



**United States Department of State**

***Washington, D.C. 20520***

November 29, 2024

Case No. FL-2023-00013

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

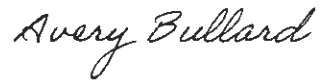
Dear Mr. Rubinstein:

As we noted in our letter dated October 31, 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 two additional responsive records subject to the FOIA. Upon review, we have determined that both records may be released in full.

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](mailto: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 "Avery Bullard".

Avery Bullard  
Supervisory Government Information Specialist  
Litigation and Appeals Office

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**

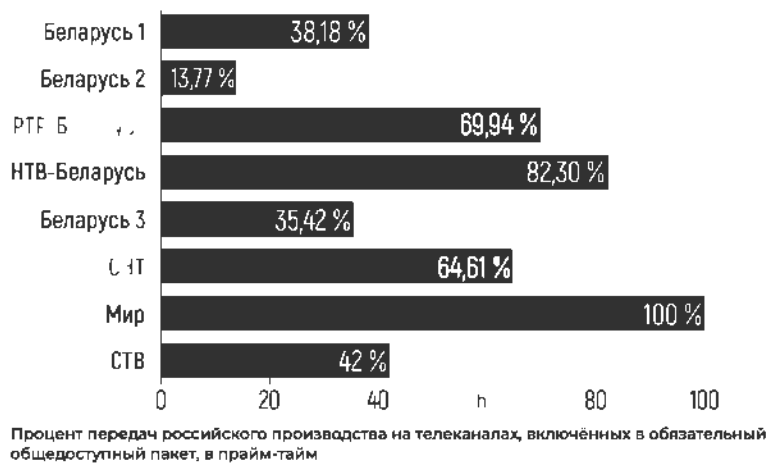
- NR Material not responsive to a FOIA request excised with the agreement of the requester

### Proliferators of Russian Disinformation in Belarus

According to a 2019 study by USAID-funded media monitoring project Media IQ, Belarusian state television is one of the most significant proliferators of Russian disinformation and propaganda. The study found that nearly 49% of primetime programs broadcast on Belarusian state television originated in Russia. The graph below shows the percentage of Russia-originated primetime programs by channel.

<https://mediaiq.by/article/kak-za-byudzhetye-dengi-v-belarusi-prodvigayut-russkiy-mir-cifry-primery-infografika>

#### Цифры



Following an employee walkout at the Belarusian state broadcaster and several firings of employees accused of supporting the opposition, international news outlets have reported that a large group of Russian media professionals have taken over Belarusian state television at President Lukashenko's request. According to the GEC partner NGO iSANS, "We already see the first results of this work: wild propaganda videos ... with the aim of demonizing Svetlana Tikhanovskaya. In fact, now the role of state TV channels is reduced to inciting violent civil conflict in Belarus."

#### Other major proliferators of Russian disinformation in Belarus include:

- **Sputnik Belarus** – a Belarusian branch of the Russian state-funded Sputnik news agency: <https://sputnik.by> and <https://t.me/sputnikby> and <https://t.me/sputniklive>
- **Komsomolskaya Pravda Belarus** – a Belarusian branch of the Russian pro-Kremlin daily: <https://www.kp.by>
- **SONAR2050** — one of the key promoters of the Union State narrative: <https://www.sonar2050.org>

- **Teleskop** – publishes pro-Union State narratives and materials critical of democratic opposition members and independent media; also fake news of attacks against Russian speakers: <http://teleskop-by.org>
- **IMHOclub Portal** – positions itself as an “open public political discussion club for everyone who cares about the present and the future of Belarus.” Led by individuals with ties to the European right. Its Latvian branch was closed by Latvian security services: <https://imhoclub.by>
- **Aleksey Dzermant** – IMHOclub’s editor-in-chief; pro-Russian and Eurasianist; often appears on Russian state TV: <https://t.me/dzermant>
- **Grodno Daily** – created in February 2018 and hosted in Moscow: <http://grodnodaily.net>
- **Vitbich** – Created in February 2018 and hosted in Moscow. Re-publishes content from Sputnik and pro-Kremlin Telegram channels: <http://vitbich.org/>
- **Nash Gomel** – Hosted in Russia, but purports to be a regional news source: <http://sozh.info>
- **Chesnok** – the site republishes content from Russian propaganda outlets RT, Sputnik and Tsargrad: <https://4esnok.by>
- **Berestye News** – another Moscow-hosted site that poses as a regional news website: <https://berestje-news.org>
- **Pool Pervogo** – an anonymous Telegram channel that mostly reports on Lukashenko’s activities and often publishes Russian propaganda: [https://t.me/pul\\_1](https://t.me/pul_1)
- **Vremya** – news bulletin produced by the Russian state-owned broadcaster Pervyy Kanal. In Belarus it is transmitted each night by Belarusian state-owned channel ONT (Obshchenatsionalnoye televideniye).
- **Vesti** – news bulletin produced by the Russian state-owned broadcaster VGTRK (Vserossiyskaya gosudarstvennaya televizionnaya i radioveshchatelnaya kompaniya). In Belarus it is transmitted each night by the Belarusian state-controlled TV channel RTR-Belarus.
- **Segodnya** – news bulletin produced by the Russian state-controlled broadcaster NTV. In Belarus it is transmitted each night by the Belarusian state-owned channel NTV-Belarus.
- **Panorama** – news bulletin produced and broadcast by the Belarusian state-owned channel Belarus 1.
- **Nashi Novosti** – news bulletin produced and broadcast by the Belarusian state-owned channel ONT.
- **24 Chasa** – news bulletin produced and broadcast by the Belarusian state-controlled channel STV.
- **BelGazeta** – weekly newspaper whose ownership structure is not in the public domain but is known to belong to the same group of Russian shareholders as Komsomolskaya Pravda v Belorussii.
- **Argumenty i Fakty v Belorussii** – belongs/ed to the PromSvyazCapital group controlled by Russian businessmen brothers Dmitriy and Aleksey Ananyev.

## Regional Internet Sites

Since late 2015, Russian institutions have developed an active policy of launching regional internet platforms mimicking authentic local websites. The phenomenon is studied by Belarusian researchers and journalists. According to *Nasha Niva*, in some cases, (e.g., Homel), such platforms have managed to attract numbers of users comparable to those of regional state-owned internet media. Researchers and journalists have learned that the owners and authors behind these “new wave” platforms can be either citizens of Russia or Belarus, but share radically pro-Russian views, and many also share far-right sentiments. Sources of funding remain largely unclear; this likely indicates unofficial funding by state-owned or state-controlled Russian sources.

These websites can be split into two major groups. One group (including sozh.info, berestje-news.org, vitbich.org, mogilew.by and 4esnok.by) positions itself as local or national Belarusian sites. Some of them indeed are Belarusian, although they often promote anti-nationalist and anti-Western narratives similar to Russian media. Deeper organizational and financial ties with Russia are possible. For the sake of attracting traffic, they do not focus exclusively on political news; they offer varying amounts of such content. These websites tend to feature hate speech and traditionalist ideology typical of Russian nationalism, such as anti-LGBTQ discrimination. They also participate in disinformation campaigns.

The other major group of websites (teleskop-by.org, ross-bel.ru, imperiyanews.ru and other sites including social media platforms) is openly pro-Russian. These sites promote an ideology of West-Russism (*zapadnorusizm*), which holds that the Belarusian people do not constitute a separate nation; instead they form part of the “triune Russian people” comprising Russians, Belarusians and Ukrainians. These sites also seek to “unmask pro-Western agents” in Belarus, criticize displays of Belarusian national identity, and generally align with mainstream Russian nationalist narratives.

GEC partner NGO iSans proposed the following classification:

1. The most aggressive sources that exclusively focus on Belarusian topics, publish their own disinformation and propaganda, and frequently use ethnic slurs: Вместе с Россией / Ross-bel.ru, Teleskop, Sozh, Vitbich, Berestje-News, GrodnoDaily, Mogilew.by, Podneprovie-Info, Imhoclub.by, Dranik, Politring.
2. Sites propagating disinformation from other sources, without using ethnic slurs: 4esnok, Sonar2050, Друзья-сябры, Sputnik Беларусь, Belvpo, Vesti24, EADaily, Regnum.
3. Russian sources that do not focus on Belarus exclusively, but do frequently post materials on Belarus. Some have a separate Belarus-focused section: РИА ФАН, ИА 3, REX, Politrivator, Oko-Planet, News-Front, Ukraina.ru, Materik, Topwar, Ruskline, Cont.ws, Fondsk.su, Rusvesna, Rubaltic.

4. Sites that are fully or partially dedicated to Belarus and regularly post material propagating disinformation and propaganda but are less popular and rarely produce their own content: Rosbelsoyuz, Inspect.by, Vitrusdom, Soglasie, Mogilew.net, Mogilew.org, Mogilew.com, ImperiyaNews.

Source: iSans, "КАРДИНАЛЬНЫЕ ПЕРЕМЕНЫ В АНТИБЕЛОРУССКОЙ ДЕЗИНФОРМАЦИИ И ПРОПАГАНДЕ: АНАЛИЗ КОЛИЧЕСТВЕННЫХ И КАЧЕСТВЕННЫХ ИЗМЕНЕНИЙ", <http://east-center.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Belarus-Disinformation-Propaganda-2019-RU.pdf>

**Pro-Kremlin Telegram Channels that Post on Belarus:**

<https://telegram.me/golosmordora>

<https://t.me/bobakovtimoshkin/1820>

<https://t.me/gazetaru>

[https://t.me/tass\\_agency](https://t.me/tass_agency)

<https://t.me/politjoystic/15906>

<https://t.me/politjoystic/15888>

<https://t.me/kremlinprachka/9336>

<https://t.me/maester/1595>

<https://t.me/mediatech/10222>

<https://t.me/polkovnik/224>

[https://t.me/the\\_diletant/2177](https://t.me/the_diletant/2177)

<https://t.me/wargonzo/3189>

<https://t.me/Dragonandbear>



# GEC Russian Disinformation Trends on Ukraine

## Disinformation Overview

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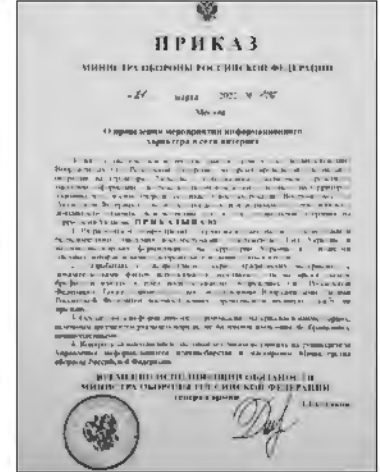
Check [www.state.gov/disarming-disinformation](http://www.state.gov/disarming-disinformation) for the latest State Department public releases on countering Russia's disinformation on Ukraine.

**RUSSIA INCREASES COVERAGE OF WHAT IT ALLEGES ARE UKRAINIAN ATROCITIES:** Russia's disinformation and propaganda ecosystem has increased its coverage of what it alleges are Ukrainian atrocities committed against Russian forces (see bottom right). Russian officials, state media, and outlets tied to Russia's intelligence services have all amplified and spun *unconfirmed* claims that the Ukrainian Armed Forces have engaged in the torture of POWs. Ukrainian Presidential Advisor Oleksiy Arestovych denounced the behavior, if true, while Russian sources and unverified videos on social media push the claims alongside "anti-fascist" rhetoric. While the GEC cannot confirm the veracity of Russia's claims due to fog of war, the coupling of these allegations with known Russian disinformation narratives suggest that some of these claims and videos may be partially false or outright fabrications. Readers should be cautious of potential fabrications by unknown actors to bolster or deny such allegations (see top right).

**BIOLOGICAL LABS & FALSE WEAPONS NARRATIVES STRIKE SENSITIVE CHORDS:** Russia's disinformation ecosystem has recently overwhelmingly covered and spun narratives alleging notable U.S. companies and persons, such as Burisma Holdings, funded military biological research laboratories in Ukraine. Even if said companies and persons engaged in the partial funding of these *non-military* bio-labs, the Kremlin, MOD, MFA, Rospotrebnadzor (consumer watchdog), Sputnik, RT, and Russian proxy sites linked to the SVR, FSB, and GRU have all falsely alleged that specific entities have ties to military biological laboratories in Ukraine. Russian MFA Spokeswoman Zakharova used the term "BioBiden" in her lengthy Telegram post featuring the narratives. These claims have been covered in Western media outlets. In addition to this new narrative on bio-labs, Secretary of Russia's Security Council Nikolay Patrushev made yet another sensitive false claim: that the United States' bio

## Beware of Potential Forgeries: Russian MOD Propaganda Decree

The hacking group Anonymous posted what it describes as a "leaked document from Russia" allegedly detailing a Russian MOD decree supposedly signed by "Interim Minister of Defense" to develop and produce materials detailing the "inhumane behavior" of the Ukrainian Armed Forces. The document emerged shortly after Ukrainian forces were accused of violence against Russian POWs. Given the unknown providence of this document, as well as spelling errors (such as the correct "обязанности" vs. "обязаности") and a lack of confirmation that Deputy Minister of Defense Dmitry Bulgakov is serving as Interim Minister of Defense (strangely, instead of First Dep. MinDef Gerasimov or Tsalikov). Several parties, including Anonymous itself, could have motives for producing this *potential* forgery, but regardless of who is responsible, counter-disinformation practitioners should exercise caution when citing such documents.



## Russian Digital Media Increases Coverage of Alleged Ukrainian Violence

Russian digital media mentions of "torture" or "cruel treatment" of Russian forces spiked significantly following the initial March 27 appearance on social media of unconfirmed video depicting alleged Ukrainian violence against Russian POWs.

