



# **RESISTING FOREIGN STATE PROPAGANDA IN THE NEW INFORMATION ENVIRONMENT: THE CASE OF THE EU, RUSSIA, AND THE EASTERN PARTNERSHIP COUNTRIES**



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## INCREASING THE RESISTANCE OF DEMOCRATIC STATES TO HOSTILE FOREIGN PROPAGANDA—WHAT IS THE RIGHT RECIPE?



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In order to discuss whether there is an effective recipe for increasing the resistance of democratic states to hostile foreign propaganda, it is important to consider the different forms that propaganda can take, the routes through which it can be channelled to its target audiences, and the purposes propaganda can serve.

This article examines the often-unappreciated route of channelling grey and black propaganda through the prism of social and religious issues in order to promote political goals. The cases of Latvia, an EU member state, and Georgia, an Eastern Partnership country, will be discussed in this article.

### 1. What is propaganda?

In Russia, a poll carried out by the Public Opinion Foundation revealed that 31% of respondents could neither provide a definition of propaganda nor their attitude towards it.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, as political scientist Aleksey Makarin (Алексей Макаркин) told the Russian daily business newspaper *Kommersant*,<sup>2</sup> Russians associate the word ‘propaganda’ with the West and with something bad, but do not realise that they are under the influence of propaganda from the Russian mass media when the information provided is consistent with their worldview.

One is likely to find a similar lack of awareness about propaganda among the general public of the EU and Eastern Partnership countries for two reasons: audiences do not tend to challenge views that affirm their own convictions and they lack of awareness of the diverse manipulative techniques which are used by propagandists.<sup>3</sup> If the issue at hand resonates with an audience’s existing beliefs or concerns, the audience will likely take an uncritical approach to consuming the information provided, regardless of the source.

We are conditioned to detect hostile foreign propaganda when looking at issues we consider important for state security and believe to be likely targets for propaganda activities. But we are often blind to less obvious propaganda attempts that may be hidden under ‘innocent’ or ‘noble’ topics with a moral flavour, or human-interest stories concerning topics that affect us all, such as fighting child abuse.

All of the reasons stated above contribute to the challenge of building resistance to hostile foreign

<sup>1</sup> <http://fom.ru/SMI-i-internet/12302>

<sup>2</sup> <http://kommersant.ru/doc/2800302>

<sup>3</sup> For some examples of manipulative techniques, see <http://www.stratcomcoe.org/manipulative-techniques-russian-information-campaign-against-ukraine>

propaganda. How can this be done without an overall awareness of what exactly it is we must resist and the various misleading forms it can take?

### **Three types of propaganda**

One should remember that propaganda can be white, grey, or black. White propaganda clearly identifies its source/author and normally presents true and factual information, albeit one-sided. White propagandists will withhold undesirable information, while promoting information that supports their cause. Practitioners of white propaganda normally employ standard public relations techniques and rely heavily on soft power in order to persuade audiences.

Grey propaganda is variously defined. Some authors state that practitioners of grey propaganda do not hide their sources; they simply avoid determining the validity of the information they spread because it serves their interests. Other authors say that for something to be called grey propaganda, the source must be obscured or unattributable, and one can only guess who is behind it by trying to analyse what particular interest is being promoted. A bold example of grey propaganda are the posters which appeared in Crimea prior to the 16 March 2014 referendum, anonymously urging voters to choose between grim 'Nazi occupation' represented by the Kyiv government or a bright future with the Russian Federation.<sup>4</sup>

Last but not least, practitioners of black propaganda falsely attribute their sources/authors, and are usually promoting a subversive goal. By creating bits of information that would cause the alleged author embarrassment, black propagandists often resort to falsified document leaks, gossip and rumours, inappropriate humour,

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-26552066>

and offensive visual symbols. For example, the stories spread by the Russian media concerning the cruel treatment and even executions of children by the Ukrainian Army in east Ukraine can be classified as black propaganda, especially since the eyewitness reports presenting this information were later proven to be false. But let's not forget that this kind of propaganda spreads like wildfire on social networks, precisely because it is made up of human-interest stories.

### **NGOs as 'agents of influence'**

Hostile foreign propaganda is often channelled into a target country through the so-called network of 'agents of influence'; NGOs can play an active role in this. An NGO established, lead-by, or mobilised by a foreign government's agent of influence becomes part of a covert operation to conceal the identity of, or permit the plausible denial of the real 'sponsor'.

As during the Cold War, when influence was exerted on target audiences through seemingly apolitical organisations and events such as youth conventions, cultural or religious societies, environmental movements and the like, today we can also observe the creation of various NGOs or movements whose goals and activities seem to have nothing to do with the politics or promotion of interests of a foreign government at first glance. However 'innocent' or 'noble' the cause, the organization promoting it may well be serving as a tool for disinformation. Subversive NGOs attack the core values of a society in order to create confusion and distrust, either in the government, between societal groups, or even between countries. Their tactics include discrediting particular individuals, political forces, or the country at large. Moreover, if such NGOs have partners among legislative decision-makers (for example, Parliamentarians), they can

introduce desired legislative changes or at least disrupt the political process.

If the 'innocent' or 'noble' cause the NGO stands for contains a human-interest story with highly emotional content, it provides an additional advantage: the mass media are likely to give it coverage. Unfortunately, those media outlets lacking professionalism and resources will do so uncritically, without verifying facts or analysing statements, let alone the people behind the NGO. Thus they unwittingly become a platform for promoting a hidden party's interests, e.g. those of a foreign and competing government.

## 2. Using social and religious issues as vehicles of influence

Social issues are convenient topics for propaganda. For example, most everyone is concerned with the well-being of children, so related topics easily draw attention and can mobilise various segments of society to action, despite their differences. Religion and morality are also convenient topics, especially in predominantly conservative societies. These topics become hot buttons when a society is facing some form of crisis or insecurity. Today, the European idea is being called into question by political actors positioning themselves as 'whistle blowers' shining a light on the perversion, decadence, or immorality allegedly enforced or supported by Western governments. Moral issues are exploited to polarize Western society around competing understandings of core European values.

### The Refugee Crisis and Propaganda

Europe has experienced considerable turmoil over the past few years, including financial austerity, the ongoing refugee crisis, and the recent terrorist attacks. For many

Europeans these upheavals have increased the feeling of instability, this creates fertile ground for populism and propaganda. A society that is facing a crisis is more susceptible to manipulation as it seeks to find a way out. By providing black and white physical or moral binary choices, propaganda peddlers stir up emotion, trivialise the issues at hand, and push their target audiences toward voluntary acceptance of the solution that works to their favour.

The refugee crisis has caused a significant outburst of propaganda. In this context the key messages have been about loosing European identity, lack of trust in governments' ability to guarantee security, and, importantly, the religious and moral issues associated with an influx of Muslims into areas where they might affect the local sense of identity. Russia has played its role in the anti-refugee propaganda campaign in Europe, the most well-known case being about the underage girl Lisa supposedly kidnapped by Muslim migrants. Apart from the notorious propaganda story spread by the Russian state-owned TV *Perviy Kanal*, it is important to remember the protest meetings organised in Berlin. The organiser was 'The International Convention of Russian Germans' which has a significant history of cooperation with far-right German political forces. As reported by Meduza.io,<sup>5</sup> during the protest 'Against Violence' (An innocent and noble slogan!) held near Angela Merkel's residence on 23 January, the chairman of this NGO accused the German police of not defending society's interests, called Merkel's government 'fascist puppets', suggested the organisation of 'international self-defence units' (deja vu from Crimea and east Ukraine), and demanded Merkel's resignation. The same NGO was also the most cited source for reports aired on Russian TV. Their posters hit

<sup>5</sup> <https://meduza.io/feature/2016/01/25/russkiy-mir-prishel-v-berlin>

key propaganda messages (1) increase the feeling of insecurity, (2) stimulate distrust in the government and law-enforcement bodies, (3) appeal to human interest:<sup>6</sup> ‘Today it’s my child—tomorrow it’s yours!’ (human-interest), ‘Our children are in danger!’ (insecurity), ‘There is no such thing as somebody else’s child!’ (human-interest), ‘We have reason to doubt the objectivity of the police!’ (distrust in government and police).

### **The cases of Latvia and Georgia**

Against a backdrop of the events in Ukraine and the refugee crisis during the past two years, both Latvia and Georgia have seen an increase in anti-European propaganda from a number of sources, including local actors, such as NGOs that successfully engage with local political forces, the mass media, and in some cases turn to religious leaders for support.

There has been a rise in NGOs that present themselves as the ‘moral guardians’ of society. Both Latvia and Georgia have ethnically diverse populations, which often disagree on their interpretations of history and on political issues. However, there are many other topics on which they hold the same or similar views; these normally concern welfare, social issues, and moral or religious issues. This is important because the propagandists who hope to manipulate these societies have recognised that success lies in their ability to unite and mobilise diverse groups for the same cause.

It is also important to consider that Latvians and Georgians tend to be conservative, which affects how a society approaches issues of morality and religion, although the people themselves do not always recognise it.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> <http://m.dw.com/ru/случай-русской-девочки-в-берлине-использовали-антиимигрантские-движения/a-19000842>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.diena.lv/sodien-laikraksta/latvijas-sabiedriba-ir-vairak-kreis-konservativa-neka-labeja-13942008>

Last but not least, the current trend toward traditionalism and protecting moral values in Latvia and Georgia has encouraged religious leaders to become more involved. This sometimes results in attempts to influence political decision-making. When it comes to a choice between Europe and Russia, it is important to remember that the idea of the Russian World (discussed in the next paragraph) is closely tied to religion, and, more importantly, to the acceptance of a ‘symbiosis’ between the secular state powers and the church. This is contrary to the principles of the democratic West where church and state are clearly separated; religious leaders should not influence a democratically elected government.

### **The choice between Europe and Russia**

Although at first glance the increase of anti-European propaganda has nothing to do with promoting Russian interests in Latvia and Georgia, it has a more dangerous dimension.

The choice between Europe and Russia is not necessarily based on economic choices, or military and political alliances.<sup>8</sup> It starts with identity. Identity is closely linked to values and beliefs—the prism through which we perceive the world around us. In the case of Russia this prism is defined through the notion of the Russian World. As O. Lutsevych writes: ‘Russia wanted an ideological tool of its own to counter the Western narrative of democracy promotion. Thus the concept of the Russian World became an operational matrix for building up Russian legitimacy and influence in the region, and a key framework for its proxy groups. The current narrative of the Russian World encompasses language, culture, history, shared heritage, economic links, religion

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<sup>8</sup> In the case of Georgia, between the Moscow-lead Eurasian Economic Union and the EU

and conservative values.<sup>9</sup> In the context of the current discussion, the key words here are religion and conservatism.

Already in 2013, at the Valdai meeting, President Putin said: ‘We can see how many of the Euro-Atlantic countries are actually rejecting their roots, including the Christian values that constitute the basis of Western civilisation. They are denying moral principles and all traditional identities: national, cultural, religious and even sexual. They are implementing policies that equate large families with same-sex partnerships, belief in God with the belief in Satan. The excesses of political correctness have reached the point where people are seriously talking about registering political parties whose aim is to promote paedophilia.’<sup>10</sup> Since Russia cannot compete with the West on a Global scale in terms of foreign policy influence, military strength, or economic development, recent examples show that pro-Russian sentiment is being cultivated through a different prism—through social and religious issues, appeals to morality, and to saving the future of our children/for human kind. In the current circumstances, when some segments of European society feel that their way of life is being threatened by an outside force (such as terrorists or migrants) and their governments are unable to fully protect their interests, appeals to moral values—the cornerstone of a decent life—can prove extremely effective.

## The case of Latvia

During the past few years pro-family, pro-church, children’s rights activists, and other similarly minded NGOs

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/files/chathamhouse/publications/research/2016-04-14-agents-russian-world-lutsevych.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/19243>

have become increasingly vocal in Latvia. At first glance one might consider this to be a healthy expression of democracy. However, the Latvian investigative journalism project Re:Baltica offers a different perspective. Re:Baltica has investigated Russian financial support for local NGOs that defend Russian policies in Latvia.<sup>11</sup> Of course, proving direct links can be difficult, but the network of people involved in supporting various initiatives is often the same and closely linked to activists and politicians who openly support Putin’s foreign policy goals.

Whilst fighting for their ‘noble’ causes, these organisations also work to achieve three other important objectives:

- to discredit democracy in the Baltic States by supporting the introduction of backward or undemocratic policies (e.g. in Latvia an amendment to the law on school materials was proposed, introducing censorship under the veil of virtue and morality)
- to create a crisis in values by promoting the idea that European values are detrimental to the development of a healthy society
- to cause a rift between Latvian society and its historic European allies, such as Scandinavia and Germany, by spreading black propaganda about those countries.<sup>12</sup>

Known pro-Kremlin activists, who previously have not shown concern for the issues they now are championing, have founded some of these NGOs. For instance, the ‘Let’s Protect Our Children’ Facebook page contains biased anti-EU, anti-American, anti-Ukrainian, and anti-Latvian content based on pro-Kremlin sources or

<sup>11</sup> [http://www.rebaltica.lv/en/investigations/money\\_from\\_russia/a/1257/kremlins\\_millions.html](http://www.rebaltica.lv/en/investigations/money_from_russia/a/1257/kremlins_millions.html)

<sup>12</sup> For more insight see the investigation by Re:Baltica on the smear campaign against Norway: [http://www.rebaltica.lv/en/investigations/russia\\_and\\_family\\_values/a/1297/putin\\_s\\_children.html](http://www.rebaltica.lv/en/investigations/russia_and_family_values/a/1297/putin_s_children.html)

sources that are unverifiable.<sup>13</sup> One of the recent posts claims that Ukraine is due to legalise the adoption of children by pederasts. The source quoted is the webpage of late author Oles Buzina. Buzina openly supported the idea of the Russian World, the federalisation of Ukraine, and Russian as the second official language in Ukraine; he claimed that Ukrainians are destroying Russian culture and affirmed his dislike of the Orange Revolution.<sup>14</sup> Vadim Gilis, one of the founders of this NGO, is the author of a draft law on the autonomous status to the Latvian border region Latgale where many Russians live.<sup>15</sup> The name of the real leader of the organisation, former National Bolshevik leader Vladimir Linderman, is not found in the organisation's documents. He explained to Re:Baltica that this was a conscious decision, so there wouldn't be problems with registering the organisation.<sup>16</sup> Linderman, a Latvian non-citizen, organised a failed referendum on Russian as a second official language in Latvia. He is often seen as a proxy for Russia by the Latvian authorities. 'Let's Protect Our Children' claims that people who support their anti-LGTB initiatives, namely parents of 'traditional families', are being persecuted by the Latvian juvenile justice system.

The critique of the juvenile justice system in Latvia has been particularly prevalent as of late, including accusations of an illegal trade in children to the West. For example, Re:Baltica reports that pro-Russian activist Alexander Gaponenko, who had previously specialised in discrimination against non-citizens, the rights of Russian-speakers in Latvia, and the fight against 'resurgent

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/norma.tradicija>

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.buzina.org/about-avtor.html>

<sup>15</sup> [http://imhoclub.lv/ru/material/zakon\\_ob\\_osobom\\_pravovom\\_statuse\\_latgalii](http://imhoclub.lv/ru/material/zakon_ob_osobom_pravovom_statuse_latgalii)

<sup>16</sup> [http://www.rebaltica.lv/en/investigations/russia\\_and\\_family\\_values/a/1297/the\\_rise\\_of\\_latvias\\_moral\\_guardians.html](http://www.rebaltica.lv/en/investigations/russia_and_family_values/a/1297/the_rise_of_latvias_moral_guardians.html)

fascism', has broadened his focus to include the juvenile justice system.<sup>17</sup> He recently finished a documentary on the topic, claiming that the problem has 'a European dimension', and that there is 'an international power struggle for the reduction of humans on Earth'. Gaponenko refused to say who finances him. He was also the one who called for a Maidan in Riga—an event opposing the pro-European EuroMaidan movement in Kyiv—to 'show what local Russians are capable of'.<sup>18</sup> The Security Police of Latvia forbade the event.

Why have so many pro-Kremlin activists simultaneously begun focusing on child protection, juvenile justice, and Christian morality? Clearly there is a pattern. It is an attempt to mobilise society beyond ethnic and other lines of division, with the ultimate goal to undermine the European idea and label it as dangerous for the future development of Latvia.

## The case of Georgia

A very recent example of the promotion of Moscow's interests in Georgia, which has mostly gone undetected, was the 10th World Congress of Families (WCF) that took place in Tbilisi in May. The chairman of the Georgian committee of the WCF, Levan Vasadze, said at the event on 16 May that the 'Western Project' in Georgia has turned out to be a flop, and he calls for Western institutions to stop meddling in Georgia's internal matters and for Georgia to block sources financing the promotion of Western liberalism.<sup>19</sup> He also said, 'As one of the oldest Christian nations on earth, we think this

<sup>17</sup> [http://www.rebaltica.lv/en/investigations/russia\\_and\\_family\\_values/a/1297/putin's\\_children.html](http://www.rebaltica.lv/en/investigations/russia_and_family_values/a/1297/putin's_children.html)

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.delfi.lv/news/national/politics/gaponenko-riga-piesaka-vietejo-maidanu.d?id=44413605>

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.ipress.ge/new/32318-levan-vasadze-saqartveloshi-dasavlu-ri-proeqti-daemkho>

[WCF] will be a refreshing opportunity for me and my fellow Georgians to meet Westerners, unlike those sent to Tbilisi by George Soros, who affirm human rights for all persons from conception to natural death, but also defend the Truth, Beauty, and Goodness found in the Natural Family as the fundamental and only sustainable unit of society'.<sup>20</sup> According to Larry Jacobs, Managing Director of WCF, 'despite the lies and attacks from the sexual radicals and neo-liberal elites, WCF leaders and Georgians together will show that true equality, fairness, diversity, justice and authentic freedom can only arise from God-centred and family-centred civilizations'.<sup>21</sup> Such statements are clearly biased towards undermining the European idea and democratic values, but are in line with a conservative and Orthodox-centred worldview.

According to the report by the Human Rights Campaign Foundation,<sup>22</sup> the organisation has been most active in Russia where billionaire oligarchs and extremist members of the Russian Orthodox Church support the group, although it is registered in the United States. It works closely with members of the Russian Duma and Putin's regime, and has encouraged the passage of anti-LGBT laws in Russia, most notably the 2013 ban on 'gay propaganda'. WCF's backers include Russian officials who were sanctioned by the United States government following Russia's annexation of Crimea. Indeed, WCF staff members continued to praise Putin's actions in Ukraine after the Russian incursion. WCF spokesman Don Feder continued to defend Putin, calling him 'a power player who cares more about Russia's national interests, and

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.christiannewswire.com/news/37076974.html>

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> <http://hrc-assets.s3-website-us-east-1.amazonaws.com/files/assets/resources/WorldCongressOfFamilies.pdf>

Russian minorities in his "near abroad", than in that mythical force known as world opinion'.<sup>23</sup>

In December 2014, the organization Shaltai Boltai published a collection of leaked emails between WCF and senior conservative Russian officials such as Konstantin Malofeev and Alexey Komov (WCF's Russian representative), some of whom are tied to the Ukraine separatists.<sup>24</sup> According to BuzzFeed, the emails show WCF working together with Russians 'to promote Russia's geopolitical agenda'.<sup>25</sup>

In this regard, Konstantin Malofeev is a particularly interesting figure. He is the founder of the investment firm Marshall Capital, which at one point was the largest minority shareholder in the Russian telephone company Rostelecom. Marshall Capital supports the Saint Basil the Great Charitable Foundation, which Malofeev personally established in 2007. This foundation finances the WCF.

Malofeev was placed on the European Union's sanctions list on 30 July 2014 for his role in supporting the armed separatist movements in Ukraine and was added to Canada's sanctions list a month later.<sup>26</sup> The *Financial Times* reported Malofeev has emerged as a key figure linking pro-Russian forces on the ground in Ukraine (including direct ties with Alexander Borodai, the PM of the self-declared Donetsk People's Republic, and Igor Girkin, aka Strelkov, the commander of pro-Russian military operations in the east of Ukraine) and the political

<sup>23</sup> [http://www.americanthinker.com/2014/03/putin\\_doesnt\\_threaten\\_our\\_national\\_security\\_obama\\_does.html](http://www.americanthinker.com/2014/03/putin_doesnt_threaten_our_national_security_obama_does.html)

<sup>24</sup> [https://www.buzzfeed.com/lesterfeder/emails-show-pro-family-activists-feeding-contacts-to-russian?utm\\_term=.hg5yrnqbR#.uxy9d5Ro8](https://www.buzzfeed.com/lesterfeder/emails-show-pro-family-activists-feeding-contacts-to-russian?utm_term=.hg5yrnqbR#.uxy9d5Ro8)

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.buzzfeed.com/lesterfeder/emails-show-pro-family-activists-feeding-contacts-to-russian#.qtwwqN26wl>

<sup>26</sup> <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:L:2014:226:-FULL&from=EN#page25>

establishment in Moscow.<sup>27</sup> In addition, he has repeatedly stated that he wishes to see the Russian Empire re-established. According to *Bloomberg*, Malofeev is quoted as saying: 'I'm sorry for my lack of political correctness, but Ukraine is part of Russia. I can't consider the Ukrainian people as non-Russian.'<sup>28</sup> Konstantin Zatulin, a former lawmaker in the ruling United Russia party who was an official observer during Crimea's referendum on joining Russia, said by phone to *Bloomberg* that Malofeev has given 'some help' to the rebels in Donetsk, without providing details.

Clearly, Malofeev is closely tied with promoting President Putin's interests and does not waste words or money on projects that do not bring Russia closer to the 'restoration of the Empire'. So what interest does he have in sponsoring WCF? Clearly, it is believed that the WCF is helpful to the current regime in Russia for exerting its influence in the 'near abroad' like Georgia, and in strengthening the position of the Russian World in this country under the slogan of support to Christian values which is a sensitive topic for most of the Georgian society.<sup>29</sup>

### 3. What can be the recipe?

**Building resistance to hostile propaganda must start with a serious effort to raise awareness** among senior level decision-makers—members of Cabinet and Parliament, and journalists, focusing on the following issues:

- understanding and recognising the different types and techniques of propaganda
- learning about the various channels of spreading propaganda

<sup>27</sup> <https://next.ft.com/content/84481538-1103-11e4-94f3-00144feabdc0>

<sup>28</sup> <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2014-06-15/putin-s-soros-dreams-of-empire-as-allies-wage-ukraine-revolt>

<sup>29</sup> <http://georgiatoday.ge/news/3614/Poll-Shows-Georgians-Reject-Parties-Critical-of-Church,-Traditional-Values>

- grasping the variety of ways how hostile foreign propaganda may target the cornerstones of democratic systems, including through seemingly 'innocent' and 'morally right' topics like social issues and religion.

Such awareness raising should be followed by a social advertising campaign for the general public. It does not necessarily have to give real-life examples of hostile foreign propaganda, but must clearly explain the propaganda techniques against the background of attempts to re-define or disfigure European values. That would also serve as a myth-busting activity.

**The second step** could be support and encouragement for investigative activities (e.g. Re:Baltica in the Latvian case) to track and expose different agents of influence working to spread hostile foreign propaganda that contradicts the principles of democratic society and the European idea. It is important to note that all such investigations should be presented in a language and manner that is accessible and interesting to society at large, rather than for 'elite' circles, as it still regrettably the case more often than not.

**The third step** could be increased funding for responsible media regulators to monitor media content activities to prevent different actors from spreading disinformation. Due to lack of resources, current monitoring activities seems sporadic and can be interpreted as politically motivated, rather than corresponding to legal requirements. This should go hand-in-hand with a significant public diplomacy effort to explain to the allies the current problem and the legal, democratic means of dealing with it.

**The fourth step** could be ensuring the exposure of all segments of society to information sources of European origin by making them more widely accessible than Russian state-controlled media sources. That would also

include either increased knowledge of foreign languages among certain audiences, or increased allocation of resources for translation, since lack of language knowledge prevents certain segments of society from accessing or crosschecking information.

**Last but not least**, more effective strategic communication on the behalf of the EU would be of significant value. In the case of Georgia, there is a clear sense of fatigue from Euro-Atlantic integration due to the lack of tangible deliverables with immediate benefits for the society. As in Latvia, there is dissonance between the current European narrative, weakened due to political and economic turbulence, and the conservative worldview of a society looking for a sense of stability and safety.