

**Strengthening
the Capacity
to Counter
Disinformation**

Belarusian 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.

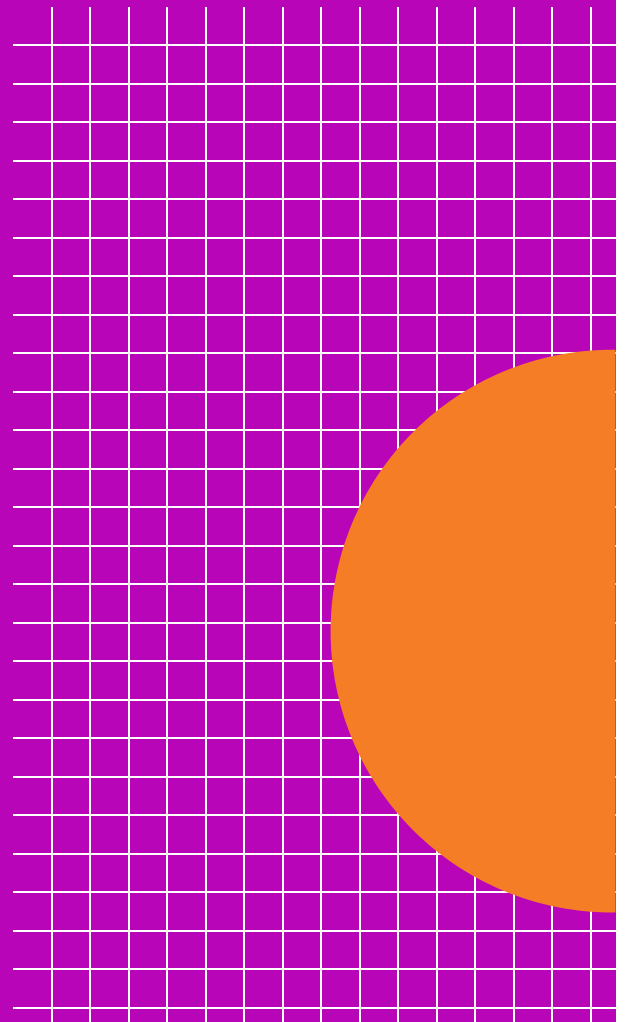
The main activity includes the development of the international Permanent Monitoring and Analyzing Group (PMAG). The main task of the PMAG will be monitoring and analyzing Russian information space in three ways: with the main Russian online media, niche or regional Russian online media as well as Russian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

Russia in the Belarusian media online

Monitoring and Analysis
of Belarusian information
space in September 2021

Konrad Sztafa



Monitored media:

www.belta.by, ont.by, www.sb.by, interfax.by

The research results

Overall number of news items: 2056 results – 38,22% more than in August (1270 results).

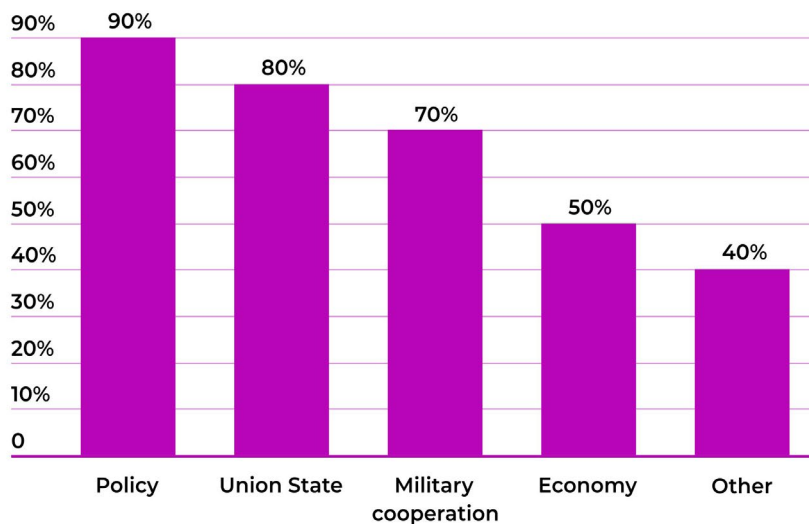
Main trends this month – topics that dominated: Union State development (70-80%); Military cooperation (60-70%); Policy (80-90%); Economy (40-50%); Other (30-40%); Afghanistan, CIS, Shanghai Cooperation Organization/SCO).

Thematic areas that dominated: Politics; Economy; Other.

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

- Topics gained: Union State development; military cooperation (Zapad 2021, Collective Security Treaty Organization [CSTO]); Lukashenko-Putin meetings; Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) cooperation; anti-West.
- Constant: Sanctions.
- Decrease: Russia's economic support; sport.

Main thematic areas:



Source: Own elaboration, Center for Propaganda and Disinformation Analysis



The main narrative says that

The development process of the Union State reached a new phase in September after the approval of 28 preliminary programs by Russia and Belarus. Large focus was placed on the question of Belarusian impence within the State Union and how Russia would not “acquire” Belarus.

Another narrative concerned Russia's participation in Zapad 2021 military exercises and forming a united defensive structure with Belarus.



What goals do those who spread it want to achieve?

To ensure that the Belarusian population understands that the State Union would raise new opportunities for Belarus and the country would not lose its independence to Russia as a part of the agreement.



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

Union State is a long-term strategy and not a response to a current geopolitical situation.



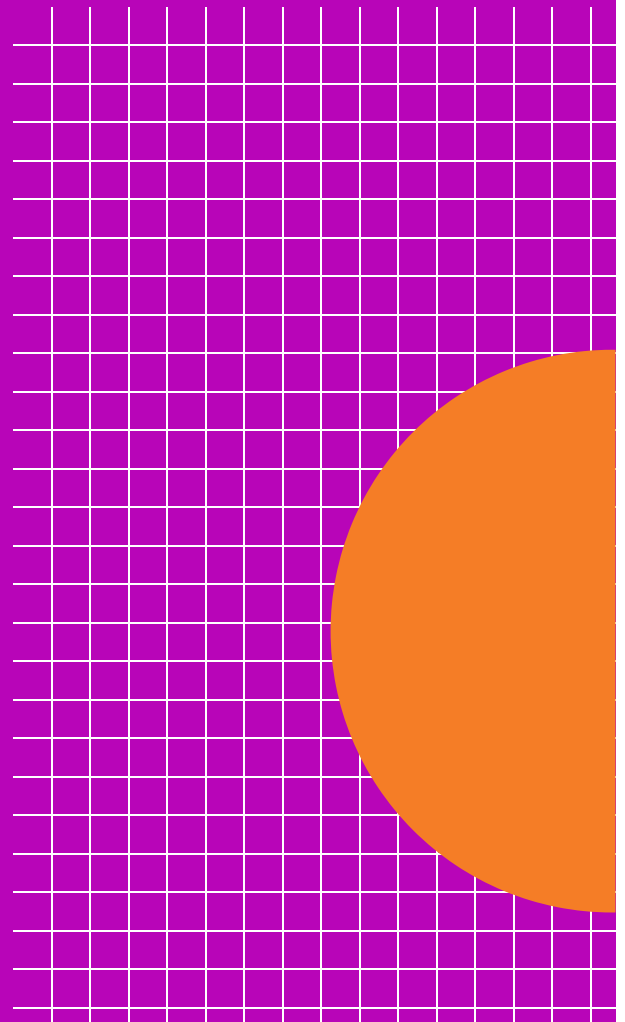
Data / information from this period that is considered the most important in this monitoring period

A significant focus on was given to the relationship between Alexander Lukashenko and Vladimir Putin, the role of Belarus in international politics (CIS, SCO, CSTO) and its military potential.

Russia in the Belarusian media online

Monitoring and Analysis
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space in September 2021

Palina Shcherbava



Monitored media:

belsat.eu, money.onliner.by, tech.onliner.by,
people.onliner.by, nn.by, www.kp.by, kp.by

The research results

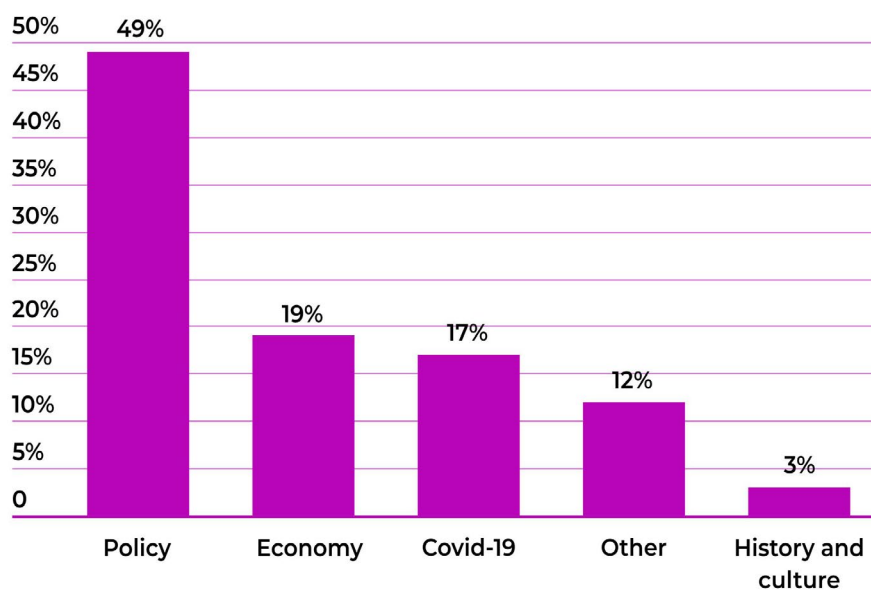
Overall number of news items: 355 – 19,71% increase compared to August (285 results).

Main thematic areas: Policy (49%); Economy (19%); Covid-19 (17%); History and culture (3%); Other (12%).

Countries / Entities: Russia – 246 mentions; EU – 63; NATO – 16.

Main trends: The overall number of news items in the niche media in September remained significantly lower than in May – July, however it has slightly increased compared to August. This month, news from the media portal Nasha Niva (nn.by) were again excluded from the monitoring. News about politics continued to prevail among other thematic areas together with the news about economy and Covid-19.

Main thematic areas:



Source: Own elaboration, Center for Propaganda and Disinformation Analysis



The main news subjects and their context

Russian – Belarusian relations: joint military exercises “Zapad-2021”; **completion of the integration program approval process;** ongoing meetings and talks between Kremlin and Minsk; Russian financial aid plan for Belarus and the unification of the gas market; potential supply of Russian military equipment to Belarus.

Belarus – European Union/United States relations: migrant crisis at the Belarusian border with the EU; “Ryś-21” military exercises conducted by Poland in the east of the country.

Other topics: Coronavirus crisis; 2021 Russian legislative elections; Nord Stream 2.



Main narrative

The overall narrative of Belarusian state propaganda in relation to Russia remained unchanged. This month, a lot of attention was paid to the topic of Belarusian-Russian integration: current and future benefits of economic rapprochement, as well as reassuring of Russia’s permanent readiness to provide economic support to Belarus. **The image of Russia as the closest ideological and military ally has also continued to be communicated.**

There has been equally no change in the narrative about the continued threat posed by the “Western” states: from paradoxically accusing the EU of provoking the migration crisis and tensions along common borders to revealing plans of the U.S. to unleash a full-fledged war against Russia and Belarus with the help of its “puppet” – Ukraine.



Goal / Purpose

The main goal pursued by the Belarusian state propaganda is to create an appearance of the external threat coming from the EU and the U.S. This is done in order to shift the responsibility and blame from Belarusian government for the deep internal and external political crisis that this country is currently facing, **as well as to show that the future of Belarus is possible only in close alliance with Russia.**



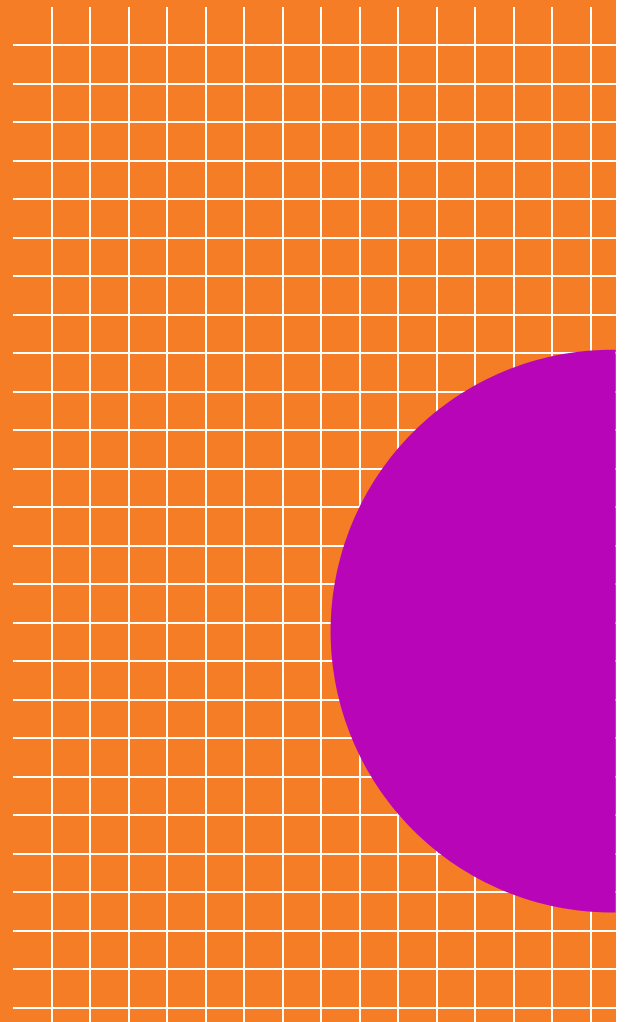
Impact / Consequences

The growing level of hostility towards the EU, the U.S. and the other countries of NATO coalition among a part of Belarusian population. Further improvement of Russia's image.

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The research results

Overall number of news items: 1767 results (decrease of 14.06% compared to September).

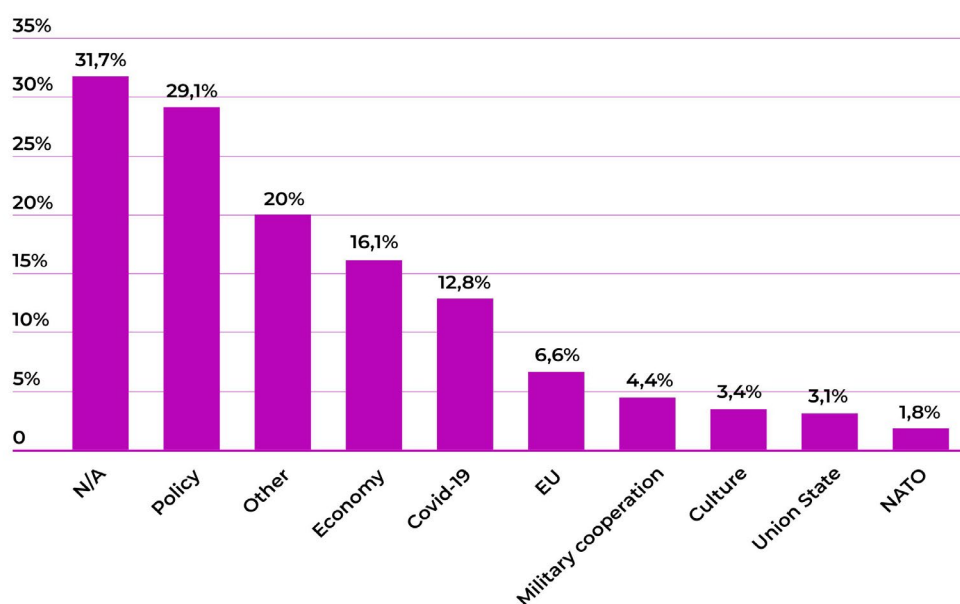
Main thematic areas: N/A (31,7%); Policy (29,1%); Other (20%); Economy (16,1%); Covid-19 (12,8%); European Union (6,6%); Military cooperation (4,4%); Culture (3,4%); Union State (3,1%); NATO (1,8%).

Thematic areas that dominated: N/A – 412 mentions; Policy – 377; Other – 260; Economy – 210.

The number of messages with the indication of increases and decreases in relation to the previous month:

- increase: Other (increase by 4,9%), Covid-19 (increase by 7,5%);
- decrease: Union State (decrease by 9,8%), Military cooperation (decrease by 6,3%);
- constant: Policy, EU, Culture, NATO, Economy.

Main thematic areas:



Source: Own elaboration, Center for Propaganda and Disinformation Analysis



The main narrative says that

This month did not have a straightforward focus on a particular narrative. It featured Russia as a main ally and economic partner of Belarus, but there was attention paid to the topic of the Union State. **Russia was also portrayed in a rather neutral way in regard to current political events, such as the closure of Komsomolskaya Pravda media outlet branch in Belarus, Nobel Prize for Russian journalist Dmitry Muratov, migrant crisis on the western border of Belarus, etc.**

This month featured more media coverage on the cooperation of separate Russian regions with Belarus, as well as the cooperation within the Eurasian Custom Union. Russia was also presented as one of the global key players in the Afghanistan crisis and a part of “one block” with China on this matter.



What goals do those who spread it want to achieve?

It could be assumed that this month’s lack of a straight general narrative or topic was a result of last month’s overloaded self-explanation regarding the alleged loss of independence to Russia within the State Union. The same reason could be attributed to the subject of military cooperation.



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

The informational relief noticed in October was a consequence of exceptionally overwhelming media flow in September.



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

Focus on a rather neutral topic of cooperation between separate Russian regions with Belarus. This topic usually does not require referencing to international politics, sanctions, anti-Western rhetoric, etc.



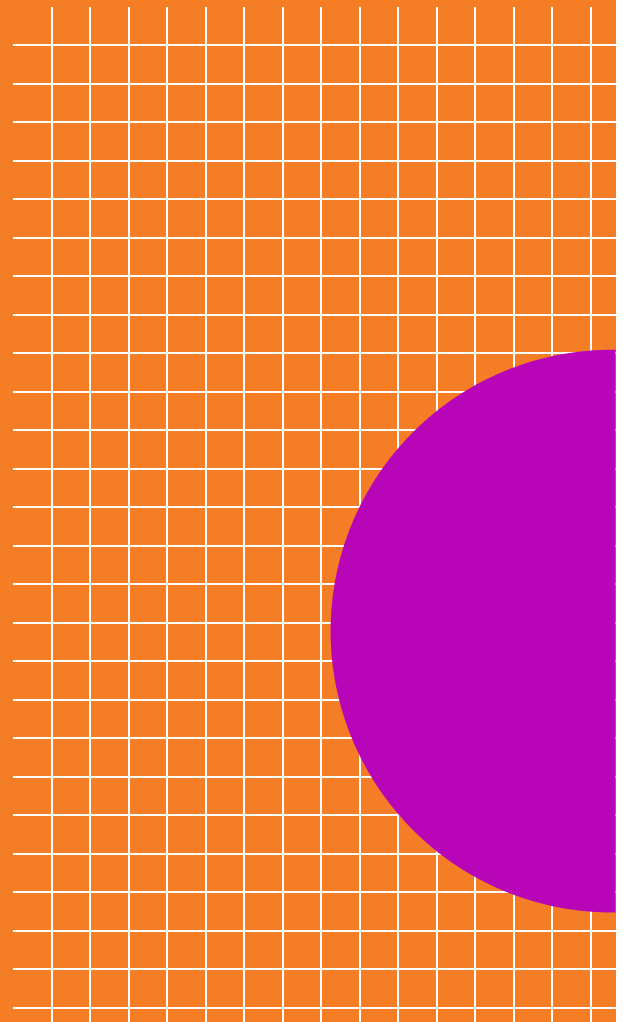
Other comments and / or, if possible, a forecast

It is worth noting that the minimal quantitative differences (0.1 – 2.5%) in tags were assigned as “constant” topics.

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people.onliner.by, nn.by, www.kp.by, kp.by

The research results

Overall number of news items: 52 results.

Main thematic areas: Economy (36%); Other (23%); Covid-19 (17%); Policy (15%); History and culture (9%).

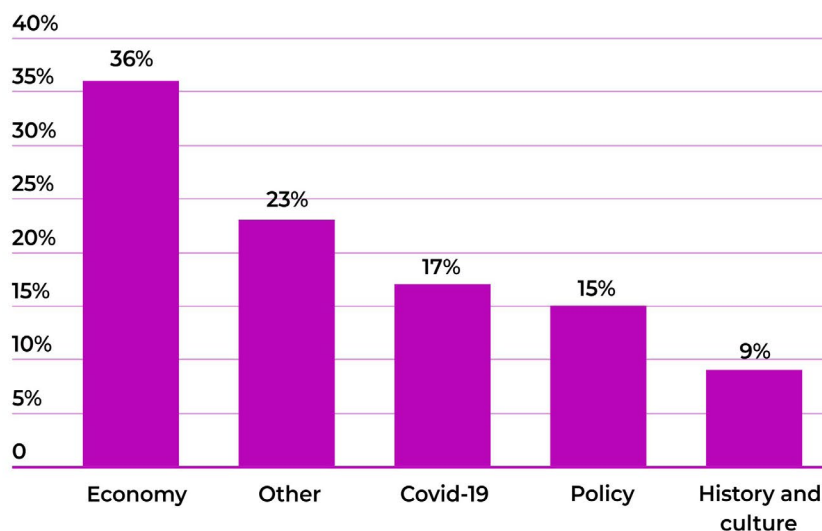
Countries/Entities: Russia – 40 mentions; EU – 2; NATO – 2.

Main trends: The overall number of news items in the niche media in October has drastically decreased.

Due to technical problems, the only source available for this month's monitoring was a web portal Onliner (onliner.by). Data collection from Nasha Niva (nn.by), Komsomolskaya Pravda (kp.by), and Belsat (belsat.eu) was not active and therefore those media outlets were excluded from the monitoring.

Since Onliner mainly focuses on covering news about technology, it had a major impact on thematic areas and subjects that had been covered. Thus, news about economy and finances, society (as a part of "other" category), as well as Covid-19 pandemic, were the ones that prevailed this month.

Main thematic areas:



Source: Own elaboration, Center for Propaganda and Disinformation Analysis



The main news subjects and their context

Currency exchange rate, price changes, aviation-related news, restrictions on imports of certain Belarusian goods to Russia.

Other topics: technology, culture, coronavirus crisis.

The only news of political nature was limited to a news digest published in the beginning of the month that covered the situation of migrants on the Polish-Belarusian border, military exercises of Belarusian missile forces, the closure of “Komsomolskaya Pravda” in Belarus, as well as funeral of a KGB officer.



Main narrative

It is worth noting the form in which the news on the economy and finances were presented.

News about exchange rates, price changes as well as prices on specific goods were always presented in comparison to the situation in Russia. This provides an excellent illustration of the degree of dependence of the Belarusian economy on the Russian one.



Centrum Analiz Propagandy i Dezinformacji

Center for Propaganda and Disinformation Analysis



capd.pl



fundacja@capd.pl



fb.com/capdpl



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