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**NEWS DISCOURSE OF RUSSIAN INFORMATION WARFARE: THE CASE
OF „SPUTNIK“**

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**RUSIJOS INFORMACINIO KARO NAUJIENŲ DISKURSAS: „SPUTNIK“
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SUMMARY

Pursuing its political aims, Russia develops more and more sophisticated power to manipulate mass consciousness, introducing new techniques, which should be researched both quantitatively and qualitatively. In the recent years after annexation of Crimea in 2014 and escalation of the armed conflict in the Eastern Ukraine, it has been the main scientific problem of many contemporary researches. Since new technologies of information warfare are introduced by Russia constantly, and information continues, providing researchers with new material to be analyzed, the problem not only remains relevant but also requires some regular update.

Sputnik is one of the main tools, used by Russia in its information warfare. Launched less than three years ago, it has been actively spreading disinformation and Russian narratives all over the world.

This research on a topic ‘News Discourse of Russian Information Warfare: the Case of ‘Sputnik’ is aimed to provide new data on some major narratives in Russian news discourse, and, more importantly to explore how Sputnik’s discourse is shaped in accordance with them to help Kremlin to achieve its political goals by influencing international audiences’ opinion.

The main objectives are to understand the role and functions of Sputnik in Russian information warfare, to identify contemporary Russian narratives in Sputnik’s news discourse, to describe strategies techniques and instruments, used by Sputnik to spread Russian narratives and influence international audiences, as well as analyze dynamics of Sputnik’s news discourse in the context of the concrete events and Kremlin’s policy.

To achieve these objects literature analysis, institutional networking analysis of Sputnik, discourse analysis and qualitative content analysis of Sputnik’s were conducted, as well as two case studies were presented.

In the course of the research the better understanding of modern Russian information warfare was acquired, Russian narratives were identified, techniques and instruments used by Sputnik were described.

Results of the research showed that Sputnik’s discourse is constructed in line with official Kremlin’s position, and aimed to fulfill its political goals. Sputnik’s example showed that Russian media not only able to dramatically change public opinion in the way, beneficial for Kremlin, in the short periods of time, but also have a direct influence on international events. It was concluded that offensive strategy is more efficient in information warfare than defensive one, and some recommendations were formulated.

SANTRAUKA

Siekdama savo politinių tikslų, Rusija vysto vis stipresnę jėgą, skirtą manipuliuoti masių sąmoningumu, kuri pasireiškia įvairiausiais metodais. Tokia jėga turėtų būti išanalizuota kokybiškai ir kiekybiškai. Paskutiniu laikotarpiu, kai nuo 2014 metų, kai rytų Ukrainoje kilo karinis konfliktas ir buvo aneksuotas Krymo pusiasalis, tai buvo viena pagrindinių daugelio šiandieninių mokslinių tyrimų problema. Kadangi Rusija pastoviai naudoja vis naujesnes informacinio karo priemones, kurių kiekis nemažėja, įvairūs tyrimai visada turi naujos medžiagos, kuri dar nėra analizuota. Dėl šios priežasties esanti problema išlieka ne tik pastoviai aktuali, bet ir reikalauja nuolatinio atnaujinimo.

Naujienų kanalas 'Sputnik' yra vienas pagrindinių įrankių, Rusijos naudojamų savo informaciniame kare. Sukurtas prieš mažiau nei 3 metus, jis aktyviai visame pasaulyje skleidžia Rusijos dezinformaciją ir kuriamą naratyvą,

Šio tyrimo tema – Rusijos informacinio karo naujienų diskursas: 'Sputnik' atvejis', tikslas – pateikti naujos informacijos apie didžiausius Rusijos kuriamo naujienų diskurso naratyvus, ir, svarbiausia, tuo pačiu metu parodyti, kaip 'Sputnik' diskursas yra formuojamas Kremliaus, kurio tikslas – pasiekti politinius tikslus darant įtaką tarptautinės auditorijos nuomonei.

Pagrindiniai tyrimo uždaviniai – suprasti informaciniame kare dalyvaujančios Rusijos kuriamo 'Sputnik' funkcijas, nustatyti šiandieninį Rusijos naratyvą 'Sputnik' naujienų diskurse, aprašyti strategijas, technikas ir instrumentus, naudojamus 'Sputnik' skleidžiant Rusijos naratyvą ir siekiant įtakos tarptautinėms auditorijoms, taip pat – išanalizuoti 'Sputnik' naujienų diskurso dinamiką konkrečių įvykių ir Kremliaus politikos kontekste.

Norint įgyvendinti šiuos uždavinius, buvo atlikta literatūros analizė, institucinių 'Sputnik' tinklų analizė, diskurso analizė ir kokybinė 'Sputnik' kuriamo turinio analizė, taip pat pristatyta dviejų atvejų analizė.

Tyrimo metu buvo įgytas geresnis modernaus Rusijos informacinio karo supratimas, identifikuotas Rusijos kuriamas naratyvas, aprašytos 'Sputnik' naudojamos technikos ir instrumentai.

Tyrimo rezultatai parodė, kad 'Sputnik' diskursas yra konstruojamas paraleliai su Kremliaus pozicija, siekiant įgyvendinti šios institucijos politinius tikslus. 'Sputnik' pavyzdys parodė, kad Rusijos žiniasklaida ne tik geba drastiškai pakeisti viešą nuomonę Kremliui palankia linkme, kas atliekama labai greitai, – šis žiniasklaidos kanalas gali daryti tiesioginę įtaką tarptautiniams įvykiams. Tyrime padaryta išvada, kad puolamoji strategija informaciniame kare yra daug efektyvesnė už ginamąją, taip pat suformuluotos kelios rekomendacijos.

INTRODUCTION

Dramatic development of information technologies during recent decades resulted into the unprecedented amount of information and free access to it, creating massive opportunities for manipulation of mass consciousness.

In November, 2016 the EU Parliament adopted a draft resolution on the EU strategic communication to counteract propaganda against it by third parties. In particular, the European Parliament officially called on the EU to make strategic communication its priority, and emphasized the need to raise awareness about hybrid warfare and *'demonstrate assertiveness through institutional / political communication, think tank / academia research, social media campaigns, civil society initiatives, media literacy and other useful actions'* (Committee on Foreign Affairs, 2016).

Since the nature of hybrid warfare makes it unclear who is an opponent in it, it is very important, that the resolution not only admitted and characterized the challenge, but also named concrete non-state and state actors, threatening peace and stability of Europe, namely terrorist groups (like Daesh) and Russian Federation. According to the resolution, the latter tries to *'challenge democratic values, divide Europe, gather domestic support and create the perception of failed states in the EU's eastern neighborhood'* (European Parliament, 2016).

More than that, the resolution recognizes that strategic communication and information warfare threat are not only external EU issues but also internal ones. Annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation, as well as Russian-backed military conflict in the Donbas, proved that hybrid warfare is one of the major challenges to the world nowadays, since its consequences can be as harmful as those of traditional wars, waged in previous centuries.

Recognition of the challenge of information warfare on the highest level by the EU legislative body not only increases the **significance** of academic researches on related topics even more, but also makes it a duty of European academic society to contribute to security and stability of the region in the insecure and unstable times by conducting researches, dedicated to contemporary challenges, which European society faces. As Ukraine's example shows, it is especially relevant for Russia's neighboring countries from the post-Soviet space, including Baltic states, which are the closest potential targets of Russian hybrid warfare.

To protect our information space and design effective information security strategy, adequate to the contemporary challenges, we need at first to research strategy of the aggressor's warfare, and technologies used.

Pursuing its political aims, Russia develops more and more sophisticated power to manipulate mass consciousness, introducing new techniques, which should be researched both

quantitatively and qualitatively. In the recent years, especially since above-mentioned events took place in Ukraine in 2014, this has been the main **scientific problem** of many contemporary researches. Since new technologies of information warfare are introduced by Russia constantly, and information warfare is constantly going on, providing us with new materials to be analyzed, the problem not only remains relevant but also requires some regular update, which explains the **novelty** of this particular research.

Since methods and focus of researches have been different, it helped in time to achieve broader perspective on the problem and make a switch from looking at Russian actions through public diplomacy to considering it as a new type of warfare, waged by Russia.

Thus, concentrating on the process of Russia's annexation of Crimea, Berzins (2014) used it as a case study to explore changes in the character of armed conflict, which he characterized as 'Russian New-generation Warfare'. As he concluded, propaganda in media played important role in the first phase of that warfare. Similarly, Thornton (2015; 2016) emphasized on the novelty of Russian information warfare, which, according to him, played the major role in Crimea's annexation. One of the first to analyze Russian-Ukrainian conflict, focusing on the use of cyberspace, was also Maurer (2014). Later Snegovaya (2015), also analyzing Russian aggression in Ukraine, stated that Russian advanced form of hybrid warfare was not a product of innovation, but almost fully based on the Soviet techniques instead, especially such element as 'reflexive control', which, according to the researcher, was the key to success in the era of hybrid war. The similar opinion was shared by Kasapoglu (2015) and Darczewska (2015), who argued that the main Russia's opponent in the information warfare was not only Ukraine, but also the West in general (especially NATO and US). Kofman and Rojansky (2015), meanwhile, viewed Russian hybrid warfare as the attempt to use diplomatic, economic, military and information instruments to defend its own national interests. Thomas (2014; 2015), in his turn, analyzing both traditional and modern elements of military strategy of the Russian Federation, emphasized on its use of non-military and military activities in the ratio 4:1. Analyzing Russian literature and other sources on information warfare, Franke (2015) concluded that it is conducted continuously in peacetime and wartime alike. Blending and coordination between different informational tools was characterized as another distinctive feature of Russian information warfare by Giles (2015; 2016). One of the latest contribution to the problem's research was made by Van Herpen (2016), who conducted a very broad analysis of the tools of the propaganda offensive launched by the Kremlin after the intervention in Ukraine in 2014, including also activities of Sputnik.

In the resolution by European Parliament Sputnik news was named among tools, used by Russia in its information warfare. Launched less than three years ago, this multimedia multilingual service has been actively spreading disinformation and Russian narratives all over the world, due to

the generous Russian budget. Since the media is much newer than RT, it is much less analyzed, that is why complex researches of Sputnik's activities are needed.

Taking into consideration the fact that Russian information warfare involves a great variety of institutions and organizations, activities of which is impossible to analyze within a framework of master thesis, we concentrate in this research specifically on Sputnik as an instrument of Russian information warfare. The **object** of our research is dynamics of Sputnik's news discourse in accordance with contemporary political goals of Russia.

The **aim** of the research is to provide new data on some major narratives in Russian news discourse, and, more importantly to explore how Sputnik's discourse is shaped in accordance with them to help Kremlin to achieve its political goals by influencing international audiences' opinion.

Accomplishing the aim requires achieving several **objectives**:

- To examine literature on information warfare, its elements and ideological roots;
- To get better understanding of the nature of Russian information warfare by getting acquainted with contemporary researches on it;
- To understand the role and functions of Sputnik plays in Russian information warfare as a state institution;
- To analyze concrete examples of Sputnik's coverage of international events, in which Russia was directly or indirectly involved, defending its national interests;
- To identify contemporary Russian narratives in Sputnik's news discourse;
- To describe strategies techniques and instruments, used by Sputnik to spread contemporary Russian narratives and influence international audiences;
- To compare Sputnik's coverage of particular events with Kremlin's official position;
- To analyze dynamics of Sputnik's news discourse in the context of the concrete events and Kremlin's policy.

In order to reach achieved objectives, following research strategies and methods were used.

- Literature analysis was conducted to set theoretical basis of the research, explain definitions used, and to present the progress, made by researchers of the scientific problem so far. For the purpose of objectivity literature from different periods (with an emphasis on contemporary literature) and countries was analyzed.
- Since Kremlin's vertical of power is based not on the level of narratives and discourses, but on the institutions and their financial and fear dependences, therefore narrative strategies could be periodically changed, it was decided to use both critical discourse and institutional analysis.

- Qualitative content analysis of articles allowed us to illustrate strategies, techniques and instruments, used by Sputnik.
- Case studies were presented to illustrate dynamics of the discourse in the context of particular events with concrete timeline, in which Russia had specific aims.

The main primary source of the research became content of Sputnik, including texts, visual and audiovisual content, published within the particular topic and specific period of time. Thus, to analyze the coverage of Dutch referendum, 86 materials, dedicated to this topic, and published in the time period between 31.07.2015 (when the first article about this topic was published) and 21.04.2016 (2 weeks after the referendum took place) were analyzed. Since Sputnik didn't create specific section for this topic, we used 'search' instrument on Sputnik's web-site, and collected results of the search request, which consisted of key words 'Dutch referendum' and 'Ukraine'. In the second case study we analyzed 274 articles, devoted to the downing of Russian Su-24 plane in the period between November 24, 2015 (when the plane was shot) and November, 25, 2016 (the last article in the thematic section). In this case Sputnik added major articles on the topic to the section 'Russian Su-24 Jet Downed Over Syria' to make it possible for readers to keep the track of the events, therefore we didn't need to use 'search' instrument. Besides 24 cartoons and 4 polls, devoted to the topic, were analyzed. Moreover, some quantitative data was collected from other broadcasters (RT, Ukrinform), to which Sputnik is compared, as well as social media (YouTube, Twitter, Facebook), which aren't only often cited by Sputnik, but also are platform for its own content.

Data from secondary sources was also used, namely results of Levada center's surveys, which helped to illustrate the change in public opinion, following Sputnik's information campaign. Among other secondary sources are academic articles on Russian information warfare, researches by NATO StratCom COE, articles by authoritative media about Sputnik and Russia.

All the translations, tables and graphs were prepared in the course of this research by its author. All tables and most of the graphs were prepared in accordance with quantitative data, collected by the author (except 'Attitudes of Russian population toward Turkey' graph, which is author's visualization of Levada center's quantitative data).

The chosen methodology has some limitations, which should be mentioned:

- 1) Presented case studies don't grasp all narratives, involved in Russian information warfare, that is why emphasize was laid on the techniques, instruments and strategies, which are common for Russian information warfare in many cases.
- 2) Discourse of Sputnik's website was analyzed only, although Sputnik has also pages in social media. Sputnik's social media discourse also should be analyzed in the future.

- 3) In the second case study only articles, included in the thematic section were analyzed. It wasn't possible to analyze rest of the articles on the topic due to time limit.

In the first chapter theoretical background of the research is presented, including review of literature on Information warfare, manipulation of mass consciousness, propaganda, as well as analysis of Lyotard's findings on grand narratives and Van Dijk's multidisciplinary approach to news as the discourse.

In the first section of the second chapter Sputnik is analyzed as an institution of Russia's public diplomacy. Its purpose of creation, aims and audience are explained. In the second section Sputnik's technologies and strategies are analyzed according to four major developments of Russian communication model since Soviet times, according to Van Herpen (2016).

In the third chapter two case studies are presented: Sputnik's coverage of Dutch referendum on Ukraine-EU Association agreement, and Sputnik's anti-Turkish information campaign, launched after Turkey shot Russian warplane. Both case studies include analysis of Sputnik's discourse in the context of Russian policies and discourses.

1. INFORMATION WARFARE AS THE MAJOR INSTRUMENT OF RUSSIA'S MODERN HYBRID WARFARE

1.1. Understanding of Modern Russian Information Warfare in the era of Information Society

Information warfare technologies existed long before such term was even introduced in the academic and military circles. However, profound researches in the sphere of mass communication influences appeared only in XX century, when thanks to the technological progress the nature of media became truly mass. Development of press, invention of telegraph, telephone and radio, later television, and finally Internet not only allowed us to speak about mass information as such, but also made researchers concerned about the threats, brought by its usage with the aim to influence people's consciousness.

Various information manipulative techniques such as propaganda were widely used during two world wars, while the Cold War between USA and the Soviet Union became a bright example of the information used not just an additional but the main instrument of confronting the external enemy.

To better understand the nature of modern Information Warfare, and Russia's approach to it, it is important to look at the main findings on this issue starting from the last century.

Thus, the problem of influence on public opinion in democratic society and culture of masses were key themes for Lippman (1922), who also one of the first started using term 'Cold War' and introduced the concept of stereotype, on the system of which usually the public opinion is built. Relying on the idea of crowd psychology, Bernays (2004) also researched the structure of mechanism, which controls the public opinion, as well as the ways to manipulate it, he was researching propaganda in the contemporary democracy, for the first time having explored the use of psychology and other social sciences for public campaigns.

Jaques Ellul (1973) was one of the first, who used psychological and sociological approaches to explore the phenomena of propaganda. In his work he suggests several theories about the nature of propaganda, stating that media usually serve special interests of market or state, while information consumers get captured by received facts, not being able to go beyond them.

Laswell, also using interdisciplinary method, explored influence of institutions, individuals, events, political actions, doctrines, myths and legends on the particular components of personal structure. Moreover, he viewed language as an instrument of power, which is able with the help of words and symbols to customize audience in a certain way. Similarly Chomsky and

Herman (2002) stated that media elites use propaganda to manipulate consciousness of masses to strengthen their dominance in the society.

Crucial were prophetic findings of McLuhan and Toffler, which allowed come close to understanding of modern forms of information warfare. McLuhan (2001) predicted creation of Internet as well as the key role of information in the world economy and politics, stating that *'Real, total war has become information war'*. Meanwhile, Toffler concentrated on potential consequences of the digital and communication revolutions on the verge of two centuries. Similarly to McLuhan, in his theory of the Third Wave Toffler (1984) predicted that information and knowledge will prevail over material values in the Information era society. His words *'an information bomb is exploding in our midst, showering us with shrapnel of images and drastically changing the way each of us perceives and acts upon our private world'* can be understood also as a metaphorical image of the information warfare.

Invention of the Internet, and in particular technology Web 2.0, which changed traditional communication model from 'One to many' to 'Many to many' can be considered as the beginning of the new Information era, Toffler was talking about. In this era, when almost everyone (it is only a matter of time, when it will be everyone, since information technologies nowadays became more of a necessity instead of a luxury item) can reach information from any part of the world, when the world becomes more and more globalized (with the essential contribution of social networks), the role of physical borders has been dramatically diminished.

On the one hand it means, that it is a much harder task for elites Laswell is talking about to control information flows, their citizens deal with, like it was in the Soviet Union, for example, when because of the 'Iron curtain' it was almost impossible to exchange any kind of information with the 'outside world'. It is especially true for democratic societies, where freedom of speech is praised very much, but even for autocratic states (which Russia is not de jure but de facto) it is also usually impossible to cut their citizens totally from the rest of the world (with some extreme exceptions such as North Korea)

On the other hand, it led to the change of the nature of warfare. Modern wars are waged much less for just territories and natural resources, but more for the international influence, the key to which is information. Naturally, nowadays nation-states are fighting for control of information *'just as they battled in the past for control over territory, and afterwards for control of access to and exploitation of raw materials and cheap labor'* (p. 5), just like Lyotard (1984) predicted.

Even in the case of Russia's annexation of Crimea and military aggression in Donbas the main motivation of Russian leadership seems to be not the territory itself (or coal mines in the East of Ukraine, for instance), but the imperial ambitions and desire of Kremlin (and personally Russian president Vladimir Putin) to be seen as a powerful player in the contemporary world by both

international and Russian community. It also has to do with an attempt to restore the status quo with the United States and the West (NATO) in general, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, which Putin called *'the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century'* (Putin, 2005).

However, the nature of warfare has changed not only in terms of motivation. Thus, Libicki (1995) emphasizes the change of the role of information in warfare, analyzing global consequences of information and technological revolutions.

The fact that information started playing much more important role in the contemporary military conflicts can be also illustrated through the focus of many researches on a separate information strategy (Arquilla, 2007; Libicki, 1995; Molander, 1996; Stein, 1995), which emerged as a result of a quick cyberspace evolution. Thus, Arquilla (2007) considers information strategy equally important to the traditional war strategy.

Thomas (2015), analyzing both traditional and modern elements of military strategy of Russian Federation, notes that it uses non-military and military activities in the ratio 4:1. It means that information not only plays important role in the modern-type warfare, but very often it becomes its main instrument.

Another important change is that nowadays wars are officially claimed very rarely. For example, the conflict between Russia and Ukraine in Donbas doesn't have a status of war on the official level. Since neither of the sides proclaimed a war against each other, Ukraine calls the conflict *'Anti-terrorist operation'*, while Russia officially denies that it has to do anything with it at all. For this reason the term *'Information warfare'* is used much more often by the researchers than *'Information war'*. Ukrainian researcher Heorhiy Pocheptsov (Telekrytyka, 2009) calls the latter a journalistic term while *'Information operations'*, in his opinion, is a *'professional'* definition, since *'information war'* cannot be waged in the peace time, as distinct from the information operations.

Here is how Szafranski (1995) explains the difference:

'Warfare is the set of all lethal and nonlethal activities undertaken to subdue the hostile will of an adversary or enemy. [...] Warfare doesn't require a declaration of war, nor does it require existence of a condition widely recognized as a 'state of war'. [...] The aim of warfare is not necessarily to kill the enemy. The aim of warfare is to merely subdue the enemy.' (p. 3).

According to Szafranski (1995), *'the adversary is subdued when he behaves in ways that are coincident with the ways in which the aggressor or the defender intends for him to behave'*. The same logic is followed by Thomas (2014), when he defines Information Warfare as *'the purposeful training or persuasion of an enemy to get him to do something seemingly for himself but in actuality doing something that benefits you'* (p. 104). We can find a lot of examples, which prove such

definition to be correct, for example the way Russian officials together with Russian media have been advocating idea of federalization of Ukraine or potential introducing Russian as the second official language in Latvia and Ukraine. In both cases Kremlin actively has been using information tools, such as media, while the key role belonged to the local pro-Kremlin media outlets and local Kremlin-friendly political forces (which have support and trust of part of the local population), which have been trying to convince local population that proposed changes are for good. Meanwhile Russian officials could refer to those activities as ‘the voice of people’, which is not heard by local governments to increase pressure on the authorities from the outside (manipulating Western adherence to democratic values like human rights) and the inside (mobilizing local groups to protest). Naturally, Kremlin’s message was never ‘Do it, because it is good for us’, but ‘Do it, because it is good for your citizens’, although the real motivation has always been the former. Language issue, for instance, has always been an effective way to set up against each other different groups of society, as well as an excuse to intervene into other state’s affairs (Russia’s ‘defending’ Russian-speakers in both Crimea and Eastern Ukraine). It is not a new strategy, being used by Nazi Germany in 1930s to annex parts of other states.

It is waging war without declaring one which is the essence of the hybrid or non-linear warfare. These are the terms, which are used by almost the whole world community in terms of Russian aggression against Ukraine (Hunter, 2015). The same characteristic was given to non-linear war by Chief of the General Staff of the Russian Federation, General Valery Gerasimov, who emphasized on a tendency toward *‘blurring the lines between the states of war and peace’* (Galeotti).

The main threats of hybrid war are the uncertainty of who is an opponent in it, erasure of the borders and absence of scenarios of the beginning and the end of such warfare (Mahda, 2014).

In general hybrid warfare means complex campaigns, which combine ordinary and special operations; offensive cyber- and satellite attacks; psychological operations, which use social and traditional media to influence general perceptions and international opinion (Hunter, 2015). Since hybrid warfare is characterized by combining traditional military actions with cyber- and information warfare (Maurer, 2014) the latter can be considered as an element of hybrid warfare.

However the very concept of the information warfare, researchers interpret differently. Some of them (Libicky, 1995; Kroeger, 2003) see it as a complex of actions, such as electronic warfare, psychological operations, hacker attacks on information systems, information economic warfare, cyber war etc.

At the same time according to Stein (1995), primarily information warfare aims at human consciousness, therefore he sees cyber space as a battlefield, while the battle remains the battle for the mind.

'Although information warfare would be waged largely, but not entirely, through the communication nets of a society or its military, it is fundamentally not about satellites, wires, and computers. It is about influencing human beings and the decisions they make'.

Similar approach is taken by Berzins (2014), who analyzes strategy of the 'new generation war', waged by the Russian army, which includes information/psychological warfare and 'war of perceptions'. That kind of war, according to him, is waged on three 'fronts': physical environment, cyber space and human mind.

By the war in 'physical environment' we understand that type of war, which we usually call 'traditional', meaning that weapons of physical destruction are involved. The war in cyberspace seems to be the war with the extensive use of information technologies, aimed at informational systems (cyber attacks, hacker attacks, etc.), while human mind, as far as we concerned, is the major 'front' of information warfare, which main 'fighting units' are media, which task is to construct a *'version of reality that suits political and military purposes at all levels of warfare'* (Thornton, 2015).

However, it is also important to bear in mind two other 'fronts', especially the 'physical' one, since in case of Russia we tend to believe that there is a strong connection between activities on the battlefield and activities of media. Both state-owned media like Sputnik and Russian armed forces comply with instructions from the same center, which is Kremlin, that is why logically there is supposed to be coordination between activities of the two (combined with officials' and other state institutions' actions, social media campaigns etc.). In fact, *'blending and coordination between different informational tools is a distinctive feature of how Russia aspires to prosecute information warfare'* (Giles 2016, p. 7).

Although the concepts of information and hybrid warfare isn't new, after the Russo-Georgian war in 2008, when Russian media took active part in presenting Kremlin's version of the events, it became evident that Russia does practice a new or at least renewed model of the warfare, providing researchers with plenty of material for analysis. In 2014 Kremlin brought it on the next level by annexing Crimea. That operation is a bright example of fighting on three 'fronts' at the same time, The key instruments in that operation were military without insignia, so-called 'little green men', responsible for 'physical front' and Russian media, whose role was crucial in the influence on the local Russian-speaking population (it started many years before annexation, as Russian media were widely represented in Ukraine, especially Crimea) before referendum, as well as presenting Kremlin-constructed picture to the foreign audiences. Importantly, access to alternative sources of information was limited (Ukrainian channels were cut off) on the peninsula immediately, which can be considered as an operation on the 'technological' or 'cyber' front. As a

result, without a bullet shot, Russia managed to cease a big part of other state's territory, presenting what hybrid warfare is capable of. Sputnik news was launched the same year, meaning that Kremlin felt the need to increase its presence in the global media conversation, or rather monologue, since Russian media are usually very ignorant to criticism or considering other point of views, interested only in presenting its own agenda.

Those events together with following Russian-backed escalation of the conflict in the East of Ukraine was a point of no return, when it became obvious, that the world is not the same as in XX century, and the rules of the game (war) have also been changed. A lot of researchers all around the worlds, especially from the West, became very interested in the topic of Russian hybrid warfare (after all, the West seems to be the main opponent for Russia in it), which only increased since Russia's involvement in Syria. The main challenge for them, however, in analyzing Russian activities, was to understand Kremlin's logic, since the Russian and the Western understandings of hybrid warfare differ to a great extent (Kasapoglu, 2015).

Thus, Western researchers often rely on the definition of hybrid warfare, given by Hoffman (2007), who called it a *'fusion of war forms that blurs regular and irregular warfare'* (p. 7-8). However, Western researchers have different opinion on the roots of Russian non-linear warfare. Some believe, that Russia developed a *'the new generation of warfare'* (Thornton, 2015), others rather see it as a re-invention or Soviet Cold-era model, based on reflexive control (Darczewska, 2014; Snegovaya, 2015), Kasapoglu (2015) thinks, that we rather deal with a new military thinking, than a new Russian military strategy, while some understand it as an *'attempt to catch up conceptually to the realities of modern war, with which the United States has been grappling for over a decade in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere'* (Kofman and Rojansky, 2015). Such diversity can be explained by the complexity of the nature of hybrid warfare, since each of mentioned opinions follows particular logic, based on the facts, which don't exclude each other.

Interestingly, Russian researchers don't try to ascribe development of new strategies to Russia, but rather present them as the Western tool, which Russia has to adopt to protect itself. Having analyzed Russian authoritative papers and essays on the theory and practice of warfare from military journals and conferences, Giles (2016) concludes, that in their findings, Russian researchers *'describing not Russia's own approaches, but the approaches which they say are adopted by foreign powers seeking to harm Russia'* (p. 1-2). For example, Korybko (2015), speaking about 'indirect warfare', sees it as an attempt of the West to destabilize Russia's neighborhood (which is perceived by Russia as a threat to itself) by sponsoring 'colored revolutions', backing fifth-column regime changes and extensively using social networks. In such way Russia is put in the defensive position, which is supposed to legitimate its activities in the neighboring countries as a response to the 'Western aggression'.

Besides the logic and motivation behind the Russian information warfare, it is also important to understand its place in the system of hybrid warfare. Its role seems to be much more important than simply justifying the military actions, especially since information warfare *'is now not only seen by the Russian military as a force multiplier, but also as a war-winning tool'* (Thornton, 2015).

To win the war in the previous centuries meant to force your enemy to officially surrender, usually with signing of the special document, which was followed with the loss of territories, reparations paid and other conditions met. Nowadays, however, it is more about making enemy stop resisting (Szafranski, 1995) and make decisions, which would meet the victor's interests, often without any shooting (at least visible), which make us see Russia's campaign in Crimea in 2014 *'based principally on information warfare'* (Thornton, 2015) as Kremlin's victory.

More than that, information superiority is seen by Russia as a *'key enabler for victory in current and future conflict'* (Giles, 2016, p. 6).

'Information warfare in the new conditions will be the starting point of every action now called the new type of warfare, or hybrid war, in which broad use will be made of the mass media and, where feasible, global computer networks (blogs, various social networks, and other resources)' (Chekinov and Bogdanov, 2015, p. 44-45).

Since information warfare is *'continuous through peace and war'* (Franke, 2015, p. 40), it is actually not an easy task to define, what is the *'starting point'* of the modern warfare, what is the exact date when it starts, and when it ends. Trying to do that by following the logic of the *'old-fashioned'* war, we would be limited to the military actions, which would be a mistake. For example, appearing of the *'little green men'* in Crimea or Donbas can be only viewed as the beginning of the *'military'* or *'physical'* phase of the conflict, because the information offensive started in those regions much earlier. Media had been preparing the launching grand for the military during several years by transmitting Kremlin's messages to local population and fighting for their minds. Thus, information warfare requires *'thorough planning before the shooting starts'* (Franke, 2015, p. 31), which means it is a part of a strategy.

Speaking of social networks, it should be mentioned that, used by Russia as a tool of information warfare (*'troll farms'*, bots, etc.), they at the same time make Kremlin face some new challenges. For example by publishing photos on social networks and using location services, Russian soldiers provided the West with the evidence of Russia's military presence in Ukraine (Vice News, 2015). Russia already made some steps to solve this problem by increasing responsibility for the content published online and taking control of the most-popular Russian social

network ‘Vkontakte’, however taking the full control of social media (like in China, for instance) still seems a difficult task with unclear consequences for Russia.

Although Russian information warfare has been mostly associated with disinformation, it would be wrong to think that Russian approach is just about lies and denial, for example stating that there has never been any Russian troops in Crimea. Instead, *‘Russian state and non-state actors have exploited history, culture, language, nationalism, disaffection and more to carry out cyber-enhanced disinformation campaigns with much wider objectives’* (Giles, 2016, p. 12).

At this point we can conclude that:

- Information warfare plays a key role in Russia’s hybrid warfare, being its starting point and winning tool at the same time (not just a supporting instrument);
- Mass media and social networks are the major tools of Russia’s information warfare, therefore deep analysis of their activities in the context of Kremlin’s actions is needed. Especially it is important to look at the new networks like Sputnik, which are less researched, therefore they might give insights into Russia’s latest innovations in the information warfare.

1.2. News as ideological discourse

It could be superficial to analyze the institution of information warfare without analyzing critics of ideology and ideologically important narratives and discourses, which propaganda is always related to. Therefore methodology of this research will be based on the interdisciplinary approach of Van Dijk (1985), who was one of the first to argue that mass communication and discourse analysis should not be separated, as both have some common interests. In particular, *‘one of the fields where the studies of discourse and communication overlap is the theory and analysis of news’* (Van Dijk, 2008). Since the object of this research is the way Sputnik presents Kremlin’s messages in the context of news, we are going to analyze mostly texts, in particular the way, they were meant to be decoded by readers. Therefore critical discourse analysis (CDA) fits this research the best, since it deals rather with the context and messages, which target is human consciousness, than literal meaning or grammatical features of the text.

For better understanding what discourse analysis actually deals with, it would be better to start with looking closer at some basic concepts, relevant for this method. One of such concepts is ideology, because no matter what aims information warfare has (economic, political, military), activities of its instruments have always been based on particular ideology. More than that, news in

the press (which is also true for Internet media as press' successor) has ideological nature (Van Dijk, 2008), while news itself can be viewed as ideological discourse (Van Dijk, 2008).

Ideologies are *'primarily some kind of 'ideas', that is, belief systems [...] socially shared by the members of a collectivity of social actors'* (Van Dijk, 2006b, p. 116). Importantly, such systems are *'more fundamental or axiomatic'*, which allow them to *'control and organize other socially shared beliefs'*, as well as *'specify what general cultural values [...] are relevant for the group'* (Van Dijk, 2006b, p. 116). Therefore ideologies allow those in power to consolidate, mobilize large groups of people around some kind of ideas.

Van Dijk (2006b) defines several major cognitive and social functions of ideology:

- *they are the ultimate basis of the discourses and other social practices of the members of social groups as group members;*
- *they allow members to organize and coordinate their (joint) actions and interactions in view of the goals and interests of the group as a whole;*
- *they function as the part of the sociocognitive interface between social structures (conditions, etc.) of groups on the one hand, and their discourses and other social practices on the other hand (p. 117).*

The important condition, required by ideology is stability (Van Dijk, 2006b). It would be logical to state then that the larger is the presence of ideology in different spheres of everyday life, the more often ideological messages are repeated (which is the task of propaganda), the stronger those messages are, – the more similar are believes of the society and the more homogeneous it is. Since such societies are much easier to control and mobilize, it is usually the main motivation of authoritarian or totalitarian regimes to build such societies, which are basically built on ideologies. We can also state that nowadays Russia, despite officially being democratic state, has been moving in the same direction, actively using USSR's methods.

As it follows from the definition and functions of it, ideology is at the basis of discourse. However, Van Dijk (2006b) emphasizes that since the same *'obligatory, grammatical structures'* are shared by speakers of language, they are *'ideologically neutral', that is why ideologies mostly influence 'contextually variable structures of discourse'* (p. 126). For that reason quantitative methods only wouldn't be sufficient for analysis of the news. Only with qualitative approach we can de-code the original meaning and purpose of the news content, the way its presented, ideological messages and manipulative techniques involved and conclude, whether particular news discourse is ideologically biased. For that matter it is important to consider context, event models, knowledge and group believes of particular group, which shape perception of the events, and therefore taken into account by news producers.

Analyzing news discourse it is important not to overlook the *'way recipients understand, memorize and integrate information and knowledge from news'* (Van Dijk, 2008, p. 191). Social beliefs, in particular knowledge, are especially important, since they are taken for granted by different ideological groups within the community, which allows to *'control the construction of specific models and hence, indirectly, also the production and understanding of discourse'* (Van Dijk, 2006b, p. 122).

Lytard (1984) predicted that *'knowledge in the form of an informational commodity indispensable to productive power would remain the major stake in the worldwide competition for power'* (p. 5). He also foresaw that the ruling class would preserve its decision making role, while the class itself wouldn't consist only of traditional politicians. Nowadays the strong involvement of religious (Patriarch of Russian Orthodox Church Kirill), military and security forces' (so-called 'siloviki') leadership in the decision making process in Russia can be observed.

It is worth mentioning that commercialization of knowledge, Lyotard (1984) is talking about, is more of a challenge for Kremlin on the international stage, than inside the country, where *'the problem of the relationship between economic and State powers'* (p. 5) is becoming less and less important, as state powers in Russia takes more and more control over the economic powers, basically having merged in the one machine. For that reason the state is the one, which Lyotard calls *'institutions of knowledge'*, meaning those, who *'knows'*, and who monopolizes the right to possess and spread the *'knowledge'* among audiences. The main challenge here is that it's up to the state to decide what kind of information should be accepted as knowledge, what kind of knowledge should be presented, as well as in which form. All these factors are equally important, since they shape audience's perception not just of particular events, but anything that happens in the world. The better its perception is shaped, the easier it is to manipulate what is called *'public opinion'*. According to Van Dijk (2006a), since discourse structures as such are not manipulative, manipulation *'takes place through discourse in a broad sense, that is, including non-verbal characteristics, such as gestures, facework, text layout, pictures, sounds, music, and so on'* (p. 372).

It is important to remember, though, that normally the same knowledge is shared by different ideological groups of the same community. That is why what is perceived as *'knowledge'* in one community, might be viewed as ideologically biased information in others. It is a crucial point for waging information warfare abroad, when foreign audiences are involved. In this respect Russia has a great benefit of the big number of Russian-speakers in different countries, as well as their common knowledge, shaped during many decades in the Soviet republics. Therefore, it makes perfect sense that Kremlin reinforces and reinvents Soviet narratives, referring to the Soviet-era knowledge of different communities in the Eastern Europe.

Using its financial superiority, Kremlin has been creating high quality media products (films, TV-programs, shows, music), which have been preferred in many cases by representatives of different communities to their local ones, spreading through them Kremlin's discourses in the Russian-speaking countries. We are talking about popularity of Russian TV-channels and Russia-produced content (for example, TV-series and entertainment shows) in many post-Soviet countries, which allowed Kremlin to have permanent access to the local audiences. That is why so many people in Crimea, for example, were so eager to 'reunite' with the Russian Federation in 2014, when the peninsula was annexed.

Speaking of Ukraine's case, Kremlin's soft power there, based on cultural and linguistic ties with Ukraine wasn't any kind of revelation. For instance, earlier Ukrainian researchers Bogomolov and Lytvynenko (2012) stated that with the help of media Russia produced narratives, aimed to connect the future of Ukraine with the future of Russia, as well as other post-soviet states. However, some serious steps were taken only after Crimea's annexation, when Russian TV-channels in Ukraine were banned, and Russian-produced content in most of the cases was replaced. It can be explained by the change of authorities, as the previous Ukrainian government was pro-Russian.

The same messages, however, are likely to fail in the Western communities, where Kremlin has to refer to the knowledge of the local audiences. This is the reason (besides language), why nowadays' international broadcasters like Sputnik have so many different versions for different countries, or, at least regions.

To reach the audience, to make it identify itself with the knowledge, referred to, it is vital to follow the logic, culturally accepted by this audience, to 'wrap' a message in a form, easily recognizable by the audience. In other words, it is important to use familiar scenario, known in communication theory as narrative, which Lyotard (1984) *calls 'quintessential form of customary knowledge'* (p. 19). Now, let's take a look at some major aspects of narrative knowledge, according to Lyotard (1984).

1. *'A collectivity that takes narrative as its key form of competence has no need to remember its past. [...] The narratives' reference may seem to belong to the past, but in reality it is always contemporaneous with the act of recitation'* (p. 22). Russia is a good example of this aspect, since its major narratives (at least those, formed for the internal audience) seem to be connected to the 'glorious' past of Russia (Russian Empire and USSR as world's greatest powers, Orthodoxy, Russian 'traditional values', etc.), but in reality recitation is more important, than history itself. For example, every year Kremlin organizes massive celebrations of 'victory' in what it calls 'The Great Patriotic War', which involve impressive military parades. Symbols of these celebrations are

St. George's ribbon (which is an artificial symbol, introduced in the XXI century) and war veterans, including many fake ones. Therefore the main purpose of such events is not to remember the past, but to reinforce the contemporary narrative (for both Russians and the West) about Russia as a great (first of all, military) power, which 'defeated the greatest evil in human history' and ready to 'repeat' it. That is why authenticity of symbols doesn't really matter to Kremlin, while repetition of the myth about 'the great feat' is more important, than historical truth. Another bright example is 'appropriating' of Vladimir the Great and the glory of Kyivan Rus, which might be characterized as creating 'para-history', stories, which have little to do with historical events, but are presented as ones.

2. Narratives *'define what has the right to be said and done in the culture in question, and since they are themselves a part of that culture, they are legitimated by the simple fact that they do what they do'* (p. 23). However, in the era of Internet it seems harder to legitimate the narrative knowledge, especially with international audiences, who are more critical, and who are influenced by other narratives.

3. *'The narrator's only claim to competence for telling the story is the fact that he has heard it himself'*, which means that narrator becomes the hero of the narrative by inserting himself in it. Of course, it doesn't mean that narrator (who is an authority in our case) lived at the same time as the heroes of the past, but he should be perceived as their legitimate successor. For that reason contemporary Russia is presented as a USSR's successor, while Vladimir Putin keeps praising leaders of the past (Peter the Great, Joseph Stalin, whom he called 'the great manager', or Vladimir the Great, who luckily had the same name), to whom he often is compared as the strong leader, who is able to return contemporary Russia its glory. The other side of the coin is represented by military aggression and political repressions, connected with the names of USSR and in particular Joseph Stalin, which makes many people see contemporary Russia as the one to blame for the Soviet crimes or ask for compensations from. For that reason such narratives are much more effective with the internal audience than the external one.

4. *'Reality' is what provides the evidence used as proof in [...] argumentation, and also provides prescriptions and promises of a juridical, ethical, and political nature with results, one can master all of these games by mastering 'reality.'* [...] Now it is precisely this kind of context control that a generalized computerization of society may bring. (p. 47) Here Lyotard (1984) is speaking about the possibilities that Internet brought to narratives. Accessibility and operativity of information not only allowed to legitimate and increase the power, but also to control the discourse.

Lyotard (1984) also states, that it's getting harder to attract public with the stories about the heroes of the past. He gives an example of the French President's goal, offered to his countrymen, to catch up with Germany, which he calls *'not exactly existing'* (p. 14). The copy of

something, which doesn't exist anymore or never existed at all, according to Baudrillard (1994) is called simulacra. In the context of information warfare we should be talking about the third level of simulacra, which is representation of reality, which defines reality by preceding it. The main instruments of 'mass production' of such simulacra are media like Sputnik news.

In his book Lyotard (1984) speaks about 'crisis' and 'decline' of grand narrative, which, according to him, 'lost its credibility'. The reason for that he sees in the development of techniques and technologies after the WWII, which *'has shifted emphasis from the ends of action to its means'* (p. 31). What he probably means by that is the switch from great master-narratives to grand discourses, which are less obvious for the audience of different culture, since they refer mostly to subconscious level. I understand this switch as shaping context, which make any message in it biased instead of simply shaping the message in a form of narrative. However, it doesn't mean that narratives lost their relevance for modern information warfare. Instead they are being updated to the nowadays criteria. Thus, in the military context, the concept of 'strategic narrative' appeared. According to Zalman (2012), it is a new type of military operations, aimed to destroy the narratives, on which the enemy bases himself, and which drive his actions.

According to Van Dijk (2006b), ideology can be expressed in the news discourse in various ways. Therefore, to analyze the news in terms of ideological bias, it is important to take those expressions into account.

First of all, it is vital to know the context, since speaker (in our case it is Sputnik) speaks as a representative of a particular group (official Russia) to its audience as a particular group. Since Sputnik addresses to audiences in many different societies, it cannot simply translate the same news in different languages, because of the different contexts there. It concerns not only what news is about (because agenda in different countries is not the same, people in Belarus and Spain consider different things to be important), but also the way they are presented, the style and emphasize on different facts, relevant for the particular audience in the particular moment of time.

Overall strategy for ideological discourse is *'positive presentation/action of Us, negative presentation/action of Them'*, which includes *'emphasize Our good things, and Their bad things'*, and *'De-emphasize Our bad things, and Their good things'* (Van Dijk, 2006b, p. 125). Usually journalists tend to identify themselves not only with language but also with their nation state. This is especially typical for nationalist ideologies, for which *'identity is crucial, and associated with a complex system of positive characteristics about how we are, about our history and habits, our language and culture, national character, and so on'* (Van Dijk, 2008, p. 201). It can be seen very obviously in contemporary Russian discourse, since it is strongly based on the ideas of nationalism, meant to fill in the identity emptiness after the collapse of the USSR. One of the major concepts for Russian ideology is 'Russkiy Mir' (Russian World), which has to do with unity of several nations

under superiority of Russia. Following Soviet tradition, state institutions (including state media) normally try to be as loyal as possible to the state, at the same time being critical to external competitors.

Nationalist ideologies' influence on news is especially obvious in the coverage of the *'foreign' news (about events and people abroad), as well as wars, conflicts, competitions, terrorists' attacks* (Van Dijk, 2008). This is because the main source of nationalist ideologies is the idea of opposition between 'good Us' and 'bad Them', which is especially relevant in the period of crisis or war (Can Dijk, 2008). In this case discourse normally refers to the concepts of 'our land', values, culture etc., which are supposedly endangered by the external enemy. On the one hand, it mobilizes a society around state leadership against the common enemy, and, on the other hand, it distracts society from the internal problems.

The main values for nationalist ideologies, on which discourse is usually based, are loyalty and patriotism. Russia has been constantly involved in the number of military conflicts since the first Chechen war in 1994, which resulted also in the economic and political crisis in the country, that is why 'Us vs. Them' model is actively used nowadays by Russian media, both domestic and international. It is used not only for the news about war conflicts, since the discourse is much wider, and covers a great variety of topics from everyday life.

Taking into consideration the indirect nature of information warfare, I see some challenges for Russia's using of such model.

From the very beginning of the annexation of Crimea and armed conflict in Donbas, Russian authorities claimed that there were no Russian troops involved in those events. At that point, there were not 'Us vs. Them' in the official discourse, but rather 'Them vs. them' ('Kyiv junta' vs. 'ordinary Ukrainians' or 'local rebels'). The emphasis was made on the solidarity and compassion to the one of 'them', and negative image of the other. To make it more relevant to 'Us', the issues of language (Russian speakers) and territory (concepts of 'Krym nash' (Crimea, which originally belonged to Russia) and 'Novorossiya') was involved. I assume that such strategy didn't have an effect, expected by Kremlin, but more importantly, it made it harder to present the role of Russia in the mentioned events. For that reason it was harder to put Russia in the position of victim in terms of Western sanctions (if Russia was not involved, why would the sanctions be imposed?), and, at the same time, it contradicted with Kremlin's desire to present Russia as the superpower (arguably, annexation of Crimea was organized to show Russia's power in the first place). That is why, I think, Kremlin decided to make the situation more 'personal', when in the end of 2015 Vladimir Putin basically admitted that there are Russian military in Ukraine's territory by saying that it was never said that *'there are no people, who deal with particular issues, including military sphere'* (RBC, 2015). Still, Kremlin keeps insisting on its own version that no regular troops were

sent to Ukraine, where volunteers only fight with the weapons, found in mines or somewhere else. For that reason, I think, narrative about Ukrainian internal conflict, presented by Russian media, is merely a part of the discourse, in which ‘Russian world’ opposes ‘Western world’.

Besides necessary emphasis put on, and selecting positive/negative topics about Us/Them, ideology also influences news discourse with specific lexicon used, meaning selection of positive terms for ‘Us’ and negative terms for ‘Them’. A lot of examples can be found in the Russian media’s coverage of the events in Ukraine. Thus, armed conflict in the Donbas constantly has been called ‘civil conflict’ and ‘military operation of Kyiv against rebels’, Ukrainian troops have been often called ‘karатели’ (punishers), Ukraine’s government called ‘Junta’ or ‘illegal regime’, while militants from the so-called ‘DNR’ and ‘LNR’ have been called ‘Ukrainskiye povstancy’ or ‘Narodnoye opolcheniye Donbassa’ (basically Ukrainian rebels). At the same time annexation of Crimea has been always called ‘Reunion with Russia’.

Specific or ‘magical’ use of words is also an important element of the building of myths. Importantly, such words are effective only in the special emotional atmosphere. Creation and maintaining of such atmosphere is also the task of mass media. For example, to keep the power and negative connotation of such words as ‘banderovtsy’ (literally followers of the leader of Ukrainian nationalists in the past) and ‘fascists’, Russian media constantly add pressure to the topic of nationalism and radicalism in Ukraine, topic of collaboration between UPA (Ukrainian Insurgent Army) and Nazis during the Second World War, as well as USSR’s ‘great victory over fascist Germany’ in 1945.

As can be seen so far, information warfare is not only about disinformation. It has a wide range of instruments, based on grand narratives, myths, ideologies. Since information warfare is the conflict of ideas, perceptions and values, it is impossible to analyze news in terms of information warfare with quantitative methods only. In contrast, critical discourse analysis takes into consideration specific context, ideology of the state, media represents, and other vital elements, which allow us to understand the meaning of the actual message in the news, to look at the news much broader: not just as an information about the event, but as a part of bigger discourse.

2. THE ROLE OF SPUTNIK IN CONTEMPORARY RUSSIAN INFORMATION WARFARE

2.1. Sputnik as a political institution of Russian public diplomacy

The idea of news as a product of news organizations, which are, in turn, influenced by many different factors is not new. For example, Potter (2014) is quite specific about it, while explaining, why news is not a reflection of actual events, but a construction by news workers. According to him, key influences on the construction of news are unavoidable constraints (such as deadlines, geographical location and limited resources), business environment and operating conventions. Therefore, he concentrates mostly on business and organizational factors. Potter, though, is not the only one, who sticks to such approach of looking at media as journalistic commercially-driven organizations. The main idea of such approach is that the work practice of journalists is strongly influenced by business interests of media organizations' owners, whose top priority is to increase audience and therefore to attract advertisers.

It is mentioned not to criticize such approach, but to emphasize limitations of it in nowadays world, especially in case of analyzing media like Sputnik. These limitations arise, first of all, because Western researchers tend to look at media through Western perspective, based on capitalistic approach. Meanwhile, media environment of Eastern Europe differs to a great extent from the Western one, especially if we are talking about countries, which for a long time were under communist regimes, where media remain highly politicized (Voltmer, 2008). Thus, in post-communist countries media play the role of communication channel with voters (Voltmer, 2008), rather than a watchdog, like in the West.

In many countries of the post-soviet bloc corruption and lack of transparency make it possible for politicians to own private media and therefore influence public opinion to achieve their own political goals. It is basically a closed circle, in which those with money use media to take political power, which allows them to lobby their business interests. In such case, contrary to the Western model, political power is the way to increase income, while media organizations are only an instrument.

The main idea here is that the payback of media is often not the issue. It seems to be true also for Russian state-owned media. It seems unrealistic that Kremlin would be motivated to create RT and Sputnik simply as a business project. The main aim of propagandistic channels since the First World War has never been specifically earning money. Of course, such media might be profitable, but it is definitely not the case of Russia's international media projects. The bright example is RT network, which is more than generously financed from the Russian state budget.

Thus, to cover the cost of launching ‘round-the-clock news channels broadcasting in English, Arabic and Spanish, a documentary channel RTDoc airing in both English and Russian, a video news agency RUPTLY, as well as online news platforms in Russian, German, and French’ (RT), plus studios in Washington, DC and London, and hiring social media team, RT’s annual budget increased tenfold - from \$30 million in 2005 to over \$300 million in 2013 (Bidder, 2013). In 2014 it was reported that RT received \$310 million in state funding, and would receive \$400 million in 2015 (Tétrault-Farber, 2014).

Sputnik with its ‘modern multimedia centers in dozens of countries’ (Sputnik), foreign bureaus and content in 30 languages also seems to require some serious investments. According to editor-in-chief of ‘Rossiya Segodnya’ information agency (part of which is Sputnik) Margarita Simonyan, Russian government allocated 6.5 billion rubles for the agency in 2015 (Nehezin, 2014). She also noted that international broadcasting was the main expenditure item of the agency, requiring almost 2/3 of its budget. That means that in 2015 Sputnik’s budget was approximately 4.3 billion rubles or almost \$90 million at that time’s currency exchange rate. Total spending by Russia on television, radio and online services overseas was projected to be £151 million (\$200 million) in 2015, but was raised to £255m (approximately \$332 million), according to the latest Kremlin budget (Harper, 2016). To compare, world’s biggest broadcast newsgathering organization BBC World Service Group had a \$367 million budget in 2014-15 (Shuster, 2015).

It doesn’t seem possible to estimate efficiency of Russian international broadcasters, since the main criteria for that should be audience size. RT claims to be available to over 700 million people in 100+ countries, this number seems only the potential geographical scope of the audience, while The Daily Beast even accused RT of lying about its ratings. Reliable figures for Sputnik’s worldwide audience are not available as well. However, to have the general idea about Russian media popularity, we can take a look at the number of people, who like their pages in social networks. As of March 17, 2017 this number looks far less impressive, than above-mentioned budget.

Table 1. Popularity of international broadcasters in social networks

Broadcaster	Number of likes/followers	
	Facebook (main page)	Twitter (main account)
RT	4 266 107	2.58 million
Sputnik	1 093 229	171 000
BBC	39 820 277	18,5 million

As we can see from the table, having approximately the same budgets, BBC and Russian media outlets aren't comparable in terms of audience, at least on social networks. Nevertheless, it reflects the general picture. It seems doubtful, that Kremlin would keep spending so much money on two networks for such a long period (RT since 2005) if the original aim was to make profit out of it. In the meantime, Kremlin keeps increasing financing in spite of Russia's current economic difficulties, worsened by imposed EU and US sanctions. Such policy seems similar to that of the Soviet Union, priority of which during Cold War was military and space competition with the United States, although economic situation inside the country wasn't good. Similarly, ambitions of modern Russia demand investing in the development of both army and media.

To sum it up, RT and Sputnik obviously have other aims than generating revenue, and that is why, in our opinion, business approach towards analysis of Sputnik wouldn't succeed. Instead, it seems reasonable to look at this media as a political institution.

Hallin and Mancini (2004) perfectly demonstrated dependency of media systems on political culture and political system, while Cook (2006) fairly noted that *'the media are a product of politics and feed back in to influence politics as well'* (p. 159). Although he was concentrating mostly on internal relationships between media and politicians inside the country, there is no reason to think, that his statement wouldn't remain true in terms of international media and politics. However, instead of emphasizing walls, which separate media from other political institutions, which is typical for institutional approach, we will concentrate on the *'ever-closer linkage of newsmaking and policymaking to the point that they are all but indistinguishable'*. Similarly, Allern and Blach-Ørsten (2011) state, that *'politics and the news media have become almost interchangeable'* (p. 92). Thus, contrary to business approach, which tends to see media content as the market product, designed to meet audience's desires and expectations, institutional approach rather presents news as the political message, shaped in the familiar, standardized form of news.

Cook (2006) examines newsmaking as *'one part of the overall process by which officials and other political actors communicate'* (p. 161). This brings us to the model of traditional diplomacy G2G (government to government), which doesn't fully correspond to the aims of propaganda. Russian media, often called *'Rupor Kremlya'* (literally it means Kremlin's loudspeaker) more likely to use traditional public diplomacy (and also propagandistic) model G2P (government to public), when political messages are directed at broad public, which, in turn, might put pressure on political actors and influence their decisions. In case of Sputnik we can also speak about new public diplomacy model P2P (public to public), bearing in mind though, that public opinion might be not necessarily represented, but artificially constructed instead by so-called 'trolls' and 'bots'.

An institutional approach also suggests that the news media's political role may differ across media systems (Allern, Blach-Ørsten, 2011). Thus, to understand logic and motives of Sputnik network, we need firstly to look at Russian media system, in which it operates, and to understand political goals of Kremlin.

According to Freedom House (2017), Russia's press freedom status is 'Not free'. It is hardly surprising, considering that president Vladimir Putin built a strong vertical structure of power in the country, which also involved taking control over media. In Russia it was done by restructuring of media ownership in the country. Those media outlets, which would dare to criticize or question official Kremlin's discourse, were in many cases accused of some violations of law. That was the common reason to take away media's license and in such way to 'shut up' the voice of opposition. Smaller media simply disappeared, while more influential and popular ones under pressure were forced to change owner, editor-in-chief, and often the whole editorial (as in the case of Lenta.ru), becoming another Kremlin's 'loudspeaker'.

Becker (2004) calls Russia's media system 'neo-authoritarian', emphasizing the key role of television as a propaganda channel in such system. However, it looks like the Internet, from the very beginning perceived by Russian security services as a threat to national security, is also becoming more and more controlled by the state due to '*an intricate system for controlling, surveillance, and influencing on the Internet*' (Pallin, 2017). The main goal of Kremlin is to control the discourse, as '*those, who have greater control over increasingly more influential discourses [...] are also more powerful*' (Van Dijk, 1999, p. 27).

Naturally, being successful at controlling internal discourses, Kremlin wants to repeat the same on the international stage.

Many researchers, who analyze Russian international media, tend to perceive them as instruments of Russian public diplomacy or soft power (Rawnsley, 2015; Rotaru, 2017; Kazantsev, Rutland, 2016, Van Herpen, 2016). Interestingly, it is Sputnik, which Rawnsley (2015) considers the main media instrument of Russian public diplomacy while RT, according to him, is more energetic on Twitter. Considering the difference between the numbers of RT and Sputnik followers, it does look like RT has more influence on social networks.

According to Cull (2008), one of the key areas of public diplomacy is international broadcasting. We can characterize international broadcasting as a specific activity, the main aim of which is to influence foreign audiences with the different kinds of information in the form of news, TV programs etc.

International broadcasting has a big potential for psychological and informational influence, since international broadcasters usually monopolize the right to be a 'voice' of a state thanks to state's support and their special mission. However, there are exceptions (Russia has two

international broadcasters RT and Sputnik, while in Ukraine private channels Ukraine Today and Hromadske International, as well as volunteer initiatives like StopFake have played more significant role in countering Russian information aggression, than newly created Ukrainian information broadcaster UATV). That is why international broadcasting have always been used as an important tool in popularizing country's values, defending national interests and promoting country's image. However, very often it is used to manipulate audiences and impose one's own version of reality. In the era of globalization the role of international broadcasting only increased, as for many states (especially large and influential, like Russia, whose 'voice' is more likely to be heard) it is an instrument of 'soft power' that allows them to play bigger political role in the world. International broadcasting allows countries to bring their version of events and offer agenda, which is different from others. That is why nowadays it is more and more often used as an instrument of Information warfare. For example, active involvement of the foreign audiences has been a clear feature of Russian-led information warfare.

Russian high officials on numerous occasions underlined the importance of soft power for defending country's national interests. However, the meaning of soft power in the context of Russian foreign policy fundamentally differs from the classical definition by Nye (2011), according to whom soft power is *'the ability to affect others through the co-optive means of framing the agenda, persuading and eliciting positive attraction in order to obtain preferred outcomes'* (p. 21) or in other words expanding a nation's influence through persuasion and attraction rather than through military or economic pressure.

In case of Russia we deal with much more complicated phenomena, which, we believe, is a complex of military and psychological operations, coordinated from the same center. Moreover, the latter are intentionally presented as a 'soft power' to hide their original nature. The bright example is military operation in Crimea in 2014, accompanied by active information campaign in Russian media outlets. At the same time Kremlin wages aggressive information warfare against the West. That is why Russia's soft power called *'handmaiden to Russia's hard power'* (Kazantsev, Rutland, 2016, p. 397) or *'hard power in a velvet glove'* (Van Herpen, 2016).

Analyzing Russian international broadcasting Rawnsley (2015) notes that *'the conceptual differentiation between public diplomacy and propaganda is blurred'* (p. 274). Further he gives a broader explanation of his statement:

'This is not only suggested by the content, style and motivation of broadcasts, but also from their organization and especially the close relationship between international broadcasting stations and the state. This brings to the surface the issue of credibility, which

is the single most important factor in determining whether or not a particular broadcast will be interpreted as propaganda or public diplomacy' (p. 274).

As of autumn/winter 2014 RT was *'finding its own credibility seriously challenged by events and therefore its value as an instrument of Russian public diplomacy undermined'* (Rawnsley, 2015, p. 281) due to Russia's involvement in conflicts in Georgia and Ukraine. Biased coverage of the latter made British broadcasting regulator warn RT and threaten it with sanctions. That is why the launch of Sputnik agency at the same period (on November 10, 2014) by a Decree of the President of Russia doesn't seem much of a coincidence. We assume that being not satisfied with the late results of its main international broadcaster's work even after its rebranding (from Russia Today to RT), Russia decided to create a new brand, which would assist RT in promoting Kremlin's main discourses.

To emphasize the newness of the network, different color gamma was chosen (orange and black instead of black and green) and a resonant name was chosen. Literally in Russian language Sputnik means a fellow companion or traveler, which is a nice metaphor, which presents Sputnik agency as a companion, who will guide a reader through the jungle of 'Western disinformation' and show the right way. The main idea, though, was to evoke associations with the first artificial Earth satellite Sputnik-1, well known by both Eastern and Western audiences. Launch of Sputnik-1 by the USSR in 1957 shocked America and started a Space race. Therefore Sputnik is a symbol of Soviet superiority over the West and the reference to the Cold war times.

However, the main challenge for Kremlin was inability to start with a 'clean sheet' (if it was the goal, of course). It was proved by suspicious and somewhat skeptical reaction of Western media following the launch of Sputnik agency. Telegraph wrote that *'Sputnik may be brought down to earth by at least some Russian realities'* (Parfitt, 2014), New York Times reminded that *'Kremlin aggressively expands its voice in the Western media'* (Roth, 2014), while some others immediately labeled it as a *'propaganda outlet'* (Elder, 2014) or *'Putin's media toy'* (von Felix-Emeric, 2015). Such skepticism was often supported by analysis of Russian narratives in Sputnik's first articles.

The main reasons for such cool reaction of Western media often were association of Sputnik with RT, Russia's damaged international image, and the fact that newly established organization was funded by Kremlin (everyone knows saying 'he who pays the piper calls the tune'). Finally, Sputnik agency was presented by general director of news agency Rossiya Segodnya, odious Russian media figure and anchor Dmitriy Kiselyov, known in Western media as Kremlin's 'propagandist in chief'.

Interestingly, during the presentation Kiselyov himself admitted that Sputnik could be called 'propaganda' (Nehezin, 2014), aimed to compete with 'aggressive propaganda', fed to the

World by Western media. Obviously, rhetoric has changed and became more aggressive since the launch of RT in 2005, whose claimed goal was to cover ‘stories overlooked by the mainstream media’ and to present ‘*Russian viewpoint on major global events*’ (RT) to foreign audiences. Paradoxically, Sputnik was the one called ‘a lightweight version of RT’ and ‘*Russian propaganda with some fluff*’ (Komuves, 2014) when it just began operating.

An interesting description was also given by Groll (2014):

‘Like RT, Sputnik slickly remixes President Vladimir Putin’s brand of revanchist nationalism for an international audience, presenting the United States as an ailing imperial power bent on holding on to its domains. But whereas RT functions more like a tabloid news service, Sputnik looks to be presenting a kind of propaganda that’s very much rooted in 2014. RT, one might say, is the Daily Mail of Kremlin propaganda — aggressive, brash, and often ridiculous. [...] Sputnik, meanwhile, is like its BuzzFeed equivalent: cheeky, Internet-savvy, smarter.’

Although we don’t rule out that the first materials of Sputnik could be ‘softer’ on purpose to look more credible, overall Sputnik has been compared and associated with RT all the time.

In November, 2016 European Parliament voted on a non-legislative resolution calling the EU to respond to information warfare by Russia, including RT and Sputnik news agency to the list of the main information threats to the European Union alongside activities of terrorist groups. Interestingly, Sputnik, instead of denying accusations, tried to discredit the author of resolution instead, as well as accuse European media of the same (‘*War on ‘Propaganda’: EU Accuses Russian Media of What European Media Always Does*’).

NATO, being a military alliance in the first place, also has been paying much attention recently to what is happening on the ‘information front’, calling this part of its activity ‘strategic communication’. Activities of Russia are of particular interests for NATO strategic communication institutions (for example, Riga-based NATO StratCom Center of Excellence prepared many publications on Russian information activities). Just recently some NATO officials accused Sputnik’s new bureau in Edinburgh of destabilizing of the UK by supporting Scottish independence (RT). All this means that Sputnik is considered by the two major political institutions not merely as Russian biased media outlet, but a real tool of achieving Kremlin’s political goals abroad.

If we look at Sputnik’s role from the opposite (Russian) side, we can once again cite much-cited article by Russian Chief of the General Staff Valery Gerasimov, also known as ‘Gerasimov Doctrine’:

'The very "rules of war" have changed. The role of nonmilitary means of achieving political and strategic goals has grown, and, in many cases, they have exceeded the power of force of weapons in their effectiveness' (Galeotti).

'Nonmilitary measures', according to Gerasimov, include also information ones. It isn't to say, that Gerasimov was the first one to see information as a potential weapon, but to show, that he underlines the importance of such measures in modern conflicts, encouraging Russia to concentrate on such measures. It might be that he had made such conclusions after Russian-Georgian conflict in 2008, which arguably was lost by Kremlin on the information level, at least internationally. In one year after Gerasimov's (Gerasimov, 2013) article was published, Crimea was annexed by Russia, and that time Kremlin used different strategy than in Georgia. Interestingly, it fully complied with Gerasimov's concept of the modern warfare, known as non-linear warfare.

Since international broadcasting is the instrument of public diplomacy, which, in turn, is the part of state's foreign policy, it is logical to conclude that activities of international broadcasters, at the very least, are influenced by political institutions. Naturally, the more autocratic is the state we are talking about (like in case of Russia), the bigger is probability that international broadcaster fulfills political tasks of the government. In fact, it is essential for public diplomacy (and therefore for international broadcaster) to align the message with state's policy (Rawnsley, 2015). In terms of analyzing activities of Sputnik as an instrument of information warfare it means that every decision by Russia's political/military leadership concerning military operations is supposed to be coordinated with Sputnik's information activities to create the mutual strategy. In such context concept of the media as the 'fourth estate' of the country doesn't look like a metaphor anymore.

2.2. Strategies and technologies of Sputnik

Since strategy is a plan of particular actions, aimed to achieve certain goals, it is logical to start analyzing Sputnik's strategies with a look at the Russian information strategy in general, as well as Sputnik's goals.

Many researchers agree that in general in its information warfare Kremlin relies on information strategies, developed during the Soviet era (Darczewska, 2014; Kazantsev, Rutland, 2016; Snegovaya, 2015, Thornton, 2015), such as reflexive control, defined as 'means of conveying to a partner or an opponent specially prepared information to incline him to voluntarily make the predetermined decision desired by the initiator of the action' (Thomas, 2004). In other words, reflexive control is Soviet-era disinformation tactics, which, combined with contemporary technologies, form the basis of modern Russian information warfare strategy.

However, Van Herpen (2016) argues that Kremlin's propaganda strategy is not a mere repetition of Soviet model. According to him, Russia managed to implement four major developments since Soviet times:

- an unprecedentedly generous budget, that has been allocated to all actors involved in the campaign;
- the profound modernization of the media machine (which includes all media, not just newspapers);
- the growth of psychological know how;
- exploitation of the openness of Western media to convey its messages.

Large budgets of Sputnik and RT we already mentioned in the previous section, so let's look at Sputnik through the other three dimensions.

The profound modernization of the media machine

Similarly to RT, Sputnik is up-to-date multimedia network, based on the format of Western international broadcasters. It uses various modern technologies to produce attractive content and attract bigger audiences.

First of all, it has up-to-date Internet web-site, which both follows current trends in web-design (minimalistic and full of images) and has simple, logical structure. Thus, the site not only attracts visitors' attention from the first sight, but also is easy to orient on.

Secondly, Sputnik's web-site follows the latest trends of combining different popular multimedia formats within the one Internet platform, such as radio podcasts, photo reports, infographics, live broadcasting, video reports and others. Content is produced mostly by Sputnik, but content made by other sources is also used. Sputnik also uses information stream of RT, which increases access to the information, created and spread by RT (at the same time, RT often makes references to Sputnik), which is another proof of both media being tools of the same mechanism. Interestingly, 'hard' news in the video section (*'Dutch MH17 Report Contains Falsified Data – Russian Aviation Regulator'*, *'Lavrov on the Normandy Four Decision: This is Exactly What Russia's President Proposed'*) are widely combined with 'soft' ones, which mostly involves animals (*'Cuteness Overload: Hamsters Celebrate St. Valentine's Day'*) or sensational materials (*'Vermont Looking for Man Seen Urinating in Washing Machines'*, *'Huge Wave Sweeps Reporter During Live Broadcast'*). The reason for that, in our opinion, is, on the one hand, to attract bigger audience (such videos are likely to get a lot of 'views' and be shared on social networks), and, on the other hand, to 'soften' the 'hard' content, resulting in 'propaganda with some fluff', as Komuves (2014) accurately called it.

Thirdly, being also a radio broadcaster will, Sputnik ‘uses only modern formats, such as FM, digital DAB/DAB+ (Digital Radio Broadcasting), HD-Radio, as well as mobile phones and the Internet’ (Sputnik). It offers special applications (AppStore, Google play) for mobile platforms and is present in all the world’s most popular social networks (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, Soundcloud, YouTube). Activity in social networks is a very important element of success for contemporary broadcasters, as they allow them to increase audience, build connection with readers and analyze audience (‘likes’ and ‘shares’). More and more Internet users prefer to read news from social networks instead of the web-sites. Other than that, active social network account allows to increase ‘views’ on the web-site, since many people click on the shared link.

Finally, contrary to many Western networks, which decrease the number of their foreign bureaus and language services (Rawnsley, 2015), Sputnik increases its presence in the world, investing in its expansion and opening new bureaus. Such growth might be explained by the fast transformation of media market in the last decade with global mobile internet penetration rising from very low levels in 2005 (when RT was launched) to 35% today. A combination of reduced distribution costs and a globalization of the world have encouraged a rise in both the supply of, and demand for, news – and in particular, for cross - border news i.e. news consumed outside the country of its producer. Monthly use of cross-border news – at 66% of all respondents – is prevalent in all markets, but particularly emerging ones; although the largest sources of cross-border news remain the long-established providers from the US and UK, the fastest-growing ones come from the Middle East, Asia and Russia (PwC UK, 2016).

It is difficult to imagine Soviet bureaus in so many countries (including USA and Great Britain), but nowadays Russian international broadcaster benefits from openness of the world and collects necessary information first-hand. Sputnik’s administration was emphasizing this when the network was only launched to build up its credibility. At the same time more and more countries are concerned about Sputnik’s activities. For example, Latvia (Sputnik opened web-sites for Latvia and Estonia in the beginning of 2016) closed Sputnik’s local domain .lv, explaining it as a part of EU sanctions, imposed on Dmitry Kiselyov (Delfi, 2016b). Sputnik’s Latvian web-site kept operating with the domain .com, but in several other countries, (Finland, Denmark, Norway, Sweden) web-sites were closed (Delfi, 2016a).

While RT is mostly concentrated on the West (countries, which speak world’s most widespread languages, such as English, French, Spanish and German) and Arabic-speaking audiences, Sputnik has 30 versions, specifically devoted to particular Eastern/Central European and Asian countries, especially those where Russia has been trying to achieve its political goals (Sputnik produces its own multimedia content and broadcasts in: Russian, Abkhaz, Azerbaijani, Arabic, Armenian, Chinese, Crimean Tatar, Dari, English, Estonian, French, Finnish, German,

Georgian, Hindi, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Latvian, Moldavian, Polish, Portuguese, Pashto, Spanish, Serbian, Turkish, Tajik, Uzbek, Ukrainian, Japanese). It can have twofold aim: on the one hand, to influence public of selected countries with Russian narratives, and, on the other hand, to change the discourse about these countries in general, since content might be produced not only for the country, but also about it. Sections of different editions differ, which is an indicator of the individual approach.

Most of Sputnik's editions have versions in different languages (mostly in local language and Russian), since Kremlin always has paid special attention to Russian speaking population abroad, especially in Post-Soviet countries like Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Belarus and Moldova. Called in Russian political discourse 'compatriots abroad', these people are especially sensitive to Russian narratives, which might be explained by the lack of national identity after collapse of the Soviet Union. For the same reason it is often seem as a tool in Russia's hybrid warfare (brightest examples of its use are annexation of Crimea and creation of the so-called Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics).

The growth of psychological know how

Sputnik uses the same approach as RT *'using the formats and protocols familiar to global audiences'*, which *'not only reinforces their acceptability, it also helps to make viewers comfortable in their presence'* (Rawnsley, 2015, p. 275). It means that news is presented in a way, which target audience is used to, to get more trust. That includes not only the style of news coverage, but also involvement of native speakers (reporters and 'experts'), who literally and metaphorically can talk one language with the audience. That is an important factor for international broadcaster to achieve success.

As a radio broadcaster, Sputnik doesn't necessarily need to hire young, good-looking reporters and anchors, like RT does. For Sputnik much more important criteria is being a native speaker, since only audial channel of human perception is involved in this type of broadcasting. Audience can only hear, but not see the person talking, therefore it is extremely important to make sure that audience can actually understand the speaker and, what is more, associate itself with him, therefore his speech should resonate, sounds natural. That is why it is understandable, that all the authors or probably it's better to call them presenters (since we don't know who is the real author) of Sputnik's radio programs are native speakers. For example, in the international version of Sputnik, only English native-speakers are involved in the programs, although there are also Russian journalists, but they usually write articles. It is logical, because it is much easier to write fluently, copying style of foreign media, than to speak like native speaker. For the same reasons mostly native speakers and foreigners with good English skills are invited to Sputnik's programs as guests

and experts, which also is connected to credibility, since they usually represent some institution with attractive name (e.g. University of Rhode Island), although the real status and reputation is usually unknown to the audience, as well as the biography and views of the ‘expert’. Such approach is probably based on believe that an average Radio listener/Internet user normally wouldn’t check such information after he heard/read it. That allows media like Sputnik to manipulate its audience by presenting in its materials only those points of view, in which the media is interested, or cooperating with the same group of commentators, presented as ‘experts’.

The role of Sputnik’s Blogs section is somewhat different. Recently such sections have become very popular among online news media as a platform for opinions to be expressed (usually by so-called ‘opinion leaders’, public figures or simply those, whose opinion is interesting for the audience). Such sections could be compared to print press’ op-eds. Therefore, the role of such news media is not reduced just to news. Interestingly, Sputnik’s competitors CNN and BBC don’t have such sections, while on Aljazeera’s website it is called ‘Opinion’, where experts of different professional and cultural background write about issues of their interest. Normally it is possible to find the name of the author, basic data about him, as well as his contact information (usually it’s an email or social media page’s address), which is the case of Aljazeera, but not the Sputnik. The only information that Russian broadcaster provides to its online readers is author’s name. The main benefit of Sputnik’s using blog format we see in the fact that unlikely to its own content (or rather content which is presented as its own, since blogs also might be written by staff writers, presented as independent ones) Sputnik officially isn’t responsible for content of blogs. Similarly to press op-eds, in the end of every blogger’s article it is mentioned in italics font that ‘the views expressed in this article are solely those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official position of Sputnik.’ This allows Sputnik to support its own narratives with the ‘independent’ opinions very often in more aggressive form, than content, published by Sputnik’s staff, e.g. *‘Who Will Stop the Rise of Merkel’s Multikult 4th Reich?’*; *‘Fallen Star: NATO’s Blood-Soaked Dance of the Seven Betrayals’* (Gallagher, 2016; 2017).

Sputnik announced launching of Blog platform in October, 2015, inviting its readers to *‘contribute and share your thoughts and opinions on featured news stories from around the globe’* (Team Sputnik, 2015) and also encouraging them by point system. So basically anyone could become a Sputnik blogger, which might be considered as a recruiting free ‘trolls’.

Another technique, which Sputnik uses, is humor. In particular, it is used in a separate ‘Cartoons’ section, which consists of Spurnik-produced cartoons about current affairs. They are always followed by short text, which explains the event, the particular cartoon is devoted to. Sometimes cartoon includes text, but sometimes it is simply an image. Although such technique is

not new and has been used by media (especially socio political) for a long time, recently interest in it resumed in the context of information warfare.

In March, 2017 Riga-based NATO Strategic Communications Center of Excellence presented results of 6-months study, requested by Ministry of Defense of Republic of Latvia, devoted to humor as a tool of strategic communication. The focus was made on Russian humorous TV-shows and the way they support Kremlin's policies and actions. The use of humor is twofold:

'On the one hand, humor is an integral component of each culture, it is one of the most frequently used communication tools that entertains, attracts attention, serves as light relief or a method of subversion in situations of conflict and discontent, informs and humanizes many actions taken by politicians. But, on the other hand, humor can serve as an effective element of propaganda, manipulating and influencing hearts and minds of with methods which do not fall into the classic category of information warfare. Entertainment can contain much more powerful content and sets of well-planned-in-advance goals to change human behavior that are not recognized by the audience' (NATO StratCom COE, 2017).

According to researchers, humor is an important tool of Russian propaganda. That is why it isn't surprising that it is actively used by both RT and Sputnik. Such sections legitimate use of humor techniques to present news emotionally (which normally is considered as a violation of journalistic standards) in a simplified, softened form, which appeals to audience's experience and make it even more vulnerable to constructed discourse. At the same time humor helps to ridicule opponent (in Sputnik's case it's the West) and its narratives.

Creation of Web 2.0 information technology provided new opportunities for waging information warfare, since it made possible to any Internet user to generate and spread the content basically without any limits. As a result nowadays the world is awash in unprecedented amounts of data and an expanding network of sources for news (Howard, 2014). That, in turn, allowed media like Sputnik to introduce some new tools of propaganda, which are related with each other.

Undoubtedly, one of the most important of those instruments is trolling. By 'trolls' we mean recruited commentators, whose activity on the Internet artificially create an illusion of the public opinion (usually by supporting or criticizing something/someone). Usually trolls' task is to create as many comments or posts on different forums, news web sites and social networks as possible to support pro-Russian narratives and silence Western ones. In such a way *'aggressive pro-Russia troll campaigns have manipulated the public debate and silenced citizens'* (Aro, 2016) in many countries. Van Herpen explains that trolls are recruited to digitally invade Western media

with pro-Putin comments. Efforts have also been made to automate some of ‘trolls’ activities using bots (Inkster, 2016).

After several interviews of ex-‘trolls’, it became obvious that, in fact, a lot of people are involved in this activity. Another proof was a dramatic increase in the number of Internet accounts among Russian citizens since the beginning of the Russian aggression against Ukraine (Thiele, 2015). Work spaces of ‘trolls’ were called ‘troll farms’, which tasks also include spreading disinformation (Aro, 2016; Inkster, 2016).

Disinformation presupposes deceiving of the object about one’s true intentions to make him do the programmed act. It is one of the basic methods of Information Warfare, together with diversification of public opinion, psychological pressure, spreading of rumors and propaganda.

Another tool, which Russian propaganda channels use thank to Web 2.0 is fakes. Nowadays fake is understood as falsified information, fabricated facts or non-truthful news, which is presented as the truth on purpose to manipulate mass consciousness. Sputnik has been accused on numerous occasions of producing fake stories. The most dangerous is the fact that fakes are often spread unintentionally by other media, which makes it much harder to distinguish between real story and fake.

Exploitation of the openness of Western media to convey its messages

Since the main goal of international broadcasters is normally to form the positive image of the country, the launch of Russia Today in 2005 was seen as such media, which would ‘reflect Russian position on the major issues of international politics’ and ‘inform audience about events and phenomena of Russian life’. It was announced as a channel which would represent Russia abroad, while the head of Russia Today noted that the format wouldn’t differ from other international broadcasters (such as CNN and BBC) (Lenta.ru). However, instead of promoting Russia’s image abroad, Russian broadcaster concentrated much more on criticizing the West (especially the United States) and Western media (Rawnsley, 2015; Kazantsev, Rutland, 2016), which made researchers think that RT approach has more to do with Cold-war propaganda than with public diplomacy.

‘Russia Today was designed not so much to promote Russia’s image in the world, but to change the dynamics of the global media market by breaking the perceived monopoly enjoyed by Western news organizations’ (Kazantsev, Rutland 2016).

Such approach is called ‘oppositional’ to soft power, meaning that instead of working on Russia’s positive image, media like RT and Sputnik are shaping negative image of the West (undermining Western narrative).

The problem for Russia, according to Rawnsley (2015), is that it cannot control the way it is reported by foreign media, that is why the best that it can do is *'to present a credible alternative to Western news reporting'*. In fact, that is exactly how both RT and Sputnik position themselves, almost identically. Sputnik describes itself as a *'provider of alternative news content'*, while RT states that it *'covers stories overlooked by the mainstream media, provides alternative perspectives on current affairs'*. Even mottos of both media similarly emphasize their role as alternative sources of news, which provide information, hidden by Western news organizations: for RT it is *'Question more'*, while Sputnik's motto is *'Telling the untold'*. Therefore, not being able to change Western media's agenda, Russian organizations try to form their own agenda as an opposition to it. In other words, instead of simply replying to Western narratives (they also do it, for example, recently RT announced the launch of the FakeCheck project, *'aimed at weeding out and correcting inaccuracies, bias, misinformation and falsehoods in global coverage of major news stories'* (Sputnik, 2017), Kremlin's broadcasters create and spread their own ones. As a result, *'Russia and the West propose two radically opposite positions which cancel each other out'*, which Van Herpen (2016) calls *'zero sum game'*.

Another thing that cannot be guaranteed is whether the international audience will understand Sputnik's messages the same way they were meant to be understood, *'since interpretation occurs according to the prevailing cultural, social and political beliefs, attitudes and norms among individual audience members'* (Rawnsley, 2015, p. 280). Finally, in Rawnsley's opinion, the biggest challenge for international broadcasters is to find a balance between *'objective'* journalism and serving state's interests. Being very arguable concept in general, objectivity is usually understood as balanced storytelling, which means presenting all sides of the story/conflict. It is one of the standards of Western journalism, that's why it is understandable, why Rawnsley, as a Western researcher, is concerned about it. However, Sputnik network follows different logic, which allows it to be worried neither of the audience's interpretations nor about objectivity. This logic stems from the main goal of Russia in the information warfare against the West, which is *'not to convince but to create doubt and uncertainty to the point where it becomes hard to discern where the truth lies'* (Inkster, 2016, p. 29).

Moreover, Sputnik in its activities uses Western tradition of *'objectivity'* against the West:

'Information operations of this kind rely on the fact that Western governments simply lack the resources that would be required systematically to refute or debunk the huge number of stories put out, and on the Western media's professional obligation to report both sides of a story, thereby giving a veneer of legitimacy to Russian fabrications. Moscow's goal is not to rebut, but to obfuscate' (Inkster, 2016, p. 29).

That is how Sputnik's information is often distributed by oppositional media, which do it for the sake of opinion balance, but at some point readers see it is a contradiction, which can make them start having doubts or in the worst case to lose the sense of reality.

To conclude, although Kremlin uses model of the Information Warfare, similar to the Soviet one, based on the use of disinformation and reflexive control, Russian cross-border media operate under conditions of globalization and unprecedented amount of information. Sputnik in particular uses different kind of techniques systematically, inventing also some new ones. Its strategy relies on opposing Kremlin's agenda to the one of Western media, which allows Sputnik to position itself as an alternative source of news. Using openness and objectivity standard of Western media, Sputnik became an important instrument in Kremlin's information warfare. It is used to win hearts and minds of foreign citizens or at least make them doubt, but most importantly to justify Russia's activities on the political stage and destabilize situation in Europe.

3. SPUTNIK'S NEWS DISCOURSE AS DISCOURSE OF RUSSIAN INFORMATION WARFARE

3.1. Case study: Sputnik's coverage of the Dutch referendum on EU-Ukraine Association agreement

This case has been chosen for the reason that it involves variety of Kremlin narratives, directed against both Ukraine and European Union, and, at the same time, it is a good example of how cross-border media like Sputnik can be used to achieve several political goals of the state at the same time.

EU-Ukraine Association agreement is the momentous document in Ukraine's newest history. Last-moment refusal of pro-Russian Ukraine's president Viktor Yanukovich to sign the agreement in Vilnius in November, 2013 after many years of EU and Ukraine making steps towards each other, ignited mass protests all over Ukraine, known as Euromaidan, which, in turn, resulted in Yanukovich fleeing the country, and arguably triggered Russia's annexation of Crimea and escalating armed conflict in the Eastern Ukraine.

Since then the Agreement has been '*vital to Kyiv's efforts to establish closer ties with the West*' (RFE/RL, 2016). In March, 2014, the political provisions (so-called 'political part') of the agreement were signed, with signing of economical part following in June, 2014. It totally contradicted Kremlin's scenario with pro-Russian government in Kyiv, which was supposed to ensure Ukraine's rapprochement with Russia. For that reason Kremlin insisted on the postponing the Agreement's entry into force till January, 2016. From the information warfare perspective it looks like Russia was not ready for such scenario and simply tried to win time to prepare response to the ongoing events. This case study shows that the time was not wasted.

In October, 2014 Sputnik published interview with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov stating that Russia '*never questioned Ukraine's right to develop partnership relations with the European Union*' (Sputnik, 2014) and laying an emphasis on the potential economic losses for Russia and even Ukraine itself, created by the Agreement between EU and Ukraine.

'What's at issue here is that it should not harm Russia, its partners in the Customs Union and all members of the CIS free trade zone, which includes Ukraine [...] Ukraine's trade relations with the European Union should not create side paths for the duty-free entry of cheap European goods into our territory.'

Although Kremlin tried to make it look like 'nothing personal, business only' issue, it was clear that Russia is afraid to lose Ukraine (meaning, first of all, its influence on political and other

processes inside the country, as well as Ukraine's energetic dependency on Russia) in a much broader sense than just economically. Historically Russia has included Ukraine in its imperialistic plans, which haven't changed much since the collapse of the USSR, as Russia has kept permanently emphasizing the connection between Russia and other ex-Soviet states, in particular Ukraine, which is the largest and one of the richest in natural sources among them, and, what is important, it has cultural, linguistic, historical, and religious similarities with Russia. Even RT's special project ИНОТВ (2017) (review of foreign media outlets) includes two sections 'Russia', and 'Former USSR', which is an example of simulacra (USSR doesn't exist anymore), used in contemporary news discourse. Importantly, in this narrative Ukraine has always played a role of Russia's 'younger brother', meaning the closest possible relation (by blood) of two nations with the emphasis on Ukraine being a 'younger one'. Younger not in a sense of the age (in fact, Kyiv has much longer history than Moscow), but the status. Younger brother is usually weaker, less developed physically and mentally than the older one, therefore he needs to be guided, protected, advised and controlled by the older brother. Younger brother has less rights than the older one and has to obey to him. Such frame is typical for family models in societies with big power distance, like most of post-Soviet countries, including Russia and Ukraine. It was important to have a closer look on that narrative to have a better understanding of how it shapes Ukraine-Russia relations and their presentation by Russia on the global stage. For instance, such approach might be used to justify trilateral talks in Brussels between Ukraine, Russia and EU on the implementation of the association agreement between Ukraine and EU. For outside observer the situation might look strange: why would Russia be there? However, put in the 'younger and older brother' story, the situation might not look so ambiguous. It looks strange if a person goes to the bank to open an account with his neighbor, but if it is his brother, it looks completely normal for the observer.

In the course of 2014 and 2015 the Association agreement with Ukraine was ratified by all the EU member states but Netherlands. Dutch website GeenStijl together with ultra-right Eurosceptic parties (which are often linked to Kremlin) like 'Forum for Democracy' initiated campaign for collecting necessary amount of signatures to organize referendum on the Ukraine-EU Association. Eventually, it was held in the Netherlands on 6 April 2016. The referendum question was: 'Are you for or against the Approval Act of the Association Agreement between the European Union and Ukraine?'

Although referendum had advisory function, it attracted a lot of attention of media, in particular Russian cross-border media outlets. Thus, in April, 2016 most of RT's articles about Ukraine were devoted to the Dutch referendum. As of April 2016 Sputnik overall published 86 articles on that topic, which is almost three times more than RT, and more than Ukrainian major information agency Ukrinform did.

Our hypothesis is that such interest of Sputnik in Dutch referendum was a result of Russia's desire to destabilize situation in the European Union in general by enforcing so-called Eurosceptic movement, and in particular to intervene into EU and Ukraine rapprochement.

Table 2. Coverage of Dutch referendum by Russian and Ukrainian cross-border media as of April, 2016

Media	Number of materials on the website, dedicated to Dutch referendum
RT (Russia)	30
Sputnik (Russia)	86
Ukrinform (Ukraine)	52

That is why this case is particularly interesting, since Sputnik had a real chance to influence the result of the referendum and harm Ukraine's national interests by influencing its Western readership. In that case audience was the decision maker, since ordinary citizens participated in the referendum. Since Sputnik didn't have (and still doesn't) a version in Dutch, it had to rely on its international version in English. Such decision can be also explained by desire to reach broader European audience and encourage Eurosceptic sentiments in other countries by showing them Dutch example.

It would be a difficult task to measure the effectiveness of this information campaign launched by Sputnik in terms of the number of people influenced, as well as Sputnik's contribution to the result of the referendum. That is why in our analysis we concentrated on the discourse, instruments of information warfare used, and narratives involved.

From the very beginning Sputnik's coverage of the referendum was very one-sided. The media presented in most cases only one point of view, namely representatives of the Dutch blog *GeenStijl*, which initiated referendum; opponents of the ratification of the Ukraine-EU association in the Netherlands and other countries; politicians, journalists, activists with Pro-Russian views and anti-EU (in some cases anti-Ukrainian) position.

Already in July, 2015, when initiative to hold a referendum only appeared, Sputnik published an interview with Vam Rossem, editor at *Geenstijl*. Interestingly, in the text version of the interview (audio version was also published in the same material) emphasis is clearly laid on the statements about lack of democracy in the European Union and negative attitude towards its expansion.

'We first and foremost see this referendum as a signal that there needs to be more democracy in the EU. We need to have a bigger say in European political developments and expansion because it is growing beyond our democratic reach, and that matter is a threat to Dutch wellbeing and also for people in other different countries [...] It's more the people who are slowly losing their democratic voice in the ever-growing and ever-expanding European Union...'

'Brussels' stance against Russia in relation to Ukraine' and 'the criticism of how the EU handled Russia's conflict with Ukraine' is mentioned in different articles on numerous occasions, which was not the main reason for the referendum on the Association, therefore was not that important for Dutch voters, but it was clearly very important for Sputnik, since it was a great opportunity to present EU sanctions against Russia as actions of prejudiced politicians, which aren't supported by ordinary Europeans, who have nothing against Russia.

Comparison between audio and text version of the same interview shows, that Sputnik's journalist chose specific quotes, directed specifically against expansion of EU, underlying Western prejudiced attitude against Russia (*'There seems to be an undertone of blaming Russia for everything that has gone on'*) and mentioning results of surveys, according to which most of the Dutch people would vote against the Association with Ukraine.

The most powerful places of the interview (e.g. *'Association Agreement — Provocation and Threat'*) were emphasized with technical tools such as bigger font, bold letters, italics etc. At the same time the very first phrase in the interview in which Rossem says that 'First of all, we don't think that Ukraine forms a direct threat to Dutch wellbeing' is not included in the text version of the interview, which proves the selective manner of the text material. Thus, a person who would prefer reading to listening might have had a different perception of the interview.

Later Sputnik continued emphasizing the 'provocative' nature of EU-Ukraine agreement and a 'threat' to welfare and well-being of both Dutch and Ukrainian people, often citing unnamed 'activists'. This idea is repeated in the number of Sputnik's publications, as well as the statement that it's oligarchs than ordinary people who would rather benefit from the EU-Ukraine Association agreement.

In some cases Sputnik fell back on manipulations with the news headlines. Thus, the article titled *'Dutch Anti-Association Push: Holland Does Not Want Ukraine in EU'* tells only about the local public poll results, according to which *'73% of the Dutch think that it will eventually result in Ukraine's accession into the Union...and don't want this to happen.'* Firstly, 73% of the respondents were meant instead of 73% of all Dutch, as it can be understood. Secondly, there is no link to the results of mentioned poll in the article, or at least the number of the respondents, which

doesn't look reliable. Without this information or concrete link to the 'local media' such information seems like mere manipulation.

Another example of such manipulation is the article *'One Third of Dutch Citizens Do Not Want Ukraine in the EU'*, which is not about Ukraine's potential EU membership, but EU-Ukraine association agreement. More than that, the headline is based on the survey, which involved only 1004 respondents, which is clearly not enough to conclude for the whole country. In the published video this information is placed in the very end and is hard to read due to pale color and small size of the font.

It is worth mentioning how Sputnik sometimes twisted the meaning of the statement in the headline, which doesn't seem to be an accidental mistake, but rather another manipulation, aimed at the part of the audience who would read only the headline, skipping the main body of the text. For instance, *'IMF Chief Discouraged by Dutch EU-Ukraine Association Agreement 'No' Vote'*. In reality IMF Chief said that she is 'not encouraged by the vote'. Although the general meaning remained the same, stylistic difference is big. Literally to be discouraged means to lose enthusiasm (fully or partially), while to be not encouraged means that person doesn't feel enthusiasm, or didn't become more enthusiastic. As we can see, in the first case the mood is much more pessimistic than in the second, which can be used to distort reader's perception.

Sputnik actively worked on the implementing narrative 'ordinary Dutch citizens vs. EU authorities'. It tried to do so with the help of such provocative headlines like *'Dutch People vs Brussels: Ukraine Referendum Will Show Who Wears the Pants'* or phrases like *'The referendum is shaping up to be a historical one, determining whether the power lies in Brussels or in the hands of the Dutch people.'* At the same time the importance and historical meaning of the referendum were underlined, as well as the fact that 'the Dutch people weren't even asked their opinion on the controversial association agreement, with no debate taking place in society, in the media, or even in government.'

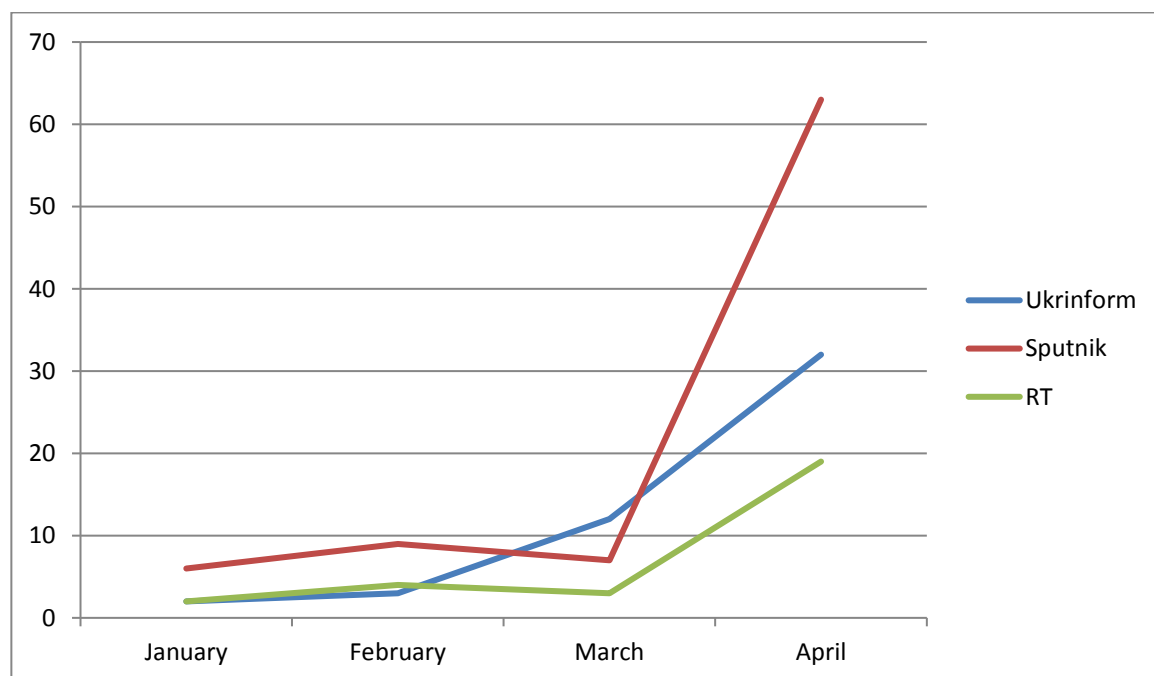
On the one hand, Sputnik was spreading myths about Ukraine's membership at the EU and NATO as the inevitable result of the ratification of the Association agreement, as well as the disadvantageousness of the Agreement to all the parties, including Ukraine, which would turn into the 'colony of Brussels'. The main argument for the latter is that Ukraine would need to report to Brussels about any changes in the legislation, which is the common practice for EU member states and is just about reporting, not Brussels' dictate. That is why 'turning into the colony' is exaggeration and logical fallacy. On the other hand, Sputnik was trying to make true facts to look like myths. For instance, the fact that the major point of the Agreement was to simplify trade between Ukraine and EU was equaled to the 'versions of Dutch media'.

We can also see that Sputnik often manipulates with the major concepts, on which EU policy and ideology rely: democracy and EU values.

‘The EU is developing towards areas where they are not necessarily shared values – cultural values, economic values — with the rest of the European Union, and this is going at such a speed that we are having difficulty in bridging these differences’.

‘European values’ have been constantly mentioned in the Ukrainian discourses during and after Euromaidan events, as the major factor of EU and Ukraine unity, that’s why in Sputnik’s content we can often see attempts to discredit this factor by presenting Ukraine as the country with different values. Democracy is also a part of these values, that’s why it is important for Sputnik to show Ukraine as corrupted, non-democratic, ‘failed’ state. Sputnik addresses to the value of democracy on the regular basis, calling the Dutch referendum a ‘democratic tool’, branding the change of power in Ukraine during Euromaidan as a ‘coup’, underlining the illegal status of the current Ukrainian government, and emphasizing on the fact that President Yanukovich was ‘democratically-elected’.

Figure 1. **Intensity of coverage of the Dutch referendum by Ukrainian and Russian cross-border media from January to April, 2016**



With the beginning of 2016 and approaching of the referendum, Sputnik started publishing materials on the topic on regular basis.

Besides criticism of Brussels (for example, interview with Ukrainian businessman Yuriy Kosyuk, who called free-trade agreement with EU a ‘defrauding of Ukraine’), negativity was common for Sputnik’s coverage of news about Ukraine in the analyzed period (July, 2015 – May, 2016). That news didn’t necessarily have anything to do with the Dutch referendum or the Association agreement, but those were usually mentioned ‘by the way’, in contrast to Ukraine’s unwillingness to implement reforms in exchange for European money. Sputnik tried to create negative emotions against Ukraine by publishing articles, which were supposed to compromise it, for example about ‘the Dutch people's negative attitudes toward post-Maidan Ukraine’ because of the ‘discovery of stolen paintings from a Dutch museum in the hands of pro-Kiev 'nationalists' in east Ukraine’ (Sputnik, 2016) or by publishing *‘disclosed Kiev's plans to torpedo the Dutch referendum on Ukraine's Association Agreement with the EU’* (Sputnik, 2016), supposedly signed by the President of Ukraine, which was proved to be another fake by CyberBerkut ‘hacker group’ (StopFake, 2016).

At the same time Sputnik actively used technology of intimidation, stating that problems of Ukraine in case of its further European integration would become problems of the EU citizens, while millions of immigrants would from war-thorn, radicalized Ukraine would flood EU in case borders’ opening with EU (which was supposed to be very effective in the context of migration crisis in Europe). Sputnik was also reporting about threats of ‘Ukrainian nationalists’ ‘to cause chaos in the Netherlands if Dutch citizens will vote against the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement’. It was based on the video of questionable provenance (Sputnik, 2016), which demonstrated masked people in military uniform, making statement and burning Dutch flag, which, in my opinion, is likely to be fake, aimed to discredit Ukraine in the eyes of the Dutch voters. However, the most interesting is not the video itself but Sputnik’s attitude towards it:

‘Fabricated or not, the video has spooked many Europeans who have begun to second guess whether getting too chummy with Ukraine might end well for the EU. Nobody in Europe wants to see Ukrainian radicals carrying out potential terrorist acts like they said they would in the video’.

In this statement it is clear that Sputnik is okay with spreading disinformation, making conclusions, based on it. In the first sentence it is stated that the video might be a fake, but already in the next one people in video called ‘Ukrainian radicals’, as it is proved.

Other statements, published by Sputnik in a form of author or quoted text were Kremlin has nothing to do with the results of the Dutch referendum; and regardless results of the referendum, Brussels will continue implementing of the Association agreement, which would mean ‘not serious attitude towards democracy’. Moreover, Sputnik constantly was inflaming pessimism

to cause atmosphere of discouragement and demoralization, stating almost as a matter of fact that Dutch would vote against the Agreement, and Ukraine would never join EU. E.g. *‘French MP Predicts Dutch ‘No’ to EU-Ukraine Association’*, *‘Sucker Punch: Ukraine Will End Up Waiting Forever for EU Membership’*, *‘The Dutch Are to Oppose EU-Ukraine Association Treaty in Referendum’*, *‘Forget ‘Waiting 20-25 Years’: Dutch PM Says Ukraine Can Never Join EU’*. Materials about impossibility for Ukraine to join EU even in the long perspective were contradicting with those, which stated that association agreement would mean Ukraine’s membership. In my opinion, such contradiction is a result of Sputnik’s attempts to reach two audiences at the same time: to make Dutch voters and Western Europeans afraid of problematic Ukraine’s integration in the EU, and make Ukrainians disappoint in the Western promises and turn back to Russia.

It is also important to mention that online polls on Sputnik’s website were repeatedly used as a proof to shaped narratives.

Screenshot of the survey by Sputnik News

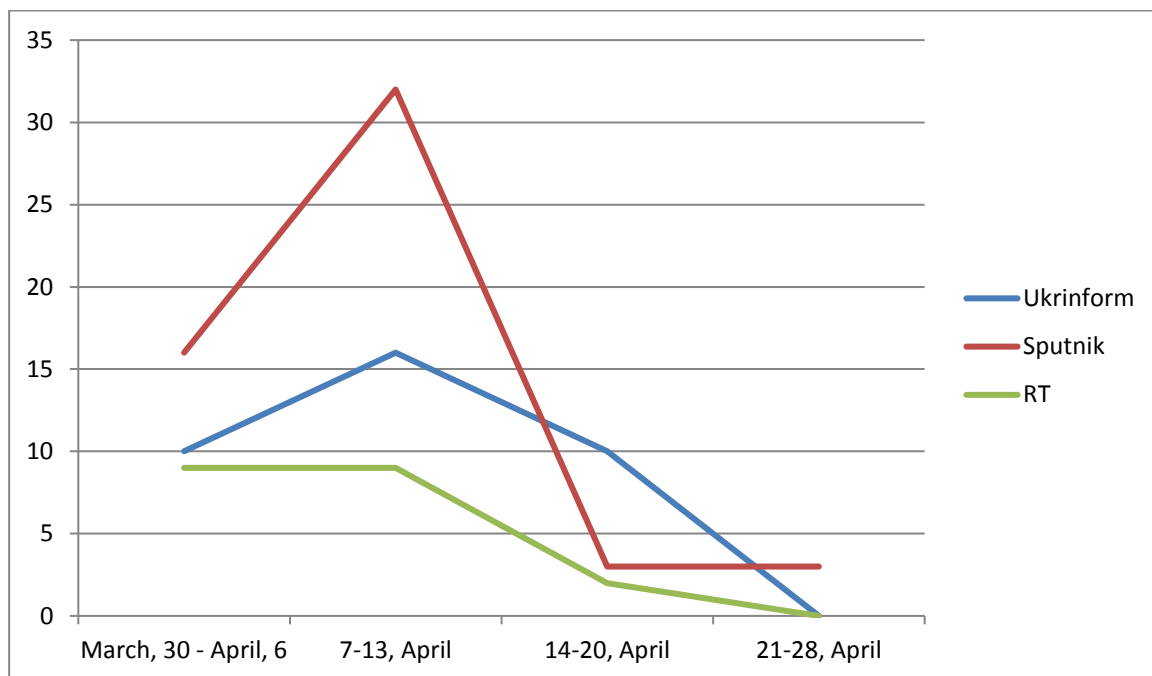


It is hard to say though, to which extent such surveys can be trusted. On the one hand, audience of the particular media might be biased, while, on the other hand, modern technologies allow media to create any results of the survey. In any case results cannot be considered as objective. More important in this case is the effect, which such results have on the audience.

It should be noted that Sputnik was especially active on the day of the referendum and also afterwards, citing anti-EU statements and Twits by the anonymous accounts to show the ‘reaction of media’ to the results of the referendum (61.1 percent of Dutch voters voted against ratification of

the Ukraine-EU association agreement); encouraging other EU countries to follow example of the Netherlands, and spreading hysteria about the end of the EU as such.

Figure 2. **Intensity of coverage of the Dutch referendum by Ukrainian and Russian cross-border media in April, 2016**



The reaction of Kremlin showed that Moscow is satisfied with the results of the referendum. Stating that ‘*Russia would be happy if the association agreement between the EU and Ukraine yielded any sort of success for Kiev*’ after the Dutch vote against looked like Kremlin’s attempt to look good without losing anything.

All in all, Sputnik was very active in its coverage of the Dutch referendum and the issue of Ukraine-EU association agreement, which can be explained by Kremlin’s straight interest in the issue. We can assume that many Dutch and European citizens weren’t well informed about the aims and potential consequences of the referendum, meaning of the Ukraine-EU Association agreement and situation in Ukraine in general. Sputnik tried to fill in those information gaps with its own version of events by using variety of techniques:

- Only one point of view was presented;
- Strong anti-EU and anti-Ukraine position;
- Selectivity in presenting information;
- Lack of references to authoritative sources;
- Manipulative headlines;
- Discreditation of Dutch media;

- Creating negative image of EU authorities and Ukraine;
- Using same “experts” and sources;
- Usage of fakes;
- Advocating Russia;
- Usage of such manipulative technologies as threatening, infusion, mistranslation.

Using Dutch people’s anti-EU sentiments, lack of knowledge about association agreement and Ukraine, and dissatisfaction with the local government, Sputnik presented information in such way to persuade ordinary Dutch people to vote against agreement and to spread anti-EU sentiments.

Therefore Sputnik’s goal was the same as Kremlin’s – to destabilize situation in EU even more and intervene Ukraine’s European integration.

Altogether Sputnik’s strategy turned out to be successful, since in December, 2016 *‘the Dutch government has asked the EU for additional guarantees to ensure that ratification of the association agreement does not lead to EU membership for Ukraine’* (RFE/RL, 2016), which means that Ukraine is very unlikely to join EU in the near future. This won more time for Kremlin, which doesn’t seem to give up on the idea of turning Ukraine back to Russia. As of April, 21 the Association agreement hasn’t been ratified yet by the Netherlands.

3.2. Case study: Sputnik’s anti-Turkish information campaign after Turkey's downing of Russian Su-24 warplane

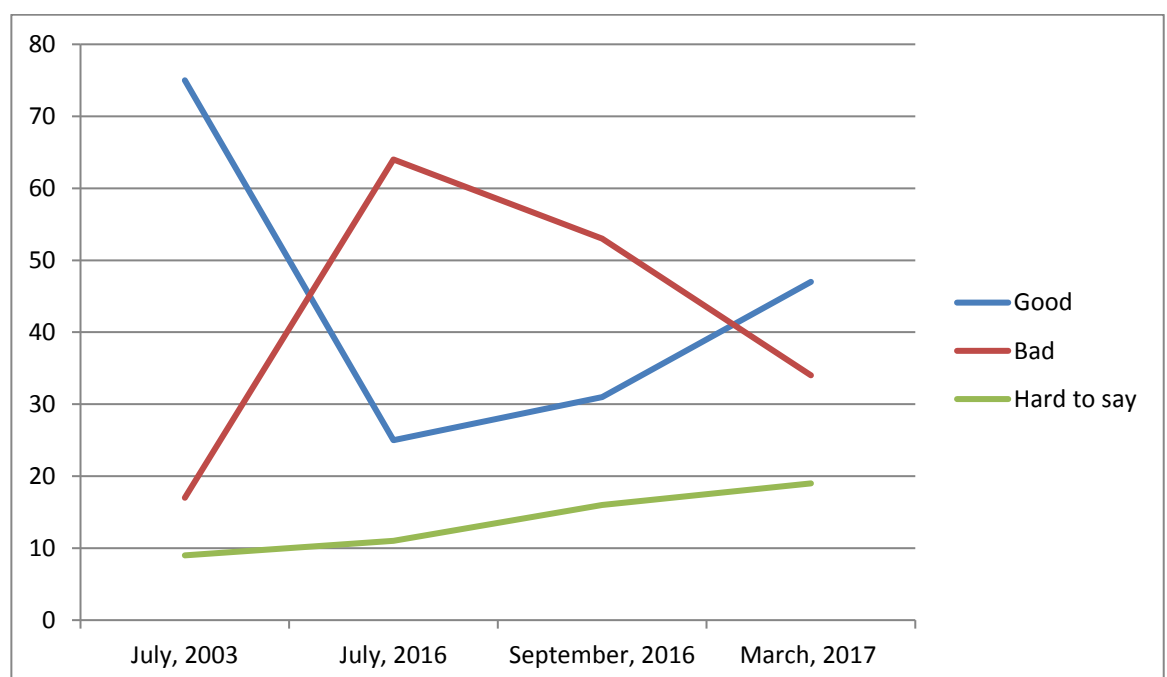
Relations between Russia and Turkey historically have been complicated. They were often strained from the late 16th to the early 20th centuries, when Ottoman and Russian empires were engaged in number of the Russo-Turkish wars. Afterwards there was a short thaw in 1920s and 1930s, which lasted until Turkey joined NATO in 1952, which was one of the major enemies of the Soviet Union. Taking into consideration that modern Russian Federation is heavily influenced by its Soviet legacy there is no surprise that attitude towards NATO and the West in Russia remained mostly negative, especially in the last years. However, after the collapse of the USSR relations between Turkey and Russia significantly improved. Moreover, in a while they became one of the major trade partners to each other with Russia becoming Turkey's largest provider of energy and many of Turkish companies operating in Russia. In this period, Turkey became the top foreign destination for Russian tourists. Considering that improvement of relations, the phenomena of their dramatic changes in the recent years looks very interesting, especially since media discourse played the major role in the change of public attitudes.

The first step was done when Turkey's leadership didn't recognize Russia's annexation of the Crimea in 2014, expressing support and desire to cooperate with Ukrainian authorities. Afterwards Turkey made a big step towards the European Union by accepting a significant amount of refugees from Syria, expecting liberation of visa requirements and other benefits in exchange. On the top of it, Turkey remains the member of NATO, being its second largest standing military force after the United States. Besides, Turkey has been participating in military operations in Syria, supporting opposition to the regime of Bashar al-Assad, who is the ally of Russian Federation.

Nevertheless, it influenced much neither the economic relations between two countries, nor the attitude of Russians towards Turkey. Thus, according to Russian respected Yuri Levada Analytical Center, in 2014 and 2015 only 1% of respondents in Russia considered Turkey as an unfriendly country (which was the same result as for officially friendly Syria). In 2016, however, this number dramatically increased to 29% (according to the survey, conducted in May, 2016), while Turkey was ranked third major Russia's enemy after the US and Ukraine (Levada Center, 2016). The key point of such a dramatic switch was Turkey's downing of Russian warplane Su-24 on November 24, 2015. The major part in changing attitudes towards Turkey played Russian state media, namely Sputnik, which actively covered this particular topic since the very first day.

Interestingly, as Levada center's data shows, after July, 2016, when it was reported that Turkish president Erdogan apologized for the downing of Russian plane, and normalization of Russo-Turkish relations started, attitudes of Russians toward Turkey started changing in positive direction (Levada Center, 2017). That dynamics continued in 2017, as we can see on the graph below.

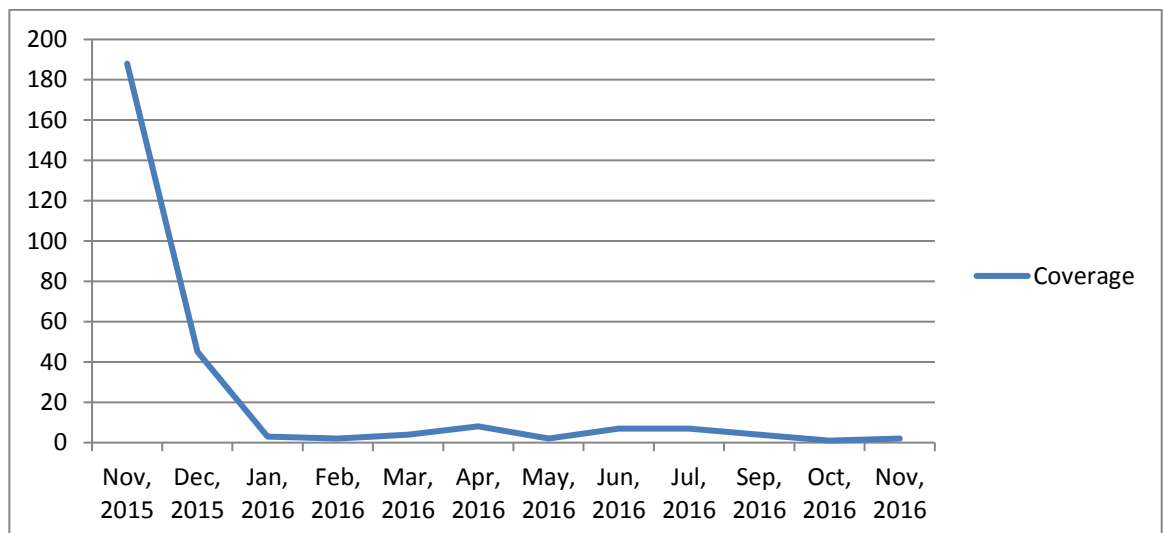
Figure 3. Attitudes of Russian population toward Turkey (Levada Center, 2016)



In March, 2017, when survey was conducted again, leaders of Russia and Turkey met in Moscow, expressing their satisfaction of the normalization of relations of two countries. As Vladimir Putin stated, *'We are very happy that connections between our countries are being re-established quickly'*. The proof of his words was reestablishing of Russo-Turkish economic ties and military cooperation and coordination in Syria. Interestingly, when 'three Turkish soldiers were accidentally killed [...] in a Russian air raid [...] it did not derail military coordination between the two countries' (Voice of America, 2017), in contrast to Russia's extremely negative reaction after its plane was downed in November, 2015.

Since political motives of Russia is not the object of this research, we would like to concentrate on Sputnik's discourse, devoted to the downing of Russian plane in the period between November 24, 2015 and November, 25 2016. This period is chosen, because on November 24, 2015 the plane was shot and Sputnik immediately started covering this event, returning to the topic many times afterwards. To make it possible for readers to keep the track of the events, Sputnik left tags in major articles, so all of them could be found in the 'topic' section as 'Russian Su-24 Jet Downed Over Syria' (Sputnik, 2015, November 24 – 2016, November 25). The last article in this topic was published on November 25, 2016, almost exactly one year after the first one, and that is why this is the last article we analyze. Altogether 274 articles were published and tagged (therefore included in the 'topic' section) in that period. It means that although those weren't all the articles devoted to Russian-Turkish relations, Turkey and its leadership, and in particular downing of Russian plane (which was mentioned in many articles), those were the articles, chosen by Sputnik's editorial as the most important materials, which shouldn't be missed by a reader. Therefore this amount of articles is enough to analyze Sputnik's discourse on the issue in general, since major narratives are regularly repeated in different articles.

Figure 4. Articles, tagged as 'Russian Su-24 Jet Downed Over Syria' by Sputnik



Majority of these articles (188) was published in the first week after the plane's crash, while after normalization of relations between Turkey and Russia started on the political level in Spring, 2016, the amount of articles gradually decreased, being more of the reminder than major topic, like in was in the end of 2016.

It would be wrong to state that Russian discourse about Turkey was completely positive before the crash of Russian jet, since Turkey and Russia supported opposing sides in Syrian conflict (Kremlin backed governmental forces, while Ankara supported opposition).

That is why one of the main Russian narratives at that time (the end of 2015) was to present Russia as the main (and the only successful) fighter against terrorism in Syria, so Turkey, in contrast, would look like supporter of terrorism, following the logic 'those who are not with us are against us'.

'...Turkey, has long served as a safe haven for Syrian "rebel-terrorists." There is also evidence that Turkish officials could have been involved in ISIL's oil smuggling operations.'

After it was officially confirmed that Russian Su-24 jet was shot by Turkey, Sputnik intensified spreading narratives, aimed to present Turkey as a supporter of terrorism, explaining it often by Turkey's business interests (including personal business interest of Erdogan's family).

'Turkey has been a major instigator of the civil war in Syria and benefactor for the Islamic State by purchasing illicit oil that funds the ISIL movement'

Downing of Russian plane was often presented as an evidence of Turkey being on the terrorists' side, since it is fighting anti-terrorist forces (Russia). For that reason, in the most of analyzed articles it was emphasized that Russian plane was in the middle of its anti-terrorist mission, as well as on Russia's role in fighting ISIL in Syria in general.

'Shooting down a Russian jet in Syria was an act of support for the Islamic State terrorists being targeted by Russian airstrikes'

Here we can see an example of logical fallacy, since Turkey's shooting Russian plane did not necessarily mean Turkey's support of terrorist groups. Such technique was used by Sputnik quite often in this case.

The clear evidence that Sputnik didn't create that narrative, but was following official Kremlin's line is President Putin's statement soon after the jet was downed, in which he described 'the Turkish attack' as a 'stab in the back' carried out by 'accomplices of terrorists'. This statement is repeated in the vast majority of the analyzed articles, therefore we may conclude that this

message plays the major role in Sputnik's discourse. In fact, it contains more than one narrative. 'Stab in the back' is not merely a bright metaphor, but a straight reference to one of the oldest (therefore universal, since it can be applied to any audience in the world) narratives of betrayal. Russian Foreign Ministry also called Turkey's act 'betrayal'. The power of this narrative lays in the reference to basic human values, according to which, betrayal is usually considered one of the worst possible crimes. That is why the narrative of betrayal has been often used in Information warfare. In fact, Russia has been actively referring to this narrative in its information warfare against Ukraine, which has been presented as a traitor, who betrayed his older brother.

Importance of the narrative can be also seen at the way it was spread around social media: on the same day when the plane was shot, the (#УдарВСпину (#StabInTheBack) campaign was launched to engage as many Internet users as possible. Sputnik reported on the campaign by showing examples of social media reaction. All of them contained anti-Turkish messages, often with emotional images, picturing Turkey as ISIL's ally. Authors of those messages are unknown social media users, often anonymous. Since messages were selected by Sputnik, such articles seem to be extremely manipulative, since they aim to construct public opinion.

'Others allowed their anger to get the best of them, recalling old historical wounds, from Russian battles with the Ottomans over Constantinople, to Turkey's cooperation with the Nazis during World War II.'

The word 'wounds' from this report shows that Sputnik was very attentive to the language used to make its message stronger. Interestingly, 'cooperation with Nazis' is a reference to Non-aggression pact signed by Nazi Germany and Turkey, similar to the one signed earlier by Nazi Germany and USSR, while picture of Constantinople refers to the events of 907, when Kyivan Rus' ruler Oleg fixed his shield to the gates of the Constantinople, before Russia or Ottoman empire even existed.

Sputnik quite often referred to 'social media' as an indicator of public opinion. Thus, to show world's solidarity with Russia Sputnik published an article about another campaign #IstandWithRussia, showing a few examples of posts from Russian and Serbian users. There was number of articles, published with such aim, like 'Ordinary Turks React to Su-24 Shoot Down: 'A Lot of Us Are on Your Side', 'Ordinary Voices: Western Public Expresses Outrage Over Downed Russian Su-24' (photo from Russian rally used). Clearly the emphasis was made on the 'ordinary' people, who support Russia, contrary to their authorities (same narrative as in coverage of Dutch referendum). Interestingly, Sputnik often put screenshots from social media in the middle of the interview or article without explaining who is the author of the quote, what the context is, and why it was used in the article.

'We have always regarded Turkey not only as a close neighbor, but also as a friendly state. I don't know who needed what was done today, but we didn't in any case.'

For instance, right after this president Putin's quote the screenshot from Wikipedia published by social media user, with the list of Russo-Turkish war was inserted. The aim probably was to show the contrast between calling Turkey a 'friendly neighbor' and past experience, which would fit the narrative about 'two-faced' Turkey.

Negative reaction of the society was also presented by publishing statements by Russia-friendly governments (Greece, Armenia, Syria) or Russian-friendly political forces (like Italy's Euroskeptik Lega Nord Party), shown as the voice of the country.

Along with the narrative of Turkey's betrayal there was another one of Turkey being double-faced by 'targeting regional rivals alongside striking ISIL'.

'A lot of people in Turkey are doing very well out of the conflict in Syria, especially with ISIS in control of part of the territory' Turkey has done little in the fight against the Islamic State, and has instead focused on its conflict with Kurdish separatists.'

One of the proofs used in many articles was contradicting quote by president Erdogan in 2012 who said that *'brief violation of a country's airspace shouldn't be a pretext to shoot down a plane'*.

Another important Kremlin's narrative, spread by Sputnik, was about the need for the West and Russia to unite for the common purpose, which is fight against terrorism, was used before the downing of the plane (after terrorist attacks in Paris). Using technology of threatening, Sputnik wrote about potential consequences of Turkey's actions not just for Turkey (economic problems or end of Erdogan's career), but the whole world (complicating situation in Syria or even World War III scenario). At the same time in the context of the need for unity (e.g. *'Su-24 Crash 'Should Be a Wake-up Call' for Washington to Work With Moscow'*), Ukraine was mentioned on numerous occasions as the example of obstacle for this unity.

'NATO is still at odds with Russia over Crimea and Eastern Ukraine and that the latest incident has made cooperation more difficult even though ISIL presents a common threat.'

Another quote by 'the retired US Air Force general' is even more controversial:

'...seeing Russia and NATO get into another conflict like we had in the Ukraine, which we do not need'

In this narrative not only annexation of Crimea and war in Donbas are equaled to the shot plane (both called ‘incidents’), but situation in Ukraine is overall presented as the unnecessary problem for the West, which doesn’t allow it to cooperate with Russia. Therefore the message is to give up on Ukraine, which, in turn, could have different interpretations, all of which are aims of Russia’s foreign policy (lifting sanctions imposed on Russia, stop supporting Ukraine financially, to slow down rapprochement between EU and Ukraine etc.).

Turkey’s membership in NATO was emphasized and manipulated in the number of controversial conspiracy theories, published by Sputnik. While some articles presented the downing of Su-24 as pre-planned ‘intentional provocation’ by Turkey with the purpose either to involve NATO more in the Syrian conflict, or to put NATO against Russia, in the others incident was explained by Western involvement or even coordination. As the proof of the latter, the Western ignorance of the ‘evidence’ or lack of sympathy was pointed. Thus, in the first version NATO was used by Turkey, while in the second one Turkey was used by NATO, or both were operating in coordination. Other conspiracy theories like ISIL being a Western project to ‘overthrow the Syrian government’ or Turkey’s provocation ‘on the eve of a scheduled meeting of a Russian-Turkish group on strategic dialogue’ could be also found in Sputnik’s discourse, which increased confusion about the overall situation (results of Levada center’s survey shows that percentage of Russians, for whom it was hard to express their attitude toward Turkey increased). Besides confusion we see more specific purpose for spreading such conspiracy theories, which is an attempt to distance Turkey from NATO and the West in general (or vice versa). Such statements as ‘NATO doesn't need Turkey and it's time to ditch Ankara’ and ‘Turkey is now further away from international law and 'European values' than ever before’ is a clear attempt to emphasize that Turkey and the West cannot work together. On the one hand, the aim could be to destabilize NATO, while, on the other hand, to return Turkey as an ally. The latter might be an explanation of why Russia didn’t take more radical steps than it did against Turkey.

While in Sputnik’s discourse Turkey is an aggressor and traitor, Russia, in contrast, is shown not as a victim, but rather, as one, who is ready to response firmly to any provocations. Russian officials repeatedly stated that Turkey would face consequences, emphasizing its economic dependence on Russia. Besides number of economic sanctions imposed on Turkey by Russia (which caused another anti-Turkish information campaign in social media *#IAmNotGoingToTurkey*), Kremlin cancelled scheduled summit with Turkey, stopped mutual projects and decided to send more planes and anti-aircraft defense systems. It was followed by Sputnik’s articles about efficiency of Russian sanctions (e.g. *‘Turkey Risks Losing \$9Bln in Revenue Over Russian Crisis’*, *‘Ankara Considers Measures to Compensate Losses From Russian Restrictions’*) and power of Russian newly deployed defense systems which were a *‘stark warning*

to Turkey’ by Russia, which, at the same time, was ‘unlikely to complicate anti-ISIL efforts in Syria’. Through its discourse Sputnik presents Russia not only decisive but also a powerful opponent (this is historically important narrative for Russia). Thus, Sputnik’s columnist Alexander Mercouris called Turkey’s position ‘weak’, while Russian response was described as ‘vigorous’. He pictures Russia a reasonable, but undoubtedly strong power.

‘If something like this had happened to a US aircraft the air would now be thick with demands for vengeance. Fortunately Russia’s response — though strong — will be more measured.’

The West, in contrast, is shown as a passive side, calling for ‘de-escalation’, which can be seen as either inability or unwillingness to take serious steps against Turkey.

Sputnik formed its agenda to a great extent by interviews with ‘experts’, mostly ‘geopolitical analysts’ and former officials from different countries, including Turkey (which is especially important, since it showed that Turkish official policy has no 100% support in its own society) as well as quoting Russian officials or ‘anonymous officials’ from the West. It should be noted that Russia’s position in Sputnik’s articles was presented much broader, and usually after Turkey’s version was shortly mentioned, which created an effect of ‘the last word in the argument’. Citing different sources allowed Sputnik to select more radical statements and avoid responsibility. At the same time, Sputnik is not responsible for materials of its columnists, whose views, expressed in the article ‘do not necessarily reflect the official position of Sputnik’. The language, used in citations of former and unnamed officials, the interviews with ‘experts’ and columns was more negative and sharp than in the statements, made by high Kremlin’s and foreign officials. Overall, however, rhetoric remained the same.

Table 3. Terms used in coverage of downing of SU-24

What is characterized	Interviews with ‘Experts’, columns and quotes by unnamed and former officials	Statements by high officials	Sputnik’s journalists
Downing of Su-24, Turkey’s activities	‘act of war by Turkey’ ‘reckless criminal act’, ‘suicide mission’, ‘Erdogan’s gambit’, ‘an act of support for the	‘tragic event’, ‘the unacceptable shutdown’, ‘attack on anti-terrorism efforts’, ‘stab in the back’, ‘a blow to anti-terrorism	‘incident’, ‘tragedy’

	Islamic State terrorists’, ‘ambush’, ‘trap’, ‘planned attack’, ‘President Erdogan's act of revenge’, ‘accident’, ‘intentional provocation’, ‘NATO aggression against Russia’, ‘Murder of Su-24 pilot’.	fight’, ‘illegal act’, ‘unfriendly act’, ‘hostile act’, ‘betrayal’	
Turkey	‘mere vassal state’, ‘problem child’, ‘accomplice to the crime at the very least’	‘accomplices of terrorists’	‘Islamist-leaning Turkey’

As we can see, mostly negative words were used to characterize Turkey and its action to present the incident as an illegal act, often with emphasis on personal motives and connection to terrorism. Since the latter has highly negative connotations (after all, the nature of terrorism is to spread terror in the society) in international discourse in general (similarly to fascism), it also plays the key role in Sputnik’s and Kremlin’s discourses. Right after Su-24 was downed, Russian foreign ministry ‘warned Russian citizens against visiting Turkey amid terrorist threat’, while Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov stated that ‘the terrorist threat in Turkey is growing’.

Following Kremlin’s discourse Sputnik blurs the difference between opposition to Assad’s regime (whom Kremlin supports) and ISIL, putting both in the same context.

‘Syria has been mired in civil war since 2011, with so-called moderate opposition factions as well as extremist groups like the Islamic State.’

The word ‘opposition’ is usually taken in quotation marks, or mentioned in the combination with construction ‘so-called’ (‘so-called moderate opposition’), to place in doubt the nature of the movement. More than that, the same words are often quoted/used by Sputnik to describe Assad’s opposition (‘bunch of "moderate rebels"’, ‘Syrian rebels’, ‘jihadi allies’) and ISIL (‘rebel-terrorists’, ‘jihadists’), sometimes without even separating two (‘Ankara has been overtly supporting radical groups’). At the same time, the word ‘terrorists’ is often replaced with such concepts as ‘islamists’, ‘extremists’, ‘jihadist groups’, which makes it even more difficult to the reader to distinguish ‘so-called moderate opposition’ (or ‘Turkey-backed militants’) from ‘various extremist

groups', since both of them are fighting against Syrian governmental forces, and, according to Sputnik, 'backed by Ankara'. Using the complexity of Syrian conflict, such discourse is aimed to simplify the situation by presenting only two groups: 'Us' (Russia, Syrian governmental forces) and 'Them' (Turkey, ISIL, opposition), which also put into question the role of Western coalition (which side they really support), creating opportunities for conspiracies.

Although most of Sputnik's textual discourse consists of selected quotations and interviews, its original content is also shaped to set Kremlin's agenda. It can be seen in the way, Russian (and Russian-friendly) officials are presented in contrast to others. E.g. U.S. State Department spokesman's statement was characterized as 'playing dumb', while reaction to it by the Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson was called 'emotional response'. Especially it is evident in Sputnik's headlines (e.g. *'Getting Tough on Turkey: Kremlin Vows to Punish Ankara for Downed Jet'*, *'Turkish Account of Su-24 Downing Makes No Sense'*, *'The Sick Man of NATO: Erdogan's Madness 'Could Provoke WWII'*, *'Erdogan's Twisted Logic: S-400 Must Not Shoot Down Turkish Fighter Jets Over Syria'*, *'Not Us! Pentagon Not Involved in Downing of Russian Su-24 Aircraft'*). Alongside powerful headlines, personal emotional stories about jet pilots were published (*'Relatives of Russian Su-24 Pilot Refuse to Believe He is Dead'*, *'Rescued Su-24 Co-Pilot: I Have Debt to Repay, for My Commander'*). In Sputnik's discourse Russian pilots are presented as heroes, who were fulfilling their duty.

Sputnik turned to audience's emotions also with the help of audiovisual discourse, such as photo and video materials, as well as cartoons.

Most of the photos (except one photo report from the rally next to the Turkish embassy in Russia) were used along with the text. They could be divided into two groups, according to the function fulfilled.

First group's function was merely to illustrate the text, therefore those were usually some abstract photos, which referred to the main topic of the article (in most cases, it was a photo of the plane).

The function of the second group was to strengthen narrative of the article by creating additional reference to readers' emotions. Most of those photos depicted either president of Turkey, or president of Russian Federation. Sputnik usually chose photos, where the former would look insidious, evil or foolish, while the latter would look serious, adequate and self-confident. This is also true for other Russian officials, whose photos were used.

Video discourse on this topic was presented much less during analyzed period. Although in general Sputnik's video discourse is presented by short amateur non-political videos, aimed to entertain viewers, professional videos with troops or military equipment (mostly Russian or its allies') are published on regular basis. Usually these videos are created by RT. During the analyzed

period, majority of such videos were devoted to activities of Russian and Syrian troops in Syria (drills, planes, taking off for mission etc.), emphasizing combat capabilities of both, probably aimed to demoralize the enemy. At the same time, right after Su-24 was shot by Turkey Sputnik published amateur video of the group of militants, chanting ‘Allahu Akbar!’ right next to what looks like a dead body of Russian pilot with the headline ‘*Self-Defense Turkish Style: Shooting Unarmed Parachuting Pilot*’ and caption ‘*...does self-defense suppose shooting an unarmed pilot while he was parachuting to the earth after ejecting from his downed plane? Normal people call it murder.*’ It was followed by RT’s video of Erdogan’s effigy burned during protest in Crimea. However, it can be stated that video discourse didn’t play the major role in the analyzed information campaign against Turkey.

The same might be stated about cartoons (all of them are created by Sputnik), however their role, and the role of humor in information warfare in general, should not be underestimated. As the study by NATO StratCom COE shows, humor is an effective tool of strategic communication, which transforms and manipulates messages through simplification and structural manipulation of the content. On the one hand, it means that content becomes more understandable and therefore more attractive for the audience (communication efficiency is increased). Cartoons usually represent the most simplified messages, that is why their potential communication efficiency is higher than that of any other discourse (if the message is not over-simplified). On the other hand, ‘*several aspects that are important to the political content of the message are emphasized whereas other aspects that are not relevant are eliminated; in jokes, content is emotionally reshaped*’ (NATO StratCom COE, 2017).

Altogether 24 cartoons were published by Sputnik during analyzed period. The very first one ‘Did My Back Hurt Your Knife?’ was published on the same day, when Russian jet was downed right after Russian president described the incident as a ‘stab in the back’. It depicts strong bear, threading down ISIL, and president Erdogan in jihadist-style clothes with the knife, sneaking up behind the bear. This is a bright example of how already mentioned narratives (strong Russia, fighting terrorism, and terrorist-friendly, sneaky Turkey) are presented in the form of cartoon.

Main character of majority of cartoons (19 out of 24) was Turkish president.

Several major themes were emphasized in those cartoons:

- 1) Turkey’s connection to ISIL (e.g. protection of terrorists, helping ISIL to sell ‘stolen’ Syrian oil, providing Daesh terrorists with medical treatment, building new military base in Qatar instead of concentrating on fight against terrorism);

- 2) Turkey's failure to establish closer relations with the EU (e.g. incompatibility with EU principles like human rights, mutual insincerity, Turkey as a threat to European security, EU's unwillingness to grant Turkey with visa free travel);
- 3) Negative consequences of Turkey's policy (e.g. worsening of Turkey's image, Turkey's political and economic dependency, dramatic decrease of the number of Russian tourists);
- 4) Crisis of human rights in Turkey (e.g. 'attempt to curb freedom of speech in the country', in particular ban of Sputnik in Turkey, 'war against journalists', resignation of Turkey's Prime minister, pressure on Turkish academia);
- 5) Attempts to discredit president of Turkey personally or through his family (Erdogan's wife mistake about historical fact, the possibility that president has no higher education).

Since cartoons are part of visual discourse it is logical that visual methods were used to emphasize shaped narratives. Thus, black color was often used, especially picturing terrorists and oil. Red blood, in turn, fit the red Turkish flag. Terrorists and Erdogan were pictured unnaturally small and not proportional. In such a way they were ridiculed not only through messages of cartoons but also through their physical images.

Sputnik tried to present that its narratives are supported by public (in particular European) not only through referring to social media, but also by publishing polls, conducted for Sputnik (e.g. *'Europeans Suspect Turkey of Collaborating With Daesh'*, *'Germans, Brits Say Downing of Russian Su-24 Unjustified, US Opinion Split'*, *'Over 60% of French Citizens Consider Su-24 Downing by Ankara Unjustified'*, *'Europeans Skeptical About Turkey Joining EU'*).

Very soon after the downing of Su-24, both Kremlin and Ankara expressed their regrets about worsening of relationships. Obviously, both governments were interested in cooperation, but the image of strong countries was equally important for both of them. That is why neither Turkey nor Russia wanted to be the first ones in peace-making process, not to appear weak in the eyes of the world, but most importantly, their own citizens, which wouldn't fit the shaped image of strong leaders.

The turning point took place in April, 2016, when both sides expressed their desire to settle the crisis in their relationship. However, Kremlin wanted to look like a winner in that situation that is why it kept underlining the necessity of Turkey's apology and compensation. At that time Sputnik 'went easier' on Turkey, however it kept putting it in the weak position (e.g. *'Breaking the Ice: How Turkey Tries to Win Russia Over, 'Kremlin Reminds Erdogan What Must be Done if Turkey Hopes to Improve Relations With Russia'*). In its discourse Sputnik started concentrating

more on the investigation process of Russian's plane downing, spreading a new version, initiated by Turkish side that Turkish pilot Alparslan Celik was the one to blame, since *'Turkey allowed pilots to shoot down planes prior to Russian Su-24 downing'*. Making responsibility personal Turkey could 'save the face', that is why Celik was arrested in Turkey, while Sputnik was writing about *'Su-24 Pilot Killer's'*, who *'made decision to shoot down Russian Su-24 jet himself'*. There were also some rumors about the same pilot who *'also bombed the Turkish parliament during the coup attempt'*.

Eventually, in July, 2016 it was reported by Sputnik that Erdogan offered 'sincere apologies to Putin in pure Russian style', which marked the end of the conflict. However, although on official level the peace was made (president Putin immediately ordered talks on restoring ties), Sputnik in various ways tried to demonstrate that Turkey was the losing side in the conflict, which had no choice (*'Empty Beaches Force Ankara to Apologize for Downing Russian Jet'*, *'Gulen: Turkey Started Rapprochement With Russia Due to Lack of Options'*), but to admit its failure, which was a good lesson to other countries not to confront Russia (*'This is Why 'Getting Tough' With Russia is a Bad Idea'*, *'Lavrov on Su-24 Downing: Turkey Knows Repeat of Scenario is Impossible'*). Sputnik's cartoons also pictured Turkey as a humiliated side, which was 'taught a lesson' by Russia. It proves that the information campaign by Sputnik was going on even after the official settle of the conflict. The last material in the section about *'Russian combat pilot Slain in Syria honored with a monument'* was published on November 25, 2016.

We can conclude that intensive anti-Turkish information campaign was launched by Sputnik right after Kremlin expressed its official position on the downing of Russian plane. It had strong emphasis on the negative role of Turkish leadership and Western powers in the incident, which resulted in 56% of Russians blaming president Erdogan for downing Su-24, and 25% blaming U.S. and NATO leadership (Levada center, 2015).

Following major Kremlin's narratives, Sputnik correlated its discourse according to the changes on the political level. Considering the short period, in which Turkey changed its role in Kremlin's political discourse twice (from friend to enemy and back), it seems that information activity was the key factor to the dramatic change of public opinion rather than political re-establishment of ties by Russian and Turkish leaderships.

CONCLUSIONS

As a result of the research we accomplished the aim and carried out objectives.

- 1) Literature on information warfare, grand narratives and discourses was analyzed. It follows from the analysis that information plays key role in contemporary hybrid warfare. Moreover, disinformation is only one of the strategies, used in the course of such warfare, which involves complex of instruments, based on grand narratives, myths and ideology. The most ideologically influenced discourse is news. That is why different ideological background of different societies makes activities of international broadcasters with different versions like Sputnik especially important.
- 2) Although many researches have been done on Russian information warfare in the recent years, activities of Sputnik require special attention, since they aren't much analyzed and contain information on the latest developments in Russian information warfare.
- 3) We acquired better understanding of modern Russian information warfare. In particular, an example of Russian-Ukrainian conflict showed that information warfare doesn't only prepare a staging ground for Russian military operations, but also considered a winning tool in Russian hybrid warfare, since its main aim is to influence decisions of other states in a way so they meet Russia's interests. Since the main 'battlefield' of such warfare is mass consciousness, mass media serve as the main weapon in it. Similarly to USSR, Kremlin's model of the Information Warfare is strongly based on the use of disinformation and reflexive control, updated according to the modern conditions of the Information era (generous budget, modernization of media machine, psychological know how, exploitation of the openness of Western media to convey its messages).
- 4) The role and functions of Sputnik were characterized. Sputnik is an important institution of Russia's public diplomacy, but its activities run far beyond Western understanding of 'soft power'. Its strategy relies on confrontation of Western agenda with Kremlin's one, which allows Sputnik to position itself as an alternative source of news. Using openness and objectivity standard of Western media for its own benefit, Sputnik tries to influence foreign audiences or make them doubt, creating the atmosphere of confusion and disbelieve. Therefore the main function of Sputnik nowadays is to justify Russia's activities on the political stage and destabilize its opponents (Ukraine, EU).

- 5) Two examples of Sputnik's coverage of the events, in which Russia was involved directly or indirectly were analyzed. Case studies showed that Sputnik's discourse is constructed in line with official Kremlin's position, and aimed to fulfill its political goals.
- 6) Major Russian narratives in two case studies were identified. In the case of referendum, the most common narratives were connected to the opposition between ordinary people and EU authorities, and anti-Ukrainian and anti-EU narratives in general, while in the second case narrative of betrayal was the key one together with the attempt to present Turkey as double faced supporter of terrorism. In both cases strong anti-Western narrative was presented.
- 7) Discourse analysis helped us to describe techniques and instruments used by Sputnik in two cases. The most common ones are logical fallacies, conspiracy theories, threatening, usage of specific lexicon, imbalance in presenting opinions, selectivity in presenting facts, spreading fakes, discrediting of opponent, justifying Russian activities/position. Sputnik tried to gain credibility through quoting social media users and referring to Russian-friendly 'experts' and politicians (often former or anonymous officials) and polls results, credibility of which is questioned. Besides textual discourse, visual materials were used, in particular cartoons, aimed to ridicule opponent and simplify the ideological message.
- 8) Dynamics of discourse in the context of two events was examined. In both cases Sputnik started covering issues on the very early stage, which underlines the importance in information warfare to be the first one to comment on the situation. In the first case Sputnik's discourse was a 'preparation' to the event (the aim was to influence decision-making), while in the second one it was a 'reaction' to it (the aim was to shape public opinion on what happened), but in both cases the aim was to influence public opinion. We found out that dynamics of discourse might differ, depending on the nature of the event and chosen strategy ('preparation' or 'reaction' and country's involvement (direct or indirect)).
- 9) Analysis of empirical data shows that Russian media not only able to dramatically change public opinion in the way, beneficial for Kremlin, in the short periods of time, but also have a direct influence on international events.

Although this research doesn't solve the scientific problem, it expands our knowledge about Russian information warfare and clarify Sputnik's role in it. More than that, it gives a clear understanding that offensive strategy is more efficient in information warfare than defensive one.

That is why organizations and states who try to counter Russian propaganda and respond to Russian narratives will always be one step behind Russia. To succeed in information warfare, they need to produce their own narratives and discourses instead of merely reacting to those of Russia. Moreover, some Western core principles, vulnerable to Russian information operations, should be reconsidered. In particular, principles of freedom of speech and balance of opinions should not be exploited to the benefit of institutions like Sputnik, which operate all around the world freely, spreading anti-Western narratives on Western territories. The draft resolution by EU Parliament, which recognized Sputnik and RT as Russia's information warfare tools, is a first step in this direction, which gives us a reason for optimism.

The findings of the research might be useful for think tanks and agencies, in particular in the EU countries, and especially neighboring states to Russia, which deal with information security or strategic communication issues and working on effective information defense strategy. They can be also used for educational purposes in political, journalistic and media studies programs of higher educational institutions.

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