



Media monitoring report: Anti-Ukrainian war Propaganda in the Baltic states

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Russia's war against Ukraine is pressing into its seventh month – despite several rounds of failed peace talks, and Western countries' issuing severe economic sanctions against Russia. The war isn't happening just on Ukrainian soil. President Vladimir Putin's propaganda is propelling the Ukraine war through Russia media, while continuing to intensify tensions with the West. Putin's propaganda expands beyond Ukraine into other parts of Europe, including the Baltic region. In recent years, awareness of Russia's disinformation activities and efforts have been growing both in the West and in Central and Eastern Europe. Nevertheless, the governments and citizens of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania are subject to daily Russian strategic information operations and propaganda activities that are part of campaigns designed to undermine trust in their institutions, foment ethnic and social tensions, and erode confidence in North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) collective defense commitments.

Due to the restrictions adopted by the Baltic countries on large Russian propaganda media outlets, some of them become less accessible to consumers, and naturally receive less attention. As a result, the readership of "RuBaltic.Ru" rose and it became dominant in the Baltic countries. "RuBaltic.Ru" began its work in January 2013. The initiative belongs to a group of experts from Kaliningrad and Moscow who specialize in studying the post-Soviet space and, in particular, the countries of the Baltic region. The rubaltic.ru domain was registered on May 12, 2010. The current Editor-in-Chief of "RuBaltic.Ru" is Sergey Rekedda, Ph.D., under the President of the Russian Federation Director of the Centre for the Study of Integration Prospect, Russian International Affairs Council's expert. "RuBaltic's" SQI (site quality index) is 3600.¹ The average traffic of the portal in 2018 was 50-60 thousand people per day. This website also publishes articles in Belarussian, Lithuanian, Latvian and Polish languages. "RuBaltic.Ru" still has open access in Lithuania to this day.

Using a media monitoring tool "NewsWhip" we were able to investigate what are the most prevalent propaganda narratives in the Baltic region's news outlets in the Russian language. Additionally, we were able to see how the propaganda shifted its attention from one pressing issue to the next over time. In our latest research, we investigate different articles and their content to see which propaganda narratives dominated the Russian-speaking public space in the Baltic region.

¹ SQI is an indicator assigned by the Yandex search engine to websites, and displaying the popularity and weight of the site. It can also be referred to as TCI (thematic citation index). The value of the SQI depends on the number of links to the site from other sites, which must be indexed by Yandex.

Methodology

For our research, we used "NewsWhip", a media monitoring platform that tracks content by amount and location of user engagement and tracks audience interests and changes in interests over time. This platform enabled us to conduct research on a list of news outlets² using specific key words³, looking for any propaganda content. Throughout our monitoring process which started on the 13th of June and ended on the 28th of August, we identified 520 articles which contained propaganda and had the biggest user interaction. User interaction was measured by looking at how many Facebook and Twitter "likes" or Telegram "views" for each article.

Each article was then categorized into one of the seven identified primary narrative groups:

1) "Events of the Russia-Ukraine war"

2) "Refugees"

3) "Economic consequences of sanctions"

4) "Conditions of Russians and Russian-speaking minorities"

5) "Military threats to Eastern Europe / Risk of war expanding beyond Ukraine"

6) "Military aid to Ukraine"

7) "Miscellaneous". Each of these primary narrative groups have their own sub-narratives.

Events of the Russia-Ukraine war

This is one of the broadest primary narrative groups, which contains 25 sub-narratives. They cover such topics as the cause of war (i.e. *Russia only attacked because Ukraine was planning to attack it first, The US provoked the conflict between Ukraine and Russia*), Ukrainian reaction to the war (i.e. *Ukrainians are welcoming Russian "saviours", Ukrainians refuse to fight, Ukrainian civil society wants to make concessions to Russia*), the West's reaction to the war (i.e. *NATO/The West will attack Russia, The West is losing interest in helping Ukraine, The West is using Ukraine to wage war against Russia*) or outright accusations against Ukraine (i.e. *Ukraine is causing the global food crisis, Ukrainians are Nazis, Ukrainians are targeting civilians and commit other war crimes*).

We identified 188 articles that fit into this primary narrative group, which amounts to around 36% of all the monitored articles. These articles gathered 94640 views on Telegram in total. This narrative was the most popular from the 13th of June until the 17th of July. In this time period, we identified around 23 to 25 articles containing this propaganda narrative every week. From July 18th until the 7th of August, this narrative dipped in popularity – only having 6 to 8 articles each week. In the time period between the 8th and 28th of August, this narrative started to regain some traction getting around 17 articles each week.

² The news outlets list: grani.lv; rubaltic.ru; leta.lv; press.lv; respublika.lt; lt.sputniknews.ru; lv.sputniknews.ru; kurier.lt; obzor.lt; inbaltic.lt; news.tts.lt; lt.balt-news.com; dvee; kriis.ee; gazeta.ee; renkuosilietuva.lt; orthodoxy.lt

³ The key word list: Украина; война; Кремль; НАТО; Запад; министр иностранных дел; агрессия; рубль; эксперт; меньшинство; Брюссель; беженец; Зеленский; Киев; Донбасс; Донецк; Байрактар; геноцид; Лавров; Шойгу; неонацисты; Демилитаризация; нацизм; санкции; «Специальная военная операция»; Львов; эмбарго

The most popular sub-narratives for this group were "Ukrainians are targeting civilians and commit other war crimes" (43 articles, 52612 interactions), "Ukraine is losing the war" (50 articles, 35064 interactions), "The West is losing interest in helping Ukraine" (35 articles, 22011 interactions).

Propaganda narrative example(s) and case debunking

Example 1.

"The main goals of the special operation: the protection of the Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) and Luhansk People's Republic (LPR), the operation is not directed against the inhabitants of Ukraine."⁴

The article from "RuBaltic.Ru" states that the main goal of the "special operation" in Ukraine is the protection of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, ensuring a good quality of life and to create such conditions in Severodonetsk so that people can spend the winter in peace. The article quotes head of the LPR, Leonid Pasechnik and tries to portray the Luhansk situation in a positive manner stating that: "People with great enthusiasm are putting their city in order, sorting out the rubble, sweeping the streets and that a lot of people are already coming back."

While in reality, since February 24th until August 22nd a total of 7620 people in Donetsk and Luhansk regions suffered casualties - 3317 people were killed and 4303 were injured. On territory controlled by Russian armed forces and affiliated armed groups, Ukraine suffered 1,475 casualties (302 people killed and 1173 injured).⁵ From 1st to 21st August 2022, 51 people were killed and 180



⁴ Article: <https://www.rubaltic.ru/cifrobalt/20220728-posledstviya-svo-severodonetsk-razminirovan-bolee-chem-na-50/>

⁵ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/news/2022/09/ukraine-civilian-casualty-update-5-september-2022>

were injured in 7 settlements in parts of Luhansk and Donetsk regions controlled by Russian armed forces and affiliated armed groups.

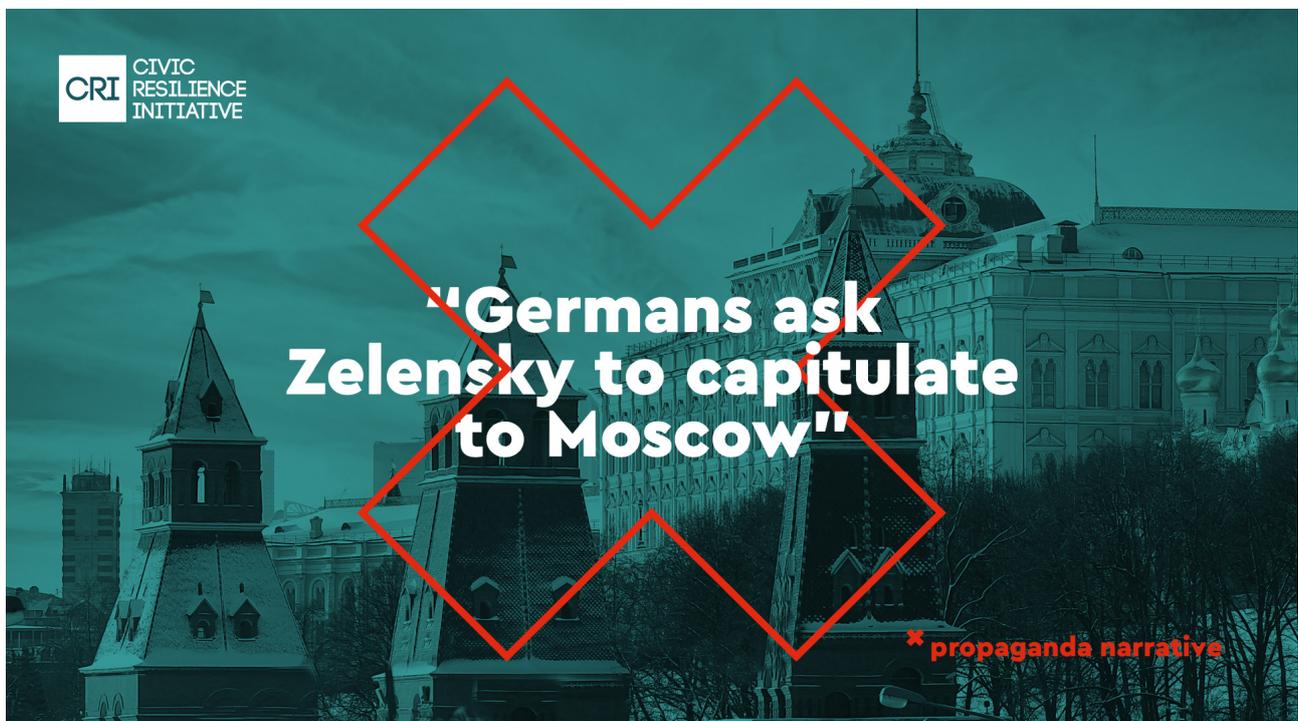
Most of the civilian casualties recorded were caused by the use of explosive weapons with wide area effects, including shelling from heavy artillery, multiple launch rocket systems, missiles and air strikes. Contrary to the Russian narrative, the evidence shows that these regions are still very much in a state of war because of the Russian invasion, and that civilians are continuing to bear the brunt of the conflict.

Example 2.

“Germans ask Zelensky to capitulate to Moscow”⁶

The article from “RuBaltic.Ru” tries to frame this issue as if the majority of Germany’s population expects Ukraine to surrender to Russia even though it quotes some random comments from the German daily newspaper “Die Welt”. The article is framed around anonymous readers (bots) who make such statements as: “Zelensky needs to face the truth and make a peace deal on Russian terms”, “Zelensky again begs and demands instead of capitulating and stopping hostilities”, “Ukraine does not need weapons, but decency, diplomacy and, most importantly, a new government.”

In fact a survey conducted by German broadcaster ZDF between July 12th and 14th showed that



⁶ Article: <https://www.rubaltic.ru/news/23072022-bud-smyshlenym-malchikom-nemtsy-prosyat-zelenskogo-kapitulirovat-pered-moskvoy/>

70% of Germans back Ukraine despite high energy prices, while only 22% said they did not want Germany to support Ukraine.

Moreover, Germany is one of the leaders in accepting Ukrainian refugees in the EU, second only to Poland. Currently, more than 900,000 Ukrainians have found refuge in Germany. The German government is always in talks with Ukraine and In the view of Germany's Federal Government Commissioner for Integration, the admission and integration of war refugees from Ukraine has worked well so far.

All of this proves that the Germans are willing to help Ukraine, and that cherry-picked comments from the comment section of an article are not representative of public opinion.

Example 3.

“The Kyiv regime follows the path of outright terrorism in Donetsk”⁷

The article from “RuBaltic.Ru” states that the successful offensive of Russian troops during the special military operation led the Kyiv regime to follow the path of outright terrorism. The article claims that this is happening especially in Donetsk, where civilians experience daily Ukrainian artillery attacks. The whole article is framed in such a way that Russia bears no responsibility for the suffering of the people living there.

At the beginning of July, Russia launched heavy attacks in an attempt to take full control of the industrialized Donbas region. Russia has turned the entire Donetsk region into a war zone where it is dangerous for civilians to remain. Vladimir Putin has said one of the main goals of his invasion of Ukraine is full control of the eastern sector, the mostly Russian-speaking Donbas region encompassing the two provinces.

Ukrainian officials said Russian attacks had killed at least eight civilians on the 5th of July and had wounded 25 more. Russian forces are burning down and destroying everything in their path.

On August 14th, heavy and constant bombardment by Russian forces were once again reported in Donetsk region.

Russia is at fault for the terror, that Donetsk region's residents face, and no evidence was presented to support the claim that Ukrainian forces are engaged in terrorism against civilians.

⁷Article: <https://www.rubaltic.ru/article/politika-i-obshchestvo/20220621-kak-ugomonit-vsu-donetsk-perezhivaet-strashneyshie-obstrely-za-vse-gody-voiny/>

Refugees

This primary narrative encompasses only 4 sub-narratives. Most of them regard the refugees' relation with their host country - *Ukrainian refugees undermine host countries' internal stability*, *Ukrainian refugees are prioritized over the host country citizens/inhabitants*, *Ukrainian refugees are no longer welcome*. Only one of the sub-narratives addresses the state of the refugees themselves - *Ukrainian refugees are spoiled/ungrateful*.



We identified 15 articles that fit into this primary narrative group, which amounts to only 3% of all the monitored articles. These articles gathered 17942 views on Telegram in total. There were weeks where no articles were identified with this narrative group. This narrative gained the most traction between the 18th and 24th of July. Throughout that period five articles were identified, gathering 7314 interactions.

The most popular sub-narrative for this group were "Ukrainian refugees undermine host countries' internal stability" (8 articles, 4835 interactions) and "Ukrainian refugees are no longer welcome" (6 articles, 6340 interactions).

Propaganda narrative example(s) and case debunking

Example 1.

"Lithuanian social activist spoke about fatigue from Ukrainian refugees"⁸

This article presents arguments from well known Russian propaganda public figures in Lithuania Erika Švenčionienė and Kazimieras Juraitis who made their comments on the air of the "RuBaltic. Ru" project "Stream News". E. Švenčionienė states that Lithuanians are tired and angry of the fact that Ukrainians live better than they do, while K. Juraitis states that it was difficult to evict the refugees from their own apartments.

According to a survey conducted by Eurobarometer between April 13th and 20th, Lithuanian residents are among the most supportive of financial aid to Ukraine and aid in the purchase of military equipment - 88 and 84% were in favor, respectively. Almost all respondents in Lithuania (96%) support the provision of humanitarian aid to people affected by the war, nine out of ten support the idea of the EU accepting people fleeing the war, and support the financial aid provided to Ukraine. 94 percent Lithuanian residents say they feel sympathy for the Ukrainians.

⁸ Article: <https://www.rubaltic.ru/news/21072022-litovskaya-obshchestvennitsa-rasskazala-ob-ustalosti-ot-ukrainskikh-bezhentsev/>

According to a survey conducted by YouGov throughout April 1-25, 87% of Lithuanians support sending humanitarian aid to Ukraine, 82% support allowing Ukrainian refugees to enter the country, 78% support allowing Ukrainian refugees to enter the labor market.

All of this data shows, that those statements made by Švenčienienė and Juraitis are statistically wrong. The majority of Lithuania supports Ukraine and willingly accepts refugees.

Economic consequences of sanctions

This is the second broadest group of primary narratives. It contains 8 sub-narratives. Half of them concern the West's and EU's relation with the economy (i.e. *Sanctions hurt the West more than Russia, The West is secretly trading with Russia, The inflation and the energy crises are caused by the false political approach of Europe and the US*). The other half concerns Russia's reaction to the sanctions (i.e. *Russia is unaffected by sanctions, Russia will stop all gas deliveries for Europe, Economic sanctions on Russia caused the war*).

We identified 149 articles that fit into this primary narrative group, which amounts to around 28% of all the monitored articles. These articles gathered 97457 views on Telegram in total. This narrative was the most popular from the 18th of July until the 7th of August. In this time period we identified around 18 to 22 articles containing this propaganda narrative every week. From August 15th until August 28th, this narrative dipped in popularity, only having 11 articles each week.

The most popular sub-narrative for this group were "Sanctions hurt the West more than Russia" (82 articles, 59516 interactions), "The inflation and the energy crises are caused by the false political approach of Europe and the US" (26 articles, 17426 interactions) and "Russia is unaffected by sanctions" (20 articles, 8444 interactions).

Propaganda narrative example(s) and case debunking

Example 1.

“Europe has exhausted its full potential of sanctions against Russia”⁹

The article is framed around Russian Foreign Minister's Sergei Lavrov's statement that the EU has exhausted all its possibilities to harm the Russian economy through sanctions. It attempts to convince readers that sanctions don't affect Russia and will do more harm to the EU instead.

As the war drags on and the costs of energy rises, people in Europe and elsewhere will ask whether these sanctions are working or whether the side effects are too great. sanctions remain an important instrument of political action. They require strategic patience because it may take a long time for them to have the desired effect.

One of the main sanctions adopted by the EU is to phase out the purchase of 90% of its oil supplies from Russia by the end of 2022, depriving Moscow of corresponding revenues. Yes, Russia is able to sell its oil to other markets, however this benefit is limited by the fact that Russia is forced to give high discounts on each barrel (Russian oil is sold at around \$ 30 less than the global average).

Are the sanctions really hurting the Russian economy? Some observers have argued they are not very effective because the exchange rate of the Russian currency is very high. However, this interpretation is dubious. The exchange rate of the Rouble simply reflects the fact that Russia has a massive imbalance between the high volume of oil and gas exports and the parallel collapse of imports that has followed the sanctions. This trade surplus is not a sign of good economic health, especially for an economy like Russia. While exporting unprocessed raw materials, Russia must import many high-value products that it does not manufacture. For advanced technology products, Russia depends on Europe for more than 45%, the United States for 21% and China for only 11%.

Sanctions on semiconductors imports for instance have a direct impact on Russian companies that produce consumer electronics, computers, airplanes, cars, or military equipment. In this field, which is obviously crucial in the war in Ukraine, sanctions limit Russia's capacity to produce precision missiles. The automotive sector is another sector that is very much feeling the effects of the sanctions. Almost all foreign manufacturers have decided to withdraw from Russia, and production was last May down by 97% compared with 2021.

⁹Article: <https://www.rubaltic.ru/news/20072022-lavrov-evropa-ischerpala-ves-svoy-potentsial-sanktsiy-protiv-rossii/>

Over time, the Russian oil industry will suffer not only from the departure of foreign operators but also from its increasing difficulty in accessing sophisticated technologies such as horizontal drilling. In fact, the capacity of Russia to put new wells in production will be limited, which will lead to a drop in production. Finally, there is the airline industry, which plays a very important role in such a vast country. Around 700 of Russia's 1,100 civilian aircraft are of foreign origin. Russia will have to sacrifice a large part of its fleet, to find spare parts, so that the remaining aircrafts can fly.

The list could go on with other important factors: the loss of access to financial markets; the disconnection of Russia from major global research networks such as CERN; the massive brain drain of Russian elites with thousands of highly qualified professionals having left the country. The effects of such moves are not immediately visible. However, the scientific, economic and technological isolation of Russia is a major loss for the country in the medium term.

Example 2.

“In the event of a disconnection from the unified energy system BRELL (Belarus, Russia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania), Vilnius will not have enough electricity to cover the needs of the entire country”¹⁰

This article covers a statement made by the President of the Russian Association for Baltic Studies, political scientist Nikolai Mezhevich. He says that Lithuania would not be able to have enough electricity to cover its needs even in the summer as air conditioning uses up a lot of electricity. Heating and air conditioning consume an equal amount of energy.



¹⁰ Article: <https://www.rubaltic.ru/news/23062022-politolog-rasskazal-cto-zhdet-litvu-v-sluchae-otklyucheniya-ot-brell/>

The BRELL agreement is signed by the operators of 5 countries on technical conditions and system management rules to ensure electricity quality parameters and to maintain a stable and reliable electricity supply.

Lithuania's president Gitanas Nausėda stated that the country is ready for the fact that Russia, in retaliation for the suspension of the transit of EU-sanctioned goods to Kaliningrad, may disconnect it from the BRELL electricity system.

Energy Minister Dainius Kreivys said back in April that in the event the Baltic countries were disconnected from BRELL, Lithuania's national security would not be threatened because of the country's ability to immediately connect to Western European networks through Poland. Lithuanian residents would not suffer from any disconnection.

On the 13th of July, Rokas Masiulis, the head of "Litgrid" stated that if Russia were to disconnect Lithuania from BRELL, the country would be ready for it. According to Masiulis, such a step would not affect electricity prices. When asked if such a move should not limit electricity consumption, the head of "Litgrid" assures that "there would be no major consequences in this area".

Masiulis explained that the three Baltic countries together would ensure the operation of their national systems with the agreement from the EU that the Baltic grids would be synchronized with Western European networks within 24 hours. The Baltic countries intend to synchronize their electricity networks with continental Europe and disconnect from the post-Soviet BRELL ring by the end of 2025. After the start of the war in Ukraine, the ministers responsible for energy of all three countries called on the European Union to speed up this process.

Example 3.

"In Latvia, jumps in electricity prices were linked to the disorganization of the sector of its production"¹¹

This article from "RuBaltic.Ru" presents an argument stated by Juris Ozoliņš, a freelance energy sector consultant, which claims that sharp jumps in electricity prices indicate the disorganization of the sector's production capacity. According to the article, regulators who monitor the market have not yet given specific explanations as to why energy rose so sharply. Moreover, the article is framed in such a way that the war in Ukraine does not have any influence on the rising electricity prices in Latvia.

While it is true that in July 2022 the average electricity price in Latvia's zone increased to 304.96

¹¹ Article: <https://www.rubaltic.ru/news/17082022-v-latvii-svyazali-skachki-tsen-na-elektroenergiyu-s-neorganizovannostyu-sektora-ee-proizvodstva/>

EUR/MWh, which remains historically the highest monthly average price for the second consecutive months since the liberalisation of the electricity market, experts have provided specific explanations regarding the rapid price rise.

The supply of electricity in the Baltic market is limited due to ongoing repairs on Daugava's hydroelectric power plant. As a result, the low water level causes hydroelectric power plants in Latvia to produce little electricity. The price is also affected by the availability of gas and its high price for electricity production at CHP plants as well as the decision to cease imports of natural gas from Russia. Moreover, Latvia's limited interconnection is caused by delayed repair work and hot weather.

All of these explanations mean that the high price of electricity in Latvia can be linked with temporary problems, which are being fixed and not with the "tragic state of the sector's production capacity organization".

Conditions of Russians and Russian-speaking minorities

This group of primary narratives consists only of 2 sub-narratives – "Ukrainians discriminate against/terrorize Russian-speakers" and "X country is Russophobic / Russian culture is being attacked". Nevertheless it was still quite popular – we identified 93 articles that fit into this primary narrative group, which amounts to around 17% of all the monitored articles. These articles gathered 100497 views on Telegram in total – the most out of any primary narrative groups. This narrative's popularity sharply rose from the 25 th of July. It has since stayed the most popular narrative each week, as we identified around 14 articles in that timeframe. The only identified sub-narrative for this group was "X country is Russophobic / Russian culture is being attacked".

Propaganda narrative example(s) and case debunking

Example 1.

“Proto-fascist regimes have been established in the Baltic countries”¹²

This article from “RuBaltic.Ru” presents an argument stated by Andrei Krivosheev, chairman of the board of the Belarusian Union of Journalists, which claims that the Baltic states have already established proto-fascist regimes that fully segregate not only Russian and Belarusian businesses, but also Russian minorities.

Fascism is a political philosophy, movement, or regime that exalts nation above the individual and is organized around a centralized autocratic government, with a dictatorial leader. This also includes severe economic and social regimentation, as well as forcible suppression of opposition.

In the Baltic nations, freedom of thought and expression are constitutionally protected rights. Moreover, the freedom to express one's convictions and disseminate information cannot be considered a criminal act unless it's to incite national, racial, religious or social hatred, violence and discrimination, defamation and disinformation. Citizens belonging to national communities have the right to nurture their language, culture and customs. This means that the Law protects citizens of the Baltic states from segregation based on nationality.

All of the Baltic states are run by democratic governments. Citizens are guaranteed the right to criticize the work of state institutions or officials, which means that opposition is free to express their beliefs. The decision of all three Baltic states to cut off ties with Russian and Belarusian companies is based on the sanctions proposed by the EU Council, not on discrimination against Russians or Belarusians.

All of this proves that the claim which states that “Proto-fascist regimes have been established in the Baltic countries” is false.

¹² Article: <https://www.rubaltic.ru/news/15082022-belorusskiy-zhurnalists-v-stranakh-baltii-ustanovilis-protofashistskie-rezhimy/>

Military threats to Eastern Europe / Risk of war expanding beyond Ukraine

This group of primary narratives consists of 5 sub-narratives. Half of them concern Russia's potential overreaction in the war (i.e. *Putin will wipe out Europe with the Sarmat, Russia is losing the war and will use nuclear weapons*). The other half concerns potential moves from the West (i.e. *The West will sacrifice Eastern Europe if war spills over, Poland is escalating the war*).

We identified 26 articles that fit into this primary narrative group, which amounts to 5% of all the monitored articles. These articles gathered 16747 views on Telegram in total. This narrative was the most popular from the 13th until the 26th of June. In this time period, we identified around 9 to 16 articles containing this propaganda narrative every week. Since then the narrative dipped in popularity and did not appear at all most of the time.

The most popular sub-narrative for this group were "Lithuania's decision to cut off Kaliningrad's transit will lead to severe consequences" (14 articles, 9230 interactions) and "Poland is escalating the war" (6 articles, 2810 interactions).

Propaganda narrative example(s) and case debunking

Example 1.

"Ukraine is planning to occupy Transnistria"¹³

This article from "RuBaltic.Ru" states that Ukraine is willing to opening a new front in Transnistria and that it's capture will deflect from the series of defeats experienced by the Ukrainian army. The article argues that Transnistria can be described as uncertain and unstable, in which aggravations and terrorist acts are replaced by periods of calm. The unrecognized Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic (PMR), more than 200,000 inhabitants of which have citizenship of the Russian Federation, is actually sandwiched between Ukraine and Moldova, which can by no means be called friendly. The main factor contributing to the escalation of tension around Transnistria is the desire to create another front against Russia.

Like Moscow's actions in parts of Ukraine and Georgia, the Kremlin asserts that Russia's role in Transnistria serves to protect the local population. The Russian government's narrative is that Transnistrians would suffer from "oppression" under Moldova's Romanian-speakers if not for

¹³Article: <https://www.rubaltic.ru/article/politika-i-obshchestvo/20220710-zamorozhennyy-front-reshatsya-li-moldova-i-ukraina-na-zakhvat-pridnestrovyia/>

breaking away from Chisinau. Moscow's geopolitical interests are about ensuring that the Moldova-Transnistria conflict remains frozen. On April 22, Rustam Minnekaev, the acting commander of Russia's Central Military District, declared that Moscow seeks to establish a land bridge connecting Donbas to Transnistria. Should Russia ever succeed in doing so, Ukraine would become a landlocked country with the war spreading into Moldova.

While in fact for Moscow, Transnistria's importance stems from the enclave's ability to usefully distract. Minnekaev's words about connecting Donbas to Transnistria were based on the "hope that it would persuade Kyiv to shift forces away from where they were needed, and towards a threat that didn't really exist". Transnistria would be a gateway for Russia to spread the war to Moldova.

The President of Moldova, Maia Sandu, was in Kyiv in June speaking at a news conference with President Volodymyr Zelenskyy when she declared, "We are closely following all developments in Transnistria and we are seeing no threats looming. We are doing everything we can to prevent this separatist region from posing a threat to Ukraine and Moldova.". This proves that Ukraine has no plans of occupying Transnistria.

Military aid to Ukraine

This group of primary narratives consists of 8 sub-narratives. Most of them concern technical matters (i.e. *Western military aid is being misused/stolen*, *Military aid is weakening/jeopardizing the countries that provide it*, *The West will no longer provide Ukraine with military aid*). Although there are a couple of sub-narratives which concern the moral problem of providing military aid to Ukraine (i.e. *Donating for military aid is immoral*, *Ukraine will use Western weapons to kill Russians/attack Russian territory*).

We identified 11 articles that fit into this primary narrative group, which amounts to around 2% of all the monitored articles. These articles gathered 3705 views on Telegram in total. This narrative only appeared from the 27th of June until the 10th of July and from the 8th until the 21st of August.

The most popular sub-narrative for this group were "Military aid is weakening/jeopardizing the countries that provide it" (3 articles, 1272 interactions) and "Western military aid is being misused/stolen" (3 articles, 603 interactions).

Miscellaneous

This group of primary narratives consists of 17 sub-narratives, which did not fit within the frame of any other primary narrative group. Some of them concern the world's politicians status (i.e. *The Ukrainian leadership is corrupt and/or incompetent, Russia's diplomats excel over their Western counterparts, The Ukrainian leadership is pretentious/demanding*). Others try to discredit countries or glorify Russia (i.e. *X country should be neutral to prevent being dragged into war, The EU and/or NATO and/or the West are weak and will break apart, Third World countries are choosing Russia over the West, X country is controlled by the West*).

We identified 24 articles that fit into this primary narrative group, which amounts to around 4 of all the monitored articles. These articles gathered 23432 views on Telegram in total. This narrative has started to appear since the 4th of July. It gained the most popularity during the third week of July – in this period we identified 7 articles. Ever since it has worn off, although it started to gain some traction in the last couple of weeks in August when we identified 4 articles each week.

The most popular sub-narrative for this group was "X country should be neutral to prevent being dragged into war" (4 articles, 2560 interactions) and "The Ukrainian leadership is corrupt and/or incompetent" (4 articles, 2340 interactions).

Propaganda narrative example(s) and case debunking

Example 1.

"President of Latvia: to fight for Hitler is patriotic"¹⁴

This "RuBaltic.Ru" article claims that Latvia's president Egil Levits glorifies the Latvian SS Legion, erects monuments to it in Europe and destroys monuments to the victors of fascism on its territory. The article continues to show that Latvia is a fascist country which collaborated with the Nazis to kill Jews. These claims were made after Egil Levite on the "Day of Remembrance for the Victims of the Communist Genocide" stated that Russia rewrites and falsifies history in grotesque forms prompted this type of reaction by the article's author Vadim Avva.

These absurd statements could not be further from the truth. The former European Court of Justice judge Egil Levits and his Latvian patriot parents were expelled from former Soviet Union in 1972 because the KGB viewed them as threat. Levits has Jewish roots - his father, Jonas, was Jewish but his mother was not. All of his father's relatives were killed in the Holocaust, and my mother and my grandmother were sent away on March 25," he said, naming the 1949 date on

¹⁴ Article: <https://www.rubaltic.ru/blogpost/20220614-prezident-latvii-voevat-za-gitlera-eto-patriotichno/>

which Soviet authorities deported thousands of suspected dissidents, including many ethnic Germans and nationalists.

On the 4th of July, 2021, the Day of Remembrance for victims of the Jewish Genocide in Latvia, was acknowledged with a flowerlaying ceremony at the Riga memorial on Gogol Street. Egils Levits, the President of Latvia, attended the ceremony in honor of these Holocaust victims. Participants in the event also laid flowers at the Zhanis Lipke monument in honor of all those who helped rescue Jews during the Holocaust, saluting those who risked their lives and the lives of their families to save the persecuted.

The President has often noted that "this was one of the most heinous crimes against humanity in history, and we remember the victims of this crime." The 4th of July became an official commemorative day of mourning in Latvia more than a quarter of a century ago. The Supreme Council of Latvia adopted the corresponding law on October 3, 1990.

This proves that statements which claim that the President of Latvia supports Nazism are false and absurd.

Summary

This research analyzed propaganda in the Baltic region's news outlets in the Russian language. Throughout our monitoring process which took place from the 13th of June until the 28th of August we identified 520 articles which contained propaganda and had the biggest user interaction. The vast majority of them (over 95%) were published in "RuBaltic.Ru". All of these articles gathered 354420 views on Telegram.

They were categorized into 7 groups of primary narratives. The most popular were "Events of Russia-Ukraine war" (188 articles, 94640 views on Telegram), "Economic consequences of sanctions" (149 articles, 97457 views on Telegram) and "Conditions of Russians and Russian-speaking minorities" (93 articles, 100497 views on Telegram).

The five most popular sub-narratives were:

- 1) "X country is Russophobic / Russian culture is being attacked"** (93 articles, 100497 interactions)
 - 2) "Sanctions hurt the West more than Russia"** (82 articles, 59516 interactions)
 - 3) "Ukraine is losing the war"** (50 articles, 35064 interactions)
 - 4) "Ukrainians are targeting civilians and commit other war crimes"** (43 articles, 52612 interactions)
 - 5) "The West is losing interest in helping Ukraine"** (35 articles, 22011 interactions)
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Civic Resilience Initiative.
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