

Strengthening the Capacity to Counter Disinformation

Russian information space

May-June 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.

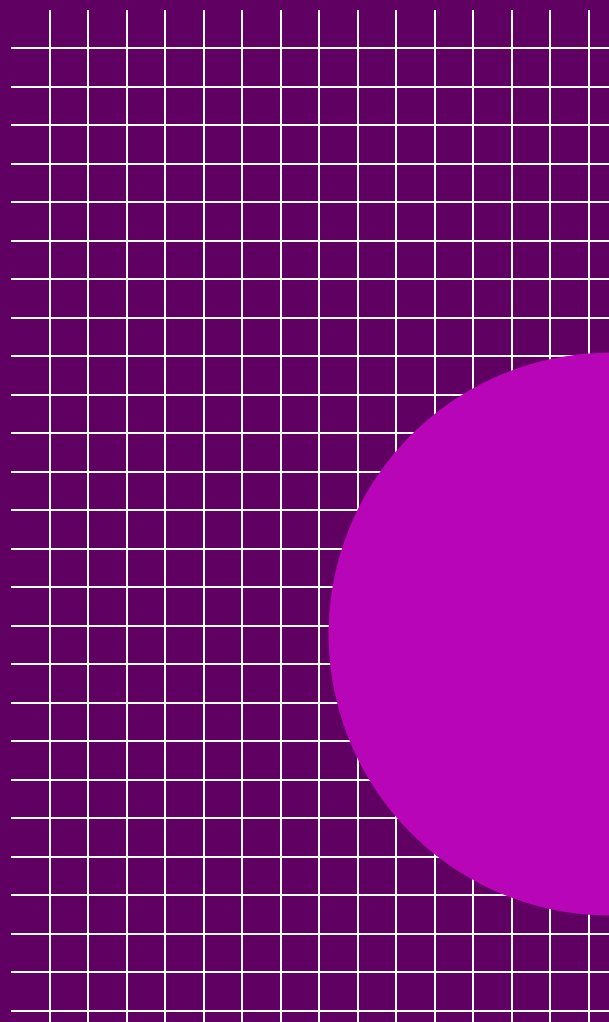
The main activity includes the development of the international Permanent Monitoring and Analyzing Group (PMAG). The main task of the PMAG will be monitoring and analyzing Russian information space in three ways: with the main Russian online media, niche or regional Russian online media as well as Russian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

The monitoring and analysis methodology assume the selection of at least 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 May 2021

Ewelina Załuska



Monitored media:

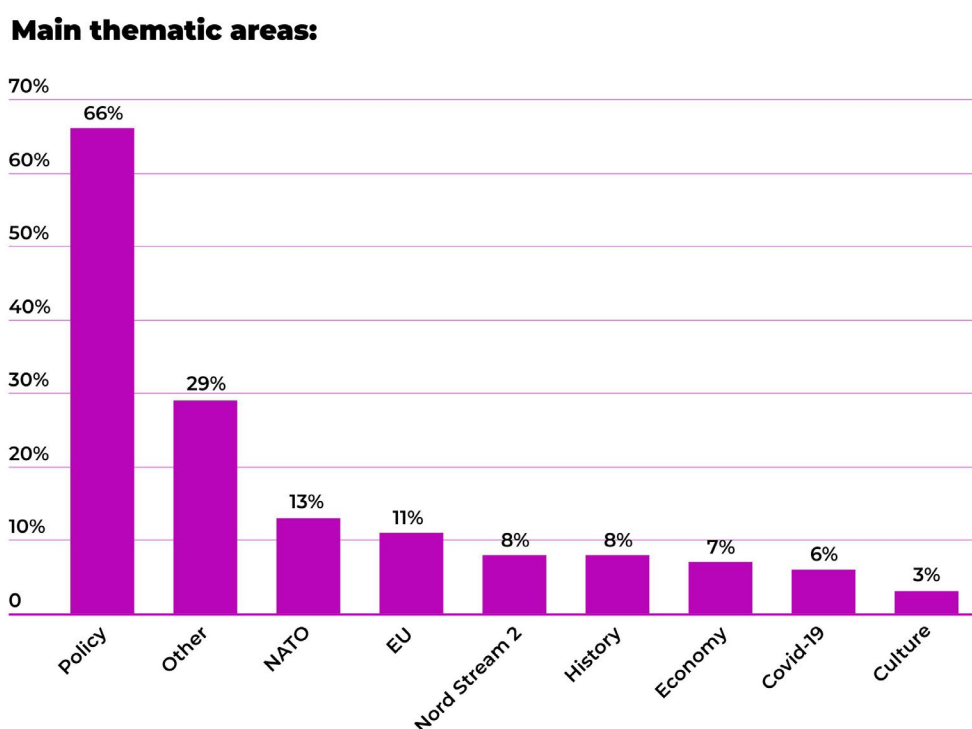
tass.ru, www.rbc.ru, www.gazeta.ru, lenta.ru, www.kp.ru

The research results

Overall number of news items: 214.

Main thematic areas: Policy (66%); Other (29%); NATO (13%); EU (11%); Nord Stream 2 (8%); History (8%); Economy (7%); Covid-19 (6%); Culture (3%).

Thematic areas that dominated: Roman Protasevich's and Sofia Sapega's arrest – 33 mentions; Polish-American cooperation – 15; Sanctions against Belarus and banning Belarusian aircrafts from entering Polish airspace – a result of a false bomb threat report from Belarusian authorities and Protasevich's arrest – 19; Polish-Ukrainian cooperation – 27; World War II history – 12; Polish-Russian relations – 45; Poland's opposition to the construction of Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline – 18.



Source: Own elaboration, Center for Propaganda and Disinformation Analysis



The main narrative says that

Poland is hostile to Russia, which shows by cooperation with Ukraine against Russia, falsifying the history of World War II. Polish elite's see Russia as hostile, inadequate and hypocritical.



What goals do those who spread it want to achieve?

Diminishing the competency of Polish authorities and Poland's importance in the region. Poland is supportive of Belarusian opposition and Ukraine and critical toward Russia media is portraying Poland as a satellite to the US in regards to relations with Russia and Belarus.



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

Protecting Kremlin's agenda regarding the situation in the Eastern Europe. **Poland and Baltic states are mentioned together as EU's primary initiators to impose sanctions or otherwise take action.**



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

1. May 9th is the Victory day in Russia, hence the publication of articles on the role of Red Army in freeing Poland from Nazi Germany.
2. Roman Protasevich's and Sofia Sapega's arrest – they were on a Ryanair Flight 4978 (Polish aircraft) from Athens to Vilnius, while the flight crew received a false bomb threat report and was diverted by Belarusian air traffic control to Minsk National Airport.



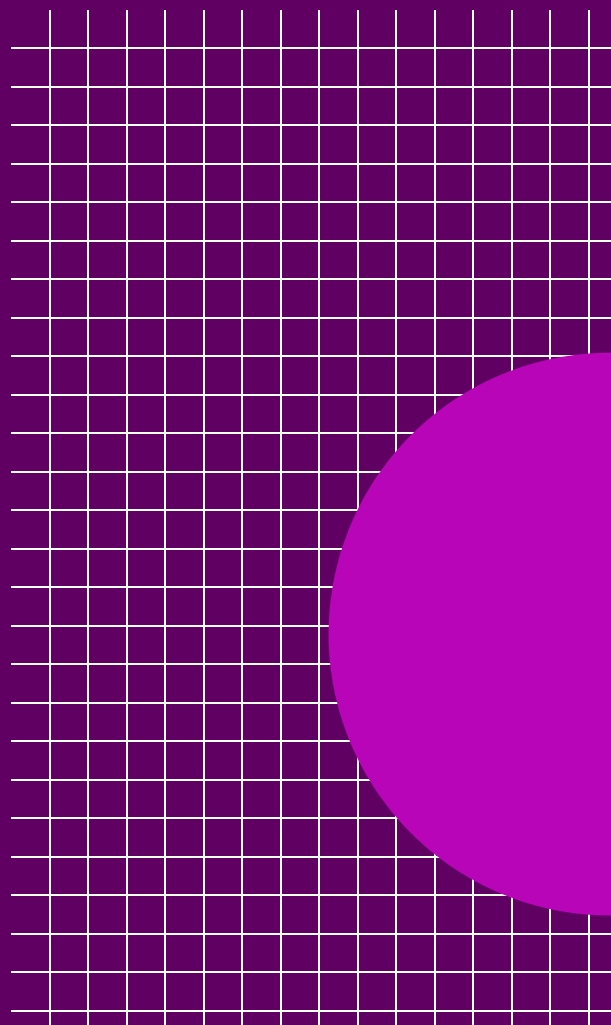
Other comments and / or, if possible, a forecast of the listed points

The topic of Norde Stream 2 will probably get more coverage in the next reports, and since Poland is against its construction it might be continued to be criticized on that.

Poland in the Russian media online

Monitoring and Analysis
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space in May 2021

Olha Tarnavska



Monitored media:

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

The research results

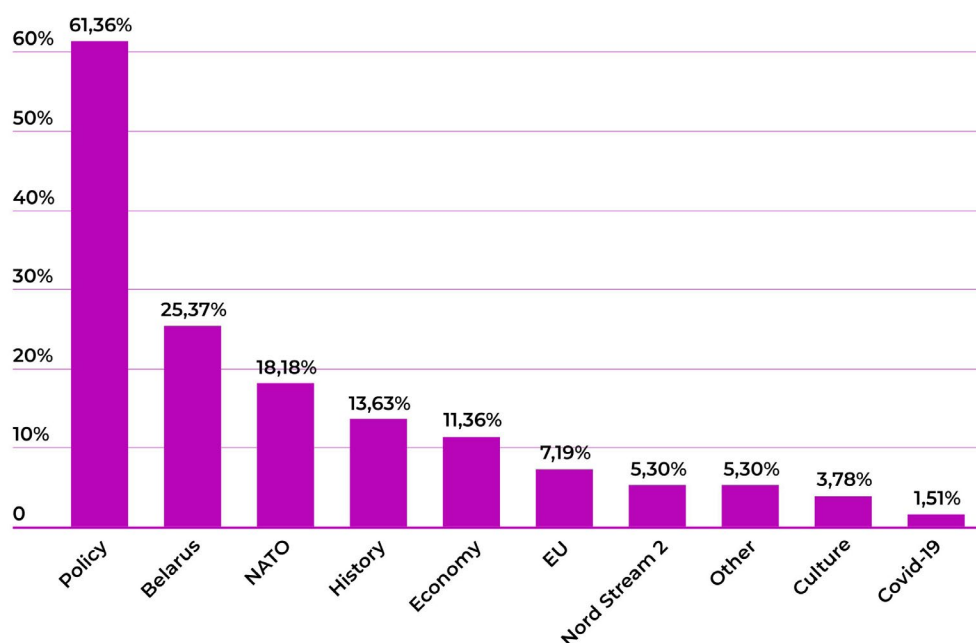
Overall number of news items: 264.

Main thematic areas: Policy (61,36%); Belarus (25,37%); NATO (18,18%); History (13,63%); Economy (11,36%); EU (7,19%); Nord Stream 2 (5,30%); Other (5,30%); Culture (3,78%); Covid-19 (1,51%).

Thematic areas that dominated: Policy – 162 mentions; NATO – 48; History – 36.

What topics gained, what were constant, and what topics decreased (based on tags): In the second half of the monitoring period the following topics gained: Belarus, EU, Economy, Nord Stream 2; The following topics were constant: NATO; The following topics decreased: History.

Main thematic areas:



Source: Own elaboration, Center for Propaganda and Disinformation Analysis



Main narrative

The main narrative says that contemporary Polish historical policy is aimed to undermine the Soviet Army's feat in Poland. The Soviet memorial sites in Poland are being devastated. Such policy is a part of Polish explicit anti-Russian rhetoric, which is being conducted by the Polish government in order to get the advantage in Polish-American relations. This results in the lowest point in relations between Russia and Poland since World War II and the responsibility for this lies entirely with the Polish government.

The second narrative says that Poland interferes in Belarusian affairs and coordinates the activities of the Belarusian opposition. This message was spread after the hijacking of the Ryanair Flight by Belarusian authorities on May 23 with Raman Pratasevich on board.



Goal / Purpose

The main goal is to create a negative image of Poland and shape public opinion using a very sensitive topic for the Russian society – World War II.

Regarding the Belarusian narrative, the goal is to show that the Belarusian opposition and NEXTA are being controlled by Poland, so the protests in Belarus were initiated from the outside. Poland is playing a huge role in that, that's why Poland should be on the "unfriendly states" list.



Impact / Consequences

In May Russian niche media were spreading the narratives that Poland is the most anti-Russian state in the European Union and NATO. Poland is accused of the falsification of history and belittling the role of the Soviet Army in the "liberation" of Poland in 1945. Additionally, Poland was presented as a state that is constantly meddling in Belarusian and Ukrainian affairs.



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

The most important information during the monitoring period was about the increased activities of the NATO members at the Belarusian and Russian borders. The narratives stated that Poland and other member states (especially the USA) are preparing for the military conflict with Belarus and Russia and building up their forces.



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

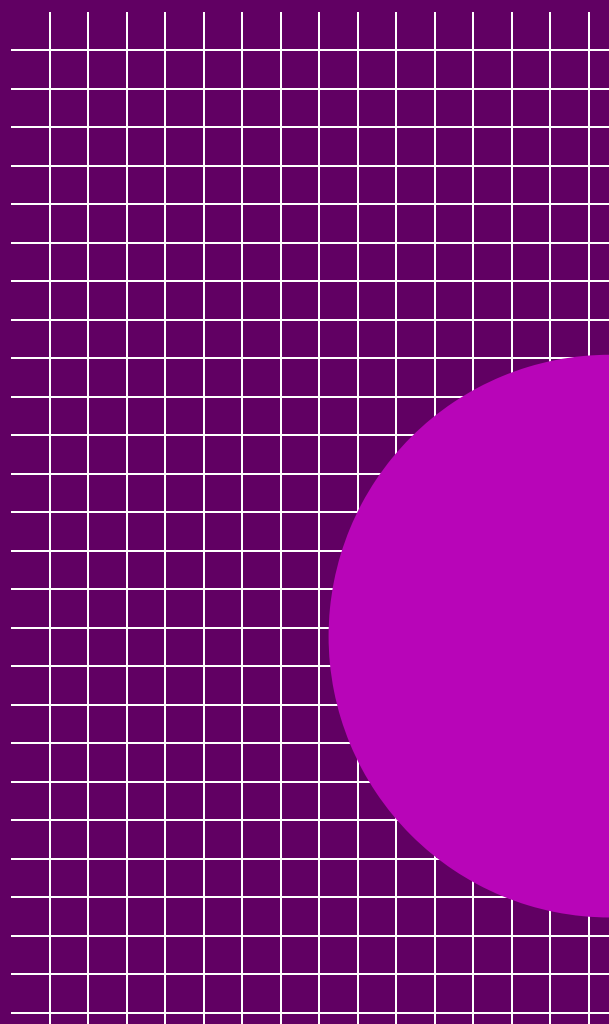
It needs to be pointed out that most of the propaganda narratives was misleading and rather than fake. They are based on facts, but presented in manipulative way, for example NEXTA headquarters are based in Warsaw, therefore Poland must be coordinating the Belarussian opposition movement.

There is a very active comment section on the <https://topwar.ru> web page. The commenting users are openly critical about Poland and Polish contemporary policy, which could indicate the additional activities of the anti-Polish bots.

Baltic states in the Russian media online

Monitoring and Analysis
of Russian information
space in May 2021

Adam Błonowski



Monitored media:

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

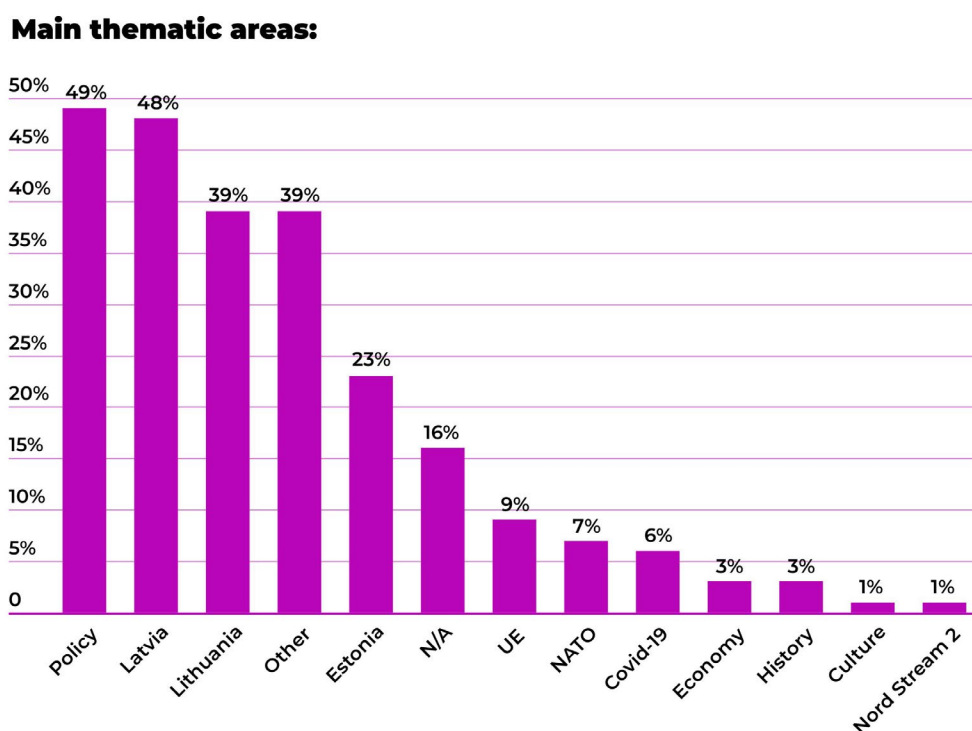
The research results

Overall number of news items: 851.

Main thematic areas: Policy (49%); Latvia (48%); Lithuania (39%); Other (39%); Estonia (23%); N/A (16%); EU (9%); NATO (7%); Covid-19 (6%); Economy (3%); History (3%); Culture (1%); Nord Stream 2 (1%).

Thematic areas that dominated: Removing the flag of Belarus at the World Championships in Riga; Forced landing of Ryanair flight in Minsk.

What topics gained, what were constant, and what topics decreased (based on tags): Gained: Economy, Covid-19, NATO; Constant: Other, History, Culture, EU, Latvia; Decreased: Policy, Lithuania, Estonia.



Source: Own elaboration, Center for Propaganda and Disinformation Analysis



Main narrative

- Presentation of the offensive policy of the United States against Russia – the largest military maneuvers in 25 years, as well as the ineffectiveness of American soldiers during the landing in Estonia.
- The discriminatory policy of the Latvian authorities towards Latvian citizens who want to celebrate May 9.
- Serious consequences for Latvian economy and foreign policy for removing the Belarusian flag in Riga during the Ice Hockey World Championship.
- **The Russophobic position of the Baltic states, which demand sanctions against Russia in NATO and the EU.**



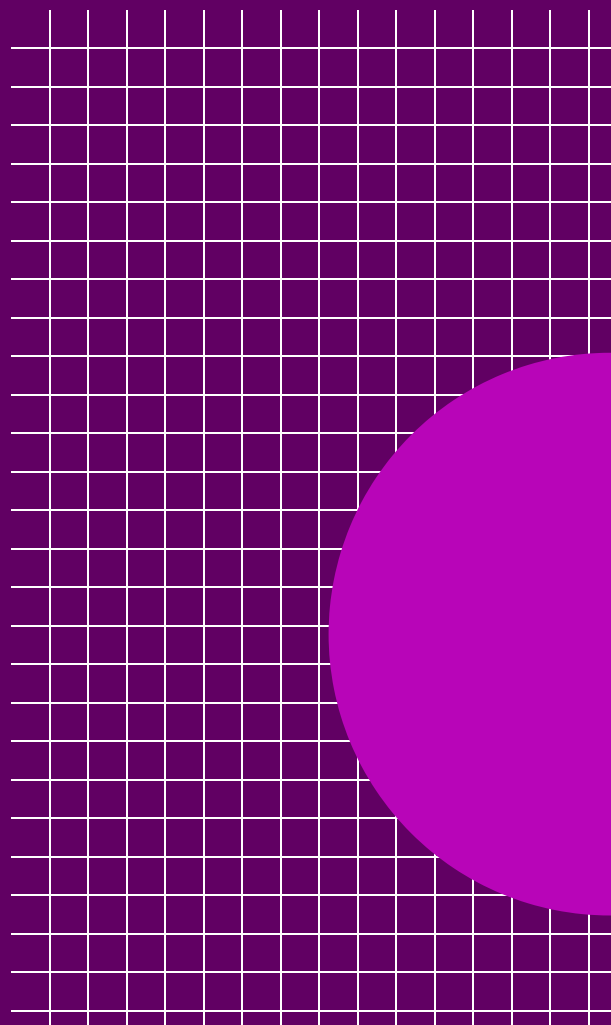
Data / information that is considered the most important in this monitoring period

1. American military maneuvers in Estonia; Statement by the President of Latvia Egils Levits on the Second World War; Victory Day (9th May) at the Monument to the Liberators of Soviet Latvia and Riga.
2. Ice Hockey World Championship in Latvia; Belarus launches a criminal case against the mayors of Riga and the Foreign Minister of Latvia, due to the incident with the Belarusian state flag at the Ice Hockey World Cup.
3. Lithuania and Latvia have banned Belarusian Belavia airlines; Belarus has declared two Lithuanian diplomats personae non gratae in response to Lithuania's decision to expel two Belarusian diplomats.

Baltic states in the Russian media online

Monitoring and Analysis
of Russian information
space in May 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: 308.

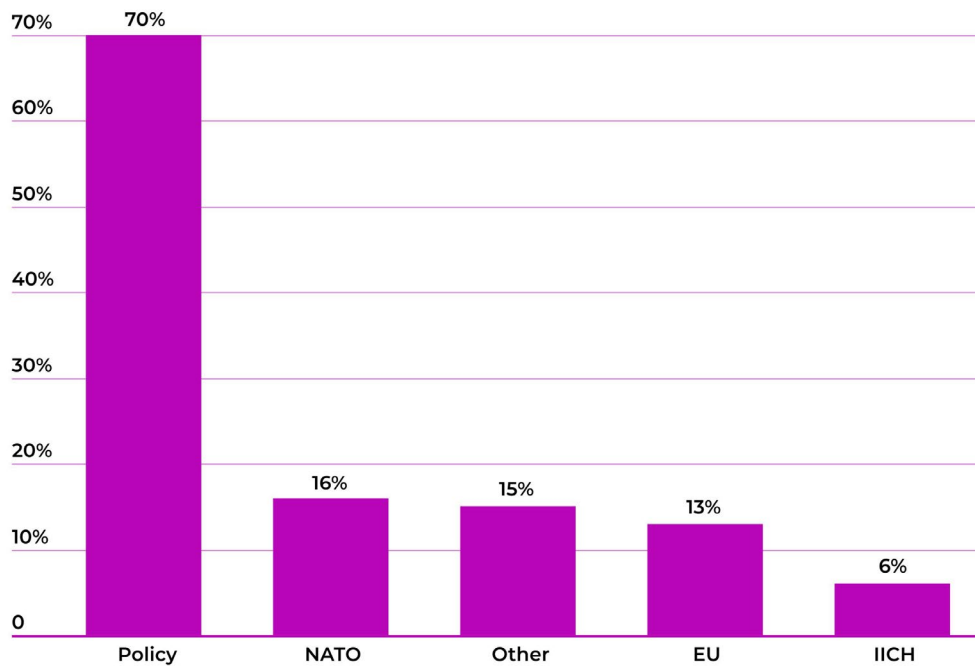
Main thematic areas: The main topic covered hijacking of plane by Belarus authorities and the EU potential sanctions in response to the event (45%). Other dominant topics were NATO exercise in Estonia (7%), IIHF (Ice Hockey World Championship) follows (6%) and then Ukraine's western integration efforts are discussed (5%), most under the topic of NATO Bucharest Summit (4%). Another topic reflected more intensely than others was an issue with replacement of Belarusian and Russian flags in Riga during the IIHF (5%).

Thematic areas that dominated: An absolute dominant thematic area was "policy" (70% of all tags) with other themes way ahead. The second most reflected theme was NATO (16%) and "other" (15%) mostly covering sport, IIHF in particular (6%). EU followed with 13%.

From the country perspective, Lithuania dominated and was covered in 58% of cases. Latvia and Estonia were covered in 36% and 32% of articles respectively.

What topics gained, what were constant, and what topics decreased (based on tags): The topic of policy was covered intensely throughout May. Belarus issues entered the agenda on 23 May when the incident with hijacking of the plane took place and remained until the end of May; Belarus was not covered before. Ukraine's European and NATO integration prospects were among the main topics (5%) in early-May as the Bucharest 9 Summit took place. Later Ukraine was covered less. NATO coverage fluctuated and increased during the NATO exercise in Estonia – Defender Europe (2%) in Mid-May and later during Spring Storm (3%) in late-May. History topic also gained during the Victory Day celebrations and remained covered on 8 and 9 May (3%).

Main thematic areas:



Source: Own elaboration, Center for Propaganda and Disinformation Analysis



The main narrative says that

- Skepticism in respect to Ukraine's European and NATO integration was communicated.
- **The Baltics and NATO are presented as confrontational in respect to Russia. NATO is presented acting aggressively along Russia's borders. The Baltic and CEE countries are presented as positioning Russia as a threat.**
- The West, with the Baltics states acting as peace-setters, will punish Belarus for hijacking the plane.
- Latvia acted wrongfully, even shamefully when changed Belarus' flag and Russia's flag during the IICH.
- Latvia is presented as alienated from WWII and the great Victory.



What goals do those who spread it want to achieve?

- **To demonstrate Ukrainians's failure and weak prospects of Westernisation.**
- **To minimize sympathies of Russian audience towards Baltic countries, to illustrate them as unfriendly and hysteric.**
- To compromise official governmental policies of the Baltic countries in respect foreign military presence, stance on Belarus etc.



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

- **To alienate Russian people from the neighboring Balts and illustrate them as emotional/hysteric, radical, unfriendly.** To depict the Baltics as arrogant and unfriendly for the Russia's domestic needs. Framing an external "evil" for the domestic audience along with legitimizing Russia's security concerns.
- To compromise Ukraine's example of changes brought about by the popular uprising in order to prevent similar sentiments in Russia.
- **To polarize the Baltic societies and appeal to Russian communities, especially using history matters and compromising national policies.**



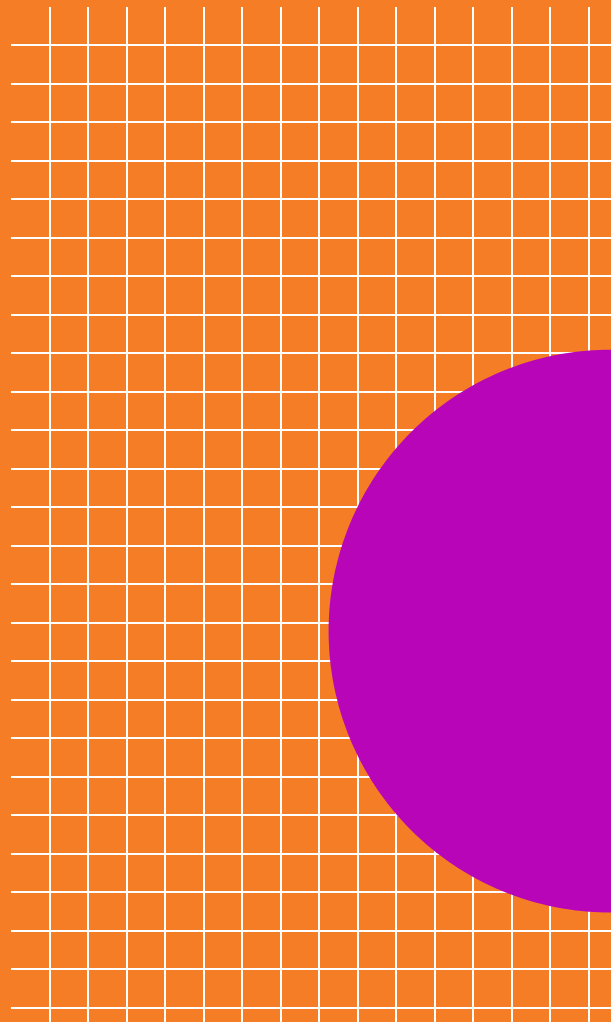
Data / information that is considered the most important in this monitoring period

1. Skeptical reflection of Ukraine's European and NATO integration efforts;
2. Latvia's illustration as a betrayer of historic, universal values, namely the significance of Victory in WWII;
3. Proactive engagement of the Baltic countries in response to Belarus' hijacked plane crisis;
4. Reflection of flag change by Latvia during the II CH.

Poland in the Russian media online

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space in June 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: 213.

Main thematic areas: Politics (63%); Other (22%); Economy (19%); NATO (16%); Nord Stream 2 (15%).

Thematic areas that dominated: Cyberattacks in Poland and the accusations of its preparation levelled at Russia; Poland's objections against the construction of Nord Stream 2 as well as expansionist policy followed by Russia; Baltic Pipe gas line project: suspension of works in the Danish section; Warsaw as a potential place for transferring talks from Minsk; EU sanctions imposed on Belarus; Belarus establishes National Unity Day which will be celebrated on 17th November – Poland's reaction; Belarusian opposition's activity in Poland.

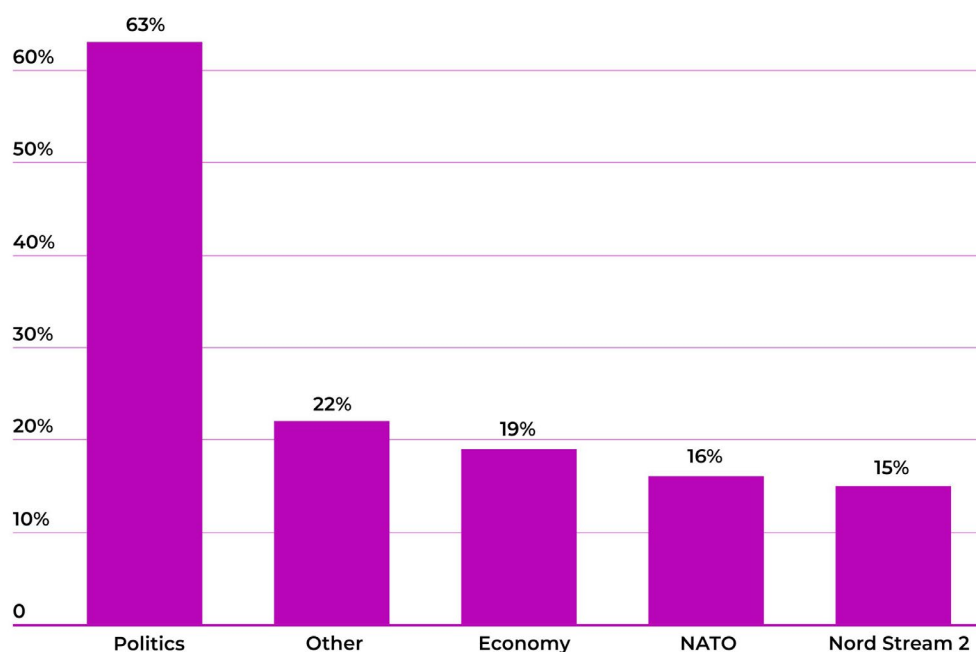
Which topics increased, were constant and decreased in popularity (based on tags)?

Increase in popularity: economy, Nord Stream 2, NATO;

Constant: politics, EU, history, culture;

Decrease in popularity: COVID-19, other.

Main thematic areas:



Source: Own elaboration, Center for Propaganda and Disinformation Analysis



The main narrative says that

Poland fears Russia and is hostile towards it.



What goals do those who spread it want to achieve?

The actions undertaken by the Polish government as well as the stance adopted towards Russia, Belarus and Ukraine result from Russophobia and they are a means for protecting their own economic interests.



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

Downplaying the importance of the Polish interests, showing that the fears of Russian attack against Poland or its responsibility for the attempts to disrupt the work of the Polish constitutional authorities (cyberattack) are groundless, which is why the Polish objections against the completion of Nord Stream 2 are treated not only as a problem related to the safety of Poland and the region, but also a manifestation of Russophobia.



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

The construction of Nord Stream 2 is damaging the relations between Poland and Russia, which is visible in the media. Often the articles comprise the statements by the representatives of the State Duma, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or the President in response to the Polish politicians uttering their negative comments about Russia.



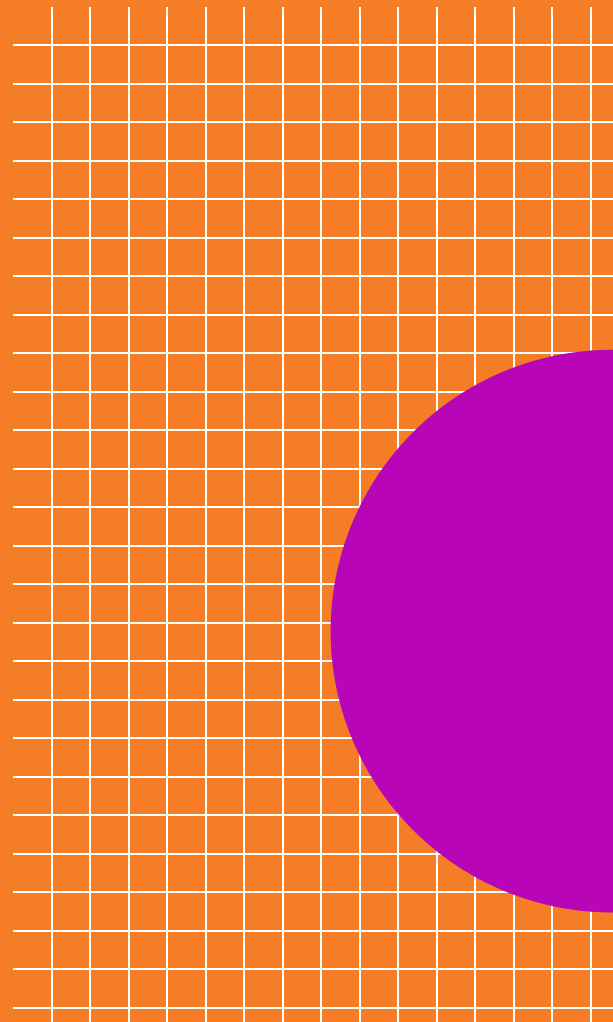
Other comments and / or, if possible, a forecast of the listed points

The situation concerning the construction of Nord Stream 2 and Baltic Pipe is responsible for the increased interest in economic subject areas. Possible continuation of this trend in the following months.

Poland in the Russian media online

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Olha Tarnavska



Monitored media:

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

The research results

Overall number of news items: 278 (an increase of 5,30% in relation to previous month).

Main thematic areas: Policy (47,12%); NATO (14,02%); Economy (12,94%); Belarus (12,23%); History (10,79%); Other – Sport, Euro 2020 (9,71%); EU (6,83%); Nord Stream 2 (5,75%); Covid-19 (3,59%); Culture (2,51%).

Thematic areas that dominated: Policy – 131 mentions; NATO – 39; Economy – 36.

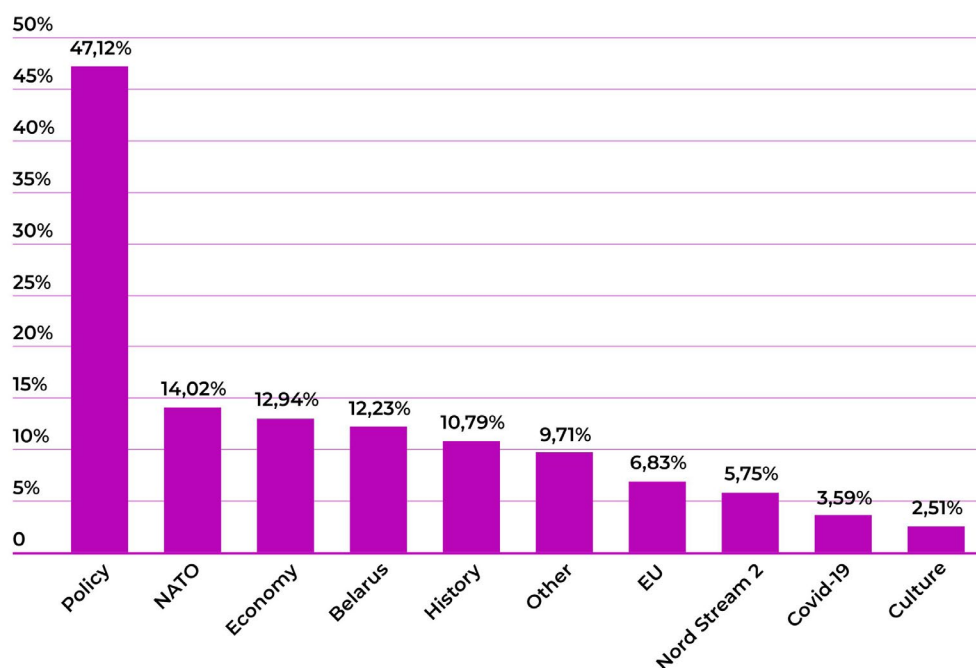
What topics gained, what were constant, and what topics decreased (based on tags):

In June the following topics gained: Economy (May: 30 news; June: 36 news, an increase of 20%); Other (May: 14 news; June: 27 news, an increase of 92,85%); Covid-19 (May: 4 news; June: 10 news, an increase of 150%).

The following topics were constant: NS2 (May: 15 news; June: 16 news); EU (May: 19 news; June: 19 news).

The following topics decreased: NATO (May: 48 news; June: 39 news, a decrease of 18,75%); Belarus (May: 67 news; June: 34, a decrease of 49,25%); History (May: 36 news; June: 30, a decrease of 16,66%); Policy (May: 162 news; June: 131, a decrease of 19,13%); Culture (May: 10 news; June: 7, a decrease of 30%).

Main thematic areas:



Source: Own elaboration, Center for Propaganda and Disinformation Analysis



Main narrative

The military conflict with Russian Federation is perceived among Polish political elites as a highly possible, that's why Poland together with NATO members, especially the USA, Romania and Baltic states, are currently developing their military potential, e.g by the installation of the Aegis Weapon System the missile defense complex near Redzikowo. That has begun, by deploying on June 21 st ATGM FGM-148F Javelin in the east of the country, as well as by purchasing Bayraktar TB2 aerial vehicle from Turkey. **In this context, propagandists pointed out that those actions are directed against “supposed Russian aggression” which, that according to them originates from unjustified Russophobia.** Additionally, Russian media were spreading the message that NATO is “openly preparing to take over the Kaliningrad Oblast”, as evidenced by the increase of NATO's military exercises along the Russian borders and further deployment of NATO's troops in Poland. Poland plays a key role in those events.



What goals do those who spread it want to achieve?

The primary goal is to show Poland as an aggressor, that poses a threat to Russia, as well as to Belarus. This propaganda narrative is based mainly on facts (modernization of the Polish army), which are presented in a quite misleading way.



Impact / Consequences

Russian niche media tried to shape the public discussion about Poland as a part of NATO. This is a part of the bigger propaganda strategy of the Kremlin, which aims to show the recipients that Russia is surrounded by enemies that are preparing for the military conflict with Russia. Hence, a false image is being created that Russia is a victim of the “Western aggressive policy”. In this regard, propagandists emphasized, that Russian authorities should adopt a more stringent policy towards Poland.



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

Niche media informed that the Polish President wanted to discuss the Nord Stream 2 project with Joe Biden before the Biden-Putin summit. Due to the completion of the first section of Nord Stream 2, the increased interest in this issue can be expected in the next month.



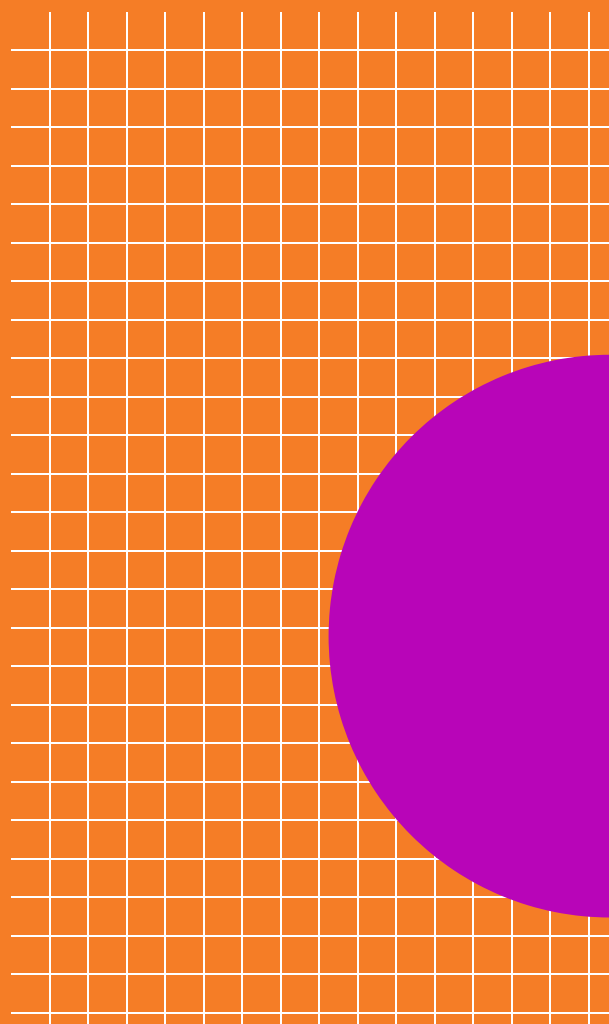
Other comments and / or, if possible, a forecast of the listed points

The main narrative during the monitoring period was spread mainly by www.topwar.ru. The articles published on this media are characterized by fierce criticism mainly of the Polish historical and military policy. **Additionally, in June niche media was frequently quoting the President of Belarus Aleksandr Lukashenko who accused Poland and other European states of supporting “terrorist sleeper cells” in Belarus.**

Baltic states in the Russian media online

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Adam Błonowski



Monitored media:

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

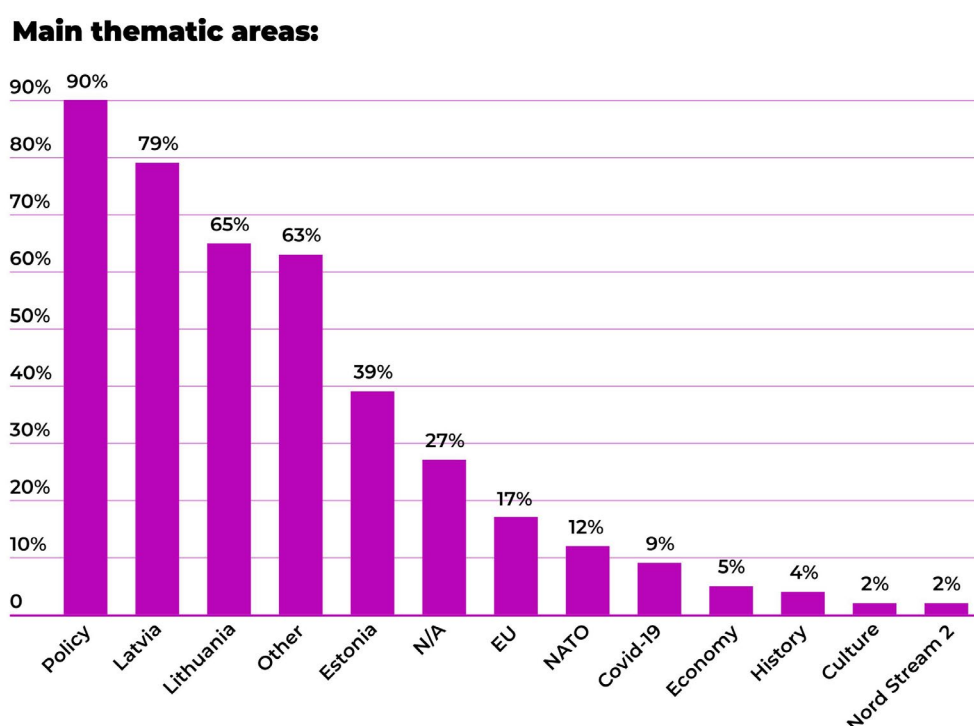
The research results

Overall number of news items: 493.

Main thematic areas: Policy (90%); Latvia (79%); Lithuania (65%); Other (63%); Estonia (39%); N/A (27%); EU (17%); NATO (12%); Covid-19 (9%); Economy (5%); History (4%); Culture (2%); Nord Stream 2 (2%).

Thematic areas that dominated: Crisis on the Lithuanian-Belarusian border – Belarus accused of transferring illegal migrants to Europe; Lithuania plans to build a wall on the border with Belarus; Liquidation of the Russian-language channel LTV7 in Latvia; In Estonia was an incident involving drunk British soldiers; Local elections in Latvia; NATO starts naval exercises in the Baltic Sea; NATO Summit – US President to discuss Russian cyberspace threats with Baltic heads of state.

What topics gained, what were constant, and what topics decreased (based on tags): Gained: NATO, EU; Constant: Policy, History, Covid-19, N/A, Lithuania, Estonia; Decreased: Economy, Culture, Other, NS2, Latvia.



Source: Own elaboration, Center for Propaganda and Disinformation Analysis



Main narrative

- Estonia accuses Russia of violating the air border – Russia denied information about violation of Estonian air borders.
- An incident in Estonia involving drunk British soldiers – Russia has been accused of discrediting NATO soldiers in the Baltics states.
- Local elections in Latvia – the lowest turnout in the history of the country.
- Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov delivered a speech to the OSCE Commissioner on National Minorities – the deteriorating situation of the Russian-speaking population in the Baltic countries.
- Liquidation of the Russian-language channel LTV7 in Latvia – TV in Russian will be stopped in Latvia; the liquidation LTV7 in Latvia is an act of linguistic aggression.
- Crisis on the Lithuanian-Belarusian border – Belarus accused of transferring illegal migrants to Europe.



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

Russia to inspect military facilities in Estonia. It was also informed about the ongoing NATO military exercises and that the inspection was carried out under the Treaty of Vienna.

Russia raised the issue of the situation of the Russian media in Lithuania in the OSCE. The ban on broadcasting by seven Russian TV channels was mentioned. The narrative about the coordinated action of the Baltic states against the Russian media dominated the news.

In Latvia, a MP was detained in the case of espionage for Russia. The media coverage is dominated by information about the arrest and searches of the detained deputy.

NATO begins naval exercises in the Baltic Sea. Therefore, it was reminded that these are traditional spring exercises, e.g. ships of the Baltic states, in which also ships from other NATO member states took part.

Lithuania plans to build a wall on the border with Belarus due to the influx of illegal migrants. Statements by Lithuanian politicians, including the minister of internal affairs and the prime minister, were presented, which showed the lack of coherence in their views on securing the Lithuanian border. It is also reminded of the tense

situation on the Lithuanian-Belarusian border, as well as the Baltic states' earlier plans to build border fences.

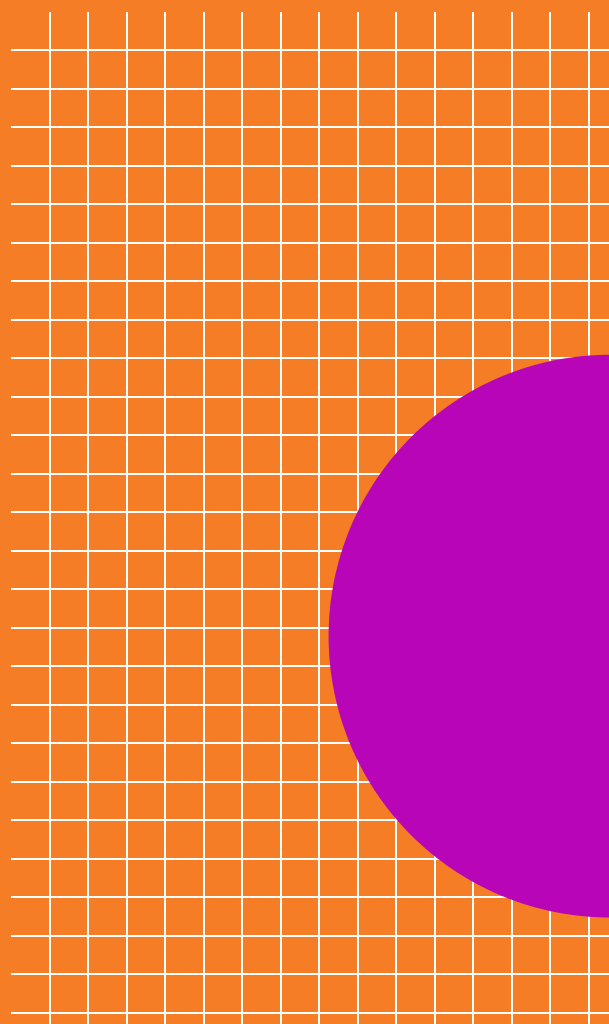
NATO Summit – the US president will discuss the threats related to Russian cyber attacks with representatives of the Baltic states. The statement was quoted by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, who accused Russia of an „aggressive behavior” and demanded that the alliance’s defense be strengthened and funding increased. The Russian media pointed to the increased activity of NATO on Russian borders.

The Belarusian Prosecutor General’s Office will check the involvement of the former president of Lithuania in the genocide of Belarusians. Presentation of the Belarusian version on the connection of Valdas Adamkus with collaborative formations during World War II. On the other hand, there were quoted perfunctory statements by Adamkus, which show that he had not been aware of anything.

Baltic states in the Russian media online

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Evija Djatkoviča



Monitored media:

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

The research results

Overall number of news items: 188 messages were screened throughout June. There was -39% information flow decrease comparing to May.

Main thematic areas: This month four topics dominated. The main information flow was devoted to the Belarus issues (19%), including EU sanction policy after hijacking of plane, were covered most. Then WWII issues were intensely reflected (9%), including Russia's significance in Eastern Europe. Another dominant topic was coverage of Ukraine (6%), including in terms of EU – Putin summit, provision of armament by the US and purchase of vessels from UK and the EU failed summit with Putin (5%).

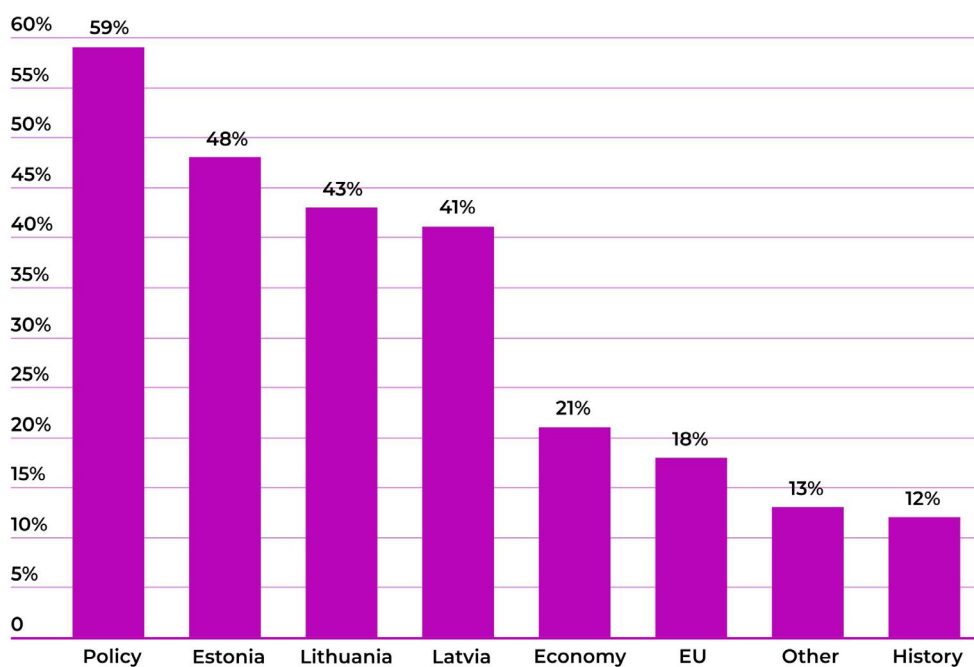
Thematic areas that dominated: Throughout June an absolute dominant thematic area again was policy (average 59% of all tags). The second dominant theme was economy (21%), including in terms of EU response measure to Belarus crisis. "EU" issues come next (18%). Certain number of articles were related to the theme "other" (13%) mostly covering sports (9%) and IHC in particular. History theme came right after (12%). Latvia and Lithuania were covered equally, i.e., 41% and 43% respectively. Estonia was covered slightly more intensely (48%).

What topics gained, what were constant, and what topics decreased (based on tags): Retrospectively looking "policy" decreased by -17% comparing to coverage in May, though it dominated the agenda throughout June. Belarus issues that entered agenda in late-May remained on agenda throughout June; Ukraine topic had exited policy agenda in late-May but was back in June and was covered from time to time – in relation to specific events (EU-Russia summit) or occasions (armament purchase deals).

NATO coverage was observed in June comparing to May (-34%) as no major NATO exercise took place comparing to May. Likewise, "other" topic (-13%) was observed in June as coverage of IICH gradually declined comparing to May. In June coverage of Lithuania decreased by -26%, but coverage of Estonia increased by +49%.

Economy coverage gained significantly, i.e., by 173%. Its coverage was more intense in early-June when EU discussed new sanctions against Belarus. History gained (+44%) and EU issues also gained (+35%).

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 structures. Sarcastic attitude is emphasized regarding Ukraine's role in the EU and the West; Ukraine is demonstrated as a puppet state.
- EU cooperation with Putin is hampered only by some countries, including the Baltic ones.
- NATO troops in the Baltics are disorganized, misbehave and harm local social environment.
- Russia depicts its very special role in the Eastern European countries' history and existence.



What goals do those who spread it want to achieve?

- To ridicule Ukraine's European integration efforts in the eyes of Russian audience.
- To illustrate EU as internally split in respect to cooperation with Russia, with key players being positive while bunch of small, hysteric CEE countries including the Baltics, remaining unfriendly.
- To compromise NATO deterrence measures in the Baltics.
- To increase Russia's significance and justify its interests in the neighboring countries.



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

The main target is Russian domestic audience that is persuaded to believe in:

- the failure of Ukraine to implement democracy and European integration aimed at preventing similar societal moods in Russia;
- NATO dysfunctionality and harmful effects for the hosting nations;
- Baltic countries back nonfriendly policies of the EU in respect to Russia, thus Russia tries to eradicate sympathies towards neighbors in domestic audience;
- **exclusiveness and "derzhavnost" of Russia, especially in the neighborhood.**



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

1. Coverage of Ukraine and EU in general in terms of failed EU summit with Putin.
2. Reflection of US soldiers' misbehavior in Estonia.
3. Reflection of Russia's historical significance in Eastern Europe.



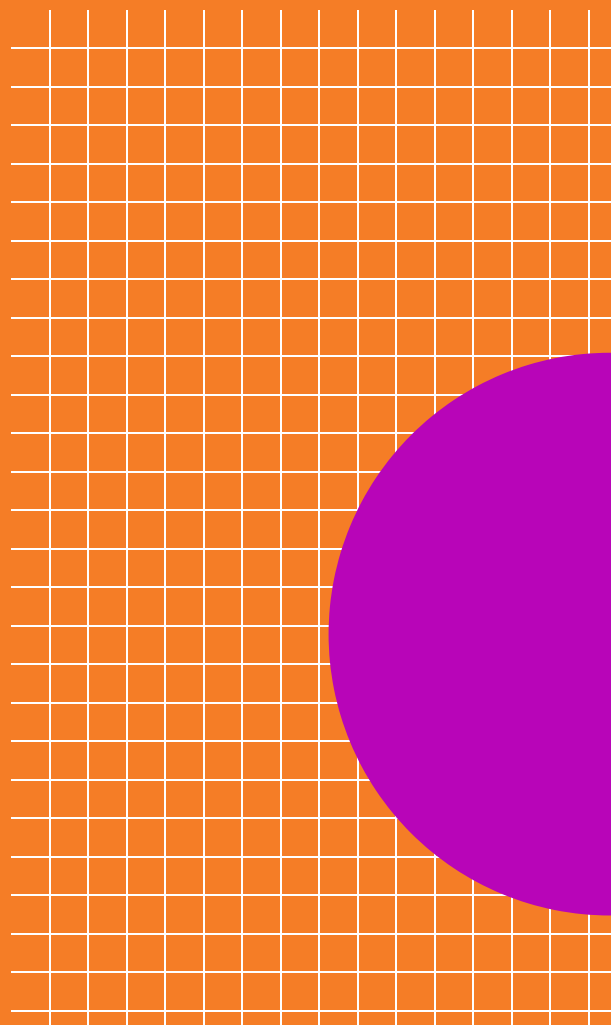
Other comments and / or, if possible, a forecast of the listed points

Politics will remain the dominating theme. Belarus crisis, Ukraine's European integration, unfriendliness and hysteric perception of Russia by the Baltics, and WWII topics will be dominant. Overall, narratives and reflected topics will change, but their goal and purpose will remain unchanged.

Belarus in the Russian media online

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of Russian information
space in June 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: 1456.

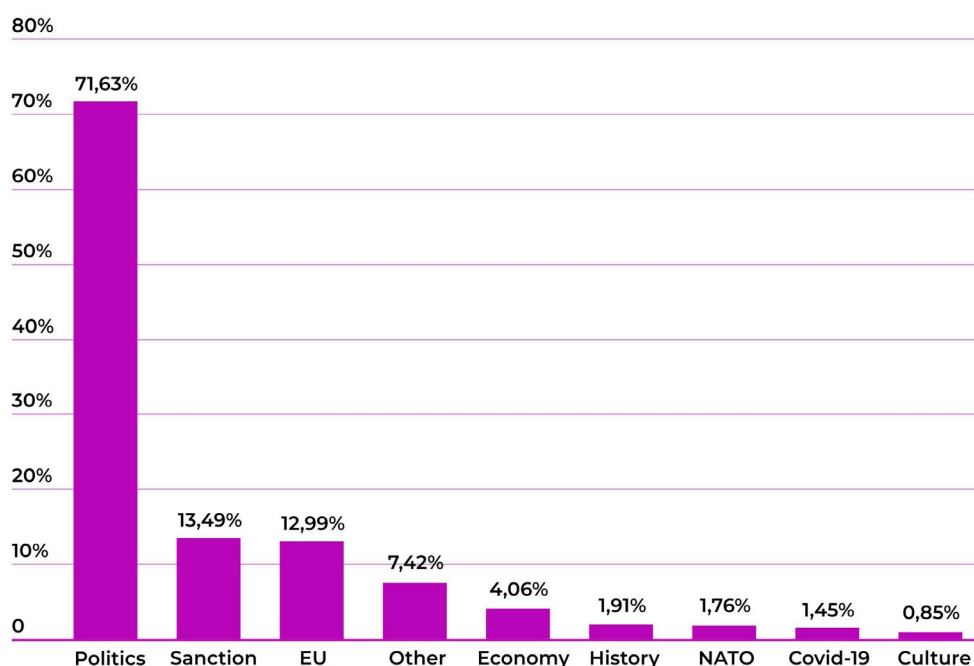
Main thematic areas: Politics (71,63%); Sanction (13,49%); EU (12,99%); Other (7,42%); Economy (4,06%); History (1,91%); NATO (1,76%); Covid-19 (1,45%); Culture (0,85%).

Thematic areas that dominated: politics – 72% (slight decrease compared to the previous reporting period).

This subject area was dominated by:

- EU/US sanctions imposed on Belarus as well as Belarus' responses with regards to them; Protasiewicz and Sapiega's cases (interviews, criticism of the opposition, etc.); meetings of the representatives of Russian and Belarusian Ministries of Foreign Affairs; Belarus' walkout from the Eastern Partnership; further integration between Russia and Belarus; migration from Belarus to Baltic states; involvement of American services in the attempted coup in Belarus and the overthrow of Lukashenko; Ukraine joins EU in imposing sanctions on Belarus, criticising Belarusian authorities (e.g. on the issue of Crimea or recognition of separatist republics in the eastern part of the country);
- 13% of articles with EU tag – 259 articles – an increase (also in the absolute number) in the articles with this tag compared to the previous period, mainly due to sanctions;
- 13% of articles with a new tag sanctions – 269 articles.

Main thematic areas:



Source: Own elaboration, Center for Propaganda and Disinformation Analysis



Main narrative and their aims

Russia:

- depicting Russia as an advocate of Belarus, joint response to Western sanctions, sustaining the economy, attempts to stabilise prices in Belarus, \$500m loan for Belarus;
- representing Belarus' interests during talks between the authorities of Russia and US/EU;
- **depicting Russia and Belarus' relations as equal, emphasising Lukashenko's statements about the lack of need to deploy new Russian forces in Belarus;**
- emphasising burdening Russia with the economic and political consequences of the Belarusian authorities' actions;
- emphasising that Western sanctions threaten to make Belarus even more dependent on Russia.

It aims to emphasise the independence of Belarus from Russia, cooperation on equal terms and mutual benefits, the absence of threat from Russia to the independence of Belarus, and at reassuring Belarusians about the possibility of the country being subordinated to Russia or the desire for Belarus to be absorbed by Russia.

Belarusian authorities:

- continuous emphasis on the atmosphere of control by the Belarusian authorities over every aspect of state's activity and the state itself (media, organisations, economy, all channels of information) – the rhetoric aimed at frightening all (potential) opponents of the regime – harsh consequences of speaking out against the authorities are emphasised;
- 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 EU/US sanctions against Belarus, so as to depict members of opposition as traitors;
- the opposition depicted as dishonourable, internally divided and pursuing their own private interests rather than the interest of the state/society („revelations” by Protasiewicz about members of the opposition, publication of names, description of the inside processes);
- emphasising that the main opposition forces are funded externally by Russia.

Ukraine:

- continuing to depict Ukraine as an „obstructionist” – complete closure of airspace, threatening to impose sanctions on Belarus, attempts to strengthen the border with Belarus;
- criticism of the Ukrainian politicians regarding the actions of Ukraine towards Belarus (e.g. closing the air space or the Rada of Ukraine's deputy's comment that it is Ukraine that will pay dearly for breaking the trade relations with Belarus, and not the other way round);
- depicting Ukraine as a weak, unreliable country, which is not taken into account by other countries.

Migrants:

- attempting to cross the Belarusian border with the Baltic states – fresh information, no specific narrative yet, topic to be discussed further.



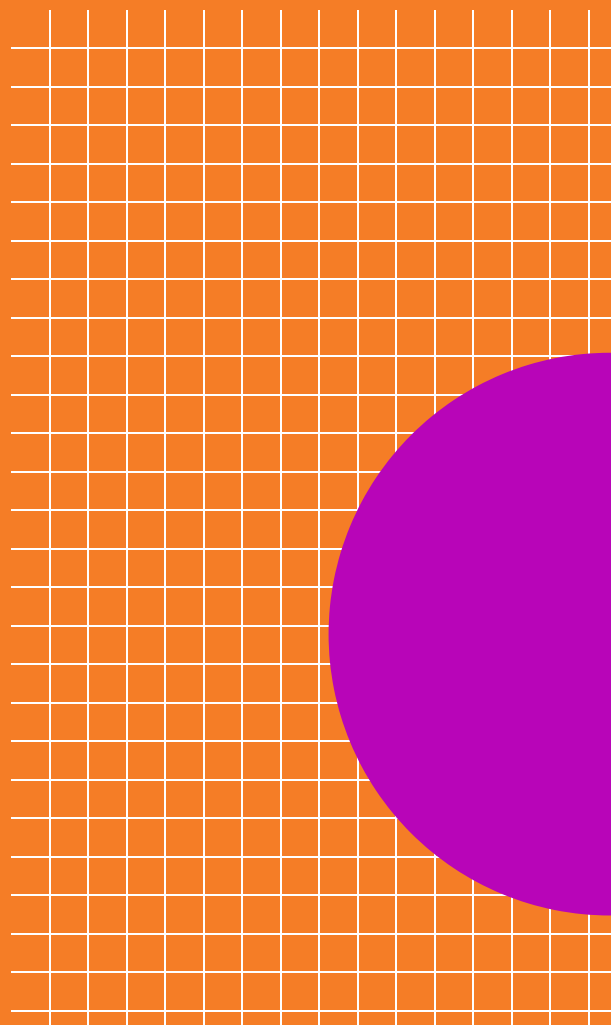
Data / information that is considered the most important in this monitoring period

Actions aiming to discredit the Belarusian opposition – mainly through interviews with Protasiewicz.

Belarus in the Russian media online

Monitoring and Analysis
of Russian information
space in June 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: 456 (decreases of 30% – 662 May).

Main thematic areas: Russia (16,7%); Lukashenko (16,2%); Sanctions (14%); Raman Pratasevich (10,3%); Flights (9,2%); Putin (8,5%); Ryanair plane (4,6%); Sofia Sapega (4,6%); Covid-19 (3%); Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya (1,3%); Political prisoners (0,9%).

Thematic areas that dominated: According to the results of monitoring in June, it can be stated that politics continued to dominate the agenda of Russian niche media in the context of Belarus – at least around 60% were dedicated to this topic. It included Belarusian-Russian relations (around 18%) and the consequences of the landing of Ryanair plane in Minsk on May 23, 2021 (together around 20%). One should also underline an outburst growth of history-related topics around June 22 (the day Nazi Germany attacked the USSR in 1941) – the overall number of such messages wasn't significant against the background of other topics, amounting to less than 5%.

What topics gained, what were constant, and what topics decreased (based on tags): Lukashenko continued to take his traditional place on the agenda of Russian niche media – 16,2% of all the messages were dedicated to him. However, there is a small decrease in comparison to May results (by almost 2% – from 18%). The topics, Ryanair-related case and involved personalities into it showed more than 2 times decrease in comparison with May (around 20% against 45%). At the same time, the topic of Western sanctions against Lukashenko regime entered the top-3 of the most popular topics during the month – 14% (almost 3 times growth - from 5,2% in May). Finally, the messages mentioning Russia suddenly became the most popular ones – 16,7%. Taking into consideration that Vladimir Putin also got 8,5% (5,5% in May), one can state that Russia was the main subject to be mentioned in the context of Belarus in Russian niche media in June.

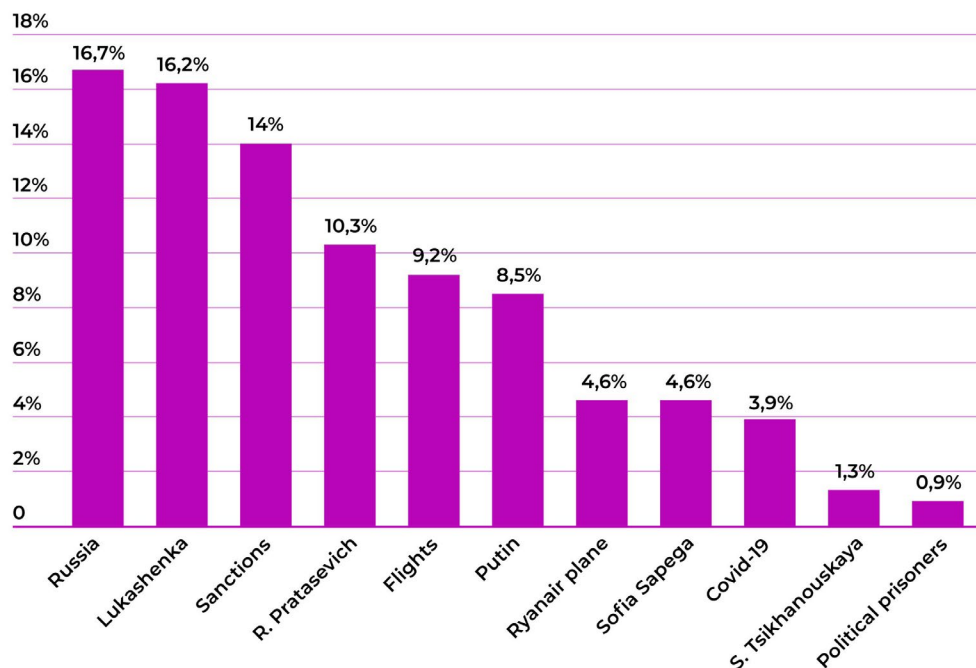
However, it is necessary to mention that many topics covered very thoroughly in Belarusian information space (both by independent media and Lukashenko propaganda means). For example, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya was mentioned only 6 times (1,3% of the messages) within the whole June. At the same time, the following topics that for a couple of days were on the top of Belarusian agenda were ignored by the monitored Russian niche media (were mentioned one time or not mentioned at all):

- illegal migrants sent to Lithuania by Lukashenko regime;
- constitutional reform, promoted by Lukashenko and Kremlin;
- scandal in the Orthodox Church – the removal of Archbishop Artsemi from the

Hrodna diocese for openly expressing his political views against Lukashenko regime and violence against the Belarusians;

- protests on Belarusian-Polish border in order to push the EU to implement further sanctions against Lukashenko regime.

Main thematic areas:



Source: Own elaboration, Center for Propaganda and Disinformation Analysis



Main narrative

It is necessary to speak about a couple of narratives. The first one was the reporting Lukashenko's "mindflow" on June 22, when he openly compared current EU authorities and especially the German government with Nazi Germany and implementation of sanctions against him to genocide during WWII.

The strongest narrative in June was promoted in the context of Putin and Biden's meeting: Putin is supporting Lukashenko and will stand his ground in the negotiations with Biden. It should be understood in the way that **the Kremlin will never step back in its "sphere of interest" and will get what it wants**. Belarus constantly was mentioned in the context of this meeting, which tells us that this topic was at least an important point for the Kremlin in its negotiations with the West.



What goals do those who spread it want to achieve?

The main goal was to demonstrate the public support of Kremlin to its main formal ally. The messages on Putin and Biden's meeting as well as on blaming West in "Nazi-like" policy towards Lukashenko regime were targeting exactly that aim. At the same time, one has to underline quite soft character of the messages published in Russian niche media. The Russian presenters weren't repeating Lukashenko's extremely radical statements, and delivering lighter rhetoric instead. On one hand Russian media were showing full support from Kremlin to Lukashenko, but on the other one – complete dependence of Minsk on the dictates of Moscow.

Regarding the case involving the diverted Ryanair flight and subsequent events, one can also mention that this situation was presented from different points, as Russian niche media used different sources for that: Lukashenko's propaganda, Belarusian independent media, Russian officials and the Western speakers and reports. Therefore, one can say here that Russia was trying to avoid being associated with this scandal at all.



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

One can easily see that **in June the Russian context dominated in the Belarusian agenda in Russian niche media.** It tells us a clear fact: Russian media appreciate Belarus as a part of Kremlin's "sphere of influence" and even more – present it as something natural and well-known to everyone.



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

One can say, that the image of Lukashenko as totally dependent on Putin and Belarus being totally dependent on Russia in whole is under construction in Russian media. The facts and news, that are inconvenient for the Kremlin but extremely important on Belarusian agenda, were just ignored (like the constitutional reform or scandal with the resignation of Orthodox Archbishop Artsemi because of his political views).



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