



**THE REPUBLIC OF TÜRKİYE  
SOCIAL SCIENCES UNIVERSITY OF ANKARA  
INSTITUTE OF GRADUATE STUDIES IN SOCIAL SCIENCE**

**FROM EYES OF RUSSIAN MEDIA: EUROPEAN UNION AND THE NATO**

**Master's Thesis**

**Serter İlkan Altındal**

**Political Science**

**December 2023**



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**THESIS APPROVAL**

This is to certify that the thesis defense examination for the thesis titled From Eyes of Russian Media: European Union and the NATO prepared by Serter İlkan Altındal with student number 195415012 studying in the field of Political Science and Public Administration Department Political Science Program has been conducted in accordance with the related clauses of the Graduate Studies and Examination Code of YOK (Council of Higher Education) on ...../...../.....(date) at .....(hour), and has been approved by majority of votes/by unanimous vote.

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*To my beloved family...*

DECEMBER 2023

SERTER İLKAN ALTINDAL

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## ÖZET

### RUS MEDYASI GÖZÜNDEN: AVRUPA BİRLİĞİ VE NATO

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Sputnik, doğrudan Rus devletine bağlı bir haber ajansıdır. Bu çalışma, devlete ait bir medya kuruluşunun çatışma dönemlerinde nasıl davrandığını ve bir dış politika aracı olarak nasıl kullanılabileceğini araştırmayı amaçlamaktadır. Sputnik (İngilizce)'te savaşın yaklaşık ilk iki ayında haberlerin nitel içerik analizi yoluyla, Rusya-Ukrayna Savaşı sırasında Sputnik'in Ukrayna'yı, Kuzey Atlantik Antlaşması Örgütü'nü ve Avrupa Birliği'ni nasıl tasvir ettiğini anlamaya çalışıyoruz. Çalışma aynı zamanda Sputnik'in anlatısında inşa edilen Rusya imajını ve Rusya'nın Ukrayna'ya saldırısını küresel izleyiciler için nasıl çerçevelediğini incelemektedir. Sputnik'in sadece bir yumuşak güç ve kamu diplomasisi aracı olmadığını, aynı zamanda propaganda ve diğer çeşitli gayrimeşru iletişim stratejilerini kullanarak Rusya'nın Batı'ya karşı yürüttüğü hibrit savaşa dahil olduğunu öne sürüyoruz. Bu stratejiler, Rusya'yı eski Sovyet ve komünist ülkelerin yanı sıra Üçüncü Dünya ülkelerine karşı yardımsever bir süper güç olarak gösteren ve onları Batı'nın algılanan kötülüklerinden koruyan bir anlatı yaratmak için kullanılmıştır. Sputnik bu yolla Batılı izleyicilerin Rusya'nın dış politikasına ilişkin algısını etkilemeyi, Rusya'nın seyirci ülkelerle ilişkilerinin bozulmasını önlemeyi ve Batılı müttefiklerin Rusya'ya karşı tepkilerini azaltmayı amaçlamaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Sputnik, Rusya, Ukrayna, Propaganda, Medya

## ABSTRACT

### FROM EYES OF RUSSIAN MEDIA: EUROPEAN UNION AND THE NATO

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Sputnik is a news agency directly affiliated with the Russian state. This study aims to investigate how a state-owned media outlet behaves during times of conflict and how it can be utilized as a foreign policy tool. Through a qualitative content analysis of Sputnik (English) in approximately first two months of the war, we try to understand how Sputnik portrays Ukraine, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and European Union during the Russian-Ukrainian War. The study also examines the geopolitical image of Russia constructed in Sputnik's narrative and how it frames Russia's assault on Ukraine for global audiences. We suggest that Sputnik is not only a soft power and public diplomacy tool, but it is also engaged in Russia's hybrid war against the West through the use of propaganda and various other illegitimate communication strategies. These strategies were employed to create a narrative that portrays Russia as a benevolent superpower towards former Soviet and communist countries, as well as Third World nations, protecting them from the perceived malice of the West. By this way, Sputnik aims to influence the Western audience's perception of Russia's foreign policy, prevent any deterioration of Russia's relations with by-stander countries, and mitigate the reaction of Western allies against Russia.

**Keywords:** Sputnik, Russia, Ukraine, Propaganda, Medya

## **ABBREVIATIONS**

ATO: Anti-Terrorist Operation (Conducted by Ukraine)

CTS: Centre for Transition Sciences

DPR: Donetsk People's Republic

eFP: Enhanced Forward Presence

EU: European Union

LPR: Luhansk People's Republic

NATO: North Atlantic Treaty Organization

NGO: Non-Governmental Organization

PR: Public Relations

RF: Russian Federation

RT: Russia Today

RU: Russia

SACEUR: Supreme Allied Commander Europe

SS: Schutzstaffel

UA: Republic of Ukraine

UN: United Nations

UNSC: United Nations Security Council

USA: United States of America

USSR: Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

VPN: Virtual Private Network

WARP: World Advanced Research Project

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# CHAPTER 1

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Soft power can be asserted through diplomatic relations, dissemination of information, propaganda, assistance, and cultural programming to achieve political ends (Bohorquez, 2005). In contrast, hard power rest on inducement and threats which is the ability to influence others through coercion that can bring frightening experiences and a negative response which can be asserted through either military power or economic coercion (Trunkos, 2013). Soft power is important because hard power alone cannot guarantee in achieving desired outcomes; for example, The United States has not been able to achieve all its goals solely – in Vietnam, Afghanistan, Iraq etc. – through military power despite having the most powerful military in the world (Rahman, 2014 p.4). In this context, soft power is a need rather than a choice in Russia’s current situation too.

Because of the increased significance of soft power in international politics; mass, social and digital media has been a battleground of geopolitics. The use of media by governments and states are not a new thing, but it has taken new characteristics in the global age, especially in times of conflict and war. American media’s role during the War on Terror campaigns and Operation Enduring Freedom, and “embedded journalism” was criticized by many (Robinson, Goddard and Parry, 2009; Hayes and Guardino, 2010; Mackie 2012). Beginning from the invasion and illegal annexation of Crimea, Russia instituted more control over Russian media system for advancing its foreign policy goals (Cerulli & Rhodes, 2022). After 2014 Russian use of media and information technologies were included as part of hybrid war techniques. Russian propaganda and disinformation activities were documented in the shooting of MH17 aircraft in Ukraine in 2014, sowing

discord in 2016 US Presidential elections, flaming anti-immigration rhetoric to disrupt Brexit referendum, interference with 2017 presidential balloting in France Since 2014, promoting anti-immigration campaign in Germany in 2015; extending frozen conflict in Transnistria in the 2010s, covering up crash of the plane carrying Polish president in Smolensk, Russia, buttressing Assad regime in Syria (Pherson et al, 2023; Boyd-Barett, 2019)). Russian information and media strategies are examined from media studies perspective (Birge, 2022; Wagnsson 2023, Furman et al 2023; Mogoş, 2022; Gozimirski, 2021) from security perspectives (Lucas & Pomeranzev, 2016; Hansen 2017; Ferencik 2023; Wiseman 2022; Flanagan & Chindrea 2019; Hoyle and Pijpers, 2022). Russian media' disinformation on COVID 19 vaccines (Furman et al, 2023) and 5G (Ventsel, 2021) were identified. Russian public diplomacy strategies targeting various group of countries such as Nordic countries, Balkan countries, Eastern European Baltic countries, Spain, Turkey, Georgia and Ukraine are examined by several authors (Makhasvili, 2017; Kragh & Asberg, 2017; Mandic & Klaric, 2023; Hoyle, 2023). On 2 March 2022, in response to framed and anti-Western narratives surrounding the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the Council of the European Union legally banned two Russian state-sponsored media outlets, RT and Sputnik, within EU borders (Press Release, 2022). Despite blanket ban, Sputnik English continues to influence global audiences through an internet-based platform, VPN and utilizing social media platforms such as X and Telegram.

As Russia became a clear case of competitive authoritarian regime, media has come under the control of Russian government, and many are state-owned. After Russia's attack of Ukraine all opposition media is officially banned. Russia's domestic authoritarian media policy is reflected in foreign policy too, as Russia regards Sputnik English and Russia Today (RT) as instruments that could facilitate Russia's geopolitical objectives, mainly obtaining status of a great power once again (Deverell, 2023; Salva & de Leon, 2018).

We would like to contribute to the literature by examining the strategic narratives of Sputnik (English) advanced from 24 February to 1 April 2022 – on Ukraine. While several earlier cases of Russian media use in foreign policy were examined, there are not yet

sufficient research on strategies and narratives of Russian media or Sputnik during the Russia's attack on Ukraine. While many blame Russian media organs for biased coverage, as scientists we can accept these claims with face-value. It is important to research and provide evidence whether it uses any propaganda methods and distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate techniques of perception management it uses. Moreover, Sputnik's narrative of war and Russia's geopolitical place in the world must be examined to understand better Russia's changing geopolitical identity, foreign policy objectives, and how it relates to other countries in the world. As Russia is not the only country which utilizes technologies of communication and information in war and hybrid war situations, a case study of Sputnik can throw light to other cases of state-owned media's use in advancing soft power and geopolitical goals.

### **1.1. Research Question**

This study aims to answer the following research questions:

How does a state-owned media outlet act during the times of a conflict and how can it be used as a foreign policy tool? How does Sputnik News narrate Russia's adversary Ukraine and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and European Union (EU) who support Ukraine? What type of geopolitical image of Russia was constructed in Sputnik's narrative and how Russia's assault on Ukraine is framed for the world audiences?

By answering these questions, we could learn more about Russia's emerging identity in the geopolitical realms and its goals and preferences.

### **1.2. Main Argument**

Our main argument is that:

Sputnik's deep connection to Russian state officials directly influences news releases and broadcasts and those Russian state officials guide journalists, editors, and executive branches of Sputnik News to use official news sources for news releases and broadcasts.

This structural difference makes Sputnik more biased than other public broadcasts as BBC, CBC, ABC, which maintain certain level of autonomy and journalistic principles most of the time, if not always.

Sputnik may be seen as serving a soft power and public diplomacy function using attraction and persuasion as Voice of America, BBC, France 24, Deutsche Welle who also try to shape perceptions, and further the desired intent of the country they belong. While these organizations can also be and weaponized at certain historical events, in this thesis we would like to suggest that Sputnik News engaged in Russia's hybrid war against the West through use of illegitimate communication strategies such as old propaganda techniques and new propaganda techniques during the Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Through these illegitimate communication strategies, Russia tried to form a certain narrative that Russia is a benevolent superpower towards former Soviet and communist countries as well as Third World, protecting them from a malicious West. In that, Russia deploys Cold War ideological divides and conspiratorial logic. Sputnik Europe not only aims to neutralize the Western audience towards Russia's aggressive foreign policy. Through this narrative communicated by various techniques of misinformation and disinformation, Sputnik mainly aimed to justify invasion, prevent any deterioration of Russia's relations with other countries, ease the reaction of Western allies against Russia. Russia's foreign policy discourse is repeated for domestic audiences and othering West was used to bolster national cohesion, sense of national uniqueness and purpose.

### **1.3. Methods**

Since 2014, Russia more actively uses media in the geopolitical realm towards western and Eastern European, Middle eastern and former Soviet countries. Therefore, it is expected that invasion of Ukraine would be the case in which Russia would deploy all its previous hybrid war capacities developed in earlier episodes of conflict in a more forceful way, as this was the most large-scale war Russia fought since WWII. Moreover, Western governments was more prepared for Russia's illegitimate use of soft power strategies in war with continuous statements from Secretary General of NATO, therefore they also engaged in

more forceful perception management campaign early on, if not propaganda. This arguably made Russia pay more attention to information and communication policies. Therefore, case study of Sputnik in the beginning of enables us to see Russian weaponization of media par excellence. The policies set in the beginning was largely continued until today.

For a case-study of Sputnik's narratives, we conduct a content analysis of its coverage of Russian invasion of Republic of Ukraine, between February 24th and April 1st, 2022. We have chosen this period because February 24th marks the date of beginning of the invasion and April 1st marks the date of Russia's withdrawal from the offensive line targeting capital of Ukraine, Kyiv. This can be periodized as the first stage of war, in which it became clear that the war will be long, and Russia understood that Ukraine would show resistance to invasion.

We conduct a qualitative content analysis of the website of Sputnik News, including the news, and opinion pieces and layout of photographs of the news as our units of analysis. Qualitative content analysis is a research method used to systematically analyze and interpret the content of written, verbal, or visual communication to identify patterns, themes, and relationships within the content. We engaged in substantive coding (Holton, 2007 p.21) which includes both open, axial, and selective coding. We followed the following sequence of tactics:

- (i) taking textual data and breaking it into discrete parts,
- (ii) developing working definitions of codes by sifting through the data and using hunches, questions, conjectures,
- (iii) drawing connections between codes,
- (iv) reading over codes and the underlying data to find how codes can be grouped into more abstract categories,
- (v) selecting a few themes that connects all the categories,
- (vi) making connections with literature identifying the connections between these overarching themes and the rest of your codes and data,

(vii) removing categories or codes that don't have enough supporting data. (Thornberg and Charmaz, p.163; Holton 2007, p.21; Holton and Glaser, 2005).

Using these tactics, we have found 431 news releases from Sputnik Websites, Sputnik X (Twitter) and Sputnik Telegram on the topics we investigate. We selected coded 168 news releases and developed categories and themes.

#### **1.4. Limitations**

According to transmission model of the communication, communication has three parts (i) message constructed by a sender (ii) the medium through which the message is transmitted and (iii) the receiver or audience. (Dyczok, 2009). Our research will be limited to the first part of transmission model, that the message. To investigate how Sputnik's message is received by the world audience and its possible political effects is beyond the limits of this study.

Sputnik is structurally established as an arm of the government and acts as the mouthpiece of the Russian government, especially on topics related to Russian state interests. This situation prevents Sputnik to fulfill its watchdog role. Therefore, it is not possible to discern Sputnik's journalistic autonomy, as is the case in many other competitive authoritarian regimes, which are based on the suppression of media freedoms and control of available media. Russian state officials guide journalists, editors, and executive branches of Sputnik News to use as credible and official news sources for news releases and broadcasts. The credible news sources are mainly the state officials' themselves, who uses the news for the benefits of the state. Those benefits come from directing or changing public opinion on matters that Russian state wants to be involved.

Therefore, most of the time in the news Russia's viewpoints are directly reflected without journalistic interpretation. Occasionally Sputnik seeks to amplify the Russian narrative by supporting interviews and news. Consequently, while studying Sputnik's narrative, we in fact study the Russian narrative. Therefore, in this thesis, we might use

Sputnik and Russia interchangeable if Sputnik presents Russian official view without any editing. Where news is interpreted by Sputnik to a limited extent, we use Sputnik as a subject. Admittedly, Sputnik has a more neutral and objective coverage of issues unrelated to Russian foreign policy, but even this could be strategic as it enables Sputnik main access to more media literate readers.

We also came across limitations in our research due to the ban of Sputnik News in Western bloc, which hampered reaching to the Sputnik News' website. Even with VPN, Sputnik had technical problems and could not open its website for a considerable time. During this time, we used Sputnik News' Telegram channel, and Twitter account. In social media platforms, the news that we gained access had only the text devoid of any images. We could see the lay out of the news in the page only after Sputnik News' website was re-opened after solving its technical problems in July 2022.

## **1.5. Historical Background**

Before examining, Sputnik's portrayal of Russia's attack on Ukraine, it is important to provide a summary of events and facts as well as context of attack.

### **1.5.1. Historical Background of Conflict in Ukraine**

As the night changed the day from February 23rd to February 24th, the air raid sirens activated in the capital city of Ukraine, Kyiv as well as major cities and those cities near the alleged new states of Luhansk People's Republic (LPR) and Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) in the Donbass region. The air raid sirens were activated because of the Russian military buildup near Ukrainian border, from Belarus to Donbass Region, from Black Sea to Sea of Azov; started to attack Ukrainian territory and Ukrainian military assets, as well as Ukrainian cities. This action titled by Russia (RF) as Special Military Operation and described as a necessity to stop Ukraine to harm civilians in Donbass region, where population consists mainly of descendants of Russians and Russia related people and protect

the territory and people of newly formed alleged states Donetsk People's Republic and Luhansk People's Republic, which solely recognized by Russian Federation. This was a start of an invasion of a sovereign state, but it can also construe as a continuation if we remember the 2014 invasion and annexation of Crimea. It strongly effected not only Eastern European region but all of Continental Europe alongside the whole world.

Without doubt, this situation has a historical background and can be dated back to the 2014 invasion and illegal annexation of Crimea – as well as the predated events that lead to the 2014 invasion. But we must not miss out the fact that the main character of 2014 invasion and illegal annexation of Crimea was the separatists that backed by the Russian Federation, which was a proxy war; while this recent invasion of Ukraine's main character is the Russian Armed Forces alongside the separatists from Donbass region, which is a directly and openly involved conflict by Russia. This conflict generated by Russia itself, to fulfill President Putin's nostalgic dreams of a bigger, Soviet Union type, Russia, which I will extend our argument in the literature review section of this study.

The conflict between Ukraine and Russia has deep roots, mainly coming from Russian President Vladimir Putin's – Make Russia Great Again – type of idea filled publication named “On The Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians”; this publication suggested that Ukrainian and Russian people are the same, they are “one” (Putin, 2021). In Putin's mind, greater Russia – greater in territory, economy, international influence – comes from regaining Soviet Union type of power (Putin, 2021). This invasion was not the first time Russia tried to invade a sovereign state by using autonomous regions or separatist actions. If we can remember Russia – Georgia War in 2008 was a “trailer” of invasion of Ukraine, because nearly same tactics have been used. First, autonomous then self-proclaimed states of South Ossetia and Abkhazia – very similar to Donetsk People's Republic and Luhansk People's Republic – broke ceasefire; Russian-backed South Ossetian forces started strikes on Georgian civilian zones (Russia Guilty of Violations During 2008 War with Georgia, Says Europe's Top Court, *Euronews*, 26.01.2021). In the following events, Russian troops crossed the Russian – Georgian border, prior to the Georgian forces' response to the region and once again, very similar to current situation in Ukraine, Russia blamed Georgia

for committing genocide and aggression against autonomous region. Thus, Russia launched a full-scale military operation against Georgia and referred it as “peace enforcement operation”. Allegations on Georgia extended by information warfare and once again Russian media took the lead on spreading false information, misinformation, manipulation and propaganda. In this context, this Russian – Georgian War in 2008 can be labeled as first hybrid warfare of Russian Federation. Also, it is important to note that the European Court of Human Right, in 2021, convicted Russia for having direct control over the separatist forces and therefore responsible for large-scale human rights abuses on ethnic Georgians; and in 2022, International Criminal Court issued arrest warrants for numerous Russians for war crimes against ethnic Georgians during the war (Situation in Georgia: ICC Pre-Trial Chamber Delivers Three Arrest Warrants, *International Criminal Court*, 2022).

As far as Russia is concerned, its foreign policy is consistent with the traditional aspiration – to establish an informal empire in the post-Soviet area; it is also worth remembering that almost every Russian regional project in Eurasia has first been introduced, tested, and applied to two states – Belarus and Ukraine. Russia tried to influence Ukraine with indirect methods to keep it in line with Russian Federation. Antczak explains it with Russia’s efforts to promote and support its protégé, Viktor Yanukovich, to the highest political post; Russia assertively declared its intention to protect its geopolitical and economic interests in the international arena and in its immediate neighborhood. Russia’s purpose was to split Ukraine into smaller pieces, which started with the “New Generation War” doctrine, which clearly stated that NATO expansion was one of the greatest external threats as well as that Russia had the right to intervene in its closest neighborhood including military intervention whenever neighboring countries’ governments would not realize Russia-friendly politics (in line with Moscow’s interests) (Antczak, 2017, p. 163-178).

As we go further from 2008 to 2014, we come across with the illegal annexation of Crimea. The events led to the illegal annexation of Crimea started with Maidan Revolution in Ukraine that come to a point of stop in the late February 2014. President of Ukraine – at time – Victor Yanukovich, who is a publicly known as pro-Russian,

vacated the Kyiv as a result of Maidan Revolution. Parliament of Ukraine – Rada – selected an acting president as well as an acting prime minister. This new appointed government made it clear that Ukraine is in a path to the West, more specifically European Union and North Atlantic Treaty Organization. This new formed government and European Union signed an agreement to proceed to accept Ukraine as a member to the European Union. This new pro-Western government's action raised alarm bells in Russia for losing influence on Ukraine and seeing Western bloc is getting closer to its border. Putin's ambitions to extend Russia's borders and influence, saw the potential to turn their aim on the Crimea. In the beginning, pro-Russian protesters emerged in the Crimean peninsula and those protests caused civilian unrest in the region. In the wake of pro-Russian protests, heavily armed men started to emerge in the cities of Crimea; those armed groups wearing military uniform, which is very similar to Russian Armed Forces combat uniform, lacked any clear identifying insignias or country flags on the uniform; started to make roadblocks, checkpoints and took key locations to assert dominance. Those events accompanied by a masked armed groups' storm to the Parliament of Crimea and government buildings, to take control of the Crimea as a whole; also, this armed group taking control of parliament building, raised a Russian flag on the parliament's flagpole. The presence of Ukrainian Armed Forces in the Crimean peninsula was promising to regain control over the territory but lacked any movement towards the unidentified armed groups and stayed in their military bases; afterwards, those bases completely besieged by unidentified armed groups and Ukrainian garrison did not step a foot outside of their bases. Russia, in the beginning, did not accept the presence of Russian troops in Crimea but later admitted the fact that those were Russian troops who took control of the entire Crimean peninsula and of course Parliament of Crimea; events lead to the illegal annexation of Crimea moved very quickly from this point (Pifer, 2020, p. 263-277).

Pro-Russian members of parliament dismissed the government and appointed Sergey Aksyonov as Prime Minister of Crimea, who is also the leader of Russian Unity Party; Crimea's links to the mainland Ukraine have been severed and isolated from the rest of the country. Parliament of Crimea, on March 6, decided to ask

people to join Russia, the council established the date of referendum for March 16; the choices given to people were either joining Russia or returning to the 1992 Constitution of Crimea, which projects of extended autonomy in the Crimean peninsula, those who wanted to stay in the current bounds with Ukraine had no chance to vote for it. The process of referendum was not in the form of a fair election, presence of armed men reported from several voting sites. Officials claimed that the turnout was 83% and the 97% voted to join Russia, those numbers are significantly questionable since ethnic Ukrainians and Crimean Tatars makes up around 40% percent of the population in the Crimean peninsula. As the referendum “officially” showed the next step, Crimean and Russian officials signed the agreement for the accession of Crimea to Russia (Grant, 2015, p. 68-95).

In the following month of illegal annexation of Crimea – April 2014 – pro-Russian groups started demonstrations, this time, in the Donbass region of Ukraine; the escalation of tension in the Donbass region, lead to the armed conflict between Ukrainian Armed Forces and Russia-backed separatist groups. Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Donbass declared themselves as republics and this escalated the tension further. In a contrary to the behavior showed by Ukrainian Armed Forces, against unidentified armed groups in Crimea, this time Ukrainian Armed Forces engaged with separatist groups; armed pro-Russian separatist groups started to seize government buildings and key locations across the Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts – collectively called Donbass – to assert dominance over Ukrainian government. Thereupon, Ukrainian government ordered Ukrainian Armed Forces to intervene to the situation in Donbass region; therefore, Ukrainian Armed Forces launched a counter-offensive against pro-Russian armed groups and called it Anti-Terrorist Operation (Ukraine Says Donetsk ‘Anti-Terror Operation’ Under Way, *BBC*, 2014). This military effort to regain control over Donbass region was successful up until August 2014; after August, Russia gave up on hybrid warfare tactic and involved in conventional means. Russia’s involvement in the Donbass conflict was blurry in way, Russia did not officially confirm the presence of Russian Armed Forces, but unmarked military vehicles and armed men reminded the insignia and country flag lacked combat uniform wearing armed groups in Crimea when conflict began. The escalation of tension and conflicts slowed down with

first Minsk Agreement in September 2015, but frequent violations of ceasefire made it impossible to end conflict. Thus, second Minsk Agreement signed in February 2015, amid the continuous clashes across the Donbass region. Thereupon, agreement de-escalated the tension in region but sustained a hostile environment, which lead to the years long conflict and finally a full-fledged war between Russia and Ukraine.

It also worth to mention that the conflict and Russian actions in Ukraine raised the alarm bells in North Atlantic Treaty Organization as well since 2014. Right after the conflict began in Ukraine, NATO started to take defensive measures. In 2016, NATO started to deploy combat-ready multinational task forces alongside the NATO's Eastern border, which consists of Poland, Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia. This multinational task forces named Enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) Battlegroups, aimed to enhance collective defense in NATO territory. After the invasion of Ukraine, begun, NATO has doubled those deployed combat-ready battlegroups and four more battlegroups formed in Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary and Slovakia. For the first time in its history, NATO activated European Defense Plan with the request of Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR) and NATO mobilized the NATO Response Force as a precaution if Russia would not stop in Ukraine and continue its movement towards NATO territory.

In March 2021, we began to notice the Russian Armed Forces' movements, deployment of troops and military assets to build-up alongside the Ukrainian border. This movement was in a limited scale and noticed by NATO; therefore, allies started to monitor Russian Armed Forces' movement near the Ukrainian border, both in Russia and Belarus, closely. This first military movement draw too much attention from NATO, therefore Russia limited their military movement and said that it was for conducting military drills. After couple of months, as October 2021 came, Russian military movements restarted to build-up alongside the Ukrainian border intensified. NATO once again draw attention on Russian military movements and informed the allies as well as global public about the large-scale military assets of Russian Armed Forces in Belarus and in Russia alongside the entire Ukrainian border in a combat ready position. Russian officials once again said that the military movement was for conducting military drills and once the drills over, troops would

go back to their original garrison. In the meantime, when the time getting closer to 2022, NATO – Russia Council meetings held for several times but concluded without any reasonable outcome. Russia publicly demanded NATO to stop its enlargement plans by giving up on Ukraine’s membership of NATO, return to arms control agreements to limit ballistic missiles in the Europe which Trump administration withdraw from. Unfortunately, the course of meetings significantly deteriorated relations of NATO with Russia; even when NATO called on Russia for further diplomatic meetings and negotiations, Russia started to use threatful words. In Putin’s mind, either Russia would acquire the demands from NATO – Russia Council or Russia would acquire their demands with military options. This state-of-mind revealed that the Russian Armed Forces’ build-up was not in fact for conducting military drills, but for show of force towards NATO and Ukraine.

Prior to the full-scale Russian Armed Forces operation towards Ukraine, Russian side started to intensify ongoing information warfare towards Ukraine in the contexts of neo-Nazis in Ukraine and Ukrainian actions towards people of Donbass, mainly consists of Russian origin. On one hand, the neo-Nazi sentiments towards Ukraine, derived from the presence of paramilitary organization Azov Regiment under the National Guard of Ukraine; Azov Regiment consist of volunteers and uses a insignia, Wolfsangel, a significant reminder to the notorious Second World War Nazi Germany organization Schutzstaffel’s (SS) unit under Waffen-SS, 2nd SS Panzer Division Das Reich. This symbolism and presence of Azov Regiment helped Russia to create a foundation for their neo-Nazi sentiments in their information warfare. Russia’s aim for using neo-Nazi sentiments and reminding Great Patriotic War was for recalling national emotions acquired during World War II and using it against Ukraine in the current situation. On the other hand, Ukrainian actions towards people of Donbass referred as a genocide and hatred against ethnic Russians; by combining these two main arguments towards Ukraine, outcome from Russian perspective shows up as living Great Patriotic War situation once again. Those recalled emotions in Russian people’s minds created the main standing point of Russian information warfare against Ukraine, both before and during the unjustified invasion of Ukraine.

As mentioned before, the war go-off in Ukraine is the culmination of escalated tension not only in Ukraine but also in the region. As time showed, escalation of tension turned into more aggressive actions. The situation in Donbass got deteriorated as late February 2022; clashes between Ukrainian Armed Forces and separatists in Donbass region intensified as of February 17, 2022. Both sides blamed each other for firing upon line of contact and violating ceasefire; I may argue that the separatist groups tried to provoke Ukrainian Armed Forces and return fire with greater scale to justify any further Russian military involvement in the conflict; my argument can prove it if we consider the following events. As of February 19, 2022, self-proclaimed states of Donetsk People's Republic and Luhansk People's Republic declared full mobilization in their states. On 21 February 2022, Donetsk People's Republic and Luhansk People's Republic declared independence and Russia recognized these two self-proclaimed states; on the same day, in the evening Putin ordered Russian Armed Forces to move into Donbass region as two newly recognized states asked help from Russia to defend its territory and its people. Russian Armed Forces started to cross Ukraine – Russia border into Donbass region on 22 February 2022 and made their way to the line of contact between Ukraine Armed Forces and separatist forces.

In the night that tied the day from 23 February 2022 to 24 February 2022, President of Russia, Vladimir Putin appeared on Russian televisions for an address to the nation. His speech was in short, the declaration of military operation into Ukrainian territory. Immediately after President Putin's concluded, Ukrainian capital Kyiv and major cities like Kharkiv, Odesa and those inside the Donbass region witnessed the explosions from Russian strikes. Right after Russian strikes have begun, Republic of Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky declared country wide martial law and ordered for general mobilization in the same day, prohibited the men ages between 18 and 60 from leaving country. Russian offensive consisted of four spear heads: from Belarus aiming Kyiv, from Russian border aiming Kharkiv, from Donetsk People's Republic and Luhansk People's Republic aiming Donbass region line of contact, from Crimea aiming Ukraine's coastal cities facing Black Sea and Sea of Azov. First engagement took place in the dawn of 24 February around 3:40 a.m. at Luhansk Oblast; after that, Europe's state of peace has been broken and violent clashes begun in Ukrainian territory.

The Russian Armed Forces vehicles that crossed into Ukraine marked with white Z letter on sides and top to probably prevent any friendly-fire situation and separate from similar Ukrainian Armed Forces vehicles, which both sides have similar T-72, T-80 tanks and transport trucks. This mark of Z became main symbol of Russia's unjustified and brutal invasion of a sovereign country, a violent conflict that both sides suffered large number of losses. People, who is responsible of this invasion and supporters of this war should realize that every one of deceased and injured human being from both sides had dreams to live, families to love and a life to embrace and now it's all gone. People lost their loved ones and homes; civilians had to leave the place they live, some took shelter in subway tunnels, some seek refuge to neighboring countries like Poland and Romania with the fear for their lives and with their loved ones and homes in their minds.

Russian Armed Forces aimed to capture key locations of Ukraine in the very beginning of the invasion; from the course of movement of Russian troops we can say that their aim was to capture Ukraine's capital, Kyiv and remove the government – especially President of Ukraine – from position. This coincide with the fact that Russia's one of the main arguments towards this invasion was that the Ukraine is ruled by neo-Nazi sympathizers; capturing Kyiv and removing those government officials could accomplished the mission and end the war, in Russian eyes. I feel the need to note that the President of Ukraine Volodimir Zelensky is Jewish and Russia accuses him of being a neo-Nazi sympathizer, this accusation – with simple words – does not appear to be feasible. Russian airborne troops conducted an air assault to Hostomel Airport, in the suburbs of Kyiv, which was repelled after counter-offensive of Ukrainian troops and left the world's single biggest plane in ruins. Invading force targeted multiple civilian infrastructure and blamed Ukrainian forces for deploying military assets in residential areas and using civilians as human shields, which I will go into details in the following chapters. Russian troops also captured key locations of Ukraine like notorious Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant. In the first couple of days of invasion, Russian Armed Forces got as close as 9 kilometers from the building of Ukrainian Parliament and that was the closest they can get to capture the capital city. Ukraine showed unpredictable amounts of resistance and showed great success in their defense

against invading forces. Ukrainian resistance was not only consisting of regular army, but the resistance also comprised of Ukrainian Armed Forces, Ukrainian National Guards and Territorial Defense Forces; Territorial Defense Forces formed with civilians who volunteered to defend their cities. In the following days, Ukraine slowed down the Russian advance and pushed back from most of the captured zones and eliminated the threat against capital city, Kyiv. In between of February 24th and April 1st of 2022, Russia attacked Ukraine from multiple fronts and captured most of the Donbass region as well as the areas that are in the way of Kyiv; Ukraine repelled most of the Russian forces except Donbass region and Russia focused on keeping Donbass region in their hands rather than occupying Kyiv, overthrowing Ukrainian government and establishing a puppet government that will serve for Russian interests.

### **1.5.2. Historical Background of Use of Propaganda in Foreign Policy**

Propaganda can be described as an unobjective information that mainly used to have support from public by influencing public to gain endorsement for an agenda that set by propaganda making bodies either inside of a state or outside of a state. The information is unobjective because the offered facts are selected or intentionally misleading; thus, the method of propaganda tends to create emotional response rather than a rational response from the public by the aid of manipulated facts. The propaganda makers from outside of the state usually are political parties of opposition to government, legal or illegal organizations to gain stand against government, gain the power to rule or change social life in a country. Propaganda makers from inside the state usually aims to ensure public trust on a state-driven policy or unite public opinion on a matter by influencing public to do so (Rogatchevskaia, 2022). Rogatchevskaia suggests that over the 20th century, the word of “propaganda” acquired predominantly negative association of ideas and to many, it is incorporated with totalitarian regimes (Rogatchevskaia, 2022). She mentions Edward Bernays, who is known as “father of public relations”, for his words about propaganda suggesting that, the propaganda is good or bad depends upon the merit of the cause urged and the correctness of the information published; in the war time propaganda, there are two main goals: To mobilize the population and to demoralize the enemy or convince the enemy troops to switch

sides or stop the war (Rogatchevskaia, 2022). This definition of propaganda shows us that nearly a century after the Russian Revolution, goals of propaganda haven't changed but the means and tools of propaganda have changed with the technological advancements in the communications arena; thus, we can still study propaganda with core and old arguments, but we cannot fully apply them to our study without contemporary propaganda structures.

History of propaganda can be dated back to ancient times with its primitive shape; however, the propaganda we know today is fairly a modern case. What makes it a modern phenomenon is the necessity of presence of mass media and lettered people to have knowledge from mass media; moreover, the presence of politically active people. Advancements in the technology of communication pave the way to the propaganda we know today. The first major scale and orderly utilization of propaganda emerged during The Great War; both sides of the war used propaganda techniques to persuade their people to the righteousness of their purpose of going into war, encourage recruitment into the army, discredit the opponent, affect the people of enemy countries to destabilize them and influence neutral countries to join the alliance or maintain their neutral status to prevent being an opponent. This progress of propaganda had seen in numerous countries, both in the Central Powers and the Allied Powers.

The evolution of use of propaganda in the times of war reached its peak point in the World War II. The best example for successful use of propaganda is the Nazi Germany during the rule of Nazi Party and Adolf Hitler. Nazi Germany attributed great importance to propaganda and even established a ministry that its only task was directing propaganda. The well-known Propaganda Minister of Nazi Germany, Joseph Goebbels, directed all propaganda efforts of Nazi Germany since the establishment of ministry until the end of World War II and fall of Nazi Germany. The allied countries used propaganda as well and best-known propaganda campaign is the United States' "I Want You" poster, which Uncle Sam points at you and calls you to join military of United States. The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics extensively used propaganda to reinforce its military power and their propaganda efforts oriented around classic "motherland" argument.

The next significant use of propaganda in the times of war was the Cold War. The Cold War was not the classic type of war, and it was a new phenomenon for the world. The Cold War – except the hot conflicts like the Korean War, Vietnam War and Invasion of Afghanistan – mostly consisted of propaganda wars between two West and East. One of the well-known examples of propaganda effort was the space race. United States and Soviets raced against each other to prove that they are better in the space efforts for propaganda purposes. Another well-known example of propaganda effort was the developments of weapons and military vehicles. The focus on developing better weapons and military vehicles of West and East were to deter each other from war and as well as for propaganda purposes; the propaganda also was a part of intimidation against the opponent during the Cold War.

### **1.5.3. Historical Background of Russian Propaganda in Soviet Era**

Russian propaganda efforts saw its first large scale and organized actions during The Great War, like other major countries that is the part of The Great War. Before the October Revolution in 1917, there were two sides in the Russian Empire; one side was the Tsar influenced or supported part, other side was the Vladimir Lenin influenced or supported part. As I argued before, propaganda makers can be from two sides: inside of the state or outside of the state. Propaganda makers from inside of the state tried to unite public opinion and gain public trust; while propaganda makers from outside of the state tried to gain a stand against government, gain the power to rule and change lifestyle of the country. Propaganda makers from inside of the state represents Tsar side and propaganda makers from outside of the state represents Vladimir Lenin side. Russia witnessed the propaganda war of both sides in the first and second decades of 20th century. The Tsar oriented propaganda significantly emerged with The Protocols of the Elders of Zion, which was a manipulative and antisemitic text claimed that Jewish people were planning to dominate world and this text speeded shortly before the 1905 Revolution. After the 1905 Revolution, Tsar oriented propaganda insignificantly used this text for the reason of revolts inside the Russia; intense usage came after the October Revolution in 1917 and put forward the Jewish people for causing the

Bolshevik Revolution. The Protocol used as a propaganda weapon against Bolsheviks, depicted Bolsheviks as mainly consisted of Jews and the plans of Bolsheviks contained in The Protocols of the Elders of Zion. The intention of Tsar oriented propaganda for using The Protocol as a propaganda weapon were to discredit communism, bring down the Lenin's regime and prevent other countries to recognize Soviet Union.

Revolutionaries of the 19th and 20th century, in Russia, divided propaganda term into two aspects. One part of propaganda was agitation and other part was the term we know as propaganda; combination of those two parts called as agitprop. Agitprop, saw its full potential in Soviet Union but it was any Marxist activists majorly used action even before the October Revolution. The term of agitprop was actually an acronym for the Department for Agitation and Propaganda, which was a prominent department inside the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Agitation branch of agitprop's main cause was to pursue people to be a communist who were not communist, while propaganda branch of agitprop was mainly focused to the works inside the party and party members. Utilization of agitation focused on gaining positive public opinion for communism and encourage political and public unrest; while Soviet propaganda's primary utilization was for the efforts of teaching Marxism, helping people to have knowledge of Marxist economics and propagation of revolutionary ideas. Eventually, propaganda in Soviet Union was in the same line with the goals of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. In a contrary to the today's negative feel towards propaganda, back in these days propaganda and agitation were promoted with positive feelings (Cassinelli, 1960, p. 68-95).

The Soviet Union is known for using extensive methods of propaganda tools for the sake of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics itself. Creation of an official censorship agency was in fact, for more effective use of propaganda tools; shortly called as Glavlit, was established in 1922 and this agency tasked with not only to impose censor to the improper materials but also to ensure materials contained desired ideological contents. The Soviet Union under Stalin regime, enforce severe punishments to those who got out of line of

established propaganda frame; the punishments were as severe as execution and exile to Gulags. Those methods of punishments left their seat, with time, to punishment methods of retributive psychiatry, denial of work, loss of citizenship and prison. Those oppressive measures suggests that no one can say there was a presence of right of free speech in the Soviet Union. The oppressive measures surely were in place for the effective use of propaganda and to unite public opinion, no matter what it takes (Brandenberger, 2012, p. 1-8).

The Soviet propaganda machine existed with various forms, propaganda techniques ranged from using newspapers to having influential methods for schools and youth organizations. Out of many ambitions Soviet propaganda machine had, one was growing the desired Soviet citizens from the root; schools and youth organizations have used to fulfill this ambition. The Soviet Union intended to teach children collective way of life that communism foreseen; for this reason, I argue that the Soviet propaganda machine saw an opportunity for spreading propaganda easily by manipulating and altering reality in children's minds, which is fairly easier than manipulating and altering reality in adult's minds (Heftberger, 2015, p. 9-10). Over and above, manipulated children could affect their friends or families and hearing same thing from different people – children or adult – may have helped the Soviet propaganda machine to alter and manipulate minds of more people (Heftberger, 2015, p. 11-12).

In addition to this, the Soviet Union extensively used radios, posters, cinema / movies, meetings for lectures, art, books, theatres and the unique propaganda train, commonly known as Agit-train. The Agit-train was the effort of previously mentioned agitprop and the Agit-train tasked with travelling thru the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics; the goal was to reach people of Soviet Union to teach them communism and spread propaganda to every inch of the Soviet Union, to every small or big settlement (Black, 2022).

In the following years, especially after the World War II, every republic inside the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact states started the creation of their own propaganda tools;

this can be generalizing as Eastern Bloc propaganda machine. Every country's propaganda and media were in direct control of all countries' own communist party. This situation suggests that not only Moscow was in charge of propaganda, but every Eastern Bloc country also controlled its own propaganda organs such as state-controlled media, censorship. Communist party and ownership over television, radio and printed materials served as an important tool to control information, spread Eastern Block desired information and control public opinion. Some countries extremely restricted flow of information from their countries to outside world and vice versa by enforced travel ban for their citizens or foreigners who wanted to travel to their country and tried to separate foreigners from local population (Nietzel, 2016; Barghoom, 2015).

Active measures are the political warfare conducted by the Soviet Union and Russian Federation. This phenomenon dates back to the 1920s and active measures uses espionage, propaganda, sabotage and assassination in accordance with objectives of the Soviet Union's and Russian Federation's foreign policy goals (Abrams, 2016, p. 5). Active measures have continued in the post-Soviet Russian Federation and are in many ways based on Cold War schematics (Darczewska & Zochowski, 2017, p. 6). The invention of the Internet, especially the introduction of social media offered new opportunities for active measures. The Kremlin-affiliated Internet Research Agency, also described as the Information Warfare Branch, was founded in 2013; this agency's main goal is to spreading disinformation through the Internet, the most well-known and foremost operation being its part in the interference in the 2016 US presidential election (Prier, 2017, p. 67).

#### **1.5.4. Contemporary Russian Media System in Russia**

Russia has a media landscape where state-owned or state-controlled outlets play a significant role. Key media organizations, including major television channels and news agencies, have close ties to the government. The Russian state-owned media outlets are the primary tool for glorifying Russia and the President of Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin. Those efforts to glorify Vladimir Putin is not only for Russian people to get under influence of their "fierce" leader, but for foreign people as well, especially Western Block citizens.

Contemporary Russian propaganda turns around creating a cult of personality for President Vladimir Putin and maintaining the created cult of personality (Khrebtan & Hörhager & Pyatovskaya, 2022).

Russian media system serves to the Russian government and their study showed that Russian propaganda has a huge impact on society and on societies way of thinking (Antczak & Śliwa, 2021, p. 522). Despite the fact that television serves as a main source of news for the overwhelming majority of the Russian population, online media and social media in particular have become a supplementary arena for promotion of the discourse on fascism, which has served to facilitate further homogenization of public opinion. This was clearly observed in the Ukrainian crisis. The fact that major portion of Russians approving the Russian policy on Ukraine despite heavy human losses, economic problems and severe limitations of rights and liberties is a proof that Russian media has the power to sway public opinion and influence the targeted audience (Gaufman, 2015, p. 141-142).

The main discussion in the media sphere in the early 2000s was Russia's poor image in the world, which hampered foreign direct investment in the country. Therefore, news outlets such as RT was initially founded to present Russia as democratic, peaceful, respectful to human rights, economically and politically closer to the values of Europe. It was mainly formed as a soft power tool which engaged in public diplomacy. Russia Today, often abbreviated as RT, that serves as the flagship outlet for the international multimedia information project funded by the Russian government. RT was launched in 2005 and is part of the larger media conglomerate, ANO TV-Novosti, which falls under the umbrella of the Russian government-owned news agency Rossiya Segodnya. RT presents itself as an alternative international news source, offering news and analysis from a Russian perspective 24/7. It provides content in multiple languages, including English, Spanish, Arabic, and others, to reach a global audience. Particularly during the illegal annexation of Crimea, Russian approach to international media changed, although there were early signs of it during Russia's attack on Georgia in 2008. Russian PR efforts exchanged to old and new propaganda efforts disinformation and manipulation. Russian state-owned news outlets mainly targeted Ukrainian government and Ukrainian fighters in the regions of conflict.

Sputnik is RT's sister news agency and radio network based in Russia that operates internationally. It was launched on November 10, 2014, by the Russian government-owned media group Rossiya Segodnya. The name "Sputnik" is derived from the Russian word for "satellite" and is also the name of the first artificial Earth satellite, launched by the Soviet Union in 1957. Sputnik presents itself as an alternative voice in the global media landscape, offering news and analysis from a Russian perspective. It provides content in multiple languages in 31 languages including English, Spanish, Arabic, and others, reaching a global audience on a wide range of topics, including politics, economics, culture, and science (Østevik & Godzimirski, 2018, p. 1-4). The multi-language propaganda efforts helped the Russia to influence or manipulate more people around the world; especially those who don't speak English, which might not acquire factual information from English language news outlets, apart from Russia controlled ones (Paul & Matthews, 2016, p. 1).

Russia does not use only news outlets; an intensified use of social media is a significant fact. The social media platforms are the simplest and easiest way to spread fake news that can't be spread via conventional news outlets. The social media users generally don't question what they read online and does not tend to do further readings to see if the post that they saw online is real or fake; and tend to accept the news as factual information. This mostly happens when person has a feeling of trust to the social media account they follow. The most prominent event of using social media to manipulate people happened during the 2016 U.S. presidential election; Russia was accused of swaying and manipulating public opinion on presidential candidates (Jamieson, 2020, p. 19). Moreover, Russian language-oriented news channels and social media platforms are commonly used news sources among the Russian people; therefore, the lack of not using foreign news outlets and social media accounts that share factual information, helps Russian government to influence people with less effort (Paul & Matthews, 2016). United States Department of State Global Engagement Center published a special report on Russian media titled as "Kremlin-Funded Media: RT and Sputnik's Role in Russia's Disinformation and Propaganda Ecosystem" and this detailed report linked every figure in Russian media system, which can be found below:



Figure 1.1. Kremlin-Funded Media: RT and Sputnik’s Role in Russia’s Disinformation and Propaganda Ecosystem (U.S. Department of State Global Engagement Center, 2022).

## CHAPTER 2

### 2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

From a media studies approach, a news outlet must be examined if it fulfills the journalistic standards such as the principles of truthfulness, accuracy and fact-based communications, independence, objectivity, impartiality, fairness, respect for others and public accountability, as these apply to the gathering, editing and dissemination of newsworthy information to the public. In the literature it is fairly established that Sputnik does not follow the truthfulness and accuracy as it publishes fake news, disinformation, misinformation and malinformation. Sputnik releases news very fast which puts into doubt the fact-checking process was conducted, and in many instances news conflict with facts. Not only Sputnik is a state-owned company, but it does not have journalistic autonomy as it never publishes articles critical of Russian government. Sputnik also publishes dehumanization of Ukrainians, hate speech towards certain individuals and disguises human right violations of Ukrainians. It is not objective, impartial or publicly accountable as there is not a media freedom and strong ombudsman in Russian media system. Most of the time Sputnik News publishes official statements from Russian government with credits and adds comments into the news; in addition to that, Sputnik News, releases several news in anonymity, the authors of the news do not list in the news; which creates no attribution to the news of authors. This situation creates a suspicion for the source of the news or for who edited the news and decided to publish. While the standards Sputnik does not follow are pointed out in the media literature, we would like to incorporate literature on political uses and abuses to understand what Sputnik does and why it does what it does. We will discuss the literature review under two different sections; this separation aims to discuss the utilization of media organs as a soft power instrument.

## 2.1. Literature Review I: Legitimate Uses of Media in Foreign Policy

I will discuss literature review under two different sections; this separation aimed to discuss utilization of media organs as a soft power instrument and an important part of conducting hybrid warfare.

Nowadays we cannot talk about politics without invoking media, and we cannot understand contemporary media without appreciating the role they play in the political system. Advancements in the field of communications, especially the widespread use of internet, created more public political circumference and this change of publicity in politics also changed the political strategies to use. For Brown, this new, more open environment does not *determine* political outcomes but modifies the dynamics of the processes that occur (Brown, 2005, p. 57-58).

Fascinated politicians, government officials, journalists, and scholars resulted from a perception of the media in general, and television in particular, as being the most important power broker in politics; *mediademocracy*, *medialism*, *mediapolitik*, *mediocracy*, and *teledemocracy* are but a few postmodern terms coined to describe this new media-dominated political system (Gilboa, 2005, p. 1). Also, according to Gilboa, two particular formats are more significant: The breaking news and the continuing crisis coverage characterized by a special logo, such as *War on Terrorism* or the *Middle East Crisis* (Gilboa, 2005, p. 2). This situation has a similarity in Invasion of Ukraine with Sputnik News' *Special Military Operation in Ukraine* and *Genocide in Donbass* sections on their news website. Against a backdrop of conflict, the media facilitate mobilization of opinion, affect policymaking, and influence the different stages of waging war and making peace; communications products range from the public diplomacy designed to help avoid or win support for conflict, to the real-time journalism that brings the battlefield vividly to the public (Seib, 2005, p. Preface). According to Gilboa, media do not have power of their own, power resides with the public, and to the extent the media have power, it is derived from the perceived ability to stimulate or even shape public opinion (Gilboa, 2005, p. 4).

In addition to mass media and classical journalism, social media has a significant role in conducting diplomacy today, which is sometimes referred as Twitter (X) Diplomacy. High-ranking government officials, diplomats, and international organizations use Twitter to convey official statements, engage with the public, interact with counterparts from other countries, and shape public opinion on matters of international significance. Twitter diplomacy has become an important tool for diplomats and political leaders to communicate directly with a global audience, bypassing traditional media channels. It allows for real-time updates, immediate responses, and the ability to reach a vast and diverse audience. Twitter diplomacy can serve various purposes, including crisis communication, public diplomacy, policy announcements, and cultural exchange. While Twitter diplomacy can enhance transparency and accessibility in diplomatic communication, it also presents challenges, such as the need for cautiously selecting the contents within the platform's character limit and the potential for misinterpretation or miscommunication due to the shortness of tweets. Additionally, the informal nature of social media can blur the lines between official statements and personal opinions, requiring diplomats to exercise discretion in their online interactions (Chhabra, 2020, p. 2-10).

Consequently, both mass media and social media began to be increasingly regarded as a tool of public diplomacy. As a soft power projection method, public diplomacy has two significant genres of connection; first link is from government to public, the second link is from public to public. The link from government to public consists of notifying policies and activities by official organs to its people; on the other hand, the link from public-to-public lean on operating with the roles of NGO's, universities, research centers, associations, public opinion research companies and of course press. Many scholars of political science discipline suggests that there are three reasons why public diplomacy activities were born during Cold War era. First and foremost, reason is the advancements of communications technologies, which lead ordinary people to have communication devices in their daily lives. Technological advancement has made the public opinion, which now has the opportunity to access information, an actor that needs to be convinced by the states for public policies and for propaganda-oriented

desires. The second reason is deeply connected with first reason, which lead to the increasing importance of public opinion. Third and last reason is the establishment of new countries, because public diplomacy created with international meetings, discussions found an audience to perform with new communication technologies (Firrone, 2023, p. 18-22).

Public diplomacy lost its importance with the end of Cold War but regained its place after 9/11 attack as a soft power tool. In this course of re-establishment of public diplomacy, there are various factors such as the necessity of ideological and intellectual promotion of struggle against terrorism; to achieve support from the regional public in countering terrorism and strengthening the foreign policy and legitimizing the efforts for Global War on Terror campaign of United States of America, which lead to decade long war in Afghanistan and ended without any gains. Recently, traditional public diplomacy has been replaced by the contemporary understanding of public diplomacy which is also closely related to the concept of soft power by using socioventional media, which is the concept depicting how social and conventional media amalgamated today.

One use of media is which is in the gray area is perception management. Perception management, also known as image management or reality engineering, refers to the process of deliberately influencing or shaping the way individuals or groups perceive a particular person, organization, product, idea, or event. It involves the strategic manipulation of information, communication, and imagery to create a specific impression or narrative as shown in the Table 1. Perception management is used in various contexts, including public relations, marketing, politics, and international relations. It is important to note that while perception management is a common practice, it can raise ethical concerns when it involves deception, manipulation, or the deliberate withholding of important information. Overall, perception management plays a substantial part in shaping public opinion and influencing the way individuals and groups perceive the entities and ideas around them.

<b>Key Aspects of Perception Management</b>	<b>Description</b>
Control of Information	Involves controlling the flow of information to ensure that only specific messages, facts, or narratives are communicated. Other information may be downplayed or suppressed.
Image Crafting	Involves carefully curating and presenting a desired image or identity to the public. This includes portraying a person or organization as trustworthy, competent, caring, or possessing any other desired attribute.
Selective Disclosure	Central element of perception management where entities choose which information to disclose and which to withhold. This allows for framing narratives in a way that serves the interests of the entity engaged in the practice.
Emotional Appeal	Seeks to elicit specific emotions in the audience, such as trust, empathy, fear, or admiration. Achieved through various means, including storytelling, visual imagery, and persuasive language.
Reputation Management	Involves strategies to enhance a positive reputation or mitigate damage to a negative one. Common application of perception management focused on shaping how an entity is viewed by the public.
Crisis Communication	Used in times of crisis or controversy to control the narrative and mitigate damage to the image of a person, organization, or product. Involves strategic communication to address and manage the impact of adverse events.
Media Relations	Involves establishing and maintaining relationships with media outlets and influencers. Crucial in perception management, providing greater control over the dissemination of information and shaping media coverage.

<b>Key Aspects of Perception Management</b>	<b>Description</b>
Social Media Engagement	With the rise of social media, perception management extends to online platforms. Entities actively engage with and influence public opinion through social media channels. Social media serves as a powerful tool for shaping narratives and interacting directly with the audience.

Table 2.1. Key aspects of perception management (Ambrosio, 2016, p. 467-490).

Another aspect of media use that can be classified in the grey area, which can be deemed good or bad depending on the intention, is the strategic narratives. Strategic narratives are those designed for certain audiences, and they are preferred because narrative have higher rhetorical power than scientific facts, and they generally have higher resonance in population. In an age of social media strategic narratives create echo chambers, in which people become stuck in the same network with people of the same opinion with them, without having a chance to hear different opinions. Stefan suggests identification and questioning of narratives as a powerful counter- strategy to counter them.

There is much to be done and questions to be asked, beyond the correct identification of that part of our community that is permeable to the Russian disinformation campaigns; there is a necessity for correct recognition of Russian narratives, specially designed for this Eastern part of Europe. The purpose is not only to recognize the strategic narrative that Russia is trying to promote in our data sphere, but also to prepare the society to question everything they read and escape from their echo chamber (Ştefan, 2020, p. 113-123).

**2.2. Illegitimate Use of Media in Foreign Policymaking**

Instead of providing information and opinions based on facts and evidence, when media is used for propaganda, disinformation and manipulation it can be

considered illegitimate use of media in foreign policy making. Propaganda is the general concept that refers to information often of a biased or misleading nature, used to promote a particular point of view, cause, or ideology. Propaganda can take various forms, including written or spoken messages, images, videos, and other media. It's important to note that propaganda is not limited to any specific political or social group, and it has been used throughout history by governments, political movements, organizations, and individuals with diverse aims. Discerning and critically evaluating information is essential in order to recognize and counter the influence of propaganda in public discourse. Propaganda can be employed for a variety of purposes such as influencing public opinion, beliefs, or behaviors in a way that aligns with the interests of the entity or individual producing the information. political persuasion, ideological reinforcement, recruitment, and manipulation of public sentiment (Conserva, 2003, p. 19-29).

It often employs persuasive techniques and may rely on emotional appeals, selective presentation of facts, and sometimes even misinformation or disinformation to achieve its objectives. Propaganda can be categorized into several different types or techniques, each designed to achieve specific goals. Old propaganda techniques are listed in Table 2.

<b>Propaganda Category</b>	<b>Description</b>
Loaded Language	Uses emotionally charged or highly connotative language to sway opinions. Aims to evoke strong emotions and create biased perceptions.
Selective Presentation	Presents specific facts or information supporting a viewpoint, while omitting or downplaying contrary evidence. Results in a one-sided and misleading representation of a topic.
Stereotyping and Demonization	Portrays a group, individual, or idea in a simplified, negative, or exaggerated manner. Can foster prejudice and create an "us versus them" mentality.

<b>Propaganda Category</b>	<b>Description</b>
Appeals to Authority	Relies on the endorsement of respected or authoritative figures to lend credibility to a message or viewpoint.
Bandwagon Effect	Aims to create a sense of conformity or peer pressure by suggesting that everyone is adopting a particular belief or behavior. Seeks to convince people to join the perceived majority.
Fearmongering	Uses fear to instill anxiety or concern in the audience to influence attitudes or behaviors. Presents a threat or crisis as a way to gain support for a specific course of action.
Testimonials and Personal Stories	Uses personal anecdotes or experiences to make a message relatable and emotionally compelling. Aims to create a connection between the audience and the message.
Glittering Generalities	Involves using broad and vague positive terms or values without providing specific details. Appeals to general ideals that are widely accepted.
Repetition	Aims to reinforce a particular belief or viewpoint by repeatedly presenting a message, idea, or image.
False Information (Disinformation)	Involves spreading deliberately false or misleading information with the intent to deceive or manipulate public opinion. Used to create confusion, sow division, or advance a hidden agenda.
Misinformation	Inadvertent sharing of false information

Table 2.2. Old propaganda techniques (Conserva, 2003, p. 19-29).

### 2.2.1. New Propaganda

"New propaganda" is a term that is not as widely used or defined as the more general concept of propaganda. However, it may refer to contemporary or evolving methods and techniques of persuasion, information dissemination, and influence campaigns in the context of modern communication technologies and social media. In the 21st century, with the advent of the internet and social media platforms, propaganda has taken on new forms and has become more sophisticated in its delivery and targeting. Some characteristics of "new propaganda" includes digital platforms, micro-targeting, algorithmic amplification, disinformation and misinformation campaigns, influence operations, deepfakes and synthetic media, interactive and engaging content, ephemeral messaging, polarization and echo chambers which means exploiting existing political, social, or cultural divisions to reinforce existing beliefs or create further polarization (White, 2021, p. 1-3).

It's important to note that "new propaganda" is a term that may be used in various ways depending on the context and the specific area of study. Different scholars or experts may have varying interpretations or definitions of this term. As such, the meaning of "new propaganda" should be understood in the specific context in which it is used.

<b>"New Propaganda" Characteristics</b>	<b>Description</b>
Digital Platforms	Utilizes online platforms and social media for information dissemination.
Micro-Targeting	Targets specific demographic groups with tailored messages.
Algorithmic Amplification	Utilizes algorithms to amplify certain content based on user engagement.
Disinformation and Misinformation	Involves deliberate spread of false or misleading information.

<b>"New Propaganda" Characteristics</b>	<b>Description</b>
Influence Operations	Engages in campaigns to influence public opinion or behavior.
Deepfakes and Synthetic Media	Uses AI-generated content to create realistic but false information.
Interactive and Engaging Content	Creates content that encourages audience interaction.
Ephemeral Messaging	Utilizes temporary or disappearing content to convey messages.
Polarization and Echo Chambers  Fake news  Malinformation	Exploits existing divisions to reinforce beliefs or create polarization.  refers to deliberately fabricated or misleading information presented as if it were true, often with the intent to deceive or manipulate the audience. This false information can be spread through various mediums, including websites, social media, videos, and other forms of digital communication. Fake news may be tailored to appeal to specific beliefs or ideologies, exploiting confirmation bias, where individuals seek out information that confirms their existing viewpoints.  involves the deliberate sharing of true information for malicious purposes. designed to cause harm, create confusion, or manipulate perceptions. such as the selective disclosure of facts to present a biased narrative, the leaking of sensitive information for strategic or political purposes, or the public release of private information with the intent to embarrass or damage an individual or organization.

Table 2.3. New propaganda characteristics (White, 2021, p. 5-27).

### 2.2.2. Fake News

Fake news is the most significant and dangerous invention of new propaganda techniques as it is highly effective with great majority of layperson as they do have media literacy and disseminated easily and exponentially in the age of social media. Guadagno and Guttieri suggest that some factors of fake news are historical as fake news are in our life for a long time, Russia uses psywar for a long time as well and some factors are situational like simplicity of spreading fake news through social media; but most importantly some factors are individual with the fact that politically conservative people are more responsive to the fake news and they watch different news channels than politically liberal people (Guadagno & Guttieri, 2019,186).

In an age where most consumers receive and share their news online, false information can reach large audiences rapidly and fake news is any information that deliberately intended to mislead; fake news stories mimic real journalism and can disseminate through social media. Although it is not a new phenomenon, misinformation through false news has become lucrative today, the rapid spread of online misinformation poses an increasing risk to societies worldwide and it is a serious problem calling for solutions (Sadiku & Eze & Musa, 2018, p. 189). They propose that a new system of check and balance is needed, which means the use of fake news and misinformation is illegitimate and needs to be countered.

Types of fake news are Clickbait, which is the exaggerated or false story created with the intent of generating clicks to increase advertisement revenue; propaganda, which is the deceptive story designed to promote author's agenda or politically motivated situations; opinion, which is the story that the author's commentary intended to influence the reader; humor, is for the purpose of entertainment and it is using satire to discuss public affair. Other types are news parody, forgery, and photo manipulation; these types of fake news are based on two factors: levels of facticity and deception. Fake news undermines trust, and it has been

regarded as a threat to democracy; the impact of fake news on the human life may cause conflict or even war, it may cause confusion and moral panic and eventually undermine an informed citizenry. False information can be seen by large audiences in a fast way in a global order where most of the people receive their news and information online (Sadiku & Eze & Musa, 2019, p. 187-188).

### **2.2.3. Creation of Post-Truth Environment**

These techniques breed a "post-truth" environment in which appeals to emotions and personal beliefs have more influence on public opinion than objective facts and rational arguments. In a post-truth context, emotions, beliefs, and subjective opinions often hold greater sway than empirical evidence or objective reality when shaping public discourse and decision-making. Appeals to emotion, personal beliefs, and identity tend to carry more weight than factual accuracy or evidence-based arguments. Objective facts and verifiable data may be downplayed or dismissed in favor of narratives that align with pre-existing beliefs or ideologies. Post-truth environments can lead to increased polarization, as individuals may be more likely to seek out and believe information that confirms their existing viewpoints. False or misleading information, often referred to as disinformation and misinformation, can circulate widely, making it challenging for the public to discern reliable sources from unreliable ones. Traditional authorities, institutions, and experts may face skepticism or even rejection, as some individuals turn to alternative sources of information that validate their perspectives. Fake news can have real-world consequences, leading to misinformation, public panic, damage to reputations, or even influencing public opinion in significant ways. The rise of social media and digital platforms can amplify the spread of information, both accurate and inaccurate, contributing to the post-truth phenomenon. maintaining a shared factual basis for public discussion and decision-making in an era where emotional appeal and subjective belief systems can sometimes overshadow empirical evidence and objective reality becomes very challenging (McIntyre, 2018, p. 127-133).

### **2.3. Media Abuse in Hybrid War and Hybrid War as a Conceptual Framework That Characterizes Sputnik's Role**

Though hybrid war is a historical concept and was adopted by other states from time to time, Russia is the state that systematically used and developed it since 2014. The Russian Ministry of Defense website explains the phenomenon as such in its website:

The confrontation between two or more states in the information space to inflict damage to information systems, processes, and resources, critical and other structures, undermining the political, economic and social systems, a massive psychological manipulation of the population to destabilize the state and society, as well as coercion of the state to take decisions for the benefit of the opposing force (Filipec, 2020, p. 19).

Hybrid warfare is a concept that refers to the use of a mix of military, non-military, covert, and overt tactics to achieve political goals. In this context, less legitimate soft power pursuits may play a role in a broader strategy that includes elements of hybrid warfare. manipulating information to shape perceptions, influence public opinion, and create confusion can play a role in a hybrid war.

Illegitimate pursuit of soft power includes the use of old and new propaganda techniques, fake news in media, and abuse of perception management strategies and strategic narratives to create a post-truth environment not only to obtain security objectives, but also “destroy political, economic and social systems” and “psychological manipulation of the population to destabilize the state and society”, and “coercion of state to serve the interest of belligerent power”. This concept can only be elucidated by an example:

In 2014, very well-organized Russian propaganda played a significant role in the war, presenting in the media the members of the temporary government in Kyiv and their

supporters as fascists who brought Ukraine to the edge of a civil war; the message intensified mainly on underlining the illegitimacy of the Kyiv government which takes illicit actions against the separatists, This message was spread by a large part of the Western media, while Russian society was permanently misinformed and manipulated by government propaganda (Antczak, 2017, p. 166-167). Russian propaganda frequently uses the topic of brutality of the proceedings of the opposing party (particularly desirable images are showing violence against women and children), suffering of civilians (mostly children) during the armed clash has become the pivotal weapon used by information warfare; information and psychological operations are addressed in at least two ways, international community, and the local population with the extensive use of nationalism and xenophobia to unite “indigenous Russian population” (Antczak, 2017, p. 167). Information warfare, noted by Russian Federation as one of the elements of hybrid war, focuses primarily on massif manipulation through the media, including social networking and fueling public sentiment, which is based on imperial resentment as well as a sense of injustice and mistreatment of Russia and its citizens by the West (Antczak, 2017, p. 171).

Another example can be given from a situation in Moldova:

Ștefan’s study shows that the Sputnik News is one of the main channels used by Russia to direct disinformation campaigns across its borders, in the example of Moldova, Sputnik has fourth place among the news platforms and fortieth place on country rank; but in Romania 894<sup>th</sup> position, which indicates that Sputnik does not have an impact but there is a twist, over 40% of the audience is made by visitors living in Russia and this explains the 80% access of the Moldovan sub-domain, where you can read news in Russian about Moldova and Russia and most importantly, the access zone is closely followed by Romania. The study also shows that a consistent group was formed for Sputnik News, but interaction metrics remain modest as an average person visits 1.5 pages, peak visits do not exceed 2.9 pages per visit and the average time spent on a website is 2 minutes, and 30 seconds, which suggests that people only scroll through news feed and only reads headlines of the news (Ștefan, 2020, p. 122).

This also means that the use of headlines and thumbnails with propaganda rhetoric might have a significant impact on the audience. This audience could function like echo chambers as described by Roose, fuels Russian foreign policy, and creates communities, politically biased groups that can accept and support Russia's foreign policy and agenda (Roose, 2018). The echo chamber is a perimeter or ecosystem both in traditional media and social media, which their subscribers coincides beliefs that amplify or reinforce their preexisting opinion by communication and repetition inside a closed system and insulated from rebuttal (Diaz Ruiz & Nilsson, 2023). Ștefan also says that:

Antczak and Śliwa argue that even chaos and inconsistency in Russian state-owned media could be intentional and swing to the purpose of chaos, apathy disillusionment from politicians.

To achieve the goals of information mobilization by the Russian media, numerous techniques of manipulation are used. These include the manipulation of emotions, images, and sounds, as well as media political discourse. The Russian authorities can easily introduce propaganda messages into public circulation, as most media remain under the control and influence of the state. Therefore, everything that is broadcast serves the information strategy, and even if the message seems chaotic and incoherent at first glance, it only means that it has a specific task to fulfill (introducing information chaos and causing irritation among the recipients). It is also largely based on stereotypes built on preserved historical memory and myths, historical and cultural heritage, and the need to defend Orthodox values and the resulting belief in the spiritual uniqueness of Russia and Russians (Antczak & Śliwa, 2021, p. 521-522).

Media activity based on journalistic principles and objectivity	Public Diplomacy	Perception Management	Perception Management	Old Propaganda	New Propaganda	Fake News	Post Truth Environment	Media as a Tool in Hybrid War
Media Autonomy From Politics	Legitimate Media Use in Politics		Illegitimate Media Use in Politics				Abuse of Media for Political Purposes	

Table 2.4. Spectrum of Use and Abuse of Media in Foreign Policymaking

## 2.4. Strategic Narrative

Russia utilizes a mix of old and new propaganda techniques and perception management to create and foster a strategic narrative that will breed a post-truth environment and thereby serve its foreign policy purposes. A narrative is a discourse “with a clear sequential order that connects events in a meaningful way ... thus offer(ing) insights about the world” (Hinchman & Hinchman, 2001, xvi). While discourse is intersubjective, a narrative can be strategic as stories which have a lesson for the future and suggestions (Jones & McBeth, 2010). Narratives are more persuasive than analytical arguments (Escalas, 2007). A narrative ascribes meaning to a situation identifying what is happening how, where when and why and who the protagonists are. They interpret material conditions and ascribe meaning to conditions (Hagström & Gustafson, 2019, 388). Narratives are spun as events unfold; they are instantly constructed in accordance with the changes in events. If these

narratives take on, they are likely to constitute and utilize power over agenda setting, the following discussion of issues as well as the policies adopted (Hagström & Gustafson, 2019, p.388).

Hagström and Gustafsson explain the power of narratives. We handle a narrative as preponderant, or powerful, if a crucial body of social actors accepts it as ‘common sense’ (Epstein, 2008; Krebs, 2015). In these situations, alternative stories are set down to obscurity. If the preponderant narrative logical to and therefore resonates with most of a focused audience, the exercise of power can be so effective that it goes largely unnoticed.

Narratives are performative and enable certain policies and antagonisms (Hagström & Gustafson, 2019, p.388). All foreign policy narratives are currently influence by realist story (Morgenthau, 1948; Waltz, 1979) as master narrative. International actors are aware about the significance of narratives. Chinese government is in need to tell story of China (Lim & Berghin, 2018), and Obama White House engaged in a ‘narrative battle’ with IS (Warren, 2016). Deeply established master narratives thus circumstance the formulation and acceptance of less established narratives.

Narratives must draw on deeply sedimented or established master narratives or discourses already accepted by the target audience in order to appear commonsensical and become dominant (Ewick & Silbey, 1995; Spencer, 2016, p.394). The matter that narratives on present events need to initiate master narratives in order to cause effects and implement power highlights the significance of internarrativity. The narrative on the Asia–Pacific power shift and rising of China, the ineluctable of future conflict arguably becomes reasonable exactly by drawing on deeply established master narratives about power transitions and the rise and fall of great powers, which, moreover, draw legitimacy from their academic status (Spencer, 2016, p.394; Ewick & Silbey, 1995).

Narratives can affect beliefs through the contraption of ‘transportation’; that is, the story ‘transports’ the audience by resonating emotions and images so that it (Linus Hagstream & Karl Gustafsson, 2015, p.394). Research also suggests that narratives create

influence when they appeal to common emotions (Solomon, 2014; Hagstroom & Gustafsson 2015; Hall & Ross, 2015, p.395). The most important form of power involves convincing actors to accept policies and norms that contradict their ‘real interests’ (Lukes, 2005; Hagström, 2005; Nabers, 2010).

Existing research shows that narratives are performative. By ascribing qualities, dispositions and intentions to actors, they establish their identities and, by extension, their interests (Ringmar, 1996; Spencer, 2016). In these narratives, the identity of the self typically emerges through its aligning with spatial or interim difference, or others (Rumelili, 2004; Gustafsson, 2016; Hagstroom & Hanssen, 2016). Furthermore, narratives may produce effects by generating some actors as powerful and others as less so (Breslin, 2009; Adler-Nissen & Pouliot, 2014), and such characterizations also generate effects (Breslin, 2009; Adler-Nissen & Pouliot, 2014, p.395).

Narratives peak ‘in a moral to the story’ (Jones & McBeth, 2010, p.329) or a lesson for the forthcoming that propose a certain course of action (Gustafsson, 2011). Once accommodated, narratives, and discourses more at large, make some actions appear realistic, natural, legitimate while others come to be viewed as the opposite (Doty, 1993; Holland, 2013; Ewick & Silbey, 1995; Bruner, 1991; Weldes & Saco, 1996). For example narratives could have an important role in securitization processes if those constructed as others are depicted as minacious (Buzan, 1998).

The literature does not distinguish with progressive, positive, liberating narratives, and colonialist narratives. Illegitimate use of soft power can serve as precursor or complement to more traditional military actions. Russia aims to weaken the determination of Western publics creating confusion about who is right and wrong. For, Russia’s purpose is not to win a war with Ukraine, but to challenge and change the international system in a way that will benefit Russia and permit ongoing Russian colonialism. For this purpose, in the following chapter, we will identify the strategic narrative constructed by Russia using various propaganda and perception management techniques and fake news. Strategic narratives also build geopolitical identities (Hagström & Gustafson, 2019, 387).



## **CHAPTER 3**

### **3. THE CASE OF SPUTNIK'S COMMUNICATION STRATEGY IN THE RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN WAR**

It is not only a discursive battle, but material information dissemination capacities are a significant part of hybrid war. Before 2014 Russia paid attention to dominating Ukrainian and other former Soviet media with its satellite televisions. The troll factory in St. Petersburg was deployed as boasts to create swing of opinions on Twitter or telegram. So structural aspects of information battles also matter. Sputnik complains about the European Union and the United States' decision to block them online and on social media.

We will outline the strategic narrative portrayed by Sputnik to increase Russia's power in war. (I) Russia's appeal on the master narrative of West vs East-West vs Russian/Empire historiographical narrative. As this narrative is largely accepted in the colonized East this gives power. (II) Words such as 'containment' are proximate causes of conflict fit into this larger master narrative. (III) Russian victimhood, benign great power, EU and West as antagonist. (IV) Mobilize and influence world public to act on Russian demands. (V) Silence about Russian colonialism and Ukrainian victimhood.

#### **3.1. Sputnik Refers to the Master Narrative of West vs East and West vs Russian/Empire Narrative**

As strategic narratives depend on master narratives to be more resonant, Russian statements related to NATO and the EU always refer to a civilizational conflict narrative between a colonizing, exploiting, belligerent West and victim and benign Russia. This recycles the exclusion of the Russian Empire from the European system of balance of power

and Napoleon's advances to Russia and the geopolitical master frame advanced by the Soviet Union during the Cold War in which geopolitical rivalry between the capitalist West and socialist Soviet Union to win the Third World countries in their bloc.

Sputnik interprets Russia's actions as a response to Western actions to take Ukraine into NATO, thereby encroaching on Russia. Many academic experts are cited to have an opinion, but these alchemists are generally not well-known. The Sputnik News released an interview with an academician, Dr. Zorawar Daulet Singh, who has a favorable opinion of Russia. Sputnik News aims to use an academic opinion to support its invasion of Ukraine and gain a standing point to justify it both domestically and internationally. His academic opinion suggests that the illegal annexation of Crimea was justifiable since its ethnicity "consists of Russian" and the recent invasion is rightful because "Russian containment" which means NATO aims to surround Russia by making Ukraine a NATO member state. He suggests that the conflict would turn out to be a nuclear crisis if Ukraine was already a NATO member state.

Although this person's academic credentials are emphasized, the argument does not fit academic standards as counterarguments are not considered or refuted, and argumentation is not balanced. He argues that NATO expansion threatens Russia as it comes closer to the Russian border. However, Baltic states are NATO members, and they have a border with Russia with the Kaliningrad region and mainland; thus, those arguments about Ukraine's NATO membership would get NATO closer to the Russian border, proves itself wrong with this fact. Similarly constituting an ethnic majority does not justify separation as seen in many examples in the world (Catalonia, Wales, Northern Ireland, etc.), and only genocide or the possibility of genocide could warrant such a claim. The "Containment" argument is also not an unbiased one as Russia is the largest country in the world and cannot be easily contained without the collaboration of Asian states.

An Indian official was quoted to blame the West, even with inciting a danger of nuclear war. This argument involves a perception management technique as Russia was argued to be automatically compelled to a nuclear war. It uses euphemisms such as

“neutralization of Ukraine” and “security crisis” to belittle Russia’s actions such as starting an unprovoked war, invading a neighbor, or killing civilians.

Putin on several occasions recently, said the possibility of a major confrontation between Russia and US-NATO would have taken on a very different meaning had Ukraine already been a member state of NATO. Putin even raised the specter of a nuclear crisis in the hypothetical scenario of Ukraine inside NATO's tent. Therefore, Russia is seeking to neutralize Ukraine's geopolitical status to solve the dangerous security crisis in Europe. This worrying development since 2014 led to a counter-reaction by Russia. Firstly, that counter-reaction led to the integration of Crimea after the referendum of its predominantly ethnic Russian population to join mainland Russia. (Kumar, 2022).

Sputnik claims this is not a war between Russia and Ukraine but a war between Russia and the West, especially the United States. To prove this point Sputnik refers to Western military aid to Ukraine, and Western sanctions against Russia characterizing it as a Western proxy war against Russia. Sputnik produces a “conspiracy theory” about how Biden will possibly initiate a cyber-attack against Russian infrastructure and interfere with Russia’s abilities to supply its forces. The specificity of Sputnik’s strategic narrative is it liberally uses the old and new propaganda techniques to bolster the discourse. Similarly, along with discourse about the West being a malicious power, Sputnik offers misinformation that the US transfers terrorists from one place to another for its dark purposes and fake news that the US transfers ISIS militants to Ukraine. While it is claimed that Russian officials have proof, no such proof is produced and published in the newspaper.

US special services could send members of Daesh, as well as other terrorist groups in Syria, to Ukraine, Syrian Deputy Foreign Minister Bashar Jaafari told Sputnik. ‘Based on the analysis, we can say that this is quite possibly true. We, as a state, have evidence that the US military in Syria is transferring terrorists from one place to another, especially members of the IS and Jabhat al-Nusra\*,’ Jaafari said. He argued that the US had transferred terrorists from Syria to Afghanistan and Burkina-

Faso and that the use of mercenaries is a well-established US practice. He added that Western states have been supporting nationalist radicals in Ukraine. (US Could Transfer Terrorists From Syria to Ukraine Amid Russian Op, Damascus Says, 2022).

A constant discourse in Sputnik is to blame the conflict on the West, and since it was Russia who attacked first Sputnik tries to use propaganda techniques to make the case. An interview with “an ex-Pentagon analyst” suggests that the responsible parties of this conflict are the United States and NATO as part of the perception management effort. Dubious experts and Westerners who side with Russian and Chinese officials are often interviewed on Sputnik to give more credibility to the news.

Sputnik often engages in whataboutism and malinformation practice citing US wars in the world. The US is blamed for being an escalator of the conflict in Ukraine as well. Similarity is drawn between US wars in the Middle East and Afghanistan and Ukraine. Sputnik is silent about Russian interference in Syria and Soviet interference in Afghanistan, which would put Russia in a similar colonizer position as the US.

While Chinese officials ambiguously side with Russia, China’s view is the cornerstone of Russia’s perception management regarding Russia’s support in the world. Russia seeks to isolate the West by trying to attract China to its camp. Here is a quote from a Chinese official:

The United States should ‘ask itself’ who is to blame for the Ukraine crisis, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian has suggested. ‘Never forget who’s the real threat to the world,’ the Chinese Embassy in Russia wrote in a separate tweet accompanied by a ‘USA Bombing List: The Democracy World Tour’ graphic showing over 30 countries bombed by the US from the 1950s to the present. The graphic, first posted by Zhao, was shared and reposted by multiple Chinese missions and officials. The Embassy blamed the US for ‘the current tensions around Ukraine,’ suggesting that ‘if someone continues to pour oil on the flame while accusing others of not doing their

best to put out the fire, that type of behavior is irresponsible and immoral. (Tsukanov, 2022).

The master narrative of geopolitical rivalry is reminded by bringing in Cuba's support for Russia, as Cuba was a significant country in the Cold War with its geographical position and the conflict. Cuba also is given as a representative from the Third World to counter anti-Russian operation rhetoric's that are coming from the Western bloc. Such endorsements usually come from anti-Western-oriented countries, which have close relations with Russia. One of the countries that supports Russia is Cuba. Cuba accuses the US of its persistence in NATO's expansion eastward because of Ukraine's will to become a member of NATO and this situation caused unpredictable consequences that could have been avoided if the US did not push forward to have Ukraine in NATO. The Cuban Ministry of Foreign and Cuban National Assembly stated that:

The American determination to continue the progressive expansion of NATO towards the borders of Russia led to a scenario with implications of unpredictable scope that could have been avoided ... *the recent US and NATO deployments close to the Russian borders and the delivery of weapons to Kyiv amount to a 'progressive military encirclement'*. The Cuban National Assembly earlier called on the United States to take Russia's security proposals "seriously and realistically," saying that Russia has the right to defend itself (Geydarova, 2022).

Russian government emphasizes Ukraine has to be a neutral country as before 2013 and NATO should not deploy forces in Eastern Europe. This shows that Russia still registers for Cold War type of international relations in which the world is divided between the West and the Soviet spheres of influence.

Sputnik complains about its being targeted by the West as a source of propaganda and disinformation. Sputnik mentions Twitter's move on Sputnik staff to label Russian-State Owned Media as a witch hunt. This news also shows that Sputnik News accepted that it is a state-owned media outlet. I am surprised that Sputnik quoted von der Leyen saying "will no

longer be able to spread their lies to justify Putin's war and to sow division in our union”  
This quote summarizes the whole literature about Sputnik News and RU state-owned media:

Twitter's labeling of the accounts of Sputnik employees amounts to a ‘witch hunt,’ the news agency has said. Earlier, the US social media giant began to assign the accounts of Sputnik staff special markings to indicate that they work for state-owned media, supposedly ‘to provide more context and ensure transparency.’ The move by Twitter is the latest attack on Russian media by Western governments and internet giants. Earlier, Sputnik's Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok accounts were restricted across Europe, with Instagram justifying the decision citing ‘an order from the government, court or other authority.’ On Sunday, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen promised to ‘ban in the EU the Kremlin's media machine,’ and announced that ‘the state-owned Russia Today and Sputnik as well as their subsidiaries will no longer be able to spread their lies to justify Putin's war and to sow division in our union.’ The censorship campaign is just one element of a broad package of measures taken by the US, the European Union, and their allies against Russia over its military operation in Ukraine (Tsukanov, 2022).

Western countries especially US and UK were targeted with malinformation to discredit them, especially with issues such as corruption and child abuse, as a right of the morally corrupt West. Sputnik released news about United Kingdom’s Royal Family, Prince Andrew’s scandal:

British MPs are unable to probe whether public money was funneled into Prince Andrew’s multi-million-pound out-of-court settlement with his sex abuse accuser Virginia Giuffre due to an ancient custom barring the discussion of royals in Parliament, reported The Sun. This has prompted Labor MP Andy McDonald to write to minister Steve Barclay - No.10’s new chief of staff - requesting confirmation that no taxpayer cash was used in this instance (Ekimenko, 2022).

This news is another discrediting news that Sputnik released. I went on The Sun newspaper website, as Sputnik referred to it, and checked the news date and it showed that The Sun released the news on February 16th and Sputnik released the news on February 28th. Releasing 12-day-old news at that time as a new story shows Sputnik's intentions to discredit an allied country.

### **3.2. Proximate Causes of Conflict Fit Into This Larger Master Narrative**

Since 2014 Russia has been consolidating a specific narrative on post-2014 events and changes in Ukraine. This narrative was easily applied to the recent attack on Ukraine. It is summarized in Sputnik as such:

The coup prompted authorities in Crimea to organize a referendum on the peninsula's status, with a majority of residents voting to break off from the new Ukraine and rejoin Russia. The installation of the new regime in Kyiv also sparked large-scale protests in the country's east and south, with dozens of activists and high-profile political figures intimidated, jailed, murdered or quietly disappeared over their opposition to the government and desire to maintain close links with Russia ... In the spring of 2014, when Kyiv sent troops to try to crush a fledgling independence movement, residents, ex-military, and volunteers organized into militias, sparking a civil conflict that would continue for nearly eight years ... amid a Ukrainian military buildup near Donbas and reports of hundreds of violations of the Minsk ceasefire, Russia took the unprecedented step of recognizing the Donbas breakaways as independent states. Days later, on the night of 23 February, pointing to continued Ukrainian attacks, the new nations asked Moscow for assistance. On the morning of 24 February, Moscow launched what President Putin said was a 'special military operation' aimed at 'demilitarizing and denazifying' the country (Tsukanov, 2022).

In the early hours of February 24th, 2022, Vladimir Putin announced the start of so called "special military operation". The first news released by Sputnik News at 05:59 on February 24th, 2022, via Telegram about the Russian operation; the news solely consisted

of Vladimir Putin's address. Vladimir Putin declared that Russia sees Ukraine as a threat to Russia and Russia wants security guarantees from Ukraine for Russia and for people of the Donbass region who are ethnic Russians. Vladimir Putin stated that Russia has no intention to occupy Ukrainian territory and that Russian forces will leave Ukrainian soil once they accomplish their objectives, which are to denazify and demilitarize Ukraine so Russia can guarantee the safety of the homeland and the safety of ethnic Russians in Donbas region. As Sputnik presents the Russian leader's talking point without any framing and interpretation, we need to accept Sputnik's endorsements and analyze these claims as well.

Here we see the justification of the attack with the propaganda that it was not Ukrainian but Russian security was under attack. Putin wanted to establish the attack as "provoked" referring to the civilizational war master narrative of international relations explained in the earlier section. Biden made a point of repeating the Russian attack was "unprovoked", which shows that the US also attempted to develop counterpropaganda early on. At the very beginning of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and heavy deployment of propaganda, disinformation, and fake news by this speech, which formulated the Russian narrative about the war. Russia was established as the victim whose security was breached. Russian occupation is branded as a "special military operation" that enables Russia to occupy Ukraine without accepting to have occupied it, which signaled the creation of a post-truth atmosphere for this war. Previously, by occupying Crimea with 40,000 soldiers who did not have insignia, Russia claimed not to have occupied Crimea. In this way, the attack on Ukraine also demonstrates the heavy use of hybrid war methods, as an essential and integrated aspect of military operation. The euphemism "demilitarization" is used to support special operation claims and to denote that Russia would attack only military targets, sparing civilians. In the early days of the war, Russia was counting on these civilians to change sides as it partly happened in Crimea and Donbas because of the post-war environment created through lies and distortion. In the war in Ukraine too, Sputnik News intensely and regularly used fake news to disrupt the morale of Ukrainian forces. Even in the early hours of the invasion, the news from the Telegram channel of Sputnik on February 24th, 2022, at 10:18 says that:

“The Luhansk People’s Republic says Ukrainian soldiers on the line of contact in Donbas are en masse refusing to obey orders and are abandoning their positions. The Donetsk People’s Republic says they are conducting successful offensive operations in several areas and Kiev forces are leaving their positions” (Sputnik News Telegram Channel, 24.02.2022 10:18).

Another similar news:

... The MoD has also reported on instances of mass surrender by Ukrainian forces, with the Russian side guaranteeing their safety and promising to allow them to return home to their families ... (Tsukanov, 2022).

This type of news focuses on reducing the will to fight Ukrainian forces against Russian forces by convincing them that their forces are refusing to fight, and they should consider doing the same. Unlike during the invasion of Crimea, Ukrainian and Western media’s vigilance and scale of war, more awareness of Russian propaganda among civilians disrupted the building of a perfect alternative reality.

Another instance of perception management was that in the late hours of February 24th, 2022, Sputnik released breaking news at 23:45 on its Telegram channel which claims that the West expects Kyiv to fall to the Russian forces within hours and also claims that Ukraine’s air defenses mostly eliminated according to “a western official”. This breaking news released by Sputnik News only relies on a tweet from Robert Burgess who is the Bloomberg Opinion executive editor and the only source of that news is an unknown Western official; this unreliable news proved itself as fake news in time as Kyiv did not fall and Ukrainian air defenses were still active. Another related news to the defeat of Ukraine came a day after Sputnik claimed that a plane left Kyiv and the Italian Prime Minister could not get in touch with Zelensky, suggesting that Zelensky left Kyiv and abandoned the Ukrainian capital. Although these lies could be obvious in a few days, Russia through its media tried to form a post-truth environment that could dissuade Ukrainian people from believing in Zelensky and fighting with Russia. Russian State Duma speaker Vyacheslav

Volodin said that Ukrainian President Zelensky had left Kyiv for Lvov (uses the Russian version of the name) as of 25th of February by saying:

"Zelensky hastily left Kiev. He was not in the capital of Ukraine yesterday. Together with his entourage, he fled to the city of Lvov, where he and his assistants were equipped with a place to live" and also said that all the videos that Zelensky published on social networks were recorded in advance and Volodin also claimed that he received that information from the deputies of Rada, which is the Ukrainian Legislature." (Zelensky Had Fled Kiev for Lvov, Russian State Duma Speaker Says, 2022).

In the early days of the invasion, the effort to create a post-truth environment continued with malinformation. A telegram post of Sputnik News claimed that Zelensky was offered asylum by the UK and France, which is true, but the continuation of this news consists of fake news claiming that Zelensky had been sacrificed or rather abandoned by his Western allies and Europeans do not have plan B for Ukraine,

Putin appeals to the common-sense anti-Nazi feelings by claiming his purpose to be denazification and drawing WWII parallels as the Soviets fought against Nazis to make bystanders believe his claim. This claim also builds a post-truth environment as currently Nazi ideology and threat are not viable, but Putin aims to establish as if it was a real threat. Several articles in Sputnik claim that Ukraine has neo-Nazi organizations, and this is a direct threat to Russians in Donbass region and to the world. The first news related to that argument from Moscow came on February 24th, 2022, at 14:30 on the Sputnik Telegram channel that claimed the Russian operation will depend on its effectiveness and Russia's ideal goal is to liberate Ukraine and clear it of Nazis. Here WWII analogy which has resonance among Soviet and post-Soviet peoples was drawn to draw support from them or at least neutralize them. It also contributes to the creation of a post-truth atmosphere, as it denies the truth that Russia attacks Ukraine which it claims to have strong ethnic and cultural affinity: "Russia is not fighting with Ukraine, but it is fighting with Nazis, who took over Ukrainian

government.” Russian propaganda is not random or merely aiming to slander, but it is part of a systemic effort to the creation of an alternative reality.

Another way Russia creates a post-truth enemy in Ukraine is the term Banderites. Peskov claimed the existence of Ukrainian nationalists called Banderites, who were followers of WWII Ukrainian liberationist Bandera. Deploying biased historiography, Bandera is connected to Nazis as he fought against the Soviet Union to liberate Ukraine. In the below quote, Peskov cites they use the same “jihadist” attack vehicles, again to rise the emotions of especially Western readers, who are already prompted to have strong negative feelings against so-called Jihadists.

There were clashes with mobile groups of nationalists and Banderites, who used light vehicles and trucks fitted with weapons on the principle of ‘jihad mobiles,’ only there they are now called “Bandera mobiles” (Tsukanov, 2022).

This Bandera statement refers to Stepan Bandera, who is a World War II era Ukrainian nationalist and Sputnik mentions that saying “Stepan Bandera, a WWII-era Ukrainian ultranationalist and Nazi collaborator whose follower’s exterminated tens of thousands of Poles, Jews, and Red Army troops during the war. Bandera has been lionized as a national hero by Ukraine’s authorities ever since the 2014 coup in Kiev.” (Tsukanov, 2022).

Ukrainian-Daesh analogy is drawn in other new items as well.

... spoke about the tremendous spread of disinformation and ‘fake news’ regarding Russia's special military operation in Ukraine, including claims of ‘bombardment’ of civilian facilities ... ‘in social media, one can easily find tutorials that teach how to shoot fakes that should defile our special operation’ ... envoy also reiterated evidence of Kiev using civilians as human shields ... so far ignored by Western politicians and received no coverage in foreign media, despite being witnessed by ordinary Ukrainians, in tactics similar to ‘that of [Daesh\*] terrorists’ ... ‘These methods are

actively used by terrorists supervised by the CIA in the Middle East and other countries' (Geydarova, 2022).

As days pass after the attack, the attack's justification seems to have not been sufficient therefore new reasons are produced that were not there on the first day, such as Kyiv's rejection of Minsk agreements, as presented in the new below.

The Foreign Ministers of Russia and China, Sergey Lavrov and Wang Yi have expressed a common opinion that the cause of the crisis around Ukraine is Kiev's rejection of the Minsk agreements, which was encouraged by the US and its allies, the Russian Foreign Ministry says.” (Sputnik Telegram Channel, 24.02.2022 14:55).

Repeating that Russia is open to diplomatic solutions, but Ukraine is the party that does not accept international accords, Russia again passes the blame to Ukraine for its attack. Sputnik and Russian leaders are silent about Russia's breach of the Budapest memorandum in which Russia became a guarantor of Ukrainian territorial integrity along with the US and UK. To say the least Ukraine's lack of compliance with international law and agreements and aversion from diplomacy is a misinformation. Another news at 14:55 on the Sputnik Telegram channel claims that Ukraine is responsible for this conflict because of the refusal of the Minsk Agreement, which the US stimulated Ukraine to do so. This is again misinformation as Ukraine's refusal was neither new nor formed a physical threat to Russian-occupied parts of Donbass. It was not like Ukraine succeeded in taking those regions back. Russia presents itself as a lawful state by referring to calls from “Luhansk and Donetsk People's Republics”, which was specifically founded by KGB operations in 2014, and “declared independence” on February 22. This whole event of course goes beyond perception management and post-truth and can be characterized as an intelligence service's interference in a foreign soil for occupation.

More excuses for the Russian attack were produced as time went by. Sputnik News repeated the claim that after the governmental change happened in 2014 in Ukraine, the new pro-Western government organized volunteer battalions and such battalions committed war

crimes; thus, volunteer battalions – who are backed by the Ukrainian government – committed human rights violations. Which directly or indirectly makes the Ukrainian government criminal and also this is a continuation of earlier discourse from 2021. Such news was first released on February 25, 2022, stating that:

Apart from deploying regular troops to shell the cities of the DPR and LPR, the new Kiev leadership attracted several so-called "volunteer battalions" – ragtag groups of people, often nationalists and ex-convicts, funded and equipped by Ukrainian oligarchs and businessmen with connections to the new government. Their members were often involved in various war crimes – ranging from looting to killing civilians and rape. One such battalion, dubbed "Tornado", was disbanded in December 2014 by Kiev following numerous reports of its crimes, but its members were never prosecuted, with many of them moving to other battalions (What Did Putin Mean by 'Denazification' of Ukraine and Why is It So Important, 2022).

Continuing with defamation of the Ukrainian state, Sputnik News claims Russia tried to convince Western nations to investigate war crimes committed by Ukrainian authorities against Russians or Russian-speaking people with the use of "neo-Nazis", but Western states ignored Russia. This news section claims that Ukrainian authorities are oppressing Russians in Donbass region and the West shut their eyes to the human rights violations; thus, Russia had to intervene militarily to stop these war crimes. In addition, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs claimed that the European Court of Human Rights ignored the killing of thousands of civilians by Ukrainian death squads in Donbass for eight years. This purposeful fake news was utilized to ease the reaction from the world and lay responsibility to the West for this conflict. Using strong claims such as "war crimes", and "death squads" aims to create strong emotional reactions for people who could question the Russian attack and neutralize them.

The dark propaganda did not stop at war crimes and death squads, but Ukraine was accused with emotionally charged claim of genocide. Sputnik News claims that the Russian Foreign Ministry made a book about longstanding war crimes and human

rights violations of the Ukrainian Government, and it is 80 pages long. This news is considered misinformative news because the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) was active in Donbass region and observed both sides for a long time and they did not report any systematic or exclusive human rights violations or war crimes; this argument solely comes from Russian Government to justify their actions in the international arena. This misinformative news also clearly shows that Russian officials and government organizations create misinformation and Sputnik News Agency helps to spread that misinformation. (What Did Putin Mean by ‘Denazification’ of Ukraine and Why is It So Important, 2022).

That statement resembles the Russian operation in Ukraine to those NATO campaigns as they were established to prevent genocide and war crimes committed by Serbian troops. Thus, according to his point-of-view, if NATO sees those operations as legitimate, then the Russian special military operation is legitimate too, as it launched to stop “genocide” against Russians in Donbass region by neo-Nazis of Ukraine.

Claims of “genocide” are fake news as there were observers from the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe since the conflict began in 2014 and they did not report a systematic act that can be considered as genocide; so, this claim of Russia falls on the fake news side with that fact. As if claims of genocide were not enough, another grand accusation was directed towards Ukraine: having weapons of mass destruction. As world audiences are also sensitive to this concept, this was also deployed to neutralize them.

This is US and NATO policy, and it was cited by Putin last week as a reason for Moscow's recognition of the two eastern republics, and his military attacks on Ukraine's military capabilities, chemical and biological laboratories, and political command and control,’ she (former Pentagon analyst and retired US Air Force Lt. Col. Karen Kwiatkowski) said (Ex-DoD Analyst: Biden Team Risks Regional War, Energy Costs for Sake of Ukraine Escalation, 2022).

The argument about Ukraine possessing weapons of mass destruction is fake news as Russia could not show any real evidence on this occasion later. However, this fake news made its way to one of the major Turkish newspapers, Cumhuriyet.

The Sputnik News Agency covered the invasion of Ukraine in a wide range and established a special section on their website titled “Situation in Ukraine” that solely consisted of related news. The news released in this section has common arguments and similar rhetoric’s. One of these similarities worth mentioning can be seen in the ending section of every news released in the early days of the war, which is:

... comes days after Russia began a special operation to demilitarize and ‘denazify’ Ukraine, responding to calls from the Donetsk and Lugansk people's republics for help in countering the aggression of Ukrainian forces. The Russian Defense Ministry said the special operation is targeting Ukrainian military infrastructure only and the civilian population is not in danger. Moscow says it has no plans to occupy Ukraine (Brunov, 2022).

Repetition is a common tactic in Sputnik's establishment of a post-truth atmosphere. To state that Moscow has no plan to occupy Ukraine when it already did again is a post-truth tactic.

Disinformation accompanied as Russia attacked more on the civilian population. Russian Federation’s first use of media as a tool came in the early hours of February 24th, 2022, at 07:46 with the news from the Russian Ministry of Defense, which states that Russian Armed Forces are not carrying out any strikes on Ukrainian cities but Ukrainian military infrastructure, air defenses, and other military assets are being disabled by high precision weapons. Let alone the fact that Russia did not have many high-precision weapons Russian weapons technology was very advanced, and Russian soldiers were sufficiently trained due to corruption in the army, there was evidence that Russia wanted to break civilians by attacking them and causing them to change sides. Much evidence was compiled by Ukraine's state organs, citizen

journalists, and Western media about attacks on Ukrainian civilian areas and civilian infrastructure. Another excuse for attacks on civilians is the Russian Ministry of Defense's claim that they are not conducting any strikes against residential areas in Ukrainian cities, but Ukrainian nationalists are using civilians as human shields by deploying military equipment in residential areas, which, has been denied by Ukrainian authorities several times (Dergalin, 2022).

In accordance with Russia framing the war as an age-old civilizational rivalry between the West and Russia, the Russian foreign ministry calls the Ukrainian government a “puppet regime” of the West (Sputnik Telegram Channel, 25.02.2022, 22:17). Russian strategic narrative is based on disregard of Ukrainian agency, non-recognition of Ukraine as an independent sovereign country, with its own interests and identity. According to Putin's ideology, Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus form a unique triadic nation. Thus, for the Russian narrative, the 2014 Euromaidan revolution is a coup and Russia will free the Ukrainian people who are under the Ukrainian Government's oppression (Sputnik Telegram Channel, 25.02.2022, 22:17). As Ukraine is a non-entity, NATO was shown as the real initiator of war in Sputnik narrative. Ukraine does not have a right to security, only NATO and Russia do. First NATO related news came on February 26, 2022, and in this news, Sputnik News claims that NATO has disregarded Russia in the context of European Security and the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs considers that NATO's statement related to the war comes from NATO's lack of abilities to strengthen the security of Europe and ignoring Russia for this topic. Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokeswoman Maria Zakharova states that:

NATO has no grounds to call the ongoing Russian special military operation in Ukraine ‘aggression’ ... NATO countries’ inability to negotiate and their lack of desire to truly strengthen security in Europe on the basis of the principle of equal and indivisible security, we consider their attempts to accuse us of aggression to be groundless” after NATO's extraordinary heads of state summit, regarding the situation in Ukraine (Tsukanov, 2022).

Ukrainian and Western narrative regards the Russian invasion was strong therefore, Sputnik tries to counter-frame by referencing a Westerner who was supposedly observed in Donbas. Using academics, experts and Westerners is a tactic to render more legitimacy for Russia's actions and challenge the Western narrative more forcefully. In this case George Eliason, an American investigative journalist who lives and works in Donbass states that:

The 'Russia invasion' narrative wasn't the West's 'prophecy' but rather a cover-up for a new attempt to return the breakaway Donetsk and Lugansk republics by force to Ukraine ... Bringing back Donbass would have paved the way for Ukraine's NATO membership: in accordance with the alliance's rules, a country having territorial disputes cannot be admitted to the bloc (Blinova, 2022).

This argument sounds like an illogical conspiracy theory: the US is accused of forcibly integrating Donbass region, aiming to integrate Ukraine into NATO. Ukraine is disregarded as a willing actor, and Ukraine's integration into NATO could be the US' wish. It is illogical because if the US wished only to integrate Ukraine into NATO, and Ukraine was a passive actor, the US could convince Ukraine to give up Donbass and take the country into NATO. Sputnik News also misrepresents NATO as it is an alliance of several members who have to unanimously make decisions, and any of them can block the entrance of Ukraine. This news also can be interpreted as Russia's ulterior motive in this invasion has been to disrupt the territorial integrity of Ukraine to block any move of Ukraine to become a member of NATO; as NATO membership requires territorial integrity and zero territorial dispute.

NATO was accused of trying to manipulate Ukraine into entering NATO, while Ukraine already and clearly demanded to enter NATO several times. However, Sputnik needs to show Ukraine does not have an independent will. According to this narrative, Ukraine would not in its right mind want to enter Russia, therefore it should be either taken over by corrupt individuals who pretend to be a rightful government or manipulated by NATO.

Apart from NATO, Western European countries are also blamed for not resolving the Donbas Conflict, which emerged due to Russian intelligence and military operations and incitement of separatist movements in this region. Sputnik News blames NATO for the lack of resolution to Donbass crisis despite Russia's sat with Germany and France, two NATO countries to broker a peace deal in Donbass over the last 8 years. As this is a case of Western countries being blamed for not resolving a conflict started by Russia, and this conflict itself is used as a pretext for the invasion of Ukraine, it could be considered as the establishment of a post-truth environment accompanying the Russian invasion of Ukraine. These arguments are necessary components of Russia's military campaign in Ukraine. Sputnik puts forward these arguments as such:

The current crisis is the culmination of eight years of escalating tension between Russia and the West over Ukraine following a pro-Western coup in Kiev in February 2014, which ousted the country's neutrality-seeking government and replaced it with forces seeking to integrate the country into the European Union and NATO.” (Tsukanov, 2022).

Not only Russia has initiated the Donbas conflict, but it is not used as a pretext for starting in Ukraine as framed by Sputnik. “Russia didn't start the years-old conflict in Ukraine but is seeking to bring it to a conclusion ...” (Tsukanov, 2022).

Sputnik is silent about the historical context in which Ukraine was colonized by Russia, suffered Holodomor – man-made famine – and was threatened by Russia with gas cuts since the 2004 Orange Revolution.

As European military aid to Ukraine increased, Russia developed a new frame that Western countries are “prolonging the war”. Again, a Westerner is called to support this narrative. An honorary senator of Belgium supports Russia's argument that the Western bloc escalated the tension this far:

... sending medical supplies is one thing, prolonging the war is another, especially after provoking it,' says Frank Creyelman, a Belgian honorary senator and honorary member of the Flemish Parliament. Germany on 26 February reversed its policy of never sending weapons to conflict zones ... Germany had resisted the pressure from its EU and NATO allies, refusing to send lethal military aid to Ukraine. ... EU officials are working on a program to arm Ukraine, even though the bloc's treaties prohibit it from using its normal budget to fund military operations. However, Brussels decided to use an 'off-budget' financing vehicle, called the 'European Peace Facility,' to provide weapons to Kiev. No Longer a 'Peaceful' Alliance of Democracies. Germany's change of heart could be explained by growing pressure from Washington, according to the observers (Blinova, 2022).

On the same news, Sputnik News argues that the European Union launched a Proxy war against Russia via Ukraine at the expense of the Ukrainian people, with the mention of Kovalik's statement on Sputnik puts the blame on Western bloc about this conflict again:

Sending lethal aid to Ukraine by the EU amounts to declaring a proxy war on Russia, according to Trifkovic. However, he insists that it has been the intention all along. What's worse, this proxy war against Russia comes at the expense of the Ukrainian people, says Dan Kovalik. 'The United States and the UK wound Ukraine up, clearly provoked Russia, clearly wanted this conflict, and then once it started, they just backed off and watched it happen,' he says. 'I would very clearly say that I don't think the United States supports Ukraine or the Ukrainian people. If it did, it would have done much, much more to prevent the tragedy in the Donbass that's been going on for the last eight years,' the academic notes (Blinova, 2022).

Russia argues that the European Union is no longer a peace-seeking organization as it uses the European Peace Facility fund to provide arms to Ukraine where the fund's name consists of the "Peace" word and is a contradiction to its name. This decision came right after Germany changed its mind about sending military aid to Ukraine with the possible pressure from the United States of America.

The Belarusian President claimed some foreign actors encouraged and pushed Kyiv to fight against Russia and he claims that those foreign actors promised fighters from Afghanistan, the Middle East, and private military companies; but time revealed that Russia is the one who uses foreign fighters and private military companies in Ukraine not the Ukraine, Russia does this with the help of Wagner group, which is the private military company.

The most of news released by Sputnik that proven wrong, which makes it fake news, mostly consists of Russian claims. Those Russian claims are coming from authorities both in Russia and the so-called DPR & LPR from Donbass region. One of those fake news released on February 24th, 2022, at 10:42 from the Sputnik Telegram channel; the news covers so-called DPR head Denis Pushilin who claims that Ukraine's national guards blocking exits from Mariupol and forcing people of Mariupol to stay to hide behind their backs and there are clashes between civilians and Ukrainian law enforcement agencies at checkpoints. This news can be interpreted as Ukrainian forces using civilians as human shields Ukrainian forces do not care about civilians and Ukrainian law enforcement agencies' employees oppress civilians. This news release proves itself wrong with the news that Ukrainian forces evacuate civilians by railroads that are close to the line of contact. Another news from the Russian Ministry of Defense at the same time and date on Sputnik's Telegram channel claims that there are civilian casualties in DPR and LPR from shelling by Ukrainian forces of "peaceful cities of Donbass"; which also shows Sputnik News claims that Ukrainian forces do not care about civilians and harms them. Two similar news at the same time and date from two different sources but with the same context on Sputnik raised suspicion and later it was proven to be fake news of Russian claims.

### **3.3. Russian Victimhood, Benign Great Power, EU and West as Antagonists and Corrupt Countries**

The WWII myth of Russia still seems to be a significant source of Russian identity. Russia defines itself as a heroic identity for opposing Nazi Germany by a mechanism of

selective remembering without mentioning the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact or partitioning of Poland. To bolster this heroic identity, Russia alludes to anti-Nazi sentiments widespread in the world's public opinion. Sputnik involves many post-truth arguments about the Ukrainian government and Zelensky, despite being a Jew is a Nazi. The latter seems to aim to create confusion.

Aligning with the anti-Nazi narrative in the world, Russia is argued to conduct the “denazification of Ukraine”. George Soros, who is a target of worldwide conspiracy theories is also taken up by Sputnik as he has many qualities that could contribute Russian Narrative. Soros applauded the 2012 Euromaidan Revolution and even confessed his support to pro-democracy NGOs in Ukraine as part of his open society initiative. The promotion of democracy in the former communist countries has been greatly perceived as a threat by Russia since the Color Revolution in Georgia, and their spread to many countries in the region. Sputnik used George Soros’ tweets as a supporting argument for Russia’s neo-Nazi Ukraine claims and that Russia is once again fighting against fascists, but also Sputnik claimed that Soros is a threat to Russia as he started working against Russia in 1990 and sponsored “2014 Maidan coup” against Russia oriented Ukrainian government and aimed to overthrow Russian government:

Soros’ Open Society Foundations have been active in Ukraine since 1990 when the country was still part of the Soviet Union ... The billionaire boasted in 2014 that his money and organizations sponsored by his NGOs ‘played an important part’ in assuring the victory of the February 2014 Maidan coup. In 2015, a hack and subsequent leak of communications between Soros and Ukrainian authorities revealed that Soros sought to build on the success of the coup in Kyiv to overthrow the Russian government. (Tsukanov, 2022).

Accordingly, Soros is demonized by Sputnik in several ways. That he is a Jew plays into the international Jewish conspiracy narrative. He and his family resisted the invasion of Budapest already made him an enemy of Russia, the successor of the Soviet Union. While demanding attention to complexity before judging Russia, Sputnik here declares Soros to be

Nazi since he likened the defense of Ukraine to the defense of Budapest and the Waffen-SS, German forces, and local fascists were among those who fought against the Red Army during the siege of Budapest in 1944. Here is the quote:

George Soros has compared the ‘brave’ Ukrainian military facing off against Russian troops to actual World War II-era German forces, including the Waffen-SS. In a multi-part Twitter thread Saturday, the Hungarian-born billionaire wrote that the ‘brave Ukrainians are now on the frontline and risking their lives in an onslaught that reminds me of the siege of Budapest in 1944 and the siege of Sarajevo in 1993.’ The ‘siege of Budapest’ referred to by Soros saw Red Army troops face off against fanatical local fascists and crack German troops who occupied Hungary in March 1944 after the collapse of its pro-Hitler puppet government. ... Soros, who is of Jewish descent, was a 14-year-old boy living in Budapest at the time of the Soviet operation, and, according to his biography, managed to survive the 1944 Nazi takeover because his father purchased documents saying the family was Christians (Tsukanov, 2022).

Stating that conscripts are not involved does not reflect the truth, there were too many social media posts about KIA or MIA Russian troops who are conscripts, also all settlements which have come under the control of the Russian military are continuing life as a normal argument does not reflect the truth either, excluding Donbass region. The surrendering of Ukrainian forces guaranteed safety argument is not realistic as there were incidents where Ukrainian troops were mistreated and abused, which is also against the Geneva Convention about prisoners of war. When Sputnik News said that activists and high-profile political figures intimidated, jailed, murdered, or quietly disappeared, this argument sounded like a Russian way of “solving problems” and they used that to discredit Ukraine. Furthermore, the Russian Ministry of Defense’s definition of Crimea statement saying that the majority of residents voting to break off from the new Ukraine and rejoin Russia section is a big controversy because only Russia sees this way, the rest of the world sees it as an illegal annexation. Violations of the Minsk ceasefire argument is from a Russian point-of-view; from the Ukrainian side, it is a precaution against Russian troops that have been building up

for months near the Ukrainian border, from all fronts. Also, a violator of the Minsk ceasefire was militias, Ukrainian forces were returning fire; Russia complained before that they had to hit residential areas to return fire because Ukrainian forces used civilians as human shields and Ukraine deployed military assets in residential areas, but when Ukraine does the same thing Russia does, it is a probable cause, in Russian point-of-view.

Sputnik News claims that NATO is responsible for Ukraine becoming a neo-Nazi state and Ukraine is the responsible party for this military operation by ignoring peaceful solutions, which means Russia justifies its attack on Ukraine as the problem is Ukraine becoming a neo-Nazi state supported by NATO. The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokeswoman Zakharova says:

... the nations of the North Atlantic bloc should answer for their military adventurism, as well as their inaction on the matter of encouraging the regime in Kiev to peacefully resolve the Donbass problem” at a press conference and added “a country which, with the connivance of the West, has become a hotbed of Nazi ideology” after NATO leaders at the virtual summit expressed all possible support for Ukraine (Tsukanov, 2022).

Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs Spokesman argued that United States IT companies help spread disinformation and more importantly, participate in disinformation activities. I interpret what the spokesman says as showing Sputnik, Russia Today, and other Russian state-owned media outlets as disinformation prevention tools. The other argument about Russians acquiring information from different sources, including Western media outlets, is aimed to show Western countries commit repressive actions on news media:

Moscow considers US IT companies' actions censoring Russian media to be ‘unacceptable,’ a Foreign Ministry spokesman has said. These companies' actions not only serve as a medium for spreading disinformation, but also see them directly participating in such activities ... Accusing the US and its allies of ‘shamelessly inciting’ a proxy war using Ukrainians to fight Russia ... So far, Russian authorities

and IT companies have refrained from a tit-for-tat retaliation, with most Western news sources remaining open inside Russia (apart from those shuttered by foreign news outlets themselves using IP blocks), and Russians remain able to get information about the situation in Ukraine from a variety of sources - ranging from government and independent media to local reporters and residents on the ground, including via social media. (Tsukanov, 2022).

Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs Spokesman missed a point: Western media offices are closed inside Russia.

### **3.4. Mobilize and Influence the World Public to Act on Russian Demands**

Russia is most fearful of isolation by NATO as Sputnik explains Third World's support for the Un General Assembly's condemnation of Russia's war with Western pressure. United Nations General Assembly condemned Russia for its operation in Ukraine but according to Russian Ambassador to the United Nations, Western countries pressured other countries to vote for condemnation; he says there were open threats but shows no evidence or example:

Russian Ambassador to the United Nations Vassily Nebenzia urged the General Assembly on Wednesday not to support the resolution condemning the Russian military operation. According to him, the Western countries used "unprecedented pressure" on a "large number of countries" to vote "as they see fit". "There were open and cynical threats, and we know about it (UNGA Passes Resolution Demanding Russia Stop Military Operation in Ukraine, 2022).

Here Russian representatives engaged in disinformation as there was no evidence of Western pressure though Western countries actively lobbied for the vote in United Nations. Many countries reacted against the unprovoked and unjust attack.

Sputnik has much news that suggests that India and China support Russia in its geopolitical rivalry against Moscow. An Indian official is quoted:

China and India's support to Russia is suggested as a balance to US power in many places. ... Of course, both Delhi and Beijing strongly believe in the concept of sovereignty and territorial integrity, but both also see the lead-up to this crisis as very much part of a complex history where it was a relentless encroachment by NATO after the end of the Cold War deeper and deeper into Eastern Europe and up to a point where it was poised to acquire a member state literally at Russia's doorstep (Kumar, 2022).

Sputnik News gives priority to academic opinions that support Russia and its actions. An exclusive report with Fabio Massimo Parenti, Associate Professor of International Political Economy and Global Studies at China Foreign Affairs University and the Italian International Institute Lorenzo de' Medici, released by Sputnik; interview indicates a stronger Russia-China relationship and also stronger Russia – China - Iran relationship and military cooperation against the pressures of NATO and NATO partners. China also considers its benefits on controversial areas of its own with the Russian relationship against NATO's pressure:

The global economy has already changed radically and in material terms in favor of the emerging countries, while the US and its allies were striving to contain this rise by cutting the economic linkages, above all between the European Union and other Eurasian partners, according to the professor. Washington's assertive actions facilitated the rapprochement between Moscow and Beijing. Beijing understands that the US attempting to separate Russia from Europe ... 'China knows that supporting Russia is an existential need for itself as well, not only for friendship with Russia, but above all for its existential threat: that they are living equally in confronting NATO's forces, driven exclusively prevalently by the United States and its domination project' ... Moscow and Beijing have common interests in various parts of the world, including Latin America, the Middle East, and Africa ... 'The trilateral relationship between

Russia and China and Iran' translated into a 'counter-hegemonic bloc, even though it was not the intention of these three powers' ... Increasing pressure from NATO is prompting the countries to bolster their defenses and review their security strategies (Blinova, 2022).

An interviewed academician, Heinz Dieterich, director of the Centre for Transition Sciences (CTS) at the Autonomous Metropolitan University in Mexico City, and coordinator at the World Advanced Research Project (WARP), legitimize the invasion on the basis of Article 51 of the United Nations Charter and reminded that NATO Campaigns of Operation Deliberate Force and Operation Allied Force to state that those operations were illegal as United Nations Security Council did not give permission:

President Putin's special military operation to defend the people of Donbass from an imminent general offensive by the neo-Nazi regime in Kiev not only is fully justified in international law by Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, but it is fully consistent with the military praxis and doctrine of the legitimate self-defense of States in the face of an imminent threat emanating from a neighboring state or enemy forces.' says Heinz Dieterich ... In 1995, the US and NATO bombed Serbian forces in Bosnia and Herzegovina 'from bases in Italy and Germany and US warships in the Mediterranean, without any authorization from the United Nations Security Council,' ... it was 'a clear act of war of aggression and violation of international law.' In 1999, Washington and its NATO allies carried out a new bombing campaign against Serbia, which resulted in the re-draw of national boundaries in Europe ... Despite the systematic campaign of lies by the Western mainstream media, the Ukraine crisis is just part of the US-NATO's broader hybrid wars against Russia and China, which have recently been named as Washington's major "adversaries" in the Pentagon and the transatlantic alliance's security doctrines (Blinova, 2022).

In the news regarding the Cuban Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cuban National Assembly; Sputnik finished the news by saying:

The unprecedented proximity of NATO forces, basically the *encirclement* of Russia, was cited as the main reason for the special operation, along with what Moscow called the ‘*genocide*’ of the Russian-speaking population in Donbas (Geydarova, 2022).

In conclusion, Sputnik News claims that the NATO and USA are responsible for disrupting peace in Europe and Russia calls NATO a hypocrite as NATO stayed silent when the USA withdrew from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty which broke the peaceful environment in Europe. Furthermore, Russia also claims that the hypocrisy of NATO can be seen in the bombing of Yugoslavia, and Libya and the invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan as they led to the total degradation of those countries; meaning that, NATO had aggression towards many countries on several continents. These kinds of rhetoric are disinformation as spreading false information intentionally to change the topic of disrupting peace in Europe and divert the target from themselves – and this is an example of whataboutism – to NATO to lay the burden of this war to NATO.

## CHAPTER 4

### 4. CONCLUSION

While western media outlets could fall under government influence more or less from time to time, many journalists still strive to maintain their autonomy. As a competitive authoritarian system, media is strictly controlled by Russia. My case study shows that the Sputnik News mainly focuses on justifying Russia's actions and counteract the news against Russia's interests and actions that was coming from Western bloc and Ukraine. Sputnik News uses methods of propaganda news, fake news, misinformation, disinformation, discrediting of opponents, populist sentiments and manipulative news. These methods were not only used in opinion articles or commentative articles; these methods even used in breaking news broadcasts like in Zelensky's escape from Kyiv news, which this type of news should be solely consisted of instant information's without any comments or additions.

According to the strategic narrative defended by Russia, there are several reasons of Russia to invade Ukraine: The news that Sputnik News released on NATO and European Union mostly consists of putting the blame on NATO or European Union for this conflict to indicate that Russia has tried peaceful solutions to solve their problem of security concerns that might come from Ukraine. These security concerns were mainly consisted of NATO's expansion towards to the East via the membership of Ukraine to the NATO.

Ukraine being Neo-Nazi, Ukrainian forces creates humanity crisis in Donbas region, Ukraine commits genocide in Donbas against Russian population, Ukraine is a security problem for Russia, NATO will get close to Russian border if Ukraine becomes a member and so on and so forth. Those arguments eroded in the course of time, like NATO will get

close to Russian border, but NATO already has borders with Russia as Baltic states are a NATO member.

We show that other arguments of neo-Nazi Ukraine or humanity crisis in Donbas against Russian population are a frame to invade Ukraine to block from acquiring NATO membership. Russia's goal was to occupy Ukraine's territory so the Ukraine would not fulfill the NATO's requirement for territorial integrity for an applicant to become a member. In other words, according to Russian thinking, Ukraine should not become a member of NATO.

Vladimir Putin dreams a bigger Russia and wants to bring back Soviet Union; this process did not start with Invasion of Ukraine, this process started with the Georgia – Russia war and continued with illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014 and de facto invasion of Donbas region. This current war of Ukraine is to block Ukraine to become a NATO member, so the Russia could have Ukraine as part of the Motherland again. Russia only underestimated Ukrainian Government, Ukrainian people's will to fight and Western bloc's reaction. Russia did not expect this much help would come from West and Russia projected to end the operation in matter of days, which did not happen in reality and Russia had to fall back from Kyiv when Russia think that the war would be won.

Russia aims to weaken the determination of Western publics creating confusion about who is right and wrong. For, Russia's purpose is not to win a war with Ukraine, but to challenge and change the international system in a way that will benefit Russia and permit ongoing Russian colonialism.

Even though media studies and security studies established that Sputnik engages in propaganda and perception management for malicious purposes, there has not yet been a study analyzing of foreign policy objectives of Sputnik News, especially its strategic narrative, different types of propaganda techniques involved and their specific functions in obtaining foreign policy objectives. This thesis can provide some guidelines to study other Russian or authoritarian countries' media outlets pursuing foreign policy objectives.

Soft power is a part and parcel of international politics, but it can have positive and negative objectives. More legitimate pursuit of soft power such as cultural exchanges, development assistance, promotion of positive values, influence through accurate information dissemination, economic cooperation, cultural organizations, NGOs that promote collaboration, mutual understanding and shared values. Certain soft power pursuit that include propaganda, and disinformation tactics such as manipulating online discourse, coercive tactics, economic pressure and threats, cultural imperialism, and information released based on political interests and in general for promotion of colonial, authoritarian purposes are less legitimate. It is true that in democratic countries too media engage in propaganda under the influence of government, lobbies and capital from time to time, and because of ideological biases of liberal society and Western ethnocentrism, especially in times of international and domestic conflict. However, since there is not a total control of information space, oppositional and dissenting views can find their way into main media organs and disrupt the dominant narratives sooner or later. Media in authoritarian countries are under not only systematic control but also under direction of governments and become a tool for the pursuit of authoritarian objectives domestically and internationally. In this thesis, we examined Russia's use of Sputnik as a tool of perception management, fake news, creation of post-truth and eventually as a vehicle of hybrid war operations.

Therefore, my thesis fills a gap in the academic studies for state-influenced media's impression on relationships between states and international organizations as a foreign policy tool in a situation of war that causes international crises. country and slams it with Russian state's justifications for this attack. While we focused on Sputnik English, multilingual news channels also could be examined for more holistic interpretation of this media outlet.

# CHAPTER 5

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# **RESUME**

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Bachelor's Degree: Ondokuz Mayıs University – Political Science and Public Administration – Samsun / Türkiye (2014-2019)

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