



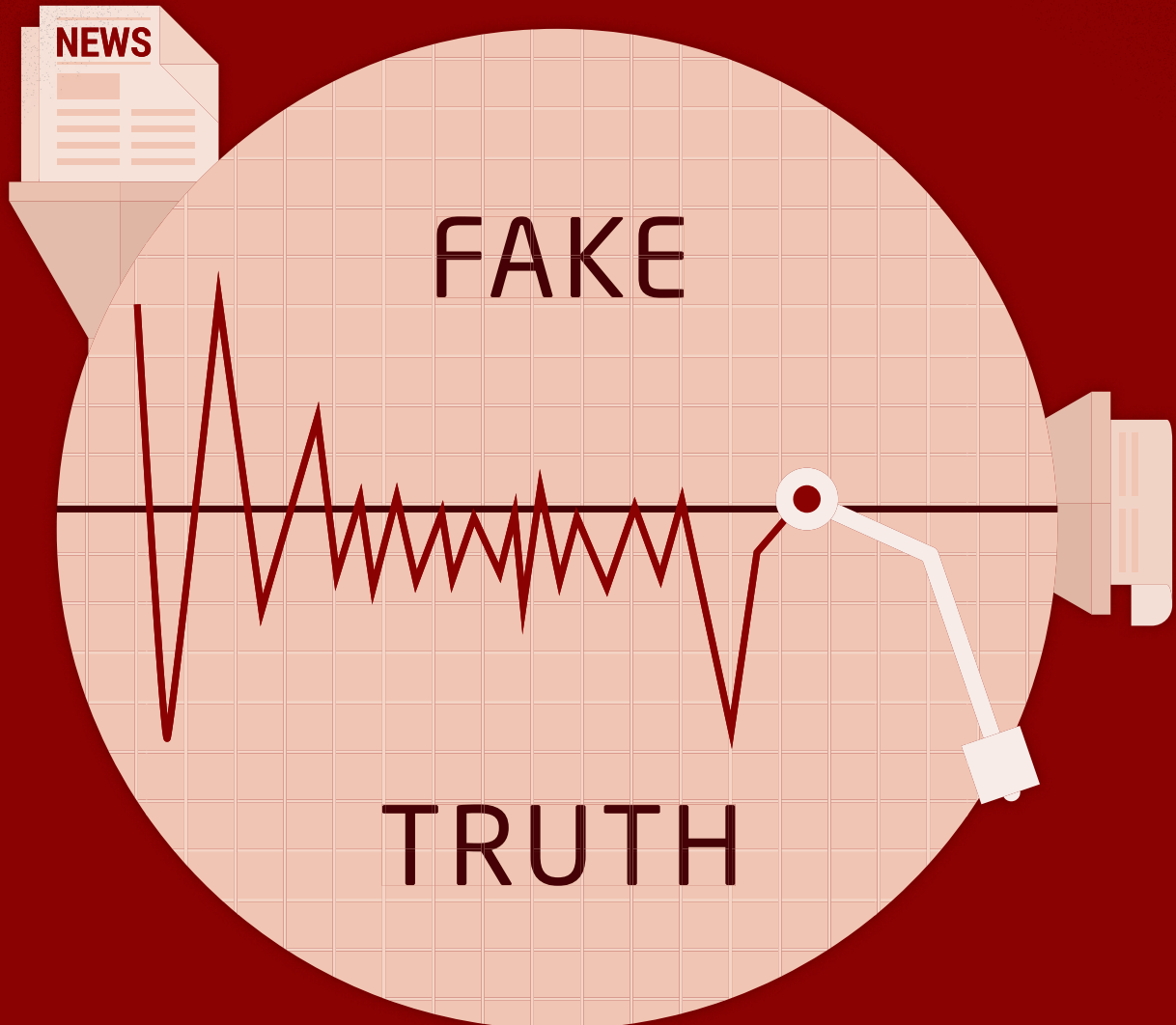
Oleg PANFILOV

Iliia State University (Georgia) professor, researcher of the propaganda issues, journalist. Commentator and author of the Radio Liberty.



Maksym KHYLKO

Maksym Khylyko, PhD, Senior Research Fellow at the Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv; Coordinator at the East European Security Research Initiative; between 2001-2010 worked as a political and media analyst and consultant.



**RECOMMENDATIONS
FOR COMBATING
RUSSIAN PROPAGANDA**



The same year Vladimir Putin first became president of Russia, the Information Security Doctrine of the Russian Federation was adopted, calling for measures to prevent “information aggression” by the West. The first warning bell showing the substance of the country’s new information policy rang during the Second Chechen War, when the space for expression of independent and pluralistic opinions on the developments came under threat for both local and foreign journalists.

The way Putin’s Russia envisages the use of information tools in its foreign policy became apparent only in 2008, when Russia occupied the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. During the war Russia Today (RT) ran a nonstop news ticker saying: “Georgia commits genocide in Ossetia.”

However it was only in 2014, when Russia launched its hybrid war against Ukraine, that the Kremlin’s determination to use media warfare, particularly propaganda, to deliberately destabilise a region and enhance territorial claims on neighboring sovereign states became evident for international community.

Russian propaganda poses a threat not only to Ukraine and Georgia but also to other Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries and the European Union. It primarily targets Russian-speaking audiences all around the world, who lack alternative sources to Russian state-controlled media for unbiased and trustworthy information in Russian. However, RT, a state funded media outlet with an annual budget of around \$270 million broadcasts in English, Arabic, Spanish and German and targets audiences in the EU and the US.

Over the past decade Russia’s influence over political life and public opinion in the EU and EaP countries has grown considerably. Propaganda is only one of the tools of Russia’s influence among a wide range of means it employs including also financial, political and technical assistance to political parties and other institutions including think-tanks and media in the EU.

Moreover, as written by Peter Pomerantsev, there is growing tendency for undemocratic regimes to “partner up to create international disinformation networks”. Russian TV channels, for example, have already been helping to disseminate story lines favorable to the Bashar al-Assad regime in Syria¹.

There is therefore now a need for a comprehensive and systematic approach to counter propaganda and only a unified position among EU member states can make it efficient. The European Council stressed this need in its conclusions of 20 March 2015 calling for preparation of an action plan to counter Russia’s disinformation campaigns. Below are a set of recommendations for combating Russian propaganda in the EU and EaP countries developed by Ilia State University (Georgia) professor, an internationally recognized expert on press freedom and journalism in crises Oleg Panfilov and Maksym Khytko, PhD, Senior Research Fellow at the Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, Coordinator at the East European Security Research Initiative (between 2001-2010 he worked as a political and media analyst and consultant) in cooperation with the Centre for Civil Liberties.

1 Peter Pomerantsev Unplugging Putin TV, How to Beat Back the Kremlin Propaganda in Foreign Affairs (February 18, 2015), available at www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/143100/peter-pomerantsev/unplugging-putin-tv

MONITORING & REGULATION



1. Creation and support of a monitoring group to gather and process information on the level of propaganda, restrictions on journalists, manipulation of information in the media of both EU Member States and Eastern Partnership countries. This research should look at public opinion polls, monitoring and other instruments in order to measure the influence of propaganda coming not only from media but also different lobby groups positioning themselves as “independent experts”.

2. Establish a team of lawyers to develop a mechanism to limit the possibility for Russian propagandistic media to operate on the territory of the EU and Eastern Partnership countries.

In particular, rules of reciprocity should be established in relations with Russia and other third parties. The Kremlin manipulates European freedom of speech, exploiting it to spread propaganda, while restricting the opportunities for the European and the U.S. media to work in Russia.

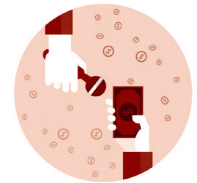


This is not an equal treatment. Governments, which restrict freedom of speech at home, should not be granted the opportunity to exploit freedom of speech abroad for the propaganda purposes. Instead, the **EU should facilitate access to its market for independent Russian media**, which provide the accurate information about life in Russia.



3. More strict legal regulation of the lobbying activities should be developed. There is a clear need to stop the practice of deceiving European citizens by presenting Kremlin-funded lobbying structures under the guise of “independent” think tanks. A lobbyist should be called a “lobbyist”, but not an “independent expert”; similarly paid-for advertising should not be described as “expert analysis”.

4. A zero tolerance for corruption in European media should be established. From time to time respected European and American media publish articles, that are little bit better than those published by Kremlin propaganda mouthpieces. This is not about an alternative point of view, but about obvious propaganda and signed by some so-called ‘expert,’ who may happen to work for some Russia-owned company (which of course is not mentioned in the article). The level of corruption in the Kremlin leaves Europe with little choice but to establish more stringent rules on the media market. It is worth considering the idea of special panels made up of renowned experts — who would **address difficult cases of possible violations of media legislation and professional standards.** While it may be difficult to prove that authors are illegally receiving fees for their articles, it is possible to prove that an article is just a piece of propaganda. As far back as the mid XX century, a well-known American researcher Harold Dwight Lasswell successfully discovered Nazi propaganda in the U.S. newspapers.



NEW MEDIA & NEW POSSIBILITIES

5. Establish a Russian-language media outlet providing alternative information (to state controlled media) about Russia, broadcasting for Russian-speakers all over the world with a special focus on the post-Soviet countries. The creation of new Russian-language informational sources on the internet, as well as TV and radio should be supported both in the EU and in the Eastern Partnership countries. The experience of PIK TV (Georgia) shows that the post-Soviet space has a special need of alternative source of information in Russian. Such a channel should involve journalists experienced working on the post-Soviet states. Broadcasting should be in parallel — on cable networks (where available), satellite and the internet. For better understanding of democratic processes it is worth producing educational programmes, screening documentaries dedicated to the transitional process in Central and Eastern Europe after the collapse of the USSR. Contests for interesting ideas and concepts for these media outlets should also be held. Traditional approaches can hardly be considered exhaustive.

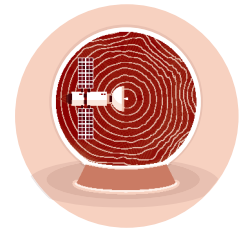


It is necessary to understand the keys to the success of Russian propaganda and why people tend to believe it. Significant amounts of time, money and effort can easily be wasted thanks to the misconception that a lack of access to alternative sources of information is the main problem. You can meet people living in the EU for decades who still prefer and believe in Russian propaganda media. The main problem, therefore, is not the lack of alternative Russian-language sources of information but the lack of a comprehensive approach. Why do so many people in Russia and ethnic Russians abroad tend to consume Kremlin propaganda instead of searching for the truth? Why they are so willing to accept negative and hateful so-called ‘news’ about the EU, the U.S., Ukraine, Poland and the Baltic states? These are the questions to be answered while taking decisions on which kind of Russian-language media should be established. Old school Cold war time recipes will not work out. That does not mean that there is no sense in creating the alternative, opposite, but this alternative should be based on smart, effective and systematic approach. This range of issues requires careful study through the mass communication and psychology methodology (including but not limited to the best practices of the *Uses and gratifications theory*, *Theory of cognitive dissonance* and *Spiral of silence theory*) with involvement of the scientific potential of the U.S., the EU, the neighbouring countries and Russia.



6. More local correspondent offices should be established in the neighbouring countries. What is really worth spending money on is the opening of local correspondent offices of European media outlets in the countries neighbouring the EU. It is almost impossible to know the truth about the real situation in Ukraine, Belarus or Armenia, if the news about them is being prepared in Moscow-based correspondent offices. The same applies to the local offices of the European and American think tanks. Even the most impartial Russian expert cannot know all the circumstances of the situation in Ukraine or Belarus, cannot feel the local mood, and in any case views these countries through the prism of Russia's interests.

7. Support projects to verify facts and expose fakes in media should be provided. The other things worth supporting are the projects that verify facts and to expose the fakes in published media. The Ukrainian resource *StopFake.org* is a good example, and some other similar projects work in the other countries. The EU could establish a single coordination centre to join efforts of all such local resources, to support them and to establish other similar local projects if needed. The geographic coverage of exposing fakes and propaganda in media should be as wide as possible and it should certainly include European media.



8. Media literacy and education of new journalists the more long term but most promising way. In the information age media literacy should be included to the list of mandatory schools subjects. Regardless of the presence or absence of information aggression, everyone should have the opportunity to gain knowledge on how to protect herself/himself against manipulation of the media, how to distinguish news from propaganda and how to critically evaluate information. This is needed not only to feel secure against the Russian or any other propaganda, but also to strengthen the foundation of the values underpinning European civilisation.



Journalism training in the post-Soviet space is also a subject for discussion and reform. Exchange programmes with EU member states and education based on the values of freedom of speech and quality journalism are still important for the Eastern Partnership countries and even more so for independent Russian journalists. Changes in the media climate and the emergence of a new generation of journalists working according the standards of contemporary journalism is a prerequisite for the countering Russian propaganda.

EDITING AND COORDINATION:

Maria Tomak, Center for Civil Liberties, Euromaidan SOS initiative

Olena Ivantsiv, project manager working on human rights and development of independent media in Ukraine

