WAR IN UKRAINE: RUSSIAN PROPAGANDA THEMES

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  With this article, we aim to identify the propaganda themes associated with the Russian Federation in the context of the war in Ukraine and how they are formulated, based on an analysis of the articles found in the database of EUvsDisinfo (Disinfo Database) over a two-month period (August – September 2022). Propaganda themes were identified by applying two types of research: qualitative (content analysis and thematic analysis) and quantitative. The research results indicated the following Russian propaganda themes: the theme of the Zaporozhye nuclear power plant attack, the theme of Nazism and fascism, the theme of military aggression, the theme of Russian values and legality (referendum), the theme of lost sovereignty and imperialism, the theme of staging attacks/massacres, the theme of the global conspiracy and the West, the theme of the food crisis/food insecurity, the theme of Russian minority and Russophobia. The purpose of this analysis is to increase awareness regarding Russian Federation's hostile actions in the virtual space, as well as the resilience of users to online messages.

  Keywords: Russian Federation; propaganda; disinformation; Ukraine; war in Ukraine; Central and Eastern Europe.

Introduction

  The aggressive actions of the Russian Federation in Ukraine are not only taking place on the ground, but also in the information space, through propaganda and disinformation. By propaganda we mean "the systematic dissemination of ideas, theories, opinions with a political purpose, especially to win the masses over to the side of power" (Voicu 2018, 12). Closely related to propaganda, disinformation is defined by those "false or distorted information that have been carefully constructed,

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being secretly introduced into the adversary's communication system in order to deceive either decision-makers or public opinion" (Voicu 2018, 11). The link between the two briefly defined concepts resides in the fact that propaganda includes disinformation, seen as an action to manipulate/persuade a target audience in order to advance political objectives; in other words, disinformation can be considered a tool of propaganda, aiming to attack/denigrate/criticize actors on the international stage.

Throughout this paper, we will use the phrase *propaganda messages* with reference to the Russian Federation, precisely to illustrate and encompass the totality of information distortion actions, through falsification or biased presentation of them, based on multiple purposes (attracting the public, legitimization of aggressive military actions, etc.).

In the article, we aim to achieve the following objectives: the analysis of Russian propaganda themes by identifying, in the database of EUvsDisinfo (Disinfo Database), articles present on various Russian propaganda websites, directed against Central and Eastern Europe states, the USA and NATO and EU organizations; identifying the targets of Russian propaganda; identification of websites that disseminate propaganda messages and their investigation (presence on social media, number of followers, interactions with users in the online environment); detection of propaganda themes applicable to the identified states/organizations, based on the disinformation messages investigated.

1. Methodology and Steps to Obtain the Research Results

The types of research used were qualitative analysis (by analyzing messages thematically) and quantitative analysis. For the present research we used open sources, namely the EUvsDisinfo[1] database, which deals with the identification of disinformation messages of the Russian Federation. We chose this database because it provides relevant information and data and is one of the largest sources of information on the area of research interest, having indexed and identified over 14,000 disinformation messages from international and[2] national /local[3]media. The EUvsDisinfo project was developed in 2015, by the East Group StratCom of the European External Action Service, to better forecast, address and respond to Russian Federation's propaganda campaigns affecting the European Union, its Member States and countries in the common neighborhood. The main objective of EUvsDisinfo is to increase awareness and understanding of the Kremlin's propaganda operations

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[1] Available at https://euvsdisinfo.eu/disinformation-cases/

[2] As described on the web page, About section, https://euvsdisinfo.eu/about/#

[3] national / local media we mean those publications / news that reproduce local events/situations, in the language of the respective state, without having international visibility. For example, The New York Times is visible internationally, compared to the publication Gazeta de Sud, which is a regional newspaper.

and to help citizens in Europe and beyond develop resilience to propaganda and manipulation (EUvsDisinfo).

After selecting the database, we applied *criteria to narrow the search*, depending on: (1) the states/organizations that show interest in the research problem and (2) the period under research. For this purpose, Central and Eastern Europe countries[4], NATO and EU organizations and the USA were selected. We believe that the US is relevant in the current context, as it has shown its economic and diplomatic support to Ukraine since 2014, being the most important donor of humanitarian assistance to Ukraine. According to the US State Department since 2014, the United States has provided approximately $900 million in humanitarian assistance to vulnerable communities in Ukraine (www.state.gov). For this reason, we appreciate that it is obviously a target of propaganda messages in the context of the war in Ukraine. In terms of the period under investigation, we have chosen the period August 01−September 30, 2022. We have chosen this period from the perspective of the current events of the war in Ukraine, namely: the expansion of strategic and military objectives by the Russian Federation, with reference to the Kherson and Zaporizhia regions; the preparation of the referendum on the illegal annexation of the four regions in the south and east of Ukraine (Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporozhye, Kherson); decreeing partial mobilization in the Russian Federation on September 21, 2022.

After identifying the database and applying narrowing search criteria, 158 messages disseminated by Russian propaganda sites resulted. We specify that certain sites could not be accessed, especially those disseminated by RT/Sputnik in the European Union, due to restrictions and the closure of those sites.

Data coding and organization

For the organization and structuring of the data, we have divided each propaganda message according to the state and/or organization targeted by the respective messages: Ukraine; US; EU; NATO; West; states from Central and Eastern Europe.

Criteria for analyzing Russian propaganda messages

After the data organization stage, we applied several criteria for message analysis:

− *Criterion of distribution of propaganda messages* was chosen to investigate the most active social media sites/platforms/channels in terms of the spreading Russian propaganda messages;

− the language/content rendering criterion was applied to investigate the role of Russian language in the context of dissemination of propaganda messages, starting from the idea that Russian speakers and ethnic Russians can be more easily influenced based on information sent in their native language;

[4] The states were included in the research considering the definition proposed by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development for the states in the CEEC area – Central and Eastern European Countries.

− *the criterion of social media presence* of websites disseminating propaganda messages was chosen to analyze the potential for amplification and dissemination of Russian propaganda messages;

− *State/supra-state criterion*: the messages were analyzed and grouped according to the states and/or organizations targeted by propaganda messages (for example, Ukraine, Poland, US, NATO, EU). We used this criterion to observe the dynamics and preponderance of targeting a certain state in the region by the Russian Federation;

− *The thematic criterion* pursued the investigation of propaganda themes, resulting in nine Russian propaganda themes targeting Central and Eastern Europe states, in the context of the war in Ukraine.

2. Research Results

In this section, we present the research results, grouped on two dimensions: quantitative and qualitative. Thus, the quantitative dimension will indicate the total number of propaganda messages identified, as well as the most active sites/platforms through which the respective messages were disseminated. The qualitative dimension will focus on the thematic analysis of propaganda messages.

The quantitative dimension
The results of the research related to the quantitative dimension record 158 propaganda messages disseminated through 116 channels (sites/social media platforms).

• *Online platforms and number of messages disseminated*
As the size and objectives of the work do not allow us to analyze all the sites/platforms identified in the database − 116, we will consider the four most active sites identified in the EUvsDisinfo database, according to the number of messages disseminated in the selected period. Thus, we identified the following sites: (1) arabic.rt.com, (2) nabd.com, (3) RIA Novosti, (4) oroszhirek.hu. In the following, we will analyze each of these sites/platforms to indicate the number of messages disseminated, the states and the targeted organizations.

Arabic.rt.com disseminated the most propaganda messages (18) during the selected period, and the messages targeted Ukraine, the US and Europe/EU. As other studies show (Oweidat 2022), Russian propaganda in the Middle East through *arabic.rt.com* is very active, as there are several conditions that provide the opportunity for the Russian Federation to advance its foreign policy: firstly, amid historical distrust of Western news sources, the Russian Federation presents its own media as a better alternative to other Arabic-language networks and has a more receptive audience in the region than in the West.

Nabd.com disseminated 12 propaganda messages during the selected period and they targeted Ukraine, Europe/EU, the US. Nabd is a free app/platform that allows access to the latest news based on each user's personalized feed. The platform has taken the messages shared by RT into its content.

RIA Novosti disseminated 11 propaganda messages during the selected period; it is a press agency in the Russian Federation, believed to be the promoter of official Russian propaganda messages. The messages are directed against Ukraine and the European Union. It should be noted that, at this moment (November 2022), the agency's page cannot be accessed in the European Union states.

Oroszhirek.hu has promoted nine pro-Russian propaganda messages, targeting Ukraine, Poland, Romania, the European Union, and the US.
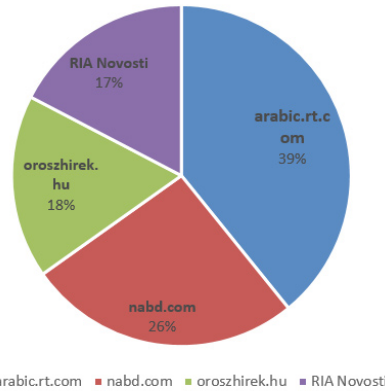
Figure no. 1: Distribution of propaganda messages according to the websites/platforms identified

• *The language criteria*

The language criterion was applied to identify the states and audience category to which Russian propaganda messages are addressed. Thus, of the 116 sites/platforms identified, Russian is the predominant language, followed by Arabic, Hungarian and Spanish. Propaganda messages in the Russian language and about *the Russian World* (*ruskiy mir*) are particularly aimed at countries with significant Russian-speaking minorities. The purpose of using the Russian language in advancing propaganda messages is to create and deepen the connection between these communities and the Russian Federation, by encouraging the self-identification of citizens of other states with Russia. This category includes countries such as Latvia, Estonia, Ukraine, Lithuania and Moldova, where Russian-speaking communities represent between 4 and 25% of the population (Coolican 2021, 6).
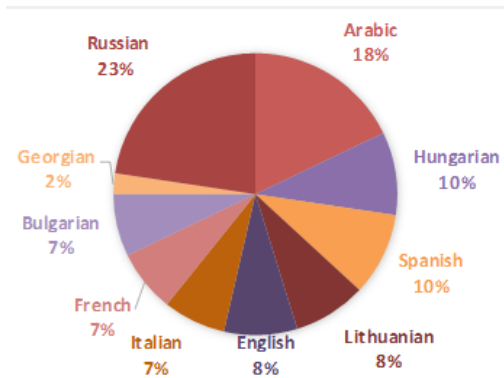
Figure no. 2: Language criteria of propaganda messages

• *Potential for amplifying propaganda messages depending on social media activity/presence of identified sites*

We consider it important to investigate this aspect in order to understand the connection between the propaganda messages used and the number of platforms that can be targeted for exploitation. Therefore, within highly digitized societies within which a multitude of platforms are used, they are inevitably exposed to greater risk due to the diversity of messages that can be used to reach a wider audience. (Bokša 2019, 2)

Orszhinek.hu is present on the Facebook/Meta, Twitter, VKontakte, Telegram and YouTube. Note that the website has also been ranked by other researchers as being among the most influential in Hungary in terms of the impact of messages on the population (Bartha 2018) and as a source of disinformation (Šuplata 2016). *Arabic. rt.com* is present on almost all social media platforms: Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Twitter, Telegram, VKontakte, Rutube, YouTube. *RIA Novosti*, the press agency controlled by the government of the Russian Federation, had at the beginning of October 2022 more than 2.2 million followers on Facebook and Instagram, millions of subscribers on Telegram, followers on TikTok, subscribers on VKontakte and Rutube. The *Nabd.com* platform is also present on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

Table no. 1: Social media presence
of the identified sites

Platform	Arabic.rt.com	RIA Novosti	Orszhinek.hu	Nabd.com
Facebook (Likes/Followers)	15,000,000	2,200,000	160,000	1,700,000
Twitter (followers)	5,000,000	No data available	1,400	300,000
Instagram	1,600.000	1,000,000	-	288,000
YouTube	2,500	-	-	-
Rutube	1,000	30,000	-	-
VKontakte	100,000	3,000,000	1,200	-
TikTok	1,000	1,000,000	-	-
Telegram	30,000	2,000,000	12,000	-

• *State criterion*

Regarding the 158 messages identified in the EUvsDisinfo database, the most (156) targeted Ukraine, followed by the US, EU, NATO, Poland.

Table no. 2: Russian propaganda messages
and targeted states/organizations

Targeted state/ organization	Examples of Russian propaganda messages	Number of propaganda messages in which each state/organization was mentioned
Ukraine	"Ukraine is a non-sovereign state, ruled either by the US or other European states." "Ukraine supplies grain to European states in exchange for weapons and is responsible for the food crisis in Africa." "Ukraine is committing atrocities against its own people." "Ukraine plans to attack Zarapozhie nuclear power plant ." "Ukraine is a Nazi, corrupt, terrorist state dependent on the US."	156
US	"US Develops Biological Weapons on Russia's Border." "The US and the West are waging a hybrid war against Russia in Ukraine." "The US and Britain have created their own army in Ukraine."	61
EU	"EU sanctions hurt Europe more than Russia." "EU citizens ask it to stop supporting Ukraine." "Europe has become a US military and political colony." "Fascist EU sanctions against Russia prove that European countries are no longer democratic."	50
NATO	"NATO is creating the pretext for a world war." "NATO is directly involved and is on the Ukrainian side." "Soldiers fighting under the Ukrainian flag are citizens of NATO member states."	16
Poland	"Poland plans to impose control over agriculture and other sectors of Ukraine's economy." "Poland will annex territories from Ukraine."	10
Romania	"Ukraine controls territories that belong to other countries. Ukraine exists within unnatural borders. Transcarpathia should be ceded to Hungary, Galicia to Poland, Bucovina to Romania, Donbass and Crimea to Russia."	2
Letvia	"Russian citizens are segregated in public transport in Riga."	3
Hungary	"The head of the European Commission threatened Italian, Hungarian and Polish citizens."	3
Moldavia	"Moldova decided to ban flights to Moscow, under pressure from Kiev."	1

Source: EUvsDisinfo Review

Qualitative dimension – thematic analysis of Russian propaganda messages
After selecting and organizing the studied messages in the database, the next step was to identify recurrent themes, to which the propaganda messages found in the EUvsDisinfo database were subsumed. For this, we identified the frequency of occurrence of key terms in the titles of the propaganda messages, in the following form: nuclear/Zaporozhe, Nazism/fascism, military aggression, referendum, lost sovereignty, massacre, conspiracy, food crisis/food insecurity, Russian minority/ Russophobia.

We have chosen thematic analysis because it is a type of qualitative research, which allows the investigation and analysis of a large set of data. It is a research method through which themes identified in a data set can be identified, analyzed, organized and described (Braun and Clarke 2006). Thematic analysis is also useful for summarizing key features of a large data set and helps the researcher structure the data to produce an organized paper (King 2004). In the present case, the propaganda messages found on EUvsDisinfo were structured in the form of themes, detailed below. A theme is an abstract entity that gives meaning and identity to a recurring experience and its varied manifestations. As such, a theme captures and unifies the nature or basis of experience into a meaningful whole (King, 362). In the context of the war in Ukraine, the identification of propaganda themes facilitates our understanding of the Russian Federation's foreign policy strategy and objectives.
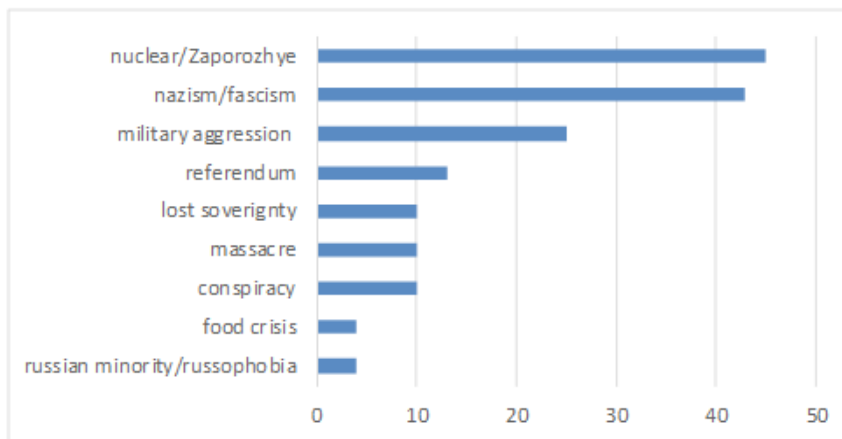

Figure no. 3: Frequency of key terms, subsumed by propaganda themes

Thus, we identified nine themes of Russian propaganda messages, as follows**:** (1) *the theme of the nuclear attack −Zaporizhia power plant;* (2) *the theme of Nazism and fascism;* (3) *the theme of military aggression;* (4) *the issue of Russian values and legality (referendum); (5) the theme of lost sovereignty and imperialism; (6) the theme of staged attacks and massacres; (7) the theme of global conspiracy and the West;* (8) *the theme of food crisis/insecurity;* (9) *the theme of Russian minority and Russophobia.*

The theme of the nuclear attack – the Zaporizhye plant

Zaporizhia nuclear power plant is a central point of interest for Russian propaganda, with messages targeting Ukraine or Western states. The Russian Federation's rhetoric on the nuclear issue is repetitive and emphasizes the Russian

state's immediate readiness to use nuclear weapons. However, the intent of use can only be at the declarative level, with the ultimate goal being to induce fear among the population. The impact of these threats is based on the Russian Federation's extensive network of influence in other states, which perpetuates the nuclear rhetoric. (Arndt and Horovitz 2022)

This propaganda narrative that Ukrainian forces want to destroy the Zaporozhye nuclear power plant is designed to distract the public from the real perpetrators of war atrocities. Ukrainian authorities have accused the Russian Federation of dangerous actions that could cause a nuclear catastrophe. (EUvsDisinfo)

In a report dated August 3, 2022, the Institute for the Study of War (ISW, 03/08/2022) believes that Russian forces are exploiting the general fear of a nuclear disaster in Ukraine in order to diminish the military support offered by Western states to the Ukrainian army. At the same time, the director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), Rafael Grossi, declared on August 3 that the nuclear power plant in Ukraine, which is currently occupied by Russian forces, is "completely out of control" and that "all principles of nuclear security have been violated" (Lederer, August 3, 2022). Subsequently, the EU High Representative, Joseph Borrell, in a Twitter postdated August 6, 2022[5], condemned Russia's military activities in Zaporozhye and labeled them as a serious and irresponsible violation of nuclear security rules and another example of Russia's non-compliance with international norms.

The theme of Nazism and fascism

Concepts related to World War II, Nazism and fascism are used by the Russian Federation to accuse Ukraine of being ruled by Nazi leaders. The importance of World War II as a symbolic resource of nation-building has been noted by some scholars. (Malinova 2014) The accusation of "fascism/Nazism" is a way of appealing to the values of the Russian population, who associate World War II with fascist horrors and crimes. (Cottiero, și alții 2015)

The fascist label has been attached to the Ukrainian government and Ukrainian soldiers by Russian media since 2014, in the context of ultra-nationalist movements in the Euro Maidan protests. Through Russian propaganda messages, Ukraine is repeatedly referred to as a Nazi country and as using symbols of Nazism. In a Russian propaganda show, a video was broadcast [6]showing white crosses, which the broadcast considered to be Nazi symbols on Ukrainian army tanks. In reality, the white crosses shown in the video are not Nazi symbols. Such crosses were often depicted on the flags of various Cossack regiments. (EUvsDisinfo, 09/08/2022, No. 308) Unlike

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[5] Available at https://twitter.com/JosepBorrellF/status/1555858270589538305
[6] Available at https://all-make.net/polnyj-kontakt-s-vladimirom-solovyovym-ot-08-09-2022.html - (between 01:06:05 and 01:06:27)

these white crosses, the German crosses on tanks and other military equipment were distinct. In reality, crosses of various colours and shapes are widespread symbols in Christian nations around the world. They are present during religious ceremonies and are present on national flags and coats of arms or in other spheres of public life. (EUvsDisinfo, 09/08/2022, no. 308)

The theme of military aggression

Military aggression is attributed in particular to NATO, which is considered to be directly involved in the war in Ukraine. This is a recurring Russian propaganda narrative, which claims that Alliance forces are directly involved in the "special military operation". Both before and during the war in Ukraine, disinformation messages have sought to distort NATO's image and reputation both within member states and abroad. These messages are an attempt to justify Russian military failures and to downplay the role of the Ukrainian armed forces, presenting the military conflict as a war with NATO. (EUvsDisinfo)

The theme of Russian values and legality (referendum)

While in other themes previously developed, the messages discredited or were in a negative register, the propaganda messages that support the actions and foreign policy lines of the Russian Federation consider it to be the liberating state of the Ukrainian territories. These narratives portray the Russian Federation as a liberator state, conducting legitimate military actions.

In the context of holding referendums, the Russian Federation is trying to justify the annexation of Ukrainian territories by claiming that the inhabitants of these regions want to join the Russian Federation freely and that the referendum is legal (a view presented by sites such as bgr.news-front.info). This is an attempt to legitimize its illegal military control and aims to forcibly change Ukraine's borders, in violation of the UN Charter and the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine. (EUvsDisinfo) At the same time, through this narrative, Russian propaganda seeks to manipulate public opinion regarding the reality of the unfolding of events. In reality, voters are being coerced into voting, the BBC reports. The EU High Representative, Joseph Borrell, condemned the decision to hold a referendum, stating that the EU would not recognize "these illegal votes" as they do not express the free will of the people living in these regions. Other messages supporting the actions of the Russian Federation emphasize that it strictly respects humanitarian law and only strikes military targets, or that the military actions are in full compliance with the UN Charter.

Another propaganda narrative that attempts to emphasize the superiority of Russian culture and language is that by which Russia claims that it must purify the Ukrainian language by eliminating totalitarian and terrorist influences and that the Ukrainian language is an artificial creation (EUvsDisinfo).

The theme of lost sovereignty and imperialism

Within this theme, the US, NATO and the EU are discredited and portrayed as sovereign over other states within the European Union. Another state with imperial ambitions is considered to be Poland. Through propaganda messages, Ukraine's statehood and independence is contested, presenting Poland as a country with imperial ambitions. Also, messages about the Western strategy to create a joint Poland-Ukraine state, disseminated by websites such as ukraina.ru, RIA, geworld.ge, have also been identified. We believe that the objective of these propaganda narratives is to create a sense of distrust between Ukraine and Poland and other Western states supporting Ukraine.

As for Ukraine, Russian propaganda messages claim that it has lost its sovereignty and the country's president is under the control of other political leaders in France, Germany or the US. (belvpo.com, 08/31/2022)

Theme of staging attacks/massacres

This is a recurring theme through which Russian propaganda messages attempt to relativize the actions of the Russian military in Ukraine. These messages are an attempt to deflect responsibility from the Russian Federation for the massacres committed by the Russian armed forces during the occupation of the Kharkov region, actions proven by forensic teams and witnesses. (EUvsDisinfo)

Contrary to this propaganda theme, not only Ukrainian soldiers, but also several civilians were tortured and execute. A similar pattern has been observed in other areas under Russian occupation. On September 23, the UN Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine presented its conclusions, after investigations in four regions: Kyiv, Kharkov, Sumy and Chernihiv; from these it appears that the Russian Federation committed multiple war crimes during the invasion.

The theme of global conspiracy and the West

The global conspiracy theme is an inherent element of the Russian propaganda system, having a negative impact on critical thinking skills by undermining the public's trust in objective information, leading to low resilience to propaganda. For example, in the present research, we have identified a conspiratorial message[7] that portrays a global elite inciting ethnic conflict to save its decadent hegemony. This is a recurring Russian propaganda narrative that seeks to discredit liberal democracies by claiming that the latter are in reality systems run by "globalist elites" and "shadow governments" that subjugate and manipulate the masses by disintegrating communities and by deepening ethnic divisions in society. (www.geopolitika.ru) The article's message about Western elites' supposed subservience to "international financiers" is also consistent with recurring pro-Russian propaganda

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[7] Available in Italian at https://www.geopolitika.ru/it/article/latlantismo-sbagliato-memoria-di-darya-2

narratives about all-powerful global elites or secret elites who rule the world and control political leaders.

Another topic identified within this theme is built around the assassination of Daria Dughina, a context in which the Western secret services, along with Ukraine, are accused of plotting and her assassination. Messages have been disseminated by sites such as *www.svpressa.ru* and *www.geworld.ge*

The theme of food crisis/insecurity

Under this theme, Russian propaganda messages claim that the economic sanctions imposed on the Russian Federation in the context of the war of aggression against Ukraine caused the food crisis. In reality, Moscow is responsible for the global food crisis as a result of the war in Ukraine: the naval blockade of Ukrainian ports, the bombing of transport infrastructure and the bombing of food storage facilities. The Russian Federation's invasion of Ukraine has serious consequences for global agriculture and food security. Russian media and officials attempt to deflect attention from the Russian Federation's responsibility for increasing global food insecurity. (US Department of State 2022)

The worsening food crisis due to the war has also generated intense concerns at European level. The President of the European Council, Charles Michel, said at the World Food Security Summit in September 2022 that "food security is the main challenge facing the world today. The current world food crisis is exacerbated by Russia's war against Ukraine". (www.consilium.europa.eu)

"The Russian Federation is instrumentalizing the food crisis and launching propaganda and disinformation messages for ideological purposes, using the mass media and diplomats' speeches" (Mario Morales, Diálogo, 2022). Russian warships are blockading Ukrainian ports in the Black Sea, preventing grain exports, posing a risk to global food supply chains. The invasion of Ukraine by Russia has generated a global food crisis that could last for several years. (UN, 2022)

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has destabilized global food markets and driven up food prices due to increased costs of production, transportation and cargo insurance. At the same time, the Russian Federation has attacked and destroyed substantial food stocks. In reality, EU sanctions are directed against the Russian government, financial sector and economic elites, and target the Russian Federation's ability to finance military aggression. Russia's agricultural sector is not targeted. The US also exempts transactions in food, agricultural products and medical supplies from sanctions (EUvsDisinfo).

The theme of the Russian minority and Russophobia

Against the backdrop of protecting the Russian minority, Russian propaganda actively promotes messages justifying its aggressive military actions, including

the invasion of Ukraine, or accusing other states of violating human rights and the Russian-speaking minority. For example, in this research, we identified a disinformation message about public transport in Riga (Latvia), according to which Russian citizens are segregated in public transport and are not allowed to sit in the front rows of public transport. These disinformation messages were promoted by sites such as *sport24.ru* or *ren.tv.* Therefore, Latvia is accused of violating the human rights of the Russian-speaking minority, although the managers of the transport company in Riga (Rigas Satiksme) have denied the information and qualified the action as provocation. (Myth Detector, September 2022)

Another type of message identified in the current research is subsumed under the same type of argumentation, according to which Russian citizens are discriminated: in schools in Ukraine, students would be taught to report their parents and children to tell the teacher if the family has relatives in Russia and if the parents speak Russian. This type of message has been disseminated on various pro-Russian websites: *donpress.ru*[8]; *rg.ru* , as well as on the Twitter platform. According to the disinformation message, children are encouraged to immediately report if their parents watch Russia TV programs if their parents talk negatively about Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky.

Conclusions

Currently, in Ukraine, Russian propaganda is directed not only against the Ukrainian state, but also against Central and Eastern Europe states, as well as NATO, the EU and the US. The main difference from the pre-war period is that the entire propaganda system is much more active in disseminating propaganda and disinformation messages. Through the Internet (social media platforms, mass media, online channels), the Russian Federation promotes propaganda messages in the context of the war in Ukraine with the aim of changing the perception of the internal and external public regarding the unfolding events, but also with the aim of creating the appearance of legitimacy of its actions, including through the instrumentalization of visual content from the online environment. The Russian Federation aims to (re) assert the Russian identity in the public space, sending discrediting messages to Western nations and trans-Atlantic structures in the context of the war in Ukraine.

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