



PROPAGANDA, FALSE NARRATIVES, MISINFORMATION - THE HARMFUL EFFECTS OF KREMLIN INFLUENCE IN NORTH MACEDONIA

Primer of media articles



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INTRODUCTION

The Metamorphosis Foundation for Internet and Society strengthens the awareness and capacity of citizens and civil society to take on the best possible role as activists for democracy, supporting state institutions and other social actors to fulfill their democratic roles - to serve society and the public interest.

For democracy to be sustainable and functional, it is necessary not only inclusive and active citizenship but also a well-informed public, which enables quality decision-making based on knowledge. In contrast, freedoms of expression and the media are threatened by a wave of disinformation that is part of populist authoritarian propaganda from domestic and foreign sources.

The “Anti-Disinformation Hub: Exposing Malign Influences through Watchdog Journalism” project aims to expose the main propaganda claims that deny the existence of harmful foreign influences in the Republic of North Macedonia aimed at undermining democracy. It is part of the ongoing efforts of the Metamorphosis Foundation and a network of media, investigative journalists, and analysts to document the situation and unmask the disinformation by providing evidence of the factual situation. The Primer “Propaganda, false narratives, disinformation - the harmful effects of the Kremlin influence in N. Macedonia” is a selection of created public records based on a transparent methodological approach for fact-checking that refutes the central principles of anti-democratic and populist propaganda.

Educating citizens in determining which information is relevant and accurate allows the whole society to become less vulnerable to the effects of foreign harmful influences. The acquired knowledge is the basis for an advocacy initiative that unites relevant stakeholders (government institutions, media associations, individual media, civil society organizations, the scientific-educational community, and the private sector) to counter the toxic effects of disinformation through inclusive public policy development and specific joint activities.

Bardhyl Jashari,
Executive Director of the Metamorphosis Foundation





DISINFORMATION TRENDS RELATED TO FOREIGN INFLUENCES IN THE REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA

Prepared by Despina Kovacevska and Gjorgji Mitrevski

To identify the trends of media reporting, as well as the key disinformation trends related to foreign influences in the country, within this study, the domestic media were monitored in the period from November 2021 to April 2022.

To determine the main disinformation trends, an analysis of more than 300 anti-disinformation articles was conducted, 160 of which directly related to the detection of disinformation related to foreign influences in the country, and were published as fact-checking and analytical articles by Truthmeter. The sample for conducting this analysis included all available articles that contain verifiable facts that can be checked by professional journalistic methods, including all highly viral articles, i.e. articles with high representation on social networks.

To obtain additional data on the total media representation of information related to the war in Ukraine, which was the most current media topic in the monitoring period, and thus the most susceptible to disinformation, monitoring was conducted using keywords, which were based on previous qualitative analysis of the present narratives in the media space. The sample for conducting the monitoring using keywords covered all media articles from the monitored period, available to domestic news aggregators.

This methodological approach does not provide a comprehensive picture of domestic media coverage in the observed period but provides a clear picture of the trend in domestic media reporting and the prevalence of disinformation trends in the country.





Key disinformation trends related to foreign influences

Out of the total number of identified disinformation articles in the monitored period, the sample of disinformation articles related to foreign influences included all articles that refer to or retrieve information from abroad, articles that mention other countries and/or international organizations and/or institutions, as well as articles that reflect some of the global conspiracy theories in the domestic media space. Through this method of selection, the analyzed sample contained all known disinformation articles, except for those that had no relation to topics, theories, or entities outside the country and referred exclusively to domestic social life.

The analysis of disinformation articles in the period November 2021 to April 2022 reveals that in the media and social networks in the country, there are three main disinformation trends. Understandably, the most common, given the intensity of events and media coverage of the topic, was disinformation related to the war in Ukraine, which was identified in 57 different articles.

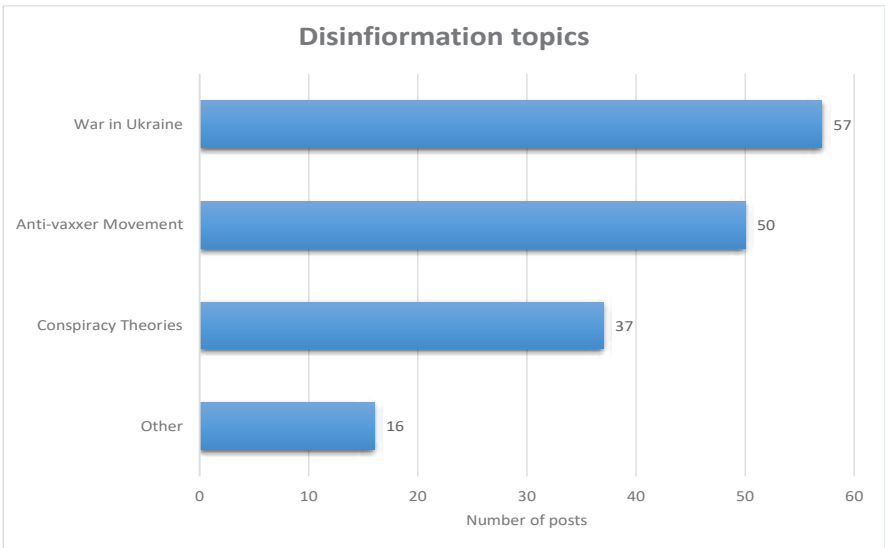
Disinformation aimed at promoting anti-vaccination, as a still very common disinformation trend in the country, was presented in 50 different articles. The main narratives of these disinformation articles are the previously known claims that the vaccine against Covid-19 causes diseases (such as cancer, Ebola, HIV, neurological diseases, heart disease, infections, and blood clots), then that the vaccines contain poison, i.e., graphene oxide, and that vaccines are harmful to pregnancy.

Disinformation that supports various conspiracy theories was somewhat less common. The analysis identified 37 different articles that disseminate conspiracy theories, with almost all the previously known theories such as chipping, DNA cloning, and other genetic manipulations, 5G, Plandemia, Fauci, pharmaceutical mafia, and eugenics.

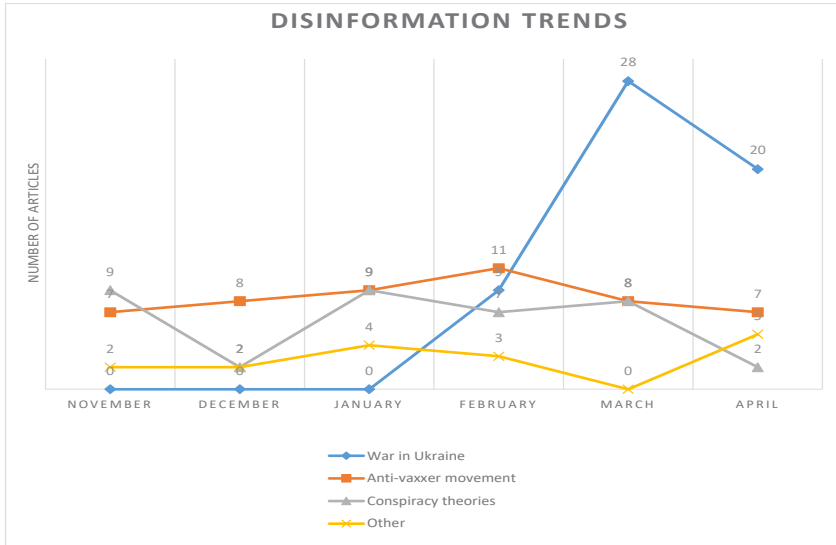
The sample also identified 16 additional articles with disinformation related to various other topics in the field of foreign influences in the country.



If we take a look at the presence of identified disinformation trends in the period from November 2021 to April 2022, we will notice that disinformation related to anti-vaccination and conspiracy theories, has a constant time representation, with little variation over the months, as opposed to disinformation about the war in Ukraine that follow the trend of media reporting on the topic.



The spread of disinformation related to the crisis in Ukraine at the beginning of the year, while the crisis was intensifying, was still very small. But after the start of hostilities in Ukraine on the morning of February 24, fact-checkers witnessed a dramatic change in the situation and a huge increase in disinformation about the events, so that in March the maximum disinformation activity was reached, and the disinformation related to the war in Ukraine was more than tripled. Although in April there was a slight decline in the number of misinformation articles on this topic, they are still three times more common than others.



Most disinformation articles come from social networks. As many as 152 of the analyzed articles were personal posts on Facebook, and only 8 were media articles.

The disinformation was mostly based on media articles in the domestic or foreign media (as many as 76 of all disinformation articles), followed by posts on social networks (38 posts, of which 19 on Facebook and 14 on Twitter). To a lesser extent, the disinformation was based on YouTube posts (16, web pages 13), as well as other sources.



Disinformation trends related to the war in Ukraine

With the development of war scenarios for Ukraine, disinformation narratives are also developing, which reach a global audience. However, the high level of readiness of fact-checking organizations has enabled the rapid detection of growing narratives and the implementation of fraudulent initiatives. The results of the monitoring of media coverage so far show that there is disinformation that benefits both warring parties; however, the ratio is far from equivalent. The Kremlin-led information war is systematic, far-reaching and truly destructive.

In the very early stages of the Russian military invasion, disinformation was primarily focused on military aspects that would raise the level of alarm and confusion. Then, referring to historical “truths”, the disinformation served to legitimize and even justify the antagonism, while the shocking stories of Ukrainian civilians were intended to provoke emotional reactions. Finally, conspiracy theories involving Ukraine, such as pandemic-related scams or the “deep state”, close the circle of well-known disinformation narratives. As events unfold, disinformation is expected to continue to adapt to developing scenarios, such as the growing disinformation about increased migration flows.

According to the weekly reports on disinformation narratives about the war in Ukraine ¹ of the European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO)², by the end of April this year, a large number of narratives are circulating in the European media space, which create the following disinformation trends:

- I. Rethinking the war, from its reality to its motives;
- II. Unfounded information about military operations;
- III. Distorted representation of Ukrainians and Zelensky;
- IV. Discrediting media coverage of Ukraine;

1 <https://edmo.eu/war-in-ukraine-the-fact-checked-disinformation-detected-in-the-eu/>

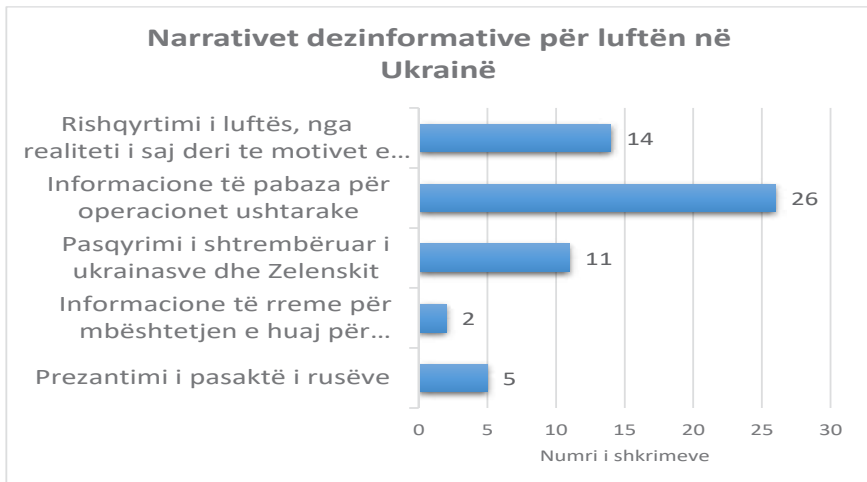
2 European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO); <https://edmo.eu/>





- V. Disinformation about the responsibility for the Ukrainian civilian casualties;
- VI. Disinformation about Ukrainian refugees;
- VII. Disinformation about the humanitarian crisis;
- VIII. False information about foreign support for Ukraine;
- IX. Schemes to support the Russian invasion of Ukraine;
- X. False information about food and medicine shortages; and
- XI. Incorrect representation of the Russians.

The analysis of the domestic articles shows that the disinformation that is spreading in the country is generally grouped around several disinformation trends that are most general and most present in the European media space (such as unfounded information about military operations, rethinking the motives for the war, or distorted representation of the warring parties). On the other hand, disinformation related to the humanitarian dimension of the war (such as the responsibility for the Ukrainian civilian casualties, the refugee or humanitarian crisis) is not present at all.



Unfounded information about military operations

The fabricated information about the development of the war was the first to spread since the beginning of the invasion, confusing public opinion and creating panic. From the very beginning of the war until now, we have seen decontextualized videos and photos in the media, which spread disinformation about armed aggression, explosions and other events on the battlefield. There is also a large number of articles spreading disinformation about NATO bases and biological weapons laboratories in Ukraine, which have affected not only digital but also some of the traditional media. Such narratives are present in almost half of the articles that spread disinformation about the war in Ukraine in the country (44%), and are also most present in the European media where they represent about one third of all disinformation related to the war in Ukraine.

Rethinking the war, from its reality to its motives

The number of narratives that confuse the public by questioning the reasons and even the basic facts about the existence of the war in Ukraine is not small. Disinformation is spread on social media that the war in Ukraine is staged, that the media is falsely reporting on the conflict, and even that the events in Bucha and Mariupol are not true, but it is a Ukrainian scenario intended to harm the Russian position. Such narratives can be spotted in a quarter (25%) of the disinformation from the domestic media, and they are equally found in the European media space.

Distorted representation of Ukrainians and Zelensky

As the conflict in Ukraine evoked difficult historical memories, narratives began to emerge in the public sphere that interpreted events through various allusions to the Nazi regime. Although the use of such narratives has been noticed by both warring parties, it should be noted that the Russian disinformation offensive is far more successful in this case. Unlike the anti-Russian disinformation (such as the cover of Time magazine, which featured Putin in Hitler's mustache) that was present to a lesser extent, the



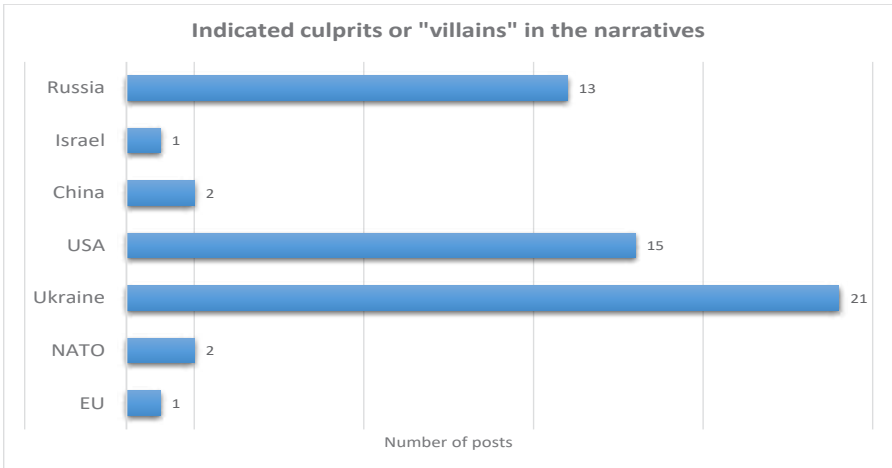


pro-Russian disinformation portraying President Zelensky and the Ukrainians in a Nazi light (such as for example, the edited photo of Zelensky holding a football jersey with a swastika), were very present in the domestic media space. There were several other narratives present as well, intended to discredit President Zelensky, found in almost a quarter (25%) of the articles that spread disinformation about the war in Ukraine.

Distorted representation of the Russians

The analysis of the domestic articles shows that, unlike the widespread pro-Russian narratives, anti-Russian disinformation is present in a significantly smaller number. Namely, on the domestic digital media, only five articles were found in which disinformation intended to discredit the person of Russian President Putin were identified.

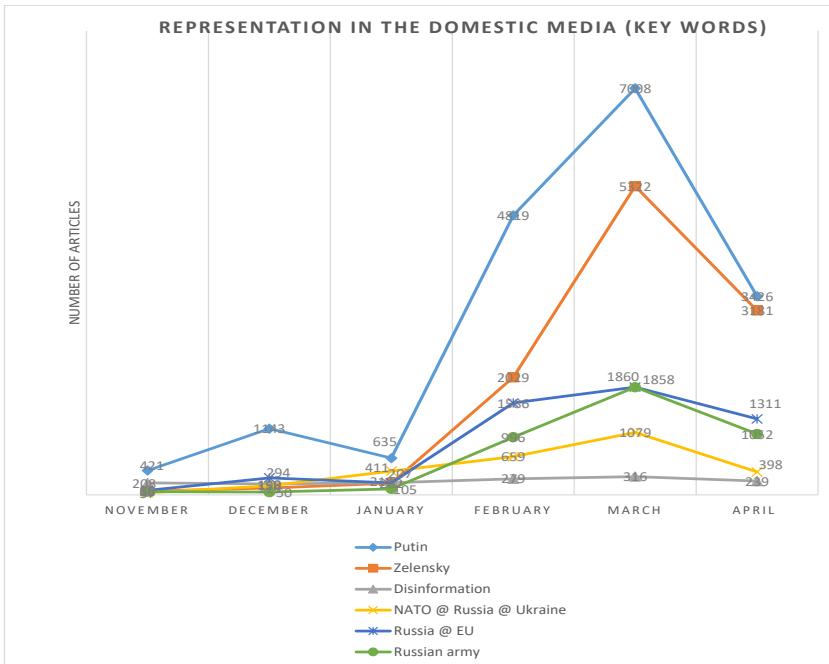
Content analysis of disinformation trends indicates that pro-Russian



disinformation narratives dominate the analyzed sample. With the exception of 5 articles, which represent only about 4% of the total sample, all other articles support Russian propaganda. The additional analysis shows that Ukraine, i.e. the USA or NATO, in a negative context are explicitly mentioned in more than two thirds of the media articles.

Monitoring domestic media coverage of the war in Ukraine

The monitoring of the media coverage for the period November 2021 to April 2022 gives a clear picture of the thematic presence in the domestic media. Media coverage of war-related topics in Ukraine has been on an upward trend since the beginning of 2022, when an enormous intensification of media coverage was observed, with the largest number of articles (main peak) observed in March, when the number of media articles on the topic doubled compared to the previous month, and tripled compared to January of the same year. In April, we see a decrease in the number of articles to a lower degree than in February.



The monitoring found that most of the articles in the media coverage from that period refer to the views and statements of Russian President Putin. Putin's media coverage is quite high in the run-up to the war in Ukraine. Thus, Putin was mentioned in 421 media articles in November, in 1143 ar-





ticles in December, and in 635 media articles in January. In February, the number of articles mentioning the Russian president rose to 4819, in March to a record 7008, while in April the number was 3426. Ukrainian President Zelensky in the period November 2021 to January 2022 is mentioned in a significantly smaller number of articles in compared to Putin. In November, Zelensky was mentioned in only 66 journalistic articles, in December in 119, and in January in 202. However, in February the number of media articles mentioning Zelensky rose sharply to 2029, while in March, it reached a maximum of 5322, and in April, it dropped to 3181 articles.

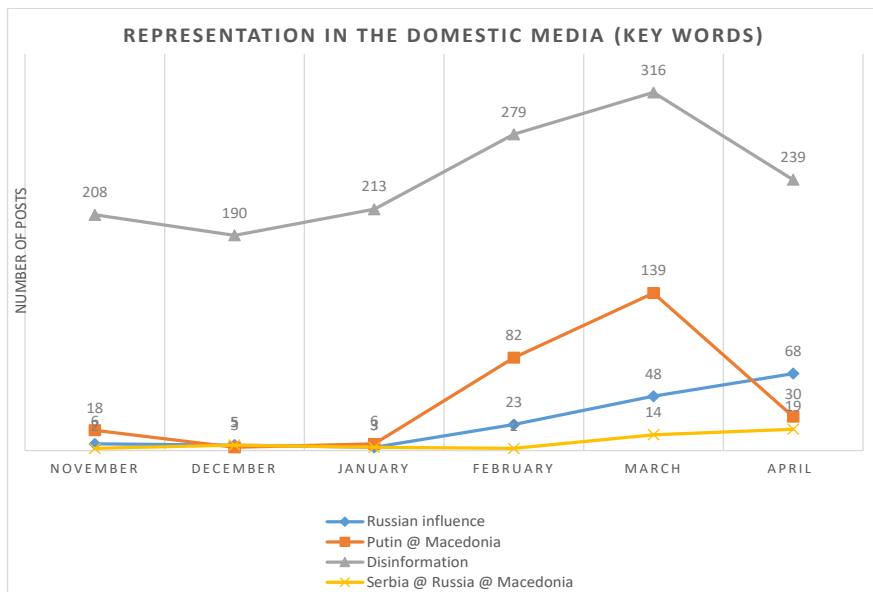
The quantitative comparative analysis of the media representation of the two leaders shows a clear trend of increasing the media representation of Zelensky. If in January, Zelensky was mentioned three times less than Putin, during February and March that difference narrows significantly, and in April, we note almost an equal number of articles referring to Putin and Zelensky.

In the media, we also notice an intensification of the coverage of the activities of the Russian army from the beginning of 2022. Thus, the Russian army was mentioned in 105 journalistic articles in January, in 996 in February, in 1858 in March, and in 1052 articles in April.

The domestic media reported more on the relationship between the European Union and Russia than on the NATO-Russia-Ukraine relationship. The relations between the European Union and Russia were reported in 80 journalistic articles in November, in 294 in December, in 207 in January, while in February in as many as 1586 journalistic articles. The largest media coverage was measured in March (1860 articles), and in April this number decreased to 1311. The number of journalistic articles mentioning the warring parties Russia and Ukraine, but also the NATO alliance, in November was 37, in December 158, in January 411, in February 659, in March maximum 1079, and in April dropped to 398 articles.

The notion of disinformation is almost equally present in the monitored period, with a slight intensification in the period January-April, following





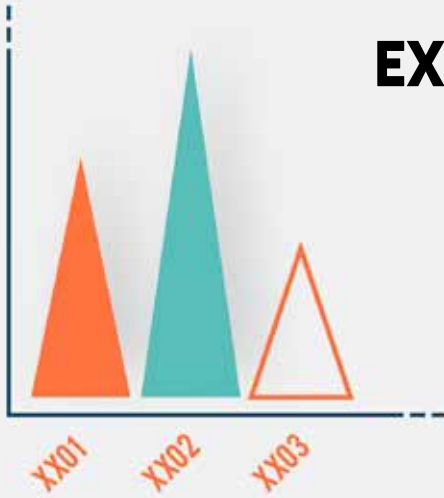
the same trend of increasing media coverage of articles reporting on the war in Ukraine. In November, disinformation was mentioned in 208 articles, in December in 190, and in January in 213. The number of articles containing disinformation increased to 279 in February, to 316 in March, and to 239 in April.

It is obvious that in the period January-March, the number of articles mentioning Russian President Putin in the context of our country increased sharply. In January, only 6 such articles were noticed, in February the number increased to 82, while in March even to 132. In April, the number of such articles in the domestic media dropped to 30.

Since January, we have also seen a growing trend of media articles analyzing Russian influence. Namely, there were 3 such articles in January, in February, 23, in March 48, and in April 68. In March and April, there is an appearance of articles in which content is included that includes Russia, Serbia and North Macedonia (14 in March and 16 in April).



IN-DEPTH EXPLANATORY ANALYSIS



THE MANNER OF CREATING FASCINATION WITH RUSSIA'S POWER IN THE MEDIA AND ON SOCIAL NETWORKS IN NORTH MACEDONIA

One of the simplest ways to influence a wider number of people is to glorify a country. Positive glorification can evoke admiration, a sense of belonging and community, a sense of protection, an ever-present refuge, an alternative available to citizens and the state... This is especially possible in times of stunted development or unfulfilled expectations or **dissatisfaction with speed with which things are moving**, in this case, the accession negotiations with the EU

Author: prof. Mirjana Najcevska, PhD,

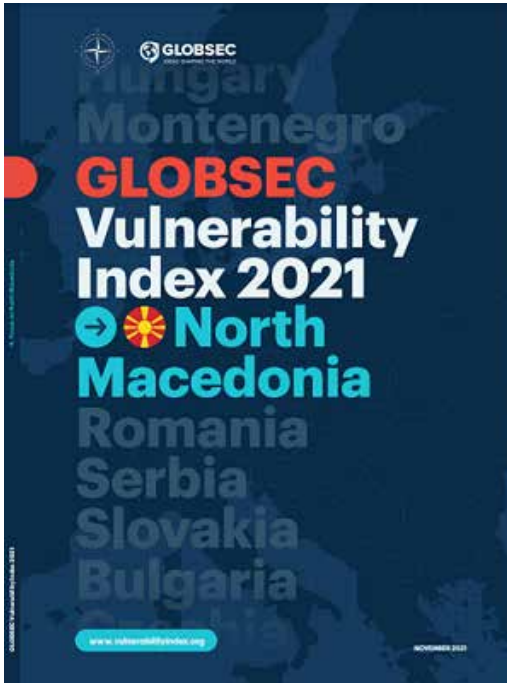
an expert on the rule of law and human rights

(Truthmeter, 31.01.2022)

Demonstrating the power of a state can refer to cultural, scientific or some other type of power, but it is most striking when it corresponds to the emphasis on military power. Exactly this segment of possible influence is interesting and catches the eye when analyzing the influence that Russia has in the Republic of North Macedonia.

In general, North Macedonia is not too exposed, nor is it under any visible and strong influence of Russia. Regular monitoring of the vulnerability of the country from this kind of influence by the think tank **GLOBSEC** from Bratislava shows that N. Macedonia is **moderately vulnerable** and that it has mechanisms that manage to deal with it.





GLOBSEC

Fascination with Russia's power exists and is transmitted both through the formal media and, moreover, through social networks and websites, but it is difficult to quantify and measure.

This is influenced by several factors.

First, analytical and investigative journalism is not developed in the country, but rather, copying and republishing news/information/analysis from other, mostly foreign media is practised. Considering that even in this

transmission the media from which the text is being republished are not quoted, and even less often links are given to the specific texts, one can only assume from which source certain news/information is taken according to its content.

Second, there is a tradition of listening/watching/reading media coming from the neighboring Republic of Serbia. It is very difficult to determine the extent of citizens' exposure to these media (many of which are very positive and non-selective when it comes to transmitting information related to Russia and its military power). The situation is worsening with the purchase of some of the media in the Republic of North Macedonia by **Serbian owners**. If this is put in the context of the **analyses that indicate** the great influence of Russia **in the Serbian media**, a conclusion can be drawn about that influence in the Republic of North Macedonia as well.

Third, **social networks** are an important source of information that is difficult to quantify. Trust in media outlets whose source cannot be verified is **significant and unequivocally dangerous**. Precisely because of the most informal way of conveying information, views, opinions, it is not easy to assess the level of impact it has on a wider circle of people.

What can be deduced from the analysis of the media in the Republic of North Macedonia is that Russia's military power is talked about in a way and in a quantity that can not be found in any other country. The one-sidedness of the information is emphasized by the fact that in the media there are no **relevant measurements and data** from which one can see the military power of individual countries/alliances.

1	United States		PwrIndx Score: 0.0453	▲
2	Russia		PwrIndx Score: 0.0501	▲
3	China		PwrIndx Score: 0.0511	▲
4	India		PwrIndx Score: 0.0979	▲
5	Japan		PwrIndx Score: 0.1195	▲
6	South Korea		PwrIndx Score: 0.1261	▲
7	France		PwrIndx Score: 0.1283	▲
8	United Kingdom			▲

Illustration: List of countries by military power according to GlobalFirepower (GFP).





This fascination (in the way it is portrayed in the media) may or may not correspond to **factual data** (given that very few articles point to relevant data or sources for certain claims). In any case, the media **are not opposed to different sources of data**.

In some articles, the absence of sources and relevant data is replaced by giving details of specific types of weapons and/or armaments that should create the impression of **relevance and knowledge**. For example, one such article is entitled “**A Killer Carrier Will Make Russia a Powerful Hypersonic Force,**” which provides a very detailed account of the “new” weapons being developed by Russia. Or “**Russian S-350 anti-aircraft systems coming to Crimea soon,**” “**Kaliningrad Fortress: The Russian army is rapidly forming a powerful division to defend important enclaves.**”

Some of the articles are structured in such a way that at first glance they seem to send a **message of concern** (from Russia’s military power), but in a number of such cases, the entire text radiates **admiration**.

Usually, Russia’s military power is not part of a broader or more in-depth analysis, the mention is often made out of context (related to an event – celebration, maneuver, statements by senior Russian government officials) and has no comparative elements or balanced representation of the military power of other states.

Even when the media refers to an expert or specific analyzes undertaken by other media, it is very rare to provide a link that would verify their original form. In any case, there is no balanced view or reference to different analyzes (some praising Russia’s power and its readiness to defeat the United States, and others claiming the opposite).

The small number of **serious analyzes** of the distribution of military power in the media of North Macedonia give completely **opposite data** (about military power and powerlessness, but even more about the economic situation in Russia) on those spread by portals and media that fuel the fascination with the military power of Russia.

Interestingly, when we talk about the distribution of military power worldwide (and even a possible conflict), we are usually talking about the



United States and Russia, and not about the balance of power or a possible conflict between Russia (or a structure led by Russia) and NATO.

Information about Russia's military power is mostly part of the news transmitted through social networks, but it is not uncommon for it to find a place in established print and electronic media. Part of that trend is the oldest newspapers in North Macedonia such as "Nova Makedonija" with articles titled "Russia is powerful again and the West must oblige" and "Vecer" with "VIDEO | Russia successfully tests another hypersonic missile."

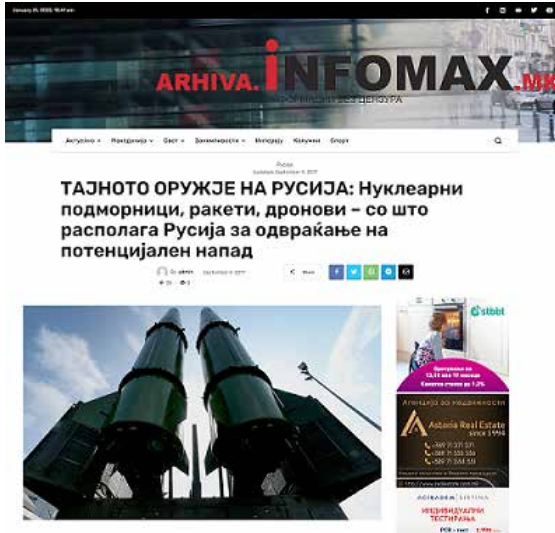
Sometimes it is indirect messages related to the sale of weapons to neighbors or "friends" or simply an attempt is made to achieve an appropriate effect with a **disparaging attitude towards NATO**.

In this sense, the choice of terms used to describe Russia's military power is also interesting. For example, it talks about " **All the power and beauty of the Russian army in one video: The Russian military TV channel broadcasts a spectacular video**":

The video was prepared by the team of the TV channel "Zvezda". It shows the mastery of Russian military pilots, tankers, paratroopers, artillerymen and machine gunners. Scenes from the launch of Caliber rockets from ships, as well as scenes of attack by attack helicopters and target-launching aircraft, are shown. The scenes with the take-off of the strategic bombers Tu-160 'White Swan' deserve special attention.

Much of the news related to Russia's military equipment and military power, which is further transmitted on certain portals or even in reputable media in North Macedonia, is downloaded from the **Russia Beyond** portal. Most often in such cases, this portal is not indicated at all as a source of information/data, nor is it mentioned that the information is part of a network of media funded by the Russian government, which includes the parent publication „Российская газета“ and **Russia Today (RT)**.





Printscreen of an article by Infomax.mk.

In building the impression of grandeur and fostering a fascination with Russia's military power, **some secret and brand new weapons** are often talked about.

No specific conclusions can be drawn from the articles presenting Russia's military power (obviously that is not the purpose of the articles), nor are any negative connotations of such military power mentioned. Usually, only the **impression of grandeur remains**.

This type of article is frequent in situations of potential conflict involving Russia as a party to the conflict, such as the latest example with Ukraine.

At the beginning of the rise of tensions related to Ukraine, the media in the Republic of North Macedonia did not have **too much analysis** on the topic. It is interesting that in **some of those that were made**, there was more talk about what is bothering the Russians than about what worries the Western European countries. In some of the information related to the conflict over Ukraine, a very open side was taken with the use of appropriate wording and context in which the statements of senior officials on both sides are transmitted ("Let's remember, Pentagon spokesman John Kirby"

(according to the portal “Lokalno”) stated that Russia is allegedly preparing an excuse for the invasion of Ukraine, without providing evidence for those allegations,”... “Until the evidence is presented, it will be considered fake news and false accusations against Russia.” – writes the portal “Observer”).

The number of columns analyzing the relationship between Russia and Ukraine in the light of European values was even smaller. One of the few columns in which an attempt is made for a balanced approach, which tries to correlate with the developments in Macedonia and the attitude of European countries towards it, was published by the portal “Factor” in 2019.

The next level was to develop a positive perception of Russia’s military power and to accept their actions as desired. In articles such as “Peacekeepers withdraw from Kazakhstan” published by the portal “Express” in January 2022, they become peacekeepers, with a clear peace role. Sometimes a positive perception is well packaged in a seemingly objective text.

This impression is emphasized by the quiet admiration for Putin’s tactics or “NATO disunity” and Western European countries, i.e. the “western” disinterest in Ukraine, as well as by the one-sided portrayal of Russia as a victim.

All of this can foster a generally positive attitude toward Russia, softening the perception of Russia as someone who uses its military power to expand its own influence and creates a perception of Russia as a possible protector, not a possible aggressor.

In the context of the large presence of articles from the Serbian media that nurture a negative approach to NATO, this is gaining momentum.

The number of information and articles on the relations between Russia and Ukraine that show the overall situation and from another perspective is increasing with the growth of the possibility of conflict, i.e., the entry of Russian military forces into the territory of Ukraine in the last weeks of January to gain enormous proportions. In January 2022, articles appeared for the first time talking about military power and military assistance that the United States and NATO are beginning to manifest/provide in relation to the conflict.





Lack of original analysis

There are still **no analyzes** by local authors, but **the source of information** (at least in the larger established media) is, above all, **the Western media**.

The information that tries to give an objective picture of the situation is gradually gaining in number and largely “covering up” those who continue to broadcast **anti-NATO** content in some of the media and content that belittles **any form of sanctions** in the event of possible aggression by Russia, i.e. such aggression is presented as **moral and justified**.

However, the problem remains with the transmission of content that very openly promotes support for Russia in the conflict with Ukraine through social networks. Namely, the official information and the transmission of the escalation of the conflict given in a number of media are not transmitted further by the social networks, unlike the contents in which **Russia is supported**, which are transmitted through **Facebook groups and informal groups that organize protests** and declare themselves open opponents of NATO and **silent supporters of Russia**. Moreover, on informal portals and websites that do not have an impressum and transparent information about the ownership, **such content** is produced by people that some citizens perceive as serious journalists.

Informing about the views of Macedonian politicians regarding Russia

In recent years, Macedonian politicians in power have rarely spoken out about relations with Russia. When they do, they usually try to sound democratic and politically correct and in no case place open accusations against Russia. Thus, for example, in 2019, Prime Minister Zoran Zaev on the affair with Russian pranksters, which was **officially described as a “hybrid attack”** by government officials, said that “it is not an act of the Russian Federation, a country that is our friend.”

Regarding Russia’s conflict with Ukraine, the **newly appointed Minister of Defense Slavjanka Petrovska** gave open support to Ukraine for the



first time. This statement was transmitted by a number of media in North Macedonia, but also caused an **avalanche of insults and humiliation** (which are again used to **emphasize Russia's military power**).

In contrast, open support for Russia (even in the conflict with Ukraine) is given by a **very small number of politicians** and they are usually in the opposition. An even smaller number of politicians currently involved in government structures make statements that openly support Russia and oppose Macedonia's NATO orientation.

One of them is MP Apasiev, who belongs to the Left Party (a party that won two seats in the 2020 parliamentary elections, and which in its **election program** clearly states that it is committed to Macedonia leaving NATO).

The leader of the party "Levica", Dimitar Apasiev, met with the Ambassador of Russia in Skopje, Sergei Baznikin, in the representative "Struga Room" of the Assembly. The MP's party says that the professor and the diplomat, among other things, discussed the famous tweet with which the Minister of Foreign Affairs Bujar Osmani gave his support to the United States in dealing with the tensions on the Russian-Ukrainian border.

Apasiev's statements are aimed at a positive perception of Russia.

It can be concluded that in some of the media, portals and websites within the social networks in the Republic of North Macedonia, a channel has been built for constantly and quietly building a positive attitude towards Russia's armed power and fueling the fascination of its magnitude.

It is very difficult to determine the true impact that this kind of information has on the general public, but the fact remains about the constant presence of this type of perception that can be easily thrown to the surface and multiplied in times of crisis and especially in conditions of growing dissatisfaction in the country from the (non)support it receives in the European integration processes.





TRUST IN MEDICINE – TOOL OF RUSSIAN INFLUENCE

Previously established trust in Soviet and Russian science and medicine is used as a means of political influence, especially in connection with the Covid-19 pandemic and vaccines

Author: prof. Mirjana Najcevska, PhD,
an expert on the rule of law and human rights

(Truthmeter, 23.02.2022)

Trust is a powerful tool in spreading Russian influence in North Macedonia.

In the case of Russia, it is a trust that has been built for decades and that can, but does not have to, be based on real elements. It is usually a trust based on the perception of high development and great achievements in the development of science, especially in medicine in Russia (formerly the USSR). Trust based on the perception (again regardless of whether there is relevant data and factual elements) that Macedonia has the **support** and assistance of Russia (despite the always **problematic** and **dubious behavior** of “Europe” and Western countries/democracies in general and “**their double standards**“).

This trust is promoted on social networks and by prominent professors in North Macedonia (and the **real developments** are ignored, which do not correspond to the given statements):

Tweet from prof. Tanja Karakamisheva, PhD, holder of high state positions in the period of captive state, with a text about a fabricated international initiative against the new constitutional name of the Republic of North Macedonia: “It is expected behind the initiative of Russia, China and Turkey to name Macedonia as the Republic





of Macedonia, and not as RNM to stand many UN member states, which will inform the Government and the President that they will use the name Republic of Macedonia. CHECKMATE or... “



An interesting example of a specific way of Russian influence in Macedonia based on trust is the media coverage of the pandemic declared in connection with the spread of Covid-19.

In this case, too, it is mostly information that is shared on social networks and in a limited number of portals and media, but they also find a place in established media (where the **low level of trust** of the citizens of North Macedonia in the media, in general, should be taken into account). The impact that such news has on the general public can be recognized in the phrases, words and explanations that are spread, which in full or in many respects resemble those promoted through openly pro-Russian oriented portals.

When it comes to trust in Russia as one of the ways to spread Russian influence, this trust should be correlated with distrust of Western European countries and the United States (as the other side of the coin) embedded in the information itself.



In this case, three sets of information/texts can be identified through which Russian influence penetrates (which seem to be even contradictory to each other but are ultimately based on trust in Russia and lead to the strengthening of this trust).

Conspiracy theories about the Covid-19 pandemic

The first group of texts refers to the denial of the pandemic, the existence of the virus and especially the problematization of the way of dealing with it (based on information shared by the Russian media or referring to Russian doctors/scientists).

Denial of the pandemic is often **straightforward and very open**:

After Britain and Russian Medicine with the Same Attitude: Covid-19 Is Not A Particularly Dangerous Infection - Panic Is Fabricated!

But it is often not direct, but very subtle. However, it very clearly indicates the intention of the “western countries” to use the “**pandemic lie**” in order to reduce the rights and freedoms of the people:

The panic of the “highly transmitted” mutated virus spreading across European countries - including Germany, Denmark and Ireland, among others - has prompted governments there to lock down these nations once again.

The denial of the existence of the virus is garnished with **quasi-analyses**, which offer political explanations for the way the pandemic is used in the world. Usually, this kind of “analysis” is mentioned by an analyst/scientist from Russia (in many cases even with a misspelt name or surname), for which there is no **evidence that they are in any way** relevant to the given field:





A prominent analyst at the Russian Center for Military-Strategic Research at the General Staff of the Russian Federation – Colonel Vladimir Kvatkov, analyzed the world psychosis caused by the coronavirus.

...
The pandemic, which does not exist, is a global strategic special operation. It is an exercise in command and control behind the scenes, in order to gain complete control over humanity. This is the background for the appearance of coronaviruses. The world of backstage, especially the financial one, aims to reduce the country's population. According to them, there are too many of us on the planet. There should be about a hundred million or more servants, a maximum of about one billion on earth.

The rhetoric of such conspiracy theories, which portray the pandemic as a means by “western” centers of power to kill part of the world's population, and to use survivors as “servants” or “slaves”, by anonymous authors and hidden impressium, then spills over into political discourse.

Glorifying the Russian role in the fight against the Covid-19 pandemic

The second group of texts is a glorification of Russia's achievements in the fight against the pandemic, the **manufacturing and efficacy of the Russian vaccine** and the progress in the discovery of **medicine against Covid-19**.

This line is further developed in **criticism of the government for the late establishment of a request to Russia for their vaccines, even by current politicians / MPs:**

Hey, is it true that the Russophobic idiots from the Government ignored the direct offer of a Russian vaccine, so they applied through the COVAX mechanism of the WHO. And, oh, they again got the Russian vaccine!?! What a colossal incompetence, - writes the MP from the ranks of the Left Party, Dimitar Apasiev.

Similarly, on social media, the government is openly labeled as Russophobic, accusing that such a relationship stems from the desire to be part of NATO and the European Union (EU) and that it is about:

... servile slave courtship of NATO and the EU.

The message is reinforced by pointing out the countries that have already done so (procurement of the Russian vaccine), expressing concern over the state's silence, and in particular information on the appropriate actions of the Serbian authorities and the friendly response by Russia:

I am not fully aware of whether a request for help came from Serbia. In any case, there is no doubt that this request will not go unanswered, especially because it is an important, allied and brotherly country, said Peskov.

Tensions are constantly rising and heating up with the release of data on the “huge” and “selfless” aid that Serbia is receiving.

Representatives of parties that openly spread misinformation and at the same time promote the Sputnik V vaccine appear on social networks as the only sure thing in dealing with the pandemic:

First, many countries in Europe and the world have banned the use of the Astra Zeneca vaccine because of the catastrophic consequences of receiving it. Second, the so-called Covid mechanism is a system of the World Health Organization, which receives free vaccine to distribute to incompetent countries that can not manage themselves.

Interestingly, even certain doctors (perhaps unwillingly) come in support of the Russian vaccine:





“I think that the Sputnik V vaccine will not reach the country again, that is my personal position due to the political problems with Russia,” Dr. Nikola Panovski told Fokus.

According to him, this vaccine has proven to be one of the most effective in the fight against the coronavirus and citizens to be vaccinated with “Sputnik V” may have to travel abroad again to be vaccinated with a third dose.

Many media outlets are sensationally placing articles **talking of high confidence in the vaccine (and in English)** and building the impression that it is widely present in neighboring EU member states:

Croats occupy Russian embassy, want to be vaccinated with Sputnik V



Page of the aggregator Time.mk with links to articles (11.2.2021) based on a statement of the Russian Embassy in Croatia (8.2.2021), which mentions that they allegedly “received a number of questions” from the citizens there about the purchase of a vaccine. Many Macedonian media outlets use sensational headlines such as “Croats want Russian vaccine, phones on the Russian embassy in Zagreb keep ringing”, “Russian embassy under siege by Croats over vaccine”, “Croats occupy Russian embassy in Zagreb”. Various reports warn of up to “hundreds” and “thousands” of Croats, backed by photos

of the masses. The truth is that there was no gathering, and the photos of thousands of people are protesting against the epidemiological measures in the main square in Zagreb, which had nothing to do with the embassy (February 3, 2021).

In articles in the Macedonian media or on social networks, the “Sputnik V” vaccine (made in Russia) is at no time associated with any form of **negative intentions, side effects** or imagined ways of **control (chipping, killing)**, which has repeatedly been linked to vaccines made in **Western European countries**. This as information is especially shared **through social networks**:

The Russian Sputnik V vaccine has already proven its safety and efficacy. After receiving the vaccine, almost no unpleasant, side effects occur, unlike other vaccines used in Europe and the United States.

Very few Macedonian media outlets report and explain **why the Russian vaccine is not recognized by the World Health Organization (WHO)**, the European Medicines Agency (EMA) and health and government authorities in a number of countries – because the manufacturer did not provide complete production and clinical trials to the WHO.

There is a lack of more detailed information/analysis on possible adverse reactions to the vaccine or long-term consequences, unlike such **information on other vaccines** (developed by Western European countries). This does not prevent the media from formulating messages that can be perceived as a **recommendation regarding the Russian vaccine**.

The information is further upgraded and expanded even in media that have a relatively **high rating and have existed** for a long time:

Almost all of the key vaccines produced in the West have problems. Either the problem is in the production (and delivery) process, or it has been determined to be available late (and Europe has no time to delay), or new





studies suggest that these vaccines may be less effective in creating immunity to new coronavirus variants that emerged as part of this pandemic.

Suddenly, the vaccines that “should not even have been mentioned” are not only good, but are also praised especially China’s Sinopharm and Russia’s Sputnik V (after the study was published in the medical journal *The Lancet*).

These media even conclude that there is **direct pressure on Russia** by the West:

One thing has been constant in recent years, for almost ten years – Western pressure on Russia.

...

It is also no secret that all this time Europe has been the bearer of American policy towards Russia, a policy that comes down to “isolating and surrounding” Russia.

...

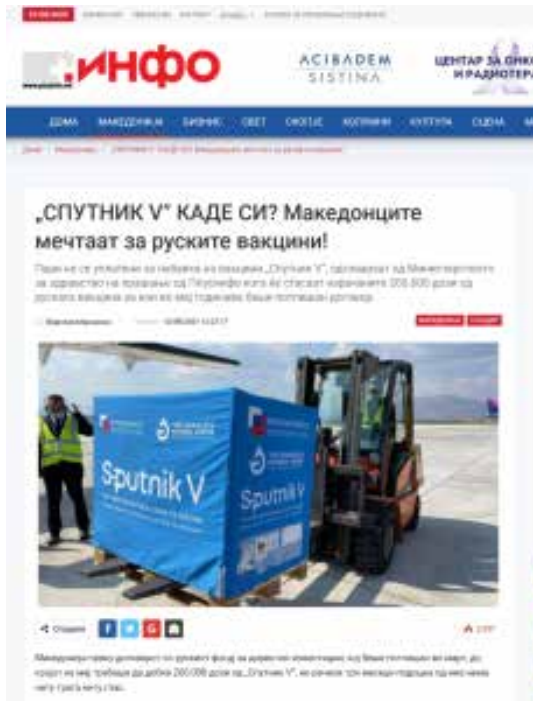
But Europe “wants to interfere” in Russia’s internal affairs.

Without any real data, information is spread that even Western European countries (EU member states) require Sputnik V vaccines (**as the least harmful**, but with other better properties):

Some EU members are turning to Russia and China, and even French President Macron is wondering if AstraZeneca vaccines (and other Western vaccine makers) are worth now.

Difficulties in delivering and storing the AstraZeneca-Oxford vaccine, combined with unanswered questions about vaccine efficacy and safety, are causing demand to decline, not only in the UK but across Europe.





As a result of all this, a large part of the citizens of North Macedonia is in favor of the Russian vaccine, as described in the article entitled “Sputnik V, where are you? Macedonians dream of Russian vaccines!”

Despite the fact that in our country a large number of citizens would like to be vaccinated with “Sputnik V”, as shown by the Makfax poll, according to which a third of the surveyed citizens opted for the Russian vaccine, but also according to the information that Macedonians that were vaccinated in Serbia chose the vaccine of the Russian manufacturer, the Macedonian authorities cannot provide it,” *the article reads.*

The claim that “Sputnik V” is a better vaccine continues to this day, and there are claims (completely unconfirmed) that this vaccine protects against the emerging variants and subvariants of the virus:





Sputnik V provides better protection against omicron than the Pfizer vaccine

All this is updated with articles describing medicine for Covid-19 promoted and already used in Russia, **and even officially registered:**

Russia has registered a spray against Covid-19, patients recover in just eight days

The mosaic is complemented by a number of articles promoting specific findings by Russian scientists helping to fight Covid-19, such as “**Scientists at St. Petersburg State University: TB vaccination could reduce the spread of Covid-19 and facilitate recovery**” and “**Russia is developing a unique coronavirus vaccine**”.

Russian scientists are working to develop a unique vaccine that will simultaneously protect against the flu and the coronavirus, the director general of the Almazov National Center for Medical Research, *Evgeny Shakhto*, said on Wednesday.

This is compounded by **erroneous or lacking information** (especially at the beginning of the pandemic) **about the real situation with Covid-19 in Russia**, the number of cases and deaths.

In general, according to Russian President Vladimir Putin, the number of COVID-19 cases is currently declining, and “the pandemic is really gradually receding.”

The third group of texts builds/confirms the trust in Russia in the case of dealing with the pandemic on the claim that Russia cares about people, not about profit.



They say that Macedonian citizens can get access to the Russian vaccine if the government decides to purchase the Russian vaccine, and the Russian Direct Investment Fund is ready to start negotiations, including the delivery of the vaccine, which “will certainly be available at the most competitive price“.

There is no information in the media on the profit of the pharmaceutical companies in Russia, the state or individuals related to the vaccine against Covid-19 (there is an impression that this is an act of goodwill or a minimal fee), in contrast to the large number of such information relating to other vaccines.



A thread tweet that does not contain links to the mentioned scientific journals reads: “The Russian vaccine Sputnik V is a product of a military-scientific institute, not a pharmaceutical company. It is said to affect all corona variants. The latest from Lancet is that it is 91% effective and has no significant side effects. British AstraZeneca works with the Russians.”

The perception that Russia works for the greater good, and not for profit, is reinforced by statements such as:





The scientist noted that Russia can be an efficient and economically profitable donor of vaccine deliveries to countries that do not have their own vaccines with the sole purpose of protecting the world population from Covid-19.

Abuse of trust as a means of political influence

The impact that trust uses as a tool can be very powerful and difficult to detect.

The pandemic and dealing with it opened the door for two lines of influence of Russia through the media and social networks in North Macedonia.

The first line focuses on strengthening existing trust in Russia and expanding and upgrading it, using the direct promotion of Russia's involvement in dealing with the pandemic, indirect input of completely unverified information about Russia's place in efforts to deal with the pandemic globally, and direct accusations by the current government of North Macedonia about the lack of greater cooperation with Russia.

However, much more problematic and frightening is the second line of influence which is based on comparing Russia and the EU and the US in order to build elements of distrust towards the EU and the US according to one-sided, incomplete and/or non-existent data, their dehumanization and creating constant suspicion about manipulation and evil intentions and/or a simple desire for profit.



THE SENSE OF BELONGING AS A TOOL FOR RUSSIAN INFLUENCE IN NORTH MACEDONIA

One of the simplest ways of influencing a wider circle of people, which has been continuously used by Russia in the Republic of North Macedonia, is to build and nurture the narrative of mutual belonging (in international relations this theory is known as “natural alliance”). Unity and common affiliation are associated with Slavism, religion, language, tradition, and lately more and more with the value system that distinguishes them as countries and peoples from that of the “West”

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(Truthmeter, 25.03.2022)

Origin and traditional connection

Although Slavism as a connecting point with Russia is not mentioned so often (as in neighboring Serbia or in the period when antiquisation in Macedonia had not yet gained momentum), it must not be neglected.

Belonging to Slavism is presented as a curse and as a gift, and it is promoted quietly, **as opposed to those others from the “West”**:

The world of the Slavs is associated with overheated emotions, unbridled passions, suicidal irrationality, Orthodox restraint and explosive mixtures of tears and laughter. The West, on the other hand, is considered sober and tolerant, Protestant rational and civilized. And look, the time has come for the wars of the Slavic





everyday life to seem like a banal childish defiance in relation to the Western ones.

Slavism is always present in the texts that celebrate **Cyril and Methodius**.

The Day of the All-Macedonian and All-Slavic Enlighteners, the Day of the All-Macedonian and All-Slavic Culture and Literacy, the Day of the Thessaloniki Brothers Holy Apostles Cyril and Methodius the Macedonians!

More often than not, communion is implied by the use of the terms “brotherly peoples” and “brotherly relations”. These terms (which are contained in several texts, especially on social networks) promote and **support the idea of a traditional connection** between Russia and Macedonia, i.e. the Russian and Macedonian people:

HOMELAND MACEDONIA will renew the close and fraternal relations with Russia, unnaturally interrupted by other global interests in the last century and, as stated in the geostrategic program strategy, will incorporate Macedonia in the Eurasian Union of fraternal freedom-loving peoples from Lisbon to Vladivostok.

Thus we will renew the close historical ties between the two fraternal peoples that have their roots in Alexander the Great with the Bodriches (Macedonians) and Rurik who was incorporated in the creation of the Russian state, through the Macedonian and all-Slavic educators St. Clement and Nahum, St. Cyril and Methodius, the participation of the Macedonian volunteer regiment in the Crimean War in the XIX century and the activity of the Macedonian intellectuals and fighters for national freedom in St. Petersburg, Dimitrija Cupovski and Krste Misirkov, and the Miladinovci Brothers.

These seemingly unfavorable expressions of unity and reference to the historical roots of the connection (which can be disputed by [historical facts](#)), result in support of the current government in Russia, and in support of the [Putin's current aggression against Ukraine](#).

Macedonians, on Saturday at 14:30 come in front of the Russian Embassy in Skopje, there will be a rally to express dissatisfaction with the fact that the occupying junta put us on the list of enemies of Russia, under the motto "Your enemy is the North, the Macedonian is your brother!"

Let us all unite and go in front of the Russian Embassy and give support to Russia against the propaganda and Russophobia !

Given that Russian influence is most easily spread among those who see danger in embracing "Western" values and "Western" democracy, the problem of Slavism as the denominator of communion collides with the idea of the ancient origins of today's Macedonians and direct ties to Alexander the Great.

In order to resolve this contradiction, [more extreme "analyzes"](#) appear on some of the portals in which the connection between Macedonia and Russia is connected with the Macedonian origin of the Russians:

To support this claim we will use an excerpt from the book [Slavic Origin \(Stolen History, Petar Popovski, PhD, pp. 361-362\)](#) which clearly states:

"The ancient written document of the Moscow Annals explicitly claims that the Russians, i.e. the Muscovites,





who came from the Macedonian territories, spoke the same language as the ancient Macedonians.”

According to this, the Russians come from Macedonia, just as the Russian language has its roots in the Macedonian.

However, on the whole, those who spread the idea of unity and traditional connection between Macedonians and Russians do not engage in resolving this kind of contradiction and illogicalities.

The positive attitude towards Russia is further built by **promoting** Russia / Putin's alleged support for the Macedonian identity (again avoiding the explanation of whether it is a Slavic or an identity that originates from the ancient Macedonians):

The Russian Embassy in Skopje, quoting a statement by the President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin, “literacy came from the Macedonian land” congratulates the Macedonian people on the national holiday, the Day of the All-Slavic educators Saints Cyril and Methodius.

This is further spread in different (pictorial) ways on social networks, emphasizing the importance and with a clear implication for those “others” who contribute to changing the name, language, identity of Macedonia and the Macedonians.

The connection with Russia **through religion (as part of a common identity)** and some general statements by Putin are made even when these statements have no direct or indirect connection with Macedonia or the Macedonian people.





In this way, the perception is built that there is **continuous support of the authorities in Russia** (especially Putin personally) for the protection of the identity of the Macedonians and the recognition of the importance and merits of Macedonia for the entire Slavic world.

Russia always unconditionally recognizes the independence and authenticity of the Macedonian language, history, culture and identity, said today the Russian Ambassador Sergey Baznikin during his visit to Kumanovo.

This narrative is continuously expanding and gaining importance, despite the fact that it does not coincide with the reality in which Russia recognizes Macedonia under its new constitutional name **North Macedonia**, nor the fact that the Russian Church at **no time showed intention to recognize** the Macedonian Orthodox Church or the **absence of significant economic support** from Russia.





Trade with Russia is around 2% of the total trade. Foreign direct investments are 0.5%, and foreign currency remittances, which are a significant motivator of the Macedonian economy, i.e. Russian remittances in Macedonia participate with only 0.1%.

It is obvious that this type of texts have been especially spread on social networks in the recent period (since the beginning of Putin's aggression against Ukraine), regardless of the fact that they were first written / shared much earlier.



Maja

@_maja

Со оваа реченица направи повеќе за македонскиот народ од било кој политичар на светот! И ај сега чај пријатно!

Translate Tweet

ПУТИН: ПИСМЕНОСТА ДОЈДЕ ОД МАКЕДОНСКИОТ ЈАЗИК

понеделник, 24 мај, 2021

👍 64311 ми 1



10:23 AM - Mar 17, 2022 - Twitter for iPhone

43 Retweets 5 Quoted Tweets 177 Likes

Common tradition and values

A particularly striking way of influencing Russia in Macedonia is by claiming that the two peoples/countries have a common tradition and especially a common value system (contrary to the values that, in addition to the messages placed in certain media and social networks, the “western countries” are trying to impose).

Most often, the message is two-sided. It points to a clear commonality of the general value system with Russia and emphasizes the differences in relation to the “Western” countries.

For example, in a column entitled “Sorry, but we cannot believe

in the same values, Mrs. Galloway” dedicated to the “double standards” of “Western” democracy against the Russian Federation, there is a sentence in which the Cossacks are suddenly mentioned (probably as an antipode of the Slavs?):

Well, you remember your family leaving for England in 1911, after the Cossacks tried to take (I guess, forcibly abduct) your four-year-old great uncle. And you have to remember, because uprooting every family is a tragedy in itself that I sympathize with it.

It is not uncommon the appearance of the claim that the “West” was not and cannot be a friend of the Slavs. *They follow it, but for a short time.*

Dostoevsky warns that Russia should be seriously prepared for the future behavior of the Slavs, who will enthusiastically turn to Europe to the point of losing their national individuality, their culture and traditions. He says that they will be infected with the virus of the European institutions, but they will have a long way to go towards Europeanization, slowly losing their identity, and thus their importance as Slavic peoples. Although the people will long have the feeling that Europe has neither been nor can be a true friend, nor can it be expected to help in any greater trouble, they will try to put themselves under its umbrella.

Such texts are not placed in the context of the current situation, the connection of the countries with a predominantly Slavic population with the “West”, the clearly expressed aspiration for unity within the EU and of course the economic aid and support coming from the “West”.

This is followed by a series of *analyzes of European values (which collide with those of other, non-Western European values):*





Next term is the term European values. This term builds on the term Euro-Atlantic integration and is always used in its context. Their goal is to create an image that in the EU and NATO people live according to European values, and everything outside is without values, uncivilized and, of course, if they wish to be civilized, they need those famous Euro-Atlantic integrations. The first problem is that European values are not limited to the borders of EU and NATO countries. European values are also Glagolitic, Cyrillic, Koneski, Racin, Andrkj,, Dostoevsky, Tchaikovsky, etc. In addition, Europe, when thinking of the West, did not just produce values. Western European products also include chauvinism, imperialism, racism, fascism and Nazism.

This often ends with the glorification of Russia and especially [Putin in his struggle for traditional values](#).

Vladimir Putin read his annual message as President of the Russian Federation addressed to the Federal Assembly. This year the message was read on the day of the 20th anniversary of the Constitution of the Russian Federation, which was adopted on December 12, 1993, by universal suffrage. In his address, Vladimir Putin stressed that Russia will continue to defend traditional values.

The most explicit support for those different values offered by Russia versus the “West” is discussed on the [Free World website](#), which is further transmitted through social networks:

We are convinced that Western civilization, with its liberal economic market model, migration policy and consumer society ideas, leads to the death and destruction of the entire indigenous European population, and only Russia, as the last bastion of traditional values in Europe, is able to ensure a peaceful and a decent life for all Slavic and other European peoples.

This completely ignores the fact that the consumer society, the liberal market and the migration policy are as present in Russia as in other countries.

In some of the media this is done by directly transmitting **statements of senior Russian officials**, which allude to the closeness of the peoples and the discrepancy between what is meant by public opinion and opinion/position of the current political set in Macedonia, i.e. promoting the idea that the current situation and the “West” orientation is artificially imputed by the governing structures and opposite the governing structures that are influenced by the “West”.

North Macedonia and Montenegro, unfortunately, fell under the influence of the West, failed to form any independent policy in the Ukrainian direction and joined the regime of frontal sanctions. It will inevitably affect them, complicating the already difficult economic situation. Of course, bilateral relations with Russia will suffer. We have warned about all this many times before. It should be repeated that the hostile line of local leaders towards our country does not enjoy public support. Despite the attempts of the West to impose destructive unanimity, the citizens of these countries are able to create an objective picture, to separate the propaganda lie from the facts.





The “new world order”, which should be based on the common Slavic values, **is promoted by alleged scientific / expert analyzes** that are placed on social networks (which again completely ignore the current political and economic system in Russia):

Russia does not put pressure on Macedonian policy, we want other countries to do the same, said today in Skopje Alexander Dugin, the first adviser to Russian President Vladimir Putin and creator of Russia’s all-Slavic strategy, participating on the panel discussion “Macedonia in a strategic alliance with Russia and membership in the Eurasian Economic Union”

In a number of texts this rises to the level of a frightening conflict, which is explained by the hatred of the “West” for everything Slavic, and even with intentions to destroy the **Russian media scene: Controlled content with little space for foreign media**. According to some media, **a biological war is already being waged against all Slavs** and biological weapons are being made genetically modified and directed against Slavs.

Coronavirus is deadliest for the Slavs - The famous geopolitical analyst claims that the Russians have evidence of the laboratory origin of the virus

The absurd claim, based on the existence of genetically pure peoples and which overlooks that Ukrainians and Russians are Slavs, develops into a theory based on statistics, designed to unite all of Slavic descent **against a common enemy from the “West”** :

What is even more terrifying is the list of countries in terms of the number of deaths per million inhabitants in the world. Of the 10 countries with the highest mortality

per million inhabitants, as many as 9 are members of the Slavic group of peoples or share a huge number of genes with the Slavic peoples and are countries of Eastern Europe.

If we go a little further than 30 countries in the world with the highest mortality of one million inhabitants of the coronavirus in the world, as many as 19 countries are from Eastern Europe and with a large Slavic population!

The topic continues to be “elaborated” in concrete “examples” of how the Slavs should be destroyed:

Biological weapons developed in Ukraine affect the reproductive system of women and the immunity of certain ethnic groups, the head of Russia’s state space agency Roscosmos, Dmitry Rogozin, said on Monday.

These frightening “intentions” of the “West” (despite all their illogicality, utter arbitrariness and unreality in terms of science and especially in terms of the absence of pure ethnic groups) find a place on social networks and in the media and encourage new grouping based of fear, the certainty of belonging on the basis of traditional values and imaginary support.





RUSSIAN PROPAGANDA DURING THE MACEDONIAN POLITICAL CRISIS (2015) – DISINFORMATION ABOUT THE “UKRAINIAN SCENARIO”

Analysis of the disinformation and conspiracy theories about the “Ukrainian scenario”, the “colored revolution” and the “Macedonian Maidan” with which Russian propaganda and its local allies in 2015 imposed narratives to justify Russian aggression against Ukraine and anti-democratic populist regimes of Putin and Gruevski

Authors: Žarko Trajanoski, media analyst

(Truthmeter, 10.02.2022)

The propaganda efforts of official Russia, which sought to **discredit** the anti-government protests in Kazakhstan as a “colored revolution” directed and planned in the West, fall within the realm of “already seen” communication strategies. On the same day that Kazakh President **Kasim-Zhomart Tokayev** propagated a coup attempt and aggression by “foreign militants”, Russian President **Vladimir Putin** **spoke** of measures to prevent a scenario of “colored revolutions” and the application of “**Maidan technologies**” in Kazakhstan.

The term “colored revolutions” is an integral part of the Kremlin’s official communications, especially after the events in Ukraine known as the “**Orange Revolution**” of 2004 and the **Euromaidan** of 2012.

Moscow sees the “colored revolutions” as a security threat not only to Russia but also to the world, especially after the end of the “Ukrainian (Maidan) Revolution” in February 2014. Putin also spoke of the threats of “colored revolutions” at the “**Third Moscow International Conference on International Security**”, which takes place shortly before the election of **Petro Poroshenko** as President of Ukraine on May 25, 2014. The conference





described the “colored revolutions” as factors for destabilization around the world, and the criteria for “exporting” “colored revolutions” and the aspects of “information warfare” are highlighted.

The “colored revolutions” are not only part of Russia’s military-political propaganda, but also part of the military-political doctrine to suppress them. An indicator of this is the joint “**Slavic Brotherhood**” exercises in 2015, which included Russian, Belarusian and Serbian troops, aimed at combating a “potential Maidan scenario”, including in the Balkans. There are serious indications of other **activities by Serbia and Russia** to oppose “colored revolutions”.

The Russian military-political propaganda and doctrine of the “colored revolutions” was applied in the context of the political crisis in the Republic of Macedonia in 2015. Macedonia was the target not only of propaganda communications from official Russia but also fertile ground for disinformation and conspiracy theories about the “Ukrainian scenario”, the “colored revolution” and the “Macedonian Maidan”.

In this analysis we will focus only on the first period of the political crisis – from the announcement of the “Coup” case to the final “Pržino Agreement” – a political framework for the peaceful overcoming of the Macedonian political crisis in 2015, which temporarily dispels the dark conspiracy theories for a bloody “colored revolution.” In the second period of the political crisis – from the formation of the SPO, to the holding of early elections in December 2016, as well as in the third period – after the early elections to the formation of the political government on May 31, 2017, there were Russian conspiracy theories and disinformation for a “colored revolution” in Macedonia, which will be the subject of additional analysis.

The beginning was a “coup” – “Ukrainian scenario” and a prevented “colored revolution”

Although there were announcements of a “Ukrainian scenario” **before the 2014 elections**, and at the **end of 2014**, the term “Ukrainian scenario” was especially exploited after the “official” start of the political crisis in Macedonia in 2015.



The beginning of the political crisis is usually considered the date when the then **Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski** publicly accused the then opposition leader of SDSM, **Zoran Zaev**, of attempting a coup in cooperation with “foreign services” (the so-called “Coup” case). This was followed by **criminal charges** from the Ministry of Interior, which “informed” that *“for the first time in history, a case was realized in which an attempt was made to endanger the constitutional order and undemocratic takeover of power.”* Official **Moscow immediately reacted** with a “strategic communication” in which the official story of a prevented “coup d’etat” by the SDSM leadership, in cooperation with “foreign services”, **was supported**. This surprising communication from Moscow provoked **media headlines** with a “Ukrainian scenario” and **analysis** that the statement of the Russian Foreign Ministry in the “Coup” case is aimed at supporting Russian interests in Ukraine.

At the same time, pro-government propagandists launched a fierce campaign against Zoran Zaev who received footage from foreign services. Serbian and pro-Russian military-political propagandist **Miroslav Lazanski**, who later **became Serbia’s ambassador to Russia**, also took part in the defamation campaign against Zaev. His statements were popularized in a political show with the pro-Russian host **Milenko Nedelkovski** on Kanal 5, one of the most-watched TV stations.

Prior to the release of the footage by the opposition (popularly called “bombs”), **conspiracy theories** spread in the Macedonian media in an attempt to create a “Ukrainian scenario”, followed by accusations that Zaev “with some ‘foreign service’ allowed the wiretapping of the entire state leadership and a large number of citizens”.

After Zaev on February 9, 2015, **accused** the then Prime Minister Gruevski and his first cousin (head of the secret police), **Sašo Mijalkov**, of mass wiretapping of thousands of citizens, conspiracy theories about a “Ukrainian scenario” and “colored revolution” began to spread in the Macedonian media, reinforced by pro-Russian propagandists.

For example, pro-Russian conspiracy theorist **Umberto Pascali**, in an **interview** with “Sonce TV” in the program “Voice of the People”, explicitly accused him of a desperate attempt to provoke a “sorosoid” “color





revolution” to destabilize Macedonia. Pascali’s messages were disseminated with dozens of articles with headlines such as “**Pascali: Macedonia avoided the Ukrainian-style tragedy, Zaev’s plot ended in a farce**” on popular TV channels such as Sitel and Kanal 5, as well as dozens of **other media**.

Other pro-Russian analysts on **Russian propaganda channels** have personally accused US officials of “*a Kiev-style coup in Macedonia*”, claiming that “Zaev’s bombs” were given to him by the CIA. Such conspiracies broke out in the Macedonian **pro-government media at the time**, with accusations that “After Bulgaria and Ukraine, the oilmen are destroying Macedonia !”, with Soros being accused not only of financing the failed “Macedonian Maidan”, but also of wiretapping as much as 20,000 Macedonians.

“Color Revolution” in Skopje same as the one in Kiev, “Turkish Stream” and “Greater Albania”

While the opposition published footage showing corruption and lawlessness by the government, Russia’s propaganda theory of a “colored revolution” was making its way into the Macedonian media. For example, **Sputnik’s propagandist Andrei Koribko**, portrayed as a “Russian analyst” on Sonce TV, would point out that “*Macedonia is in the midst of a deliberate ‘colored revolution’*, with Zaev unsuccessfully trying to take Macedonians to the streets to turn Skopje into Kiev “.

Koribko’s propaganda theses were disseminated in the Macedonian **pro-government media** and on **Russian propaganda channels**. In his **radio show**, Koribko will also interview guests who will support the propaganda thesis that the attempted “coup d’etat” in Macedonia is, in fact, a “colored revolution”, and that it is related to the conspiracy theory to prevent the “Turkish stream”. One of the guests, the host of a Macedonian propaganda show in which his Russian host previously appeared as an analyst, will point out that “Macedonia is not Ukraine”, that it will not be destabilized, that there will be no “colored revolution” or civil war, and that support for the “Balkan Stream” is great. The story of the connection between the “Turkish Stream” and the “colored revolution” caused by the West was the subject of other Russian propaganda channels that offered **geopolitical arguments**, aimed not only at Macedonia but also at **Serbia and Bulgaria**.

After Putin reiterated the threat to international security at an **international conference in Moscow** in April 2015 from various scenarios of “colored revolutions” that cause violence and chaos, Russian propaganda channels continued to conspire for a colored revolution in Macedonia.

They also introduced new elements – “Albanian terrorism” and “Greater Albania”. An **anxious Moscow reacted** after the armed attack near Gošince, when the Macedonian border police watchtower was attacked by an armed group from Kosovo. At the same time, Sputnik accused the United States of trying to transform the failed “colored revolution” in Macedonia into an unconventional war that would neutralize the **geostrategic route** to the “Turkish Stream”. The message that “*Gošince is part of the ‘colored revolution’ in Macedonia*” was **spread in the Macedonian media** by other **pro-Russian propagandists**.



Protest in Skopje on 17.05.2015 Photo: Vanco Dzambaski, CC BY-NC-SA.

Officialization of the propaganda story of the “colored revolution” against the “Turkish stream”

Russia’s “unofficial” propaganda story – that an attempt at a “colored revolution” is taking place in Macedonia, which is directly related to Russia’s “Turkish Stream” energy project, became “official” only after Russian Foreign Minister **Sergei Lavrov’s** visit to Belgrade on May 15, 2015.





Previously, three key events took place in Macedonia that ignited the political crisis: **Police brutality** of the protests on May 5, 2015, which were precisely against police brutality, the announcement of a mass opposition protest on May 17 which was **propagandistically attacked** as a “Ukrainian scenario”, and the **armed conflict in Kumanovo** on May 9-10, 2015, after which the then President **Gjorge Ivanov** had to interrupt his visit to Moscow to mark the victory of fascism and convene the Security Council.

A few days after the dramatic conflict, on May 12, the Minister of Interior and the head of the secret police – Nikola Gruevski’s first cousin – resigned, and another minister for whom major abuses were revealed in the published recordings. The conflict has been **interpreted** by Russian propagandists as a “*devilish plan to destabilize Macedonia*”, with opposition leaders dubbed “*Arseniy Yatsenuk and Petro Poroshenko from Macedonia*”.

Ivanov decided to attend a grand parade in Moscow on May 9 in the face of a Western **boycott** of Russia’s annexation of Crimea, and his presence, originally **announced** by Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, was defended by **the phrase** “*a policy of openness to all*”. At the meeting with Putin, according to **Ivanov’s cabinet**, “*mutual satisfaction with the continuous positive trend in relations*” was expressed.

In May 2015, the (pro) Russian propaganda machinery was **particularly preoccupied** with Macedonia. The interpretation of the political situation in Macedonia through the prism of “colored revolution” and “Ukrainian scenarios” continued. At the same time, demonizing parallels with Ukraine and dark **geostrategic conspiracy theories** were spread by calling on “**Greater Albania**”. Therefore, it is not at all surprising that Russian Minister Lavrov during his visit to Belgrade on May 15, 2015, received an **explicit question** whether there is a parallel between the situation in Ukraine and Macedonia. Lavrov sent a message that the events in Macedonia and pro-Russian policies were related, that is, that they had to do with Macedonia’s refusal to impose sanctions on Russia and plans to build the “Turkish Stream” gas pipeline. A day after Lavrov “verified” the “Turkish Stream” conspiracy theory, previously communicated on Russian propaganda channels, the **Russian Foreign Ministry** answered in



the affirmative to a direct question avoided by Lavrov, pointing out that the country was **plunged into the abyss** of a “colored revolution”.

The stories of “The Color Revolution” and “The Counter-Color Revolution” in May 2015

Given the big propaganda story from Moscow about an attempt at a “colored revolution” in Macedonia, the Macedonian pro-government media from the time tried to **discredit the big protest** announced by the opposition on May 17, 2015, as a “Ukrainian scenario”. A **column** entitled “Ukrainian Scenario” even anticipates a request for military assistance from the “*Donbass commanders Motorola or Prizren*” who would be deployed in Polog.

Some pro-government media outlets issued **dramatic warnings** that there was a “bloody and infernal plan for violence” on May 17, and **propaganda predictions** of a “Ukrainian scenario”, that is, of violent protests “at the behest of Ukraine”.

Contrary to the gloomy media predictions, on May 17, 2015, a mass peaceful opposition protest took place, with legitimate democratic demands by the opposition. After the propaganda announcements for a hellish “Ukrainian scenario” did not come true, the Russian propaganda channels **spread the theory** that the violence on May 17 was prevented.

During this period, it can be seen that Russian propaganda uses flagrant disinformation in an attempt to discredit opposition leader Zoran Zaev, imputing to him statements containing threats of war. Russian propaganda tried to spread **disinformation** that the then leader of SDSM, Zaev, speaking at a mass protest on May 17, 2015, said that if Gruevski did not leave, “*Macedonia will witness war, as in Ukraine.*” Zaev did not make such a statement at the protest rally of the “Citizens of Macedonia”, nor did the Macedonian media report that there were any threats of war in Zaev’s speech, “*as in Ukraine*”.





Tweet of the Russian Ambassador to the United Kingdom Alexander Yakovenko with a picture of the Kumanovo events

A day after a mass opposition protest in front of the government, there was also a **mass pro-government protest** in front of the assembly where the opposition was accused of “organizing Ukrainian drama” and the opposition leader was compared to a “Ukrainian Klitschko”. Initially, “Sputnik” **published** information that there were 30 thousand people at the pro-government protest, for the next day the pro-government protest to be declared “the largest in the history of the country”, which was attended by 90 thousand people.

On May 19, 2015, the Russian propaganda machinery **sent a message** that “*the coup attempt by the West will not succeed in Macedonia.*” The Russian “Pravda” accused the West of “*acting in Macedonia following the Kiev Maidan scenario*”, and **advocated** the idea that Russia must build a strong Orthodox coalition in Europe to defeat the West.

At the end of May 2015, when he received the new Macedonian ambassador to Russia, Putin **supported** the Macedonian authorities in normalizing the situation, noting that Russia and Macedonia have “*deep historical roots, cultural and spiritual closeness.*”

Even after the large opposition and pro-government protests, Russian propaganda did not rest. Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov **made explicit**

it parallels between the situation in Macedonia and Ukraine, reiterating the thesis that events in Macedonia are orchestrated from the outside, as a result of the refusal to impose sanctions on Russia and the support of “Turkish Stream”. Lavrov accused of the external use of the “Albanian factor”, and spread conspiracies for further federalization of Macedonia and division of the country between Albania and Bulgaria.

The formation of an opposition camp in front of the government building has intensified the dark theories of a “Ukrainian scenario” and a civil war. The opposition was propagandistically discredited and branded by the Russian media as the “fifth column”, which wants to create a “new Maidan, as in Ukraine”, i.e. a new “colored revolution”. Some Russian propagandists have even tried to call it a failed “lipstick revolution.”



*Protest camp in front of the Government headquarters in Skopje, 18.05.2015.
Photo: Vancho Dzambaski CC BY-NC-SA.*

Despite denigrating and underestimating the number of the “colored revolution”, Sputnik favored the “counter-colored revolution” – as resistance against foreign interference and popular support for a democratically elected leadership that opposed sanctions on Russia and sent its leader to a celebration on May 9, 2015, in Moscow. On the Russian propaganda channels, Macedonia was treated as a new example of successfully





opposing the “colored revolutions”, with the so-called “Mass anti-Maidan demonstrations.” The “Macedonian Resistance” received open congratulations from the Russian propagandists for successfully dealing with the attempt for a “colored revolution”.

Of course, Russian propaganda actively aided the so-called “counter-colored revolution”, with attempts to discredit the opposition camp in front of the government, which organized civic debates and sought solutions for a peaceful way out of the crisis. For example, the famous Russian TV host and propagandist Dmitry Kiselev on May 24, 2015, will announce the [propaganda article](#) for the opposition camp as “Maidan in Macedonia” which continues to develop according to the classic “Ukrainian scenario”. Although the propaganda article contains a statement by the opposition leader Zaev who sends explicit messages against the use of violence, the whole article is an attempt to draw a discrediting parallel between the violent “Maidan” in Ukraine and Macedonia. Opposition campers in front of the government are denigrated as neo-Nazi activists or hooligans trained and paid by Soros to provoke violent protests.

Even after [Zaev explicitly distanced](#) himself from “Ukrainian scenarios”, Russian officials continued to conspire theories of a “colored revolution”. For example, Russian Deputy Defense Minister Antonov will point out at an international conference that a wave of “colored” revolutions launched from outside has reached Macedonia, [comparing](#) the “epidemic of ‘colored revolutions’ in the Middle East” to a devastating hurricane.

“Color Revolution” and “Ukrainian Scenario” in the Context of the “Pržino Agreement”

The Macedonian political crisis in 2015 was temporarily overcome with the “Pržino Agreement” (June 2 and July 15, 2015) – a political framework based on European democratic principles, [which provided for](#) early parliamentary elections in 2016, the return of the opposition to parliament, the two government ministers from the opposition and a new special public prosecutor.

However, even when it was clear that a political agreement would be reached, the Russian propaganda matrix [continued](#) with conspiracy theories



about a violent “Ukrainian scenario” launched from outside. Sputnik Serbia **explicitly** accused the Americans and the British of organizing the attacks in Kumanovo.

At the same time, the idea of a “Greater Albania” **became relevant** on pro-Russian propaganda channels. For pro-Russian propagandists, the political crisis in Macedonia exploited through the prism of the “Ukrainian scenario” was a great occasion for **targeting** US policies, and those of their officials in the Balkans.

Even when pro-Russian media prophecies about a hellish “Ukrainian scenario” in Macedonia did not materialize in the summer of 2015, Russian propagandists continued to target opposition leader Zaev as “Poroshenko or Yatsenuk.” Even after the signing of the “Pržino Agreement”, the Russian propaganda channels proposed **pro-Russian solutions to the political crisis** – the unification of the opponents of the EU policies in Macedonia with an ally like Russia and other BRICS countries.

Conclusion: Moscow's colored propaganda for a “colored revolution”

The political crisis in Macedonia in 2015 was used as fertile ground for **Russian “strategic communications”**. The sensationalist expressions “Ukrainian scenario”, “colored revolution” and “Macedonian Mайдan” were part of a well-organized propaganda campaign in 2015.

The propaganda campaign was biased and “colored”, with the obvious aim of denigrating and delegitimizing the pro-Western opposition and legitimizing a government accused of corruption, election fraud, and abuse of institutions for party and private purposes.

Sowing fears of a “Ukrainian scenario”, a “colored revolution” and a “Macedonian Mайдan”, Russian propaganda has successfully exploited the Macedonian political crisis from the very beginning – not only to target the West, NATO and the EU as destabilizing factors but also to increase its political influence in Macedonia and the Balkans. The Russian propaganda campaign in Macedonia continued with the deepening of the political crisis in 2016 and 2017, as we will see in the second part of the analysis.





RUSSIAN PROPAGANDA FOR THE “UKRAINIAN SCENARIO” IN MACEDONIA (2016-2017)

During 2016 and 2017 Macedonian and Russian propagandists simultaneously promote conspiracy theories about the “Ukrainian scenario” in order to sabotage the resolution of the political crisis, the work of the SPO, the non-violent Colorful Revolution and the Pržino Agreement, as well as to justify attempts to forcibly retain power after the 2016 elections

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(Truthmeter, 23.02.2022)

In the **first part of the analysis** of Russian propaganda during the Macedonian political crisis (2015-2017) we pointed out that the terms “*Ukrainian scenario*”, “*colored revolution*” and “*Macedonian Maidan*” were an integral part of the main propaganda messages of a communication strategy, which are realized on several propaganda channels in 2015.

The sowing of fear for the “Ukrainian scenario” **continued in 2016**, especially after the deepening of the political crisis on 12 April 2016, when President **Gjorge Ivanov** decided to pardon 56 people, which provoked civil protests throughout Macedonia. Ivanov’s **spin speech**, which emphasized the expressions “*This is someone else’s game*”, “*This is someone else’s interest*”, masked the personal and party interest from the decision to stop the proceedings of the Special Public Prosecutor’s Office, which **indicated that** “*the wiretapping was performed in Macedonia, with the equipment of the UBK at the Ministry of Interior, which was then deliberate and in order not to reveal the traces*”.





Moscow: Activation of the “Ukrainian scenario”

Immediately after the protests that followed the reaction to the collective pardon of politicians suspected of corruption, unauthorized wire-tapping and election fraud, **Moscow came out** and warned of a “**Ukrainian scenario**” of a coup d’etat from outside:

Activation of the “Ukrainian scenario”, external inspiration of illegal actions and coups can lead to serious quakes in Macedonia, as well as destabilization of the entire Balkan region. (MFA Russia with a comment on the latest developments in Macedonia, RUSSIAN SPEECH IN MACEDONIAN, APRIL 14, 2016).

The authorities in Macedonia were explicitly on the same line with Moscow, arguing that “major foreign services are behind the ‘Ukrainian’ scenario in Macedonia” (**Moscow vs. Brussels and Washington in the Macedonian crisis**, April 15 2016). Causing a feeling of danger to Macedonia from foreign influences, Ivanov **fiercely attacked** the SPO, without giving a specific answer as to **how he found out** about the pardoned persons, whose names are not publically announced.

On Russian propaganda channels, protests after Ivanov’s collective pardon were used to accuse the United States of wanting to destabilize Macedonia with a “*second hybrid war*” and turn Skopje into a “*Balkan Kyiv*” (**THE US WANTS TO TURN SKOPJE INTO THE BALKAN KIEV**, 15.4.2016).

In an interview with the pro-government media “Dnevnik”, the Russian Ambassador to Macedonia **Oleg Shcherbak** received an **explicit question** about the inadmissibility of the “Ukrainian scenario” as one of Moscow’s key theses. Speaking about Ukraine, alluding to Macedonia, the Russian ambassador reminded that “*street democracy*” aimed at the violent overthrow of the legally elected government led to a complete economic and financial collapse, a civil war with thousands of victims, poverty, corruption, divisions and the loss of Ukraine’s sovereignty, which is run by the West. Shcherbak warned that any attempt at external pressure by openly manipulating civil society could lead to catastrophic consequences, as in the aforementioned tragedy in Ukraine.

Gruevski: While I stand, I will not allow a Ukrainian scenario in Macedonia



Propaganda message on the Facebook page of VMRO-DPMNE, April 14, 2016

Along with the “concerns” of Moscow and Ivanov, the most-watched Macedonian pro-government media began to propagandistically exploit the topic of the “Ukrainian scenario” to delegitimize the opposition protests (Zaev tonight announced a Ukrainian scenario for Macedonia – Hooligans on the street started with realization, Sitel 14 April 2016).

The most-watched TV “Sitel” manipulatively claimed that the leader of the opposition **Zoran Zaev**, “when asked by the journalist ‘Is a Ukrainian scenario possible in Macedonia?’, answered that it is ‘absolutely possible’”. But, the journalist of “Telma” asks: “Did Ivanov lay the foundations for the Ukrainian scenario in Macedonia yesterday?”, and Zaev in an interview for “**Top-tema**”, a programme on “Telma TV” from April 13, 2016, answered: “Well, it can be put that way. He laid serious foundations for a Ukrainian scenario in Macedonia as well.”

The media accusations of a “Ukrainian scenario” were a **propaganda spin**, twisting a single sentence by Zaev as a comment on Ivanov’s abolition, which was used to reinforce the narrative of a “Ukrainian scenario”, which had already been widely exploited by the VMRO-DPMNE party and pro-government media.

On April 14, 2016, Prime Minister **Nikola Gruevski** at a news conference blamed opposition leader Zaev for “mentioning that the country’s facing a ‘Ukrainian scenario’”, which, according to Gruevski, “means thousands dead





and injured, a dizzying economic downturn and other dire consequences”. Several media conveyed the key propaganda message of Gruevski – “While I stand I will not allow a Ukrainian scenario in Macedonia.”



Cover page of the then pro-government weekly “Republika”, “Zaev announces Ukrainian scenario”.

The same day, an association of defenders (war veterans from the 2001 conflict) sent a **propaganda message** that “they will not allow the Ukrainian scenario of SDSM”, and the **propaganda attack** continued in the following days by attributing a “Ukrainian scenario” to SDSM and Zaev. At a protest in front of SDSM headquarters, organized by the pro-government movement GDOM, a message was sent that they would not allow a “Ukrainian scenario” (“scenario for destabilization of the state and a coup d’etat”), as well as a request to the Constitutional Court to temporarily ban the work of every association and foundation. The pro-government movement GDOM continued with protests calling for elections on June 5, 2016, to prevent a “Ukrainian scenario” in Macedonia.

The protests were provoked by the West, and Ivanov prevented a “Ukrainian scenario”

Russian propaganda media tried to delegitimize the opposition protests after Ivanov’s collective pardon labeling them as “provoked by the US and the EU”, and as a result of Macedonia’s refusal to join the sanctions against Russia. The site “EU vs Disinfo” pointed to this disinformation, explaining that the eruption of the protests was the result of a general pardon by Ivanov of 56 people linked to the wiretapping scandal and that the EU was involved as a mediator between the parties.

Pro-government propagandists began defending Ivanov’s decision, claiming it had thwarted a second coup attempt and a Ukrainian scenario in Macedonia, citing Russian propagandists who warned of “Washington and its subordinate Brussels’ intentions to provoke a bloody civil war in Macedonia following the example of the Ukrainian scenario” (Ivanov’s decision prevented the second coup attempt – Greeks cheer for puppet Zaev, April 15, 2016).



Cover page of the then pro-government media “Republika” from April 22, 2016.





Such propaganda disinformation with a “Ukrainian scenario” provoked reactions not only from domestic journalists and analysts but also from **humorists**. A **well-known columnist** mocked the hypocrisy of the president and the leader of the ruling party, who “*won the election with full mouth EU*” and “*do not boast that we will meet Russian standards*”, and now speak of a “*Ukrainian scenario*”. “*If they do not want a ‘Ukrainian scenario’, then why are they protesting?*”, the columnist asked lucidly. Another analyst accused that “*Ivanov is forcibly pushing Macedonia into the Ukrainian scenario*”, that the destabilizing factor is the pardoned criminals from VMRO-DPMNE and Ivanov, and that “*they are the ones who provoke Maidan in the middle of Skopje*” (Ivanov and Gruevski have all the responsibility for a possible Ukrainian scenario, 16.4.2016).

The harmony of Macedonian and Russian propagandists for “Ukrainian scenario”

The answer to the question “*Is Macedonia following the path of Ukraine?*” was affirmative for the Macedonian pro-government **propagandists**, who tried to present the non-violent **Colorful Revolution** as a “*pale copy of the Ukrainian scenario*” and accused Zaev of “*laying the foundations of the Ukrainian scenario in Macedonia*” (Alfa, May 27, 2016).

Without presenting evidence, pro-government propagandists claimed that “*the day of Molotov cocktails and excavators rushing to the institutions is not far off*” and that “*the frightening scenes from Ukraine, one by one, are reflected in the violent protests in Skopje*” (**Ukrainian scenario in Macedonia – performance by Zaev**, Kurir, 27.5.2016). Without any basis, pro-government propagandists tried to present that the protesters in Skopje were “*imported*” and that they used the same weapons as in Kyiv, comparing a photo of throwing a “*Molotov cocktail*” and throwing paint with a “*fork*”. (See the analysis “*There is no Ukrainian, but a Balkan scenario written by corrupt leaders*”).



Print screen from the TV “analysis” of the then pro-government “Sitel” from May 27, 2016.

One propagandist even insinuates a “*Ukrainian scenario*” (in the sense of deliberately killing protesters with bullets in the back) to increase tensions, pointing out that “the path from a peaceful protest by throwing paint in the fountain under the Warrior on a Horse to real blood on the streets of Skopje or Bitola is small.” (*SDSM twinned Serbian mercenaries and Islamic radicals*, Republika, 22.4.2016, p. 19).

Another propagandist and conspiracy theorist exposed *the networks that color Macedonia* and made unsubstantiated claims that “*wiretapping in Macedonia is the work of the British services*”, as well as the “*internationalization of the Maidan scenario*” which was carried out “*with war attacks on institutions*”.

Russian propaganda channels have strengthened *domestic anti-Western conspiracy theorists* against the “*colored revolution*” and the “*Ukrainian scenario*” carried out by George Soros, who “*wants to destroy Macedonia, its name, language and identity.*” Russia’s propaganda campaign against Macedonia in April 2016 continued to *target* mainly the United States as a destabilizing factor in the Balkans, as an illegal eavesdropper in Macedonia seeking to turn Skopje into a Balkan Kyiv to sabotage Russia’s “multipolar projects” and China in the region. Despite all these accusations, the United States was accused of having a plan to “*internationalize the Macedonian crisis.*” On the other hand, Russian propagandists openly praised the applied strategies and tactics – *GDOM counter-protests*, claiming that “*VM-RO-DPMNE is ingeniously dealing with the Colored Revolution.*”





This Manichaeen “black and white” framing was also noticeable in the propaganda articles of the pro-government media, which tried to delegitimize the Colorful Revolution as a “*mercenary revolution*”, and its participants as “mercenaries” whose **sole purpose** was to “Ukrainian scenario” violently taking power in the state.

Harmony of Macedonian and Russian official politicians on “Ukrainian scenario”

The propaganda that the non-violent protests of the Colorful Revolution are an integral part of a violent scenario was reinforced by President Ivanov himself, who after the mass protests first withdrew the decision to pardon the 22 most exposed politicians, and on June 6 to all other pardoned people. In an **interview with the pro-government Dnevnik** (which no longer exists), President Ivanov then accused Zaev of announcing a “Ukrainian scenario” and threatening violence:

I am not the one who announced a Ukrainian scenario in Macedonia. I am not the one who compared the situation in Macedonia with the situation in Syria. Zaev was the one who did that, he threatened with violence.



Cover page of the pro-government “Dnevnik” from June 25-26, 2016

During the period of political negotiations for the peaceful overcoming of the political crisis mediated by the EU, Moscow has repeatedly accused that it is preparing the ground for provoking a new “*colored revolution*” in Macedonia (Zakharova: A “*colored revolution*” is being prepared for Macedonia).



With the return of the propaganda story of a “*colored revolution*”, Moscow openly sided with Gruevski, once again underestimating the Macedonian citizens who have been seeking justice in the streets for months after Ivanov’s abolition.

However, despite the propaganda announcements of a violent “Ukrainian scenario” and preparations for a new “*colored revolution*”, the four largest political parties reached an agreement on holding peaceful elections on December 11, 2016, which was published on the website of the EU Delegation to Macedonia.

The “Ukrainian scenario” after the peaceful elections on December 11, 2016

Contrary to gloomy predictions that the ground was being prepared for a new “*colored revolution*”, Moscow described the December 11, 2016, parliamentary elections as peaceful, said none of the parties had won an absolute majority and called on all political forces in the country to “respect the will of the voters, to act within the framework of the Constitution, not to allow counterproductive external influence on the process of forming the new government”.

However, after it became clear that Gruevski could not form a new parliamentary majority, Moscow changed the banner that neither party





had won an absolute majority. It started talking again about “foreign influence” and “foreign interference” by the West, about “the use of destructive methods of ‘colored revolutions’”, and unjustifiably claiming that Gruevski’s party won the elections – “*the ruling party won a majority of the votes, and the opposition, despite all the manipulations and the undisguised support of the EU and the US, suffered a defeat.*”



Along with Moscow, the ruling party has put the ‘Ukrainian scenario’ back into play after the “SPO dropped the Coup case for lack of evidence.” A VMRO-DPMNE spokesman described the cancellation of the Coup case as “*a clear step by the SPO to protect criminals who advocated civil war, Ukrainian scenarios and bloodshed,*” and announced that the people were rising up against redefining the state with “*the Tirana platform*”. As pro-government protesters protested against the “*tyrannical platform*”, and Gruevski used almost the same words – “*Ukrainian scenario, civil war and bloodshed were advocated*” – in an interview with the Serbian “Telegraph” (WE DO NOT WANT AN UKRANIAN SCENARIO, BUT WE WILL NOT SLEEP WHILE THEY ARE DESTROYING THE COUNTRY: Gruevski’s interview for the Serbian Telegraph!, March 10, 2017). Opposition spokesmen said “Macedonia will not be allowed to turn into Ukraine” .

The same rhetoric of Gruevski against the so-called Ukrainian scenario (attempt by foreign services to overthrow a legally elected government) was also accepted by the protest movement “*For a Common Macedonia*”, which opposed the “tyrannical platform”, bilingualism, federalization and direct foreign interference in Macedonia, especially by Soros.

2017: Violence by pro-government protesters instead of opposition “Ukrainian scenario”

As early as March, it was clear to analysts that the views of the Russian Foreign Ministry coincided with the views of VMRO-DPMNE, which presented the Colorful Revolution as a “*Ukrainian scenario*” for the overthrow of the government in Macedonia.



*Protests in Skopje – April 2016, Colorful Revolution
Photo: Vanco Dzambaski CC BY-SA*

But in the spring of 2017, the government was not forcibly overthrown by any “*Ukrainian scenario*”. Violence as a method was used by pro-government protesters on April 27 to prevent a democratic change of government by the newly formed parliamentary majority.

During that period, Russian propagandists did not stop talking about the “*Ukrainian scenario*”. The Russian propaganda machine accused NATO of





wanting to see “blood on the streets of Macedonia” over the “Greater Albania” project, sowed fear of the country’s **disintegration** and sent a message that it was time for Macedonia to “**trust Russia, not Trump**”. Spreading photos of the mass pro-government protests, Russia’s Sputnik even claimed not only that **Brussels had been defeated in Macedonia**, but that the whole of Eastern Europe was **turning its eyes from the EU to Russia**.

In the wake of the April 27 violence by pro-government protesters backed by Russia, Moscow accused the opposition of trying to **seize power** by force and that this had been **planned in advance**. Making unfounded comparisons with Ukraine, Russian propaganda has spread disinformation that protesters in parliament were unarmed and wanted to prevent a coup, accusing Washington and Brussels of **double standards**. Russian propagandists have spread **disinformation** that the new parliamentary majority cannot enter parliament, as well as conspiracy theories that the “**Albanianization**” of the Balkans was supported by EU officials. Playing the card of “**Greater Albania**” and the “Tirana Platform”, Russian propaganda again tried to draw parallels between **Ukraine and Macedonia**. However, even pro-Russian analysts who see Macedonia integrated into the “Serbian world” (“a form of integration between Serbia, Montenegro, Republika Srpska, and Macedonia”) have begun to **see fundamental differences between Macedonia and Ukraine**.

Even after the violence on April 27, the Macedonian propagandists tried to interpret the events with conspiracy theories, using again the propaganda phrase “**Ukrainian scenario**”, which was allegedly exposed and prevented by VMRO-DPMNE.

*The exploitation of the fear of **Ukrainianization of Macedonia***

Official Moscow and its propaganda machine made the most of the political crisis in Macedonia (2015-2017) to attack Washington and Brussels, sowing fear of a “**bloody Ukrainian scenario**” in a bid to reduce the Western influence in Macedonia and the Balkans. After Ivanov gave the mandate to Zaev and it was clear that the new parliamentary majority would form a



government, Russian propagandists continued to accuse the United States of **not resolving the Macedonian crisis, but of exacerbating it** and endangering the Balkans. Russia has maximally exploited the fear of the **Ukranianization of Macedonia** in order to weaken the West and strengthen its interests in Macedonia and the Balkans.

Although official Moscow defended the violent protesters and corrupt politicians who violated the constitution and obstructed the democratic procedures for change of government, on May 24, 2017, **Putin wished Ivanov** the development of the internal political situation in accordance with the Constitution and the democratic procedure.



Putin congratulates Ivanov's award at the meeting on May 24, 2017 Photo: Office of the President of Russia (kremlin.ru), Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International

On the Day of Slavic Literacy, Putin congratulated Ivanov on the award for strengthening inter-Orthodox relations, given by the International Social Foundation for the Unity of Orthodox Peoples, and presented personally by the Russian Patriarch.





RUSSIAN PROPAGANDA IN MACEDONIA IN 2018: “UNITED MACEDONIA” AS A “PAWN” OF “UNITED RUSSIA”

The recent expulsion of five Russian diplomats is not the first expulsion of Russian diplomats from Macedonia. For the first time, Macedonia expelled a Russian diplomat in 2018, when not only the intensified Russian propaganda influence was noticeable, but also an attempt for Russian political influence by supporting the Macedonian clone of “United Russia”

Author: Žarko Trajanoski, media analyst

(Truthmeter, 05.04.2022)

Russian influence in Macedonia is not only through the “Russian salad”

Even before the beginning of 2018, the Russian Embassy in Macedonia tried to joke about “increasing Russian influence” by publishing a photo of the “Russian salad”, which is mostly consumed during the New Year holidays. But on the subject of “Russian influence” and the “Ukrainian scenario”, the devil had long done its job (see analyses 1 and 2). As in the past few years, in December 2017, Russian propagandists published gloomy predictions for Macedonia to disappear from the world map and for the division of Macedonia between Albania and Bulgaria (See ANNEY KORIBKO’S ANALYSIS: Will Macedonia disappear from the world map in 2018?). Local Russian spokesmen, meanwhile, spread apocalyptic predictions that “Macedonia has been chosen as the place where the next war will start, i.e. the world conflict between NATO and Russia.”





целата територија на #Македонија и пошироко.
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One month after the prediction of an avant-garde “third force” in Macedonia, which would fight for its protection from destruction, such a candidate appeared on the political scene. It was the “United Macedonia” party, which openly advocated an alliance with Russia and waged a black campaign against NATO and the EU.

“United Macedonia” against the “fascism” of NATO and the EU

Immediately after the renaming, representatives of “United Macedonia” declared NATO and the EU fascist institutions. The leader of the party with a new pro-Russian identity branded NATO not only as “fascist” but also as “a genocidal organization for Macedonians with the attempt to change our centuries-old name and identity”. In January 2018, “United Macedonia” suggested that the highway to Greece be called genocide instead of friendship and asked the government to withdraw its application for EU membership, in line with its strategic goal of membership in the Eurasian Economic Union and strategic partnership with Russia. Also, “United Macedonia” announced that the procedure in the Parliament against Macedonia’s membership in NATO has started, which ensures the “survival of Macedonia and the Macedonians”.

While the media spread rumors that Macedonians prefer the Russian president as their leader, Russian Ambassador Shcherbak claimed that Russia neither interfered nor will ever interfere in the internal affairs of Macedonia. While Lavrov warned that NATO expansion with Macedonia was a mistake, the leader of United Macedonia was trying to mobilize politically with disinformation anti-Albanian messages and messages against the “*fascist demand for a change of name and identity for membership in the Union*”.

Bačev also published two open letters. The first letter was addressed to the President of the EC, in which he sent a message that Macedonia “*does not see its future in the EU and NATO and does not share your liberal values contrary to natural laws.*” The second letter was addressed to Putin, in which Bačev congratulated him on his victory, thanking him for Russia’s support and expressing confidence that in his term “*the Republic of Macedonia will gain a historic strategic alliance with Russia and membership in the Eurasian Economic Union*”.

Russia's propaganda offensive against NATO and the EU

In February and March 2018 it was already visible that pro-Russian propaganda in Macedonia was on a political “offensive”. For example, in the then most-watched show “Samo vistina” on February 20, 2018, two pro-Russian propagandists “debated” the topic “*Is there an alternative for Macedonia except for EU and NATO?*”. The guests were the only ones to wage a negative campaign against the EU and NATO, denigrate the pro-Western government and ridicule the supporters of joining NATO and the EU. In the same show, the representative of “United Macedonia” sent explicit anti-Albanian messages that Albanians “*will have two options - either to start learning Russian or to learn to swim, and I say that very seriously.*” The leader of “United Macedonia” Bačev was a guest in the same debate show in early March 2018, when he claimed that “*the strategic alliance with Russia ensures the survival and future of Macedonia*”. The guest of “Samo vistina” in March was the columnist, Professor **Biljana Vankovska**, as the first signatory of the manipulative proclamation of intellectuals who demanded the termination of the name negotiations. Vankovska, author of the column Nobel Prize for Putin: And why not? (in “*Ruska Reč*”), previously promoted the slogan “NO to NATO, even under a constitutional name!”.

Despite attempts to intimidate with “brutal Albanianization”, “United Macedonia” constantly played the “anti-fascist” card, presenting the “West” as fascist. Thus, at the propaganda session at which the honorary speaker was the Russian propagandist and geopolitician Alexander Dugin, the spokesman of “United Macedonia”, **Vlahov Micov**, spread disinformation about the number of Albanians in Macedonia (“13.6% minority”), who aimed





to destroy the Slavic world: *“Currently, the United States, NATO and the EU constitute the fourth fascist Reich, whose predecessor is the third Hitler Reich..... the goal of these new Hitlers is the complete destruction of the Slavic world led by Russia..”*

“United Macedonia” and Dugin offered the Macedonian public not only negative propaganda towards the West and liberalism but also a political alternative in the Eurasian Union and the “Slavic Brotherhood” (see: The Propagandist Dugin, the Satanization of the West and the Apology of Russian Imperialism).



The headquarters of the party “United Macedonia” on the main square in Prilep, March 31, 2022. Photo: Truthmeter

The propaganda offensive continued after Putin’s election victory when **Mirka Velinovska** in her column “Russia Changes the World” denigrated the “Euro-Atlantic Western political-elitist nomenclature” as a *“vulgar, vandal tribe”* and *“a collection of savages in Brussels”*. Velinovska described the Macedonian prime minister as *“the most vulgar example, but also a living proof of the value paradigm of the vandalized uncivilized West”* and accused the “Euro-Atlantic broilers” of allying *“with the fascist Euro-American militant conspiracy against Russia”*.

Russia’s official spokesmen have not spared slander against NATO. Lavrov’s message that “NATO enlargement with Macedonia is a mistake” was followed by a statement by the Russian Foreign Ministry that *“plans to bring the Republic of Macedonia into NATO could have negative consequences for*

regional security and bilateral relations.” Russian Ambassador Shcherbak joined the chase against NATO with the message that “NATO is not a school for peacekeepers, but an aggressive military-political bloc guilty of many military interventions.”

After Macedonia expelled a Russian diplomat on March 26, 2018, due to the “Skripal case” and crossing the red line, Moscow reacted sharply, warning that “the responsibility for the consequences of this move will be fully borne by the Macedonian side.”

The Russian ambassador first stated in a column that “Macedonia was part of the countries that give in to this Anglo-Saxon psychosis and to the detriment of the interests of their country make hasty decisions that complicate relations with Russia.” Then, at a press conference, Shcherbak issued a threatening warning that “Macedonia will be a legitimate target of Russia in case of conflict with NATO,” at which Prime Minister Zaev commented that Macedonia does not want quarrels with Moscow.

The “United Macedonia” party condemned the expulsion of the Russian diplomat and called a rally in front of the Russian embassy, where they told the Russian ambassador that the Macedonian people want to be part of the Eurasian Union and that EU access wished only “*corrupt Macedonians who are paid with foreign money*”.



The headquarters of the party “United Macedonia” in Skopje, April 1, 2022. Photo: Truthmeter





Russian propaganda before the Prespa Agreement: An attempt to use the name dispute

Just before the launch of the Macedonian version of “United Russia”, the statement of the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs **Sergey Lavrov** on January 15, 2018, regarding the possible solution to the “name dispute” caused real media waves. After several media reported that Russia will accept any name change (Lavrov: We will accept the name that will be agreed between Athens and Skopje/Lavrov: We will accept any new name of Macedonia/“Russia on the side of Greece wants Macedonia to change the name “), the Russian embassy warned in a tweet that the Macedonian media manipulated, that is, spread a false interpretation of Lavrov’s words (a transcript of Lavrov’s statement was also published). However, some of the concerned media correctly pointed out that what was reported by Lavrov in the Macedonian media was in fact a quote from the Russian site “Russia Today”, where the following short news was published during Lavrov’s press conference: *“On the name dispute between Greece and Macedonia, Lavrov says Russia would abide by any decision made in the Macedonian constitution, should that happen (RT).* Later, the Russian Ambassador Shcherbak, at the promotion of the exhibition “Moscow Today” (February 28, 2018), stressed that “Greece and Macedonia have the right to a solution that suits both sides.”

However, after Lavrov’s controversial statements and political interpretations of the emergence of a “third force”, the marginal party “People’s Movement for Macedonia” decided to rename itself “United Macedonia” and to oppose NATO and EU membership, and declare itself an alliance with Russia and membership in the Eurasian Union. “United Macedonia” and other pro-Russian spokesmen stressed the need to preserve the constitutional name at all costs, which can be interpreted as an indication that Russia is still trying to use the name dispute to achieve its strategic goals in Macedonia and the Balkans. The support of Savin and Dugin for the preservation of the name was interpreted in that direction, a visit that some analysts interpreted as a “hybrid act”.

Following the expulsion of the Russian diplomat in March, the Russian embassy tweeted in response to a statement by VMRO-DPMNE Vice

President **Aleksandar Nikolovski** where he said that “*Macedonia must be a member of the EU and NATO*” and that “*Our partner is not Moscow, our partners are Brussels, London and Washington*”:

According to Aleksandar Nikolovski, Moscow was not a partner for VMRO-DPMNE. Remarkable attitude.

Russian Ambassador Shcherbak also interpreted the statement as a reflection of the “*inconsistent policy of part of the VMRO-DPMNE leadership*”, which “*led to VMRO-DPMNE losing power.*” Contrary to the statement “*our partner is not Moscow*”, Shcherbak indicated that he knew many of Nikolovski’s party members who were “*in the mood to develop constructive and partnership relations with Russia*”.

Due to the statement “*our partner is not Moscow*”, VMRO-DPMNE and its leader were the target of slander by Russian propagandists in Macedonia, who announced the “*disintegration of VMRO-DPMNE*”. The Macedonian clone of “*United Russia*” also targeted “*bandits from VMRO-DPMNE and SDSM*”, calling for early elections for the people to decide “*whether it is for NATO and the EU or for Russia and the EEU.*”

While the Russian ambassador suggested status of military neutrality and showed concern for the Macedonians with the message “*We do not want NATO to use the Macedonians as cannon fodder*”, the leader of “*United Macedonia*” sent anti-Albanian messages. Bačev demanded the revocation of the recognition of Kosovo, urging the foreign minister “*to start learning Russian together with his Albanian compatriots, and for radical Albanians to learn to swim.*”

Contrary to the claims of the Russian ambassador (Shcherbak: Allegations that Russia is interfering in the name dispute are propaganda lies), the leader of the Macedonian clone of “*United Russia*” tried to make the most of the name dispute for his own promotion and party mobilization. Bačev even tried to send a letter to the Greek Embassy to Tsipras with a message that “*the Macedonian people and most of the citizens of the Republic of Macedonia do not stand behind any agreement between the Republic of Macedonia and the Hellenic Republic to change the Macedonian name and*





identity.” Also in the letter, Bačev stressed that *“we do not see our future in the EU and NATO, but in a strategic alliance with Russia and membership in the Eurasian Economic Union.”* “United Macedonia” was trying to promote itself as the only party against the name change, which was clear from the video posted on their Facebook page entitled: **“Mickovski and Zaev are for the name change”**.

The same month when the Russian ambassador claimed in a column that Russia was being accused without evidence of *“alleged attempts to destabilize Macedonia”* and that it was doing everything *“to prevent the country’s NATO integration”*, the leader of “United Macedonia” boasted that not only who was on a party visit to Russia, but also that as a party they successfully passed the Russian training. Speaking on Star TV, Bačev said that he had met in the State Duma of Russia, with the leaders of the Eurasian movement Dugin and Savin, but also with representatives of “our close party United Russia”.

Thanks to “Russian training” by Dugin’s aide, Bacev claimed that they would defeat the *“disastrous policies of the ‘Funeral for Macedonia’ party composed of SDSM and VMRO-DPMNE”* and that they were ready to take power and clear up with all “National traitors”. The “trainer” Leonid Savin from Russia prophetically confirmed that *“the new government that will be in United Macedonia should maintain the unity of the country”*.



***Municipal Committee of the party “United Macedonia” in Tetovo,
31.05.2022. Photo: Truthmeter***

Russian propaganda after the Prespa Agreement: Attempts to destabilize

In June 2018, the “trained” Bačev began to discredit the negotiations with Greece as *“the private party of Zaeu and Tsipras for a name change agreement”* and predicted that *“Neither the name change will take place nor Macedonia will become a member of NATO.”*

After it became clear on June 12, 2018, that an agreement would be signed with Greece, the fan group “Komiti”, of the sports club “Vardar” owned by **Sergey Samsonenko** – Honorary Consul of the Russian Federation, called for a mass protest and sent a threatening message to all involved in changing *“our age-old name“*: *“we will come after you and your family!”*, reads the post of “Komiti”, who published a photo with the slogan *“damn the traitors who betrayed their own people”*.

The “Komiti” in their political “communiqué” claimed that the country was *“fiercely attacked by internal foreign aggressors, who want to change identity, nation, language, history by force and genocidal methods ...* “and called for a revolution.

At the same time, Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov expressed hope that *“the agreement has broad popular support”*, that is, that it will be supported by Russia *“if the name agreement is supported by the citizens of both countries”*. The Vice President of VMRO-DPMNE and some media interpreted that “Lavrov supported the agreement” and “welcomed the renaming of North Macedonia”, i.e. that the support of “brotherly” Russia for the name was stopped (So much was the “support” of “brotherly” Russia for the name – Lavrov in the company of Kozijas welcomed the agreement).

However, the Russian embassy clarified in a tweet that

Unfortunately, some media outlets continue to spread tendentious interpretations and false news about Russia’s views on the name issue of the Republic of Macedonia.

A prominent Russian propagandist the next day even personally targeted the VMRO-DPMNE vice president as a “liar and spinner”.





On a TV appearance, Bačev claimed that *“It was a big lie that Lavrov agreed to the name change”* and that *“that spin was made by those Soros media in the country”* (although the most explicit interpretation is that “Lavrov supported the agreement” was from the vice president of VMRO-DPMNE). And then Bačev placed SDSM and VMRO-DPMNE in the same opposite camp as pro-NATO parties: *“On one side are VMRO-DPMNE and SDSM, which say” NATO and the EU have no alternative “, on the other side we say strategic alliance with Russia”*. In the same TV show, hosted by a well-known pro-Russian spokesman, the other guest, **Alexander Stankovski**, promoted the Eurasian orientation as an ideology and satanized the West and liberalism, citing Dugin:

... what Dugin calls the fourth way, the fourth ideological or political theory. So liberalism, which has lasted for 200 years, is ready, it does not give results, it gives degeneration, it gives problems, it creates unnecessary wars in the world, it creates domination that is SATAN.

A day before the signing of the Prespa Agreement, “United Macedonia” declared it a *“national betrayal and a grave crime against the Macedonian people”*, and announced that *“the new legal government of United Macedonia will immediately annul such an agreement.”* On the day of the signing of the agreement, “United Macedonia” supported the “Komiti”, who called for a mass protest, again threatening: *“we are the Komiti and we will find you, and you have read the rest in the history textbooks.”* The radical group “Tvrdokorni” made themselves available to President Ivanov *“in defence of our homeland”*, who previously called the agreement with Greece “harmful” and announced that he would not sign it.

At the protest in front of the Parliament on June 17, 2018, which was full of hate speech and explicit threats of violence, “Komiti” broke the police cordon, and the leader of “United Macedonia”, Bačev with a Russian flag climbed on a police car. The Ministry of Interior said that *“some of the protesters used explosives and forcibly pushed the protective fence, trying to force*

their way into the Parliament”, and the government sent a message that “*a replay of April 27 will not be allowed*”. Later, information was made public by the Prime Minister that the rioters had been paid by Greek businessmen, and that Russian officials had encouraged the protests and the violence. Investigative journalists established incriminating relations between the Russian businessman, the United Russia party, the Komiti fan group, and the owner of the Vardar Football Club (Honorary Consul of Russia).

After the leader of “United Macedonia” waved the Russian flag during the violent protests in front of the Parliament, he was propagandistically targeted as a “Trojan horse” and installation of SDSM by media close to VMRO-DPMNE. Bacev’s party reacts sharply against “*journalistic janissaries and mercenaries, formerly Gruevski, now Mickoski.*”



Photo: print screen video from Radio Free Europe

In a speech in front of Parliament on May 18, 2018, Bačev disparaged the Prespa Agreement as a “*private party*”, similar to pro-Russian propagandist **Milenko Nedelkovski**, who called it a “*private party of the Greek and Macedonian prime ministers*”. Bačev then assured the protesting groups that “*there is no international agreement*” and that “*Macedonia will neither become a NATO member nor change its name*”.

However, the reality is denied by the university professor of international law at the Faculty of Law at the International Slavic University “Gavrilo Romanovich Derzhavin”. In the continuation of the analysis we will see how





exactly thanks to the Prespa Agreement, Macedonia became a member of NATO after the change of the constitutional name, despite the increased Russian influence during the referendum and the process of constitutional changes.



NOTHING CAN JUSTIFY THE RUSSIAN INVASION OF UKRAINE

One of the ways to insert influence, which is hard to notice and become increasingly aggressive since the beginning of Putin's invasion of Ukraine, is to compare, equate and justify the war

Author: prof. Mirjana Najcevska, PhD,
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(Truthmeter, 03.03.2022)

Putin's invasion of Ukraine opened up new space and created a new need for greater Russian influence in North Macedonia.

In conditions when the government in North Macedonia gives undoubted and very open support to Ukraine, condemns the invasion and offers material assistance to the citizens of Ukraine, the wave of Russian influence on social networks and certain portals/media is intensifying.

This impact is no longer so direct, immediate and open, but it is no less dangerous.

Texts and positions can still be seen on social media that directly support Putin and the invasion of Ukraine, but the media and official portals do not allow such an open approach and begin to use more subtle tools of disinformation.

Putin's direct support is often placed in the context of the alleged threat to North Macedonia posed by Western European countries, accompanied by videos and photos showing the alleged success of the Russian military in the fighting in Ukraine, i.e. articles alluding to the power of the Russian army, and its humanity.





However, one of the ways to insert influence, which is hard to notice ad become increasingly aggressive since the beginning of Putin's invasion of Ukraine, is to compare, equate and justify the war.

THE FIRST LEVEL is a comparison of the current invasion of Ukraine. It is usually done by comparing Putin's invasion of Ukraine with military intervention, military presence and/or military support given by the United States in the civil wars/conflicts in Syria, Libya, Yemen, or the recognition of Kosovo.

This is a quasi-comparison, which usually begins with the expressions: double standards; Russia did not destroy the international order, NATO and America did this; the US regime creates crises; why no one complained about the war in Syria; if there were such sanctions for every US aggression, the world would not know what the American anthem sounds like, nor would any of their athletes know; Remember when the US received EU sanctions for attacks on Yugoslavia, Libya, Iraq, Syria, etc.? No. We do not remember either....

The most common way to quasi-compare Putin's invasion of Ukraine with US military activity is by posting charts, graphs, lists, and brief statements listing U.S. military bases or countries where the U.S. have been or are in any manner military present or where they have "participated" in inciting the overthrow of regimes.

Without entering into a debate on whether a possible violation of the law at another time, other conditions, elsewhere, in a completely different conflict is automatically sufficient justification for the same or similar violation of the law now, in these conditions, in a particular country - Ukraine.

In fact, no one starts or engages in such a debate.



KOREA, 1950-53	GUATEMALA, 1967-69	SUDAN, 1998
CHINA, 1950-53	CAMBODIA, 1969-70	AFGHANISTAN, 1998
IRAN, 1953	CHILE, 1970-73	YUGOSLAVIA, 1999
GUATEMALA, 1954	ARGENTINA, 1976	AFGHANISTAN, 2001
TIBET, 1955-70s	ANGOLA, 1976-92	IRAQ, 2002-03
INDONESIA, 1958	TURKEY, 1980	YEMEN, 2002-20
CUBA, 1959	POLAND, 1980-81	HAITI, 2004
DEMOCRATIC	EL SALVADOR, 1981-92	SOMALIA, 2006-07
REPUBLIC OF	NICARAGUA, 1981-90	IRAN, 2005-PRESENT
CONGO, 1960-65	CAMBODIA, 1980-95	HONDURAS, 2009
DOMINICAN	LEBANON, 1982-84	LIBYA, 2011
REPUBLIC, 1961	GRENADA, 1983-84	SYRIA, 2011-PRESENT
VIETNAM, 1961-73	LIBYA, 1985	BRAZIL, 2016
BRAZIL, 1964	IRAN, 1987-88	BOLIVIA, 2019
BRITISH GUIANA, 1964	LIBYA, 1989	VENEZUELA, 2019
REPUBLIC OF	PHILIPPINES, 1989	GUYANA, 2020
CONGO, 1964	PANAMA, 1989-90	IRAQ, 2020

Tables and figures are easily re-produced. Lists, charts, tables, short statements...

The spread of such charts, graphs and texts on social networks is aimed at promoting the idea of a huge quantitative imbalance in US military action around the world, which necessarily leads to a conclusion about the justification and, above all, the “defensive” character of Putin’s military invasion of Ukraine.

With this, the EU and European countries in general, are again removed (or put on the sidelines) from the image of the conflict between Putin and the democratic world, the conflict is presented as a conflict between Russia and the United States and all comparisons are reduced to Russia and the United States. In this way, a complete defocus from the real situation is made and the global picture in which the Putin regime (not Russia) undertakes an invasion, which is condemned by the

majority of countries in the world, is no longer seen, but the perception of equal action of two great powers is imputed implying that the public does not condemn the actions of one, but condemns the actions of the other.



A tweet from Tanja Karakamiševa, a professor at the Faculty of Law at UKIM, who re-published a picture posted by RedFish, a Kremlin-backed propaganda publication run by people linked to



Russian state television Russia Today. This infographic, which shows military operations in various places and from different periods of time, is often cited as an example of manipulation, i.e. a new version of the Soviet tactic of defocusing (whataboutism).

The simplified form of these articles (especially charts and graphs) allows them to be easily disseminated and a clear perception is built, which presents the “identified adversary” – the United States – in the worst possible light and incites negative feelings as a “proven” conqueror and aggressor, as opposed to Russia for which a perception as someone who is persistently defending themselves is offered.

This is achieved by the fact that none of these texts is backed by or refers to analyzes, research, broader data, which would include a real comparison (the role of the former USSR and today’s Russia in those or similar conflicts), nor does it offer an explanation of the content of the mentioned activities, background, involvement/role of the mentioned country.

PUT IN THE SAME BASKET

At the same time, the perception is reinforced by the fact that completely different situations and activities are placed in the same basket (which can never be placed under the same denominator). Just as an example we mention Poland (1980-81), Kuwait (1991), and Vietnam (1961-73), which together appear on one of the most widespread lists.

Namely, when Poland is in question, we are talking about an original internal movement, which has been developing for years and which culminates in the activities of “Solidarity”, and is aimed at liberation from the presence of Russia and democratization of its own society (which has nothing to do with the United States) and is disavowing the long struggle of the Polish people for liberation from the influence of the USSR and democratization of their own society.

Kuwait was opposing an invasion by Iraq involving 32 countries (at that time the largest coalition of states since World War II) and there was even a common position of the United States and the then USSR regarding the



invasion and UN resolution supporting action to oust Saddam Hussein (Iraq) from Kuwait.

The Vietnam War is part of the conflicts that arise and are part of the Cold War. The war itself has a very complex background (involving both the US and the USSR), and the US role in it is one of the most controversial, with the least support from other countries, and is openly condemned as immoral by the American academia and many citizens of the United States.

This leads to the **SECOND LEVEL** – a kind of equalization, erasure of differences, identification (systems, procedures, activities, mode of action), which dilutes the condemnation and disperses any disagreement with Putin's concrete aggression on Ukraine.

The equation begins with denying the difference in reporting on Putin's aggression on Ukraine between the Russian regime-controlled media and the media of the “Western” countries and creating the impression that it is a simple struggle between the lies of two propaganda machines. The closure of media space in Russia and the absence of external information is equated with the current restriction of cable broadcasting to Russia's two state-controlled media (done, above all, as a symbolic act, which expresses an attitude rather than a real limitation, given the openness of the media space in Western democracies).

The equation continues with the claim that all politicians are the same and that the international community should react in the same way when it comes to the very similar violations of international law to be rounded up in statements that these are equal democratic systems with human rights violations (and even much greater respect for them by Putin than by Western democracies). However, these are not qualitatively different, i.e.:

From a political and strategic point of view, as we have seen, the intervention in Ukraine is only an operationalization of the diplomatically expressed ambitions for a new world order. In practice, this is articulated through the fear of NATO, the threat posed by NATO and the immanent danger that, according to Russia,





gives it legitimacy to use force. This, in itself, suggests that in legal terms, perhaps Putin is referring to another zealous precedent in the use of force, and that is the premature use of force, which was very relevant during the global war on terror.

This is an interesting way of ensuring the persistence of a positive attitude towards the Putin regime by minimizing wrongdoing, placing it in a broader context without offering more compelling explanations, or deriving a common denominator.

In this regard, there are articles that seem to be a general condemnation of the war, but in which behind the generalization the absence of a concrete condemnation is hidden, putting it in the same basket and identification. The bottom line is that Ukraine is not a victim of Putin, but of a global war that is constantly being waged on all sides, in which one culprit cannot be identified because everyone is equally guilty and/or responsible.

“I’m against all wars” is the best way to avoid saying whether you are against this concrete war. Probably the best example of this is the text of Professor **Biljana Vankovska** written for the newspaper “Nova Makedonija”.



I signed the petition, although it is a pathetic attempt to “do something”, to calm the conscience and to demonstrate the standing on the “right side” (after a decade of silence about other military campaigns, some of which are still active today). The so-called “fact-checkers” ask someone like me with decades of experience in the anti-war movement and a book of anti-war essays to swear again and again that I am against this war (as well as many others). Three times a day, and with a mandatory flag on the FB profile. The implicit imperative is to take sides, as if we are in a crisis with the Inform Bureau: whether you are for Tito or Stalin has now been replaced by whether you are for NATO/Ukraine or Putin. That false dilemma in the binary mind (this or that) is embedded in the foundations of the moral collapse of mankind. They cannot understand that one must be equally against the two warring parties. Especially when we are on the verge of a nuclear holocaust and the EU is acting like an arsonist, not a Nobel Peace Prize winner. By supplying weapons, Ukraine is becoming a de facto battleground between NATO and Russia, let us not be fooled. According to Jan Oberg, the West is on an autopilot of boundless hatred of Russia and everything Russian (from Tchaikovsky to the Bolshoi Theater), its military operations, as well as the right to veto in the UN Security Council (just as the United States has blocked any condemnation of Israel for decades and manipulated various resolutions to find a “hole in the law” for operations in which entire states were disbanded and left millions of innocent civilian victims).

Condemnation of concrete aggression against a particular state is called a “*false dilemma*”, the opposition to Putin’s aggression is called “*boundless hatred of Russia and everything Russian*”, and the equalization is clearly propagated by the message that it should be “*equal against the two warring parties*”.





SUBTLE EQUALIZATION AND SHIFTING OF BLAME

Another subtle way of influencing identification is to problematize and/or deny the democratic character of European states, which publicly oppose Putin's aggression on Ukraine. This is even more dangerous when it comes from a member of the Macedonian Academy of Sciences and Arts - MANU.

Just as an example, on her FB status (which was later published in several media and shared on social networks), academician **Katica Kjulafkova** claims that:

But today, March 2022, after several days of special Russian military intervention in Ukraine, the entire “progressive” European and American world, and even the Macedonian, promoted the brutal policy of boycotting art and culture that has a Russian symbol. Almost hysterically are banned all performances, promotions, classes, distribution and communication of top and popular works of art and masterpieces, bestsellers, theater performances, films, concerts, authors, composers, painters, opera singers, sporting events, just because they have Russian sign.

With what unprecedented moral and intellectual ease are Dostoevsky, Chekhov, Tchaikovsky, Russian ballet, Russian romance banned...? This is a total decadence of the Enlightenment spirit of Europe.

Why and how is such a post dangerous and an example of spreading Russian influence in Macedonia?

The seemingly legitimate call for the protection of human cultural, artistic and intellectual heritage carries a hidden content, which unilaterally and without arguments condemns the actions of Western European democracies, denies their democratization and equates their action with that of Putin.

How is the act of subtle equalization, shifting of blame and unilateral condemnation (in favor of Putin and his aggression) carried out?



First, before this text, Academician Kjulafkova has not published on her FB profile any other text condemning Putin's military aggression against Ukraine. This means that the public starts from the assumption that Academician Kjulafkova does not find anything wrong with this aggression.

Second, she calls Putin's war against Ukraine a "special military operation" in line with the demands of the Putin administration, which denies war in Ukraine.

Third, it quotes the word "progressiveness," which problematizes and denies the progressiveness of Western democracies.

Fourth, she speaks of the "brutal policy" of a boycott of Russian arts and culture, accusing it of hysterical bans on:

Dostoevsky, Chekhov, Tchaikovsky, Russian ballet, Russian romance...? This is a total decadence of the Enlightenment spirit of Europe.

It does not provide any link or specific case of these prohibitions (placed in the context of each of the given cases).

Thus, it is not mentioned that the attempt to ban Dostoevsky's study met with a very sharp and quick reaction from the academic community and was thwarted. She did not mention that conductor Valery Georgiev, who was forced to resign as honorary president of the Edinburgh International Film Festival, had shown solidarity with Putin and had not distanced himself from Putin's aggression on Ukraine. She did not mention that there will be no Russian pavilion at the Venice Biennale because Russian artists withdrew, explaining that:

There is no place for art when civilians die under rocket fire, when Ukrainian citizens hide in shelters, when Russian protesters are silenced.





Most importantly, Academician Kjulafkova finds no place in her post to express concern about Ukrainian artists, the endangered artistic heritage in Ukraine, and the already destroyed works of art as a result of Putin's aggression in Ukraine.

Academician Kjulafkova ends her FB status with the question:

Quo vadis, Europe? Are you facing a mutated transnational Nazism?

In this way, she clearly implies Nazi characteristics for European countries and leads to the “logical conclusion” of all these activities, which is to justify Putin's military aggression against Ukraine.

What you will read now is what Putin said two months ago and was reported by the British Guardian on December 21, 2021. After these statements, it will become clear to you that the West is actually pushing Russia into a corner, and Putin simply had no choice, because Russia was threatened in its own backyard. If the adversary simply does not want to talk and make compromises, then war is the only solution. After all, let us recall the Cuban Missile Crisis. United States couldn't allow missiles into its own backyard.

THIRD LEVEL, justification for Putin's aggression on Ukraine is packed with alleged Russophobia.



It is often presented as a struggle against fascism in Europe and European countries.



Од Македон @OdArgeadite · 13h

Историски никој никогаш не ја победил Русија.

На актуелниве македонски политичари и големи партии како и на фашистите низ светов им се ближи крајот.

Смрт фашизму, слобода народу.

Да живее краснаја армија!

It is further developed into the claim that this is a defensive war.

“A third world war is planned against Russia” - a shocking statement by the former Prime Minister of Ukraine

We come to the very clear support given by the president of the party “United Macedonia”, **Janko Bacev** (found in the renowned weekly “Fokus”):

For me, the Russian intervention is justified because they were put in a position to have nothing more to lose if NATO came to their border. I ask how NATO and the United States would react in a presumed situation, if Canada or Mexico enters into a military alliance with Russia and, consequently, the Russian side piles up Russian weapons on the border with the United States. How would Americans react in that case?

None of these theses is supported by relevant data, arguments, analyzes, facts... However, with their growing number, they try to create the impression that there is some “hidden” truth, a big conspiracy, a situation completely different from the one that people can see unfolding before their eyes.

And just in case, here is another message from another intellectual that what is happening in Ukraine is very tragic and sad, but has nothing to do with Macedonia and our lives:





My heart aches when I see that the Macedonian people are divided on the question of who is for Russia or Ukraine. I prefer everyone to be for Macedonia. Unfortunately, only a few hundred, from time to time several thousand, were the idealists who took to the streets, in front of the Assembly and the Government, fighting for Macedonia. The majority stayed at home and kept silent!

I'm sorry you do not see the big picture, - while you are all arguing, throwing punches, swearing, someone else is making money. Do not enter other people's agendas. Love yourself, take care of your families and loved ones, and do not forget, Macedonia above all!

According to this message, because they are all the same and there is no difference in the value systems they offer, we are talking only about games in which there is no place for us and it is best not to take sides because the only side that should interest us is ours.

In this way, not only are Western democracies and Putin's regime in Russia are equated, but the propaganda of favouritism and inclination towards the winner, whoever they are, is spread.

THE PROPAGANDIST DUGIN, THE SATANIZATION OF THE WEST AND THE APOLOGY OF RUSSIAN IMPERIALISM

In this brief analysis, written at a time when Putin's troops are persistently shelling civilian facilities in Kyiv, we will take a look at Dugin's ideological and propaganda activities following Russia's military "special operation", recalling his propaganda activities and messages from the "Eurasian" mission in Macedonia in 2018

Author: Žarko Trajanoski, media analyst

(Truthmeter, 23.03.2022)

Aleksandr Dugin, the ideologue of the "Eurasian movement" and one of the most agile military agitators and propagandists after the Russian aggression in Ukraine, is known to the Macedonian public since his guest appearance on the "Milenko Nedelkovski Show" in 2015.

On this occasion, his host, who had the opportunity to read an article by Dugin promoting the common struggle of Christians and Muslims against the Antichrist, directly asked him, "*Who is the Antichrist?*" Dugin explicitly replies that "*the Antichrist is the United States,*" accusing it of being a materialistic civilization and of "*sowing blood, evil, and meanness.*" In the same "Milenko Nedelkovski Show" from December 2015, Dugin announced the collapse of liberalism, which would lead to the collapse of the EU, and "prophetically" indicated that "*war is inevitable, a real great war.*" Dugin also described the "*maximum on the Russian perimeter*" of action aimed at "*liberating Russia's three most important shrines – Kyiv, Constantinople, Jerusalem*" – pointing out that Kyiv is "*the capital of the Russian world*", Constantinople – *the capital of Orthodoxy*, and Jerusalem – *the world capital*.





Alexander Dugin
Photo: Mehdi Bolurian, Wikipedia, 2020

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Dugin's Satanization of Ukraine, Zelensky and the West

Aleksandr Dugin is trying to justify Russian aggression against Ukraine using a wide range of propaganda techniques, narratives and media messages. One of the techniques he uses is a deification of the cause (Russia and the "special operation" in Ukraine) and satanization of the opponent (Ukrainian state and the West), i.e. slandering the opponent as a "devil". For example, on March 13, 2022, the popular right-wing and pro-Putin portal Infomax published a column (republishing it from the Free Globe) in which Dugin sent a frightening message that Russia's war against Ukraine was a war against the devil himself, who wanted to destroy humanity and turn humans into robots and mutants:

The real war is not against Ukraine, but against the World Economic Forum and its infernal plans to destroy humanity by legalizing all kinds of perversions, sins and crimes and ultimately turning people into robots and mutants and transferring the power of artificial intelligence. We are dealing with the devil himself, Dugin wrote.

The message that Russia is “dealing with the devil itself” is not surprising to those familiar with Dugin’s propaganda. In his books, Dugin preaches that Russia is on the periphery of the “devil’s city” propagating a “revolution against the postmodern world” (*Political Platonism, Philosophy of Politics*, 2019). Dugin also describes globalization (centered on the United States) as the “*kingdom of the Antichrist*” and unipolarity as evil in his Fourth Political Theory. In Dugin’s bipolar interpretations, as opposed to evil and the “Antichrist” is Moscow – as the “Third Rome”, as protection from the Antichrist or the Orthodox “fortress” (Katechon). It is interesting to note that Dugin not only satanizes Ukraine and the West but also Russia itself, which he claims was created by the devil in the 1990s as “anti-Russia.”

Dugin justifies Putin’s “special operation” as severing ties with the “*devilish*” West, as the beginning of “*the last battle of light and darkness, us and them, Eurasia and the Atlantic.*” The battle with the “*devil*”, according to Dugin, is not only against Ukraine and the West but also against the fifth column satanized as a “*devil’s layer in Russian society.*”

When he uses the propaganda technique of Satanization, Dugin does not only denigrates certain countries (such as Ukraine or the United States), but also specific individuals in power. For example, immediately after Zelensky’s victory in the 2019 Ukrainian elections, Dugin wrote on his Facebook profile that “*the devil has won the Ukrainian elections*” and that “*the real disintegration of Ukraine begins right now.*”





Dugin's apology for the Russian imperialism: "Empire strikes back"?

The day before the Russian military aggression on Ukraine, Aleksandr Dugin announced the beginning of "*Russian Eurasian mobilization*" with the propaganda slogan "New Russia is the territory of the future." Speaking in the first person plural, on behalf of the people, Dugin declared that "*We are the people of the empire.*" In contrast to "*Glory to Ukraine*", Dugin's slogan is "*Glory to New Russia*", an expression accepted by the Tsargrad movement. For Dugin, Putin's recognition of the "*republics*" in Ukraine marked "*the second beginning of the great Slavic reconquest.*"

On March 12, 2022, Dugin was a guest on the TV show with the most popular Russian propagandist **Vladimir Solovyev**, who introduced him as "*the leader of the international Eurasian movement.*" In his famous propaganda style, Soloviev concluded that the West had set itself the task of destroying - not so much Russia, but the Russian people, the Russian culture, the very spirit of Russian civilization. In his "philosophical" monologue, Dugin followed up on Solovyev's "official" propaganda myths, while in the background of the conversation, the Russian military machinery in action was advertised. According to Dugin, Russia's "special operation" would allow it to be regarded as a serious player on the geopolitical chessboard, "as the pawn of a multipolar world" and as a "sovereign civilization."



Dugin in the TV show with the most popular Russian propagandist Vladimir Solovyov

However, Dugin's real propaganda home is the Russian Orthodox TV channel Tsargrad, owned by Russian oligarch **Konstantin Malofeyev**, who was on the EU sanctions list in 2014 for his support of destabilizing eastern Ukraine. Dugin himself introduces himself as the former editor-in-chief of “Telekanal Constantinople”, and describes himself as his mastermind. Interestingly, Malofeev as the general producer of “God’s TV” hires a Western expert – a former Fox News producer – who in 2022 is prosecuted by the United States for collaborating with the sanctioned Malofeev, in an attempt to establish TV networks in Russia, Bulgaria and Greece.

Dugin's closeness to Konstantin Malofeyev is also reflected in what Malofeyev describes as a “philosopher and like-minded person” in the introduction to his book “Empire”, promoted by no one else, but Dugin. At the book launch in December 2021, Dugin stated that “*We live in a world of empires*” and that “*We have never lived outside the world of empires*”. He stressed that “*Christianity and the empire are inseparable*” and that Russia as the “*third Rome*” is a continuation of Christian policy.



Dugin promoting the book “Empire” by Russian oligarch Konstantin Malofeyev





In an interview with Dugin on Tsargrad TV in early 2022, Malofeev promoted his imperial political slogan: *“The empire is our past and our future. We can not but be an empire.”* According to Malofeev, Russia is a *“self-sufficient great civilization”* that must develop on its own: *“either we are an adherent of the Western civilization of money, the new global Canaan, or we are the Empire, the Catechon, which protects the world from evil”.*



Konstantin Malofeyev

From numerous other media reports, we can see that Dugin and Malofeev are not just ordinary militant agitators and propagandists, but that they also act as preachers of the *“third Rome”* and ideologues of Putin’s *“Eurasian”* imperialism.

In his *“geopolitical analysis”* published on March 10, 2022, Dugin emphasized that *“according to the laws of geopolitics”*, Russia (*“Eurasia”*) without Ukraine is not an empire and civilization, but that with Ukraine it is an empire and civilization. Dugin preached the *“unification”* of Russia and Ukraine and the collapse of *“unipolarity”* with the geopolitical

idea of a “union of Slavic states” as a continuation of “Eurasian integration”. Dugin claims that this is “*a completely new page in world history, a multipolar world and a complete change of the world order*”, with the Eastern Slavs “*integrated*” into the territory of “Eurasia”.

Such Eurasian “*integration*”, according to Dugin, means “*the complete abolition of the model of nation-state and nation*”, which has been developing for more than 30 years in modern post-Soviet Ukraine. The geopolitical “*prophet*” predicts a return to the state before the beginning of Ukraine’s statehood – the “*integration*” into a nation of Eastern Slavs, whose branches are the Great Russians and the Little Russians (as well as the Belarusians).

And what will happen to the citizens of Ukraine who identify as Ukrainians? Before the start of the “*special operation*”, Dugin declared Ukraine a “*failed state*”, announcing that the Ukrainians would pay a huge price for choosing to be “*lackeys of the West*”. Such implicit threats to Dugin are not uncommon if we recall his explicit extremist statements from 2014, which were removed from YouTube because of hate speech. After the “*special operation*”, the Russian imperialist Dugin began to preach another story, that “*Ukrainians have been and always will be our brothers and sisters*”, that “*Ukrainians are not enemies, they are our people*” and that “*Ukrainian brothers*” were tragically mistaken as a result of Western propaganda.

Dugin on “the end of history”, “the clash of civilizations” and “absolute evil”

On February 24, 2022, when Putin launched a “*special operation*” with military aggression against Ukraine, Dugin “*declared*” that the contours of “*eternal Russia*” were in sight and that it was a religious moment: “*This is a religious moment. Not just geopolitics or conflict of interest. This is a clash between civilizations*”.

In an article on March 14, 2022, “*The End of History That Never Happened and Russian War on the Liberal Order*,” Dugin is convinced that Huntington





theoretically defeated Fukuyama with the “*clash between civilizations*” with the “*end of history*,” but that the expression of Fukuyama “Putin’s war on the liberal order” is absolutely correct.

Dugin echoed the propaganda slogan that “*without Ukraine Russia is not an empire*”, suggesting that it would be even more transparent to say that without Ukraine – Russia would not be civilization or a “*pole in a multipolar world*”. According to Dugin, “*the special military operation in Ukraine is the key momentum in establishing Russia as a civilization, as the sovereign pole of a multipolar world,*” and that the operation was directed against liberalism and globalism (against the “*diabolical plan of globalists*” and against modern liberalism as real and “*absolute evil*”).

On February 24, 2022, when Russian tanks began to invade Ukraine, the prophet of “Novorussia” in his “Katehon” published demonizing comments against the liberals: “*When we are dealing with liberals, we are dealing with obsessed people. They are demon-possessed.*”

But how does Dugin try to justify Russian “civilizational” attacks on civilian targets and on Ukrainians as a separate nation? According to Dugin, the Ukrainians are part of the “*three-sided East Slavic people*”, and “were convinced that they were part of the Western (global) world” and that “the Russians are not brothers, but fierce enemies.”

Following Dugin’s “logic”, imperialist Putin shelled and bombed “demon-possessed” Ukrainians to “liberate” them from Western demons and to “convince” them that they were brothers and not enemies. As the “prophet” Dugin struggles to justify imperialist Putin as a fighter “*not against Ukraine but for Ukraine*” (but in Eurasia), “*Putin’s war against the liberal order*” has sparked a humanitarian crisis with thousands of victims and millions of refugees horrified by “*civilizational*” actions of “*brotherly Russia*”.



Dugin's Eurasian Mission in Macedonia and its followers

After the beginning of 2018, the marginal party of **Janko Bačev** NDM was renamed “United Macedonia” (modelled on Putin’s “United Russia”), the newly branded party organizes a panel discussion on key political goals – “The Republic of Macedonia in strategic alliance with Russia and membership in the Eurasian Economic Union”. At the discussion as the main speaker was presented “*prof. Aleksandr Dugin, the first adviser to Russian President Vladimir Putin.*” Dugin and “*his deputy prof. Leonid Savin*” and in the Macedonian media were described as “Advisers to Russian President Vladimir Putin” or “Putin’s political scout”, and Dugin as “the first adviser to Russian President Vladimir Putin” and “Putin’s brain”, which was interpreted as an exaggeration.

Before the start of the debate, in a statement to reporters, Dugin stressed his pan-Slavic commitment to unite parts of the Slavic peoples and the need “*not to sacrifice Slavic unity*”. Dugin’s key propaganda theses were that “*the EU is slowly falling apart*” and “*the West is falling apart*” (Dugin: You do not need the EU, it will fall apart), and “Russia is open as an Eurasian alliance”. Dugin’s message – “*If you are in the Russian Federation we will be a common Slavic world*”, was followed by a statement that Russia was not against the West: “*We do not oppose the West, we want a good understanding with all nations, including European nations.*”

From today’s perspective, Dugin’s unbelievable stories from Skopje that Russia did not oppose the West were denied by Dugin himself, as were his unreliable descriptions of Russia as a “*demonized*” country:

Russia is a demonized country, they tell us things that are not real, that we want to conquer, to subjugate, to interfere in domestic politics... None of this is true, - said Dugin in Skopje in 2018.





In the face of Dugin's propaganda rhetoric in 2018, the demonizing Dugin in 2022 justifies Russia as an empire that is not at war with Ukraine, but with the West and the Antichrist – who had hellish plans to destroy humanity and turn humans into robots and mutants.

With political propagandists and prophets like Aleksandr Dugin, Putin's Russia is not a “*demonized country*” but a country that demonizes and satanizes in an attempt to justify Ukraine's unjustified aggression.

ANALYSES



UKRAINE URGES NORTH MACEDONIA TO JOIN EU'S ECONOMIC SANCTIONS FOR RUSSIA

Writes: Bojan Blazevski

Infographics: Goran Rizaov

(Meta, 14.02.2022)

The ambassador of Ukraine to North Macedonia, Natalia Zadorozhniuk in the panel discussion “The Russian-Ukrainian Crisis and North Macedonia” organized by CIVIL, which took place on the 9th of February, said that Ukraine expects clear and unambiguous political support from its friend North Macedonia in the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, but also that North Macedonia should join the EU economic sanctions against Russia, which were introduced by the European Union (EU) in 2014, following the illegal Russian annexation of the Crimean Peninsula.



*The Ambassador of
Ukraine in Skopje,
Natalia Zadorozhniuk;
Photo: Embassy of
Ukraine in Skopje*





“We expect [North Macedonia to join] the sanctions of the European Union. You can't sit in two chairs at once! There are times in life when you need to decide for yourself, first of all and most importantly, on which side of the barricade you will stand. The Ukrainians have a very vivid negative experience with neutrality. If we go towards the European Union and NATO, if we are part of the European values, then we should demonstrate this not only with words, but also with our deeds and actions,” the Ukrainian ambassador Zadorozhniuk said.

Ukraine has political support from North Macedonia

Concerning the political support, North Macedonia's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Bujar Osmani on the 31st of January at the meeting with the Russian ambassador in Skopje, Sergey Bazdnikin, reiterated the stance that North Macedonia respects the sovereignty and the territorial integrity of Ukraine within the internationally recognized borders. Political support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity and independence also came a few days later from Prime Minister Dimitar Kovachevski, who on the 3rd of February this year, met with the Secretary General of NATO, Jens Stoltenberg.



Prime minister of North Macedonia, Dimitar Kovachevski and the Secretary General of NATO, Jens Stoltenberg | Source: Government of the Republic of North Macedonia

“We support the proposal of NATO for topical meetings with Russia, concerning the state of the relations, the European security with a focus on Ukraine, the transparency, the risk reduction and control of the weapons. We fully support the sovereignty and the territorial integrity of Ukraine within the internationally recognized borders,” Prime minister Kovachevski said.

No economic sanctions by North Macedonia for Russia

However, North Macedonia for years has not joined the sanctions for Russia which the European Union introduced after the Russian illegal annexation of the Crimean Peninsula, which is situated on the Ukrainian territory. Macedonia in 2014 did not join the sanctions of the EU after the annexation of Crimea, and since then, we have not adopted a new decision. At the end of 2020, Radio Free Europe in Macedonian language version wrote on the topic.

The former Prime minister Zoran Zaev, in a statement on the 30th of December 2020 explained that North Macedonia hadn't joined the sanctions of the EU for Russia because the country has serious interests for the economic cooperation with Russia.



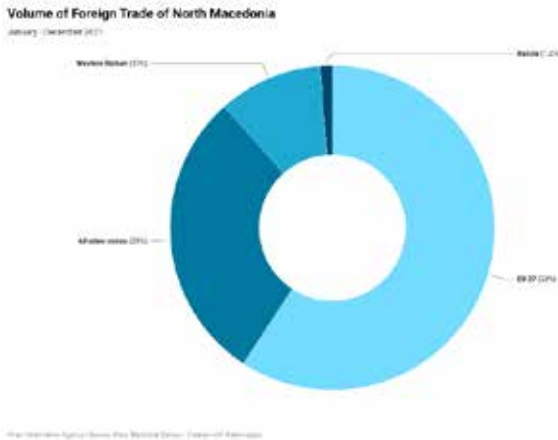
The former Macedonian Prime minister Zoran Zaev | Photo: Government of the RNM





“We are a candidate for EU membership, but not a member yet. It is in the interest of the citizens and the state to avoid doing something that we are not obliged to do. And therefore, in addition to all the things I have mentioned, we have not joined the economic measures against Russia, because we have serious interests for economic cooperation with Russia. We are a member of NATO and for us there is no alternative to the EU, but our country has interest in being a friend to the rest of the world,” the then prime minister Zaev said.

He added that the country since 2016 had joined all the statements, declarations, actions, and sanctions adopted by the EU, including those against Russian citizens and Russian legal entities. However, the rate of alignment of the Republic of North Macedonia with the stances, the declarations of the EU, i.e. the agreement with them, at the end of the year 2020 were 94%, and by 2016 it was 74%.



The exports to Russia in decline, the import grows
On the other hand, according to the most recent data from the State Statistical Office about the foreign trade exchange, in the period from January to December 2021, the Russian Federation was in the 20th position on the list of countries North Macedonia has highest volume of trade in goods with. The total trading volume last year was

US \$233,507,000, which was an increase of 12.4% compared to 2020. In addition, North Macedonia's exports to the Russian Federation last year were US \$57,140,000, a decrease of 5,4% compared to 2020, while in 2021 we imported goods from Russia worth US \$176,367,000 of dollars, which is an increase of 19.7% in comparison with January-December 2020.

Volume of Foreign Trade of North Macedonia

(January - December 2021)

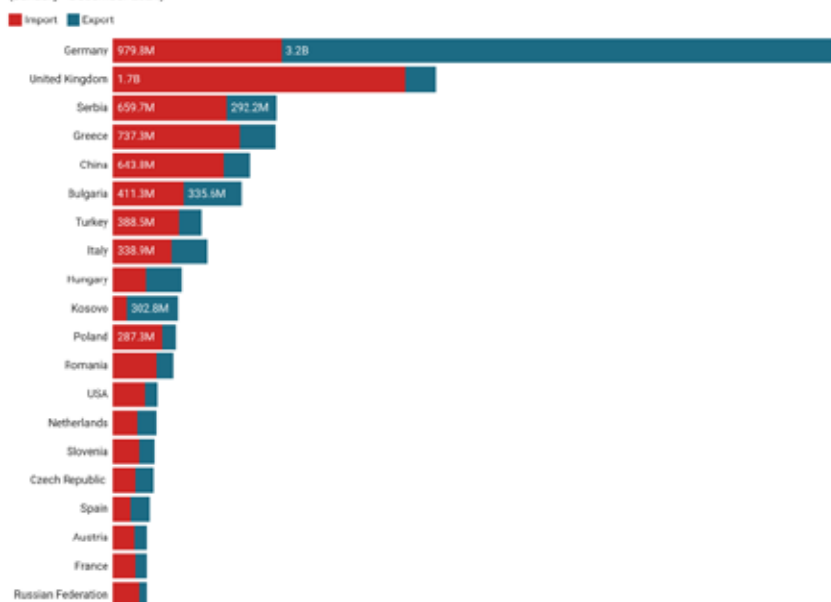


Chart: Meta News Agency - Source: State Statistical Bureau - Created with Datawrapper

The EU sanctions have been in force for almost 8 years. Nevertheless, the European Union together with the USA immediately after the illegal Russian annexation of the Crimea in 2014 have imposed sanctions to Russia. According to the press release of the European Council from the 13th of January 2022, EU extended the economic sanctions for Russia until the 31st of July 2022. With the extending of the sanctions so far, EU very often added new measures against Russia.

The EU sanctions for Russia include restriction of access to primary and secondary capital markets in the EU for certain Russian banks and com-





panies, as well as a ban of the forms of financial assistance and mediation for Russian financial institutions. The sanctions prohibit direct or indirect export, import or transfer of materials associated with the defense, but also a limitation of the Russian access to certain sensitive technologies that can be used in the Russian energy sector, for example, in the production and prospecting for oil, as well as a series of other economic sanctions of EU for Russia.

At the same time, the measures undertaken by the EU towards Russia concerning the territorial integrity of Ukraine, at the moment are directed toward 185 persons and 48 subjects. Concerning the persons, they are subject to freezing of the property, including a ban on managing the finances, as well as a ban on travel, which prevents these persons to enter or transit through EU countries, states the website of the European Council.

In addition to the implementation by the EU member countries, these sanctions of EU for Russia due to the annexation of Crimea were also supported by Montenegro and Albania, as candidates for full membership in the EU, but not by North Macedonia and Serbia.

According to the press release of the European Council on the 27th of July of 2021, the sanctions that had been extended until the summer of 2022, were supported by Montenegro and Albania, together with Georgia and Norway. Otherwise, the candidate countries for EY membership are not obliged to implement in full the EU regulations before they become official members of the EU.

North Macedonia does not have political interests similar to those of Serbia

However, in the case of Serbia, the current leadership in Belgrade through the president of the Serbian parliament's Ivica Dacic in June of 2021, said that Serbia would never introduce sanctions against "its friend Russia" and EURactiv published his opinion and the opinion of the Serbian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Nikola Selakovic that Russia has given the great-



est support to Serbia in the preservation of the territorial integrity and sovereignty in relation to Kosovo. However, unlike Serbia, which seeks a more powerful ally for the settlement of a long-running dispute with Kosovo, North Macedonia, at the moment has no such political interests in Russia.



The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Serbia, Nikola Selaković || Photo: Government of the Republic of Serbia, srbija.gov.rs

Apart from North Macedonia, the Russian influence in the energy sector in Serbia is much more present. The Naftna industrija Srbije – NIS, (Oil Industry of Serbia), one of the greatest Serbian exporters is majority-owned by the Russian company “Gazprom Neft” (Газпром нефть), after 51% of the shares were sold in 2008. Radio Free Europe in Serbian language says that eight years in a row, NIS hasn’t been able to get credits from the western banks and financial institutions, but the problem is also the purchase of equipment from manufacturers in the European Union and the USA. The reason for this is not just the economic sanctions of the EU towards Russia, but also in the fact that the Russian state company “Gazprom neft”, which is the owner of NIS, is on the black list of the EU and the USA, following the illegal annexation of Crimea by Russia.





INFORMATION

ANALYSIS: THE WAR IN UKRAINE WILL CAUSE ECONOMIC INSTABILITY IN RNM

The military conflict in Ukraine is expected to have consequences for the economy of North Macedonia. The consequences, above all, are related to the obstacles in the trade exchange with Ukraine, which is a direct target of military attacks, but also with Russia, against which North Macedonia has imposed sanctions and from which reciprocal sanctions are expected in the coming period.

Author: Teuta Buçi

(Truthmeter, 22.02.2022)

The members of the expert working group on foreign and security policy and the executive director of the **Prespa Institute**, Ivana Jordanoska, Angelina Cvetkovska, Vesna Poposka, Vesna Shapkoski and Andreja Popovski conducted an analysis, which was presented on March 22, 2022, on important issues related to the Russian invasion of Ukraine and its effect on Europe, but also on North Macedonia.

According to the analysis, the fact that key products such as natural gas, oil and wheat come from Russia and Ukraine, shows that shocking prices and economic instability are expected in the country. Whether the trade takes place directly between North Macedonia and these two countries or through European Union channels, the consequences are already being felt and will only worsen if hostilities are not stopped soon.

Natural gas may prove to be the product that may be most critical in the coming period, as a direct consequence of the hostilities and economic sanctions that are being imposed. The crisis in energy supply is expected to





significantly affect the European Union. This, in addition to being transposed into a significant price shock for a wide range of products, not only in the member states but also in other countries, dependent on imports from the EU, as is the case with North Macedonia, - *the analysis reads.*

Russian oil is imported to our country with around 25% percent of total imports. Asked whether this would lead to an increase in the oil prices as well as the prices of other energy sources, and electricity, as a domino effect of the Russian-Ukrainian crisis, **academician Abdulmenaf Bexheti** told “Truthmeter”:

This is already seen in strategic goods - prices are rising. These are raw materials, i.e. inputs that are needed. However, I do not think that alternative solutions will not be found. The only question is what prices we will find from those alternative products. Pressed by the inflationary spiral, national banks may be forced to raise interest rates to keep inflation in check. And now the question is how much that shift will lead to a reduction in investment, given the reduction in supply. The institutions are observing these movements quite closely. I observe the budget dynamics daily and believe me when I say that it is ideal. For the first two months, both in a crisis and in these tense situations, around 14 percent of the budget revenues are realized in such crisis months, and the expenditure side is 15 percent, which is quite balanced. So, the situation is not for any alarm. Okay, yes, we need to be aware of monitoring the situation daily, but not to panic, given that the economy is sensitive to panic.

Are there any real pro-Russian sentiments in RNM?

As for the Russian influence in the country, the research of the Prespa Institute shows that there are no real pro-Russian sentiments in the country. It is a mix of factors that give the impression of an authentic and complete orientation in support of Putin's aggression against Ukraine.

The voters of Levitsa expressed the highest support for Russia. As many as 6.9% of them recognize Russia as the best friend of the country. For the voters of Levitsa, Russia is the second choice for the best friend, right behind Serbia which is the choice of 68.1% of them. This political party was also the only one that did not vote for the Resolution21 of the Assembly of the Republic of Northern Macedonia condemning Russia's invasion on Ukraine, - the analysis underlines.

Why is it important that Serbia joins sanctions against Russia?

The analysis, presented today by members of the working group, also covers the issue of sanctions against Russia. Experts have expressed concern about the position of Serbia, the only country in Europe that has not joined the sanctions against Russia. According to them, this is a worrying fact not only for North Macedonia but also for the wider region and Europe in general. There is a possibility to import Russian products to Serbia which would then be repackaged and sold as Serbian products.

“An additional cause for concern is the constant and increased volume of flights between Serbia and Russia¹⁶. The Allies, as well as the European Union, must pay increased attention to potential violations of the sanctions regime, both in the region and beyond. Russian influence in Serbia is significant, given the fact that Serbia, besides Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina, is the only country in the region that is not a NATO member and has no such aspirations given historical developments. In this context, we should





mention the “Serbian-Russian Humanitarian Centre” in Nis, the functioning of which has long been questionable, both for independent journalists in Serbia and for the security structures of other countries,” – it is stated in the analysis.

It was also pointed out that at the moment the institutions of North Macedonia have expressed readiness to accept refugees from Ukraine, but there are no concrete steps on how to do that. According to the latest information from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, accommodation capacity is still being assessed. North Macedonia is a transit zone for most of the refugees entering its territory. It is currently assumed that Ukrainian refugees will not come to North Macedonia.

Will there be a nuclear war?

As for the possibility of a nuclear war, experts say that the chances of that are small because if a nuclear bomb is dropped on the territory of Ukraine, depending on the size, the consequences would be felt in neighboring countries – some of the EU member states and NATO.

“Such a situation would cause a counterattack, in which case, the nuclear disaster would have consequences for North Macedonia. Another nuclear threat is the potential damage, whether it be intentional or unintentional, to a nuclear power plant that could cause a nuclear accident on Ukrainian territory,” – the analysis states.

It is further discussed that these scenarios are extreme and efforts are being made to prevent them for a number of reasons. First of all, it would destroy the Baltic and Eastern European countries even more, and then it would have catastrophic consequences for the Russian people and finally it would plunge Europe into World War III.

But what does Russia, led by Putin, want to achieve as an end goal?

Denko Maleski, professor and first Minister of Foreign Affairs in independent Macedonia, for “Truthmeter” says:

Russia opposes NATO enlargement to its borders. It is a great power that at the end of the eighties, when the Berlin Wall fell, withdrew from all of Eastern Europe, i.e. from all the countries that were members of the Warsaw Pact. Russia then decided to get rid of those colonies that were occupied during World War II, when Russian troops pushed Hitler and marched to Berlin. The hope was that Russia would begin to develop as part of the world, and possibly even as a democracy. Then debates erupted over Eastern Europe - where those countries would go, whether to stay out of alliances or join NATO. There was a great debate then about the future of Eastern Europe. There were people, the so-called American realists, who said that it was better for American power to withdraw back to America since there was no reason for NATO to exist because the reason for NATO's existence was the Warsaw Pact. And now they emerge with their theses that if it had not been done then, this now would not have happened. However, it is a fact that the countries of Eastern Europe asked for a guarantee, they were persistent in becoming members of NATO. Eventually, the logic of power prevailed in America, bringing NATO closer to Russia's borders. Russia, while weak, economically and politically, had no way of resisting this. Even then, however, Kissinger warned that at some point Russia would begin to expand its power beyond its borders. That's roughly what happened. Russia rose under Putin, began to prosper as a state, and rebuilt its army. His opponents also admit that in the first ten years of his rule he did valuable things for the country, bringing it in order, but in a Russian way, as a former member of the KGB and surrounded by such people. After those ten years, Putin became a dictator and now, it is he who has the decision for war or peace.





RUSSIAN MEDIA SCENE: CONTROLLED CONTENT WITH LITTLE SPACE FOR FOREIGN MEDIA

Citizens in Russia receive dosed content, and censorship laws are in place, enacted by the newly adopted Law on March 4, which even provides for a prison sentence of 10 to 15 years “for knowingly spreading false news about the Russian military”. Leading Russian television “Channel 1” and “Russia 1” are state-controlled, and the third-largest TV network, NTV, is owned by state-owned energy giant Gazprom. There are more than 3,000 radio stations in the Russian Federation, and the state is the founder of the three main networks “Radio Rossii”, “Mayak” and “Vesti FM”. More than 16,000 registered newspapers are published in Russia, while only 22 can be purchased nationwide. Identical to television and newspapers, the most popular ones have a pro-government editorial policy

Author: Vesna Kolovska

(Truthmeter, 23.03.2022)

A video poll among citizens of the Russian cities of Perm and Vladivostok showed that a larger percentage of respondents do not know and do not believe that the Russian army has entered Ukraine.

“No one is bombing Kyiv. I do not believe in that,” said one of the citizens on the street, when asked by a journalist, who also showed him photos from the bombings in Ukraine as evidence. Even an older man said they did not believe there was a war.

Putin could not do that. To occupy Ukraine?! Why? Our people also live there – both in Ukraine and in Belarus.





“But it happened,” *the journalist told them in the video.*

I do not know. They do not say that on the news, *the man replied.*

The video is the best illustration of the state of the media in Russia, which is heavily controlled by the Russian government. Citizens receive dosed content while censorship laws come into force, reinforced by the newly adopted Law on March 4, which even provides for a prison sentence of 10 to 15 years “for knowingly spreading false news about the Russian military.” Television, according to Reporters Without Borders, remains the most trusted medium in Russia, with most of the channels being state-owned or owned by companies with close ties to the Kremlin.

Media under the direct control of the Kremlin

Leading Russian television channels “Channel 1” and “Russia 1” are state-controlled, and the third-largest TV network, NTV, is owned by state-owned energy giant Gazprom.

These are the dominant domestic channels, while internationally, the main Russian TV broadcaster is the Russian-language satellite television station Russia Today (RT), which is funded by the federal budget. Founded in 2005, Russia Today broadcasts in Arabic, Spanish and French in addition to English.

There are more than 3,000 radio stations in the Russian Federation. The state is the founder of the three main networks “Radio Rossii”, “Mayak” and “Vesti FM”. There are a number of commercial stations, which are mainly music radios.

More than 16,000 registered newspapers are published in Russia, while only 22 can be purchased nationwide. Identical to television, the most popular newspapers have pro-government editorial policies, while several influential dailies are owned by companies with close ties to the Kremlin.



Media in Russia

TV STATIONS

Rossiya 1 – national network, operated by the Russian Broadcasting Company (VGTRK)

Channel 1 – national network, 51% owned by the state, 49% by private shareholders

NTV – national network, owned by the state giant “Gazprom”

Center TV – owned by the Moscow City Administration

Ren TV – a commercial station based in Moscow with a strong regional network, majority ownership of the media holding NMG

RT – state-funded international information satellite channel in English

RADIO STATIONS

Radio Rossii – a national network operated by the state broadcasting company (VGTRK)

News FM – state property

Moscow Echo – majority ownership of state-owned Gazprom

Mayak – state national network

Russian radio – a large private network, music radio

Print Media

Komsomolskaya Pravda – a pro-government tabloid

Kommersant – daily, business-oriented, controlled by tycoon Alisher Usmanov, close to Putin

Moscow Komsomolets – a popular Moscow-owned privately owned daily newspaper

Izvestia – a popular pro-Kremlin daily, owned by media holding NMG

Rossiyskaya Gazeta – a government-owned daily newspaper

Nezavisimaya Gazeta – an influential privately owned daily newspaper





Arguments and Facts – a popular weekly owned by Promsvyazbank

Novaya Gazeta – publishes three times a week, known for its investigative journalism

RBC – business daily newspaper

Vedomosti – financial daily newspaper

NEWS AGENCIES/ INTERNET

TASS – state news agency, with English translation

Interfax – a private news agency with English translation

Lenta.ru – a popular online news source

Moscow Times – English-language news website, successor to now defunct newspaper

Rambler.ru – the main internet portal

Sputnik – state multimedia platform for international cooperation with multilingual service

Yandex.ru – the leading search engine

VKontakte – a leading social network

Raskomnadzor – the main censorship arm of the government

Russia ranks 150th out of 180 on Reporters without Borders' media freedom list in 2021. State control of the media and the Internet is exercised through Roskomnadzor, a federal executive body responsible for ensuring that the media follow Russian law and issues warnings when violating these laws. Roskomnadzor may also restrict traffic to its social media site, which is its legal obligation. The Russian government in December 2020 passed a law increasing penalties for online platforms and ISPs, giving it the authority to restrict or completely block websites.

This powerful state censor withdrew the license of the German service “Deutsche Welle”, and placed the media in the group of foreign agents. The move was in response to the withdrawal of RT's broadcasting

license in Germany and on internet platforms. The European Union has banned “Sputnik” and “RT” on European soil, while the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, **Josep Borrell**, assessed that:

These are not independent media, but weapons in the Kremlin’s manipulation system.

In response, the list of “foreign agents”, which includes more than 100 foreign and domestic media organizations and individuals, compiled by the Russian Ministry of Justice, has grown. The law dates back to 2012 and at that time it referred to non-governmental organizations that received funds from abroad. Its scope was expanded in 2019 to individuals or organizations that receive any amount of foreign funding and publish “*print, audio, audio-visual or other reports and materials.*”

In 2014, a law was passed that restricts the freedom of online media. The “Lugovoy Law” – named after one of its authors, State Duma MP **Andrey Lugovoy** – allows news sites to be blocked without a court order if required by the prosecution.

Before and after the invasion of Ukraine, a number of foreign media outlets, which had their own Russian-language newsrooms and broadcasts in Russian, were forced to withdraw or restrict their publications.

The latest in a series of stopping work is that of Radio Free Europe (RFE / RL), funded by the US Congress, which has said it is suspending operations in Russia after local tax authorities filed for bankruptcy against the Russian branch of 4 March. RFE / RL reports that police have stepped up pressure on journalists. This came after the Russian Duma passed a law that any journalist who deviates from the Kremlin’s stance on the war in Ukraine could face up to 15 years in prison.

The RFE / RL’s announcement is part of a series to shut down or reduce the work of independent media. In just a few days, several domestic media outlets shut down or announced that they would be operating online, and some of the journalists decided to leave the country. Among them is the





editor of TV Dozhd, **Tikhon Dzyadko**, who left Russia with several of his colleagues after the television station was shut down.

After the blocking of the “Rain” website, the “Rain” orders on the social networks and the threat to some employees, it is obvious that the personal safety of some of us is endangered, wrote the editor Dzyadko on [Telegram](#).

The closure of TV “Dozhd” was immediately after the entry into force of the Law with the envisaged draconian penalties.

The television, while broadcasting its latest news, played Tchaikovsky’s “Swan Lake” ballet, as a reminder of the 1991 coup attempt against the government of then-Soviet leader **Mikhail Gorbachev**. While the coup was taking place in the field, the ballet was constantly broadcast on state television, which was an indication to the viewers that something was wrong. TV “Rain” from August 2021 was on the list of “foreign agents” along with the independent channel “Medusa”, based in Latvia, popular in Russia. The register of foreign agents includes media, journalists and activists. In addition to “Medusa” and “TV Dozhd”, the list also includes the research publications iStories and Insider, Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty (RFE / RL), and veteran human rights activist **Lev Ponomarev** co-founder of the human rights organization Memorial.

Moscow Echo Radio said it had shut down its radio channel and website, while the Russian independent newspaper Novaya Gazeta, known for its investigative journalism as Nobel Peace Prize laureate Dmitry Muratov, announced that it was removing articles about the Ukraine war with the explanation that the Russian censors ordered those materials to be removed. Raskomnadzor issued a statement informing the Russian media that:

They are obliged to use only the information and data they have received from official Russian sources.



The statement also warned that unnamed media outlets were spreading “*unverified and unreliable information*”.

The BBC, whose service is also restricted by the Russian government, has announced that it will remain on the ground and report on the incident.

Access to accurate, independent information is a fundamental human right that should not be denied to the people of Russia, millions of whom rely on BBC news every week, the BBC Press Service [reported](#) shortly after Russian authorities restricted access to its website.

The restriction, according to the British service, is counterproductive. Weekly visits to the BBC's Russian-language website, the company said, had more than tripled to 10.7 million. Traffic from Russia to the BBC English-language website increased by 252 percent.

On whether the Putin regime has the support from ordinary citizens, given that they receive controlled and dosed information, **Andrey Zakharov**, from the Russian service of the BBC in an interview with “Truthmeter” says:

A lot of people really support the war, and it's not only about propaganda, which was preparing people for this war for 8 years, since Crimea action. Although propaganda was really preparing people, saying the war is good and Ukraine is a fake country, at the same time in post imperial states like Russia, if your propaganda is saying that the war is good, you raise negative feelings in peoples' minds. We can't say that this is only Putin's war. Although I'm sure that if we had another president who didn't stepped to prepare people for this war, we wouldn't have this much support. People support it.





There are situations when relatives from Ukraine send videos and photos to their relatives in Russia and the relatives say, ‘that is fake’. In some moment they ignore the reality and if you ignore the reality, it’s like it doesn’t exist. Some people try to protest, but as I said before, it is very dangerous in Russia, so a lot of people left Russia and some were arrested. Some sources say that 300.000 people left Russia since the war started, not just journalists. I don’t know if this numbers are real, but I know that a lot of people left the country. They just don’t want to live in a country that started a war with the neighbor.

But, people will feel the effects of the war later. In a half of year or after one year. I think people will be changing their mind about this war, step by step, when we will see the economy crises. But this process can’t happen fast. If people realize and admit that this war is a crime, it will ruin the whole picture in their mind, from psychological point of view. It is a lengthy process, and we can’t expect it to happen tomorrow.

Russian media presence in Macedonia

There are no registered Russian media in North Macedonia, which broadcast their program in the Macedonian language. Russian media influence comes from the Serbian edition of Sputnik, a state-owned multimedia platform for international co-operation with services in multiple languages, including Serbian. Some of the Macedonian media, and especially some of the users of the social networks occasionally broadcast content from the Serbian “Sputnik”. The web platform “Russia Beyond” is also present, which is a rebranded edition of “Russian Word”, which is published in 14 languages, including Macedonian. The platform was created, as stated in the explanation, to spread Russian culture. When reviewing the contents, almost every second or third article is about Russian President **Vladimir**

Putin, his character and work, and there are also content from Russian cities and Russian achievements.

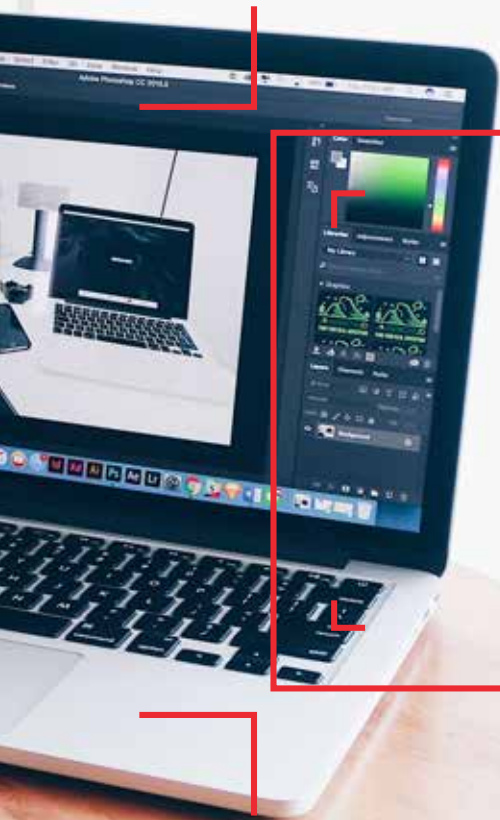
For years, two networks of magazines, originating from Serbia, have been published on the Macedonian market through the publishing house “Color Media Press”. The most famous editions are “Russian Doctor” and “Russian Travar” by the publishing house “Novosti”, which are distributed through direct exports to Bosnia and Montenegro and/or through localized editions in North Macedonia, Croatia and Slovenia in the local languages.

Two years ago, the Meta News Agency published an analysis in which it assessed that *“these magazines continue to commercially exploit the positive perceptions of Russia and its culture, which were previously present in part of the Balkan population, further contributing to the strengthening of propaganda positions of the Putin regime.”*

For example, in the latest, January issue of the Macedonian edition of “Russian Doctor”, the headline on the front page is the “exclusive” article about “Putin’s 10 secrets to health” which presents as “secret” the proper diet, the morning gymnastics, but also engaging in sports such as skiing, hockey, horseback riding and fishing, which are largely beyond the financial capabilities of the target (retired) audience, writes “Meta.mk” in January 2020.

In the list of registered newspapers and magazines of AAAMS (updated on March 21, 2022), “Color Media Plus” is registered as a publisher of “Good Food” and “Russian Doctor”.





THE ROLE OF THE ALBANIAN PARTIES IN RNM IN THE CONTEXT OF THE FIGHT AGAINST RUSSIAN INFLUENCE

In 2001, in North Macedonia two very important agreements on the country's progress were signed. The first agreement (the Ohrid Agreement) saved the country from a possible catastrophe and guaranteed a multiethnic and democratic state according to EU principles. The second agreement (Stabilization and Association Agreement) gave the country a Euro-Atlantic direction, minimizing the chances of anti-democratic influence in the country. The Albanian political parties in RNM were directly involved in the process of signing these agreements and clearly stated their support for the EU and NATO membership. Meanwhile, the EU and NATO supported the “colorful revolution” that overthrew a government close to Russia and Putin.

Author: Ardit Ramadani

(Portalb, 07.04.2022)

With the *Ohrid Agreement and the Stabilization and Association Agreement*, the country set out in the Euro-Atlantic direction

The shaping of the Euro-Atlantic path of North Macedonia began after the armed conflict in 2001 between the National Liberation Army (NLA) and the Army of the Republic of Macedonia (ARM), which lasted less than 8 months – from January 22, 2001, when the attack on the Tanuševci police station occurred, until 13 August 2001, when the Ohrid Framework Agreement was signed between the two warring parties. This was essentially a peace agreement and was followed by the rapid disarmament of the NLA under the agreement. At that time, the pro-Russian Ukrainian government decided to help the Macedonian army by selling weapons. However, the peo-





ple of Ukraine took power in 2014, toppling Viktor Yanukovich's government because he denied them the right to be part of the European Union.

Aware of this fact, the Albanian political party that emerged from the war in 2001, the Democratic Union for Integration (DUI), today does not blame Ukraine for the sale of planes and helicopters to the Macedonian Army, i.e. ARM, but on the contrary, this party condemned the Russian aggression and expressed full support for the Republic of Ukraine and the Ukrainian people.

“It is in everyone’s interest to find a solution as soon as possible and to end this sad situation in Ukraine, to find a solution to the ceasefire and to open the way for dialogue, to establish peace and to liberate the Ukrainians, to decide their fate for themselves. I think that President Putin and Russia should feel responsible for the fact that as a superpower they attacked people, did not respect the will of those people and for this they should be ashamed and as soon as possible withdraw, and so it will be better for both Russia and Europe. I think the Russian people have a collective responsibility not to allow such a ruthless war to take place in Ukraine,” said Ali Ahmeti, leader of the Democratic Union for Integration and NLA political representative during the 2001 military conflict.

“In these difficult times we are with Ukraine,” said Foreign Minister Bujar Osmani, a member of the Democratic Union for Integration.

One of the most important documents that ended the conflict in 2001 was the Ohrid Agreement. This agreement, in addition to ending the conflict, also set the Constitution of the RNM on a new basis, ensuring more equal representation in certain political and institutional areas between the two largest ethnic groups in the country, Macedonian and Albanian.

This document, which brought North Macedonia one step closer to the **European Union and NATO** membership, and which enabled the minimization of the possible influences of non-progressive forces in the country, was signed by the then President Boris Trajkovski, the then Prime



Minister and leader of VMRO- DPMNE, Ljubco Georgievski, SDSM leader Branko Crvenkovski, DPA leader Arben Xhaferi and PDP leader Imer Imeri. The document was also signed by EU Special Representative Francois Leotard and US Special Representative James Pardew as guarantors.

Peter Feith, the Special Representative of the NATO Secretary-General, was also involved in resolving the crisis, coordinating all activities between the security forces of the Republic of Macedonia and the NLA.

Having in mind that the guarantors of the agreement were **the EU and the USA**, as well as that this agreement covers many principles of the European Union, this agreement is the most important step towards advancing North Macedonia's path to European integration and the country's NATO membership.

The signatories of the Ohrid Agreement from the ranks of the Albanian political parties were Arben Xhaferi as president of the then DPA and Imer Imeri as president of the PPD. **However, all Albanian political parties, including the current parties on the political scene, support this agreement but have differing views on its implementation.**

Non-progressive trends were minimized with the signing and start of implementation of the Stabilization and Association Agreement.

Although negotiations took place before that, the Stabilization and Association Agreement between RNM and the European Union was signed the same year as the Ohrid Agreement. This agreement ranked the Republic of Macedonia on the list of countries with prospects for membership in the European Union, while economically the signing of the agreement opened the door to one of the largest and most powerful financial markets in the world.

The fulfillment of the items of this agreement brought the country closer every day to the European Union and NATO, and from these items, we single out the following:

- Approaching the region towards closer and more complete integration in the structures of the European Union,
- Support for rapid democratic consolidation, rule of law, economic





development and structural reforms, appropriate administrative structures and regional cooperation,

- Establish a formal framework for political dialogue, both bilaterally and regionally.
- Advancing economic relations, trade, investment, enterprise policy, transport and development, and customs cooperation, with prospects for closer integration into the world trade system, including the possibility of establishing a free trade area once progress is made on economic reforms.

In the meantime, all Albanian political parties in North Macedonia **have expressed their support** for this agreement, as well as for all other agreements that bring the country closer to the European Union.

Today, due to the above agreement which resulted in increased economic cooperation between Northern Macedonia and the European Union, and according to the latest poll by the International Republican Institute (IRI), the majority of citizens (35%) believe that the largest donor in RNM is the European Union, while only (3%) believe that it is Russia.

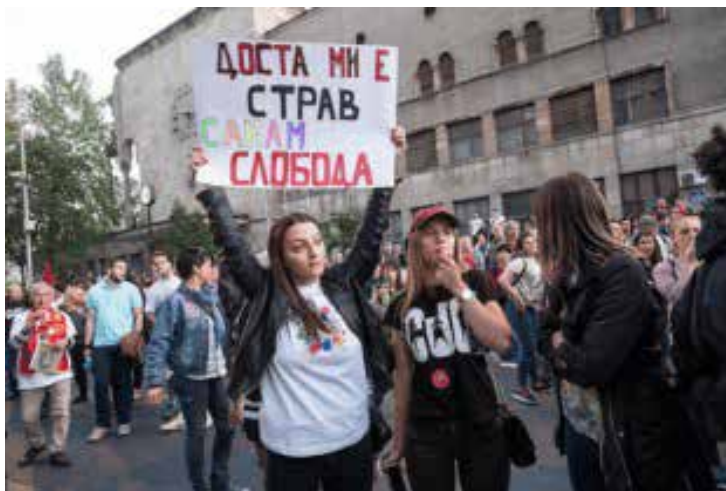
Moreover, 47% of respondents see the **United States of America (USA)** as the most important economic partner of RNM, and 32% believe that **Russia** is the most important economic partner. To read the full study, click [HERE](#).

All Albanian political parties **have expressed their support for this agreement** and are committed to the country's membership in the European Union. This commitment is clearly seen in the statute of the Alliance for Albanians, here you can read about the position of the Democratic Party of Albanians, it is clearly defined in the statute of the Democratic Union for Integration and the Alternative Party, also the BESA Movement spoke in favor of the country's membership in the European Union and the acceptance of European values.



“Colorful Revolution” – the end of the pro-Russian government, 2015

The protests that began after the assassination of Martin Neškovski on election night in 2011, turned into a movement known as #IProtest, which in mid-April 2016 grew into the so-called “Colorful Revolution” in Macedonia. Protesters demand the departure of the Gruevski-Ahmeti government.



Peaceful protests of the Colorful Revolution, April 2016, Skopje, Photo: Vanco Dzambaski CC BY-SA

The demands for justice were only part of the protests that became mass on April 12, 2016, after the then President of Macedonia Gorge Ivanov announced the abolition of 56 people suspected of involvement in the wiretapping scandal.

That same night, several thousand people took to the streets of Skopje, broke through a police cordon and set fire to Ivanov’s office in the city center. The protests continued in the following months with greater intensity and mass. On April 15, the facade of Porta Makedonija was painted for the first time – which later became a symbol of the protests.





Russia benefited from the continuation of the Gruevski-Ahmeti government

“United Russia”, the party of Russian President Vladimir Putin, at the time was reacting against the “Colorful Revolution” in RNM and others in the Balkans. According to regional media reports, United Russia has sent a call to political partners in the Balkans to fight the Colorful Revolution in North Macedonia and other colorful revolutions in the territory of the former Yugoslavia.

As the end of Gruevski-Ahmeti’s rule approached, so did Russia’s turmoil

“As part of the Balkan region, North Macedonia is in Russia’s area of interest, because this region borders the EU, something that Moscow wants to keep under control or at least under its influence,” the Free Russia Foundation report said, based in the USA.

This report states that Russia has used and continues to use various means to influence the internal affairs of North Macedonia.

“However, not all attempts to influence the Macedonian economy and politics have yielded the desired results. On the one hand, Russia managed to establish close relations with the Macedonian political elite in Gruevski’s time, but, on the other hand, it failed to oppose the opposition, which caused substantial changes in the government and severance of political ties with the country’s politicians, reads the report.

Russia has made significant efforts to keep North Macedonia out of NATO and has managed to reduce its participation in the name change referendum. The Russian Foreign Ministry reacted sharply after the elections in December 2016, when Gruevski’s party, despite winning the elections, failed to form a majority in parliament. In response to the Russian Foreign Ministry, they expressed support not only for Gruevski, but also for

the President of the Democratic Union for Integration, Ali Ahmeti.

It seems that the political forces in Macedonia are being greatly influenced by pseudo-democratic slogans. The goal is clear - to deal with Macedonian politicians who are undesirable from the West and to recompose the authorities despite the clear support of voters for the coalition “For a Better Macedonia” led by Nikola Gruevski and the Democratic Union for Integration led by Ali Ahmeti, [stated by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs on February 11, 2017.](#)

Despite this, all Albanian political parties supported the “Colorful Revolution”

The Alliance for Albanians (then DR-DPA), the NDP and the BESA Movement expressed their support for the “Colorful Revolution”, they sent a call to their activists to come out and protest.

“For these reasons, as well as the fact that this regime has proven to be the most anti-Albanian, anti-NATO and anti-EU regime and which has badly captured the political will of the Albanians - by capturing the ruling Albanian parties, the BESA Movement supports these protests, because they are the last way to save this country and restore democracy,” *said the BESA Movement.*

“We publicly call on all Albanians who do not call themselves captives, but call themselves free, Albanian NGOs, independent intellectuals, political parties and all citizens who want freedom, justice, dignity, progress, aiming for perspective and happiness, to join this nationwide protest to yell stop to this system,” [said the DR-DPA, the NDP and several non-governmental organizations.](#)





Although part of the government was favourable to Russia, DUI declaratively asked SDSM and VMRO-DPMNE to find a way out of the crisis, in accordance with “the demands of Brussels and Washington.”

Apart from the Albanian political parties, the Macedonian opposition parties also supported the “Colorful Revolution” and were an active part in organizing the protests. At that time, people close to Russia were trying in various ways to preserve that status quo and that there would be no change of government in Macedonia.

Russia’s “last” attempt to keep Gruevski in power, April 27, 2017

One of the darkest days for democracy in North Macedonia was April 27, 2017, when a large group of protesters, orchestrated by VMRO-DPMNE leader Nikola Gruevski and foreign (mostly Russian) forces, managed to enter the Assembly, injuring many MPs and the media workers.

It was later revealed that Russia had interfered in the orchestration of the event through Serbian diplomats, i.e. **Goran Živaljevič**, an agent of the Serbian intelligence agency, who at that time was in Skopje as a diplomat and advisor to the Serbian Embassy since 2015. Živaljevič was followed for a long time by the UBK, which concluded that he had regular communication with the Member of Parliament of the RNM of Serbian nationality, **Ivan Stoilkovič**, and with the Serbian journalist **Miroslav Lazanski**. These three joined forces to spread propaganda in the media in order to provoke political destabilization in Macedonia.

According to the British “Guardian”, these three acted under the leadership of the Russian secret services and had only one task – **to prevent Macedonia’s membership in NATO**.

After the bloody events in the Assembly, the Russian Foreign Ministry expressed support for Gruevski and the protesters who stormed the Assembly, saying that SDSM wants to elect a President of the Parliament by seriously violating the procedures. According to the Russian Foreign Ministry, the protesters rightly objected to this.



However, with a majority of votes and the **support of all Albanian political parties in the country**, as well as in an emergency, **Talat Xhaferi** was elected Speaker of the Assembly that day. The attack on the Assembly was condemned by all political parties, including VMRO-DPMNE, although it was its instigator.

The Prespa Agreement and the membership of RNM in NATO

One of the reasons that kept North Macedonia “hostage” from NATO membership was the name dispute that our country had with the neighboring country, the Republic of Greece. On June 17, 2018, North Macedonia and Greece signed an agreement to resolve this dispute.

This document envisaged the current name of the country, “North Macedonia” and it was signed in Prespa, in the Greek part, by the then Ministers of Foreign Affairs, **Nikola Dimitrov** and **Nikos Kozijas**, in the presence of the then Prime Ministers **Zoran Zaev** and **Alexis Tsipras**.

The United States welcomed the agreement

The United States welcomed the decision of the Macedonian Parliament to initiate the necessary constitutional changes to implement the Prespa Agreement with Greece, said State Department spokeswoman **Heather Nuert**.

The statement said the United States believes the agreement is a historic opportunity to promote stability, security and progress in the region.

This Agreement brought RNM closer to NATO, and Russia did not like it

Immediately after the signing of the Agreement, the Russian Foreign Ministry reacted, stating that the Agreement was signed against the will of the two peoples, Macedonians and Greeks and that it was imposed by the European Union and the United States.





The Foreign Minister of RNM together with his counterpart from Greece urged the Russian Federation not to interfere in the internal affairs of the two countries.

“The Ministry of Foreign Affairs regrets that the Information Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, again in a negative context, emphasizes the authentic political processes between the two countries, which lead to resolving problems, strengthening trust and building friendship,” [the statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said.](#)

We are convinced that Russia, which for years has recognized FYROM as the “Republic of Macedonia”, will respect the sensitivity of the Greek people in using the name Macedonia and will now refer to this country with the new constitutional name “North Macedonia”, and most importantly to refrain from such views, because such a thing is interference in the internal affairs of Greece, [said in a statement the Greek Foreign Ministry.](#)

However, there were political parties in the country that **had the same views** as Russia:

- **VMRO-DPMNE**

Gjorge Ivanov, the then president of North Macedonia, was one of the most vocal opponents of the Prespa Agreement. He said its implementation would have negative consequences. According to him, the name change is only in the interest of Greece. Ivanov boycotted the referendum on September 30, 2018, and held hostage the Law on the Albanian Language.

Hristijan Mickoski, the president of VMRO-DPMNE, has repeatedly stated that when they come to power they will terminate the Prespa Agreement.

“With a two-thirds majority in the Assembly, we will terminate the Prespa Agreement,” Mickoski said during a [televised appearance](#) in December 2019.

He made similar statements several times, often leading to constant clashes with the ruling party, SDSM. It is worth noting that Mickovski’s rhetoric on this topic has now softened.

- **The Party “Levica”**

If VMRO-DPMNE can be more flexible on this issue, “Levica” represented by two members of parliament, is adamant that the Prespa and Ohrid agreements should be annulled. This party led by **Dimitar Apasiev** and in the early parliamentary elections (2021), in its program in the field of foreign policy, in addition to the annulment of the Prespa and Ohrid Agreement and the review of the Agreement with Bulgaria, one of the main goals in the field of bilateral relations was the withdrawal of recognition of Kosovo, Israel and South Korea. In terms of multilateral relations, the party aims to immediately withdraw the country from NATO and unconditionally withdraw all security forces from foreign military missions that do not have a UN mandate.

Moreover, there were several smaller Macedonian parties that loudly opposed the Prespa Agreement, but most of them had no political power or influence to change the reality.

We remind you that US President **Joe Biden** issued an executive order to freeze property and ban entry to the United States, which included those working against the Prespa Agreement and the Ohrid Framework





Agreement, and it is a clear message that international agreements will remain the points for which the US administration will not compromise and will fight all those who are against them. “Without such agreements, the country would have ended in disaster,” say experts from North Macedonia.

All Albanian parties supported the Prespa Agreement

All Albanian political parties that had representatives in the legislature, namely the Alliance for Albanians (AA), the BESA Movement, Alternative, the Democratic Union for Integration and the Democratic Party of Albanians, declaratively and by voting supported this Agreement.

Without exception, all the above-mentioned Albanian parties have stated that one of the reasons they voted for the Prespa Agreement is to pave the way for the country to join NATO and the European Union.

- You can read the full text of the Agreement: [HERE](#)
- For reaching this Agreement, Zaev and Tsipras were nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize.

No Russian scenario has proved successful; North Macedonia has become a NATO member

The Protocol for Macedonia’s membership in NATO was signed at the NATO Headquarters in Brussels on February 6, 2019, thus starting the final phase of the process for full membership. In the presence of the then Macedonian Foreign Minister **Nikola Dimitrov** and NATO Secretary-General **Jens Stoltenberg**, the representatives of the member states signed the protocol one by one.

Dimitrov addressed the representatives of the member states and Secretary Stoltenberg, emphasizing that the country is ready to assume the

obligations that come with full membership in the Alliance.

This has been a long road. Macedonia will soon be the Republic of North Macedonia, it is a matter of days. We have proved that we can solve the problems we face. This will send a message to the region where there is still uncertainty. We are ready, we are here, and we will take on the obligations arising from NATO membership. I hope for efficient implementation of the ratification, [*said Dimitrov.*](#)

Putin was unhappy about this, calling it a step taken under pressure

“When it comes to the Balkans, then the main serious destabilizing factor is the policy of the United States and some Western countries, which aim to strengthen their dominance in the region,” [*said Russian President Vladimir Putin in an interview with “Politika” and “Vecerni Novosti”.*](#)

Putin also added that a year earlier, in his opinion, in order to speed up the process of Macedonia’s membership in NATO, it was agreed to change the name of Macedonia and the Constitution of Macedonia, completely ignoring the Macedonian people who in the referendum for name change spoke out against, which is not at all true.

The leader of VMRO DPMNE with controversial statements continued to oppose the Agreement that allowed the country to join NATO, but said he supported the membership in the Alliance.





Asked if he supported Macedonia's NATO membership, Mickoski said "absolutely yes" and that he could not be against, it because the biggest reforms for NATO membership were made by the governments of VMRO-DPMNE. However, he said he was against the Agreement with Greece signed by the government of Zoran Zaev and which changed the name of the country, adding that he had strong objections to the approval of that Agreement and did not support it.

"Levica" is against NATO membership

NATO's goal is one and the same: expanding economic dominance and expanding neoliberal doctrine, as well as preserving the status of the United States and its allies as imperial hegemony in the world, the party [said](#).

Let us remind that "Levica" continues to demand that North Macedonia leave NATO and change its strategic partners. In addition to this, **Janko Bacev's** pro-Russian non-parliamentary party, United Macedonia, was against the country's NATO membership.

All Albanian parties were "**FOR**" **NATO membership** and welcomed this decision, click [HERE](#) to read the statement of the Alliance of Albanians, click [HERE](#) to read the statement of the Democratic Union for Integration, [HERE](#) to read the statement of the Movement BESA, [HERE](#) to read the statement of Alternative, and [HERE](#) to read the statement of the Democratic Party of Albanians.

Even after the country's membership in NATO, using the public statements of former President **Gjorge Ivanov**, Russia tried in various ways to annul this Agreement, but without success. According to Euractiv, Russia's last hope was to return to power a nationalist party that would not allow the country to join NATO and change the country's name.



DEBUNKING ARTICLES



"GLOBAL FASCISTS" ARE NOT DESTROYED IN UKRAINE, BUT CIVILIANS AND CHILDREN ARE KILLED

Contrary to the absurd claim in the post that “the Russian army is destroying the global fascists and their henchmen”, in the war in Ukraine that Russia started on February 24, soldiers are suffering, but also innocent civilians, including many children. According to the Ukrainian authorities so far (02.03.2022) more than 2,000 civilians have been killed. The killing of civilians has been confirmed by the United Nations. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights says more than 500 civilian casualties have been reported in Ukraine, including at least 136 killed and 400 injured, but expects the actual number to be much higher

Author: Truthmeter's team

(Thrutmeter, 05.03.2022)

We are reviewing a Facebook post, in which it is claimed that in Ukraine there is no war between the fraternal Orthodox nations, but Russia is killing “global fascists”. This is complete **disinformation**.

The post reads:

There is no war in Ukraine between the two fraternal Orthodox nations. The Russian army is destroying the global fascists and their henchmen.

Contrary to the absurd claim in the post, in the war in Ukraine, which was started by Russia on February 24, soldiers are suffering, but also an innocent civilian population, among them a large number of children.





CIVILIANS AND CHILDREN ARE SUFFERING IN UKRAINE, NOT GLOBAL FASCISTS

According to one of the latest statements from the Ukrainian authorities so far (March 2, 2022), more than 2,000 civilians have been killed.

Ukraine reports that 21 children have been killed and 55 have been injured since the beginning of the invasion. This information was published by the Ukrainian ombudsman.

In the seven days of the war, Russia destroyed hundreds of buildings, hospitals and kindergartens, Ukrainian officials said, *according to media reports.*

Dozens of ambulance workers were reported killed, firefighters put out more than 400 wildfires that erupted after Russian attacks across the country, and the army and police defused 416 explosive devices.

The death toll in Ukraine has risen since the first day of the Russian invasion when 57 people were killed and 169 were wounded. Those numbers include soldiers and civilians. These are not “global fascists”, but residents of Ukraine.

MURDER OF CIVILIANS CONFIRMED BY UN

The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has said more than 500 civilian casualties have been reported in Ukraine – including at least 136 killed and 400 injured, but expects the actual number to be much higher, the CNN reported.

Most of these casualties were caused by the use of explosive weapons with a wide impact area, including shelling from heavy artillery and multiple launch rocket systems, and air strikes. These are only the casualties

we were able to cross-check, and the real toll is likely to be much higher,” the UN office said in a statement on Tuesday, reported by the CNN.

US Secretary of State **Anthony Blinken**, during his speech before the UN Council, condemned Russia for the killing of civilians in Ukraine, raising the idea that Russia should be expelled from the UN Human Rights Council.

They are destroying critical infrastructure, which provides millions of people across Ukraine with drinking water, gas to keep them from freezing to death, and electricity. Civilian buses, cars, and even ambulances have been shelled. Russia is doing this every day – across Ukraine, Blinken said.

In recent days, Russian attacks have hit civilians, signaling a shift to much more aggressive bombing. Previous Russian attacks have focused more on military targets.

Two days ago, the BBC reported that dozens of civilians had been killed in Kharkiv, while shelling continued into the morning, with residents hiding in underground shelters in fear.

THE RUSSIAN MILITARY TARGETS CIVIL FACILITIES, HOSPITALS, MUSEUMS, SCHOOLS

Russian artillery and missile strikes hit Kharkiv, Ukraine’s second most populous city, after Kyiv. The videos posted on social media and confirmed by CNN showed significant destruction in the northeastern part of the city. One hit a residential complex near a hospital, and the regional police and Kharkiv National University were also hit.

Russian forces have stepped up attacks on settlements in Ukraine, bombing a square in Kharkiv and a television tower in Kyiv.

According to Ukrainian authorities, five people were killed in the afternoon attack on the TV tower, a few kilometers from the center of Kyiv and near numerous residential buildings. A Russian cruise missile attack on an





administration building in Kharkiv has killed at least six people. During the day, rescuers pulled victims and survivors from under the rubble of the building.

Grenades fell near a shopping center in Kharkiv as fighting continued in the streets.

In Kharkiv, Russian troops attacked a military medical center, the Ukrainian news agency Unian reported. Fighting broke out with Ukrainian forces. The Ukrainian side said that Russian grenades fell on the city center, including residential buildings, as well as the building of the regional administration, Deutsche Welle reported.

The building of the Slovenian consulate was seriously damaged in the attack of the Russian army on Kharkiv, the Slovenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced on Twitter.

On the sixth day of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the army continues to fire rockets and multiple rocket launchers at the Ukrainian cities of Kharkiv, Chernihiv, Sumy, Mariupol and others with the full knowledge that they are killing civilians, not the military, writes Ukrainian analyst **Roman Rukomeda** in his fifth story about the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which he managed to send to EURACTIV despite limited internet access.

According to his report, 80 kindergartens, schools, colleges, hospitals and social-educational facilities were destroyed. They deliberately aim at hospitals, such as Kharkiv, to cause as many civilian deaths as possible.

Russian military forces also rocketed one of the most tragic monuments in Kyiv, Babi Yar, where thousands of Jews, Roma, Ukrainians and other nationalities were killed by German Nazis during World War II.

OVER 800,000 REFUGEES FLED UKRAINE

The BBC reports that more than 830,000 civilians have fled Ukraine.

The European Union (EU) estimates that up to four million people could try to flee the country due to the Russian invasion. The bloc has relaxed refugee rules and says its member states will welcome refugees with open arms.



A report released by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) says 453,000 are in Poland alone, with 50,000 arriving daily.

According to a UN report on the number of refugees:

- Hungary - 116,348
- Moldova - 79,315
- Slovakia - 67,000
- Romania - 44,450
- Russia - 42,900
- Belarus - 341
- 600 people moved from these countries to others in Europe.

Many touching video testimonies of Ukrainians who fled to other European countries due to military aggression have been published on the BBC.

Popular opera and jazz singer **Suzana Alimovna Jamaladinova** from Ukraine, better known as Jamala, who won the 2016 Eurovision Song Contest with the song “1944”, is one of those who became refugees in the early days of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. She recounted her terrifying story, taking refuge with her two children in Turkey after hearing explosions near her home in Kyiv.

Given everything that has happened and is happening in Ukraine after the Russian invasion, it is pointless and shameful for the author of the post to call the innocent civilian population and children who are victims of the war in Ukraine “global fascists and their henchmen.” We assess the post as complete **disinformation**.

Regarding the misinformation related to the war in Ukraine, Giovanni Kessler, Italian prosecutor who worked in the office of the famous Sicilian prosecutor Paolo Borsalino in 1995, in an interview with “Truthmeter” says that fake news and propaganda have been spreading for a long time, not from a few weeks or months:





Disinformation and propaganda have been spreading for a long time and the Russians are great at it, they are the best in the world. They have dedicated structures, they have powerful tools and financial means, to create and convey their views. This is propaganda because it contains fake information. This was done by Russians years ago. Something interesting and new was the way that they use the army, and their propaganda to fight the war. The war didn't start one week ago. The war started months before when 150.000 Russian troops were being deployed on the Ukraine border. What was interesting was the fact that their fake news portal broadcast the troops. That was the way to put incredible pressure on Ukraine by Russian propaganda. First, they have the intention to show Ukrainian institutions as very weak, in the end, it turned out that they are not weak, they intended to let Ukraine collapse, just by showing and broadcasting propaganda. War in Ukraine started at that moment when they started to broadcast their propaganda. They wanted propaganda to destroy Ukraine without any single shot. That modern propaganda media does this.

IT IS NOT TRUE THAT RUSSIA IS NOT SHELLING CIVILIAN BUILDINGS AND THAT THE MARIUPOL FOOTAGE IS FAKE

The claim of the Russian ambassador to the country, Sergey Baznikin, that the Russian armed forces do not shell civilian buildings and that the footage from Mariupol is fake, seems strange and at least sounds unreasonable in a situation where numerous world and domestic media constantly publish footage of destroyed civilian buildings. It is not possible for all those recordings that appear in the media and on social networks to be fake. Confirmation that Russian forces are attacking civilian buildings has also come from the Ukrainian authorities.

Author: Ana Anastasovska

(Truthmeter 15.03.2022)

Speaking about the situation with the Russian-Ukrainian conflict and the shelling of civilian buildings in the Ukrainian city of Mariupol by the Russian army, the Ambassador of the Russian Federation to Macedonia, **Sergey Baznikin** made the following statement:

We are doing everything we can to prevent any civilian casualties. At the beginning of the special military operation, the Russian military leadership gave a clear and unequivocal order not to attack settlements and civilian infrastructure. Our armed forces, together with the troops of the Donetsk and Luhansk Republics,





use high-precision weapons and destroy exclusively, I emphasize, the military infrastructure of the Ukrainian authorities in the context of the demilitarization task. This command is being fulfilled. However, all combat operations are unfortunately associated with casualties. One of the main problems is the use of the civilian population by the Nazi formations of Ukraine as a human shield, not figuratively, but literally. We do not shell any children's hospitals or any civilian facility.

Asked by the journalist if the recordings posted by Mariupol were fake, Baznikin said: Yes.

**[Source: YouTube – Sitel TV (from 15:15 to 17:54 in the video);
Date: 10.03.2022]**

EXPLANATION:

The claim of the Russian ambassador to the country, **Sergey Baznikin**, that the Russian army does not attack or shell civilian facilities in Ukraine, is **untrue**. The footage from Mariupol, but also from other cities where destroyed civilian buildings can be seen, are not fake, as Baznikin wants to show.

On March 11, as reported by TV 21, broadcasting video material, the target of the Russian attacks was the city of **Dnipro**. Three airstrikes hit the city in the early hours of the morning. A kindergarten, an apartment building and a shoe factory were affected. There have also been reports of bombings in the city of **Lutsk** in northwestern Ukraine. On the 16th day of the Russian aggression, a psychiatric hospital in the eastern city of **Izum** was also hit, regional authorities said. There were 330 people in the hospital, and the number of victims was unknown.

As for the city of **Mariupol**, it was under 14-hour shelling by the Russian army on March 2, which was confirmed by the local Ukrainian authorities.

As SDK.mk reported, numerous civilians died as a result of the 14-hour intensive shelling of the city, which has been under siege by Russian forces for days. This city on the shores of the Sea of Azov is strategically important to Russia, as it provides a land connection to the annexed Crimean peninsula with separatist troops in eastern Ukraine.

We do not know the exact number of victims, but we believe that there are hundreds of dead. We can not collect the bodies. The Russian military is using all possible weapons and is trying to completely destroy the city, said Deputy Mayor Sergius Orlov.

Mayor **Vadim Boychenko** said Russian troops had stopped the evacuation of civilians.

There is huge destruction of housing infrastructure. There are many wounded and, unfortunately, dead, including women, children and the elderly. Genocide of the Ukrainian people is happening. The occupying forces of the Russian Federation did everything possible to prevent the evacuation of civilians from the city. The railway traffic was interrupted and the locomotives were shelled. Their goal is to destroy us, Boychenko said.

A children's hospital in Mariupol was shelled on March 10, as confirmed by Ukrainian President **Volodymyr Zelensky** and the head of the regional military administration, Pavlo Kirilenko.

President **Zelensky** posted a video of the incident on Twitter – which he described as a “direct hit”, and the footage showed destroyed rooms along the hallway of the building.





A military attack on a maternity hospital is the final proof that genocide is being committed against Ukrainians. Europeans, you can not say that you did not know what was happening to the Ukrainians in Mariupol. That is why you have to increase sanctions on Russia so that it can never continue this genocide. You have to put pressure on Russia to sit down at the negotiating table and end this barbaric war, Zelensky said in a video address.

The head of the regional military administration, Kirilenko, also posted videos of the Facebook attacks.

Several children were killed in the attack, and a pregnant woman who was waiting for childbirth was injured. According to Ukrainian authorities, this was just one of three attacks by the Russian military on hospitals. Two hospitals in the town of Zhytomyr, about 150 km west of Kyiv, were also bombed.

The New York Times and ABC News also reported footage of the attack on a children's hospital in Mariupol in which pregnant women were killed.

The Ukrainian Foreign Ministry announced on March 12 that Russian forces had shelled a mosque in the southern Ukrainian city of Mariupol, where more than 80 children and adults were sheltered. The Ukrainian ministry announced on Twitter that Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent's mosque in Mariupol had been shelled by Russian "attackers".

On March 14, aerial footage of Mariupol shelling was released.

The video of the drone captured the moment when Russian missiles turned the besieged southern Ukrainian city of Mariupol into a hellish landscape as Moscow forces continued to bomb buildings, leaving civilians without food and water.

Radio Free Europe reported on the situation after the shelling in Mariupol.

The claim of the Russian ambassador to the country, Sergei Baznikin, that the Russian armed forces do not shell civilian buildings and that the

footage from Mariupol is fake, seems strange and at least sounds unreasonable in a situation where numerous world and domestic media constantly publish footage of destroyed civilian buildings. It is not possible for all those recordings that appear in the media and on social networks to be fake. Confirmation of such information also comes from the Ukrainian authorities.

Given all of the above, we assess Bazdnikin's statement as **untrue**.

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WITH ONE-SIDED FACTS ON SOCIAL NETWORKS, CITIZENS ARE OFFERED TO BE PRO RUSSIAN AGGRESSION IN UKRAINE

Consciously or not, pro-Russian propaganda about the current Russian-Ukrainian conflict is indirectly spread on social networks by certain people and sites. By not presenting all the facts, the language of hatred towards Ukraine spreads with claims that Ukraine, during the years 1998/99, sent mercenaries to kill the Albanian people in Kosovo, supported the bombing of the Albanians in Macedonia in 2001 and opposed the independence of Kosovo. The transmission of such information is one-sided and does not represent the factual reality in order for the public to have room to assess the situation in Ukraine.

Author: Shefkije Alasani

(Portalb, 07.03.2022)

A photo has been shared on social media, mainly Facebook, showing a military plane bombing populated territory. The photo is accompanied by the following description:

“This is how Ukraine bombed the Albanians from Macedonia in 2001, where many pregnant women, mothers, children, the elderly were killed and many others were left disabled”.

Just hours after it was posted, the post was shared by dozens of other profiles and commented on by hundreds of others. **The level of hatred caused by posts with incomplete information made by strangers, as well as the fact that the photos used are taken out of context, are worrying.**

A search for the source of the photo in Google Images shows that the photo used in the above post was published by the Russian media to report on the conflict in North Macedonia in 2001, **but it is not stated** that the





plane shown in the photo is a Ukrainian plane. Fact-checking data show that the photograph was taken in the village of Vaksince – Kumanovo, during the 2001 armed conflict in North Macedonia.

From the very beginning of the Russian aggression in Ukraine, on February 24, pro-Russian propaganda with one-sided facts has been widely spread on social networks and web portals in the Albanian language. **Hundreds of photos have been shared on Facebook and Instagram listing some “facts” that tend to incite public hatred against Ukraine and the Ukrainian people.**

The agreement was between the governments of Ukraine and Macedonia

It is true that during the armed conflict in 2001, Ukraine, along with Russia, was one of the main supporters of the Macedonian army. During the 2001 conflict, Ukraine trained Macedonian pilots in its academies, supported the air force, and provided training assistance to Macedonian police and Special Forces. Ukraine even offered assistance in servicing Macedonian military equipment and delivered at that time several helicopters, transport Mi-8 and Mi-17 and combat Mi-24, four SU-25 aircraft and other equipment for the ground army, after the Republic of Macedonia at that time paid them with the money from the sale of the Telecom and with the export of other goods. Under strong pressure from the United States and NATO, Ukraine agreed to “suspend” the delivery of military weapons to Macedonia during the NATO peacekeeping disarmament operation following the signing of the Ohrid Agreement.

In the spring of 2001, Macedonian police, parliament and government, involving Macedonian political parties (VMRO-DPMNE and LDP) and the Albanian Political Party (DPA), took up arms, including agreements with pro-Russian Ukraine at the time.

The Ukrainian people, who are now being bombed and suffering casualties, are not responsible for the agreements then made more than 20 years ago by the country’s leaders. There should be no resentment against civilians fleeing Russian aggression en masse.



Not showing solidarity with them puts everyone on the side of aggressor Vladimir Putin.

According to the President of the Assembly, Talat Xhaferi, the votes on which side the Albanians from North Macedonia should be “rearranged” in the war between Russia and Ukraine come from pro-Russian circles and he believes that this cannot be a parameter for assessing the determination of a state.

“Pro-Russian circles who want to justify the support they have, and in crisis situations the states are supplied everywhere, but that cannot be the parameter on which we should make the assessment. Our assessment is, either during the Renaissance or before the Renaissance and then, our orientation is pro-Western. You can take the historical context of Russian-Albanian relations from any angle, it has no support. Apart from interest and exploitation,” Xhaferi told ClickPlus on TV21, among other things.

Albanian leaders in RNM, Kosovo and Albania condemn Russian aggression

North Macedonia officially condemned the Russian aggression in Ukraine and became part of the EU sanctions against Russia. The Assembly of Kosovo even adopted a Resolution condemning Russian aggression in Ukraine. As for the rumors that Ukraine refuses to recognize Kosovo’s independence, the Ukrainian authorities claim that the non-recognition of Kosovo is only a consequence of the parallels that Russia draws between Kosovo and Crimea.

“The reason why Ukraine did not recognize Kosovo is obviously related to Russia, which is clearly manipulating without any political or legal basis, finding similarities between the illegal annexation of Crimea and the struggle of Kosovars for their future. But in our position we have never blocked any attempt by Kosovo to join international organizations. We even play football matches with Kosovo, and that is a sign, on our part, that this is not our special political position, it is just a way to not allow Russia to further manipulate this issue,” said the former Foreign Minister of Ukraine, **Pavlo**





Klimkin, during an official visit to Tirana.

Meanwhile, a few days ago, MP Iryna Friz said it was time for Ukraine to recognize Kosovo's statehood. In a Facebook post, Friz emphasizes that in these difficult times for her country, Kosovo is lining up against Ukraine's friends.

Under what political circumstances did Ukraine function during 2001?

There are many important facts that, while claiming that Ukraine supported the “killing of Albanians”, are not presented to readers. One of the primary facts is the pro-Russian policy pursued by Ukrainian leaders elected and strongly supported by the Russian government at the time. These reports do not mention at all the essential element that there has **been a drastic change in Ukrainian politics in 2001 and the current one.**

During the conflict in Macedonia in 2001, the president of Ukraine was Leonid Danilovich Kuchma, whose leadership is known for a series of corruption scandals, censorship of freedom of speech and a collaborator of Russia. **Kuchma signed a “Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Partnership” with Russia** and called Russian the “official language” of Ukraine. The publication of several wiretap conversations by Ukrainian opposition leader Oleksandr Moroz from 1998 to 2000 revealed the numerous crimes of former President Leonid Kuchma. In particular, his approval of the sale of radar systems to Saddam Hussein (along with other illegal arms sales).

After Leonid Kuchma, the politician **Viktor Yushchenko** came to head Ukraine. “*Bandits will go to jail!*” was the main motto of his presidential campaign, but after taking power he failed to meet the expectations of the Ukrainian people, who saw him as a saviour of Ukraine. Ukraine's 2004 presidential election was quite tumultuous, with **Viktor Yanukovych** running for president. In fact, Yanukovych was the successor chosen by Leonid Kuchma himself, who in 2012 appointed Yanukovych as Ukraine's prime minister, making it available to him to use the state apparatus and budget during the campaign. The Central Election Commission declared Viktor Yanukovych



the winner, and this caused a great deal of revolt among the Ukrainian people who did not accept a result that was manipulated by the government.

At the end of November 2004, mass protests in support of Yushchenko began in Kyiv, later known as the “Orange Revolution.” **Yushchenko won and was inaugurated as Ukraine’s third president on January 23, 2005.** Viktor Yushchenko was president until 2010 and is remembered in history as a leader who did not fulfill his promises and **continued the tradition of his predecessors to help enrich the current oligarchs and the emergence of new oligarchs, his closest people.**

In 2010, Viktor Yanukovich, known to the public as a strong supporter of the policies of Russian President Vladimir Putin, became President of Ukraine. During Yanukovich’s tenure, Russia and Ukraine reached an agreement on the price of gas in exchange for extending the lease of the Russian navy in the Ukrainian Black Seaport. Transparency International named President Yanukovich an example of the highest level of corruption in the world. **In 2013, Yanukovich’s government suspended trade and association talks with the EU and decided to revive economic ties with Moscow, sparking mass rallies in Kyiv for months. Protests aimed at ousting President Viktor Yanukovich escalated into violence, killing dozens of protesters.**

Since 2014, the will of the people and the political orientation of Ukraine have changed direction

The wave of violent demonstrations in Ukraine was dubbed “Euro-aidan” and led to the 2014 Ukrainian Revolution, known as the “Revolution of Dignity“. In February 2014, the Ukrainian parliament voted to oust Yanukovich, who fled to Moscow. According to Russian politician Oleg Mitvol, **Yanukovich bought a house in Barvikha on February 26, 2014, for \$ 52 million.** In Ukraine, meanwhile, gunmen stormed parliament and took control of the Kremlin, hanging the Russian flag. Moscow annexed the territory of the Kremlin after the March 16 referendum. In April, pro-Russian separatists in the eastern Donbas region declared independence. Fighting erupts which, despite frequent ceasefires, continue sporadically





until 2022.

Ukraine was on the brink of disaster in the weeks and months after Euromaidan. Russia, alarmed that Euromaidan would push Ukraine away from the Kremlin and bring it closer to the European Union, quickly annexed Crimea and sparked a separatist conflict in the Donbas region. Decades of corruption have left the Ukrainian military unfit to defend the country's sovereignty. Meanwhile, the ousted leader of the Euromaidan movement, Viktor Yanukovich, fled to Russia, leaving behind an empty vault.

The next president of Ukraine was businessman Petro Poroshenko, who was inaugurated on June 5, 2014. During the election campaign, Poroshenko promised that things would change. **While building his business empire, Poroshenko held political positions during the leadership of three of his four presidential predecessors.** Poroshenko has faced accusations that he profited from being in power, or by making lucrative supply contracts, lobbying for his companies or using the justice system to his advantage and that of his partners.

On May 20, 2019, Volodymyr Zelensky was inaugurated as the sixth President of Ukraine, **a new name in Ukrainian politics who has built his image and fortune as a comedian, actor and television character.** Zelensky won the presidential election with promises to end corruption in his country and resolve the tense conflict in eastern Ukraine. The new leadership in Ukraine had the youngest president in its history (41 years old), the youngest parliament (average age of 41 years), the youngest prime minister (35 years old) and the youngest cabinet in Europe (average age of 39 years old). The new cabinet also quickly became known as the "most liberal" in Ukraine's history, and government leaders promised 40 percent GDP growth over five years. **The current president of Ukraine is known as a supporter of pro-Western and anti-Russian policies. More about the political leadership of Ukraine and Russia and their connections can be seen [HERE](#).**



Readers should be careful with the channels of information, journalists should report professionally

Crises have always been a source of power for propaganda machines. The essence of journalism is multifaceted, but the core consists of two things: facts and truth. If some information does not contain these two elements then we are dealing with a phenomenon called propaganda and the purpose of propaganda is to play with the feelings of public opinion and to impose a positive or negative opinion on a particular party. The choice of reliable sources of information is very important for public opinion, while for those who broadcast news it is important to first of all respect the principles of the Code of Ethics and be aware of the negative consequences of misinformation in society.

The Association of Journalists of Macedonia (AJM) and the Council for Media Ethics in Macedonia (CEMM), after the beginning of the war in Ukraine, called on the media to inform with maximum responsibility and professionalism, and not to contribute to spreading speculation and untruths in the public.

Marina Tuneva, director of CEMM, says that professional credible media have the biggest role and can help present the truth about the war in Ukraine. In the interview for “Truthmeter” Tuneva adds:

It is not always easy to get to the truth, especially in such conditions, it is difficult for journalists and media workers to do their job, in a constant flood of disinformation coming from different sides, but everyone who works professionally has it striving to find the truth and find the right sources of information. One way of recognizing speculative and propagandistic information is when the source of the information is questionable. It is enough to do a little research and see where the information is taken from, whether





that source is credible, relevant. Is the person speaking qualified to speak about a particular topic and thus slowly get to the truth? There are several tools that journalists already use in their work to find out if a piece of content is edited, fabricated, or misused. Professional journalists should help expose disinformation and fabricated content.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs, Bujar Osmani, points out that disinformation and propaganda are one of the tools of war and are active here in the region, in some countries more than in others. In the interview for “Portalb” he states:

They are present and have been constantly present in the past in various forms, but now they are even more intense. In this regard, the Government has taken certain measures, as you know, has stopped broadcasting Russian state television in the country, but of course, through various regional platforms, but also local platforms they continue to operate in our country. An NGO made an analysis comparing the number of publications on Ukraine and Russia and it can be seen that there is almost a balance in this regard, which means that as the facts and truths are published, untruths and misinformation are published with the same intensity. This is a dangerous intensity that affects the creation of public opinion and the abuse of feelings in people. All this is happening on an inappropriate ground due to the frustrations that people have about the blocked European path, the many compromises that the country has been forced to make over the years, and all this energy of discontent, of frustration among people, is now precisely channeled to achieve specific goals. And those goals are to reduce the trust of the people in the institutions, and I think this was

one of the main goals because at the moment when the trust of the people in the institutions disappears, then they can be easily manipulated. Institutions then become irrelevant in decision-making and this makes governance much more difficult.





WESTERN BALKAN COUNTRIES SENDING “MERCENARIES” TO FIGHT IN UKRAINE!?! JUST SHEER RUSSIAN PROPAGANDA!

Author: Ardit Ramadani

(Portalb, 24.02.2022)

Through a tendentious and sensationalist headline, a Facebook portal misinforms the public that many Kosovo citizens are mobilized to defend Ukraine over recent events related to Russia. Apart from the fact that this is not true, the citizens of Kosovo are prohibited by law from participating in wars outside Kosovo, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kosovo confirmed that none of its citizens went to fight for Ukraine, reports Portalb.mk.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has never spoken out about Kosovo's support for Ukraine in recent events, much less expressed concern about it.

*“Putin scared to death” / Citizens of Kosovo mobilize “to defend Ukraine!”
- is the headline of the news we are reviewing.*

The headline of this news is tendentious and manipulative, and above all, it claims something that is not true, because, neither Putin was scared to death, nor the citizens of Kosovo are mobilized to defend Ukraine. The news that the ambassador of Ukraine to the Republic of Albania stated that there were Kosovars interested in defending Ukraine from Russia is true, but apart from this statement, there is no other evidence to support this claim.

The origin of this disinformation is from Russian TASS and Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov





A few days earlier, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov had said that Ukraine was “recruiting” mercenaries from Kosovo, Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina to defend it.

“There are reports that mercenaries from Kosovo, Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina are being recruited to misbalance Russia and they send them to various places, including Donbass,” Lavrov said.

Then, also the Russian news agency TASS had such inaccurate information. Immediately after this, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kosovo denied the Russian Minister and the Russian news agency TASS, stating that there are no Kosovars who went to fight in Ukraine because it is prohibited by law.

We inform Russian Minister Lavrov and the Russian news agency TASS that the Republic of Kosovo has by law banned its citizens from participating in wars abroad and this law provides severe penalties for any of its citizens who may be part of such activities, the MFA states.

The ministry estimates that the statements of the TASS agency and Minister Lavrov are part of a fierce campaign of Russian propaganda, which according to aims to attract the attention of the entire democratic world.

This fierce Russian campaign against Kosovo and other Western Balkan countries, among other things, aims to escalate the situation in Kosovo and the wider region through the Russian satellite in the Balkans, Serbia. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs expresses the full solidarity of the people of Kosovo with the people of Ukraine for the right to a free and sovereign life in their own country. The Republic of Kosovo calls for the reduction of tension and the avoidance of conflict, which could reach unpredictable proportions, according to a statement from the Kosovo Foreign Ministry.

In this statement from the ministry is also underlined that Kosovo joined the democratic world in condemning Russia’s hegemonic and expansionist policies to the detriment of the sovereign and the independent state of Ukraine.

To conclude, the disinformation is that there is an official mobilization to send Kosovars to fight in Ukraine.



THERE IS NO US-FUNDED BIOLOGICAL WEAPONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM IN UKRAINE

There is no evidence that the Ukrainian government ordered the eradication of anthrax, cholera and other infectious diseases on the day Putin invaded Ukraine. It is also not true that there are US-funded biological weapons laboratories in Ukraine. On the contrary, the laboratories that exist there are in order to prevent the spread of infectious diseases and are part of the Development Program for reducing the risks and dangers of diseases.

Author: Truthmeter's team

(Truthmeter, 11.03.2022))

We review a Facebook post claiming that *“Ukraine is destroying evidence of a US-funded biological weapons development program”*. As part of the post, a text was shared from the site Kolovrt, which claims that after Russian troops entered Ukraine on February 24 this year, the Ukrainian government ordered the immediate destruction of plague and anthrax pathogens in US-funded laboratories. The US-funded biological weapons program also involved the production of biological weapons components in laboratories in the cities of Poltava and Kharkiv.

The allegations were attributed to the Russian Ministry of Defense and alleged documents were presented containing a list of pathogens that were to be destroyed, and it is said that the first information was published by the Russian media “Russia Today”, which is state-controlled. The text also reads that “Rusia Today” cannot confirm that the documents are credible.





What events preceded this bombastic announcement?

In an attempt to justify its invasion of Ukraine, Russian propaganda once again promotes the false narrative that Ukraine is developing biological weapons with US assistance. On March 6, Russia's Defense Ministry claimed to have received evidence that Ukraine and the United States had cooperated in developing biological weapons. In many Russian media, this information resonated with the speed of light and was transmitted by Macedonian media as well. According to Major General **Igor Konashenkov**, pathogens for deadly diseases, including plague, anthrax and cholera, were created in these laboratories to be used in biological warfare, and these laboratories were "*established by the United States and the US Department of Defense.*"

The false claim that there are US-funded laboratories in Ukraine that produce pathogens has been repeated by Russia since 2020.

In May 2020, at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, Ukraine's secret service issued a statement urging politicians to stop spreading disinformation about the existence of "*US military biological laboratories in Ukraine.*"

There are no foreign biological laboratories operating in Ukraine. The claims of individual politicians about the alleged existence of such laboratories are untrue and are a deliberate distortion of the facts, [the statement reads.](#)

In April 2020, the US Embassy in Ukraine also issued a statement saying it wanted to explain the disinformation about the program.

The statement reads:

The United States and Ukraine have had a partnership since 2005 to prevent the spread of infectious diseases and to facilitate the peaceful development of vaccines. This partnership between the US Department of Defense and the Ukrainian Ministry of Health is part of the Cooperative Threat Reduction Program, which began in

1991 to reduce the threat of weapons of mass destruction after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

This partnership does not mean that there are US-led laboratories in Ukraine; in fact, the US Department of Defense has never had a biological laboratory in Ukraine.

“Rather, the U.S. Department of Defense Cooperative Threat Reduction Program has provided technical support to the Ukrainian Ministry of Health [since 2005](#) to improve public health laboratories, whose mission is analogous to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention,” *Andy Weber, member of the board of the Arms Control Association told [PolitiFact](#).*

Biological weapons researcher and professor at King’s College London, Philippa Lenzo, told AFP that there were no indications that these laboratories in Ukraine were being used to develop biological weapons, **but that their aim was to prevent the spread of infectious diseases.**

According to the Atlantic Council, the Kremlin has repeatedly used forged documents, forged signatures as part of previous operations for influence.

In 2020, media close to the Kremlin tried to blame America for the Covid-19 pandemic, suggesting that the virus was created in laboratories.

Given the above facts, we consider that there is no evidence that the Ukrainian government ordered the destruction of pathogens of anthrax, cholera and other infectious diseases on the day when Putin invaded Ukraine. We also accept that it is not true that there are US-funded biological weapons laboratories in Ukraine. On the contrary, the laboratories that exist there are in order to prevent the spread of infectious diseases and are part of the Development Program for reduction of risks and dangers.





NEWS



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Photographs by
JAMES NACH

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RUSSIAN EMBASSY IN SKOPJE THREATENS TO 'RECORD' DISSENTERS FROM KREMLIN OFFICIAL POSITIONS, LABELED 'RUSOPHOBES'

Author: Filip Stojanovski

(Meta, 06.03.2022)

Russian embassy in Skopje has been the only one in the Balkans region to translate and transmit the “warning” by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation (MFA) about the increased level of “russophobia” which stresses that “all such incidents are meticulously recorded.”

Even though the state institutions of the Russian Federation had limited or blocked access to social network platforms Facebook and Twitter for their citizens, the Russian MFA continues to utilize both.

The official Twitter profile of the Russian MFA published the following announcement on March 5 at 17:55 CET. Few hours later, at 23:03 CET it was translated into Macedonian and quote tweeted by the official profile of the Russian embassy in Skopje.

“WE HAVE TAKEN NOTICE OF AN UNPRECEDENTED LEVEL OF RUSOPHOBIA IN SEVERAL FOREIGN COUNTRIES IN THE CONTEXT OF THE SPECIAL MILITARY OPERATION IN UKRAINE.

WE WARN THAT ALL SUCH INCIDENTS ARE METICUOLOSLY RECORDED.”

One day before, on March 4, the Russian parliament (Duma) adopted legislation proscribing draconian sentences for “intentional spreading of fake news” about the Russian army operations, which includes sentences of up to 15 years in prison, the Truthmeter.mk reported.

Besides criminalization Russian parliament also adopted a range of monetary fees for “discreditation of the armed forces of the Russian Feder-





ation (RF).” The citizens will be held responsible for public calls demanding the prevention of the use of RF armed forces.

The new law includes specific censorship provisions regarding the activities of Russian armed forces against Ukraine, forbidding use of the terms “invasion” and “war,” proscribing use of the official Kremlin terminology of “special military operation” only.

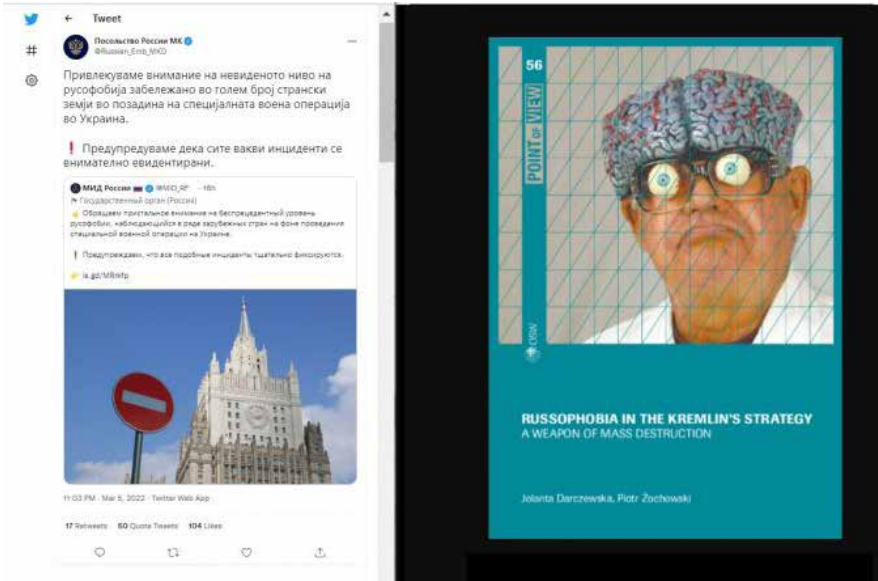


Photo: Collage from the Twitter post of the Russian Embassy and the front page of the publication

The posting by the Russian embassy in Skopje incited hundreds of reaction of defiance by insulted Macedonian citizens, ranging from statements of disbelief to foul language to expressions of support for the invaded Ukraine, as well as for the Russian people suffering under dictatorship.

“DO YOU ACTUALLY BELIEVE IN THE STUFF YOU TRANSLATE AND POST? I ASK THIS IN THE CAPACITY OF ADMIRER OF RUSSIAN ART AND LITERATURE. AND BY THE WAY, FEEL FREE TO RECORD ME, TOO.

Alongside the majority of outraged reaction, several tweets by profiles that self-identify as part of the political party Levica expressed support for the Kremlin regime, including attempts to discredit journalists and gloating in regard to creation of blacklists that will lead to purges.

Threats and accusations of “rusophobia” as propaganda weapon

European analysts had been warning for years that accusations of “rusophobia” have been part of the Kremlin propaganda arsenal. For example, the study “Russophobia in the Kremlin’s strategy. A weapon of mass destruction” published by the Polish think tank Centre for Eastern Studies (OSW) in November 2015 states:

“BUILDING UP AN IMAGE OF RUSSOPHOBIC COUNTRIES IS CURRENTLY INSTRUMENTAL IN SHAPING A NEO-IMPERIAL POLITICAL IDENTITY AMONG THE CITIZENS OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION, MOBILISING THEM IN THE FACE OF REAL OR ALLEGED THREATS, AND ALSO SERVES AS A FORM OF RESTORING PSYCHOLOGICAL COMFORT TO THEM IN THE FACE OF THE FAILURE OF THE KREMLIN’S ACTIONS (AS IN UKRAINE, FOR EXAMPLE). THE MYTHOLOGISED STEREOTYPE OF RUSSOPHOBIC COUNTRIES ALSO REMAINS A CROWNING ARGUMENT AND A SIMPLE EXPLANATION FOR THE ONGOING TENSIONS IN RELATIONS BETWEEN RUSSIA AND THE WEST.”

The Russian embassy in Skopje has issued direct threats against the citizens of Republic of North Macedonia in the past. After the banishment of an embassy employee for engaging in activities that go beyond the diplomatic status, the Russian ambassador Oleg Shcherbak stated that Macedonia shouldn’t join NATO, and that in the case of “possible clash between Russia and NATO, Macedonia would be a legitimate target.”

At a special conference for the media, Shcherbak stated:

“BY JOINING [NATO] REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA WILL BECAME PART OF THIS MILITARY MACHINERY AND PART OF AGGRESSION AGAINST RUSSIA. THIS WILL MAKE YOU A TARGET OF RETALIATORY STRIKE BY





RUSSIA. IS THIS REALLY NECESSARY FOR YOU AND YOUR CHILDREN? BESIDES, JOINING NATO WILL LEAD TO LIMIT YOUR SOVEREIGNTY AND LIMIT YOUR FOREIGN POLICY..”

During the following months Shcherbak continued issuing warnings against inclusion in the systems of European solidarity. In August 2018 he was replaced from the position of Russian ambassador by Sergey Bazdnikin.

At the time of closing of this article, the website of the Embassy of Russian Federation in Skopje macedonia.mid.ru is not accessible.

At the same time, their Facebook page remains accessible. Similar to the threat on Twitter, the Facebook page also contains a post with a warning that all such incidents will be “meticulously recorded” or documented, while the relevant materials will be transferred too the competent authorities for legal evaluation, and those found guilty will be held responsible according to current legislation.

MUNICIPALITY OF CENTAR DOESN'T KNOW WHO REMOVED NAME BOARD FOR UKRAINIAN CITY OF SEVASTOPOL FROM RUSSIAN THEMED PLAYGROUND IN SKOPJE



The sign with the city of Sevastopol that was placed on the children's playground at the Universal Hall; Photo: Meta.mk

Author: Meta's team (Meta, 18.02.2022)





The Municipality of Centar hasn't removed the board with the name of the Ukrainian town of Sevastopol from the Russian-themed children's playground behind the Universal Hall in Skopje, the capital of North Macedonia.

The municipal authorities also don't have a clue who and why removed the board with the name of the Ukrainian town that was located between the name boards for Russian cities.

"So far, we haven't received any information about who removed the board from the playground," said the Municipality of Centar for Meta.mk.

Between the name boards for the Russian cities of Veliki Novgorod and Soggi, there was a board with the name of the Ukrainian city Sevastopol. It was completely removed from the children's playground toward the end of December 2021; Photo credit: Meta.mk

Regarding the information who financed the construction of the Russian-themed children's playground, the municipal authorities said that most of the assets (over €40,000 or more than 90% of the total sum) have arrived from the local authorities i.e. Municipality of Centar's annual budget. The Russian embassy in Skopje has participated with only MKD150,000 or around €2,500.

"The Municipality of Centar financed the playground's reconstruction with the amount of MKD2,481,928, and the Embassy of the Russian Federation participated with an additional MKD150,000," said the Municipality of Centar for Meta.mk.

The local authorities also said that the Decision for the playground's reconstruction is evidenced in the Annual program of the Sector for regulating property development and land use in the Municipality of Centar. The same program was submitted to the Council and was approved by the members of the Council of Centar's in the previous mandate.

The Municipality of Centar stressed that regarding the city of Sevastopol's legal status, it completely supports the decisions made by the Govern-

ment of North Macedonia and the Foreign Affairs Ministry.

On the 31st of January last year, the Macedonian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Bujar Osmani, during the meeting with the Russian Ambassador in Skopje, Sergei Bazdnikin, repeated the stance that North Macedonia respects Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders. A political support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity arrived several days later from Prime Minister Dimitar Kovachevski, who met with NATO's Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg on the 3rd of February.

The Russian-themed children playground has caused a diplomatic scandal in this country since a board containing the Ukrainian city Sevastopol was put inside of it. It's the biggest city in the Crimea peninsula in the Black sea, which was annexed by the Russian Federation and there is a dispute about the violation of the international law and Ukraine's territorial integrity.

In October last year, former Mayor Sasha Bogdanovic announced and the Russian Embassy in Skopje confirmed that the Russian-themed children playground was jointly financed by the municipality of Centar and the Russian Embassy in Skopje.

Before New Year's Eve, Meta.mk contacted the Ukrainian Embassy in Skopje which confirmed that it has sent a reaction to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the City Hall of Skopje because of the board with the name Sevastopol.

“The Ambassador of Ukraine in North Macedonia, Ms. Nataliya Zadoroznyuk had several meetings at the MFA, where she expressed her stance against the unacceptable participation of North Macedonia's officials, especially the Municipality of Centar's leadership, in an effort of the Russian side to legalize the status of the temporarily occupied territories of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol as a special subject





of the Russian Federation,” stated the Ukrainian embassy.

The Embassy stated that the MFA has confirmed North Macedonia’s firm support of Ukraine’s integrity and sovereignty and that the issue will be solved by the MFA.

Until the publication of this article, Meta.mk didn’t receive any answer neither from the City of Skopje nor the MFA, about the questions regarding the Russian-themed playground.

In the past period, there were almost daily public reactions from the Ukrainian and the Russian Embassies in Skopje, where statements by official state officials from both countries are issued about potential new Russian assault on Ukraine.

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