RUSSIAN PROPAGANDA EFFORTS IN THE BALTICS AND THE WIDER REGION

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Since early 2010s, Russia stepped into the whole new level of propaganda game. Varying in forms and shapes, Russia's propaganda continues to be displayed in advancement of all the ongoing conflicts as well as targeting closest Eastern European countries or NATO allies. Despite that it is prospering and has advanced considerably through the past years, yet still has its noticeable tendencies. Five clear strategies that Russia seems to be following while building up its approach to propaganda, such as spread of propaganda on as many various channels as possible or making the disinformation opportunistic, have been distinguished in the paper. Based on different real examples taken from the Russian campaign, this paper is structured for the best possible exposure of different techniques used in clash between artificial facts presented by the Russian and the real facts. In accordance with the main tactics implemented by Russia, five reasoned recommendations to counterstrike fake reality, development of national narratives and strong national institution for strategic communication being great examples, are presented as well. In spite of inability to completely avoid or stop the spread of developing Kremlin propaganda, numerous measures might be taken to diminish the impact of propaganda and to avoid dramatic consequences.

INTRODUCTION

It dates back to 2008, if not even before that, to the well known Georgia-Russia conflict. Not only the remarkably grown influence over Georgia made it special to Russia: hardly concealable changes in Russia's approach to its propaganda took the stage. And… has never left it ever since. Most clearly propaganda was demonstrated during the annexation of the Crimean peninsula back in 2014 but it didn't confine itself there: Russia's propaganda continues to be displayed in advancement of all the ongoing conflicts as well as targeting closest Eastern European countries or NATO allies.

The ongoing Russian information warfare comes in many different shapes and forms. Despite the fact that Russia's approach to propaganda still at least partly builds on techniques of Soviet Cold War era (active front organizations, agents of influence, fake stories in non-Soviet Media, forgeries, etc.[1]), the country has taken an obvious advantage of technology and brought the propaganda to whole other level. Now it is prospering, yet still has its noticeable tendencies. It is possible to distinguish five clear strategies that Russia might follow while building up its approach to propaganda. It is really important to note that a story can fit to more than one of the criteria listed below. This paper is based on different real examples taken from the Russian campaign and is structured for the best possible exposure of different techniques used in clash between the facts presented by Russia and the real facts. Five main characteristics that Russia follows throughout its spread of modified truth starts with repetition. Old Latin proverb states that "repetition is the mother of learning" and it seems like Kremlin follows it well.

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[1] Nicholas J. Cull, et al. "Soviet Subversion, Disinformation and Propaganda: How the West Fought Against it An Analytic History, with Lessons for the Present"; The London School of Economic and Political Science, 1-8, 2017 http://www.lse.ac.uk/iga/assets/documents/arena/2018/Soviet-Subversion-and-Propaganda-how-the-west-thought-against-it.pdf.

1. Kremlin Disinformation is Repetitive: Very Same Stories Appear in Totally Different Coutries

As the Kremlin propaganda does not have to reason with real life events or the reality itself, the same messages often appear to be cross-promoted. The ability not to check facts, or verify their arguments, allows the Kremlin propagandists to react swiftly and present the messages in correspondence to the occurring events faster than some of the legitimate sources. Shortly, the lack of its commitment to objective reality — thing, which should not be taken for granted by any means, while talking about spreading news worldwide — makes Russian propaganda very responsive. Furthermore, once an effective narrative is found, it can be applied and reapplied numerous times to various nations, events or times, depending on when it is needed the most. The repetitiveness can also be treated as information recycling, as exactly the same patterns of the stories would reaper almost unchanged in different countries, talking about the same countries or even in the same countries themselves. Despite that Kremlin does not put a huge effort to adjust stories to the desired context, it still manages to bring relatively huge success. It is mostly based on scientifically tested relations between constant repetition, feeling of familiarity and finally — acceptance[2]. The more times audience hears the same fact, the less people tend to question it and rate it more valid and believable compared to the new statements. Perfect combination between high responsiveness and constant repetiti-veness allows Kremlin propaganda to bribe more and more people throughout the time.

1.1. The Rape Narrative

In addition to the simplest methods, some of the messages that start spreading from Kremlin involve highly contemporary technology – bots or hacker attacks, to mention the least. Others rely mainly on emotional narratives. While considering specifically the Baltic States case, Kremlin is often using Nazism narrative, which is deeply connected with Russian historical identity and call out strong emotions. Another proven accelerant topic for emotions is the accusations of rape.

These stories tend to serve a simple purpose of alienating local population against the soldiers, especially foreigners. Most of the time 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 seem to be at the first glance, eventually they become less effective, especially as used in the same repetitive manner. This so called trend started with The Lisa story — case that took Berlin by surprise in January 2016, when a 13-year-old Russian-German girl was announced missing and reported by Channel One Russia to have been raped by migrants[3]. This fake story was in the very center of German public discussions for a couple of weeks and even after being reported as fictional, it was still intensively reported in both foreign and domestic Russian media.

As the narrative was proven to be a very successful and effective tool, it was brought to attention quite frequently ever

[2] Jean-Charles Chebat, Michel Laroche, Daisy Baddoura, and Pierre Filiatrault (1992) ,"Effects of Source Likability on Attitude Change Through Message Repetition", in NA - Advances in Consumer Research Volume 19, eds. John F. Sherry, Jr. and Brian Sternthal, Provo, UT: Association for Consumer Research, Pages: 353-358.

[3] Andriukaitis L., "Russian Disinfo Patterns: Rape Accusations", Vilnius Institute for Policy Analysis for Integrity Initiative, 2018 https://vilniusin-stitute.lt/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/10-Rape-Accusations.pdf.

[4] Ibid.

WHO'S DOMINATING THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE SPACE?

**Most Engaged With Media Content:
'NATO Baltic States' Jul 21, 2016 – Jul 21, 2018**

Legend:
- Number of Articles Published
- Total Engagements
- Estimated Total Engagements
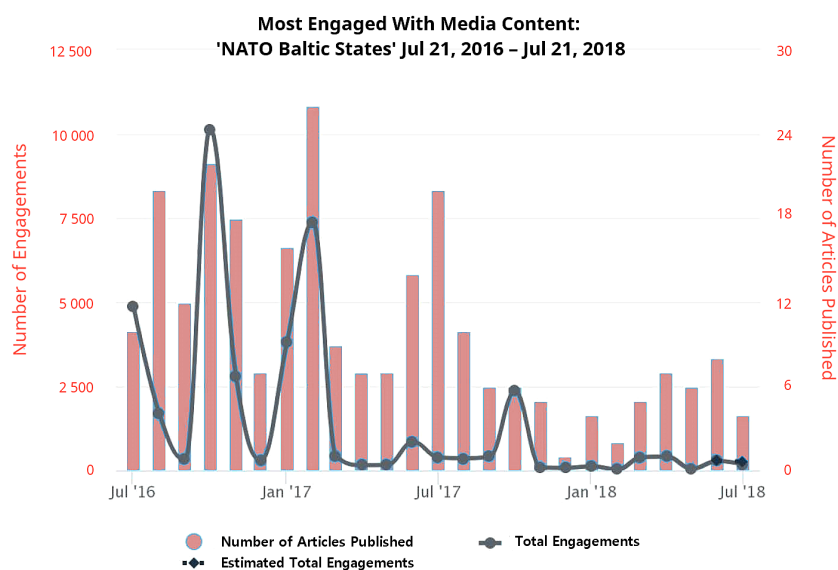
The Russian annexation of Crimea and invasion into Eastern Ukraine in 2014 served as a wake-up call for NATO countries. Not only had it helped to understand the threats of hybrid warfare, but also to rally public support for increase in NATO defense measures. One of the most successfully implemented measures were the Enhanced Forward Presence Battalions on the Eastern NATO flank. As a result, Kremlin again turned to information warfare methods to counter these measures by trying to turn local populations against the troops and donor countries to lose faith in the idea. Articles and posts regarding NATO in the Baltic countries were investigated to see who dominates the public space in the English language. Russian state funded media outlets are playing an exceptionally big role in forming public opinions in English speaking digital space[5].

since the Lisa case. For instance, the following attempt to use this specific narrative was noticed in Lithuanian, just one year later. Luckily, emerging story was effectively stopped before it could do any serious damage in Lithuania[4]. Rape accusations are believed to continue appearing to be a very emotionally charged narrative. Fortunately, a certain decline in the trustworthiness of these stories can be observed. Nonetheless they should be taken with a grain of salt, because even the big Russian media outlets seem to be using these fake, yet very serious accusations. Untangling Russian narratives and disinfo-patterns is crucial as these show no signs of disappe-

aring any time soon. It is important to know the recurring fake hostile narratives, as the knowledge of the maneuvers help to react swiftly and effectively.

1.2. EFP Soldiers' Coverage in the Baltics

Considering repetitive Kremlin disinformation, cases of Enhanced Forward Presence (EFP) troops are worth mentioning. All three Baltic states and Poland each received a multinational battalion of NATO troops strengthening the vulnerable Eastern flank and making it a hard nut to crack for the Kremlin. It led to major Krem-

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5 Ibid.

THE OUTREACH OF SPUTNIK NEWS
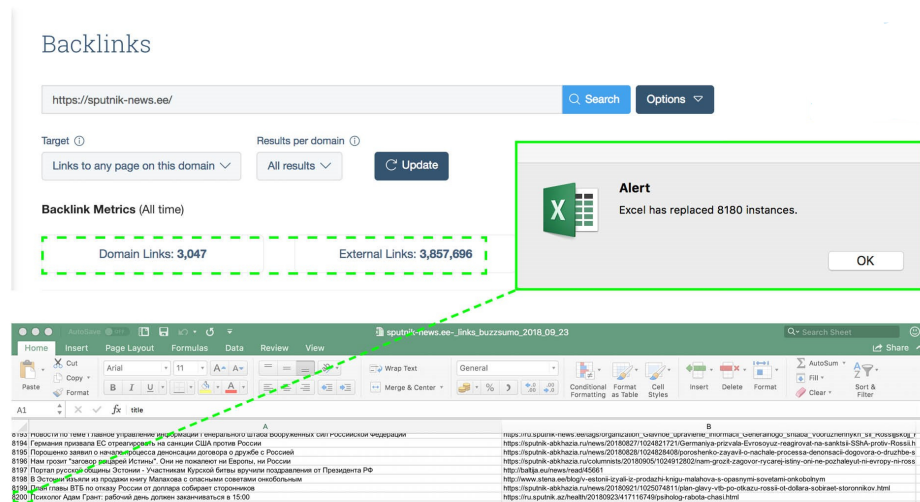
Since their launch in the Baltic region in 2016, local Sputnik News outlets were unable to reach large popularity. The outreach of Sputnik News and RT have been long debated amongst experts. The investigation of the backlinks leading to these websites was required and some interesting patterns appeared as most of the backlinks leading to the Baltic Sputnik News websites were from other Sputnik News websites. Backlink Analysis reveals that vast majority of the backlinks of the Baltic states Sputnik News consists of other Sputnik News domains[7].

lin efforts trying to turn local populations against the troops and donor countries to reject the idea. Russia used information warfare methods to counter the successful implementation of the troops[6]. Media content in regard to NATO in the three Baltic states was closely analyzed. After using such keywords as 'NATO Lithuania', 'NATO Latvia', 'NATO Estonia' and 'NATO Baltic States', the analysis revealed that all of these keywords had exceptionally high Russian media influence. Furthermore, not only the engagement was unnaturally high, but also the content had a critical stance of NATO. A gradual build-up can be observed, reaching its very peak in February of 2017, when first EFP soldiers reached the Baltic states. The peak was followed by a slow decline in the reporting and engagement, because this pattern suggests a possible

well thought through informational operation with obvious preparation and systematic execution.

Another important EFP-related observation worth mentioning is that none of the most engaged with outlets were of local Baltic origin. It brings the conclusion, that the countries actually hosting the EFP troops are not even involved in forming pubic opinion in most used NATO language[8], while Russian state funded media outlets are playing an exceptionally big role in spreading the news on NATO topics that, not surprisingly, are highly negative most of the times.

2. Kremlin Disinformation is Spread on Various Channels

Another great feature of Russian propaganda is that it is produced in exceedingly

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[6] Andriukaitis L., "NATO Coverage in The Baltic States: Who's Dominating the English Language Space?", Vilnius Institute for Policy Analysis for Intefrity Initiative, 2018, https://vilniusinstitute.lt/wp-content/uplo-ads/2019/07/7-NATO-Coverage-in-the-Baltic-States.pdf.

[7] Andriukaitis L., "Baltic Sputnik News Interests Only Other Sputnik News" 2018 https://vilniusinstitute.lt/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/5-Baltic-Sputnik-News.pdf.

[8] Andriukaitis, "NATO Coverage in The Baltic States: Who's Dominating the English Language Space?",
https://vilniusinstitute.lt/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/7-NATO-Cove-rage-in-the-Baltic-States.pdf.

YOUTH CAMP "SOYUZ"

In late 2014 Lithuanian society was alerted about a propagandist mane-uver to indoctrinate the young members of Lithuanian Russian-speaking community by sending them to Russian military youth camps. The camp emphasizes military routine, cultural and educational programs. And this is where the main danger comes from – the Russian official historical narratives are not objective. Children competing in military games and completing tasks with weapons[9].

large quantities and disseminated through the variety of channels. The propaganda can be spread in numerous ways: in form of text, video, images, social media posts, social media comments, television, radio, etc. The same propaganda messages are usually spread through different channels that complement each other in spreading the story. It cannot be unnoticed that Kremlin uses very creative approaches and experiment in new ways to achieve their information goals. Kremlin's propaganda and information operations use a model, which Atlantic Council's DFRLab identifies as full spectrum propaganda model, which spans social, traditional media, and other means of information[10]. Some of the channels that Kremlin uses are overt and official, others are covert and claim to be independent, or are created for a certain purpose. Many different channels are being used together in order to manipulate the audience, as it makes one believe that many voices share the same stances on different platforms.

2.1. Sputnik in FB Pages

Widely known Kremlin propaganda outlet Sputnik News is active not only in the form of media outlets, but also on social media. As the efficiency and the outreach of Sputnik News in other regions remains debatable, it is necessary to point out that the Baltic branches of the outlet are not reaching results desired by Kremlin[11]. Despite that, the analysis of 7+1 Facebook pages in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland revealed some interesting trends: in all of the countries the Russian language groups were far more popular than then ones in the local language. Even if these Facebook groups seem to be harmless, they should be treated with great caution. These groups, especially the Russian language pages, have significant number of followers relative to the small the Baltic States.

According to the analysis made at DFRLab[12], vast majority of the backlinks (99,39% – 99,75%) of the Baltic states Sputnik News backlinks consist of other Sputnik News domains. This is a highly unnatural result for a news website, to say the least. It suggests that the outlet itself simulates the traffic to these websites. This finding reveals that these websites are not only lacking readers, but also fail to attract attention from other websites and outlets. Out of all different disinformation warfare tactics that Kremlin is using in the Baltic states, Sputnik News would most likely rank not on the top of the list. According to its founder Dimitri Kiselyov, Sputnik News mission is to "speak about what others keep quiet about", but apparently disinformation they are trying to foist does not

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[9] Lukas Andriukaitis "Russian Military Camps for Lithuanian Children", Vilnius Institute for Policy Analysis for Intefrity Initiative, 2018.

[10] Ben Nimmo, Senior Fellow for Information Defense at the Atlantic Council's Digital Forensic Research Lab, "Russia's Full Spectrum Propaganda", DFRLab, 2018 https://medium.com/dfrlab/russias-full-spectrum-propaganda-9436a246e970.

[11] Andriukaitis L., "Baltic Sputnik News ...".

[12] Lukas Andriukaitis. "Baltic Sputnik News ...".

ACCUSED OF SOMETHING?
ACCUSE SOMEONE ELSE OF THE SAME THING!

NATO is to blame for Kaliningrad's armament with top-notch aerial denial weaponry. In March 2019, Russian Armed Forces reportedly stationed another unit of S-400 missile systems in Kaliningrad. The continuous armament of the Kaliningrad exclave has the goal of challenging NATO's and especially U.S. air superiority in the region, rendering it inaccessible for both NATO and Russia. Yet, as the tiny Russian exclave in Europe continues to be militarized, Kremlin juxtaposes criticism of the Western countries by their own narrative. Likely geolocation of the new S-400 unit in Kaliningrad[13].

really interest the Baltic audiences or other websites.

2.2. Russian Military Camps

While trying out as many different channels as possible, Kremlin targeted the youth for spreading its influence. In late 2014 a scandal made headlines in Lithuania[14] that young Lithuanian Russian-speaking students are being sent to Russian military youth camps. This incident reached attention both of the highest government officials and the intelligence community in Lithuania[15]. Lithuanian society was alerted and saw this as a propagandist maneuver to indoctrinate the young member of Lithuanian Russian-speaking community. The camp Soyuz, Nasledniki Pobedy (RU: Союз, Наследники Победы; EN: The Union, The Heirs of the Victory) invited students from the post-Soviet countries to come for a 10 day sports and educational program, highly emphasizing military routine, cultural and educational aspects.

In their official webpage camps are described as "*an International Youth Educational Event of Military Sports Organizations and Cadet Corps. The program of patriotic education, developed by Afghanistan's veterans, was recognized by the authorities of Russian Federation and its allies, but was condemned by some members of NATO*"[16]. Lithuanian government decided to take soft measures against this propagandist threat, by urging teachers to think twice before sending the students to these events. In 2017, the mayor of Plungė (town in Western part of Lithuania) publicly apologized[17] for allowing Lithuanian-speaking students to go to one of these camps. Despite the public apologies, it is clear that Kremlin once again found a grey zone to manipulate in without activating the state's judiciary system.

[13] Andriukaitis L., "Russian Disinfo Patterns: NATO Is to Blame For Kaliningrad's Militarization", Vilnius Institute for Policy Analysis for Intefrity Initiative, 2018, https://vilniusinstitute.lt/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Russian-Disinfo-Patterns.pdf

[14] Kasnikovksytė M., "Akmenės paaugliai siunčiami į stovyklą Rusijoje: ketina reklamuoti Lietuvą" ,TV3.lt, 2018 https://www.tv3.lt/naujiena/lietuva/969794/akmenes-paaugliai-siunciami-i-stovykla-rusijoje-ketina-reklamuoti-lietuva.

[15] L.rytas news, "Saugumas: į Rusijos stovyklas mokinius siunčia daugiau mokyklų`", 2014, https://tv.lrytas.lt/zinios/lietuvos-diena/2014/10/13/news/saugumas-i-rusijos-stovyklas-mokinius-siuncia-daugiau-mokyklu-175940/.
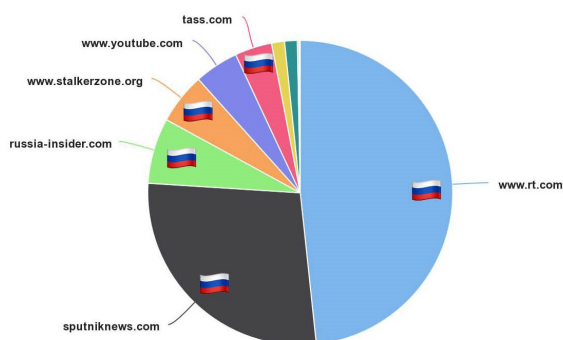
[16] "Солдаты России", http://www.soldatru.ru/game_sbor/game.php?id=11.

[17] 15min.lt, "Plungės meras teisinasi dėl skandalingos jaunimo kelionės į Rusiją: įvyko klaida", 2017 https://www.15min.lt/naujiena/aktualu/lietuva/plunges-meras-teisinasi-del-skandalingos-jaunimo-keliones-i-rusija-ivyko-klaida-56-828050?

THE BEST DEFENSE IS A GOOD OFFENSE

Most Engaged With Media Content: 'Russophobic'
Top Domains on All Networks / Aug 22, 2016 – Aug 22, 2018

	Facebook	Twitter	Pinterest	Reddit	Total Engagements
rt.com	5 624	1 658	7	29	7 318
sputniknews.com	3 278	892	2	20	4 192
russia-insider.com	961	94	0	0	1 055

Russian disinfo patterns were investigated, while checking different defensive keywords that constantly appear in Kremlin-funded media, to see their scope of outreach and their effectiveness. Analysis reveals that pro-Kremlin outlets are dominating when it comes to defensive keywords, suggesting a systematic Kremlin's approach. Some of the keywords, such as 'Russophobic' or 'Russophobia' appear to be used exceptionally by the Russian outlets without quotations, showing that this term is not used organically in the Western media. For the keyword 'Russophobic', Russian state-funded and strictly pro-Kremlin media outlets clearly dominates the statistics[18].

3. Kremlin Narratives Can Be Based on Facts, but not Necessarily

The propaganda that is currently being produced by Kremlin is very vaguely based on facts. It does not mean that is always 100% based on alternative facts, quite the opposite – it often has a large part of it based on factual truth. Same facts can be rearranged, some facts can be conveniently hushed up to fit certain narratives that the Kremlin is pushing for. Sometimes, however, events reported in Russian propaganda are fully manufactured and do not have anything remotely close with the truth. Kremlin propagandists tend to manufacture sources. To make it more convincible, Russian propaganda has often relied on manufactured evidence – often photographic, or other types of visuals. Out of numerous examples, the paper provides widely known and highly debatable ones.

3.1. Kaliningrad Militarization

In March 2019, Russian Armed Forces reportedly stationed another unit of S-400 missile defense systems in Kaliningrad[19]. These systems are considered to be the top-notch anti-aircraft weapons in Russia's possession, as they are capable of bringing down airborne targets at a range of 400 kilometers. The continuous armament of the Kaliningrad exclave has the goal of challenging NATO's[20] and especially U.S. air superiority in the region. Yet, as the tiny Russian exclave in Europe continues to be militarized, Kremlin juxtaposes criticism of the Western countries by their own narrative. Kremlin has already justified all of the deployments as purely defensive and Russian media sees the never-ending militarization of Kaliningrad as a result of alleged NATO's aggression.

It must be admitted, that Russian military developments are being significantly cove-

[18] Andriukaitis L., "Russian Disinfo Patterns: The Best Defense Is a Good Offense", Vilnius Institute for Policy Analysis for Integrity Initiative, 2018 https://vilniusinstitute.lt/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/6-The-Best-Defense.pdf.

[19] TVN24 News in English, "Russia deploys new S-400 missile systems in its Baltic exclave of Kaliningrad", 2019, https://www.tvn24.pl/tvn24-news-in-english,157,m/russia-deploys-iskander-nuclear-capable-missiles-to-kaliningrad-region,918726.html.

[20] Grove T., "The New Iron Curtain: Russian Missile Defense Challenges U.S. Air Power", The Wall Street Journal, 2019. https://www.wsj.com/articles/russias-missile-defense-draws-a-new-iron-curtain-against-u-s-military-11548255438.

SPORT AS A PERFECT POLITICAL TOOL

Putin needed the World Cup mainly for domestic purposes pushing his approval rating up, because most people enjoy watching football. Even if the event was short-lived, it served as a distraction from the harsh post-Soviet reality. But even before the FIFA 2018 has started, Putin was able to use it for gains in international domain: the defensive narratives using FIFA 2018 started as early as 2017, and were used up until the start of the championship. All the main crimes convicted by the Kremlin, such as the downing of MH17, poisoning of Skripal or attempted homicide of Babchenko were countered as sabotage by the West[21].
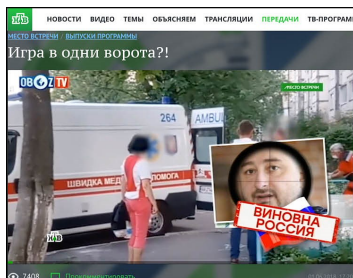
red by informational campaigns in Russian. Even if social media listening tools did not reveal enormous spread of these messages in the form of new media outlets neither in Russian nor English, yet the search on VK using the keywords "C-400"and "Калининград" revealed that these messages were very prominent in the middle of March[22]. In addition to this, messages mentioned above caused significant commenting of VK users who were praising this development and expressed highly negative emotions towards NATO. It seems like these messages were intentionally spread in Russian and on social media, likely to rally local population support for the never-ending armament of tiny, yet so important Kaliningrad enclave.

3.2. Lithuania Sets Eyes on Kaliningrad

One of the marginal stories that managed to find its way on the Russian social media portal VKontakte (VK) is the "Lithuanian dream" of taking Kaliningrad. At the very end of 2018, lots of similar posts appeared, claiming that not only Lithuanian society but academia and politicians as well, are actively agitating to take Kaliningrad under control[23]. Considering this Russian exclave's between Poland and Lithuania on the Baltic Sea meaning also tactical location, it does sound as a reasonable target for Kremlin fake storytellers.

The VK posts that started appearing in January 2018 not only blame Lithuania for expansionary visions but also raise the question of the Baltic countries' sovereignty. Posts claim that if Lithuania is aiming to incorporate Kaliningrad into its territory, Lithuania should be incorporated into Russia. The fact that all of these posts have been written in Russian suggest that these stories were most likely tailored for the Russian domestic audience[24] and the stories aimed at Russians are usually based on strong emotions, while the facts are distorted, misinterpreted or not apparent at all.

Fabricated to appeal to the Russian-spe-

[21] Andriukaitis L. "Russian Disinfo Patterns: Kremlin's Defensive FIFA 2018 Narrative", Vilnius Institute for Policy Analysis for Intefrity Initiative, 2018. https://vilniusinstitute.lt/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/8-Defensive-FIFA-Narrative.pdf.

[22] Andriukaitis L., "Russian Disinfo Patterns: NATO...", https://vilniusinstitute.lt/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Russian-Disinfo-Patterns.pdf .

[23] Рябушев А., "Литва претендует на Калининград", Независимое военное обозрение, 2001, http://www.ng.ru/regions/2001-12-11/9_lithuania.html.

[24] Andriukaitis L., "Russian Disinfo Patterns: "Lithuania Aims for Kaliningrad" Narrative", Vilnius Institute for Policy Analysis for Integrity Initiative, 2019, https://vilniusinstitute.lt/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/15-Lithuania-Aims-for-Kaliningrad.pdf.

aking community and heighten anti-Lithuanian sentiments, this specific narrative, fortunately, does not appear to have achieved wider reach or provoked large-scale discussions online amongst Russian speakers. But the fact alone that it keeps reappearing shows that the Kremlin believes it is effective enough to keep pushing, with the aim of portraying Lithuania as an aggressive neighbour.

3.3. Best Defense is a Good Offense

This widely known strategic offensive principle of war had been used for so many years. And it seems like the Kremlin takes this time-proof adage and still manages to apply it to Russian politics nowadays. One of a few methods that Russians use in their disinformation campaign is 'distract' which works in a following way — if you are accused of something, accuse someone else of the very same thing. One cannot deny, that this tactic does make sense. Just as well, as one cannot argue with the fact that Kremlin has masterfully used the method of 'distract' with the introduction of specific terminology used in their information campaigns.

The keywords like 'Russophobic', 'Russophobia', 'Anti-Russian Hysteria', 'NATO Aggression' can be highlighted as most outstanding and most often. They signify attempts to thwart criticism towards current Russian regime[25] and their aggression against neighbors. These keywords are often used in Russia's defensive narratives and are, not surprisingly, highly dominated by the pro-Kremlin outlets. Even tough the scope of outreach and the effectiveness of

specific expressions remain debatable, pro-Kremlin outlets are still dominating when it comes to defensive keywords, suggesting a systematic Kremlin's approach.

### 4. KREMLIN DISINFORMATION IS OP-PORTUNISTIC

Moving forward through key characteristics of Russian propaganda the feature, of opportunism must be picked out. Even though opportunistic disinformation can be interpreted in many different ways, the core similarity is the following — the attempts of individuals to capitalize on a particular event or accident[26]. Having Russian case in mind, this strategy is applied in so many different levels as many historical facts are being rewritten, reinterpreted and distorted in order to reach Kremlin's strategic objectives. Just a couple examples from totally different spheres and period will be looked through in this paper.

4.1. Forest Brothers Coverage

Firstly, let's settle in the Baltics, particularly — Lithuania. This country is especially proud of Freedom Fighters, who resisted the occupation by fighting the Soviet occupants for many years. In the beginning of 2019, the last few remaining Freedom Fighters received the Freedom Awards in Lithuanian Parliament and were honored by high Lithuanian officials. Unfortunately, as the key historical period that Kremlin is fighting for is the Second World War (or as they call it "The Great Patriotic War"), the legacy of the countries that resi-

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[25] Andriukaitis L., "Russian Disinfo Patterns: The Best Defense …", https://vilniusinstitute.lt/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/6-The-Best-Defense.pdf.

[26] U.S. Department of Homeland Security, "Countering False Information on Social Media in Disasters and Emergencies: Social Media Working Group for Emergency Services and Disaster Management", US: March, 2018.
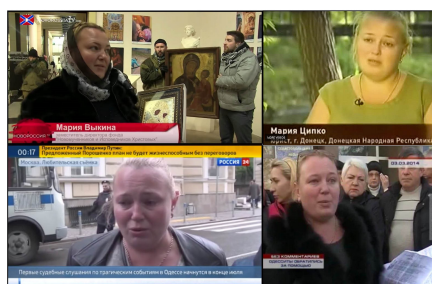
SAME ACTOR, BUT DIFFERENT SET
One of Russian propoganda techniques was to overfill the media with made up stories of Ukrainian troops committing various crimes. In many cases the same actors were used to play the roles of alleged locals. Despite the fact that currently the use of this method has decreased significantly, it remains one of the most blatant and effective tools in information warfare. Same person (Marina Cipko) presented as 4 different characters[27].

sted comes directly against Kremlin's narratives of the Great Victory. Eventually, Freedom Fighters, besides being highly honored in their own country, become targets of Russian disinformation.

As this topic is emotionally charged and of huge importance to Lithuanian history, it creates yet another chance for Russia "to bite" the Baltics. The Kremlin tried to demean Freedom Fighters' good name by distorting historical facts. Various posts and claims targeted at them revealed a wider Kremlin narrative and the interest of the Russian social media platform VKontakte (VK) users[28]. The stories varied throughout the past years, but were constructed mainly on false accusations and alternative statements rather than historical facts. The Forest Brothers were constantly being portrayed as Nazi corroborators and sympathizers, criminals, bandits and even terrorists. Even more, Lithuanian Partisan movement was publicly blamed for involvement in the Holocaust.

Despite the fact that The Forest Brothers are considered[29] to be real national heroes in the Baltic states, the Russian propaganda puts major efforts to portray them differently. The Kremlin seems to understand that managing to reach the very core of independent country's history and changing local "heroes" into "villains" would give a powerful tool to manipulate another episodes from their history as well. It depends on how much stronger Russian influence gets and how perceptive the societies of the Baltic countries remain.

4.2. FIFA Narratives

Getting a wider perspective and going beyond the borders of the Baltics, such example as well-known International Federation of Football (FIFA) and its relation to the Kremlin disinformation can be considered. On the eve of World Cup 2018 that took place in Russia, Russian President Vladimir Putin called not to mix sports and politics[30]. Being more isolated recently than it has been in decades, Russia needed the World Cup mainly for domestic purposes pushing Putin's approval rating up, since most people enjoy watching football. As some sports fans followed the plan, others organized protests urged to boycott these "blood-soaked" games[31].

Even before the FIFA 2018 has started, Putin was able to use the event for gains in international domain. A number of different narratives involving FIFA 2018 championship have been used by the Kremlin to

27 Andriukaitis L., "Russian Disinfo Patterns: Same Actors, Different Sets", Vilnius Institute for Policy Analysis for Integrity Initiative, 2018, https://vilniusinstitute.lt/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/9-Same-Actors-1.pdf.

28 Andriukaitis L., "Kremlin disinformation around Baltic anti-Soviet Forest Brothers", Vilnius Institute for Policy Analysis for Integrity Initiative, 2018, https://medium.com/@hitthehybrid/forest-brothers-1f99cca3a4b9.

25 Nimmo B. and Barojan D., "History Revisited: The Forest Brothers: Video spurs social media fight between Russia and the Baltics". DFR-Lab, 2017, https://medium.com/dfrlab/history-revisited-the-forest-brothers-e49cdcadb7bf.

30 Croucher Sh., "Putin Wants You To Shut Up About Russia's Politics During World Cup 2018", U.S.: NewsWeek, 2018, https://www.newsweek.com/putin-wants-you-shut-about-russias-politics-during-world-cup-2018-974849.

31 Current Time, "Ukrainians Protest As FIFA World Cup In Russia Kicks Off". RadioFreeEurope Radio Liberty, 2018, https://www.rferl.org/a/ukraine-russia-fifa-sentsov/29290688.html.

contradict allegations for their wrong-doings. There were various claims and accusations made that revealed what Kremlin wanted to make people think about FIFA 2018 before it actually started[32]. Pro-Kremlin outlets were dominating when it comes to defensive keywords, suggesting a systematic Kremlin's approach.

Not surprisingly, Ukraine became a common target by Russian propaganda and got accused for such things as using the moment of FIFA 2018 to start a new campaign in Donbass region. Moreover, United Kingdom got accused of sabotaging the hosting of FIFA 2018 as the plans of boycotting the games went viral. Many more fake claims were made as Russia tried to take its best shots while acting as the host country for such a huge event[33].

Taking everything into consideration, all the influence mentioned would not be surprising in Russian language space, but in English language space it is rather alarming. As with most of Russian information attacks in the FIFA 2018 case, the method of throwing a number of different narratives on the wall and seeing what sticks was used by the Kremlin. And here is yet another good example of Kremlin's cognitive dissonance: as Putin urge not to mix sports and politics and at the same time use this mass event for disinformation campaigns. It is vital to understand that Kremlin is willing to use any convenient event to push its agenda both for domestic and international audiences.

5. KREMLIN DISINFORMATION IS INNOVATIVE

The last in the list, but clearly not the least and just as important as the other features of Kremlin propaganda is innovativeness. Constantly introducing new approaches and different channels, Russia puts disinformation game to the whole new level. Examples of one of the widely-known news agency Sputnik News and the tactics of putting same actors in different sets in Russian media game will be considered as they represent different yet still innovative and thoughtful moves form the Kremlin side.

5.1. Sputnik Backlinks

Innovativeness starts with the Sputnik News shared online. Most of the articles in local Sputnik News outlets garner only a few likes and up to a couple hundred views. These websites are a part of a large Kremlin-funded news website platform, consisting of over 30 different languages, penetrating not only post-Soviet countries, but also Western Europe[34]. With an exceptional interest in the Sputnik News platforms in the Baltics, an investigation of their scope and variety of backlinks (links that are directed towards a particular website) leading to them has been made. Even though the outreach of Sputnik News and RT has been long debated amongst experts[35], the research revealed some interesting facts.

Why backlinks? The number of them is an indicator of the popularity/importance of a particular website. Backlinks are important for Search Engine Optimization because some search engines, especially Google, will prioritize websites that have a good

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[32] Andriukaitis L., "Russian Disinfo Patterns: FIFA …", https://vilniusinstitute.lt/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/8-Defensive-FIFA-Narrative.pdf..

[33] Ibid..

[34] Gerdziunas B., "Baltics battle Russia in online disinformation war", DW News, 2017, https://www.dw.com/en/baltics-battle-russia-in-online-disinformation-war/a-40828834. .

[35] Kremlin Watch, "RT and Sputnik had more Twitter outreach than official Brexit campaigns", Ukraine: Stop Fake, 2018, https://www.stopfake.org/en/rt-and-sputnik-had-more-twitter-outreach-than-official-brexit-campaigns/.

number of quality backlinks, and consider those as more relevant in their results. So, the unusually high percentage of backlinks from other Sputnik News websites suggest two main findings, that the Baltic Sputnik News outlets do not interest other websites to refer to them and that a likely deliberate cross-promotion cycle is set-up to provide as much coverage as possible[36]. This tactic can be seen as a desperate move in order to promote the currently largely unpopular media coverage in the Baltic States, furthermore signifying a systemic approach to cross-promotion. Yet another platform well used by the Kremlin.

5.2. Same Actors, Different Sets

That weird feeling that you have seen particular person before, even if the name looks totally unfamiliar, turns out to be more than just a feeling if you are constant consumer of Kremlin-influenced media. That is because Russians seem to master yet another innovative way to strengthen their influence — the technique of using the same actors to instigate different propaganda scenes. The logic behind this disinformation tool is rather simple. In order to make as many heart-touching stories, mobile reporter teams are deployed[37]. This simple tactic is significantly effective and mostly targeted at Russian-speaking television viewers. As most of the casual Russian TV viewers are likely to get their everyday information from one constant source, most of them have no chance to find out that the things they saw were professionally instigated lies.

Despite the fact that currently the use of

this method has decreased significantly, it still remains one of the most effective tools in information warfare. If there are not enough events worthy to report on, new ones have to be invented to feed the population with the preferred ideas. Even though investigators are very active online and it gets really hard for Kremlin-funded media to succeed with the scams on a large scale, some websites report, that there are even groups of professional actors who engage in staging propaganda scenes for the Russian speaking media outlets[38]. As propaganda reports are likely to be one of the most effective forms of information warfare, these professionals also make mistakes and, fortunately, are in many cases caught red-handed.

RECCOMENDATIONS

After going through major strategies that Kremlin tend to implement, some suggestions have been made in accordance with them. Below are a number of recommendations that were developed from the experience in the Baltic States and the wider region. Five key recommendations were identified as the main thrusts to improve the informational resilience as effectively as possible.

1. STRONG NATIONAL INSTITUTION FOR STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION (STRAT-COM) SET-UP THAT WOULD LEAD THE INTEGRATION OF ANTI-DISINFORMATION EFFORTS

It is hardly possible to talk about any security developments if a strong local Strat-

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[36] Andriukaitis L., "Baltic Sputnik News …", https://vilniusinstitute.lt/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/5-Baltic-Sputnik-News.pdf .

[37] Andriukaitis L., "Russian Disinfo Patterns: Same Actors…", https://vilniusinstitute.lt/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/9-Same-Actors-1.pdf.

[38] LiveJournal, "Творческая артель «МК Донбасс» корпорации дезо-мразо-инфо", 2015, https://911tm.livejournal.com/4734.html.

Com set-up does not exist in every country at first. The key to respond the fire-hose of Kremlin propaganda is to establish and constantly improve a national StratCom coordinating body. In essence, it is a political tool designed to influence certain target audiences that also reflects the political culture, historical experiences, and civil-military and other intra-governmental relationships of the state or entity[39]. It is important to acknowledge that the lack of a formal StratCom framework, however, does not mean that a country is not engaged in any strategic communication, as there are some examples in the world, where existing agencies of government performs StratCom practices essentially. Anyway, the absence of it might cause some key challenges, namely, the danger of miscalculations occurring as a result of uncoordinated messaging; the 'say-do gap' as the government struggles to fulfill some of its aspirations under the rubric of 'proactive contribution to peace', and the difficulty of sending coherent messages and avoiding unintended messaging. To avoid any additional problems and to guarantee a strong base for national security, strong national StartCom set-up is highly desirable and recommended.

2. DEVELOPMENT OF NATIONAL NARRATIVES

As the unfriendly countries are using clearly defined narratives to achieve their goals, it becomes country's own responsibility to develop national narratives and improve country's image, firstly, among their own citizens. What is needed to understand is the great importance of seizing control of one's national narrative and the possibilities for rescripting it before anyone else does it for you. Students and practitioners of public diplomacy understand well the significance of nation branding, a process in which national narratives figure centrally. There are three main strands in any national narrative — the establishment of a founding story, the conception of national identity, and the parameters of national unity[40]. All things aside, keeping these three in your hands and constantly reminding country's citizens of them, would guarantee some problems for the unfriendly countries, trying to make any changes considering the established national narratives. It is important to highlight that national narrative should not be understood primarily in terms of an externally directed "soft power", what it surely is, but firstly, it needs to be understood in terms of its serious domestic implications. If carefully crafted and ably wielded, national narrative can represent a formidable power. The loss of its control, obviously, could lead to tragic consequences.

3. PRO-ACTION VS. REACTION, SETTING GOALS VS. PUTTING OUT FIRES

If following recommendations and having strong national StratCom body established, it is possible to expand its functions. Firstly, StratCom should be focused on achieving strategic information goals. All of the resources and efforts should be put into achieving strategic, long-term goals rather than responding to tactical fights from the enemy side. Simultaneously, the

[39] Aoi Ch., "Japanese Strategic Communication: Its Significance As A Political Tool", DEFENCE STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS: The official journal of the NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, 3, 2017, 95-96.

[40] Brand L., "The Politics Of National Narratives", University of Central California: Center on Public Diplomacy, US: California, 2014, https://www.uscpublicdiplomacy.org/blog/politics-national-narratives.

enemy, being tactical and wise, of course would try to initiate as many of those as possible. Wasting StratCom's energy and part of resources on minor tactical fights might cost considerably a lot — the concentration of its main goal. The aim of public diplomacy strategic communication should utilizing the core practices in conjunction with the other elements of other NATO StratCom in order to preserve the inward quiet of the region. Strategic use of public diplomacy would allow NATO to address potential threats early on and potentially avert a crisis altogether[41]. Ignoring continuous and concentrated work, constantly putting out fires and at most reacting to each and every minor fight from the enemy, thus, would decrease the role and the importance of a functional National StratCom set-up.

4. ADAPTION OF TECHNOLOGICAL MEANS

The absolute majority of the information warfare nowadays is digital. That logically leads to another suggestion for addressing the challenge of Russian propaganda, related to technologies: it is the usage of different technical means to turn off the flow. Even though the future of combating digital disinformation and propaganda is uncertain, there are various opportunities to fix these occurring problems. Many individuals already leverage their skills in advertising, analytics, and data science, becoming capable of rooting out destructive digital content on their own dime. These independent information warriors are often standing in the first line of defense against

the manipulation of narrative in the wake of a crisis[42]. Anything from aggressive enforcement of terms of service agreements with Internet providers and social media services to electronic warfare or cyberspace operations could lower the volume and, obviously, the impact of Kremlin propaganda. If the firehose of falsehood is being employed as part of active hostilities, or if counterpropaganda efforts escalate to include usage of various information warfare capabilities, then destroying or otherwise interfering with the ability of the propagandists to broadcast their messages could minimize the impact of their efforts.

5. EDUCATION OF ALL AGE GROUPS

Last recommendation standing in the list, but clearly of undeniable importance is education. It is hard to consider any other developments in the country if the society is not educationally ready to accept the measures or plans implemented nationally. Even then, no matter how intelligent an individual may be, almost every person is susceptible to propaganda[43].

Thus, education is the least we can do and a great thing to begin a never-ending journey to demolishing fake news. This measure is one of the most essential factors that can be controlled and guaranteed and it is clearly one of the most effective. The factor of appropriate education is principal, as there is no chance that every single modified truth would be checked and eliminated by the professionals who specialize in propaganda area. Consciousness of every member of society and their

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[41] Schindler C., "Proactively Preserving The Inward Quiet: Public Diplomacy And Nato", DEFENCE STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS: The official journal of the NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, 1(1), 2015, 146-148.

[42] Research Briefs: Cyber security, "Who Will Lead The Fight Against Online Disinformation & Propaganda?", US 2018 https://www.cbinsights.com/research/fighting-online-disinformation-propaganda-conference/.

ability to distinguish black and white – truth and false – is vital. Therefore, quality education from elementary school pupils to the elderly, who had fewer opportunities to interact with digital information through time, must be spread within country's boundaries.

All things considered, it can be concluded, that there is hardly any way to avoid or completely stop the spread of developing Kremlin propaganda. But, it is necessary to point out that where is a problem — there is a solution just as well. In this paper, besides the presentation of five main Russian techniques that have been actively used in the recent times, there are also five recommendations that provide us with effective ways to counter the attacks. If eventually, the number of well-educated, patriotic citizens will be raised, strong National StratCom bodies will be established in the countries and the importance of country's history and the formidable power of national narratives will be understood and cherished, there is scarcely a way that any outside enemy could de-stroy or by any means affect such a strong unity. ■

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[40] Hunter B., "Education Is the State's Greatest Tool for Propaganda", Foundation for Economic Education, 2017, https://fee.org/articles/education-is-the-states-greatest-tool-for-propaganda/.

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LE NORD DE L'EUROPE,
Contenant
LE DANEMARK LA NORWEGE,
LA SUEDE ET LA LAPONIE
avec la Majeure Partie
de la Russie Européenne
Par M. BONNE,
Ingénieur-Hydrogrphe
de la Marine

Vilnius
Institute
for Policy Analysis