
How two information portals hide their ties to the Russian News Agency Inforos

OSINT INVESTIGATION

EU DisinfoLab

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I. Executive summary

In March 2020, we stumbled across articles from a French website called “ObservateurContinental.fr” which spreads disinformation related to the COVID-19. For example:

- An article blaming NATO Defender-Europe 20 exercises for the outbreak of COVID-19 in Europe.¹ As shown by a DFRLab study, similar narratives trying to link the COVID-19 to NATO military exercises in Europe were also debunked in Italy.²
- Another one repropagated the interview of the former US bioweapon expert Francis Boyle, who falsely asserted without evidence that the “COVID-19 is a perfect biological weapon”.³

Investigating further, we found that the website has spread:

- A lot of polarizing content targeting France, such as the claim that the “Yellow Vest Movement is manipulated by George Soros”⁴) from an interview with Emmanuel Leroy, a French political scientist (and a former counsellor of the French far-right Marine Le Pen);
- Some messages extremely favourable to Russia, such as the article presenting the findings from *Le Monde* about a network of Russian spies active in the French Alps as “fiction”.⁵

In its “About us” section, Observateur Continental presents itself as an “independent and non-profit information portal”. It also claims to share articles from “analysts from all over the world” with a prime focus on the “Eurasian continent”.⁶ On this page, there is no mention of any individual/organisation linked to the website nor an indication suggesting that the website might be connected to a foreign country.

Looking at the technical data linked to the website, we did not find anything significant at first sight: Observateurcontinental.fr is hosted on a shared server with one IP address also connected to thousands of unremarkable, mostly French, websites.

However, the historical WHOIS data related to the website, which is publicly available, revealed interesting insights⁷. Even though the domain owner of “observateurcontinental.fr” is PTS Privacy & Trustee Services GmbH – a German company that offers the possibility to

¹ <https://perma.cc/C2BY-LKKQ>

² <https://perma.cc/LN5C-J7X9>

³ <https://perma.cc/ZZJ9-4RXG>

⁴ <https://perma.cc/CYX8-7R7D>

⁵ <https://perma.cc/GR33-AD5C>

⁶ <https://perma.cc/54P8-4M66>

⁷ <https://perma.cc/APN3-BMLN>

anonymously register websites online – the registration data mentions that management of technical issues related to the “Observateurcontinental.fr” domain name is delegated to an individual named “Alex Kouchnir”. According to this data, Alex Kouchnir serves as point of contact for the Russian press agency InfoRos Co.Ltd, based in Moscow.⁸ The WHOIS lookup also includes:

- an email address that was used for the website’s registration (nic@inforos.ru)
- a physical address (Krzhizhanovskogo Street 13/2, 11/218 Moscow), which is an address known to host InfoRos but also other Russian organisations, such as the Russkiy Mir Foundation, which are funded by the Russian government.

Moreover, looking at the source code of Observateurcontinental.fr, we were able to find distinctive labels on the search forms used by the website: “forms-base-el--input”. Using a public source code search engine, we were able to find that this distinctive code is used on 243 other media websites, which are all linked to InfoRos. We also observed strong similarities with how the websites were built.

A deeper analysis of the articles published by ObservateurContinental.fr also showed that some of them were in fact translations of pieces that were first published in Russian by Inforos.ru.

These links between Observateur Continental and InfoRos are completely hidden to readers. There are no public traces of any of these ties between InfoRos and the Observateur Continental website, which poses as a “French information portal” and spreads clear disinformation.

Our own investigation shows that InfoRos seems to be a regular contractor of Russian authorities. InfoRos also have a wide range of activities from managing local Russian media outlets’ websites to organizing events for the Russian authorities, and maintaining some more partisan websites (e.g. genocide-in-ossetia.com).

Moreover, according to a report from the Washington Post from December 2018 citing Western intelligence sources, InfoRos is considered as a front organisation for covered information operations for the GRU (“Main Directorate of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation”), the Russian state’s foreign military-intelligence agency.⁹ The US media’s article named more precisely here the GRU Unit 54777, also known as “the 72nd Special Service Center”, which is considered as “the center of the Russian military’s

⁸ Information which can be found on the technical contact section of the WHOIS.

⁹ https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/how-russias-military-intelligence-agency-became-the-covert-muscle-in-putins-duels-with-the-west/2018/12/27/2736bbe2-fb2d-11e8-8c9a-860ce2a8148f_story.html

psychological-warfare capabilities" and has been involved in several covert information operations in Ukraine and the West, according to the same Western Intelligence officials.¹⁰

Furthermore, our investigation also allowed us to uncover undisclosed ties between "One World Global Think Tank" – a website already identified as a Moscow-based information portal by a EUvsDisinfo report¹¹ – and InfoRos.

Even if Observateur Continental does not disclose any of these links and maintains strong opacity around its functioning, two individuals have regularly signed articles produced on the website.

One of the main contributors, **Olivier Renault**, presents himself on his LinkedIn profile as a "freelance journalist" based in Russia. According to his personal website, the French journalist wrote articles on a regular basis for the Russian-state media *La Voix de la Russie* (now *Sputnik France*) and *Stimme Russlands* (now *Sputnik Germany*) from 2012 to 2014. Then, he collaborated with the pro-Russian media outlet (*Novorossia Today / NRT24*) based in Donetsk (Ukraine) until the beginning of 2019. He also claims to have worked in the past for the controversial German media *Junge Freiheit*,¹² the French media *Rue89*, and gave interviews for the Iranian government media *Press TV*.¹³ He is also identified as a regular contributor for the controversial alternative media *Riposte Laïque*¹⁴ and several well-known conspiracy websites, such as *mondialisation.ca*¹⁵ and *reseauinternational.net*.¹⁶

Even though it was limited in number, we also found that Olivier Renault had signed at least four articles in Russian published on *Inforos.ru*.¹⁷

On his professional Facebook page, he uses as a profile picture of what seems to be his Russian professional press card.¹⁸ However, despite being quite transparent about some of his connections to Russia, he does not mention an affiliation to either Observateur Continental or InfoRos.

The other main contributor is **Mikhail Gamandiy Egorov**. According to his LinkedIn profile, he occupied the position of columnist and analyst for *La Voix de La Russie* then for *Sputnik France* from September 2012 to December 2018. In parallel, he had a short mission with the

¹⁰ Ibidem

¹¹ <https://euvsdisinfo.eu/one-world-one-author-one-chain-of-command/>

¹² <https://perma.cc/WJ4V-BU9H>

¹³ <https://perma.cc/Y3HL-VVDL>

¹⁴ <https://perma.cc/DG3S-CM2U>

¹⁵ <https://perma.cc/QZR8-HPZN>

¹⁶ <https://perma.cc/B492-SQUG>

¹⁷ <https://perma.cc/8NBH-85VJ>

¹⁸ <https://perma.cc/H3KB-RG9E>

Skolkovo Foundation (from December 2013 to March 2014) and founded “BRICS Dream”, an organisation focused on solidifying the relations between BRICS countries, which was active from November 2014 to August 2017. According to his LinkedIn profile, he has been acting since November 2019 as a “Journalist for *l’Observateur Continental*” and a Director for “Afro-Wave Agency”, a Public Relations agency based in Rabat, Morocco.

Going further in our investigation on Mikhail Gamandiy-Egorov, we discovered that he has also been a contributor for many conspiracy and “alternative” websites (GlobalResearch.ca, Mondialisation.ca, Palestine-solidarité.org, eode.org, revuemethode.org ...) and has been a regular interviewee for Iranian state media for many years (*Press TV, Pars Today, Almanar...*).¹⁹

Observateur Continental has its own Facebook Page (11k likes) and Twitter account (76 followers) to share articles from its website. However, the apparent low audience of the Observateur Continental’s social media accounts does not reflect the real reach of the content produced by the website. As for the other media outlet called “oneworld.press”, which we uncovered as tied to InfoRos, Observateur Continental sees its articles regularly reproduced by many bigger websites – sometimes on an almost systematic basis.

For example, an author page managed by “Patrice Bravo” (likely a fake alias)²⁰ on the French blogging platform Agoravox.fr²¹ is exclusively dedicated to the reproduction of articles published by Observateur Continental. We noticed that this is one of the main amplification channels for the website. Another example of an amplifier was the French reinformation media Adoxa.info before its closure, which had already published 19 articles on its website since January 2020, branded as “in partnership with Observateur Continental”.²² Moreover, Les Moutons Enragés, a French conspiracy website known to spread a lot of disinformation,²³ has also been regularly reproducing content from Observateur Continental since 2019 (around 41 articles).

In addition to the amplification in the French information ecosystem, we studied the propagation of a specific story from Observateur Continental that falsely linked “the outbreak of COVID-19 in Europe to the NATO Europe-Defender 2020 military exercises”. Even though the overall audience was limited, we were able to show that the article from the small French website was shared directly and indirectly by multiple actors in France but also in several European countries.

¹⁹ <https://perma.cc/DSP8-86R7>

²⁰ <https://perma.cc/8WJK-NFVT>

²¹ A French media platform which is composed only of blogs managed by regular Internet users

²² <https://perma.cc/XR6D-XW5X> / <https://perma.cc/4PBG-ATTV> / <https://perma.cc/4PBG-ATTV>

²³ <https://perma.cc/DL24-CEQH>

Finally, we investigated how websites that are presented by the alternative media outlet One World Press as “partners” also played an important role in the amplification of the articles produced by Observateur Continental and One World.

II. A website spreading disinformation items

Between March and April 2020, we stumbled across articles from a French website called “Observateurcontinental.fr,” which was spreading disinformation items related to the COVID-19. We noticed for example:

- An article blaming NATO for the outbreak of COVID-19 in Europe;²⁴ similar conspiratorial narratives circulating in Italy were, for example, also debunked by Pagella Politica;²⁵
- Another article repropagating the interview from the former US bioweapon expert Francis Boyle, who falsely asserted without evidence that the “COVID-19 is a perfect biological weapon”²⁶;
- An article claiming that political opponents of a lockdown in Germany were arrested and placed in psychiatric institutions²⁷.

1) Story linking COVID-19 to NATO military exercises in Europe

On March 5th 2020, the website “ObservateurContinental.fr” published an article titled “Coronavirus: The NATO DEFENDER-Europe 20 military exercises threaten Europe”. The article was written by an individual called Olivier Renault.

²⁴ <https://perma.cc/C2BY-LKKQ>

²⁵ <https://pagellapolitica.it/blog/show/637/che-cosa-sappiamo-di-defender-europe-20-e-quanto-centra-con-il-coronavirus>

²⁶ <https://perma.cc/ZZJ9-4RXG>

²⁷ <https://perma.cc/7DGA-SF24>



Figure 1 - Screenshot of the article titled "COVID-19: The NATO DEFENDER-Europe 20 military exercises threaten Europe" from observateurcontinental.fr²⁸

This piece suggested that there is a link between the outbreak of COVID-19 in Europe and the preparation of the NATO DEFENDER-Europe 20 military exercises:

- First, the author underlines, with a conspiratorial tone, that the COVID-19 pandemic might be a cover-up to prevent European media from talking about NATO DEFENDER-Europe 20 exercises.
- Then, a focus is made on some very specific COVID-19 cases that occurred among staff from the European Defence Agency in Brussels as well as airbases in France and the US. This was used to claim without any solid evidence that the spread of the virus in Europe was very likely connected to NATO military facilities.

The article vaguely mentioned that most of the first people infected in Europe and the US did not have any links to these military bases.

2) COVID-19 is a perfect bioweapon

On February 27th 2020, Observateur Continental published an article repropagating false claims made by the US Professor of Law Francis Boyle about the origin of COVID-19 (he described it as "a perfect bioweapon which probably leaked from a lab").

²⁸ <https://perma.cc/C2BY-LKKQ>



Figure 2 - Screenshot of the article titled “Francis Boyle: “The COVID-19, a perfect bioweapon” from observateurcontinental.fr²⁹

Multiple scientific studies on the origin of the virus have already concluded that the “COVID-19 is a natural virus and was not man-made³⁰”. Moreover, the conspiracy theory built by Francis Boyle was debunked by several factcheckers and media all over the world.³¹ One interesting element is that Olivier Renault – the Observateur Continental article’s author – does not agree 100% with the theories of Francis Boyle. Even though he fully goes along with the false hypothesis of the “COVID-19 being a bioweapon”, an alternative story about the exact initial origin of the virus is built in the article. Whereas Francis Boyle describes a plot involving a lab in Winnipeg (Canada), Renault’s article tries to implicate a laboratory facility in North Carolina and the US Food and Drugs Administration. This suggests not only a desire to spread disinformation about the “man-made origin of the virus” but also a will to build a narrative blaming the US.

3) Covid-19 as an excuse to lock-up political opponents in Germany

On April 13th 2020, Observateur Continental published an article from Olivier Renault titled “COVID-19 in Germany: when the police knocks at the door”.

²⁹<https://perma.cc/ZZJ9-4RXG>

³⁰<https://www.factcheck.org/2020/02/baseless-conspiracy-theories-claim-new-coronavirus-was-bioengineered/>

³¹https://www.lemonde.fr/les-decodeurs/article/2020/03/06/le-coronavirus-arme-biologique-le-vrai-du-faux-d-une-video-virale_6032098_4355770.html/ <https://asiatimes.com/2020/02/chinas-bioweapon-spy-story-that-never-was/>



Figure 3 - Screenshot of the article titled “COVID-19 in Germany: when the police knocks at the door” from observateurcontinental.fr³²

This piece suggested that “there is a strategy in Germany to lock-up all the people who oppose local governments’ responses against COVID-19”. To support this “authoritarian drift” narrative, the article mixes and misrepresents several real facts:

- In order to create suspicion, the article highlights the German police escorting of doctors from the Klinikum University in Munich to conduct random door-to-door tests to evaluate the proportion of people immunized against COVID-19. According to the author, this is proof that people will be forced to take the test and could be imprisoned if they refuse. There is no evidence to sustain such claim.³³
- The article links the “testing campaign in Bavaria” to discussions on “the possibility of imposing a forced quarantine for people who do not want to respect lockdown measures in psychiatric wards in the Saxony region”. For Olivier Renault, this demonstrates that “there is an ongoing plan in Germany to lock-up political opponents”. In reality, the Saxony government had already fully refuted that it seriously considered such radical measures two days before Olivier Renault published his alarmist article on the same topic on Observateur Continental.³⁴
- Finally, the article mentions the arrest of a known conspiracy theorist and COVID-19 denier³⁵ for making threats against some of his relatives and the authorities.³⁶ This

³² <https://perma.cc/7DGA-SF24>

³³ <https://perma.cc/WY5N-GB79>

³⁴ <https://perma.cc/EE35-BCYX>

³⁵ <https://perma.cc/3ZFZ-BRG6>

³⁶ <https://perma.cc/HCM7-BSTZ>

was another example of “the authoritarian drift happening in Germany”. After his arrest, the individual was put in a psychiatric ward. Without entering into the debate around the legitimacy of such arrest, it is still noticeable to underline that the article seems to use this example to draw a comparison with the “alleged measures put in place in psychiatric wards in Saxony”, despite the fact that, in reality, the arrest didn’t occur in Germany but in Switzerland.

III. “An alternative news portal” with strong hidden ties to Russia

1) What does Observateur Continental claim to be?

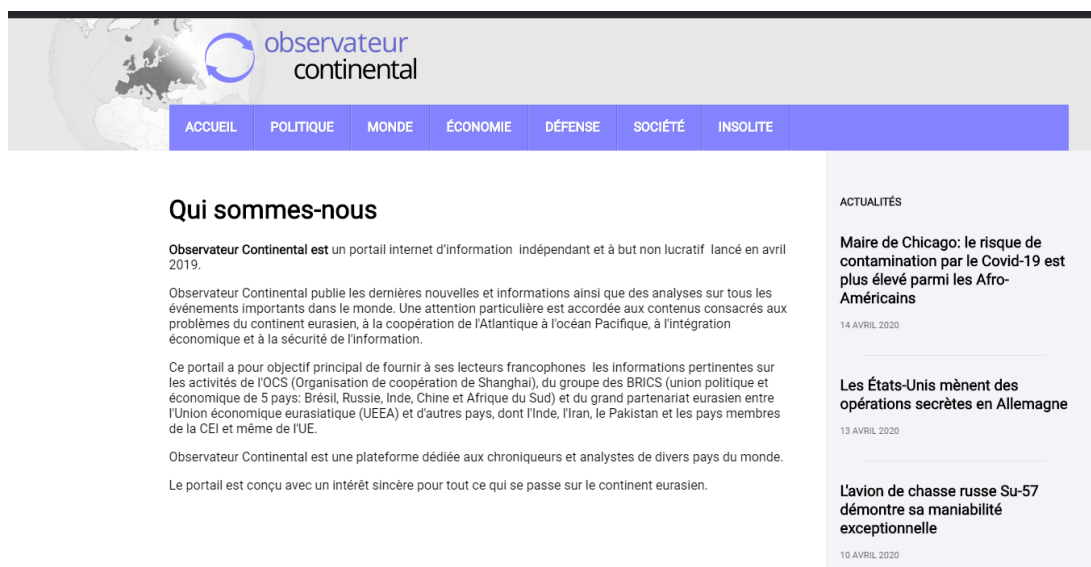


Figure 4 - Screenshot of the “About Us” section on the website observateurcontinental.fr³⁷

When consulting Observateurcontinental.fr,³⁸ there is no information (address, phone number, organigram, authors’ pages…) that could allow users to clearly identify the website’s manager(s).

Still, Observateur Continental includes a “about us” section. However, this page only contains extremely vague and general details. The website presents itself as “an independent and non-profit internet information portal launched in April 2019.” It claims to offer pertinent information to a “French-speaking audience” about the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, the BRICS, the Eurasian Economic Union, the CEI (Commonwealth of Independent States), the “EU”, as well as other topics related to the “Eurasian continent”. The portal also claims to be dedicated to “analysts and columnists from all over the world”.

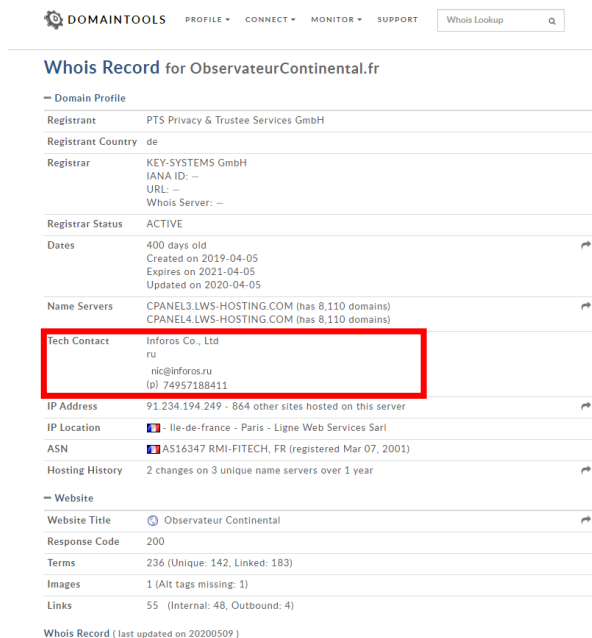
³⁷ <https://perma.cc/54P8-4M66>

³⁸ <https://perma.cc/65VD-QSRD>

As the website is exclusively in French and covers a lot of topics linked to France, the natural guess is to think that this “information portal” is probably French. There is no clear information suggesting a connection to a foreign country.

2) Attribution investigation: the structure of the website shows strong links to Russia

a) Technical analysis: WHOIS and the specificities linked to the coding of “Observateurcontinental.fr”



Whois Record for ObservateurContinental.fr	
— Domain Profile	
Registrant	PTS Privacy & Trustee Services GmbH
Registrant Country	de
Registrar	KEY-SYSTEMS GmbH IANA ID: — URL: — Whois Server: —
Registrar Status	ACTIVE
Dates	400 days old Created on 2019-04-05 Expires on 2021-04-05 Updated on 2020-04-05
Name Servers	CPANEL3.LWS-HOSTING.COM (has 8,110 domains) CPANEL4.LWS-HOSTING.COM (has 8,110 domains)
Tech Contact	Inforos Co., Ltd ru nic@inforos.ru ID 74957188411
IP Address	91.234.194.249 - 864 other sites hosted on this server
IP Location	🇫🇷 Ile-de-france - Paris - Ligne Web Services Sarl
ASN	🇫🇷 AS16347 RMI-FITECH, FR (registered Mar 07, 2001)
Hosting History	2 changes on 3 unique name servers over 1 year
— Website	
Website Title	🌐 Observateur Continental
Response Code	200
Terms	236 (Unique: 142, Linked: 183)
Images	1 (Alt tags missing: 1)
Links	55 (Internal: 48, Outbound: 4)
Whois Record (last updated on 20200509)	

Figure 5 - WHOIS data linked to observateurcontinental.fr available on the website whois.domaintools.com

The main registrant of this website is PTS Privacy and Trustee Services GmbH, a German company, which – according to its corporate website – allows anyone to anonymously register domain names.³⁹ In practice, this means that the official owner of the domain name “observateurcontinental.fr” is supposed to be PTS Privacy and Trustee Services GmbH, acting as a proxy for the true owner. However, the WHOIS data mentions a second organisation as “technical contact”. The technical contact included in the WHOIS information is the person responsible for technical details related to the domain name. Renewal information and other technical notes will, for example, be redirected to this person’s email.

³⁹ <https://perma.cc/EDM4-W3N9>

```
nic-hdl: ICL98-FRNIC
type: ORGANIZATION
contact: Inforos Co., Ltd
address: Alex Kouchnir
address: 13-2 Krzhizhanovskogo st.
address: 117218 Moscow
country: RU
phone: +7.4957188411
e-mail: nic@inforos.ru
registrar: KEY-SYSTEMS GmbH
changed: 2019-04-04T08:02:28Z nic@nic.fr
anonymous: NO
obsoleted: NO
eligstatus: not identified
reachstatus: not identified
source: FRNIC
```

Figure 6 - WHOIS data in the "Tech-c section" linked to *observateurcontinental.fr* which is available on the website www.whois-raynette.fr⁴⁰

Inforos Co., Ltd is an organisation that presents itself as a news agency based in Moscow. Its main website contains articles both in Russian⁴¹ and in English.⁴²

On the Inforos.ru website, the Russian press agency indicates "7-2 Krzhizhanovskogo, 117218 Moscow" as a physical address and "+7 (495) 7188411" as phone number.⁴³ When we compared this to the information included in the WHOIS from *Observateurcontinental.fr*, we could see that the phone numbers are similar, and the physical addresses were very close.

For the physical address, we found however "13-2 Krzhizhanovskogo, 117218 Moscow" as the official address for Inforos Co., Ltd (instead of 7-2) on several others websites compiling information from official Russian Corporate Registries,⁴⁴ suggesting that the difference of numbers (13-2 vs 7-2) is not really significant.

Coding of "ObservateurContinental.fr"

In order to attempt to confirm the links suggested by the WHOIS information, we explored the source code of *Observateurcontinental.fr* to see if we could find specificities that could link the website to other websites managed by InfoRos news agency.

⁴⁰ <https://perma.cc/APN3-BMLN>

⁴¹ <https://archive.is/djJ7Z>

⁴² <https://archive.is/Pcp12>

⁴³ <https://archive.is/2hkku>

⁴⁴ <https://perma.cc/DEQ8-2F5J>/<https://perma.cc/FHJ3-ZYE2/> <https://perma.cc/7FGE-BSGK>

```

1 <!DOCTYPE html>
2 <html>
3 <head>
4   <meta name="description" content='Observateur Continental' />
5   <meta name="keywords" content="Observateur Continental" />
6   <title> Observateur Continental</title>
7
8   <script type="text/javascript" src="/themes/absp/node_modules/jquery/dist/jquery.min.js"></script>
9   <script type="text/javascript" src="/themes/absp/src/script.js"></script>
10  <link rel="stylesheet" type="text/css" href="/themes/absp/src/style.css">
11  <meta charset="utf-8">
12  <meta name="viewport" content="width=device-width, initial-scale=1.0, maximum-scale=1.0">
13 </head>
14 <body>
15 <div class="site-wrapp">
16   <div class="site-head-tail">
17     <div class="top-links">
18       <div class="wrap">
19         <a href="https://www.facebook.com/Observateur-Continental-1366236293764476/" class="fab fa-facebook-f"></a>
20         <a href="https://twitter.com/ObsContinental" class="fab fa-twitter"></a>
21         <a href="#" class="fab fa-linkedin-in"></a>
22         <a href="#" class="fas fa-envelope"></a>
23         <a href="#" class="fas fa-search search-button"></a>
24       </div>
25
26     </div>
27     <div class="search-form">
28 <form method="post" action="" class="site-form site-search form-noajax">
29   <input type="hidden" name="formid" value="c218251mb3jtLS1zaXRlX01lYXJjaA==">
30
31   <div class="form-item el-name-query forms-base-el--input">
32     <input type="text" placeholder="Recherche" class="search_text" required="required" name="query" />
33   </div>
34   <button type="submit" class="fas fa-search submit-form"></button>
35
36 </form>
37 <script type="text/javascript">
38 </script></div>
39 </div>
40 <div class="site-head">
41   <div class="content">
42     <div class="globas">
43       <a class="logo" href="/"></a>
44     </div>
45
46     <span class="fas fa-bars open-menu"></span>
47
48   </div>
49
50 </div>
51 <ul class="head-menu">
52
53
54

```

Figure 7 - Source code from ObservateurContinental.fr's main page⁴⁵

We were able to identify distinctive labels on the search forms: "forms-base-el--input". Using the source code search engine from publicwww.com, we managed to find that this distinctive code was only used on 243 other websites, almost all of them registered in Russia and in the Russian language. There are only two noteworthy exceptions in this list: Observateurcontinental.fr and oneworld.press.

⁴⁵ <https://web.archive.org/web/20200509125014/http://www.observateurcontinental.fr/>

Search: forms-base-el-input

Need more results? Try internal pages search. [query syntax](#)

243 web pages in 0.00 s.

Rank	Uri	Snippets
6 081 881	https://rabskovo.ru/	m-item el-name-name forms-base-el-input <input type="text
8 315 895	https://infovologda.ru/	m-item el-name-name forms-base-el-input <input type="text
14 010 188	https://infotambov.ru/	m-item el-name-name forms-base-el-input <input type="text
14 702 648	https://gazeta-star.ru/	m-item el-name-name forms-base-el-input <input type="text
15 690 776	https://infobarovsk.ru/	m-item el-name-name forms-base-el-input <input type="text
19 627 884	https://dobtrud.ru/	m-item el-name-name forms-base-el-input <input type="text
24 229 811	https://baltvedomosti.ru/	-item el-name-query forms-base-el-input <input type="text
26 379 102	https://vostregion.ru/	m-item el-name-name forms-base-el-input <input type="text
29 143 988	https://infoya.ru/	m-item el-name-name forms-base-el-input <input type="text
30 885 214	https://svetvestnik.ru/	m-item el-name-name forms-base-el-input <input type="text
>30M	https://infobira.ru/	m-item el-name-name forms-base-el-input <input type="text
>30M	https://infokatun.ru/	m-item el-name-name forms-base-el-input <input type="text
>30M	https://infovolhov.ru/	m-item el-name-name forms-base-el-input <input type="text
>30M	https://infobaltica.ru/	m-item el-name-name forms-base-el-input <input type="text
>30M	https://infofskov.ru/	m-item el-name-name forms-base-el-input <input type="text
>30M	https://infobelg.ru/	m-item el-name-name forms-base-el-input <input type="text
>30M	https://infoyug.ru/	m-item el-name-name forms-base-el-input <input type="text

Search: "forms-base-el-input"

Need more results? Try internal pages search. [query syntax](#)

243 web pages in 0.00 s.

Rank	Uri	Snippets
>30M	https://infoust-kamchatsk.ru/	m-item el-name-name forms-base-el-input <input type="text
>30M	https://infoslavyansk-na-kubani.ru/	m-item el-name-name forms-base-el-input <input type="text
>30M	https://infobinsk.ru/	m-item el-name-name forms-base-el-input <input type="text
>30M	https://infoejsk.ru/	m-item el-name-name forms-base-el-input <input type="text
>30M	https://infoapsheronsk.ru/	m-item el-name-name forms-base-el-input <input type="text
>30M	https://osvod-crimea.ru/	m-item el-name-name forms-base-el-input <input type="text
>30M	https://hadjensk.ru/	m-item el-name-name forms-base-el-input <input type="text
>30M	https://infoatipskiy.ru/	m-item el-name-name forms-base-el-input <input type="text
>30M	https://infojeleznogorsk.ru/	m-item el-name-name forms-base-el-input <input type="text
>30M	https://infonazarovo.ru/	m-item el-name-name forms-base-el-input <input type="text
>30M	https://infoparma.ru/	-item el-name-query forms-base-el-input <input type="text
>30M	https://infoamursk.ru/	m-item el-name-name forms-base-el-input <input type="text
>30M	https://infonezlobnaya.ru/	m-item el-name-name forms-base-el-input <input type="text
>30M	https://infosiolkovskiy.ru/	m-item el-name-name forms-base-el-input <input type="text
>30M	https://voinskaya-slava.ru/	m-item el-name-name forms-base-el-input <input type="text
>30M	http://oneworld.press/	-item el-name-query forms-base-el-input <input type="text
>30M	https://infotimashevsk.ru/	m-item el-name-name forms-base-el-input <input type="text
>30M	http://observateurcontinental.fr/	-item el-name-query forms-base-el-input <input type="text
>30M	https://zatozelenogorsk.ru/	m-item el-name-name forms-base-el-input <input type="text

Figure 8 - Screenshots from the list of websites detected by PublicWWW as including the "forms-base-el-input" code in their design.

A vast majority of the websites from this list appears to be Russian local media which often have the same design and are openly managed by InfoRos. We took four of them as an example:

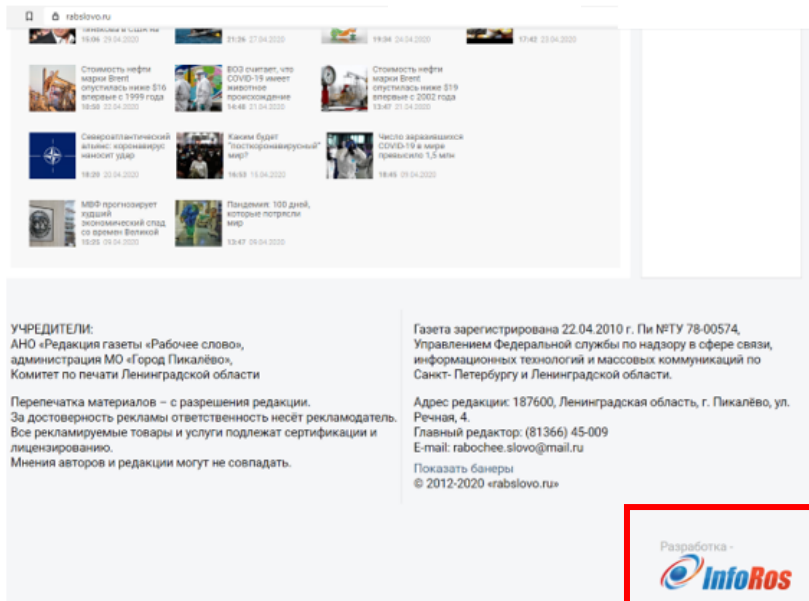


Figure 9 - Screenshot from the website rabslovo.ru with a clear InfoRos logo at the bottom⁴⁶

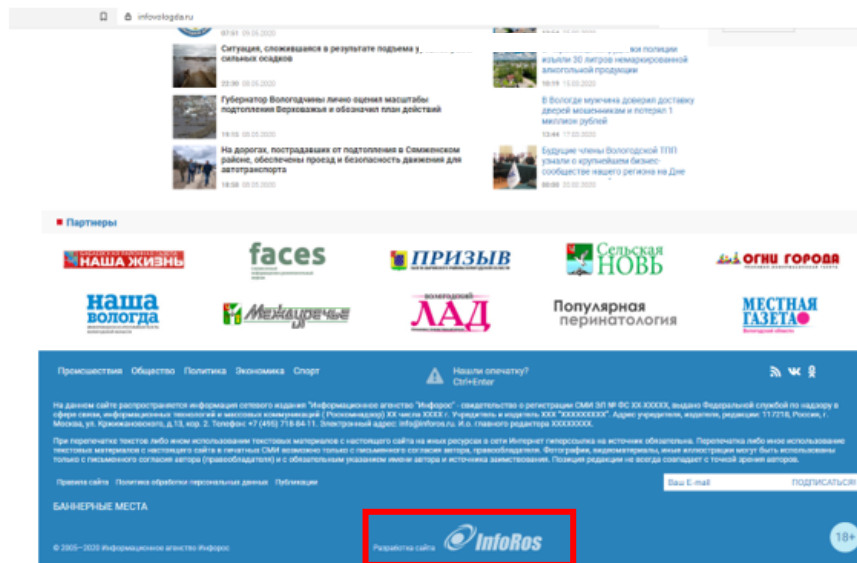


Figure 10 - Screenshot from the website infovolgd.ru with a clear InfoRos logo at the bottom⁴⁷

⁴⁶ <https://web.archive.org/web/20200502082922/https://rabslovo.ru/>

⁴⁷ <https://web.archive.org/web/20200502082657/https://infovolgd.ru/>

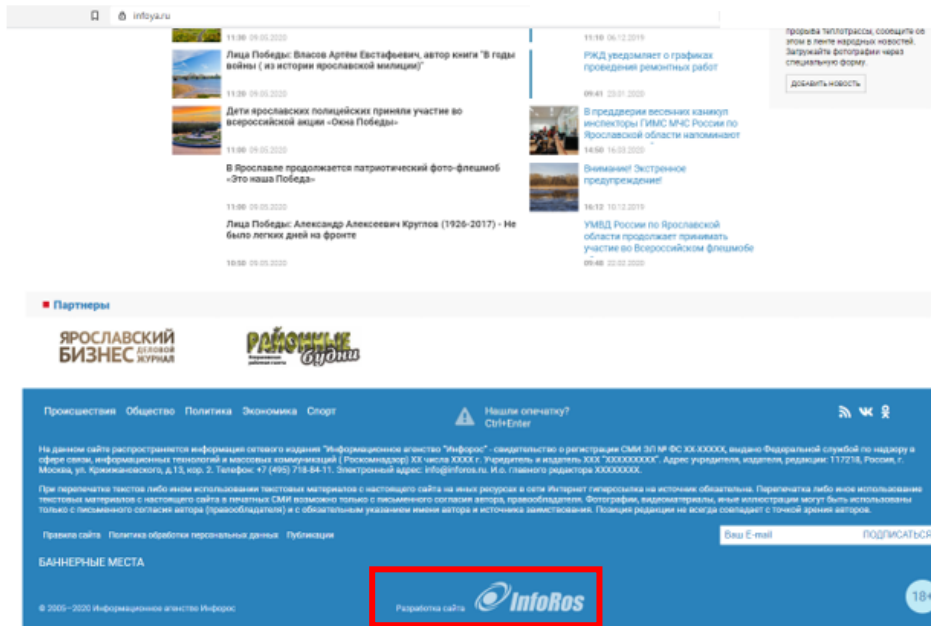


Figure 11 - Screenshot from the website infoya.ru with a clear InfoRos logo at the bottom⁴⁸

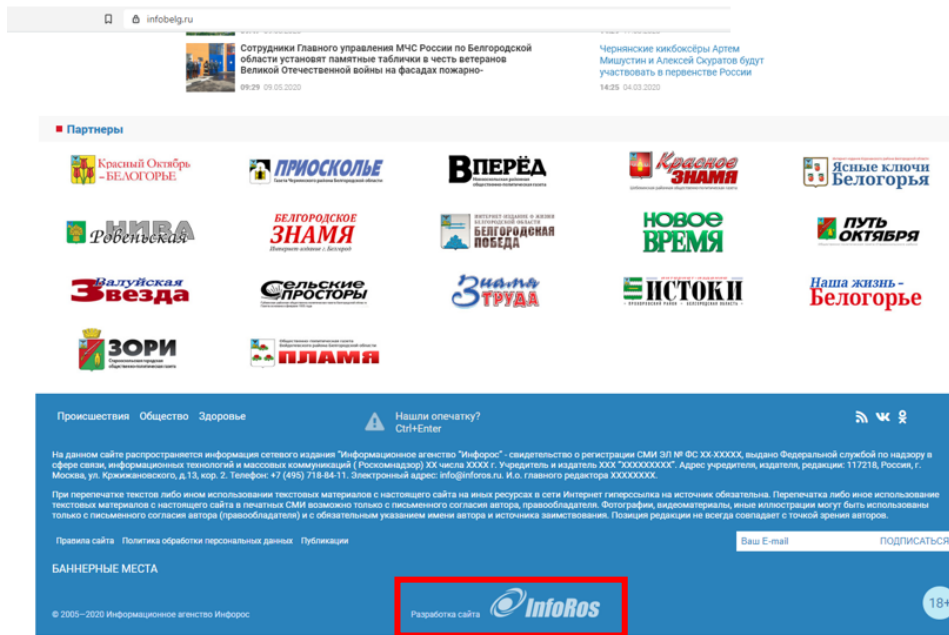



Figure 12 - Screenshot from the website infobelg.ru with a clear InfoRos logo at the bottom⁴⁹

Finally, an extra small detail also caught our attention: we noticed a folder called "gazetastar" in Observateurcontinental.fr's repository.

⁴⁸<https://web.archive.org/web/20200502084851/https://infoya.ru/>

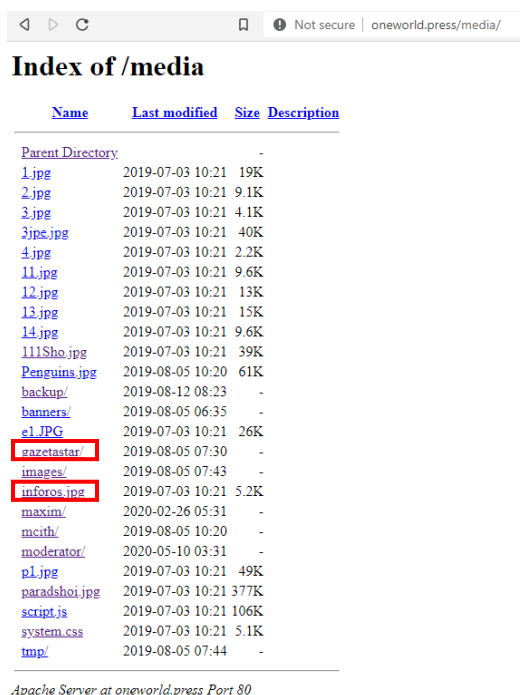
⁴⁹<https://web.archive.org/web/20200502085553/https://infobelg.ru/>



Name	Last modified	Size	Description
Parent Directory		-	
4-65.jpeg	2020-04-28 13:40	23K	
945.jpg	2019-05-16 14:11	50K	
anna/	2020-05-04 17:01	-	
anna/	2019-05-23 08:44	-	
backup/	2019-04-26 13:30	-	
balloons-874838_1280.>	2019-03-18 10:48	49K	
bundeshaus-1432221_1.>	2019-03-18 10:44	50K	
gazetastar/	2019-05-16 10:57	-	
kav/	2019-05-16 09:37	-	
map.png	2019-03-22 15:17	26K	
mcith/	2019-05-16 14:11	-	
moderator/	2019-05-23 12:11	-	
volodina/	2020-05-08 15:47	-	

Figure 13 - Screenshot from Observateurcontinental.fr's repository⁵⁰

We found exactly the same mention multiple times on oneworld.press's repository with also a direct mention of InfoRos in an image file, linking the foreign website directly to the Russian news agency.



Name	Last modified	Size	Description
Parent Directory		-	
1.jpg	2019-07-03 10:21	19K	
2.jpg	2019-07-03 10:21	9.1K	
3.jpg	2019-07-03 10:21	4.1K	
3jps.jpg	2019-07-03 10:21	40K	
4.jpg	2019-07-03 10:21	2.2K	
11.jpg	2019-07-03 10:21	9.6K	
12.jpg	2019-07-03 10:21	13K	
13.jpg	2019-07-03 10:21	15K	
14.jpg	2019-07-03 10:21	9.6K	
111Sho.jpg	2019-07-03 10:21	39K	
Penguins.jpg	2019-08-05 10:20	61K	
backup/	2019-08-12 08:23	-	
banners/	2019-08-05 06:35	-	
e1.JPG	2019-07-03 10:21	26K	
gazetastar/	2019-08-05 07:30	-	
images/	2019-08-05 07:43	-	
inforos.jpg	2019-07-03 10:21	5.2K	
maxim/	2020-02-26 05:31	-	
mcith/	2019-08-05 10:20	-	
moderator/	2020-05-10 03:31	-	
p1.jpg	2019-07-03 10:21	49K	
paradshoi.jpg	2019-07-03 10:21	377K	
script.js	2019-07-03 10:21	106K	
system.css	2019-07-03 10:21	5.1K	
tmp/	2019-08-05 07:44	-	

Apache Server at oneworld.press Port 80

Figure 14 - Screenshot from oneworld.press's repository⁵¹

This mention of "Gazeta-star" is relevant as "gazeta-star.ru" is a website that has the same specific coding as both websites and is openly managed by InfoRos.

⁵⁰ <https://perma.cc/HE4W-VF4M>

⁵¹ <https://web.archive.org/web/20200510105754/http://oneworld.press/media/>

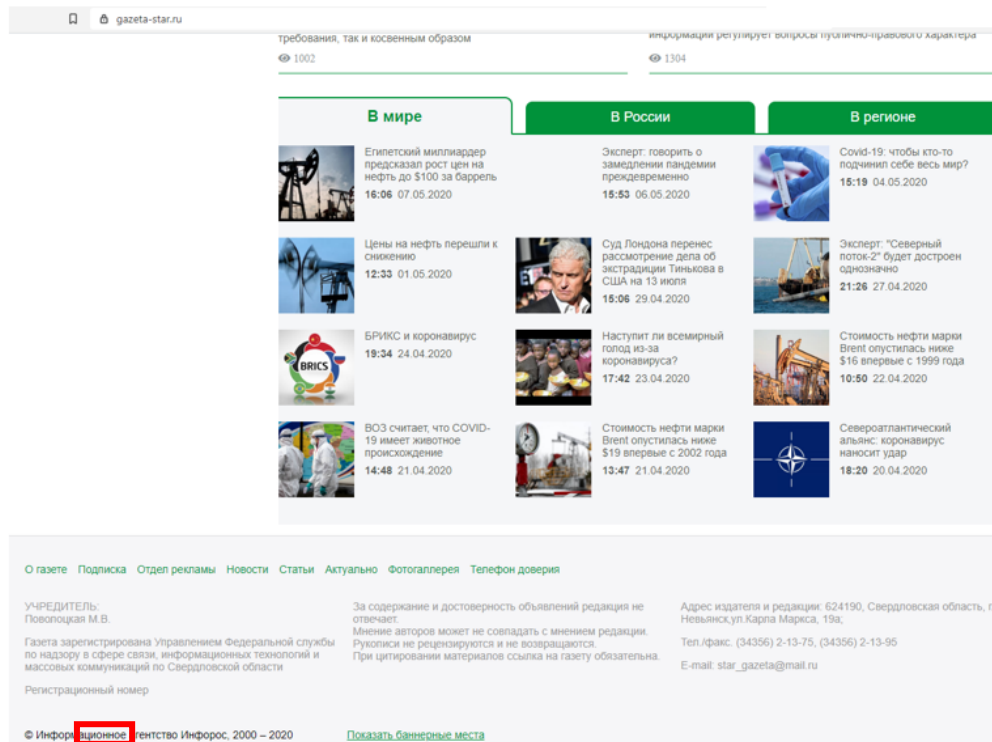


Figure 15 - Screenshot from the website gazeta-star.ru with a mention of InfoRos in Russian at the bottom⁵²

Eventually, when randomly searching for URLs that do not retrieve an article, Observateur Continental returns an error page, indicating the article is not available. It is noticeable that this indication is written in Russian.

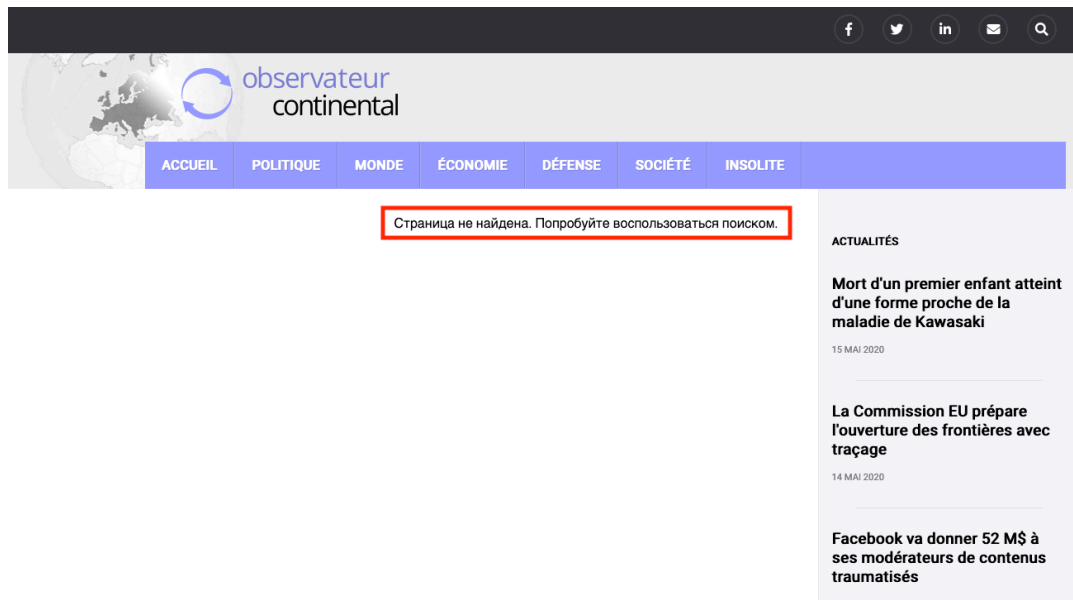


Figure 16 - Screenshot from an error page of Observateur Continental. The Russian sentence says "Page not found. Try using the search"⁵³

⁵²<https://web.archive.org/web/20200502083255/https://gazeta-star.ru/>

⁵³ <https://perma.cc/Q4DB-TQD7>

In addition to the WHOIS information from observateurcontinental.fr, which already suggested a technical link between the French website and InfoRos, as previously explained there were also now some strong specific similarities in terms of architecture and “source code”. This makes it extremely likely that Observateur Continental’s website was built by an individual or an organisation which also took care of the creation of multiple InfoRos’ local websites.

b) Human evidence of a link between Observateur Continental and InfoRos

Observateur Continental published one of its first articles on April 4th, 2019. The post is an interview from a former French army General, Dominique Delawarde, about the situation in Venezuela. Strangely, the article’s introduction says that the former French General is going to “talk to us about the giant power cut in Venezuela”. Or, if “us” is supposed to represent Observateur Continental, InfoRos is stated as the interviewer in the article.



Figure 17 - screenshot from an ObservateurContinental.fr’s interview where the interviewer is named InfoRos⁵⁴

Digging deeper, we found that interview was in fact a translation from Russian to French of an interview that the same retired general gave two weeks before (on March 20th, 2019) to Inforos.ru.

⁵⁴ <https://perma.cc/PCL8-ENJV>

Figure 18 - screenshot from the original interview of Dominique Delawarde in Russian made by InfoRos.ru⁵⁵

Moreover, in the first articles published on Observateur Continental, we also found a piece wrote by Olivier Renault, a regular contributor to the website, claiming that the “the German government protects the accomplice of the terrorist who attacked the Berlin’s Christmas market on December 2016” (10th April 2019).

Figure 19 - screenshot of the article from Olivier Renault about the Berlin terror attack on Observateur Continental⁵⁶

⁵⁵ <https://web.archive.org/web/20190322235002/http://inforos.ru/ru/?module=news&action=view&id=87915>

⁵⁶ <https://perma.cc/W9Y7-BFRU>

It appeared that, once again, the article had been first published (with Olivier Renault as an author) on the Russian version of the InfoRos website six weeks earlier on February 26th, 2019.

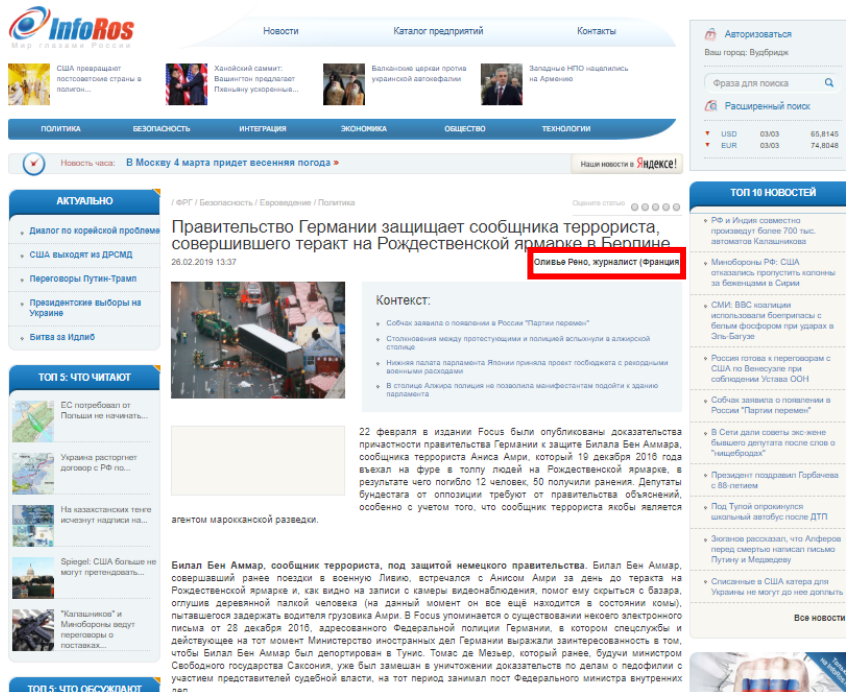


Figure 20 - screenshot of the original article in Russian from Olivier Renault about the Berlin terror attack, which was published first on Inforos.ru⁵⁷

Observateur Continental also published an interview of the French activist Pierre Cassen with a wrong title and InfoRos as the name of the interviewer on April 10th, 2019. Afterwards, the same interview was republished the exact same day with a correct title and Observateur Continental as the name of the interviewer instead of InfoRos. Until now, both articles (the good one and the incorrect one) are still online on Observateur Continental.

⁵⁷<https://web.archive.org/web/20190303125935/http://inforos.ru/?module=news&action=view&id=86496>

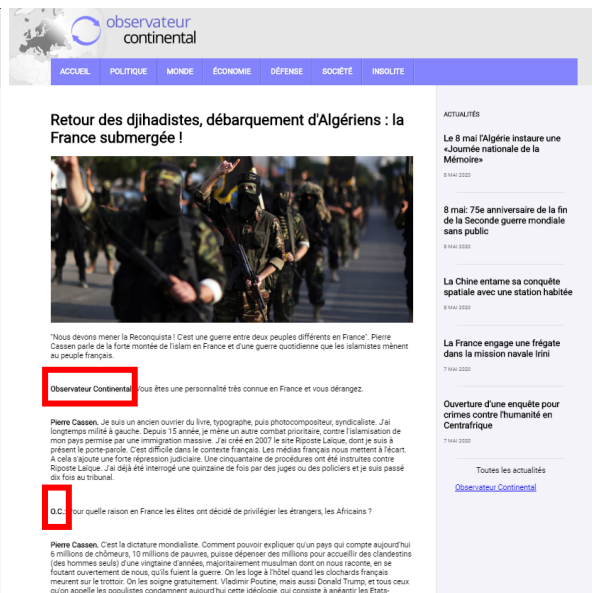


Figure 21 - On the left, screenshot of the interview with the wrong title and InfoRos as interviewer⁵⁸. On the right, the same interview with the good title and OBSERVATEUR CONTINENTAL as interviewer⁵⁹.

Furthermore, we discovered that the original interview was published on March 13th, 2019 by Olivier Renault on the French controversial alternative website ripostelaique.com, but also in Russian, on the same day, by InfoRos.



Figure 22 - On the left, screenshot of the interview published on March 13th, 2019 on ripostelaique.com by Olivier Renault.⁶⁰ On the right, the same interview posted the same day on inforos.ru.⁶¹

As you can see with these examples, there are multiple human traces that strength the hidden technical links between InfoRos and Observateur Continental. It also seems there is a confusion between some articles written by Observateur Continental and original stories from InfoRos. We found multiple occurrences where the content from Observateur

⁵⁸ <https://perma.cc/88VA-DQR7>

⁵⁹ <https://perma.cc/8PUJ-KDNT>

⁶⁰ <https://perma.cc/LF3B-3KLN>

⁶¹ <https://web.archive.org/web/20190322234712/http://inforos.ru/ru/?module=news&action=view&id=87406>

Continental is simply a translation of articles published by the Russian media InfoRos, without any mention of the original source. So, what exactly is InfoRos?

3) What is InfoRos?

On its English-speaking Facebook page,⁶² InfoRos claims to be a “website (...) dedicated to a wide range of topical issues of political, economic and socio-cultural life in Russia and CIS countries”.

However, as explained in previous sections, InfoRos hides its links to Observateur Continental, a website that spreads disinformation items in France. This tends to raise a lot of questions around the real scope of activities from this Russian press agency.

In this section, we will look into what InfoRos is by going through some of our OSINT findings and looking at the possible links between this media outlet and the Russian state, which has been exposed in the past by other organisations.

On InfoRos’ servers, we were able to find many local news websites aimed at regional Russian audiences. But, at the same time, in a sharp contrast, there were for example some English-written partisan websites that “denounce the genocide in Ossetia by Georgian army” or promote “the role of Russia as a force for peace”.

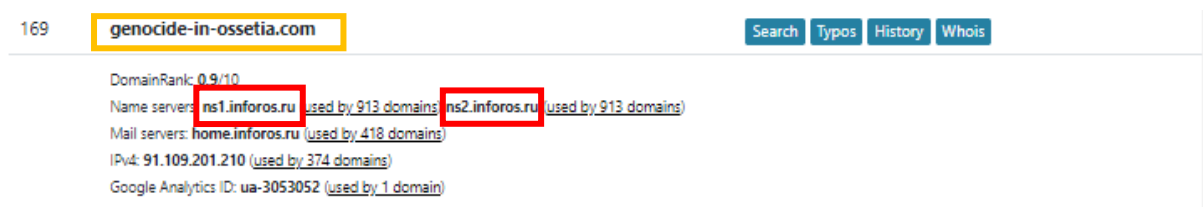


Figure 23 - screenshot from DNSlytics platform showing that the website “genocide-in-ossetia.com”⁶³ is hosted on Inforos’s servers.



Figure 24 - screenshot from DNSlytics platform showing that the website “russianpeacekeeper.com”⁶⁴ is hosted on Inforos’ servers

⁶² <https://perma.cc/2YCS-8R9P>

⁶³ <https://perma.cc/6S4Z-68CH>

⁶⁴ <https://perma.cc/5ZHZ-G2HF>

During our investigation, we were able to consult public contracts attributed to InfoRos.⁶⁵ According to this data, InfoRos has benefited multiple times from contracts linked to Russian authorities. For example:

- A contract awarded by the Russian Foreign Affairs ministry to develop and manage a website on a theme of interest for the Russian state (e.g. BRICS).⁶⁶
- A contract awarded by the think tank InterAffairs (linked to the Russian Foreign Affairs Ministry⁶⁷) to organise an international conference on information and cybersecurity in Germany.⁶⁸
- A contract awarded by the Moscow government to maintain websites and conduct opinion polls.⁶⁹

We looked further into the physical address associated with InfoRos in the WHOIS information for “observateurcontinental.fr” and on Russian business registers (Ulitsa Krzhizhanovskogo 13, corpus 2, Moscow, Russia 117218). We noticed the building at this address has external signs pointing to the Russkiy Mir Foundation.⁷⁰

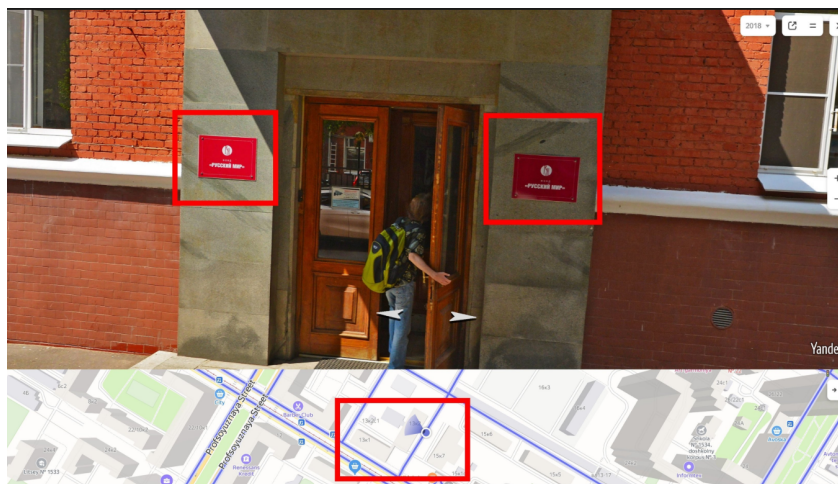


Figure 25 - Photo of the entrance of the building located at the 13/2 Krzhizhanovskogo, Moscow, which InfoRos has registered as its official address⁷¹. A Russkiy Mir Foundation sign can also be seen. We did not find any other distinctive signs at this address.

⁶⁵ <https://perma.cc/XXV8-4RW5>

⁶⁶ <https://perma.cc/RJ4Q-N52F>/<https://perma.cc/YX6B-CDK6>

⁶⁷ <https://perma.cc/7CJT-PTKD>

⁶⁸ <https://perma.cc/PH3W-3HU6>/<https://perma.cc/DAL8-WBTQ>/<https://perma.cc/7DL5-ZP9R>

⁶⁹ <https://perma.cc/ZDV8-V2N6>/<https://perma.cc/382H-HD7Z>

⁷⁰ <https://perma.cc/B3YB-Y34G>

⁷¹ <https://perma.cc/DEQ8-2F5J>/<https://perma.cc/FHJ3-ZYE2>/<https://perma.cc/7FGE-BSGK>

Founded in 2007 by Vladimir Putin, the Russkiy Mir Foundation is a state-sponsored organisation that aims to promote the Russian language and culture all over the world. A useful soft power instrument of the Russian state, the foundation has been accused of being a part of a more aggressive strategy of influence and information operations, especially targeting ethnic Russian minorities in neighbouring countries.⁷²

Moreover, there are reports from other organisations suggesting ties between InfoRos and the Russian state in the field of information operations. On December 28th 2018, the Washington Post published an article about the expansion of the GRU's activities (Russia's military intelligence agency) against the West, in particular in the cyberspace. Based on the testimony of "Western intelligence officials who spoke on the condition of anonymity", the article namely designated InfoRos and another organisation, the Institute of Russian Diaspora⁷³, as "front organisations" for the GRU unit 54777, also known as the 72nd Special Service Center.

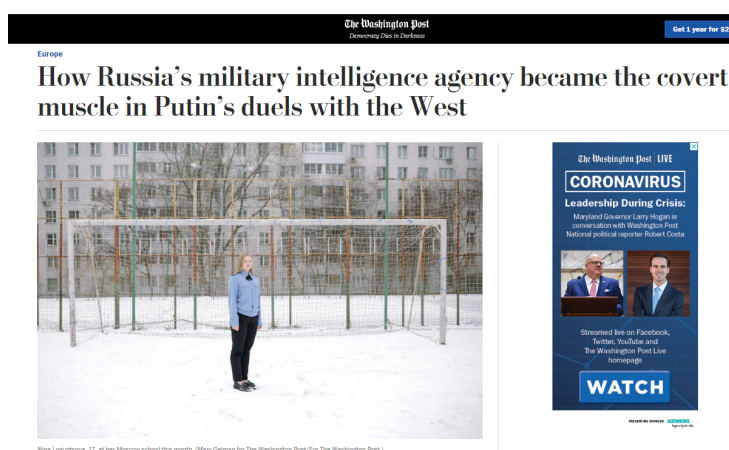


Figure 26 - Screenshot from the article about the GRU's increasing infops published by the Washington Post on 28th December, 2018⁷⁴

The intelligence officers who spoke to the US media described the GRU Unit 54777 as "the center of the Russian military's psychological-warfare capability". The article mentions an alleged appeal launched at the beginning of the Ukrainian crisis by both InfoRos and the Institute of the Russian Diaspora, "purportedly on behalf of Russian organisations in Ukraine, calling on Putin to intervene in the brewing crisis," which was an example of "information operation".

⁷² See p.22 in this White Paper from the US DoD <https://perma.cc/2WJA-YL2Y> / <https://globalinterests.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/FINAL-CGI-Russian-World-Marlene-Laruelle.pdf><https://perma.cc/W3NF-ZBPE/> / <https://perma.cc/4ENG-WV2Z>

⁷³ See the website [russkie.org](https://www.russkie.org), also hosted on InfoRos servers <https://perma.cc/5CG8-ACD2>

⁷⁴ https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/how-russias-military-intelligence-agency-became-the-covert-muscle-in-putins-duels-with-the-west/2018/12/27/2736bbe2-fb2d-11e8-8c9a-860ce2a8148f_story.html

On November 2019, the FSI Stanford released a report titled “Potemkin Pages & Personas: Assessing GRU Online Operations, 2014-2019”.⁷⁵ A section of the study is dedicated to the information operation called “*Victory for Peace*”. This Russian information operation consisted of “supporting and defending pro-Russian and pro-Soviet narratives of the war” in the run-up to the 70th anniversary of the Allied victory in World War II. This involved the publication of articles on a website (“victoryforpeace.ru”), which was openly managed by InfoRos, and included activities around a Facebook Page (“Victory for Peace”). According to the Stanford Internet Observatory’s report, Facebook attributed the “Victory for Peace” Facebook page to the GRU’s operations when the US company removed it on April 28th 2015.

Our investigation does not give definitive answers to the questions raised around the real activities led by InfoRos. Still, by showing how the Russian press agency is secretly tied to a website that spreads disinformation and pro-Russian narratives in France, we once again shed a light on this Russian actor. InfoRos is evolving in a shady grey zone, where regular information activities are mixed with more controversial actions that could be quite possibly linked to the Russian state’s information operations.

4) Oneworld.press

During our investigation, we found another website in the same network, which was oriented towards propagating information outside Russia: oneworld.press.



Figure 27 - Screenshot of the main page of the website oneworld.press⁷⁶

⁷⁵ See *Victory for Peace and InfoRos* (p 43-51), <https://fsi-live.s3.us-west-1.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/potemkin-pages-personas-sio-wp.pdf>

⁷⁶ <https://perma.cc/HS86-8J2E>

With the noteworthy exception of the WHOIS information, we identified similar technical evidences (coding and website repository), linking both One World and Observateur Continental to InfoRos.

On Oneworld.press's media directory, the evidence is even stronger: this directory contains an image of the InfoRos logo but also multiple PDF copies of what seems to be the printed edition of the Russian local media "Gazeta-star". As we have previously showed in this report, the "Gazeta-star" is publicly connected to InfoRos.

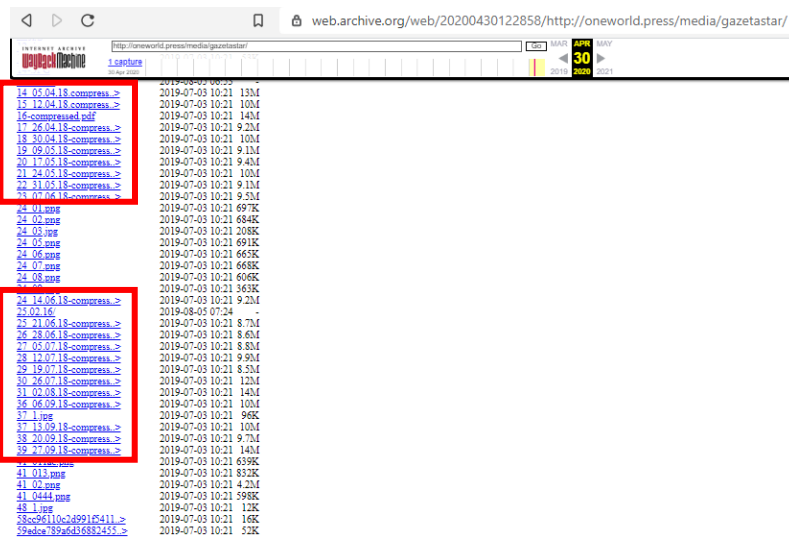


Figure 28 - Screenshot of oneworld.press's repository where you can find copies of the Gazeta-Star newspaper in PDF⁷⁷

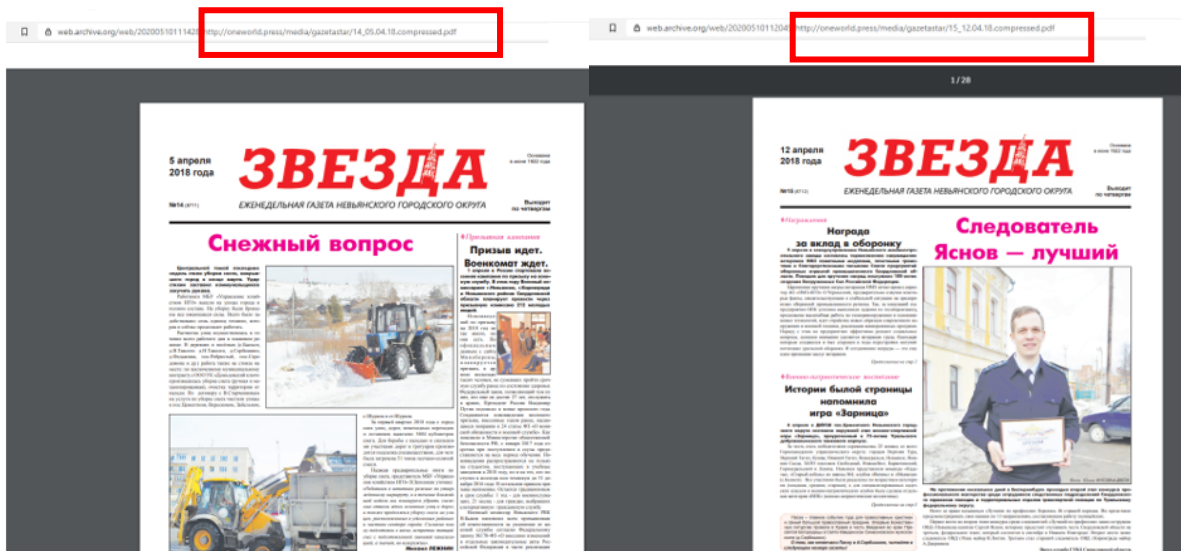


Figure 29 - Screenshots of two copies of the Gazeta-Star newspaper in PDF which are available on oneworld.press's repository^{78,79}

⁷⁷<https://web.archive.org/web/20200430122858/http://oneworld.press/media/gazetastar/>

⁷⁸https://web.archive.org/web/20200510112049/http://oneworld.press/media/gazetastar/15_12.04.18.compressed.pdf

⁷⁹https://web.archive.org/web/20200510111428/http://oneworld.press/media/gazetastar/14_05.04.18.compressed.pdf

We also found another extremely specific piece of code “anoneslistblock” on One World’s website, which only elsewhere appears on Russian websites openly managed by InfoRos.

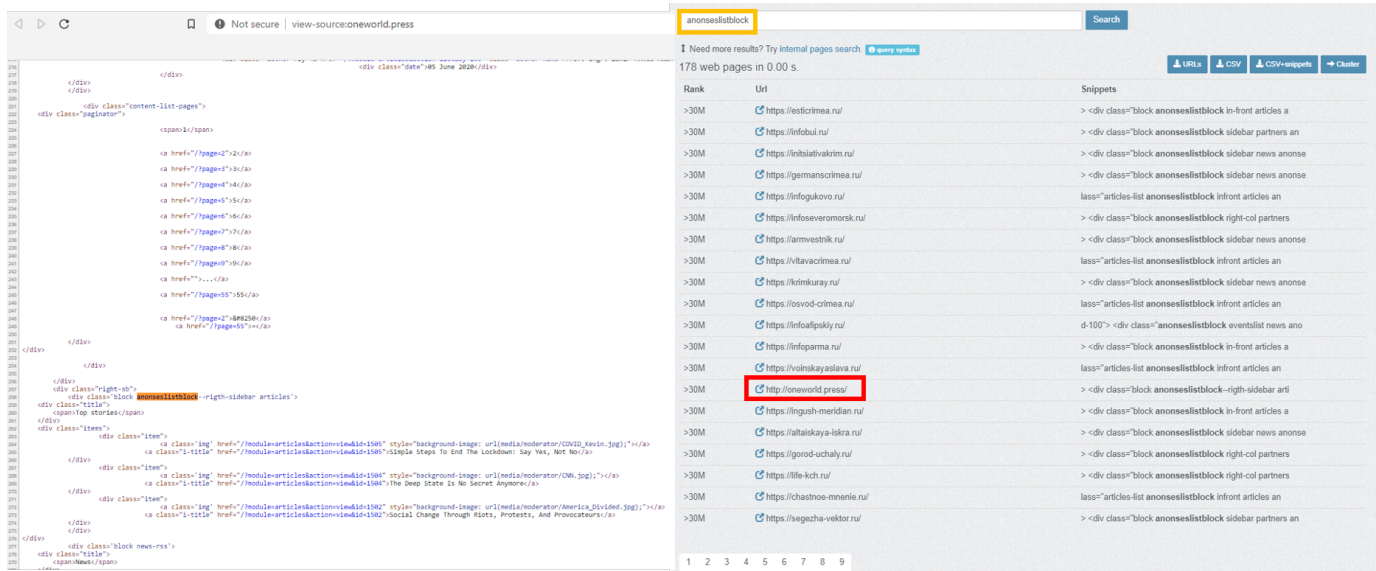


Figure 30 – On the left, screenshot of the source code of “oneworld.press” mentioning InfoRos. On the right, an extract from publicwww showing a list of Russian websites openly managed by InfoRos and oneworld.press containing “anoneslistblock” in their source codes.

Presenting itself as a “think-tank”, a “non-profit start-up” and a “media outlet”, One World has already been exposed by EUvsDisinfo as a “Moscow-based disinformation outlet”.⁸⁰ However, according to our research, we did not find any report covering the link between One World and the Russian press agency InfoRos – something which reinforces the questions around this “small Russian English-speaking outlet” and InfoRos.

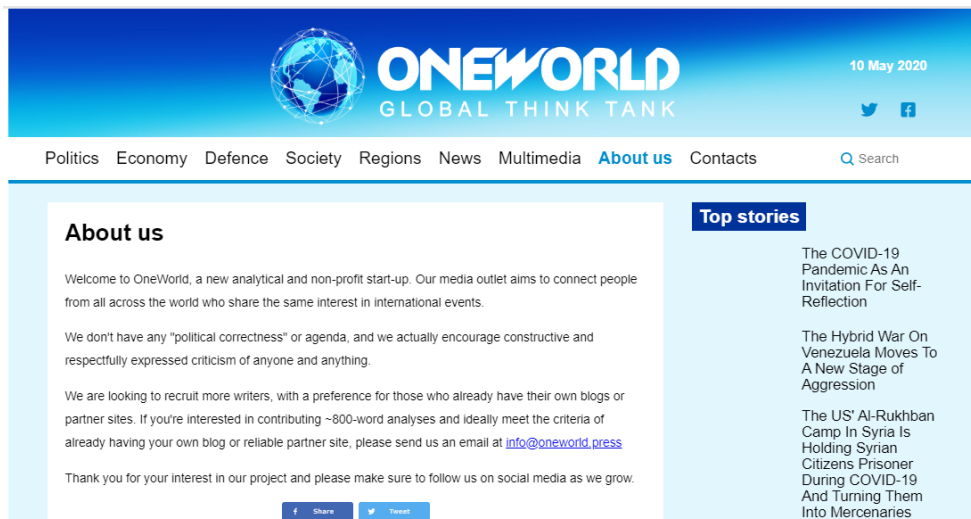


Figure 31 - Screenshot of the “About Us” section on the website oneworld.press⁸¹

⁸⁰ <https://euvsdisinfo.eu/one-world-one-author-one-chain-of-command/>

⁸¹ <https://perma.cc/V5C3-G2D6>

The “About Us” section of One World is fairly similar to what can be read on Observateur Continental’s website. The organisation does not display any clear affiliation and presents itself as a “non-profit” organisation without “any agenda”.⁸² As for Observateur Continental, One World also welcomes articles from external contributors. These similarities might suggest a pattern in terms of the strategies deployed both by One World and Observateur Continental to amplify content from local actors.



Figure 32 - Screenshot from part of the list of partners displayed on oneworld.press⁸³

As mentioned by the report from EUvsDisinfo,⁸⁴ the One World site contains a wide list of “partner blogs” that significantly amplify the content produced by the small media outlet.⁸⁵ Interestingly, as we will see in the amplification part of this report, at least two of One World’s partners (Global Research and Réseau International) also reproduce content from Observateur Continental on an extremely regular basis. They widely contribute to the amplification of the French website’s stories, which does not appear for now to be followed by a very large French-speaking audience. Therefore, as for One World, the outreach of Observateur Continental strongly depends on external actors and at least some of them are common amplification channels for both websites.

Similarly to what we will later see with Observateur Continental, One World also uses Facebook advertisements to reach a wider audience.

⁸² ObservateurContinental.fr describes itself as “an independent non-profit organisation”

⁸³ <https://perma.cc/5RQ9-WGEG>

⁸⁴ <https://euvsdisinfo.eu/one-world-one-author-one-chain-of-command/>

⁸⁵ The EUvsDisinfo report shows for example how “An article of the 12 November 2019 on One World is reproduced at Canadian Global Research the same day, US registered, French language Réseau International on the 13th”

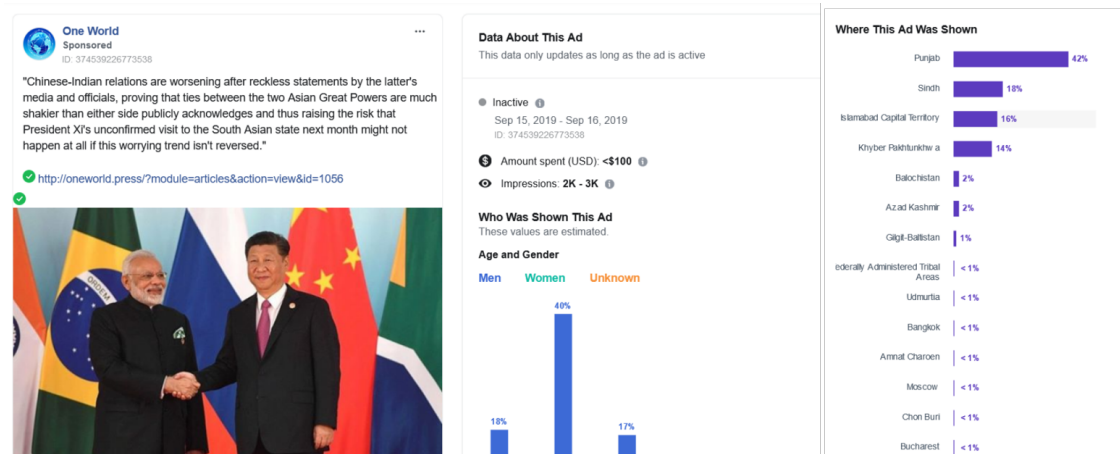


Figure 33 - Screenshot of a Facebook ads from One World targeting India

Finally, Andrew Korybko, who was identified as the main contributor of One World by EUvsDisinfo's report, also wrote at least 54 articles for the English version of InfoRos.ru.

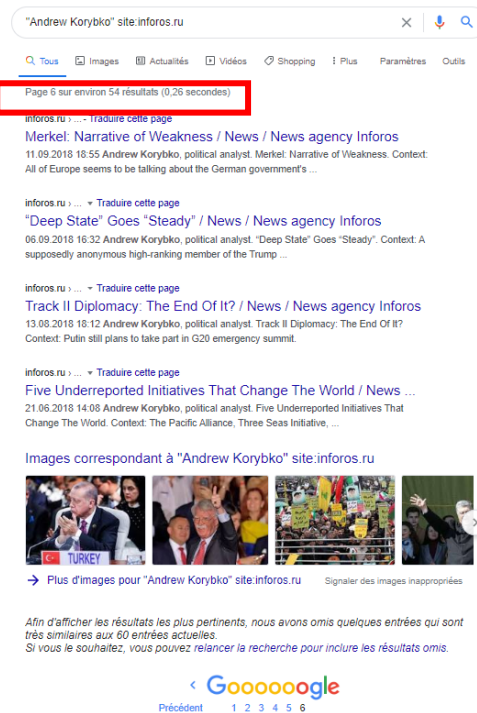


Figure 34 - Screenshot of the Google search which shows that Andrew Korybko signed at least 54 articles for InfoRos.ru⁸⁶

⁸⁶ <https://perma.cc/XJ6L-ZTBM>

IV. Authors of Observateur Continental

From our analysis of the articles from Observateur Continental, we identified two regular contributors: Olivier Renault (60 articles⁸⁷) and Mikhail Gamandyi-Egorov (54 articles⁸⁸).

A deeper look into their activities showed us that these two men have clear links to Russian-state media (e.g. both were regular contributors for Sputnik) and have witnessed their publications shared by a global network of alternative media outlets for years. While Olivier Renault is clearly identifiable as an “independent French journalist based in Russia”, the profile of Mikhail Gamandyi-Egorov is more complex. He occupied multiple functions (journalist, analyst, businessman...) and presents himself as “a promoter of Russia-Africa relations”.

1) Olivier Renault

On his LinkedIn page, Olivier Renault presents himself as a “freelance journalist” based in Russia.

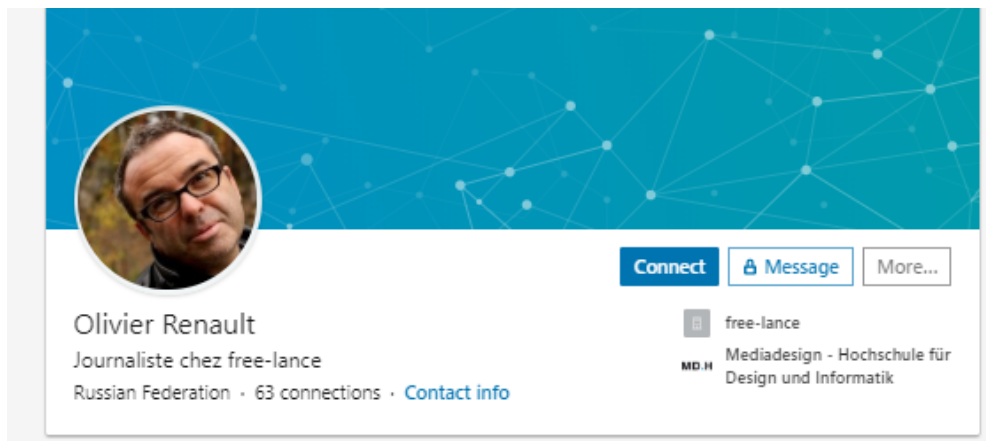


Figure 35 - Screenshot of Olivier Renault's LinkedIn account

According to his personal website, he wrote articles on a regular basis for Russian state media outlets in French and German until 2015 (*La Voix de la Russie, Stimme Russlands*).⁸⁹ Then, he also worked regularly for the pro-Russian media *Novorossia Today*, which is based in Donetsk (Ukraine).

⁸⁷ <https://perma.cc/4SPT-8YUN>

⁸⁸ <https://perma.cc/5UHX-37UP>

⁸⁹ <https://perma.cc/6PWL-Q8VE>

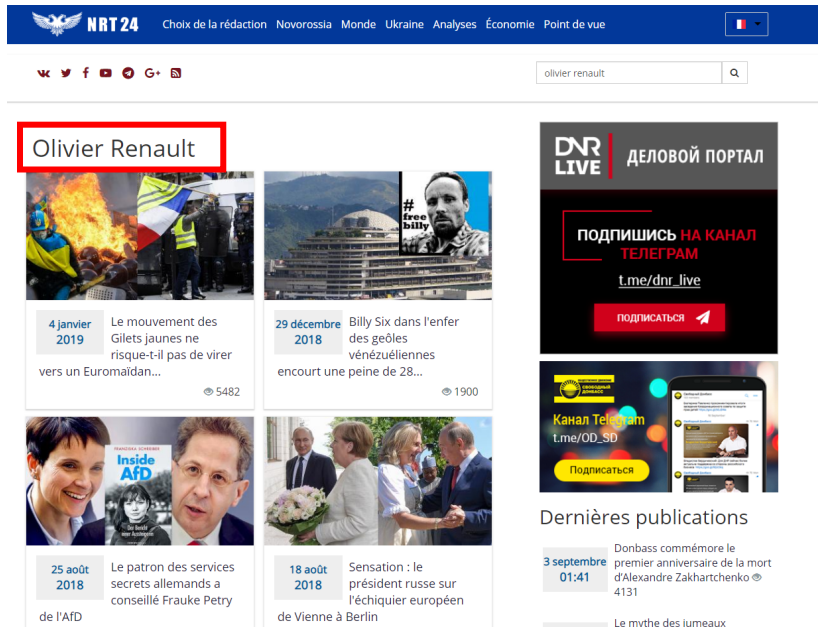


Figure 36 - Screenshot of Olivier Renault's author page on NRT24⁹⁰

Olivier Renault also claims to have worked in the past for the controversial German media *Junge Freiheit*,⁹¹ the French media *Rue89*, and gave interviews for the Iranian state media *Press TV*⁹². During our investigation, we noticed he is also a contributor for the controversial alternative media *Riposte Laïque*,⁹³ something which could explain why *InfoRos/Observateur Continental* interviewed the founder of this movement in 2019. His author pages on reseauinternational.net⁹⁴ and mondialisation.ca⁹⁵ reveal that he has published 82 of his articles on the French conspiracy website and 21 of his articles on the Canadian one, respectively.

A Google search shows that he wrote at least 4 articles for the Russian website of InfoRos from February to May 2019⁹⁶ – at the time when *Observateur Continental* was launched.

⁹⁰ <https://perma.cc/XP4T-DP57>

⁹¹ <https://perma.cc/WJ4V-BU9H>

⁹² <https://perma.cc/Y3HL-VVDL>

⁹³ <https://perma.cc/DG3S-CM2U>

⁹⁴ <https://perma.cc/B492-SQUG>

⁹⁵ <https://perma.cc/QZR8-HPZN>

⁹⁶ <https://perma.cc/8NBH-85VJ>

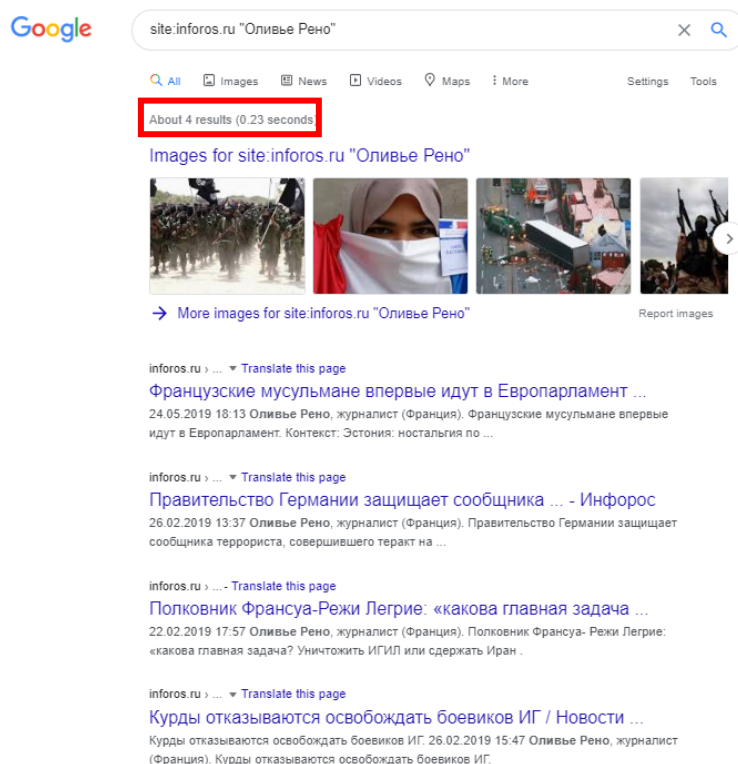


Figure 37 - Screenshot from a Google query showing that "Olivier Renault" (in Russian) is mentioned 4 times on Inforos.ru.⁹⁷ We manually confirmed that the 4 results were linked to articles he wrote for InfoRos.

On his former professional Facebook page, his profile picture seems to match the design of a Russian professional press card,⁹⁸ openly showing some of his links to Russia. However, despite this transparency, we could not find any mention of his affiliation to Observateur Continental or his connection with InfoRos.

2) Mikhail Gamandyi-Egorov

The other main contributor of Observateur Continental is Mikhail Gamandyi-Egorov. Former student at the Sorbonne University in Paris, he worked mostly as an interpreter and communication officer for political or private entities during the first part of his career in Moscow. Then, he occupied the position of columnist and analyst for *La Voix de la Russie*, which became later *Sputnik France*, from September 2012 to December 2018.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ <https://perma.cc/XP4T-DP57>

⁹⁸ <https://perma.cc/H3KB-RG9E>

⁹⁹ <https://perma.cc/9RSL-45LT>



Figure 38 - Screenshot from Mikhail Gamandiy-Egorov's author page which is still available on Sputnik France's website

In parallel, he undertook a short mission for the Skolkovo Foundation (from December 2013 to March 2014) and founded BRICS Dream,¹⁰⁰ an organisation focused on solidifying the relations between BRICS countries, which was active from November 2014 to August 2017. According to his LinkedIn profile and his personal blog, he is now a "Journalist for Observateur Continental" and Director of the Afro-Wave Agency, a PR agency based in Rabat, Morocco. He has also been presented as "Analyst-columnist for the agency *Observateur-Continental*" by some Iranian State media, for which he has been a regular interviewee.¹⁰¹

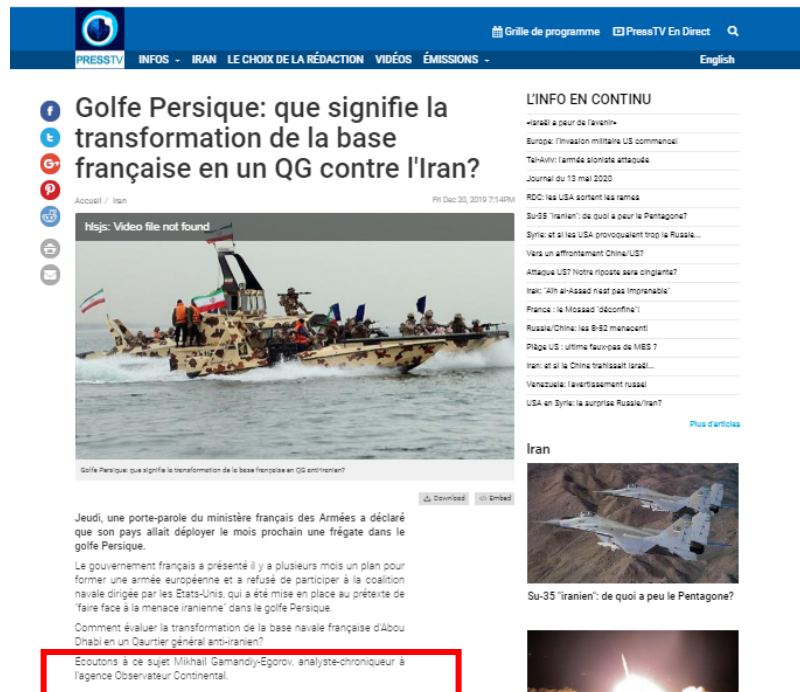


Figure 39 - Screenshot from a PressTV article presenting Mikhail Gamandiy-Egorov as "Analyst-columnist for Observateur"

¹⁰⁰ <https://perma.cc/SF39-7SVH>

¹⁰¹ <https://perma.cc/Y3F9-TV7Z/> <https://perma.cc/ZD98-96GU/> <https://perma.cc/G47E-D6L4/> <https://perma.cc/3N5U-NGR6/> <https://perma.cc/4536-R9L6/>

Going further in our investigation on Mikhail Gamandiy-Egorov, we discovered that he has also been regularly quoted or published by several other alternative and thematic websites (Mondialisation.ca,¹⁰² Palestine-solidarité.org,¹⁰³ revuemethode.org,¹⁰⁴ and lesmoutonsenrages.fr¹⁰⁵).

V. Sources and Amplification: Clusters

1) Social media accounts and ads

Observateur Continental manages a Facebook Page currently followed by more than 11k users, which was created in July 2019.



Figure 4033 - Screenshot from Observateur Continental's Facebook Page¹⁰⁶

During our investigation, we found that Observateur Continental had been buying advertisements on Facebook to promote its page.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰² <https://perma.cc/LAC7-VNZW>

¹⁰³ <https://perma.cc/6SYE-T9CT>

¹⁰⁴ <https://perma.cc/FM8G-UHHC>

¹⁰⁵ <https://perma.cc/PB4N-UET6>

¹⁰⁶ <https://archive.vn/8IG4b>

¹⁰⁷ This data is available from the Facebook Ads Library

[https://www.facebook.com/ads/library/?active_status=all&ad_type=all&country=ALL&impression_search_field=has_impression_s_lifetime&view_all_page_id=1366236293764476&sort_data\[direction\]=desc&sort_data\[mode\]=relevancy_monthly_grouped](https://www.facebook.com/ads/library/?active_status=all&ad_type=all&country=ALL&impression_search_field=has_impression_s_lifetime&view_all_page_id=1366236293764476&sort_data[direction]=desc&sort_data[mode]=relevancy_monthly_grouped)

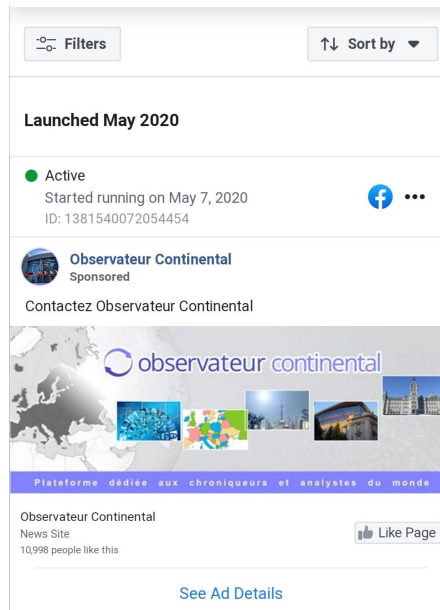


Figure 41 – Sample of one advertisement from Observateur Continental’s Facebook Page launched on May 7, 2020

A few days later, we could not find any trace of this original advertisement in the Facebook Ads Library, as it only displays active advertisements. However, the Facebook Ads Library did contain a similar advertisement launched on May 16, 2020.

Launched May 2020

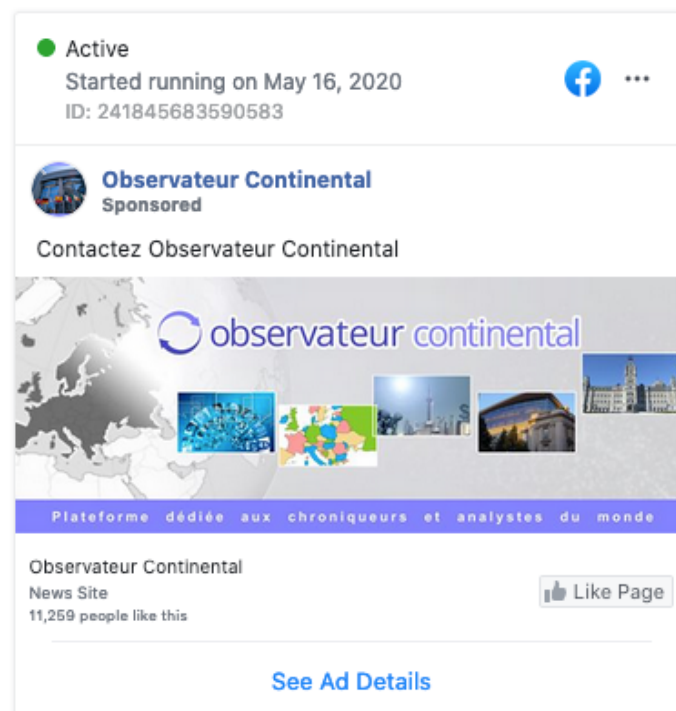


Figure 42 - Similar advertisement, with a different ID number, launched on May 16th, 2020¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ <https://perma.cc/G9PL-VR7F?type=image>

Facebook did not classify advertisements from Observateur Continental as relevant to social issues, elections or politics,¹⁰⁹ which would have meant that inactive advertisements from Observateur Continental would also be displayed for public consultation. It was also not possible to consult the target options of this advertisement nor the amount spent. This example clearly shows the limits of Facebook Ads Library, as there is no possibility to consult all past/inactive advertisements from Observateur Continental, and there is a clear lack of data to understand to what extent advertisements helped the Facebook Page build its audience.

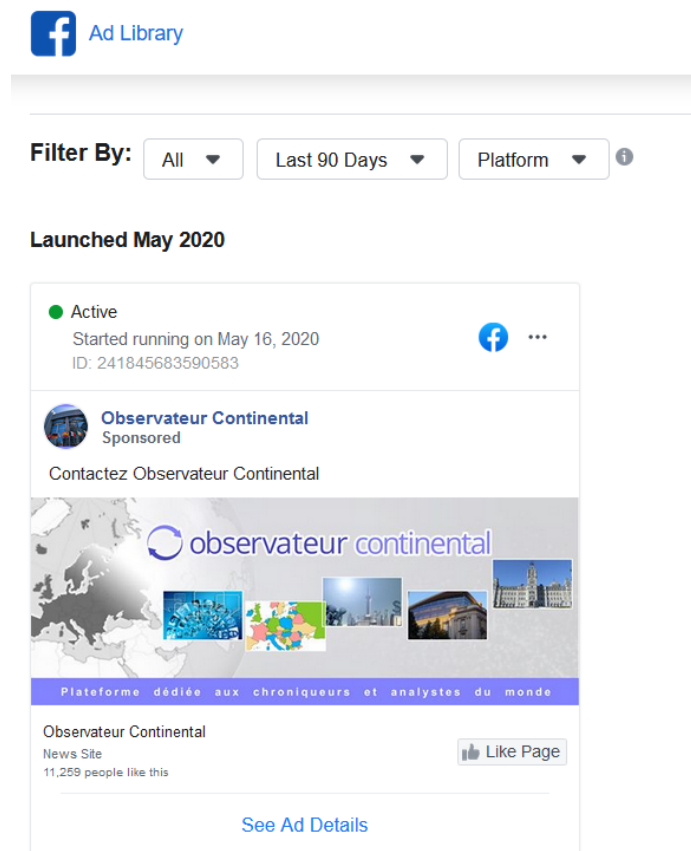


Figure 43- Screenshot from Facebook Ads Library misleading the user about only one advertisement being run in the last 90days, as we've shown they were also inactive ads.

Observateur Continental's Twitter account has an even more limited audience with only 76 followers (the account was created in November 2019). All the tweets follow the same pattern (title of the article + link to the article + hashtags).

¹⁰⁹ <https://www.facebook.com/ads/library/>

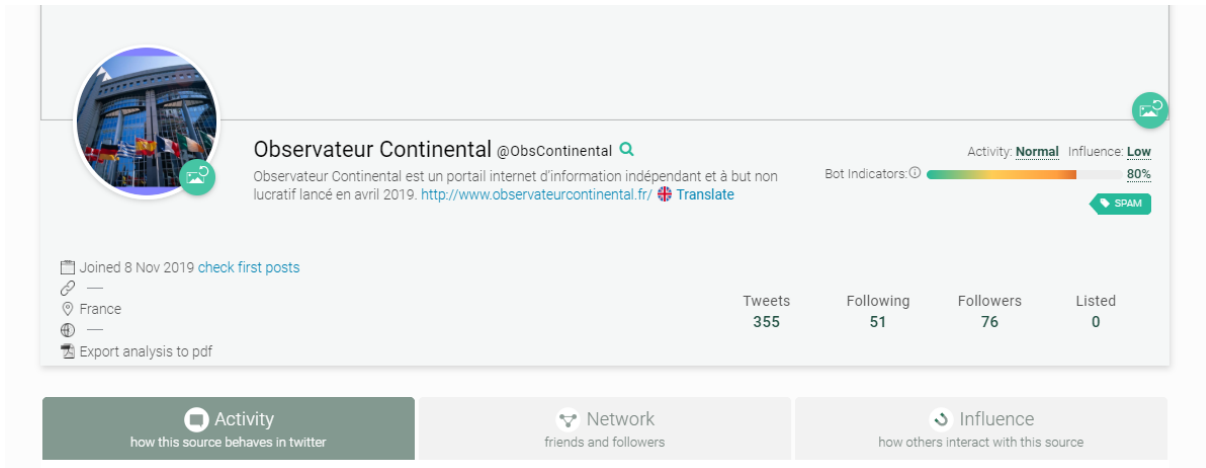


Figure 44 - Screenshot from the TruthNest analysis of Observateur Continental Twitter account

During our investigation we were not able to find any Observateur Continental advertisements on Twitter.¹¹⁰

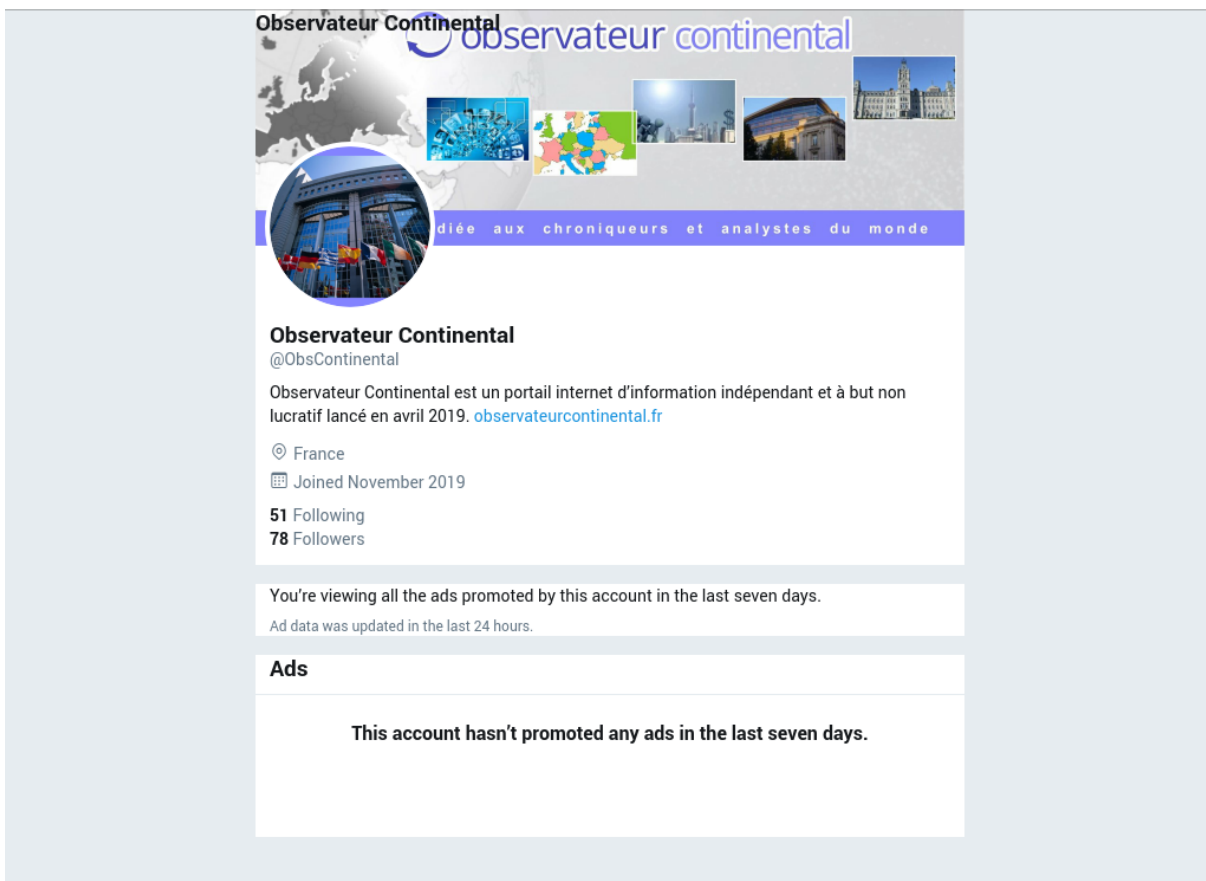


Figure 45 - Screenshot of Twitter Ad archive for Observateur Continental

¹¹⁰ <https://perma.cc/5JGN-DWRN?type=image>

The Twitter Ads Transparency Center only displays ads active in the past 7 days. We were also not able to conclude if Observateur Continental had bought advertisements on Twitter in the past.

In a similar way to what EUvsDisinfo observed about One World,¹¹¹ (the other foreign alternative media that we linked to InfoRos with this investigation), Observateur Continental also seems to have a relatively small audience. Still, there seems to be an ongoing effort to grow an audience on Facebook through its advertisement system.

However, focusing too much on the number of likes/followers doesn't fully capture the essence of media outlets like One World and Observateur Continental. Even though they are trying to grow an audience with ads, this does not seem to be their primary goal. Rather, they aim to develop a wide network of "proxies" (alternative media and conspiracy websites) to relay their narratives without attracting too much attention. These partner websites, which are much more well-established in the targeted information ecosystem, are more efficient in the distribution of polarizing narratives and disinformation.

2) Amplification of one successful story from Observateur Continental

To better comprehend how the content of Observateur Continental is amplified, we decided to investigate how the article that linked NATO military exercises to the outbreak of COVID-19 in Europe was shared online.



Figure 46 - Screenshot of the article titled "COVID-19: The NATO DEFENDER-Europe 20 military exercises threaten Europe" from observateurcontinental.fr¹¹²

¹¹¹ <https://euvsdisinfo.eu/one-world-one-author-one-chain-of-command/>

¹¹² <https://perma.cc/C2BY-LKKQ>

The initial post of the article by Observateur Continental's Facebook page, which is their main social media account, generated only 109 interactions (65 likes, 39 shares, 5 comments).



Figure 47 - Screenshot of the main Observateur Continental's Facebook page publishing the article about COVID-19 and NATO¹¹³

But soon, we started to observe the reproduction of the article by multiple alternative websites. During the course of five days, this content was copy-pasted/republished on the following websites:

- On March 6th, it was republished on the website Les Moutons Enragés¹¹⁴ (131 interactions on Facebook).
- On March 7th, it was republished on the website Réseau International¹¹⁵ (537 interactions on Facebook).
- On March 8th, it was republished on the French website Comite Valmy¹¹⁶ (no data available for Facebook).
- On March 9th, the story was copy pasted on Patrice Bravo's Agoravox blog¹¹⁷, a blog which exclusively reproduces articles from Observateur Continental (1248 interactions on Facebook) and was also republished on the conspiracy website Wikistrike¹¹⁸ (1175 interactions on Facebook).
- On March 10th, it was republished on the website lecolonel.net¹¹⁹ (8 interactions on Facebook).

¹¹³ <https://perma.cc/C2BY-LKKQ>

¹¹⁴ <https://perma.cc/6D32-5G86>

¹¹⁵ <https://perma.cc/NC74-SDN7>

¹¹⁶ <https://perma.cc/56Z4-KY57>

¹¹⁷ <https://perma.cc/TP7R-24MH>

¹¹⁸ <https://perma.cc/FK66-TF9L>

¹¹⁹ <https://perma.cc/5NWF-C6NW>

The first wave of amplification lasts until March 10th – mostly fed by alternative French websites and Facebook groups promoting conspiracy theories and “reinformation”.¹²⁰

If we look only at Facebook, it is already possible to identify that some copy-pasted articles generated ten times more interactions than the initial post from Observateur Continental's Facebook page (Wikistrike's article and Agoravox's article). Even though the figures for this story are modest, this illustrates well the amplification scheme around this small French-speaking website.

Using CrowdTangle, we identified a second wave of amplification between the 13-17 March for Agoravox, Les Moutons Enrages, Wikistrike, and Observateur Continental's URLs. Despite a limited amplification on Twitter and Facebook, we none the less observed a continuous sharing of the article in France, but also abroad:

- **Czech Republic:** The article on Agoravox was translated by the controversial platform První Zprávy¹²¹ and widely shared on Czech and Slovak political Facebook pages and groups;
- **Slovakia:** The story from Agoravox/ První Zprávy was reproduced by the Slovakian alternative media InfoVojna¹²² and then spread in multiple Slovakian Facebook groups (including at least one clear anti-NATO/pro-Russian group¹²³);
- **France:** we saw some versions of this article shared in some popular Yellow Vest Movement groups and a public pro-Russia Facebook group¹²⁴, without being reshared a lot¹²⁵;
- **Italy:** The original article from Observateur Continental was shared in a Beppe Grillo supporters Facebook group¹²⁶ and in other Facebook groups.

We do not consider this list exhaustive nor do we exclude the possibility that this story has been translated and pushed in other countries.

¹²⁰ See here for more explanation about the far-right French concept of “reinformation”:

<https://www.hopenothate.org.uk/research/french-election-special/mainstream-far-right/>

¹²¹ <https://perma.cc/GM4C-EHSH>/ <https://perma.cc/M5YB-WX73>

¹²² <https://perma.cc/95PE-6UDG>/ <https://perma.cc/8D7P-V3LZ>

¹²³ <https://perma.cc/SL38-8G39>

¹²⁴ <https://perma.cc/S7GM-Q65R>

¹²⁵ <https://perma.cc/25FW-V5K2>/ <https://perma.cc/RUJ5-PSXP>/ <https://perma.cc/4H7G-XLL6>

¹²⁶ <https://perma.cc/8A4D-9CKX>

shared a link to the group: [Blog di Beppe Grillo](#)

Notizie.
March 10 · 🌐

Questo deve diventare virale...

L'articolo in lingua originale potrà essere visionato cliccando sul seguente link: <https://www.observateurcontinental.fr/...>

"Un massiccio sbarco di truppe americane ha avuto luogo in Europa dalla fine di gennaio e, stranamente, ciò corrisponde all'arrivo del Coronavirus nel vecchio continente.

Il dispiegamento mediatico sull'epidemia ci impedisce di nascondere quanto accade e ci spinge a parlare dell'attuazione delle principali manovre della NATO, ma soprattutto a dire che l'espansione del coronavirus nell'UE sembra avere un legame con questa invasione di uniformi statunitensi provenienti da diversi angoli del mondo, tra cui l'Asia. In effetti, il personale della NATO proviene dall'Asia.

Figure 48 - NATO story amplified in a Beppe Grillo group

Q <https://reseauinternational.net/coronavirus-les-exercices-defender-europe-20-de-lotan-menacent-leurope/>








WHO SHARED THIS LINK?	MESSAGE	DATE	INTERACTIONS
 Réseau International 157,033 Page Likes	par Olivier Renault. Un débarquement massif de troupes américaines met le pied en Europe depuis la fin du mois de janvier et, chose étrange, cela correspond à l'arrivée de coronavirus sur le vieux continent. Le traitement médiatique de l'épidémie	MAR 7, 2020	72
 Coup de pouce à la Réelle Info... 6,239 Members		MAR 7, 2020	45
 Journalistes Sans Frontières - ... 1,891 Members	Nous sommes un certain nombre de journalistes indépendants à avoir relevé ce détail troublant, et visiblement d'autres font le même constat. Le coronavirus semble suivre le même trajet que les militaires américains dans les bases de l'OTAN de la planète.	MAR 7, 2020	11
 Esprits Libres du Monde 12,251 Members	Un débarquement massif de troupes américaines met le pied en Europe depuis la fin du mois de janvier et, chose étrange, cela correspond à l'arrivée de coronavirus sur le vieux continent. Le traitement médiatique de l'épidémie empêche de couvrir et de	MAR 7, 2020	9
 LUTTE POUR LA PAIX DU MONDE 1,694 Members	Dans le cadre des activités de l'Otan, relatifs aux "Exercices Defender Europe 20", des transferts des troupes depuis l'Asie vers l'Europe et de l'Italie vers la France, seraient responsables de la propagation du Coronavirus en France dont le 1er cas a été	MAR 7, 2020	8
 Les pro russe 18,926 Members		MAR 7, 2020	6
 Discussions autour de l'UPR 12,698 Members		MAR 8, 2020	4

Figure 49 - Public Facebook amplification of the French Réseau International version (Source: Crowdtangle)

WHO SHARED THIS LINK?	MESSAGE	DATE	INTERACTIONS
Děkujeme Maďarsku , děkujeme p... 4,697 Members	Vojáci NATO rozšiřují epidemii koronaviru po celé Evropě Masivní přesun amerických jednotek do Evropy koncem ledna kupodivu odpovídá „příchodu“ koronaviru na starý kontinent. První případy koronaviru ve Francii, kde lidé podle zdrojů médií necestovali do	MAR 13, 2020	35
Generál Blaško v EU parlamentu... 6,427 Members	Vojáci NATO rozšiřují epidemii koronaviru po celé Evropě Masivní přesun amerických jednotek do Evropy koncem ledna kupodivu odpovídá „příchodu“ koronaviru na starý kontinent. První případy koronaviru ve Francii, kde lidé podle zdrojů médií necestovali do	MAR 13, 2020	29
Přátele Miloše Zemana 16,243 Members	Vojáci NATO rozšiřují epidemii koronaviru po celé Evropě Masivní přesun amerických jednotek do Evropy koncem ledna kupodivu odpovídá „příchodu“ koronaviru na starý kontinent. První případy koronaviru ve Francii, kde lidé podle zdrojů médií necestovali do	MAR 13, 2020	11
c fini 536 Members	Que préparent t-ils?	MAR 17, 2020	6
J'arrete de travailler, je boy... 2,728 Members	Rien n'arrive par hasard...😬	MAR 16, 2020	5
NDA Espérance 2022 4,211 Members		MAR 17, 2020	4
Noi che ci mobilitiamo contro ... 2,396 Members	https://www.agoravox.fr/tribune-libre/article/coronavirus-les-exercices-defender-222063[https://www.agoravox.fr/tribune-libre/article/coronavirus-les-exercices-defender-222063]	MAR 13, 2020	2

Figure 50 - Public Facebook amplification of the Agoravox (French) story (Source: Crowdtangle)

povoluje rozmístění amerických vojáků a NATO v těchto lokalitách -

První případy koronaviru ve Francii, kde lidé podle zdrojů médií necestovali do Číny, odpovídají místům francouzských vojenských základů, které spolupracují s NATO: 9. námořní pěchotní brigáda a 3. námořní pěší pluk ve Vannes, který se nachází vedle „klástru“ v Carnac a letecké základně v Creil v departementu Oise.

První americké tanky se valí po německých silnicích

Media nemluví o propojení mezi základnami NATO po celém světě a vojenskými základnami ve Francii, které také spolupracují s touto vojenskou organizací, zejména v souvislosti s organizací cvičení DEFENDER-Europe 20. Na základně v Creilu je Ředitelství vojenské zpravodajské služby (DRM), nervové centrum mezi francouzskými ozbrojenými silami a NATO, které bylo právě umístěno pod náčelníkem obranného štábu (CEMA), který je proto důležitým spojením s Evropskou obrannou agenturou, ústředím NATO v Bruselu a mnohonárodním velitelstvím sil rychlého nasazení příslušných NATO v Miláně, což je region, ve kterém existuje významný „kláster“.

Se základnou Creil je spojen další případ odhalený médiem ve Spojených státech, potvrzuje skutečnost, že ke koncentraci dočasných vojenských činností. CNN říká, že žena, která byla evakuována z Wu-chanu do Lackland Air Force Base v San Antonio charterovým letem ministerstva zahraničí, byla propuštěna ze základny, později byla testována pozitivně na koronavirus.

Ministerstvo ozbrojených sil prohlašuje, že „vojáci Esterelské flotily se sídlem v Creilu a účastníci se repatrace Francouzů z Wu-chanu nejsou původci dovozu viru“. Pokud navštívil vojenského zpravodajství Creil (DRM) a mezinárodní základnou NATO v Miláně v době Defender-Europe 20 co by byl zdrojem, protože Milán je největším „klástem“ v Evropě, aniž by započal na území a Evropskou obrannou agenturu.

Zdá se, že tyto věci jsou potvrzeny skutečností, že úředník Evropské obranné agentury byl sledován pozitivním na koronavirus a že někteří kolegové v AED byli v karanténě.

Kontaminace mezi základnami NATO se vyskytují také v Německu, protože tyto německé „klástry“ se nacházejí nedaleko od centrály NATO v Bruselu a v oblastech, kde se americké základny nacházejí v zemi.

(p.přiznizpravy.cz.agoravox.foto.arch.)

[Tisk stránky](#)
[Donořit stránku](#)

24%

Jenom v sobotu?

24%

Jenom v neděli?

23%

SLOVO ČTEMÁRE

Re Pyratů darebáci... Díky za historické a biblické vysvětlení funkce ženy a muže v evoluci a

Vzhledem k tomu, že si Američané ten výskum v Číně plátní, tak jim nepochybne patří Čínaže jim za

BIBLE: Galatským 1:10 Ziskávám si teď lidi nebo Boha? Či se snažím líbit lidem? Kdybych se ještě

[Vložit názor](#)

Figure 51 - Czech version of the NATO Defender Europe story quoting Agoravox as a source

https://www.prvnizpravy.cz/zpravy/zpravy/vojaci-nato-rozsiruji-epidemii-koronaviru-po-cele-evrope/

WHO SHARED THIS LINK?	MESSAGE	DATE	INTERACTIONS
Nedůverujem ex-prezidentovi Ki... 24,670 Members		MAR 14, 2020	553
Aliance národních sil		MAR 10, 2020	492
Slovenska unia 6,551 Page Likes		MAR 10, 2020	245
Zastavme teroristov z Bruselu! 1,560 Members	VAROVANIE	MAR 10, 2020	228
Klub Svobodného vysiláče 1,729 Members		MAR 10, 2020	225
Nedůverujem ex-prezidentovi Ki... 24,461 Members	VAROVANIE	MAR 10, 2020	189
Příznivci Hynka Blaško - za na... 4,857 Members		MAR 14, 2020	144
Slovensko patri občanom-Odstav... 2,485 Members		MAR 10, 2020	142

Figure 52 - Public Facebook amplification of the Prvni Zpravi story (Source: Crowdtangle)

Ministerstvo ozbrojených síl prohlašuje, že „vojáci Esterelké flotily se sídlím v Creilu a účastníci se repatriácie Francouzí z Wu-chanu nejsou původci dovozu viru“. Pokud navrátilci z Wu-chanu nejsou příčinou epidemie, pak provoz mezi personálem ředitelství vojenského zpravodajství Creil (DRM) a mezinárodní základnou NATO v Miláně v době Defender-Europe 20 cs by byl zdrojem, protože Milán je největším „klastrem“ v Evropě, aniž by zapomněli na výměny s Evropskou obrannou agenturou.

Zdá se, že tyto verze jsou potvrzeny skutečností, že úředník Evropské obranné agentury byl sledován pozitivním na koronavirus a že někteří kolegové v AED byli v karanténě.

Kontaminace mezi základnami NATO se vyskytují také v Německu, protože tyto německé „klastry“ se nacházejí nedaleko od centrály NATO v Bruselu a v oblastech, kde se americké základny nacházejí v zemi.

Zdroj: [agoravox.fr](https://www.agoravox.fr)
Překlad: [prvnizpravy.cz](https://www.prvnizpravy.cz)

Články súvisiace s tematikou:

InfoVojna
8 y a environ 2 mois

Koronavírus: Na Slovensku začal platiť dvojtýždňový zákaz ...
Na Slovensku sa doteraz potvrdilo sedem pozitívnych prípadov ochorenia ...

Zaujímavosti

V CNN debatovali o koronavíruse. Nezapadli pozvať aj Gretu
<https://www.konzevachnyweb.sk> 18.05.2020

Muselo to přijít: Temná zima na obzoru? Ukolébání zdánlivým ústupem nákazy. Proskakuje splnění skrz média?
<https://www.protoproud.cz> 18.05.2020

MATOVÍČOVA VLÁDA PODPORUJE SKRYTÝ PRIVATIZÁCIU BRATISLAVSKÉHO LETISKA
<https://www.entraplus.sk> 18.05.2020

VIDEO: Kdo má pravdu o vakcínách? Soubor doktor VS pacient
<https://www.obavivajoumyfi.cz> 17.05.2020

“Veľké ako kuľor.” Americké námorníctvo zverejnilo utajené výpovede pilotov o stretnutiach s UFO
<https://hnanie.sk> 17.05.2020

Pandémia zdôraznila význam slobody médií pre zachovanie demokracie, uviedla Merkelová

Figure 5334 - Slovak version of the NATO Defender Europe story quoting Agoravox as a source

https://www.infovojna.sk/article/vojaci-nato-rozsiruji-epidemii-koronaviru-po-cele-evrope









WHO SHARED THIS LINK?	MESSAGE	DATE	INTERACTIONS
 InfoVojna 28,292 Page Likes	Vojáci NATO rozširujú epidemii koronavírusu po celej Európe	MAR 10, 2020	634
 Slovenska unia 6,551 Page Likes		MAR 10, 2020	75
 SLOVENSKO-RUSKÁ SPOLOČNOSŤ 3,863 Members		MAR 10, 2020	52
 Nedôverujem ex-prezidentovi Ki... 24,461 Members		MAR 10, 2020	42
 AntiSoros nezastavíš 1,738 Page Likes	Popredná česká virologička tvrdí, že #COVID19 bol umelo vytvorený. Aj pád akcií nemeckej #DeutscheBank v 3 ročnom rozmedzí je len takou „netopieriou“ náhodnou piesňou. 4 € 50 centov za akciu, no nekúpte to !! Inak prečítajte si aj časť o	MAR 16, 2020	38
 Volím Harabina 9,272 Members		MAR 10, 2020	35
 Chemtrails Slovensko 2,316 Members		MAR 10, 2020	28
 Chemtrails Slovensko 2,315 Members		MAR 11, 2020	15

Figure 54 - Public Facebook amplification of the InfoVojna story (Source: Crowdtangle)

Through Agoravox RSS feed, we were also able to find many occurrences of the story republished on local French blogs.

3) Agoravox & the French alternative news media ecosystem

a) Agoravox

During our investigation, we identified an author page on Agoravox,¹²⁷ which is managed by an individual who presents himself as Patrice Bravo. This page exclusively republished articles from Observateur Continental (162 articles since October 2019).

¹²⁷ Agoravox.fr is a French participatory platform which was built to host contributions from non-professional writers and volunteers (<https://perma.cc/57V9-JDF7>)



Figure 55 - Screenshot of the AgoraVox's author page named Patrice Bravo which links ObservateurContinental.fr as its website¹²⁸

Thanks to a Google image reverse search, we identified that the photo used to represent "Patrice Bravo" is in fact a picture of the model Vinnie Woolston.¹²⁹ It is not possible to know who manages this page.



Figure 56 - Screenshot which shows that the 6 most successful articles from Observateur Continental republished by "Patrice Bravo" received between 14k and 4.5k visits¹³⁰

¹²⁸ <https://perma.cc/N5AW-KJQQ>

¹²⁹ <https://perma.cc/6QBU-7ANT>

¹³⁰ <https://perma.cc/5TQW-KXVA>

The six most viewed articles from Observateur Continental on the Agoravox platform received between 14k and 4.5k visits. This is a way for Observateur Continental to build an amplification channel that can be used regularly without exposing the website too much.

b) Les Moutons Enragés

During our investigation, we noticed that articles from Observateur Continental were regularly shared by the conspiracy website LesMoutonsEnrages.fr.¹³¹ We identified that 41 articles were reproduced.

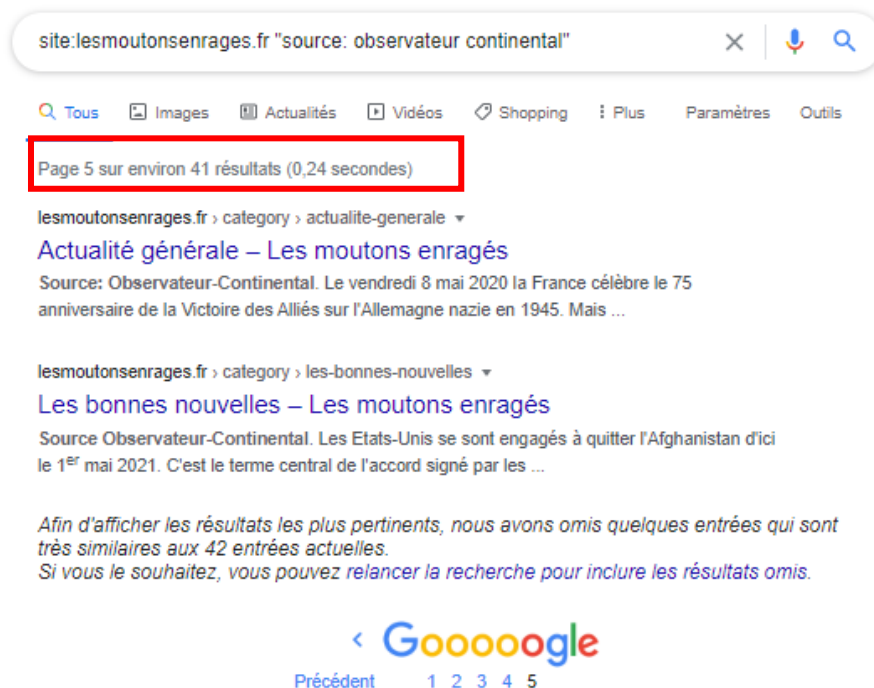


Figure 5735 - Screenshot of a Google search suggesting that there are at least 41 articles on LesMoutonsEnrages.fr which were copied from Observateur Continental¹³²

Questioned by one of its readers about why LesMoutonsEnrages.fr regularly shares content from Observateur Continental, in the comments section, *Volt*¹³³ answered that they are doing it "upon request of the Observateur Continental blog".

¹³¹ https://www.newsguardtech.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/LesMoutonsEnrages.fr_ENG.pdf

¹³² <https://perma.cc/D3Q3-UCE8>

¹³³ The identified anonymous founder of Les Moutons Enragés



Figure 58 - Screenshot of the comment from the founder of LesMoutonsEnragés.fr known as Volti, explaining why he regularly shares regularly content from Observateur Continental¹³⁴

The Les Moutons Enragés' Facebook Page is followed by more than 47k people. This shows how such partnership can offer a greater visibility to content initially produced by Observateur Continental or even by InfoRos on social media.



Figure 59 - Screenshot from LesMoutonsEnragés.fr Facebook Page¹³⁵

¹³⁴ <https://perma.cc/6WCS-HB4L>

¹³⁵ <https://archive.is/BpJzY>

c) Adoxa

Going further, we also identified that Observateur Continental had another partnership with the French reinformation website Adoxa.info (now closed).¹³⁶ Looking at the author page of Observateur Continental on Adoxa's website, we identified 19 articles branded as "proposed in partnership with Observateur Continental",¹³⁷ which had been copy-pasted from the website tied to Russia.



Figure 60 - Screenshot of the mention added to articles on Adoxa.info which are reproduced from Observateur Continental¹³⁸

Adoxa.info was mainly active on Twitter (only 680 people followed Adoxa.info's main Facebook page after their previous page was suspended in July 2019¹³⁹). The main Twitter account for Adoxa had 11.1k followers,¹⁴⁰ and the founder of this alternative media has more than 29.9k followers. During our investigation, Adoxa.info decided to stop its activities.

¹³⁶ <https://perma.cc/3PYX-CCLB>

¹³⁷ <https://perma.cc/PCT4-CEMY>

¹³⁸ <https://perma.cc/9L7W-DNKB>

¹³⁹ <https://perma.cc/9JSW-UN58>

¹⁴⁰ <https://perma.cc/4VBT-87NJ>



Figure 6136 - Screenshots of Adoxa.info Twitter accounts

It is extremely important to highlight that there is not enough evidence to determine whether all the actors mentioned in this section (Adoxa.info and Les Moutons Enragés) are aware of the real scheme behind Observateur Continental that involves InfoRos. The nature of the partnership concluded is also not transparent. Still, these sites are regularly used, willingly or unwillingly, as an amplifier of the polarizing content and disinformation produced by a French website that has deep ties to a controversial Russian press agency.

4) The amplification through the media linked to the One World network

Following our investigation into some of the French local actors that republish content from Observateur Continental, we decided to have a look to the French-speaking partners of One World¹⁴¹ to see whether they were also a vector of amplification for Observateur Continental's articles.

a) Mondialisation.ca

On Mondialisation.ca,¹⁴² we identified 50 occurrences of Observateur Continental's articles, distributed between 3 different authors pages (Observateur Continental, Olivier Renault, and Mikhael Gamandiy-Egorov).

¹⁴¹ <https://euvsdisinfo.eu/one-world-one-author-one-chain-of-command/>

¹⁴² Mondialisation.ca is the French-speaking version of the conspiracy website GlobalResearch.ca which is presented as "a partner blog" on oneworld.press.



Figure 62 - Screenshot of Mikhail Gamandiy-Egorov's author page on Mondialisation.ca which contains 8 articles he wrote for Observateur Continental¹⁴³

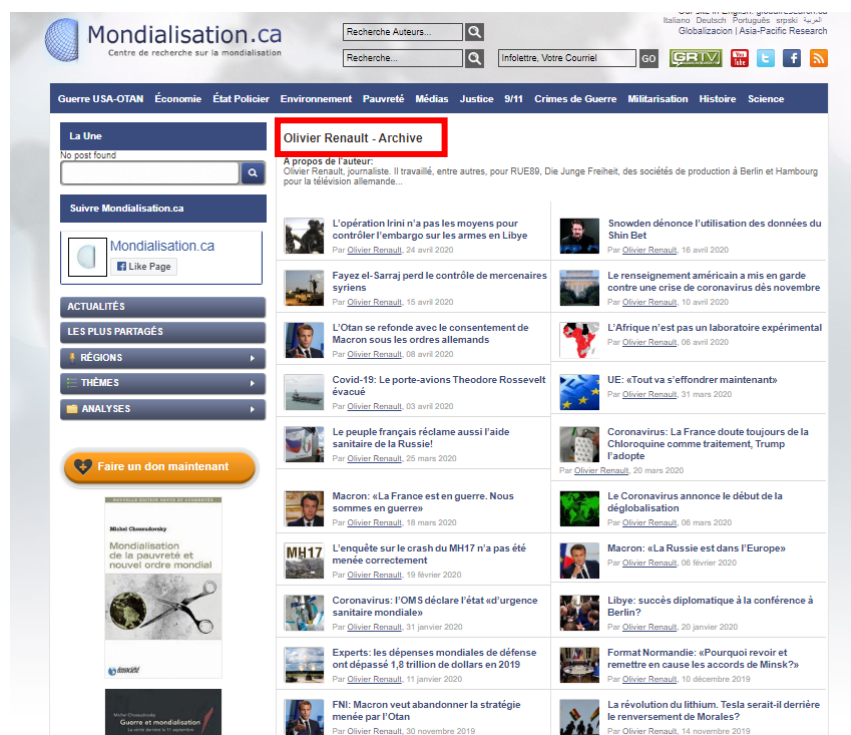


Figure 6337 - Screenshot of Olivier Renault's author page on Mondialisation.ca which contains 20 articles he wrote for Observateur Continental¹⁴⁴

¹⁴³ <https://perma.cc/EV2X-2TME>

¹⁴⁴ <https://perma.cc/5ZG9-ZXRA>

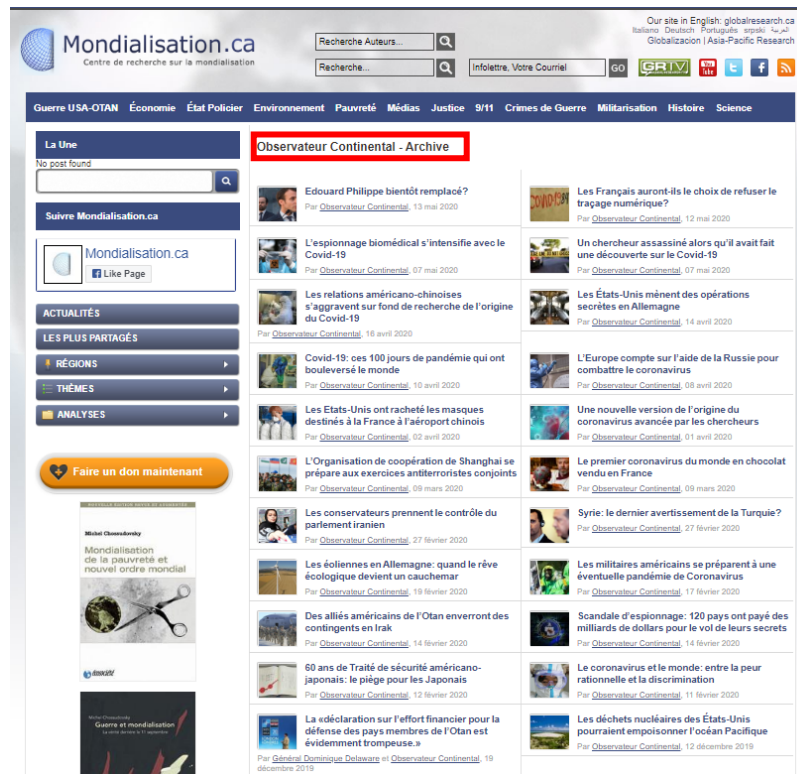


Figure 64 - Screenshot of Observateur Continental's author page on Mondialisation.ca which contains 22 articles he wrote for Observateur Continental¹⁴⁵

Multiple articles were republished on Mondialisation.ca the same day or a day after their publication on Observateur Continental.



¹⁴⁵ <https://perma.cc/5ZG9-ZXRA>



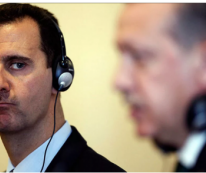
Les relations américano-chinoises s'aggravent sur fond de recherche de l'origine du Covid-19

Les relations américano-chinoises s'aggravent sur fond de recherche de l'origine du Covid-19

16 avril 2020

Par Observateur Continental
Mondialisation.ca, 16 avril 2020
Observateur continental

Région : Asie, États-Unis
Thème : Science et médecine
Analyses: COVID-19



Syrie: le dernier avertissement de la Turquie?

L'ultimatum lancé par Ankara à Damas expire dans deux jours

Syrie: le dernier avertissement de la Turquie?

27 février 2020

Par Observateur Continental
Mondialisation.ca, 27 février 2020
Observateur continental

Analyses: SYRIE

Figure 65 - On the left, screenshots of some articles previews from Observateur Continental¹⁴⁶. On the right, screenshots of the same articles reproduced the same day or one after on Mondialisation¹⁴⁷.

Even though republishing patterns do not allow us to draw definitive conclusions about the links between Mondialisation.ca and Observateurcontinental.fr, they still suggest a clear proximity. The Canadian website acts as an amplifier for the French website. Mondialisation.ca has a Twitter account (around 4.5k followers) and a Facebook Page (24.2k likes) to propagate its content.

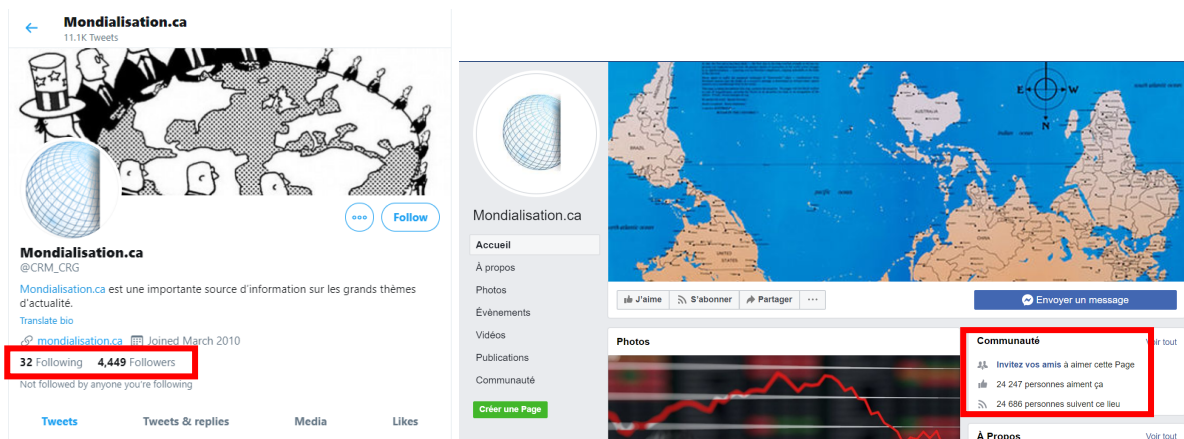


Figure 66 - Screenshots of Mondialisation.ca's Twitter account¹⁴⁸ and Facebook page¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁶<https://perma.cc/FNT7-D4JW>/ <https://perma.cc/6NNR-5JCU>/ <https://perma.cc/38ZJ-S2GC>/<https://perma.cc/7X5P-LUJP>

¹⁴⁷ <https://perma.cc/9RT3-QBMQ/> <https://perma.cc/J6GE-2G7U/><https://perma.cc/C3ZP-QFJJ/> <https://perma.cc/94MV-K82K>

¹⁴⁸<https://perma.cc/DRS7-Q2K3>

¹⁴⁹ <https://archive.is/LixrG>

b) Reseauinternational.net

Also mentioned as a partner by One World,¹⁵⁰ Réseau International is known to be a website that regularly spreads disinformation and conspiracy theories.¹⁵¹ Active since 2013, the alternative media has managed to build quite a significant audience:

- Facebook Page: 156k followers,¹⁵²
- Twitter account: 14.1k followers,¹⁵³
- YouTube channel: 2.28k subscribers.¹⁵⁴



Figure 67 - Screenshot of ReseauInternational.net Facebook Page

Olivier Renault is one of the 37 individuals listed as contributors for the website. He has published 82 articles on reseauinternational.net since 2013.¹⁵⁵ We were able to determine that 44 of them were openly copy-pasted from Observateur Continental. The other articles were previously written by Olivier Renault for the pro-Russian media Novorossia based in Donetsk (Ukraine), suggesting the cooperation started before Observateur Continental's launch.

¹⁵⁰ <https://perma.cc/6EWC-LKLC>

¹⁵¹ <https://perma.cc/6EWC-LKLC>

¹⁵² <https://archive.vn/VFCCq>

¹⁵³ <https://perma.cc/N6UV-9ZKH>

¹⁵⁴ <https://perma.cc/V2LH-LU25>

¹⁵⁵ <https://perma.cc/8KHY-NG6B>



Figure 68 - Screenshot of Olivier Renault's author page on ReseauInternational.net

Going further, conducting a Google search revealed that there were in fact 149 articles from Observateur Continental that have been reproduced by reseauinternational.net so far.

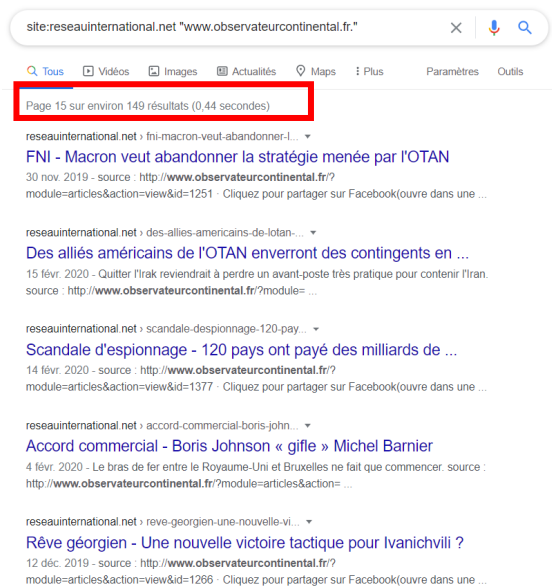


Figure 6938 - Screenshot of the Google query which shows that 149 articles from ReseauInternational.net provided the site Observateur Continental as source¹⁵⁶

The regular republication of articles from Observateur Continental by Reseau International offers the newcomer in the French disinformation ecosystem access to a far wider audience than its initial 11k followers on Facebook.

¹⁵⁶ <https://perma.cc/PF6N-7SJS>

c) Other partners of the One World

A rapid investigation into the other partners of One World allowed us to spot a small detail. The two Brazilian alternative media Dossier Sul and Radioweb Rebelde mentioned Observateur Continental as a partner despite not having any clear links to the small French website.



Figure 70 - Screenshot of the dossiersul.com.br main page listing Observateur Continental as partner¹⁵⁷



Figure 71 39 - Screenshot of the radiowebrebelde.com.br main page listing Observateur Continental as partner¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁷ <https://perma.cc/AL6W-L9CA>

¹⁵⁸ <https://perma.cc/BRQ8-F97Z>

VI. Conclusion

What we think is interesting here is that the strategy we observed resembles the one described by Stanford Internet Observatory's report on GRU information operations. They conclude that this is a way for GRU to "achieve influence by feeding its narratives into the wider mass-media ecosystem with the help of think tanks, affiliated websites [etc]". The Stanford Internet Observatory also adds: "It [GRU] either did not view maximizing social audience engagement as a priority or did not have the wherewithal to do so. To the contrary, it appears to have designed its operation to achieve influence in other ways."¹⁵⁹

We are confident our findings shed a new light on new strategies deployed by some actors to spread disinformation and polarizing narratives across the world. These actors keep on innovating and trying to remain undetectable, with a focus on the spread of narratives instead of the development of large social media accounts. Using a network of proxy websites and partnerships with well-established conspiracy portals, they are successful in making sure that the content circulates far and wide, making it even harder to go back to the original source (in this case, InfoRos).

It is crucial that tackling disinformation adapts to these innovations. These actors know too well that institutions are looking for "data" and "KPIs", the bigger the better. During the course of our investigation, we were also questioned by partners about the rather low (at first sight) scope of the websites we were looking at. As we showed in this report, the reach of these websites goes far beyond what their Facebook or Twitter account shows. We deeply believe this should be remembered when reporting on disinformation or when asking platforms for data transparency: "more" is not always the best.

¹⁵⁹ <https://cyber.fsi.stanford.edu/io/news/potemkin-pages-personas-blog>