Defending and Ultimately Defeating Russia's Disinformation Techniques

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Recommendations

A Report by CEPA's Information Warfare Project in Partnership with the Legatum Institute

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This report is produced under the auspices of the Center for European Policy Analysis' (CEPA) Information Warfare Initiative. Co-authored by CEPA Senior Vice President **Edward Lucas** and Legatum Institute Senior Fellow **Peter Pomerantsev,** it is part of an ongoing effort at CEPA to monitor, collate, analyze, rebut and expose Russian propaganda in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). Previous publications in this series provided an analytical foundation for evaluating the methods and aims of Russian propaganda. This report extends that research, examining how Russian propaganda is being employed across the CEE region, the perils it presents and actionable counter-strategies for addressing it.

In preparing this report, the authors conducted an extended assessment of the existing record of Russian, English and Baltic language literature on the subject of information warfare. They solicited written inputs from, and conducted interviews with, members of the scholarly, academic and expert community who are investigating specific dimensions of Russia's "new" propaganda. Additionally, the authors solicited written and conceptual inputs through practitioner workshops with CEE media specialist, area experts and journalists – individuals who are on the frontlines of the Western response to Russian disinformation campaigns.

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INTRODUCTION

Russia's use of information as a weapon is not new, but the sophistication and intensity are increasing. Belatedly, the West has begun to realize that disinformation poses a serious threat to the United States and its European allies, primarily the "frontline states"—Poland, the Baltic states, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Ukraine—but also to Western Europe and North America. Across the Western world, the Kremlin promotes conspiratorial discourse and uses disinformation to pollute the information space, increase polarization and undermine democratic debate. Russia's actions accelerate the declining confidence in international alliances and organizations, public institutions and mainstream media.

Recommendations

The Kremlin uses disinformation campaigns, incitement to violence and hate speech to undermine neighbors, break Western alliances and, in Ukraine, pave the way for kinetic war.[1] The aim is to destroy trust, sap morale, degrade the information space, help destroy public discourse and increase partisanship. Russia's tactics draw on Soviet traditions of "active measures" and *dezinformatsiya.* But in an age of transnational broadcasting and a global internet, the potential for sowing chaos, distrust and polarization has become much greater. As we consider responses, it is important to appreciate that:

- Today's media and information environment is deeply fractured. Each echo chamber has its own dynamics. During the Cold War, it was enough to win the argument in a limited information space. Now it is necessary to communicate in different ways with different people, even within countries. Transborder broadcasting, blogs and social media mean that whole audiences can no longer be reached by "mainstream media." During the Cold War it was also enough to prove to major newspapers and broadcasters that the Kremlin was spreading disinformation about, for example, the CIA having designed the AIDS virus. But now myth-busting and fact-checking conducted by mainstream newspapers will only reach a certain audience and probably not the one the Kremlin is targeting anyway.

- If there is one common thread in the Kremlin's many narratives it is the use of conspiratorial discourse and a strategic use of disinformation to trash the information space, break trust, increase polarization and undermine the public space for democratic debate: This is a war on information rather than an "information war." In this regard the Kremlin is going with the flow of changes in Western media, politics and society, where there is less trust in public institutions and mainstream media, where previously fringe movements are gaining strength and the space for a public discourse is shrinking.

- Unlike the Cold War, when Russia promoted itself as an attractive, communist alternative to the West, today's Kremlin focuses on exacerbating existing fissures in the West, using anti-immigration, anti-US or anti-EU sentiments to further its own goals. Russia does sell itself as an attractive alternative to Russian speakers in former captive nations in Ukraine and the Baltics, but even in those cases the motivations of audiences in, shall we say, Luhansk and Narva can be very different.

These factors mean that in considering how to confront the Kremlin's challenge, we face a paradox: on one hand the need to talk to different audiences and echo chambers in different ways; on the other to build trust between polarized groups to build overall trust. With that in mind, we have divided our recommendations into:

- Recommendations aimed at strengthening the quality of the information space and strengthening trust;

- Recommendations aimed at "neutral" and "mainstream media" audiences in EU and EU Association countries;

- Recommendations aimed at Russian-speaking audiences in EU and EU Association countries;

- Recommendations aimed at "disenfranchised" audiences in EU and Association countries; far-left and far-right groups, etc.

We have also divided our recommendations into:

- **Tactical** (short-term, reactive)
- **Strategic** (medium term, pro-active)
- **Long term**

Throughout our document we look at what attempts, if any, have been made to deal with the latest disinformation threats, and extrapolate broader lessons. Many of the examples of preliminary responses are from Ukraine, which is at the frontline of these challenges.

Tactical

Broad tactical recommendations aimed at strengthening the quality of the information space and building trust

i) A European-wide network of targeted audience analysis, media environment and social network analysis centers: More than ever before, countermessaging is about listening rather than talking. Understanding local needs and motivations—particular media environments and social networks—holds the key to success. Audiences are more fractured than ever, but up-to-date sociology and big-data analysis also allow us to understand more about audiences than ever. Simply "blasting" single messages at audiences is naïve and could well be counterproductive.

Currently, there is no dedicated agency analyzing the impact of Russian (or any other) disinformation in either Eastern or Western Europe on different audiences. A pro-Kremlin supporter in Narva, Estonia, might be motivated by something quite different than a pro-Kremlin supporter in Odesa, Ukraine. Our understanding of the impact and patterns of Internet echo chambers, information cascades and social networks remains at a very early stage. Deeper research is needed into the way echo chambers grow and how one can penetrate them, the impact of computerized "bots" and trolls on audiences, and the ways in which information can be manipulated by different groups with concrete goals.

This means that all response efforts right now are speculative; we simply do not know what works. As a first priority, funding should be directed at setting up or strengthening existing centers conducting:

- Regular, targeted audience analysis;
- Analysis of the local media environment to detect disinformation campaigns and understand what sources shape publics;
- Monitoring of social media, identifying trends and personalities who are popular among different polarized social groups and who could be engaged with to build trust.

These centers would then communicate insights to each other, governments, donors and public broadcasters.

ii) A "Venice Commission" for media: A strong regulator is key to ensuring broadcasters maintain journalistic standards. To be effective, regulators need clear guidelines about when to sanction channels for violating laws on "hate speech," "incitement to violence" and inaccuracy. Regulators in EU Association countries are often weak or captured by vested interests, and have little experience in imposing sanctions.

Take the example of Ukraine. Following Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea, Kremlin-controlled media openly tried to provoke civil war in the rest of the country. In response, Ukraine's television and broadcasting regulator (the National Council for TV and Radio) appealed to the Ukrainian courts to suspend the broadcasting of seven Russian channels in the country.[2]

The courts agreed to the suspension while they considered the evidence presented by the regulator regarding hate speech, war propaganda and other alleged infringements by Russian broadcasters. Two years later, evidence has been presented regarding three of the channels. Four more are still under scrutiny. According to members of the National Council and others close to the process, the main difficulty has been defining "hate speech", "war propaganda" and "threats to national security." Ukraine has no previous case history to rely on. The process of examining the cases is slow.[3] Without "solid grounds and arguments in the national courts to stop, block and ban propaganda," writes the OSCE High Representative of the Media for Freedom of the Media, the Ukrainian government has resorted to a more "familiar instrument—drafting restrictive legislation targeting, under different pretexts, Russian media and journalists as a class."[4] This has damaged its international reputation and created a climate where the rules are unclear.

Explaining why a channel has been sanctioned is a key part of the "information war." Existing legislation, such as Article 6 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, already stipulates that "member states shall ensure by appropriate means …media service providers under their jurisdiction do not contain any incitement to hatred based on race, sex, religion or nationality."[5] This directive informed the 2015 EU decision to support Lithuania's three-month ban on RTR Planeta, on the grounds that the Russian state channel instigated discord and a military climate, demonized Ukrainians, used hate speech, and incited tension and violence between Russians and Ukrainians and also against the EU and NATO states.[6]

The Lithuanian case shows how it is possible to use existing legislation to clamp down on broadcasters. A strong regulator is key. In the UK, the regulator Ofcom has repeatedly reprimanded the English-language Russian broadcaster RT, but has focused on specific examples of breaches in impartiality and accuracy—and threatening fines without resorting to blanket bans.[7]

To help guide countries where there is no strong regulator, where the domestic journalistic broadcasting standards are low and where pro-Kremlin media attempt to spread hate speech and disinformation, a strong case exists to create an international commission under the auspices of the Council of Europe that would evaluate channels for hate speech, disinformation and other faults. The commission would guide weak regulators, help them communicate their findings and ensure their independence, while setting standards for the whole continent and driving a broader discussion of these issues. An international "Venice Commission" for media, under the auspices of the Council of Europe, would be able to:

- **Advise fledgling regulators;** ensure their independence and help communicate their decisions

- **Act as a badge of quality for broadcasters,** allowing donors to guide support for the creation of new content to broadcasters who have high journalistic standards. Aid to EU Association countries and others in this area is a unique opportunity to use Western leverage to improve the overall quality of media.

iii) Enhance government strategic communications: Do the threats posed by 21st century information warfare require new government institutions to manage them? In the United States, some are calling for the reconstruction of the US Information Agency, an institution abandoned after the end of the Cold War. A bill co-sponsored by Senators Chris Murphy and Rob Portman calls for the creation of an **interagency** "Center for Information Analysis and Response," a smaller and more flexible response.[8] Such a center could analyze Russian information warfare efforts; establish a framework for the integration of critical data into national strategy; develop, plan and synchronize a response across different government bodies that would expose foreign information operations, and pro-actively advance fact-based narratives.[108] In Europe, Jakub Janda of the European Values think tank has made a strong case for strategic communications departments throughout the EU to rapidly gather evidence, analyze and respond to disinformation campaigns.[9]

Western governments and international organizations could certainly improve how they communicate their policies. However, democratic governments will never be as effective in this area as are authoritarian regimes, which can dictate themes to all of their country's media. Instead, democratic governments should focus on the areas where they do have an advantage. In the information field, the strength of democracies is their diversity—the rich mix of civil society, media and individuals all involved in media and communication. Western governments need to find a constructive way to interact with media and NGOs. Former NATO press spokesman Ben Nimmo has suggested Western governments invest in exchanges between NGOs and journalists in front line areas to foster a community of transnational critical inquiry and trust able to withstand disinformation attacks.[10] Governments also have an advantage in obtaining proof of financial crimes, video of covert military operations and audio intercepts. To date there has been a reluctance to share these. In an age of skepticism towards governments, the more open the interaction between government and other players, the more effective it can be.

Tactical recommendations aimed at "neutral"/mainstream media audiences

iv) An equivalent to OCCRP/Transparency International/Global Witness to combat disinformation: The Panama Leaks show that an international consortia of journalists and activists can be extremely effective in confronting international corruption. A similar approach is needed to combating disinformation campaigns and active measures. Imagine the counter-disinformation equivalent of Global Witness, Transparency International and the OCCRP. Such an organization would include a range of activities, including:

- **Investigate Russian (and other) disinformation campaigns.** It is impossible and counterproductive to try and deflect every Russian falsehood. Instead of sporadic and disjointed research, we need international, linked investigations and campaigns which understand how the Kremlin's "soft power" toolkit fits into Moscow's broader strategic aims. Coda Story, a journalism NGO based in Georgia and dedicated to covering stories in depth "after the rest of the media has moved on," and Rebaltica, an investigative journalism outfit in Riga, have been doing pioneering work in this field focusing on the Kremlin's anti-LGBT and "family values" campaigns.[11]

- **Targeted Myth-Busting:** Fact-checking and myth-busting work when they are targeted at key audiences who are receptive to fact-based argument. We are now seeing a fact-checking movement emerge around the Ukraine crisis: from the growing presence of StopFake through to the EU External Action Service's Disinformation Review. To be truly effective, this research needs to be targeted towards media and policy makers and made relevant to their agendas. Whether reacting rapidly to disinformation repeated by mainstream media, or contributing to policy debates, myth-busting sites battling Kremlin disinformation need to be strengthened and honed to achieve clear aims.

- **Pioneer the latest in myth-busting online technology in Europe.** The technological possibilities are only just being explored, largely in the United States. ClaimBuster, for example, was invented by computer scientists at the University of Texas-Arlington with students at Duke and Stanford. It automatically scans texts and finds factual claims that fact-checkers should check, thus saving on the work currently done by college interns. Duke and Google's think tank Jigsaw are also currently designing a widget which allows fact-checkers to easily share their material in larger text. These and other technological innovations need to be introduced in CEE.

- **Educate journalists and editors.** Journalists continue to fall for the Kremlin's bag of "dezinformatsiya" tricks. An NGO could deliver workshops and training to help journalists learn to identify how the Kremlin manipulates context, framing, agenda-setting and language (see Urve Eslas in previous papers for full list of tricks).

- **Create "disinformation" ratings for media.** This refers to an index that would rate media according to their reliability and accuracy. Such a rating would put peer pressure on media to improve content. In countries such as Ukraine and Moldova where broadcasters are soliciting financial help from the West for new content, the index would act as a guide for donors when deciding which media are worthy of support.

Tactical recommendations aimed at Russian-language audiences

v) A working group on historical and psychological trauma

One of the powerful and effective Russian narratives when reaching out to Russian speakers abroad revolves around the historic legacy of World War II and the Soviet era. Over and over again, Russian books, films and TV programs describe the heroism of ordinary soldiers, the triumph of Hitler's defeat and the vindication that victory brought to the Soviet system. Most of these stories emphasize Russian leadership, downplay the role of other nationalities and ignore the war's less savory aspects, such as major Soviet errors of judgement. Most of all, these stories squarely identify Ukrainian and Baltic nationalists of the era—those who refused to fight with the Red Army—as "fascists" and draw a link between them and Ukraine's current government.

By contrast, the national memory in other countries is more complex. In Ukraine, for example, people fought on multiple sides of the conflict. Most were part of the Red Army, but others did fight for the Ukrainian resistance, believing that to do so would lead to an independent Ukraine. At one point, some joined the Nazis in order to fight against Soviet power. Especially in western Ukraine—which the USSR annexed in 1939—many remember the war's end as the beginning of a new era of repression. One person's May 9 Victory Day is another's May 9 Occupation Day.[12]

To reflect these mixed memories—and also to counter the Russian narrative about the nature of the war—the Ukrainian government has changed the national holiday, celebrating it on both May 8 and May 9 and renaming it "Remembrance Day" instead of Victory Day.[13] The symbol for the holiday has also been changed from the Kremlin's orange-and-black ribbon to the poppy, an international symbol of mourning war dead, thus bringing Ukraine's commemorative celebrations closer in line with those held in other parts of the world.[14]

In 2015, the government also launched an advertising campaign featuring well-known Soviet actors of Ukrainian origin as well as iconic films of the period. The ads linked Ukraine's victory against Nazi Germany to the ongoing conflict with Russia, and turned the Russian narrative on its head: Putin's Russia, not the new Ukraine, are now portrayed as the modern incarnation of the wartime fascists. The campaign was carefully planned: "The May 8-9, 2015, coverage was agreed and coordinated between government and key media outlets. There was a will to work out a coordinated campaign" says Zurab Alasanya, director of the National TV and Radio Company of Ukraine.[15]

History as used by the Kremlin is not about facts but about psychological effect. The Ukrainian red poppy and war ads show how to use historical themes for a positive effect, helping heal divisions and move on from past traumas. Floriana Fossato, a media researcher who specializes in the post-Soviet space, has suggested the creation of a working group consisting of psychologists, historians, sociologists and creative media experts to develop a permanent factory of ideas about how to engage with historical and psychological trauma, which would then create promotional activities such as lecture tours, video and books around these ideas.[16]

Tactical recommendations aimed at niche and disenfranchised audiences in CEE

vi) Targeted online video and one-on-one online interactions: Social media and online search engines allow marketing and advertising companies to gather highly specific information about target audiences, and to tailor their products accordingly. The same technology could and should be used by countermessaging organizations creating content aimed at radicalized and alienated audiences.

The London-based Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD) has undertaken pioneering work in this field. The ISD has created short videos targeted at potential violent extremists in the United States, Great Britain and the Middle East. One of ISD's products, for example, was "Average Mohamed"—a cartoon aimed at introducing at-risk youngsters in the United States to more moderate forms of Islam. Another project, One-to-One, is even more targeted. Former Islamic radicals and far-right extremists use Facebook technology to reach out directly to individuals who are currently following a radical path.[17] Similar initiatives should be undertaken with radicalized, pro-Kremlin supporters, those on the far left and the far-right, and Russian speakers.

Strategic

Broad strategic recommendations aimed at strengthening the quality of the information space and building trust

vii) Reinventing public broadcasting for the 21st century: Solutions-aimed journalism: Support for the development of public broadcasting is included in the EU Association Agreement with Ukraine and is a high priority for other Association countries and EU member states with weak media. The challenge facing public broadcasters in fractured countries such as Ukraine or Moldova—as well as many in Western Europe—is not merely to "set standards" but to actively unite and build trust in the country. In a fragmented media landscape, a strong, independent public broadcaster could set standards and grow to be the most trusted medium available.

In Ukraine, for example, as in much of Europe, audiences dwell in small media bubbles and echo chambers, reinforced by social media. Odesa alone has 44 local TV channels, not all of them active. Trust towards any media, whether Russian, Ukrainian or other, is low. The public broadcaster will always be poorer than oligarch-owned or Kremlin-sponsored channels, and it won't be able to fully compete by reeling in audiences with big-money entertainment shows. But it can be more clever. A key way to build trust is to prove one's relevance to people's daily lives and to involve disparate groups in common activities. For a public broadcaster, this will mean moving from merely setting journalistic standards to creating activist projects around social causes. Whether it is improving roads, health care or corruption in the judiciary, such a "solutions-aimed" journalism will highlight issues through investigations and citizen journalism; build campaigns to lobby for change and win people's trust by effecting change. A 21st-century public broadcaster is an activist broadcaster, providing a "public service" in the sense of helping to create better "public services." The content around these campaigns can include everything from reality shows to comedy and protest actions; the point is they will help deliver real solutions and "news you can use." It will also need to employ the latest in social media analysis to ensure its relevance online

In countries where there is no political will to strengthen the public broadcaster, attempts should be made to create a "public-spirited" broadcaster from the bottom up. Hromadske TV, an online TV and news portal, is trying this in Ukraine. Established in November 2013, Hromadske TV is an ambitious attempt to build—from scratch—a public broadcaster free of any political and business interests or government propaganda influences, and funded only by donors and public donations. Employing just 20 full-time journalists, it strove to produce impartial journalism, becoming especially well-known for its live reports from demonstrations on the Maidan. Hromadske is currently in talks with the reformed public broadcaster to create a multimedia network to educate, unite and inform the country.

viii) A "blogger's charter" and international exchanges for information activists: Information activists are a new breed of actors transforming the information space. They can have both a positive and negative effect. In Ukraine, for example, the Euromaidan used the Internet as a major tool to mobilize, organize and provide information support. Livestreaming and video blogging allowed people to follow events in real time, while social networks promoted a new breed of opinion-makers, bloggers and civil society activists and shattered the hierarchy of established media and pundits. On the other hand, social media has also empowered far-right groups such as Right Sector—a paramilitary formation fighting outside state defense structures in eastern Ukraine—and the Azov nationalist battalion, now integrated into state defense structures.

The propaganda campaign promoted by these groups played a major role in shaping a militaristic sub-narrative in Ukraine. Some "patriotic" bloggers and activists began to accuse any government critics of *zdrada* (betrayal).

In order to create international networks while simultaneously encouraging best practices, information activists could be encouraged to sign up to ethics charters. Such charters could be jointly written and of course voluntary, but they could be used to distinguish between actors. Those who sign up should be supported by governments and foundations to take part in regular exchange programs among journalists, information activists, NGOs and academics, operating between core Western and frontline states, to create transnational communities of trust and critical inquiry. Currently, domestic audiences in countries like Spain often view information about Ukraine or the Baltics through the distorted lenses of Russian propaganda. Bringing academics, journalists and activists to and from the Baltics, the Caucasus or Ukraine will help build networks able to withstand disinformation attacks. This is what analyst Ben Nimmo calls "information defense."

Strategic, medium-term recommendations for Russian speakers

ix) Russian-language entertainment content factory: Kremlin propaganda is powerful because it mixes entertainment, emotions and current affairs. Viewers in Ukraine, the Baltics and the Caucasus tune into Kremlin TV because it's better made, glossier and more entertaining. Even Georgian and Lithuanian speakers tune in for the serials and talent shows, and they often end up staying for the current affairs.[18] Russian programming dominates Moldovan media as well, yet making alternative Russian-language or domestic content is expensive and the advertising markets of these regions do not appear profitable the foreseeable future. Governments can use laws to help stimulate local production, imitating the French or other models where a certain percentage of content must be domestically produced. But for the moment Western governments, NGOs and other donors can help by creating content at reduced rates. The British Foreign Office, for example, is currently developing a 'content factory' to help EU Association and Baltic countries create new Russian-language content: BBC Media Action, a media development agency of the BBC, has been tasked with producing a blueprint for such an entity. Other donors should support this initiative.

This should be seen as a unique opportunity to improve journalistic standards in Association Countries. Guided by the judgments delivered by the commission for regulating media standards described earlier in this document, or by media watchdogs and NGOs, Western donors could emphasize support for channels with better journalistic standards, thus creating a virtuous circle between better entertainment TV and better journalism. Donors should, of course, be allowed to use their discretion when choosing which channels to work with. But the hallmark of a media regulator modeled on the "Venice Commission" can serve as an important compass.

x) A Russian-language news wire/hub: Since the demise of the Medvedev-era Ria Novosti in 2012, no quality news wire providing a steady, reliable flow of news exists in the Russian language. Ideally one would build a Russian-language Reuters or AP, but this is expensive. Vasily Gatov of the European Endowment for Democracy has proposed a more affordable alternative: the creation of a **hub or exchange** to serve as a proto-news agency for regional news outlets. Pooled newsgathering efforts, where appropriate, would ease cost pressures on individual outlets and fill the gap created by Russia's monopoly on Russian-language news content. Free Press Unlimited, a Dutch media development group, received a government grant to develop a news exchange—a Russian-language independent regional news agency working as a cooperative. Supported by a central news desk, its members will be able to access "high-quality local, regional and international news and analysis."[19] This initiative should be encouraged and further supported.

xi) Estonian Russian-language public broadcaster as a pilot project: In response to Russia's war in Ukraine and the intensification of Kremlin disinformation aimed at sowing enmity between the Estonian and Estonian-Russian populations, the Estonian government approved the creation of a Russian-language public broadcaster, ETV+. Currently surviving on an annual budget of €4 million, the channel focuses on town-hall and talk-show type programming to help disenfranchised audiences feel understood. It has little capacity, however, for more expensive programming, whether on-the-ground news reporting or factual entertainment.

Donors should further support ETV+, which can be seen as a pilot project for many of the ideas in this document: from the Russian-language news hub to the content factory, "solutions-based" news, media literacy, social network and target audience analysis. Estonia is a unique opportunity to show how other countries how to resist Kremlin disinformation, and to pilot initiatives that can be replicated in more complex environments such as Moldova or Ukraine.

Long-term

xii) Popularize media literacy for the 21st century: TV and Internet entertainment that incorporate media literacy lessons: As governments and NGOs search for a response to the rise of sophisticated propaganda and information warfare, more and more are calling for increased media literacy. For example, a 2015 OSCE report, Propaganda and Freedom of the Media, lists in its "tool box" of responses "putting efforts into educational programs on media and Internet literacy."[20] Likewise, a 2016 NATO Stratcom report, Internet Trolling as a Tool of Hybrid Warfare, advises governments to "enhance the public's critical thinking and media literacy."[21] Yet neither report suggests what those efforts should be or how to achieve them.

The concept of media literacy has long been seen as synonymous with education—but what media literacy education means is changing: it is moving out of the classroom and into communities. In Ukraine, the Washington-based International Research & Exchanges Board (IREX)—a global nonprofit "providing thought leadership and innovative programs to promote positive lasting change globally"—has broken new ground in stepping outside the education system to promote media literacy.[22]

In 2015 and 2016, IREX ran courses through its own parallel educational network of more than 440 "trainers" in central and eastern Ukraine, including in or near conflict zones. These trainers, who had long worked for the NGO, delivered IREX's "Media Literacy Curriculum" to as many people from all walks of life as they could persuade to sign up. Unlike other media literacy curricula, this one was meant to be both fun and full of practical tools which anybody—with or without a college degree—could apply to the media they consume. "We basically tried to get away from anything academic" said Myahriban Karyagdyyeva, IREX Ukraine Director of Programs, "rather developing practical tools targeted at different types of people so that the next time they have an emotional reaction to a piece of 'news' or other media, they take a step back."[23] The curriculum was distributed to trainers along with a flash drive packed full of videos, games and props such as cards and stickers—all designed to make the course fun and relevant. The trainers then enrolled as many as possible into a two-day course following the curriculum, which was essentially a thorough grounding in the key principles of media literacy, with special emphasis on the Ukrainian context.

By the time the project came to an end in March 2016, over 15,000 people had taken part. Of these, 64 percent were women. In addition, 79 percent had some kind of higher educational qualification. This was a more female and better-educated demographic than IREX had ideally hoped for: anecdotally, it seems that because most of the NGO's trainers were teachers, librarians or university lecturers, they recruited the kind of people they knew. But soldiers, police officers, doctors, nurses and journalists also participated in the training.[24]

While those trained by IREX are likely to have influence in their home communities, the demographic reached still falls short of truly "making media literacy popular." Indeed, 15,000 people is still a tiny fraction in a country of 42 million inhabitants

The next stage for rolling out media literacy could very well be to use the media itself to spread the message. This means drawing upon the skills of content producers who know how to win—and keep—a mass audience. This is the final stage of media literacy's journey from the classroom and university lecture hall into the public domain. It also turns the tables on the propagandists by taking a leaf out of their book; if they've used the storytelling techniques of TV, the Internet and other mass media to make their messages cut through, then surely we can, too.

Of all the ways to reach a mass audience, the two most powerful are TV and online. That's not to say other forms of media are irrelevant; IREX uses billboard advertising to promote media literacy in Ukraine. But TV is still the world's most popular and widespread medium, as well as the one capable of making the most emotional impact. And the Internet is the most dynamic, fastest-growing medium with the lowest transmission costs.

To promote media literacy through the media itself, we can take a mix-and-match approach to TV and the Internet, choosing the best platform available for the audiences we want to reach, and making use of both established "broadcasters" and "viral" social media. If communicated correctly, media literacy can make for good TV and online content; it offers lots of opportunities for humor, fun, liveliness and other qualities that audiences like—as well as relying on a desire to learn or be informed. To reach the most at-risk audiences, media literacy should be included in the structure of mainstream programming rather than as a separate "news" show or video game. The challenge is how to introduce media literacy themes into breakfast talk shows, sitcoms, popular dramas, kids' programming, celebrity online news and YouTube cartoons. A series of dedicated pilot programs could explore what works in each territory.

xiii) Campaigns to stop Western advertising on channels which use hate speech and incite violence: One of the great ironies of today's so-called "information war" is that Western advertisers fund Kremlin hate speech, demonization of LGBT people, incitement to violence and so on. Western production companies also sell entertainment formats to the same channels, helping them become popular and attract viewers to their hate speech programs. A sustained campaign is needed to raise awareness among the general public about how advertisers and production companies directly help fuel attacks on minorities and incite violence, an idea originally put forward by Vasily Gatov.

In a parallel initiative, a group of Slovak ad agencies have grouped together to advise their customers to avoid advertising on a list of websites that promote xenophobia, pro-Kremlin disinformation, health conspiracies and other inaccuracies. The argument these agencies make is that appearing on these sites damage their clients' brands. This is an interesting development driven by profit motives rather than morals.

Further awareness raising and campaigns are needed on this topic, with the ultimate aim of discouraging media outlets that promote hate speech and disinformation from attracting advertisers —thereby preventing them from purchasing the best Western entertainment formats. We need to move towards a virtuous cycle where watchdogs award media with the best-quality news a seal of approval, in turn stimulating Western donors to support these outlets in buying the best entertainment formats, which in turn attracts advertising.

Afterword

The information revolution has opened up opportunities for Russia and other states like China and Iran with obvious information agendas to buy and influence the TV programs people see in Western countries—and the articles they read—on a scale bigger than anything seen during the Cold War. The Kremlin's aim is not so much to win an ideological debate, though it can use a variety of ideologies when it needs to, but to use the radical changes in the media environment and fissures in society caused by the information revolution to undermine the public space, well-informed debate and trust pn which democracy depends.

In some senses, the situation resembles previous moments in history like the 1930s, when the then-new medium of radio was beginning to reach public audiences and change the way they understood politics, as well as the 1950s, when TV first came into wide usage. But both radio and TV proved susceptible to regulation. Regulators who made the rules could also grant access to bandwidths. Some of those rules can be used today, as in Ukraine, to block excessive distortion of the news.

But as this paper makes plain, today's challenges are in other ways unprecedented. Government has very limited impact on the Internet. Civil-society groups and media are better poised to battle disinformation online, but they are not able to reach all audiences. In general, public awareness of the problem is still very low.

No silver bullet will solve this problem, and the answers won't be the same in every European country. Governments, concerned citizens and journalists will have to work together to fashion a response that neither promotes censorship nor hampers intellectual freedom. Europe will require a range of policies to help voters and citizens get access to an accurate and balanced understanding of the world. Without better information, democracy will quickly become difficult—if not impossible.

Endnotes

1. Special thanks to Anne Applebaum, Marina Denysenko, Paul Copeland, and Magda Walter for their contributions to this section of the report.

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24. Our own researcher attended the IREX "Peer Review Workshop" for this project.



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