

Russian Disinfo Patterns: Rape Accusations

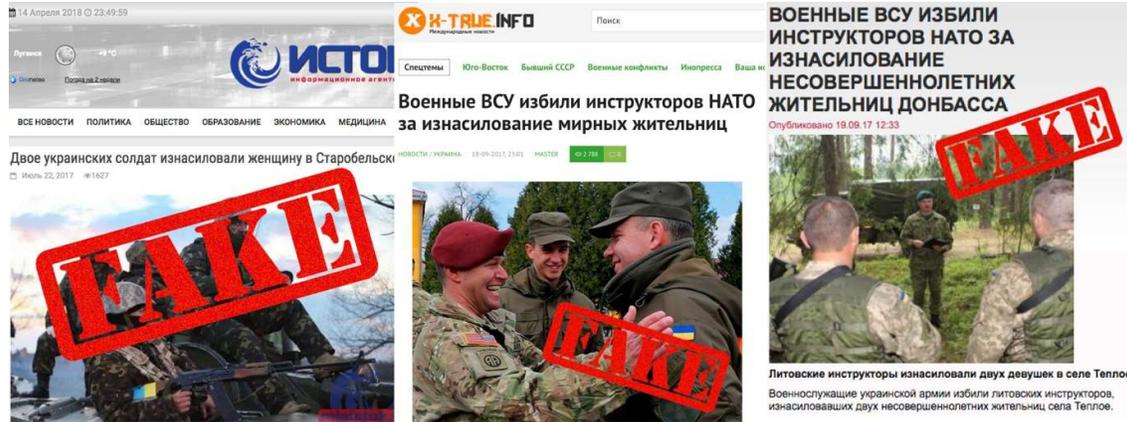


Image Source – [NewsFront](#), [topnews.ru](#), [x-true.info](#).

The current Russian information warfare comes in many shapes and forms. Some of the methods involve highly contemporary technology, such as bots and hackers, others rely on emotional narratives. Vilnius Institute for Policy Analysis already presented how Russia is using Nazism narrative in the Baltic States, which is deeply connected with Russian historical identity and emotions, this time we are looking into a new pattern of disinformation – accusations of rape. The trend that started as the Lisa story in Germany, keeps reappearing in the region, followed by instances in Lithuania and Ukraine. These stories are usually debunked very fast, but the emotionally charged stories usually do damage faster than it can be controlled. These stories have similarities to the crucifixion narratives in Ukraine, nonetheless they are more believable and much more common. VIPA analyzed the recurring patterns of soldier rape narrative, it's reach in the social media and the possible results it reaches. Here is what we found.

The Original Lisa Case

The very first fake viral story regarding this narrative appeared in Germany. The 13-year-old Russian-German girl named Lisa had gone missing for 30 hours and was reported by Channel One Russia to have been raped by migrants. This fake case of Lisa dominated the German public discussion for a couple of weeks on January, 2016. [The story](#) turned out to be fake but was intensively reported in Russian domestic and foreign media, and ended in diplomatic tensions between Germany and Russia. Here is how the story was unfolded:



The unfolding of the 'Lisa case' story from the Russian side.

The media storm that surrounded the fake story of a raped girl in Germany served as a wake up call for Germany and the Western countries. After this event, for the first time it was clearly seen how the links between Russia's domestic and foreign media information campaigns work and what impact can it bring. The rape narrative, proven to be very successful and effective, was used rather frequently ever since. Here are some other examples on how it was used in the region.

Lithuanian Lisa Case

The following attempt to use the narrative for diplomatic tension building happened in Lithuania on February 14, 2017. Only a few days after the German Enhanced Forward Presence (EFP) were [stationed](#) in Rukla, Lithuania, a similar story targeted them. Emails claiming that German soldiers had raped an underage Lithuanian girl were sent to the Chairman of the Lithuanian parliament and various Lithuanian media outlets. Even the local pro-Russian outlets in Lithuania and the Baltics responded by admitting this fake story, such as Vesti.lv and BaltNews.lt.

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«Меня изнасиловали немецкие солдаты» — новая тема телефонных хулиганов в Литве

Литва новостей
 С избирателями — только на литовском
 Праздник испортил настроение
 Игры-2018: волонтерские страдания
 16 вещей в доме, которые каждый день портят вам настроение
 Как распознать и остановить манипуляцию
 Нацбанк и «Единство» готовят очередную подлость против русского избирателя
 Иглоукальвание набирает популярность в ветеринарии
 Шенген и вино хороши в борьбе с сердечно-сосудистыми заболеваниями
 США призывают уничтожить Донбасс
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Attempts to promote fake rape news in Lithuania. Image Sources – baltnews.lt, vesti.lv

Meanwhile, the main Lithuanian [media-outlets](#) cold-headedly responded to this provocation with investigative journalism articles. Lithuanian Ministry of Defense released a public statement explaining the situation, Czech General Petr Pavel, head of NATO's military committee, got out ahead of Lithuanian investigators and [blamed](#) the incident on Moscow. The story fell flat before it was able to inflict any damage. Due to effective and timely responses the Russian media was unable to amplify the story and it went basically unnoticed in Russian media and on Russian social-media.

Lithuanian Instructors in Ukraine

Another story that touched upon Lithuania allegedly happened in Ukraine. Only this time, Lithuanian soldiers were claimed to be the ones who raped underage girls. This story received relative success with the domestic Russian-speaking audience. At one of the press conferences media representative - Colonel Andrej Marochko, of the so-called “Luhansk People’s Republic” claimed that three Lithuanian military instructors serving in eastern Ukraine raped two underage girls. This alleged incident took place in the village of Teploe, Luhansk district on September 12.

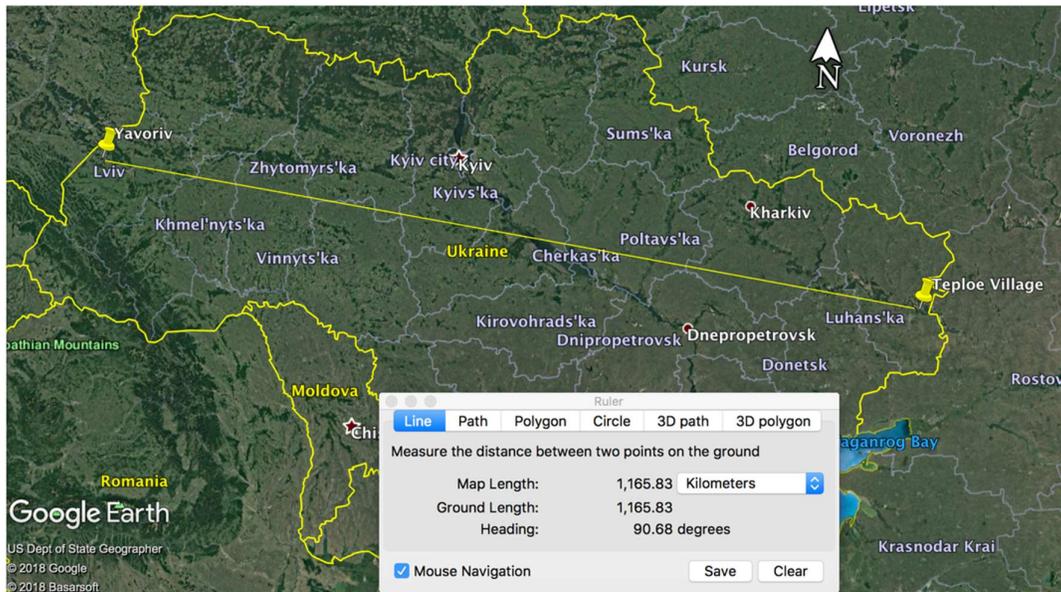
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tBsnpkgyjsl>

Video report of an alleged rape. Video Source – YouTube

According to Colonel Marochko, the local police advised both victims to keep their mouths shut about this event. He also claimed that upset the locals and Ukrainian Armed Forces soldiers turned to violence against the accused Lithuanian military instructors. According to the Colonel, this incident showed the true face of the foreign aid that Lithuania and other NATO countries are providing. Articles supporting the story went even further with their statements. Komsomolskaya Pravda in their article claimed, that Lithuanians do not count

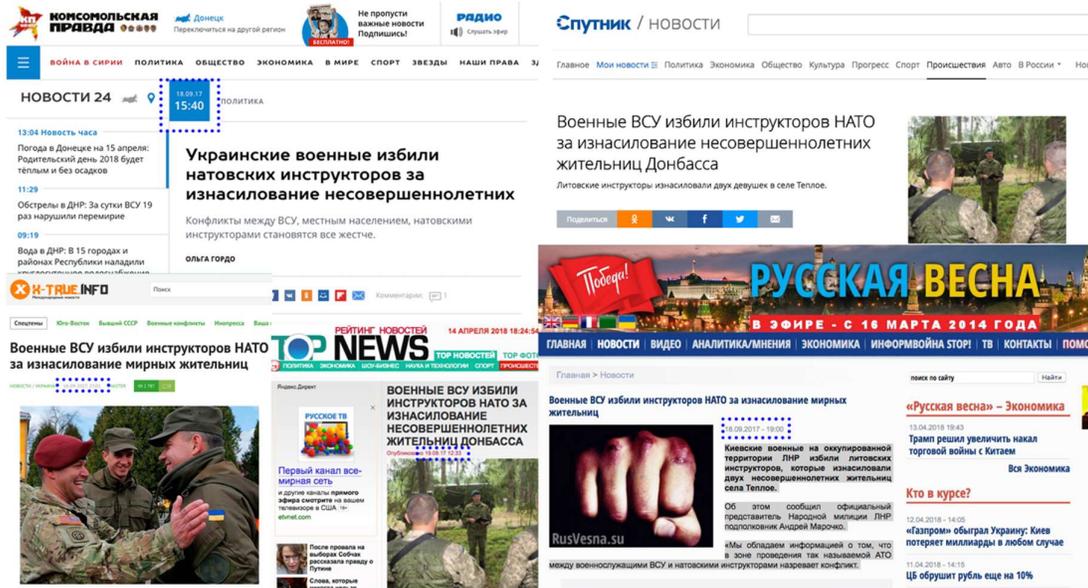
Donbas inhabitants as people and Top News argued that foreign powers (NATO) are carrying out a genocide against the locals.

This story had no proof, neither it had logic behind it. Lithuanian instructors that came to train Ukrainian troops were [stationed](#) at Yavoriv Combat Training Center in Lviv district. No Lithuanian troops ever [took part in the ATO](#) and were stationed more than 1000 kilometers away from the alleged crime scene.



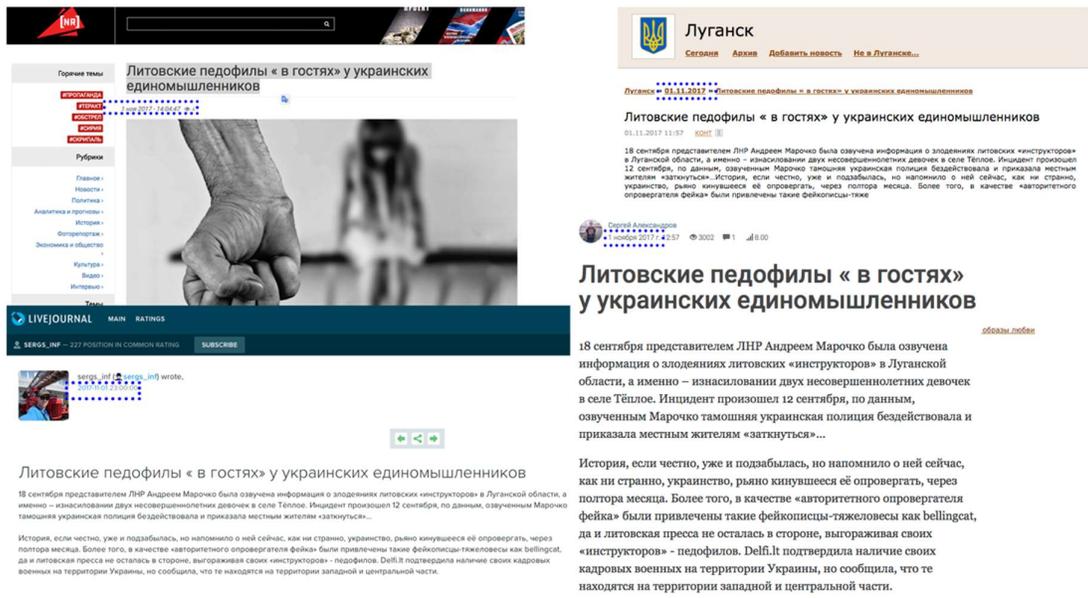
Approximate distance between military base where Lithuanian troops are based and the village where the rape allegedly took place. Image Source – GoogleMaps.

Despite that this fake story was not picked up by Ukrainian or Western countries' media, pro-Kremlin media did their best to promote it. The first wave of promotion took place on September 18, and involved even bigger Russian media-outlets, such as [Regnum](#) and [Komsomolskaya Pravda](#).



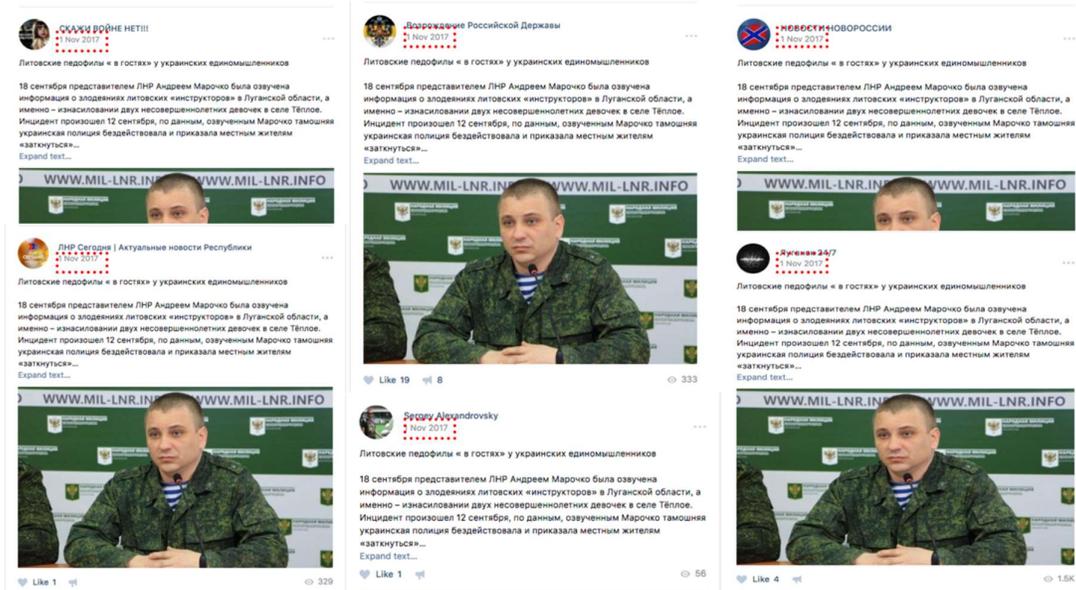
Info attack on media outlets and blogs, September 18, 2017. Image Sources – topnews.ru, x-true.info, sputnik.news, rusvesna.su, kp.ru

Interestingly, the story resurfaced again more than a month later, on November 1. Few minor media outlets, together with various blogs and other websites published the same story while counter-attacking the Western media claims about the story being fake. Lithuanian news-portal Delfi and investigative research team Bellingcat were mentioned as trying to cover up the story.



Info attack on media outlets and blogs, November 1, 2017. Image Sources – Novorossia.su, sergs.inf, cont.ws, 123ru.net

Differently from the September 18 amplification, this time the story also received a push on Russian social media – VK. A large number of identical or slightly similar posts claiming the same facts as the published articles or just promoting them.



Info attack on VK, November 1, 2017. Image Sources – [VK Search](#)

Ukrainian Soldiers in Donbas

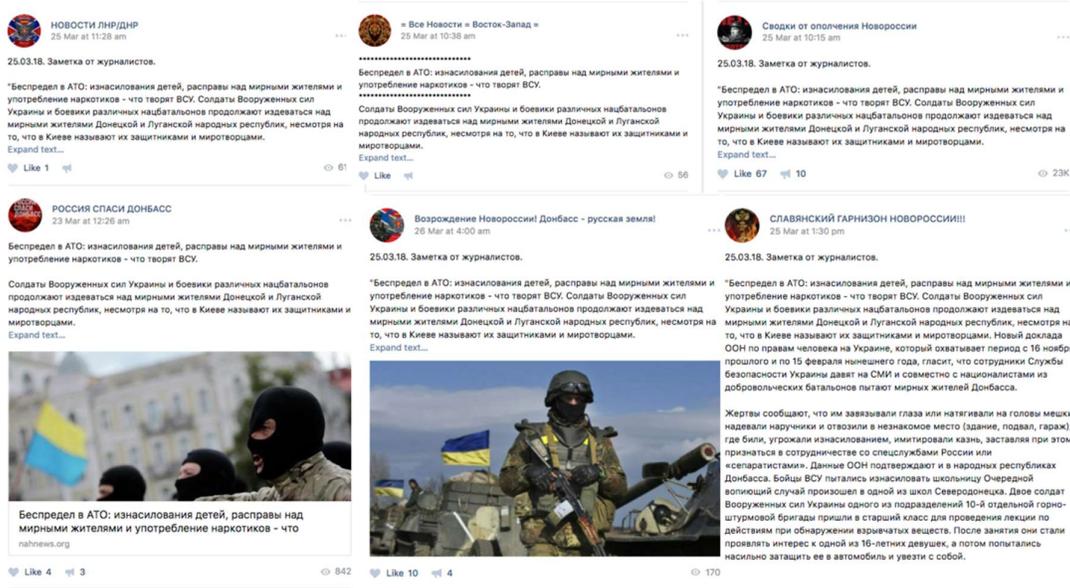
The rape narrative towards Ukrainian soldiers is very common place on Russian social media. New false stories pop-up regularly achieving limited results.

One of the latest examples happened on March 21, 2018, during the recent press conferences of the so-called “Luhansk People’s Republic”. Colonel Marochko claimed that Ukrainian soldiers gave a lecture in one of the schools in Western Donbas about detecting explosives. Allegedly, after the lecture, two Ukrainian soldiers tried to force a 16-year-old schoolgirl into the car and take her with them. Marochko continued to argue that these soldiers wanted to rape the girl, but she was rescued by her classmates. Allegedly, after the incident, Ukrainian servicemen tried to convince the witnesses that they had no bad motives and were not going to take the girl away, and also demanded not to spread this fact.

https://vk.com/video383272206_456239380?list=874641d62b1fac78cb

Video report claiming that Russian soldiers tried to rape a schoolgirl. Video Source – YouTube

The story appeared on VK in a large number of different posts. Most of the posts however failed to reach big audiences, judging by the views and likes on the posts.



Accusation towards Ukrainian troops trying to rape 16-year-old school girl. Image Sources – [VK Search](#)

It can be clearly observed that a few different posts were made and cross-promoted, by troll accounts. These posts re-told the Marochko’s argument, promoted articles in fringe social media regarding the story and sparked limited hate filled discussions in the comments section.



Accusation towards Ukrainian troops trying to rape 16-year-old school girl. Image Sources – [VK Search](#)

More of these bold accusations towards Ukrainian troops can be easily found online. As these narratives tend to become less successful in the Western Media, they are turned more on the local audiences.

The screenshot shows the website 'ИСТОК' (Istok) with a news article. The article title is 'Двое украинских солдат изнасиловали женщину в Старобельске' (Two Ukrainian soldiers raped a woman in Starobelsk). The article text describes a case where a woman was raped by two Ukrainian soldiers in Starobelsk. The text includes details about the incident, the woman's account, and the involvement of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the LNR. The article is dated July 22, 2017.

Accusations of Ukrainian troops raping women. [Ministry of Internal Affairs of LNR, mialstok.ru](http://mialstok.ru)

Conclusions

Rape is a very serious crime and should be addressed seriously, but Russian media seem to be using this seriousness in information warfare to achieve certain goals. These stories tend to serve a simple purpose of alienate local population against the soldiers, especially foreigners. Usually these stories have no evidence to back-up the claims and even use the same generic pictures to support the posts and articles. As effective as these narratives might be at first, with time they become less effective, especially as used in the same repetitive manner. It is important to know the recurring fake hostile narratives, as the knowledge of the maneuvers help to react swiftly and effectively. A certain decline in the trustworthiness of these stories can be observed. The Lisa case took Berlin by surprise in January 2016, but only a year later a similar story was effectively stopped before it could do any damage in Lithuania. Rape accusations will continue to appear as a very emotionally charged narrative, nonetheless they should be taken with a grain of salt, as even the big Russian media-outlets seem to be using these fake accusations. Untangling Russian narratives and disinfo-patterns is crucial as these show no signs of disappearing any time soon.

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