5. RUSSIAN INFORMATION WARFARE AGAINST UKRAINE I: ONLINE NEWS AND SOCIAL MEDIA ANALYSIS

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This chapter presents research findings on Russian information activities against Ukraine based on the media analysis. The results of the interviews are presented in Chapter 6.

5.1. Russia's Information Warfare Against Ukraine

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Introduction

Since 2014, during the course of the Ukraine crisis the role of actual military interventions has remained low in comparison to different tools of asymmetric warfare (information warfare, economic measures, cyber war, and psychological war on all levels), often referred to as hybrid warfare.[145] Despite the recent increased usage of this term due to the Ukraine crisis, the principles of the phenomenon it is used to describe were also characteristic to already the Soviet military thinking. According to András Rácz, in hybrid war, '*the regular military force is used mainly as a deterrent and not as a tool of open aggression*'[146] in comparison to other types of war. However, what was new in 2014, was the '*highly effective, in many cases almost real-time coordination of the various means employed, including political, military, special operations and information measures*' that caught both the Kyiv government and the West off guard in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine.[147] This chapter focuses on one component of the unconventional or non-linear war – information warfare.

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[145] For further elaboration on the ambiguity of the concept 'hybrid warfare', see Chapter 3.

[146] **Rácz, A**. 2015. Russia's Hybrid War in Ukraine: Breaking the Enemy's Ability to Resist. Helsinki: The Finnish Institute of International Affairs, pp. 88–89.

[147] *Ibid.*, p. 87.

According to Ulrik Franke[148], information warfare is about achieving goals, e.g. annexing another country, by replacing military force and bloodshed with cleverly crafted and credibly supported messages to win over the minds of the belligerents. However, for Russia, information warfare is not simply an accidental choice of instruments in a diverse toolbox of weapons. The new Russian military doctrine from December 2014[149] explicitly states that in modern warfare information superiority is essential to achieve victory on the physical battlefield. Or, as Army General Valery Gerasimov[150], Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Russia, explains: '*Information warfare opens wide asymmetric possibilities for decreasing the fighting potential of enemy*'. Russian scholars Chekinov and Bogdanov[151] use the term *strategic information warfare*, which forms a vital part of supporting different military and non-military measures (e.g. disrupting military and government leadership, misleading the enemy, forming desirable public opinions, organising anti-government activities) aimed at decreasing the determination of the opponent to resist.

Yevhen Fedchenko, Director of the Mohyla School of Journalism in Kyiv and co-founder of the StopFake.org website describes the Russian state propaganda:

> *For the Kremlin, propaganda has become an integral part of information warfare. Throughout the past decade the Russian propaganda machine has been structured and effectively implemented, reaching a climax during the occupation of Crimea and the subsequent devastating war in Eastern Ukraine. It started in 2005 with the creation of Russia Today (subsequently RT) and every year more 'media' outlets are added to this global network. Almost every week another propaganda outlet, Sputnik International, opens a new bureau somewhere in the world, hiring qualified local journalists and producing radio and multimedia content in almost 30 languages. According to their website, 'Sputnik points the way to a multipolar world that respects every country's national interests, culture, history and traditions. This is just one of the many examples of media outlet double-speak. In reality, their aim is to influence global public opinion, distort reality and act as a mouthpiece for the Kremlin.*[152]

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[148] **Franke, U**. 2015. War by non-military means: Understanding Russian information warfare. – Avdelningen för Försvarsanalys. Stockholm: Totalförsvarets forskningsinstitut, p. 9.

[149] Rossiyskaya Gazeta 2014.

[150] **Gerasimov** 2013, pp. 2–3.

[151] **Чекинов, С. Г.; Богданов, С. А**. 2011. Влияние непрямых действий на характер современной войны. – Военная мысль (6), p. 6.

[152] **Fedchenko** 2015.

Compared with the 2008 war in Georgia, when Russia misjudged the importance of information warfare[153] and eventually it lost the war of narratives to the West, Russia has learned its lessons and now pays more attention to the role of information in the high-tech world, strategic communications, and modern warfare.[154] In 2014, Russia's information operations against Ukraine played a significant part in its actions on the territory of Eastern Ukraine.[155]

Nevertheless, it is important to note that the Russian information operations against Ukraine are not new. Vitalii Moroz[156], Head of the New Media Department at Internews Ukraine, and Tetyana Lebedeva[157], Honorary Head of the Independent Association of Broadcasters, point to the years 2003–2004 when the Russian propagandists started to develop the idea of dividing Ukraine into two or three parts. Moroz associates it with the events taking place in Russia at the same time – the oppression of the *NTV* news channel and the appearance of political technologists in the Russian media space.[158] Some of these technologists were simultaneously hired by the team of Yanukovych to work against the Ukrainian president Viktor Yushchenko (2005–2010).[159] According to Lebedeva, Russian information activities started to appear already during the presidency of Leonid Kuchma (1994–2004), but the impact of the 'first Maidan' – the Orange Revolution of 2004 – made the Russian rulers uneasy about maintaining their influence over Ukraine.[160]

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[153] See e.g. **Niedermaier, Ana, K**. (ed.) 2008. Countdown to War in Georgia. Russia's Foreign Policy and Media Coverage of the Conflict in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Minneapolis: East View Press.

[154] **Ginos, N. D**. 2010. The Securitization of Russian Strategic Communication. A Monograph. School of Advanced Military Studies, United States Army Command and General Staff College. Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, AY.

[155] See e.g. **Berzinš, J**. 2014. Russia's New Generation Warfare in Ukraine: Implications for Latvian Defense Policy. – Policy Paper No. 2 (April 2014). Riga: National Defence Academy of Latvia Center for Security and Strategic Research; **De Silva, R**. 2015. Ukraine's Information Security Head Discusses Russian Propaganda Tactics. – Defence IQ, 01.06.2015. <http://www.defenceiq.com/defence-technology/articles/ukraine-s-information-security-head-discusses-russ/> (15.07.2015); **Galeotti, M**. 2014. Hybrid War' and 'Little Green Men': How It Works, and How It Doesn't. – Pikulicka-Wilczewska, A. Sakwa, R. (eds.) 2015. Ukraine and Russia: People, Politics, Propaganda and Perspectives, Published by E-international Relations (Bristol, UK), pp. 157–164; **Howard, C.; Puhkov, R**. 2014. Brothers Armed. Military Aspects of the Crisis in Ukraine. Minneapolis, USA: East View Press.

[156] Interview with Vitalii Moroz, carried out by Sazonov.

[157] Interview with Tetyana Lebedeva, carried out by Sazonov.

[158] Interview with Moroz.

[159] *Ibid.*

[160] Interview with Lebedeva.

Back then, Russian information operations were not as massive, aggressive, influential, or visible as they are now. Dmytro Kuleba, Ambassador-at-Large of the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry, is of the opinion that a more aggressive wave of Russian information campaigns began approximately one year before the annexation of Crimea, in 2013.[161] The way in which the process unfolded indicates that this was a well-prepared action and Russia was militarily ready to conduct the operation in Crimea.

In the conflict in Eastern Ukraine and Crimea during 2014, Russian information operations were used at all levels from the political level against the state of Ukraine, its structures, and politicians, up to the military level. According to Jolanta Darczewska[162], diplomats, politicians, political analysts, experts, and representatives of the academic and cultural elites supported an unprecedentedly large-scale exploitation of Russian federal television and radio channels, newspapers, and online resources.

In Russia's information campaigns against Ukraine, Moscow propagandists use a number of different myths and narratives that are mostly related to the Second World War, Stepan Bandera, and the Ukrainian nationalists of the 1940s, but also refer to Nazism and violence. Additionally, they use the images of the 'glorious' Soviet period. Such manipulations in the Russian media are very common since Vladimir Putin came to power in the Russian Federation.[163]

Russia's propaganda machine is powerful, functions well, and targets a number of different audiences in Ukraine. It aims to disparage the Ukrainian government and demonstrate that it is a corrupt, illegal, and fascist junta.

The Ukrainian defence forces and its volunteer units are often compared to *Einsatztruppen* (executions squads), Nazis, killers, terrorists, bandits, and servants of the Kyiv junta. Ukraine is portrayed as a failed state, or a puppet of NATO and Western countries.

Another strong narrative promoted by Russian propagandists is the existence of a Western conspiracy against Russia, Russians, and the Russian

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[161] Interview with Kuleba, carried out by Sazonov.

[162] **Darczewska, J**. 2014. The Anatomy of Russian Information Warfare the Crimean operation, a case study. – Point of View, Number 42 (May 2014). Warsaw: Ośrodek Studiów Wschodnich im. Marka Karpia, Centre for Eastern Studies, p. 5.

[163] **Lipman, M**. 2009. Media Manipulation and Political Control in Russia. – Carnegie Moscow Center. <http://carnegie.ru/2009/02/03/media-manipulation-and-political-control-in-russia-pub-37199>.

World.[164] Western politicians are depicted as cowardly and double-faced people who support killing civilians in Ukraine, especially children.[165]

5.2. A Comparative Overview of Online News

Kristiina Müür

Analysis of the three online news channels – **Komsomolskaya Pravda (KP), Regnum**, *and* **TV Zvezda** – revealed a range of approaches used in Russian information campaigns to construct a negative image of Ukraine. Although the three channels under scrutiny do not represent the entire spectrum of the Russian media, the study nevertheless shows how an anti-Ukrainian approach can take different stylistic forms and rely on various nuances. By using different channels with different approaches, Russia's information warfare manages to cater for different audiences with different tastes and needs for media consumption.

As to the **genre,** each of the channels can be characterised by a different style of broadcast (see Figure 2). While *KP* uses the greatest variety of different journalistic genres, it is *TV Zvezda* that spreads the word predominantly in the form of news.

Therefore, while *TV Zvezda* focuses on the newsworthiness of different events and fast facts (whether or not they are actually true), *KP* takes it one step further by also providing its readers with conclusions and interpretations by going in-depth with interviews, reports, and opinion pieces in addition to classical news stories.

Regnum has adopted an interesting approach by relying mostly on two genres – news and statements. The statements are mostly quotations from various politicians, officials, and institutions that are used to gain additional credibility by relying on the external authority of prominent figures.

The list of **main topics** (see Figure 3) is dominated by different war-related events – combat activities, violence, and terrorism. Since the focus of the study was on the military aspects of the on-going crisis, this is to be expected.

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[164] See e.g. **Коц, А.; Стешин, Д**. 2014. Ополченец из Афганистана: Ливия, Сирия, Ирак... Вас, русских, окружают. – Комсомольская правда, 20.11.2014. <http://kompravda.eu/daily/26310.3/3188038> (22.06.2016).

[165] See e.g. **Туханина, О**. 2014. Почему Запад вступается за Пусси Райот, а не за мертвых девочек из Луганска. – Комсомольская правда, 24.9.2014. <http://kompravda.eu/daily/26273.7/3150573/> (22.06.2016).
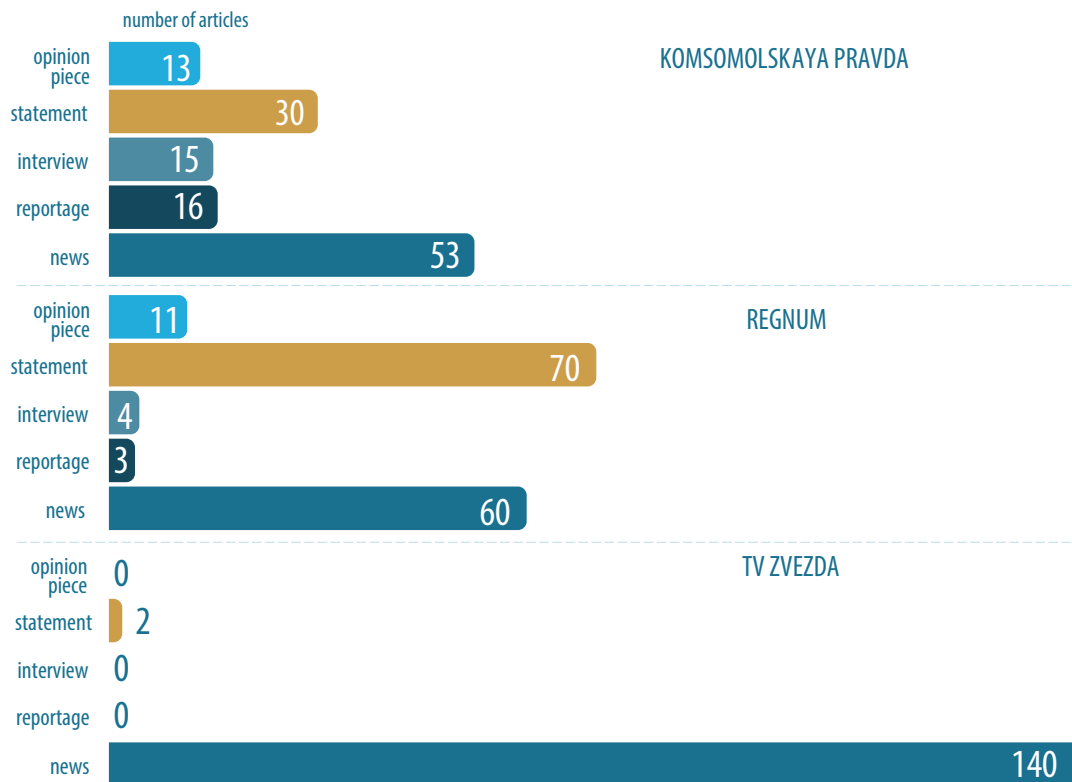
Figure 2. Genres of the articles analysed

The presence of the participants in the conflict on the ground – Ukrainian and separatist armed forces, as well as prisoners of war (POWs) – is less prevalent. Nevertheless, in *KP* and *TV Zvezda,* the Ukrainian armed forces are still the third most common topic. These two outlets pay considerably less attention to the separatist armed forces. In *Regnum,* on the other hand, the armed forces, whether Ukrainian or separatist, figure equally little.

Of the three outlets surveyed, it is *Regnum* that focuses most on the political aspects of the conflict by including stories that deal with the Ukrainian government, the West's interference in Ukraine, and Russia. These topics also appear in *TV Zvezda,* but to a lesser extent. Interestingly, they are virtually non-existent in *KP*.

Topics concerning the separatists – the so-called Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics (DPR/LPR), Novorossiya, and Crimea – are present to only a very small degree as main topics across all three outlets. This shows that while reporting the military aspects of the crisis, even if the articles deal with Eastern Ukraine, the main focus was on specific events (battles, shootings, violence etc.) rather than on broader questions, e.g. legal recognition of the separatist entities.
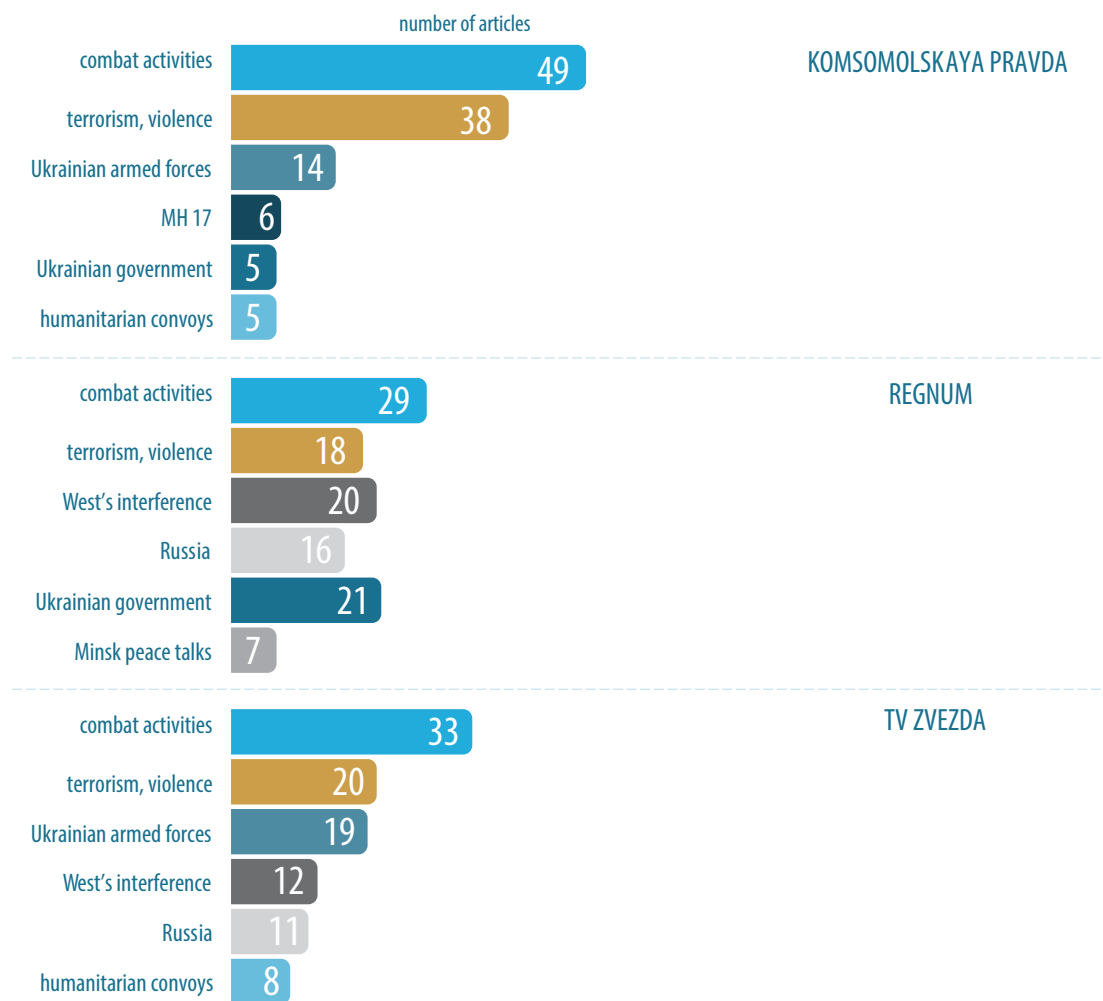
number of articles

KOMSOMOLSKAYA PRAVDA

Topic	Number of articles
combat activities	49
terrorism, violence	38
Ukrainian armed forces	14
MH 17	6
Ukrainian government	5
humanitarian convoys	5

REGNUM

Topic	Number of articles
combat activities	29
terrorism, violence	18
West's interference	20
Russia	16
Ukrainian government	21
Minsk peace talks	7

TV ZVEZDA

Topic	Number of articles
combat activities	33
terrorism, violence	20
Ukrainian armed forces	19
West's interference	12
Russia	11
humanitarian convoys	8

Figure 3. Main topics of the articles in *KP*, *Regnum*, *TV Zvezda*

All in all, it is *KP* that stands out with the narrowest range of topics, concentrating largely on the events on the ground, and leaving the political aspects of the crisis in the background. *Regnum* and *TV Zvezda* have a more even distribution of main topics.

When it comes to a breakdown of the main topics across the four phases of the conflict (as specified in Chapter 4), the overall trend is that the first phase (April 2014 – provoking the military conflict) can be distinguished from the phases II–IV, which correspond to the direct military conflict (see Appendix 4, Figure 15–19). The various attitudes present in the articles do not display any major trends throughout phases II–IV, except for the appearance of certain time-specific events in the media (e.g. MH17 plane crash, the Minsk peace talks, and 'humanitarian convoys').
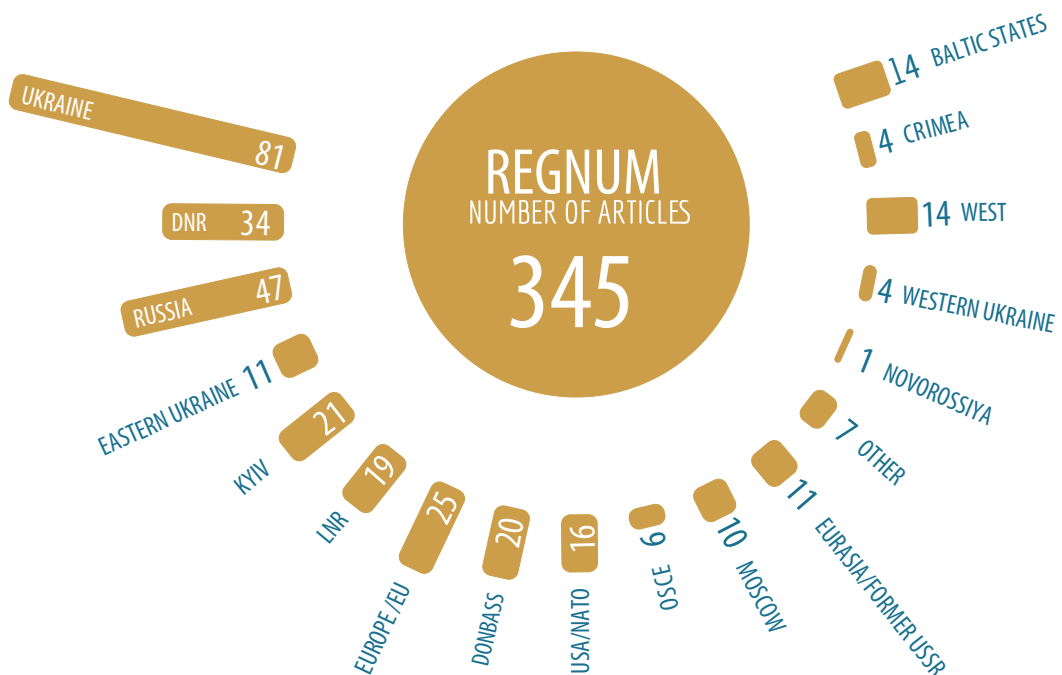
KP stands out by focusing exclusively on topics related to combat activities and separatist armed forces (see Appendix 4, Figure 15) during Phase
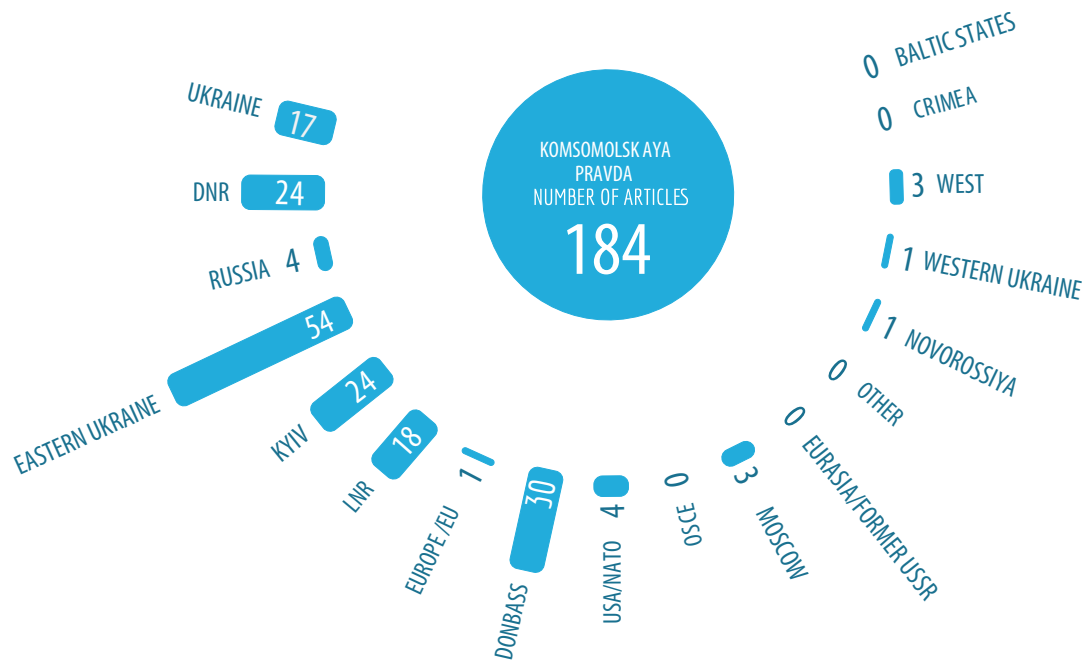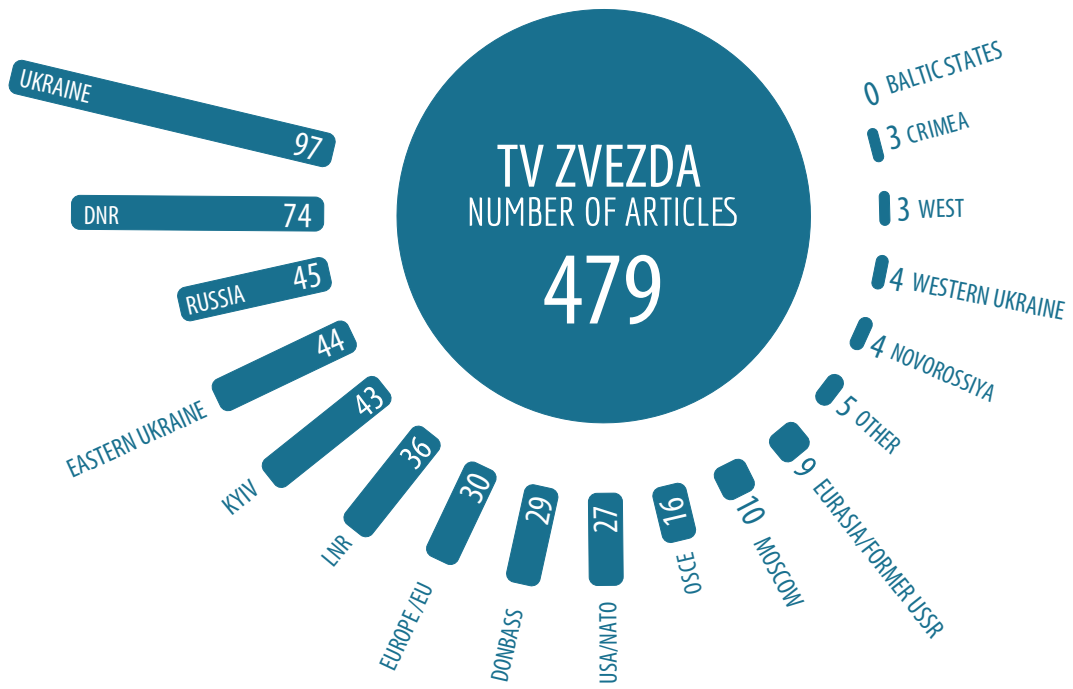
I. During Phases II and III, the relative share of topics related to combat activities and terrorism is the highest in *KP* across all outlets, which coincides with the most acute phases of the military conflict (see Appendix 4, Figure 16–18) and is in line with our expectations. The selection of the main topics is the widest in Phase IV (see Appendix 4, Figure 18). This illustrates how the Russian information campaigns against Ukraine grow broader in scope.

In terms of **geographic contextualisation** (see Figures 4–6), the three news channels also exhibit different focuses.

KP treats the crisis most 'locally'. References to Eastern Ukraine and the different entities in that region – the DNR, Donbass, LNR – dominate. In comparison to the other outlets *KP* publishes the least number of references to the whole of Ukraine. *KP* concentrates on Kyiv, mostly in the form of stories about the Eastern regions being in opposition to the policies of the new government.

The frequency and scope of geographical/geopolitical references in *Regnum* and *TV Zvezda* is considerably higher, therefore showing more of the 'big picture'. *Regnum* and *TV Zvezda* mention Ukraine the most. Regarding the different possible territorial entities in Eastern Ukraine, they refer mostly to the DNR, followed by Donbass. *TV Zvezda* and *Regnum* also bring in Russia, the West, and the USA/NATO, which remain largely untouched by *KP*.

REGNUM
NUMBER OF ARTICLES
345

UKRAINE 81
DNR 34
RUSSIA 47
EASTERN UKRAINE 11
KYIV 21
LNR 19
EUROPE/EU 25
DONBASS 20
USA/NATO 16
OSCE 9
MOSCOW 10
EURASIA/FORMER USSR 11
OTHER 7
NOVOROSSIYA 1
WESTERN UKRAINE 4
WEST 14
CRIMEA 4
BALTIC STATES 14

UKRAINE 97

DNR 74

RUSSIA 45

44

EASTERN UKRAINE

43

KYIV

36

LNR

30

EUROPE/EU

29

DONBASS

27

USA/NATO

16

OSCE

10 MOSCOW

9 EURASIA/FORMER USSR

5 OTHER

4 NOVOROSSIYA

4 WESTERN UKRAINE

3 WEST

3 CRIMEA

0 BALTIC STATES

TV ZVEZDA
NUMBER OF ARTICLES
479

UKRAINE 17

DNR 24

RUSSIA 4

54

EASTERN UKRAINE

24

KYIV

18

LNR

1

EUROPE/EU

30

DONBASS

4

USA/NATO

0

OSCE

3 MOSCOW

0 EURASIA/FORMER USSR

0 OTHER

1 NOVOROSSIYA

1 WESTERN UKRAINE

3 WEST

0 CRIMEA

0 BALTIC STATES

KOMSOMOLSK AYA
PRAVDA
NUMBER OF ARTICLES
184

Figures 4–6. Geographic contextualisation of the Ukraine crisis in the articles

Contrary to expectation, the **temporal contextualisation** (see Figure 7) of the stories was predominantly present-centred. *KP* did not make a single reference to past events.

On a few occasions *TV Zvezda* referred to the events of the recent past, starting from the EuroMaidan.

Regnum used the widest selection of references to historical events, including WWII and the Soviet period, but the share of articles referring to past events did not account for more than 10 per cent of the overall number of articles examined.

Therefore, the parallels that are often drawn between Ukraine and Nazi Germany do not come in the form of references to the actual events of the past. Instead, they appear in the form of labels used to describe target groups in Ukraine.

The news outlets also differ in terms of **sources** used (see Figure 8). *KP* relies mostly on the Russian media and different groups of people involved in the events. The categories most often referred to are other Russian media outlets, participants/civilians among separatists, separatist soldiers, and Ukrainian soldiers.

number of articles — KOMSOMOLSKAYA PRAVDA

Present time	128
Recent past	0

REGNUM

Present time	126
Recent past	2
1991–2003	2
1945–1991	3
WWII	4
Soviet Ukraine 1922–1939	2

TV ZVEZDA

Present time	141
Recent past	4
Annexation of Crimea	1
WW II	1
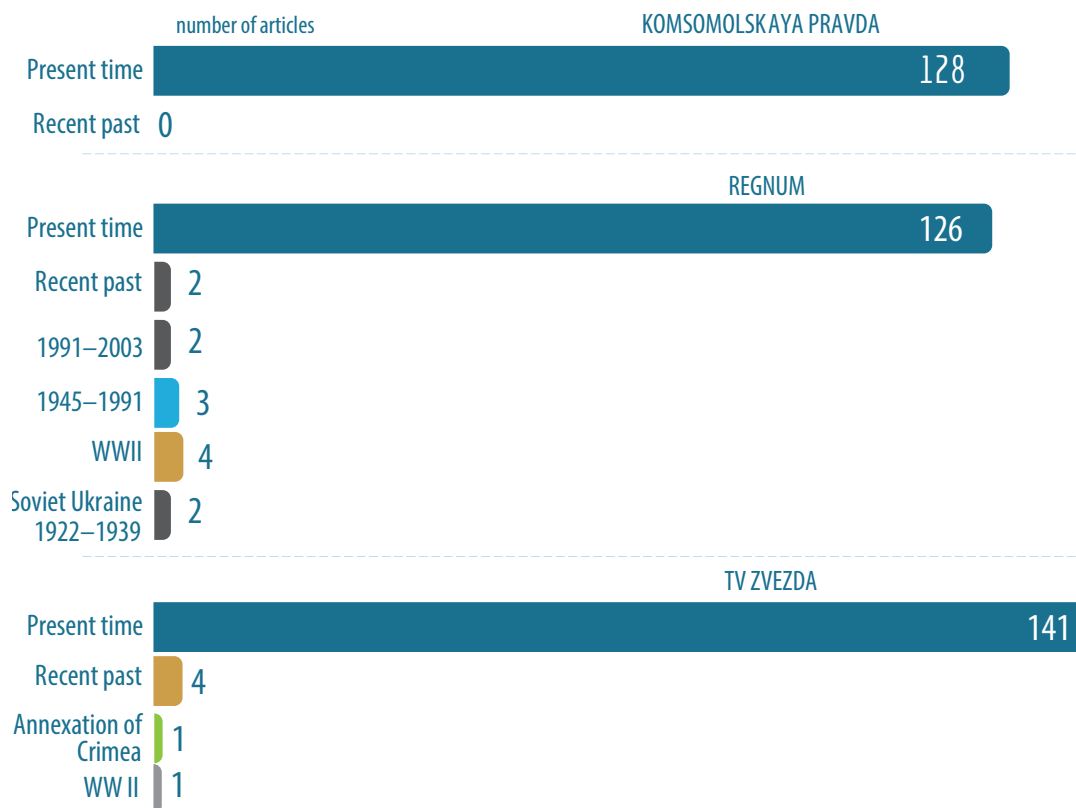
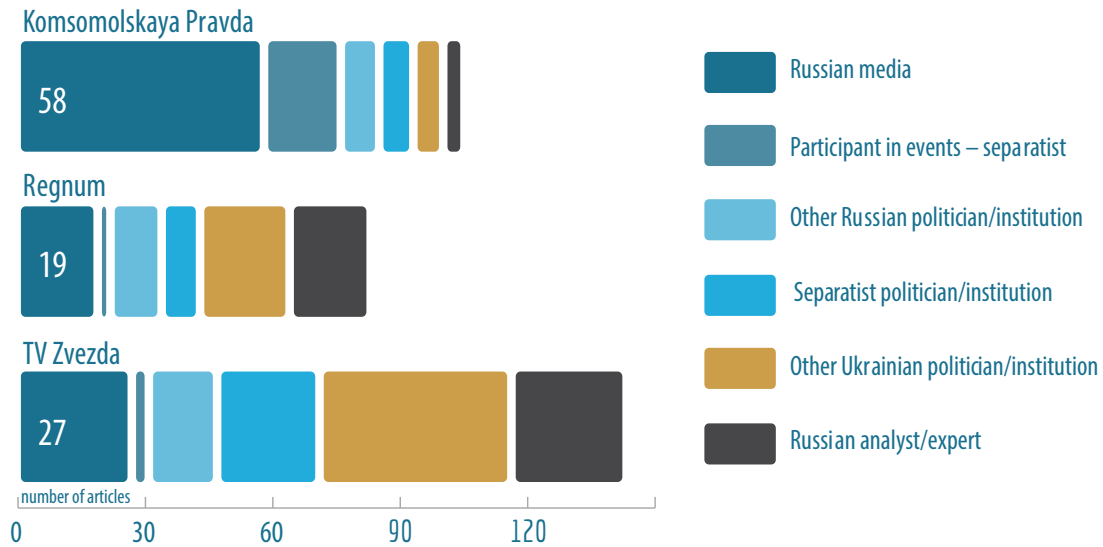**Figure 7**. Temporal contextualisation of the Ukraine crisis in the articles

Figure 8. Most popular sources referred to in the articles

Regnum relies mostly on experts and authorities. Ukrainian and Western politicians and institutions, the Russian media, and Russian experts/analysts top their list of sources.

The list of sources used by *TV Zvezda* is the most varied and includes Ukrainian politicians and institutions, the Russian media, and separatist and Western politicians/institutions.

TV Zvezda mostly relies on political figures and institutions as sources (see Figure 9). While Poroshenko is the most often cited individual politician in *TV Zvezda* and *KP*, *Regnum* refers mostly to Putin. While Putin is shown as being critical towards Ukraine, the outlets are critical towards Poroshenko for a wide array of grievances. Lavrov is also somewhat visible – mostly with regard to his statements in international organisations – but references to Yatsenyuk, Shoigu, and Yanukovych are rare. Interestingly, Medvedev is not referred to even once in any of the outlets. Quotes from ministries and their spokespeople provide the greatest number of references to other politicians in Ukraine and Russia.

John Kerry and Anders Fogh Rasmussen figure most as individual Western politicians, mostly in the context of USA/NATO interference in Ukraine, together with references to different ministries and their spokespersons.
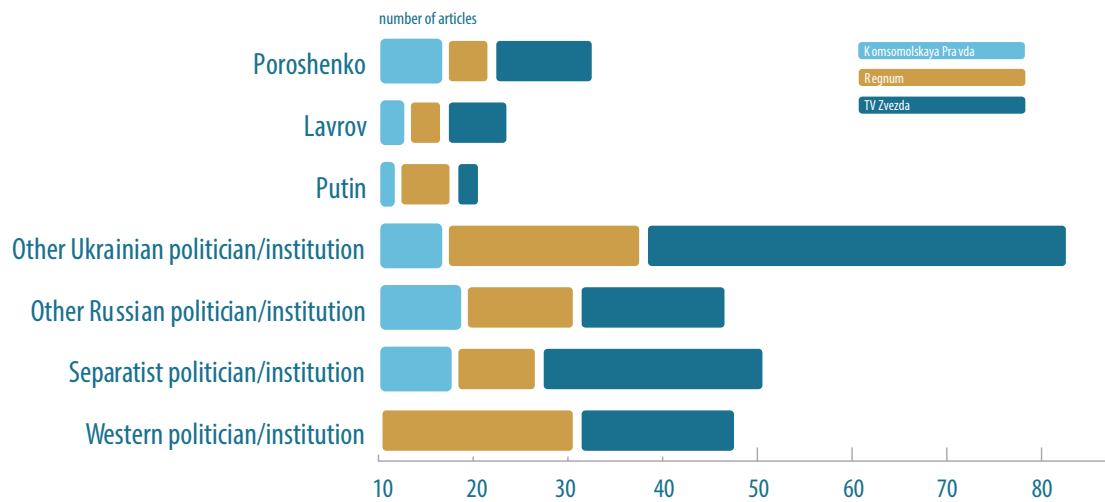
Figure 9. Politicians and official institutions referred to the most in the articles

Different target groups in **Ukraine – soldiers, army leadership, and the government** (see Figure 10–12) – receive the most diverse and critical treatment by *KP*.

While *TV Zvezda* and *Regnum* only compare the Ukrainian government with Nazis, *KP* extends this judgement to the Ukrainian army and its leadership as well. In general *KP* is the most judgemental of the three.
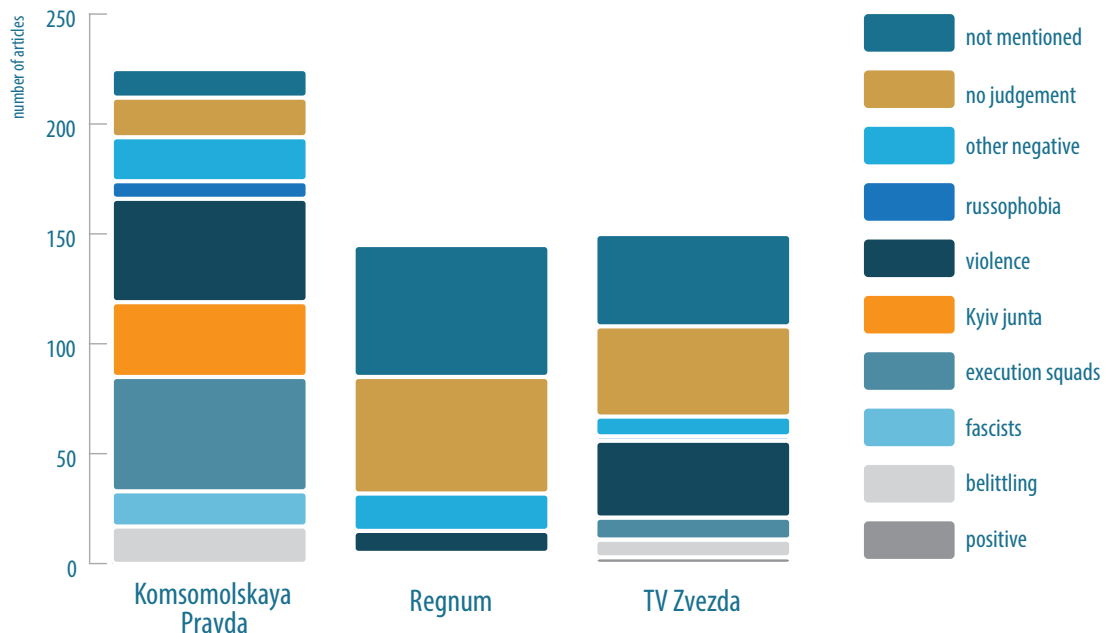

Figure 10. Attitude of the articles towards the Ukrainian armed forces[166]

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[166] Including volunteers.
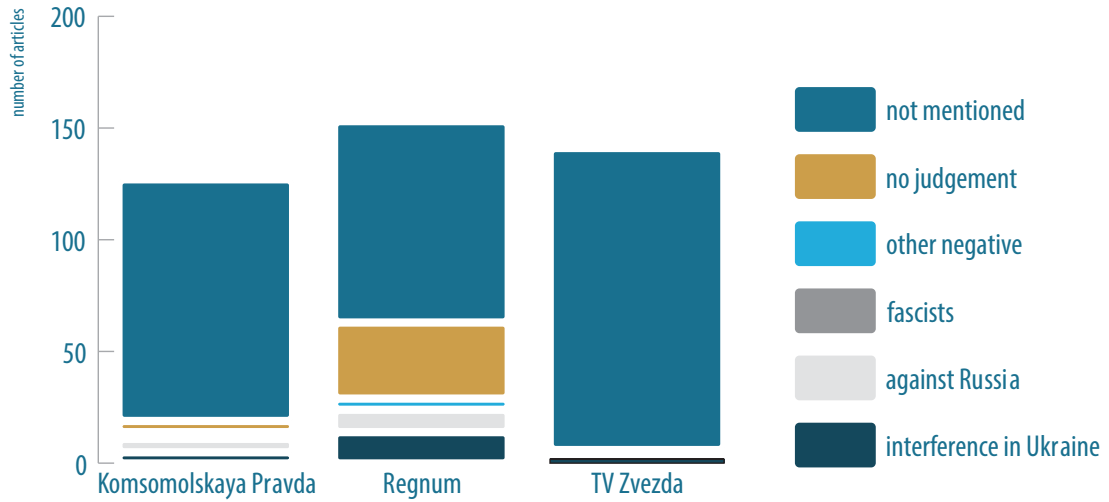
Figure 11. Attitude of the articles towards the command authorities of the Ukrainian armed forces – most mentioned
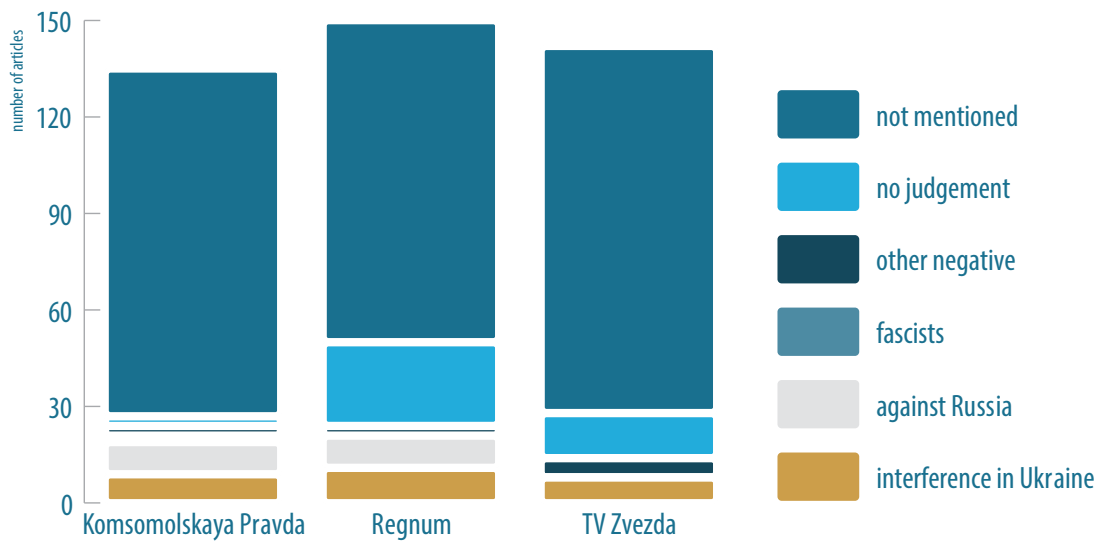
Figure 12. Attitude of the articles towards the Ukrainian government – most mentioned

In many cases *Regnum* and *TV Zvezda* simply present events in a neutral-looking manner, whether or not the facts they use are actually true, but do not draw explicit conclusions and are, therefore, more reserved in their style.

TV Zvezda pays much less attention to the leadership of the Ukrainian army in comparison with Ukrainian soldiers and government, and also when compared to the other outlets.

Throughout the period under scrutiny, it is phase I (April – provoking the military conflict) that stands out in terms of portraying the **Ukrainian armed forces** and its volunteers (see Appendix 4, Figure 19). This is evident by the highest share of non-judgemental articles (*KP, Regnum*) and the lowest number of articles to mention the Ukrainian armed forces (*TV Zvezda*) in comparison to the later phases.

The overall picture of different labels and keywords used about the Ukrainian armed forces also becomes more diverse during phases II–IV (direct military conflict) across all outlets as the demonisation of Ukraine intensifies (see Appendix 4, Figures 20–23).

In terms of change in attitudes towards the Ukrainian government regarding the different phases of the conflict, the greatest difference comes into play when associating the government with violence against its people. Similarly to previous categories, the change also becomes evident when comparing the first phase with the later ones (see Appendix 4, Figures 23–27).

While *TV Zvezda* remained relatively modest about the Ukrainian armed forces in April when compared to the other outlets, then it is in April when *TV Zvezda* associates the government the most with violence.

TV Zvezda argues less for acts of violence during the later phases while *KP*, on the other hand, increases its use of this narrative. The selection of narratives used by *KP* also widens with time, while *Regnum* and *TV Zvezda* display more fluctuation.

The **West** gets considerably less attention in all three outlets than Ukraine, whether in the form of USA/NATO, Europe/EU, or as a whole (see Figures 13–15). Across all of these categories, the West figures mostly in *Regnum,* despite half of those articles actually not making any explicit judgements. While *TV Zvezda* focuses on the West's involvement in Ukraine, then *Regnum* and *KP* also bring in the narrative of the West's involvement in Ukraine as provocation against Russia.

Interestingly, the **USA/NATO**, which are depicted as the major Western adversaries, are treated roughly the same way throughout the entire period under research. No significant change in tonality towards the USA/NATO can be observed throughout the four phases (see Appendix 4, Figures 27–31).
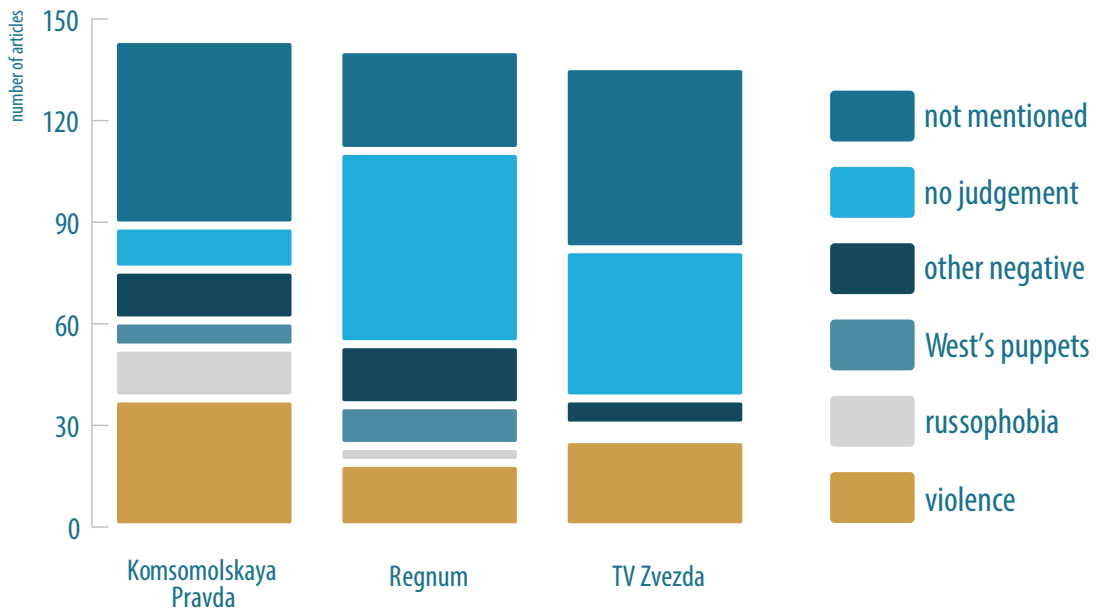
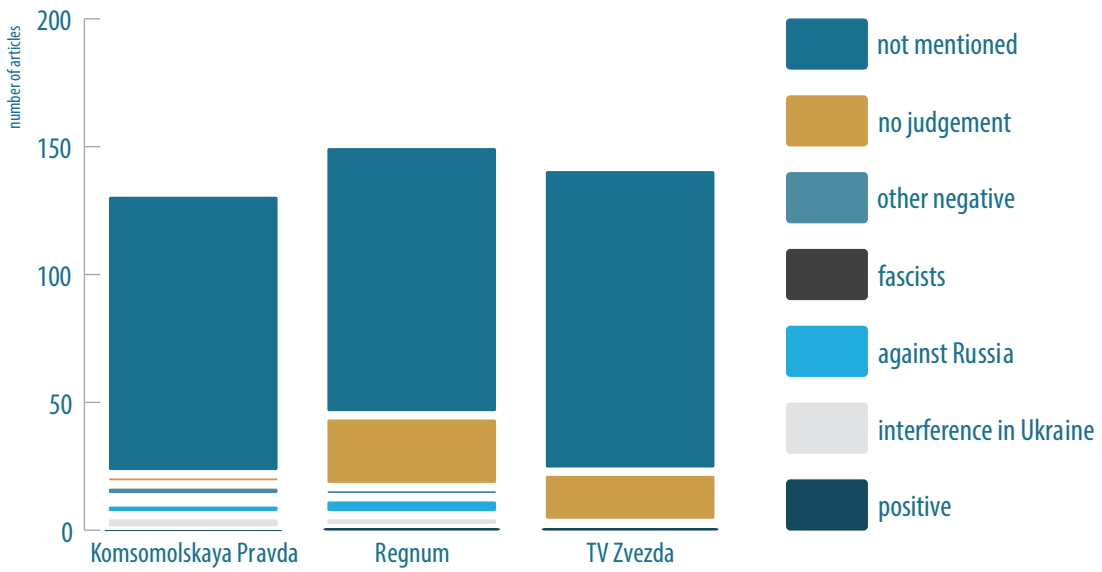**Figure 13.** Attitude of the articles towards USA/NATO – most mentioned

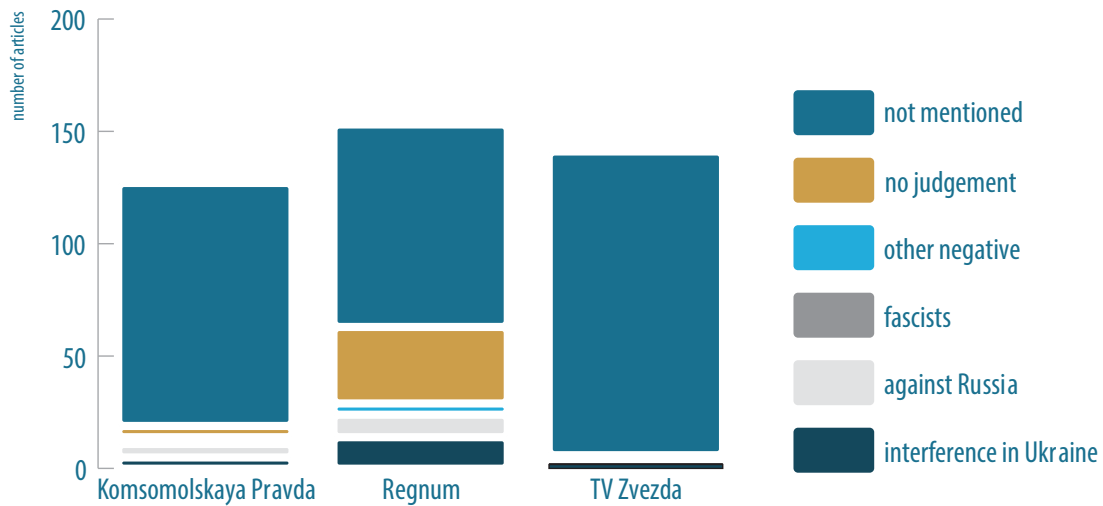**Figure 14.** Attitude of the articles towards Europe/EU – most mentioned

Figure 15. Attitude of the articles towards the West as a whole –most mentioned

5.3. Komsomolskaya Pravda

Vladimir Sazonov

Komsomolskaya Pravda (KP), established in 1925 in Soviet Union, is one of the oldest newspapers in Russia. The *Komsomolskaya Pravda* Publishing House does not only have online and print outlets, but also owns a radio channel.[167]

KP is still well respected among the Russian audience and is very influential not only in Russia, but has also in Ukraine (especially in Eastern Ukraine), Moldova, Belarus, and in other countries with large Russian diasporas, including the Baltic States.[168] It is published in altogether 53 countries: 11 in the CIS and 42 in the rest of the world.[169] The overall circulation of the entire *Komsomolskaya Pravda* Publishing House comprises 46.1 million copies per month; the kp.ru web portal is visited by more than 20 million

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[167] <http://www.kp.ru/radio/>.

[168] See **Комсомольская Правда**, <http://www.kp.ru>; **Комсомольская Правда в Украине**, <www.kp.ua>; **Комсомольская Правда: Северная Европа**, <www.kompravda.eu>; **Комсомольская Правда в Молдове**, <http://www.kp.md>.

[169] <http://advert.kp.ru/Files/20150901122913.pdf>. However, the list of CIS countries also includes the Georgian breakaway territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, recognised as independent by Russia.

people a month.[170] The headquarters of *KP* are located in Moscow, but it has several offices across the country. *KP* gathers information through its own correspondents, affiliated agencies, and partners.[171] Importantly, the ranks of 'journalists' working for *KP* have historically included numerous spies from the Soviet intelligence services and the KGB, especially during Soviet times. Even in the 1990s, *KP* had about a dozen foreign correspondents, of whom only one was not related to the intelligence services.[172]

In total, the research comprised 128 articles examined using the coding manual. The majority of articles were news stories, followed by statements, but there were also many opinion pieces, interviews and reportages.[173]

KP, like *Regnum,* often refers to soft propaganda mechanisms and methods, but it relies more heavily on aggressive and emotional rhetoric incriminating the Ukrainian state, its army and army volunteers in different crimes and misdeeds – e.g. crimes against humanity, genocide, international terrorism, torturing and murdering civilians, as well as chauvinism, the discrimination of Russian-speaking people, nationalism, xenophobia, and fascism.[174] The most frequent negative narrative used by *KP* associated the Ukrainian government with violence and terrorism against its people. The Ukrainian government was accused of ordering the killing of Russian-speaking people in *KP* news stories, and genocide was referred to as the Ukrainian state policy. For example, one article describes how the Investigations Committee of the Russian Federation started a criminal case against the Ukrainian armed forces, which had killed over 2,500 civilians.[175] Another article stated that '*the Ukrainian TV channel Hromadske TV announces the planned killing of at least 1.5 million Novorossiyans.*'[176]

During the entire year of 2014, especially since the annexation of Crimea in April 2014, *KP* continuously depicted the Ukrainian government and poli-

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[170] See <http://www.kp.ru/about/>; see also <http://www.chel.kp.ru/daily/24213.4/416227/>; <http://mediaguide.ru/?p=house&house_id=04>.

[171] АО «ИД «Комсомольская правда». <http://www.kp.ru> (05.07.2015).

[172] **Earley** 2009, p. 244.

[173] Additional 50 articles were examined qualitatively to illustrate the case studies of MH17 and the so-called humanitarian convoys, see further in Appendix 2.

[174] For a more detailed overview how Komsomolskaya Pravda portrays Ukraine, see Appendix 3.

[175] **Гришин, А**. 2014. Обыкновенный геноцид: «Высшее руководство Украины приказывало уничтожать русскоязычных». – Комсомольская правда, 29.09.2014. <http://kompravda.eu/daily/26288.5/3166244/> (22.06.2016).

[176] **Рёснес, О**. 2014. Укро-нацистский лохотрон. – Комсомольская Правда, 2.09.2014. <http://kompravda.eu/daily/26276/3154284>.

ticians, governmental organisations, the defence forces and its volunteers as Russophobes, Nazis, liars, and criminals.[177] The West (the USA, NATO, and Europe) is sometimes, but not often, referred to as fascists trying to annihilate the Russian World who use the Ukrainians as puppets in the global information and economic war against Russia. Sometimes *KP* gives negative information about NATO's 'interventions' and 'provocations' in the Donbass conflict and in Ukraine generally.[178] Maidan and the conflict in Donbass are allegedly nothing more than Western provocations against Russia. Other times, *KP* choses a Western country and then creates an illusion of this country being directly involved in the Ukrainian crisis – for example Sweden 'sent soldiers to Ukraine near Poltava'.[179] This is a reference to the famous battle of Poltava that took place on 27 June 1709 near Poltava (Ukraine). This was a decisive Russia victory over the Swedish army during the Great Northern War (1700–1721).

KP pays close attention to the **Ukrainian government**, usually in a negative way. Roughly one quarter of the articles from the entire data sample showed the Ukrainian government as illegitimate and corrupt. Kyiv is labelled as junta together with the Ukrainian army, and the army leaders are pictured as blind followers of the junta.

Another popular topic is the misdeeds, crimes, inefficiency, and incapability of the **Ukrainian armed forces, volunteers, and their commanders**. Numerous articles in *Komsomolskaya Pravda* refer to violence, e.g. against people of Donbass. Many articles deal with executions, killings and the torture of Russian-speaking people by Ukrainian forces and volunteers.[180]

More than 10 per cent of the whole data sample portrayed the Ukrainian government and armed forces as fascists or Nazis.

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[177] **Панкин, А**. 2014. Активист «болотного движения», вернувшись с Украины: «Ты как знаешь, Леша, но это реальный фашизм». – Комсомольская правда, 30.09. 2014. <http://kompravda.eu/daily/26288/3166866>.

[178] **Дэ, В**. 2014. Спецкор «КП»: В ДНР не желают видеть у себя солдат НАТО. – Радио «Комсомольская правда», 7.10.2014. <http://kompravda.eu/daily/26291.5/3169107/>; **Баранов, А**. 2014. Раскроют ли США «военный зонтик» над Украиной? – Комсомольская правда, 28.07.2014. <http://kompravda.eu/daily/26261.5/3140138/>; **Морская пехота США высадилась в Киеве**. – Комсомольская правда, 26.02.2014. <http://kompravda.eu/daily/26200.4/3086371/>.

[179] **Архангельский, М**. 2915. Шведские солдаты отправляются под Полтаву? – Комсомольская правда, 15.05.2015. <http://kompravda.eu/daily/26381/3259838/>.

[180] E.g. **Коц, А**. 2014 «Били тупой стороной топора по почкам...» Западная правозащитная организация обнародовала факты зверств в Донбассе карателей из батальона «Айдар». – Комсомольская правда, 24.09.2014. <http://kompravda.eu/daily/26286/3164117/>.

The Ukrainian army is often associated with the Nazis and their war crimes, and depicted as execution sqads ('*karateli*') who rape and kill women, children, etc.[181] An article concerning the Ukrainian subunit Tornado establishing a 360 degree defence perimiter calls Ukrainian soldiers Nazis-perverts (see Picture 3).[182] Ukrainian soldiers are also portrayed as homosexuals who do not want to fight in battles.

The humiliation and belittling of Ukrainian soldiers and their leaders is common. *KP* journalists often call the Ukrainian army and their volunteers criminals, rapists, drug addicts, alcoholics, robbers, and cowards who taunt and torture women, children, and the elderly.[183] The Ukrainian armed forces are pictured as revolting due to grave conditions in the army and Ukrainian soldiers do not want to shoot civilians.[184] One article claims that '*The moral conditions of the Ukrainian army make us more and more concerned. But the moral condition of army authorities is laughter through tears*'.[185] *KP* attempts to show that the Ukrainian army is governed by violence and chaos, hunger and illnesses. During the escalation of the conflict in Donbass, especially before the mobilisation of Ukrainians, *Komsomolskaya Pravda* regularly published news of deserters from the Ukrainian army, hundreds and thousands of soldiers leaving the army *en masse* to go to the Russian side.[186]

KP refers to opinions regarding to the Ukrainian crisis from different European countries, also from Eastern Europe (including former Soviet republics). The style is rather emotional especially in statements, reportages and opinion pieces. *KP* opinion pieces are pro-Russian. Zakharchenko

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[181] E.g. **В лагере карателей под Донецком нашли тела зверски убитых женщин**. – <http://kompravda.eu/daily/26285/3163684/>; **Новикова А**. 2014. Ополченцы: В районе дислокации батальона Нацгвардии пропали без вести почти 400 женщин. – Комсомольская правда, 31.102.2014. <http://www.kp.ru/online/news/1885285/>; **Сборщикова, В**. 2014. В Донецке каратели убили двоих детей на школьном стадионе. – Комсомольская правда, 6.11.2014. <http://kompravda.eu/daily/26304.4/3182699/>.

[182] **Бойко, А**. 2014. Нацисты-извращенцы из украинского подразделения «Торнадо» заняли круговую оборону. – Комсомольская правда, 19.06.2014. <http://kompravda.eu/daily/26395.4/3272387/>.

[183] E.g. **Баранец, В**. 2014. «Комсомолка» узнала имена фронтовиков, которых ограбили украинские солдаты. – Комсомольская правда, 26.9.2014. <http://kompravda.eu/daily/26287/3165405/>; **Дэ, В**. 2014. Украинская армия открыла огонь по своим же солдатам. – Комсомольская правда, 17.10.2014. <http://kompravda.eu/daily/26296/3174231/>.

[184] **В украинской армии начались бунты**. – Комсомольская правда, 23.04.2014. <http://kompravda.eu/daily/26223/3106716>.

[185] *Ibid.*

[186] **Стешин, Д**. 2014. Снова бои под Донецком: армия Украины перешла в отступление. – Комсомольская правда, 3.6.2014. <http://kompravda.eu/daily/26389/3267064/>.

and Igor Girkin (Strelkov), leaders of the so-called 'People's Republics of Donetsk and Luhansk', receive very favourable treatment. Along with the separatist combatants they are described as heroes fighting against the evil Nazis and terrorists.

Picture 3. 'Nazis-perverts of the Ukrainian subunit Tornado established a 360 degree defence' (Source: *Komsomolskaya Pravda*)

The majority of news, statements, reports, and interviews in *KP* are loaded with strong judgement and play on emotions. Most of them are written in a relatively simple manner, using primitive propaganda methods. The share of neutral-looking articles that do not include direct accusations is quite low – less than 15 per cent. However, some of the neutral articles still manage to take an implicitly negative stance. Several articles present opinion pieces by

different experts, analysts and politicians from Russia, Ukraine and the West in order to increase the authority of the content. *KP* sometimes refers to criticism against Ukraine by respected Western outlets.

When military operations were in an active phase (battle of Ilovaysk, in Donetsk airport, Mariupol etc.) and also in the case of MH17 or when Ukrainians started mobilisation, *Komsomolskaya Pravda* became more active in its usage of aggressive rhetoric against the Ukrainian army, volunteers, and government, in order to create panic or hysteria among the Russian-speaking audience in Ukraine, but also in Russia.

No doubt, *Komsomolskaya Pravda* is a powerful instrument of Russia's information warfare and has played an important role in spreading anti-Ukrainian views. This was also confirmed by several Ukrainian media experts, with whom interviews were carried out in May 2015 in Kyiv.[187]

5.4. I.A. Regnum

Holger Mölder

The *Regnum News Agency* is a Russian non-governmental federal information agency, which gathers information through its own correspondents, affiliated agencies and partners. They focus on news from Russia and its so-called near abroad.[188] According to *LiveInternet.ru*, the monthly audience is more than 4.3 million people.[189] Vigen Akopyan, the former editor-in-chief of *Regnum,* has declared that the agency will oppose Russian investments in any country, whose politics are hostile to Russia or which support the rehabilitation of fascism. [190] Regnum is also known for its anti-Baltics activity. For example, in 2010 it published a memorandum of the principles of Russia's politics towards Estonia.[191] The aim of the memorandum was to persuade the Russian government to continue its anti-Estonian policy (for a more detailed

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[187] See more in chapter 6. Russia's Information Warfare Against Ukraine II: Influences on the Armed Forces of Ukraine. Based on Interviews in Ukraine (May–June 2015).

[188] Regnum – информационное агентство. (04.07.2015).

[189] See more <http://www.liveinternet.ru/stat/regnum.ru/>.

[190] **Информагентство «Регнум» не станет рекламировать Эстонию даже за деньги.** – Baltija.eu. <http://baltija.eu/news/read/25568> (04.07.2015).

[191] **Общественный Меморандум о принципах политики России в отношении Эстонии (январь 2010).** – Подробности. <http://www.regnum.ru/news/polit/1243064.html> (15.01.2010).

overview see the 2010 Yearbook of the Estonian Security Police). The memorandum accused the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the attempts to improve their relations with Estonia, Russian businessmen being mostly to blame for that. It required to maintain its strict foreign policy. The aggressive style of *Regnum* towards Estonia continued afterwards.[192]

Nonetheless, the style used by *Regnum* is more restrained compared with the style of newspapers and they use also Ukrainian and Western sources for balancing Russian and pro-Russian channels in their routine work of news-building. There are no colourful metaphors for labelling the Ukrainian armed forces – just *siloviki*[193] is probably most frequently used for indicating the Ukrainian fighters in the Eastern Ukraine. *Regnum* usually refers to soft propaganda mechanisms, which puts emphasis on facts and does not provoke emotions. In total, the research involved 148 articles, the majority of them were news or news related to statements made by somebody on the Ukrainian crisis. The minority of articles were opinion pieces, interviews and reportages. They continue to follow the Ukrainian events on a normal basis, not focusing its special attention on the Ukrainian crisis.

The majority of news is given without judgement. *Regnum* often refers to opinions from different Eastern European countries (including former Soviet republics) regarding the Ukrainian crisis. They paid attention to the attitudes especially in Poland, Baltic countries, Moldova and Georgia. The style of certain authors is emotionally loaded in opinion pieces. Opinion pieces are overwhelmingly pro-Russian or at least neutral and do not demonstrate criticism towards the Russian government.

Regnum also turns to Ukrainian and Western analysts that have critical views of the Ukrainian authorities or experts from other CIS countries that may produce opinions favourable for Russia. However, in the opinion-building *Regnum* usually avoids direct disparagement of opponents. There can be found indirect belittling, which makes the Ukrainian authorities responsible for the violence and human catastrophe in the Eastern Ukraine and describes the Ukrainian crisis as a conflict between the Western and Russian civilisation, where the Ukrainian authorities are the puppets of the West. At the same time, *Regnum* avoids calling the Ukrainian authorities and armed forces fascists or criminals, or using other extreme expressions to

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[192] **Kaitsepolitseiamet. Aastaraamat 2010,** pp. 8–9.
<https://www.kapo.ee/cms-data/_text/38/44/files/kapo-aastaraamat-2010-est.pdf>.
Kaitsepolitseiamet. Aastaraamat 2013, p. 9.
<https://www.kapo.ee/cms-data/_text/38/44/files/kaitsepolitsei-aastaraamat-2013.pdf>.

[193] "Persons of force", representatives of the security or military services.

describe them. Military activities (i.e. battles, direct clashes between armed units) are usually given fact-based without judgement.

Local news often describes the situation in different places of Ukraine, including Crimea and the so-called Republics of Donetsk and Luhansk. Moreover, *Regnum* often produces news, how Ukrainian war refugees have been settled in Russia and other humanitarian issues related to the crisis.

5.5. TV Zvezda

Kristiina Müür

TV Zvezda is a nationwide Russian TV network owned by the Russian Ministry of Defence. Therefore, it was of special interest for this research project. Although primarily a TV channel, the study analysed the online news published on the *TV Zvezda* website. Altogether 142 articles were analysed.

Similarly to *Regnum,* the style used by *TV Zvezda* is more restrained compared to *KP* in terms of portraying the crisis. The vast majority of the articles were news stories as opposed to a wider selection of genres in the two other outlets. As news stories, the articles were heavily present-centred with less than 5% of the stories referring to past events. Although the Russian information campaigns often rely on drawing parallels between Ukraine and Nazi Germany, these associations were largely missing in *TV Zvezda*, whether referring to past events or describing the Ukrainian government, army, or army leadership. Although the term *karateli* (execution squads) was sometimes used, the frequency was low. The most negatively loaded expression commonly used for the Ukrainian army was *siloviki.*

Another feature characteristic of *TV Zvezda* is a significantly more thorough geographical contextualisation of the stories in terms of frequency. While *KP* remained rather Ukraine-centred, then *TV Zvezda* and *Regnum* also included the West as a counterpart into their information campaigns. The latter was done mostly by referring to events, speeches, and statements from the international arena – the USA, NATO, the UN – which also included the topic of the West providing financial or military support for Ukraine.

Regardless of whether the content was factually correct, the format of news stories included references to different sources. In comparison with the other two outlets, references to political figures and institutions were used more often, but official documents were not referred to at all. While the articles and sources quoted by *TV Zvezda* remained stylistically reserved, more colourful descriptions and negative judgements were brought in when occasionally quoting civilians. On the political level, bolder statements about Ukraine

appeared when referring to statements made by Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov or Russian diplomats in the international arena. John Kerry and Anders Fogh Rasmussen were the most often mentioned figures from the West; this mostly happened in the context of the alleged interference of the USA/NATO in Ukraine. While *TV Zvezda* refrains from openly attacking high-level politicians, it does allow a considerably more critical approach when it comes to statements made by spokespersons for different institutions. For example, US State Department spokesperson Marie Harf is readily described as making unfounded accusations against Russia on the subject of war crimes[194].

When it comes to portraying different groups of adversaries – Ukrainian military and government institutions, and the West – *TV Zvezda* adopted more subtle methods of conveying its messages. *TV Zvezda* mostly targets the Ukrainian armed forces and the government as 'enemies' within Ukraine. The Ukrainian army leadership does not appear in almost any of the stories. Half of the articles dealing with the Ukrainian army and government convey negative attitudes, mostly associating them with various acts of violence and terrorism within the country. The remainder of the stories describe events without any explicit judgement, thus seemingly leaving it to the readers to draw conclusions for themselves. At first glance, the news stories seem to follow the logic of solid journalistic production – referring to sources, avoiding the extravagant display of emotions, using reserved language. Nevertheless, when looked upon as a whole, the anti-Ukrainian stance becomes apparent.

Also, *TV Zvezda* has its ways of 'helping' the reader reach an anti-Ukrainian point of view. One ways is choice of illustrative photos. For instance, a news story with a headline about Poroshenko checking the readiness of the troops in the special operations zones is paired with a photograph showing Poroshenko holding a pair of rubber boots (see Picture 4).[195] As a result, the article can easily succeed in giving a discrediting impression of Ukraine – whether targeted specifically at the military supplies of the army, the ability of Poroshenko or the Ukrainian government to provide that to the troops, or contributing generally to the overall negative tonality.

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[194] **Госдеп США безосновательно обвинил Россию в военном преступлении**. – Звезда, 26 июля 2014. <http://tvzvezda.ru/news/vstrane_i_mire/content/201407260011-1tmz.htm>.

[195] **Порошенко проводит проверку боеготовности войск в зоне спецоперации**. – _ Звезда, 10 октября 2014.
<http://tvzvezda.ru/news/vstrane_i_mire/content/201410101914-yjur.htm>.

В СТРАНЕ И МИРЕ

10 октября 2014, 19:14

Порошенко проводит проверку боеготовности войск в зоне спецоперации

Код для вставки в блог

Опубликовать   Я рекомендую

Президент Украины Петр Порошенко начал проверку боеготовности силовиков в зоне спецоперации. Об этом сообщает пресс-служба администрации украинского президента 10 октября.

Picture 4. Poroshenko checking the military preparedness of troops in the special operations zone (Source: *TV Zvezda*)

Another example is choosing a title that implies far-reaching conclusions than the content of the story that follows justifies. For example, an article is published under the headline '*German troops preparing to be deployed to Ukraine*' (see Picture 5).[196] Upon reading the article it becomes clear that 'Germans troops' means 200 soldiers securing OSCE observers according to the Minsk agreements. Nevertheless, before reading to understand, the reader may have already imagined something significantly more large-scale.

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[196] **Германские войска готовятся к отправке на Украину**. – Звезда, 4 октября 2014. <http://tvzvezda.ru/news/vstrane_i_mire/content/201410040212-8ujh.htm>.

Picture 5. *'German troops preparing to be deployed to Ukraine' (Source: TV Zvezda)*

Another subtle way of constructing a negative image of the Ukrainian army is to report a brutal crime against innocent people and then casually mention that a Ukrainian army base happens to be located in the same town (see Picture 6).[197] Indeed, technically the article does not accuse anyone but it does require a conscious effort in critical thinking on behalf of the reader not to associate these two separate statements.

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[197] **Тела 286 женщин обнаружены под Красноармейском**. – Звезда, 31 октября 2014. <http://tvzvezda.ru/news/vstrane_i_mire/content/201410311222-k3zy.htm>. The main body of

В СТРАНЕ И МИРЕ

31 октября 2014, 12:22

Тела 286 женщин обнаружены под Красноармейском

Код для вставки в блог

Опубликовать

Я рекомендую

За последнее время в районе города Красноармейска Донецкой области были обнаружены тела 286 женщин. Об этом со ссылкой на премьер-министра самопровозглашенной Донецкой Народной Республики Александра Захарченко сообщает РИА Новости. Всего пропавшими без вести на территории ДНР числились 400 человек в возрасте от 18 до 25 лет.

«Почти 400 женщин в возрасте от 18 до 25 лет пропали в Красноармейске без вести, где расквартирован батальон «Днепр-1». 286 тел женщин были обнаружены вокруг Красноармейска изнасилованными», - цитирует Захарченко агентство.

Picture 6. Bodies of 286 women found near Krasnoarmeysk (Source: *TV Zvezda*)

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the article says: "Bodies of 286 women were recently found in a district of the Krasnoarmeysk town in the Donetsk oblast. This was reported by RIA Novosti with reference to the Prime Minister of the self-proclaimed People's Republic of Donetsk Alexander Zakharchenko. Altogether, 400 people aged 18 to 25 have been reported missing on the territory of DPR. Nearly 400 women aged 18 to 25 years went missing in Krasnoarmeysk, where the battalion 'Dnepr-1' is quartered. 286 bodies of women were found around Krasnoarmeysk raped', – the agency quotes Zakharchenko."

When it comes to constructing an image of the West, it is mostly the US and NATO that are depicted as the enemy. Europe and the EU do not figure nearly as much and abstract references to the West are rare. Interestingly, while *TV Zvezda* is the most thorough of the three media outlets analysed in terms of geographic contextualisation, it does not argue that the West intentionally stages provocations against Russia as *Regnum* and *KP* do on occasion. *TV Zvezda* mostly argues that the USA/NATO are interfering in Ukrainian matters.

5.6. RIA Novosti

Valeria Jakobson

Ria Novosti is a nationwide Russian news agency, which originates from *Sovinfrmbyro* (1941–1961) and *APN* (*Agentstvo Pechati Novosti* 1961–1990). It has belonged to the state since 1993 and has been a part of the state corporation *Russia Today* since December 2013[198]. The study analysed news items published online: 152 units for 2014 and 204 for 2015, with a total of 356 articles.

The style used by *Ria Novosti* is closer to *Regnum* and *TV Zvezda* than to *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, in terms of the topics and vocabulary used in portraying the Ukrainian crisis. It is interesting that many of the news items do have sources, but no author. The journalist behind the text remains nameless.

The genre structure is quite specific in comparison to previous channels. It must be said that it is often difficult to define the genre, as many items have characteristics of several genres, so a key feature of this channel is genre vagueness. Nevertheless, the authors of the study have classified 42% of the coded materials as news (150 articles), 27% as reportages (95 articles), 23% as statements (84 articles), and 8% as features and others (27 articles). Again, the news items are mainly so-called "widened news", as the traditional news piece (who? what? where? when?) is usually followed by a text of the same amount or more which puts the event into the wider context of '*Kiev power aggression against the population of Donbass, who are not satisfied with the February putsch*'. This paragraph is repeated regularly from 31.08.2014 to 27.12.2015 (and likely continues, although the selection studied did not include 2016).

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[198] See <https://ria.ru/docs/about/ria_history.html>

Киевские власти с апреля проводят на востоке Украины силовую операцию, направленную против недовольных февральским госпереворотом жителей Донбасса. По информации ООН, с середины апреля по 27 августа на Украине убиты более 2,5 тысячи мирных жителей, около 6 тысяч ранены.[199]

This context is repeated in different texts, with a growing number of victims (over 9000 killed by the end of 2015). It is likely that this context becomes more important than the current event. This method is used not only in news items, but in all genres and it has a "cumulative effect": when certain information is repeated many times, it becomes a fact, providing a framework for the interpretation of other facts.

The articles are mainly focused on the present; the past is mentioned only as a background or for comparison in 21 article (5,8%). World War II was mentioned only in 6 articles (less than 2%). The comparison of Ukrainian power with fascists belongs to prime-minister of Crimea Aksjonov[200] and some Western journalists and antifascists[201]. In four of the articles, US politics in Ukraine and in Middle-Eastern countries were compared with fascism and former US President Obama with Hitler. These views were mainly articulated by various Western experts or left-wing politicians and once by the Russian Foreign Affairs Minister, Mr. Lavrov.

Furthermore, in 11 articles (3%) Ukrainian army soldiers are called *fascists* and in 14 articles (4%) *karateli*. Such semantically-colored words are usually used by DNR or LNR officials, military or civilian, while Russian officials and military usually avoid name-calling and try to remain within the frames of politically correct terminology. As in other sources, the term most often used for the Ukrainian army was *siloviki*.

It should be noted that the Ukrainian government is repeatedly blamed for organizing the war in Ukraine. In every third article (119), the 'non-legitimate' character of the Ukrainian government is mentioned. In 13% of the articles (47), the Ukrainian government is directly blamed for organizing war, terrorism, and fratricidal war in Donbass.

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[199] Since April 2014, Kiev authorities have been carrying out military operations in the East of Ukraine directed against Donbass residents, who disagreed with the February coup. According to UN data, from mid-April to 27 August, more than 2.5 thousand civilians were killed and approximately 6000 injured in Ukraine.

[200] **Аксенов: власти Украины, начав войну с народом, уподобились фашистам**. – Ria Novosti, 22.06.2014. <https://ria.ru/world/20140622/1013073793.html> (01.09.2017).

[201] **Антифашисты не пустили фотовыставку о «героях АТО» в Политехникум Афин**. – Ria Novosti, 16.11.2014. <https://ria.ru/world/20141116/1033495175.html> (01.09.2017).

Британский профсоюзный лидер назвал украинские власти "фашистами"

Тема: Реакция на события на Украине. Август 2014 года (379)

12:35 03.08.2014   (обновлено: 13:08 03.08.2014)   💬 0   👁 231409   👍 1287   👎 43

Сторонники движения Правый сектор. Архивное фото

© РИА Новости. Александр Максименко | Перейти в фотобанк

Глава администрации крупнейшего профсоюза Великобритании Unite the Union Эндрю Мюррэй решительно осудил украинское правительство, сказав, что его политика "направлена на истребление своего собственного народа".

The general ideological construction is that this is NATO/US provocation against Russia and Russian-speaking people, committed via state coup in Ukraine. Forty-three articles (12%) mentioned Western or NATO provocation in Ukraine, and 29 articles (8%) say that it is NATO or Western provocation against Russia. This conflict is connected with Western sanctions against Russia. A cruel joke has appeared in Russian folk discourse that the US and Russia will continue the war in Donbass until the last Ukrainian dies.

> США используют конфликт на Украине для продвижения своих собст-
> венных "стратегических интересов в Европе и Евразии", считает
> американский журналист Стивен Лендман./.../ В этих целях, с точки
> зрения автора материала, США активно используют военный конфликт
> в Донбассе, поддерживая и даже поощряя киевскую агрессию в регионе.

> *Журналист уверен, что Пентагон скрыто спонсирует и предоставляет оружие украинской армии.*[202]

Civilians of Donbass are portrayed as the main victims of the conflict in 58% of the articles (206). Ukrainians are mentioned as victims of the conflict in 13% of the articles (46). A significant amount of attention is drawn to the sufferings of the victims – civilians and refugees. In connection with the refugees, the role of Russia in their reception and assistance measures is emphasized. *Humanitarian convoys* are described within this framework of humantarian assistance to starving and homeless inhabitants of Donbass.

There are several types of casualties that are also mentioned. These are 1) children; 2) orthodox churches and priests; and 3) the environment. This is important, because among the audience there is a growing number of people who distance themselves from politics since they do not expect to read the truth anyway.[203] Humanitarian values, such as children's well-being, religion or spirituality, and environmental protection, are usually very important to this audience, so some articles target this particular group.

> *'Я не верю, что на храм мог случайно быть брошен снаряд. /.../ Я знаю, какой злобой пышут те, кто к нашей Церкви не принадлежит. И не исключено, что целясь в этот храм, они целились во всех нас, во всю Русь Святую, во всю Русь историческую, в которую многократно целились на протяжении всей нашей истории', – заявил патриарх Кирилл.*[204]

> *Юго-восток Украины находится на грани техногенной катастрофы. Любой завод или фабрика, а их здесь около четырех тысяч, может*

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[202] **Global Research: США напрямую управляют конфликтом в Донбассе**. – Ria Novosti, 25.01.2015. <https://ria.ru/world/20150125/1044223327.html> (01.09.2017). "'The US uses the conflict in Ukraine to promote their own 'strategic interests in Europe and Eurasia', says the American journalist Steven Landman ./... / With this aim, from the point of view of the author of the material, the United States actively uses the military conflict in the Donbass, supporting Kiev aggression in the region. The journalist asserts that the Pentagon secretly sponsors and provides weapons to the Ukrainian army."

[203] **Doherty, J.; Kaljurand, R**. 2015. Estonia's "Virtual Russian World": The Influence of Russian Media on Estonia's Russian Speakers. – RKK/ICDS Analysis. October 2015. <https://www.icds.ee/fileadmin/media/icds.ee/failid/Jill_Dougherty__Riina_Kaljurand_-_Estonia_s__Virtual_Russian_World_.pdf>.

[204] **Патриарх: попадание снаряда в храм Донецкой области не случайность**. – Ria Novosti, 24.08.2014. <https://ria.ru/religion/20140824/1021250300.html> (01.09.2017). "I do not believe that the church could be bombed accidentally. /... / I know what hatred feel those who do not belong to our church. They are not only aiming at the church, they were aiming at all of us, Holy Russia, all historical Russia in general, which repeatedly happened throughout our history", the Patriarch said.

взлететь на воздух из-за непрекращающихся боев./.../ от аварий на промышленных предприятиях Донбасса могут пострадать все соседние страны Евросоюза и Россия.[205]

One of the special features of this propaganda is combining classical methods (labelling, opposition, semantically-colored words) with more subtle ones (structuring the text to bring more attention to the background than the facts, repetition of statements, cumulative effect, targeting specific audiences, etc).

A key method of producing credibility here is the selection of sources of information. The most acute critics of the Ukrainian government and army and the US/NATO usually do not come from Russian officials directly. As for military actions (bombing, shooting, etc), they are heavily criticized mostly by local civilians, priests and officials (i.e. witnesses, deserving more trust than those who are away from the front). As for blaming NATO and the US for fueling the conflict, using it in its own interest against Russia, military support of Ukrainian troops, etc, Western experts and journalists are often quoted, thus adding credibility to the information. So the selection of sources is also well thought out and works as a subtle method of propaganda.

As on *TV Zvezda*, the Ukrainian army leadership does not appear in almost any of the stories. Negative evaluations of the Ukrainian army appear only in 24 articles (7%). Ukrainian soldiers are mainly portrayed in these articles as being low on morale, undisciplined, poorly equipped, and prone to robbery, violence and desertion. It is repeated that the management of the armed forces abandoned poorly equipped and hungry soldiers to their fate. In fact, these assertions give an implicit message to the Ukrainian soldiers who read this source (targeting a specific audience again): *You are abandoned by your cowardly and thieving bosses and suffer deprivation and risk your life for NATO/USA interests.*

More than half of the articles dealing with the Ukrainian army and government refrain from labelling, but still refer to acts of violence and terrorism. *Ria Novosti* depicts the Ukrainian army in a similar style as *TV Zvezda*.

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[205] **Отравленная жизнь Донбасса: 'Стирол' и другие катастрофы**. – Ria Novosti, 14.08.2014. <https://ria.ru/radio/20140814/1019980325.html> (01.09.2017). South-East Ukraine is on the edge of man-made disaster. Any plant or factory, and there are about four thousand of them, may blow up because of the ongoing fighting. /.../ all neighboring countries of the EU and Russia could be affected by accidents at industrial enterprises in Donbass.

Украинских военных на Донбасс отправляют в касках времен ВОВ

Тема: Спецоперация на востоке Украины (1559)

22:29 22.06.2014 (обновлено: 22:40 22.06.2014) 💬 0 👁 18456 👍 162 👎 16

© REUTERS/ Baz Ratner

Военнослужащие одного из батальонов территориальной обороны Украины перед отправкой в зону проведения так называемой антитеррористической операции на востоке страны рассказали о неудовлетворительной военной подготовке и отсутствии необходимой амуниции, техники и средств связи.

One more thing worth noting is that following negotiations or agreements that have been reached, another ideological construction appears: the government and the army try to fulfil the agreements, but there are nationalists/volunteers who do not obey presidential/army commands, start provocations, break agreements, commit crimes against peaceful inhabitants, etc.

All these constructions promote the concept of a weak, dependent, controlled from the outside, unsustainable state, which is breaking apart and will not survive without considering Russia's political interests.

5.7. Social Media

Kristiina Müür

The Facebook study is based on a single public group, *Национально-Освободительное Движение* – the National Liberation Movement, which unites political forces who support the 'territorial integrity of Russia' and whose aim is to 're-establish the sovereignty lost in 1991'.[206]

Level of public engagement in debates

Despite the popular assumption that the almighty Facebook and Russian troll factories rule the hearts and minds of people simply due to the massive influx of information, our results provide arguments for more research into the actual reception and influence of these messages. For example, one of the initially unexpected results of the study was the lack of public engagement and passivity of the group. Although the frequency of new postings in the group was relatively high, the number of individuals actually writing posts in the data sample was very limited and relied mostly on a few activists even though the study looked at postings from almost every day. In most cases the posts were also limited to sharing photos, videos, and links from other sources. The number of original texts was very small. Furthermore, the reaction from other members in the group remained passive. More than half of the posts received no comments or likes. Only about 10% of the posts under scrutiny received any comments at all. Less than half of all posts received any likes, and those that did, got a maximum of two or three. Whether or not it was orchestrated by trolls, the group seemed to serve as a channel for a top-down flow of information. Since these messages did not engage the audience in any immediate visible way, the possible long-term impact of these information activities could depend mostly on the repetition of certain messages.

The content of the information activities

Considering the aims of the National Liberation Movement, the messages in the group were unsurprisingly mostly contextualised around the clash between Russia and West, with the Ukraine crisis being the most acute example. The list of topics was topped by Russia and the West, and followed

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[206] See **НОД: Национально-освободительное дивжение**.
<http://rusnod.ru/index/o-dvizhenii/>.(01.09.2017).

by the combat and terror activities perpetrated by the Ukrainian government (for a set of more extravagant examples of these topics, see Pictures 7–11).

The content of the posts relating to the Ukraine crisis was of a more general nature, providing overviews and generalised information, not focusing on specific events. For example, posts regarding the MH17 catastrophe and the Minsk peace talks were virtually non-existent. Similarly, almost no references were made to Maidan (or AntiMaidan). The study did not include the content of the videos or links shared.

Contrary to our expectations and similarly to the results of the online news analysis, the content of the Facebook posts was present-centred and references to historical events, especially to WWII, were rare. Less than 5% of the stories contained references to WWII. The same applied to the Soviet period and even the events related to the on-going crisis, such as the Vilnius summit or the annexation of Crimea. The sources referred to were most often either links to Russian press of other social media sources. In the case of social media, YouTube videos were frequently shared (very often these were videos from other Russian or separatist news channels), *Vkontakte* also figured to a lesser extent. Many of the videos were no longer available due to copyright issues or accounts being closed. Therefore, we can assume that some sort of countermeasures to Russian information warfare are being carried out.

When it comes to constructing the enemy, two categories emerged – Ukraine and the West. The Ukrainian government received much more attention than the Ukrainian armed forces or the army leadership. However, the share of posts mentioning the Ukraine government was only about one quarter of the overall amount of posts. While the parallels with the WWII did not prevail in the stories when referring to past events, associations with the Nazis and Third Reich were often used to characterise the Ukraine government. Two other common characterisations associated the Ukrainian government with violence (occupation, genocide, terrorism etc.) in Eastern Ukraine and portrayed the Kyiv government as puppets of the West, mostly the US. The Ukrainian armed forces were mostly associated with the war atrocities.

As for the West, it is mostly the USA/NATO that are identified as the enemy. Europe/EU figure considerably less, and generalisations about the Western world as the enemy are rare. Again, the share of stories actually dealing with any of these groups is not high. The USA/NATO figure in almost one quarter of the posts, the highest share overall. The USA/NATO were mostly depicted as engaging in confrontation with Russia or interfering in Ukraine, which was often regarded as indirect provocation of Russia. The most radical line of thought regarding the US was about its involvement in genocide against the Russian nationals in Eastern Ukraine.

Picture 7. Referendum in the East. Ukrainian media. Reality.

(Source: <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=1401189390165493&set=gm.309
015822589221&type=1>)

Picture 8. Road to Donbass. Road from Donbass.

(Source: <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=1410177119266720&set=gm.314
165772074226&type=1>)

Picture 9. Obama *vs.* Putin, 'freedom' *vs.* 'occupation'

(Source: <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=747957925286365&set=gm.3920 88527615283&type=1>)

Picture 10. Referendum for detaching the US from planet Earth. Repost if you agree.

(Source: <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=1489749131309518&set=gm.401 719373318865&type=1>)

Picture 11. The USA did not leave the British Empire entirely legally.

(Source: <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=1414239628860469&set=gm.318
447504979386&type=1>)