

Strengthening the Capacity to Counter Disinformation

Russian information space

September-October 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.

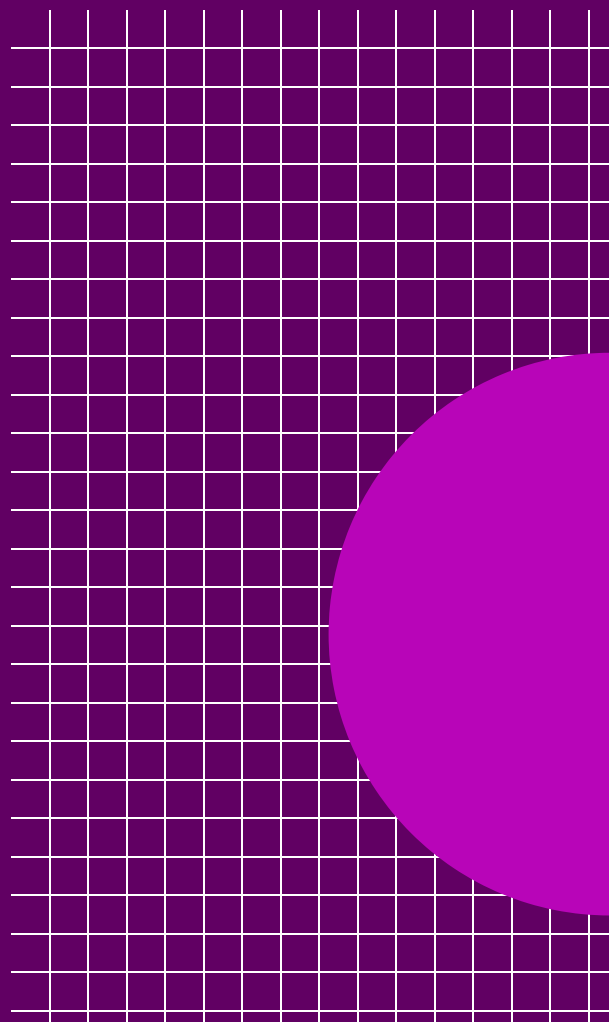
The main activity includes the development of the international Permanent Monitoring and Analyzing Group (PMAG). The main task of the PMAG will be monitoring and analyzing Russian information space in three ways: with the main Russian online media, niche or regional Russian online media as well as Russian 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 September 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: 394; 140 more than in the previous month (August) – an increase of 35,53%.

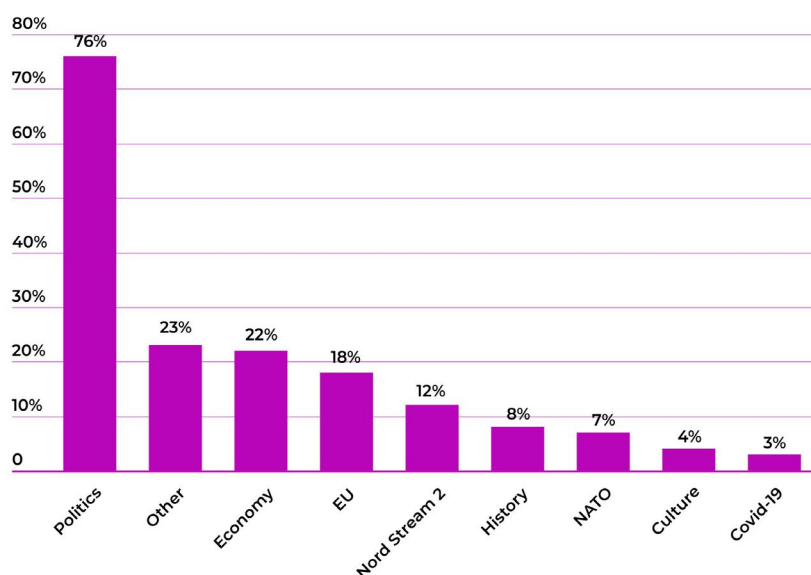
Main thematic areas: Politics (76%); Other (23%); Economy (22%); EU (18%); Nord Stream 2 (12%); History (8%); NATO (7%); Culture (4%); Covid-19 (3%).

Thematic areas that dominated: Defense, military equipment – 54 mentions; Migrant crisis on Belarusian borders with Poland and Lithuania – 73; Poland's opposition to the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline – 47; Poland-EU disputes – 30; Poland-Germany relations – 34; European gas market – 27; Poland-Ukraine relations – 33; Poland-US relations – 14; Poland-Russia relations – 45; Poland-Belarus relations – 26.

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

- **increase:** Politics – 300 mentions (39% more in comparison to August 2021); Other – 92 (44% more); Economy – 87 (164% more); Nord Stream 2 – 47 (88% more); EU – 70 (312% more); History – 31 (55% more); NATO – 27 (17% more); Culture – 15 (400% more); COVID-19 – 11 (10% more).

Main thematic areas:



Source: Own elaboration, Center for Propaganda and Disinformation Analysis



The main narrative says that

The Polish authorities are trying to politicize economic issues and are convinced of the existence of a geopolitical threat from Russia.



What goals do those who spread it want to achieve?

Decreasing the importance of the Polish authorities' objections to the actions taken by the Russian government in the consciousness of Russian society.



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

The Russian mainstream media promote the image of Russia as a superpower, a politically, economically and militarily strong state, for which it is necessary to depreciate Poland's position.



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

Before and during the Zapad-2021 exercises, there was an increase in the number of articles on the military sector, albeit not directly related to the exercises taking place, which may have a propaganda role as this showed Russia's military strength.



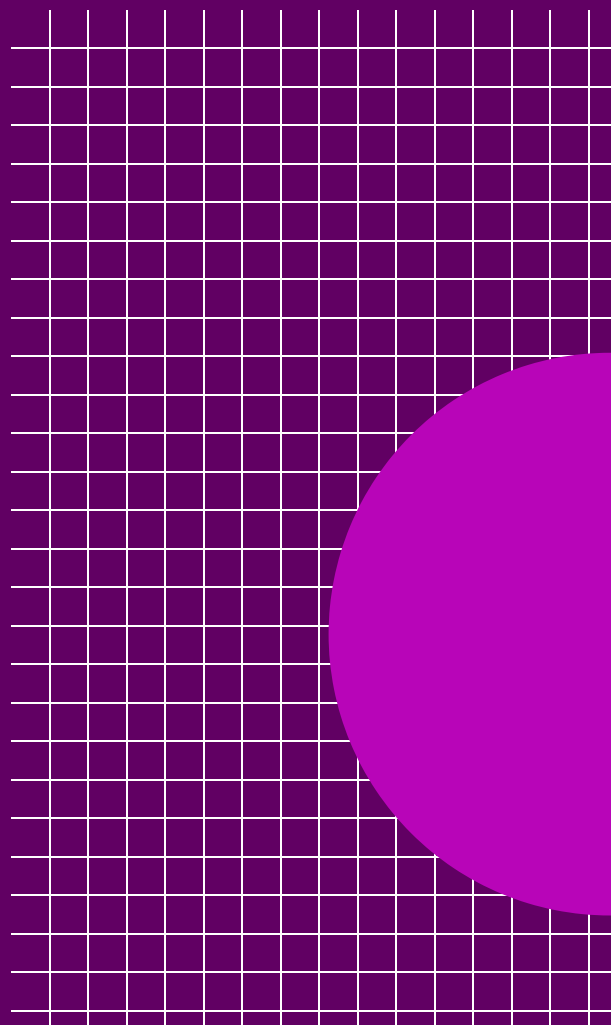
Other comments and / or, if possible, a forecast of the listed points

The increase in the number of articles on Poland is due to the simultaneous occurrence of a number of "catchy" and widely commented situations in addition to the previous ones, i.e. the migrant crisis and Poland's opposition to Nord Stream 2, the Zapad-2021 military exercises, the increase in gas prices and events related to the unstable relations between Poland and the EU. The question of the continuation of the trend so far has been related to the increased number of articles published about Poland, therefore, it depends on the development of the situation on the Polish-Belarusian border related to migrants as well as the political course taken by the Polish authorities towards the EU and the Nord Stream 2.

Poland in the Russian media online

Monitoring and Analysis
of Russian information
space in September 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: 304, an increase of 22.08% in relation to the previous month.

Main thematic areas: Policy (61,18%); Belarus (24,01%); EU (23,68%); NATO (15,78%); Nord Stream 2 (14,14%); Economy (12,82%); History (12,5%); Other (5,92%); Culture (2,63%); Covid-19 (1,64%); Sanctions (1,31%).

Thematic areas that dominated: Policy – 186 mentions; Belarus – 73; EU – 72.

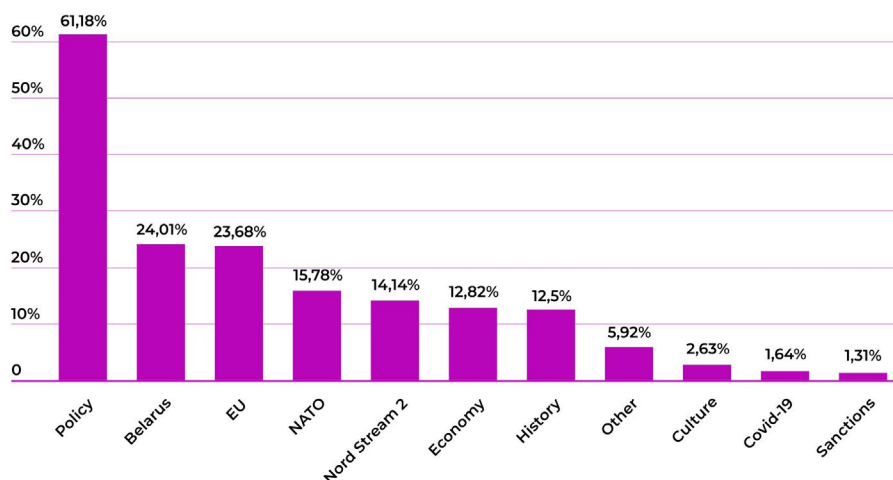
What topics gained, what were constant, and what topics decreased (based on tags):

In September the following topics gained: EU (August: 12 news; September: 72 news, an increase of 500%); Nord Stream 2 (August: 18 news; September: 43 news, an increase of 138,8%); NATO (August: 33 news; September: 48 news, an increase of 45,45%); Policy (August: 132 news; September: 184, an increase of 39,39%); Economy (August: 30 news; September: 39 news, an increase of 30%); History (August: 34 news; September: 38 news, an increase of 11,76%).

The following topics were constant: Covid-19 (August: 4 news, September: 5 news); Culture (August: 5 news; September: 8 news); Sanctions (August: 6 news; September: 4 news); Belarus (August: 79 news; September: 73 news).

The following topics decreased: Other (August: 50; September: 18, a decrease of 64%).

Main thematic areas:



Source: Own elaboration, Center for Propaganda and Disinformation Analysis



Main narrative

There is a continuous militarization of Poland, which is directed against Belarus and Russia. The militarization of the state is part of NATO's aggressive actions in the region, which poses a threat to the Russian-Belarusian Union State. On the other hand, niche Russian media were referring to Polish and foreign media outlets who were implying a threat from Russia during the Zapad 2021 exercises, undermining their reports as well as directing the audience's attention to NATO activities in the region.



Goal / Purpose

The main objective of this narrative is to influence public opinion about NATO and Poland and to show them as a potential threat to the security of Belarus and Russia. Furthermore, the media emphasized that these actions were intended to change the existing military balance of power in the Eastern European region. **The niche media shall aim to strengthen support for the increased militarization of Belarus and Russia as a response to this threat.**



Impact / Consequences

Above all, Russia is shown as a defensive actor, and military exercises such as the Zapad 2021 are presented as a necessary action during a hybrid conflict with the United States and the European Union. Thus, niche media justify the possible deployment of additional Russian forces in Belarus.



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

Attention should be drawn to information that has appeared several times in niche media, namely the existence of anti-Russian information warfare centers in Poland and the Baltic states. The media report that such centers are sponsored by the United States and the United Kingdom. The centers' activities are focused on spreading "propaganda about Russia" through the media and on supporting "pseudo-organizations" supporting human rights in Russia. One of the main tasks of these organizations is allegedly to create chaos in Russia. The information that appeared in a few niche media was quite vague and in no way proven.



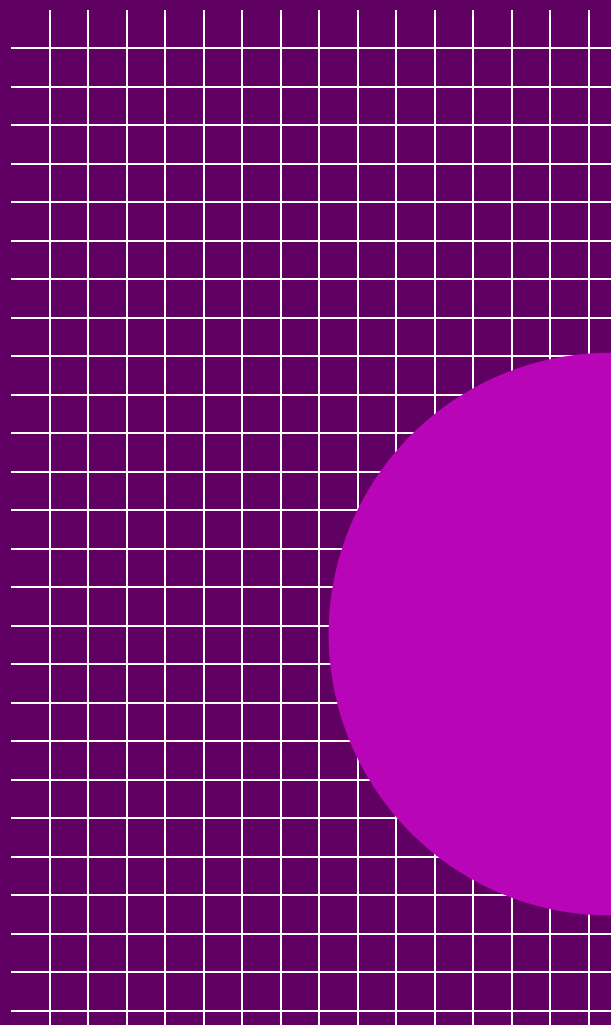
Other comments and / or, if possible, a forecast of the listed points

During the following period, the niche media have been actively covering the conflict in relations between Poland and the European Union, paying particular attention to the traditional values that Poland “defends” in the EU as one of the few countries.

Baltic states in the Russian media online

Monitoring and Analysis
of Russian information
space in September 2021

Adam Błonowski



Monitored media:

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

The research results

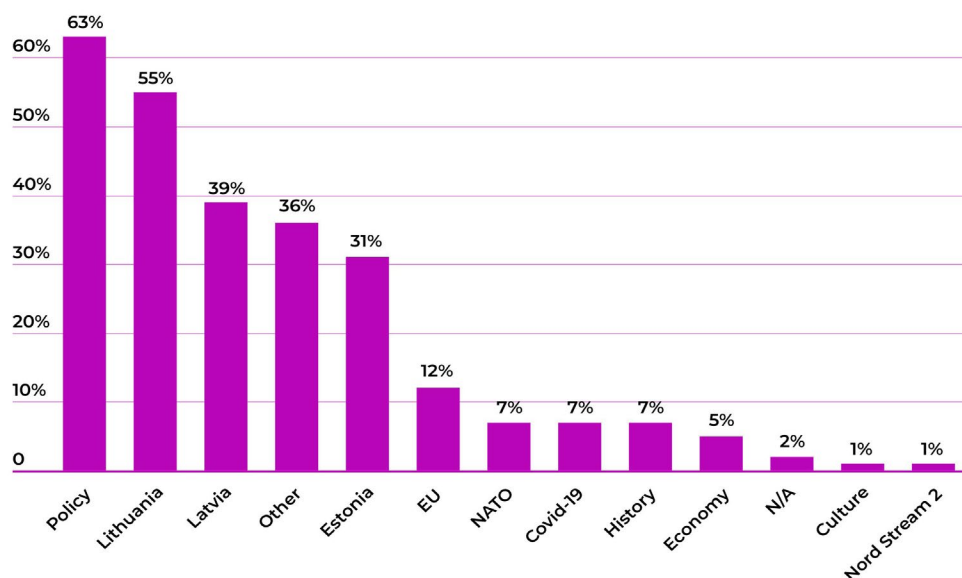
Overall number of news items: 644 results in September (1,55% increase compared to August).

Main thematic areas: Policy (63%); Lithuania (55%); Latvia (39%); Other (36%); Estonia (31%); EU (12%); NATO (7%); Covid-19 (7%); History (7%); Economy (5%); N/A (2%); Culture (1%); Nord Stream 2 (1%).

Thematic areas that dominated: Statement by the President of Estonia on Ukraine's future membership in NATO and the EU; Migration crisis and Lithuania's announced that Russia will engage in Belarusian "hybrid aggression"; COVID-19 pandemic in Lithuania: Imposing restrictions on people who are not vaccinated against the coronavirus; Lithuania observing Zapad 2021 military drills in Belarus; Baltic Pride in Vilnius; St. George's Ribbon banned at public events in Latvia; Violation of Estonian airspace by a Russian plane; US support for Lithuania during the migration crisis and dispute with China; Refusal to provide Belarus with legal aid by the Lithuanian Prosecutor General's Office in the matter of the genocide in Belarus during World War II and in the post-war period.

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

Main thematic areas:



Source: Own elaboration, Center for Propaganda and Disinformation Analysis



Main narrative

- Regarding the migration crisis on the Lithuanian-Belarusian border, the defense minister of Lithuania accused Belarus and Russia for a jointly coordinated “hybrid attack” involving illegal migrants on the border of the Baltic states and Poland.
- Lithuania imposed severe restrictions on those who do not vaccinate from coronavirus.
- Lithuania reacted to military training “Zapad-2021” of Russia and Belarus.
- The President of Lithuania has changed his attitude towards sexual minorities. Gitanas Nausėda opposed the “European values”.
- Lithuania intended to donate military ammunition to Ukraine for €677,000.
- Lithuania called upon to continue economic pressure on Belarus.
- Nationalist Party became the most popular one in Estonia.
- Estonian President Kersti Kaljulaid recognized that Ukraine was “several light years away” from fulfilling the necessary conditions for a membership at the European Union.
- Estonian Defense Forces Martin Herem stated that the Russian Federation poses a serious threat and may attack the Baltic countries.



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

Russian-Belarusian “Zapad-2021” joint military drills. It was reported that their course would be observed by two Lithuanian officers and that during similar exercises in Lithuania representatives of Belarus or Russia were invited as well. It was pointed out that the drills were aimed at testing the readiness and the ability to lead the armed forces of Russia and Belarus and had a defensive character. It was also emphasized that at the same time military exercises were held in Latvia along with the participation of other NATO member states. The prevailing media narrative was that the Baltic states accused Russia of pursuing an aggressive foreign policy, hence the growing presence of NATO forces in the region.

Lithuania handed a note of protest to Belarus due to the violation of the Lithuanian border by a group of Belarusian customs officers. This situation was presented as Lithuania only claiming that the violation had taken place.

The Lithuanian Prosecutor General's Office refused to provide legal assistance to Belarus in a criminal investigation into crimes against the population during World

War II. It was indicated that by refusing to help, Lithuania is breaking the provisions on international investigations and contributes to hiding Lithuanian collaborators from the judiciary. It was emphasized that the issue of so-called crimes committed by Lithuanian collaborators during the World War II were among the least researched in Lithuania and in the “territory of the Baltic states of the former USSR”.

The President of Estonia expressed skepticism towards Ukraine’s membership in the EU. The Copenhagen criteria that the applicant countries must meet were brought to readers’ attention. It was emphasized that there is an ongoing dispute between the EU and Ukraine, which is allegedly reluctant to include Ukraine as a member state, plus statements such as the one made by the Estonian do not favor mutual friendly relations.

Lithuania accused Russia of intentionally withholding gas supplies to the EU. Low gas storage in Europe was mentioned.

Baltic Pride 2021 in Vilnius. According to the media propaganda regarding the pride parade, there is a division in the Lithuanian society in terms of the issue of family values, as exemplified by the entrance of liberal parties into the parliament or the support of Family Defense March by the president of Lithuania.

Lithuania to deliver military equipment to Ukraine. It was pointed out that both Lithuania and other Baltic states have been providing Ukraine with military aid from back in the Soviet era or the one left by NATO forces. It was noted that member states are engaged in a practice of giving away the outdated gear to countries that are less technologically developed, and an example of Lithuania was given, as it had received equipment from Denmark prior to joining NATO.

The Latvian Saeima endorsed a law prohibiting the use of Saint George ribbon in the second reading. It was mentioned that there have been marches of Latvian SS Legion organized in Latvia, during which Nazi symbols are used. Statements of Russian politicians referring to the common USSR history and sentiments of Russian-speaking Latvians towards the memories of World War II were cited.

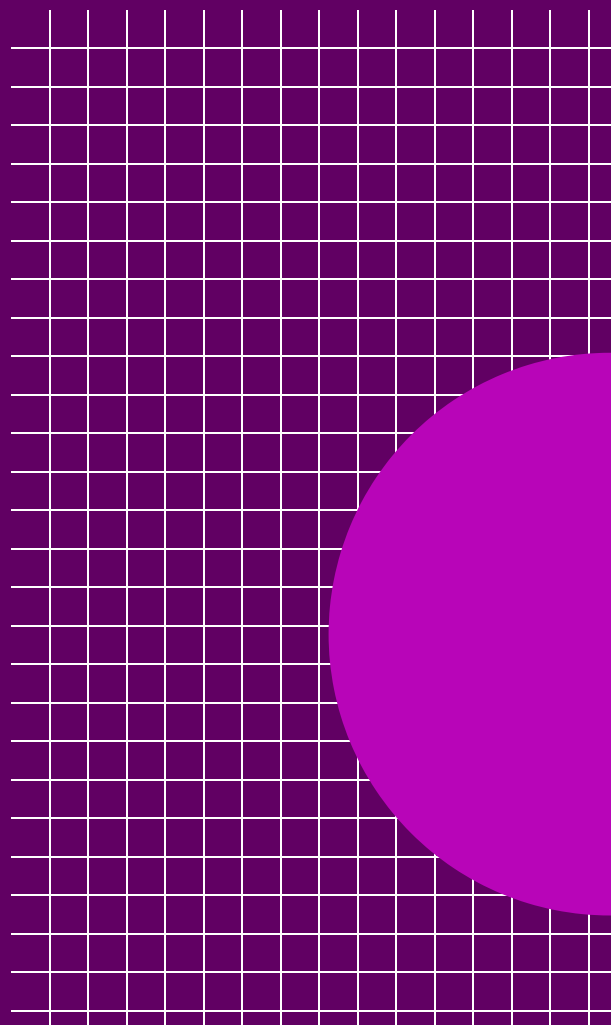
The Russian Federation sent a note of protest to Latvia regarding a war monument in Riga. It was reported about the desecration of the World War II memorial. The content of this note sent by the Russian Embassy described it as an act of vandalism and profanation of the memory of fallen victims. Similar incidents taking place in countries like Ukraine were also mentioned.

Estonia accused Russia of airspace violation. An opportunity was taken to mention various Estonian activities in order to protect the state borders.

Baltic states in the Russian media online

Monitoring and Analysis
of Russian information
space in September 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, 250 messages were analyzed throughout September. There was a 10% information flow increase comparing to August.

Main thematic areas: This month, similarly to the previous one, the main information flow was devoted to the Belarus issues (30%), mostly related to Belarus' waged migrant crisis (21%) in terms of setting up barbed wire on the border of Lithuania, Latvia and Poland. This month the security-related topics were also reflected in relation to Belarus – Zapad 2021 exercises (2%), Ukraine's military drills and NATO's presence there (1%) and intensifying Belarusian military cooperation with Russia (0,8%). Ukraine's issues were likewise discussed this month (8%). In respect to Ukraine, information about the Western unwillingness to proceed with its European and NATO integration dominated (4%). Estonia was emphasized in particular on this subject (3%). Other published topics covered Putin's initiated social benefits for the veterans of Leningrad blockade (3%) and Estonia's claims that Russia had violated the country's airspace six times this year (2%).

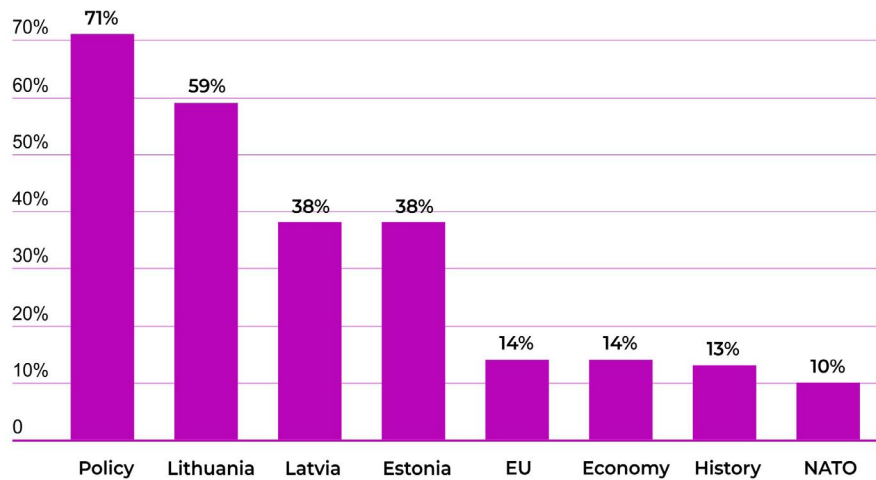
Thematic areas that dominated: In August, just like in previous month, policy theme dominated again (71% out of all tags). The second dominant theme this month was EU (14%), mostly reflected in relation to the migrant crisis (4%), skepticism about Ukraine's European integration prospects (3,2%) and energy issues, namely gas and electricity price (2%). Economy was also covered in 14% of all news items. Another dominant subject was gas prices in Europe (3,2%). This was followed by history (13%), as most articles focused on World War II, including Putin's initiative to grant money to the Leningrad blockade's veterans (2%). NATO and culture were reflected in 10% of all tags. Ukraine-related issues dominated the NATO theme (3,6%). Coverage of Lithuania (59%) prevailed just like in the previous month. Latvia and Estonia were equally covered (38%).

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

This month culture gained the most attention (+267%) and history increased (+71) significantly, too. The EU and economy were covered more than in the previous month. The EU and economy gained respectively 65% and 57% more media interest. Ukraine also dominated in the information space and saw a 27% increase in the amount of news items. Policy, NATO and Belarus coverage remained almost at the same level.

In September, there was a considerable media attention paid to Latvia (+38%), while coverage of Estonia rose only slightly (+9%). Lithuania dominated the agenda this month again, although the level of coverage remained relatively unchanged (+6%).

Main thematic areas:



Source: Own elaboration, Center for Propaganda and Disinformation Analysis



The main narrative says that

- **Ukraine is getting frustrated with the Western ambivalent support to its European and NATO integration and the West does not want Ukraine in their club;**
- Closer Belarusian-Russian integration, particularly in the military field, is on agenda. Narrative is well exemplified by one of the headlines: “A single country by 2024?”;
- **Russian language is highly popular and used in Latvia, but rights of Russian speakers are often violated;** Russia will persistently support the Russian speaking community.



What goals do those who spread it want to achieve?

- To show Ukraine’s frustration with the Eurointegration’s reality offered by the West and poor protects of the country to achieve desired goals;
- Possibly to prepare audience for the deepening cooperation, including the military one, of Belarus and Russia, and depict how an updated military initiative poses new threats to NATO and Ukraine, while secures Russia’s own positions and dominance in the region;

- To depict Latvia as a Russian-speaking and Russian-affiliated country, which does not respect rights of their own Russian-speaking population. Latvia is portrayed as an unfriendly, nationalist state and Russians living there are in need of external support.



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

The Kremlin aims to appeal to its own population by illustrating Ukraine as a failed state and unwanted in the West, which tries to suspend its links with the Brother Nation. Public opinion is set up to support Russia's aggression in Ukraine, compromise Ukraine's political course and prevent popular uprising in Russia itself.

By reflecting new military initiatives with Belarus, Russia tests and gradually prepares its domestic audience for even deeper integration of two countries, not excluding their merge, too. Such a scenario is depicted as favorable for the security of both countries, especially during the time of extensive external threats.



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

1. Belarusian-Russian deeper military integration.
2. Ukraine's frustration with the West and their general skepticism regarding Ukraine's Euro integration prospects.
3. Latvia is partially a Russian-speaking country, yet it violates Russian speakers' rights.



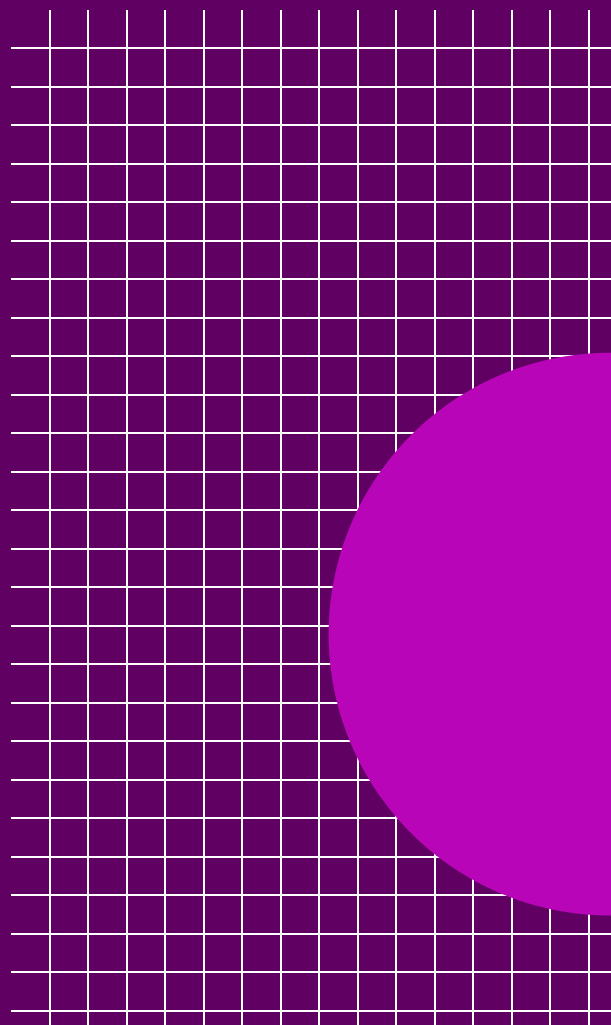
Other comments and / or, if possible, a forecast of the listed points

Topics concerning Belarus and Ukraine will dominate the agenda further on. Policy will dominate in the thematic area. The aims of narratives will remain unchanged.

Belarus in the Russian media online

Monitoring and Analysis
of Russian information
space in September 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: 1039 articles about Belarus, the number increased by 7,5%.

Main thematic areas: Politics (88,9%) and Economy (13,5%). The percentage does not add up to 100% as particular articles may be marked with several tags at once.

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

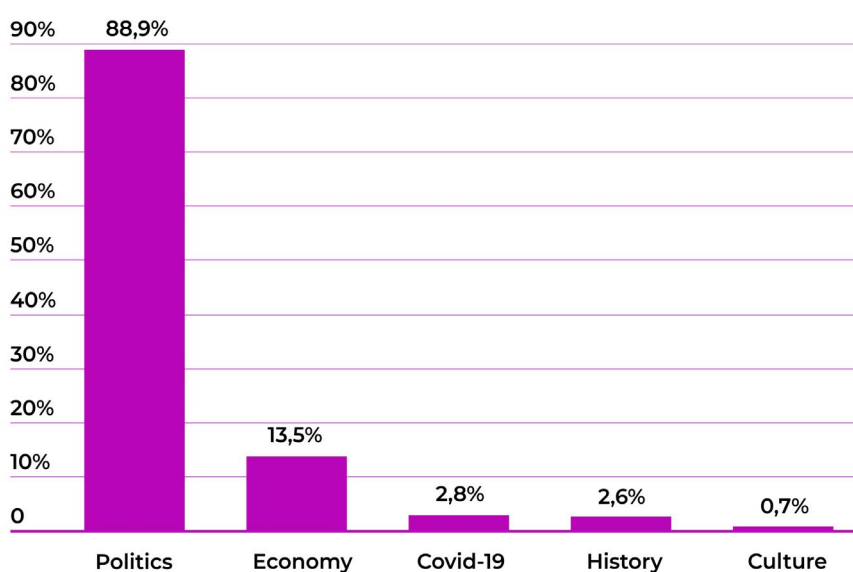
Politics: Russian-Belarusian military exercises Zapad-2021 (10,4%) and NATO's reaction (4%); accelerating integration between Russia and Belarus (5%); migration crisis on Belarusian borders (4%).

Economy: increase of gas prices in the EU and the creation of a common Belarusian-Russian gas market.

History: dissolution of the USSR (29,6%). Covid-19: effectiveness and availability of Sputnik V vaccine (20,7%).

Which topics increased, were constant and decreased in popularity? Political (88,9%) and Economic topics (13,5%) gained popularity. Covid-19 (2,8%) and History (2,6%) – constant number of articles. Culture (0,7%) – decrease in popularity.

Main thematic areas:



Source: Own elaboration, Center for Propaganda and Disinformation Analysis



Main narrative and their aims

Lukashenko in moments of uncertainty always turns to Russia for greater integration in the military field.



What goals do those who spread it want to achieve?

To reveal the role of the growing NATO “threat” as a factor that strengthens the Russian-Belarusian cooperation; to contrast the indispensable need for integration of the peoples of Russia and Belarus with the volatility and political games of Lukashenko; to show that **the permanent deployment of Russian troops in Belarus is in everyone’s interest; to present Russia as a real guarantor of regional stability.**



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

The media coverage of the Zapad-2021 exercises should show the public that Russian power is constantly growing. Narratives suggest that Russia’s role in the Collective Security Treaty Organization and in curbing “Western appetites” is decisive. This is the reason why Belarus (of course, “independently” and “sovereignly”) wants to strengthen integration even in the military field. In addition, opinion-forming texts stress that the Russian authorities are fully aware of Lukashenko’s opportunism. They are therefore formulating their policy on Belarus in a prudent and far-sighted manner – for the good of the Russian people.



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

As predicted in the August 2021 report, the intensification of sentiment towards the USSR in the media space prepared Russian society for September events – the decision of the leaders of Russia and Belarus to accelerating integration in the economic sphere. Twenty-eight union programmes have been tentatively agreed, with the ultimate aim of unifying economic, social and energy policies, including the creation of a common market for gas, oil and electricity. **According to the dominant narrative in the mainstream media, the goal of integration is not to unite states, but to let “the two nations win” (a win-win situation).**



Other comments and / or, if possible, a forecast

a) Media attention is focused on two dimensions of Russian-Belarusian cooperation – military and economic. Messages answering basic questions are addressed to the public, for example: “How will integration affect our economy?” or “Does it mean the political unification of Russia and Belarus?”. It is worth noting that all the preliminary resolutions are presented in a positive light, as a success for Russia. It can be assumed that this topic will be discussed further.

b) In military terms, the media comment baldly: the Zapad-2021 exercises are a signal that the Russians are “staying for good” in Belarus. This signal is sent in particular to Lukashenko, who is accused of inconsistency, or even, of deliberate opportunism in matters of military cooperation. In this light, unfavorable opinions are presented that he overestimates the role of Belarus in regional security and treats Russia only as a source of resources.

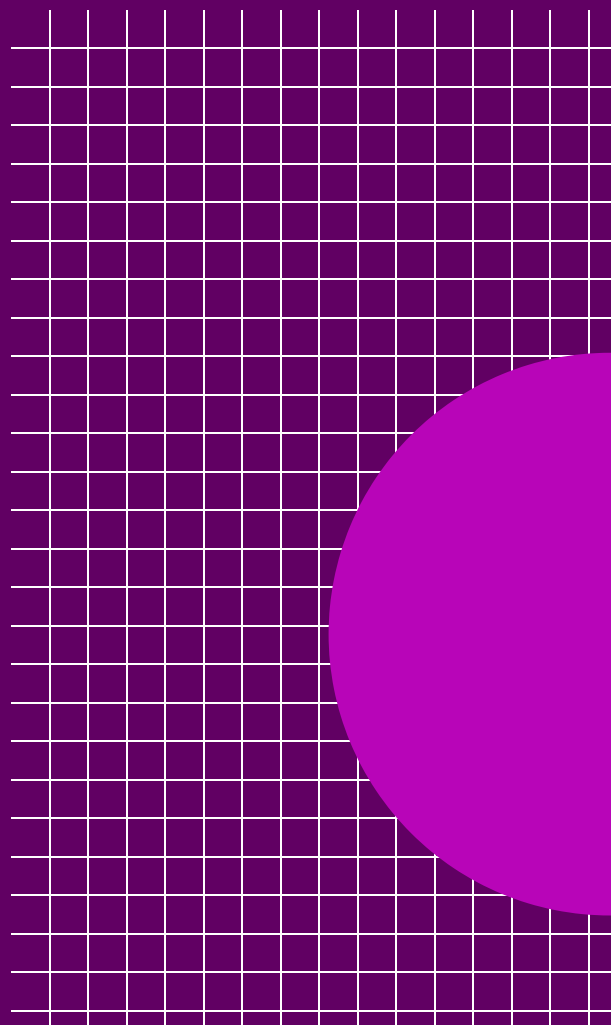
Once the Zapad-2021 exercises are over, the military themes may take the backseat, but more general narratives are to be expected:

1. Russia responds proportionately to NATO activity in Central and Eastern Europe;
2. continuation of the integration policy is necessary to prevent Belarus from falling into NATO's sphere of influence.

Belarus in the Russian media online

Monitoring and Analysis
of Russian information
space in September 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: 499 (out of 761 mentioning Belarus).

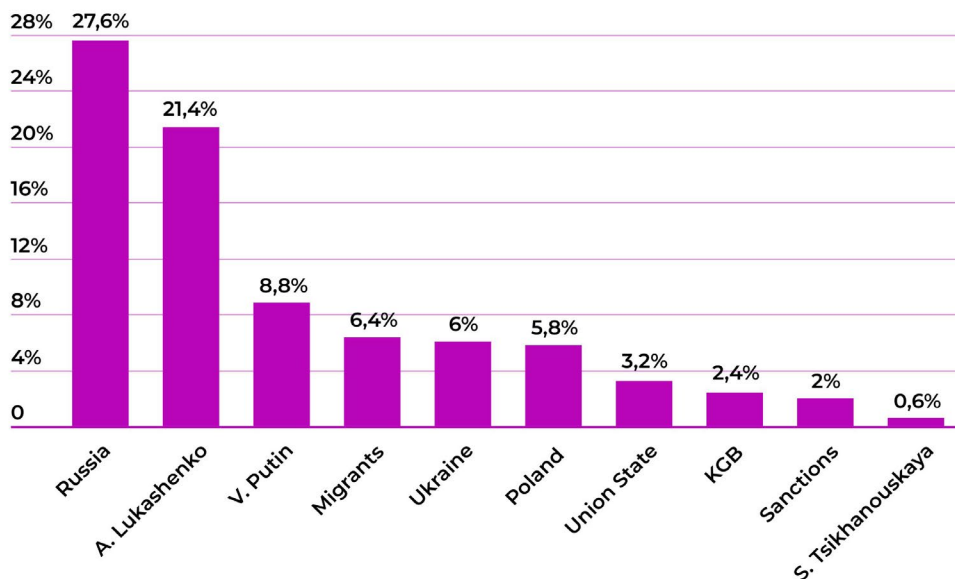
Main thematic areas: Russia (27,6%); Alexander Lukashenko (21,4%); Vladimir Putin (8,8%); Migrants (6,4%); Ukraine (6%); Poland (5,8%); Union state (3,2%); KGB (2,4%); Sanctions (2%); Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya (0,6%).

Thematic areas that dominated: According to the results of monitoring in September, politics continued to be the main area on the agenda of Russian niche media in the context of Belarus. However, its role continues to decrease – it took around 40% of all the messages – which is less than in August (when it was around 50%). At the same time, it should be noted that around 20% of the news items were dedicated to the sphere of defense, which is explained by the detailed coverage of the “Zapad-2021” exercises in the Russian media.

What topics gained, what were constant, and what topics decreased (based on tags): September was the first month in the monitoring, when Alexander Lukashenko was “overthrown” from the first place on the list of most covered topics. This leader was mentioned in 21,4% of all the messages (in comparison to 23,3% in August), **following the Russia-related news, the amount of which increased almost twice – from 15,6% in August to 27,6% in September.** The third most dominant subject was Vladimir Putin; the coverage regarding the Russian president increased four times and amounted to 8,8% (in comparison to 2% in August). The topic of migrants saw more than twice as less news compared to August – from 14,3% to 6,4%. The topic of sanctions continued to be overlooked, with only 2% of news items in September (in comparison to 2,6% in August). One should note the noticeable appearance of Poland and Ukraine on the agenda.

It is necessary to note that Russian media continued to ignore various topics important for the Belarusian media agenda. Thus, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya was practically inexistent in the Russian niche media outlets. Last but not least, the murder of a KGB officer during the attack of KGB “Alfa-group” on a man’s apartment was covered only slightly (2,4%).

Main thematic areas:



Source: Own elaboration, Center for Propaganda and Disinformation Analysis



Main narrative

The main narrative this time was the inevitability of integration of Belarus into Russia. The Russian niche media were mentioning different scenarios of such integration as well as the perspectives of Lukashenko himself in this case. The signing of 28 “union programs” was presented as a success of the Russian foreign policy, but also a possible solution for the ongoing political crisis in Belarus. The integration was the main topic of the meeting between Lukashenko and Putin in September, that is why it dominated the September agenda.



What goals do those who spread it want to achieve?

Presenting the Belarusian-Russian integration and relations between Alexander Lukashenko and Vladimir Putin as the only main topic has one goal – to show that the situation in Belarus and its future fate can only be reliant on the Kremlin, who had reached certain agreements with Minsk despite the pressure from the West.



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

It should be emphasized that Russian niche media are mainly oriented to the Russian internal affairs. **Less attention paid to the migration crisis, as well as to other important topics concerning Belarus, prove that Russian niche media outlets mainly strive to cover topics that are closely connected to the internal situation in Russia in the context of Belarus.**



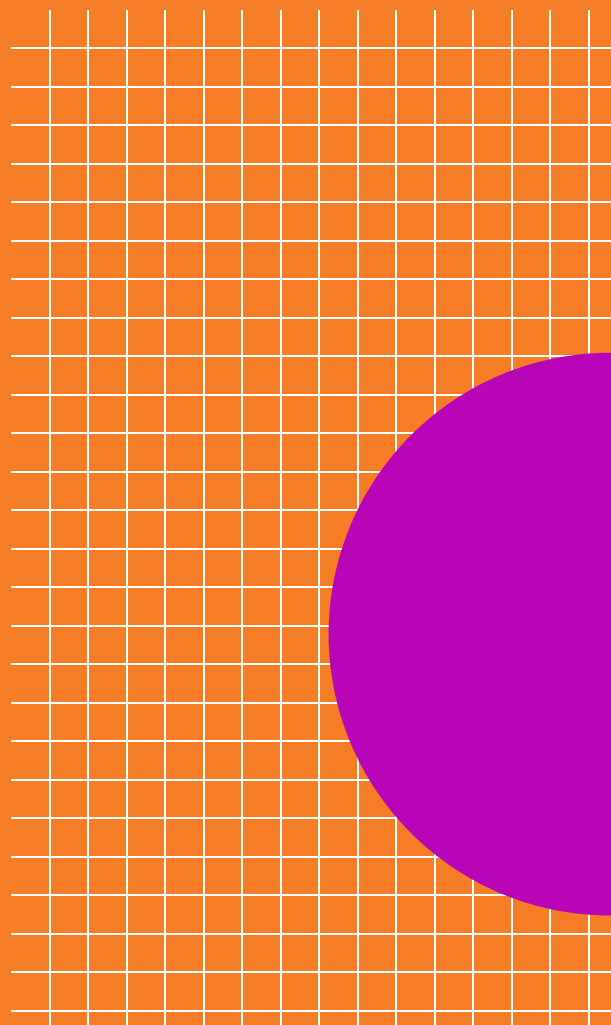
Data / information that is considered the most important in this monitoring period

It is necessary to note that there were a couple of fake news spotted that had been disseminated by the Russian niche media this month. For example, there were several news about the procurement of Abrams tanks by Poland – it was claimed that Poland was going to deploy all 250 tanks (the whole brigade) to the border with Belarus, which was absolutely not true. At the same time, the famous technique of Russian propaganda was used, which was producing a news story based solely on the comments published under the articles of foreign media outlets. For example, the news about “Germans requiring exclusion of Poland from the EU” was based on just two comments under some Der Spiegel article.

Poland in the Russian media online

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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: 404 articles, so 10 messages more compared to September 2021 (2,48% more)¹.

Main thematic areas: Politics (73%); EU (37%); Economy (29%); Other (16%); Nord Stream 2 (12%); NATO (7%); History (4%); Culture (4%); Covid-19 (2%).

Thematic areas that dominated: Migrant crisis on the Polish-Belarusian border (83/21%); Poland-Ukraine relations and cooperation (28/7%); European gas market (87/22%); Poland-European Union relations (63/16%); Poland-Russia relations (79/20%); Poland-Belarus relations (45/11%); Poland's opposition to the Nord Stream 2 project (48/12%)

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

Increase in popularity

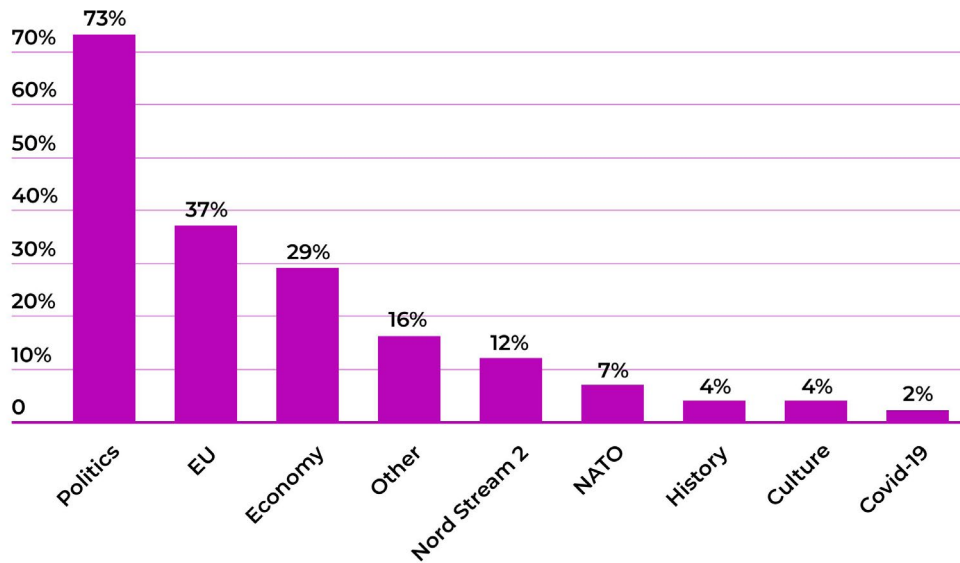
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|---------------|---------|-----|-----------|----|----------|-------------|
| EU | October | 148 | September | 70 | increase | 111% |
| Economy | October | 117 | September | 87 | increase | 34% |
| NATO | October | 29 | September | 27 | increase | 7% |
| Culture | October | 16 | September | 15 | increase | 7% |
| Nord Stream 2 | October | 48 | September | 47 | increase | 2% |

Decrease in popularity

| | | | | | | |
|----------|---------|-----|-----------|-----|----------|------------|
| Politics | October | 296 | September | 300 | decrease | 1% |
| Covid-19 | October | 10 | September | 11 | decrease | 9% |
| Other | October | 63 | September | 92 | decrease | 32% |
| History | October | 18 | September | 31 | decrease | 42% |

¹ The data is incomplete due to lack of results for 25-31.10.2021, caused by an error on the Pulsar platform.

Main thematic areas:



Source: Own elaboration, Center for Propaganda and Disinformation Analysis



The main narrative says that

The Polish authorities are making accusations against Russia of deliberately causing an energy crisis in Europe.



What goals do those who spread it want to achieve?

Presentation of economic relations linking Russia with other countries as non-political.



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

Protection of Russian economic interests.



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

The subject of rising gas prices in Europe was discussed in both economic and political terms. In the political context, Gazprom's deliberate manipulation of raw material prices was ruled out, and their increase was presented as the result of natural economic processes.



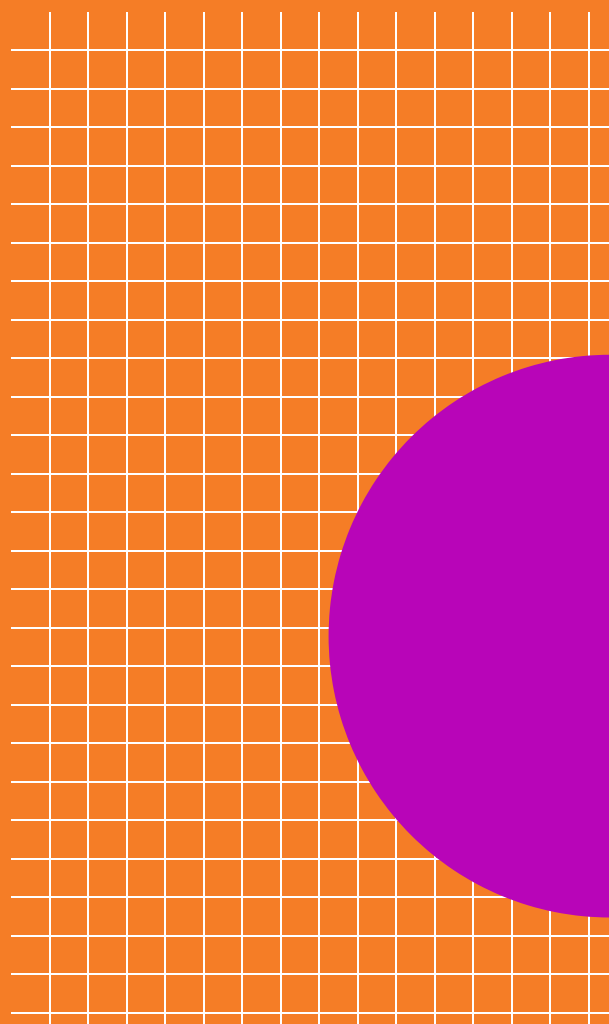
Other comments and / or, if possible, a forecast of the listed points

An increased interest in the European Union in the monitored media outlets can be observed (148 messages in October compared to 70 in September). This is due to the sentence of the Constitutional Tribunal of Poland concerning the primacy of the Polish constitution over EU treaties and the discussion within EU institutions regarding the rule of law in Poland. The popularity of the European Union-related topics is also linked to initiatives jointly undertaken by its member states (and proposals for such actions), such as sanctions against Belarus over migrant crisis, and the study of Gazprom's alleged influence on rising gas prices in Europe. The continuation of this trend in the coming weeks would be possible and depends on Warsaw's adopted approach towards the European Union as well as future developments in gas prices.

Poland in the Russian media online

Monitoring and Analysis
of Russian information
space in October 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: 283 in total – a 6,9% decrease compared to the previous month.

Main thematic areas: Policy (66,78%); EU (31,8%); Belarus (31,09%); Other (12,36%); NATO (12,01%); Economy (12,01%); Nord Stream 2 (10,6%); History (8,83%); Sanctions (4,59%); Culture (2,12%); Covid-19 (2,12%).

Thematic areas that dominated: Policy – 189 mentions; EU – 90; Belarus – 88.

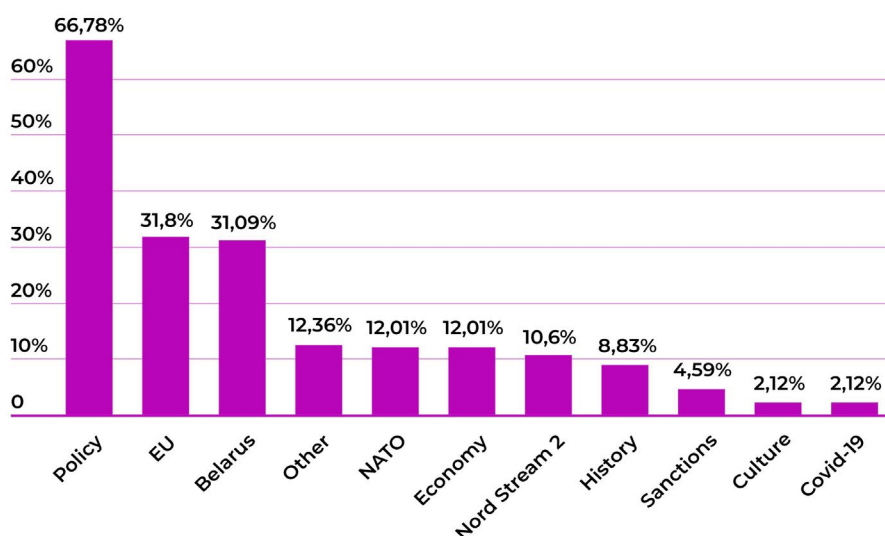
What topics gained, what were constant, and what topics decreased (based on tags):

In August the following topics gained: EU (September: 72 news; October: 90 news, an increase of 25%); Other (September: 18 news; October: 35 news, an increase of 94,44%); Belarus (September: 73 news; October: 88 news, an increase of 20,54%); Sanctions (September: 4 news; October: 13 news, an increase of 225%).

The following topics were constant: Covid-19 (September: 5 news; October: 6 news); Culture (September: 8 news; October: 6 news); Economy (September: 39 news; October: 34 news); Policy (September: 184 news; October: 189 news).

The following topics decreased: Nord Stream 2 (September: 43 news; October: 30 news, a decrease of 30,23%); NATO (September: 48 news; October: 34 news, a decrease of 29,16%); History (September: 38 news; October: 25 news, a decrease of 34,21%).

Main thematic areas:



Source: Own elaboration, Center for Propaganda and Disinformation Analysis



Main narrative

Poland, together with other European countries, continues to interfere in the internal affairs of Belarus in order to bring about a change of power in the country and a military conflict. The migrant crisis on the border with Belarus is described as a “military-political instrument” in the hands of the Polish authorities against Alexander Lukashenko.



What goals do those who spread it want to achieve?

The main objective in this case is to demonstrate Poland’s aggressive policy towards Russia’s closest ally and to shift the emphasis in the migration crisis created by the Belarusian government onto Polish actions.



Impact / Consequences

This narrative is reflected in the new military doctrine of the Union State of Russia and Belarus, which was presented on October 20. One of the driving forces of this doctrine is the increased activity of NATO forces in Poland in the border area with Belarus.



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

Several times over the course of the monitoring, there was information that **Poland, if Ukraine were to collapse, for various reasons (war with Russia, disintegration of state structures) would join Russia and Hungary in the occupation of the Ukrainian state and annex the region of Galicia.** This narrative was usually presented in the form of statements made by Ukrainian or Russian political analysts. However, it is worth pointing out that this rhetoric has existed in the Russian information space for a long time and has been repeatedly refuted by the Polish authorities.



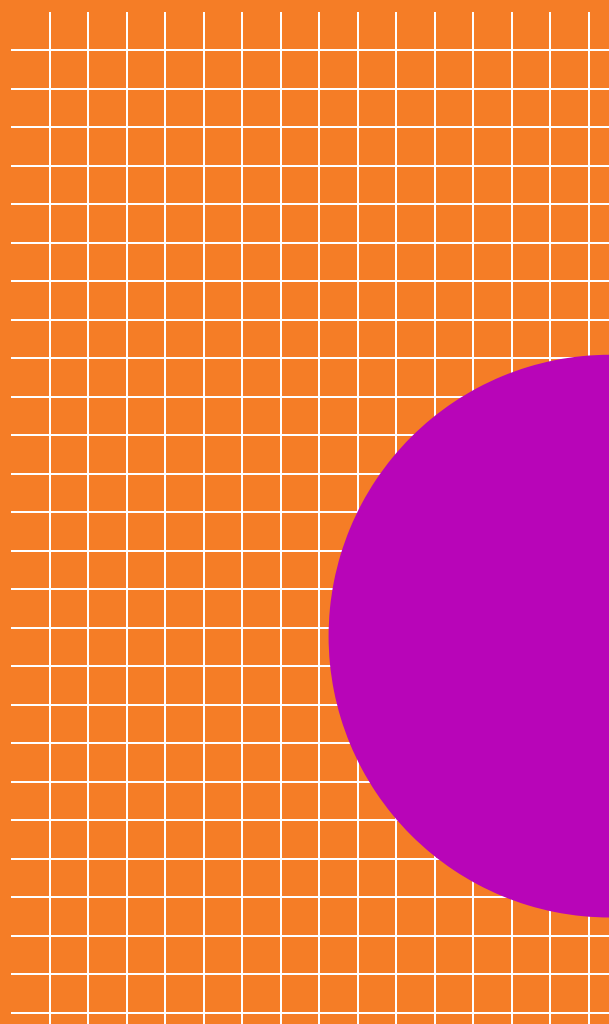
Other comments and / or, if possible, a forecast of the listed points

On 15th of October, the Russian authorities have designated the legal entities of the Rosbalt News Agency as “foreign agents”. Since then, Rosbalt was ordered to label their content with an intrusive disclaimer. This showed that the Russian government continues to fight against any form of media freedom, that Rosbalt would benefit from prior to the recent events.

Baltic states in the Russian media online

Monitoring and Analysis
of Russian information
space in October 2021

Adam Błonowski



Monitored media:

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

The research results

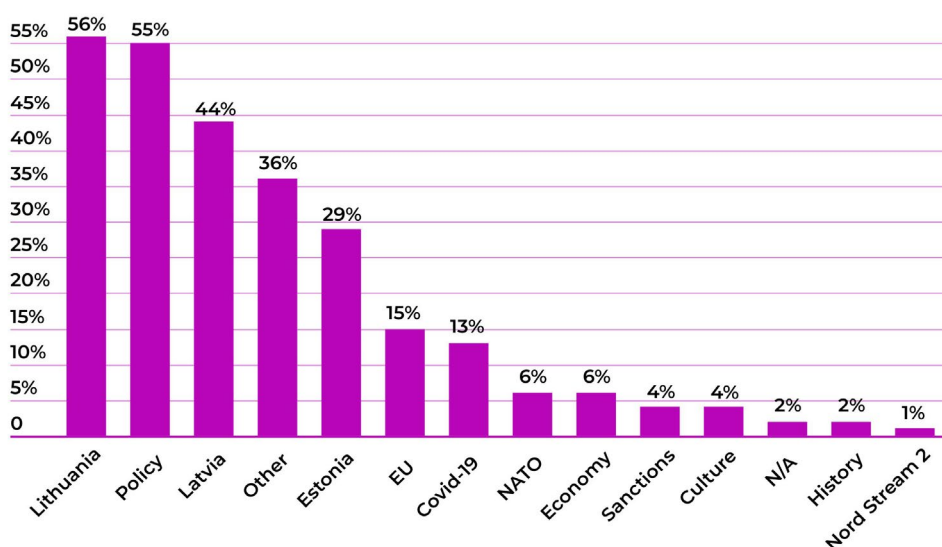
Overall number of news items: 539 articles. Previous period (1-30 September): 619. Relative change: 13%.

Main thematic areas: Lithuania (56%); Policy (55%); Latvia (44%); Other (36%); Estonia (29%); EU (15%); Covid-19 (13%); NATO (6%); Economy (6%); Sanctions (4%); Culture (4%); N/A (2%); History (2%); Nord Stream 2 (1%).

Thematic areas that dominated: Visit of the British Minister of Foreign Affairs to the Baltic States; Flight of the US B-1B Lancer strategic bombers over Lithuania; Statement by a Lithuanian politician on the conditions of the “return” of the Crimea to Ukraine; Statement by the former president of the Supreme Council of Lithuania on the conditions of the return of the Crimean to Ukraine; Belarus–European Union border crisis: Lithuanian calls for a new EU Migration Pact; Russian criticism of the ban on broadcasting the First Channel in Latvia; Lockdown in Latvia; Statement made by the Estonian Defense Minister that the USSR “occupied” the Baltic states.

What topics gained, what were constant, and what topics decreased (based on tags): Gained: COVID-19, NATO, EU, Latvia, Estonia, sanctions; Constant: policy, economy, history, culture, other, Lithuania; Decreased: NS2.

Main thematic areas:



Source: Own elaboration, Center for Propaganda and Disinformation Analysis



Main narrative

The narrative was mostly focused on statements made by the important figures of the Baltic countries' political scenes regarding historical and current relations with Russia. This was to portray Baltic states as hostile and delusional towards Russia and Belarus.

For example, Lithuania dreams of “collapse of Russia”, so that Ukraine can take over Crimea, as stated by the former president of the Lithuanian Supreme Council Vytautas Landsbergis. The speech made by the Estonian Minister of Defence Kalle Laanet at the Warsaw Security Forum, during which he expressed that Estonia wanted to stop Russia with the help of “solidarity” (which could be understood as the engagement of Estonia's allies), was also mentioned. Another example is Lithuanian President Gitanas Nausėda's call for amending the Schengen Code due to hybrid attack by Minsk. The unfriendly attitude of Baltic states (as well as of Poland) was also implied by reports on: Estonian claims that their country had been “occupied” by the USSR and that Russia was their main threat; the demarch of Polish and Baltic states' delegations during Speaker of the Federation Council Valentina Matvienko's speech at the Conference of European Speakers in Athens; Lithuania's purchase of hundreds of kilometers of barbed wire in order to construct a fence along the border with Belarus; reference of discrimination against Russian-speaking minority in Estonia by Alar Karis in his first speech as president.



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

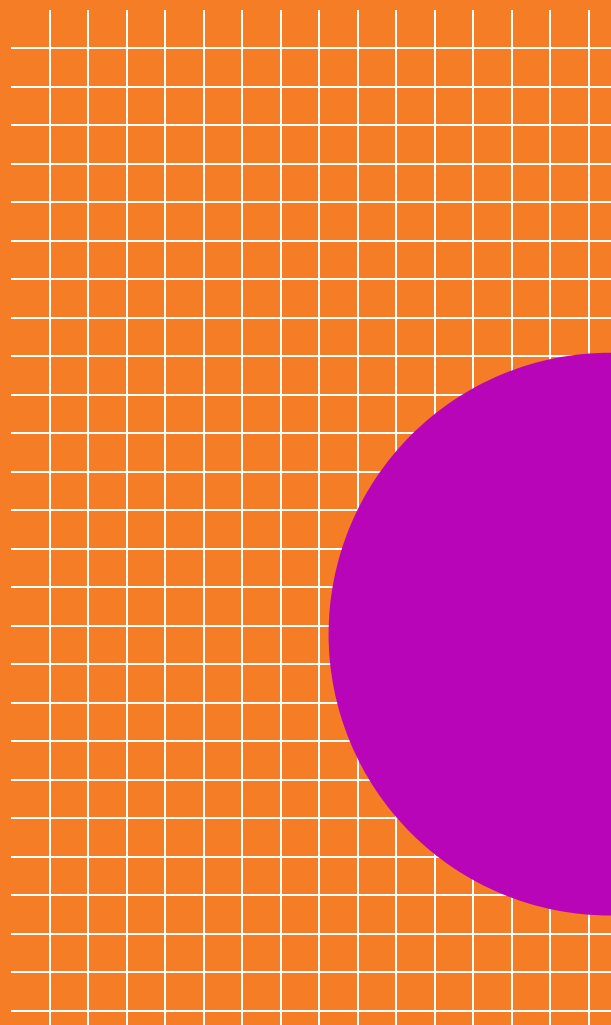
- COVID-19 situation in Lithuania: death of 22 people after being vaccinated against coronavirus since the beginning of the vaccination program.
- Four-week-long lockdown in Latvia.
- Former chairman of the Supreme Council of Lithuania Vytautas Landsbergis speaking about the conditions for the “return” of Crimea to Ukraine.
- The British Minister of Foreign Affairs discussing Russian, Belarusian and Chinese affairs at the meeting of his counterparts from Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia.
- US Air Force strategic bombers B-1B Lancer flying over the Baltic Sea.
- Latvian President Egils Zemtars contracting coronavirus.
- Imposition of the three-month-long state of emergency in Latvia due to COVID-19.

- Claims of the president of the board of Latvijas Gaze gas company Aigars Kalvītis that Nord Stream 2 may stabilize gas prices.
- Increase of the electricity supplies to Estonia and Latvia by Russian “Inter RAO” company.
- Russian Embassy’s condemnation of the act of vandalism against the monument to fallen soldiers in Afghanistan in Tallinn.
- Recognition of the need for demonstrating solidarity as an effective way to stop Russia by the Estonian Defense Minister Kalle Laanet at the Warsaw Security Forum.
- Purchase of Blue Spear anti-ship missiles by Estonia from Israel.
- Visit of the new president of Estonia to Latvia. Statement on the meeting with Vladimir Putin.
- Lithuanian President calling on EU to change the migration policy towards Belarus.
- EU’s refusal to sponsor the construction of a fence on the Lithuanian-Belarusian border.
- Lithuania’s offer to EU to close the airspace for airlines flying to Minsk.
- Appointment of the new Russian ambassador in Latvia.
- Reaction of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the ban on broadcasting the First Channel in Latvia.
- The Estonian Defense Minister naming Moscow the main threat to Tallinn’s independence.
- NATO’s third airbase in Latvia.
- Delegations from Poland and the Baltic States leaving the conference hall during Matvienko’s speech at the Conference of European Speakers in Athens.

Baltic states in the Russian media online

Monitoring and Analysis
of Russian information
space in October 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, 224 messages were analyzed throughout October. It's been -10% information flow decrease compared to September.

Main thematic areas: This time period, similarly to the previous one, the main information flow was devoted to the Belarusian issues (38%). The most debated topic was the migrant crisis (15%), which was discussed from various angles. Migrant issues on the Polish – Belarusian border went to the forefront, the European Union's situation deterioration due to the migrant crisis forged by Belarus and the next round of EU sanctions were also reported. Ukrainian affairs were covered (4%) in terms of a conflict with Hungary over gas supply deal and its confrontation with Russia. Apart from that, the US military aircraft manoeuvres near Kaliningrad Oblast (2%), the Baltic countries' and Polish delegations leaving the European Conference of Presidents of Parliaments in Athens prior to Valentina Matvienko's speech (2%), energy prices and Russian engagement in the energy crisis, including the Nord Stream 2 promotion, were covered (2%).

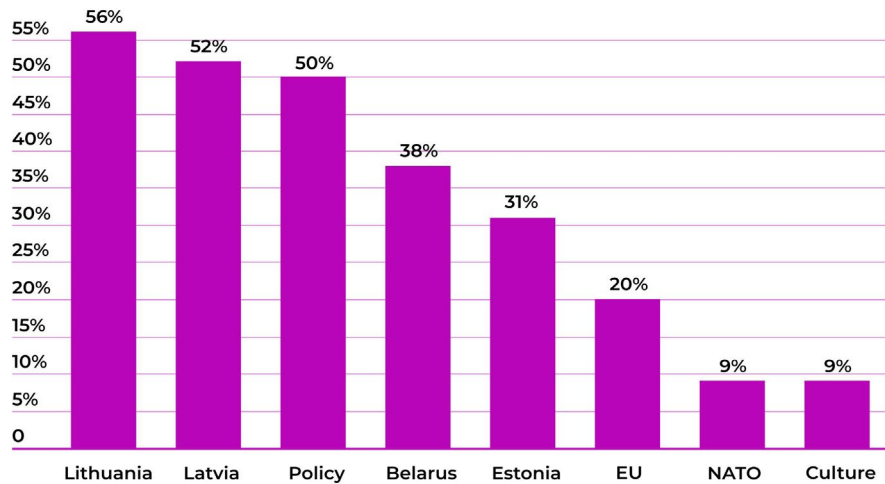
Thematic areas that dominated: Just like in the previous months, policy clearly dominated in October (50%). The Belarus crisis was the next most reflected subject area (38%), including the migrant crisis issues (19%). The EU-related news came in second (20%), among which the migrant crisis aspects were the most discussed (14%). Other prevailing topics were NATO and culture, as both had 9% of tags. Lithuania was the most popular among the Baltic states this month (56%), followed by Latvia (52%) and Estonia (31%).

What topics gained, what were constant, and what topics decreased (based on tags): This month, the coverage of most topics decreased. History decreased by 50%, economy – 47% and policy – by 29%. Ukraine-related news also declined quite significantly by almost 57%. Coverage on cultural issues decreased only slightly, just like the topic of Lithuania which remained almost at the same level (less than 10% decrease). Less news were related to Estonia (-18%).

Some subjects gained more attention this month. Topics that saw the most growth include: European Union (+40%), Latvia (+38%) and Belarus (+23%).

The media coverage intensity remained almost at the same level for NATO and Lithuania.

Main thematic areas:



Source: Own elaboration, Center for Propaganda and Disinformation Analysis



The main narrative says that

Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia are unfriendly, antagonistic and even aggressive towards Russia. More broadly, the environment around Russia and Belarus this month, especially near the EU's eastern border, has gotten even more unfriendly. NATO is boosting its capabilities in the region. Hence, power-balancing measures must be taken.

According to Russian propaganda, in Latvia in particular, but also in other two Baltic states there is a problem with the respect for the rights of their Russian communities (language and 'alien' status issues).



What goals do those who spread it want to achieve?

1. To alienate Russian audience from the Baltic countries, to build perception of unfriendly external environment, near their borders in particular;
2. To justify deeper military integration of Russia and Belarus.



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

1. To consolidate domestic audience over external threats and drive its focus away from the domestic issues;
2. To build patriotic sentiment and support for the Russian aggressive foreign policy, as well as to justify Russia's military penetration in Belarus.



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

1. Three Baltic countries portrayed as conflicting towards Russia;
2. Latvia has issues with Russian-speaking community and Russian media;
- 3. Latvia has closed down another Russian audience TV channel, which indicates that this country has issues with respecting human rights and freedoms.**



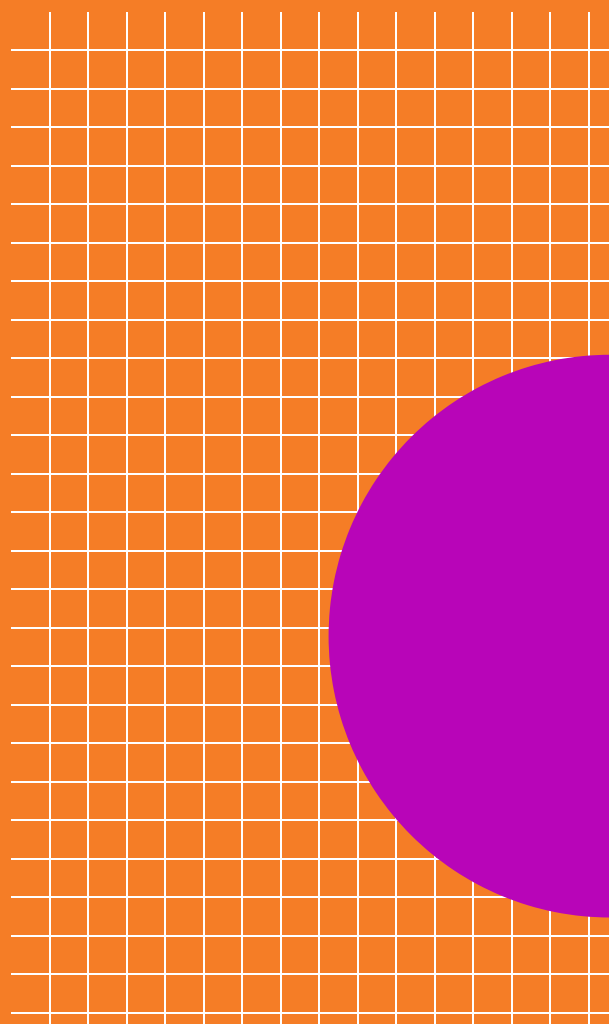
Other comments and / or, if possible, a forecast of the listed points

Goal and impact of narratives will remain the same.

Belarus in the Russian media online

Monitoring and Analysis
of Russian information
space in October 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: 683 articles about Belarus. The number decreased by 34,3%.

Main thematic areas: Politics (76,3%) and Economy (9,4%). The percentage does not add up to 100%, as particular articles may be marked with several tags at once.

Thematic areas that dominated:

Politics: the blockade of the Belarusian edition of the Russian “Komsomolskaya Pravda” portal and detention of their journalist Gennady Mozheiko (11,3%); the reaction of the West to the migrant crisis on the borders of Belarus (9,8%).

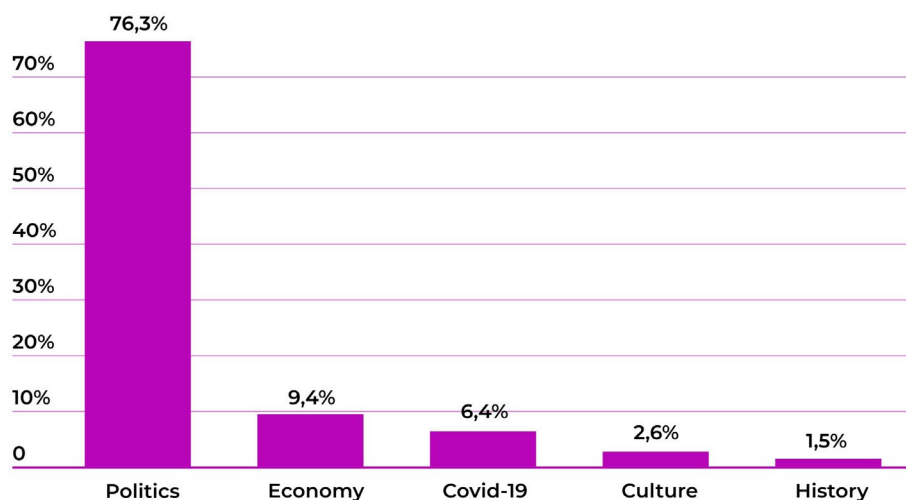
Economy: planned actions in the face of Western sanctions (28,1%); increase of the gas prices in the European Union and plans to create a common Belarusian-Russian gas market (26,6%).

Covid-19: work on Belarusian vaccine (29,5%); introduction of mandatory mask policy and its abolition after criticism of the Health Ministry's decision made by president Alexander Lukashenko (27,3%).

History and culture: no dominant topics.

What topics gained, what were constant, and what topics decreased (based on tags): Covid-19 (6,4%) and Culture-related topics (2,6%) gained popularity. The percentage of news on Politics (76,3%), Economy (9,4%) and History (1,5%) decreased.

Main thematic areas:



Source: Own elaboration, Center for Propaganda and Disinformation Analysis



Main narrative

Alexander Lukashenko cannot leave office as long as the West is putting pressure on Belarus.



What goals do those who spread it want to achieve?

To justify the need for control of the society and persecutions to maintain the national security of Belarus; to show that **the West's "interference" in internal affairs of Belarus leaves no possibility of power transition**; to perpetuate the belief that any attempt to change the status quo will result in a loss of Belarusian state sovereignty.



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

The narrative makes the alleged departure of Alexander Lukashenko from office on concessions by EU and NATO countries. This is part of a broader information campaign, as a result of which society should understand that the real responsibility for the current political situation in Belarus should lie with the West. In addition, **the narrative builds the image of Alexander Lukashenko as an experienced "host" who cannot hand over power, when there is an ongoing threat of hostile actions from the West.** Similar messages resonate with the Russian media's earlier reaction to the newly introduced sanctions.



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

Following the Zapad-2021 exercises, allegations of aggression by Western countries have intensified. Alexander Lukashenko said in one of his speeches, that "if necessary, Belarus will turn into a joint Belarusian and Russian base to counter your [NATO] aggression." At the same time, Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoygu announced that NATO was increasing its presence in the immediate vicinity of the borders of the Union State of Russia and Belarus. The messages appeared in the context of:

1. the announcement of the organization of the next Russian-Belarusian military exercises "Union Shield" in 2023;
2. the signing of the joint war doctrine, which concentrates on coordinating efforts in response to political and economic pressure from the so-called "collective

West.” This term became widespread in the media after president Vladimir Putin used it in his annual address to the Federal Assembly in April 2021.



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

a) The narrative of planned NATO aggression may involve preparing the public opinion for the possible dislocation of Russian troops in Belarus in response to NATO’s actions.

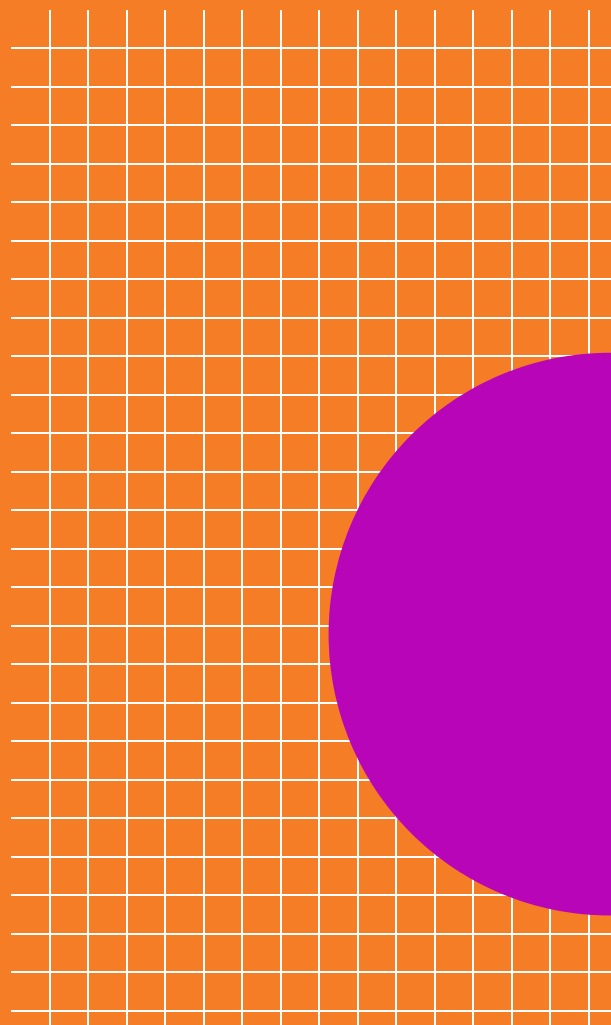
b) Although the activities of the Belarusian opposition were not a priority for the Russian media in October, opinion pieces with political scientists were published to outline the broader context of the situation in the country. It was emphasized that Russia held talks with both the authorities and the opposition activists, but did not support those who take to the streets. Experts pointed out that Russia can recognise the opposition, which is part of the system and belongs to the so-called elite. **Most likely both objective factors in Russia’s foreign policy and a complete rejection of the possibility of pro-democracy protests are behind such a message. The aim of this type of interviews is to develop the aversion of Russian society towards street protests, which would be motivated, among other things, by the fear of destabilization of the system from below or even “colour revolutions”.**

c) The recent actions of the Belarusian government against the mass media (e.g. blockade of “Komsomolskaya Pravda”, detention of a journalist) and online censorship (detention of Telegram users) have met with cautious disapproval from the Russian media. This opportunity was used to highlight the problems with freedom of expression in Belarus and to whitewash the image of Russia as “concerned” about the situation (even though media censorship in the Russian Federation itself has been in place for years).

Belarus in the Russian media online

Monitoring and Analysis
of Russian information
space in October 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: decrease by 36,27% (499/761).

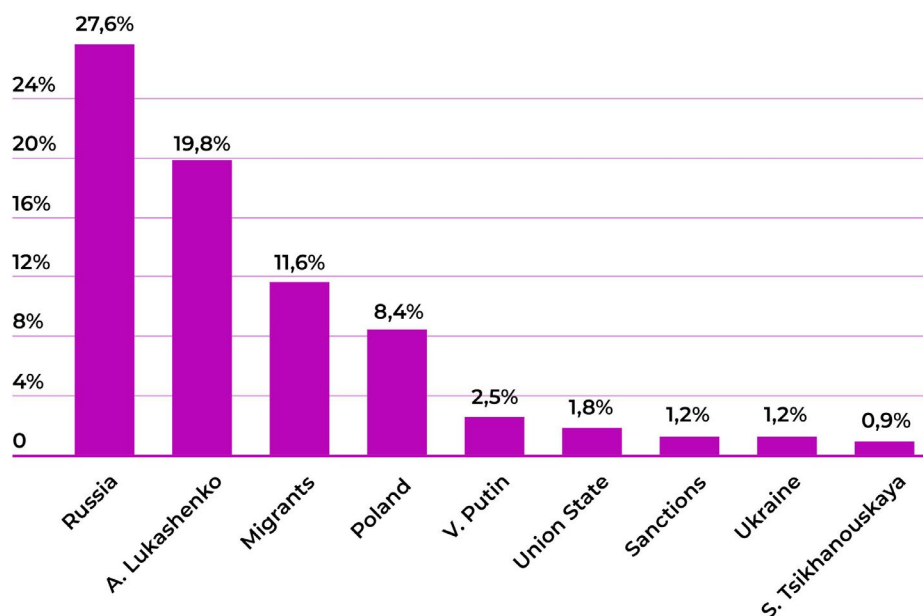
Main thematic areas: Russia (27,6%); Alexander Lukashenko (19,8%); Migrants (11,6%); Poland (8,4%); Vladimir Putin (2,5%); Union state (1,8%); Sanctions (1,2%); Ukraine (1,2%); Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya (0,9%).

Thematic areas that dominated: According to the results of monitoring in October, politics continued to be the main subject area on the agenda of Russian niche media in the context of Belarus. Its share increased in comparison with September, when it was only around 40% of all the news – this time the number reached around 55%. The rise of Poland- and migrants-related news was noted – both topics were interconnected and discussed from the political perspective.

What topics gained, what were constant, and what topics decreased (based on tags): In October, Russia continued to be the most popular topic, making up 27,6% of all the news items (exactly the same amount as in September). The number of Lukashenko-related news decreased once again – from 21,4% in September to 19,8% in October. The topic of migrants was in third place, accounting 11,6% of the news, so twice as many as in September (when it was 6,4%). The amount of articles covering Poland grew from 5,6% in September to 8,4%. There was a significant decrease in terms of news about Vladimir Putin (from 8,8% in September to 2,5% in October). The topic of sanctions remained quite stagnant – 1,2% in October compared to 2% in the previous month.

It is necessary to note that Russian media continued to ignore topics relevant for the Belarusian media agenda. As usual, coverage on Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya was literally non-existent in the Russian niche media despite the international attention and reporting anywhere else. The series of scandals involving representatives of the Belarusian enforcement agencies, which was the main topic in Belarus throughout October, did not receive any coverage of the Russian niche media. The similar situation applies to the case of suspension of the planned healthcare measures due to the collapse of the healthcare system and cancellation of mask mandates by Lukashenko's order.

Main thematic areas:



Source: Own elaboration, Center for Propaganda and Disinformation Analysis



Main narrative

Once again, the main narrative concerned the common future of Belarus and Russia: implementation of integration programs, harmonization of their military structures, etc. However, one should pay attention to **Russian niche media promoting Lukashenko's propaganda narrative about how badly Polish guards have been treating illegal migrants on the Belarusian-Polish border.** The monitored media throughout the month were reporting about the Polish border security beating up the migrants, pushing them back onto Belarusian territory and even causing death of some, including pregnant women.



What goals do those who spread it want to achieve?

The main goal was to present Poland as a state that is breaking international rule and is treating "the poor refugees" in an extremely bad way. At the same time, **the direct involvement of Lukashenko in organizing this migration crisis on the Belarus-EU border was completely ignored.** No related journalist investigations or information from other sources rather than Lukashenko regime propaganda were published by the monitored media.

Thus, there was a clear goal to attack Poland in order to cause pressure on it from the EU officials.



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

It should be noted that mentions of migrants in the Russian niche media grew along with the Polish references. This clearly shows that reporting on the migration crisis on the Belarus-EU borders provided an opportunity to attack Poland. Lack of reports on the actual reasons for this crisis and the actions of Lukashenko's border police also support this assumption.



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

Belarusian-Russian common projects, as well as other integration initiatives, are widely covered by the Russian niche media, but almost never in the Belarusian information space. This proves that Belarus has become an object of interest by the Russian media mainly in the context of Russian political expansion. However, the full support of Minsk's negative rhetoric on Poland should also be paid attention to, as it shows the prospect of the migration crisis in Russia as the European Union's problem and its disintegration caused by Poland and Lithuania.



Centrum Analiz Propagandy i Dezinformacji

Center for Propaganda and Disinformation Analysis



capd.pl



fundacja@capd.pl



fb.com/capdpl



[@Fundacja_CAPD](https://twitter.com/Fundacja_CAPD)