

FORECAST: primary goals of Russian propaganda in Poland for 2017



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The activity of Kremlin propaganda centres and the associated state structures clearly indicates that the coming months will see an escalation of actions hostile to Poland in the information space of Poland and its neighbours and allies from NATO. The context of the current geopolitical considerations suggests that apart from strictly disinformation actions: a) components making them appear real (organisation of real events / actions) and b) operational activity of Russian services (political, organisational and financial support for certain structures, entities and individuals as well as intensified recruitment of collaborators and expansion of pro-Russian networks in Poland, which are aimed at reinforcing the influence on the Polish political class and the Polish society) will be strengthened in coordination with them.

Polish-Ukrainian section

The escalation of tension between Warsaw and Kyiv has reached a new level. Apart from damaging cemeteries and monuments, first in Poland and subsequently in Ukraine, and large-scale activities in the information space addressed primarily to the Russian-speaking recipients but also to the Ukrainian audience (the intensification has been noticeable since December 2016), such events took place that took advantage of hired protesters from Ukraine and the alleged Polish minority (Ukrainian or Russian citizens pretending to be Poles) – debates and attempts to organise provocative conferences, a blockade of the international road near Lviv, but also a terrorist attack on the Consulate of the Republic of Poland in Lutsk. The latter incident shows that the Kremlin has begun a new step in its policy, by resorting to methods known from military and paramilitary actions, testing new ways to create chaos, but also verifying the readiness of its people for action in west Ukraine. This also implies that Russian propaganda has increased its interest in the Polish recipients.

For a long time, Moscow's activities on the Polish-Ukrainian section have been mirror images of each other in terms of operations on both sides of the border. Therefore, it can be assumed that the range of standard methods of disinformation intended to increase the temperature of the Polish-Ukrainian dialogue and to activate the radical circles in both countries will be extended by actions, taking place also in Poland, involving physical violence and attacks on state administration facilities on the part of the alleged Ukrainian minority in Poland. The possibility that violence will be inflicted on tourists/students by "unknown perpetrators," both in Poland and in Ukraine, remains one of the major threats.

The following in particular will be used to build the propaganda message:

- intensified information noise and more false information, among others concerning a) Polish citizens being mugged by Ukrainians, b) accusations that Polish women are rape victims, c) anti-Polish / anti-Semitic / anti-EU / anti-government statements on the part of Ukrainian citizens staying in Poland (especially by alleged students or workers of Polish enterprises holding Ukrainian passports) or opinion leaders in Ukraine, d) the operation of Polish and Ukrainian state services (e.g. brutality of police or border guard officers towards the citizens of the other country);

- organisation of provocation actions – manifestations, protests, blockades, poster / “information” actions (anti-Bandera, anti-Fascist, anti-immigration) by radical structures, supported by religious, political or media / cultural authorities;
- organisation of academic or cultural events: debates, conferences, speeches, discussions, film shows, exhibitions about history, with the main guests being persons famous for their pro-Russian or anti-Ukrainian inclinations, aimed at gaining interest from the so-called patriotic political circles, in particular from the party that rules in Poland, which has been repeatedly successful not only in Przemyśl but also in other Polish towns or even state institutions;
- further operational work in the Polish diaspora communities in Ukraine and patriotic circles in Poland, and subsequently taking advantage of individuals’ behaviour or public statements to discredit the respective circles, organisations, institutions or generally the Polish-Ukrainian dialogue itself, by means of aggressive commentaries or publications in the media on both sides of the border and coordinated information operations in social media;
- intensification of various forms of attacks on politicians, diplomats, columnists and analyst groups supporting the Polish-Ukrainian dialogue, both in Poland and in Ukraine, by so-called opinion leaders in right-wing and left-wing circles, Russian agents of influence, pro-Russian / anti-Ukrainian bloggers and on the part of organised groups of Internet trolls / fake accounts;
- undermining and challenging all efforts for Polish-Ukrainian cooperation in the area of economy, trade, science, culture, technology and above all in the field of armaments industry and energy cooperation, with history and migration issues remaining the main two areas of special narrative influence for Kremlin;
- increase in the number of coordinated actions in the information space against any form of military cooperation between Warsaw and Kyiv.

NATO/USA section

As regards NATO, any and all actions aimed at NATO enlargement east of the present border of the Alliance and increased military presence near the Russian border but also in countries designated by Russia as its sphere of influence result in intensified reactions of the Russian Federation. On this section, it is not sufficient to speak of propaganda or even information operations that are limited to anti-NATO narration. This is also one of the most important sections where Russian special services operate. So propaganda, military and political measures are undertaken to weaken Poland's position and combat capabilities, which exerts an indirect impact on the whole North Atlantic Alliance. In connection with the decisions about NATO's future made during last year's NATO summit in Warsaw and the deployment of Alliance's troops in Poland, Russian activity on this section will intensify.

This will mean:

- propaganda and disinformation measures in the form of anti-NATO narration in the Polish information space, inspiration and promotion of anti-NATO information, use of so-called publicity agents, i.e. journalists, academics, diplomats, soldiers, whose task will be to discredit, whether deliberately or unwittingly, NATO structures, in particular the presence of the allied forces in Poland, to inspire conflicts or disseminate untrue information about them (e.g. drunkenness, fights with and mugging Polish citizens by NATO soldiers, rapes);
- provocations on the border with Poland, being at the same time the east NATO border (with Kaliningrad Oblast, Ukraine and Belarus), in particular in the context of 'Zapad-2017' - the combined military exercises of Russia and Belarus. The greater number of incidents related to attempts to bring weapons to Poland by individuals should be regarded as a form of psychological warfare, i.e. instilling fear in the Polish society and tension by provoking Polish services responsible for security, and as a means of putting pressure on the Polish government, as well as a test of the border rather than a real objective to actually bring weapons across the border;
- special operations coupled with the effect of propaganda and disinformation in the area of national security and defence, which should be considered as activities tasked with making Poland weak, and ultimately the ally of NATO being the strategic part of the Alliance's eastern flank – anticipated measures to be undertaken by Russian special services on this section include intensified efforts to strengthen the centralisation of decision-making processes related to the operation of the Ministry of National Defence and Polish services responsible for security (it is easier to disturb and destabilise them in such case); weakening the communication with the structure subordinate to the head office; contributing to unfavourable personnel decisions (particularly dangerous in the case of central units responsible for national security and defence); inspiring internal conflicts in these structures; inspiring wrong decisions concerning e.g. Polish special services; demoralising and decreasing the prestige and significance of the Ministry of National Defence and Polish military structures and challenging Poland's defensive capabilities in public. Special operations will be accompanied by information noise in the Polish information space, regarding, among others, escalating conflicts between the President of the Republic of Poland and the Minister of National Defence or in state institutions responsible for security, especially around the activities of the Ministry itself;
- simultaneously with efforts intended to weaken NATO, actions will be pursued on the USA section, being the core of the Alliance – what can be expected are above all propaganda activities tasked with reinforcing a negative image of the new president of the USA in the media, and thereby in the awareness of the Polish society; using humour, creating mocking caricatures, graphics / memes with President Donald Trump – building an image of an unpredictable politician who poses a threat to security on the global and regional scale; deprecating the achievements, values and importance

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of the USA and creating an image of Poland as a weak country dependant on the decisions of the United States;

- energy and security issues related to Washington will remain an important topic for Russian propagandists – criticising the shale gas mining technology, promoting contents related to reinforcement of credibility of pseudo-scientific and pseudo-analytical materials that expose actions, hostile to the humankind, taken by the American elites as well as global conspiracies of the United States and Israel. Work with such issues is most dangerous from the point of view of young Internet users and this effort is intended to last for years.

European/EU section

Internal problems of the European Union caused, among others, by the migration crisis and nationalist circles growing stronger in individual Member States provide an opportunity for Russia to build another section of its propaganda addressed not only against the EU as a whole but also Poland. Its primary goal is to weaken and in the longer term also to destroy the structure currently known as the European Union. Therefore, Russia might undertake the following actions intended to accomplish its goals on this section:

- support of anti-EU communications in the Polish media; a particularly important thread is the topic of immigration and refugees from Africa and the Middle East, reinforced with the message about economic immigrants from Ukraine and refugees from Chechnya; while in the former case the intention is to destabilise the EU community by creating divergent viewpoints, generating disputes and strengthening populist and radical forces and as a result making decisions in contradiction with the will of the majority of EU Member States, and while in the latter case the goal is to bring about a local conflict and to antagonise the societies of neighbouring countries, than in the case of Chechen refugees who have a problem on the border to enter Poland or are refused the acknowledgement of their refugee status as a result of administrative proceedings, Russia might build an emotion-based image of Chechens and thereby inspire certain social groups to stand up for Chechens – this action is oriented towards long-term goals, which in the future will permit organised infiltration of such persons to Poland that are potentially dangerous to national security or the possibility to execute a transit of these persons to other EU Member States;
- inspiration and organisation of anti-EU and anti-immigration actions and events in Poland, particularly in the eastern part of the country. Hiring extreme nationalist and right-wing circles or influencing them indirectly, including in particular the process of their ideological identity without the need to release funds (opinion leaders, agents of influence, activities in the information space that make attitudes more radical). Successive incidents can be anticipated, with the victims being identified with Islam solely based on the external appearance;
- intensification of propaganda and disinformation actions aimed at popularising the anti-German narration among Poles, disseminating information about German propaganda in Poland, building Germany's image as a country that ignores Polish interests and strives for accomplishing its own political or economic goals in Poland or via other entities; continuing to arouse doubts as to Germany's loyalty as Poland's strategic partner; for this purpose, above all generally accessible Polish nationwide media will be used and local media might be used, also in the eastern part of Poland, for strengthening the effect of fear in the part of the society that is potentially under the greatest threat from the possible conflict on the part of Russia. In this situation, anti-German statements and gestures by Polish politicians are particularly dangerous, because they are immediately captured and used by the Russian side for propaganda purposes, firstly, for building the anti-German narration in Poland and, secondly, for building a negative image of Poland on the international stage;
- support for Polish initiatives which may constitute a part of anti-EU propaganda and disinformation on the international stage – examples are the concepts of Intermarium, Trimarium, Baltic-Black Sea cooperation, and other manifestations of regional cooperation with Poland as a participant, in particular in the Central Eastern Europe region; the paradox of these measures lies in supporting, promoting, etc. them in Poland so that a narration about alternative solutions to EU structures is created outside Poland. Intensification of these activities is expected in the coming months in connection with the Trimarium Forum to be held in July in Wrocław, with participation of European partners. What is particularly dangerous on this section is activities performed by new niche media that position themselves as "specialist" ones; most often their

publications contain, apart from official data and statistics, various types of messages compliant with the Russian propaganda, and after some time of building their position they might be used for information and disinformation operations of big media and academic or expert circles.

Polish-Russian section

Escalation of information and disinformation actions requires continual financial support for various initiatives that pretend to be media and for the circles that form them; for Russia, in turn, the priority will remain to acquire collaborators: from translators to so-called moral authorities or opinion leaders. Therefore, a new wave of recruitment can be expected, which will be preceded by creeping activation of Russian capital in Poland, most often concealed in entities of various legal forms from other European countries.

The following in particular will be observed among Russian activities in the coming months:

- further attempts to impose the Russian historical narration and to discredit the Polish history – this concerns above all the inter-War period in Poland (coupled with the activities on the Polish-Ukrainian section in this area). This means, among others, organisation of academic events, initiation of Polish-Russian academic cooperation – the Polish historical environment is particularly vulnerable to manipulation on the part of Russia. For this purpose, apart from traditional universities and research centres, Russian GONGOs (Government-Organized Non-Governmental Organization) can be used, such as “History of Motherland” Fund (Russian: Фонд “История Отечества”), which was established under a decree of President V. Putin in 2016 to popularise the Russian history in the Russian Federation and abroad, to protect the historical heritage and tradition of Russia’s nations, as well as to support historical education schemes. The aim of such initiatives is to disseminate and entrench the Russian viewpoint on historical issues. This year, which has been designated the year of Marshal Józef Piłsudski and General Józef Haller, can experience manipulations of information concerning both these characters and the Polish-Bolshevik War 1919-1921 – its causes, course and effects;
- it is already evident that Kremlin does not hesitate to take advantage of the topic of Katyn Massacre to generate renewed provocations. Disinformation and propaganda actions in connection with the Smolensk Crash will be continued simultaneously in order to generate information chaos and increase the temperature of internal political disputes in Poland;
- further activation of Russian agent, collaboration and inspiration structures in Poland. Infiltration of political, financial and military circles by Russians is particularly real in the situation of political and economic instability of Poland. Apart from the already described threats arising from the actions against structures responsible for national security and defence, attention must be drawn to the threats related to infiltration of Polish information and financial systems – it is anticipated that there will be more cyber-attacks on both state and commercial infrastructure on the part of Russia. An additional probable threat is the infiltration of the said structures or activation of individuals placed there earlier;
- initiation, organisation and promotion of cultural and social events, including in particular those addressed to the youth – film festivals, concerts, literature competitions, Russia knowledge competitions, promotion of Russian language, scholarships for, among others, language courses and training, possibility to commence education free of charge at the higher education level in Russia, youth exchange, trips, etc. Initiatives financed directly by organisations associated with Russian state authorities, such as “Russkiy Mir” Foundation (Rus. Фонд “Русский мир”) or “Russian-Polish Center for Dialogue and Understanding” Foundation (Rus. Фонд “Российско-польский центр диалога и согласия”) are noteworthy here;

- propaganda addressed to Russian-speaking people in Poland who use Russian-language information sources and to participants of Russian-language forums and groups, meetings of the Russian-language minority. Building Poland's image as a Russophobic country that is dangerous to Russians, inspiring tensions between Russians and Poles as well as other Russian-speaking people, in particular Ukrainians;
- a separate block related to the Russian propaganda is the use of popular, particularly in the Russian-speaking circles but also in the Polish youth circles, graphics / memes, which in many cases may be the single form of message about political events in the country; this tool is dangerous in that it is generally available and has a large manipulative effect, especially on the young recipient who does not use alternative information sources;
- continuation of the use of the monument war and accusing Poland of changing the history and the lack of respect for the Soviet Russia, which, in the opinion of Kremlin, liberated Poland from Fascism. Manipulations in this regard can appear in particular in the period of preparations for the celebrations of 9th May in Russia;
- building Russian soft power in the form of social activity of democratic and liberal circles from Russia, whose goal is to form Russian civil society and Polish-Russian dialogue; this action is controversial in that such initiatives cannot be accused of threatening Poland's security, and all the more so their activists cannot be suspected of bad intentions or propaganda measures; however, infiltration of these circles by Russian special services and their use for manipulation of the public opinion in Poland cannot be excluded; the above concerns also Russian-speaking experts affiliated with them, especially in light of a noticeable increase in the number of events and initiatives connected with these circles. At the same time, what can be expected is intensification of actions aimed at discrediting the Russian liberal and democratic opposition among Polish recipients, which is directly related to the presidential elections to be held in the Russian Federation next year;
- ordering articles, books and other publications for money, bribing or intimidating journalists and experts, whose opinions / ratings / position are somehow significant for the Russian side; invoking journalism standards/pluralism, which is used by numerous suspicious media projects, i.e. supporting the publication of controversial materials or statements of pro-Russian experts/politicians/academics from Poland and abroad as "the need to listen to all parties." The above involves, among others, inviting Polish journalists and experts to Russia, but also to Donbas and Crimea for the purpose of preparing objective materials, e.g. about the participation or actually to convince the Polish reader that the Russian side does not participate in the war in eastern Ukraine; inviting Polish commentators, journalists, photographers or representatives of other professional groups to Russian media and covering the expenses related to their participation;
- strengthening and expanding "networks" comprising: ethnic minority, immigrants, criminal structures, pro-Russian activities, journalists, bloggers, politicians, academics, representatives of the world of culture and art, former employees and collaborators of special services of the Polish People's Republic period, Communist activists, etc. However, the greatest threat is buying people from the surroundings of consultants/collaborators of politicians or installing trusted collaborators around them or around the institutions managed by them or installing such people whose family members are somehow affiliated with the Russian capital. Owing to such ties, Russian propaganda and disinformation processes are executed most effectively, bypassing public communication channels and virtually preventing access to this process by outside people.

Section of internal policy of Poland

The primary goal of Russian propaganda in the area of Poland's internal situation is to destabilise the Polish political stage, to maintain the social polarisation and to prevent the accomplishment of Polish targets in foreign policy, and thus to weaken its position in the region and more broadly – on the international stage, including in the political and military structures to which Warsaw belongs or to torpedo new potential political, economic or military projects. For pursuit of Kremlin's policy, it is necessary to reinforce sentiments that are pro-Russian or consistent with Russian interests among: a) Polish political elites, b) Polish intellectual elites, c) Polish society.

Apart from classical disinformation methods and the information operations commonly employed by Moscow, it is necessary to support and work with spheres that oppose the trans-Atlantic vector, are anti-Ukrainian, but also academic or business groups whose convictions or interests correspond to Russian strategic goals on any section of Vladimir Putin's foreign policy. It is worth underlining that, when analysing reports of services of Poland's neighbours, actions by other NATO allies of Warsaw, Russian actions in Ukraine, and actions of Polish pro-Russian circles home and abroad, Kremlin has still been using only a small fraction of its potential to destabilise the Polish internal situation. This may result from the current Russian priorities (elections in Germany and France, intensification of operational activity in Sweden, Finland and Baltic States, policy of the new US President, and conflict in Syria), but also from the relative ease to generate political tension in Poland through history-related topics (both in relations with Ukraine and Russia) and the issues of Smolensk crash.

Expected measures to be undertaken by Russian propaganda in Poland include:

- further intensification of the influence on the cognitive area, in particular the axiological and epistemological areas of Polish elites and Polish society with the use of, in particular, social media, quasi-media on the Internet, actions of Russian network structures and information operations coordinated on the micro and macro scale (also internationally), combined with creation of information chaos and noise that disturbs verification and undermines credibility of information, as well as other measures of information and psychological warfare taking advantage of individuals, organisations and so-called moral authorities;
- the following in particular have long been the areas of interests of Russian propaganda: abortion, morality and religiousness, opposition against any forms of Western liberalism, Fascism, support for feminist ideas, sexual minorities, gender ideology, social inequalities, economic exploitation, human rights, conspiracy theories (New World Order, planned world depopulation by bankers, poisoning of food, water and air, prevailing influence of Israel on the rest of the world, etc.), various forms of Pan-Slavism (including support for streams and organisations invoking pagan traditions), criticism of USA, NATO, EU policy and generally challenging the overall present international order, creating a common political and economic space from Lisbon to Vladivostok, issues of migration from Muslim countries, Islamic State and joint fight of Europe and Russia against the threat of Islamic terrorism, fight for the "historical truth," "inevitable" downfall of the West and its values, Kremlin's military, economic and political power, myth of Vladimir Putin's ingenuity and patriotism and of uniqueness of the Russian state, etc.; for years, each of these sections in Poland has been operated by thousands of bots, trolls, bloggers, anonymous commentators, but also well-known personas, who, similarly to most Internet users, have unconsciously become victim of Russian propaganda at some point, even in only one area – but the influence of Russian propaganda in Poland is still limited in terms of structure and organisation, so expected activities include further

recruitment efforts, attempts to escalate emotions (especially through coordinated activity in commentaries and actions in social media) and create information noise;

- further support for Polish pro-Russian, anti-Ukrainian, patriotic, anti-American, anti-EU and other circles, structures and organisations, home and abroad, together with support for the image, legitimation and careers of their primary representatives and leaders, whose promotions in the structures of local or central authority or administration reinforce the pro-Russian lobby in the Polish political sphere (this is particularly evident in the academia and in the groups providing subject matter back-up for the main political parties in Poland);
- the previous sphere, coupled with the activation of pro-Russian individuals in religious circles and organised groups in social media, leads to increased pressure on Polish politicians, for the time being in a few areas, among others, history-related policy or the "Euro-scepticism," which is "fashionable" among the ruling party members; however, at the same time allegedly alternative narrations emerge in the field of foreign policy and geopolitics, such as the new form of Eurasianism being closer cooperation with China as an alternative to the trans-Atlantic vector (as shown by the past months, works in this area have been continued in the background of the Polish politics);
- increased activity of organisations acting as part of religious communities, especially at the Eastern Orthodox Church, including youth organisation, with will pose a significant threat if activities by right-wing and patriotic organisations are coordinated further, given the fact that some representatives of these circles are members of paramilitary structures or have enlisted to the newly formed units of Poland's Territorial Defence Force; actions performed by such structures have long been used for propaganda purposes in Russia against Poland, its allies in NATO and for building various tensions or psychological operations for the needs of the Polish recipient;
- at present, there are two most dangerous hot spots in Poland: Przemyśl and Białystok; the latter has not been fully activated yet and has not appeared in the broader awareness of the Polish information recipient yet but all the signs are that this is only a matter of time; for the time being, propaganda activities in line with Russian interests are pursued by various right-wing structures, most actively in Przemyśl, Warsaw and in Silesia;
- Polish decisions concerning armaments procurements or strategic decisions in the energy sector (in particular Nord Stream 2, nuclear power station in Kaliningrad, energy diversification, construction of a Polish nuclear power station, EU energy policy) will be of crucial importance to Kremlin – it can be assumed that provocations and disinformation campaigns will be considerably intensified, which, coupled with cyber-attacks, synchronisation with information operations in the information space of Poland and its allies, and sabotage by Russian special services (including and with the use of collaborators acquired in Poland), might effectively destabilise the decision-making process or even prevent effective pursuit of the strategic goals adopted by Warsaw in these areas;
- further reinforcement of the narration about the need to cooperate closely with Russia, the common interests, invocation of Pan-Slavic concepts, need of dialogue, building Europe from Lisbon to Vladivostok, necessity to work out political and economic structures as an alternative to the "EU on the verge of downfall," Poland's betrayal by the allies, etc., will become increasingly more aggressive and successive attempts will be made to increase the significance of this message. The latter is executed by supporting pro-Russian opinion leaders from patriotic circles, whose nominations and promotions are becoming increasingly more dangerous phenomena due to the scale and negative functional and image-related consequences (apart from obvious implications of gaining a greater influence on decision-making processes in the world of politics, one cannot ignore also contacts of such individuals with students at state universities or their frequent presence in the public media).

Conclusion

The arsenal of Russian propaganda machine comprises a wide spectrum of overt and covert elements. For several months, many provocation or destabilisation incidents should be regarded a test or preparation rather than a reflection of the full potential of Kremlin. Numerous factors indicate that this situation can transform dynamically depending on the needs of the current foreign policy of the Russian Federation. The coming elections in France and Germany as well as the situation in South-East Asia along with the Syrian conflict concentrate the Russian assets effectively but the escalation of hostilities in Donbas and the intensification of provocations in whole Ukraine impel us to focus more on the dangerous trends in Poland's internal situation and on the greater activation of pro-Russian circles in Poland.

The overall goal of all the above activities is to build the image of reality imposed in line with the Russian needs in the awareness of the Polish society and of people responsible for making political, economic and military decisions, and to cause specific beneficial (which does not always mean overtly pro-Russian) decisions and actions. The greatest threats from the point of view of Russian propaganda activities in Poland are the deterioration of the Polish political stage destabilisation, the disintegration of state institutions (in the context of national security particularly those related to making and executing national security and defence decisions) as well as the emergence and exacerbation of social divisions. Actions that seemingly have nothing to do with Russia may be elements of a well-thought Russian special operation against Poland's security.

What is particularly dangerous is the turn of numerous political forces towards radical right-wing postulates, which not only legitimises them but also mobilises the pro-Russian circles and directly and indirectly reinforces their influence, thus facilitating the disinformation and propaganda activities in Poland. In light of the flagrant disproportions in expenditures on measures and instruments related to the field of use and counteracting of information and psychological warfare operations, it is necessary to review numerous assumptions of the internal and foreign policy as well as to adapt to the growing threat to Poland. It can be assumed that the lack of appropriate political actions in Warsaw as regards establishment of an information space defence system, in particular a system of distributed defence capable of identifying, counteracting and combating, might have far-reaching consequences. This is not only about a potential deep political crisis in Poland but also long-term weakening of Poland's political position in the region and in international political structures, which will exert an impact on Poland's economic standing and security.