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“Vaccinodemic” as a component of the global hybrid conflict between democracy and autocracy: the case of Ukraine

„Wakcynodemia” jako składnik globalnej opozycji hybrydowej między demokracją a autokracją: przypadek Ukrainy

Summary: Today, there is no doubt that the large-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russian troops in February 2022 represents just another phase of the Russo-Ukrainian War that has lasted for nine years. There are many aspects to this confrontation. The consequences of the war will affect the future of the world order. It will include such aspects as security, formation of new political blocs, force interaction of political regimes, the choice of state-building models by the countries, the art of war, the role of civil society, and strengthening of the informational component in the confrontation between states and their alliances. Russia-Iran has already emerged as one such aggressive alliance. In the article, the authors explain the phenomenon of the infodemic and one of its structural elements, the “vaccinodemic”.

The COVID-19 pandemic became a vivid example of the global clash of actors in international relations that implement conflicting ideologies – democratic or authoritarian rule in the social and political life of their states – and realize such aspects in foreign policy. The authors assert that the current situation in Ukraine, namely, the open military Russian invasion and the further aggravation of the security crisis, primarily in the European region, are only the next phase of an ideological confrontation that could be observed during the response to the COVID-19 pandemic by humanity. Now, this confrontation continues in a more aggressive, conventional format. Manifestations of the infodemic and its unique form, the “vaccinodemic”, captured the essence of the global confrontation, which will determine international processes for decades. Namely, Russia’s fight between democracy and authoritarianism has acquired neo-totalitarian characteristics. This fight will determine, in addition to other social phenomena, the structure and content of the global informa-

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tion space. It is noted that authoritarian regimes have shown some success in addressing the pandemic, which may aggravate the rivalry between democracy and authoritarianism, as the former will have to prove its effectiveness and long-term advantages.

Keywords: vaccinodemic, infodemic, misinformation, democracy, neo-totalitarianism, reflexive management, COVID-19, cognitive war

Streszczenie: Dziś nie ma wątpliwości, że zakrojona na szeroką skalę inwazja wojsk rosyjskich na Ukrainę w lutym 2022 roku to tylko kolejny etap wielkiej wojny rosyjsko-ukraińskiej, która trwa już dziewiąty rok. Ta konfrontacja ma wiele aspektów. Konsekwencje wojny wpłyną na całą architekturę przyszłego porządku światowego. Dotyczyć to będzie takich aspektów jak bezpieczeństwo, tworzenie nowych bloków, wzajemne oddziaływanie sił ustrojów politycznych, wybór modeli budowy państwa, sztuka wojenna, rola społeczeństwa obywatelskiego oraz wzmocnienie komponentu informacyjnego w konfrontacji między państwami i ich sojuszami. W artykule autorzy wykazują, że zjawisko infodemii, a także jeden z jej elementów strukturalnych – epidemia szczepionkowa, w czasie pandemii choroby koronawirusowej COVID-19 stały się żywym przykładem globalnego starcia aktorów stosunków międzynarodowych, które są realizowane w życiu społecznym i politycznym ich państw oraz wdrażane w polityce zagranicznej jako sprzeczne ideologie – rządy demokratyczne i autorytarne. Autorzy skłaniają się do założenia, że obecne wydarzenia na Ukrainie, a mianowicie otwarta inwazja wojskowa ze strony Rosji, dalsze zaostrzenie się kryzysu bezpieczeństwa, przede wszystkim w regionie europejskim, to dopiero kolejna faza ideologicznej konfrontacji, jaką można było zaobserwować podczas przezwyciężania pandemii COVID-19 przez ludzkość. Teraz odbywa się w jeszcze bardziej agresywnym, konwencjonalnym formacie. Manifestacje infodemii i jej szczególnego formatu – wacynodemii – uchwyciły istotę globalnej konfrontacji, która na kolejne dziesięciolecie będzie determinować procesy międzynarodowe. Mianowicie: konfrontacja demokracji z autorytaryzmem, który w Rosji nabral cech neototalitaryzmu. Ich konfrontacja określi, obok innych zjawisk społecznych, strukturę i treść globalnej przestrzeni informacyjnej. Należy zauważyć, że reżimy autorytarne odniosły pewien sukces podczas pandemii. Może to świadczyć o zaostrzeniu rywalizacji między demokracjami a autorytaryzmem, bo te pierwsze będą musiały udowodnić swoją skuteczność i długofalowe zalety.

Słowa kluczowe: wacynodemia, infodemia, dezinformacja, demokracja, neototalitaryzm, zarządzanie refleksyjne, COVID-19

Introduction

At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared that it was fighting not only the virus but also the fake news surrounding it, or more precisely, the infodemic, a term that has been coined as a blend of *information* and *epidemic*¹. If during elections disinformation can influence political choices,

1 M. Richtel, *W.H.O. Fights a Pandemic Besides Coronavirus: An 'Infodemic'*, The New York Times, 6 February 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/06/health/coronavirus-misinformation-so>

then in the conditions of the pandemic, false information can threaten physical survival. Without vaccines, losses from the 2019 SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) coronavirus pandemic would have been expected to reach \$3.4 trillion annually².

Humankind has entered a new information world where as well as long-familiar concepts such as misinformation, manipulation, and fake news, new social phenomena are emerging that require detailed study. Under the state of fear provoked by the pandemic, common phenomena and conditions have reached such a scale that medicine has acquired the characteristics of religion³. Social life in most countries, both developed and impoverished, has not reached equilibrium, and has become unstable and nationally selfish, guided by the principle "we would survive on our own". The behaviour of citizens is often suspicious and intolerant of the "other"⁴. With the spread of COVID-19 in the world, an information epidemic began, or as it is also called an "infodemic" – spreading pandemic fake news and false information about COVID-19.

The article's purpose is to consider the phenomenon of the vaccinodemic as a new stage of information confrontation, which, in our opinion, should be regarded as another step in the global cognitive war.

The vaccinodemic may be regarded as one of the signs of the end of the unipolar world. This phenomenon increased the dilemma for the governments and societies of fragile states of whether they should choose the authoritarian or democratic model to effectively overcome the pandemic's social, economic, and security consequences. This is a particularly critical issue for the fragile transitional democracies in Eastern and Central Europe. We strongly believe that even amid Russia's open aggression against Ukraine which began on 24 February 2022 as a new stage of the Russian-Ukrainian war, the information competition within the framework of the COVID-19 pandemic should be considered a separate act of a modern confrontation be-

cial-media.html [05.06.2022].

- 2 T.E. Board, *Opinion. The Era of Vaccine Diplomacy Is Here*, The New York Times, 28 February 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/28/opinion/covid-vaccine-global.html> [20.07.2022].
- 3 G. Agamben, *Medicine as a religion [La medicina come religione]*, Quodlibet, 2 May 2020, <https://www.quodlibet.it/giorgio-agamben-la-medicina-come-religione> [16.07.2022].
- 4 J. Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Polity Press 1989.

tween authoritarian and democratic states, a test of their efficiency; of their ability to work together to overcome narrow national interests for the benefit of common needs; of their ability to preserve and strengthen the ideas and values of democratic rule as the most expedient for the survival of the nation and protection of state sovereignty. The debate is whether authoritarian or even totalitarian states, considering their internal consolidation, the ability of their governments to make quick one-person decisions, influence on social communications and secrecy of information, police coercion and state propaganda, even with an ineffective health care system, can form in their population and sympathizers from other states the persistent illusion that a non-democratic regime is more powerful and effective in extreme situations. It is said that such a regime relies on broad support from society, which at the same time lacks any influence on the authorities. In our opinion, the situation with the pandemic, and its informational component – the infodemic – gave authoritarian leaders the false impression that they could also resort to building up and implementing their expansionist, neo-imperialist, and nationalistic intentions in matters of geopolitics. Therefore, it can be asserted that the hysteria around COVID-19, led by propaganda centres (including the broad international movement of anti-vaccinators) present both in the US Congress and among members of the European Parliament, fuelled a bellicose mood in Russia. And the vaccinodemic itself has become a convenient format for a new round of informational struggle, the establishment of great-power supremacy, and the incitement of chauvinistic sentiments among the Russian population by means of government propaganda. All these things pushed Putin's authoritarian regime to a military invasion of Ukraine and strengthened chauvinistic, Ukrainophobic sentiments among Russian society, which is reflected today in the Russians' support for the so-called "special military operation", in fact a war. The chauvinistic sentiments of Russian society were used by the Kremlin to announce a general mobilization or the use of tactical nuclear weapons in Ukraine, if Russian troops are threatened with operational defeat. Judging by the effective defence and counteroffensive actions of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, such a prospect is not excluded by the military command of Ukraine nor by global experts.

Our main task is to analyse, with an emphasis on Ukraine, the phenomenon of the vaccinodemic as part of a broader phenomenon – the infodemic – which should give us answers to the new security challenges caused by Russia's aggression. It seems useful to us to analyse the infodemic regarding COVID-19 as a historical prelude to the open phase of the Russian-Ukrainian war, which has destroyed the international security system, threatened all of democratic Europe, caused migration, energy and food crises, and has the potential to expand the theatre of war. In many countries, the infodemic is considered part of a social disaster⁵. False rumours threaten people's lives and destroy the state's efforts to overcome the consequences of the pandemic. Without the necessary level of trust and accurate information, immunization campaigns (or efforts to promote effective vaccines) do not achieve their goals, and the virus spreads unchecked⁶. In addition, false rumours polarize public opinion, provoke hate speech, increase the risk of conflict, violence, and human rights violations, and threaten the long-term prospects for strengthening democracy, human rights, and social cohesion. This, in turn, leads to the appearance of a new phenomenon represented by a neologism – a "vaccinodemic", a term that until recently did not appear in public discourse, but with the help of which it is possible to describe the new phenomenon of information struggle. First of all, it is the inequality between those who received and those who waited (often without knowing how long they would have to wait) for vaccination, a propaganda struggle around the promotion of vaccines to world markets or their restriction, prohibitions, and fear of vaccination.

- 5 WHO / World Health Organization, *Managing the COVID-19 infodemic: promoting healthy behaviours and mitigating the harm from misinformation and disinformation*, 23 September 2020, <https://www.who.int/news/item/23-09-2020-managing-the-covid-19-infodemic-promoting-healthy-behaviours-and-mitigating-the-harm-from-misinformation-and-disinformation> [5.05.2022].
- 6 Public Health Center of Ukraine / Ministry of Health of Ukraine, *World Immunization Week: Pandemic does not cancel routine vaccination* [Центр громадського здоров'я України / МОЗ, *Всесвітній тиждень імунізації: пандемія не скасовує рутинну вакцинацію*], 24 April 2020, <https://www.phc.org.ua/news/vsesvitniy-tizhden-imunizacii-pandemiya-ne-skasovue-rutinnu-vakcinaciyu> [17.04.2022].

1 Framework of the analysis

Many social scientists have begun to study the phenomenon of the infodemic. The scientific study *Portrait d'une infodémie. Retour sur la première vague de COVID-19* concludes that the infodemic was an integral part of the debate on “fake news”, new forms of political populism (the central figure of which was then-President Donald Trump), as well as the role of Russia and other states in international disinformation, the spread of anti-vaccination propaganda and, in general, the so-called “conspiracy” of the digital age⁷.

Angeliki Monnier, in her work *Covid-19: de la pandémie à l'infodémie et la chasse aux fake news*, rightly points out that in the modern context of the infodemic, there is an intense politicization of the exchange of information (conspiracy theories, accusations among states, etc.). This confirms the thesis that, on the one hand, health is about medicine, and on the other hand, it is primarily a political issue, a set of ideas, understandings, and practices that mobilize forms of power and constitute social and political relations⁸.

Marcel Schliebs writes that the COVID-19 pandemic is accompanied by an “infodemic” – disinformation and propaganda that undermines public health measures worldwide. Furthermore, building resilience to such disinformation campaigns requires a collaborative effort on the part of social media firms, the media, government, and civil society. The author also points out that the sources of misinformation and propaganda around COVID-19 are so diverse that he offers only a selective overview. Marcel Schliebs expresses the opinion, which we explore in this article, concerning the new reality that authoritarian governments used the pandemic to advance their geopolitical interests and discredit their rivals⁹. Besides this, the experience of previous pandemics only proves that national governments try to

7 F. Durand et al., *Portrait of an infodemic. Back to the first wave of COVID-19* [*Portrait d'une infodémie Retour sur la première vague de COVID-19*], March 2021, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/351349226_Portrait_d'une_infodemie_Retour_sur_la_premiere_vague_de_la_COVID-19 [29.04.2020].

8 A. Monnier, *Covid-19: from the pandemic to the infodemic and the hunt for fake news* [*Covid-19: de la pandémie à l'infodémie et la chasse aux fake news*], “Recherches & éducations”, July 2020, <https://journals.openedition.org/rechercheseducations/9898> [30.04.2022].

9 M. Schliebs, *The COVID-19 “Infodemic”*, *Zeitschrift Internationale Politik*, 10 December 2020, <https://internationalepolitik.de/en/covid-19-infodemic> [10.03.2022].

prioritize their own interests instead of fighting the virus together. States resort to a policy of vaccine nationalism, which has led to uneven vaccine distribution. So here, a new field emerged for the fight for the vaccine sales markets; some countries resorted to vaccine diplomacy. Since the time of the Cold War, vaccines have become as important a component of diplomacy as weapons or food. A state that can manufacture and distribute vaccines that save the lives of citizens of other, less wealthy states can later see the results of its investment in soft power, such as enhanced prestige or reputation.

Adam M. Enders, Justin Stoler, Joseph E. Uscinski, and Casey Klofstad argue that belief in COVID-19 conspiracy theories and disinformation is not directly related to vaccination intentions, educational attainment, and attitudes towards government regulations during the pandemic. These results can help policymakers and science communicators properly prioritize information gathering and debunk misinformation¹⁰. Given the above, we can confidently say that there may be other examples of politicians and propagandists (in the case of Russia, the state media) when the state info politics will be skewed in such a way as to incite ultrapatriotic hysteria around vaccines and their distribution, and to misinform, above all, the population about their effectiveness.

The COVID-19 pandemic triggered an infodemic where an unprecedented level of misinformation led to widespread misconceptions about a novel viral infection, COVID-19. Aengus Bridgman, Eric Merkley, Oleg Zhilin, Peter John Loewen, Taylor Owen, and Derek Ruths put forth an influential theory and empirically demonstrate "a key pathway for the globalization of the infodemic: ignoring the national origin of social media posts"¹¹.

Polish researchers are constantly studying the problems of the establishment of democracy in Ukraine, the chances of establishing democratic standards in this state and overcoming the consequenc-

10 A.M. Enders et al., *The different forms of COVID-19 misinformation and their consequences*, Harvard Kennedy School / Misinformation Review, 16 November 2020, <https://misinformreview.hks.harvard.edu/article/the-different-forms-of-covid-19-misinformation-and-their-consequences/> [3.06.2022].

11 A. Bridgman et al., *Infodemic pathways: evaluating the role that traditional and social media play in cross-national information transfer*, Frontiers, 29 March 2021, <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpos.2021.648646/full> [8.05.2022].

es of Soviet totalitarianism. Hanna Bazhenova expresses her vision of what kind of state is being built in Ukraine, whether liberal-democratic or authoritarian¹².

Jakub Olchowski, in his article *How to Weaponise Information*, analyses how Russia uses information to achieve its political goals. The main focus is on the process and specific methods used by the Russian Federation to carry out its information operations. Russia consistently and widely uses information policy tools to advance its security interests, including disinformation, propaganda, and manipulation. This experience, combined with innovative technologies, made it possible to launch anti-Western information campaigns, which were difficult for the West to counter. Russia considers information operations a key component of modern non-linear (hybrid) warfare combining military and non-military means, which will remain unchanged in the near future¹³.

In a publication jointly edited by Valentyn Baluk and Mykola Doroshko, Ukrainian and Polish researchers present a wide range of issues related to national existence under the conditions of Russia's hybrid war against Ukraine after Euromaidan in 2014. For the first time in Ukrainian international political literature, the work presents the position of the leadership of Poland on the latest Russian-Ukrainian war¹⁴.

A thorough study by Aleksandra Kuczyńska-Zonik, *The Baltic States: digital democracy in the era of the pandemic* (series editors: Beata Surmacz and Tomasz Stępniewski), notes that the role of digitization has become crucial in the conditions of the global pandemic. State bodies are forced to use innovative solutions in the fight against the virus and the consequences of the pandemic. National governments were the first to respond to the COVID-19 crisis and have played an essential role in ensuring that rights are protected by providing public services¹⁵.

12 H. Bazhenova, *Liberal Democracy vs. Autocracy: the Case of Ukraine*, "Yearbook of the Institute of East-Central Europe" 2018, vol. 16, no. 5, <https://ies.lublin.pl/rocznik/riesw/2018/5/2/> [5.06.2022].

13 J. Olchowski, *How to Weaponise Information*, [in:] *Disinformation, Narratives and Memory Politics in Russia and Belarus*, A. Legucka, R. Kupiecki (eds.), London 2022, pp. 59-71.

14 *Wojna hybrydowa Rosji przeciwko Ukrainie w latach 2014-2016*, W.R. Baluk, M. Doroszko (eds.), Lublin 2017.

15 A. Kuczyńska-Zonik, *The Baltic States: digital democracy in the era of the pandemic*, B. Surmacz, T. Stępniewski (eds.), Lublin 2021, https://ies.lublin.pl/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/ies_

2. The vaccinodemic phenomenon

When international political research scientists outline the camp of states with an authoritarian form of government, which constitutes opposition to the democratic camp, they primarily refer to China and Russia. It can be argued that the vaccine diplomacy of Beijing and Moscow was combined with manipulation and disinformation to undermine the credibility of the Western vaccines, EU institutions, and Western European vaccination strategies, representing a typical vaccinodemic phenomenon. According to the European External Affairs Service, Russia and China used state-controlled media and social networks in this way, including official diplomatic accounts. The Russian campaign to promote the Sputnik V vaccine involved government agencies, state-owned companies, and state-run media. Russian officials promoted Sputnik V and used disinformation to accuse the West and the EU of sabotaging the Russian vaccine.

Pro-Kremlin media, including the official Sputnik V Twitter account, have tried to undermine public confidence in the European Medicines Agency (EMA) by questioning its procedures and political impartiality. Having sown distrust in the EMA, Russia sought to undermine and fragment the pan-European approach to ensuring the supply of vaccines. Reports from Russia's state-controlled media have primarily focused on promoting Sputnik V, defaming Western vaccines, and blaming the EU for its failed vaccination or COVID-19 response¹⁶.

The opposite pattern is a chaotic, divided "collective West", and an inactive NATO, which refrains from a direct conflict with Russia, which itself seeks to return to Ukraine out of, as Russian leaders believe, "historical justice". These considerations are also based on assessments of the Western countries' experience of the consequences of coronavirus. That experience was not very successful if we analyse it through the prism of information, especially media messages. We cannot exclude the confusion of democratic states in overcoming the pandemic crisis. A particular "pandemic nationalism" declared by

policy_papers_no_2021-006.pdf [1.08.2022].

16 Read *EEAS Special Report Update: Short Assessment of Narratives and Disinformation around the COVID-19/Coronavirus Pandemic (Update December 2020 – April 2021)*, EEAS Website, 19 May 2021, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/georgia/read-eeas-special-report-update-short-assessment-narratives-and-disinformation_en [6.06.2022].

Donald Trump at the beginning of the crisis's unfolding became another factor for Vladimir Putin to approve the decision on an open military invasion of Ukraine.

The Russian government publicly cultivated Russian supremacy, its technological and scientific-technical superiority over the rest of the world, which encouraged the growth of militaristic and chauvinistic sentiments among its population. Russia became the first country in the world to announce the registration of a vaccine: Sputnik V¹⁷. According to estimates made by the Russian Direct Investment Fund, 60 countries have approved the use of the Russian Sputnik V vaccine, covering a total population of more than 3 billion people, about 40% of the world's population. Russia sought to demonstrate its sincere support for allied states (such as Belarus and Venezuela) by announcing the provision of its vaccines in a generous gesture¹⁸. Such statements looked extremely populist because, under the conditions of a closed Russia, it is difficult to find confirmation that the Russian pharmaceutical industry, which is technologically dependent on Western supplies, can provide both itself and its partners with the promised drug.

Russia claimed that more than 20 countries had ordered their Sputnik V vaccine. For example, Mexico signed an agreement to buy 7.4 million vaccine doses. In response, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, the president of Mexico, invited V. Putin to his country. The Russian Federation practised its usual tactics of "buying" the loyalty of the countries of Central and Latin America. Other countries that agreed to use the Russian-made vaccine include Bolivia, Venezuela, Belarus, Iran, and Argentina. It is noteworthy that the first three did not support the Resolution of the UN General Assembly on the territorial integrity of Ukraine No. 68/262. So, we can conclude that this is just another way for the Kremlin to influence and secure support among world autocracies¹⁹.

17 *About Sputnik V [О Спутник V]*, Sputnik V. Official website vaccine against coronavirus Sputnik, <https://sputnikvaccine.com/rus/about-vaccine/> [23.09.2022].

18 *Sputnik V vaccine authorized in India*, Sputnik V. Official website vaccine against coronavirus Sputnik, 12 April 2021, <https://sputnikvaccine.com/newsroom/pressreleases/sputnik-v-authorized-for-use-in-india/> [23.09.2022].

19 T.E Board, op. cit.

However, Western governments have become suspicious that the Kremlin is using reports of the creation of Sputnik V as a new pretext for a propaganda attack. Thus, the French government accused Russia of spreading its "propaganda and aggressive diplomacy" along with the vaccine²⁰. Emmanuel Macron noted that due to the coronavirus pandemic and attempts by Russia and China to influence the supply of vaccines politically, European countries are on the verge of a new type of the world war²¹.

Despite the European Union's refusal to use the Russian vaccine, Hungary became one of the first EU countries to use Sputnik V. Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán commented on this decision: "There is no Western or Eastern vaccine; there is only a bad and a good one". But he emphasized that currently, at that time, the EU could not satisfy its citizens with the necessary amount of vaccine²².

Germany then agreed to negotiate with Russia to supply the vaccine, but a final decision was to be made after Sputnik V had met all EMA criteria and been granted approval. The majority of EU countries followed this decision because at that time, at the peak of "aggressive vaccine diplomacy", the drug review by the EMA had not yet been completed²³.

The Sputnik V vaccine has never been widely distributed in the Europe, but it received informational attention and spread pro-Russian sentiment. The purchase of the Russian vaccine caused a political crisis in Slovakia. The events surrounding the purchase of Sputnik V led to high-profile resignations and a political crisis²⁴. Foreign Minister Ivan

20 [#BREAKING France slams Russia's Sputnik V vaccine as tool of 'propaganda and aggressive diplomacy'], AFP News Agency on Twitter, 26 March 2021, <https://twitter.com/AFP/status/1375364153133662209> [13.07.2022].

21 Covid-19: the vaccine, a new issue of power on a global scale [Covid-19 : le vaccin, un nouvel enjeu de pouvoir à l'échelle Mondiale], Franceinfo, 26 March 2021, https://www.francetvinfo.fr/sante/maladie/coronavirus/vaccin/covid-19-le-vaccin-un-nouvel-enjeu-de-pouvoir-a-l-echelle-mondiale_4348763.html [22.07.2022].

22 T. Öztürk, Hungary premier: No East, West vaccines, only good, bad, Anadolu Ajansı, 23 February 2021, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/hungary-premier-no-east-west-vaccines-only-good-bad/2154649> [28.07.2022].

23 Exclusive: Germany wants to buy Sputnik COVID vaccine if approved by EU, source says, Reuters, 24 March 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-germany-sputnik-ex-idUSKBN2BU389> [29.07.2022].

24 The Prime Minister of Slovakia resigned over the Russian vaccine scandal [Прем'єр Словаччини подав у відставку через скандал із російською вакциною], Ukrinform. Multimedia platform of Ukraine

Korčok even stated that the Sputnik V vaccine was a tool of hybrid warfare that divides the country²⁵. In response to Prime Minister Ihor Matovych's actions, six members of the Slovak government resigned. There was a threat of a collapse of the government coalition and early elections²⁶. The Slovak State Institute restoked the controversy when it began Control of Medicines tests. It turned out that the batch of vaccine sent for testing differed in its characteristics and properties from the drug of the same name, the research results of which had been published in the *Lancet*." (i.e. the results were for Sputnik V)²⁷. When Slovakia reported this to Russia, the conclusions of Slovak scientists were called "fake" and "an act of sabotage"²⁸.

If we look at the vaccinodemic phenomenon from the other side, to some extent, it can be argued that the use of the Russian vaccine could make European countries dependent on the Kremlin, as happened with the supply of energy carriers, and in the eyes of voters it becomes a manifestation of support for Russian policy. This is another confirmation that any common human problem, such as the pandemic of 2020, the migration crisis in Europe in 2015, or climate change, can become an instrument of the aggressive influence of the Russian authoritarian state aiming to destroy the unity of the democratic world, undermining its values and preparing for an open force

[Укрінформ. Мультимедійна платформа іномовлення України], 30 March 2021, <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-world/3218168-premer-slovaccini-podav-u-vidstavku-cerez-skandal-iz-rosijskou-vakcinou.html> [14.07.2022].

- 25 I. Sitnikova, *In Slovakia, six ministers have already resigned: a political crisis has arisen in the country due to the purchase of "Sputnik V"*, Hromadske [I. Сітнікова, *У Словаччині вже шість міністрів подали у відставку: через закупівлю «Спутника V» у країні виникла політична криза, Громадське телебачення України*], 24 March 2021, <https://hromadske.ua/posts/u-slovachchini-vzhe-shist-ministriv-podali-u-vidstavku-cherez-zakupivlyu-sputnika-v-u-krayini-rozgorilas-politichna-kriza> [17.07.2022].
- 26 O. Kurenkova, *Needle diplomacy. How the Russian vaccine is splitting Europe*, Hromadske [O. Куренкова, *Дипломатія голки. Як російська вакцина розколює Європу*, Громадське телебачення України], 18 April 2021, <https://hromadske.ua/posts/diplomatiya-golki-yak-rosijska-vakcina-rozkolyuye-yevropu> [18.07.2022].
- 27 I. Jones, P. Roy, *Sputnik V COVID-19 vaccine candidate appears safe and effective*, "The Lancet", 2 February 2021, [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(21\)00191-4/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(21)00191-4/fulltext) [1.07.2022].
- 28 O. Boldyrev, *«Спутник V» вызвал сомнения в Словакии. РФПИ потребовал все вернуть*, BBC News Russian Service [O. Болдырев, *"Sputnik V" raised doubts in Slovakia. RDIF demanded everything back*, BBC News Русская служба], 8 April 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/russian/news-56681244> [27.07.2022].

revision of the world order, the destruction of security stabilizers. In the footsteps of Russia, in terms of propaganda, world crises become a tool of influence and expansionist politics. Often this happens at the expense of their people.

The head of the Lithuanian government, Ingrid Šimonite, noted on her Twitter that V. Putin does not want to use Sputnik V as medicine for the Russian people. He offers it to the world as another hybrid weapon to implement the principle of "divide and rule"²⁹.

3. The infodemic in Ukraine

A study commissioned by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) showed how the infodemic threatens Ukrainians. SemanticForce, a social media monitoring and analysis platform, tracked more than 30 million posts related to the topic of COVID-19 on social media. During the research, 250,000 disinformation messages related to COVID-19 were found on Ukrainian online mass media, blogs, forums, social networks, and messaging apps.

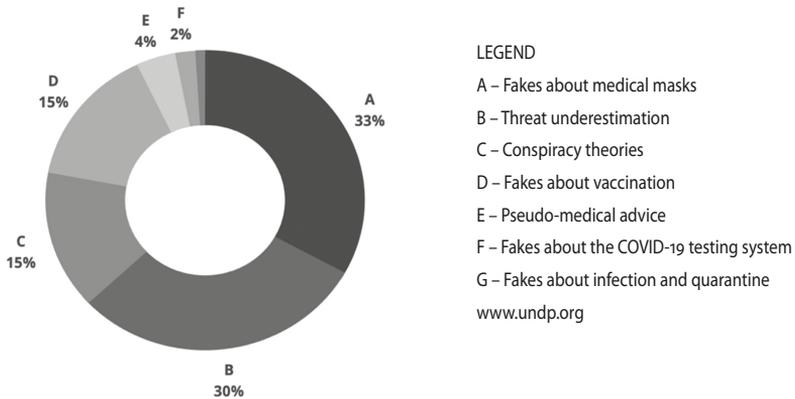
One of the most popular messaging apps for spreading disinformation and using manipulation has become Telegram. On the one hand, Telegram is a place of freedom, as in the case of protests in Belarus or coverage of events in Ukraine after 24 February 2022. This messaging app became a platform that helped people unite against the onslaught of the brutal and authoritarian Belarusian government and a source of information for those Russians who wanted to know the truth about Russia's invasion of Ukraine. On the other hand, such a politic platform attracted those who did not believe in democratic principles. Telegram has also become a haven for extremists and radicals. The online platform's policy provides the opportunity to communicate freely and even spread propaganda³⁰.

29 I. Šimonytė, *[They say, Sputnik V is good but Putin doesn't care to use it as a cure for the Russian people – he offers it to the world as another hybrid weapon to divide and rule. This is neter news nor good...]*, Twitter, 5 February 2021, <https://twitter.com/IngridaSimonyte/status/1357767922106720258> [6.07.2022].

30 K. Iliuk, *How does Telegram spread misinformation and manipulation?* [К. Ілюк, *Як Телеграм сприяє дезінформації та маніпуляціям?*], *ms.detector.media*, 18 April 2021, <https://ms.detec>

A study of how misinformation spreads on social networks has shown that people have a low level of willingness to follow public health guidelines (wearing masks, maintaining physical distance, etc.), which makes it less likely that they will recommend vaccination to the most vulnerable people in their social circle. The discovered disinformation narratives include manipulative and outright false information about wearing masks, conspiracy theories about the origin and even existence of the novel coronavirus and the COVID-19 disease, false rumours about the effectiveness of coronavirus testing and vaccinations, and other false information about COVID-19.

Diagram 1. Share of COVID-19 disinformation narratives



Source: SemanticForce (2020)³¹

According to the UNDP resident representative in Ukraine, Dafina Gercheva³², the study showed that the infodemic was a real threat to public health in Ukraine. To overcome this, the government has to join forces with non-governmental organizations, fact-checkers, and

tor.media/internet/post/27097/2021-04-18-yak-telegram-spryaiaie-dezinformatsii-ta-manipulyatsiyam/ [13.06.2022].

31 SemanticForce, *Research and analysis of misinformation and disinformation on Covid- 19 in Ukraine in online media*, Unicef, March November 2020, <https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgk326/files/migration/ua/UNDP-COVID-19-Report-2020-by-SemanticForce.pdf> [24.05.2022].

32 "Infodemic" of COVID-19 disinformation bad for Ukrainians health, study for UN finds [«Інфодемія» дезінформації про COVID-19 шкодить здоров'ю українців – з'ясовано в дослідженні на замовлення ООН], United Nations Development Programme, 3 March 2021, <https://www.undp.org/uk/ukraine/press-releases/«інфодемія»-дезінформації-про-covid-19-шкодить-здоров'ю-українців—з'ясовано-в-дослідженні-на-замовлення-оон> [17.05.2022].

opinion leaders on social media. Conspiracy theories, rumours, and malicious misinformation quickly went viral on social media, especially amid low public trust in government institutions. Furthermore, the study found that a combination of efforts by the government, the media, social media influencers, and other trusted sources can promote the dissemination of reliable information and address the dangers of misinformation about COVID-19. For example, in parallel with social media monitoring, 1,000 Ukrainians were interviewed as part of the study to analyse public opinion regarding the pandemic. According to the survey results, about a third of Ukrainians believed their chances of contracting the new coronavirus were low. The top three sources preferred by citizens are social media – 42%, television – 26%, and doctors and medical professionals – 24%. This opinion goes along with Lotta Sylwander's reasoning, head of the UNICEF office in Ukraine. According to her observations, the risks of inaccurate information have become higher than ever during the coronavirus crisis, and "the infodemic threatens to increase doubts about vaccination, which, in turn, can complicate the introduction of new vaccines and undermine public confidence in the health care system".

4. Are vaccines a tool of hybrid warfare or a "global public good"?

As Russia was promoting Sputnik V, another country which international political scientists call an authoritarian regime that promotes its vision of the idea of people's rule, China, has tried to promote its vaccines as a "global public good". The Chinese government also joined the vaccinodemic race for ideological and propaganda reasons as a form of "propaganda and aggressive diplomacy"³³. Beijing has emphasized the availability and stable supply of Chinese vaccines. Accordingly, such vaccines are more accessible, suitable, and cheap for developing countries with weak health systems, a lack of financial reserves, and weak diplomatic lobbying. These remarks also apply to the countries

33 *Covid-19: Emmanuel Macron criticizes China, Beijing denies any "concealment"* [Covid-19: Emmanuel Macron critique la Chine, Pékin nie toute "dissimulation"], France24, 17 April 2020, <https://www.france24.com/fr/20200416-emmanuel-macron-appelle-à-ne-pas-être-naïfs-face-à-la-gestion-chinoise-du-covid-19> [31.05.2022].

of the Western Balkans. The main message spread by Chinese state media is that Western countries are politicizing vaccines and contributing to the “vaccine gap”, thereby highlighting the difference between Chinese and Western approaches. This narrative was punctuated by adverse reports about the vaccination process in the EU, accusations of hoarding vaccines at the expense of poorer countries, and the mishandling of the AstraZeneca vaccine. In China’s state media, there was an attempt to accuse Western media of double standards and a lack of professionalism in covering information about Chinese vaccines³⁴.

China intended to be the first to develop a publicly available vaccine. In addition, the Chinese government does not share the term *vaccine diplomacy*, and any accusations that China distributes vaccine doses to expand its global influence have been firmly rejected and called “sinister”. As the state-owned Xinhua News Agency reported, Beijing only promotes cooperation in the fight against the pandemic, and does not seek any geopolitical goals or economic interests of its own, but behaves as a responsible world power. China tried to succeed with vaccines where it failed with masks in the spring of 2020 because there were quality control issues and clumsy propaganda. However, Beijing had additional goals: vaccines began to be developed earlier, and the Chinese state media clearly showed that with their help, China preferred to demonstrate its technical potential and the advantages of not only an authoritarian model of governance but also its ideology and culture of political rule. Indeed, owing to this, or rather top-down management, a vaccine development team was provided simultaneously by several scientific centres. In February 2020, Ad5-nCoV was developed for the first time. The results of the clinical trials were published in May. China presented this as a demonstration of the country’s progress, the embodiment of the concept of a “powerful state”, its responsibility, and a unique contribution to the development of all humanity. Commercial purposes are also hidden behind these statements. Chinese pharmaceutical companies are expanding in the markets of other countries without additional investments. The Medical Silk Road is an essential component of the One Belt One Road initiative. Xiaofeng Liang, a former deputy director of the Chinese Center

for Disease Control and Prevention, has publicly called for priority to be given to countries participating in the initiative. China invests under this project in more than 70 countries and in the activities of international organizations. Thus, using vaccines as a new component of its public policy of propaganda, China gains access to new markets, strengthening its control over weaker economies. This should enable Beijing to impose its political will on governments engaged in open cooperation with Greater China³⁵.

Beijing's foreign policy, without doubt, cannot be called openly aggressive or militaristic, as compared to what has been demonstrated by Russia in Ukraine. China is used to acting by other methods based on the teachings of Confucius. However, the war in Ukraine and the authoritarianism in the policy of the Chinese regime encourage careful observation of events around Taiwan. There are some reasons to pay such attention. Chinese Ambassador to France Lu Shaye has said that Beijing is ready to return to Taiwan by military means³⁶.

As we can see, the approaches of the two states, Russia and China, generally differ in rhetoric, propaganda statements, and secret diplomacy. However, they have common goals: a common aggressive and expansionist approach, which involves the promotion of their own models of political regime. At first glance, there is nothing unusual about this. Every state or union strives for this, to promote its values, culture, and way of life. Yet we point more to the ideological rapprochement between Moscow and Beijing, the desire to oppose other Western models of development openly, and the push for aggressive steps. Such a coincidence of views also pushed Moscow to open aggression in Ukraine in February 2022, with the expectation that Beijing, if it is not an ally in military actions against Kyiv, would not prevent V. Putin with his statements and diplomacy from implementing his policy of restoring the former Russian, and then Soviet, Empire.

It should be noted that Ukraine has been living in a state of hybrid war with Russia for several decades, mainly being waged in the in-

35 Y. Huang, *Vaccine Diplomacy Is Paying Off for China*, Foreign Affairs, 11 March 2021, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2021-03-11/vaccine-diplomacy-paying-china> [18.09.2022].

36 Livre Noir, *Chinese Ambassador: "We will take back Taiwan by all means!"* [Ambassadeur de Chine: «Nous reprendrons Taïwan par tous les moyens!»], YouTube, 23 June 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GkFO9e5hNDY> [23.06.2022].

formation space. Now researchers agree that it has not stopped since Kyiv gained independence in 1991. In today's reality, we are faced with a much broader problem in the national information space than fake news and disinformation. We are talking about information warfare as an element of hybrid warfare. Alyona Romaniuk, editor-in-chief of the Facebook campaign "On the other side of the news" (IRRP) studied in detail the issue of "coronavirus fakes" and the techniques of disinformers. Since the coronavirus pandemic in the world contributed to the spread of a new, massive wave of disinformation, disinformers have taken advantage of this audience's interest. Volodymyr Yermolenko, a director of analytics at Internews-Ukraine and editor-in-chief of UkraineWorld.org, called it "a blow to Western values".

At the same time, there were and still are media in Ukraine that follow standards in information coverage. However, there were and still are those who spread fakes and manipulations to bring the audience to their site and increase traffic. The coronavirus hysteria in Ukraine confirmed that disinformers use many manipulative tools. Among them there are fake expert doctors and scientists who comment on research (e.g. a young doctor from the Russian Federation, Yura Klimov, advises holding your breath for 10 seconds to check whether a person is sick with the coronavirus). Let us add to this the attribution to real people of words that they did not say; substitution of concepts, for example, when photos from Russian hospitals were passed off as Ukrainian; manipulation of numbers and data, taking them out of context to achieve one's own goal; cleverly combined half-truths or distorted facts.

By topic, pandemic fakes can be divided into several groups:

1. The coronavirus is artificially created and comes from China. Russian journalists spread this falsehood. Over time, it changed, and for a short time, various countries in whose laboratories the virus allegedly appeared were named. Later, this disinformation would return to the traditional topic of Russian propaganda about the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) bio laboratories in Ukraine, which were developing technologies with birds that were supposed to infect Russians with new viruses. This topic has appeared in Russian propaganda since the beginning of the 2000s and has been revived within the framework of the open phase of aggression.

2. A lot of recommendations are made concerning drugs and treatment, including the miraculous effect of lemons, garlic, and ginger. We must remember that after the spread of a lie about their unique benefits in the fight against the coronavirus, the prices of these products in Ukrainian stores soared many times, indicating the effectiveness of the influence of propaganda³⁷.

India is the world's largest producer of non-patented medicines and started producing its Covaxin vaccine. It undertook to produce Covishield at its facilities, the same AstraZeneca vaccine developed by the University of Oxford³⁸. Although India has a population of 1.3 billion people, its government sent millions of free doses to neighbouring countries until it succumbed to the coronavirus's Delta strain. Delhi has agreed with other governments worldwide to provide them with vaccines. India did this for one reason: it produced more vaccines at a specific time than it could sell at home. This may also include Ukraine, where 500,000 doses of the Covishield vaccine were sold. Also, it has given rise to much speculation that the vaccine is a "generic drug" (a non-proprietary drug that is a copy of the original drug) and has nothing to do with the vaccine developed by Oxford. The vaccine has been accused of causing multiple sclerosis, infertility in women, and a lack of protection against the coronavirus. There have also been accusations that immunized patients will later become infected and die from the disease, and that it is changing our genes³⁹.

These days, there is no single source that produces fake information. Some fakes appear due to unintentional distortion of information. Others are produced intentionally to generate hype, build reputation, and attract subscribers. We should also mention fake targeted campaigns. In his work, Peter Pomarantsev studies Russian troll and bot factories, including the Internet Research Agency located in St.

37 N. Mamchur, *Hybrid warfare in the time of the coronavirus. Who, how and why controls our perception* [Н. Мамчур, *Гібридна війна в часи коронавірусу. Хто, як і навіщо керує нашим сприйняттям*], Texty.org.ua, 12 June 2021, <https://texty.org.ua/articles/101212/gibrydna-vijna-v-chasy-koronavirusu-hto-yak-i-navisho-keruye-nashym-spryjnyattjam/> [15.06.2022].

38 S. Biswas, *Covaxin: What was the rush to approve India's homegrown vaccine?*, BBC News, 5 January 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-55534902> [21.06.2022].

39 *The most common fakes about vaccination*, Ministry of Health of Ukraine [Найпоширеніші фейки про вакцинацію, Міністерство охорони здоров'я України], 2021, <https://moz.gov.ua/najposhirenishi-fejki-pro-vakcinaciju> [1.06.2022].

Petersburg⁴⁰. Every misinformation campaign from Russia has been connected to it, which was only reformatted after the exposure but continued its activities in one way or another. It is possible to assume the active participation of the Internet Research Agency in promoting the infodemic and the vaccinodemic both in Ukraine and abroad. Analysing recent events and the practice of conducting disinformation campaigns by Russian “specialists”, we conclude that the concept of fake is too narrow today. Therefore, we should talk about a set of measures to manage perception. A new phase of the hybrid war is underway against Ukraine, where the conventional confrontation has only now come to the fore. However, fake news and other methods remain a tool of this war, and its purpose is to influence our perception so that Ukraine changes its political choices. In such a situation, it is vital to understand where we are being pushed. If we give this question a theoretical basis, we should mention the Soviet scientist Volodymyr Lefebvre, who studied the reflexive control method in detail.

Reflexive management involves informational influence on subjects, for which it is necessary to use such concepts as consciousness and will. Objects of this kind are individual people and groups of people: family, group, nation, society, and civilization. The term “reflexive management” can be understood in two senses. Firstly, it is the art of manipulation of people and associations of people. Secondly, it is a specific method of social control. Reflexive management is an influence on subjects that leads them to make decisions that are prepared in advance by the party in charge. Vladimir Lefebvre distinguishes four types of reflexive management: 1) manipulation through influence (direct influence); 2) manipulation by changing relationships (between individuals in the group); 3) manipulation of the order of significance; 4) influence on the unconscious sphere of subjects⁴¹. In his article, Georgii Pocheptsov, referring to Steve Tetem, notes that reflexive management was used in the case of Crimea⁴². Ex-Deputy

40 Pomerantsev P., *This Is Not Propaganda: Adventures in the War Against Reality*, Public Affairs 2019.

41 V. Lefevr, *Lectures on the theory of reflexive games*, Cogito Centre 2019 [В. Лефевр, *Лекции по теории рефлексивных игр*, Когито-Центр 2019], p. 89.

42 H. Pocheptsov, *Three models for building information operations* [Г. Почепцов, *Три модели построения информационных операций*], ms.detector.media, 12 October 2014, <https://ms.detector.media/manipulyatsii/post/11571/2014-10-12-try-modely-postroyenyaya-ynformatsyonnykh-operatsyy/> [7.07.2022].

Minister of Information Policy of Ukraine and expert in information technology Dmytro Zolotukhin spoke a lot on reflexive management, using the example of the case with Russia⁴³.

The interest of the Russian authorities in the model of "reflexive management" is not accidental. Russian specialists consider the disorganization of the enemy as a goal that leads to information superiority. Reflexive control involves forcing the adversary make the correct decision from the communicator's point of view. In Russia, Volodymyr Lepyskiy is currently dealing with these issues in detail. There is a whole website on this topic, with the same name as the journal "Reflexive Processes and Management" – www.reflexion.ru.

Heorhii Smolian, the chief researcher at the Institute of Systems Analysis of the Russian Academy of Sciences, asserts that manipulative actions are at the heart of reflexive management⁴⁴. His words are confirmed by Vasyl Mykryukov, noting that "the most complex and dangerous application of reflexive management is its use to influence the processes of state decision-making with the help of carefully prepared information or disinformation. Modern technologies significantly expand the possibilities for manipulation. Information sabotage, violation of communication lines, theft and copying of data, their distortion – all this allows for the influencing the decisions made by the authorities"⁴⁵. Therefore, it is quite possible to assume that the vaccinodemic did not pass by the Russian propaganda specialists, and they took full advantage of its disinformation potential. Placed at the centre of reflexive control the problem of vaccines and vaccination as the only effective method of overcoming the pandemic became a new topic, a subject for "recovery", a kind of impulse to revive the entire Russian propaganda apparatus. It shows that the information war re-

43 D. Zolotukhin, *Reflexive control of mass consciousness: analysis of manipulative technologies* [Д. Золотухін, *Рефлексивний контроль масової свідомості: розбір маніпулятивних технологій*], *detector.media*, 2 November 2020, <https://detector.media/withoutsection/article/182139/2020-11-02-refleksyvnnyy-kontrol-masovoi-svidomosti-rozbir-manipulyatyvnykh-tehnologiy/> [16.07.2022].

44 H. Smolian, *Reflexive control is a technology for making manipulative decisions* [Рефлексивное управление — технология принятия манипулятивных решений] "Труды ИСА РАН" 2013, vol. 63, no. 2, <https://gtmarket.ru/library/articles/7309> [7.07.2022].

45 H. Pochepstov, *Contexts of the disinformation emergence* [Г. Почепцов, *Контексты возникновения дезинформации*], *ms.detector.media*, 3 June 2018, <https://ms.detector.media/mediaanalitika/post/21264/2018-06-03-konteksty-vozniknovenyya-dezynformatsyy/> [30.06.2022].

quires periodic updating of messages in promoting and consolidating a reasonably stable set of propaganda narratives used by Russian state propaganda.

Vaccines against COVID-19 were critical to contain the pandemic, combined with effective testing and precautionary measures which national governments are actively implementing. Using other countries' experiences, Ukraine found its way to overcome the pandemic of coronavirus infection. Under a resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine in July 2021, the rules for obtaining a COVID certificate for Ukrainians appeared. They were developed together with the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Digital Transformation⁴⁶.

The main goal of the COVID certificate was to simplify foreign travel. The document certified that its owner was not a carrier of the coronavirus and, therefore, had the right to travel abroad without restrictions. Other countries have recognized Ukrainian documents confirming vaccination. The head of the Public Health Centre, Roman Rodyna, assured us that the Ukrainian COVID certificate had been entered into the European Certificate Repository. Their content corresponds to a similar EU document – the EU Digital COVID Certificate (DGC)⁴⁷. Also, the vaccines that Ukrainians used to inoculate against the coronavirus are of great significance. Thus, the general recommendations of the EU were that the basis for entry could be vaccination only with drugs approved in the European Union. Accordingly, these were vaccines from four companies: Pfizer/BioNTech, AstraZeneca (made in the EU), Moderna, and Johnson & Johnson⁴⁸.

46 Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, *Some issues of the formation and use of a certificate confirming vaccination against the acute respiratory disease COVID-19 caused by the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus, a negative test result or a person's recovery from the specified disease*, Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine no. 677 [Кабінет Міністрів України, *Деякі питання формування та використання сертифіката, що підтверджує вакцинацію від гострої респіраторної хвороби COVID-19, спричиненої коронавірусом SARS-CoV-2, негативний результат тестування або одужання особи від зазначеної хвороби*, Постанова Кабінету Міністрів України no. 677], 29 June 2021, <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/677-2021-п#Text> [30.06.2022].

47 *In Ukraine started the pilot operation of Covid certificates* [В Україні розпочалася пілотна експлуатація ковідних сертифікатів], Interfax Ukraine, 1 July 2021, <https://ua.interfax.com.ua/news/pharmacy/753099.html> [1.07.2022].

48 European Commission, *Safe COVID-19 vaccines for Europeans*, https://ec.europa.eu/info/live-work-travel-eu/coronavirus-response/safe-covid-19-vaccines-europeans_en [29.06.2022].

Conclusion

In the context of the post-COVID-19 pandemic crisis and the new security reality, the SARS-CoV-2 vaccine has become a tool of the informational struggle, which is caused by the desires of world actors to redistribute the balance of power in the world, to strengthen their influence on countries with lower incomes, to conquer new sales markets, and to promote their ideological values. The vaccine, which was supposed to save lives, has become a weapon – informational, diplomatic, and political. As part of a wide range of infodemic tools, the vaccinodemic has become a global phenomenon. If the first deepened the pandemic crisis, the second became its consequence. Vaccine nationalism and diplomacy, as components of the new tools of information warfare, have become so crucial that authoritarian governments such as those in China and Russia have begun to rely on them more and more, along with military force and intimidation. Although, for the most part, these methods are synergistic, according to the plans of Beijing and Moscow, the methods should allow them to establish a new order in the world by imposing their will on others and ultimately undermining faith in democracy and Western values in favour of an autocratic system. Russia's violent war against Ukraine caused "the strongest dynamics of geopolitical and geoeconomic changes". The end result and consequences of this dynamic are not remotely predictable, but no one will be able to avoid them. Furthermore, one of the goals of democratic regimes should be independence from authoritarian states (Frank-Walter Steinmeier).

The infodemic is an excess of both online and offline information. It involves deliberately spreading false information to disrupt public health measures and promoting alternative group or individual goals. Unreliable and deliberately false information can harm people's physical and mental health, increase stigmatization, and create contempt for public health measures, thereby reducing their effectiveness and limiting the ability of countries to end the pandemic. The vaccinodemic, as one of the stages of the infodemic, became a prelude to a new round of hybrid confrontation, which took the open form of a military conflict in Ukraine in February 2022.

Ordering his troops to enter Ukraine, V. Putin had some reference points. These are successfully used tools of propaganda, the results of the managed infodemic, aggressive vaccine diplomacy and the vac-

cinodemic created around it, successful cyberattacks on critical infrastructure, growing populism in the West (including its American variety, Trumpism), as well as state protectionism and the contemptuous politics of the countries of “old Europe”, and the problems of democratic transition in Ukraine.

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