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## **RUSSIAN INFORMATIONAL AND PROPAGANDA CAMPAIGN AGAINST UKRAINE PRIOR TO THE EUROMAIDAN (2013-2014): DENYING SOVEREIGNTY**

### **Introduction**

Since the misfortunate Council of Pereyaslav (1654) relationships between Ukraine, Ukrainian lands and Russia have been shaped by the acute sense of competition and both tacit and apparent rejection of Ukrainian state-building aspirations/capabilities from the side of Moscow. Incidentally, these sentiments have been shared by both ruling elites and wide layers of ordinary Russians whose vision and perception of Ukraine have been formed from above due to the deliberately created image.

By virtue of history Ukraine found itself to be between two centers of power (Europe and Russia), which pre-determined its frequent mission of a battle ground between ambitious and powerful neighbors. On the other hand, the eastern neighbor as a classical example of the “land power” has always considered Ukraine as a natural bulwark against technologically more advanced West, which stipulated general trajectory of behavior of Russia towards Ukraine. A simple formula that describes patterns of relations between Russia and Ukraine could be summed up in the following manner: when Moscow accumulates sufficient resources and capabilities it aspires to project (and proliferate) its influence onto the neighboring territories, which means increasing role of Ukraine in geopolitical calculations of the eastern neighbor.

In addition to economic and military tools of pressure, Russian side also adopted and extensively employed ideological instruments meant to justify Russian conduct towards Ukraine. Central notion that has been engrained in Russian behavior towards Ukraine since Modern times is the status of the latter being the “younger brother” that

cannot effectively handle both internal and external affairs without the former. Therefore, the main argument extensively used by Russian propaganda boils down to simple downgrading of historical mission of Ukraine as a state, its state-building capabilities, inferiority of its culture as well as absence of its own history and traditions. Simultaneously the meaning of Russia as an indispensable element binding Slavic nations of Central and Eastern Europe has been artificially and purposefully inflated significantly beyond actual scopes. Interestingly enough, yet the majority of debates in Russian history between proponents of various civilization paths continually referred to the states of Central and Eastern Europe as pivotal region with Ukraine and Poland occupying central places in it. Frequently, such reflections were based on crude expansionism and aggressive political moves (such as the notorious Molotov – Ribbentrop Pact of August 1939 or the Russian secession of the Crimean Peninsula in the year 2014) and resulted in unlawful re-drawings of European political map and grave security challenges.

Justifying its involvement in affairs of post-Soviet states and the former Socialist Camp Moscow has come up with so-called “Russian World” ideological doctrine – loose, highly nationalist and extremely aggressive concept that envisages employing broad range of tools facilitating Russian destructive involvement in the former Communist countries, with special emphasis on the Ukraine and the Baltic States („Русский мир”, бессмысленный и беспощадный). In this juncture, it ought to be mentioned that tools of propaganda minted by Russian ideologists were based on extensive using of ethnic Russian minorities especially susceptible to the Kremlin-inspired propaganda campaigns.

On numerous occasions ideological tools elaborated by Moscow have led internal conflicts and increasing international tensions. However, the most vividly seen outcome of Russian ideological and propaganda campaigns came about with the outbreak of the Euromaidan (2013-2014) events which spurred anti-democratic hysteria in certain parts of Ukraine in the regions that had been the main “customers” of Russian propaganda since the breakdown of USSR. Therefore, it would be adequate to ascertain that Russian information and propaganda campaigns encroach far beyond purely ideological domain and constitute a serious challenge for regional peace and security.

This paper aims to identify the main steps taken by the Russian side in the area of propaganda in dealing with Ukraine and its multicultural population up until the Euro-maidan events (2013-2014).

## Russian perception of itself and the role of Ukraine

Leo Trotsky who claimed that the Soviet authorities could not successfully carry on without Ukraine was absolutely right: it was the decision of Kiev to proclaim independence and reject membership in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) that precipitated actual disintegration of the Soviet Union (the former) and for certain period of time cooled down neo-Soviet sentiments still alive within certain part of Russian ruling elites (Троцкий).

The role of Ukraine for Russia has always been instrumental in several key domains. First, being rich in natural resources and wielding powerful industrial capabilities Ukraine played the role of economic muscle during both the Tsarist Empire and the Soviet Union. Secondly, predominantly Slavic Orthodox population of Ukraine always ensured Eurasian essence of Russia (Brzezinski 1998), which seems to be relevant especially after the breakdown of the USSR and increasing share of Muslim population in the Russian Federation (Sukhankin 2014). And finally, Ukrainians and those who had made their political careers in the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic (Ukrainian SSR) managed to occupy key positions in the Soviet state apparatus (Haran 1995).

Combined, these historical facts implied that the ultimate collapse of the USSR (even though perceived as final triumph of liberal democracy worldwide) did not automatically mean that Moscow would easily accept and recognize undisputed Ukrainian sovereignty. On the other hand, Ukraine was the only Soviet republic where the referendum regarding secession from the USSR actually took place (which incidentally, was mandatory condition of the law stipulating this procedure), which de-jure made Ukraine the most lawful among other newly emerged state of the former Soviet Union that complied with all norms and legal requirements stipulated by the Soviet law (*Закон СССР от 3 апреля 1990 года № 1409-1 «О порядке решения вопросов, связанных с выходом союзной республики из СССР»*).

Compliance with all legal requirements as well as peaceful transition of power in Ukraine constituted a visible ideological challenge for the new Russian elites that employed measures beyond Constitutional while acquiring power. Therefore, it would be adequate to establish that due to political, historical and ideological reasons the notion of Ukraine gaining independence was not entirely accepted by Moscow. In effect, the essence of relations between Ukraine and the Russian Federation since the year 1991 has been marked by explicit Russian unwillingness to recognize Ukraine as a fully independent sovereign state that has aspirations and foreign policy priorities of its own.

Within the period 1991-2000 the Kremlin could not directly influence Ukraine the way it would have aspired. The wave of separatism, brink of economic collapse and changing political paradigms significantly curtailed Russian abilities in the domain of foreign policy. Nevertheless, tracing practical steps conducted by the Kremlin in the post-Soviet space (primarily, its tacit and open involvement in regional military conflicts), Moscow had never concealed its actual goals in respect to the former clients. In this regard it needs to be understood that total forfeiture of Ukraine was a luxury that Russia could not possibly afford, especially given the fact that since the year 1999 owing to the improving economic conditions (primarily stipulated by skyrocketing price of energy resources) and renaissance in the domain of military capabilities Russian ruling elites assumed much more assertive stance on external relations. Inception of the second Chechen war (that de-facto eliminated humiliating provisions of the Khasavyurt Accord) and attainment of political stability provided Russian ruling elites with an opportunity to divert greater resources for achieving specific goals in the domain of foreign policy. Similarly, Moscow indicated profound interest in changing its international role in the post-Cold War system of international relations in favor of multi polar world, with Russia constituting an independent and self-sufficient unit in this new architecture. These events did to a substantial degree change both internal and external self/perception of the Russian Federation and its role on the Eurasian continent.

In Ukraine however, events took very different course of development: in addition to economic predicaments the state was submerged under the wave of political shocks. So-called “multivector” foreign policy (Kuzio 2005) pursued by President Leonid Kuchma turned out to be incoherent, ill-calculated oscillation mixed with a fair share of political self-escapism. By the beginning of early 2000th Ukraine turned into the byword of corruption, larceny and instability – this was reflected by both internal instability (“Ukraine without Kuchma” Maidan) and international schism.

In its post-Soviet relations with Kiev the Kremlin recognized that the model of polity formed in Ukraine (so-called “crony capitalism”, Matuszczak 2012) was incapable of taking firm stance in dealing with the Russian Federation. Within the period 1991-2013 in dialogue with the Russian Federation Ukrainian political leadership tended to opt for temporary benefits that kept the existing model intact. Indecisiveness of Ukrainian political elites encouraged Russian political and intellectual establishment to act more aggressively while pursuing specific goals in regard of Ukraine. In fact, this state of affairs spurred Moscow to go ahead with more decisive projects of Eurasian integration (openly neo-Imperialist approaches in the vein of the “sphere-of-influence”

mode of thinking), where Ukraine was supposed to be unconditionally re-incorporated into the Russian orbit of influence.

Simultaneously, wide layers of Russian society (due to the outstanding role of the state-sponsored mass media) were convinced that post-Soviet Ukraine did not acquire necessary attributes pertaining to a sovereign state: it was depicted as an artificial formation torn apart by cultural, historical and linguistic differences and acute economic disparity between its regions. Being historically susceptible to ideas dispatched and transmitted into broad masses by official media, majority of Russians willingly accepted aforementioned ideas.

Similarly, by committing fatal blunder (sticking to “path dependency” rather than “path changing” course of development) Ukrainian political leadership did not only facilitate efforts of Russian propaganda leveled at domestic audience, yet also downgraded their own legitimacy in the eyes of Ukrainians as well. The impact of Russian propaganda could have been partly neutralized if Ukrainian elites had assumed different stance on dependence on Russia as a potential major security challenge (with Moscow-promoted information propaganda being one of the most essential tools). For instance, in this regard examples of the Baltic States and Poland could have been taken into greater consideration. Even though decisive rejection of the Communist past resulted in open confrontations with the Kremlin that tried to use economic, political and ethno-cultural (via significant Russian minority residing in the Baltic States) tools. Nonetheless, having firmly pursued chosen path of development, these states successfully passed onerous test and managed to join democratic community of nations. Unfortunately, Ukraine’s post-Soviet path drastically diverged from the above-mentioned example.

Behavior patterns of the Kremlin towards Ukraine after the year 1991 have been dominated by three major themes:

- Prevention of the ultimate breakdown of ethno-cultural and linguistic bond between two states.
- Preserving in Ukraine largely inefficient economic model based on profligate consumption of energy resources.
- Proliferation and maintaining of the “myth-build” identity in Ukrainian South-east as a source of implied conflict between Ukrainian regions (via nourishing mutual grievances).

Broadly speaking, Russian elites dismissed ideas that the Post-Soviet states (especially Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus) should undergo modernization similar to Poland and

the Baltic States (which can only be conducted with direct participation of the EuroAtlantic structures and frameworks), which is deemed as a direct security challenge for Russian regional ambitions. With NATO taking a firmer stance of energy security matters (at the 2008 Bucharest Summit) and the EU searching for alternative sources of energy supplies these concerns transcended from theoretical into practical domain. Moreover, global financial crisis that revealed numerous weaknesses of Russian economic model and changing internal political environment resulted in significant drop in popularity of the Russian ruling elites the apex of which came about in the year 2011. Unfavorable internal and external conditions induced Russian elites to fall back on the media that has had deep historical roots – aggressive propaganda aimed to create the image of enemy to divert public wrath into the “right” direction and explicitly spear-headed against potential enemies.

Leaving aside other targets chosen by Russian side, this paper is to discuss the case of Ukraine that was submerged under the wave discriminative and highly aggressive propaganda evolving into the genuine crusade organized by the Kremlin and carried out by the Russian mass media, prominent politicians, influential intellectuals and most well-known representatives of cultural community.

### Historical alliance between nationalism and propaganda in Russia: creating the image of enemy

In his famous maxim stating that humankind has always been earning for demons and could not live without gods C.G. Jung was able to capture one of the most essential mechanisms of how the image of enemy has been created in Russia. Indeed, Russian historical experience suggests that numerous grievances, phobias and failures have always been associated with and blamed for activities of “third parties” (so-called “fifth column”). It would also be adequate to mention that the image of an enemy itself has undergone significant transformation and was identified with different forces at changing historical interims. For instance, in the Tsarist Russia the aforementioned image was mostly associated with internal forces – revolutionaries that aspired to change the course of historical development of the Empire via radical transformation of the existing political architecture. Since many revolutionaries belonged to ethnic minorities (primarily due to the xenophobic and ethnically motivated policies of the ruling elites) which led to the fact that the “enemy” was tainted in respective national colors.

The Soviet propaganda introduced notions of both internal and external enemies. Incidentally, external dimension of the Soviet propaganda came into play as early as the year 1919 – it was primarily related to the acute necessity of mobilization of the population during the civil war and introducing the notion of the Soviet Russia being strangled by international intervention led by capitalist countries. Interestingly enough, yet the Soviet authorities extensively relied on the Soviet intelligentsia as a tool of propaganda. For instance, such prominent Soviet intellectuals as Dmitry Moor, Vladimir Mayakovsky, Kazimir Malevich and many others were actively engaged in the work of the first outlet of the Soviet propaganda – “Okna satiry ROSTA”/“Windows of the satire ROSTA” (Лебедев 1949). During first decade of the Soviet power image of the external enemy received definite shape: the Great Britain, France, the Baltic States, Poland and Rumania were considered to be the most anti-Soviet countries of Europe (Дукельский, Юрнев). The Second World War and ensued Cold War incurred visible changes. From summer 1946 the main external foe acquired conspicuous Stars & Stripes colors peculiarly coupled with “brown” colors<sup>1</sup>. Internal enemies were so-called “cosmopolitans” who were accused of being the “fifth column”, “agents of the West” and explicitly unpatriotic force inherently adverse to the Soviet people.

However, by the end of 1980s and in the immediate aftermath of the collapse of the USSR the image of enemy lost its clear form primarily due to the fact that the world-weary post-Soviet society was craving for better living conditions and at the time did not approve previous regime along with its ideological dogmas. From other prospective, the Kremlin was unable to provide adequate resources for intensive and sophisticated propaganda being torn apart between conflicting trajectories for further development of the Russian Federation. Nonetheless, the actual absence of enemy inevitably meant that the problems at hand and failures that accompanied arduous transformation of the Russian society was to be associated with own deficiencies and miscalculations committed by Russian ruling elites.

Therefore, it seemed easier for Russian establishment to opt for re-channeling public dissatisfaction in different direction via reviving old grievances and resurrection of phobias that had for a long time constituted the essence of the mass consciousness of the Russian society. Naturally, two main targets that would easily inflame “justified” negative reaction from the side of the Russian population were the internal enemies (such as representatives of ethnic minorities – which was especially evident due to the outbreak

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<sup>1</sup> For more information see: <http://psyfactor.org/lib/fateev2.htm>.

of separatism in Russia and the First Chechen War) and external enemies whose diapason now included not only the abstract “West” yet also certain countries of the post-Soviet area that were blamed for surging nationalism, Russophobia and the breakdown of the Soviet Union.

On numerous occasions has historical experience proven the point that the Russian state is susceptible to internal malaises to a significantly much greater extent than to external dangers. If the former activities have tended to expose malignant processes concealed under the image of prosperity and alleged might, the latter will produce consolidative and reconciliatory effect not only between various groups within Russian society, yet between the “people” and the “power” as well. Therefore, the image of external enemy has been endeared not only by the Soviet political leadership, yet also preserved and carefully cultivated in the post-Soviet Russia (particularly under President Vladimir Putin). New Russian President produced enormous effort in reanimating of the Soviet-style propaganda via implementation of the new “Information Security Doctrine” (Доктрина Информационной Безопасности Российской Федерации, 2000).

By the year 2003 the “axis of enemies” had received clear identification. The broad notion defined as the “West” was blamed for unwillingness to recognize “Russia raising from its knees” (in effect, trying to re-take its hold in the former Soviet Union) and thwarting the process of transformation of Russia into an independent pole of international relations. This turn was stipulated not solely by involvement of the NATO in the war in the former Yugoslavia and invasion of Iraq (2003) – most certainly, these were milestones that did facilitate further souring relations between Russia and the West. However, the ultimate phase when image of an enemy acquired completed forms came about with a series of color revolutions: the Revolution of Roses in Georgia (2003) and the Orange Revolution in Ukraine (2004-2005). Moscow construed these events as an explicit attempt of the West to encroach upon the “red flags” set up by the Kremlin and a direct threat to existing political regime in Russia as well. Decision of the Kremlin to establish channel Russia Today (December 2005) that was to broadcast in English, Arabic and Spanish had a clear goal of attracting international audience.

### Sources of the Ukrainophobia in Russian public consciousness

Prior to start reflections on contemporary stage of anti-Ukrainian propaganda campaigns initiated by Russian mass media, it would be prudent to briefly discuss historical



roots and circumstances of Ukrainophobia that emerged and developed in Russian society. In this regard, we will be primarily referring to the conceptual Ukrainophobia as a phenomenon (Shkandrij 2001) that denies vital traits related to Ukraine (such as statehood, culture, separate identity and linguistic particularities pertaining to Ukrainian nation). It ought to be underscored that conceptual denial of Ukrainian nation has had significant historical background and goes back to Modern History.

Soviet/Russian historian Borys Floria pointed out that ethnic slur applicable to Ukrainians started to be used in official Russian correspondence as early as the year 1620 (Флоря 1999, p. 59). The same pattern of defining of Ukrainians was officially introduced in the dictionary of Polikarpov in the year 1704. One of the main purposes that stipulated emergence and extensive use of ethnic slur was an attempt to create a distinction between Ukrainians and Russians with the former being clearly inferior to the latter. This also found its reflection in the way Russians (“velikoross”) and Ukrainians (“maloross”) were identified in Russian historiography – whereby suggesting that Ukrainians were merely a branch pertaining to Russians as an ethnic group (Kostomarov 1906, p. 25).

Anti-Ukrainian sentiments in Russian society received new impetus during the Great Northern War (1700-1721) when the name of Hetman Ivan Mazepa (“mazepintsy” – followers of the Hetman) who defected Russian troops and started to collaborate with the Swedes believing that this was Ukrainian road for independence, became Russian byword for treason and treachery. Even though Russian public is not fully aware of genuine reasons of the war as well as traitorous conduct of the Russian side prior to the outbreak of hostilities, which are usually muted.

The First World War and ensued events put forth Symon Petilura as a staunch anti-Soviet Russia Ukrainian figure, whose supporters were called “petileurovtsy” (Капелер 1997, p. 142), whereas the Second World War provided Russian dictionary of anti-Ukrainian lexicon with a notion “Banderovtsy” (initially used to define followers of Stepan Banreda) which came to be widely employed in regard to population of Western Ukraine (even for ethnically Russians living in this part of Ukraine) as well as those Ukrainians who use Ukrainian language on the daily basis. Should one take closer look at the aforementioned tendency it becomes clear that the very idea of independent Ukraine was inconceivable for Russian ruling and intellectual elites and was strongly resented. On the lower level (wide masses of ordinary Russians) extensive use of ethnic slur and primitive propaganda were primarily employed as a means to vilify the image of Ukraine/Ukrainians, whereby justifying the thesis that independent Ukraine would

be a direct rival of Russia. In this context, it would be adequate to sum up historical phobias persevering among Russians by quoting notorious Russian statesman, xenophobe and Ukrainophobe Konstantin Zatulin, who claimed that independent Ukraine is “not a brotherly country, yet a product of Bandera ideology, whereas Banderovets is not a brother to Russian (Лановенко 2000, p. 93).

In this context it would also be relevant to suggest that Ukrainophobia as a distinctive and historically enduring phenomenon of Russian outlook is deeply engrained in the Russian mass consciousness also due to Kiev Rus’ and its historical legacy. Therefore, from Russian prospective Ukrainians are not entitled to have separate identity and pursue state-building aspirations neither from historical nor cultural points of view. That is why at times when Ukrainian aspirations in these domain have been on the surge Russia construed these activities as being anti-Russian and representing serious security challenge for Moscow.

### The Orange Revolution and the outbreak of anti-Ukrainian hysteria in Russia

Events in Ukraine within November 2004-January 2005 (the Orange Revolution) had a crucial meaning for the Russian Federation: not only was it understood as an explicit attempt of the third parties to openly encroach upon Russian “sphere of influence”, it also had profound impact on perception of relations between the “power” and the “people” within ruling and intellectual elites in Russia. Even a theoretical possibility of democratic transformations in Ukraine (as a post-Soviet country) was construed as a direct threat to Russian state architecture and the entire system of relations in the Russian Federation.

Therefore, for the Kremlin it was vital to elaborate methods and tactics capable of discriminating the very idea of the Orange Revolution in the light favorable to the Kremlin. For this purpose, events in Ukraine were being painted in the colors of “anti- governmental revolt” and “ultra nationalist coup” guided by visible anti-Russian sentiments. For this purpose representatives of ultra nationalist and openly xenophobic forces within Russian intellectual and political elites (masking their actions under the habit of patriotism) were deployed. Russian mass media launched a propagandist campaign whose leitmotif boiled down to the notion that Ukraine had come to the brink of collapse and disintegration. Widely referring to statements purposefully dispatched by the most reactionary and centrifugal forces within Ukraine (primarily concentrated in Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts and the Republic of Crimea) the Kremlin-controlled

media (it would not be an exaggeration to suggest that by the year 2005 the absolute majority of Russian mass media had been subordinated to the Kremlin) voiced approaching collapse of Ukraine.

Notwithstanding the fact that the “Orange Camp” turned out to be an ad hoc alliance and structural reforms would be left out of the agenda, the anti-Ukrainian sentiments did not evaporate from Russian public consciousness. Empirical evidences suggested that they grew and took even greater hold of Russian public mass consciousness. According to the Levada Center within the period 2004-2008 the overall share of Russians whose attitude to Ukraine as a state was negative increased from 37% to 62%, which was primarily stipulated by aggressive informational campaigns that were carried out by Russian mass media against Ukraine (*Обережно, українофобія!*). For those who initiated anti-Ukrainian hysteria it was essential to convince broad layers of Russian society that stability (especially in terms of ruling elites) was much more a precious commodity than quasi-democracy imposed by external forces. On the other hand, Russian media praised powerful state (with executive power enjoying clear superiority) as well as collective standing above individual.

Speaking about relations and perception of each other within mentioned historical interim a very interesting trajectory could be ascertained. In Ukraine where the level of tolerance within society has been historically significantly much higher than in authoritarian and prone towards centralization Russia, both Russia (as a state) and Russians (as a nation) were perceived in a very positive light. In a survey conducted by the Kiev International Institute of Sociology in April 2008 positive attitude towards Russia expressed 88% of respondents whereas mere 6,8% described their feelings as negative<sup>2</sup>.

Within the period 2004-2010 the most notorious state-sponsored anti-Ukrainian informational outlet was the “Odnako” (“However”) TV programme anchored Mikhail Leontyev. Full of spite and negative attitude to the West, it was Ukraine that would receive the greatest share of critique. The focal point of the show based on a Soviet-style propaganda aimed at ordinary Russians, who were offered uncontested view on the international affairs, boiled down to the theory of international conspiracy against Russia, where certain post-Soviet states (naturally, Georgia and Ukraine) practically bereaved of sovereignty simply performed the role of anti-Russian agents. Particularly aggressive and intolerant stance the programme took within the period 2006-2009 that coincided with two gas wars between Russia and Ukraine and inception of the global financial crisis. Russian public was offered a clear image of an enemy that was comprised

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<sup>2</sup> For more information see: <http://kiis.com.ua/?lang=rus&cat=reports&id=443&page=1&y=2008>.

of the US (and its European allies), Georgia and Ukraine. Highly provocative parlance and unsubstantiated nature of the remarks were nevertheless willingly consumed by many Russians. Continually referring to Ukraine as an “anti-Russian project” (not a sovereign state), the anchor utterly denied Ukraine the right to be called a sovereign state, defining it as a “spoof” and claiming that there has never been any national-liberation idea in Ukraine whatsoever (ЛЕОНТЬЕВ). It should also be taken into account that “Odanko” was deliberately incorporated into a very popular “Novosti” (“the News”) information programme (aired during the evening), which substantially increased its audience and facilitated growth in popularity.

On 3 February 2010 Channel One (the main TV channel) presented a film created by M. Leontyev and Veronika Krashennikova titled „Orange children of the Third Reich” (*Оранжевые дети Третьего рейха*), which appeared several days prior to the second tour of presidential elections in Ukraine (where Viktor Yanukovich and Yulia Tymoshenko were competing for the post of President of Ukraine). Undoubtedly, the main purpose of this pseudo-historical film was both vilification of Y. Tymoshenko and discrediting of Ukraine as a state. Aside from numerous historical inaccuracies this film became an apex of ideological assault (within the period 2004-2010) waged by the Russian mass media against sovereign and independent Ukraine. In the final analysis, the movie signified the most apparent historical phobia of Russian ruling elites – fear of inevitable national awakening in Ukraine and potential firm pro-European choice of Ukrainian population (that was depicted as adherence to National Socialism and far right ideology).

Extremely interesting difference between Ukrainian and Russian societies and their perception of each other could be found in yet another example. Amidst hysteria and waves of anti-Ukrainian paranoia emanating from Russian mass media, 250 most distinguished Ukrainian professors (teaching both in Ukraine and abroad) signed a petition addressed to their colleagues in Russia in order to stop proliferation and support of anti-Ukrainian sentiments in the Russian Federation: “Ukrainian scientists seek to develop contacts with their Russian colleagues. That is why we are deeply concerned that lately the Russian Federation leadership, higher officials, has allowed themselves preaching at Ukraine in a tone, which is intolerable in the practice of equal international relations, moreover, they have threatened with applying force in case if our state dares to undertake steps and make decisions, undesirable from the point of view of Kremlin... anti-Ukrainian hysteria, developed by Russian ruling elites, has already negatively influenced the atmosphere of friendship and trust between our nations. Scientific and

innovation projects, necessary for both the countries, are being curtailed” (*Ukrainian scientists call on to stop anti-Ukrainian hysteria in Russia*).

The advent of President Viktor Yanukovich (allegedly pro-Russian candidate) was met by Russian propaganda by change of rhetoric and the wording, yet the essence remained intact. For instance, instead of direct accusations in anti-Russian policies and “treasonous” behavior during the Second World War, Russian propaganda concentrated on illegitimacy of dissolution of the USSR and decisive role of Ukraine in the event that was not welcomed by the majority of the Soviet population (Мищенко). This approach was popularized by notorious M. Leontyev who via “Odnako” programme where he developed the “Soviet nostalgia” – set of ideologically reactionary and potentially extremely dangerous dogmas that would in fact turn out to be a serious challenge for regional peace and security. From this prospect, Russian propaganda praised the Russian-led Customs Union and the would-be Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) as the only conceivable option for post-Soviet states and their ruling elites to continue their dominant positions in power.

Aside from already described sources of anti-Ukrainian propaganda the same activities were carried out via such sources as the “Sunday Times” (“Voskresnoje Vremia”) with Peter Tolstoy and the “News of the week” (“Vesti Nedeli”) with Dmitry Kiselev. Aside from areas covered by the “Odnako” show these programmes (and their anchors) allocated great deal of attention to the issue related to the status of Russian language in Ukraine (especially in the predominantly Russophone Southeast). Naturally, the main purpose was not to provide the Russian audience with the real state of affairs (which by the way drastically contradicted with grim images depicted by Russian mass media), yet to appeal to Russian society by touching perhaps the most sensitive cord among ordinary Russians in regard to Ukraine – status of the Russian language. On the other hand, Russian mass media skillfully manipulated with a concept of the West aspiring to encroach upon Russia via Ukraine, where total elimination of Russian language (as the most powerful bond between Russia and its former satellites from the former Soviet Union) was to be achieved and nationalist sentiments revived. Incidentally, it was Peter Tolstoy’s programme that would be named in the year 2012 “the most outrageous anti Ukrainian propaganda case on the Russian TV”.

Another public figure that significantly contributed to vilification and distortion of the image of Ukraine in Russia was already mentioned D. Kiselyov. In his quasi-informational programme infamous for open chauvinism and aggressive parlance Kiselyov would soon emerge as perhaps the most well-known Ukrainophobe in Russian

mass media. The former liberal journalist, main milestones of whose professional career were tightly related with both the US and Ukraine blatantly accused his former benefactors of anti-Russian sentiments. He also willingly and deliberately presented Russian public disgusting image of the West (swamped under profligacy and moral degradation) with its values and principles incompatible with Russian cultural and historic traditions. Being able to capture so-called “conservatism” twist in Kremlin’s political discourse Kiselyov rapidly acquired fame of the staunchest homophobe generating a wave of protests from the Russian community of bloggers with his rhetorical escapades that had distinct far right motifs.

Prior to the Vilnius Summit and prospective signing of the Association Agreement (AA) between the EU and Ukraine D. Kiselyov acquired dominant positions of the most influential representative of Russian mass media who commented the course of negotiations and the essence of the AA in the light favorable to Moscow. In harsh tones the anchor ridiculed the very essence of the EU – Ukrainian cooperation describing the AA as “lame” and a “fishy business”, which will bring nothing to Ukraine except humiliation and growing poverty (*Госканал РФ обрисовал дела Януковича как “дрянь”, а соглашение с ЕС назвал “литой”*).

Without any logical explanations D. Kiselyov offered nothing save intolerable accusations, spite and loath leveled against Ukraine and Ukrainians. Taking into account that anti-Ukrainian sentiments had been on the raise and the fertile ground for deep Ukrainophobia that had been prepared in advance “Vesti Nedeli” acquired wide interest from the side of Russian audience and became the main information outlet providing the audience with situation in Ukraine and around the EU – Ukrainian negotiations regarding the AA (*Москва подседа на «Вести недели», Россия осталась верна программе «Время»*). The main aspects that secured skyrocketing popularity of the TV programme were specific parlance (very plain, accusative, and insulting), unsophisticated lexicon and the sense of sensation (with conspicuous traits of theatricality) – all necessary components for creation of the “catch all” product. In the final analysis, it has been established that patterns of propaganda elaborated by D. Kiselyov could be considered as a new type of propaganda explicitly seeking to agitate and mobilize the audience proliferating ethnic hatred and fear (*Russian propaganda 1984 in 2014*). Similarly, Lev Gudkov (head of the Levada Center) reflecting upon anti-Ukrainian propaganda engendered by Russian mass media comes to the conclusion that the main goal of such spiteful campaign is “de-humanization of Ukrainians” (*Говорит и обманывает Москва: Плацдарм для пропаганды Кремль готовил минимум 14 лет*).

Russian propaganda also extensively used conflicts in Libya and Syria as a means of proliferation of anti-Ukrainian feelings and sentiments. Within the period 2011-2013 the Russian mass media started hysterical assaults on Ukraine regarding “smuggling of weapon to Libya from Ukraine” (*Informational onslaught as the main “weapon” against Ukraine in the world weapon market*) as well as reportedly observed “Ukrainian mercenaries and snipers”. Russian information outlets expressed their “concern” with norms of International Humanitarian Law and the Law of Armed Conflicts, being allegedly systematically broken by Ukraine while delivering arms produced on its territory to Syria despite international sanctions. Russian bloggers filled Russian information space with headlines such as “Syrian rebels possess Ukrainian weapon”, “Rebels in Syria use Ukrainian weapon from Luhansk”, “Ukrainian weapon found at Syrian rebels”.

Aside from nourishing anti-Ukrainian feelings within Russian society such propagandist turns also were characterized by visible uneasiness of Russian side with potential entering of Ukraine on the Middle Eastern (and South Caucasian) market of arms and munitions, where Kiev could have become a competitor to Russian state-protected enterprises.

### Mass culture as a tool of anti-Ukrainian propaganda

Historical memory of each and every society where main stages pertaining to creation and formation of nation have been overcome allows its elements (members of the society) to preserve and transmit from one generation to another already established images of enemies and the main mechanisms of identification of these adverse forces. This process if being conducted via mass culture coupled with historical narratives that constitute essential pillars of historical memory and the public mass consciousness. Therefore, when society is facing perils (both internal and external) its historical memory acquires a unique quality capable of “resurrecting” old phobias, fears and images of enemies, yet supplemented by new images and traits. Given the fact that mass culture has gained visible role in contemporary Russia, anti-Ukrainian propaganda has also been transmitted via this channel as well.

Aside from popular “Brat 2” (“Brother 2”) movie permeated with xenophobic and chauvinist rhetoric (not only Ukrainians were portrayed in negative light), Russian side produced several movies (widely promoted in Russia) with a clear goal of depicting Ukrainians as negative forces: Russophobes, collaborators with Nazi forces, neo-Nazis

and forces that hindered re/creation of Russian statehood whose main trait of national character were treason, greed and spitefulness contrary to Russian national qualities.

Anti-Ukrainian propaganda coined by Russian mass culture (where prominent role was played by the film industry) could be divided onto two major steps related to political transformations experienced by the Russian Federation.

**The first phase** (2004-2009/2010) was marked by an explicit attempt to portray Ukrainians as a force that historically was prone to hinder reviving Russian statehood via expressing anti-Russian feelings and extensively collaborating with external forces. Moreover, Ukraine was perceived as a country that unlawfully possessed lands and territories that were deemed to be Russian on both historical and moral grounds. This stage was primarily accompanied by creation of such openly anti-Ukrainian films as: “72 Meters” (2004), “Avtonomka” (2006) TV show, “1612” (2007) and “Taras Bul’ba” (2009). The latter product of the Russian cinematography was presented as a historical movie, although it offered a number of deliberately distorted historical facts that provided Russian audience with the main thesis that nation-patriotic war of Ukrainians was actually waged by Russians (that Ukrainians never existed as an independent nation or even an ethnic group). Moreover, the word “Ukraine” was purposefully substituted by the notion “Russian land” (“*Russkaja Zemlia*”) or “Malorossia”. This explicitly suggested that Ukraine was not meant to become a sovereign country and Ukrainians were not a separate ethnic group with history, culture and language of their own.

**Second phase** (starting from the year 2010) was represented by two most well-known movies, where Ukrainians were depicted as followers and active collaborators of Nazi Germany – traitors who readily betrayed Russians who bravely fought against Nazis. In “The Game” (“Match”, 2011) negative protagonists not only collaborated with occupation forces, yet also spoke Ukrainian and wore ribbons with the color of Ukrainian national flag.

Another piece of Russian propagandist cinematography “We are from the future 2” (“*Mi iz budushogo 2*”, 2010) all Ukrainians were portrayed as members/collaborators of UPA unmerciful to children, women and elderly people.

In the final analysis, it ought to be recognized that gradual transformation of the Russian Federation was also accompanied with vigorous anti-Ukrainian sentiments clearly traceable in cinematography and mass culture, which was to provide negative feelings toward Ukraine and Ukrainians among those elements of Russian society who have no interest in politics. From other prospective, Russian cinematography extensively employed illustrious actors and screen writers known to Russian public from the Soviet



times, which allegedly made them infallible and unbiased. Similarly, younger generation of Russians who have very superficial knowledge of history are offered pseudo-historical narrative filled with notions and ideas specifically selected in such a way as to re/create the image of Russian enemy under the guise of history.

### **... and the carrot**

Aside from aggressive pressure on Ukraine and visible attempts to form negative image of the state and its population among wide layers of Russian society, the Kremlin also employed other means that could be conditionally defined as “soft power” (although such measures were frequently supplemented by direct economic and political pressure). Namely, during the summer 2013 preceding the Vilnius Summit the Kremlin deployed extensive propaganda campaign whose main goal was to discredit apparent benefits of Ukraine getting close to Europe, whereby accentuating essential role and of the Customs Union (consisting of Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan). Naturally, Moscow was not keen to reveal the main prospects for Ukraine after joining the CU that could be briefly summed up as: long term rejection of modernization, deepening reliance on Russian energy and a clear prospect of becoming a puppet-state directly controlled by Moscow via corrupt elites. Undoubtedly, acute necessity of painful reforms, total dedication and commitment to modernization and transformation (to certain extent even alteration of certain traits of mentality) would be integral elements for Ukraine and Ukrainians aspiring to join European community. Nevertheless, this path would certainly be seen as a progressive trajectory of development associated with strengthening of Ukrainian sovereignty and statehood. Under scenario chosen for Ukraine by Moscow the direct outcome would be a forfeiture of sovereignty and further degradation/disintegration of Ukraine as a state.

It ought to be mentioned that the so-called “soft power approach” was mostly promoted by prominent Russian economists, political scientists, intellectuals, statesmen with an explicit support of pro-Russian oligarchs and influential persons in Ukraine. Perhaps, the most visible figure and the living embodiment of propaganda campaign was Sergey Glazyev – President’s advisor on economic matters and a central figure in the Eurasian Economic Commission and the Customs Union. In his numerous statements and discussions pertaining to the prospects of the CU and its potential membership for other countries S. Glazyev conspicuously used tactics of persuasion corroborating his ideas with fact and figures. Operating with complex economic

calculations and statistical data (though unreliable and fabricated in favor of Russian interests) Russian scientist and statesman made an attempt to represent signing of the AA as a detrimental decision for Ukrainian economy, whereas accession to the CU was portrayed as the only chance for Kiev to stay afloat. In this context, even the prospect of potentially punitive measures against Ukraine in the domain of economics were explained as a “necessity to protect the CU” (*Куда Путин зовет Украину? Или зачем нам Таможенный союз*) stipulated by the Tax Code of the CU, yet not a punishment for choosing the “wrong side”. Therefore, the blame would totally be administrated by Ukrainian government and ruling elites but ordinary Ukrainians.

Naturally, this type of propaganda was primarily aimed at educated layers of Ukrainian society and those whose economic interests were primarily connected with the Russian Federation – the main arguments mostly pertained to economic interactions between Russia and Ukraine: common projects that were supposed to bring about positive micro and macroeconomic shifts, reduction of oil and gas prices indispensable for Ukrainian economy and ability for Ukrainian goods to easily enter markets of Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan (*Речь о вступлении Украины в ТС пока не идет – советник президента РФ ПИЛА Новости Украина*) – these factors should have tipped the balance in favor of the CU. On the other hand, S. Glazyev persisted with constant references to weaknesses of Ukraine in terms of economic development and its inability to compete with goods, products and services of European origin, which suggested impossibility of economic integration between Ukraine in the EU. Nevertheless, even this approach (that included a great deal of “persuasion” that is not generally typical for Russian style of negotiations with weaker counterparts) was mostly based on the axiom that Ukraine had no other choice but to join the CU sooner or later (which was frequently construed as the “inevitability”) which on numerous occasions was conducted in pejorative tones with explicit disregard to Ukraine as a sovereign country. Interestingly enough, yet allegedly pro-Russian President Viktor Yanukovich expressed his deep dissatisfaction with the way Russia was “inviting” Ukraine into the CU (*Виктор Янукович: мы не бедные родственники и не будем ими никогда*).

Aforementioned propaganda campaign did constitute yet another implied peril: by deliberately juxtaposing prospective membership in the CU and signing of the AA with the EU, Russian propaganda purposefully created the rift between Ukrainian regions redirecting economic matters into political vein, handsomely supplementing it with language/ethnic-tinted colors. Unfortunately, many arguments (though biased and obfuscating other vital aspects) did contain kernels of truth: in terms of economic

development Ukraine was a drawback state with such vital areas as heavy industry and mining desperately craving for technological modernization and consuming enormous amounts of energy resources. Certainly, many businesses that had been developing cooperation ties with Russia felt jeopardized with a possibility of cutting economic ties with their main trading partner and simultaneously being scared with the possibility of going out of market encountering with European competitors. Oligarchs and financial elites also felt ill at ease with both potential accession to both the CU (being afraid of tough and frequently plying beyond rules of business Russian companies) and signing of the AA with the EU (which would have exposed them to subsidizing state subsidies and greater accountability), which actually stipulated growing rift within Ukrainian society regarding further path of development.

On the other hand, Russian propaganda skillfully manipulated with the image of resurging Russia deliberately avoiding serious maladies concealed under the glacial of prosperity and stability: lack of modernization, undiversified economy, utmost dependence on natural resources, rise of far ultra-nationalism and growing ethnic tensions – understandably, these and many other grave issues had been omitted by Russian side. Instead Russian propaganda concentrated on the fact that so-called “sovereign democracy” and the “vertical of power” established in Russia as well as the image of Vladimir Putin being patriotic and decisive politician brought about crucial shifts in R&D (Skolkovo project), sports, welfare and economics (mirage of the emerging “social state”), political weight of Moscow on international arena (growing importance of the Russian Federation in international organizations), military and security (alleged “subordination” of Chechnya and rapid war with Georgia) as well as protection of Russians living abroad. This was constantly compared to Ukraine and its political elites turning into the prime object of both internal and external humiliation and disgrace. For many Ukrainians such arguments as stable income and social security even at the expense of curtailing of democratic freedoms seemed to be appealing enough to trade stability for sovereignty (not “stability for democracy” as was in the case of Russia).

### **The last resort of Russian propaganda machine: Vladimir Putin on stage**

Image of the new Russia created by Russian propaganda – restored and recreated from scratch – was tightly bound to personality of Vladimir Putin. This reflection (in many respects artificial) facilitated enormous growth in personal popularity and political

weight of the Russian President in former Communist states (naturally, Ukraine was not an exception). Being particularly fond of historical parallels and analogies V. Putin seemed to have drawn a parallel between contemporary Russia and historical interim in Russian Modern History known as the 'Time of Troubles, where the burden of "restoration" of powerful central authority and "reassembling" of the Empire would be conducted by strong personality endowed with messianic mission. Naturally, incorporation of Ukraine in the orbit of Kremlin`s influence was perceived as perhaps the most vital pillar within the process of "rectifying historical injustices" suffered by post-Soviet Russia.

In his article dated by January 23-rd 2012 and published in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* ("Independent Newspaper") Putin came up with his vision of reunification of the post-Soviet space based on the common "cultural code" as well as decisive role of Russian ethnic group as a cornerstone of common Slavic civilization based on traditions, culture and a thousand year "Russian history" (Путин 2012). According to V. Putin, Russia as the most powerful (economically, politically, culturally, institutionally and militarily) actor in the post-Soviet area is to play the key role directing the process in the "right" vein.

President Putin's message that underscored decisive role of Russia as a "beacon" for other neighboring states contained visible signs of irredentist sentiments and explicit disapproval of certain post-Soviet states being independent countries. This approach implicitly underscored the notion that due to numerous similarities (on various levels) Ukraine and Belarus should not "artificially" stick to independence and accede to the CU/EEU as supplement to reviving neo-Imperial ambitions of the Kremlin. By sending this and similar messages aimed at population of Ukraine V. Putin extensively and deliberately appealed to positive historical experience, culture, religion and language as decisive factors that should shape the new form of Slavic Union. Naturally, in this configuration Ukrainian sovereignty and independence would have largely symbolic meaning bringing Ukrainian statehood back for several decades. Certainly, such a whim of history would have had devastating impact on the new generation of Ukrainians born in independent state and being free of malaises that suffered Soviet society.

Despite significant historical interim spent in the USSR, Ukrainian society was able to preserve its most distinctive traits – Orthodox Christianity and devotion to the land – qualities that have been severely damaged by the Soviet ideology in Russia. Integral part of propagandist methods extensively employed by V. Putin was direct appeal to religion (Orthodox Christianity) that was to underscore proximity/similarity of

Russians and Ukrainians on the subconscious/nonmaterial level and stipulate inevitability of common historical mission. Noticeably, initiation of the last round of negotiations between V. Putin and V. Yanukovych regarding Ukrainian membership in the CU took place in Kiev during the 1025<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Baptizing of the Kiev Rus. By attending this event Russian President tackled two most important issues. On the one hand, he appeared as the main stalwart of Orthodox Christianity and conservative values that actually distinct Eastern Slavs from Europe. On the other hand, this was an explicit propagandist address to Ukrainians of Orthodox creed to follow Russian endeavor and join brotherly nation in the newly emerging regional organization (the CU/EEU).

Interestingly enough, yet this type of propaganda pursued by V. Putin was one of the first and perhaps most coherent attempts produced by Russian political leaders to actually apply “soft power” mechanisms in dealing with wide public and broad masses of ordinary people. Tacitly referring to potential membership in the CU Russian leader ostentatiously expressed his full underscored his full adherence to “every choice that would make Ukraine happy”. At least at this point V. Putin seemed to have tried to stay above economic and political matters and perform the role a zealous guardian of brotherhood and unity between two nations.

### Final remarks and further reflections

Russian anti-Ukrainian propaganda within the period 1991-2013 has gone through several stages and took many forms and shapes depending on the stage of relations between Kiev and Moscow. Nonetheless, the essence of propaganda did not change: irrespectively of political regime in Ukraine, the main ethos of Russian discourse boiled down to a simple yet utterly inappropriate and historically disputable formula – Ukraine is not entitled to be an independent sovereign nation. Reflecting upon the main aspects of Russian propaganda regarding Ukraine it ought to be mentioned that the actual “soft power” that could have been utilized by Moscow while dealing with Ukraine was used unsystematically, quite unskillfully and most importantly without realizing its own potential. Instead, Russian ideologists concentrated on two major aspects: attempts to humiliate Ukraine rejecting its culture, language and history, whereby pinpointing groundless nature of Ukrainian state-building aspirations. On the hand, Moscow dismissed the necessity of “working” with broad masses of Ukrainians (taking for

granted predominantly positive attitude and broad sympathy of the population to Russia) concentrating on the dialogue with ruling elites.

In the final analysis, returning back to the celebration in Kiev related to the anniversary of Baptizing of the Rus it ought to be remembered that the events that ensued in the immediate aftermath of the gala – trade wars between Russia and Ukraine – clearly initiated by Moscow as a means of intimidation of Ukraine to join the CU and renounce its European aspirations should have been considered by both Ukrainian society and external democratic forces as a warning signal sent by the Kremlin.

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### **Russian informational and propaganda campaign against Ukraine prior to the Euromaidan (2013-2014): denying sovereignty**

#### **Abstract**

The article aims to outline the main ideas and strategies pertaining to the Russian information and propaganda campaigns waged against Ukraine within the period 1991 – 2013. Current research also aims to discuss the nature and main sources of Ukrainophobia in Russian society as a complex phenomenon that has deep historical



and cultural roots. Particular emphasis is made on various vehicles and tools extensively used by the Russian side in the process of creation of the enemy and its historical tradition in Russian society.

**Keywords:** Russia, *Ukraine, propaganda, Ukrainophobia, informational warfare, politics, religion*