

Strengthening the Capacity to Counter Disinformation

Russian information space

July-August 2021



Center for Propaganda
and Disinformation Analysis



NATIONAL
ENDOWMENT
FOR
DEMOCRACY

SUPPORTING FREEDOM AROUND THE WORLD

Introduction

Initiatives related to activities identified in the area of information and psychological influences in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe are devoid of analytical component of Russian internal actions (in the Russian information space), which distorts the real picture and scale of hostile actions, hinders forecasting and increases security gaps resulting from coordination of simultaneous, multi-vector Russian operations, calculated to achieve specific goals by impacting on various auditoriums. This project's goal is to spread information about those actions.

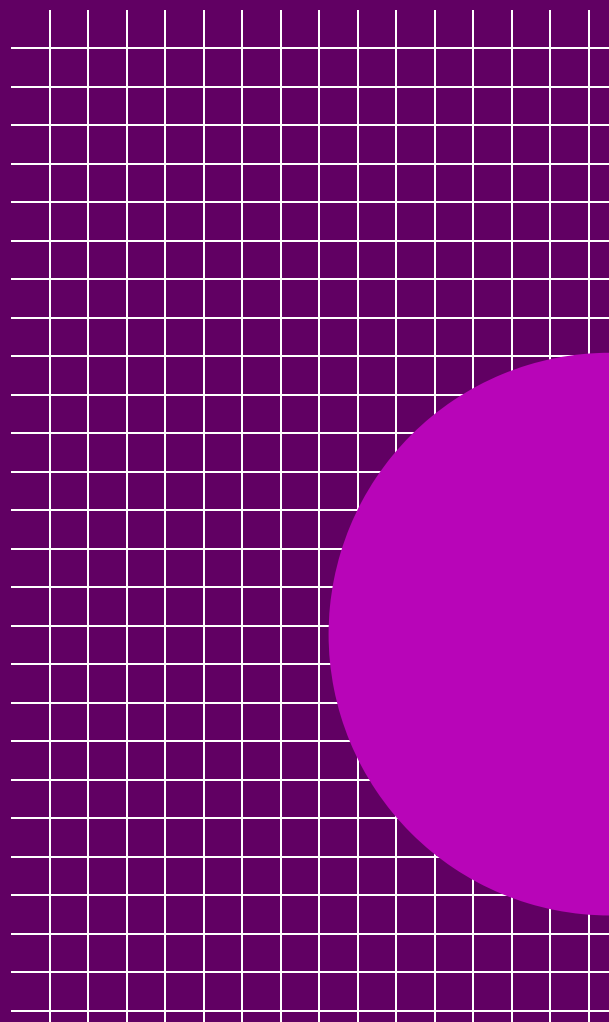
The main activity includes the development of the international Permanent Monitoring and Analyzing Group (PMAG). The main task of the PMAG will be monitoring and analyzing Russian information space in three ways: with the main Russian online media, niche or regional Russian online media as well as Russian social media landscape.

The monitoring and analysis methodology assume the selection of up to 3 main Russian language online media, 3 niche or regional Russian media; the same with regard to Belarusian media online; daily monitoring for information related to Poland, Baltic states, Belarus and Russia; collecting and cataloging of that information by the following categories: Economy, Policy, History, Culture, Other.

Poland in the Russian media online

Monitoring and Analysis
of Russian information
space in July 2021

Ewelina Załuska



Monitored media:

tass.ru, www.rbc.ru, www.gazeta.ru, lenta.ru, www.kp.ru

The research results

Overall number of news items: 154 (59% less in comparison to June 2021).

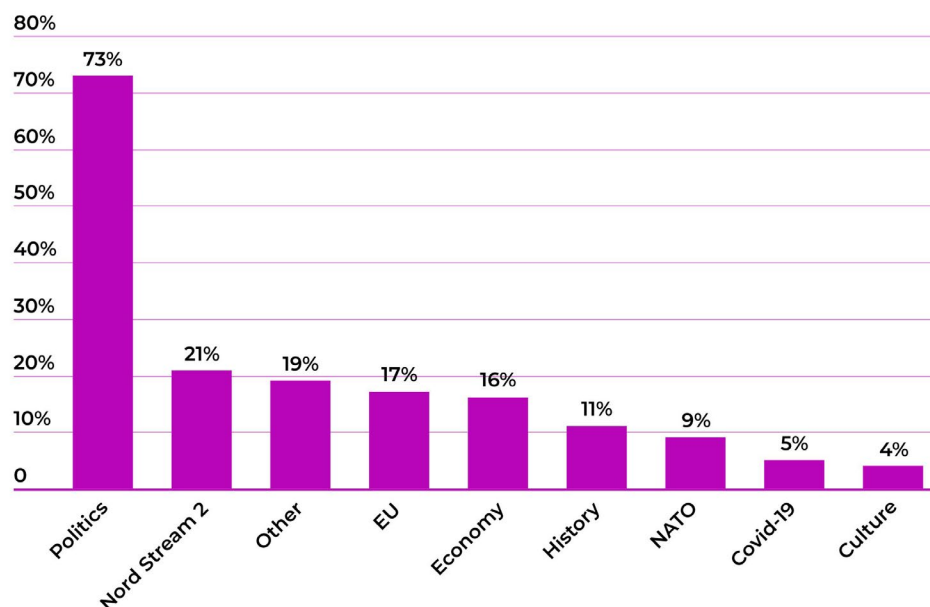
Main thematic areas: Politics (73%); Nord Stream 2 (21%); Other (19%); EU (17%); Economy (16%); History (11%); NATO (9%); Covid-19 (5%); Culture (4%).

Thematic areas that dominated: Polish-Russian relations – 32 mentions; Poland's objection to the construction of Nord Stream 2 – 32; Polish-Ukrainian relations – 24; Polish-Belarusian relations – 19; migration crisis on the borders of Belarus with Poland and Lithuania – 17; relations between Poland and EU – 12; Polish-American relations – 9.

What topics gained, what were constant, and what topics decreased:

- increase: EU – 26 mentions (8% more in comparison to June 2021); Nord Stream 2 – 32 (3% more);
- decrease: History – 17 mentions (11% less in comparison to June 2021); Covid-19 – 8 (11% less); Culture – 6 (14% less); Politics – 112 (17% less); Other – 30 (35% less); Economy – 24 (41% less); NATO – 14 (60% less).

Main thematic areas:



Source: Own elaboration, Center for Propaganda and Disinformation Analysis



The main narrative says that

Poland objects against the Nord Stream 2 project, as it does not comply with the EU rules.



What goals do those who spread it want to achieve?

To present the Polish interests in the Nord Stream 2 project as insignificant and the Polish actions as harmful and illogical; to demonstrate the EU's weaknesses, its internal conflicts; to justify and strengthen Russia's stance on the construction of the gas pipeline.



What is the impact / how is it to be understood?

To show Russia's economic and political strength, and to demonstrate the rationality and balance of the representatives of the Russian government



What data / information do you consider the most important in this monitoring period?

Compared to earlier periods, more attention was paid to the situation within the EU and to Poland's functioning within the community.



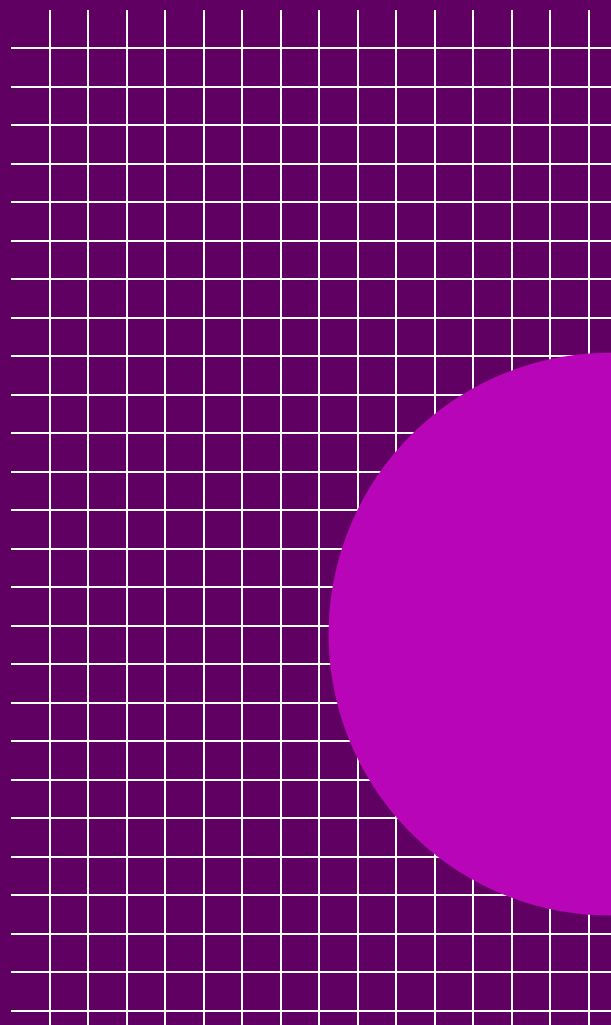
Other comments and / or, if possible, a forecast of the listed points

The apparent use of the Polish opposition's criticism of the Polish authorities and internal disagreement within the EU to promote its agenda. Presenting facts in a biased way, making the Polish government look incompetent – for example, the Minister of Defence Mariusz Blaszczak's mistake was captured by the media and reproduced.

Poland in the Russian media online

Monitoring and Analysis
of Russian information
space in July 2021

Olha Tarnavska



Monitored media:

www.rosbalt.ru, rg.ru, expert.ru, www.fontanka.ru, topwar.ru

The research results

Overall number of news items: 216, a decrease of 22.3% in relation to the previous month.

Main thematic areas: Policy (59,72%); Belarus (19,44%); NATO (16,20%); History (15,74%); Nord Stream 2 (14,81%); Economy (11,11%); EU (9,72%); Other (3,7%); Covid-19 (1,85%); Culture (0,46%) .

Thematic areas that dominated: Policy – 129 mentions; Belarus – 42; NATO – 35.

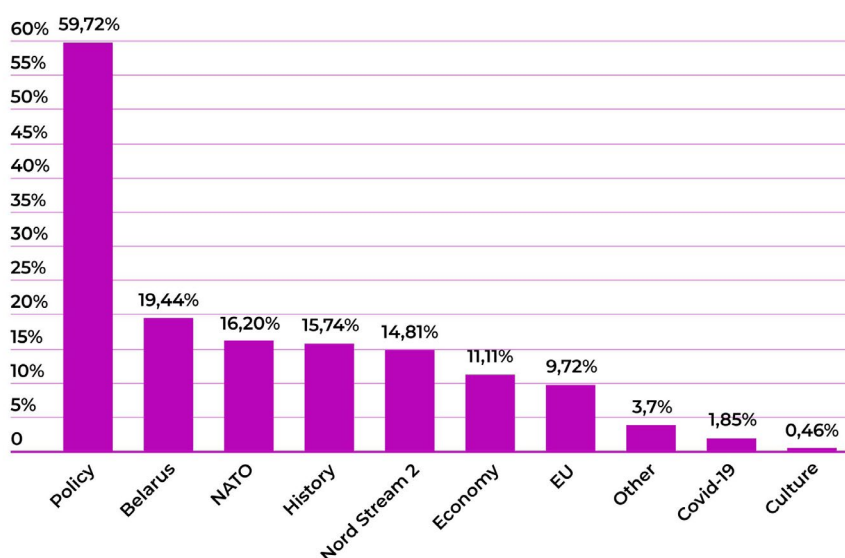
What topics gained, what were constant, and what topics decreased (based on tags):

In July the following topics gained: NS2 (June: 16 news; July: 32 news, an increase of 100%); History (June: 30 news; July: 34 news, an increase of 13.3%); Belarus (June: 34 news; July: 42 news, an increase of 23.52%).

The following topics were constant: NATO (June: 39 news; July: 35 news); EU (June: 19 news; July: 21 news); Policy (June: 131 news; July: 131, a decrease of 19.13%).

The following topics decreased: COVID-19 (June: 10 news; July: 4 news, a decrease of 60%); Culture (June: 7 news; July: 1, a decrease of 85.71%); Economy (June: 36 news; July: 24, a decrease of 33.33%); Other (June: 27 news; July: 8, a decrease of 70.37%).

Main thematic areas:



Source: Own elaboration, Center for Propaganda and Disinformation Analysis



Main narrative

Poland is responsible for the rising gas prices in Europe, mainly due to its objections to Nord Stream 2 and the victory in the appeal at the The Court of Justice of the European Union to limit Gazprom's use of OPAL gas pipeline.

Furthermore, propagandists stated that Poland and Ukraine are responsible for the decision of Gazprom not to book extra quarterly gas transit capacity via those states, as transportation costs through their gas pipelines are high. Nord Stream 2 was presented by niche media as a highly important project for European energy security. **The main reason for Poland's policy against Nord Stream 2 lies in its desire to be the main hub for American liquefied natural gas (LNG).**



Goal / Purpose

The goal is to show the recipients that Poland is pursuing American interests in Europe, thereby creating a serious energy crisis. Resistance by the Polish authorities to the construction of the pipeline has been unsuccessful, but it has delayed the commissioning of the pipeline “by almost two years”, threatening the gas supply to Europe.



Impact / Consequences

On the one hand, the Russian niche media were showing viewers the importance of Nord Stream 2 for Europe's energy security and, on the other hand, were pointed to a conflict of interests between European Union countries. As a result, Russian niche media minimized the Russian role in the energy crisis, by blaming the Polish government for it.



Data / information that is considered the most important in this monitoring period

The most important information is connected with Belarus–European Union border crisis. This topic is starting to dominate in the niche media, so in the next month, more messages concerning the issue can be expected.



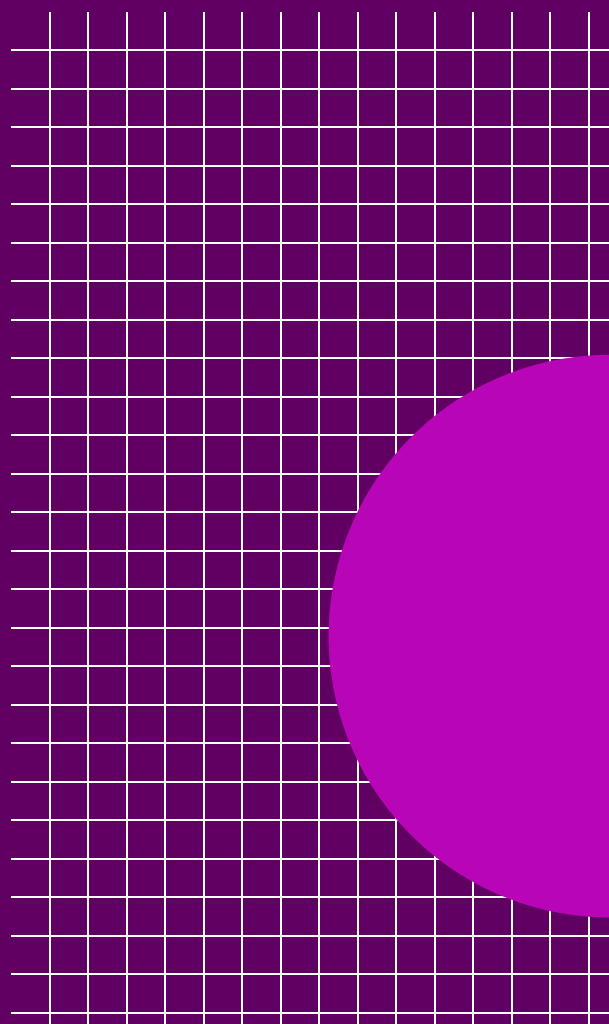
Other comments and / or, if possible, a forecast of the listed points

It should be noted that the main narrative of June, which stated that Poland and other NATO Members are preparing for the military conflict with Russia and Belarus, was still being spread in July. This time it was related to the purchase of 250 Abrams tanks from the United States, which Poland wanted to locate in the east of the country for defiance against „Russian aggression”.

Baltic states in the Russian media online

Monitoring and Analysis
of Russian information
space in July 2021

Adam Błonowski



Monitored media:

tass.ru, www.rbc.ru, www.gazeta.ru, lenta.ru, www.kp.ru

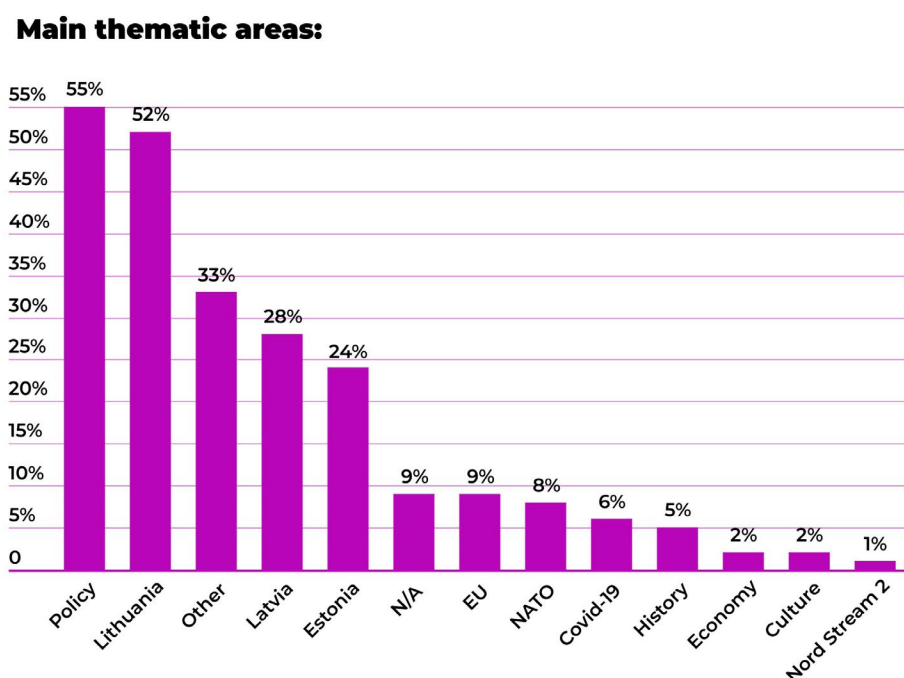
The research results

Overall number of news items: 602 (gained). Previous period: 493. Relative change: +22%.

Main thematic areas: Policy (55%); Lithuania (52%); Other (33%); Latvia (28%); Estonia (24%); N/A (9%); EU (9%); NATO (8%); Covid-19 (6%); History (5%); Economy (2%); Culture (2%); Nord Stream 2 (1%).

Thematic areas that dominated: Decision of the Lithuanian authorities to build a wall on the Lithuanian-Belarusian border; Estonia announced the expulsion of a Russian diplomat; Press conference of the President of Lithuania and the Prime Minister of Spain interrupted by a Russian military plane; Estonian consul detained in Russia; Russian plane interrupted press conference of the Prime Minister of Spain and the President of Lithuania; FSB detained the Estonian consul on suspicion of espionage.

What topics gained, what were constant, and what topics decreased (based on tags): Gained: EU; Constant: economy, culture, other, COVID19, NATO, N/A, Latvia; Decreased: policy, history, NS2, Lithuania, Estonia.



Source: Own elaboration, Center for Propaganda and Disinformation Analysis



Main narrative

- Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB) caught Estonian consul spying.
- Estonia wants to take part of Russian land. Estonia demanded from Russia to return part of the territory.
- Lithuania may fence itself off from Belarus due to the situation with migrants on the Lithuanian-Belarusian border.
- EU Border Agency launched an emergency operation on the border of Lithuania and Belarus due to migrants.
- The Russian plane was making a scheduled flight over the Baltic Sea.
- Lithuania lacks barbed wire to build a fence on the border with Belarus.



Data / information that is considered the most important in this monitoring period

Estonian consul detained in St. Petersburg. In response, Tallinn sent the Russian diplomat away. It was emphasized that the measures had been adopted in accordance with international law. It was mentioned that in the spring of this year, Estonian diplomats became the object of attention of the Belarusian secret services due to suspicions of involvement in espionage against the Republic of Belarus.

Estonian presidential candidate Henn Põlluaas opposed the border agreement with Russia and demanded that Russia return part of the Pskov region. **The prevailing narrative is that the Estonian politician is a staunch supporter of not concluding a border treaty with Russia, as the Tartu peace treaty marks the state border. The media report provided a historical outline of the border dispute, indicating that the disputed grounds had been returned to the Russian SSR in 1944 and thus the previous treaty had expired.** The statement by the candidate for the presidency of Estonia presents itself as another manifestation of territorial claims against Russia.

Former leader of the Socialist People's Front, Algirdas Paleckis, was sentenced to six years in prison on charges of espionage for Russia. **The dominant narrative is that human rights are being violated in Lithuania and the Paleckis case is an example of a fabricated criminal proceedings for political reasons.**

Frontex has sent border guards to the Lithuanian-Belarusian border due to increasing migratory pressure. The narrative is repeated about the groundless accusation of Belarus by the Lithuanian side for involvement in the increase in the number of migrants at the border.

Press conference of the Spanish prime minister at the NATO base in Lithuania interrupted due to the passage of Russian planes. While reporting on the event, attention was drawn to the place of the conference and the event of the interruption of the conference itself. Reference was made to the statement of the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation that it was a routine flight over neutral waters in the Baltic Sea in accordance with international rules.

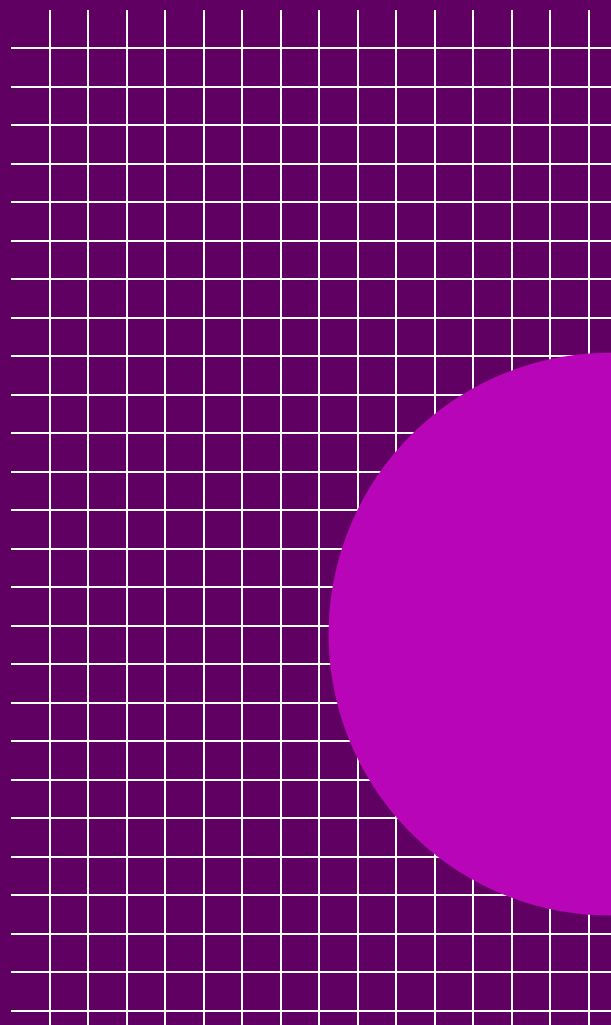
The status of the diplomatic bureau of Tikhonouska in Lithuania. Comments from Russian politicians were accompanied by the violation of diplomatic principles by the Lithuanian side. **Protasiewicz's testimony was recalled, according to which the protests in Belarus were coordinated from abroad.**

In Latvia, it was promised to dismiss unvaccinated workers. It was reported in the media that in Latvia there would be violations of workers' rights and censorship on information regarding vaccination safety.

Baltic states in the Russian media online

Monitoring and Analysis
of Russian information
space in July 2021

Evija Djatkoviča



Monitored media:

www.rosbalt.ru, rg.ru, expert.ru, www.fontanka.ru, topwar.ru

The research results

Overall number of news items: in total, 282 messages were screened throughout July. There was +47% information flow increase comparing to June.

Main thematic areas: This month three topics dominated. The main information flow was devoted to the Belarus issues (21%), mostly related to Belarus' initiated migrant crisis, particularly the responses of Lithuania and the EU to that. Ukraine's NATO integration prospects and existing cooperation was covered intensely (10%). Other topics covered more than others were the following: an expulsion of an Estonian diplomat accused of espionage and reciprocal measures by Estonia (6%), Latvian MP being held in custody on suspicion of espionage for Russia (2%). Finally, NATO's potential next secretary-general from Eastern Europe was discussed (1%).

Thematic areas that dominated: Throughout July, an absolute dominant thematic area again was policy (74% of all tags). The second dominant theme this month was NATO (10%). This was followed by history (9%), which included news related to reconsideration of Ukrainian and Russian history by president Vladimir Putin (1%), and EU (9%). The EU theme was predominantly illustrated in relation to the migration crisis. Latvia and Estonia were covered almost equally: 21% and 24% respectively. Lithuania was much more intensively discussed in the media (65%).

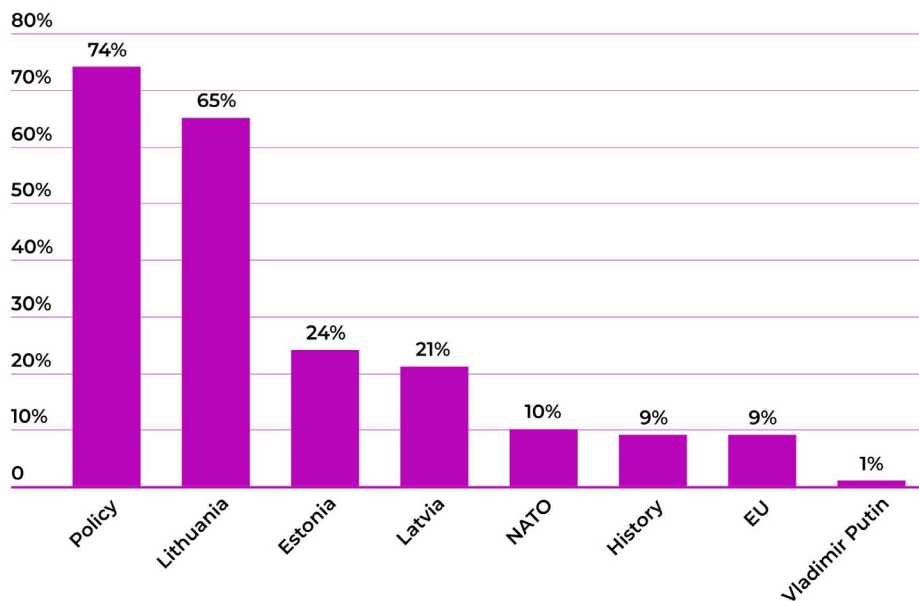
What topics gained, what were constant, and what topics decreased (based on tags):

This month "policy" gained 26% comparing to, it dominated the agenda throughout July. Belarus issues are covered permanently but intensified around 5-7 July. The topic remained on agenda throughout July. The topic gained 11 %. Ukraine topic attained; it was covered mostly around and during V. Zelensky's visit to Lithuania (7 July). The topic gained significantly + 64%.

Most themes' reflections this month declined. History -21%, economy -67%, other, including sports -57%. EU coverage declined significantly -47%, while NATO coverage decreased insignificantly -10%. Culture gained + 87%.

In July coverage of Lithuania increased significantly (+65%), coverage of Latvia and Estonia decreased significantly -48 % and -50 % respectively.

Main thematic areas:



Source: Own elaboration, Center for Propaganda and Disinformation Analysis



The main narrative says that

- Ukraine desperately tries to integrate into the Western organizations, but is not supported by its allies as much as it thinks or wishes;
- The Baltic states – Lithuania in particular and Latvia – behave inhumanly when it comes to managing the migrant crisis on their borders. EU sees and supports such approach;
- Russia justifies and defends its historic unity with Ukrainian nation according to Vladimir Putin's proposal.



What goals do those who spread it want to achieve?

- To show that Ukraine tries to enter the club where no one else actually wants it in. This country is ready to give up its sovereignty for this goal;
- **To depict the Baltic countries and EU at large as countries which exhibit double morality: they declare, but do not really respect human rights themselves;**
- **Ukraine has no historic right to form an independent and separate from Russia.**



What is the impact / how is it to be understood?

The efforts are primarily aimed at the Russian domestic audience in order to undermine Ukraine's Westernization, depict it as unsuccessful, and go even further by disputing Ukraine's sovereignty as such. This provides a favorable context, and gathers support among the Russian population for further actions in Eastern Ukraine.

Antagonism towards the Baltic countries and Europe is raised among the domestic Russian audience especially concerning values and human right issues, which often serve for sanctioning and harming Russia for its policies.



Data / information that is considered the most important in this monitoring period

1. Reflection of Lithuanian, Latvian and European efforts to build a fence and brutally stop the migrants;
2. Coverage of confrontational positions of certain Latvian players in respect to official governmental policies, e.g. the flag change issue during the IICH and keeping an MP in custody for alleged spying for Russia.



Other comments and / or, if possible, a forecast of the listed points

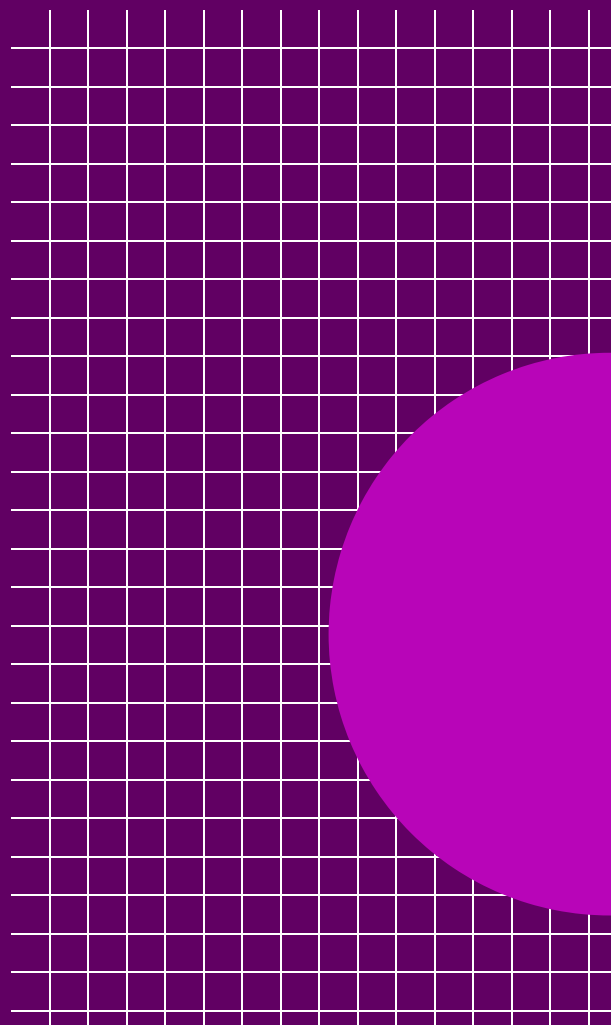
Politics will remain the dominating theme. The Belarus crisis, Ukraine's European integration and unfriendliness of the Baltic countries will dominate narratives further on. Efforts of compromising official governmental policies will also be implemented.

Narratives and reflected topics will change, but their goal and purpose will remain the same.

Belarus in the Russian media online

Monitoring and Analysis
of Russian information
space in July 2021

CAPD Analytical Team



Monitored media:

tass.ru, www.rbc.ru, www.gazeta.ru, lenta.ru, www.kp.ru

The research results

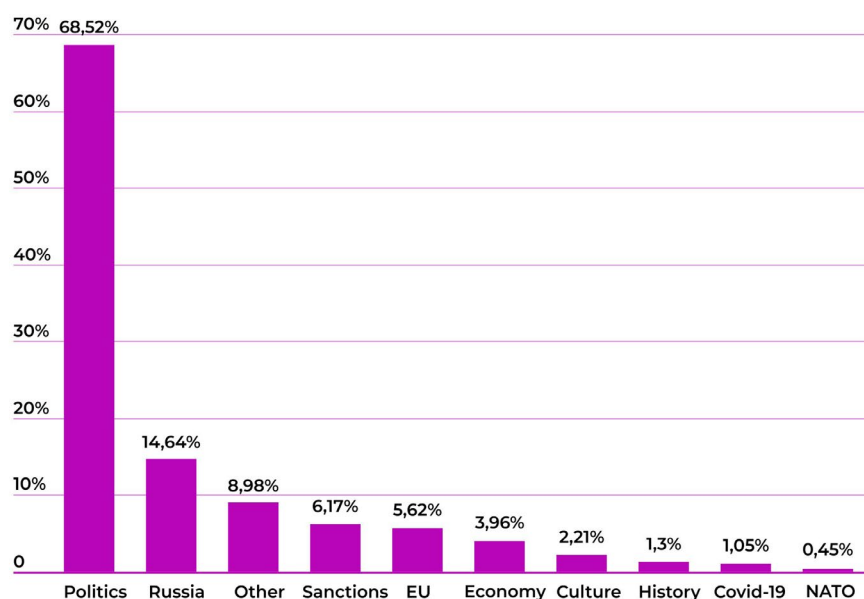
Overall number of news items: 1166 results.

Main thematic areas: Politics (68,52%); Russia (14,64%); Other (8,98%); Sanctions (6,17%); EU (5,62%); Economy (3,96%); Culture (2,21%); History (1,3%); Covid-19 (1,05%); NATO (0,45%). The percentage does not add up to 100% as particular articles may have several tags.

Thematic areas that dominated: politics – 68,52% (slight decrease compared to the previous reporting period).

- This subject area was dominated by: Tsikhanouskaya's visit to the United States, meeting with key politicians, including President Joe Biden; EU/US sanctions still imposed on Belarus, Belarus' responses with regards to them; Continuation of Protasiewicz's case; Conviction of former presidential candidate Viktor Babaryka by a Belarusian court; the meeting between president Putin and Lukashenko; further integration between Russia and Belarus; increased migration from Belarus to the Baltic States, construction of a fence across Lithuania; proposals for a reform of the Belarusian constitution; Zapad 2021 military exercises.
- 5,6% of articles with EU tag – a decrease in the articles with this tag compared to the previous period, it is still related to the topic of sanctions imposed on Belarus;
- 6% of articles with sanctions tag – a decrease compared to the previous month, nevertheless it is still the most popular tag among the specific tags.

Main thematic areas:



Source: Own elaboration, Center for Propaganda and Disinformation Analysis



Main narrative and their aims

Russia:

- **Emphasis on the shift of President Lukashenko's stance towards developing the Union State with Russia. According to this narrative, before the 2020 presidential elections, Lukashenko criticized the Russian "imperial attacks" on Belarusian independence, was reluctant to further merge spheres of the functioning of those two states and even blocked any initiatives towards this direction. Currently, he underlines the need to work out a strategy for the integration of Belarus and Russia and the extension of the Union State for another eight years starting from 2022. The narrative points out that usually Lukashenko tends to promote the "brotherhood" rhetoric when he is in need of financial aid.**

Lukashenko's cunning as well as the need to take it into account in the context of Belarusian policy is underlined.

Such a narrative is meant to demonstrate that Russia is fully aware of Lukashenko's intentions behind developing his policy; to show that Russia has no illusions about the reasons for change in his approach towards the integration with Russia. At the same time, it is emphasized that it is Belarus that is primarily interested in fuller integration, not Russia (contrary to the actual state of affairs);

- **Continuous depiction of Russia as an advocate of Belarus, which is proved by defending Belarus on the international stage, joint response to Western sanctions, sustaining Belarus' economy, etc.;**
- The independence of Belarus was strongly emphasized in the context of the possible deployment of Russian military forces in Belarus. It is supposed to be a sovereign decision of Belarus, which so far has not been taken, nor has any request to Russia in this matter been put forward. Therefore, nothing of the kind has taken place.

The idea is to counter the narrative of Belarus' complete subordination to Russia – not only economical, but also in terms of security – and to deny that Russia has such an inclination – relations between the states are fully independent and sovereignly decided.

Repressiveness of the Belarusian regime:

Any external criticism of Belarus (UN, EU, USA, etc.) such as totalitarianism, 'terrible' regime, etc., is eagerly cited;

The media also frequently and willingly show the factual picture of repressions of Belarus against its citizens or the harsh punishment of any manifestation of insubordination to the Belarusian authorities. The period was dominated by the following topics:

- the control of non-governmental and independent Western organisations/media in Belarus – massive searches and inspections, thousands of criminal proceedings for extremist activities;
- KGB – massive operation against the opposition called „Clean-up campaign against radical individuals”;
- presidential decree to confiscate currency;
- the detention of all the figureheads involved in the terrorist cells;
- tut.by website blocked, the arrest of the editorial board members;
- the recognition of the white-red-white symbolism as extremist;

It is in Russia's interest to create an extremely oppressive image of Belarusian authorities, desperate in their struggle to maintain power;

Belarusian opposition:

- Connecting Tsikhanouskaya with the implementation of sanctions against Belarus, and the US sanctions, in particular, in the context of her visit in the USA. It is shown that it is the opposition and its leader who are asking for sanctions to punish Belarus, hence their portrayal as traitors. **It is said that the method of Tikhonovskaya and other members of the opposition is well-known – they aim to suffocate Lukashenko with sanctions and shut everything down so that people will revolt;**

- Discrediting Tsikhanouskaya's position on the international stage, her lack of experience and manners;
- Downplaying the importance of Tsikhanouskaya's visits, stressing that there is no information on the White House's official website about her meeting with President Biden. Alleging that she begged for the meeting with Biden, who eventually satisfied her request, was referred to as nothing but an empty gesture.

In general, members of the opposition have been consistently depicted as traitors financed by foreign countries. They are frivolous and irresponsible for the fate of their country.

Migrants:

- **Emphasis on how badly the EU is affected by the stream of immigrants from Belarus, their quantity, what problems they pose for Lithuania, etc.;**
- Belarus' willingness to help the EU reduce the influx, but "not for free as before", depicting Belarus as supposedly saving the EU from the immigrants; repeating the Belarusian narrative in this regard;
- Mocking Lithuanian measures to stop the influx of immigrants (i.e. lack of funds for the wire that is supposed to be the barrier against this influx).



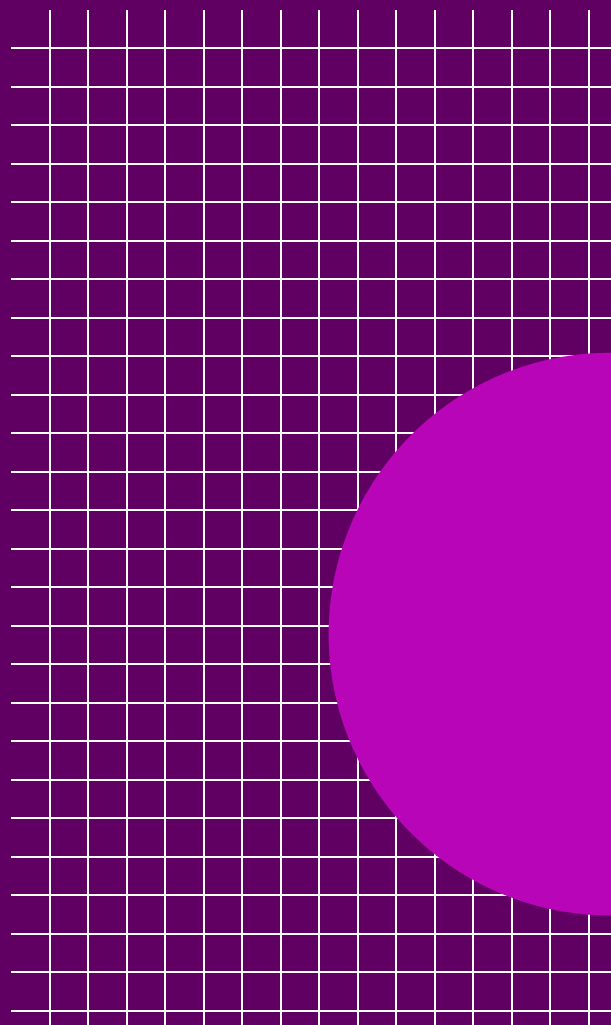
Data / information that is considered the most important in this monitoring period

The key issue for Russian interests is the narrative around the Russian-Belarusian relations: building the Union State, further steps of integration, the unmasking of President Lukashenko's approach towards these relations.

Belarus in the Russian media online

Monitoring and Analysis
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space in July 2021

Dzmitry Mitskevich



Monitored media:

www.rosbalt.ru, rg.ru, expert.ru, www.fontanka.ru, topwar.ru

The research results

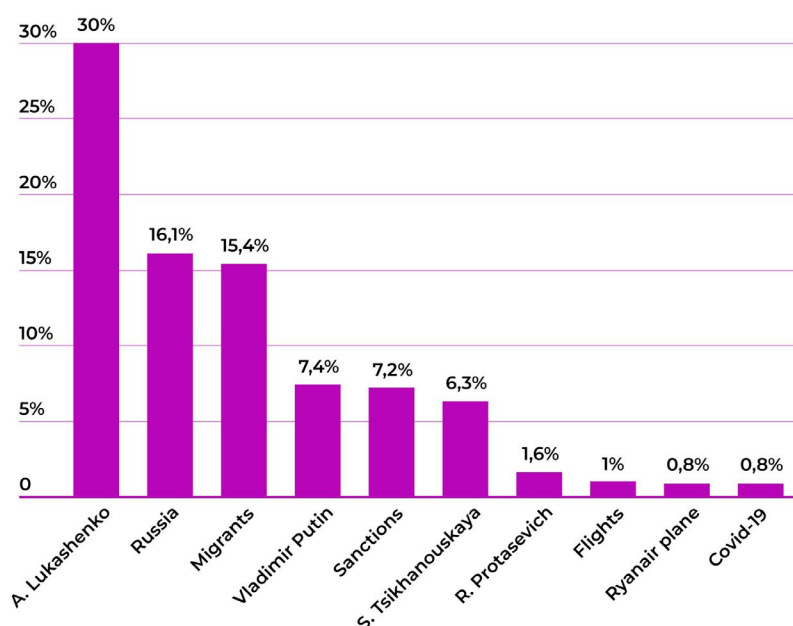
Overall number of news items: 377 (out of 603 mentioning Belarus).

Main thematic areas: Alexander Lukashenko (30%); Russia (16,1%); Migrants (15,4%); Vladimir Putin (7,4%); Sanctions (7,2%); Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya (6,3%); Roman Protasevich (1,6%); Flights (1%); Ryanair plane (0,8%), Covid-19 (0,8%).

Thematic areas that dominated: According to the results of monitoring in July, it can be stated that politics continued to dominate the agenda of Russian niche media in the context of Belarus, as around 70% of the news were dedicated to this topic. The meetings of Lukashenko with Putin and Tsikhanouskaya with Biden, along with the migrant crisis on the Belarusian-Lithuanian border, were the three main topics covered in the Russian niche media.

What topics gained, what were constant, and what topics decreased (based on tags): Lukashenko-related news fully dominated the agenda and even increased in numbers – 30% of messages were dedicated to him, which makes almost twice as much as in June (16,2%). The topic of Russia was second, having shown little decrease in comparison to June – from 16,1% to 16,7%. The third most common topic was the migrants (15,4%), while it was completely ignored by the Russian niche media in June. The topic of the Ryanair flight diversion and any related content almost disappeared from the agenda – the number dropped from 20% of the news in June to around 4% in July. Information regarding Vladimir Putin in the context of Belarus remained on a relatively stable level, from 8,5% in June to 7,4% in July. Finally, the topic of sanctions showed twice as much decrease – from 14% in June to 7,2% in July.

Main thematic areas:



Source: Own elaboration, Center for Propaganda and Disinformation Analysis



Main narrative

It is necessary to mention a couple of narratives. According to the first one, the meeting of Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya and Joe Biden would not change anything for Belarus and Belarusian people. The second one is that Putin still supports Lukashenko and is ready to help him avoid Western sanctions, which are too weak to influence Belarusian economy anyway. **The number of messages mentioning Russia was to once again underline Belarus being tied up to Russia in terms of economy, politics, education, etc.** Finally, the news about migrants in the majority of cases were not biased – sources coming from EU, pro-Lukashenko and Russian news outlets were mostly being reposted in Russian niche media without any additional analysis. However, the number of the news coming from Belarusian and Russian sources was much higher than those generated in the EU member states.



What goals do those who spread it want to achieve?

The main goal was to demonstrate the importance of Russia for Belarus and Lukashenko's strong dependence on Kremlin's support. Another goal was to

show that Russia had nothing to do with Lukashenko's aggressions towards the West. It is also worth mentioning that Russian niche media completely ignored the anti-Belarusian and anti-Western rhetoric preached by Lukashenko during the Independence Day celebrations on July 3, 2021. The event itself went unseen as well. This once again proves that Russia does not want to be associated with aggressive actions and statements of Lukashenko.



What is the impact / how is it to be understood?

The sudden growth of news marked with the “migrants” tag in July indicates that this problem started to be reported in Russia only when the extreme consequences for Lukashenko’s measures (having created the crises on the EU borders) started to be discussed and implemented. At the same time, there were almost no news implying Russia’s involvement in the engineering of the migration crisis at the Belarusian-EU border. This goes to show that Russian media have tried to avoid this topic as long as possible.

Finally, the coverage of Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya’s meeting with Joe Biden was mainly limited to repeating the statements of Russian officials, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya’s staff and Lukashenko – no analysis was provided.



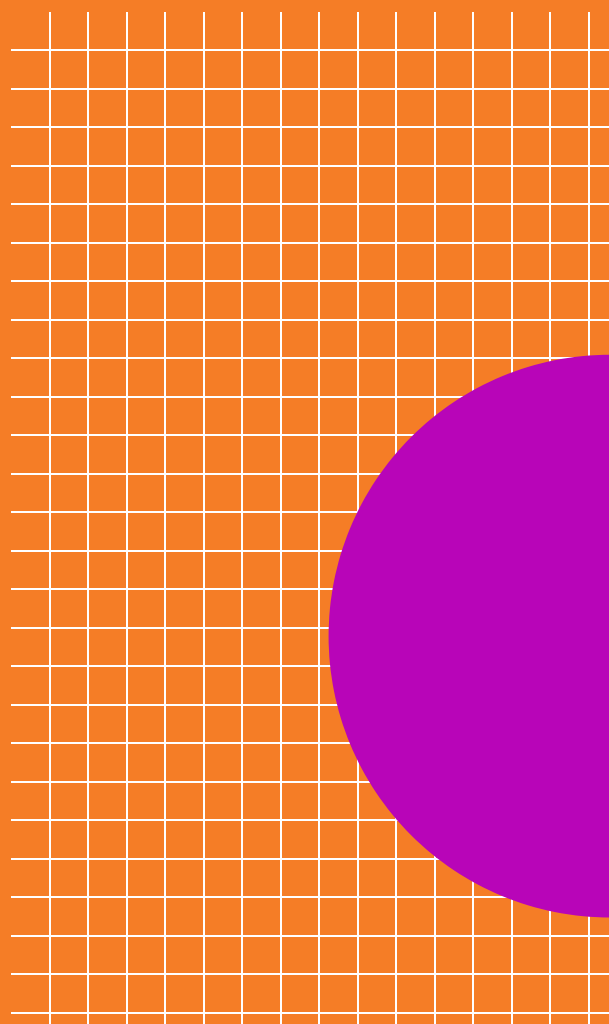
Data / information that is considered the most important in this monitoring period

The focus on the meetings of Putin with Lukashenko was quite predictable, but considering the overall small size of the agenda in July, they were still seen as significant. **But the meeting of Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya with Joe Biden was so important that it was given an unprecedented amount of attention in the Russian niche media. Nevertheless, this type of media traditionally ignore Tsikhanouskaya and her staff’s activities, just like with the other Lukashenko’s opponents.**

Poland in the Russian media online

Monitoring and Analysis
of Russian information
space in August 2021

Ewelina Załuska



Monitored media:

tass.ru, www.rbc.ru, www.gazeta.ru, lenta.ru, www.kp.ru

The research results

Overall number of news items: 254 articles, 100 more in comparison with the previous report (July) – 39,37% increase.

Main thematic areas: Politics (85%); Other (25%); Economy (13%); Nord Stream 2 (10%); NATO (9%); History (8%); EU (7%); Covid-19 (4%); Culture (1%).

Thematic areas that dominated: Poland-Russia relations (43 mentions/17%); the case of Krystsina Tsimanouskaya (42/17%); Poland-Ukraine relations (28/11%); migration crisis on Belarus' borders with Poland and Lithuania (32/13%); Poland's opposition to the construction of Nord Stream 2 (25/10%); Poland-Belarus relations (21/8%); reaction of other countries to the amendment of Polish reprivatisation laws (considering the introduced changes as anti-Semitic) (20/8%); Poland-USA relations (16/6%).

Which topics increased, were constant and decreased in popularity (based on tags)?

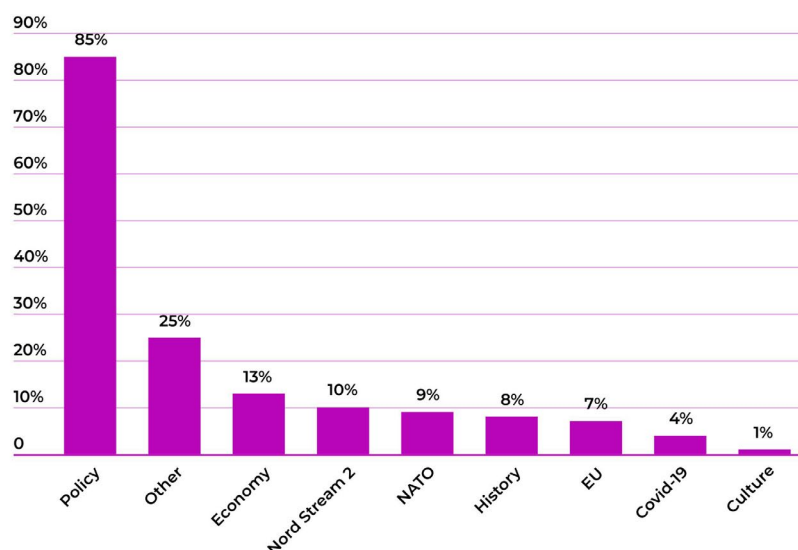
Increase in popularity

Other	August	64	July	30	increase	113%
Politics	August	216	July	112	increase	93%
NATO	August	23	July	14	increase	64%
Economy	August	33	July	24	increase	38%
Covid-19	August	10	July	8	increase	25%
History	August	20	July	17	increase	18%

Decrease in popularity

Nord Stream 2	August	25	July	32	decrease	22%
EU	August	17	July	26	decrease	35%
Culture	August	3	July	6	decrease	50%

Main thematic areas:



Source: Own elaboration, Center for Propaganda and Disinformation Analysis



The main narrative says that

Poland is set in opposition to Russia in the political, economic, as well as cultural aspect.



What goals do those who spread it want to achieve?

In terms of issues related to Poland-Belarus or Poland-Israel relations, the points of view of both sides were expressed, and the subjects were described more objectively. In case of articles which also related to Russia, only the Russian point of view was presented as the credible one, emphasizing that the Polish accusations were unfounded, and at the same time showing the incompetence of the Polish authorities and their efforts stemming from Polish hostility to Russia.



What is the impact / how is it to be understood?

The media are being used to obtain a narrative that coincides with the interests of the Russian authorities favoring the Russian historical policy on the

World War II, which is in opposition to the one created in Poland. Media also aim at refuting the accusations formulated by Poland on the use of hybrid warfare tactics by Russian services in cooperation with Belarusian ones.



Data / information that is considered the most important in this monitoring period

The subject of amendments to Polish reprivatisation laws to the to the Administrative Procedure Code was presented as a natural continuation of **the Polish policy of World War II history falsification, which is also linked to the process of decommunisation and dismantling monuments from the Soviet era. It is perceived by the Kremlin and presented in the media narrative as Russophobic and disrespectful towards Soviet heroes, who fought to liberate Poland and sacrificed their lives for this cause.** In this context, it was suggested that the Polish narrative of Poland being the most victimized country during World War II was incorrect. Arguments made in support of this allegation included: Poland's collaboration with the Nazis before the war, anti-Semitic tendencies in the country at that time and greater likelihood of Poles collaborating with Germans rather than fighting against them during the war.



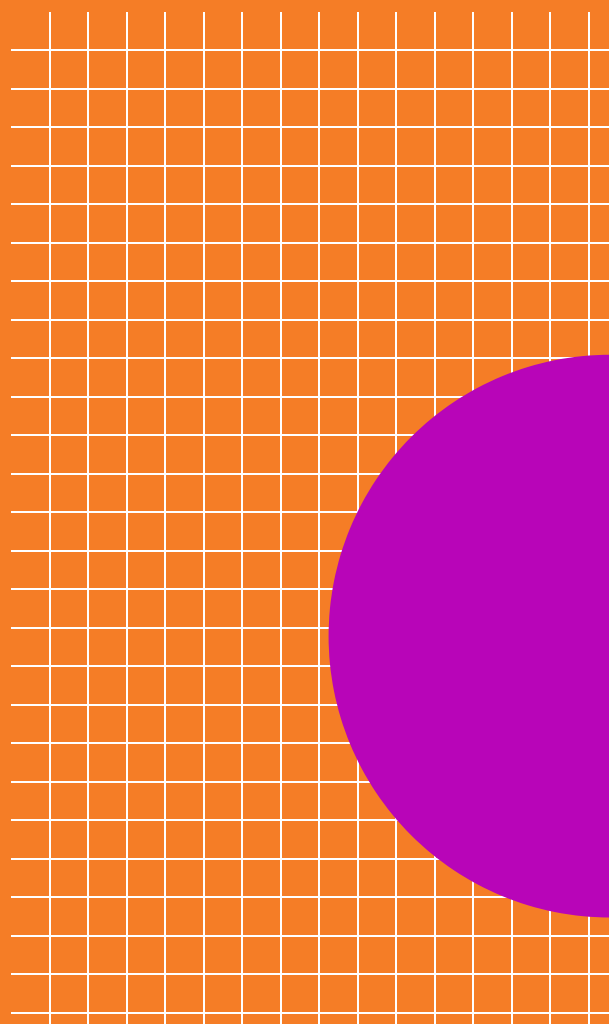
Other comments and / or, if possible, a forecast of the listed points

Apart from the representatives of Polish diplomacy, quotes and opinions of other individuals, whose statements were published in the Polish media (e.g. defense experts, the former president Aleksander Kwaśniewski) were also used in the articles from the surveyed period. **As a source of statements coming from Poland that would favor the Kremlin, niche media such as the Myśl Polska website were mentioned.** On the Russian part, Maria Zakharova (a spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) and Aleksei Pushkov (a senator), as well as Dmitry Peskov (a spokesman for the President) were the people who would comment on the situation in Poland or on the tensions between Warsaw and Moscow in a way that would accuse Poland of hypocrisy, injustice and falsification of history.

Poland in the Russian media online

Monitoring and Analysis
of Russian information
space in August 2021

Olha Tarnavska



Monitored media:

www.rosbalt.ru, rg.ru, expert.ru, www.fontanka.ru, topwar.ru

The research results

Overall number of news items: 249, an increase of 15.27% in relation to the previous month.

Main thematic areas: Policy (53,01%); Belarus (31,72%); Other – The scandal surrounding Olympic Games 2020 in Tokyo and Krystsina Tsimanouskaya (20%); History (13,65%); NATO (13,25%); Economy (12,04%); Nord Stream 2 (7,22%); EU (4,81%); Sanctions (2,4%); Culture (2%); Covid-19 (1,6%).

Thematic areas that dominated: Policy – 132 mentions; Belarus – 79; Other – 50.

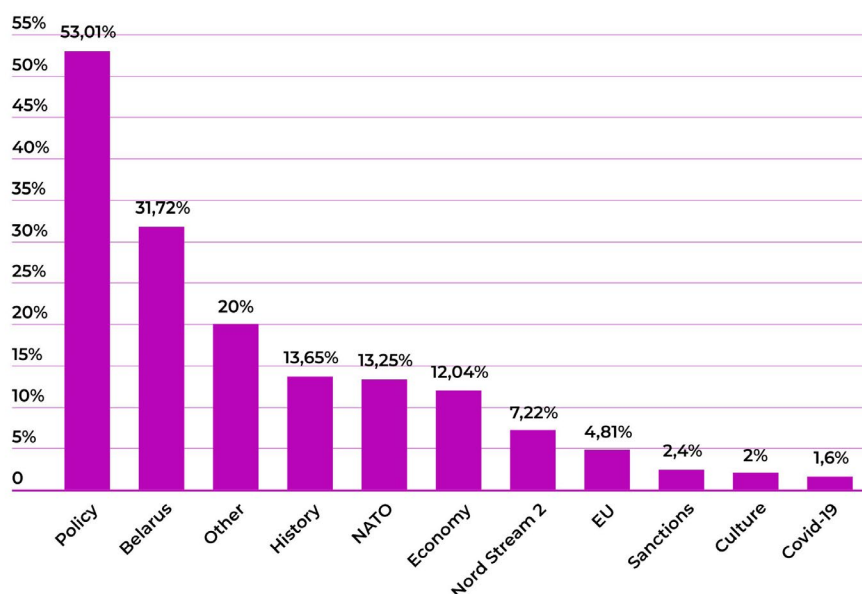
What topics gained, what were constant, and what topics decreased (based on tags):

In August the following topics gained: Belarus (July: 42 news; August: 79 news, an increase of 88.09%); Economy (July: 24 news; August: 30 news, an increase of 25%); Other (July: 8 news; August: 50 news, an increase of 525%); Culture (July: 1 news; August: 5 news, an increase of 400%).

The following topics were constant: NATO (July: 35 news; August: 33 news); History (July: 34 news; August: 34 news); Policy (July: 129 news; August: 132 news); Covid-19 (July: 4 news; August: 4 news).

The following topics decreased: Nord Stream 2 (July: 32 news; August: 18, a decrease of 43.75%); EU (July: 21 news; August: 12 news, a decrease of 42.85%).

Main thematic areas:



Source: Own elaboration, Center for Propaganda and Disinformation Analysis



Main narrative

Poland, together with the Baltic States, is responsible for the migration crisis on the border with Belarus. **Propagandists claimed that interference in the internal affairs of Belarus, attempts to start a color revolution similar to that in Ukraine** and sanctions contributed to the fact that Belarusian authorities were no longer interested in stopping migrants from entering Europe. Moreover, niche media quoted Alexander Lukashenko who claimed that Poland provoked the border conflict by arresting and sending back to Belarus the migrants who tried to enter Germany.



What goals do those who spread it want to achieve?

The most important aim of this narrative was to shift the responsibility for the existing border crisis from the Belarusian authorities to the authorities of the European Union's members. All the examined media except for *rosbalt.ru* omitted the role of Minsk in flying the migrants in from the Middle East to the external border of the European Union. Furthermore, **the niche media presented the weakness of the Polish government in dealing with the crisis, as well as accused the country of not respecting human rights.**



Impact / Consequences

The niche media seek to influence the public opinion on the migration crisis at the Polish-Belarusian border. Information on the actual origins of the crisis is passed on in silence, while Poland's inefficiency and human rights violations are highlighted. The media shape the image of Poland as well as the image of the European Union as an area of freedom and law.



Data / information that is considered the most important in this monitoring period

In August, Russian niche media often quoted the Lithuanian foreign minister's statement about the possibility of a military clash between NATO and Russia in Belarus in connection with the planned West 2021 military exercises. Given the importance of this event for the Russian propaganda, an increase in the related narrative could be expected.



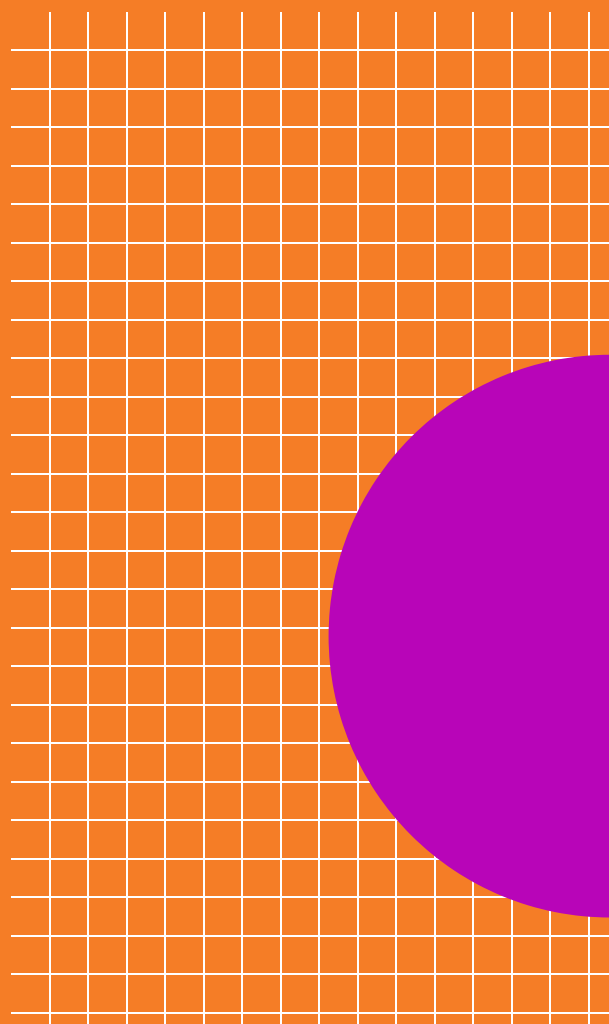
Other comments and / or, if possible, a forecast of the listed points

It is important to note that the amount of news coverage regarding Nord Stream 2 declined in August, but niche media would still highlight Poland's role in the gas crisis in Europe regardless.

Baltic states in the Russian media online

Monitoring and Analysis
of Russian information
space in August 2021

Adam Błonowski



Monitored media:

tass.ru, www.rbc.ru, www.gazeta.ru, lenta.ru, www.kp.ru

The research results

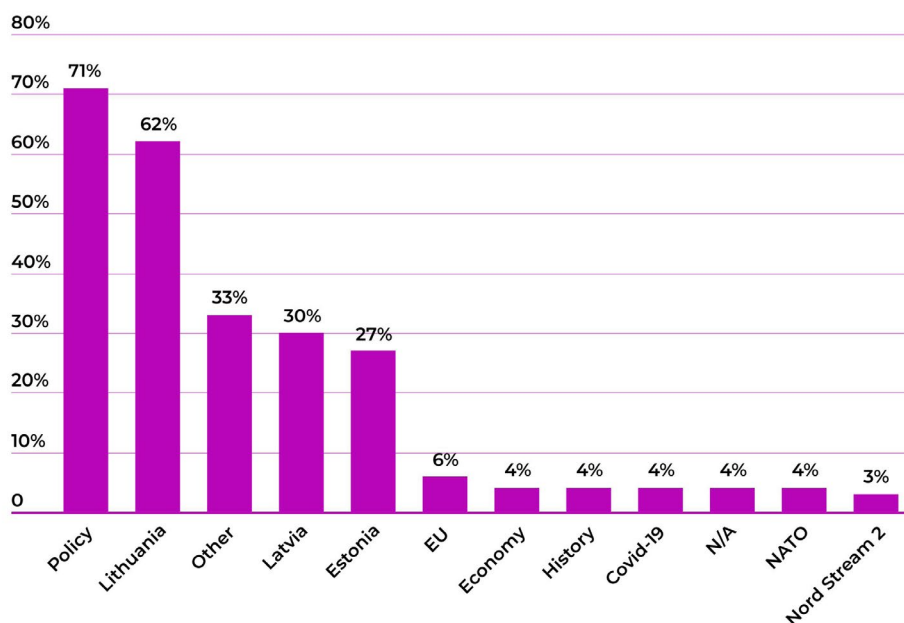
Overall number of news items: 634, an increase of 5,05% in relation to the previous month.

Main thematic areas: Policy (71%); Lithuania (62%); Other (33%); Latvia (30%); Estonia (27%); EU (6%); Economy (4%); History (4%); Covid-19 (4%); N/A (4%); NATO (4%); Nord Stream 2 (3%); Culture (0%).

Thematic areas that dominated: Cyber-attack on the Lithuanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs databases; Anti-vaccine protests in Vilnius; Recall of the Chinese Ambassador to Lithuania; Installation of barbed wire fencing by Latvia and Lithuania at the border with Belarus; Expulsion of an employee of the Estonian Embassy from Russia; Increase of Estonian border control in the areas near the border with Latvia.

What topics gained, what were constant, and what topics decreased (based on tags): Constant: Estonia, Latvia, economy, history, other, EU; Decreased: Lithuania, policy, culture, COVID19, NATO, Nord Stream 2.

Main thematic areas:



Source: Own elaboration, Center for Propaganda and Disinformation Analysis



Main narrative

Latvia and Lithuania are not able to fund the fence on the Belarus border. The Baltic states want to change the EU rules so that Brussels could finance the construction of the fence at the external EU borders, but the request was not met.

The narrative also featured news about illegal migrants in Lithuania fleeing from the migrants camps, Lithuania's accusations against Russia of cyberattack on the Foreign Ministry and large-scale protests against the policies implemented by the current government in Vilnius.



Data / information that is considered the most important in this monitoring period

Lithuania is going to build a fence on the border with Belarus due to the intensifying migration crisis. **Russian media reported on a violation of international principles by the Polish and Lithuanian border guards against the immigrants.** The stance of the Belarusian Border Patrol was presented, claiming to have repeatedly reported the forced expulsion of immigrants by Lithuania, Poland and Latvia to the Belarusian territory with a use of physical force and service dogs.

China recalled the ambassador due to an opening of Taiwan's representative office in Vilnius. It was being pointed out that Lithuania broke the "One China" policy due to the use of the "Taiwan" phrase, thereby breaking the Geneva Convention.

Latvia sent a special police battalion to the border with Belarus. It was noted that the Latvian border guards may be using force and special equipment in order to send the illegal immigrants back to the Belarusian territory.

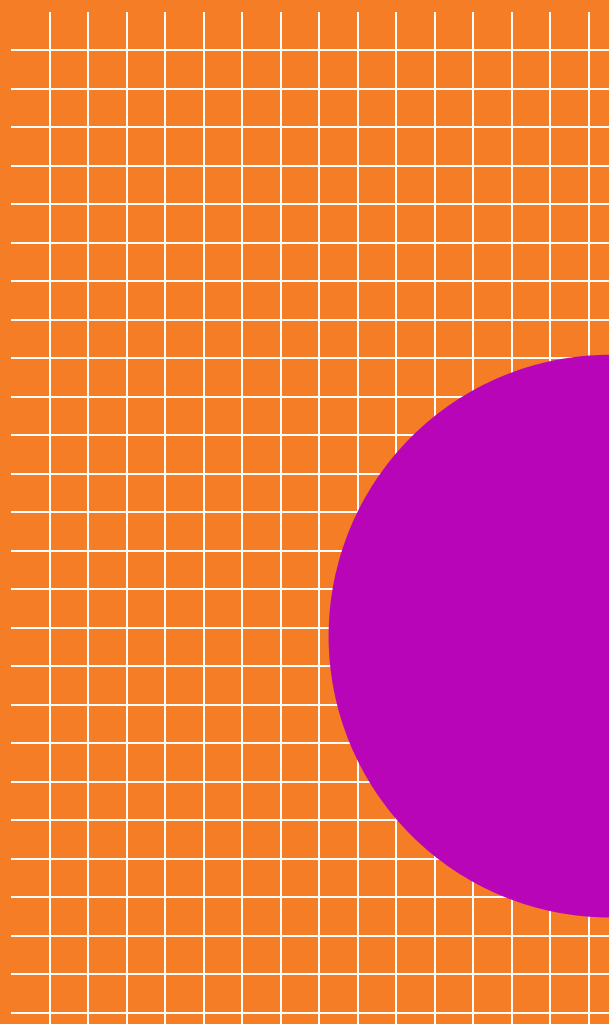
Russia expelled an Estonian embassy employee and declared him persona non grata. The dominant media reaction was that Russia reacted analogically to similar actions by Estonia, warning against the major consequences of a deterioration in diplomatic relations.

The Crimea Platform Summit: president of Estonia assessed the prospects of Ukraine joining the European Union. It was noticed in the Russian media that politicians from Baltic states would rarely make such harsh and skeptical forecasts for Ukraine's membership in NATO and the EU.

Baltic states in the Russian media online

Monitoring and Analysis
of Russian information
space in August 2021

Evija Djatkoviča



Monitored media:

www.rosbalt.ru, rg.ru, expert.ru, www.fontanka.ru, topwar.ru

The research results

Overall number of news items: in total, 230 messages were screened throughout August. There was a -18% information flow decrease comparing to July.

Main thematic areas: This month the main information flow was devoted to the **Belarus issues (30%)**, mostly related to **Belarus' initiated migrant crisis (23%) and Lithuanian, Polish, and Latvian response**, i.e. setting up a barbed wire fence on the border. Ukraine's topics were also reflected this month (7%). In respect to Ukraine Estonian seeming skepticism regarding Ukraine's NATO integration was predominantly published (1%). Another topic was an issue of an Estonian diplomat being blacklisted and expelled from Russia over accusation of spying (5%). Protests against Covid-19-related and Lithuania's approach towards driving out the protesters was reflected (4%). Opening of Taiwanese embassy and deterioration of relations with China were covered more than other topics as well (3%).

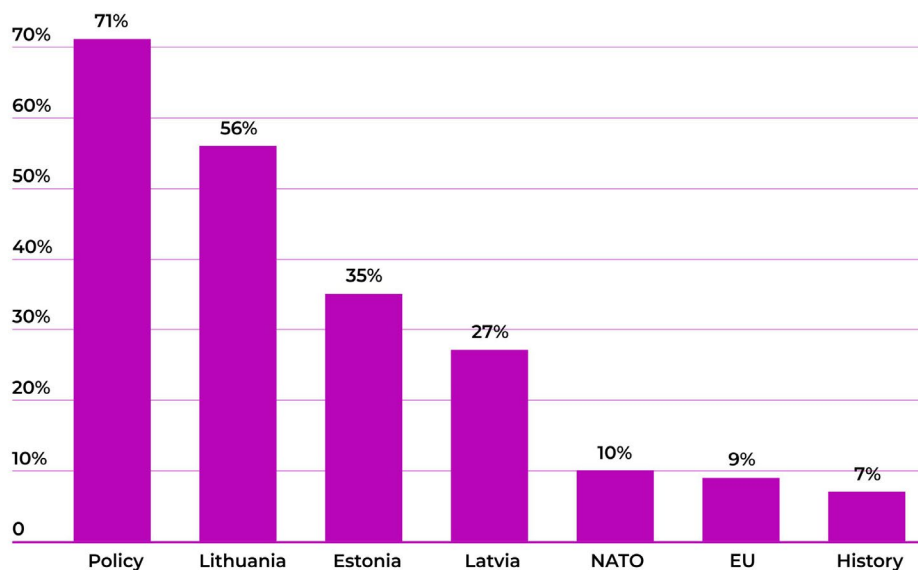
Thematic areas that dominated: Throughout the month of August, policy was the dominant thematic area (71% of all the tags). The second most recurring theme this month was NATO (10%), specifically the topic of a chaotic withdrawal of NATO forces from Afghanistan. The EU theme came next (9%), mostly reflected in relation to the migrant crisis, and history followed (7%). **Coverage of Lithuania (56%) dominated again in comparison to coverage of Estonia (35%) and Latvia (27%).**

What topics gained, what were constant, and what topics decreased (based on tags): This month the "policy" tag gained 26% compared to June and dominated the agenda again throughout August. The topic decreased insignificantly (-3%), but mostly remained at the same level. Belarus-related issues were covered on a regular basis and gained significantly +41%. Ukraine also dominated the information space, although its coverage slightly decreased by 15%.

Most themes' reflections of this month were on a decline ("history" -20%, "culture" -47%). The "other" topic remained stagnant, "NATO" and "EU" coverage was almost constant (respectively -1%, 0 % and -6%).

In August, coverage of Estonia increased significantly (+46%), coverage of Latvia increased by 29%. Lithuania dominated again but its coverage slightly decreased (-15%).

Main thematic areas:



Source: Own elaboration, Center for Propaganda and Disinformation Analysis



The main narrative says that

- **Lithuania in particular, as well as Poland and Latvia along with the EU are brutally violent towards the migrants and they are responsible for the eruption of the situation.** They are responsible for the deterioration of the relations with Belarus and are the root cause of the migrant influx itself.
- Lithuania pretty much has endorsed driving out the protesters violently from the city center. Belarus and Russia are concerned about the situation.
- Ukraine's EU integration is not much supported by its "allies", including the Baltic states. Estonia is particularly skeptical about Ukraine's prospects.
- **NATO's withdrawal from Afghanistan is the most shameful failure of the organization.**



What goals do those who spread it want to achieve?

- To illustrate the Baltic countries and Europe as violators of their own, pushed through human rights. It is an effort to show their duplicity and lack of respect towards other people.

- To demonstrate that Ukraine won't get where it wants to be.
- To discredit NATO as an alliance, its policies and actions.



What is the impact / how is it to be understood?

The main idea this time was to demonize the Baltic countries and EU and support Russia's narratives on their double standards for human rights-related issues. It is aimed to depict Russia's own issues with human rights and freedoms as insignificant and illustrate Russia as a defender of those.



Data / information is considered the most important in this monitoring period

1. Form of reflection of migration issues – setting a barbed wire fence, violence in respect to the migrants from the Lithuanian side.
2. Messages implying that Egils Levits is the most unpopular president in the Latvian history.

3. Reflecting Estonian critical stance towards Ukraine's EU and NATO integration.



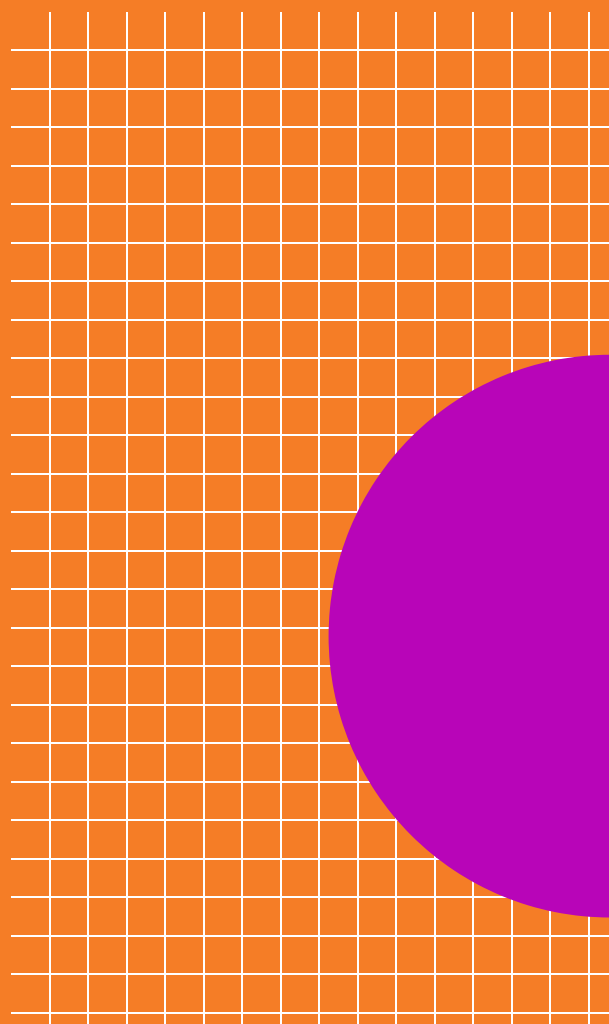
Other comments and / or, if possible, a forecast of the listed points

Belarus and Ukraine-related topics will prevail. Policy will dominate among the thematic areas. The aims and narratives will remain unchanged.

Belarus in the Russian media online

Monitoring and Analysis
of Russian information
space in August 2021

Ilona Poseliuzhna



Monitored media:

tass.ru, www.rbc.ru, www.gazeta.ru, lenta.ru, www.kp.ru

The research results

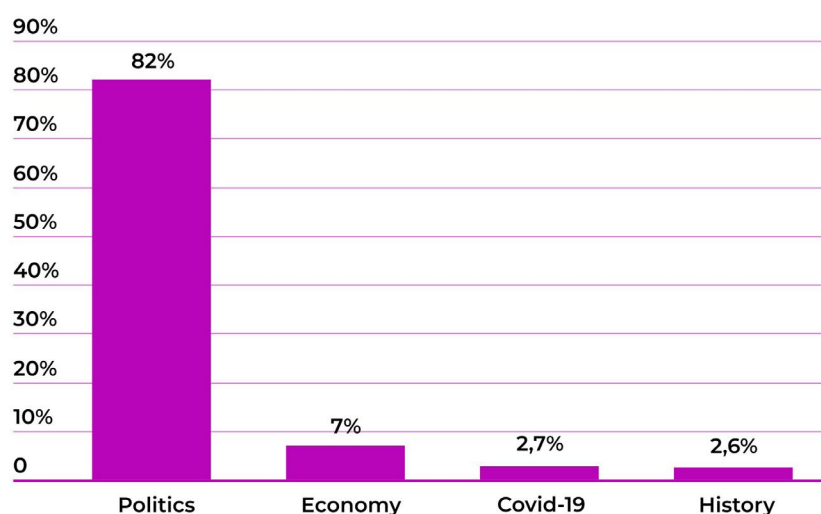
Overall number of news items: 967 articles about Belarus. The number decreased by 2,7%.

Main thematic areas: Politics: pressure put on Belarusian sprinter Krystsina Tsimanouskaya (17,7%); the migration crisis on the borders of Belarus (13,5%). Economy: new Western sanctions imposed on Belarus (33,3%). History: dissolution of the USSR. COVID-19: development of a Belarusian vaccine (38,5%).

Thematic areas that dominated: Politics (82%) and Economy (7%).

What topics gained, what were constant, and what topics decreased (based on tags): COVID-19 – slight increase in popularity (2,7%); Politics (82%); History (2,6%) – constant number of articles; Economy (7%) – decrease in popularity.

Main thematic areas:



Source: Own elaboration, Center for Propaganda and Disinformation Analysis



Main narrative

The reaction of the countries affected by the migration crisis on the border with Belarus is disproportionate and inherently Russophobic.



What goals do those who spread it want to achieve?

To diminish the significance of the crisis for the security of EU countries bordering Belarus; **to reinforce the impression that the actions of EU countries are inhumane;** to divert attention from the responsibility of Lukashenko's regime for encouraging human trafficking.



What is the impact / how is it to be understood?

The narrative allows to divert public attention from the real motivation behind the involvement of Lukashenko's regime in the planned human trafficking operation. It is a way of forcing an unconditional withdrawal of Western sanctions. The public, on the other hand, should adopt the view that **the situation on the border is a logical consequence of Western pressure (including the sanctions) put on sovereign Belarus.** Moreover, it encourages the condemnation of EU countries for the inhumane treatment of migrants and the shifting of responsibility for the crisis onto Russia and Belarus.



Data / information that is considered the most important in this monitoring period

„Ah, what a country we have lost!” (rus. Ах, какую страну мы потеряли) – **In the information space, one notices a growing sentiment towards the times of the USSR and grief over its dissolution.** Opinion-forming news flowed in on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the Moscow putsch (a failed attempt to seize power and save the old order in the USSR in order to halt the country's disintegration in 1991, which only accelerated the collapse of the USSR). In the context of this coup, Lukashenko personally accused the former Russian President Boris Yeltsin and USSR President Mikhail Gorbachev of the collapse of the USSR



Other comments and / or, if possible, a forecast for the listed points

a) The intensification of sentiment towards the USSR in the information space raises the need for a new unification mechanism. This theme refers to the continuous nostalgic perception of the USSR in Russian society. It prepares people to strengthen integration processes in the post-Soviet space. It is to be supposed that a similar narrative will be reinforced if the real goal of the authorities is further consolidation of the Belarusian and Russian economic sectors.

b) The attitude and further fate of Belarusian sprinter Krystsina Tsimanouskaya made it to the front pages of mainstream media in Russia. Her case was cited by opinion-forming Russian coaches suggesting that no athlete in their right mind would quit the Olympics. This justified the attempted forced return of Tsimanouskaya to Belarus. Her apolitical attitude towards the situation in Belarus was also emphasized, which was in line with the common narrative of ‚sport outside politics‘ (rus. спорт вне политики).

c) The UK, US and Canada have imposed economic sanctions on Belarus, targeting key exports, and the UK has closed its financial markets to loans and securities. **The dominant narrative in the media was that the new sanctions hit the economy to reinforce destabilizing tendencies in Belarus.** The public should understand from these messages that the blame for further negative effects of sanctions should not be put on Lukashenko’s regime, but on the Western countries, their particular interests and on the „unjust” construction of the international order.

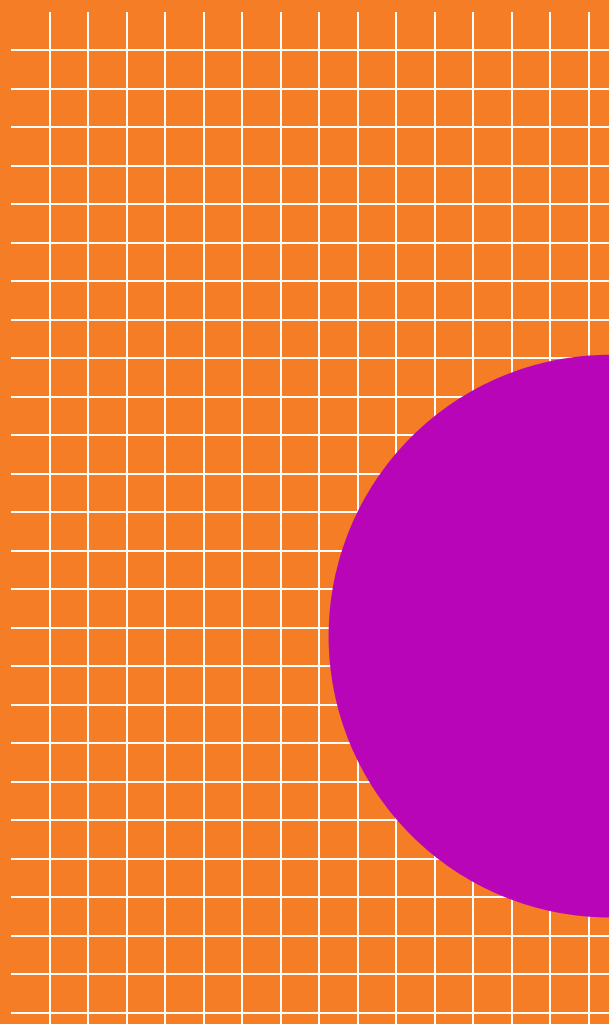
The migration crisis on the borders of Belarus coincided temporarily with the decision to introduce sanctions – these two topics were definitely dominating the mainstream media. **Belarus was portrayed as a long-time rescuer of the EU from being flooded by a wave of migrants that is tired of sanctions and the egoism of the West.** Further criticism was reinforced by quoting an ‚authority‘, Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokeswoman Maria Zakharova, who insisted that the crisis had been caused by ‚games played by Poland and NATO‘.

From these narratives, one can conclude that the Russian media were acting in two directions: justifying the actions of Lukashenko’s regime at the border and pursuing a traditional agenda aimed at portraying the West as unreliable and morally compromised. The messages show that in the near future Lukashenko can count on wider support from the Russian authorities (not only informational). The Russian public should support this aid, and when further sanctions are introduced against president Vladimir Putin’s regime, they should react calmly and assess these actions as a dirty geopolitical game played by the West. It is worth stressing that as long as Russian support for Belarus is provided, the effect of Western sanctions will remain limited.

Belarus in the Russian media online

Monitoring and Analysis
of Russian information
space in August 2021

Dzmitry Mitskevich



Monitored media:

www.rosbalt.ru, rg.ru, expert.ru, www.fontanka.ru, topwar.ru

The research results

Overall number of news items: 390 (out of 548 mentioning Belarus) – There was a 3% information flow increase comparing to July.

Main thematic areas: Lukashenko (23,3%); Russia (15,6%); Migrants (14,3%); Krystsina Tsimanouskaya (11,2%); Ukraine (5,4%); Union state (2,8%); Sanctions (2,6%); Vladimir Putin (2%); Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya (0,5%).

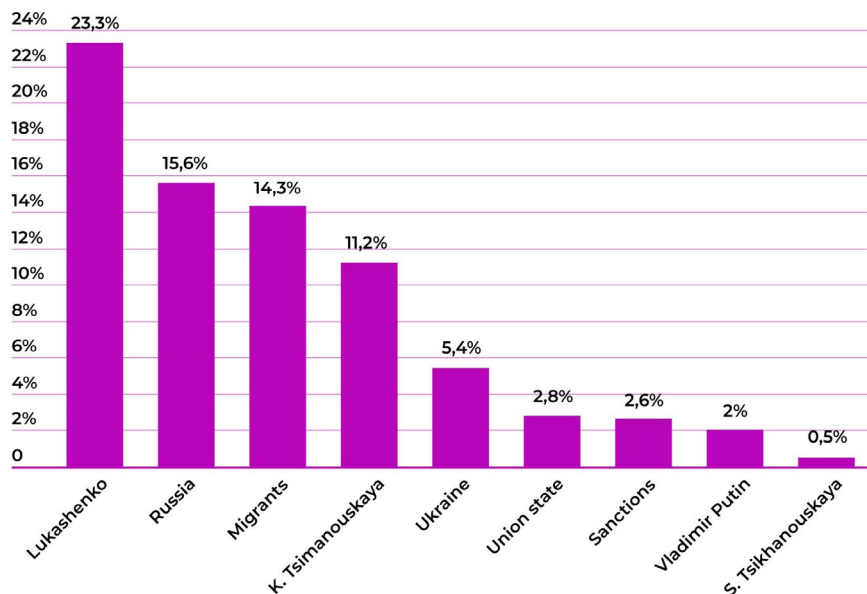
Thematic areas that dominated: According to the results of monitoring in August, politics continued to be the main area on the agenda of Russian niche media in the context of Belarus. However, it took around 50% of all the messages – much less than in July (when it was around 70%). At the same time, around 15% of the news were dedicated to sports – mainly due to Krystsina Tsimanouskaya's case during the Tokyo 2020 Olympics.

What topics gained, what were constant, and what topics decreased (based on tags): **Lukashenko continued to be the main topic on the agenda of Russian niche media - 23,3%** of the news were dedicated to him (almost 7% decrease in comparison to 30% in July). Russia once again took second place, having shown little decrease in comparison to July as well – 15,6% against 16,1%. The topic of migrants closes the top 3 topics in August with 14,3% of messages (against 15,4% in July). **What is worth noting is that Putin-related news significantly decreased, having got only 2% against 7,4% in July.** Finally, the topic of sanctions drastically declined as well – from 7,2% in July to 2,6% in August.

One should also pay attention that the following topics, extremely important in Belarusian information field, were almost completely ignored by the Russian niche media:

- murder of the head of Belarusian House in Ukraine Vital Shyshou in Kyiv;
- activities of Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya's staff, the negotiations with the EU on further sanctions;
- discussion on the sports sanctions against Belarusian sports associations and federations.

Main thematic areas:



Source: Own elaboration, Center for Propaganda and Disinformation Analysis



Main narrative

The main narrative referred to **Lukashenko's "Big Conversation with the President", an 8-hour-long news conference, during which bold allegations, such as the West trying to ruin and occupy Belarus, were made. This event was the most extensively discussed topic in August.** Russian niche media intensively shared Lukashenko's quotes from the conference on an unprecedented scale, to the point that separate news reports were devoted to every single "sensational" statement of the leader. On the other hand, this event was completely abandoned by the Belarusian independent media and almost non-existent in Belarusian information space: it took place on August 9, 2020, the anniversary of the presidential elections. Therefore, the flow of news related to this topic completely overwhelmed the agenda.



What goals do those who spread it want to achieve?

One can state that the main goal was to show the "unity" of Belarus and Russia as well as Lukashenko's aggressive rhetoric against the West. Underlining the Belarusian ruler's attacks on the EU and the USA is obviously one of the main goals

of the Russian media, as they are exceptionally attentive to this kind of statements, much more than the Belarusian media.



What is the impact / how is it to be understood?

Firstly, Lukashenko's the only Belarusian actor in the information field, who is commonly known in Russia. That's why he is the main figure portrayed in Russian niche media. At the same time, reporting his sharp rhetoric is necessary to present him as the main scarecrow for the West – one can get an impression that even Putin does not seem as dangerous compared to Lukashenko and his anti-Western verbiage.

Secondly, the complete disregard for issues important in the Belarusian information field (like Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya's achievements or the murder of the head of Belarusian House in Ukraine), shows us the determination of Russian media to present Lukashenko as the only significant political figure that has any influence in Belarus.



Data / information that is considered the most important in this monitoring period

The full-fledged reports of Lukashenko's speech on August 9, 2021 against the background of almost total silence about the issues really dominating Belarusian information field at that moment.



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