

Human and Social Studies Foundation – Sofia

(HSSF)

SUMMARY

of Report:

Russian Propaganda in Bulgarian Online Media (Part Three).

Facebook

Research team:

Veronika Dimitrova

Lyubomir Donchev

Valentin Valkanov

An essential part of the hybrid war that the Russian Federation is conducting with the West, and in particular on Bulgarian territory, is the dissemination of political propaganda aimed at manipulating public opinion in the direction desired by Moscow. The third report of the study on “**Russian Propaganda in Bulgarian Online Media**”¹ is devoted to Facebook. It offers an overview of the public Facebook pages that spread Russian propaganda in the period from 1 January to 9 May 2022. The database we used was provided by Data for Good and contains 4,752 posts, which were selected on the basis of specific semantic clusters identified through an extensive analysis of Russian propaganda narratives since 2014. Public groups were excluded in the compilation of the database for the third report.

The most frequent posters of propaganda content on public Bulgarian Facebook pages in the period under study were various news websites, the Russian Embassy, and the political party Vazrazhdane (Revival). Some of the pages had a significant number of followers (over 100,000). The Facebook pages of media outlets that posted the most propaganda content were those of informiran.net, pogled.info, epicenter.bg, and actualno.com. The political pages that most often posted propaganda messages were those of the Embassy of Russia in Bulgaria, several Russophile associations, and Vazrazhdane leader Kostadin Kostadinov.

However, the number of posts, that is, the amount of content posted, was not the key factor for influence on Facebook. Those who had the highest average

¹ See the previous two reports (in Bulgarian) at: <https://hssfoundation.org/3970/>.

number of interactions – comments, shares, likes, etc. – in the period under study were public figures, not media outlets or other entities: politician Kostadin Kostadinov (6,449) and journalist Martin Karbovski (6,115). After them was the Embassy of Russia in Bulgaria (3,056). The news Facebook pages with the highest average number of interactions were Pogled-info (1,696), novini.bg (1,515), skandalno.net (1,515) and glasove (1,363). Public figures – but also the Russian Embassy – drew more interactions and had more followers: they were better influencers. News pages, although significantly more active in sharing propaganda content, were less influential.

This report shows that those who have significant propaganda influence on Bulgarian Facebook are: 1) journalists, among whom the most prominent is Martin Karbovski; 2) political parties and politicians, among whom the most influential are Vazrazhdane and Kostadin Kostadinov; 3) the Russian Embassy in Bulgaria;² and 4) media, among which the most influential ones by individual indicators are Pogled-info, Novini ot Balgariya i sveta (News from Bulgaria and the World), Novini ot posledniya chas (News from the Last Hour), novini.bg, Aktualni novini (Topical news), Epicenter, skandalno.net, and glasove. Each of those channels is used in different ways for propaganda purposes. The Facebook pages of journalists and politicians are more likely to attract hardcore supporters of propaganda theses, while news pages and groups are used more to attract new recruits. However, it may be said that the spokespersons of Russian propaganda can be counted on the fingers of one hand, and that Russian propaganda relies primarily on reposting of ready-made and packaged messages from other sources. But since the start of the war in Ukraine, these propaganda pages have been gradually gaining further popularity on Bulgarian Facebook.

Full report available (in Bulgarian) at: <https://hssfoundation.org/%d1%80%d1%83%d1%81%d0%ba%d0%b0%d1%82%d0%b0-%d0%bf%d1%80%d0%be%d0%bf%d0%b0%d0%b3%d0%b0%d0%bd%d0%b4%d0%b0-%d0%b0-%d0%b2-%d0%b1%d1%8a%d0%bb%d0%b3%d0%b0%d1%80%d1%81%d0%ba%d0%b8%d1%82%d0%b5-%d0%bc%d0%b5%d0%b4-3/>.

² Before the expulsion of 70 diplomats and staff of the Russian Embassy. Its current activity on Facebook needs to be checked!