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Five Principles of Media Propaganda and Russian Geopolitical Expansionism

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This article provides the analysis of Russian media content based on Jolanta Darczewska's five key principles of Russian propaganda. The analysis builds up on the context of Russian geopolitical expansionism and is focused in the case study of Crimean annexation and the conflict on the East of Ukraine as an example of the geopolitical dispute in which media has largely shaped the public opinion on the events and consequently distorted their outcome. The paper examines Darczewska's methodology providing the case-based examples of media coverage, elaborating on the theoretical groundwork, and evaluating its practical feasibility. The author focuses on the three most popular state-owned or state-dependent media outlets: Radio of Russia (Radio Rosii, Радио России), Channel One (Piervyi Kanal, Первый Канал), and Izvestiia (Известия, literally meaning 'tidings'). Drawing from the analysis, the article puts forward its own suggestions of the potential updates to the methodology.

The results of the analysis are provisional and can be used for the following research in the area of media, new media, propaganda, the politics of identity, and Russian foreign policy tools. The outcomes of the article are applicable for the coherent assessment of the current trends in the area of information security and emphasises the significance of information flows in ongoing geopolitical transformations. Furthermore, it also portrays media propaganda as a foreign policy tool. The paper provides interdisciplinary perspective on current geopolitical phenomena and brings up the main ideological discourses which have been utilised by the Russian authorities in order to achieve foreign policy goals.

Keywords: Ukraine, Jolanta Darczewska, Russian propaganda, Russian media, Russian expansionism, Crimean annexation, Crisis in Ukraine, War in the East of Ukraine, Media propaganda

Introduction.

The recent Russia's expansionist policy has drawn the attention of the international community not only because of its grave geopolitical effects, but also due to the means which Russian leadership utilises to achieve its goals. Apparently, the international political environment has undergone crucial changes and has liberalised during the last several decades – at the time when the Russian political culture has preserved its realist and authoritarian tradition. Today, a direct military aggression is generally condemned and followed by a corresponding response from the international community, but usually in the form of economic and political sanctions. States like Russia find such a system to be unnatural for their political culture. Thus, they adjust their traditional tools for power projection to make them (look) fit to the new liberal order. Russia resorts to hybrid

tactics in order to manipulate the existing global international law system. This article will focus on Russian media as one of the hybrid tools utilised to gain the ability to influence people`s beliefs, perception of places and, subsequently, the geopolitical reality in general. The paper will particularly look into Jolanta Darczewska`s categorization of the Russian media propaganda.

In her article, 'The Anatomy of Russian Information Warfare', Darczewska presents 5 key principles of Russian media rhetoric: 1) principle of massive and long-lasting impact; 2) principle of desired information; 3) principle of emotional agitation; 4) clarity principle; 5) principle of supposed obviousness [12, 25]. First, as in the article Darczewska herself does not provide any illustrative examples to the methodology, **the aim of this paper** will be to test her approach on the up-to-date media content. Another aim will reside in underlining the key ideological discourses which are used in Russian foreign policy. The material for the analysis is taken from the websites of the three major state-controlled media companies: Radio of Russia (Radio Rosii, Радио России) – radio broadcasting; Channel 1 (Piervyi Kanal, Первый Канал) – television broadcasting; Izvestiia (Известия, literally meaning 'tidings') – print media.

The case study for the analysis will be Crimean annexation, the conflict on the East of Ukraine, and the preconditions of the both. One must agree that these events are a unique phenomenon in the post-war Europe. Beginning from the 1940s there were no cases in

Europe where the border of a sovereign state was violated by another state under such a dubious pretext. Moreover, what happened in Crimea is an example of a bloodless annexation, which certainly makes it a good ground for the analysis in this paper. It allows to show the role and importance of ideas and beliefs (which are transmitted through media) in the most recent geopolitical phenomena.

Five principles of Russian propaganda. Explaining Ukraine.

First, it is relevant to drive attention to **the principle of massive and long-lasting impact**. Under this notion, Darczewska implied particular labels attached to Ukrainian activists: 'orange plague' (from the Orange Revolution in Ukraine 2004), '*Banderivtsy*' (from the name of Stepan Bandera, the leader of XX century Ukrainian nationalist movement) and other political stigmas, which 'have been incessantly reiterated since 2003' [12, 25]. It is relevant to mention that Joanna Szostek [18] provided a comprehensive analysis of Russian (and Ukrainian) media, where she also mentioned the labelling practice on the part of Russia. However, it is important to stress that she completed her research before the Euromaidan took place, which certainly means that Russian media utilised the stereotyping before the media warfare developed between the states. Therefore, their primary goal is creation of the preliminary, long-lasting image of the 'opponent', which sets a particular social attitude towards the latter. This goes in line with the rhetoric of well-known Russian political analyst and prop-

agandist Aleksandr Dugin, who underlines the abstract but symbolic division between 'US' and 'THEM' [6].

However, this symbolic personification is not fully explicit: there is no clear image of who THEY are. Who are these 'westeners' – Europeans or Americans, politicians or common citizens? Do THEY have specific beliefs? Or are THEY just the part of the world population living in the Western Hemisphere? Do THEY support Ukraine or want to seize control over it? Are THEIR values wrong, or do WE also live according to the same social/political ethics?

Evidently, there are many uncertainties appearing around the controversial 'THEM' when switching to the analytical assessment of media content. For instance, one may take a closer look at the news episode of Channel One covering the rallies of Russian people who supported Russian-speaking population in Ukraine (events took place in the context of new Ukrainian government coming to power and rise of 'anti-nationalist' campaigns). Within this narrative, one may come across the word 'fascism' and its derivatives four times, none of which specifically refers to a certain nationality or group of people, states, politicians, neither their policies [2]. This implies the lack of clear image of the opponent and creates a general sentiment of outside danger and inclines people towards mobilising their internal national identity. Ina Shakhrai provided an ample support to this argument claiming that the construction of the myths about external threat by Russian government actually enforces the authoritarian regime in the state. She also

emphasizes propaganda`s reference to national identity as opposed to the image of external Others [16, 29].

Thus, it is important to emphasise one specific element of 'fascist' (and other) paradigms – despite being uncertain of opponent`s figure, it carries a clear picture of who WE are. To explain this point, it is relevant to consider once again the mentioned reportage. One may find the conjunction 'fraternal people' (братский народ, *bratskii narod*) or 'fraternal Ukraine' (братская Украина, *bratskaia Ukraina*). The title of the broadcasted material reads: 'Massive rallies supporting Russian-speaking population in Ukraine are continuing in Russia', while the expression 'fraternal' appears in the first paragraph of the broadcasted text as a substitute to 'Russian speaking population is Ukraine'. Apparently, this particular label carries the inclusive element of Russian grassroots national tradition, and automatically brings Russian speakers of Ukraine under its umbrella.

What is more important, the 'fascist' stigmatization plays a significant role in this context due to the strong negative sentiment of Russians towards fascism. The latter is associated with the Great Patriotic War and symbolizes the enemy of Russian heroes, whose death in a struggle against the fascist ideology became a part of Russian collective memory. Indeed, as emphasised by Nataliia Steblyna, 'The Second World War's history can be a good example for the construction of a new reality' [17]. Thus, it will not be surprising if the 'fascist' stigma sticks to the pro-European Ukrainians for a long time. Simultaneously, it may evolve into the element of Russian national identity para-

digm: 'fascists' versus 'fraternal people' who are the part on Russian national historical tradition. Moreover, within the given context, the collective memory of Russian people will prompt them to protect 'fraternal' from 'fascist', which is, again, a part of division between 'US' and 'THEM'. As current state of affairs shows, for Russian society, it not only justified the takeover of Crimea but also the military invasion on the East of Ukraine. At this point, the principle of massive and long-lasting impact osculates with the following principles outlined by Darczewska.

The last argument put forward in the previous paragraph is also a pertinent illustration of **the principle of desired information**. According to this principle, as briefly explained by Darczewska, 'Russians and Russian-speaking people expect that their rights should be protected, so they believed the manipulated information that the Russian language had been banned' [12, 25]. The latter refers to the controversial Law 'On the principles of state language policy' [14] adopted and banned short before the rise of anti-Maidan in 2013, which was believed to limit the rights of Russian-speakers in Ukraine. This principle seems to be understandable and clear: there are certain templates of people`s collective memory which predefine particular beliefs and are vulnerable to emotional provocations. For instance, in 2007, Izvestiia reported a story titled 'Crimea in "RU" Style' about Russian businessmen who were investing in many Crimean hotels and guest houses as well as other private projects. The article emphasised that soon only

car registration numbers and names of government institutions would be left Ukrainian, while everything in Crimea is gradually becoming Russian [9]. Apparently, for Russians, Crimea has always had a special place in their national tradition. Therefore, they would believe that Crimea is only sustained by the Russian state, which feels its duty and historical connection on behalf of the peninsula. Moreover, when asked about the reason why one of the investors is risking his finances for potentially unprofitable projects, the man interviewed in the article answers in a simply way: 'It's Crimea though' [9]. Therefore, one may see here yet another element of manipulation – emotional appeal to the grass root sentiment about Crimea as something sacred in Russian collective memory. The following principle deals with emotional element of Russian propaganda in a more detailed way.

In addition to what has been stated previously, **the principle of emotional agitation** seems to be osculating all other principles outlined by Darczewska. However, it is relevant to assess the particular features of this emotional agitation by looking at the most apparent examples. The opportune instance would be the famous 'story about the crucified boy', which received a strong criticism and claims about falsity from the Russian opposition media as well as Ukrainian media. The famous news episode made by Channel One Russia presents an interview of the allegedly Ukrainian refugee in Russia, who describes the 'demonstrative execution' of a three-year old child by the Ukrainian soldiers. The woman provides very shocking details of

child being nailed to the announcement desk 'like a Jesus' on the main square of the city of Slovyansk. Further on, she says that the child`s mother was soon tied to the tank and pulled along the square [1].

Obviously, this material contains a strong emotional appeal, which leaves little space for rational response from the audience. Evidently, the veracity of this story is undermined by very few among the Russian society. On the contrary, Western media presented the story as 'uncorroborated', while Ukrainians accused Russia of fierce propaganda and compared it to the one utilized by Nazi Germans [19]. According to the further investigations, the story turned out to be falsified [e.g. see 15].

Importantly, after meeting the criticism and condemnation on behalf of its counterparts, Channel One Russia made a responsive report. However, the report itself did not address the 'story about the crucified boy' to a great extent. In fact, it mentioned the general overview of the story and emphasized that neither Russian nor any media are able to discover whether the story told by the women was honest. Surprisingly, the report further switches to the deployment of horrifying pictures and footages claimed to be depicting the 'crimes against the peaceful Donbas population'. The presented materials mostly depict the bodies of dead children with a focus on corporal injuries accompanied with disturbing psychic sounds on the background. This covers around eighty percent of the whole broadcast and certainly breaches the frame of journalist ethics. The newsreader finishes the report with the following words: 'if

the story of the Luhansk refugee is a sick fantasy, then life turns out to be worse that fantasy' [2]. This broadcast clearly corresponds to Darczewska's comment on the principle of emotional agitation. Namely, she identified it as 'bringing the recipients of the message to a condition in which they will act without much thought' [12, 25].

As one may observe, in this case, Channel One utilizes an exclusively emotional method of persuasion. Evidently, even when being accused of misinformation, it still resorts to even stronger emotional appeal rather than reasonable argumentation to prove the initial stand. These materials seem to be exemplary in demonstrating the principle of emotional agitation.

Another side of the principle of emotional agitation is reference to the historical past of Russia – namely, those aspects which reveal a strong connection between Russia, Ukraine, and Crimea. The most illustrative examples are connected to the religious topic, for Russia not only poses itself as a 'Third Rome', but also appeals to the historical event of the Prince Volodymyr's baptism in Crimea before he baptised the whole Rus`. This literally legitimises the annexation of Crimea for the Russian society, for it is presented as a cradle of Russian Christianity. Therefore, the arrival of the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church Patriarch Kirill to Ukraine during the celebration of 1025 anniversary of Christianisation of Rus` was widely broadcasted by all Russian media with the most glorious language. What is interesting, Channel One Russia emphasised the fact that it is an important event for Russia, Ukraine, and also Be-

larus, where the Patriarch was planning to travel after his visit to Kyiv [10]. Thus, one may also observe the elements of Russian glory and symbolism alluding to the political dependence of Ukraine on Russia which has been formed throughout ages.

The fourth point is **the clarity principle**, which implies the use of easy-to-understand language carrying simple and catchy, but strongly politicised load. Darczewska explains this principle by claiming that Russian propaganda operates within black-and-white terms [12, 25]. Thus, it is analogical to the Darczewska`s first principle of long-lasting impact: it constructs labels and stereotypes which easily stick to audience`s view on a particular topic. Therefore, it seems to be fair to embrace these two principles under the one framework and provide additional examples of media content. For instance, one of the articles published in Izvestiia titled 'Novorossiia – Born in Flame', mentions the word 'fascism' and its derivations for fifteen times [11]. Aleksandr Prokhanov, the author of the article, utilises such a rhetoric in order to create the simplistic image of Novorossiia as a part of great Russian history. Importantly, this image is constructed as opposed to fascism. In fact, it is a way for the author to define what Novorossiia is: instead of claiming what it stands for, Prokhanov pathetically indicates what it opposes. This bifurcated paradigm is a profound example of the application of clarity principle in propaganda. Although the article concerns the conflict in the East of Ukraine rather than Crimean annexation, it still presents the way in which Russia legitimises its expansion-

ary policy in the region by references to the well-known paradigm of Russian greatness. This article is also a good example of language with emotional implications, which proves the existing interconnection between all five principles of propaganda.

Last but not least, **the principle of supposed obviousness** indicates the audience`s unquestioned consumption of the information, which carries a politically loaded implication. Darczewska explains this principle as 'causing the propaganda thesis to be associated with created political myths' [12, 25]. These myths are predefined by the previously mentioned principles: stereotypes and labels, desired information, and emotional agitation. Apparently, each of these aspects of Russian propaganda determine a certain outlook that Russian society has concerning the events taking place in the revolutionary Ukraine. What is more, they directly influence the local disposition of the Crimean population: namely, their attitude towards Ukrainian government, its legitimacy, and role of Russia in the existing political instability within the state.

The principle of supposed obviousness embraces the phrases like 'of course', 'expectedly', 'as it was supposed to be'. For instance, the news report broadcasted by Radio of Russia during the Euromaidan events is one of the examples of such rhetoric: the correspondent reports about aggravation of the situation on Maidan with the prefatory phrase 'as it was expected' and similar wording that emphasises the predictability of the situation [3]. The supposed obviousness certainly comes from the stereotypes and myths explained

in the first point. Obviously, within the frameworks of Russian propaganda, the Euromaidan became associated with fascism, nationalist movements, and, consequently, chaos. Thus, as far as the reportage and the audience`s reaction to it are concerned, the supposed obviousness paradigm seems to be a natural result of the long-lasting impact of previous informational manipulations.

Moreover, this principle may gain (and usually does) a more direct implication, when the news reporters do not need to underline the predictability of the covered events. That is to say, the reported material may contain ungrounded politically loaded elements or facts with the rhetorical omission of the prefatory phrases like 'of course', 'expectedly', or any other explanation to support it. Thus, despite being subjective or biased, the information is presented as natural and true. For instance, in one of the following news broadcasts by Radio of Russia during the Maidan, the news reporter informs about the squads ('отряды', *otriady*) which are mobilized in the city of Lviv and transferred to Kyiv every day [4]. If to skip the evaluation of its veracity, for the impartial listener, this information seems to be incomplete. Firstly, 'squad' implies the military unit, which is automatically associated with armed confrontation between at least two parties. Furthermore, it needs to be explained by whom these parties are represented and what their goals are. Are 'squads' are formed by ordinary people, 'radicals', or militants? Who organizes the mobilization? Most importantly, what is the goal of this mobilization and why should it take place at all? Altogether, the

reportage creates a general impression of a real military conflict taking place in Kyiv. Undoubtedly, the lack of need for providing the additional facts implies that the audience is supposed to already have a certain knowledge covering the omitted information in the news stories.

Again, it should be reiterated that the political myths, labels, and stereotypes addressed in the principle of massive and long-lasting impact play a crucial role here. Namely, they construct the model of the society`s worldview which inclines people to particular judgements. It may be argued that media construct an alternative reality in which the Ukrainian government is nationalist and Maidan is associated with chaos and violence. Thus, within this reality, it turns out to be quite clear and logical why there is a need for the 'squads' to be formed in Lviv (which is associated with Ukrainian XX century nationalism among Russians) and what their potential role in Kyiv is.

Furthermore, it is also important to say that, as a result of media analysis, there has been coined another principle, which has not been outlined by Darczewska. Namely, **the principle of opinion leadership** seems to be utilised in different aspects of Russian media. This principle operates under the framework of mass communication model suggested by Lazarsfeld and Katz. The academics emphasized the importance of inclusion of the opinion authority element into a message transmission [13]. Under the principle of opinion leadership, one should take into consideration the fact that the very nature of Lazarsfeld-Katz model and

the way it works in Russian propaganda is unique. This is due to the fact that opinion leaders change their faces, social groups, age, and nationality to comply with the material they have to support. For instance, when they cover the Ukrainian history or local events, they refer to correspondingly 'Ukrainian historians' (existence of whom is questioned) and local population, witnesses of the events (although they always have pro-Russian beliefs and certainly do not present a real picture of realities in Ukraine). When they try to discard the decisions of Western politicians, they refer namely to other **Western** [emphasis added by YH] politicians or analysts. For instance, one of the reportages of Channel One emphasised that during the Crimean referendum, fifty experts from all over the world came to supervise the process [8]. Obviously, this information is supposed to increase the credibility of the referendum and present it as open and supported by the international community. However, it is important to stress that the names of experts were not indicated in the report, while no Western media presented any similar information. Moreover, the references were also made to politicians like François Fillon, the former prime minister of France, to make an argument that more Western politicians appear to be against the sanctions imposed on Russia [5].

However, the assessment shows that the opinion leadership pattern is not universal. Apparently, it is due to the fact that, for instance, a media message of this type requires more careful, selective, and time-consuming processing of the working material on the part of journalists to prepare

a credible content. This is hard to achieve due to at least two reasons. Firstly, Western politicians rarely demonstrate open criticism towards their Western counterparts (especially if to compare with Russian politician's rhetoric). Secondly, it is not easy to avoid the public suspicion when referring to the non-existent Russian 'experts' to provide media stories with the lacking credibility on the daily basis.

All in all, the five principles are interconnected with each other, while a news material usually contains several of them at once. This does not seem to be surprising, particularly in the context of construction of the effective and persuasive message.

Conclusions. Does it work?

The paper has presented a row of specific features and principles within the framework of which Russian propaganda operates. Firstly, the analysis tested the applicability of Darczewska's methodology, which proved to be efficient in distinguishing the elements of propaganda in the media content. Yet this paper has suggested to implement certain changes to Darczewska's categorisation. In particular, it has merged **the clarity principle** and **the principle of long-lasting impact**, for they are interconnected within the general idea that message should be simple but dogmatic and lead to the creation of the long-lasting stereotypes and labels like, for instance, 'orange plague'. At the same time, the research has provided additional pattern of propaganda techniques – **the opinion leadership principle**. This paradigm has been put forward as an additional element of Russian propaganda in this paper.

Secondly, the analysis has presented the key ideological messages (discourses), which are used by Russia to justify its expansionist policy. Geopolitical markers like '*Novorossiia*' and dogmas like 'fraternal people' or 'Russian speakers' (русскоязычные, *russkoyazychnye*) are aimed at triggering empathy and affiliation to people and territories which are eventually included into the Russian national identity. In this context, expansionism on the cost of Ukrainian sovereignty is fully justifiable. Moreover, although Russians draw the delimitation lines between themselves and the West, they still feel the pressure of prevailing liberal conceptions within the international order. This forces them to search for the legitimization of government`s actions within the framework of Western moral and political ethics. The references to the violation of Russian-speaking population' rights in Ukraine are the most pertinent examples of such rhetoric.

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П’ять Принципів Медіа-пропаганди та Геополітичний Експансіонізм Росії

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У цій статті аналізуються російські ЗМІ на основі п’яти основних принципів російської пропаганди Йоланти Дарчевської. Аналіз побудований на прикладі анексії Криму й конфлікту на Сході України, що стали геополітичною суперечкою, в якій засоби масової інформації РФ спотворювали її сприйняття, формуючи відповідну громадську думку щодо подій. У роботі досліджується методологія Дарчевської на прикладі висвітлення вищезгаданих подій у ЗМІ, що передбачає критичну оцінку теоретичного підґрунтя п’яти принципів та їхнього практичного застосування. Автор зосереджується на трьох найпопулярніших державних чи залежних від держави засобах масової інформації: Радіо Росії (Радио России), Перший канал (Первый Канал) та «Известия» (буквально означає «звістки»). На основі аналізу, автор висуває власні пропозиції щодо потенційного розширення методології.

Ключові слова: Україна, Йоланта Дарчевська, російська пропаганда, російські ЗМІ, російський експансіонізм, анексія Криму, криза в Україні, війна на Сході України, пропаганда в ЗМІ

Пять принципов Медиа-пропаганды и Геополитический Экспансионизм России

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Эта статья представляет анализ российских СМИ на основе пяти основных принципов российской пропаганды Иоланты Дарчевськой. Анализ построен на примере аннексии Крыма и конфликта на Востоке Украины, ставших геополитическим спором, в котором средства массовой информации РФ искажали его восприятие, формируя соответственное общественное мнение относительно событий. В работе исследуется методология Дарчевськой на примере освещения вышеупомянутых событий в СМИ, что предполагает критическую оценку теоретической основы пяти принципов, а также их практического применения. Автор сосредотачивается на трех самых популярных государственных или зависимых от государства средствах массовой информации: Радио России, Первый Канал и Известия. На основе анализа, автор выдвигает свои предложения относительно потенциального расширения методологии.

Ключевые слова: Украина, Иоланта Дарчевска, российская пропаганда, российские СМИ, российский экспансионизм, аннексия Крыма, кризис в Украине, война на Востоке Украины, пропаганда в СМИ

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