes advantage of situations that emerge rather than creates or triggers it. In the previous year, Poland was involved in an array of internal and external tensions that heated up the negative atmosphere of relations with Ukraine, Germany, the U.S., Israel, and the EU. Those tensions established fertile ground for foreign manipulative influence in Poland.

At this stage, Poland has limited expertise and capacity to combat such vulnerabilities, as well as a low level of resilience to Kremlin disinformation operations or foreign manipulative media influence. A trend observed among many politicians is a growing tendency to call every information they disagree with 'disinformation' or 'fake news', no matter if the information is true or not. As a consequence, instead of fighting disinformation, some Polish politicians provoke or encourage it.

The underdevelopment of information security institutions (namely, the absence of a specified scope of responsibilities and power-sharing), the lack of cooperation and sustainable partnership among existing ones result in a high level of susceptibility to Kremlin-backed or other third-party information influence or targeted operations.

The lack of well-defined, comprehensive, clearly explained division of responsibilities and authority in legislation and regulations exacerbates Poland's vulnerability in the information security field.

The country's media environment faces a lot of challenges as well. The short-lived interest in information on the internet causes journalists to publish their materials quickly, sometimes without double-checking their sources and facts. While editorial desks struggling with a lack of funding, unable to invest in the investigative journalism, a well-functioning fact-checking body, training to strengthen journalists' skills and competences, continuous media-monitoring, the launch of well-established media-literacy programmes, and other digital-debunking initiatives must be supported and strengthened in Poland on all levels.

The government institutions, as well as the media outlets and civil-society organisations are still in need of stronger cooperation, but, first and foremost, a clear comprehension of the current information threats. In this regard, it is not only the political elite that must

be engaged but the civil sector and media should be ready to share their expertise and knowledge and work in concert.

To increase analytical expertise in the information security field and make civil-society organisations more active in the digital-debunking and fact-checking, the development of effective and well-functioning communications channels is both desirable and required.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To Government Institutions

1. Establish a platform for regular meetings of government officials, experts, and civil-society representatives in the information security field. The experts from analytical institutions, academia, and civil-society organisations can share with and update government institutions on the most recent developments in the field, share the best international and national practices, and propose some new approaches and solutions.

2. Introduce changes into the school and higher-education curricula and add obligatory media-literacy courses. Programmes, handbooks, and other materials prepared for established national civil-society organisations and initiatives should be used for this task too.

3. Launch continuous training and sharing of information-security best practices, as well as the related workshops for the government officials and civil officers to strength their expertise and build the capacity to respond to the challenges. The international experience might be used for this task too (for example, from Estonia or Latvia).

4. Support media-literacy projects for all age groups. Thus, civil-society organisations and initiatives will be able to provide their expertise and experience on this issue.

To Civil Society

1. Cooperate on a regular basis in the exchange of expertise and experience with international civil-society organisations and actors who have extensive experience and involvement

in local media-literacy projects and digital-debunking initiatives. Other countries' experience can extend and expand the view of the country's weaknesses.

2. Maintain cooperation with the local civil-society platforms and actors to enhance the level of societal resilience to media manipulation and disinformation.

3. Conduct education activities for all age groups on basic media literacy and media-manipulation awareness. Build up an experienced and professional team of trainers and experts able to conduct on-demand training and workshops for government officials, civil-society representatives and media people on advanced media literacy, psychological media influence, and manipulation.

To Media

1. Support investigative journalism initiatives and programmes, with a focus on the local level. Engage experienced international and mature national investigative journalists to share their expertise and build new skills and competences of Polish investigative and digital journalism.

2. Conduct training and workshops on media ethics and journalism standards on a regular basis.

3. Launch editorial fact-checking boards in leading media outlets.

TEODOR LUCIAN
MOGA

*Centre for European Studies, Faculty of Law,
Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iasi*

ROMANIA

A ●————————————————● 1.3

B ●————————————————————————————■ 2.5

C ●————————————————————————◀ 2.3

0   1   2   3   4
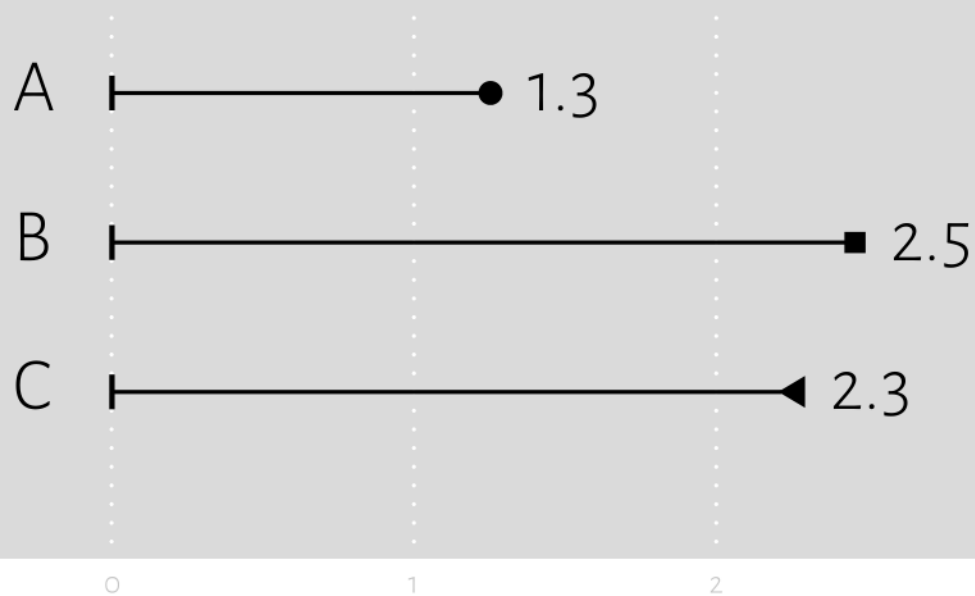
INTRODUCTION

Against the current geopolitical backdrop marked by heightened tensions between the Euro-Atlantic community and Russia, both Romania and Russia have been looking at each other with suspicion. Romania's participation in the EU and NATO has meant aligning Bucharest's foreign policy options with its Western partners, which often collides with Russia's interests in the region. Moreover, strong cooperation between Romania and Moldova, and Romania's active support of Ukraine post-Euromaidan, coupled with the vocal condemnation of Russia's annexation of Crimea and its support of the pro-Russia rebellion in the Donbas region have vexed Moscow and paved the way for a glacial relationship.[1] As a result, Romania has not been neglected by the Kremlin's arsenal of disinformation, which includes communication and psychological campaigns aimed at destabilising the domestic environment and changing the attitudes of the population. Given its complicated relations with Russia, Romania has always been wary of Moscow's actions in Eastern Europe. Historically, this dates to the 19th century when parts of the Moldavian principality were ceded to the Russian Empire by the Ottomans. Moreover, after World War II, Soviet aggression towards the integrity of Romania is linked to the incorporation of Northern Bukovina and Bessarabia into the USSR, with the advent of communism and the Soviet dominance over Romania during the Cold War.

The economic ties between Romania and Russia have ebbed and flowed. The strong relationship during the communist era was quickly abandoned in the early 1990s. This found Romania struggling to overcome its communist legacy and catch up with the West. Nevertheless, Romanian–Russian cooperation remained significant in the energy field, despite Romania's reduced dependency on Russian resources. Unlike its Eastern European neighbours, Romania imports only about one-quarter of its domestic demand from Russia while the rest is supplied by its own natural reserves. The Ukrainian and subsequent reciprocal economic sanctions between the EU and Russia meant a sharp decline by roughly 34 % in Romanian-Russian trade relations (from 4.998 billion USD in 2014 to 3.309 billion USD in 2015).[2]

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[1]   Emmott, Robin. 2016. "U.S. Activates Romanian Missile Defense Site, Angering Russia." Reuters. 2016. *http://reut.rs/2hLkjo3*.

[2]   "Relaţiile Comerciale Şi Economice Ruso-Române." 2018. Ambasada Federaţiei Ruse în România. 2018. *https://romania.mid.ru/web/romania_ro/economia*.

Romania has undergone a series of socio-cultural changes. While experiencing strong Western influence at the time when the Romanian state was established in the late 19th century, it faded away after World War II, when during communist rule Romania came under strong Soviet influence. Besides political and economic policies, socio-cultural institutions put in place by the Soviets were closely adhered to by the Romanian authorities. The 'Westernization' of Romania resumed in the early 1990s, with the country's renewed commitment to Euro-Atlantic values. Nevertheless, Romania's spirituality is strongly influenced by its connections with Eastern Orthodox Christianity[3] while the Latin roots of Romanian make Romania a distinct case among its mainly Slavic neighbours.

VULNERABLE GROUPS

In Romania, the spread of pro-Kremlin misinformation is very subtle, since the language barrier impedes the precise retransmission of propagandistic messages. Thus, Russian disinformation takes into account country specifics and chiefly exploits local political squabbling, and main institutional and democratic weaknesses.

Among the main vulnerable groups susceptible to being influenced by pro-Kremlin propaganda are Romanian nationalists/right-wingers, who depict themselves as staunch—often inflexible—believers in Romania's uniqueness among nations. They often castigate Romania's alliance with the West, militate for a non-aligned and 'independent' path for the country, and argue in favour of a friendly relationship with Russia. The usual message conveyed is that of a bleak international milieu where the West, by and large, and American hegemony, in particular, is blamed for disguised imperialism, the world's exploitation, many of the existing regional conflicts, and its corrupt leadership and biased media.

Similarly, religious conservatives (usually ultra-orthodox) emerge as another vulnerable group, predisposed to favour pro-Kremlin propaganda. According to this group, the dysfunctionality of the decadent West is evident when compared with Romania's ethically superior traditional society and religious beliefs.

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[3]   82 % of Romanians are orthodox according to the last 2011 census.

Last but not least, communist nostalgics (mostly elderly people) constitute another vulnerable group easy to exploit by the pro-Kremlin disinformation campaigns. Generally, they have been affected by the chaotic transition in Romania, often being economically marginalised, socially discontent, and often manipulated by the political elites.

MEDIA LANDSCAPE

The Romanian media landscape appears to be fertile ground for the Kremlin's misinformation network. According to the 2017 World Press Freedom Index, the Romanian press ranks 46 in the world (out of 180) and is considered generally free. In spite of a slight advancement from its 2016 position of 49 to the present 46, the report characterises Romania as being

'manipulated and spied on' and signals the 'excessive politicisation of the media, corrupt financing mechanisms, editorial policies subordinated to owner interests and intelligence agency infiltration of staff—such has been the impact of the media's transformation into political propaganda tools, which has been particularly visible in election years'.[4]

Today, Romania experiences strong competition in the media market, with television as the main telecommunications medium, particularly in rural areas. In 2016, Romanians spent on average 340 minutes a day watching TV channels, with a large portion combining both entertainment and news. The year 2016 also saw a similar hierarchy to 2015 with PRO TV maintaining the leading position (4.3 % rating, 20.9 % market share), followed by Antena 1 (3.2 % and 15.5 %) and Kanal D (1.6 % and 7.8 %).[5]

Despite its increased diversity and dynamism, the radio audience remained stable in 2016, particularly at the urban level, reaching roughly 75 % of the population, although listeners spent less than one hour tuned in to their favourite radio station. Radio Romania Actualități maintained its top position at the national level with a market share of 12.7 %, followed by KISS FM (11.4 %), and Radio ZU (8.2 %).[6]

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[4]   "Romania." 2018. Reporters Without Borders. 2018. *https://rsf.org/en/romania*.

[5]   "Media Fact Book Romania 2017." 2017. *http://www.mediafactbook.ro/public/files/MFB2017.pdf*.

[6]   "Rezultatele Studiului de Audiență Radio Valul de Vară 2017." 20

None of these traditional media outlets retransmit pro-Kremlin narratives; however, in their search for 'sensational' stories, news concocted by pro-Kremlin news agencies (Russia Today, Sputnik, etc.) might be reproduced. For instance, the 'Soros' narrative, which stemmed from Russia and expanded all across Central and Eastern Europe, has also made several headlines in Romania.

The digital segment has experienced one of the most rapid expansions in Eastern Europe because of the increased number of internet and smartphone users. According to the National Institute of Statistics, almost 70% of people aged 16 to 74 in Romania, about 10.6 million, accessed the internet in 2016, despite not being regular users. Roughly 75% of Romanian internet users participate in social media,[7] where Facebook is the most common forum for Romanians, reaching 7 million daily users (13+ years).[8]

This rich digital landscape disguises many cyber challenges. According to Iulian Chifu and Oazu Nantoi (2016),[9] in Romania, pro-Kremlin disinformation takes the form of online measures that create an alternative reality by re-branding facts, events, and concrete arguments, with the ultimate goal of undermining objective truth, cultivating confusion, and mistrust in Western values and solidarity. To this end, various news websites are used to share phony and manipulative messages using no fact-checking and having no link to journalistic deontology. They also entertain a constant flux of comments, which afterwards generate snowball effect on social networks.

Social media tools are particularly efficient in this case, considering the ease with which they offer vivid platforms where such 'alternative' narratives can be disseminated and amplified. According to the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, in Romania, news platforms

'compete online for readers' attention and for advertising money with Google and Facebook, with bloggers and influencers (who often do not make clear their financial interests), and with fake news and conspiracy theorists'.[10]

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[7]   "Europe's Digital Progress Report." 2017. European Commission. 2017. https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/european-digital-progress-report.

[8]   On average Romanians spend 316 min. on the internet.

[9]   Chifu, Iulian and Nantoi, Oazu. 2016. "Război Informaţional. Tipizarea Modelului Agresiunii." Institutului de Ştiinţe Politice şi Relaţii Internaţionale Ion I.C. Brătianu al Academiei Române. https://nato.md/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Razboi-Informational.pdf.

[10]   "Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2017." 2018. Reuters Institute. http://bit.ly/2tSeHbL

Most recently, an online application has been developed in Romania that cross-checks published news and warns users about the accuracy of information found on the websites. More than 71 news websites have been identified so far, which intensively make use of fake news, some of them extremely popular among internet users (e.g. *Antena3.ro*, *Romaniatv.net*, *stiripesurse.ro* or *Dcnews.ro*).[11]

Nonetheless, apart from *Sputnik*, which in May 2015 launched its Romanian online news platform in the Republic of Moldova dedicated to a Romanian-speaking audience,[12] other websites have no formal, proven ties to Russia, although their motivation to propagate such news is unknown. Yet, there is no transparency either when it comes to their organisational and financial structures. What these websites have in common is their straightforward approach and aggressiveness, particularly when their reasons for disseminating such news are being inquired, since questioning their publication goals is often branded as an attempt to undermine the diversity of opinions or as a counter-attack of 'politically-correctness'.

Corina Rebegea, an expert at the Center for European Policy Analysis (CEPA), believes these are only

'"*camouflage" actions aimed at indirectly conveying pro-Kremlin messages*',[13]

since overt Russian propaganda would not be positively received in Romania considering the Russophobic sentiment existing in Romanian society. In any case, the narratives these websites and social media tools have in common are similar and range from a pervasive, nationalistic, and anti-EU/NATO/US campaign, mostly depicting Romania as a 'colony/vassal/puppet'[14] of the Western powers, and the decadence of the West, including here a fierce critique against capitalism, globalisation, 'political correctness', minority, and gender rights, etc. Western progressive values are portrayed as in obvious antithesis with Romanian society, which is depicted as the holder of 'true' traditional, religious, and moral values.[15]

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[11] "Lista Site-Urilor Unde Informaţia Trebuie Verificată de Două Ori Include Şi Unul Din Iaşi!" 2017. Ziaruldeiasi.ro. 2017. *http://bit.ly/2pcDl0M*

[12] Many articles produced by Sputnik.md either favour the opinions of journalists or praise politicians who are vehemently critical about the fight against corruption in Romania and follow a strong anti-Western line. See, for instance, *https://pressone.ro/sectiuni/trei-nume-pe-care-sputnik-moldova-romania-le-elogiaza-constant/*.

[13] Rebegea, Corina. 2017. "Giving Pro-Kremlin Propaganda a Helping Hand." StopFake.org. 2017. *https://www.stopfake.org/en/giving-pro-kremlin-propaganda-a-helping-hand/*.

[14] "Pleşoianu Se Ia Tare de SUA: Noua Securitate ESTE Creaţie de Peste Ocean." 2017. Sputnik.md. 2017. *https://ro.sputnik.md/politics/20170905/14373687/plesoianu-tare-sua-noua-securitate-creatie-peste-ocean.html*.

[15] "EURACTIV: Sua isi muta armele nucleare din Turcia in România!" 2016. *http://bit.ly/2Gscg7h*.

In fact, religion is an important soft-power instrument employed by Russia to expand its political influence and deliver its anti-Western messages in countries that share the Christian Orthodox faith. Romania is no exception.[16]

According to Rebegea,

'The Kremlin's arsenal of disinformation in Romania—and across southeastern Europe—includes narratives that are tightly connected with existing home-grown nationalist discourse. Many times, this blurs the lines between various actors (pro-Russian trolls or Romanian right-wingers) and their goals, which in the end provides a perfect camouflage for Russian propaganda'.[17]

For instance, one of the most popular fake-stories injected into the Romanian public by different news outlets (TV channels and websites) inaccurately claimed the imminent transfer of US nuclear warheads from Turkey to Romania, against the background of strained relations between Washington and Ankara. This would have made Romania a first-line target in the eventuality of a war between the West and Russia.[18] Another example portrays Romania as a preferred destination for selling American second-hand military equipment.[19]

Similarly, some blogs insistently criticised Romania's latest military acquisition aimed at augmenting the capabilities of the Romanian air forces in line with its NATO allies. The purchase of a squadron of 36 F-16s previously used by the Portuguese air force was seen not only as an expensive move for acquiring aged military equipment but also as unneeded, since Romania is not the target of any outside threat.[20]

Furthermore, what these websites and blogs have in common is their recurring mission to 'help' Romania get rid of the malevolent influence of George Soros, the well-known Jewish American businessman

[16]   See, for instance, Alexandru Lazescu 2017, A Proxy for the Kremlin: The Russian Orthodox Church, available at: http://www.worldaffairsjournal.org/article/proxy-kremlin-russian-orthodox-church and Corina Rebegea 2017, Kremlin plays the religion card, available at: http://infowar.cepa.org/Briefs/Ro/Kremlin-plays-the-religion-card.

[17]   Rebegea, Corina. 2017. "Russian Propaganda Meets Romanian Nationalism." Center for European Policy Analysis. 2017. http://infowar.cepa.org/Briefs/Ro/Russian-propaganda-meets-Romanian-nationalism.

[18]   Tudor, Iulian. 2016. "SUA Mută Arme Nucleare Din Turcia În RomâNia. Ministerul de Externe Neagă. SUA Nu Spun Nimic." Romaniatv.net. 2016. https://www.romaniatv.net/sua-muta-arme-nucleare-din-turcia-in-romania-euractiv_309625.html.

[19]   Vasilescu, Valentin. 2015. "Marşul Cavaleriei Americane Prin RomâNia, În Folosul Complexului Militar- Industrial Al SUA." RussiaToday.ro. 2015. http://bit.ly/2pgSpzY.

       Țene, Ionuț. 2017. "Informații Trecute Sub Tăcere de Presa Centrală! Războiul Este Iminent." Alternativenews.ro. 2017. http://bit.ly/2FHSFPt.

[20]   "La Avioane F16 Second-Hand, Pilotii or Fi de Prima Mana?" 2016. Politicscam.ro. 2016. http://politicscam.ro/avioane-f16-second-hand-romania/.

and philanthropist. According to the narrative, Soros' network of NGOs and initiatives unceasingly conspire not only against the current political establishment but also against the very existence of the Romanian state and traditional life. The 'Soros' narrative carefully concocted in the Kremlin's laboratories has been very effective in Romania. Subsequently, it has been often employed by politicians from the ruling coalition[21] to justify their controversial political moves as a desire to protect the Romanian people from the vested interests of Western multinational companies, which, allegedly, exploit simple and decent Romanians.[22]

Perhaps the most well-known narrative was circulated at the beginning of 2017, when massive anti-graft protests took place across the country against the decision by the government to soften penalties for wrongdoing and corruption by officials. This narrative depicted the huge influx of people gathered in the country's biggest cities as directly financed by Soros and other multinationals whose aims would have been the destabilisation of the state.[23] According to one of our interviewees, the 'Soros' narrative played well in the hand of the Romanian politicians by being already deeply rooted in their discourse and public statements:

'The Soros (threat) is a Kremlin-generated problem, which (...) was taken by our politicians and used in their campaigns; they took advantage of it'.[24]

Complementarily, these kinds of messages have been followed by ones aimed at creating the impression that EU accession was in fact an error while the anti-corruption efforts undertaken by Romania in past years are just instruments of foreign interference by Western powers.[25] Such allegations are personified by a group of three—the *Ku Klux Klan* of imposters[26]—which includes the president, Klaus Iohannis, Laura Codruța Kövesi, the current chief prosecutor of Romania's National Anti-

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[21]   Romania is currently governed by the PSD-ALDE coalition with the centre-left Social Democratic Party (SDP) holding a parliamentary majority after the December 2016 elections.

[22]   "Dragnea: Totul Pleacă de La Soros, de La Răul Pe Care Vrea Să-l Facă României." 2017. Digi24. 2017. *http://bit.ly/2HyL6Lm*.

Ion, Raluca. 2017. "Noua Manipulare a PSD: Multinaționalele Atacă Țara." Republica. 2017. *https://republica.ro/noua-manipulare-a-psd-multinationalele-ataca-tara*.

[23]   "L. Dragnea: Am Auzit Zvonuri Că Multinaționalele Au Finanțat Protestele." 2017. Digi24. 2017. *http://bit.ly/2pduQaT*.

Dumitru, Adrian. 2017. "VIDEO ȘOCANT! Mîna Dreaptă a Lui Trump Confirmă Implicarea Lui Soros În RomâNia." EVZ.ro. 2017. *http://evz.ro/trump-soros-romania.html*.

[24]   Anonymous informant, Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iasi, Romania, October 3, 2017. In-depth interview.

[25]   Departamentul Zamolxe România 2017, available at: *http://bit.ly/2DpPPwx*; *http://bit.ly/2Dr3dAi* "EURACTIV: SUA ISI MUTA ARMELE NUCLEARE DIN TURCIA IN ROMÂNIA!" 2016. *Http://www.cuvantul-ortodox.ro/*. 2016. *http://bit.ly/2Gscg7h*.

[26]   "Klaus, Kovesi Și Klemm, Un „Klu Klux Klan" Al Impostorilor." 2017. Justitiarul National. 2017. *http://www.justitiarul.ro/klaus-kovesi-si-klemm-un-klu-klux-klan-al-impostorilor/*.

corruption Directorate, and Hans George Klemm, the US ambassador to Romania. Interestingly, the names of the president and chief prosecutor were not chosen arbitrarily. They are both staunch supporters of the Western alliance (President Iohannis has often criticised the aggressive Russian foreign policy), and interestingly, their names have no Romanian origin. In fact, President Iohannis comes from the ethnic German minority. This has lately been a recurring strategy to demonise Romania's pro-Western leaders. One year ago, false information was circulating on the internet that the then-Romanian prime-minister and former European Commissioner, Dacian Cioloș, is the illegitimate son of Soros.[27]

INSTITUTIONAL SETUP AND LEGAL REGULATIONS

Media in Romania are poorly regulated while regulatory standards and norms for the online media environment are absent. There is no functional press law as such in Romania. A press law was adopted in communist Romania in 1974. It was completely ignored after the end of the communist regime, despite never fully being abrogated.[28] In the early 1990s, press freedom was guaranteed in Article 30 of the new Romanian constitution from 1991 (amended in 2003). As far as the audiovisual landscape is concerned, regulation is underpinned by an outdated law (Audiovisual Law no. 504/ July 11, 2002), which, nevertheless, sets up the general framework under which media services should be provided. For instance, according to Art. 3, para. 1, 'all audiovisual media service providers must ensure the objective information of the public by correctly presenting the facts and events and they must favour the free formation of opinions'.[29] Romania is also subject to the Audiovisual Media Services Directive 2010/13 / EU of the European Parliament and of the Council, which coordinates the provision of audiovisual services in EU countries.[30]

Yet, with the exception of the National Audiovisual Council of Romania (CNA), the official regulator for the audiovisual sector in Romania,

[27]   Lazar, Valeriu. 2016. "Dacian Ciolos, Illegitimate Son of George Soros? A Joke with High Stupidity Level, the PM Says." The Romania Jounalal. 2016. *http://bit.ly/2Fy1WNX* .

[28]   Ulmanu, Alexandru-Brădut. n.d. "Media Landscapes - Romania." European Journalism Centre. *http://ejc.net/media_landscapes/romania*.

[29]   The Audiovisual Law no. 504/July 11th, 2002, available at: *http://www.cna.ro*/The-Audio-visual-Law,1655.html.

[30]   On the Coordination of Certain Provisions Laid down by Law, Regulation or Administrative Action in Member States Concerning the Provision of Audiovisual Media Services. 2010. *http://bit.ly/28PAfvX*.

other regulatory bodies do not currently exist to examine the quality and accuracy of information for print and online media. Since today most 'fake news' is circulating in the online environment, it is practically impossible to prevent it from spreading due to three main factors: 1) the difficulty to oversee the deontology and responsibility of news websites; 2) the complexity in penalising any kind of toxic interaction occurring online; 3) the process of identifying and counteracting the source(s) of these 'hybrid' risks. For instance, during the anti-graft protests in Romania in January-February 2017, CNA received over 2 000 complaints, nearly 10 times more than the number in the same period of 2016.[31]

This worrying trend is not recent and was the subject of an elaborated sociological study in 2009, when the Centre for Independent Journalism and Active Watch identified many irregularities and deviations from professional journalism standards. According to this study, many Romanian journalists do not abide by any ethics code while professional norms are neglected in newsrooms. Moreover, many journalists have complained that they are constantly exposed to political pressure.[32] In spite of repeated efforts undertaken by various professional organisations (*The Romanian Press Club, the Convention of Media Organisations, the Centre for Independent Journalism, ActiveWatch – The Media Monitoring Agency, the MediaSind trade union, and the Association of Journalists in Romania, etc.*) to encourage deontological codes,

'there has not been any comprehensive system of accountability agreed upon by the entire profession, or at least by a significant part of it'.[33]

With respect to the legal regulations concerning information security, Romania has had since 2011 a *National Computer Security Incident Response Team*, a specialised structure aimed at analysing, identifying and preventing/reacting to cyberthreats,[34] and starting from 2013 a Cyber Security Strategy.[35] Moreover, the *Romanian Intelligence Service* has also developed a department (*Cyberint*)[36] for overseeing Romanian cyberspace; however, the country has still not developed a strategy

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[31]   Touma, Ana Maria. 2017. "Wave of Fake News 'Fuelling Divisions' in Romania." BalkanInsight. 2017. https://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/fake-news-fuel-political-divisions-in-romania-04-03-2017.

[32]   "Autoreglementarea Presei În RomâNia." 2009. http://bit.ly/2FP4dDN

[33]   Ulmanu, Alexandru-Brădut. n.d. "Media Landscapes - Romania." European Journalism Centre. http://ejc.net/media_landscapes/romania.

[34]   National Cyber Security and Incident Response Team, https://cert.ro/.

[35]   Cyber Security Strategy in Romania, http://bit.ly/2pcQ7BL

[36]   Cyberint, available at: https://www.sri.ro/cyberint.

to combat or at least to soften the adverse effect of disinformation circulating online.

Our respondents also agreed that such challenges to information security in Romania could have been efficiently countered by more rigorous legislation in place. However, an interviewed expert believes that,

'Romania has still not clearly defined all the components of a potential cyber threat, which means that appropriate infrastructure still needs to be developed'. [37]

Furthermore,

'Romania does not invest sufficiently in security infrastructure, and real risks are only later learned, which diminishes the efficiency of the security measures put in place. Finally, there is not enough coordination between the regulatory bodies in charge; likewise, there is no clarity about the way escalation points are coped with'. [38]

DIGITAL DEBUNKING TEAMS AND MEDIA LITERACY PROJECTS

Media literacy is rather low in Romania. According to a report undertaken by the Open Society Foundation,

'investment in good-news and debate programmes has fallen over the past (few) years', [39]

particularly since the Romanian television, print, and online sectors were hard hit by the economic crisis of 2008—2009. Moreover, rural areas, where almost half of the Romanian population lives, have limited access to quality print media, while the newspaper market in rural regions is almost non-existent. Concurrently, media education in a broader cultural and critical understanding has not been defined in national policy documents. This only concerns a narrow definition of the integration of ICT education and e-learning

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[37]   Anonymous informant, Capgemini Services Romania, Iași, Romania, October 8, 2017. In-depth interview.

[38]   Anonymous informant, Capgemini Services Romania, Iași, Romania, October 8, 2017. In-depth interview.

[39]   Proteasa, Manuela, and Iulian Comanescu. 2011. "Mapping Digital Media: Romania." Open Society Foundaiton. *https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/reports/mapping-digital-media-romania*.

in teaching and learning methods, in line with the European recommendations.[40]

Actually, the noteworthy impact of 'fake news' in Romania has been linked by one of the interviewees with the limited media literacy and critical thinking (corroborated as insufficient knowledge about fact-checking),[41] while another expert blames low journalistic standards and/or training that results in ignoring facts and giving preference to the 'sensational'. According to his assessment,

'such journalists are vulnerable to disinformation attacks and become, even unintentionally, propagators of false messages, populist or pro-Kremlin'.[42]

In addition, most of the disinformation sources contaminating Romanian mass media are rather domestic, and not externally originating, as

'most of the Romanian media holdings do not promote investigative journalism anymore and do not do fact-checking. In fact, the real threat stems from the lack of media literacy in Romania'.[43]

This statement comes in line with one recent GLOBSEC report (2017), which points to Romania's modest media literacy, since a high number of Romanians tend to trust online disinformation websites as relevant sources of information, while 57% show a lack of confidence in information provided by mainstream media.[44]

Concurrently, another respondent believes that corruption—a deep-rooted problem in Romania—also contributes to the widespread dissemination of propaganda, as

'corruption opens the gates to propagandistic messages'.[45]

In spite of the obvious vulnerability vis-à-vis Russian disinformation, the respondent has pointed out the uniqueness of the Romanian case, where domestic political elites often use similar misinformation tools to confuse the public and justify their actions:

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[40]   Stanila, Corina, and Nicoleta Fotiade. n.d. "Media and Information Literacy Policies in Romania (2013)." Asociatia Edumedia. *http://ppemi.ens-cachan.fr/data/media/colloque140528/rapports/ROMANIA_2014.pdf*.

[41]   Anonymous informant, "Mihai Viteazul" National Intelligence Academy, Bucharest, August 9, 2017. In-depth interview.

[42]   Anonymous informant, University of Bucharest, August 11, 2017. In-depth interview.

[43]   Anonymous informant, Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iasi, Romania, October 3, 2017. In-depth interview.

[44]   Actually, roughly 30% of Romanians consider online disinformation websites as relevant sources of information: Hajdu, Dominika, Katarína Klingová, and Daniel Milo. 2017. "GLOBSEC Trends 2017: Mixed Messages and Signs of Hope from Central and Eastern Europe." GLOBSEC. *https://www.globsec.org/publications/globsec-trends-2017-mixed-messages-signs-hope-central-eastern-europe-2/*.

[45]   Anonymous informant, Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iasi, Romania, September 25, 2017. In-depth interview.

'the potential threat faced by our country has to do not solely with Russian influence on the Romanian media/online environment, but with the Russian efforts to influence domestic actors to follow a similar disinformation strategy. Unfortunately, these domestic actors with local credibility can easily serve as opinion multipliers. In other words, Sputnik is not itself a problem; the problem is in fact when the information published by Sputnik is employed internally by the social networks or other media sources to convey a message serving a clear political/ideological purpose'.[46]

For this reason, many volunteer groups of young Romanians decided to launch different initiatives and software applications aimed at identifying 'fake news'.

One of the most successful digital debunking teams in exposing and combating disinformation including on social media, online forums etc. by anonymous users and botnets has been the so-called *Funky Citizens*. This team established the first Romanian fact-checking, myth- and hoax-busting platform (www.factual.ro).

An interesting and useful application developed by another group of Romanian programmers has been '*Not to believe*' (https://denecrezut.faction.ro/) aimed at filtering the news and warning the readership about the veracity of the informative content spread on dubious news websites. A similar initiative has been developed by the '*Forum Apulum*' association whose goal is raising awareness about the negative implications of propaganda and disinformation in the media space. They also published a newspaper called '*Fake News*' for investigating this phenomenon and for encouraging civic involvement to combat disinformation.[47] Likewise, the *Centre for Independent Journalism* has recently launched a project, entitled '*Teaching Media Literacy*', sponsored by the Romanian-American Foundation, which aims at enhancing media literacy of young adults and at endowing them with critical thinking to identify and defend themselves from political propaganda. More than 11 000 students and 90 teachers across the country are expected to participate and learn to improve their media literacy skills.[48]

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[46]   Anonymous informant, Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iasi, Romania, September 25, 2017. In-depth interview.

[47]   Forum Apulum 2017, available at: *http://forumapulum.ro/conferinta-fakenews/.*

[48]   Teaching Media Literacy 2017, available at: http://www.rafonline.org/en/programe/teaching-media-literacy/.

Nevertheless, these laudable initiatives are not sufficient to tackle the increasing volume of disinformation that seems to have hit Romania hard in the past few years.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

When assessing the vulnerability and resilience to Russian disinformation warfare, the Romanian case stands out for many reasons.

First, in Romania an obvious and recurring disinformation and propaganda pattern can be identified. This follows the 'roadmap' employed by the Kremlin's propaganda machine in other Eastern European states where a high share of the population is Russian-speaking. The model features a similar anti-Western narrative aimed at agitating audiences and creating a psychological state of paranoia in which generally Euro-Atlantic frameworks are depicted in cynical terms and contrasted with a friendly and peaceful vision of Russia. In spite of the language barrier, in Romania many narratives elicit a strikingly similar line of argumentation.

Second, compared with the Eastern Partnership states, Romania appears less vulnerable to Russian disinformation campaigns. In fact, there has been no proven formal links between the Romanian media environment and Russian-controlled media outlets. In the same vein, the multiple online sources that propagate pro-Russian messages are still in a 'grey area', while the reasons for their extensive online and social media campaigns has so far been unclear, or ambiguous, to say the least. Nevertheless, to date, there has not been any investigative effort to unveil any Russian involvement or other foreign interference to the size and scope of the current investigation taking place in the US on whether Russia-linked actors influenced the 2016 election results. Perhaps, a specialised department to tackle the spread of fake stories and Russian disinformation following the model of the newly founded *Centre Against Terrorism and Hybrid Threats* in the Czech Interior Ministry is necessary also in Romania.

Third, in Romania much of the disinformation is generated internally, by local sources. As pointed out above, there have been obvious cases of politicians and persons of influence who, alongside with cohorts of journalists and media broadcasters serving their interests, have frequently made use of and propagated similar misinformation strategies to the ones

employed by the Kremlin-backed propaganda. Defending their political agendas, securing their interests, tightening their grip on power, etc. has often required building-up populist messages where the West, Soros and multinational companies, etc. have been the usual villains.

Based on the data collected from our interviewees, the chapter signals the need for a common effort to counter these threats and requires increased dedicated budgets to enhance infrastructure, educate the population and/or share good practices between institutions and local organisations, and sponsor politically non-affiliated organisations to conduct fact-checking work. According to our respondents, this critical field still has not received sufficient attention while the subject of the negative impact of disinformation is almost ignored, both in the media sphere and in the specific institutions (such as schools, universities, local and regional authorities, ministries, etc.).

In addition, there is a strong need for increased partnership between various government institutions, civil society, and private entrepreneurs for a better alignment of the security information strategies under a clear chain of command available at the national level. Finally, journalistic standards should undergo a complete re-assessment, since a balanced and neutral approach[49] based on thorough research is strongly desirable. Without the dedicated support of mainstream media, scattered efforts and/or volunteer initiatives would have only limited effects.

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[49]   According to one of our respondents, in many European countries "the pro-Russian propaganda is to a certain extent also the result of strong anti-Russian propaganda" (Anonymous informant, Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iasi, Romania, July 27, 2017. In-depth interview).

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Strategic Policy Institute

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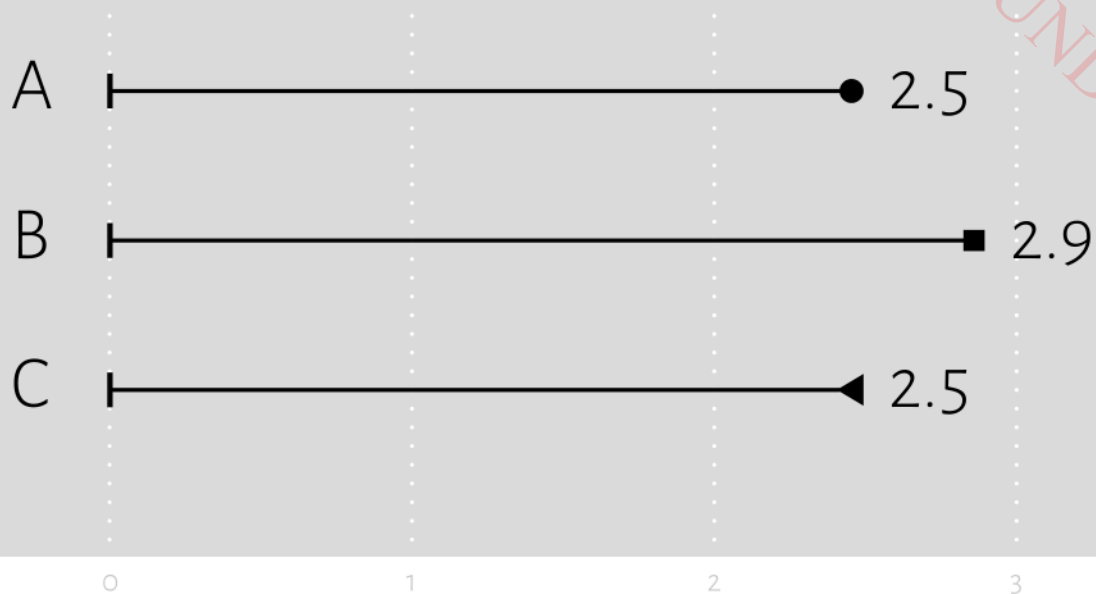
INTRODUCTION

Slovakia is a landlocked Central European country that got its
independence after the peaceful dissolution of Czechoslovakia
in 1993. Since then, despite being under communist rule and a member
of the Eastern Bloc for more than four decades until 1989, the country
has reversed its political course completely by becoming a democracy,
a member of NATO and the EU in 2004, and of the Eurozone in 2009.
However, even in 2017, Slovakia is still branded as a nation in transit
according to Freedom House, which gives it a democracy score of 2.61,[1]
and Democracy Index 2017 compiled by the Economist Intelligence
Unit,[2] which rates Slovakia as a flawed democracy, with a score of 7.16
(44th in the world). Quite symptomatic are also the results of a survey[3]
conducted by the GLOBSEC Policy Institute in 2016, in which 52 %
of respondents stated that Slovakia should serve as a bridge between
the East and the West, an idea that Martin Sklenár, Director of the
Security Policy Department at the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs
of the Slovak Republic, mentioned as one of the most illustrative examples
of how pro-Kremlin disinformation exploits long-held beliefs in the
country.[4]

Slovak society is often described as a traditional one. For example,
the two largest demonstrations in Slovakia since the Velvet Revolution
in 1989 were national pro-life marches organised by the Episcopal
Conference of Slovakia in 2013 and 2015 and attented by approximately
80 000[5] and 85 000[6] people, respectively. According to the 2011 census,
only 13.4 % of the population consider themselves to be atheists, while
62 % describe themselves as Roman Catholic.[7] Ethnically, the population
of Slovakia is homogenous. The idea of Slavic unity or brotherhood has
been present since the end of the 18th century, when the area of present

[1] "Nations in Transit 2017. Slovakia: Country Profile." 2018. Freedom House.
https://freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit/2017/slovakia.

[2] "Democracy Index 2017." 2018. https://www.eiu.com/topic/democracy-index.

[3] "GLOBSEC Trends. Stredná Európa Pod Paľbou Ruskej Propagandy: Skúmanie Postojov Verejnosti v Čechách, Maďarsku a Na
Slovensku." 2016. GLOBSEC Policy Institute. https://www.globsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/globsec_trends_2016_sk.pdf.

[4] Martin Sklenár, Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, January 30, 2018. In-depth Interview.

[5] Teraz.sk. 1970. "Na Národný Pochod Za Život Prišli Desaťtisíce Ľudí." TERAZ.Sk. January 1, 1970. h
ttp://www.teraz.sk/regiony/kosice-pochod-za-zivot/58997-clanok.html.

[6] "Bratislavské Centrum Zaplnili Desaťtisíce Ľudí. Pochod Za Život Na Fotografiách – Denník N." 2018. https://dennikn.sk/245670/
desattisice-ludi-pochoduju-centrom-bratislavy-za-zivot/.

[7] Štatistický úrad SR. 2011. SODB 2011. Retrieved from: http://bit.ly/2DtwcUf

Slovakia was under the rule of the Austrian Empire and later Austria-Hungary. Pan-Slavism as a cultural and political movement appeared in the 19th century, and is associated closely with the ideological fathers of the Slovak national revival, including Ľudovít Stur, who is generally considered to be one of the most important figures in Slovak history. Nowadays, according to an opinion poll conducted by the Institute for Public Affairs (IVO) in 2015, 31 % of Slovaks trust Russia, which is the highest number among all Visegrad Group (V4) countries.[8]

While Slovakia's biggest trade partners are mostly EU Member States, the country is almost completely dependent on imported Russian gas (which supplies approximately 97 % of Slovakia's demands) and oil (approximately 98 %), which makes the country very sensitive to any worsening in mutual relations.[9] The situation is similar in the military area, as the Slovak army remains heavily dependent on Soviet military equipment.[10] Even though both energy diversification and modernisation of the Slovak army are high on the agenda of the Slovak parliament, any radical changes are unlikely to happen soon, mainly for financial and technical reasons or, in some cases, lack of political will.

To sum up, Kremlin-orchestrated disinformation campaigns can exploit a shared communist past, the conservatism of Slovak society, the common Slavic ethnic background or the country's economic dependence on Russian gas and oil to spread their narratives in Slovakia. However, it is necessary to understand that most of these contexts have only limited value for pro-Kremlin propaganda. A shared communist past brings not only nostalgia, but also negative memories of occupation (for example, the 1968 Warsaw Pact invasion). Conservatism is limited by the different dominant religious beliefs (Orthodox Christianity vs Roman Catholic), and the common Slavic background is problematic because of the geographical distance or the usage of different scripts (Latin vs Cyrillic) that makes Russian hardly understandable in written form, especially for younger generations.

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[8]   "PRIESKUM: Rusku Najviac Dôveruje z Krajín V4 Slovensko." 2018.
        http://www2.teraz.sk/slovensko/prieskum-rusku-najviac-doveruje-z-v4-s/198140-clanok.html.

[9]   Marušiak, Juraj. 2013. "Slovakia's Eastern Policy—from the Trojan Horse of Russia to 'Eastern Multivectoralism.'"
        International Issues & Slovak Foreign Policy Affairs XXII (1–2): 42–70.

[10]   Onuferová, Marianna. 2018. "Slovenská armáda je závislá od ruských dodávok." ekonomika.sme.sk.
        https://ekonomika.sme.sk/c/7195940/slovenska-armada-je-zavisla-od-ruskych-dodavok.html.

VULNERABLE GROUPS

Despite being a part of the Eastern Bloc in the past, Slovakia does not have any significant Russian population that could be considered as an obvious target audience for pro-Kremlin false and manipulative content. Moreover, there is no other important ethnic group that could be exploited by Russian propaganda on the basis of ethnic grievances, as the largest ethnic minority (8.2 % of the total population) are Hungarians, of which only 11 % think that in Slovakia members of the Hungarian minority have a disadvantageous starting position in every aspect of life.[11]

According to the majority of the consulted experts, Kremlin-originated or inspired narratives are exploiting the country's economic, historic, societal, ethnolinguistic, and religious context. Vladimír Snídl, a journalist from Denník N, stated that:

'It is very difficult to identify any specifically vulnerable group, as disinformation campaigns could be appealing to virtually anyone, regardless of their education, age or occupation'.[12]

However, there are certain segments of the society that could be considered as more vulnerable than others.

The first includes those Slovaks who feel strong nostalgia for their communist past. Many of them feel socio-economically disadvantaged and perceive a low level of social security, especially when compared to the pre-1989 era.[13] A typical example is a representative of the lower middle class or working class, with basic education, working manually or unemployed, typically from a rural region. This group has become more and more disillusioned with the current pro-Western course of the Slovak Republic, as its members do not perceive any social or economic benefits of the post-communist era.[14] As the results of a poll by Focus in 2007, and another by Focus and the Institute for Public Affairs in 2014 suggest,

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[11]   Vrabcová, Marie. n.d. "Maďarov na Slovensku ubúda. Čo ich najviac trápi?" 2018.
       https://plus.sme.sk/c/20092327/madarov-na-slovensku-ubuda-co-ich-najviac-trapi.html.

[12]   Vladimír Šnídl, Denník N, January 26, 2018. In-depth interview.

[13]   "Dvadsaťpäť Rokov Od Nežnej Revolúcie Očami Občanov Slovenskej Republiky a Českej Republiky — IVO — I
       nštitút Pre Verejné Otázky." 2018.
       http://www.ivo.sk/7551/sk/aktuality/dvadsatpat-rokov-od-neznej-revolucie-ocami-obcanov-slovenskej-republiky-a-ceskej-republiky.

[14]   "Press Release: Hodnotenie spoločenskej zmeny po novembri 1989." 2007. Agentúra Focus.
       http://www.focus-research.sk/files/72_Hodnotenie%20spolocenskej%20zmeny%20po%20novembri%201989%20_%20okt2007.pdf.

most in this sector of society are retired people (age 60+), but the ratio of the negative perception of the system change in 1989 is also higher than the average in society within the 45+ age group (31.8 %).[15][16] According to a survey conducted by GLOBSEC Policy Institute, 42 % of Slovaks would define the country's geopolitical orientation as 'in between', neither West nor East oriented, 59 % want to stay in the EU, and 56 % of respondents would agree that NATO membership is good for Slovakia's security.[17]

A surprisingly vulnerable group is composed of young people aged under 25. One of the main reasons, besides systemic flaws in the educational system, is arguably the grim future prospects for students with high school diplomas, and of those from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, who are unable to find decent jobs. In September 2017, youth unemployment (under 25s) was at 14.9 % in Slovakia.[18]

As the last parliamentary election showed, a higher percentage of first-time voters supported the right-wing extremist party Ľudova strana nase Slovensko (LSNS), whose leader Marian Kotleba openly promotes his pro-Russian, anti-systemic politics based on anti-EU and anti-NATO rhetoric.[19][20] As an example, in 2014 he sent a supportive letter to the then president of Ukraine Viktor Yanukovych and later, during his term as a chairman of the Banska Bystrica self-governing region, he welcomed members of the Night Wolves motorcycle club with the flag of the president of Russia raised on the government building.[21][22] At the same time, 30 % of young Slovaks are undecided about their country's geopolitical orientation, which creates space for potential propaganda exploitation.[23]

[15]   Ibid.

[16]   "Dvadsaťpäť rokov od nežnej revolúcie o ami ob anov SR a ČR." 2014. Agentúra Focus, Centrum pro výzkum veřejného mínění, Sociologický ústav AV ČR. http://www.ivo.sk/buxus/docs/vyskum/subor/dvadsatpat_rokov_novembra_tlacova_sprava.pdf.

[17]   "Mixed Messages and Signs of Hope from Central & Eastern Europe." 2017. GLOBSEC Policy Institute. https://www.globsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/globsec_trends_2017.pdf.

[18]   "Press Release: Euro Area Unemployment at 8.9%." 2017. Eurostat. http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/2995521/8357265/3-31102017-CP-EN.pdf/cc23432e-f918-4f93-9fe7-0c03badb9792.

[19]   Dugovič, Matej. 2016. "U prvovoličov bodoval kotleba, chyba môže byť v školstve—Denník N." https://dennikn.sk/395832/prvovolicov-bodoval-kotleba-chyba-moze-byt-skolstve/.

[20]   Bútorová, Zora. 2014. "November 1989 v zrkadle verejnej mienky: zisky, straty, vyhliadky." blog.sme.sk. Accessed April 4, 2018. https://institutpre.blog.sme.sk/c/370654/november-1989-v-zrkadle-verejnej-mienky-zisky-straty-vyhliadky.html.

[21]   Vražda, Daniel. 2014. "Kotleba píše ukrajinskému prezidentovi Janukovyčovi: neustupujte—domov. Sme.Sk." Accessed April 4, 2018. https://domov.sme.sk/c/7086506/kotleba-pise-ukrajinskemu-prezidentovi-janukovycovi-neustupujte.html.

[22]   "Do bystrice prišli noční vlci, Kotleba vyvesil na župe ruskú vlajku." 2016. https://slovensko.hnonline.sk/657800-do-bystrice-prisli-nocni-vlci-kotleba-vyvesil-na-zupe-rusku-vlajku.

[23]   Milo, Daniel, and Katarína Klingová. 2018. "GLOBSEC Youth Trends: How Young Central Europeans View the World." GLOBSEC Policy Institute. https://www.globsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/GLOBSEC-Youth-Trends-How-Young-Central-Europeans-View-the-World.pdf.

Most importantly, there are political parties in Slovakia promoting pro-Russian views. One of the most significant is LSNS (8.04 % in the 2016 parliamentary election) with its pro-Russian political pan-Slavism and strong anti-EU and anti-NATO stance.[24] LSNS is also connected to the rest of the far-right spectrum in Slovakia, which is very pro-Russian in general. However, pro-Russian tendencies can be observed even in traditional parties, especially in nationalist, conservative Slovenska narodna strana (SNS) (8.64 %). Its leader, Andrej Danko, recently stressed in his speech in the Russian State Duma the importance of the common Slavic culture, and expressed a will to cooperate with Russia in many areas, including education.[25]

Furthermore, even Prime Minister Robert Fico, the leader of the largest ruling party SMER (socialna demokracia, SMER–SD, 28.28 %), reflected a traditionally positive image of Russia among the Slovak population, and of Slovak dependence on Russian gas in his 'friendly-pragmatic' condemnation of the sanctions against Russia.[26] Mirek Tóda, a journalist of Denník N, repeatedly stressed the negative impact of this kind of populism on Slovak politics and the public sphere, and even labeled it as one of the key information security challenges for Slovakia. Moreover, he added that:

'The majority of the highest representatives of the state, probably only with the exception of the president, are not willing to criticise Russia openly in any situation for various reasons'.[27]

To sum up, even though the main direct target group of Kremlin-inspired propaganda is very limited, as it includes mainly the far-right nationalist anti-systemic spectrum that already has strong pro-Russian views and serves mainly as a proxy for spreading propaganda, a substantial number of Slovak citizens are sympathetic towards Russia.

Other vulnerable subcategories are socio-economically weaker people of 45+ years of age, who feel a sense of nostalgia for the previous regime, and young disillusioned people with grim socio-economic prospects. Those are the people who are dissatisfied with the current situation

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[24]   "Naše Názory. Kotleba – Ľudová Strana Naše Slovensko." 2018. *http://www.naseslovensko.net/kategoria/nase-nazory/.*

[25]   "Danko ako prvý slovák vystúpil na pôde ruskej štátnej dumy. Televízia TA3." 2018. *https://www.ta3.com/clanok/1116435/danko-ako-prvy-slovak-vystupil-na-pode-ruskej-statnej-dumy.html.*

[26]   Krekó, Péter, Lóránt Győri, Daniel Milo, Juraj Marušiak, János Széky, and Anita Lencsés. 2015. "Marching Towards Eurasia. The Kremlin Connections of the Slovak Far-Right." Political Capital Kft., Social Development Institute Kft. *http://www.politicalcapital.hu/wp-content/uploads/PC_Study_Russian_Influence_Slovakia_ENG.pdf.*

[27]   Mirek Tóda, Denník N, February 5, 2018. In-depth interview.

in general, and are therefore prone to believe Russian propaganda as an alternative based on economic, historical, societal, ethnolinguistic or religious similarities. In addition, as some of the interviewed experts emphasised, it is necessary to include active and retired armed forces personnel in the list of groups vulnerable to the effects of Kremlin-led propaganda, as the activities of openly pro-Russian groups such as the Association of the Slovak soldiers (ASV) might pose a significant security risk.

MEDIA LANDSCAPE

The World Press Freedom Index placed Slovakia 17th in the world rankings in 2017, out of 180 countries. However, compared to 2016, Slovakia has fallen in the ranking by five places, mostly because of the growing number of defamation actions against journalists being brought by businessmen, politicians and judicial officials. Any journalist convicted of such an offence faces up to eight years in prison.[28]

According to the Media Pluralism Monitor, Slovakia has good results (22 %, low risk) in the area of basic protection (regulatory framework, status of journalists, reach of traditional media, etc.); medium results (35 %, medium risk) in the area of market plurality (transparency of media ownership, prevention of concentration of media ownership, competition enforcement, and state protection of media pluralism, etc.) and social inclusiveness (34 %, medium risk). The area that scores the highest risk (53 %, medium risk) is political independence (political control over media, regulatory safeguards against political bias), as there are issues with political control over local/regional/municipal media, editorial autonomy, and funding.[29]

The recent murder of Jan Kuciak, member of an investigative team at Aktuality.sk, who was found shot dead with his fiancée on February 25, was the first time a journalist had been killed since Slovakia gained independence. This crime shocked Slovak society and could lead to deep political consequences. Kuciak's last published articles uncovered the activities of alleged Ndrangeta mafia members in fraud and corruption

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[28]   "2017 World Freedom Index." 2017. Reporters Without Borders. *https://rsf.org/en/ranking*.

[29]   Sampor, Željko. 2016. "Media Pluralism Monitor 2016: Slovakia." Media Pluralism Monitor. European University Institute. *http://cmpf.eui.eu/media-pluralism-monitor/mpm-2016-results/slovakia/*.

allegations regarding EU funds, and involved the relationship with high-ranking individuals in the Slovak government.[30]

There are four big media groups who control most of the TV market in Slovakia. The biggest one is Bermudian CME (25.7 % share of the market as of the 51st week, December 2017) with the most important channel TV Markíza. J&T Media Enterprises Group controls 23.6 % of market and owns channel TV JOJ. Other significant players include public broadcaster RTVS (13.6 %) with channels Jednotka and Dvojka, and the business giant Grafobal Group (1.3 %) with the news channel of TA3.[31] Despite some rumours of a lack of political impartiality, for example in the case of TA3,[32][33] there have been no signs of pro-Kremlin narratives from any of the significant TV broadcasters on any of the mentioned channels broadcast in the Slovak language.

The biggest radio broadcasting network is public RTVS (25.9 %). The single most popular radio station is commercial Radio Express (19.3 %).[34] Probably the most important 'alternative' radio station is the Internet radio station called Slobodny Vysielac, which serves as a hub for the disinformation spreading community and individuals. Documents regarding NATO information operations, colour revolutions, and Oliver Stone's documentary about Vladimir Putin can be found under the sub-page called Warsonline.[35] As there are no precise data available about Slobodny Vysielac's popularity, the only indicator for measuring its audience are numbers published by the Radia.sk website, focusing on Slovak radio stations and their Internet streaming applications. According to data from November 2017, Slobodny Vysielac had a 2.7 % share of the app users market with 5 673.68 hours.[36]

Regarding mainstream print media, no title has a pro-Russian bias. There are however some marginal weekly and monthly magazines, such as Literarny tyzdenník and Nove slovo, which support pro-Russia views. The

[30]   Rezaian, Jason. 2018. "These Are the Corruption Allegations That May Have Gotten a Slovak Journalist Killed." Washington Post. *https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2018/02/28/these-are-the-corruption-allegations-that-may-have-gotten-a-slovak-journalist-killed/*.

[31]   Mediálne.Sk. 2017. " Trhový podiel TV." *https://medialne.etrend.sk/televizia-grafy-a-tabulky.html*.

[32]   Daniš, Dag. 2015. "Komentár Daga Daniša: Ako majiteľ TA3 zarába milióny na gastrolístkoch." aktuality.sk. *https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/310447/komentar-daga-danisa-ako-majitel-ta3-zaraba-miliony-na-gastrolistkoch/*.

[33]   Kernová, Miroslava. 2013. "TA3 má na politikov dvojaký meter." blog.sme.sk. *https://omediach.blog.sme.sk/c/320528/TA3-ma-na-politikov-dvojaky-meter.html*.

[34]   Mediálne.Sk. 2017. "Rádiá: počúvanosť. *https://medialne.etrend.sk/radia-grafy-a-tabulky.html*

[35]   Wars Online. (2018). Wars Online—Slobodný vysiela . *http://warsonline.slobodnyvysielac.sk/*

[36]   "Počúvanosť Rádií Cez Aplikácie Radia.Sk." 2017. Radia.sk. *https://www.radia.sk/_subory/prieskumy_radia_sk/2017/11/poradie.pdf*.

most important one is Zem a vek, a monthly magazine spreading hoaxes, pro-Russian propaganda, and conspiracy theories. There are no reliable data available, but according to Tibor Eliot Rostas, editor-in-chief of Zem a Vek, there 25 000 copies[37] were published monthly in 2015, and there were almost 7 000 subscribers.[38] In comparison, the most circulated (64 864 copies sold) monthly magazine Novy Cas Krízovky published 91 510 copies in November 2017.[39] Andrej Matisak, a renowned Slovak journalist, sees the Slovak media market as rather fragmented and extremely small:

'We are struggling to find a sustainable business model. Lack of resources, both financial and human, is leading to a situation when a single journalist is expected to master Twitter, Facebook, and of course deliver source-rich, fact-based pieces. Everything is done under huge time stress'.[40]

Slovak print media reacted to the digital era by enhancing business models with paid for online content. Jana Polacikova, a news media researcher and scholar, argues that this model is understandable, but it also leads to a paradoxical situation, in which young people, who consume information predominantly online, naturally prefer free sources, sometimes of questionable quality, rather than the paid content of traditional media.[41] According to the Global Trends study by GLOBSEC Policy Institute, 12 % of respondents consider online disinformation sites as a legitimate source of information, while 40 % of respondents do not trust mainstream media.[42]

Pro-Kremlin narratives (NATO wants to destroy Russia, Russia is the only protector of conservative values and traditions while the West is decadent, a planned U.S. military base in Slovakia, etc.) are mostly visible on the Internet. In 2015, there were at least 42 web pages of Slovak and Czech (as a result of language similarities, the online space of Slovakia and the Czech Republic is shared to a large extent) origin spreading Russian propaganda.[43] One of the most popular websites spreading pro-Kremlin

[37] Havranovo Talk Show, Hostia: Tibor Eliot Rostas a Juraj Smatana. 2015. Nu Spirit Club. *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ONr6uHAD-hM*.

[38] "Hlavná stránka." 2018. Zem a vek. *http://zemavek.sk/*.

[39] Mediálne.Sk. 2017. "Tla: mesaníky: predajnos" *https://medialne.etrend.sk/mesacniky-grafy-a-tabulky.html*

[40] Andrej Matišák, Pravda. January 26, 2018. In-depth interview.

[41] Jana Poláčiková, College of Economics and Management in Public Administration. January 12, 2018. In-depth interview.

[42] Milo, Daniel, Katarína Klingová, and Dominika Hajdu. 2017. "GLOBSEC Trends 2017: Mixed Messages and Signs of Hope from Central and Eastern Europe." GLOBSEC Policy Institute. *https://www.globsec.org/publications/globsec-trends-2017-mixed-messages-signs-hope-central-eastern-europe-2/*.

[43] Šnídl, Vladimír. 2015. "Proruskú propagandu o zhýralom Západe u nás šíri 42 webov." Denník N. *https://dennikn.sk/57740/prorusku-propagandu-o-zhyralom-zapade-u-nas-siri-42-webov/*.

narratives ('Putin forces out dollar with golden ruble', 'Brits are ready to emigrate to Russia en masse', 'OSCE observers confirmed illegal organ transplant stations in Ukraine')[44] is a news website called Hlavne Spravy. According to the Similarweb, Hlavne Spravy has a country rank of 80 with 4.58 million visits in December 2017.[45] In comparison, the most popular news website Sme.sk had more than 25 million visits in the same month, while the fifth most visited, hnonline.sk, had more than 17 million.

The limited long-term impact of 'alternative media' is also confirmed by Snídl, which stresses their ability to reach a wider audience through specific topics such as migration.[46] According to activist Juraj Smatana, who was first to come up with a list of web pages spreading pro-Kremlin propaganda, it is a decentralised network with three main branches: anonymous websites publishing lies and disinformation, half-anonymous websites without any names, but their owners willing to communicate via email or telephone, and web pages with published real names of the authors. The components of this network are very closely interconnected, with social media being the main tool of connection.[47]

LEGAL REGULATIONS AND INSTITUTIONAL SETUP

The media regulatory framework in Slovakia is based on Article 26 of the Constitution of the Slovak Republic, which guarantees the freedom of expression and the right to information. It also provides everyone with rights to express their opinion and declares that no approval process shall be required for press publishing while '[e]ntrepreneurial activity in the field of radio and television broadcasting may be subject to permission from the state'. The rest of the article prohibits censorship, specifies that 'freedom of expression and the right to seek and disseminate information may be restricted by law only if it is regarding measures necessary in a democratic society to protect the rights and freedoms of others, national security, public order, protection of health, and morals', and declares that 'public authority bodies shall be obliged

[44]   "Hlavnespravy.sk: Postupné primiešavanie jedu." Denník N. 2016. https://dennikn.sk/blog/562295/hlavnespravy-sk-postupne-primiesavanie-jedu/.

[45]   SimilarWeb. 2017. Hlavnespravy.sk. https://www.similarweb.com/website/hlavnespravy.sk

[46]   Vladimír Šnídl, Denník N, January 26, 2018. In-depth interview.

[47]   Majchrák, Jozef, and Eva Čobejová. 2015. "Kto je tu proruský." .týždeň. https://www.tyzden.sk/casopis/17220/kto-je-tu-prorusky/.

to provide information about their activities in an appropriate manner in the official language'.[48]

The most important act for TV and radio providers is the Act on Broadcasting and Re-transmission published in 2015. It regulates 'the status and competence of the Council for Broadcasting and Re-transmission', of which members are nominated by the National Council of the Slovak Republic, and 'the rights and duties of a broadcaster, a re-transmission operator, the provider of an on-demand audio-visual media service and legal entities or natural persons'.[49]

Besides the nationwide active media, which received their licences by the decision of the National Council of the Slovak Republic, all regional TV and radio broadcasters obtain their licences and registration from the Council for Broadcasting and Re-transmission, which also has the right to fine them or revoke their licence or registration for re-transmission if they break the rules of the Act on Broadcasting and Re-transmission. Furthermore, ownership of more than one type of nationwide media is prohibited. In 2017, Tibor E. Rostas, editor-in-chief of Zem a Vek, was charged with the criminal offence of defamation of a nation, race, and belief because of his article about Jews called 'Klin zidov medzi Slovanmi' ('The Legion of Jews among the Slavs').[50]

Unlike TV and radio, the print media environment is not regulated. The only obligation for publishers is to register at the Ministry of Culture and to report all changes. The self-regulation of printed media is based on the Association for the Protection of Journalistic Ethics (AONE) and its executive body the Print-Digital Council of the Slovak Republic (TR SR), which follows the Code of Journalistic Ethics. AONE was founded in 2001 by representatives of the Slovak Syndicate of Journalists and Slovak Press Publishers' Association. Later, it was also joined by the biggest association in the Slovak digital market, IAB Slovakia (the Association of the Internet Media).[51] However, as membership of all these organisations is voluntary, not every journalist or media outlet is a member. Moreover, as Julius Lorincz, a former chairman of the Print-Digital Council of the Slovak Republic stated:

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[48] Constitution of the Slovak Republic. 1992. *https://www.prezident.sk/upload-files/46422.pdf*

[49] Act on Broadcasting and Retransmission. 2000.
http://www.rvr.sk/_cms/data/modules/download/1462523380_act_on_broadcasting_and_retransmission.pdf

[50] Tódová, Monika, and Miro Kern. 2018. "Konšpirátora Rostása obvinili za hanobenie židov, spravili u neho domovú prehliadku."
Denník N. *https://dennikn.sk/1040747/konspiratora-rostasa-obvinili-za-hanobenie-zidov-robia-mu-domovu-prehliadku/.*

[51] The Association for the Protection of Journalistic Ethics. *http://www.aonesr.sk/english/*

'The powers of TR SR are limited in practice with admonition being their only tool of punishment'.

He added:

'Better transparency of the funding and ownership of the media has to be implemented, through an obligatory registration at the relevant state agency'.[52]

With regard to the alternative media scene, it became more organised in 2016 when representatives of Zem a Vek, Slobodny Vysielac, Hlavne Spravy and Medzi a Dav Dva established their own organisation, the Association of the Independent Media (ANM).[53] Besides media regulation, Slovakia does not yet have a specific legal framework focused on information security.

Information about strategic propaganda practices and the threat of disinformation campaigns can be found in a 2016 white paper about defence regarding the Slovak Republic. The document evaluated previous activities of The Ministry of Defence in strategic communication:

'Communication concerning national defence lacked strategy, making it underdeveloped, ineffectual and largely reactive. All this in an era when the information channels in the Slovak Republic are being filled by domestic extremist groups and foreign players spreading their message and propaganda aimed against the security interests of the Slovak Republic'.[54]

The updated official documents, Security Strategy of the Slovak Republic (2017) and the Defence Strategy of the Slovak Republic (2017) consider this area specifically, and suggest broad counter-measures. The Security Strategy describes disinformation campaigns as a subtype of hybrid threats. The document suggests developing special strategies to develop resilience against hybrid threats, and building capacity in strategic communications.[55] The Slovak Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs (MFEA) created the Strategic Communication Unit in July 2017. The head of this unit, Miroslav Wlachovsky, described the current state of institutional preparedness to counter propaganda influence:

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[52] Július Lőrincz, Print-Digital Council of the Slovak Republic, December 20, 2017. In-depth interview.

[53] Asociácia nezávislých médií. https://aneme.sk/

[54] "White Paper on Defence of the Slovak Republic." 2016. Ministry of Defence of the Slovak Republic. http://www.mosr.sk/data/WPDSR2016_LQ.pdf.

[55] Návrh Bezpečnostná Stratégia Slovenskej Republiky. 2017. LP/2017/627. https://www.slov-lex.sk/legislativne-procesy/SK/LP/2017/627

'We are moving forward. We have adopted a Concept of Strategic Communication of MFEA, and cooperate closely with partners in the international arena. Several ministries are developing their own strategic communication activities, but so far we lack broader concept and strategy. Now we need to move forward and synchronise on a governmental level. The only truly effective approach would be a whole government, whole society approach to disinformation and hostile narratives'.[56]

The planned counter-measures include strengthening the confidence of the population through strategic communication, active dialogue, support of the development of civil society, focus on the younger generation, etc.

'Positive and assertive narratives communicated from the top down through the political elite should be at the very heart of our communication. Messages and statements coming from the Office of the President of the Slovak Republic are a good example how to do that'.

Wlachovsky concludes:[57]

'Positive and assertive narratives communicated from the top -down through the political elite should be at the very heart of our communication. Messages and statements coming from the Office of the President of the Slovak Republic are a good example how to do that'.

However, as Martin Sklenar added:

'International cooperation on a European level is the only meaningful way for Slovakia to put pressure on huge online platforms such as Facebook and Google to implement additional restrictions and regulations if needed'.[58]

IN FOCUS

Cooperation between Sputnik and The News Agency of the Slovak Republic

The Sputnik news agency announced the signing of a cooperation agreement with TASR, which is the official public news agency of Slovakia, on April 29, 2017. TASR confirmed the cooperation agreement, which resulted in a strong

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[56]   Miroslav Wlachovský, Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, January 29, 2018. In-depth interview

[57]   Ibid.

[58]   Martin Sklenár, Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, January 30, 2018. In-depth Interview.

negative reaction from journalists, civil society, and politicians. The minister of culture officially requested an explanation from the director of TASR, and publically criticised the agreement. Shortly after the incident, TASR announced the cancellation of the agreement. While the whole incident ended with public outrage and suspension of the agreement, it is quite disturbing that the Slovak public found out about agreement one month after its approval, and from Sputnik rather than from TASR, established and is funded by the state.

DIGITAL DEBUNKING TEAMS

Fact-checking and debunking initiatives are deeply rooted within Slovak civil society. Some projects were initiated by individual activists, while others were created under research think tanks or NGOs. The first Slovak fact-checking project, *Demagog.sk*, was founded in March 2010, inspired by PolitiFact.com and FactCheck.org, political fact-checking projects monitoring public speeches and political campaigns in the U.S. environment. Since its foundation, the Demagog.sk team has analysed about 700 political debates and more than 13 000 statements.

Project director Lenka Galetova says:[59]

'Currently, a team of five members of senior staff and ten interns, mostly university students, are involved in the project'.

The project was initially strictly focused on fact-checking of political debates on TV. Later, Demagog.sk expanded its activities to educational lectures for secondary school students, fact-checking of electoral campaigns together with one of the biggest Slovak daily news outlets SME, and established a special section focused on the European Union and Visegrad policies. There are no other fact-checking projects or initiatives, and no media networks have developed their own capacities for traditional fact-checking. Demagog.sk was able to fill a gap successfully, and has become a synonym for fact-checking in Slovakia.

With regard to fact-checking or debunking propaganda stories, hoaxes, and fake news coming from various sources, the first reaction in Slovakia

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[59]   Lenka Galetová, Demagog.sk, December 10, 2017. In-depth interview.

came on an individual level, from anti-corruption and civil society activists. Secondary school teacher Juraj Smatana published the first version of his list of websites spreading disinformation in 2015, and he also created a popular Facebook page focused on debunking hoaxes and fake news (Dezinformacie Hoaxy Propaganda).[60] Activist Jan Bencik systematically reveals and publishes stories on his blog about Slovak far-right extremists and their ties to separatists fighting in Donbas.[61] As Tomas Cizik, director of the Centre for European and North Atlantic Affairs, commented:

'Civil society and NGOs are most active in countering disinformation campaigns in Slovakia. They are organising public debates, seminars for students and teachers, and leading debunking sites, etc'.[62]

IN FOCUS

YouTubers against Hoaxes and Hate Speech

Two popular Slovak YouTubers Selassie and Exploited attacked each other in a series of videos with fabricated claims and fake news on Instagram and YouTube. Their fan-base immediately polarised into two camps exchanging thousands of negative comments, dislikes and messages in a small virtual war. The last video made together by both YouTubers revealed it was all part of a campaign by PR agency Seesame and the GLOBSEC Policy Institute to raise awareness of false information, emotionally driven hate speech, and hoaxes online. The campaign has produced a significant reaction among young people and media.

The website *Antipropaganda.sk* was created in 2015 by a group of individuals from security and foreign policy think tanks, as a part of a broader programme by the Slovak Security Policy Institute. The page publishes regular analysis reacting to hoaxes, stereotypical stories about the European Union, NATO and other topics promoted by Kremlin-inspired disinformation campaigns. There are several other notable projects countering disinformation. The the GLOBSEC Institute website *Counterdisinfo.org* is a virtual one-stop shop, a toolkit for civil society

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[60]   "Dezinformácie Hoaxy Propaganda. Facebook Group." 2018.
       https://www.facebook.com/Dezinform%C3%A1cie-Hoaxy-Propaganda-1144754945569773/.

[61]   Ján Benčík: Blog N. 2018. https://dennikn.sk/autor/jan-bencik/

[62]   Tomáš Čížik, Centre for European and North Atlantic Affairs, January 28, 2018. In-depth interview.

organisations and active citizens concerned about their information environment.[63] The GLOBSEC Institute also developed an online course called Media and Disinformation.[64] Blbec.online, a website developed by unknown vigilantes, aggregates and processes open sources of online data from Facebook groups, showing most viral fake news and their sources from the Czech and Slovak online space.[65] Project *Konspiratori.sk* is creating a database for individuals and companies who are trying to avoid having their paid online advertisements on websites spreading hoaxes and fake news.[66]

IN FOCUS

Konspiratori.sk

NetSuccess, an online marketing agency, is behind the project Konspiratori. sk. The company was looking for a solution for its customers, who didn't want to have their brands and products associated with controversial, misleading hoaxes and websites spreading disinformation by supporting them financially through paid adverts. Therefore, NetSucces established a database of websites with controversial content. This database was created and is regularly updated by an expert commission consisting of various professionals from academia, media, the business world and other areas. The commission uses clear and simple criteria for its evaluation. The database, commission and criteria are public and can be found at the website Konspiratori.sk.

MEDIA LITERACY PROJECTS

Media literacy and critical thinking are not new topics in Slovakia's public debates or public policies. In the area of formal education, the first experimental programmes can be traced back to the years 2005 to 2007, when the State Pedagogical Institute prepared educational texts, methodological guidelines and workshops for teachers with the

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[63]   GLOBSEC Policy Institute. 2018. Countering Disinformation Online Toolkit. *https://counterdisinfo.org/*

[64]   GLOBSEC. (2018) Media and Disinformation. Retrieved from *https://globsec.learnworlds.com/course?courseid=cto*

[65]   Blbec.Online. blbec.online

[66]   Konspiratori. *https://www.konspiratori.sk/*

engagement of journalists, mass media theorists, and other experts.[67] It was the first programme of its kind to be implemented in Slovakia. In 2011, the concept of media literacy in the Slovak Republic within the context of lifelong education was adopted by the Slovak government as a key document defining goals, strategy, and assumptions in creating an effective media education system.[68]

Media literacy and critical thinking are most often in the curriculum or broader agenda of organisations dedicated to furthering teacher training, reforming Slovakia's educational system and empowering civil society. One example is the *Comenius Institute*, with its workshops on critical thinking and argumentation of what a teacher should know about disinformation. Another is the *Institute for Active Citizenship*, which runs a broad programme of civic education. Another noteworthy initiative is the *InfoKompas* project, created by the Strategic Policy Institute and Demagog.sk.[69] The aim of their activities is to provide mentoring for teachers to improve their thinking and media literacy, seminars for students, and an evaluation of the current state of education in media literacy of pedagogics students and secondary school teachers. The *Slovak Debate Association* is creating projects from elementary school to university level, including a special programme for teachers.

CONCLUSIONS

Two main vulnerable groups within Slovak society can be identified. The first are young people who consume digital information, predominantly from the disinformation-polluted online environment, and who are struggling with challenging economic prospects, and are easily exploited by anti-establishment rhetoric, calling for leaving the EU and NATO. The second group includes people with a strong sense of nostalgia and perceptions that the promises of economic success and standards of living improvements associated with EU membership have not been delivered.

Slovakia's media deal with challenges similar to those faced in other countries around the world. Fragmentation, financial pressures,

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[67]   "Mediálna Výchova – ŠPÚ. Ministerstvo Školstva, Vedy, Výskumu a Športu Slovenskej Republiky." 2005. 2005. *http://www.statpedu.sk/files/articles/dokumenty/statny-vzdelavaci-program/medialna-vychova-isced-3.pdf*.

[68]   "Ministerstvo Kultúry SR – Koncepcia Mediálnej Výchovy v SR." 2012. *http://mksrtest.cmsromboid.sk/posobnost-ministerstva/media-audiovizia-a-autorske-pravo-/media-a-audiovizia/koncepcia-medialnej-vychovy-v-sr-1d3.html*.

[69]   STRATPOL. 2018. InfoKompas: Navigácia bludiskom dezinformácií. h*ttp://infokompas.stratpol.sk/*

and ownership structures are the defining factors of the internal media landscape dynamics. Alternative media spreading Kremlin-inspired viewpoints are not overwhelmingly popular. While traditional media suffer from a lack of trust, online platforms spreading disinformation and hoaxes do not seem to be a straightforward alternative for the general public.

Slovakia's institutional preparedness is in the first stages of development and capacity building. Relevant official documents do reflect the new threats related to this topic, and a basic framework for strategic communication is being developed. With regard to specific legislation, as some of the interviewed experts have suggested, even the existing media regulatory framework is not in need of improvement, mainly because of the risk of violating freedom of speech and other related issues. If a decision to move toward more restricted and regulated online media environment is made, Slovakia should join the ongoing discussions and look for possible solutions on a European Union level.

The civil sector has served Slovakia well as an early warning system, and still creates a huge part of the country's response to propaganda-induced threats. Debunking and fact-checking initiatives are currently getting follow-up activities focused on developing the media literacy and critical thinking skills of the young generation. The spectrum of third-sector activities is rather broad, resulting in the projects being arguably underfunded, and its long-term sustainability is in question.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **To acknowledge publically the presence of pro-Kremlin propaganda and disinformation campaigns in order to be able to adopt effective counter-measures involving all the relevant subjects including state agencies, media, and NGOs.**

   - The state should develop a robust strategic communication strategy and prepare an adequate institutional framework for its realisation. An assertive, self-confident, both internally and externally-oriented positive narrative of the Slovak Republic should lie at the very heart of such strategy.

2. **To increase the openness of the state institutions towards the public with open and clear communication.**

   - It is necessary that all the mentioned subjects express clearly that Slovakia is 'Western', and explain the benefits of membership of the Euro-Atlantic structures that are in the interests of the nation.

   - Moreover, to overcome the growing distrust of the general public towards state representatives and institutions, it is necessary to be able to communicate clearly not only through official channels but also through mainstream media.

   - Departments for strategic communication, such as the one which already exists at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, should be established at other ministries. These can be led and coordinated by a specialised body on a government level, or by the Security Council of the Slovak Republic, with strategic communication recognised as a vital part of its agenda.

3. **To improve grant schemes for civil society support.**

   - Relevant ministries should, within their strategic communication departments, develop synchronised grant schemes for civil society support. Aligned grant schemes would allow the state to plan synergic steps in its strategic communication. At the same time, this would be helpful for NGOs and activists in preparing their activities and projects on a broader scale.

4. **To improve cooperation between the relevant subjects.**

- NGOs and civil society activists should pay more attention to cooperation. Several projects with almost identical goals, methods, and audiences can be identified in many cases. Close coordination between different organisations should begin at the preparation and planning phases and conclude with the projects' realisation. If NGOs work together, networking and cooperation would help to broaden the projects' reach and make them more effective.

- The state should cooperate actively with mainstream media and relevant NGOs in order to create a platform (i.e. regularly organised round tables) to exchange experiences and knowledge, and to provide some guidance to the mentioned subjects.

5. **To raise awareness of disinformation, hoaxes and propaganda campaigns among the general public, and increase the media literacy of the population in general, in particular students at secondary schools and relevant state representatives.**

- To organise workshops and seminars for state representatives and active or retired members of the armed forces, with the involvement of media and NGO experts, in order to increase their media literacy and strengthen their resilience to propaganda or disinformation.

- To improve current media literacy initiatives in the state curriculum, in order to educate not only the students but also their teachers. To do that, the The Ministry of Education, Science, Research, and Sport of the Slovak Republic, as the central body of the state administration, has to cooperate actively with relevant experts from media and NGOs, in order to create an effective and meaningful curriculum for media education as a subject at school level. To create a sustainable model, it is necessary to educate pedagogues in the first place.

- To organise events, workshops, and campaigns for the general public, involving representatives of the media and NGOs.

6. **To improve legislation in regard to the ownership and funding of the media**.

- To cooperate actively on the European level in order to persuade international online platforms to adopt policies against disinformation, hoaxes, and propaganda.

SERGIY
GERASYMCHUK,

HENNADIY
MAKSAK

Foreign Policy Council "Ukrainian Prism"

UKRAINE

A ├─────────────────────● 2.6

B ├───────────────────■ 2.5

C ├──────────────◄ 2.2

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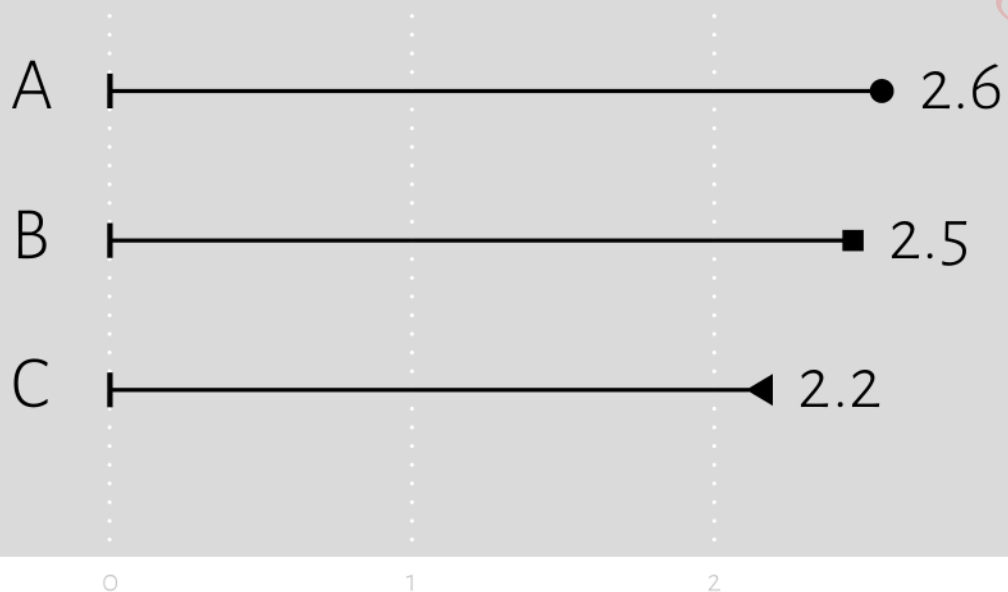
INTRODUCTION

Historically, Ukraine and Russia have been close neighbouring states. Moreover, for the largest part of their histories, Ukraine has been dominated by Russia and its predecessors. Ukrainian attempts to withdraw from the sphere of Russian influence have been rejected by Russia. Furthermore, during the period of its greatest domination, Russia attempted to control Ukraine by exterminating its elites and political opponents. Russia further ensured loyalty through a mixture of intimidation, the Russification of Ukrainian lands, deliberately engineered close economic ties rooted in their Soviet legacy and shared religious values. The Ukrainian Orthodox Church is subordinated to the Moscow patriarchy in order to preserve Russian domination on the Ukrainian terrain.

Starting in 1654, Russian/Muscovite tsars began to extend their control steadily over Ukrainian territory, and from this point on Ukraine faced the challenges of Russification and the attempts of assimilation. Russia was successful in imposing an imperial narrative on Ukraine by using existing instruments of control including linguistic proximity and common religion.

The Russian language was promoted as superior to the Ukrainian language, which was associated with lower social status.[1] Since the two languages are closely related and share many common traits (vocabulary and grammatical structures), mutual comprehensibility is relatively high. Many Ukrainians are native speakers in both Russian and Ukrainian, and have a lot of exposure to both languages, so bilingualism is prevalent in Ukraine.[2]

During the 1920s, many of Ukraine's spiritual leaders, artists and philosophers, who produced some of the nation's greatest works, were either shot or sent to labour camps (gulags) where they would die of hypothermia and/or exhaustion.[3] This loss of the Ukrainian elite was later called the "Shattered Renaissance» (a term proposed

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[1]   Solonenko, Iryna, and Anastasiia Grynko. 2017. "Freedom of Expression in Post-Euromaidan Ukraine. External Aggression, Internal Challenges." PEN-International. *http://pen-international.org/app/uploads/archive/2017/09/PEN-International-Ukraine-Report.pdf*.

[2]   Pereltsvaig, Asya. 2015. "Ukraine's Ethnolinguistic Landscape—and Changing Attitudes towards Russia and the Russian Language." Languages Of The World (blog). April 22, 2015. *http://www.languagesoftheworld.info/russia-ukraine-and-the-caucasus/ukraines-ethnolinguistic-landscape-changing-attitudes-towards-russia-russian-language.html*.

[3]   Komarnyckyj, Stephen. 2016.
       "Ukraine's Executed Renaissance and a Kickstarter for One of Its Modern Successors." Euromaidan Press (blog). March 3, 2016. *http://euromaidanpress.com/2016/03/04/ukraines-executed-renaissance-and-a-kickstarter-for-one-of-its-modern-successors/*.

by the Polish publicist Jerzy Giedroyc).[4] Moreover, the Great Famine of 1933 resulted in a further weakening of the Ukrainian nation and its elites. Loyalty to Russian elites was a matter of survival, and it had an impact on the further development of relations between Ukraine and Russia.

The effects of the termination of elites, the Russification and the construction of loyal attitudes through the use of terror and intimidation has created a strong ideological, economical, and political interdependence. As a result, both Russia and Ukraine share close cultural, ideological, and economic ties.

The established historical ties and loyalty towards Russia are so strong that, even in 1991 when Ukraine gained independence after the collapse of the Soviet Union, not that many things changed. Ukraine was a country intellectually decapitated, for which the effects of Russification and artificially constructed loyalty to Moscow (not to mention close economic ties with Russia) assured dependence. This could be further illustrated by the generally positive attitude of Ukrainians towards Russians. However, this started to deteriorate in 2012, and during the period of 2012 to 2015 the number of those holding very positive or positive opinions about Russians decreased from 80 % to 30 %.[5] By 2017, only 34 % had a positive attitude towards Russians.[6]

The Russian minority population is another instrument of influence which allegedly accompanies the historical dominance of Ukraine. Russians are the second most numerous ethnic group in Ukraine. In 1989, they made up 26.6 % of the population, a figure which had fallen 4.8 percentage points to 17.3 % by 2001.[7] Although 2001 was the last time a population census was conducted, polling data from 2017 show that Russians accounted for only 6.3 % of the Ukrainian population in that year. [8] Thus, the impact of this factor of influence is gradually decreasing.

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[4]   "'Executed Renaissance': Today 70 Years of Beginning of Extermination of Ukrainian Elite." 2018. FrontNews. https://frontnews.eu/news/en/16406.

[5]   Червоненко, Віталій. 2016. "Українці vs росіяни: революція чи еволюція ставлення?" BBC News Україна. https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/politics/2016/01/160115_ukraine_russia_attitude_change_vc.

[6]   "Динаміка позитивного ставлення населення України до Росії і населення Росії до України («Кінець нерозділеного кохання Українців до Росії»)." 2015. Київський міжнародний інститут соціології. http://www.kiis.com.ua/?lang=ukr&cat=reports&id=550&page=1.

[7]   "All-Ukrainian Population Census 2001." 2018. State Statistics Committee of Ukraine. http://2001.ukrcensus.gov.ua/eng/results/general/nationality/.

[8]   "В Україні рекордно скоротилася кількість росіян: опубліковано інфографіку." 2017. Апостроф. https://apostrophe.ua/ua/news/society/2017-06-17/v-ukraine-rekordno-sokratilos-kolichestvo-russkih-opublikovana-infografika/99081.

If we consider religious proximity, the Russian Empire cooperated closely with the Orthodox Church, which was seen as important tool of legitimisation and stability. Today, Russia continues to follow this policy, using the Orthodox Church as an instrument of its politics of hegemony while supporting the institution's aspirations. In Ukraine, this policy is facilitated by the fact that a majority of Ukrainian Orthodox believers declare themselves members of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church headed by the Patriarch of Moscow (there is also a Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Kyiv Patriarchate, which emerged in 1992 but remains unrecognised by canonical Eastern Orthodox).

Despite the victory of Viktor Yushchenko (often perceived as an anti-Russian politician) in the 2004 election, Ukrainian political elites abstained from organising anti-Russian media campaigns. Throughout this period (2004 to 2013), Ukrainians never held negative views of Russians, only turning against the Russian state and its leaders because of Vladimir Putin's aggression.[9]

VULNERABLE GROUPS

Based on the above proximities and consequent vulnerabilities, the Russian Federation is shaping narratives which have an impact on the population of Ukraine.

The Kremlin's disinformation campaign targeting Ukraine uses a wide variety of techniques. It adapts its messages to different audiences, whether in eastern Ukraine or Western Europe. It not only brazenly seeds disinformation, but ensures that its lies are entertaining and emotionally engaging, and fits them into a strategic narrative tailored to match the preconceptions and biases of its audiences. In order to make this content appealing, Russia is prepared to fabricate stories entirely, using photos and video footage to suit Russia's needs. A full range of media, from cinema to news, talk shows, print, and social media are engaged in promoting official Russian narratives.[10]

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[9]   Kuzio, Taras. 2017. "What Do Russians Think of Ukrainians, and Vice Versa?" Atlantic Council.
       http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/what-do-russians-think-of-ukrainians-and-vice-versa.

[10]   Lukas, Edward, and Peter Pomerantsev. 2016. "Winning the Information War. Techniques and Counter-Strategies to Russian
       Propaganda in Central and Eastern Europe." Center for European Policy Analysis.
       https://lif.blob.core.windows.net/lif/docs/default-source/publications/winning-the-information-war-full-report-pdf.pdf?sfvrsn=2.

The Russian language and media are used as one of the channels of influence (in particular, the Russian-speaking population and Russian minorities in Ukraine). Russian media dominate in the eastern part of Ukraine, and are almost the exclusive source of information in the regions of Donetsk and Luhansk, neither of which are controlled by the Ukrainian government. However, according to data obtained by *StopFake*, disinformation is spread throughout Ukraine. A survey conducted by this organisation revealed that the main channels of Russian propaganda are Russian traditional media (identified by 45 % of the respondents) and Russian Internet media (34.5 %).[11]

Allegedly, common religion is also a precondition for channelling propaganda. Conscious of the role played by Pope John Paul II in supporting the Solidarity movement in Poland, thereby contributing to the demise of the Soviet Union, the Russian leadership started using the same techniques to strengthen Russian imperial imperatives through the Russian Orthodox Church, which consists of 12 069 parishes.[12]

A useful tool for defining vulnerable groups in Ukraine is the Index of the Efficiency of Russian Propaganda, released by Kyiv International Institute of Sociology in 2015. According to the results of this research ,[13] people over the age of 70 are slightly more vulnerable to Russian propaganda. People with a higher education are slightly more resilient to Russian propaganda. Education doesn't play a key role due to a lack of media literacy skills and low demand for alternative sources of information (according to the data obtained by StopFake 58.4 % of the respondents do not feel they need additional knowledge or skills to detect propaganda).[14] However, key differences can be identified in geographic terms. The inhabitants of the western and central regions of Ukraine are the least vulnerable to Russian propaganda. The Index of the Efficiency of Russian Propaganda places vulnerability four times higher in southern and eastern Ukraine than in the western part of the country. The authors of the Index suggest that the main counter-propaganda efforts should be applied in the Odessa and Kharkiv regions.

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[11]   "Осведомленность и отношение к дезинформации и пропаганде в СМИ: отчет об исследовании StopFake." 2017. StopFake.org (blog). June 12, 2017.
https://www.stopfake.org/osvedomlennost-i-otnoshenie-k-dezinformatsii-i-propagande-v-smi-otchet-ob-issledovanii-stopfake/.

[12]   Herpen, Marcel H. Van. 2015. Putin's Propaganda Machine: Soft Power and Russian Foreign Policy. Rowman & Littlefield.

[13]   "Індекс Результативності Російської Пропаганди." 2015. Київський міжнародний інститут соціології.
http://www.kiis.com.ua/?lang=ukr&cat=reports&id=510.

[14]   "Осведомленность и отношение к дезинформации и пропаганде в СМИ: отчет об исследовании StopFake." 2017. Ibid.

MEDIA LANDSCAPE

The Ukrainian media landscape has been taking shape since the country gained independence in 1991. In the course of the initial privatisation process in the early 1990s, which was marred by corruption, a few oligarchs accumulated large amounts of capital by gaining control of the key industries of the country. As a result, the mainstream media outlets were obtained by the business elites who had privileged relations with the authorities.[15]

At the same time, efforts to strengthen independent journalism in Ukraine were undertaken. Western donors including the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), National Endowment for Democracy, Internews, and the International Renaissance Foundation (Open Society Network) alongside the governments of the United Kingdom, Germany, Norway, Sweden, and Denmark supported independent media. Funding went to educational programmes for journalists, development of information legislation that meets democratic principles, journalistic projects, and support for investigations.

According to Freedom House, Ukraine was mostly evaluated as partially free in terms of freedom of speech, except for in 2003, 2004 and 2014, when the country was marked as not free.[16] The lack of freedom of speech and the dependence of media on their owners, amongst other things, led to the media being used to foster political interests and agendas, with delays in reforming state-owned media, intimidation and attacks on journalists and impunity for the perpetrators.[17] However, at the same time a new generation of journalists was gradually emerging.

In 2000, independent journalism in Ukraine experienced a major setback when Georgiy Gongadze, the founder of the opposition website Ukrayinska Pravda, was murdered. It was one of the most high-profile criminal cases and attacks on independent journalism in Ukraine. Gongadze criticised the authorities, investigated President Leonid Kuchma and the activities of his entourage. For these actions, journalist received phone threats. On September 16, 2000, he disappeared, and six months later his headless

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[15]   Solonenko, Iryna, and Anastasiia Grynko. 2017. Ibid.

[16]   "Ukraine. Freedom House." 2018. Freedom House. https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2017/ukraine.

[17]   Ibid.

body was found in the forest near Kyiv. Indirectly, the tragedy led to the Orange Revolution of 2004. Only in 2013 was former senior police officer Oleksiy Pukach, the hired assassin who had killed the reporter, tried, convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment. Pukach's paymasters still haven't been found.

The vulnerability of the information space in Ukraine was very high at the beginning of 2014 due to some inherited preconditions. First was the formidable dependence on foreign states and media corporations, the vast majority of which were of Russian origin. This primarily manifested in the appointment of Russians as top managers at Ukrainian channels. Also there was a dominance of Russian channels and media products on Ukrainian cable networks. Second, faced with only modest support for the domestic film industry, all national and regional TV channels were filled with Russian TV serials and films transmitting pro-Russian narratives. Third, the Ukrainian media market was characterised by excessive political pressure and a concentration of mainstream and regional media in the hands of oligarchs and businessmen close to Yanukovych. Public media was openly censored by the central and local authorities. In this environment, it is no wonder that Ukraine was forced to start building an information security system from scratch in the media space.

The start of Revolution of Dignity of 2013 to 2014 gave birth to conflict journalism in Ukraine. The journalists required new skills, such as fact-checking in extreme conditions, mastering the basics of safety and so on. By 2014, it was clear that Russia was waging a disinformation war against Ukraine, which included the Russian media's one-sided coverage of events, distortion of facts, outright lies, etc. The realisation of these facts has impacted the development of Ukrainian journalism, for example through the launch of public broadcasting.

A recent poll from Internews Ukraine revealed a steady decline in the number of Ukrainians consuming Russian media (across all outlets) in Ukraine, a trend which has been continuing over the past three years. The levels of trust in Russian television in Ukraine fell from 20 % in 2014 to just 4 % in 2015. For online Russian media, it dropped from 16 % in 2014 to 8 % in 2016, and for print it fell from 8 % to 2 %. Trust in Russian radio also fell, from 8 % to 3 % within the same period.[18] In 2017, only

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[18]   Bruce, Daniel. 2016. "How 'Generation Z' Is Shaping Ukraine's Media Landscape." Internews. https://www.internews.org/story/how-generation-z-shaping-ukraines-media-landscape.

1 % of respondents said they consumed Russian media, compared to 4 % the year before.[19] One of the experts interviewed admitted:

'The restriction of the Russian Federation's influence on the information space of Ukraine had a positive effect. At least, it narrows the window of possibilities for Kremlin manipulators. Therefore, I personally and my organisation support the prohibition of Russian film products and the prohibition of Russian TV channels, as well as language quotas on radio and television'.[20]

TV channel   *% of surveyed*

Ukrainian

1+1	43.1
Inter	34
Ukraina	20.1
STB	15.7
ICTV	15.3

Russian

Rossiya	1.7
Channel One	1.1
NTV	0.9
Dozhd	0.2
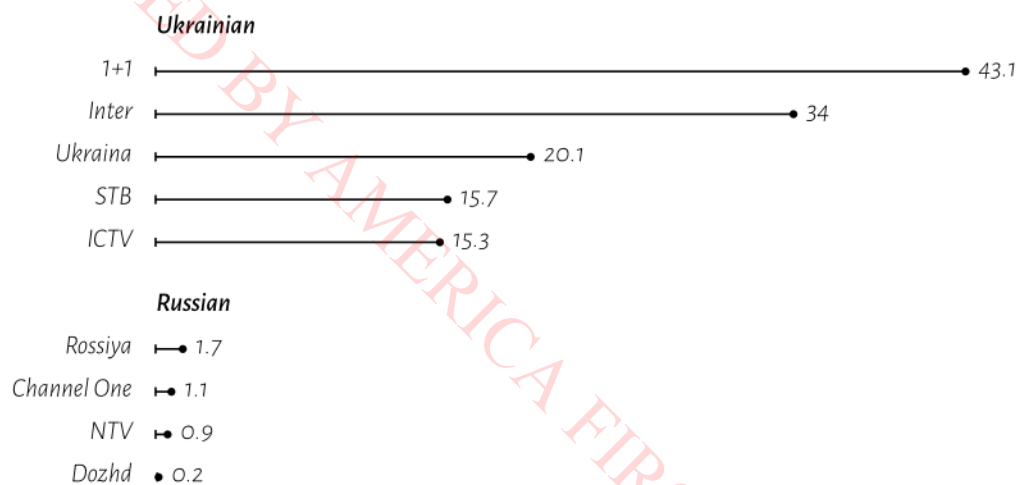
TV channels providing information about the military conflict in Donbas or about the Crimea
Source: Detector Media[21]

The Law on the System of Foreign Broadcasting of Ukraine kickstarted the creation of Ukrainian information content for foreign consumers. In October 2015, the Multimedia Broadcasting Platform of Ukraine was launched, incorporating the resources of the TV channel UA|TV and the National News Agency Ukrinform.

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[19] "Media Consumption in Ukraine 2017." 2017. Internews. https://internews.in.ua/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/USAID_UMedia_AnnualMediaConsumptionSurvey_2017_FULL_eng.pdf.

[20] Roman Kabachiy, Institute of Mass Information, August, 16, 2017. In-depth interview.

[21] "Survey of Russian Propaganda Influence on Public Opinion in Ukraine Findings." 2017. http://osvita.mediasapiens.ua/detector_media_en/reports_eng/survey_of_russian_propaganda_influence_on_public_opinion_in_ukraine_findings/.

In 2017, Ukraine was ranked 102nd in the World Press Freedom Index. The situation had slightly improved compared to 2016, when Ukraine was ranked 107th.[22]

According to an assessment by Freedom House, Ukraine in 2017 was defined as partly free.[23] In this regard, Ukraine has made significant progress in comparison to 2013, when it was marked as not free. However, in recent years there has been some slow-down in the progress of reforms related to media freedom (but at the same time more attention is being paid to measures counteracting Russian propaganda and legislation, strategies and doctrines, alongside a special budget aimed at financing the respective measures).

Despite the mentioned positive developments there are still grounds for concern. In particular, with the start of the war in Donbas, Russian project leaders had to rethink their policies and began faking objective journalism, instead of pushing straightforward and crude propaganda. Projects do use the services of some genuinely pro-Ukrainian journalists, who do their work to high professional standards, but in general they on the 80/20 Pareto principle, providing 80 % of neutral information and 20 % of Russian propaganda. Among websites transmitting Russian narratives, InfromNapalm names *Vesti*, *UBR*, and *Strana.UA*.[24] According to Ukrainian Internet Association data, in December of 2017 these resources had the following Internet audience: Strana .UA—12 % (ranking ninth in the top 100 Ukrainian news websites), Vesti—8 %, UBR—4 %.[25] Research on propaganda in the Eastern Partnership countries adds the TV channel *Inter*, one of the most popular in the country, to this list.[26] The National Council of Television and Radio Broadcasting of Ukraine ranks Inter sixth among the most viewed TV stations.[27]

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[22]   "Ukraine : At the Crossroads." 2017. Reporters without Borders. RSF. *https://rsf.org/en/ukraine*.

[23]   Ibid.

[24]   "Russian Media Lobby in Ukraine: Vesti, UBR, Strana.UA and Ukraina.RU—InformNapalm.Org (English)." InformNapalm.org (English), February 20, 2017. *https://informnapalm.org/en/russian-media-lobby-ukraine-vesti-ubr-strana-ua-ukraina-ru/*.

[25]   "Рейтинг ТОП-100 новинних сайтів суспільно-політичної тематики за грудень 2017р." January 16, 2018. *http://inau.ua/news/reytyng-top-100-novynnyh-saytiv-suspilno-politychnoyi-tematyky-za-gruden-2017r*.

[26]   "Мониторинг СМИ стран Восточного партнерства и России." 2016. *http://ypc.am/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/2016_Monitoring_Propaganda_Report_RUS.pdf*

[27]   "Рейтинг Телеканалів Загального Перегляду Серед Користувачів IPTV Та ОТТ (Вересень 2017 р.)." Національна рада України з питань телебачення і радіомовлення, October 25, 2017. *https://www.nrada.gov.ua/rejtyng-telekanaliv-zagalnogo-pereglyadu-sered-korystuvachiv-iptv-ta-ott/*.

LEGAL REGULATIONS

Following the annexation of Crimea in 2014, work aimed at creating specific information security documents was launched. In April 2014, the National Security and Defence Council (NSDCU) adopted measures to improve the development of state policy for the information security of Ukraine. It tasked Ukrainian government and state institutions with drafting some legal and conceptual documents: the Strategy for The Development of the Information Space in Ukraine, the Informational Security Doctrine, the Strategy for Cybersecurity in Ukraine, and to draft laws on Cybersecurity in Ukraine. The decision also sought to find legal solutions to counter information aggression by foreign states, by virtue of banning selected foreign television channels from broadcasting in Ukraine or creating special accreditation and protection regimes for journalists.

Since 2014, the Ukrainian authorities have adopted a number of reforms, including media ownership transparency and access to state-held information. The Law on Transparency of Media Ownership was adopted on September 3, 2015, establishing one of the best legal frameworks in Europe.[28] Although the legislation is in place, it is often implemented poorly. Transparency in the media sector should be improved. One expert interviewed for this study said:

'The main threat in information security area is an oligarch controlled media market. In Ukrainian realities, this often turns into censorship by the owners'.[29]

The State Committee for Television and Radio Broadcasting of Ukraine has been assigned to lead work on developing the Strategy for the Development of the Information Space and the Information Security Doctrine. In September 2014, the State Committee presented the draft Strategy for public discussion. Although the document was prepared following the decision of the National Security and Defence Council of Ukraine to react to Russian information aggression, the Strategy was met with numerous concerns from civil society and independent

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[28]   "Freedom of Media in Ukraine." Council of Europe Office in Ukraine. 2018. https://www.coe.int/en/web/kyiv/freedom-of-media-in-ukraine.

[29]   Roman Shutov, Program director, Detector Media, August, 16, 2017. In-depth interview.

media experts. The core concern was that the draft Strategy greatly echoed the Strategy for Information Society development adopted in 2013.

In 2015, with the establishment of the Ministry of Information Policy, the coordination centre has shifted towards this new institution. A special expert council has been established under the ministry, tasked with the creation of a new draft of the Information Security Concept. Despite international support and the inclusive and transparent process of drafting, the Concept did not become law. But, at the same time, the ministry took up the baton of development of the Information Security Doctrine.

The first stage in securing Ukraine's media space was of a restrictive nature. Since 2017, the National Council of Television and Radio Broadcasting of Ukraine has restricted the broadcast of 77 Russian TV Channels on cable networks in Ukraine.[30] It is important to bear in mind that, as of 2014, there were 82 Russian cable TV channels in Ukraine. The Ukrainian State Film Agency, in accordance with the norms of the Law of Ukraine on Cinematography, cancelled the state registration of films produced in Russia and released after January 1, 2014.

In November 2016, the Law on Amendments to the Law of Ukraine on Television and Radio Broadcasting initiated a gradual introduction of quotas for songs and programmes in the Ukrainian language in radio broadcasts. In October 2017, the Law of Ukraine on Amendments to some Laws of Ukraine Regarding the Language of Audiovisual (Electronic) Mass Media established that transmissions, films and news in Ukrainian must account at least for 75 % of the total length of the programmes and films.[31] According to the law, local broadcasters must have at least 50 % of programming in Ukrainian.

In April 2017, the National Security and Defence Council of Ukraine (NSDCU) added Russian legal entities Yandex, Mail.RU Ukraine, VKontakte, Odnoklassniki, and others to the sanctions list. The decision of the NSDCU was enacted by Presidential Decree in May 2017.[32] According to the Ministry of Information Policy of Ukraine, this led to a drop in the number

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[30]   "Нацрада заборонила 'Дождь' в Україні." 2017.
https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-society/2155072-nacrada-zaboronila-dozd-v-ukraini.html.

[31]   "Про внесення змін до деяких законів України щодо мови аудіовізуальних (Електронних) Засобів Масової Інформації" 2017. Голос України. http://www.golos.com.ua/article/290061.

[32]   "Указ Президента України №133/2017." Офіційне інтернет-представництво Президента України. http://www.president.gov.ua/documents/1332017-21850.

of VKontakte users, from nine million to 300 000, which proves that Ukrainians support the decision.

In 2017, the president of Ukraine signed legislation on the Cybersecurity Strategy of Ukraine, after a number of severe cyberattacks on the telecommunication systems of state institutions and entities of critical infrastructure. In this domain, legal efforts were advanced with the adoption of the Law of Ukraine on Cybersecurity in Ukraine in September 2017.

In February 2017, the new Information Security Doctrine of Ukraine was adopted. It defines the national interests of Ukraine in the information sphere, the threats to their implementation, and the directions and priorities of the state policy in the information sphere. However, despite its progressiveness and relevance, this document has not yet formed the basis for the development of an integral normative system of building information security. Many respondents from Ukrainian state institutions confirmed that they did not take this document into account while planning their activity in information security area.

In June 2017, the government approved the first Action Plan on the implementation of the Concept of the Popularisation of Ukraine in the world and of promoting the interests of Ukraine in the global information space. The document was prepared by the Ministry of Information Policy and envisages very deep inter-agency cooperation.

In this vein, one should also mention the Public Diplomacy Strategy, which the MFA is still in the process of creating.

In 2017, the Strategies of Information Reintegration of Donbas and Crimea were prepared, and the implementation process started. The documents are aimed at the creation of preconditions for the reintegration of Crimea and inclusion of the temporarily occupied territories of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts into the Ukrainian informational space and the promotion of pro-Ukrainian narratives, and envisages institutional and organisational steps.

INSTITUTIONAL SETUP

The Information Security Doctrine (ISD), adopted in February 2017, proposes an enhanced institutional mechanism:

- The National Security and Defence Council of Ukraine

- The Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine

- The Ministry of Information Policy

- The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine

- The Ministry of Defence of Ukraine

- The Ministry of Culture of Ukraine

- The Ukrainian State Film Agency

- The National Council of Television and Radio Broadcasting of Ukraine

- The State Committee for Television and Radio Broadcasting of Ukraine

- The Security Service of Ukraine

- Intelligence Services of Ukraine

- The National Institute for Strategic Studies

- The State Service of Special Communications and Information Protection of Ukraine

The document also acknowledges that the implementation of the Doctrine is possible only with the proper coordination of efforts by all state institutions.

Key measures and activities in accordance with the provisions of the Doctrine will be determined by the National Security and Defence Council of Ukraine. In April 2017, the *Service for Information Security* was established within the new structure of the Staff of the NSDCU.

It would be appropriate to mention here *the Committee on the Freedom of Speech and Information Policy of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine* as a part of the institutional framework in the information security domain. This parliamentary body is in charge of preparing and overseeing all draft laws in the information policy and security domain.

On an executive level, one has to include the *press services of ministries and regional state administrations* in the framework. Although absent in the ISD, they are mentioned, along with the parliamentary committee, in the system of public institutions in field of the information policy indicated in the MIP reports and action plans.[33]

A significant part of information security coordination and implementation was taken over by the Ministry of Information Policy, established in January 2015. The ministry, for the moment, is the main body in the system of the central institutions of executive power, which forms and implements public policy in the areas of media development and information security. As of 2016, the ministry had formed four strategic directions for the development of information policy:

1. Development of the information space of Ukraine;

2. Public StratCom system development;

3. Information reintegration: annexed Crimea, temporarily uncontrolled territories of the Luhansk and Donetsk regions, internally displaced persons;

4. Popularisation of Ukraine and its values in the world.[34]

As many experts confirmed, the existence of the ISD and clear indication of the institutional framework has not contributed drastically to the effectiveness of the implementation of information security policy. As one expert put it during an interview:

'There are some significant steps towards improvement. This is primarily the Information Security Doctrine, which covers information interests. This is very important because it is the basis, but now we have to look at the division of powers in public authorities. This mechanism, which is prescribed in the Information Security Doctrine, and, in fact, is well-written, should be implemented. However, there are problems with implementation because, if we look at the list of powers, we come to chaos. And I think this chaos in the division of powers in the area of information security is the main regulatory barrier'.[35]

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[33]   "Міністерство інформаційної політики України: план на 2016 рік." *http://mip.gov.ua/files/Presentation/MIP_activity_2016.pdf*

[34]   "Питання діяльності Міністерства інформаційної політики України."
Постанова Кабінету Міністрів України від 14 січня 2015 р. № 2. *http://zakon2.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/en/2-2015-%D0%BF*.

[35]   Roman Shutov, Detector Media, August, 16, 2017. In-depth interview.

The first and most serious problem is that no functions audit was conducted prior to the elaboration and adoption of the ISD in the realm of information security. Functions sometimes overlap, and there are sometimes gaps in information security performance. As one of those interviewed described it:

'The doctrine is an important thing for those who made it and for the main executor. It seems to me that this doctrine lacks the involvement of other authorities. Even for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, this is not what we use every day. It is not a reference point. I consider this to be the main problem of this document'.[36]

There exists a traditional level of interaction between the state ministries and agencies, as well as with some NGOs, on information security and media issues, but this interaction does not extend to the utilisation and building of an all-encompassing and comprehensive system of monitoring and reaction to information security challenges.

However, some positive developments took place in 2017 after the adoption of the ISD, and these might be considered as progress in implementation in terms of strategic vision and coordination of efforts.

In July 2017, a project team was formed within the framework of the creation of the system of state strategic communications, which included representatives of the MIP, the NSDCU, the National Institute for Strategic Studies and NGO StratCom Ukraine. During meetings in July and August 2017, the overall design of the project was determined and a detailed project plan was developed.

In 2017, the Ministry of Information Policy also created an inter-agency commission for popularising Ukraine in the world, including representatives from ministries, businesses, NGOs and PR specialists. From the outset, the Commission has been tasked with creating the official brand of Ukraine and taking stock of all the initiatives of this kind done by government bodies and business.

In terms of cooperation with NGOs and civic initiatives, one of the experts said:[37]

'Such cooperation exists, but it lacks cohesion and communication channels between civil society and state authorities. On the other hand, one should

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[36]   Oleksii Makeiev, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, August, 16, 2017. In-depth interview.

[37]   Eugen Magda, Institute of World Policy, August, 21 2017. In-depth interview.

realise that the state authorities may not always allow themselves to stick to all the proposals offered by of the public. Let us not forget that democracy does not mean unanimity, but democracy is a precondition for national interests and ways of implementing them. They may be different, but they must at least be somehow agreed'.

Many experts from NGOs mention a good level of cooperation, although this is highly dependent on their specific project activity.

A. Kulakov, a project director for Internews Ukraine, said:[38]

'Systemic cooperation starts with projects. For instance, there was a project on freedom on the Internet. A task force was established. We cooperated with the Security Service of Ukraine, Ministry of Defence, Ministry of Information Policy and the Internet Association. In other words, it is systemic cooperation. However, when a project finishes contacts are there but cooperation becomes sporadic, which is often the case for the third sector'.

Civic activists also mention the cooperation platforms created by the MIP and MFA (Expert Council and Public Council under the MIP and Public Council under the MFA).

IN FOCUS

Russian singer Samoilova banned from attending the 2017 Eurovision Song Contest in Ukraine

This is a positive example of the coordination of efforts between different Ukrainian public authorities to protect the information space. In March 2017, on the eve of the Eurovision Song Contest in Kyiv, the Security Service of Ukraine issued a travel ban on Yulia Samoilova, a Russian singer with disabilities, who was supposed to take part in the contest. The argument was clear and legitimate from the Ukrainian side. Samoilova had previously taken part in a concert in Crimea after its annexation, crossing the Ukrainian state border outside Ukrainian checkpoints, which is prohibited by Ukrainian legislation. The Kremlin's aim was to discredit Ukraine by portraying it as immoral and ineffective. The Samoilova case was one in a series that the Kremlin applied in this disinformation campaign. But, due to the well-thought approach to the communication side of the decision, Ukraine succeeded in creating the truthful image.

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[38]   Andriy Kulakov, Internews Ukraine, August, 30, 2017. In-depth interview.

DIGITAL DEBUNKING TEAMS

Debunking teams have been serving a crucial role in fighting Kremlin-led propaganda since the start of aggression against Ukraine. Many of these groups appeared spontaneously as a reaction the Kremlin-backed disinformation campaign surrounding the annexation of Crimea in February and March 2014. Due to the unpreparedness of the Ukrainian state authorities, volunteer and civil society groups performed a lot of activity in this realm. Even now, the ISD acknowledges the importance of civil society involvement in countering Russian disinformation.

There are different types of the initiatives on the ground taking into account the diversity of tools applied by Russia in its disinformation war. They comprise fact-checking teams, open source intelligence communities, investigative journalism groups, media hubs, and expert networking agencies, social media initiatives, cyberactivists, and IT companies with specialised software.

The first initiative to mention is the project *StopFake*, established by Kyiv Mohyla Academy lecturers and researchers in March 2014. The website of the project initially focused on debunking Russian propaganda about events in Ukraine. As time passed, it evolved into an information hub where the team studied all aspects of Kremlin propaganda. StopFake's information products are translated into 10 foreign languages to increase outreach. The initiative states its independent status and non-affiliation with any Ukrainian institution.[39]

Information Resistance started as a non-government project in March 2014. It aims to counteract external threats to the informational space of Ukraine in the main areas of the military, economic, and energy sectors, and in the sphere of information security. Information Resistance functions as an initiative of the NGO Centre for Military and Political Studies.[40] It is operated by Ukrainian reserve officers and is widely known for thorough fact-checking of the news and some inside military information delivered from the occupied territories of Ukraine.

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[39]   StopFake. *https://www.stopfake.org/en/about-us/*.

[40]   Information Resistance. *http://sprotyv.info/en/about-us*.

InformNapalm is a volunteer community that was also launched in March 2014. Its main task is debunking disinformation provided by Russia. The international team is made up of more than 30 people from 10-plus countries. It focuses on fact-checking and investigative journalism connected to aggression and its impact on Ukrainians. Due to close work with other institutions from the information security realm, InformNapalm provides debunking with in-depth analysis and detailed reliable information in more than 20 languages.[41] It has also issued a handbook of Russian aggression in Ukraine, called 'Donbas in Flames. Guide to the Conflict Zone'.

Almost at the same time, in March 2014, the *Ukraine Crisis Media Centre (UCMC)* was founded by a group of media experts and civic activists to enhance Ukraine's potential for resistance in the information space. UCMC is widely known for its press centre, which allows Ukrainian and foreign experts, politicians, and representatives of the civic sector to use this platform to inform domestic and external audiences about events in Ukraine. This often helped the Ministry of Defence and General Staff press services to deliver regular briefings and updates about the situation in the Anti-Terrorist Operation (ATO) zone.[42]

Dating from 2014, *Euromaidan Press* (EP) is an online English-language independent media platform that focuses on events in and around Ukraine and provides translations of Ukrainian news, expert analysis and independent research. Its main tasks are to extend Ukrainian outreach abroad, and to promote non-partisan, non-biased information in the fight against the Kremlin-led disinformation campaign. Many of its news stories are devoted to the Ukrainian military fighting against Russia and its proxies in Donbas.[43]

UkraineWorld is an overarching initiative proposed by *Internews Ukraine* in 2014 to bring together key Ukrainian and international experts and journalists interested in Ukraine, and to counteract Russian propaganda and disinformation. It functions as a communication network, mainly through the exchange of information. The website accumulates texts and analysis produced as a result of group discussions and debates.[44]

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[41]   Informnapalm. *http://informnapalm.rocks/*.

[42]   Ukraine Crisis Media Centre. *http://ucmc.org.ua/about/*.

[43]   Euromaidan Press. *http://euromaidanpress.com/about/*.

[44]   UkraineWorld. *http://ukraineworld.org/about/*.

Project *Verify* was launched by Internews Ukraine with the support of the Latvian Journalists Association in 2016.[45] It is a verification assistant based on open data and online tools. It helps media users to draw their own conclusions about content needing to be verified.

The educational project *ЛІКБЕЗ. Historical Front* unites professional historians. The project community runs awareness-raising campaigns and debunking projects connected to historical narratives used by Russia. More than 50 Ukrainian historians have taken part in the project.[46]

Some volunteer initiatives existed only for a short time in 2014, and aimed specifically to counter Russian propaganda. From March until May 2014, there was a special initiative launched by Ukrainian experts. A project called *Ukrainian Information Front* was devoted to establishing contacts with foreign media, mainly in the post-Soviet space, and delivering analysis and comments about the situation in Crimea and domestic politics in Ukraine. Although active for only a short period of time, the project united about 20 well-known Ukrainian experts from a wide array of policy areas.[47] Contacts made by these experts with foreign media have been often used for delivering comments since then.

Since 2017, *Western Information Front* has been engaged in countering Russian information aggression and protecting good relations between Ukraine and its neighbours (Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, and Romania) from Russian provocations and disinformation .[48]

Additionally, we have to mention some social media communities which are very visible in fact-checking and debunking activities. A group of volunteers named *Group #IPSO #Trollbusters* started its activity on Facebook by revealing the botnets used by the Kremlin, and the tactics and methods of their activity in social networks, at the end of 2014. In their posts, they also described changes in the narratives Russia used in its disinformation campaigns.[49]

Similar to the previous group's activity the volunteer initiative *TrolleyBust* has been engaged in detecting bots malicious accounts in social networks, and trying to ban them since 2014. In 2015, the initiative launched a special

[45]   Verify. *http://verify.org.ua/en/about/*.

[46]   "ЛІКБЕЗ. Історичний фронт". *http://likbez.org.ua/ua/*.

[47]   Украинский информационный фронт. Дайджест экспертных мнений №2, 16.04.2014.

[48]   Західний інформаційний фронт. *https://zahidfront.com.ua/support_fund.html/*.

[49]   "#Trollbusters #IPSO Охотники за кремлетролями." 2015. Newssky. *http://newssky.com.ua/trollbusters-ipso-ohotniki-za-kremletrolyami/#.VLL66NKsUZ5*.

web service to detect and block Internet trolls and other sources of anti-Ukrainian propaganda. The aim is to give volunteers access to the toolkit and unite their efforts to clear the information space of propaganda oriented against Ukraine and Ukrainians. There are three main areas of focus for the ban: propagandists and pseudo-experts, bots and fake accounts, and other users that doubt the territorial integrity of Ukraine.[50]

In 2014, the *Boycott Russia Today* FB community was launched. As well as calling for U.S. citizens to boycott RT, and urging U.S. cable and satellite TV providers to suspend RT from their channel line-ups, they regularly post myth-busting materials.[51]

In 2015, under the umbrella of the Ministry of Information Policy, the *Information Forces of Ukraine* started. The aim of this Internet project was to mobilise users of social networks to counter Russian propaganda and extend the outreach of reliable information. Since August 2017, the project has officially been independent.[52]

The initiative *Ukrainian Cyber Forces is* a network of Ukrainian IT specialists operating in cyberspace to block the bank accounts of terrorists and web pages with Russian propaganda. They are also active in investigating and reporting on the presence of Russian military personnel and equipment on Ukrainian territory. By the end of December 2017, they had blocked more than 200 websites belonging to Russians and separatists, as well as hundreds of web pages and blogs that published the personal data of Ukrainian servicemen.[53]

Yet another very efficient group, *Ukrainian Cyber Alliance (UCA)*, unites cyberactivists from different cities in Ukraine and all over the world. Since 2016, the group has performed a number of successful hacks on separatist web resources, personal emails and profiles. A recent famous flashmob campaign, #FuckResponsibleDisclosure, was launched at the end of 2017. Together with other IT specialists, the UCA has searched for vulnerabilities within government telecommunication systems, public web accounts and sites.[54]

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[50]   TrolleyBust. *https://trolleybust.com/*.

[51]   Boycott Russia Today. *https://www.facebook.com/pg/boycottrussiatoday/about/?ref=page_internal*.

[52]   "МІП: «Інформаційні Війська України» Стають Самостійним Проектом." Міністерство інформаційної політики України. *http://mip.gov.ua/news/1931.html*.

[53]   Personal account in FB of Eugene Dokukin, CEO & Founder "Ukrainian Cyber Forces". *https://www.facebook.com/eugene.dokukin/posts/1985630725036030*

[54]   "Activists Publish Results of #FuckResponsibleDisclosure Campaign." 2017. InformNapalm. *https://informnapalm.org/en/activists-publish-results-fuckresponsibledisclosure-campaign/*.

The Monitoring project OKO has been created by Ukraine's Image Agency and Together for Ukraine, both of which are NGOs. The project consists of monitoring software based on Google and Bing which sorts articles about Ukraine by language, date, and popularity in foreign media and on Facebook. A specific algorithm automatically processes selected articles by content and its emotional coverage, as well as by frequency of mentions.[55]

IN FOCUS

MH17

Most of the interviewed experts emphasised that the Ukrainian response to the MH17 catastrophe was a good example of effective and efficient cooperation between government structures, security bodies, NGOs, think tanks, and journalists, which enabled proper, transparent, and open coverage of the catastrophe circumstances that if not prevented then at least minimised the damage from Russian propaganda and Russian attempts to blame Ukraine for shooting down the Malaysian Airlines Boeing. The patterns of cooperation and interaction applied then should be studied and further applied.

False suggestion of Ukrainian involvement in North Korea's missile program

In August 2017, this article appeared in the New York Times. It showed that North Korea's ICBM success had been made possible by illegal purchases of rocket engines probably from Ukraine. Although the material was based on a study by Michael Elleman, of the International Institute for Strategic Studies, Ukraine had many reasons to suspect Russian involvement in the story. This case is reminiscent of the Koltchuga scandal (the Ukrainian Passive Early Warning Radar allegedly sold to Iraq), which had farreaching image losses for Ukraine.

Regardless the origin of the fake news, Ukraine reacted in a timely manner and with high level of coordination of messages intended for external audiences.

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[55]   Моніторинговий Проект "ОКО". *http://www.ukroko.org/*.

As one of our experts pointed out:[56]

'It is very good that officials dealing with this issue decided to involve Volodymyr Gorbulin to debunk this fake news. He enjoys a high level of trust and he knows perfectly well all the technical details to dispel it',

MEDIA LITERACY PROJECTS

There are different kinds of media literacy programmes on the government (involving universities and schools) and civil society (educating broad population) levels.

In 2014 to 2017, media education and literacy projects gained some prominence and attention in Ukraine. However, from the outset, one should mention here previous media literacy activity provided by the Academy of Ukrainian Press and *Telekritika* (now *Detector Media*). The web portal Media Sapiens was launched by a Telekritika team in 2010, some time before the Revolution of Dignity. The aim was to enhance the media literacy of the audience, form critical thinking towards media and detect manipulative attempts to impact public opinion. Since then it has become a hub of information about media development, information security, media education, and literacy.[57]

The primary goal of the *Academy of Ukrainian Press* (AUP) primary goal is the implementation of media education through the creation and encouragement of a leading media teachers' network, applying international experience to help implement media education in Ukraine. The AUP focuses on the preparation of handbooks for teachers and the design of academic courses. Since 2013, it has been running the project 'Media education and media literacy', within the framework of which an online platform was launched in 2013. The platform was designed to facilitate the exchange of opinions between media teachers who promote transparency and publicity in the media educational environment.[58] In 2016, the Road Map for Media Education and Media

[56]   Eugene Magda. In-depth interview.

[57]   MediaSapiens. *http://osvita.mediasapiens.ua/about/editorial/*.

[58]   Медіаосвіта і медіаграмотність. *http://www.medialiteracy.org.ua/index.php*.

Literacy was introduced by the expert group of the AUP.[59] This states that, at the moment, media education and media literacy are taught in Ukrainian secondary schools in the form of separate subjects ('Basics of media literacy, 'Stairway to media literacy', 'Media culture', 'Media education', etc.), as well as integrated lessons. Media education and media literacy as a separate subject is taught in about 300 secondary schools.

In 2016, the National Academy of Pedagogical Sciences of Ukraine approved a new version of the Concept for the Implementation of Media Education in Ukraine. The previous version of the Concept dated back to 2010. The main goal of media education is to create the foundation for state information security, develop civil society, counter external information aggression, prepare children and youths for the secure and effective use of modern media, and form media literacy and media culture.[60] In 2017, the Ministry of Education and Science approved a experiment on media education for 2017 to 2022, entitled 'Standardisation of the cross-cutting socio-psychological model of mass media education implementation in Ukrainian pedagogical practice'. The experiment involves the implementation of media education in educational institutions, including nurseries, schools and higher education entities (153 institutions).

The *OSINT Academy*, a joint project of the Institute of Post-information Society and the Ministry of Information Policy was launched in 2015. A special online course is devoted to enhancing skills when working with open sources intelligence and searching for reliable data to fact-check. It also aims to increase public awareness of information manipulation, and to promote media literacy.[61]

In 2016, Detector Media launched a multimedia online textbook for youths, detailing how to use media in day-to-day life and develop critical thinking towards media products.[62] Another project, 'News literacy', is a course of lectures that aims to disseminate media literacy among the population in situations of conflict.[63]

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[59]   "Дорожня Карта з Медіаосвіти і Медіаграмотності." 2016. Академія української преси. *http://www.aup.com.ua/ml/Media_Literacy_Road_Map_AUP_2016.pdf*.

[60]   "Концепція Впровадження Медіаосвіти в Україні (Нова Редакція)." 2016. MediaSapiens. *http://osvita.mediasapiens.ua/mediaprosvita/mediaosvita/kontseptsiya_vprovadzhennya_mediaosviti_v_ukraini_nova_redaktsiya/*.

[61]   "OSINT Academy: Приемы Поиска и Получения Информации." 2016. Информационно-Аналитический Центр. *http://mediarnbo.org/2016/12/24/osint-academy-priemyi-poiska-i-polucheniya-informatsii-videouroki/?lang=ru*.

[62]   Медіа-драйвер. *http://mediadriver.online/*.

[63]   Он-лайн курс "Новинна грамотність". *http://www.video.detector.media/special-projects/novynna-gramotnist-i22*.

There is an interesting online game called 'Mission of media literacy', and a distance learning course called 'Media literacy for citizens', created as a joint initiative between IREX, AUP and StopFake. The curriculum of the distance learning course and the online game are based on materials from the media literacy handbook, which was created as a result of cooperation between the three organisations involved in the 'Media Literacy for Citizens Programme', which was implemented in July 2015 and ran until March 2016. As part of the project, training seminars took place in 14 regions of Ukraine, primarily in the east and south. In total, more than 14 000 citizens took part in these training seminars.[64]

CONCLUSIONS

Since the start of Russian aggression in 2014, the Ukrainian authorities and civil society have done significant work in order to build up national resilience in many areas, including in the information domain. One could hardly call the years 2014 to 2015 a successful period in terms of governmental strategic vision or institutional capacity. Some of the positive results should be attributed to volunteer initiatives and restrictions on media outlets promoting Russian propaganda.

It is fair to say that, from 2016 to 2017, the activity of Ukrainian public institutions intensified, as did cooperation with civic initiatives. Strategic planning and coordination became more visible. The Ministry of Information Policy more actively steers the implementation of information security policy. However, there is still room for improvement on all levels of public policy development and execution.

Ukrainian resilience to Russian disinformation is very multi-layered. First, both at state and societal levels, we are conscious that Kremlin-backed disinformation and propaganda as physiological operations (PSYOPS) are part and parcel of hybrid warfare, along with military aggression, trade and energy wars, annexation and occupation, and political destabilisation. Experiencing all these facets at the same time leaves the Ukrainian authorities with no illusions about the gravity of the consequences, or what is at stake. Second, since Ukraine has been placed at the core of the Russian global disinformation strategy, the

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[64]   "В Україні запустили дистанційний курс та онлайн гру з медіаграмотності—Медіаграмотність." 2016. MediaSapiens. 2016. _http://osvita.mediasapiens.ua/mediaprosvita/mediaosvita/v_ukraini_zapustili_distantsiyniy_kurs_ta_onlayn_gru_z_mediagramotnosti/._

state differs in the breadth and scope of the areas in which it must resist aggression. That said, in Ukraine there are three main directions in which it is necessary to apply different strategies and instruments to defend Ukrainian national interests. Both state bodies and expert communities have to deliver on information security tasks (1) on the sovereign territory of Ukraine, (2) in the occupied and annexed areas, and, last but not the least, (3) outside Ukraine. All three areas are crucial, but are very different in terms of narratives, channels, and strategic tactics applied by the aggressor against Ukraine.

These two above mentioned arguments are very significant when it comes to comparative assessment of disinformation resilience in the wider CEE region. In quantitative and qualitative terms, the level of disinformation challenges and threats is far higher for Ukraine than for its neighbours. As a result, the number of tasks Ukraine needs to accomplish differs significantly from its neighbours. The number of tasks may partially explain why some of our interviewed experts sometimes feel pessimistic about the steps which have already been taken by the Ukrainian state. While other states have achieved success in countering disinformation using such methods, these alone are not enough in the case of Ukraine. This is especially true when experts refer to cooperation between state institutions, civil society, and the expert community.

As one interviewed expert concluded:[65]

'There are certain systemic problems, which stand in the way of cooperation, when political decisions are made based on the current context and political will. When this is done, little room is left for understanding the real state of the problem, for real reflections on the purpose, means, and possible consequences of state policy. In fact, there is no time left for what think tanks are doing'.

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[65]   Roman Shutov. In-depth interview.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. While the adoption of the ISD might be considered as a breakthrough in development in information security, it does not by itself create the necessary framework for public institutions and other non-government players to achieve the previously identified goals. More work has to be done to bring the necessary strategic documents to individual departments. However, this work should not be scaled down to a purely bureaucratic process. Even if not done in line with strategic planning, the implementation of IDS should be broken down on an operational level, and a clear hierarchical structure of documentation should be developed (information security strategy, information security program, information security short-term and mid-term action plans).

2. In 2017, the Ministry of Information Policy took a more prominent leading role. However, not all state bodies, NGOs, and journalists have recognised this, and therefore policy implementation is still fragmented. Further work is needed to establish a coordinated and coherent strategy. A case in point is strategic communication (stratcom) inside and outside Ukraine. Since the MIP is involved in government stratcom development, it should take the lead in the creation of an intrastate network of stratcom players, including those from the non-government sector.

3. The MFA is currently preparing the Public Diplomacy Strategy and is in charge of the coordination of external communication activity. Thus, it should be the responsibility of the MFA to map Ukrainian NGOs and think tanks to establish the potential for increasing outreach overseas and synchronising debunking and anti-propaganda efforts ' to ensure proper synchronisation of communicators', as stated by one expert.[66] Further coordination might be provided under the plan of action on the implementation of the Concept of the popularisation of Ukraine in the world and of promoting the interests of Ukraine within the global information space.

4. Among the recommendations one should mention the necessity of embedding media literacy elements at all levels of primary, secondary and higher education. Every level of education has to be supplemented with adjusted programmes and interactive products oriented towards enhancing skills of responsible media consumption.

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[66]   Roman Shutov. In-depth interview.

5. In the Ukrainian media, there is a deficit of personnel who are able to recognise propaganda and fake news professionally, not to mention a lack of professionals in the field of strategic communications. These factors weaken the media sector and make it vulnerable to foreign interference. Additional investment is needed in educational programmes (fact-checking, OSINT courses and Internet security) to strengthen media literacy, and to give new impetus to coordination between professional unions and groups, and cooperation between NGOs. Regular meetings are needed between the authorities and media in order to develop the habit of using unified terminology in fighting disinformation. The educational programmes should be both short-term and long-term. The short-term educational programmes should have the media community as the target audience whereas the long-term initiatives should be oriented towards pupils and students, with the aim of increasing media literacy in general.

6. Apart from the media, the situation in law enforcement should be tackled. Representatives of the police, the Security Service of Ukraine and other relevant government bodies should also be properly trained to be able to counteract propaganda, fake news, and disinformation campaigns. In this regard, cooperation with European and NATO structures working in the field of strategic communications will be of added value. The existing road maps of cooperation have to be enriched with new initiatives in the area. Moreover, improving skills in preventing cyberattacks and responding to them adequately and efficiently is essential for the representatives from all security bodies, not only the 'cyberpolice'.

7. Another field in which the efforts should be applied is preventing the dissemination of fake news about Ukraine in foreign media. This can be done by encouraging the opening of contact points or branches for foreign media, which can learn from local experts. These measures would mean that foreign audiences would be able to get first-hand information about developments in Ukraine and reduce the likelihood of manipulation, fake news, and disinformation being spread. If such contact points are a medium-term goal, the state should immediately encourage the organisation of media tours to Ukraine for foreign journalists.

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CONCLUSIONS

Among worrying security trends in Central and Eastern Europe cited in its report 'GLOBSEC Megatrends 2018'[1], the GLOBSEC Policy Institute names heightened confrontation in global security relations, the growing influence of cyber offensive capabilities and increased weaponisation of technologies to achieve political goals. In the recently changed political and security regional environment, national resilience systems in many countries remain fairly fragile to mushrooming sources of destructive foreign-initiated information influence.

In light of the mentioned trends, our study aims at scrutinising the level of national resilience to foreign, foremost Kremlin-engineered, information influence across 14 CEE countries. The sum of the national resilience of the 14 countries reveals *the degree of the defence immune system of the whole region*. While the report centers on Kremlin-led information invasions, it in many respects reveals the ability to resist any foreign-backed information influence.

The *elderly and national minorities are most often presented as the population groups most susceptible to Kremlin-led disinformation and propaganda* than the population at large. Older people in CEE countries tend to display nostalgic feelings for the Soviet/socialist past and usually are inexperienced users of modern technological tools. For instance, a survey conducted in 2016 in Lithuania showed that 45.8 % of the population aged 46 or older tend to agree that 'in the Soviet Union life was better than today in Lithuania'.

National minorities are considered an easy target for Kremlin-backed disinformation, and this category goes far beyond ethnic Russians across the region. Even in those CEE countries where ethnic Russians represent a sizeable part of the population (Estonia, Latvia), experts rather speak of *Russian language-speaking minorities*, which often include ethnic Ukrainians, Belarusians, Moldovans, etc. It is important to take into account that Russian language-speakers are not a monolithic part of their respective societies but rather a heterogeneous group in many respects, including their political views and preferences and level of integration. In Lithuania, the Polish-speaking minority falls into the vulnerable category as well. In Georgia, ethnic Armenians and Azeris, who comprise around 11 % of the country's population and are insufficiently integrated into Georgian society, are believed to be vulnerable groups to pro-Kremlin propaganda. In Azerbaijan, vulnerable ethnic groups include the Lazgins and Talish, while in Moldova, ethnic Ukrainians and Gagauz people are

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[1]   "GLOBSEC Megatrends 2018." 2018. GLOBSEC. https://www.globsec.org/globsec-megatrends-2018/.

more receptive to Kremlin-led messages than the population as a whole. In the absence of systemic actions to promote minority languages in some CEE states, national minorities have adopted Russian as a proxy language and have become heavy consumers of Russian media.

Active followers of the Orthodox Christian church (most notably, in Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine) are another prominent vulnerable group to Kremlin-led disinformation. For instance, in Moldova, the church enjoys the highest level of trust among all social institutions. Therefore, it makes it very influential in Moldovan society, and the Moldovan Metropolitanate maintains close ideological and economic relations with Russia through ties with the Russian Orthodox Church.

An equally important societal group susceptible to Kremlin-led narratives is the group of *supporters of far-right ideology and so-called 'ideologies for hire'* — right-wing extremism, racist rhetoric, fascism, ultra-nationalism, 'conservatism', etc. Kremlin-led disinformation and propaganda is highly successful in the identification and consolidation of such groups around these ideological constructs and issues such as identity, religious fundamentalism, economic inequality, social security, immigration, and others.

Several country experts report that *young people under 25* are yet another group at risk. Individuals in this age group experience some emotional and psychological adjustment problems, usually were just graduated and still lack skills to resist various sorts of manipulation, including information and psychological ones. Although they are well experienced with new technology, this age group often lacks real-life competences that would allow them to critically process increasing flows of information. Furthermore, there are some other country-specific vulnerable groups. In Belarus, these include *army officers and military personnel*, while in South Caucasus countries, *those with close business and economic ties with Russia* are named among the vulnerable groups.

While acknowledging the quality and diversity of Kremlin-led disinformation methods, one should not exaggerate their sophistication. Experts express doubt that Russia actually possesses a specific media strategy towards any given CEE country. Usually only a very limited number of media products is designed for specific country-targeting. For instance, many identical narratives target the Baltic states in general rather than Lithuania or Latvia individually.

The usage and popularity of Russian-language media platforms heavily determines the degree of population exposure to Kremlin-led messages. These indicators vary greatly across the countries. While, for instance, in Hungary or Romania, Russian-language media are virtually not present, in Belarus, Russian TV channels are the main source of information for around 40 % of the country's population. In three out of nine publicly accessible TV networks in Belarus, Russia-originated content prevails, while in all the remaining six it is also present to a large extent. In Moldova, five out of the top 10 TV channels heavily rebroadcast Russian TV channels.

In Latvia and Estonia, four out of the 10 most popular TV channels heavily broadcast Russian TV content and, therefore, occasionally spread Kremlin-led disinformation and propaganda. These channels enjoy a combined total viewing time of 24.8 % and 16.3 % in Latvia and Estonia, respectively. The substantial difference between the funding of the Latvian and Russia-originated channels is reported to be one of the reasons for the impressive attractiveness of Russian TV channels in Latvia. Since a Russian-speaking part of the population in Lithuania is many times less numerous than in Latvia and Estonia, Lithuanians are much less exposed to the Russian media environment, rarely use Russian social media, and generally are less susceptible to Russian traditional and digital media.

Virtually all CEE countries *lack quality systemic responses*. National institutions and regulations on information security are often underdeveloped. Often, the regulatory environment is outdated, thus preventing the relevant regulatory agencies from duly scrutinising disinformation channels for compliance with legislative norms. For instance, in Romania, with the exception of the National Audiovisual Council, the official regulator for the audiovisual sector, no other regulatory bodies monitor the quality and accuracy of information. In some cases when the institutional structure is more or less complete (such as in Lithuania), intra-institutional cooperation is inadequate.

Another common feature across the CEE countries is *a deficiency of national long-term strategies aimed at combating foreign-led disinformation campaigns and producing coherent narratives towards vulnerable groups* of the population. Only Estonia stands out with its noticeably better ranking in the respective Disinformation Resilience Index indicator among the 14 reviewed CEE countries due to its well-functioning institutional setup, regulations, and high quality of other systemic responses. In some cases, even if relevant national regulations are in place, they are just not followed.

In Moldova, although the objective to reach a general broadcast of 70 % of programs in the national language is stipulated in the respective national strategy, four out of the five most popular TV stations do not comply with this legal requirement.

To reach its audiences in European countries, *Russia exploits loopholes in EU regulations*. The EU Audiovisual Media Services Directive allows media to be registered in any EU member state as long as one of the media company's board members resides in that country. The Baltic states are vocal that this allowance prevents them from regulating media companies properly, since they are subject to the legislation of other countries of registration (e.g., United Kingdom or Sweden). In some instances, Lithuania and Latvia went as far as to temporarily block the broadcast of certain TV channels with Russia-originated content for spreading messages violating domestic legislation.

Media self-regulatory mechanisms in the CEE countries are mostly ineffective, the country analyses show. Although national journalist communities are usually governed by a journalist code of ethics and observing bodies have been established within journalist associations (such as the Czech Syndicate of Journalists or the Union of Journalists of Armenia), experts decry the absence of effective enforcement mechanisms to ensure media outlets comply with the respective decisions. In a number of countries (e.g., Belarus, Latvia) two rival journalist associations exist, which hampers the development of effective media self-regulation.

The experts positively assess *the role of civil society in withstanding foreign-triggered disinformation and manipulation campaigns*. A number of recent government and grassroots initiatives throughout the CEE countries introduced opulently media-literacy programmes and advanced digital skills to their national education systems. One successful example is the launch of the Baltic Media Centre of Excellence in Riga, Latvia, in February 2017.

While the populations of Belarus and Moldova are immersed in the Russian media sphere to a much larger extent than elsewhere in the CEE region, even in countries where Russian media are nearly not as present or where their popularity is marginal, *pro-Kremlin narratives occasionally reach local audiences through national media*. They retransmit Russia-originated narratives or unreliable news, either unintentionally as a consequence of flawed editorial policies, or on purpose, often for political reasons. For instance, the 'Soros' narrative has spread

well to media in the Visegrad countries and in Romania. Generally, the most popular radio and newspapers are less frequent transmitters of Kremlin-led disinformation across CEE countries than TV channels and online media.

On research team:

This book is a result of the research which was carried out in May 2017 — May 2018 by the Foreign Policy Council "Ukrainian Prism" and the Eurasian States in Transition research center (EAST Center) in cooperation with other CEE research centers in the framework of the project "Assessing Vulnerability and Resilience to Russian Disinformation Warfare: Practical Overview and Qualitative Evaluation of Critical Infrastructure".

The Foreign Policy Council "Ukrainian Prism", lead organisation of the project. "Ukrainian Prism" is a network-based non-governmental think tank, the goal of which is to participate in providing democratic ground for development and implementation of foreign and security policies by government of Ukraine, implementation of international and nationwide projects and programs, directed at improvement of foreign policy analysis and expertise, enhancement of expert community participation in a decision-making process in the spheres of foreign policy, international relations, public diplomacy.

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The Eurasian States in Transition research center (EAST Center), responsible for the scientific part of the project, including elaboration of methodology and scientific editing of the country chapters. The EAST Center is a Warsaw-based independent, interdisciplinary think-tank focused on Post-Soviet and East European studies. It concentrates on migration, media and communication studies including media disinformation in the Central and Eastern Europe, the study of domestic and foreign policies in the Eastern European countries as well as Eurasian integration research.

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A

B

C

MILITARY AND SECURITY DEVELOPMENTS INVOLVING THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

2020

ANNUAL REPORT TO CONGRESS

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704   Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China   UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013-20231229   3

Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2020

Annual Report to Congress

A Report to Congress Pursuant to the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2000, as Amended

Section 1260, "Modifications to Annual Report on Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China," of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020, Public Law 116-92, which amends the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2000, Section 1202, Public Law 106-65, provides that the Secretary of Defense shall submit a report "in both classified and unclassified form, on military and security developments involving the People's Republic of China. The report shall address the current and probable future course of military-technological development of the People's Liberation Army and the tenets and probable development of Chinese security strategy and military strategy, and of the military organizations and operational concepts supporting such development over the next 20 years. The report shall also address United States-China engagement and cooperation on security matters during the period covered by the report, including through United States-China military-to-military contacts, and the United States strategy for such engagement and cooperation in the future."

PREFACE:

A 20 YEAR RETROSPECTIVE ON CHINA'S STRATEGY AND ARMED FORCES

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FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704   Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China   UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013-20231229 5

For 20 years, the Department of Defense (DoD) has provided Congress with an annual report on military and security developments involving the People's Republic of China (PRC). These reports have assessed the contours of China's national strategy, its approach to security and military affairs, and potential changes in the PRC's armed forces over the next 20 years, among other matters. 2020 marks an important year for the People's Liberation Army (PLA) as it works to achieve important modernization milestones ahead of the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) broader goal to transform China into a "moderately prosperous society" by the CCP's centenary in 2021. As the United States continues to respond to the growing strategic challenges posed by the PRC, 2020 offers a unique opportunity to assess both the continuity and changes that have taken place in the PRC's strategy and armed forces over the past two decades.

DoD's first annual report to Congress in 2000 assessed the PRC's armed forces at that time to be a sizable but mostly archaic military that was poorly suited to the CCP's long-term ambitions. The report recognized the CCP's objective was for the PRC to become a "strong, modernized, unified, and wealthy nation." Despite these great power aspirations, the PLA lacked the capabilities, organization, and readiness for modern warfare. Yet the CCP understood these deficiencies and set long-term goals to strengthen and transform its armed forces in a manner commensurate with its aspirations to strengthen and transform China.

DoD's 2000 report assessed that the PLA was slowly and unevenly adapting to the trends in modern warfare. The PLA's force structure and capabilities focused largely on waging large-scale land warfare along China's borders. The PLA's ground, air, and naval forces were sizable but mostly obsolete. Its conventional missiles were generally of short range and modest accuracy. The PLA's emergent cyber capabilities were rudimentary; its use of information technology was well behind the curve; and its nominal space capabilities were based on outdated technologies for the day. Further, China's defense industry struggled to produce high-quality systems. Even if the PRC could produce or acquire modern weapons, the PLA lacked the joint organizations and training needed to field them effectively. The report assessed that the PLA's organizational obstacles were severe enough that if left unaddressed they would "inhibit the PLA's maturation into a world-class military force."

Two decades later, the PLA's objective is to become a "world-class" military by the end of 2049—a goal first announced by General Secretary Xi Jinping in 2017. Although the CCP has not defined what a "world-class" military means, within the context of the PRC's national strategy it is likely that Beijing will seek to develop a military by mid-century that is equal to—or in some cases superior to—the U.S. military, or that of any other great power that the PRC views as a threat. As this year's report details, the PRC has marshalled the resources, technology, and political will over the past two decades to strengthen and modernize the PLA in nearly every respect. Indeed, as this report shows, China is already ahead of the United States in certain areas such as:

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FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704   Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China   UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229 6

> Shipbuilding: The PRC has the largest navy in the world, with an overall battle force of approximately 350 ships and submarines including over 130 major surface combatants. In comparison, the U.S. Navy's battle force is approximately 293 ships as of early 2020.

> Land-based conventional ballistic and cruise missiles: The PRC has more than 1,250 ground-launched ballistic missiles (GLBMs) and ground-launched cruise missiles (GLCMs) with ranges between 500 and 5,500 kilometers. The United States currently fields one type of conventional GLBM with a range of 70 to 300 kilometers and no GLCMs.

> Integrated air defense systems: The PRC has one of the world's largest forces of advanced long-range surface-to-air systems—including Russian-built S-400s, S-300s, and domestically produced systems—that constitute part of its robust and redundant integrated air defense system architecture.

More striking than the PLA's staggering amounts of new military hardware are the recent sweeping efforts taken by CCP leaders that include completely restructuring the PLA into a force better suited for joint operations, improving the PLA's overall combat readiness, encouraging the PLA to embrace new operational concepts, and expanding the PRC's overseas military footprint.

Despite the PLA's progress over the past 20 years, major gaps and shortcomings remain. The PRC's leaders are aware of these problems, and their strategy envisions the PLA undergoing almost 30 more years of modernization and reform. Of course, the CCP does not intend for the PLA to be merely a showpiece of China's modernity or to keep it focused solely on regional threats. As this report shows, the CCP desires the PLA to become a practical instrument of its statecraft with an active role in advancing the PRC's foreign policy, particularly with respect to the PRC's increasingly global interests and its aims to revise aspects of the international order.

Given the continuity in the PRC's strategic objectives, the past 20 years offer a harbinger for the future course of the PRC's national strategy and military aspirations. Certainly, many factors will determine how this course unfolds. What is certain is that the CCP has a strategic end state that it is working towards, which if achieved and its accompanying military modernization left unaddressed, will have serious implications for U.S. national interests and the security of the international rules-based order.

Report scope: This report covers security and military developments involving the PRC until the end of 2019. Developments in 2020, including the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic, will be covered in DoD's 2021 report.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704   Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China   UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229 9

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UNDERSTANDING CHINA'S STRATEGY

China's National Strategy

> The People's Republic of China's (PRC's) strategy aims to achieve "the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation" by 2049. China's strategy can be characterized as a determined pursuit of political and social modernity that includes far-ranging efforts to expand China's national power, perfect its governance systems, and revise the international order.

> The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) frames this strategy as an effort to realize long-held nationalist aspirations to "return" China to a position of strength, prosperity, and leadership on the world stage.

> The CCP's leadership has long viewed China as embroiled in a major international strategic competition with other states, including, and in particular, the United States.

> In 2019, China intensified its efforts to advance its overall development including steadying its economic growth, strengthening its armed forces, and taking a more active role in global affairs.

Foreign Policy

> The PRC's foreign policy seeks to revise aspects of the international order on the Party's terms and in accordance with ideas and principles it views as essential to forging an external environment conducive to China's national rejuvenation.

> In 2019, the PRC recognized that its armed forces should take a more active role in advancing its foreign policy, highlighting the increasingly global character that Beijing ascribes to its military power.

Economic Policy

> The CCP prioritizes economic development as the "central task" and the force that drives China's modernization across all areas, including its armed forces.

> China's economic development supports its military modernization not only by providing the means for larger defense budgets, but through deliberate Party-led initiatives such as OBOR and Made in China 2025, as well as the systemic benefits of China's growing national industrial and technological base.

Military-Civil Fusion (MCF) Development Strategy

> The PRC pursues its MCF Development Strategy to "fuse" its economic and social development strategies with its security strategies to build an integrated national strategic system and capabilities in support of China's national rejuvenation goals.

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FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704   Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China   UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229 10

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

> MCF encompasses six interrelated efforts: (1) fusing the China's defense industrial base and its civilian technology and industrial base; (2) integrating and leveraging science and technology innovations across military and civilian sectors; (3) cultivating talent and blending military and civilian expertise and knowledge; (4) building military requirements into civilian infrastructure and leveraging civilian construction for military purposes; (5) leveraging civilian service and logistics capabilities for military purposes; and, (6) expanding and deepening China's national defense mobilization system to include all relevant aspects of its society and economy for use in competition and war.

> While MCF has broader purposes than acquiring foreign technology, in practice, MCF means there is not a clear line between the PRC's civilian and military economies, raising due diligence costs for U.S. and global entities that do not desire to contribute to the PRC's military modernization.

Defense Policy & Military Strategy

> The PRC has stated its defense policy aims to safeguard its sovereignty, security, and development interests. China's military strategy remains based on the concept of "active defense."

> In 2019, the PLA remained primarily oriented towards longstanding regional threats while emphasizing a greater global role for itself in accordance with China's defense policy and military strategy.

> China's leaders stress the imperative of meeting key military transformation markers set in 2020 and 2035. These milestones seek to align the PLA's transformation with China's overall national modernization so that by the end of 2049, China will field a "world-class" military.

> The CCP has not defined what it means by its ambition to have a "world-class" military. Within the context of China's national strategy, however, it is likely that China will aim to develop a military by mid-century that is equal to—or in some cases superior to—the U.S. military, or that of any other great power that China views as a threat to its sovereignty, security, and development interests.

MISSIONS, TASKS, & MODERNIZATION OF CHINA'S ARMED FORCES IN THE "NEW ERA"

> The PRC's strategy includes advancing a comprehensive military modernization program that aims to "basically" complete military modernization by 2035 and transform the PLA into a "world-class" military by the end of 2049.

> The PLA's evolving capabilities and concepts continue to strengthen the PRC's ability to counter an intervention by an adversary in the Indo-Pacific region and project power globally.

> In 2019, the PLA continued to make progress implementing major structural reforms, fielding modern indigenous systems, building readiness, and strengthening its competency to conduct joint operations.

> China has already achieved parity with—or even exceeded—the United States in several military modernization areas, including:

  - **Shipbuilding**: The PRC has the largest navy in the world, with an overall battle force of approximately 350 ships and submarines including over 130 major surface combatants. In comparison, the U.S. Navy's battle force is approximately 293 ships as of early 2020. China is the top ship-producing nation in the world by tonnage and is increasing its shipbuilding capacity and capability for all naval classes.

  - **Land-based conventional ballistic and cruise missiles**: The PRC has developed its conventional missile forces unrestrained by any international agreements. The PRC has more than 1,250 ground-launched ballistic missiles (GLBMs) and ground-launched cruise missiles (GLCMs) with ranges between 500 and 5,500 kilometers. The United States currently fields one type of conventional GLBM with a range of 70 to 300 kilometers and no GLCMs.

  - **Integrated air defense systems**: The PRC has one of the world's largest forces of advanced long-range surface-to-air systems—including Russian-built S-400s, S-300s, and domestically produced systems—that constitute part of its robust and redundant integrated air defense system (IADS) architecture.

Developments in the PLA's Modernization and Reform

> **The People's Liberation Army Army (PLAA)** is the largest standing ground force in the world. In 2019, the PLAA continued to transition into a modern, mobile, and lethal ground force by fielding upgraded combat systems and communications equipment and enhancing its ability to conduct and manage complex combined-arms and joint operations.

> **The People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN)**—the largest navy in the world—is an increasingly modern and flexible force that has focused on replacing previous generations of platforms with limited capabilities in favor of larger, modern multi-role combatants. As of 2019, the PLAN is largely composed of modern multi-role platforms featuring advanced anti-ship, anti-air, and anti-submarine weapons and sensors.

  - **Naval Shipbuilding and Modernization:** The PLAN remains engaged in a robust shipbuilding and modernization program that includes submarines, surface combatants, amphibious warfare ships, aircraft carriers, and auxiliary ships as well as developing and fielding advanced weapons, sensors, and command and control capabilities.

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704 Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China

UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229 12

> **The People's Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF)** and PLAN Aviation together constitute the largest aviation forces in the region and the third largest in the world, with over 2,500 total aircraft and approximately 2,000 combat aircraft. The PLAAF is rapidly catching up to Western air forces across a broad range of capabilities and competencies.

> **The People's Liberation Army Rocket Force (PLARF)** is responsible for the PRC's strategic land-based nuclear and conventional missile forces. The PLARF develops and fields a wide variety of conventional mobile ground-launched ballistic missiles and cruise missiles. The PRC is developing new intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) that will significantly improve its nuclear-capable missile forces. The number of warheads on the PRC's land-based ICBMs capable of threatening the United States is expected to grow to roughly 200 in the next five years.

  – The PRC is expanding its inventory of the multi-role DF-26, a mobile, ground-launched intermediate-range ballistic missile system capable of rapidly swapping conventional and nuclear warheads.

  – The PRC's robust ground-based conventional missile forces compliment the growing size and capabilities of its air- and sea-based precision strike capabilities.

> **The PLA Strategic Support Force (SSF)** is a theater command-level organization established to centralize the PLA's strategic space, cyber, electronic, and psychological warfare missions and capabilities. The SSF Network Systems Department is responsible for cyberwarfare, technical reconnaissance, electronic warfare, and psychological warfare. Its current major target is the United States.

  - **The PRC's Space Enterprise**. The PRC's space enterprise continues to mature rapidly. Beijing has devoted significant resources to growing all aspects of its space program, from military space applications to civil applications such as profit-generating launches, scientific endeavors, and space exploration.

  - The PLA has historically managed the PRC's space program. The SSF Space Systems Department is responsible for nearly all PLA space operations.

  - In 2019, the PRC described space as a "critical domain in international strategic competition" and stated the security of space provided strategic assurance to the country's national and social development.

> **Military Readiness**: In recent years, CCP leaders have directed the PLA to improve its combat readiness. This guidance is increasingly evident in the intensity of the PLA's training and the complexity and scale of its exercises.

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704 Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China   UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023 FL-2023-00013 20231229 13

Capabilities for Counter Intervention and Power Projection

> The PLA is developing capabilities to provide options for the PRC to dissuade, deter, or, if ordered, defeat third-party intervention during a large-scale, theater campaign such as a Taiwan contingency.

> The PLA's anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD) capabilities are currently the most robust within the First Island Chain, although the PRC aims to strengthen its capabilities to reach farther into the Pacific Ocean.

> The PRC also continues to increase its military capabilities to achieve regional and global security objectives beyond a Taiwan contingency.

> The PLA is developing the capabilities and operational concepts to conduct offensive operations within the Second Island Chain, in the Pacific and Indian Oceans, and in some cases, globally. In addition to strike, air and missile defense, anti-surface and anti-submarine capabilities improvements, China is focusing on information, cyber, and space and counterspace operations.

Nuclear Deterrence

> China's strategic ambitions, evolving view of the security landscape, and concerns over survivability are driving significant changes to the size, capabilities, and readiness of its nuclear forces.

> China's nuclear forces will significantly evolve over the next decade as it modernizes, diversifies, and increases the number of its land-, sea-, and air-based nuclear delivery platforms.

> Over the next decade, China's nuclear warhead stockpile—currently estimated to be in the low-200s—is projected to at least double in size as China expands and modernizes its nuclear forces.

> China is pursuing a "nuclear triad" with the development of a nuclear capable air-launched ballistic missile (ALBM) and improving its ground and sea-based nuclear capabilities.

> New developments in 2019 further suggest that China intends to increase the peacetime readiness of its nuclear forces by moving to a launch-on-warning (LOW) posture with an expanded silo-based force.

THE PLA'S GROWING GLOBAL PRESENCE

> CCP leaders believe that the PRC's global activities, including the PLA's growing global presence, are necessary to create a "favorable" international environment for China's national rejuvenation.

> The CCP has tasked the PLA to develop the capability to project power outside China's borders and immediate periphery to secure the PRC's growing overseas interests and advance its foreign policy goals.

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704 Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China   UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229 14

China's Global Military Activities

> The PRC has increasingly recognized that its armed forces should take a more active role in advancing its foreign policy goals.

> As the PRC's overseas interests have grown over the past two decades, the Party's leaders have increasingly pushed the PLA to think about how it will operate beyond China's borders and its immediate periphery to advance and defend these interests.

> In 2019, the PLA continued to expand its participation in bilateral and multilateral military exercises, normalize its presence overseas, and build closer ties to foreign militaries.

PLA Overseas Basing and Access

> The PRC is seeking to establish a more robust overseas logistics and basing infrastructure to allow the PLA to project and sustain military power at greater distances.

> Beyond its current base in Djibouti, the PRC is very likely already considering and planning for additional overseas military logistics facilities to support naval, air, and ground forces. The PRC has likely considered locations for PLA military logistics facilities in Myanmar, Thailand, Singapore, Indonesia, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, United Arab Emirates, Kenya, Seychelles, Tanzania, Angola, and Tajikistan. The PRC and Cambodia have publicly denied having signed an agreement to provide the PLAN with access to Cambodia's Ream Naval Base.

> A global PLA military logistics network could interfere with U.S. military operations and provide flexibility to support offensive operations against the United States.

The PRC's Influence Operations

> The PRC conducts influence operations to achieve outcomes favorable to its strategic objectives by targeting cultural institutions, media organizations, business, academic, and policy communities in the United States, other countries, and international institutions.

> The CCP seeks to condition domestic, foreign, and multilateral political establishments and public opinion to accept Beijing's narratives.

> CCP leaders probably consider open democracies, including the United States, as more susceptible to influence operations than other types of governments.

X

RESOURCES AND TECHNOLOGY FOR FORCE MODERNIZATION

> The PRC's long-term goal is to create an entirely self-reliant defense-industrial sector—fused with a strong civilian industrial and technology sector—that can meet the PLA's needs for modern military capabilities.

> The PRC has mobilized vast resources in support of its defense modernization, including the implementation of its MCF Development Strategy, as well as espionage activities to acquire sensitive, dual-use, and military-grade equipment.

> In 2019, the PRC announced its annual military budget would increase by 6.2 percent, continuing more than 20 years of annual defense spending increases and sustaining its position as the second-largest military spender in the world. The PRC's published military budget omits several major categories of expenditures and its actual military-related spending is higher than what it states in its official budget.

Science and Technology Goals Supporting Military Modernization

> China seeks to become a leader in key technologies with military potential, such as AI, autonomous systems, advanced computing, quantum information sciences, biotechnology, and advanced materials and manufacturing.

> China has invested significant resources to fund research and subsidize companies involved in strategic S&T fields while pressing private firms, universities, and provincial governments to cooperate with the military in developing advanced technologies.

> China continues to undermine the integrity of the U.S. science and technology research enterprise through a variety of actions such as hidden diversions of research, resources, and intellectual property.

Foreign Technology Acquisition

> The PRC pursues many vectors to acquire foreign technologies, including both licit and illicit means. The PRC's efforts include a range of practices and methods to acquire sensitive and dual-use technologies and military-grade equipment to advance its military modernization goals.

> The PRC leverages foreign investments, commercial joint ventures, mergers and acquisitions, and state-sponsored industrial and technical espionage, and the manipulation of export controls for the illicit diversion of dual-use technologies to increase the level of technologies and expertise available to support military research, development, and acquisition.

> In 2019, the PRC's efforts included efforts to acquire dynamic random access memory, aviation, and anti-submarine warfare technologies.

U.S.-CHINA DEFENSE CONTACTS AND EXCHANGES IN 2019

> U.S. defense contacts and exchanges conducted in 2019 supported overall U.S. policy and strategy toward China, were focused on reducing risk and preventing misunderstanding in times of crisis, and were conducted in accordance with the statutory limitations of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2000, as amended.

> Pursuit of a constructive results-oriented relationship with China is an important part of U.S. strategy in the Indo-Pacific region. The 2018 *National Defense Strategy* seeks areas of cooperation with China from positions of U.S. strength, with a long-term aim to set the military-to military relationship on a path of strategic transparency and non-aggression, and to encourage China to act in a manner consistent with the free and open international order.

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704   Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China   UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229 17

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

1

UNDERSTANDING CHINA'S STRATEGY

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704 Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229 19

Understanding the tenets of China's national strategy is essential to understanding the future course of China's security and military strategy. This in turn offers insights on the current and future course of the People's Liberation Army's (PLA) reform and modernization in terms of its strength, technological advances, organization, and operational concepts.

CHINA'S NATIONAL STRATEGY

Key Takeaways

> China's strategy seeks to achieve "the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation" by 2049. China's strategy can be characterized as a determined pursuit of political and social modernity that includes far-ranging efforts to expand China's national power, perfect its governance systems, and revise the international order.

> The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) frames this strategy as an effort to realize long-held nationalist aspirations to "return" China to a position of strength, prosperity, and leadership on the world stage.

> The CCP asserts its absolute leadership and governance systems are indispensable to China's national renewal into a "great modern socialist country."

> In 2019, China intensified its efforts to advance its overall development including steadying economic growth, strengthening its armed forces, and taking a more active role in global affairs.

> The CCP's leadership has long viewed China as embroiled in a major international strategic competition with other states, including, and in particular, the United States.

In 2019, the People's Republic of China (PRC) marked the 70th anniversary of its founding. On October 1, 2019, President Xi Jinping presided over the National Day ceremony in Beijing, standing atop the Gate of Heavenly Peace overlooking Tiananmen Square in front of a crowd that included the collected leaders of the CCP and foreign dignitaries while a massive assembly of forces and modern equipment from the PLA prepared to parade. In a brief speech, President Xi noted that it was 70 years to the day since Mao Zedong had stood in that very spot and proclaimed the founding of the PRC, ending what Xi described as the humiliations and misery that China had suffered in the previous century. President Xi then remarked, "The Chinese people managed to stand up on their feet and embark on a great journey of national rejuvenation...Today a socialist China is standing in the east of the world and there is no force that can shake the foundation of this great nation."

1

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704 Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China   UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229 20

China's strategy seeks to realize "the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation." This objective, which President Xi Jinping calls "the Chinese Dream," is a long-held national aspiration to "restore" China to a position of strength, prosperity, and leadership on the world stage. Throughout 2019, China continued to pursue this objective in line with the direction that the CCP Central Committee put forth in Xi's report to the 19th Party Congress in 2017, which set ambitious policy milestones and laid out initiatives for China to further its overall development, strengthen its armed forces, and take a more active role in global affairs.

China's leaders characterize their strategy to achieve political and social modernity as a grand national endeavor that is sweeping in scope and far-reaching in how it will transform China, and in turn, the world. China's strategy entails deliberate and determined efforts to amass, improve, and harness the internal and external elements of national power that will place China in a "leading position." China's leaders frequently refer to building China's "composite" national power in this context. China's strategy entails a long-term planning process to attain national rejuvenation that sets objectives, priorities, and milestones for the country's modernization across virtually every aspect of governance including economics, political affairs, the rule of law, public order, national security, diplomacy, and defense, as well as social affairs, education, science and technology, culture, the environment, and other matters. Although Party leaders have consistently pursued national rejuvenation as their goal, they have demonstrated a degree of strategic adaptability in execution to seize opportunities and manage threats to their strategy.

China pursues modernity and greater national power from the basis of defending and advancing its sovereignty, security, and development interests. Consequently, China's national ambitions and statecraft cannot be accurately characterized absent the CCP-dominated political system underpinned by the Party's theory of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics and the Party itself as the essential feature. The objective of this Party-led strategy is reflected in what the Party calls its "basic line," a single sentence in the CCP's Constitution that serves as the mission of the Party and the cornerstone for its policymaking. Last amended at the 19th Party Congress in 2017, it states:

> The basic line of the Communist Party of China in the primary stage of socialism is to lead all the people of China together in a self-reliant and pioneering effort, making economic development the central task, upholding the Four Cardinal Principles, and remaining committed to reform and opening up, so as to see China becomes a great modern socialist country that is prosperous, strong, democratic, culturally advanced, harmonious, and beautiful.

The basic line summarizes the Party's mission during what it considers China's current "primary" stage of socialist development.

2

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704   Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229 21

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

People's Republic of China

External Ambitions. Among the external elements of China's national strategy are its ambitions to create a "favorable" international environment, according to Yang Jiechi, a member of the Politburo and a leading Party official on foreign policy. The Party seeks international conditions for the PRC that are conducive to its continued development and compatible with its aspirations for China's rejuvenation as a "great modern socialist country." As Party leaders view a divided China as a weak China, they argue that "full reunification"—unification with Taiwan on Beijing's terms and completing Hong Kong and Macau's integration by the end of 2049—is a fundamental condition of national rejuvenation. CCP leaders view it as imperative that a renewed China field a "world-class" military led by the Party that can "fight and win" and "resolutely safeguard" the country's sovereignty, security, and development interests. Similarly, the CCP seeks for all countries to adopt a new approach to interstate relations that reflect the Party's principles and its concept of a "community with a shared future for mankind."

The CCP's leaders claim that their strategy to achieve national rejuvenation requires the PRC to "lead the reform of the global governance system" as they view the current system as antithetical to their socialist system and an intolerable constraint on their strategic ends. The Party views aspects of the status quo order as incompatible with the sovereignty, security, and development interests of a strong and rejuvenated China. To the CCP, revisions are necessary to accommodate China's development and should reflect the CCP's foreign policy principles, which occupy "the commanding height of human morality," according to the PRC's Foreign Ministry.

Key Objectives and Milestones. For decades, China's leaders have framed the pursuit of modernity and power as advancing China along a specific trajectory with the PRC's centenary in 2049 as the target when China seeks to achieve national rejuvenation and become a "great modern socialist country." From the Party's perspective of China as a developing nation that must transition into a "fully developed and highly advanced" socialist society, this trajectory involves the CCP shepherding China through different stages of gradual but systematic modernization and development. The CCP demarcates the stages of China's strategy with milestones, each with objectives and priorities determined by the Party's leaders and planning processes.

Reflecting on China's progress at the 19th Party Congress, General Secretary Xi declared that China had assumed "…a leading position in terms of economic and technological strength, defense capabilities, and composite national strength" and therefore "crossed the threshold into a New Era." Xi's declaration that China had entered a "New Era" was not a change in strategic objectives, but an important signal of confidence that China's progress was sufficient to tackle the next set of challenges in its development. For China's strategy in the "New Era," Xi laid out a broad plan to achieve national rejuvenation with a timeline linked to two symbolically important centenary milestones reached in

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704 Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China   UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229 22

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

2021 (the CCP's centenary) and 2049 (the PRC's centenary). To bridge the lengthy gap between the two anniversaries, Xi added interim objectives for 2035 and laid out a broad two-stage modernization plan to reach 2049. Further demonstrating the Party's confidence in China's progress, Xi's objectives for 2035 moved up certain mid-century targets set by the Party going back to 1987.

By the time the CCP marks its centenary in 2021, China aims to complete building a "moderately prosperous society in all respects." Beyond 2021, China will use the "moderately prosperous society" as the basis for Xi's "two-stage" plan to achieve national rejuvenation by the PRC's centenary in 2049. In the first stage from 2021 to 2035, the Party aims for China to "basically" meet its initial thresholds for becoming a "great modern socialist country." In this stage, China will likely continue to prioritize economic development as "the central task," but rather than rapid economic growth, it will seek to address its uneven economic development and inequalities that the CCP recognized as the new "principal contradiction" in Chinese society in the "New Era." By 2035, China will also seek to increase its economic and technological strength to become a "global leader in innovation" and to "basically" complete its military modernization. China will also seek to strengthen its international "soft power" significantly and improve its domestic rule of law and governance systems.

In the second stage from 2035 to 2049, the Party will seek for China to complete its development and attain national rejuvenation, The Party defines national rejuvenation as a state in which China is "prosperous, strong, democratic, culturally advanced, and harmonious." A renewed China will have realized an international status that Xi describes as being a "global leader in terms of composite national strength and international influence." China will have also attained—among the Party's many goals—its objectives to field a "world-class" military and assume a leading position within an international order revised in line with China's overall foreign policy goal to establish a "community with a shared future for mankind."

Historic Continuity. Understanding the origins of China's national rejuvenation is crucial to understanding how China will likely shape and pursue this strategic objective. CCP leaders have consistently framed their efforts as seeking to "restore" China to a preeminent place in the world after enduring what the Party characterizes as China's "century of humiliation" beginning in the 19th century as the Qing Dynasty began to disintegrate and lasting until the founding of the PRC in 1949. Although the Party's exact articulation of this goal as "the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation" first emerged in the late 1980s, the CCP has portrayed itself as a champion of the cause of rebuilding China since the 1920s. General Secretary Xi Jinping frequently points to the CCP's steadfastness to the cause of national rejuvenation and describes it as the Party's "original aspiration."

4

The Party's objectives and narratives of national rejuvenation speak to the deep impressions left on China's political identity over an era defined by the disintegration of China's polity, repeated violations of China's sovereignty by foreign powers, and the prolonged absence of physical and economic security for many Chinese people. For a civilization with a history stretching back thousands of years—much of it spent as one of the most powerful and advanced civilizations in the world—nationalist appeals to restore China to greatness are deeply rooted. The threads of national renewal can be traced to China's nationalist revolutionary leaders in the late Qing Dynasty and emerged as a common nationalist theme in the fractured politics of China's Republican era. This resonance is crucial to why the CCP portrays China's rejuvenation as a nationalist project that the Party "shoulders" for the country.

China's Strategy and the CCP. The Party's leaders frame Socialism with Chinese Characteristics and the CCP as indispensable to China overcoming its historical circumstances and attaining national rejuvenation. As General Secretary Xi Jinping stated in a speech to the CCP Central Committee in 2013, "Which ideological system a country implements depends on one crucial issue: can this ideology resolve the historical problems facing the country?" From the Party's perspective, its leadership and systems are uniquely able to restore China's strength, prosperity, and prestige—underscored with the implicit warning that any deviation from socialism's path would result in "chaos" and China falling behind on its "historic mission." As Xi stated, "…only socialism can save China—and only Socialism with Chinese Characteristics can develop China."

CCP leaders flatly reject the notion that the Party has abandoned its socialist ideology in recent decades with the introduction of market features into China's economy or drifted towards a non-ideological form of governance. The Party asserts that China remains on the path of "socialist modernization" but it seeks to advance the country gradually as a lesson painfully learned from the Mao-era catastrophes that sought rapid progress. Accordingly, the Party claims that to perform its decisive role in guiding China into a "great modern socialist country," it must ensure that the country advances in line with "the Four Cardinal Principles." First stated by Deng Xiaoping and later written into the CCP Constitution, these principles direct the Party "to keep to the path of socialism, to uphold the people's democratic dictatorship, to uphold the leadership of the CCP, and to uphold Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought." The Four Cardinal Principles are the basis for political and governance reforms pursued by the Party and the outer boundaries of its efforts to "reform" and "open up" the country. As General Secretary Xi Jinping told Party cadres in 2014, "promoting the modernization of the national governance system and capacity is definitely not Westernization or capitalism." In addition to cultivating ideological discipline and fighting corruption within the Party, Xi has sought to advance China's strategy by strengthening the Party's primacy across China's governance systems and making the Party more effective at managing China's political, economic and social problems. Xi's

5

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704 Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China   UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229 24

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

emphasis on building the CCP's institutional capacity and promoting internal unity—which he views as the means for the Party to perform its strategic role—has become a prominent feature of his tenure.

In 2019, the Party continued its efforts to "perfect" its governance systems domestically and internationally. Notably, at the Fourth Plenum of the 19th Party Congress in October 2019, convened amid trade negotiations with the United States and widespread protests in Hong Kong, the plenum's agenda was heavily focused on improving the Party's governance systems across all aspects of Chinese society. The Fourth Plenum's focus on Party building and greater ideological coherence seemed to underscore the leaderships' confidence in the Party's systems and the need for the Party to manage emerging challenges to China's strategy.

External Threats and Opportunities. The CCP's leadership has long viewed China as embroiled in a major international strategic competition with other states. Throughout the post-Mao reform era and particularly after the end of the Cold War, the Party's leaders recognized their socialist system was—and would remain over the long-term—an underlying source of tension with the West. Given the Party's ambitions to "restore" China's place in the world and their assessment of China's relative weakness vis-à-vis rival states, CCP leaders recognized China's growing strength could flare tensions with others without careful management. Deng Xiaoping's reputed approach to this dilemma, as attributed by other Party leaders, was for China to, "hide our capacities and bide our time, preserve ourselves, and develop gradually." Although Party leaders have consistently pursued national rejuvenation as their goal, they have demonstrated a degree of strategic adaptability in execution to seize opportunities and manage threats to their strategy.

Over time, the CCP has characterized China's view of strategic competition in terms of a rivalry among powerful nation states as well as a clash of opposing political and governance systems in which ideology is a defining characteristic. Speaking to the importance the Party places on perfecting its systems and competing with different systems, General Secretary Xi remarked that, "System advantages are the greatest advantages of a country, and the competition of different systems is the most fundamental competition between countries." Party leaders have described their view of competition as entailing aspects of cooperation and conflict and that the CCP would need to be adaptable, flexible, and, above all, patient. The Party's leaders have also offered a view of competition based on relative levels of economic, technological, and military power. Speaking to the CCP Central Committee in 2013, General Secretary Xi Jinping remarked that the Party needed to "appreciate" that "developed Western nations" would continue to possess "real, long-term advantages" over China in the economic, technological, and military domains. Xi argued that China would need to "diligently prepare for a long period of cooperation and of conflict between these two social systems in each of these domains." Lastly, Xi alluded to the core elements of national rejuvenation as China's approach

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704 Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China
UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229 25

to this competition. Xi stated, "most importantly, we must concentrate our efforts on bettering our own affairs, continually broadening our comprehensive national power, improving the lives of our people, building a socialism that is superior to capitalism, and laying the foundation for a future where we will win the initiative and have the dominant position."

Since just prior to the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the PRC's leaders have consistently characterized China's security environment as undergoing intense changes and have viewed the international order as shifting towards a multipolar system as a consequence of China's development. The Party views a shift towards a multipolar system as vital for China to advance its strategy. China's leaders have eagerly embraced narratives of the West's relative decline and the inevitability of China's rise as largely consistent with their strategy and purported evidence of China's progress. Despite China benefiting enormously from the general peace and prosperity of the current international system, the Party views core aspects of the system as incompatible with its strategy and has offered a vision for a revised order premised on its "community with a shared future for mankind." For example, Beijing views U.S. security alliances and partnerships, especially those in the Indo-Pacific region, as destabilizing and irreconcilable with the PRC's sovereignty, security, and development interests. Regionally, the PRC's 2019 defense white paper claims that "Asia-Pacific" countries are "increasingly aware that they are members" of China's "community with a shared future for mankind" and that managing disputes through dialogue is its "preferred policy option." In practice, the PRC often favors "dialogue" as a power play and a means of using political, economic, or military coercion rather than force.

Beijing has also expressed concerns over growing global instability and a mounting sense of insecurity towards the United States. The PRC's 2019 defense white paper criticized the United States as the "principal instigator" of global instability and driver of "international strategic competition." The PRC's leadership sees U.S. policy towards China as a critical factor affecting China's national strategy and increasingly views the United States as more willing to confront Beijing on matters where U.S. and PRC interests are inimical. CCP leaders' perceptions of intensifying strategic competition driven by structural changes in the international system and an increasingly confrontational United States is consistent with the Party's long-held opinion—based on its view of competition between systems—that the United States seeks to prevent China's rejuvenation.

Despite the perceived threats and challenges to its interests, the PRC evaluated the strategic landscape in 2019 as sufficiently favorable to continue prioritizing its economic and political development in support of its strategy. This assessment underscores the contradictions in China's strategic approach. China desires to continue benefiting from the general peace and prosperity it has enjoyed for decades under the current international system in order to advance its overall development towards national

7

rejuvenation. Simultaneously, China's national ambitions and political and governance systems, coupled with growing means and opportunity, induce it to adopt more assertive and revisionist policies which threaten the peace and stability Beijing requires to meet its developmental goals.

As the Party's leaders seek to translate China's growing economic and military means into influence to advance their international aspirations, they must also carefully balance China's expanding interests with their priorities and resources. For example, the PRC's One Belt, One Road (OBOR) initiative expands China's overseas development and security interests. The CCP has signaled this will drive China towards expanding its overseas military footprint to protect those interests, which the CCP recognizes may provoke pushback from other states. CCP leaders also seem to have recognized that OBOR and other initiatives have sparked concerns about China's intentions, leading Beijing to use less inflammatory and more tailored rhetoric without altering the initiatives' fundamental goals. Similar tensions can be found in China's efforts to advance President Xi's foreign policy goals such as building a "community with a shared future for mankind;" pressing revisions to the international order; and establishing diplomatic relationships in accordance with what China calls "strategic partnerships." China seeks to secure and advance its overseas interests without entirely compromising the relationships and stability crucial to its continued development—China's highest priority at this stage of its strategy. This tension underscores the increasingly complex decisions and risks China's leaders must weigh in implementing their strategy.

China's National Security Concept and Management

In recent years, China has articulated its view of national security as a broad concept that spans the confluence of internal and external threats to the PRC's interests. Party leaders have identified national security as encompassing traditional and non-traditional domestic and foreign threats; the intersection of external influences on internal stability; and economic, cultural, societal, and environmental threats. Additionally, Beijing has taken steps to define a concept for national security; improve the CCP's ability to develop and coordinate national security policy across party, military, and state organs; and raise public awareness of national security concerns. These efforts seek to address longstanding concerns of China's leadership that the country's legacy system of stove-piped party-state organizations was ill equipped to meet the growing national security challenges that China faces.

National Security Concept: The CCP's "Overall National Security Concept" provides the framework for China's national security system, the mission of the Central National Security Commission (CNSC), and the basis of China's national security strategy. First proposed by General Secretary Xi Jinping in 2014, China's state media describes the "Overall National Security Concept" as "a powerful ideological weapon and action guide…." According to the Party, the premise of the concept is that "People's security is the purpose of national security, political security is the foundation of national security, and the supremacy of national interests is the criterion of national security." China's leaders consider people's security, political security, and national interests as mutually reinforcing aspects of national security. Party outlets describe people's security as the purpose because national security fundamentally must serve the Chinese people and the Chinese nation. Similarly, the Party's view of political security as the foundation of national security is described in terms of the maintenance and "ruling status" of the Party and the system of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics. This reflects the Party's certainty that its leadership and systems are indispensable to China's national rejuvenation. Party leaders assess the supremacy of national interests as the criterion or standard by which the Party expects its stewardship of China's national security will be judged: its ability to "resolutely safeguard" China's sovereignty, security, and development interests. China's concept also views development and security as mutually supporting aspects of national security in which "… development is the foundation and purpose of security, and security is the condition and guarantee of development."

Central National Security Commission (CNSC): To improve coordination on national security matters, the CCP created the Central National Security Commission (CNSC) in 2013. At the first CNSC meeting in April 2014, Xi called on the CNSC to establish, "a centralized, unified, highly-effective and authoritative national security leading system." The CNSC advises the Politburo,

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704 Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229 28

oversees the coordination of national security issues across the government, and manages crises, according to academics. Embracing the Party's expansive concept of national security, the CNSC's purview covers internal and external national security matters. The CNSC's mission, codification in law, sprawling definition of national security, and powerful leadership suggest the CNSC may continue to grow as an important party-state organ by the end of Xi's second term in 2022.

Membership. China's top three leaders lead the CNSC: Xi who serves as the CNSC Chairman; Li Keqiang (Premier of the State Council); and probably Li Zhanshu (Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress). According to reports, CNSC membership may include Politburo members, senior government leaders, and senior PLA leaders (including the two Vice Chairman of the CMC). The CNSC General Office is responsible for the commission's daily work and is run by senior CCP officials serving in dual-hatted roles in other positions. The current Director of the CNSC General Office is likely Ding Xuexiang, a longtime political aide to Xi according to media reports. Ding also serves as the Director of the General Office of the Central Committee and is a member of the Politburo. Since May 2018, Chen Wenqing has served as Deputy Director of the CNSC. Chen is also the Minister of State Security and a member of the Politburo.

National Security Strategy. By 2015, the CCP adopted China's first national security strategy outline following the CNSC's establishment. PRC media noted the strategy intends to unify efforts by various departments under the central leadership's guidance. Over the years, China's leaders and media have indicated various national security sub-strategies that cover a variety of issues including Political Security, Homeland Security, Military Security, Economic Security, Cultural Security, Societal Security, Technology Security, Network Security, Nuclear Safety, Ecological Security, Resource Security, and Biosecurity.

In an effort to raise public awareness of the Party's national security concepts and emphasize national security as a civic responsibility, the 2015 *National Security Law* designated April 15 of each year as National Security Education Day. Recent years have seen schools and universities in China mark the day through propaganda and education initiatives to raise public awareness of national security matters—notably foreign espionage. Indicating the reach and depth the Party desires its national security concepts to penetrate into the party-state, the 2015 *National Security Law* also made provincial, autonomous regions, and municipalities responsible for national security work within their administrative areas. This has led to the creation of national security committees in the Party's provincial-level organizations, each headed by the province's party chief. In recent years, provincial leaders have used National Security Education Day to highlight their public education efforts and the passage and implementation of local "national security" regulations such as the establishment of a rewards system for locals to encourage reporting of suspected espionage.

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704   Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China   UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229 29

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

FOREIGN POLICY

Key Takeaways

> China's foreign policy seeks to build a "community with a shared future for mankind" that supports its strategy to realize "the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation."

> China's revisionist approach to the international order derives from the objectives of its national strategy and the Party's political and governing systems.

> China's foreign policy promotes changes to the international system on Beijing's terms and according to ideas and principles it views as essential to its concept of a "community with a shared future for mankind."

> In 2019, the PRC recognized that its armed forces should take a more active role in advancing its foreign policy, highlighting the increasingly global character that Beijing ascribes to its military power.

In 2019, China's diplomatic activities continued to carve a more prominent role for Beijing in international affairs. China has embraced a new diplomatic framework that it terms "Major Power Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics in the New Era," which is guided by the foreign policy direction determined by the CCP Central Committee and set forth in General Secretary Xi Jinping's report at the 19th Party Congress. This framework seeks to advance China's strategy of national rejuvenation by achieving the CCP's two centenary goals, improving the coordination of China's major domestic and international policies, reforming aspects of the international order, adhering to the CCP Central Committee's direction, and defending China's "core and major interests."

The CCP's theory of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics underpins the conduct of China's foreign affairs. Since President Xi Jinping assumed power at the 18th Party Congress in 2012, the CCP Central Committee has placed greater emphasis on China's foreign policy advancing "the cause of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics." Yang Jiechi, a top Party official for the PRC's foreign policy, has claimed that adherence to Socialism with Chinese Characteristics is the "root and soul for our foreign work" and contributes to China's "wisdom" and "programs to solve mankind's problems." Importantly, the CCP's theory shapes the particular contexts and caveats that China applies to its diplomatic concepts and principles. For instance, a tenet of China's approach is adhering to a "path of peaceful development based on mutual respect, cooperation and mutual benefit," —loaded terms that have distinct meanings to Beijing.

4

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704 Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China   UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229 30

According to Party officials, the overall goal of the PRC's foreign policy is to build a "community with a shared future for mankind" that seeks to shift the international system towards an architecture based on the CCP's principles for how nations should interact. This goal is essential to how China's foreign policy supports its broader strategy to achieve national rejuvenation. From China's perspective, establishing this "community" is necessary to set the external security and economic conditions for China's national rejuvenation by "safeguarding world peace" and "promoting common development" according to the Party's principles. China recognizes it cannot achieve its goals in isolation and seeks "all countries" to adopt its diplomatic framework in order to "lead the way forward for mankind" and "open up a road to common development for China and the world." Lastly, PRC officials acknowledge that aspects of the international order are inconsistent with its objectives. China's diplomatic framework seeks to remedy this by promoting changes in a more "just and rational direction."

China's revisionist approach to the international order derives from the objectives of its national strategy and the Party's political and governing systems. The PRC does not frame its revisionist efforts as simply opportunistic challenges to the status quo or a significant deviation from the past. Rather, Beijing is acting upon its longstanding desire to redesign the architecture of the international order to support China's national rejuvenation, efforts that are married with growing resources and opportunities to do so. The PRC's foreign policy seeks to revise aspects of the international order on the Party's terms and in accordance with ideas and principles it views as essential to forging an external environment supportive of China's national rejuvenation. Yang Jiechi refers to global governance reforms as a "key issue of China's foreign work." China's foreign policy framework includes several efforts to promote and accelerate the transformation in the distribution of power, redefine longstanding principles of interstate relations, and reform global governance structures.

Within the context of "Major Power Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics in the New Era," PRC officials have described how China differentiates its goals and relations according to the power relationships among four categories of actors: major powers, peripheral nations, developing nations, and international organizations. Among the major powers, China contends that a new framework for relations is necessary to construct a "stable and balanced development" between the powers—in essence a multipolar system. With peripheral nations, China seeks to strengthen these relationships to create a more favorable environment along its maritime and land borders in accordance with Beijing's "correct view of justice and interests." For developing countries, China emphasizes solidarity and cooperation as well as "actively" carrying out multilateral diplomatic work. This likely refers to the importance that China places on attaining support from developing countries within international

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704 Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China   UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229 31

organizations such as the World Health Organization (WHO), the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), and others.

Another tenet of "Major Power Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics in the New Era" is Beijing's ambition to construct "new types" of bilateral and multilateral relationships among all states. China desires for its concepts of mutual respect, cooperation, and mutual benefit to provide the basis for these "new types" of relations. Yang Jiechi describes China's "new type" relationships as strategic partnerships that follow a new path of "common country-to-country interaction." Although distinct from alliance relationships, China's notion of strategic partnerships are indicative of a relationship that meets China's criteria and is worthy of a higher level of bilateral cooperation. To improve its diplomatic support further, China also seeks to create what it calls a "comprehensive global partnership network" of its strategic partners in order to form a global "circle of friends."

China also promotes reforms to the "global governance system" as part of its diplomatic framework in order to reflect the "profound evolution" of the international order. According to Yang Jiechi, "The global governance system is at an important stage of profound evolution, and global governance has increasingly become the frontier and key issue of China's foreign work." To "seize the opportunity" for reform, China actively participates in the construction of a new, "more balanced" global governance system based upon the Party's principles. For example, China promotes OBOR as an "important practical platform for the concept of the community with a shared future for mankind." OBOR also serves to strengthen China's strategic partnerships, enlarge its network of strategic partners, and advance reforms to the international order to support China's strategy.

In 2019, the PRC continued to expand its diplomatic footprint and increase its diplomatic activities in the pursuit of its foreign policy goals. Over the course of 2019, the PRC's formal diplomatic relations grew to 180 countries, according to Chinese state media, including several countries that bowed to the PRC's pressure and switched their official recognition from Taiwan. Moreover, Beijing contends that 100 countries have agreed to form a "strategic partnership" with China. In 2019, President Xi Jinping made seven foreign trips, visited 12 countries, and attended a number of important international conferences such as the G20 Summit. In June 2019 alone, President Xi traveled to Russia, Central Asia, North Korea, and Japan. President Xi also hosted a number of large-scale diplomatic events in China, including the second "Belt and Road" International Cooperation Summit Forum.

Throughout 2019, the PRC's leaders continued to push diplomatic efforts to strengthen China's economic connectivity across the Indo-Pacific region. China's efforts led to additional countries and international organizations agreeing to cooperate on OBOR. Similarly, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, a multilateral development bank whose establishment President Xi spearheaded,

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704 Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China   UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229 32

increased its membership to 100 countries. China made progress towards finalizing negotiations for the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), a significant trade agreement among 15 regional states. China will likely wield significant influence within the RCEP pact given China's economic weight and India's withdrawal from RCEP negotiations in late 2019.

In 2019, the PRC recognized that its armed forces should take a more active role in advancing its foreign policy, highlighting the increasingly global character that Beijing ascribes to its military power. The PRC's 2019 defense white paper notably described its armed forces as responding, "faithfully to the call for a community with a shared future for mankind." Moreover, the white paper described the "global significance" of China's national defense in the "New Era" and called on the PRC's armed forces to act "in the service" of China's foreign policy goals. The explicit alignment of China's defense policy and armed forces working on the behalf of China's foreign policy within the framework of "Major Power Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics" marks an important distinction that China has typically avoided in the past outside of the context of Taiwan. This change is likely due to Beijing's perception that such an alignment is a strategic necessity in the "New Era" and its confidence in the PLA's expanding capacity to support the PRC's foreign policy.

Further highlighting the alignment of the PRC's defense and foreign policies, the 2019 defense white paper called for China's armed forces to, "actively participate in the reform of global security governance system." China has more prominently recognized the PLA's role in defending China's overseas interests, with the defense white paper noting that the PLA "promotes international security and military cooperation and refines relevant mechanisms for protecting China's overseas interests."

China's military diplomacy contributes to its foreign policy goals to develop strategic partnerships and revise aspects of the international system. The PLA seeks to build a "new model" of security partnerships based on the PRC's foreign policy principles, according to the 2019 defense white paper. China's "new configuration of foreign military relations" aims to deepen China's global partnership network through greater military cooperation. The PLA keeps close contact with the military leadership of neighboring countries through more than 40 reciprocal military visits at and above the service commander-level every year. China has set up defense and security consultations as well as working meeting mechanisms with 17 neighboring countries to keep exchange channels open. Similarly, China seeks to develop its military relationships in Europe and strengthen military exchanges with countries in Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean, and the South Pacific.

China's willingness to engage in military diplomacy with other countries can vary considerably based on its perception of a country's adherence to China's diplomatic framework. China has demonstrated a willingness to engage in higher levels of military cooperation with countries with which it has

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704 Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China   UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229 33

established a strategic partnership in accordance with China's proprietary criteria. For example, China's "comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination" with Russia entails a relatively high degree of military cooperation. Sino-Russian military cooperation occurs in practical forms through exchanges of training, equipment, technology, high-level visits, and other coordination mechanisms. For other strategic partnership countries, China seeks to leverage those relationships to reinforce China's systemic preferences and maintain stability in Beijing's favor. For countries with whom China has not established strategic partnerships, such as the United States, China shapes its military cooperation along more minimalist principles of conflict avoidance that emphasize "non-conflict" and "mutual respect." From China's perspective, these curtailed relationships at least serve its foreign policy goal of ensuring stable relations with major powers.

In this regard, 2019 was a pivotal point for the PLA as it continued to intensify its support to China's foreign policy through active participation in the reform of the global security governance system, and to advance China's strategic partnerships.

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704 Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the 12/21/2023 FL-2023-00013 20231229 34 UNCLASSIFIED

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
People's Republic of China

China's Territorial Disputes in Context

The PRC's use of force in territorial disputes has varied widely since 1949. Some disputes led to war, as in border conflicts with India in 1962 and Vietnam in 1979. China's contested border with the Soviet Union during the 1960s raised the possibility of nuclear war. In recent cases involving land border disputes, China has sometimes been willing to compromise with and even offer concessions to its neighbors. Since 1998, China has settled 11 land-based territorial disputes with six of its neighbors. In recent years, China has employed a more coercive approach to deal with several disputes over maritime features and ownership of potentially rich offshore oil and gas deposits.

China and Japan have overlapping claims to both the continental shelves and the exclusive economic zones (EEZs) in the East China Sea. The East China Sea contains natural gas and oil, though hydrocarbon reserves are difficult to estimate. Japan maintains that an equidistant line from each country involved should separate the EEZs, while China claims an extended continental shelf beyond the equidistant line to the Okinawa Trench. Japan has called for resumed negotiations with China on the principled consensus reached in 2008 that both sides would respect an equidistant median line in the East China Sea for resource development while conducting joint development of oil and natural gas fields in a delineated area spanning the line near the northern end. Japan is concerned that China has conducted oil and gas drilling on the Chinese side of the median line of the East China Sea since 2013. China continues to contest Japan's administration of the nearby Senkaku Islands.

The South China Sea plays an important role in security considerations across East Asia because Northeast Asia relies heavily on the flow of oil and commerce through South China Sea shipping lanes, including more than 80 percent of the crude oil to Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan. China claims sovereignty over the Spratly and Paracel Island groups and other land features within its ambiguous self-proclaimed "nine-dash line" – claims disputed in whole or part by Brunei, the Philippines, Malaysia, and Vietnam. Taiwan, which occupies Itu Aba Island in the Spratly Islands, makes the same territorial assertions as China. In 2009, China protested extended continental shelf submissions in the South China Sea made by Malaysia and Vietnam in two note verbales to the United Nations (UN). In its notes, China stated that it has "indisputable sovereignty over the islands in the South China Sea and the adjacent waters, and enjoys sovereign rights and jurisdiction over the relevant waters as well as the seabed and subsoil thereof" and included its ambiguous "nine-dash line" map. In 2016, a tribunal established pursuant to the Law of the Sea Convention ruled that any PRC claim to "historic rights" in the South China Sea within the area depicted as the "nine-dash line" could not exceed its maritime rights or entitlements as specifically set out in the Law of the Sea Convention. China did not

participate in the arbitration, and PRC officials publicly voiced opposition to the ruling. By the terms of the Convention, the ruling is final and binding on China and the Philippines.

Tensions with India persist along the northeastern border near the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh, which China asserts is part of Tibet and therefore part of China, and near the Aksai Chin region at the western end of the Tibetan Plateau. Chinese and Indian patrols regularly encounter one another along the disputed border, and both sides often accuse one another of border incursions. However, Chinese and Indian forces have regularly interacted since the 2017 Doklam standoff and generally kept disputes from escalating in 2019. After the 22nd round of India-China border talks held in September 2019, China and India agreed for the first time to coordinate patrolling at one disputed point along the Line of Actual Control in Arunachal Pradesh as a confidence-building measure to maintain peace at the border.

Selected Chinese Territorial Claims
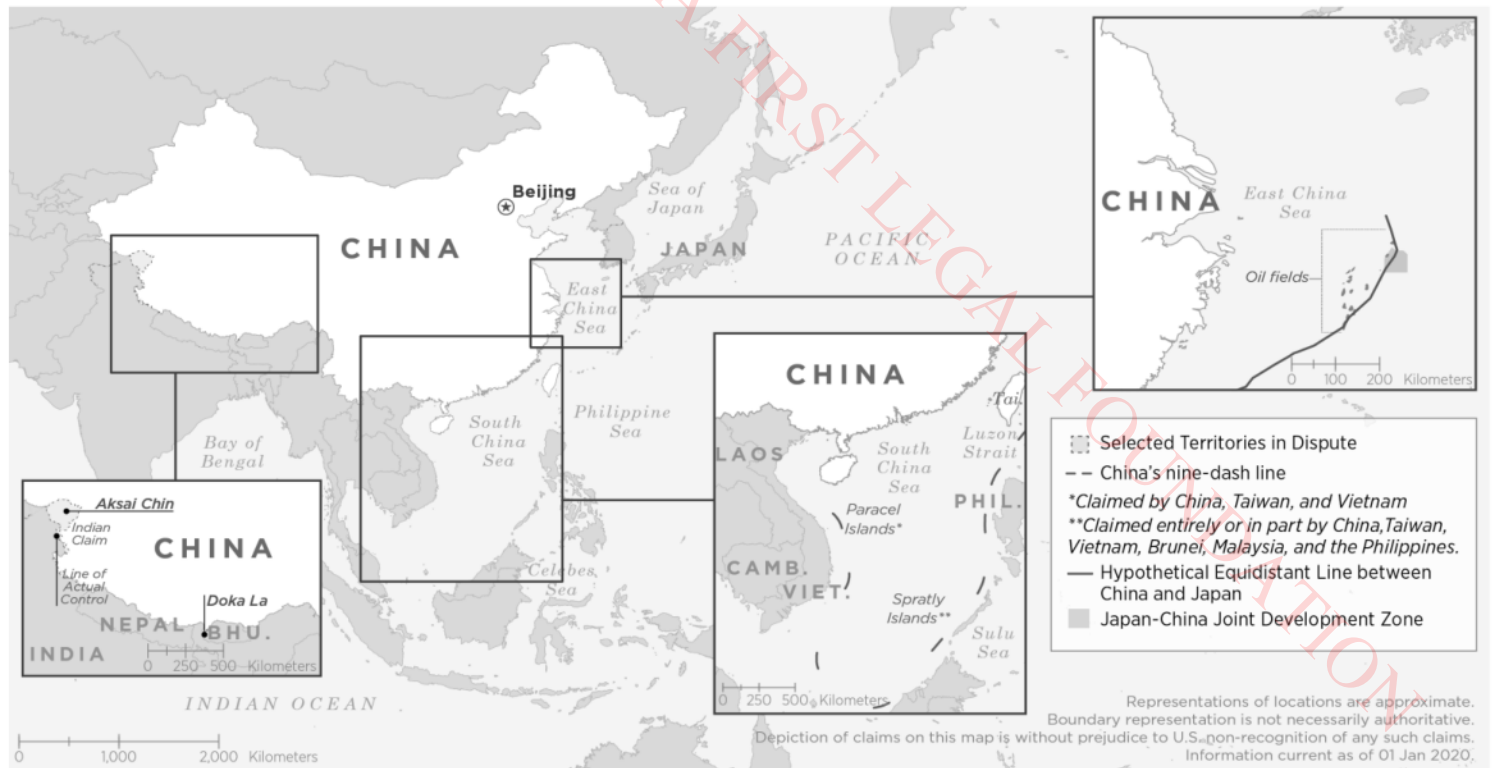
ECONOMIC POLICY

Key Takeaways

> China's military modernization objectives are commensurate with and part of China's broader national development aspirations. China's economic, political, social, and security development efforts are mutually reinforcing and support China's strategy of national rejuvenation.

> The Party prioritizes economic development as the "central task" and the force that drives China's modernization across all areas, including its armed forces.

> China's economic development supports its military modernization not only by providing the means for larger defense budgets, but through deliberate Party-led initiatives such as OBOR and Made in China 2025, as well as the systemic benefits of China's growing national industrial and technological base.

> China's tools of economic statecraft include inducements such as infrastructure investments under OBOR; industrial and technology policies such as Made in China 2025 that seek foreign technology transfers in exchange for market access; protectionist policies and legal barriers for foreign firms to compete in China's domestic market; selective observance of trade commitments; and economic coercion against other states.

China's military modernization objectives are commensurate with and part of China's broader national development aspirations and work in coordination with China's economic policies and systems. China's leaders directly link the pace and scale of the PLA's modernization with the country's overall development. China's economic, political, social, and military development efforts are mutually reinforcing and support its strategy of national rejuvenation. The Party prioritizes China's economic development as the "central task" and frames its economic system as the means of advancing the nation's overall political and social modernity. In particular, China's economic statecraft focuses intensely on advancing what the Party calls the country's "productive forces" (e.g., industry, technology, infrastructure, and human capital) which it views as the means to achieve the country's political and social modernity—including building a "world-class" military. The party-state's relentless efforts to grow and mature China's national industrial and technological base has significant implications for China's military modernization, as well as for China's global economic partners.

Rather than a repudiation of the Party's fundamental ideals, CCP leaders have cast China's partial adoption of market features, part of its "reform and opening up" beginning in the late 1970s, and subsequent economic transformation, as evidence that their strategy to modernize China is succeeding.

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704 Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229 37

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

Party leaders since Deng Xiaoping have consistently rationalized China's market-oriented economic reforms as a necessary regression from socialism needed to account properly for China's historical circumstances, which left it significantly underdeveloped. According to the Party, contemporary China remains at the beginning stage or the "primary stage of socialism" with a long process of socialist modernization ahead.

Basic Economic System. The Party conceives of China's economy as constituting the "basic economic system" in which public ownership is dominant and state, collective, and private forms of ownership develop side by side. The basic economic system is comprised of China's public ownership economy and the multi-ownership economy.

Economic Development Goals. Despite headwinds in China's economic performance in recent years, China has generally continued to pursue the economic policy objectives determined by the CCP Central Committee and set forth in Xi's report to the 19th Party Congress in 2017. According to Xi's report, China's economic goals are: (1) furthering supply-side structural reform; (2) making China a country of innovators; (3) pursuing a rural vitalization strategy; (4) implementing the coordinated regional development strategy; (5) accelerating efforts to improve the socialist market economy; and, (6) making new ground in pursuing opening up on all fronts. The CCP sets more specific development goals in its Five-Year Plans (FYPs). The PRC is currently executing the 13th FYP and the CCP is formulating the 14th FYP that will cover 2021-2025. The priorities and goals in the FYPs not only apply to the government and the public ownership economy, but also serve as implicit guidance from the Party to the multi-ownership economy.

Economic Conditions. In 2019, China's efforts to stem domestic credit growth and U.S.-China trade tensions exacerbated a slowdown in China's economy. In March 2019, China lowered its annual real gross domestic product growth target for 2019 to between 6 and 6.5 percent, from the previous year's target of "about" 6.5 percent. In the first three quarters of 2019, China posted an official gross domestic product growth rate of 6.2 percent marking the slowest rate of growth in nearly 30 years. China's economic growth has slowed down due to decreases in state-led infrastructure investment and urbanization, as well as China's decision since 2016 to increase oversight on the financial sector and risky lending.

Economic Policies and Practices. The PRC's introduction of some features of a market economy within the "basic economic system" without a full transition to a market economy has resulted in laws, regulations, and policies that generally disadvantage foreign firms vis- à-vis their Chinese counterparts in terms of tradable goods, services sectors, market access, and foreign direct investment. Examples of China's unfair economic policies and trade practices include its support to domestic industries at

12

the expense of foreign counterparts, commercial joint venture requirements, technology transfer requirements, subsidies to lower the cost of inputs, sustaining excess capacity in multiple industries, sector-specific limits on foreign direct investment, discriminatory cybersecurity and data transfer rules, insufficient intellectual property rights enforcement, inadequate transparency, and lack of market access—particularly in the information and communications technology (ICT), agriculture and service sectors.

In March 2018, an investigation by the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) under Section 301 of the Trade Act of 1974 determined that the acts, policies, and practices of the PRC government related to technology transfer, intellectual property, and innovation are unreasonable or discriminatory and burden or restrict U.S. commerce, resulting in harm to the U.S. economy of at least $50 billion per year. Additionally, the USTR's annual Special 301 Report, which identifies trading partners that do not adequately or effectively protect and enforce intellectual property rights and the findings of its Review of Notorious Markets for Counterfeiting and Piracy, has repeatedly identified China as a country that has serious intellectual property rights deficiencies. These reports, for example, have repeatedly identified China as the world's leading source of counterfeit and pirated goods. Since 2006, USTR has continually placed China on its Priority Watch List, placement on which indicates particular problems with respect to intellectual property protection, enforcement, or market access for U.S. persons relying on intellectual property.

The USTR's 2020 Special 301 Report states: "China's placement on the Priority Watch List reflects U.S. concerns with China's system of pressuring and coercing technology transfer, and the continued need for fundamental structural changes to strengthen intellectual property protection and enforcement, [to include] trade secret theft, obstacles to protecting trademarks, online piracy and counterfeiting, the high-volume manufacturing and export of counterfeit goods, and impediments to pharmaceutical innovation."

Market access remains challenging for foreign firms, as China's restriction of inbound investment results in persistent underperformance in other countries' services exports, particularly in the banking, insurance, Internet-related, professional, and retail services sectors. Apart from the Section 301 investigation, the United States has placed sanctions on specific Chinese firms for violating U.S. sanctions against other states, stealing U.S. intellectual property, having ties to the PLA in dual-use sectors, and providing surveillance technology to PRC authorities in Xinjiang. In 2019, the Chinese telecommunications firm Huawei came under greater scrutiny due to concerns of its close links with the PRC government and its evasion of sanctions on Iran.

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704 Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229 39

A large portion of China's economic output results from government and policy-directed investments rather than market-based forces. China pursues state-directed investment overseas and encourages mergers and acquisitions. Along with heavy investments in infrastructure and commodities to support its strategic firms, increase economic engagement, and improve economic security, China is investing in technologies that will be foundational for future innovations with both commercial and military applications.

China obtains foreign technology through foreign direct investment, overseas acquisitions, legal technology imports, the establishment of foreign research and development (R&D) centers, joint ventures, research and academic partnerships, talent recruitment, and industrial and cyber espionage and theft.

Recent legal proceedings highlight numerous cases of China's efforts to obtain technology and knowledge through theft of trade secrets and economic espionage. In November 2019, a U.S. Federal grand jury indicted a PRC national who had worked as an imaging scientist for Monsanto and its subsidiary, The Climate Corporation, on charges related to economic espionage and stealing trade secrets for China. Federal officials stopped him from boarding a flight on a one-way trip to China in 2017 with a proprietary algorithm according to the U.S. Department of Justice. In December 2018, the U.S. Department of Justice indicted two PRC nationals associated with a hacking group operating in China, known as Advanced Persistent Threat 10 (APT10), for conspiracy to commit computer intrusions, conspiracy to commit wire fraud, and aggravated identity theft. They worked for a Chinese company in association with the PRC Ministry of State Security (MSS) to conduct computer intrusions, resulting in the theft of hundreds of gigabytes of sensitive data involving aviation, space and satellite technology, manufacturing technology, pharmaceutical technology, oil and gas exploration and production technology, communications technology, computer processor technology, and maritime technology. In August 2017, a U.S. cybersecurity firm identified a separate hacking group in China, referred to as APT41, which has been operating since 2012. APT41 targeted industries associated with the PRC's economic priorities. The hackers repeatedly targeted tech groups developing machine learning, autonomous vehicles, medical imaging, semiconductors, processors, and enterprise cloud computing software.

The PRC's recent economic policies have promoted innovation focused on strengthening domestic industry, while placing additional restrictions on foreign firms. Recognizing that some of its initiatives such as "Made in China 2025" and OBOR have sparked concerns about China's intentions, China's leaders have adopted less inflammatory rhetoric when promoting these initiatives without altering their fundamental strategic goals.

> *Made in China 2025*: First announced by the PRC in May 2015, the "Made in China 2025" plan seeks to increase China's domestic innovation by setting higher targets for domestic manufacturing in strategic industries such as robotics, power equipment, and next-generation information technology by 2020 and 2025. This plan seeks to strengthen China's domestic enterprises through awarding subsidies and other incentives while increasing pressure on foreign firms to transfer technology in order to have market access in China. "Made in China 2025" came under criticism from advanced countries for unfairly favoring China's domestic enterprises at the expense of foreign participants in China's markets. Increasingly aware and sensitive to these concerns, by June 2018, China began avoiding references to "Made in China 2025" in major policy papers. The PRC government ordered its media outlets to downplay use of the term in June 2018. Key events that PRC leaders use to set strategic directives have also avoided references to "Made in China," including the 2019 Central Economic Work Conference and the NPC. Despite the adjustments in its narrative, China has largely implementing the policies behind "Made in China 2025."

> *One Belt, One Road (OBOR)*: Launched by the PRC in 2013, OBOR seeks to foster closer economic integration with countries along China's periphery and beyond thereby shaping these countries' interests to align with the PRC's, while promoting regional stability and dulling criticism over the PRC's approach to issues it views as sensitive. OBOR also helps China's state-owned enterprises (SOEs) find productive uses for their excess capacity in the cement, steel and construction sectors, as well as creating investment opportunities for China's large reserve of savings. Countries participating in OBOR could develop economic dependence on Chinese capital, which the PRC could leverage to pursue its geopolitical interests. The growth of China's global economic footprint also makes its interests increasingly vulnerable to domestic political transitions in participating countries, international and regional turmoil, terrorism, piracy, and serious natural disasters and epidemics, which places new requirements on China to address these threats. Some OBOR projects could create potential military advantages for the PRC, such as PLA access to selected foreign ports to pre-position the necessary logistics support to sustain naval deployments in waters as distant as the Indian Ocean, Mediterranean Sea, and Atlantic Ocean to protect its growing interests. In 2019, Beijing hosted the Second Belt and Road Forum, during which the PRC sought to address growing international skepticism stemming from concerns over corruption, indebtedness, environmental sustainability, and lack of transparency surrounding OBOR projects.

> *Digital Silk Road*: The PRC's Digital Silk Road initiative, announced in 2015 as a digital subset of OBOR, seeks to build China-centric digital infrastructure, export industrial overcapacity, facilitate expansion of Chinese technology corporations, and access large repositories of data. The PRC

15

also hopes the Digital Silk Road will increase international e-commerce by reducing cross-border trade barriers and establishing regional logistics centers by promoting e-commerce through digital free trade zones. China is investing in digital infrastructure abroad, including next-generation cellular networks—such as fifth-generation (5G) networks—fiber optic cables, undersea cables, and data centers. The initiative also includes developing advanced technologies including satellite navigation systems, artificial intelligence (AI), and quantum computing for domestic use and export.

Legal Framework. The PRC in recent years has implemented new laws that seek to place further restrictions on foreign firms while creating or strengthening the legal framework for the Party's national security concepts and in some cases furthering its Military-Civil Fusion (MCF) Development Strategy (discussed in the next section):

> *National Security Law*: Adopted in July 2015, the law limits foreign access to the information and communications technology (ICT) market in China on national security grounds.

> *Counterterrorism Law*: Adopted in December 2015, among its provisions, the law requires telecommunications operators and Internet service providers to provide information, decryption, and other technical support to public and state security organizations "conducting prevention and investigation of terrorist activities."

> *Cyber Security Law*: The law, which went into effect in June 2017, promotes development of indigenous technologies and restricts sales of foreign ICT in China. The law also requires that foreign companies submit ICT for government-administered national security reviews, store data in China, and seek government approval before transferring data outside of China.

> *Intelligence Law*: Passed in June 2017, the law allows authorities to monitor and investigate foreign and domestic individuals and organizations to protect national security. Specifically, it allows authorities to use or seize vehicles, communication devices, and buildings to support intelligence collection efforts.

> *Cryptography Law*: Adopted in October 2019 and coming into effect in 2020, this law requires entities working on cryptography to have management systems in place to ensure sufficient security for their encryption. Although the law encourages development of commercial encryption technology, its use cannot harm national security or the public good. It provides for the State Cryptography Administration and its local agencies to have complete access to cryptography systems and the data protected by those systems.

16

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704 Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229 42

In March 2019, the PRC's NPC passed a new Foreign Investment Law with the stated objective of improving the business environment for foreign investors and leveling the playing field between foreign businesses and Chinese private firms and SOEs. The law passed in just three months, which reflects an unusually fast turnaround in China where the same level of legislation usually takes years. PRC officials have indicated that swift passage of the law was to facilitate U.S.-China trade talks, and the law appears to respond to a number of issues raised by the U.S. Trade Representative's Section 301 report related to unfair Chinese trade practices related to intellectual property, technology transfer, and innovation. Despite the law's stated objective, its wording is vague and the most substantial provisions are not new.

Economic Coercion. The PRC employs economic coercion to advance its objectives during periods of political tensions with other countries. For example, in response to legislation in 2019 that would lead to a ban on Huawei operating in Germany, China's ambassador alluded to retaliation against German automobile sales in China. In 2017, China used economic and diplomatic pressure in an attempt to urge South Korea to reconsider its approval for the United States to deploy the Terminal High-Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system within its territory. In 2016, after the visit of the Dalai Lama to Mongolia, the PRC suspended talks on a major assistance loan, worsening Mongolia's fiscal challenges and eventually driving it to seek a bailout from the International Monetary Fund. China also increased fees on imports of mining products from Mongolia and temporarily closed an important border crossing.

17

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704 Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China   UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229 43

MILITARY-CIVIL FUSION DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

Key Takeaways

> The PRC pursues its Military-Civil Fusion (MCF) Development Strategy to "fuse" its economic and social development strategies with its security strategies to build an integrated national strategic system and capabilities in support of China's national rejuvenation goals.

> Although China's MCF strategy includes objectives to develop and acquire advanced dual-use technology for military purposes and deepen reform of the national defense science and technology industries, its broader purpose is to strengthen all of China's instruments of national power by "fusing" aspects of its economic, military, and social governance.

> China's MCF development strategy encompasses six interrelated efforts: (1) fusing the China's defense industrial base and its civilian technology and industrial base; (2) integrating and leveraging science and technology innovations across military and civilian sectors; (3) cultivating talent and blending military and civilian expertise and knowledge; (4) building military requirements into civilian infrastructure and leveraging civilian construction for military purposes; (5) leveraging civilian service and logistics capabilities for military purposes; and, (6) expanding and deepening China's national defense mobilization system to include all relevant aspects of its society and economy for use in competition and war.

> Although MCF has broader purposes than acquiring foreign technology, in practice, MCF means there is not a clear line between the PRC's civilian and military economies, raising due diligence costs for U.S. and global entities that do not desire to contribute to the PRC's military modernization.

The PRC pursues its Military-Civil Fusion (MCF) Development Strategy as a nationwide endeavor that seeks to "fuse" its economic and social development strategies with its security strategies to build an integrated national strategic system and capabilities in support of China's national rejuvenation goals. The Party's leaders view MCF as a critical element of their strategy for the PRC to become a "great modern socialist country" which includes becoming a world leader in science and technology (S&T) and developing a "world-class" military. Although China's MCF strategy includes objectives to develop and acquire advanced dual-use technology for military purposes and deepen reform of the national defense S&T industries, its broader purpose is to strengthen all of China's instruments of national power by "fusing" aspects of its economic, military, and social governance.

18

China pursues MCF through six interrelated efforts. Each effort overlaps with the others and has both domestic and international components. The Party seeks to implement the MCF Development Strategy across every level of China's party-state from the highest national-level organs down to provinces and township. China refers to these six aspects as "systems," which may also be understood as mutually supporting lines of effort or components. The six systems in the MCF Development Strategy are:

The Advanced Defense Science, Technology, and Industrial System. This system focuses on fusing China's defense industrial base and its civilian technology and industrial base. This includes expanding the private sector's participation in China's defense industrial base and supply chains as well as improving the efficiency, capacity, and flexibility of defense and civilian industrial and manufacturing processes. This broader participation seeks to transfer mature technologies both ways across military and civilian sectors, with the goal to produce outsized benefits for both sectors. This also aims to increase the competitiveness within the PRC's defense industrial base in which one or two defense SOEs dominate an entire sector. This MCF system also seeks to advance China's self-reliance in manufacturing key industrial technologies, equipment, and materials to reduce its dependence on imports, including those with dual-uses. The PRC's MCF-influenced industrial and technology endeavors include *Made in China 2025* that sets targets for China to achieve greater self-sufficiency in key industrial areas such as aerospace, communications, and transportation.

The Military-Civil Coordinated Technology Innovation System. This MCF system seeks to maximize the full benefits and potential of the country's S&T development. Consistent with the CCP leadership's view that high technology and innovation are critical to strengthening China's composite national power, this system develops and integrates advanced technologies across civilian and military entities, projects and initiatives—with benefits flowing in both directions. This includes using cutting-edge civilian technology for military applications or to more broadly advance military S&T as well as using military advancements to push civilian economic development. Although related to the Advanced Defense Science, Technology, and Industrial System, this system largely focuses on fusing innovations and advance in basic and applied research. Specific efforts in this MCF system include strengthening and promoting civilian and military R&D in advanced dual-use technologies and cross-pollinating military and civilian basic research. Additional efforts include promoting the sharing of scientific resources, expanding the institutions involved in defense research, and fostering greater collaboration across defense and civilian research communities. This system also seeks to foster "new-type" research institutions with mixed funding sources and lean management structures that are more dynamic, efficient, and effective than the PRC's wholly state-owned research bodies. Examples of

19

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704 Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 12/21/2023 FL-2023-00013 20231229 45

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
UNCLASSIFIED

MCF-influenced dual-use S&T endeavors include China's Innovation Driven Development Strategy and Artificial Intelligence National Project.

The Fundamental Domain Resource Sharing System. This system includes building military requirements into the construction of civilian infrastructure from the ground up as well as leveraging China's civilian construction and logistics capacities and capabilities for military purposes. This includes factoring military requirements and dual-use purposes into building civilian private and public transportation infrastructure such as airports, port facilities, railways, roads, and communications networks. This also extends to infrastructure projects in dual-use domains such as space and undersea as well as mobile communications networks and topographical and meteorological systems. Another element seeks to set common military and civilian standards to make infrastructure easier to use in emergencies and wartime. This aspect of MCF has arguably the greatest reach into the PRC's local governance systems as military requirements inform infrastructure construction at the province, county, and township levels. The influence of this aspect of MCF is visible in the PRC's major land reclamations and military construction activities in the South China Sea, which brought together numerous government entities, the PLA, law enforcement, construction companies, and commercial entities. It may also have important implications for the PRC's overseas infrastructure projects and investments under OBOR as the PRC seeks to establish a more robust overseas logistics and basing infrastructure to allow the PLA to project and sustain military power.

The Military Personnel (Talent) Cultivation System. This MCF system seeks to blend and cultivate military and civilian S&T expertise through education programs, personnel exchanges, and knowledge sharing. The purpose of this effort is to improve the utilization of experts able to participate in S&T projects irrespective of whether they are military or civilian (or even foreign) experts and allow expertise to flow more freely across sectors. This aspect of MCF also seeks to reform China's talent cultivation system, which encompasses hundreds of talent recruitment plans, in order to improve China's human capital, build a highly skilled workforce, and recruit foreign experts to provide access to know-how, expertise, and foreign technology. It takes into account all levels of education from the Party's nationwide "patriotic education" programs for children to the matriculation of post-doctorate researchers within China and at institutions abroad. Many of the PRC's named "talents" programs are likely influenced by MCF planning, as are reforms in its military academies, national universities, and research institutes.

The Socialized Support and Sustainment System for the PLA. This system entails two major efforts that seeks to shift the PLA away from its inefficient self-contained logistics and sustainment systems and towards modern streamlined logistics and support services. First, it seeks to harness civilian public sector and private sector resources to improve the PLA's basic services and support

functions—ranging from food, housing, and healthcare services. The concept is to gain efficiencies in costs and personnel by outsourcing non-military services previously performed by the PLA while also improving the quality of life for military personnel. Second, it seeks to further the construction of a modern military logistics system that is able to support and sustain the PLA in joint operations and for overseas operations. This system seeks to fuse the PLA Joint Logistic Support Force's (JLSF) efforts to integrate the military's joint logistics functions with the PRC's advanced civilian logistics, infrastructure, and delivery service companies and networks. These arrangements seek to provide the PLA with modern transportation and distribution, warehousing, information sharing, and other types of support in peacetime and wartime. This fusion also seeks to provide the PLA with a logistics system that is more efficient, higher capacity, higher quality, and global in reach.

The National Defense Mobilization System. This MCF system binds the other systems as it seeks to mobilize China's military, economic, and social resources to defend or advance China's sovereignty, security and development interests. The Party views China's growing strength as only useful to the extent that the party-state can mobilize it. China views mobilization as the ability to use precisely the instrument, capability, or resource needed, when needed, for the duration needed. Within the PLA, the reforms in 2015-16 elevated defense mobilization to a department called the National Defense Mobilization Department (NDMD), which reports directly to the Central Military Commission (CMC). The NDMD plays an important role in this system by organizing and overseeing the PLA's reserve forces, militia, and provincial military districts and below. This system also seeks to integrate the state emergency management system into the national defense mobilization system in order to achieve a coordinated military-civilian response during a crisis. Consistent with the Party's view of international competition, many MCF mobilization initiatives not only seek to reform how China mobilizes for war and responds to emergencies, but how the economy and society can be leveraged to support China's strategic needs for international competition.

Development and Significance. The Party has explored the concept of leveraging or integrating the combined contributions of the military and civilian sectors since the PRC's founding. The current MCF concept initially took root in the early 2000s as the Party sought methods to enhance China's overall development. This led Party leaders to call for improving "military-civilian integration" that echoed the collaboration between the defense and civilian sectors that China observed in the United States and other developed countries. Implementation of these efforts stalled due to a lack of centralized government control and the organizational barriers that exist across the party-state. Coinciding with the 11th Five Year Plan (FYP) (2006-2010), China began replacing "military-civilian integration" with "military-civilian fusion." In 2007, Party officials publicly noted the change from

"integration" to "fusion" was not merely cosmetic, but represented a "theoretical 'great leap' following a long period of trial and error."

Since that time, MCF's ambitions have grown in scope and scale as the Party has come to view it as a means to bridge China's economic and social development with its security development in support of the PRC's national strategy to renew China. As such, the Party has continued to elevate MCF's importance. In 2015, the CCP Central Committee elevated the MCF Development Strategy to a national-level strategy to serve as a "bridge" between the PRC's national development strategy and its national security strategy that seeks to build an "integrated national strategic system and capabilities," all of which support the PRC's goal of national rejuvenation.

Management and Implementation. The overall management and implementation of the MCF Development Strategy involves the most powerful organs in the party-state: the Politburo, the State Council (notably the National Development and Reform Commission), and the CMC. In addition to signifying its importance, the CCP Central Committee's elevation of the MCF Development Strategy to a national-level strategy also intended to overcome obstacles to implementation across the party-state.

This elevation also led to the establishment of the Central Commission for Military Civilian Fusion Development (CCMCFD) in 2017, chaired by General Secretary Xi Jinping, Premier Li Keqiang, several other members of the Politburo Standing Committee, two State Councilors, both CMC Vice Chairmen, 12 Ministry-level leaders, and others. The stated objective of the CCMCFD is to build China's "national strategic system and capabilities." This commission works to improve the "top-level design" of MCF and overcome impediments to implementation. The elevation of the MCF Development Strategy and the creation of the CCMCFD signals the importance that Party leaders place on MCF and the scope and scale of the strategy's ambitions.

MCF Linkages. Each MCF system entails linkages between dozens of organizations and government entities, including:

> *Ministry-level organizations from the State Council:* Examples include the National Development and Reform Commission, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, Ministry of Education, and key state entities such as the State Administration of Science and Technology in National Defense and others.

> *Lead military organs subordinate to the Central Military Commission*: CMC Strategic Planning Office, Joint Political, Logistics, and Equipment Development Departments, as well as operational units and the regional military structure at the Military District and Sub-District levels; military universities

22

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704   Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229 48

and academies such as National Defense University, Academy of Military Science, National University of Defense Technology, and service institutions.

> *State-sponsored educational institutions, research centers, and key laboratories*: prominent examples include the "Seven Sons of National Defense" (Harbin Institute of Technology, Nanjing University of Science and Technology, Northwestern Polytechnical Institute, Beijing Institute of Technology, Harbin Engineering University, Beihang University, Nanjing University of Aeronautics and Astronautics), as well as certain PLA-affiliated laboratories of Tsinghua University, Beijing University, and Shanghai Jiaotong University, North University of China, and others.

> *Defense industry*: the ten major defense SOEs still fill their traditional roles providing weapons and equipment to the military services. Many defense SOEs consist of dozens of subsidiaries, sub-contractors, and subordinate research institutes.

> *Other SOEs and quasi-private companies*: high profile examples include PRC high-tech corporations and important SOEs like China Ocean Shipping Company (COSCO), China National Offshore Oil Company, and major construction companies that have roles in OBOR projects as well as helping the PRC build out occupied terrain features in the South China Sea.

> *Provincial governments*: In practice, many MCF efforts involve partnerships between provincial or city government entities and military district departments and PLA departments.

23

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704   Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China   UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229 49

DEFENSE POLICY AND MILITARY STRATEGY

Key Takeaways

> The PRC has stated its defense policy aims to safeguard its sovereignty, security, and development interests. China's military strategy remains based on the concept of "active defense."

> China's leaders stress the imperative of strengthening the PLA into a "world-class" military by the end of 2049 as an essential element of its strategy to rejuvenate China into a "great modern socialist country."

> The CCP has not defined what it means by its ambition to have a "world-class" military by the end of 2049. Within the context of China's national strategy, however, it is likely that China will aim to develop a military by mid-century that is equal to—or in some cases superior to—the U.S. military, or that of any other great power that China views as a threat to its sovereignty, security, and development interests.

> In 2019, the PLA remained primarily oriented towards longstanding regional threats while emphasizing a greater global role for itself in accordance with China's defense policy and military strategy.

> Throughout 2019, the PLA continued to pursue ambitious modernization efforts, implement major organizational reforms, and improve its combat readiness.

The PRC has stated its defense policy aims to safeguard its national sovereignty, security, and development interests. China's leaders view these interests as foundational to their national strategy. In 2019, China's defense policy and military strategy primarily oriented the PLA towards longstanding regional threats. At the same time, China's leaders increasingly cast the armed forces as a practical instrument to defend Beijing's expanding global interests and to advance its foreign policy goals within the framework of "Major Power Diplomacy in a New Era." China's military strategy is based on "active defense," a concept that adopts the principles of strategic defense in combination with offensive action at the operational and tactical levels. To adapt the PRC's armed forces to long-term trends in global military affairs and meet the country's evolving national security needs, China's leaders stress the imperative of meeting key military transformation targets set in 2020 and 2035. These milestones seek to align the PLA's transformation with China's overall national modernization so that by the end of 2049, China will field a "world-class" military. Throughout 2019, the PLA continued to

pursue these ambitious modernization efforts, implement major organizational reforms, and improve its combat readiness.

Strategic Assessment. A key driver of the PRC's defense policy is how China's leaders perceive the relative threats and opportunities facing the country's comprehensive development. In 2019, the PRC published a new defense white paper, China's National Defense in the New Era, which outlined China's views of the international and "Asia-Pacific" security landscape and offered insights into its defense policy and military strategy. According to the paper, Beijing views the international environment as undergoing "profound changes unseen in a century." The PRC presents a relatively optimistic assessment that, "… the configuration of strategic power is becoming more balanced. The pursuit of peace, stability and development has become a universal aspiration of the international community with forces for peace predominating over elements of war."

Yet the PRC also concludes that "international strategic competition is on the rise" and expresses deep concerns at what it sees as growing sources of instability in the near-term. Offering no introspection on Beijing's own role in stirring geopolitical tensions through its economic practices, military activities and modernization, excessive maritime territorial claims, or efforts to revise aspects of global governance, the PRC describes the international system as being "…undermined by growing hegemonism, power politics, unilateralism and constant regional conflicts and wars." Similarly, the PRC contends that global military competition is intensifying and that "major countries" are adjusting their security and military strategies, reorganizing their militaries, and are developing new types of combat forces to "seize the strategic commanding heights in military competition."

Defense Policy. The PRC's stated defense policy is to "resolutely safeguard" its sovereignty, security, and development interests, according to its 2019 defense white paper—offering continuity with past statements by PRC senior leaders and other official documents. The 2019 defense white paper also identifies China's national defense aims that support these interests, likely offered in order of importance:

> to deter and resist aggression;

> to safeguard national political security, the people's security and social stability;

> to oppose and contain "Taiwan independence";

> to crack down on proponents of separatist movements such as "Tibet independence" and the creation of "East Turkistan";

> to safeguard national sovereignty, unity, territorial integrity and security;

25

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704   Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China   UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229 51

> to safeguard China's maritime rights and interests;

> to safeguard China's security interests in outer space, electromagnetic space and cyberspace;

> to safeguard China's overseas interests; and,

> to support the sustainable development of the country.

Party-Army Relations

The PLA is the principal armed wing of the CCP and, as a party-army, does not directly serve the state. The CCP Central Military Commission (CMC), currently chaired by Xi Jinping, is the highest military decision-making body in China. As a party-army, the PLA is a political actor. As a constituency within the Party, it participates in the PRC's political and governance systems. As the ultimate guarantor of the Party's rule and political and governance systems, the PLA's missions include formal and informal domestic security missions in addition to its national defense missions. Although visible differences between the CCP and the PLA are extremely rare, in recent years outside observers have pointed out that Party leaders and official propaganda have increasingly emphasized the principles of the Party's absolute control over the PLA and the PLA's loyalty to the Party, despite the fact that the officer corps is composed almost entirely of Party members.

Military Strategic Guidelines. The Chairman of the CMC issues military strategic guidelines to the PLA that provide the foundation of China's military strategy. The military strategic guidelines set the general principles and concepts for the use of force in support of the CCP's strategic objectives, provide guidance on the threats and conditions the armed forces should be prepared to face, and set priorities for planning, modernization, force structure, and readiness. The CCP leadership issues new military strategic guidelines whenever they perceive it necessary to shift the PLA's priorities based on the Party's perceptions of China's security environment or changes in the character of warfare.

Recent trends suggest China may have recently reviewed and adjusted its military strategic guidelines. In early 2019, PRC state media indicated senior-level meetings were being held to "establish the military strategy of the 'New Era.'" The PRC's 2019 defense white paper states that the PLA is implementing guidelines for the "New Era" that, "…actively adapt to the new landscape of strategic competition, the new demands of national security, and new developments in modern warfare…" PRC official media in the latter half of 2019 echoed these themes and described the guidelines as

26

constituting a notable change. The PRC's defense white paper may reflect changes in the guidelines given its emphasis on the intensification of global military competition, the increase in the pace of technological change, and the military modernization themes introduced by General Secretary Xi at the 19th Party Congress.

These developments are notable because the CCP leadership has issued new military strategic guidelines only a few times since the end of the Cold War. In 1993, the CMC under Jiang Zemin directed the PLA to prepare to win "local wars" under "high-tech conditions" after observing U.S. military operations in the Gulf War. In 2004, the CMC under Hu Jintao ordered the military to focus on winning "local wars under informatized conditions." In 2014, the CMC under Chairman Xi Jinping issued new guidelines that placed greater focus on conflicts in the maritime domain and fighting "informatized local wars."

Military Strategy: Active Defense. China's military strategy is based on active defense, a concept that adopts the principles of strategic defense in combination with offensive action at the operational and tactical levels. Active defense is neither a purely defensive strategy nor limited to territorial defense. Active defense encompasses offensive and preemptive aspects. It can apply to the PRC acting externally to defend its interests. Active defense is rooted on the principle of avoiding initiating armed conflict, but responding forcefully if challenged. China's 2019 defense white paper reaffirmed active defense as the basis for its military strategy. Minister of National Defense Gen Wei Fenghe reiterated this principle of active defense in his speech at the Ninth Beijing Xiangshan Forum in 2019, stating that China "will not attack unless attacked but will surely counterattack if attacked."

First adopted by the CCP in the 1930s, active defense has served as the basis for the PRC's military strategy since its founding in 1949. Although China has adjusted and tailored the specifics of active defense over time based on changes in strategic circumstances, its general principles have remained consistent. Contemporary Chinese writings describe the tenets of active defense as:

> *Adhere to a position of self-defense and stay with striking back.* This describes the basic principle for the use of military force under active defense. The PRC's 2019 defense white paper describes this principle as, "We will not attack unless we are attacked, but we will surely counterattack if attacked." Active defense may entail defensive counterattacks in response to an attack or preemptively striking an adversary preparing to attack.

> *Combine strategic defense with operational and tactical offense.* This aspect offers two approaches to warfare influenced by Mao Zedong's notion of using defense and offensive in turns. First, active defense may involve offensive campaigns, operations, and tactical actions in support of the strategic

27

defense. These may occur rapidly and along "external lines." Second, it uses strategic defense to weaken the enemy and set the conditions to transition into strategic offense in order to secure victory.

> *Taking the operational initiative.* This aspect emphasizes the effective use of offensives at the operational and tactical levels, avoiding enemy strengths, and concentrating on building asymmetric advantages against enemy weaknesses to "change what is inferior into what is superior."

> *Strive for the best possibilities.* This calls for thorough peacetime military preparations and planning based on fighting the most challenging threat under the most complicated circumstances "in order to get the best results." This aspect stresses the importance of setting conditions in advance and suggests it is preferable to be prepared and not fight, than to fight unprepared.

> *The dialectical unity of restraining war and winning war.* This tenet seeks to resolve the dilemma that using too little force may protract a war instead of stopping it while the unconstrained use of force may worsen a war and make it harder to stop. Calling for the "effective restraint of warfare," this tenet seeks to avoid war first through sufficient military preparations and powerful conventional and strategic forces that act in concert with political and diplomatic efforts to "subdue the enemy's troops without fighting." If war is unavoidable, however, this aspect calls for restraining war by taking the "opening move" and "using war to stop war."

> *Soldiers and the people are the source of victory.* This integrates the concept of active defense with the concept of "people's war." People's war comprises subordinate military strategies, "guerrilla war" and "protracted war" that Mao saw as a means to harness the capacity of China's populace as a source of political legitimacy and mobilization to generate military power. Contemporary Chinese writings link people's war to national mobilization and participation in wartime as a whole-of-nation concept of warfare.

Military Missions and Tasks. The CMC directs the PLA to be ready and able to perform specific missions and tasks to support the Party's strategy and defend the PRC's sovereignty, security, and development interests. The PLA's missions and tasks in the "New Era" include: safeguarding China's territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests; maintaining combat readiness; conducting military training under real combat conditions; safeguarding China's nuclear weapons and its interests in the space and cyber domains; countering terrorism and maintaining stability; protecting the PRC's overseas interests; and participating in emergency response and disaster relief.

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704   Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China   UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229 54

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

The PRC's Internal Security Forces

The PRC's internal security forces consist primarily of the Ministry of Public Security (MPS), the Ministry of State Security (MSS), the People's Armed Police (PAP), the PLA, and the militia. The Party relies on these forces to address challenges ranging from protests over political, social, environmental, or economic problems, to terrorism and natural disasters. For example, in 2019, the PRC's internal security forces in Xinjiang oversaw extensive detentions of Uyghurs at detention camps, mass surveillance, suppression of religious activities, and searches of personal property. In 2019, the PRC deployed the PAP in Shenzhen and probably in Hong Kong to bolster PLA Hong Kong Garrison elements positioned to respond to protests. The PRC's 2019 defense white paper claimed that since 2012 it has deployed 950,000 PLA and PAP soldiers and 1.41 million militia personnel for domestic emergency response and disaster relief.

Ministry of Public Security (MPS). The MPS leads the PRC's civilian national police, which serves as the first-line force for public order. The key mission of the MPS is domestic law enforcement and the "maintenance of social security and order" with duties including anti-rioting and anti-terrorism.

Ministry of State Security (MSS). The MSS is the PRC's main civilian intelligence and counterintelligence service. The missions of the MSS are to protect the PRC's national security; secure political and social stability; implement the State Security Law and related laws and regulations; protect state secrets; conduct counterintelligence; and investigate organizations or people inside China who carry out or direct, support, or aid other people perceived to harm national security.

People's Armed Police (PAP). The PAP is a paramilitary component of the PRC's armed forces. Its primary missions include internal security, maintaining public order, maritime security, and assisting the PLA in times of war. As part of a reorganization of China's security structures, in 2018, the CMC assumed direct control of the PAP. The same reform also subordinated the China Coast Guard (CCG) to the PAP.

People's Liberation Army (PLA). In addition to its national defense mission, the PLA has formal and informal roles in the PRC's internal security. As the principal armed wing of the CCP, the PLA is the ultimate guarantor of the CCP's survival and supports other internal security forces as necessary. For example, the PLA may provide transportation, logistics, and intelligence to assist local public security forces with internal security. The PLA's active and reserve forces are authorized under the 1997 National Defense Law to directly "assist in maintaining public order" when CCP leaders consider it necessary.

Militia. The militia is an armed reserve force of civilians available for mobilization. It is distinct from the PLA's reserve forces. Militia units organize around towns, villages, urban sub-districts, and enterprises and vary widely in composition and mission. The PRC's 1997 *National Defense Law* authorizes the militia to assist in maintaining public order. The People's Armed Forces Maritime Militia (PAFMM) is a component of the militia and its tasks include safeguarding maritime claims, which it often performs in conjunction with the PLAN and the CCG.

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704 Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China   UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229 55

Modernization Objectives and Targets. Within the context of the Party's strategy, the modernization of the PRC's armed forces is not merely a policy preference or a momentary endeavor that may fade over time in importance. Rather, modernization of the armed forces is an indispensable element of the Party's national strategy to modernize the country. As the PRC's 2019 defense white paper states, "Building a fortified national defense and a strong military commensurate with the country's international standing and its security and development interests is *a strategic task for China's socialist modernization*" [emphasis added]. Throughout 2019, the PLA continued to pursue ambitious modernization objectives, implement major organizational reforms, and improve its combat readiness in line with the goals and timelines announced by General Secretary Xi Jinping at the 19th Party Congress in 2017. The PRC's goals for modernizing its armed forces in the "New Era," as stated in the 2019 defense white paper, are:

> **By 2020**: "To generally achieve mechanization…with significantly enhanced informationization and greatly improved strategic capabilities;"

> **By 2035**: "To comprehensively advance the modernization of military theory, organizational structure, military personnel, and weaponry and equipment in step with the modernization of the country and basically complete the modernization of national defense and the military …"; and,

> **In 2049**: "To fully transform the people's armed forces into world-class forces."

The PLA's modernization goals set by Chairman Xi Jinping and the CMC align with and provide support to the broader elements of China's national strategy, including the two centenary milestones in 2021 and 2049 and the interim waypoint in 2035. China wants to "generally" complete the PLA's mechanization and make "major progress" toward informatization by the end of 2020. This is ahead of the CCP's centenary in 2021, the point at which the Party seeks to complete building China into a "moderately prosperous society." Beyond 2021, the PLA's major modernization goals follow the Party's "two-step" national development approach to achieving national rejuvenation in 2049. In the first stage from 2021 to 2035, the PLA will seek to "basically complete" military modernization by 2035, at which point China will have "basically" met the Party's initial thresholds of a "great modern socialist country." In the second stage from 2035 to 2049, the PLA will aim to complete its transformation into a "world-class" military in support of the Party's goal to finish national modernization and fully realize its renewal as a "great modern socialist country."

Although China's leaders view building military strength as a strategic imperative, they also place important caveats on these objectives. For example, Chairman Xi's direction to the PLA to "basically complete" modernization by 2035 should also occur "in step with the modernization of the country."

These qualifications serve several purposes that highlight the interlocking nature of the Party's strategic planning. First, as the PRC's interests continue to expand as it develops, the Party expects the PLA to keep pace with the country's evolving interests and be ready and able to defend its progress. Second, linking the PLA's transformation to the country's transformation allows Party leaders to signal the scope and scale of the internal changes they expect the PLA to implement, particularly given its historic resistance to reforms that challenge its risk-adverse organizational culture or threaten vested bureaucratic interests. Finally, these qualifications provide flexibility to the Party's leaders to modulate military resources and defense objectives based on the conditions of the country's overall development. This offers the PRC's leaders flexibility to adapt to changing economic or international conditions and ensure military investments support—rather than compromise—the strategy.

Defense Ambitions. The CCP has not defined what it means by its ambition to have a "world-class" military by the end of 2049. Within the context of China's national strategy, however, it is likely that China will seek to develop a military by mid-century that is equal to—or in some cases superior to—the U.S. military, or that of any other great power that China views as a threat to its sovereignty, security, and development interests. Given the far-reaching ambitions the CCP has for a rejuvenated China, it is unlikely that the Party would aim for an end state in which China would remain in a position of military inferiority vis-à-vis the United States or any other potential rival. For China to aim lower or otherwise willingly accept a permanent condition of military inferiority would seem anathema to the fundamental purpose of becoming a "great modern socialist country." However, this does not mean that China will aim for the PLA to mirror the U.S. military in terms of capacity, capability, or readiness. China will likely develop its "world-class" military in a manner that best suits the needs of China's armed forces to defend and advance the country's interests and how the PLA—guided by the Party—adapts to the changing character of warfare. Additionally, China's military modernization ambitions do not necessarily shed light on how the PRC may intend to use force or posture its forces abroad in the future.

Readiness. As with other aspects of China's growing strength, the Party views the PLA's long-term development as useful to the extent that the party-state can wield it. Alongside modernizing the PLA's capabilities and organizational reform, China's leaders have identified enhancing the combat readiness of the armed forces as an important element in developing China's military strength. In recent years, Chairman Xi Jinping and senior military leaders have continued to emphasize the need to build the PLA's combat readiness so it can "fight and win." This emphasis has not only entailed the PLA conducting more training, but making its training more rigorous and realistic as well as addressing issues in the PLA's training and education systems relating conducting complex joint operations and adapting to other aspects of modern warfare.

31

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704 Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China   UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229 57

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

Non-War Military Activities (NWMA)

PLA writings divide military operations into two categories: war and non-war. The PLA's concept of non-war military activities (NWMA) is an expansive and diverse set of military operations ranging from humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HA/DR) to suppressing domestic unrest to maritime rights protection. PLA writings describe NWMA as serving a variety of political purposes, occurring at varying intensities and durations, and may include the threat of violence or the use of violence from low levels to levels approaching war. According to PLA writings, NWMA are an important "strategic means" for the military to serve the national political interest. Additionally, the PLA views NWMA as an effective way for it to support and safeguard China's development, as a means to expand the PRC's global interests, and an opportunity to gain valuable operational experience.

NWMA can be conducted internationally or domestically and encompass activities in multiple domains. NWMA can notably include operations in which the PLA uses coercive threats and/or violence below the level of armed conflict against states and other actors to safeguard the PRC's sovereignty and national interests. NWMA can also blend military and law enforcement activities including for maritime rights protection, border and coastal defense, air and sea control, deterrence operations, suppression of domestic unrest, and other forms of stability maintenance operations. NWMA also includes military diplomacy, HA/DR, counterterrorism, counterpiracy, counterdrug, peacekeeping, and noncombatant evacuation operations. In the past, PRC official writings have described aspects of NWMA as military operations other than war (MOOTW).

Along with the CCP leadership's focus on improving the PLA's combat readiness, in recent years PLA media outlets have noted shortcomings in the military's training and education systems that reportedly left some commanders—particularly at the operational level—inadequately prepared for modern warfare. In recent years, PLA media outlets have identified the need for the military to address the "Five Incapables" problem: that some commanders cannot (1) judge situations; (2) understand higher authorities' intentions; (3) make operational decisions; (4) deploy forces; and, (5) manage unexpected situations. Although PLA writings do not specify how widespread the "Five Incapables" are, PLA media outlets have consistently raised them. One outside expert has noted this may indicate the PLA lacks confidence in its proficiency to execute its own operational concepts. Additionally, senior Party and PLA leaders are keenly aware that the military has not experienced combat in decades nor fought with its current suite of capabilities and organizational structures. PLA leaders and state media frequently call on the force to remedy the "peacetime disease" that manifests in the form of lax training attitudes and practices that are viewed as hindering combat readiness.

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704   Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China   UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229 58

The CMC and PLA continue to take determined steps to rectify these issues and strengthen the PLA's readiness. Starting in 2018, the PLA introduced a "rolling" training outline to ensure continuity in training and more dynamically adjust training to new requirements. In January 2019, the PLA updated its *Outline of Military Training and Evaluation* to emphasize realistic and joint training across all warfare domains. The 2019 outline reflects the PLA's push to streamline various training requirements established by national-level authorities, the theater commands, and services, as well as to enhance accountability for training standards and increase peacetime combat readiness. In February 2019, Chairman Xi issued a new regulation to the PLA that formally expanded the supervision of military training with inspectors and a new oversight system. According to PRC state media, the regulation sought to "rectify practices that are inconsistent with the requirements of actual combat" and correct "peacetime malpractices." Similarly, the PRC's 2019 defense white paper claimed the PLA (and PAP and militia) are placing a higher priority on combat readiness, enhancing training under realistic combat conditions, organizing contests and competitions to encourage training, and stepping up oversight of training to ensure adherence to training standards to "uproot peacetime ills." Chapter 2 discusses the PLA's 2019 training and exercises in detail.

Anticorruption Campaign. Anticorruption investigations in the PLA are a component of a Party-wide effort that General Secretary Xi strengthened and accelerated shortly after taking office. The stated goal of these campaigns is to safeguard the legitimacy of the CCP, root out corruption, improve governance, and centralize Xi's and the Party's authority. Military discipline inspectors led by the CMC Discipline Inspection Commission have targeted individual power networks and occupational specialties historically prone to corruption, such as officers connected to disgraced former CMC Vice Chairmen Xu Caihou and Guo Boxiong and, more recently, to General Fang Fenghui and General Zhang Yang. The Party demoted more than 70 PLA officers for their alleged involvement in Fang Fenghui's bribery scheme; Fang was sentenced to life in prison in February 2019.

China's Military Leadership

CENTRAL MILITARY COMMISSION

Chairman	Xi Jinping		
Vice Chairmen	Gen Xu Qiliang	Gen Zhang Youxia	
Members	Gen Wei Fenghe	Gen Li Zuocheng	Adm Miao Hua	Gen Zhang Shengmin

DEPARTMENTS

- CMC General Office
- Joint Staff Department
- Political Work Department
- Logistic Support Department
- Equipment Development Department
- Training and Administration Department
- National Defense Mobilization Department

COMMISSIONS

- Discipline Inspection Commission
- Politics and Law Commission
- Science and Technology Commission

OFFICES

- Agency for Offices Administration
- Audit Office
- Office for International Military Cooperation
- Reform and Organization Office
- Strategic Planning Office

THEATER COMMANDS

- Eastern Theater
- Southern Theater
- Western Theater
- Northern Theater
- Central Theater

SERVICES AND SUPPORT FORCES

- PLA Army
- PLA Navy
- PLA Air Force
- PLA Rocket Force
- PLA Strategic Support Force
- PLA Joint Logistic Support Force

SCHOOLS

- Academy of Military Science
- National Defense University
- National University of Defense Technology

PARAMILITARY FORCES

- People's Armed Police
  - China Coast Guard
- Militia
  - People's Armed Forces Maritime Militia*

These forces can fall under both civilian and PLA command.

This chart does not depict the Ministry of National Defense (which is not in the chain of command), general offices, military districts, garrisons, sub-districts, and People's Armed Forces Departments (which command the militia)

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704   Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229 60 People's Republic of China

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

China's Military Leadership

The military's highest decision-making body, the Central Military Commission (CMC), is technically a department of the CCP Central Committee. The CMC Chairman is a civilian, usually serving concurrently as the General Secretary of the CCP and President of China. Following the 19th Party Congress, the CMC consists of two vice chairs, the chiefs of the Joint Staff and Political Work Departments, the head of the Discipline Inspection Commission, and the Minister of National Defense.

Members of the CCP Central Military Commission

Chairman Xi Jinping's appointment as Party General Secretary and CMC Chairman in 2012 and his selection as President in the spring of 2013 represented the first simultaneous transfer of all three of China's top positions to an incoming leader in recent decades. Xi was reappointed to his Party positions at the 19th Party Congress and was reappointed president in spring 2018 at the NPC. The same meeting also granted approval to remove presidential term limits, potentially allowing Xi to remain president beyond his second term. In 2016, Xi was announced as the commander-in-chief of the CMC's Joint Operations Command Center (JOCC) and was named "core" leader of the CCP Central Committee. Prior to becoming CMC Chairman, Xi served as the CMC's only civilian Vice Chairman under Hu Jintao. Xi's father was an important military figure during China's communist revolution and was a Politburo member in the 1980s. The younger Xi served as an aide to a defense minister early in his career and had regular interactions with the PLA as a provincial Party official. In meetings with U.S. officials, Xi has emphasized improving military-to-military relations between China and the United States.

Vice Chairman General Xu Qiliang is the first career PLA Air Force (PLAAF) officer appointed China's top uniformed official. Xu is a public advocate for reform and guides the effort as a deputy secretary of the CMC's reform leading group. Xu previously served on the CMC as the PLAAF commander, where he oversaw rapid force modernization and expanded the air force's foreign engagement. He may have crossed paths with Xi Jinping early in his career, when both men served in Fujian Province. Xu was the first PLAAF officer to serve as deputy chief of the General Staff Department (GSD) since the Cultural Revolution period, and – at 54 years of age at the time – the youngest in PLA history. Xu is serving a third term as a CMC member.

Vice Chairman General Zhang Youxia is China's second-most senior officer and former head of the Equipment Development Department. Zhang gained rare experience as a combat commander during China's brief war with Vietnam in 1979. Zhang formerly commanded the Shenyang Military Region, which shared a border with North Korea and Russia. Zhang is one of China's military

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704   Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China   UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229 61

"princelings." His father, a well-known military figure in China, served with Xi Jinping's father at the close of China's Civil War in 1949. Zhang is currently serving his second term on the CMC.

Minister of National Defense General Wei Fenghe was appointed at the NPC in March 2018. Wei is the PLA's third-most senior officer and manages its relationship with state bureaucracies and foreign militaries. Unlike the U.S. Secretary of Defense, he is not part of the chain of command and his primary policy influence is derived from membership in the CMC. Wei served in multiple missile bases across different military regions and held top posts in the headquarters of the former PLA Second Artillery Corps, the PLA Rocket Force's (PLARF's) predecessor, before being promoted in late 2010 to Deputy Chief of the General Staff – the first officer from the Second Artillery to do so. Wei was previously the PLARF commander. Wei is serving a second term as a CMC member.

Joint Staff Department Chief General Li Zuocheng oversees PLA operations, a narrowing of the wider responsibilities held by the former GSD prior to reforms initiated in 2015. Li is one of few remaining active duty PLA officers with combat experience and is recognized as a combat hero for his service in the PRC's border war with Vietnam. He was also the first PLA Army (PLAA) commander after the PLAA became a separate service in 2015. Li previously commanded the Chengdu Military Region, which was responsible for the sensitive area of Tibet.

Political Work Department Director Admiral Miao Hua oversees the PLA's political work, including propaganda, organization, and education. Miao is a former Army officer who switched services to the Navy in December 2014 when he became political commissar of the PLA Navy (PLAN). Miao may have ties to Xi from his time serving in the 31st Group Army in Fujian Province, when his career overlapped with Xi's. Miao participated as the PLAN political commissar during the Navy's OBOR cruise conducted in mid-2017.

Secretary of the Discipline Inspection Commission General Zhang Shengmin oversees the highest-level organization responsible for investigating military violations of Party discipline. Zhang is also a deputy secretary and third ranking member on the standing committee of the Party's Discipline Inspection Commission. Zhang's appointments indicate the Party's commitment to the anticorruption campaign in the military. Shortly after his appointment to the CMC, Zhang was promoted to the rank of general, the highest rank in the military.

2

MISSIONS, TASKS, AND MODERNIZATION OF CHINA'S ARMED FORCES IN THE "NEW ERA"

Key Takeaways

> With a force that totals approximately two million personnel in the regular forces, the PLA has sought to modernize its capabilities and improve its proficiencies across all warfare domains so that as a joint force it can conduct the range of land, air, and maritime operations as well as space, counterspace, electronic warfare (EW), and cyber operations.

> The PLA's evolving capabilities and concepts continue to strengthen the PRC's ability to counter an intervention by a third party in a conflict along China's periphery and project power globally.

> In 2019, the PLA continued to make progress implementing major structural reforms, fielding modern indigenous systems, building readiness, and strengthening its competency to conduct joint operations.

> China has already achieved parity with—or even exceeded—the United States in several military modernization areas, including shipbuilding, land-based conventional ballistic and cruise missiles, and integrated air defense systems.

DEVELOPMENTS IN THE PLA'S MODERNIZATION AND REFORM

The PRC's strategy of national rejuvenation entails strengthening and adapting its armed forces to the long-term trends in global military affairs and meeting the country's evolving national security needs. During the last two decades, the PRC has invested in and improved the PLA's capabilities to address a range of security objectives beyond its continued emphasis on Taiwan contingencies. The PLA's evolving capabilities and concepts continue to strengthen the PRC's ability to counter an intervention by a third party in a conflict along China's periphery, project power globally, and deter nuclear attack.

With a force that totals approximately two million personnel in the regular forces, the PLA has sought to modernize its capabilities and improve its proficiencies across all warfare domains so that as a joint force it can conduct the range of land, air, and maritime operations as well as space, counterspace, electronic warfare (EW), and cyber operations. China has already achieved parity with—or even exceeded—the United States in several military modernization areas, including shipbuilding, land-based conventional ballistic and cruise missiles, and integrated air defense systems. Recognizing that joint operations, information flows, and rapid decision-making are vital in modern warfare, the PRC continues to place a high priority on modernizing the PLA's capability to command complex joint operations in near and distant battlefields. The PRC is seeking to enhance the PLA's joint command and control systems, joint logistics systems, and command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (C4ISR) systems. The PRC is also modernizing,

38

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704 Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China   UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229 64

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

diversifying, and expanding its nuclear forces as well as deepening the PLA's interoperability and integration with the PRC's paramilitary and militia forces.

In recent years, the CCP's efforts to strengthen its armed forces have also included undertaking the most comprehensive restructuring of the PLA's command and control arrangements, forces structure, and administrative organs in its history. These reforms have sought to reinforce the CCP's control of the military, improve the PLA's ability to conduct joint operations, increase its combat effectiveness, and address longstanding issues such as corruption and the institutional primacy of the army over the other services.

Status of 2020 Milestones (Mechanization and Reform). Although the PLA continued to make progress towards its modernization and reform goals throughout 2019, the PLA might be unable to meet several of the milestones that it planned to achieve by 2020. Among the PLA's modernization goals set by the CCP leadership is to "generally achieve mechanization" by 2020. However, the PRC's 2019 defense white paper noted that the PLA had "yet to complete the task of mechanization," suggesting it was also unlikely that the PLA would achieve this goal by the end of 2020. Additionally, PLA officials have indicated that the third (and final) stage of PLA reforms would take place in 2021 or 2022. The PRC's original timetable from late 2015 for the completion of the PLA's reforms indicated that 2020 was the target for completion. References to 2021 or 2022 may imply the PLA is a year or two behind in completing its reforms. Both of these years are significant for the CCP. The Party aims for China to achieve its "moderately prosperous society" goal by the CCP's centenary in 2021. The CCP will also hold its 20th Party Congress in 2022.

FL-2023-00013 A-00000736704 Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China UNCLASSIFIED 12/21/2023 FL-2023-00013 20231229 65

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

PEOPLE'S LIBERATION ARMY ARMY (PLAA)

Key Takeaways

> The PLAA is the world's largest standing ground force, with approximately 915,000 active-duty personnel in combat units.

> In 2019, the PLAA continued to transition into a more modern, mobile, and lethal ground force through the fielding of upgraded combat systems and the integration of communications equipment and other technologies. The PLAA's modernization seeks to improve its ability to conduct joint operations in a high-intensity conflict and project power abroad.

> In 2019, the PLAA continued to create and mature formations at lower echelons that are more operationally flexible and better suited to conducting and managing complex combined-arms and joint operations.

> In 2019, the PLAA demonstrated a significant increase in training at both the service-level and joint-level and it continued to implement more realistic training methods.

The People's Liberation Army Army (PLAA) is the world's largest standing ground force, with approximately 915,000 active-duty personnel in combat units. The PLAA is the primary ground fighting force for the PLA. The PRC's 2019 defense white paper described the PLAA's tasks as transitioning from "regional defense" to trans-theater operations with an emphasis on improving its capabilities to conduct multi-domain, trans-theater, and sustained operations "so as to build a new type of strong and modernized land force." In 2019, the PLAA continued efforts to transition into a more modern, mobile, and lethal ground force through the fielding of upgraded combat systems and the integration of communications equipment and other technologies, to improve its ability to project power and conduct joint operations in a high-intensity conflict in line with the CCP's modernization goals. Throughout 2019, the PLAA also continued to implement the major PLA-wide structural reforms that began in late 2015 and improving its combat readiness.

Force Structure and Organization. In 2019, the PLAA continued to create and mature formations at lower echelons that are more operationally flexible and better suited to conducting and managing complex combined-arms and joint operations. The PLAA's forces are organized into five Theater Army Commands, the Xinjiang military command, and the Tibet military command. The PLAA has now standardized its 13 group armies (roughly a U.S. corps-level equivalent), which were reduced in number from 18 in 2017 as part of an effort to downsize and streamline the PLAA's force structure. Each group army now includes multiple combined-arms brigades. In total, these 78 combined-arms brigades serve as the PLAA's primary maneuver force. These brigades vary in size and composition.

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704 Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229 66

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

The PLAA delineates its combined-arms brigades into three types: heavy (tracked armored vehicles), medium (wheeled armored vehicles), and light (high-mobility, mountain, air assault and motorized) and can contain up to 5,000 troops each. Each group army controls six additional brigades responsible for operational element functions: an artillery brigade, an air defense brigade, an army aviation (or air assault) brigade, a special operations forces (SOF) brigade, an engineer and chemical defense brigade, and a sustainment brigade. Although the PLAA has standardized its group armies, it does retain a number of nonstandard independent divisions and brigades that exist outside of the group armies. These units are typically located in areas the CCP considers sensitive including Xinjiang, Tibet, Hong Kong, and Beijing.

The PLAA continues to emphasize the group army-combined-arms brigade-battalion structure to reinforce combat capabilities at the tactical level and improve multi-domain operations. At the brigade and battalion levels, the PLAA reorganized and consolidated its staff structure to refine and synchronize planning and operational support efforts. Combined-arms brigades' subordinate combined-arms battalions have become the PLAA's basic tactical unit for joint operations. The PLAA has staffed and restructured its combined-arms battalions to enable them to conduct operations with greater independence from higher echelons. Combined-arms battalion commanders now have staff officers who assist in the development and implementation of plans and orders in addition to new reconnaissance assets and subordinate support units. Additionally, the variety of combat units at the brigade and battalion level provides the PLAA with greater flexibility to tailor force packages.

Capabilities and Modernization. The PLAA's modernization continues to emphasize vehicle and weapon upgrades in line with the PLA's overall modernization priorities and CMC guidance. The PRC's 2019 defense white paper, however, noted that the PLA "has yet to complete the task of mechanization," implying that completing mechanization by the end of 2020 was unlikely. Western observers have noted that the CCP's mechanization goal pertains primarily to the PLA's ground forces and point to the challenges of modernizing the PLAA given its sheer size. For example, equipment in PLAA infantry units varies and may include a mix of obsolete platforms from the 1960s up to some of the region's most modern and capable platforms. Similarly, PLAA armored units are comprised of a wide range of legacy tanks and modernized third-generation main battle tanks. Despite the PLA's modernization ambitions and its demonstrated ability to develop highly modern equipment for ground forces, the PLAA has faced challenges acquiring and fielding new equipment in sufficient quantities to retire its legacy equipment, although it continues to make progress in this regard.

In parades, state media, and other venues in 2019, the PLAA sought to highlight various types of new and upgraded equipment and vehicles, including small arms, all-terrain vehicles and modern camouflage patterns, to demonstrate the PLAA's commitment and progress towards modernization.

41

The PLAA also continues to bolster its armor capabilities in heavy combined-arms brigades with the initial fielding of the Type-15 light main battle tank, which can operate in mountainous and soft terrain environments with the firepower of its 105mm main gun. The PLAA's combined-arms brigades continued integrating new communications systems, information warfare platforms and low altitude unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) during 2019. The PLAA also fielded the Z-20 medium lift helicopter, which will enhance aviation and air assault brigades' ability to perform rapid air insertion operations, light infantry force projection, and expedited logistics.

Readiness. After two years of focusing on implementing significant force restructuring, the PLAA began shifting its focus toward combined-arms and joint training in 2019. The PLAA increased participation in the STRIDE 2019 series of combined-arms exercises, which involved multiple phases across the Zhurihe, Queshan, Sanjie, and Taonan training areas. More PLAA units participated in STRIDE 2019 exercises compared to the more limited STRIDE 2018. The PLAA continued high utilization of the Zhurihe Joint Training Base to simulate realistic force-on-force, high intensity conflict and to provide a venue to practice ground-to-air integration. Zhurihe Joint Training Base is comparable to the U.S. military's National Training Center at Fort Irwin, California, with a large amount of maneuver space, a dedicated opposing force, and an urban terrain training area.

The PLAA's participation in Russia's national-level military exercise TSENTR-19 in September 2019 indicated a continued prioritization of combined-arms training with regional partners as well as refining its counterterrorism capabilities. Aside from named exercises, the PLAA continued to leverage training simulation technology to include virtual reality scenarios and battalion level simulators to increase training repetitions and improve skills. PLAA units take a systematic approach to training and familiarization when integrating new tactical systems and military equipment into subordinate formations prior to testing them in training exercise scenarios.

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704   Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China   UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229 68

Major Ground Units

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704   Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229 69

PEOPLE'S LIBERATION ARMY NAVY (PLAN)

Key Takeaways

> The PRC has numerically the largest navy in the world with an overall battle force of approximately 350 ships and submarines, including more than 130 major surface combatants.

> As of 2019, the PLAN is largely composed of modern multi-role platforms featuring advanced anti-ship, anti-air, and anti-submarine weapons and sensors.

> The PRC commissioned its first domestically built aircraft carrier in late 2019. China expects its second domestically built aircraft carrier to enter service by 2023.

> In 2019, the PRC launched its first Yushen class amphibious assault ship (Type 075 LHA), its first class of large deck amphibious warship.

> In the near-term, the PLAN will have the capability to conduct long-range precision strikes against land targets from its submarine and surface combatants using land-attack cruise missiles, notably enhancing the PRC's global power projection capabilities.

The People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) is the largest navy in the world with a battle force of approximately 350 platforms, including major surface combatants, submarines, ocean-going amphibious ships, mine warfare ships, aircraft carriers, and fleet auxiliaries. The PRC's 2019 defense white paper described the PLAN as speeding up the transition of its tasks from "defense on the near seas" to "protection missions on the far seas." The PLAN is an increasingly modern and flexible force that has focused on replacing its previous generations of platforms with limited capabilities in favor of larger, modern multi-role combatants. As of 2019, the PLAN is largely composed of modern multi-role platforms featuring advanced anti-ship, anti-air, and anti-submarine weapons and sensors. This modernization aligns with the PRC's growing emphasis on the maritime domain and increasing demands for the PLAN to operate at greater distances from mainland China.

The PLAN organizes, mans, trains, and equips the PLA's naval and naval aviation forces, as well as the PLA Marine Corps (PLANMC), which is subordinate to the PLAN. In 2019, the PLAN continued to implement structural reforms that began in late 2015 and early 2016. Similar to the other services, the PLA-wide reforms removed the PLAN headquarters from conducting operations, which became the purview of the PLA's joint Theater Commands, and focused it on organizing, manning, training, and equipping naval forces. The PLAN's force structure consists of three fleets with subordinate submarine flotillas, surface ship flotillas, aviation brigades, and naval bases. The PLAN's North Sea

44

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704 Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China   UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229 70

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

Fleet is subordinate to the Northern Theater Command, the East Sea Fleet is subordinate to the Eastern Theater Command, and the South Sea Fleet is subordinate to the Southern Theater Command.

Submarines. Modernizing the PLAN's submarine force remains a high priority for the PRC. The PLAN currently operates four nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines (SSBNs) with two additional hulls fitting out, six nuclear-powered attack submarines (SSNs), and 50 diesel-powered attack submarines (SSs). The PLAN will likely maintain between 65 and 70 submarines through the 2020s, replacing older units with more capable units on a near one-to-one basis.

China continues to increase its inventory of conventional submarines capable of firing advanced anti-ship cruise missiles (ASCMs). Since the mid-1990s, the PLAN has purchased 12 Russian-built Kilo class SS units, eight of which are capable of launching ASCMs. During these years, China's shipyards have delivered 13 Song class SS units (Type 039) and 17 Yuan class diesel-electric air-independent-powered attack submarine (SSP) (Type 039A/B). The PRC is expected to produce a total of 25 or more Yuan class submarines by 2025.

Over the past 15 years, the PLAN has constructed twelve nuclear submarines – two Shang I class SSNs (Type 093), four Shang II class SSNs (Type 093A), and six Jin class SSBNs (Type 094), two of which were awaiting entry into service in late 2019. Equipped with the CSS-N-14 (JL-2) submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM), the PLAN's four operational Jin class SSBNs represent the PRC's first credible sea-based nuclear deterrent. Each Jin class SSBN can carry up to 12 JL-2 SLBMs. In 2019, these missiles were displayed at the PRC's 70th anniversary parade revealing at least a full complement of 12 JL-2s are complete and operational. China's next-generation Type 096 SSBN, which will likely begin construction in the early-2020s, will reportedly carry a new type of SLBM. The PLAN is expected to operate the Type 094 and Type 096 SSBNs concurrently and could have up to eight SSBNs by 2030. This would align with Chairman Xi Jinping's 2018 directive for the SSBN force to achieve "stronger growth."

By the mid-2020s, China will likely build the Type 093B guided-missile nuclear attack submarine. This new Shang class variant will enhance the PLAN's anti-surface warfare capability and could provide a clandestine land-attack option if equipped with land-attack cruise missiles (LACMs). The PLAN is also improving its anti-submarine warfare capabilities through the development of its surface combatants and special mission aircraft, but it continues to lack a robust deep-water anti-submarine warfare (ASW) capability.

Surface Combatants. The PLAN remains engaged in a robust shipbuilding program for surface combatants, producing new guided-missile cruisers (CGs), guided-missile destroyers (DDGs) and

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704   Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China   UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229 71

corvettes (FFLs). These assets will significantly upgrade the PLAN's air defense, anti-ship, and anti-submarine capabilities and will be critical as the PLAN expands its operations beyond the range of the PLA's shore-based air defense systems. In December 2019, China launched the sixth Renhai class cruiser (Type 055) and was set to commission the first hull of the class in early 2020. The Renhai carry a large load out of weapons including ASCMs, surface-to-air missiles (SAMs), and anti-submarine weapons along with likely LACMs and anti-ship ballistic missiles (ASBMs) when those become operational. By the end of 2019, the PRC had launched 23 Luyang III DDGs—including 10 lengthened Luyang III MODs—with 13 of the 23 Luyang III DDGs operational with the PLAN. Both the standard Luyang III and the Luyang III MOD have a 64-cell multipurpose vertical launch system capable of launching cruise missiles, SAMs, and anti-submarine missiles. In 2019, the PLAN commissioned its 30th Jiangkai II class guided-missile frigate (FFG), likely completing the production run while it finalizes a follow-on class. The PLAN is augmenting its littoral warfare capabilities, especially for operations in the East and South China Seas, with high-rate production of the Jiangdao class FFLs (Type 056). By the end of 2019, more than 42 Jiangdao class FFLs had entered service out of an expected production run of at least 70 ships. The latest FFLs are anti-submarine warfare (ASW) variants with a towed-array sonar. The PRC has also built 60 Houbei class wave-piercing catamaran guided-missile patrol boats (Type 022) for operations in China's "near seas."

The PLAN continues to emphasize anti-surface warfare capabilities in its force development. The PLAN's frigates and FFLs, as well as modernized older combatants, carry variants of the YJ-83/YJ-83J ASCM (97 nm, 180 km), while newer surface combatants such as the Luyang II class DDGs are fitted with the YJ-62 (215 nm, 400 km). The Luyang III class DDGs and the Renhai class CGs will be fitted with a variant of China's newest ASCM, the YJ-18A (290 nm, 537 km). A few modernized destroyers have been retrofitted with the supersonic YJ-12A ASCM (250 nm, 285 km). Eight of the PLAN's 12 Kilo class SSs are equipped with the Russian-built SS-N-27 ASCM (120-nm, 222-km). The PRC's Song class SS, Yuan class SSP, and Shang class SSN will field the PLAN's newest domestic submarine-launched YJ-18 and its variants, which constitute an improvement over the SS-N-27 ASCM.

The PLAN recognizes that long-range ASCMs require a robust, over-the-horizon (OTH) targeting capability to realize their full potential. To fill this capability gap, China is investing in reconnaissance, surveillance, command, control, and communications systems at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels to provide high-fidelity targeting information to surface and subsurface launch platforms.

As the PLAN continues to transition into a global multi-mission force, the addition of land-attack capabilities to its modern array of anti-surface and anti-air capabilities is a logical next step. In the coming years, the PLAN will probably field LACMs on its newer cruisers and destroyers and developmental Type 093B nuclear attack submarines. The PLAN could also retrofit its older surface

combatants and submarines with land-attack capabilities as well. The addition of land-attack capabilities to the PLAN's surface combatants and submarines would provide the PLA with flexible long-range strike options. This would allow the PRC to hold land targets at risk beyond the Indo-Pacific region.

Amphibious Warfare Ships. China's investment in LHAs signal its intent to continue to develop its expeditionary warfare capabilities. In 2019, China launched its first Yushen class LHA (Type 075) and a second Yushen class LHA is under construction with additional hulls expected during the 2020s. The Yushen class are highly capable large-deck amphibious ships that will provide the PLAN with an all-aspect expeditionary capability. The Yushen class can carry a large number of landing craft, troops, armored vehicles, and helicopters. In addition, the PLAN has seven large Yuzhao class amphibious transport docks (LPDs) (Type 071), with an eighth ship expected to commission in 2020. The Yuzhao class LPDs and Yushen class LHAs provide the PLA with greater capacity, endurance, and more flexibility for long-range operations than the PLAN's older landing ships, which it has reduced in number over the last decade with obsolete units being decommissioned. The Yushen and Yuzhao can each carry several of the new Yuyi class air-cushion medium landing craft and a variety of helicopters, as well as tanks, armored vehicles and PLAN marines for long-distance deployments.

Aircraft Carriers. In December 2019, the PRC commissioned its first domestically built aircraft carrier, *Shandong*, which launched in 2017 and completed multiple sea trials during 2018-2019. The new carrier is a modified version of the *Liaoning* (Soviet Kuznetsov) design and likewise uses a ski-jump takeoff method for its aircraft. China continued work on its second domestically built aircraft carrier in 2019, which will be larger and fitted with a catapult launch system. This design will enable it to support additional fighter aircraft, fixed-wing early-warning aircraft, and more rapid flight operations and thus extend the reach and effectiveness of its carrier based strike aircraft. The PRC's second domestically built carrier is projected to be operational by 2024, with additional carriers to follow.

Auxiliary Ships. The PLAN continues to build a large number of seagoing auxiliary and support ships, including intelligence collection ships (AGIs), ocean surveillance ships (AGOSs), fleet replenishment oilers (AORs), hospital ships, submarine salvage and rescue ships, and various other specialized units. Additionally, China's first domestically built polar icebreaker, Xuelong 2, became operational in 2019. It is not operated by the PLAN, but rather by the Polar Research Institute of the State Oceanic Administration.

PLA Navy Marine Corps. As the PLAN's land combat arm, the PLA Navy Marine Corps (PLANMC) continues to complete its expansion and focus on expeditionary operations. The PLANMC previously

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704 Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229 73

consisted of two brigades (approximately 10,000 personnel) and was limited in geography and mission to amphibious assault and defense of South China Sea outposts. In 2019, the PLANMC continued to mature an enlarged force structure of eight brigades intended to be scalable and mobile, modernize its capabilities for joint expeditionary operations—including operations beyond the First Island Chain—and become more proficient in conventional and irregular warfare. The PLANMC continues to work towards fully equipping its four newly established maneuver brigades (in addition to its two previously existing brigades), a SOF brigade, and an aviation (helicopter) brigade. Overall, the PLANMC's reform and modernization has proven slower than expected given the CMC's milestone for the PLA to "generally achieve mechanization" by the end of 2020 ahead of the CCP's centenary in 2021.

The PLANMC's roles and missions principally include defending PLA bases in mainland China, the South China Sea and abroad, conducting amphibious operations to seize and defend small reef and island outposts, and conducting non-war military activities (NWMA). Although the PLANMC has traditionally focused on its task to assault and defense of small islands in the South China Sea, more recently its focus has grown to include expeditionary operations beyond the First Island Chain. The PLANMC's roles under NWMA support the PRC's efforts to protect its overseas interests including resources, infrastructure, and citizens abroad.

The PLANMC maintains a presence at the PRC's first overseas military base in Djibouti that extends Beijing's military reach and strategic influence in Africa and the Middle East. The PLANMC's presence in Djibouti provides the PRC with the ability to support a military response to contingencies affecting China's investments and infrastructure in the region and the approximately 1 million PRC citizens in Africa and 500,000 in the Middle East. The PLANMC presence in Djibouti also embarks a contingent of marines with the PLAN's Gulf of Aden counterpiracy-focused naval escort task force that supports China's trade interests. Additionally, the PLANMC supports the PRC's military diplomacy. For example, it has trained with Russian and Thai forces and participated in exchanges with the United States and Australia.

Major Naval Units

Northern Theater Navy HQ

Eastern Theater Navy HQ

Southern Theater Navy HQ

— Theater boundary

Northern Theater Navy

1 Aircraft Carrier
4 Nuclear-powered Attack Submarines
14 Diesel-powered Attack Submarines
1 Crusier
9 Destroyers
12 Frigates
10 Corvettes
2 Tank Landing Ships
5 Medium Landing Ships
18 Missile Patrol Craft

Eastern Theater Navy

18 Diesel-powered Attack Submarines
12 Destroyers
23 Frigates
19 Corvettes
2 Amphibious Transport Docks
16 Tank Landing Ships
7 Medium Landing Ships
46 Missile Patrol Craft

Southern Theater Navy

1 Aircraft Carrier
4 Nuclear-powered Ballistic Missile Submarines
2 Nuclear-powered Attack Submarines
14 Diesel-powered Attack Submarines
11 Destroyers
18 Frigates
20 Corvettes
4 Amphibious Transport Docks
13 Tank Landing Ships
9 Medium Landing Ships
22 Missile Patrol Craft

0   250   500   Kilometers

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FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704 Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229 75

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

PEOPLE'S LIBERATION ARMY AIR FORCE (PLAAF) AND PLAN AVIATION

Key Takeaways

> The PLAAF and PLAN Aviation together constitute the largest aviation force in the Indo-Pacific region.

> The PLAAF is rapidly catching up to Western air forces. The PLAAF continues to modernize with the delivery of domestically built aircraft and a wide range of UAVs.

> In October 2019, China signaled the return of the airborne leg of its nuclear triad after the PLAAF publicly revealed the H-6N as its first nuclear-capable air-to-air refuelable bomber.

The People's Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF) and PLAN Aviation together constitute the largest aviation forces in the region and the third largest in the world, with over 2,500 total aircraft (not including trainer variants or UAVs) of which approximately 2,000 are combat aircraft (including fighters, strategic bombers, tactical bombers, multi-mission tactical, and attack aircraft). The PLAAF's role is to serve as a comprehensive strategic air force capable of long-range airpower projection. The PRC's 2019 defense white paper described the PLAAF's missions and tasks as transitioning from territorial air defense to "offensive and defensive operations." In 2017, Lieutenant General Ding Laihang assumed the post of PLAAF commander and exhorted the service to build a truly "strategic" air force capable of projecting airpower at a long range. The PLAAF is rapidly catching up to Western air forces. This trend is gradually eroding longstanding and significant U.S. military technical advantages vis-à-vis the PRC in the air domain.

The CMC's intent is to transform the PLAAF into a more effective and capable force that is proficient at conducting joint operations. The PLAAF is comprised of aviation, airborne, air defense, radar, electronic countermeasure, and communications forces. Amid the wide-ranging reorganization of the PLA, the PLAAF has reorganized into five Theater Command Air Forces, established at least six new air bases, and restructured previously subordinate regiments into brigades under the new bases by disbanding its fighter and fighter-bomber divisions.

Fighters. The PLAAF and PLAN Aviation continue to field greater numbers of fourth-generation aircraft (now more than 800 of 1,500 total operational fighters, not including trainers) and probably will become a majority fourth-generation force within the next several years. For fifth-generation fighters, the PLAAF operationally fielded limited numbers of its new J-20, while development continues on the smaller FC-31/J-31 for export or as a future naval fighter for the PLAN's next class of aircraft carriers. During the PRC's 70th anniversary parade in October 2019, the PLAAF conducted

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704 Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China   UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229 76

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

high-profile flyovers of its J-20, and J-16 and J-10C advanced fourth-generation fighters armed with the latest air-to-air missiles (AAMs). In addition, the PRC has received delivery of all 24 Su-35 advanced fourth-generation fighters it purchased from Russia in 2016. Finally, the PLAAF is preparing upgrades for the J-20, which may include increasing the number of AAMs the fighter can carry in its low-observable configuration, installing thrust-vectoring engine nozzles, and adding super cruise capability by installing higher-thrust indigenous WS-15 engines.

Bombers. China's bomber force is composed of H-6 Badger variants, which are domestically produced versions of the Soviet Tupolev Tu-16 (Badger) bomber. Despite the relative age of its bomber force, China has worked to maintain and enhance the operational effectiveness of these aircraft. In recent years, China has fielded greater numbers of the H-6K, a modernized H-6 variant that integrates standoff weapons and features more-efficient turbofan engines for extended-range. The H-6K can carry six LACMs, giving the PLA a long-range standoff precision strike capability that can range Guam from home airfields in mainland China. PLAN Aviation has traditionally fielded the H-6G to support maritime missions. More recently, PLAN Aviation has begun operating the H-6J, a maritime strike version of the H-6K with six weapons pylons for ASCMs. This aircraft carries six supersonic long-range YJ-12 ASCMs and can attack warships out to the Second Island Chain – significantly extending PLAN Aviation's reach. During the PRC's 70th anniversary parade in 2019, the PLAAF publicly revealed the H-6N, a derivative of the H-6K optimized for long-range strikes. The H-6N features a modified fuselage that allows it to carry externally either a drone or an air-launched ballistic missile (ALBM) that may be nuclear capable. The H-6N's air-to-air refueling capability also provides it greater reach over other H-6 variants that are not refuelable in air. In addition, the PLAAF is seeking to extend its power projection capability with the development of a new stealth strategic bomber. PLAAF leaders publicly announced the program in 2016, however commentators speculate that it may take more than a decade to develop this type of advanced bomber.

Special Mission Aircraft. In 2019, the PLAAF publicly debuted its new Y-9 communications jamming/electronic countermeasures aircraft (known as the GX-11). This aircraft is designed to disrupt an adversary's battlespace awareness at long ranges. The PLA can conduct air-to-air refueling operations to extend the ranges of its fighter and bomber aircraft equipped with refueling probes using the H-6U, a modified tanker variant of the H-6 bomber, as well as a small number of larger IL-78 Midas purchased from Ukraine. In addition, China is developing a tanker variant of its Y-20 heavy-lift transport, which will enable the PLAAF to expand its tanker fleet and improve the PLAAF's ability to operate beyond the First Island Chain from bases in mainland China.

Production and deliveries of the KJ-500—China's most advanced airborne early warning and control (AEW&C) aircraft—continued at a rapid pace, joining earlier KJ-2000 Mainring and KJ-200 Moth

51

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704   Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China   UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229 77

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

variants. These aircraft amplify PLAAF's ability to detect, track, and target threats in varying conditions, in larger volumes, and at greater distances. These aircraft also help to extend the range of the PRC's integrated air defense system (IADS) network. Furthermore, China has produced at least one KJ-500 with an aerial refueling probe, which will improve the aircraft's ability to provide persistent AEW&C coverage.

China's aviation industry continues to advance with deliveries of its domestic Y-20 large transport aircraft and completion of the world's largest seaplane, the AG600. Both aircraft made debut appearances at the Zhuhai Air Show in November 2016. These new transports will supplement and eventually replace China's small fleet of strategic airlift assets, which to date, consists of a limited number of Russian-made IL-76 aircraft. These large transports are intended to support airborne C2, logistics, paradrop, aerial refueling, and strategic reconnaissance operations as well as HA/DR missions.

Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs). The PRC displayed its largest ever suite of UAV aircraft at the Zhuhai Air Show in November 2018. In addition to displays of armed-capable reconnaissance UAVs such as the Yunying, Caihong CH-4 and CH-5, and Yilong (Wing Loong) series of aircraft, there were multiple of displays of low-observable flying-wing aircraft such as the CH-7, Tianying, and Yaoying-III to complement earlier flying wing UAVs such as the Anjian and Lijian. The Tengden Company also displayed armed UAVs, such as the TW328, as well as a large dual-engine TW356 transport UAV that suspends a large cargo pod between the two large engine nacelles. China has begun deploying its Xianglong joined-wing high altitude reconnaissance UAV to airfields in Western China and to Hainan Island. China is continuing to develop the Shendiao and upgrade the BZK-005 Changying to a larger and longer enduring aircraft. During the PRC's 70th anniversary parade, the PLA displayed several advanced unmanned aerial systems such as the rocket-powered, high-speed Wuzhen-8 and the Gongji-11 stealth unmanned combat aerial vehicle.

Air and Missile Defense. The PLAAF possesses one of the largest forces of advanced long-range SAM systems in the world, composed of Russian-sourced SA-20 (S-300) battalions and domestically produced CSA-9 (HQ-9) battalions. To improve its strategic long-range air defenses, the PRC has contracted with Russia to acquire the SA-21 (S-400) SAM system and is developing the CSA-21 (HQ-9B) as follow-ons to its SA-20s and CSA-9s. The PLAAF conducted its first SA-21 test fires in December 2018. The PRC is also developing its indigenous CH-AB-X-02 (HQ-19), which will likely have a ballistic missile defense (BMD) capability. China is also developing kinetic-kill vehicle technology to field a mid-course interceptor, which will form the upper layer of a multi-tiered missile defense.

52

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704   UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229 78

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China

Airborne. The PLAAF Airborne Corps comprises up to six airborne combined-arms brigades (to include an air assault combined-arms brigade), a SOF brigade, a service support brigade, and an air transport brigade. At least one of the airborne combined-arms brigades is mechanized with air-droppable tracked ZBD03 infantry fighting vehicles. In 2019, the airborne brigades continued integration and parachute and heavy drop training, while the air assault brigade emphasized air landing operations, rapid force projection, and integration into airborne operations. In summer 2019, elements from one of the PLAAF Airborne Corps brigades participated in Russia's TSENTR-2019 exercise, conducting combined airborne operations including parachute drops and airborne landing operations with Russian troops. Additionally, China held a seminar in Beijing focused on airborne integration into joint operations and improving airborne training.

Major Aviation Units

PEOPLE'S LIBERATION ARMY ROCKET FORCE (PLARF)

Key Takeaways

> In 2019, the PLARF advanced long-term modernization plans to enhance its "strategic deterrence."

> In 2019, the PRC launched more ballistic missiles for testing and training than the rest of the world combined.

> The PLARF continues to grow its inventories of DF-26 intermediate-range ballistic missiles (IRBMs) which is capable of conducting both conventional and nuclear precision strikes against ground targets as well as conventional strikes against naval targets.

> The PRC is developing new intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) that will significantly improve its nuclear-capable missile forces and will require increased nuclear warhead production, partially due to the introduction of multiple independently targetable reentry vehicle (MIRV) capabilities.

> The number of warheads on the PRC's land-based ICBMs capable of threatening the United States is expected to grow to roughly 200 in the next five years.

The PLA Rocket Force (PLARF) organizes, mans, trains, and equips the PRC's strategic land-based nuclear and conventional missile forces and associated support forces and missile bases. The PLARF is a critical component of the PRC's nuclear deterrence strategy to deter and counter third-party intervention in regional conflicts. The PLARF, previously known as the PLA Second Artillery Force, was elevated to the status of a full service alongside the PLAA, PLAN, and PLAAF and renamed as part of the sweeping PLA reforms initiated in late 2015. According to the PRC's 2019 defense white paper, the PLARF is working towards "enhancing its credible and reliable capabilities of nuclear deterrence and counterattack, strengthening intermediate and long-range precision strike forces, and enhancing strategic counter-balance capability, so as to build a strong and modernized rocket force." In 2019, the PLARF's participation in the PRC's 70th anniversary military parade was designed to show its progress towards goals first publicized by Chairman Xi Jinping in 2016 and 2017 to "achieve a great rise in strategic capabilities" and accelerating the PLARF's pace of development and making enhanced "breakthroughs…in strategic deterrence capability."

The PLARF fields a variety of conventional mobile ground-launched short-, medium-, and intermediate-range ballistic missiles and ground-launched cruise missiles. The PLARF's ground-based missile forces compliment the air and sea-based precision strike capabilities of the PLAAF and PLAN. The PLARF's conventional missile forces includes the CSS-6 (DF-15) short-range ballistic missile

(SRBM) (range 725-850 km); the CSS-7 (DF-11) SRBM (600 km); the CSS-11 (DF-16) SRBM (more than 700 km); land-attack and anti-ship variants of the CSS-5 (DF-21) medium-range ballistic missile (MRBM) (approximately 1,500 km); the DF-26 IRBM (approximately 4,000 km); and the CJ-10 (DH-10) ground-launched cruise missile (GLCM) (approximately 1,500 km). The PLARF's conventionally armed CSS-5 Mod 5 (DF-21D) ASBM variant gives the PLA the capability to conduct long-range precision strikes against ships, including aircraft carriers, out to the Western Pacific from mainland China. The DF-21D has a range exceeding 1,500 km, is fitted with a maneuverable reentry vehicle (MARV) warhead, and is claimed to be capable of rapidly reloading in the field. The PLARF continues to grow its inventories of DF-26 IRBM, which it first revealed in 2015 and fielded in 2016. The multi-role DF-26 is designed to rapidly swap conventional and nuclear warheads and is capable of conducting precision strikes in the Western Pacific, the Indian Ocean, and the South China Sea from mainland China.

The PLARF is developing and testing several new variants of theater-range missiles and developing capabilities and methods to counter adversary BMD systems. In 2019, the PRC launched more ballistic missiles for testing and training than the rest of the world combined. China has placed a heavy emphasis on developing and testing hypersonic glide vehicles. In August 2018, China successfully tested the XINGKONG-2 (Starry Sky-2), which it publicly described as a hypersonic waverider vehicle. The PLARF also paraded the DF-17 missile for the first time as part of the PRC's 70th anniversary parade in 2019.

The PLARF is developing ICBMs that will significantly improve its nuclear-capable missile forces with more survivable delivery systems and will require increased nuclear warhead production, partially due to the introduction of MIRV capabilities. The number of warheads on land-based PRC ICBMs capable of threatening the United States is expected to grow to roughly 200 in the next five years. China's fixed ICBM arsenal consists of 100 ICBMs, including the shorter range CSS-3 (DF-4) as well as the silo-based CSS-4 Mod 2 (DF-5A) and MIRV-equipped Mod 3 (DF-5B) which is capable of carrying up to five MIRVs. Chinese media suggests a follow-on DF-5C may be in development. The solid-fueled, road-mobile CSS-10 class missiles complement this force. The CSS-10 Mod 2 (DF-31A), with a range in excess of 11,200 km, can reach most locations within the continental United States. Chinese media reports suggest a DF-31B might also be in development. Development of the CSS-X-20 (DF-41), a new MIRV-capable, road-mobile ICBM, continued in 2019, and the PRC paraded at least 16 road-mobile DF-41 launchers during the 2019 parade that Beijing said belonged to two PLARF brigades. China appears to be considering additional DF-41 launch options, including rail-mobile and silo basing.

56

Conventional Strike Capabilities

Maximum Missile Range

- SRBMs (such as CSS-6, CSS-7, CSS-11)
- Land Attack Missiles (such as CSS-5, DF-17, and CJ-10 LACM)
- Antiship Missiles (such as CSS-5 ASBM)
- H-6J with ASCM
- Legacy H-6 with ASCM
- DF-26 Multi-role IRBM

Information current as of 01 Jan 2020.
Representation of locations, points of origin, and ranges are approximate.
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OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704   Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China   UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229 83

Nuclear Ballistic Missiles

Maximum Missile Range
- CSS-5 Mod 2/Mod 6 (1,750km)
- DF-26 (4,000km)
- CSS-3 (5,500km)
- CSS-10 Mod 1 and JL-2 (7,200km)
- CSS-10 Mod 2 (11,200km)
- DF-41 (12,000km)
- CSS-4 Mod 2 and Mod 3 (13,000km)

0   1,500   3,000   Kilometers

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FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704   Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China   UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229 84

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

Conventional Precision Strike

Short-Range Ballistic Missiles (300-1,000 km). The PLARF has approximately 200 SRBM launchers and over 600 SRBMs. These missile systems include advanced variants with improved ranges and accuracy as well as more sophisticated payloads; earlier generations are being phased out and replaced by variants with true precision strike capability.

Medium-Range Ballistic Missiles (1,000-3,000 km). The PLA fields approximately 150 conventional MRBMs launchers and more than 150 missiles which increase the range at which it can conduct precision strikes against land targets and naval ships operating out to the First Island Chain.

Intermediate-Range Ballistic Missiles (3,000-5,500 km). The PLA's DF-26 is a road-mobile, nuclear and conventional capable IRBM that is able to conduct near-precision strikes as far away from China as Guam in the Second Island Chain. The PLA has fielded approximately 200 IRBM launchers and more than 200 missiles. In conjunction with reconnaissance satellites, the PLAN's expanding network of sky wave and surface wave over-the-horizon (OTH) systems provide warning and targeting capabilities at extended distances from China to support long-range precision strikes, including employment of ASBMs.

Land-Attack Cruise Missiles. The PLA fields approximately 100 ground-launched LACMs launchers and more than 300 missiles for standoff precision strikes. The PLA continues to develop additional LACM-variants for deployment with the PLAN and PLAAF.

Anti-ship Cruise Missiles. China deploys a wide range of advanced ASCMs, with the YJ-83 family of missiles the most numerous, and equipping the majority of China's ships as well as multiple aircraft. China has also outfitted several ships with YJ-62 ASCMs. The YJ-18 is a long range, torpedo tube launched ASCM with a supersonic terminal sprint. It has likely replaced the older YJ-82 on Song, Yuan, and Shang class submarines. China claims its new Luyang III class DDGs and Renhai CGs have a vertically launched variant of the YJ-18. China has also developed the long range supersonic YJ-12 ASCM for the H-6 bomber. At a 2018 exhibition, China displayed a ship-to-ship variant of the YJ-12 called the YJ-12A and the ground launched anti-ship variant YJ-12B. China has deployed the YJ-12B to several outposts in the South China Sea. China carries the Russian SS-N-22 SUNBURN on two Russian-built Sovremenny class DDGs. Upgrades to two of the Sovremenny DDGs (Hulls 136 and 137) allow them to fire the YJ-12A. China also employs the Russian SS-N-27b SIZZLER on eight Russian built Kilo class submarines.

Ground Attack Munitions. The PLAAF has a small number of tactical air-to-surface missiles (ASMs) as well as precision munitions; guidance options include satellite positioning, laser, electro-optic, and

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704   Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China   UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229 85

imaging infrared. China is developing or adapting a range of smaller ASMs and guided bombs for use on its expanding fleet of armed UAVs.

Anti-Radiation Weapons. The PLA imported Israeli-made Harpy UAVs and Russian-made anti-radiation missiles during the 1990s. China is integrating the YJ-91, an indigenous version of the Russian Kh-31P (AS-17), into its fighter-bomber force and advertising the ASN-301 anti-radiation drone, an improved domestic variant of the Harpy.

Artillery-Delivered High Precision Munitions. The PLA is fielding long-range rocket artillery systems with the range to strike targets within or even across the Taiwan Strait. The most common of these systems is the PHL-03 12x300 mm multiple-rocket launcher – similar to the Russian 9A52-2

Anti-Radiation Weapons. The PLA imported Israeli-made HARPY UAVs and Russian-made anti-radiation missiles during the 1990s. China is integrating the YJ-91, an indigenous version of the Russian Kh-31P (AS-17), into its fighter-bomber force and advertising the ASN-301 anti-radiation drone, an improved domestic variant of the HARPY.

Artillery-Delivered High Precision Munitions. The PLA is fielding long-range rocket artillery systems with the range to strike targets within or even across the Taiwan Strait. The most common of these systems is the PHL-03 12x300 mm multiple-rocket launcher – similar to the Russian 9A52-2 SMERCH – with a 150 km range. Improved warheads for these rockets may include vertical penetrators and sensor-fuzed munitions.

STRATEGIC SUPPORT FORCE (SSF)

Key Takeaways

> The PLA Strategic Support Forces (SSF) is a theater command-level organization established to centralize the PLA's strategic space, cyber, electronic, and psychological warfare missions and capabilities.

> The SSF's Network Systems Department is responsible for information warfare with a mission set that includes cyberwarfare, technical reconnaissance, electronic warfare, and psychological warfare. Its current major target is the United States.

> The PRC's 2019 defense white paper described space as a "critical domain in international strategic competition" and stated the security of space provided strategic assurance to the country's national and social development.

> The PRC's space enterprise continues to mature rapidly. Beijing has devoted significant resources to growing all aspects of its space program, from military space applications to civil applications such as profit-generating launches, scientific endeavors, and space exploration.

As part of its efforts to restructure the PLA for modern warfare, the CMC established the PLA Strategic Support Force (SSF) in 2016 as a theater command-level organization to centralize the PLA's strategic space, cyber, electronic, and psychological warfare missions and capabilities. The SSF's creation highlights the PRC's understanding of information as a strategic resource in modern warfare. Among the impetuses for the SSF's establishment was the PLA's apparent concern about the disparity between its cyber capabilities and those of the United States and the view of China's leaders that achieving information dominance and denying adversaries the use of the electromagnetic spectrum is necessary to seize and maintain the strategic initiative in a conflict. The SSF was formed from organizations formerly subordinate to the PLA services and the CMC's General Staff Department (GSD) with the goal of creating operational synergies between formerly disparate information warfare capabilities to enable the information dominance that the PRC views will be decisive in future wars. The SSF reports directly to the CMC and supports the entire PLA with its capabilities. The PRC's 2019 defense white paper described the SSF's modernization goals as "seeking to achieve big development strides in key areas and accelerate the integrated development of new-type combat forces, so as to build a strong and modernized strategic support force."

The SSF oversees two deputy theater command-level departments: the Space Systems Department responsible for military space operations, and the Network Systems Department responsible for

information operations (IO), which includes EW, cyber warfare, and psychological operations. At the headquarters level, the SSF has a four-department administrative structure that includes the Staff, Equipment, Political Work, and Logistics Departments. As a strategic organization, the SSF reports directly to the CMC and not to the theater commands. Through its Space Systems Department and Network Systems Department, the SSF provides information support derived from space-based and cyber-based means to all PLA services and the five theater commands. The SFF may be the PRC's first step in the development of a cyber force by centralizing the PLA's previously disparate cyber reconnaissance, cyberattack, and cyber defense capabilities and units into one organization.

In March 2019, General Li Fengbiao replaced General Gao Jin as the SSF commander. Lt. Gen. Shang Hong and Lt. Gen Ju Qiansheng are the commanders of the Space Systems and Network Systems Departments, respectively. Throughout 2019, the SSF participated in joint exercises and training throughout China, including a possible high-level and large-scale joint exercise in the waters and airspace off China's southeastern coast. During 2019, SSF units also exercised establishing command posts and provided joint communications training to the theater commands.

Network Systems Department. The SSF Network Systems Department is responsible for information warfare with a mission set that includes cyberwarfare, technical reconnaissance, EW, and psychological warfare. By placing these missions under the same organizational umbrella, the Party seeks to remedy the operational coordination challenges that hindered information sharing under the PLA's pre-reform organizational structure. The integration of cyber and EW elements under one organization is a crucial step towards realizing the operational concept of integrated network and electronic warfare that the PLA has envisioned since the early 2000s. The Network Systems Department operates five theater designated technical reconnaissance bases, most of the former GSD Third Department's (3PLA's) numbered bureaus, the former GSD 56th, 57th, and 58th Research Institutes, and elements of the GSD Fourth Department (4PLA). The Network Systems Department's current major target is the United States. The Network Systems Department also provides intelligence support to the theater commands' regional focuses.

> ***The SFF and the "Three Warfares" Concept***: The former General Political Department's 311 Base, which now falls under the SFF Network Systems Department, performs missions and tasks associated with the PLA's concept of "Three Warfares" which comprises psychological warfare, public opinion warfare, and legal warfare. This base is the only publicly known organization in the PLA that performs psychological warfare operations. The PLA's psychological warfare mission is to shape international public narratives, weaken the enemy's will, shape diplomatic and political narratives, and advance the PRC's interests through all phases of conflict.

62

Space Systems Department. The SSF Space Systems Department is responsible for nearly all PLA space operations, including: space launch and support; space surveillance; space information support; space telemetry, tracking, and control; and space warfare. The Space Systems Department seeks to resolve the bureaucratic struggles that existed over the PLA space mission, as elements of the mission were previously dispersed across several national and service-subordinate organizations. The PRC officially designated space as a new domain of warfare in its 2015 defense white paper, and expects space to play an important role in future conflicts by enabling long-range precision strikes and in denying other militaries the use of overhead command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (C4ISR) systems. The Space System Department operates at least eight bases, including those whose core missions are the launch, tracking R&D, and operation of the satellites vital to China's overhead C4ISR architecture. The SSF runs tracking, telemetry, and command stations in Namibia, Pakistan, and Argentina. The SSF also has a handful of Yuan Wang space support ships to track satellite and intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) launches.

SSF Research and Development. The SSF operates several subordinate academic and research institutions including the Information Engineering University, Space Engineering University, and the former GSD 56th and 57th Research Institutes. These institutions offer programs in space based surveillance, intelligence, weapon launch and early warning, communications and information engineering, cryptology, big data, and information attack and defense technology.

Space and Counterspace Capabilities. The PRC's space enterprise continues to mature rapidly. Beijing has devoted significant economic and political resources to growing all aspects of its space program, from military space applications to civil applications such as profit-generating launches, scientific endeavors, and space exploration. The PRC's space enterprise not only includes the SSF but also encompasses other military, government, and civilian organizations, including state-owned enterprises, academic institutions, and commercial entities. The PLA has historically managed the PRC's space program and the SSF Space Systems Department is responsible for nearly all PLA space operations. The PRC continues to strengthen its military space capabilities, despite its public stance against the weaponization of space. The PLA continues to invest in improving its capabilities in space-based intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR), satellite communication, satellite navigation, and meteorology, as well as human spaceflight and robotic space exploration. China plans to have a permanently operating space station by 2022 that will host its own and foreign payloads and astronauts. China has built an expansive ground support infrastructure to support its growing on-orbit fleet and related functions including spacecraft and space launch vehicle (SLV) manufacture, launch, C2, and data downlink. Additionally, the PRC continues to develop counterspace capabilities—

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704 Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229 89

including direct ascent, co-orbital, electronic warfare, and directed energy capabilities—that can contest or deny an adversary's access to and operations in the space domain during a crisis or conflict.

In 2019, China launched 34 SLVs (of which 32 were successful) that placed more than 70 spacecraft into orbit including navigation, ISR, and test/engineering satellites, as well as satellites for foreign customers. Key developments in 2019 include:

> *Advancing Space Launch and Access to Space.* In 2019, the PRC continued to develop its space launch capabilities, providing cost-savings through efficiency and reliability, extending their reach into multiple Earth orbits, and improving their capability to rapidly reconstitute space capabilities in low Earth orbit. In December 2019, China launched the Long March-5 (LM-5) heavy lift vehicle as part of its return to flight. China plans to use this launch vehicle for lunar and interplanetary exploration missions in 2020 and use a variant, the LM-5B, to launch the core module of its space station for completion and use by 2022. In June 2019, China performed its first seaborne launch using its LM-11 solid-propellant vehicle. China also successfully launched an updated LM-2C with grid fins on its core stage in July 2019, providing greater landing precision of rocket debris and lowering the risk of collateral damage when falling over China. Additionally, two new launch vehicles were successful in their maiden flights: Hyperbola-1—built by the private firm iSpace—and Smart Dragon-1—built by ChinaRocket, a subsidiary of China Academy of Launch Vehicle Technology. LinkSpace, another private firm, completed suborbital tests of reusable rocket technology for its future NewLine-1 reusable launch vehicle, which is expected in 2021. Finally, state-owned commercial company Expace conducted two orbital missions using Kuaizhou-1A light-lift vehicles from the Taiyuan Satellite Launch Center within six hours of one another.

> *Strengthening Satellite Navigation:* Augmenting its regional BeiDou-2 satellite navigation system, the PRC moved closer to achieving global service capabilities through its BeiDou-3 constellation with the launching of nine additional BeiDou-3 satellites in 2019. China also launched one BeiDou-2 satellite in 2019 bringing the combined total of operational BeiDou-2 and BeiDou-3 satellites to 44. By mid-2020, China plans for the BeiDou-3 worldwide constellation to be at full operating capability with 30 satellites, providing mass communication capabilities to its users and additional command and control for the PLA, reducing or removing China's dependence on U.S. GPS. New BeiDou satellites are equipped with radiofrequency inter-satellite links, new atomic clocks, and other advanced technologies. Additionally, China plans to offer satellite-based augmentation services, a worldwide short message service, and internationally recognized search and rescue capabilities.

64

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704 Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China
UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229 90

> *Continuing Lunar Exploration:* In January 2019, China became the first country to soft land a probe on the far side of the Moon with its Chang'e-4 lunar lander. Shortly after reaching the surface, the lander deployed China's second lunar rover, Yutu-2. In May, Yutu-2 completed its primary objective of characterizing materials from the Moon's largest far side crater. Building on these missions, China plans to conduct a lunar sample return mission in the late 2020s, construct a lunar research station around 2025, and establish a crewed lunar research and development base around 2050.

> *Enhancing Data Relay:* China launched the first of its second-generation Tianlian-2 data relay satellites in March. Once complete, the Tianlian-2 satellite will reportedly provide faster data transmission and greater connectivity between ground control stations and spacecraft in low Earth orbit. China could also use the Tianlian-2 satellite constellation to maintain communications with future human spaceflight missions, including its planned space station.

The PLA continues to acquire and develop a range of counterspace capabilities and related technologies, including kinetic-kill missiles, ground-based lasers, and orbiting space robots, as well as expanding space surveillance capabilities, which can monitor objects in space within their field of view and enable counterspace actions. As of May 2018, the PRC's reconnaissance and remote sensing fleet consisted of more than 120 satellites designed to collect data for civil, commercial, or military owners and operators. Reportedly, the PLA owns and operates approximately half of these systems, most of which could support situational awareness of regional rivals and potential flashpoints, while monitoring, tracking, and targeting an adversary's forces. In concert with its marked improvements in satellite navigation, launch capabilities, and space object surveillance and identification, the PRC is developing electronic warfare capabilities such as satellite jammers; offensive cyber capabilities; and directed-energy weapons. Moreover, China has demonstrated sophisticated, potentially damaging on-orbit behavior with space-based technologies. China has an operational ground-based Anti-Satellite (ASAT) missile intended to target low-Earth orbit satellites, and China probably intends to pursue additional ASAT weapons capable of destroying satellites up to geosynchronous Earth orbit. China is employing more sophisticated satellite operations and is probably testing dual-use technologies in space that could be applied to counterspace missions.

Although the PRC has not publicly acknowledged the existence of any new programs since it confirmed it used an ASAT missile to destroy a weather satellite in 2007, the PLA's defense academics often publish on counterspace threat technologies. These scholars stress the necessity of "destroying, damaging, and interfering with the enemy's reconnaissance...and communications satellites," suggesting that such systems, as well as navigation and early warning satellites, could be among the targets of attacks designed to "blind and deafen the enemy."

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704   Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China   UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229 91

JOINT LOGISTIC SUPPORT FORCE (JLSF)

Key Takeaways

> The JLSF is establishing support relationships between joint logistic units and other PLA service logistics elements and integrating civilian logistics into military operations.

> The PLA leverages a variety of means and arrangements to use civilian transport resources to move military personnel and equipment more rapidly.

The PLA Joint Logistic Support Force (JLSF) provides integrated joint logistics support for the PLA. Established in 2016, the JLSF intends to be the "backbone" of the PLA's logistics system. The JLSF's development is central to the PRC's efforts to build a joint, lean and efficient "combat-oriented modern logistics system," which Beijing views as essential for modern warfare. The JLSF works to streamline the PLA's joint strategic- and campaign-level logistics by overseeing theater-wide supply operations, establishing and coordinating support relationships among the PLA services' logistics elements, conducting joint logistics exercises with the PLA services, and integrating civilian logistics resources into military operations. In 2019, the JLSF conducted exercises of various size, scope, and complexity that aimed to improve the PLA's ability to conduct joint operations. In 2019, the JLSF troops made their first public debut at the PRC's 70th anniversary parade and the First Party Congress of the JLSF defined its development plans for the next five years. According to the PRC's 2019 defense white paper, the JLSF is "being integrated into the joint operations system to enhance the capabilities of integrated joint logistics, so as to build a strong and modernized joint logistic support force."

Headquartered at the Wuhan Joint Logistics Support Base, the JLSF has force elements for inventory and warehousing, medical services, transport, force projection, oil pipelines, engineering and construction management, reserve equipment, and procurement support. The JLSF provides the PLA with joint strategic- and campaign-level logistics, enabling the PLA to conduct large-scale operations. The JLSF has five subordinate Joint Logistics Service Centers (JLSCs) aligned with the five theater commands that are intend to streamline the PLA's logistics support. During peacetime, the JLSF controls the JLSCs' operations and activities; during wartime, each theater command assumes control of their designated JLSC.

In 2019, the JLSF focused on increasing mobile support speed and exploring new joint training and support opportunities. In the Northern Theater Command, a Shenyang JLSC-subordinate logistic support brigade rapidly delivered fuel and other needed supplies to forward-deployed PLAA elements during a field exercise. A field hospital based in the Eastern Theater Command conducted a cross-

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704 Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China   UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229 92

theater, long-distance mobility exercise to a medical training base in Xi'an, located in the Central Theater Command, supported by the PLAAF Military Medical University.

The PLA leverages a variety of means and arrangements to use civilian transport resources to move military personnel and equipment more rapidly. In 2019, the JLSF routinely integrated civilian logistics resources and equipment into military operations and exercises. During a 2019 exercise, Zhengzhou JLSC in the Central Theater Command employed civil air transport to move military personnel and equipment more rapidly, reducing its reliance on rail transport. Also in 2019, the Shenyang JLSC coordinated the movement of soldiers and equipment across Bohai Bay using a civilian roll-on/roll-off ship. JOINT LOGISTIC FORCE 2018B, a Central Theater Command exercise held in late 2018, featured 37 joint military and civilian teams from five provinces and two municipalities operating together to set up refueling stations, medical service centers, maintenance centers, and catering services. This PLA Zhengzhou JLSC organized exercise was a joint service support exercise that featured civilian-military logistics integration and PLAAF participation.

MILITARY READINESS

Key Takeaways

> In recent years, the CMC has directed the PLA to improve its combat readiness. This guidance is increasingly evident in the intensity of the PLA's training and the complexity and scale of its exercises.

> The PLA is training to "fight and win" through increasingly realistic combat training that uses dedicated "blue force" opponents and other elements to improve realism.

> In 2019, the PLA conducted a nation-wide exercise across all five-theater commands that included all four services, the SSF, and the JLSF.

In recent years, the CMC has directed the PLA to improve its combat readiness. This guidance is increasingly evident in the intensity of the PLA's training and the complexity and scale of its exercises. In 2019, the PLA continued to focus its annual training cycle on building readiness through increasingly larger-scale and complex joint exercises, service-level exercises, numerous mission-oriented force-on-force exercises, live-fire exercises, and skills-based competition exercises. Notable is the PLA's focus on increasingly realistic combat training using dedicated "blue force" opponents to improve realism, training simulation technology, and enacting efforts to strengthen and evaluate commanders' ability to conduct joint operations.

In 2019, the PLA conducted a nation-wide exercise across all five-theater commands that included all four services, the SSF, and the JLSF. Led by the CMC's Joint Operational Command Center, the exercises sought to test joint coordinated operations of all five military commands and took place at multiple locations near Taiwan. The exercise could have been simulating a Taiwan or a Senkaku contingency.

In 2019, the PLAA conducted training and evaluations of nearly 200 corps-grade commanders, building upon the testing of the 13 group army commanders in 2018. The PLAA conducted the annual STRIDE and FIREPOWER exercises in 2019 across multiple theaters with elements of combined-arms brigades represented conducting confrontation drills against dedicated opposing forces. The PLAA conducted its annual STRIDE exercise in multiple iterations and focused on evaluating offensive and defense combat capabilities of heavy combined-arms brigades. FIREPOWER continued the series' focus on artillery skills during opposing forces operations, with 2019 iteration notably including elements of an artillery brigade from the PLA Tibet Military District.

As part of its wider series of Ingenious Soldier-2019 exercises, the PLAA also conducted a cyber-simulation exercise, Ingenious Cyber-Electromagnetic Soldier-2019 with approximately 200 troops at a Central Theater Command training base. The exercise indicates the emphasis the PLA has on electronic countermeasures as an operational force in winning wars under informatized conditions.

The PLAN conducted significant training events throughout 2019 and marked the PLAN's 70th anniversary in April 2019 with an international fleet review and naval parade in Qingdao and in the Yellow Sea. The PLAN displayed more than 32 warships, including the lead ship of its new Renhai class guided missile destroyers, its first aircraft carrier—the *Liaoning*—submarines, destroyers, and fighter jets. Nearly 20 foreign vessels from approximately a dozen countries including Russia took part in the review. The PRC probably sought to leverage the fleet review to portray its navy as dedicated to building a maritime community with a shared future by enhancing cooperation, though participating navies' receptivity was uneven. The PLANMC participated in a maritime amphibious assault exercise this year off China's southeastern coast. The exercise incorporated PLANMC amphibious armored vehicles and probably tested incorporating the PLANMC in joint operations.

The PLAAF continues to bolster its readiness and competencies through four key annual training exercises and competitions: RED SWORD, BLUE SHIELD, GOLDEN DART, and GOLDEN HELMET. The primary focus of these activities is to prepare for combat under by training under realistic conditions that introduce uncertainty, such as a complex electromagnetic environment. In 2019, the PLAAF continued its service-level RED SWORD exercise with the focus on systems-on-systems confrontation. RED SWORD also incorporated the live-fire of air defense systems operating

in a degraded electromagnetic environment. The GOLDEN DART exercise incorporated assault fighter and bomber tactical drills on a mockup of an integrated air defense system, which included blue force ground-to-air missiles and surveillance radars. The PLAAF also continues to deploy advanced combat aircraft to train in bilateral and multilateral exercises. In 2019, the PLAAF sent two H-6K bombers to participate in Russia's TSENTR exercise.

The PLARF continued its annual HEAVEN'S SWORD series of exercises in 2019 to focus on preparations for realistic combat training for commanders and troops and to enhance the high state of readiness for combat forces. In 2019, the exercise featured the nighttime transfer of missiles, moving to different launch positions, and a "blue force" confrontation drill.

The SSF conducted a field command post exercise in July 2019 to test troops' familiarity with equipment and refine battlefield communications capabilities in complex terrain environments. In 2019, field hospital teams from JLSF and PLAA hospitals participated in Medical Logistics Forces 2019A and 2019B cross-theater base rotation exercises. In the exercise series, field medical teams practiced maneuvering to medical training bases, overseen by PLAA and PLAAF military medical universities. Each iteration was the first time the participating medical teams conducted a cross-theater mobilization to exercise field medical support capabilities.

INCREASING INTEROPERABILITY WITH PARAMILITARY AND MILITIA

Key Takeaway

> Interoperability and integration between the PLA and the PRC's paramilitary forces continues to grow in scale and sophistication, including the coordination between the PLAN, the CCG, and the People's Armed Forces Maritime Militia (PAFMM).

People's Armed Police (PAP). The PAP is a paramilitary police component of the PRC's armed forces and an armed wing of the CCP. Its primary missions include internal security, maritime security, and assisting the PLA in times of war. In early 2018, the CMC assumed direct control of the PAP after the CCP ended the previous CMC-State Council dual-command system. As part of this reform, the PAP also assumed control of the China Coast Guard (CCG) in July 2018 from the PRC's State Oceanic Administration. In addition to these changes, the PAP has undergone a comprehensive reorganization and shed missions and some specialized forces for border defense, firefighting, natural resource protection (forests, gold mines, and hydropower), allowing the PAP to focus more on internal security. The PAP is comprised principally of the Mobile Corps, the Internal Security Corps, and the CCG. The Mobile Corps is comprised of two large mobile contingents at the national level without fixed geographic areas of responsibility. The Internal Security Corps covers each of the PRC's provinces,

69

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704   Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China   UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229 95

autonomous regions, and centrally administered cities. Each province has at least one PAP contingent focused on rapid response to internal security threats at the provincial and local level. In 2019, the PAP announced the establishment of a new special operations counterterrorism unit called the Mountain Eagle Commando Unit, based in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region to support the CCP's growing counterterrorism efforts. Unlike the PAP's two other commando units, the Snow Leopard Unit and the Falcon Unit, the Mountain Eagle Unit is reportedly designed to operate in more austere terrain environments characterized by mountains and plateaus as opposed to urban warfare.

In 2018, Chairman Xi Jinping tasked the PAP to improve "combat-ready training" and rapidly integrate into the PLA's joint operation system. The PAP is increasingly focusing on internal security and joint operations with the PLA and is developing capabilities for rapid response, mobility, and counterterrorism operations. In addition, the PAP conducts training with foreign counterparts. Since at least 2016, PAP forces have likely operated in Tajikistan, patrolling the tri-border region connecting Tajikistan, Afghanistan, and China. In 2019, the PAP hosted joint counterterrorism training in China and in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan.

China's Coercive Approach

China's leaders use tactics short of armed conflict to pursue China's objectives. China calibrates its coercive activities to fall below the threshold of provoking armed conflict with the United States, its allies and partners, or others in the Indo-Pacific region. These tactics are particularly evident in China's pursuit of its territorial and maritime claims in the South and East China Seas as well as along its border with India and Bhutan.[1] In recent years, the PLA has also increased patrols around and near Taiwan using bomber, fighter, and surveillance aircraft to signal Taiwan. China also employs non-military tools coercively, including economic tools during periods of political tensions with countries that China accuses of harming its national interests.

China Coast Guard (CCG). The CCG is subordinate to the PAP and is responsible for a wide range of missions under the umbrella of maritime rights protection, including enforcement of the PRC's sovereignty claims, surveillance, protection of fisheries' resources, anti-smuggling, and general law enforcement. In July 2018, the CCG completed its merger into the CMC command structure through its subordination to the PAP, which itself is under the CMC like the PLA. This could facilitate closer coordination between the CCG and the PLAN. The PRC primarily uses paramilitary maritime law

enforcement agencies in maritime disputes, selectively using the PLAN to provide overwatch in case of escalation.

The CCG's rapid expansion and modernization has improved China's ability to enforce its maritime claims. Since 2010, the CCG's fleet of large patrol ships (more than 1,000 tons) has more than doubled from approximately 60 to more than 130 ships, making it by far the largest coast guard force in the world and increasing its capacity to conduct simultaneous, extended offshore operations in multiple disputed areas. Furthermore, the newer ships are substantially larger and more capable than the older ships, and the majority are equipped with helicopter facilities, high-capacity water cannons, and guns ranging from 30 mm to 76 mm. A number of these ships are capable of long-endurance and out-of-area operations. These characteristics give CCG vessels the ability to intimidate local, non-PRC fishing boats, as occurred in an October 2016 incident near Scarborough Reef.

In addition, the CCG operates more than 70 fast patrol combatants (more than 500 tons), which can be used for limited offshore operations, more than 400 coastal patrol craft, and approximately 1,000 inshore and riverine patrol boats. The CCG is likely to add another 25-30 patrol ships and patrol combatants by the end of the decade before the construction program levels off.

People's Armed Forces Maritime Militia (PAFMM). The PAFMM is a subset of China's national militia, an armed reserve force of civilians available for mobilization. Militia units organize around towns, villages, urban sub-districts, and enterprises, and vary widely in composition and mission. In the South China Sea, the PAFMM plays a major role in coercive activities to achieve the PRC's political goals without fighting, part of broader Chinese military theory that sees confrontational operations short of war as an effective means of accomplishing political objectives. The militia has played significant roles in a number of military campaigns and coercive incidents over the years, including the 2009 harassment of USNS *Impeccable* conducting normal operations, the 2012 Scarborough Reef standoff, the 2014 Haiyang Shiyou-981 oilrig standoff, and a large incursion in waters near the Senkakus in 2016.

A large number of PAFMM vessels train with and assist the PLAN and CCG in tasks such as safeguarding maritime claims, surveillance and reconnaissance, fisheries protection, logistic support, and search and rescue. The government subsidizes various local and provincial commercial organizations to operate militia vessels to perform "official" missions on an ad hoc basis outside of their regular civilian commercial activities.

The PAFMM often rents fishing vessels from companies or individual fishermen. However, China has also built a state-owned fishing fleet for at least part of its "maritime militia" in the South China

71

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704 Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China   OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229 97

Sea. The Hainan provincial government, adjacent to the South China Sea, ordered the building of 84 large militia fishing vessels with reinforced hulls and ammunition storage, which the militia received by the end of 2016, along with extensive subsidies to encourage frequent operations in the Spratly Islands. This particular PAFMM unit is also China's most professional. Its forces are paid salaries independent of any clear commercial fishing responsibilities and recruited from recently separated veterans.

PLA CAPABILITIES IN DEVELOPMENT

Key Takeaways

> The PLA is developing capabilities to provide options for the PRC to dissuade, deter, or, if ordered, defeat third-party intervention during a large-scale, theater campaign such as a Taiwan contingency. U.S. defense planners often refer to these collective capabilities as anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD) capabilities.

> The PLA is additionally developing the capabilities and operational concepts to conduct offensive operations within the Second Island Chain, in the Pacific and Indian Oceans, and in some cases, globally.

MILITARY CAPABILITIES FOR A2/AD WITHIN THE FIRST ISLAND CHAIN

Key Takeaways

> In addition to strike, air and missile defense, anti-surface and anti-submarine capabilities improvements, China is focusing on information, cyber, and space and counterspace operations.

> The PLA's A2/AD capabilities are, to date, the most robust within the First Island Chain, although the PRC seeks to strengthen its capabilities to reach farther into the Pacific Ocean.

The PRC's military modernization plan includes the development of A2/AD capabilities to conduct long-range attacks against adversary forces who might deploy or operate within the western Pacific Ocean. The PLA's A2/AD capabilities are, to date, the most robust within the First Island Chain, although the PRC seeks to strengthen its capabilities to reach farther into the Pacific Ocean. These capabilities span the air, maritime, space, electromagnetic, and information domains.

Long-Range Precision Strike. Military modernization has resulted in the rapid transformation of the PLA's missile force. U.S. bases in Japan are in range of a growing number of Chinese MRBMs and LACMs. H-6K bomber flights into the western Pacific Ocean demonstrate China's ability to range

72

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704 Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the UNCLASSIFIED 12/21/2023 FL-2023-00013 20231229 98 People's Republic of China

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

Guam with air-launched LACMs. The DF-26, which debuted publicly in 2015 and was paraded by China again in 2017, is capable of conducting precision conventional or nuclear strikes against ground targets, which could include U.S. bases on Guam. PLA writings see logistics and power projection assets as potential vulnerabilities in modern warfare – a judgement in accord with an expanding ability to target regional air bases, logistics and port facilities, communications, and other ground-based infrastructure.

Ballistic Missile Defense (BMD). China is working to develop ballistic missile defenses consisting of exo-atmospheric and endo-atmospheric kinetic-energy interceptors. In 2016, official media confirmed China's intent to move ahead with land- and sea-based mid-course missile defense capabilities. The HQ-19 mid-course interceptor has undergone tests to verify its capability against 3,000 km-class ballistic missiles, and an HQ-19 unit may have begun preliminary operations in western China. Indigenous radars including the JY-27A and JL-1A – the latter advertised as capable of precision tracking of multiple ballistic missiles – reportedly provide target detection for the system.

The PLA's long-range SAM inventory also offers a limited capability against ballistic missiles. China's domestic CSA-9 (HQ-9) long-range SAM system likely has a limited capability to provide point defense against tactical ballistic missiles. China has fielded SA-20 (S-300 PMU2) SAMs, and its SA-21 (S-400) SAMs may have some capability to engage ballistic missiles, depending on the interceptors and supporting infrastructure.

Surface and Undersea Operations. China continues to construct an array of offensive and defensive capabilities to enable the PLA to gain maritime superiority within the first island chain – the islands running from the Kurils, through Taiwan, to Borneo, roughly encompassing the Yellow Sea, East China Sea, and South China Sea – and grow toward projecting limited combat power at longer ranges. China's broad range of ASCMs and launch platforms as well as submarine-launched torpedoes and naval mines allow the PLAN to create an increasingly lethal, multi-access threat against an adversary approaching Chinese waters and operating areas. Additionally, the PLA has fielded CSS-5 ASBMs specifically designed to hold adversary aircraft carriers at risk when located up to 1,500 km off China's coast, and it has an ASBM variant of the longer range DF-26 IRBM. The PLA's undersea domain capabilities are gradually progressing as well, but it continues to lack a robust deep-water anti-submarine warfare capability. China is installing undersea monitoring systems, which could improve China's knowledge of the undersea environment. Whether the PLA can collect accurate targeting information and pass it to launch platforms in time for successful strikes in sea areas beyond the first island chain is unclear.

Information Operations (IO). China assesses that controlling the information spectrum in the modern battlespace is a critical enabler, if not a fundamental prerequisite, of its ability to counter third-party intervention in a conflict. PLA authors often cite this capability – sometimes termed "information blockade" or "information dominance" – as necessary to seize the initiative and set the conditions necessary to gain air and sea superiority. This "information blockade" concept likely envisions combining military capabilities across space and cyber domains with non-military instruments of state power. China's investment in advanced electronic warfare (EW) systems, counterspace capabilities, and cyber operations – combined with more traditional forms of information control, such as propaganda and denial via opacity – reflect the priority the PLA places on information advantage.

Space and Counterspace. PLA strategists regard the ability to use space-based systems – and to deny them to adversaries – as central to modern warfare. The PLA continues to strengthen its military space capabilities, despite its public stance against the militarization of space. The PLA views space operations as a key enabler of PLA campaigns aimed at countering third-party intervention, although many PLA writings have not elevated these operations to the level of a separate "campaign." China seeks to enhance C2 in joint operations and establish a real-time surveillance, reconnaissance, and warning system, and it is increasing the number and capabilities of its space systems, including various communications and intelligence satellites as well as the Beidou navigation satellite system. China also continues to develop counterspace capabilities and related technologies, including kinetic-kill missiles, ground-based lasers, and orbiting space robots, as well as expanding space surveillance capabilities, which can monitor objects across the globe and in space and enable counterspace actions.

Cyber Operations. PLA researchers believe that building strong cyber capabilities are necessary to protect Chinese networks and advocate seizing "cyberspace superiority" by using offensive cyber operations to deter or degrade an adversary's ability to conduct military operations against China. Chinese writings suggest cyber operations allow China to manage the escalation of a conflict because cyber attacks are a low-cost deterrent. The writings also suggest that cyber attacks demonstrate capabilities and resolve to an adversary. To support A2/AD, Chinese cyber attack operations aim to target critical military and civilian nodes to deter or disrupt adversary intervention, and to retain the option to scale these attacks to achieve desired conditions with minimal strategic cost. China believes its cyber capabilities and cyber personnel lag behind the United States, and it is working to improve training and bolster domestic innovation to overcome these perceived deficiencies and advance cyberspace operations.

Integrated Air Defense System (IADS). China has a robust and redundant IADS architecture over land areas and within 300 nm (556 km) of its coast that relies on an extensive early warning radar

network, fighter aircraft, and a variety of SAM systems. China is also placing radars and air defense weapons on outposts in the South China Sea, further extending its IADS. It also employs point defenses, primarily to defend strategic targets against adversary long-range cruise missiles and airborne strike platforms.

China has increasing numbers of advanced long-range SAMs, including its indigenous CSA-9, Russian SA-10 (S-300 PMU), and SA-20 (S-300 PMU1/PMU2), all of which have the advertised capability to protect against both aircraft and low-flying cruise missiles. To improve its strategic air defenses, China has taken initial delivery of the Russian-built S-400 Triumf SAM system as a follow-on to the SA-20. Compared to these other systems, the S-400s feature a longer maximum range, improved missile seekers, and more sophisticated radars. China manufactures a variety of long-range air surveillance radars, including models claiming to support ballistic missile defense and other models asserting the ability to detect stealth aircraft. Marketing materials also emphasize these systems' ability to counter long-range airborne strike and combat support aircraft. PLAAF airborne early warning and control (AEW&C) aircraft such as the KJ-2000 and KJ-500 can further extend China's radar coverage well past the range of its ground-based radars.

> *Ballistic Missile Defense (BMD).* The PLA's long-range SAM inventory also offers a limited capability against ballistic missiles. China's domestic CSA-9 (HQ-9) long-range SAM system likely has a limited capability to provide point defense against tactical ballistic missiles. China has fielded SA-20 (S-300 PMU2) SAMs, and its SA-21 (S-400) SAMs may have some capability to engage ballistic missiles, depending on the interceptors and supporting infrastructure. China is working to develop BMD systems consisting of exo-atmospheric and endo-atmospheric kinetic-energy interceptors. PRC state media confirmed China's intent to move ahead with land- and sea-based mid-course missile defense capabilities in 2016. The HQ-19 interceptor has undergone tests to verify its capability against 3,000 km-range ballistic missiles. In addition, China is pursuing a mid-course interceptor that may have capabilities against IRBMs and possibly ICBMs.

Air Operations. The PLA's planned fielding of a fifth-generation fighter force will bolster its air-to-air capability, adding to the airpower of China's fourth-generation Russian-built Su-27/Su-30 and J-11A, and its indigenous J- 10A/B/C, J-11B, and more advanced J-16 fighters. The J-20 and FC-31/J-31 feature high maneuverability, stealth characteristics, and an internal weapons bay, as well as advanced avionics and sensors providing enhanced situational awareness, advanced radar tracking and targeting capabilities, and integrated EW systems.

75

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704   Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China   UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229-101

> The PLAAF's growing fleet of J-20, J-16, and J-10C fighters operating with KJ-500 AEW&C aircraft will enable longer-range A2/AD and counterair operations across the Western Pacific Ocean.

> China's continuing upgrades to its bomber fleet will give it the capability to carry new, longer-range cruise missiles. In addition, the PLAAF has added an aerial refueling capability to its new H-6N, extending its range and/or loiter time. Moreover, China is developing the Y-20U, a new tanker variant of its large Y-20 heavy-lift transport, which will enable the PLAAF to significantly expand its tanker fleet and improve its power projection capabilities.

> The PLAAF employs the medium-range H-6K bomber, which can carry up to six precision-guided CJ-20 air-launched cruise missiles (ALCMs) each, giving it the ability to engage U.S. forces as far away as Guam. Since 2016, the PLAAF has steadily increased H-6K operating areas into the western Pacific Ocean and the South China Sea. China continues to employ long-range circumnavigation flights to deter and intimidate Taiwan.

> The PLAN is currently fielding the H-6J bomber, a maritime derivative of the H-6K, which can carry up to six supersonic YJ-12 ASCMs each, allowing for saturation attacks against U.S. naval groups within the Second Island Chain. These will supplement the existing PLAN H-6G bombers capable of carrying up to four YJ-12 ASCMs.

MILITARY CAPABILITIES FOR POWER PROJECTION BEYOND THE FIRST ISLAND CHAIN

Key Takeaways

> The PRC continues to increase its military capabilities to achieve regional and global security objectives beyond a Taiwan contingency.

> China's continuing improvements of air and ground-based missile strike capabilities within and, increasingly, beyond the First Island Chain enable other military assets to operate farther from China.

> China continues to build a multi-carrier force. China's next generation of carriers will have greater endurance and a catapult system.

The PRC continues to increase its military capabilities to achieve regional and global security objectives beyond a Taiwan contingency. PLA ground, naval, air and missile forces are increasingly capable of

projecting power at greater distances from China and they are expanding the PLA's capacity to contest U.S. military superiority in the event of a conflict.

Improvements in China's air and ground-based missile capabilities to range targets beyond the First Island Chain enable other military assets to operate farther from China. These assets can conduct a variety of missions, including sovereignty enforcement and offensive operations such as blockades. China is also enhancing the PLA's ISR capabilities to extend the reach of the PLA's situational awareness, enabling timely responses to perceived threats.

PLA Army (PLAA). Power projection and ground force maneuver for multi-domain operations are consistent themes in the PLAA's modernization efforts. The PLAA continues to play a vital role in the PRC's military defense structure, but the CMC demands that the PLAA emphasize long-range maneuver capabilities and trans-theater exercises. In order to accommodate this, the PLAA is refining its capabilities and prioritizing modernization to prepare for multi-domain, multi-functional operations, and the ability to sustain those operations.

The PLAA's restructuring highlighted and empowered the use of combined-arms brigades and battalions, and the PLAA has started to place an emphasis on the concept of smaller, more adaptable and rapidly deployable formations. The rapidly deployable battalions within PLAA combined-arms brigades have become the new standard "combat element" for the PLAA for combined-arms and joint operations. Medium and light combined-arms battalions are equipped with wheeled, high-mobility vehicles to support rapid, long-range maneuver while conducting independent operations.

As a part of the PLA restructuring, the PLAA increased its number of SOF brigades to 15, providing PLAA commanders at the tactical and operational levels specialized reconnaissance, sabotage effects, and infiltration in support of contingency operations beyond China's borders. During 2019, official PLA media published articles and videos discussing the SOF brigades' capacity for long-range reconnaissance, air mobility, parachute insertion and joint capability, as well as the use of highly trained infantry forces used for rapid strike and seizure operations in unfamiliar locations.

The PLAA's advancing rotary wing aviation capabilities and, more specifically, its new air assault brigades play a vital role in the Army's ability to project power. The PLAA's two air assault brigades participated in an array of training scenarios where they were reportedly able to insert infantry forces on tactical objectives in an expedited fashion. Additionally, the fielding of the new Z-20 medium-lift helicopter will provide the air assault and army aviation brigades with new capabilities for rapid airlift and long-range insertion.

77

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704   Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China   **UNCLASSIFIED**   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229-103

PLA Navy (PLAN). The PLAN continues to develop into a global force, gradually extending its operational reach beyond East Asia into a sustained ability to operate at increasingly longer ranges. The PLAN's latest surface and subsurface platforms enable combat operations beyond the reach of the PRC's land-based defenses. In particular, China's aircraft carriers and planned follow-on carriers, once operational, will extend air defense coverage beyond the range of coastal and shipboard missile systems and will enable task group operations at increasingly longer ranges. The PLAN's emerging requirement for sea-based land-attack systems will also enhance the PRC's ability to project power. Furthermore, the PLAN now has a sizable force of highly capable logistical replenishment ships to support long-distance, long-duration deployments, including two new Fuyu class fast combat support ships (AOEs) built specifically to support aircraft carrier operations. The PLAN's expanding fleet of large modern amphibious warships will enable it to conduct in a wide range of expeditionary operations wherever PRC interests are threatened or in support of PRC participation in UN-sanctioned peacekeeping operations. The expansion of naval operations beyond China's immediate region will also facilitate its non-war military activities and further legitimize the PRC's growing global military posture, including its base in Djibouti.

> The PLAN's force structure continues to evolve, incorporating more platforms with the versatility for both offshore and long- distance power projection. China is engaged in series production of the Renhai class CG, the Luyang III MOD class DDG, and the Jiangdao class FFL, with the full production run of Jiangkai II FFGs probably completed with the delivery of the 30th unit in the class. The Renhai CG displaces more than 10,000 tons and can carry an array of long-range ASCMs and SAMs. It will likely be able to launch ASBMs and LACMs once these weapons are available. The Renhai CG will be China's premier carrier escort for blue-water operations. Four units are currently outfitting, with several more under construction.

> The PLAN continues to extend its strike range with more domestically produced ship-, submarine-, and aircraft-deployed ASCMs with the exception of a few legacy missiles imported from Russia in the 1990s and early 2000s.

> China continues to learn lessons from operating its first aircraft carrier, Liaoning. Its first domestically built aircraft carrier, Shandong, was launched in 2017 and commissioned in December 2019—the beginning of what the PLA states will be a multi-carrier force. China's next generation of carriers, including one that began construction in 2018, will have greater endurance and a catapult launch system capable of launching various types of special mission fixed-wing aircraft for missions such as early warning, EW, and ASW. These improvements would increase the striking power of a potential carrier battle group when deployed to areas beyond China's immediate periphery.

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704   Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China   UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229-104

> The PLAN continues to build multiple new, large ships that can support force projection operations, including LHAs, LPDs, large logistic support ships, and specialized blue-water auxiliary ships—including high-capability intelligence collection ships (AGI/AGOS).

The PLAN's ability to perform missions beyond the First Island Chain is modest but growing as it gains more experience operating in distant waters and acquires larger and more advanced platforms. China's experience in extended range operations primarily comes from extended task group deployments and its ongoing counterpiracy mission in the Gulf of Aden.

> In June 2019, Liaoning, accompanied by at least five additional ships transited the Miyako Strait in the First Island Chain en route to the Western Pacific for what China stated was a routine training exercise. The presence of an AOE increases the PLAN's capability to conduct extended carrier operations.

> The PLAN sustained its counter-piracy task groups in the Gulf of Aden in 2019, a ten-year effort that is the PRC's first enduring naval operation beyond the Indo-Pacific region.

> PLAN AGIs operated beyond the First Island Chain in 2019; one Type 815 Dongdiao-class AGI deployed to Australian waters to collect against the trilateral exercise TALISMAN SABER held by the United States, Australia, and Japan.

China has long challenged foreign military activities in its maritime zones in a manner that is inconsistent with the rules of customary international law as reflected in the Law of the Sea Convention. However, in recent years, the PLA has begun conducting the very same types of military activities inside and outside the First Island Chain in the maritime zones of other countries. This activity highlights China's double standard in the application of international law. Examples include sending AGIs to collect on military exercises such as the Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) exercise off Hawaii in 2014 and 2018, TALISMAN SABER off Australia in 2019, and a U.S. missile defense test off Alaska in 2017.

PLAN Marine Corps (PLANMC). Ultimately, the PLANMC will be capable of operating from the land, sea, and air to support the PLA's global operations, but this goal will likely not be realized by China's stated goal to complete PLA reforms by 2020. Four new brigades have been established, bringing the total number of combat brigades to six, but only the original two brigades are fully mission capable. There is no evidence to indicate the new brigades are manned, trained and equipped to perform expeditionary missions yet. Additionally, the PLANMC has established an aviation brigade, which will provide the force with organic aviation capabilities, and a SOF brigade.

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704   Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China   UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229-105

> In 2019, the PLAN launched its first full-length, flat-deck LHA, highlighting China's growing maritime power projection capabilities.

PLA Air Force (PLAAF) and PLA Navy Aviation. The PLAAF and PLAN Aviation continued to improve their capabilities to conduct offensive and defensive offshore operations such as strike, air and missile defense, strategic mobility, and early warning and reconnaissance missions. Although they currently have limited power projection capability, both the PLAAF and PLAN Aviation are seeking to extend their reach. The PLAAF, in particular, has received repeated calls from its leadership to become a truly "strategic" air force, able to project power at long distances and advance and defend the PRC's global interests.

> The PLAAF is expanding its inventory of refuelable fighters, developing refuelable variants of the H-6 bomber and KJ-500 AEW&C aircraft, and testing a tanker variant of its Y-20 heavy lift transport. Together, these new aircraft will noticeably expand China's ability to conduct long-range offensive air operations.

> Following former PLAAF Commander General Ma Xiaotian's 2016 public statement that China was developing a new generation of long-range bombers, a number of reports suggest the new bomber, likely named the H-20, could debut sometime in the next decade with the following features: a stealthy design, employing many fifth- generation technologies; a likely range of at least 8,500 km; a payload of at least 10 metric tons; and a capability to employ both conventional and nuclear weaponry.

> The construction of new airfields and hangars on outposts in the South China Sea extends the possible operating areas of PLA aviation forces. Future deployments of PLA combat aircraft operating from Spratly Island outposts could feature extended range and/or loiter time over the South China Sea or even reach into the Indian Ocean. China could also replicate its success establishing a naval base in Djibouti to establish overseas logistics facilities that would further extend and sustain regional and global air operations.

> In 2019, the PLAAF participated in several joint multinational training exercises, as well as its first coordinated bomber flight with Russia on July 23, 2019, which PRC state media described as a 'joint strategic air navigation" and was intended to improve coordination and message on strategic stability. During the flight, PLAAF H-6K bombers flew in formation with Russian Tu-95 bombers between Korea and Japan, prompting multiple intercepts from Japanese and South Korean military aircraft. The PRC continued their trend of foreign military competitions and deployed

80

PLAAF aircraft to AVIADARTS 2019 in Russia. However, the PLAAF also sent H-6K bombers for the first time to TSENTR 19, Russia's strategic military exercise.

> In April 2019, Beijing announced that China and Russia would hold their third computer simulated combined missile defense exercise in Russia, but it is unclear whether this drill happened. China and Russia previously conducted similar exercises in 2016 and 2017.

PLA Rocket Force (PLARF). The PLARF fields multiple missiles capable of strikes within and beyond the First Island Chain. Among these are the CSS-5 Mod 5 (DF-21D) ASBM – with a range of 1,500 km – and a MARV to challenge BMD systems. China also deploys the land-attack CSS-5 Mod 4 (DF-21C) and the ground-launched CH-SSC-9 (CJ-10) LACM, placing infrastructure on Okinawa and the main Japanese islands at risk. The DF-26 IRBM has a maximum range of 4,000 km and is capable of precision strikes against ground and ship targets, potentially threatening U.S. land and sea-based forces as far away as Guam.

PLA Strategic Support Force (SSF). The SFF's strategic space, cyber, and psychological warfare capabilities and missions are not bound by geographic constraints and can be used independently or to enable and support PLA global power projection operations. China continues to develop a variety counterspace capabilities designed to limit or prevent an adversary's use of space-based assets during crisis or conflict. In addition to the development of directed-energy weapons and satellite jammers, the PLA has an operational ground-based anti-satellite (ASAT) missile intended to target low-Earth orbit satellites, and China probably intends to pursue additional ASAT weapons capable of destroying satellites up to geosynchronous Earth orbit.

ADVANCING TOWARD AN INFORMATIZED MILITARY

Key Takeaways

> Chairman Xi Jinping has called for the PLA to create a highly informatized force capable of dominating all networks and expanding the country's security and development interests.

> The PLA considers information operations (IO) as a means of achieving information dominance early in a conflict, and continues to expand the scope and frequency of IO in military exercises.

> The PRC presents a significant, persistent cyber espionage and attack threat to an adversary's military and critical infrastructure systems.

Chairman Xi Jinping has called for the PLA to create a highly informatized force capable of dominating all networks and expanding the country's security and development interests. Chinese

81

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704 Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229-107

military writings describe informatized warfare as the use of information technology to create an operational system-of-systems, which would enable the PLA to acquire, transmit, process, and use information during a conflict to conduct joint military operations across the ground, maritime, air, space, cyberspace, and electromagnetic spectrum domains. Ongoing military reforms are accelerating the incorporation of command information systems enabling forces and commanders to carry out missions and tasks more effectively to win informatized local wars. The PLA continues to expand the scope and regularity of military exercises simulating informatized operations and likely views conventional and cyberspace operations as a means of achieving information dominance early in a contingency or conflict.

Command, Control, Communications, Computers, and Intelligence (C4I). China continues to prioritize C4I modernization as a response to trends in modern warfare that emphasize the importance of rapid information sharing, processing, and decision-making. The PLA seeks to modernize itself, both technologically and organizationally, to command complex, joint operations.

The PLA sees networked, technologically advanced C4I systems as essential to provide reliable, secure communications to fixed and mobile command posts, thereby enabling rapid, effective, multi-echelon decision-making. These systems were designed to distribute data including intelligence, battlefield information, logistical information, and weather reports via redundant, resilient communications networks to improve commanders' situational awareness. The PLA views making near-real-time ISR data available to field commanders as especially valuable in streamlining their decision processes. China is fielding the Integrated Command Platform to units at multiple levels across the force to enable lateral and cross-service communications required for joint operations. Digital databases and command automation tools allow commanders to simultaneously issue orders to multiple units while on the move and they enable units to quickly adapt their actions to shifting conditions in the battlespace.

These technical improvements are notably boosting PLA operational flexibility and responsiveness. As the PLA continues to focus on its ability to fight and win informatized wars, future information systems will likely implement emerging technologies such as big data, the internet of things, artificial intelligence (AI), and cloud computing to provide reliable, automated platforms yielding further process efficiencies. The PLA has already begun this process by embracing big data analytics that fuse a variety of data to improve automation and to create a comprehensive, real-time picture.

Electronic Warfare. The PLA considers EW an integral component of modern warfare. China's EW strategy emphasizes suppressing, degrading, disrupting, or deceiving enemy electronic equipment. Potential EW targets include adversary systems operating in radio, radar, microwave, infrared and optical frequency ranges, as well as adversary computer and information systems. PLA EW units

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704 Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229-108

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

routinely train to conduct jamming and anti-jamming operations against multiple communication and radar systems and Global Positioning System (GPS) satellite systems in force-on- force exercises. These exercises test operational units' understanding of EW weapons, equipment, and performance but they also enable operators to improve confidence in their ability to operate effectively in a complex electromagnetic environment. In addition, the PLA reportedly tests and validates advances in EW weapons R&D during these exercises.

Cyberwarfare. The development of cyberwarfare capabilities is consistent with PLA writings, which identify IO – comprising cyber, electronic, and psychological warfare – as integral to achieving information superiority and as an effective means for countering a stronger foe. China has publicly identified cyberspace as a critical domain for national security and declared its intent to expedite the development of its cyber forces.

The PRC presents a significant, persistent cyber espionage and attack threat to military and critical infrastructure systems. China seeks to create disruptive and destructive effects—from denial-of-service attacks to physical disruptions of critical infrastructure— to shape decision-making and disrupt military operations in the initial stages of a conflict by targeting and exploiting perceived weaknesses of militarily superior adversaries. China is improving its cyberattack capabilities and has the ability to launch cyberattacks—such as disruption of a natural gas pipeline for days to weeks—in the United States.

PLA writings note the effectiveness of IO and cyberwarfare in recent conflicts and advocate targeting C2 and logistics networks to affect an adversary's ability to operate during the early stages of conflict. Authoritative PLA sources call for the coordinated employment of space, cyber, and EW as strategic weapons to "paralyze the enemy's operational system of systems" and "sabotage the enemy's war command system of systems" early in a conflict. Increasingly, the PLA considers cyber capabilities a critical component in its overall integrated strategic deterrence posture, alongside space and nuclear deterrence. PLA studies discuss using warning or demonstration strikes—strikes against select military, political, and economic targets with clear "awing effects"—as part of deterrence. Accordingly, the PLA probably seeks to use its cyberwarfare capabilities to collect data for intelligence and cyberattack purposes; to constrain an adversary's actions by targeting network-based logistics, C2, communications, commercial activities, and civilian and defense critical infrastructure; or, to serve as a force-multiplier when coupled with kinetic attacks during armed conflict.

The PLA's ongoing structural reforms may further change how the PLA organizes and commands IO, particularly as the SSF evolves over time. By consolidating cyber and other IO-related elements,

the SSF likely is generating synergies by combining national-level cyber reconnaissance, attack, and defense capabilities in its organization.

Activities Directed Against the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD)

PRC-based intrusions continued to target computer systems around the world including those owned by the U.S. Government through 2019. These and past intrusions focus on accessing networks and extracting information. China uses its cyber capabilities to not only support intelligence collection against U.S. diplomatic, economic, academic, and defense industrial base sectors, but also to exfiltrate sensitive information from the defense industrial base to gain military advantage. The targeted information can benefit China's defense high-technology industries, support China's military modernization, provide the CCP insights into U.S. leadership perspectives, and enable diplomatic negotiations, such as those supporting the One Belt, One Road initiative (OBOR). Additionally, targeted information could enable PLA cyber forces to build an operational picture of U.S. defense networks, military disposition, logistics, and related military capabilities that could be exploited prior to or during a crisis. The accesses and skills required for these intrusions are similar to those necessary to conduct cyber operations in an attempt to deter, delay, disrupt, and degrade DoD operations prior to or during a conflict. In aggregate, these cyber-enabled campaigns threaten to erode U.S. military advantages and imperil the infrastructure and prosperity on which those advantages rely.

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704 Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China   UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229-110

NUCLEAR DETERRENCE

Key Takeaways

> The PRC's strategic ambitions, evolving view of the security landscape, and concerns over survivability are driving significant changes to the size, capabilities, and readiness of its nuclear forces.

> China's nuclear weapons policy prioritizes the maintenance of a survivable nuclear force that can retaliate against an adversary's first strike.

> China has long maintained a "no first use" (NFU) policy, although there is ambiguity over the conditions under which China would act outside of its NFU policy.

> China's nuclear forces will significantly evolve over the next decade as it modernizes, diversifies, and increases the number of its land-, sea-, and air-based nuclear delivery platforms.

> Over the next decade, China's nuclear warhead stockpile—currently estimated to be in the low-200s—is projected to at least double in size as China expands and modernizes its nuclear forces.

> China is pursuing a "nuclear triad" with the development of a nuclear capable air-launched ballistic missile (ALBM) and improving its ground and sea-based nuclear capabilities.

> New developments in 2019 further suggest that China intends to increase the peacetime readiness of its nuclear forces by moving to a launch-on-warning (LOW) posture with an expanded silo-based force.

The PRC's nuclear weapons policy prioritizes the maintenance of a nuclear force able to survive a first strike and respond with sufficient strength to inflict unacceptable damage on an enemy. China is enhancing peacetime readiness levels for these nuclear forces to ensure their responsiveness. In addition, China insists its new generation of mobile missiles, with warheads consisting of MIRVs and penetration aids, are intended to ensure the viability of its strategic nuclear forces in the face of continued advances in U.S. and, to a lesser extent, Russian strategic ISR, precision strike, and missile defense capabilities. India also plays a factor in China's nuclear threat perceptions.

Over the next decade, China's nuclear warhead stockpile—currently estimated to be in the low-200s—is projected to at least double in size as China expands and modernizes its nuclear forces. The anticipated changes to the capacity, capability, and readiness of China's nuclear forces in the coming years seem likely to outpace potential developments by any adversary that could plausibly threaten

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704   Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China   UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229-111

China's ability to retaliate against a first strike. These developments and China's lack of transparency raise concerns that China is not only shifting its requirements for what constitutes a minimal deterrent, but that it could shift away from its longstanding minimalist force posture.

No First Use Policy. China has long maintained an NFU policy, stating that it would use nuclear forces only in response to a nuclear strike against China. China's NFU pledge consists of two stated commitments: China will never use nuclear weapons first at any time nor under any circumstances, and China unconditionally undertakes not to use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against any non-nuclear-weapon state or in nuclear-weapon-free zones.

There is some ambiguity, however, in the narrative in China over the conditions under which China's NFU policy would no longer apply. Some PLA officers have written publicly of the need to spell out conditions under which China might need to use nuclear weapons first; for example, if an enemy's conventional attack threatened the survival of China's nuclear force or of the regime itself. There has been no indication that national leaders are willing to attach such nuances and caveats publicly to China's existing NFU policy as affirmed by recent statements by the PRC Foreign Ministry. China's lack of transparency regarding the scope and scale of its nuclear modernization program, however, raises questions regarding its future intent as it fields larger, more capable nuclear forces.

Land-Based Platforms. China's nuclear arsenal currently consists of approximately 100 ICBMs, including the silo-based CSS-4 Mod 2 (DF-5A) and Mod 3 (DF-5B); the solid-fueled, road-mobile CSS-10-class (DF-31, DF-31A and DF-31AG); and the more limited range roll-out-to-launch CSS-3 (DF-4). This strategic arsenal is complemented by road-mobile, solid-fueled CSS-5 Mod 2 and Mod 6 (DF-21) MRBMs and DF-26 IRBMs capable of ranging targets in the Indo-Pacific region. Media reports suggest that China may be developing a DF-5C and DF-31B ICBM with the DF-41 (CSS-X-20) ICBM fielding possible in the near term.

Sea-based Platforms. China has constructed six Jin class SSBNs, with four operational and two outfitting at Huludao Shipyard. China's Jin SSBNs, which are equipped to carry up to 12 CSS-N-14 (JL-2) SLBMs, are the country's first viable sea-based nuclear deterrent. China's next-generation Type 096 SSBN reportedly will be armed with a follow-on SLBM, and it will likely begin construction in the early- 2020s. Based on the 40-plus-year service life of China's first generation SSNs, China will operate its Jin and Type 096 SSBN fleets concurrently. The current range limitations of the JL-2 will require the Jin class SSBNs to operate in areas north and east of Hawaii if China seeks to target the east coast of the United States. As China fields newer, more capable, and longer ranged SLBMs such as the JL-3, the PLAN will gain the ability to target the United States from littoral waters.

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704   Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China   UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229-112

Air Platforms. The PLAAF publicly revealed the H-6N as a long-range strategic bomber during the 70th anniversary parade in October 2019. The most significant improvements of the H-6N versus legacy H-6 bombers is the addition of its air-to-air refueling probe, as well as its recessed fuselage modifications that would allow for external carriage of an ALBM believed to be nuclear capable.

Future Developments. Over the next decade, China will expand and diversify its nuclear forces, likely at least doubling its nuclear warhead stockpile. China probably intends to develop new nuclear warheads and delivery platforms that at least equal the effectiveness, reliability, and/or survivability of some of the warheads and delivery platforms currently under development by the United States and Russia.

Currently, China probably maintains an operational nuclear warhead stockpile in the low-200s. China probably has enough nuclear materials to at least double its warhead stockpile without new fissile material production.

China justifies its development of a range of technologies for its nuclear forces—including MARV, MIRVs, decoys, chaff, jamming, thermal shielding, and hypersonic glide vehicles—as necessary to counter U.S. and other countries' BMD, ISR, and precision strike systems. China is working to field nuclear theater-range, precision-strike systems.

China maintains nuclear-capable delivery systems in the PLARF and PLAN, and the PLAAF has been reassigned a nuclear mission. To date, PRC officials have identified both the H-6N bomber and China's future strategic stealth bomber as dual-capable delivery platforms. The PLA is upgrading its aircraft with two new ALBMs, one of which may include a nuclear payload. Its deployment and integration would provide China for the first time with a viable nuclear triad of delivery systems dispersed across land, sea, and air forces.

China maintained a high level of activity at its Lop Nur nuclear weapons test site throughout 2019, according to the U.S. Department of State's April 2020 *Executive Summary of Findings on Adherence to and Compliance with Arms Control, Nonproliferation, and Disarmament Agreements and Commitments.* The executive summary states, "China's possible preparation to operate its Lop Nur test site year-round, its use of explosive containment chambers, extensive excavation activities at Lop Nur, and lack of transparency on its nuclear testing activities – which has included frequently blocking the flow of data from its International Monitoring System (IMS) stations to the International Data Center operated by the Preparatory Commission for the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty Organization – raise concerns regarding its adherence to the 'zero yield' standard adhered to by the United States, United Kingdom, and France in their respective nuclear weapons testing moratoria."

The PRC has not clarified how its strategic forces will evolve commensurate with its objective of having a "world-class" military or if China's goal of becoming a "great modern socialist country" will alter its nuclear deterrence requirements. In its 2019 defense white paper, China reiterated its longstanding position that it "…keeps its nuclear capabilities at the minimum level required for national security." However, China's nuclear forces appear to be on a trajectory to exceed the size of a "minimum deterrent" as described in the PLA's own writings as a small quantity of nuclear weapons to strike enemy urban targets. China's evolving posture is more consistent with what PLA writings describe as a "limited deterrent"—a posture that the PLA describes as between a minimum and maximum deterrent.

Lower-yield Nuclear Weapons. PRC strategists have highlighted the need for lower-yield nuclear weapons in order to increase the deterrence value of China's nuclear force without defining specific nuclear yield values. A 2017 defense industry publication indicated a lower-yield weapon had been developed for use against campaign and tactical targets that would reduce collateral damage. The DF-26 is China's first nuclear-capable missile system that can conduct precision strikes, and therefore, is the most likely weapon system to field a lower-yield warhead in the near-term.

Readiness. Although China almost certainly keeps the majority of its nuclear force on a peacetime status—with separated launchers, missiles, and warheads—nuclear and conventional PLARF brigades conduct "combat readiness duty" and "high alert duty" which apparently includes assigning a missile battalion to be ready to launch, and rotating to standby positions as much as monthly for unspecified periods of time. Authoritative PLA text books on strategy state "high alert duty" is valuable for the defender in a nuclear war, recommending the PLARF adopt a high alert posture conceptually comparable to the claimed high alert posture kept by portions of U.S. and Russian nuclear forces, and that such a posture is compatible with the PRC's active defense concept, NFU policy, and post-strike response approach.

Launch on Warning (LOW). Increasing evidence emerged in 2019 indicates that China seeks to keep at least a portion of its force on a LOW posture. This includes further investment in silo-based forces—while building more survivable mobile platforms—that China has previously assessed as having low survivability in the absence of a force-wide LOW posture and new developments in its early warning capabilities.

The PRC's 2015 defense white paper identified "improved strategic early warning, command and control…and rapid reaction," as specific nuclear force modernization goals. In 2015 and 2016, PRC official state media reported that some of its ICBM force was conducting alerts, including the DF-31A ICBM. It is unclear from these reports what such alerts entailed.

Commercial imagery from 2019 has revealed that China has constructed an ICBM silo at one of the PLARF's Western training ranges that is smaller than China's existing CSS-4 (DF-5) silos. According to state media, the CSS-X-20 (DF-41) ICBM can be launched from silos; this site is probably being used to at least develop a concept of operations for silo basing this system. There are also some indications that China may be building new CSS-4 (DF-5) ICBM silos.

China is working to develop a space-based early warning capability that could support this posture in the future. In October 2019, Russia announced plans to assist China in developing their missile-attack early warning network, including aiding the development of ground-based radars and potentially extending to space-based sensors. China already has several ground-based large phase array radars – similar in appearance to U.S. PAVE PAWS radars – that could support a missile early warning role.

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704   Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China   UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229-115

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These images show that new silos, having first been identified in fall 2019 by a non-governmental organization's commercial imagery, appear externally complete. Their size precludes use by the DF-5 and may support concept development for a silo-based DF-41 or one of China's smaller ICBMs. When taken with China's past concerns about silo survivability and ongoing strategic early warning developments, these new silos provide further evidence China is moving to a LOW posture.

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704 Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229-116

PLA Underground Facilities

The PLA continues to maintain a robust and technologically advanced underground facility (UGF) program to protect all aspects of its military forces, including C2, logistics, missile systems, and naval forces. China has thousands of UGFs and it continues to construct more each year. The PLA utilizes these UGFs to protect valuable assets from the effects of missile strikes and to conceal military operations from adversaries. China's NFU policy also contributed to the construction of UGFs for the country's nuclear forces, which may have planned to survive an initial nuclear first strike by an adversary.

China began to update and expand its military UGF program in the mid- to late-1980s. This modernization effort took on renewed urgency following China's observation of U.S. and Coalition air operations during the 1991 Gulf War and their use in Operation ALLIED FORCE. These military campaigns convinced China it needs to build more survivable, deeply buried facilities to protect military assets from the effects of penetrating conventional munition and nuclear strikes. China will likely continue to develop and expand its UGF program to support its expanding forces.

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3

FORCES, CAPABILITIES, AND ACTIVITIES ON CHINA'S PERIPHERY

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704   Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229-119   People's Republic of China

UNCLASSIFIED

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

Key Takeaways

> China continues to implement reforms associated with the establishment of the Eastern, Southern, Western, Northern, and Central Theater Commands, which are organized based on China's perception of peripheral threats.

> Under the direction of the Central Military Commission (CMC), each Theater Command has authority over the services and conventional forces within the theater.

China continues to implement reforms associated with the establishment of five theater commands in early 2016. The Eastern, Southern, Western, Northern and Central Theater Commands replaced seven army-based military regions and are now the highest-ranking joint operations command organizations within their respective geographical areas. Each theater command receives direction from the CMC and has operational authority over most PLA conventional forces within its theater. The theater commands are also responsible for all non-nuclear combat and non-combat operations within their area of responsibility. Theater commands are also responsible for developing theater-specific command strategies aimed at preparing to fight and win against adversaries, developing joint operational plans, assessing military capability requirements for the forces in their theaters, responding to crises, and safeguarding the sovereignty and stability of their theaters. The PRC's threat perceptions shape the strategic directions for the theater commands, with levels of emphasis and specific missions and tasks varying:

> **Eastern Theater Command** – Taiwan, Japan, East China Sea;

> **Southern Theater Command** – South China Sea, Southeast Asia;

> **Western Theater Command** – India, South Asia, Central Asia, "counterterrorism" in Xinjiang and Tibet;

> **Northern Theater Command** – Korean Peninsula, Russia;

> **Central Theater Command** – Capital defense; surge support to other theaters.

94

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704   Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China   UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229-120

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

EASTERN THEATER COMMAND

Key Takeaway

> The Eastern Theater Command is oriented toward Taiwan and the East China Sea.

The Eastern Theater Command likely executes operational control over national defense matters related to Taiwan and Japan, including contingencies in and around the Taiwan Strait and the Senkaku Islands. In 2019, the Eastern Theater Command focused on a series of training and exercises to improve joint operations and combat readiness, organizing exercises and drills consisting of long-distance training and mobilization, aerial combat, and live-fire training. PLA units located within the Eastern Theater Command include three group armies, a naval fleet, two marine brigades, two Air Force bases, and one missile base. The Eastern Theater Command also likely commands all China Coast Guard (CCG) and maritime militia ships while conducting Senkakus-related operations.

> In April 2019, the Eastern Theater Command JOCC commanded joint training east of Taiwan, which they asserted was to train for joint fire and maritime strike. The training included bombers, fighters, electronic jamming and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) aircraft circumnavigating Taiwan while naval combatants trained for mock strikes and helicopters delivered an amphibious landing force. In March, two J-11 fighters crossed the unofficial median line of the Taiwan Strait, for the first time since 1999. The Eastern Theater Command also likely played a significant role in a nationwide exercise across all five theater commands based on the locations of some of the exercise activity near Taiwan.

> As of March 2019, the PLA Air Force (PLAAF) assigned its first fifth generation J-20s to an operational unit, a fighter brigade in the Eastern Theater Command, probably to improve its ability to respond to U.S. and allied aircraft in the area. In March 2019, a likely Eastern Theater Y-8Q anti-submarine warfare (ASW) aircraft was also first observed operating in the East China Sea by Japan.

95

DEVELOPMENTS IN THE SECURITY SITUATION IN THE TAIWAN STRAIT

Key Takeaways

> Relations between the PRC and Taiwan remained tense through 2019.

> The PLA continued Taiwan Strait contingency preparations.

Relations between the PRC and Taiwan remained at an impasse through 2019. Since the 2016 election of Tsai Ing-wen as Taiwan's president, China halted formal communication with Taiwan and has repeatedly stressed that Taiwan must accept the "1992 Consensus" to restart formal engagement. Since November 2016, China's leaders have directly equated the "1992 Consensus" to "one China," which was reaffirmed by President Xi in a January 2019 address to "compatriots" in Taiwan. Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen has continually pledged to maintain the status quo in cross-Strait relations and called for China to respect Taiwan's democracy and agree to negotiations without preconditions.

The PRC also maintained its diplomatic pressure on Taiwan, thwarting Taiwan's efforts to participate in international organizations such as the World Health Organization, International Civil Aviation Organization, and INTERPOL. In 2019, the PRC convinced the Solomon Islands and Kiribati to break diplomatic relations with Taiwan. Despite the stalled consultations with the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) continues to engage with Taiwan's Kuomintang (KMT) party, and the PRC continues to hold lower-level cross-Strait exchanges such as the municipal Shanghai-Taipei Twin City Forum.

The PLA continues to prepare for contingencies in the Taiwan Strait to deter, and if necessary, compel Taiwan to abandon moves toward independence. The PLA also is likely preparing for a contingency to unify Taiwan with the mainland by force, while simultaneously deterring, delaying, or denying any third-party intervention on Taiwan's behalf. As part of a comprehensive campaign to pressure Taiwan and the Tsai Administration, China has increased military exercises in the vicinity of Taiwan, including circumnavigation flights by the PLAAF and naval exercises in the East China Sea.

Taiwan's national defense report released in 2017 cited concerns that increased PLA military activity near Taiwan poses an "enormous threat to security in the Taiwan Strait," and that Taiwan requires a "multiple deterrence strategy," including an emphasis on developing asymmetric warfare to counter PLA advances.

EAST CHINA SEA

Key Takeaway

> China continues to use maritime law enforcement ships and aircraft to patrol near the Japan-administered Senkaku Islands.

China claims sovereignty over the Japanese-administered Senkaku Islands in the East China Sea, which Taiwan also claims. The United States does not take a position on sovereignty of the Senkaku Islands but recognizes Japan's administration of the islands and continues to reaffirm that the islands fall within the scope of Article 5 of the U.S.-Japan Mutual Security Treaty. In addition, the United States opposes any unilateral actions that seek to undermine Japan's administration of the islands. China uses maritime law enforcement ships and aircraft to patrol near the islands. During 2019, China typically maintained a presence in the Senkaku Islands with four CCG ships, which enter the waters within 12 nm of the islands. The CCG conducted its longest-ever patrol, 64 days, in the Senkaku Islands contiguous zone in 2019, and entered Japanese territorial waters in the Tsugaru Strait.

Separately, the PLA Navy (PLAN) frequently advances into the Pacific Ocean by passing between Japan's Okinawa and Miyako Islands. The Eastern Theater Navy regularly conducts military exercises in the Sea of Japan to prepare for potential conflicts.

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704   Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China

UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229-123

Eastern Theater

Legend:

Theater Command HQ

PLA Army
- Theater Army HQ
- Group Army HQ
- Combined Arms Brigade
- Amphibious Combined Arms Brigade
- Artillery Brigade
- Air Defense Brigade
- Army Aviation Brigade
- Special Operations Brigade
- Service Support Brigade
- Engineering and Chemical Defense Brigade

PLA Air Force
- Theater Air Force HQ
- Base
- Fighter/Ground Attack Brigade
- Transportation
- SM Special Mission Division

PLA Rocket Force
- Missile Base
- Missile Unit

PLA Navy
- Theater Navy HQ
- Theater Naval Aviation HQ
- Naval Aviation Brigade
- Marine Brigade
- Base
- SM Naval Aviation Special Mission Division
- Destroyer Flotilla
- Landing Ship Flotilla
- Submarine Flotilla
- Theater boundary

PLA Joint Logistics Support Force
- Joint Logistics Support Center

CHINA

Eastern Theater

East China Sea

Taiwan

Taiwan Strait

Hong Kong S.A.R.

Macau S.A.R.

Unlocated Units
- 7 Combined Arms Brigades
- 2 Service Support Brigades
- 1 Special Operations Brigade

0   150   300   Kilometers

Representations of locations are approximate.
Boundary representation is not necessarily authoritative.
Information current as of 01 Jan 2020.

98

SOUTHERN THEATER COMMAND

Key Takeaway

> The Southern Theater Command is oriented toward the South China Sea, Southeast Asia border security, and territorial and maritime disputes.

The area of responsibility of the Southern Theater Command covers mainland and maritime Southeast Asia, including the South China Sea. This geographic area implies that the Southern Theater Command is responsible for securing the South China Sea, supporting the Eastern Theater Command in any invasion of Taiwan, responding to territorial disputes, and assuring the security of sea lines of communication (SLOCs) seen as vital to China's global ambitions. PLA units located within the Southern Theater Command are two group armies, a naval fleet, two marine brigades, two Air Force bases, and two Rocket Force bases. The Southern Theater Command is responsible for responding to U.S. freedom of navigation operations in the South China Sea, and likely commands all CCG and maritime militia ships conducting operations within China's claimed "nine-dash line."

> The Southern Theater Command is responsible for training, force disposition, and operations in the South China Sea. In 2019, Southern Theater Command units conducted multiple live-fire drills and amphibious training events near PRC-occupied features in the South China Sea. The Southern Theater Command also plays a significant role in the PLA's bilateral and multilateral exercises with countries in Southeast Asia, participating in counterterrorism and naval exercises in 2019.

> The Southern Theater Command commands the PLA Hong Kong and Macao garrisons. In August 2019, the PLA Hong Kong and Macao garrisons conducted an annual rotation of forces. In Hong Kong, PLA and probable People's Armed Police (PAP) forces deployed into Hong Kong by land, air, and sea from Shenzhen at night, however, no forces were observed rotating out of Hong Kong. The PRC's troop rotation announcement in 2019 did not include a statement that PLA troop and equipment levels remain unchanged. Throughout the months of protests, PAP and PLA units have been publicly highlighting their anti-riot, counterterrorism, and disaster prevention training.

> All the PLA's 24 Su-35s purchased from Russia are assigned to the Southern Theater Command Air Force, and have flown patrols in the South China Sea and into the Western Pacific. The Southern Theater Command was the first command to receive the PLAN's H-6J maritime strike bombers. China's first-domestically produced aircraft carrier arrived in the Southern Theater Command at Yulin Naval Base, very likely its operational base, in November 2019 with embarked J-15s.

99

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704 Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229-125

SOUTH CHINA SEA

Key Takeaways

> In 2019, China did not resume South China Sea land reclamation or major military infrastructure construction at its seven Spratly Islands outposts.

> China's outposts are capable of supporting military operations and include advanced weapon systems; however, no large-scale air presence has been yet observed in the Spratly Islands.

> In 2019, China deployed PLAN, CCG, and civilian ships in response to Vietnamese and Malaysian drilling operations within China's claimed "nine-dash-line" and construction by the Philippines at Thitu Island.

Developments in the Security Situation. In July 2016, an arbitral tribunal convened pursuant to provisions in the 1982 Law of the Sea Convention ruled in a case brought by the Philippines that China's claims to "historic rights" in the South China Sea within the area depicted by the "nine-dash line" could not exceed its maritime rights or entitlements as specifically provided in relevant provisions of the Law of the Sea Convention. Despite the decision, the PRC continues to use coercive tactics, including the employment of PLA naval and paramilitary vessels, to enforce its claims and advance its interests. China does so in ways calculated to remain below the threshold of provoking conflict. China has deployed anti-ship cruise missiles (ASCMs) and long-range surface-to-air missiles (SAMs) to the Spratly Islands, and fighters and SAMs to the disputed Paracel Islands.

> China states that international military presence within the South China Sea is a challenge to its sovereignty. China continues to employ coercive tactics to enforce its claims. In 2019, China deployed PLAN, CCG, and civilian ships in response to Vietnamese and Malaysian drilling operations within China's claimed "nine-dash line" and construction by the Philippines at Thitu Island.

> In July 2019, China and Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) members completed the first reading of the China-ASEAN Code of Conduct, with a second and third reading remaining before China and ASEAN members finalize the agreement. China and ASEAN member states seek to complete negotiations by 2021. The negotiations are unlikely to produce substantive outcomes because China and some South China Sea claimants are probably sensitive to diplomatic language that limits their activities and a requirement for ASEAN consensus.

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704   Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China   UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229-126

Outposts in the Spratly Islands

Representations of locations are approximate.
Boundary representation is not necessarily authoritative.
Depiction of claims on this map is without prejudice to U.S. non-recognition of any such claims.
Information current as of 01 Jan 2020.

Outposts Capable of Supporting Military Operations. Since early 2018, PRC-occupied Spratly Island outposts have been equipped with advanced anti-ship and anti-aircraft missile systems and military jamming equipment, marking the most capable land-based weapons systems deployed by any claimant in the disputed South China Sea to date. From early 2018 to late 2019, China regularly utilized its Spratly Islands outposts to support naval and coast guard operations in the South China Sea.

The PRC completed military infrastructure on its three larger outposts in the Spratly Islands at Fiery Cross, Subi, and Mischief Reefs by early 2018, including aviation facilities, port facilities, fixed-weapons positions, barracks, administration buildings, and communications facilities; and shore-based

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704   Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China

UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229-127

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

infrastructure on its four smaller outposts in the Spratly Islands—Johnson, Gaven, Hughes, and Cuarteron Reefs—by early 2016, including administrative buildings, weapons stations, and sensor emplacements.

No substantial land has been reclaimed at any of the outposts since the PRC completed its extensive artificial manipulation in the Spratly Islands in late 2015, after adding more than 3,200 acres of land to the seven features it occupies in the Spratlys.

China has stated these projects are mainly to improve marine research, safety of navigation, and the living and working conditions of personnel stationed on the outposts. However, the outposts provide airfields, berthing areas, and resupply facilities that allow China to maintain a more flexible and persistent military and paramilitary presence in the area. This improves China's ability to detect and challenge activities by rival claimants or third parties and widens the range of response options available to China.

Southern Theater

CHINA

Unlocated Units

8 Combined Arms Brigades

2 Service Support Brigades

1 Special Operations Brigade

1 Theater Navy Aviation HQ

Theater Command HQ

PLA Army
- Theater Army HQ
- Group Army HQ
- Infantry Division
- Combined Arms Brigade
- Amphibious Combined Arms Brigade
- Artillery Brigade
- Air Defense Brigade
- Army Aviation Brigade
- Special Operations Brigade
- Service Support Brigade
- Border Defense Brigade
- Engineering and Chemical Defense Brigade

PLA Air Force
- Theater Air Force HQ
- Base
- Fighter/Ground Attack Brigade
- Bomber Division
- Transportation and SAR Brigade
- Special Mission Division

PLA Rocket Force
- Missile Base
- Missile Unit

PLA Navy
- Theater Navy HQ
- Theater Naval Aviation HQ
- Naval Aviation Brigade
- Marine Brigade
- Base
- Naval Aviation Special Mission Division
- Destroyer Flotilla
- Landing Ship Flotilla
- Submarine Flotilla
- Theater boundary

PLA Joint Logistics Support Force
- Joint Logistics Support Center

CHINA

Southern Theater

BURMA

VIETNAM

LAOS

THAILAND

Hainan Island

Hong Kong S.A.R.

Macau S.A.R.

South China Sea

0   150   300   Kilometers

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FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704   Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China   UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229-129

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

WESTERN THEATER COMMAND

Key Takeaway

> The Western Theater Command is oriented towards India and "counterterrorism" missions along the PRC's western borders.

The Western Theater Command is geographically the largest theater command within China and is likely responsible for responding to conflict with India and terrorist and insurgent threats to and within western China. PLA units located within the Western Theater Command include two group armies, other Army units under the region's two military districts (Xinjiang and Tibet), three Air Force bases, and one Rocket Force base. PAP units responsible for Xinjiang operations are also likely under the control of the Western Theater Command.

Within China, the Western Theater Command focuses on the Xinjiang and Tibet Autonomous Regions where the CPP perceives a high threat of separatism and terrorism, particularly among Uyghur populations. According to the U.S. Department of State's *2019 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*, the PRC in 2019 "continued its campaign of mass detention of members of Muslim minority groups in the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region (Xinjiang). Authorities were reportedly to have arbitrarily detained more than one million Uyghurs, ethnic Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, and other Muslims in extrajudicial internment camps designed to erase religious and ethnic identities. Chinese government officials justified the camps under the pretense of combatting terrorism, separatism, and extremism."

CHINA-INDIA BORDER

Key Takeaways

> In 2019, officials from the PRC and India continued regular meetings regarding their disputed border, while low-level face-offs persisted between Chinese and Indian military personnel.

> Chinese and Indian forces both continued construction and patrols in contested regions along the disputed border, but generally kept tensions from escalating in 2019.

Chinese and Indian patrols regularly encountered one another along their disputed border, and both sides often accuse each other of border incursions. Despite low-level face-offs among troops in 2019, China and India prevented these incidents from escalating to the level of the 73-day border standoff at the Doklam Plateau in 2017. In 2019, Chinese and Indian forces engaged in regular border meetings to discuss disputes. Meanwhile, Chinese and Indian officials continued diplomatic discussions on border issues.

> In October 2019, President Xi Jinping met with Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Chennai, India to discuss economic relations and the importance of the peaceful resolution of contentious issues, particularly regarding the border. This meeting was the second summit between Xi and Modi, the first of which occurred in April 2018 following the 2017 Doklam standoff.

> In August 2019, China submitted "early harvest" proposals regarding China-India border issues to India, which was the first time that China had approached India with resolution proposals. Although India was not pleased with the proposals, the 22nd meeting of the Special Representatives of India and China occurred in December 2019 and reinforced both sides' shared intent to manage tensions in the border region.

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704   Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China

UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229-131

Western Theater

Unlocated Units

4 Combined Arms Brigades
2 Service Support Brigades
1 Engineer and Chemical Defense Brigade
1 Army Aviation Brigade

NORTHERN THEATER COMMAND

Key Takeaway

> The Northern Theater Command is oriented toward the Korean Peninsula and Russian border security.

The area of responsibility of the Northern Theater Command includes the majority of China's borders with Mongolia and Russia, North Korea, and the Yellow Sea. The Northern Theater is responsible for operations along China's northern periphery and conducting border stability operations associated with a North Korean contingency and northern border contingencies involving Mongolia or Russia. PLA units located within the Northern Theater Command are three group armies, a naval fleet, two marine brigades, two air bases, and one PLARF base. The Northern Theater Navy would be responsible primarily for protecting the sea approaches to northern China, but could provide mission-critical assets to support other fleets. In 2019, the Northern Theater Command Navy carried out a comprehensive anti-submarine drill and a long-range air defense maneuver exercise. The Northern Theater Air Force also executed a combat-readiness drill, conducting day and nighttime patrols.

RELATIONS WITH NORTH KOREA

Key Takeaways

> China's strained relationship with North Korea appeared to warm somewhat in 2019.

> The PLA continued to conduct military exercises in preparation for a contingency on the Korean Peninsula.

The PRC's relationship with North Korea appeared to warm somewhat following a period tensions after China increased implementation of UN Security Council resolutions in 2017. China largely continues to enforce a number of the UN Security Council's resolution sanctions against North Korea, but Beijing regularly fails to act against illicit ship-to-ship transfers in China's territorial seas, take action against China-based North Korean banking and weapons trade representatives and their activities, and continues to import coal—albeit at lower volumes—via Chinese barges and ship-to-ship transfers. In 2019, President Xi Jinping met twice with Kim Jong-un, complementing numerous lower-level official exchanges in both North Korea and China. China and North Korea restarted high-level military diplomacy, which included North Korean participation in the PLA Navy's (PLAN's) international fleet review and several meetings between military officials. These engagements include a high-level

107

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704 Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China   UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229-133

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

visit by the director of the General Political Bureau of the Korean People's Army Kim Su-gil with CMC

Vice Chairman Zhang Youxia in Beijing. China's objectives for the Korean Peninsula include stability, denuclearization, and the absence of U.S. forces near China's border. China's focus on maintaining stability on the Korean Peninsula involves preventing North Korea's collapse and military conflict on the Peninsula. Toward these ends, China continues to advocate for a dual-track approach towards North Korea that embraces both dialogue and pressure, and that encourages the resumption of U.S.-North Korea talks.

The PLA conducts military exercises in preparation for a contingency on the Korean Peninsula including air, land, sea, and chemical defense training events. China's leaders could order the Northern Theater Command to engage in a range of operations in the event of a crisis. These could include securing the China-North Korea border to prevent the flow of refugees or a military intervention into North Korea. China could cite the 1961 Treaty of Friendship, Co-operation and Mutual Assistance that it signed with North Korea as a justification to send the PLA into North Korea.

Northern Theater

Legend:

Theater Command HQ

PLA Army
- Theater Army HQ
- Group Army
- Combined Arms Brigade
- Artillery Division/Brigade
- Air Defense Brigade
- Army Aviation Brigade
- Special Operations Brigade
- Service Support Brigade
- Border Defense Brigade
- Engineering and Chemical Defense Brigade

PLA Air Force
- Theater Air Force HQ
- Base
- Fighter/Ground Attack Brigade
- Transportation and SAR Brigade
- SM Special Mission Division

PLA Rocket Force
- Missile Base
- Missile Unit

PLA Joint Logistics Support Force
- Joint Logistics Support Center

PLA Navy
- Theater Navy HQ
- Theater Naval Aviation HQ
- Base
- Fighter/Ground Attack Brigade
- Marine Brigade
- Transport Regiment
- SM Navy Special Mission Division
- Destroyer Flotilla
- Submarine Flotilla
- Theater Boundary

Unlocated Units

8 Combined Arms Brigades

3 Service Support Brigades

1 Engineer and Chemical Defense Brigade

Representations of locations are approximate.
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Information current as of 01 Jan 2020.

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704   Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China   UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229-135

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

CENTRAL THEATER COMMAND

Key Takeaway

> The Central Theater Command is oriented toward capital defense and providing surge support to other theaters.

The Central Theater Command is responsible for the defense of the capital, providing security for CCP leadership, and serving as a strategic reserve to the other theater commands. The Central Theater Command's area of responsibility stretches from the Bohai Gulf to the interior of China, connecting the other four theater commands. Units within the Central Theater Command include three group armies, two Air Force bases, and one Rocket Force base. Although the Central Theater Command has coastal responsibilities, it lacks a subordinate naval fleet.

Central Theater

Theater Command HQ

PLA Army
- Theater Army HQ
- Group Army HQ
- Base
- Infantry Division
- Combined Arms Brigade
- Artillery Brigade
- Air Defense Brigade
- Air Assault Brigade
- Army Aviation Brigade
- Special Operations Brigade
- Service Support Brigade
- Engineering and Chemical Defense Brigade

PLA Air Force
- Theater Air Force HQ
- Base
- Fighter/Ground Attack Brigade
- Bomber Division
- Transport Division

PLA Rocket Force
- Missile Base
- Missile Unit
- Theater boundary

PLA Joint Logistics Support Force
- Joint Logistics Support Center
- Joint Logistics Support Base

Unlocated Units

| 11 Combined Arms Brigades |
| 3 Service Support Brigades |

Representations of locations are approximate.
Boundary representation is not necessarily authoritative.
Information current as of 1 Jan 2020.

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704   Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China   UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229-137

CHINA'S STRATEGY AND CAPABILITIES DEVELOPMENT IN THE TAIWAN STRAIT

Key Takeaways

> Although China advocates for peaceful unification with Taiwan, China has never renounced the use of military force; the circumstances under which China has historically warned it would use force remain ambiguous and have evolved over time.

> China has a range of options for military campaigns against Taiwan, from an air and maritime blockade to a full-scale amphibious invasion to seize and occupy some or all of Taiwan or its offshore islands.

The PRC appears willing to defer the use of military force as long as it considers that unification with Taiwan could be negotiated over the long-term and the costs of conflict outweigh the benefits. China argues that the credible threat of force is essential to maintaining the conditions for political progress and preventing Taiwan from making moves toward independence. In January 2019, President Xi Jinping publicly reiterated China's long-standing refusal to renounce the use of force to resolve the Taiwan issue. In the same speech, Xi also reaffirmed China's longstanding position for peaceful unification under the principle of "one country, two systems."

The circumstances under which the PRC has historically warned it would use force have evolved over time. These circumstances have included:

> Formal declaration of Taiwan independence;

> Undefined moves toward Taiwan independence;

> Internal unrest in Taiwan;

> Taiwan's acquisition of nuclear weapons;

> Indefinite delays in the resumption of cross-Strait dialogue on unification;

> Foreign intervention in Taiwan's internal affairs; and,

> Foreign forces stationed on Taiwan.

Article 8 of China's March 2005 *Anti-Secession Law* states China may use "non-peaceful means" if "secessionist forces . . . cause the fact of Taiwan's secession from China," if "major incidents entailing Taiwan's secession" occur, or if "possibilities for peaceful reunification" are exhausted. China's use of such non-specific conditions increases their policy flexibility through deliberate strategic ambiguity.

112

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704   Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the
UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229-138
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
People's Republic of China

China continues to view the Taiwan issue as the most important and sensitive issue between the United States and China.

CHINA'S COURSES OF ACTION AGAINST TAIWAN

The PRC continues to signal its willingness to use military force against Taiwan. The PLA has a range of options to coerce Taipei based on its increasing capabilities in multiple domains. China could pursue a measured approach by signaling its readiness to use force or conduct punitive actions against Taiwan. The PLA could also conduct a more comprehensive campaign designed to force Taiwan to capitulate to unification, or unification dialogue under China's terms. Notably, China would seek to deter potential U.S. intervention in any Taiwan contingency campaign – capabilities that the PRC highlighted during its October 2019 military parade celebrating its 70th anniversary. Failing that, China would attempt to delay and defeat intervention in an asymmetric, limited war of short duration. In the event of a protracted conflict, China might choose to escalate cyberspace, space, or nuclear activities in an attempt to end the conflict, or it might choose to fight to a stalemate and pursue a political settlement. The PLA could initiate the military options listed below individually or in combination.

Air and Maritime Blockade. PLA writings describe a Joint Blockade Campaign in which China would employ kinetic blockades of maritime and air traffic, including a cut-off of Taiwan's vital imports, to force Taiwan's capitulation. Large-scale missile strikes and possible seizures of Taiwan's offshore islands would accompany a Joint Blockade in an attempt to achieve a rapid Taiwan surrender, while at the same time, posturing air and naval forces to conduct weeks or months of blockade operations if necessary. China will also likely complement its air and maritime blockade operations with concurrent electronic warfare (EW), network attacks, and information operations (IO) to further isolate Taiwan's authorities and populace and to control the international narrative of the conflict.

Limited Force or Coercive Options. China could use a variety of disruptive, punitive, or lethal military actions in a limited campaign against Taiwan, probably in conjunction with overt and clandestine economic and political activities supported by a variety of IO to shape perceptions or undercut the effectiveness or legitimacy of the Taiwan authorities. Such a campaign could include computer network or limited kinetic attacks against Taiwan's political, military, and economic infrastructure to induce fear in Taiwan and degrade the Taiwan population's confidence in their leaders. Similarly, PLA special operations forces (SOF) could infiltrate Taiwan and conduct attacks against infrastructure or leadership targets.

Air and Missile Campaign. China could use missile attacks and precision air strikes against air defense systems, including air bases, radar sites, missiles, space assets, and communications facilities to degrade Taiwan's defenses, neutralize Taiwan's leadership, or break the Taiwan people's resolve.

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704 Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China
UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229-139

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

Invasion of Taiwan. Publicly available Chinese writings describe different operational concepts for an amphibious invasion of Taiwan. The most prominent of these, the Joint Island Landing Campaign, envisions a complex operation relying on coordinated, interlocking campaigns for logistics, air, and naval support, and EW. The objective would be to break through or circumvent shore defenses, establish and build a beachhead, transport personnel and materiel to designated landing sites in the north or south of Taiwan's western coastline, and launch attacks to seize and occupy key targets or the entire island. In 2019, the PLA conducted joint amphibious assault exercises near Taiwan. Furthermore, China continues to build capabilities that would contribute to a full-scale invasion; in 2019, the PLA completed construction of its first helicopter dock amphibious assault ship (LHA).

Large-scale amphibious invasion is one of the most complicated and difficult military operations. Success depends upon air and maritime superiority, the rapid buildup and sustainment of supplies onshore, and uninterrupted support. An attempt to invade Taiwan would likely strain China's armed forces and invite international intervention. These stresses, combined with China's combat force attrition and the complexity of urban warfare and counterinsurgency, even assuming a successful landing and breakout, make an amphibious invasion of Taiwan a significant political and military risk.

The PLA is capable of accomplishing various amphibious operations short of a full-scale invasion of Taiwan as well. With few overt military preparations beyond routine training, China could launch an invasion of small Taiwan-occupied islands in the South China Sea such as Pratas or Itu Aba. A PLA invasion of a medium-sized, better-defended island such as Matsu or Jinmen is within China's capabilities. Such an invasion would demonstrate military capability, political resolve, and achieve tangible territorial gain while simultaneously showing some measure of restraint. However, this kind of operation involves significant, and possibly prohibitive, political risk because it could galvanize pro-independence sentiment on Taiwan and generate international opposition.

114

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704 Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China   UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229-140

Effect of PLA Reform on a Taiwan Contingency

One of the overarching goals of the structural reforms to reshape the PLA was to construct a military capable of conducting complex joint operations, including those that would be involved in a Taiwan contingency. PLA reforms seek to clarify command authorities, improving joint integration, and facilitating the transition from peace to war. The abolishment of military regions in favor of military theaters – in this case, the PLA's Eastern Theater Command – has also likely streamlined and improved the PLA's ability to conduct yearlong planning and preparation for joint military operations across the Taiwan Strait. PLA combat units are likely experiencing temporary decreases in readiness and proficiency to conduct large-scale joint operations as they reorganize units, integrate new capabilities, and adjust to new command structures.

A significant addition to the overall structure of the PLA is the establishment of the Strategic Support Force (SSF) and the Joint Logistic Support Force (JLSF). During a Taiwan contingency, the JLSF, in conjunction with subordinate joint logistics support centers, would coordinate joint logistics and the delivery of materiel as well as oversee various civil-military support systems to sustain the campaign. The creation of the SSF likely improves the PLA's ability to execute and coordinate IO (particularly cyber, EW, and counterspace) in a Taiwan contingency. It may also improve the PLA's ability to manage and provide space-based reconnaissance to the CMC and the Eastern Theater Command, improving PLA command staffs' situational awareness of Taiwan's military units and facilities. The PLA is likely still exploring how to reform its joint command processes to integrate IO and ISR capabilities more fully at the theater-level, but structural reforms have removed the biggest barriers to integrating these strategic capabilities at the theater-level.

Structural reforms within the military and paramilitary forces also have implications on resources and operational capabilities available to the PLA for a future Taiwan contingency.

115

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704 Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China   UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229-141

Taiwan Strait

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Information current as of 01 Jan 2020.

THE PLA'S CURRENT POSTURE FOR A TAIWAN CONFLICT

PLA Army (PLAA). The PLAA continues to enhance its readiness to prevent Taiwan independence and execute an invasion if necessary. Through their design and training, the PLAA's restructured and improved combined-arms brigades prioritize maneuver, flexibility, and ability to deploy in different terrain environments while bringing ample firepower in combat scenarios beyond China's borders. The PLA Eastern Theater Command and Southern Theater Command field multiple amphibious combined-arms brigades in relatively close proximity to Taiwan. These amphibious combined-arms brigades are outfitted with specialized vehicles and equipment, including Type 05 amphibious infantry fighting vehicles, amphibious assault guns, and other multi-purpose amphibious vehicles.

116

PLAA units continue to conduct amphibious assault training in both single service and joint environments. Recent training involving PLAA amphibious elements and PLAN landing craft have likely sought to improve the tactical skills necessary to conduct an amphibious assault and provided experience to PLAA and PLAN leaders working together in a joint environment. As new systems proliferate and complex training continues, the PLAA will likely increase its ability to establish, defend, and exploit a beachhead lodgment.

Throughout 2019, the PLAA highlighted training opportunities within their aviation and air assault brigades. The PLAA's two air assault brigades provide increased attack, air assault, and close air support options for a Taiwan invasion. Additionally, the PLAA's ongoing fielding of advanced air defense, EW, and command and control (C2) systems enhances the combat power, force protection, and sustainment capabilities of its brigades, which are essential for successful invasion scenarios.

PLA Navy (PLAN). The PLAN is improving anti-air, anti-surface, and anti-submarine warfare capabilities, developing an at-sea nuclear deterrent, and introducing new multi-mission platforms capable of striking Taiwan's naval forces in a cross-Strait conflict as well as conducting diverse missions in other contingency operations. New attack submarines and modern surface combatants with anti-air capabilities and fourth-generation naval aircraft entering the force are designed to achieve maritime superiority within the First Island Chain as well as to deter and counter any potential third-party intervention in a Taiwan conflict. China's amphibious ship fleet, however, has in recent years focused on acquiring a modest number of ocean-going amphibious transport docks (LPDs) and now LHAs, indicating a near term focus on regional and eventually global expeditionary missions rather than the large number of landing ship transports and medium landing craft that would be necessary for a large-scale direct beach assault. There is also no indication China is significantly expanding its force of LSTs and medium sized landing craft at this time – suggesting a direct beach-assault operation requiring extensive lift is less likely in planning.

PLA Air Force (PLAAF). The PLAAF has maintained a force posture that provides a variety of capabilities for a Taiwan contingency. It has acquired a large number of advanced aircraft capable of conducting operations against Taiwan without requiring refueling, providing it with a significant capability to conduct air-superiority and ground-attack operations. A number of long-range air defense systems provide a strong layer of defense of China's mainland against counterattack. In addition, China's development of support aircraft provides the PLAAF with improved ISR capability to support PLA operations in a contingency.

PLA Rocket Force (PLARF). The PLARF is prepared to conduct missile attacks against high-value targets, including Taiwan's C2 facilities, air bases, radar sites, and others in an attempt to degrade Taiwan's defenses, neutralize Taiwan's leadership, or break the public's will to fight.

Strategic Support Force (SSF). PLA doctrinal writings emphasize the importance of space and cyberspace domains in joint operations. The PRC's 2019 defense white paper states that its armed forces are accelerating the build-up of its cyberspace capabilities, specifically its cyber defenses and its ability to detect and counter network intrusions. PLA writings suggest that the SSF would be responsible for the use of EW and cyber operations during a Taiwan contingency, as one of the missions of the force is "seizing and maintaining battlefield information control in contemporary informatized warfare." The SSF 311 Base would also be responsible for political and psychological warfare against Taiwan to influence public opinion and promote the PRC's interests.

Joint Logistic Support Force (JLSF). The JLSF's primary goal is to provide joint logistics support to the PLA's strategic and campaign-level operations, such as a Taiwan contingency, by conducting C2 of joint logistics, delivering materiel, and overseeing various support mechanisms.

China's Amphibious Capabilities

The PLA continues to make modest gains in amphibious warfare by developing additional capabilities to conduct amphibious landings and seize and defend small islands. The PLA has 12 units organized and equipped to conduct amphibious operations. Over the last five years, the PLAA and the PLA Navy Marine Corps (PLANMC) have fielded new equipment designed specifically for amphibious operations such as the ZBD-05 amphibious infantry fighting vehicle and the PLZ-07B amphibious self-propelled howitzer. The PLA has also made efforts to improve its ability to insert forces by air, restructuring the Airborne Corps and establishing Army air assault units, which would seize key terrain and interdict Taiwan counterattacks. Both PLAA and PLANMC units equipped for amphibious operations conduct regular company- to battalion-level amphibious training exercises, and the PLA continues to integrate aerial insertion training into larger exercises, to include dropping airborne troops from the Y-20 heavy-lift aircraft for the first time. However, the PLA rarely conducts amphibious exercises involving echelons above a battalion, though both PLAA and PLANMC units have emphasized the development of combined-arms battalion formations since 2012.

TAIWAN'S DEFENSIVE CAPABILITIES

Key Takeaways

> China's multi-decademilitary modernization effort has eroded or negated many of the military advantages that Taiwan has historically enjoyed the context of a cross-Strait conflict.

> To counter China's improving capabilities, Taiwan is developing new concepts and capabilities for asymmetric warfare.

Taiwan has historically enjoyed military advantages in the context of a cross-Strait conflict, such as technological superiority and the inherent geographic advantages of island defense, but China's multi-decade military modernization effort has eroded or negated many of these advantages. Although Taiwan is taking important steps to compensate for the growing disparities – building its war reserve stocks, growing its defense-industrial base, improving joint operations and crisis response capabilities, and strengthening its officer and noncommissioned officer corps – these improvements only partially address Taiwan's declining defensive advantages. Taiwan's Ministry of National Defense 2019 *National Defense Report* reflects adjustments to the military's strategy for defending the island, placing greater emphasis on protecting its littorals and near-shore coastal areas. The modified strategy stresses enhanced asymmetric capabilities, as well as suggesting greater reliance on Taiwan's Air Force and Navy. Taiwan's armed forces are authorized to fill approximately 215,000 billets, including 188,000 active duty billets. Reservists and civil defense volunteers support the active duty forces. The Ministry of National Defense has stated that its goal is to fill 90 percent of the billets (or approximately 169,000) by 2020. Taiwan's military modernization program envisions a continued decrease in Taiwan's active duty force to approximately 175,000 personnel as part of a transition to an all-volunteer force. This transition has slowed due to severe difficulties recruiting volunteers. The cost savings from manpower reductions provides some margin to improve individual pay and benefits, housing, and incentive pay; however, these savings have been insufficient to cover the full increase in manpower-related costs needed to attract and retain personnel under the new system. The unanticipated magnitude of transition costs has led Taiwan to divert funds from foreign and indigenous defense acquisition programs, as well as near-term training and readiness. Taiwan also faces considerable equipment and readiness challenges.

In addition, Taiwan's military spending remains at approximately two percent of its gross domestic product. In August 2019, Taiwan said it would increase the island's defense budget by 5.2 percent to NT $358 billion ($11.6 billion). Meanwhile, China's official defense budget continues to grow, and for 2019, is roughly 15 times that of Taiwan, with much of it focused on developing the capability to unify

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704   Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China   UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229-145

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

Taiwan with the PRC by force. Recognizing the growing disparity between their respective defense expenditures, Taiwan has stated that it is working to develop new concepts and capabilities for asymmetric warfare. Some specific areas of emphasis include offensive and defensive information and EW, high-speed stealth vessels, shore-based mobile missiles, rapid mining and minesweeping, unmanned aerial systems, and critical infrastructure protection.

The United States maintains a "one-China" policy that is based on the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA) and the three Joint Communiqués. The United States opposes unilateral actions aimed at altering the status quo. The United States continues to support the peaceful resolution of cross-Strait issues in a manner, scope, and pace acceptable to both sides.

Consistent with the TRA, the United States contributes to peace, security, and stability in the Taiwan Strait by providing defense articles and services to enable Taiwan to maintain a sufficient self-defense capability. In May 2020, the White House publicly released a report to Congress entitled, *United States Strategic Approach to the People's Republic of China*. The report states, "Beijing's failure to honor its commitments under the communiques, as demonstrated by its massive military buildup, compels the United States to continue to assist the Taiwan military in maintaining a credible self-defense, which deters aggression and helps to ensure peace and stability in the region. In a 1982 memorandum, President Ronald Reagan insisted 'that the quantity and quality of the arms provided Taiwan be conditioned entirely on the threat posed by the PRC.'" In October 2019, Taiwan announced the purchase of F-16V fighter aircraft for $8 billion. Since 2010, the United States has announced more than $23 billion in arms sales to Taiwan.

4

THE PLA'S GROWING GLOBAL PRESENCE

Key Takeaways

> CCP leaders believe that the PRC's global activities, including the PLA's growing global presence, are necessary to create a "favorable" international environment for China's national rejuvenation.

> The CCP has tasked the PLA to develop the capability to project power outside China's borders and immediate periphery to secure the PRC's growing overseas interests and advance its foreign policy goals.

The CCP seeks to create international conditions that are conducive to the PRC's continued development and that are compatible with its aspirations for China's rejuvenation as a "great modern socialist country." CCP leaders believe that the PRC's global activities, including the PLA's growing global presence, contribute to creating a "favorable" international environment for China's national rejuvenation. This evolving approach parallels the Party's view that the initial decades of the 21st century represent a "period of strategic opportunity" to focus on building China's composite national power.

The CCP has tasked the PLA to develop the capability to project power outside China's borders and immediate periphery to secure the PRC's growing overseas interests and advance its foreign policy goals. China is focusing efforts to develop security relationships with key countries along its periphery and beyond the Second Island Chain. In addition to promoting the One Belt, One Road (OBOR) initiative, China almost certainly will seek new cooperative security partnerships with foreign nations, including the expansion of the PLA's global military attaché presence and access, and ensuring more reliable, cost-effective, and diverse sources of energy and other strategic resources.

The PRC probably will continue to expand the PLA's global military presence through humanitarian assistance, naval escorts and port calls, UN peacekeeping operations (PKO), arm sales, influence operations, and bilateral and multilateral military exercises. Through these engagements, Beijing can strengthen and expand its diplomatic relationships to advance its foreign policy goals, to include shaping the international system to align with the PRC's interests, and allow the PLA to gain operational experience.

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704 Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China   UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229-148

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

CHINA'S ONE BELT, ONE ROAD (OBOR) INITIATIVE

Key Takeaways

> Beijing uses OBOR to support its strategy of national rejuvenation by seeking to expand global transportation and trade linkages to support its development and deepen its economic integration with nations along its periphery and beyond.

> The PRC's overseas development and security interests under OBOR will drive the PRC towards expanding its overseas military footprint to protect those interests.

First announced in 2013, China's OBOR initiative is a signature foreign and economic policy advanced by President Xi Jinping. Beijing uses OBOR to support its strategy of national rejuvenation by seeking to expand global transportation and trade linkages to support its development and deepen its economic integration with nations along its periphery and beyond. China implements OBOR by financing, constructing, and developing transportation infrastructure, natural gas pipelines, hydropower projects, digital connectivity, and technology and industrial parks worldwide. PRC leaders have touted the economic benefits of OBOR and invited foreign partners to join, promising wealth and prosperity to those nations that participate. Since its creation, over 125 countries have signed OBOR cooperation documents. OBOR-related spending is difficult to estimate because there is no comprehensive list of projects.

In support of its national strategy, the PRC pursues a range of goals through OBOR to include strengthening its territorial integrity, increasing its energy security, and expanding its international influence. Given the Party views the PRC's security and development interests as complementary, the PRC leverages OBOR to invest in projects along China's western and southern periphery to improve stability and diminish threats along its borders. Similarly, OBOR projects associated with pipelines and port construction in Pakistan intend to decrease China's reliance on transporting energy resources through strategic choke points, such as the Strait of Malacca.

The PRC attempts to use the economic influence it accrues through OBOR to encourage participating countries to support Beijing's priorities and objectives on a range of other matters. The PRC applies military, intelligence, diplomatic, and economic tools to counter perceived threats to OBOR's long-term viability, although the party-state lacks the expertise necessary to assess comprehensive risks in most OBOR participating countries. China's leaders have tried to counteract negative perceptions of OBOR to attract potential investors as well as reduce suspicions of Beijing's intentions. In the wake of domestic and international criticism of OBOR, China has attempted to appear more responsive to partner-country input, and open to wider participation. In April 2019, China hosted leaders from 37

123

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704 Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229-149

countries and delegates from over 150 countries to the second Belt and Road Forum in Beijing. During the forum, PRC leaders attempted to respond to criticism and concerns over corruption, debt sustainability, environmental effects, and the CCP's underlying goals associated with OBOR.

As the PRC's overseas development and security interests expand under OBOR, the CCP has signaled that its overseas military footprint will expand accordingly to protect those interests, which the CCP recognizes may provoke pushback from other states. Some of OBOR's planned economic corridors would transit regions prone to violence, separatism, armed conflict, and instability, putting OBOR-related projects and PRC citizens working overseas at risk. China's defense and security outreach has sought to extend its ability to project military power to safeguard its overseas interests, including OBOR, by developing closer regional and bilateral counterterrorism cooperation, supporting host-nation security forces, and other means.

CHINA'S GLOBAL MILITARY ACTIVITIES

Key Takeaways

> The PRC has increasingly recognized that its armed forces should take a more active role in advancing its foreign policy goals.

> As the PRC's overseas interests have grown over the past two decades, the Party's leaders have increasingly pushed the PLA to think about how it will operate beyond China's borders and its immediate periphery to advance and defend these interests.

> In 2019, the PLA continued to expand its participation in bilateral and multilateral military exercises, normalize its presence overseas, and build closer ties to foreign militaries.

As the PRC's overseas interests have grown over the past two decades, the Party's leaders have increasingly pushed the PLA to think about how it will operate beyond China's borders and its immediate periphery to advance and defend these interests. More recently, the PRC has recognized that its armed forces should take a more active role in advancing its foreign policy goals. The PRC's 2019 defense white paper notably described its armed forces as responding, "faithfully to the call for a community with a shared future for mankind" and called on its military to "actively participate in the reform of global security governance system." In line with this direction, the PLA in 2019 continued to expand its participation in bilateral and multilateral military exercises, normalize its presence overseas, and build closer ties to foreign militaries. The PLA is increasingly likely to couch the purpose of its external activities in terms of providing direct support to the PRC's foreign policy goals, such as advancing China's strategic partnerships through greater military cooperation.

124

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704 Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China   UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229-150

The PLA's Evolving Missions and Tasks. In 2004, one of the "new historic missions" given to the PLA by then-President Hu Jintao was to support China's overseas interests and diplomacy. The PLAN's evolving focus—from "offshore waters defense" to a mix of "offshore waters defense" and "open seas protection" —reflects the PLAN's interest in a wider operational reach. The PLAAF's missions and tasks have similarly evolved towards conducting operations beyond China and its immediate periphery and supporting the PRC's interests by becoming a "strategic" air force. Additionally, the PLA has embraced its concept of non-war military activities (NWMA) as an effective way for it lend support to and safeguard China's development, expand the PRC's global interests, and gain valuable operational experience.

The PLAN, PLAAF, PLAA, and SSF have deployed abroad for counterpiracy, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HA/DR), peacekeeping, training exercises, and space support operations. Within the PLA, the PLAN may have the most experience operating abroad due to its far seas deployments and counterpiracy missions, the PLAAF likely has the most experience conducting rapid response HA/DR operations abroad, and the PLAA has the most experience conducting PKO. The SSF runs tracking, telemetry, and command stations in Namibia, Pakistan, and Argentina. The SSF also has a handful of Yuan Wang space support ships to track satellite and intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) launches.

> Since 2008, PLAN ships have visited the Middle East, Europe, Africa, South Asia, Southeast Asia, Oceania, and Latin America. The PLAN has also conducted submarine deployments to the Indian Ocean, demonstrating its increasing familiarity with operating in that region and underscoring China's interest in protecting sea lines of communication (SLOCs) beyond the South China Sea. In 2015, three PLAN ships from a Gulf of Aden naval escort task force evacuated 629 PRC citizens from Yemen to Djibouti and Oman.

> Since 2002, the PLAAF has delivered aid after natural disasters throughout Southeast Asia and South Asia, assisted with evacuation from Libya in 2015, and searched for Malaysian aircraft MH370 in 2014.

Counterpiracy Efforts. In 2019, China continued to conduct counterpiracy operations in the Gulf of Aden by deploying its 31st, 32nd, and 33rd naval escort task forces to the area since 2008. The 32nd Task Force escorted 42 Chinese and foreign ships during its deployment and participated in the China-France military exchange and the Russian Navy Day festival celebrations. At the conclusion of deployments, these task groups conduct port calls and held bilateral engagements with host country militaries and local Chinese communities, providing additional opportunities for PLA military diplomacy. The 32nd Task Force conducted port calls to Mozambique and Malaysia.

125

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704   Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229-151

Peacekeeping Operations. In 2019, China remained the largest troop contributor to UN peacekeeping missions among the permanent members of the UN Security Council. China uses it participation in UN PKO to highlight its role as a "responsible" global actor and to obtain operational experience for the PLA. The PLA uses its participation in PKO to refine its ability to operate beyond the PRC's borders. The PLA highlighted its peacekeeping contributions in the PRC's 70th anniversary parade in October 2019.

> China provides personnel to UN operations in Sudan, South Sudan, Mali, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Western Sahara, Cyprus, Lebanon and elsewhere in the Middle East. PRC personnel deployed to PKO consist of troops, police, staff officers, and experts including engineers, medical professionals, and logisticians. In August 2019, the PLAA sent its third helicopter detachment to Sudan, transported by PLAAF heavy-lift transport aircraft, and in November 2019, sent its sixth peacekeeping infantry battalion to South Sudan.

> As of December 2019, China was the tenth-largest contributor to UN PKOs with approximately 2,545 personnel among eight UN PKO missions in Africa, Europe and the Middle East. China's personnel contributions have decreased slightly since 2018 from 2,634 personnel in January 2018 to 2,545 personnel in December 2019. China is the second largest contributor to UN PKO and funded 15.21 percent of the total $6.5 billion annual UN peacekeeping budget in 2019, an increase from 10.24 percent in 2018.

Military Cooperation. Recognizing the PLA's role in defending China's overseas interests and supporting its foreign policy, the PRC's 2019 defense white paper noted that the PLA "promotes international security and military cooperation and refines relevant mechanisms for protecting China's overseas interests." As the PRC's regional and international interests grow more complex, the PLA's international engagements will likely continue to expand. For example, senior-level military visits and exchanges provide the PLA with opportunities to increase its officers' international exposure, advance the PRC's foreign policy goals through military assistance programs, and develop professional relationships. Expanding travel abroad for PLA officers enables the PLA to better observe and study foreign military command structures, unit formations, and operational training and shape approaches to shared security concerns. In 2019, PRC Defense Minister General Wei Fenghe attended the Shangri-La Dialogue for the first time since 2011 and spoke on the PRC's role in the Indo-Pacific region.

The PRC continues to expand the PLA's participation in bilateral and multilateral military exercises, normalizing the PLA's presence overseas and establishing ties to foreign militaries. For example, in 2019 the PLA participated in Russia's national-level exercise TSENTR-19 along with forces from India,

126

Pakistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. To participate in the exercise, the PLA deployed 1,600 personnel from the Western Theater Command and nearly 30 fixed-wing aircraft and helicopters. For a list of selected PLA bilateral and multilateral exercises in 2019, see Appendix IV. In recent years, China has increased its military cooperation and engagements on security issues with the African Union (AU), with an emphasis on peacekeeping capacity building. In addition to providing PLA forces and other personnel to several UN PKOs in Africa, the PRC provides support to AU-sanctioned operations including the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) to which it has provided equipment and $1.2 million in annual funding. China also provided $100 million dollars of military equipment to the AU-supported African Standby Force's strategic stockpile at the Continental Logistics Base in Douala, Cameroon. In July 2019, the PRC Ministry of National Defense hosted the first China-Africa Peace and Security Forum in Beijing. Attended by defense and military representatives from 50 African countries, the forum sought to deepen China's role in African security issues and more broadly promote the PRC's foreign policy objectives to strengthen its strategic partnerships with African countries and further its concept of building a "community with a shared future for mankind."

CHINA-TAJIKISTAN COUNTERTERRORISM COOPERATION

Since at least 2016, People's Armed Police (PAP) forces have likely operated in Tajikistan, patrolling the tri-border region connecting Tajikistan, Afghanistan, and China. This is likely tied to the August 2016 creation of a quadrilateral counterterrorism coordination mechanism between Afghanistan, China, Pakistan, and Tajikistan to jointly strengthen border security against China's defined "three evils," terrorism, separatism, and religious extremism. PAP forces operating in Tajikistan are from Xinjiang province, likely also exporting its more suppressive approach to the "three evils."

> Although the agreement may initially have authorized combined patrols, China now appears to be conducting unilateral patrols in the tri-border region. The PLA is also expanding their cooperation with Tajikistan, notably expanding their bilateral counterterrorism exercise in 2019, including PLAAF fighters, fighter-bombers, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), and combined close-air support with Tajik special operations forces (SOF).

> China's concerns about border stability were probably heightened after U.S. and NATO combat forces began withdrawing from Afghanistan in 2014, especially concerns over terrorists moving from Afghanistan into China's Xinjiang province. In 2015, China passed a counterterrorism law authorizing overseas military counterterrorism operations.

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704 Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China
UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229-153

> In 2011, China and Tajikistan settled their border dispute in this region by Tajikistan ceding more than 300 sq. miles of land to China. Since 2016, China has also agreed to build guard outposts and a training facility in the tri-border region, with some reports suggesting the new outposts could number as high as 40.

PRC technology companies may also be collecting facial recognition data on Tajikistanis with the citywide facial recognition supplied since at least 2013, similar to the surveillance equipment installed in Xinjiang.

PLA OVERSEAS BASING AND ACCESS

Key Takeaways

> The PRC is seeking to establish a more robust overseas logistics and basing infrastructure to allow the PLA to project and sustain military power at greater distances.

> A global PLA military logistics network could both interfere with U.S. military operations and support offensive operations against the United States as the PRC's global military objectives evolve.

> Beyond its base in Djibouti, the PRC is very likely already considering and planning for additional military logistics facilities to support naval, air, and ground forces projection.

> The PRC has likely considered Myanmar, Thailand, Singapore, Indonesia, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, United Arab Emirates, Kenya, Seychelles, Tanzania, Angola, and Tajikistan as locations for PLA military logistics facilities.

The PRC is seeking to establish a more robust overseas logistics and basing infrastructure to allow the PLA to project and sustain military power at greater distances. Beijing may assess that a mixture of military logistics models, including preferred access to commercial infrastructure abroad, exclusive PLA logistics facilities with prepositioned supplies co-located with commercial infrastructure, and bases with stationed forces, most closely aligns with the PRC's overseas military logistics needs. Currently, the PRC uses commercial infrastructure to support all of its military operations abroad, including the PLA's presence in other countries' territories, including its base in Djibouti. Some of the PRC's OBOR projects could create potential military advantages, such as PLA access to selected foreign ports to pre-position the necessary logistics support to sustain naval deployments in waters as distant as the Indian Ocean, Mediterranean Sea, and Atlantic Ocean to protect its growing interests.

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704 Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023 FL-2023-00013 20231229-154

PRC official sources assert that military logistics facilities, to include its Djibouti base, will be used to provide international public goods like support to U.N. operations and HA/DR, and to secure China's lines of communication, citizens and assets abroad. Regardless, a global PLA military logistics network could both interfere with U.S. military operations and support offensive operations against the United States as the PRC's global military objectives evolve. Host nations can perform an essential role in regulating the PRC's military operations, as PRC officials very likely recognize that a stable long-term relationship with the host nation is critical to the success of their military logistics facilities.

> PRC military academics assert that bases abroad can enable forward deployment of PLA forces and support military conflict, diplomatic signaling, political change, bilateral and multilateral cooperation, and training. They also suggest that a military logistics network could enable intelligence monitoring of the U.S. military.

> In August 2017, the PRC officially opened its first PLA base in Djibouti. PLA Navy Marines are stationed at the base with wheeled armored vehicles and artillery but are currently dependent on nearby commercial ports due to the lack of a pier on base. PLA personnel at the facility have interfered with U.S. flights by lasing pilots and flying drones, and the PRC has sought to restrict Djiboutian sovereign airspace over the base.

Beyond its base in Djibouti, the PRC is very likely already considering and planning for additional military logistics facilities to support naval, air, and ground forces projection. The PLA's approach likely includes consideration of many different sites and outreach to many countries, but only some will advance to negotiations for an infrastructure agreement, status of forces or visiting forces agreement, and/or basing agreement. Critical organizations involved in planning and negotiating for military logistics facilities are the Central Military Commission (CMC) Joint Staff Department, CMC Logistic Support Department, and service headquarters. China's overseas military basing will be constrained by the willingness of potential host nations to support a PLA presence.

> The PRC has likely considered Myanmar, Thailand, Singapore, Indonesia, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, United Arab Emirates, Kenya, Seychelles, Tanzania, Angola, and Tajikistan as locations for PLA military logistics facilities. The PRC has probably already made overtures to Namibia, Vanuatu, and the Solomon Islands. Known focus areas of PLA planning are along the SLOCs from China to the Strait of Hormuz, Africa, and the Pacific Islands.

> Cambodia declined a U.S. offer to pay to renovate a U.S.-donated building on Ream Naval Base in Cambodia. Cambodia may have instead accepted assistance from China or another country to develop Ream Naval Base. If China is able to leverage such assistance into a presence at Ream Naval Base, it suggests that China's overseas basing strategy has diversified to include military

capacity-building efforts. Both the PRC and Cambodia have publicly denied having signed an agreement to provide the PLAN access to Ream Naval Base.

THE PRC'S INFLUENCE OPERATIONS

Key Takeaways

> The PLA has emphasized the development of its "Three Warfares" concept—comprised of psychological warfare, public opinion warfare, and legal warfare—in its operational planning since at least 2003.

> The PRC conducts influence operations to achieve outcomes favorable to its strategic objectives by targeting cultural institutions, media organizations, business, academic, and policy communities in the United States, other countries, and international institutions.

> The CCP seeks to condition domestic, foreign, and multilateral political establishments and public opinion to accept Beijing's narratives.

> CCP leaders probably consider open democracies, including the United States, as more susceptible to influence operations than other types of governments.

The PLA has emphasized the development of its "Three Warfares" concept—encompassing psychological warfare, public opinion warfare, and legal warfare—in its operational planning since at least 2003. Psychological warfare uses propaganda, deception, threats, and coercion to affect the adversary's decision-making, while also countering adversary psychological operations. Public opinion warfare disseminates information for public consumption to guide and influence public opinion and gain support from domestic and international audiences. Legal warfare uses international and domestic laws to gain international support, manage political repercussions, and sway target audiences. China views the cyberspace domain as a platform providing opportunities for influence operations, and the PLA likely seeks to use online influence activities to support its overall "Three Warfares" concept and to undermine an adversary's resolve in a contingency or conflict.

The PRC conducts influence operations by targeting cultural institutions, media organizations, business, academic, and policy communities in the United States, other countries, and international institutions. CCP leaders probably consider open democracies, including the United States, as more susceptible to influence operations than other types of governments. The PRC's influence operations are coordinated at a high level within the party-state and executed by a range of actors, such as the United Front Work Department, the Propaganda Ministry, the State Council Information Office, the PLA and the Ministry of State Security (MSS). The CCP has a long history of using influence

operations for domestic purposes, including "United Front Work" prior to the formulation of the PRC and onwards, to co-opt and align non-Party actors in society. The CCP utilizes United Front actors to advocate for the PRC's sovereignty interests within China and abroad.

A cornerstone of the CCP's approach to influence operations includes appealing to PRC citizens living overseas and members of Chinese diaspora populations, regardless of their citizenship, to advance the Party's objectives. The PRC also sometimes uses coercion or blackmail to manipulate its citizens overseas to conduct influence operations on behalf of the PRC, such as threatening ethnic Uyghurs living in the United States with imprisonment of their family members in China. The PRC's intelligence services often facilitate these operations. Additionally, the PRC targets individuals in other countries to support its acquisition of foreign technology. The PRC's "Thousand Talents Program" seeks to recruit individuals primarily, but not exclusively, from relevant diaspora populations and recent emigrants from the PRC, as well as foreign national experts whose recruitment the PRC views as necessary to its scientific and technical modernization, especially with regard to defense technology.

The PRC uses its so-called "5 cent army" to spread Party-approved narratives abroad via social media. These posts promote positive narratives of the PRC and support Beijing's programs to try to influence public opinion towards the pro-China perspectives. In August 2019, Facebook and Twitter announced they had deleted accounts associated with the PRC that were promoting disinformation regarding the protests in Hong Kong.

The CCP seeks to condition domestic and foreign publics to accept Beijing's narratives surrounding its priorities like OBOR and South China Sea territorial and maritime claims. Furthermore, the PRC seeks to harness academia and educational institutions, think tanks, and state-run media to advance its soft power campaign in support of the PRC's interests. For example, the PRC uses its citizens studying abroad and academic organizations to spread the Party's narrative on Tibet and the Dalai Lama. Chinese Students and Scholars Associations and Confucius Institutes organize events to support the PRC's sovereignty claims. They also organize protests and lodge complaints against academic institutions that fail to comport with the Party's narratives.

The PRC's foreign influence activities also focus on establishing and maintaining influence with power brokers within foreign governments to promote policies that Beijing views will facilitate its national rejuvenation, despite the PRC's public position that it does not interfere in the internal affairs of other countries. China's diplomatic outreach stresses building personal rapport with influential people, providing assistance, and emphasizing "win-win cooperation" through trade and diplomacy. This approach allows China to offer expedited, small-scale accomplishments to partners abroad, often in exchange for seemingly symbolic gestures of support to the PRC's long-term strategic goals. Some

131

countries have begun to implement policy responses to the PRC's influence activities, including within the European Union as well as Australia and New Zealand.

The PRC uses multilateral forums and international organizations to generate new opportunities to expand its influence, strengthen its political influence, promotes strategic messaging that portrays it as a responsible global actor, advance its development interests, and limit outside interference in and criticism of its initiatives. Towards these ends, the PRC has embraced multilateral organizations such as Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa (BRICS), the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the African Union (AU), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), as well as forums and initiatives such as the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum, the "17+1" initiative between China and 17 Central and Eastern European countries, and the Belt and Road Forum.

CHINA IN THE ARCTIC

Key Takeaway

> In May 2019, the PRC hosted the Arctic Circle China Forum in Shanghai and PRC officials highlighted the PRC's interest in expanding its partnership with countries along what it calls the "Polar Silk Road."

The PRC has increased activities and engagement in the Arctic region since gaining observer status in the Arctic Council in 2013. In May 2019, the PRC hosted the Arctic Circle China Forum in Shanghai and PRC officials highlighted the PRC's interest in expanding its partnership with countries along what it calls the "Polar Silk Road." In January 2018, the PRC published its first Arctic strategy that first promoted a "Polar Silk Road" and declared China to be a "near-Arctic State." The strategy identifies the PRC's interests, which include access to natural resources and SLOCs, and the promotion of an image of the PRC as a "responsible major country" in Arctic affairs that "aims to contribute its wisdom to the development of the Arctic region." The strategy highlights China's icebreaker vessels and research stations as integral to implementation.

China maintains research stations in Iceland and Norway and operates two icebreaking research vessels. In 2017, the Ukrainian-built Xue Long became China's first official vessel to traverse the Northwest Passage. In late September 2019, Xue Long completed the 10th Arctic expedition that focused on research on the Arctic environment. Last year, China launched its second icebreaking research vessel, Xue Long 2. Xue Long 2 can break ice 1.5 meters thick, compared to Xue Long 1's maximum of 1.2 meters. Furthermore, Xue Long 2 is the first polar research vessel that can break ice while moving forwards or backwards. In 2019, Xue Long 2 set sail on its maiden voyage to the

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704   Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments involving the   UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229-158   People's Republic of China

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

Antarctic. The PRC's SOEs are probably in the very early stages of developing China's first nuclear-powered icebreaker; however, it is unclear when the vessel will be completed.

The PRC's expanding Arctic engagement has created new opportunities for engagement between China and Russia. In April 2019, China and Russia established the Sino-Russian Arctic Research Center. In 2020, China and Russia plan to use this center to conduct a joint expedition to the Arctic to research optimal routes of the Northern Sea Route and the effects of climate change. The PRC will cover 75 percent of the expedition's expenses.

Russian regulations governing the passage along the Northern Sea Route requires foreign states' warships to give Russia 45 days' notice of their intention to follow this route, to have a Russian pilot on board, and to be subject to Moscow's decision to refuse passage through the Northern Sea Route. This regulation potentially restricts the PLAN's ability to operate in the Arctic. China and Russia support further civilian cooperation between Sino-Russian enterprises in the use of the Northern Sea Route, and the Arctic region is an area of opportunity for Sino-Russian commercial cooperation in addition to energy development and infrastructure projects such as the Yamal LNG project and LNG 2.

CHINA'S HYDROCARBON STRATEGY

Key Takeaway

> China's interest in ensuring reliable, cost-effective, and diverse energy sources to support its economic growth drives its overseas investments.

China's interest in ensuring reliable, cost-effective, and diverse fuel sources to support and sustain its economic development has led it to import petroleum and gas from more than 40 countries. In 2019, China imported approximately 10.1 million barrels per day of crude oil, which met approximately 77 percent of its needs. Also in 2019, China met 43 percent of its natural gas demand with imports, which the IEA projects will grow to 46 percent by 2035. Most of China's oil and natural gas imports come primarily from the Persian Gulf, Africa, Russia, and Central Asia. China's energy investments will help diversify transport networks for oil and gas, which could help reduce dependency on strategic chokepoints, such as the Strait of Malacca.

China relies on SLOCs such as the South China Sea and Strait of Malacca for most of its hydrocarbon deliveries. In 2019, approximately 77 percent of China's oil imports and 10 percent of its natural gas imports transited the South China Sea and Strait of Malacca. Despite China's efforts to diversify energy

suppliers, the sheer volume of oil and liquefied natural gas imported from the Middle East and Africa will make securing strategic SLOCs a priority for China for at least the next 15 years.

Crude oil pipelines from Russia and Kazakhstan to China demonstrate China's interest in increasing overland supply. In early 2019, China's 600,000-barrels-per-day pipeline from Russia made up approximately 6 percent of all crude oil imports. In April 2017, Burma and China commissioned a new crude oil pipeline. This 440,000-barrels-per-day pipeline bypasses the Strait of Malacca by transporting crude oil from Kyaukpyu, Burma, to Kunming, China. Middle Eastern and African countries supplied the crude oil for this pipeline.

In 2019, approximately 34 percent of China's natural gas imports (45 billion cubic meters) came from Turkmenistan by a pipeline that runs through Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. This pipeline can transport 55 billion cubic meters per year, and Turkmenistan and China plan to expand it to 80 billion cubic meters per year in 2020. A natural gas pipeline connecting China to Burma can deliver 12 billion cubic meters per year, but only 4.6 billion cubic meters of gas was shipped in 2019. In early December 2019, the first phase of the Power of Siberia natural gas pipeline was commissioned, transporting natural gas from Russia's Chayandinskoye gas field to China's border in Amur Oblast. The contract for this pipeline is for 30 years and stipulates that 38 billion cubic meters of natural gas be delivered to China each year. A list of China's top crude suppliers in 2019 is provided in Appendix III.

MILITARY ATTACHÉ PRESENCE

China manages its day-to-day overseas military diplomacy work using PLA officers assigned as military attachés in over 110 offices worldwide. China's military attaché presence has grown around the world, which reflects China's increasing global interests. China's military attachés serve as military advisors to the ambassador, support Ministry of Foreign Affairs and PLA foreign policy objectives, and perform a variety of duties tied to PLA military and security cooperation, including counterpart exchanges with host-nation and third-country personnel. Military attachés also conduct clandestine and overt intelligence collection on their countries or areas of assignment. Although the general function of an attaché office is the same worldwide, some attaché offices probably prioritize specific missions or diplomatic priorities due to close bilateral relations or other factors.

China's military attaché offices vary in size, generally ranging from two to ten PLA officers. Most offices consist of just a few accredited officers; however, offices in countries considered important to China's strategic interests are often considerably larger, potentially including multiple assistant attachés, dedicated naval or air force attachés, and support staff.

CHINA-RUSSIA RELATIONS

In June 2019, Russia and China upgraded their relations to a 'comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination in a new era," pledging closer coordination on global security issues and mutual support. This was followed by the PLAAF and the Russian Aerospace Force conducting their first combined air patrol in the Asia-Pacific region. For the second year in a row, China participated in a Russian strategic command and staff exercise, TSENTR-2019, held this year in the Russian Central Military District. Additionally, cooperation between the two militaries includes joint defense technology development, exercises, and cooperation on other military modernization initiatives. Despite continued military cooperation, the PRC and Russia have denied the creation of a military alliance or their intent to enter into an alliance.

TSENTR-2019. From mid-late September, China participated in Russia's strategic command-staff exercise, TSENTR-2019, along with armed forces elements from India, Pakistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. The aim of the exercise was to test readiness levels of the Russian military and interoperability among regional partners, while simulating a response to terrorist threats in Central Asia. China represented the largest foreign contingent, deploying about 1,600 ground and air troops from the PLA's Western Theater Command and nearly 30 fixed-wing aircraft and helicopters, including H-6 bombers. During the exercise, China and Russia conducted ground maneuvers and Chinese and Russian aircraft may have conducted missile and bombing strikes on mock enemy targets. The PRC's Minister of Defense Wei observed part of the exercise alongside the Russian defense minister and President Vladimir Putin, commenting on the increased level of China-Russia cooperation. Following last year's VOSTOK exercise, TSENTR marked the second consecutive year that China has participated in Russia's command-staff capstone exercise series.

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704   Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229-161

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RESOURCES AND TECHNOLOGY FOR FORCE MODERNIZATION

Key Takeaways

> The PRC's long-term goal is to create an entirely self-reliant defense-industrial sector—fused with a strong civilian industrial and technology sector—that can meet the PLA's needs for modern military capabilities.

> The PRC has mobilized vast resources in support of its defense modernization, including the implementation of its Military-Civil Fusion (MCF) Development Strategy, as well as espionage activities to acquire sensitive, dual-use, and military-grade equipment.

> In 2019, the PRC announced its annual military budget would increase by 6.2 percent, continuing more than 20 years of annual defense spending increases and sustaining its position as the second-largest military spender in the world. The PRC's published military budget omits several major categories of expenditures and its actual military-related spending is higher than what it states in its official budget.

In spite of forecast difficulties for China's economic growth in the 2020s, the Party has the political will and fiscal strength to sustain a steady increase in defense spending over the next decade, which will help support People's Liberation Army (PLA) modernization, develop a fused military-civilian defense industry, and explore new technologies with defense applications. The PRC draws from diverse sources to support PLA modernization, including domestic defense investments, domestic defense-industrial development, a growing R&D and S&T base, dual-use technologies conveyed in part through its MCF strategy, and the acquisition of foreign technology and expertise.

The PRC's long-term goal is to create an entirely self-reliant defense-industrial sector—fused with a strong civilian industrial and technology sector—that can meet the PLA's needs for modern capabilities. However, the PLA still looks to import foreign equipment, technologies, and knowledge to fill some critical, near-term capability gaps and accelerate its modernization. The PRC leverages foreign investments, commercial joint ventures, mergers and acquisitions, academic exchanges, the foreign experience that students and researchers from the PRC gain from studying in foreign nations, and state-sponsored industrial and technical espionage, and the manipulation of export controls for the illicit diversion of dual-use technologies to increase the level of technologies and expertise available to support military research, development, and acquisition.

138

MILITARY EXPENDITURES TRENDS

In early 2019, the PRC announced a 6.2-percent inflation-adjusted increase in its annual military budget to $174 billion, which is approximately 1.3 percent of gross domestic product. This year's budget continues more than 20 years of annual defense spending increases and sustains the PRC's position as the second-largest military spender in the world after the United States. The PRC's defense budget has nearly doubled during the past 10 years—data from 2010 through 2019 indicates China's official military budget grew at an annual average of approximately 8 percent in inflation-adjusted terms. Based on its official defense spending figures, which omit several major categories of expenditures, the PRC can support continued growth in defense spending for at least the next five to ten years, based on economic data and growth projections.

China: Official Defense Budget, 2010–2019

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704   Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China   UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229-165

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
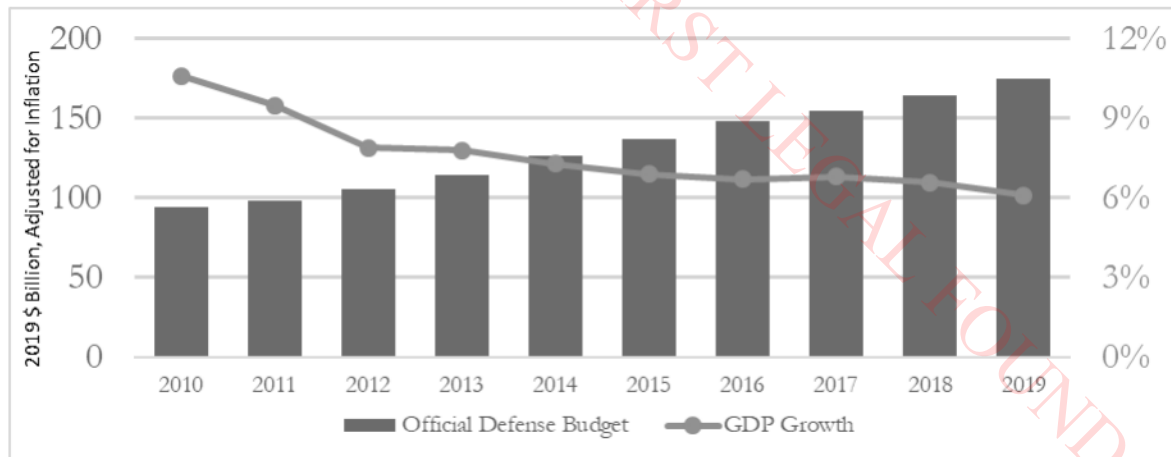
China's Estimated Military Expenditures. The PRC's published military budget omits several major categories of expenditures, including R&D and foreign weapons procurement. In 2019, China's actual military-related spending could be more than $200 billion, much higher than stated in its official budget. However, actual military expenses are difficult to calculate, largely because of China's poor accounting transparency.

China's Estimated Defense Budget Growth. If China's official defense budget increases annually by an average of 6 percent, growing to $270 billion by 2023, the PLA can dedicate more money for training, operations, and modernization considering the reduction of the PLA's size by 300,000 people. Economic forecasters project that China's economic growth will slow during the next 10 years, falling from 6.1 percent in 2019 to 3 percent in 2030, which could slow future defense spending growth. Assuming accurate economic projections and a steady defense burden, China will remain the second-largest spender after the United States.

Regional Comparison of the PRC's 2019 Official Defense Budget
(adjusted for inflation)

	Billion (USD)
PRC (official budget)	$174.0
India	$61.7
Japan	$53.9
Russia (national defense budget)	$54.8
South Korea	$39.8
Taiwan	$10.9

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704 Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229-166
UNCLASSIFIED

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

DEVELOPMENTS AND TRENDS IN CHINA'S DEFENSE SYSTEM

Key Takeaways

> China has substantially reorganized its defense-industrial sector to improve weapon system research, development, acquisition, testing, evaluation, and production.

> China's Military-Civil Fusion (MCF) Development Strategy is a key part of its defense sector reform.

S&T Industry and Innovation: China has substantially reorganized its defense-industrial sector to improve weapon system research, development, acquisition, testing, evaluation, and production. As part of the 13th Five-Year Plan (2016–2020), China implemented a number of critical reforms with the objective of increasingly its competitiveness in key defense industries. Focus areas include aerospace engines—including turbofan technology—and gas turbines; quantum communications and computing; innovative electronics and software; automation and robotics; special materials and applications; nanotechnology; neuroscience, neural research, and artificial intelligence (AI); and deep-space exploration and on-orbit servicing and maintenance systems. China also is applying substantial R&D resources to nuclear fusion, hypersonic weapons technology, and the deployment and hardening of its expanding multipurpose satellite constellation.

> In 2016, the Central Military Commission (CMC) established the Science and Technology Commission, an independent high-level defense research body subordinated to the CMC. The Science and Technology Commission organizes and guides cutting-edge technological innovation in military technology and seeks to increase the pace of military technology development to modernize the PLA using both civilian and military S&T resources.

> In early 2017, the PLA set up the Scientific Research Steering Committee, which is subordinate to the CMC, consisting of scientists and engineers that have experience with cutting-edge technologies. Modeled on the U.S. Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency, this agency seeks to fuel technological innovations with military applications. Along with the Science and Technology Commission, the steering committee will spearhead S&T innovation by advising the CMC on early-stage research projects.

> In July 2017, China reorganized the PLA's top three academic institutes—the PLA Academy of Military Science (AMS), National Defense University, and National University of Defense Technology—as part of its PLA reform initiative. Under the new structure, AMS will focus on

141

scientific research related to military affairs, facilitating closer ties between military theory and S&T development.

> China's MCF Development Strategy is a key part of China's defense sector reform. China emphasizes assimilating private sector innovation into the defense-industrial base. Responsibility for MCF was centralized in 2017 with the establishment of the Central Commission for Integrated Military and Civilian Development, which is subordinate to the CCP Central Committee.

Two of the most influential proponents in promoting and enforcing China's, S&T initiatives are the State Administration for Science, Technology, and Industry for National Defense and the CMC's Equipment Development Department, which monitor and guide the state and military sides of China's defense-industrial apparatus, respectively. The Equipment Development Department and its military service counterparts cooperate with China's 10 state-owned defense-industrial corporations through a network of military representative bureaus and offices to supervise quality control and defense contract compliance.

The National Science Foundation of China (NSFC), the China Academy of Sciences (CAS), and the Ministry of Science and Technology are key to S&T decision making and funding and to promoting basic and applied research, scientific innovation, and high-tech integration throughout China's scientific, engineering, and civil-military industrial complex. CAS is China's highest academic institution for comprehensive R&D in the natural and applied sciences, and it reports directly to the State Council in an advisory capacity. CAS works closely with NSFC, and much of its work contributes to products for military use. The NSFC and CMC Science and Technology Commission are key advisers on emerging and disruptive technologies and signed a five-year strategic cooperation agreement in August 2016 to collaborate on civil-military innovation and basic research for national defense.

Artificial Intelligence. China views AI as critical to its future military and industrial power. China is making strategic investments worldwide in AI to reap national security and economic benefits. AI is a central component in many of China's publicly released national plans. The Next Generation AI Plan details China's AI strategy and outlines China's goals of using commercial and military entities to gain parity with the world leaders in AI by 2020, achieving major breakthroughs in AI by 2025, and establishing China as the global leader in AI by 2030. The PRC is pursuing a whole-of-society effort to become a global leader in AI, which includes designating select private AI companies in China as "AI champions" to emphasize R&D in specific dual-use technologies. Many of these "AI champions," including Huawei and Hikvision, are major suppliers of AI surveillance technology worldwide. In 2019, the private PRC-based company Ziyan UAV exhibited armed swarming drones that it claimed use AI

142

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704   Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China   UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229-168

to perform autonomous guidance, target acquisition, and attack execution. During the past five years, China has made achievements in AI-enabled unmanned surface vessels, which China plans to use to patrol and bolster its territorial claims in the South China Sea. China has also tested unmanned tanks as part of research efforts to integrate AI into ground forces' equipment.

MILITARY INDUSTRIAL BASE TRENDS

Key Takeaways

> Many of China's missile programs are comparable to other international top-tier producers; China can use aspects of the S-400 surface-to-air missile (SAM) system it began receiving from Russia in 2018 to reverse-engineer capabilities it lacks.

> China is the top ship-producing nation in the world by tonnage and has the capability to produce naval gas turbine and diesel engines as well as shipboard weapons and electronic systems, which makes it nearly self-sufficient for all shipbuilding needs.

Missile and Space Industry. Most of China's missile programs, including its ballistic and cruise missile systems, are comparable in quality to other international top-tier producers. China produces a wide range of missiles—ballistic, cruise, air-to-air, and surface-to-air—for the PLA and for export, and it continues to expand its missile test facilities. The PRC publicly debuted a new supersonic cruise missile and hypersonic glide vehicle during the 70th anniversary parade in October 2019. Also in 2019, China tested and deployed the advanced S-400 SAM systems it received from Russia in 2018. In 2018, China highlighted the development of its first beyond-visual-range air-to-air missile (AAM).

The PRC's space industry, historically managed by the PLA, is rapidly expanding its intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR), navigation and communication satellite constellations and making substantial strides in its space launch capabilities, human spaceflight, and lunar exploration programs. However, the PRC is placing greater emphasis on decentralizing and diversifying its space industry to increase competition, resulting in a complex structure of military, political, defense-industrial, and commercial sectors. China has developed a "quick response" space launch vehicle (SLV) to increase its attractiveness as a commercial small satellite launch provider and to rapidly reconstitute low Earth orbit space capabilities; its mixed-ownership enterprises offer remote sensing, launch, and communication services.

Naval and Shipbuilding Industry. China, the top ship-producing nation in the world by tonnage, is increasing its shipbuilding capacity and capability for all naval classes, including submarines, surface combatants, and transport and amphibious ships. China's two largest state-owned shipbuilders—the

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704 Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China   UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229-169

China State Shipbuilding Corporation and the China Shipbuilding Industry Corporation, merged in November 2019 creating the world's largest shipbuilder as measured by production capacity. China domestically produces its naval gas turbine and diesel engines, as well as almost all shipboard weapons and electronic systems, making it nearly self-sufficient for all shipbuilding needs.

Armaments Industry. China's production capacity is improving in nearly every category of PLA ground systems, including armored personnel carriers, assault vehicles, air defense artillery systems, artillery systems and pieces, and main and light battle tanks. Notably, China began testing unmanned Type 59 tanks in November 2018. China can produce ground weapon systems at or near world-class standards; however, quality deficiencies persist with some exported equipment, which is inhibiting China's ability to expand its export markets.

Aviation Industry. China is advancing its domestic aviation industry through two major state-owned aircraft corporations, AVIC and the Commercial Aircraft Corporation of China (COMAC). AVIC designs and produces China's military aircraft including the J-20 fifth-generation fighter, the Y-20 large transport, and the future H-20 flying wing stealth bomber. COMAC produces large passenger aircraft and aims to compete in the commercial airliner market. COMAC is producing the ARJ21 regional jet, flight-testing the C919 airliner, and working with Russia to develop the CR929 wide-body airliner. China is the second-largest exporter of UAVs. However, China's aviation industry is unable to produce reliable high-performance aircraft engines and relies on Western and Russian engines, such as the Franco-American CFM Leap 1C that powers the COMAC C919 and the Russian D-30 that powers the Y-20 and H-6K and H6-N variants. China is developing the CJ-1000, AEF3500, and WS-20 high-bypass turbofan engines to power the C919, CR929, and Y-20, respectively.

S&T GOALS IN SUPPORT OF MILITARY MODERNIZATION

Key Takeaways

> China's effort to build national corporate champions that achieve rapid market dominance across a range of technologies directly complements the PLA's modernization efforts. The PRC intends to leverage its commercial sector to realize the PLA's modernization goals.

> China seeks to become a leader in key technologies with military potential, such as AI, autonomous systems, advanced computing, quantum information sciences, biotechnology, and advanced materials and manufacturing. China's implementation of AI and a quantum communication network demonstrates the speed and scale with which it intends to deploy certain emerging technologies.

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704 Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the
UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023 FL-2023-00013 20231229-170

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
People's Republic of China

> China has mobilized vast resources to fund research and subsidize companies involved in strategic S&T fields while pressing private firms, universities, and provincial governments to cooperate with the military in developing advanced technologies. China has also reorganized its military research institutions and key military think tanks to provide the PLA advanced capabilities and a modern warfighting doctrine.

> The PRC continues to undermine the integrity of the U.S. S&T research enterprise through a variety of actions such as hidden diversions of research, resources, and intellectual property.

China's S&T Goals and Plans. The PRC has issued an array of major national plans over the last decade that stress indigenous innovation and the rapid development of strategic S&T sectors, such as information and communications technology (ICT), high-end manufacturing, quantum technology, alternative energy, and biotechnology. The PRC's 13th Five-Year Plan calls for accelerating research on "majorly influential disruptive technologies" and the pursuit of "leapfrog" S&T developments in order to win "a competitive advantage in the new round of industry transformation." While slowly increasing funding for basic research, China has made comprehensive efforts to grow the country's inventive capabilities over the last decade.

> The 2017 National Artificial Intelligence Plan describes steps for China to become the "world's major AI innovation center" by 2030 and calls for the country to accelerate the integration of AI with the economy, society, and national defense. The plan foresees a great expansion in the "breadth and depth of AI applications in… national defense construction."

> Other plans address the development of various sectors of China's robust Internet ecosystem, including cloud computing, big data, e-commerce, and next-generation broadband wireless communications networks, including fifth-generation (5G) wireless networks. Due to information sharing requirements with the PRC's security services as required by PRC laws, worldwide expansion of 5G networks by PRC companies will challenge the security and resiliency of other countries' networks.

The commercial sector increasingly drives breakthroughs in advanced dual-use technologies, and PRC companies have research efforts aimed at generating breakthroughs in emerging technologies. China continues to execute "Made in China 2025," an ambitious industrial policy centered around "smart manufacturing," that seeks to create a vanguard of corporations in the PRC that are global leaders in ten strategic industries. These industries include new generation information technology, high-grade machine tooling and robotics; aerospace equipment; marine engineering equipment and high-tech ships; advanced rail transportation equipment; new-energy automobiles; electric power equipment; agricultural equipment; new materials; and biomedicine and high-tech medical devices. The plan

145

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704 Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China   UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229-171

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

stresses the need to replace imported technology with domestically produced technology, a goal that corresponds with China's desire to reduce its reliance on other nations and develop a fully indigenous defense sector. In addition to presenting an economic challenge to nations that export high-tech products, the plan directly supports China's military modernization goals by stressing proprietary mastery of advanced dual-use technologies. China's leaders have used less inflammatory rhetoric regarding "Made in China 2025" in response to concerns from advanced industrial countries regarding the PRC's licit and illicit acquisition of intellectual property pursuant to that policy.

Heavy Government and Corporate Sector Investment. The PRC has mobilized vast resources to fund research and subsidize companies involved in strategic S&T fields while pressing private firms, universities, and provincial governments to cooperate with the military in developing advanced technologies. Although China remains reliant on certain types of foreign technology, the country's decades-long execution of a strategy of advancing domestic S&T and R&D through large-scale technology transfer has deepened the expertise of scientists and engineers in the PRC and placed them at, or near, the forefront of many scientific fields.

> The PRC's state investment funds established to support priority industries have marshalled hundreds of billions of dollars in capital.

> China expects to field an exascale computer based on domestically produced technology by 2020, ahead of the United States, the European Union, and Japan.

> China conducted the first quantum-secured intercontinental videoconference in September 2017 and plans to have a satellite-enabled, global, quantum-encrypted communications capability operational by 2030. China is also reportedly building the world's largest quantum research facility slated to open in the city of Hefei in 2020. China already has a 2,000 km secure quantum communication ground line between Beijing and Shanghai and plans to expand the line across China.

> In 2019, scientists in the PRC claimed to have developed a human brain-computer interface to send targeting information directly to a search-and-rescue drone. Also in 2019, a separate group of scientists claimed to have developed a brain-computer interface that enabled human-thought control of a rat in a maze, signifying China's interest advanced human-machine teaming technologies.

China's private sector, led by Internet companies Baidu, Alibaba, and Tencent and telecommunications equipment manufacturers Huawei and Zhongxing Telecommunications Company Ltd. (ZTE), is driving the development of emerging technologies, such as facial recognition

and 5G, by establishing innovation centers and funding technology startups, or in the case of 5G, competing to build the world's next-generation networks. PRC technology companies are also expanding into overseas markets, in some cases by offering smart city technologies, a development that could increase their access to foreign talent and data.

> In 2017, China designated Alibaba, Baidu, iFlytek, and Tencent as the country's official "AI Champions," with SenseTime joining in 2018. This designation gives these companies the lead for setting national technical standards and enables extensive cooperation with China's national security community. In 2019, China added ten new companies, including Huawei, Hikvision, Megvii, and Yitu, to the champions list.

> In November 2017, the PRC startup Yitu won a U.S. government-sponsored competition involving facial recognition technology. Yitu, along with other PRC AI and facial recognition firms like SenseTime, Megvii, and Deepglint, reportedly received hundreds of millions of dollars in investments in 2017. China is the world's largest market for video surveillance technologies.

> The 2017 National Intelligence Law requires PRC companies, such as Huawei and ZTE, to support, provide assistance, and cooperate in China's national intelligence work wherever they operate.

Potential Military Applications. China's pursuit of an innovation-driven economic model supports its goal of building a "modern and specialized military capable of fighting and winning wars in the information age." China intends to harness its commercial technology sector to accomplish the PLA's goal of intelligentized warfare. The PLA has reorganized a key military think tank—the Academy of Military Sciences (AMS)—and reasserted this organization's leadership of military science research programs. The CMC has tasked the revamped AMS to drive defense innovation, conduct enhanced academic outreach, and to ensure that the PLA's warfighting theory and doctrine fully capitalize on disruptive technologies like AI and autonomous systems.

> Researchers at the China Academy of Sciences reportedly developed an early version of an AI-powered decision-support system that the PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs is field-testing with its diplomats. The system uses deep learning and a neural network for "geopolitical environment simulation and prediction."

The PRC is pursuing a number of advanced military capabilities with disruptive potential such as hypersonic weapons, electromagnetic railguns, directed energy weapons, and counterspace capabilities. The country's effort to build national corporate champions that achieve rapid market dominance across a range of frontier technologies directly complements the PLA's modernization efforts and

carries serious military implications. Given China's willingness to deploy emerging technologies rapidly and at massive scale as well as China's focus on MCF, the PLA would likely quickly benefit from any scientific breakthroughs with military utility. Potential military applications of some emerging technologies include:

> *AI and Advanced Robotics*: enhanced data exploitation, decision support, manufacturing, unmanned systems, and command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (C4ISR).

> *Semiconductors and Advanced Computing*: enhanced cyber operations and weapons design, and shortened R&D cycles.

> *Quantum Technologies*: secure global communications, enhanced computing and decryption capabilities, undersea target detection, and enhanced submarine navigation.

> *Biotechnology*: enhanced warfighter selection and performance, advanced human-machine teaming.

> *Hypersonic and Directed Energy Weapons*: global strike and defeat of missile defense systems, anti-satellite (ASAT)/missile/ unmanned aircraft system capabilities.

> *Advanced Materials and Alternative Energy*: improved military equipment and weapon systems.

FOREIGN TECHNOLOGY ACQUISITION

Key Takeaways

> The PRC pursues many vectors to acquire foreign technologies, including both licit and illicit means. The PRC's efforts include a range of practices and methods to acquire sensitive and dual-use technologies and military-grade equipment to advance its military modernization goals.

> The PRC leverages foreign investments, commercial joint ventures, mergers and acquisitions, and state-sponsored industrial and technical espionage, and the manipulation of export controls for the illicit diversion of dual-use technologies to increase the level of technologies and expertise available to support military research, development, and acquisition.

> In 2019, the PRC's efforts included efforts to acquire dynamic random access memory, aviation, and anti-submarine warfare (ASW) technologies.

In 2019, the PRC continued to supplement its national S&T and industrial modernization by obtaining foreign technologies and knowledge through a variety of means both licit and illicit. China is investing

148

in and seeking to acquire critical technologies that will be foundational for future innovations both for commercial and military applications, including AI, robotics, autonomous vehicles, quantum information sciences, augmented and virtual reality, financial technology, and biotechnology. The line demarcating products designed for commercial versus military purposes is blurring with these new technologies. *Imports*: China acquires dual-use, export controlled technology by applying for licenses through the U.S. Department of Commerce. The majority of China's imports have traditionally been electronic and materials processing and test, inspection, and production equipment.

Activities Supporting China's Military Modernization. The PRC is actively pursuing an intensive campaign to obtain foreign technology through imports, foreign direct investment, talent recruitment, and R&D and academic collaborations. The PRC uses a variety of licit means to acquire foreign technology and knowledge to supplement its S&T industrial base, including its military-industrial base. These efforts include:

> *Imports*. China acquires technology via imports and transfers from foreign industries. U.S. industry transfers dual-use export controlled technologies to China by applying for export licenses through the Department of Commerce.

> *Foreign Direct Investment*. China invests in or outright purchases foreign companies that have technology, facilities, and people working in key technology areas.

> *Talent Recruitment*. The PRC uses various incentive strategies to attract foreign personnel to work on and manage strategic programs and fill technical knowledge gaps. For example, Beijing's "Thousand Talents Program," recruits individuals from PRC diaspora populations, persons with familiar ties or ties of affection in the PRC, recent emigrants from the PRC, and foreign national experts whose recruitment the PRC views as necessary to its scientific and technical modernization, especially with regard to defense technology.

> *Research and Development and Academic Collaborations*. China actively seeks partnerships with private, government, and academic research labs to gain exposure to cutting-edge technology and researchers. These partnerships also provide China with the technical expertise to run, manage, and organize such facilities.

In several of these areas, China's methods and practices undermine the integrity of the U.S. science and technology research enterprise. These actions include hidden diversions of research and/or resources, undermining peer review and grant award processes, failing to provide reciprocity for scientists and institutions engaged in scientific research, and violating the principles of impartiality and

149

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704 Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229-175

objectivity in scientific research that guard against improper influence and the distortion of scientific knowledge.

ESPIONAGE ACTIVITIES SUPPORTING CHINA'S MILITARY MODERNIZATION.

Multiple U.S. criminal indictments since 2015 involve PRC nationals, naturalized U.S. citizens or permanent resident aliens from the PRC, and U.S. citizens, procuring and exporting controlled items to China, according to a U.S. Department of Justice summary of major U.S. export enforcement, economic espionage, and sanctions-related criminal cases. The PRC's efforts to acquire sensitive, dual-use, or military-grade equipment included radiation hardened integrated circuits, monolithic microwave integrated circuits, accelerometers, gyroscopes, naval and marine technologies, syntactic foam trade secrets, space communications, military communication jamming equipment, dynamic random access memory, aviation technologies, and ASW technologies. Recent cases include:

> In October 2019, a PRC national was sentenced to 40 months in prison for conspiring to export military- and space-grade technology illegally from the United States to China. The PRC national worked with other individuals in China to purchase radiation-hardened power amplifiers and supervisory circuits used for military and space applications.

> In November 2018, a PRC national residing in the United States was charged with conspiring to export devices with military applications to PRC government and military actors. The PRC national fulfilled instructions from the PLA to obtain dual-use technology used for ASW and other advanced military capabilities. This included remotely operated side scan sonar systems, hydrophones, robotic boats, unmanned underwater vehicles, and unmanned surface vehicles.

> In October 2018, a group of PRC Ministry of State Security (MSS) intelligence officers, associated cyber actors, and other co-conspirators were indicted on charges of conspiring to steal sensitive technological information related to turbofan engines used in commercial airliners. At the time of the intrusions, a PRC state-owned enterprise (SOE) was developing a comparable engine for use in commercial aircraft manufactured in China and elsewhere.

> In October 2018, an MSS officer was arrested and charged with economic espionage involving the of trade secrets for civilian and military aircraft technology related to engineering services and signature material, advanced communication systems, jet engines and aircraft propulsion, and engine containment structures from leading U.S. aviation firms. In addition, the officer targeted industry experts for recruitment by facilitating travel to China under the guise of delivering

university presentations. The intelligence officer also provided monetary compensation and other forms of reimbursement to these experts.

> In September 2018, a PRC SOE was implicated in a conspiracy to commit economic espionage through the theft, conveyance, and possession of stolen trade secrets from a U.S. semiconductor company. The U.S. company is a global leader in the semiconductor industry and specializes in dynamic random-access memory (DRAM). China identifies DRAM development as a national priority.

Illicit Diversion of Dual-Use Technologies Supporting China's Military Modernization. One of the key tenets of the U.S. export control system is the expectation that the applicant, the foreign end-user and their affidavits on how the technology will be used are truthful and genuine. The PRC's laws and its Military Civil-Fusion Development Strategy, however, means that civil-end use exports can be diverted without the exporter's knowledge. The PRC's *National Intelligence Law* and *National Security Law* provide the legal authority for the PRC to compel civilian companies in China to hand over U.S. and other foreign-origin technologies, including dual-use technologies. MCF through top-down direction for deeper integration, resource sharing, and interoperability between China's civilian and military sectors further muddies the waters between a civil end user and military end user.

The PRC has learned how to structure exports in a manner to help it circumvent U.S. export controls, sometimes outright deceiving an exporter on the end user and end use and other times providing the exporter with the veneer of a legal end user and end use. For example, in 2012, a Western defense company plead guilty to violating the U.S. Arms Export Control Act for exporting restricted U.S. defense technology to China that was used in the development of the PLA's first modern military attack helicopter, the Z-10. According to the Department of Justice press release, China sought to develop its military attack helicopter under the guise of a civilian medium helicopter program in order to secure Western assistance. The release states that while the company knew that supplying China's Z-10 project with U.S.-origin components would be illegal, the PRC importer claimed it was developing a civilian version of the helicopter in parallel with the military version. Anticipating its work on China's military attack helicopter would open the door to a far more lucrative civilian helicopter market in China, the company "purposely turned a blind eye to the helicopter's military application." The company determined on its own that its exports for the Z-10 did not constitute "defense articles" requiring a U.S. export license. In 2018, a PRC national was charged with violating export laws for exporting 60 hydrophones, used to detect and monitor sound underwater, without obtaining export licenses and concealing that a military research institute in the PRC was the true end-user.

151

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704 Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229-177

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6

U.S.-CHINA DEFENSE CONTACTS AND EXCHANGES

Key Takeaways

> DoD engagement with China supports overall U.S. policy and strategy toward China.

> DoD's defense contacts and exchanges with China in 2019, which included multiple senior level engagements, helped advance the Department's effort to build a constructive results-oriented defense relationship with China.

U.S. defense contacts and exchanges conducted in 2019 supported overall U.S. policy and strategy toward China. The 2017 *National Security Strategy*, the 2018 *National Defense Strategy*, the 2018 *Nuclear Posture Review*, and the 2019 *Missile Defense Review* recognize the growing trend of military competition in a dynamic security environment. The United States will compete from a position of strength while encouraging China to cooperate with the United States on security issues where our interests align. DoD engagements with China are limited, and focused, on reducing risk and preventing misunderstanding in times of increased tension. Engagements are conducted in accordance with the statutory limitations of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2000, as amended.

Defense contacts and exchanges with China seek to build the structures and habits necessary to prevent, defuse, and manage crises. In 2019, DoD's plan for defense contacts and exchanges with China focused on three interconnected priorities: (1) encouraging China to act in ways consistent with the free and open international order; (2) promoting risk reduction and risk management to limit the potential for misunderstanding or miscalculation; and (3) establishing the communications mechanisms necessary to de-escalate incidents before they become crisis or conflict.

The pace and scope of the PRC's military modernization and expansion provides opportunities as well as challenges for U.S. defense relations. As the PRC's military develops and expands its reach globally, the risk of an accident or miscalculation also increases, putting a premium on risk reduction efforts and highlighting the need to ensure the operational safety of forces operating in close proximity, as well as the need to establish crisis communication mechanisms.

Pursuit of a constructive results-oriented relationship with China is an important part of U.S. strategy in the Indo-Pacific region. The 2018 *National Defense Strategy* seeks areas of cooperation with China from positions of U.S. strength, with a long-term objective to set the military-to military relationship on a path of strategic transparency and non-aggression, and to encourage China to act in a manner consistent with the free and open international order.

DEFENSE CONTACTS AND EXCHANGES IN 2019

Key Takeaways

> High-level contacts enable U.S. leaders to challenge PRC behaviors that are inconsistent with the free and open international order, gain insight into China's strategic intent, manage differences, and cooperate where our interests align.

> For example, the Secretary of Defense met with the PRC Minister of National Defense on the sidelines of multinational events several times during the year.

> Recurring exchanges serve as a mechanism for dialogue at the strategic and policy-levels, including risk reduction and practical cooperation.

> Functional engagements focus on risk reduction and communication to promote operational deconfliction and coordination.

> Exchanges improve the ability to interact and coordinate in providing international public goods in areas of mutual interest.

DoD conducts all contacts with China in a manner consistent with the relevant provisions of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2000, as amended.

In 2019, the U.S. and China defense relationship focused on strategic communications and reducing the risk of misunderstanding or miscalculation.

DoD continued to make progress with the People's Liberation Army (PLA) in developing the capacity to cooperate in multilateral settings. The two militaries participated in a Disaster Management Exchange with an emphasis on deconfliction in a Multinational Coordination Cell. Such examples of defense engagement enable risk reduction and enhance understanding of how each side responds to humanitarian disasters. As the 2018 *National Defense Strategy* states, the United States is "open to opportunities for cooperation but from a position of strength and based on our national interests. Should cooperation fail, we will be ready to defend the American people, our values, and interests."

Selected visits and exchanges are below. A complete list of 2019 engagements is in Appendix II.

High-Level Visits and Engagements. High-level contacts are an important means to exchange views on the international security environment, to identify areas of common interest, to manage

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704 Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China

UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229-181

differences, and to facilitate common approaches to shared challenges. Discussions focused on areas of military cooperation and candidly addressed differences.

Then-Acting Secretary of Defense Patrick Shanahan met General Wei Fenghe, Minister of National Defense, on the sidelines of the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore on May 31. Additionally, Secretary of Defense Mark Esper met General Wei at the annual Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Defense Ministers' Meeting-Plus (ADMM-Plus) in Thailand in November. At both meetings, the Secretaries engaged on strategic topics, discussed differences, and affirmed a strong commitment to a constructive, stable, results-oriented bilateral relationship.

Chief of Naval Operations Admiral John Richardson visited Beijing in January 2019. However, the PRC delayed a counterpart visit in the United States between the Chief of the PLA's Joint Staff Department, General Li Zuocheng, and then-Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Dunford. Similarly, the PRC delayed a visit by the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM) Commander to the PRC.

In 2019, the PRC accepted several requests for the use of the Defense Telephone Link (DTL) or Video Teleconference (VTC). Six high level VTCs occurred, including the first initiated by the PRC in May between the PLA's Office of International Military Cooperation Deputy Director, Major General Huang Xueping, and Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for East Asia Mary Beth Morgan. The DTLs and VTCs contribute to establishing regular communications and confidence building between senior defense leaders. While these DTLs allow communications with the PLA, the Department continues to work to build the systems necessary to communicate rapidly and effectively to prevent incidents from escalating into crises.

In August 2019, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for China (DASD) Chad Sbragia hosted a PRC delegation in Washington D.C. to discuss the contents of China's recently released defense white paper titled China's National Defense in the New Era. Major General Huang Xueping, Deputy Director of the Office of Interational Military Cooperation (OIMC) led the PRC delegation. The meeting was consistent with the Memoradum of Understanding on Notification of Major Military Activties Confidence Building Measure Mechanism to gain a better understanding of China's national defense policy. The U.S. delegation included representatives from the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the Joint Staff, the State Department, and the National Security Council staff.

In October 2019, DASD Chad Sbragia attended Beijing's Ninth Xiangshan Forum. DASD Sbragia offered brief remarks on "A Future-Oriented Asia-Pacific Security Architecture," and conducted official meetings Major General Huang Xueping (OIMC).

Recurrent Exchanges. Recurring exchanges form the backbone of U.S.-China defense discussions each year. They serve as regularized mechanisms for dialogue at the strategic and policy levels on risk reduction, crisis communication, and areas for cooperation.

In June 2019, the Military Maritime Consultative Agreement (MMCA) Working Group met in Qingdao to improve operational safety through open communication between U.S. and PLA naval and air forces. In November 2019, the MMCA Working Group and MMCA Plenary convened in Honolulu. Major General Stephen Sklenka, Director for Strategic Planning and Policy, USINDOPACOM, and representatives from U.S. Pacific Fleet, U.S. Pacific Air Forces, U.S. Africa Command (USAFRICOM), and U.S. Coast Guard met with a PLA Navy (PLAN) and PLA Air Force (PLAAF) delegation led by Rear Admiral Wu Dongzhu, PLAN Deputy Chief of Staff. Both sides reviewed the operational safety situation over the last year and discussed implementation and assessment of the Rules of Behavior for Safety of Air and Maritime Encounters Memorandum of Understanding.

The Defense Policy Coordination Talks (DPCT) are an annual dialogue, The 2019 DPCTs were postposed to January 2020. Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for China Chad Sbragia participated in the Defense Policy Coordination Talks in Beijing with Major General Huang Xueping, Deputy Director, Office for International Military Cooperation (OIMC). The U.S. delegation included representatives from the Joint Staff, USINDOPACOM, and the State Department. The leaders discussed how to reshape the U.S.-China military contacts and exchanges to achieve the goals of risk reduction, crisis communications, cooperation, and confidence building.

In May 2019. Assistant Secretary of Defense for Indo-Pacific Security Affairs Randall Schriver co-hosted the 3rd Asia-Pacific Security Dialogue (APSD) in Washington DC with Major General Ci Guowei, Director, OIMC. The U.S. delegation included representatives from Joint Staff, USINDOPACOM, and the State Department. The leaders discussed regional security issues, the South China Sea, North Korea, and the enforcement of United National Security Council Resolutions.

Functional and Academic Exchanges. Functional engagements focus on advancing risk reduction, understanding, and communication channels to promote deconfliction and coordination. Functional

157

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704 Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China   UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229-183

exchanges such as port calls are also used to enhance operational safety and exercise communications and navigation protocols.

In March 2019, a U.S. Air Force Air War College delegation visited their PLA Air Force Command College counterparts in Beijing. In April, the U.S. National War College and China's National Defense University exchanged visits, with the U.S. National War College conducting a research seminar in China and China's National Defense University operational command course "Tigers" visiting the United States. In May, the U.S. Marine Corps War College visited China, followed by a visit to the United States by PLA general officers in the strategic-level "Dragons" course from the PLA National Defense University, and a visit by the PLA Air Force Command College to the U.S. Air Force Air War College. In June, PLA Navy Command College students visited the U.S. Naval War College. In July, the presidents of both countries' national defense universities conducted their biennial meeting, followed by the U.S. National Defense University CAPSTONE visit of new U.S. general and flag officers to China. In December 2019, the U.S. Naval War College visited the PLA Navy Command College as a reciprocal exchange event for the June visit. These visits and other academic exchanges during the year offered an opportunity to increase understanding of China and the Indo-Pacific through engagements with various echelons of the PLA.

In November 2019, PLA and U.S. Army soldiers participated in a Disaster Management Exchange in Hawaii. U.S. Army Pacific Commander, General Paul LeCamera, met with Major General Xu Qiling, Commander of the PLA Eastern Theater Command Army. The exchange focused on HADR in a volcano eruption scenario in a third country in which both armies would interact as part of a Multinational Coordination Center using the ASEAN standard operating procedures.

PLANNING FOR DEFENSE CONTACTS AND EXCHANGES IN 2020

A list of planned engagements for 2020 is provided in Appendix II. Although the U.S. and China agreed at the January 2020 Defense Policy Consultative Talks on a series of military contact events to occur during 2020, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has necessitated delaying or cancelling events.

SPECIAL TOPIC: THE PRC'S 2019 DEFENSE WHITE PAPER

In July 2019, the PRC's State Council Information Office released a new white paper on defense titled, *China's National Defense in the New Era*. Typically published biennially, this is the PRC's tenth defense white paper since 1998 and the first to be published since 2015, the same year the PRC began extensive reforms of its armed forces. The defense white papers represent authoritative statements from the PRC government on its defense and security policies. The PRC publishes these papers to portray itself as transparent and shape international and domestic perceptions in accordance with CCP-approved priorities. The white papers also amplify preexisting messaging, as the 2019 paper is largely consistent with remarks made by China's leaders at the 19th Party Congress in 2017, which set the CCP's expectations for the PLA in the "New Era."

In August 2019, the PLA dispatched delegations to brief the white paper to foreign audiences. PLA officials from the Central Military Commission's (CMC's) Office of International Military Cooperation led a delegation to brief audiences at the Pentagon, National Defense University, and Center for Naval Analyses.

Perceptions of the Global Security Environment. The PRC's defense white papers can offer insights into how China's leaders view global affairs. *China's National Defense in a New Era* claims that China remains in the "period of strategic opportunity," but describes the international security environment as marred by increased "strategic competition," the growing prospect of nuclear arms racing, and shifting towards greater multi-polarity. The paper primarily blames the United States for increasing global and regional tension, and characterizes U.S. pursuit of "absolute military supremacy" as increasing international strategic competition. This characterization of the United States differs from the PRC's 2015 defense white paper that vaguely referenced growing threats from "hegemonism." The paper repeated the PRC's longstanding policy of seeking unification with Taiwan while underscoring its right to use force against Taiwan if necessary, and specifically cited the Democratic Progressive Party of President Tsai Ing-wen as a primary source of hostility and a threat to peace, a first for a defense white paper. In response to its perceptions of the international security environment, the PRC elaborated its own vision for the international order in its concept of a "community with a shared future for mankind." Although China frequently describes its vision for this community, the latest defense white paper notably draws a direct link between the PRC's global military activities and the wellbeing of its community concept.

Justification for Expanding Overseas. The CMC has tasked the PLA with defending the PRC's overseas interests and citizens, and provides its justification in the defense white paper for the PLA's expanding global footprint. The paper states that in order to address deficiencies in overseas operations and support, the PRC has continued to improve its naval forces, develop overseas logistical facilities, and enhance the military's capability to complete diversified tasks. The paper also depicts the PLA's presence abroad as a benefactor to the regions where the PLA operates and the international

system as a whole, arguing that the international community is becoming more dependent on the PLA's support. The PLA base in Djibouti, for example, is touted for offering medical and military assistance, and for providing local donations to schools. Additionally, the paper portrays the PLA as positively contributing to UN peacekeeping operations, counterterrorism efforts, maritime security, and disaster relief as a provider of "international public security goods." Probably due to concerns generated by the PLA's expending presence and, the PRC's white paper tries to assure audiences that the PLA acts responsibly and appropriately while defending the PRC's interests.

Building a National Defense Policy System. China is developing a national defense policy and military policy decision-making and implementation system. It is an outcome of the major reforms the PLA has undergone since 2015, and this system was described as "the biggest difference compared to past white papers." The national defense policy system will provide the organization and authorities for the PLA to develop and implement policy. The system includes the 15 offices organized under the CMC staff and the recently formed theater commands. It is unclear how the Central National Security Commission (CNSC) is involved with this system.

Status of 2020 Milestones (Mechanization and Reform). The PLA might be unable to meet some of its near-term modernization and reform milestones that it planned to achieve by 2020. Among the PLA's modernization goals set by the CCP leadership is to "generally achieve mechanization" by 2020. However, the PRC's 2019 defense white paper noted that the PLA had "yet to complete the task of mechanization," suggesting it was also unlikely that the PLA would achieve this goal by the end of 2020. Additionally, PLA officials have indicated that the third (and final) stage of PLA reforms would take place in 2021 or 2022. The PRC's original timetable from late 2015 for the completion of the PLA's reforms indicated that 2020 was the target for completion. References to 2021 or 2022 may imply the PLA is a year or two behind in completing its reforms. Both of these years are significant for the Party and its strategy. The Party aims for China to achieve its "moderately prosperous society" goal by the CCP's centenary in 2021. The CCP will also hold its 20th Party Congress in 2022.

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704   Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the Office of the Secretary of Defense Report to Congress: UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229-186 People's Republic of China

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

SPECIAL TOPIC: PLA'S APPROACH TOWARD INFORMATIZATION AND INTELLIGENTIZATION, INCLUDING ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

The People's Liberation Army (PLA) sees emerging technologies as driving a shift to "intelligentized" warfare from today's "informatized" way of war. PLA strategists broadly describe intelligentized warfare as the operationalization of artificial intelligence (AI) and its enabling technologies, such as cloud computing, big data analytics, quantum information, and unmanned systems, for military applications. These technologies, according to PRC leaders—including Chairman Xi Jinping— represent a "Revolution in Military Affairs" for which China must undertake a whole-of-government approach to secure critical economic and military advantages against advanced militaries.

China seeks to lead the shift to "intelligentized warfare" through its Military-Civil Fusion (MCF) Development Strategy and by reforming both its research and development (R&D) as well as strategy and doctrine organizations. In 2015, the PRC elevated MCF to a national strategy, and it continues to establish new organizations and promulgate policies to drive development of dual-use technologies and further integrate civilian and military administration. In 2017, the PLA reorganized its military research and education institutes to synchronize advances in emerging technologies with the development of new operational concepts. The Academy of Military Science (AMS), which has traditionally been responsible for writing new doctrine, now oversees several PLA science and technology institutes.

The PLA argues that the implementation of "intelligentized" capabilities will increase the speed of future combat, necessitating more rapid processing and fusing of information to support quick and efficient command decision making. Victory in future warfare, according to PLA strategists, will depend upon which side can more quickly and effectively observe, orient, decide, and act in an increasingly dynamic operating environment. As a result, China is pursuing new technologies like AI to support future military capabilities, such as autonomous command and control (C2) systems, more sophisticated and predictive operational planning, and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) fusion. In addition, the PLA is developing more capable command information systems and decision aids for battlefield commanders. Future command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (C4ISR) systems will seek to use AI to collect, fuse, and transmit big data for more effective battlespace management and to generate optimal courses of action.

PLA strategists recognize the importance of information superiority during a conflict. The PLA has emphasized the need for the capabilities to target and degrade adversary command and control systems and future AI systems. As such, the PLA plans to employ technologies associated with intelligentized warfare to support the deployment of autonomous unmanned systems and conduct information operations (IO). PRC weapons developers are researching new unmanned aerial, surface, sub-surface, and ground vehicles that will enable new operational concepts and require new C2 models. The PLA is pursuing greater autonomy for unmanned platforms, to include swarm intelligence and

161

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704 Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China   UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229-187

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

manned-unmanned teaming capabilities, to provide more lethal kinetic that and nonkinetic strike options that can saturate adversary defenses as well as more survivable and long-distance ISR capabilities, among other applications. The PLA also intends to improve its cyber and electronic warfare (EW) capabilities through AI-assisted network vulnerability analysis, countermeasure identification, and electromagnetic spectrum management.

PLA discussions of "intelligentized warfare" also acknowledge the difficulties of developing future technologies and implementing new capabilities. The delegation of decision-making authorities to lower echelons may run counter to the PLA's traditionally hierarchical and centralized C2 structure. The PLA's ability to leverage big data will depend upon its ability to obtain large quantities of high-quality data on foreign militaries. Additionally, the complexity of future conflict probably will challenge the PLA to recruit, train, and retain the highly competent and technically proficient personnel necessary to understand and operate future "intelligentized" systems.

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704   Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China
UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229-188

SPECIAL TOPIC: EMERGING MILITARY CAMPAIGN CONCEPTS

The People's Liberation Army's (PLA) will likely need to update its existing doctrine, concepts, and campaigns to adapt to the long-term trends in global military affairs, meet the PRC's evolving national security needs, and account for the significant changes in the PLA's structures and capabilities. Evolving campaign concepts will aim to advance the PLA's goal to become a fully modern and "informatized" force by 2035. Going forward, PLA strategists envision further improving joint operations and shifting towards "intelligentized warfare," defined by the application of artificial intelligence (AI) and other advanced technologies, driving additional campaign development.

As PRC leaders push the PLA to operate in defense of China's expanding national interests, the PLA will develop concepts and capabilities to conduct force projection and defensive operations that expand China's strategic space farther from mainland China. New PLA campaign concepts also will attempt to integrate these new missions and capabilities across theater commands and in new domains, like cyber and space. For example, the creation of the Strategic Support Force (SSF) and the PLA's growing cyber, space, and electronic warfare (EW) capabilities will require campaigns that expand upon PLA notions of space confrontation operations by integrating space and terrestrial activates into multi-domain joint operations. Future campaigns may also integrate far seas air and naval operations. PLA strategists also discuss the need to secure air, maritime, and information superiority at greater distances, which could entail campaign concepts that integrate joint forces—possibly to include forces deployed to overseas bases—to execute operations abroad, such as in the western Pacific and Indian Ocean. These operations will require a mature command and control (C2) organizations and processes for overseas operations that effectively divide responsibilities between the Central Military Commission (CMC), theater commands, and services.

What is a Campaign?

The PLA has developed a series of "campaigns" that outline operational military activities to achieve China's strategic objectives. These campaigns incorporate activities across the PLA for contingencies ranging from border defense to large-scale multinational war. PLA joint campaigns—those that feature forces of two or more services under a joint command, like a theater command—include offensive campaigns, such as joint firepower strike, island blockade, or island offensive operations, and defensive campaigns like air defense, border defense, and counter-landing operations.

Future campaigns could also include guidance to conduct non-war military activities (NWMA) and operate with foreign militaries. Overseas operations, such as the PLA's participation in peacekeeping operations, can help the PLA develop tactics, techniques, and procedures to inform future campaigns that include humanitarian assistance/disaster relief (HA/DR) and noncombatant evacuation operations. In addition, an increase in bilateral and multilateral engagement with foreign militaries, including Russia, Pakistan, and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) can improve the PLA's ability to organize and manage combined operations that integrate foreign forces.

163

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704   Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China   UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229-189

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

APPENDIX I: CHINA AND TAIWAN FORCES DATA

The data in this year's report is derived from a new methodology that may result in significantly different numbers than shown in previous reports, but does not necessarily reflect a sudden change in capability.

Taiwan Strait Military Balance, Ground Forces

	China		Taiwan
	Total	Eastern and Southern Theaters	Total
Total Ground Force Personnel	1,030,000	412,000	88,000**
Group Armies	13	5	3
Combined Arms Brigades	78	30 (6 amphibious)	N/A
Mechanized Infantry Brigades			3
Motorized Infantry Brigades	N/A		6
Armor Brigades			4
Air Assault/Army Aviation Brigades	15	5	2
Artillery Brigades	15	5	3
Airborne Brigades	7*	7	0
Marine Brigades	8*	4	3
Tanks	6,300		800
Artillery Pieces	6,300		1,100

Note: For the purposes of this document, the "Taiwan Strait Area" includes the PLA's Eastern and Southern Theater Commands.

*Although counted as ground forces for the purposes of this chart, China's airborne brigades belong to the PLA Air Force (PLAAF) Airborne Corps and the marine brigades to the PLA Navy Marine Corps (PLANMC).
**Counts only active-duty Army personnel.

Taiwan Strait Military Balance, Naval Forces

	China		Taiwan
	Total	Eastern and Southern Theater	Total
Aircraft Carriers	2	1	0
Cruisers	1	0	0
Destroyers	32	23	4
Frigates	49	37	22
Corvettes	49	39	0
Tank Landing Ships/ Amphibious Transport Dock	37	35	14
Medium Landing Ships	21	16	0
Diesel Attack Submarines	46	32	2
Nuclear Attack Submarines	6	2	0
Ballistic Missile Submarines	4	4	0
Coastal Patrol (Missile)	86	68	44
Coast Guard Ships	255*	N / A	23

Note: In the event of a major Taiwan conflict, the PLA's Eastern and Southern Theater Navies would participate in direct action against the Taiwan Navy. The Northern Theater Navy (not shown) would be responsible primarily for protecting the sea approaches to China, but could provide mission-critical assets to support the other fleets. In conflict, China may also employ China Coast Guard (CCG) and People's Armed Forces Maritime Militia (PAFMM) ships to support military operations.

*China's coast guard ships belong to the China Coast Guard (CCG), which is subordinate to the People's Armed Police (PAP).

Taiwan Strait Military Balance, Air Forces

	China		Taiwan
	Total	Eastern and Southern Theater	Total
Fighters	1,500 (2,700*)	600 (750*)	400 (500*)
Bombers/Attack	450	250	0
Transport	400	20	30
Special Mission Aircraft	150	100	30

Note: This chart displays estimated totals of operational military aircraft from both PLAAF and PLAN Aviation. However, the PLAAF may supplement its military transports with civilian aircraft in a combat scenario. Note that approximately 800 of the PLAAF/PLAN Aviation's total fighters are at least modern fourth-generation aircraft.

*The totals in parentheses include fighter trainers.

China's Rocket Force

System	Launchers	Missiles	Estimated Range
ICBM	100	100	>5,500km
IRBM	200	200+	3,000-5,500km
MRBM	150	150+	1,000-3,000km
SRBM	250	600+	300-1,000km
GLCM	100	300+	>1,500km

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704 Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023 FL-2023-00013 20231229-192

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

APPENDIX II: DEFENSE CONTACTS AND EXCHANGES

U.S.-CHINA MILITARY-TO-MILITARY CONTACTS FOR 2019	
HIGH-LEVEL VISITS TO CHINA	*Month (2019)*
Chief of Naval Operations	January
ENGAGEMENTS	
PRC Defense White Paper Delegation in the United States	August
Beijing's Ninth Xiangshan Forum	October
RECURRENT EXCHANGES	
Asia Pacific Security Dialogue in the United States	May
Military Maritime Consultative Agreement Working Group in China and the Working Group and Plenary in the United States	June / November
Defense Policy Coordination Talks in China	January 2020
ACADEMIC EXCHANGES	
U.S. Air War College Delegation to China	March
U.S. National War College Delegation to China	April
PLA National War College Delegation to the United States	April
PLA Air Force Command College Delegation to United States	May
U.S. Marine Corps War College Delegation to China	May
PLA National Defense University Delegation to United States	May
PLA Navy Command College Delegation to the United States	June
National Defense University Presidents Meeting	July
U.S. National Defense University CAPSTONE Delegation to China	July
U.S. Naval War College Delegation to China	December
FUNCTIONAL EXCHANGES	
Disaster Management Exchange in China	November

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704   Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China
UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229-193

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

U.S.-CHINA MILITARY-TO-MILITARY EXCHANGES PLANNED FOR 2020

HIGH-LEVEL VISITS TO CHINA

U.S. Senior Defense or Military Leader to China (TBD)

HIGH-LEVEL VISITS TO UNITED STATES

PRC Senior Defense or Military Leader to the United States (TBD)

PLA Navy Delegation to International Sea Symposium
Commander, Southern Theater

INSTITUTIONALIZED EXCHANGES

Defense Policy Coordination Talks (TBD)

MMCA Plenary and Working Groups (TBD)

Defense Consultative Talks (TBD)

Asia-Pacific Security Dialogue (TBD)

ACADEMIC EXCHANGES

PRC Academy delegation to the United States (TBD)

U.S. NDU or Academy delegation to China (TBD)

FUNCTIONAL EXCHANGES

Disaster Management Exchange (TBD)

APPENDIX III: SELECTED PLA BILATERAL AND MULTILATERAL EXERCISES IN 2019

Selected PLA Bilateral and Multilateral Exercises in 2019		
Exercise Name	**Type of Exercise**	**Participants**
WARRIOR VI	Counter-terrorism	Pakistan
Joint Strike-2019	Counter-terrorism	Thailand
Aman-2019	Multi-national naval exercise	Pakistan
Golden Dragon-2019	Joint exercise	Cambodia
Joint Maritime Drill-2019	Multi-national naval exercise	ASEAN
Joint Sea-2019	Naval exercise	Russia
Blue Commando-2019	Naval exercise	Thailand
Khan Quest 2019	Multi-national PKO exercise	Mongolia
Combined Aid	Medical exercise	Germany
Exercise Cooperation	Counter-terrorism	Singapore
Cooperation-2019	Counter-terrorism	Tajikistan
Peace Train-2019	Humanitarian / medical exercise	Laos
Falcon Strike-2019	Air exercise	Thailand
TSENTR-2019	Multi-national joint exercise	Russia
Sincere Partners-2019	Joint land forces training	Tanzania
Shaheen VIII	Air exercise	Pakistan
Fox Hunting-2019	Counter-terrorism	Kazakhstan
Mosi-2019	Maritime security and trade, HA/DR	Russia, South Africa
Maritime Security Belt-2019	Counter-piracy	Russia, Iran

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704   Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the   UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229-195   People's Republic of China

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

APPENDIX IV: CHINA'S TOP CRUDE SUPPLIERS IN 2019

China's Top Crude Suppliers 2019		
Country	**Volume (1,000 barrels/day)**	**Percentage of Imported Crude Oil**
Saudi Arabia	1,669	16
Russia	1,555	15
Iraq	1,037	10
Angola	949	9
Brazil	804	8
Oman	678	7
Kuwait	454	4
UAE	306	3
Iran	296	3
Colombia	263	3
Others	2,120	21
Total	**10,131**	**99**

Numbers may not equal 100, as figures have been rounded.

FL-2023-00013   A-00000736704 Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China   UNCLASSIFIED   12/21/2023   FL-2023-00013 20231229-196

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

APPENDIX V: ACRONYMS

3PLA	General Staff Department's Third Department
4PLA	General Staff Department's Fourth Department
5G	fifth-generation
A2/AD	anti-access/area-denial
AAM	air-to-air missile
AEW&C	airborne early warning and control
AGI	intelligence collection ship
AGOS	ocean surveillance ship
AI	artificial intelligence
ALBM	air-launched ballistic missile
ALCM	air-launched cruise missile
AMS	Academy of Military Science
AOE	fast combat support ship
AOR	replenishment oiler
APT	Advanced Persistent Threat
ASAT	anti-satellite
ASBM	anti-ship ballistic missile
ASCM	anti-ship cruise missile
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ASM	air-to-surface missile
ASW	anti-submarine warfare
AU	African Union
AVIC	Aviation Industry of China
BMD	ballistic missile defense
BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa
C2	command and control
C4I	command, control, communications, computers, and intelligence
C4ISR	command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance
CAS	China Academy of Sciences
CCG	China Coast Guard
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CG	guided-missile cruiser
CMC	Central Military Commission
CNSC	Central National Security Commission
COMAC	Commercial Aircraft Corporation of China
DDG	guided-missile destroyer
DoD	Department of Defense

171

DRAM	dynamic random-access memory
EEZ	exclusive economic zone
EW	electronic warfare
FFG	guided-missile frigate
FFL	corvette
FOCAC	Forum on China-Africa Cooperation
FYP	Five-Year Plan
GPS	Global Positioning System
HA/DR	humanitarian assistance/disaster relief
IADS	integrated air defense system
ICBM	intercontinental ballistic missile
ICT	information and communications technology
IO	information operations
IP	intellectual property
IRBM	intermediate-range ballistic missile
ISR	intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance
JLSF	Joint Logistic Support Force
LACM	land-attack cruise missile
LHA	amphibious assault ship
LOW	launch-on-warning
LPD	amphibious transport dock
MARV	maneuverable reentry vehicle
MCF	military-civil fusion
MIRV	multiple independently targetable reentry vehicle
MOOTW	military operations other than war
MPS	Ministry of Public Security
MRBM	medium-range ballistic missile
MSS	Ministry of State Security
NFU	No First Use
NDU	National Defense University
NORINCO	North Industries Corporation
NPC	National People's Congress
NWMA	non-war military activities
OBOR	One Belt, One Road
OTH	over-the-horizon
PAFMM	People's Armed Forces Maritime Militia
PAP	People's Armed Police
PKO	peacekeeping operations
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PLAA	PLA Army

172

PLAAF	PLA Air Force
PLAN	PLA Navy
PLANMC	PLA Navy Marine Corps
PLARF	PLA Rocket Force
PRC	People's Republic of China
R&D	research and development
RCEP	Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership
RIMPAC	Rim of the Pacific
S&T	science and technology
SAM	surface-to-air missile
SLBM	submarine-launched ballistic missile
SLOC	sea line of communication
SLV	space launch vehicle
SOE	state-owned enterprise
SOF	special operations forces
SRBM	short-range ballistic missile
SS	diesel-powered attack submarine
SSBN	nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarine
SSF	Strategic Support Force
SSN	nuclear-powered attack submarine
SSP	air- independent-powered attack submarine
THAAD	terminal high-altitude area defense
TRA	Taiwan Relations Act
UAV	unmanned aerial vehicle
UGF	underground facility
USAFRICOM	U.S. Africa Command
USINDOPACOM	U.S. Indo-Pacific Command
USTR	U.S. Trade Representative
UN	United Nations
WTO	World Trade Organization
ZTE	Zhongxing Telecommunications Company Ltd.