

Strengthening the Capacity to Counter Disinformation

Russian information space

November-December 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.

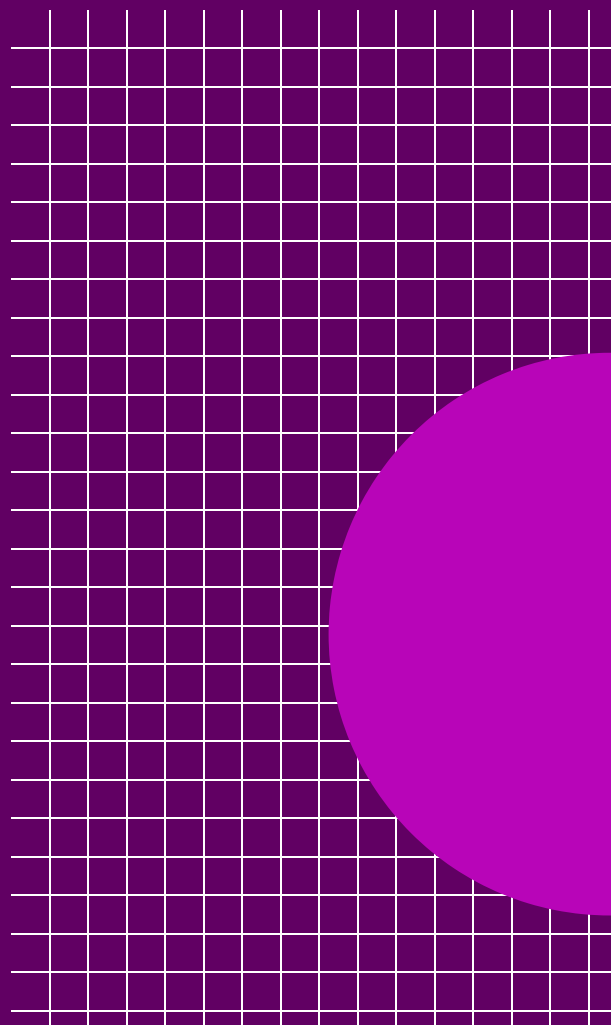
The main activity includes the development of the international Permanent Monitoring and Analyzing Group (PMAG). The main task of the PMAG will be monitoring and analyzing Russian information space in three ways: with the main Russian online media, niche or regional Russian online media as well as Russian 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 November 2021

Pavlo Kolotvin



Monitored media:

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

The research results

Overall number of news items: There were 682 results in October (including 404 with the “Poland” tag), and 2819 results in November (including 1691 with the “Poland” tag). If we count the amount of news items with any tag, there was a 313,34% increase of results (or 318,56% increase of the news marked with the “Poland” tag only).

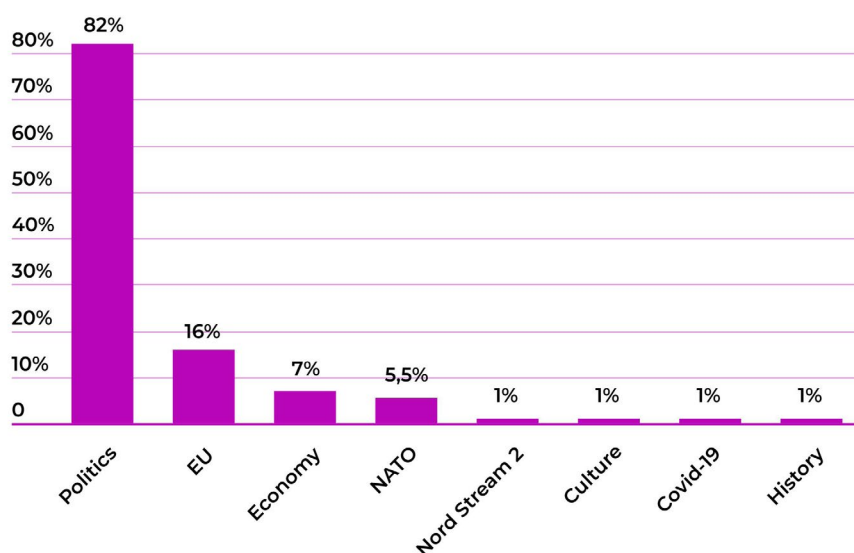
Main thematic areas: Politics – 1383/82%; EU – 265/16%; Economy – 124/7%; NATO – 94/5,5%; Nord Stream 2 – 37/1%; Culture – 17/1%; Covid-19 – 16/1%; History – 21/1%.

Thematic areas that dominated: Migration crisis on the Polish-Belarusian border (1155/68%); Poland-Belarus relations (446/26%); Poland-Russia relations (255/15%); situation on the European gas market (103/6%).

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

- **increase:** EU (44% more in comparison to September 2021); Economy (6% more); NATO (324% more); Culture (6% more); Nord Stream 2 (11% more); Politics (467% more); Covid-19 (37,5% more); History (14% more).

Main thematic areas:



Source: Own elaboration, Center for Propaganda and Disinformation Analysis



The main narrative says that

Poland's reaction to the migrant crisis on the Polish-Belarusian border, as well as the reaction of the European Union and NATO countries expressing concern about the situation of the migrants and the border security are not justified.

The number of news articles related to Nord Stream 2 and the pro-Russian narrative has increased. More media attention focused on claims that the British would help develop the Narew missile for the Polish army.

The Russian authorities focus on deploying new anti-aircraft and anti-missile weapons in Romania and Poland. **It is believed in the media that NATO enlargement threatens Russia and Belarus.**

Details of the discussions between the Polish and German governments on the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline were circulating in the Russian media. This message was spreading in the context of a lack of consolidation and unity in the EU.

Presenting the announcement of EU sanctions against Belarus as an unnecessary move and showing the accusations against Russia of co-organising the arrival of migrants at the Polish-Belarusian border as unfounded.

The media were trying to deny Russia's role in the delivery of migrants to Belarusian border with the EU and the allegations of a "hybrid war" being waged by Minsk with the help of Russia.



What goals do those who spread it want to achieve?

The Belarusian and Russian governments are using the migrant crisis as an opportunity to influence the resolution of issues related to Nord Stream 2 and the deployment of NATO missile defence systems.



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

The migration crisis has begun to be seen in the Russian media in the context of gas supply agreements, NATO and missile defence.



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

Escalation of the migrant crisis on the Polish-Belarusian border as a result of the arrival of several thousand migrants from the Middle East at the border and their attempts to enter Poland.

Reports on the detailed discussions between the Polish and German governments on the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline in conjunction with the lack of consolidation and unity within the EU. More media focus on claims that the British would help develop the Narew missile for the Polish army and that NATO enlargement would threaten Russia and Belarus.



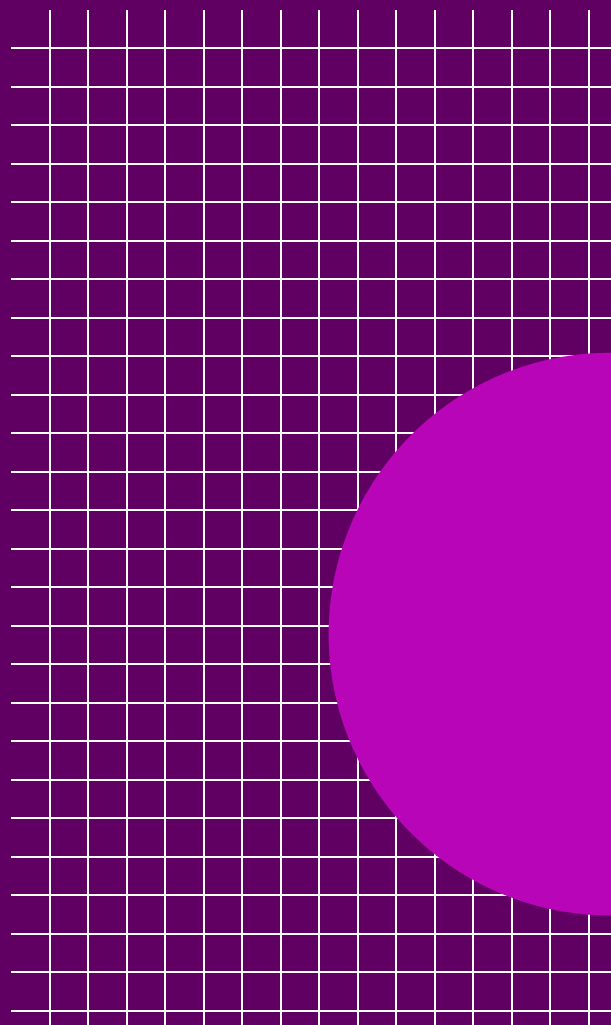
Other comments and / or, if possible, a forecast of the listed points

The migrant crisis remained the main topic in the Russian news. The decline in news coverage and the use of the migrant crisis in the context of news about NATO, Nord Stream 2 and missile defence systems suggest that the acute phase of the crisis has passed and now either a temporary pause or a slight de-escalation could be observed. The Polish Army was portrayed negatively. **The image of tortured migrants was created and the blame for their suffering was shifted exclusively onto the EU and Poland.**

Poland in the Russian media online

Monitoring and Analysis
of Russian information
space in November 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: 889 (36 N/A) an increase of 214.13% in relation to the previous month.

Main thematic areas: Policy – 732/82,3%; Belarus – 648/72,89%; EU – 504/56,69%; Economy – 96/10,79%; NATO – 86/9,67%; Other – 70/7,87%; Sanctions – 70/7,87%; Nord Stream 2 – 48/5,39%; History – 20/2,24%; Covid-19 – 12/1,34%; Culture – 9/1,01%.

Thematic areas that dominated: Policy – 732 mentions; Belarus – 648; EU – 504.

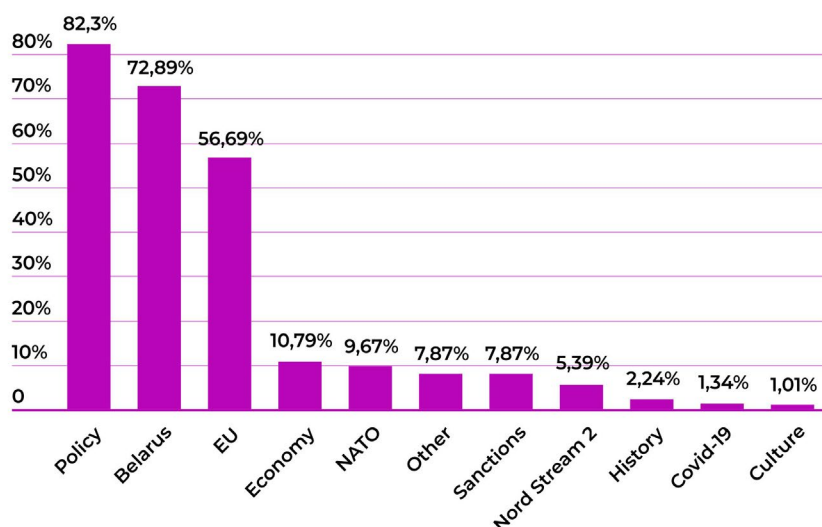
What topics gained, what were constant, and what topics decreased (based on tags):

In November the following topics gained: Belarus (October: 88 news; November: 648 news, an increase of 636.36%); EU (October: 90 news; November: 504 news, an increase of 459.9%); Sanctions (October: 13 news; November: 70 news, an increase of 438.46%); Policy (October: 189 news; November: 732 news, an increase of 287.30%); Economy (October: 34 news; November: 96 news, an increase of 182.35%); NATO (October: 34 news; November: 86 news, an increase of 152.9%); Other (October: 35 news; November: 70 news, an increase of 100%); Covid-19 (October: 6 news; November: 12 news, an increase of 100%); Nord Stream 2 (October: 30 news; November: 48 news, an increase of 60%).

The following topics were constant: Culture (October: 6 news; November: 9 news).

The following topics decreased: History (October: 25 news; November: 20 news, a decrease of 20%).

Main thematic areas:



Source: Own elaboration, Center for Propaganda and Disinformation Analysis



Main narrative

Poland together with NATO members was showing increased military activity on the border with Belarus and Russia, which indicated the militarization of the region and the intensified preparation of NATO for a military conflict.

Additionally, it was claimed that NATO was deploying troops in Poland on the border with Belarus. In the media coverage, the crisis on the Polish-Belarusian border was seen as one of the elements of hostile activities initiated by NATO states. During the monitoring period, **Russian niche media marginalized the role of Belarus in the crisis.** The increased movement of migrants was shown as a consequence of NATO's – including Poland's – actions in the Middle East. Additionally, **the present crisis was presented as a hybrid activity of Western countries to influence the Belarusian authorities to bring about the downfall of Lukashenko's regime.**



Goal / Purpose

The most important objective was to show the audience that Russia and Belarus were facing a hybrid attack from the Western. **Russian propaganda in its messages sought to shift the responsibility for the crisis entirely onto Poland and the United States.** The latter, as the driving force behind NATO, allegedly aimed to resolve the conflict in Eastern Europe, which Belarus and Russia do not want to allow.



Impact / Consequences

It can be expected that the Russian authorities would decide to support Belarus militarily in order to help regulate the situation on the border.



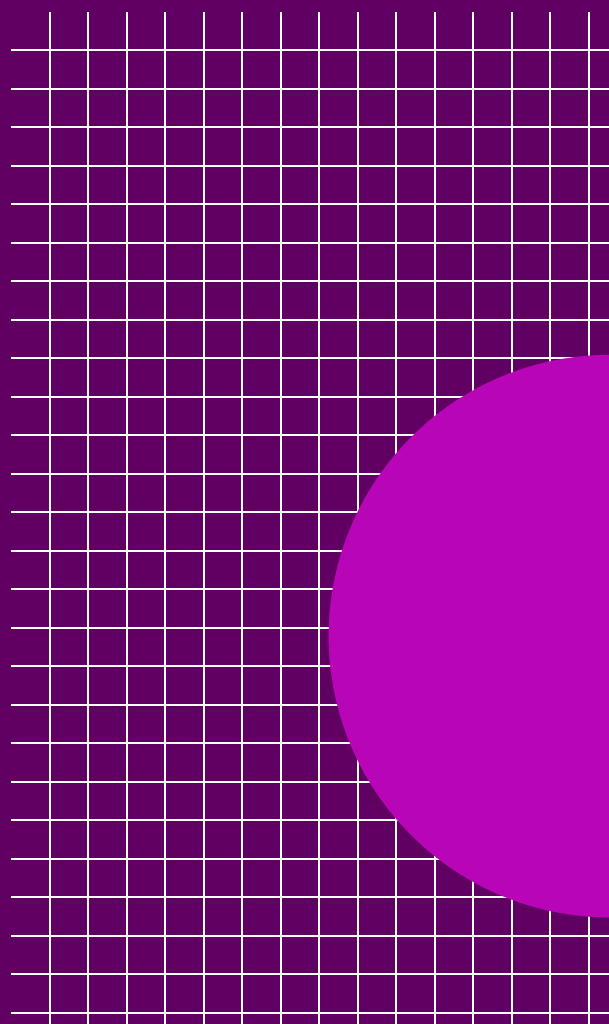
Data / information that is considered the most important in this monitoring period

In late November it was reported that President of Belarus Aleksander Lukashenko offered to host Russian nuclear weapons. In the context of Poland and NATO, they were being accused of war preparation, which could lead to the gradual escalation in the region. Given the importance of this event for Russian propaganda, an increase in the related narrative could be expected.

Baltic states in the Russian media online

Monitoring and Analysis
of Russian information
space in November 2021

Adam Błonowski



Monitored media:

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

The research results

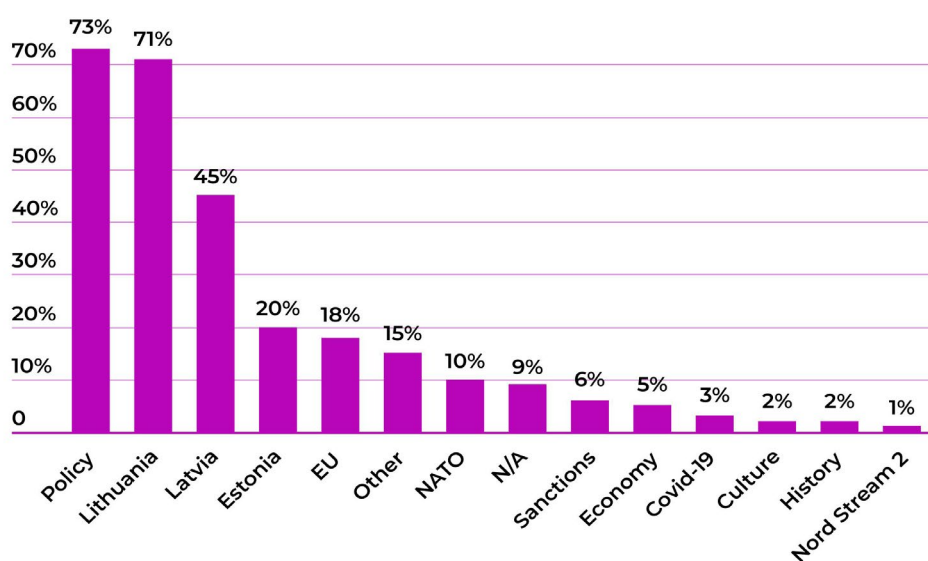
Overall number of news items: 539. Previous period (1-30 October): 619. Relative change: 110%.

Main thematic areas: Policy (73%); Lithuania (71%); Latvia (45%); Estonia (20%); EU (18%); Other (15%); NATO (10%); N/A (9%); Sanctions (6%); Economy (5%); Covid-19 (3%); Culture (2%); History (2%); Nord Stream 2 (1%).

Thematic areas that dominated: In Lithuania, a state of emergency will be introduced due to migrants at the border with Belarus; The Parliament of Latvia adopted a law on the construction of infrastructure on the border with Belarus; Latvian Parliament upholds ban on public use of St. George ribbons; Estonia to build 130 km of barbed wire wall on the border with Russia; Presidents of Baltic republics condemn Lukashenko for exploiting migrants; Taiwan opened a representative office in Lithuania; Migration crisis on the EU-Belarus border. Accusations by Belarus against Lithuania; NATO military manoeuvres in Latvia; Lithuanian politicians comment on Angela Merkel's conversation with Alexander Lukashenko.

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

Main thematic areas:



Source: Own elaboration, Center for Propaganda and Disinformation Analysis



Main narrative

- Migration crisis on the border of Belarus and the EU. Lithuania, Latvia and Poland have been grappling with an increase in the number of illegal migrants on the border with Belarus in recent months, accusing Minsk of triggering a migration crisis in response to EU sanctions.
- Baltic countries refuse to accept migrants from the Belarusian border.
- Estonia will establish protection at the border with Russia because of fear of “hybrid attack”.
- Lithuania pulled up troops and security forces to the border with Belarus.
- Lithuanian President considers the use of weapons against illegal migrants as a last resort.
- The prime ministers of Latvia, Lithuania and Poland call on the EU for tougher sanctions against Belarus.
- Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania believe that the crisis on the border is caused by Minsk.
- Latvian Armed Forces conduct large-scale military exercises near the border with Belarus.
- Estonian Prime Minister Kaya Kallas predicted a “high price” for Russia for the attack on Ukraine.
- Latvia said that the EU and NATO should send a signal to Moscow about the „clear consequences” of the escalation in the Russia-Ukrainian border.
- Belarus announced the body of a beaten refugee abandoned by the Lithuanian security forces.
- Lithuania advised to place migrants in Ukraine or Moldova.
- The security forces of Poland and Lithuania have tried to oust migrants to Belarus.
- The President of Lithuania said that the military integration of the Russian Federation and Belarus threatens NATO countries.
- Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia condemned the government of Belarus due to the migration border restriction.
- Lithuanian security forces dumped the body of a beaten refugee at the border with Belarus.



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

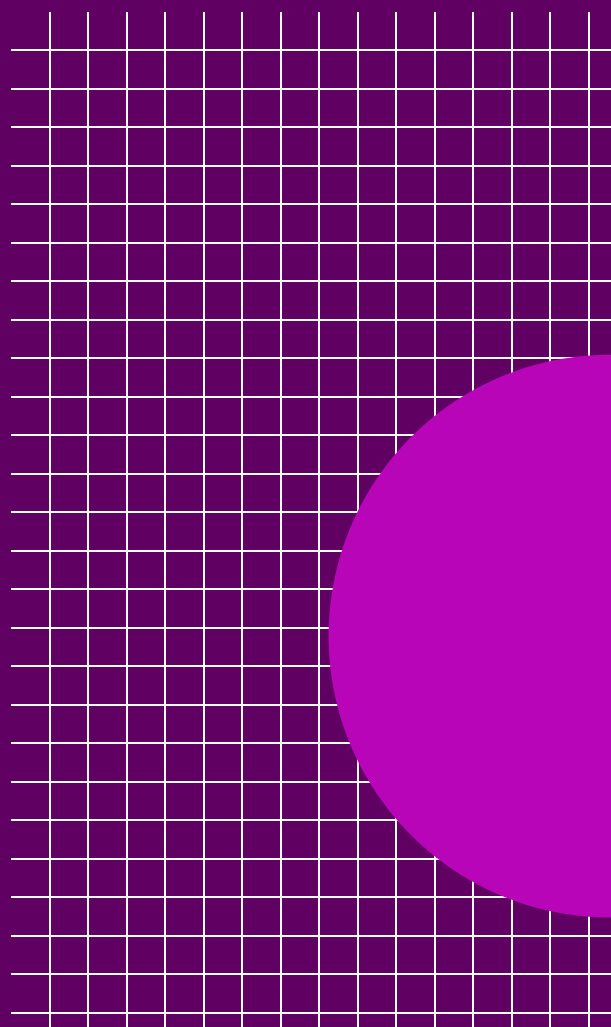
- Poland, Lithuania and Latvia discuss the use of the 4th article of the NATO treaty.
- Estonia plans to stretch barbed wire along the Russian border.
- The Parliament of Latvia adopted a law on the construction of infrastructure on the border with Belarus.
- The UN Security Council countries condemn the Belarusian authorities over the conflict on the Polish-Belarusian border (one of the members is Estonia).
- In Lithuania, state of emergency will be introduced due to migrants at the border with Belarus.
- Lithuania sends troops to the border with Poland and Belarus due to the accumulation of migrants.
- Two Lithuanian citizens sentenced for spying for Russia.
- NATO expresses solidarity with Poland, Lithuania and Latvia over the migration crisis.
- Latvian Parliament upholds ban on public use of St. George ribbons.
- In Latvia, the Russian-speaking population was accused of spreading COVID-19.
- Latvia announced the refusal of the Baltic States and Poland to accept migrants.
- Increased morbidity in Europe. Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia on the red list.
- Latvia has announced its readiness to introduce new sanctions against Belarus.
- Presidents of Baltic republics condemn Lukashenko for exploiting migrants.
- Lithuanian President announced Moscow's involvement in the influx of migrants to Belarus
- Latvia has begun military exercises on the border with Russia and Belarus
- Estonia predicted Russia's confrontation with the United States and NATO in the event of an attack on Ukraine.
- Latvia urges EU and NATO to send signal to Moscow about "escalation consequences" in the Russia-Ukrainian border.

- Lithuania declared readiness to repel attempts of armed invasion of illegal migrants.
- The Chinese proposed to Russia and Belarus to divide Lithuania in reaction to the opening of a representative office of Taiwan in Vilnius.
- The presidents of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia have come out in support of Poland, which is defending its borders against the backdrop of the situation with the migration crisis.
- NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg to meet with Lithuanian President Nauseda to discuss Belarus
- EU will allocate funds to Lithuania, Latvia and Poland for border security.
- Ex-Prime Minister of Lithuania Kubilius spoke about the timing of the entry into the EU of post-Soviet countries.
- Lithuanian deputy reveals the cost of maintaining former Belarusian presidential candidate Svetlana Tikhanovskaya in Lithuania.
- Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas supported Poland in protecting the external borders of the EU and NATO.
- NATO military maneuvers in Latvia with the participation of soldiers from Latvia and Lithuania.
- Lithuanian politicians comment on Angela Merkel's conversation with Alexander Lukashenko.
- Estonia builds a fence on the border with Russia.
- Gitanas Nauseda accused Russia of what was happening on the border of Belarus with Poland and Lithuania.

Baltic states in the Russian media online

Monitoring and Analysis
of Russian information
space in November 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, 413 messages were analysed in November. There has been an 84% increase of news items compared to October.

Main thematic areas: Throughout this month, the migrant crisis was unquestionably the most dominant topic. It has been reflected in multiple contexts, but especially in policy-related news, which made up 69% of all tags.

In the first half of November, the main topics were the possible sanctions imposed by the European Union on Belarus (6%), Lithuania's declared state of emergency on the border (5%), Russia's possible involvement in the crisis and associated risks (5%).

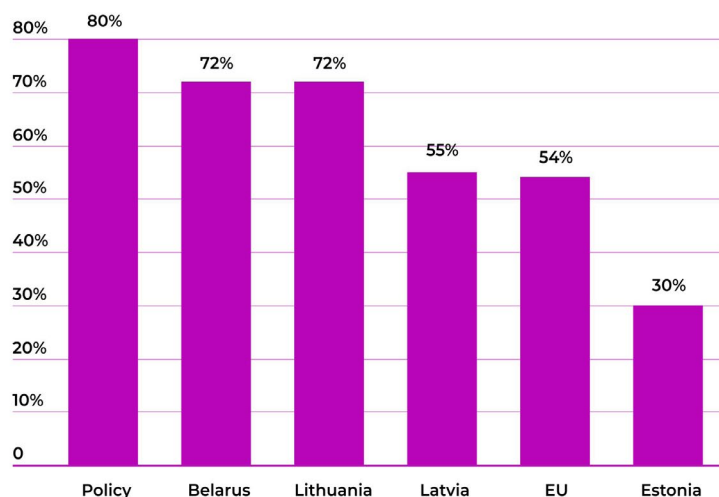
As for the second half, NATO's growing military presence on the borders with Belarus and possibility of war was discussed both directly and indirectly (around 4-5%). Another topic was Germany's call to president Lukashenko and his possible legitimisation by this move (3%). Last but not least, a widely discussed issue was the deterioration of Lithuania's relations with China over Taiwan (5%).

Thematic areas that dominated: The absolute leader in terms of a subject area was policy, which accounted for 80% of all tags in November. It was followed by Belarus with 72% of news items, while the EU came next with 54%. The most frequently covered country from the three Baltic states was Lithuania (72%). Latvia and Estonia were mentioned in respectively 55% and 30% of the articles.

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

In comparison to October, the news coverage on the EU increased significantly (+170%) and so did the one on Belarus (+91%). Policy-related news likewise gained (58%), along with NATO and (+36% and +28%). The topic that saw a significant decrease was first and foremost Ukraine (-70%). The news regarding history, economy, culture and Covid-19 likewise decreased. Reflections on Latvia (+5%) and Estonia (-4%) remained almost at the same level.

Main thematic areas:



Source: Own elaboration, Center for Propaganda and Disinformation Analysis



The main narrative says that

- The Baltic countries are the most active and hostile members of NATO;
- The Baltic countries and Poland are driving forward the possible war between NATO on one side and Belarus with Russia on another.

Dominant narrative in early November:

- Russia's involvement in the migrant crisis is not excluded, even though there are certain risks coming with it; the European Union needs to start talks with Minsk in order to solve the migrant crisis.

Dominant narrative in late November:

- The EU talks with president Lukashenko are controversial within its borders, however, they have taken place and contribute to legitimisation of the Belarusian leader;
- Russia has nothing to do with the migrant crisis; the country is merely an observer and an external voice of "heart consciousness" in this crisis.



What goals do those who spread it want to achieve?

The responsibility of military tension and its possible escalation is clearly put on NATO, the Baltic states and Poland. **Russia could have possibly used military assistance and presence in Belarus as a chance to test out what kind of**

reactions could be expected from the West, and afterwards tended to assure the audience of the Kremlin's neutrality in the migrant crisis and in respect to the sovereignty of Belarus.



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

1. Maintaining the general image of hostile attitudes of the neighbourhood and NATO;
2. On the one hand, the stage of initial preparation for integration with Belarus can be noticed. **In the other, Moscow distances itself from the adventurism of Belarus and speculations about further integration plans, which could indicate either uncertainty of the decision, intentional creation of an informational “fog” or acknowledgment that Belarus is an inconvenient partner for Russia as well.**



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

1. Information about Russia's possible involvement in the migrant crisis;
2. EU's wrong and inappropriate manner in dealing with Belarus in terms of the migrant crisis's solution;
3. Reports on Latvia's decision to ban the St. George's ribbons, rising issues with non-citizens and nationalism, misinterpretation of history and abusing the rights of WWII veterans.
4. Hostility of NATO and the Baltic countries.



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

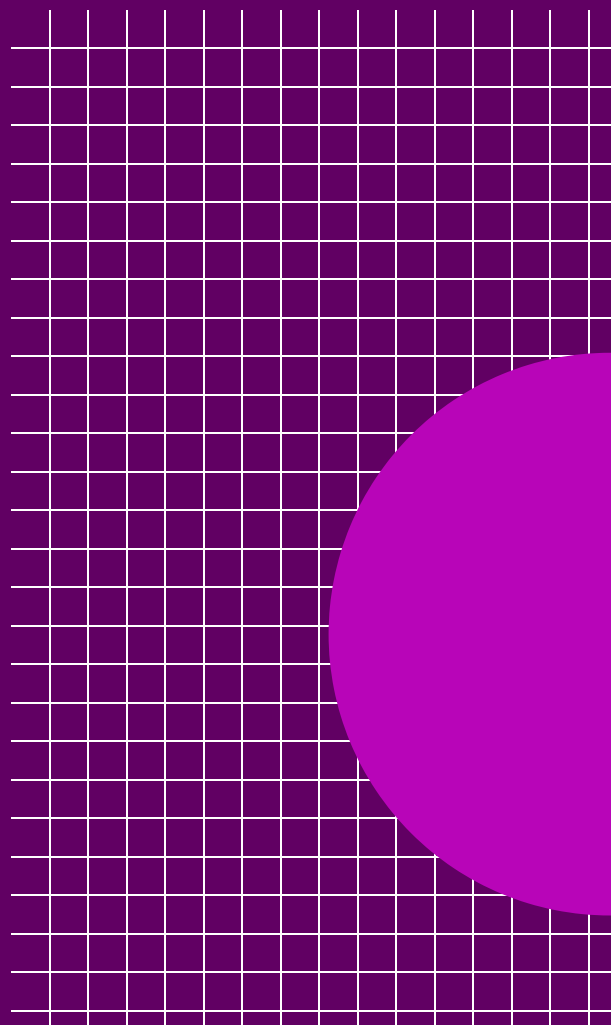
It is likely that soon it will become clear whether forecasting of events work based on media analysis in the long run. Topics to be followed are:

1. hostility of the Baltic countries (they could be included in the Russian list of unfriendly states or other measures, even malign action, could be undertaken by Russia)
2. further Belarusian-Russian integration;
3. military assistance to Belarus in order to handle the migrant crisis and escalating relations with NATO.

Belarus in the Russian media online

Monitoring and Analysis
of Russian information
space in November 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: 2676 articles about Belarus. The number increased by 291,8%. A significant increase in the information flow is related to the escalation of the migrant crisis on the Polish-Belarusian border.

Main thematic areas: Politics (88,2%) and Economy (11,1%). The percentage does not add up to 100% as particular articles may have several tags.

Main trends this month. Which topics dominated the information space?

An oversaturation of political topics was observed in November. Predominant topics on politics were the following:

- Migrant crisis on the Belarusian border and international reaction to its development (37,1%). Since November 8th (the beginning of the escalation on the Polish-Belarusian border), the media have started to use the term „refugees” more often (11,8% of the news on this topic) instead of the previously common „migrants” or „illegal migrants”.
- Belarusian-Ukrainian tensions and denial of Russian-Belarusian threat to the integrity of Ukraine (11,2%).
- Military rhetoric: threat of war and possibility of deployment of nuclear weapons in Belarus (2,9%).
- Possible recognition of Crimea as a Russian territory by Belarus (1,6%).

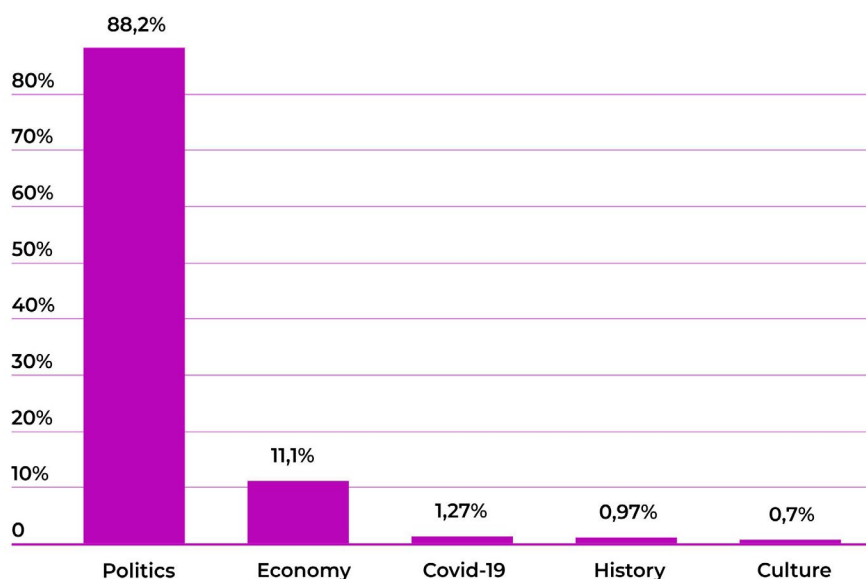
Economy: introduction of new sanctions and Belarusian reaction (31%).

COVID-19: work on Belarusian vaccine (11,8%).

History and culture: no dominant topics.

Which topics increased, were constant and decreased in popularity? Political topics gained popularity (88,2%). New items regarding the economy remained at the same level (11,1%). The percentage of news on Covid-19 (1,27%), history (0,97%) and culture (0,7%) decreased. The percentage does not add up to 100% as particular articles may have various topic ranges.

Main thematic areas:



Source: Own elaboration, Center for Propaganda and Disinformation Analysis



Main narrative and their aims

The West has no moral right to accuse Russia of orchestrating the migrant crisis on the Belarusian border, since it had caused it itself.



What goals do those who spread it want to achieve?

Shifting responsibility from Belarus and Russia to the European countries and the United States without attempting to respond to the allegations that had been made; highlighting how the West violates the principles of humanity; creating the impression that hostile actions are being taken against Russia in the information space; generally discrediting the European Union and highlighting its inaction.



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

The narrative in the first place should confirm the lack of foundation for allegations of involvement in the coordination (or any form of support) of the migrant crisis. **The public should believe that Western countries are approaching the issue from an eminently Russophobic perspective, and the accusations „go beyond the limits of common sense” (quoted by Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria**

Zakharova). Moreover, some articles explicitly stress that Russia is not involved in the escalation of the „Lukashenko crisis”.



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

Lukashenko claimed that Crimea was Russian territory *de jure* and *de facto*. Russian media portrayed the news as an official recognition of Crimea as Russian by Belarus.



Other comments and / or, if possible, a forecast

a) A sequence of articles has emerged about how Western countries had unleashed a „migration problem” ever since the Arab Spring, how they violate human rights and humanitarian principles and at the same time accuse Russia and Belarus of the same.

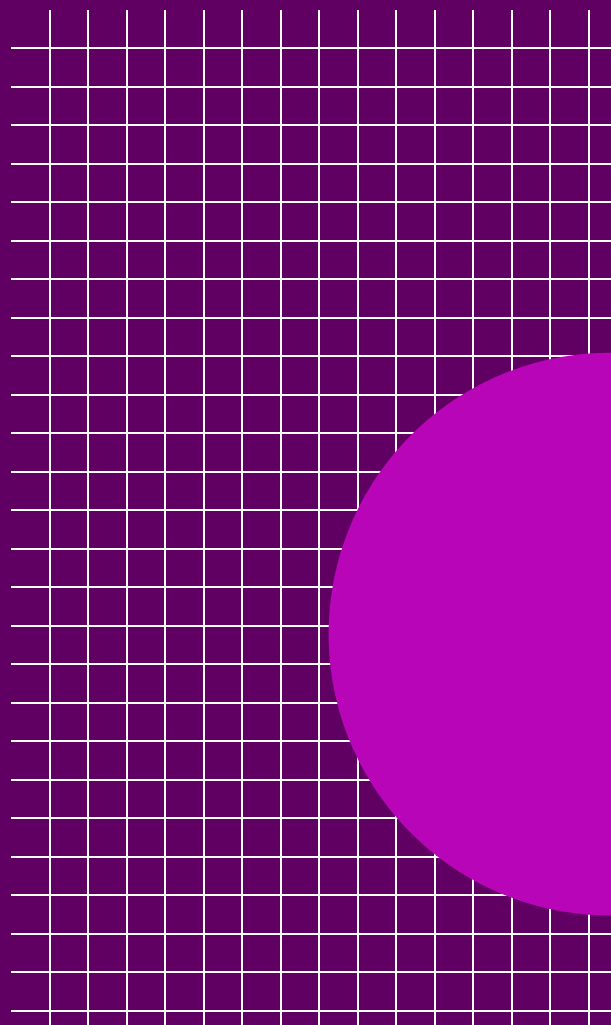
As a result, November saw the great return of the so-called whataboutism – pointing out other countries’ mistakes (or overinterpreting them) as a way of stopping criticism towards Russia. This method has been a widely used practice in the mainstream media since the Soviet times.

b) Regarding Alexander Lukashenko’s recognition of Crimea as Russian, this is a continuation of the rhetoric of recent months (e.g. information that Belarus will side with Russia in the event of war with Ukraine). However, it is worth noting that Lukashenko has been referring to Crimea as “Russian” in interviews for years. From the perspective of the information policy, the media are returning to the topic of the „growing” international recognition of Crimea, particularly outlining the possibility of a visit paid by the Belarusian leader to the peninsula.

Belarus in the Russian media online

Monitoring and Analysis
of Russian information
space in November 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: There were 500 results in October (including 100 with the “Belarus” tag), and 1306 results in November (including 639 with the “Belarus” tag). If we count the amount of news items with any tag, there was a 161,2% increase of results (or 539% increase of the news marked with the “Belarus” tag only).

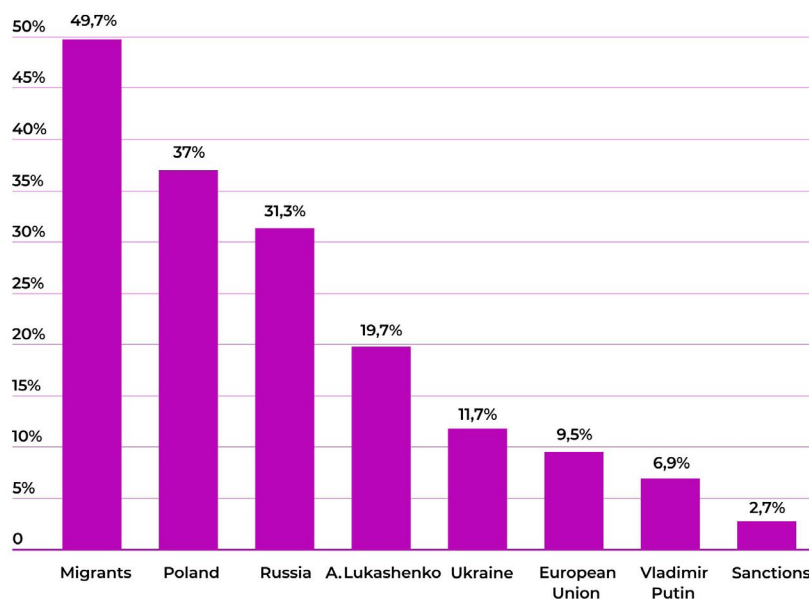
Main thematic areas: Migrants – 427 messages/49,7%; Poland – 318/37%; Russia – 269/31,3%; Alexander Lukashenko – 170/19,7%; Ukraine – 101/11,7%; European Union – 82/9,5%; Vladimir Putin – 59/6,9%; Sanctions – 23/2,7%; Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya – 3 messages (!!!).

Thematic areas that dominated: The politics completely overwhelmed the agenda – around 85% of all the monitored news were dedicated to this subject area. Its share increased in comparison with October, when it was only around 55%.

What topics gained, what were constant, and what topics decreased (based on tags): November saw an overturn in terms of the Russian niche media. For the first time since the start of the monitoring, Lukashenko-related news were not ranked among top 3 most popular topics, having gained 19,7% of the articles (almost the same amount (19,8%) as in October). The first position was taken by the migrant topic, the share of which have quadrupled (from 11,6% in October to almost 50% in November). The news covering Poland experienced the same growth, from 8,4% of October news to 37% in November, gaining second place and outnumbering even Russia, which also grew from 27,6% in October to 31,3%. **The mentions of Ukraine increased by ten-fold – from 1,2% in October to 11,7%.** For the first time throughout monitoring, the European Union was mentioned in almost 10% of messages.

Russian media continued to ignore Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya and paid very little attention to her (3% of all the news) and the topic of sanctions imposed by the EU and USA. No information about Polish military and law enforcement officers being injured by the migrants was reported at all. One has also to notice minimal coverage of Lukashenko's interview for British BBC Television despite the large attention given by the Belarusian information field for a couple of days.

Main thematic areas:



Source: Own elaboration, Center for Propaganda and Disinformation Analysis



Main narrative

Two narratives should be underlined here. The first narrative was about the West being responsible for the migration crisis on the border of Belarus and the EU, while the second one was about the Polish government behaving in an extremely inhumane way by breaking international laws and not letting the migrants into the country.



What goals do those who spread it want to achieve?

The main goal was to blame Poland for the “humanitarian catastrophe” on its borders while persuading the audience that it is the Western politicians who are responsible for the influx of migrants. Russian niche media also aimed to show that Lukashenko’s regime had nothing to do with the migration crisis and has only been trying to help people to get to the EU. But at the same time, according to the disseminated messages, this crisis can be resolved only through negotiations of the Western leaders with Lukashenko and only on his terms. **Finally, Russian niche media also spreaded fake news about Ukraine’s decision to shoot at migrants at the border in case the migration flow headed there. In this case, the intention was to depict Ukraine as completely “unfitting”**

for the European community and structures.



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

Russian niche media unquestionably supported Belarusian propaganda regarding the migration crisis. The overall message was that the Poles deprive innocent refugees from their right to reside in the European Union. Poland was a target of disinformation campaigns – the main goal was to show the absence of unity in the EU and depict Poland as a “troublemaker” in the EU and international politics. Taking into consideration the sudden growth of news about Poland and Ukraine, the possibility of a targeted disinformation campaign should not be excluded.

At the same time, the Ukrainian topic (including its officials speaking about migration and protection of the border in case migration flows were directed towards Ukraine) was also highly discussed, although it was almost non-existent in the Belarusian information field. However, **Russian media never tackled Russia’s alleged involvement in the migration crisis and proposed solutions. This means that the Kremlin mainly strived to take advantage of the escalation on the EU’s eastern border and undermine the unity within the organization.**



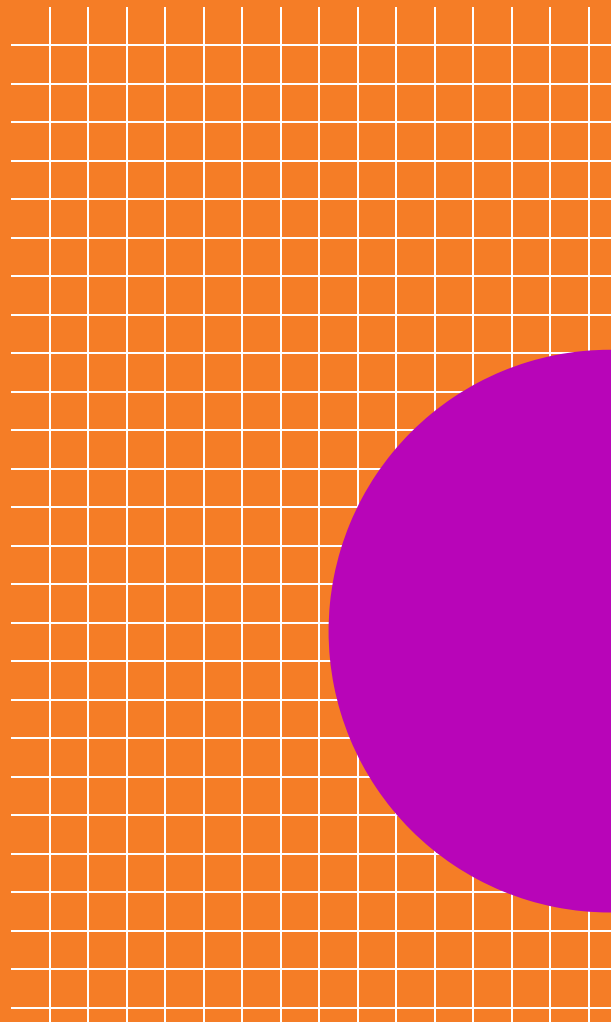
Data / information that is considered the most important in this monitoring period

The number of news concerning Belarus in November was higher than in any of the previous months. This would mean that Russian media might have launched a massive information campaign on this matter. Moreover, there were substantially more articles about Poland than Russia, which indicates another target of the above-mentioned measure, aimed at portraying Poland as the country that breaks EU’s “refugees welcome” rule. There was a clear aim to depict the European Union as a structure that has no unity and stability, which suggests its inability to make swift and effective decisions in emergency situations.

Poland in the Russian media online

Monitoring and Analysis
of Russian information
space in December 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: 763 – 54,88% decrease (928 less compared to November 1-30) and 359 more than in October.⁹

Main thematic areas: Policy (42,5%); EU (7%); Economy (17,5%); NATO (11%); Nord Stream 2 (5%); Culture (2%); Covid-19 (1,5%); History (1,5%).

Thematic areas that dominated: Gas market situation in Europe (192/25%); migration crisis on the Polish-Belarusian border (80/10,5%); Relations between NATO and Russia (48/6%).

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

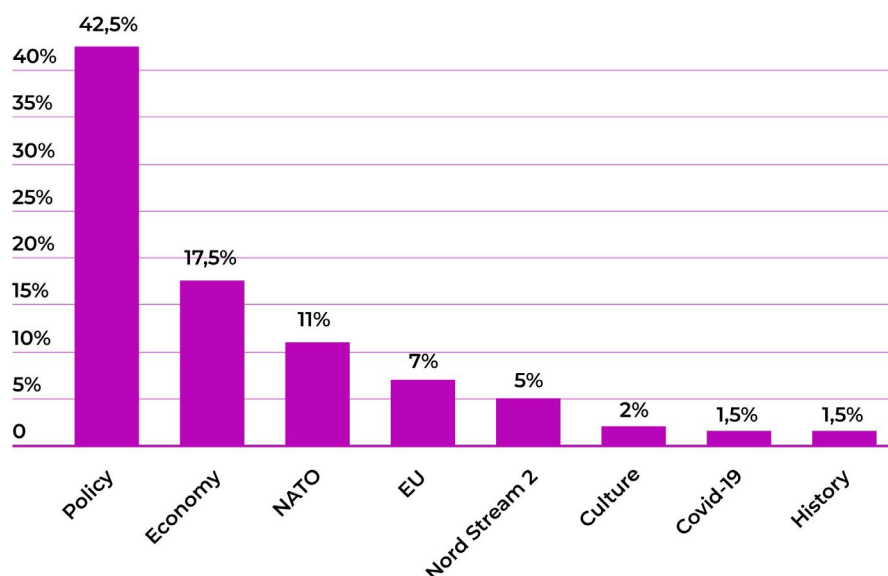
Quantitative indicator

EU	December	52	November	265	decrease	80%
Economy	December	134	November	124	increase	7,5%
NATO	December	81	November	94	decrease	14%
Culture	December	13	November	17	decrease	23,5%
Nord Stream 2	December	37	November	54	decrease	31,5%
Policy	December	324	November	1383	decrease	76,5%
COVID-19	December	12	November	16	decrease	25%
History	December	11	November	21	decrease	47,5%

Percentage indicator

EU	December	7%	November	16%	decrease	9%
Economy	December	17,5%	November	7%	increase	10,5%
NATO	December	11%	November	5,5%	increase	5,5%
Culture	December	2%	November	1%	increase	1%
Nord Stream 2	December	5%	November	1%	increase	5%
Policy	December	42,5%	November	82%	decrease	40,5%
COVID-19	December	1,5%	November	1%	increase	0,5%
History	December	1,5%	November	1%	increase	0,5%

Main thematic areas:



Source: Own elaboration, Center for Propaganda and Disinformation Analysis



The main narrative says that

There were reports prepared in a unified format according to which the European Union, including Poland, were suffering from cold weather and a shortage of electricity, and that residents have begun to pay more for utilities.

There was a noticeable increase in news about the record high gas prices in Europe, as well as fixation on the fact that transit through Poland has been stopped.

The idea was being introduced into the information space that Polish people believe that gas prices were rising because of the EU's position on this issue.

The Russian media, at their own discretion, interpreted Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki's statements that "it was time for Russia to decide who it wanted to be with: with Europe or against it". In the news on this topic, this statement was described with the term „ultimatum”, which sounded quite aggressive in Russian. In the language of diplomacy, it was also interpreted as an aggressive rhetoric.

The appearance of a Polish soldier Emil Cieczko in Belarus was interpreted as an escape, news spread about the involvement of the Polish military in the murder of migrants and volunteers.

News quoted the statement by a Polish deserted soldier about the killings of migrants and other allegations of crimes against migrants committed by the Polish side.

The migration crisis was not covered strictly as a fact, but rather presented in the context of relations with Poland, the EU and NATO.

There has been a significant increase in reports on the strengthening of NATO forces in Europe, as well as reports on a potential war between NATO and Russia. There was an escalation of the situation according to Russian news. The thesis about the need to deploy nuclear weapons in Belarus in response to missile defense in Poland was being introduced into the Russian information space.

At the beginning of the month, there were many politically neutral reports about the delay of a dry cargo ship with a drunken Russian crew.



What goals do those who spread it want to achieve?

Belarus and Russian authorities are using the migration crisis as an element of influence on the solution of problems related to Nord Stream 2 and the deployment of NATO missile defense systems.



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

The migration crisis is starting to be perceived in a broader perspective in the Russian media: in the context of gas relations, NATO and missile defense.



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

The number of economic news about the situation on the energy market in Europe has increased. Many of these news had no political context, but they can be seen as preparation for the further use of this topic in political messages and the strengthening of political propaganda in this direction.

The information space has significantly increased in the number of articles about a possible military conflict with NATO and the need to prepare for it. The Russian media notes that NATO has also been preparing for it.



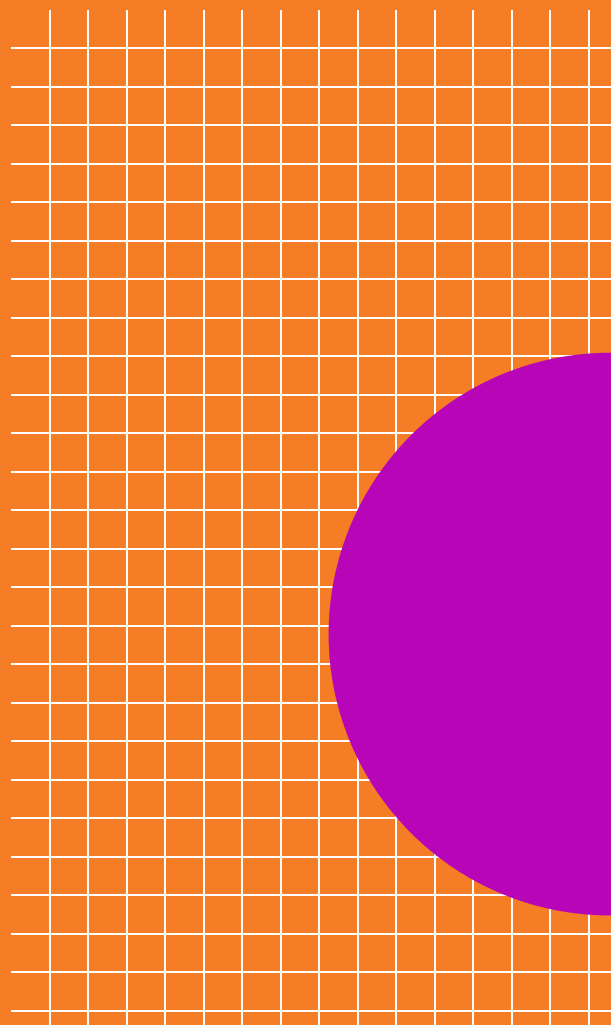
Other comments and / or, if possible, a forecast of the listed points

The migration crisis has ceased to be the main topic in the Russian media. The dominant topics were related to the situation on the gas market and the energy market in Europe, as well as the relationship between NATO, the United States and Russia. The Russian media notes that Gazprom has stopped the transit of gas through Poland, the Polish government is sending Russia „ultimatums” and is pursuing an aggressive policy, deploying missiles and violating the rights of migrants.

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Monitoring and Analysis
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space in December 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: 389, a decrease of 56,24% in relation to the previous month.

Main thematic areas: Policy (54,75%); EU (45,52%); Belarus (35,47%); Economy (28,27%); NATO (18,5%); Nord Stream 2 (7,96%); Other (7,71%); Sanctions (5,91%); History (3,08%); Covid-19 (2,05%); Culture (1,28%).

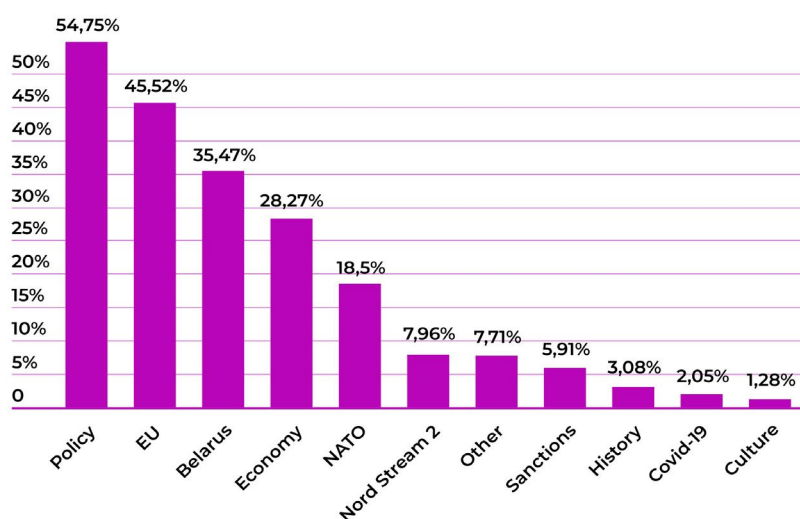
Thematic areas that dominated: Policy – 213 mentions; EU – 181; Belarus – 138.

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

In November the following topics gained: Economy (November: 96 news; December: 110 news, an increase of 14.58%).

The following topics decreased: History (November: 20 news; December: 12 news, a decrease of 40%); Belarus (November: 648 news; December: 138 news, a decrease of 78,7%); EU (November: 504 news; December: 181 news, a decrease of 64,08%); Sanctions (November: 70 news; December: 23 news, a decrease of 67,14%); Policy (November: 732 news; December: 213 news, a decrease of 70,9%); NATO (November: 86 news; December: 72 news, a decrease of 17,44%); Other (November: 70 news; December: 30 news, a decrease of 57,14%); Covid-19 (November: 12 news; December: 8 news, a decrease of 33,3%); Culture (November: 9 news; December: 5 news, a decrease of 44,4%); Nord Stream 2 (November: 48 news; December: 30 news, a decrease of 35,41%).

Main thematic areas:



Source: Own elaboration, Center for Propaganda and Disinformation Analysis



Main narrative

The deployment of NATO and US weapons on Polish territory is directed against Russia and poses an existential threat to the security of the Russian state and Belarus. In this context, a threat to Belarus' security posed by Poland and the Baltic states was also highlighted. **According to the Russian niche media, Poland interferes in the Belarusian internal affairs and seeks to change the regime of A. Lukashenko.**



What goals do those who spread it want to achieve?

The most important goal of this narrative is to present to the audience that Russia and Belarus are the victims of NATO's aggressive policies and the organization's eastward expansion. Thus, president Vladimir Putin's ultimatum to NATO members is presented as a defensive action.



Impact / Consequences

Such propaganda activities are aimed at increasing support for Putin's policies, namely the deployment of troops on the border with Ukraine, as well as the military exercises to be held in early 2022 in Belarus.



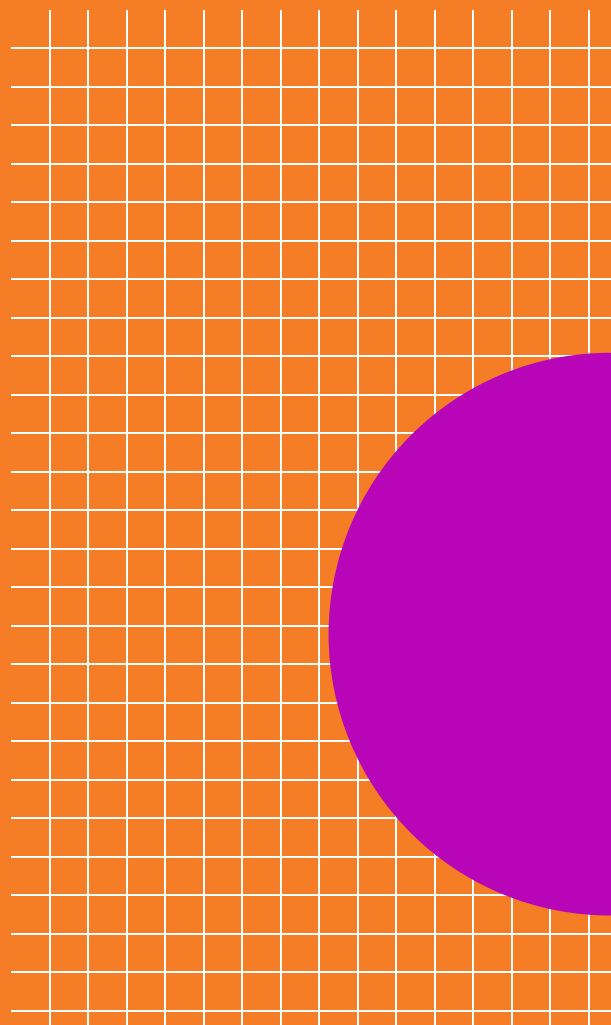
Data / information that is considered the most important in this monitoring period

Information about a Polish soldier Emil Czechko, who fled from Poland and sought political asylum in Belarus is the most important in this monitoring period. The Belarusian services will use this situation to conduct a disinformation campaign against the Polish government, with the support of the Russian media. Therefore, more news concerning Czechko's testimony should be expected in the nearest future.

Baltic states in the Russian media online

Monitoring and Analysis
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Adam Błonowski



Monitored media:

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

The research results

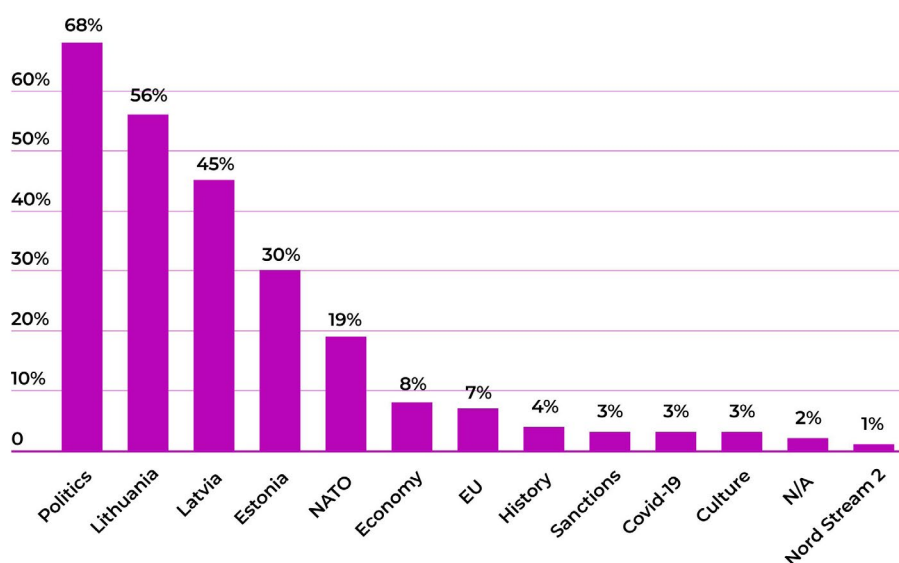
Overall number of news items: 625. Previous period (1-30 November): 1167. Relative change: -46,44%.

Main thematic areas: Politics (68%); Lithuania (56%); Latvia (45%); Estonia (30%); NATO (19%); Other (16%); Economy (8%); EU (7%); History (4%); Sanctions (3%); Covid-19 (3%); Culture (3%); N/A (2%); Nord Stream 2 (1%).

Thematic areas that dominated: US President Joe Biden talks with the presidents of the “Bucharest 9” (B9) countries in the context of tensions around Ukraine; The Baltic states discussing an increase in electricity purchases in the Russian Federation; China has removed Lithuania from customs systems; The Baltic states did not accept Russia’s proposal on NATO; The transit of Belarusian goods is the cause of the political crisis in the Baltic states; Latvia to provide weapons to Ukraine in the event of a conflict with Russia; The Baltic states intend to jointly purchase a missile artillery system; The Russian media are alerting that all classes in Estonian secondary schools will be conducted in Estonian only.

What topics gained, what were constant, and what topics decreased (based on tags): Constant: Politics, Economy, History, Other, Estonia; Decreased: Sanctions, Culture, Covid-19, NATO, EU, Nord Stream 2, Lithuania, Latvia.

Main thematic areas:



Source: Own elaboration, Center for Propaganda and Disinformation Analysis



Main narrative

- President Biden allowed to send troops to NATO countries in the event of an „invasion” of Russia.
- Russia criticized Estonia for statelessness on Human Rights Day.
- The Estonian Prime Minister believes that the Russian Federation „cannot be given the right to vote” on the issue of NATO expansion.
- Latvia and Estonia, hoping to lower electricity prices, convince Lithuania to increase connection capacity again in order to receive more electricity from the Russian Federation and Belarus.
- In Lithuania, there are plans to impose sanctions on production that is transited from Belarus.
- Estonia is preparing for the forced assimilation of Russian-speaking children.
- Baltic states did not accept Russia’s proposal on NATO.
- Lithuania urged NATO to reject Russian proposals on security in Europe.
- Baltic states announced their readiness to immediately provide military assistance to Ukraine.
- Baltic states plan to create a joint missile system to defend against Russia.
- Lithuania wants to ban the transit and import of Belarusian goods.
- Russia is concerned by Lithuania’s plans to block Belarusian transit.



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

US President Joe Biden held a conversation with B9 leaders in the context of tensions over Ukraine. His comments directed at Vladimir Putin were portrayed as populist and aggressive. It was pointed out that Biden’s statement about Russian aggression against Ukraine was an excuse to send additional forces to NATO’s eastern flank.

Russia criticised Estonia for preserving the institution of statelessness. Statements by Russian politicians, including the ones by the Russian Embassy in Tallinn, were invoked on Human Rights Day, which is celebrated on December 10, as an opportunity to recall the problem of statelessness in Estonia.

Meeting of Baltic states’ leaders in Vilnius. Reference was made to the Estonian Prime Minister’s statement that the EU and NATO should react quickly to Russia’s actions in Ukraine or that Russia should not decide on the country’s membership

in NATO. It was reiterated that Russia has repeatedly expressed concern over the expansion of NATO forces in Europe, and the Kremlin also asserted that Russia poses no threat to anyone, but neither will it ignore actions that potentially threaten its interests.

The Baltic states are considering the possibility of increasing electricity purchases from Russia and Belarus. The reason behind the rising prices of electricity was indicated – it is imported from, among others, Finland, which in turn itself has problems in the transit of energy from Norway and Sweden. It was underlined that Estonia and Latvia have reduced their electricity imports from Russia, mainly due to Lithuania's demands for a boycott of energy imports from the Ostrovet's Nuclear Power Plant in Belarus.

China has removed Lithuania from its customs systems. Tensions in relations between Lithuania and the PRC over the opening of a Taiwanese representative office in Vilnius were mentioned. The Russian media described Lithuania's role as a tool used by the US to achieve its political goals in the region, mentioning among other things, support for the Belarusian opposition or the imposition of sanctions on products imported directly or indirectly from Belarus. It mentions the scandal in Lithuania that erupted after sanctions were imposed on the Belarusian fertiliser company Belaruskali, resulting in the resignation of the head of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of Transport.

Media coverage portrayed Lithuania as a victim of US sanctions, which have damaged the country's reputation.

The presidents of Lithuania, Poland and Ukraine have called on the West to tighten sanctions against Russia over its aggressive policy towards Ukraine and the launch of the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline.

Northern European and Baltic states did not agree with the draft agreements on security guarantees proposed by Russia. The Baltic States were portrayed as anti-Russian, benefiting from NATO membership. It cited statements by Baltic states' leaders which indicated that discussions with Russia should not be entered into and that the presence of NATO forces in the Eastern European region should be increased. It was often recalled that Russia had published two draft agreements with NATO and the US on not expanding NATO eastwards and not placing military bases on the territory of former Soviet republics.

Scandal over the transit of fertilisers by the Belarusian producer Belaruskali through Lithuanian territory. It was reported that a scandal broke out in Lithuania after the US had imposed sanctions on the Belarusian fertiliser company Belaruskali and Lithuanian Railways refused to suspend the transit of Belarusian fertilisers through Lithuanian territory, for which they had already received an

advance payment. As a result, Lithuanian Foreign Minister Gabrielius Landsbergis and Transport Minister Marius Skuodis resigned. It was pointed out that the US, by [imposing sanctions](#) on a Belarusian fertiliser company, had almost led to the resignation of high-ranking officials in Lithuania.

Latvia is ready to supply arms to Ukraine in the event of an escalation of the situation on the Russian-Ukrainian border. Lithuanian Defence Minister Arvydas Anušauskas said the Baltic states were ready to provide military and non-military assistance to Ukraine. Earlier, Pabriks said that Latvia may have to ask for an increase in the contingent of [NATO troops](#) in the republic due to the situation involving Ukraine. In the media space, it was reported that Ukraine and Western countries had expressed concern over Russia's „alleged escalation of aggressive actions” near Ukraine's borders, and that Russia had repeatedly denied Western and Ukrainian accusations, claiming that statements about „Russian aggression” were being used as a pretext to concentrate more NATO military equipment near Russian borders.

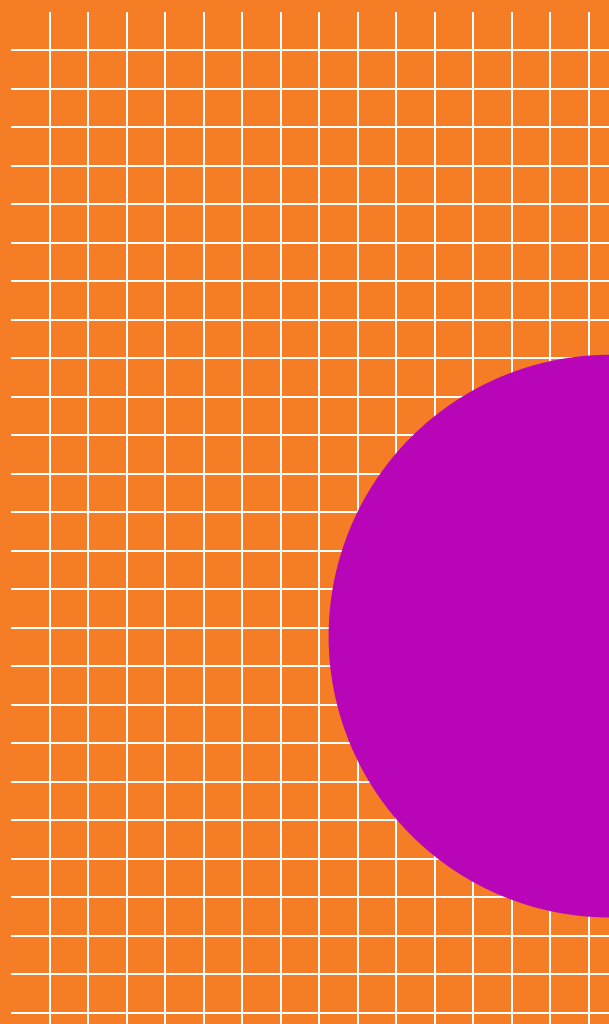
The Baltic states intend to jointly **purchase a rocket artillery system for all three countries**. The defense ministers of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia agreed to acquire an MLRS multi-barrel rocket launcher system common to the three countries. It was reported that the purpose of the agreement was to seek to further strengthen the regional deterrence and defense posture, notably through the building of MLRS (Multiple Launch Rocket System) capabilities. Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia also wanted to develop integrated „maritime situational awareness” and increase the involvement of NATO allies in the region. It was pointed out that, through similar steps, the Baltic States or Poland were preparing for military action.

Russian media reported that all Russian state schools in Estonia would be closed by 2035. The plan is to teach exclusively in Estonian. It was reported that 30% of Estonians consider Russian to be their mother tongue. The news of the discontinuation of funding for education in Russian schools by 2035 has sparked a number of negative comments and opinions in the media space in Russia. President Alar Karis has criticised proposals to abandon Russian language teaching in schools and the idea of free education only in Estonian.

Baltic states in the Russian media online

Monitoring and Analysis
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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: In total, 222 messages were analyzed throughout December. It is 46% less than in November. This likely results from the festive season's specificities.

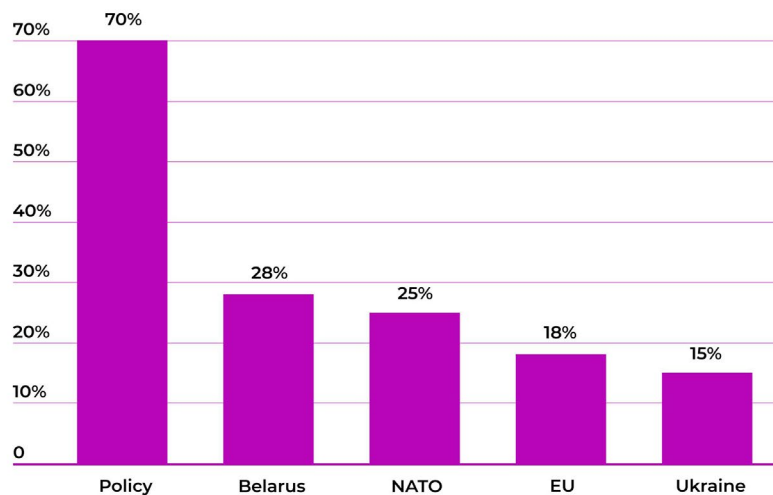
Main thematic areas: Belarus dominated the agenda, especially in the first half of the month. The migrant crisis was in the forefront (5%). Ukraine was likewise covered intensely, mostly in respect to Russia's potential invasion (9%). Lithuanian deteriorating relations with China was on the agenda throughout the month (7%).

In the second half of December, the dominant topic was the Putin – Biden negotiations and Russia's request for security guarantees (5%). **Most of the articles reflected anxiety of the Baltic countries, Nordic over negotiations between the big related to the small countries.** Apart from that Lithuanian arms purchase from the US (3%) was reported. Issues with Belarusian transit through the territory of Lithuania (2%) and Russia's anxiety over the rights of compatriots in Latvia and Estonia (2%) were also discussed in December.

Thematic areas that dominated: Like in the previous month, the distinctively dominant thematic area was policy (70%). The next came Belarus (28%) and NATO (25%). The EU and Ukraine followed with 18% and 15% respectively.

What topics gained, what were constant, and what topics decreased (based on tags): **Topics that gained the most were: history (+185 %),** Ukraine (167%), NATO (108 %), economy (108%). Others gained significantly less: culture (28%), other (24%), Estonia (16%). In contrast, the main declining topics were: EU (-68%), Belarus (-60%), Covid -19 (-63%). Other topics declined less significantly: Lithuania (-27%), Latvia (-26%).

Main thematic areas:



Source: Own elaboration, Center for Propaganda and Disinformation Analysis



The main narrative says that

1. The Baltic countries and Poland are the key Ukraine's supporters and the most hostile out of all NATO and EU member states vis a vis Russia.
- 2. Europe, particularly Latvia, Lithuania and Poland significantly violate human rights and decisions of the European Court of Human Rights. In a broader context, Europe degrades in its understanding of liberalism and has double standards towards the values it promotes.**
3. The Baltic countries are nervous and do not want the major powers to agree on peace and security conditions in Europe among themselves.
4. Lithuania is gravely hostile in its foreign policy – not only in relations with Belarus, but also China.
- 5. Latvia and Estonia do not respect the rights of Russian compatriots in their countries.**



What goals do those who spread it want to achieve?

1. **To build a particular image of Russia as a fortress surrounded by hostile external environment and keeper of classical, conservative values – the right values.**
2. To illustrate the Baltic countries and, more broadly, small countries in the region as hostile, hysteric but powerless.



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

1. Such an image helps justify the aggressive foreign policy, military spending, promotes stability of current authorities and helps gaining domestic and foreign support among those who associate themselves with Christian and conservative set of ideas.
2. To illustrate the global politics as a business of the big, with their interests that everyone else should count with. Meanwhile, small countries are illustrated as the ones that exaggerate the severity of threats and are hostile.



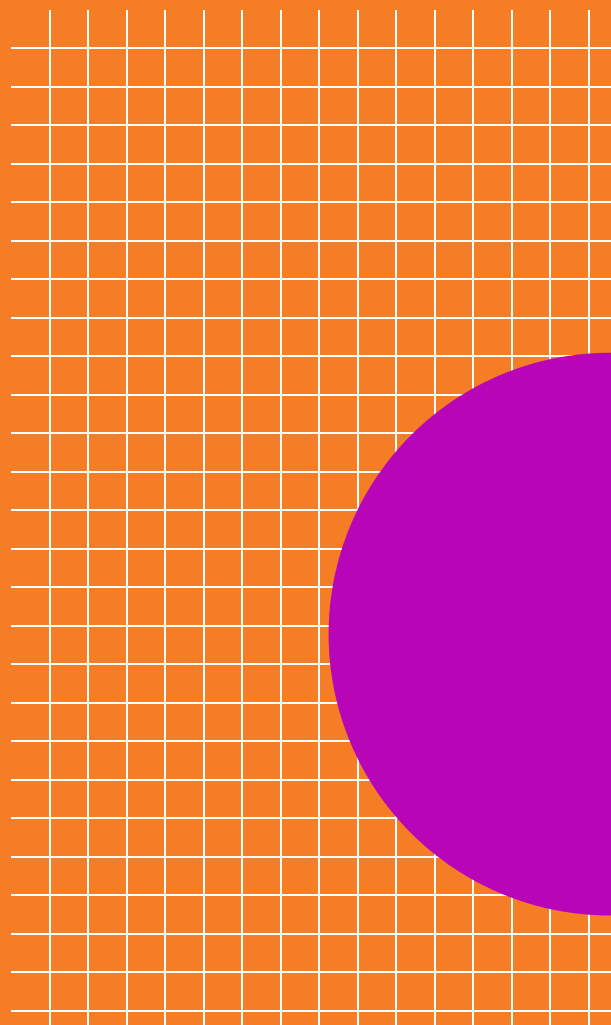
Data / information is considered the most important in this monitoring period

1. Putin-Biden negotiations about security in Europe and reaction of the Nordic-Baltic countries.
2. Emphasized human rights violations with regard to Russian compatriots in Latvia and Estonia.
3. Europe's lack of respect for human rights and the decisions of their own court.

Belarus in the Russian media online

Monitoring and Analysis
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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: 1180 articles about Belarus. The number decreased by 55,9%.

Main thematic areas: Politics (83,4%) and economy (19,7%). The percentage does not add up to 100% as particular articles may have several tags.

Thematic areas that dominated:

Among the political topics, it is impossible to identify a single dominant issue:

- International response to the migration crisis on the Belarusian border (6,7%);
- Alexander Lukashenko's attitude towards Crimea (5,9%);
- Russia's and Belarus' relations with the West (5,1%) in a broad sense.

Economy: sanctions and Belarus' response to them (39,1%); announcement of energy resources transit blockade from Russia to Europe, the role of Belarus in the transit (25,8%);

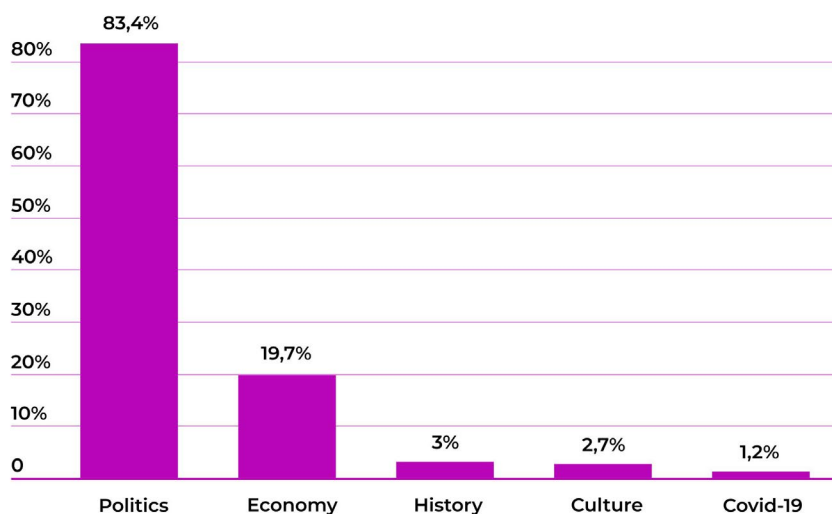
History: reflection on the collapse of the USSR (46,7%);

Culture: deaths of artists in 2021, memories of their life and work (21,9%);

Covid-19 – no dominant topics.

What topics gained, what were constant, and what topics decreased (based on tags): Economy (19,7%), history (3%) and culture-related topics (2,7%) gained popularity. Covid-19 topics remained at the same level (1,2%). Politics (83,4%) – decrease in popularity. The percentage does not add up to 100% as particular articles may have various topic range.

Main thematic areas:



Source: Own elaboration, Center for Propaganda and Disinformation Analysis



Main narrative

The West is putting so much pressure on Belarus that it is forced to give a tough response.



What goals do those who spread it want to achieve?

To suggest that the West wants to destroy the Belarusian economy; to justify the extreme blackmail and threats of Alexander Lukashenko towards the West; to show that Belarus has nothing left to lose as a result of the sanctions.



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

In Russian society, the narrative should:

1) evoke a sense of empathy towards the fate of Belarusians who have been “left behind” by the West; 2) reinforce the impression of the “us vs. them” division (i.e. Russian-Western animosities) and highlight the alleged threat from European countries and the US.



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

Information on other foreign policy vectors of Belarus. First, there was news that Alexander Lukashenko signed a directive on the development of bilateral relations with China until 2025, including cooperation in the military and political spheres. Later, information about a potential severance of relations with the EU from the Belarusian Foreign Minister was reported. However, it was not specified exactly what kind of relationship the Minister had in mind beyond the term “normal”.



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

a) Underlying the main narrative are president Lukashenko's December statements about the possibility of:

1. the deployment of Russian nuclear weapons on Belarusian territory due to the “reckless policy of the West”;
2. cutting off gas transit to Europe.

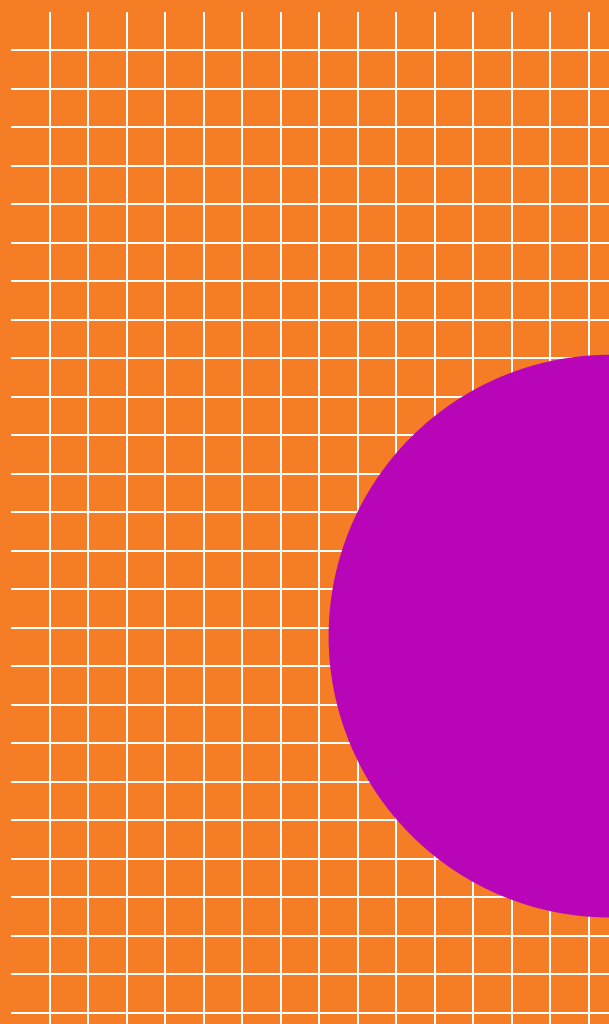
These two statements were presented as a Belarusian expression of desperation. Similar narratives should trigger a sense of moral obligation in Russia to provide more support to its neighbours. They gain deeper significance in the context of the earlier information about granting additional loans to Belarus and the need for further economic integration.

b) The topic of the migration crisis was presented from the perspective of Belarusian efforts to solve it. Dominant narrative was that “Belarus is doing everything it can.” It was emphasised that the EU is passive and did not take concrete action beyond criticism (verbal or written). The term “refugee”, which has been more widely used since November, also featured in the articles.

Belarus in the Russian media online

Monitoring and Analysis
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Dzmitry Mitskevich



Monitored media:

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

The research results

Overall number of news items: there were 639 results with “Belarus” tag in November (out of 1306), and 148 out of 714 in December; therefore, there was a 76,84% decrease of news items with “Belarus” tag.

Main thematic areas: Russia (30,8%); Alexander Lukashenko(24,9%); Poland (19,5%); European Union (12,7%); Sanctions (9,4%); Migrants (7,8%); Ukraine (6,3%); Vladimir Putin (5,4%); Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya (0,9%).

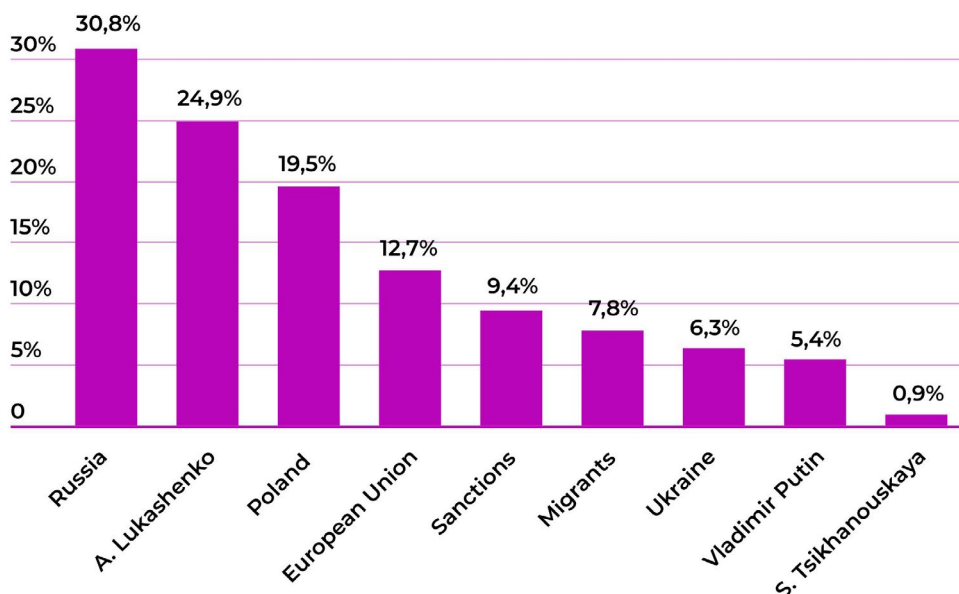
Thematic areas that dominated: The politics continued to take the main place on the agenda, however, its role declined in comparison with the previous month. In December, it was around 55% (compared to almost 85% in November). At the same time, it should be noted that a significant part of the news was dedicated to the economy (around 25%) and to the issues of national security and defense (around 20%).

What topics gained, what were constant, and what topics decreased (based on tags): In December, the information agenda of Russian niche media went back to paying more attention to Russia (30,8% of the messages in comparison to 31,3% in November) and Lukashenko (24,9% against 19,7%). However, Poland still was among the three most discussed topics, although its share dropped significantly (from 37% in November to 19,5% in December). The mentions of Ukraine were twice as few – from 11,7% in November to 6,3%. The European Union was mentioned in 12,7% of messages (the percentage grew slightly in comparison to almost 10% in November). One has to note that Russian niche media started to pay attention to Western sanctions against Lukashenko’s regime as well as counter-sanctions of Minsk (14% in comparison to 3% last month).

Russian niche media almost completely ignored the following topics that were on the top of agenda in Belarusian information field:

- appointment of the new head of Belarusian Central Electoral Commission;
- threats of Lukashenko to support Russian military aggression against Ukraine;
- Lukashenko’s claims of having purchased nuclear weapons;
- the proposal of constitutional reform that was rolled out by Minsk.

Main thematic areas:



Source: Own elaboration, Center for Propaganda and Disinformation Analysis



Main narrative

There were two narratives worth mentioning. The first one was connected with promoting the “confessions” of Emil Czecko – Polish deserter who ran away from the Polish army to be used by Lukashenka and Kremlin’s propaganda. Every possible pro-government media outlet reported his words about Polish soldiers killing hundreds of volunteers and migrants at the Polish-Belarusian border. The second important narrative was revolved around statements that the close cooperation of Belarus and Russia in the light of sanctions against Lukashenka’s regime will help Minsk to overcome all difficulties. This narrative was accompanied with another one about the ineffectiveness of Western sanctions.



What goals do those who spread it want to achieve?

The main goal was to impose pressure on Poland from the EU by showing that Poland is allegedly breaking the international law and acting in an inhumane way. Another aim was to worsen the image of Western sanctions and to show that their implementation would have no impact. This was intended to show that Belarus has only one way to improve its situation and this way is establishing a close union with Russia.



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

Russian media continue to support Lukashenka's rhetoric about the senselessness of Western sanctions. **However, they also want to show that Russia is the only ally left, which pushes Minsk to closer integration in the light of "aggressive policy of collective West".** It is also necessary to note that the Russian niche media paid no interest to the topics which can really influence the current situation in Belarus – for example, personnel changes in the Central Electoral Commission or the project of a constitutional reform.



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

For the first time throughout the monitoring, Russian niche media paid more or less significant attention to sanctions, which tells us about the influence of this topic both for Lukashenka's regime and the Kremlin. The topic of the migration crisis became popular once again after the appearance of Emil Czecko in the media. **It is important to underline the small number of the reports from the meeting of Lukashenka and Putin, taking place at the end of the month.** This tells us about the actual absence of any significant result in negotiations of Minsk and Moscow, as well as Lukashenka's failure to "sell" his project of a constitutional reform to Putin.



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