**InfoSec in East-Central Europe:
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Information security and Russian aggression: Ukraine–EU–NATO hybrid response to hybrid war

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Abstract: In this contribution, information security and hybrid war are examined through the media terrain of modern conflict between Russia and other nations. This paper explores common instances of reaction to Russian information aggression against Ukraine, the European Union and other countries. In their battle for public opinion in Russia itself, Europe and overseas, state-controlled Russian media employ well known or new methods of propaganda. Russian agents of influence work not only at RT Channel worldwide but can also make the respected media in the United Kingdom, France or other countries publish Russian spin-doctors' messages. The internet has also become a battlefield for Russian trolls and hackers. The common ways of responding to these challenges by Ukraine and other East-Central European countries are examined and discussed to identify their weaknesses.
Keywords: information security, information warfare, hybrid warfare, Russia, Ukraine, EU, NATO.

Introduction

Since the spring of 2014, Ukraine has been in war, even if that war was not officially proclaimed, with the Russian Federation (RF).[1] Although by the end of February 2016, in the so called antiterrorist operation conducted against pro-Russian rebels and separatists in Donbas, over 2600 Ukrainian servicemen had been killed and more than 9000 wounded[2], in informational context of this resistance the

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[1] EEAS, 'Frequently asked questions about Ukraine, the EU's Eastern Partnership and the EU–Ukraine Association Agreement', *News*, European External Action Service (EEAS), April 24, 2015, http://eeas. europa.eu/delegations/russia/documents/news/04-27_faq_on_ukraine_en.pdf (2016-02-10).

[2] MFA of Ukraine, 'Statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine on implementation of the Minsk agreements', *Statements and Comments*, February 29, 2016, http://mfa.gov.ua/en/

number of losses seems to be different. To a great extent this situation is the outcome of the Russian media amplification of the Ukrainian front to complicated anti-Western propaganda threatening the entire Euro-Atlantic space and its democratic values.[3] Taking into consideration the actual and concrete external threats to the Ukrainian state and its independence from hostile information interference, we have to accept the existence of complete information warfare waged by Russia against Ukraine. This type of warfare is hybrid and uses a broad variety of hostile interference methods employed across several spheres. In this context, the pressing question is if it is possible to counter this aggression by employing methods and tactics different from those employed by Russia. The major argument advanced in this paper is that in order to respond and counter the threat of Russian traditional and online media propaganda, Ukraine, the European Union (EU) and NATO have been using the same information tools and techniques. However, these are insufficient to overcome the primary sources of misinformation that Russia spreads. The greatest challenge here mirrors the core distinctions between Western societies (democratically transparent and predictable) and authoritarian Russia (with a closed inner system and therefore unpredictable).[4] In order to address this issue, the argument in this paper is structured as follows. First, the main terms used in this paper are defined. The second part is dedicated to an overview of Russian information aggression on Ukraine and the rest of the world in traditional media. Here, the origins of this rhetoric as well as the main methods applied and messages projected are discussed. Afterwards, the discussion shifts on the issue of the Ukrainian response to the information threat, at the official and public sector levels. The EU and NATO attempts to respond to Russian information attacks are also examined through the lens of the developments in Ukraine.

press-center/comments/5163-statement-of-the-ministry-of-foreign-affairs-of-ukraine-on-imple-mentation-of-the-minsk-agreements (2016-03-01).

3   G. Reire, 'Euro-Atlantic Values and Russia's propaganda in the Euro-Atlantic Space', *Yearbook of the Institute of East-Central Europe*, vol. 13, no. 4, 2015, pp. 9-28.

4   Ibid.

1. Information security and threat, information warfare and hybrid warfare

Information security is understood as ways of protecting information, especially electronic data, from being used or seen without permission.[5] Information security is not a single technology; it is rather a strategy comprised of the processes, tools and policies necessary to prevent, detect, document and counter threats to digital and non-digital information.[6] Information security can be basically divided into two types, i.e. individual informational security and informational security of the state. Despite the visible distance between them, there might be a correlation that influences both types of informational security. The individual information security is characterized as a state of security of the person, various social groups and associations of people from the influences that are able to change the mental state and psychological characteristics of human behaviour, modify it and restrict the freedom of choice against people's will and desire. The information security of the state is a degree of protection of the information environment that provides operating conditions regardless of the possible and real internal and external threats. In both cases, the information security is a complex term provided by a set of political, economic and organizational measures to prevent, detect and neutralize those circumstances, factors and actions that may do damage or harm to the implementation of information rights, needs and interests of the country and its citizens.

Information warfare is not a separate war technique. It contains a number of forms[7] and can be supplemented by new ones; depending on technological innovations or evolution of the interstate and other relations. Ukrainian modern history and the country's tension with the RF prove that information warfare has now become the centre of politics, economy and military affairs.[8] The RF's invasion of Crimea and Eastern Ukraine in early 2014 might be explained as one step in the

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5   Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 'Information security', *Definitions*, http://www.oxford-learnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/information-security (2016-02-10).
6   SearchSecurity, 'Information security (#InfoSec)', *Definitions*, http://searchsecurity.techtarget.com/definition/information-security-infosec (2016-02-10).
7   M.C. Libicki, *What Is Information Warfare*, National Defense University, 1995, p. x.
8   Г. Почепцов [G. Pochepcov], 'Информационная война: определения и базовые понятия' [Information warfare: definition and basic concepts], *Media Sapiens*, February 16, 2014, http://osvita.

Russian ruling elite's game to preserve its influence and restore power and international clout of the Soviet empire. Modern communication technologies seem to play an important role in this strategy aimed at restoring Russia as the world's superpower. Clearly, Russia is not the only state expressing such ambitions; China seems to be interested in computer warfare.[9] Nevertheless, it is Russia, the close neighbour of East-Central Europe that is the actual source of deep concerns, not only for Ukraine, with regard to hybrid warfare.

Other countries did not appear to be ready for Russian information intervention. Moreover, it was a matter of a core difference between Russian and Western (American and European) understanding of peace, i.e. for Moscow it seems to be a period to prepare for war. Despite the possibility that the consciousness of Russian officials and common people (if they trust their ruling elites) has changed since the collapse of the Soviet Union, their former ambitions remained.[10] These Russian ambitions in composition with specific information operations on the national and international level gave birth to what is called hybrid war in Ukraine. "Ukrainians are resisting this Russian desire to subordinate them by means of political, economic and information tools."[11] From NATO's perspective, hybrid warfare is widely understood to blend conventional/unconventional, regular/irregular, and information and cyber warfare.[12] The history of Russia's last cyber warfare operations (in the last 10 years) seems to be rich enough to trace some kind of a tendency in Moscow's official attempts to obtain international supremacy in cyber space information resistance. The cases of Estonia in 2007, Georgia in 2008, Crimea and Ukraine since 2014 constitute integral parts of the war strategy of the RF.

mediasapiens.ua/ethics/manipulation/informatsionnaya_voyna_opredeleniya_i_bazovye_ponyatiya/ (2016-02-10).

9   M.C. Libicki, *The Future of Information Security*, Institute for National Strategic Studies, http://fas.org/irp/threat/cyber/docs/infosec.htm (2016-10-02).

10 P.M. Joyal, 'Cyber Threats and Russian Information Warfare', *InFocus*, Winter 2016, Jewish Policy Center, http://www.jewishpolicycenter.org/5723/russia-information-warfare (2016-02-10).

11 Є. Магда [E. Magda], 'Гібридна війна: питання і відповіді' [Hybrid war: questions and answers], *Media Sapiens*, July 27, 2015, http://osvita.mediasapiens.ua/trends/1411978127/gibridna_viyna_pitannya_i_vidpovidi/ (2016-02-10).

12 NATO, 'Hybrid war – does it even exist?', *NATO Review magazine*, 2015, http://www.nato.int/docu/Review/2015/Also-in-2015/hybrid-modern-future-warfare-russia-ukraine/EN/index.htm (2016-02-10).

2. 'Ukrainian fascist and Nazi', i.e. the propaganda rhetoric in Russian media

One of the manipulative techniques of modern Russian propaganda is labelling.[13] It started with Bolsheviks who created the phrase 'Ukrainian fascism'[14]. The 'fascist' label was used in Ukraine long before the actual war was started by Russia in 2014. It was even a year before the presidential elections in late October 2003, during Viktor Yushchenko's visit and the congress of his political force *Nasha Ukraina* [Our Ukraine] in Donetsk, nowadays occupied by pro-Russian militants. The city was full of billboards describing the opposition leader as a Nazi but the local authorities in the home city of the ruling Party of Regions did nothing to allow the officially announced congress to be held.[15] At that time Viktor Yanukovych, later the president of Ukraine, was the prime minister and leader of the Party of Regions. He lost the election campaign in 2004 because of the Orange Revolution. He took revenge in 2010 but did not manage to serve a full term as faced with the Revolution of Dignity, he fled to Russia; hiding from 'Ukrainian fascists', in line with the version delivered by Russian media. The images of 'modern fascists in Ukraine' produced by Russian media were colourful and cruel despite the fact that they were far from reality. Ukrainian journalists and activists even prepared top 5 of hoaxes and disinformation provided by Russian media in the previous years, e.g. a crucifixion of a rebel's little son in Slavyansk, a distorted version of the Malaysia Airlines Flight MH 17 tragedy, or a story about slaves, promised to Ukrainian soldiers, who participated in antiterrorist operations.[16]

The exact number of fiction stories produced by Russian media is unknown because they are multilingual and wide spread – due to the possibilities provided via the internet. Jill Dougherty, the Former

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13   Reire, op. cit.

14   Я. Примаченко [Y. Primachenko], 'Російська інформаційна війна проти України: у пошуках першоджерела' [Russian information war against Ukraine: in search of the source], *Дзеркало тижня. Україна* [Mirror of the week. Ukraine], no. 39, October 16, 2015, http://gazeta.dt.ua/history/rosiyska-informaciyna-viyna-proti-ukrayini-u-poshukah-pershodzherela-_.html (2016-02-10).

15   Based on the Author's visit to Donetsk on October 30-31, 2003.

16   UT, 'Top 5 Russian fake reports of 2014', *Ukraine Today*, December 30, 2014, http://uatoday.tv/geopolitics/top-5-russian-fake-reports-of-2014-400310.html (2016-02-10).

Moscow CNN bureau chief, argues that Moscow in its information offence on the world is implementing some kind of a well composed and multimode plan.[17] The 'information army Russian troops' seem to understand and use Oswald Spengler's thought: "Any fact, even the simplest one, contains a theory. Fact – it is a single impression on a waking creature."[18] So they tend to play with any stories produced by their imagination, mixing them with "pure" facts and exploiting this information to subjugate the minds of separate individuals, mislead the public opinion and other countries' politicians to ensure Russian elite's profit in this game.

The 'Kremlin propaganda machine' demonstrates the weird flexibility when the moment of discourse change comes. For instance, in 2013-2015, when the events in Ukraine reached the headlines in Russian mass media, leaving almost no space for stories about life in Russia itself, the news concerning the battle with 'Ukrainian Nazis' was immediately modified. A pro-Russian newspaper *Komsomolskaya Pravda* initiated a festive event: congratulate your relatives and friends across the Russian-Ukrainian border on New Year and Christmas "as all we need today [is] just simple words of kindness"[19]. That does not mean that the Russian Federation suddenly turned its anti-Ukrainian position 180 degrees. It would be better to say that it was a traditional 360 degree turn: in the face of international sanctions, Russia's poor internal situation and another not very successful 'petite victorious war' in Syria. So the symptoms of brotherhood could only be a trick, especially taking into consideration further information provocations.

On February 1st 2016, the official site of the British newspaper (owned by Russian oligarch Alexander Lebedev) *Independent* published an article titled 'Ukraine plans to join fight against ISIS means troops could come up against Russian forces in Syria'[20]. In no time,

17   J. Dougherty, 'Everyone Lies: The Ukraine Conflict and Russia's Media Transformation', *Politics and Public Policy Discussion Paper Series*, no. 88, July 2014, Shorenstein Center on Media, http://shorensteincenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/d88-dougherty.pdf (2016-02-10).

18   O. Spengler, *The Decline of the West. Book I*, Moscow: Ayris-Press, 2006, p. 439.

19   С. Шебеліст [S. Shebelist], 'І стає маразмом «навіки разом»' [And it becomes marasmus 'forever together'], *Zaxid.net*, January 11, 2016, http://zaxid.net/news/showNews.do?i_staye_marazmom_naviki_razom&objectId=1378796 (2016-02-10).

20   A. Nathan, 'Ukraine plans to join fight against Isis means troops could come up against Russian forces in Syria', *The Independent*, January 31, 2016, http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/

the Ukrainian Ministry of Defence noted that Ukraine considered no possibility of using the units of the Armed Forces of Ukraine for the military purpose in Syria or Iraq. Information that appeared in some media about the alleged possible participation of the Armed Forces of Ukraine in the fight against ISIS in Syria, is another example of misinformation and ongoing hybrid war against Ukraine.[21] The appearance of a totally false article on the internet page of a well-known and respected British periodical is not surprising any more. From time to time, pro-Russian or pro-Ukrainian articles are published in different newspapers of the world – including the USA, the UK, Germany, Italy or France. They can be dedicated to some official visits of state leaders (president, prime minister or a minister of foreign affairs can be even an official author of a particular text), published by some observers or lobbyist groups on a commercial basis.

In February 2016, on the second anniversary of the Ukrainian Revolution of Dignity, a French popular channel Canal+ Decale showed the documentary made by Paul Moreira, titled 'Ukraine. The masks of the revolution'. As another French journalist Benoît Vitkine from *Le Monde* wrote in his review, 'Paul Moreira gives a distorted view of the Ukrainian conflict'.[22] Ukraine's authorities urged the French broadcaster to take the documentary off the air. The Embassy of Ukraine proposed to the French television channel to broadcast their own collection of documentaries about the events in the country.[23] The documentary was heavily backed-up by pro-Russian media abroad and Ukrainian diplomats were criticized for their 'offence on the freedom of speech'. RT (Russia Today Channel) described the documentary as a special investigation carried out by Moreira, covering the events in Ukraine over 2014; the far-right radical groups allegedly backed by the US, as

europe/ukraine-plans-to-join-fight-against-isis-means-troops-could-come-up-against-russian-forces-in-syria-a6845336.html (2016-02-10).

21   MD of Ukraine, 'On participation of Ukraine in International Coalition against ISIL', *News*, February 1, 2016, http://www.mil.gov.ua/en/news/2016/02/01/on-participation-of-ukraine-in-international-coalition-against-isil/ (2016-02-10).

22   B. Vitkine, 'Paul Moreira donne une vision déformée du conflit ukrainien' [Paul Moreira gives a distorted view of the Ukrainian conflict], *Le Monde*, January 31, 2016, http://www.lemonde.fr/televisions-radio/article/2016/01/31/les-lunettes-deformantes-de-moreira_4856732_1655027.html (2016-02-10).

23   Facebook, Ukrainian Embassy in France, January 29, 2016, https://www.facebook.com/ambassadeukraineenfrance/?fref=nf (2016-02-10).

well as the deadly violence in the southern Ukrainian town of Odessa.[24] Once the documentary had been broadcast, not only Ukrainian but also French journalists expressed the feeling that the French channel had shown the story from RT's perspective.[25]

At the same time, French journalists working in Ukraine issued a collective appeal, which criticized Moreira's work. According to them, the film shows no understanding of the complex issues of Russian-Ukrainian relations, and it is confusing as it contains a number of delusions and unverified information combined with editing manipulation.[26] This set of criticisms echoes the depiction of the whole work and mission of RT Channel.[27] Basic methods of this Russian information warfare are not new at all: almost nothing has changed since the basic principles of propaganda were proclaimed by the Reich Minister of Propaganda in Nazi Germany from 1933 to 1945, Joseph Goebbels.[28]

Not all journalists could stand the fact of being a part of Russian propagandistic machine. For example, Liz Wahl, RT's American anchor, quit on air and accused the network of 'whitewashing' the actions of Russian leader Vladimir Putin and Moscow's military intervention in Crimea.[29] Further online discussion that followed could serve as a proof of a wide and professionally constructed trolls' network seeking to discredit her with posts like this: "Liz Wahl was paid off to commit career suicide and give RT a black eye. She needs to now pursue a new career as a bargain basement prostitute"[30]. Such accusations against

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24   RT, '"Wrong" Maidan: Ukraine demands that France's Canal+ TV take hard-hitting documentary off air', *Russia Today*, February 1, 2016, https://www.rt.com/news/330836-ukraine-france-maidan-documentary/ (2016-02-10).

25   О. Серветтаз [O. Servettaz], 'Французькі журналісти: «Ніби на Canal+ показали сюжет Russia Today…»' [French journalists: 'As if Canal+ showed the story of Russia Today…'], *Deutsche Welle*, February 2, 2016, http://dw.com/p/1HoAk (2016-02-10).

26   L'Obs, 'Open Letter to Paul Moreira after "Ukraine, masks of the revolution"', *L'Obs*, February 3, 2016, http://teleobs.nouvelobs.com/actualites/20160202.OBS3854/lettre-ouverte-a-paul-moreira-apres-ukraine-les-masques-de-la-revolution.html (2016-02-10).

27   E. Lucas, 'Russia's information warfare', *Politico*, June 11, 2014, http://www.politico.eu/article/russias-information-warfare/ (2016-02-10).

28   L.W. Doob, 'Goebbels' Principles of Propaganda', *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, vol. 14, no. 3, 1950, pp. 419-442.

29   Youtube, *RT America's Liz Wahl resigns live on air*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2h79v9uirLY (2016-02-10).

30   Ibid.

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people who dare to claim that they are not 'in love with the Russian world', are not rare, not only in Western but also in Ukrainian media.

The Kremlin's propaganda seems to be able to produce an answer to any argument, denying the existence of its own troll army producing thousands of comments a day to distort or kill a meaningful dialogue or discussion on the Ukrainian conflict or other related stories.[31] From this perspective, one can assume that Russia is winning its information war in virtual space. Massive, multilingual, well paid (so far – despite the sanctions and the decrease of the Russian economy) and professionally coordinated waves of 'almost truthful' fiction storytelling in media are followed by broad discussions on each of the stories. In comparison, Ukraine was almost defenceless at the beginning of the war between two countries. But the Russian Federation authorities decided to go further in their aggression and that fact tremendously impacted Ukraine. At first, Russia was victorious in the information and cyber space, but then Putin started to shed real, physical blood and that fact mobilized Ukrainian communicative and propaganda capabilities, awakening the national resistance of Ukrainians.[32]

3. Ukraine's response: a 'Ministry of Truth' and the strength of a common people

At the same time, the Ukrainian state realized that it had to pay more attention to Ukraine's foreign broadcasting system and reform it in order to present to the world an image of Ukraine that was not distorted or fragmented. After the Russian TV channels completely replaced Ukrainian ones in Crimea, Ukraine's media regulator ordered all cable providers to stop transmitting Russian state-controlled TV channels.[33] Officials explained that they were acting in the interests of 'informa-

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31 P.G. Roderick, 'Putin's New Weapon In The Ukraine Propaganda War: Internet Trolls', *Forbes*, December 9, 2014, http://www.forbes.com/sites/paulroderickgregory/2014/12/09/putins-new-weapon-in-the-ukraine-propaganda-war-internet-trolls/#2338982159e5 (2016-02-10).

32 Г. Почепцов [G. Pochepcov], 'Росія і Україна у порівнянні їх комунікативно-пропагандистських можливостей', [Russia and Ukraine in the comparison of their communicative and propagandistic opportunities], *Media Sapiens*, August 3, 2014, http://osvita.mediasapiens.ua/ethics/manipulation/rosiya_i_ukraina_u_spivstavlenni_ikh_komunikativnopropagandistskikh_mozhlivostey/ (2016-02-10).

33 S. Ennis, 'Ukraine hits back at Russian TV onslaught', *BBC*, March 12, 2014, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-26546083 (2016-02-10).

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tion security' as there is almost no language barrier for Ukrainians to understand the messages of Russian propaganda. At the same time, viewers in Ukraine are also able to access Russian TV via satellite.

Public activists also managed to start some successful initiatives and projects to inform the multilingual audience about Ukraine. One of them is a project *Stopfake*[34] by the students and graduates of the Mohyla School of Journalism. The initiative was launched in March 2014 to search for false news about Ukraine and publish their refutations. Other examples include, the *Ukrainian Crisis Media Center*[35], *Euromaidan Press*[36], *Vox Ukraine Portal*[37], StopTerror[38], Likbez[39], Dokaz[40] and Information Resistance[41]. Another initiative is Inform-Napalm[42], established by volunteers from Sevastopol, Crimea, and Georgia. This initiative gathers former military servants, journalists, analysts, translators and other activists who were forced to become soldiers of the information front in the face of Russian aggression. The project is not limited to the Ukrainian territory, it also covers the Russian army presence in Syria, providing evidence of Moscow's aggressive policies worldwide.[43]

Social networks are another battlefield for Ukrainian counterstrike to Russian information operations. One can trace there a lot of photos and videos that can be used as signs of evidence to prove the fact of Russian aggression.[44] Some activists managed to unmask the whole Russian project of 'Third Maidan' preparation in Ukraine: on the basis of a story by one Russian, former militant in Donbas, who online

34   www.stopfake.org
35   www.uacrisis.org
36   www.euromaidanpress.com
37   www.voxukraine.org
38   www.stopterror.in.ua
39   www.likbez.org.ua
40   www.dokaz.org.ua
41   www.sprotyv.info
42   Informnapalm.org
43   InformNapalm, 'Сухопутная операция РФ в Сирии: «вежливые люди» в окрестностя Slanfah' [Land Russian operation in Syria 'polite people' around Slanfah], January 23, 2016, https://inform-napalm.org/18964-slanfah/ (2016-02-10).
44   Ю. Залізняк [Y. Zaliznyak], 'Профіль російського окупанта в соціальних мережах як доказ агресії проти України' [Social networks profile of Russian invaders as evidence of aggression against Ukraine], *MediaKrytyka* [Media-Criticism], November 4, 2014, http://www.mediakrytyka.info/ohlyady-analityka/profil-rosiyskoho-okupanta-v-sotsialnykh-merezhakh-yak-dokaz-ahresi-yi-proty-ukrayiny.html (2016-02-10).

pretended to be a Ukrainian patriot. They also discovered a complex technology of discrediting the Ukrainian Revolution and throwing the country into a new unstable period.[45] From now on, any person who reads patriotic posts on Facebook or blogs containing critical comments about the actual power of the state, cannot be sure whether the author of these words is a real Ukrainian patriot revealing the hidden truth or hot facts or he is a Russian special agent working undercover online from Moscow, St. Petersburg or Geleznogorsk. At the end of 2015, the Ukrainian parliament supported[46] the idea of creating a foreign broadcasting company *Ukraine Tomorrow*. President Petro Poroshenko signed Law on foreign broadcasting and commented: "We shouldn't copy propaganda methods of the aggressor country. On the contrary, our journalists should tell the truth about the war in Ukraine and gain trust this way."[47]

Some analysts warn Ukrainians not to duplicate the Russian propaganda methods by introducing similar TV channels.[48] Although no one has denied the common rules of the global TV market, the national market of Ukraine is a different case – people are already engaged there, or even over engaged, regarding the accurate work done by domestic media. The war has dramatically influenced their rhetoric.[49] Sometimes, however, these messages that seek to counter propaganda sound not professional enough. Even top national TV channels have earned a portion of rational criticism for some of the smallest mistakes in their work:

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45 Л. Самохвалова [L. Samokhvalova], 'Московський слід колорадського Жука, або Хто і як готує «Майдан-3»' [Moscow trace of the Colorado potato beetle, or who and how to prepare 'Maidan-3'], *Ukrinform*, January 21, 2016, http://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-politycs/1948496-moskovskij-slid-koloradskogo-zuka-abo-hto-i-ak-gotue-majdan3.html (2016-02-10).

46 Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 'Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine adopts Law "On system of overseas broadcast"', *News*, December 8, 2015, http://iportal.rada.gov.ua/en/news/page/news/News/121287.html (2016-02-10).

47 President of Ukraine, 'President signed Law on foreign broadcasting: We should defeat the lies of aggressor with truth', *News*, December 28, 2015, http://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/prezident-pidpisav-zakon-pro-inomovlennya-mayemo-pravdoyu-pe-36575 (2016-02-10).

48 P. Pomerantsev, 'Can Ukraine Win Its Information War With Russia?', *The Atlantic*, June 11, 2014, http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/06/can-ukraine-win-its-information-war-with-russia/372564/ (2016-02-10).

49 I. Burdyga, 'Stop this "Black and White" Thinking!', *Ostpol*, December 16, 2015, http://www.ostpol.de/beitrag/4468-stop_this_black_and_white_thinking (2016-02-10).

"The central channels seem to become tired of the war in the East. The material's plot is repeated as a cliché, reports from the front are not checked for accuracy and even have no links to the sources. Reports from the battlefront are more like an action movie than objective news: journalists use personal judgments, incorrect terminology, and emotive vocabulary – in order to keep tension."[50]

Ukrainian authorities have decided to provide some additional control of information space of the country while it is fighting for its independence. The Ministry of Information Policy, led by Yuriy Stets, a former producer at Channel 5 and a close personal friend of President Poroshenko, was established at the end of 2014. Some journalists and civil-society activists dubbed it the *Ministry of Truth* despite Stets's promises not to be engaged in propaganda or censorship.[51] Until now, the Ministry has called Ukrainians to enlist in the country's 'information forces' to battle against online propaganda spread by Russian trolls and pro-Kremlin media. The ministry has started the "Embedded journalism" project, it publishes videos and photographs that prove the presence of the Russian military in the territory of Ukrainian Donbas. Western countries are also actively engaged in the process of searching for the solution for Ukraine in its information counterattack on Russia.[52] Ukraine did not get any special equipment from Western allies to mute Russian channels' signal from occupied Crimea as the matter of self-defence seems to be a principal question for Western Europe, especially after a series of bloody terrorist attacks there.

4. The EU and NATO's response to Ukraine's predicament

The redeployment of military units and weapons on the Eastern borders of the EU is not the only answer of the West to the Russian challenge. The information front seems to become a key aspect of the

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50 I. Андрейців [I. Andreyciv], 'Між «своїми» і «чужими»' [Amongst 'friends' and 'foes'], *Media Sapiens*, December 23, 2015, http://osvita.mediasapiens.ua/monitoring/daily_news/mizh_svoimi_y_chuzhimi/ (2016-02-10).
51 The Economist, 'Battle of the memes', *News/Europe*, March 12, 2015, http://www.economist.com/news/europe/21646280-russia-has-shown-its-mastery-propaganda-war-ukraine-struggling-catch-up-battle-web (2016-02-10).
52 Lucas, op. cit.

defence strategy and tactics, especially after the intelligence agencies' reports about constant Russian endeavours to destabilize the particular information space and divide the EU.[53] In its resolution of 10 June 2015, the European Parliament called on the Commission "to earmark without delay adequate funding for concrete projects aimed at countering Russian propaganda and misinformation within the EU and abroad".[54] In a few months' perspective, this initiative brought East StratCom Force to life with its disinformation review. This strategic communication organ, targeted at the audience over the Eastern border of the EU, resembles the Ukrainian Ministry of Information Policy. Both institutions declare their opposition to ongoing Russia's disinformation campaigns and both are quite open as for their assignment explanation. On the other hand, Russian propagandistic forces are not so open as for their real mission and principles of public confession. Administrated by East StratCom Force, the European External Action Service (EEAS) in Russian[55] also looks very similar to Ukrainian online sources mentioned above. Another grassroots project is Bellingcat, conducted by and for investigative journalism activists, using open sources and social media to investigate a variety of subjects, Russian aggression and MH-17 case being some of them.

NATO started developing a new strategy of speed decision-making and improving its response to the kind of unconventional warfare the West says Russia has used in Crimea and eastern Ukraine. The new playbook is expected to lay out the alliance's help for members if they come under pressure from Russia or another country.[56] These defence initiatives seem to be of a strategic, not tactic character – in

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53 R. Lohse, M. Veser, M. Wehner, M. Wyssuwa, 'Russlands geheimer Feldzug gegen den Westen' [Russia's secret campaign against the West], *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, March 11, 2016, http://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/fluechtlingskrise/putin-manipuliert-gezielte-medienkampagne-gegen-deutschland-14117555.html (2016-03-15).

54 European Parliament, *European Parliament resolution of 10 June 2015 on the state of EU–Russia relations*, June 10, 2015, P8_TA(2015)0225, http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P8-TA-2015-0225+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN&language=EN (2016-02-10).

55 European External Action Service (EEAS) in Russian, http://eeas.europa.eu/ru/index_ru.htm (2016-02-10).

56 J.E. Barnes, 'NATO Works to Adapt to More Ambiguous Warfare Techniques', *The Wall Street Journal*, February 8, 2016, http://www.wsj.com/articles/nato-works-to-adapt-to-more-ambiguous-warfare-techniques-1454928411 (2016-02-10).

order to solve the challenges that cannot be resolved in a short time perspective. The birth of new and official Russian-language information sources in Western countries means that they have understood and accepted the Kremlin's challenge. It means the recognition of the threat and of the actual war: „But the war is not a true war unless its first aim is a heap of enemy dead."[57]

Western media system is too open for Russian propaganda. A properly organized story, apparently meeting the basic standards of journalism but containing partly distorted information and biased conclusions (targeted at political system or particular politicians) can be published in British, German, French, Italian or other newspapers. Respectfully, Russia does not seem to be a country that lets a similar article criticizing actual Russian ruling elite appear in mainstream media. Even a reprint of some critical passages from foreign media in a private social network can be punished in accordance with Russian national security law. Of course, there are some partly oppositional media, but they exist basically on the internet. However, the main source of information for Russians is TV – totally controlled by the state, whereas internet penetration and foreign language knowledge in this country is at a comparatively low level. This brings us to the problem of veracity concerning EU and US Russian-language sources. It is not only a problem of access to the internet – it is a problem of trust and time in counterpropaganda game. The US Department of State's Russian-language account on Twitter with its about 10 thousand readers[58] is incomparable to the audience of the Russian *First National TV* channel or *Rossiya TV*. And it is hard to imagine what kind of tweet it has to be to affect the Russian audience and convince it to something different from what has been told for decades by different state media.

The roots of this problem refer to the characteristic of human thinking process and perception of reality modified by homeland and foreign media outlets for decades. Modern warfare has been transformed from a war between nations, ethnic or fanatic groups, using weapons to hurt or kill the opponents, into a war between meanings

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57 E. Canetti, *Crowds and Power*, New York: Continuum, 1981, p. 68.
58 Twitter, US Department of State official Russian-language account, https://twitter.com/USApo-Russki (2016-02-10).

– as cornerstones of individual and mass realities. Special information operation can last for years – deepening social stereotypes, chasing specific goals: to integrate different nations into one state by erasing the language, cultural or other borders, and to mobilize one nation for a battle with the whole world in the name of some holy mission.[59] A synthetic character of meanings and messages allows the other side of the conflict to counterattack or prepare for a possibility of such a conflict beforehand. Success here becomes a matter of staying alert and able to rebuff information attacks. It is necessary to remember that "the more experience one has with any one piece of software the more holes can be closed. Yet, even a perfect fix lasts only until the next innovation hits the system"[60]. In the case of the Russian aggression against Ukraine, Europe, the United States and the rest of the world, we cannot disagree with such a statement: "Countering the storm of Russian propaganda will require innovative thinking as well as money, two resources in scarce supply in Europe. But it is worth giving truth a chance."[61]

Conclusions

The EU does not have only to follow the Ukrainian example of counter-propaganda work – despite another truce, Ukrainian servicemen and civilians are perishing in the Donbas region. And mental destruction of an individual or a nation as a result of the information war cannot be prevented by using the mirrored methods of the enemy, by denial and discrediting of his attacks. Except the counterattacks in virtual space – even with logical and strong arguments – Western civilization has to accept the existence of several separate audiences in this hybrid war. Certain messages have to be prepared for each of them, taking into consideration the connections between them and specif-

59 Г. Почепцов [G. Pocherpcov], 'Смислові та інформаційні війни: пошук відмінностей' [Semantic and information warfare: in search for differences], *Media Sapiens*, March 17, 2013, http://osvita. mediasapiens.ua/ethics/manipulation/smislovi_ta_informatsiyni_viyni_poshuk_vidminnostey/ (2016-02-10).

60 Libicki, *The Future of Information Security*, op. cit.

61 The Economist, 'Aux armes, journalistes!', *The Economist*, March 19, 2015, http://www.economist. com/news/europe/21646756-europe-belatedly-waking-up-russias-information-warfare-aux-armes-journalistes (2016-02-10).

ics of their role in the conflict: whether it is the homeland audience, the inhabitants of borderlands and partly occupied countries or even the citizens of the hostile state. The core questions to answer here are language, internet and satellite access issues, inner political order and the balance between sovereignty, democratic values and principles and the need for self-defence.

Social and political tensions in Ukraine and their desirable positive outcomes would be the best ground for effective information resistance to Russia. Any myths authors could not stand in a long run contrast with reality but Ukrainians are obliged to bring those real reforms into life. At the same time, European leaders have to acknowledge that their current system of decision making is contrary to the Russian one. The democratic process of discussion, approval and implementation is too long in comparison with Moscow's authoritarian style. Brussels and Strasbourg must understand that the actual foe is acquainted with the length of typical procedures in European decision making and could use this knowledge in further tensions on information, economic, political, humanitarian or even military grounds. The former geopolitical order was ruined by the Russian Federation in 2014 in Crimea and Donbas – with a preliminary campaign in 2008 in Georgia. The world and Europe in particular should draw some concrete conclusions and reconstruct themselves – according to the new threat.

Real Ukrainian independence from Russia began not in 1991 but in 2014, i.e. following the Revolution of Dignity and the war that followed. State institutions in Kyiv are too young and too inexperienced to provide the equivalent and sustained response to Russian information aggression. The financial aspect is also important, i.e. the Ukrainian economy is too weak to allow appropriate expenditure on counter-propaganda in national and international information space. But the process has begun, not only in Ukraine but also in the EU and NATO states, with their powerful media outlets revising and adopting their strategies and standards to the new reality. It would be a fatal mistake to let the Russian or pro-Russian media keep working in Ukraine and other countries telling the world (Russian or not – it makes no difference here) their own interpretation of these countries' modern history. New Russian and English language media have to be established in Ukraine as soon as possible and their main duty has to be the Ukrainian perspective of the situation in the country and abroad

– without oligarchic influences but with public interest in mind. The best response to Russian information aggression and hybrid war has to be asymmetric and hybrid: profound reforms in Ukraine, under international support leading to the destruction of the former corrupted system. Sustainable growth of the country's economy and public sector will lead to the emergence of the image that Russian television could try to deny or distort. But that would already be the North Korean way of 'news' production.

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