Between Fact and Fakery

Information and Instability
in the South Caucasus and Beyond

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Study Group Information

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Information and Instability in the South Caucasus and Beyond

**16th Workshop of the PfP Consortium Study Group
"Regional Stability in the South Caucasus"**

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Preface

Frederic Labarre and George Niculescu

The 16th Regional Stability in the South Caucasus Study Group (RSSC SG 16) workshop took place in Reichenau, Austria, from 9-12 November, and was dedicated to the theme of the hour; the epidemic of false reporting, and the general mistrust of the media by news consumers. The co-chairs felt that the combination of mistrust in elites and in the fifth estate could pose great risks for the search for stability in the South Caucasus. Simultaneously, it was worth investigating whether the careful and purposeful orchestration of news – not to say the alteration of reality – could have a beneficial impact on stability and reconciliation between the conflicting parties in the South Caucasus.

This workshop was thematic more than regional, and thus the organizers could resume using the four-panel format that had been the norm at the beginning of this Study Group. This enabled a greater scope of experience to be collected from participants. The workshop theme also brought balance to an earlier media-themed workshop held in Reichenau in November 2015. The readers are therefore hereby guided to the Study Group Information booklet and Policy Recommendations for the 12th RSSC SG workshop entitled "The Media is the Message: Shaping Compromise in the South Caucasus" which found great resonance especially among our Russian participants.

The interactive discussions for this 16th RSSC SG workshop owed much to the achievement of that earlier workshop, and this shows that the Study Group considers its topics carefully, and seeks to enact follow-up on its recommendations. This said, there are limits to the Study Group's actual influence on events. However, there is evidence that workshop participants assiduously promote the conclusions and recommendations of the Study Group within their own networks. We are thankful and proud of that achievement. When the work of a Study Group becomes so valuable, it is easy to find engaging topics to examine and further build consensus.

It is also easy to interest new partners to join in the effort. The RSSC SG 16th workshop welcomed the Dialogue of Civilizations' Research Institute (DOC/RI) as a major new contributor to the work of the Study Group. DOC/RI provided the input of Prof. h.c. Dr. Peter Schulze and Mr. Thomas Fasbender as contributors to the workshop, and their notes are reproduced here. DOC/RI has also committed significant financial resources in support of the execution of the workshop, providing air travel to nearly all participants. The latest information reveals that representatives of the Austrian Ministry of Defence and Sports and of DOC/RI were negotiating the support of future workshops as well. This explains the presence of the logos of the DOC/RI organization and Georg-August University in Göttingen, Germany on the inner page of this Study Group Information booklet, as well as on our Policy Recommendations bulletin. The co-chairs are grateful for DOC/RI's input and we look forward to a fruitful and lengthy collaboration.

DOC/RI and the co-chairs, as well as the Austrian organizers of the Regional Stability in the South Caucasus workshops share the vision that true reconciliation and stabilization begin with the neutralization of the perception of the causes of conflict. Only by successfully evacuating emotionality from debates can we come to common understanding and develop creative and constructive solutions.

More importantly, there is also evidence that time seems to be running out for the South Caucasus. The tectonic changes brought about by the political decisions of constituents in major powers, signal the effects of a vitiated media environment and the lackluster education of the masses. Be that as it may, counter-intuitive decisions and decision-makers have emerged; Mr. Trump was elected as the United States' 45th President. The United Kingdom has chosen to leave the European Union – a decision it is painfully revising as we speak. France has elected a non-establishment representative to guide its destinies. Catalonia has declared independence, forcing the Spanish government to restrict Catalan autonomy. In Germany, the far-right has made significant gains, making coalition-building even more difficult than five years ago. The belief that Mr. Putin and Russia are behind all these changes permeates the news, yet there is no firm evidence that this is the case. And even if there was any objective evidence, that too would be mistrusted. Evidently, proper reporting, understanding, and political deci-

sion-making go hand in hand, and this is why it was timely to examine the topic of fakery within the current changing geopolitical context.

Prof. Dr. Peter Schulze of Georg-August University in Göttingen, Germany, opened proceedings from a strategic perspective. He warned that "there is a consensus now… that the world is in disarray… that there is no order anymore." In addition, he qualified the presidency of Mr. Trump, in the United States, as a game-changer for other policy-making individuals and agencies; making "how" to think about the future increasingly difficult. Prof. Dr. Schulze compared two recent strategic documents – from the U.S. National Intelligence Council (NIC) and the Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC) – which sought to give a prospective meaning to the global power relations. Both documents assert that bipolarity is no more, and that the world is moving towards centralist multipolarity. The risk, according to Prof. Dr. Schulze, is that isolationist tendencies throughout a multipolar world will be aggravated by anti-elite forces within the States, and nationalist tensions between States, causing ever-increasing instability. The most urgent task is for great powers to move from confrontation to cooperation to manage this change.

Clearly, the keynote address described a world resulting in some part by today's vitiated information environment, of which the South Caucasus is part. The 16th RSSC SG workshop sought to alert South Caucasus constituencies and leadership centres of the dangers of mis-information for the stability of the region. The objective of the workshop was to analyse the features of contemporary news-making and media operations, and to determine whether and how, if advisable, the parlous state of public information and journalism today could be leveraged to implement solutions that could bring stability to the South Caucasus.

The framework for debate of this workshop, corresponding to the structure and content of this Study Group Information, was built around the following key questions:

- How can we incentivize the regional media in the South Caucasus to avoid (or stop) spreading biased news?

- How can the sponsors and advertisers of South Caucasus media be sensitized to how fake news affects their reputation?
- What is the consequence of news fakery for freedom of speech in the South Caucasus?
- How can governments be sensitized to the dangers to their stability created by fake news?
- What legal recourses are available to governments to limit fakery?
- What are the consequences of informational confusion on government decision-making?
- How can the public be made aware, or educated to recognize and defend against fakery?
- Are the current conflicts in the South Caucasus the result of news fakery?
- Would it be advantageous to conflict resolution to "believe" that South Caucasus conflicts are the result of fraud?

Panel 1: Impact of Fakery on a Democratizing Media

In this panel, speakers were invited to reflect on the process of freedom of information in their respective countries. While noting the changing quality of journalistic reporting since the "snap-democratization" that followed the end of the Cold War and the liberalization in the post-Soviet space, panelists were invited to assess the impact of the information revolution on their respective societies, and to discuss whether the newly-found "freedom" of opinion had found itself countervailed by self-censorship or the politicisation of the media (and the minds).

The first panelist spoke of "evil powers" having overcome the media sphere with false information for political and commercial purposes. This trend is exacerbated by the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI), internet robots (Bots) and trolls. This contributes to a loss of journalistic standards, to the decline of democratic *achievement*, and a general mistrust in the news as a public service. In particular, today's social media revolution represents a stress test for democracies.

The second panelist argued that old Soviet practices never really went away after the fall of the Soviet Union. In the case of Armenia, the slow building

of democratic principles meant that the shortcomings of Soviet-era media practices could not be overcome. Media independence being insufficient in Armenia, the new generation has turned to social media to develop a digital identity. Activists can organize and mobilize much faster thanks to it, representing a challenge to established powers. The result has been ever-increasing use of the internet, without restrictions, but ever-harsher clampdowns on civic actions.

Speaking on the situation in Georgia, the third panelist called fake news a cancer, destroying lives and reputations. It is stifling democratic political processes at a moment when the role of Georgian media is increasing in developing public socio-political attitudes. In a media market ever more saturated with a greater number of outlets, each medium fails at reaching financial independence, and therefore has to "sell-out" to particular interests. For this panelist, greater public education, higher journalistic standards and efforts at story corroboration compose the solution to this problem.

The last speaker spoke of the "politicization of the minds" in Ukraine, promoted by modern communication strategies. While this is useful to help the public conceive the world, the individual is rapidly losing tools to challenge this conception against changes. The media is used to create a "national spirit" rather than a framework for interpretation of facts. In addition, she suggested that a change of the narrative of betrayal into a narrative of success was needed to better shape public perceptions on both domestic and external politics.

Panel 2: How a Trusting Public Can Be Led to War

This panel looked at the technological, psychometrical and socio-psychological influences of new forms and methods of information creation and dissemination. Speakers were asked to reflect on how technology shaped the perception of events and to explain how new information ingestion limits the ability for comparison, corroboration and critical assessment of news, leading a community to believe false information, and damaging its well-being. They were also invited to inquire the impact of the frequency of "new" news, of dubious reporting practices, and of the role of public relation companies in "campaigning" information, influencing and directing individual and collective decision-making.

The first panelist reiterated what had been addressed in the first panel. News fakery and propaganda are not new. If one takes away the internet, there is really nothing really different in today's world, compared to the past. Based on Cold War experience, the solution to prevent a trusting public from being accidentally led to war requires new agencies and institutions at the national and international level. Namely, there should be "counter-fake news units" to immediately correct false reporting.

The second panelist showed how two distinct actors with different agendas could nevertheless find a common target. For example, Russian media is seen as pro-Kremlin on the one hand, and on the other (opposing) hand, anti-liberal and ethno-nationalist. While these media representatives are ostensibly hostile within Russia, they nevertheless are both anti-Western. This leads this panelist to argue that de-falsification of the news needs to be incentivized if it is to be stymied.

The third panelist addressed a crucial issue as it relates to one of the deadliest conflicts in the South Caucasus; Nagorno-Karabakh. Up to this day, he claimed, there is no guarantee that the events that triggered hostilities between Armenia and Azerbaijan were not precipitated by false reports, or false flag activities. For this panelist, what is important in the fight against news fakery is what happens to the minds of the people who consume news daily. Especially in countries with fledgling democracies, false reporting may lead countries to make particular (and sub-optimal or damaging) defence decisions. He called for the need of on-line solutions to identify and counter fake news across the South Caucasus region.

The fourth panelist presented a case study of Armenia's accession to the Eurasian Economic Union as opposed to the European Union's Association Agreements. One could see the competition played out in the Western media as well as in the Armenian media. In the former, the Eurasian Union was systematically maligned as a ploy to restore a Soviet-like dominance over Armenia. The tension between the two narratives has meant that now the new generation turns to social media for information. Facebook has become a news media of sorts.

The fifth panelist argued that in early 1990s' Azerbaijan, opinions were more easily rejected, and critical thinking seemed more vibrant. Today, this

trend has been reversed; despite 5000 journalists being registered at the Ministry of Justice to enable them to ply their trade in Azerbaijan, opinions are now more important than facts. Readers are now considered merely consumers of the ideas market, and democracy, according to this panelist, has been hijacked to permit this state of affairs. A culture of investigative education must be promoted to counteract these trends.

Panel 3: How Fakery Acts to Destabilize Regimes and Regions

Political theorist David Easton created a descriptive model, in 1957, of how socio-political systems take in information from their environment and produce legitimate decisions. The media is obviously an important means for public inputs into the political system. However, how "optimal" the political system would react to those inputs would largely depend on how "factual" and accurate the information that shaped and supported public opinion was. Sub-optimal public information could lead a political system, a public or its elected officials to make irrational decisions. The objective of this panel was to raise awareness of this danger and propose solutions for mitigation, and policy recommendations aimed at ensuring that South Caucasus governments develop the methods and self-confidence to absorb all sorts of information and input while at the same time remaining resilient to structural or societal stresses.

The first speaker recalled an incident where "news" of a false attack on Georgia from Russia in 2010 caused panic and overwhelmed emergency dispatchers. While the news reports were merely part of an imaginary scenario, the television station which promoted it violated ethics of objectivity and impartiality. If the public cannot differentiate between fact and fiction, it will not be able to tell when the government should or should not intervene, leading to a crisis of trust.

The second speaker stated an obvious point which merited repetition; news fakery is not new. While journalism should provide a safe space for dialogue, it is the Soviet narrative, filtered through news agencies, which has shaped the political and ethnic agenda in the South Caucasus. For this speaker, the post-World War II narrative of nationalism in the U.S.S.R. ultimately sparked the events which led to current instability in the South Caucasus, enabling Moscow to maintain direct influence over subsequent

events in this region. This would have been mitigated had there been more rigorous journalistic standards.

The third presenter argued forcefully that Moscow knows very well how to calibrate its influence in the South Caucasus, and that while Russian television was less effective in Armenia, Russian propaganda could nevertheless affect events there, as well as in Azerbaijan. Russia, for this speaker, remains the sine qua non power-broker in the South Caucasus.

The fourth presenter in this panel followed in the wake of the third. Georgia's subjection to Russian influence keeps increasing in the context of the European Union's failure to make good on its promises, and the distance from Georgia's original NATO membership objectives. News fakery is definitely a tool in the hybrid warrior's arsenal, and for this analyst, the solution is to enact legislation to tackle hybrid warfare.

Panel 4: The Peace Potential of Fakery: Using Yesterday's Lies for Tomorrow's Peace

This panel was meant to explore how today's methods of shaping public opinion could be used to "redress" yesterday's abuses and mis-information. Speakers were asked to reflect on how this process could be implemented, whether special regulations might be needed, or legislation, and what kind of narrative should be promoted. The intention was to develop ways to better inform the public, protect the regimes from illegitimate influences and pressures and thereby safeguard internal stability. Questions were raised on how whether a campaign would develop a common view on particular topics of concern, such as refugee or IDP return, non-use of force, or repatriation of territory, or on whether the techniques of hybrid warfare could also be used for peacefare purposes.

The first presenter pleaded to bring back "neutrality's good name" into play. He argued that in the OSCE Minsk process for example there was no possibility for mediation because there was an ingrained inability to look at facts objectively, neutrally. Otherwise, right or wrong will forever be substituted by objective ideas of good and bad. Lying is always counterproductive in the end. The current problem is that neutrality is equated

with apathy or heartlessness. That is the cause and consequence of the vitiated news media atmosphere today.

The second presenter of this last panel argued that "infotainment" trivializes information, while the mass media's primary role is to reconcile theoretical ideals with pragmatic applications of information as a public good. As a result, the media is not used for educating but to reinforce pre-existing views. Answering the question as to whether it was OK to lie, the presenter drew a parallel between "white lies" directed at individuals, and "blue lies" which are societal lies.

The third presenter argued that perhaps it was too late to do anything about journalistic rectitude, and that the task of thinking and talking critically about conflict resolution devolved to enlightened academics. With this in mind he argued that a program or an initiative of "scholars for peace" should be supported, as the current political elite in the South Caucasus are incapable of thinking "how" to change. Journalism should be mainstreaming peace, rather than pushing the conflicting, unimaginative narratives of the elite. In addition, a regional website called "South Caucasus for Reconciliation and Peace" was also proposed to promote exchanges of knowledge and experience between media outlets in the three countries aiming to support peacebuilding. It could also facilitate regional networking of peace supporters (scholars, journalists, and civil society activists), and help creating synergies in promoting reconciliation and peacebuilding. Such an initiative would help regional peacebuilders to counter information warfare by creating new opportunities to facilitate enshrining the benefits of peace into the public mind.

The fourth presenter argued that it would be counter-productive to use deception or lies to alter the course of the current narrative. Journalism must contribute to building a better discursive space for peacebuilding. The South Caucasus and the international community in general should take advantage of the fact that the current generation has no first-hand experience of the conflicts in the South Caucasus.

Interactive Discussions

The first session of interactive discussion sought to revisit the conclusions of the November 2015 RSSC SG workshop in Reichenau, debating wheth-

er some recommendations were still valid today. There was consensus on the fact that indeed, recommendations[1] were still valid, in particular that a regional journalistic standards organization should be created, the enforcement of standards incentivized, exchange of journalists to develop a common narrative, one that focuses on the merits of cultural and commercial blending. While there was broad agreement as to the need to insist on reliable standards and institutions, the group nevertheless disagreed as to what caused the problem of fake news in the first place.

For instance; is fakery a journalistic problem or is it a societal problem? Is it a cause or a symptom of political polarization? Even if standards were similar regionally, their implementation would be unequal. In Georgia, where the media is arguably free, such a prospect is possible, but currently, the tense relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan make regional standardization unlikely to succeed.

Furthermore, fakery is not spread only by governments, but by non-state actors and individuals who are not journalists, but abuse the democratization of communication. Precisely because of democratic principles, it is unadvisable to tell journalists how to act, how to discipline themselves, or to enforce discipline from without. Since time for decision is always scarcer, readers and consumers do not have time to corroborate, and neither do bona fide journalists; deadlines loom and shareholders and sponsors demand ever more column inches and sensationalism.

Participants of the 16th RSSC SG workshop felt that revisiting previous policy recommendations was useful, but insufficient, as the problem of fake news was not addressed at the 2015 RSSC SG event. Participants therefore felt that educating the public in identifying fakery and building resilience to it was perhaps a better plan than merely focusing on building journalistic skill in the South Caucasus. Although, insofar as the media industry is concerned, some media actors in the South Caucasus could be interested in promoting the reduction of news fakery (for fear that their reputation might entail a loss of sponsorship and advertising revenue).

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[1] Full recommendations are available at: http://www.bundesheer.at/wissen-forschung/publikationen/beitrag.php?id=2690.

Interestingly, some participants argued that addressing news fakery in the South Caucasus would be best handled by acting nationally first, then regionally. Some emphasized that the presence of external actors (such as Western and/or Russian media, for example) might be counter-productive and lead to unnecessary tensions. This sort of promotion could be the work of national media agencies in the South Caucasus, for instance.

The second interactive discussion session sought to highlight common ground on matters of historical importance for the South Caucasus, particularly concerning Armenia and Azerbaijan. The discussion tried to elicit from participants the degree of confidence in news items which were published in the wake of ethnic clashes thirty years ago. How confident could anyone be about the veracity of the facts reported? Could new "alternative" reports aimed at laying blame on now-departed actors be beneficial to reconciliation, for instance? Could this approach "neutralize" the debate, evacuate emotionality and offer a return to rationality? Most participants argued that toying with facts would be counterproductive at this stage.

Rather, proposals for mutual forgiveness (to which local elite would never concede) were offered as the beginning of a solution. One participant suggested that a general relaxation of tensions, combined with a respect for territorial integrity and political compromise would be necessary for mutual forgiveness to begin to be possible. However, the current propagandist trend reinforces the mistrust by the public of both the media and the elite, and makes reconciliation seem an almost secondary problem, since mutual trust will only be possible if public communication is possible, and this is generally filtered through the media.

The co-chairs had fantastic challenges in orienting exchanges towards the formulation of workable policy recommendations. Nevertheless, they eventually seized on some important initiatives proposed by the floor, which are summarized in the Policy Recommendations at the end of this booklet. We hope that the reader finds this contribution to the debates useful for the purpose of building greater consensus, raising awareness, and developing constructive solutions.

Acknowledgements

The 16th Regional Stability in the South Caucasus Study Group workshop could not have been held without the outstanding financial (and logistical) support of the Dialogue of Civilizations' Research Institute (DOC/RI) in Berlin, Germany. In this respect, the co-chairs want to recognize in particular the vision of Prof. h.c. Dr. Peter Schulze in seeking a partnership with the Austrian National Defence Academy. We look forward to the continuation and deepening of this partnership.

The co-chairs also want to highlight the extreme efficiency with which the travel arrangements for our participants was expedited, the Policy Recommendations drafted and circulated, and this very product – the Study Group Information booklet, which you hold in your hands – produced. This was accomplished by a trio of muses; Agnieszka Rzepka, from DOC/RI, Veronika Fuchshuber, from the Austrian National Defence Academy, and Emma Lamperson, from the PfP Consortium Secretariat. Agnieszka and Veronika have expertly coordinated the logistics, and later, Veronika and Emma have cooperated to bring to press the Policy Recommendations and this booklet in record time. We are deeply grateful.

Lastly, we want to recognize those participants who have stepped up their participation by arranging and funding their own travel to attend this event; Thomas Fasbender, Boris Kuznetsov, Michael Eric Lambert, Kieran Pender and Jens Wendland. We are delighted that they have taken time from their busy schedules to participate and share their expertise during this workshop.

Abstract

This SGI publication following the 16th RSSC Workshop in Reichenau/ Austria focusses on the consequences of mis- and disinformation on the political and societal stability in the South Caucasus and beyond. It explores the development of a free media environment in the South Caucasus region and in particular the impact of fake reporting on this process. The authors provide reflections on methods and technologies which lead a community to believe false information and analyse how the stability of regional regimes is affected by this misinformation. Large player's competition for power and influence in the region through shaping the public opinion is discussed. Against this background the study group members examine whether false reporting could be justified for positive motives and how methods of shaping opinion could be used to better inform the public and protect regimes from illegitimate influences.

Key Note Address: The Teething Problems of a Multipolar or 'Polycentric' World Order: Views from Russian and US Think Tanks

Peter W. Schulze

Fake news is one indication of the rapidly changing constellation of power in the international system. It is a symptom, but not a cause, of conflicts. In contrast to the military confrontation of the Cold War period, which hinged on the balance of terror of Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD), fake news represents an instrument of soft power.

Firstly, fake news is by nature defensive, signifying a new type of battle for moral and ideological dominance. Secondly, it seeks to disrupt domestic politics by sowing mistrust and undermining social consensus. Thirdly, it aims to mobilise domestic social and political forces, new social movements, and NGOs *from below*, in order to either provoke forms of regime change, or to at least immobilise political decision making.

The year of 2017 was one of historical reflection. Looking back, the revolutionary process initiated in 1917 not only altered the international system's structure of power but unleashed political forces which transformed the social and economic make up of European societies from within.

A century later, in the midst of rapid changes, rising tensions, and growing unpredictability on the international scene caused by the weakening of international rules and leadership, we observe a striking phenomenon: A world in disarray has elicited numerous forecasts and reports assessing the implications of current "mega-trends" and potential game-changers.

Indeed, since 2016, several jarring game changers have troubled the international system, with consequences for European stability: Brexit, the Trump presidency, the loss of consensus within the European Union, the ongoing migration crisis, and most recently the results of the German parliamentary elections.

The events of 24 November 2017 caused a political shockwave in Germany and abroad. For the first time since 1949, a stable government in Berlin seems unlikely, unless the Social Democratic Party (SPD) reverses course and once more enters into a grand coalition with the CDU and CSU. The so-called "Jamaica coalition" – the only other numerically realistic alternative – was proved unrealistic by its untenable internal conflicts.

However, even if a grand coalition governs Germany once again, questions over European leadership that meets the challenges of migration and necessary EU restructuring remain critically unresolved.

Against the backdrop of such transformational changes, two particular reports – one from the U.S. National Intelligence Council and the other from the Russian Institute of International Affairs (RIAC) – are worthy of attention.

Although the reports differ in status and authority, both shed light on how US and Russian experts view global developments and both make political recommendations. Neither report presents a precise prognosis for the coming decades but both share a vision of the future for the sake of their respective national administrations, highlighting necessary decisions and likely challenges in light of ongoing international transformation.

1. Russian International Affairs Council: Theses on Russia's Foreign and Global Positioning (2017-2024)

In June 2017, the Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC) published a report sketching out potential Russian foreign policy in the context of a "chaotization of international relations."[1] The report highlights internal economic and institutional factors undermining Russian sovereignty and limiting the reach of it foreign policy. The essential message is a call for the Kremlin to participate openly in the globalisation process and to develop a cooperative foreign policy, with two objectives: Firstly, to overcome the

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[1]   Andrey Kortunov and Sergey Utkin, (2017). *Theses on Russia's Foreign and Global Positioning (2017-2024).* RIAC, Moscow, p.5.

country's economic and institutional backwardness. Secondly, to preserve its independence in matters of security.

The report points to the military reforms that began a decade ago and projected Russia into the realm of strong military powers. Due to its nuclear potential, Russia is not seen as threatened by direct military aggression. This idea is astonishing given the numerical and budgetary dominance of the neighbouring NATO military alliance. However, it is not external military aggression, but the "underdevelopment of the Russian economy and governance institutions"[2] which is identified as more significant threats to the country's sovereignty.

The RIAC and NIC reports agree that the balance of international power is shifting and the international environment is undergoing severe transformation. A new world order is emerging, with multipolar or 'polycentric' characteristics. The RIAC report – which is less pretentious than the NIC's – presents policy recommendations as "tasks." Here are its main recommendations;

- Task one: "Radically change the country's policy in the post-Soviet space through the creation of appealing economic integration and collective security institutions." Furthermore, Russia should look for partners beyond the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and must settle the conflict in the Donbass region.

- Task two: "Actively develop non-Western lines of economic and political cooperation" to overcome the imbalance between the "high level of political confidence and the relatively weak economic interaction." A precondition for this is strengthening the Russian economy.

- Task three: Secure "compromises on key political problems" with the West, maintaining "selective cooperation and … changing Russia's relations with the West from confrontation to mutually beneficial cooperation in the modern polycentric world."

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[2]   Ibid, p.12.

- Task four: Reinforce "global governance institutions" to tackle common global problems like energy security, climate change, food security, and cyber security.
- Task five: Link "foreign policy to ... domestic development goals." This requires a diversification of foreign policy tools and the involvement of a broader collection of social groups.

The RIAC report warns against "two extreme alternatives" for foreign policy. The first and most threatening is "self-isolation", involving "the militarization of the economy and society, and rigid centralization."

The second danger is defined as a "chaotic retreat with unilateral concessions and capitulations" resulting from growing economic, social, and political dangers domestically. To steer clear of such extremes, Russia requires a "qualitative leap forward." Otherwise the country is doomed to a "peripheral role" in global affairs.

The report offers no remedy, but defines clear objectives beyond the present status quo and it may serve as a point of reference for policy discussion in advance of the 2018 presidential elections.[3]

Given Russia's current political conditions, the study shies away from identifying actors who could operate as agents of social or political change.[4] Although it has been discussed on platforms like *The Independent,* the British

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[3] Another recent study supports the RIAC report's major findings but draws attention to the upcoming presidential elections. The study, *Putin at the crossroads: Reflections about the Future of Russia*, was published on 23 October 2017 by Vladislav Inosemzev, founder and head of the Center for Studies of the Postindustrial Society. It is available online at https://snob.ru/selected/entry/130376.

[4] Doubtlessly, the study assumes that Putin will win the elections in 2018. But it will be his last term in office and the search for a real successor – unlike 2008 – will begin much earlier and will likely shake the cohesion of the Kremlin's inner circle. According to Inosemzev, four different scenarios could emerge by 2024, influencing Russia's development: https://snob.ru/selected/entry/130376.

newspaper,[5] this has not provoked deeper or renewed assessments of Russian foreign policy among Western experts.

2. The National Intelligence Council's *Global Trends: Paradox of Progress* Report

Thinking about the future is difficult but vital for framing strategic planning.[6] That is why every four years, one month after the presidential election, the US National Intelligence Council (NIC) undertakes a major assessment of the influences and choices that will shape the world over the next two decades.

"The report's main section lays out the key trends, explores their implications, and offers … scenarios to help readers imagine how different choices and developments could play out in very different ways over the next several decades."

The report released upon Mr. Trump's inauguration in January 2017 develops the assessments and findings from December 2012's previous edition, *Global Trends 2030: Alternative Worlds*,[7] covering similar ground and exploring a comparable timeframe.

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5   *The Independent* reports that behind the scenes a vivid discussion of scenarios after Putin's possible retreat from office has already begun among influential groups in Russia. Political analysts predict that a consensus among the Kremlin's inner circle and other powerful groups on a successor is not yet in sight. "According to a leading political analyst, Pavlovsky, a power vacuum with unpredictable political consequences could occur, if Putin would leave his post. … Vladimir Putin has carved out a unique role over nearly two decades, and sits at the top of a balanced, highly personalized system. His exit, when it comes, will be profound". Available online at http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/vladimir-putin-russia-latest-quitting-presidential-election-dmitry-medvedev-alexei-navalny-new-a8062776.html.

6   National Intelligence Council. *Global Trends: Paradox of Progress*. (2017). Washington, DC. Available online at https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/nic/GT-Full-Report.pdf.

7   *Global Trends 2030: Alternative Worlds*. (2012). National Intelligence Council. Available online at www.dni.gov/nic/globaltrends.

Recapping the *Alternative Worlds* report's fundamental assumptions, it describes the US' role and position in a rapidly changing international environment. The report states the US is and will remain[8] the world's dominant military power for decades to come but will be unable to prevent its relative economic and financial decline. US global hegemony will fade and a time may come when the US will have to share global dominance.[9]

The need for burden sharing and the search for alliances and partners to safeguard the institutional hegemony of global liberalism are the most difficult tasks to accomplish in the near future.

This outlook is widely shared in US policy circles. For example, the late Zbigniew Brzezinski, recognising the US' prevailing but weakened hegemony, made persistent demands for a foreign policy "which needs to realize that globalisation means in essence 'interdependence' and 'consensual leadership'."[10] He insisted the US transform its global dominance into a "co-operative hegemony"[11] or "global community of shared interest."[12]

In Brzezinski's opinion, the building block of such a community was already in place, as he argued, "the interwoven institutional and value-based binding interdependence between the EU and the US."[13]

A US-EU alliance would stop nascent oppositional powers, for example, BRIC countries, from successfully challenging the hegemony of a US-EU block. Safeguarding and protecting US dominance in global affairs was and remains the main objective of US foreign policy.

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8   See also Zbigniew Brzezinski. (2004). The Choice: Global Domination or Global Leadership. New York, p.IX, where Brzezinski speaks of "global military reach" and the US as the "ultimate guarantor of global stability." He concludes that there is no "rival in sight".
9   Ibid p.213.
10   Ibid, p. XI.
11   Ibid, p.217.
12   Ibid, p.218.
13   Ibid, p.219.

Eastern and Western experts both agree that neither the bipolar order of the Cold War era, nor the United States' subsequent unipolar hegemony have succeeded in creating a peaceful world. On the contrary, world politics at present are increasingly unpredictable, dangerously complex, and packed with irreconcilable contradictions.

Although interstate wars are currently far from the norm, ethnic, religious, and separatist clashes involving warlords, opposition movements, and corrupt administrations are rife. Conventional warfare has given way to hybrid warfare, and other informal or anonymous forms of military conflict.

Globalisation has contributed to complex and multi-layered conflicts which combine regional causes with external actors, making it difficult to demarcate between internal and external conflicts.[14]

As a result, international institutions are often neither willing nor able to intervene. The present situations in Syria and Ukraine demonstrate that such conflicts are constantly at risk of spilling over into adjacent countries and causing regional and international crises.

The former German Foreign Minister, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, said piercingly, "*Die Welt ist aus den Fugen geraten*" ("the world is in disarray").[15] Andrey Kortunov[16] agrees with Steinmeier's point of view, and argues that in the second decade of the twenty-first century the "world has entered a period of chronic instability, regional and global turmoil, and a dramatic decline in the governability of the international system."[17]

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[14] Peter W. Schulze (Ed.). (2017). Core Europe and Greater Eurasia: A Roadmap for the Future. Frankfurt: Campus.

[15] He went on, "Eine alte Ordnung ist weggefallen, aber eine neue ist nicht an ihre Stelle getreten. Wir leben in einer Welt auf der Suche nach Ordnung"; translated: "An old order has disappeared, but a new one has not taken its place. We live in a world in search of order."

[16] Andrey Kortunov is the director general of the Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC) and the president of the New Eurasia Foundation in Moscow.

[17] Andrey Kortunov. (2017). From Post-Modernism to Neo-Modernism: The World at the Crossroads of Two Eras. Russia in Global Affairs, 1, January/March.

As a consequence, a backlash against post-modern theories and policies has taken place. A neo-modern paradigm prevails in International Relations theories, reflecting the grim changes and conditions of the international system. While post–modern theories focused on the advance of democracy and the "ousting of authoritarianism",[18] neo-modernist theories reflect the declining governability of the present international system. Emphasis has thus shifted towards themes of stability and security.

> For the majority of neo-modernists the question of democracy and authoritarianism is drifting into the background, giving way to an issue they consider much more important, namely the border between order and chaos in international relations.[19]

There is little disagreement among experts that the bipolar system was replaced by a temporary unipolar world order that has gradually lost its power of coercion.

The unipolar order "is withering away" emphasises Sergey Karaganov, creating a "governance vacuum." This power, he stresses, will be filled with a new order in which Russia will play a key role. According to him, Russia "has re-established itself as a balancing influence within the global order". Russia and China have been able to "build an increasingly robust partnership" that is challenging US hegemony.[20]

But the overall question and uncertainties remain. What will replace the unipolar, US-led order? How and by whom can the transition be managed?

Evidently, the international system is in transformational mode. Various stages of transformation have been distinctly shaped by the interplay of Washington, Moscow, Beijing, and to a lesser extent, Brussels.

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[18] Ibid.

[19] Andrey Kortunov. (2017). From Post-Modernism to Neo-Modernism: The World at the Crossroads of Two Eras. Russia in Global Affairs, 1, January/March.

[20] Sergey Karaganov. (2017). Mutual Assured Deterrence. Russia in Global Affairs, 1, January/March. Karaganov argues that a "big troika" of China, the US, and Russia should create the conditions for a peaceful transition to a more stable world order. Such order should be expanded to other nations and based on "multilateral mutual deterrence".

Although the Cold War ended with the demise of the Soviet Union, several core elements of the bipolar order remained components of the succeeding unipolar period and have shaped the present tendencies towards a multipolar order.

The unipolar world order since 1992 reflects;
- US exceptionalism[21] at its core, based on both normative and hard power;
- US military hegemony with global reach;
- Liberal institutional hegemony based on the global spread of universal values;
- The projection of US democracy through policy forums, media, Atlanticist institutions, and cultural and education programs, in order to influence the national elites of targeted countries and create "informal international governance structures";[22]
- Global US use of "techniques of co-optation" and the "indirect exercise of influence on dependent foreign elites" to a degree far beyond that of earlier imperial systems.[23]

The liberal institutional global order, based on universal values, is now challenged by nascent counter forces which, if successful, will in time create a multipolar global order. This process is driven predominantly by China and

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[21] Henry Kissinger. (2015). World Order, Reflections on the Character of Nations and the Course of History. Penguin Books. p.276ff. Kissinger accurately defines the role the US has to play in world politics. According to him, all US presidents have "passionately affirmed an exceptional role for America in the world." Furthermore, he adds that all "American principles" are applicable to the "entire world." He goes on to state that world order rests on "American power", buttressed by a consensus of US leaders on "moral universalism". And he comes close to defining the basis of US power when stating that the US not only helped Europe to rebuild its devastated economies and created NATO, but "formed a global network of security and economic partnerships". The fusion of "American idealism and exceptionalism were the driving forces behind a new international order".

[22] Zbigniew Brzezinski. (2004). The Choice; Global Domination or Global Leadership. New York. p.214.

[23] Zbigniew Brzezinski. (1997). *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and its Geostrategic Imperatives*. New York. p.25.

Russia and other emerging economies, gathered either within the BRICS group or under the G20 umbrella.

It is doubtful that Brussels will influence the shape of the emerging global order, given the present state of the European Union – fragmented by uncontrollable external challenges and home-grown problems which have been eroding EU solidarity since 2009. The loss of legitimacy, the rising anti-EU sentiment within Member States, the ongoing catastrophe of the refugee crisis, the unresolved Ukrainian conflict, and the impossibility of overcoming persistent financial crises all contribute to an immobilisation of Brussels' capacity to act as a geopolitical power.

In addition, Brexit has weakened the EU's main instrument of persuasion and soft power influence.[24] The recent victory of Emmanuel Macron in the French presidential elections and the desired landslide success of his *En Marche!* movement in the parliamentary elections has met with triumphant enthusiasm from political establishments in Brussels, Paris, and Berlin. But it remains to be seen if such an undoubtedly positive development could be a game changer to kick-start the EU restructuring process, enhance its geopolitical influence, or promote a comprehensive order for peace, security, and welfare on the continent.

Paradox of Progress, the NIC report published in January 2017,[25] combines its assessments of long-run "mega-trends" with responses to more recent game changers like Brexit and the election of a new and – certainly as far as foreign policy is concerned – unpredictable U.S. President. The report re-

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[24] On one hand, Brexit will undoubtedly aggravate the complexity of the European Common Security and Defence Policy. The UK could regress to a more interest-based foreign and security policy, coordinated with the US and reliant on the strengthening of the special relationship between London and Washington. Such an idea was proposed by the British prime minister, Theresa May, during her first visit to Donald Trump in February 2017. Acting in common with Washington would further remove restrictions on London's foreign policy in areas defined as essential for the national interest. The UK's role in the EU may evaporate slowly, but a withdrawal from NATO is not on the agenda. On the other hand, the UK's withdrawal from the EU may provide a push for the CSDP and weaken the pro-Atlantic clienteles within the EU which clearly tread an anti-Russian policy line.

[25] https://www.dni.gov/index.php/global-trends-home.

volves around the core issue of how changes in the make-up of international power are raising tensions at both global and national levels, affecting the stability of the international order.

Many of the 2012 edition's trends are re-emphasised as unresolved problems. These include;

1. Rising tensions within and between countries over the next five years;

2. A slowdown in global economic growth, which despite the lifting of millions out of poverty by globalisation and technological advance, will accentuate the problem of the "hollowed out Western middle classes";[26]

3. Migrant flows will become an even greater drain on Western welfare systems, reinforcing anti-elite sentiments. This will fuel tensions within states and nationalism between states;

4. A broader range of states, organisations, and NGOs will exercise geopolitical influence;

5. American dominance coming to an end; this decline will be accompanied by a weakening of the rule-based international order;

6. Shared understandings of world events undermined by veto powers and collaboration will be blocked; international cooperation therefore will become more difficult. States will remain powerful actors but the most potent future actors will draw on networks, relationships, and information to compete and cooperate;

7. A crisis in cooperation affecting all levels of government, locally and internationally, and will touch on issues including the environment, religion, security, and universal values. Diverging values will threaten international security;

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26   Ibid, p. X.

8. The tempting but costly imposition of order under conditions of chaos that would fail in the long run under conditions of slow growth and debt;

9. The expanded threat of terrorism as groups master new technologies and use them to their advantage.

As the driving forces of the emerging world order, the NIC report assumes that China and Russia will be "emboldened" to "check US influence" through diverse methods of disruption, but conflicts will stay beneath the threshold of open war.[27]

In almost Hollywood fashion, the report consoles us at its close by stating that in spite of all the depressing assumptions, nothing is set in stone so brighter developments may occur.

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[27] Ibid, p. X.

PART I: IMPACT OF FAKERY
ON A DEMOCRATIZING MEDIA

Impact of Fakery on a Democratizing Media

Shushanik Minasyan[1]

Since independence, the Armenian transition course has revealed many difficulties in implementation. The development of the state was very slow in terms of institutionalizing democratic structures. The consolidation of democratic practices at the decision-making levels has serious limits. We may speak of an atmosphere in which the emergence of pluralistic forces and the consolidation of active civil society becomes possible, but there are still various institutional and organizational barriers that do not allow civil society actors as well as media to become key factors in promoting democracy in Armenia. The Constitution includes the formal strengthening of the rule of law. However the formal strengthening of the control of institutions and provisions on rule of law and civic freedoms stand in contrast to reality. A first and important point is that Soviet practice still dominates the political system, the power of the local elite in political and economic terms is substantial, and institutional performance remains weak.

Unfortunately, the soviet heritage finds reflection not only in political and economic area, it is also partly present in the Armenian medial landscape. Since 1990 the Armenian media faced horizons of freedom, but the short-comings of the soviet media system could not be overcome. For several decades the Armenian media were wholly controlled by the communist regime, which regarded all forms of press as well as mass communications as a political instrument in supporting and legitimizing its own ideology. The media were generally shaped and used for propaganda, in order to form a society with a communist morality.

> There was no interest in facts, no tradition of collecting or reporting objective information, and no attempt to separate facts from value-based statements. Facts, it was understood, were often random or incomplete, and changed continually. They were subjected to interpretation before they could be published. Therefore, there was no need for fact-gathering, no requirement for such training within the jour-

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[1] Department for Political Sciences and Sociology at the University of Bonn.

nalistic profession, no understanding of how to gain access to sources and then how to treat them, and no room for investigative journalism.[2]

The Soviet media was identified with the Party and remained subject to the Party.

As Armenia moved into the post-Soviet era, journalists had the opportunity to operate in a more democratic political and legal framework. Despite these preconditions the media industry in Armenia faced in the initial phase of political transition two serious challenges. The first one was lack of professionalism and skills development. The collapse of Soviet-style journalism has brought a new type of writer to the fore; youthful, enthusiastic, but often without training or experience. With no working mechanisms, journalists had difficulties replacing Soviet-era training with new methods, which were deeply rooted in the media self-image. They missed the experience, how to manage, verify and work with information. Furthermore, in the course of the war in Nagorno-Karabakh in the early 1990s the Armenian media was characterized by the dominance of a nationalistic discourse. It played a central role in the war propaganda and oriented its reporting style towards the creation of the national spirit. This process makes the media closer to politics, and has handicapped the reconstruction of the free, investigative and critical media industry in Armenia. It was the birth of politicized media in independent Armenia, which promoted return of the Soviet-style practice and hindered the effective development of Armenia's infant civic society.

The second decade of independence was marked by a noticeable decline in some basic civil freedoms, with a troubling and more frequent pattern of state control and intimidation of the Armenian media. The main strategy of state influence over the media has been to adopt the Russian model, with tactics of economic pressure and a complete control of state licenses for media outlets. The overall state of Armenia's media remains marked by a dominant state-run broadcast and print media set against a financially vulnerable and harassed opposition or independent media.[3] Despite massive

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[2]   Kurkchiyan, Marina. (2006). *The Armenian media in Context: Soviet Heritage, the Politics of Transition, Democracy and the Rule of Law*. Washington, D.C., p. 269.
[3]   Bertelsmann Transformation Index, Country Report: Armenia, 2003.

changes to the media since 2005 in the course of democratic reforms and increasing cooperation with Western actors, media independence remained insufficient and there were no developments regarding pluralism in the broadcasting media and transparency of media ownership. The National Commission for Television and Radio was the key regulatory institution for the broadcast media, and is nominated by the president and by the parliament. Private TV channels have been indirectly influenced by government institutions.

When protests grew against the autocratic regimes and revolutions broke out across the Arab world, giving rise to the "Arab Spring" (2010-2012), the waves of democratization reached also a number of post-Soviet countries, such as Kyrgyzstan (in 2010)[4] and Ukraine (in 2014),[5] where popular protest against the increasingly authoritarian governments gave birth to uprisings and revolutions that toppled the ruling regimes. This dynamic had also effects on the democratization process in Armenia. Nevertheless, growing poverty and socioeconomic discontent has led to more clashes between the police and small social protest groups. Since 2010, protests sparked by civic initiatives have become very common in Armenia's capital Yerevan and, to a lesser extent, in the smaller cities of Gyumri and Vanadzor. Civic initiatives in Armenia address a range of issues including the environment, cultural preservation, consumer rights, labour and employment issues, as well as human rights. In 2013, demonstrators protested price hikes for public transportation. The Yerevan public transport boycott started July 20, after the city government decided to raise transportation fares in Armenia's capital city by at least 50 percent – a move that many saw as benefiting private companies with perceived ties to pro-government politicians.[6] In 2014 it was pension reform. Several thousand people rallied in Yerevan's Liberty Square in January 2014 to protest against government's

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4   Harding, Luke. "Kyrgystan Capital bloodied, looted and chaotic after overthrow of Bakiyev." The Guardian, 08. April 2010, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/apr/08/kyrgyzstan-revolt-over-kurmanbek-bakiyev (02.11.17).

5   Jenkins, Simon. "Maidan, Ukraine…Tahrir, Egypt … the Square symbolises Failure, not Hop." The Guardian, 26. February 2014, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/feb/26/ukraine-maidan-square-symbolises-failure (02.11.17).

6   Grigoryan, Marianna. "Armenia. Can a Bus Boycott lead to shift in the Political Dynamic." *Eurasianet*, 29. July 2013, http://www.eurasianet.org/node/67312 (02.11.17).

pension reforms. The controversial reforms, which went into effect on January 1, envisaged a 5-percent salary deduction for the pension funds. The reforms have spurred wide public outcry. The civil initiative called Dem.Am (I'm Against) as well as opposition parties denounced the measure and demanded that the Court recognize it unconstitutional.[7] In 2015, what started as a protest against higher electricity bills became the so-called "Electric Yerevan" movement. The Electric Yerevan protests began on June 19, when protesters gathered on the street to express their discontent with the local power company, the Electric Networks of Armenia (ENA) and its planned 14 percent increase in electricity tariffs from August, the third price increase within two years, which would result in a more than 60 percent overall increase in electricity tariffs. Public discontent was further aggravated by a report revealing evidence of gross corruption and mismanagement at the utility. The report exposed the extravagant lifestyle of the ENA management and revealed that the ENA has accumulated debt by overpaying suppliers and contractors. On June 23, four days after the start of the protests, roughly 2,000 protesters gathered on Baghramyan Avenue to express their grievances with the ENA management.[8]

The rise of civic activism in Armenia included three interesting factors.

> First, the coming of age of the first post-Soviet generation of Armenians has meant there is now a generation of Armenians who never personally lived through the Soviet period and hence, they not only have a different worldview, but also, having grown up in the neo-liberal context where a strong welfare state never existed, they have different expectations and understandings about the state and its relationship to citizens. Unlike older generations of Armenians who argue, "the state must provide services" they don't harbour any such expectations from the State. As such, they take a more active approach to raising awareness of and addressing problems within society from cleaning up public parks to defending the rights of citizens using public transportation.[9]

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[7] "Is Armenia's Government running Scared, or playing for Time?" Radio Free Europe, 03. April 2014, https://www.rferl.org/a/armenia-pension-reform-protests/ 25319747.html 02.11.17).

[8] Luhn, Alec. "Armenia Protests escalate after Police turn on Demonstrators." The Guardian, 25. June 2015, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jun/24/ armenia-yerevan-protests-electric-prices-russia (02.11.17).

[9] Ishkanyan, Armine. (2013). Civil society, Development and Environmental Activism in Armenia. London, p. 28.

While civic initiatives addressed very specific issues, their emergence was informed by and articulated much broader concerns around corruption, the absence of rule of law, the lack of democracy, the rise of oligarchic capitalism, and the failure of formal political elites to address the concerns of ordinary Armenian citizens.

Second factor was the crucial role of social media for these movements. New technologies of communication introduced also major changes in Armenian media as well as in the civil landscape. It fundamentally changed how people are able to manage their political identities, to form their own global communities and to express their views free of traditional methods of regulation as well as political limitation. Cyberspace undermines the traditional media bases of democratic institutions by allowing individuals to be both sender and receiver. The scale of social networks and the speed of information transfer has shifted the paradigm of citizen expression as well as created non-hierarchical communication structures. Bazerman states that the internet opens new possibilities for non-politicians and non-journalists to perform political and journalistic activities, elevating their local talk into a public performance.[10] Particularly in developing countries and countries in transition the freedom in the virtual space encourages the pluralistic society and contributes to the strengthening of the civil society as well as their political conversation with the government institutions.

A good example was the so-called "Arab Spring" in early 2011 when social media has become a kind of a new platform for civic activism. Social media networks were instrumental in driving and facilitating such "leaderless" revolutions and were widely used during civic protests in the Arab countries in expressing common frustration with authorities as well as in mobilizing and coordinating social movements against the governments. In quickly disseminating information, social media played a crucial role in attracting both national and international attention to protesters' plight and subsequently swaying international opinion and policy. In Armenia the introduction and spread of social media, including Facebook and YouTube,

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[10] Bazerman, Charles. (2002). "Genre and Identity: Citizenship in the Age of the Internet and the Age of Global Capitalism." The Rhetoric and Ideology of Genre, edited by Richard Coe, Lorelei Lingard, and Tatiana Teslenko, Hampton Press, pp. 13-37.

as well as the greater availability and affordability of broadband technology which allows for uploading videos and Live Streaming, has allowed civic activists to organise and mobilise much more effectively and rapidly. The grassroots civic initiatives in Armenia extensively used social media in their campaigns by synergising and combining campaigning in both virtual and physical spheres.

In recent years social media reshaped Armenia's media landscape and generated an energetic and vibrant civil society. In contrast to the political parties, the civil groups had been perceived as harmless by the government. However, the rising influence of civil groups has harshened the authorities' attitude. One of the most important novelties, appeared in the public life of Armenia as a result of civic initiatives, has become the shaping of a new collective identity. The collective identity is crucial for the success of social movements. Thanks to it, the connection of participants of action with the activities, around which people are united, becomes more definite. The collective identity also regulates the problem of people's participation. In terms of media according to ARMedia the importance of Internet as "the most important source of information on current events and news" grew from 6 percent in 2011 to 17percent in 2013. Online publications are used at least once or twice per month "to get information about current events and news" by 34 percent of the population in 2013 as compared to 15 percent in 2011. Use of social networking sites for the similar purpose increased from 22 to 36 percent respectively. (Figure 1.)

As Figure 2 illustrates, the importance of Internet in general, and the use of social platforms, in particular, has grown. Trust towards these alternative sources of information increased as well. On a four-point scale (where one means no trust at all and four means "trust very much") online media sources received an average score of 2.63 in 2011 and 2.73 in 2013. Trust towards social networking sites increased slightly; from average 2.54 in 2011 to 2.59 in 2013. Among social network users, the percentage of those who use it for sharing political and/or social news increased from 16percent in 2011 to 21 percent in 2013 (3.4 and 7.5 percent of the general population, respectively).
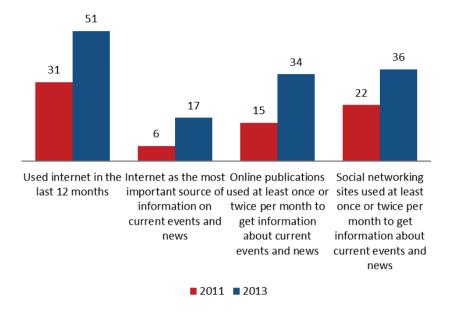
Figure 1: Increased importance of Internet as an information source (ARMedia, percent)
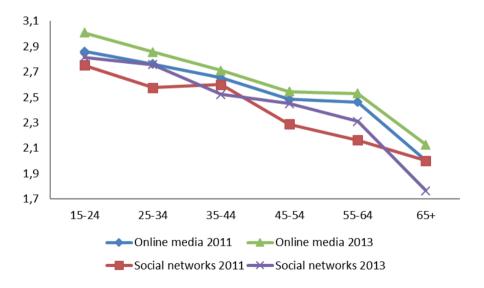

Figure 2: Average trust towards online information sources by age cohorts (ARMedia, mean on the scale from 1 'don't trust at all' to 4 'trust very much')

Although criticism of the government and public officials is tolerated in general, and there are no restrictions on the use of the Internet, as well as freedom of opinion in social networks. However the intimidation, harassment, threats and abuse are part of the Armenian reality. The safety and security of anti-government journalists and civic activists remain of serious concerns. They often become subject of physical and verbal assaults by the police. There has also been an increase in clampdowns on civil activists. The European Union delegation has recorded a number of attacks against civil society organizations (CSOs), as well as inadequate investigation of these attacks by the authorities. Nevertheless, although civil society and the media remain constrained, there has been a recent increase in the number of civic initiatives indicating a stronger voice emerging from the non-state sectors of society.[11]

There are several challenges to media freedom. Most print and broadcast outlets are affiliated with political or commercial interests, and journalists practice self-censorship to avoid harassment by government or business figures. Most independent and investigative outlets operate online. Several journalists reported being assaulted or having their equipment damaged by security forces during the energy protests in Yerevan in 2015, and a few reporters were temporarily detained. Police investigations into the incidents were ongoing at year's end. Private discussion is relatively free and vibrant. The law prohibits wiretapping or other electronic surveillance without judicial approval, but there have been reports of judges issuing warrants in cases lacking sufficient justification.[12]

The media and civil society remain nevertheless the weakest institutions in Armenia. There are concerns about the capacity and sustainability of CSOs in Armenia. Due to a lack of financial independence, newspapers continue to be controlled by political parties or wealthy individuals. Newspaper coverage typically reflects funder's expectations. "Ordered articles," also called indirect advertising, as well as strong criticism for the opposition, are clearly noticeable in Armenian print media. This has a negative impact on do-

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[11] Human Rights Watch: Armenia, 2016, https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2017/country-chapters/armenia (02.11.17).
[12] Freedom House: Freedom in the World. Armenia, 2016.

mestic journalism and is one of the main reasons why Armenians don't concentrate on print media. Many Armenians find newspapers arrogant, aggressive and out of touch. Progress has been made among some online newspapers, although the majority remain closely linked to the political elite. Print and broadcast media lacks diversity of political opinion, and most television outlets reflected government views. Regulation of broadcast media remains highly politicised because of the government agents serving on the National Commission on Television and Radio. This gave rise to poorer quality television for the Armenian audience. The incident also damaged the country's reputation regarding freedom of speech. The government cannot generally control the content of online media, which together with social networks, serve as an important alternative source of information. Unlike broadcast media, online media and social networks tend to provide diverse political opinions. The live-streaming of important political events gain in importance among the online media outlets, especially during public protests. Nevertheless, online media also showed signs of the influence by politically connected owners and advertisers. Traditional and online media ownership remain opaque to this day.

Speaking Notes: We Will Return to the Price of Our Word!

Akaki Gvimradze

The distribution of counterfeit news is a cancer, which at a high speed destroys a healthy body of mass media, eats all healthy cells and destroys the chance of life. It deprives media of its past, present and future and destroys its reputation in society, which has been acquired through long-term purposeful work and fight.

This is a particularly painful process for the leading media who for many years built confidential bridges with society, which worked reliably to provide society real, fact-based and impartial information. This is the basis for strengthening democratic processes and democratic institutions – they took responsibility to make a contribution in the formation of a strong society and accordingly in the formation of a strong democratic state. The objective information does not lie in creating a basis for modern Western democracy.

And so, why is this fake stream of information so dangerous? What kind of danger does it contain? Why did we meet here, to judge about this issue? We have met because it may have a significantly negative impact on the development of political and social processes, especially in such a changeable, explosive and conflict-filled region, like the South Caucasus.

Global changes caused by the collapse of the Soviet Union, have surpassed the states of the regional tsunami and their formation processes have not yet been completed.

The South Caucasus is a small region, but it is remarkably varied and different – there are three small states in the region: Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia. Despite the territorial proximity and immediate neighbourhoods, they differ significantly from one another. The religious, linguistic, traditional and cultural features in these countries and respective societies differ greatly from each other.

However, I will focus on the problems of Georgia and pay attention to its media democratization process. During only 25 years of independence in modern history, there have been so many political, military and public tsunamis in this small state that I am surprised how the community was saved and its society continues to develop.

Throughout the process, its contribution was undoubtedly made by the Georgian media, which developed and is nowadays developing with the newly-formed state. I can say that media plays an important role in the development of socio-political processes in our country.

Unfortunately, this role is not always positive. The main reason is that many of the leading media outlets have lost their editorial independence and have become a tool in the hands of certain business-political groups, becoming a party that propagates the kind of information that its owners need for their own narrow business and political interests.

For a small state like Georgia, whose population is about 3.5-4 million people without occupied regions, the number of different types of media is illogically rising, but the advertising market for media is being annually reduced. It is impossible to allocate so little to such media outlets.

It is quite logical that the vast majority of the media simply do not have the chance to stay independent because they do not have the financial resources. The only chance to survive in such circumstances is by carrying out certain interests in the hands of different business-political groups and to endure not having editorial independence.

The impossibility of producing independent editorial policy is one of the main sources of the distribution of false and trending information.

The result is that the society is bombarded daily with tens of thousands of media outlets, from which a significant part is tendentious or simply fraudulent. In society, it is becoming more difficult to find the difference between the false and trending information, and objective journalism.

That is why the quality of trust towards the media is falling and society is looking for alternative sources of information.

Such an alternative source has become social networks in recent years, especially Facebook, which is now the source of the most popular and powerful information flows for Georgian society.

Facebook has just separated the majority of our community from media outlets and their attention has been completely conquered. Georgians spend as much time on Facebook as with family.

Failure of the unpredictable information flows by Facebook has become a source of fraudulent, unverified and trending information for groups and communities that are targeted by various political and business groups deliberately intimidating certain types of fraudulent information and effectively affecting public attitudes.

They send messages and information to Georgians on sensitive topics, such as religion, national identity, and racial discrimination. It is very dangerous.

Many of these types of false information are simply a secret call for violence against certain groups of people.

In recent years, there is a particularly marked violation against immigrants and people who have a non-traditional sexual orientation.

For instance, some fake information has been spread over the current year that immigrants of certain nationalities have been subjected to grave crimes, particularly the actions of the perpetrators towards Georgian juveniles, which has led to public disturbances and there were some speeches on the ground.

These types of fraudulent information allowed some aggressive groups to activate and move public movements against foreigners. For a long time, the situation was explosive and the events unfolded on the dangerous side. This was one of the most striking examples of the fraudulent weapon in the hands of people who want to demolish state democracy.

For us, the journalists have a very important role – our reputation, which many generations of journalists have built step-by-step. How do you protect yourself and society from false information?

To tell the truth, I do not have any original and especially effective recipe for this. I think that the main thing is to fight for the value of what is true, objective journalism.

Each journalist must place himself to higher moral standards. Let us review the information, check the sources, feel the responsibility to society and fight for the sake of retaining society's trust. Nothing is worse than when your word has no price – let's return to the price of our word!

Narrative Shaping in Strategic Communication

Irina Lysychkina

Introduction

In modern hybrid warfare, the information and communication domains are becoming important battlefields. Strategies, tactics, planning policies and engagement principles are elaborated and applied for the information and communication domains like for any other domain of warfare. At the same time, modern warfare tends to exploit a wider arsenal of conventional and unconventional tools and means, constantly seeking new options. Strategic communication offers new perspectives worth considering, such as "access to information is not enough, because a framework of understanding is required."[1]

The Partnership for Peace Consortium Study Group, "Regional Stability in the South Caucasus," examines the possibility of developing a sample media narrative and campaign that could prepare public opinion for the difficult decisions that South Caucasus political elite have to make regarding status and cooperation, assuming that letting the media shape public opinion, even with biased information, is permissible as long as the result is in the public interest, and fosters the common good.

This research aims at defining the principles of constructing effective narratives with the use of strategic communication capabilities and the media.

Strategic Communication and the Media

Though very popular and often overused, "strategic communication" is a relatively new term defining "the practice of deliberate and purposive communication that a communication agent enacts in the public sphere on

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[1] Noam Chomsky. (2008). *Talks at Google*. Published 2 May, 2008. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rnLWSC5p1XE#t=27m38s>, accessed on 06.11.2017.

behalf of a communicative entity to reach set goals."[2] Strategic communication aims at forming and maintaining a positive image/reputation of the communicative entity, thus filling in the communication space with the appropriate information, and diminishing the impact of the undesirable discrediting information from other sources.

There are several basic principles of strategic communication for the communicator;

- to have healthy professional relations with the media;
- to recognizing the diversity of the media and to choose appropriate media as a communication channel;
- for each message to be in congruity with the communicative entity narrative;
- for each message to the target audience not to conflict with collateral and/or "eavesdropping" audiences.

Strategic communication operates with factual information, and it is not propaganda with "Big Lie" techniques. Deception and manipulation strategies require special caution in using them as they might lead to loss of credibility and trust. "Holding the credibility requires that the deeds match the words."[3] Any manipulation has its counter actions that can be used by society, but these actions depend on the manipulation detection, which requires critical thinking on the part of the audience.

Strategic communication incorporates a wide range of influence strategies, specifically tailored for every target audience. The target audience conditions the choice of the influence channels for strategic communication,

[2] Holtzhausen, Derina, Zerfass, Ansgar. (2015). "Strategic Communication: Opportunities and Challenges of the Research Area." In: The Routledge Handbook of Strategic Communication, ed. by Derina Holtzhausen and Ansgar Zerfass. New York, London: Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, p. 74.

[3] Sillanpää, Antti. *Strategic communications and need for societal narratives*. Paper presented at the The Riga Conference 2015, Riga, November 13th, 2015. <https://www.rigaconference.lv/rc-views/22/strategic-communications-and-need-for-societal-narratives>, accessed on 03.11.2017.

varying from polished websites and media messages for general audience to Twitter and Facebook for young millennials. Though the role of the media in strategic communication is hard to overestimate, traditional (old) media enjoys more credibility. The Economist gives the following statistics: "only 37 percent of Americans trust what they get from social media, half the share that trust printed newspapers and magazines."[4]

Media Consciousness

The media have the capacity of constructing the desired frames in the audience's consciousness. In his frame theory, Lakoff states that "frames are mental structures shaping the way we see the world."[5] According to Lakoff:

> [f]raming is critical because a frame, once established in the mind of the reader (or listener, viewer, etc.), leads that person almost inevitably to the conclusion desired by the framer, and it blocks consideration of other possible facts and interpretations.[6]

Frames are constructed through the media-created virtual world. Usually brighter than the real one, it is clearly based on the cognitive map of human consciousness. Language and communication do not simply describe the world around, they create the mental model of the situation, on which the consumer of the information starts to rely. This virtual mental model creates another "draft" of the world, which is superimposed on the basic mental model.

Since the media professionally take into account the painful points of mass consciousness for building the communication, nowadays, we fail to tell fake information from the truth because we experience a lot of forgery and fakery.[7]

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[4] "Do social media threaten democracy?" *The Economist*, November 4th, 2017. <https://www.economist.com/news/leaders/21730871-facebook-google-and-twitter-were-supposed-save-politics-good-information-drove-out >, accessed on 06.11.2017.

[5] Lakoff, George. (2014). *The ALL NEW Don't Think of an Elephant!: Know Your Values and Frame the Debate*. White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green Publishing, p. XV.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Navarro, Joe: *What everybody is saying*. New York, 2008.

"Fake news" has been announced as the Collins Word of the Year 2017.[8] The usage of the term has risen by 365 percent since 2016. In the 80s of the previous century, Chomsky proposed that

>…the mass communication media of the U.S. are effective and powerful ideological institutions that carry out a system-supportive propaganda function, by reliance on market forces, internalized assumptions, and self-censorship, and without overt coercion, by means of the propaganda model of communication.[9]

In recent years, the media created or destroyed social movements, justified wars, tempered financial crises, spurred on some other ideological currents, and even gave the phenomenon of media as producers of reality within the collective psyche.[10]

Nowadays, we face the politicization of the media and the corresponding politicization of the mind of their audience. Decision-making which used to be based on the mass consciousness now is reliant on the media consciousness, that is, the consciousness created with the help of media technologies. "Media consciousness can be regarded as the second "ego" of a person, essentially forming their thoughts and behaviour."[11] We often underestimate such influence, and thereby depreciate the status of the media consciousness in our life.

In most cases, a person does not conflict with the model of the world, and does not seek for an alternative interpretation. When the interpretation in the mind coincides with the one offered in media communication, this model is strengthened.[12] The built-in frames support this process and block any "side" information. Further "side" facts will be denied by the person

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8   Collins 2017 Word of the Year Shortlist <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/word-lovers-blog/new/collins-2017-word-of-the-year-shortlist,396,HCB.html >, accessed on 04.11.2017.
9   Herman, Edward S., Chomsky, Noam. (1988). *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media.* New York: Pantheon Books.
10 "10 Media manipulation strategies" by Noam Chomsky. Published 7 June, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=glFjSRCai5s >, accessed on 06.11.2017.
11 Pocheptsov, Heorhii. "Media Consciousness: How to find a black cat in a dark room." №12 [330] 20.10.2017 <http://www.relga.ru/Environ/WebObjects/tgu-www.woa/wa/Main?textid=5147&level1=main&level2=articles>, accessed on 04.11.2017.
12 Ibid.

themselves if they do not correspond to the existing model of the situation. It is worth mentioning that, for instance, social media has the capacity to evaluate their influence and to have a clear understanding of their audience.

Thus, media consciousness is, in fact, a virtual world, imposed by the media. The media are capable to design a world different from the reality, and to replace the latter with it. We accept this world as a reality, having neither will, nor time, nor opportunity to verify it[13] since the accelerated change of news deprives the person of adequate understanding. This virtual world is constructed with the help of relevant narratives which are developed by the media (rather their stakeholders) themselves or designed within strategic communication of the communication entity and then widely translated (broadcast, tweeted etc.) via the media.

Narrative Design

In general, a narrative is understood as "a story explaining an actor's actions in order to justify them to their audience. Narrative is a story of a sequence of events with significance for narrator and audience"[14], hence, it includes stories about the events that are defined by the narrator/communicator as relevant for the audience. In other words, "to be effective, narratives must both resonate with the intended audience's core values and advocate a persuasive cause-effect description that ties events together in an explanatory framework".[15]

"The aim of a narrative is to guide decisions so as to ensure their coherence."[16] Arguing that literary and cultural phenomena are best understood within a consilient disciplinary framework, Landa associates this perspec-

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[13] Pocheptsov: Media Consciousness.
[14] Denzin, N.K. (1989). *Interpretive Biography*. London: Sage, 1989.
[15] Antoniades, O'Loughlin, Miskimmon. *Great Power Politics*, p. 5.
[16] Reding, Anais, Weed, Kristin, and Ghez, Jeremy J. (2010). *NATO's Strategic Communications Concept and its Relevance for France*. Washington DC and Paris: RAND Corporation, La Défense, p. X.

tive with "big history", the broad context of the evolution of societies and of life generally.[17]

Strategic narratives are "intended to help people make sense of events related to the use of military force in ways that are likely to give rise to a particular feeling or opinion."[18] Strong strategic narratives are characterized by four basic elements;[19]

- They articulate a clear and compelling mission purpose.
- They hold the promise of [wartime] success.
- They must be coherent and consistent.
- They are characterized by having few and/or weak competitors.

I concur with Sillanpää that "positive and credible narratives build population's resilience against hostilities. Holding that credibility requires that the deeds match the words."[20]

Point of Focalization in the Narrative

According to Genette,[21] any story has a point of view which is aligned with one of the characters or voices in the narrative. This is the point of focalization of the narrative, and it can change throughout the story. Modern strategic narratives that are translated via the media and influence the mind of the audience usually have the external focalization, that is, the narrative point of view is not associated with any character, though this external focalization gets more credibility when supported and presented by the focal-

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[17] Landa, García, Ángel, José. (2017). "The Story behind Any Story: Evolution, Historicity, and Narrative Mapping." In: Emerging Vectors of Narratology. John Pier, Ed. Berlin: De Gruyter.

[18] Antoniades, O'Loughlin, Miskimmon: Great Power Politics.

[19] Ringsmose, Jens, Børgesen, Berit K. (2011). "Shaping Public Attitudes towards the Deployment of Military Power: NATO, Afghanistan and the Use of Strategic Narratives." *European Security*, 20:4, pp. 505-528. Accessed on 03.08.2017. doi:10.1080/09662839.2011.617368, at pp. 513-514.

[20] Sillanpää: *Strategic Communications*.

[21] Genette, Gerard. (1930). Narrative Discourse. An Essay in Method. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

ization points of celebrities and experts. In different political talk-shows, especially during election campaigns we see so called talking heads and experts who have nothing to do with the issues under discussion, but they are authorities in their fields whom the audience trust whether because the audience feel they know the celebrities as family members, following them in the media and social nets, or because the audience trust that the media invite really credible experts to share their unbiased point of view.

The choice of the right point of focalization is significant since it allows to block the criticism of the audience and to provide the disseminated information with the overarching status of knowledge. This is a perfectly understandable struggle from someone else's position/point of view, because knowledge stands above information.[22]

Narratives Competition

Information forms the model of the world in the mind, where in principle there cannot be any competition with other interpretations. People accept either one or the other to avoid the cognitive dissonance. The frames in the mind of the audience filter out any facts that contradict the strategic narrative.

Competing narratives, as well as the plurality of possible interpretations of events, are destroyed with the help of the media, which begin to broadcast one interpretation of the event that matches the narrative, thus making it the truth. Simultaneous use of several different types of media intensifies the influence and support of the narrative. Repeating information changes its status and makes it not just a fact, but general knowledge.
Pocheptsov points out that

> this is generally an interesting problem of the coexistence of real knowledge and hypothetical knowledge, generated and derived by the information consumers [the audience] themselves on the basis of data received from the media.[23]

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[22] Pocheptsov: *Media Consciousness.*
[23] Ibid.

People operate with the concepts of induction and deduction, forgetting about yet another – the abduction as the process of generating hypotheses, which was proposed by Pierce.

> Abduction is normally thought of as being one of three major types of inference, the other two being deduction and induction. The distinction between deduction, on the one hand, and induction and abduction, on the other hand, corresponds to the distinction between necessary and non-necessary inferences. In deductive inferences, what is inferred is *necessarily* true if the premises from which it is inferred are true; that is, the truth of the premises *guarantees* the truth of the conclusion.[24]

With reference to Pierce's abduction theory, "making a given fact a matter of course" can be read as "giving a satisfactory explanation of that fact", thus, the narrative explains the fact/event in a way that makes only one interpretation possible which is desired by the communicator and presented as the truth. For instance, in the 1993 election campaign, Rudy Giuliani avoided "crime", "criminals" and related "fighting crime" shifting to "personal and public safety" and "safe, civil society."[25] Changing perception is an important aspect of the strategic narrative.

Narratives and Their Perception

The hermeneutics perspective, which presupposes the study and interpretation of human behaviour and social institutions, questions "What did really happen?", "Who knows it all?", "What impressions do people have who possess only this piece of the puzzle, or that one?" which tend to reinforce and supply powerful narrative demonstrations.

The success of any narrative depends on the main concepts selected for this narrative and their concrete verbalization in different contexts for different audiences. For instance, the narrative on reform should embed the concepts of "success", "improvement", "congruence", "better living", "perspectives", "transitory challenges", "future", and "welfare". The narrative of "Reconciliation" might demand "future", "perspectives", "com-

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[24] Abduction. First published Wed Mar 9, 2011; substantive revision Fri Apr 28, 2017. <https://stanford.library.sydney.edu.au/entries/abduction/>, accessed on 05.11.2017.

[25] Luntz, Frank. (2007). Words That Work: It's Not What You Say, It's What People Hear. New York, NY: Hyperion, p. 178.

promise", "civilized neighbourhood", "cooperation", "development", etc. Analyzing the current situation in Ukraine, Pocheptsov believes that the change of the narrative of "Betrayal" to "Success" is very important for the local population,[26] as well as to promote the narrative of "Success" to the external audience in describing the events in Ukraine, since

> Ukraine failed to ensure the narrative "Reforms are taking place" not only because the government does not have a strong information policy, but also because these reforms are not yet translated into street or human level. Each such step still leads to the deterioration in the standard of living. Therefore, stories about success have no effect. And even more - mistrust of any actions, detachment of people from public life take place. If 2013-2014 were the years of public activity, now we see the removal of people.[27]

From the pragmatic perspective, the recipient's factor is the most significant for the narrative success, since "it is not what you say, it is what people hear."[28] Thus, the narrative is composed with regard to the target audience's variables; age, gender, education, occupation, life experience, and assumptions. Even rhetorical skills nowadays are not about speech, they are about recognizing social circumstances and grasping what the audience expects.[29] For example, women generally respond better to stories, anecdotes and metaphors, while men are more fact-oriented and statistical,[30] young people read less and tweet more, so if "you want to reach the people, you must first speak their language."[31]

The ideal narrative must bring some personal meaning and values to the audience. Personalization and humanization of a message [within the narrative] help to trigger an emotional remembrance.[32] Narrative impressions

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[26] Доктор філологічних наук Георгій Почепцов: «Дуже важливо змінити наратив «зрада» на «успіх» / Doctor of Sciences Heorhii Pocheptsov: "It is very important to substitute the "Betrayal" narrative" with the "Success" narrative <https://ukurier.gov.ua/uk/articles/doktor-filologichnih-nauk-georgij-pochepcov-duzhe-/>, accessed on 05.11.2017.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Luntz: *Words That Work*.

[29] Krebs, Ron R. (2015). *Narrative and the making of US national security*. New York: Cambridge University Press, p. 32.

[30] Luntz: op. cit., p. 43.

[31] Ibid., p. 3.

[32] Ibid., p. 18.

could be depicted as super additions: stories added to stories, facts to facts. Thus, they further strengthen the frames in the mind of the audience and elaborate the events in question.

Any narrative is not only a sequence story of the selected events, but also a persuasion in its nature. For a narrative to be persuasive, special attention should be given to the structure of messages within this narrative, which depends on a number of factors: audience, channel, time, topic, etc. It has proven to be effective to "give context 'why' before 'so that' and 'how', because the order in which information is presented determines context, and it can be as important as the substance of the information itself".[33] This corresponds to an essential language rule that contradicts the logics: "A+B+C does not necessarily equal C+B+A."[34]

Shaped as a part of strategic communication and then circulating in the media, strong narratives block the audience's reflection on the situation since they persuasively provide the audience with seemingly sufficient information and interpretation of the facts that tend to become knowledge being translated into the audience's language and discussed by the credible celebrities and experts.

Conclusion

On-going changes in the information environment affect how people search and find information, affect the type of information people receive, reduce the value of interpersonal interaction, and revise the scale of information and the role of social networks. These changes vary in the developing social media that have become accessible to people in the last decades.

Information technologies have simplified the load on the human memory and even mind, thus, becoming more video-technological than informational. Mass consciousness has been superseded by media consciousness with the dominant role of television serials and talk-shows dictating the behaviour patterns to the audience.

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[33] Luntz: *Words That Work*, p. 26.
[34] Ibid., p. 41.

Taking into consideration the available capacity of strategic communication and the media to construct the desired frames in the audience's consciousness, as well as the global expansion of the media and their increasing influence on the audience, I believe it is possible to develop and promote a sample media narrative of "reconciliation" in the South Caucasus that will support the political elite's difficult decisions regarding status and cooperation. Moreover, heavy reliance on biased information can undermine the credibility of the information source, though the mind is the most vulnerable component in the conflict.

Special attention should be paid to the frames constructed in the mind mainly by the media. Since these frames are able to filter out the incoming information, the correction of the existing frames and the construction of the new ones that won't block the desired narrative are required.

Narratives as stories of sequences of events with significance for the narrator and the audience exploit the audience value system and intrude into the human cognitive space since they should resonate with the intended audience's core values and advocate a persuasive cause-effect description that links the facts and events together.

Further insights into the problem of shaping narratives will allow outlining best practices and their elements to develop the narrative of "reconciliation."

Speaking Notes: Fake News and Democracy

Jens Wendland

An up-to-date assessment of the disturbing media reality seems simple: evil powers, especially during election periods, overflow the internet with deliberately false information – the names Trump or Putin are considered the most prominent market leaders, but they are "only" the tips of the iceberg. I could easily exhaust my contribution with current case studies – about hackers and trolls, tirades of a twittering president etc.

Although clear insights and conclusions can hardly be crystallized from the spiraling mists of digital information basic knowledge already emerges: the analogue printed and electronic media – newspapers, radio and television have made public in civil society. They conveyed background and orientation to opinion formation. But it is becoming ever clearer how fake news manipulates the conveyance of information as an essential element of democratic processes. Representative democracy is increasingly robbing its element of the mediated public.

The assessment of the endangerment of democratic processes I share with growing concern. But the relevant interpretations and assignments of fake news are too simplistic.

Fake news are the product of an informed society from the beginning. The fake news career ran through the tabloids and advertisements to hybrid forms of fake news. They contain a core truth but are manipulated for commercial or political purposes. Who would deny that politics cultivates these forms?

In my mind many politicians who complain about fake news with extreme vehemence and moral impetus, behave like the protagonists of Max Frisch's drama "Biedermann and the Brandstifter (arsonist)" – but in the face of the digital transformation of fake news, they are at the same time sorcerer's apprentices. They will no longer be in control of the effects of fake news, which they use for instance in election campaigns.

Digitized fake news are not conveyed openly, but immerses algorythmically hidden in closed societies. How you call into social media, it rings out of the community: in echo chambers, included in filter bubbles, getting into the stream of news, the Multimedia heated news feeds. However, this closed system of digital message strengthening is in line with the increasingly self-referential practice of current journalism.

Artificial intelligence dominates and manages the infinite supply of big data, with automated procedures and instruments – using robots to increase the impact. Let us briefly stick to one frightening future of old media of the analogue information society. As far as the future of the oldest mediating organ, the printed Newspaper, is concerned, those who are really on the point of departure only diverge in the exact termination of the death knell.

This prospect of an enlightened information society is equally explained by deficits and apparent added value. Among the deficits I count above all the defensive of today's leading media.

They have left and/or forgotten their selling point. Quality media continue to push themselves as mass media at the lowest common denominator of entertainment, crime and sports and serve their consumers less and less as places of public discourse. The public media play a socially inglorious role although they are paid with fees for providing publicity and society. Even in the face of digital flooding, they arrogantly think they are still in the middle of society.

And politics at least in Western Europe sees itself as a repair shop, has little blueprints for the future – in Germany, almost provincial mediocrity dominates. Here, for example, the idea of confronting consumer-oriented relevant search engines with a variant anchored in public law has been haughtily and quickly rejected. After all the idea of a "European Google" has been discussed.

The deficit includes the increasing loss of professional standards within media professions. A key example: given the breathtaking updating of the digital information business, it may not even be a matter of time before the principle of message-giving, according to which a message needs at least a

second verification source before its publication, becomes an exception. The new flood of information threatens careful research.

Therefore it would be necessary too to adapt the professionally ethical rules of journalistic self-image and the profession of the journalist for the digital future. But there is little hope for that. Thus, a promising approach to make the journalist the gatekeeper of the flood of information has not been systematically pursued.

On the other hand, social media, such as Facebook or search engines like Google, are still struggling to understand themselves as genuine media with the task of self-regulation.

The insistence on a previously proven media order cannot be maintained in the age of digital multimedia, especially when one considers that the digital future develops not only in information, but to a certain extent comprehensively in the control of society up to the production of things. The concept of the smart city as an example between analogue location and total digital service is already experiencing this future.

The so-called added value of digital information follows the laws of a new media economy. It does not require any major investment in order to become marketable. The raw material – big data – is infinitely available. The new media economy enables fast market power. Socially, this added value has critical consequences. They include the entire social development, politics, the working world as well as the whole culture.

Especially in old Europe, this critical discourse runs in the patterns of the old media discourse and social constitutions. Even an adaptation to the digital future, as for instance Jürgen Habermas imagines, when he sketches a paradigm shift according to old patterns: after that, in addition to market and political power, a free space of individual discourse should also be preserved in digital communication.

Fake News is a stress test for the mediatized society, for democracy – as Dirk Baecker named. The fear of disrupting democracy is becoming more concrete, accompanied by a growing decline in belief in the achievements of democracy, which is currently being accepted only by a quarter of the

world's population, according to a study by the Pew Research Center. The vulnerability rates for fake news are scary, as evidenced by a survey after the last federal election in Germany. Fake news have a great effect, especially for right-wing populism. "Beliefs in what suits the world view", is the conclusion of the study, the enlightening aspect of an informed, media-mediated public weakens.

The construction sites of the digital future lie deep within the foundations of civil society: they can be labeled with central concepts such as security of communication systems, free access, education to avoid digital divide – even Facebooks Marc Zuckerberg agrees; security is more important than profits.

Behind each of these key concepts of digitization is a mammoth social task whose positioning and character may be understood globally, but identifies large intercultural differences between, for example, the individual Western approach of Habermas or the roots of collective Confucian thought. Finally, one must consider the shifting of the market and political power of Silicon Valley, including its American business model, to the multi-polar emergence for instance of the BRIC states, ahead of China. And, last but not least, it becomes clear that there will be only very small room for today's media elite in this digital society.

PART II: HOW A TRUSTING PUBLIC CAN BE LED TO WAR

How the Public Can Be Led to War

Dariia Serikova

Introduction

The aim of the article is to analyse how the public can be led to war. The relevance of the paper is based on the fact that recently in Georgia, the results of a public opinion poll carried out by the American think tank National-Democratic Institute (NDI) were published. Regarding the question whether Georgia will join the Eurasian Union or the European Union, the answers were distributed as follows: 65 percent want to join the European Union; 21 percent want to join the Eurasian Union, and 7 percent are against both unions. A question about propaganda was asked, which has increased markedly in recent years; 47 percent agree that Georgia is influenced by propaganda, 27 percent disagree with this fact, and 26 percent do not know. Thirty-nine percent of respondents believe that propaganda is disseminated through Georgian-language channels (Lens, Tbilisi 24), which will be discussed later, and 34 percent believe that it is done through political parties; 32 percent think it is spread through the Internet and social networks; 15 percent suppose that propaganda is spread by non-Georgian-language TV channels.

1. How Can We Incentivize the Regional Media in the South Caucasus to Avoid (or Stop) Spreading Biased News?

What is the situation in the country and what technologies are used to spread propaganda? Our first study on "Analysis of media content" was conducted in 2014-2015. There were other studies on the evaluation of the government strategy for European integration of communication, where the results of the interim monitoring were also shown. Basically, the focus was on the TV messages from the authorities, which flowed smoothly in 2016 and remain a problem today. However, after the 2016 election the number of such messages has declined, as some actors like Gogi Topadze and Tamaz Mechiauri are not in the coalition with Russia or the USA. Recently there has been a relative decrease in the amount of governmental TV

messages from members of the Party "Georgian dream", which may be connected with their desire to improve the party's public image. At the same time, it should be noted that a deputy from the majority, Nukri Kantaria, continues to proliferate homophobic statements, connecting homosexuality with the Western lifestyle and defining that as a problem.[1]

We have divided politicians into two groups; propagandists who openly declare that the salvation of Georgia is only in the rapprochement with either Russia, or the USA, and anti-liberal ethno-nationalists.

Based on our comprehensive analysis, we have concluded that they have absolutely identical messages that are only represented differently. Presenting that message in an ethno-nationalist patriotic wrapper is much more advantageous than declaring openly that they support certain political forces. The results of the last elections showed that the party of Irma Inashvili "Alliance of Patriots" turned out to be much more successful and got more votes than the party of Nino Burjanadze "Democratic movement – United Georgia."

So, is there a difference between anti-Western and anti-liberal rhetoric? No. One can put an equality sign between them. The presentation is the only variable here. Burjanadze says plainly that Georgia does not need NATO, i.e. an alliance will bring danger, and it is better to choose another way – in coalition with Russia or having a zero status (neutral status). Tarkhan-Mouravi ("Alliance of Patriots") is sceptical about European integration and differently states that among their supporters there are opponents of NATO membership, and supporters thereof.

We can say that in 2017, there have been changes – anti-Western statements have become less common, but a constitutional initiative on the part of the ruling party clarified the definition of marriage, which reinforced homophobic sentiments and contained anti-Western concepts.

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[1]   Liana Sayadyan (2017) *Goodbye to Freedom? A Survey of Media Freedom across Europe. Georgia.* Association of European Journalists. (Webpage: www.aejuk.org/AEJ-mediasurvey.doc).

2. Can NGOs Be Influenced by Propaganda?

As for non-governmental organizations (NGOs), here we have a rather fragmented picture. That being said, such organizations as "Institute of the Eurasian Union" and "Association of Human Rights" openly declare their Pro-Russian position. Their funding channels are opaque at best, so it is impossible to know the source of their financial support. That being said, the "Institute of information freedom development" conducted a major study, which shows their connection with the Gorchakov Fund and other Russian organizations. You can analyse this and other Georgian media: "Geworld.ge (Georgia and the world)", "Sakinform", and "Politicano". Anti-liberal and ethno-national mass media are as follows: newspaper "Asaval-Dasavali", TV-channel "Lens", media-holding "Alia", which publishes the newspaper "Alia", "Kviris Khronika (Chronicle of the week)", etc. Our study also showed that some openly Pro-Kremlin publishers were funded from the state budget of Georgia. For example, "Tbilisi 24" was issued a contract with the Ministry of the Execution of Punishment and Probation.[2]

There are concerns that Georgia's endeavour to join NATO may lead to the loss of occupied territories. Such beliefs are spread deliberately, and to some extent they are aimed at emotional perception, with the subsequent manipulation of public opinion. The scepticism towards the Alliance was considerable, one reason was precisely the fear of a loss of territories, Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region. In the Georgian case, the international community does not recognize the independence of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region, only Russia and a small number of pro-Russian countries do so.

3. How Can the Public Be Made Aware, or Educated to Recognize and Defend against Fakery?

The fact that some Georgian media are directly identified with Russian primary sources is shown by Valerie Kvaratskhelia in his TV-show "Lens" where he demonstrates some of the programs of Russian TV channels. We checked other sources to determine if information is true or false. Basically,

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[2]   Liana Sayadyan: *Goodbye to Freedom?*

some media repeat the fake news, and photo manipulation. In reality, it turned out that information was taken from satirical-humorous publications like Russia's "City News" and distributed as real news.

With the aid of the method of deflection of such shocking facts, the information intentionally leads society astray, and gives more legitimacy to their message. If, for example, the information was published in the tabloid newspaper "Asaval-Dasavali." To make it more convincing next to the text the author published a photo and showed what the news site "Pravda.ru" did. Another example of misinformation is that a man in England used human skin rather than artificial skin to sew clothes. In reality, a French designer who works in the company "Human Leather" decided to create clothes with a texture that would be close to human skin.[3]

Perhaps such a conception is not to everyone's taste, but it has nothing to do with the killing of a person. This is in no way legitimate news. The information we receive here is a priori dubious, which prompts the "newsmaker" to create fake websites to create artificial sources in order to back up the made-up news story. For example, stories written in the satirical-humorous vein, which are presented to readers as real. Manipulative headlines, photos, and video fabrication are mainly used.

Media education is important and contributes to the development of a culture of verifying an information. Social media has expanded this capacity; every day we receive a huge amount of information. To not encourage the spread of misinformation, it is important to have some knowledge of the target audience. Modern technology has improved the situation from the point of view of pluralism, but there were side effects used by totalitarian countries and those forces which its propaganda serves. On the other hand, there do exist all sorts of restrictions, which can lead to a complete ban on critical thinking.

This is a serious problem not only for Georgia, but as we have seen, it has become a problem for the international community, as Russian propaganda

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[3] Bartels, L.M. (2013) "Messages Received: The Political Impact of Media Exposure." *American Political Science Review*, 87(2), pp. 267-285.

is much more organized and efficient. In Georgia, work in this direction is undertaken by many other organizations. In this situation, the main actor is the government, which is still under the influence and activities of civil society, advocacy, primarily at the level of the main political document that recognized the propaganda as a danger. The government should develop a sound plan of action and use all available means against misinformation. We hope that the strategy will be followed by real steps aimed at the correct and timely understanding of our society.

Many countries, including Georgia and Armenia are cooperating with the EU Stratcom initiative. The group consists of more than 300 experts from different countries that constantly exchange information. It is important for us to be aware of events, to understand the facts and not confuse them with misinformation; to observe which trends are dominant. We work with strategic communications and a permanent exchange of information.

The U.S. Senate supported the Georgian leadership, approving a bill to provide Tbilisi financial assistance along with Ukraine. Georgians cheered and said that now they will fight the propaganda. Analysts continue to broadcast on the timeliness of such assistance, as Georgia supposedly is already unable to cope with the propaganda which is becoming increasingly difficult.

The important thing is that the US together with the the European Union and NATO in the next two years will allocate for these purposes about 250 million dollars to NGOs and the media. Media in this direction always operate on the old, time-tested schemes. Informing the public with the aim of neutralizing the influence of propaganda will be built on the same principles as it was done in Germany during the World War II era, when Soviet media tried to struggle against it. By talking about allied media, it is meant to create engagement in counter-propaganda.

4. **How Can the Sponsors and Advertisers of South Caucasus Media Be Sensitized to How Fake News Affects Their Reputation?**

Vakhtang Maisaia stated that "Russia and the USA need the Caucasus as a military base for further expansion." He regarded in this aspect the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh and Abkhazia. Nagorno-Karabakh shows the

tendency to the aggravation of the situation, up to the war between Azerbaijan and Armenia. Experiencing the intentions of Russia towards the South Caucasus it is important to mention that Russia has serious claims and aims to strengthen its combat readiness in the South Caucasus.

Forgetting about the events of 2008 and the aggression of Saakashvili, Georgians require a return to the pre-war borders. Now they hope to put pressure on Russia via the NATO Parliamentary Assembly which President, Paolo Alli, said that NATO supports Georgian demands that Russia should return to the officially recognized borders.
Paolo Alli said that

> [w]e recognize the inconceivable efforts that Georgia has shown in recent years, in terms of strengthening democracy. Georgia's stability is important not only for Georgia and the region, but also for all the Western countries – what is happening in the region is important given the aggressive behaviour of Russia in Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova.[4]

According to the American non-governmental research organization Jamestown Foundation the Media Development Foundation (MDF) in Georgia recently published a 53-page report on anti-Western propaganda in the country. The report covers the period from 1 January to 31 December 2016. It is based on a long-term study of anti-Western messages and information (or propaganda) that is distributed by the Georgian television, print and Internet sources.[5]

The report shows the growing strength and sophistication of anti-Western propaganda in Georgia. Researchers have come to the conclusion that the old media sources and non-governmental organizations that existed prior to 2012 (that is, before the ruling coalition came to power), and new sources, opened after, gradually changed the public opinion in the country. The MDF report conditionally divides them into two groups: those that are set up openly as Pro-Russian, and those who are anti-liberal and ethno-national but not required to support Moscow.

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4   "Bertelsmann Transformation Index" (2013) (Webpage: http://bti2003.bertelsmann transformation-index.de/fileadmin/pdf/laendergutachten_en/gus_mongolei/ Armenia).

5   Bartels: "Messages Received…" pp. 267-285.

However, what both groups have in common is that they are clearly anti-Western. The increase in the number of such media organizations is not the only trend. Pro-Western propaganda in Georgia demonstrates an increasing sophistication in respect to its ability to capitalize on public sentiment. So, problems and narratives are skilfully formulated in such a way to manipulate the existing public opinion.

Such discourses often "supported" outright misinformation and unfounded assumptions. For example, anti-Western sources in the media and politicians often emphasize that the membership of Georgia in NATO will lead to the final loss of the Russian-occupied separatist territories of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region (South Ossetia).

However, these statements are never supported by explanations or hypotheses about how one serves the other. This anti-Western propaganda is already having a significant impact on public opinion of Georgians, as evidenced, above all, by the rapidly decreasing support for accession of Georgia to NATO.

In addition, propaganda skilfully plays on the cultural aspects of a deeply conservative, religious Georgian society. In particular, the Western world (including USA and EU) is depicted as the force that "imposes homosexuality, fights against national identity, tradition, orthodoxy and the family as a social institution."

5. What is the Consequence of News Fakery for Freedom of Speech in the South Caucasus?

According to the report, from the point of view of Internet freedom, Georgia and Armenia are free states and Azerbaijan is partially free. Assessing the degree of freedom for each country was influenced by three main criteria. The first is the availability of the Internet: infrastructure, economic barriers, access to Internet providers, free market, issues of regulatory independence of the telecommunications sector.

The second criterion is content limitation. It includes the online content, censorship, self-censorship, blocking of web pages and filtering of ques-

tions, variety of online media, new technologies and the use of social networks for various civil activities.

The third criterion draws attention to the practice of eavesdropping, providing privacy, cases of detention or harassment due to online activity. Researchers and media experts who worked on the report share with the European Journalists Organization (EJO) their opinions about the situation in the field of Internet freedom in their countries.

Journalist and media expert from Azerbaijan, Arzu Geybulla, says that in her country Facebook has become a popular platform where people express their discontent. Journalists also use it as a place where you can find interesting news and political activists – the opposition leads their campaigns, spreads information about corruption, and about the economic problems. However, the activity on Facebook has become dangerous.[6]

> This year for any comment in social networks, written against President Ilham Ali-yev a person could be threatened with imprisonment, corrective labour or a fine. The Internet has become the only place where one can still express their opinions, to find alternative information and debate. But I think soon it will cease to be so. In recent years, people started to be arrested for Facebook posts, comments. Of course, in criminal cases, it is concealed – often they are imprisoned [for] the drugs or for hooliganism. Defamation is criminalized…[7]

says Geybulla. Also, according to her, there is still an acute problem of access to the Internet. Until now, in Azerbaijan there are places where people use dial-up.

The fees for high quality Internet connection are prohibitive. If we compare them with Russia or Georgia, Azerbaijan has higher prices. In general, the situation with freedom of speech in Azerbaijan is poor. Journalists and bloggers are imprisoned, intimidated, their families are threatened, fired, newspapers are closed down. Among the political prisoners in the country there are journalists and bloggers. And even if some journalists have fled the country and are in exile, their families are watched over.

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[6] "Bertelsmann Transformation Index" (2013) http://bti2003.bertelsmann transformationindex.de/fileadmin/pdf/laendergutachten_en/gus_mongolei/Armenia.

[7] Bartels: "Messages Received…" pp. 267-285.

According to the rating of Freedom House, Georgia is characterized as a free country since 2012. Such indicators as the availability of the Internet, a variety of online content and protection of the rights of Internet users in the country have improved.

An analyst at the Institute for Development of Freedom of Information (IDFI), Teona Turashvili, said that over the past few years social networks have become very popular. Social networks are important for planning civil action. For example, in 2016 the report provides an example of the campaign which was called "Beka is not a crime" that began after wide-spread viewing of an online video.

The number of online petitions, although they have no legal force, show the mood of the people and society. Last year, the government announced that it will create a platform for online petitions. It was assumed that, if the petition gathers a certain number of votes, the government should consider the demands asserted in it. But this promise has remained just a promise until today. It is also difficult to determine how closely the government is monitoring users of social networks. In Georgia, there are no laws that would seriously restrict freedom of expression, and freedom of speech. It is believed that in Georgia people can express their thoughts through blogs, web pages or other online resources. The only problem is self-censorship of certain professions. This is especially true for civil servants.

Georgia is considered to be a free country for the reason that online media are not subject to systematic censorship and manipulation by the government; members of the opposition or dissenters are not imprisoned for the expression of opinions online; the government does not block websites or online content for individuals and organizations.

That being said, this year there was the first reported case in Georgia of a brief restriction of access to the international platforms of YouTube and WordPress.[8] This, however, was made in connection with the efforts of the authorities to restrict access to specific illegal content. Because of one post and one video file they closed access to the entire platform. It is therefore

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[8]   Liana Sayadyan: *Goodbye to Freedom?*

important that the government improve the legislation of the country in this regard.

Conclusions

In our research we studied mainly Georgian and Armenian resources. We believe that ethno-national media, which overtly declare their interests are more dangerous than the propaganda itself, which is less legitimate in society and those who spread their message, referring to the alleged English-language media. In general, the media in the South Caucasus is free. As for whether the authorities closely watch over the Internet and Internet content – people have no documented evidence to draw any conclusions at this time. People know that the authorities quickly respond to major trending topics on the Internet. This means that they, at least, treat the Internet like any other media.

The Role of Media in Shaping Public Perceptions: The Case of Armenia

Benyamin Poghosyan

Armenian Media Landscape

Since the late 1990s there has been a rapid development of information; communication technologies have brought about fundamental changes in the ways the public receives and perceives information. The launch of the internet, social media platforms, and the "smartphone revolution" have transformed society. In the "Radio and Television" era the distribution of information was a monopoly of broadcasting companies. Currently, each person with a smartphone and access to the internet is a source of information and by using social media tools can reach relatively big audiences sometimes competing with other traditional sources of media.

The start of the information revolution in Armenia coincided with the collapse of the Soviet Union and early days of independence. The social economic problems connected with the earthquake of 1988, the war in Karabakh and blockade imposed by Azerbaijan and Turkey delayed Armenia's path towards the digitalized economy. During the first years of independence Armenia saw a burst of independent print media with some 100 newspapers coming to life between 1990-1991. But economic and energy crises had a negative impact on print media. In the mid-1990s they lost their audience and ceased to play any important role in shaping and influencing public perceptions. Since the late 1990s the first private TV companies had emerged and their numbers started to grow significantly, though almost all of them were controlled by state or state affiliated institutions. Thus, the first decade of the 21st century can be defined as the "Television era" under the strict control of the government.

Since the late 2000s, the growing access to internet started to make significant changes in the Armenian media landscape. The 2008 Presidential elections can be viewed as the first political campaign with active use of new technologies. However, the real revolution came in 2010-2011 with wide-

spread usage of broadband internet, social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and growing numbers of people using smartphones and cable TV networks. The special research, "Facebook in Armenia," carried out in Armenia in 2013 with OSCE support has revealed that in late 2013 the number of Facebook users in Armenia was approximately 560,000.[1] Given that the population is less than one million, this number is really impressive. Especially taking into account the fact that Facebook became popular in Armenia only between 2009-2010. According to the same research, Facebook users were mainly among the younger generation of people up to 35 years of age, who actively used the social network not only as a tool for mutual interaction, but as a source of information. Just two years later, the number of Facebook users reached 860,000.[2] A growing number of TV stations and newspapers have launched their own social media accounts, thus transforming them as another source for disseminating the information.

The latest feature in Armenia's media landscape is the emergence of live broadcasting internet television. The webpages of Radio liberty, Civilnet, 1in.am were using live broadcasts during almost all key political and social events, including the summer 2015 protest movement against the electricity price hike and demonstrations in Yerevan during the July 2016 crisis when an armed group occupied a police station for two weeks. Live broadcasts by internet television has effectively ended the state monopoly over the dissemination of breaking news and headlines.[3] However, it should be mentioned that TV keeps its role as one of the main sources of information. Especially for people above 40 years old who continue to receive the bulk of their information from TV. Meanwhile, the active spread of cable TV networks brings international news channels closer to the Armenian public. The Russian version of RT, as well as CNN, BBC World, and Euronews are available in main Armenian cable TV networks. Thus, both

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[1] OSCE. (2013). *Facebook in Armenia*. Yerevan, p. 3.
[2] "Number of Facebook users in Armenia growing – cyber security specialist" http://telecom.arka.am/en/news/internet/number_of_facebook_users_in_armenia_growing_cyber_security_specialist.
[3] Sayadyan L., Martirosyan N. (2017). "Political Processes and Media in Armenia (after 1990s)." *Current Issues of Mass Media and Political Communications*, Yerevan.

digital and traditional media have a growing impact in the shaping of Armenians public perceptions.

According to the sociological survey carried out by Caucasus Research Resources Centre Armenia in 2013, 79 percent of participants mentioned TV as their main source of information. However, only 57 percent believed that TV can be trusted. For 17 percent, the Internet was the main source of information, but only 40 percent of those believed that the Internet can be trusted.[4]

While discussing the role of media in the process of shaping the public perceptions it should be noted that for the Armenian public the local media is the main information source for domestic politics and relations with Azerbaijan and Turkey. As for international relations the main source of information are Russian TV channels and other Russian media platforms including social media.

The cultivation theory of George Gerbner argues that TV plays a key role in shaping public perceptions on violence in ordinary life. Gerbner divides the public into two main sub categories – "hard TV watchers", who spend more than 4 hours in front of TV and "light TV watchers", who spend much less time watching TV. According to Gerbner, Hard TV watchers believe that violence is widespread in society and had an exaggerated perception on crime rates.[5]

In 2012, the special research, "Aggressive TV," was published in Yerevan. The author has found interesting link between the number of violent scenes in Armenian popular soap operas and the growth of violent crime rate crime in 2009-2010.[6]

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[4]   Sayadyan L., Martirosyan N., ibid.
[5]   Atanesyan A., Ter Arutyunyan A. (2017). "Contemporary Critical Theories of Mass Media." *Current Issues of Mass Media and Political Communications*. Yerevan.
[6]   V. Miraqyan. (2012). "Aggressive TV." Yerevan.

The Influence of Media on Public Perceptions in Armenia: Case Study

The role of media in influencing public opinion in Armenia can be explained through the case of Armenia's involvement in the EU eastern partnership program, negotiations on signing the Association Agreement, and Armenia's eventual refusal to sign the Association Agreement and enter the Eurasian Economic Union.

Armenia-EU cooperation was launched in the mid-1990s. The first Armenia-EU agreement was signed in 1996 and came into force in 1999 defining the main areas of interaction. However, bilateral relations were maintained at a generally low level until the launch of the European Neighbourhood Policy in 2004 and the Eastern Partnership (EaP) programme in 2009. Armenia participated in the EaP inaugural May 2009 Prague summit and signed a Joint Declaration.

Thus, in July 2010, Armenia launched negotiations with the EU on developing an Association Agreement (AA) with a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA). The negotiations were successfully concluded in July 2013 and it was widely expected that Armenia would sign it during the November 2013 EaP summit in Vilnius.

It is worthy to mention that the launch of the Eastern Partnership program coincided with the "reset" in US-Russia relations. Several positive interactions transpired between 2009-2011, such interactions include Russia and the US signing a new treaty on the reduction of strategic weapons (the so-called "New START") and Russia voting in favour of the 2010 UN Security Council resolution imposing sanctions on Iran. Additionally, in 2011 Russia abstained on the UN Security Council Libya resolution and the US supported the Russian bid to become a member of World Trade Organization (WTO).

However, the pattern has dramatically changed since late 2011 when then Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin made a decision to run for a third presidential term in the Spring 2012 elections and put forward an idea to create the Eurasian Economic Union. The US establishment perceived this move as a clear sign of growing authoritarianism in Russia. The Eurasian

Economic Union project was viewed as an effort to re-Sovietize the region under another name and to restore the Russian zone of influence within the post-Soviet space. The Russian decision to grant asylum to the traitor Edward Snowden only exacerbated the situation. Despite the fact that the US and Russia managed to overcome the crisis concerning the alleged use of chemical weapons by the Syrian government in the late summer of 2013, mutual distrust was only growing.[7]

In this atmosphere, Russia's views on the Eastern partnership were growing extremely negative. Thus, in spring-summer 2013, Russia was aggressively pushing back the EU Eastern Partnership program, perceiving it as another Western attempt to encroach on its legitimate sphere of special interests. The target in that geo-strategic struggle obviously was Ukraine, but Armenia was put under hard Russian pressure too.

The Russian anti-Association Agreement campaign in Armenia was concentrated on two dimensions: political interactions with political-military leadership in Armenia, and the media. The main trump card in the media sphere was speculations on Armenia's security and Karabakh conflict as well as the depiction of closer ties with the EU as a clear path towards denunciation of Armenian traditional values. Both Russian and Russian language domestic media was full of analysis suggesting that if Armenia were to sign the Association Agreement it would put the security of Karabakh at risk. It should be mentioned that the Russians were successfully using the perceptions of Russia within Armenian society to promote their ideas.

To better understand the reasons of such a campaign it worthy to briefly decipher the perceptions of Russia in Armenia. Two main factors play a key role here; history and geopolitics. Since the beginning of 18th century Russia was perceived in Armenian political and religious circles as the only state capable and willing to liberate Armenia from Persian and Ottoman domination. In the early 19th century, after Russia's victory over the Persians and the incorporation of Eastern Armenia into the Russian Empire,

7   Benyamin Poghosyan. (2017). US-Russia Relations: Implications for the South Caucasus, https://overthehorizonmdos.com/2017/10/02/us-russia-relations-implications-for-the-south-caucasus/.

the perception of Russia as a saviour became very popular among Armenians. Even the 1920 Russia-Turkey alliance, and their joint efforts leading to the defeat of the first Republic of Armenia, was not able to substantially damage the positive image of Russia among Armenian society. Soviet period propaganda cemented the views of Russia as Armenia's saviour and "big brother" without whose support Armenians were under real threat of total annihilation.

Since 1991, the geopolitical situation in the South Caucasus has only fostered these deeply rooted pro-Russian sentiments among Armenians. The war in Nagorno-Karabakh, as well as the blockade imposed on Armenia by NATO member Turkey, has left Armenia no choice but to align itself with Russia to balance the Azerbaijan-Turkey tandem. Unsurprisingly, Armenia signed the Collective Security Treaty (predecessor of the CSTO) in May 1992, and in 1995 the bilateral agreement was ratified on the deployment of a Russian military base in Armenia. Another key factor supporting Russia's positive image in Armenia is the large Armenian diaspora in Russia. Some 2.5 million Armenians currently live in Russia, and private remittances from Russia, although they declined in recent years due to the economic crisis, still count for 60 percent of all remittances transferred in 2016.[8]

Thus, the Russian campaign against Armenia's signature of the Association Agreement was based on Armenian historical memories as well as vulnerabilities in the Armenian external security environment with covert threats towards Russia. These developments have put enormous pressure on Armenia. Given Armenia's geopolitical position, with a no war no peace situation in Nagorno-Karabakh and closed borders with Turkey, Yerevan has little if any alternatives to Russian security guarantees. Armenia clearly understood the main message from the 2008 Russia-Georgia war: Russia is the number one decision-maker in the region, and no other power is able and/or wishing to decisively challenge Russian actions on the ground.

Thus, it was not surprising that as a key explanation of Armenia's September 2013 decision to join the Russia-led Customs Union and later Eurasian

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[8]   Benyamin Poghosyan. *Armenia's Russian hug*, http://commonspace.eu/index.php?m=23&news_id=4295.

Economic Union was Armenia's concerns over hard security. The Armenian leadership clearly stated that Armenia could not be part of different security and economic systems and could not afford to put at risk its strategic alliance with Russia. It is typical that the decision to join the Customs Union and later the Eurasian Economic Union was announced during the Armenian President's trip to Moscow in September 2013. Thus, the Russian campaign of intimidation was useful and effective.

The latest developments have put doubts on the notion of Russia as a key security guarantor of Armenia. In 2016, the April "Four-day war" on the Nagorno-Karabakh Line of Contact and Russia's vague reaction to it alarmed Yerevan. The Russia-Azerbaijan agreement to supply Azerbaijan with a total of 4 billion USD in weapons, which was signed prior to the April escalation, was perceived very negatively in Armenia. Despite being Armenia's strategic ally, Russia did not criticize Azerbaijan during the April events and high level Russian officials, including Deputy Prime Minister Dmitri Rogozin, reiterated that Russia would continue to provide Azerbaijan with modern assault weaponry.

Armenia suddenly realized that its strategic alliance with Russia and membership in the CSTO and EAEU do not provide the necessary security guarantees for Armenia as Russia, in its efforts to bring Azerbaijan into its sphere of influence, may use the Karabakh conflict as a bargaining chip in its dealings with Baku.

Fake News as a Threat to Peace Talks
in the South Caucasus

Razi Nurullayev[1]

I come from the instable region of South Caucasus, where almost every day we come across fact and fakery. Nowadays it is utmost hard to differentiate between the two notions; fakery overlaps fact and vice-versa. I remember back at times of late eighties one unproven information, gossip or may be the fact in one or other form, on how the Nagorno-Karabakh war escalated: A bus was travelling from mostly Armenian populated Khankendi (Armenia calls it Stepanakert) to the Azerbaijani populated area. The road was passing through the mountainous areas. One Azerbaijani child on the bus was screaming extremely loudly and the mother failed to calm the baby. Then one Armenian guy took the child from her mother, slid the bus window and threw the baby outside. I recollect how I went crazy and all the people in my city demanded revenge.

Of course, until today I do not know if this was true or fake. I am sure that it might not be as true as it was stated if that case had happened. But it is true that the news rendered socio-psychological influence on Azerbaijani people. When the kind of information is false, stands out serving the particular mission trying to hammer and form the peoples' minds in the psychological sense.

Today hammering, extending and forming the minds of people is as easy as never before thanks to new media technology, which shapes the perception of events. Creating "new" news has become a matter of two or three minutes depending on how fast one is typing. Disseminating fake news is tied to one button on Facebook and YouTube. One just publishes the news as a body message or puts a link to news and presses "Boost a post" button on Facebook or elsewhere and chooses the number of people and countries one wishes to target. One can reach with one post almost all the

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1   Razi Nurullayev is chairperson of "Region" International Analytical Center (RIAC), Baku, Azerbaijan.

countries and millions of people across the world, any particular region and any particular dominant audience. This is to say that information technology is much drearier than even the Iskander ballistic missile produced and deployed by the Russian Federation.

The latest Global Digital Statshot[2] from "We Are Social" and "Hootsuite" reveals that the number of people using social media around the world has just passed the momentous three billion mark. Growth trends show no signs of slowing either, with the number of active social media users growing at a rate of one million new users per day over the past quarter. That's a mind-boggling number, especially when you consider that the Earth's population is estimated to be 7.524 billion people.

There are over 1.2 million Facebook users in Azerbaijan, below one million in Georgia and Armenia. All these users are information disseminators. I remember cases when clashes happened between Armenia and Azerbaijan, thousands of fake news and status updates on deaths and destructions were circulated on the Internet, psychologically influencing relatives, close ones and relatives of those who are at the front line.

Many of you may remember the Foreign Policy[3] article published on March 28, 2012 reporting that Israel was granted access to the airbases in the Caucasus nation, raising the fears of US officials that it is readying an attack on Iran. "The Israelis have bought an airfield," the article quoted a senior US administration official as saying, "and the airfield is called Azerbaijan."[4]

This was denied by Azerbaijan presidential official by saying the article was aimed at damaging relations between Azerbaijan and Iran. This was fakery, and it might cost Azerbaijan and its people a big deal. Iran warned and threatened to strike Azerbaijan's oil fields both offshore and onshore, seize the country just in a day. It was hardest days for Azerbaijan and it took the whole three years to persuade Iranians that the published article was not

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2   https://thenextweb.com/contributors/2017/08/07/number-social-media-users-passes-3-billion-no-signs-slowing/.
3   http://foreignpolicy.com/2012/03/28/israels-secret-staging-ground.
4   Ibid.

true and Azerbaijan would never allow its territory to be a polygon for striking Iran.

Yes, Azerbaijan bought and keeps buying weapons from Israel. Israeli PM Netanyahu visited Azerbaijan in December 2016, where in a joint conference with Azerbaijani president Ilham Aliyev he stated that Azerbaijan had signed 5 billion USD worth of long-term contracts over the years to buy weapons and security equipment from Israel.[5]

Speaking on this I would like to bring some other examples on how exaggerated and threatening new information on Armenia's possession of Iskander ballistic missiles led the Azerbaijanis believing Armenia would launch the rockets on Azerbaijan in retaliation for the April war, where more than officially stated 200 soldiers died. Especially tens of Armenian mass media disseminated information and even indicated the date and time of the Iskander attack on Azerbaijan. The whole month the propaganda war continued between the sides and led the community to believe in false information and to damage its well-being.

How Fakery Damages the Well-Being of the People

Now I would like to make clear the above-mentioned statement on damaging the well-being of the people. If Russia provided Iskander ballistic missiles to Armenia, it meant to cause an arms race. The conflict is a good leverage for Russia to pressurize the belligerent sides and keep them around its orbit. What did Azerbaijan need to do? Azerbaijan had to buy "Iron Domes" from Israel against Iskander missiles. Of course, the entire world knows well that either Russia produced Iskander or Israeli produced Iron Domes cost hundreds of millions of US dollars. Now let us look at the economy of the countries involved – Armenia and Azerbaijan. Citizens of both countries suffer from unemployment, mass emigration to foreign countries, weakening economy on the background of low oil prices, low salaries, poor social services and etc. Of course, Azerbaijan in comparison to Armenia has got a high-level living standard. But, nevertheless, arma-

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5   http://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/Politics-And-Diplomacy/Israel-looking-to-sell-missile-defense-systems-to-Azerbaijan-475242.

ment eats a big deal of the state budget. Media, instead of pursuing a line of conciliation and disarmament, does a dirty job of escalating the situation by providing false information and forcing the public to believe it.

I would like to elaborate a little bit on the Russian media. Russia in parallel with the United States of America and France is a co-chair of the OSCE Minsk Group over the Nagorno-Karabakh settlement. Russian media mostly provide one-sided information. Of course, media should be independent and not depend on the government policy and under government pressure what to write and how to introduce events. This may be partially true for established democracies like the United States and France, which are also co-chairs in the Minsk Group. Russian media however pursue the state policy on the conflicts in the former soviet areas such as the Armenia-Azerbaijan Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, Abkhazia, Ossetia, Ukraine and Transnistria. The whole world witnessed how the Russian media behaved and keeps behaving regarding the Russia-Ukraine war following the annexation of Crimea by Russia.

One can witness that in most cases where Russian interests are involved in conflict areas the media stand by the government and are used as a propaganda machine. Russian media, as usual see the conflicts, protests in one channel; all the governments and protesters that criticize Russia are run by anti-Semitic fascists, people killed in protests are shot by opposition snipers and the West is behind it all. Lev Gudkov, head of a respected independent Moscow-based polling agency, says the propagandist tone of Russian state television has reached new levels: "For intensity, comprehensiveness and aggressiveness, this is like nothing I have ever seen over the whole post-Soviet period."[6]

On the same success the same media is used to escalate the situation between Azerbaijan and Armenia. Apart from the above-mentioned reasons, several media holdings in Russia are held by ethnic Armenian businessmen, who introduce the conflict sides in different shapes – Azerbaijan wishing a war and killing more Armenians and poor Armenians defending their lands

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[6]   http://nationalpost.com/news/russias-propaganda-war-on-ukraine-reaches-soviet-levels-ahead-of-crimea-vote.

and well-being from Azerbaijan aggression and weapons. Azerbaijan tries to recuperate Nagorno-Karabakh, which is its internationally recognized territory. Apart from Armenia all the world countries recognize Azerbaijan's territorial integrity with Nagorno-Karabakh together. All the Armenians living in this enclave are citizens of Azerbaijan, so, Azerbaijan would never kill or attack its own citizens.

Even today according to the Institute of Geography of the Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences, there are 20,000 Armenians living in Baku today, with a total of 120,000 living in the country.[7] It is worthy to say no single Azerbaijani lives in Armenia.

Russia itself provides weapons to both Armenia and Azerbaijan, thus trying to keep impartial. However, how can a country with the role of a mediator in the negotiations arm the belligerent sides to kill each other? Turkey, for example is not let into the Minsk Group with the caution that it would take the side of Azerbaijan and there is a claimed genocide issue between Turkey and Armenia. Russia and Turkey are involved in the conflict - both of them being regional superpowers which regard themselves as respective protecting powers.

Obviously, both nations are involved in the Karabakh conflict. Turkey is clearly backing Azerbaijan. Russia has close ties with Armenia. Russia has a military base there, and it has troops deployed in Armenia. Russia is a major arms supplier for both Azerbaijan and Armenia, and the former receives much of its sophisticated heavy weapons from Russia. The issues and approaches by Russia are so complex and interwoven that to untangle it seems not possible. The more one digs the more new questions arise and all witness to the fact that Russia uses the conflicts in its own favour and its fake diplomacy is supported and introduced by its own fake media news in the useful manner.

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[7]   http://en.apa.az/azerbaijani-news/social-news/number-of-armenians-living-in-azerbaijan-revealed.html.

Using Psychometrical Tools

What I notice in most cases is that both belligerent sides apply psychometrical tools. The Iskander and Iron Dome stories helped the warring sides to estimate the mood at each side and learn the public behaviour. The media was used for propaganda and became a dirty tool damaging the well-being of the citizens.

How Can We Incentivize the Regional Media in the South Caucasus to Avoid (or Stop) Spreading Biased News?

First of all, making references to media outlets gains them credits and thus they can easily spread any kind of information. CNN is a reliable source of information and there could be few people accusing it spreading fake and false information. US President Donald Trump at his first press conference since Election Day, answered questions about fake news and the media, while avoiding press questions from organizations he considers "terrible". He says to a journalist "you are fake news."[8] Trump's attacks on fake news and fake-news making journalists put CNN and other news agencies on high alert and today we can witness how they are now cautious on news making. Nevertheless, the majority of Americans did not consider CNN fake news and thought that US president's statements are politically motivated. But, in any case it worked for the public good.

What would incentivize the regional media to avoid spreading biased news would be naming those outlets which spread fake news and calling on the people not to read and boycott them. This would be well implemented in partnership with outstanding and famous journalist organisations worldwide. This would considerably reduce the fake information spreading and raise the responsibility among the news makers. Apart from this it would considerably help if those media outlets are blacklisted by international journalist organisations from receiving grants and invitations to international events. A special website could be built and all those fake infor-

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[8] https://www.cnbc.com/video/2017/01/11/trump-to-cnn-reporter-you-are-fake-news.html.

mation makers are enlisted in there with concrete facts and so that all people, organisations and governments can get access.

How Can the Sponsors and Advertisers of South Caucasus Media be Sensitized to How Fake News Affects Their Reputation?

There are not many sponsors and advertisers in the South Caucasus media landscape. Georgia stands out in this list due to more advanced democratic establishment in the country and freedom of the media. In Armenia and Azerbaijan media are usually either state run or sponsored by people close the governments. Therefore, it is not that easy to manage their sponsors. In regard to businesses and international interaction they mostly follow their benefits and by placing their ads in the media, silence them for critics in their own address. Usually, big companies launder their reputation through ads and sponsorship, thus preventing critical articles on their activities. What would be useful in this regard is to involve reputable businesses and corporations to pay attention to recommendations of the international journalistic organisations that could be placed in the special website briefly described above.

What Is the Consequence of News Fakery for Freedom of Speech in the South Caucasus?

As said, mostly in most former soviet republics media are controlled by the state and they're not usually free what to write. Media sponsors are also either governments or businesses under their umbrella. Therefore, the media chiefs in some instances carry a mission provided by the incumbent regimes. Journalists working in those news agencies can witness writing against their will and sometimes they are just used to spread fake information. This is to say, freedom of speech in the South Caucasus is considerably a big issue and has a consequence for escalating the warring situation in the region and also for freedom of speech. Many journalists can't freely express what they think or find out, but are obliged to express those opinions that are forcibly imposed upon them.

There are instances in which public authorities intimidate and threaten the media, e.g. by stating that the media is "the opposition" or is "lying" and has a hidden political agenda, which increases the risk of threats and vio-

lence against journalists, undermines public trust and confidence in journalism as a public watchdog, and of course may mislead the public by blurring the lines between disinformation and media products containing independently verifiable facts.[9] This is really the case in the South Caucasus and has a serious consequence for freedom of speech.

News Fakery Leading to Conflicts, Confrontations and Misleading the Public

Current conflicts in the South Caucasus have also escalated as a result of news fakery. Fake news stopped negotiations for several times between Azerbaijan and Armenia. Minsk Group co-chairs and corresponding governments have put a lot of efforts to bring them to the negotiation table. Definitely news fakery has at times escalated the war and worsened the situation on the frontlines, too.

Disinformation and fake news played a crucial role in the Russia-Ukraine conflict, and Russia's use of false stories as a cyberwarfare tactic is a real threat in countries as diverse as Sweden, Estonia and Moldova. Fake news potentially affected the outcome of the US presidential elections and it's feared it could also have influenced key elections in France, the Netherlands and Germany in 2017.

It is hard to find analysis on the South Caucasus, but I would like to bring analysis on other countries, which are also true for the region concerned. A recent Pew Research Center survey[10] suggested that almost a quarter of American adults have shared fake news, knowingly or unknowingly. Fake news are out-performing the mainstream media thanks to the multiplying force effect of social media.

On the other hand, a study[11] published by the Columbia Journalism Review in 2017 found the reader base of fake news websites is about 10 times

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9   http://www.osce.org/fom/302796?download=true.
10 http://www.journalism.org/2016/12/15/many-americans-believe-fake-news-is-sowing-confusion/.
11 http://www.cjr.org/analysis/fake-news-facebook-audience-drudge-breitbart-study.php.

smaller than "real" news sites. It also revealed that people exposed to fake news aren't only necessarily experiencing the Internet in a filter bubble (as is often presumed) but also visit real news sites, and therefore access verified information as well. Very much in line with this research, according to the Stanford University fake news study, is that social media wasn't people's most important source of US election news and that "even the most widely circulated fake news stories were seen by only a small fraction of Americans." [12]

There is an unofficial ban in Azerbaijan for journalists not to write on the war situation in the frontline. The case emerged with the fact that the media started writing unchecked information on the frontline during the four-day war in April 2016, which misled the public on the real situation. In Egypt, for example, an Al Jazeera reporter arrested in December 2016 is still in jail on fake news charges, and in Ecuador – despite the protests of press freedom organizations – legislation includes a penalty of five to seven years in prison for creating economic panic by "publishing, spreading, or divulging false news that causes harm to the national economy in order to alter the prices of goods."

As seen above, there are cases when the ban is well justified in the case of Azerbaijan and Ecuador.

Would It Be Advantageous to Conflict Resolution to "Believe" that South Caucasus Conflicts Are the Result of Fraud?

Yes. Armenians were persuaded that Nagorno-Karabakh was their ancestral land and historically Armenians lived there. Shusha (Armenians call it Shushi), the major city of Nagorno-Karabakh is called the pearl of Azerbaijan. This fortress town was established in 1750 by Panah Ali-khan Javanshir,[13] founder and ruler of the independent Azerbaijani Karabakh khanate and became its capital. At first the town's name was Panahabad, in the honour of its founder. After some time its name was changed by Ibrahim Khalil-khan, son and successor of Panah khan, to "Shusha Galasi" (Shusha

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12 https://web.stanford.edu/~gentzkow/research/fakenews.pdf.
13 http://www.azerbaijan.com/shusha.html.

fortress), supposedly after the name of the nearest village of Shusha which could trace its name to pre-Median origin. Hence, he became known in official documents as Ibrahim Khalil-khan Shushinskii (of the city of Shusha) and Karabakhskii (of the khanate of Karabakh).

The Karabakh khanate rapidly developed during the years of Ibrahim khan's reign, establishing diplomatic and commercial relations with other Azerbaijani khanates, as well as with Georgia, Ottoman Empire and Iran. Shusha achieved renown for its heroic defence against the Iranian Army of the Agha Mohammad Khan Qajar, Shah of Iran.

Due to rapid and powerful advances of the Russian army from the north waging cruel wars against Azerbaijani khanates, as well as devastating Russian-Iranian and Russian-Turkish (Ottoman) wars, Ibrahim khan decided to sign a treaty in 1805 with Russia to stop the bloodshed. During the Russo-Iranian War of 1826-1828, which ultimately resulted in the annexation of the whole of North Azerbaijan by Russia according to the Gulistan (1813) and Turkmanchay Treaties (1828) the small garrison of Shusha held out heroically for some 40 days against the Iranian forces of Abbas-Mirza. Shusha became a district capital of Elizavetpol' Gubernia (Province) in 1840 and the administrative centre of the Stalin-inspired Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (NKAO) within Azerbaijan SSR in 1923.

Namely, after the foundation of Shusha today's Nagorno-Karabkah surroundings started emerging as a civilization. This area always belonged to Azerbaijan and during the Soviet Union rule it was also part of Azerbaijan. Armenia annexed it in 1988 with the support of Moscow. It is worthy to say that the collapse of the Soviet Union also started with this conflict. Abkhazia and Ossetia conflicts also started with the help of Soviet Russia and escalated with the sovereign Russia. Russia promised those high mountains, wealthy independent life and prosperous future. Where is that bright future? This was the lie, this was the fraud.

Between Fact and Fakery

Sadi Sadiyev[1]

Abstract

This paper analyses the Azerbaijan situation as a case to demonstrate that in Azerbaijan information and media systems observed at the international level also exist at the national level. The author proposes some mechanisms for achieving the democratization of information and sanitation of media at the national level. The arguable factor in this process, which the author discusses, is that genuine political will and commitments are needed to effect the necessary changes.

Introduction

Fake news is a cancer that eats away at the credibility of trained individuals and professionalism in an insidious fashion.

Information fuels democracy, but if the inputs are wrong then the outcome must inevitably be corrupted. The greatest irony attached to the so-called information age is that it is increasingly difficult to rely on information that engulfs us. Worse, there are elements which create fake news to deliberately undermine the credibility of the mainstream media and use the lack of trust

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[1]   Prof. Sadi S. Sadyev is currently serving in the military education and sciences environment in Baku, Azerbaijan. Dr. Sadyev was admitted to the State University of Languages in 1996 and earned his Bachelor's degree of Faculty of Translation (English and German) in 2000. In 2002, he earned a Master's degree in the same field of study. In 2002, Dr. Sadiyev was accepted to into the PhD program at the Institute of Literature of the National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Azerbaijan, earning his PhD in 2006. In 2014, he was awarded the rank of associated professor rank and in 2015 was promoted to professor at Azerbaijan Republic War College of the Armed Forces. Dr. Sadiyev has published a book "Literature of Balkan Turks" and has more than 50 scientific articles on literature and strategic issues. He has attended and presented at more than 20 State and International Conferences as well as workshops and trainings abroad. Dr. Sadiyev is currently training two PhD students.

they create as a shield to defend their own agendas. Opinion might be free, but facts must once again become sacred.

İn the early nineties, when editors saw how breaking news was becoming a commoditized product free to all, they shifted away from reporting the facts and towards delivering opinion. This was another bad decision, which had the effect of further devaluing factual content. It allowed readers to say: your opinion is no more valuable than mine. The meaning of facts may be debated, but opinions are more easily rejected.

So, now we live in an age of alternative facts where there is often only a thin line, which separates facts from fake information. All consumers alike can have extreme difficulty in deciding which is right. Politicians repeatedly brand each other's claims as "not true." Whether it is in parliament, or on public debates. Unproved information becomes a fact in the mind of readers and viewers, not because it is right, but because it is what they have chosen to believe.

Media Systems in Azerbaijan

From the very first day, Azerbaijan decided to set a healthy atmosphere and normalize the media systems in Azerbaijan. As one of the key factors, development of free press and media was a priority for the country. We must look back at the history of media in Azerbaijan in order to evaluate the current situation of Azerbaijan's media system.

In 1998, the central government revoked censorship in the country and consequently, it led to abundance of information. A number of press and media agencies emerged in the media stage. In 2000, "[s]tate support to mass media institutions in Azerbaijan" was ratified.[2]

In a referendum held in 2009, responsibilities and obligations of the media were clarified in order to prevent fake news and blackmailing news.[3]

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[2]   https://apa.az/.../media.../azerbaycanda-media-muhiti-movcud-duru.
[3]   https://sfera.az/mediaya-herterefli-destek-gsterilir-vuqar-seferli/.

Available data on media distribution indicate that the media system in the country operates in a decentralized fashion. This includes newspapers, radio, television, and online media.

This establishes that there is a legal base for the free media set up in Azerbaijan. But, there are problems existing in Azerbaijan as media is an integral part of the country. One of these problems is fake news or dissemination of disinformation through traditional and online media, which subsequently is associated with negative repercussions for the freedom of expression.

Media Market vs. Progress

There are not any specific criteria to evaluate the level of progress of media yet; however, there are objective and subjective evaluations. According to a press release by the Ministry of Justice, 5000 media institutions have registered at the Ministry of Justice so far.[4]

Media in Azerbaijan has not yet adapted to free market principles. Although there are media institutions which have successfully tuned their performance up corresponding to the requirements of free market policy, there are still media institutions which are failing in self-funding. The government's financial support is still occupying the leitmotiv line in order to help particularly traditional media institutions' survival or growth. The interest of the state to support the media institutions is to motivate the institutions to prioritize issues, which are topical for the state and the society.

Another crucial problem within the Azerbaijan media is the emergence of people trying to take advantage or benefit from the media. In Azerbaijan, there are a number of unprofessional pirate journalists in the media who are called "racket journalists" who are taking advantage of media's democratization. It causes a problem and disturbs the media market. Despite these issues, if we compare the media's past and present, we may observe improvement in quality as well as quantity.

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[4]   aspi.az/az/bes-minden-yuxari-metbu-orqan-teleble-teklifin-tezadi/.

Internet media has been pinning traditional media down. Azerbaijan is a country where there is not any particular legislation for online or social media. This is to say that there is no limit in this sphere. In turn, it leads to another problem. There is chaos with the internet media, and it creates a venue for fake news, purposeful blackmailing, or infiltrating someone's personal life.

Fakery News

Azerbaijan is located in a region where different interests clash. Regional and global actors try to inculcate their principles into the incumbent government, as well as the opposition parties. Azerbaijan is determined to pursue an independent policy, which infuriates the global and regional players. The global and regional players try to have leverage on every decision the government makes. When the government doesn't "toe the line," different "mechanisms" come to the fore. The mass media is the main soft tool to exert influence on both the rank and file of government officials, which in general ends up with prejudices and fake news detrimental to the image of any country. Fake news is highly partisan for the headlines and therefore reinforces existing bias. The value of fake news starts with advertising, leads into influence and drives more clicks than real news. In order to impair the reputation and prestige of the government, fake news is prevalently used in Azerbaijan under the auspices of malevolent countries who want to impose undue pressure on the country. Touting the media as a "watchdog of democracy" results in political, social and economic repercussions, even wars.

Fake news is becoming more popular nowadays, and is also called "yellow journalism." "Fake news" comprises purposeful disinformation or chaos which are spread through traditional means as well as social media. According to Douglas, Chee Siang, and Deravi (2017), there are various purposes behind fake news, but according to experts, it is mainly inspired by financial or political aims.[5]

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[5]   Douglas, K. M., Chee Siang, A., & Deravi, F. (2017). Reclaiming the Truth. *Psychologist*, 3036-40.

The owners of some social media content have been confessing that they make good money from their fake news.[6] According to an article published in April 2016, sources such as, Buzzfeed News, Google AdSense, Revcontent, Content, etc. have been broadcasting their commercials on fake news pages in the net. According to BBC Business, these commercials had been making great profit to not only webpage owners, but also to big media organizations. Facebook and Google promised not to upload their ads on pages of fake news.[7]

There are political motives in proliferation of fake news too; according to the Oxford Internet Institute (OII), bots were used during elections for the purpose of propaganda for the broad proliferation of fake news in the USA., Russia, Ukraine, Germany, Canada, China, Taiwan, Brazil and Poland.[8] Azerbaijan is a country suffering from internally and externally launched fake news from time to time.

Conclusions: Anti-Fakery Precautions

In spite of calls for a fight against fake news, some advertisement networks are still inserting commercials into fake news webpages. This usually takes place in online media in Azerbaijan. Webpage owners upload fake news in order to attract a greater audience to view commercials uploaded on their links. Pirate journalists or people who want to share fake news do so as well in order to attract more readers or advertise their stuff through fake media.

It is very difficult to prevent proliferation of fake news as there are political as well as commercial interests behind them. However, some actions could be taken by news readers in order to avoid fake news;
1. Check the link address of webpages;
2. Check dates of photos and articles;
3. Investigate the sources;
4. Be sceptical of news headlines;
5. Get corroborative information.

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[6] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul_Horner.

[7] https://www.reuters.com/article/us-alphabet-advertising-idUSKBN1392MM.

[8] https://www.oii.ox.ac.uk › Research.

PART III: HOW FAKERY ACTS TO DESTABILIZE REGIMES AND REGIONS

Speaking Notes: How Fakery Acts to Destabilize Regimes and Regions

Vaso Kapanadze

False information can really destabilize the situation or at least make the public of a particular region nervous. I want to give two examples of fake news. Two years after the end of the military conflict in South Ossetia, one of the leading Georgian TV companies, "Imedi," began to broadcast a false report. According to the false report, the war between the two neighbouring states had resumed and the Russian military had again attacked the Georgian cities. Before the beginning of this so-called modeled program, the host of the program stated that the TV reporting starting in a few minutes was a simulation of dramatic events, but during half an hour the simulated images were broadcast without any indication that it was a simulation. At the end of the program, the presenter noted again that the frames were modeled, but it was too late.

This program aired on March 13, 2010 causing panic within Georgian society. People left their homes. Part of the population fled to the forest. Queues stood at gasoline stations and in grocery stores. Cases of emergency calls were sharply increased. The special broadcast suggested that a terrorist attack had been carried out against the leader of South Ossetia, Eduard Kokoity, after which Russian troops invaded Georgia. A few minutes later, the broadcaster announced that President Mikhail Saakashvili was killed and a new government headed by Nino Burdjanadze had been created. According to the version of the simulated program, part of the opposition helped Russia annex Georgia. The population was in chaos. Everyone tried to contact relatives and friends. Telephone lines were overloaded.

Later, the people responsible for the TV company apologized and Georgian news agencies disseminated a statement from the President of the country. In the President's opinion, similar events really could come to pass and the Georgian population should realize it. Accordingly, the imitation was as close to reality as possible. The mentioned TV program caused a worldwide response. The foreign press spoke about the protest of the pop-

ulation gathered at the TV company's office and discussed about the psychological stress, which was still not healed after almost two years since the beginning of the war.

"The Georgians were greatly stressed when on March 13, 'Imedi' reported about the fact as if the Russian military was conquering the country 18 months after the war," wrote "Time" magazine. "Fortunately, there was no war in reality, however the TV channel showed the development of dramatic events in case of assassination of the country's President", the author of the article, Glen Lev, noted.

The journalist underlined that the TV channel offered its audience a simulated version of events, but this warning was left unnoticed by most of the viewers. Due to the stress received, many people were hospitalized and one woman, whose son was serving in the army, died as a result of a heart attack.

President Mikhael Saakashvili denied all links to the simulated news, but according to the foreign press, the TV company would not have dared to do this without governmental approval. The Russian media named this fact a provocation by the President of Georgia.

Based on the principles of journalistic ethics, objectivity and impartiality, the provision of correct, qualitative information for society are the basic values of this profession. But the TV company, "Imedi," violated those principles. The audience should have been informed in advance about the program's objectives and the authors of the program should have clearly distinguished between reality and fiction, in order to not mislead the audience. "Time" magazine also published an article, "British diplomat protests over his inclusion in a false report on the intervention in Georgia," by Tony Halpin.

He wrote that the false report turned into an international incident. The ambassadors of Great Britain and France made harsh statements because of their involvement in the fake news. The author also quotes the letter of the French Ambassador to Georgia, Eric Fournier, in which he assesses the television company's reporting as a violation of professional journalistic standards. The same article mentions the statement of the EU monitoring

mission, which notes that the report could have triggered a conflict between Georgian and Russian military forces.

US Ambassador to Georgia, John Bass, indignantly called the report extremely irresponsible and unconstructive against the backdrop, when Georgia faces real challenges in terms of its security. "Le Monde" published an article, "Fake Russian intervention and real heart attacks." The article said that "[t]he Georgian authorities assure that they did not know anything about this report in advance, but President Saakashvili declared that the film was "unpleasant", however this is what our enemies are plotting."

While the host of the program talked about the panic and queues caused by the occupation, people actually fled from their houses to stock up on food. Nowadays, it is clear that for avoiding a general panic the necessary inscription stating the program was simulated should have been indicated during the whole program, since most viewers turn on a particular TV channel temporarily and do not watch news programs from the beginning to the end. The main function of journalism is the formation of public opinion and the provision of society with real and objective information. In this case, these functions were grossly violated.

The second case concerns a comic video which, in early February 2017, was posted on YouTube by unknown authors as a form of appeal of the Georgian government to President Trump. The Armenian media, "Sputnik-Armenia," devoted an article to this video. The article emphasized the fact that unknown authors of the video suggested Trump was using Georgian territory to inflict rocket attacks on the Kremlin. It was interesting that the video showed the coordinates of the Kremlin. The spokesperson for the Georgian government's press service, Manana Tokmadzhishvili, said that such comic videos can be found on YouTube on behalf of other countries too. Anyway, the identity of the real authors of this video was not established and it is not a fact that the video was made in Georgia and specifically by Georgian nationals.

However, the video caused a sharp reaction in Moscow. The political scientist, international relations expert and representative of the Foreign Ministry of the Russian Federation, Nikolay Silaev, reacted emotionally to the

material published on the Armenian website and the video message on his Facebook page. He stated,

> [a]t the end of the video, Georgian authors suggest Trump to launch a rocket at the specified coordinates. The Great Kremlin Palace is located at these coordinates. We in Moscow will appreciate this joke and remember, of course.

Nikolay Silaev noted that this fact could not be considered normal, even if it was a joke or a game of some sort.

> Georgian-Russian reconciliation cannot be one-sided ... the responsibility for current state of affairs between Russia and Georgia lies on Georgia to the same extent as on Russia. Therefore, we will not undertake steps to meet people who are jeering at the fact as a nuclear missile flies into the Kremlin,

declared Silaev, who has been actively involved in the settlement of Georgian-Russian relations for several years. By the way, his views appeared in the analytical material, "Georgia's Security and the Geopolitical Frontier in Europe," of well-known political scientist, Andrei Sushentsov, which was published on the "Valdai Club" website on February 6, 2017.

As a conclusion, I would like to say that we all agree that acts of fakery really destabilize regions and regimes. The media, quite clearly, is an important import for public inputs into a political system. But we all see, that sometimes our media has serious problems in this sphere. So, in my opinion, politicians, representatives of NGO's and international institutions, experts and the media itself all have to fight together against the creation and distribution of fake information.

Foreign Actors Shaping the Informational Environment for the Conflicts in the South Caucasus:
A Retrospective Analysis

Ahmad Alili[1]

Introduction

Humans are rational beings; analysis of information lies at the basis of our decision-making. Despite how evolved the social intelligence of humans has become, it contains a bias, which later affects the decision-making process. Evolved social intelligence does not guarantee fully rational behaviour because of factors such as limited available information and misinformation.

In many cases, a lack of reliable information or actual misinformation led to wars and disastrous consequences. Hence, the informational environment is a vital aspect of decision-making and the fate of nations. In many instances, nations are intentionally fed misinformation or they become affected by the informational environment created by the others – far larger and more important – players. Canadian political scientist David Easton's widely used system theory, which analysed decision-making as (i) input, (ii) conversion, (iii) output, (iv) feedback and (v) environment, is an essential tool for understanding the effect of the environment on decision-making.

Since misinformation, propaganda and fake news leads to greater political destabilisation, one might ask if the conflicts we see today could be caused by the misinformation and fake news produced years or even decades ago. Modern societies are getting more complex. Introducing new elements and communication technologies to social interactions has changed the informational environment in terms of quantity and quality. Now, in conflicts, rival parties have more to analyse; hence, the chances of errors in the analy-

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[1] Centre for Economic and Social Development (CESD).

sis due to misinformation have also increased. Additionally, in the last years, a new phenomenon has emerged: fake news.

Fake news, together with misinformation, limited available information and propaganda couple together to cloud the judgement of the situation on the ground. Oftentimes, conflicting parties are not able to assess a situation properly. The aforementioned phenomena also create additional opportunities for external players to influence local decision-makers.

In this article, we will try to analyse the decisions taken by the nations in the South Caucasus and how they were affected by the information environment created by outside players: in this case Soviet Russia. The paper will present a retrospective view on the existing conflicts in the South Caucasus, and how they were triggered in the modern South Caucasus.

Reviewing international developments in Post-World War II and in the Soviet Union reveals the hidden processes of the Communist party's decision-making. Researching the bureaucratic apparatus of the Soviet Union is an important place for understanding the conflicts, which later emerged in the territories of the Former Soviet Union (in our case South Caucasus). Can modern day conflicts in the South Caucasus be shaped by the informational environment created for advancing Stalin's foreign policy vision?

This paper will unfold as follows. The first part will analyse the informational environment of the conflicts in the South Caucasus created in the times of the Soviet Union and asses the propaganda and clichés which led to the rise of nationalism in the region. The second section will shed light on the role of the bureaucratic apparatus and the role of regional separatist leaders who used the informational environment in their own favour. The last sections will discuss ethical journalism standards in order to counter this phenomenon, and the modern informational warfare apparatus.

The Soviet Environment Surrounding the Conflicts in the Caucasus

The period of "Perestroika" at the end of the 1980s, is remembered in the Caucasus as a period of freedom and ethnonational revival. The aspirations of the informal leaders of various social movements in that period brought both national freedom and devastation to regional economies.

Six of the eight armed conflicts in the territory of the former Soviet Union took place in the Greater Caucasus. It was in the Caucasus that the fundamental principle on which the entire geopolitical architecture of the post-Soviet space was created was broken – the inviolability of the borders between the former Soviet Union republics.

The initial environment – the inputs of the political system – of the emergence of the conflict over the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and other conflicts in the region was found in the Soviet Union. The "fraternity of peoples" policy by Soviet propaganda had to cover all the defects of the existing Socialist system and present an ideal picture regarding the nationalistic feelings.

Therefore, this period needs to be analysed in terms of the informational environment of the conflicts in the region.

The conflicts occurring in the South Caucasus have historical roots. The Gorbachev-initiated policies did not create the conflicts, but they did enable dissident voices to come out and form national movements leading to ethnic clashes. "Glasnost" allowed the masses in the Soviet Union to speak freely on the topics which were considered to be "un-Soviet" and previously had been stopped by censorship and other administrative-repressive means of the Soviet government.

It was during this period when the ethnic conflicts in the region were uncovered and the latent state of the conflicts ended. In the wake of anti-Communist sentiments, nations no longer perceived the Communist truth as the only truth and started to seek a new ideology – nationalism was the result for many of the region's ethnic groups.

Nevertheless, the conflicts – as any other political processes – could not be formed in a vacuum. The hostile processes which took place at the end of the 1980s and the basis of the latent processes which exploded at this time had been constructed long before, earlier in the Soviet Union.

The beginning of the latent phase of the conflicts can be traced back to the Stalinist foreign policy agenda of the end of the Second World War. Stalin's vision for the future of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia was one of the

expansions of these territories far beyond their given borders. Soviet Azerbaijan was to annex Northern Iran – where a considerable minority of Azerbaijanis lived. Soviet Armenia was to rule over the eastern regions of Turkey. Finally, Soviet Georgia was destined to take the Black Sea regions of Turkey for its own.

In March 1945, the Soviet Union denounced the Soviet-Turkish Kars Treaty, signed on 25 December 1925. This signalled that new issues needed to be negotiated between the two countries, particularly while the Soviet Union was not happy with Turkey's "neutral" role during the Second World War. As a member of the winning coalition, the Soviets demanded free passage for the Soviet Army through the territories of the Turkish Republic and the Soviet Navy through the Bosporus Strait, in the case of a war or a hostile action against the Soviets. A similar contract already existed between the Soviets and Iran, which Moscow used to deploy its troops during WWII.

Turkey had initially agreed with the draft version of the agreement, but in light of Ankara's lack of strategic resources to stand against the Soviet Army, which had destroyed Hitler's a few months earlier, Moscow decided to push further.

A new series of negotiations were held between S. Sarper, the Ambassador of Turkey to the Soviet Union, and V. Molotov, the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs. Moscow expressed its conditions as follows:

- The deployment of Soviet troops and the creation of a naval base in the Black Sea Straits (joint Soviet-Turkish control over the Bosporus.

- "Corrections" to the 1921 Soviet-Turkey Agreement which defined the Eastern borders of Turkey. Moscow wanted to see the new border correspond roughly to the previous Russian-Ottoman border of 1878. Molotov called the territories of the Kars region, the areas

south of the Georgian Batumi region and the Surmalin district of the former Irevan (Yerevan) province "illegally torn away from Russia".[2]

In order to legitimatize these claims, local governments and the general public of the Armenian and Georgian SSRs were to be activated; the nationalist narrative was allowed to be aroused in the 'multi-ethnic' Soviet family of brotherhood nations. The Armenian Communist Party Secretary G. Arutyunov publicly revealed the territorial claims of Armenia and the Armenian population over the Turkish Kars region and Surmalin district of the Irevan (Yerevan) province.

From April 1945 on, there were several letters sent by G. Arutyunov to Stalin, yet, interestingly enough, even though they discussed the Turkish territories, none of these letters contained any territorial claims over Azerbaijan.[3] The letters solely discussed the resettlement of foreign Armenians to Armenia and territorial claims against Turkey. In his report to Stalin, G. Arutyunov claimed these territories were ancient Armenian territories and even religious representatives from Armenia expressed their public support for this idea. On 27 November, the head of Armenian Apostolic Church Gevork VI addressed similar letters[4] to Stalin and other 'Great Powers' asking for support for such Armenian claims.[5]

On 2 December 1945, "Pravda", "Izvestiia" and "Sovetakan Haiastan" (Soviet Armenia) published articles and an official decree on the repatriation of Armenians.[6]

[2]   Central Intelligence Agency. Armenian Demands on Turkish Territory (Confidential report by A. K. Dshivelagov). Declassified in Part. Sanitized Copy Approved for Release 2012/04/05 https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP82-00039R000100090009-3.pdf.
[3]   Jamil Hasanli. (2011). *Stalin and the Turkish Crisis of the Cold War, 1945–1953*. Plymouth, MA: LexingtonBooks, p.264.
[4]   https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP85T00283R000400030009-2.pdf.
[5]   Suny, R. G. (1993). *Looking Toward Ararat: Armenia in Modern History*. Indiana: Indiana Univ Press.
[6]   Ibid.

The People's Commissar of Foreign Affairs of the Armenian SSR was also involved in the task of preparing a historical reference justifying the return to the 1878 border between Russia and Turkey, which would restore the Russian-Turkish border in Eleshirt, Dogubeyazit, Erzurum, Mush, Van and Bitlis.

Similar actions, with the participation of local governments and the general public, were started in the Georgian SSR as well. According to the plan, the Black Sea regions of Turkey – the Southern part of Batumi, Artvin, Ardahan and Olti district – would be attached to the existing territories of Georgia.[7]

On 20 December 1945, "Pravda", "Izvestiia" and "Krasnaia Zvezda" (Red Star) once more printed articles, but this time on Georgian claims toward Turkey. Representatives of the Georgian Academy of Sciences, S. R. Djanashia and N. Berdzenishvili's article[8] published in the local party newspaper 'Kommunisti' had already set the tone for such claims.[9]

The head of the Georgian Communist Party K. Charkviani was not satisfied with some of the territories Armenia claimed, calling them his own. The scientific community in Georgia was instructed to justify his claims and prepare both historical and geographical backgrounds for the contradictory plans of the Soviet leadership in Moscow, proving the historical belonging of these territories to the Georgian, and not Armenian, people. The Georgian leadership also sought the patronage of L. Beria, an ethnic Georgian.[10]

Georgian leaders were claiming southwestern Meskhetia in the Chorokh basin, Tortum, Ispir, Bayburt, as well as part of the province of Lazistan (Rize, Trabzon, Gumushkhane and Giresun). The Laz minority group in

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[7]   Jamil Hasanli. (2008). "The 'Turkish crisis' of the Cold war period and the South Caucasian republics." *The Caucasus & Globalization*. #4.http://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/the-turkish-crisis-of-the-cold-war-period-and-the-south-caucasian-republics.

[8]   Ibid.

[9]   Kuniholm, B. R. (2014). *The Origins of the Cold War in the Near East. Great Power Conflict and Diplomacy in Iran, Turkey, and Greece*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

[10] Ibid.

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Turkey is an ethnic group which speaks a language similar to Georgian, but who has been turkified. The Georgian authority demanded autonomy, at the least, for this group.[11]

Azerbaijan had also experienced similar developments and a revival of nationalistic feelings in the same period. Nevertheless, Azerbaijan's claims were addressed to Iran, not Turkey. Stalin aimed to spread communism among the Azeri minority living in the Northern Iran, whose population was greater than Soviet Azerbaijan's. In contrary toward the Armenian and Georgian claims toward Turkey, the claims toward Iran temporarily succeeded: Soviet troops set foot in Northern Iran and began to establish a Soviet government in Iranian Azerbaijan, which lasted a few months even after the Soviet withdrawal from these territories.

Azerbaijani society also mirrored the government's rise of nationalist feelings; however, due to the failure of the plan, the public narrative of the local intelligentsia was not tolerated by Communist Moscow. By the end of 1950s, many members of the intelligentsia who supported the national awakening either lost their public positions or were found dead.

In all three countries, newly created poems and poetry were designed to address the nationalistic developments. The poets and writers of the time were prized for their nationalistic creativity; in Georgia, Ilia (Ilo) Mosashvili, who wrote the play "The Sunken Stones" about the Georgian diaspora in Turkey, was awarded Stalin's prize in 1951.[12] Despite the USSR's dropped claims against Turkey in the late 1940s, as the direct result of the re-emerged nationalist narratives, a decade later the Armenian party leadership erected a monument in Siserkebend to commemorate the Armenians who lost their lives during WWI.

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[11] Ayşe Serdar. *Strategies of making and unmaking ethnic boundaries: Evidence on the Laz of Turkey. Ethnicities.*
http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1468796817739933.

[12] M. Kveselaeva, ed. (2001). *Anthology of Georgian Poetry*. Honolulu, HI. University Press of the Pacific, page 23.

As such, nationalistic narratives were not meant to target neighbouring Caucasian nations, but only to posture against external powers.

Many modern historians claim these Stalinist plans, playing the nations of the Caucasus against Turkey, had a major role in bringing Turkey and NATO together, with Turkey joining NATO as a precaution against the Soviets.

Indeed, nationalist feelings were not an unusual thing in the Caucasus; however, the process of exporting the foreign policy agenda of Moscow to the region and the informational environment created through this process empowered a latent process which set into the region. The Soviet agenda definitely did not create the core disagreements of the conflicts, but it did help the local intelligentsia to express themselves freely and, in most instances, to fabricate certain elements of national identity and territorial claims which were not inhabited by the representatives of any ethnicities under the Soviet Union. These narratives surrounding identity and territory would later feed into the actual conflicts, clouding the truth and judgements of all sides.

The Role of Regional Separatist Leaders in the Early 1990s

Separatist movements are not only beneficial in that they inflame nationalistic feelings leading to nation-building, but also while they bring business opportunities. Financing conflicts can secure large revenues from wartime economies; military engagement, despite being a highly costly business, has created the necessary environment for groups of people to benefit and gain profits. The complex regional dynamics and incentives of regional leaders can also cause a conflict. During times of turmoil, confusion and war, informal networks of businesspersons can turn into governmental institutions.

Separatist conflicts are an excellent means through which to overthrow existing elites and take power. The conflicts in the Caucasus (Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Chechnya) all took place with the participation of central governments, local elites, armed forces, outside regional players and international mediating missions. At this point in time, only the conflict in Chechnya can be considered 'resolved' (by military

means); the rest of the conflicts appear to be lacking any progress whatso-ever towards resolution.

In his article "The Benefits of Ethnic War: Understanding Eurasia's Un-recognized States", Charles King presents two central arguments for the explanation of why the regional conflicts in the South Caucasus have not been solved:

> First, the territorial separatist of the early 1990s has become the state builder of the early 2000s, creating de facto countries whose ability to field armed forces, control their own territory, educate their children, and maintain local economies is about as well developed as that of the recognized states of which they are still notionally a part. Second, the disputes have evolved from engagements to something close to equilibrium. In many cases, both the separatists and their erstwhile opponents in central governments benefit from the untaxed trade and production flowing through the former war zones. Even in less unsavoury ways, individuals inside and outside the conflict areas have an interest in maintaining the status quo – from po-et who has built a career extolling their newfound statehood to pensioners worried about how their meagre incomes might be further diminished if the country were once again integrated.[13]

The aforementioned is exactly what happened in the conflicts in the South Caucasus: separatist leaders promised the maximization of prosperity for local populations, motivating the masses to move to the streets shouting nationalistic slogans, and created conflicts.

The informational environment created by the late 1940s and early 1950s in the states of the South Caucasus was an excellent surrounding for national-ist-separatist and irredentist leaders. The clichés and narratives from the late 1940s become handy for their endeavours.

In the case of the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, one should not ignore the role of the Armenian diaspora – another external source adding to the informational environment. Starting from the mid-1980s, the Armenian diaspora has been targeting the domestic affairs and foreign policy of Ar-menia, in many cases, even against the realities of the homeland. As some researchers noted that "[t]he Armenian diaspora has been taking positions,

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[13] King, C. (2001). "The Benefits of Ethnic War: Understanding Eurasia's Unrecognized States." *World Politics*, 53(4), 524-552. http://www.jstor.org/stable/25054164.

which are not favouring Armenia's interests. Some of these critical issues are the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh and Turkey-Armenian relations."[14]

The foreign informational environment and the public agenda shaped outside of the region not taking into account the local needs once more intervened to the fate of the nations in the region.

When the strong security apparatus of the Soviet Union was scaled back during 'Perestroika' and 'Glasnost', local communities were left with the corrupt leaders of the Brezhnev era. The superficial democratisation of the Soviet Union coincided with the growth of corruption and increased the role of regional leaders. It increased the autonomy of local leaders. Regional leaders in turn, using their newly gained de facto power over the public, tried to gain favour among the local population.

Many of these leaders were active members of the shadow economy in the Soviet Union. The movement "Tsekhoviki" (the initial form of business activities in the Soviet Union) and the 'shadow economy' created an economic incentive for local elites and separatist leaders.

In the end, Perestroika and liberalisation in the Soviet Union increased the power of local elites. In the Caucasus, many members of local elites in all three countries used their chance to advance their interests of personal gain. The nationalist narrative and the informational environment created in the late 1940s become handy in creating a new ideology for the countries in the Caucasus.

The Media and Ethical Standards for Reporting

As it was revealed in the previous chapters, the information environment available in a country may lead to the inflammation of nationalist sentiments and cause conflicts. As such, can media then, on the other hand, also eliminate hate speech and create opportunities for peace and reconciliation?

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[14] Baser, B., & Swain, A. (2009). "Diaspora Design Versus Homeland Realities: Case Study of Armenian Diaspora." *Caucasian Review of International Affairs*, pp. 45-62.

One should not ignore the fact that media is the main tool for the creation of the information environment. It has caused conflicts in some places, such as Rwanda. Considering the correlation between hate speech nurtured by the media and conflicts, the answer is affirmative.

The neutrality of media and unbiasedness of reporting are challenged across the global informational landscape. Both journalists and editors are intensely pushed to choose one side or another. In some instances, there is intense monitoring of media and social network accounts; nationalist PR managers are effectively pushing the "conflict narrative" across the World Wide Web.

Providing information on conflicts has become a very challenging ethical task for reporters. In many cases, journalists have to choose between maintaining the highest professional standards and not hurting the feelings of their compatriots or "national interests." This is especially challenging in South Caucasian countries.

Crystallised opinions, which are the result of national awakening processes, are one of the main problems preventing reconciliation in the South Caucasus. Media challenging the crystallised opinions found in the region will be the first step towards sustainable peace in the region.

Despite all of these nuances, reporters are responsible for delivering unbiased information to readers, avoiding hate speech and stopping the spread of inflammatory content. In many cases, it is very hard to do so in the midst of a battle, while intensified public pressure makes impartiality especially difficult.

Within this context, the capacity building of media organisations in the region is the only way to improve the quality of journalism and reporting. Qualified media personnel should certify that;

- the reasons of the actions of all conflicting parties are clearly reported;
- fake news are not disseminated and, hence, create a platform for dialogue;

- the situation is analysed in an unbiased manner and content for peace and reconciliation is created.

Unfortunately, regional media traditions are not different from those found during Soviet times. In many cases, media has become a platform for repetitive statements, which confirm the exclusiveness of one of the nations in the region. In many instances, South Caucasian media avoid providing a platform for the discussion of sensitive issues, also a part of the Soviet media heritage. In some instances, journalists themselves become casual victims of the complex news environment, which was created by prejudice and political manipulation. Ignorance and lack of appreciation for differences in the region, of cultures, traditions and beliefs, causes the further crystallisation of stereotypes and propagation of racist attitudes.

The Code of Principles of the International Federation of Journalists and other relevant institutions includes articles for countering the creation of a discriminatory environment, and would be helpful to incorporate in the educational and professional spheres of the region.

In order to create a healthy information environment, the countries in the South Caucasus have to assure the following, as are required by the Ethical Journalist Standards:

- organised monitoring and assessment of the hate speech in media and social networks;
- joining global incentives for training journalists on fitting hate speech and racism;
- encouraging the creation of media dialogue structures, which will aid journalists in unbiased reporting, and explaining the mindset of the opposite side.

The Role of Modern Informational Warfare in Modern Days as Leftover from the Past

The role of foreign influence agents and their effectiveness have recently been restated during the elections in the United States and several European countries. As was seen in recent elections in the USA, Germany, the

Netherlands and the separatist movement in Catalonia, Spain, community representatives from all of these countries, at some point, claimed the role of Russian influence agents in their elections.

The actions of Moscow are alleged to consist of overt activities by government agencies, state-backed media, internet bots and ill-intended cyber activities led by Russian intelligence institutions.

The state-funded media outlets Russia Today and Sputnik television network tried to uncover the defects of one of the candidates, consistently presenting only negative coverage of them in the elections and lowering the chances of that candidate winning. The outlets also had effective actions aimed at social media by attacking and trolling the behaviours of voters. It is also claimed that Russia hacked into the computer networks of the major US political parties.

Nevertheless, Donald Trump and his team, which denied the case since the beginning, have denied any involvement of the Russian intelligence community, ironically, even using the arguments generated by the Moscow propaganda machine itself. In order to downplay the US intelligence community's assessment of the Russian intelligence community's role in the elections, Trump's transition team initially used the same arguments which Putin and his team would use to deny the claims, saying: "these are the same people that said Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction."[15]

The last statement clearly shows how foreign influence can be effective in disturbing internal matters. Even established democracies[16] are not immune from this influence.[17]

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[15] Washington Post. "Trump, CIA on collision course over Russia's role in U.S. election." 10 December 2016. https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/trump-cia-on-collision-course-over-russias-role-in-us-election/2016/12/10/ad01556c-bf01-11e6-91ee-1adddfe36cbe_story.html.

[16] Woolley, Samuel C. *Automating power: Social bot interference in global politics* http://firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/6161/5300.

[17] "Russia-backed Facebook posts 'reached 126m Americans' during US election." *The Guardian.* 30 October 2017. https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2017/oct/30/facebook-russia-fake-accounts-126-million.

P. Rutland and A. Kazantsev also noted Russia's role in foreign informational environments:

> Alongside official news agencies such as Russia Today, Russia also spawned a host of shadowy operations utilizing the internet and social media to spread false news stories reflecting badly on Russia's adversaries, and hiring internet trolls to pack chat rooms with pro-Russian commentary (Aro 2015). Borthwick (2015) cites examples of a report that supposedly found that 26percent of survey respondents in France supported ISIS, and another story of a chemical factory explosion in Louisiana on 10 September 2014 that never happened. These practices are a direct continuation of Soviet-era disinformation tactics and have little to do with Nye's soft power.[18]

As it is shown in the aforementioned examples, even established democracies sometimes do not have an antidote for some of the actions of the agents of foreign influence. The foreign influence agent can effectively create the informational environment – for public and for the decision-makers – and hence affect their decision-making, alter their ideas, present information they deserve to read about: hence create the effect of "wishful thinking."

The US intelligence agencies may not have evaluated the electoral consequences of Russian influence in the last presidential elections, but Moscow's role in influencing electoral behaviour has been established. Theoretically, this case proves: the informational environment can be created by outsiders and they can affect the path of democratic processes.

If it can affect the established democracies, the countries of the South Caucasus – with their corrupt decision-making institutions and local elites – are more prone to be influenced by external actors.

In this context, one should not forget, the region is surrounded by three regional players who have ambitions in the region. Their influence in some of the cases are ignored, but it exists. These regional players can effectively use the established conflict narrative in their own favour. Hence, confusing

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[18] Rutland, P., & Kazantsev, A. (2016). "The limits of Russia's 'soft power'." http://prutland.faculty.wesleyan.edu/files/2016/07/soft-power.pdf.

the facts with fakery they can easily manipulate the masses and destabilise the region.

Conclusion & Recommendation

The nations in the South Caucasus are not detached from national feelings; on the contrary, national identity and the preservation of national self-awareness were main details which helped them to sustain their statehood in a sensitive, geopolitical region, which was controlled by many outsiders. Hence, they have developed strong national identities and national narratives throughout history.

In many cases, their narratives and decision-making were part of the informational environment created by outsiders – by the empires controlling the region.

That is what happened in the post-World War II geopolitical environment in the Caucasus. Because of Stalin's plans to advance Soviet borders further down in Iran and west in Turkey, the Regional Communist Party members and Academies of Science were instructed to justify the territorial claims of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia against Turkey and Iran.

Due to the fast-changing geopolitical environment of the late 1940s and the pressure of European countries, Turkey expressed its intent to join NATO. The USA's victory over Japan caused Moscow to change its intentions toward the region and not advance its borders further West and South beyond the Caucasus.

Nevertheless, the nationalistic, historical and ethnographical narratives created by the propaganda machine of the late 1940s and early 1950s created an informational environment for the future nationalistic narratives in the region.

Because of the "brotherhood of nations" policy enacted by the Communists, the processes stayed latent for a long time; however, dissent voices started expressing their dissatisfaction with the existing borders only when they were allowed to speak up by Gorbachev's "Perestroika" and "Glas-

nost." The cause of the conflicts which occurred in the late 1980s have therefore been laid back in the 1940s, rather than more present-day.

The only counter measures for decreasing the nationalistic narratives in the media – which is the main generator of the informational environment in the countries – is the enforcement of the Ethical Journalism Rules in the media environment in these countries.

Nevertheless, we are living in an era of digital technology. Concepts such as social networks and fake news, which would not be relevant some 10 years ago, are setting tune and creating our informational environment. It has also become a major tool for outsider, external powers to shape the informational environment in the South Caucasian countries. Russia's intelligence agencies influence in the election processes of EU countries and the last US presidential election has demonstrated the effectiveness of the process.

The precise, quantified effect of the action by the Russian's intelligence agencies toward these election processes may not be calculated yet, but there is no denial of the foreign interference to the informational environment during the electoral process.

The South Caucasus, which has always been a playground for external powers and has always been influenced by bigger, foreign actors, has been sensitive toward continued interference by these actors.

Nowadays, all the three major regional powers have established their network in the media environment of these countries, which created informational environment and nationalistic narrative.

Taking into account the aforementioned points, we propose the following:

1. Foundation of a coalition of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) monitoring hate speech in the media;
2. Reinforcing of ethical journalism rules in the regional countries;
3. Monitoring of the activity of media institutions affiliated to foreign regional powers.

How Fakery Acts to Destabilize Regimes and Regions: An Armenian Perspective

David Shahnazaryan and Ruben Mehrabyan

Introduction

Russia's policy towards the post-Soviet republics collectively fits into a single logic no matter at which degree it's systematically formulated by those making that policy. Its logic and algorithms are not from yesterday and principally don't contain anything innovative. However, innovations of revolutionary nature have been introduced into its tools and method of realization conditioned by the information revolution worldwide, and in the use of its achievements to advance in its tasks, Russia and its authorities have taken the leading positions. Moreover, in certain dimensions, they can be called pioneers.

We won't find a "Putin Doctrine" as such formulated in Russia's fundamental foreign policy documents. Like the "Brezhnev Doctrine" of the Soviet period, its components comprise several crucial public speeches of Vladimir Putin from early 2000s, adopted conceptions and doctrines by different spheres,[1] significant commentaries and speeches of a number of Russian politicians in conjunction with practical policy of the Russian Federation of the post-Soviet period.

The "Brezhnev Doctrine" as such was formulated by western politicians and political scientists after the eponymous Communist Party Secretary's speech at the Congress of the Polish United Worker's Party in 1968, observing political-ideological grounding and justification for the then policy of interference into the affairs of the countries in the socialist "camp."

Its essence was provision of stability of the political course of those subjects, directed to close cooperation with the USSR and recognizing the lat-

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[1] Doctrine of information security of the Republic of Armenia (in Russian), *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 06.05.2017.

ter's predominance in that "camp", consolidated by Communist ideology. That Doctrine was also named "doctrine of limited sovereignty" of the countries that make up the Soviet "camp."

On the Essence of the "Putin Doctrine"

In 1968 Brezhnev announced in Warsaw:

> …when internal and external forces hostile to socialism try to reverse the development of any socialist country towards capitalism, it becomes not only an issue of the country concerned, but a common issue and concern of all socialist countries.

The "Putin Doctrine" is inspired by Brezhnev's. Compared to his "forerunner" it is deprived of any ideology and naturally is realized in quite different internal and external conditions, and the term of ideology is applicable to "Eurasianism", "Russian world" with prefix "pseudo" for all that it equally rejects liberal values and is aimed at systemic weakening of the West.

However, by virtue of fundamental change in correlation of powers and resources, if the doctrine of limited sovereignty under Brezhnev was realized worldwide, then under Putin it was realized only in the post-Soviet space, where, according to the "Concept of foreign policy of the Russian Federation" from February 2, 2013,

> Russia considers the issue of formation of Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) a priority, meant not only to maximally set in motion mutually beneficial economic ties in the territory of CIS, but to become a model of unification open for other republics and determining the future of Commonwealth countries.[2]

When Mr. Putin took office, the notion of "Putinism"[3] was introduced into the political life of media outlets, which unites characteristic features of his management, and the term "Putin Doctrine" appeared already in March 2013.[4]

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[2] Conception of foreign policy of the Russian Federation (in Russian) Point 44, RF MFA official website, 12.02.2013.

[3] William Safire. "Putinism Looms." *The New York Times*, 31.01.2000.

[4] Leon Aron. "The Putin Doctrine, Russia's Quest to Rebuild the Soviet State." *Foreign Affairs.* 08.03.2013.

Particularly, in his article with that title Len Aron, American expert on Russian affairs and former USSR, states that in Russian political elite one of the crucial composites of foreign policy consensus is over regional hegemony: "To reach that goal Moscow strives to new political, economic, military and cultural integration of former Soviet bloc countries under Russia's domination."[5] He added that this means an attempt of "Finlandisation" of post-Soviet republics, reminding Soviet times, when "In the period of the Cold War Moscow was controlling Finland's foreign policy."[6]

Within such a scheme, Moscow allows its neighbours to independently choose their domestic policy and economic systems, while it reserved the last word in issues related to their external orientation. "Accordingly, the Kremlin takes a very tough stance in relation with former Soviet republics, striving to redirect their foreign policies," the expert states.[7]

Regional organizations established by Russia's initiative, such as CSTO and EAEU, play a role of instruments in realization of the "Putin Doctrine." [8] The issue of membership for different republics of the post-Soviet space in them generated crisis or dramatic developments, like on September 3, 2013 in Armenia, when the president of Armenia in Moscow announced on withdrawal from the Association Agreement (AA) with the EU and his intention to involve Armenia in the Eurasian Union, like refusal by Viktor Yanukovich, president of Ukraine, to sign the already initialled AA with the EU, leading to mass protests in Maidan in Kiev, breakdown of his power, followed by annexation of Crimea and occupation of a part of Donetsk and Lugansk regions of Ukraine by Russia and formation of another "frozen conflict."

The solution to frozen conflicts in the post-Soviet orbit is deliberately linked to membership in Moscow's integrative processes, like the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). "If we want peace in the Caucasus, the entire

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[5]   Leon Aron. "The Putin Doctrine, Russia's Quest to Rebuild the Soviet State".
[6]   Ibid.
[7]   Ibid.
[8]   Policy of the USA in the South Caucasus: Armenia, Georgia, Azerbaijan in a great game (in Russian), Starvision, 15.10.2017.

Caucasus should be integrated into EAEU," Sergey Glazyev, advisor to the president of Russian Federation, stated in Yerevan.[9] Nevertheless, this is only the regional reflection of that global vision of world order voiced by Moscow's military-political leadership.

In his remarkable article entitled "Future world order" (Будущий миропорядок), Sergey Karaganov, Kremlin-associated expert on international affairs, outlining the main theses of his speech on "What follows the 'liberal world order'?" stresses that

> …it's better to start building the new world order from partnership of Great Eurasia, including Europe – a concept initiated by Russia and supported by China, and with the Chinese One belt-One way, which coincides with it and was supported by Russia. Probably nothing new will be born in old Atlantics.[10]

In his view, the way to establish a new world order "will be dangerous and long – about 15 years," and

> …that world order will be much freer than the previous one, yet much freer than many former ones. Already now, the imposition of political systems, cultural and human values is becoming more and more difficult. Exactly from this many in the West fold their arms.[11]

Days later Karaganov stated that another cold war had broken out between Russia and the West, as well as China and the West, as "…in the West they have stingily resolved to seize former Russian and Soviet assets," also for the reason that "the USA much harshly deters China, attempting to prevent enlargement of its zone of influence in the Pacific Ocean," and "liberal economic order, established in the West after WWII and then spread worldwide, is being sprinkled."[12]

The "Putin Doctrine" finds its roots already in the administration of B. Yeltsin's days. A report by Anatoly Gromyko, son of the well-known Soviet Foreign Minister in the period of 1957-85, at the meeting of State

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[9]   Putin's advisor: If we want peace in the Caucasus, the entire Caucasus should be involved into EAEU. (in Russian), Radio Liberty Armenia, 06.10.2017.
[10] Sergei Karaganov. Future World Order. *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 07.09.2017.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Sergey Karaganov. Cold War: Forecast for Tomorrow. (in Russian), Rossiyskaya Gazeta, 22.10.2017.

Duma Committee of the Russian Federation on geopolitics of December 19, 1996, devoted to the 90th anniversary of his father, is worth attention.

Touching upon the "Brezhnev Doctrine" he called on to reset those approaches in the formation of the foreign policy of post-Soviet Russia,

> …now everyone sees that a real struggle evolves to oust Russia from the geopolitical space of former Soviet Union. In this struggle a lot depends on how sober Russian leadership will assess the unfolding situation. If it casts away such delusions that world politics is a salon of courtesy exchange, that Russia recorded victory by the end of the cold war, i.e. placid pink moods, then our country will suffer a new cataclysm – Russia will fall to pieces, Siberia will withdraw, and the state of Moskovy will remain.

> That state was lost under Gorbachev. Lost without a trace! The current leadership of the country is confused in geopolitical realities. As a result, we have what we have. Russia doesn't possess Crimea, even Sevastopol! Ukraine slowly drifts towards the West. Black and Mediterranean Seas, their channels are controlled by Turkey. Control over the Caspian and its immense oil reserves is claimed by anyone, who feels like it. Kaliningrad region appeared to be cut off from the entire territory of the state. The most important strategic beachhead, the Baltic, is lost, where neither naval base isn't formulated by Russia as property or rent! [13]

Gromyko went on;

> Russia shouldn't fish for friendship, it's necessary to pursue tough policy in support of its national interests. Tough resistance towards NATO's enlargement to the East should be launched. While others speak about "tough resistance," I would call on "resistance with tangible results for the West." Let the political figures think how to do that. Permit weakness in this issue at the moment – increased difficulties in near future will be recorded by far. Russia should take tough position: its borders are immune, CIS is the zone of its vital interests.[14]

Russia considers that it has lost the Cold War, as a result of which USSR and the Communist camp have collapsed, exclusively due to miscalculations and mediocre leadership of the country by Gorbachev, Yeltsin and their teams.

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[13] Geopolitical doctrine of Brezhnev, Report by Anatoly Gromyko of December 19, 1996 devoted to the 90th anniversary of L. I. Brezhnev at State Duma meeting on geopolitics (in Russian).
[14] Ibid.

Konstantin Kosachev, Chairman of the Russian Senate's Foreign Affairs Committee, confirms that what goes on around Russia and its president bears a systemic nature. He considers these are occurrences launched yet a quarter of a century ago, after the end of the Cold War,

> …the West assumed itself a winner in this war. It considered the whole world is at its feet and it finally became unipolar. Actually, the only power standing against the concept of a unipolar world is Russia. And the fact that the world is multipolar now, that the West doesn't have a monopoly to resolve global issues exclusively in its own interests, undoubtedly, is Russia's contribution.[15]

In his conceptual article "Value of science in prediction" Valeriy Gerasimov, Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Russian Federation, stated in February 2013, that "the role of non-military means in reaching political and strategic goals has increased, which in several cases has considerably surpassed the power of the weapon by its effectiveness," adding that, "…remote contactless action on the adversary is becoming the main means to reach purposes of the war and operation."[16]

Actually the concept formulated by Colonel Gerasimov fits into the postulate of Sun Tzu: "best of best is conquering another's army, without a battle," and fully and systematically reflects the new methodology and planning of advance of Russian policy in a period of 15 years mentioned by Karaganov, under the conditions, when the world is plunged into "the first world hybrid warfare."[17]

> Thanks to the internet and social media, the kinds of operations Soviet psy-ops teams once could only fantasize about – upending the domestic affairs of nations

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[15] "The Federation Council regrets that the West used Putin's birthday to discredit him." (in Russian), *TASS*, 07.10.2017.

[16] Valeriy Gerasimov. Value of science is in prevision. (in Russian) , *Voenniy-Promishlenniy Kurier*, 26.02.2013.

[17] "The first world hybrid warfare was launched long ago: what's anticipated on Artsakh front?" (in Russian), *First Armenian news and analyses*, 1in.am, 04.10.2017. See also Igor Eydman. The first world hybrid warfare (in Russian), Kasparov.ru, 02.10.2017.

with information alone – are now plausible. The information space opens wide asymmetrical possibilities for reducing the fighting potential of the enemy…[18]

…stresses Molly K. McKew, expert on information warfare.

The Armenian "Front" in the "Putin Doctrine": Moscow's Undeclared Hybrid Warfare against Armenia

Armenia, as the only country in the South Caucasus, not bordering with Russia and more vulnerable geopolitically, plays a key role in Russia's military-political presence in the region. After the terror act at the Armenian parliament on October 27, 1999 a wide spectrum opened before Russia for possession of economic, military and political levers in Armenia, allowing it to have a fatal impact on Armenia's policy in the future. Igor Eydman states:

> In Russian commercial raiding, the following tactics are often applied: at first raiders purchase high management of the enterprise, then the latter helps the stranger to seize the asset. And if the manager isn't bribed, raiders attempt to alienate him/her usually with the help of ordered criminal case. Putin and his people have passed a tough school of commercial wars in the 90s, actively participated in the process of property redistribution in St. Petersburg and adjacent precincts.

> They're experienced in recording results by these very means. Apparently, this experience prompted Putin's oligarchy the idea of hybrid warfare against foreign, firstly Western countries. In important for itself states the Kremlin attempts to "change the management", support its protégés come to power, and then with their help "privatize the asset", i.e. subdue the country's policy. Only instead of raid by sold cops Putin's raiders use information warfare, hacker attacks, dissemination of discrediting evidence, black PR, etc."[19]

Contemporary hybrid aggression is impossible to imagine without the following seven components:

1. Information and propaganda;
2. Political and diplomatic;

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[18] Molly K. McKew. The Gerasimov Doctrine. *Politico Magazine*, September/October 2017.

[19] Igor Eydman. The first world hybrid warfare.

3. Commercial and economic with elements of lobbying and corruption;
4. Energy and infrastructural;
5. Intelligence-sabotage-partisan;
6. Regular military operations;
7. Possibility for limited use of tactical nuclear weapons.[20]

In its general features, according to a Ukrainian expert, hybrid warfare may be defined…

> …as a complex of early planned and operatively implemented actions of military, diplomatic, economic, informative nature, aimed at reaching strategic goals. Its key purpose is subordination of interests of one state to the other under formal preservation of the political structure of the victim-country.[21]

Of the above-mentioned seven components, Russia fully applies the first four, and the fifth partially, although it possesses all necessary infrastructures to fully use it in the territory of Armenia, and the sixth one – together with Azerbaijan, intensifying its military potential to that end.

A highly professional and motivated group of personalities deals with the application of information-propaganda; members of which became the "faces of Russian propaganda"; Dmitry Kiselev, Margarita Simonyan and others, who possess impressive funds and are vertically integrated, effective informative structures, operating by one intention and attached almost by military discipline. Whereas respective institutes designed to counteract it in the West and post-Soviet countries, moreover – in Armenia, are in embryonic state only.

And against this background D. Kiselev announced that the USA "is losing the information war" against Russia.[22] A reality already acknowledged well before that statement was made reveals the scope and reach of Russian

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[20] Yevgeniy Magda. (2017). *Russia's hybrid aggression: lessons for Europe*. (In Russian), Kiev: Kalamar. p. 28.
[21] Yevgeniy Magda. *Russia's hybrid aggression*.
[22] Dmitri Kiselev. "The USA loses in information war with Russia." (in Russian), Vesti.ru, 01.10.2017.

propaganda.[23] At the same time, if western media outlets, including state-financed broadcasting companies, operate based on the principles of balanced and reliable coverage, then Russian propaganda widely practices replicating of fakes or simply lies.[24]

Compared to Georgia, where media outlets and the state successfully cooperate[25] with the Strategic Communications Division of the EU,[26] created to counteract Russian propaganda, in Armenia comfortable conditions have been established for Russian propaganda units, and Russian hybrid warfare in its information component combined with others was actually involved in "one gate" game, not coming across with counteraction, not taking into account the efforts of the civil society – several NGOs and media outlets.

In recent months the information agency "Sputnik-Armenia", the Armenian service of Russian channel "Sputnik", is engaged in replicating disinformation, conspiracy theories, fakes in compliance with the agenda adapted to Armenian realities to discredit Armenia-EU, Armenia-West relations, universal human and European values, introducing their "amorality" and contrast to "traditional" ones and etc., stuffing of narratives on anti-Semitism, as well as threatening with "future cataclysms."

Catchy headlines of publications are rather expressive and don't need in detailed elaboration. In particular:

- "Do they want to take children from families or Armenia on the threshold of a civil war?"[27]

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[23] Ibid.

[24] Artyom Voronin. "The language of fake: what mistakes extradited fake interview of MI-6." (In Russian), BBC Russian service, 15.08.2017.

[25] "Propaganda: Russian 'soft power' of actions." (In Russian), Georgia-online, 25.05.2017.

[26] Website "EU against disinformation" (in Russian), Euvsdisinfo.eu.

[27] Laura Sarkisyan. "Do they want to take children form families, or Armenia on the threshold of a civil war?" (In Russian), *Sputnik-Armenia*, 04.10.2017.

- "Pentagon prepares "bombs" for Yerevan: do US bio-laboratories threat Armenians?"[28]
- "Incest-parades are awaiting Armenia or where does LGBT propaganda lead us to?"[29]
- "Armenians in Jerusalem: when orthodox Jews see us, they spit out";[30]
- "Agreement with the EU as a threat to Armenia's security: will Armenia be deprived of NPP?"[31]
- "Why doesn't Armenia anticipate concessions from the EU: unmasking the myths of 'partnership'";[32]
- "Polish messenger from the West: did Warsaw begin to play with Yerevan to encircle Moscow?"[33]

The abovementioned headlines are just samples of aggressive publications that fit into the "global" agenda of Russian propaganda.[34]

Unfolding Realities and Possible Implications

In recent years Russia, by means of its hybrid actions, and using local and great powers' systemic indecisiveness, succeeded in subduing Armenia's entire policy to its interests, and freedom of actions is allotted to Yerevan

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[28] "Pentagon prepares "bombs" for Yerevan: Do US bio-laboratories threaten Armenians" (in Russian), *Sputnik-Armenia*, 10.10.2017.

[29] Ruben Gyulmisaryan. "Incest-parades are awaiting Armenia or where does LGBT propaganda lead us to?" (In Russian), *Sputnik-Armenia*, 11.10.2017.

[30] Laura Sarkisyan. "Armenians in Jerusalem: when orthodox Jews see us, they spit out." (In Russian), *Sputnik-Armenia*, 15.10.2017.

[31] David Galstyan. "Agreement with the EU as a threat to Armenia's security: will Armenia be deprived of NPP?" (In Russian), *Sputnik-Armenia*, 14.10.2017.

[32] Vladimir Lepekhin. "Why doesn't Armenia wait for concessions from the EU: unmasking myths on 'partnership'." (In Russian), *Sputnik-Armenia*, 20.10.2017.

[33] "Polish messenger from the West: did Warsaw begin to play with Yerevan to encircle Moscow?" Arman Vanesghekyan (in Russian), Sputnik-Armenia, 20.10.2017.

[34] "Russian TV: European Council as 'gay park' and warnings on 'great war' in Ukraine." (in Russian), Euvsdisinfo.eu, 13.10.2017.

to the extent it doesn't interfere with Moscow's interests.[35] Because of its integration into the Russian system and dependency on it, Armenia has absorbed all its systemic defects; corruption and monopolistic-oligopolistic economy, merging of business and politics, social apathy. The process of deinstitutionalization in Russia and the establishment of personalist authoritarian regime of Putin also had very negative impact on Armenia's internal life.

This combination restricts Armenia's opportunities to respond to security challenges by Russia and the current quality of Armenian-Russian relations. However, an exit is still possible.

New Armenia-EU Agreement: New Opportunities of Diversifying Foreign Policy and New Challenges

Armenia has options to diversify its policies and in this respect already initialled and ready for signing the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA) with the European Union considerably widens policy opportunities.[36] It will enable Armenia to fill the gap of strategic imperfections, given the fact that the country doesn't have partners in Russia-led unions (CSTO and EAEU) and its membership in them is just anchored on the component of bilateral relations with Russia, but not with other member-countries, with which Armenia has no borders, no adequate volume and level of relations, no shared interests over issues significant for Armenia.[37]

Despite Armenia's sudden withdrawal from the Association Agreement with the EU and its rather negative political implications, Yerevan and Brussels didn't abandon attempts to set a new ground to Armenia-EU rela-

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[35] "Attitude of Russia towards its neighbours is unacceptable." (in Russian), Speech by Ruben Mehrabyan at the Conference at Warsaw University, 1in.am, 19.07.2013.

[36] Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement between the European Union and the Republic of Armenia (CEPA), www.council.eu, 25.09.2017.

[37] US policy in the South Caucasus: Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan in a great game. (in Russian), Starvision, 15.10.2017.

tions.[38] It should be noted that formulations on Nagorno-Karabakh in that agreement, such as recognition of

> the importance of the commitment of the Republic of Armenia to the peaceful and lasting settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, and the need to achieve that settlement as early as possible, in the framework of the negotiations led by the OSCE Minsk Group co-chairs; also recognizing the need to achieve that settlement on the basis of the purposes and principles enshrined in the UN Charter and the OSCE Helsinki Final Act, in particular those related to refraining from the threat or use of force, the territorial integrity of States, and the equal rights and self-determination of peoples and reflected in all declarations issued within the framework of the OSCE Minsk Group co-chairmanship since the 16th OSCE Ministerial Council of 2008; also noting the stated commitment of the European Union to support this settlement process.[39]

The basis for such a statement is the consensus over the principle of territorial integrity of the mentioned states. Three principles of the Helsinki Final Act of 1975 are referred to regarding the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict; territorial integrity, non-use of force, and self-determination of peoples. Moreover, the definition "people of Nagorno-Karabakh" was never used in US Department of State's foreign policy statements and documents. Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is the only one in the post-Soviet area, where due to OSCE Minsk Group, in which Russia is only one of the three co-chairs, Moscow failed to fully realize its intentions and deploy its peacekeepers; the OSCE Minsk Group is a weighty restricting factor in this regard, conditioning counteraction and discontent of Moscow, Baku and Ankara to the work of this format.[40]

Another achievement in this agreement is that actually not only the political part of the rejected Armenia-EU Association Agreement of 2013 is preserved, but it's also widened with several new provisions. However, the economic part was considerably shortened, as talk of free trade had to be reconciled with Armenia's position within the EAEU.

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[38] Ruben Mehrabyan. "Armenia's membership to Eurasian Economic Union: Political implications." (In Russian), AIISA, April 2015.
[39] CEPA, op. Cit., p. 8.
[40] David Shahnazaryan. "A Conflict of Interests in Nagorno-Karabakh." *Stratfor*, 28.07.2017.

At time of writing, Moscow hadn't voiced any objections. Whether Russia will be roused depends on continued U.S. passivity. Nevertheless, the Kremlin's propagandists are wasting no time to have their say. As already mentioned above, sub-divisions of Russian propaganda in Armenia have unfolded the information attack on the Agreement.

It should be stressed that Azerbaijan's efforts to disrupt the Armenia-EU Agreement also fully fit into the course of Russian strategy, as their success will soften the game in the region by Russian rules. Therefore, it seems that signing of Armenia-EU Agreement is of regional importance and dimension as well and is capable of becoming a new factor of regional stability.[41]

Conclusion: The Regional Dimension

For the time being the world suffers the third crisis of liberal democracy, one of manifestations of which is certain dysfunctionality of the US foreign policy as a whole and lack of strategy in relations of Russia and post-Soviet member countries within the Eastern Partnership, and lack of regional strategy in the South Caucasus. As a consequence, there is a degradation of the situation and inadequate reaction to the crisis, which is reflected in the following;

- European business ties with Russia are still significant, which actually is legitimation of Putin's policy. Although it should also be noted that the position of the European Commission on Nord Stream-2 is able to blow up efforts of Gazprom and Russia on further corrupting of Europe's political elite.[42]

- Institutional weakening of the West, as a system of European and global security, continues, and to that end Karaganov's confession on the fact that "indeed, Russia consciously disrupts that order by

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[41] David Shahnazaryan. "There was impression as if Aliyev was led to the scaffold." (In Russian), *Aravot*, 17.10.2017.

[42] "The European Commission will appear with new initiative on Nord Stream-2." (in Russian), *Deutsche Welle*, 23.10.2017.

its own hands."[43] All this as presented remains without due attention and adequate assessment against the background of, first and foremost, moral crisis. And the statements of the Kremlin-associated figures are acknowledgement and recognition of the fact that Russia is the main instigator of "the first world hybrid war", which due to its blurring and prevalence of non-military forms of its conduct still remains unperceived. Although, in particular, the alleged interference of Russia to elections in the USA is already assessed as military operations in the US political elite.[44]

- Against the background of aggravating deep crisis of liberal democracy little attention is attached to another important component of hybrid warfare – international corruption. America's Sanctions Act[45] adopted by the US Congress may become a key factor in the neutralization of international corruption, however, the bipartisan group of Congressmen raised an issue that the White House doesn't act in compliance with the Act and postpones strengthening of pressure on Russia.[46]

- The capability to counteract Russia's hybrid warfare remains extremely weak. The point is that there is no institute able to effectively deal with information sabotages.

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[43] "US Department of State called Russian interference into elections 'military operations'." (In Russian), *Aravot*, 20.10.2017.

[44] Ibid.

[45] *Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act*, Congress.gov, 08.08.2017.

[46] "US Senators outraged that Trump hasn't yet imposed new sanctions against Russia." (In Russian), KP.ru, 12.10.2017.

PART IV: THE PEACE POTENTIAL OF FAKERY. USING YESTERDAY'S LIES FOR TOMORROW'S PEACE

Fake News: Can There Be a Positive Side?

Gregory Simons

> *The men the American people admire most extravagantly are the most daring liars;*
> *the men they detest most violently are those who try to tell them the truth.*
> *H. L. Mencken, US journalist*

Introduction

Fake news is firmly in the public's attention once more, occupying a lot of media space to the presumed unstoppable power and the consequences of this much slated threat to the very fabric of society and the democratic system. It has been projected as a great menace and has gradually snow-balled into a moral panic in the information environment. However, in spite of the great deal of recent publicity on the fake news issue, it is far from being a very recent 'invention' and problem.

A lot of the blame has been directed at social media and the mainstream media for spreading fake news on an unprecedented level and on a global scale. There is a great deal of divergence among stakeholders on the definition and significance of fake news. In spite of there being relatively little objective comprehensive research done on the phenomenon of fake news, many alarmist assertions point to a massive problem and risk. The over-whelming focus of media reporting and academic research focuses on the insidious use of fake news for narrow and selfish purposes.

This paper shall undertake the ambitious task of investigating whether it is ethically and practically possible and permissible to disseminate fake news. The assumption being that not all fake news is equal, currently there is a concentration on the destructive and selfish forms, but some forms will possibly be benevolent and for a greater good. Therefore, the following question will be asked; under what circumstances is it permissible and pos-sible to communicate fake news to target audiences?

The first step of this paper will be to identify and define the role and significance of news in society. There is also a need to distinguish between the ideal (utopian) and pragmatic aspects of this task as well. After this section, there will be an effort to catch the academic and practitioner debate on fake news, especially with regards to its definition and understanding its significance and implications. Finally, the paper will address the ethical and philosophical question as to whether it is OK to tell a lie in a 'good' cause, and by extension of that whether it is theoretically and practically possible to engage in a 'benevolent' form of fake news.

Role of News

In terms of an idealised and utopian understanding of the role of journalism (as the professional producers of news) in a democratic society (where persuasion rather than coercion takes place in society between the political elite and the masses), five functions are presumed to exist. 1) To *inform* citizens of what is happening in their surroundings, 2) to *educate* the public as to the significance and meaning of those 'facts', 3) to provide a *platform* for open political discussions in the public sphere to facilitate the formation of public opinion, 4) to provide *publicity* to the governmental and political institutions as a watchdog role of journalism, and 5) as a channel for the advocacy of political viewpoints (McNair, 2007: 19-20). These functions often manifest themselves in the form of news.

News is something that saturates the information environment, and can come in many different shapes and forms from many different kinds of media. So what is news exactly? Denis McQuail provides a concise definition. "The main form in which current information about public events is carried by media of all kinds. There is a great diversity of types and formats as well as cross-cultural differences, but defining characteristics are generally held to be timeliness, relevance and reliability (truth value)" McQuail, 2010, p. 564). News can be found in many different shapes and forms, there are a number of common underlying conceptual commonalities though.

One of the basic underlying assumptions and duties of journalism is to separate "facts" from "values" – i.e. the importance of objectivity in reporting. Having said this, rather than being found in absolute values, objectivity

and subjectivity should be viewed as being in greater or lesser sums. News were something that was seen as needing to be factual and non-partisan (Allan, 1999, p. 18). Therefore, there is an inherent commitment to the truth in news reporting. "The news frame's tacit claim to comprehensiveness dictates that it must be seen as 'balanced' and 'fair' in its treatment of counter-positions" (Ibid., p. 64). Thus there are many different automatic assumptions and claims when the word news is evoked. Ties to the producers of the news content can be found in understanding that the ideological power of journalism is what makes it important to those seeking political influence and power. "The ownership and control of print and broadcast journalistic media is presumed to bring with it power in the political sphere because underpinning the 'truth' of any successful journalistic account of events is a statement of values and ideology" (McNair, 1998: 57).

However, the format in which the news is told has been changing. In response to changes in the information environment, news is being presented in a more simplified, trivial and entertaining manner. Infotainment, the name given to this process, creates a much more descriptive rather than analytical approach to news reporting (Thussu, 2009). Political news that involves highly subjective value judgements in an environment that requires the façade of perceived legitimacy is especially vulnerable to manipulation in order to strike the 'right' tone. Armed conflict is one of those subjects in particular, which can be subjected to the infotainment format. "Covering wars is inevitably a difficult journalistic endeavour but the demand for live 24/7 news, as well as competition among news providers, can lead to the sensationalisation and trivialisation of often complex situations and a temptation to highlight the entertainment value of news" (Ibid., p. 113). Little is done by mass media in trying to adequately explain actual or proposed policy, especially when the element of a crisis laden value conflict is present, instead there is a tendency to entertaining or promoting a certain policy path (Andersen, 2006, p. 82). This has a tendency to make news as a marketable political product, rather than as something to inform and enlighten an audience.

The infotainment format of news lends itself well to supporting a policy position in a political conflict. On the superficial level, news concerns being objective and telling the truth, which can have a legitimising effect in terms of news projecting itself as an objective and enlightening activity. On the

applied level, infotainment brings a level of shallowness to the news through it being very descriptive (and therefore lacking in analysis), which has the tendency to leave the event out of context. Infotainment also has a tendency to assign values to the different parties of a story, which includes identifying the "good" and "bad" sides of a story narrative.

Related to the issue of infotainment, although not the same, is the problem of spin entering the news sphere. Spin is a means and form of rhetorical-based deception. "Spinners mislead by means that range from subtle omissions to outright lies. Spin paints a false picture of reality by bending facts, mischaracterising the words of others, ignoring or denying crucial evidence, or just 'spinning a yarn' – by making things up" (Jackson & Jamieson, 2007, p. vii). Mixed in with this problem is the problematic understanding and judging of what is the 'truth.' As noted by academics, such as McQuail, truth, objectivity and verification are all essential elements of the news. The contrary has been noted, "…perhaps, they speculate, in the new information age reality is simply a matter of belief, not anything objective or verified" (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2010, p. 6). Ultimately, such as situation as the current one described above, when applied to the news industry leaves the public at risk from interest groups seeking to manipulate and exploit public perception and opinion.

Thus journalism can be caught in a severe dilemma and predicament between ideal public expectations and pragmatic situational demands. Journalism is expected to be the "harness" of the truth, which means adhering to the elements that contribute to journalistic truth – accuracy, context and balance (Bivins, 2010: 122-123). However, this situation can be offset and contradicted by journalistic deception. This is in relation to "using questionable means to gather news deemed of value" although this is normally in the context of utilitarian grounds in order to further public interest (Bivins, 2010: 124). The situation may also see the practice conducted in order to further vested political or economic interests, thereby undermining the spirit and practice of public interest. Therefore, there are some that have seen news as a mechanism to steer the 'democratic' process by engineering the consent of the public through the nature of the timing and content of the news (Bernays, 1947). As a result journalism and news becomes a process more akin to persuasion rather than informing and educating.

One period that is more susceptible to abusing the power of journalism and news is during periods of increased political competition (such as during an election), where information is used for the purpose of influencing target audiences opinion and behaviour through persuasive communication. The situation may include news media providing their endorsement for a specific political candidate or political party (McDonald Ladd & Lenz, 2009); a generalised media bias in favour of a particular party by a media outlet to affect voting patterns, such as Fox News coverage (Della Vigna & Kaplan, 2007); news media coverage of crisis events and especially the initial phases of wars, such as the Iraq War of 2003 (Johansen & Joslyn, 2008). The news content coverage of foreign nations can also be used for an agenda-setting influence, where negative coverage can have a negative effect on the perception and opinion among the audience of the country covered (Wanta et al, 2004). The result is a rapidly changing information environment and people's relationship and reaction to it.

The rapidly fragmenting global information environment that is characterised by starkly diverging projections of reality may be part of a larger picture. This is one "pertaining to a larger crisis of liberal institutions marked by their potential loss of hegemony in deliberative practices and collective truth finding" (Knupfer, 2017: 15). This has had a marked effect upon the news industry in a couple of ways. In a study of recent developments in television cable news in the United States, two trends have been observed – a blurring of soft and hard news, and increasing levels of overt partisanship (Coe et al, 2008). Such developments have led to some searching for answers to the question, what is objective journalism? Media Lens took up this question and concluded that objective journalism must be for the truth rather than subjectively supporting one side or another within the context of news coverage.[1] It has produced a situation where some observers have warned that in the contemporary global environment, the truth is losing.[2]

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[1] The Editor, *What is Objective Journalism?*, Media Lens, http://www.medialens.org/index.php/alerts/alert-archive/2017/842-what-is-objective-journalism.html, 21 March 2017 (accessed 23 March 2017).

[2] Ignatius, D., *In Today's World, The Truth is Losing*, The Washington Post, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/global-opinions/in-todays-world-the-truth-is-losing/2016/11/29/3f685cd2-b680-11e6-b8df-

An interesting attempt at turning trends and events came with the European Federation of Journalists, which represents some 320, 000 journalists across 39 countries, attempt to lobby the European Parliament to declare journalism as a public good.[3] Within the context of this increasing toxic information environment is the issue of fake news.

Understanding and Defining the Fake News Phenomenon

The term fake news has been somewhat co-opted by Donald Trump recently, it is global and further eroding an already weakening trust in media.[4] A lot of attention has been focused upon the issue of fake news recently, the level and nature of activity, and the supposed risks and threats that come with it. Blame for the current fake news trends has been levelled at different scapegoats. "Some have rushed to blame technology and the bottom-line priorities of internet and social media giants such as Google, Facebook and Twitter for the crisis. Others point to the media's own failures – a deeply flawed and politicised press and broadcast system stuck in a metropolitan bubble, itself part of the establishment elite, and unable to properly connect with the frustration and anger of people and communities."[5]

Fake news as a manipulative tool of communication and a problem is not something that is new; President Thomas Jefferson complained in 1807 that someone who does not read a newspaper is better informed on events

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600bd9d38a02_story.html?utm_term=.3f365b7b93cb, 29 November 2016 (accessed 31 August 2017).

[3] Phillips, L., *European Reporters' Unions Want EU to Back Journalism as a 'Public Good'*, EU Observer, https://euobserver.com/economic/29899, 20 April 2010 (accessed 6 November 2017).

[4] Kestler-D'Amours, J., *How to Fight 'Fake News' in a Post-Truth Environment*, Al Jazeera, http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2017/03/fight-fake-news-post-truth-environment-170327162945897.html, 24 April 2017 (accessed 1 May 2017).

[5] White, A., *Facebook and Matters of Fact in the Post-Truth Era*, Ethical Journalism Network, https://blog.wan-ifra.org/2017/01/10/facebook-and-matters-of-fact-in-the-post-truth-era, (accessed 31 October 2017).

that someone that does read newspapers.[6] What is new and changing is how fake news is conceived and defined. In a 2017 a British Parliamentary inquiry submission identified a number of aspects associated with the fake news trends:

- Fake news has a broader definition than online media outlets publishing false stories to garner publicity;
- Fake news has been a problem in the news media for a long time and fake news articles can be published by any media outlet;
- Two common sources of fake news are press releases as part of marketing campaigns that are reproduced in the media without due process of fact-checking, as well as reporting on developments in science without a full critique of the scientific research conducted.[7]

The first point is in reference to the expansion of public relations and lobbying firms inside the news systems of the world, which has resulted in a deliberate form of news management.[8] This is a basic summary from the point of view and observations of policy makers and practitioners, trying to establish the nature and extent of the problem at hand. Rubin, Chen and Conroy (2015) identified three types of fake news in their research: 1) serious fabrications that are uncovered in the media; 2) large-scale hoaxes; and 3) humorous fakes, such as news satire, parody and game shows. There are some that object to the use of the term 'fake news' because they think that it is "unhelpful", yet feel obliged to use it because there are a lack of alternative means to name it. There is also an understanding that this is not just about news, but the whole information ecosystem. Therefore, there needs

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[6] Uberti, D., *The Real History of Fake News*, Columbia Journalism Review, https://www.cjr.org/special_report/fake_news_history.php, 15 December 2016 (accessed 29 June 2017).

[7] Thorrington, D., *Written Evidence Submitted by Dominic Thorrington*, Fake News Inquiry – Publications, Digital, Culture, Media and Sports Committee, http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/culture-media-and-sport-committee/inquiries/parliament-2015/inquiry2/publications/, 19 April 2017 (accessed 31 August 2017).

[8] Phillips, P., *Propaganda, Fake News, and Media Lies: The Diabolical Business of Global Public Relations Firms*, Global Research, https://www.globalresearch.ca/propaganda-fake-news-and-media-lies-the-diabolical-business-of-global-public-relations-firms/5580331, 18 March 2017 (accessed 18 March 2017).

to be a breaking down of that environment into: 1) the different types of content being created and shared; 2) understanding what motivates those who create that content; and 3) means of disseminating that content.[9] Fake news has had a long history of use, recently the way in which the term was defined began to change.

About one decade ago, some academics attempted to characterise such media and communication formats and content as satire and talk shows as being 'fake news' owing to the aspect of their dependence on the mimicry of journalists and journalism that made up the 'real' news (Borden & Tew, 2007: 312-313). More recently, the definition of 'fake news' has moved to one that includes the elements of deception and misinformation. Albright (2017) stresses the need for journalists to seek facts and to engage audiences with accurate information. However, it is contradicted by an information environment where fact-based evidence is less relevant for a growing segment of the populace. This is evident where news organisations follow news 'trends' and shape the narrative with deceptive statements.

The observation by Albright concerning audiences increasingly seeking opinionated news rather than objective news was in part substantiated in a study on youth news behaviours and attitudes by Marchi (2012). Given the current level of debate and use of the term 'fake news' a new turn in the definition and understanding of the practice seems to have evolved, which is fake news is a label to attach to news and information that contradicts one's world view and beliefs, and within the context of politicised debates where disputed facts surround complex controversies.[10] This is seen in the different sides that publicly dismiss news and information, such as Trump's

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[9]   Wardle, C., *Fake News. It's Complicated*, First Draft News, https://firstdraftnews.com/fake-news-complicated/, 16 February 2017 (accessed 29 June 2017).
[10]   Parry, R., *NYT's Fake News About Fake News*, Consortium News, https://consortiumnews.com/2017/02/22/nyts-fake-news-about-fake-news/, 22 February 2017 (accessed 24 February 2017); Kestler-D'Amours, J., *How to Fight 'Fake News' in a Post-Truth Environment*, Al Jazeera, http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2017/03/fight-fake-news-post-truth-environment-170327162945897.html, 24 April 2017 (accessed 1 May 2017).

use of this tactic against mainstream reporting on or about him.[11] This leads to discussions on the presumed effect of fakery and assigning guilt for it.

The fake news cycle does exert an effect upon people that are exposed to it. Research conducted by Balmas (2014) hints at a trend where people exposed to high levels of fake news and low levels of hard news (as opposed to high levels of exposure to both fake and hard news) perceive a greater level of realism and authenticity in the fake news content. The higher profile of fake news in the global information environment has resulted in calls for creating automated methods for detecting deception and fake news in informational and news content (Conroy et al, 2015; Chen et al, 2015). Social media have taken a lot of attention and blame for spreading 'fake news', however, a lack of professionalism by journalists should be taken into account too. Even though social media is a significant source of news headlines for mainstream media, and in some cases at least a third of that information is proven to be false, there are still few editorial guidelines issued on how to verify information from social media sources.[12] This has an impact upon how the public view mainstream media content and its reliability. A Harvard-Harris poll conducted in the United States in 2017 saw nearly two thirds of the respondents say mainstream press is full of fake news, which is a sentiment held by voters across the ideological spectrum.[13] There are some disagreements and diverging perceptions concerning the issue of fake news and how it should be defined and understood.

However, not everyone agrees on the level of presumed potency of social media and fake news in manipulating people to think and behave in a manner desired by the communicator. Some observers have noted the co-opting of fake news during the 2016 US Presidential Elections as a means to try and put the opponent at a disadvantage, it is a situation where the

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[11] Boyer, D., *Trump Calls Out CNN Reporter as 'Fake News'*, The Washington Times, https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2017/aug/14/trump-calls-out-cnn-reporter-fake-news/, 14 August 2017 (accessed 7 November 2017).

[12] *The Rise and Rise of Fake News*, BBC, http://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-trending-37846860, 6 November 2016 (accessed 31 October 2017).

[13] Easley, J., *Poll: Majority Says Mainstream Media Publishes Fake News*, The Hill, http://thehill.com/homenews/campaign/334897-poll-majority-says-mainstream-media-publishes-fake-news, 24 May 2017 (accessed 31 August 2017).

mainstream media were not a neutral party, but a highly active part of the process.[14] A Stanford University study of the fake news storm around the 2016 Presidential Elections in the United States revealed a great deal of Measure of Activity in terms of the sheer number of fake news items being published and shared. This did not automatically translate into Measure of Effect though, the study suggesting that it is unlikely that fake news swayed the election result (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017).[15] Internet researcher William Dutton refers to fake news, echo chambers and filter bubbles as being under researched and overhyped, where the panic over these is not supported by the current evidence. He also concludes that like-minded people tend to unwittingly lock themselves into echo chambers that tend to reinforce their own existing biases.[16]

Mission Impossible: "Good" Fake News?

Before engaging in the question as to whether it is possible to engage in fake news with 'good' (benevolent intent) fake news dissemination, it is necessary to preliminarily engage in the subject of the ethics of lying. As the heart of this section it is about conscious efforts to deceive an audience through communication. Therefore, is it possible to delineate between 'good' and 'bad' lies? It is a reference to the age-old dilemma of telling "little white lies". White lies are conceived by some as an act of compassion, in order to avoid a hurtful or uncomfortable situation in a dignified manner in order to calm a potentially problematic situation.[17] This is often thought of as being done on an individual basis, there are other forms of 'benevolent' lying too.

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[14] Giraldi, P., *The Fake News Fake Story*, The American Conservative, http://www.theamericanconservative.com/articles/the-fake-news-fake-story/, 28 November 2016 (accessed 28 November 2016).

[15] Crawford, K., *Stanford Study Examines Fake News and the 2016 Presidential Election*, Stanford News, https://news.stanford.edu/2017/01/18/stanford-study-examines-fake-news-2016-presidential-election/, 18 January 2017 (accessed 31 October 2017).

[16] Dutton, W. H., *Fake News, Echo Chambers and Filter Bubbles: Underresearched and Overhyped*, The Conversation, http://theconversation.com/fake-news-echo-chambers-and-filter-bubbles-underresearched-and-overhyped-76688, 5 May 2017 (accessed 22 May 2017).

[17] Shapiro, E. & Shapiro, D., *When Telling a Lie is the Right Thing to Do*, Huffington Post, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/ed-and-deb-shapiro/when-telling-a-lie-is-right_b_841017.html, 29 March 2011 (accessed 5 November 2017).

There is a stream of thought in psychology that people do not mind lying if they think it is in a good cause. Gentle untruths can be referred to as being "blue lies", which is used to describe "lying in the name of the collective good." An example could be when intelligence officials lie for the sake of the nation's security.[18] Thus there is a stream of thought on the practice of "benevolent deception." But there is a clear distinction to observe: "well-intentioned lies are considered moral, while selfish or meaningless lies are considered immoral."[19] As a summarisation of the philosophy of 'benevolent' lying, lies can be seen as being excusable if they are intended as being in the cause for a better world. But then this becomes a highly contentious and subjective, not to mention debatable issue as it involves the use of deliberate deception in order to influence and persuade a target audience.

Historically and contemporarily there have been cases of deception, which have relied on publicity in order to be successful by influencing and persuading particular target audiences that consume news from specific sources. This influence may be intended as a direct or an indirect means, but in all cases the actions are calculated and deliberate and are intended to influence the perception, opinion and behaviour of that audience in such a manner that aids the aims and goals of the originator of the communication. Thus there needs to be present: 1) a conscious and deliberate deception through the communication of fake news; 2) a concrete aim or goal by the messenger; 3) an intended or desired response from the target audience(s); and 4) the message needs to be communicated openly in the public information space. In addition to these requirements as a result of the specific inquiry of this paper, an extra requirement of the fake news must have benevolent intent and be for the 'greater good' as understood by the term *blue lie*.

One of the age old sources of public deception is by the military. From the time of Sun Tzu with the notion of military deception as a means of gain-

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[18] Brown, J., *People Don't Mind Lying if They Think It's for a Good Cause*, Science of Us, http://nymag.com/scienceofus/2017/03/people-dont-mind-lying-if-they-think-its-for-a-good-cause.html, 30 March 2017 (accessed 5 November 2017).

[19] Segran, E., *When Lying is Good*, Fast Company, https://www.fastcompany.com/3035863/when-lying-is-good, 17 September 2014 (accessed 5 November 2017).

ing advantage over a military adversary has gained greater traction and seen these deceptions played out in news coverage. These events certainly meet Bernays' (1947) criteria that there is no coincidence in the nature of the timing or content of news in this regard. There has been an, at times, uneasy relationship between the journalism and the military and especially during periods of war. This creates a situation where journalism is theoretically guided by public interest that requires critical publicity and the military being guided by operational security that requires the guarding of knowledge and information from public scrutiny. However, mass media and journalism do provide a measure of 'authenticity' for the military's deceptive communications (such as fake news).

In 1990-1991 Operation Desert Storm witnessed the use of operational-level military deception, which involved the United States and its allies funnelling fake news to the mass media and journalists. The intention was to gradually feed the fake news to Iraq's decision makers, who were expected to be reading, watching and listening to media news content. As a result, it was intended to mislead the enemy through that distorted information and therefore achieve security and gain the element of surprise (Ross, 1998). From an ethical standpoint, how does this situation meet the earlier mentioned criteria concerning the requisite conditions needed for benevolent fake news?

This was certainly a conscious and deliberate effort on the part of the military and political hierarchy to communicate fake news. There was certainly a concreate aim and goal by those communicating, namely to deceive and confuse Iraqi military decision makers in to achieve military surprise and advantage. Given that the fake news was communicated via mass media news content, the nature of the communication was very open to global audiences. Finally the issue of the 'greater good' for society, does this in fact exist. Of course, this is a very disputable and contestable point, especially given the fact that in general people do not like the feeling of having been deceived, even if they were not the primary target audience. Having given this caveat, it is possible to argue that the "greater good" was served if the narrative for the war is accepted at face value. That particular narrative being that the war was ostensibly fought in the name of liberating the country of Kuwait from Iraqi occupation.

What about other cases of fake news that do not include the aspect of military deception, can they too, be considered in any sense ethically and morally justifiable? A second case to be selected is from Kyrgyzstan where officials lied about cause of deaths in Kyrgyz girl's boarding school near Osh after the 2010 ethnic unrest. In late 2013 I was engaged in fieldwork after being assigned as one of the external experts by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe to investigate and analyse the performance of the Kyrgyz officials (at local, provincial and national levels) at crisis communication.

The background to the situation was the bloody events of the summer of 2010, which saw a second revolution (the first being in 2005), with the lack of a central government the state of law and order crumbled. In the Fergana Valley, which is very ethnically diverse, a number of inter-ethnic tensions flared between different groups, especially between ethnic Kyrgyz and Uzbeks. In the wake after the event, when a resemblance of law and order was being re-established a group of Uzbek men broke into a boarding school for ethnic Kyrgyz and killed a number of them. During my interview with Kyrgyz officials (shall remain anonymous for security reasons), I was informed that officials made the statement that this was an "accident" and not a break-in and deliberate incident. Although the parents of the girls understood, upon reclaiming the bodies of their children, the official reason was fake and the parents were not happy, there were greater issues at risk. To announce the real reason and to have this published would be almost certain to provoke a reprisal attack that would witness a return to the ethnic bloodshed of the summer of 2010.

Unlike the Operation Desert Storm case, the Kyrgyz case represents a tactical level of fake news. When seeking to apply the conditional criteria as to whether this is a justifiable case of 'blue lie' fake news, there seem to be some support for the idea of it being possible as it is not intended as being self-serving or selfish. What is certain is that it is a deliberate and calculated communication of fake news. The concrete aim and goal of the authorities was to prevent further ethnic unrest. There was an intended effect upon the target audience, namely the Uzbek and Kyrgyz communities to not know the real reasons and therefore permit a gradual defusing of the hostility and tensions. The message was communicated to the general public through local media outlets. This case is much clearer cut as to whether it

serves the 'greater good' of society or not than the last case. It involves attempts to try and prevent inter-ethnic violence and the likely deaths and destruction that would result from such, which involves preventing rather than enabling violence.

Conclusion

Fake news is more generally framed, perceived and understood as being an insidious problem that potentially will undermine journalism, mass media and the very fabric of liberal democracy. This is due in part, how the utopian role of journalism and mass media, particularly within the frame of news production, play in a democratic society. A reference to the notion of the function of the fourth estate, a check and balance against the excesses and abuses of the executive, legislative and judicial branches of government. It is also a product of people's aversion to the thought of having their free will and choice being manipulated by another party.

The question posed in the very beginning of this paper was under what circumstances is it permissible and possible to communicate fake news to target audiences? Before arriving at the answer to this particular question it was necessary to delve in to the significance of news and its utopian vision for a democratic society. According to many researchers, objective news is a requirement for an active citizenry to inform themselves in order to make the best possible choices concerning the fundamental issues and challenges they face in their lives. However, a more cynical understanding of news is that it is an instrument to influence and persuade the public in order to 'steer' them in a façade of a democratic process. Certainly fake news fits into the second category of the news function.

When entertaining and considering an ethical question, such as the theoretical and practical permissibility of using fake news to manipulate a target public, there needs to be an assessment of the specific cultural and philosophical ethics that surround such a proposal. In way of an initial step, the question becomes is it acceptable to lie and deceive? During upbringing there is a strict taboo in society on lying, however, there is also a scale of lying too. One of these is the concept of the white lie, which is associated with an individual in an awkward social context. There is also the concept

of the blue lie, which is understood within a collective context and the idea of achieving an outcome for the good of society.

Therefore, in spite of the taboos of lying and people's general dislike for being lied to and deceived, it is in fact possible and permissible to lie. If the lie is for a 'good' reason that benefits society as opposed to something motivated by selfish desires. Both of the cases used within the context of this paper use of the concept and logic of fake news being used for the greater good of society. One is done at an operational level military operation, and the other is done at a tactical level civil operation. Although the military case does raise a number of further ethical and philosophical questions concerning enabling the use of military force, at a rhetorical level it is intended to redress the situation where Iraq attacked and occupied the country and therefore this seems to be more clear cut in terms of the blue lie logic than the military operation that was launched in March 2003. The example from Southern Kyrgyzstan is another example of a blue lie, where a lie was circulated via fake news in the local media in order to keep law and order in an environment of inter-ethnic tension.

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Should We Use Yesterday's Lies for Tomorrow's Peace?

Thomas Fasbender

To get a more precise understanding of the term fake news, we may first devote some thought to the opposite: non-fake news. As much as we apply the term to most of the information we come across - in a pure and literal sense, non-fake news do not exist. News come to our knowledge via agents or mediators: the media. Even in the case of first-hand knowledge, when we are the immediate witness of an event, perspective and focalization interfere with our recognition. In fact, our cognitive faculties do not allow for an objective representation of the true nature of anything beyond simple abstract entities such as numbers, some basic ideas like perfect spheres, etc.

But that is only one trap out of many. Even if we were convinced that there is no such thing as non-fake news, we would still assume, and rightly so, that the totality "fake news" is all but homogenous and that any individual news item can be gauged on a scale of proximity to the objective representation of the purported fact or event. But who vouches that one news item is 2/3 likely to be "true" and the other only 1/3? Here comes another trap: the alleged credibility of the agent, the media. Some believe they are truly informed by Breitbart News, others by the Washington Post. It goes without saying that both Breitbart and the Post equally claim to be agents of objective representation.

The internet and its "democratizing" effects have created a sort of level playing field where the Breitbarts and the Posts present and promote themselves equally accessible and with equal quality (assuming they both recruit the adequate talent). And, with equal authority. In case there remains an establishment preference in favour of the Post it results from inherited cultural prejudices, linked to social distinctions of the past.

The vertically organized cultural hegemonies of the past, embodied and dominated by ruling classes determining good and bad and right and wrong, in short: exerting interpretational sovereignty in a society, have been replaced by the internet-fueled mass democracy. As of today, we are

stranded in a horizontal structure of infinite filter bubbles with equal claims to truth and objectivity.

Besides the cacophony and informational chaos yet another development is characteristic of the last 25 years: the moralization of politics. Most people would say, a good thing. At last humanity shows its ability to improve. The truth is much less palpable. Conventional *realpolitik* focused on national or state interests, inter-state conflicts and inter-states processes. Diplomacy prided itself to attract the cool-hearted and the cool-minded. Business was difficult enough without emotions. Now enter morals. As any student of philosophy knows, moral judgements are as Janus-headed as can be. What prevails, moral intuition or moral reasoning? In any case, as soon as moral criteria are introduced in a dispute, whatever the issue, cold blood will turn hot. Laced with emotions – and intuitions are emotions' relatives – any conflict will become infinitely more difficult to mediate.

There is yet another, equally dangerous side of the moralization of politics. It provokes partisanship. Staying neutral regarding some third parties' property or other material dispute doesn't require much effort. Staying neutral in a conflict regarding an alleged breach of moral values is a different thing. The dilemma is that political conflicts, which by default are as much about power and being right or wrong as conflicts in marriage, hardly ever assign one-sided moral blame.

With neutrality as a concept having become obsolete – a result of the lamented moralization of politics – and everybody taking sides in any given conflict, there are no more arbiters or brokers who can bring about compromise. What can be expected of the Minsk agreement when all participants are siding with one Ukrainian civil war party or the other? The situation leaves only one way out: legitimation by victory, at least moral victory. The winner takes it all. And since grasping the objective issues that lie at the bottom of any conflict is a tedious undertaking, both parties' objective will be to occupy the higher moral grounds. If that requires fake news, then news will be faked. Piece of cake.

The problem with faking news, or with spinning or however manipulating them, is that professional, ethical standards, just like any other standards of civilization and culture, are much faster abandoned than achieved. For that

reason, the assumption of "Using Yesterday's Lies for Tomorrow's Peace" is a devious, misleading scheme that would only accelerate the ever-progressing degradation of the news-reporting industry.

Over the last few decades, two essential role models of Western Civilization have disappeared: the neutral agent in a conflict, including moral ones, and the disciplined journalist who painstakingly distinguishes between report and comment. Both were victimized by the apparent duty to take sides, to identify with a moral cause. The general relief that accompanies these developments – "at last morality enters politics" – blanks out the fact that, often enough, power is rooted in the capacity to remain neutral and play inferior forces and interests to one's advantage.

Unless Western civilization does not regain its lost aloofness, unless its politicians do not re-embrace the concept of neutrality, and unless its journalists do not return to distinguish between information and opinion, the West won't exert even a fraction of the power and influence it was once used to command. It is not fake news that will bring about peace, not in the South Caucasus and not elsewhere. Peace is a function of authority, and authority is waning.

Transforming Western (Mis)Perceptions of Abkhazia: Prospects for Peacebuilding

Kieran Pender[1]

Abstract

Georgian-fuelled Western perceptions of Abkhazia as a Russian-occupied territory are misleading. This discourse has negative consequences at both a macro and micro-level, inhibiting effective efforts at reconciliation and peace-building. Fostering a more sophisticated and nuanced discussion around Abkhazia is a necessary step on the long road to conflict resolution. Only then will yesterday's lies help facilitate tomorrow's peace.

Introduction

In July 2016, then-United States Secretary of State John Kerry visited Georgia. Speaking to the media, he said: 'Russia's occupation and militarisation of parts of Georgia's territory are unacceptable.'[2] Several years earlier, a former British minister wrote an article for *Open Democracy* decrying Abkhazia's "foreign occupation and control … There is no future for Abkhazia as an international pariah and Russian puppet."[3] A quick Google search returns plenty more of this language – Abkhazia is a Russian-

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[2]   Lesley Wroughton and Margarita Antidze, 'John Kerry Commits More US Military Aid for Ex-Soviet Georgia', *Reuters*, 6 July 2016, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-georgia-usa-kerry/john-kerry-commits-more-u-s-military-aid-for-ex-soviet-georgia-idUSKCN0ZM0RG>.

[3]   Denis MacShane, 'Abkhazian Elections: Russia's Pawn in Georgian Game?', *Open Democracy*, 25 August 2011, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/node/61113/author/nicolas-bouchet>.

occupied territory, Abkhazia is a Russian pawn – used on a regular basis in Georgian and Western media.

Unfortunately, this is all fake news.

Abkhazia is not a Russian-occupied territory. Yes, Abkhazia is economically reliant on Russia. Yes, Russia exercises considerable political influence in Abkhazia. Yes, Russian has military bases in Abkhazia. But none of these equate to foreign occupation, and having spent considerable time in Abkhazia over the past year, I can tell you that Abkhazia is not occupied. The partially-recognised territory is led by its own government, a regime with considerable agency – in another conference paper I have detailed various examples of Abkhazia refusing to follow the preferred position of Moscow, to demonstrate the incorrectness of the "Russian puppet" rhetoric.[4] It is, in my opinion, simply factually incorrect to say that Abkhazia is occupied.

But the intention of my paper today is not to argue that highly-controversial proposition, which I am sure will cause some disagreement among my Georgian colleagues. Instead, I want to consider how the misleading and hyperbolic perceptions of Abkhazia in Georgia and the West have inhibited peacebuilding, and how constructing a more sophisticated discursive space can improve prospects for reconciliation between Abkhazia and Georgia. I will firstly provide the necessary context, before considering the deleterious impact of the present discourse. I will then consider solutions – how, in the words of the abstract for this panel, yesterday's lies might help facilitate tomorrow's peace.

Before I begin, a brief note on methodology. This paper is based on field research conducted in Abkhazia over the past year. I have undertaken extensive qualitative interviews with political elites, civil society members and the general population. I have twice interviewed the President of Abkhazia, Raul Khajimba; I have interviewed both the present and former Foreign Ministers, the Prime Minister and the Interior Minister. I have interviewed

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4   Pender, Kieran, '"Russian Pawn" or the Next Kosovo? Perspectives from Abkhazia' (Paper delivered to Putin's Russia in the Wake of the Cold War Conference, The Australian National University, August 2016).

dozens of journalists and civil society activists, from different ethnic groups and a range of societal spheres. I hope, therefore, that the following analysis provides a constructive and empirically-informed appraisal of the situation in Abkhazia.

Context

This year marked the 25th anniversary of the outbreak of conflict between Abkhazia[5] – an Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic during the USSR era – and Georgia. Georgian troops arrived in the regional capital Sukhum/i in August 1992 following a declaration of independence by Abkhazia's autonomous parliament, sparking a bloody internecine conflict. Within 13 months, Abkhazian militia groups had regained control of their territory, but not before allegations of ethnic cleansing were levelled against both sides. The conflict caused considerable displacement of ethnic Georgians living in Abkhazia, and many remain displaced to this day.

Although some Russian fighters and arms ended up on Abkhazia's side during the hostilities,[6] Russia proclaimed its neutrality throughout the conflict and acted as the primary mediator. Following the war, the Russia-led Commonwealth of Independent States imposed economic and diplomatic sanctions on Abkhazia. Yet while Russia's boycott persisted on paper until 2008, in reality Abkhazia grew economically dependent on their powerful neighbour in the late 1990s. Moscow also began to widely distribute travel documents to Abkhazians, and it is estimated that 90 percent of the population now have Russian passports.[7] The paradigm then shifted dramatically in 2008 following the Russian-Georgian War,[8] with Moscow officially rec-

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[5] For a primer on the history of Abkhazia, see James Forsyth, *The Caucasus: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

[6] Human Rights Watch, 'Georgia/Abkhazia: Violations of the Laws of War and Russia's Role in the Conflict', March 1995, <https://www.hrw.org/reports/1995/Georgia2.htm>.

[7] Freedom House, 'Freedom in the World: Abkhazia', <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2015/abkhazia>.

[8] Thomas Frear, 'The Foreign Policy Options of a Small Unrecognised State: The Case of Abkhazia', *Caucasus Survey* 1, no.2 (2014): 87.

ognising Abkhazia and nearby South Ossetia. In recent years, relations between the Kremlin and Sukhum/i have grown ever closer.

It is in light of that context that the 'Russian-occupied region' rhetoric has flourished post-2008. Yet this characterisation is strenuously denied by Abkhazian officials. Abkhazia's former Prime Minister Artur Mikvabia told me while in office that although "Russia remains our strategic partner …Russia has no say in the internal politics of Abkhazia. When someone suggests that Russia dictates everything that happens in the Abkhazia, with the same approach one can say that the United States dictates everything that happens in Georgia."[9] Foreign Minister at the time Viacheslav Chirikba offered a more light-hearted riposte to the West's rhetoric: "Abkhazia internally is fully sovereign. If you look at our ministry they are all locals. There is no Russian FSB operator saying: 'Do this, don't do this.'"

Problems

The inflammatory discursive construction of Abkhazia in Georgian and Western contexts has had both macro and micro-level negative consequences. From a macro perspective, the conceptualisation of the Abkhazia-Georgia conflict as in fact a Russian-Georgian conflict is immensely counterproductive to reconciliation. As long as Georgia and the West look to engage with Moscow rather than Sukhum/i over resolution of the frozen conflict, there will be little progress towards permanent peace – indeed many Abkhazians feel angered by the idea that a conflict involving Abkhazia can be solved without input from Abkhazia. This is a point that has been directly acknowledged by European Union officials, who are cited by scholar Thomas de Waal as admitting "formal use of [the term occupation] is unhelpful because it … denies any useful role for the Abkhaz and South Ossetians."[10] The present rhetoric creates structural barriers to peacebuilding, and will continue to impede conflict resolution.

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[9] Artur Mikvabia, interview by author, 2 June, 2016 in Sukhum/i, recording and notes in author's possession.

[10] Thomas de Waal, 'Enhancing the EU's Engagement with Separatist Territories', *Carnegie Europe*, 17 January 2017, <http://carnegieeurope.eu/2017/01/17/enhancing-eu-s-engagement-with-separatist-territories-pub-67694>.

At a micro-level, Western and Georgian descriptions of the territory are deeply offensive to many Abkhazians and exacerbate the chasm between Abkhazia and Georgia. While I am mindful of the advice that "the plural of anecdote is not data", I can barely recall all the times young Abkhazians complained to me about the way their territory is perceived abroad and how it affects them personally. Whenever articles about Abkhazia are posted on Facebook, the comments sections become filled with Georgians saying: "Abkhazia is a Russian-occupied part of Georgia." As a journalist who has published extensively on Abkhazia, I have had first-hand experience of this phenomenon – I was recently called an agent of "Russian disinformation" on Twitter. I even recall seeing an online comment on another author's *Open Democracy* column describing Abkhazia as a "Nazi pseudo state."[11] Such rhetoric is deeply divisive, antagonising Abkhazians and sewing further distrust of Georgia and the West.

The longer-term impact of these problems is two-fold. Firstly, the prevailing conception of Abkhazia prevents effective attempts at reconciliation – 25 years later, an end to the now-frozen conflict does not appear in sight. There is today a politically-active generation in both Sukhum/i and Tbilisi that do not have first-hand memory of the war – creating, in theory at least, a space for potential dialogue and reconciliation a step removed from the scars of war. But there is a real risk that this new generation in Abkhazia are becoming even more anti-Georgian than their parents, after enduring a decade of demonisation. This risk is exacerbated by the growing language divide between the two peoples.

Secondly, ironically the "Russian puppet" hyperbole is driving Abkhazia closer to Russia. Conceptualising Abkhazia in this way leads to less engagement and furthers the isolationist status quo. Liana Kvarchelia, an influential civil society leader in Abkhazia, offered salient perspective in this regard. She told me:

> People here don't want Abkhazia to join Russia … But it will be difficult if the policy of isolation and associated rhetoric continues. When we talk to the Georgians through various platforms, they agree that if we do not want Abkhazia becoming

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[11] George Hewitt, 'Abkhazia, Georgia: A Response', *Open Democracy*, 25 August 2009, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/article/abkhazia-georgia-and-history-a-response>.

part of Russia we need to have closer ties to the outside world. But simultaneously they are afraid of creeping recognition. That fear blinds them. If the policy does not change, we will become more and more dependent on Russia.[12]

Solutions

I will begin the penultimate section of my paper with a caveat. I am not naïve, and fully appreciate that there is no easy answer to the difficulties highlighted above. However, I am firmly of the belief that efforts by all stakeholders to foster more nuanced dialogue and debate can actively contribute to peace-building and reconciliation.

This change has to begin with us. I have been disappointed over the course of the conference to hear regular reference to Abkhazia as an 'occupied territory'. A broader transformation to our understanding of the situation in Abkhazia must come initially from the academy and the media. This is a problem not only in discussions of the present but also studies of the past; scholar Robert Crabtree has observed how the history of Abkhazia is "studied and argued over in the competing historiographies of conflicting nationalisms, in the search for justificatory pedigrees."[13]

Fora such as this present one are good starting points for the dialogue and shared understanding that might contribute to a more nuanced appreciation of the factual reality. This is indeed wishful thinking, but greater opportunity for experts from both sides to visit the other could go a long way to improving the quality of the rhetoric. After spending a few weeks travelling around Abkhazia and seeing a distinct lack of Russian troops or officials, I would challenge any of you to maintain the "Russian-occupied" narrative. And of course change needs to come from the top. Earlier this year Donald Trump signed into law American legislation that purported to

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[12] Liana Kvarchelia, interview by author, 7 June 2016 in Sukhum/i, recording and notes in author's possession.

[13] Robert Crabtree, 'New Ways of Looking at an Intractable Problem: Minorities, the Displaced and the "Frozen Conflict" in Abkhazia' (MA thesis, University of Adelaide, 2010), 5.

recognise Abkhazia as a Russian-occupied region.[14] While I have no hope whatsoever of improvement in the approach of the present United States' administration, I believe all stakeholders need to take responsibility for the fact that this self-perpetuating rhetoric promoted by Georgia and the West continues to inhibit peace-building.

My core hope for change, then, is that the relevant parties might realise their own self-interest in this narrative reform. Georgia's Western supporters would do well to heed the words of that European Union official I quoted early. The current discourse is deeply counterproductive. If Georgia, the United States and the EU want lasting peace, engaging with the complex reality – rather than name-calling – is a necessary first step.

Conclusion

The conflict between Abkhazia and Georgia was once fought with weapons. Today it is largely fought with words. Those words are important. How we describe and conceptualise the partially-recognised separatist territory has consequences for peace-building. The topic is fraught – a matter as simple as whether the capital city is called Sukhum or Sukhumi provokes vitriol – so the prevailing Georgian and Western narrative of post-2008 Abkhazia as Russian-occupied territory or a Russian puppet state is the verbal equivalent of a sledgehammer.

In my paper I have outlined the negative impact of such discourse on political reconciliation, and proposed how the initial stages of peace might be forged through a more sophisticated understanding of modern Abkhazia.
As if to underscore the pressing relevance of this topic, yesterday news broke that the town of Kilmarnock in Scotland – a twin city of Sukhum/i – had agreed to Georgia's request to remove a memorial honouring victims of the Abkhazian conflict which featured an Abkhazian flag. The comments of Georgia's Ambassador to the United Kingdom are representative;

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[14] 'Donald Trump Signs Legislative Act Recognizing Abkhazia and Tskhinvali as Georgia's Regions Occupied by Russia', *Georgia Today*, 6 May 2017, <https://www.georgianjournal.ge/politics/33523-donald-trump-signs-legislative-act-recognizing-abkhazia-and-tskhinvali-as-georgias-regions-occupied-by-russia.html>.

Tamar Beruchashvili described the 'Russian occupation' and criticised "the efforts of the Russian government to propagate the so-called independence of Abkhazia."[15] The Ambassador's information warfare helps nobody. Only with balanced dialogue will there be any hope of a prosperous future for Georgia and Abkhazia, shared in one way or another. Ceasing to propagate this fake news would be a good place to start.

[15] 'Abkhazian Memorial in Scotland to be Dismantled', *Georgia Today*, 10 November 2017, <http://georgiatoday.ge/news/8147/Abkhazian-Memorial-in-Scotland-to-be-Dismantled>.

Turning Information Warfare into Information Peacefare: Challenges and Opportunities for Change in the South Caucasus

*Elkhan Nuriyev**

Introduction

Evidently, the continued neglect of the South Caucasus by the international community, and the lack of understanding of the deep-rooted issues in this part of the world have created an informational landscape where fake news stories harm the ordinary people and violate their fundamental right to make informed choices on the basis of accurate information that is free of deception and manipulation. In effect, the current climate of disinformation aggravates regional tensions and makes incumbent authorities vulnerable to instability. More to the point, false information not only leads to disastrous results for regional stability but also directly affects peace process in the conflict-torn areas.

The fact that misinformation has a devastating impact on conflict resolution in the South Caucasus is evidenced by the recent effects of handling crisis situations in Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia. Certainly, international efforts to resolve protracted conflicts in these regions must increasingly be looked for at the political, diplomatic and human lev-

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els instead of applying traditional forms of information warfare. What is most important today, however, is to develop the art of waging peace. This needs to be done by all the parties involved in the negotiating process in order to prevent further escalation of the unresolved conflicts.

Moving away from Information Warfare to Information Peacefare

Clearly, the dissemination of disinformation and propaganda through traditional media and social networks poses numerous problems and challenges that sow discord, undermine free society and damage public trust. In effect, information warfare as a major source of fake news is highly politicized in the South Caucasus where conflict resolution process has been in something of a political limbo since the late 1990s. Increasingly, local media is used as a tool of information warfare – a weapon of words that influences public minds, and a weapon of operations that affects domestic policies. The ability to conduct information warfare activities and disseminate fake stories to shape the public narratives has rapidly transformed local media outlets into strategic weapons in the hands of incumbent governments engaged in the protracted conflicts. Hence, information warfare waged between conflicting parties strongly influences the peace process which continues to languish in the doldrums.

More precisely, information warfare can have effects on mediation efforts and stances of the peace brokers, and on their own interests, and on the methods they usually use to prevent an escalation in the intractable conflict and its extremely negative consequences. This explains why diplomatic efforts of the international mediators imply actions aimed at achieving "negative" peace; preventing, stopping, or not permitting a renewal of hostilities in the conflict zone. In fact, ineffective methods of conflict resolution are mostly directed to reach speedy agreements, hence establish negative peace.[1] Further to the point, negotiations on stopping wars and enter-

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[1] Nuriyev, Elkhan. "Re-engaging Armenia and Azerbaijan in Reconciliation Process: Prospects and Incentives for Nagorno-Karabakh Breakthrough." In: Felberbauer, Ernst, Labarre, Frederic (Eds.): *What Kind of Sovereignty? Examining Alternative Governance Methods in the South Caucasus*, Study Group Publication Series, National Defense Academy, Vienna, Austria, 3/2014, pp. 168-169.

ing agreements on non-use of force are only attempts to halt or at least, control violence already happening, which has been caused by deep-rooted problems and circumstances.

However, there is also "positive" peace which implies eliminating the internal and structural reasons and conditions arousing a violent conflict, toward the curtailment of which "negative" peace processes are aimed. So far, unfortunately, very little has been done to achieve "positive" peace. There is no intention of belittling the role of the mediators and reducing their efforts to naught. No one also denies the fact that peace brokers have made rather persistent attempts to resolve the protracted conflicts in the South Caucasus. But if conflicting parties are unable to reach "positive" peace under the auspices of the international mediators in the near future, "negative" peace will easily collapse and one way or another will lead to renewed hostilities it was aimed against.[2] This process could go on forever, which is evidenced by the existing political deadlocks around Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Nagorno-Karabakh where fragile "negative" peace has been kept up for more than twenty five years now.

In essence, there are at least two important circumstances that the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group[3] and the Geneva International Discussions[4] should take into account in the present-day situation. First, it is the potential impact that negative consequences of information warfare already pose to the current negotiating stalemate in the South Caucasus where the wider public reaction could be aroused by unsuccessful mediation efforts. Second are the tenacious mores, mentality

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[2] Ibid. at pp. 169-170.

[3] The Minsk Group, the activities of which have become known as the Minsk Process, spearheads the OSCE's mediation efforts to find a peaceful solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. It is co-chaired by Russia, France, and the United States.

[4] The Geneva International Discussions are multilateral talks, launched in Geneva, Switzerland in October 2008, to address the consequences of the territorial conflicts in Georgia. Mediated by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the European Union (EU), and the United Nations (UN), the Geneva process involves representatives from Georgia, Russia and the United States, as well as members of both the Georgian exiled administrations of Abkhazia and South Ossetia and the de-facto authorities of the two breakaway regions.

and culture motivating the conduct of the people in the conflict situation, let alone the expediency of reckoning with the realistic possibilities, the specific situation, and public opinion.

On the other hand, the present impasse exists not only because a solution cannot be found, but because established narratives, thought patterns and distrust have been deliberately nurtured. Achieving political settlement, therefore, is but one element of a bigger challenge, whose essence is to change the perspectives of the respective governments as to the utility of ongoing stalemate. Exploring and promoting innovative ideas could certainly help inspire and motivate conflicting parties to unjam the frozen peace process. For this to happen, there is a strong need to adopt a changed narrative on conflict resolution reflecting a constructive, dialogue-oriented approach. The main goal is to develop more effective ways to better inform the wider public, protect society from illegitimate pressures and thereby safeguard internal stability.

But still, dangerously spreading misinformation calculated to demonize and threaten the other party remains a major obstacle to bringing about peace in the South Caucasus. Given the absence of broad civic discourse on the approaches to the speedy conflict resolution in Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Nagorno-Karabakh, the co-chairs of both the OSCE Minsk Group and the Geneva International Discussions should therefore undertake commitment to meet renowned scholars, civil society activists and media representatives from Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia on a regular basis to engage them in a more nuanced public debate searching for innovative ways to shape compromise and promote reconciliation. The initial point of such an initiative is to establish an expert group in each South Caucasus country as a means for fostering "positive" peace in the conflict-torn areas and to help local media outlets rather move away from information warfare to "information peacefare."

Building Corridors for Peace Dialogue

As is well known, dialogue and peace always serve as common language spoken among nations. Problems of lack of mutual understanding are usually solved by dialogue which is the only way forward to ease tensions and resolve conflicts. Doing enough dialogue means doing enough peace,

thereby bridging the gap between the parties and bringing them together for increased understanding how demanding peace dialogue is. That is why using the language of peace as a vital component in the pursuit of reconciliation is so essential to find any common ground needed to push the peace process further.

Obviously, one of the most challenging problems the South Caucasus is facing today is that incumbent political elites have so far failed to create a viable language for peace as part of a new technology for information peacefare. While there is a relatively well-developed technology of information warfare, political leaderships throughout the entire region still lack a concrete image of what information peacefare might look like. There is a strong need to begin to address this problem by creating and testing new innovative ways to build a platform of mutual dialogue that will enable the parties in conflict to establish a climate of trust and achieve reconciliation. In other words, it is necessary to invent an art of waging "positive" peace, instead of maintaining "negative" peace. With this in mind, the ruling authorities in the conflict-ridden areas must search for alternative approaches and avenues that will provide a way out of the current impasse to negotiate constructively and move seriously towards a political solution.

More frequently, politicians and policy analysts use words like "conflict freeze" "nonviolence" and "non-use of force" to protest the use of warfare. But yet they have to look at the other side of conflict resolution. It is about a space for deliberation, learning, and looking inward. It is a time of looking at relationships from a different perspective. Openness, tolerance and hope are key factors that foster healthy conflict resolution. Trust is the ability to build confidence in relationships in which the parties believe they will act in their best common interest. There is only one thing that can restore broken trust. It is a mutual forgiveness that could indeed bring about reconciliation and peace to the conflict-torn region. But when peace supporters talk about "forgiveness", their efforts are not taken seriously by decision-makers. This is a very real problem for those of scholars working in the field of peacebuilding.

Paradoxically, the incumbent elites have not yet been able to invent a practical tool of peacefare itself. This explains why they cannot develop and apply the technology of "information peacefare." This is still not being

done largely because they either want to continue to do things the way they have been doing them down through the recent decades, or because they don't know how to find new and better ways of resolving intractable disputes and how to take an innovative approach to making peace with modern information society tools.

Nonetheless, the conflicting parties should first build corridors for dialogue through interaction and mutual understanding, and only then move on to foster and facilitate the practice of information peacefare. In order to develop helpful technologies and new approaches in information peacefare, there is certainly an increasing need for a new type of leadership with far more robust diplomacy and strong strategic vision to end still unresolved conflicts. This job could, after all, be done by a new generation of credible leaders willing to invest more of their countries' resources in establishing and conducting positive peacefare.[5] They could create a professional team of conflict resolution facilitators who would test specific models in the field of peacebuilding that could eventually supersede information warfare and promote genuine peace dialogue instead.

Launching New Cooperation Projects: Key Recommendations

Albert Einstein (1879-1955), one of the world's leading spokesmen for nonviolent conflict resolution in his speech to the New History Society on 14 December 1930 famously said, "Peace cannot be kept by force. It can only be achieved by understanding."[6] This inspirational quote seems to mean that if the conflicting parties do not understand one another, there cannot be a peace. There will be misunderstandings leading to heated disagreements which will eventually cause conflict. If they really do not understand each other's motivations, there is little chance for de-escalation of conflict. Hence, effective communication is the only way to defuse tension and create the right atmosphere for the peace talks to succeed.

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[5] For an interesting overview on the issue, see Swan, Herbert Lewis. Positive (Negative) Peacefare: The Neglected Art of Waging Peace. 1st Edition, Vantage Press, New York, USA, 1966.

[6] Albert Einstein, "A speech to the New History Society." 14 December 1930, reprinted in "Militant Pacifism" in *Cosmic Religion* (1931). Also see Calaprice, Alice. (2005). *The New Quotable Einstein, Commemorative Edition*. Princeton, NJ: PUP, p. 158.

But the following interesting question arises: How is peace actually waged? Yet the answer is very simple. Eye to eye, the parties should talk and cooperate in exploring how their differences and disagreements could eventually be buried. In particular, a meaningful public discourse can extensively be employed as a crucial tool for achieving peace, with the precepts that academics and media are significant instruments for promoting mutual understanding and reconciliation. In this context, the EU, the OSCE, the Council of Europe (CoE), international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs) and other public authorities, such as regional governments and civil society organizations must strongly support and encourage greater participation of research scholars and media professionals in the peace dialogue process.

The establishment of the South Caucasus Peacebuilding Platform, a regional network that would aim to provide an open intellectual space for academics and media to learn from each other and jointly work to shape public discourse of reconciliation could be an important step forward in trying to contribute towards stimulating progress in the peace talks. The presence of such an interactive network could play a substantial role in helping to prepare fertile ground for accepting a compromise solution and building up the constituencies for peace when new opportunities for would emerge.

Most notably, international think-tanks like George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies in Garmisch-Partenkirchen and/or Dialogue of Civilizations Research Institute in Berlin should actively support peace studies scholars in a variety of ways to encourage debate and bring about positive change within and between their societies. One specific recommendation is to launch a program or initiative called "Scholars Waging Peace." It is about a special project aimed at building a team of conflict resolution facilitators working to investigate technology's potential for stimulating and strengthening approaches that can pave the way to true reconciliation process. This group must be made up of professionals who have specific skills, significant competency and extensive knowledge to deal with conflict settlement and with information peacefare technology.

In effect, the initiative described above could help bring experts, their experiences and insights to the table with policymakers, attempting to resolve territorial conflicts. Scholars could share their views and ideas, building coalitions to come up with a new concept and to develop a concrete image

of a workable model for "South Caucasus Peacefare" in the public mind. The primary purpose of the Scholars Waging Peace Program would be to demonstrate to skeptical leaders that there are indeed more effective ways to deal with differences than the use of military force.

But even so, it is still necessary to devise a coherent strategic vision and to be able to visualize the possibility of reaching a solution. If a team of impartial facilitators can point to something important that has worked much better or more effectively than warfare, incumbent political leaders will be under severe pressure to search for alternatives and to use the new tools. This in turn will allow the conflicting parties to reshape their perspectives and to visibly turn obstacles into opportunities. Given expertise and capabilities offered by professionals, the aforementioned think-tanks could guide Scholars for Peace initiative to a positive outcome. So all in all, the program's work could yield tangible results satisfactory to all the parties searching for innovative ways of breaking the current impasse and resolving the protracted conflicts.

Most importantly, the idea of organizing an international conference for peace scholars, policymakers and practitioners in Garmisch-Partenkirchen or Berlin could be a starting point in establishing some kind of regional networking. A select group of specialists in focused field of study could first present their innovative proposals, then debate and deliberate about case scenarios and possible solutions. The main intention is to add value to a new cooperation project with participation of key speakers/peace promoters who could focus especially on a strategic roadmap for fostering dialogue and reconciliation by offering insider perspectives and sharing their expertise.

Meanwhile, information can be for better or for worse. It is just as important to talk about information that serves to create common understanding and peace. In this respect, the media is a vital tool in helping to shape public opinion. Hence the media can indeed play a key role in "peace mainstreaming" and in setting up the image of "information peacefare." The media representatives should talk more and more about valuable contributions to "information peacefare" and/or about innovative possibilities of information "peacekeeping" as an activity to create and to use situations with symmetric or identical information and knowledge to construct public

opinion and to prepare for constructive change in relations among the parties. Addressing the challenges of waging "information peacefare" would be best handled by acting nationally first, and then regionally. This is because the presence of external actors, for example, such as Western and/or Russian media might lead to unnecessary tensions. This kind of promotion could therefore be done by cooperative efforts of the three major media outlets in the South Caucasus.

Certainly, coordinated action by regional media holdings will be critical to successful "information peacefare" campaigning. For instance, regional media agencies could launch a pilot project that would deal with conversion of media to journalism of peace. One could start with inviting the makers of Peace Journalism to present their ideas and views on potential opportunities for regional cooperation of promoters of peace media. One of the main aims is to set up the South Caucasus Learning Partnership on Peace Journalism and to help people to access and produce alternative sources of information. The pilot project would work with selected local media agencies to make films and documentaries as well as publish opinion articles, essays, commentaries and promote stories that speak of human and cultural diplomacy, using examples of successful multi-ethnic societies and advantages of maintaining good neighbourly relations.

More specifically, a website project called "South Caucasus for Reconciliation and Peace" whose purpose would be to promote an exchange of knowledge and experience at the service of the construction of an art of peacebuilding could be launched jointly by the respective media outlets in each South Caucasus country. The website could serve as a tool that would help to translate creative and innovative ideas into action. Its mission should be to make available expertise and know-how about peacebuilding at the service of the implementation of common initiatives at regional level. The main goal is to bring together scholars, journalists, and civil society activists through online tool to form a regional network and to create a synergy between those working effectively in favour of promoting reconciliation and rebuilding peace in the South Caucasus. This initiative could help regional peacebuilders confront information warfare activities by creating new opportunities for them to facilitate the practice of "information peacefare" and make the image of "making peace" real in public mind.

Nonetheless, specific measures aimed at triggering relaxation of tensions can be envisaged to promote a constructive dialogue through a well thought-out media campaign:

- Refocus the media narratives on "information peacefare" and put forward a fairly straightforward message containing a rhetoric that favours reconciliation, for example, by jointly addressing common security challenges such as terrorism, energy disasters, and other global issues.

- Better inform the wider public on the benefits of peace, regional integration and commercial exchange for prosperity of all sides.

- Engage media to support and promote TV talk shows and newspaper stories advocating greater transfer of public funds to peace education.

- Increase social and humanitarian reporting with a view of developing a common view on particular topic of concern, such as return of refugees and IDPs, thereby giving a larger voice to NGOs and civil society activists.

Perhaps more to the point, only a successful media campaign can move the South Caucasus audience from emotionality to rationality, and hence from open warfare to true peacefare.

Conclusion

Peace is not simply the absence of war. It is also a process in search of good-neighbourly relations, stability, development and prosperity. Even notwithstanding numerous complications, difficulties and challenges facing the South Caucasus today, there are sensible forces ready to think strategically of tomorrow's peace and to add value to the conflict settlement process. They often argue for investment in information peacefare that can significantly contribute to creating conditions of mutual consent and advancing reconciliation. By materializing the whole package of initiatives outlined above, peace scholars and media professionals could therefore

generate wider public opinion to convince or pressure incumbent political elites to use modern tools and apply new approaches to constructive conflict resolution.

By doing so, the relations between the conflicting parties would evolve into a "warm peace" that could include things like mutual trade, tourism, and cultural exchanges. Achieving such peace certainly requires years of hard work and may even take generations as it needs to be fully blossomed. That, however, proves to be no simple task. It takes a great deal of patience, effort, diligence and commitment to achieve tangible progress.

PART V: ADDITIONAL CONTRIBUTION

Weaponized Information and Narratives on the South Caucasus Landscapes of Narratives

Hrachya V. Arzumanian[1]

The emergence of social media and networks led to the transformation of the information space into an ecosystem operating on the principles of the theory of complex adaptive systems, complex thinking and science of complexity. Consequently, deep structural changes in the way society is informed and interacts within itself took place. The emergence of the information ecosystem, economic and financial uncertainty, and instability created prerequisites for the weaponization of information in ways that can be destructive on a global scale.

The US presidential elections of 2016 showed how influential social and informational activity in the ecosystem can be. Many politicians and analysts were surprised at the decisive impact that targeting the flow of information and news, including misinformation and false information (fake news), can have on the results of political struggle.

Attempts to create a response to new challenges showed that misinformation and false information are only elements of a wider problem of weaponized narratives. Viewing the South Caucasus from the point of view of creating a common landscape of narratives, allows to speak of a serious challenge, which demands revision of fundamental concepts and regional borders in order to respond to it.

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[1] Hrachya V. Arzumanian, PhD is Director of the "Ashkhar" Centre for Strategic Studies, Hadrut.

1. Stages of Development of Mass Media and the Information Ecosystem

Development of Mass Media until the Middle of the 20ᵗʰ Century

More than five centuries ago the emergence of publishing in Europe created the necessary conditions for the involvement of the general public in the process of exchanging ideas, theories and views. In turn, this formed the phenomenon of "public opinion," which became an important political factor and an attribute of the democratic form of government over time. By the middle of the 18ᵗʰ century and the beginning of the 19ᵗʰ century the newspapers became bodies of political parties. The "freedom of speech" was interpreted as the right to prepare practically any content serving the political goals of a party and criticizing the views of its opponents.

However, during the 19ᵗʰ century the party press gradually gave way to another press, which was funded by advertising. Journalism gradually separated from the patronage of parties, and the formed content was dictated by the market. Journalism's purpose became drawing the attention of the readers and increasing sales. As a result, the materials devoted to crimes, scandals and so forth became the most demanded. A phenomenon which was named "sensationalism". According to a number of researchers, press was substantially compromised due to sensationalism, which led to the reduction of its efficiency as an indicator of authority and power.[2]

In the 19ᵗʰ century, besides the paper press, the telegraph was invented which had a huge impact on the formation of mass media. In 1838, Sidney Morse congratulated his brother Samuel on the creation of the telegraph, which he called "not only the greatest invention of this age, but the greatest invention of any age."

With the appearance of the telegraph the public suddenly had an opportunity to be informed about events, which previously only the governments were privy. Political and informational arenas became densely connected

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[2] Kaplan, Richard L. (2002). *Politics and the American Press: The Rise of Objectivity, 1865-1920*. Cambridge University Press.

via many communication channels, which increased the connectivity of the world political system. Supported by other changes of the industrial age, the qualitatively increased tempo of processes in the international arena created new and unfamiliar threats, which would have been called "black swan"- like events today.

In the 20th century, mass media turned into corporations which were actively guided by the ideal of "social responsibility." Receiving profit still remained the main motive and driver of the mass media industry; however, lessons of the past and the aspiration to maintain their reputation made the conscientious covering of events favourable. As a result, towards the second half of the 20th century mass media formed the public agenda, defining which events and facts were important and "real". They also established the parameters of normalcy, "appointing" dissidents and deviant behaviour.

It allowed the leading mass media corporations to accumulate considerable power, turning them into the "fourth estate". There were even fears that the domination of mass media, above all electronic, would reduce the volume of discussions of strategic questions between political forces and politicians when a reaction to the current events was decisive. Concentration of power in the hands of several large corporations will lead to a situation where charismatic or "telegenic" candidates get advantage over more prepared and qualified ones.[3]

Thus, by the end of the 20th century, mass media applied for complete corporate control and concentration of property, allowing them to limit diversity of interpretations which are present in a public discourse.

Electronic Mass Media and Networks. The Birth of the Information Ecosystem

The emergence of social media and networks led to profound structural changes in the ways that society is informed and organizes the interactions within itself. While having a great influence on public consciousness, social

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[3] Bagdikian, Ben. (1983). *The Media Monopoly.* Beacon Press, also Lang, Kurt and Gladys Engel-Lang. (2002). *Television and Politics.* NJ: Transaction Publishers.

media and networks do not form their own content, but are the environment which provides social and informational communications.

Users of social media and networks had the opportunity to actively search and filter the information, without relying on journalists, by creating and editing new content independently. That, in turn, has led to an erosion of the role of professional journalists and editors who carried out the role of intermediaries and "guardians", controlling the information products before they got to the end users.[4] That, in turn, led to emergence of new forms of creation of information by ordinary citizens and "a democratization of news production"[5] challenging the control of information, including by the government. Nevertheless, social media and networks became a valuable platform of public life, based on which many citizens consume news and even define their political identity.

Thus, information space in the 20th century represented a complicated hierarchical system. The basic elements of which were the mass media, possessing global scope, influence, and power. Formation of social media and networks led to the transformation of the information space into a complex adaptive system and, now, an information ecosystem, which functions on the principles of complex thinking and complexity science.[6]

In general, an information ecosystem and in particular social media and networks, challenge the traditional power of the journalists and editors. A trend which is followed by an increase in the mistrust of the dominating mass media, thanks to the widespread violations of the standards of ethics, and corruption.[7] As a result, many readers consider the news sites more genuine and truthful than the dominating traditional mass media, which

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[4] Bruns, A. "Gatewatching, not gatekeeping: Collaborative online news," *Media International Australia Incorporating Culture and Policy*, Vol. 107(1), pp. 31-44. 2003.

[5] Gillmor, Dan. "We the media: The rise of citizen journalists," *National Civic Review*, Vol. 93(3), pp. 58-63, 2004.

[6] Tuchman, Barbara W. (1962). *The Guns of August*. New York: Dell Publishing.

[7] Siles, Ignasio, and Boczkowski, Pablo J. "Making sense of the newspaper crisis: A critical assessment of existing research and an agenda for future work," *New Media & Society*, Vol. 14(8), 2012. pp. 1375-1394.

correlates with the increasing mistrust in the latter.[8] In the 21ˢᵗ century the formed public discourse becomes the subject of the continuous fight, which develops in all segments of public life. A situation, which the philosopher of science Paul Feyerabend calls "epistemological anarchy."[9]

However, the blurring and even the loss of the standards of preparation and dissemination of information, with the absence of the criteria allowing to keep the trust, led to the fact that the information ecosystem was vulnerable to mutations and the distribution of misinformation and false information.[10] The information ecosystem, social media and networks turned into a mirror which reflects all the ranges of human interests and ideas, all spheres of the life of the society. The duality of human nature, its tendency of both peace, and violence and war, reflects in the ecosystem, turning it, sometimes, into a shattered[11] or even "a black mirror."

The Misinformation, False Information, and Mutations in the Information Ecosystem

The U.S. presidential elections of 2016 showed how influential social and informational activity in an ecosystem can be. Many politicians and political strategists were surprised at the fact, that the targeted use of the news and the flow of information, including misinformation and false information, in social media and networks, can have a decisive impact on the results of a political struggle. An immediate response to the "fake news" narrative was born, which became fashionable, and also a large number of papers on the subject were written.

As for the public and the academic world, it became obvious that the information ecosystem raises questions of its own vulnerability and the vul-

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8   Tsfati, Yarif. "Online news exposure and trust in the mainstream media: Exploring possible associations," *American Behavioral Scientist*, Vol. 54(1), 2010. pp. 22-42.

9   Feyerabend, Paul K. (2010). *Against Method. London: Verso (4th edition).*

10   Benkler, Y. et al. "Study: Breitbart-led right-wing media ecosystem altered broader media agenda," *Columbia Journalism Review*, March 3, 2017. 27 October 2017. http://www.cjr.org/analysis/breitbart-media-trump-harvard-study.php.

11   Public Policy Forum. "The Shattered Mirror: News, Democracy and Trust in the Digital Age," January 2017, p. 56. 27 October 2017. http://www.newsmediauk.org/write/MediaUploads/Fakepercent20News/theShatteredMirror.pdf.

nerability of modern societies to various forms of false or misinformation, such as "fake news", disinformation, propaganda, etc.

There are some reasons why social media and networks are so vulnerable to manipulations with information;

1) the fixed expenses for the access to the network and the market of content production appear to be the lowest;
2) it is extremely difficult to make judgments concerning the correctness of information materials in social media and networks, in virtue of the large number of sources of information and its fast distribution;
3) fake news and other forms of misinformation or false information, when gaining viral character, can bring in a significant advertising income;
4) social media and networks facilitate the formation of ideologically divided closed micro networks. The wide diversity of the points of view facilitates the creation of "echo chambers" or "filter bubbles" by similarly conceiving citizens, where they are isolated from opposite opinions;[12]
5) the amplifying polarization and the increasing negative emotions of each of the parties of the political range towards each other takes place. As a result, each of the parties is inclined to trust the negative news, including the distorted and false information, concerning the other;
6) the polls conducted by Gallup's institute revealed the proceeding decrease in "trust and confidence" towards the traditional mass media, "when it concerns the reporting of full, exact and objective news."[13]

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[12] Sunstein, Cass R. (2001). *Echo chambers: Bush v. Gore, impeachment, and beyond*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press; Pariser, Eli. (2011). *The Filter Bubble: What the Internet is Hiding from You*. Penguin Press UK.

[13] Allcott, Hunt and Matthew Gentzkow. "Social Media and Fake News in the 2016 Election," *NBER Working Paper*, No. 23089, January 2017, Revised April 2017. p. 6. 27 October 2017. http://www.nber.org/papers/w23089.

Despite the actualization of the problem of using misinformation or false information as a means of influencing the public opinion and behavior in 2016, these methods were always used. Moreover, "fake news" is not a new term. In the 1925 article of the *Harper* magazine, "Fake news and the public," the increase in the quantity of similar news is condemned: "Once the news faker obtains access to the press wires, all the honest editors alive will not be able to repair the mischief he can do. An editor receiving a news item over the wire has no opportunity to test its authenticity as he would in the case of a local report."[14]

Some researchers are of the opinion that the influence of misinformation or fake news in the information ecosystem is overestimated. Moreover, the speculations on the subject of "fake news" and the requirements to strengthen control over networks are used for the prosecution of other purposes. According to "The Guardian," fake news is "becoming a […] phrase for anything people happen to disagree with"[15]. Under these circumstances, the pressure forcing companies owning social media and networks to remove materials which are considered "fake", can lead to the suppression of the "alternative voices" and "the weeding out of viewpoints that are in conflict with established interests."[16]

The citizen's knowledge of the actual information regarding the politics and political life is important for the functioning democracy.[17] Factual information is the "currency of democratic citizenship" providing common grounds within the political debate. It allows citizens to estimate a public policy and take a conscious participation in the political life.[18]

[14] McKernon, E. "Fake News and the Public: How the Press Combats Rumor, The Market Rigger, and The Propagandist," *Harper's Magazine,* 1925. Citations from: Lazer, David et al. *Combating Fake News.*

[15] Allbright, Jonathan. "Stop Worrying about Fake News. What Comes Next Will Be Much Worse." *The Guardian*, December 9, 2016. 27 October 2017. https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/dec/09/fake-news-technology-filters.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Carpini, Delli, Michael and Scott Keeter. (1996). *What Americans Know About Politics and Why It Matters*. Yale University Press.

[18] Kuklinski, J. et al. (2000) "Misinformation and the Currency of Democratic Citizenship," *Journal of Politics*, Vol. 623, pp. 790-816.

2. Forms, Classification and Distribution of the Misinformation and False Information

Forms and Classification of the False Information and Misinformation

Though the term "fake news" became popular in 2016, concepts of false information and misinformation are widely presented in the academic literature on economy, psychology, political science and informatics.[19]

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[19] It is possible to give the following sources as an example. The review of political false perceptions:

Flynn, D. J., Brendan Nyhan, and Jason Reifler. "The Nature and Origins of Misperceptions: Understanding False and Unsupported Beliefs about Politics," *Advances in Political Psychology,* Vol 38(S1), 2017, pp. 127-50. 27 October 2017. https://www.dartmouth.edu/~nyhan/nature-origins-misperceptions.pdf.
The impact of new information on political beliefs:

Berinsky, Adam J. "Rumors and Health Care Reform: Experiments in Political Misinformation," *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 47(2), 2017, pp. 241-62;

DiFonzo, Nicholas, and Prashant Bordia. (2007) *Rumor Psychology: Social and Organizational Approaches*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association;

Taber, Charles S. and Milton Lodge. "Motivated Skepticism in the Evaluation of Political Beliefs," *American Journal of Political Science,*" Vol. 50(3), 2006, pp. 755-69. 27 October 2017. https://www.unc.edu/~fbaum/teaching/articles/AJPS-2006-Taber.pdf.
The mechanisms of rumours distribution of hearings:

Friggeri, Adrien et al. "Rumour Cascades," *Proceedings of the Eighth International AAAI Conference on Weblogs and Social Media*, 2014. 27 October 2017. https://www.aaai.org/ocs/index.php/ICWSM/ICWSM14/paper/viewFile/8122/811.
The effects of exposures in mass media:

Bartels, Larry M. "Messages received: the political impact of media exposure," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 87(2), 1993, pp. 267-285; 27 October 2017. https://my.vanderbilt.edu/larrybartels/files/2011/12/Messages_received.pdf;

DellaVigna, Stefano and Ethan Kaplan. "The Fox News effect: media bias and voting," *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, Vol. 122(3), 2007, pp. 1187-1234;

Enikolopov, Ruben et al. "Media and political persuasion: evidence from Russia," *The American Economic Review*, Vol. 101(7), 2011, pp. 3253-3285. 27 October 2017. https://www.jstor.org/stable/41408737;

Gerber, Alan S. et al. "How large and long-lasting are the persuasive effects of televised campaign ads? Results from a randomized field experiment," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 105(1), 2011, pp. 135-150; 27 October 2017. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/231827675_How_Large_and_Long-Lasting_Are_the_Persuasive_Effects_of_Televised_Campaign_Ads;

Hunt Allcott and Matthew Gentzkow, researchers at Stanford University, have defined fake news as "news articles that are intentionally and verifiably false", particularly with political implications,[20] and especially those, that gain "enormous traction" in the popular imagination.[21]

Fake news must be differentiated from other types of false information or misinformation. One can define the following forms of such information;

1) unintentional reporting of mistakes;
2) satire as a news story that has purposefully false content, is financially motivated, and is not intended by its author to deceive readers;
3) trolling is presenting news or information that has biased or fake content, is motivated by an attempt to get personal humor value, and is intended by its author to deceive the reader;
4) rumors that do not originate from a particular news article;
5) false statements by politicians;
6) reports that are slanted or misleading but not outright false;
7) disinformation;
8) active measures;

DellaVigna, Stefano and Matthew Gentzkow. "*Persuasion: empirical evidence*," *Annual Review of Economics*, Vol. 2(1), 2010, pp. 643-669. 27 October 2017. http://www.nber.org/papers/w15298.

The ideological segregation in consumption of news:

Bakshy, Eytan et al. "Exposure to ideologically diverse news and opinion on Facebook," *Science*, Vol. 348(6239), 2015, pp. 1130-1132. 27 October 2017. http://education.biu.ac.il/files/education/shared/science-2015-bakshy-1130-2.pdf;

Gentzkow, Matthew and Jesse M. Shapiro. "Ideological segregation online and offline," *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, Vol. 126(4), 2011, pp. 1799-1839. 27 October 2017. http://www.nber.org/papers/w15916;

Flaxman, Seth et al. "Filter bubbles, echo chambers, and online news consumption," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 80(1), 2016, pp. 298-320. 27 October 2017. https://5harad.com/papers/bubbles.pdf.

[20] Allcott and Gentzkow, *Social Media and Fake News in the 2016 Election*, p. 4.
[21] CBS News. "What's 'Fake News?' 60 Minutes Producers Investigate," 26 March 2017. 27 October 2017. https://www.cbsnews.com/news/whats-fake-news-60-minutes-producers-investigate/.

9) conspiracy theories (these are, by definition, difficult to verify as true or false, and they are typically originated by people who believe them to be true).

Disinformation. Disinformation is not a new phenomenon and extensive literature exists, which describes and critically investigates its methods. Disinformation was widely used by both superpowers for propaganda purposes in order to mobilize society and influence the public opinion during the Cold War. Lothar Metzel from the CIA defines disinformation (or *dezinformatsiya)*, as "operations aiming at pollution of the opinion-making processes in the West," a crucial component of which is "producing a lack of faith in traditional media."[22]

Unlike the majority of other types of false information and misinformation, disinformation is "the question of truth"[23] and aims at "intentional deception."[24] Some researchers expand this definition as, "'misinformation' can be simply defined as false, mistaken, or misleading information, 'disinformation' entails the distribution, assertion, or dissemination of false, mistaken, or misleading information in an intentional, deliberate, or purposeful effort to mislead, deceive or confuse."[25] As a result, the neutralization of disinformation appears extremely problematic as its purpose is changing the perception of audience.

With the formation of the information ecosystem it became "easier for people to create and disseminate inaccurate and misleading information," disinformation expanded its opportunities and efficiency.[26] In the 21st century, the state and non-state actors apply disinformation methods to solve a wide range of tasks from the destabilization of the society, to the solving of

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[22] Dornan, *Dezinformatsiya.*
[23] Stahl, Bernd Carsten. "On the Difference or Equality of Information, Misinformation, and Disinformation: A Critical Research Perspective," *Informing Science Journal*, Vol. 9, 2006, pp. 83-96. 27 October 2017. http://inform.nu/Articles/Vol9/v9p083-096 Stahl65.pdf.
[24] Fallis, *What Is Disinformation.*
[25] Fetzer, James H. "Disinformation: The Use of False Information," *Minds and Machines*, Vol. 14(2), 2004, pp. 231-240.
[26] Fallis, *What Is Disinformation.*

important tasks in regional and geopolitical arenas. Peter Pomerantsev and Michael Weiss, investigating the Russian campaigns for disinformation two years before the American presidential elections of 2016, claimed that the western countries were vulnerable to the threats of the information ecosystem. Russia "weaponized" disinformation and "the West has no institutional or analytical tools to deal with it."[27] "Today's Kremlin … might perhaps be viewed as an avant-garde of malevolent globalization. The methods it pursues will be taken up by others."[28]

Active measures. The emergence of the information ecosystem allowed Russia to adapt the Soviet strategy of active measures in order to carry out propaganda campaigns. And, if during the Cold War the USSR, overcoming the countermeasures of the counterintelligence, had to develop a network of agents of influence in the West, leaning on the communist parties and the left movements, then today the possibilities of the information ecosystem provides a cheap and effective access to the audience of the Western countries. According to a number of researchers, since the end of 2014 Russia developed and operates the most effective campaign of influence in the world history by relying on the updated strategy of active measures[29] through "the force of politics as opposed to the politics of force."[30]

How can the mass media and the other actors of the information ecosystem resist the propaganda methods relying on the strategy of active measures, disinformation and other types of false information and misin-

27 Pomerantsev, Peter and Michael Weiss. "The Menace of Unreality: How the Kremlin Weaponizes Information, Culture and Money." *The Interpreter*, Institute of Modern Russia. November 22, 2014. 27 October 2017. https://www.stratcomcoe.org/peter-pomerantsev-michael-weiss-menace-unreality-how-kremlin-weaponizes-information-culture-and.

28 Ibid.

29 Frankovic, Kathy. "Americans and Trump part ways over Russia," *YouGov*, December 14, 2016. 27 October 2017. https://today.yougov.com/news/2016/12/14/americans-and-trump-part-ways-over-russia/.

30 U.S. Information Agency. *Soviet Active Measures in the "Post-Cold War" Era 1988-1991*. U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Appropriations, June 1992. 27 October 2017. http://intellit.muskingum.edu/russia_folder/pcw_era/exec_sum.htm.

formation? To answer that question it is necessary to pay attention to the psychology and the mechanisms of the distribution of false information and misinformation.

The Distribution of False Information and Misinformation

The sovereign states and politically motivated organizations long remained almost the only founders and distributors of the false information and misinformation. Historical research shows that the distribution of false information and misinformation rarely happens because of misunderstandings, but is a result of organized and strategic campaigns pursuing political or military aims. For example, Great Britain carried out an effective propaganda campaign around the alleged German crimes during World War I to mobilize the internal and global public opinion against Germany. However, its efforts returned as a boomerang during World War II, when the memories of this campaign resulted in public scepticism towards the messages of carnages in Nazi Germany.[31]

The features of the information ecosystem, which make it attractive, include the ease of division of the interested content with other users (sharing), the creation and the breakage of social communications, and the facilitation of manipulation from the concerned parties. Thus, various tools, including the distribution of false information and misinformation are used.[32]

The mechanisms of distribution of the false information and misinformation are connected with the physiological and psychological restrictions of a person. Even if the users prefer to share the verified information, the limitation of attention and the information overdose interfere with the distinction of the qualitative content on the systemic level. As a result, the false information or misinformation can extend virally, using the same mechanisms and opportunities, as the verified information.

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[31] *Ibid.*
[32] Menczer, F. "The spread of misinformation in social media," in *Proceedings of the 25th International Conference Companion on World Wide Web*, International World Wide Web Conferences Steering Committee, 2016, pp. 717-717.

Polarization and filter bubbles. Research shows a strong correlation between the polarization of the opinion and the charges of distribution of "fake news" in social media and networks, when the users of a network mark any information or sources which they do not support as "fake".[33] The increase in the polarization for a long time leads to a division of the social group into two subgroups adhering to the clashing and antagonistic points of view on a subject.[34]

Online discussions impact the polarization of opinions and the segregation in social media and networks, which leads to the isolation of people with various points of view into homogeneous "echo chambers".[35] Such "filter bubbles", which are a result of the principles of the functioning of the social media and networks, limit the possibilities of the users to access ideologically diverse content and causes an increasing concern.[36] The polarized and segregated structure of the social media and networks is a result of the operation of the two main mechanisms of the sharing – the social influence and the unfriending, - creates ideal conditions for selective influence.[37] The high connectivity of the filter bubbles allows the content to extend effectively and quickly when each user receives the very same content from many sources.[38] In such an environment the false information and misinformation have high chances of becoming viral.

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[33] Oremus, Will. "Stop Calling Everything 'Fake News,'" *Slate Magazine*, December 6, 2016. 27 October 2017. http://www.slate.com/articles/technology/technology /2016/12/stop_calling_everything_fake_news.html.

[34] Sunstein, Cass R. "Law of Group Polarization," *Journal of Political Philosophy*, Vol. 10(2), 2002, pp. 175-195. 27 October 2017. http://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/cgi/ viewcontent.cgi?article=1541&context=law_and_economics.

[35] Flaxman, *Filter bubbles, echo chambers, and online news consumption*. 27 October 2017. https://5harad.com/papers/bubbles.pdf.

[36] Lazer, David. "The rise of the social algorithm," *Science*, Vol. 348(6239), 2015, pp. 1090-1091. 27 October 2017. http://education.biu.ac.il/files/education/shared /science-2015-lazer-1090-1.pdf.

[37] Flaxman, *Filter bubbles, echo chambers, and online news consumption*.

[38] Conover, M. et al. "Partisan asymmetries in online political activity," *EPJ Data Science*, Vol. 1(6), 2012. 27 October 2017. https://epjdatascience.springeropen.com/articles /10.1140/epjds6.

Bots. The mechanisms of distribution of the false information and misinformation use special programs (bots), which control the content or the accounts in an ecosystem. Bots facilitate and make the management of the network activity, the exploitation of the weakest points connected with the cognitive and social shifts of the user, more effective. Research shows that the bots can be quite influential.[39] They can create a visibility of an active exchange of content, controlling the attention of influential users and inducing them to share the false information and misinformation.[40]

Psychology of a fake news. The decision-making of a person is substantially carried out not on the basis of individual rationality, but on the general narrative of a social group.[41] As a result, a person's perception of verified, false or misinformation depends not so much on the personal rational assessment, but the heuristics and social processes. First of all, it should be noted that the reliability of a source has a deep impact on the social interpretation of information.[42] People trust the information given by known or familiar sources, adhering to a similar outlook and confirming their own views more. In other words, people are inclined to perceive the information non-critically, and can be considered asymmetric devices that correct the arriving information based on their political preferences.[43]

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[39] Ferrara, E., et al. "The rise of social bots," *Communication of the ACM*, Vol. 59(7), 2016 pp. 96-104. 27 October 2017. https://cacm.acm.org/magazines/2016/7/204021-the-rise-of-social-bots/fulltext.

[40] Ratkiewicz, J., et al. "Detecting and tracking political abuse in social media," in Processing of 5th International AAAI Conference on Weblogs and Social Media, July 2011. 27 October 2017. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/221297912_Detecting_and_Tracking_Political_Abuse_in_Social_Media.

[41] Sloman, S., and Fernbach P. *The Knowledge Illusion: Why We Never Think Alone.* Riverhead Books, March 2017.

[42] Swire, B., et al. "Processing political misinformation: comprehending the Trump phenomenon," *Royal Society Open Science*, Vol. 4(3), 160802, March 2017. 27 October 2017. http://rsos.royalsocietypublishing.org/content/4/3/160802;
Baum, M.A. and Groeling T. "Shot by the messenger: Partisan cues and public opinion regarding national security and war, *Political Behavior* Vol. 31(2), 2009, pp. 157-186. 27 October 2017. https://sites.hks.harvard.edu/fs/mbaum/documents/ShotByThe Messenger_POBH.pdf.

[43] Sunstein, Cass R., et al. "How People Update Beliefs about Climate Change: Good News and Bad News," *Cornell Law Review*, Vol. 102, 2017, pp.1431-1444 27 October 2017. http://cornelllawreview.org/files/2017/10/Sunsteinetal.final_.pdf.

The reaction to false information or misinformation is also hard and ambiguous, when its subsequent adjustment does not necessarily change the beliefs of people.[44] Susceptibility to the influence of false information during a long period of time forms a distorted perception and a stable internal model of the world. The correction of the model on the basis of new information appears to be an unstable process and is a subject of remission. A more stable factor, that influences the perception of information, is the social pressure - when the behaviour of the people depends on the estimates of the public and is dictated by the aspiration to save the reputation. The problem of the influence of the false information or misinformation is inseparable from the problems of perception, compelling to spend considerable amounts of effort and resources to understand how alternative and false perceptions are formed and the ways they influence the political relations.[45]

3. Weaponization of False Information and Misinformation. Methods of Counteraction to the False Information and Misinformation

Weaponization of False Information and Misinformation

The emergence of the information ecosystem, the economic and financial uncertainty and instability create the prerequisites for the use of information in ways which can be destructive on a global scale. Under conditions of amplifying confrontation in the geopolitical arena, that is becoming more and more complicated, "both elite and public opinion has proved ill-prepared about how to react to policy change", as a result, "state propaganda agencies step in the breach, making...the 'weaponization of information' a central facet of international conflict."[46]

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[44] Nyhan, B. and Reifler, J. "When corrections fail: The persistence of political misperceptions," *Political Behavior*, Vol. 32(2), 2010, pp. 303–330. 27 October 2017. https://www.dartmouth.edu/~nyhan/nyhan-reifler.pdf.

[45] Nyhan and Reifler, *When corrections fail*.

[46] MacFarquhar, Neil. "A Powerful Russian Weapon: The Spread Of False Stories," *New York Times*, August 28, 2016. 27 October 2017. https://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/29/world/europe/russia-sweden-disinformation.html.

Weaponization of information means that the actions of the state and non-state actors aim to have an impact on and change the public perception, and the agenda concerning any crisis, problem or the countries and the people. The weaponization of the information allows the ability and the skill of the state and non-state actors to "use the tools of a free society, including the media and social media, to distort reality, and defend the indefensible," in a complex, creative and rather cheap way, which was not available in the years of the Cold War.[47]

The weaponization of the information pursues two aims. The first is to destroy the narratives of the internal and external opponents, challenging the very basis of their existence. The second is to mobilize its own citizens and supporters, having the public energy and attention directed to support the steps taken by the state. Today practically every politician, public official, and national leader strikes blows using Twitter, and the war of the hashtags attracts attention of the world community. Public moods are created and directed, also by using viral contents, the name (viral) of which supposes the possibility of losing control over the processes.[48]

Weaponization of information by ISIS. When thinking about the ways in which the weaponized information and narratives are used to involve people around the globe in a remote conflict, one can consider the example of ISIS, as the efficiency of its propaganda machine looks quite frightening. The group did not invent anything new in the propaganda methods, but it adapted the tested strategies and tactics to the global world and the information ecosystem.

The research of 1300 propaganda videos of ISIS by Javier Lesaca showed that 20 percent of the propagandist production of ISIS was directly inspired by Western entertainment. Destiny sometimes is full of irony, and

[47] Paul, Christopher and William Courtney. (2016) "Russian Propaganda Is Pervasive, And America Is Behind The Power Curve In Countering It." Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation. 27 October 2017. https://www.rand.org/blog/2016/09/russian-propaganda-is-pervasive-and-america-is-behind.html.

[48] Brooking T. Emerson and P. W. Singer. "War Goes Viral: How social media is being weaponized across the world," *The Atlantic*, November 2016. 27 October 2017. https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2016/11/war-goes-viral/501125/.

the terrorist group, which arose from Al-Qaeda in Iraq, copies in its clips the shots from the movie of Clint Eastwood devoted to an American soldier fighting against Al-Qaeda in Iraq. A careful audio-visual study of the content from ISIS allows to judge the general tendencies of the war in the information ecosystem. It is always based on symbols and images, historical references, and memoirs united into weaponized narratives.[49]

Qatar crisis. The Qatar crisis shows how false information and misinformation can be used for the escalation of a diplomatic crisis or even a retraction into a war. The crisis began on May 23, when the statements attributed to the Emir of Qatar Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad al-Thani started being distributed in social media and networks. They appeared on Qatar News Agency – the main state mass media, working for the outside world. Later, it became known that 20 percent of the pages that sent hashtags "Anti-Qatar" on Twitter, were bots.

Statements were concerning the extremely sensitive problems for the Arab world – Iran and HAMAS, and caused an immediate and rigid reaction from Saudi Arabia, the members of the Gulf Cooperation Council and the other Arab countries. Though Qatar denied the statements, reporting about a hacker attack of the state mass media, they were ignored by the mass media of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. On June 7, the FBI reported that there were Russian hackers behind the attack of the Qatar News Agency and the statements attributed to the Qatar Emir were false. Nevertheless, the situation continued to be heated which compelled Turkey to give direct military support by adopting a bill which was quickly carried out through parliament and allowed to deploy increment troops in Qatar.[50]

Reaction of the Authoritative States to the Wars in the Information Ecosystem

The publications about the problem can give the impression that the democratic states are more vulnerable to the weaponized information. There

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[49] Ibid.
[50] Unver H. Akin. "Can Fake News Lead to War? What the Gulf Crisis Tell Us," *War on the Rocks*, June 13, 2017. 27 October 2017. https://warontherocks.com/2017/06/can-fake-news-lead-to-war-what-the-gulf-crisis-tells-us/.

are opinions that the threats of the information ecosystem make the democratic policy "impossible" and even endanger the democracy. However, there is not enough research referring the influence of the weaponized information on the authoritarian regimes.

The above mentioned Qatar crisis allows to speak about a much wider vulnerability of such regimes to the attacks in the information ecosystem. And, if in free political systems the restriction of information is a more complex challenge than in an authoritative one, the quantity and diversity of actors which could be involved in the confrontation in an ecosystem is qualitatively less in the latter. Although the democratic states are really vulnerable to the strategic information campaigns, the diversity of sources, the opportunities to check the information and so forth; democracies do create the necessary prerequisites for the adaptation and the preparation of a response, while using the abilities and resources of not only the states, but also of the society. Activity on social media and networks became a part of the political culture of the democratic states, and the information ecosystem – the tool of public policy. Authoritarian regimes do not possess such an asset.[51]

The situation in the authoritative countries is aggravated by the structuring of the policy around an authoritative leader or a narrow circle of politicians who can be excessively emotional during decision-making. The cult of the leader, that is particular to authoritarian regimes, creates the rich soil for excessive emotional reaction to the external crises. And the danger grows exponentially with the increase in numbers of the authoritative states involved in the crisis.

In this case, the external forces, whether it be the state or non-state actors, can promote the crisis escalation rather easily using the instruments of war in the information ecosystem. Under conditions with a lack of the necessary infrastructure for counteraction, a mature civil society and a free press, the danger of the crisis sliding into an armed conflict is incomparably higher in authoritarian regimes, than in the democratic states.

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[51] Ibid.

The higher vulnerability of authoritarian regimes to attacks in the information ecosystem during the crises provides leaders with two alternatives;
- to create mechanisms of self-restrictions and self-control to interfere with the emotional reaction, which is extremely doubtful, considering the authoritarianism psychology; or
- to start adapting to the realities of the ecosystem and the new aspects of world politics, giving the civil society a chance to form and create mechanisms of social control of the information.[52]

In order to get a chance to adapt to the information ecosystem, the countries, though it sounds paradoxical, will have to open and not be closed in the face of challenges and threats. A response has to be the inclusion of technological expert knowledge in the structure of the government and political institutions, and also the contribution to form a civil society and its instruments of control over socially significant information. Such tools are extremely painful for authoritarian regimes, but, nevertheless, offer reliable mechanisms of control and containment which cannot be provided by the governmental bodies in conditions with high rates of crisis escalation.

Methods of Counteraction to False Information and Misinformation

The comprehension of the intentions behind a certain action is an extremely complex problem. The majority of theories agree that the psychological state of a person has a great influence on the formation of intentions. The attempts to comprehend the formation of intentions not as a problem of a person, but as a social phenomenon in political-military decision-making by a group of people, institutions, leads to the separation of the cognitive domain of war, within which these processes are considered.[53]

Another problem is the use of both truthful and false information and misinformation within one narrative. The considered above disinformation methods, the strategy of active measures and other forms of propaganda intentionally create a narrative, the stability and power of which relies on

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[52] Ibid.
[53] Арзуманян Р.В. (2012). *Кромка хаоса: Парадигма нелинейности и среда безопасности 21 века.* М.: ИД «Регнум», Серия «Selecta XIX».

the use of mixed information. As a result, there is a situation when some or even the majority of elements of a narrative are right; however, a narrative as whole, as well as the ways of its representation in an ecosystem mislead and lead to false perceptions and conclusions.[54]

One can speak of about four ways of the counteraction and restriction of the influence of the false information and misinformation in an ecosystem; legislative and other of the state's activities;
- exploitation of the market mechanisms;
- exploitation of the structures and functions (architecture) of the information ecosystem; and
- adaptation of the social institutes and norms.

The state operates through violence or the threat of sanctions and its decisions have an exclusive character and are obligatory. Some researchers state against direct intervention of the state in the information ecosystem. The state decisions are undesirable as they are based on experimental mechanisms which did not pass broad approbation and potentially have unpredictable collateral effects. Nevertheless, it is true for all other ways of regulation of the information ecosystem too, which is complex and unpredictable by the nature of the system.

The decisions based on market mechanisms act through the information products delivered to the market, advertising and other services. There were already reports stating that social media and networks, the industry of web searching, are urged to take steps to reduce the distribution of false information and misinformation in the search results.

The structure and function of the information ecosystem, which are invisible and not controllable by the users, give an opportunity to advance a certain system of values and to suppress the others, protecting the corporate or national interests. The knowledge of the architecture of the ecosystem, the algorithms of its functioning and its vulnerable points can be used by

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[54] Verstraete, Mark et al. "Identifying and Countering fake news", University of Arizona, James E. Rogers College of Law, August 1, 2017. 27 October 2017. https://andyblackassociates.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/fakenewsfinal.pdf.

the advanced users, corporations, social and political groups for the extraction of financial or political benefit. According to Sir Tim Berners-Lee, the inventor of the World Wide Web, the organizations wishing to "game the system to spread misinformation for financial or political gain",[55] could use the knowledge of the algorithms for their own purposes.

The social norms within social institutes limit the behaviour of people through encouragement and/or rendering pressure, with the purpose of forcing them to conform to certain standards. Social institutes and norms structure how the members of the society communicate with each other, which can be used to indirectly regulate the false information and misinformation.[56]

Nevertheless, it is necessary to realize that all measures offered above are necessary, but are not sufficient to speak about overcoming the challenges of false information and misinformation in the ecosystem. Moreover, the formation of an exhaustive response to such challenges is impossible when taking into account that the false information and misinformation are only elements of a broad problem. The person receives information from an ecosystem not in an isolated manner, but within some narratives within which it is perceived, comprehended and interpreted. The problem of the false information and misinformation is a part of a broader problem of the weaponized narratives.

4. The Principles, Strategy of Application and Counteraction by the Weaponized Narratives

Weaponized Narratives

For the most part, the information that people face every day is presented in the form of a story or a narrative. People are creatures that tell stories and look for patterns and meanings allowing them to explain and to restrain chaos in themselves, society and the objective reality. The person

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55 Lee, *Three Challenges for the Web, According to its Inventor.*
56 Shiffrin, Seana Valentine. (2014). *Speech Matters: On Lying, Morality, and the Law.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

cannot take the absence of a sense and of a meaning and has an internal requirement to create narratives. The ability to weaponize the narratives turns them into dangerous weapons of extraordinary power. Such weapons attack the world's perception and ability to sense, the myths and legends of the society, the group identity and criteria that allow to distinguish between self and "others."[57] Throughout the world's history, the religious leaders, philosophers, politicians considered narratives a powerful tool to change the beliefs and behaviour of the audience.[58]

All the institutions of the society, – from the government and political parties to the organizations and corporations, – continuously develop and support their own narratives called to overshadow the contradictions, to structure debates and to make the interests of the institutions acceptable for the society.[59] By bringing the social groups and the whole society to a condition where they cease to trust their own narratives, the words of the spiritual and political leaders, the mass media, the scientific and moral authorities, you gain an impact on the society similar to the impact of a traditional intervention. The history shows that the confrontation of narratives is a natural context of world history and can lead to a victory in centenary wars, which belongs to the side that was able to create and tell the most convincing stories.[60]

The emerging of post-secular age and narratives problem. The system of the nation-states is based on the principles of applied rationality, the

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[57] Garreau, Joel. (2017). "Attacking Who We Are as Humans," in Brad Allenby and Joel Garreau (Eds.) *Weaponized Narrative: The New Battlespace.* Center on the Future War, Washington DC: The Weaponized Narrative Initiative, pp. 10-14. 27 October 2017. https://weaponizednarrative.asu.edu/publications/weaponized-narrative-new-battlespace-0.

[58] Green, M. C. and Brock, T. C. (2002). "In the mind's eye: Transportation-imagery model of narrative persuasion," in M. C. Green, J. J. Strange, & T. C. Brock (eds.). *Narrative impact: Social and cognitive foundations.* Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, pp. 315-342.

[59] Ruston, Scott. (2017). "Defending: Awareness and Protection," in Brad Allenby and Joel Garreau (Eds.) *Weaponized Narrative: The New Battlespace.* Center on the Future War, Washington DC: The Weaponized Narrative Initiative, pp. 36-40. 27 October 2017. https://weaponizednarrative.asu.edu/publications/weaponized-narrative-new-battlespace-0.

[60] Garreau, *Attacking Who We Are as Humans.*

balance of power, human rights and the freedoms of the Modern age. The emergence of post-secular ages made the Westphalian system vulnerable to already emerged and future challenges and threats.[61] The world turns to the state of "a long disorder" and an explosive mix of religions, ideologies, clans, governments, armed groups of the new Middle Ages more and more.[62] The new age is not a consequence of the inefficiency of the previous, rather it is the contrary. Only due to the success of the Modern and the postmodern, when scientific forms of knowledge and technology were in focus, allowed to achieve present levels of societal developments and complexity.

After the Modern and postmodern, came an age where the main characteristics were complexity and unpredictability, which gives the narrative an advantage over the applied rationality and the policy that appeals to the facts and knowledge. The commitment to the greater state and social identities weakens in such conditions, the geopolitical arena and the security environment become more complex while the operating power centres and institutions slide off to the simplified narrative.

What is going on is not something new and the same took place when the Westphalian system was being formed, when the secularization of the political system and the state were considered catastrophic by the Catholic Church and the traditional empires. One can say with a great deal of confidence that currently there is a similar turning point. The understanding of the coming (approaching) times, gives hope for a rather quiet transition from a postmodern to more complex and less ordered age and its values.[63]

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[61] Арзуманян Р.В. Центры власти в 21 веке. Взаимоотношения между политическим и религиозным на современном этапе. – М.: АНО ЦСОиП, 2015. – 136 с. (Новая стратегия, 5).

[62] McFate, Sean. (2014). *The Modern Mercenary.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 74.

[63] Allenby, Brad. (2017). "The End of Enlightenment 1.0: Why Weaponized Narrative Won't Go Away," in Brad Allenby and Joel Garreau (Eds.) *Weaponized Narrative: The New Battlespace.* Center on the Future War, Washington DC: The Weaponized Narrative Initiative, pp. 15-19. 27 October 2017. https://weaponizednarrative.asu.edu/publications/weaponized-narrative-new-battlespace-0.

Traditional vs. weaponized narratives. What is the difference between the weaponized narratives and the traditional ones? The fundamental principle of psychology proceeds from the fact that people comprehend themselves in terms of narratives when the future is perceived as a continuation of still unfinished stories. Society perceives and comprehends itself and its identity through the stories that connect in a system of narratives (a landscape of narratives), the structure of which provides patterns for the design of the future, understanding of other societies and so forth.[64]

If the new stories that appear in the landscape of the narratives of the society are perceived and are estimated based on the formed patterns, then how do the weaponized narratives attack its identity and collective will? The first method is reduced to the attempts to "flood" the landscape of the narratives with alternative patterns. The second strives to enter numerous new components (stories, events, symbols and signs) into the existing narratives, which tear up the integrity of the landscape and destroy the coherence of the system of the narratives. The breach of trust towards the fundamental narratives of the society results in a corrosion of the public identity, faith in the collective will and divided values.[65]

Methods of Release and Strategy of Weaponized Narratives

Methods of the release of the weaponized narratives. The weaponized narratives can be used tactically, as part of the military or geopolitical conflict, or strategically, as a method of weakening, neutralizing and winning over the civilization, the state or the organization. The attack towards the fundamental narratives of the society can reduce it to simpler and even primitive narratives, concentrating on the distinction of "aliens" that must be attacked.[66] Swiss historian Jacob Burckhardt called "terrible simplifiers," the demagogues who seek power by exploiting the frustration of the society and making appealing but "terribly simplified" and, ultimately, deceitful promises.[67]

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[64]   Ruston, *Defending: Awareness and Protection.*
[65]   Ibid.
[66]   Garreau, *Attacking Who We Are as Humans.*
[67]   Burckhardt, Jacob. (1999). *The Greeks and Greek Civilization.* New York, NY: St. Martin's.

Thus, the weaponized narrative becomes a response to the globalization and emergence of the information ecosystem. Weaponized narratives give the person and the society the emotional confidence that relies on clear, rational understanding of the events by offering a simplified view on the world that is becoming more and more complex. When in the hands of professionals, strong emotions like anger and fear, used as a part of weaponized narratives, become a unique form of soft power capable of influencing the behaviour of the opponent, limiting and destroying the functionality of his social institutes and systems. Moreover, the validity of the information plays a secondary role. Contrary to popular belief, the truth not necessarily prevails when it faces weaponized narratives.

The use of weaponized narratives leads to regimes which can be called soft authoritarianism. And, unlike classical authoritarianism which demands the deployment of the oppressive power of the State and the providing of un-limited control over the information, soft authoritarianism can achieve the necessary results by less violent and expensive methods and without the need of deployment of the broad oppressive power apparatus of the traditional authoritarianism.[68]

Methods of neutralization of hostile narratives. The neutralization of the hostile narratives has to include two types of countermeasures. The first is similar to the development and use of an antidote allowing the society to resist the sharp phase of the attack. However, such methods have to be supplemented with measures that increase the resilience of the immune system of the society, allowing it to resist the "pathogenic" narratives. Measures of the first type allow the dangerous destruction of a landscape of narratives of the society to stop while the second - to prepare the society for the possible attacks through strengthening of the resilience and increasing the effectiveness of the national security system. And if the methods of the first type are functions of the classified units of strategic

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[68] Allenby, Brad and Joel Garreau. (2017). "Weaponized Narrative Is the New Battlespace: And the U.S. is in the unaccustomed position of being seriously behind its adversaries," in Brad Allenby and Joel Garreau (Eds.) *Weaponized Narrative: The New Battlespace.* Center on the Future War, Washington DC: The Weaponized Narrative Initiative, pp. 5-9. 27 October 2017. https://weaponizednarrative.asu.edu/publications/weaponized-narrative-new-battlespace-0.

communication, information and psi-operations in the military and the national security system, the intelligence services, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, etc., the methods of the second are realized with the support of the social institutes of the society.[69]

Strategies of weaponized narratives. The emergence of the nuclear weapon after World War II demanded to develop a strategy, which would operate with the weapon of an earlier inconceivable power. In the 21st century, the unprecedented power of the weaponized narrative also demands to develop appropriate strategies. And as it is impossible to compare the striking ability of natural anthrax to the strains developed as a biological weapon, the same way the natural narrative cannot be compared with the weaponized one developed to defeat the reasoning and will of a person and the cognitive domain of the society.[70]

The weaponized narrative combines the achievements of the cognitive neuroscience, the theory of communications, and the achievements of the information technologies. One can speak of six factors which make such narratives so effective: vector, vulnerability, virulence, scope, speed, and synergy.[71]

The Vector is urged to emphasize the reach of the content in an ecosystem. If the physical weapon demands delivery systems and, often, extensive logistics, then the information in an ecosystem is distributed, copied and multiplied practically without restrictions, possessing a global "blast radius."

Vulnerability emphasizes the ability of the weaponized narratives to overcome the resistance of the traditional narratives of the society through a

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[69] Ruston, Scott. (2017). "Defending: Awareness and Protection," in Brad Allenby and Joel Garreau (Eds.) *Weaponized Narrative: The New Battlespace.* Center on the Future War, Washington DC: The Weaponized Narrative Initiative, pp. 36-40. 27 October 2017. https://weaponizednarrative.asu.edu/publications/weaponized-narrative-new-battlespace-0.

[70] Herrmann, Jon. "Nine Links in the Chain: The Weaponized Narrative, Sun Tzu, and the Essence of War," *The Bridge*, July 7, 2017. 27 October 2017. https://thestrategybridge.org/the-bridge/2017/7/27/nine-links-in-the-chain-the-weaponized-narrative-sun-tzu-and-the-essence-of-war.

[71] Ibid.

series of organized serial attack-events. Eventually, the process similar to the way the stresses, pathogenic microbes and viruses are able to lower the immunity of an organism to an illness.

Virulence reflects the fact that the knowledge of cognitive weakness and the vulnerable points of the narratives of the society allows to develop attack methods, which are difficult to resist.

Scope is used to reflect a large number of actors that can be engaged in the organization of the attack of the cognitive domain of the society. The low cost of creation of actors in the information ecosystem allows to organize attacks in which millions of users and a network of bots participate.

Speed is necessary to emphasize the "rate of fire" in the information ecosystem. The weaponized false and misinformation can "flood" the cognitive domain of the attacked society within seconds and minutes, gaining virus character and apply the ideas, meanings and values necessary to an attacking party. A process, which can be compared to a flood caused by a fire hose.[72]

The Synergy means that all the above-mentioned factors, applied together or in some sequence, can be used to achieve a synergetic effect which is qualitatively strengthening the action of each one of them.
The weaponized narrative gives an advantage to the attacking party and differs from forms of propaganda of the old school the same way that the nuclear weapon differs from the conventional.[73] Nevertheless, the principles of the strategy of such narratives can be found in the treasury of strategic thought, for example, in the principles of war of Sun Tzu.

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[72] Paul, Chris and Miriam Matthews. (2016). "The Russian "Firehose of Falsehood" Propaganda Model," *Perspective*, Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation.

[73] Chessen, Matt. "Artificial intelligence chatbots will overwhelm human speech online; the rise of MADCOMs," *Medium*, March 16, 2017. 27 October 2017. https://medium.com/artificial-intelligence-policy-laws-and-ethics/artificial-intelligence-chatbots-will-overwhelm-human-speech-online-the-rise-of-madcoms-e007818f31a1.

5. South Caucasus Landscape of Narratives

The view of the South Caucasus from the point of view of the system of the narratives shows the uncertainty of this notion. It is possible to speak about the South Caucasus as a region only from the point of view of the regional security system that allows to preserve relative peace and stability of the communication and energy projects, but nothing more. Today there are no narratives on the South Caucasus, which would show a possibility of a joint coexistence and development of the people. In the South Caucasus there are no centripetal vectors, but obviously centrifugal ones are present when the people of the region perceive each other, at best, as neighbours going their own ways.

The second problem is reflected in the name of the region, when in cognitive domain of values and meanings it is attributed to the "Caucasus", which leads to challenges and problems. Whether there will be a landscape of narratives of the South Caucasus as a part of a broader "Unified Caucasus", which also includes the "North Caucasus" and the Caucasian republics of Russia. If this point of view is accepted, the formed landscape inevitably includes the Russian Empire, which structured the geographical, political and cultural space of the Caucasus for the last centuries, as the dominating center.

Thus, the attempts to comprehend the problem of the general landscape of narratives of the South Caucasus leads to the understanding of a deeper challenge, when it is impossible to draw a clear boundary of the region. Should the general landscape around the "Caucasus" to be built or expanded - capturing also the Caspian and Black seas? Or should the developed common landscape of narratives be even wider and guided by the Intermarium project?[74]

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[74] Umland, Andreas and Fedorenko Konstiantyn. "How to solve Ukraine's Security Dilemma? The Idea of an Intermarium Coalition in East-Central Europe," *War on the Rocks*, August 30, 2017. 27 October 2017. https://warontherocks.com/2017/08/how-to-solve-ukraines-security-dilemma-the-idea-of-an-intermarium-coalition-in-east-central-europe/.

Above the possibilities of creation of united narratives and a landscape where Europe or Russia act as a centre of gravity were considered. However, the South Caucasus has a historical and political memory connected with the Persian and Ottoman empires too, which gives the successors (Iran and Turkey) the right to include the region in their own narratives. It leads to challenges, which the people of South Caucasus have no right to wave away. Even more so, when taking into account the influence and the role of Iran in Azerbaijan, and the role of Turkey in Georgia.

Today the people of the South Caucasus develop national narratives which do not assume an inclusion in a common system of narratives of higher order and a common landscape.

Georgia seeks "to leave" the Caucasus and join United Europe alone. Such a breakthrough looks rather doubtful as Georgia was the centre of gravity around which the Russian Empire built the all-Caucasian narrative throughout the last centuries. The breakthrough to Europe is possible if Georgia, carrying on the traditions, remains the centre of gravity of the Caucasus and frames "the United Caucasus" of the 21st century within which it will be able to become a part of the Wider Europe. However the war of 2008, the gap with Abkhazia and South Ossetia postpones the possibility of implementation of such a project, which started to be studied in the 90s of the 20th Century, for indefinite time.

Azerbaijan, being a young multinational state, is at the stage of formation of its identity and national narratives, which are unstable. Azerbaijan declares the intention to become a part of a landscape of the narratives of Europe, Turkey, Iran, and the united Turkic space. Besides, it is necessary to take into account the commitment of the authoritarian regime in Azerbaijan to an extremely aggressive ideology and policy, an element of which is the open *armyanofobiya* as a form of Nazism. The aforementioned international experience shows that such regimes can be rather easily provoked to aggressive actions, which are undermining not only a security system, but are also breaking off the potential future general landscape of narratives of the people of the South Caucasus. The modern narratives of Azerbaijan deny the very right of existence of Armenia and the Armenian people in the region.

Armenia holds a special position in the region, possessing the developed narratives, focused on the restoration of the Armenian statehood on the Armenian Highland throughout centuries. Not the Caucasus, which is considered the periphery, but the Armenian Highland appears to be the centre of gravity of the Armenian narratives. A vector of the Armenian narratives, based on the South Caucasus, is directed from the Caucasus to the Armenian Highland which has to become a part of the United European landscape again. Besides, the narratives of the ancient civilizations and nations of the Middle East are being restored into the European landscape of narratives along with the Armenian Highland, which, together, form the cradle of the unified European civilization. Initiatives to unite the narratives of the ancient nations of the Middle East are already unfolding. The Armenian landscape of narratives in the 21st century is not exclusive, but inclusive.

The Armenian people already managed to build the landscape of national narratives uniting various Christian faiths. At the present time there is an intensive debate on how the parts of the Armenian people belonging to Islamic culture have to be considered within the general Armenian narrative, how the Hamshen Armenians, and the, so-called crypto-Armenians, living in the territory of Turkey, could become elements of the general Armenian landscape of narratives.

In Armenian-centric system of narratives the "Caucasus" and the "South Caucasus" are rather interpreted within the expanded Intermarium project. There is a question. Can the Armenian culture develop a common language of notions, meanings and sense which would be accepted by other people of the region? Are there positive examples of creation of a general cultural platform in the past, which are giving hope for success of such a construction in the 21st century? From this point of view the legacy of Sergei Parajanov, who created a language uniting various cultures and nations, is of interest. The great director tells stories and legends of various cultures and nations, he created narratives, which were accepted and recognized by representatives of these cultures. It is enough to remember such works as "Andriesh" (Moldova), "Shadows of forgotten ancestors" (Ukraine), "The Color of Pomegranates" (Armenia), "The legend of Suram Fortress" (Georgia) "Ashik-Kerib" (Azerbaijan). Parajanov's art is certainly a unique phenomenon of an ingenious master who was born and grew up in Tbilisi

and was able to connect something that many still find to be unjoinable and even antagonistic.

Yes, he based it on the Armenian culture; however, the synthetic art-language of images and symbols that he created is understood and native not only to the Armenian, but also the European culture in general. Parajanov's view of the Caucasus and wider Intermarium is the European view of the reality, which locates at the intersection of various worlds. Parajanov's view is a view of a European and a possibility of the projection and designing of the Caucasus, the Armenian Highland and the Intermarium in terms, concepts and symbols of the European thinking and culture. Parajanov's legacy shows that the United Caucasus, and a wider Intermarium are possible. We have hope, but the preparation of a response to such a challenge requires efforts of absolutely another scale and scope.

PART VI: EPILOGUE

Epilogue

Frederic Labarre

The 16th RSSC SG workshop resumed the original format of conferencing because the group had chosen to explore the problem of information and insecurity in the South Caucasus, in the context of the phenomenon of fake news. This provided rich discussions, and intense interest from the participants, which the reader can appreciate by the mere size of this publication (the last such comparable volume was that of the proceedings of the November 2013 workshop entitled "What Kind of Sovereignty? Examining Alternative Governance Methods in the South Caucasus").[1]

While this workshop followed on the heels of the "Media is the Message" workshop of two years' prior, it aimed to answer this single question; should we, or should we not leverage the current phenomenon of fake news in favour of peace? The answer has been unequivocally "no." Perhaps this is not surprising. News fakery is (or seems) so prevalent these days that not only would lying to obtain a peace better than a mere frozen conflict be counter-productive, it would also remove legitimacy to the peace-makers. Besides, the narrative that would have been patiently built might not be believed. In other words, there is no point in lying any more than there is a point in telling the truth in the current context. This poses special problems to the challenge of unifying the South Caucasus under a single strategic identity.

One of those problems is created by the accelerating geopolitical shifts caused by the loss of authority of the United States globally, and the vacuum thus created in regions under dispute, such as the South Caucasus. The tensions that are arising threaten to fragment the post-World War II order (admittedly, it requires extensive reform and revision, but that is for another workshop, perhaps the next one). From this fragmentation may come

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[1] Ernst. M. Felberbauer and Frederic Labarre, eds. *What Kind of Sovereignty? Examining Alternative Governance Methods in the South Caucasus*. Study Group Information 3/2014. Vienna: National Defence Academy, February 2014.

severe upheavals which the countries of the South Caucasus (however defined) will be ill-equipped to meet, unless they meet them in unison? Perhaps then the reality will be plain to see for all concerned. One therefore hopes that there will still be time to react appropriately, if security challenges emerge unequivocally.

Because the Study Group has had the wisdom to call lying evil, we must therefore find ways to reverse the trend of disbelief in public opinion, as well as the trend of fakery in the media. This is a challenge which the RSSC SG is not well equipped to address. For one, this Study Group workshop was supposed to have experts in the field of psychology who were unfortunately unavailable to inform us on how electronic media and the way in which it is presented, including social media, affect our psychology and biology. Had this point been made, the urgency of finding alternative ways to correctly obtaining information to better shape one's opinion would have seemed more objective – and urgent.

In this respect, Hrachya Arzumanyan's paper makes a valiant effort in that direction, as does Thomas Fasbender's. The co-chairs entertained the belief that if the public *understood* that *any* piece of information presented under the new media threatened their rationality and powers of objective perception, they would be instantly interested in finding a remedy. Alas, today's media is designed to be addictive, and much like a smoker will leverage cognitive dissonance to rationalise his or her need to smoke, today's information consumer cannot tune off from social media. In fact, Daniel Kahneman's *Thinking, Fast and Slow*[2] (2013) makes the point that this requires *physical* effort. While this physical effort takes place in the brain, it nevertheless requires the use of an immense amount of calories (much more than manual workers require in a day, and definitely much more than those manual workers would admit or let alone believe are needed).

The policy recommendations proposed by the Study Group would require the individual to slow down their intake of information and compute to such an extent that any piece of information would (should) trigger an aca-

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[2] Kahneman, Daniel: *Thinking, Fast and Slow*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, April 2013.

demic level of questioning from the individual. Perhaps then our contribution is not useless, even if we cannot answer positively that lying would be beneficial for peace; for at least the recommendations will be joined to other's alarming realization that the fifth estate, the media, does not perform the social and civic duty that it was entrusted with. Since we cannot force the media to police itself (for that would be un-democratic), we must urge the individual to adopt the habits that will ensure that they have optimal information before making decisions.

Time must be taken, for we are on the cusp of technological transformations that will affect the way our brains work. Whether this is for the better is unforeseeable. 500 years ago, the invention of the printing press *required* that everyone knew how to read. Until then, only the elite had that skill, and then, only in Latin or Greek. While this was undoubtedly a measure of social progress, it also affected the physical characteristics of our brain, which relied on rote memorization to transmit knowledge. Literally, more percentage of our medieval brains was used for memory than for synthesis and reflection. James Burke in the acclaimed series *The Day the Universe Changed* (1985) explained that the ordinary peasant from the Middle Ages could repeat a message of a thousand words after having it heard only once. This is because of a larger cerebral mass dedicated to memory. Today's brain is not larger than that of our ancestors, but less of it is used for memory, and more of it for reflection and interpretation. From that faculty stems the capability to perform scientific research, to literally reach for the stars.

Today, the percentage of people who believe that creation took place in seven days some six thousand years ago, or those who believe that the earth is flat keeps increasing, and not because they are stupid, but because the process of scientific inquiry has been abused, democratised, and manipulated by unscrupulous charlatans. In many ways, the stability of the South Caucasus has been torn asunder by the same processes, yet, using the same tactics will not put Humpty Dumpty back together again. So we have to accept that our brains will change with the use of social media, and with the accelerating pace of news feeds. Let's propel this change in a direction which will have better odds for social justice and individual sanity.

Already states are tackling the phenomenon of fakery by the horns. The French Republic is legislating to make the spreading of false news a crime. Some media (among which Radio-Canada) are providing courses for the public on how to spot fake news. The New York Times now has a feature where the process of investigation of particular news story is fully explained. Social media giants have also been taking their responsibilities (after all it's their fault), but even then, they contribute to the creation of individual mental echo chambers which work against the necessity of corroborating information.

The RSSC SG has done its part twice already in this domain, by providing policy recommendations at the 12th and 16th workshops, the latter which the reader can consult after this section. However, during interactive discussions, the co-chairs asked the assembled experts whether they would consent to volunteer their time to the creation of a reference curriculum pertaining to countering disinformation. Many hands were raised, and the program managers and co-chairs of the RSSC SG are currently busy lobbying the necessary agencies for funds to make this happen.

In the meantime, we can only hope that the resonance of the RSSC SG and its policy recommendations will reach the proper decision centres, and that action will come forth. The co-chairs remain extremely proud of the work achieved by the Study Group, and especially of the camaraderie that is clearly visible within its ranks, even among nationals who normally would be shy in one another's presence. We also congratulate ourselves with the arrival of new partners, among which the Dialogue of Civilizations' Research Institute (Berlin) which has graciously helped to arrange for the travel of our participants. We look forward to a long and fruitful collaboration in the future.

As we look to the future, we will endeavour to leverage the sense of urgency created by the geopolitical shifts to create challenging and stimulating content for upcoming RSSC SG workshops. We intend to take a more direct approach in the formulation of peace-making solutions for the South Caucasus, and, as ever, we will rely on the assiduous participation of our friends and colleagues from the Study Group, and the continued interest of the Austrian National Defence Academy in this project.

PART VII: POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Policy Recommendations[1]

Regional Stability in the South Caucasus Study Group

Executive Summary

The Regional Stability in the South Caucasus Study Group (RSSC SG) held its 16th workshop from 9 to 12 November 2017 in Reichenau/Austria, and discussed a theme of extreme urgency: the impact of fake news on regional stability. The aim of the workshop was to examine the impact of false reporting on the development of a free media environment in the South Caucasus, on the existing stability of regional regimes, and on the competition for power and influence by large powers in the region. Lastly, the workshop begged the question as to whether false reporting was ever justified, even for positive motives, such as the search for more harmonious intra-regional relationships, and the neutralization of emotionality in conflict resolution.

The following key recommendations were the object of significant debate and were agreed by the Study Group participants:

1. Re-affirm the validity of policy recommendations issued in the wake of the 12th RSSC SG Workshop of November 2015 (The Media is the Message: Shaping Compromise in the South Caucasus), particularly calls for a regional prize rewarding journalistic excellence and inter-professional exchanges. Full recommendations are

available at: http://www.bundesheer.at/wissen-forschung/publikationen/beitrag.php?id=2690.

2. Create, with the assistance of PfP Consortium volunteers, a Reference Curriculum on Media Literacy, emphasizing the impact of modern communication techniques and social media on human biology, psychology and behaviour. The aim would be to raise awareness of the media as a tool of hybrid warfare, and how to build resilience to it at individual level.

3. Prevent and remedy the effects on inaccurate reporting on regional stability by establishing national "counter-fakery" agencies. The task of these agencies would be to counteract damaging reporting particularly in cases where the media becomes a tool of hybrid warfare.

Keynote Address

Prof. h.c. Dr. Peter Schulze of Georg-August University in Göttingen and Co-Founder of the Dialogue of Civilizations Research Institute, addressed the audience from a strategic perspective. While referring to the 2017 Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC) assessment of Russian foreign policy, and the US National Intelligence Council (US NIC) report on global trends, he warned that "there is a consensus now… that the world is in disarray … that the rules-based international order is weakening," making "how" to think about the future increasingly difficult. The risk, according to Prof. Dr. Schulze, is that isolationist tendencies within a multipolar world will be aggravated by anti-elite forces within the states, and nationalist tensions between states, causing ever-increasing instability.

The address described a world resulting in some part by today's vitiated information environment, of which the South Caucasus is part. Prof. Dr. Schulze's address described vividly the gloomy future that awaits us all in a world without order. This sort of anarchy could have dire consequences for the future of the South Caucasus, and therefore conflict resolution is more urgent than ever.

Impact of Fakery on a Democratizing Media

False reporting is a "cancer" affecting a saturated media market in the South Caucasus, destroying lives and careers. The asymmetrical development of socio-political consciousness in the region and the lack of a free press is at root of the problem. The context in which these developments took place, say some panelists, harkens back to the dying days of the Communist period. Indeed, Soviet methods of reporting have been perpetuated well into the post-Cold War period, encouraging a "politicization of the minds" and an atmosphere where the media is used to create "national identity", and to promote political or commercial interests. Media therefore tends to "sell-out" to particular interests. Panelists argued that the unequal level of media democratization in the South Caucasus prompted consumers to rapidly adopt a digital identity, and substitute social media to mainstream media as news provider.

Indeed, the problem may be accentuated by "evil powers" who have overcome the media market with Artificial Intelligence (AI), internet robots (Bots) and trolls. This contributes to a loss of trust in the elite, in the media and in the news as a public service. Today's social media revolution represents a stress test for democracies. The result has been ever-increasing use of the internet, without restrictions, but ever-harsher clampdowns on civic actions, as witnessed in Azerbaijan recently. Greater public education, higher journalistic standards and efforts at story corroboration could compose the solution to this problem.

How a Trusting Public Can Be Led to War

News fakery and propaganda are not new. If one takes away the internet, there is really nothing really different in today's world, compared to the past. Based on Cold War experience, the solution to prevent a trusting public from being accidentally led to war requires new agencies and institutions at the national and international level. Namely, there should be "counter-fake news units" to immediately correct false reporting.

Such an approach would have been welcome in the early stages of the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh. Up to this day, there is no guarantee that the events that triggered hostilities between Armenia and Azerbaijan were not

precipitated by false reports, or false flag activities. What happens to the minds of the people who consume news daily is of crucial importance in fledgling democracies, where false reporting may lead countries to make sub-optimal defence decisions. A culture of investigative education can counteract these trends. Unfortunately, information is still shaped by extremist narratives that preserve the conflicts unresolved. More needs to be done to promote narratives that foster political compromise enabling conflict resolution.

How Fakery Acts to Destabilize Regimes and Regions

In 2010, "news" of an attack on Georgia from Russia caused panic and overwhelmed emergency dispatchers. While this news report was merely part of an imaginary scenario, the television station which promoted it violated universally-agreed journalistic ethics. If the public cannot differentiate between fact and fiction, it will not be able to tell when the government should or should not intervene, leading to a crisis of trust. Therefore, even well-intentioned and original reporting meant to educate can be misunderstood if incorrectly labeled.

Journalism standards are essential in mitigating the enduring Soviet narrative has shaped the political and ethnic agenda in the South Caucasus in the post-War media. The post-World War II narrative of nationalism in the U.S.S.R. ultimately sparked the events which would lead to conflagration in the South Caucasus, enabling Moscow to maintain direct influence over subsequent events in this region. Moscow knows very well how to calibrate its influence in the South Caucasus, and while Russian television was less effective in Armenia, Russian propaganda could nevertheless affect events there, as well as in Azerbaijan.

News fakery is a tool in the hybrid warrior's arsenal, and the solution is to enact legislation to tackle hybrid warfare. Without credible counter-propaganda and anti-fakery mechanisms, the message of the European Union and of NATO powers will lose out to the more sophisticated influence methods of other powers, leading to a collapse of Western democracies' credibility to shape the European security agenda and maintain the South Caucasus in play.

The Peace Potential of Fakery: Using Yesterday's Lies for Tomorrow's Peace

The fourth panel pleaded to bring back "neutrality's good name" into play. In the Minsk process, for example, there is no possibility for mediation because there is an ingrained inability to look at facts objectively, neutrally. Right or wrong become substituted by subjective ideas of good and bad. The current problem is that neutrality is equated with apathy or heartlessness. That is the cause and consequence of the vitiated news media atmosphere today.

"Info-tainment" trivializes information, while the mass media's primary role is to reconcile theoretical ideals with pragmatic applications of information as a public good. Journalism should be mainstreaming peace, rather than pushing the unimaginative narratives of the elite or the interests of meddlesome great powers. The panel concluded that it would be counterproductive to use deception or lies to alter the course of the current narrative. Journalism must contribute to building a better discursive space for peacebuilding. The South Caucasus and the international community in general should take advantage of the fact that the current generation has no first-hand experience of the conflicts in the South Caucasus to neutralize the emotionality that pervades the disputes.

Interactive Discussions

The first session of interactive discussion sought to revisit the conclusions of the November 2015 RSSC SG workshop in Reichenau, debating whether some recommendations were still valid today. There was consensus on the fact that they were, in particular that a regional journalistic standards organization should be created, the enforcement of standards should be incentivized and the exchange of journalists to develop a common narrative focusing on cultural and commercial blending should be fostered.

The group nevertheless disagreed as to what *caused* the problem of fake news in the first place; is fakery a journalistic problem or is it a societal problem? Is it a cause or a symptom of political polarization? Even if standards were similar regionally, their implementation would be unequal. In Georgia, where the media is arguably free, such a prospect is possible,

but current Armeno-Azerbaijani relations in the wake of the April 2016 clashes make regional standardization unlikely.

Furthermore, fakery is spread by actors who are not journalists, but abuse the democratization of communication. Democratic principles forbid telling journalists how to act, or how to discipline themselves. Since time for decision is always shorter, consumers do not have time to corroborate, and neither do *bona fide* journalists; deadlines loom and shareholders and sponsors demand ever more column inches and sensationalism.

Participants felt that educating the public in identifying fakery and building resilience to it was perhaps a better plan than merely focusing on building journalistic skill in the South Caucasus. Although, some media actors might be motivated to resist fakery as it would negatively impact advertising sales.

Interestingly, some participants argued that addressing news fakery in the South Caucasus would be best handled by acting nationally first, then regionally. Some emphasized that the presence of external actors (such as Western and/or Russian media, for example) might be counter-productive. This sort of promotion could be the work of the three national media agencies in the South Caucasus, for instance. In addition, a regional website called "South Caucasus for Reconciliation and Peace" was also proposed to promote exchanges of knowledge and experience between media outlets in the three countries aiming to support peacebuilding. Its mission should be to make available expertise and knowledge in support of the implementation of common regional initiatives. It could facilitate regional networking of peace supporters (scholars, journalists, and civil society activists), and help creating synergies in promoting reconciliation and peacebuilding. Such an initiative would help regional peacebuilders to counter information warfare by creating new opportunities to facilitate enshrining the benefits of peace into the public mind.

The second interactive discussion session sought to highlight common ground on matters of historical importance for the South Caucasus, particularly concerning Armenia and Azerbaijan. The discussion tried to elicit from participants the degree of confidence in news items which were published in the wake of ethnic clashes twenty five years ago. How confident could anyone be about the veracity of the facts reported? Could new "al-

ternative" reports aimed at laying blame on now-departed actors be beneficial to reconciliation, for instance? Could this approach "neutralize" the debate, evacuate emotionality and offer a return to rationality? Most participants argued that toying with facts would be counterproductive at this stage.

Rather, proposals for mutual forgiveness (to which local elite would never concede) were offered as the beginning of a solution. One participant suggested that a general relaxation of tensions, combined with a respect for territorial integrity and political compromise would be necessary for mutual forgiveness to begin to be possible. The current propagandist trend, inherent mistrust of the media by the public and of the elite makes reconciliation seem an almost secondary problem, since mutual trust will only be possible if communication is possible, and communication is generally filtered through the media.

Policy Recommendations:

1. It was generally agreed that the policy recommendations made during the November 2015 RSSC SG should be reaffirmed as valid and necessary to implement (full recommendations are available at: http://www.bundesheer.at/wissen-forschung/publikationen/ beitrag.php?id=2690.). It is therefore suggested that these recommendations be signified to the media agencies and Ministries of Communication of the whole South Caucasus for consideration; that a generous prize rewarding excellence in journalism be created; that inter-cultural and inter-professional exchanges with foreign news agencies be stimulated, and that a regional agency for journalistic standards be created.

2. Further to the last point above, the participants generally agreed that a program or initiative called "scholars for peace" should be examined. This would partially shift the burden of examining news fakery from the shoulders of journalists to share it with academics who can unpack the concept. Part of this initiative could include a "mapping exercise" to enable to identify markers of fakery in news reporting, which would then be communicated to the public. One of the co-chairs promised to put the initiators of this idea in touch

with the relevant persons responsible within the PfP Consortium network. This initiative might be coupled with setting-up (on-line) media forums in each South Caucasus country, as a means for fostering "peace journalism", and a regional website called "South Caucasus for Reconciliation and Peace" that would enable the media to move away from information warfare (a major source of fake news) to "information peace-fare."

3. A Reference Curriculum on Media Literacy was proposed spontaneously from the floor, insofar as repeated calls for better public education of the media's role in society were deemed necessary. Leveraging information exchanged outside the conference, the co-chairs could then propose to require PfP Consortium funding for fiscal year 2019 to begin building this reference curriculum. Part of this curriculum could include the mapping process highlighted in point 2 above, as well as building case studies cooperatively (even on the most difficult topics) to support the curriculum. The co-chairs also believe that this reference curriculum could benefit from a generous examination into the cause of news fakery, its impact on human psychology, the role of social media and internet use in changing our cerebral biology, and how the use of modern communication tools correlate to political and religious radicalization. Ensuing on-line courses should be accessible to the general public via different platforms, including social networks, and YouTube.

4. Insofar as media fakery is an arsenal of the hybrid warrior, false reporting should be treated the same way as hostile intelligence gathering is remedied by counter-intelligence action. For example, neutral "counter-fakery" agencies should be enabled to react more quickly, and effectively to correct inaccurate reporting damaging to regime or regional stability. Developing on-line tools, using more effectively the existing off-line media tools, and cooperation with international organizations (i.e. EU's Stratcom East, NATO's Stratcom Centre of Excellence) might be considered by the three Caucasus states.[1]

List of Abbreviations

AA	Association Agreement
AI	Artificial Intelligence
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BRIC	countries Brazil, Russia, India and China
BRICS	Association of five major emerging countries: Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa
CDU	Christian Democratic Union of Germany
CEPA	Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CNN	Cable News Network, U.S.-based television network
CoE	Council of Europe
CSO	civil society organisation
CSTO	Collective Security Treaty Organization
CSU	Christian Social Union in Bavaria
DCFTA	Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area
DOC/RI	Dialogue of Civilizations Research Institute
EAEU	Eurasian Economic Union
EaP	Eastern Partnership
EJO	European Journalists Organization
ENA	Electric Networks of Armenia
EU	European Union
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
FSB	Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation
G20	Group of 20: international forum of for governments and central bank governors of 19 states and the EU
ICT	information and communication technology
IDFI	Institute for Development of Freedom of Information
IDP	internally displaced person
IFPG	Intergovernmental Financial and Industrial Group
IoT	The Internet of Things

ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
IT	information technology
LGBT	lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender
MAD	mutually assured destruction
MDF	Media Development Foundation, Georgia
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NDI	American National-democratic Institute
NGO	non-governmental organisations
NIC	US National Intelligence Council
NKAO	Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast
NPP	nuclear power plant
OII	Oxford Internet Institute
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe
OSCE MG	OSCE Minsk Group
PfP	Partnership for Peace
PM	prime minister
PR	public relations
RIAC	Russian International Affairs Council
RSSC SG	"Regional Stability in the South Caucasus" Study Group
RT	"RT" Russian TV Network
SGI	Study Group Information publication
SPD	Social Democratic Party of Germany
SSR	Soviet Socialist Republic
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States of America
USD	US dollar
U.S.S.R	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
WTO	World Trade Organisation
WWI	World War I
WWII	World War II

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Fake news is a theme of extreme urgency but not a new phenomenon. The information revolution allowed this practice of misinformation to gain extremely far-ranging consequences for political regimes, society and the media itself – and this is the novelty.

The 16th RSSC SG publication examines the impact of false reporting on the development of a free media environment in the South Caucasus, on the stability of regional regimes and on the competition for power and influence by large players in the region. Within this framework, this publication amongst others discusses whether false reporting could ever be justified, even for positive motives, and how information warfare could be turned into information peacefare.

16th Workshop of the PfP Consortium Study Group
Regional Stability in the South Caucasus