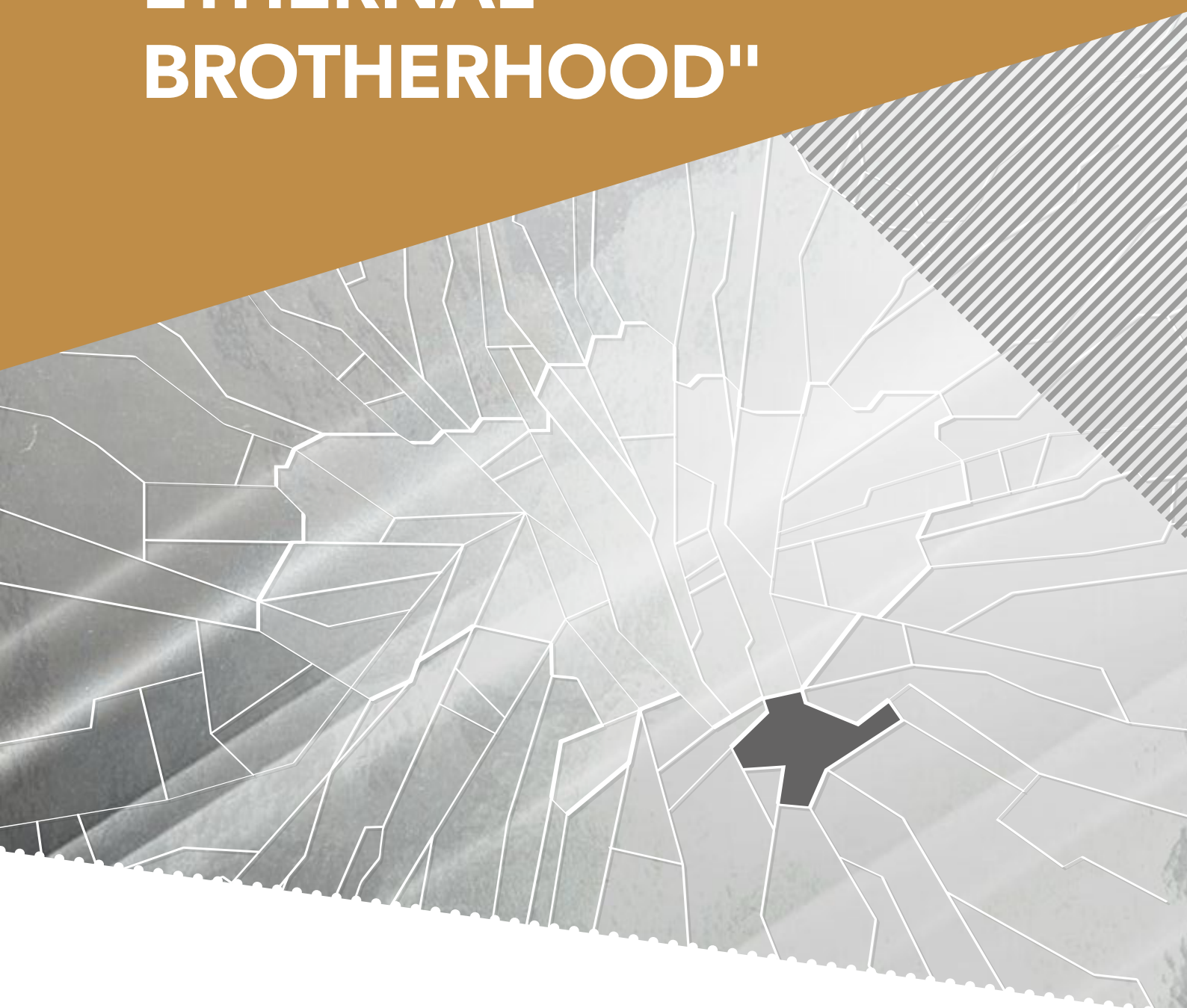# "RUSSIAN–UKRANIAN ETHERNAL BROTHERHOOD"

Revealing Russian disinformation networks and active measures fuelling secessionism and border revisionism in Ukraine

POLITICAL CAPITAL
POLICY RESEARCH & CONSULTING INSTITUTE

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

Since the start of the Crimean war in 2014, Russia has masterfully exploited societal divisions present in Ukrainian society and abroad. The war against Ukraine was part of the Kremlin's long-term foreign policy attempt to preserve or (re)gain influence over the post-Soviet space and its countries by creating so called "frozen conflicts" in territories such as Transnistria in Moldova, Abkhazia in Georgia or Donetsk in Ukraine, which claimed independence based on alleged differences or societal divisions rooted in ethnicity, language, historical origins etc., supported by the Russian state. Territorial secessionism as a foreign policy tool has been enabled by rights-based territorial discourses or narratives to legitimize current-day or historical justifications for territorial authority over a piece of land.

Political Capital has laid out in numerous studies how the Kremlin transformed European far-right parties and extremist organisations harbouring age-old territorial or other grievances against other countries into pro-Russian political assets since the early 2000s to garner intelligence and leverage over foreign countries' political life.[1] The pro-Kremlin extremists and their media potential was then put to good use during the illegal occupation of Crimea in 2014, to provide political and media cover for the illegal secession referendum and the subsequent war in Eastern Ukraine. Russian power projection has also relied on disinformation campaigns – "active measures" – targeting audiences in Poland, Hungary, Slovakia and Ukraine to create or escalate bilateral tensions between these countries along ethnic or territorial lines to this day. The leaked emails of Vladislav Surkov,[2] a chief strategist of the Crimean annexation, detailed how Ukraine's territory could be further disintegrated or "federalised" with the help of minority/secessionist organisations in Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia.[3]

Vulnerabilities to Russian media or other (hard or soft, sharp) influence have been investigated extensively before.[4] We have not set out to define the Kremlin's overall strategy to destabilize European security and economic coalitions in order to shift the balance of power in its favour. Rather we seek to understand the inner workings of "revisionist" disinformation campaigns as tools of destabilisation on a regional level. To this end, with the help of the Open Information Partnership, Political Capital and its partners in Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Ukraine and Poland launched a year-long media research study in six countries to identify pro-Kremlin domestic or international disinformation campaigns, or so called "active measures," that are specifically reliant on revisionism and inter-ethnic conflicts.[5]

We hope that our research findings may provide local elites, the Euro-Atlantic Community and the wider public with insights and tools to better identify and thwart Russian hostile information operations based on social divisions and identity politics aimed at upending European peace and stability.

METHODOLOGY AND THE SCOPE OF RESEARCH

The geographical scope and timeframe of the media research study was defined to reflect current or past territorial disputes – flashpoints of national discourses related first and foremost to World War I about identity, language or territories and proactively utilized by the Kremlin to sow divisions among Central-European countries.

We therefore chose to limit our research to Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania and Serbia, in addition to Ukraine, as focal points of hostile disinformation operations, because they all experienced territorial disputes and shifting borders dating back to World War I. More specifically,

Romania: Romania celebrated the 100-year anniversary of its Great Unification of Bessarabia, Bucovina and Transylvania in 2018.[6]

Hungary: 2020 is the 100th anniversary of the Trianon Treaty, declared the Year of National Togetherness by the Hungarian National Assembly to commemorate the loss of territory and population formerly belonging to the Hungarian Kingdom and the Austrian-Hungarian Monarchy.[7]

Poland: Historical legacy of the Polish-Ukrainian War between 1918 and 1919 that resulted in the control of Galicia and the city of Lviv by the Second Polish Republic until 1939.

Current inter-ethnic conflicts: Disinformation campaigns based on current territorial conflicts addressed Russian revisionism in Ukraine and Slovakia, and the status of Kosovo in Serbia.

In line with the timing of national anniversaries and commemorations, we conducted our media monitoring activities during the period from 1 January 2018 to 15 April 2020, to reveal Russian hostile influence operations targeting the commemorative events or exploiting other forms of territorial revisionist, separatist tendencies and inter-ethnic conflicts in the countries under review.

The research addressed the following four questions:

1. What are the basic and most widespread revisionist narratives, related (dis)information strategies and identity politics concerning the official commemorations of World War I or other significant current-day territorial issues?

2. What are the drivers of revisionist media trends, in terms of events, actors and media sources in news media and in social media?

3. What are the prerequisites for the successful dissemination and construction of revisionist narratives and messages in pro-Kremlin media in each of the countries under review?

4. What are the vulnerabilities of each society to foreign hostile influence operations based on territorial issues and societal divisions between minority and majority populations?

We defined a "narrative" as a specific structure of (real or imaginary) events or occurrences linked by causality in storytelling, which can be articulated in oral, written, visual etc. forms of communication. Within each narrative we were looking for the type of information used to interpret the main line of argumentation: (1) information (fact-based, objective reporting); (2) disinformation (misleading information disseminated intentionally); (3) misinformation (ad hoc or accidentally false information).

Because territorial revisionist tendencies against other countries are not present in Slovakia and Ukraine, we expanded the operational definition of "revisionist narratives" in two important ways.

First, revisionist narratives were categorised as either exhibiting "aggressive" or "victimhood" aspects. "Aggressive" territorial narratives express a wish or demand for territorial change, or a revision of borders favouring a certain state or country, while "victimhood" narratives express fear of a possible change of the sovereign status of a given territory.

Second, we distinguished between "domestic" and "Russian" revisionist narratives. While domestic narratives were not created to manipulate specific audiences and did not necessarily contain any disinformation, pro-Kremlin or Russian disinformation meta-narratives reinterpreted domestic narratives for disinformation purposes as part of their disinformation campaigns.

In Ukraine, our initial desktop research revealed that territorial revisionism or territory-related narratives present in the current media space and domestic political discourse first and foremost addressed the ongoing Russian war against Ukraine rather than historical narratives (although it must be noted that World War II is a very important topic for pro-Kremlin actors in Ukraine). Since the start of the invasion in 2014, Russia has maintained the position that its regular military units occupying Donbas and Crimea are actually local "separatists," and thus the question of territorial integrity of Ukraine is one of local ethnic conflicts.

The following research methods were used to prepare this study.

- Desktop research to collect the necessary information related to territorial revisionist politics, political ideas and media activity in each country to narrow down our research foci, and create three lists of mainstream, far-right and pro-Kremlin media for monitoring purposes.
- In-depth interviews with experts of scientific life, politics and the media so as to move beyond an exclusive reliance on open-source information, and to acquire a deeper understanding of the background of certain actors and events.
- Monitoring of revisionism-related websites' articles and Facebook messages on mainstream news media, and fringe pro-Kremlin and far-right media using the SentiOne online platform's research function which gathered data in the given timeframe based on country-specific sets of keywords selected by our researchers in each country under review.[8] As a result, we ended up with "relevant" messages in the forms of website articles or Facebook posts related to revisionist ideas, territory-related information, disinformation, conspiracy theories, and all the "irrelevant" messages produced by the media on our three initial media lists.

Media data gathered was analysed using four distinct research methodologies.

- Time trends of the dissemination of website articles and Facebook posts were analysed through the SentiOne platform's data visualization tools to understand the main events, actors, media, etc. driving mainstream or fringe media discourseswebsite.
- To identify, map and categorise the most prevalent revisionist narratives present in each country, we took a random, representative sample of website articles of at least 500 articles per country. The recurring, representative themes of articles were categorised into the main types of narratives present in each country.[9]
- To understand what conditions or prerequisites make revisionist or territory-related narratives and conspiracy theories successful in social media, we compared the most successful fringe (far-right or pro-Kremlin) Facebook pages' and posts' statistical performance to each other in terms of the number of interactions (based on the number of reactions, comments and shares).
- The research utilized a "big data approach" to comprehend how pro-Kremlin networks of websites in each country disseminated revisionism or territory-related messages through hyperlinks embedded in articles, in order to direct their audience to other revisionist sites or construct impactful messages by referencing – many times – third party sources website.

Ultimately, we combined several layers of analytical and methodological approaches to provide a comprehensive picture of all the revisionist narratives and related (dis)information campaigns utilized by pro-Kremlin actors to sow social polarisation and geopolitical instability in all six countries under review.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- **Expert interviews, Facebook and network analysis of mainstream, fringe far-right and pro-Kremlin sources demonstrated that the issues of historical and territorial revisionism remain high on the agenda in Ukraine.**

- **They are overwhelmingly connected to the ongoing Russian aggression** that has resulted in the annexation of Crimea and the occupation of several regions in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts in the south-eastern part of the country.

- **However, the specificity of territorial narratives and information campaigns in Ukraine concern two main aspects: Ukraine in itself is the target of these narratives** linked to ongoing military operations and a "frozen conflict" in the East, **while the country also serves as a launching point for the Kremlin's wider geopolitical ambitions aimed at subverting its European and Euroatlantic integration, as well as the international community to legitimize the Russian aggression.**

- **The territorial destabilization narratives are concerned mainly with historical revisionism, especially on the topic of World War II, as well as the deconstruction of the Ukrainian national identity based on societal (linguistic, religious etc.) divisions and the historical „justification" of aggressive Russian foreign politics towards Ukraine to control it through territorial disintegration.**

- Experience suggests that Central and, especially, Western Ukraine have their hotspots of potential tensions, which are unlikely to turn into a large-scale conflict but could substantially sour relations between Kyiv and its European partners, especially in the CEE region.

- **The success or failure of revisionist narratives depends on three key aspects: the societal polarisation present in Ukrainian society; the institutional setting of the media space; and the disinformation strategies applied by pro-Kremlin media outlets**. In terms of existing societal divisions, the Kremlin's communications approach targets members of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate based on religion, Russian speakers based on language and ethnic Russians based on national identity, the latter geographically located in the Eastern regions of the country. Beyond these, societal groups vulnerable to Russian disinformation campaigns include older generations socialized in Soviet times, young people consuming Russian entertainment through new/social media and low-paid workers from the Eastern and Southern regions.

- **The structure of the Ukrainian media space also contributes to the spread of territorial narratives due to media owned by oligarchs, the presence of "junk websites" serving business and other interests without adhering to journalistic standards, and the "closing of the digital divide" by websites linked to television channels**. The vulnerability of the Ukrainian media to Russian influence is further exacerbated by the lack of media literacy and digital security in society and significant infiltration of the pro-Kremlin agenda into the Ukrainian media landscape.

- **Media strategies applied by pro-Kremlin media and actors utilize narratives that either question Ukraine as a sovereign, territorially unified state or legitimize Ukrainians' and Ukrainian territories' historical association with Russia.**

- **The narratives' dissemination strategy depends on both media present in the Ukrainian media space, as well as media banned by the Ukrainian authorities and migrating to alternative media platforms, and on the bot and troll armies on social media** in Ukraine.

- Therefore, Facebook is not the primary channel of communication for pro-Kremlin media. **They typically prefer websites and use Facebook only as a supplementary means to reach the audience that does not have access to banned websites in Ukraine. Altogether, our**

network analysis revealed that pro-Kremlin sites primarily rely on a tight dissemination network of webpages that allows them to conduct coordinated campaigns in and outside of Ukraine.

- **Based on a representative sampling of articles, we were able to identify 14 revisionist narratives that rely on a single meta-narrative or dichotomy about the West, as opposed to the East as more pro-Russian, which are irreconcilable in terms of religion, culture, societal habits, values** etc. The narratives' terminology presents a "war of discourses", which addresses and frames the Russian aggression on both sides. **While the Russian narratives argue that "separatism" was a natural result of the "unconstitutional coup," followed by the political emancipation of the local citizens in the Eastern territories, Ukraine makes it clear the Kremlin's conduct is an act of aggression** trying to subdue Ukrainian sovereignty, the Revolution of Dignity and a war against the West.

GENERAL POLITICAL AND GEOPOLITICAL ATTITUDES IN UKRAINE

Geopolitical attitudes and social divisions related to issues of race, ethnicity, religion or language may serve as vulnerabilities which the Kremlin can use to sow discord and create inter-ethnic tensions in domestic politics or in international relations. National identities intertwined with historical narratives serve as the most powerful basis for geopolitical orientations in a given country, making it susceptible or protected against the Kremlin's power projection or soft and sharp powers.

Ukrainians have a complicated relationship with national institutions. According to a 2019 poll[10], Ukraine was the country with the lowest level of trust in authority, with just 9% of respondents stating that they are confident in their government. This attitude was reflected in recent Ukrainian presidential elections, where the populist candidate Vladimir Zelensky, who was previously one of the most popular comics and showmen in the country, had a landslide victory despite the lack of political experience. Less than half a year later his party, "Servant of the People," enjoyed a similarly spectacular success, with a number of new MPs also being completely new to the world of politics.

Combined with low levels of media-literacy,[11] the lack of adequate governmental support to raise awareness about the necessity to fact-check information makes Ukrainians somewhat susceptible to a massive pro-Kremlin disinformation campaign in media and social networks. Even the new political elites can succumb to the narratives that are distrib-

uted from Russia. According to a recent journalistic investigation[12], which analysed political Telegram[13]-channels favored by the MPs of the "Servant of People" party, most of channels examined were either run from Russia or by known pro-Kremlin actors in Ukraine.

Nevertheless, geopolitical attitudes in Ukraine have been more or less constant ever since the 2014 Euromaidan, when thousands of people loudly revolted against pro-Russian president Viktor Yanukovych's desire to steer the nation away from integration with the EU. The level of support for European and Euroatlantic integration in Ukraine is gradually rising. As of 2020, 64.2% of Ukrainians support the idea of joining the European Union. The level of support for joining NATO stands at 51%[14]. In 2018, the numbers in favour of joining NATO were 51% and 40%, respectively[15].

Additionally, despite massive disinformation efforts by the Kremlin to prove otherwise, 45% of Ukrainian respondents are confident in calling military conflict in the Eastern and Southern regions of the country (resulting in the occupation of Crimea and parts of the Donbas region) Russian aggression against Ukraine. More than 13% of respondents stated that this is "Russia's war with the West on Ukrainian territory".[16] This result is possible due to the resilience efforts of Ukrainian civil society, which combats Russian attacks in the information field on a daily basis.

THE UKRAINIAN MEDIA SPACE

The success of hostile influence operations is highly dependent on the media environment in each country. A free and balanced media space characterised by a high degree of media freedom and freedom of speech is more resilient to disinformation attacks, since fact-based reporting makes it easy to debunk and expose disinformation and conspiracy theories, thereby rendering manipulation attempts ineffective. On a more general level, the presence of a strong, balanced and independent mainstream media in a country directly neutralizes local pro-Kremlin networks and indirectly improves audiences' media literacy against manipulation.

In case of the Ukrainian media landscape,[17] the most notable distinction is the oligarchization of this sphere in the country. This process started in the 1990s with Ukrainian oligarchs, such as Rinat Akhmetov, Viktor Pinchuk, and Ihor Kolomoyskiy, investing money into creating and promoting their outlets, which led to the present-day situation, when ten of the most popular TV-channels are all oligarch-owned[18]. Media outlets enjoy relative freedom of speech and compete actively, but at the same time they are dependent and influenced by businessmen who are often involved with politics as well.

When it comes to online media in Ukraine, there is another important distinction that should be made. Such outlets can be divided into professional and "junk" websites – the latter enjoy a high popularity but do not follow standards of journalism and disseminate a mixture of political news pieces, tabloid news and paid-for information. While the first category is generally pro-Western or neutral, the second tends to be pro-Kremlin. These pro-Kremlin media outlets often serve as proxies to promote the Kremlin-tailored narratives in the Ukrainian media landscape after the state banned several Russian TV-channels and the social networks Vkontakte and Odnoklassniki.

These fringe pro-Russian media outlets are, among others, highly concerned with historical revisionism, especially on the topic of World War II as well as the deconstruction of Ukrainian national identity based on societal (linguistic, religious etc.) divisions and a historical "justification" of aggressive Russian politics towards Ukraine. Examples of promoted narratives that stem from these points include:

- "Crimea has always been Russian."[19]
- "Donbas has always been Russian."[20]
- "Ukrainians are actually Russians."[21]

While banned openly pro-Russian outlets enjoy significantly less popularity, "junk" websites often do the same in a more subtle way and have substantial audiences – "news" shared by such "media" is often of very low quality or even completely fake. Still they can reach up to 50 million visitors per month. By way of comparison, "Ukrainska Pravda" (mainstream media) reaches around 39 million visitors[22].

However, not all pro-Kremlin media are banned outlets that are administrated from Russia or are "junk" websites. There are outlets, linked to Ukrainian oligarch and politician Viktor Medvedchuk, who has strong personal ties to Russian President Vladimir Putin and is the main promoter of pro-Kremlin narratives in Ukraine. Medvedchuk-affiliated media include the TV-channels 112, NewsOne[23] and Zik[24].

SOCIETAL AND POLITICAL INTERPRETATIONS OF "SEPARATISM"

Political and media discourses about our topic can influence both how political actors and the media may deal with present-day or historical issues regarding territorial disputes and identity politics, and how the Kremlin or its local allies take advantage of such a sensitive issue present in a society or in multilateral relations. This section will attempt to provide a holistic picture of the Kremlin's hostile influence operations, or "active measures," centred around inter-ethnic conflicts and revisionist narratives and the risk they pose to national security in each country. Against the backdrop of Russian manipulation efforts and domestic political discourses, the impact of revisionist narratives may be assessed throughout the course of our media analysis.

The societal context of "separatism" in Ukraine is largely linked to the territorial ambitions of the Russian Federation, the government of which consistently perceives Ukraine as its geopolitical backyard and questions the state's sovereignty. This perception is linked in the long history of Russian political, economic and cultural domination over Ukraine lasting more than 300 years, starting with the Russian Empire and continuing with the Soviet rule. The political myth of "brotherly nations" targeting Russia, Belarus and Ukraine, promoted by the Kremlin and its local agents of influence, sets the ground for the "friend or foe" identification on a macro-level, where Russia is positioned as a friend sharing a historical and cultural background, while the West is portrayed as a hostile force trying to separate Ukraine from it. This myth is amplified by Soviet nostalgia, actively promoted by pro-Russian actors in Ukraine – in the framework of the Kremlin's large-scale campaign to whitewash and glorify the totalitarian Soviet regime.

This context serves as a stepping stone for Russian territorial and historical revisionism in Ukraine. The regions that have been under its strongest influence are mostly those of South-Eastern Ukraine, including the annexed Crimea and the occupied territories of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts. Their political predisposition is explained by a complex set of factors from historical – e.g., during the Soviet rule Crimean Tatars have been deported en masse, and these regions were heavily populated by ethnic Russians – to political ones. The dichotomy between the West as more pro-European and the East as more pro-Russian has been consistently amplified in Ukraine for political purposes since the 2000s, at the very least: for example, Russian political advisors to Viktor Yanukovych, a former pro-Russian president, used this trope to polarize the country back in the 2004 election[25].

In 2014-2015, the Russian government attempted to seize more Ukrainian territories than it succeeded to within the framework of the "Novorossiya" project which included the Odesa, Kherson, Zaporizhia, Kharkiv and Dnipropetrovsk regions (South-Eastern Ukraine). The campaign was orchestrated by Russian Presidential Administration under the direct patronage of Vladislav Surkov, then an aide to the Russian President[26]. "Novorossiya," described as a "union of people's republics" – the so-called "DNR" and "LNR" –, was briefly announced in the period between June 2014 and May 2015, and it was essentially unsuccessful, being declared a frozen project by Oleh Tsariov, a former member of the pro-Russian "Party of Regions" and now a fugitive from the Russian Federation[27]. Destabilization attempts with the use of proxy actors have failed, but the Eastern regions of Ukraine, regardless of them being occupied by Russia or under the control of Ukraine, remain highly vulnerable to malign Russian influence, a substantial component of which lies in the promotion of Russian historical and territorial revisionist narratives. Such promotion is facilitated by the multilayer media-system at the disposal of pro-Russian political forces, described in greater detail in the previous section about the media space. It also involves the wide network of Russian "soft power" agents[28] directly linked to institutions such as Rossotrudnichestvo and "Russkiy Mir" foundation.

The term "separatism" in the context of ongoing Russian aggression is widely advocated against, since it contributes to the legitimization of the Kremlin's hybrid war in Ukraine, which has been described as a "civil war" by the Russian political and media eco-system since the very beginning. It is argued that "separatism" was a natural result of the "unconstitutional coup," as the Revolution of Dignity was labelled, and was a natural choice of the local citizens in the occupied territories. Such wording substantially underplays the Russian role in the hostilities incited by the Kremlin, starting with the use of regular military[29] and proxy actors akin to paramilitary biker[30] clubs, the Russian Orthodox Church[31] and Russian ultranationalist movements.

The primary goal of the "active measures" was to further polarize the society along the lines of the artificial "East vs. West" division that was actively cultivated since the 2000s and to use this polarization as a means of destabilizing Ukrainian society, in particular regarding its current pro-Western geopolitical vector. As for the Russian war in Ukraine, the aim was to redefine the context of the war, which stems from the current regime's imperialist tendencies, into a more favorable picture of "civil war", which Russia is trying to solve as a benevolent peacekeeper rather than a direct aggressor.

EXPERT INTERVIEWS

Within the framework of the project, a total of 5 interviews were conducted with the leading experts in the field. Expert opinions can support or refine some qualitative or quantitative research results of our media research.

They came to a consensus that issues of territorial revisionism remain extremely high on the agenda in regard to the ongoing Russian aggression against Ukraine. As Olha Chyzhova, communications director at Foreign Policy Council "Ukrainian Prism" put it, "*the main informational discourse is centred on regaining control over temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine and restoring our nation's territorial integrity*". The majority of commemoration events are related to the same issue, as the historical agenda linked to World War I, the initial focus of the research, is not relevant in Ukraine. However, the testimony of Mykhailo Basarab, a renowned Ukrainian historian, supported our initial hypothesis that organized commemorations in the context of the Trianon treaty, as few of them as there are, are more common in the Western regions of Ukraine. Discussing the Transcarpathian region, he highlighted the public events dedicated to Carpathian Ukraine [an autonomous republic that briefly existed within Czechoslovakia in 1938-39] and the involvement of the local Hungarian community in commemorating World War I. This provides an opportunity for the Kremlin to use active measures, such as a 2018 arson attack against the Hungarian minority cultural office, as a means of destabilizing society. Revisionism in general is, according to Mr Basarab, strongly condemned at all levels of society.

There is also a general agreement among experts regarding the media landscape of the country, as they describe the mainstream media as pro-Ukrainian in terms of Ukraine's sovereignty and Russian aggression. Still, it is essential to remember that, as Mr Basarab stresses, local mainstream media are heavily dependent on oligarchs and various business groups – so the risk is that "*their geopolitical stance changes [according to] the interests of those economic groups*". At the same time, interview subjects highlighted the danger presented by fringe pro-Kremlin outlets. They are "*mostly centred on pro-Russian and pro-Soviet sentiment of specific groups of the Ukrainian public*". The groups the respondent is referring to consist of older people predominantly from Eastern and Southern Ukraine, whose media cultural consumption habits allow easy access for pro-Kremlin actors. As one of the interviewees who chose to remain anonymous claimed, the opinion leaders in pro-Kremlin discourse are "*Opposition Platform [- For Life], Medvedchuk and his people and some other representatives of the former "Party of Regions*". Interviewees also mentioned blogger Anatolii Shariy, who is heavily empowered by Medvedchuk-linked media resources, as one of the key pro-Russian speakers.

These actors are focused on promoting the negative image of NATO and the EU: as Ms Chyzhova claims, "*usually they echo traditional Russian topics of the 'decaying West' and 'aggressive NATO'. These should also include such message as 'no NATO member wants Ukraine to become a part of the Alliance', which is a common societal misconception*". This stance is supported by other interviewees, one of whom lists the following points on the pro-Russian agenda: NATO is aggressive, the EU is a bureaucratic, disintegrating structure, the United States is attempting to control the globe, Ukraine has lost its sovereignty and is a failed state – all of which fit the framework of narratives promoted by Russian state-controlled television.

These media circumstances severely undermine the resilience of Ukrainian society. According to Ms Chyzhova, "*the general public is still quite accepting of Russian and pro-Russian media influence due to existing informational and cultural patterns mostly in Eastern and Southern parts of Ukraine*". The most vulnerable societal groups are identified as "*Older generations, who are brought up on stereotypes of «the Russian-Ukrainian eternal brotherhood; young generation, who are constantly under a heavy informational influx of Russian video, music and informational content in popular social media platforms; low-paid workers from Eastern and Southern regions, who constitute the major target audience of Russian informational efforts*." While there are several prominent organizations in the civic sector, dedicating their efforts to countering disinformation, in the opinion of UkraineWorld analyst Vitalii Rybak, "*no single societal branch can come up with the ideal response to such propaganda narratives alone. Civil society and the government should work together to increase societal resilience to separatist and revisionist narratives in Ukraine*". Grassroots efforts appear to be insufficient to counterbalance the revisionist pro-Russian narratives in the Ukrainian media landscape, considering the strength of the local pro-Kremlin actors mentioned above. Substantial media-resources at their disposal and the ongoing unification of their efforts in the information field, where TV-channels linked to Viktor Medvechuk serve as a hub, cannot be countered by civic society alone.

TREND ANALYSIS OF MAINSTREAM AND FRINGE MEDIA DISCOURSES

The trend analysis focused on general dissemination patterns of all media and social media under review in terms of news peaks, top sources and drivers of discussions about nationalism.[32]

GENERAL TREND

The general trend of Ukrainian political discourse revolves heavily around the war with Russia and so, naturally, all the major peaks revolve around newsworthy events related to this war.

There were 5 major peaks for all sources during the selected timeframe. The first peak occurred during the week of 14 to 21 May 2018, and the leading source[33] comes[34] from znaj.ua – a "junk" website used to manipulate public opinion by paid-for materials in the interest of different political actors. However, in this specific case this article, published by znaj.ua, came from a credible source (sites like this often repost quality content that legitimizes their questionable items) and the article describes Ukrainian NGOs gathering evidence of Russian aggression for the International Criminal Court. Practically all other top news for this peak are about the legitimization of the war with Russia, since the majority of content is coming from pro-Russian website rusvesna.su (banned in Ukraine) and the rest is mostly from neutral websites like obozrevatel. com and nv.ua.
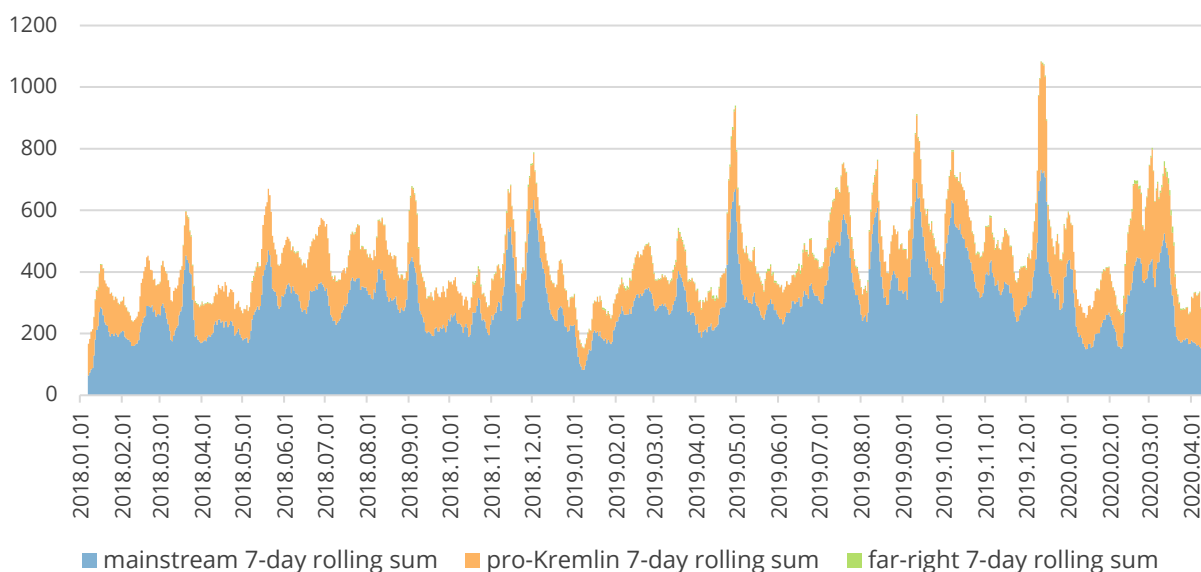
The number of revisionism-related website articles and Facebook posts in the Ukrainian media space between 1 January 2018 and 15 April 2020[96]

The second peak is dated 26 November to 3 December 2018, and the leading article here is an opinion piece[35] from obozrevatel.com, concerning the introduction of martial law in Ukraine after the Russian Navy kidnapped and jailed Ukrainian sailors in the Azov Sea, a decision that came under heavy criticism for not being introduced at the very beginning of the war. The majority of other top news are dedicated to concerns about the well-being of the captured sailors or martial law and come either from znaj.ua or rusvesna.su, or neutral obozrevatel.com, with reactions varying from supporting the sailors and blaming Russia for attacking them (neutral) to calling the incident an act of "Ukrainian provocation" (pro-Russian media).

The third peak falls between 22 and 29 April 2019, and it comes from the Facebook page of a politically neutral and balanced outlet, pravda.com.ua[36]. The topic concerns Putin's decree on "passportization" of the occupied territories (weaponized approach of the Kremlin, where Russian passports are

issued in massive amounts in order to claim "protection of Russian citizens" and justify aggression). During this peak, most top sources come either from Facebook pages of neutral outlets, such as pravda.com.ua, nv.ua and 24tv.ua, or from the znaj.ua website, and are closely related to the topic of the lead article.

The fourth peak is the largest one, occurring between 9 and 16 December 2019. The top story again comes from the Facebook page of politically neutral media obozrevatel.com[37]. This article is about Putin's demand to change the Ukrainian Constitution and add the "special status of Donbas" as well as introduce amnesty for all militia and the administration of the Kremlin's puppet republics. The majority of top news discuss this demand and also the meeting of the Normandy summit in Paris. Pro-Russian rusvesna.su and neutral pravda.com.ua are prevalent among top sources.

The last peak is dated 24 February to 2 March 2020, and the main article here comes from politically neutral nv.ua[38]. The main topic of this peak is Zelensky's decision to announce the 26th of February as a day of resistance[39] to the annexation of Crimea, Russia's negative reaction to this announcement, and a general discussion about recent history concerning occupation of the peninsula. The majority of top sources are again divided between pro-Russian rusvesna.su and a neutral outlet, this time nv.ua, who either support the president's decision (neutral) or promote the Kremlin's agenda of denouncing this event (pro-Russian).

The list of all top sources is crowned by 5 websites: Gordon.ua, 24tv.ua, obozrevatel.com, rusvesna.su and znaj.ua. The selection showcases a battle of discourses regarding issues of national identity and territorial revisionism. Said aggression, being of a hybrid nature, utilizes the division of the target society regarding issues of identity and statehood, and this divide is evident in the list. Two sources, 24tv.ua and obozrevatel, are neutral[40], with one being linked to mayor of Lviv Andriy Sadovy and having the necessary financial support for its functioning. Gordon.ua and rusvesna.su represent two sides of the pro-Russian discourse. The first is more moderate and cautious in promoting the Kremlin's messages which attract audiences questioning professional Ukrainian media and looking for "alternative points of view". The second one presents a radical pro-Moscow stance and was popularized by Kremlin-linked actors in the early times of the aggression, gaining traction and recognition from readers who did not need persuasion but looked for constant support of their anti-Ukrainian sentiments. Znaj.ua is a "junk" website, a category that does not adhere to standards of journalism and publishes paid-for materials, some being political advertising, some disinformation and some emotionally engaging: easily consumed materials, popular with the general public.

NARRATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE ARTICLE SAMPLES

Using the SentiOne platform we generated a representative sample of website articles of at least 500 articles in each country to reveal and categorise the main types of revisionist narratives present in our data of tens of thousands of articles.[41] The samples representative of all the articles' and sources' distribution within our timeframe between 1 January 2018 and 15 April 2020 allowed researchers to identify and categorise the main types of revisionist or territory-related narratives in each country without the need to read through thousands of articles. Narrative analysis of samples revealed the differences between fringe or mainstream interpretations of the same topics and the construction of country-specific narratives utilizing unique manipulation techniques and disinformation of the Kremlin's playbook.

The three groups of Ukrainian narratives – mainstream, far-right and pro-Kremlin – under examination seem to have little overlap. There are, however, certain links between the first two groups, in particular when it comes to exploring the activities of pro-Russian political forces in Ukraine. This may be explained by the fact that public far-right discourse is focused on the issue of countering Russian aggression, which fits well the nationalist framework – but is also a broader issue of national security and sovereignty, which attracts the attention of different segments of the population. When it comes to historical and territorial revisionism, which in this case are inseparable from war based on the falsified historical claims of the Kremlin to Ukrainian territories, the Russian Federation and attitude towards Russian leadership, they inevitably become focal points of cross-cutting discourses. Far-right and mainstream media evaluate Russian policies in a negative way, while pro-Russian outlets naturally view them as positive phenomena – as opposed to their perception of Ukraine. Key narratives on pro-Russian resources are in line with the Kremlin's rhetoric and are ultimately inaccurate, because they constitute an element of Moscow's media policy in the framework of a hybrid war.

MAINSTREAM NARRATIVES

Mainstream media and the general narratives they promote are not tailored to a specific target audience, as is the case with pro-Russian and far-right groups. Rather, they aim to inform the domestic population about the key developments in Ukraine. The main narratives that derive from a sample analysis of mainstream media in Ukraine (the order of listing does not indicate quantitative prevalence of one over another) are as follows:

1. Criticism of Russia's policies towards Ukraine.
2. Exploration of instability of the Kremlin's puppet republics "DNR/LNR" and occupied Crimea.
3. Commentary on Ukrainian politics and how select politicians interact with Russia.
4. Raising awareness about cases of Ukrainian political prisoners in Russia.
5. Coverage of the situation on the frontlines.

Firstly, it is important to note an overarching trend in mainstream media: it tries to maintain a pro-Ukrainian rhetoric when covering news relating to Russian aggression towards Ukraine. Names of the Kremlin's puppet republics are commonly placed in quotation marks and dubbed "so-called" to indicate societal consensus on their faux nature. So-called "authorities" of occupied Donbas are referred to as terrorists, militants, separatists etc., whereas the ones in Crimea are called occupation authorities. The use of this terminology, however, is not necessarily a sign of a pro-Ukrainian stance, and "junk websites" like Znaj.ua can use such rhetoric to appear like regular mainstream outlets. This legitimizes such websites even though they are often paid to write specific pieces for political forces of different people to promote their interests.

Narrative	Number of articles	Type of media	Percentage
Criticism of Russia's policies towards Ukraine	76	Mainstream	16%
Exploration of instability of the Kremlin's puppet republics "DNR/LNR" and occupied Crimea	40	Mainstream	8%
Commentary on Ukrainian politics and how select politicians interact with Russia	123	Mainstream, occasionally far-right	26%
Raising awareness about cases of Ukrainian political prisoners in Russia	34	Mainstream	7%
Coverage of the situation on the frontlines	45	Mainstream	9%
Ukraine is Russophobic and ungrateful to Russia	51	Pro-Kremlin	11%
Ukraine is used as a pawn by the United States to promote anti-Russian policies	37	Pro-Kremlin	8%
Ukraine attacks Donbas	46	Pro-Kremlin	10%
Donbas will not return to Ukraine	23	Pro-Kremlin	5%
Criticism of pro-Russian revanchism in Ukraine	1	Mainstream and far-right	0.2%
Existing Russian influence in Ukraine, from business ties to media	1	Far-right, occasionally mainstream	0.2%
Necessity to protect the "language law" and preserve the history of nationalist movements	3	Far-right	0.6%
Defence against the discrediting of the right movement and military veterans	1	Far-right	0.2%
Decisive role of the right movement in Revolution of Dignity and protecting Ukraine.	1	Far-right	0.2%
Altogether	482		100%

Table 1. The number and share of different narratives across mainstream, far-right and pro-Kremlin samples in Ukraine

As for the criticism of Russia's policies towards Ukraine, mainstream media for the most part remain critical of Russian actions towards Ukraine and often comment on Ukraine-related news from the internal Russian agenda, like the scandal[42] concerning Natalya Poklonskaya – a former prosecutor general in occupied Crimea and a current Russian MP – sentencing a person on separatism charges, which angered Russian politicians, but is describes as rather ironic by Ukrainian media.

Mainstream media also occasionally berate Ukrainian politicians for any perceived weaknesses when dealing with the Kremlin. This includes scepticism[43] at the idea of "peace at any cost", which can sometimes be associated[44] with President Zelensky and his party "Servant of the People". This topic was often discussed in anticipation of the summit in the Normandy Format, when media were speculating about whether or not the outcome[45] will be negative for Ukraine.

Additionally, the examination of pro-Russian revanchism in Ukraine is not uncommon, and this is a similarity between mainstream and far-right discourses, although mainstream media do, of course, provide factual analysis to support their claims, whereas far-right publications are designed to elicit emotions by appealing to the patriotism of their audience. Politicians such as Viktor Medvedchuk, his party members and media outlets belonging to him are systematically designated as "pro-Russian" and can become a subject of intense discussion in society, like in the case of an infamous attempt to arrange a teleconference[46] between Ukraine and Russia.

Covering the instability of life in puppet republics and debunking Russian disinformation about the desires of local populations is another important aspect in mainstream media. This can come in the form of reporting on the events in the "republics", like this piece[47] about an explosion during a so-called "congress of the communist party of DNR." Another article is a detailed exploration[48] of how the Donbas population was duped by Putin into supporting the creation of puppet republics and their current condition, or a report of the forced "passportization"[49] of the local population. Here is an article[50] from the junk-site Znaj.ua, where they examine numerous foreign outlets which write about life in occupied Donbas. It is important to

note here that "junk-sites" like this one would often post pro-Ukrainian articles from valid sources, which would allow them to legitimize their more questionable content, such as negative paid campaigns against targeted politicians or political parties.

Ukrainian political prisoners in Russia are frequently discussed and were an especially hot topic when president Zelensky was organizing prisoner exchanges[51]. This was a controversial[52] move, since the Ukrainian side managed to free some of the more famous Kremlin prisoners like Oleg Sentsov and the Ukrainian sailors captured during the act of Russian aggression in Azov sea, but had to give up Volodymyr Tsemakh – a key witness the in MH17 process, which could have potentially complicated the ongoing trial.

The situation on the frontlines and the number of casualties is another closely followed topic. Interestingly, mainstream media report not only on the casualties of the Armed Forces of Ukraine (AFU), but occasionally also comment[53] on the losses on the side of so-called "republics", especially when casualties were the results of violations of ceasefire. The coverage of the latter is factual and they are referred to as terrorists or militants.

FAR-RIGHT NARRATIVES

The sample analysis of articles in a far-right category allows for the establishment of 5 key narratives (the order does not indicate quantitative prevalence of one over another). Among the top sources we can find far-right organizations such as "Pravy Sector", "Bily Molot", "National Corps" and their media, formulating the following narratives:

1. Criticism of pro-Russian revanchism in Ukraine.
2. Emphasizing existing Russian influence in Ukraine, from business ties to media.
3. Necessity to protect the "language law" and preserve the history of the nationalist movement.
4. Defence against the discrediting of the right movement and military veterans.
5. The decisive role of the right movement in the Revolution of Dignity and protecting Ukraine.

There are, however, several important observations to make regarding the identification of far-right narratives and the broader context in which they are developed. First, given the relatively small size of the sample, it is recommended not to extrapolate these narratives regarding the overall or general far-right discourse(s) in Ukraine. The recommendation is further underlined by the fact that randomly selected articles vary greatly in their focus, from identifying[54] existing business activities of Russian oligarchs in Ukraine to offering congratulations[55] on the national Unity Day.

Second, the separation and concealment of different discourses in far-right movements is of special importance here, as a significant part of communication, which could have altered the narratives identified, is taking place in closed Facebook groups

and in messaging applications such Viber and Telegram, which are both outside of the scope of this research and difficult to gain access to. Publicly available information on the resources analyzed is focused on Russian aggression and drifts closer to neutral media, mostly (but not always) avoiding the rhetoric typically attributed to the far-right, such as the promotion of traditional values, anti-immigration sentiments, sexism, homophobia etc. A notable exception is an interview[56] with Vyacheslav Horin, leader of the far-right "Bily Molot" organization, where the interviewer speculates that "*lobbying for liberal values and the propaganda of tolerance or, holding LGBT-parades*" contributes to "*ideological conflict in society*". Additionally, Horin expresses soft sexism, stating that "*a true Ukrainian woman would overcome everything for her warrior. Today, women are tasked with a great mission to safeguard their loved ones, while we [are tasked with] – protecting our land and our women*".

Another important observation deals with accuracies and inaccuracies of the established narratives. Ukrainian civil society largely agrees that there is a growing threat of pro-Russian revanchism[57] in Ukraine and that this threat undermines Ukrainian national security. There is also no doubt that Russian business groups still hold sufficient influence in Ukraine, and pro-Russian share in Ukrainian media landscape is significant. The "language law," much demonized by Russian and pro-Russian media,[58] although not without shortcomings, is not discriminatory against minorities, but is aimed at supporting the Ukrainian language in public schools and curriculums. Stepping back from it would indeed mean giving into the pressure coming from the Kremlin. The criminal case regarding the murder of journalist

Pavlo Sheremet[59] is one of the most public, closely followed and important criminal cases in Ukraine at the moment. In the investigation, 5 suspects have been identified, all of whom are linked to Joint Forces Operations against Russian aggression in the East in 2019 – 2 are Ukrainian veterans, 1 is a volunteer, 1 is a military doctor and 1 is a sergeant at JFO.[60] The case has achieved a high-profile and become quite contradictory, as there is widespread belief that the suspects are innocent, accompanied by a public campaign for their release; there is also a fear that the case is, indeed, aimed at discrediting veterans. It should be noted, however, that veterans and volunteers should not be linked to far-right movements in Ukraine, which repeatedly attempt to overplay its role in protecting Ukraine against Russian aggression.

This overstated role of far-right movements in countering Russian aggression is, perhaps, a key inaccuracy in identified and publicly promoted narratives – regarding, specifically, narrative five about the decisive role the right movement played in the Revolution of Dignity and protecting Ukraine. The Revolution of Dignity united many different social groups, often with conflicting views, such as far-right and pro-human-rights groups. The same goes for the participants of the JFO and other forces trying to enhance national security – this is not a homogenous community, and the right movement does not play decisive role here. Far-right groups often try to monopolize the discourse of war and emphasize their role in the volunteer movement. The movement, however, involved civic activists with different backgrounds, students, the LGBT+ community and members of Ukrainian civil society in general.

PRO-KREMLIN NARRATIVES

Analysis of the sample of pro-Kremlin media demonstrates 4 meta[61]-narratives (the order does not indicate quantitative prevalence of one over another). They mostly target Russian-speaking populations with an actively pro-Russian position; however, some sources promote these narratives in a more subtle way, to broaden the target audience. These include:

1. Ukraine is Russophobic and ungrateful to Russia.

2. Ukraine is used as pawn by the United States to promote anti-Russian policy.
3. Ukraine attacks Donbas.
4. Donbas will not return to Ukraine.

In addition to these overarching narratives, there are several recurring topics which pro-Kremlin fringe media tend to focus on, particularly the issue of water supply in Crimea (which the Kremlin presses Ukraine to reinstate), the discussion of the Minsk agreements and comparisons between Poroshenko

and Zelensky (changing from more to less favourable perception of Zelensky).

Alleged Russophobia and using Ukraine as a political tool to undermine Russia (N1 and N2) are of particular importance, and have been among the predominant narratives on Kremlin-controlled Russian TV as well. Overall, the narratives tend to overlap and amplify each other, as exemplified[62] here: "*Two last presidents of Ukraine, with all the differences in their approaches and principles of governance, exemplify the essence of Ukrainian state and society. There could be no other presidents in Ukraine. Poroshenko and Zelensky, regardless of what guided them, continued on the highway that was laid out with support of the West back in 1991 – building an anti-Russia*". The source – Alternatio.org – belongs to the first out of two groups pro-Kremlin media may be categorized in: openly supporting the Kremlin's rhetoric (this category is usually banned by the Ukrainian government, but still easily accessible with VPN and via a number of other resources, such as Telegram, where websites have their own channels) and ones adopting a softer tone and/or spreading disinformation in other ways.

Two groups – with a harder and softer pro-Russian stance – are sometimes at odds with each other. For example, Rusvesna, an openly pro-Russian source,[63] alleged that journalist Dmytrii Gordon is "a Kyiv propagandist", while Gordon himself – knowingly or not – often serves, in a much more subtle way, Russian interests in the Ukrainian media landscape, mostly through giving agency to Russian actors such as the terrorist[64] Igor Girkin[65]. He has recently given a number of controversial interviews with the former so-called "Prosecutor General" of the occupied Crimea, Natalia Poklonskaya, and Girkin himself, a move which was met with much criticism by the Ukrainian media community not only for giv-

ing them access to the Ukrainian audience, but also for the non-challenging attitude he adopted during the interviews. Such a stand-off between two groups of pro-Russian media is important, as it creates an artificial sense of trust towards the sources of softer propaganda and facilitates its spread.

The narrative of Ukraine-alleged attacks[66] on Donbas is also, expectedly, in line with narratives promoted by Russian TV: "*In addition to the increasing intensity of provocative shelling of our republic's territory before the meeting of the contact group in Minsk, the criminal leadership of Ukraine, with a goal of imposing political pressure, started implementing Zelensky's electoral promise to declare an information war on Donbas.*" Statements[67] such as "*AFU attempts to hide the truth about the actual situation death squads at Donbas are in*" also fit this framework, as Russian propaganda has traditionally portrayed Ukrainian military as aggressive and suffering from severe losses.

A significant part of the messaging on the openly pro-Kremlin sources is aimed at promoting the visibility of political autonomy of the Kremlin's puppet republics. While they are portrayed as distinctly pro-Russian and having inseparable ties with Russia ("*Residents of DNR actively compile documents for receiving Russian citizenship[68]*"), attention is also focused on the activities of local "authorities", always pictured in a positive light. For example:[69] "DNR Ministry of energy and coal continues to implement social guarantees for miners and pensioners of the field," claimed one pro-Kremlin piece. One of the key messages widely used to highlight distancing between Donbas and Ukraine was an interview with the former Putin aide responsible for the Kremlin's policy towards Ukraine Vladislav Surkov, where he "*explained[70], why Donbas will not return to the current Ukraine*".

NETWORK ANALYSIS OF FRINGE WEBSITES

Big data researchers created a network of pro-Kremlin and third-party websites based on the hyperlinks embedded into articles published on pro-Kremlin media in each country.[71] We decided to use hyperlinks as building blocks of our networks, since links either direct interested audiences to other relevant pro-Kremlin media, or they serve as references to third-party sources to authenticate their articles. Consequently, the examination of networks revealed two aspects of pro-Kremlin communication: the wider dissemination networks of pro-Kremlin media used to spread revisionist messages and link other pro-Kremlin sources; and the prerequisites of impactful message construction. Researchers analysed three types of networks in their respective countries. A "complete network," with all the media, to understand all the media's interconnectedness and their main dissemination/reference strategies.

A "clean network" of websites were used to analyse only the most important nodes of the network and connections between media disseminating revisionist narratives.[72] Finally, a network comprised of only our initial pro-Kremlin websites revealed the interconnectedness of the core pro-Kremlin media used throughout this research, examining if they formed a strong bond in the dissemination process of revisionist narratives.

In the Ukrainian network under review, the diversified network of pro-Kremlin media in Ukraine – members of which employ different tactics of legitimization and amplification of corresponding messages – shows the massive effort the Kremlin puts into promoting their main narratives in Ukraine with the aim to undermine the government and mainstream media.
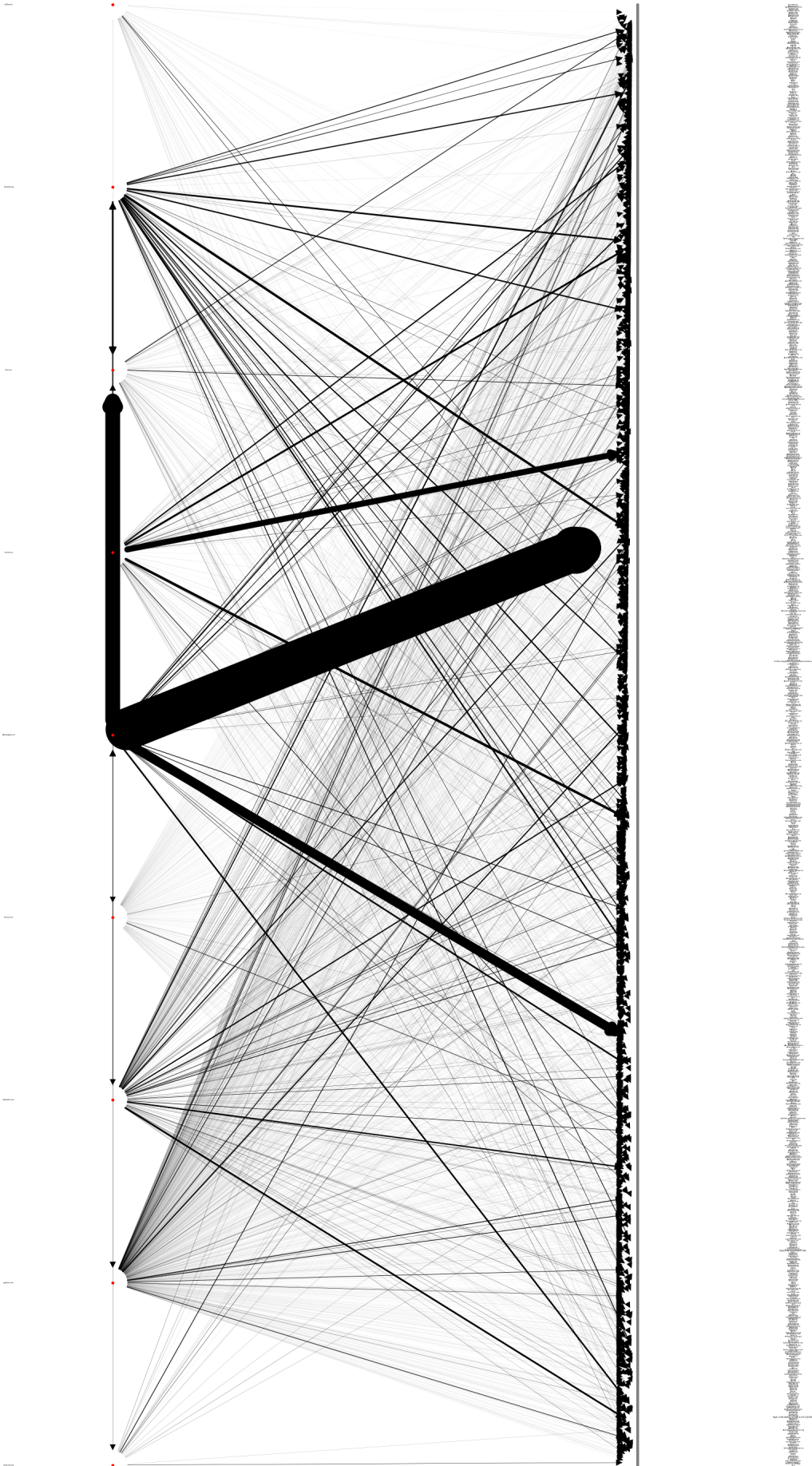
THE COMPLETE UKRAINIAN NETWORK

Analysis of the complete network revealed an interesting difference of the pro-Kremlin media's approach to distributing and reinforcing its content.

Some are blatantly pro-Russian, while others pose as legitimate sources with professional journalists only to be spreading toned-down pro-Kremlin messages. Gordon.ua is the site with the largest number – 7360 – of relations (a metric used to establish the significance in the network). It positions itself as a mainstream media outlet but is known to frequently promote pro-Kremlin narratives. It is oriented towards widely disseminating their own materials through social networks, and thus has the biggest connections to Facebook, Twitter and Youtube platforms. Dubbed the official Facebook page of Dmitriy Gordon – founder and head of the titular outlet, who claims to be a professional journalist –, it has 315,932 followers[73] and the official (albeit unverified by Facebook) page of the outlet has 138,819 followers[74]. This self-referential activity reveals not only the click-bait nature of the outlet, but also the fact Gordon.ua has a much better level of legitimacy as a "mainstream" media outlet than the rest of the pro-Kremlin media.

Unsurprisingly, a common trait across all pro-Kremlin media, such as the aforementioned Gordon.ua, Rusvesna.su and Alternatio.org, was using Russian news agencies such as TASS, RIA Novosti and RBC for reference. However, Gordon.ua is an outlier within the pro-Kremlin media in that it also uses recognized Ukrainian and international media as well as Ukrainian governmental sites to support its claims. This tactic is similar to the way "junk-sites" – portals that often share questionable content, which targets specific politicians or political forces, depending on the will of those who paid for such an information attack – try to legitimize themselves. Using both Russian and Ukrainian/international sources creates an illusion of objective journalism, which is an image Gordon does his best to promote.

Another noteworthy finding was that the outlet with the second highest number of relations – Rusvesna.su – had the strongest connection to pravoslavie.ru – a site connected to the Russian Orthodox church. This falls in line with the general process of merging the church and state that can be observed in Russia and the emphasis of Putin's regime on so-called

The complete network of Ukrainian pro-Kremlin websites and third-party sites

"traditional values" derived partially from Orthodox Christianity. It is important to note that the Russian Orthodox Church is used to promote pro-Kremlin narratives regarding the Russian war in Ukraine as well.

THE CLEAN NETWORK

The greatest number of connections in the clean network can be attributed to, unsurprisingly, Gordon.ua, which paints a picture of supposed objectiveness in their materials – as seen on the graph below.

It has, however, the most significant connections to Russian news agencies TASS and Interfax, the Russian governmental site Kremlin.ru, thus operating as an "echo-chamber" for Russian narratives. On the other hand, it also relies on Radio Svoboda and its affiliated portal with news about Crimea, which is considered to be a reliable source as a part of the Radio Free Europe network.

A similar tactic of legitimizing itself through references to credible Ukrainian sources is employed by a smaller pro-Kremlin outlet, From-ua. com. Interestingly, Grodon.ua and From-ua.com, as well as Ua24ua.net (the domain name resembles 24tv.ua – a mainstream outlet) use the denominator "ua" to hide their pro-Kremlin nature, unlike more starkly pro-Russian Ukraina.ru and Rusvesna.su.

Speaking of which, Rusvesna.su is connected only to other similar outlets that are banned in Ukraine and to Russian news agencies, whereas Ua24ua.net and Antifashist.com are connected predominantly to Facebook, where they interact with their audiences. Thus, these pages try to circumvent the Ukrainian media space either through their (banned) websites or via social media to reach the target audience in Ukraine.

In terms on content, the aforementioned sites can be divided into roughly 2 major categories: openly pro-Russian sites (which are banned in Ukraine) and plat-

forms with a general pro-Russian agenda, but which try to legitimize themselves as mainstream media. While all of them will cover the news through the angle of Kremlin narratives about Ukraine and the world, these categories differ in rhetoric and the way they disseminate Putin's agenda.

The former, which include Ukraina.ru, Rusvesna.su and Alternatio.org, would describe Russian military forces in Donbas as local freedom fighters and Russian aggression as civil war in Ukraine, and they
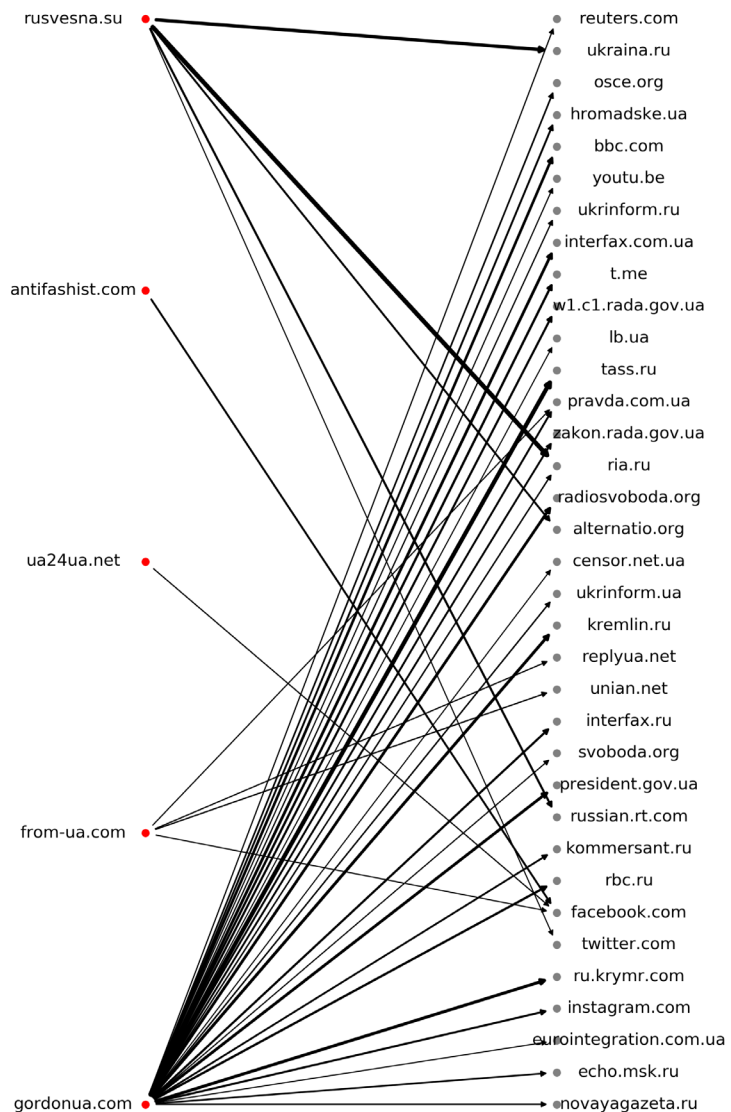
The clean network of Ukrainian pro-Kremlin websites and third-party sites

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would promote aggressive propaganda towards the Ukrainian government and Western countries that can be typically observed on Kremlin-backed television and press in Russia. The latter category, which includes Gordon.ua, Strana.ua, Vesti.ua etc. take a more subtle approach both with rhetoric and messaging in order to mimic mainstream media.

THE NETWORK OF PRO-KREMLIN PAGES

Our analysis uncovered a clearly defined, interconnected network of pro-Kremlin outlets in Ukraine, which shows that dissemination of pro-Kremlin messages is a systemic and planned strategy, as seen on the graph below.
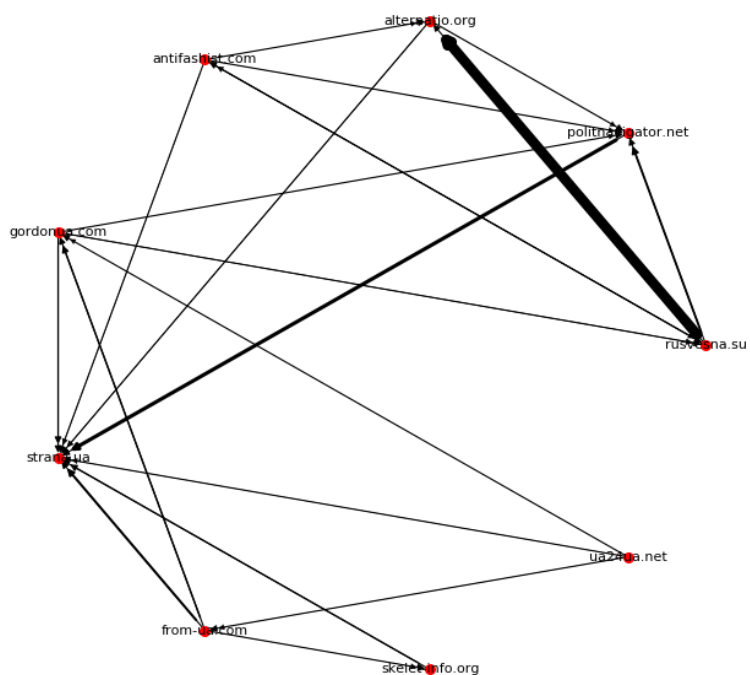
The strongest connection exists between the sites Rusvesna.su and Alternatio.org, both of which are banned in Ukraine. This shows how these media – which we can classify as being the most fringe ones within the category (since not all of the selected media are banned) – amplify one another through creating a loop of confirming similar messaging. These sites, administrated from Russia, were banned by the Ukrainian government as such that threaten national security due to their anti-Ukrainian nature. They are connected by their similarity in rhetoric and the blunt dissemination of Kremlin narratives. For example, this article[75] from Rusvesna.su completely parrots statements from Russian federal television about "Nazis in charge of Ukraine" and "Ukraine is a failed state".

Another important finding is the absolute connectedness of all outlets to Strana.ua, arguably one of the top and most-recognized pages among pro-Russian websites (with over 30 million views in May alone[76]). This outlet is a great example of the way how such media are able to legitimize themselves as "mainstream," given enough resources and a subtlety in conveying Kremlin narratives. The site's relative "credibility" serves as a way to reinforce the narratives of other media that cite it.

As it is clear from the graph, the massive information campaign against Ukraine is coordinated and structured in nature. While there was a presence of Kremlin discourse in the Ukrainian media landscape all throughout Ukrainian independence, the boom of appearance

of pro-Kremlin fringe media started in 2014, after the Russian military invasion and the occupation of Ukrainian territories. Select media, like Strana.ua, even managed to change their reputation to that of a "mainstream" outlet during that time. While there is a different tone and rhetoric depending on the outlet, most of the articles on pro-Kremlin media are concerned with Ukrainian politics, relations with Russia and the situation in the occupied territories.

A good example of pushing the same narrative regarding Russian military intervention and aspirations towards Ukrainian territories across different media comes from discussions of the Normandy Format summit. While the tone of such coverage might be different, ranging from staunchly anti-Ukrainian on the banned outlets[77, 78] to seemingly neutral[79, 80], there is a common factor in these articles of so-called "forced appeasement" (when reaching peace with the aggressor at all costs is presented as an inevitability) and the erasure of the Kremlin's role as said aggressor from the discourse.

The Ukrainian network of pro-Kremlin websites

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS OF FRINGE FACEBOOK PAGES

To reveal successful dissemination strategies on social media (Facebook), we conducted a comparison of top-performing fringe Facebook pages' and posts' statistical data.[81] Our analysis focused on far-right and pro-Kremlin pages only, because these are the main venues of pro-Kremlin or extremist, revisionist communication in most of the countries under review. Based on the analysis of the 5 top-performing far-right and 5 top-performing pro-Kremlin pages in terms of the number of average reactions per post, we identified the conditions for the successful dissemination of revisionist narratives and historical grievances in each country's social media. A comparison of top-performing fringe posts in terms of the total number of interactions was conducted to reveal why certain chauvinistic, revisionist or pro-Kremlin messages are more viral than others. The comparison of viral posts was extended to "irrelevant" or non-relevant posts as well, to see whether revisionist posts performed better or worse than any other posts found on the fringe pages.

Analysis of the Facebook pages focused on fringe far-right and pro-Kremlin sources – the latter, how-ever, cannot definitely be identified as Ukrainian, since some of them (like Ukraina.ru) are linked to media allegedly sponsored by the Russian government. Both groups are heavily focused on issues related to territorial revisionism in regard to Crimea and Eastern Ukraine. However, as expected, they approach it from opposing points of view: while far-right sources share the predominant position that these territories are integral parts of Ukraine (which also makes them more acceptable in the mainstream information field), pro-Kremlin sources question this stance. Our analysis briefly explores similarities and differences between the performance of the two groups and how they are linked to the key narratives on far-right and pro-Kremlin outlets. In both cases, Facebook is not the primary channel of communication – as stated previously, far-right groups often adapt their discourse on public sources and have transferred a significant part of their communication to closed groups and messengers; meanwhile, pro-Kremlin media typically prefer websites and use Facebook as a supplementary means to reach an audience that does not have access to websites banned in Ukraine[82].

PERFORMANCE OF FACEBOOK PAGES

The best-performing Facebook pages, based on the number of subscribers, in the far-right group include:

- *Pravyy Sektor* (Right Sector) with 69,400+ subscribers – arguably the most well-known nationalist organization turned party in Ukraine.
- *Tradytsiya I Poryadok* (Tradition and Order) – website of a self-defined conservative movement that aims to form a party with a traditionalist agenda.
- *Molodizhnyi Natsionalistychnyi Kongress* (Youth Nationalist Congress) – website of an organization targeting youth to promote Ukrainian nationalism.
- *VGO "Sokil"* (All-Ukrainian GO "Falcon") – website of a sports and paramilitary organization based on "the ideology of Ukrainian nationalism".

- *Nevidomyy Patriot* (Unknown Patriot) – website of the NGO of the same name focused on tracking Russian aggression and criticizing the current Ukrainian government.

The picture is slightly different when average interaction numbers with the posts are analysed. In this category, the leaders are *Pravyy Sektor* (Right Sector), *Nevidomyy Patriot* (Unknown Patriot) and *Tradytsiya I Poryadok* (Tradition and Order). The difference in the number of subscribers and engagement numbers[83] can be attributed to the fact that these groups are more focused on engaging members in direct action (protests, marches etc.)

A noteworthy characteristic is that all these pages are linked to already recognized organizations and not to mostly unknown grass-roots initiatives or volunteer groups, which allows them to formal-

ize their presence on social media and dedicate more resources to improving their performance. The substantial gap in terms of the amount of subscribers between "Right Sector" and other pages is explained by the fact that RS receives the most publicity due to Russian propaganda back in 2014 building a myth about RS as an aggressive Ukrainian far-right movement ready to attack the Russian-speaking population in Crimea and South-Eastern Ukraine. The Russian disinformation campaign then attracted many readers who did not necessarily share far-right views but were looking for a well-known organization with a focus on countering Russian influence.

As for fringe pro-Kremlin Facebook pages, the top-ranking ones are:

- *Strana.ua – Novosti Ukrainy* (Strana.ua – News from Ukraine) –website of the arguably most well-known online media outlet (due to successful efforts legitimizing itself as mainstream) in the pro-Kremlin segment, Strana.ua, with 66,400+ subscribers.
- *Ukraina.ru* – website linked to another key resource promoting Kremlin narratives, with the website itself blocked in Ukraine.
- *Golos Pravdy* (Voice of Truth) – website of the outlet "Golos Pravdy", self-defined as opposition to the Ukrainian government
- *Antifashist* – website of a self-defined "information agency" promoting anti-Ukrainian messaging, with the website also blocked in Ukraine.

Again, the leading page enjoys significantly more subscribers than the others. This may be explained by the fact that unlike many other pro-Russian resources, Strana.ua is not blocked in Ukraine. The original website has close to 50 million visits each month (according to SimilarWeb) with visitors from both Ukraine and Russia, and it may be viewed as a pro-Kremlin news hub, with its visibility attracting subscribers to the Facebook page.

When it comes to average interactions per post, the leaders are *Golos Pravdy* (Voice of Truth) and *Antifashist*. Interestingly, resources like Ukraina.ru and Antifashist use Facebook as an alternative means to reach Ukrainian audiences despite their websites being blocked – they also use YouTube and Telegram channels for the same purpose.

A comparison of far-right and pro-Kremlin Facebook pages allows us to establish that a key prerequisite to success is the publicity gained through the Revolution and subsequent opinion-forming about the war. They also mobilize their target audience through appealing to threats – far-right pages focus on Russian aggression, while pro-Kremlin ones exploit the fears established by Russian propaganda, such as a fear of Russian speakers' suppression and the narrative related to rising fascism in Ukraine. On the other hand, far-right pages are mostly linked to organizations, while pro-Kremlin ones pose as "news outlets"; also, far-right pages post in Ukrainian while pro-Kremlin in Russian.

PERFORMANCE OF VIRAL POSTS

A comparison of the online performance of both "relevant" and "irrelevant" messages shows that relevant posts trigger more reactions (174.9 on average) than irrelevant ones (46.2 on average) – as seen in the table below.

This particularly affects the number of shares (127 vs. 17.3 on average). The most viral posts in both segments usually deal with issues of ongoing Russian hybrid aggression in Ukraine, which is a pressing issue and naturally attracts more attention from the audience than other topics. Far-right groups, espe-

	Average Number of Reactions	Average Number of Comments	Average Number of Shares	Numbers of Documents
Irrelevant posts	46.2	9.5	17.3	28,589
Relevant posts	174.9	18.3	127.0	161
Total	47.0	9.5	17.9	28,750

Table 2. The average number of total reactions, comments or shares produced by revisionism-related or unrelated Facebook posts found on far-right or pro-Kremlin pages in Ukraine

cially the best-performing Right Sector, focus on the issue of Russian revanchism in Ukraine – one of the predominant narratives on their websites as well – which explains their popularity, because problems related to the Orthodox Church of Ukraine[84] and occupied territories interest a wide array of people, not only those with nationalist views. Two of the top-performing posts, based on the total number of shares, are people-focused: a story[85] about an attack on a student who protested against a monument to controversial Soviet military commander Vatutin in Kyiv 2 years ago, and an interview[86] with a 74-year old veteran who fought in the battle for Donetsk airport. In the first case, a widely discussed issue of decommunization encouraged active reactions (including 12,000 shares) combined with the emotional story of an attack and an unfair sentence (7 years in prison for vandalizing a statue) for the victim of the attack itself.[87] In the second case, the atypical age of the solider and his involvement in one of the most well-known battles at the early stages of the war were also factors which contributed to high performance. The fact that he bravely defended his country at such an advanced age creates an emotional backdrop for glorifying volunteers enlisting to fight on the Ukrainian side.

Pro-Kremlin pages focus on discrediting[88] veterans, alleged Russophobia[89] and fascism in Ukraine as well as the so-called "external governance"[90] on behalf of the United States that, according to Russian and subsequently pro-Russian sources, incited "civil war" in Ukraine. Posts by "Golos Pravdy" often combine several narratives in one publication, which also works well for attracting a wider audience. Their best-performing post, based on the total number of shares, deals with a slightly different issue – a news announcement[91] that the occupying authorities in Donetsk and Luhansk closed the borders and refused to let the locals seeking treatment leave for the Russian Federation due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The popularity of the post is explained, first and foremost, by the sheer popularity of Strana.ua itself, as well as by the pressing issue of the coronavirus and related restrictions. Another notable example of Kremlin narratives that are disseminated is "Ukraine is a failed state", which is reflected in this article[92] that states people in occupied Crimea are scared to "go back to Ukraine".

SOCIETAL RESILIENCE

The capacity for resilience to pro-Kremlin disinformation efforts among the general public in Ukraine is currently insufficient. This stems largely from two main factors: low levels of media literacy and digital security in society, and significant infiltration of the pro-Kremlin agenda in the Ukrainian media landscape. Due to the low level of media literacy in Ukraine, the general public is overall vulnerable to information operations. Fringe far-right or far-left groups are even more vulnerable to such influence and, moreover, are often used as instruments of active measures to promote particular narratives and conspiracy theories.

The Ukrainian population in the South-Eastern regions of Ukraine – in particular, the majority of respondents from Donbas – claimed they do not trust Ukrainian television[93] and Propaganda effectiveness Index is the highest (50) in Donetsk oblast, compared to 5 in Volyn oblast.[94] This makes the target population highly vulnerable to Russian disinformation and propaganda. Russian-speakers are generally more susceptible to Russian disinformation than Ukrainian-speakers[95]. Followers of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (the Moscow Patriarchate) are the most vulnerable among the notable religious groups.

Since Ukraine is in the centre of Russian hybrid aggression, there is a significant and multifaceted effort to push back pro-Kremlin influence in the country. The Ministry of Information Policy of Ukraine which existed from 2014 to 2019 (later merged with Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Youth and Sports) dealt with information attacks on the governmental level. The new Ministry of Culture has similar objectives regarding combating disinformation.

As for civil society, the list of Ukrainian non-governmental organizations which directly combat disinformation, includes but is not limited to the following: Ukraine Crisis Media Center, StopFake, Euromaidan Press, Detector Media, Texty, Informnapalm, Internews Ukraine, Center for defence reforms etc. These NGOs excel particularly in promoting media literacy, debunking fakes and raising awareness of Russian hybrid operations worldwide.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Countering revisionist narratives that are closely linked to the pro-Russian disinformation eco-system in Ukraine can only be effective with the cooperation of civil society and the government, which is faced with a responsibility to implement a number of broader systemic reforms concerning the spread of fake news and disinformation. Given the role of oligarchic media in Ukraine and their destructive influence, it is essential to have a transparent, independent media market in the country. In such a situation, disinformation, including issues of Russian aggression and historical/territorial revisionism inseparably linked to it, would not be publicly broadcast and amplified by high-ranking TV-channels and other media outlets in the best interest of a given politician. This, however, is a strategic task that many Ukrainian governments, including the current one, have been struggling with.

In a middle- and short-term perspective, the government should increase the transparency and effectiveness of its communication on the relevant issues. Sitting President Volodymyr Zelensky and his entourage consistently use vague and ambiguous wording on the issues of Russian aggression, often neglecting to recognize it as such and do not adhere to the basic principle of "naming and shaming" the actors responsible for spreading disinformation in Ukraine. It is essential that bodies of authority are timely and clear in their communication to avoid the creation of an information vacuum, which is filled with disinformation. They should also more actively involve the expert community in the fight against disinformation, engaging its representatives in supervisory boards and/or other advisory bodies – not only at the level of the central government. This issue can be solved be reviving the Ministry of Information Policy as a separate entity, but with increased oversight responsibilities. It has been highlighted by the interviewees that South-Eastern regions of Ukraine are particularly vulnerable to malign information influence, and that members of civil society who have substantial experience and are aware of specific regional threats should have a voice on the ground.

Nevertheless, it is worth expanding the focus of analysis and paying attention not only to the issues directly linked to Russian historical and territorial revisionism in the most heavily targeted regions. Experience shows that Central and, especially, Western Ukraine have their hotspots of potential tensions – which are unlikely to turn into a large-scale conflict, but could substantially sour relations between Kyiv and its European partners. The Kremlin has been spotted behind attempts to target the bilateral relationship between Ukraine and Poland as well as Hungary and Romania, using historical and territorial issues. These risk zones differ significantly in their economic, societal and historical context from South-Eastern Ukraine, and they should be monitored and evaluated carefully by the professional community whose advisory contributions to the government would be quite necessary.

ENDNOTES

1   'The Russian Connection, The Spread of pro-Russian Policies on the European Far Right', Political Capital, 14 March 2014, http://www.riskandforecast.com/useruploads/files/pc_flash_report_russian_connection.pdf.

2   Reid Standish, 'Hacked: Putin Aide's Emails Detail Alleged Plot to Destabilize Ukraine', Foreign Policy (blog), accessed 9 October 2020, https://foreignpolicy.com/2016/10/25/hacked-putin-aides-emails-detail-alleged-plot-to-destabilize-kiev-surkov-ukraine-leaks/.

3   'Kiszivárgott Iratok: A Fidesz És a Jobbik Segítségével Akarta Megszállni Kárpátalját Putyin?', Kettős Mérce, accessed 10 August 2020, http://kettosmerce.blog.hu/2016/10/26/a_fidesz_es_a_jobbik_segitsegevel_akarta_megszallni_karpataljat_putyin.

4   Péter Krekó, Lóránt Győri, Edit Zgut, 'From Russia with Hate', Political Capital, 28 April 2017, http://www.politicalcapital.hu/pc-admin/source/documents/PC_NED_summary_analysis_EN_20170428.pdf.

5   Active measures of the Kremlin combine intelligence operations with actions of local media, political actors and NGOs to directly influence the political process in a given country. For more please see: Steve Abrams, "Beyond Propaganda: Soviet Active Measures in Putin's Russia," 2016, https://www.jstor.org/stable/26326426?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents

6   'Romania 100', Uncover Romania (blog), accessed 14 September 2020, https://www.uncover-romania.com/romania-100/.

7   'A nemzeti összetartozás évének nyilvánította 2020-at az Országgyűlés', https://www.origo.hu/, accessed 14 September 2020, https://www.origo.hu/itthon/20190618-nemzeti-osszetartozas-eve-orszaggyules.html.

8   'SentiOne Conversational AI Platform', SentiOne, accessed 4 August 2020, https://sentione.com.

9   The Hungarian research team also employed a "big data" approach to identify relevant clusters or categories of narratives through an automated, algorithm-guided textual analysis of all the "relevant" articles present on all mainstream, and fringe media under review. Automated, quantitative content-analysis supplemented the qualitative identification and categorisation of narratives.

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11   "Ставлення населення до ЗМІ та споживання різних типів медіа у 2019 році. Результати соціологічного опитування." Accessed August 10, 2020. https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-presshall/2800872-stavlenna-naselenna-do-zmi-ta-spozivanna-riznih-tipiv-media-u-2019-roci-rezultati-sociologicnogo-opituvanna.html.

12   "'Тєлєга' для Слуги. Як Телеграм-канали, що ймовірно ведуться з Росії, впливають на роботу Ради." Accessed August 10, 2020. https://texty.org.ua/articles/101438/tyelyeha-dlya-sluhy-yak-telehram-kanaly-sho-jmovirno-vedutsya-z-rosiyi-vplyvayut-na-robotu-rady/.

13   Messenger app, popular mostly in CIS countries

14   "Патріотизм, мова та зовнішньополітичні пріоритети – громадська думка України." Accessed August 8, 2020. https://dif.org.ua/article/%20patriotyzm_mova%20%20.

15   "Прес-Релізи Та Звіти - Геополітичні Орієнтації Жителів України: Лютий 2019." Accessed August 8, 2020. http://kiis.com.ua/?lang=ukr&cat=reports&id=827&page=1.

16   "Шляхи досягнення миру на Донбасі: суспільні настрої, очікування, перестороги – загальнонаціональне опитування." Accessed August 10, 2020. https://dif.org.ua/article/shlyakhi-dosyagnennya-miru-na-donbasi-suspilni-nastroi-ochikuvannya-perestorogi-zagalnonatsionalne-opituvannya.

17   Ukraine ranks 96th out of 180 countries with a score of 32.25 according to the 2020 World Press Freedom Index of Reporters Without Borders: https://rsf.org/en/ranking

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19   "Делегация Из Словакии: Крым Всегда Был Русским : Политика Newsland – Комментарии, Дискуссии и Обсуждения Новости." Accessed August 8, 2020. https://newsland.com/user/4297828236/content/delegatsiia-iz-slovakii-krym-vsegda-byl-russkim/6428779.

20   "Триумф и Трагедия Донбасса." Accessed August 8, 2020. http://alternatio.org/articles/articles/item/57455-triumf-i-tragediya-donbassa.

21   Апухтин, Юрий. "Кто мы: безродные «украинцы» или русские?" Альтернатива. Accessed August 8, 2020. http://alternatio.org/articles/item/57070-.

22   SimilarWeb. "Pravda.Com.Ua Traffic Statistics." Accessed August 9, 2020. http://similarweb.com/website/pravda.com.ua/.

23   Мінаков, Олексій. "(Column) NewsOne і «112» — не опозиційні телеканали, а пропагандистські." detector.media, August 22, 2018. https://detector.media/infospace/article/140355/2018-08-22-newsone-i-112-ne-opozitsini-telekanali-a-propagandistski/.

24   Українська правда. "Із 'медведчуківського' ZIKу масово звільняються топ-менеджери й журналісти." Accessed August 9, 2020. http://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2019/06/14/7218206/.

25   Dmytro Kuleba, "War for Reality", Книголав, 2017, p.310

26   Rusi.org. SurkovLeaks report. Accessed July 13, 2020. https://rusi.org/sites/default/files/201907_op_surkov_leaks_web_final.pdf

27　"РосЗМІ: Проект '"Новоросія"' Офіційно Закрили, Царьов Не Знадобився | Українська Правда." Accessed August 9, 2020. https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2015/05/20/7068502/.

28　Chatham House. Agents of Russian world. Accessed 13, 2020. https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/publications/research/2016-04-14-agents-russian-world-lutsevych.pdf

29　InformNapalm.org (English). "Professional Russian Army in Ukraine. Database and Visualisation." Accessed August 9, 2020. https://informnapalm.org/en/professional-russian-army-in-ukraine-database-and-visualisation/.

30　"Meet the Night Wolves, Russia's Paramilitary Biker Gang | SOFREP." Accessed August 9, 2020. https://sofrep.com/news/meet-the-night-wolves-russias-paramilitary-biker-gang/.

31　ICDS. "The Russian Orthodox Church: Faith, Power and Conquest." Accessed August 9, 2020. https://icds.ee/en/the-russian-orthodox-church-faith-power-and-conquest/.

32　Although, our analysis focused on webites and Facebook pages only, the Russian social network Vkontakte, currently banned in Ukraine, plays an important role in disseminating pro-Kremlin messaging in Ukraine. Despite the fact that it is banned, users can access it and since it is now more limited, the effort to promote Russian narratives is more focused on Ukrainian users.

33　Throughout the research the top article for each peak would be based on the influence score

34　znaj.ua. "'Говорять Застінки': правозахисники розкрили злочини путінських нелюдів в Україні," May 16, 2018. https://znaj.ua/govoryat-zastinky-pravozahysnyky-rozkryly-zlochyny-putinskyh-nelyudiv-v-ukrayini.

35　OBOZREVATEL. "Анатолій Гриценко: Чому воєнний стан не було введено у 2014-му, коли росіяни атакували нас '"Градами"'?" Accessed August 7, 2020. https://www.obozrevatel.com/ukr/politics/chomu-voennij-stan-ne-bulo-vvedeno-u-2014-mu-koli-rosiyani-atakuvali-nas-gradami.htm.

36　OBOZREVATEL. "Анатолій Гриценко: Чому воєнний стан не було введено у 2014-му, коли росіяни атакували нас '"Градами"'?" Accessed August 7, 2020. https://www.obozrevatel.com/ukr/politics/chomu-voennij-stan-ne-bulo-vvedeno-u-2014-mu-koli-rosiyani-atakuvali-nas-gradami.htm.

37　OBOZREVATEL. ""Постійний особливий статус Донбасу"': Путін закликав змінити Конституцію України." Accessed August 7, 2020. https://www.obozrevatel.com/ukr/abroad/osoblivij-status-donbasu-v-konstitutsiyu-putin-postaviv-svoi-umovi-pislya-zustrichi-v-parizhi.htm.

38　""Один народ" — одно государство. Зачем Путину советские мифы." Accessed August 7, 2020. https://nv.ua/opinion/putin-ob-ukraine-v-kakie-mify-verit-prezident-rf-novosti-rossii-50072200.html.

39　The initiative serves to remind Ukraine and the world that Crimean Peninsula was illegally occupied in violation of international laws.

40　Neutral media are described here as such if they have a credible reputation for objective fact-based reporting, but often they are pro-Ukrainian in the context of Russian aggression.

41　The Hungarian country case-study supplemented the representative polling with a deeper machine learning based natural language processing (NLP) analysis to reveal Hungarian revisionist narratives.

42　"Наталья Поклонская: Депутата Поймали На Лжи о Крыме - Новости России." Accessed June 14, 2020. https://www.obozrevatel.com/russia/patriotku-russkogo-mira-poklonskuyu-pojmali-na-lzhi-o-kryime-videofakt.htm.

43　"Даже мир имеет свою цену. Ее заплатит каждый из нас." Accessed June 14, 2020. https://www.obozrevatel.com/crime/olena-stepova-dazhe-mir-imeet-svoyu-tsenu-ee-zaplatit-kazhdyij-iz-nas.htm.

44　"Отношения с РФ: Мир Любой Ценой - Катастрофа Для Украины. Мнение Борислав Береза: Борислав Береза - Новости Украины, Политика - LIGA.Net." Accessed June 14, 2020. https://www.liga.net/politics/opinion/otnosheniya-s-rf-mir-lyuboy-tsenoy---katastrofa-dlya-ukrainy.

45　"А Теперь Давайте о Правде. Что Подписал Зеленский в Париже." Accessed June 14, 2020. https://nv.ua/opinion/putin-zelenskiy-chto-podpisali-v-parizhe-v-ramkah-normandskogo-sammita-novosti-ukrainy-50059855.html.

46　24 Канал. "Скандальный телемост между Newsone и 'Россия 24': Украинские политики взорвались негодованием." Accessed June 14, 2020. https://24tv.ua/ru/skandalnyj_telemost_mezhdu_newsone_i_rossija_24_ukrainskie_politiki_vzorvalis_negodovaniem_n1176441.

47　24 Канал. "Главные новости 29 сентября: боевиков взорвали в Донецке, смертоносная стихия в Индонезии." Accessed June 14, 2020. https://24tv.ua/ru/glavnye_novosti_ukrainy_segodnja_29_09_2018_novosti_mira_segodnja_29_sentjabrja_n1038939.

48　"Пока Маск соберется на Марс, мы в Марс превратим Луганщину" Accessed June 14, 2020. https://www.obozrevatel.com/society/poka-mask-soberetsya-na-mars-myi-v-mars-prevratim-luganschinu.htm.

49　"ОГП собирает доказательства принудительной выдачи псевдопаспортов 'ЛДНР' для отправки в Гаагский суд." Accessed June 14, 2020. https://www.unian.net/politics/10874276-ogp-sobiraet-dokazatelstva-prinuditelnoy-vydachi-psevdopasportov-ldnr-dlya-otpravki-v-gaagskiy-sud.html.

50　Znaj.ua. "Уничтожают сами себя: Европе рассказали о кошмаре на Донбассе," August 10, 2018. https://znaj.ua/ru/society/unychtozhayut-samy-sebya-evrope-rasskazaly-o-koshmare-na-donbasse.

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54   "ЯК ЗАРОБИТИ ГРОШІ НА УКРАЇНЦЯХ – ВГО 'Сокіл.'" Accessed June 13, 2020. http://vgo-sok-il.org.ua/%d0%af%d0%9a-%d0%97%d0%90%d0%a0%d0%9e%d0%91%d0%98%d0%a2%d0%98-%d0%93%d0%a0%d0%9e%d0%a8%d0%86-%d0%9d%d0%90-%d0%a3%d0%9a%d0%a0%d0%90%d0%87%d0%9d%d0%a6%d0%af%d0%a5/.

55   Офіційний сайт полку "Азов" На захисті України з 2014 року. "22 січня Україна відзначає День Соборності," January 22, 2020. https://azov.org.ua/22-sich-nia-den-sobornosti/.

56   Білий Молот. "Вячеслав Горанін: Націоналісти — це антитіла для суспільства.," March 16, 2018. http://biliymolot.in.ua/?p=929.

57   Pro-Russian revanchism is generally under-stood in Ukraine as efforts of political forces linked to the Kremlin to subvert European and Euroatlantic integration and return to Russian zone of influence. The term "revan-chism" is used because a substantial amount of these forces' representatives are linked to a regime of Viktor Yanukovych, the pro-Russian President who abandoned signing the EU Association Agreement under pressure from Moscow and was forced out by the Revolution of Dignity in 2014.

Pro-Russian revanchism is a complex issue unfolding in different areas, from political decisions made by pro-Rus-sian actors such as the "Opposition Platform – For Life" (OPFL) to the promotion of Kremlin narratives in local media field. The latter is mostly done via channels linked to Viktor Medvedchuk, the leader of the OPFL, howev-er, other channels of communication are involved. Pro-Russian forces target different segments of the popu-lation in adaptable way. E.g., OPFL is oriented towards those voters who are rather distinctive in their pro-Rus-sian choice. The "Shariy Party" – the party of a pro-Russian political blogger Anatolii Sharii – targets younger peo-ple who may not have such a distinct sentiment towards Moscow, but are attracted by other factors.

58   'Ukrainian President Signs Controversial Language Bill Into Law', RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty, accessed 19 August 2020, https://www.rferl.org/a/ukrainian-poroshenko-signs-controversial-lan-guage-bill-into-law/28757195.html. https://www.rferl.org/a/ukrainian-poroshenko-signs-controver-sial-language-bill-into-law/28757195.html.","plain-Citation":"'Ukrainian President Signs Controversial Language Bill Into Law', RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty, accessed 19 August 2020, https://www.rferl.org/a/ukrainian-poroshenko-signs-controversial-lan-guage-bill-into-law/28757195.html.","noteIndex":65},"ci-tationItems":[{"id":1219,"uris":["http://zotero.org/us-ers/local/J2moXS9Y/items/6G497UE8"],"uri":["http://zotero.org/users/local/J2moXS9Y/items/6G497UE8"],"itemData":{"id":1219,"type":"web-page","abstract":"Ukraine's president has signed into law a controversial bill that makes Ukrainian the re-quired language of study in state schools from the fifth grade on.","container-title":"RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty","language":"en","title":"Ukrainian President Signs Controversial Language Bill Into Law","URL":"https://www.rferl.org/a/ukrainian-poroshenko-signs-controver-sial-language-bill-into-law/28757195.html","accessed":{"-date-parts":[["2020",8,19]]}}}],"schema":"https://github.com/citation-style-language/schema/raw/master/csl-ci-tation.json"}

59   A widely publicized case in Ukraine, widely seen in civil society as an attempt to discredit veterans, given the dubious grounds for persecution. Far-right groups are not the only ones to be focused on the case; it is a widely discussed issue.

60   'Who Are The Five Suspects In The 2016 Killing Of Pavel Sheremet In Kyiv?', RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty, accessed 19 August 2020, https://www.rferl.org/a/ukraine-sheremets-killing-suspects/30324417.html.

61   "Meta" is used here to indicate

62   Апухтин, Юрий. "Две Украины: нацистская Порошенко и русофобская Зеленского." Альтернатива. Accessed June 13, 2020. http://alternatio.org/articles/articles/item/76510-dve-ukrainy-natsistskaya-poroshen-ko-i-rusofobskaya-zelenskogo.

63   "Россия Может «всучить Этот Гнойник» Украине, — Украинский Журналист Высказался о Донбассе (ВИДЕО) | Русская Весна." Accessed June 13, 2020. https://rusvesna.su/news/1579182324.

64   Igor Girkin is a Russian national and FSB officer who was actively involved in the Russian military offen-sive in Eastern Ukraine, was a first "Minister of Defence" in the so-called "DNR". He is wanted internationally for involvement in the downing of Malaysian Airlines flight MH17. The Ukrainian government has launched a num-ber of criminal proceedings against him, including but not limited to charges of terrorism.

65   "'Загроза – Реальна'. Гіркін Оголосив у Москві Акції Протесту Проти Передання Японії Курильських Островів / ГОРДОН." Accessed June 13, 2020. https://gordonua.com/ukr/news/worldnews/-zagroza-real-na-girkin-ogolosiv-u-moskvi-aktsiji-protestu-proti-pere-dachi-japoniji-kurilskih-ostroviv-647428.html.

66   "Нейтрализована Спецгруппа ВСУ, На Донбассе Началась Реализация Плана Зеленского: Сводка (+ВИДЕО) | Русская Весна." Accessed June 13, 2020. https://rusvesna.su/news/1580207291.

67   "ВСУ Пытаются Скрыть Правду о Положении Карателей На Донбассе — Сводка с Фронта (ВИДЕО) | Русская Весна." Accessed June 13, 2020. https://rusvesna.su/news/1568132230.

68   "Жители ДНР активно получают российские паспорта — подробности (ВИДЕО)." Accessed June 13, 2020. https://rusvesna.su/news/1567800162.

69   "В ДНР Продолжается Вывоз Бесплатного Угля На Бытовые Нужды | Русская Весна." Accessed June 13, 2020. https://rusvesna.su/aboutall/1585584881.

70   "Сурков о Возвращении ЛДНР На Украину: Донбасс Не Заслуживает Такого Унижения, а Украина — Такой Чести - АНТИФАШИСТ." Accessed June 13, 2020. http://antifashist.com/item/surkov-o-vozvrashhenii-ldnr-na-ukrainu-donbass-ne-zasluzhivaet-takogo-unizheniya-a-ukraina-takoj-chesti.html#ixzz6PFrtdvBA.

71   Networks could be based only on hyperlinks found in website articles due to Facebook restricting access to pages' data or hyperlinks.

72   The rationale behind the selection was to highlight and make visible portals with a significant number of connections, while excluding 1-2 nodes with a significantly higher number of connections, usually leading to social media pages, to reveal the overall and typical structure of the revisionism-related dissemination process.

73   "Dmitriy Gordon - Home." Accessed July 5, 2020. https://www.facebook.com/gordondmitry.

74   "ГОРДОН - Home." Accessed July 5, 2020. https://www.facebook.com/gordonuacom/.

75   "Донбасс: Обстановка Напряжённая, Нацисты Готовятся к Борьбе За Власть Внутри Украины, — Сводка (ВИДЕО) | Русская Весна." Accessed July 29, 2020. https://rusvesna.su/news/1532076035.

76   SimilarWeb. "Strana.Ua Traffic Statistics." Accessed July 5, 2020. http://similarweb.com/website/strana.ua/.

77   "«Пытаются Выскочить Из Нормандского Формата и Минска»: В ДНР Прокомментировали Инициативу Зеленского о Привлечении к Переговорам США и Великобритании - АНТИФАШИСТ." Accessed July 29, 2020. http://antifashist.com/item/pytayutsya-vyskochit-iz-normandskogo-formata-i-minska-v-dnr-prokommentirovali-iniciativu-zelenskogo-o-privlechenii-k-peregovoram-ssha-i-velikobritanii.html.

78   Резникова, Лиза. "«То, к чему нас принуждают, еще будет оценено историей как предательство и измена». Народный военкор Марина Харькова о Минских соглашениях и ситуации на донбасском фронте." АНТИФАШИСТ. Accessed July 29, 2020. http://antifashist.com/item/to-k-chemu-nas-prinuzhdayut-eshhe-budet-oceneno-istoriej-kak-predatelstvo-i-izmena-narodnyj-voenkor-marina-harkova-o-minskih-soglasheniyah-i-situacii-na-donbasskom-fronte.html.

79   "Белковский: Думаю, Грядет Еще Одна Волна Зачистки Руководства 'ДНР' и 'ЛНР'. Ведь Они Не Собираются Реинтегрироваться в Украину / ГОРДОН." Accessed July 29, 2020. https://gordonua.com/news/war/belkovskiy-dumayu-gryadet-eshche-odna-volna-zachistki-rukovodstva-dnr-i-lnr-ved-oni-ne-sobirayutsya-reintegrirovatsya-v-ukrainu-1484644.html.

80   "Путин Настаивает На Прямом Диалоге Киева с ОРДЛО и Закреплении в Конституции Украины Особого Статуса Донбасса." Accessed July 29, 2020. https://gordonua.com/news/war/putin-nastaivaet-na-prjamom-dialoge-kieva-s-ordlo-i-zakreplenii-v-konstitutsii-ukrainy-osobogo-statusa-donbassa-1478611.html.

81   The analysis of social media was limited to Facebook, since it is the only and main platform of elite or grassroots political discussions in Central-Eastern Europe.

82   Not all pro-Russian websites are banned in Ukraine, as some of them have a more subtle approach in disseminating Kremlin narratives

83   This mostly concerns the case of Nevidomyy Patriot, since the other two organizations have both the highest subscriber counts and the highest numbers of engagements

84   Kremlin has long struggled against creation of the autonomous Orthodox Church of Ukraine, promoting instead Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate, which is curated from Russia.

85   "Невідомий Патріот - Posts." Accessed July 5, 2020. https://www.facebook.com/213441955893762/posts/623190484918905.

86   "ПРАВИЙ СЕКТОР - Posts." Accessed July 5, 2020. https://www.facebook.com/610642055722207/posts/2435819136537814.

87   Decommunization is the process of dismantling the legacies of communist political and institutional establishments, which usually occurred after the democratic transition of former Soviet and Eastern Block countries from the 1990s onward.

88   "Голос Правды - Posts." Accessed July 5, 2020. https://www.facebook.com/2412174675774990/posts/2548959015429888.

89   "Голос Правды - Posts." Accessed July 5, 2020. https://www.facebook.com/2412174675774990/posts/2622608041398318.

90   "Голос Правды - Posts." Accessed July 5, 2020. https://www.facebook.com/2412174675774990/posts/2543436632648793.

91   "Страна.UA - Новости Украины - Posts." Accessed July 5, 2020. https://www.facebook.com/225855087749367/posts/1133449750323225.

92   "Голос Правды - Posts." Accessed July 29, 2020. https://www.facebook.com/2412174675774990/posts/2622608041398318.

93   Українська правда. "Жителі вільного Донбасу мало довіряють українським ЗМІ." Accessed August 8, 2020. http://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2017/11/15/7162185/.

94   Крым.Реалии. "На сході України найбільше довіряють російській пропаганді – опитування." Accessed August 8, 2020. https://ua.krymr.com/a/26920338.html.

95   Портал мовної політики. "Сергій Оснач. Мовна складова гібридної війни," June 13, 2015. http://language-policy.info/2015/06/serhij-osnach-movna-skladova-hibrydnoji-vijny/.

96   Messages were selected based on a set of pre-defined keywords in each country under review.

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