



IMSIS
International Master
Security, Intelligence
& Strategic Studies



**Erasmus
Mundus**

**Domestic depiction of Russia's
foreign information operations**

July 2021

2377920

19108354

25223283

**Presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
Degree of
International Master in Security, Intelligence and Strategic Studies**

Word Count: 22762

Supervisor: Dr Ammon Cheskin

Date of Submission: July 26, 2021



**University
of Glasgow**



CHARLES UNIVERSITY

Table of Contents

ABSTRACT	3
INTRODUCTION	3
LITERATURE REVIEW	6
METHODOLOGY	13
CHAPTER 1 Russia’s foreign Information Operations targeting the West.....	18
1.1 Information operations	18
1.2 Russia’s foreign Information Operations targeting the West	20
1.3 Russia’s domestic image.....	26
CHAPTER 2 Framing messages through Russian state mass media	31
2.1 Media – Kremlin’s domestic influence tool.....	31
2.2 Building and delivering efficient narratives for framing the domestic audience opinion.....	35
2.3 Main domestic narratives regarding the West.....	38
CHAPTER 3 Case study: domestic media narratives on Russian interference in 2016 US presidential elections.....	44
3.1 Russia’s interference into the US Presidential elections 2016.....	45
3.2 Russia’s Domestic narratives based on Talk-Show “ <i>Vecher s Vladimirom Solovyovim</i> ”	48
CONCLUSION	57
Bibliography.....	60

ABSTRACT

This research explores the issue of domestic depiction of Russia's foreign information operations through qualitative narrative analyses and aims to answer the research question: how Russia uses its foreign information operations to improve its domestic image and influence domestic audience? While the existing literature mostly addresses Russia's information operations from international perspective, this study tries to analyze the topic from domestic prism. The paper links foreign information operations with Russia's domestic objectives of reinforcing its great power image. For this end, the paper looks into the domestic context of Russia's information operations targeting the West and analyzes how these operations are converted into the internal narratives through state media channels. By analyzing the case study of Russian interference into the 2016 US presidential election, the research explores Kremlin's respective messages produced to influence the formation of the perception of Russian population and contribute to the narrative of depicting Russia as a great power, which consequently leads to broader political objective of Kremlin's power legitimation.

INTRODUCTION

Information operations are generally considered as the activities aimed at influencing “opinion-formation and the behavior of targets”¹ domestically as well as in foreign states. They are conducted to contribute to and advance the specific strategic interests of the influencer.² Russia actively refers to the influence operations as the integral component of achieving its policy objectives. On the one hand, this implies targeting Western democracies in order to undermine the “values of the liberal democratic world order, and weaken the reach of American power”³ and on the other hand, influence the perceptions and attitudes of Russian society with views favorable to the Kremlin. Russia aimed at contributing to these objectives by interfering in the 2016 US presidential elections.⁴

¹ Sean Cordey, *Cyber Influence Operations: An Overview and Comparative Analysis*, Center for Security Studies (CSS), ETH Zurich, 2019, p – 10, Available at <https://www.research-collection.ethz.ch/bitstream/handle/20.500.11850/382358/Cyber-Reports-2019-10-CyberInfluence.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>, Accessed 16 January 2021.

² Cordey, *Cyber Influence Operations*, p – 10.

³ Molly K. Mckew, *Russia Is Already Winning*, *Politico Magazine*, January 2017, Available at <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2017/01/russia-is-already-winning-214648>, Accessed 19 January 2021.

⁴ Mckew, *Russia Is Already Winning*.

The research question which this thesis addresses is: how Russia uses its foreign information operations to improve its domestic image and influence domestic audience? The research argues, that by producing the media narratives creating enemy image and emphasizing the Western information warfare waged towards Russia towards Russia

Russian operations with informational-psychological effects are widely discussed, though mostly from international perspective exploring the ways Russia influences target audiences in foreign states.⁵ However, this thesis aims at looking into the different and less-explored side of Russian information operations. Namely, the issue of Russia utilizing its foreign influence operations for domestic purposes. The paper analyzes how Russian leadership portrays its foreign influence operations domestically and what messages it transmits to its internal audience through state media. Through looking into the case study of Russian interference into the 2016 US presidential elections, the thesis explores how Russia used election meddling for domestic purposes, more specifically how Russia portrayed its foreign influence activities to its own population using Russian mass media.

Overall aim of the research is to analyze the impact of Russia's foreign information operations, directed towards influencing Western states, on its domestic audience. Influence activities have two main target audiences, foreign and domestic.⁶ Therefore, in order to proceed towards its strategic objectives, domestic audience is one of the targets for Russia's influence operations. Russia deems essential to maintain control over its population through respective techniques of influencing opinion-formation and behavior.⁷ Furthermore, the thesis specifically highlights Russian thinking and approach to information operations aiming at influencing foreign audiences and the importance of those operations for domestic policy objectives of the Kremlin.

The first chapter addresses the theoretical side of Russia's foreign information operations targeting the West. The chapter defines the concept of the information influence operations in general and underlines the essential feature of the information operations to exploit vulnerabilities of the specific target societies. Therefore, in case of the Western democracies, which is the subject of the given paper, Russia's information operations target free formation of the public opinion. Next, the paper focuses specifically on Russia's foreign Information

⁵ T. S. Allen and A. J. Moore, *Victory without Casualties: Russia's Information Operations*, 2018, p – 60, Available at http://www.assetallocation.org/resources/Research-Materials/Russia/Russian_Info_Operations.pdf, Accessed 24 January 2021.

⁶ Cordey, *Cyber Influence Operations*, p – 5.

⁷ Cordey, *Cyber Influence Operations*, pp – 5, 8.

Operations targeting the West. This part of the paper outlines the objectives of Russia's information operations conducted through manipulations of the consciousness of target audiences. Respectively, the methods, approaches and Russia's key motivations for applying the information influence operations while confronting the Western societies, are addressed. Finally, in frames of outlining the theoretical bases of the thesis, the first chapter explores the place of the domestic factor, namely the perception of the domestic audience, in influencing and shaping the foreign policy of the country. Respectively, by outlining the core directions of Russia's domestic narrative regarding the West, this part contributes to understanding the importance of public opinion, as the internal element for determining and justifying Russia's foreign information influence activities targeting Western societies.

Another objective of the thesis is to examine the role of the Russian media in shaping the opinions and perceptions of internal population regarding its operations targeting the West. Respectively, the second chapter addresses the role of media as a main communicator of the Kremlin narratives to Russia's population. First, the chapter contextualizes Russia's media landscape and discusses how Russian media serves as the tool for delivering government-favored messages to the domestic audience and outlines how the media contributes to legitimization of the Kremlin power. Furthermore, this part explores the role of Russia's state media in producing key messages for shaping opinions of domestic audience regarding Russia's foreign activities. Considering the fact that big majority of Russian public or private media companies is state-controlled, it is easily utilized as a tool for spreading government messages, which essentially present Russian perspective regarding its activities.⁸ Furthermore, after outlining the theoretical background of narrative formation and addressing the main characteristics of efficient framing, next part of the paper explores empirically Russia's Western narratives. By looking into the Russian political TV programmes, the paper analyzes key messages regarding the West and, more precisely, the Western information operations waged against Russia, as Russian messages label it. In order to explain and justify its foreign (Western) information operations, the Kremlin needs to portray the aggressive image of the West merged with the positive and peaceful image of Russia. Therefore, in response to the research question, the paper highlights the view from the inside, focusing on the content that

⁸ Keir Giles, Anthony Seaboyer, *The Russian Information Warfare Construct*, Defence R&D Canada, Toronto Research Centre Contract Report, DRDC-RDDC-2019-C241, pp – 18-20, October 2019, Available at https://cradpdf.drdc-rddc.gc.ca/PDFS/unc341/p811007_A1b.pdf, Accessed 16 January, 2021.

shapes the attitude of the Russian society regarding the West and, respectively, regarding the information operations conducted by Russian government.

The final chapter presents the case-study of Russian interference in 2016 US presidential election. It examines how the political Talk-Show *Večer s Vladimirom Solovyovim* broadcasted on Russian state media channel *Russia 1*, covers the US election campaign and the allegations of Russian interference. More specifically, it examines how *Russia 1* contributed to Russia's domestic goals of influencing and shaping public perceptions and opinion through promoting government messages regarding the abovementioned operation. The third chapter highlights main narratives in this regard, which are domestically helpful for Russia and contribute to enhancing Russia's great power image, as well as creating legitimacy of the Kremlin power.

Overall, the paper highlights the importance of the foreign information influence operations for domestic purposes and argues that Russia's activities directed towards influencing Western nations are employed for depicting positive image of the country domestically.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The paper addresses Russia's foreign information influence operations, however from the different prism. The purpose of this paper is not to explore Russian information operations specifically, it rather analyses their correlation with domestic policy objectives. More specifically, the paper argues that Russia foreign information operations are tightly intertwined with internal perception of Russian identity and insurance of power legitimacy.

Mostly Russia's foreign information operations are discussed in the scope of their objectives, impact and tools used to influence western audiences.⁹ However, these operations have significant domestic implications as well and in order to understand Russia's foreign activities, it is essential to explore and analyze how they are perceived domestically and how they are presented to the domestic audience. Therefore, the objective of this paper is to address the way Russian information operations targeting the West are used for domestic agenda purposes.

Theoretical framework and understanding of the concept of information operations is broadly discussed in literature. It has been the subject gaining a great deal of attention and importance

⁹ Allen and Moore, *Victory without Casualties*, pp – 59-70.

in recent years, however the concept still remains controversial.¹⁰ This is specifically important regarding offensive aspect of information operations “as far as democratic states with rule of law are concerned.”¹¹ Information operations today represent an integral part of the warfare in which media is presented as “weapons not just symbolically, but in a very real sense.”¹² Myriam Caveltly underlines the broad range of intentions of the information operations, that can be aimed at the domestic population, adversary country, partner nation and more broadly at the global public.¹³ She assumes that information in the context of information operations encompasses not only “to information disseminated via mass media, but to the entire communication infrastructure of an opponent, including civilian and military data networks, telecommunications installations, and the mass media.”¹⁴ Moreover, the dividing line between “combatants and non-combatants in information warfare”¹⁵ is actually blurred.¹⁶ Controversial understanding and conceptual ambiguity of the information operations and information warfare is largely due to the lack of their doctrinal definition.¹⁷ According to Tashev, Purcell and McLaughlin, US understanding of the information operations refers mainly to operation and tactical levels, not addressing the strategic one.¹⁸ Accordingly, information operations in the US are “increasingly associated with the military and warfighting, divorcing it from any broader – civilian, nonmilitary, and peacetime – efforts.”¹⁹ Tashev, Purcell, and McLaughlin address the US investment in strategic competition within the information environment, however according to their analyses the US is facing difficulties “addressing the intangible elements inherent to this form of confrontation.”²⁰ US Joint Publication 3-13 on Information Operations distinguishes the physical or tangible, real world, informational or data-centric and cognitive or Human-centric dimension of the information environment.²¹ Tashev, Purcell, and McLaughlin consider all three dimensions essential criteria for the success and efficiency of

¹⁰ Myriam dunn Caveltly, Information Operations: Trends and Controversies, CSS Analyses in Security Policy, ETH Zurich Vol. 3, No. 34, May 2008, p – 3, available at https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/55474/css_analysen_nr34-0508_e.pdf, accessed 15 July, 2021.

¹¹ Caveltly, Information Operations, p – 3.

¹² Caveltly, Information Operations, p – 3.

¹³ Caveltly, Information Operations, p – 3.

¹⁴ Caveltly, Information Operations, p – 3.

¹⁵ Caveltly, Information Operations, p – 3.

¹⁶ Caveltly, Information Operations, p – 3.

¹⁷ Blagovest Tashev, Michael Purcell, Brian McLaughlin, Russia’s Information Warfare, Exploring the Cognitive Dimension, MCU Journal vol. 10, no. 2, p – 132, 2019, Available at https://www.usmcu.edu/Portals/218/CAOCL/files/RussiasInformationWarfare_MCUJ_Fall2019.pdf?ver=2019-11-19-093543-040, Accessed 17 January 2021.

¹⁸ Tashev, Purcell, McLaughlin, Russia’s Information Warfare, p – 132.

¹⁹ Tashev, Purcell, McLaughlin, Russia’s Information Warfare, p – 132.

²⁰ Tashev, Purcell, McLaughlin, Russia’s Information Warfare, p – 130.

²¹ Joint Publication 3-13, Information Operations, Joint Chiefs of Staff, November 2012, available at https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/pubs/jp3_13.pdf, accessed 16 July 2021.

the information activities, however cognitive dimension is referred as the most important in the information environment.²²

Hutchinson defines influence operations as the exertion of power with the key objective to change the attitudes, followed by the respective change of “the emotions, behavior, knowledge and beliefs of the targeted group.”²³ He further underlines that messages should be built on credible reality.²⁴ Considering the fact that the understanding of the reality often differs for different parties, Russian influence operations are based on the reality that Russia wants to deliver to its target audience, considering the scope of this thesis, to domestic audience. Gilles and Seaboyer argue, that the reality that Russian society faces is almost fully based on Kremlin messages and therefore, extremely different from the real world.²⁵

Tashev, Purcell and McLaughlin further analyze Russian approach to information warfare, which as they argue provide “valuable insights into the complexity of this issue.”²⁶ They argue that in terms of cognitive dimension of the information operations, US professionals “must come to terms with Russia’s philosophically different understanding and approach.”²⁷ According to Tashev, Purcell and McLaughlin, US definition of the information operations concept, even in its broadest understanding, cannot fully capture the nature of Russian approach, which faces less constraints applying information operations on the tactical and operational levels and utilizes them on the strategic level as well during war as well as peacetime.²⁸ Timothy Thomas explored the distinct nature of Russian approach to the information operations and underlined three main elements characterizing specifically Russian approach.²⁹ The first one is strong emphasis on information-psychological processes in perception of information threats, that is due to the overall context of institutional and philosophical instability of the Russian state.³⁰ Secondly, different emphasis of Russian and western viewpoints on the use of information weapons on military art, due to the divergent

²² Tashev, Purcell, McLaughlin, *Russia’s Information Warfare*, p – 130-131.

²³ William Hutchinson, *Influence Operations: Action and Attitude*, 11th Australian Information Warfare and Security Conference, Edith Cowan University, Perth Western Australia, posted at Research Online, p. 14, November 2010, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4225/75/57a82e15aa0e1>, Available at <https://ro.ecu.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1032&context=isw>, Accessed 17 January 2021.

²⁴ Hutchinson, *Influence Operations*, p – 13.

²⁵ Giles, Seaboyer, *The Russian Information Warfare*, p – 18.

²⁶ Tashev, Purcell, McLaughlin, *Russia’s Information Warfare*, p – 130.

²⁷ Tashev, Purcell, McLaughlin, *Russia’s Information Warfare*, p – 130.

²⁸ Tashev, Purcell, McLaughlin, *Russia’s Information Warfare*, p – 132.

²⁹ Timothy L. Thomas, *Dialectical versus empirical thinking: Ten key elements of the Russian understanding of information operations*, *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, 11:1, 1998, p – 40, available at <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/13518049808430328?needAccess=true>, accessed 16 July 2021.

³⁰ Thomas, *Dialectical versus empirical*, p – 40.

military thinking and ideological backgrounds.³¹ And finally, Thomas argues that Russia is turning its budgetary, technological and infrastructural drawbacks into the advantages by directing the main focus of Russian scientists on information operations theory in order to “reach reasonable parity” with the Western approach, which mostly concentrates on practice.³² However, in this direction, Russia is improving practical side as well by growing investments in its capabilities and structures.³³

The literature underlines difference in conceptual understanding and distinct character of Russia’s approach to information influence operations. Tashev, Purcell and McLaughlin highlight the new term adopted specifically for the Russian way, namely “information confrontation.”³⁴ They further underline, that Russian military and political leaders while addressing the concept, broadly concentrate around the western way of conducting the information operations and do not discuss how is Russia involved in the conduct of information activities.³⁵ According to their analyses, Russian political leaders, experts and even official documents mostly cover the threats faced by Russia and posed by the west through the information environment.³⁶ Therefore, there is a lack of comprehensive analyses regarding specifically the Russian strategy of conducting influence operations³⁷ as well as regarding the way those operations are reported to Russia’s domestic audience.

According to Igor Panarin, influence is the key purpose of producing information.³⁸ This refers to individuals and social groups as well.³⁹ Panarin argues, that in order to defend social groups from the information confrontation, it is necessary to provide informational-psychological defensive measures, as the integral part of Russia’s security policy.⁴⁰ Therefore, according to Panarin, in its conduct of information operations Russia is ensuring the psychological security of Russian society.⁴¹ Thus, as the Kremlin considers society as one of the targets of the information operations, Russia deems essential to protect the society and ensure its resistance

³¹ Thomas, *Dialectical versus empirical*, p – 40.

³² Thomas, *Dialectical versus empirical*, p – 40.

³³ Tashev, Purcell, McLaughlin, *Russia’s Information Warfare*, p – 139.

³⁴ Tashev, Purcell, McLaughlin, *Russia’s Information Warfare*, pp – 137-138.

³⁵ Tashev, Purcell, McLaughlin, *Russia’s Information Warfare*, p – 137.

³⁶ Tashev, Purcell, McLaughlin, *Russia’s Information Warfare*, p – 138.

³⁷ Tashev, Purcell, McLaughlin, *Russia’s Information Warfare*, pp – 137-138.

³⁸ Igor Panarin, *СМИ, пропаганда и информационные войны* [Mass Media, Propaganda and Information Warfare], *History of propaganda*, 2012, Available at https://propagandahistory.ru/books/Igor-Panarin_SMI--propaganda-i-informatsionnye-voyny/28, Accessed 18 January 2021.

³⁹ Panarin, *Mass Media, Propaganda*.

⁴⁰ Panarin, *Mass Media, Propaganda*.

⁴¹ Panarin, *Mass Media, Propaganda*.

to foreign information campaigns.⁴² This leads to the main purpose of the paper which is largely underexplored topic, namely the correlation of Russia's foreign information operations and domestic population.

In order to see the wider picture between domestic objectives and foreign information operations we need to focus on the elements which in combination construct the picture of how Russia's domestic influence machine works. Respectively, one of the thesis sub-goals in this context is analysis of the role of media in communicating the Kremlin messages to the audience. Media is perceived as a tool which ensures that Russian population receives those proper messages that justify actions of the government and contribute to the Kremlin objectives. The securitization of the television as the tool for ensuring Kremlin influence on the domestic population, aimed to portray Russia's positive image domestically and exert power to implement and maintain control over the population, will be further analyzed in the research.

Gilles and Seaboyer emphasize the potential of Russian television to influence and shape the public opinion and formulate the perceptions of the target audience.⁴³ In democratic states, media delivers different points of view and the society enjoys possibility to look at the events from various angles.⁴⁴ However, as Keir Gilles and Anthony Seaboyer highlight, in order to "restitute control over the information space," Russian leadership controls the media industry and severely isolates its internal population from "alternative sources of information."⁴⁵ Galina Lukyanova argues, Russian media is mainly focused on framing the messages in specific directions in order to direct the attention and behavior of the population to the desired results.⁴⁶ In this regard, Russia's media broadcast is mainly oriented towards the legitimization of Presidential power and political course of action.⁴⁷

Galina Lukyanova has studied the frames in news releases of Russian federal media and identified key elements of each frame.⁴⁸ According to her analyses, the most frequently used framings are the "Great Power" frame portraying Russia as the "rapidly developing

⁴² Tashev, Purcell, McLaughlin, *Russia's Information Warfare*, p – 139.

⁴³ Giles, Seaboyer, *The Russian Information Warfare*, p – 18.

⁴⁴ Galina Lukyanova, *Framing in Russian TV News: How to Shape Reality?*, SHS Web of Conferences 50, 01098, 2018, *CILDIAH-2018*, p – 1, available at https://www.shs-conferences.org/articles/shsconf/abs/2018/11/shsconf_cildiah2018_01098/shsconf_cildiah2018_01098.html, accessed 18 January 2021

⁴⁵ Giles, Seaboyer, *The Russian Information Warfare*, p – 18.

⁴⁶ Lukyanova, *Framing in Russian TV*, pp – 1-6.

⁴⁷ Lukyanova, *Framing in Russian TV*, p – 1.

⁴⁸ Lukyanova, *Framing in Russian TV*, p – 2.

independent state”⁴⁹ loyal to traditional values, leader in economic and political affairs and with other countries dependent on it; “Ineptitude of other countries,” which is “aimed at discrediting the political power of the United States, the EU, and Ukraine”⁵⁰ as well as the particular leaders of these countries; “international intervention” frame used often with “confrontation” frame and utilized to deliver mainly assumptions without strong evidences and describing imaginary threats like international intervention that Russia and its citizens are facing; and the “Strong leader” frame which highlights the “exclusivity of the Russian president.”⁵¹ According to the results of the analyses the frequency and merging of different frames plays the major role in the approval of president’s activities within the Russian society.⁵² Lukyanova mainly concentrates on Russia’s domestic activities while discussing Great Power image, however, this thesis will specifically focus on the framing of Russia’s domestic image based on its foreign information activities.

Kari Roberts explains that Russia’s foreign actions are significantly shaped by “a sense of Russian identity that is highly influenced by its relations with the West, particularly the US.”⁵³ He addresses the connection between identity and foreign policy and underlines the broad impact of the West’s actions on enhancing and contributing to Russia’s narrative.⁵⁴ Roberts argues that the West’s actions such as eastward expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) or the West’s involvement in the Ukraine crises are perceived by Russia as provocations and factors creating “an alternative to Western dominance of the world affairs.”⁵⁵ Respectively, this approach contributes to the Kremlin narrative of Russian exceptionalism and nation’s perception as an alternative power to Western dominance.⁵⁶ Roberts emphasizes that Russia criticizes the West for its “abuses of power, for being the source of great instability in the international system, for using international law selectively, and for creating intractable problems.”⁵⁷ Thus, the West is considered to be integral element of Russia’s perception regarding its own role and status on the global arena and the narrative of

⁴⁹ Lukyanova, Framing in Russian TV, p – 2.

⁵⁰ Lukyanova, Framing in Russian TV, p – 4.

⁵¹ Lukyanova, Framing in Russian TV, p – 3-6.

⁵² Lukyanova, Framing in Russian TV, pp – 1-6.

⁵³ Kari Roberts, Understanding Putin, *International Journal*, March 2017, Vol. 72, No. 1, p – 29, Sage Publications Ltd. on behalf of the Canadian International Council, available at <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/26414074.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3Adc4eb0842143f2110efd0572911cb6c2>, accessed 17 July 2021.

⁵⁴ Roberts, Understanding Putin, p – 30.

⁵⁵ Roberts, Understanding Putin, p – 30.

⁵⁶ Roberts, Understanding Putin, p – 30.

⁵⁷ Roberts, Understanding Putin, p – 38.

Russian identity and exceptionalism.⁵⁸ Consequently, as Roberts argues, Russia is constructing its identity narrative based on the understanding of its power as an alternative to the Western dominance merged with “concerns about a hostile West that has failed to acknowledge Russia’s rightful place as a major power in the international system.”⁵⁹

As mentioned above, one of the most successful tools for disseminating the Kremlin narratives is the media. Thus, as an empirical example of Russia’s foreign information influence operation, the paper refers to the case of Russian interference in 2016 US presidential election through analyzing the key narratives of the Talk-Show *Vecher s Vladimirom Solovyovim* during the election campaign. The thesis explores which messages were communicated to the Russian audience, thus what was the main rhetoric influencing the audience. In this regard, it is interesting to refer to Tina Burrett article, that examined the Russian television news coverage of 2016 US presidential election, and analyzed “Russian government influence over domestic television news” through focusing on *Channel one* news program *Vremia* (Time) reporting.⁶⁰ Burrett outlines main themes on which *Vremia* based the elections coverage and concludes, that the coverage of presidential candidates was secondary compared to *Vremia*’s core objective to question the solidity of US democracy.⁶¹ The narratives from *Vremia* analyzed by Burrett showed that the key themes regarding US presidential election coverage were the criticism of the US democracy, rejection of allegations regarding Russian interference in the election, presenting positive image of Donald Trump and negative image of Hillary Clinton, though it is noted that Clinton’s criticism became particularly negative after she accused Russia of meddling in the elections.⁶² Burrett argues, that “political and news programing on state controlled channels predominantly promote the Putin administration’s policies and political priorities.”⁶³ Respectively, *Vremia*’s coverage of the US election was reinforcing official Kremlin narratives, which “Putin has long maintained regarding U.S. democracy, foreign policy, and relations with Russia,”⁶⁴ and which are more broadly aiming at maintaining popular support for Russia’s domestic and foreign policy objectives.⁶⁵ The messages which are reported by *Vremia* largely correspond with the narratives communicated through the Solovyov’s Talk-

⁵⁸ Roberts, *Understanding Putin*, p – 47.

⁵⁹ Roberts, *Understanding Putin*, p – 38.

⁶⁰ Tina Burrett, Russian state television coverage of the 2016 U.S. presidential election. *Demokratizatsiya: the Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization*, vol. 26, no. 3, George Washington University, 2018, pp – 287-319, *Project MUSE* muse.jhu.edu/article/699569

⁶¹ Tina Burrett, *Russian state television*, p – 287.

⁶² Tina Burrett, *Russian state television*, p – 292.

⁶³ Tina Burrett, *Russian state television*, p – 288.

⁶⁴ Tina Burrett, *Russian state television*, p – 319.

⁶⁵ Tina Burrett, *Russian state television*, p – 289.

Show, that can be considered as one additional confirmation of different Russian channels and different programmes mainly following the same line of narratives regarding Russia's positioning towards the US. However, Burrett mainly outlines the way Russia portrays the US to its own society, therefore, the contribution of this research is that it builds the nexus between Russia's domestic narratives reported through media and its foreign information operations.

Hence, the existing literature mainly addressed the international perspective on Russian information operations and its objectives to influence foreign audiences and undermine the credibility of Western democracies. However, the lesser-explored issue is how Russian information operations directed against foreign targets can be used for domestic purposes.

Therefore, this research paper will essentially concentrate on more in-depth analyses of the mechanisms through which Russia utilizes its foreign activities domestically, which contribute to Russia's identity narratives, improve its domestic image and ensure power legitimization.

This thesis will contribute to the existing academic research by focusing on the domestic benefits of Russia's activities initially targeting the Western states. Furthermore, the methodological approach of analyzing Russian state media narratives portraying country's positive domestic image through covering its foreign interference activities will also contribute to filling the existing gaps.

METHODOLOGY

In order to answer the outlined research question, namely analyze how Russian state media narratives regarding the foreign information operations are communicated to the domestic audience, this thesis refers to qualitative research methods, with the focus on the narrative analyses. To analyze Russia's domestic positioning regarding its foreign influence operations, the thesis will focus on Russian interference into the 2016 US presidential elections as a case study. This case study was chosen as it looks into the issue of Russia's foreign information influence activity which at the same time implied advancement of "specific narratives that are important domestically in Russia".⁶⁶ The objective of this research is to provide better understanding of domestic implications of Russia's foreign information operations waged against the West. For this end, the single case study research strategy is used as an "empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context."⁶⁷ The case study of Russian interference into the 2016 US elections is selected due to its direct

⁶⁶ Mckew, *Russia Is Already Winning*.

⁶⁷ Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research* (3rd ed.), Sage Publications, 2003, p – 13.

representation of Russia's information influence operation, which is the subject of the paper. The case is particularly interesting as it demonstrates and helps to "understand the behavioral conditions through the actor's perspective."⁶⁸ Furthermore, this case study provides the understanding of the methods and objectives of Russia's external information operations. The operation encompassed a broad range of methods combination of which contributed to the successful outcome.⁶⁹ Therefore, it is especially interesting for exploring Russia's methods of efficiently merging various means of conducting influence operation and interfering in the domestic affairs of the sovereign state.⁷⁰ However, 2016 election interference served Russia's domestic objectives as well. Exploring those domestic objectives and the ways of communicating desired narratives to the domestic population are the primary goals of this paper.

For analyzing the nature, objectives and mechanisms characterizing specifically Russian way of formulating the messages for internal audience regarding its foreign influence activities, narratives from Russian state television political Talk-Show on federal TV channel *Russia 1 - Vecher s Vladimirom Solovyovim* will be analyzed.

In this regard, the paper will mostly concentrate on the qualitative approach for the in-depth analysis of the main narratives produced by Russian media which actively contribute to the broad acceptance "of the version of reality endorsed by the Russian state."⁷¹ Key messages which were communicated to the Russia's domestic audience during 2016 US presidential elections coverage will be reviewed through looking into respective episodes of the Talk-Show *Vecher s Vladimirom Solovyovim*. This thesis will qualitatively assess the key narratives referring to the Russian interference in the elections and analyze the context through which they were presented to the domestic audience.

Selection of the Talk-Show *Vecher s Vladimirom Solovyovim* is purposeful due to the following reasons. First of all, it is broadcasted on the most important Russian federal channel. *Russia 1* is one of the top Russian state channels according to the audience share⁷², in 2016 *Russia 1*

⁶⁸ Zaidah Zainal, Case study as a research method, *Jurnal Kemanusiaan* bil.9, Jun 2007, available at <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/11784113.pdf>, accessed 8 July, 2021.

⁶⁹ Michael McFaul, Putin, Putinism, and the Domestic Determinants of Russian Foreign Policy, *International Security*, 45 (2), 2020, available at <https://direct.mit.edu/isec/article/45/2/95/95260/Putin-Putinism-and-the-Domestic-Determinants-of>, accessed 8 July, 2021.

⁷⁰ McFaul, Putin, Putinism.

⁷¹ Giles, Seaboyer, *The Russian Information Warfare*, p. 20.

⁷² From programs of which television channels do you usually get the latest news in our country and abroad?, Statista, available at <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1094481/russia-most-watched-tv-channels-for-news/>, accessed 8 July 2021.

was the most popular TV channel within Russian audience, including the audience share for the social-political programmes.⁷³ Therefore, the programmes transmitted on this channel “provide the most precise demonstration of Kremlin’s official perspective of events.”⁷⁴

Modern Russia continues the Soviet tradition of looking for enemy image inside as well as outside of the country.⁷⁵ The enemy image is one of the key components of Russia’s totalitarian consciousness,⁷⁶ which, in its turn is linked to Russian identity and its great power image. One of the key tools to transfer these elements to Russia’s domestic audience is the Media. Therefore, the second reason for selecting the analyses of the Talk-Show narrative as a research method is its significance in communicating the government messages to the population.

Russian population is exposed to believe the Kremlin propaganda without critically questioning it and Ukraine Crises Media Center outlines several reasons of that. Firstly, the information control system established in Russia enables the Kremlin to efficiently reach its domestic audience and influence their attitudes “due to the dominating worldview among the Russians that eliminates critical understanding of the objective reality.”⁷⁷ Secondly, the Kremlin constantly seeks to modernize and develop its propaganda tools, in order to make it more interesting and convincing.⁷⁸ The report admits that the Kremlin propaganda machine is “very effective” and this specially refers to the “propaganda via mass media.”⁷⁹ The main methods characterizing the Kremlin’s domestic propaganda and making it successful are (1) long-term repetition of the same message through different channels in order make it shared by many people; (2) locating each event into a specific and related narrative in order to multiply the reasonings of the hostile actions of adversaries, that makes the narrative more convincing and “inevitably leads to simplifications and flourishing conspiracy theories;”⁸⁰ (3) delivering multiple versions of the events to make impression that there are other alternative “truths” for the relatively skeptical people; engaging “useful idiots” from foreign countries; (4) active support for threat narratives, as security is considered as the basic need of the population

⁷³ Anna Afanasyeva, Смотрящие сменили лидера, Телеканал «Россия 1» обошел «Первый» по аудитории [The audience changed the leader, TV Channel *Rossya 1* overtook *Channel 1* according to the audience share], Коммерсантъ [Commerzant], available at <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/3186828>, accessed 8 July 2021.

⁷⁴ Oleksiy Makukhin, Liubov Tsubulska, Ruslan Kavatsiuk, How Russian media foments hostility towards the West, the Black Sea Trust for Regional Cooperation and Ukraine Crises Media Center Report, September 2018, p – 10, available at <https://uacrisis.org/en/how-russian-media-foments-hostility-towards-the-west>, accessed 8 July 2021.

⁷⁵ Makukhin, Tsubulska, Kavatsiuk, How Russian media, p – 25.

⁷⁶ Makukhin, Tsubulska, Kavatsiuk, How Russian media, p – 25.

⁷⁷ Makukhin, Tsubulska, Kavatsiuk, How Russian media, p – 25.

⁷⁸ Makukhin, Tsubulska, Kavatsiuk, How Russian media, p – 26.

⁷⁹ Makukhin, Tsubulska, Kavatsiuk, How Russian media, p – 26.

⁸⁰ Makukhin, Tsubulska, Kavatsiuk, How Russian media, p – 26.

“constant feeling of being threatened is one of the few incentives that can unite people of very different social and demographic profiles.”⁸¹ In this regard, political TV Talk-Shows on Russian channels are one of the key sources for disseminating propaganda narratives.⁸² They support the Kremlin to disseminate desired narratives, promote “the most radical messages without taking responsibility.”⁸³ Consequently, by being frequently repeated those messages become the part of public debate.⁸⁴ One of the interesting characteristic of political Talk-Shows on Russian TV Channels is that on the one hand, the opposing opinion is presented very nominally and, on the other, that the host and respectively, the pro-Kremlin speakers are dominant and in full control of the discussion.⁸⁵ This makes the impression that the argument is shared and agreed by the majority, and thus, represents the acceptable viewpoint in the eyes of the general population.⁸⁶ This leads to another function of the Talk-Shows, namely building the impression of the existing freedom of speech in Russia, creating the “illusion of free discussion” and showing the different aspects of the same opinion, though all Kremlin-favored.⁸⁷ Therefore, the analyses of the narratives reported from the Talk-Show is highly interesting for portraying the picture of reality that the primary audience of Russian television views.

Selection of the Talk-Show *Večer s Vladimirom Solovyovim* is due to its high prominence on the most important Russian state channel. In 2017 the host of the programme, Vladimir Solovyov, was named as the most authoritative journalist in Russia,⁸⁸ and in 2019 as most trusted one.⁸⁹ According to the Levada Center analytical report, his programme was the first one in regularly watched programmes within Russia with the 40% rate.⁹⁰ The Talk-Show is broadcasted on week-days and its Sunday addition is *Voskresnii Večer s Vladimirom Solovyovim* (*Sunday evening with Vladimir Solovyov*). *Večer s Vladimirom Solovyovim*, “the

⁸¹ Makukhin, Tsubulska, Kavatsiuk, *How Russian media*, p – 26.

⁸² Makukhin, Tsubulska, Kavatsiuk, *How Russian media*, p – 31.

⁸³ Makukhin, Tsubulska, Kavatsiuk, *How Russian media*, p – 31.

⁸⁴ Makukhin, Tsubulska, Kavatsiuk, *How Russian media*, p – 31.

⁸⁵ Makukhin, Tsubulska, Kavatsiuk, *How Russian media*, p – 31.

⁸⁶ Makukhin, Tsubulska, Kavatsiuk, *How Russian media*, p – 31.

⁸⁷ Makukhin, Tsubulska, Kavatsiuk, *How Russian media*, p – 32.

⁸⁸ Denis Volkov, Stepan Goncharov, *Российский медиаландшафт основные тенденции использования СМИ – 2017* [Russian media landscape: Main tendencies of using Mass Media – 2017], Analytical Center of Yuri Levada (Levada Center), August 2017, available at <https://www.levada.ru/2017/08/22/16440/>, accessed 9 July 2021.

⁸⁹ *Россияне назвали Соловьева и Малахова вызывающими доверие журналистами* [Russians named Solovyov and Malakhov as trusted journalists], August 2019, available at <https://www.rbc.ru/politics/01/08/2019/5d418f489a79470e1276cebe>, accessed 9 July 2021

⁹⁰ Volkov, Goncharov, *Russian media landscape*.

country's premier political talk show" as *The Washington Post* article names it⁹¹, is a Russian TV Talk-Show discussing the most critical ongoing issues from a broad range of topics, including politics, economic and social spheres and invited guests represent the experts, politicians, journalists, economists, historians and other representatives of different spheres according to the topic discussed.

The timeframe for the case study was defined by selecting the Talk-Show episodes discussing the US election Campaign and the post-election episodes within the period from September to December, 2016. The narratives were analyzed from the respective episodes of the Talk-Show, which were retrieved from the archive of the Talk-Show YouTube channel. The respective parts of the Talk-Show were analyzed thematically according to the main frames.

Television Talk-Shows have lately become one of the main scenes for influencing public opinion, thus making the Narratives "a key discursive device in Talk-Shows."⁹² According to Denis McQuail, history of mass media clearly demonstrates, that media narratives are considered to be a valuable leverage for gaining and enhancing political and economic power "at the will of those who direct, own or control them or who use them as channels for messages."⁹³ McQuail outlines several significant advantages of the mass media control, namely the media can attract the attention, and influence and shape the opinion of the population to the specific problems important for those in control; media can discuss the specific problematic issues and "confirm the legitimacy;" media can be the tool to persuade and mobilize; media can be a means "for offering psychic rewards and gratifications."⁹⁴ Additionally, media is a cost-effective, fast, flexible and relatively easy" way for maintaining the communication with the society.⁹⁵ The same argument is outlined by Stephen Ansolabehere et al. who emphasize media's significant role in influencing and shaping public opinion.⁹⁶ Thus, the narratives communicated to Russia's domestic audience through the media space

⁹¹ Russia's TV talk shows smooth Putin's way from crisis to crisis, *The Washington Post*, December 2015, available at https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/russia-television-talk-shows-smooth-putins-way-from-crisis-to-crisis/2015/12/12/a151fa5a-6c4b-11e5-91eb-27ad15c2b723_story.html, accessed 9 July 2021.

⁹² Joanna Thornborrow, Narrative, opinion and situated argument in talk show discourse, *Pragmatics*, August 2007, p – 1437, 1438, DOI: 10.1016/j.pragma.2007.04.001, Source: OAI.

⁹³ Denis McQuail, The influence and effects of mass media, p – 21, available at <https://www.csub.edu/~mault/the%20influence%20and%20effects%20o.pdf>, accessed 10 July 2021.

⁹⁴ McQuail, The influence and effects, p – 21.

⁹⁵ McQuail, The influence and effects, p – 21.

⁹⁶ Stephen Ansolabehere, Roy Behr, Shanto Iyengar, *The Media Game: American Politics in the Television Age* (New Topics in Politics), Macmillan, 1993, p – 139, available at <https://www.csub.edu/~mault/the%20multiple%20effects%20of%20tel.pdf>, accessed 10 July 2021.

well-demonstrate how the Kremlin shapes perceptions of its internal population and depicts its desirable image domestically.

CHAPTER 1 Russia's foreign Information Operations targeting the West

1.1 Information operations

Information has long been considered as an important source of power, though in the last decades it has become an efficient element of national security and foreign policy. During the past several decades, information operations are considered not only as supplementary elements of the combat operations, but they can also be used as a independent tools for achieving specific objectives. "Media and information are integrated as actual weapons into the arsenal of offensive and defensive capabilities."⁹⁷ The use of information and new technologies giving the ability to influence adversary's information environment and the attitudes and behavior of the population has "become a core power resource in the system of international relations."⁹⁸

Information operations which are also known as influence operations, refer to the collection of the tactical information about the enemy and spreading of propaganda in order to gain strategic advantage over the adversary.⁹⁹ Foreign powers conduct information influence operations with the purpose of influencing "perceptions, behavior and decisions of target groups" in a specific country to accomplish their objectives and achieve desired benefits.¹⁰⁰ Those influence operations can be coordinated activities of the foreign powers carried out separately as a single activity or as a combination of several different activities.¹⁰¹ Information operations have several features that distinguish them from the Public relations, public affairs and public diplomacy that in their turn are as well characterized by the application of the information power legitimately in order to influence the policy outcomes.¹⁰² Firstly, information influence operations deceive people, they influence public opinion by deceptive means through manipulating information. The objective of the operations is "to undermine or otherwise harm

⁹⁷ Cavelti, Information Operations, p – 1.

⁹⁸ Cavelti, Information Operations, p – 1.

⁹⁹ RAND Corporation, Information Operations, Available at <https://www.rand.org/topics/information-operations.html>, accessed 8 April 2021.

¹⁰⁰ James Pamment, Howard Nothhaft, Henrik Agardh-Twetman, Alicia Fjällhed, Countering Information Influence Activities, The State of the Art, version 1.4 (1 July 2018), Department of Strategic Communication, Lund University, p – 14, available at <https://www.msb.se/RibData/Filer/pdf/28697.pdf>, accessed 8 April 2021.

¹⁰¹ Pamment, Nothhaft, Agardh-Twetman, Fjällhed, Countering Information, p – 14.

¹⁰² Pamment, Nothhaft, Agardh-Twetman, Fjällhed, Countering Information, p – 14.

society to further own goals and objectives.”¹⁰³ Another distinguishing characteristic of information influence operations is that they are oriented on the vulnerabilities by exploiting the system of opinion formation of the target audiences.¹⁰⁴

Overall, information operations encompass and synchronize influence, cyber and psychological activities.¹⁰⁵ They are related with the specific target audiences and present powerful tools to “influence, disrupt, corrupt, or usurp” the target audiences in order to create intended effects on an adversary and achieve desired goals.¹⁰⁶

According to the report commissioned to support the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency work, the very essential feature of the information influence activities is their ability to exploit the most valuable features of the societies and turn them into the vulnerabilities.¹⁰⁷ Respectively, in case of Western democracies, which is the subject of this research, one of the targets of information influence operations is free and open opinion formation, as one of the key principles of the democratic system.¹⁰⁸ Information influence operations imitate legitimate behavior while violating the rules of free and open debates.¹⁰⁹ The report outlines four main elements characterizing information influence activities, namely that information influence activities are deceptive, thus mislead and disinform; their goal is to do harm and not to support constructive solutions; they are disruptive; and information influence operations interfere in the domestic affairs of the sovereign states.¹¹⁰ These features of the information operations interlink, work holistically, and are designed to be hard to detect.¹¹¹

As this paper addresses Russia’s information operations targeting specifically Western nations, it is important to look into the features of the Western societies which can be exploited as vulnerabilities.

Western democracies are based on the principle of free opinion formation, as the essential value for building the liberal society and this achievement of the Western society is targeted by the information influence activities as a significant vulnerability.¹¹² Three main sources of

¹⁰³ Pamment, Nothhaft, Agardh-Twetman, Fjällhed, *Countering Information*, p – 17.

¹⁰⁴ Pamment, Nothhaft, Agardh-Twetman, Fjällhed, *Countering Information*, p – 15.

¹⁰⁵ Matthew J. Fecteau, *Understanding Information Operations & Information Warfare*, Global Security review, Jun 7, 2019, available at <https://globalsecurityreview.com/understanding-information-operations-information-warfare/>, accessed 11 April 2021.

¹⁰⁶ Joint Publication 3-13, p – II-1.

¹⁰⁷ Pamment, Nothhaft, Agardh-Twetman, Fjällhed, *Countering Information*, p – 9.

¹⁰⁸ Pamment, Nothhaft, Agardh-Twetman, Fjällhed, *Countering Information*, p – 9.

¹⁰⁹ Pamment, Nothhaft, Agardh-Twetman, Fjällhed, *Countering Information*, p – 9.

¹¹⁰ Pamment, Nothhaft, Agardh-Twetman, Fjällhed, *Countering Information*, p – 9.

¹¹¹ Pamment, Nothhaft, Agardh-Twetman, Fjällhed, *Countering Information*, p – 16-17.

¹¹² Pamment, Nothhaft, Agardh-Twetman, Fjällhed, *Countering Information*, p – 15.

vulnerability can be distinguished, which are media system vulnerability, public opinion vulnerability, and cognitive vulnerability.¹¹³ Firstly, technological, regulatory and economic vulnerabilities paired with invisible commercial reconfigurations of the Western media systems are exploited as the leverages for negatively influencing public opinion formation.¹¹⁴ Secondly, public opinion vulnerability is heavily influenced by the digital technologies.¹¹⁵ Though public opinion and perceptions in western societies are based on free and open debates and relies on the judgements of public persons and experts with respective reputations, new technologies give possibility to everyone, including outside players to engage in the process of forming public opinion. Moreover, these players can often be anonymous and act unidentified.¹¹⁶ Finally, information influence activities use the processes going on in the human mind while facing the conflicting principles to influence people's perceptions and behavior.¹¹⁷

1.2 Russia's foreign Information Operations targeting the West

There are different classifications and understandings of information operations, many states have their own doctrines and approaches defining the characteristics of the concept.¹¹⁸ One particularly interesting case is Russian information operations, which is the essential foundation of this research. Thus, in order to understand domestic implications of Russia's foreign information operations, it is important to first look into the key characteristics of Russian information operations particularly.

Russia has referred to information influence operations for a long time and has integrated the "strategic thinking about the role of information in projecting national power."¹¹⁹ Russian approach to information operations does not differentiate between war and peacetime, represents "whole of government" activity and basically uses nonmilitary means.¹²⁰

Russia actively implies information influence operations on the way of pursuing and legitimizing its political objectives, both foreign and domestic. According to Darczewska and Żochowski, lately, the utilization of information environment and information technologies by

¹¹³ Pamment, Nothhaft, Agardh-Twetman, Fjällhed, Countering Information, p – 20-21.

¹¹⁴ Pamment, Nothhaft, Agardh-Twetman, Fjällhed, Countering Information, p – 20.

¹¹⁵ Pamment, Nothhaft, Agardh-Twetman, Fjällhed, Countering Information, p – 20.

¹¹⁶ Pamment, Nothhaft, Agardh-Twetman, Fjällhed, Countering Information, p – 20.

¹¹⁷ Pamment, Nothhaft, Agardh-Twetman, Fjällhed, Countering Information, p – 18, 20-21.

¹¹⁸ Cordey, Cyber Influence Operations, p – 9.

¹¹⁹ Cordey, Cyber Influence Operations, p – 9.

¹²⁰ Stephen Blank, Cyber War and Information War à la Russe in George Perkovich and Ariel E. Levite (eds.), Understanding Cyber Conflict: 14 Analogies, Georgetown University Press, Washington, DC, October 2017, available at <https://carnegieendowment.org/2017/10/16/cyber-war-and-information-war-la-russe-pub-73399>, accessed 26 April 2021.

Russia has significantly increased and are “regarded as an effective and perspective way of shaping collective consciousness.”¹²¹ They explain Russian activities conducted through the information space as a well-planned, long-term operations manipulating information and ensuring social control in the broader frame of confrontation with the West.¹²²

Russia uses information operations to pursue broad strategic goals and sometimes they are enough to send the proper messages even without referring to the traditional military power.¹²³ According to the “Strategy for the national security of the Russian Federation,” information is considered as one of the essential tools for ensuring Russia’s influence on the international arena because informational confrontation is increasingly affecting the international environment.¹²⁴

Russia’s information operations, as an integral part of the broader information warfare, mostly imply information-propagandist activities that affect the mindset and behavior of the individuals and the societies as a whole.¹²⁵ Thus, in order to achieve its strategic objectives, Russia refers to the special activities influencing the information space of the adversary.¹²⁶ Those activities are “seeking to steal, plant, interdict, manipulate, distort or destroy information,”¹²⁷ while the methods include “computers, smartphones, real or invented news media, statements by leaders or celebrities, online troll campaigns, text messages, vox pops (snapshots of local opinions) by concerned citizens, YouTube videos, or direct approaches to individual human targets.”¹²⁸

Russian information warfare and, accordingly, information operations are gaining increasingly high importance in achieving desired strategic advantage over the political adversaries.¹²⁹ Russia refers to these operations aiming at a number of goals and objectives, offensive as well

¹²¹ Jolanta Darczewska, Piotr Żochowski, Russophobia in the Kremlin’s strategy - A Weapon of Mass Destruction, Point of View, Number 56, Warsaw, Ośrodek Studiów Wschodnich im. Marka Karpia/Centre for Eastern Studies, October 2015, p – 13, available at https://www.osw.waw.pl/sites/default/files/pw_56_ang_russophobia_net.pdf, accessed 17 April 2021.

¹²² Darczewska, Żochowski, Russophobia in the Kremlin’s strategy, p – 13.

¹²³ Ulrik Franke, War by non-military means: Understanding Russian Information Operations, March 2015, p – 9, available at https://dataspace.princeton.edu/bitstream/88435/dsp019c67wq22q/1/foir_4065.pdf, accessed 26 April 2021.

¹²⁴ Стратегия национальной безопасности Российской Федерации [National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation], утв. Указом Президента Российской Федерации от 31.12.2015 г. № 683, Moscow Kremlin, available at <http://www.scrf.gov.ru/security/docs/document133/>, accessed 26 April, 2021.

¹²⁵ Igor Panarin, Система информационного противоборства [System of the Information Confrontation], Военно-Промышленный Курьер ВПК, Issue 41 (257), October 2008, available at <https://www.vpk-news.ru/articles/3672>, accessed 26 April 2021.

¹²⁶ Panarin, Система информационного.

¹²⁷ Giles and Seaboyer, The Russian Information Warfare, p – 5.

¹²⁸ Giles and Seaboyer, The Russian Information Warfare, p – 5.

¹²⁹ Giles and Seaboyer, The Russian Information Warfare, p – 12.

as defensive.¹³⁰ As Giles and Seaboyer define, Russia's information operations as a stand-alone activity with specific geopolitical objectives and as a tool for weakening the adversary through different manipulations "without necessarily any specific end state in mind."¹³¹ Authors highlight that Russian approach is broadly ambitious and comprehensive intending to reach its strategic objectives by affecting the consciousness of not only the ruling regimes, but also of the mass consciousness of the whole population of the country.¹³²

Another objective of Russia in its information activities is influencing foreign decision-making through delivering disinformation into the decision-making framework of the target nation, but even if the disinformation is spread only to the public, the overall goal of creating the "permissive public opinion environment"¹³³ can still be achieved.¹³⁴ While disseminating Russian narratives into the public of the target nation "Moscow's potential gain is to win public support in adversary nations, and thereby attenuate resistance to future actions planned by Russia."¹³⁵ Information operations directed towards the foreign nations aim at disseminating the narratives and framing the environment, therefore, public opinion in the way favorable to the Kremlin.¹³⁶

In order to justify its actions Russia spreads disinformation through presenting current as well as historical events selectively and in a distorted form.¹³⁷ Russia selectively and carefully chooses the events suitable for its propaganda and disinformation purposes and afterwards builds on the narratives desirable for the Kremlin objectives.¹³⁸

Subversion and destabilization are also essential objectives of the Russia's information operations, which are more broad and long-term goals directed towards undermining the adversaries and demonstrating Russia's strength and weakness of target nations.¹³⁹ Activities related to the influencing events and audience behavior of the foreign nations have been practiced by Russia for a long time, ever since Soviet times.¹⁴⁰ These activities in western

¹³⁰ Giles and Seaboyer, *The Russian Information Warfare*, p – 13.

¹³¹ Giles and Seaboyer, *The Russian Information Warfare*, p – 13.

¹³² Giles and Seaboyer, *The Russian Information Warfare*, p – 13-14.

¹³³ Giles and Seaboyer, *The Russian Information Warfare*, p – 15.

¹³⁴ Giles and Seaboyer, *The Russian Information Warfare*, p – 15.

¹³⁵ Giles and Seaboyer, *The Russian Information Warfare*, p – 15.

¹³⁶ Giles and Seaboyer, *The Russian Information Warfare*, p – 15.

¹³⁷ Giles and Seaboyer, *The Russian Information Warfare*, p – 16.

¹³⁸ Estonian Internal Security Service, *Annual Review 2015*, p – 12.

¹³⁹ Giles and Seaboyer, *The Russian Information Warfare*, p – 16.

¹⁴⁰ Katri Pynnöniemi & András Rácz (eds.), *Fog of Falsehood, Russian Strategy of Deception and the Conflict in Ukraine*, The Finnish Institute of International Affairs Report No. 45, Helsinki, 2016, p – 33-37, available at https://www.fiia.fi/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/fiiareport45_fogoffalsehood.pdf, accessed 4 May 2021.

literature were termed as *covert actions*.¹⁴¹ Pynnöniemi and Rácz argue, that the main goal of these influence operations was to influence the policies of foreign governments, undermine the confidence of the population towards their own government institutions, disrupt the relations between the specific nations and discredit and weaken political opponents.¹⁴² According to their analyses, Russia delivers the desired messages in a manner which specific target audiences are open to hear. Contemporary Russian propaganda and disinformation, called by Pynnöniemi and Rácz in their report as strategic deception, “is instantly transformed into multiple versions of reality.”¹⁴³ Furthermore, Russian activities conducted without specific geopolitical objectives, only in order to undermine targeted foreign societies, are as well largely inherited from the Soviet times.¹⁴⁴

Since the last decade the information environment has become an important element of interstate strategic competition.¹⁴⁵ Influencing the cognitive dimension of the information environment has significantly advanced Russia’s expanding power.¹⁴⁶ As Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Russia, General of the Army Valery Gerasimov, argues, “the role of nonmilitary means of achieving political and strategic goals has substantially increased and in many cases those means have significantly exceeded the power of military weapons in their efficacy.”¹⁴⁷ Therefore, information operations are one of Russia’s central tools in the confrontation with not only its neighboring countries but Europe and the US as well. In case of confronting the Western societies, these tools are especially useful in peacetime and when “public perceptions are becoming the center of gravity in determining confrontation outcomes.”¹⁴⁸

Russia has unified and holistic strategic approach to the information operations, thus, its foreign information operations are oriented not only to affect the Armed Forces of the adversary state, but also aim at influencing the minds of the population of target nation as well as the decision-making processes in favor of Russia’s desired objectives.¹⁴⁹ Russia includes multiple governmental bodies in the conduct of the information operations to achieve its goals

¹⁴¹ Pynnöniemi and Rácz, *Fog of Falsehood*, p – 38.

¹⁴² Pynnöniemi and Rácz, *Fog of Falsehood*, p – 38.

¹⁴³ Pynnöniemi and Rácz, *Fog of Falsehood*, p – 38, 42, 320.

¹⁴⁴ Giles and Seaboyer, *The Russian Information Warfare*, p – 18.

¹⁴⁵ Tashev, Purcell, McLaughlin, *Russia’s Information Warfare*, p – 130.

¹⁴⁶ Tashev, Purcell, McLaughlin, *Russia’s Information Warfare*, p – 130.

¹⁴⁷ Valery Gerasimov, *Ценность науки в предвидении* [The Value of science is in the foresight], *Military-Industrial Kurier*, February 2013, available at <https://vpk-news.ru/articles/14632>, accessed 26 April 2021.

¹⁴⁸ Tashev, Purcell, McLaughlin, *Russia’s Information Warfare*, p – 130-133

¹⁴⁹ Tashev, Purcell, McLaughlin, *Russia’s Information Warfare*, p – 139-140.

and intentions through manipulating the cognitive dimension of the target society.¹⁵⁰ Overall it is complicated to trail exactly the Russian approach, because its essential characteristics are “innovation, flexibility, adaptability, and no fear of failure.”¹⁵¹

In Russia’s information operations separate individuals play significant role.¹⁵² On the one hand, they are targets upon whom Russia exerts its influence and, on the other, they are tools through which Russia implements its ultimate objectives.¹⁵³ Therefore, “alone or in groups, individual decision-makers, advisors, experts, the media representatives and the general population can facilitate or obstruct the Kremlin's exercise of influence over the outcome of political deliberations.”¹⁵⁴ Through psychological pressure, the emotions as well as the perceptions of individuals are influenced and consequently altered in favor of Russia. Therefore, these individuals or groups are turned into the tools that will, in their turn, influence the decisions of the government, media or public sphere and serve the Russian interests.¹⁵⁵ Methods of psychological pressure vary, though several of them are used systematically either separately or in combination.¹⁵⁶ These methods include, but are not limited to public accusations of selected individuals and entities they work for; allegations of “anti-Russian ‘phobia’” and public threatening towards the critics of the Russian leadership and Kremlin policy; fabrication and manipulation of information disseminated to the wide public for discrediting of the targeted individuals.¹⁵⁷

Russia’s motivations and objectives of conducting information operations abroad are determined by multiple factors and nevertheless they are largely opaque and serve broad range of objectives, there can be highlighted several key drivers.¹⁵⁸ Kremlin’s foreign policy, including foreign information operations, is largely influenced by its threat perceptions and accordingly confrontation with the West.¹⁵⁹ Strategy for the national security of the Russian Federation clearly states that Russia’s foreign and domestic policy faces complex threats from

¹⁵⁰ Tashev, Purcell, McLaughlin, *Russia’s Information Warfare*, p – 139.

¹⁵¹ Tashev, Purcell and McLaughlin, *Russia’s Information Warfare*, p – 140.

¹⁵² Anke Schmidt-Felzmann, *More than 'just' disinformation. Russia's information operations in the Nordic region*, April 2017, p – 36.

¹⁵³ Schmidt-Felzmann, *More than 'just' disinformation*, p – 36.

¹⁵⁴ Schmidt-Felzmann, *More than 'just' disinformation*, p – 36.

¹⁵⁵ Schmidt-Felzmann, *More than 'just' disinformation*, p – 37.

¹⁵⁶ Schmidt-Felzmann, *More than 'just' disinformation*, p – 37.

¹⁵⁷ Schmidt-Felzmann, *More than 'just' disinformation*, p – 37.

¹⁵⁸ Conor Cunningham, *A Russian Federation Information Warfare Primer*, The Henry M. Jackson School of International Studies, University of Washington, November 2020, available at https://jsis.washington.edu/news/a-russian-federation-information-warfare-primer/#_ftnref8, accessed 9 May, 2021.

¹⁵⁹ Cunningham, *A Russian Federation Information Warfare*.

the US and its allies, that are striving for maintaining their dominance in global affairs.¹⁶⁰ According to the document Russia is under constant political, economic, military and informational pressure.¹⁶¹ Therefore, as Cunningham argues, Russia's information activities are triggered by the threats posed by the West and are portrayed as defensive in nature.¹⁶² According to Cunningham this is Russia's strategy for justifying its foreign information operations, however, he further clarifies that Russia's real objectives and the overarching goal is "the protection of its own power and stability through the expansion of Russian hegemony in various sectors."¹⁶³

Another essential motivation for Russia's information operations is its long history of being a global superpower.¹⁶⁴ After the dissolution of the Soviet Union and consequent weakening of Russia's superpower image, Kremlin now sees critically important to regain its prestige and "to create a new polycentric world and establish itself as a powerful player with a central role in global conflicts."¹⁶⁵ Information operations, in this sense, represent relatively cheap and effective way for achieving its foreign policy goals.¹⁶⁶ Furthermore, on the way of exerting its influence on the global arena through competing with the West, Russia demonstrates the acknowledgements of its limitations, as well as strengths and weaknesses of the opponents.¹⁶⁷ In this regard, Stephen Blank argues, that Russian official documents since 2009 have been oriented on "mobilizing the entire state for conflict"¹⁶⁸ and reinforcing the narratives regarding Russia being under constant attack from the US-led information warfare and military threats.¹⁶⁹ Eugene Rumer and Andrew Weiss argue, that the key objective of the Moscow is to counter the US-based international liberal order, which includes "undermining democratic governance, stoking ethnic and religious tensions, and building new outposts for gathering intelligence and projecting military power."¹⁷⁰ Moreover, Russia seeks to establish the multipolar world where

¹⁶⁰ Стратегия национальной безопасности Российской Федерации [National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation].

¹⁶¹ Стратегия национальной безопасности.

¹⁶² Cunningham, A Russian Federation Information Warfare.

¹⁶³ Cunningham, A Russian Federation Information Warfare.

¹⁶⁴ Cunningham, A Russian Federation Information Warfare.

¹⁶⁵ Cunningham, A Russian Federation Information Warfare.

¹⁶⁶ Cunningham, A Russian Federation Information Warfare.

¹⁶⁷ Andrew S. Weiss, New Tools, Old Tricks: Emerging Technologies and Russia's Global Tool Kit, CARNEGIE Endowment for International Peace, April 2021, available at <https://carnegieendowment.org/2021/04/29/new-tools-old-tricks-emerging-technologies-and-russia-s-global-tool-kit-pub-84437>, accessed 9 May 2021.

¹⁶⁸ Blank, Cyber War and Information, p – 83.

¹⁶⁹ Blank, Cyber War and Information, p – 83.

¹⁷⁰ Eugene Rumer, Andrew S. Weiss, Vladimir Putin's Russia Goes Global, The Wall Street Journal, August 2017, available at <https://www.wsj.com/articles/vladimir-putins-russia-goes-global-1501877673>, accessed 9 May 2021.

Russia is among the key players.¹⁷¹ And for this end, undermining the enemy from inside through non-military means is one of the Russia's essential strategic operations conducted through the information space.¹⁷²

1.3 Russia's domestic image

Foreign policy of the state represents the cross-point of domestic and international politics.¹⁷³ Therefore, there are two major determinants which influence the shape of foreign policy – “international or external and domestic or internal.”¹⁷⁴ International environment is considered as one of the key factors determining the course of the foreign strategy.¹⁷⁵ Among the external components effecting state's foreign policy the key elements are “the international system or power structure, international law, international organizations, alliances, and military strength or arm race.”¹⁷⁶ On the other hand, internal environment of the country plays essential role in determining which course of action country follows in its foreign policy.¹⁷⁷ Domestic factors influencing foreign policy include, but are not limited to culture and history, geography, population, political institutionalization, economic and military capabilities, technology and science and personal characteristics of the leader.¹⁷⁸ Internal elements also include mass public opinion, which is of specific interest for the purpose of this paper.¹⁷⁹

Laura Neack distinguishes two basic ways of public opinion and policy making interaction.¹⁸⁰ The first one is the “bottom-up” approach, meaning that general public impacts the foreign policy decision-making and the other is “top-down” approach, where elites influence the formulation of the mass public opinion.¹⁸¹ Though the impact of public opinion on policy-making is indirect, it is still one of the key political resources for key political actors and, thus, highly matters.¹⁸²

¹⁷¹ Paul Stronski, Richard Sokolsky, *The Return of Global Russia: An Analytical Framework*, CARNEGIE Endowment for international Peace, December 2017, available at <https://carnegieendowment.org/2017/12/14/return-of-global-russia-analytical-framework-pub-75003>, accessed 9 May 2021.

¹⁷² Blank, *Cyber War and Information*, p – 93.

¹⁷³ Bojang AS, *The Study of Foreign Policy in International Relations*, *Journal of Political Sciences & Public Affairs* 6:4, October 2018, p – 2, available at <https://www.longdom.org/open-access/the-study-of-foreign-policy-in-international-relations-2332-0761-1000337.pdf>, accessed 13 May 2021

¹⁷⁴ AS, *The Study of Foreign Policy*, p – 2.

¹⁷⁵ AS, *The Study of Foreign Policy*, p – 2.

¹⁷⁶ AS, *The Study of Foreign Policy*, p – 2.

¹⁷⁷ AS, *The Study of Foreign Policy*, p – 5.

¹⁷⁸ AS, *The Study of Foreign Policy*, p – 5-7.

¹⁷⁹ AS, *The Study of Foreign Policy*, p – 7.

¹⁸⁰ Laura Neack, *The New Foreign Policy, Power Seeking in a Globalized Era* 2nd Ed., Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., Lanham, 2008, p – 114.

¹⁸¹ Neack, *The New Foreign Policy*, p – 114-115.

¹⁸² Neack, *The New Foreign Policy*, p – 116, 121.

In Russia, where regime is not democratically competitive, as Anna Efimova and Denis Strebkov assert public opinion is not considered as an essential force for determining Russia's behavior on international arena.¹⁸³ The ultimate decision-making power is in President's hand and, thus, the dominant elite manipulates and "seeks to shape, rather than respond to, public opinion."¹⁸⁴ Russian public opinion is mainly in line with the official course of foreign policy.¹⁸⁵ Official statements and mass media have their prominent role in shaping and adjusting the opinion of the population.¹⁸⁶ Gradually increasing narrative of making Russia "a great power again has been widely accepted by mass opinion, the elites and the leadership."¹⁸⁷ Moreover, Vladimir Putin, as a leader and, accordingly, his foreign policy course has enjoyed the high public support regardless of altered attitude in his foreign policy towards the West during his presidency.¹⁸⁸ Russians supported his relatively "pro-Western" policy since 9/11 attacks and supported his decision to be a partner in the international war on terrorism.¹⁸⁹ In the third term of Putin's presidency, according to Efimova and Strebkov, Russia's turn to the decisive anti-Western policy was as well supported by the population.¹⁹⁰ The goal of returning the great power status to Russia, "combined with the steady shift towards authoritarianism, [...] has become the basis for building consensus in foreign policy."¹⁹¹

One of the most efficient ways to shape the public opinion and collective consciousness is to communicate to the population the narratives portraying an image of Russia desirable for the governing elite.¹⁹² The communication is conducted as a long-term special operation of manipulating the information and utilizing the elements of social control placed "in a deterministic context of rivalry with the Western world."¹⁹³ As Darczewska and Żochowski argue, Russia's way of delivering its messages is direct and aggressive, leaving no way for alternative view or compromise neither for alternative methods, except of those taken by the

¹⁸³ Anna Efimova & Denis Strebkov, *Linking Public Opinion and Foreign Policy in Russia*, *The International Spectator*, 55:1, 2020, p – 93, DOI: 10.1080/03932729.2019.1700040, available at <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/03932729.2019.1700040?needAccess=true>, accessed 15 May 2021

¹⁸⁴ Efimova & Strebkov, *Linking Public Opinion*, p – 93.

¹⁸⁵ Efimova & Strebkov, *Linking Public Opinion*, p – 97.

¹⁸⁶ Efimova & Strebkov, *Linking Public Opinion*, p – 95.

¹⁸⁷ Efimova & Strebkov, *Linking Public Opinion*, p – 108.

¹⁸⁸ Efimova & Strebkov, *Linking Public Opinion*, p – 103.

¹⁸⁹ John O'Loughlin, Gearóid O' Tuathail & Vladimir Kolosov, 'A 'Risky Westward Turn'? Putin's 9–11 Script and Ordinary Russians', *Europe-Asia Studies*, 56:1, 2004, p – 25, available at <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/0966813032000161428?needAccess=true>, accessed 15 May 2021.

¹⁹⁰ Efimova & Strebkov, *Linking Public Opinion*, p – 103.

¹⁹¹ Efimova & Strebkov, *Linking Public Opinion*, p – 108.

¹⁹² Darczewska, Żochowski, *Russophobia in the Kremlin's*, p – 7.

¹⁹³ Darczewska, Żochowski, *Russophobia in the Kremlin's*, p – 13.

Kremlin.¹⁹⁴ Key principle here is the delivery of simple, repetitive and emotional messages, triggering the “us and them” attitude within the Russian audience. The principle of “us and them” implies the “construction of an image of the enemy”, where West is intimidating the Russians and its neighboring countries and is engaged in conspiracy theories against Russia. Therefore, from the Russian viewpoint, “Russian conservatism is a response to Western liberalism.”¹⁹⁵ Accordingly, Russia’s foreign policy, and the information operations directed towards the West are a response to their aggressive actions.

The key term for highlighting the “us and them” principle is the old concept of Russophobia, which besides Russian citizens who are opposing the government’s policy, refers to the NATO and EU member states.¹⁹⁶ The Kremlin manages to steadily embed this threat in the perception of its domestic audience and mobilize Russian public against the threat alleged by its government.¹⁹⁷ Russia actively and efficiently refers to this approach in its information operations.¹⁹⁸ By intentionally manipulating the information and, thus, delivering selected government-controlled narratives, state propaganda machine is aiming at “manually controlling” the general public.¹⁹⁹

Russian information warfare is different on international and domestic fronts.²⁰⁰ As Timothy Thomas explains, on international front Russian policymakers shape the information environment and concentrate on influencing the international public opinion at the United Nations (UN) and worldwide conferences on information-related issues.²⁰¹ On the domestic front Russia develops doctrines and policies intended to enhance domestic information security and focuses on “the impact of new media on the Russian population.”²⁰² Russia’s propagandist domestic narratives are the important part of Russia’s information operations waged against the West.²⁰³ It is a bases and solid ground prepared in advance of the operation itself in order to justify the future actions.²⁰⁴ The arguments and messages desirable for the Kremlin are

¹⁹⁴ Darczewska, Żochowski, Russophobia in the Kremlin’s, p – 13.

¹⁹⁵ Darczewska, Żochowski, Russophobia in the Kremlin’s, p – 14.

¹⁹⁶ Darczewska, Żochowski, Russophobia in the Kremlin’s, p – 15.

¹⁹⁷ Darczewska, Żochowski, Russophobia in the Kremlin’s, p – 15.

¹⁹⁸ Schmidt-Felzmann, More than 'just' disinformation, p – 37.

¹⁹⁹ Darczewska, Żochowski, Russophobia in the Kremlin’s, p – 7.

²⁰⁰ Timothy L. Thomas, Russian information warfare theory: the consequences of August 2008 in Stephen J. Blank, Richard Weitz (eds.), *The Russian military today and tomorrow*, Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, 2010, pp – 267, available at <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/resrep12110.8.pdf>, accessed 23 July 2021

²⁰¹ Thomas, Russian information warfare, pp – 268.

²⁰² Thomas, Russian information warfare, p – 268.

²⁰³ Darczewska, Żochowski, Russophobia in the Kremlin’s, p – 19.

²⁰⁴ Darczewska, Żochowski, Russophobia in the Kremlin’s, p – 19.

popularized through media sources. Russia's domestic audience is the key target for the government's narratives regarding the Western Russophobia.²⁰⁵ Through this perspective Russia justifies its foreign information operations and portrays itself as a defender of the Russian society.²⁰⁶ Information operations against the West and, thus, fighting the created image of an enemy, is Russia's "tool for shaping the neo-imperial political identity of Russia's citizens, of mobilizing them in the face of real or alleged threats."²⁰⁷ This strategy ensures the strong support of the society for the kremlin's policy and, for the Russian side, justifies the continuing confrontation between Russia and the West.²⁰⁸

As Russian historian, social scientist and publicist Andrey Fursov argues, the long-lasting objectives of the West is to weaken and subordinate Russia.²⁰⁹ He further states that the West is waging psychological warfare against Russia through drawing the image of negative and aggressive Russia, which is trying to deter the "normal" development of the West.²¹⁰ The primary objective of Russia's enemies is to bring damage to Russia.²¹¹ Therefore, Russia has to deter itself and, thus, be strong and able to retaliate in line with permanent development of its capabilities in order to defend itself within the information warfare waged against it.²¹² The process of information warfare against Russia is ongoing for a long time and at the beginning was relatively successful, though since 2000's when Vladimir Putin came to power, the process of creeping dissolution of Russia halted, and information activities from the West, directed towards undermining the national cultural and moral values of Russia intensified.²¹³ As Press-secretary of the President of Russia, Dmitri Peskov mentioned, currently Russia is facing the information war with the founders of the operations in the information environment, meaning primarily the Western nations and their mass media.²¹⁴

²⁰⁵ Darczewska, Źochowski, Russophobia in the Kremlin's, p – 28.

²⁰⁶ Darczewska, Źochowski, Russophobia in the Kremlin's, p – 28.

²⁰⁷ Darczewska, Źochowski, Russophobia in the Kremlin's, p – 28.

²⁰⁸ Darczewska, Źochowski, Russophobia in the Kremlin's, p – 19, 28.

²⁰⁹ Andrey Fursov, Русофобия - психоисторическое оружие в борьбе против России [Russophobia - psychological weapon in the battle against Russia], konkir.ru, available at <https://konkir.ru/articles/rusofobiya-psihoistoricheskoe-oruzhie-v-borbe-protiv-rossii>, accessed 16 May 2021.

²¹⁰ Fursov, Русофобия – психоисторическое.

²¹¹ Fursov, Русофобия – психоисторическое.

²¹² Fursov, Русофобия – психоисторическое.

²¹³ Krylova I., Информационные войны и безопасность России, [Information Wars and Russian Security], ИНФОРМАЦИОННЫЕ ВОЙНЫ, No 3(39), Russian Academy of Sciences, Military Sciences Academy, 2016, p – 66, available at https://1309c818-d573-eb27-9a0a-a9949b19df7a.filesusr.com/ugd/ec9cc2_8d82be40ba2e42fe9da7a1b311372cc5.pdf, accessed 18 May 2021.

²¹⁴ Мы находимся в состоянии информационной войны с англосаксами [We are in the state of information war with Anglo-Saxons], Коммерсантъ, 26.03.2016, available at <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2949150>, accessed 18 May 2021.

Accordingly, the narrative broadly promoted by the Kremlin to its domestic audience, and often influencing the Western experts as well, is the justification of Russia's actions as the inevitable "revenge" for "the so-called 'humiliation of Russia'."²¹⁵ According to the President Putin's address to the Federal Assembly, Russia is under the constant provocations from the West, which take place without any reason and threaten core security interests of the country.²¹⁶ In response, Russia is acting in an "extremely restrained manner" and is oriented on cooperation, though if the provocations continue "Russia's response will be asymmetrical, swift and tough."²¹⁷ Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russian Federation, Sergey Lavrov emphasized the Russophobic obsession of the US, which is, according to his words, crossing all the red lines.²¹⁸

According to the Ukraine Crisis Media Center report, threat perception is the main domestic propaganda narrative of the Kremlin, meaning that the West is "unstable and aggressive", while Russia is presented as "stable and peaceful."²¹⁹ Accordingly, Russia's enemies are waging a constant battle against it.²²⁰ These narrative shapes the way Russian society thinks about the West and justifies Putin's foreign information operations against the West. James Wertsch outlined the template for the Russian narrative formulation, according to which (1) in the "initial situation" Russia is peaceful and does not interfere in the domestic politics of other countries; (2) foreign enemies attack Russia without any provocation; (3) enemy threatens Russia's national security and intends to destroy it as a civilization; (4) eventually, Russia, standing alone, succeeds over the foreign enemy due to its exceptionalism.²²¹ According to Wertsch, as a result of Kremlin's successful narrative delivery activities, this viewpoint is shared by the majority of Russia's population in present days as well and Russia's actions against Western states are explained as the "reasonable response to an external threat."²²² When

²¹⁵ Lilia Shevtsova, *Russia and the West: a liberal view*, November 2008, openDemocracy, available at <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/russia-and-the-west-a-liberal-view/>, accessed 17 May 2021.

²¹⁶ Address of the President of the Russian Federation to the Federal Assembly, April 21, 2021, Moscow, available at <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/65418>, accessed 17 May 2021.

²¹⁷ Address of the President of the Russian Federation, 17 May 2021.

²¹⁸ Сергей Лавров: "Русофобия в США переходит все грани" [Sergey Lavrov: "Russophobia in the US is crossing all the red lines], Euronews, June 2017, available at <https://ru.euronews.com/2017/06/21/france-russia>, accessed 17 May 2021.

²¹⁹ Makukhin, Tsybul'ska, Kavatsiuk, *How Russian media*.

²²⁰ Makukhin, Tsybul'ska, Kavatsiuk, *How Russian media*.

²²¹ James V. Wertsch, *Narrative Tools, Truth, and Fast Thinking in National Memory*, in Åsa Mäkitalo, Per Linell and Roger Säljö (eds.), *Memory practices and learning: interactional, institutional, and sociocultural perspectives*, Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing Inc., 2017, p – 239.

²²² James V. Wertsch, *Narrative Tools, Truth, and Fast Thinking in National Memory*, in Åsa Mäkitalo, Per Linell and Roger Säljö (eds.), *Memory practices and learning: interactional, institutional, and sociocultural perspectives*, Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing Inc., 2017, p – 239.

explaining Russia's actions in Crimea, including information operations, according to Russia's narrative, which shaped its domestic public opinion as well, it was US and Europe who encouraged Ukraine "to break away from Russia."²²³

The narrative of the "enemy image" of the West waging information warfare against Russia on the one hand and the nationalistic rhetoric of Russia's great power image on the other, presented to the domestic population are actively utilized to explain and legitimize Russia's operations against the West in the eyes of its domestic audience.²²⁴

For the Kremlin, one of the key tools to disseminate its narratives, thus accordingly shape and manipulate public opinion, is the mass media, controlled by the Kremlin itself.²²⁵ This well-demonstrates Putin's viewpoint, described by Jill Dougherly as - "whoever owns the media controls what it says."²²⁶

CHAPTER 2 Framing messages through Russian state mass media

2.1 Media – Kremlin's domestic influence tool

This chapter explores the role of Russian television in reporting the Kremlin narratives to the domestic audience. In order to identify Russia's key narratives regarding its foreign activities disseminated to internal population, the chapter addresses the theoretical foundations of media framing and empirical examples of Russia's Western narratives. This chapter argues, that Russia efficiently influences the media narratives to advance its domestic objectives of shaping desirable domestic public opinion.

For autocratic regimes, like Russia, public opinion and legitimacy are significant aspects to maintain power.²²⁷ They realize the necessity to at least appear responsive to society's

²²³ Wertsch, Narrative Tools, p – 239.

²²⁴ Stephen Hutchings, Joanna Szostek, Dominant Narratives in Russian Political and Media Discourse during the Ukraine Crisis, E-International Relations, April 2015, available at <https://www.e-ir.info/2015/04/28/dominant-narratives-in-russian-political-and-media-discourse-during-the-crisis/>, accessed 20 May 2021.

²²⁵ Maria Lipman, Media Manipulation and Political Control in Russia, February 2009, Chatham House, available at <https://carnegie.ru/2009/02/03/media-manipulation-and-political-control-in-russia-pub-37199>, accessed 20 May 2021.

²²⁶ Jill Dougherly, How the Media Became One of Putin's Most Powerful Weapons, The Atlantic, April 2015, available at <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/04/how-the-media-became-putins-most-powerful-weapon/391062/>, accessed 20 May 2021.

²²⁷ Erik C. Nisbet, Elizabeth Stoycheff, Why Russians support Putin's foreign policy, September 2016, The Conversation, available at <https://theconversation.com/why-russians-support-putins-foreign-policy-64353>, accessed 23 May 2021.

opinion.²²⁸ As one of the core tools to engage with public is media, it is essential for the Kremlin to maintain control over the sources of mass communication.²²⁹ The competition on Russia's media market is low, as all the major media outlets are controlled by the Kremlin and, thus, the population can have "access only to one-sided political coverage."²³⁰ Large majority of Russia's media outlets is owned by the state or the persons close to the political leadership, which allows them to broadcast the content favorable to the government and accordingly prevent the dissemination critical material.²³¹ According to the Freedom House report, notwithstanding the freedom of the speech prescribed in the constitution of the Russian Federation, the Russian government suppresses any kind of information that does not have official Kremlin support.²³² The government controls all the national television networks with very few media outlets struggling to maintain independence, which gives the Kremlin essential leverage to influence the population for whom television is still the main source for receiving news, though nowadays with declining influence considering the attachment of younger population more on the internet.²³³ Overall, according to the survey on television watching frequency in Russia, conducted in January 2021, almost 60 percent of Russians watch television daily.²³⁴ Television in Russia today, as well as during the Soviet times, is still the "most trusted opinion-maker."²³⁵ Modern Russia successfully imposes its desired worldview on domestic population²³⁶ and promotes ethnic nationalism through its government-controlled media.²³⁷ Through the manipulations, increasing control and restrictions, the Kremlin "has 'weaponized' the media as a source of disinformation at home and abroad."²³⁸

For the Kremlin, media is the essential tool for shaping public opinion and influencing the population to accept the different reality which the President and government's senior officials

²²⁸ Nisbet and Stoycheff, Why Russians support.

²²⁹ Nisbet and Stoycheff, Why Russians support.

²³⁰ Ruben Enikolopov, Maria Petrova and Ekaterina Zhuravskaya, Media and Political Persuasion: Evidence from Russia, *The American Economic Review*, American Economic Association, December 2011, Vol. 101, No. 7, p – 3254, available at <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/41408737.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A5c496c1e8ea68d2a128f2711eb8a1e4e>, accessed 23 May 2021.

²³¹ FREEDOM OF THE PRESS 2015, Freedom House, p – 4, available at https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/FreedomofthePress_2015_FINAL.pdf, accessed 25 May 2021.

²³² Freedom in the World 2021 — Russia Country Report, Freedom House, available at <https://freedomhouse.org/country/russia/freedom-world/2021>, accessed 25 May 2021.

²³³ Freedom in the World 2021.

²³⁴ D. Elagina, Television watching frequency in Russia 2021, February 2021, Statista, available at <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1094478/russia-television-viewing-frequency/>, accessed 25 May 2021.

²³⁵ Makukhin, Tsybul'ska, Kavatsiuk, How Russian media foments, p – 17.

²³⁶ Makukhin, Tsybul'ska and Kavatsiuk, How Russian media, p – 25.

²³⁷ Nisbet, Stoycheff, Why Russians support.

²³⁸ Nisbet, Stoycheff, Why Russians support.

want to frame.²³⁹ Though there are several media outlets which accept these manipulations in order to survive, the majority “not only agree to the state's manipulations, but go one step further by offering creative ideas for advancing the Kremlin's official line.”²⁴⁰ In order to shape the “pseudo-reality” and manipulate public emotions in a specific way, the president administration and other government structures can themselves directly provide the material to the key media providers.²⁴¹ In regard to controlling the media space and regulating media policy, Russia’s presidential administration defines official messaging directions, allocates resources, and establishes the boundaries.²⁴²

Considering the existing boundaries in messaging, the Kremlin is carefully trying to maintain integrity in messaging and remain consistent, as well as avoid provoking mistrust which will undermine the efficiency and credibility of the narratives.²⁴³ Not only the Presidential administration is involved in directing the main media narratives, other governmental structures, such as the Security Council and several ministries also contribute through delivering and technically validating essential messages domestically.²⁴⁴ Moreover, President Putin is personally controlling the media narratives through “direct engagement” and “highly visible leadership.”²⁴⁵ The engagement is especially visible when Putin’s control over the political system, his political legitimacy and Russia’s national security interests are at stake.²⁴⁶ Russia’s president is not only the decision-maker but he personally delivers the most significant messages to the public and, thus, successfully uses the desired “style and tone of Russia’s messaging.”²⁴⁷

The state-controlled television channels are the key tool for artificially constructing the reality for Russia’s domestic audience through excluding the events which really happened on the one hand, and replacing them with distorted content/information on the other.²⁴⁸

²³⁹ Vasily Gatov, How the Kremlin and the Media Ended Up in Bed Together, March 2015, The Moscow Times, available at <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2015/03/11/how-the-kremlin-and-the-media-ended-up-in-bed-together-a44663>, accessed 25 May 2021

²⁴⁰ Gatov, How the Kremlin.

²⁴¹ Gatov, How the Kremlin.

²⁴² Vera Zakem, Paul Saunders, Umida Hashimova, and P. Kathleen Hammerberg, Mapping Russian Media Network: Media’s Role in Russian Foreign Policy and Decision-making, CNA, January 2018, p – 22, available at https://www.cna.org/cna_files/pdf/DRM-2017-U-015367-3Rev.pdf, accessed 26 May 2021.

²⁴³ Zakem, Saunders, Hashimova, and Hammerberg, Mapping Russian Media, p – 20.

²⁴⁴ Zakem, Saunders, Hashimova, and Hammerberg, Mapping Russian Media, p – 23-25.

²⁴⁵ Zakem, Saunders, Hashimova, and Hammerberg, Mapping Russian Media, p – 26.

²⁴⁶ Zakem, Saunders, Hashimova, and Hammerberg, Mapping Russian Media, p – 27.

²⁴⁷ Zakem, Saunders, Hashimova, and Hammerberg, Mapping Russian Media, p – 28.

²⁴⁸ Gatov, How the Kremlin.

Government control over the media is further accompanied with other barriers, such as violation of the freedom of speech guaranteed by the constitution, selective application of laws to media outlets, and lack of journalistic ethics from the journalists themselves as well as from the government representatives.²⁴⁹ Therefore, though television is perceived as a provider of information, at the same time it is an institution which shapes and enhances political power.²⁵⁰ This is especially obvious in countries like Russia, where due to the weakness of democratic institutions, media is utilized more as “a tool for suppressing democracy than a force for empowering the public.”²⁵¹ Regarding the attitude of the population to the media, according to Sarah Oates, Russian population is more interested in a sense of pride and nationhood from the television broadcast than in objective and unbiased information.²⁵² As the survey of the Levada-Center conducted in 2020 shows, 57 percent of Russia’s population are sure that the television objectively broadcasts Russia’s foreign policy events.²⁵³

Media in general and television particularly is one of the core instruments of policy in Russia.²⁵⁴ As the President Putin highlighted “there should be patriotically minded people at the head of state information resources, people who uphold the interests of the Russian Federation. These are state resources. That is the way it is going to be.”²⁵⁵ Russia efficiently utilizes its domestic media in support of its foreign and security policy.²⁵⁶ In this regard, key objective of the Kremlin is to mobilize the support of the internal audience through state-controlled domestic media.²⁵⁷

Jill Dougherty in her article for *The Atlantic* highlighted Alexey Venediktov’s, editor in chief of Echo of Moscow, words that well explain Putin’s view on the media: “it’s not an institution of civil society, it’s propaganda” and “the Russian broadcasters [...] are all instruments for reaching a goal inside the country, and abroad.”²⁵⁸ As Dougherty argues, for Kremlin the information and thus, media which processes and broadcasts it, is the most essential and

²⁴⁹ Sarah Oates, *Television, Democracy and Elections in Russia*, Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2006, p – 21.

²⁵⁰ Oates, *Television, Democracy*, p – 189.

²⁵¹ Oates, *Television, Democracy*, p – 189.

²⁵² Oates, *Television, Democracy*, p – 20.

²⁵³ РОССИЙСКИЙ МЕДИАЛАНДШАФТ – 2020 [Russia’s media environment – 2020], Levada Analytical Center (Levada-Center), May 2020, available at <https://www.levada.ru/2020/05/20/rossijskij-medialandshaft-2020-2/>, accessed 26 May 2021.

²⁵⁴ Zakem, Saunders, Hashimova, and Hammerberg, *Mapping Russian Media*, p – 16.

²⁵⁵ News conference of Vladimir Putin, December 19, 2013, available at <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/19859>, accessed 26 May 2021.

²⁵⁶ Zakem, Saunders, Hashimova, and Hammerberg, *Mapping Russian Media*.

²⁵⁷ Zakem, Saunders, Hashimova, and Hammerberg, *Mapping Russian Media*, p – 17.

²⁵⁸ Dougherty, *How the Media*.

efficient weapon of the contemporary world.²⁵⁹ Therefore, the kremlin-centric Russian television is primarily concerned about producing messages to please the Kremlin and then to communicate them to the viewers.²⁶⁰ Russian media is well-prepared to sort out information and produce different interpretations of the original material.²⁶¹

2.2 Building and delivering efficient narratives for framing the domestic audience opinion

Narrative structures influence thinking, perception, imagination and moral choices of the people.²⁶² Various incidents fall into the different categories of the dominant narratives and affect the process of forming the general worldview.²⁶³ Today political narratives are already an essential part of the society's everyday reality and broadly shape the perceptions and ideas of the population, that bring it to the center of the domestic and international politics as well.²⁶⁴ As Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, and Roselle define it, "strategic narratives are a means for political actors to construct a shared meaning of the past, present, and future of international politics to shape the behavior of domestic and international actors."²⁶⁵ States elaborate strategic narratives to expand their influence and change the political environment in their favor.²⁶⁶ In contemporary world, states use comprehensive strategies and various powerful tools to produce narratives and, thus, frame the desired picture of reality.²⁶⁷ One of these powerful tools is the media.²⁶⁸ Therefore, the Kremlin deems the development of media resources as particularly important for communicating its viewpoint and key messages to the target audiences.²⁶⁹ The methods of delivering and framing the narratives are essential to consider when addressing their efficiency to shape the opinion.²⁷⁰ Through referring to various media effects the narratives are able to influence, and when necessary, alter the viewpoint and/or attitude to specific political events or actors, which in their turn contribute to the power legitimization.²⁷¹

²⁵⁹ Dougherty, *How the Media*.

²⁶⁰ Ellen Mickiewicz, *Television, Power, and the Public in Russia*, Cambridge University Press, New-York, 2008, p – 3.

²⁶¹ Mickiewicz, *Television, Power*, p – 3.

²⁶² Theodore R. Sarbin, *The Narrative as a Root Metaphor for Psychology*, in Theodore R. Sarbin (ed.), *Narrative Psychology: The Storied Nature of Human Conduct*, Praeger Publishers, Westport, 1986, p – 8.

²⁶³ Alisher Faizullaev, *Russia, the West and the Growing Gap between Narratives*, E-INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS, May 2018, available at <https://www.e-ir.info/2018/05/08/russia-and-the-west-what-to-do-with-the-growing-gap-between-narratives/>, accessed 26 May 2021.

²⁶⁴ Faizullaev, *Russia, the West*.

²⁶⁵ Alister Miskimmon, Ben O'Loughlin, and Laura Roselle, *Strategic Narratives: Communication Power and the New World Order*, Routledge, New York, 2013, p – 3.

²⁶⁶ Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, and Roselle, *Strategic Narratives*, p – 3.

²⁶⁷ Faizullaev, *Russia, the West*.

²⁶⁸ Faizullaev, *Russia, the West*.

²⁶⁹ Hutchings and Szostek, *Dominant Narratives*.

²⁷⁰ Lukyanova, *Framing in Russian*, p – 1.

²⁷¹ Lukyanova, *Framing in Russian*, p – 1.

By properly framing particular information into the desired message, it becomes powerful tool to shape desired political reality, “manipulate public opinion and influence the legitimation or de-legitimation of political power.”²⁷² As Robert Entman argues, media narratives can indeed move the audience in a specific direction through influencing public preferences and, consequently, affecting the attitudes of the people.²⁷³

What is also key in delivering messages to the audience, and what significantly contributes to the efficiency of the message, is its emotional side and as Robert Entman argues, the information received from the media remarkably engages with the emotional needs, hence, stimulates emotional responses.²⁷⁴ Russian television enhances the emotional impact by referring to “such techniques as parceling, sarcasm and irony” in parallel with “a large number of metaphors, epithets, comparisons, litotes, and hyperboles, and expressive vocabulary.”²⁷⁵

While reporting the narratives media creates “framing effects.”²⁷⁶ Media effects and framing are essential elements for developing successful narratives. In order to understand how Russia implements domestic objectives of influencing public perceptions, the following part of the paper looks into the wider debates of media framing. As Kirk Hallahan defines it, “framing is a critical activity in the construction of social reality because it helps shape the perspectives through which people see the world.”²⁷⁷ Therefore, the frames that are important elements, which, as Galina Lukyanova argues, in order to be powerful should originate from the politicians, are processed by the media and finally reach citizens, to whom the framed messages are addressed.²⁷⁸

The analyses of the news on Russian federal TV channels *Pervyi*, and *Russia-1* conducted by Lukyanova showed that frames can indeed contribute to the process of political power legitimization.²⁷⁹ By properly framing the narratives and repeatedly presenting them on

²⁷² Lukyanova, Framing in Russian, p – 1.

²⁷³ Robert M. Entman, *Democracy Without Citizens: Media and the Decay of American Politics*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1989, pp – 75-81.

²⁷⁴ Entman, *Democracy Without Citizens*, p – 84.

²⁷⁵ Lukyanova, Framing in Russian, p – 6.

²⁷⁶ Efimova and Strebkov, *Linking Public Opinion*, p – 95.

²⁷⁷ Kirk Hallahan, Seven Models of Framing: Implications for Public Relations, *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 11:3, 1999, p – 207, available at https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1207/s1532754xjpr1103_02?needAccess=true, accessed 10 June 2021.

²⁷⁸ Lukyanova, Framing in Russian, p – 2.

²⁷⁹ Lukyanova, Framing in Russian, p – 2-3.

different channels, Russia significantly reinforce the impact of the narrative and increases the support to government activities.²⁸⁰

In order to analyze the domestic factors influencing Russia's behavior on the international stage and, thus, its foreign information activities, it would be interesting to look into the core strategic narratives presented to Russia's internal population. Through strategic narratives states structure their identity and international experience.²⁸¹ One of the core lines of Russia's strategic narratives, first of all targeting its internal population and then international audience, are constructed on the bases of national identity and focus on building of the oppositional relationship between Russia and the West.²⁸² As Iulia-Sabina Joja mentions, "Russia's strategic narrative would simply not exist without" blaming the West, thus by "constructing his opponent as an identarian threat, Vladimir Putin has securitized the West."²⁸³ Joja argues, that the information which reaches Kremlin's target audiences is manipulated, the West's intentions and actions are interpreted, and weaknesses specifically outlined.²⁸⁴ As a positive alternative to "the West", Russia presents itself as "a moralizing, value-laden, spiritual and conservative power."²⁸⁵

Framing Russia's positive image by simultaneously highlighting anti-Western narratives is an important factor to justify and legitimize Russia's foreign information activities on the hand, and diminish the credibility of Western allegations of Russia's aggressiveness, on the other.²⁸⁶ Hutchings and Szostek emphasize the importance of these narratives as one of the core factors ensuring domestic support and justification of Russia's foreign information operations.²⁸⁷ They point out that the narratives shape the way Russian society perceives the world politics, and influence their attitude towards the Kremlin actions.²⁸⁸

In order to understand how the Kremlin legitimizes its foreign operations domestically, it is important to look into the picture of reality which Russian population sees. Russian media portrays the West in a negative light attaching it features which "include hypocrisy, risibility, arrogant foolishness, and a lack of moral integrity to the point of criminality."²⁸⁹ Russian TV

²⁸⁰ Lukyanova, *Framing in Russian*, p – 3, 6.

²⁸¹ Iulia-Sabina Joja, *Exploring Putin's strategic narrative*, GLOBAL FOCUS, available at <https://www.global-focus.eu/2019/05/exploring-putins-strategic-narrative/>, accessed 8 June 2021.

²⁸² Joja, *Exploring Putin's strategic*.

²⁸³ Joja, *Exploring Putin's strategic*.

²⁸⁴ Joja, *Exploring Putin's strategic*.

²⁸⁵ Joja, *Exploring Putin's strategic*.

²⁸⁶ Hutchings and Szostek, *Dominant Narratives*.

²⁸⁷ Hutchings and Szostek, *Dominant Narratives*.

²⁸⁸ Hutchings and Szostek, *Dominant Narratives*.

²⁸⁹ Hutchings and Szostek, *Dominant Narratives*.

programmes find and present the evidences of these characteristics from past as well as present events and, thus, as Hutchings and Szostek point out, through such claims the Kremlin challenges credibility of the allegations against Russian aggressive actions.²⁹⁰ The messages sent from the Russian television clearly outline that the Western states are acting in their own selfish interests, instead of the declared protection of democratic and moral values.²⁹¹ Russian media narratives are in constant confrontation with the Western narratives through portraying alternate realities.²⁹² Western narratives condemned Russian military involvement in Ukraine, while Russian narratives did not admit, as well as in case of the US presidential elections 2016, when Russia denied its interference in the elections, in which US accused it.²⁹³

Irina Glinskaya argues that the primary role of Russian media is to actively form and guide mass consciousness adapting it to the globalization processes with the support of state institutions and civil society.²⁹⁴ She highlights, that in line with contribution to the enhancement of Russian statehood, its science and culture, core task of Russian media encompass information counteraction to the disinformation activities waged against Russian leadership and other forms of information aggression towards destabilization of Russian society.²⁹⁵ Hence, Glinskaya emphasizes media's key role in strengthening the Russian statehood and protecting its national interests.²⁹⁶

Further, the paper explores the key Russian narratives regarding the West and information warfare waged against Russia. These narratives significantly shape the perceptions of the domestic population, thus, can demonstrate Russia's actions from the domestic prism.

2.3 Main domestic narratives regarding the West

According to the Kremlin narrative, Western powers are attempting to undermine the public and political environment and attack the vulnerabilities through various soft power methods, including information operations aiming at weakening Russia and the unity of its population.²⁹⁷ Therefore, Russia is coerced to react adequately to Western provocations.²⁹⁸ Moreover, official

²⁹⁰ Hutchings and Szostek, *Dominant Narratives*.

²⁹¹ Hutchings and Szostek, *Dominant Narratives*.

²⁹² Zakem, Saunders, Hashimova, and Hammerberg, *Mapping Russian Media*, p – 19.

²⁹³ Faizullaev, *Russia, the West*.

²⁹⁴ Irina Glinskaya, *Роль зарубежных и Российских средств массовой информации в создании имиджа России [The Foreign and Russian Mass Media in the Formation of Russia's Image]*, ГОСУДАРСТВЕННАЯ СЛУЖБА №3 (89), 2014, p – 50.

²⁹⁵ Glinskaya, *Роль зарубежных*, p – 50.

²⁹⁶ Glinskaya, *Роль зарубежных*, p – 50.

²⁹⁷ Meeting of the Security Council of the Russian Federation chaired by the Vladimir Putin, 22 July 2014, Moscow, Kremlin.ru, available at <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/46305>, accessed 29 May 2021.

²⁹⁸ Meeting of the Security Council of the Russian Federation.

representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, Maria Zakharova highlighted that the West is waging information warfare against Russia and in this warfare is referring to not only the contradicting statements, but the pure lies.²⁹⁹ Russian narratives intend to frame the perception of the domestic population the way that portrays the West, led by the US, as “actively obstructing their country’s rise and pursuit of legitimate interests.”³⁰⁰ Thus, as a continuation of this narrative, Russia needs to develop respective means to defend itself and counterattack, hence protect its image. The image actively promoted by Russian state media is presenting Russia as a “European great power.”³⁰¹

Russian TV programme narratives

Having addressed the overall context of Russian media landscape and the importance of narratives and their proper framing, next section of the paper refers to the empirical study of the narratives in Russian TV Programmes.

According to the messages discussed in the Talk-Show “*Special Correspondent*” (“*Spetsialni korrespondent*”) on Channel *Russia 1*, it is the West, namely Washington and Brussels, who is waging information warfare against Russia aiming at pursuing its global dominance, though Russia for a long time was not retaliating in this warfare, either participating very weakly and poorly.³⁰² The discussion in the studio stated, that the West had so-called monopoly on the information, and was dictating to the world what to think and how to think, however lately Anglo-Saxonian powers were confronted with Russia, which started to speak on its part.³⁰³ According to Russian experts there is a deep-rooted phobia in the West directed against Russia and that exactly is the bases for their objective to exclude Russian world from the Western media space.³⁰⁴ Western security services are intimidating and threatening the persons affiliated with Russian media outlets in their countries.³⁰⁵ Russian TV programmes further

²⁹⁹ Statement of the Russian Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman, Maria Zakharova, Захарова: информационная война против России только началась [Information warfare against Russia has just begun], 5 October, 2015, *Gazeta.ru*, available at https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/news/2015/10/05/n_7737851.shtml, accessed 29 May 2021.

³⁰⁰ Joanna Szostek, Defence and Promotion of Desired State Identity in Russia’s Strategic Narrative, *Geopolitics*, 22:3, 2017, p – 571, available at <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/14650045.2016.1214910?needAccess=true>, accessed 29 May 2021.

³⁰¹ Szostek, Defence and Promotion, p – 572.

³⁰² TV Talk-Show *Специальный корреспондент*, “Информационная война против России” [*Special Correspondent*, “Information Warfare against Russia”], *Russia 1*, 30 March 2016, available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_5rQHXYxdPqg, accessed 29 May 2021.

³⁰³ *Специальный корреспондент*, 30 March 2016.

³⁰⁴ *Специальный корреспондент*, 30 March 2016.

³⁰⁵ *Специальный корреспондент*, 30 March 2016.

expand the debates regarding the Western objectives and underline the disproportion between the scales of Western and Russian intentions.³⁰⁶ Based on the discussions, Western information operations against Russia are intending to achieve the same objectives that could be the goals of conventional warfare, namely to establish its proxy government and the leadership which will be subordinated to its interests, though, on the other hand, according to Russian experts and journalists participating in the discussion Russia is not trying to change the political leadership in the Western countries, Russian media outlets in foreign countries are just presenting their alternative point of view on the of the international affairs.³⁰⁷ Russian historian, politician and widely known public figure, Natalia Narochitskaya emphasized the element of Western egocentrism and dominance, which is not accepting any viewpoint different from its own.³⁰⁸ Russia failed the expectations of the West to be the subordinate power not protecting its national interests and following directives of the Western nations.³⁰⁹

The growing anti-Western narrative efficiently influenced Russia's domestic audience and increased the growing sense of the threat coming from the West. As the survey conducted by the Levada Center in October 2014 revealed, 79 percent of the respondents justified Russia's Ukrainian policy and viewed Western powerful states as adversaries of Russia, which are trying to weaken and pressure Russia in favor of their interests.³¹⁰ According to the discussions held in the studio of the Talk-Show "*Special Correspondent*," the West is blamed in its attempts to change the attitude of the population to the ongoing events into its favor and against Russia, due to their inability to accept divergent viewpoint expressed by Russia.³¹¹ The experts in the studio highlighted that the West is blaming Russia in its foreign propaganda and information operations, because in West's understanding "not-propaganda" is only when the West is broadcasting its unilateral viewpoint of the events without any opposing alternatives even though their messages are "malicious and paranoid rave."³¹²

TV programme "*Human and Law*" ("*Chelovek i Zakon*") on Russia's *channel 1*, in one of its episodes about the information operations in the cyberspace, addresses how the process of blaming Russia and portraying the awful Russia image, works. According to this explanation,

³⁰⁶ *Специальный корреспондент*, 30 March 2016.

³⁰⁷ *Специальный корреспондент*, 30 March 2016.

³⁰⁸ *Специальный корреспондент*, 30 March 2016.

³⁰⁹ *Специальный корреспондент*, 30 March 2016.

³¹⁰ ВНЕШНЕПОЛИТИЧЕСКИЕ ВРАГИ И ПАРТНЕРЫ РОССИИ [Russia's foreign enemies and partners], Levada Analytical Center (Levada-Center), October 2014, available at <https://www.levada.ru/2014/10/21/vneshnepoliticheskie-vragi-i-partnery-rossii/>, accessed 31 May 2021.

³¹¹ *Специальный корреспондент*, 30 March 2016.

³¹² *Специальный корреспондент*, 30 March 2016.

the US special services pick a specific network incident which happened in their country either elsewhere in Europe and store this information.³¹³ Afterwards, when they consider the right time for it, the Western services suddenly find and publicly report Russian traces in that incident and mostly this right time correlates with Russia and respective European country where an incident happened finding consensus on a specific, even very minor, issue.³¹⁴ No one questions why “some Russian hackers”, and especially Russian special services need to hack universities or hospitals in the Western countries.³¹⁵ Moreover, as the programme host notes, the attack could have originated from anywhere in the world, however, as Russian expert commented during the programme, it is advantageous for the West to blame Russia, nevertheless that none of the accidents could be proved by facts or evidences.³¹⁶ Such messages are demonstrating how anti-Western narratives are constructed and how the Kremlin portrays Russia a victim of Western hegemony. This significantly diminishes the credibility of western criticism of Russia and reinforce Russia’s self-identity narrative of a great power in Russia’s domestic population.³¹⁷

The narratives spread to the Russian society are mainly identical on different programs of the state channels. On the TV Talk-Show “*Time will Show*” (“*Vremya pokazet*”) on the *Channel 1*, programme host quoted the words of the Advisor to the Minister of Defence of the Russian Federation, Andrey Ilnitsky retrieved from the interview with the periodical “*Arsenal Otechestva*”, that the West, headed by the US, has started “mental” war against Russia.³¹⁸ As Ilnitsky emphasized, “if in classical warfare the objective is elimination of adversary forces, and in contemporary cyber warfare – destruction of adversary’s infrastructure, the goal of the new warfare is elimination of self-awareness, and causing change in mental – civilizational bases of the adversary’s population.”³¹⁹

As Piotr Tolstoy, Deputy chairman of Russia’s State Duma, participating in the Talk-Show commented, in the information warfare waged by the West, Russia was retreating for a long

³¹³ *Специальный корреспондент*, 30 March 2016.

³¹⁴ *Специальный корреспондент*, 30 March 2016.

³¹⁵ *Специальный корреспондент*, 30 March 2016.

³¹⁶ TV Programme “*Человек и закон*”, Информационные войны XXI века [“Human and Law”, Information Warfare in XXI century] Channel 1, 26 October 2020, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0yE-WnWA8Mc>, accessed 30 May 2021.

³¹⁷ Hutchings and Szostek, Dominant Narratives.

³¹⁸ TV Talk-Show “*Время покажет*”, Информационные войны XXI века, [“Time will Show”, Information Warfare in XXI century], (retrieved from the interview of Andrei Ilnitskiy with the periodical “*Arsenal Otechestva*”), Channel 1, 25 March 2021, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cfJkQLYVIRw>, 1:26, accessed 3 June 2021

³¹⁹ *Время покажет*, 25 March 2021.

time in a silent defense, though it is already time to start offensive activities, the mental counterattack, which first of all encompasses further development of Russian nation on authentic-historical foundations, that has been the bases of Russia's development for thousands of years.³²⁰ The West is imposing its values and its vision, though on the other hand Russia is not imposing anything in response, and this, according to the discussions in the studio, is one of the demonstrations of Russia's defensive position.³²¹ One of the results of the Western mental warfare, manipulating the perception of the society and imposing their values, was dissolution of the Soviet Union.³²² Back then, the West managed to influence Russian society and made them believe that the country where they lived in is weak and as the Talk-Show host emphasized, after heavy pressure from the West, it became impossible to "maintain their country," because all the people who supported the dissolution of the USSR were the targets and, eventually, victims of the Western mental warfare.³²³ Moreover, as the writer Aleksandr Prokhanov commented in one of the episodes of the Talk-Show "*Time Will Show*", through its information attacks in 1991 the West managed to destroy huge, powerful, nuclear country only by words. According to him, "the massive flow of information attacks collapsed over the Soviet people and knocked out the positive image of the homeland from the consciousness of the people."³²⁴ Prokhanov further argued, that the essence of the information activities is to distort the perceptions of the people about their country, history, and the leader.³²⁵ Russian narratives sent to its domestic audience distinguish between two sides of the Western propaganda – on the one hand it keeps the perceptions of their own population in a specific standard, and on the other hand it keeps fighting for influencing the perceptions of other people, for instance Russian citizens, to shift their opinion in favor of the West.³²⁶ This was the Western tactics during the collapse of the Soviet Union and during the Ukraine crises as well.³²⁷ Regarding Ukraine, Russian expert Sergey Mikhaev emphasized, that the West only needed to insert destruction in the heads of the population in order to generate civil war, loss of territory and crises.³²⁸

³²⁰ "Время покажет", 25 March 2021, 5:52.

³²¹ "Время покажет", 25 March 2021, 24:38.

³²² "Время покажет", 25 March 2021, 41:15.

³²³ "Время покажет", 25 March 2021, 41:20.

³²⁴ TV Talk-Show "*Время покажет*", Информационные войны, ["Time will Show", Information Warfare], comment of Sergey Jeleznyak, Deputy Chairman of Russia's State Duma, Channel 1, 30 March 2016, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fue3QGFk6Sg>, 8:06, accessed 6 June 2021.

³²⁵ "Время покажет", 30 March 2016, 8:24.

³²⁶ "Время покажет", 30 March 2016.

³²⁷ "Время покажет", 30 March 2016.

³²⁸ "Время покажет", 30 March 2016.

However, nevertheless its defensive position as Russia positions itself, Russian experts point out the cases when Russia still managed to achieve success. As Director-General of the Center for Political Information, Aleksey Mukhin mentioned, Russia has won the mental war in Syria, over the Europe and the US, because Russia has simply fully broken the West's "mentality of the winners."³²⁹ According to Mukhin's words, the effort of the coalition forces failed in Syria, however "we [Russia] came and found the solution".³³⁰ Nevertheless, according to Russian narrative, the West is not recognizing Russia's achievements neither on international stage, nor on domestic front, which highlights one of the essential aspects of the Western confrontation with Russia, namely that the West through its influence operations, is actively trying to question Russia's success and progress in foreign policy and social-economic development.³³¹ Therefore, the West is broadcasting information which portrays Russia exclusively from the negative side and skips all the positive activities.³³² Russian political scientist, Sergey Mikheev argues that via the information warfare against Russia, the West wants to rewrite the history, more specifically the West wants to be perceived as the only one associated with all the good and useful done in the world.³³³ The argument was further supported by Marc Innaro, Chief correspondent of the RAI Moscow Bureau. According to his words, "when Moscow acts according to the interests of the West, there are no issues, however whenever Russia is protecting its geopolitical, historical, economic or even military interests, the confrontation starts."³³⁴

As Russian media reports in support of the argument about Western information warfare against Russia, the US is establishing special center which will work precisely on planning the confrontation operations with target countries and Russia among them.³³⁵ As the "*Time will Show*" host points out, the US Bill "*To counter foreign disinformation and propaganda, and for other purposes*" highlights large-scale and destabilizing information activities conducted by the Russian Federation; moreover, the host focuses on the functions of the abovementioned center, namely "to develop, plan, and synchronize [...] whole-of-government initiatives to expose and counter foreign information operations directed against United States national security interests and proactively advance fact-based narratives that support United States allies

³²⁹ "Время покажет", 25 March 2021.

³³⁰ "Время покажет", 25 March 2021, 28:26.

³³¹ "Время покажет", 30 March 2016, 2:50.

³³² "Время покажет", 30 March 2016, 6:37.

³³³ "Время покажет", 30 March 2016.

³³⁴ "Время покажет", 30 March 2016, 29:45.

³³⁵ "Время покажет", 30 March 2016, 14:40.

and interests.”³³⁶ Based on the Russian framing, Russia’s target audience should understand abovementioned Bill as the preparation of the West for enhanced confrontation, where Russia’s main weapon and strength is the truth.³³⁷ Therefore, the primary Russian narrative regarding its foreign confrontation is blaming the West and primarily the US in waging information warfare, that in terms of its domestic implications, contributes to reinforcing Russia’s identity narrative.

Overall, corresponding to one of the objectives of the paper, namely examining the role of Russian media in shaping domestic public opinion, this chapter explored how the Kremlin utilizes media for achieving its domestic objectives. By addressing the methods through which Russian media frames the Kremlin messages and converts them for the public consumption, the paper demonstrated how Russian domestic public perceptions are formulated and how framing effects cognitive process for the interpretation of specific messages.³³⁸

For more in depth analyses of domestic implications of Russia’s information operations waged against the West, it would be interesting to look into the practical case study of Russian interference into the US President Elections 2016 and analyze it from the prism of Russia’s domestic audience.

CHAPTER 3 Case study: domestic media narratives on Russian interference in 2016 US presidential elections

This chapter addresses empirical illustration of Russia’s foreign information operation and analyzes the narratives presented respectively to the Russian population by Russian media channel *Russia 1*. By looking into the case study of Russian interference into the 2016 US presidential election and analyzing the respective messages delivered through the Talk Show, the paper demonstrates how the Kremlin converts information operations waged against the West into the domestic capital and utilizes it for promoting internal objectives. Broadly, this chapter illustrates how Russian authorities achieve domestic objectives through utilizing foreign information operations. More precisely, this chapter analyzes how the Kremlin converts its foreign operations into the narratives, which reinforce Russia’s great power image and influences the nationalistic perceptions of the population.

³³⁶ “Время покажет”, 30 March 2016, 15:09, retrieved from a Bill S. 2692 To counter foreign disinformation and propaganda, and for other purposes (Countering Information Warfare Act of 2016), 114 Congress, 2nd Session, March 16, 2016, available at <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/BILLS-114s2692is/pdf/BILLS-114s2692is.pdf>, accessed 12 June 2021.

³³⁷ “Время покажет”, 30 March 2016, 15:51.

³³⁸ Lukyanova, Framing in Russian, p – 1-2.

3.1 Russia's interference into the US Presidential elections 2016

The Kremlin sees the US as an adversary state and a threat to the security and national interests of Russia.³³⁹ Hence, Russia is engaged in ideological struggle between “conservative, Christian, sovereign values” represented by Russia and “decadent, liberal, multilateral ideas” embodied by the West, including first of all the United States.³⁴⁰ Accordingly, Russia's actions give the impression that Putin uses all the possible opportunities to weaken and undermine the US and 2016 presidential election was one of these opportunities.³⁴¹ This section provides an overview of Russian meddling into the US presidential election, as the case epitomizes Russia's foreign information operation and afterwards, addresses the domestic implications, Russia's internal view regarding the alleged interference and demonstrates how this operation is seen from the Russia's domestic prism.

As the Muller report summarized, “The Russian government interfered in the 2016 presidential election in sweeping and systematic fashion.”³⁴² The Kremlin employed multiple strategies and methods to interfere into the internal affairs of the US, and disrupt election process.³⁴³ The report outlined two main operations through which Russia interfered in the US elections.³⁴⁴ First operation implied social media campaign in favor of presidential candidate Donald J. Trump and against presidential candidate Hillary Clinton; the second one was the cyber intrusion operations carried out by the Russian intelligence service, which hacked the computer servers of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee (DCCC) and the Democratic National Committee (DNC) and later, via DCLeaks, WikiLeaks web-sites and online persona called “Guccifer 2.0”, published thousands of stolen documents, contained compromising and potentially damaging information to presidential candidate Hilary Clinton.³⁴⁵

³³⁹ Michael McFaul and Bronte Kass, Understanding Putin's Intentions and Actions in the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election, in Michael McFaul (ed.), *Securing American Elections: Prescriptions for Enhancing the Integrity and Independence of the 2020 U.S. Presidential Election and Beyond*, Stanford University, June 2019, p – 1, available at http://cs.brown.edu/courses/csci1800/sources/2019_06_06_Stanford_SecuringAmericanElections.pdf, accessed 15 June 2021.

³⁴⁰ McFaul and Bronte Kass, *Understanding Putin's Intentions*, p – 1.

³⁴¹ McFaul and Bronte Kass, *Understanding Putin's Intentions*, p – 1.

³⁴² Report On The Investigation Into Russian Interference In The 2016 Presidential Election, Volume I of II Special Counsel Robert S. Mueller, III, Washington, D.C. March 2019, p – 1, available at <https://www.justice.gov/archives/sco/file/1373816/download>, accessed 15 June 2021.

³⁴³ Michael McFaul (ed.), *Securing American Elections: Prescriptions for Enhancing the Integrity and Independence of the 2020 U.S. Presidential Election and Beyond*, Stanford University, June 2019, p – iii, available at http://cs.brown.edu/courses/csci1800/sources/2019_06_06_Stanford_SecuringAmericanElections.pdf, accessed 15 June 2021.

³⁴⁴ Report On The Investigation, p – 1.

³⁴⁵ Report On The Investigation, p – 1, 4.

It is important to highlight that involved parties denied their linkage with Russia. As David V. Goe points out, online persona “Guccifer 2.0” created by Russian Intelligence Services claimed to be Romanian hacker who hacked NDC Servers and provided materials to WikiLeaks.³⁴⁶ Founder of WikiLeaks, Julian Assange also denied any connection with Russian government and stated that Russia was not the source of hacked DNC campaign emails.³⁴⁷ However, US Intelligence Community Assessment highlighted “with high confidence” that Russia’s General Staff Main Intelligence Directorate (GRU) used Guccifer 2.0 and WikiLeaks to release “obtained US victim data” publicly.³⁴⁸ Furthermore, the social media campaign, used as one of the primary platforms for meddling election campaign, was also associated with Russia, more precisely its Internet Research Agency (IRA), so called “troll factory,” financed by the Kremlin.³⁴⁹ According to the US Department of Justice indictment, large number of IRA trolls and bots, conspiring their Russian affiliation, created “false U.S. personas, operated social media pages and groups designed to attract U.S. audiences” with the primary “strategic goal to sow distort in the US political system.”³⁵⁰ By applying the modern digital tools of conducting influence operations through social media manipulations Russia inserted massive amounts of disinformation into the US public discourse, that consequently aimed at manipulating public behavior and dividing electorate.³⁵¹

Furthermore, social media activities were successfully merged with Russian government official news channels such as RT and Sputnik to “to promulgate fake or misleading news

³⁴⁶ David V. Goe, *Cyber operations and useful fools: the approach of Russian hybrid intelligence*, *Intelligence and National Security*, 33:7, 2018, p – 961, available at <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/02684527.2018.1479345?needAccess=true>, accessed 16 June 2021.

³⁴⁷ Euan McKirdy, *WikiLeaks' Assange: Russia didn't give us emails*, *CNN Politics*, 5 January 2017, available at <https://edition.cnn.com/2017/01/04/politics/assange-wikileaks-hannity-intv/>, accessed 16 June 2021.

³⁴⁸ Office of the Director of National Intelligence, *Intelligence Community Assessment, Assessing Russian Activities and Intentions in Recent US Elections*, 6 January 2017, p – 3, available at <https://fas.org/irp/eprint/russia-election.pdf>, accessed 16 June 2021.

³⁴⁹ Jean-Baptiste Jeangène Vilmer, Alexandre Escorcica, Marine Guillaume, Janaina Herrera, *Information Manipulation: A Challenge for Our Democracies*, report by the Policy Planning Staff (CAPS) of the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs and the Institute for Strategic Research (IRSEM) of the Ministry for the Armed Forces, Paris, August 2018, available at https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/information_manipulation_rvb_cle838736.pdf, accessed 16 June 2021.

³⁵⁰ DOJ Indictment, *United States of America v. Internet Research Agency, et al.*, in the US District Court for the District of Columbia, filed 16 February, 2018, p – 3-4, Case 1:18-cr-00032-DLF, available at <https://www.justice.gov/file/1035477/download>, accessed 16 June 2021.

³⁵¹ Andrew Weisburd, Clint Watts, and JM Berger, *Trolling for Trump: How Russia is Trying to Destroy our Democracy*, November 2016, available at <https://warontherocks.com/2016/11/trolling-for-trump-how-russia-is-trying-to-destroy-our-democracy/>, accessed 16 June 2021.

stories.”³⁵² As Senator Mark R. Warner emphasized, “Russian propaganda outlets like RT and Sputnik successfully produced and peddled disinformation to American audiences in pursuit of Moscow's preferred outcome.”³⁵³ Christopher Paul and Miriam Matthews distinguish several distinctive characteristics of Russian propaganda machine, which makes it efficient tool for pursuing set objectives. Namely, Paul and Matthews describe Russian propaganda as produced in a very high volumes and broadcasted on a large number of channels, merged with “rapid, continuous and repetitive” character and showing less commitment to the truth and fact-checking.³⁵⁴ Overall the Russian information operation campaign combined broad range of operations and multiple means of interference.³⁵⁵ According to the Senator Warner Russia’s information influence operation of meddling presidential election was a coordinated effort with the ultimate goal “to undermine public confidence in our [American] democratic process.”³⁵⁶

Russian actions were not about simply injecting “fake news,” this was elaborate and sophisticated information operation intended to instill ideas in American society, media and broadly information environment in ways America could not control.³⁵⁷ Molly McKew argues, that the hacking and leaking of the materials were not the most important aspects of the operation not psychologically and neither technologically.³⁵⁸ Rather the most crucial element of the Kremlin campaign was the construction and elaboration of “information architecture” with the major purposes: active measures aiming at achieving specific objectives through psychological or informational tactics; reflexive control intending to shape perceptions of the target society “so we [Americans] voluntarily make decisions favorable to our enemy;” and psychological warfare targeting values and beliefs of the American society.³⁵⁹

McFaul and Kass consider that though it is not possible to say that Russian information operation had decisive role in the outcome of the election, the fact “that the Kremlin tried to

³⁵² Mark Stout, Covert Action in the Age of Social Media, Georgetown Journal of International Affairs, December 28, 2017, available at <https://www.georgetownjournalofinternationalaffairs.org/online-edition/2017/12/22/covert-action-in-the-age-of-social-media>, accessed 16 June 2021.

³⁵³ Opening Statement of Hon. Mark R. Warner, Vice Chairman, a U.S. Senator from Virginia, Senate Hearing 115-40, Part 1, Disinformation: A Primer in Russian Active Measures and Influence Campaigns, Panel I, hearing before the Select Committee on Intelligence of the United States Senate, 30 March 2017, available at <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-115shrg25362/html/CHRG-115shrg25362.htm>, accessed 16 June 2021.

³⁵⁴ Christopher Paul and Miriam Matthews, The Russian "Firehose of Falsehood" Propaganda Model: Why It Might Work and Options to Counter It, Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2016, p – 2-4.

³⁵⁵ McFaul and Kass, Understanding Putin’s Intentions, p – 5.

³⁵⁶ Opening Statement of Hon. Mark R. Warner.

³⁵⁷ McKew, Russia is already.

³⁵⁸ McKew, Russia is already.

³⁵⁹ McKew, Russia is already.

influence the outcome of the 2016 U.S. presidential election is without question.”³⁶⁰ Moreover, as McKew emphasizes it is of secondary importance whether the Kremlin really wanted to see Trump win the elections or not, what matters is that the Kremlin believed they could influence the perceptions of American society “without us [Americans] knowing about their [Russians] efforts to do so.”³⁶¹ Even more, by meddling into the elections, Russia has successfully questioned the legitimacy of the US elections and has created the perception that it exerts direct influence on the elected US president.³⁶²

There is also important domestic implication of Russia’s information operation meddling US president election. On the domestic front, as McKew argues, it served to the construction of “moral equivalency – not that Russia is better, but that America is just as flawed,”³⁶³ implying that the elections in the US are also rigged, that American society is not inclusive, that American oligarchs are very powerful and can do whatever they want, and that American free press “is corrupt, biased and feckless.”³⁶⁴ Avril Haines, former Deputy National Security Advisor, commented that Russian strategy is specifically seeking for aspects, which are of great importance for the adversary and at the same time low cost to them and gives possibility to avoid conventional attack.³⁶⁵ She underlined, that for Russia the primary goal is to obtain legitimacy and recognition of its power and equality on an international stage.³⁶⁶

3.2 Russia’s Domestic narratives based on Talk-Show “*Vecher s Vladimirom Solovyovim*”

The following part analyses how the Russian interference in the 2016 US presidential election was presented to Russia’s domestic audience. As demonstrated above, existing research regarding this case mostly focuses on international context, however this paper addresses the issue of domestic implications of Russian interference in the election and focuses on the depiction of respective domestic narratives in frames of the broader domestic objectives. Thus, in order to better understand Russia’s stance regarding the allegations in interference into the election process it would be interesting to look closely at the narratives that Russian TV Talk-Show “*Vecher s Vladimirom Solovyovim*” broadcasted. In this case it would be possible to see Russian narrative through the eyes of Russian audience. Moreover, looking at the operation

³⁶⁰ McFaul and Kass, Understanding Putin’s Intentions, p – 15.

³⁶¹ McKew, Russia is already.

³⁶² McKew, Russia is already.

³⁶³ McKew, Russia is already.

³⁶⁴ McKew, Russia is already.

³⁶⁵ Avril Haines, former Deputy National Security Advisor, Aspen Security Forum, streamed live on Jul 21, 2017, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WCWleQhjCRY>, 20:25, accessed 17 June 2021.

³⁶⁶ Avril Haines, Aspen Security Forum, 21:48.

from the domestic prism will contribute to capturing the view which the Kremlin wants to shape, the view which is helpful for the Kremlin to explain, deny or justify domestically its foreign operations.

The paper identifies main domestic narratives which were delivered to the Talk-Show audience and which well-explain how Russian government draws the controversial images of Russia and the West, particularly the US.

Vladimir Putin himself commented on the US allegations while replying to the question at the annual news conference of the President of Russia, which was broadcasted live by several Russian TV channels.³⁶⁷ According to Putin, the defeated side is looking for someone on the outside to blame, while the real problems are inside.³⁶⁸ As Putin emphasized, the US side is missing the most important point, while focusing on the actual hacking operation. But,

as the President-elect rightly noted, does anyone know who those hackers were? Maybe they came from another country, not Russia. Maybe somebody just did it from their couch or bed. These days, it is very easy to designate a random country as the source of attack while being in a completely different location.³⁶⁹

Hereby, Vladimir Putin specified what he considers the major issue, which is the information, the materials that were revealed to the public and, most importantly, that those materials were not manipulated or compiled.³⁷⁰ According to his words, the resignation of the Democratic National Committee Chairperson is the most obvious proof that the documents publicized the truth.³⁷¹ Moreover, in the interview with the NBC News³⁷², which was also broadcasted on *RT Russian (RT na russkom)*³⁷³ for the Russian-speaking audience, regarding the actual interference Putin reiterated that the hackers could be anywhere, even in the US and they intentionally “shifted the blame on to Russia.”³⁷⁴ He even considered the involvement of the US intelligence agencies using all the technical tools to make Russia look guilty.³⁷⁵ Putin

³⁶⁷ Vladimir Putin’s annual news conference, December 23, 2016, Moscow, available at <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/53573>, accessed 24 June 2021.

³⁶⁸ Vladimir Putin’s annual news conference, December 23, 2016.

³⁶⁹ Vladimir Putin’s annual news conference, December 23, 2016.

³⁷⁰ Vladimir Putin’s annual news conference, December 23, 2016.

³⁷¹ Vladimir Putin’s annual news conference, December 23, 2016.

³⁷² President Vladimir Putin On Russian Election Interference, Megyn Kelly, NBC News, Jun 5, 2017, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x8AeBAV4EiY>, accessed 26 June 2021.

³⁷³ На голом месте сделали сенсацию — Путин о «русских хакерах», Трампе и вмешательстве в выборы США, [They made sensation from nothing – Putin on “Russian hackers”, Trump and the US election meddling], RT Russian, 5 Jun 2017, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UcMLhy9Q2HE>, accessed 26 June 2021.

³⁷⁴ President Vladimir Putin On Russian Election Interference, NBC News, 3:20.

³⁷⁵ President Vladimir Putin On Russian Election Interference, NBC News, 4:05.

further accused the US that she “everywhere, all over the world actively interferes with the electoral campaigns of other countries.”³⁷⁶

One of the Russian narratives argues that the 2016 election campaign was essentially concentrated on Russia, underlining the importance of Russia and, thus, contributing to portraying the image of Russia as a great power.³⁷⁷ As Mariya Zakharova, the Director of the Information and Press Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation stated at the Vladimir Solovyov Talk-Show, “I would have called the whole campaign the bear’s debates, they are all about how the bear sleeps, how the bear does not sleep, how the bear hacks beehives.”³⁷⁸ However, as she highlighted already after the elections, Russia has never tried to interfere with the US elections and has never even commented or supported any of the candidates, despite the provocations.³⁷⁹ The main message which Zakharova outlined was that “Russia’s strength was in truth” and US provocations and “continuous aggressive lies” failed.³⁸⁰

The Talk-Show narrative analyses illustrates how Western responses to Russia’s information operation were delivered to Russian population and how were they utilized for promoting the Kremlin messages. Robert E. Berls, Jr., explains that the focus on restoration of Russia’s great power status has been the core theme of Russia’s foreign policy and national security objective since the collapse of the Soviet Union.³⁸¹ Consequently, the Kremlin’s anti-western narratives also serve the goal of defending Russian identity and great power status.³⁸² Particularly the following themes were mainly emphasized while covering the US election campaign and allegations in election meddling more precisely.

Criticizing Hillary Clinton candidacy

The Talk-Show narrative was not explicitly supporting Trump candidacy, though was obviously against Clinton. Nikolai Zlobin, Russian Political Scientist and the President of the Center on Global Interests in Washington, D.C., argued that Hillary Clinton, for various

³⁷⁶ President Vladimir Putin On Russian Election Interference, NBC News, 4:33.

³⁷⁷ TV Talk-Show “*Вечер с Владимиром Соловьевым*,” [“*Evening with Vladimir Solovyov*”], Russia 1, 5 October 2016, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D34ue3fvCWs>, 8:17, accessed 27 June 2021.

³⁷⁸ “*Вечер с Владимиром Соловьевым*,” 5 October 2016, 8:17.

³⁷⁹ TV Talk-Show “*Вечер с Владимиром Соловьевым*,” [“*Evening with Vladimir Solovyov*”], Russia 1, 13 November 2016, available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z_7ucPQm52Y, 7:05, accessed 27 June 2021.

³⁸⁰ “*Вечер с Владимиром Соловьевым*,” 13 November 2016, 8:15.

³⁸¹ Robert E. Berls, Jr., Strengthening Russia’s Influence in International Affairs, Part I: The Quest for Great Power Status, July 13, 2021, available at <https://www.nti.org/analysis/articles/strengthening-russias-influence-in-international-affairs-part-i-the-quest-for-great-power-status/>, accessed 25 July 2021.

³⁸² Hutchings and Szostek, Dominant Narratives.

reasons, however without promised facts and evidences, dragged Russia and Putin in her discussions with Trump, claiming her opponent's connection with Russian government.³⁸³ Respectively, based on the discussion, Russia is attached to the elections unjustifiably and portrayed as America's first enemy, the "empire of evil," which corrupted presidential candidate Trump.³⁸⁴ According to Zlobin, Clinton considers the allegations against Russia as strong argument for winning in the election and as Solovyov noted, "it is necessary to demonize Russia, in order to demonize Trump."³⁸⁵

Proceeding the abovementioned argument, Sergey Mikheev points out, that Hillary Clinton, intentionally or unintentionally, pushes the US to the responsive actions towards Russia.³⁸⁶ If she convinces America, that Russia is so wrongful that corrupts the US presidential candidate and the US Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI), then there will be no other way for the America than to respond respectively.³⁸⁷ Thus, Clinton triggers the further deterioration of the relations between Russia and the US even though she is not a president yet, and if she becomes one she has already determined the relations with Russia according to the worst scenario possible.³⁸⁸ Russia refers to this argument to emphasize its main rhetoric in terms of domestic objectives. Key principle of this rhetoric is that the US is ready to provoke instability in the world only for the sake of its domestic politics, and allegations of Russian interference in the US elections in favor of Trump represent is one of the illustrations of this approach.³⁸⁹ Therefore, this example clearly depicts the viciousness of the US global dominance.³⁹⁰ Moreover, the reason for blaming Russia is Clinton's weakness, according to the Russian narrative Hillary Clinton was a weak candidate, who is scared of Trump and is losing to him in multiple aspects, and that is why she dragged Russia into the US internal politics, blaming the Kremlin for the information operation aimed at influencing and supporting Trump's candidacy.³⁹¹ Participants of the Talk-Show claim, that the election campaign agenda is

³⁸³ TV Talk-Show "Вечер с Владимиром Соловьевым", Специальный выпуск ["Evening with Vladimir Solovyov," special episode], Russia 1, 31 October 2016, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2EfzdtuTpAY>, 7:38, accessed 18 June 2021.

³⁸⁴ "Вечер с Владимиром Соловьевым," 31 October 2016, 9:47.

³⁸⁵ "Вечер с Владимиром Соловьевым," 31 October 2016, 10:15, 11:07.

³⁸⁶ "Вечер с Владимиром Соловьевым," 31 October 2016, 12:05.

³⁸⁷ "Вечер с Владимиром Соловьевым," 31 October 2016, 12:10.

³⁸⁸ "Вечер с Владимиром Соловьевым," 31 October 2016, 12:28.

³⁸⁹ "Вечер с Владимиром Соловьевым," 31 October 2016, 12:28.

³⁹⁰ "Вечер с Владимиром Соловьевым," 31 October 2016, 13:34.

³⁹¹ "Вечер с Владимиром Соловьевым," 31 October 2016, 14:00.

actually dictated by the Kremlin and thus is primarily focused on the topic of revealing supposed Russian agent within their camps.³⁹²

Sergey Mikheev explains Clinton's focus on external politics and on Russia particularly. He believes the reason primarily is her weakness/limitations on internal arena and "even if she becomes the President, she will further concentrate mainly on external politics."³⁹³ Mikheev argues that Clinton will create additional conflict situations with Russia, because essential criteria of her, as a President's, efficiency will be achieving success in these conflict situations.³⁹⁴ The programme narrative portrayed the goal of Clinton's policy towards Russia in case she becomes the President. The key objective is to prevent Vladimir Putin from participating and winning next presidential elections of the Russian Federation.³⁹⁵ As Mikheev points out, they intend to destabilize Russia, particularly tighten the sanctions, change Russia's socio-economic situation and influence Russia's political environment that will avert Putin's presidency.³⁹⁶

Russian Military observer, Mikhail Khodaryonok emphasizes the institutionalized character of the US domestic as well as foreign politics, meaning that the specific leaders do follow the main policy directions³⁹⁷ and, according to the President of the Center for the National Interest in the USA Dimitri Simes, the national interests of the US.³⁹⁸ However, the essential difference is how the national interests are interpreted and, as Simes argues, "there will be huge difference between Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton in regards to Russia's issue."³⁹⁹ Therefore, even though Trump can not be considered as a friend of Russia, in case of Trump's Presidency, Simes believes, there will be more space for negotiations and cooperation.⁴⁰⁰

Blaming Russia

Russian narrative of disparaging Clinton is closely intertwined with the narrative of, as the Kremlin claims, US fabricated allegations against Russia and the source of the allegations as Russian narrative argues, is one of the presidential candidates, namely Hillary Clinton, as

³⁹² TV Talk-Show "Вечер с Владимиром Соловьевым" ["Evening with Vladimir Solovyov"], Russia 1, 2 November 2016, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ciOJ9COFkGo>, 10:12, accessed 20 June 2021.

³⁹³ "Вечер с Владимиром Соловьевым," 2 November 2016, 13:20.

³⁹⁴ "Вечер с Владимиром Соловьевым," 2 November 2016, 13:45.

³⁹⁵ "Вечер с Владимиром Соловьевым," 2 November 2016, 14:10.

³⁹⁶ "Вечер с Владимиром Соловьевым," 2 November 2016, 14:38.

³⁹⁷ "Вечер с Владимиром Соловьевым," 2 November 2016, 39:54.

³⁹⁸ TV Talk-Show "Вечер с Владимиром Соловьевым" ["Evening with Vladimir Solovyov"], Russia 1, 9 November 2016, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L74z7rlbIRc>, 1:05:43, accessed 20 June 2021.

³⁹⁹ "Вечер с Владимиром Соловьевым," 9 November 2016, 1:05:50.

⁴⁰⁰ "Вечер с Владимиром Соловьевым," 9 November 2016, 1:06:11.

mentioned above. One of the key messages regarding Russia's interference is that all the allegations are groundless and without evidences.⁴⁰¹ The host of the Talk-Show highlighted that the US is blaming Russia without presenting authentic facts, and "even finding Russian trails can not be considered as an evidence, because it could be left deliberately as a distracting maneuver/red herring."⁴⁰²

Veronika Krasheninnikova, advisor to the Director General of the International Information Agency Rossiya Segodnya, commented, that Russia was used as a country on which Hillary blamed all the responsibility for her own mistakes as well as America's systemic fundamental problems/challenges. Those challenges are so complicated, that the US needs external enemy to blame, and Russia is one of the most convenient targets in this sense.⁴⁰³ Russia's former representative to the United Nations, Vitaly Churkin also highlighted that hopefully after elections there will be no more necessity "to play Russia as a political card in the battle between two candidates."⁴⁰⁴

Senior Research Fellow of Post-Soviet Research Center in Moscow State Institute of International Affairs (MGIMO) Viktor Mizin further elaborates on the topic. He argues that Republicans and Democrats are just two sides of the same coin and, thus, whether Trump or Clinton winning the election, US foreign policy towards Russia will always follow the same line, namely Russia will be further considered as the "natural enemy" by the US and "no other enemy, even the terrorism, can be compared to it."⁴⁰⁵ This argument leads to one of the essential messages which the Kremlin wants to communicate to its audience and which is well formulated by Russian Military observer, Mikhail Khodaryonok: "The only country in the world, which can destroy the United States several times in a row is Russia."⁴⁰⁶ Construction of the enemy images and external threats is one of the efficient ways to mobilize the power and ensure the legitimacy of the regime and justify government's even most unpopular policies.⁴⁰⁷ In order "to trigger the emotions of fear, the enemy must be portrayed as aggressive, dangerous, threatening, immoral and unreliable."⁴⁰⁸ Therefore, according to Aram Terzyan exaggerating

⁴⁰¹ "Вечер с Владимиром Соловьевым," 31 October 2016, 23:50.

⁴⁰² "Вечер с Владимиром Соловьевым," 2 November 2016, 15:43.

⁴⁰³ "Вечер с Владимиром Соловьевым," 31 October 2016, 18:00.

⁴⁰⁴ "Вечер с Владимиром Соловьевым," 31 October 2016, 24:18.

⁴⁰⁵ "Вечер с Владимиром Соловьевым," 2 November 2016, 38:14.

⁴⁰⁶ "Вечер с Владимиром Соловьевым," 2 November 2016, 40:25.

⁴⁰⁷ Aram Terzyan, SUSTAINING POWER THROUGH EXTERNAL THREATS: THE POWER OF ENEMY IMAGES IN RUSSIA AND AZERBAIJAN, *Journal of Liberty and International Affairs*, Vol. 6, No. 2, Eurasia Institutes, Los Angeles, August 2020, p – 47, available at <https://e-jlia.com/index.php/jlia/article/view/191/177>, accessed 25 July 2021.

⁴⁰⁸ Terzyan, SUSTAINING POWER, p – 47.

the threats coming from the West is characterizing for the Kremlin for legitimizing the existing regime.⁴⁰⁹

Weakness of the US democracy

One of the key narratives that Russian domestic audience is revealed to is the weakness of US democracy and division of the American society. As Krasheninnikova argues, 2016 election is characterized by the deep corruption of both candidates,⁴¹⁰ and consequently Evgeny Satanovski, the President of the Institute of the Middle East, claims that “America will lose in any case, if either of the candidates wins, and Russia’s task is to find way to enable the US to consider Russia’s interests and not to cross red lines.”⁴¹¹

Satanovski believes that the United States as the system is dissolving and this process will further intensify regardless who will be the President.⁴¹² Main messages of the discussion emphasizes that for a very long time US democracy was considered exemplary, elections were believed to be held fairly, however as Mikheev underlined the 2016 election campaign has revealed all the vice of the US elections system.⁴¹³ Based on the talk-Show narrative, 2016 election was the turning point in perceptions of not only the Russian audience, but for the whole world, because it exposed that “American society is undergoing through deep crises.”⁴¹⁴ As Mikheev argues “Americans are lying when talking about democracy,” and no one discredited the democracy more than America.⁴¹⁵

The same line of thought is further maintained throughout post-election episodes of the Talk-Show. Konstantin Remchukov, Editor-in-Chief of “*Nezavisimaya Gazeta*” (“*Independent Newspaper*”) believes that the primary outcome of the elections is a massive division of American society on the one hand, and the biased nature of the US and Western media on the other.⁴¹⁶ Consequently, majority of media outlets were emphasizing low chances for Trump success and attributed his “boosted ratings” on the Kremlin support.⁴¹⁷ However, Trump’s victory proved the estimates of political scientists, sociologists, and media useless.⁴¹⁸

⁴⁰⁹ Terzyan, SUSTAINING POWER, p – 47.

⁴¹⁰ “*Вечер с Владимиром Соловьевым*,” 31 October 2016, 19:09.

⁴¹¹ “*Вечер с Владимиром Соловьевым*,” 31 October 2016, 47:10.

⁴¹² “*Вечер с Владимиром Соловьевым*,” 31 October 2016, 46:31, 58:30.

⁴¹³ “*Вечер с Владимиром Соловьевым*,” 31 October 2016, 1:11:15.

⁴¹⁴ “*Вечер с Владимиром Соловьевым*,” 31 October 2016, 1:15:58.

⁴¹⁵ “*Вечер с Владимиром Соловьевым*,” 27 September 2016, 53:02.

⁴¹⁶ “*Вечер с Владимиром Соловьевым*” [“*Evening with Vladimir Solovyov*”], Russia 1, 9 November 2016, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L74z7rlbIRc>, 12:32, accessed 20 June 2021.

⁴¹⁷ “*Вечер с Владимиром Соловьевым*,” 9 November 2016, 16:29.

⁴¹⁸ “*Вечер с Владимиром Соловьевым*,” 9 November 2016, 21:43.

Russian narrative manipulates the messages regarding US democracy on the one hand claiming that 2016 elections were “totally dirty, unfair, violating all the rules,” though on the other hand, once elaborated structure for building democracy is so robust that even those counterfeits were useless to help Clinton win.⁴¹⁹ Hereby, the host refers to the unfair attitude towards Russia compared to the US. He argues, that if those “unprecedented violations happened in Russia’s presidential elections” the West, and the US particularly, would have criticized Russia disclaiming the results.⁴²⁰ However, according to the Solovyov’s argument, the most important point here is that “it was absolutely insignificant for the US that the whole world talked about the illegitimacy of their elections.”⁴²¹

Another line of Russian narratives regarding the elections’ outcome is that the elections revealed the crises of the US internal as well as foreign policy. Yaakov Kedmi, Russian-Israeli politician and diplomat, argued that the US lacks the capabilities, power and the will of its population to “rule the world.”⁴²² He believes that the political, military, financial and economical capabilities of the US are boosted and there is significant disbalance with the real capabilities.⁴²³ Hence, as Kedmi suggests, Trump intends to return back to the real challenges facing the US, which “are rooted not in the Middle East, or Ukraine, but between Texas and Michigan,” which means that the US will focus on its domestic affairs and cease struggling for the world leadership.⁴²⁴ Accordingly, Russian experts argue, that the main challenge of the US is the discontent of its citizens primarily over the external ambitions, which influence negatively domestic conditions.⁴²⁵ This is one of Russian narratives explaining Trumps victory to the Russian population. Environment inside the US has triggered its citizens to vote for Trump, revealing their request for change, that will inevitably instigate the transformations.⁴²⁶

It should be also highlighted, that Russia depicts itself as peaceful and collaborative power. Its narrative, and, consequently, the message communicated from the Talk-Show emphasize on Russia’s positive attitude and desire for cooperation with the US. According to this narrative, Russia is making concessions and hopes to live in a democratic world, though as Talk-Show participant, Russian politician and leader of the Liberal Democratic Party, Vladimir

⁴¹⁹ “*Вечер с Владимиром Соловьевым*,” 9 November 2016, 22:21.

⁴²⁰ “*Вечер с Владимиром Соловьевым*,” 9 November 2016, 52:07.

⁴²¹ “*Вечер с Владимиром Соловьевым*,” 9 November 2016, 52:16.

⁴²² “*Вечер с Владимиром Соловьевым*,” 9 November 2016, 59:59.

⁴²³ “*Вечер с Владимиром Соловьевым*,” 9 November 2016, 1:00:58.

⁴²⁴ “*Вечер с Владимиром Соловьевым*,” 9 November 2016, 1:01:41.

⁴²⁵ “*Вечер с Владимиром Соловьевым*,” 9 November 2016, 1:49:32.

⁴²⁶ “*Вечер с Владимиром Соловьевым*,” 9 November 2016, 1:58:08.

Zhirinovskiy argues making concessions is a mistake and demonstration of weakness.⁴²⁷ In Russian view, the Kremlin's message is more than peaceful, however it faces "frenzied hysteria" from the US side. Moreover, Russia is for the cooperation, for elaboration of mutually beneficial policy, it is against escalation and confrontation, thus, the US does not feel danger and exercises the freedom of action, including expansionist policy towards Russia, which puts Russia into the defensive position.⁴²⁸ Hence, in order to strengthen its position, and make the opponent side more flexible, Russian experts suggest demonstrating the real power and capabilities, which they consider as the most convincing argument.⁴²⁹

The narratives communicated by the Russian media to the domestic audience are essentially beneficial for Russia domestically. Russian politicians and experts openly call lies the Western allegations regarding Russia being aggressive and representing a threat.⁴³⁰

Moreover, Nikolai Starikov, founder and former leader of the Great Fatherland Party blames the West in aggressiveness and argues that behind the false proposals of cooperation and negotiations, in reality they are moving their forces to Russia's borders and, thus, enhancing tensions.⁴³¹

It is also interesting to note, that in 2018 Russia accused the US in trying to interfere in Russian Presidential election and as the Deputy Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation, Sergei Ryabkov said US tried to meddle in the elections aiming at "destabilizing the situation inside country."⁴³² While discussing the abovementioned interference, Russian politician Oleg Morozov, argues that such kind of influencing on the Russian elections is characterizing for the US political leadership and it aims at forming subordinated and obedient political and business elites, and creating favorable public opinion in the country.⁴³³ As Morozov explains, this will, in its turn, trigger social, political and economic instability and create the environment ease to manipulatable, hence according to Morozov, the ultimate objective of the US in Russia

⁴²⁷ TV Talk-Show "*Вечер с Владимиром Соловьевым*" ["*Evening with Vladimir Solovyov*"], Russia 1, 9 October 2016, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RQr7PSyMtT4>, 3:30, accessed 20 June 2021.

⁴²⁸ "*Вечер с Владимиром Соловьевым*," 31 October 2016, 1:35:53.

⁴²⁹ "*Вечер с Владимиром Соловьевым*," 2 November 2016, 26:40.

⁴³⁰ TV Talk-Show "*Вечер с Владимиром Соловьевым*" ["*Evening with Vladimir Solovyov*"], Russia 1, 10 July 2016, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-cErfXuHBys>, 18:42, accessed 29 June 2021.

⁴³¹ "*Вечер с Владимиром Соловьевым*," 10 July 2016, 19:17.

⁴³² Ekaterina Syslova, Зеркальный ответ: Россия обвиняет США во вмешательстве в выборы [Mirroring response: Russia accuses the US in interfering in elections], Газета.ru, 5 March 2018, available at https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/2018/03/05_a_11671657.shtml, accessed 29 June 2021.

⁴³³ TV Talk-Show "*Вечер с Владимиром Соловьевым*" ["*Evening with Vladimir Solovyov*"], Russia 1, 27 February 2018, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-cErfXuHBys>, 3:57, accessed 29 June 2021

is destabilization of the situation or “ideally change of the political regime.”⁴³⁴ Overall, as the programme host well explained the goal of the US in meddling in Russian election, which was not the victory of any of the candidates, but the break of the trust in the institution of elections and their legitimacy.⁴³⁵ This is exactly what Russia is alleged of in regards to interfering 2016 US presidential election.

CONCLUSION

Purpose of this research is to analyze how Russia’s foreign information operations targeting the West are utilized to influence domestic audience and improve its image domestically. The paper argues that the Kremlin activities against the West are converted into the domestic objectives and contribute to the enhancement of Russia’s great power image among its population, that in its turn is used for the Kremlin’s power legitimization. In this respect, in order to explore the elements characterizing specifically Russian information operations, the paper, firstly, addresses the theoretical part of the concept of information operations generally and then addresses the Russian information operations particularly.

Russian information warfare has its origins in the Soviet thinking and dates back to the beginning of the Cold War.⁴³⁶ As Michael Connell and Sarah Vogler define it information warfare is a “holistic concept that includes computer network operations, electronic warfare, psychological operations, and information operations.”⁴³⁷ According to the Western understanding, information operations are mostly tactical operations, limited to the wartime, while Russian approach information operations is broader and carried by Russian state and non-state actors through exploiting “history, culture, language, nationalism”⁴³⁸ of the target nation.⁴³⁹ Moreover, Russian information operations are “all-encompassing” and recognizing the distinction between war and peacetime.⁴⁴⁰ It is important to look at the wider picture through the prism of the Moscow, “rather than from Washington or from Brussels.”⁴⁴¹ As Keir Giles emphasizes, Western approach mostly focuses on countering Russian disinformation

⁴³⁴ “*Вечер с Владимиром Соловьевым*,” 27 February 2018, 6:17.

⁴³⁵ “*Вечер с Владимиром Соловьевым*,” 27 February 2018, 4:40.

⁴³⁶ Sophia Porotsky, *Analyzing Russian Information Warfare And Influence Operations*, Global Security Review, June 2019, available at <https://globalsecurityreview.com/cold-war-2-0-russian-information-warfare/>, accessed 20 July 2021.

⁴³⁷ Michael Connell and Sarah Vogler, *Russia’s Approach to Cyber Warfare*, CNA Analyses and Solutions, March 2017, p – i, available at https://www.cna.org/CNA_files/PDF/DOP-2016-U-014231-1Rev.pdf, accessed 20 July 2021.

⁴³⁸ Keir Giles, *The next phase of Russian information warfare*, NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, 2016, p – 2.

⁴³⁹ Giles, *The next phase*, p – 2.

⁴⁴⁰ Porotsky, *Analyzing Russian Information*.

⁴⁴¹ Giles, *The next phase*, p – 6.

with “truth,” because Russian information operations, consisting of denials and obviously fabrications, lack plausibility.⁴⁴² However, Giles underlines the weakness of this approach arguing, that Russian information operations are the nexus of multiple various activities and “that credibility is not always a metric of success for Russian information warfare campaigns.”⁴⁴³ Thus, Russian information activities are exploiting information environment of the target nation through various means in order to efficiently fulfill its objectives. The paper argues that these objectives are targeting the Western nations on the one hand, and have significant domestic implications on the other.

In order to analyze the domestic implications of Russia’s information operations conducted against the West, the paper analyzes the correlation of foreign and domestic policy and looks into the main domestic factors influencing country’s foreign policy. In this regard, one of the key determinants is the mass public opinion. Therefore, the paper analyzes how the Kremlin is influencing and manipulating Russia’s domestic public opinion. This leads to the next part of the research, namely the analyses of the tools and objectives of the Kremlin used to influence public opinion and thus, the perceptions and attitude of its internal audience.

In the second chapter the paper analyzes the role of media, as a tool for “political messaging on state-controlled Russian television”⁴⁴⁴ aiming at influencing and shaping public opinion. By addressing the theoretical foundations and empirical examples framing the messages on Russian television, the paper demonstrates how the Kremlin imposes its desired worldview on its target population through referring to various media framing techniques. After exploring the role of media framing and produced narratives, the paper looks into the empirical examples of the narratives through which Russian TV programmes send specific messages to the internal population. The paper highlights key Russian media messages regarding the West according to which Russia is portrayed as a victim of the Western information operations. Thus, Russia’s actions in the information domain are explained to Russia’s domestic population as the elements of defence and protection of Russian identity.

In order to demonstrate Russia’s domestic narratives regarding its foreign information operation, the paper explored Russian Talk-Show “*Večer s Vladimirom Solovyovim*” on the

⁴⁴² Giles, The next phase, p – 6.

⁴⁴³ Giles, The next phase, p – 6.

⁴⁴⁴ Vera Tolz and Precious N Chatterje-Doody, Four things you need to know about Russian media manipulation strategies, The Conversation, April 2018, available at <https://theconversation.com/four-things-you-need-to-know-about-russian-media-manipulation-strategies-94307>, accessed 21 July 2021.

channel *Russia 1*. By analyzing key messages regarding Russia's interference in the 2016 US presidential election, the thesis analyzed key lines of dominant narratives which all contributed to the domestic objectives of the Kremlin, namely to enhance Russia's great power image domestically and ensure the Kremlin's power legitimacy.

Bibliography

- "ВНЕШНЕПОЛИТИЧЕСКИЕ ВРАГИ И ПАРТНЕРЫ РОССИИ [Russia's foreign enemies and partners] ." Levada Analytical Center (Levada-Center). October 2014.
- "Время покажет", Информационные войны XXI века, ["Time will Show", Information Warfare in XXI century], retrieved from the interview of Andrei Ilnitskiy with the journal/periodical "Arsenal Otechestva".
- "Время покажет", Информационные войны, ["Time will Show", Information Warfare]." Channel 1. 30 March 2016.
- Крылова, И. А. . 2016. "Информационные войны и безопасность России, [Information War and Russian Security]." *ИНФОРМАЦИОННЫЕ ВОЙНЫ. Мы находимся в состоянии информационной войны с англосаксами [We are in the state of information war with Anglo-Saxons]*. Коммерсантъ. 26 March 2016.
- "На голом месте сделали сенсацию — Путин о «русских хакерах», Трампе и вмешательстве в выборы США, [They made sensation from nothing – Putin on "Russian hackers", Trump and the US election meddling], RT Russian." 5 Jun 2017.
- РОССИЙСКИЙ МЕДИАЛАНДШАФТ – 2020 [Russia's media environment – 2020]*. Levada Analytical Center (Levada-Center).
- "Россияне назвали Соловьева и Малахова вызывающими доверие журналистами [Russians named Solovyov and Malakhov as trusted journalists]." August 2019
- "Специальный корреспондент," *Информационная война против России [Special Correspondent, "Information Warfare against Russia"]* . Produced by Russia 1. 30 March 2016.
- Стратегия национальной безопасности Российской Федерации, утв. Указом Президента Российской Федерации от 31.12.2015 г. № 683. 2015. "National Security Council of the Russian Federation." Kremlin Moscow. Accessed April 2021. <http://www.scrf.gov.ru/security/docs/document133/>.
- Фурсов, Андрей. n.d. "Русофобия - психоисторическое оружие в борьбе против России [psychological weapon in the battle against Russia]." *konkir.ru*.
- Человек и закон "Информационные войны XXI века" ["Human and Law", Information Warfare in XXI century]* . Channel 1. 26 October 2020.
- "Address of the President of the Russian Federation to the Federal Assembly." April 2021
- Afanasyeva, Anna. n.d. *Смотрящие сменили лидера, Телеканал «Россия 1» обошел «Первый» по аудитории [The audience changed the leader, TV Channel Rossya 1 overtook Channel 1 according to the audience share]*. Коммерсантъ [Commerzant].
- Allen, T. S. , and A. J. Moore. 2018. "Victory without Casualties: Russia's Information Operations." *The US Army War Collage Quarterly, Parametres* 48 (1): pp. 59 - 71 .
- Ansolahehere, Stephen, Roy Behr, and Shanto Iyengar. 1993. *The Media Game: American Politics in the Television Age (New Topics in Politics)*. Macmillan.
- AS, Bojang. 2018. "The Study of Foreign Policy in International Relations." *Journal of Political Sciences & Public Affairs* 6 (4).
- Avril Haines, former Deputy National Security Advisor, Aspen Security Forum, Streamed live on Jul 21, 2017.
- Berls, Robert E. Jr . July 2021. "Strengthening Russia's Influence in International Affairs, Part I: The Quest for Great Power Status."
- Blank, Stephen. October 2017. "Cyber War and Information War à la Russe." In *Understanding Cyber Conflict: 14 Analogies*, edited by George Perkovich and Ariel E. Levite. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.
- Burrett, Tina. 2018. "Russian state television coverage of the 2016 U.S. presidential election." *Demokratizatsiya: the Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization*, 26 (3), George Washington University.

- Cavelty, Myriam dunn. 2008. "Information Operations: Trends and Controversies." *CSS Analyses in Security Policy* (Center for Security Studies (CSS), ETH Zurich) 3 (34): 1-3.
- Connell, Michael and Vogler, Sarah. 2017. *Russia's Approach to Cyber Warfare*. CNA Analyses and Solutions.
- Cordey, Sean. October 2019. *Cyber Influence Operations: An Overview and Comparative Analysis*. Center for Security Studies (CSS), ETH Zürich.
- Cunningham, Conor. 2020. "A Russian Federation Information Warfare Primer." *The Henry M. Jackson School of International Studies, University of Washington*.
- Darczewska, Jolanta, and Piotr Żochowski. 2015. "Russophobia in the Kremlin's strategy - A Weapon of Mass Destruction." *Point of View* (Ośrodek Studiów Wschodnich im. Marka Karpia/Centre for Eastern Studies) Number 56.
- Dougherly, Jill. 2015. "How the Media Became One of Putin's Most Powerful Weapons." *The Atlantic*.
- Efimova, Anna, and Denis Strebkov. 2020. "Linking Public Opinion and Foreign Policy in Russia." *The International Spectator* 55 (1): 93-111.
- Elagina, D. . February 2021. *Television watching frequency in Russia 2021*. Statista.
- Enikolopov, Ruben, Maria Petrova, and Ekaterina Zhuravskaya. 2011. "Media and Political Persuasion: Evidence from Russia." *The American Economic Review* (American Economic Association) 101 (7).
- Entman, Robert M. . 2003. *Projections of Power: Framing News, Public Opinion, and U.S. Foreign Policy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Estonian Internal Security Service. 2015. Annual Review.
- Euronews. 2017. "Сергей Лавров: "Русофобия в США переходит все грани" [Sergey Lavrov: "Russophobia in the US is crossing all the red lines]." June.
- Faizullaev, Alisher. 2018. "Russia, the West and the Growing Gap between Narratives." *E-INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS*.
- Fecteau, Matthew J. . 2019. "Understanding Information Operations & Information Warfare." *Global Security Review*.
- Franke, Ulrik. March 2015. *War by non-military means: Understanding Russian Information Operations*.
- "Freedom in the World 2021 — Russia Country Report." (Freedom House).
- "FREEDOM OF THE PRESS 2015." (Freedom House).
- "From programs of which television channels do you usually get the latest news in our country and abroad?" Statista.
- Gatov, Vasily. 2015. "How the Kremlin and the Media Ended Up in Bed Together." *The Moscow Times*.
- Gerasimov, Valery. February 2013. *Ценность науки в предвидении [The Value of science is in the foresight]*. Military-Industrial Kurier.
- Giles, Keir, and Anthony Seaboyer. October 2019. "The Russian Information Warfare Construct." Defence R&D Canada, Toronto Research Centre Contract Report DRDC-RDDC-2019-C241.
- Giles, Keir. 2016. *The next phase of Russian information warfare, NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence*.
- Gioe, David V. . 2018. "Cyber operations and useful fools: the approach of Russian hybrid intelligence." *Intelligence and National Security*.
- Glinskaya, Irina. 2014. "Роль зарубежных и Российских средств массовой информации в создании имиджа России [The Foreign and Russian Mass Media in the Formation of Russia's Image]." *ГОСУДАРСТВЕННАЯ СЛУЖБА №3 (89)*.

- Hallahan, Kirk. 1999. Seven Models of Framing: Implications for Public Relations, *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 11:3.
- Hutchings, Stephen, and Joanna Szostek. 2015. "Dominant Narratives in Russian Political and Media Discourse during the Ukraine Crisis." *E-International Relations*.
- Hutchinson, William. November 2010. "Influence Operations: Action and Attitude." *11th Australian Information Warfare and Security Conference, Edith Cowan University*. Perth Western Australia: Research Online.
- "Intelligence Community Assessment, Assessing Russian Activities and Intentions in Recent US Elections." Office of the Director of National Intelligence. 6 January 2017.
- "Joint Publication 3-13, Information Operations, Joint Chiefs of Staff." November 2012.
- Joja, Iulia-Sabina . 2021. "Exploring Putin's Strategic Narrative." *GLOBAL FOCUS*.
- Lipman, Maria. 2009. "Media Manipulation and Political Control in Russia." *Chatham House*.
- Lukyanova, Galina. 2018. "Framing in Russian TV News: How to Shape Reality?" *SHS Web of Conferences* 50, 01098, CILDIAH-2018.
- Makukhin, Oleksiy, Liubov Tsybul'ska, and Ruslan Kavatsiuk. September 2018. "How Russian media foments hostility towards the West." *Ukraine Crisis Media Center*.
- McFaul, Michael. 2020. "Putin, Putinism, and the Domestic Determinants of Russian Foreign Policy ." *International Security* 45 (2).
- McFaul , Michael, ed. June 2019. *Securing American Elections: Prescriptions for Enhancing the Integrity and Independence of the 2020 U.S. Presidential Election and Beyond*. Stanford University.
- McFaul, Michael, and Bronte Kass. "Understanding Putin's Intentions and Actions in the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election." In *Securing American Elections: Prescriptions for Enhancing the Integrity and Independence of the 2020 U.S. Presidential Election and Beyond*, edited by Michael McFaul , 1-16.
- McKew, Molly K. . 2017. "Russia is already winning." *Politico Magazine*.
- McKirby, Euan. 2017. "WikiLeaks' Assange: Russia didn't give us emails." *CNN Politics*
- McQuail, Denis. *The influence and effects of mass media*.
- Meeting of the Security Council of the Russian Federation chaired by the Vladimir Putin*. Moscow, July 22, 2014. available at <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/46305>, accessed 29 May 2021.
- Mickiewicz, Ellen. 2008. *Television, Power, and the Public in Russia*. New-York: Cambridge University Press.
- Miskimmon, Alister, Ben O'Loughlin, and Laura Roselle. 2013. *Strategic Narratives: Communication Power and the New World Order*. New York: Routledge.
- Neack, Laura. 2008. *The New Foreign Policy, Power Seeking in a Globalized Era (2nd Ed.)* . Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. .
- "News conference of Vladimir Putin." December 19, 2013.
- Nisbet, Erik C. , and Elizabeth Stoycheff. 2016. "Why Russians support Putin's foreign policy." *The Conversation*.
- Oates, Sarah. 2006. *Television, Democracy and Elections in Russia*. Taylor & Francis e-Library.
- O'Loughlin, John, Gearo'id O' Tuathail, and Vladimir Kolossov. 2004. "A 'Risky Westward Turn'? Putin's 9–11 Script and Ordinary Russians." *Europe-Asia Studies* 56 (1).
- "Opening Statement of Hon. Mark R. Warner, Vice Chairman, a U.S. Senator from Virginia, Disinformation: A Primer in Russian Active Measures and Influence Campaigns, Panel I, hearing before the Select Committee on Intelligence of the United States Senate." Senate Hearing 115-40, Part 1. 30 March 2017.

- Pamment, James, Howard Nothhaft, Henrik Agardh-Twetman, and Alicia Fjällhed. 2018. "Countering Information Influence Activities, The State of the Art." Department of Strategic Communication, Lund University.
- Panarin, Igor. 2008. "Система информационного противоборства." *Военно-Промышленный Курьер ВПК* (41 (257)).
- Panarin, Igor. 2012. "СМИ, пропаганда и информационные войны [Mass Media, Propaganda and Information Warfare]." *History of propaganda*.
- Paul, Christopher, and Miriam Matthews. 2016. "The Russian "Firehose of Falsehood" Propaganda Model: Why It Might Work and Options to Counter It."
- Porotsky, Sophia. 2019. Analyzing Russian Information Warfare And Influence Operations, *Global Security Review*.
- "President Vladimir Putin On Russian Election Interference, Megyn Kelly, NBC News." 5 Jun 2017.
- Pynnöniemi, Katri, and András (eds.) Rácz. 2016. "Fog of Falsehood, Russian Strategy of Deception and the Conflict in Ukraine ." Report No. 45, The Finnish Institute of International Affairs , Helsinki.
- "Report On The Investigation Into Russian Interference In The 2016 Presidential Election, Volume I of II, Special Counsel Robert S. Mueller, III." Washington, D.C. . March 2019.
- RAND Corporation. Accessed April 8, 2021. <https://www.rand.org/topics/information-operations.html>.
- Roberts, Kari. 2017. "Understanding Putin ." *International Journal* (Sage Publications, Ltd. on behalf of the Canadian International Council) 72 (1): 28-55.
- Rumer, Eugene, and Andrew S. Weiss. 2017. "Vladimir Putin's Russia Goes Global." *The Wall Street Journal*.
- "Russia's TV talk shows smooth Putin's way from crisis to crisis." *The Washington Post*. December 2015.
- Sarbin, Theodore R. . 1986. "The Narrative as a Root Metaphor for Psychology." In *Narrative Psychology: The Storied Nature of Human Conduct*, edited by Theodore R. Sarbin. Westport: Praeger Publishers.
- Schmidt-Felzmann, Anke. 2017. More than 'just' disinformation. Russia's information operations in the Nordic region.
- Shevtsova, Lilia. 2008. "Russia and the West: a liberal view." *openDemocracy*, November.
- "Statement of the Russian Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman, Mariya Zakharova." *Gazeta.ru*. October 5, 2015.
- Stout, Mark. December 2017. "Covert Action in the Age of Social Media." *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*.
- Stronski, Paul, and Richard Sokolsky. 2017 . "The Return of Global Russia: An Analytical Framework." *CARNEGIE Endowment for international Peace*.
- Syslova, Ekaterina. 2018. "Зеркальный ответ: Россия обвиняет США во вмешательстве в выборы [Mirroring response: Russia accuses the US in interfering in elections]." *Газета.ru*.
- Szostek, Joanna. 2017. "Defence and Promotion of Desired State Identity in Russia's Strategic Narrative." *Geopolitics* 22 (3).
- Tashev , Blagovest, Michael Purcell, and Brian McLaughlin . Fall 2019. "Russia's Information Warfare, Exploring the Cognitive Dimension." *MCU Journal* 10 (2).
- Terzyan, Aram. August 2020. "SUSTAINING POWER THROUGH EXTERNAL THREATS: THE POWER OF ENEMY IMAGES IN RUSSIA AND AZERBAIJAN." *Journal of Liberty and International Affairs* (Eurasia Institutes) 6 (2).

- Thomas, Timothy L. . 1998. "Dialectical versus empirical thinking: Ten key elements of the Russian understanding of information operations ." *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 11 (1).
- Thomas, Timothy L. . 2010. "Russian information warfare theory: the consequences of August 2008." In *The Russian military today and tomorrow*, edited by Stephen J. Blank and Richard Weitz . Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College.
- Thornborrow, Joanna. 2007. "Narrative, opinion and situated argument in talk show discourse." *Pragmatics*.
- "To counter foreign disinformation and propaganda, and for other purposes." Bill Number - S. 2692, 114 Congress, 2nd Session. March 16, 2016.
- Tolz Vera and Chatterje-Doody Precious N. . 2008. Four things you need to know about Russian media manipulation strategies, *The Conversation*.
- "TV Talk-Show “Вечер с Владимиром Соловьевым,” [“Evening with Vladimir Solovyov”], Russia 1." 13 November 2016.
- "TV Talk-Show “Вечер с Владимиром Соловьевым,” [“Evening with Vladimir Solovyov”], Russia 1." 5 October 2016.
- "TV Talk-Show “Вечер с Владимиром Соловьевым” [“Evening with Vladimir Solovyov”], Russia 1 ." 9 October 2016.
- "TV Talk-Show “Вечер с Владимиром Соловьевым” [“Evening with Vladimir Solovyov”], Russia 1." 2 November 2016.
- "TV Talk-Show “Вечер с Владимиром Соловьевым” [“Evening with Vladimir Solovyov”], Russia 1." 9 November 2016.
- "TV Talk-Show “Вечер с Владимиром Соловьевым” [“Evening with Vladimir Solovyov”], Russia 1." 10 July 2016.
- "TV Talk-Show “Вечер с Владимиром Соловьевым” [“Evening with Vladimir Solovyov”], Russia 1." 27 September 2016.
- "TV Talk-Show “Вечер с Владимиром Соловьевым” [“Evening with Vladimir Solovyov”], Russia 1." 27 February 2018.
- "TV Talk-Show “Вечер с Владимиром Соловьевым”, Специальный выпуск [“Evening with Vladimir Soloviov”, special episode], Russia 1 ." 31 October 2016.
- "United States of America v. Internet Research Agency, et al., in the US District Court for the District of Columbia, Case 1:18-cr-00032-DLF." Department of Justice Indictment. February, 2018.
- Vilmer, Jean-Baptiste Jeangène, Alexandre Escorcia, Marine Guillaume, and Janaina Herrera. August 2018. "Information Manipulation: A Challenge for Our Democracies." Policy Planning Staff (CAPS) of the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs and the Institute for Strategic Research (IRSEM) of the Ministry for the Armed Forces, Paris.
- Vladimir Putin’s annual news conference . Moscow. 23 December 2016.
- Volkov, Denis, and Stepan Goncharov. August 2017. *Российский медиаландшафт основные тенденции использования СМИ – 2017 [Russian media landscape: Main tendencies of using Mass Media – 2017]*. Analytical Center of Yuri Levada (Levada-Center).
- Weisburd, Andrew, Clint Watts, and JM Berger . November 2016. "Trolling for Trump: How Russia is Trying to Destroy our Democracy."
- Weiss, Andrew S. . 2021. "New Tools, Old Tricks: Emerging Technologies and Russia’s Global Tool Kit." *CARNEGIE Endowment for international Peace* .
- Wertsch, James V. . 2017. "Narrative Tools, Truth, and Fast Thinking in National Memory." In *Memory practices and learning: interactional, institutional, and sociocultural*

perspectives, edited by Åsa Mäkitalo, Per Linell and Roger Säljö. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.

Yin, Robert K. . 2003. *Case Study Research (3rd ed.)* . Sage Publications.

Zainal Zaidah. 2007. Case study as a research method, *Jurnal Kemanusiaan* bil.9.

Zakem, Vera, Paul Saunders, Umida Hashimova, and P. Kathleen Hammerberg. January 2018. *Mapping Russian Media Network: Media's Role in Russian Foreign Policy and Decision-making*. CNA.