

Gunda Reire

## Euro-Atlantic Values and Russia's propaganda in the Euro-Atlantic Space\*

*History – combining elements of Antiquity, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, the Renaissance and the Enlightenment – has created an array of indisputable values, to which the European Union pays lip service, but which it often regards simply as pretty packaging for the things that really matter. But aren't these values what really matter, and are not they, on the contrary, what give direction to all the rest?*

Vaclav Havel, European Parliament, 2009

**Abstract:** Russia's war in Ukraine and the hybrid threats that it inflicted beyond Ukraine's borders have exposed the entire Euro-Atlantic space and confirmed that the power of information is incredibly strong. Russia has invested massively in anti-European, anti-United States and overall anti-Western activities in order to undermine the rule of law, the authority of NATO and the basic values that have defined the Euro-Atlantic community since its inception. Russia's propaganda deceives, multiplies absurd conspiracy theories and creates an information chaos. As societies, which are disoriented and confused, become an easy target for manipulation, the risk of political subversion, radicalization and change in the Euro-Atlantic course increases.

**Keywords:** Euro-Atlantic community, Russia, Ukraine, hybrid war, propaganda, values

- \* This article is partly based on the research findings of the study "Euro-Atlantic values and Russia's strategic political communication in the Euro-Atlantic Space", which was carried out by the Center for International Studies (Latvia) (authors: Prof. Zaneta Ozoliņa, Dr. Gunda Reire, Dr. Solvita Denisa-Liepniece, Arturs Kvesko and Sigita Struberga) and commissioned by the NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence (NATO StratCom COE, Latvia) in 2015. The aim of the study was to identify the ways and means of how Russia, with the help of mass media, influences the Euro-Atlantic values and re-defines the meaning of democracy, mass media freedom, human rights, freedom of speech and other values in the Euro-Atlantic space for different societal groups in the context of the crisis in Ukraine. The research covered the time period from April 2014 till February 2015. The study focused on the content-analysis of the following selected audio-visual platforms: *RT (Russia Today)*, *Perviy Kanal* and *Sputniknews*. The following case studies were selected for the analysis: MH-17 catastrophe; implementation of counter-sanctions; the first humanitarian convoy, The Minsk-2 agreement.

## Introduction

The struggle over control of the infosphere<sup>1</sup> can be regarded as a significant external threat to the security of the Western world today. The war that Russia wages in Ukraine and the propaganda that it employs to influence the entire Euro-Atlantic space constitute a direct threat to unity, stability and democracy across the Atlantic. Most importantly, however, it puts at stake the very values that have defined the nature of the Euro-Atlantic community and collaboration over the past century. Although explanations about the role and significance of the system of values in society abound, today the Western world is caught in an inability to devise an effective answer to Russia's strategic political communication, propaganda and manipulative techniques. Therefore, it is timely to ask the question of why it is so difficult for the West to design adequate strategic communication methods and to respond rapidly and effectively to the challenge that Russia creates.

In order to address this question, the argument in this paper is structured as follows. In the first step, the concept of the Euro-Atlantic values is elaborated critically concerning their role in defining the socio-economic and political context in which Western societies operate. In what follows, the specific propaganda tools and manipulative techniques that Russia has employed since the beginning of its aggression on Ukraine are discussed. In the third part, the possibility and feasibility of subversion is explored by reference to the case of Latvia. In the next step the Chinese military strategy concept of *hsing* is up-

1 In terms of geopolitics, there are four basic forms of strategic power – sea, land, air and space. All have their own physical environments, which have unique characteristics. D. J. Lonsdale argues that nowadays it is possible to speak of a fifth dimension of strategy: the infosphere (D. J. Lonsdale, *Information Power: Strategy, Geopolitics, and the Fifth Dimension*, [in:] C. S. Gray, G. Sloan (eds.), *Geopolitics. Geography and Strategy*, Frank Cass Publishers, 2003, p. 137-157). This refers to information power, the use of new technologies and a form of conflict that can take place within the infosphere. With the use of direct and indirect approaches, involving the techniques of fear, disinformation and deception, society can be shaped into a state of vulnerability and disintegration, and thus rendered incapable of dealing with real threats. Parts of the infosphere are physically real (computers, satellites, cables etc.), and although some scholars argue that cyberspace is characterized by 'placelessness' (for example, M. Libicki, *The Emerging Primacy of Information*, "Orbis", 1996 (Spring), p. 261-276) and that the infosphere is without boundaries, "[...] information does not flow in a vacuum but in political space already occupied" (R. O. Keohane, J. Jr. Nye, *Power and Interdependence in the Information Age*, "Foreign Affairs", 1998 (Sept., Oct.), p. 81-94).

held to point to the sources of the West's vulnerability to Russia's hybrid warfare. Conclusions and recommendations follow.

## 1 The Euro-Atlantic Values: the foundation of Western societies

The Euro-Atlantic values that form the foundation of Western societies have been a target of Russia's foreign policy even following the end of the Cold War. This element of Russia's foreign policy is not coincidental because Russia's international ambitions are not based on the aspiration to conquer new territories but on the aspiration to create "mental landscapes" that can be influenced and manipulated.

Values are the specific type and system of beliefs, which pertain to desirable behaviours, transcend specific situations and guide selection or evaluation of behaviour and events.<sup>2</sup> In addition, values become operational as systems of values.<sup>3</sup> In this way, they form the basis for a society's functioning, coherence and sustainability. Values must be "inertial enough, however, to lend stability and evaluations and behaviour"<sup>4</sup> since they can be regarded as a particular standard of societal behaviour and people's "specific political attitudes."<sup>5</sup> In turn, attitudes play the main role in studies of public opinion. Researchers of political communication argue that control of the topics (issue/agenda) of discussion (media and public) impacts public opinion.<sup>6</sup> In this context, the term "Euro-Atlantic values" relates to those values that serve as a basis for contemporary, democratic and Western-oriented society. There are six of them: humanism, rationality, secularism, the rule of law, democracy, and human rights.

2 See: S. H. Schwartz, *Universals in the Content and Structure of Values: Theoretical Advances and Empirical Tests in 20 Countries*, [in:] M. P. Zanna (ed.), *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* (vol. 24, p. 1-65), Academic Press, New York 1992, p. 4.

3 S. Feldmans, *Political Ideology*, [in:] L. Huddy, D. O. Sears, J. S. Levy (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Political Psychology*, Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 603.

4 *Ibidem*.

5 R. Clowson, Z. Oxley, *Public Opinion: Democratic Ideals, Democratic Practice*, Sage Publications, 2013, p. 19.

6 See: J. Dearing, E. Rodgers, *Agenda-Setting*, Sage Publications, 1996; A. Pratkanis, *Winning the Hearts and Minds*, [in:] J. Arquilla, A. Borer, *Information Strategy and Warfare: A Guide to Theory and Practice*, Routledge, 2007.

It has been frequently argued that authoritarian regimes use the media, and a set of manipulative techniques thus available, to influence the public opinion. Clearly, however, in authoritarian regimes, public opinion is not in the centre stage of the policy-making process, unlike in democratic regimes.<sup>7</sup> It is also worth mentioning that political conflicts are not only about values but also about beliefs, perceptions and emotions.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, O'Shaughnessy argues that propaganda does not try to destroy values, but attempts to conscript them.<sup>9</sup> Messages that appeal to values are in strong demand in any propaganda effort, while "persuasion should speak to values."<sup>10</sup> From this perspective, the notion of the authoritarian regimes employing media to communicate certain messages becomes very complex. The aim of those messages is to induce change in the value-system of a given target group. Chart 1 offers an overview of this complex correlation between values, public opinion and politics, highlighting in this way the variety of mechanisms at work that abuse people's beliefs, perception and emotions. To induce change in a value-system requires time because values are "not vulnerable to factual revision."<sup>11</sup> The interpretation of changes in the system of values can have both optimistic and pessimistic scenarios, but it is the potential "loss of values [that] can be regarded exceptionally as a symptom of a crisis."<sup>12</sup> This is the very reason why every external attempt to induce a change in the system of values of the Euro-Atlantic community needs to be addressed with the highest attention in that a lack of an appropriate response may result in the loss of some values and, therefore, in a political and socio-economic crisis in Western societies.

7 See: J. Dearing, E. Rodgers, *Agenda-Setting*.

8 See: W. Saris, P. Sniderman, *Studies in Public Opinions: Attitudes, Non-attitudes, Measurement Error, and Change*, Princeton University Press, 2004.

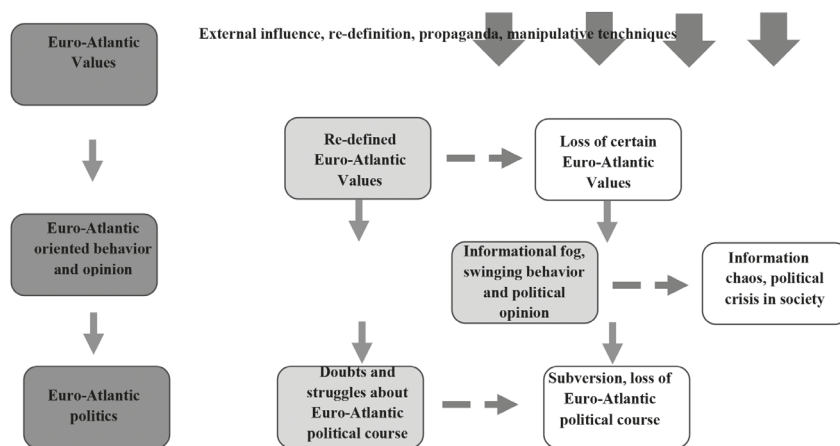
9 See: N. O'Shaughnessy, *Politics and Propaganda: Weapons of Mass Seduction*, Manchester University Press, 2004.

10 Ibidem.

11 Ibidem.

12 H. Joas, *Die Entstehung der Werte*, Suhrkamp, 1999, p. 13.

Chart 1. The Correlation between Values, Public Opinion and Politics



Source: The Author.

## 2. Russia's propaganda tools and manipulative techniques

Russia has invested massively in anti-European, anti-United States and anti-Western activities and has tried to undermine the rule of law, the authority of NATO and the basic values of democracy. It attacks, deceives, multiplies absurd conspiracy theories to create an information chaos. The challenge is how to improve Western societies' resilience to those techniques and hence limit the efficiency of Russia's continuous attempts to influence them.

### 2.1. Targeted audiences

Russia is well-armed with knowledge about the different target groups domestically and internationally. The way the narratives in news programs presented by *RT* and *Perviy Kanal* are constructed prove that identical messages can be adapted and contextualized according to the specific interests of specific audiences. Such manipula-

tive techniques<sup>13</sup> include *labelling*,<sup>14</sup> i.e. linguistic naming of issues or groups aimed at constructing the needed context: rebels – separatists; power in Kiev – government of Ukraine, and *authority*,<sup>15</sup> i.e. the use of a person or institution which has high level of trust and popularity, e.g. V. Putin. The use of other authorities, e.g. ministers or state institutions, depends on the hierarchy and the need to reinforce the original message. *Infotainment*<sup>16</sup> is used to undermine the quality of the media, the objectivity of the presented news, the credibility of Western politicians and international organizations. In the end, Western society becomes increasingly divided over controversies presented in the media questioning the efficiency of foreign and security policies and credibility of respective political leaders. At the same time in Russia, the state's control over the media allows to present coherent and clear messages supporting and strengthening the position of the political elite and Putin. In this way, their policies on international arena are not questioned by the majority of Russian citizens who anyway have been presented with a very specific narrative of the developments and responses on the part of Russia.

Also the design of the TV studios is adapted to the profile of news consumption of the respective audience. *Perviy Kanal* is the leader of the top-viewed channels watched domestically and in neighbouring countries among Russian speaking population. Here the studio and the anchor is very conservative, to the extent that it revives Soviet sentiment. In turn, the *RT* is a TV-channel with a relatively low num-

- 13 Techniques (and appeals) are defined according to PsyOp classification used in US Army (see: FM-3-05.301, *Psychological Operations Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures*, Washington 2003; FM-3-05.301, *Psychological Operations Process Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures*, Washington 2007). The field manual says: "Techniques are the methods used to present information (supporting arguments) to the TA. Effective techniques are based on the conditions affecting the TA and the type of information being presented" (FM-3-05.301, *Psychological Operations Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures*, Washington 2003, p. 5-55, available at <https://fas.org/irp/doddir/army/fm3-05-301.pdf>, last time accessed 01.07.2015).
- 14 This concept is related to PsyOp technique "name-calling" (W. Wodak, R. Cillia, m. Reisigl, K. Liebhart, *The Discursive Construction of National Identity*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh 2010/1999), which is connected with the discursive strategies (particularly referencing).
- 15 For examples of the authority in legitimation, see: T. van Leeuwen, *Legitimation in Discourse and Communication*, "Discourse & Communication", 1 (1), 2007, p. 91-112. This concept is mentioned in PsyOp manual but not as a technique (see: FM-3-05.301, *Psychological Operations Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures*, Washington 2003).
- 16 A manipulative technique to distract people's attention from the real narratives and the content of the event in depth and comprehensively with the help of entertainment tools and elements.

ber of viewers in Western countries but with a considerable growth potential. Accordingly, the RT studio is equipped with latest technologies, while the programmes look contemporary, interactive, and often involve the technique of the second screen.<sup>17</sup> Even the re-branding of *Russia Today* to *RT* shows an attempt to obtain more impartiality and to de-attach this propaganda channel from Russia.

## 2.2. Numerous subtopics and conspiracy theories

A vivid example of the use of numerous subtopics and conspiracy theories as a strategy for creating an information chaos, is the case of downing of the Malaysian aircraft MH-17<sup>18</sup> in 2014. Just a few hours after the catastrophe, a new agenda was created with the following topics: The civilian plane crash in 2001 shot down by the Ukrainian armed forces,<sup>19</sup> Malaysian “lost plane” and possible technical problems,<sup>20</sup> Putin's plane as the real target of the Ukrainian armed forces,<sup>21</sup> blaming the Western media for recalling the South-Korean plane crash in 1983 by the Soviet air forces. The topic of the civilian plane crash was updated in every analysed news program of *Perviy Kanal*. Thus, manipulative techniques of importance/placement,<sup>22</sup> i.e. presence of the issue in the agenda and the placement of an issue in a news program, and repetition,<sup>23</sup> i.e. the message is repeated many times within

17 This manipulative technique includes promotion of hashtags, social networks, and accounts to follow. It is used also for discretisation of some accounts/users.

18 Malaysian Airlines Boeing 777 was downed over Eastern Ukraine on July 17, 2014. The MH-17 was travelling from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur. Killing of all 298 people on board is still under investigation. The majority of victims were Dutch. Politically, this case became a key turning point in Western perceptions about the conflict in Ukraine and Russia's role in it. Investigations and speculations about who is responsible for this act of terrorism evoked significant changes of strategic political communication of the sides involved in the conflict. The MH-17 catastrophe was not a pre-planned action and it demonstrated the crisis management in communication.

19 Since 17 July, 2014, on *Perviy Kanal*.

20 Ibidem.

21 Since 18 July, 2014, on *Perviy Kanal*.

22 Based on the effects of agenda (setting). For examples, see: T. Borchers, *Persuasion in the Media Age*, Waveland Press, Long Grove 2013, p. 63; G. Jowett, V. O'Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion*, Sage Publication, 2015, p. 204.

23 Repetition is named among the principles of preparation of PsyOp (see: FM-3-05.301, *Psychological Operations Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures*, Washington 2003). It is also named as a tactic of intensifying persuasion (for details, see: H. Simons, J. Jones, *Persuasion in Society*, Routledge, 2011).

a news program in either one news story or different news stories, or even repeated on other days, were strongly involved.

On the day following the catastrophe, conspiracy theories were developed implicitly suggesting the possibility of the US involvement in the 9/11 tragedy, i.e. it was argued that a US air-force plane had suddenly appeared in Cuba.<sup>24</sup> The main idea behind that story was that the 9/11 tragedy was convenient for the US both politically and economically. On the other hand, the version about Putin's plane as the real target of the Ukrainian armed forces was supported with a quote from the Ukrainian TV where a politician talked about targeting Putin; "anonymous source" and graphics of the similarity of the Malaysian airplane and "Board No. 1" were employed to support that politician's statement.

At first glance, such conspiracy theories broadcast in the media are suggestive of desperation on the part of Russia. Still, they do work. Conspiracy theories are a very powerful tool that distracts people's minds from real events and engages them in non-productive mental work. The December 2013 opinion poll about the Latvian society's stance towards conspiracy theories showed that 61% of the population agreed that their lives were being affected by different conspiracy theories.<sup>25</sup>

### **2.3. Defeating the West with its own weapons: Plurality of opinions**

Authoritarian and totalitarian regimes in relations with the Western democracies have often tried to defeat democracy with its own means. The most vivid and historically tragic example is Hitler's party's ascent to power through democratic elections. Goebbels, the future Nazi Germany Minister of Propaganda, wrote in 1928 in the Nazi newspaper "Der Angriff" (The Attack): "We enter the parliament in order to supply ourselves, in the arsenal of democracy, with its own weapons [...]. If democracy is so stupid as to give us free tickets and salaries for this [...] work, that is its affair."<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup> On *Perviy Kanal*.

<sup>25</sup> SKDS, December, 2013.

<sup>26</sup> J. Goebbels, "Der Angriff" ("The Attack"), April 30, 1928.



The idea of defeating democracy with its own weapons is still alive. Nowadays, Russia attacks the Western value of rationality and uses the argument of “the second opinion” or plurality of opinions. The phrase “the second opinion” has even become the slogan of *RT*. For instance, this propaganda channel used the public opinion's contention as to the nature of the Iraq war, to sell itself as an impartial, objective media outlet in the USA. Overall, Russian propaganda involves a clash of political systems, which is more dangerous than the old-school Soviet propaganda. This is because Western societies receive an “alternative point of view,” and hence do not recognise easily the way how Russia's propaganda in a fluid manner redefines and deconstructs the Euro-Atlantic values.

#### **2.4. Vox populi, i.e. the voice of the common man**

One of the key manipulative techniques employed by the Russian propaganda engine is the voice of ordinary people, i.e. people that look and talk like most of the viewers themselves.<sup>27</sup> Opinions of – be sure of that – carefully selected “common men” offer an insight into what an average person thinks and knows about the “actual,” “true” reality. This technique is often supported by another manipulative technique, i.e. testimony,<sup>28</sup> which refers to quotes to support or reject the message. At the practical level, in that stream of Russia's propaganda, “evidence” is presented by local people without names or surnames<sup>29</sup> or as a phone call by a local resident without a photo and a surname.<sup>30</sup> Clearly, it would be futile to attempt to identify and verify either the names of the individuals whose opinions and insights were employed in the broadcast or the surroundings. Finally, the information source, even if indicated, is blurry, usually YouTube videos whose authors/source remain unidentifiable.

27 This technique is mentioned/listed as a common PsyOp technique (see: FM-3-05.301, *Psychological Operations Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures*, Washington 2003).

28 Testimony is listed as a common PsyOp technique (see: FM-3-05.301, *Psychological Operations Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures*, Washington 2003).

29 *Pervy Kanal*, August 8, 2014, news on implementation of counter-sanctions.

30 *Pervy Kanal*, July 17, 2014, news on MH-17.

In the case of the MH-17, the *RT* channel used the technique of the second screen to magnify the emotional dimension of the message. Specifically, while one of the screens would project a Twitter picture of a soldier holding a toy at the place of the tragedy, the other screen would feature a full video coverage: The soldier crosses himself after putting the toy on the ground – with a title “What really happened with the toy.”<sup>31</sup> In this way, Russia pictures the war in Ukraine by reference to the suffering of children and involving the context of fear, seriousness of the situation and heavy emotional background. This implies moral superiority of Russia and dehumanisation of Ukrainian armed forces, while at the same time portrays Ukraine as a failed state.

## 2.5. Church as a symbol of morality

To emphasise the moral superiority of Russia, the element of religion was introduced during the first humanitarian aid convoy in 2014.<sup>32</sup> The TV channels, using the technique of repetition, showed churches on fire,<sup>33</sup> i.e. targets of the Ukrainian military forces. The coverage did not involve any dates or clear references to exact venues. Another commonly shown image was a religious icon behind the window of the car of humanitarian aid or even two similar holy icons behind the car window.<sup>34</sup> The latter case was a clear indication of manipulation in that it is unlikely in the Orthodox tradition that two similar icons are placed next to each other.

That the Church, i.e. a symbol of morality, is employed suggests that Russian propaganda targets the following foundational values of the Euro-Atlantic community:

- humanism that was contrasted with Russia’s moral superiority;
- international solidarity which was ridiculed with the image of Ukraine as a failed state, pseudo-parliamentarianism, radi-

31 *RT*, July 18, 2014, news on downing the Malaysian airline MH-17.

32 On 12 August, 2014 the first Russian humanitarian aid convoy moved from the Moscow area (*Podmoskovje*) to Eastern Ukraine. Approximately 280 half-empty trucks (numbers changed) made the path to the Ukrainian border and afterwards entered Ukraine in the conflict zone. The Ukrainian side called it a violation of the border. The Russian side referred to violated agreements by the Ukrainian side.

33 *Perviy Kanal*, August 16, 2014.

34 *Perviy Kanal*, August 12, 2014.

cals going out of control, oligarchy, lack of order at the military level and politics, lack of Ukrainian connection to international organisations;

- the rule of law which was undermined by the image of Ukraine and the West violating international agreements;
- socially responsible democracy which was challenged by the image of Ukraine as a failed state incapable of acting in a socially responsible manner.

## 2.6. Entertainment instead of information

During the Minsk II agreement,<sup>35</sup> the Russian propaganda engine resorted to another powerful tool, i.e. infotainment. The main strategy was not to discuss the content of the agreement in depth and comprehensively. Instead, the focus of the media coverage was on tiny funny details of the work in Minsk, including pictures of President Lukashenka “serving drinks himself,”<sup>36</sup> a photo of a pseudo kiss between the leaders of France and Germany,<sup>37</sup> Lukashenka pushing the chair,<sup>38</sup> and others. By presenting that kind of images, Russia questioned the unity of the Western countries, separated the US from the remaining Western countries, and undermined the reliability of NATO, other international organisations and of the European Court of Human Rights. In February 2015, those goals of Russian propaganda were openly expressed. For instance, the *RT* broadcast a video about a US senator who did not verify the evidence provided by the Ukrainian MP.<sup>39</sup> This issue was supported by some fake materials on Iraq and Libya, which were used to start the military campaign. This aspect was directly linked to inability to trust Ukraine and the West. At the same time, the role of Putin was legitimised in the media, while he was presented as a re-

35 On February 11, the so called Normandy Four met in Minsk to conduct negotiations on solving the conflict in Ukraine. The leaders of France, Germany, Russia and Ukraine and a more technical group, which included the representatives of rebelling territories, came to the so called Minsk II agreement. While many remained critical, at that time this agreement was understood as a successful step toward a long-lasting peace in Eastern Ukraine.

36 *RT*, February 12, 2015.

37 *Ibidem*.

38 See: *Minsk Lukashenko removed the loose stools from Putin*, news from Ukraine, February 12, 2015, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gk3Pl4aFOYU>, last time accessed on 1.07.2015.

39 *RT International, RT America*, February 13, 2015.

liable, credible and strong leader, in a striking contrast to Western politicians that were presented as weak and unreliable. On *RT* it was done through the voice of authority from the West: Merkel saying that it was Putin who pressured the separatists to sign the truce deal. The same from Hollande: "I am thankful to Putin,"<sup>40</sup> yet, the context of these quotes was not provided.

### 3. Subversion: real or not?

In February 2015, NATO General, Sir Adrian Bradshaw argued that the "alliance needs to develop both fast-reacting conventional forces and capacities to counter Russian efforts at coercion and propaganda, as seen in Ukraine."<sup>41</sup> He stressed as well that "our information and warning system will be specifically attuned to the range of hybrid threats including not only the deployment of potentially hostile conventional forces, but also political agitation and subversion, cyber-attack, hostile propaganda and other destabilizing effects."<sup>42</sup> How real is subversion, i.e. a systematic attempt to overthrow or undermine a government or political system by persons working secretly from within, in the region close to Russia? Latvia's case proves that it is possible, yet not in a conventional manner.

In March 2015, Viktor Kalyuzhny, the former Russian ambassador to Latvia, revealed some old Russian Embassy plans to the Russian radio *Eho Moskvi*. He said, "we had a programme: 2009 should be Russia's year in Riga, but 2010 – in Saeima [Latvian parliament]."<sup>43</sup> Kalyuzhny admitted that "we did Riga"<sup>44</sup> (on June 6, 2009, municipal elections took place in Latvia, and in Riga the winner was the pro-Kremlin par-

40 *RT International*, February 12, 2015.

41 *Russian expansionism may pose existential threat, says Nato general*, "The Guardian", February 20, 2015, available at <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/feb/20/russia-existential-threat-british-nato-general>, last time accessed on 21.02.2015.

42 General Sir Adrian Bradshaw, NATO Deputy Supreme Allied Commander Europe; Speech at the Royal United Services Institute, February 21, 2015.

43 *Bijušais Krievijas vēstnieks: 2010. gadā krieviem bija jābūt Saeimā*, (The former Russian ambassador: in 2010, Russians had had to be in Saeima), "Iri", March 10, 2015, available at <http://www.iri.lv/2015/3/10/bijusais-krievijas-vestnieks-latvija-2010-gada-krieviem-bija-jabut-saeima>, last time accessed in 10.09.2015.

44 *Ibidem*.

ty "Harmony Centre", and the young politician Nils Ushakovs became that party's leader). At the same time, Kalyuzhny expressed sadness about the failure to do the same in the Latvian parliament in 2010.<sup>45</sup> The Harmony Centre entered the parliament but was not included in the coalition government and remained in the opposition. The plans revealed by Kalyuzhny indicate plans of subversion and an attempt by Russia to get embroiled in the internal affairs of Latvia; a serious violation of international public law. It is also evidence of the strategy to win democracy with its own means. In spite of the Russian failure to influence Latvia's domestic political scene, the struggle about subversion in Latvia continues. Russia's propaganda reaches also the Western media.

In *Der Spiegel* June issue,<sup>46</sup> Riga's Mayor Nils Ushakovs is portrayed as a pro-European, integrated and democratic Russian who is "unreceptive to the nationalistic attempts from Russia."<sup>47</sup> Ushakovs himself is quoted to speak of an ethnic ghetto in Latvia (sic!) and his plans to become the Prime Minister of Latvia. But Ushakovs still represents the party "Harmony Centre" which has a cooperation agreement with Putin's Party "Единая Россия" (United Russia) and has direct links to the Kremlin. Ushakovs received Patriarch Kirill's support for his position to introduce Russian as the second official language in Latvia in the referendum in 2012,<sup>48</sup> as well as The Prize of the International Foundation for the Unity of the Orthodox Christian Nations from the hands of Kirill.<sup>49</sup> In these cases, Russia with the help of Riga's Mayor clearly attacks the value of secularism, involves the church in political affairs and represents the Orthodox Church as the guarantee of morality. It must be reminded that Kirill's church is a tool for Rus-

45 Ibidem.

46 „Der Spiegel”, o. 27/26.6, 2105.

47 "unempfaenglich für die nationalistischen Versuchungen aus Russland"

48 *Святейший Патриарх Кирилл встретился с мэром Риги Нилом Ушаковым* (His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow met the Mayor of Riga Nils Ushakovs), December 4, 2012, ТВ Союз, available at <http://tv-soyuz.ru/news/svyateyshiy-patriarh-kirill-vstretilsya-s-merom-rigi-nilom-ushakovym>, last time accessed on 10.09.2015.

49 *Maskavas pareizticigo mācītājs: "Latvija nekad nav bijusi valsts!" VIDEO* (The orthodox priest of Moscow: "Latvia has never been a state!" VIDEO), February 24, 2015, available at <http://www.kasjauns.lv/lv/zinas/186424/maskavas-pareizticigo-macitajs-latvija-nekad-nav-bijusi-valsts-video>, last time accessed on 10.09.2015.

sia's domestic and international policy, while its main goal is the unification of the so called "Russian World".

Aleksandr Veshnyakov, the Russian ambassador to Latvia, has recently declared that "Russian world is without borders" and that one day Latvia could become a part of Russia, i.e. "if you will decide so – please! We are open to your membership in the Eurasian Union."<sup>50</sup> Information war continues, society's "hearts and minds"<sup>51</sup> are under attack. These seemingly innocent words of the ambassador entail big security threats. This is because if the Latvian society becomes too receptive to Russian propaganda, a time may come when Russia's plans turn into reality with democratic means.

## **4. "I determine the enemy's hsing while I have no perceptible form"<sup>52</sup>**

Big differences exist between the Euro-Atlantic community and Russia with regard to how democracy, freedom, the role of state, free market, respect of minorities, trust in international law and international organisations are understood. Russia's propaganda pictures democracy as a sign of weakness and a lack of leadership. Western media are portrayed as not free and not credible, while Western countries as those that lack solidarity and do not follow international agreements. Russia questions Western unity, separates the US from other Western countries, splits the European Union countries, seeks to turn the US and other Western countries into enemies, and undermines the reliability of NATO, other international organisations and the European Court of Human Rights. The gap between these perceptions is so wide that Russia's attempts to redefine the basic Euro-Atlantic values are a serious threat to the Western world.

50 I. Āboliriņš, Ģ. Kasparāns, *Vešņakovs: Krievu pasaulei nav robežu. Mēs jūs gaidām, ja paši tā izlemsiet* (Veshnyakov: The Russian world has no boundaries. You are welcomed if you decide so), "Sestdiena", February 6, 2015, available at <http://www.diena.lv/dienas-zurnali/sestdiena/vesnakovs-krievu-pasaulei-nav-robezu-mes-jus-gaidam-ja-pasi-ta-izlemsiet-14086533>, last time accessed on 10.09.2015.

51 A soft-power term, introduced by J. Nye.

52 Sun Tzu, trans. by R. D. Sawyer, *The Art of War*, MetroBooks, NY 2001, p. 193.

The methods and actions that tend to be described as a hybrid or information war are nothing new. In fact, they are an organic part of military strategy and were precisely described already 2500 years ago by Sun Tzu in "The Art of War". He wrote: "I determine the enemy's *hsing* while I have no perceptible form."<sup>53</sup> The Chinese term *hsing* can be translated as the enemy's disposition of forces, a pattern or inner system. In other words, to win the war, the military strategy advises to be "formless" and to be able to manage not to become a system in the eyes of the foe. When the foe sees and understands one's disposition of (political, military, information) forces, the inner system and its principles, one becomes predictable and vulnerable.

It is an easy task to decode and understand the basic principles which serve as the basis for Western societies, and it is that transparency that is simultaneously the greatest achievement and the most vulnerable point of democracy. Western democracies' inner system is open. The West's judicial system, mechanisms of decision making, principles of putting in action the defence principles and mechanisms are generally transparent and understandable, because they are generally known and embedded in international law. In contrary, Russia as a foe and an authoritarian state remains unpredictable. Everything can happen; even at the front door of the Kremlin. The *hsing* or disposition of forces and the inner system of Russia is closed and hardly decodable. Therefore, this incompatibility of inner systems is one of the main reasons why it is so difficult for the West to respond to Russia's strategic political communication properly.

Another reason why the West faces problems to re-balance Russia's foreign policy, is the fact that Russia has established a wide-range of self-defence mechanisms in Western Europe. These mechanisms involve so called compatriots and nets of experts. In recent months there has been a surge in local think-tanks and organisations that are generously financed by the Russian government or the Russian establishment-friendly business. Their representatives appear on the *RT* screen, in international conferences presenting a "softened" version of Russia's official policy and questioning efficiency and credibili-

53 Ibidem.

ty of EU and NATO member states. Still, the tight links that Russia maintains with some Western governments are the most dangerous.

It is evident that in some respects Western democracies face problems in defending their societies, their political and judicial systems, rules and norms of foreign policy. A considerable part of Western society still does not recognise that it is living in the middle of an information war and that it loses this war. The answer why Europe fails to address the information war adequately lies in the fact that the current struggle is about influence, not about a territory. Russia with its massive propaganda budget does not promote an alternative life model, as it was the case during the Cold War. Nowadays, Russia spreads doubt, confusion and dissatisfaction with the values and facts the Western mass media and political leaders are talking about and stand for. Yet, that propaganda cannot be defeated by counter-propaganda, as it was possible during World War II and during the Cold War period. That is because it would mean a loss of a certain part of democracy in the Western world; the mass media freedom would become the most affected. Secondly, within the context of the crisis in Ukraine, the boundaries between war and peace, and state sovereignty and invasion are blurred, which has led to information fog and information chaos.

Moreover, while some authors argue that Ukraine is far more important to Russia than to the United States, and that there is a clear asymmetry in interests,<sup>54</sup> in geographical terms the dispute is of the highest importance geopolitically for each of the parties involved. Motyl evaluates the situation very precisely: "Putin's aggression in Ukraine challenges the entire post-war security architecture, as well as the relevance of its institutions – NATO, the European Union, the OSCE and, ultimately, even the United Nations. Finally, Putin appears determined to weaken the West economically, to split it politically and to establish Russia as the hegemonic power in the continent of Europe."<sup>55</sup>

54 R. Menon, K. Marten, *Facing a Fragile Ceasefire. If the Deal Doesn't Hold, Don't Arm Ukraine*, "Foreign Affairs", February 13, 2015, available at [http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/143088/rajan-menon-and-kimberly-marten/facing-a-fragile-ceasefire?cid=nlc-foreign\\_affairs\\_this\\_week-021915-facing\\_a\\_fragile\\_ceasefire\\_5-021915&sp\\_mid=48064185&sp\\_rid=Z3VuZGEucmVpcmVAZ21haWwuY29tSo](http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/143088/rajan-menon-and-kimberly-marten/facing-a-fragile-ceasefire?cid=nlc-foreign_affairs_this_week-021915-facing_a_fragile_ceasefire_5-021915&sp_mid=48064185&sp_rid=Z3VuZGEucmVpcmVAZ21haWwuY29tSo), last time accessed on 15.02.2015.

55 A. J. Motyl, *The West Should Arm Ukraine. Here's Why – And How*, "Foreign Affairs", February 10, 2015, available at <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/143056/alexander-j-motyl/the-west-should-arm-ukraine>, last time accessed on 10.02.2015.



## Conclusions

In order to respond to Russia's strategic communication properly and to defend the societies, first, Western leaders and societies must be aware that the Western inner system of values is open and vulnerable. The West must be aware of the means and tools used in the information war and has to be ready to address a variety of new challenges and hence defend its foundational values. Second, while exposed to the propaganda threats, the Western world should not give up its core values. Democratic values in Western societies have been taken for granted. At the same time, their role in preserving peace, security and prosperity have not been appreciated enough. Third, the solution to the current situation is to become less dependent on Russia. That includes reorientation of businesses, less economic dependence, energy independence, and also independence of information.

Fourth, it would make sense to re-think the basic values in democracy for ourselves. This approach could involve the principle of self-defence or militant democracy or the idea that democracy has its own boundaries. Perhaps more importantly, it would make sense to re-state that democratic states can be regarded as an object of protection. If it is possible to indicate the occurrence of attempts to induce change in the nature and identity of state, elements of the state, the state order, the right of people to exercise the sovereign power, the chain of the democratic legitimacy, opposition, parties, independent judiciary, guaranties of human and fundamental rights, the principle of self-defence of democracy should come into force. Democratic order cannot directly prevent an anti-state or anti-democratic revolution but it could make it more difficult, in the long-term interest of the people. Also, peoples' right to resist can be expanded, preventive constitutional safeguards and unchangeable core of the democratic order developed, as well as further development of international law foreseen in the way the basic Trans-Atlantic values are better defended.

Fifth, the level of media literacy in society is of the utmost importance. Uninformed opinion masquerades as news, lines are blurred between legitimate journalism and propaganda, entertainment, self-promotion and unmediated information appears on the Internet as true and verified information. This superabundance of information has made it imperative that citizens learn to judge the reliability of news. Therefore, it is possible to argue that the illiterate of the 21<sup>st</sup>

century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn, relearn and evaluate the credibility and reliability of information. A contemporary media consumer has to be able to recognise the information, recognise the tools and to be able to analyse critically. One cannot be passive about news consumption, and media literacy is a set of skills which can be taught and learned.

It is the responsibility of politicians, experts and civil society to scatter the current information fog and chaos, and the most important challenge is to find adequate instruments how to cope with Russia's propaganda, how to find "liquid" tools against "liquid" threats, and stabilise the societies. It is of utmost importance to unite and re-build solidarity within the Euro-Atlantic community on the basis of these principles. Only in this way will it be able to respond to the external security threats and challenges and to maintain the social and political security of its people.

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