

The Destructive Machine of Russian Propaganda: How Pro-Russian Narratives Seep into World and Western Media

Any Russian crime has always been accompanied by powerful information operations - both within Russia itself and among the foreign community. **Distortion of facts, shifting of responsibility, and excessive hyperbolization are modern weapons of Russian propaganda.**

During the annexation of Crimea and the invasion of Donbas by Russian troops in 2014, Russia's military intervention in Syria in 2015, the whole world witnessed attempts to justify and whitewash the actions of the aggressor. For example, using the chaos of the civil war in Syria, the Russian media machine managed to spread fake information about terrorism by the "White Helmets" - a non-governmental volunteer organization that was engaged in helping civilians who were directly affected by military actions.



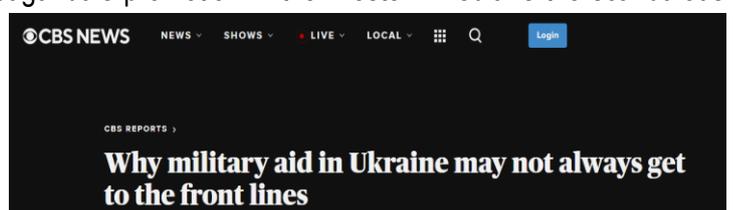
Unfortunately, at that time the world was significantly inferior to Russia in the information war it unleashed without a declaration. The result was the spreading of an inconspicuous, but the extremely dangerous weapon - **Russian narratives** through the world and Western mass media. They certainly influenced the democratic world, accustomed to the peaceful coexistence of a large number of opposing views, shaped the agenda, as well as the vision of the world around. Slowly invading people's heads, they built the worldview necessary for the Russian authorities, according to which the world would continue to ignore its most heinous crimes.

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine became a direct signal to the entire civilized world about the need for urgent action in the field of protection of state and international information spaces. Banning pro-Russian publications and television channels, and blocking pro-Russian bloggers and outspoken propagandists was the first step on the part of the West in the war for people's opinions. Finally, Russian propaganda began to be countered.



In view of the increase in aggressive activity of Russia in 2014-2015, in 2015 the European External Action Service created a special working group, which focused on detecting and countering Russian propaganda activities. Nevertheless, Russian propaganda, which managed to take root during the years of free broadcasting in Western countries, did not disappear without a trace. Under the guise of pluralism as a legal basis for spreading fake news and imperialist narratives, pro-Russian journalists and self-proclaimed experts continue to lie and support Russia in the information space with impunity. Using the substitution of concepts and framing, they try to blur the line between "aggressor" and "victim".

One of the latest highlight examples of Russian propaganda's promotion in the Western media is the scandalous publication of the news agency CBS News. Despite the increased control and verification of English-language material, the false narrative about the "black market" of weapons in Ukraine still managed to leak: the weapons received from Western partners



are resold by Ukrainian officials and do not serve the Armed Forces of Ukraine. Its goal, obviously, was to slow down military supplies and try to cause mistrust among the leadership and public of European countries in the Ukrainian government. The situation is much more difficult with local mass media that broadcast Russian propaganda for a non-English-speaking audience. The Lithuanian and Spanish news portals *Laisvaslaikrastis* and *La Haine* are real hotbeds of pro-Russian ideology and fake information, yet they are still accessible to ordinary users from Europe.



At the same time, according to the data of the EUvsDISINFO portal, many fake pro-Russian messages have recently appeared in publications focused on the Arab world. African and Indian media spaces are also quite repleted with pro-Russian narratives. The problem of the spread of Russian propaganda among non-English speaking communities was recently discussed in detail by Steven Lee Myers and Sheera Frenkel in their article in The New York Times. In their view, **recent efforts to counter Russian propaganda have only succeeded in imposing certain restrictions, rather than outright banning Russian information operations. Thus, the world has become culturally and geographically asymmetric in information access. Due to this, world politics cannot reach a single solution regarding the sealing of the infospace from Russian propaganda.** In addition, unfortunately, the non-Western mass media in their attempts to oppose the Western mainstream opinion are very easily influenced by Russia. Despite the fact that

Russia is a modern terrorist state, its information warfare is still successfully waged around the world by the hands of ignorant or incompetent media and delivered under the guise of an alternative position.

The global information space still remains under the powerful influence of Russian propaganda, which has been freely broadcasted to the international public for decades. Although Russian propaganda faces resistance from the Western information space, it is still looking for ways to bypass bans and reach susceptible local audiences. Thus, it enters the websites, television screens, and newspaper columns of the Eastern media, spreading fake news and distorted facts. Russian narratives still end up in the columns of major reputable outlets, under the guise of pluralism and democratic consideration of both sides of the conflict. Using journalistic standards, the Russians are able to push outright misinformation to the masses, which, despite its implausibility, is fixed in the minds of readers as an alternative point of view.

The world information community and the European Union, in particular, should take a more serious approach to the problem of the spread of Russian propaganda among both English-speaking and non-English-speaking communities: **block and ban such websites, limit the access of propaganda mouthpieces to social networks and broadcasts of more reputable mass media.** It should not be forgotten that Russian propaganda is a serious tool of the Kremlin's control over the moods of people not only within their own country but also throughout the world. Only by uniting and doubling our efforts are we able to create the most truthful and objective information space that will safeguard global security and peaceful coexistence.

