

REPORT

Anti-Democratic Propaganda in Bulgaria

Part One.
News Websites and Print Media:
2013 – 2016
Quantitative Research

Human and Social Studies Foundation –
Sofia, 2017



**AMERICA FOR
BULGARIA
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**American
optimism
meets
Bulgarian
potential**

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INTRODUCTION

ANTI-DEMOCRATIC PROPAGANDA

1. POPULISM AND ANTI-DEMOCRATIC PROPAGANDA: KEY CONCEPTS

Over the last ten years or so, the world has witnessed the emergence of a common “populist front” that is opposed to the values and institutions of liberal democracy which seemed to have no alternative for almost two decades.¹ A repertoire of clichés has also emerged – a **primitive propaganda language** used by different actors to criticize and undermine:

- The global international order based on the regulative idea of human rights (an order that prioritizes human rights over national sovereignty, while populism inverts the relationship between the two, denouncing human rights as a “smokescreen” that serves to secure the “hegemony of the West” and to promote private and corporate interests through “double standards”);
- To undermine, on the geopolitical plane, also the alleged “hegemony of the West” – most often, of the US as global political and economic leader, of NATO as a military alliance, and of the EU as a supranational political union – all of them identified as “villains” because of their ability to “impose” the international legal order and values of liberal democracy;
- To undermine political and economic elites at the global and national levels – contesting the “representativeness” of the elites vis-à-vis the people as well as “meritocracy” as their legitimating principle;² and hence:
- Propaganda formulas are used to undermine the institutions of representative democracy (political parties, stigmatized as “oligarchic structures” or “corporations”), civil society in the individual nation-states (the NGO sector and

¹ The populist front is a “historico-discursive formation” in the sense of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (Hegemony and Socialist Strategy, London and New York: Verso, 1985). See the analyses by Chantal Mouffe (“The populist moment”, Open Democracy, 21 November 2016 <<https://www.opendemocracy.net/democraciaabierta/chantal-mouffe/populist-moment>>), and Nancy Fraser (“The End of Progressive Neoliberalism”, Dissent, 2 January 2017 <https://www.dissentmagazine.org/online_articles/progressive-neoliberalism-reactionary-populism-nancy-fraser>).

² See Ivan Krastev, “The Rise and Fall of European Meritocracy”, The New York Times, 17 January 2017 <<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/17/opinion/the-rise-and-fall-of-european-meritocracy.html? r=0>>.

civic movements, stigmatized as “professional protesters” and “foreign agents”), and liberalism as a cultural and political model of behavior (“tolerasty”).

Also under attack is “political correctness” understood both as general support of the values of liberal democracy and as a civilized model of linguistic behavior.

Insofar as the populist front undermines the basic principles and institutions of liberal democracy listed above, we define it as **anti-democratic** and **anti-liberal**.

Insofar as the various populist formulas fall in sync with each other, turning into a primitive subversive language used by different actors in different contexts for different concrete practical purposes, but **invariably in the mode of discrediting liberal-democratic principles and institutions**, we define it as anti-democratic propaganda.

In addition, we view **propaganda language as a free resource** that can be and is **used randomly and unsystematically**, but that can also be **harnessed in a relatively consolidated and state-controlled propaganda machine, as is the case with Russian propaganda today**.

The formation of contemporary anti-democratic propaganda, however, is neither a linear process nor the work of an “evil conspiratorial genius”. On the global plane, a common propaganda language began to be formed after the global financial crisis of 2008. Its formulas are borrowed from different previous contexts – above all from the radical left critique of capitalism and from the populist right (ethno-nationalist) critique of cosmopolitan liberal democracy. In the last decade, though, these conflicting political formulas have begun to lose their mutual tensions, entering into a mode of synthetic interrelationship. This is precisely how the **common populist front of propaganda** has been formed.

Elements and figures of propaganda language – above all through the criticism of political and economic elites and of their “oligarchic” connection – can be found in the large-scale protest movements – from the Arab Spring and Occupy (2011) to the protests in Russia (2011–2012) and those in Sofia and Istanbul (2013) to Ukraine’s “Euromaidan” (2014). Elements and figures of this language can be found also in the discourse of the political regimes that crushed or tried to neutralize those protests – above all, by accusing the protesters that the protests were not spontaneous but “paid-for behind the scenes” and “orchestrated from the outside”. Elements and figures of this language can be found also in the rhetoric of populist parties and movements in Europe and America, regardless of whether they position themselves on the left or on the right of the political spectrum: from Spain’s Podemos and Greece’s Syriza to Marine Le Pen, Nigel Farage, Viktor Orbán,

and Jarosław Kaczyński. Brexit as well as the “Trumpization” of American politics – from Donald Trump’s “America first!” to his condemnation of “professional protesters” and mainstream media – are also part of the regime of populist propaganda.³

What all those disparate actors and voices have in common is that the traditional leftist anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist rhetoric often merges with the anti-globalist rhetoric of the nationalists, forming the image of a global hegemon: the cosmopolitan political and economic elites, personified most often by the US, Wall Street, Brussels, or Angela Merkel, among others. The victim of this hegemon is “the people” understood both in “leftist” (“the economically oppressed”) and “rightist” (the local, rooted, entrenched people conceived of as a primordial “sovereign ethnic nation”) terms. Thus, the “ordinary” people who are economically oppressed and left behind by globalization (“the people”) are viewed as inherently opposed to the cosmopolitan global elites (the villains of “liberalism”).

The emergence of the new common propaganda language shows a radical shift of the frontline of political confrontations from the traditional left/right divide, which has been blurred, to confrontation along the lines of globalism/localism, cosmopolitanism/isolationism, and liberal individualism/collective identities.

The emergence of a common discursive front of criticism of liberal democracy is by no means accidental, though. It is undoubtedly a reaction **to real social problems** – to the way economic and political relations (capitalism and the economy, most generally) have been developing in a globalizing world. The following key factors can be pointed out as causes for its emergence:

- The decline of the welfare state and the growth of inequalities in contemporary (including Western) societies;⁴
- The growth of job insecurity, but also the general fear caused by the difficulty people have in finding their bearings in an increasingly complex and rapidly changing world;
- The fear of the unknown “others”, exacerbated by the migrant crisis and the growth of terrorism;

³ All of them being part of the common populist march: see Fareed Zakaria, “Populism on the March: Why the West Is in Trouble” *Foreign Affairs*, 17 October 2016 <<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2016-10-17/populism-march>>.

⁴ On the growth of inequalities in individual societies and the convergence of individual countries at the global level, see Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, translated by Arthur Goldhammer, Cambridge, MA, and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014.

- The difficulty – at present bordering on impossibility – of bridging the gap between political and economic globalization, that is, the lack of mechanisms for effective political control by citizens and by national and supranational institutions over global financial and corporate capital;
- The process of economic convergence at the global level (whose pace is inversely proportional to the growth of inequalities in societies), in which the US and Europe are gradually losing their economic and military hegemony, and hence, their ability to impose a liberal international order; and many others.

If the rise of the populist front has come as a reaction to real problems, why do we define it as propaganda?

Because it does not provide real solutions to those problems. Contemporary populist propaganda operates by the **principle of maximal simplification** of complex social problems. In fact, propaganda operates through the figure of conspiracy: **villain/puppet-master – puppets – victim.**

The conspiratorial grammar of propaganda is simple, although it is constantly complexified semantically by the assignment of new meanings (through analogies) and by shifts in contexts. It operates **negatively** – on the **principle of discrediting** opponents. That is why it feeds on **people’s feelings of dissatisfaction and injustice.** It draws its power from **articulating the feeling of injustice in the simplest possible way:** pointing out the “**arch-villain**” and exposing “**his protégés**”. In this way, it creates a **simplified black-and-white picture of the world** – it pretends that it is explicitly pointing out the “bad guys”, while most often only implying who “the good guys” are (although the picture constantly varies and there is a constant switching of roles). By using simple and seemingly explicit language, it creates a feeling of “sincerity” and “truthiness” – unlike the complex language of “political correctness” or the inevitable complexity of any “expertise”. Contemporary propaganda is directly linked to the tabloidization of the media – through its “sound bites” and expressive language, it operates in the mode of “sensation” and “scandal”. It is precisely in the **simplification of the picture** (and not so much in direct lies – “fake news”) as well as **in the refusal to differentiate reality that the falsity of propaganda is to be found at the basic level:**

Maximal simplification – through analogies, but not through differentiation – is a basic characteristic of contemporary propaganda. Maximal simplification also means maximal falsification.⁵

The simplicity of propaganda-conspiratorial formulas is the main reason for the rapid dissemination of and social receptiveness to propaganda today (amplified by the tabloidization of the media and by social networks).

Contemporary propaganda is wholly **negative – this is what distinguishes it from social critique**. Propaganda **offers neither differentiated nor positive solutions to complex problems** (the solutions it offers are negative – “disbanding NATO”, “leaving the EU”, “closing borders to migrants” are part of its practical implications, which differ only by degree from more radical and very dangerous but equally simple “solutions”: “exterminating migrants, Gypsies, Jews”, “annihilating global capitalism”, etc.). In addition, contemporary anti-democratic propaganda **does not offer an alternative, different from the liberal, positive image of “the people”** – at least not anything essentially different from a (larger or smaller) dose of **authoritarianism “in the name of the people”**. Thus, unlike twentieth-century Nazi and communist propaganda, contemporary propaganda is **less ideological**.⁶ Similarly to Nazi and communist propaganda, though, it is directly **collectivistic** – and this is what distinguishes it from advertising. Similarly, it cannot appeal to the collective body of the people without fuelling **fear** – without constantly inventing **the enemy** (the West, the US, migrants, Gypsies, global capital, etc.). It is **militant** although it invariably declares that the threat of war comes from “the others”.

⁵ If we apply Karl Popper’s criterion for distinguishing science from pseudoscience (see Karl Popper, “Science as Falsification”, in *Conjectures and Refutations*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963, pp. 33–39), we will find that contemporary propaganda creates a mythic and false picture of reality because it itself is not falsifiable. Through astrology and/or conspiracy theories you can explain everything and you can never be wrong, because there is no criterion for “error”.

⁶ From this definition we exclude the propaganda of “radicalized Islam”, which ought to be the subject of another study.

Although for the time being anti-democratic propaganda operates above all subversively at the discursive level, and although even in countries like Russia, Turkey and Hungary, where this process is most advanced, basic democratic institutions are still being preserved, at least for appearance's sake, the possibility for destruction of the key institutions of liberal democracy nevertheless exists.

The big risks posed by anti-democratic propaganda are the following:

- Creation of an environment of public cynicism of the “They’re all scoundrels!” type. Hence, distrust towards any general principles, values and institutions whatsoever, and suspension of the rule of law at the international and national levels – replacement of the power of right with the power of might;
- De-institutionalization of the democratic mechanisms of the separation of powers and their mutual checks and balances, including possible rejection of parliamentarianism;
- Silencing and discrediting of civil society as an agonistic environment for free and competitive definition of the common good;
- Creeping authoritarianism of a populist or “referendum” type.

The risks for Bulgaria, in particular, are that:

- Public opinion is being prepared for Bulgaria’s exit from the EU and NATO;
- The judicial reform and all efforts at democratic imposition of the rule of law are being systematically blocked.

Of course, contemporary anti-democratic propaganda could also have a positive effect, albeit indirectly: if its pressure compels the liberal-democratic institutions to address much more directly the real social problems that engender feelings of injustice which it feeds on. Only such an adequate response could block its eroding power at the value- and institutional-democratic levels.

We must say at the very beginning, however, that:

Anti-democratic propaganda in Bulgaria is pro-Russian (there is also a very weak “Russophobic” propaganda trend). **Bulgarian pro-Russian propaganda, however, should be distinguished from official Russian propaganda.**

Undoubtedly, in the last decade Russia has played a crucial role in the transformation of the messages of populism into a common propaganda language. It is precisely the Russian media, which were again placed under the control of the Kremlin after 2000,⁷ that have contributed the most to the convergence of the various propaganda clichés into a common front – anti-Western, anti-American, and anti-liberal – reminiscent of the language from before the end of the Cold War and capable of playing the role of a propaganda weapon (in a new “hybrid” or “information” war). This propaganda front was maximally activated after the annexation of Crimea.

A number of studies and reports published by international institutions (NATO,⁸ the EU⁹) as well as by non-governmental organizations analyze the problem of Russia’s “hybrid war” against the West and of the use of propaganda and disinformation in it. Most of those studies, however, do not make a clear distinction between Russian foreign “policy”, Russian “influence”, and Russian “propaganda”, and often mix up the three terms. A number of studies include case studies of countries, usually focusing on “Russia’s influence in the respective country”. Bulgaria most often does not figure in these studies, with two important exceptions: Dimitar Bechev’s analysis on “Russia’s Influence in Bulgaria”,¹⁰ and *The Kremlin Playbook*¹¹ by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in Washington, DC, and the Center for the Study of Democracy (CSD) in Sofia. Both studies attempt to evaluate the degree of penetration of Russian interests (which are mainly economic) in Bulgaria.

The analysis of the image of Bulgaria in Russian media, specially conducted within the framework of our study,¹² shows that Bulgaria is not a central target of the Kremlin’s official propaganda channels – it is, rather, peripherally inscribed into the general strategy for undermining NATO and the EU. In other words, it is possible to identify common propaganda figures in the image of Bulgaria in the Russian media along with those of the West, the EU, and NATO. Apart from them, there are also several specific topics related to Bulgaria, which regularly appear in Russian state-owned media and tabloids and which are addressed at Russian audiences and readers. There is, however, a propaganda framework that is “made” in Bulgaria and that can be characterized as “pro-

⁷ See Olga Khvostunova, “A Brief History of the Russian Media”, *The Interpreter*, 6 December 2013 <<http://www.interpretermag.com/a-brief-history-of-the-russian-media/>>.

⁸ See, e.g., The NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, *The Kremlin and Daesh Information Activities*, October 2016 <<http://www.stratcomcoe.org/kremlin-and-daesh-information-activities>>.

⁹ See, e.g., East StratCom Task Force, “COMMENTARY: Means, goals and consequences of the pro-Kremlin disinformation campaign”, *Disinformation Review*, 19 January 2017 <<https://euvsdisinfo.eu/commentary-means-goals-and-consequences-of-the-pro-kremlin-disinformation-campaign/>>.

¹⁰ Available at: <http://europeanreform.org/files/ND-report-RussiaInfluenceInBulgaria-preview-lo-res_FV.pdf>.

¹¹ Available at: <<https://www.csis.org/analysis/kremlin-playbook>>.

¹² See “Bulgaria and Russian Propaganda” in the full text of the forthcoming Report II.

Russian”. Bulgarian pro-Russian propaganda occasionally becomes a source for materials in the Russian media. When these, in turn, fall into the focus of attention of Bulgarian media, the information in them is “relayed back” to Bulgarian audiences and readers, and its effect is amplified. Although there is no doubt that there is strong Russian “influence” in Bulgaria, the existing local-Bulgarian propaganda in fact serves to divert attention away from Russia’s economic influence, and not vice versa.¹³ The reason for this is that Russia’s influence in Bulgaria – which is precisely economic – spans the whole political spectrum and has deeply penetrated the Bulgarian business community. In this sense, our study is focused not on Russian propaganda as such, but on the Bulgarian media outlets that are disseminating “pro-Russian” views as a form of disinformation whose aim is to exert influence on the political process in Bulgaria.

2. OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE OF THE STUDY ON ANTI-DEMOCRATIC PROPAGANDA IN BULGARIA

The objectives of this study are to identify and analyze:

- the specific language of anti-democratic propaganda in Bulgaria;
- its main talking points;
- its emergence and exponential growth over time (2013 – 2016);
- the media outlets and authors disseminating anti-democratic propaganda in Bulgaria, as well as their types;
- their sources and dissemination networks

The object of studies on contemporary propaganda is, as a rule, media and social networks. This field, however, is too broad even when it is limited to a particular country and to a small language such as Bulgarian. That is why it was limited further from the outset to newspapers and news websites registered in Bulgaria and published in Bulgarian.

The reasons for this choice are the following:

- ✓ an accessible archive of publications since 2013 which, moreover, is digitalized (including for the majority of newspapers) and suitable for direct quantitative processing;

¹³ See Tom Junes, “Bulgaria: how not to mistake Russian propaganda for Russian policy”, openDemocracy, 30 November 2016 <<https://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/tom-junes/bulgaria-how-not-to-mistake-russian-propaganda-for-russian-policy>>.

- ✓ newspapers and news websites are the main producer of media content that is then disseminated both by television and radio stations, and by Facebook and other social networks;
- ✓ newspapers and news websites are economically the most vulnerable in the present situation of the media market in Bulgaria. As a CSD study on *Media and Political Influence* (in Bulgarian) has shown, their revenues from both sales of print copies and advertising have been falling steadily and drastically since 2002 (advertising is moving to national television stations and Facebook).¹⁴ In practice, nowadays this media segment cannot pay its way and, in the absence of sufficient forms of public financing, is vulnerable to shady forms of financing – and hence, to infiltration of bad journalistic practices and propaganda messages.

3. METHODOLOGY AND TOOLKIT

Here we present the data from the first phase of the study: main figures of anti-democratic propaganda and their media dissemination in Bulgaria in the period between 1 January 2013 and 31 December 2016. For the purpose of this study, an integrated research approach was developed, including the following:

- ✓ Press-clipping;
- ✓ Measuring the frequency of use of anti-democratic propaganda language;
- ✓ Typological sample of media outlets for content analysis;
- ✓ Analysis of media content.

This integrated research approach was realized in the following activities:

ACTIVITY 1: PILOT STUDY OF MEDIA CONTENT, aimed at:

- ✓ Identifying the main talking points (semantic clusters) of anti-democratic propaganda, on the basis of which to design a press-clipping matrix and codes for quantitative analysis of the Bulgarian media landscape;
- ✓ Identifying media outlets that systematically disseminate anti-democratic propaganda;
- ✓ Categorizing them into types, on the basis of which to draw a sample for standardized research (press-clipping) and content analysis.

¹⁴ Center for the Study of Democracy, *Medii i politicheskoto vliyanie*, 2016
<<http://www.csd.bg/artShowbg.php?id=17659>>.

ACTIVITY 2: MEASURING THE FREQUENCY OF USE OF ANTI-DEMOCRATIC PROPAGANDA LANGUAGE IN THE PERIOD BETWEEN 1 JANUARY 2013 AND 31 DECEMBER 2016, CONDUCTED WITH THE SENSIKA SYSTEM.

ACTIVITY 3: TYPOLOGICAL SAMPLE OF MEDIA OUTLETS FOR FULL PRESS-CLIPPING AND CONTENT ANALYSIS.

ACTIVITY 4: FULL PRESS-CLIPPING AND CONTENT ANALYSIS OF 3,305 PUBLICATIONS IN EIGHT TYPOLOGICALLY DIFFERENT MEDIA OUTLETS.

DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITIES:

ACTIVITY 1, THE PILOT STUDY OF MEDIA CONTENT was conducted in three phases.

PHASE 1: Initial review of main topics, important events in political life, and the ways of their representation and interpretation in a wide range of media outlets in the period under review (2013 – 2016).

PHASE 2: Interviews with media experts to test the conclusions from Phase 1.

PHASE 3: Pilot press-clipping and content analysis, conducted in the period between 15 July and 15 September 2016.

Based on the first two phases, main keywords and phrases were identified and 20 media outlets were selected, where the purpose was to select different types of media outlets targeted at different audiences.

The following 20 media outlets were subjected to press-clipping and preliminary coding: the news agencies Blitz, PIK, BGNES, and Focus; the monthly magazine A-specto; the news websites Pogled-info, Epicenter, Glasove, Dnevnik, Mediapool, Rusofili, Bradva, Bultimes, News-front, and Ruski Dnevnik; the newspapers Trud, 24 Chasa, Rusiya Dnes, and Weekend.

The pilot press-clipping identified 597 articles with recurrent propaganda messages. The conducted study (pilot press-clipping and content analysis of those articles) confirmed the adequacy of the developed toolkit and allowed its fine-tuning for the purpose of: 1) conducting a quantitative measurement of the frequency of use of anti-democratic propaganda language, tracing the development of the relevant discourses for the 2013–2016 period; 2) composition of a typological sample; and 3) full press-clipping of eight media outlets and design of a code matrix for processing the selected materials.

ACTIVITY 2, MEASURING THE FREQUENCY IN THE USE OF ANTI-DEMOCRATIC PROPAGANDA LANGUAGE IN THE PERIOD BETWEEN 1 JANUARY 2013 AND 31 DECEMBER 2016, was conducted with the SENSIKA system. SENSIKA maintains an electronic archive of publications on 3,080 Bulgarian-language websites and blogs since the beginning of 2013. This archive is maximally representative of the Bulgarian internet space. Discussion forums and aggregators (wholly automated websites republishing content from other sources) were deliberately excluded from the search in order to avoid the effect of erroneous identification of articles and/or the accumulation of results due to forum comments or automated content recycling. Terms in foreign languages were excluded from the search as well. Also excluded from the search were all social networks (Facebook, Twitter, etc.), which are especially important in the dissemination of propaganda but constitute another, different segment of the media landscape which is not a special object of this study.

With the thus-set search filters, what SENSIKA counted were online media articles or blog posts which contain one or more of the keywords and phrases specified in the search query. That is to say, the quantitative unit of search data is article/blog post, which is also the unit of the content analysis conducted in Activity 4.

The measurement was done by searching for keywords and phrases specially selected from the semantic clusters identified in Activity 1 (pilot study). In the course of the quantitative measurement, the results of Activity 4 (full press-clipping of eight media outlets) were used for correction and addition of keywords and phrases in the semantic clusters.

ACTIVITY 3, TYPOLOGICAL SAMPLE OF MEDIA OUTLETS FOR FULL PRESS-CLIPPING AND CONTENT ANALYSIS: Based on the pilot study, the media outlets which publish anti-democratic texts (for example, 24 Chasa) but nevertheless often juxtapose them with alternative points of view, were identified. These media outlets were not subject to classification as anti-democratic propaganda media and were excluded from the set from which a sample for press-clipping was drawn (although the relevant publications were processed through the quantitative analysis of discourse and the analysis of dissemination networks). Also excluded from the sample were automated websites and news websites authored by a single person (who, apart from that, is usually also engaged in trolling).

The remaining media outlets were categorized into types by the following three criteria:

- ✓ type of generated information (news agency – news media outlet);
- ✓ type of dissemination (online only, print only, or both online and print);
- ✓ target audience (wide audience without pretensions to general and/or political culture – narrower, “elite” audience with pretensions to general and/or political culture).

To track the difference between strategic and tactical use of direct Russian messages, we included in the sample *Rusiya Dnes*, a media outlet legally registered in Bulgaria and staffed by Bulgarians, which, however, disseminates official Russian positions.

The media outlets identified for full standardized press-clipping, processing based on the code matrix, and content analysis, are the following:

Media with official Russian orientation:

- ❖ ***Rusiya Dnes*** (bilingual weekly newspaper published by Bulgarian-Russian Information Pool OOD, Managing Director and Editor-in-Chief: Svetlana Sharenkova)
 - Dissemination: both online and in print
 - Target: wide audience without pretensions

News agencies:

- ❖ ***PIK News Agency*** (legal-person owner: PIK NEWS EOOD, natural-person owner: Nedyalko Nedyalkov, Editor-in-Chief: Zvezdomira Mastagarkova)*
 - Dissemination: online only
 - Target: wide audience without pretensions

News media outlets:

- ❖ ***Glasove*** (website, legal-person owner: Glasove.com OOD, natural-person owner: Galya Dachkova, Editor-in-Chief: Milena Neyova)
 - Dissemination: online only
 - Target: audience with elitist pretensions

- ❖ ***A-specto*** (monthly magazine, legal-person owner: A-specto Media Group EOOD, Editor-in-Chief: Kalina Androlova; and website, legal-person owner: Urmanov EOOD)
 - Dissemination: both online and in print
 - Target: audience with elitist pretensions

- ❖ **Pogled-info** (website, legal-person owner: Evrokarieri EOOD, Editor-in-Chief: Rumens Petkov)
 - Dissemination: online only
 - Target: wide audience without pretensions

- ❖ **Trud** (daily newspaper published by Trud Media EOOD, wholly owned by Blaskov Media AD; Editor-in-Chief: Petyo Blaskov)
 - Dissemination: both online and in print
 - Target: wide audience without pretensions

- ❖ **Duma** (daily newspaper, official organ of the Bulgarian Socialist Party; legal-person owner: Duma Press EOOD, Editor-in-Chief: Tanya Dzhadzheva)
 - Dissemination: both online and in print
 - Target: wide audience without pretensions

- ❖ **Weekend** (tabloid weekly newspaper published by New Media Group AD; Board of Directors: Martin Radoslavov, Radoslav Dimitrov, and Tanya Bizheva; Editor-in-Chief: Martin Radoslavov)
 - Dissemination: in print only
 - Target: wide audience without pretensions

ACTIVITY 4, ANALYSIS OF MEDIA CONTENT, included three topics (with the respective keywords) – 1. The image of Europe and the EU (“The Decline of Europe”); 2. Russia (represented as a country on the rise); 3. Bulgaria betrayed (with a focus on elites and civil society) – which were formulated, identified, and tested in the pilot study. This enabled us to look for the specific presence of those schemes of interpretation as well as to identify the role of other “characters” in the justification of anti-democratic theses.

A full analysis was conducted of Trud, Duma, Weekend, A-specto, PIK, Pogled-info, Glasove and Rusiya Dnes for the period from 1 July to 30 November 2016. The analysis of Rusiya Dnes and Trud covered a longer period – starting from 1 November and 1 December 2015, respectively. Glasove was analyzed for 2015 and 2016 (until 30 November). For greater precision, the analysis of A-specto included materials from its website (mostly from September and November 2016), as well as older issues of the magazine (in order to trace specific aspects of the magazine’s position and their development).

The analyses presented in this Report are based on the thus-created archive of 3,305 publications. The anti-liberal or anti-democratic positions in the concrete publications were described through:

- information about the author, the media outlet, the rubric and genre of each publication (formal analysis);
- the main theses and the arguments in each publication (content analysis);
- identification of key negatively-represented and positively-represented actors –
- individuals, political figures, institutions, more rarely processes (structural analysis);
- the ways of this representation – through epithets, actions, characterizations, etc. (semantic analysis).

* The team of HSSF, as well as the authors of the report apologize for a technical error in the publication of this paragraph: as physical owner and editor-in-chief of PIK we published names of persons who were not in these positions. After being alerted on January 28th, 2020, the error was corrected: according to the Commercial register and register of NPLE, owner of PIK NEWS Ltd is Nedyalko Nedyalkov and since August 2016 chief editor is Zvezdomira Mastagarkova. We apologize for the inaccuracy.

I. CHAPTER I

MAIN TALKING POINTS OF ANTI-DEMOCRATIC PROPAGANDA IN BULGARIA (SYNTATICO-SEMANTIC ANATOMY OF PROPAGANDA LANGUAGE)

The talking points of Bulgarian anti-democratic propaganda identified in the pilot study (Activity 1) are bound in a **simplistic “conspiratorial logic”**: there is a **“villain/puppet-master” (antagonist)** who is pulling the strings of his **“puppets”** in order to exploit and disintegrate his **“victim”**. Of course, the “victim” usually rises and becomes an active “protagonist”.

Although the “conspiratorial logic” is simplistic, it works **logically**, through associative analogies and shifts in contexts – including through constant switching of the characters.

The main talking points (topics) of anti-democratic propaganda in Bulgaria are the following:

I.1 “THE DECLINE OF EUROPE”

Thesis: Europe/the EU is “sick” with the virus of “liberalism”. That is why it is helpless in the face of “the migrant invasion” and the interests of global capital. It is completely dependent on the global hegemon, the US, which is pulling the strings of “its puppets” in Brussels while deliberately unleashing the migrant wave that is inundating the peoples of Europe. The European Union is an artificial construction invented by the US and by the global elites, which however is doomed to fall apart so that the peoples would restore their “sovereignty”.

Note: “Europe” appears in all three conspiratorial roles noted above: 1. Brussels and the “Eurocrats” are often the **“villain/puppet-master”** who is pulling the strings of the Bulgarian “politicians-national apostates”; 2. Brussels and the “Eurocrats” are often **“puppets”** of the US and of corporate capital; 3. Europe is often the peoples that are the **“victim”** of the above-mentioned “villains”. In all cases, however, the European Union in its present form is doomed to fall apart and die.

I.2 “THE RISE OF RUSSIA”

Thesis: Russia is rising again as a world political, military and moral leader. It is a “civilizational alternative” to the “rotten West”. Everyone who criticizes or takes preventive and/or punitive measures against Russia’s foreign policy actions is its enemy (or a “puppet” of its enemies). Everything that Russia does is in defense of its age-old and sovereign right: Crimea is Russian, and the “Maidan” in Ukraine was a “coup” orchestrated from the outside and carried out from the inside by right-wing extremists. The sanctions imposed after the annexation of Crimea must be lifted because Russia is their innocent victim and, besides, they are economically harmful for all sides, and above all for Europe and for Bulgaria in particular.

Note: *In Bulgarian anti-democratic propaganda, Russia is at once a “victim” of “Western aggression” and an exemplary “protagonist” who has risen against the aggression, becoming not only a “global leader” that is defending its own sovereignty but also a “peacemaker” and “savior of Europe”.*

I.3 “BULGARIA’S VENAL ELITES”

Thesis: All Bulgarian pro-liberal and pro-European civic movements and protests, all human rights organizations (the emblematic target being most notably the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee), all non-governmental organizations (the Institute for Market Economics, the Center for Liberal Strategies, etc.), all media (the so-called *Capital* circle, etc.), all advocates of judicial reform (the Bulgarian Judges Association, Hristo Ivanov, Lozan Panov, etc.), and all politicians and political parties that firmly take a pro-European and pro-NATO stance (Rosen Plevneliev, only occasionally Boyko Borisov, the Reformist Bloc, Democrats for a Strong Bulgaria, Yes, Bulgaria, etc.) – all of them are undermining the national interest and serving “foreign interests”: because they are Brussels’ “yes-men” and/or have been directly “bought” by George Soros, the America for Bulgaria Foundation, Washington, etc. They are “foreign agents”: “Sorosoids”, “grant-spongers”, etc., “full-time paid defamers of Russia” and servants of the “de-Bulgarization” and “Gypsization” of Bulgaria.

Note: *“Puppet” is the figure most often used to vilify political and economic opponents – through it the opponents are represented as non-independent, non-autonomous, and weak: they act not according to their own will but according to the will of their foreign masters. That is also why the accusations of “venality”, “selling out”, “lackeying”, etc., are used above all in a domestic political context.*

I.4 “THE US/NATO AS GLOBAL HEGEMON/PUPPET-MASTER”

Thesis: The US and the US-led NATO military alliance are the “world hegemon” and “puppet-master” which – behind the ideological smokescreen of “human rights protection” and through their puppets across the world – are depriving peoples of their sovereignty by infecting them with liberalism, triggering wars, exploiting them economically to the benefit of global capital, inciting Islamism, unleashing migrants on Europe, threatening and encircling Russia, etc. – in short, the US/NATO are the Arch-Villain of the global conspiracy.

Note: Although the US and NATO are represented as the Arch-Villain that unilaterally dictates the world order to its benefit, the omnipotence of this Villain has nevertheless been cracking up recently – the US and NATO are represented as weak: they are losing their hegemony, they are “relics of the past”. The US and NATO are “declining” along with Europe and liberalism in a general “Decline of the West”. Taking this ambiguity into account, the talking points of Bulgarian anti-democratic propaganda were reduced to three in the research (Activity 4): 1. The decline of the West/Europe; 2. The rise of Russia; and 3. Bulgaria’s venal elites. In the quantitative measurement of the frequency of use of anti-democratic propaganda language (Activity 2), however, the searches were conducted separately for each of the four talking points noted above.

Through semantic analysis, a “**semantic cluster**” was identified for each of the **talking points of anti-democratic propaganda**: a list of words and phrases through which the respective talking point is promoted in the public sphere and which constitute a specific “propaganda vocabulary”. These “semantic clusters” were used for the quantitative measurement of the use of propaganda language on each talking point, and they are presented here in Chapter II.

The propaganda talking points usually function as an **overarching interpretative framework**, even though different media outlets and authors put different emphasis on each of the points and recombine them in different ways, thereby imparting a **different ideological profile to the media content**. The quantitative analysis of the relative weight of the propaganda talking points in the eight media outlets selected for full press-clipping allowed classifying them into types along the axis of geopolitical/domestic political orientation (see Chapter III).

II. CHAPTER II

EMERGENCE AND DISSEMINATION OF ANTI-DEMOCRATIC PROPAGANDA LANGUAGE IN BULGARIAN NEWS WEBSITES AND BLOGS: 1 JANUARY 2013 – 31 DECEMBER 2016

The measurement was conducted by searching for specially selected keywords and phrases on four main topics identified in the analysis of propaganda (a semantic cluster was identified for each one of them: a list of characteristic epithets and phrases through which the respective propaganda thesis is promoted; the semantic clusters were identified on the basis of content analysis of 20 media outlets for the period from 15 June to 15 September 2016, where the first three of those semantic clusters were used to design the press-clipping matrix). The semantic clusters used to measure the growth of propaganda-language use in Bulgaria in the 2013–2016 period are on the following topics: **1. The Decline of Europe; 2. The Rise of Russia; 3. Bulgaria’s Venal Elites; 4. The US/NATO as Global Hegemon/Puppet-Master.**

In selecting the keywords for the semantic clusters, words that are commonly used in anti-democratic propaganda language but which can easily be used in other contexts were deliberately excluded – that is, mostly “emblematic epithets” and “phrases” of propaganda were deliberately selected. Such a procedure does not completely exclude “dispersion” of results – that is, matches in contexts where the keywords and phrases are used ironically or with another meaning. The dispersion rate, however, is negligible from the point of view of the general picture – **an average of less than 10% of the results “deviate” from propaganda language**,¹⁵ that is, these are articles where there are keyword matches but which do not reproduce the common discursive clichés of anti-democratic propaganda. The percentage of articles that are not propaganda was calculated through a full review of content on peak days for each of the searches.¹⁶

¹⁵ A higher “dispersion” rate was found in just two out of a total of six searches on Topic 2: “The Rise of Russia”. Exactly how they were treated is explained further on in this Report.

¹⁶ Available only in Bulgarian at: <www.hssfoundation.org>.

II.1 “THE DECLINE OF EUROPE”

Methodological note: The talking point on “The Decline of Europe” is often part of the more general propaganda thesis about “The Decline of the West” – the latter creates a general apocalyptic horizon of “the death of Western civilization” where “Europe’s weakness” is bound to the end of “American hegemony”, that is, to the “weakening” of the political and military might of the US. In the next part of the study, precisely the more general talking point – “The Decline of the West” – was encoded in the press-clipping matrix in order to distinguish the immanently concrete roles of the West, Europe, the US, etc., in each publication. Here, for the purposes of the general quantitative measurement of the use of anti-democratic propaganda language, “The Decline of Europe” was separated from the role of the US and NATO. The reasons for this separation are two:

- ✓ First, in this way we tested the tactical dimension of propaganda to foster Euroscepticism, that is, to prepare public opinion for the options “collapse of the EU” and/or “exit from the EU” (although according to all public opinion polls conducted in Bulgaria to date pro-European attitudes prevail, propaganda nevertheless works distinctly in the opposite direction – it inspires Euroscepticism).
- ✓ Second, by separating the role of the US and NATO in a separate semantic cluster, the conspiratorial character of propaganda becomes obvious – it is precisely the US and NATO that are most often cast in the role of the “global villain” and “culprit” that unilaterally and hegemonically dictates the international agenda: most often “behind the scenes”, as a “puppet-master” moving its “puppets”.

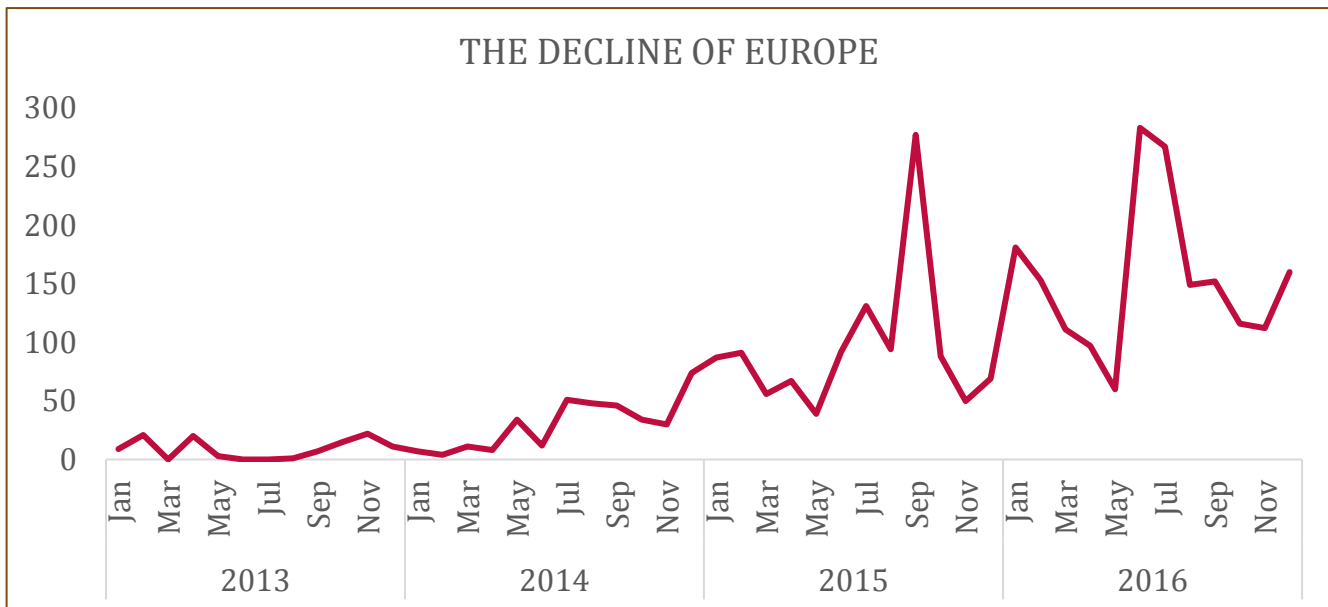
Of course, there is a paradox here: on the one hand, the US and NATO are global “hegemon” and “predictor” but, on the other hand, they are weak, they are losing their hegemony, they are “relics of the past” and they are doomed to “die”. Propaganda, however, “is not afraid” of paradoxes, it uses them adroitly by conflating them into overarching theses: the US and NATO are a **former** hegemon, the culprit for the world’s present misfortunes, which, however, is fatefully doomed to lose its hegemony **in the future**.

In conclusion: the keywords for the search on “The Decline of Europe” were selected to focus entirely on the EU and Brussels:

Keywords:

Gayrope OR “Brussels establishment” OR “the Brussels establishment” OR “European establishment” OR “the European establishment” OR “European oligarchy” OR “the European oligarchy” OR “Brussels oligarchy” OR “the Brussels oligarchy” OR “Brussels oligarchs” OR “the Brussels oligarchs” OR “European oligarchs” OR Eurooligarchs OR “European bureaucrats” OR “the European bureaucrats” OR “Brussels bureaucrats” OR “the Brussels bureaucrats” OR “European technocrats” OR “the European technocrats” OR “the technocrats in Europe” OR “the technocrats in Brussels” OR Eurocrats* OR “Europe is dying” OR “Europe is decaying” OR “the weakness of the European Union” OR “downfall of Europe” OR “the downfall of Europe” OR “death of Europe” OR “the death of Europe” OR “the collapse of the European Union” OR “the collapse of the EU” OR “Europe has failed” OR “Europe is failing” OR “the failure of Europe” OR “the failure of the EU” OR “decay of Europe” OR “Europe’s double standards” OR “the European double standards” OR “the double standard of Brussels” OR “double standards of Brussels” OR “the double standard of the EU” OR “the double standards of the EU” OR “the fragmentation of Europe” OR “the fragmented Europe” OR “decline of Europe” OR “the decline of Europe” OR “European nihilism” OR “the European nihilism” OR “European helplessness” OR “the European helplessness”*

Chart 1: Growth of propaganda discourse on Topic 1, “The Decline of Europe” (number of publications per month; 1 January 2013 – 31 December 2016)



General comments vis-à-vis the 2013–2016 political calendar

The general tendency towards growth in the number of publications on this topic is obvious – from 0 to 20 publications per month in 2013, to 50 to 300 publications per month in 2015 and 2016. Based on a review of the content of publications on peak days, we have also indicated the major concrete events motivating the increase in propaganda activity – they are the subject of most of the articles in the respective period:

In 2013 the publications that were already lamenting the EU and Europe or predicting their downfall were very few in number, but they were clearly distributed along the Bulgarian political calendar – although it is not big, the first cluster is found around the anti-monopoly protests in February and March; the next – largest – peak is around the early elections in May. From September onwards, after the summer protests against Plamen Oresharski’s government began to subside, such publications are to be found regularly and even daily, although they were not numerous. Obviously, the propaganda machine was set in motion to discredit the protests (dubbing the protesters “Sorosoids”, members of the “Sofia elite” who saw themselves as “smart and beautiful” as opposed to the rest of “the people”, etc.), indirectly implying “The Decline of Europe”.

In 2014 there were already four distinct peaks, the largest of them in August – after the resignation of the Oresharski government and during the crisis that preceded the bankruptcy of Corporate Commercial Bank (KTB). Here there is a discernible link to the international, and more precisely, to the Russian political calendar – the growth of propaganda discourse on Topic 1, “The Decline of Europe”, after August 2014 corresponds with the already introduced first round of EU sanctions against Russia over the annexation of Crimea.

The peaks in **2015** were already two to three times higher, and they are found at the end of June and beginning of July, where those in July were linked to the Greek debt crisis and the danger of a Grexit. Two propaganda lines were introduced: one of criticism of financial capitalism which triggers wars (the political leaders of Europe are serving financial capital to the detriment of their citizens), and the other of “tolerasty”. The relevant publications reproduced the theses of Andrey Fursov that George Soros is pushing Europe towards war, and of Leonid Reshetnikov that Bulgaria and Serbia are occupied by NATO – in general, there are many publications about the long arm of the US and the financial oligarchy that is creating zones of tension between Europe and Russia and pushing Europe towards war with Russia, as well as publications fanning up the feelings of inequality among the European countries and blaming this inequality on the “colonial policy” of financial capital. The propaganda line regarding “Gayrope” was also

introduced (distinctly in Glasove) – same-sex marriages and gay pride parades instead of May Day parades. The number of publications grew even more steeply in September and October – after Angela Merkel’s decision to open Germany’s borders to refugees stuck in Hungary (at the end of August) and after the beginning of Russian airstrikes against the anti-Assad forces in Syria. This period saw a spike in publications on the topic of “The Decline of Europe” which is drowning in the flood of migrants unleashed by the US and permitted by Merkel. In contrast to the weakness of Europe, there was a growth in the language of praise for Russia and Putin who are fighting Islamic terrorism in Syria and saving sick Europe – see the results on Topic 2.

The Grexit peak in early summer (unlike the anti-American peaks in the search results on Topic 4, which follow the Russian and not the American political calendar) was essentially European – an articulation of the feeling of inequality in Europe and criticism of austerity policies. It immediately intertwined with other articulations – the geopolitical theses of the Russian Institute of Strategic Studies (a Kremlin-affiliated think tank, a main source of talking points of Russian propaganda) and criticism of tolerance.

In 2016 the peaks were not drastically higher but the average numbers of publications per day and per week were distinctly higher than in 2015. We can call 2016 a year of “normalization” of messages about the collapse of Europe. The peak in the summer applies to publications on all topics after the meetings of the G7 in Davos and of NATO in Warsaw. But it also continued in August when – just as the anti-American one – it followed the line of importing Russian news.

In the topic on the declining Europe, internal European critical voices are distinctly intertwined with Russian propaganda messages.

II.2 “THE RISE OF RUSSIA”

This is the semantic cluster on which we conducted the largest number of searches in order to trace how the main theses of official Russian propaganda are recycled in Bulgaria.¹⁷ Six lists of keywords and phrases used in these talking points were drawn up – that is, Topic 2: “The Rise of Russia”, was subdivided into six sub-topics and separate searches were conducted for each sub-topic. These sub-topics are the following:

II.2.1 RUSSIA’S INCREASED POLITICAL AND SPIRITUAL MIGHT

Thesis: Russia is rising again as a world political and moral leader. Here we selected epithets and verbs that positively enhance the image of Russia, personified by Vladimir Putin, as a “global player” (“great power”) that is restoring its age-old “sovereignty” and playing the role of “peacemaker” and “savior” in world affairs thanks to “its moral superiority” over the West.

II.2.2 RUSSIA AS A CIVILIZATIONAL ALTERNATIVE TO THE WEST

Thesis: Russia is a civilizational alternative to the “rotten West”. Here we selected epithets that insist on Russia’s specific “civilizational” identity – as an epitome of “traditional values”, “Orthodox Christian civilization”, “Slavic unity”, Byzantine-type imperial “ecumenical unity”, Eurasian unity, and other predicates opposing Russia historically, culturally and spiritually to the cosmopolitan and liberal West.

***Note:** The search results on this sub-topic provided **only a general idea** of the overall growth of this type of discourse. It is a very important “pillar” of Bulgarian pro-Russian propaganda, but the keywords yielded a **dispersion rate that was higher than the acceptable for a precise analysis (an average of 40%)**. That is because this talking point still does not have its own specific vocabulary and works by mixing various vocabularies and cultural realia. Thus, the “Orthodox Christian world” appeared often as part of the messages of clerics of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, and “Slavonic unity” as part of stories revolving around the history of Bulgaria which are not unambiguously inscribed in propaganda language. The ratio between propaganda and non-propaganda uses of keywords (measured by counting the relevant articles in three peak periods) is an average 60:40. Despite this, compared with the search results on the other sub-topics of “The Rise of*

¹⁷ For a general analytical review of the main theses and discourses of official Russian propaganda, see Stephen Hutchings and Joanna Szostek, “Dominant Narratives in Russian Political and Media Discourse during the Ukraine Crisis”, E-International Relations, 28 April 2015 <<http://www.e-ir.info/2015/04/28/dominant-narratives-in-russian-political-and-media-discourse-during-the-crisis>>.

Russia” as well as with those on the topics of “The Decline of Europe” and “The US/NATO as Global Hegemon/Puppet-Master”, the curve of those search results shows analogous spikes and peaks – that is, it follows the general “logic” of propaganda. Still, because of the high dispersion rate we have not included these search results in the comparative analysis, but offer them only to give the reader a general idea in Appendix 1 to the full study (available only in Bulgarian at: <www.hssfoundation.org>).

II.2.3 RUSSIA’S ENEMIES

Thesis: Everyone who criticizes or takes preventive or punitive measures against Russia is its enemy (or a “puppet” of its enemies). Here we selected epithets and phrases used to label Russia’s critics as its “enemies” – both on the foreign political and on the domestic political plane. 1. On the foreign political plane, the selected phrases represent every criticism and every action by Western forces (especially by NATO and the US) vis-à-vis Russia as unilateral hostile “aggression” in which Russia is nothing but a totally innocent “victim”: “war or attack against Russia”, “slander or lies against Russia”, “encirclement” and “threat” (most often by NATO) against Russia, etc. 2. On the domestic political plane, we tested the pseudo-category “Russophobe” by which anti-democratic propaganda labels Russia’s critics in Bulgaria. It should be kept in mind that in its domestic political uses, the referential scope of the epithet “Russophobe” (that is, the scope of the actors referred to as such) coincides to a large extent with the referents of semantic cluster 3, “Bulgaria’s Venal Elites” (civic protests, pro-reform and pro-European politicians, media and magistrates who, according to propaganda, have been “bought” and are “puppets” of the West, and have thus become “full-time paid defamers of Russia”).

II.2.4 THE POWER OF RUSSIAN WEAPONS

Thesis: Russia is world leader in armaments. Here we selected epithets and phrases that emphasize the “superiority” of Russian weapons and Russian military might, against the background of which the main rival, NATO, is portrayed as a redundant “relic” of the past.

II.2.5 CRIMEA AND UKRAINE

Thesis: Crimea is Russian, and the “Maidan” in Ukraine was a “coup” orchestrated from the outside and carried out from the inside by right-wing extremists. Here we selected epithets that represent the official thesis of Russian propaganda on Crimea and Ukraine: Crimea is “intrinsically” Russian and it was naturally “reunified” with, not “annexed” by, the Russian Federation. The Euromaidan was a “color revolution” that was orchestrated by the West (most often, by the US) and which was a “coup” (“putsch”) against the “lawfully elected President Yanukovych”. The coup was inspired from the outside, while the internal executors of the “coup” were the Ukrainian “fascists”, “Nazis”, “Banderovtsy” who are also “puppets of the West”.

II.2.6 THE SANCTIONS AGAINST RUSSIA

Thesis: The sanctions must be lifted because Russia is innocent (the sanctions are “anti-Russian” in character, that is, they are not a punishment for concrete actions but are meant to strike at the heart of all things Russian) and they are economically harmful for all sides, and above all for Europe and for Bulgaria in particular.

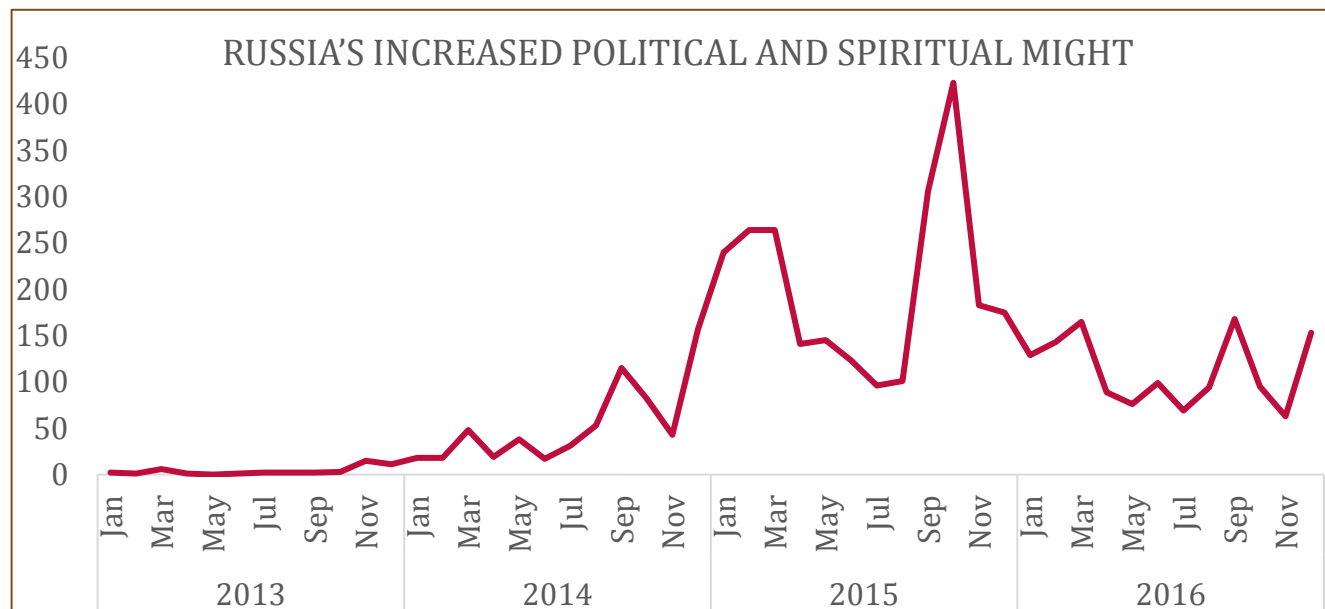
***Note:** In the search on this sub-topic, it was also difficult to limit the keywords and phrases only to propaganda ones. Whereas “anti-Russian sanctions” and “harmful sanctions” are definitely identifiable as part of anti-democratic propaganda language, “lifting of sanctions” and “sanctions versus [protiv] Russia” (although the latter is more specific than “sanctions against [sreshtu] Russia”, which is used in all sorts of contexts) yielded a higher dispersion rate. Here the dispersion rate was not very high – the content analysis of articles on two peak days found approximately 20% “deviations” from propaganda language. Still, we conducted a control search solely for the phrase “anti-Russian sanctions”, which is used unambiguously for propaganda purposes. The control search confirmed the general curve of results of the more complex search for more keywords, although it inevitably yielded a smaller number of matches.*

II.2.1 RUSSIA'S INCREASED POLITICAL AND SPIRITUAL MIGHT

Keywords:

“Russian peacemakers” OR “the Russian peacemakers” OR “Russia is saving” OR “Russia is defending” OR “Russia is liberating” OR “Russian liberators” OR “the Russian liberators” OR “the Russian defenders” OR “Russian defenders” OR “Russian saviors” OR “the Russian saviors” OR “Putin is saving” OR “moral superiority of Russia” OR “the moral superiority of Russia” OR “Russian moral superiority” OR “the Russian moral superiority” OR “moral superiority of Putin” OR “the moral superiority of Putin” OR “Russian military superiority” OR “the Russian military superiority” OR “Russian spirit” OR “the Russian spirit” OR “Russia is attracting” OR “upsurge of Russia” OR “the upsurge of Russia” OR “the might of Russia” OR “Russian might” OR “Russia’s might” OR “Russian power” OR “Russia’s power” OR “revival of Russia” OR “the revival of Russia” OR (Russia AND “Christian leader”) OR (Russia AND “Christian civilization”) OR (Russia AND “sovereign right”) OR “sovereign Russia” OR “Russian sovereignty” OR “Russia’s sovereignty” OR “the recovery of Russia” OR “Russia is reviving” OR “Russia is recovering” OR “Russia is rising” OR “rise of Russia” OR “the rise of Russia” OR (Russia AND “global player”) OR (Russia AND “world player”) OR (Russia AND “uncircumventable factor”) OR (Putin AND “global player”) OR (Putin AND “world player”) OR (Putin AND “uncircumventable factor”) OR “restoration of the USSR” OR “restoration of the Soviet Union” OR “Russian success” OR “the Russian success” OR “Russian successes” OR “the Russian successes” OR “successes of Russia” OR “the successes of Russia” OR “the success of Russia” OR “success of Russia” OR “friends of Russia” OR “the friends of Russia”

Chart 2: Growth of propaganda discourse on sub-topic 2.1, “Russia’s Increased Political and Spiritual Might” (number of publications per month; 1 January 2013 – 31 December 2016)



General comments: Whereas in 2013 general praise of Russia is found in fewer than 10 articles per month, in 2014 it soared on two occasions (around the annexation of Crimea and after the introduction of sanctions in the autumn), rising steadily and leveling off at over 50 publications per month in the next two years, with new peaks of more than 250 publications in March 2015 (the first anniversary of the annexation of Crimea) and even more than 400 per month in September–October 2015 (the deployment of Russian troops in Syria). For more details, see the general comments on all search results on Topic 2: “The Rise of Russia”.

II.2.3 RUSSIA'S ENEMIES

Keywords:

Russophob OR "attack against Russia" OR "provocations against Russia" OR "attacks and provocations by the West against Russia" OR "confrontation with Russia" OR "confrontation with Moscow" OR "Putin's patience" OR "opposition of Russia" OR "encirclement of Russia" OR "intervention in Russia" OR "NATO's march to the east" OR "march against Russia" OR "is encircling Russia" OR "is encircling the Russian Federation" OR "enlargement towards Russia" OR "demonization of Russia" OR "lies about Russia" OR "slander about Russia" OR "is threatening Russia" OR "threat to Russia" OR "actions against Russia" OR "false news against Russia" OR "false stories against Russia" OR "war with Russia" OR "war against Russia" OR "attacks against Russia" OR "attack against Russia" OR "attack against Putin" OR "the opponents of Putin" OR "enemy of Russia" OR "Russia's enemies" OR "plot against Russia"*

Chart 3: Growth of propaganda discourse on sub-topic 2.3, "Russia's Enemies" (number of publications per month; 1 January 2013 – 31 December 2016)



General comments: With almost no activity on this sub-topic at the beginning of the surveyed period – throughout 2013, Russia had no “enemies” – the use of “enemy” language rose steeply in early 2014 (after the beginning of the Ukrainian events), increasing to more than 400 publications per month after the annexation of Crimea in March. There was a second extremely steep increase from July 2014 to the end of the year, when the EU adopted sanctions against Russia in two rounds, in July and September: the number of publications grew to over 800 per month, with two peaks

ranging from 1,200 to 1,400 per month at the end of 2014 and the beginning of 2015. This was followed by a certain “normalization” in the condemnation of “Russia’s enemies” at levels of around 400 articles per month in the second half of 2015 and first half of 2016, with another spike in July and August 2016 after the meetings of the G7 in Davos and of NATO in Warsaw, where the issue of Russia’s “aggressive policy” was included in the documents adopted at those meetings. See also the general comments on all search results on Topic 2: “The Rise of Russia”.

II.2.4 THE POWER OF RUSSIAN WEAPONS

Note:

The intensity of publications covertly or overtly advertising Russian weapons in Bulgarian newspapers and websites, especially after Russia’s entry into Syria, has grown exponentially in the last few years. As our research has shown, however, this intensity cannot be captured in full by searching for general keywords: because the advertising is often done covertly, through publications describing in detail the specific technical characteristics of various Russian weapons (models of Russian tanks, missile mounts, etc.) and/or citing foreign sources, including Western ones, about their good qualities. Such publications often appear under rubrics like “Technologies”, “Science and Technology”, “News”, “World”, etc., and do not use the emblematic epithets from our list of keywords. But the reverse is true: the epithets and phrases listed for this sub-topic allow clearly showing the exponential growth of the number of publications on “Russian armaments” (the first two key phrases), with a tendency towards praising them in contrast to “the relic NATO” (all other phrases in the list).

Keywords:

“Russian weapons” OR “the Russian weapons” OR (“super weapons” AND Russia) OR “Russian super-weapons” OR “the Russian super-weapons” OR “military superiority of Russia” OR “superiority of Russia” OR “Russian superiority” OR “effective campaign in Syria” OR “power of Russian weapons” OR “might of Russian weapons” OR (“Russian army” AND “combat experience”) OR (“Russian army” AND self-confidence) OR (“Russian army” AND might) OR (“Russian army” AND power) OR (NATO AND rudiment) OR (NATO AND relic*)*

Chart 4: Growth of propaganda discourse on sub-topic 2.4, “The Power of Russian Weapons” (number of publications per month; 1 January 2013 – 31 December 2016)



General comments: The topic of Russian armaments was almost absent in Bulgarian media in 2013. The exponential growth of praise for Russia’s military might in Bulgaria wholly followed the logic of the Russian military-political calendar: it increased for the first time to low levels of maximum 20 articles per month around the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and, after a brief lull at the beginning of summer 2014, grew steadily, peaking in 2015: the first peak (over 60 articles per month) was around the first anniversary of the annexation of Crimea, the second (over 75 articles per month) around the 9 May Victory Parade in Moscow, and the third, highest (over 180 articles per month), upon the deployment of Russian troops in Syria in September. In 2016 there was a slight decline and “normalization” of praise for Russia’s military might at a stable average level of over 50 articles per month. See also the general comments on all sub-topics at the end of the section on Topic 2.

II.2.5 CRIMEA AND UKRAINE

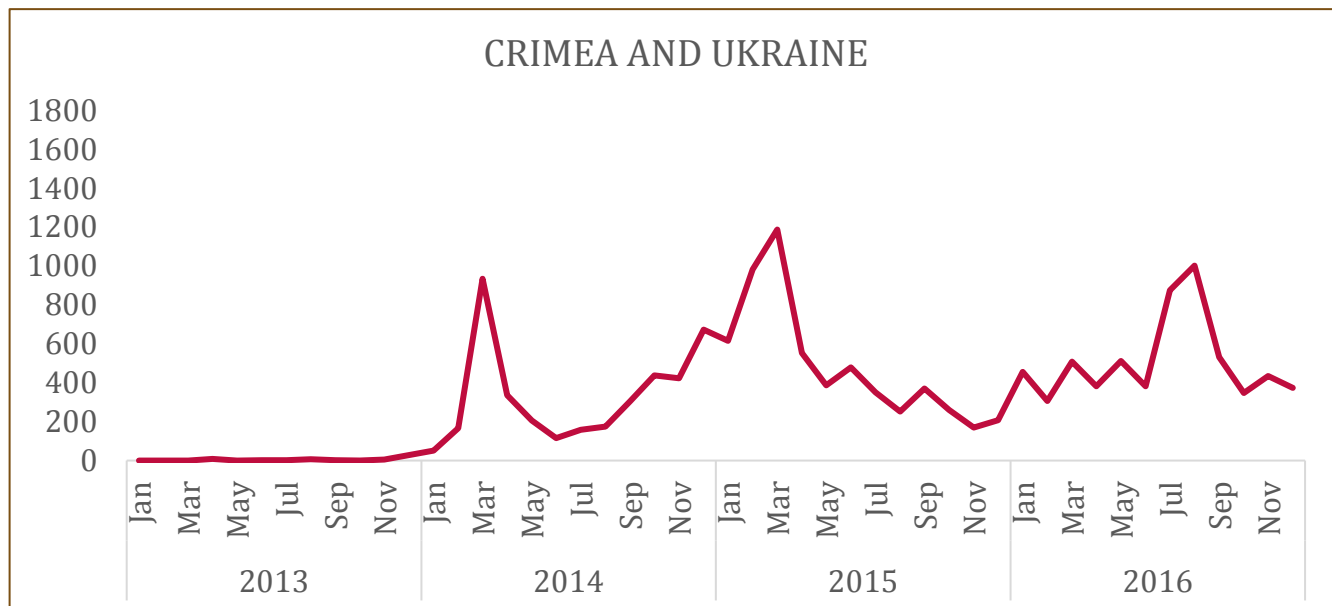
Note:

Here we selected keywords and phrases that are a Bulgarian “translation” of the vocabulary used by Russian official propaganda to describe the events in Crimea and Ukraine.

Keywords:

“accession of Crimea” OR “the accession of Crimea” OR “recognition of Crimea” OR “Russian Crimea” OR “Crimea is Russian” OR “Ukrainian diversionists” OR (Crimea AND liberated) OR “liberation of Crimea” OR “the liberation of Crimea” OR (Crimea AND “part of Russia”) OR (Crimea AND “part of the RF”) OR “Ukrainian radicals” OR “Ukrainian fascists” OR “Ukrainian Nazis” OR “Judeo-fascists” OR Ukrofascists OR Banderov OR (maidan AND coup) OR (Kiev AND coup) OR (maidan AND putsch) OR (Ukraine AND coup) OR (Yanukovych AND (“legitimate president” OR “the legitimate president”)) OR (Yanukovych AND “lawful president”) OR (Yanukovych AND “legitimate government”) OR (Yanukovych AND “lawful government”) OR (maidan AND “color revolution”) OR (Kiev AND “color revolution”) OR (maidan AND “color revolutions”) OR “American invasion in Ukraine”*

Chart 5: Growth of propaganda discourse on sub-topic 2.5, “Crimea and Ukraine” (number of publications per month; 1 January 2013 – 31 December 2016)



General comments: The general tendency remains the same. Throughout 2013, there was almost no propaganda activity. What is remarkable here, however, is the colossal growth of the number of publications using the vocabulary of the Russian official position on Crimea and Ukraine, which started practically from zero levels and rose after the beginning of the Euromaidan protests at the very end of 2013, soaring to 900 publications per month in March 2014 – the annexation of Crimea. Each peak was followed by a certain decline, but the general tendency is towards steady growth. By the beginning of summer 2014, the number of publications was already around 100 per month. Following the escalation of the imposition of sanctions against Russia, there was another steep rise, reaching a record high of almost 1,200 publications per month around the first anniversary of the annexation of Crimea in 2015. This was followed by another decline, but now at levels of up to 200 publications per month at the very end of 2015, and then by another steady rise to levels of approximately 400 publications per month throughout 2016, with another distinct spike in September 2016 (almost 1,000 articles in a single month), when the presidential election campaigns in Bulgaria and the US had already started (with a thesis advanced by Bulgarian presidential candidate Rumen Radev that Crimea is “de facto Russian”, and with statements by Donald Trump about a coming thaw in relations with Russia).

II.2.6 THE SANCTIONS AGAINST RUSSIA

Note:

As pointed out above, the search for general keywords yielded a dispersion rate of approximately 20% of the results (that is, matches with keywords used in other contexts). Despite this, the search on this sub-topic captured the general tendency – see the results of the control search solely on “anti-Russian sanctions”.

Keywords:

“lifting of sanctions” OR “lifting of the sanctions” OR “removal of the sanctions” OR “anti-Russian sanctions” OR “the anti-Russian sanctions” OR “sanctions against Russia” OR “harmful sanctions” OR “pointless sanctions” OR “the sanctions are harming”

Chart 6: Growth of propaganda discourse on sub-topic 2.6, “The Sanctions against Russia” (number of publications per month; 1 January 2013 – 31 December 2016)



Control search: “Anti-Russian sanctions”

Note:

The phrase “anti-Russian sanctions” is a distinct propaganda phrase and is practically not used in other contexts.

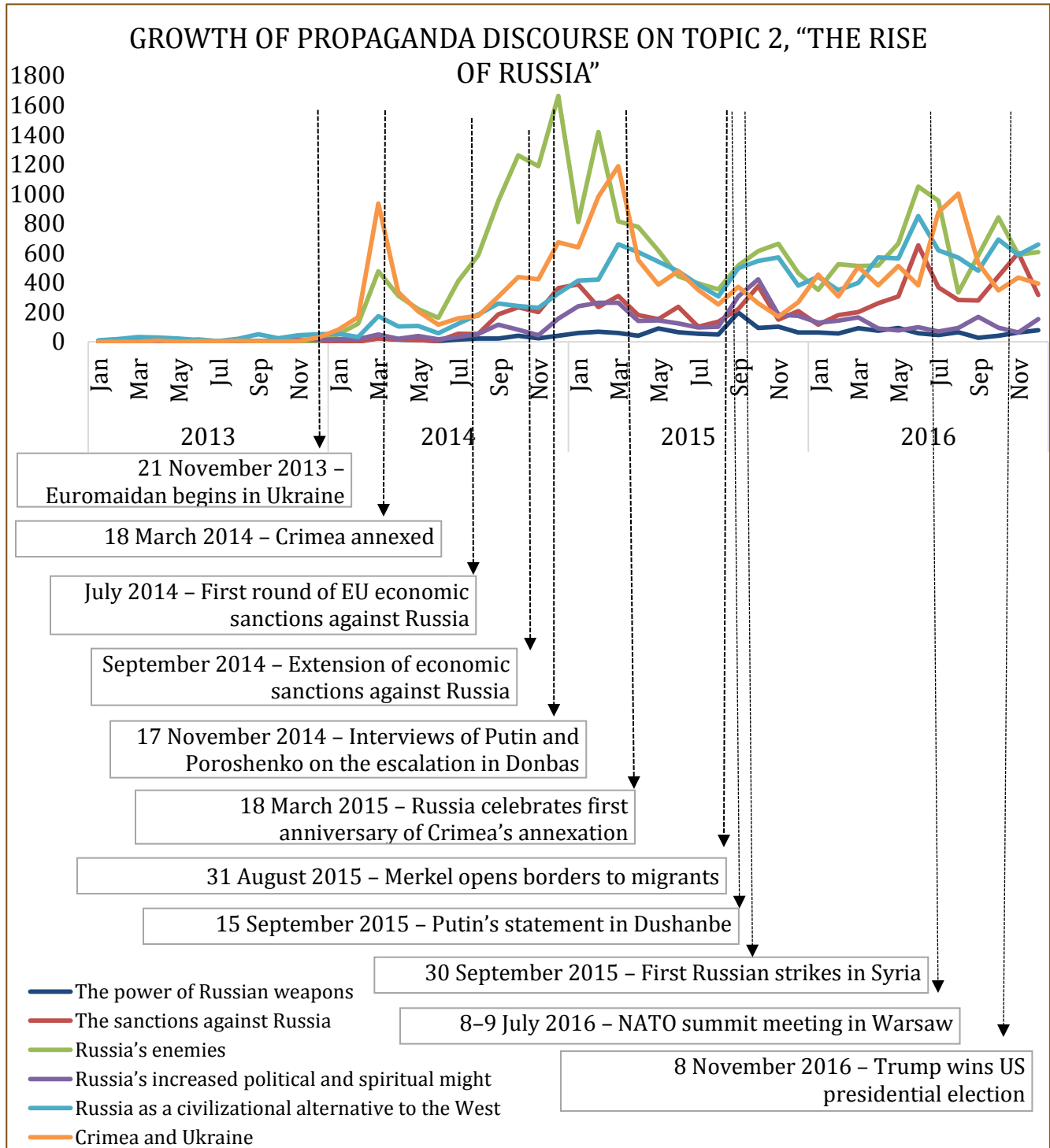
Chart 7: “Anti-Russian sanctions” (number of publications per day; 1 January 2013 – 31 December 2016)



General comments: Propaganda discourse against the sanctions followed the logic of the general propaganda language on the other sub-topics about Russia but, logically, started several months later. There was practically no propaganda activity on this sub-topic throughout 2013 and in the first half of 2014, except for several publications around the annexation of Crimea when talk first began about possible sanctions (this is the difference from the other talking points). The growth of propaganda discourse against the sanctions started in the summer of 2014, when they actually began to be introduced, reaching a peak of almost 400 publications per month at the end of 2014 and beginning of 2015. This was followed by a general lull and “normalization” at levels of approximately 200 articles per month in 2015 and the first half of 2016. The search results for all keywords and phrases on the sub-topic of “The Sanctions against Russia” for this period showed only a single peak in October–November 2015, which was less distinct in the results returned for the phrase “anti-Russian sanctions” used for the control search. There was a new peak at around and over 600 publications per month in July (after the meetings in Davos and Warsaw) and in October–November 2016 (during the presidential election campaigns in Bulgaria and the US).

COMPARISON OF THE SEARCH RESULTS ON SUB-TOPICS OF TOPIC 2: “THE RISE OF RUSSIA”

Chart 8: Growth of propaganda discourse on Topic 2, “The Rise of Russia” (number of publications per month; 1 January 2013 – 31 December 2016)



GENERAL COMMENTS ON THE SEARCH RESULTS ON “THE RISE OF RUSSIA” SEMANTIC CLUSTER

All search results on sub-topics of Topic 2: “The Rise of Russia” demonstrate a clear general tendency of rapid growth of the number of publications at least until 2015 – in some cases this growth continued until the end of the surveyed period, while in others 2016 was a year of “normalization”. For all searches, 2013 was practically a gap year – at that time anti-democratic pro-Russian propaganda had an insignificant presence in Bulgarian media, although there were some attempts at a propaganda breakthrough. The kick-start of pro-Russian propaganda was directly linked to events from the Russian political calendar – to Ukraine’s Euromaidan and the annexation of Crimea. This is also evident from the number of publications: the leading thesis of Bulgarian pro-Russian propaganda is that **“Crimea is Russian”**, a talking point directly linked – both in terms of average number of articles and of almost coinciding peaks – to the other leading propaganda thesis: the vilification of **“Russia’s enemies”** which do not recognize the annexation of Crimea and Russia’s support for the separatists in Donbas as legitimate. The peaks in search results on “Crimea and Ukraine” and “Russia’s Enemies”, which were the only ones to reach levels of over 1,000 publications per month each, closely followed the Russian military-political calendar and reacted further to the sanctions introduced by the international community against Russia.

“The Sanctions against Russia” sub-topic is the third in terms of evident growth of the number of publications, although at levels that are several times lower than those of the first two sub-topics, at least until mid-2015. After the summer of 2015, the number of publications on the sub-topics of “Crimea and Ukraine” and “Russia’s Enemies” declined slightly and “normalized”, while the discourse “against the sanctions” continued to grow, and in 2016 became closer to the first two in terms of average number of publications per month. It seems that the thesis that “Crimea is Russian” had gained enough ground on the Bulgarian media landscape to allow giving partial priority to the “pragmatic approach” insisting on the lifting of the sanctions imposed over the annexation of Crimea. The topic of the sanctions against Russia acquired new intensity in the autumn of 2016, when the frontrunners in the presidential election campaigns in Bulgaria and the US made public statements that partly chimed with the pro-Russian thesis about the lifting of sanctions.

The sub-topic that is fourth in terms of growth and number of publications is **“Russia’s Increased Political and Spiritual Might”**. The curve of search results on this sub-topic again follows the Russian political calendar, but what distinguishes it from those on the first three is that it shows an additional peak in the number of publications praising

Russia in September 2015, when Russia entered into the Syrian conflict and practically demonstrated military might. This peak, logically, coincided with the peak on “**The Power of Russian Weapons**” sub-topic. Hence, the specific praise for Russia’s military might is not an exception from the general logic of the other search results, where the growth of the number of publications followed the Russian political calendar.

MORE DETAILED COMMENTS BASED ON A REVIEW OF THE CONTENT OF PUBLICATIONS ON SELECTED PEAK DAYS:

COMMENTS ON THE 2013 POLITICAL CALENDAR

This was the last quiet year in terms of anti-democratic, pro-Russian propaganda activity in Bulgaria. However, an **important contrast** stands out: articles expressing warm feelings for Russia and building its positive image are to be found regularly, but in inconspicuous numbers: until the autumn of 2013, their number ranged from 0 to 25 publications per day. In contrast to this, however, articles outlining an “enemy/antagonist” of Russia are conspicuous by their absence – in this period, Russia apparently “**had no enemies**” (“enemy” rhetoric is found very rarely, in one or two articles per day, except for a single peak day with 16 publications in June that was in line with the domestic political calendar – immediately after the formation of the parliamentary coalition between the Bulgarian Socialist Party [BSP] and the Movement for Rights and Freedoms [DPS] that elected the Plamen Oresharski government). Logically, there are no articles promoting the Russian propaganda thesis about Crimea and Ukraine, as well as articles decrying the sanctions imposed against Russia after the annexation of Crimea – these events were yet to come. The last months of 2013 saw a slight increase in positive discourse on Russia (with peaks of 30 to 35 articles per day), with the first – still occasional publications – from the Crimea-Ukraine semantic sub-cluster appearing at the very end of the year, after the beginning of Ukraine’s Euromaidan.

COMMENTS ON THE 2014 POLITICAL CALENDAR

2014 was a crucial year for the rise of explicit pro-Russian propaganda in Bulgaria. This, on the one hand, was directly linked to Russia’s foreign-political actions – to the annexation of Crimea and the war in Eastern Ukraine. That is when Russia officially announced itself as a “great power”, violating international law. On the other hand, Bulgarian pro-Russian propaganda responded also to the counter-measures – to the international sanctions imposed against Russia. Those are the events that dictated the distinct increase in publications on all sub-topics regarding Russia:

The first distinct peak in publications was in March–April 2014, that is, after the official annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation and during the military operations in Donbas. The number of publications on the sub-topic of “Russia’s Enemies” increased significantly – from fewer than three per day at the beginning of 2014 to an average of over 10 per day from mid-March onwards and with peaks of over 30 publications per day. This also holds true for the “Crimea and Ukraine” sub-topic, which appeared for the first time in December 2013, still with sporadic publications even in that month (after the beginning of the Euromaidan protests) and with peaks of just seven to eight articles per day. Pro-Russian propaganda, however, began to be conducted on a daily basis and soared from March 2014 onwards, after the annexation of Crimea – reaching an average level of 20 publications per day, with peaks of slightly over 50 articles per day. The topic of sanctions was, logically, eclipsed by that of the annexation of Crimea – at the beginning of the year, such publications were completely sporadic, with an average number of slightly over 0 per day; after mid-March (the treaty on the “accession” of Crimea to the Russian Federation was signed on 18 March) this topic is found in connection with the still initial international reactions to the annexation and to the crisis in Eastern Ukraine – after March, sanctions are discussed in one to two publications per day, with a single peak of 10 publications. The European Union imposed effective sanctions against Russia in two rounds in 2014 – in July and September. Bulgarian propaganda responded accordingly – after the initial, lighter, sanctions imposed in July, the peaks on the “sanctions” topic rose to 12–15 publications per day, but after September, when the sanctions tightened, the number of such publications increased to an average of over 10 per day, with peaks of over 40 per day until the end of the year. The peaks on the thesis that “Crimea is Russian” also rose automatically in November and December to over 50 publications per day (with one peak of over 80 publications). Analogously, after the introduction of the second round of sanctions in September, there was a steep increase in discourse against “Russia’s enemies”, with the number of publications already averaging approximately 30 per day, with peaks of 80 to 100 publications per day (this was the second step increase in 2014 – after the first one that followed the annexation of Crimea). The general praise of Russia followed the same tendency – whereas in March–April the positive discourse about Putin and the Russian Federation more than doubled from an average of 10 to an average of 25 articles (with peaks of over 50 publications) per day, in the autumn it doubled once again – to an average of almost 50 publications per day and with peaks ranging from 80 to 140 articles per day.

COMMENTS ON THE 2015 POLITICAL CALENDAR

The search results for the phrase “lifting of the sanctions” show a peak in October–November 2015 which coincides with a peak in the number of publications containing keywords around “Russophobia”. In September there were Russian airstrikes in Syria, and in November a Turkish fighter jet shot down a Russian bomber. The later autumn months saw the launch of a specific propaganda line – criticism of the “anti-Russian propaganda” conducted by the Western media and discussions on the ban of some Russian propaganda websites in Europe.

In the search results on praise for Russia and Putin, the peak in March 2016 is once again geopolitical and military – the conquest of Palmyra.

COMMENTS ON THE 2016 POLITICAL CALENDAR

The comparison of search results for 2016 again shows coinciding peaks in publications on the sub-topics related to Russia – the first significant one was in the summer of 2016 (June and July). This can be explained with the Russian reactions to the meetings of the G7 in Davos and of NATO in Warsaw. These were globally significant events, to which Bulgarian media reacted as well – in propaganda and non-propaganda mode. That is to say, the geopolitical topic, put in terms of geopolitical confrontation, became significant, and hence, so did the peaks in the number of publications on Russia. Here we cannot assume that there was a propaganda campaign targeted specifically at Bulgaria. The point, however, is that this peak coincided with the beginning of speculations about the possible presidential candidates before Parliament’s summer recess. That is also when there was an increase in the number of publications against President Rosen Plevneliev, labeled a “NATO warhead against Russia”.

The next peak found in the search results on all sub-topics related to Russia is in the late autumn of 2016. It was generated by many publications around the US presidential elections. It is a peak which once again happened to coincide with the presidential election campaign in Bulgaria.

Another part of this peak is linked to the conquest of Aleppo and the increase in publications on the role of Russia (propaganda discourse used this occasion to draw an analogy between Aleppo and Stalingrad).

II.3 “BULGARIA’S VENAL ELITES: DISCREDITING CIVIL SOCIETY”

Note:

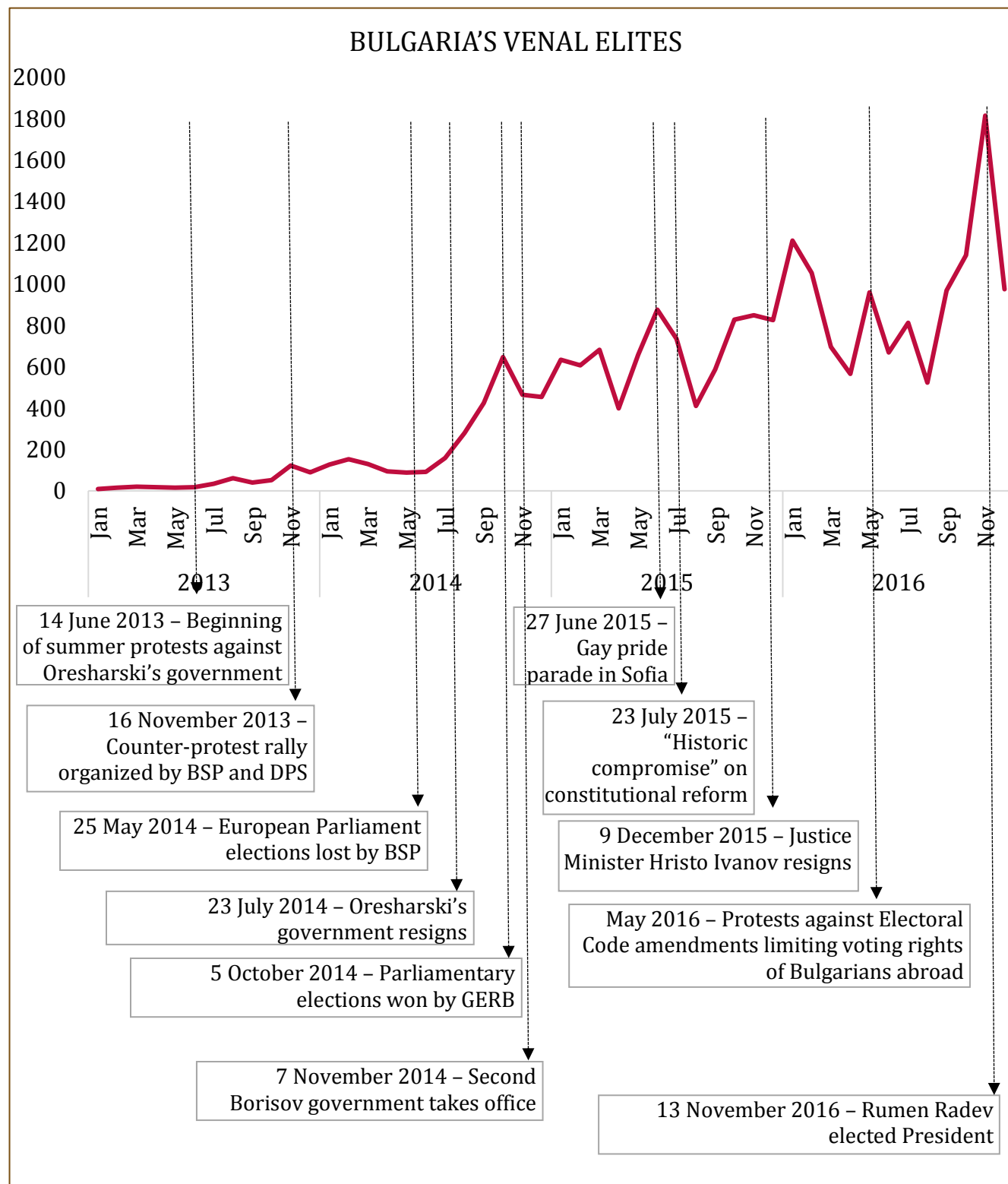
The search on this topic was done by keywords and phrases, most of them pejorative, which are commonly used to stigmatize civil society (civic protests, human-rights and other NGOs) and pro-European and pro-liberal politicians/magistrates/media in Bulgaria. The stigmatization of civil society and of pro-liberal actors used the already developed by Russian official propaganda (after the stifling of the civic protests against Putin in 2011–2012 and the adoption of the law on “foreign agents” in 2012) formulas for stigmatizing all kinds of civic protests and all active supposedly anti-Kremlin non-governmental organizations and media. A significant part of the vocabulary of Bulgarian anti-democratic propaganda is directly calqued or “translated” from the vocabulary of Russian propaganda.

Keywords:

Sorosoid OR grant-sponge* OR grant-eater* OR “grant-driven intellectuals” OR “the grant-driven intellectuals” OR “grant-driven analysts” OR “the grant-driven analysts” OR “grant-driven media” OR “the grant-driven media” OR protester* OR liberast* OR neoliberalist* OR tolerast* OR Euroguy* OR Europederast* OR psycho-right* OR “psycho rightists” OR “loony rightists” OR “servant of foreign interests” OR “servants of foreign interests” OR “foreign agent” OR “foreign agents” OR “paid servant” OR “servant of America” OR “servants of America” OR “Western servant” OR “political puppet” OR “political puppets” OR “American puppets” OR “the American puppets” OR “Euro-Atlantic puppets” OR “the Euro-Atlantic puppets” OR “servile politicians” OR “servile experts” OR “political Lilliputians” OR “spiritual Lilliputians” OR “American lackey” OR “American lackeys” OR “Western lackeys” OR “Euro-Atlantic lackeys” OR “Euro-Atlantic lackey” OR “grant-gobblers” OR “grant-gobbler” OR kinless* OR “paid analyst” OR “paid analysts” OR “the paid analysts” OR “paid politicians” OR “paid intellectuals” OR “paid experts” OR “the paid experts” OR “bought analysts” OR “bought analyst” OR “bought politicians” OR “bought intellectuals” OR “bought experts” OR “the bought experts” OR “bought protests” OR “the bought protests” OR “bought media” OR “the bought media” OR “venal media” OR “venal analysts” OR “the venal analysts” OR “venal politicians” OR “venal intellectuals” OR “venal experts” OR “the venal experts” OR “experts of the transition” OR “the experts of the transition” OR “liberal clichés” OR “the liberal clichés” OR “liberal dogmatists” OR “the liberal dogmatists” OR “liberal hags” OR “liberal dogmas” OR “the liberal dogmas” OR “multi-culti” OR “children of Captain Grant” OR “Captain Grant’s*

children” OR “shady financing” OR “foreign foundations” OR “foreign-country foundations” OR Rothschilds OR Rockefeller* OR “American mouthpieces” OR “American stooges” OR “the American stooges” OR “Euro-Atlantic fascists” OR “liberal fascists” OR “the liberal fascists” OR fascisoids* OR “the Capital circle” OR “lamb heads” OR “the lamb heads” OR “the Soros circle” OR freeloaders* OR grant-freeloaders* OR Euro-Atlanticists* OR “professional protesters” OR “the professional protesters” OR “paid protesters” OR “the paid protesters” OR “the smart and beautiful” OR “liberal fundamentalists” OR politcorrect* OR “full-time paid defamers of Russia” OR de-Bulariz* OR de-Christianiz* OR Turkiciz* OR anti-Christian* OR Gypsiz* OR anti-Bulgarian* OR “self-styled human-rights activists” OR “paid human-rights activists”*

Chart 9: Growth of propaganda discourse on Topic 3, “Bulgaria’s Venal Elites: Discrediting Civil Society” (number of publications per month; 1 January 2013 – 31 December 2016)



General comments: As this semantic cluster is used above all for discrediting civil society and liberal and pro-European actors in Bulgaria, it works primarily for domestic-political score-settling, and therefore, out of all semantic clusters of anti-democratic propaganda, it is the only one that is directly linked to the domestic (not to the international and above all to the Russian) political calendar. These propaganda epithets most often refer directly to local Bulgarian “intrigues”, but they are used above all to attack inconvenient political and economic rivals *ad hominem*. As we noted, the vocabulary of domestic propaganda was already prepared by Russian official propaganda, which had discredited the 2011–2012 protests against Vladimir Putin and which was even institutionalized in a law (adopted in 2012) requiring foreign-funded NGOs to register themselves as “foreign agents”. This part of Russian propaganda vocabulary, which stigmatizes the liberal-democratic plurality of civil society and any opposition action and rhetoric, and hence, which affirms state authoritarianism, was the earliest to gain ground in Bulgarian media. Although at low average levels, the stigmatization of civil society as a bunch of “paid foreign agents” and “puppets” was already at play at the beginning of 2013, and intensified from the autumn of that year as a systematic attack against the civic protests that had broken out in June in Bulgaria – unlike the specifically Russian topics, whose propaganda language began to gather momentum only in 2014 (above all after the annexation of Crimea). Compared with the publications on all other topics, those aimed at discrediting civil society also increased the most – both in terms of average numbers (firmly over 500 publications per month after 2015) and in terms of peaks (over 1,800 publications in the autumn of 2016). This points to the conclusion that although Bulgarian anti-democratic propaganda is pro-Russian, it is above all local – it is used above all to discredit domestic opponents.

MORE DETAILED COMMENTS BASED ON A REVIEW OF THE CONTENT ON SELECTED PEAK DAYS:

COMMENTS VIS-À-VIS THE 2013 POLITICAL CALENDAR

The keywords and phrases on Topic 3: “Bulgaria’s Venal Elites: Discrediting Civil Society”, are found already at the beginning of 2013, but their uses were rather sporadic – in one to two articles per week (including weeks in which there were none), with occasional peaks of three to four articles a day during the anti-monopoly protests of January–March 2013 and a single peak of nine articles in a day on the eve of the early parliamentary elections in May. This tendency remained in place in the next months. The summer protests of “the smart and beautiful”, which began on 14 June against the appointment of Delyan Peevski as head of the State Agency for National Security (DANS), are the first clearly identifiable and regular target of propaganda language but, as the chart above shows, the propaganda against civil society was set in motion slowly. The relevant

propaganda epithets began to be used on a daily basis for the first time in August, when the machine of the “counter-protests” had already been set in motion, with their use rising further and reaching peaks of 10 to 13 articles per day in the last months of 2013.

COMMENTS VIS-À-VIS THE 2014 POLITICAL CALENDAR

In the first half of 2014, the frequency of use of propaganda language remained relatively stable as compared with the last months of 2013. Very slight increases in the average level are to be found in February–March (the end of the Euromaidan protests and the ouster of Yanukovych, and around the annexation of Crimea) – that is, this part of the propaganda vocabulary was used above all for domestic political purposes and was only slightly influenced by the international (Russian) cycle. A significant increase is found after the end of summer, when the campaign for early parliamentary elections in Bulgaria began, and during the formation of Boyko Borisov’s coalition government: in the September–December 2014 period, the average daily level of use of propaganda epithets almost tripled (already at an average of some 20 articles per day as compared with five to six at the beginning of the year). The prime targets were already clear – they would remain prime targets throughout 2015 and 2016, too. They are “the protesters” (the Protest Network), “the reformers” (the Reformist Bloc and pro-reform politicians of GERB, as well as President Rosen Plevneliev), the advocates of a judicial and constitutional reform, and especially Hristo Ivanov (later also Lozan Panov, Kalin Kalpakchiev, the Justice for All Initiative, etc.), and the pro-liberal media (most often referred to after the name of Ivo Prokopiev, or as “the *Capital* circle”).

COMMENTS VIS-À-VIS THE 2015 POLITICAL CALENDAR

As at the end of 2014, in 2015 the prime target of anti-democratic propaganda were the reformers in the government and above all Justice Minister Hristo Ivanov’s judicial reform. Until the beginning of summer, the average numbers remained the same as in the last months of 2014 (approximately 20 articles per day). The second half of June saw an increase in propaganda activity: in that period the relevant articles took their cue from local events – protests against the Supreme Judicial Council and Prosecutor General Sotir Tsatsarov, the gay pride parade on 27 June – and there were often 40–50 articles per day. The main topic was again the constitutional reform of the judicial system, whose advocates were attacked. Next came a brief lull after the announcement on 23 July that a “historic compromise” had been reached on the constitutional reform. During the summer Bulgarian “tolerasts” were regularly attacked “en bloc” as advocates for opening up Europe to migrants: in direct connection with the opening of Germany to the refugees and Angela Merkel’s statement “*Wir schaffen das!*” (“We can manage it!”) on 31 August. After this statement Merkel’s image in Bulgarian media changed dramatically: whereas

until then her portrayal ranged between positive and neutral, she now began to be portrayed by Bulgarian anti-democratic propaganda as a “bad lady” who was to blame for Europe’s migrant crisis. In October–December 2015 there was another rise (at an average level of some 30 articles per day, with peaks ranging between 70 and 90 per day), where propaganda was targeted against all domestic advocates of a serious constitutional reform: propaganda was preparing and legitimating the parliamentary parties’ withdrawal from the “historic compromise” and, in this sense, inspired Justice Minister Hristo Ivanov’s resignation on 9 December and the internal split of the Reformist Bloc.

COMMENTS VIS-À-VIS THE 2016 POLITICAL CALENDAR

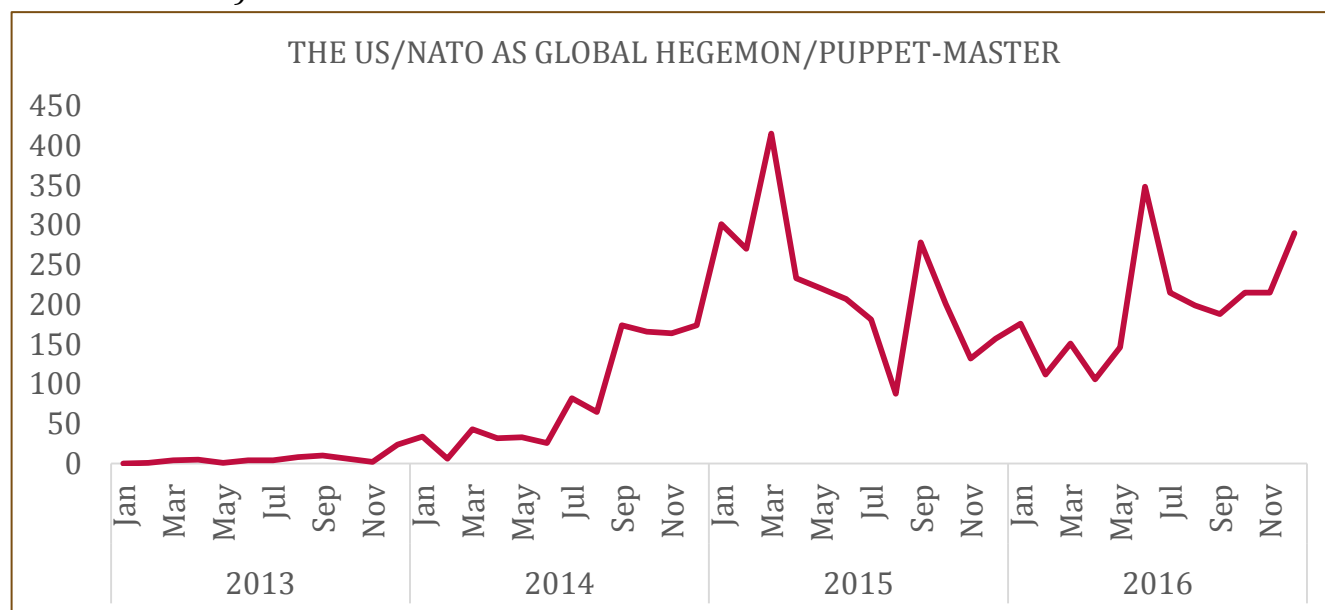
In January 2016 the average number of publications remained the same – their constant targets were already clear in 2014 and the “fire” against them continued, with peaks and overall increases on minor occasions. There was a steeper rise at the end of January and beginning of February – with peaks of 100–150 publications per day. This first spike was occasioned by the fake news that “the Turkish slavery” was to be removed from school history curricula, and by a statement by Delyan Peevski after he went to the prosecutor’s office to testify about the “Yanevagate” scandal – both received extensive media coverage (with peaks on 30 January – 1 February). Another distinct peak in anti-reformist propaganda is found in May (with peaks of 152 publications on 5 May and 145 publications on 19 May), caused by the protests against the newly adopted amendments to the Electoral Code limiting the voting rights of Bulgarians abroad, as well as by fleeting gestures such as Neshka Robeva’s refusal to accept the Order of Stara Planina because she was offended by “the freeloaders” in the government who had not supported her. The last general increase in 2016 was, logically, linked to the presidential election campaign in the October–November period. As part of the campaign, there was a distinct peak in the number of publications after Boyko Borisov made a statement playing on propaganda rhetoric and distancing himself from President Rosen Plevneliev, who Borisov claimed had been pointed out to him for the position of minister of regional development and public works in 2009 by Ivo Prokopiev, and President Plevneliev’s response denying this: propaganda pounced on this pseudo-scandal and on 25 October reached a peak of 205 publications for the day, vilifying above all “the *Capital* circle” and Plevneliev. The highest peak in 2016 was reached on 13 November, the day of Rumen Radev’s victory in the second round of the presidential election: anti-democratic propaganda gloated over the “defeat” of “the protesters”, “the Sorosoids”, “the grant-spongers”, etc., with 232 publications for the day, and continued in the same vein in the next days.

II.4 “THE US/NATO AS GLOBAL HEGEMON/PUPPET-MASTER”

Keywords:

“the hawks in the USA” OR “the hawks from the Pentagon” OR “the American hawks” OR “American hawks” OR “American masters” OR “the American masters” OR “the aggression of the USA” OR “American aggression” OR “the USA/CIA created the Islamic State” OR “the USA/CIA created ISIS” OR “American toadies” OR “American servants” OR “servants of America” OR “America is dictating” OR “the USA is dictating” OR “left NATO” OR “out of NATO” OR “leaves NATO” OR “leaving NATO” OR “the hawks in NATO” OR “the hawks from NATO” OR “NATO is a threat” OR “NATO is threatening” OR “NATO is encircling” OR “expansion of NATO” OR “NATO’s expansion” OR “NATO propaganda” OR “NATO’s propaganda” OR “NATO’s aggression” OR “NATO aggression” OR “the threat by NATO” OR “NATO is a tumor” OR “American puppets” OR “NATO’s expansion to the east” OR next OR “the CIA is manipulating” OR “CIA manipulations” OR “American propaganda” OR “the American propaganda” OR “the Western propaganda” OR “Western propaganda” OR “the American puppets” OR “the American claquers” OR “American claquers” OR “puppets of the USA” OR “puppets of NATO” OR “American puppet-masters” OR “American hegemony” OR “the American hegemony” OR “American diktat” OR “the American diktat” OR “the Euro-Atlantic aggression” OR “Euro-Atlantic aggression” OR “Euro-Atlantic toadies” OR “the Euro-Atlantic toadies” OR “Euro-Atlantic servants” OR “the Euro-Atlantic servants” OR “Euro-Atlantic puppets” OR “the Euro-Atlantic puppets” OR “Euro-Atlantic hawks” OR “the Euro-Atlantic hawks” OR “Euro-Atlantic diktat” OR “the Euro-Atlantic diktat” OR “Euro-Atlantic hegemony” OR “the Euro-Atlantic hegemony” OR “Euro-Atlantic propaganda” OR “the Euro-Atlantic propaganda” OR “Euro-Atlantic manipulations” OR “Euro-Atlantic manipulation” OR “the Euro-Atlantic manipulation” OR “Euro-Atlantic threat” OR “the Euro-Atlantic threat” OR “Euro-Atlantic masters” OR “the Euro-Atlantic masters” OR “American imperialism” OR “the American imperialism” OR “NATO’s imperial ambitions” OR “the USA’s imperial ambitions” OR “Washington’s imperial ambitions” OR “foreign agents” OR “foreign-country agents” OR “the foreign-country agents” OR “agents for influence of foreign countries” OR “the global hegemon” OR “the world hegemon” OR “the global predictor” OR “the world predictor” OR “the world mentor” OR “the world master” OR “the world ruler” OR “the world puppet-master” OR “the global mentor” OR “the global master” OR “the global ruler” OR “the global puppet-master” OR “global hegemon” OR “world hegemon” OR “global predictor” OR “world predictor” OR “world mentor” OR “world master” OR “world ruler” OR “world puppet-master” OR “global mentor” OR “global master” OR “global ruler” OR “global puppet-master” OR “the American warmongers” OR “American warmongers” OR “NATO warmongers” OR “the NATO warmongers”

Chart 10: Growth of propaganda discourse on Topic 4, “The US/NATO as Global Hegemon/Puppet-Master” (number of publications per month; 1 January 2013 – 31 December 2016)



General comments: Similarly to the search results on the topics about Russia, those on Topic 4 show that in 2013 there was almost no anti-American and anti-NATO rhetoric in the Bulgarian media. Anti-US and anti-NATO propaganda in Bulgaria is directly linked to the Russian political calendar – both its emergence at the end of 2013 (with the beginning of Euromaidan) and its average increase and peaks coincide with the search results on the sub-topics of “Crimea and Ukraine”, “The Sanctions against Russia”, and “Russia’s Enemies”. The turning point was the annexation of Crimea, whereby Putin’s Russia explicitly asserted itself as a power player: after this the time for “translating” Russian talking points into Bulgarian became shorter, but then the aggressiveness and frequency of their dissemination increased. The search on this topic yielded matches most often in articles where the keywords for the sub-topic of “Russia’s Enemies” were also found. The steep growth of anti-NATO and anti-American discourse followed Russian propaganda in response to the escalation of the sanctions against Russia, culminating in a record high around Russia’s celebration of the first anniversary of the annexation of Crimea in 2015 (with over 400 articles in a single month). The next two peaks, in September 2015 and in July 2016, also followed the Russian responses to international events – to Western commentators about Russia’s intervention in Syria and to the meetings in Davos and Warsaw.

MORE DETAILED COMMENTS BASED ON A REVIEW OF THE CONTENT OF PUBLICATIONS ON SELECTED PEAK DAYS:

COMMENTS VIS-À-VIS THE 2013–2014 POLITICAL CALENDAR

2013 was also a gap year for anti-US and anti-NATO rhetoric in Bulgaria. From time to time there were days with a maximum of four publications, but such days were few and far apart. A slight increase in publications – which started appearing almost daily, but remained few in number – is found from September onwards, when the propaganda machine had already been set in motion against the summer protests and the student occupation of universities. The first more notable increase was at the end of December, after the beginning of Ukraine’s Euromaidan, when there were 14 publications in a single day.

2014 was the year of the real start of anti-US and anti-NATO propaganda in Bulgaria. In January 2014 there was a peak similar to that in December 2013, and it was again related to the Ukrainian events. It must be noted that from their very beginning, the Ukrainian events were actively processed by Russian media propaganda but, as a rule, their “translation” into Bulgarian pro-Russian propaganda usually took time. A distinct increase in this type of publications in Bulgaria, however, is found already from March onwards – after the annexation of Crimea – with articles containing the relevant keywords appearing almost daily, although their number was still low both on average (one or two publications per day) and on peak days (a maximum of 11–18 articles per day). The second steep increase in anti-US and anti-NATO publications is found from September onwards, when sanctions had already been imposed against Russia: from this point on, the average number of such publications grew by several times (reaching 10 publications per day), with peaks ranging from 19 to 28 publications per day by the end of the year.

COMMENTS VIS-À-VIS THE 2015 POLITICAL CALENDAR

The first noteworthy peak of over 70 publications in just one day in March 2015 is telling not of a propaganda effect (such as the search results on the topics related to Russia, as well as those on the present topic for 2014 – in which we can identify a propaganda effect of accumulation of publications linked to identifiable geopolitical events) but of purposeful propaganda. It cannot be explained with any geopolitical events involving the US and NATO. It is explained, however, by the celebrations of the first anniversary of the annexation of Crimea – we find a simultaneous variation of the peak in the number of publications claiming that “Crimea is Russian” and of the peak in those calling for “Down

with NATO and the US!” in mid-March 2015. At that time neither NATO nor the US were involved in any concrete significant events attracting media coverage. The discourse against them, however, rose when Putin was giving speeches (“We couldn’t leave the people [of Crimea] to the mercy of fate, under the steamroller of nationalists” – *Rusiya Dnes*, No. 10, 2015), and Russia was celebrating the first anniversary of Crimea’s “Road to the Motherland”. Here we have an indication of a clear propaganda strategy, not a propaganda effect – the vilification of “the enemy” has replaced the commentary on Russia’s actions: we are not writing about the anniversary of the annexation of Crimea but about the warmongering of the US.

The occasion for the second peak in anti-US and anti-NATO discourse, at the end of July, was also Russian. That is when *Rusiya Dnes* reported that Kyrgyzstan was severing its friendship with the US, that a French delegation in Russia had mentioned that Crimea is Russian, and that the Bloomberg agency had announced that we should invest in Russia.

The peak in September already had a Western trace – Russia was carrying out airstrikes in Syria which were only commented on from Western positions – that they were targeted less at ISIS than at the anti-Assad opposition, that is, that they were pro-Assad, not anti-terrorist.

The next peak in anti-NATO publications followed a statement by Putin in Dushanbe, in which he had reportedly sent “a clear signal to the West” that Moscow “would not wait for Islamic fanaticism ... to set Russia and its allies on fire, too” (*Rusiya Dnes*, No. 37, 2015). In other words, the anti-NATO discourse again followed not reports on actions of NATO or of a NATO member country, but Putin’s routes. This peak also continued to identify Russia as a champion of world peace, just as it was in the Second World War. Let us remind the reader that we are talking about search results on keywords referring to NATO and the US, not to Russia. The calendar of anti-American, equated with anti-NATO, discourse in Bulgarian media followed not American and NATO but Russian events. This is indicated by the fact that the peak in publications after a Russian warplane was shot down by a Turkish F16 fighter jet was lower than the peak in those following Putin’s statement in Dushanbe, the report on which claimed that Russia was maintaining a firm line of support for the lawful government in Syria, while “the US and its allies have been supplying various terrorist gangs with weapons for years”, “the US has covered the Earth with military bases” and “is supplying with military hardware Georgians and Armenians” right next to the borders of Russia (*Rusiya Dnes*, No. 9, 2015). A concrete event linked to NATO or the US and their allies is not to be found. (In the same issue of *Rusiya Dnes*, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev announced that Azerbaijan does not need the

European values because they are hypocritical – they speak of tolerance and multiculturalism but subject the refugees to suffering.) If such an event can be found at all, it was NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg’s visit in Georgia, as well as the inauguration of a mosque in Moscow – “the largest in Europe”, “an example of religious tolerance” – at which Putin and Erdogan were together against terrorism.

But, as we already mentioned, the next peak – at the beginning of December, after the downing of the Russian warplane – was lower. The increase at the end of 2015 was again not linked to specifically NATO or American events; it was part of the review of the year, summing up that the world we know is disappearing and pointing out that Russia was celebrating the Day of the Heroes of the Fatherland.

The propaganda strategy can be clearly seen: coverage of Russia was based on news reporting and followed the geopolitical calendar. Coverage of the US and NATO was not based on concrete events, but followed the Russian domestic political calendar.

COMMENTS VIS-À-VIS THE 2016 POLITICAL CALENDAR

In 2016 the first distinct peak, in July, was slightly lower than, but nevertheless comparable to, that a year ago (in July 2015, when the turn towards anti-Western propaganda for Eastern European use obviously took place). This peak followed the meetings in Davos and Warsaw, and coincides with the peak in publications containing keywords related to the sanctions against Russia, the praise of Russia and Putin, and Russophobia.

In this peak, the number of publications on the topic of Russia in the database of news websites exceeds that of anti-West publications. As we shall see, in the researched database the publications on the topic of “The Decline of the West” outnumber those on “The Rise of Russia”.¹⁸ This difference is easy to explain – here we researched through keywords practically the whole news database; the sample is typological according to the strategies and audiences of the promoted key interpretations. To put it simply, bloggers and marginal websites are much less cautious about explicitly articulating biased geopolitical views than the media outlets presenting themselves as professional and making a pretension – in fact, merely a “pretension” in the selected sample – to geopolitical neutrality. What is important here is the coincidence of the peaks in publications on the topics on Russia (linked to concrete events) and on the US/NATO, which are dependent on the calendar related to Russia – the rise in the number of

¹⁸ Note: In the press-clipping research, the semantic clusters on Topic 1: “The Decline of Europe” and Topic 4: “The US/NATO as Global Hegemon/Puppet-Master” were united in one cluster, “The Decline of the West”.

publications on the US followed the Russian domestic political calendar for international use.

This also holds true for the peak in July 2016 – the Russian reaction to the NATO summit meeting in Warsaw led to the peak in publications on the US and NATO.

The next peak, at the end of August 2016, did not follow any world events either, but a statement by Putin about diversions prepared by the West against Crimea. The next peaks were around Donald Trump’s victory.

SUMMARY OF THE QUANTITATIVE MEASUREMENTS

The approach applied in this study does not allow for a simple summation of the results of the separate searches for keywords, because in a number of cases the same articles were identified through keywords from different semantic clusters. Given the present technical state of the SENSIKA system and the available human resources of the research team, conducting a comprehensive search for all keywords from all semantic clusters – so as to avoid the artificial increase in the number of matches in articles – was impossible. That is why, in order to show correctly the growth in the use of propaganda language according to the search results on each topic, as well as to provide a comparative perspective, we chose a different approach. We offer the following table, providing data on the number of matches in the search results on each topic by year:

Table: Number of matches in the search results on each topic by year

	The Power of Russian Weapons	The Sanctions against Russia	Russia’s Enemies	Russia’s Increased Political and Spiritual Might	Crimea and Ukraine	The US/NATO as Global Hegemon/Puppet-Master	The Decline of Europe	Bulgaria’s Venal Elites
2013	22	2	54	44	56	69	109	494
2014	219	1141	7387	635	3983	999	359	3114
2015	929	2666	7814	2448	5814	2683	1141	8094
2016	745	4005	7511	1326	6109	2361	1841	11394

Comments:

The dramatic increase in the use of propaganda language during the four years under review is a fact for all eight searches conducted under this study. The general impression is that of the burst of a “propaganda geyser”. Still, let us describe it more carefully. If we take 2013 as a basis for comparison, in 2016 the increase in the results of each search is by dozens or even by hundreds of times:

TOPIC 2: “THE RISE OF RUSSIA”

I.2.1. “Russia’s Increased Political and Spiritual Might”

- by 55 times (from 44 articles in 2013 to 1,326 in 2016)

I.2.3. “Russia’s Enemies”

- by 144 times (from 54 articles in 2013 to 7,511 in 2016)

I.2.4. “The Power of Russian Weapons”

- by 42 times (from 44 articles in 2013 to 1,326 in 2016)

As regards the other two sub-topics – **2.5: “Crimea and Ukraine”** and **2.6: “The Sanctions against Russia”** – 2013 cannot serve as a point of reference because these sub-topics are much more directly linked to a concrete event – to the annexation of Crimea in March 2014 and to the subsequent punitive measures adopted by the international community, the economic sanctions. It is important to note that the propaganda thesis that “Crimea is Russian”, which certainly cannot be simply reduced to the annexation of Crimea, was completely absent in the Bulgarian media before the beginning of the Euromaidan protests at the end of 2013 – there was no “artillery preparation” for the annexation. Otherwise the increase in the frequency of use of propaganda language on both sub-topics is completely comparable to that in those on the other sub-topics in the 2014–2016 period: the number of articles on “The Sanctions against Russia” reached 4,005 in 2016, and of those on “Crimea and Ukraine” 6,109 in 2016.

The increase in the intensity of propaganda on the other three main topics is as follows:

TOPIC 1: “THE DECLINE OF EUROPE”

- by 16 times (from 109 articles in 2013 to 1,841 in 2016)

TOPIC 3: “BULGARIA’S VENAL ELITES: DISCREDITING CIVIL SOCIETY”

- by 23 times (from 494 articles in 2013 to 11,394 in 2016)

TOPIC 4: “THE US/NATO AS GLOBAL HEGEMON/PUPPET-MASTER”

➤ by 34 times (from 69 articles in 2013 to 2,361 in 2016)

MAIN CONCLUSIONS:

1. The largest total number of search results is on Topic 3, which includes the epithets and phrases used to discredit civil society and liberal elites in Bulgaria. This segment of propaganda language was the most widespread already at the beginning of the period under review and reached its highest frequency at the end of the period. Anti-democratic pro-Russian propaganda operates most intensively on the domestic political front.
2. The highest increase is in the number of publications on sub-topic 2.3: “Russia’s Enemies” (by 144 times from 2013 to 2016). At the beginning of the period, Russia had no “enemies” even though NATO had long since expanded to the East, but after the annexation of Crimea the “enemy discourse” flared up – the West, and NATO in particular, suddenly became Russia’s enemies.

These results can also be represented in a chart in order to show the trends over time:

Chart 11:



II.5 COUNTER-PROPAGANDA IN BULGARIA

It was not the objective of this study to analyze all kinds of propaganda in Bulgaria. Still, we must say that anti-democratic propaganda in Bulgaria meets with two types of resistance:

First, attempts to unmask it precisely as propaganda, above all by exposing “fake news” or by citing international institutions and media that counter “Russian propaganda” – as done by media outlets such as Club Z, Mediapool, Dnevnik, Capital, Bulgaria Analytica, etc.¹⁹ This type of media outlets and articles which try to take an analytical perspective on anti-democratic propaganda cannot be “naturally” suspected of being counter-propaganda. More so, considering that the defense of human rights and of the institutions and values of liberal democracy is, by presumption, not propaganda (the purpose of anti-democratic propaganda is to convey the message that it is, but this was rejected already in the Introduction of this Report).

Second, anti-democratic propaganda in Bulgaria is indeed countered also **by another language which can truly be called “counter-propaganda” language**. Here “Russia”, “the Kremlin”, “the KGB” are assigned the role of the “Arch-Villain” that is moving its “puppets” – the so-called *rubladzhii* (sing. *rubladzhiya* – ruble-paid fifth-columnists) who, in turn, cause all the woes of “the Bulgarian people” by depriving it of its sovereignty. If we use propaganda language, and if we call Bulgarian pro-Russian propaganda “Russophilic”, then counter-propaganda is usually “Russophobic”. This very dilemma, however – “Russophilia/Russophobia” – is false and is itself part of propaganda discourse. More so, considering that “Russophobic” counter-propaganda is most often anti-democratic as well – it is rather nationalist.

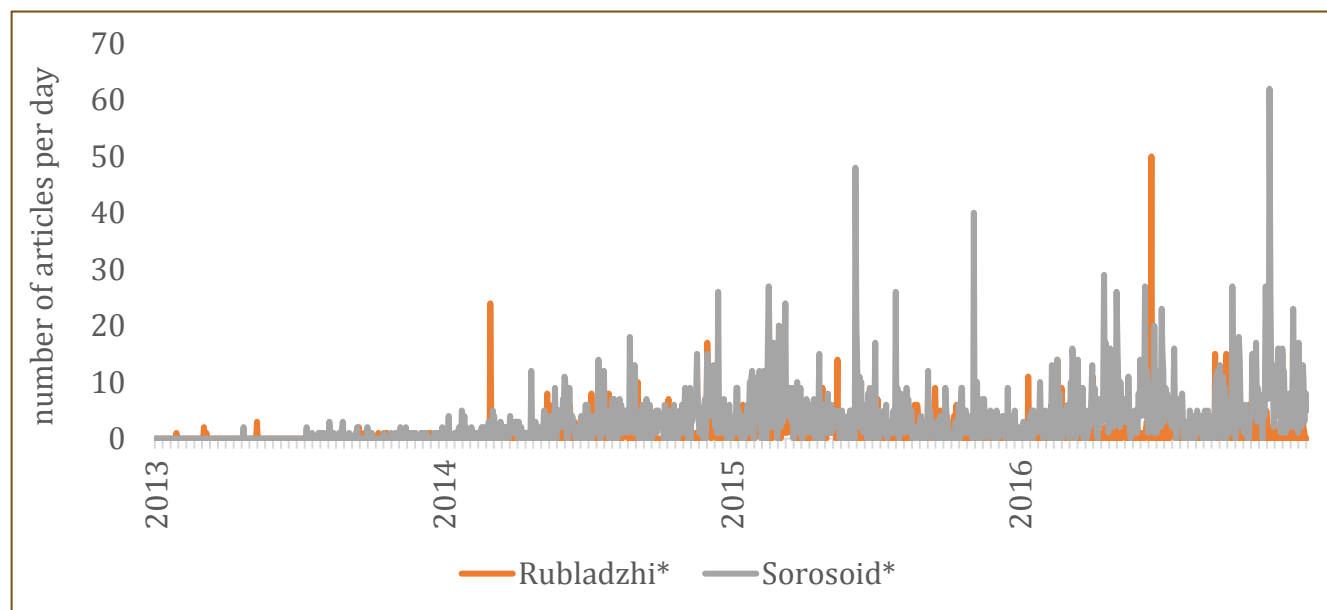
Without being a special objective of this study, the searches conducted under it found that counter-propaganda language in Bulgaria appears to be entirely reactive and quite marginal. Unlike pro-Russian anti-democratic propaganda, it does not have a ready-made extensive vocabulary of its own epithets and phrases: in the course of the study, we came

¹⁹ See, e.g., Ivan Bedrov, “Prosledyavane na lazhatata” [Tracing the lie], Club Z, 20 April 2014 <https://clubz.bg/38547-prosledqvane_na_lyjata>; Maria Manolova, “Sredstva za masova dezinformatsiya” [Mass disinformation media], PRnew.info, 4 January 2014 <<http://prnew.info/sredstva-za-masova-dezinformaciq/>>; Konstantin Mishev, “Zero Hedge veche i za balgarska upotreba” [Zero Hedge activated for Bulgarian use, too], Bulgaria Analytica, 26 June 2016 <<http://bulgariaanalytica.org/2016/06/26/zero-hedge-%D0%B2%D0%B5%D1%87%D0%B5-%D0%B8-%D0%B7%D0%B0-%D0%B1%D1%8A%D0%BB%D0%B3%D0%B0%D1%80%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%B0-%D1%83%D0%BF%D0%BE%D1%82%D1%80%D0%B5%D0%B1%D0%B0/>>.

across very few such epithets (“Putinists”, “KGB-ists/KGB-ers”, “*rubladzhii*”); counter-propaganda usually borrows phrases such as “fifth column”, “sellouts”, etc., imposed by anti-democratic pro-Russian propaganda, and uses them – by changing the meanings and referents – to describe “the Kremlin” and its “puppets”. Secondly, counter-propaganda language is practically absent in the newspapers and news websites with a pretension to serious journalism, and it is even absent in tabloids – it is disseminated primarily via blogs (the news websites which often appeared in the search results on the main keywords – such as factor.bg – as using such keywords but with an inverted meaning, were very few). Thirdly, according to the search results, counter-propaganda language usually appears as a response to pro-Russian propaganda – such discourse is activated above all on national holidays (3 March, 6 September) and most often uses arguments from Bulgarian history. And last but not least, such uses of counter-propaganda language are incomparably rarer than pro-Russian anti-democratic propaganda in Bulgaria.

This last point can be seen in the comparative chart on the frequency of use of just two keywords: “*rubladzhi**” and “*Sorosoid**”:

Chart 12:



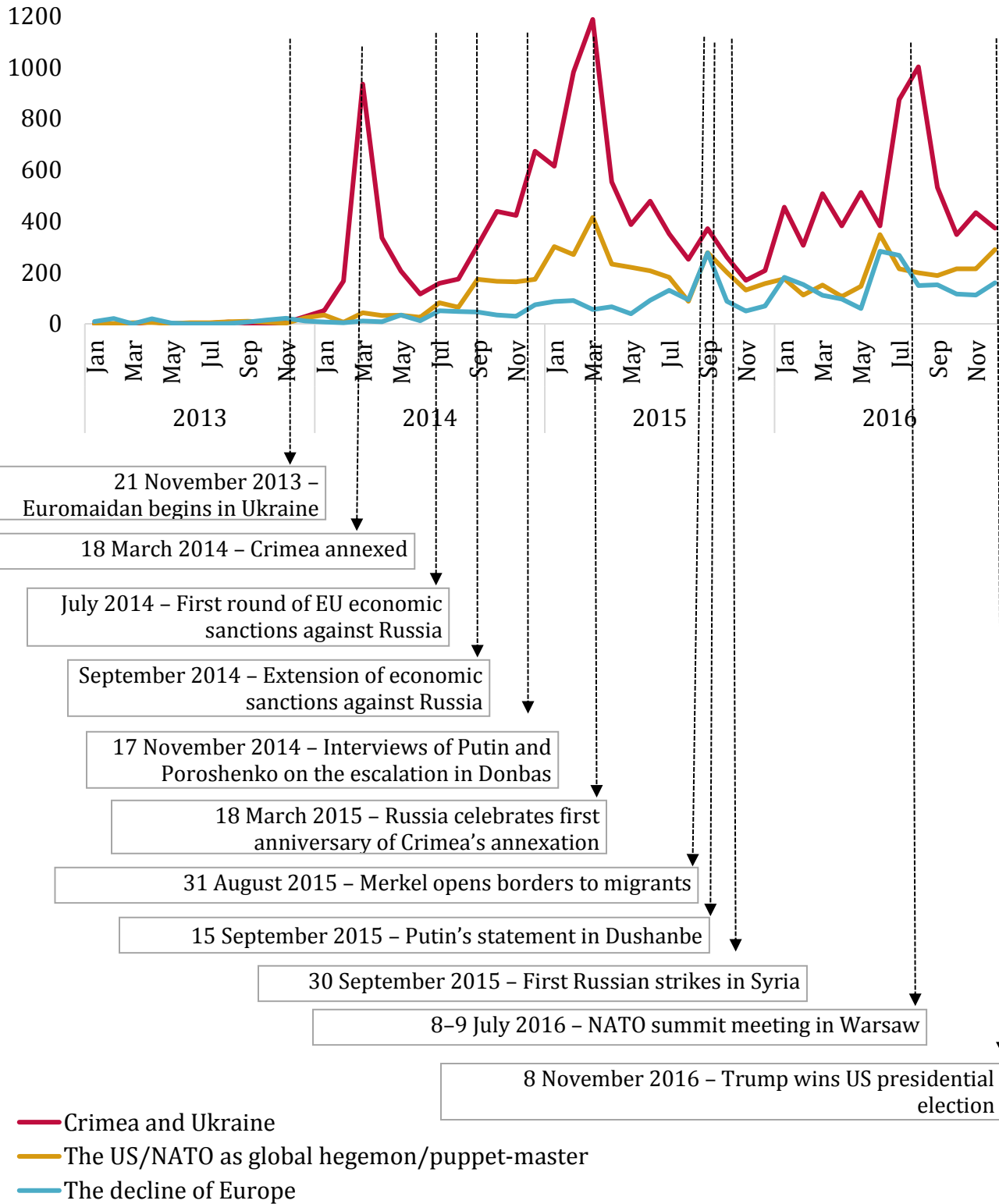
Comments: SENSIKA identified a total of 508 matches in searching for “*rubladzhii*” and 2,188 matches for “*Sorosoids*” in the period between 1 January 2013 and 31 December 2016. In other words, the total use of the propaganda epithet “*Sorosoid*” is four times higher than the counter-propaganda use of “*rubladzhiya*”. It must be noted that unlike “*rubladzhiya*”, which does not have multiple propaganda synonyms, “*Sorosoid*” has quite a few (see the semantic cluster on “Bulgaria’s Venal Elites” above). If we take this into account, then the difference in the uses of the relevant words would increase much more

in favor of “Sorosoid”, “grant-sponger”, and other such words that are characteristic of pro-Russian anti-democratic propaganda in Bulgaria.

COMMENTS AND CONCLUSIONS

1. The most sustained and steepest growth throughout the 2013–2016 period is found in the discourse discrediting civil society on the domestic political plane – Topic 3: “Bulgaria’s Venal Elites”. The steady growth confirms the general quantitative assessment – made above – regarding the particular importance of the domestic uses of anti-democratic propaganda language;
2. 2014 was the only year in which the most intensive growth – for a short while even higher than that on Topic 3 – is found in search results on subtopics 2.3: “Russia’s Enemies” and 2.5: “Crimea and Ukraine” – directly linked to the war in Eastern Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea. In 2015 the growth in search results on both sub-topics slowed down significantly, and declined slightly in the case of sub-topic 2.3: “Russia’s Enemies” in 2016. The slight decline in “enemy discourse” can be explained both with the changed international situation where ever more populist voices were mentioning the lifting of sanctions against Russia, and with the adoption of a more pragmatic focus – precisely on the lifting of the sanctions – by official Russian propaganda (see next);
3. The other two propaganda lines with a sustained growth throughout the 2013–2016 period are on sub-topic 2.6: “The Sanctions against Russia” and on Topic 1: “The Decline of Europe”. The growth in the encouragement of Euroscepticism – as compared to the overall positive attitude of the Bulgarian public towards the EU – is due both to the inertial effect of propaganda itself, and to the problems that were encountered by the EU itself and which are used to strengthen propaganda: the Greek debt crisis, the migrant crisis, Brexit.
4. Another two propaganda lines that show a slight decline in 2016 are on sub-topic 2.4: “The Power of Russian Weapons” (the peak on this sub-topic was Russia’s intervention in Syria in 2015) and on Topic 4: “The US/NATO as Global Hegemon/Puppet-Master” (anti-Americanism receded in the face of declared sympathies for Donald Trump).
5. MAIN CONCLUSION: Despite the slight divergences, the three propaganda theses – 1. The decline of Europe; 2. The rise of Russia; and 4. The US/NATO as global hegemon/puppet-master – simultaneously followed the international – mainly the Russian – political calendar. We demonstrate this with the following comparative chart:

CAMPERATIVE CHART



III. CHAPTER III

QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE PRESS-CLIPPING RESULTS²⁰

III.1 GENERAL PICTURE OF BULGARIA AND THE WORLD IN THE PROPAGANDA PRESS

Anti-democratic media create a total picture of the world. The scheme is simple and repetitive, and it can withstand almost all sorts of internal contradictions.

Europe as institutions, actors, and values appears in the following genres: opinions, analyses and pseudo-analyses, and a small number of interviews. Insofar as it is present in the reporting genre, it is to be found in reports on statements by Vladimir Putin, Eurosceptics and other critics, in reports on debates on the sanctions against Russia, as well as in reports on terrorist acts and fruitless discussions on Europe's migrant policy. Metonyms for the institutions of united Europe are Brussels, Angela Merkel, the Eurocrats, the EU bureaucrats.

Genre is the way texts act upon the reader. The forms that present the image of Europe act as direct invitations to accept a particular opinion. But the combination of genres also creates an environment for the formation of this opinion: pure commentary without news reporting creates the feeling of swampiness, of an organic process of decay, or at the least, of ahistoricity.

The main schemes through which the public is invited to share in this feeling, are the following:

Europe has been captured by the institutions of united Europe which, in their turn, are a conduit of US interests. Liberal values are a US weapon that is weakening Europe – “multiculturalism” and “human rights” are American weapons against identities. In addition, the US is also using a more direct weapon – the Islamic deluge. It has unleashed an Islamic avalanche on Europe after destroying Europe's immunity through multiculturalism and human rights. It is operating by the logic of “destroy immunity/inject disease”.

²⁰ Available only in Bulgarian at: <www.hssfoundation.org>.

As genres, opinion and commentary invite us to accept this picture. People usually do a positive test, that is, they look to their previous experience for confirmation of the picture they see. They need to have an already established alternative picture in order to be able to reject this one.

How is this picture played out in domestic-political publications? This is done by encouraging the rejection of multiculturalism and political correctness:

Multiculturalism and political correctness are American weapons against Europe and rejecting them is not wrong, it is a noble and brave act. Those who accuse you of hate speech only prove that they are American agents (in the softer version, euphemistically – a conduit of foreign interests).

At the same time, those who speak of liberal values – against hate speech, of human rights and respect for diversity – are vilified by another type of media outlets, the tabloids which have concrete political and economic stakes and enemies.

Those who speak of liberal values are office-seekers but they don't like working hard; or, at the least, they are selfish and don't notice the suffering of the poor who angrily reject human rights because human rights are in fact privileges.

The other version, where those who speak for liberal values are public officials, is that they are "lickspittles", "toadies" and other spineless jerks who want to keep their posts, privileges and/or influence. Those who speak of Euro-Atlanticism are disuniting the nation.

The dominant genre on the topic of Russia is the news report.

Russia is an innocent victim of aggression (first analogy with the Second World War). The aggressions are of three types: unwarranted sanctions, creation of a front against Russia along its western border, and a smear campaign by Western media – Russia is wrongfully accused of being a military aggressor while it is in fact a peacemaker (analogies are drawn between Donetsk/Aleppo/Stalingrad). Russia is mighty militarily – it is constantly developing new weapon- or military-use technologies that make the Americans scramble to catch up or tremble in fear.

Those media-constructed weapons have added value from the fact that they are in combat-ready mode but are not used. Russia is a “peacemaker”.

Russia’s image is promoted elliptically by analogy, too. The lines along which analogies are drawn are mainly two: Russia, which was innocently attacked but brought peace to Europe in the Second World War; and Russia, Europe’s liberator from Islam. The third line – of Christian civilization and traditional family and collective values – hovers on the periphery.

The two main lines of analogy are intertwined in Syria:

Russia is the pacifier of the conflict triggered by the US in the Near East, which is flooding Europe with Islam.

This is a direct and powerful invitation to accept the already existing association: “Russia, Europe’s liberator from Islam”.

On the **domestic political plane**, this is processed through the figure of the migrants who are increasingly equated with the refugees along the lines of refugees=migrants=Islamic terrorism.

Russia is stopping the terrorist groups in Syria; hence, it is stopping militant Islam on its march to Europe.

Refugees and migrants are only a discursive medium of the affirmation of Russia’s role not merely as peacemaker but as savior (analogy with the Russo-Turkish wars).

This is amplified by the tabloid anti-government media outlets which use the Islamic card to undermine the majority and the government.

Conclusion of the syllogism:

The US is letting Islam into Europe, while Russia is stopping Islam. Hence: Russia is defending Europe from the US, while Europe is taking part, “with stubborn recklessness”, in its self-destruction by supporting the US (with regard to the sanctions and NATO bases), that is, it is supporting the US in its war against itself. This is possible because the European Union is “neither European nor a union”, it is

a “gang of smug, soulless, fat-cat” bureaucrats, a vassal of the US, that is, of big financial capital.

This figure of a helpless Europe fighting a war against itself has its domestic-political correlates personified by President Rosen Plevneliev, the reformers, and the protesters. These correlates are rather an undifferentiated mix (protesters, Euro-Atlanticists, anti-Putinists, liberals) and it is precisely this non-differentiation and amalgamation that does the propaganda work of demoralizing. With regard to those figures, the strategy of demoralization consists in belittling and humiliating them, not in identifying them as a rival or enemy – an analogy with pups, Lilliputians, etc. Here the following contamination is at work:

Russophilia means independence, while its absence means Russophobia and conceals our venal desire to be independent. That desire, however, is driven by the petty personal interests of “the puppets”.

Next, we offer a detailed demonstration of the above picture of Bulgaria and the world in the Bulgarian anti-democratic propaganda press.

III.2 SIGNED AND ANONYMOUS ARTICLES ON THE MAIN TOPICS

Out of all 3,305 articles in the database, a negligible number (47) are indicated as reprinted from other media outlets in the sample and almost all (41) are on Topic 1: “The Decline of Europe”. It is noteworthy that practically all are centered around the death of Europe. Thirty-four articles are reprinted from Western media, with a notable prevalence of Le Figaro (22 articles, 12 of which were first published in Glasove and then reprinted in Pogled-info from Glasove).

The message is not surprising: Europe will die if it does not return to nation-states. The genre is self-criticism, confession from the heart of Europe, internal demoralization. The style is “academic”.

The policy of these publications is a classical propaganda technique of demoralization – media outlets with authoritative-sounding names, such as Le Figaro, Der Spiegel and Agence France-Presse, publish authoritative names who admit the weakness and failure of Europe, and praise Putin and Russia. **This is the main technique of explicit affirmation of Russia – by reprinting articles from Western media.**

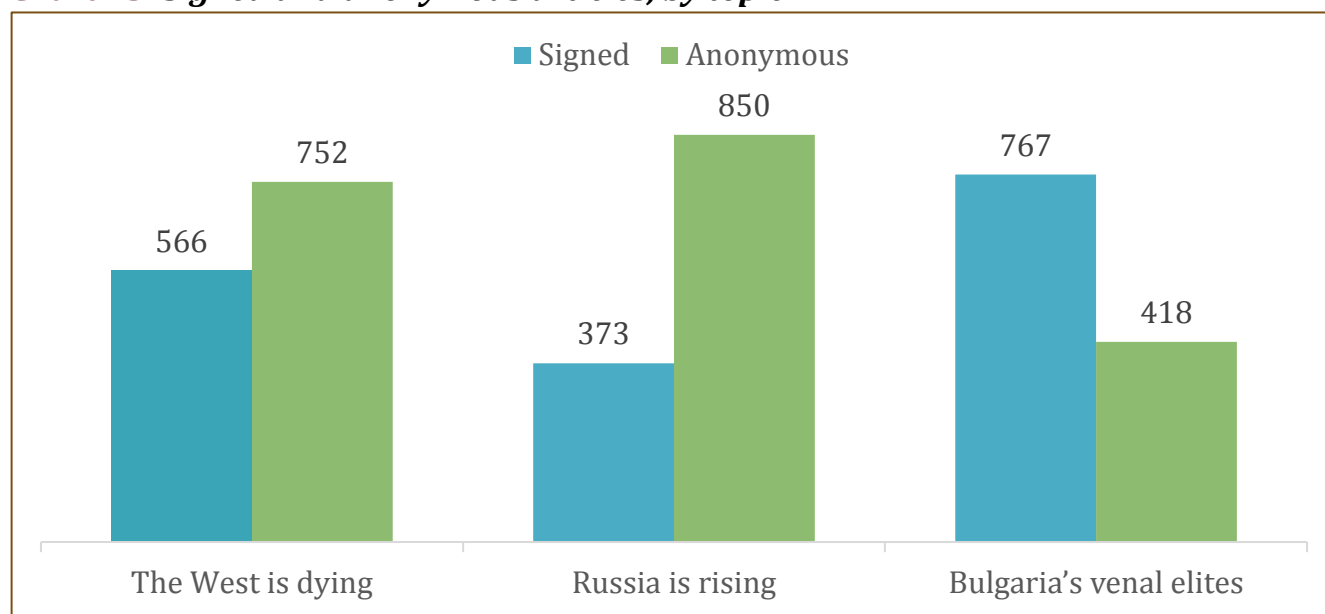
The image of Russia in Bulgarian anti-democratic propaganda has changed over time. It has turned from explicitly indicated to elliptically affirmed – as the natural negation of all evil. It has also undergone an internal change of emphasis, which is governed by the logic of Europe’s “suicide” – the message that Europe is committing suicide because it is becoming de-Christianized has given way to the message that Europe is committing suicide because it is united. The main messages are two. First, that the West is failing because of the disintegration of collective identities – the Eurocrats are against the peoples, the intellectual elites are disarming the peoples in the face of the Islamic threat, and multiculturalism is destroying European civilization. All of those claims are justified by drawing on the authority of Western-sounding names and titles from Western universities. The second main message is meant to convey the feeling that European politicians have been gripped by fear – the biggest advocates of the EU are afraid that it will collapse because of the growing revolt of the masses (Euroscepticism) or because of the migrants.

What do the majority of the publications (3,305) look like?

Forty-one percent²¹ (1,353 in number) of them “bemoan” the death of Western civilization (Topic 1). Slightly fewer (36% or 1,204 publications) show Russia as the good power (Topic 2). Third, with the same percentage but with 10 less in number, are the publications criticizing Bulgarian elites (Topic 3) – 36% or 1,194 publications. The ranking seems clear, even though the numbers are close. This, however, is not the case if we classify the publications according to whether they are signed or anonymous.

We have defined as “anonymous” those publications which are either unsigned or are signed with the name of the media outlet that has published them. Signing articles with the name of the media outlet is also a form of anonymity when it is not clear who is behind the latter. The chart below shows the clear difference between the thematic priorities of signed and anonymous articles.

Chart 13: Signed and anonymous articles, by topic



A total of 1,367 of the coded publications are signed. More than half of them are devoted to Topic 3, criticizing the Bulgarian establishment – 767 (56% of the signed articles), out of which 588 are wholly devoted to this topic. A total of 566 (41%) signed articles deal with Topic 1 (The West is dying). The smallest share of the signed articles is on Topic 2 (Russia is rising) – 27% (373 articles) of all signed articles deal with it, out of which 12% (165) are wholly devoted to Topic 2.

²¹ As many of the publications are on more than one of the topics included in this study, the total adds up to more than 100%.

What do the thematic interests of the unsigned articles look like?

The anonymous publications²² are 1,877 in number, out of which 657 in PIK, 531 in Pogled-info, 252 in Rusiya Dnes, 172 in Trud, 171 in Glasove, 75 in Duma, nine in Aspecto, and two in Weekend.

The favorite topic of the anonymous publications is that of the rise of Russia (**Topic 2**) – 850, or 45% out of all 1,877 anonymous publications are devoted to it. Many of the articles deal with more than one topic.

Forty percent (752) of all anonymous articles deal with **Topic 1** (Europe is dying) – 510 are wholly devoted to it, 173 combine the weakness of the West with the rise of Russia, and 69 discuss the decline of the West in combination with Bulgaria’s venal elites.

Topic 3 (Bulgaria’s venal elites) is addressed by 418 anonymous articles (out of which 311 are devoted wholly to it – most of them in PIK, Pogled-info and Trud). Sixty-four combine it with the decline of Europe, and 43 with the rise of Russia. Here the different strategy of signed and anonymous articles can be clearly discerned: whereas just 27% of the signed articles praise Russia, those that do so are 45% of the articles that are signed with the name of the media outlet or which are completely anonymous. **Conclusion: Openly praising Russia is “more awkward” in the first person, as an authorial stance, although it is done entirely purposefully in the name of the media outlets (through anonymous publications).**

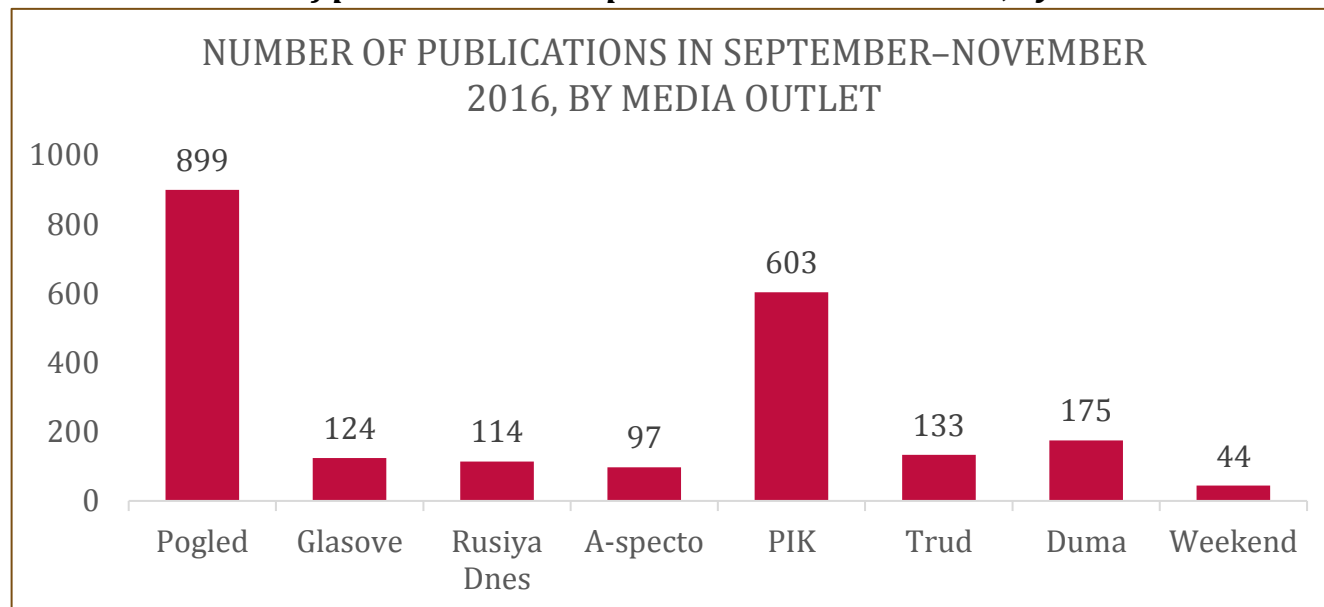
The media outlet with the highest number of anonymous publications in our database is PIK – just 25 of the articles from PIK are signed, almost all of them on Topic 3. To be more specific: if all processed publications from PIK constitute 21% of the total in the database, the signed publications from PIK are just 2% of all signed ones.

²² Unsigned publications or publications signed with the name of the media outlet that has published them.

III.3 REVIEW OF THE MEDIA OUTLETS BY TOPIC

Let us compare the intensity of publication of materials classified as anti-liberal and anti-democratic propaganda in the press-clipping. For the purpose, we will compare three months that have been thoroughly researched for all media outlets: September, October and November 2016.

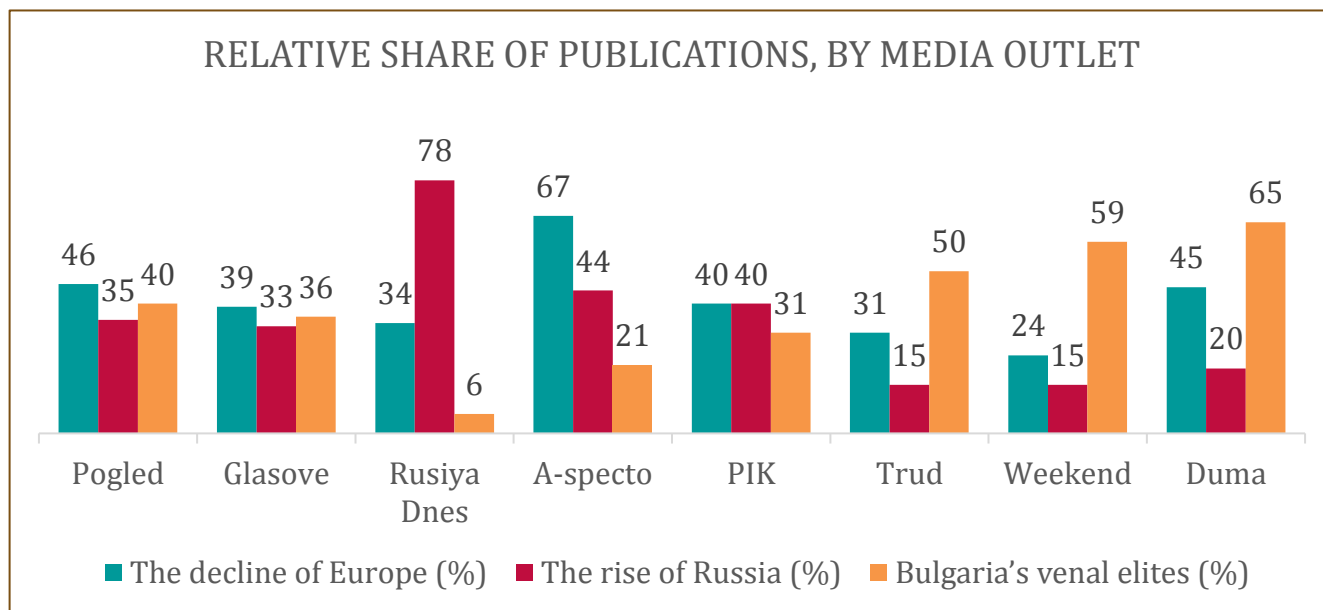
Chart 14: Number of publications in September–November 2016, by media outlet



The media outlets with the highest intensity of publication of anti-liberal and anti-democratic propaganda materials are Pogled-info, a media outlet that mostly reprints and disseminates, and PIK, the media outlet with the largest number of anonymous publications in the database. In order to compare the media outlets, we will compare the relative weights of the publications on each of the three topics in each of the media outlets – this will enable us to categorize the eight media outlets in the sample into types according to two intersecting criteria:

- a) ratio between foreign-political and domestic-political publications;
- b) ratio between topic “Bulgaria” and topic “Russia”.

Chart 15: Relative share of publications, by media outlet (for all eight media outlets)



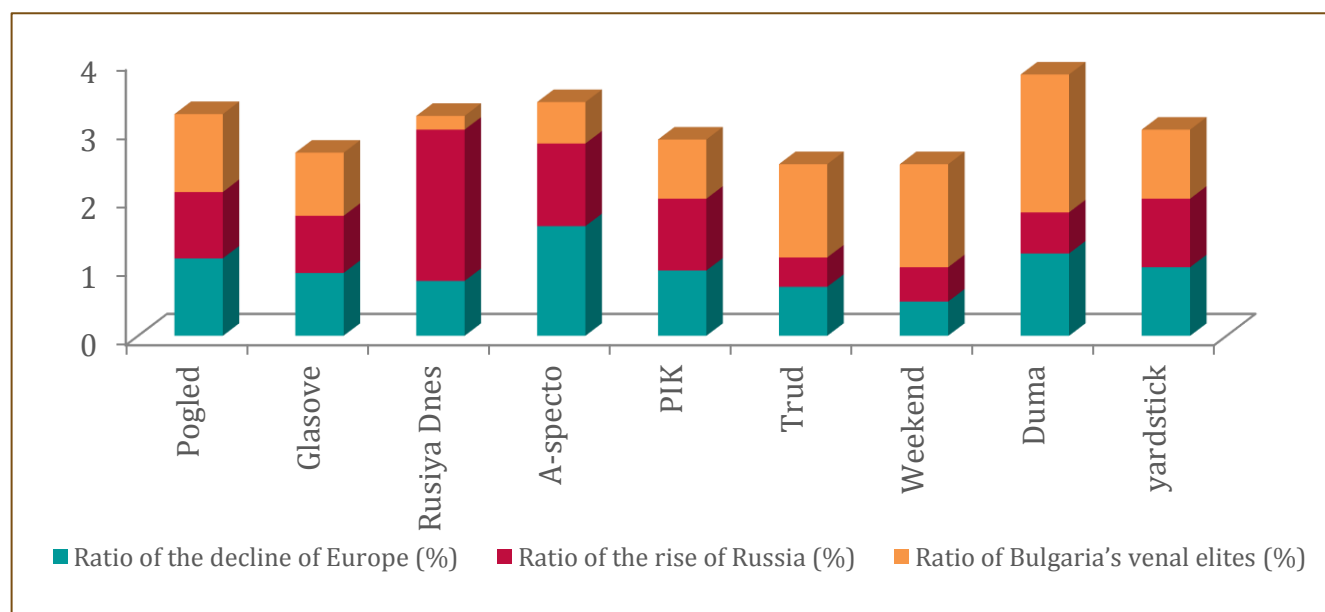
As a result of the application of these criteria, the eight media outlets can be categorized into three types:

1. **Propaganda media outlets aimed primarily at discrediting domestic political opponents:** prevalence of domestic-political publications and categorical prevalence of those on topic “Bulgaria” over those on topic “Russia”. According to the quantitative analysis, this category comprises the **newspapers Duma, Trud and Weekend**. This type of propaganda can provisionally be called “tabloid”. Trud and Weekend are undoubtedly tabloids: they use scandal and sensationalism to discredit domestic political opponents. By this criterion – priority- and ad-hominem vilification of domestic political opponents – Duma falls into the category of tabloids. By other characteristics, Duma differs from pure tabloids: 1. It is not generally subversive, it is pro-BSP and pro-PES, and therefore less anti-European (Trud and Weekend are not pro any political party and ideology), and 2. It has higher linguistic pretensions.
2. **Geopolitical propaganda media outlets:** prevalence of foreign-political publications and prevalence of topic “Russia” over topic “Bulgaria”. This category comprises the **newspaper Rusiya Dnes, the magazine A-specto and the PIK News Agency**. By other criteria, the PIK News Agency differs in that it conducts a “tabloid” domestic-political negative campaign such as is not demonstrated by the other two geopolitical propaganda media outlets in this category.

3. Rather **geopolitical propaganda media outlets with tabloid elements**: prevalence of foreign-political over domestic-political publications, but prevalence of topic “Bulgaria” over topic “Russia”. This category comprises the **websites Pogled-info and Glasove**.

To illustrate the profiles, we will show when the relative share of publications from a particular media outlet on a particular topic is larger or smaller than the relative share of publications from the same media outlet in the total database. The “yardstick” column shows what the media outlet would have looked like if it had an equal share of publications on the three topics.

Chart 16: Ratio between share of publications by topic and share of publications in the total database (for each of the eight media outlets)



It should be noted that the tabloids also conduct anti-democratic propaganda by creating a definite climate of opinion in favor of rejecting the institutions of democracy, but the logic of this propaganda is governed by battles for interests on the domestic plane.

Before specifying the profiles of the media outlets more precisely, let us look at the content of the propaganda media. We will begin with those of a mixed type, which conduct two parallel lines – pro-Russian, national-sovereignist in interpreting the world, and populist anti-government in presenting the domestic political picture.

III.3.1 POGLED-INFO

*Pogled-info*²³ practically does not generate content, it reprints content from other media in full or in part, with or without indicating the source. This makes it a typical disseminator of messages with propaganda content, or in other words, a propaganda digest. Just 197 of the 1,030 publications from Pogled-info in the database were written by staff members for this media outlet. All the rest are reprinted – mostly from *Rusiy a Dnes*, *A-specto*, *Glasove*, *Duma*, *Ruski Dnevnik*, *PIK*, and *Vzglyad*. The favorite news agencies of Pogled-info are BGNES, TASS, and Ria Novosti.

The dominant topic in Pogled-info is the failure of the Western world. Here, as in all other media outlets, the triumph of Russia is affirmed not as a figure of critique of local political actors and institutions, but as a counterpoint to the Western world. The Pentagon is trembling in fear of Russia’s military might according to statements by people with Western names, Europe is split over the sanctions against Russia, NATO is cracking in the face of the obvious injustice of opening a front along the borders of the country that bore the brunt of the Second World War.

Although the rise of Russia ranks last by number of publications on the three main topics, the internal genre structure of those publications is very telling: the overwhelming majority of publications in Pogled-info on Topic 2 are reports (analyses predominate in the case of Topic 1) – out of 357 publications on the rise of Russia, 302 are reports, while 21 are interviews in which military officers, diplomats, political commentators affirm Russia versus the moves of the West, mainly the US. The general profile of Russia is that of a powerful geopolitical player that is on the rise (Russia’s military rise looks like a metonym for an overall rise). The affirmation of this thesis is achieved through dominance of the genre of reports coming from news agencies, a strongly objectivistic style, an abundance of quotations and technical information, and bombastic headlines. Insofar as Europe and the US are present in the reports, it is in the “demoralization” genre – the West is protesting against itself (protests against CETA, statements by sensible European politicians against the sanctions, reports about NATO hawks’ fears of Russian weapons).

Through genre, texts exert influence on audiences. Viewed from the perspective of the genres used in Pogled-info, the picture looks as follows: Russia is the fresh power, there is a present and actions in it, something is happening and moving (reports whose principal appears to be factual reality itself). Conversely, in the morally-condemning opinion pieces,

²³ Online-only media outlet targeted at an audience without pretensions to general political culture.

which predominate on Topic 1, in Europe there is no action – there is a quasi-biological process of decay. The Yanks are warmongers, but their own people does not want their dirty wars.

Propaganda works to create a total picture of the world. In this picture, democracy is discursively and semantically withdrawn from institutions and assigned to “the peoples” under the guise of sovereignty.

[Vasil Vasilev:] “We are aware that the most important decisions about Bulgaria are made by Brussels and we are asking ourselves why we are electing these people in the government, and in the National Assembly, considering that it is not they who make the decisions.” [...] In his words, our state sovereignty will disappear completely, since once the agreement [CETA] enters into force, not only Brussels but also each of the big transnational corporations will have priority over Bulgarian legislation. (Pogled-info, 28 October 2016)

To summarize, the publications on the topic of Russia are dominated by news reports, where the reporting genre itself creates a feeling of reality and factual truthfulness beyond ideological discourse. Conversely, there is a practical absence of the reporting genre in the publications on topics about Europe and the US, and reduction of such publications to opinions, analyses and pseudo-analyses about the decline of the West, which elliptically and contrastingly affirm Russia as: a) a civilization (in contrast to Europe which is dying as a civilization because of its political organization which subordinates it to the interests of American financial capital and the American military-industrial complex), and b) as an armed-to-the-teeth peacemaker, through association along two lines – the war in Syria/the Great Patriotic War; the flooding of Europe with Islam orchestrated by the US versus Russia, Europe’s liberator from Islam. Those two lines of association are suggested not by concrete theses but by analogies.

Russia’s positive image is rarely associated with criticism of the Bulgarian political elites and processes. On this plane, the following scheme is affirmed: Europe is decaying as a civilization because of its organization as a political union. Let us save Europe by ensuring its disintegration. The point of intersection of the three lines of propaganda, its nexus, is the sovereigntist discourse which opposes identity to institutions and rejects democracy at the level of primordial identities.

III.3.2 GLASOVE

Glasove is one of the conceptual reservoirs of the digest Pogled-info.²⁴

Out of all 387 publications from Glasove in the database, 149 are on Topic 1, 125 on Topic 2, and 137 on Topic 3.²⁵ The ratio of publications is the same as in the disseminator Pogled-info. The news reports are less than one-third – a total of 114. In Glasove, Russia and Europe are equally present in the reports. But here is the style of the reports on the topic of Europe:

Russian President Vladimir Putin regards as “degradation of democracy” the resolution on countering Russian propaganda against the EU, which was adopted today by the European Parliament. (Glasove, 23 November 2016)

Actually, this is a common-place of propagandists – by banning Russian propaganda, the West is undermining its own liberalism. The central line of Glasove is that Europe is losing its identity, submerged in consumerism and bureaucracy, and deliberately flooded by the US with a wave of migrants. There is a crisis of identity of European civilization, which has turned away from its Christian roots (on this point, propaganda relies on an already functioning associative connection – Islam is terrifying, it is un-European; the association made is between the US and Islam, and hence, Russia is affirmed as the Old Continent’s defender against Islam). From this point on, propaganda strives to build a new associative connection by transferring the negative connotations of the first association onto Europe: Islam in Europe, hence, a dying Europe. The reports in this vein are often from Russian sources (cited as regnum.ru, Komsomolskaya Pravda, TASS, or uncited – such as, for example, the source of the full text of Vladimir Putin’s 8 March congratulations to the women of Russia, published in Glasove).

Glasove does not explicitly preach against democracy, but is consistent in its vilification of democratic institutions (both national and international ones). Here the voices are external and internal – interviews with French conservatives, articles by American authors, but also by local opinion-makers such as Yavor Dachkov and Lyubomir Yosifov.

Glasove consistently opposes European civilization to European political organization. This is done by the following logic: the EU is not Europe; the European politicians are not

²⁴ Online-only media outlet targeted at an audience with pretensions to general political culture.

²⁵ The sum of publications on the three topics adds up to more than 387 because some of them deal with more than one topic.

Europe; liberal values are not Europe. All of those are destroying Europe. What they are destroying, however, remains mythically unspecified. What remains of Europe after removing all its destroyers is national identity.

What are the prerequisites for the success of this strategy?

One of the keys to the breakthrough of anti-democratic (which, in this case, is also pro-Russian) propaganda in Bulgarian media is that in Bulgaria there is no affirmed “mythic” image of Europe from before the propaganda era. Europe is, to a large extent, seen as “the West”. The propaganda messages are infiltrated into this syncretic cluster, and they have started to build some sort of image of Europe only now. Until now Europe has been seen as the West, where the West means affluence. Europe does not have a value-based image. In addition to affluence, it is taken to mean control over the internal order. The internal order, however, looks increasingly lax and weak, which weakens the image of Europe significantly. In the final analysis, the image of Europe looks as follows: either Europe is Islamized under pressure from the US which is financing terrorists and conspiring with them, or the construction called “European Union” is in fact a conspiracy of the multinational corporations against the peoples of Europe. In Glasove the affirmation of Russia is done through Western voices, mostly publications reprinted from Le Figaro in which French conservatives praise Putin and Russia. The image of Putin’s Russia is that of a peacemaker (and, yet armed to the teeth).

The dominant domestic political picture is conspiratorial and anti-party: all political parties are disgusting, the country is governed by a cabal between Delyan Peevski and Boyko Borisov. Borisov entered politics with criminal money provided by Sreten Jocić and as an American servant. He facilitated the leaking of information about Corporate Commercial Bank (KTB) to the benefit of consulting firm AlixPartners; he took a commission on the deal privatizing Bulgartabac via offshore companies, and the money is used to finance terrorism. The other “top bad guys” are the protesters, the remains of Democrats for a Strong Bulgaria, and Ivo Prokopiev. It is noteworthy that in the interpretative scheme of Glasove, there is no business mafia – there is a political mafia that is crushing businesses.

III.3.3 WEEKEND

Weekend²⁶ falls into the category of tabloids and is predominantly focused on the domestic political picture, through which it maintains the parallel and synonymy between “the failed Bulgaria” and “the failed Europe”, and creates an atmosphere of malicious public cynicism.

This is done through metonyms for the undifferentiated mix of Euro-Atlanticists, liberals, and anti-Putinists, who are stylistically humiliated by being identified not as enemies but as non-entities: pups, Lilliputians, midgets. Belittlement demoralizes, while identification as a rival or enemy does not. The main opponents belittled in this way are Rosen Plevneliev and the liberals, Radan Kanev, Hristo Ivanov and the reformers, where the invariable emphasis is on that those “Lilliputians” are “propagandists on the payroll of a foreign embassy”.

The protagonists are “us”, where “us” is constructed by the mechanism of victimization: “us Bulgarians”, the ordinary hard-working but low-paid “good guys”:

Thank goodness, at least, that the prime minister is a guy of the people, with common sense, and not, say, an “artist” from Filip Dimitrov’s sect. (Georgi Atanasov, Weekend, No. 28, June 2016)

The thesis is that “Poor Man’s Bulgaria”, “the long-suffering Bulgarian people” is telling the truth by calling the Roma and the migrants “animals”. “We” are the victims of abuse – by gays directly; by Gypsies directly; by liberal politicians indirectly – by conspiratorial circumvention of the laws. This abuse enjoys protection and receives support (again with conspiratorial elements) – from the liberals, the Sorosoids, the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee. The judicial system is theirs via the Bulgarian Judges Association. Thus, “we” are abused by:

- Rosen Plevneliev – constantly contrasted with Boyko Borisov; a minion, Lilliputian, clown, non-entity, spokesman of the Euro-Atlantic junta; a synonym for NATO/Brussels;
- the Bulgarian Judges Association;
- the state-owned broadcast media – they are financed selectively by the liberalist NGOs;

²⁶ Both online and in-print media outlet targeted at an audience with pretensions to general political culture.

- the NGOs – structures of foreign intelligence services, which, by saying “hate speech”, give a secret password to the judicial system, George Soros, the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee, the America for Bulgaria Foundation, to attack – through lawyers and denial of financing to the media outlets that tell the truth about the abuse against “us”;
- NATO – a junta, “weapons oligarchy”, analogy to the Third Reich; the EU versus Europe – democracy is senile, debilitated, decadent, and serves fascism and war, concludes a pact with the Reich.

What are “we” doing? Nothing – we look after our families, work, speak our minds, call things by their true names (“Gypsies” and “pederasts”). It is the bad guys that are the active ones. The good guys are a victim, the people is passive: every political and civic act of the ordinary people is rendered meaningless!

The main effect of Weekend is to maintain the climate of public cynicism: “we” see and know, but will not play this game. There is no point in taking action because nothing will change, non-participation is a moral principle.

“The circle of problems and interests is limited to one’s family and closest circle” (Levada Center Director Lev Gudkov, interviewed by Mikhail Sokolov for [Radio Svoboda](#), 10 February 2016). This is superimposed on “the creation of an ultimate general background of total and unconditional corruption” ([Ibid](#)). The idea of corruption as a background feeling at once strengthens those in power because of the effect of withdrawal from action and erodes any form of power as legitimate, creating inclinations for acceptance of emergency action.

III.3.4 A-SPECTO

The profile of A-specto²⁷ – the chief interpretative and, by profile, purely propaganda media outlet in the anti-democratic propaganda machine in Bulgaria – is completely different. Out of 169 publications from A-specto in the database, 113 are devoted to Topic 1: “The Decline to Europe” (exclusively, or in combination with another topic), 36 to Topic 3: “Bulgaria’s Venal Elites”, and 75 to Topic 2: “The Rise of Russia”. The specific characteristics of A-specto include the following: it is targeted at young, successful, and highly educated urban people (from a generation to which the Russian messages must be addressed in English); its pretension is that it offers intelligent, profound, analytical, and unordinary materials that do not look as if they are based on talking points. But let us

²⁷ Both online and in-print media outlet targeted at an audience with pretensions to general political culture.

look at them, having been already prepared by the analysis of more ordinary propaganda media outlets.

Here we again find the voice of the people and the nation-sovereignist message. What is impressive is that it serves as ersatz-leftism – upon a structural analysis, this media outlet does not look leftist, but nationalism is clothed in leftist rhetoric. The institutions of the political union “Europe” are represented again as anti-national and as overlapping with the multinational corporations. Europe is portrayed as a colonial structure that has fused bureaucracy and capitalism into imperialism. Europe is “multicultural, consumerist, and de-sovereignized liberal”, and it must be decapitated by referendums. We again see the classical scheme of anti-institutionalism, withdrawal of democracy from the image of institutions and pressure upon them in the civic process, the assignment of democracy to the sovereign people in something like a referendum dictatorship. But if we think that this is a leftist idea of direct democracy, we are wrong:

The liberal [...] [n]arcissistically cares about those who are suffering, self-contemplates his humane pose, but those who suffer from his lack of foresight are others, local victims of terror, regardless of their faith and persuasions (in Nice quite a few of the victims were French Muslims) [...] The migration wave is transplanting ethnic, clan, religious and national conflicts to European soil, provoking local mores, feeding corruption and crime.

This is from an article by the spokesman of the left, Ivo Hristov, from 30 August 2016. The profile of A-specto is just as anti-liberal national-sovereignist as that of Pogled-info (which, being a disseminator, regularly reprints publications from A-specto). The leftist rhetoric is used only in negative form – for anti-capitalist critique of the EU – but there is nothing specifically leftist about the point of view of the authors; it remains merely a rhetorical instrument.

CONCLUSIONS: The media outlets differ significantly above all on the domestic-political plane. All eight researched media outlets follow the geopolitical framework of anti-democratic propaganda in Bulgaria – they are **anti-West and pro-Russia** (most often Russia is the “Good Guy” in the publications). **Rusiya Dnes and A-specto** abide above all precisely by this geopolitical framework and more rarely vilify domestic political opponents – the Arch-Villains in them are most often the US and NATO, not particular local individuals. **Duma, Glasove and Pogled-info** maintained an oppositional behaviour on the domestic political plane in 2016 – most often the Arch-Villains in them are Boyko Borisov and the GERB government. President Rosen Plevneliev is also regularly vilified, although he is rarely portrayed as one of the Arch-Villains – he is constantly belittled.

Conversely, although their geopolitical framework is anti-West and pro-Russia, the behaviour of **PIK and Trud** is almost neutral and even pro-government (pro-Boyko Borisov). **PIK and Trud** most often cast in the role of the Arch-Villain the *Capital* circle, used as a metonym for pro-reform politicians, media, magistrates, and NGOs. It is obvious that **the geopolitical propaganda orientation and the domestic-political orientation of the propaganda media outlets in Bulgaria are not strictly bound together: different domestic political opponents are regularly vilified and praised regardless of the geopolitical propaganda framework.**

III.4 AUTHORIAL VOICES: COUNTING AND DISSEMINATION OF RUSSOPHILIA

The largest concentration of authorial voices praising Russia is in A-specto – 10 authors with a total of 45 publications, 17 of which were reprinted in other media outlets – that is, A-specto is also the largest donor of authorial Bulgarian voices on Topic 2. The second largest concentration of authorial voices of Bulgarian journalists and experts is in *Glasove* – six authors with 29 publications. However, only one of them was reprinted. Third in terms of concentration of Bulgarian voices praising Russia, but without any reprints, is *Rusiya Dnes* – four authors with 19 publications. The most widely reprinted authors are not the most emblematic ones (who fuse principal and author) but, rather, the authors of “expert” messages and interviews on the subjects of geopolitics, security, and energy.

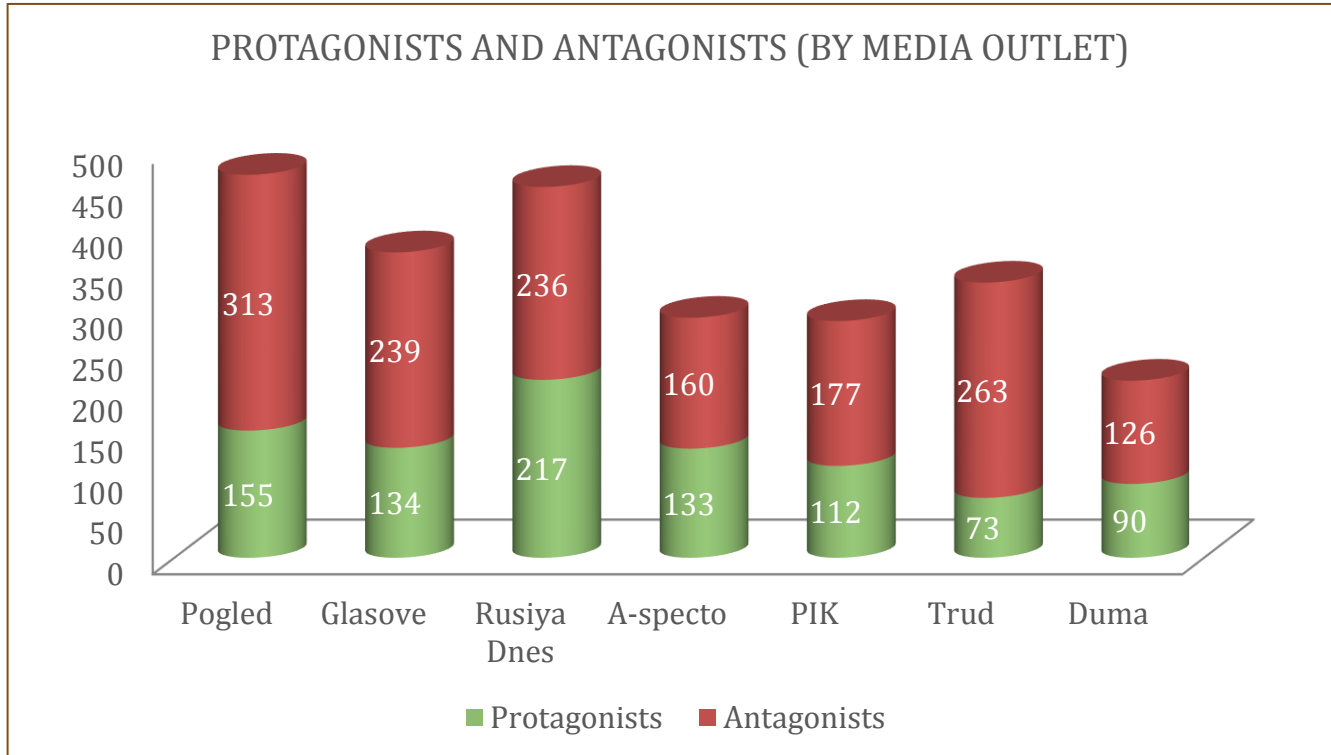
One of the main tools of propaganda myth is inevitability. One of the central feelings/expectations that are steered, strengthened, stimulated and stereotyped by the authorial voices to the point of turning them into a mythic reality is that of the downfall of Europe. We will give a random example from A-specto: “the last day of the Christian European Union”. The tone is funereal because of the negotiations with Turkey. America will be delighted that the colonization of Europe has at long last been completed. Here is another example: “The US organized the pogrom in the Near East, and it is now orchestrating the conquest of Europe”; “Europe is taking part with stubborn recklessness in the American geopolitical ventures which are foreign to its interests [...] it is taking part in the war against Russia, which is a war of the US against Europe.”

III.5 WHO ARE THE BAD GUYS WHEN EVERYTHING IS BAD?

The processing of the 3,305 press-clipped publications included a structural analysis – identifying the main protagonists and antagonists in the world of Bulgarian anti-democratic propaganda. For this purpose, a list was drawn up of the protagonists and antagonists in each publication (up to three each, when relevant), as well as of their actions and predicates. Here we will present the main conclusions from this structural analysis:

1. There are almost no matches between the lists of protagonists and antagonists: Bulgarian anti-democratic propaganda depicts a split world. An article that pretends to be analytical cannot content itself with presenting a single point of view. This is also yet another indicator of the propaganda character of the publications – presenting monolithic, seemingly non-contradictory but in fact one-sided points of view.
2. The antagonists significantly outnumber the protagonists and they are structurally first – they act in the world (doing evil). According to the ratio between them in each media outlet, we will distinguish ideological from non-ideological media outlets.
3. The protagonists are affirmed on the basis of two main models: elliptically, as antagonists of the antagonists; and as victims – by the mechanism of victimization. These models do not depend on whether the media outlet is ideological or not. That is to say, propaganda at this stage is negative, preparing public attitudes by undermining values and institutions.
4. The maligned individuals and institutions significantly outnumber the antagonists. Bulgarian anti-democratic propaganda is negatively-subversive.

Chart 17: Protagonists and antagonists (by media outlet)



Although the antagonists outnumber the protagonists in each media outlet, three different profiles can be identified. First, media outlets in which the protagonists are half as many as the antagonists (such are those of a mixed type – Pogled-info and Glasove). Second, media outlets in which the antagonists are approximately more than two-thirds of the protagonists (ideological media: Rusiya Dnes, A-specto, and to some extent PIK where the ratio between protagonists and antagonists is almost two to three – classified so far as geopolitical propaganda media. In this regard, Duma also belongs to this category; although by other criteria it is closer to domestic-oriented outlets, in terms of protagonist/antagonist ratio it can be defined as a geopolitical tabloid). Third, media outlets in which the protagonists are fewer than one-third of the antagonists – such as Trud, which is a pure subversive tabloid.

III.6 ARCH-VILLAINS (TOP ANTAGONISTS)

Up to six actors (protagonists and antagonists) were listed for each publication. We will first present the top antagonists, that is, those indicated as the most significant actors defined negatively in the respective articles: the arch-villains. In order to compare the media outlets, we have recalculated the absolute number of occurrences of each actor in percent, showing the actor's relative weight among the villains in the respective media outlet.

This also gives us an answer to the question of whether the populist messages in present-day Bulgarian anti-democratic propaganda are in fact anti-elitist. The answer is: no, not at all.

The whole database shows a discursive separation of the US from the West – the West is under the control of the US, it is a synonym for the hinterland of American hegemony. There is a mismatch between the West and Euro-Atlanticism in propaganda discourse. Euro-Atlanticism means the US plus a volatile set of institutions of united Europe, European political leaders (most often Angela Merkel), and capital cities, regarded as conduits of American interests. Through this equation, the view implicitly promoted at the level of associative manipulation is that the EU is a projection of American interests which are against the authentic European values that are supposed to be national-sovereignist. At the same time – at least in the case of Bulgaria – on the domestic political plane the national-sovereignist interests are defined (again through association, not through arguments) as anti-party.

Charts: Frequency of appearance of different actors in the role of arch-villains (in %, by media outlet):

Chart 18: Arch-villains, Pogled-info

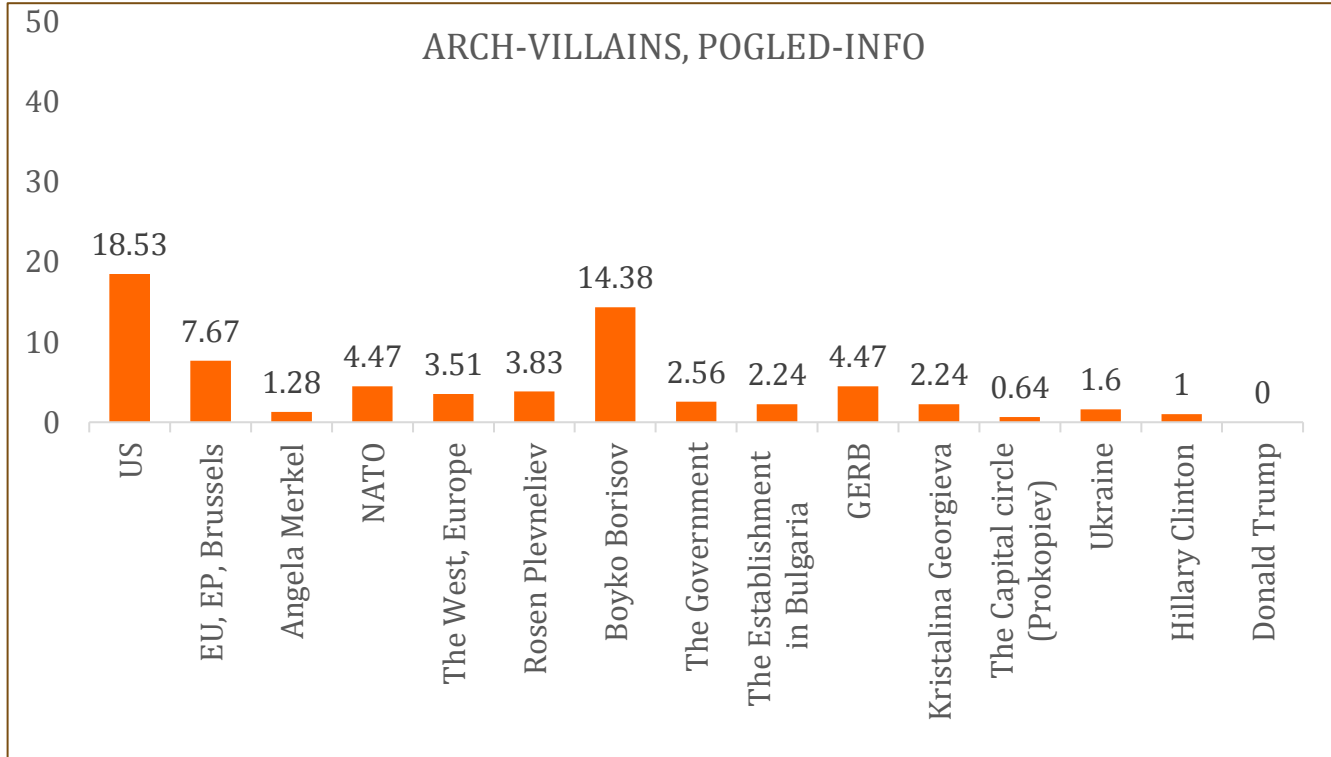


Chart 19: Arch-villains, Glasove

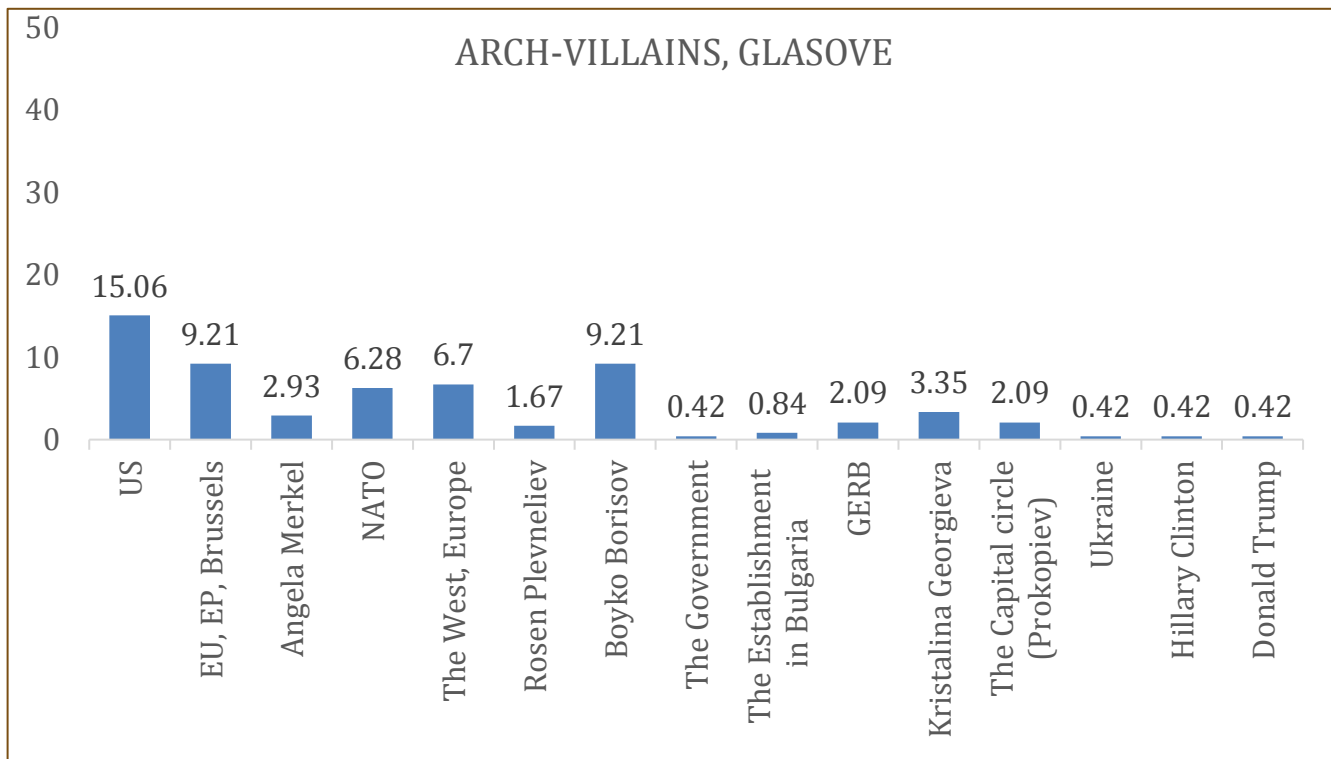


Chart 20: Arch-villains, Rusiya Dnes

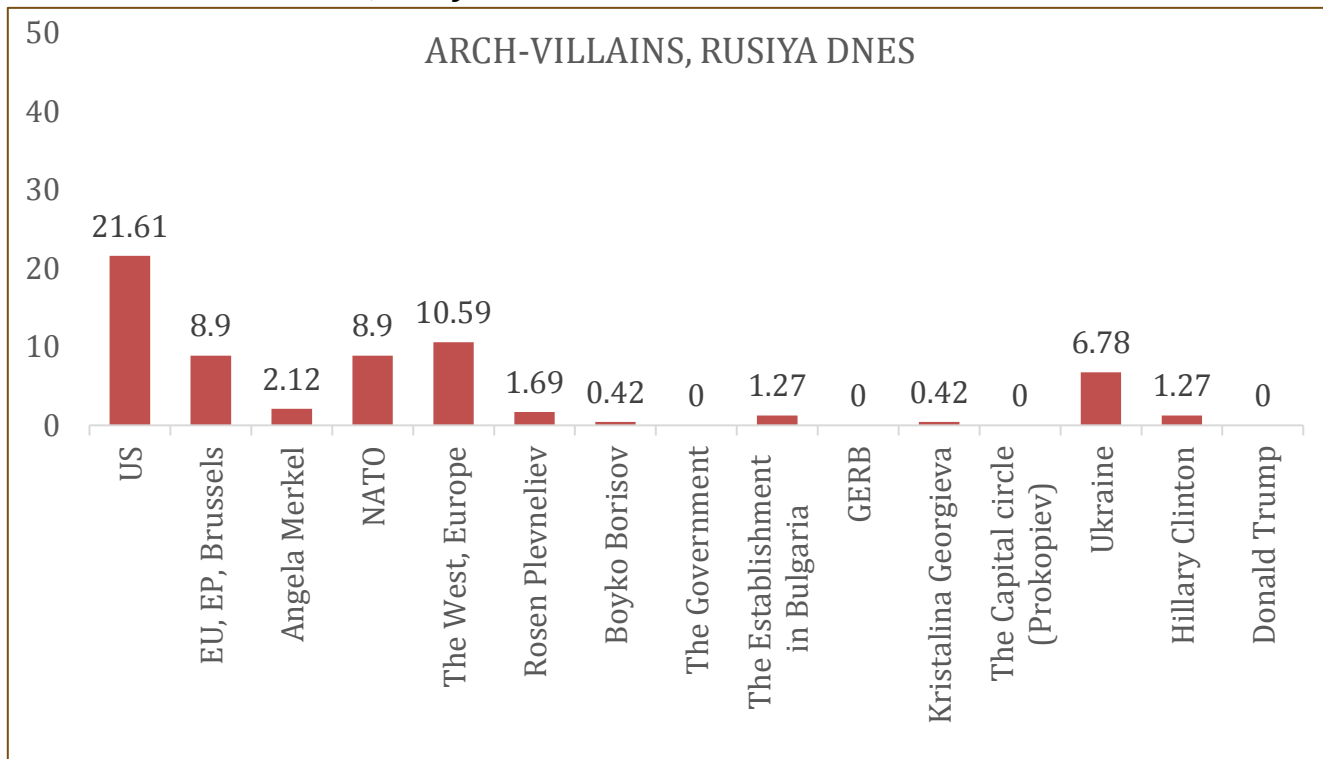


Chart 21: Arch-villains, A-specto

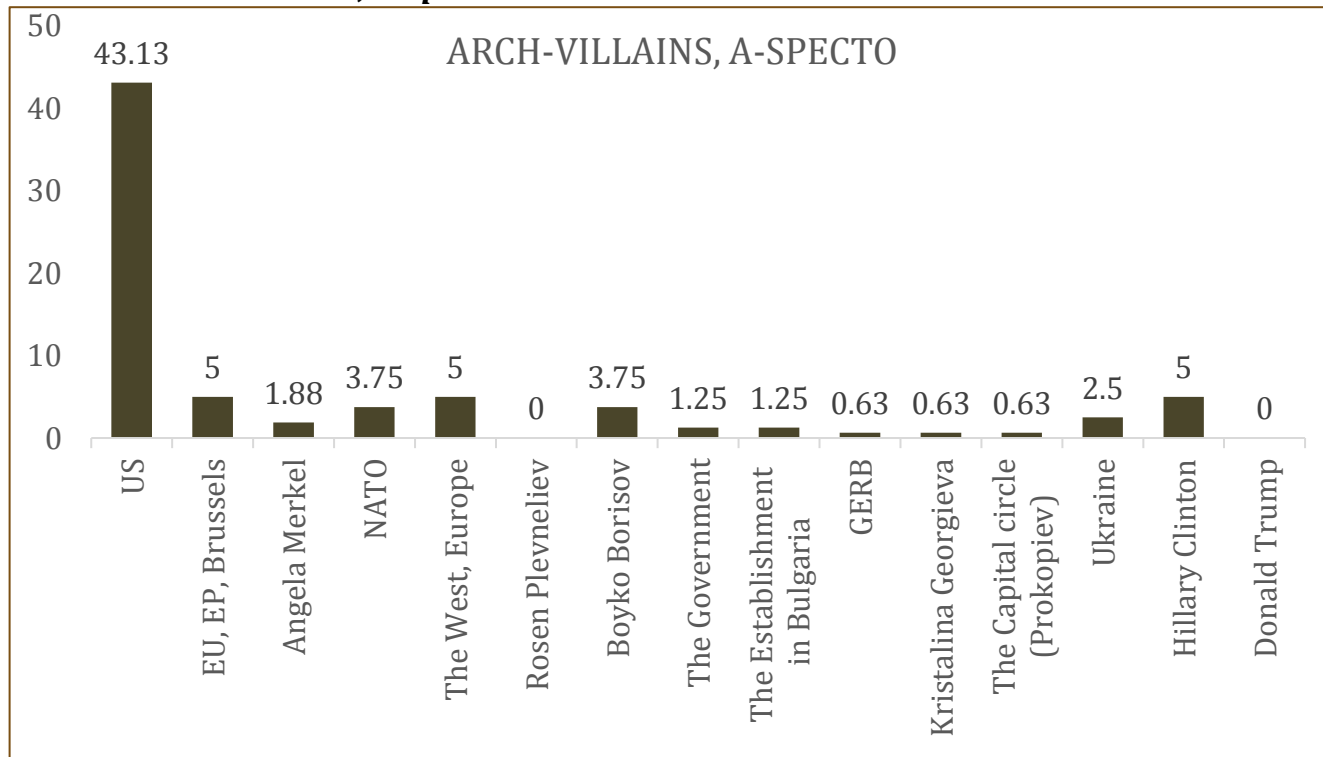


Chart 22: Arch-villains, PIK

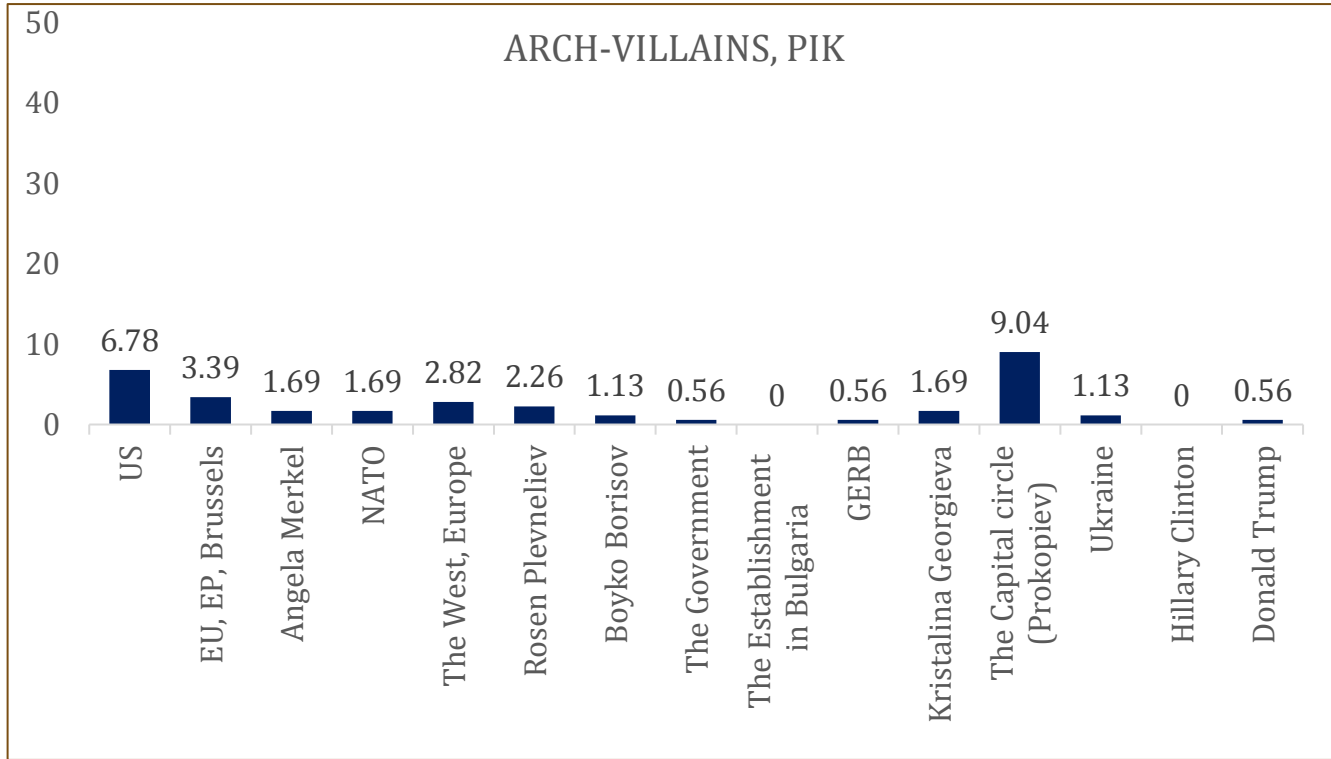


Chart 23: Arch-villains, Trud

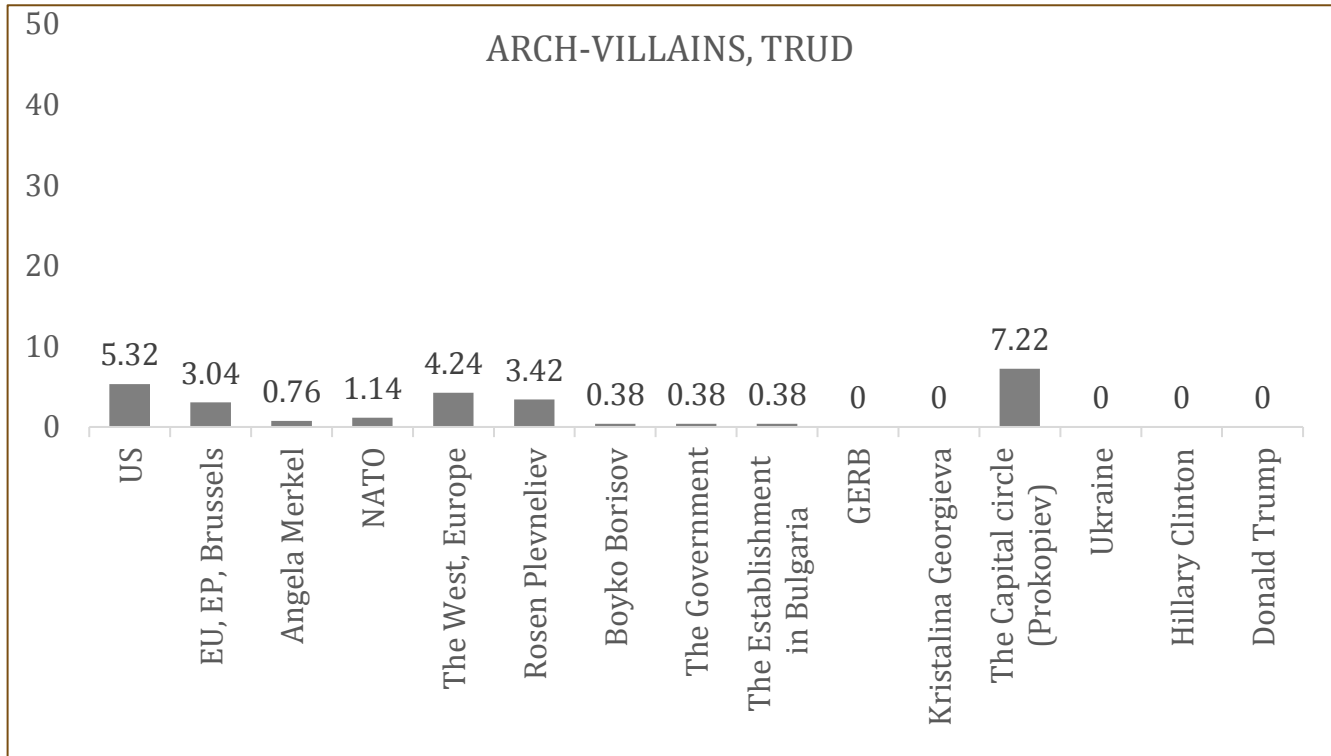
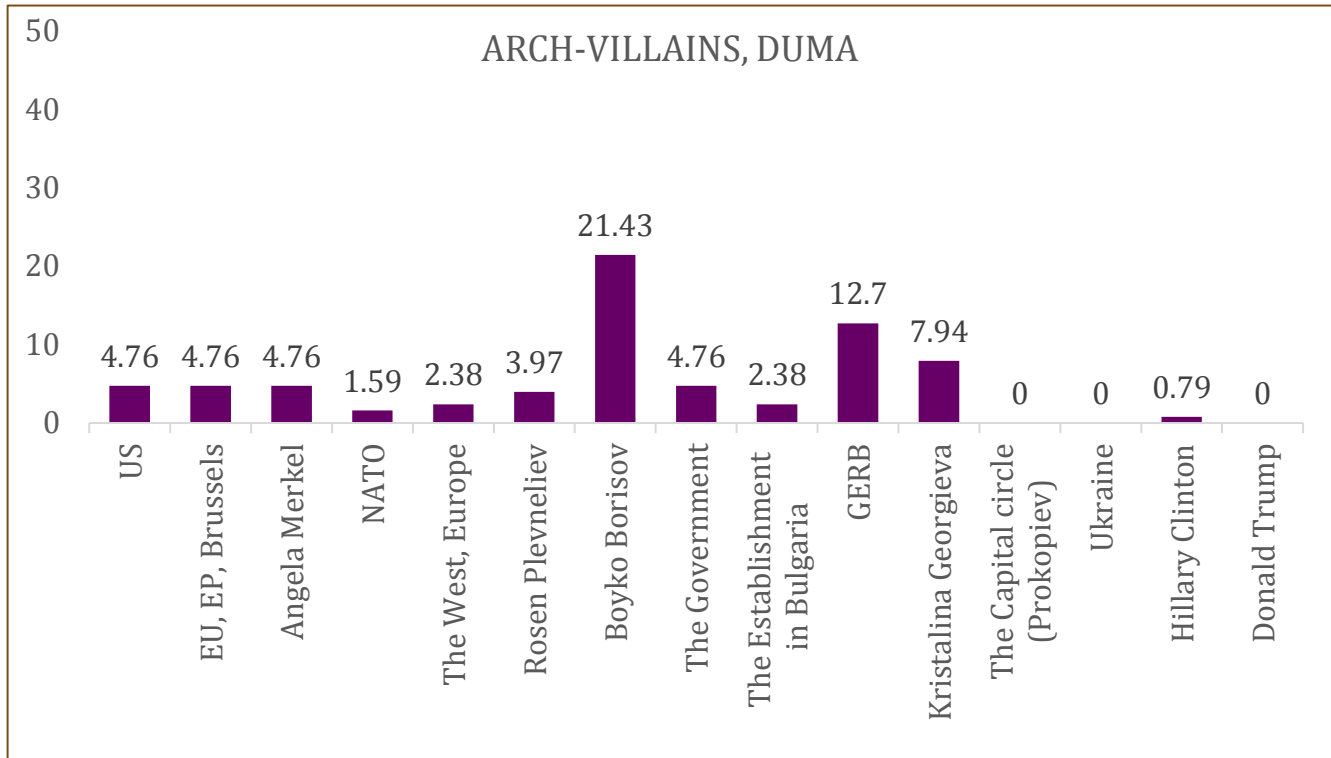


Chart 24: Arch-villains, Duma



As regards the structuring of the picture of the world, the compact-propaganda media outlets (Pogled-info, A-specto, to a significant extent Glasove and Rusiya Dnes) behave similarly and are entirely comparable. However, the tabloids which disseminate anti-liberal and anti-democratic messages are only partly comparable to those three more clear-cut cases. The main difference is in that the tabloids devote considerably more space – both in terms of number of words and as interpretative space – to ad-hominem attacks. It is noteworthy that in PIK there are quite a few publications in which Russia turns out to be the main antagonist. Here, however, PIK is playing a double game: it is quoting Anglo-American intelligence and military officers who accuse Russia in a manner that betrays fear of Russia. In this way, a double effect is achieved: apparent objectivity and a sense of awe:

The Director of the British counter-intelligence [agency] MI5, Andrew Parker, warned that Russia is using “increasingly aggressive ways” and increasingly sophisticated technologies in its fight with the West. Parker: “It [Russia] is using its whole range of state organs and powers to push its foreign policy abroad in increasingly aggressive ways – involving propaganda, espionage, subversion and cyber-attacks.” (PIK, 1 November 2016)

The cases in which Russia appears as an antagonist in *Rusiya Dnes* have been eliminated from our list – they do not involve a double game but merely irony of the sort “*Koshka broсила kotyat, eto Putin vinovat*” :²⁸

“Vladimir Vladimirovich, we’ve seized all of North America and Eurasia.”

“Why?”

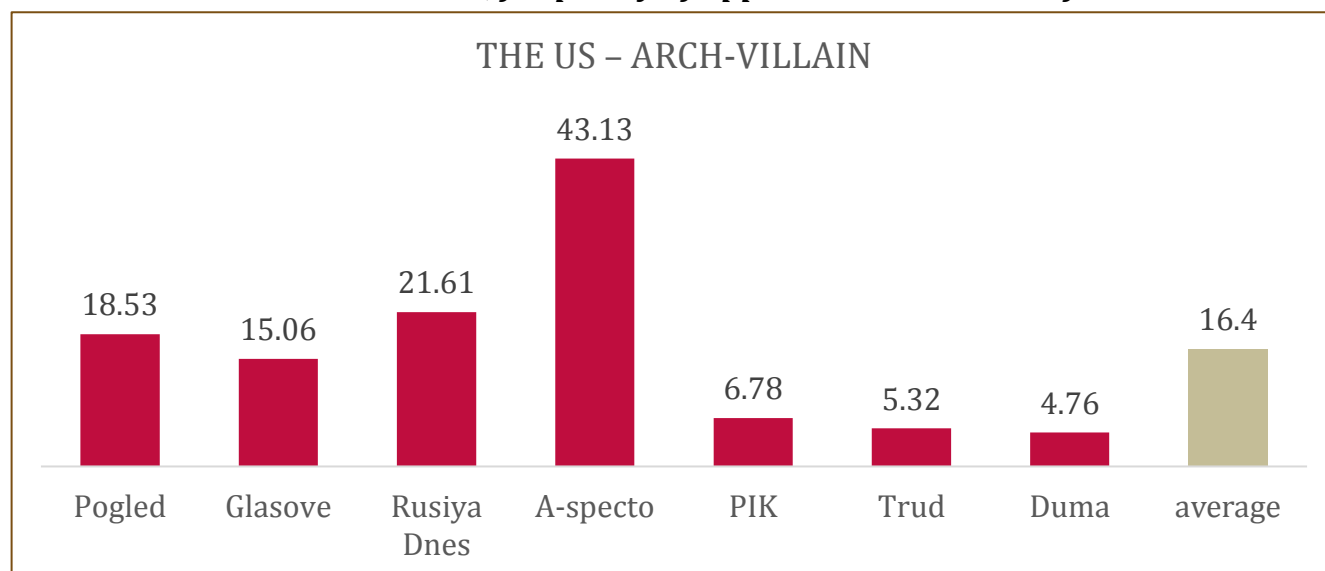
“You ordered us to conquer half the world [“*pol myra*” in Russian].”

“I said Palmyra!” :))))))

The same propaganda use of irony is found on the July 2016 cover of *A-specto* under the banner headline “*Krym nash*” (Crimea is ours) but, because of the specificities of the targeted audience, it is not in Russian but in English: a cartoon showing Putin in *Men in Black*-style, holding a cup of coffee as he speaks on the phone, saying: “Honey, you wanted cream or Crimea?”

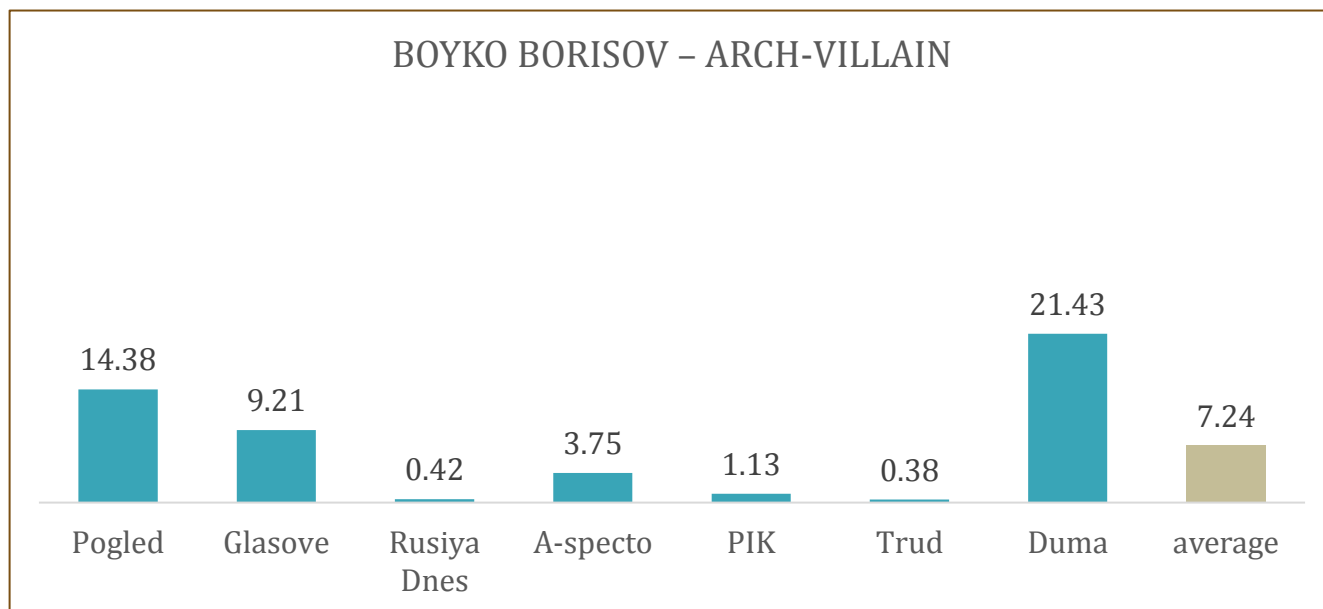
As it becomes clear, the top arch-villains are the US, the West (understood practically as Europe under the hegemony of the US, amorphously), the European institutions, and NATO. As well as Boyko Borisov. Among those arch-villains, two models can be made out: arch-villains where the standard deviation rate in the frequency of their appearance in the role of arch-villain is low, and where the standard deviation rate is high. Roughly speaking, the deviation rate shows us the range of deviation of each media outlet from an average rate. Let us look at the arch-villains with a high deviation rate: the US and Boyko Borisov.

Chart 25: The US – Arch-Villain, frequency of appearance in the list of villains



²⁸ (The cat abandoned its kittens – Putin is to blame), or, as in the “majestic”, in his words, joke told by [Alexander Simov](#) (in Russian) about a Russian military commander reporting to Putin (22 April 2016).

Chart 26: Boyko Borisov – Arch-Villain, frequency of appearance in the list of villains



Here are the profiles of the different groups of media outlets:

- Direct-propaganda media outlets: Rusiya Dnes, A-specto;
- Mixed propaganda media outlets with local interests (anti-GERB): Pogled-info, Glasove;
- Pure tabloids with instrumental use of propaganda clichés for local score-settling: Trud;
- Mixed – tabloids with local interests, publishing also propaganda texts: Weekend.

Of course, those profiles are only according to the structure of the narrative in which they portray the world. At the level of rhetoric, the picture is different – all those media outlets use also other techniques in addition to pointing out the villain: the techniques of vilification and demoralization, which use “liberalism”, “protests”, “Euro-Atlanticism” not as antagonists but simply as pejorative epithets.

III.7 PROTAGONISTS

In all types of media outlets, the protagonists are simply antagonists or victims of the antagonists; Bulgarian anti-democratic propaganda does not outline a desired picture of the world, it destroys the present hegemonic interpretation without offering anything other than national-sovereignism. The principle of affirmation of the protagonists as antagonists of the antagonists has already been described, so here it is in sum: Islam is an antagonist of Europe, Russia is an antagonist of Islam, therefore Russia is a protagonist. At the same time, Islam is not so much in the role of an actor but, rather, appears as a stage attribute – a puppet.

Chart 27: Protagonists, Pogled-info

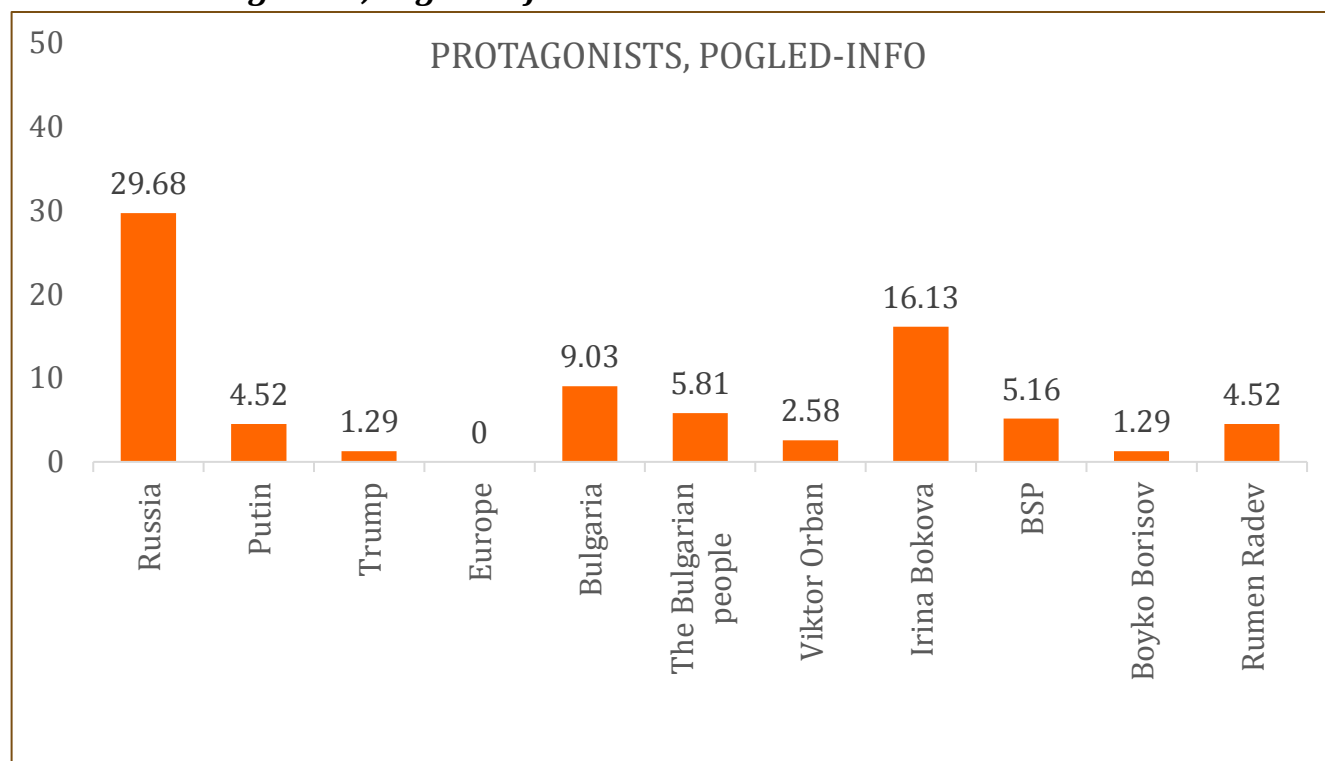


Chart 28: Protagonists, Glasove

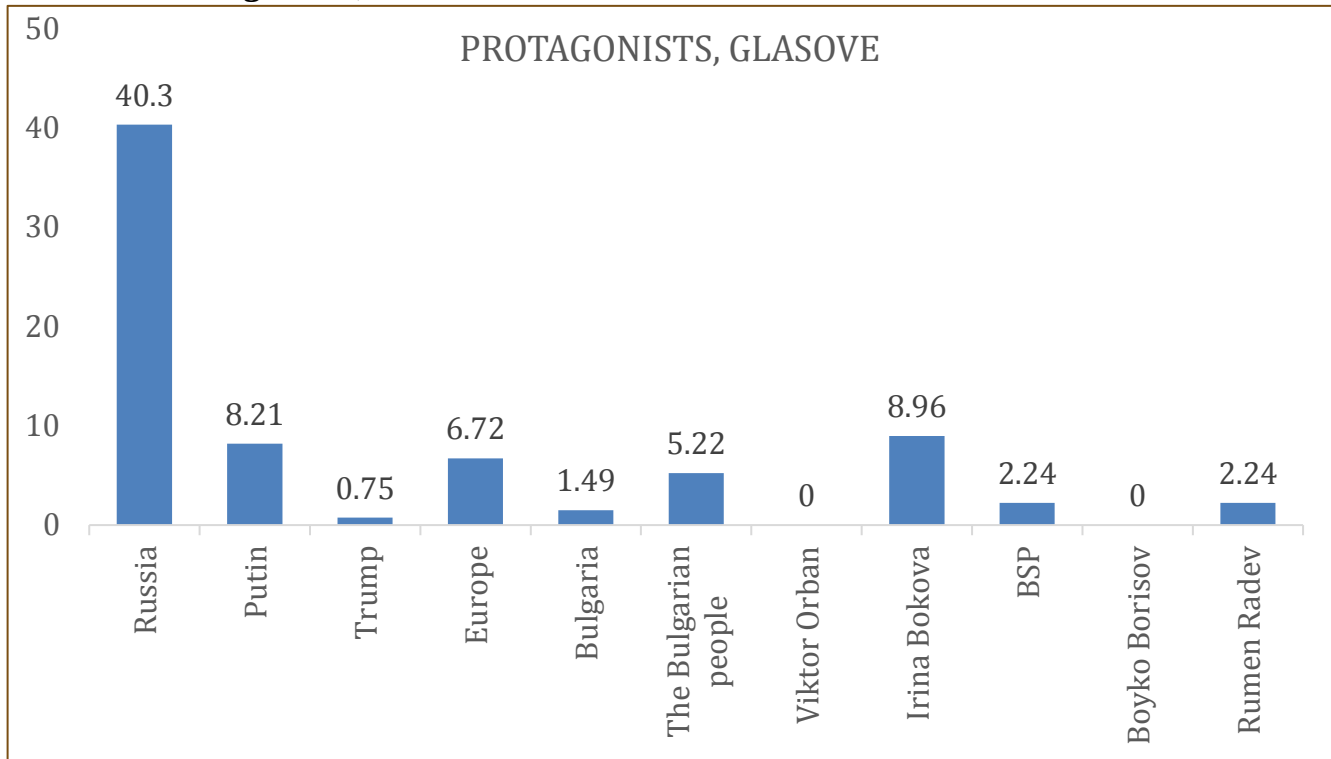


Chart 29: Protagonists, Rusiya Dnes

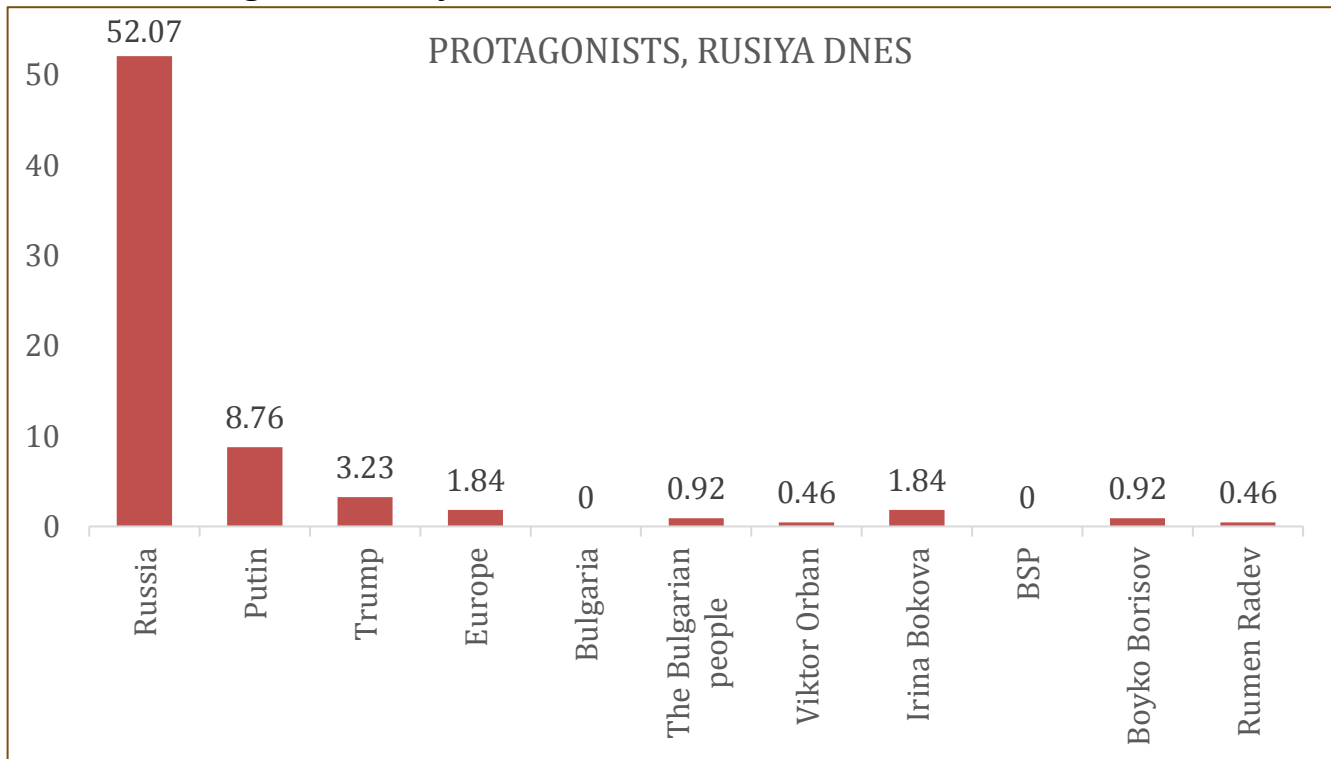


Chart 30: Protagonists, A-specto

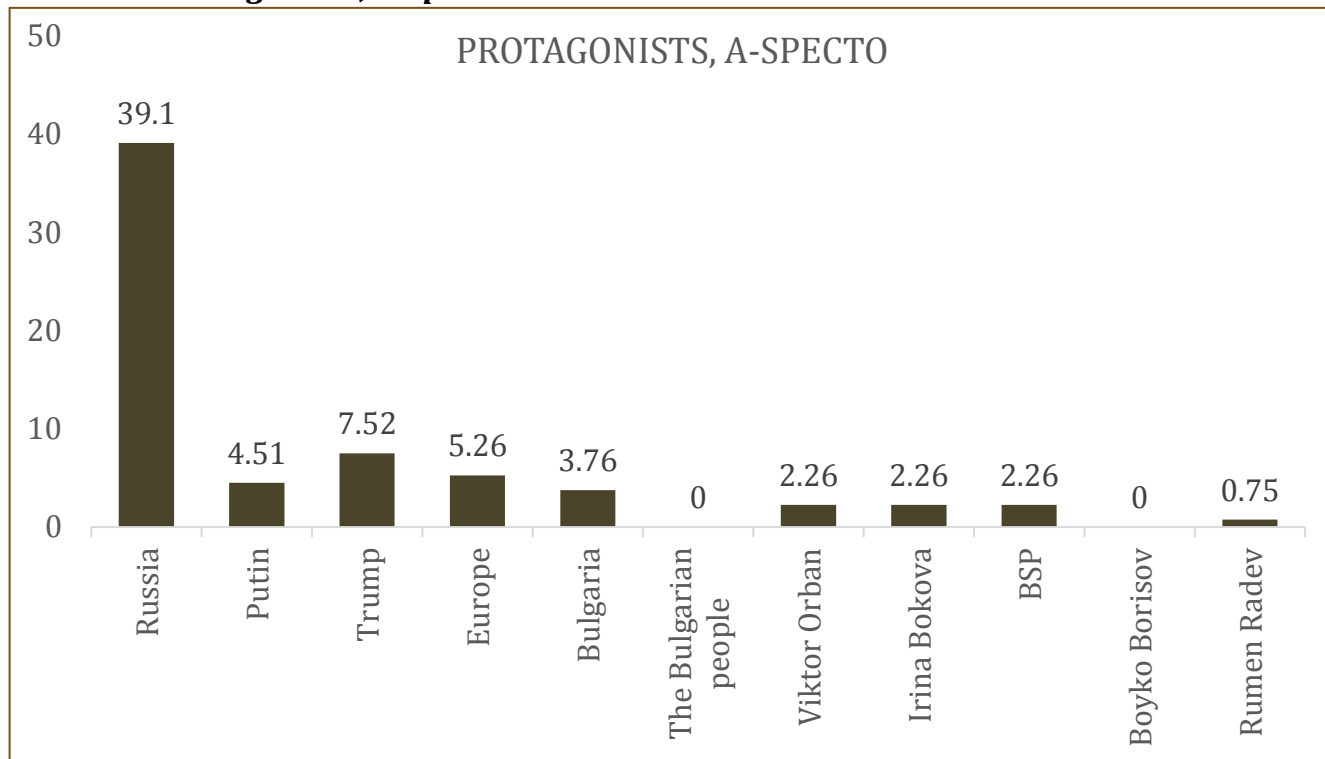


Chart 31: Protagonists, PIK

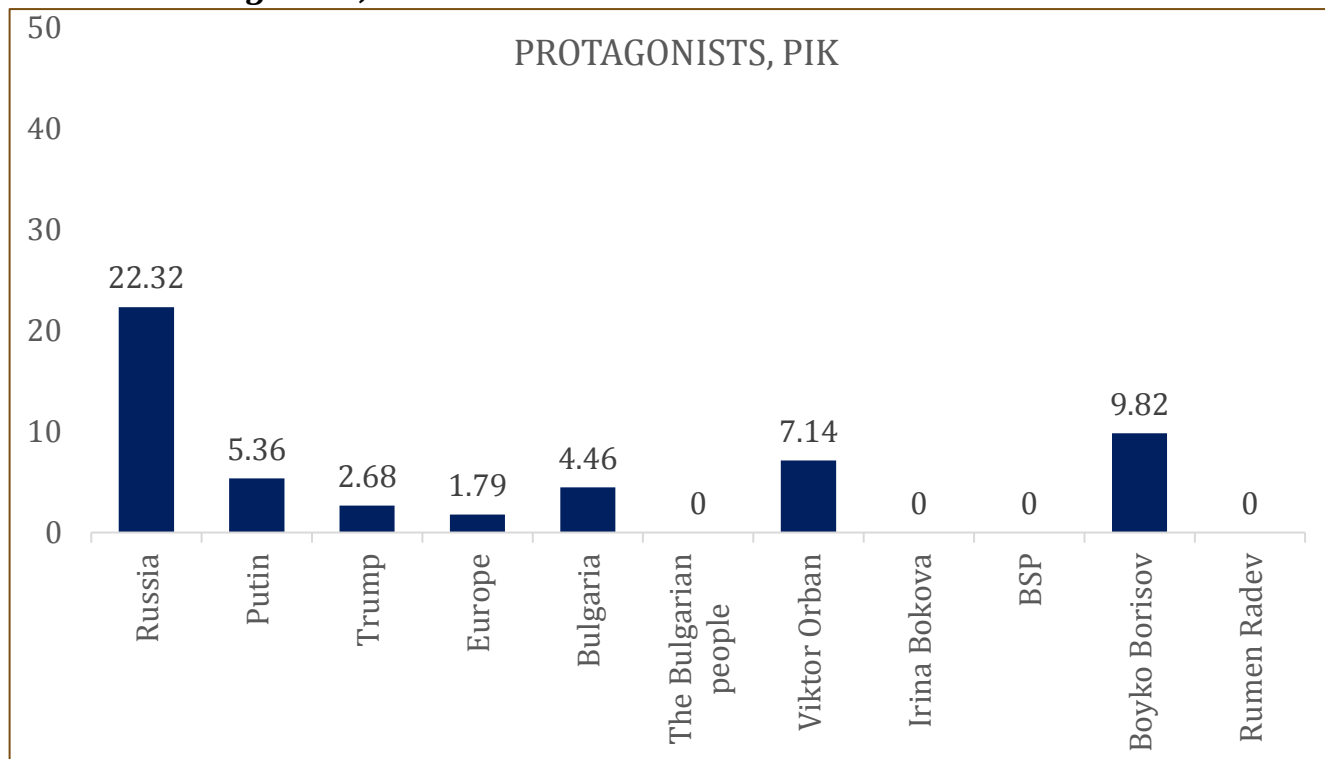


Chart 32: Protagonists, Trud

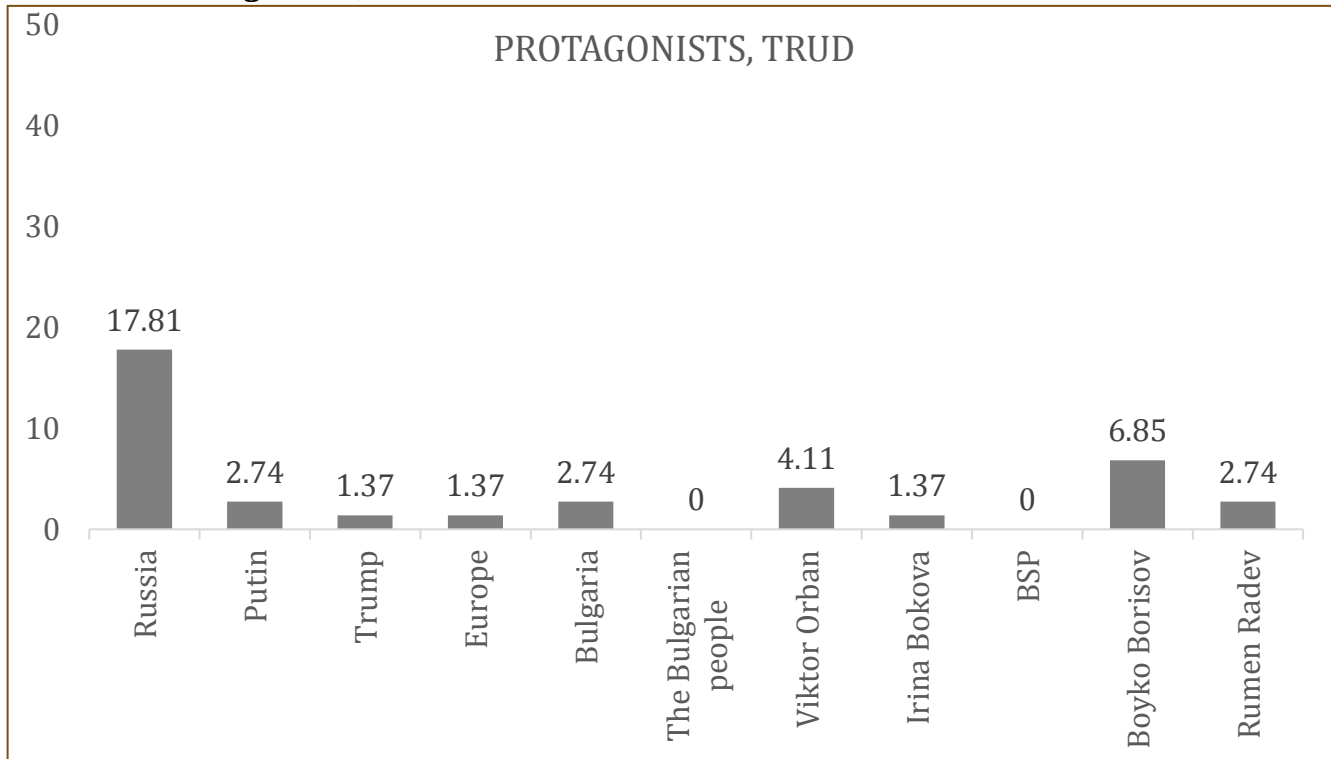
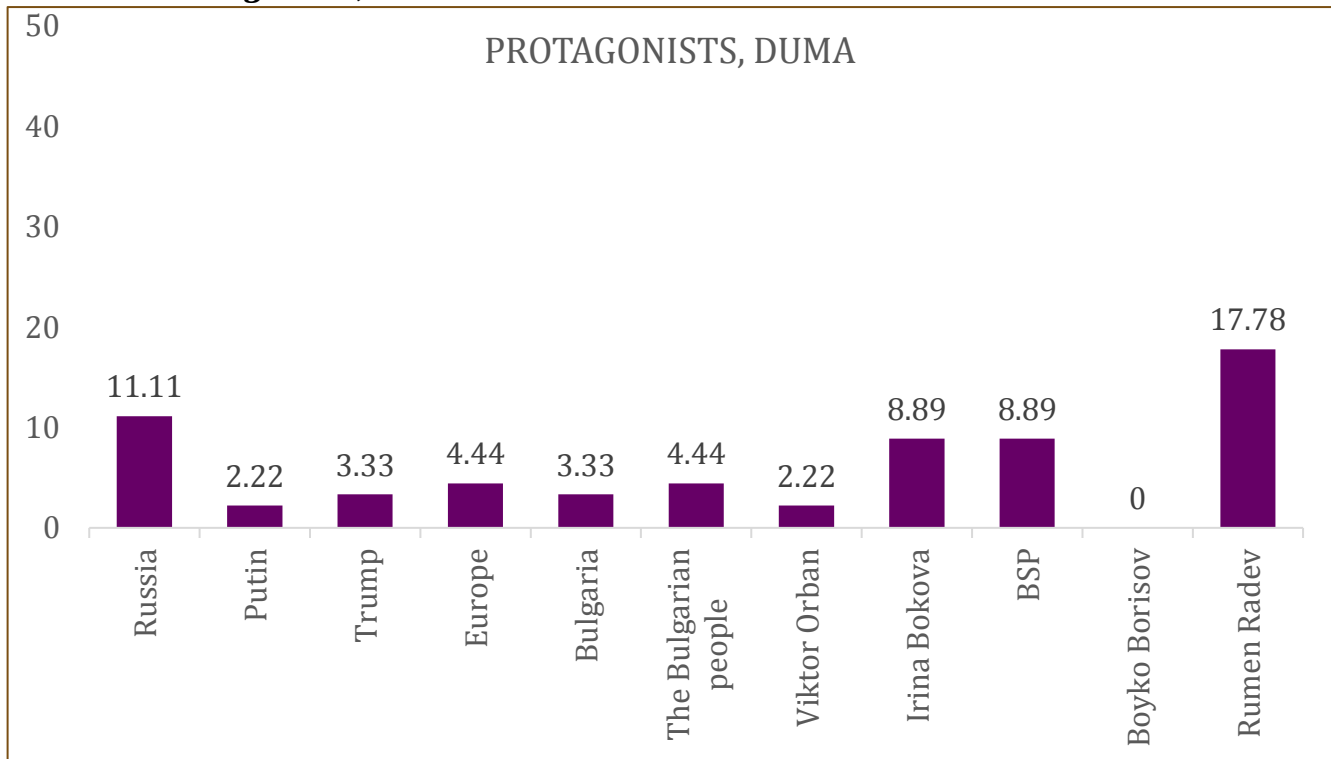


Chart 33: Protagonists, Duma



Several points stand out. In A-specto, Europe appears both as an antagonist and as a protagonist. It appears as an antagonist synonymous with the West 25 times (with a high relative weight among the villains), and as a protagonist 14 times.

Is one and the same Europe at issue here? No, there is a semantic split between the bad West (American hegemony with institutional minions in the European institutions) and the good Europe rebelling against this wretched state of affairs. Here is the first Europe, a synonym for the West which, in turn, is a synonym for American hegemony: *“in fact, ‘the emancipated’ West, and not the Near East, has caused the war”* ([A-specto, 23 July 2016](#)). This is a main type of voice in referring to Europe and the West: a reprinted article about Michel Houellebecq. This is an important semantic shift – Europe is not the West. The West is a Europe that is “submissive” to the US, that supports the deployment of medium-range weapons in proximity to Russia’s borders, it is the liberal “emancipating” civilization that creates ghettos, that pretends to be pacifist but triggers wars, for which it is now receiving retribution. The key message is conveyed through the good Europe: democracy needs a national framework.

We also need Europeans who stand up against the madness – for example, Britain, which has officially admitted that national isolation is a possible way out of the complexity and mutual dependences. ([Ibid](#))

Europeans are those who reject the West. An example is to be found in the following emblematic article which combines all anti-democratic propaganda techniques: an interview with the German equivalent of [Svetlana Sharenkova](#), a person with a foreign name (Alexander Rahr) who gives an interview to a Russian media outlet in which he promotes a book of his. The message of the article is that the West is following a double standard of morality: it criticizes and sanctions Russia for violating human rights (in the second Chechen war), but it is now faced with these problems itself; it wants to impose its conditions on Russia, whereby it has alienated Russia forever. Thus, Europe is split into two – one in the space of the Western Roman Empire, the other in the space of Byzantium. Europe as a protagonist turns out to be this split Europe which will be enriched by this division. The good Europe is a re-divided Europe.

The situation in Duma is similar, but here the good Europe are the peoples and the poor countries. As well as all autonomists – like Wallonia.

This is the main duality in the interpretation of the good Europe: Europe of nations or Europe split imperially (the cultural wealth of the two imperial circles), “Europe to the

East of the West”. Whereas the Western circle is clear – imposition of liberalism by a political and military alliance, the Byzantine one remains unclear and void – splitting from American-liberal hegemony.

Donald Trump is interpreted as a sign, but also as a protagonist of the end of this hegemony.

Chart 34: Trump: protagonist and antagonist (by media outlet)

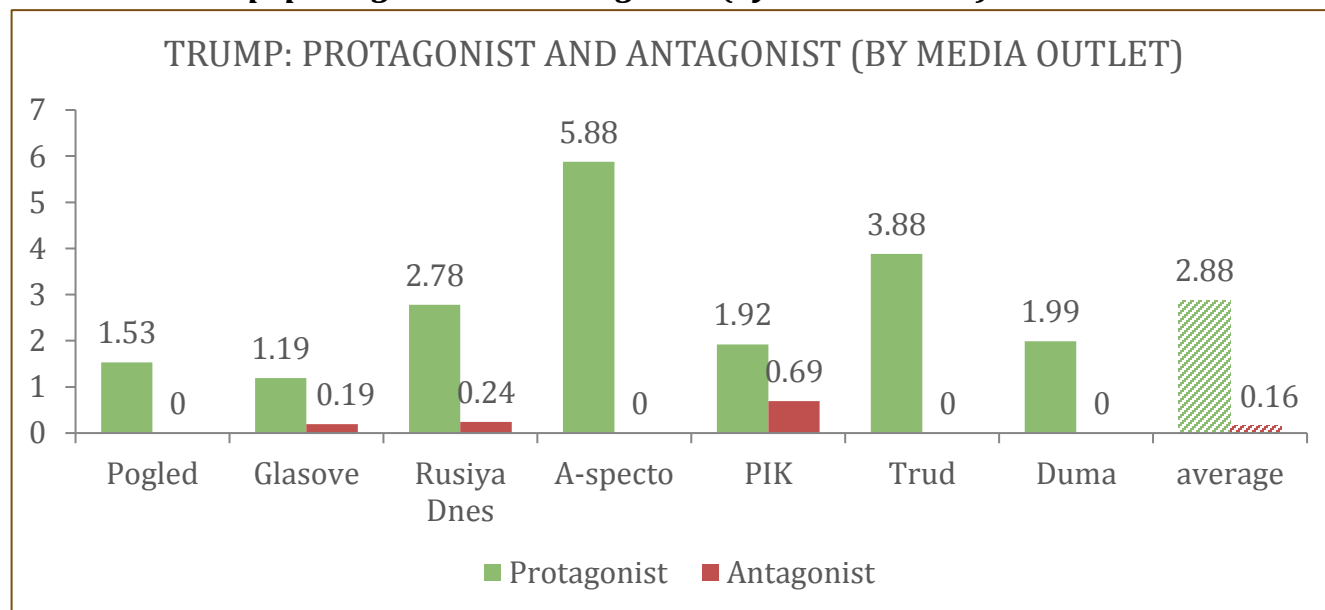
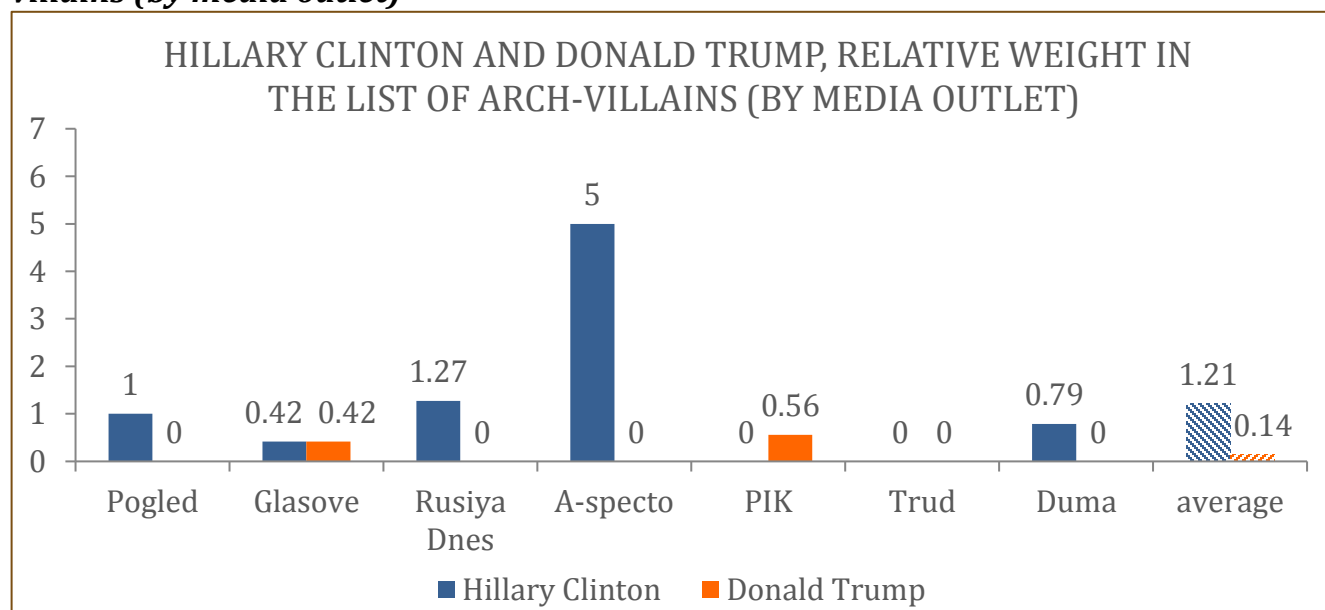


Chart 35: Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump, relative weight in the list of arch-villains (by media outlet)



Here is the good Trump as portrayed by Valentin Vtsev in an interview for A-specto:

From the point of view of the US establishment, Trump is an ordinary person, regardless of the fact that he is a millionaire, an eccentric, and that he has even married Slavic women, which is the ultimate in eccentricity in the Anglo-Saxon world. But he is an absolute outsider to America's high elite. And that is why the question here is a principled one: Can a common, wretched outsider (bad, unclear origin, ridiculous education, non-prestigious background, "new vulgar money", hasn't built a library, church or cultural center, doesn't speak French, isn't even gay, etc., etc.) enter Bohemian Grove, the world that determines the future of this great country? ([A-specto1609_06](#))

The good Europe is rebellious Europe – rebelling against the disgusting past, “stinking” Brussels, the ostentatious gay pride parades. The Europe that is rising against the US Democratic Party: “The Democrats have trained their poodles in Europe to hurt their peoples and to cause harm to their countries, and at the same time, to celebrate the disaster with joyful exclamations and magical media propaganda” that builds the myth of the aggressive Russia and the villain Putin. The good Europe is rising against the hegemony of the US which is infiltrating migrants into Europe through non-governmental organizations ([A-specto161123_06](#), Kalina Androlova).

Ukraine also appears comparatively frequently among the protagonists of A-specto. By virtue of what? By virtue of being fraternal to Russia, with the same history, with the same thin liberal elite that is suffering from an inferiority complex and slavishly imitating foreign models, and which is propagating and helplessly seeking emancipation from Russia by cloaking it as the USSR. Ukraine – a victim of the US war for global financial power and turned into a “burnt-down Maidan” (Darina Grigороva).

Chart 36: The US is bad, Russia is good (in absolute number, by media outlet)

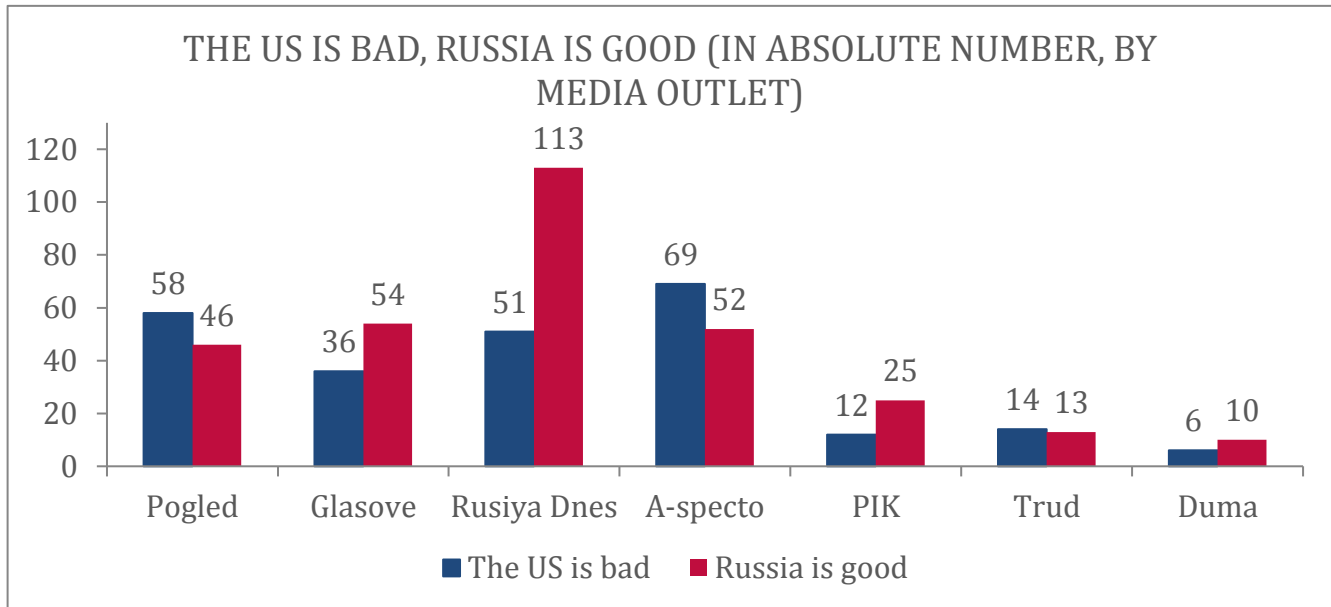
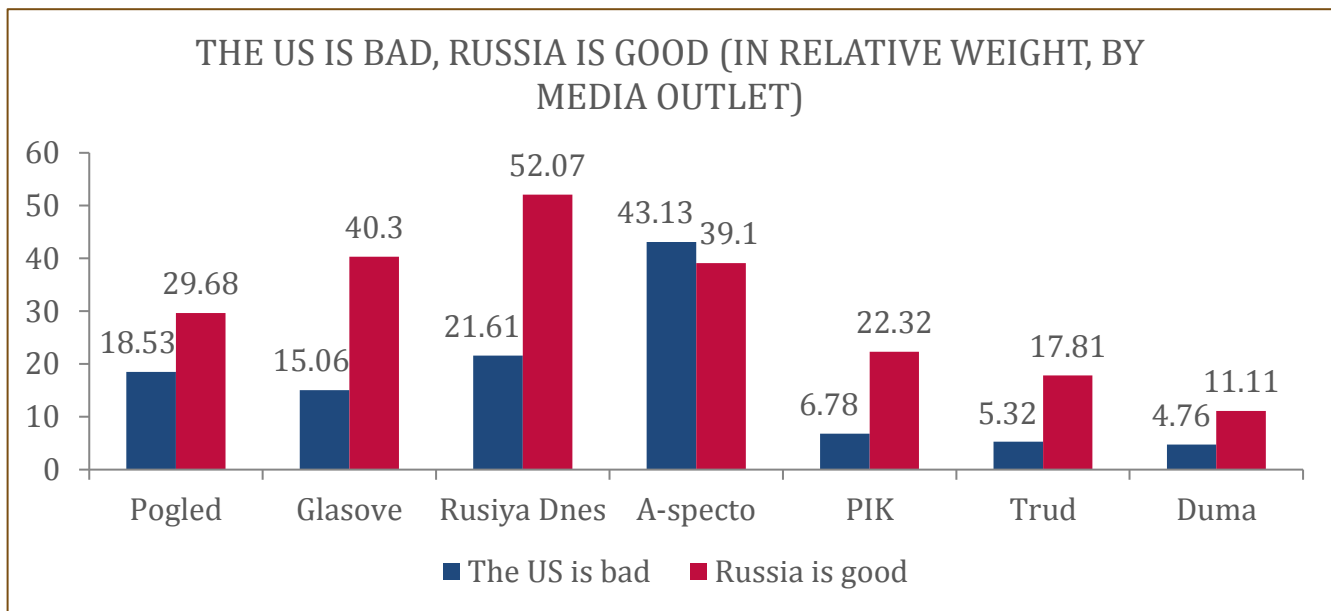
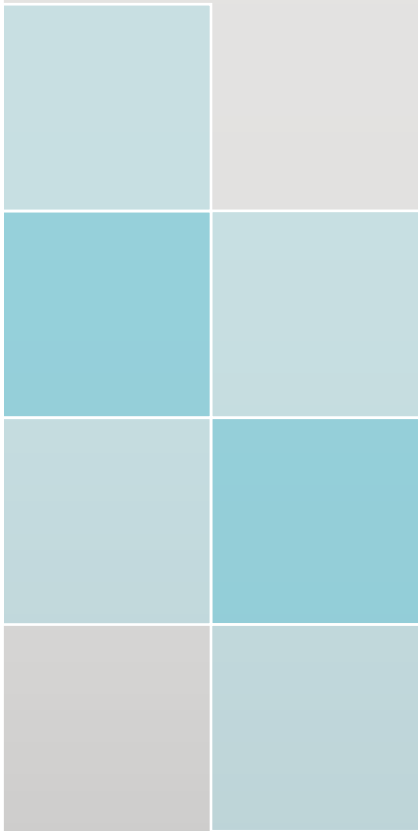


Chart 37: The US is bad, Russia is good (in relative weight, by media outlet)





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