



United States Department of State

Washington, D.C. 20520

May 31, 2024

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 April 30, 2024, 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 13 additional responsive records subject to the FOIA. Upon review, we have determined that all 13 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 Kevin Bell, U.S. Department of Justice Trial Attorney, at kevin.k.bell@usdoj.gov and (202) 305-8613. Please refer to the case number, FL-2023-00013, and the civil action number, 22-cv-03386, in all correspondence about this case.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jeanne Miller".

Jeanne Miller
Chief, Programs and Policies Division
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

From: (b)(6)

To: (b)(6) state.gov>

Subject: This is part of an ~~SP0~~ conversation. Snapshot Hobbits: chat conversation from Microsoft Teams

Date: Fri, 20 Jan 2023 22:34:40 +0000

Microsoft Teams



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U.S. DEPARTMENT of STATE
Global Engagement Center

GEC Special Report

THE KREMLIN'S CHEMICAL WEAPONS DISINFORMATION CAMPAIGNS



MAY 2022

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

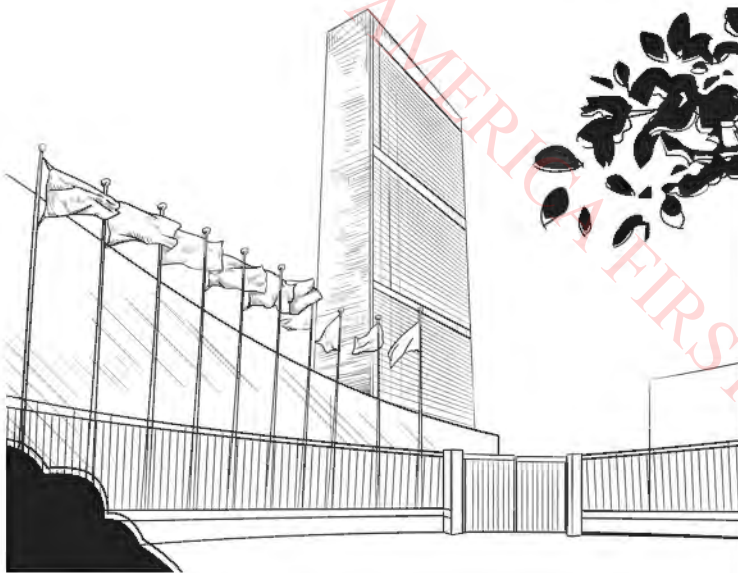
The Kremlin's spreading of unfounded and debunked allegations that the United States and Ukraine are conducting chemical and biological weapons activities in Ukraine is part of a well-established Russian disinformation tactic.

The Kremlin has a long track record of accusing others of the very violations they commit. The United States does not own or operate any chemical or biological laboratories in Ukraine and is in full compliance with its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and Biological Weapons Convention (BWC). Ukraine is also in full compliance with its obligations under the CWC and BWC. It is, in fact, the Russian Federation that has active chemical and biological weapons programs and is in violation of its international obligations.

Just like during Putin's war of choice against Ukraine, the Russian government spreads disinformation to shield its Syrian ally from accountability after the Assad regime's repeated use of chemical weapons, including the 2017 sarin attack against Syrians in Khan Shaykhun. The Kremlin also denied its own responsibility for the 2018 Novichok poisoning of Sergei Skripal and his daughter Yulia in the United Kingdom and the subsequent, related death of a UK citizen in Amesbury. The Kremlin also has tried to escape taking responsibility for the Novichok poisoning of Russian opposition politician Aleksey Navalny in 2020. Each time, the Kremlin used its seat in multilateral organizations as a platform to spread its disinformation. The Kremlin is now attempting to use the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), and other multilateral organizations to deceive people on this issue and to justify President Putin's brutal war of choice against Ukraine.

KHAN SHAYKHUN, SYRIA ATTACK 2017

Although there were indications that chemical weapons had been used in Syria previously, the August 2013 chemical weapons attack on Ghouta, which killed an estimated 1,400 civilians, drew global attention. An OPCW–UN Joint Mission was formally established in October 2013 to oversee the elimination of the Syrian chemical weapons program, with both Russia and the United States assisting the Mission. In addition, the United States and Russia worked together to ensure that Syria acceded to the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), Russia's propaganda portrayed these efforts in the media as an example of Russia's leadership on the world stage, and its indispensability in any potential resolution to the conflict. Despite successful multilateral cooperation at



that time, the Russian Federation and its disinformation and propaganda ecosystem continued to portray the United States and the West as being roadblocks to the full success of Syrian peace talks.

When the Russian military entered the Syrian armed conflict in late 2015, the Kremlin reinforced its partnership with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad with full knowledge that the Syrian regime had used chemical weapons against its own people. The enduring nature of the Syrian armed conflict, the repeated use of chemical weapons by Bashar al-Assad and the high level of public attention to these atrocities led Russia to repeatedly use disinformation to distract and obfuscate its ally's responsibility for these attacks. Because Russia had shielded Syria from accountability for these violations, in 2015, the UN Security Council established the OPCW–UN Joint Investigation Mechanism (JIM) to “identify to the greatest extent feasible” those responsible for the use of chemical weapons in Syria. The JIM confirmed Syrian government

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forces were responsible for three chlorine-barrel bomb attacks in 2014-2015, as well as the April 4, 2017, sarin attack on Khan Shaykhun. In the fall of 2017, Russia repeatedly exercised its veto on UNSC resolutions that would have extended the mandate of the JIM, to prevent it from investigating further cases of regime use of chemical weapons in order to protect Assad.

Multiple Conflicting Disinformation Narratives

On the morning of April 4, 2017, the town of Khan Shaykhun, located in the Idlib Governorate of Syria, was attacked with sarin gas. In October 2017, the JIM concluded that the Syrian Government was responsible for the attack. On the same day of the attack, Al-Masdar News, a pan-Arab outlet that supports the Assad regime, published a story claiming the attack was staged, which was quickly picked up by Russia-friendly Twitter accounts. The author of the article was Paul Antonopoulos, a frequent contributor to Russia's state-funded foreign propaganda outlet RT, and the disinformation proxy website InfoBrics, which has links to Russia's military intelligence service. Early on April 5, 2017, Russia's Ministry of Defense stated that the Syrian Air Force had destroyed a warehouse in Idlib where chemical weapons were produced by the opposition and stockpiled before being shipped to Iraq, describing its information as "fully objective and verified," despite providing no further evidence. Kremlin-funded and Kremlin-aligned media then repeated this statement in their own reporting, despite Russia's Ministry of Defense incorrectly stated the time the attack had occurred. The Ministry of Defense phrase "fully objective and verified" was repeated by both Western and Kremlin-friendly media for days following the attack. Within 24 hours of the attack, two main disinformation narratives spread throughout the information space, messaging that: 1) the operation was staged; and 2) the Syrian Air Force had destroyed an opposition chemical weapons lab.

As these two primary disinformation narratives began to spread, various Russian government officials went on the record to restate both false claims. The Kremlin then deployed a series of secondary false claims to try to bolster its case, messaging that: the OPCW and its investigative missions were flawed and unprofessional; that the White Helmets, a volunteer organization of rescue workers who operate in Syria, were untrustworthy and linked to terrorists; and that the Syrian government did not have any chemical weapons. In an emergency April 5 UNSC meeting, Russia's representative followed traditional Kremlin lines and questioned the reputation of the White Helmets and their reporting from the site of the attack, themes then repeated by Kremlin-friendly media.



Use of Multilateral Organizations

On April 6, 2017, following a U.S. strike on the airfield from which Assad's planes dropped chemical weapons on Khan Shaykhun, Russian President Vladimir Putin said the U.S. attack was made "under an invented pretext." The following day, Kremlin spokesperson Dmitri Peskov claimed that "all Syrian armed forces' chemical weapons stockpiles were eliminated was registered and confirmed by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), a specialized UN unit." In addition to ignoring the fact that the OPCW is not a body of the UN, Peskov's statement disregarded the fact that both the OPCW and the UN had repeatedly declared that Syria's CWC declaration cannot be considered accurate and complete. The

IN ADDITION TO IGNORING THE FACT THAT THE OPCW IS NOT A BODY OF THE UN, PESKOV'S STATEMENT DISREGARDED THE FACT THAT BOTH THE OPCW AND THE UN HAD REPEATEDLY DECLARED THAT SYRIA'S CWC DECLARATION CANNOT BE CONSIDERED ACCURATE AND COMPLETE

OPCW's Declaration Assessment Team (DAT) had engaged the Syrian government to resolve outstanding issues for eight years but continued to discover new gaps, inconsistencies, and discrepancies with Syria's declaration. This specific example illustrates how the Russian Federation is willing to falsely invoke the UN and the OPCW to further its disinformation narratives when it suits their needs.

On April 11, 2017, Putin claimed the chemical weapon attack on Khan Shaykhun was a false flag operation and warned that future false flag operations were planned. Various outlets subsequently spread this disinformation. The next day, the Russian Federation vetoed a UNSC resolution condemning the attack. Russia's representative, Vladimir Safronkov, promoted both disinformation narratives in one intervention, stating that it was an "alleged use of chemical weapons" but then later claimed that the Russian government has "every reason to believe that after Khan Shaykhun other provocations by extremists using toxic substances could follow." In his statement, Safronkov also questioned the professionalism of the OPCW. During the vote on the resolution, he aggressively warned the British representative, "Don't you dare insult Russia again!" Safronkov's tirade at the UNSC received significant attention in both Western and Russian media, and even RT noted the undiplomatic nature of his remarks. His emotional outbursts brought more attention to Russia's false arguments at the UNSC.

An April 13, 2017, the OPCW Executive Council meeting held to discuss the use of chemical weapons in Syria offered the Russian Federation another opportunity to use a multilateral organization as a platform to spread disinformation. After Russia vetoed a UNSC resolution the day before that would have urged Syria to cooperate with the JIM, Russia and Iran proposed launching a new, separate investigation mechanism. Following pushback, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov falsely claimed again the attack was staged

and hinted those countries that voted against the Russia-Iran proposal to launch a new investigation mechanism had a guilty conscience. The discussion continued April 19 and 20, when the Kremlin disputed sarin gas had been used in Khan Shaykhun, adopting the narrative Putin had presented on April 11 that the attack was staged. Following the failure of Russia's and Iran's proposal to launch a new investigation mechanism at the 54th Meeting at the OPCW's Executive Council, Lavrov said, "I think we are very close to this organization [OPCW] being discredited."

These actions illustrate how the Kremlin constructs a disinformation campaign following the use of chemical weapons.

Role of Russia's Disinformation and Propaganda Ecosystem

As it did during other disinformation campaigns, the Kremlin supported the use of inauthentic personas, bots, and trolls following the Khan Shaykhun attack to spread its false claims. There was a clear spike in the creation of Twitter accounts in support of Russia's narratives after the attack. Following the April 6, 2017, U.S. strike on the Syrian Shayrat airbase, the U.S. Department of Defense stated the number of Russia's troll accounts increased 2,000 percent in reaction to the situation. Russia's Mission to the UN also mocked the U.S. Ambassador to the UN on Twitter, likely in an attempt to bring further attention to Russia's claims.

The Kremlin relies heavily on its disinformation media network to introduce its most outlandish false claims. For example, on Apr. 8 and April 12, 2017, the Russian military's television channel TV Zvezda falsely claimed Ukraine had delivered chemical weapons to the Middle East. In addition, Russian state propaganda outlet Sputnik claimed that Qatar-based Al Jazeera news channel had filmed the Khan Shaykhun chemical attack and therefore was somehow complicit in staging it. Other Russian state controlled and proxy media repeated this narrative, but it did not get picked up by Western media.

The Kremlin used its disinformation and propaganda resources to shape the information space, adapting its strategy after repeated chemical weapons attacks by the Assad regime became harder to flatly deny. Russia's Ministry of Defense falsely claimed in March 2018 that "American instructors have trained several groups of insurgents near al-Tanf in order to hold provocations with chemical weapons in the south of Syria..." and that "the Jabhat al-Nusra armed formations with support of so-called 'White Helmets' are preparing a staged chemical attack near the settlements of al-Habid and Qalb Luza located 25 km northwest Idlib. Therefore, 20 containers with chloride have been delivered there." Jabhat al-Nusra is a terrorist organization and the White Helmets do not work with terrorist organizations. In this instance there was no attack, nevertheless, repeated false chemical weapon predictions by Russia's Ministry of Defense, Putin, and other Russian officials show that, the Kremlin will add to its initial disinformation narrative to further distort the information environment. Syria has leveled hundreds of similar accusations about supposed terrorist chemical plots, sometimes weaving into the accusations claims of alleged Western support, but the OPCW has not been able to verify any of these allegations from Syria or Russia. These frequent false claims provide an ample source of unverified material that Russian propaganda networks can then amplify.

THE SALISBURY AND AMESBURY POISONINGS 2018

The Russian Federation used a military grade chemical weapon in the United Kingdom when Russian military intelligence (GRU) attempted to assassinate Sergey Skripal and his daughter Yulia with the nerve agent Novichok in Salisbury, England, on March 4, 2018. This attack not only resulted in long term hospitalization for both Skripals, but also for a British police officer who was first on the scene. In June 2018, a British couple was poisoned by the same agent in nearby Amesbury, after one of them came in contact with an abandoned perfume bottle containing the poison. UK citizen Dawn Sturgess died after this exposure, the result of Russian mishandling of the deadly poison. The Kremlin's disinformation and propaganda ecosystem quickly went into action to protect Russia's interests after international outrage to the assassination operation conducted on NATO soil. At many multilateral meetings held on the Salisbury poisoning, Russia continued to lie about its involvement, inventing false narratives about who was responsible and seeking to lay groundwork for future disinformation campaigns about chemical weapons.

FOLLOWING BOTH THE SALISBURY AND AMESBURY INCIDENTS, RUSSIAN STATE MEDIA AND RUSSIAN GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS PRESENTED MANY, OFTEN MUTUALLY CONTRADICTORY, THEORIES ABOUT WHO WAS RESPONSIBLE.

Multiple Conflicting Disinformation Narratives

Following both the Salisbury and Amesbury incidents, Russian state media and Russian government officials presented many, often mutually contradictory, theories about who was responsible. The Kremlin has also used the technique of flooding the information space with many false claims following events such as the Khan Shaykhun chemical weapon attack and the downing of Malaysian Airlines Flight 17. False and contradictory claims about the Salisbury poisoning included:

- **It never happened:** the Skripals were not poisoned;
- **Someone else did it:** the UK, the United States, Ukraine, exiled Russian oligarchs, Bill Browder, Yulia Skripal's future mother-in-law, etc.;
- **It was not Novichok:** it was either a NATO toxin or fentanyl; Novichok doesn't exist; Novichok was invented elsewhere, not in Russian labs; Skripal was smuggling chemical weapons;
- **Russophobia:** Nazi propaganda; the West is vilifying Russia as a nation of criminals;

- **It is a provocation invented for an ulterior motive:** to justify sanctions; increase NATO's military budget; justify more NATO troops in the Baltic states and Eastern Europe; boycott the upcoming World Cup tournament in Russia; prepare for war against Russia; influence Russia's elections; divert attention from Brexit or Western scandals; and harm Russia's reputation as a peacemaker.

A study by Kings College London found that in the month following the Salisbury poisoning, Russian government-funded RT and Sputnik published 735 articles about the poisoning, using 138 different, often contradictory, narratives. RT and Sputnik often cited high ranking Russian government sources to support these lies. The study found that the government sources' "use of combative and confrontational language towards Western counterparts resulted in substantial coverage by mainstream UK media." The study concluded this was the most successful means by which the Russian Federation inserts Kremlin-generated narratives into Western media.

As it did with the Khan Shaykhun attack, the Kremlin used social media to amplify its disinformation. DFRlab found that "between March 28 and April 4 [2018], two out of [every] three articles on the Salisbury case shared on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, or Pinterest came from Kremlin-funded media outlets."¹

Use of Multilateral Organizations

As the Kremlin filled the information space with its disinformation narratives, the UK and its allies led international efforts to seek accountability for the use of a chemical weapon. In the March 14 UNSC meeting, Russian Ambassador to the UN Vasily Nebenzia repeated disinformation claims pushed by Russia's state and Russia-friendly media, including false claims that it was the UK that poisoned the Skripals. Nebenzia claimed the only way the UK could be certain the poison used against the Skripals was Novichok was if British officials already possessed some of the agent with which to compare the sample, insinuating that the poison must have come from British chemical labs, a blatant fabrication.

At the first OPCW meeting following the poisoning, March 13-15, 2018, Russia's representative denied the UK's accusations and said the UK would be held accountable for its lies. On April 4, the OPCW held a special meeting of the Executive Council, at the request of Russia, to specifically discuss the Salisbury poisoning. Russia's delegation brought a Doctor of Chemical Sciences from its Ministry of Defense to testify. His testimony promoted Russia's claims that the knowledge of Novichok production is easily accessible, therefore it was possible for any state to create it, and that the formula of the Novichok used against the Skripals is impossible to track to any one nation. A Sputnik report quoted this expert, Ivan Rybalchenko, a few days earlier, when he falsely claimed the United States had created the nerve agent used against Skripal. This claim was debunked a few days later in an interview with media by retired Russian scientist Vil Mirzayanov, who said that "production [of Novichok] was only refined in the USSR and Russia." This is a clear example of the Kremlin using multilateral organizations to promote disinformation narratives that it concurrently spreads in the media.

¹The Atlantic Council is a recipient of U.S. government funding.

The next day, April 5, the UNSC discussed the Salisbury poisoning. Ambassador Nebenzia claimed Russia's different theories of the Skripal poisoning were the opinions of journalists, not Russian authorities. He then used the rest of his speaking time to present yet even more scenarios for how the Skripal poisoning happened, including his theory that Western intelligence services were behind the attack.

During two other UNSC meetings held on April 10 and 12 to address the use of chemical weapons by the Assad regime in Syria, Russia's disinformation ecosystem attempted to link the Salisbury poisoning to Syria by claiming the White Helmets had conducted a false flag operation in Douma.

The extent of the Kremlin's campaign against the OPCW became even more clear on April 13 when the Netherlands Defence Intelligence and Security Service apprehended four agents from the Main Directorate of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation (Russian military intelligence- GRU) Unit 26165 for attempting to hack into the OPCW HQ's network. Dutch officials also found evidence the Russian government was planning a cyber operation on a Swiss OPCW lab. At that time, the OPCW was analyzing both the Salisbury poisoning and the Douma attack. What the Kremlin would have done with access to the OPCW's system is unclear, but there is precedent for the Russian Federation conducting "hack and release" operations, often falsifying contents of a hack to support its later narratives.

On April 18 both the UNSC and the OPCW Executive Council held meetings, which Russia used to spread disinformation. In the UNSC, Russia's representative questioned the April 12 OPCW technical assistance team report, which "confirm[ed] the findings of the United Kingdom relating to the identity of the toxic chemical that was used in Salisbury." In the OPCW meeting, Russia's representative outlined what he claimed were eight false charges against Russia. In addition, the Russian Federation submitted an 11-page aide memoire, or informal diplomatic message, outlining many of its arguments in-depth. Kremlin-backed media reported the Russian OPCW and UN representatives' statements without fact-checking their accuracy. The next day, Russia's MFA spokesperson Maria Zakharova accused the British intelligence services of conducting a false flag operation to frame the Russian Federation for the poisoning, an accusation that was picked up and spread by other pro-Kremlin disinformation outlets.

**A STUDY BY KINGS COLLEGE LONDON FOUND THAT IN THE MONTH FOLLOWING THE
SALISBURY POISONING, RUSSIAN GOVERNMENT-FUNDED RT AND SPUTNIK**

**PUBLISHED ARTICLES ABOUT THE POISONING, USING DIFFERENT, OFTEN
CONTRADICTORY, NARRATIVES.**

Role of Kremlin-Funded Media

One of the most bizarre disinformation tactics the Kremlin deployed following the Salisbury poisoning was a 25-minute video interview with the two GRU officers accused by the UK of carrying out the poisoning, conducted by RT editor-in-chief Margarita Simonyan. During the interview, the two men, visibly uncomfortable and poorly rehearsed, spun a tale of a tourist trip to Salisbury during which they were unable to see the Cathedral due to a light snowstorm. Simonyan tried to justify her guests' awkwardness by insinuating they may have been trying to conceal a same-sex relationship. The British government called the interview "an insult to the public's intelligence." The disinformation, however, worked within Russia: only three percent of Russian citizens in October 2018 believed the Kremlin was behind the poisoning, while 28 percent believed it was British intelligence.

NATO's Response

More than 20 countries and NATO expelled 153 Russian Federation diplomats and intelligence officers following the British government's decision to expel 23 Russian officers on March 20, 2018. Then-British Prime Minister Theresa May called it "the largest collective expulsion of Russian intelligence officers in history." NATO's response made it clear that despite Russia's attempts to spread disinformation, there was no confusion in the minds of the Western governments as to who was responsible.

The concerted response to the Salisbury and Amesbury poisonings provide an example of the power of unity among allies following a chemical attack. Allies working closely together maintained clarity in the face of the Kremlin's attempt to distract and confuse with multiple different disinformation claims. Further, international partners were able to take concrete, impactful actions with a broad coalition of countries to impose costs on the Russian Federation for its brazen action. The increased use of chemical weapons also led to States Parties to the OPCW adding two families of Novichok agents to the CWC's "Schedules of Chemicals" in November 2019 by consensus.

ONE OF THE
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THE SALISBURY
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25-MINUTE VIDEO
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TWO GRU OFFICERS
ACCUSED BY THE UK
OF CARRYING OUT THE
POISONING, CONDUCTED
BY RT EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
MARGARITA SIMONYAN.

THE ALEKSEY NAVALNY POISONING 2020

Despite the international backlash from using Novichok in the UK, just two years later the Russian Federation employed a chemical weapon in another assassination attempt. On August 20, 2020, Russian political opposition figure [Aleksey Navalny](#) became violently ill and collapsed on a domestic flight from Tomsk to Moscow. After an emergency landing in Omsk, Navalny was [admitted](#) to the toxicology unit of a local hospital and, two days later, flown to the Charité hospital in Berlin

at the request of his family. Navalny's personal doctor Anastasia Vasilyeva told [The New York Times](#) that Russian authorities deliberately delayed his departure in hopes the poison in his system would dissipate and become impossible to later identify.

Charité's diagnosis of Navalny [indicated](#) "poisoning with a substance from the group of cholinesterase inhibitors." On September 2, 2020, the [German government](#) announced toxicological tests conducted by the Bundeswehr laboratory "revealed unequivocal proof of the presence of a chemical nerve agent from the Novichok group" in Navalny's test samples, a finding also confirmed by the [OPCW](#) and by independent [Swedish and French](#) national laboratories. A joint investigation by Bellingcat, The Insider, Der Spiegel, and CNN [implied](#) Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB) in Navalny's poisoning.

Russian authorities and pro-Kremlin media employed a variety of disinformation and propaganda narratives to hide the facts surrounding the Navalny poisoning, including several narratives identical to those the Russian government used in the case of the Salisbury poisoning. EUvsDisinfo, the European Union's counter-disinformation website, [documented](#) more than 200 instances of disinformation from pro-Kremlin outlets about the Navalny poisoning between August 20, 2020, and January 21, 2021, more than one per day. Key disinformation narratives from the Navalny case are:

- **Deny:** deny that Navalny was poisoned; that Russia possesses the Novichok nerve agent; and that it has any motive to poison Navalny;
- **Confuse and distract:** pollute the information environment by inventing and disseminating alternative theories of what could have happened to Navalny, including a bad diet, drug overdose, illness, or alcoholism;
- **Blame the accusers:** go on the offense; falsely claim Russia's accusers committed the crime to frame Russia; portray Russia as again a victim of Russophobia.



One of the main tactics the Kremlin has used in the disinformation and propaganda campaign surrounding the Navalny poisoning is denial. Russian officials and pro-Kremlin media consistently cite the denials of the Russian toxicologists that Navalny was poisoned in Russia. According to the toxicologists' claims, made while Russia's security services were present at their hospital in Omsk, Navalny suffered from a metabolic disease and his coma could have been caused by a bad diet, excessive fatigue, overheating, overcooling, or alcohol use.

As it did in the aftermath of the Salisbury poisoning, the Russian government denied possessing the Novichok nerve agent, claiming it had eliminated all of its chemical weapons under international supervision, and that Novichok is a "purely Western brand." This deflection plays into a long existing Kremlin narrative that Russia has destroyed all of its chemical weapons. In fact, Russia has only verifiably eliminated its declared stockpile, a key caveat that it often omits to obscure its undeclared programs. Further, experts have stated Novichok is widely known to have been developed by the Soviet Union and Russian Federation.

Lastly, Moscow denied it had any motive to poison Navalny, dismissing the opposition politician as "inconsequential." For example, President Putin stated "if they [Russian security services] really wanted to [poison Navalny], they would have, most likely, carried it through." Putin used his decision to let Navalny go to Germany as supposed evidence that the Kremlin was not involved in the poisoning. "If the authorities had wanted to poison the person you mentioned [Navalny] or to poison anybody, it is very unlikely they would have sent him for medical treatment to Germany. Don't you think so?" Putin told one journalist.

Multiple Conflicting Disinformation Narratives

Reflecting the "anything could have happened to Navalny" narrative propagated by Russian doctors, Russia's state-owned and state-controlled media spread a variety of alternative explanations to deflect attention from the Russian government's role in the poisoning. The mass circulation daily newspaper Moskovskiy Komsomolets cited sources who claimed Navalny drank "village moonshine" before his flight to Omsk, while the state-owned television channel Rossiya 1 quoted an alleged developer of Novichok arguing that moonshine was possibly the culprit for Navalny's poisoning.

In addition to denying and trying to muddy the waters around the Navalny poisoning, Kremlin officials attempted to shift the blame to their accusers, to discredit them, and to portray Russia as a victim of a Western plot. Russian disinformation focused mainly on Germany, the United States, the OPCW, on the Swedish and French laboratories where the chemical weapon was identified, and on Navalny himself and his associates. Russia's Foreign Ministry argued that Germany violated the CWC, led a baseless "broad smear campaign" against Russia, refused to cooperate, and withheld information from Moscow while secretly sharing Navalny's biomaterials with partners. Lavrov said Russia had "all grounds to believe" Navalny could have been poisoned "in Germany or on the plane where he was loaded and sent to the Charité clinic" and claimed that Navalny's colleague Maria Pevchenko might be connected to the poisoning.

Many Russian state-owned or state-controlled media personalities declared on national television that Pevchikh was Navalny's poisoner and an agent of British intelligence. Sergey Naryshkin, director of Russia's Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR), claimed there was circumstantial evidence that the poisoning was a provocation by Western intelligence services to make Navalny a "sacrificial victim" in order to re-energize Russia's political opposition. Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov accused Navalny of working as a mouthpiece for the CIA, while President Putin called Bellingcat's exposure of the FSB assassins a "legalization of materials from the U.S. intelligence services," seeming to imply that U.S. intelligence agencies fed information to Bellingcat to publish.

Finally, the Kremlin tried to portray itself as a victim of another "anti-Russia propaganda attack" aimed to "contain Russia's development" and punish Moscow for its "independent foreign policy." Lavrov argued that just as in the case of the Skripals, the West was using Navalny as a pretext for imposing new sanctions on Russia, without providing any evidence to prove Russia's culpability.

Use of Multilateral Organizations

Once again, Moscow used both the UN and the OPCW platforms to spread disinformation. In a 2020 September UNSC meeting, Russia's Ambassador questioned the reputation of the OPCW and the supposed politicization of the organization. At an October 5 UNSC meeting, the Russian Ambassador falsely claimed the OPCW's Technical Secretariat was a tool the West uses to pressure Russia. Russia's state media quickly reported the ambassador's remarks in both meetings, and these UNSC statements formed the basis for future statements by Russia at other multilateral organizations. Russia's repeatedly attempts to question the OPCW's reputation to tarnish the OPCW and its findings. The Director-General of the OPCW said in 2019 that the organization is being "attacked with misinformation."

ONCE AGAIN, MOSCOW USED BOTH THE UN
AND THE OPCW PLATFORMS TO SPREAD
DISINFORMATION.

CONCLUSION

Multilateral pressure continues to grow following the Russian government's repeated use of chemical weapons. The OPCW's 99th Executive Council Session March 8-10, 2022 focused on Moscow's pattern of chemical weapons use and disinformation, extending through Putin's current war in Ukraine. OPCW States Parties overwhelmingly condemned Moscow's invasion of Ukraine. The Session also focused on Navalny's poisoning. No country spoke in favor of Russia regarding Navalny, and Russian Representative to the OPCW, Alexander Shulgin, struggled to mount a defense. NATO Allies remain united on the unacceptability of Russia's use of chemical weapons, despite Russia's continuing attempts to sow contradiction, obfuscation, and disinformation through media and international gatherings. As with other examples of Kremlin propaganda, Russian disinformation about chemical weapons are not necessarily made to persuade others to accept their arguments, but to sow doubt and confusion and undermine the unity and effectiveness of an international response.

Russia has a track record of accusing the West of the very violations that Russia itself is perpetrating. Russia is once again spreading disinformation about chemical weapons. Russia's latest attempts to twist the truth on this very serious topic may be another Kremlin ploy foreshadowing another horrific use of chemical weapons, this time in Ukraine.

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GEC Special Report:

THE KREMLIN'S CHEMICAL WEAPONS DISINFORMATION CAMPAIGNS



GEC

United States Department of State
Global Engagement Center

Accessibility Report

Filename:

The Kremlin's Chemical Weapons Disinformation Campaigns.pdf

Report created by:

GEC, State Department

Organization:

Global Engagement Center

[Personal and organization information from the Preferences > Identity dialog.]

Summary

The checker found no problems in this document.

- Needs manual check: 0
- Passed manually: 2
- Failed manually: 0
- Skipped: 0
- Passed: 30
- Failed: 0

Detailed Report

Document

Rule Name	Status	Description
Accessibility permission flag	Passed	Accessibility permission flag must be set
Image-only PDF	Passed	Document is not image-only PDF
Tagged PDF	Passed	Document is tagged PDF
Logical Reading Order	Passed manually	Document structure provides a logical reading order
Primary language	Passed	Text language is specified
Title	Passed	Document title is showing in title bar
Bookmarks	Passed	Bookmarks are present in large documents
Color contrast	Passed manually	Document has appropriate color contrast

Page Content

Rule Name	Status	Description
Tagged content	Passed	All page content is tagged
Tagged annotations	Passed	All annotations are tagged
Tab order	Passed	Tab order is consistent with structure order
Character encoding	Passed	Reliable character encoding is provided
Tagged multimedia	Passed	All multimedia objects are tagged
Screen flicker	Passed	Page will not cause screen flicker
Scripts	Passed	No inaccessible scripts
Timed responses	Passed	Page does not require timed responses
Navigation links	Passed	Navigation links are not repetitive

Forms

Rule Name	Status	Description
Tagged form fields	Passed	All form fields are tagged

Field descriptions	Passed	All form fields have description
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Alternate Text

Rule Name	Status	Description
Figures alternate text	Passed	Figures require alternate text
Nested alternate text	Passed	Alternate text that will never be read
Associated with content	Passed	Alternate text must be associated with some content
Hides annotation	Passed	Alternate text should not hide annotation
Other elements alternate text	Passed	Other elements that require alternate text

Tables

Rule Name	Status	Description
Rows	Passed	TR must be a child of Table, THead, TBody, or TFoot
TH and TD	Passed	TH and TD must be children of TR
Headers	Passed	Tables should have headers
Regularity	Passed	Tables must contain the same number of columns in each row and rows in each column
Summary	Passed	Tables must have a summary

Lists

Rule Name	Status	Description
List items	Passed	LI must be a child of L
Lbl and LBody	Passed	Lbl and LBody must be children of LI

Headings

Rule Name	Status	Description
Appropriate nesting	Passed	Appropriate nesting

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From: (b)(6)**To:** [redacted]@state.gov>**Subject:** The following message is unclassified: Russia Team Meeting: chat conversation from Microsoft Teams**Date:** Fri, 20 Jan 2023 22:22:08 +0000

Microsoft Teams



(b)(6)

2 hours ago

There's a possibility the UN support docs have "hate speech" terminology too

Sender: (b)(6)**Recipient:** [redacted]@state.gov>

From:

(b)(6)

To:

(b)(6)

@state.gov>

Subject: Russia Team Meeting: chat conversation from Microsoft Teams**Date:** Tue, 24 Jan 2023 20:56:54 +0000

Microsoft Teams



(b)(6)

There's a possibility the UN support docs have "hate speech" terminology too

Sender:

(b)(6)

Recipient:

(b)(6)

@state.gov>

From: (b)(6)

To: (b)(6)@state.gov>

Subject: Russia Team Meeting: chat conversation from Microsoft Teams

Date: Fri, 20 Jan 2023 20:45:56 +0000

Microsoft Teams



(b)(6) 34 minutes ago

(b)(6)

There's a possibility the UN support docs have "hate speech" terminology too
do not post search terms here

Sender: (b)(6)

Recipient: (b)(6)@state.gov>

From:	(b)(6)
To:	(b)(6)@state.gov>
Subject:	Nuggets about false flags
Date:	Fri, 20 Jan 2023 21:18:54 +0000

Research of non-public ~~SPU~~ snapshot drafts

Nuggets about false flags

Tuesday, October 25, 2022
10:00 AM

1/18/2022

U.S. SPREADS DISINFORMATION, SPREADS “PROVOKATIONS”: The Russian Embassy in Washington rejected U.S. claims January 15 accusing Russia of preparing a false-flag operation to be used as a pretext for invading Ukraine. Foreign Minister Lavrov and pro-Kremlin influencers dismissed the charges as “disinformation.” Pro-Kremlin media and influencers, as well as Russia-backed proxies in Donbas, again accused the U.S. of preparing chemical weapons “provocations” to force a Russian response, provide Ukraine with a casus belli for war, and impose more sanctions on Russia. “Experts” told RT that U.S. “propaganda” is projecting its own military plans onto Russia and uses Ukraine as a source of constant tensions on Russia’s borders.

UKRAINE IS GEARING UP FOR WAR: Russia falsely portrays Ukraine as an aggressor preparing for military action against Donbas. The Russian MFA has alleged since late last year that Kyiv send “half of its military personnel” to Donbas, according to state agency RIA Novosti article which also included allegations that Ukraine is mobilizing “former members of nationalists battalions.” RIA Novosti also claimed Kyiv has increased its attacks on the so-called DNR and LNR with the approval of Ukraine’s U.S. and European allies. Pro-Kremlin “military correspondent” Semyon Pegov and pro-Kremlin Telegram channels purport that Ukraine is arming its “Nazi territorial battalions,” predicting an upcoming “slaughter” in Donbas, and “bloody” clampdowns on uprisings in Ukraine. The FSB-tasked, U.S.-sanctioned disinformation outlet News Front reported that Ukraine is deploying “Lithuania-trained” snipers to carry out provocations. Commentators on state TV speculate about Ukraine’s potential attack on Belarus.

1/28/2022

THE KREMLIN AND ITS PROXIES SPEAK IN ONE VOICE: From January 24-26, the Kremlin and its eastern Ukrainian proxies accused Kyiv of preparing an imminent military incursion into the Donbas. Primetime Russian state-controlled TV news programs Vremya and

Vesti, as well as foreign-facing RT, promoted narratives during the same period blaming the United States for provocations, escalating the conflict, and forcing Ukraine into repeating Western claims about an alleged Russian invasion. These accusations included the claim that Washington is “pumping” Ukrainian “Nazis” and “nationalists” with lethal weapons into the region, emboldening the Ukrainian leadership’s “warmongering” to attack the Donbas. Several pro-Kremlin media outlets amplified “LPR/DPR” representatives’ claims that Ukraine is massing troops and military equipment on the Donbas’ front lines, arming and training nationalist battalions, and preparing military hospitals in advance of an imminent attack. Pro-Kremlin media also widely quoted “DPR” leader Denis Pushilin’s description of the departure of some U.S. embassy personnel and family members from Ukraine as an “intentional provocation.” They also amplified Pushilin’s claim that Ukraine plans to conduct false flag operations in the Don bas using chemical weapons and promoted the “DPR’s” potential to launch a counterattack.

2/3/2022

SO-CALLED DPR/LPR ARE “VICTIMS” OF KYIV’S “AGGRESSION”: Moscow attempts to depict its proxies, the so-called DPR/LPR, as the “victims” of Kyiv’s alleged aggressions and provocations. To this end, Russian state media amplify separatist allegations and grievances, which range from accusing Kyiv of plotting false flag operations to deploying military hardware and shelling innocent civilians. Employing a classic disinformation tactic, these outlets also accuse Ukrainian special services, with Western support, of mounting their own disinformation campaign, code-named “Crushing Sword,” as a pretext for a Ukrainian attack. The campaign would allegedly involve Ukrainian state TV broadcasting a “staged video” depicting the “alleged beginning of military actions against Ukraine” by Russia

2/8/2022

LPR -KYIV PLANNING TERRORISTATTACK AGAINST KHARKIV, DONETSK, OR LUHANSK OBLASTS:

In a new iteration of Russia’s overall effort to fabricate a pretext for a potential Russian offensive against Ukraine, the so-called Luhansk People’s Republic (LPR) warned on February 8 via its representative, Ivan Filipenko, that the Ukrainian Special Services are planning to carry out a “staged high-profile” terrorist act “with numerous civilian casualties” on territory under their own control to justify alleged upcoming “large-scale military operations against the defenders of Donbas.” The U.S.-sanctioned, Prigozhin-linked RIA FAN was among the disinformation outlets that covered the Filipenko statement.

Proxy Spotlight: RIA FAN

The U.S.-sanctioned **Federal News Agency (RIA FAN)**, featured on the left side of this slide, is part of the Prigozhin-led Patriot Media Group. Patriot Media Group regularly creates and amplifies disinformation and propaganda targeting Ukraine with false and distorted claims that the United States may stage a coup to destroy Ukraine. Other RIA FAN content has alleged the United States sends Polish mercenaries to Ukraine under the guise of instructors, or that Ukraine is preparing false flag operations against the Donbas.

2/10/2022

ACCUSE THE OTHER SIDE OF THAT WHICH YOU ARE GUILTY: Following the February 3 U.S. statement that the Russian government has considered producing a faked video as a pretext to initiate and potentially justify military aggression against Ukraine, state-controlled Russian television channels have accused Ukraine of engaging in the same activity. The channels showed what they claimed was footage of Ukrainian soldiers staging a provocation to discredit the "defenders of Donbas" by filming a video where they pretended to be shot by a sniper and stepping on a landmine.

2/15/2022

"LPR" PREVENTS ALLEGED UKRAINIAN "TERRORIST ATTACK": In what could be an attempted "false flag" operation, the Ministry of State Security of the so-called "LPR" alleged February 15 that it had prevented a terrorist attack possibly carried out by Ukrainian intelligence. "LPR" officials claim a resident reported a bomb spotted in a trash can located in Friendship of Peoples Square, where a remembrance rally was to be held later the same day in honor of soldiers who served outside their homeland. A seemingly staged video of "LPR" security personnel allegedly finding and securing the device is circulating on social media (note the service dog alerting to the trash can right on cue).

2/17/2022

EXPLOITING PRIMAL FEARS: Pro-Kremlin media and influencers, covertly controlled Kremlin proxy sites, and the so-called "DPR/LPR" continue spreading false claims about allegedly ongoing or upcoming "provocations" from Ukraine, the United States and NATO. Shaping disinformation stories around nightmare scenarios, Moscow "exploits primal fears" and works towards building a pretext for potential military action. Echoing previous statements from Russian Defense Minister Shoigu, the FSB-tasked News Front published an article February 16 alleging Ukraine is preparing a "chemical disaster" in the Donbas, and on the same day another one claiming the United States or Ukraine could conduct a "crushing strike" on the Zaporizhzhya nuclear power plant. The latter disinformation originally started on the Soloviev LIVE YouTube channel, run by one of Kremlin's most prominent propagandists. Another FSB-linked website, Antifashist, and TV Zvezda, an outlet operated by the Russian military, amplified claims from

“DPR”- and RT-affiliated Telegram channels accusing Ukraine and NATO of using banned ultrasonic/acoustic weapons in the Donbas. TV Zvezda also suggested Ukraine is going to attack the Donbas with a “dirty bomb.” Other disinformation outlets also promoted claims accusing the Pentagon of conducting biological experiments on Ukrainian and Georgian soldiers.

2/21/2022

Information released by the United States and other governments earlier this month predicted the Kremlin would use disinformation and propaganda to create and amplify false flag narratives to justify military action against Ukraine. The GEC has seen these tactics increase since at least February 11, when Kremlin-aligned outlets and Russian officials began amplifying statements from the head of the so-called “Donetsk People’s Republic” alleging the discovery of mass graves in the Donbas. Since then, Russian officials, Kremlin media, and proxy outlets have amplified other supposed reports of provocations by Ukraine and Western governments. Putin’s recognition of the “DPR” and “LPR” as independent furthers this false pretext.

“GENOCIDE & MASS GRAVES”: Putin, other government officials, and Russia’s entire disinformation and propaganda ecosystem have accused Ukraine of genocide, pointing to alleged mass graves recently found in the Donbas. There is no genuine evidence to suggest that a genocide against Russian-speakers is taking place. In fact, there is evidence to suggest that mass graves were previously created in the Donbas by “DPR/LPR” forces.

“UKRAINIAN AGGRESSION” & “DPR/LPR” EVACUATIONS:

Russia continues to falsely allege Ukraine is attacking “DPR/LPR” areas and will launch an offensive against the region. Russian and “DPR/LPR” sources attributed the February 17 shelling of a kindergarten near “LPR”-held territory to Ukraine, however OSINT reporting by Belling cat and others demonstrated the shelling came from the direction of “LPR” forces. Upon realizing the school was in Ukrainian-held territory, Russian media then claimed Ukraine had conducted the attack as a false flag. Videos purportedly produced by “DPR/LPR” leaders on February 18 contained metadata proving they were filmed two days prior.

2/24/2022

Documenting Russian Fabrications

Investigative organization Bellingcat has announced the creation of a public database tracking “questionable videos and claims” targeting Ukraine that appear on social media and in Russian media outlets. The purpose of the new project is to provide counter-disinformation practitioners with a “quick and easy point of reference” to examples of false claims that “have been verified, debunked or if claims contained within videos or images are inconsistent with other open-source evidence or contextual data.” So far, the database includes

several debunked cases of alleged Ukrainian provocations and attacks against Russia and the so-called "DPR/LNR."

3/1/2022

The GEC has observed a concerning increase in disinformation on alleged or potential chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear weapons (CBRN) and laboratories in Ukraine.

CHEMICAL, RADIOLOGICAL, AND NUCLEAR DISINFORMATION: Both before and after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Russian disinformation claimed Ukraine had nearly acquired a "dirty nuclear bomb," that Ukraine is preparing a "chemical disaster" in Donbas, and that the United States or Ukraine may conduct an intentional strike on the Zaporizhiya nuclear power plant as a "provocation."

3/8/2022

RADIOLOGICAL AND NUCLEAR DISINFORMATION INTENSIFIES: A new Russian false narrative that the United States transferred plutonium to Ukraine to help Kyiv develop a "dirty" nuclear weapon has spread widely across Russian state media and outlets linked to U.S.-sanctioned Yevgeniy Prigozhin (TASS, RIA Novosti, Zvezda, Polit Rossiya). The Russian MFA also alleged March 8 that Ukrainian intelligence and Azov Battalion militants had "rigged" a reactor near Kharkiv to stage a provocation and accuse Russian forces of attacking the nuclear facility. This claim also received widespread coverage in Russian media. Russia falsely claims Kyiv intended to develop nuclear weapons capacity with Western help and uses this disinformation as one of the false justifications for further invading Ukraine.

3/15/2022

A Nuclear "Fake False Flag" Exposed

Ukrainian security services announced March 6 that Russian forces had shelled the Kharkiv Institute of Physics and Technology, the site of a nuclear research facility that produced radioisotopes for medical and industrial applications. In its reply, the Russian Defense Ministry alleged Ukrainian intelligence and Azov Battalion militants had rigged a reactor to explode in a staged provocation Ukraine would then attribute to a Russian missile attack. Russian forces again shelled the now-de-energized facility March 10, causing documented superficial damages and a fire at a nearby hostel. This time, Kremlin-funded disinformation outlet Sputnik told an altogether different story. Per the Sputnik report the following day, a Russian official said "Ukrainian nationalists blew up one of the buildings ...in order to conceal evidence of the nuclear

research conducted there.” Sputnik added that “as many as 50 employees of the institute could be trapped under the rubble,” all tragic victims of Ukraine’s alleged desire for nuclear weapons.

The State Department confirmed March 11 with Ukrainian scientific and military contacts on the ground no building was destroyed.

3/17/2022

BLAMING AZOV FOR THE MARIUPOL THEATER BOMBING: To shift the blame for the March 16 bombing of the Mariupol theater that hosted several hundred refugees, Russia’s disinformation and propaganda ecosystem accuses its favorite target, the Ukrainian “nationalists” from the Azov Battalion. The emerging false narrative denies Russian involvement and claims the Azov Battalion carried out a “bloody provocation.” According to this false narrative, the battalion established a headquarters at the theater, held the civilians hostage, and then blew up the building after rigging it with explosives to frame Russia and give the United States the pretext to send its military to Ukraine. RIA Novosti quoted a “DPR” spokesman who claimed the Azov forces fired at the theater from tanks. On Telegram, pro-Kremlin accounts asserted they had evidence of Azov planning the provocation for four days and cited an alleged refugee from the theater who said all civilians were allowed to leave the building before the explosion.

4/5/2022

THE KREMLIN DISINFO PLAYBOOK TAKES ON BUCHA: Moscow has followed its standard disinformation playbook in its massive reaction to global outcry following allegations its forces committed war crimes in the city of Bucha—first denying their involvement in the massacre and then putting out several false narratives to hide the truth. The Russian MoD claimed April 3 that “the photos and video footage from Bucha are another hoax, a staged production and provocation by the Kyiv regime for the Western media.” The next day, Foreign Minister Lavrov stated that there were “signs of video fakes and other forgeries.” Russian embassies and outlets have promoted easily debunked conspiracies, including claims Ukraine used fake corpses which “reanimated” after the cameras stopped rolling. Despite ample evidence from the New York Times, Bellingcat, and the BBC disproving Russia’s claims and demonstrating the country’s involvement, the Kremlin’s disinformation machine continues to try (and fail) to hide the truth. On April 4, Russia’s Investigative Committee (Sledkom) announced investigators would legally pursue those who disseminate “knowingly false information” about the role of Russian Armed Forces in Bucha.

4/7/2022

AFTER BUCHA COMES BORODYANKA: Anticipating the exposure of more atrocities committed by Russian forces in Ukraine, the Russian Federation's MOD and its Ambassador to the United States Anatoly Antonov claimed April 6 that Kyiv is preparing more “Bucha-like provocations” in the Ukrainian town of Borodyanka and other previously Russian-occupied areas. MOD spokesperson Mikhail Mizintsev claimed Ukraine is paying \$25 to every civilian who will participate in staging and filming fabricated Russian crimes. Mizintsev also asserted that Ukrainian “nationalists” shelled civilian areas in the Kharkiv region, alleging that Ukraine’s military and Western media cooperated on filming the destruction to present it as a Russian attack. State-owned RIA Novosti separately issued false reports that Ukraine was planning another “provocation involving civilian deaths” in the Kherson region.

4/12/2022

Claims of Potential Chemical Weapons “Provocations”

Foreign facing state media outlet RT reported April 13 Russian forces discovered “three UAVs” at an “abandoned Ukrainian base” they alleged were configured for potential chemical weapons attacks. A masked Russian service member alleged the drones’ remote controls contained coordinates of “locations of Russian...forces” and “residential neighborhoods” that were “marked for spraying.” RT’s companion disinformation outlet Sputnik also reported April 13 that Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Syromolotov had told them the “threat of chemical terrorism by fascist nationalists” controlled by the “Kiev regime” and Ukrainian military was “very real.” Syromolotov added the probability was high because U.S.-and NATO-supported extremist groups had previously conducted “chemical provocations” during the Syrian conflict. The deputy FM said he also “did not rule” out transport of nuclear material into Ukraine “from third countries.”

4/26/2022

RUSSIAN UN DIPLOMAT, CBRN HEAD, & EMBASSIES MAKE WMD CLAIMS:

Russia’s Deputy UN Ambassador Dmitry Polyanskiy made a series of false claims April 25 adding to Kremlin disinformation narratives that Kyiv and Washington are preparing “staged provocations in order to accuse the Russian Armed Forces of using chemical, biological or tactical nuclear weapons.” Polyanskiy claimed that on April 21, Russian forces countered an attempt to smuggle “dangerous cargo” to the Zaporizhzhya NPP and added that Ukrainian forces are considering a strike on the now-defunct Prydniprovsky Chemical Plant—home to massive amounts of radioactive waste storage partially adjacent to the Dnieper River. Polyanskiy and

CBRN head Kirillov also claimed the United States is planning a chemical “Syria scenario,” alleging the presence of Syrian civil defense group White Helmets in Ukraine. Kirillov also claimed a “container” of chemical ampules had been dropped on Russian troops April 21. Russian ambassadors and missions around the world shared these same bogus claims on social media and in email messages to counterparts from other governments.

4/28/2022

Russian False Flag Tactics as Precedent

Ukraine’s Ministry of Defense and some experts believe the recent attacks in Transnistria may be a Russian false flag operation to provide the Kremlin pretext to launch an additional front in the conflict against Ukraine and destabilize Moldova. Russia planned false flag operations to fabricate a pretext for invading Ukraine and had developed a “specialty” in “false flag invasions.” American historian David Satter and longstanding Putin critics have claimed Russia’s Federal Security Service (FSB) carried out the 1999 apartment bombings in Russia as a false flag operation to incite public support for a new Chechen war and lift Putin to victory in a presidential election. According to Satter, after FSB operatives were caught placing a bomb in the basement of a building in Ryazan, Nikolai Patrushev (then FSB director) claimed the discovered FSB personnel were participating in an exercise involving a fake bomb.

6/9/22

LATEST CW DISINFORMATION FROM RUSSIAN MOD: The Russian MoD alleged June 9 that the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU), with support from OPCW specialists, is preparing a “chemical provocation” using “toxic substances” in the Sumy region to ultimately blame Russia for the incident. The claim was echoed by Zakharova and widely reported in Russian domestic and international state media, with many outlets also echoing the MoD’s (false) assertion that Russia has destroyed all its CW.

6/16/2022

False Flags Are Back? Russians Spread Disinfo About Shelling of Donetsk

Russia’s propaganda machine went into overdrive in blaming Ukrainian forces for artillery strikes on civilian targets in Donetsk City, including the June 13 shelling of a maternity hospital. Russia’s U.S. Ambassador Anatoly Antonov accused the United States June 15 of ignoring “the massacre by nationalists against residents of Donetsk with Western artillery” while

MFA spokesperson Maria Zakharova also blamed Western-supplied weapons for the “ongoing tragedy in Donbas.” Yet, Donetsk residents and even one “DPR” official were skeptical that Ukrainian forces were responsible as the noise of nearby artillery launches likely indicated the shelling had come from inside Donetsk City. Ukraine’s National Security and Defense Council’s Center for Countering Disinformation debunked the Russian officials’ claims, citing Ukrainian intelligence sources that the shelling originated in the Makyivka, Chervonogvardiyskiy, and Kuybyshyivskiy suburbs of Donetsk and fired towards central Donetsk City. This likely false-flag operation is a recurring tactic of “DPR” forces seeking to increase anti-Ukrainian sentiment, undermine Western governments’ support, and bolster requests to the Kremlin for Iskander missiles while also encouraging mobilization among locals resisting conscription and keeping Russian audiences’ attention on the conflict instead of the new knockoff McDonald’s grand opening.

6/28/2022

THE KREMLIN SPINS STRIKES ON CIVILIAN TARGETS: Russia’s disinformation and propaganda ecosystem disseminated false claims to obfuscate Kremlin responsibility for the June 26 missile strike on a nine-story apartment building in Kyiv and the June 27 airstrike on a shopping mall in Kremenchuk. The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) and pro-Kremlin “experts” alternated between claiming Moscow was targeting an arms depot nearby and blaming a Ukrainian missile defense system for hitting the residential building in Kyiv. The ecosystem swiftly reacted to the breaking news about Kremenchuk with similarly false motifs. Russian deputy ambassador to the United Nations Dmitry Polyanski, the FSB-tasked News Front, and others described the attack as a “Bucha-style Ukrainian provocation” intended to keep the attention of the West on Ukraine. Pro-Kremlin influencers spread disinformation “proving” that the attack was staged. The MoD announced it targeted a “stockpile of Western weapons,” which caused an explosion that damaged a “nearby non-functioning shopping mall.” Foreign Minister Lavrov further amplified the debunked claim that the shopping center was empty.

6/21/2022

Russia Turns Its “Black Mirror” Towards Kharkiv

The head of Russia’s National Defense Management Center Mikhail Mizintsev claimed June 20 that the Ukrainian Armed Forces had deployed an artillery battery in the Kharkiv region to organize a “provocation” by shelling residential areas. The claim garnered coverage across Russian state and proxy media, including the FSB-tasked News Front. Russia launched a series of missile strikes on June 20 and 21 against Kharkiv, killing several people including one child.

Russia once again demonstrated its tendency to use this sort of “black mirroring” to precede its own attacks. In this instance, by claiming Ukraine is planning to stage a “provocation” by striking its own civilians, Russia gets the first word in a false pre-bunking effort intended to hide its own attacks on civilians. **While it is unlikely that this tactic works on Ukrainians, the deception could be effective when messaging to Russian audiences for wartime propaganda purposes.**

6/30/2022

FROM ONE “PROVOCATION” TO ANOTHER: The Russian Ministry of Defense announced June 28 Kyiv was concocting a provocation in the Odesa region to blame Russia for using chemical weapons against civilians. MoD officials also accused Ukraine of preparing a missile strike from the residential areas of Kryvyi Rih at the district hospital in the Russia-occupied Vysokopillia (Kherson region) to “provoke a return fire, after which they [Ukraine] accuse the Russian Armed Forces of indiscriminate strikes on civilian infrastructure facilities and the destruction of the Ukrainian civilian population.” Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokeswoman Maria Zakharova claimed Ukrainian special services were planning “horrible” provocations against Russian journalists. These false claims likely aim to distract the public attention from Russia’s June 27 missile strike on a shopping mall in Kremenchuk, also described by Russian propagandists as a Ukrainian provocation.

7/12/2022

“DENAZIFICATION” DISINFORMATION AT THE UN: Pro-Kremlin media are amplifying false claims made during a July 11 Russia-organized informal UN Security Council meeting on “Neo-Nazism and Radical Nationalism” in Ukraine. Pravda and Ukraina.ru reported that diplomats from Russia’s UN mission presented “irrefutable evidence of Nazism in Ukraine” which they falsely depicted as a “root cause” of the war. TASS quoted Deputy Ambassador Dmitry Polyanskiy’s promise Russia would “complete the denazification of Ukraine” in honor of WWII veterans and future generations. Other Kremlin-aligned outlets amplified the testimony of Maxim Grigoryev, a Russian disinformer and member of Russia’s state-linked Civic Chamber, who leads the so-called International Public Tribunal on Ukraine. Grigoryev falsely accused Ukraine of staging false flag operations and intentionally killing civilians to “create a picture” for the Western media to blame Russia for the atrocities. The Kremlin’s long record of trying to use the UNSC and other multilateral bodies to spread disinformation has increased rapidly since February 24. Over 40 countries condemned Moscow’s “continued efforts” in this latest bogus meeting to falsely accuse Ukraine of Nazism to justify its unprovoked war.

8/2/2022

CLAIMING UKRAINIAN PROVOCATION IN OLENIVKA: Russia blames Ukraine and the United States for the July 29 killing of 53 Azov battalion prisoners of war at a prison in the Russian-occupied town of Olenivka. RIA Novosti initially reported Ukraine attacked the camp with 120-millimeter artillery shells, but then the disinformation ecosystem began amplifying Ministry of Defense (MOD) claims that Kyiv used U.S.-supplied high-mobility artillery rocket systems (HIMARS). The MOD's and "DNR's" spokesmen accused Kyiv of carrying out a "bloody provocation" to prevent Ukrainian "nationalists" from surrendering to Russia and revealing their alleged crimes. An RT op-ed argued "all signs on the ground point to a Ukrainian attack," citing pro-Kremlin Telegram channel Rybar and attempting to portray it as an independent "online observer." Ukraine said it intercepted conversations proving Russia attacked the prison to "cover up the torture and execution of prisoners," and pointed to the possible involvement of the Wagner Group. Based on statements from U.S. officials and satellite images, the Institute for the Study of War assessed Russian forces were responsible for the killing. The Red Cross has not had access to Olenivka despite Moscow's promise to allow an "objective investigation."

8/4/2022

PLAYING WITH FIRE AND LYING ABOUT IT: Moscow disseminates disinformation and propaganda to hide its dangerous activities at the Russia-occupied Zaporizhzhya nuclear power plant (NPP) and portray Ukraine as an irresponsible, dangerous actor. Ukrainian officials and civilians told The New York Times Russia has fired rockets from the cover of the NPP since mid-July, targeting Nikopol and other locations. The Kremlin knows Ukraine will not respond, but apparently attempts to provoke retaliation in an effort to discredit the government in Kyiv. U.S. Secretary of State Blinken said Russia's actions bring the "notion of having a human shield to an entirely different and horrific level." Rafael Grossi, director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), warned that the NPP "is completely out of control," requesting to allow experts to inspect the plant. The Russian MFA said the Russian military's "protection" of the NPP does not threaten security but aims to prevent provocations by nationalist formations and mercenaries. The MFA spokeswoman blamed the UN Secretariat for preventing the IAEA's visit to the plant.

9/20/2022

KYIV IS PREPARING FOR ANOTHER BUCHA: Russia's disinformation and propaganda ecosystem is trying to deflect the Kremlin's responsibility for 440 mass graves recently discovered in Izyum. Following the playbook Moscow used in April to cover up its crimes in Bucha, the ecosystem falsely claims the atrocities in Izyum were staged by Ukraine and the West as a provocation against Russia. Several Kremlin-aligned outlets assert the graves in Izyum belong to Ukrainian soldiers killed by Russia. When Kyiv allegedly refused to collect the bodies, Russia elaborated that they buried them in a "humane and Christian" way. On Telegram, Kremlin propagandists amplified statements from French "journalist" Adrien Bocquet claiming a doctor acquaintance warned him about preparations of a "very serious provocation," since the doctor was allegedly asked to transport 50 bodies from a military hospital to Izyum. To further discredit Ukraine's allegations of Russia's war crimes in Izyum, state media and VKontakte accounts circulated a video purportedly showing Izyum residents

10/20/22

NEW HEAD OF WAR SPEAKS THE "TRUTH": New head of the "Special Military Operation" General Surovikin gave a disinformation-heavy interview to state media, following Putin's declaration of martial law in the four Russia-controlled regions of Ukraine. Surovikin spoke about the war as "unpleasant" and offered the "bitter truth," warning of "difficult decisions" regarding Kherson, and portrayed Kyiv as a "criminal regime that pushes Ukrainian citizens to their deaths." Surovikin claimed Russia only wants Ukraine "to be independent from the West and NATO" and a "friendly state for Russia." The General added Kyiv may be preparing "prohibited methods...of warfare" in the Kherson area, as well as strikes on the Kakhovka hydroelectric power station and indiscriminate, high-casualty shelling of the city. Russia's propagandists attempted to present Surovikin's claims as evidence of the military finally telling the hard truth to the Russian people. One prominent political scientist expanded these claims, alleging the West is preparing a "nuclear provocation" against Kherson to target Russian forces and blame Russia, "before the U.S. Congressional elections."

Created with OneNote.

~~SBU DELIBERATIVE PROCESS~~**Sender:**

(b)(6)

Recipient:

(b)(6)

@state.gov>

Tab E**Questions & Answers**

(b)(5)

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Approved: R/GEC – Acting Coordinator Bray []

Drafted:

(b)(6)

(b)(6)

Cleared:

GEC/Russia: (b)(6) ()

GEC/FO: (b)(6) ()

GEC/FO: (b)(6) ()

GEC/FO: (b)(6) (ok)

GEC/PPD: (b)(6) (ok)

GEC/A&R: (b)(6) ()

EUR/WE/Germany: ()

EUR/EE/Ukraine: (b)(6) (ok)

EUR/RUS: ()

EUR/PPD: (b)(6) (ok)

EUR/PPD: (b)(6) ()

EUR/Press: (b)(6) ()

EUR/PPD/Stratcomm: (b)(6) ()

INR/OPN: (b)(6) ()

L/PD: (b)(6) ()

L/EUR: (b)(6) ()

INR: (b)(6) (ok)

GPA: (b)(6) ()

SPOX: ()

R: ()

(b)(5)

Baybars Orsek (b)(6)@poynter.org>

Wed 2/10/2021 2:54 PM

To: (b)(6) (Bangkok)

Cc: (b)(6) (Bangkok); (b)(6) (Bangkok)+4 others

Hi (b)(6)

Please kindly find the counter signed version attached.

All the best

Baybars

On Tue, Feb 9, 2021 at 10:35 PM (b)(6) (Bangkok)
(b)(6)@state.gov> wrote:

Thanks Baybars - totally understand.

From: Baybars Orsek (b)(6)@poynter.org>

Sent: Wednesday, February 10, 2021 9:42 AM

To: (b)(6)@state.gov>

Cc: (b)(6)@state.gov> (b)(6)

(b)(6)@state.gov> (b)(6)@state.gov> (b)(6)

(b)(6)@state.gov>; (b)(6)@state.gov>; (b)(6)

(b)(6)@state.gov>

Subject: Re: Poynter Grant Amendment - For Baybars response

Hi (b)(6)

Thank you so much! We will be providing another update to (b)(6) next week.

I've just reminded our VP of Finance and Business again for her signature.

Poynter is having its National Advisory Board meeting this week so she must have been swamped but will take care of that before the end of the week for sure.

Thanks a lot for your understanding.

Best-

Baybars

On Tue, Feb 9, 2021 at 8:52 PM (b)(6) (Bangkok)

(b)(6)@state.gov> wrote:

Hi Baybars,

So glad to see you and (b)(6) discussing the way forward. Just a quick reminder that we hope to receive the DS 1909 soon. Hope all is well in your neck of the woods.

Best,

(b)(6)

From: Baybars Orsek (b)(6)@poynter.org>

Sent: Thursday, February 4, 2021 11:19 PM

To: (b)(6)@state.gov>

Cc: (b)(6)@state.gov>; (b)(6)

(b)(6)@state.gov>; (b)(6)@state.gov>

(b)(6)@state.gov>; (b)(6)@state.gov>

(b)(6)@state.gov>

Subject: Re: Poynter Grant Amendment - For Baybars response

Hi (b)(6)

Thanks! I confirm the receipt of the DS1909.

Do you want this to be signed by us? I can send it to you after asking our VP of Finance and Business signs it.

On the other hand, we are ready to deliver the training.

How should we proceed to schedule them?

Looking forward to hearing from you.

Best

Baybars

On Sun, Jan 31, 2021 at 9:21 PM (b)(6) (Bangkok)

(b)(6) @state.gov> wrote:

Hi Baybars,

Can you please confirm receipt of the DS1909?

Thank you,

(b)(6)

From: (b)(6) (Bangkok)

Sent: Tuesday, January 26, 2021 2:50 PM

To: Baybars Orsek (b)(6) @poynter.org>

Cc: (b)(6) @state.gov> (b)(6)

(b)(6) @state.gov> (b)(6) @state.gov> (b)(6)

(b)(6) @state.gov> (b)(6) @state.gov> (b)(6)

(b)(6) @state.gov>

Subject: RE: Poynter Grant Amendment - For Baybars response

As promised, here is the new DS1909 and the new Award Provisions, which contains a detailed description of the grant's balance of payments and budget. Please review the provisions and have the DS1909 signed by one of the directors at Poynter (Wendy Wallace signed the last one).

Regards,

(b)(6)

From: (b)(6) (Bangkok)

Sent: Tuesday, January 26, 2021 1:37 PM

To: Baybars Orsek (b)(6) @poynter.org>

Cc: (b)(6) @state.gov> (b)(6)

(b)(6) @state.gov> (b)(6) @state.gov> (b)(6)

(b)(6) state.gov>; (b)(6) state.gov>; (b)(6)
(b)(6) state.gov>

Subject: RE: Poynter Grant Amendment - For Baybars response

Hi Baybars,

The grant has already been extended. Do you need more time to deliver the training? Do you still stand by the earlier commitment to give us a product this month?

Best,

(b)(6)

From: Baybars Orsek (b)(6)@poynter.org>

Sent: Tuesday, January 19, 2021 6:22 AM

To (b)(6) state.gov>

Cc: (b)(6)@state.gov>; (b)(6)
(b)(6)@state.gov>; (b)(6)@state.gov>; (b)(6)
(b)(6)@state.gov>; (b)(6)@state.gov>; (b)(6)
(b)(6)@state.gov>

Subject: Re: Poynter Grant Amendment - For Baybars response

Hi (b)(6)

Yes! The content is ready therefore we are good to go and deliver the trainings.

Looking forward to receiving the paperwork.

Thanks

Baybars

On Mon, Jan 11, 2021 at 8:17 PM (b)(6) <(b)(6)@state.gov> wrote:

Hi Baybars,

Just another ping to see if everything is going well on your side. Everything on track to produce online course content?

Best,

(b)(6)

From: (b)(6) <(b)(6)@state.gov>

Sent: Tuesday, January 5, 2021 8:30 AM

To: Baybars Orsek <(b)(6)@poynter.org>

Cc: (b)(6) <(b)(6)@state.gov>; (b)(6) <(b)(6)@state.gov>; (b)(6) <(b)(6)@state.gov>; (b)(6) <(b)(6)@state.gov>; (b)(6) <(b)(6)@state.gov>; (b)(6) <(b)(6)@state.gov>

Subject: Re: Poynter Grant Amendment - For Baybars response

Hi Baybars,

Hope you had a nice New Year holiday. Just wanted to drop a note to let you know we look forward to receiving the course outline this month. Let me know if you need to discuss anything. In the meantime, I will work on some of the required documents to reformat the grant.

Warm regards,

(b)(6)

From: (b)(6) (Bangkok)

Sent: Thursday, December 3, 2020 11:48 AM

To: Baybars Orsek <(b)(6)@poynter.org>

Cc: (b)(6) (Bangkok) <(b)(6)@state.gov>; (b)(6) (Bangkok) <(b)(6)@state.gov>; (b)(6) (Bangkok) <(b)(6)@state.gov>; (b)(6) (Bangkok) <(b)(6)@state.gov>; (b)(6) (Bangkok) <(b)(6)@state.gov>; (b)(6) (Bangkok) <(b)(6)@state.gov>

Subject: RE: Poynter Grant Amendment - For Baybars response

Hi Baybars,

When I return after Christmas we will do some paperwork outlining these initiatives more formally in the grant. For now, please proceed designing the online course and designing the virtual training.

Congrats again on the new family member.

Regards,

(b)(6)

Given we are heading to the end of the year and the winter break here, can we aim the following timeline for the amendment?

Late January: Poynter provides online course outline to Embassy for review (in English). Embassy and TJA provide feedback.

Mid February: Poynter provides online course version 2 to Embassy (in English or Thai). Embassy and TJA provide feedback.

Early March: Poynter provides final version of online course to Embassy (in Thai). Embassy and TJA make final checks.

Late March: Virtual Training + Kickoff Press Conference at TJA to introduce the new online course.

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From: (b)(6) <(b)(6)@state.gov>

Sent: Monday, November 30, 2020 9:01 PM

To: (b)(6) <(b)(6)@state.gov>; Baybars Orsek

<(b)(6)@poynter.org>

Cc: (b)(6) <(b)(6)@state.gov>; (b)(6)

(b)(6) <(b)(6)@state.gov>; (b)(6) <(b)(6)@state.gov>; (b)(6)

(b)(6) <(b)(6)@state.gov>; (b)(6) <(b)(6)@state.gov>

Subject: Poynter Grant Amendment - For Baybars response

(b)(6) adding in (b)(6) and (b)(6) from my team.

Best, (b)(6)

From: (b)(6) <(b)(6)@state.gov>

Sent: Monday, November 30, 2020 4:04 AM

To: Baybars Orsek <baybars.(b)(6)>

Cc: (b)(6) <(b)(6)@state.gov>; (b)(6)

(b)(6) <(b)(6)@state.gov>; (b)(6) <(b)(6)@state.gov>; (b)(6)

(b)(6) <(b)(6)@state.gov>

Subject: RE: Important issue to discuss

Hi Baybars,

Final check. Do you want to amend this grant?

Best,

(b)(6)

From: (b)(6)

Sent: Monday, November 23, 2020 12:23 PM

To: 'Baybars Orsek' (b)(6)@poynter.org>

Cc: (b)(6)@state.gov>; (b)(6)

(b)(6)@state.gov>

Subject: RE: Important issue to discuss

Hi Baybars – how are you? Shall we proceed with the grant amendment?

Best,

(b)(6)

From: (b)(6) (Bangkok)

Sent: Wednesday, November 4, 2020 11:18 AM

To: Baybars Orsek <baybars.(b)(6)>

Cc: (b)(6)@state.gov>; (b)(6)

(b)(6)@state.gov>

Subject: RE: Important issue to discuss

Hi Baybars,

I'll be going on leave soon and want to amend the grant as soon as possible.

Thanks,

(b)(6)

From: (b)(6) (Bangkok)

Sent: Monday, October 26, 2020 2:49 PM

To: 'Baybars Orsek' (b)(6)@poynter.org>

Cc: (b)(6)@state.gov>; (b)(6)

(b)(6)@state.gov>

Subject: RE: Important issue to discuss

Hi Baybars,

I hope you are well. I'm sure that election season is an exciting time for the fact checking community!

Given the many challenges of Covid we appreciate your willingness to be flexible in this project. My team and I have reviewed the Google Doc and we generally like the plan. We are wondering if you can make two changes. One, to be less ambitious, we recommend 1 (one) not three virtual training sessions. Also, is there any way to increase the payment to TJA for their services? Their work as implementing partner will be very important.

To review, the two major components of the grant are 1) virtual training and 2) development of an online course. Here is a rough sketch of timings we think are realistic:

Mid November: Poynter provides online course outline to Embassy for review (in English). Embassy and TJA provide feedback.

Mid December: Poynter provides online course version 2 to Embassy (in English or Thai). Embassy and TJA provide feedback.

Early January: Poynter provides final version of online course to Embassy (in Thai). Embassy and TJA make final checks.

Late January: Virtual Training + Kickoff Press Conference at TJA to introduce the new online course.

Sound okay?

Kind Regards,

(b)(6)

From: Baybars Orsek (b)(6)@poynter.org>

Sent: Friday, October 16, 2020 10:45 PM

To: (b)(6)

@state.gov>

Cc: (b)(6)

@state.gov>

(b)(6)

(b)(6)@state.gov>

Subject: Re: Important issue to discuss

Hi (b)(6)

Just wanted to follow up on this to see if we would be able to do this before the end of this year or move to 2021.

Looking forward to hearing from you.

Best,

Baybars

On Fri, Sep 25, 2020 at 4:04 AM (b)(6) (Bangkok)
(b)(6)@state.gov> wrote:

Thanks Baybars,

COVID has certainly been a challenge for grants. Glad to hear your team is engaging on elections! Important topic for fact checking!

Our team will look at the Doc and get back to you soon.

Hope all is well!

Best,

(b)(6)

From: Baybars Orsek (b)(6)@poynter.org>

Sent: Thursday, September 24, 2020 9:59 PM

To: (b)(6)@state.gov>

Cc: (b)(6)@state.gov> (b)(6)

(b)(6)@state.gov>

Subject: Re: Important issue to discuss

Hi (b)(6)

Sorry about the delay. We had been buried down with an election focused project, our new chatbot on WhatsApp around the US elections.

Sharing this document to get your feedback and discuss it over the document if needed.

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1IBhFi4s0XnHOVICcq6UZ0nqFIPmVwGdIYAkYjypauzk/edit>

I just had to adjust the dates in this timeline.

Also copying the budget notes in that document as well.

I suggest having a call with TJA as soon as possible to start planning and executing the trainings!

Looking forward to hearing from you.

Best-

Baybars

On Tue, Aug 18, 2020 at 12:34 AM (b)(6) (Bangkok)

(b)(6)@state.gov> wrote:

Hi Baybars,

We have a few ideas for how to move the grant forward. Let us know what you think, and please provide an estimate of the cost.

1. **Three Online Training Sessions** for the Thai Journalists Association (TJA is the main professional association for journalists in Thailand. We would recommend you pay TJA as the implementing partner so they can procure simultaneous translation, and naturally you would provide them with admin fees etc so they can help you organize the sessions.
 - a. Session 1 - September 3. Fact-Checking and Misinformation (broad overview for journalists and editors)
 - b. Session 2 – Mid-September. Fact-Checking for News Rooms (for news room editors)
 - c. Session 3 – October. Fact-Checking: U.S. Election Watch (20-30 media and academics.
2. **Online Course for Thai Journalists.** This would be an online course with quizzes and a final test in the Thai language. The goal is to promote journalism standards, fact-checking, and accuracy. Thai journalists who complete the course with a passing score would receive a certificate which could read “This is to certify that –NAME– has received IFCN Certification in News-Room Fact-Checking” or something similar. This would be a morale booster for the journalists, and something they can put on a resume.
 - d. Phase 1. September – IFCN submits course outline and structure to the Embassy which will seek comment from TJA and may adjust the outline to meet the needs of the Thai environment.
 - e. Phase 2. December – IFCN submits full course in Thai language to Embassy for review.
 - f. Phase 3. January – IFCN Launches course with joint press releases, social media postings, and an online event with TJA and IFCN.

Warm regards,

(b)(6)

From: Baybars Orsek (b)(6)@poynter.org>

Sent: Thursday, July 23, 2020 6:31 PM

To: (b)(6)@state.gov>
Cc: (b)(6)@state.gov>
Subject: Re: Important issue to discuss
Hi (b)(6)

Great to hear from you! I'm all good, safe, and interesting in Istanbul for a few weeks. I wanted to take the liberty of working from Istanbul for a month or so to stay a bit away from Florida and be closer to the family.

(b)(6)

I've heard that (b)(6) is now in another heaven like place in Earth after lovely Thailand and hoping she invites me to Hawai at some point to do a training there! :)

Since the Global Fact is over and I've been able to recover a bit, I'm now able to send you a proposal on our engagement in Thailand.

Would that be possible to send it in a week or two and we then start acting assuming we confirm the new scope of the program.

Looking forward to hearing from you.

Best-

Baybars

On Mon, Jul 20, 2020 at 12:03 PM (b)(6) (Bangkok)

(b)(6)@state.gov> wrote:

Hi Baybars,

Greetings from Thailand, where we have had very low cases of the virus. I hope you are well!

(b)(6) has moved to Hawaii for a year at the East West Center.

I'm writing to see if we can move the grant forward and somehow safely train/certify Thailand's first IFCN fact-check organization.

Any and all ideas are on the table – including virtual training.

All best,

(b)(6)

From: Baybars Orsek (b)(6)@poynter.org>

Sent: Wednesday, March 25, 2020 10:28 PM

To: (b)(6)@state.gov>

Cc: (b)(6)@state.gov>; (b)(6)

(b)(6)@state.gov>

Subject: Re: Important issue to discuss

Hi (b)(6)

Hope all is well on your end too and you are all doing well and healthy!

It's been a crazy week not only workwise but also personally as well for all of us so please accept my apologies for the late response.

I just wanted to share that I'll share the proposal with you before the end of the week. I couldn't do that yet because there has been an enormous workload on our e-learning department as everything is being migrated to online, therefore I had wait a bit to have my turn with them.

Once I have the costs and timeline from them, I'll share it with you and will look forward to moving forward!

Stay healthy and safe!

Best,

Baybars

On Sun, Mar 15, 2020 at 11:37 PM (b)(6)@Bangkok)

(b)(6)@state.gov> wrote:

Hi Baybars,

Hope all is well in these rapidly evolving times. Number one priority is health, of course. Looking forward to your proposal on a virtual version of activities that still gives Thai organizations a good shot at becoming certified by IFCN. I'm also open to hearing any other suggestions you have. Again, health is number one at this point.

All best,

(b)(6)

From: Baybars Orsek (b)(6)@poynter.org>

Sent: Thursday, March 5, 2020 6:02 AM

To: (b)(6)@state.gov>

Cc: (b)(6)@state.gov>; (b)(6)

(b)(6)@state.gov>

Subject: Re: Important issue to discuss

Hi (b)(6)

It was great to talk to you as well!

I agree with you. I think it will be wiser to design the extension/modification relying only on virtual teaching and a limited notion of bringing two Thai participants to Oslo.

I'll have a meeting with related faculty people at Poynter and then share the possibilities and ideas around localizing our training materials to Thai and creating new modules from scratch.

I should be able to send that email to you by Monday if that's not too late.

Best-

Baybars

On Tue, Mar 3, 2020 at 10:27 PM (b)(6) (Bangkok)

(b)(6)@state.gov> wrote:

Hi Baybars,

Was great talking to you the other day. I'm looking forward to seeing your revised proposal on how we can best utilize the remaining funds in the current environment. Thailand's Ministry of Public Health is now raising its alert level for other nations new experiencing a rise in cases, including European countries. It will also be important to note the rise in cases in the U.S. and to see if that could impact Thai travel to the U.S. Department of State

Given the rapidly evolving situation and potential risks, I'd ask you to think about virtual programming and have an annex to your proposal that has a fully virtual (no travel) scenario. This could include mass translation of web based courses into Thai, Web based virtual training, etc etc.

All best,

(b)(6)

From: Baybars Orsek (b)(6)@poynter.org>

Sent: Monday, February 24, 2020 10:26 PM

To: (b)(6)@state.gov>

Cc: (b)(6)@state.gov>; (b)(6)

(b)(6)@state.gov>

Subject: Re: Important issue to discuss

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

Hope this email finds you well.

It's great to hear from you, (b)(6) I really missed that beautiful place! Hope you had a great break! (b)(6)

My suggestion for the rest of the project based on your feedbacks are;

- To organize a Skype call Yo/Sure and Share, and SONP as per (b)(6) suggestion and discuss their progress and provide feedback before their application.
- Schedule a call this or next week to;
 - Set the date and the content for the video conference from Florida
 - Fix the scope and the date for Thai's delegation visit to St. Petersburg, FL
 - Decide who to bring to Global Fact in Oslo from Thailand (possibility from other Mekong countries as well)

Once we kick the ball rolling, this will be a lot easier to move.

Looking forward to hearing from you for your ideal day to have a 9am Bangkok time call.

Best-

Baybars

On Mon, Feb 24, 2020 at 2:59 AM (b)(6)@state.gov> wrote:

Baybars! I'm just back from the Gulf of Thailand... you know, honeymoonland. Hope all is well.

How shall we proceed? I think it's time we get something down in writing – dates for a video conference from Florida, dates for a visit by a few to Florida, and then a total number of Thais to Oslo. Let's look at the budget and the planning, get something approved, and determine when you might be able to get back out here as well!

I depart Thailand mid June, so would love to be sure we have everything rolling before I go!

All best,

(b)(6)

From: (b)(6) <(b)(6)@state.gov>

Sent: Wednesday, February 19, 2020 3:38 PM

To: Baybars Orsek <(b)(6)@poynter.org>

Cc: (b)(6) <(b)(6)@state.gov>; (b)(6)

(b)(6) <(b)(6)@state.gov>

Subject: RE: Important issue to discuss

Hi Baybars,

(b)(6) Hope all is well. The virus is still making news here but seems to be contained, for now.

Would you be willing to do the Skype connection with Yo/Sure and Share, and SONP to discuss their efforts toward certification? We know they would love to have the opportunity to talk with you on Skype. Any further thought to (b)(6) second question below as well?

Best,

(b)(6)

From: (b)(6) <(b)(6)@state.gov>

Sent: Monday, February 3, 2020 2:47 PM

To: Baybars Orsek <(b)(6)@poynter.org>

Cc: (b)(6) <(b)(6)@state.gov>; (b)(6)

(b)(6) <(b)(6)@state.gov>

Subject: RE: Important issue to discuss

Thank you Baybars. I can understand that many don't want to travel to the region considering the international declarations.

We are facing a battle here of information and misinformation. We'll very much like to see what you are doing in that space.

Meanwhile, let me talk to (b)(6) I think we would like to reformat the grant a bit and include some new elements. Would you be willing to (in addition to some international travel for Thais), do the following:

3. DVC with Yo/Sure and Share, and SONP to discuss their efforts toward certification. We can do that in February on the planned dates, or we can look to a convenient time in the next month.
4. Come back to Thailand after you can travel again, and after Oslo?

Once we know the answer to those, (b)(6) can work with you to amend the grant.

Thanks!

(b)(6)

From: Baybars Orsek (b)(6)@poynter.org>

Sent: Friday, January 31, 2020 10:22 PM

To: (b)(6)@state.gov>

Cc: (b)(6)@state.gov> (b)(6)

(b)(6)@state.gov>

Subject: Re: Important issue to discuss

Hi (b)(6)

Greetings from DC! I just organized a day-long event at the Washington Post in partnership with Google and been working on the side for the programming in Bangkok.

I've just seen the news on Reuters that Thailand confirms the first human-to-human coronavirus transmission. The virus has been a big focus for the fact-checkers lately as we keep publishing our reports on the misinformation around the disease.

I've also heard that Splice Beta is canceled/postponed due to WHO's declaration on public health emergency of international concern.

All those considered, can we officially amend the project with no travel to Bangkok in February and discuss alternative options such as bringing people either to the US or Oslo? We can multiply the impact of the engagement with such options

Looking forward to hearing your thoughts.

Thanks

Baybars

On Wed, Jan 29, 2020 at 4:17 AM (b)(6)@state.gov> wrote:

Thanks for all of this, Baybars. Our inclination is to have your deputy/trainer come in February and I hope they're still available. Our Thai partners are eager. We're just negotiating with Washington about how to spend the rest of the money, i.e. if there will be US and/or Oslo travel. We will get back to you ASAP to confirm February and also what else lies in store. Sound ok?

From: Baybars Orsek (b)(6)@poynter.org>

Sent: Thursday, January 23, 2020 1:11 PM

To: (b)(6)@state.gov>

Cc: (b)(6)@state.gov> (b)(6)

(Bangkok) (b)(6)@state.gov>

Subject: Re: Important issue to discuss

Hi (b)(6)

Thank you so much! I really appreciate it! Fingers crossed! Once again, thank you so much for your understanding.

Eoghan Sweeney, German trainer who is one of the leading experts on Open Source Intelligence Tools for fact-checking & verification. More about him and his works are available here > <https://www.osintessentials.com/> He can do great work by providing the training in those two days.

Having said that and putting more thought into it, my suggestion will be to try to invite senior and non-senior Thai to Florida and use the remaining resources to bring Thai and some other regional participants to Oslo for the Global Fact between 24-27 June. By doing these two - not doing the Bangkok training in February - we can achieve;

- having one-to-one time with leading figures of the Thai media and journalists in the steer of their newsrooms
- offering Poynter's renowned teaching resources to the participants and merging ethics & newsroom management seminars with our fact-checking training
- following up with some of the participants in Florida tour in Oslo during the Global Fact and having them (Shure and Share + others) exposed to 60+ different sessions in 3.5 days

Once the Global Fact 7 is over, Shure and Share along with other potential Thai partners can apply to the network thanks to the training they had (Bangkok/October + Florida/Spring + Oslo/June) in three different settings and the remote consulting I had been providing and will keep providing until they are evaluated by our advisory board.

If those don't sound a terrible idea to you, I can send a draft template over the weekend for what we can cover in 2-3 days in Florida for the first group. Also, the attached program of the last Global Fact which took place in Cape Town, South Africa can also give a better sense of what will most likely await the Thai & regional journalists in Oslo.

One way or another, I'll make sure we will share our know-how with the invested participants and support the practitioners in the country. I remain committed to making this effort helping the non-partisan Thai media landscape.

Best-

Baybars

On Wed, Jan 22, 2020 at 9:53 PM (b)(6) (Bangkok)
(b)(6) @state.gov> wrote:

Hi Baybars,

Great to speak with you and we wish you and your family all the best in this momentous progress toward U.S. citizenship!

I found the bio of Christina on the Poynter site, but would love to hear from you what you propose for the activities/deliverables going forward. Also, could you kindly send the bio of the trainer who would accompany Christina to Bangkok?

Though you may have more ideas, the activities we wrote down from the call were:

- Sending Thais (could be a mix of senior and working level) to Poynter in Florida
- Christina and trainer come to Thailand in place of Baybars and trainer

- Sending Thais (and perhaps other journalists from Mekong/Indo-Pacific countries) to Oslo, June 24-27

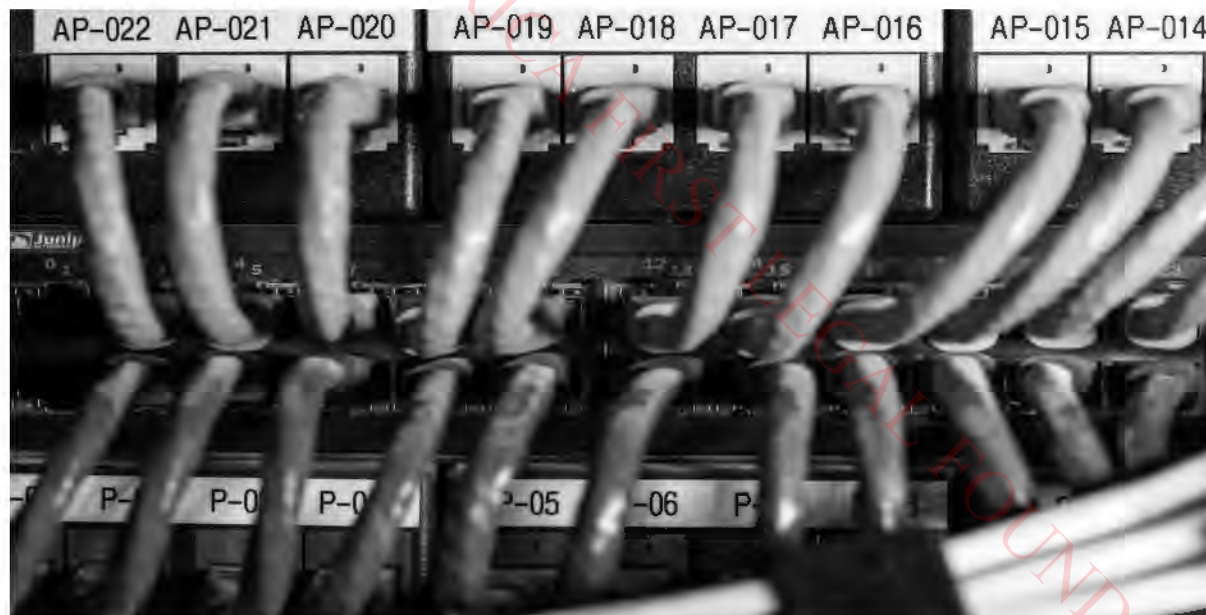
Warm regards,

(b)(6)

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FUNDAMENTAL SHIFTS IN ANTI-BELARUSIAN DISINFORMATION AND PROPAGANDA: ANALYSIS OF QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE CHANGES*

ANDREI YELISEYEU**



* This is a shortened version of the report. Full version in Russian can be found at [this link](#).

** Andrei Yeliseyev is Research Director at EAST Center. He is part of the iSANS expert network and the Younger Generation Leaders Network on Euro-Atlantic Security. Previously, he completed fellowships at GMF, GLOBSEC Policy Institute, and the Finnish Institute of International Affairs. He also worked as researcher at the Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies. Email: andrei.yelis@east-center.org

Executive Summary

Monitoring of anti-Belarusian disinformation and propaganda in the Russian online media, conducted in August-November 2016,² primarily focused on publications by the *Regnum* and *EADaily* media outlets containing hate speech. Many materials questioned the sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity of Belarus, contained derogatory statements about the Belarusian people, language, and culture.

The study indicated that the Belarusian authorities used the most radical and inexpensive method of combating the anti-Belarusian propaganda campaign by arresting three authors of such materials. The monitoring concluded the following: "Whether the anti-Belarus campaign fades away or, on the contrary, takes a new impetus, either way is of great importance in assessing evolution of Russian Belarus-related media propaganda."

Has the situation in this area changed two years later? This study, which is based upon regular monitoring and analysis, shows that there have been significant changes for the worse in both quantitative and qualitative terms, namely:

- The number of online resources which regularly publish items related to Belarus and contain disinformation, propaganda narratives and hate speech has increased severalfold (to about 40 fairly active sites);
- Over the past two years, several new active outlets of disinformation and hate speech which are entirely devoted to events in Belarus have appeared online. Their number currently stands at about 15. Earlier, the primary sources of disinformation about Belarus were Russian websites with a broad information agenda, which only partly focused on Belarus;
- A fully-fledged coordinated network of regional online portals with regular publications containing hate speech against various social, political, religious, and professional groups of the Belarusian population began its activity in 2018. Publications use aggressive, chauvinistic rhetoric, sometimes openly questioning the existence of an independent Belarusian ethnic group and language, discrediting and distorting the history of Belarus;

² Andrei Yeliseyev, Veranika Laputska. Anti-Belarus disinformation in Russian media: Trends, features, countermeasure. EAST Center, December 2016, <http://east-center.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/EAST-Media-Review.pdf>

- The leaders of a number of the most active sources of disinformation and propaganda narratives on Belarus periodically using hate speech are associated with a Russian CIS-EMO organization with a very ambiguous reputation and the "Soyuz" ("Union") civic initiative formed in 2018. They also have at least an indirect connection to Russia's Embassy in Belarus thanks to their membership on the Coordinating Council of the Leaders of the Belarusian Public Associations of Russian Compatriots (KSORS).

The content of this study is as follows:

- Classification of disinformation and propaganda sources concerning Belarus;
- Analysis of the features of the regional disinformation network, the establishment of which was finalized in 2018;
- Review of examples of hate speech regarding various groups of the Belarusian population in the materials of the regional disinformation network;
- Review of offensive statements about the Belarusian people, their culture, language, and history published by the regional disinformation network in the first quarter of 2019;
- Top-15 most incongruous statements by the regional disinformation network during the first quarter of 2019;
- Analysis of individuals and organizations behind some of the most aggressive outlets of anti-Belarusian propaganda, disinformation, and hate speech.

1. Classification of Sources of Disinformation and Propaganda Concerning Belarus.

In 2016, disinformation and propaganda, as well as the use of hate speech in publications regarding Belarus, was a relatively new phenomenon. During the monitoring, conducted at the end of 2016, *Imperiyanews.ru*, *Regnum.ru*, *Eurasia Daily (EADaily)*, *Zapadrus.su* and *Sputnikpogrom.com* were considered the main sources of such content. For these and several other sites studied at that time (*Rusnext.ru*, *Cont.ws*, *Fondsk.ru*, etc.), Belarus was not and still is not a single or defining topic.

To date, the number of Internet sites that relatively regularly host such content has increased significantly and reached about 40. Many other portals which have extremely low attendance and frequency of updates, post such materials rarely, re-publish such content exclusively from other sources, and not targeting Belarusian audience only, are not taken into account here.

Periodic changes in the editorial policy and priorities of online portals complicate their classification. Nevertheless, based on the state of affairs during the first quarter of 2019 and taking into account some arbitrariness of categorization,³ the primary sources of disinformation and propaganda against Belarus among websites can be classified as follows:





- 1. The most aggressive sources:** which focus entirely or predominantly on the coverage of Belarusian topics, regularly post their own (exclusive) materials containing disinformation and propaganda narratives while often using hate speech: *Vmeste s Rossiyei (Together with Russia)/Ross-bel.ru*, *Teleskop*, *Sozh*, *Vitbich*, *Berestje-News*, *GrodnoDaily*, *Mogilew.by*, *Podneprovie-Info*, *Imhoclub.by*, *Dranik*, *Politring*.
- 2. Sources with a high level of disinformation:** the Belarusian topic is either their main or one of the priority ones; they relatively often transmit disinformation and propaganda in their own materials or items from other sources, but without using or with a relatively rare use of hate speech: *4esnok*, *Sonar2050*, *Druzya-Syabry*, *Sputnik Belarus*, *Belypo*, *Vesti24*, *EADaily*, *Regnum*.
- 3. Sources with an average level of disinformation:** Belarusian topic is not predominant, but still rather significant (a number of outlets contain a separate section on Belarus or specific tags), periodically publish exclusive materials containing disinformation and propaganda narratives on Belarus: *RIA FAN*, *IAREX*,

³ For example, the frequency of using hate speech in publications may vary depending on the period being studied. That is why *Regnum* and *EADaily* in the first quarter of 2019 were not included in the first group of sources of disinformation and propaganda.

Politnavigator, Oko-Planet, News-Front, Ukraina.ru, Materik, Topwar, Ruskline, Cont.ws, Fondsk.su, Rusvesna, Rubaltic.

- 4. Less active sources of disinformation:** sites that are entirely or partially dedicated to Belarusian topics and regularly publish materials with disinformation and propaganda narratives, but are not very popular and do not produce their own content:

Rosbelsoyuz, Inspect.by, Vitrusdom, Soglasie, Mogilew.net, Mogilew.org, Mogilew.com, ImperiyaNews.

The most aggressive sources	Sources with a high level of disinformation	Sources with an average level of disinformation	Less active sources of disinformation
			

The first group of sites is the most destructive, since it is targeting exclusively Belarusian audience and quite often uses hate speech of varying degrees of severity, demonizing social, political, and professional groups of the Belarusian population. The expansion of their audience is a matter of time and money, and some of them do not lack financial resources judging by the scale of their activities in both quantitative and qualitative terms (including regular maintenance of numerous groups on social networks).

The significance of the second and third groups of sites on the formation of public opinion in Belarus and Russia also cannot be underestimated. Many of those sources where the Belarusian topic is not on the priority list are nonetheless very popular and significant in shaping public opinion in Russia (for example, <https://riafan.ru/>). An increase in the number of materials on Belarusian topics and the degree of their aggressiveness might only be a matter of time. It is significant that in rare cases these sites even have Belarusian language versions (<https://www.rubaltic.ru/>).

2. Analysis of Features of Regional Disinformation Network.

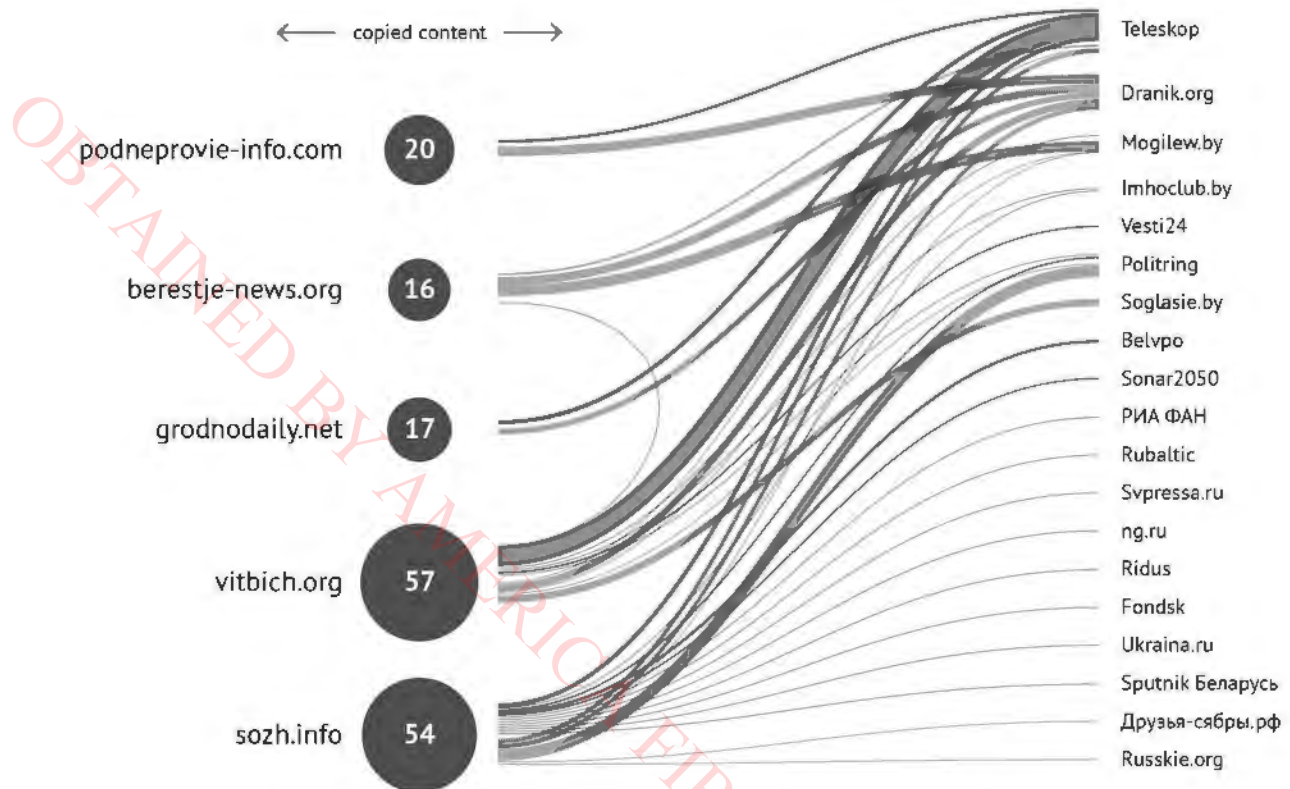
One of the most important phenomena of anti-Belarusian disinformation and propaganda at present is an active full-fledged network of regional sites. It includes *Teleskop-by.org*, *Sozh.info*, *Vitbich.org*, *Berestje-News.org*, *GrodnoDaily.net*, *Mogilew.by*, *Podneprovie-Info.com*, *Dranik.org*, and appears as follows:



The establishment of this network was completed in 2018. While each of the non-capital regions of Belarus has its own source of disinformation and propaganda (and two for the Mahilyow (Mahiloŭ) and Brest (Bieraście) regions)⁴, there is currently no such portal for the Minsk (Miensk) region. Apparently, *Teleskop-by.org* serves as a nationwide resource and at the same time as a kind of Minsk (Miensk) analog of a region-specific source.

⁴ Belarusian geographic names are given both in accordance with standardized US English spelling and Belarusian Latin alphabet.

Reposts of unique materials by the network's sites during January-March 2019.



Characteristic features of the regional propaganda and disinformation network (*Sozh.info*, *Vitbich.org*, *Podneprovie-info.com*, *Grodnodaily.net*, *Berestje-news.org*) are the following:

- A seemingly neutral design. No ambiguous symbols which may indicate belonging to radical ideologies are featured. Instead, they use images referencing the historical emblems of the regional centers (Homyel (Homiel), Vitsyebsk (Viciebsk), and Brest (Bieraście) outlets), memorial buildings (Mahilyow (Mahiloŭ) Town Hall), or have a neutral look (Hrodna (Horadnia) regional site). Teleskop-by.org's design depicts an ornament similar to traditional Belarusian pattern.



ВІЦЬБЕНЧ



Берестье News



Поднепровье
Инфо

Гродно Daily

- Combining neutral news, informative, and entertaining content, taken from other original sources, with their own extremely aggressive, chauvinistic materials. The content copied from regional government and independent websites, national portals of Belarus and certain outlets from the Russian Internet segment serves as neutral.

The two features mentioned above make it possible to use the "Trojan horse" strategy when readers' attention to promoted materials is attracted by providing a variety of neutral content.

- Frequent use of hate speech against various social, political, religious, and professional groups of the population, including journalists from Belarusian non-state media outlets and bloggers, citizens sharing pro-European views, human rights advocates and activists, individuals who do not subscribe to views considering the Belarusian nation as part of the "all-Russian people," etc.
- Frequent use of chauvinistic, totalitarian, non-scientific allegations, including revision and distortion of the history of Belarus, conspiracy theories in various forms, offensive statements about national symbols like "Pahonya" (literally: "Pursue") emblem, periodical denial of the existence of the Belarusian nation outside the concept of the "all-Russian people," denial of the existence of the Belarusian language as a full-fledged, naturally formed language, and not "artificial" or "created by the West," etc.
- The authorship of many of their exclusive materials is concealed under pseudonyms. At the same time, the style of the articles and the uniformity of grammatical errors and stylistic forms make it possible to assume the real authorship of the publications.
- Actively sharing of their exclusive content with other outlets of disinformation and propaganda narratives, especially by the following sites: *Teleskop-by.org*, *Politring.org*, *Mogilew.by*, *Dranik.org*, and to a lesser extent by *Vesti24.by* and *Sonar2050.org*.

Regional disinformation network websites advocate a radical rapprochement between Belarus and Russia, which, in fact, would mean the loss of real sovereignty in internal and external affairs, even if nominal independence remains. So, the publications of the first quarter of 2019 suggest, among other things, the following steps:

- Consider deploying Russian nuclear weapons in Belarus as part of a confrontation with the West;
- Promoting in Belarus Russian organizations that form a "common Russian identity" among Belarusians;
- Introducing the Russian ruble as a currency in Belarus;
- Stop the dialog with the West, deploy Russian military bases in Belarus and introduce criminal liability for "incitement of fear at the expense of Russia."

3. Hate Speech in Regional Disinformation Network Publications.

There is no internationally accepted definition of the term "hate speech", but in general, it can be defined as a set of linguistic means that projects discriminatory hate towards people based on national, religious, political, and other grounds. In extreme cases, hate speech can take the form of xenophobia, ethnic hatred, and intolerance, and therefore its radical manifestations are directly prohibited by both international and national law.

Hate speech uses a variety of techniques, including referring to various groups or individuals in a derogatory and offensive context, making allegations of inferiority or moral shortcomings of representatives of certain groups or individuals, general accusations of a negative influence of a group on society and attributing hostile actions to it, veiled incitement to violence or discrimination (for example, in the form of calls to "sort them out," "put them in place," an appeal to Stalinist repressive policies), an unfounded and generalizing reference to the alleged links between targeted population groups and foreign organizations to discredit them, etc.

Hate speech attributes can be found in many publications of regional network webpages (*Sozh.info*, *Vitbich.org*, *Podneprovie-info.com* / *Mogilew.by*, *Grodnodaily.net*, *Berestje-news.org* / *Dranik.org*) concerning several Belarusian population groups including:

- Independent journalists and bloggers;
- Civil activists and representatives of democratic opposition;
- Citizens with alternative political views;
- Citizens who do not support the conception of a triune Russian people;
- Followers of the Belarusian Autocephalous Orthodox Church;
- Human rights activists and citizens who resort to international human rights protection mechanisms.

Furthermore, the publications contain defamatory statements towards some political and civil activists and journalists. As part of the research, the articles of regional disinformation network published in the period from January to March 2019 (over 150) were analyzed. Whereas the complete collection of hate speech instances is available in the Russian language version of the report, a few examples are provided in English below.

Independent journalists and bloggers

Derogatory statements about *Nasha Niva* newspaper and its journalists:

I always knew that the situation with education and qualifications among opposition supporters is

very tough; however, I did not realize how bad it is... I cannot imagine who and based on what is employed at Nasha Niva, but it seems that lowlifes and drug addicts are being hired, who are caught in the basements and forcefully dragged to the office.⁵

Civil activists and representatives of democratic opposition;

Claims about moral deficiencies and attribution of hostile actions:

Our opposition supporters are not economists, they are not gifted. They are just demagogues and populists. Therefore, their main objective is to close down loss-incurring enterprises and to let their employees go home, even better to sell such enterprises to the West and to allow the Westerners to bankrupt them... Surely, our oppositionists dream about American [military] bases on our territory and foreign men speaking language unknown to our people. This is what they dream about!⁶

Citizens with alternative or pro-western views, those who do not adhere to the conception of triune Russian people.

Claims about deficiency, attribution of hostile actions, a generalized claim about group's connection with foreign structures for defamation purposes:

As it goes, as a real patriot of Belarus he has a pathological propensity toward foreign countries but not toward Belarus. Usually, 'Belarusian zmagary [a mocking reference to the oppositionists] choose Poland or Germany for worshipping... This often happens among oppositionists due to a deficit of women's attention. They degrade to some perversion and then even become zmagary... Kanstantsin[Dzmitrachkow] is not alone in his aspirations, all patriots happen to be sad that Poles did not manage to exterminate Belarusians. This is patriotism...

Defamatory statements toward a number of political and civil activists and journalists

Ungrounded accusation of politician Mikalay Statkevich in terrorism:

Let us recall that two years ago at Freedom Day Statkevich's team planned to stage a terrorist act at the rally. However, for some reason, the US State Department does not consider these facts. And the reason is that because they are interested in destabilizing our country just as our opposition members are. Therefore they have to make a big deal out of it and try to make candy out of shit [as stated in vernacular].⁸

Insulting statements about Natalya Radina (Editor-in-Chief of Charter'97), Marina Zolotova (Editor-in-Chief of TUT.BY), and Irina Levshina (Editor-in-Chief of Belapan):

⁵ <http://vitbich.org/oppozicionnaya-pleyada-i-ee-mify-i-legendy-vladimir-nabagez/>

⁶ <http://podneprovie-info.com/2019/01/07/oppoziciya-bessilna/>

⁷ <https://sozh.info/zazerkale-svyadomogo-patriotizma-v-licakh-kanstancin-dzmitrachko%D1%9E/>

⁸ <http://vitbich.org/andrej-korshunov-iz-muxi-slona/>

*In general, if you figure this out, whom in Belarus is responsible for the independent information field? Whose opinion is being imposed on Belarusian society? These women can be counted on the fingers of one hand: Marina Zolotova (Editor-in-Chief of TUT.BY), Irina Levshina (Editor-in-Chief of Belapan), and Natalya Radina (Editor-in-Chief of Charter'97). These three women after they have grown balls [as stated in vernacular] and became men, began dictating and imposing the opinions of Belarusian opposition on everyone. That is, instead of cooking borshch at home, they started doing politics and decided to go up against serious men from the government, including the Russian one because here we talk about Russian Ambassador, Mikhail Babich"*⁹

Human rights activists and citizens who resort to international human rights protection mechanisms.

Insulting statements, attribution of hostile actions, claims about moral deficiencies:

*'Holers' are those who work for the West and leak all information including classified one over there, for personal benefit or to accomplish some crazy idea... For you to understand, 'holers' are the citizens of their country who get things out in the open and therefore betray Belarusian values. For instance, Aleksandr Tyvanchuk lodged a complaint about a high state duty for crossing the 'Western Bug' border checkpoint in Brest. This way anyone can become a 'holer' and complain to the UN Committee about the high price of metro tokens, public toilets fees, taxes, excises, fines, etc... One can be sure to say that the 'holers' den is Vyasna human rights center. Why do they do this? This a good question. First, for the sake of money. Second, for the sake of an idea. Ideological 'holers' are much scarier than money-driven ones. But ideological 'holers' are much more beneficial for our opposition members because they can always be framed to make some money just as some time ago Ales Belyatskiy was framed.*¹⁰

⁹ <http://vitbich.org/arkadij-vertyazin-durnaya/>

¹⁰ <http://vitbich.org/andrej-korshunov-dyryavye/>

4. Overview of Derogatory Statements About Belarusian People, Their Culture, Language, and History.

A full version of this section with excerpts of analyzed publications is available in Russian-language version of the report. Here only the essence of derogatory statements is listed:

- The Belarusian language was artificially created in the early 20th century;
- Belarusian people are a part of Russian people, Belarusians are Russians;
- No Belarusian people existed in the late 18th century;
- The name of the country the Republic of Belarus is voluntarist, Belarus is a Western Region of Russia;
- The West's objective is to turn Belarusians into cannon fodder by creating an "artificial language" and religion for them;
- Tadeusz Kosciuszko's actions were analogous to Romuald Rajs's crimes;
- Soviet Belarus illegitimately expanded its territory by adding Vitsyebsk (Viciebsk) region;
- Belarusian Latin alphabet is a Polish Latin version;
- Derogatory claims about Pahonya coat of arms which is considered a historical and cultural value;
- Derogatory claims about former official state flag.

5. Top 15 Most Incongruous Statements by Regional Disinformation Network.


A full version of this section with excerpts of analyzed publications is available in Russian-language version of the report. Here only the essence of the most questionable statements published by *Sozh.info*, *Vitbich.org*, *Podneprovie-info.com*, *Grodnodaily.net*, and *Berestje-news.org* in January-March 2019 is listed:

1. Belarus' officials are "fifth column" of IMF and Western "gauleiters";
2. Belarus' senator Gennadiy Davydko is US State Department agent, Belarusian officials are West's sixth column;
3. Russia will become a target for destruction by Russophobic Belarus;
4. Tavistock Institute of Human Relations controls the development of the world's history;
5. OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media wants turn Belarusian segment of the Internet into "a stinky heap of garbage" and "terrorist haven;"
6. United States planned to occupy Crimea to control the Black sea;
7. In return for the visa-free regime, the EU wants Belarus to lose its independence or least to follow a 'Ukraine's scenario';
8. AIDS does not exist;
9. Feminist harassment of men takes place in the EU, it is foolish to let women to go into politics;
10. EU is a main source of Nazism;
11. The Clinton's bench in Kurapaty memorial site could have been damaged by gamblers on a bet;
12. Poland has a secret plan to take over Belarus;
13. Russophobia has won in Belarus and the country's authorities cannot do anything about it;
14. To prevent its own collapse, the European Union wants to take over Belarus;
15. Belarus' patriots want the United States to occupy Belarus.

6. Who Is Behind Most Aggressive Anti-Belarus Sources of Disinformation and Hate Speech.

The domains of four regional websites (*Vitbich.org*, *Podneprovie-info.com*, *Grodnodaily.net*, *Berestje-news.org*) were purchased at the same day on 19 February 2019. They belong to one person listed as **Aleksey Semenov** and based in Moskovskaya Oblast, Russia.

<https://www.whois.com/whois/podneprovie-info.com>

 **Technical Contact**

Name:	Aleksey Semenov
Organization:	Private person
Street:	[REDACTED]
City:	Dmitrov
State:	MOSCOW REGION
Postal Code:	141800
Country:	RU

One of CIS-EMO team members has the same first and last names.¹¹ This organization positions itself as the one in charge of independent electoral monitoring missions. It served as an umbrella organization for the so-called international observers during 2014 Crimea "referendum." Aleksey Semenov took part in CIS-EMO missions to unrecognized South Ossetia, Abkhazia, and Transnistria.

In 2003-2013 CIS-EMO was chaired by **Aleksey Kochetkov**, a former Editor-in-Chief of *Russian Order*, newspaper by Russian neo-Nazi organization Russian National Unity. It was reported that Aleksey Kochetkov used to coordinate his activities with Sergey Vinokurov, head of the Department on Regional and Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries of the Russian Presidential administration.¹² It was also reported that Sergey Vinokurov left his office in 2012 for electoral failures in unrecognized South Ossetia and Transnistria.¹³

¹¹ <http://www.cis-emo.net/ru/sotrudniki/aleksey-semenov>

¹² https://web.archive.org/web/20170406081815/http://www.newsab.ru/politics/id_342742/

¹³ <https://newdaynews.ru/policy/366076.html>

Following that, he occupied an office of deputy head of Russia's SVR (Foreign Intelligence Service) until 2016.¹⁴

Currently CIS-EMO is chaired by **Stanislav Byshok**. In 2016 Aleksey Semenov co-authored a report titled *'Strategy of cooperation with foreign NGOs in post-Soviet space'* together with Aleksey Kochetkov, Stanislav Byshok, Kirill Averyanov-Minskiy and Tatyana Drozdovskaya. This report goes as the following:

"A hundred years ago Russian intellectuals took the idea of 'independent Belarus' as a rosy phantasy of a handful of outcasts from the North-Western Area of Russian Empire. However, in the turbulent political period, Bolsheviks took over power. By creating Belarusian Soviet Social Republic and proclaiming Belarusians a distinct nation, they legalized Belarusian separatist project".¹⁵

Regional disinformation network websites post similar publications about CIS-EMO activities. Among other things, all network websites published a series of articles about CIS-EMO election monitoring mission in Madagascar.¹⁶

Kochetkov and Byshok publish Belarus-related articles and provide commentaries. In March 2019 both were hosted by *Sputnik Belarus* twice. The video programs concerned Belarus-Russia relations¹⁷ and Belarus' information security concept.¹⁸ *Sputnik Belarus* presented the two as "famous Russian political experts".

In his January 2019 article for *Teleskop-by.org*, which was also republished by *Vitbich.org*, Stanislav Byshok writes:

"Enthusiasm to live in a country stretching from Brest to Vladivostok, and not merely to Vitsyebsk (Viciebsk), is easy to understand and has to do with the ideas of cultural and civilizational unity of Belarusians and Russians, as well as with Soviet nostalgia among the old... The longer you exist within your distinct sovereign country, the more you get used to this, and the less enthusiasm remains about the prospects of changing this status".^{19 20}

¹⁴ <https://og.ru/society/2016/05/12/80798>

¹⁵ http://www.publicdiplomacy.su/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/NPO_obrez_123_200.pdf

¹⁶ Some of the links to the posts concerning the Madagascar election mission: <https://bit.ly/2UMB0ps> by Podneprovie-info.com, <https://bit.ly/2VLzCeM> by Sozh.info, <https://bit.ly/2Uu6NXP> by Vitbich.org, <https://bit.ly/2IxaODw> by Berestje-news.org, <https://bit.ly/2VJu98F> by Grodnodaily.net, <https://bit.ly/2UN8oaC> by Teleskop-by.org.

¹⁷

<https://sputnik.by/radio/20190306/1040434077/Byshok-i-Kochetkov-rasskazali-chto-nuzhno-dlya-polnotsennogo-imerushimogo-soyuza.html>

¹⁸

<https://sputnik.by/video/20190314/1040489534/Eksperty-Kontseptsiya-informatsionnoy-bezopasnosti--zaschita-ot-fake-news.html>

¹⁹ <http://teleskop-by.org/2019/01/23/stanislav-byshok-sotsintern-protiv-soyuznogo-gosudarstva/>

²⁰ <http://vitbich.org/stanislav-byshok-socintern-protiv-soyuznogo-gosudarstva/>

When it comes to Homiel regional disinformation website *Sozh.info*, its domain's holder is **Sergey Lushch** (last name spelled as "Lusch" in domain registration database), former chairman of "Rus Molodaya" (The Young Rus). *Sozh.info* became functional much earlier than most other regional network websites and has become more popular in terms of the number of visits and social media followers.

sozh.info

Updated 1 second ago

Domain Information	
Domain:	sozh.info
Registrar:	Regional Network Information Center. JSC dba RU-CENTER
Registered On:	2016-02-28
Expires On:	2019-02-28
Updated On:	2018-05-24
Status:	clientTransferProhibited
Name Servers:	ns1.hosting.reg.ru ns2.hosting.reg.ru
Registrant Contact	
Organization:	Sergey Lusch
Country:	RU

Screenshot of Whois database retrieved on 12 January 2019.

Sergey Lushch is often published by the regional disinformation network websites and national media too. He took part in *Sputnik Belarus* video programs about hybrid warfare,²¹ discussion with Belarusian economist Yaraslaw Ramanchuk about patriotism²² and with a former presidential candidate Tatsyana Karatkevich on the topic of Belarusian society development.²³

Stanislav Byshok (CIS-EMO, supposedly in control of at least four domains of the regional disinformation network), **Lev Krishtapovich** (Editor-in-Chief of one of the most aggressive anti-Belarus websites *Teleskop-by.org*) and **Sergey Lushch** (*Sozh.info* domain holder) are

²¹

<https://sputnik.by/video/20180821/1037215008/lushch-o-gibridnoj-vojne-vsekh-protiv-vsekh-i-novyh-krizisnyh-tendenciayah.html>

²²

<https://sputnik.by/video/20181023/1038305696/Romanchuk-vs-Lusch-kak-vyrvat-ponyatie-patriotizma-iz-lap-formalizma.html>

²³

<https://sputnik.by/video/20190207/1039962714/Korotkevich-vs-Lusch-a-ne-poprobovat-li-reshat-problemy-strany-v-meste.html>

three out of four co-chairmen of **Civic Initiative 'Soyuz'** which was set up in Belarus in 2018.²⁴

Fourth co-chairman is **Sergey Baburin**, former member of Russian State Duma, so-called "Russian Marches" co-organizer, head of "Russian all-people's union" political party. One of the party's objectives is *"to finalize the development of Russia-Belarus Union State quickly and consistently, as a core of a future Slavic superpower, a successor to the best traditions of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union."*²⁵



Lev Krishtapovich, Stanislav Byshok, and Sergey Lushch (left to right) at the founding congress of Civic initiative 'Soyuz' in Vitsyebsk (Viciebsk) in summer 2018. Photo by Teleskop-by.org

One of the most aggressive sources of anti-Belarusian disinformation and propaganda with the use of hate speech, along with *Teleskop-by.org* and a regional disinformation network reviewed above, is the website of public organizations of Russian compatriots in Belarus 'Together with Russia' *Ross-bel.ru*.

Ross-bel.ru regularly posts articles authored by the Chairman of the Coordinating Council of the Leaders of the Belarusian Public Associations of Russian Compatriots (KSORS) **Andrey Gerashchenko** and other KSORS members, including **Sergey Lushch** (holder of *Sozh.info* domain), **Nikolay Sergeyev** and **Lev Krishtapovich** (Editor-in-Chief of *Teleskop-by.org*) which often transmit aggressive disinformation and contain hate speech. Russian Ambassador to Belarus Mikhail Babich regularly meets KSORS representatives.

²⁴ It is worth noting that one of the 'Soyuz' civic initiative publications names Aleksey Kochetkov a co-chariman, see: <http://rosbelsoyuz.su/2019/03/07/конференция-гражданской-инициативы/>

²⁵ <http://vsezarus.ru/about/programma-partii.html>



Ambassador Mikhail Babich (sitting with his back to the camera) meets KSORS activists. Sitting in front of Babich from the left are Sergey Lusch (holder of Sozh.info domain) and Andrey Gerashchenko (Editor-in-Chief of Ross-bel.ru). A screenshot of the video report 'Diplomatic weekdays: One day of Mikhail Babich' by Russian TV channel Rossiya 24, 18 March 2019.

ross-bel.ru

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Editor-in-Chief of *Ross-bel.ru* Andrey Gerashchenko advocates for extreme integration of Belarus and Russia, which will likely leave Belarus with only nominal sovereignty:

*"You cannot be half pregnant with integration: either one has to give birth to something or to face the problem of 'placental abruption.' I mean that [addressing] the issues of a common Constitution, parliament and monetary system have long been overdue."*²⁶

In a recent publication (dated 18 March 2019) under the guise of a letter from Donetsk-based reader *Ross-bel.ru* wrote the following:

²⁶

http://ross-bel.ru/about/news_post/andrey-gerashchenko-nash-glavnyy-partner-rossiya-a-ne-yevrosoyuz-nelzya-stavit-znak-ravenstva-intervyu

*"Belarusians, take care of your country! Forget about 'independence,' this is an obvious trick as in the contemporary predatory world there is no one. We will survive only together with strong Russia."*²⁷

One of the books available at *Ross-bel.ru* is titled "Belarusian nationalism against Russkiy mir."²⁸ It was published by CIS-EMO and co-authored by Kirill Averyanov-Minskiy and Vladislav Maltsev and says the following:

- *"Only genuine realization of the Union State project, which envisages Belorussia's [reference to Belarus used in Russian press] incorporation in a common political space with Moscow, can contain Russophobic trends in Belarusian society;"*
- *"As long as Belarusian nationalism has ostentatious anti-Russian focus, the processes which are taking place in Belarus can lead to serious social upheavals. Belorussia is no less Russian-language and Russian-culture region than Donbass; therefore forceful 'Belarusization' is fraught with a repetition of 'Donbass scenario' in the Republic of Belarus;"*
- *"Russia's state bodies (foremost, Rossotrudnichestvo) and Russian media which broadcast on the territory of Belarus, have to do a consistent work on inculcation of the concept of 'triune Russian people' into the public consciousness, the concept which used to dominate in Belorussia until October revolution [of 1917]."*

Ross-bel.ru regularly posts publications with extreme conspiracy manifestations:

*"After the Soviet Union disappeared, old revanchist dreams about Rzeczpospolita stretching from the Black Sea to the Baltics returned to Poland from oblivion. In 2006 the Polish government adopted a program of establishing 4th Rzeczpospolita... Called by its proper name, it goes about turning the Republic of Belarus into a vassal-like anti-Russia [entity] dependent on Warsaw and Washington. Its western part is supposed to become "eastern borderlands" of a new Rzeczpospolita, and the remaining portion to turn into an anti-Russian buffer zone."*²⁹

**EAST
Center**

Eurasian States in Transition

²⁷ http://ross-bel.ru/about/news_post/pismo-iz-donetska

²⁸ http://ross-bel.ru/d/618179/d/extremizm_doklad_2.pdf

²⁹ http://ross-bel.ru/about/news_post/strelkov-podtverdil-khudshiye-opaseniya-po-belorussii

CONGRESSIONAL NOTIFICATION TRANSMITTAL LETTER

(b)(5)

Sincerely,

Naz Durakoglu
Acting Assistant Secretary
Bureau of Legislative Affairs

Enclosure:

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Drafted: (b)(6)

Cleared:

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EUR/ACE/PPP:

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**GEC Special Report:
Russian and PRC COVID-19 Vaccine Disinformation and Propaganda**

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Approved:

Drafted: R/GEC/Russia

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Cleared: R/GEC/PO:

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L/PD: (b)(6)

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ISN/BPS: (b)(6)

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OES/IHB: (b)(6)

CGRCU: (b)(6)

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EUR/ERA: (b)(6)

EUR/NBA: (b)(6)

EUR/SCE: (b)(6)

EUR/PPD: (b)(6)

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Scope of Work
Disinformation Response Network

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Scope of Work
Disinformation Response Network

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