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**THE INFORMATION WAR
ON UKRAINE**

NEW CHALLENGES

Dr. JOLANTA DARZEWSKA

*Deputy Director
Centre for Eastern Studies
Warsaw
Poland*

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The Cicero Foundation

FRANCE

13, rue Washington

75008 PARIS

Tel. +33 1 45 62 05 90

Fax +33 1 45 62 05 30

Email info@cicerofoundation.org

THE NETHERLANDS

Hondertmarck D 45

6211 MB MAASTRICHT

Tel. +31 43 32 60 602

Fax +31 43 32 60 828

cicerofoundation@gmail.com

The Information War on Ukraine

New Challenges

Jolanta Darczewska

Abstract

Russia's occupation and annexation of Crimea, its aggressive behaviour against eastern Ukraine (the conflict over "Novorossiya") and its destabilisation of the Ukrainian state have become yet another field of Russia's experimentation with information operations. The campaign is multidimensional and organised and inspired top-down by the Russian state. One of its dimensions concerns the challenge that Moscow has made to the post-Cold War order in Europe. Using methods inherited from the Soviet times, Russia has managed to transform the real Ukrainian-Russian conflict and military intervention into a virtual conflict between Russia and the West. It has declared an "info war" on the West (especially the USA and NATO) and has been building up the war's resources and facilities. Having resurrected the old foreign policy model based on a rivalry with the United States, Russia has now revealed its geopolitical ambitions and has set out to impose its way of thinking in terms of geopolitical blocs, while forcefully delineating a border between the "Russian world" civilisation and the West. This has been the source of many difficulties and upheavals in Russia's relations with the West in recent history. So far, the West has not been able to formulate a good response to Russia's revisionist policies, or find a way to support Ukraine, the victim of Russia's policy.

Introduction: Origins and Consequences of the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict in the Russian Federation's Official Rhetoric

During this year's meeting of the Valdai Club, which took place in late October in Sochi under the title: "The world order: new rules or a game without rules", president Putin emphasised that Russia was ready to stand up to the United States which, in his view, was crushing the global order and pushing humanity to the brink of war. Speaking about the United States' "one-sided diktat" Putin said: "Instead of settling conflicts it leads to their escalation, instead of sovereign and stable states we see the growing spread of chaos, and instead of democracy there is support for a very dubious public ranging from open neo-fascists to Islamic radicals". Referring to the origins of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, Putin explained that it had been caused by the haste with which the European Union pushed for association with Ukraine. "That was unacceptable for Russia, because it infringed on its interests in a neighbouring state". Nikolai Patrushev, the Secretary of the Security Council of the Russian Federation, interprets the events in eastern Ukraine as "next steps in the plan to disintegrate the Soviet Union and Russia". (1) He takes a long view of this plan, quoting an extensive list of "America's special operations that were carried out over the last 25 years with the intention of totally re-formatting the post-Soviet space to suit US interests" and included the 1989 "people's spring, the wars in Chechnya, the Balkan war, and the post-Soviet colour revolutions. General Patrushev argues that " ... this has led to an entire generation growing up infected with hatred towards Russia and the mythical European values". He also believes that Ukraine has no other option than to remain part of the so-called "Russian world"; he said: "Ukraine is not in a position to develop without Russia, whether someone likes it or not".

Kirill, the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, has also commented on the Western attempts at dismantling the "fragile" post-Soviet space. (2) In his address delivered during the opening of the 18th World Russian People's Council on 11 November 2014 the Patriarch said: "The year 2014 opened a new chapter in the history of the world, a difficult and dramatic one that forebodes the end of what we could call 'the post-Soviet world'. This world has been fragile. It produced no durable order based on mutual understanding and respect among people belonging to different cultures and civilisations. Those who consider themselves victors of the Cold War want everyone else to believe that the development path they have embraced is the only legitimate way. As they dominate the global information space, they impose their understanding of the economy and state governance on

everyone else, in an effort to muzzle those who are ready to defend the values and ideals that diverge from the concept of a consumer society ".

All the statements quoted above stem from the same world-view matrix. Those at the highest levels of political, security and church hierarchies see the world in an identical way and offer identical explanations of Russia's problems in the Russian-Ukrainian and international relations. They place these problems in a certain geopolitical paradigm and give them a certain ideological meaning. Their implied causes of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict have little to do with reality but demonstrate how certain geopolitical ideas (of neo-Eurasianism, conservatism, "Russian world", and others), have become subordinated to the empire-forming process and have become an attribute, an ideological "driver" of the way of thinking shared by the politically active sections of the Russian public, starting from the power elite. This mode of thinking is construed in opposition to the West and is confrontational. (3)

Info War On Ukraine or the West?

In this context, the annexation of Crimea and the conflict over "Novorossiia", which Russia has been fanning, are just other incidents in Russia's information war on the West. This war did not start with the Euromaidan in December 2013. "The Russian shift away from the West coincided with the Rose and Orange Revolutions, which brought to power new elites in Tbilisi and Kiev who wanted to take their countries in exactly the opposite direction." (4) It started when Russia entered the path of authoritarianism. At that time it became a priority for the politicians in the Kremlin to regain geopolitical control of the areas adjacent to the Russian Federation and rebuild the spheres of influence which existed back in the Soviet times. The Russian leadership tried to prevent Russia's neighbours (the Baltic countries, Georgia and Ukraine, and previously also Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia) from entering the pro-Western path. Underlying the Kremlin's tough info campaigns against these countries was the conviction that Central and Eastern Europe was a Russian sphere of influence and all measures undertaken by the West to challenge this were equivalent to challenging Russia's position as a world power. Back then, Russia's awareness of its own limitations mitigated its opposition against the enlargement of NATO and the EU. Russia sought to offer the states that aspired to join NATO and the EU a "positive" alternative to their pro-Western orientation – this included cross-guarantees of security for the countries concerned, creation of a nuclear-free zone or transformation of NATO into a political bloc that would be part of a new regional security system involving Russia. The rise of Eurasianism, however, put an end to this alternative: Russia now sees itself as a separate civilisation whose mission is to contain the West.

The formulation of the strategy and first test runs of the new methodologies and techniques of information operations also date back to Putin's first two terms as president (the war in Chechnya, the Orange revolution in Ukraine, the war with Georgia in 2008). From the start, the aim was to operate in opposition to the liberal vision of the world. An alternative, third way was sought, and was ultimately paved by the Eurasian current of thinking. That current itself has undergone a significant revolution: from a mild version (1993 – the near abroad doctrine; the public reports of the Intelligence Service, known as the Primakov reports, and especially the first one of them titled "The role of Russia in the CIS area"), to geopolitics in action (1999, the U-turn by Primakov who, on hearing about the NATO operation in Kosovo diverted the aircraft that was carrying him for a visit to the United States, and Vladimir Putin's famous revisionist address during the security conference in Munich in 2007), and to the current expansive, conservative imperialist-nationalist stance.

This approach has flourished since Putin returned to the president's seat in 2012 and the anti-Western, conservative doctrine became the ideological foundation of power in Russia. The imperial mobilisation put the president in a position that verged on a cult of personality and engendered an ideological offensive, a consolidation of the public around the president who was seen as the man building "the new Russia" ("new state"). All this is part of the reason why the doctrine has been so attractive for the Kremlin, which has come to appreciate its usefulness. Geopolitical doctrines have practical value: they serve to formulate guidelines for actions aimed at the political re-integration of Asia and Central Europe. The proponents of Eurasianism claim that there exists a separate civilizational and historical community in the territory corresponding to the area of the former Russian Empire. They ascribe a cultural meaning to the Russian-speaking community (the concept of the so-called Russian world). The concept of "nation" is expanded to include areas where the Russian language and culture are dominant. This ideology has become an instrument for managing the conflicts in the post-Soviet area (Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Crimea, etc.). Over time, it has assumed the shape of a conservative ideology referring to specifically understood conservative values (traditional family model, morality based on Orthodox values, collectivism, hierarchic view of the world) and confrontation with the Western world, which is seen as a source of alternative values and an aggressor in the area of Russia's vital interests.

The information operations built on this basis are not a new phenomenon. Some arguments ("the world cannot be unipolar") have been raised repeatedly since the early 1990s because Russia's strategic objectives have not changed since that time and still include building Russia's position as a global power, expanding the empire, weakening and incapacitating NATO, "de-Americanising" and

"snatching" Europe, and expanding the group of Russia's allies. What is new is the global scale (which corresponds to Russia's global geopolitical mission) and the level of information aggression. For this reason the new Ukrainian leadership (the "junta") is being portrayed in Russian propaganda as "pawns in Americas' geopolitical game", and Poland and the Baltic states are referred to as "the USA's bridgeheads in the fight against Russia".

The Dirty Nature of Russia's Info War

The theory and practice of Russia's info action commonly refer to the rhetoric of social engineering. The apparatus of notions employed in political debate also undergoes political manipulations. It includes a large number of slogan-notions such as "info-weapon", "civilizational weapon", "information spetsnaz", "information troops". Pro-Kremlin political scientists and journalists use these notions, as well as terms such as "sovereign democracy" or "conservative modernisation", as a matter of daily practice. Other functionally-loaded slogan-notions include "info war" and its derivatives (which concern the psychological, the ideological, the civilizational and the nuclear, i.e. reflections about the possibility of using tactical nuclear weapons against Ukraine, Europe, America, etc.). Those "militarised" notions foster confrontational attitudes and impose the Kremlin's vision of the world on the Russian and global public opinion: "The West has declared an information war on Russia," "It represents Russians as aggressors, even while ethnic cleansing of Russians goes on in Ukraine."

Experts and political scientists have been trying to pin down the main features of this war by plotting them onto existing theories of war, in an effort to define its scope, objectives and main parameters. This is no easy task because Russia's info war on Ukraine is taking place both internally, in Russia, and externally, in the post-Soviet space (where the main theme is: "The West / the European Union is rotting, it's in decay, the future belongs to the Eurasian Union"), and globally (where the argument is that "a country as uncivilised as Ukraine cannot possibly be a partner for the EU or NATO"). Russia's game is taking place in the real and virtual spaces and is multidimensional: while undermining the efficacy of the Ukrainian leadership and preventing them from carrying out reforms, it attenuates Russia's image as an aggressor, presenting the Russian Federation as the state which "strives to put down the fire and prevent a humanitarian catastrophe". Some analysts have mistakenly identified info war with cyber war. The former is a much broader term, even though it is an undisputed fact that foreign public forums are being "shelled" with massive amounts of pro-Russian posts and that software is being used to this end (viral marketing).

Yet despite those difficulties many features of Russia's information aggression can be identified. These include:

1) the **absence of a single frontline** (it is a total war whose fronts may be located in one's own country and in any other country of the world; and your compatriot may be the enemy, while a foreigner may be an ally, for instance if he or she claims such as: "Russophobia is helping the ruling elite of his or her country stay in power");

2) the **information space is the main battlefield** (the aim of the psychological treatment is to instill fear, to the point of panic, as was the case in Crimea in the spring of 2014; the war propaganda seeks to weaken the enemy's morale and reinforce the morale of one's allies);

3) there **has been no formal declaration of war, and the difference between the periods of war and peace is increasingly vague** (the info war against Ukraine has been going on continuously since 2004 when the propaganda stereotypes such as the "orange plague" or "Banderovtsy's Junta" first emerged);

4) efforts are made to mask the **objectives and the official military engagement** (Vladimir Mukhin, a military geopolitical analyst, wrote recently that "the point is to win without entering the fight." (5)

5) **large groups of the public are being involved in the fight** ("defending Russians is a patriotic duty of citizens").

The info war shares the above features with guerrilla, insurgent or hybrid warfare, which also get mentioned in debates. It has its own specificity, though. Info wars are waged on visible and invisible fronts, and both Russians and foreigners are soldiers. The Kremlin defines the main frontlines, the secret services planners prepare individual operations, and the media carry them out along with the military, diplomats, experts, academics and representatives of the world of culture. Politicians join them readily, in line with the theoretical assumption that the public opinion is particularly susceptible to official media messages. Russian politicians readily embrace disinformation, manipulation, lobbying, blackmail, lies and other methods of dirty propaganda. For instance, in an interview for the popular daily *Komsomolskaya Pravda* on 15 October 2014 Sergei Ivanov, the secretary of the Presidential Administration, denied any Russian military involvement in Donbas and said that the region had witnessed genocide and ethnic cleansing of those who wanted to speak their

native language, rather than Ukrainian. “The fact that today Donbas holds mass graves of murdered civilians proves this beyond any doubt”, he said. It is an important element of the dirty war to attach negative, emotionally charged labels to the enemy and promote them using all instruments available, knowing that one part of the public opinion will believe the labels, another part will get frightened by the possible consequences, and still another part, acting out of caution, will push the problem of Russian aggression to the margins of discourse. The operations on the “Western” front are effective, as demonstrated by the experts and politicians who repeat the Kremlin’s propaganda arguments (“One should find a solution that will allow Putin to save face”; “Russia only demands respect and dialogue with the West on an equal footing”). This is primarily a “war” of narratives and interpretations. One’s own interpretation is being reinforced and multiplied in all possible ways, while the “foreign” interpretation is being pushed to the margins where it poses no threat. The aim is to neutralise the enemy, support the allies and win over the undecided ones.

Current Trends

Sergei Rastorguyev, a Russian theoretician from the Institute of Information Security of the Lomonosov University (6) argues that there is no difference between the objectives of an info war and other kinds of war: they are all waged over the resources of other states (in the case of info wars, the social resources are at stake). “The enemy’s media and elites hold the key to those resources. It is important to possess a critical mass of agents of influence among those elites and media, and the aggressor recruits such agents from among people with egoistic dispositions or those with slave mentality”. The author notes that the “info war strategy always envisages large numbers of mutually linked tactical info operations. Their global objective is not always visible, but neither should it be. After all, what would be the point of an operation that is readily discernible to everyone, including the victim”. Rastorguyev has long argued that a defensive tactic in this kind of war would lead to defeat. In his opinion info war means an offensive, and its efficacy is determined by the real potential of power and means at one’s disposal.

The threats faced by Russia have been re-framed to fit those objectives. They have long been represented as attempts at taking over control of Russia’s resource, exploiting and degrading them. However, while previously the emphasis was on natural resources, currently civilizational threats have come to the forefront (the national culture being forced out by the American pseudo-culture, the institution of the family being destroyed by “Gayropa”). The Russian doctrinaires argue that by fighting liberal globalisation, Russia is primarily confronting anarchism (“the global Maidan”, the

negation of all hierarchic rules), and defending the sovereignty of the nation state and the nations' right to choose their own values.

President Putin presented a similar re-definition of the threats faced by Russia during the Security Council meeting on 24 July 2014. He said that there was no direct military threat to Russia's territorial integrity, even though "NATO was indeed ostensibly reinforcing itself in Eastern Europe and coming closer to Russian borders". But the real threat, according to Putin, concerned the attempts at destabilising Russia politically, which the Kremlin was determined to firmly oppose ("There will be no colour revolution in Russia"). Putin further said that "civil society" was the government's ally, and emphasised that it needed to closely co-operate with the state authorities (7) The president has recently held a number of meetings with representatives of specifically understood civil society, instructing them and assigning tasks to them. He told political scientists that "Russia would not allow others to impose a sense of guilt on itself", and tasked historians with the mission of "defending the Russian position in the information space." (8) He asked the Russian Geographic Society, which he said was a "systemic leader", to create a Russian alternative to Wikipedia as the latter "was not in a position to reliably inform about the Russian regions and life in Russia". The president's efforts show that Russia intends to stick to the direction set by the annexation of Crimea. From the Kremlin's point of view, this will require sustaining the imperial discourse, strengthening the executive front, perfecting the methods and means of influence, and building broad public support. **This means that Russia's objective is to gain an information advantage over the West and to strengthen the previously observed tendencies, such as:**

Development of the Imperial Discourse:

The dominant practice in this discourse is to resort to historical stereotypes ("historical war"). This serves to demonstrate the historical continuity of imperial Russia, from Kievan Rus, to the Grand Duchy of Moscow, the Russian Empire, the Soviet Union and to the Russian Federation. Historical facts get manipulated to fit the Russian propaganda vision of the world and to weaken the associations that are negative for Russia (e.g. Ukrainian links to the origins of the Russian state) and to strengthen associations negative for other countries (the memory of the victory over fascism is a precondition of the efficacy of the stereotype of a Ukrainian "fascist"). This explains the propaganda career of the notion of "Novorossiya". It denotes the alleged confederation of the self-proclaimed republics of Donetsk and Luhansk. Putin first called this part of Ukraine "Novorossiya" on 17 March, after the annexation of Crimea, and on 11 September he visited the church in Vorbyovy Gory in Moscow to "light candles for those fallen in the fight for Novorossiya". In the Russian empire, the

term “Novorossiya” was used interchangeably with the “Novorossiysk Governorate”, an entity created by Catherine II after the wars with Turkey. It comprised parts of present-day Ukraine: the Donetsk, Dnipropetrovsk, Zaporizhia, Mikolaiv, Kherson and Odessa Oblasts. Today “Novorossiya” with its news agencies, intelligence services, parliament, etc., is an example of a pseudo-reality created by Russia as it plays with the imperial heritage, just as the notion of the “Russian world”, which refers back to such historical notions as Pax Romana or Pax Britannica, serves to emphasise the Russian hegemony. These are the kind of ideas that define the lines of Russia's propaganda and its propaganda interpretation, serve to create new myths and new realities. The stereotype of an omnipresent “enemy” of Russia is the most productive in this respect.

Creating the Enemy:

In the propaganda practice this means creating an exaggerated picture of the adversary, meaning both internal enemy (“traitor of the nation”, “fifth column”), and external enemy (the “rotten West”). The enemy is described using the language of hate. This approach is a legacy of the KGB and is based on a black and white distinction between “friend” and “foe”. Keeping the people locked away behind the Iron Curtain required an iron argumentation. The enemy was an obstacle preventing the attainment of the promised “bright future” and created endless difficulties for the leadership (e.g. American militarists forcing Russia to arm itself, leaving the government no choice but to accept the challenge “to prevent war in any case”). The “enemy” also served to improve the leadership’s own self-image and as a stereotype it is exceptionally useful in manipulating one’s own and foreign public opinion. It may be used to frighten one’s own public (in order to then emphasise that the state is capable of “neutralising” the enemy) and the public in other countries (to show that Russia offers an alternative and is a guarantor of sovereignty). The exaggerated threat posed by the “hostile forces” also serves to conceal one’s own failures.

Formatting the Media to Fit the “Global Mission of Russia”:

In late 2013, the Russia Today International Agency was established by merging the Russia Today television, the Golos Rossii radio and the RIA Novosti news agency. The state-owned media concern that emerged has been developing dynamically and establishing new international bridgeheads for networked action (e.g. the Centre for International Journalism and Studies (9) or the Zinoviev Club. (10) In November 2014 the company’s CEO Yevgeny Kiselyov unveiled a multimedia project called Sputnik that will combine and co-ordinate the work of the exiting foreign radio stations of Golos Rossii. A multilingual online portal, a news agency and media centres (bureaus) will ensure cohesion

of the message broadcast in 30 languages. The broadcasts will be available online through mobile and digital platforms. As was the case with RT, the radio's propaganda message will be localised, i.e. it will make extensive use of local journalists and opinion leaders. While presenting the project Kiselyov said: "The exclusive content of Sputnik is addressed to billions of listeners the world over, who are tired of the aggressive propaganda promoting a unipolar world, and who want a different viewpoint" (11) RT is also developing. In 2015 its budget will be expanded by 40% in connection with the launch of new channels in German and French. New news agencies and news portals are also emerging, dedicated to individual countries, such as pl.novorossia.today/; and existing portals are adding new tabs devoted to the info war. The Crimean television has recently joined this trend (12) with a tab that says its purpose is to show events "from the point of view of the history of Russia and Crimea and the global rivalry between the Russian world and the Western world".

Networking:

Networks serve to multiply the message formulated by the state and bear the hallmarks of the KGB and Cold War experiences. A broad definition of network technologies has been adopted, which encompasses both the real and the virtual information space. The network structures are organised around specific institutions, instructed from the top, controlled and corrected. Strictly centralised, they operate in line with the principle of networked collectivism, within a shared world-view matrix. Rusrand.ru is an interesting example of such a network – in name, it positions itself as an equivalent of the US think tank Rand Corporation. Its online address hosts a number of institutions, including the Centre for Scientific Political Thought and Ideology, the Centre for Problem Analysis and State Governance Design, and the Russian Network Intellect expert society established in 2008. The most active participants of the project receive participation certificates from the project director, Prof. Stepan Sulakshin. (13)

A Boom of "Information Analysis":

The new tasks (diagnosing reality and ascribing values to it in line with Russia's interests) have given rise to a special genre of analytic work – information analysis. It is being promoted by the "Russian School of Analysis," (14) conceived by the FSB colonel Yuri Kurnosov. Kurnosov explained the objectives of the project in his book *Analysis as intellectual weapon* (Moscow, 2012). His project is based on a single methodological platform that will allow "combining analytic efforts and effective measures to counter the foreign civilizational expansion". The author identifies two objectives: 1) to create a contemporary Russian school of analysis to contribute to educating "healthily thinking

citizens capable of withstanding the expansion of foreign structures and cultures that operate according to the *divide and rule* principle, which is the basic formula of info war designed to devastate people's consciousness using information, i.e. to commit a mental genocide against Russians"; 2) to encourage sustained interest in the discipline and its use in public interest.

Dynamic Development of "Civil Society" Institutions:

Public support is being built up using various kinds of clubs, foundations and associations of intellectuals, such as the Foundation for Strategic Culture or the Association of Orthodox Experts. Party clubs and centres have also been operating more dynamically recently – the State Patriotic Club of the United Russia party (15) or the National Institute for the Development of Contemporary Ideology, (16) also affiliated to the party, whose objectives include the development of civil society, are a case in point. Their representatives are often present in the media as opinion leaders. They also initiate propaganda events (conferences, peace marches, concerts). Such clubs and associations not only serve to promote the Kremlin's concepts, but also operate as ideational platforms fighting against liberalism and "Atlanticism". A large number of them exist already but new ones keep appearing, such as the Zinoviev Club, established in July 2014 (17), or the Institute of High Communitarianism (18), launched under the slogan: "communitarianism = people power". Communitarianism is a contemporary philosophical current that emphasises the importance of communities in the social life of people. The Russian communitarianism is primarily a platform for countering liberalism. The initiative, like most of the other pro-Kremlin initiatives, seeks to achieve synergies: while referring to the critiques of liberalism, it reaches out to those communities in the West which embrace political philosophies friendly to Russia. All these projects are action-oriented.

The Izborsk Club, also known as the Institute for Dynamic Conservatism, occupies a special position here. It brings together academics (Natalia Narochnitskaya, Sergei Kurginian, Mikhail Delagin, Sergei Glazyev, Vladimir Ovchinski), journalists (Mikhail Leontyev, Maxim Shevchenko), as well as ideologues and activists (Alexander Prokhanov, Alexander Dugin, Leonid Ivashov, Nikolai Starikov), including church activists (Archimandrite Tikhon, a member of the Presidential Council for Culture, represented by the Russian media as Putin's "confessor"). Members of the Izborsk Club support the Kremlin's flagship project of the Eurasian Union, viewing it as a first step towards the empire's renaissance. They have contributed to the mainstreaming of nationalist-imperial ideas which used to be limited to the margins of political discourse, and have popularised the info war problematic by organising conference (such as the event at MGIMO University in October 2013) and publishing reports on the subject. (19) Their civilizational nationalism slogans are based on the concept of the

"Russian world". They argue that: "The real civilizational war (even if it attacks political regimes, elites and business) is waged over orientations, fundamental values, the criteria of good and evil, understanding of the role of man in the world and the vision of the future ... By creating a pole of meaning (a model of man, a system of meanings and values) Russia and other states that do not wish to support the existing world order will get chance to defend their civilizational independence." (20)

Making Use of the 30-million Russian Diaspora:

The Kremlin's attitude towards the diaspora has changed recently. The portal of Rossotrudnichestvo, the governmental agency specialising in co-operation with the diaspora, recently published a post by the agency chief Konstantin Kosachov who said that: "The task of building Russia's soft power in order to, *inter alia*, bring the truth about Russia to broad foreign audiences, is particularly important today ... We need to consistently and systematically unite the dispersed foci of support for Russia abroad, some of which are spontaneous, some – simply still undiscovered, and transform them into real bases of support, just as the Western countries have done openly and without reckoning with the cost". The diaspora is seen as an institutional resource for the information warfare. Recent initiatives by Rossotrudnichestvo and the Russkiy Mir foundation have focused on patriotic education, historical memory, and training to build the skills needed for actions in the information space. The newest examples include the conference in Chisinau on 15 November, 2014 (21), the IV Baltic Forum of Compatriots held on 20-23 November near St. Petersburg (22), which brought together 100 participants from Belarus, Estonia, Latvia, Poland, Finland and other countries, or the V Youth Forum of Compatriots (held on 21-25 November, 2014, in Sophia), which featured 300 young leaders and co-ordinators of compatriot organisations from 45 countries in Europe and the CIS. (23)

Challenges

In the West, Russia's power is measured chiefly in terms of the condition of its economy or armed forces. What slips under the radar is Russia's extensive potential to carry out political operations that inherently involve sabotage, disinformation, provocation, spets-propaganda – the 'dirty' legacy of the Soviet era. Russia's objective is not only to mold internal and external public opinion in a desirable way, i.e. in line with the Russian Federation's interests. As the annexation of Crimea has shown, it is also to shape a new reality. These efforts are not new, they are a long-duration phenomenon. What is new is the global scale, the level of aggression and the broad involvement of the Russian public and people abroad.

Russia possesses many assets in its ambition to confront the West. The most important ones include its own, controlled information space, an extensive set of social engineering instruments, the availability of competent experts, journalists and contractors, as well as many years of experience in conducting information operations. In response to Western criticism after the annexation of Crimea, the Kremlin has stepped up its imperial discourse and set out to develop the front and back facilities to support info operations in the West. The doctrines that have been put forward (Eurasianism, “Russian World”) and projects such as “the Russian School of Analysis” or rusrand.ru are in fact programmes of action. They have been employed in the war against Ukraine. These are mass actions that use new technologies and disseminate ideas that are in line with the Kremlin’s policy.

Paradoxically, the European culture of political compromise, which the Kremlin views as a weakness of the West, is a strength for Russia. In Russia’s view, the freedom of the media and the pluralism of opinion are also weaknesses of the West. Western states cannot confront Russia in the info war at the institutional level, while Russia has developed and has been consistently refining the conceptual and executive structures in charge of its info operations. Finally, poor knowledge of Russia is also a weakness of the West, as Western countries have prematurely dismantled their institutes of Soviet studies, yielding to Russia’s propaganda claims about the “strategic partnership”, “partnership for modernisation” and the like. The West has been rationalising the Russian ideas and has failed to realise the scale of disinformation or the degree to which the Russian reality is a simulation. It has failed to notice that the “info war” waged by Russia is an ideological war that reverts us to thinking in terms of geopolitical blocs.

There are various groups in the West that are susceptible to Russian propaganda and benefit from it in various ways (economically in the case of business, or politically in the case of radical parties that criticise NATO, the EU and the US to raise political capital). Russia’s information activities effectively take advantage of the Western specificity, e.g. the post-war culture of pacifism. Some Western experts seem to be terrified by the vision of a new cold war with Russia. They put the blame for the Russian aggression on their own politicians who allegedly “encroach on the former Soviet sphere of influence” (e.g. the University of Chicago professor John Mearsheimer in *Foreign Affairs* (24)). Others, like Samuel Charap and Jeremy Shapiro writing in *Current History: A Journal of Contemporary World Affairs* still believe that Russia’s objections against accepting its neighbours into the EU and NATO must not be ignored. (25) The conciliatory attitudes of experts have found an expression in the Boisto Agenda initiative, i.e. Russian-American expert consultations on how to solve the Ukrainian conflict over the heads of the Ukrainians. (26) The spirit of the policy of concessions is also present in

statements by European politicians who emphasise that the West needs Russia's involvement in solving global problems, warn against "humiliating Russia" and "demonising Putin" as that might fuel anti-Western sentiments in Russia. Such voices encourage the Kremlin to continue its aggression and deceit based on the logic on "who can trick whom."

Underlying the policy of concessions is the conviction that Russia has the right to defend its interests and soft power. However, the Russian and the Western soft power differ fundamentally. The vectors Russia's "soft power", including the Russian-speaking minority organisations, have organised and rigged the referendum in Crimea, have been destabilising the eastern regions of Ukraine and "humiliating" the Ukrainian leadership. A "soft power" that promotes the values and legitimises the foreign policy of the Russian Federation is a destructive force that devastates other value systems: it stupefies, frightens, undermines the Western societies' confidence in the policies of their governments, and destroys trust among the member states of the Western community. Most importantly, however, it refuses to reckon with the existing reality and international law, and creates a new reality. The Russian "soft power", "civil society", "expert networks" or "analytic schools" by definition are not equivalents or similar institutions in the West. They serve different functions, namely propaganda. They impose on the world the stereotypical view that any criticism of the Kremlin is a sign of Russophobia, or that Eastern Europe is an area of chaos, neo-fascism and ethnic cleansing. By mobilising civilians into obedience in Russia, they inspire civil disobedience in the West. They are organised from the top, backed financially by the Russian state and used instrumentally by the state for the purposes of its information campaigns: people with degrees, dressed in elegant suits, and representatives of "free" media (such as svpressa.ru, the "Free Press" portal, the freekaliningrad.ru portal established by the government of the Kaliningrad Oblast, or the Zinovyev Club that refers to the thought of Alexander Zinovyev also known in the West) spread disinformation that is more sophisticated and elegantly packed. Their activities deepen and create new divisions in Western societies, as demonstrated by the diversity of positions adopted on Russia and its activities in Ukraine by various groups in the West.

The West's relations with Russia have entered a new colder phase. Improving them in a durable way will be difficult. If we take a closer look at the newest history and carefully analyse the causes of the recurrent colder waves in mutual relations, we will see that the responsibility rests with the Russian power elite. Improving relations would require the Russian leadership to change its perception of the international reality and its thinking, which is based on the politics of force and spheres of influence, and to abandon its ambition to delineate new civilizational divides. As long as Russia continues to mendaciously repeat that the West has "declared a war on it", "is intent on re-coding the Russian

society”, “has cynically and unprofessionally destabilised the situation in Ukraine” (all phrases by president Putin), the chances of a positive change will be next to nil. If Russia has chosen to go on with the info war, one should not be scared but rather proceed to implement an adequate and effective “policy of containment”. This policy should be coherent and consistent.

NOTES

1. <http://www.rg.ru/2014/10/15/patrushev.html>
2. <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/3367103.html>
3. For more information see: Jolanta Darczewska, "The anatomy of Russian information warfare. The Crimean operation, a case study," *Point of View*, Centre for Eastern Studies OSW, Warsaw, May 22, 2014. <http://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/point-view/2014-05-22/anatomy-russian-information-warfare-crimean-operation-a-case-study>
4. Cf. Ronald Asmus, *A Little War that Shook the World. Georgia, Russia, and the Future of the West*, (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).
5. http://nvo.ng.ru/concepts/2014-11-21/1_infowar.html
6. *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, Issue 42 (6435), October 23, 2013.
7. <http://www.scrf.gov.ru/news/825.html>
8. <http://www.svoboda.org/content/transcript/26675801.html>
9. <http://ria.ru/cj/>
10. http://ria.ru/zinoviev_club/20141120/1034273877.html
11. <http://www.ntv.ru/novosti/1261480>
12. <http://trkcrimea.ru/programs/informational/informaczionnaya-vojna/>
13. <http://goslyudi.ru/blog/ayefremov/38333/>
14. www.analitika-kurnosov.ru
15. <http://www.gpclub.ru>
16. <http://www.nirsi.ru/>
17. <http://ria.ru/religion/20140702/1014473326.html>
18. <http://communitarian.ru/instityt/council/>
19. <http://www.dynacon.ru/esovet/>
20. Cf. Konstantin Chernykh and Marine Voskianian, *Anonimnaya voina. Doklad Izborskomu Klubu*. (See www.dynacon.ru).
21. <http://vseruss.com/spisok/Sootechestvenniki-20/Konferentsiya-sootchestvennikov-v-Kishineve-most-obmena-idej-i-nachinaniy-5468>
22. <http://baltija.eu/news/print/40792>
23. <http://vseruss.com/spisok/Sootechestvenniki-20/Pyatyj-Mezhdunarodnyj-molodezhnyj-forum-Molodezh%27-stroit-budushchee-soberet-uchastnikov-iz-45-stran-5463>
24. Cf. John J. Mearsheimer, "Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West's Fault – The Liberal Delusions That Provoked Putin," *Foreign Affairs*, Volume 93, No. 5, September/October 2014.

25. Cf. Samuel Charap and Jeremy Shapiro, „How to Avoid a New Cold War,” *Current History*, Volume 113, Issue 765, October 2014.
26. <http://theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/08...>