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# RUSSIAN SOFT POWER IN POLAND

The Kremlin and pro-Russian organizations

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## **Russian soft power in Poland - The Kremlin and pro-Russian organizations**

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## FOREWORD

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This paper is the summary of the results of a one-year long research project covering five countries and exploring the connections between a wide range of pro-Kremlin stakeholders and Central-Eastern European countries' political forces in general and the violent, fringe extreme-right movements in particular. Political Capital has already published Europe-wide researches<sup>1</sup> and country-specific case studies on the connections between (far-right) political players in Slovakia<sup>2</sup> and Hungary,<sup>3</sup> and published a report on the „export” of ultraconservative, illiberal values by pro-Kremlin players to Central-Eastern Europe.<sup>4</sup> Others have done important research on this topic as well.<sup>5</sup> However, this is the first research project that focuses mainly on the *violent* ramifications of the strategy of the Russian state and its proxies to support fringe, extremist organizations in order to undermine bilateral ties with Ukraine and the United States, and destabilize the region. The five countries that we are focusing on are Austria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia. Most of our findings are indicative of the trends in the broader region.

The war in Eastern Ukraine and the migration crisis have acted as a catalyst to not only re-legitimize these extremist organizations' sine qua non for paramilitary activities, but to pit against each other organisations harbouring ancient chauvinistic and revisionist historical sentiments between their respective Central-Eastern European. The Kremlin's aim is undeniable as part of this process. Through reaching out to or supporting paramilitary organisations, it successfully destabilizes Ukraine and the surrounding European region to keep Ukraine's legitimacy, territorial sovereignty, minority issues in constant limbo.

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<sup>1</sup> Szabados, Krisztián, Krekó, Péter: Russia's far-right friends. Riskandforecast.com

[http://www.riskandforecast.com/post/in-depth-analysis/russia-s-far-right-friends\\_349.html](http://www.riskandforecast.com/post/in-depth-analysis/russia-s-far-right-friends_349.html)

Political Capital Institute. *The Russian connection. The spread of pro-Russian policies on the European far right.*

Budapest., 2014. [http://www.riskandforecast.com/useruploads/files/pc\\_flash\\_report\\_russian\\_connection.pdf](http://www.riskandforecast.com/useruploads/files/pc_flash_report_russian_connection.pdf)

<sup>22</sup> Krekó, Péter et al., *Marching Towards Eurasia, The Kremlin connections of the Slovak far-right.* Political Capital-Social Development Institute, 2015. Accessed March 20, 2017.

[http://www.politicalcapital.hu/wp-content/uploads/PC\\_Study\\_Russian\\_Influence\\_Slovakia\\_ENG.pdf](http://www.politicalcapital.hu/wp-content/uploads/PC_Study_Russian_Influence_Slovakia_ENG.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Juhász, Attila et al., *I am Eurasian- the Kremlin Connections of the Hungarian Far-Right.* Political Capital-Social Development Institute, 2015. Accessed March 20, 2017. [http://www.politicalcapital.hu/wp-content/uploads/PC\\_SDI\\_Boll\\_study\\_IamEurasian.pdf](http://www.politicalcapital.hu/wp-content/uploads/PC_SDI_Boll_study_IamEurasian.pdf)

[http://www.politicalcapital.hu/wp-content/uploads/PC\\_SDI\\_Boll\\_study\\_IamEurasian.pdf](http://www.politicalcapital.hu/wp-content/uploads/PC_SDI_Boll_study_IamEurasian.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Krekó, Péter et al., *The Weaponization of Culture – Kremlin's Traditional Agenda and the Export of Values to Central Eastern Europe.* Political Capital, 2016. Accessed March 20, 2017. [http://www.politicalcapital.hu/wp-content/uploads/PC\\_reactionary\\_values\\_CEE\\_20160727.pdf](http://www.politicalcapital.hu/wp-content/uploads/PC_reactionary_values_CEE_20160727.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Shekhovtsov, Anton (in press): *Tango Noir: Russia and the Western Far Right: Tango Noir* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), forthcoming.

Polyakova, Alina. "Putinism and the European Far Right." Institute of Modern Russia (2016).

Orenstein, Mitchell A. "Putin's Western Allies." *Foreign Affairs* 25 (2014).

Marlene Laruelle (Ed.). *Eurasianism and the European Far Right: Reshaping the Europe–Russia Relationship.* Edited by Lexington Books, 2015.

Mudde, Cas. "Russia's Trojan Horse." (2014). *Opendemocracy.*

Poland is one of the targets of the Kremlin's influence in this respect Russia utilizes soft power to indirectly fuel nationalist or extremist organizations' anti-Ukrainian views or general anti-establishment sentiments against the EU or NATO. At the same time, there is a small political and media circle around the Change (Zmiana) party led by Mateusz Piskorski directly representing Russian interests in Poland and financed by the Kremlin, as the latest "Laundromat" scandal revealed. Despite the resiliency of Polish politics and society towards Russian hybrid warfare, there is real danger if the Kremlin continues to systematically target the achilles heel of disinformation dissemination.

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All errors and omissions are our own.

## METHODOLOGY

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During the study, we often refer to the terms “Russian influence” or the “Kremlin’s influence”. These notions are connected with the term “Russian influence through power,” by which we mean explicit and implicit actions by the Russian state and related actors (including intellectuals, businessmen, journalists, etc.) or organizations aiming to create political changes in the behavior and/or political agenda of certain political actors through political means and/or financial instruments. The “soft power” of Kremlin mainly concerns Moscow’s ability to persuade others to do what it wants without direct force or coercion, but with attraction (Nye, 2004) mainly through the means of Russian or pro-Russian media.<sup>6</sup>

This analysis of Russian influence on right-wing or left-wing extremists, fringes in Poland based on investigations involving the media, press releases from politicians, political parties and scientific evidence.

### **The main goals of the research are the following:**

- 1.) Describe the basic social, political, economic frameworks of Russia’s presence in Poland in order to understand the nature and modus operandi of Russian direct or indirect influence on the fringes.
- 2.) Reveal personal, organizational, media and other links between pro-Russian, fringe political actors and the Kremlin or Kremlin stakeholders.
- 3.) Collect and analyse the most important pro-Russian declarations and actions of the relevant radical political players in Poland.

### **We used the following research methods:**

- 1.) Desktop research to collect the necessary information, map out the order of developments and events, and gather statements.
- 2.) Analysis of Polish pro-Russian media outlets and Facebook pages.
- 3.) Primary research with the aim of gaining confidential information from actors within or close to the political fringes, and used directly or indirectly to exert influence. In order to protect their identity, sources of such information remain anonymous in the study.
- 4.) In-depth interviews with experts from academia, politics and the media to gather background information and provide a broader view of certain actors and events.

### **Interviews were conducted with the following experts:**

- Marcin Rey, analyst, investigative journalist
- Kazimierz Wójcicki, political analyst and scientist, historian, author of several books about Polish-German relations, the history of the Nazi movement and Polish eastern neighborhood policy

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<sup>6</sup> Joseph Nye, *Soft Power: The Means To Success In World Politics*, 2004.

- Piotr Żochowski, analyst and Senior Fellow at the Centre for Eastern Studies (OSW)
- Piotr Andrusieczko investigative journalist and correspondent of Gazeta Wyborcza in Kiev
- Maria Przelomiec, journalist, and expert of Polish eastern neighborhood policy and relations
- Sanita Jemberga, Latvian investigative journalist, expert on pro-Russian movements in Europe, the author of „Masterplan,” a documentary about pro-Russian parties in Poland and central Europe
- Dawid Hudziec, far-right, pro-Russian activist residing in Donetsk
- Marian Kowalski, former leader of the far-right, nationalist party National Radical Camp in Poland, former nationalist presidential candidate, one of most famous radical nationalist movement leaders
- Krzysztof Bosak, a politician of the Polish National Movement
- Janusz Korwin-Mikke, MEP of KORWiN
- Mateusz Piskorski, the leader of the pro-Russian Change (Zmiana) party, currently under arrest for spying on behalf of Russia and China, and members of his party



## MAIN FINDINGS

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- In Poland, the options for direct Russian political influence are limited, and the Kremlin mainly employs soft power due to the fact that the Polish government, political establishment, as well as societal attitudes are firmly unfavourable towards the Kremlin as a consequence of particular social, historical and political conditions. Thus, Moscow cannot exert socio-political leverage based on admiration for "the mighty Russia", cultural affinity, or a shared historical background, and instead resorts to an indirect or infiltration-focused modus operandi in Polish society.
- Recent negative geopolitical events such as the illegal occupation of Crimea in 2014, or the Smolensk tragedy in 2010, have confirmed Polish views of Russia as an untrustworthy international partner and a military aggressor. It was no surprise that Polish officials have continuously attempted to enforce the Minsk agreements and the sanctions regime. The Warsaw NATO Summit in 2016 resulted in the strengthening of the Eastern flank of the alliance militarily, while Polish governments have sought ways to achieve greater energy independence from Moscow as well.
- The direct political influence of the Kremlin involves only a handful of political actors, mainly around Zmiana and Mateusz Piskorski. The recent arrest of Piskorski attests that the activity of pro-Russian organizations are severely limited by the aforementioned conditions and the Polish state's resistance to the Kremlin.
- Nevertheless, Russian influence targets several vulnerable segments of Polish society in the form of soft power, mainly through exerting influence on political discourse, and far-left, far-right fringe groups and nationalist movements.
- Indirect influence is exerted through disinformation and propaganda either by designated media outlets or troll activity aimed at spreading anti-Western narratives in regards to NATO, Berlin, the USA or Polish internal or cross-border disputes, for example in the case of the "Volhynia" tragedy. Polish intelligence agencies have acknowledged this risk factor and are active in countering the psychological warfare conducted by the Kremlin in Poland and the CEE region.
- Fringe parties, like Zmiana, or fringe actors, like MEP Janusz Korwin-Mikke, are either infiltrated or courted to echo and legitimize pro-Russian narratives of a "fascist coup" in Kiev, or the need for fruitful cooperation with Russia despite the war in Ukraine.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Korwin-Mikke is currently one of the most popular among teenagers and young voters between 15-24 years. See:<http://www.isp.org.pl/aktualnosci,1,1616.html>

- In the case of Ukraine, Russian efforts target nationalist movements indirectly or directly. Their aim is not to bluntly reverse Polish geopolitical stances, but rather to stoke Polish-Ukrainian tensions based on historical resentment or internal anti-establishment attitudes against Euro-Atlantic institutions. The National Rebirth of Poland or the National Radical Camp display such anti-establishment attitudes, which can unintentionally support the Kremlin's narrative of the West and East, presenting a danger to Poland. Falanga and the Camp of Great Poland show signs of infiltration with members directly supporting the separatists and separatism in Eastern Ukraine partly due to narratives of present-day Fascism or "Banderism" against Poles or the Polish minority living in Ukraine.
- The most important finding is that Russian soft power in Poland does not have a substantial influence on mainstream views among politicians, the media or society at large. The Kremlin rather strives to introduce "moderate topics" "independent" of Moscow to provoke internal instability within Polish society or increase tensions with neighbouring countries in order to weaken Poland geopolitically.

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

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Taking the diversity of political and ideological influences in the respective countries into consideration, there can be no “one size fits all” strategy to repulse the increasingly frequent and intense attempts of the Kremlin to gain influence through the political fringes. The major difference is that while Russia is actively interfering with European politics and societies, the political will to push back the efforts of soft and hard power tactics, such as ideological export, is mostly lacking in Europe and in the respective member states.

In Poland, the actors or subjects of Russian influence and radicalisation mainly include Mateusz Piskorski and organizations around him, different paramilitary or nationalist groups and the fringe media. A comprehensive approach needs to address the “four R’s”: revealing the ways and means of pro-Russian activities; reacting to the Russian influence or radicalisation; ridiculing or deconstructing the pro-Russian stances; repeating the process faced with a continuous effort on the side of the Kremlin. In this respect, different layers of society have different tasks to fulfil.

### **Sectoral recommendations**

#### **State actors: reveal & react & repeat**

- Polish law enforcement authorities and the intelligence and the defence communities should monitor and counter indirect destabilization attempts using nationalist or extremist Polish movements as proxies.
- The Polish state should make resources available to civil society and media outlets engaged in fighting hate speech, thus providing the Polish public with media literacy to properly identify, and counter Russian manipulation, disinformation and trolls.
- Polish authorities should create and apply specific national security screening methods to persons or organizations participating in the Territorial Defence Force or the Force’s military training programme.
- Programs of de-radicalisation sponsored by Polish national and local authorities would provide the means to reveal weak spots within nationalist/extremist movements, and help avoid these being exploited by indirect or direct Russian disinformation in regards to the current conflict in Ukraine.

#### **Civil society: react & ridicule**

- Human rights organisations should enhance cooperation on initiatives dedicated to combating pro-Russian or extremist fringe organizations to curb their anti-establishment, anti-Ukrainian ideological influence.
- HRAWs should directly engage vulnerable groups prone to radicalisation by starting pre-emptive or post-factum deradicalisation programs and lectures.

**Media: reveal & ridicule**

- The Polish media has done a good job in revealing direct Russian influence, for example in the case of the Laundromat scandal. However, more resources need to be devoted to monitoring attempts by Russia to exploit historical grievances, and to alerting the Polish people of these attempts.
- The media's response should counter pro-Russian fringe media and educate the public about the covert or indirect manipulation attempts of the Kremlin in certain high-profile cases, such as the Volhynia movie.
- The media should cooperate with NGOs to ridicule the conspiracy theory-based, anti-NATO, and anti-Ukraine narratives employed by pro-Russian groups and individuals to exploit Polish internal or cross-border societal animosities

## POLISH-RUSSIAN RELATIONS IN A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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The end of the First World War brought Poland independence after the occupation of its territories by Germany, Russia and Austria-Hungary. More than a century of occupation was marked with periods of ruthless Germanization and Russification of culture. Immediately after regaining independence, Poland had to stand against the newly born Bolshevik Russia in a war that lasted from 1919 to 1921. After the Treaty of Riga (1921) was signed, which ended the war between Poland and Russia, Poland could finally concentrate on reconstructing its own state.

Between the First and Second World Wars, the main aim of Polish foreign policy was to maintain a certain distance from Germany and Russia, guaranteeing its national security by an equal degree of independence from both aggressive powers. To accomplish this, Poland looked towards its Western allies and guarantors of Polish independence. The Second World War started when Germany invaded Poland on the September 1, 1939. The aggression of the Soviet Union followed, and on September 17 Red Army occupied a part of Polish territory.

After the Second World War, Poland found itself under Soviet occupation. A communist regime was installed in Poland and survived almost half of a century. Thanks to the “Solidarity” movement, Communism eventually collapsed in Poland in 1989.

Poland’s foreign policy and political discourse after 1989 were built upon two fundamental principles: Poland aimed at European and Atlantic integration (in NATO and the EU) and it supported the independence and democratization of the post-Soviet republics of Ukraine, Belarus and Lithuania. Tensions between Poland and Russia in the nineties were mostly based on the fact that Russia was strongly opposed to the membership of Poland in NATO. Nevertheless, Poland managed to join the alliance in 1999. In the early 2000s the Polish elite was strongly pro-American, as exemplified by, for example, Poland’s participation in the US intervention in Iraq. After 2007, the Civic Platform government tried to implement its own “reconciliation policy” with Russia, which has resulted in the establishment of the “Kaliningrad triangle”, i.e. meetings between the ministers of foreign affairs of Poland, Germany and Russia, and the opening of visa-free local cross-border traffic between two Polish voivodeships and Kaliningrad. The Centre for Polish-Russian Dialogue and Understanding was established in 2011. The Polish “reconciliation policy” was abandoned as a result of two main factors: 1) the Russian aggression towards Ukraine - the annexation of Crimea and support for separatists in the Donbass and 2) the long-term consequences of disagreements between the two countries over the plane crash that resulted in the deaths of President Lech Kaczyński and almost one hundred other high-ranking Polish officials in Smolensk in April 2010.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> J. Kucharczyk, A. Fuksiewicz, *The long shadow of the Kremlin: Polish domestic reactions to the Russian-Ukrainian conflict*, [in:] *Diverging Voices, Converging Policies: The Visegrad States’ Reactions to the Russia-Ukraine conflict*, J. Kucharczyk, G. Meseznikov (eds.), Prague/Warsaw 2016.

The change in the policy affected various fields. As for culture, the year of 'Poland in Russia' planned for 2015 was cancelled. When it comes to military issues, Poland has strengthened its effort to command more attention from NATO, as well as its efforts to ensure the deployment of American and multinational troops to the Baltic States and Eastern Europe. Mutual cooperation ceased as both "Kaliningrad triangle" meetings and local cross-border traffic were suspended. Finally, economic cooperation also suffered as sanctions on Russia and Russian counter-sanctions negatively affected bilateral trade.

## DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS AFTER CRIMEA'S ANNEXATION

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Polish officials have taken a very critical stance towards Russia since the annexation of Crimea and the eruption of the war in Donbass. In early March 2014, the Russian ambassador in Warsaw was called to the Polish MFA and informed that Poland protests the Russian aggression in Ukraine and the Polish side urged the Kremlin to respect the territorial integrity of this country.<sup>9</sup> Warsaw has been one of the most outspoken critics of the Kremlin's intrusion into Ukraine. Polish officials have been proponents of imposing sanctions on Russia from the very beginning. Sanctions were backed by the Civic Platform government and the Polish People's Party, as well as ex-President Bronisław Komorowski. The 2015 transition to a new government led by Law and Justice and the election of President Andrzej Duda has not changed the Polish approach.<sup>10</sup> Additionally, Prime Minister Beata Szydło has said that Poland will also support the introduction of new sanctions against Russia if the Kremlin does not change its policy in Syria.<sup>11</sup>

Another factor that contributes to Polish-Russian tensions is Poland's membership in NATO. Polish officials are proponents of strengthening NATO's presence in Central Europe. They eagerly lobbied for placing NATO troops in Poland and ultimately succeeded in securing the deployment of one multinational rotational battalion comprised of 1000 soldiers to the country. A decision to deploy 4 battalions in Central European countries has also been taken recently as a result of the NATO Summit in Warsaw in 2016.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, the Polish government also supports the placement of an anti-missile defence system in Poland. These instruments are aimed at deterring Russia and reducing the threat posed by the aggressive policy of the Kremlin towards Poland.

Under Law and Justice, tensions between Warsaw and Moscow have increased with regards to the Smolensk plane crash from 2010. Polish officials do not agree with Russian investigators' assessment of the accident, who place most of the blame on the Polish side, who request the immediate return of the airplane wreckage to pursue their own investigation.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> TVN24.pl, "Ambasador Rosji Wezwany Do MSZ," *TVN24.pl*, March 4, 2014, <http://www.tvn24.pl/wiadomosci-z-kraju,3/ambasador-rosji-wezwany-do-msz,404245.html>.

<sup>10</sup> Although it seems that support for maintaining sanctions imposed on Russia is declining in the EU, Polish officials firmly maintain the strong position that until the Kremlin changes its policy towards Ukraine, sanctions cannot be lifted.

<sup>11</sup> "Beata Szydło: Jeśli sytuacja w syrii się nie poprawi, polska będzie za ponowną dyskusją o sankcjach," *Text, WPROST.pl*, (October 22, 2016), <https://www.wprost.pl/kraj/10027917/Beata-Szydlo-Jesli-sytuacja-w-Syrii-sie-nie-poprawi-Polska-bedzie-za-ponowna-dyskusja-o-sankcjach.html>.

<sup>12</sup> NATO, "Warsaw Summit Communiqué - Issued by the Heads of State and Government Participating in the Meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Warsaw, 8-9 July 2016," *NATO*, 2016, [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_133169.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_133169.htm).

<sup>13</sup> Some people from the government, including Antoni Macierewicz, Minister of Internal Defense, allege that one can't be certain whether the plane crash in Smolensk was an accident or a planned assassination. The allegation of a planned attempt to kill the Polish president and other highly ranked Polish officials is widely criticized by skeptical voices, including many experts as well as previous government representatives, such as politicians from Civil Platform and Polish People's Party.

## EFFECTS OF THE SANCTIONS AND ECONOMIC-ENERGY DEPENDENCY

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Russian exports to Poland largely consist of natural energy resources like gas and crude oil. In the last few years, mineral products have constituted approximately 75% of total imports coming from the Russian Federation.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, the price of fuel has a crucial influence on where Russia is ranked among Poland's largest trading partners. In 2015, Russia exported EUR 12.9 billion worth of goods to Poland. It amounted to 7, 3% of total imports and made Russia the third largest exporter to Poland after Germany and China.<sup>15</sup>

Polish export to Russia is much more diversified and not as dependent on the change in price of a single product, or change in any particular industry. Nowadays, Polish exports to Russia consist not only of agricultural products, but also electrical, chemical and metallurgical goods, as well as those produced by the wood and paper industry. Goods worth a total of EUR 5.1 billion were exported to Russia in 2015, which was seventh among top Polish export destinations, with a 2,9% share in total exports.<sup>16</sup>

According to statistics published by Eurostat in 2014, Poland is 28.6% dependent on foreign energy. This means Poland is much less dependent on energy imports than the average EU member state, which, according to Eurostat, was 53.5% in 2014. The real problem in the case of Poland is its dependence on a single supplier. 80% of gas imports to Poland in 2012 came from the Russian Federation (including a portion from Central Asia which travelled across Russian territory). Data from 2012 also showed that approximately 96% of total Polish oil imports came from Russia.<sup>17</sup>

In terms of energy policy, Poland strives to increase energy security by investing in diversification of import sources. The most recognizable initiative is probably the LNG terminal in Świnoujście on the Baltic Sea and next to the German border. The terminal has been operational since December 2015. According to representatives of the Polish energy sector, the LNG terminal in Świnoujście may play a very important role in safeguarding gas supplies to Poland in the event of another crisis in relations with Russia.

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<sup>14</sup> Jacek Kucharczyk and Grigorij Meseżnikov, "Consequences of the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict for the Polish Economy and Energy Sector," in *Diverging Voices, Converging Policies: The Visegrad States' Reactions to the Russia-Ukraine Conflict* (Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung, 2015), [https://www.boell.de/sites/default/files/2015-diverging\\_voices\\_converging\\_policies.pdf](https://www.boell.de/sites/default/files/2015-diverging_voices_converging_policies.pdf).

<sup>15</sup> "Yearbook Of Foreign Trade Statistics Of Poland," 2016, <https://danepubliczne.gov.pl/dataset/eea68e82-c92f-4e11-a2a8-b48ee9eb2a6e/resource/25abafbc-6563-4bb1-adde-731b76ba827d/download/rocznikstatystycznyhandluzagranicznego2016.pdf>.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Jacek Kucharczyk and Grigorij Meseżnikov, "Consequences of the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict for the Polish Economy and Energy Sector," in *Diverging Voices, Converging Policies: The Visegrad States' Reactions to the Russia-Ukraine Conflict* (Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung, 2015), [https://www.boell.de/sites/default/files/2015-diverging\\_voices\\_converging\\_policies.pdf](https://www.boell.de/sites/default/files/2015-diverging_voices_converging_policies.pdf).



Even if Russia decides to cut off gas supplies for a certain period of time Poland will be able to replenish much of the deficit by increasing supplies of liquefied natural gas accordingly. Another strategy for increasing energy security is developing regional energy integration among Central and European countries, especially with Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Lithuania. Finally, Poles are still backing the Energy Union project aimed at providing more opportunities for cooperation in the energy sector in the EU and stronger solidarity vis-à-vis third countries.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Agnieszka Łada et al., *The Energy Union: Views from France, Germany, Poland and the United Kingdom*, 2015, [https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/the\\_energy\\_union\\_-\\_views\\_from\\_france\\_germany\\_poland\\_and\\_the\\_united\\_kingdom.pdf](https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/the_energy_union_-_views_from_france_germany_poland_and_the_united_kingdom.pdf).

## PUBLIC ATTITUDES AND THE PERCEPTION OF RUSSIA-EU-US RELATIONS

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Poles have critical views on Russia. According to research conducted by the Institute of Public Affairs (IPA) from early 2015, 78% of Poles recognize that Polish – Russian relations are negative.<sup>19</sup> At the same time, Pew Research Center's data from spring 2015 reveal similar results with regards to the public's perception of Russia: 80% of Poles have an unfavourable opinion of the Russian Federation. Although the perception of Russia and Polish-Russian relations has not been particularly positive among Poles in recent years, the image of Russia has deteriorated significantly as a result of the country's foreign policy towards Ukraine, i.e. the annexation of Crimea and Russian participation in the war in the Donbass. Unfavourable opinions of Russia increased from 52% in spring 2013 to 80% in 2015.<sup>20</sup>

Poles believe, first of all, that Russia is to be blamed for the war in the Donbass. This opinion is shared by 62% of Poles, while one fifth (20%) accuse both sides equally (IPA research from 2015). One of the consequences of this attitude is the public's support for sanctions imposed on Russia after the annexation of Crimea and the start of the war in Eastern Ukraine: 41% of Poles believe sanctions should be strengthened and 35% support maintaining them as they are currently.<sup>21</sup>

Russia is perceived not only as an aggressor in Ukraine, but its international policy is believed by many to pose a potential threat to others in Europe, including Poland. As the results of IPA research show, almost three quarters (71%) of Poles view Russia as a possible military threat to their country.<sup>22</sup>

As opposed to Russia, the perception of Western partners and alliances is generally positive. 84% of Poles consider themselves to be proponents of the European Union, which was revealed by the data from a survey conducted by the Polish Public Opinion Research Centre in October 2016.<sup>23</sup> Polish society supports NATO membership. The Pew Research Center's survey from spring 2016 shows that 70% of Poles have a favourable opinion of the alliance and only 12% express the opposite view.<sup>24</sup> Pew's data also confirm that the majority of Poles view the US positively. While almost three quarters (74%) of Poles had a favorable opinion on the US, less than one fifth (16%) are of the opposite opinion.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Jacek Kucharczyk et al., "Close Together or Far Apart? Poles, Germans and Russians on the Russia-Ukraine Crisis," 2015, [http://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/fileadmin/files/user\\_upload/Study\\_Close\\_together\\_or\\_far\\_apart.pdf](http://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/fileadmin/files/user_upload/Study_Close_together_or_far_apart.pdf).

<sup>20</sup> Katie Simmons, Bruce Stokes, and Jacob Poushter, "NATO Publics Blame Russia for Ukrainian Crisis, but Reluctant to Provide Military Aid," *Pew Research Center*, June 10 (2015), <http://www.bruxelles2.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/OpinPublicArmesUkraine@Pew150610i.pdf>.

<sup>21</sup> Kucharczyk et al., "Close Together or Far Apart? Poles, Germans and Russians on the Russia-Ukraine Crisis."

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> Forsal.pl, "CBOS: 84 Proc. Polaków Popiera Członkostwo Kraju W Unii Europejskiej," *Forsal.pl*, accessed April 5, 2017, <http://forsal.pl/artykuly/993980,cbos-84-proc-polakow-popiera-czlonkostwo-kraju-w-ue.html>.

<sup>24</sup> Danielle Cuddington, "Support for NATO Is Widespread among Member Nations," *Pew Research Center*, July 6, 2016, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/07/06/support-for-nato-is-widespread-among-member-nations/>.

<sup>25</sup> Richard Wike, Jacob Poushter, and Hani Zainulbhai, "America's International Image," *Pew Research Center's Global Attitudes Project*, June 28, 2016, <http://www.pewglobal.org/2016/06/28/americas-international-image/>.

## SECURITY CONSIDERATIONS TOWARDS RUSSIA

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The national security strategy of Poland is comprised of several goals. The first is to enhance NATO's eastern flank through the presence of the NATO military forces in Poland and other countries in Central Europe. What has been achieved so far is the deployment of one international rotational battalion (1000 soldiers) to Poland, which was confirmed at the NATO summit in Warsaw in July 2016. The summit also concluded that three more battalions are to be deployed to Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. Poland also supports the construction of an American anti-missile defense system on its own territory.

The second goal is to reduce the possibility of Russian energy sabotage by investing in the diversification of energy resources.<sup>26</sup> The European Energy Union concept is also significant for Poland, especially for targeting dependency on a single provider from a non-EU country as an issue that needs to be tackled.<sup>27</sup>

The third goal is to cooperate with Eastern Partnership countries to strengthen their security and economic potential. This would also have an influence on Poland's national security. In particular, Poland is interested in promoting the cooperation of Ukraine with European and Transatlantic institutions and in advocating Ukraine as a country which would protect others from the aggressive politics of the Kremlin. This position was presented by Antoni Macierewicz, the Polish minister of internal defence, in his speech at the Atlantic Council Forum: "Ukraine is at war now and holds the burden of defending all of Europe from Russian aggression. Ukraine needs us and we need Ukraine. Crimea and Donbas have to come back to Ukraine [...]. Without respect for fundamental rights, the restoration of order and peace in Europe won't be possible."<sup>28</sup>

Polish officials and intelligence agencies acknowledge the role of Russian propaganda in Poland and the operation of Russian secret services throughout Europe. Back in 2014, the Polish Internal Security Agency published a report which stated that Russian intelligence services remain very active in Poland. The main aim of their activities is to undermine Polish opinion regarding the conflict in Ukraine and antagonize Poles and Ukrainians by exploiting the difficult shared history of the two sides.<sup>29</sup> In 2016, two events took place in Poland that were recognized as especially vulnerable to the activities of Russian secret services and internet trolls. One of them was obviously the NATO Summit in Warsaw.

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<sup>26</sup> Diversification means not only closer cooperation with neighbours such as Czech Republic, Slovakia, Lithuania, but also the introduction of new energy routes, for instance the LNG terminal in Świnoujście, which allows for the importing of gas from places such as Qatar.

<sup>27</sup> European Commission, "Energy Union and Climate," Text, *European Commission*, (December 8, 2015), [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/priorities/energy-union-and-climate\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/priorities/energy-union-and-climate_en).

<sup>28</sup> Ministerstwo Obrony Narodowej, "Szczyt NATO I Jego Konsekwencje," 2016, <http://mon.gov.pl/aktualnosci/artykul/najnowsze/szczyt-nato-i-jego-konsekwencje-m2016-07-25/>.

<sup>29</sup> Agencja Bezpieczeństwa Wewnętrznego, "Raport Z Działalności Agencji Bezpieczeństwa Wewnętrznego W 2014 R," 2015, [https://bs.net.pl/sites/default/files/media/rozne/raport\\_2015\\_int.pdf](https://bs.net.pl/sites/default/files/media/rozne/raport_2015_int.pdf).

Another important event was “World Youth Day,” a meeting of Christian youth who came to Poland from all over the world to see Pope Francis and celebrate their religion.<sup>30</sup> Those events, and also the war in Ukraine and Syria, were monitored by the Polish Parliamentary Committee for Security Services. The committee met with the heads of the Polish Foreign Intelligence Agency and the Polish Military Intelligence Agency to discuss all potential threats coming from Russia in May 2016.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> WorldYouthDay.com, “Krakow 2016,” *WorldYouthDay.com*, 2016, <http://worldyouthday.com/krakow-2016>.

<sup>31</sup> TVN24.pl, “‘To Jest Wojna Informacyjna’. Komisja Przyjrzała Się Aktywności Rosyjskich Szpiegów,” *TVN24.pl*, May 12, 2016, <http://www.tvn24.pl/wiadomosci-z-kraju,3/komisja-ds-sluzb-specjalnych-analizowala-aktywnosc-rosji,643237.html>.

## GENERAL RULES OF RUSSIAN SOFT POWER IN POLAND

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Anyone monitoring Russian ‘soft power’ and its influence on the media, politics, business and the Polish people will probably confirm it is a challenging yet intriguing subject. Since the annexation of Crimea and the start of the war in the Donbass, Poland has been one of the most outspoken critics of Putin’s regime. An attempt to re-establish the Soviet empire in the post-Soviet space by “dividing and conquering” former states under the influence of the USSR was not taken lightly and Warsaw has taken serious steps to make it clear to the Kremlin that it treats Russia as a serious threat to its own security.<sup>32</sup>

Meanwhile, according to opinion polls, Polish society is also critical of Russia. Poles blame the Kremlin for the war in Ukraine, support the maintenance of sanctions and consider Russia to be a serious threat to the safety of their own country. There are two notable conclusions to be drawn from this information. The first is that Poland will most likely be under constant siege from Russian propaganda aimed at reversing the perception of Russia among Poles. Second, whatever the involvement of the Russian influencing machine, Poland appears to be quite effective in resisting it compared to countries from Central as well as Western Europe.

However, as always, the situation is much more complex. Propaganda and the mechanisms of Russian influencing activities in Poland have created a peculiar network of names. Some of them frequently crisscross between various organizations, while others appear to be lone riders. Some are considered to be representatives of mainstream politics or academia, while others are seen as fringe and marginal politicians or journalist. Finally, among those names are people who are openly or allegedly financed by sources originating from Russia, although many promote the Kremlin's narrative simply because they firmly believe in it.

The most important finding is that the Russian narrative in general does not have a substantial influence on mainstream views among politicians, media, and, as a consequence, on society, in the sense that it fails to generate positive attitudes on the domestic or foreign policies of the Kremlin and specifically Vladimir Putin. Nor has it succeeded in convincing Poles *en masse* that Russia is not to be blamed for the conflict in Ukraine. However, it should be noted that opinions considered to be propagandistic have gained considerable popularity among fringe media platforms and politicians.<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, the mechanisms of Russian influencing efforts manage to effectively penetrate both the far-right and fringe left groups of Polish society. Interestingly, both extremes show much respect and understanding for the Russian narrative and seem to work towards similar goals, i.e. making sure that this narrative is heard in Poland.

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<sup>32</sup> The Warsaw NATO Summit concluded with a political decision to establish four new battalions on NATO’s Eastern flank, with one of the battalions being located in Poland. The main goal of the deployment: to deter Russia from military actions in Central Europe.

<sup>33</sup> The results of the research show that far-right entities are much more active in promoting the Russian narrative than the far left. This tendency resembles the general division of extremism in Poland, which is strongly dominated by the radical right. Entities representing the radical left - after almost half a century of communism in Poland - hold a much weaker position in democratic Poland.

Due to the fact that Russian propaganda cannot achieve any significant success in improving the image of Putin or Russia among Poles, improving the Kremlin's image is not high on Russia's agenda. More important is to introduce and moderate topics which at first glance might not seem to have anything to do with Russia, but which in the long-term serve to achieve the strategic goal of strengthening the Russian position in the region and weakening Poland by provoking internal arguments within society and tensions with neighbouring countries.

## **Polish-Ukrainian relations**

The number one topic being exploited as part of the general Russian media strategy in Poland after Crimea are Polish – Ukrainian relations. As complex as they are now, the Russian narrative tries to downgrade them to the level of primitive disputes that revolves around historical guilt and the way historical differences surface today. „Still, anti-Ukrainian propaganda has a more profound significance, its long-term goal is to deprive Ukraine of their independence, recognizing the fact that Ukraine is undeserving of sovereignty as its society is immature in every aspect,” said Kazimierz Wóycicki, a political analyst and scientist and a historian who was interviewed for this report. This approach was recognized as a piece of the Kremlin's strategy by the Polish Internal Security Agency in a report back in 2014. The latest scandal revolves around Russian money used to finance anti-Ukrainian campaigns through a Belarusian proxy, Aleksander Usowski, in Poland.<sup>34</sup> The most notorious example is intentionally exploiting the most tragic event of Polish-Ukrainian relations, the Volhynia tragedy.

### *The Volhynia tragedy*

The name refers to the massacres of Poles in Volhynia and Eastern Galicia carried out in Nazi German-occupied Poland by members of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA in Ukrainian) during the Second World War.<sup>35</sup> Different approaches to the interpretation of the Volhynia tragedy exist among Poles and Ukrainians and no one denies it. While many Poles (including members of the Polish Institute of National Remembrance) consider the massacre in Volhynia to be an act of genocide, the prevailing view in Ukraine is to frame the Volhynia tragedy – without denying responsibility for it - as a broader consequence of difficult Polish-Ukrainian relations before and during the war.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Newsweek.pl, “W Newsweeku: Wielbiciel Hitlera, Który Z Pieniędzy Kremla Finansował Skrajną Prawicę W Polsce. Kim Jest Aleksander Usowski?,” *Newsweek.pl*, April 3, 2017, <http://www.newsweek.pl/polska/polityka/jak-kreml-finansowal-skrajna-prawice-w-polsce-,artykuly,408023,1.html>.

<sup>35</sup> “Volhynia Massacre,” *Volhynia Massacre*, accessed April 6, 2017, <http://www.volhyniamassacre.eu/>.

<sup>36</sup> No less important is the assessment of UPA. Many Ukrainians see it as an organization that fought for an independent Ukraine against the Soviet Union and believe that some members of the UPA as well as the organization itself should be recognized as national heroes. The fact that some UPA members are responsible for the Volhynia tragedy does not mean that the entire movement should be condemned. Poles do not find it easy to accept that perspective, as for them the Ukrainian Insurgent Army is first and foremost associated with the mass murder of Poles in Volhynia. For this reason, any act of commemoration of the UPA is seen negatively in Poland.

Russian influence aims to aggravate the complicated problem of mutually negative Polish-Ukrainian relations by delivering a very simple message to Poles: not only have Ukrainians never asked Poles for forgiveness after what they did in Volhynia, they actually brag about it, honor murderers by naming streets after UPA members and erect monuments to celebrate them. This is allegedly a disgrace to Poles and it also reveals that resentment towards Poles is strong among Ukrainians and, furthermore, such feelings may manifest themselves at any time, resulting in tragic consequences. This kind of anti-Ukrainian propaganda is widely exploited by various politicians, media outlets and organizations representing far-right views, but it frequently reaches mainstream entities as well. For example Marian Kowalski, the leader of the Polish National Radical Camp said in his interview for this report:

*„Supporting Bandera's Ukraine? It is nonsense. My party will not support Kiev, because first of all, Poland is unable to win a war against Russia. Supporting the Kiev regime is stupidity, because it's not even popular with the Ukrainian nation. (...) I think that at the moment when the Bandera-course began to be cherished, Poland should have withdrawn from making any friendly gestures towards this country.”*

While stirring up negative feelings towards Ukrainians based on the sides' difficult shared history, propaganda strives to unfold other accusations: that fascism is on the rise in Ukraine and is being legitimized by the president and the parliament, and that Ukrainians are flooding the Polish labor market, taking jobs away from Poles and causing wage stagnation. All these arguments are aimed at exacerbating divisions between Poles and Ukrainians, raising tension between the two countries and subsequently transforming favorable Polish-Ukrainian relations into mutual hostility.

### *The war in the Donbass*

The engagement of radical groups in Ukraine's defensive war in the East has been blown out of proportion by the Kremlin. These ideas are closely related to Russian propaganda both in Russian media and abroad. The debate currently being provoked on the Internet in regards to the war and the revolution in Ukraine aims to place the Poles and the Russians on one side, and the 'Ukrainian fascists' on the other.<sup>37</sup> Remarkable views are held by one of the pro-Russian activists, David Hudziec, from the Camp of Great Poland, who actually lives in the Donbass and works for the Novorossiia Today information agency. He stated in an interview for this report:

*„When the conflict in Ukraine broke out, I didn't want to be passive. In Poland, everyone suddenly stood against Russia, supporting Ukrainians thoughtlessly. They forget that the Bandera movement, which has caused so much harm to the Poles, is recovering there. For Banderists, it is Poland that is their biggest enemy! I can't agree with the Russophobic line adopted by the Polish authorities and media. These official views are now repeated by a majority of Poles thoughtlessly without having an idea what the truth is and only quoting newspaper headlines.”*

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<sup>37</sup> Michał Soska, “Prawy Sektor, Donbas I Azow | Myśl Polska,” 2014, <http://www.mysl-polska.pl/node/190>.

A separate issue was the claim that the annexation of Crimea and the Crimean referendum was an act of historical justice and a righteous rebellion of the people against the elites. Janusz Korwin-Mikke, a Polish pro-Russian MEP explained:

*„It is true that the fact that there is so much suffering in Ukraine today is Mr. Putin's fault. (...) If he distanced himself from those fighting people, he wouldn't become the president in the next election. We need to understand that Russians feel that it is their people who are fighting in the east of Ukraine. The separatists in Donbass are Russian patriots. His excellence Petro Poroshenko, president of Ukraine, must destroy them, in the same way that Germans had to smother the Warsaw Uprising. (...) I will probably surprise you, but if I were Putin myself, after shooting down that plane, I would send 50,000 soldiers immediately, take over the land, execute the perpetrators and hold a fair referendum”.*

This line of pro-Russian geopolitical argument claims that Poland has no interest supporting Ukraine as Ukrainians are unable to maintain their independence. In other words, the state's very existence is threatened in the long run. According to this logic, our interest lies in maintaining a proper and friendly relationship with the real sovereign to the East of Poland, namely Russia. Moreover, the propaganda asserts that there is a type of proxy war ongoing between the West and the Russian Federation, that the revolution in Maidan was instigated by the American intelligence, and that Poland is being taken advantage of by the Americans.

## NATO

What makes far-right and fringe left groups in Poland comparable entities is their strong anti-liberal attitude and the fact that they question the very foundations of Polish geopolitical choices made after 1989. Anti-Americanism and critical attitudes toward NATO are common on the far right. The goal of its propaganda is to present the US as a hypocritical opportunist, which does not hesitate to enhance its supremacy over other countries by every possible means, including overthrowing governments and creating chaos in those countries. As opposed to the US, Russian officials are presented as reasonable people who aim to protect the interests of their own country. The message is the following: the US's version of democracy is more dangerous to the world than the Russian way of maintaining the status-quo.

This propagandistic narrative continues to promote critical and even hysterical emotions towards NATO among Poles. So, Polish officials are making a fatal mistake by tightening their relations with the alliance and bringing NATO battalions to Poland, which would have a devastating consequence for Polish national security.<sup>38</sup> What has to be emphasized is that anti-Americanism and anti-NATO propaganda are not attempting to convince Poles to shift support from one ally (USA) to another (Russia) as it seems unrealistic, but instead aim to divide society, and lead it to believe cooperation with either side is detrimental to Poland. The idea is to sow the seeds of war in Europe, in which Poland would play an integral role, and threaten that it may erupt anytime if NATO does not stop “provoking” Russia.

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<sup>38</sup> It claims that Russia has no ill intentions towards Poland, instead it is Warsaw that is provoking Moscow – with the encouragement of America and NATO - and pushing its country into war.



## Western liberalism

Russian propaganda is frequently recognized for trying to manipulate people's perception of what to consider as right and wrong values. What raises concerns in many countries is the fact that propaganda is trying to convince people that what we see now in the countries of the European Union and the USA can be described as the decay of Western civilization, and liberal democracy is to be blamed for this. As opposed to Western liberalism, the Kremlin's propagandists portray Russia as an alternative where traditional values are thriving, "weaponising" culture with the aid of three basic traditionalist values: "family," "nation," and "religion".<sup>39</sup> While the argument of "good conservative Russia" and the "bad liberal West" finds a decent audience in many countries, it appears that in Poland it is less effective. Polish society is conservative in its own Catholic way, and as a result, external convictions that are based on Orthodox Christianity don't appeal to them. What is more, Poles seem to understand that Russia's turn to conservatism is more of a political play, employed to maintain division between itself and the societies of other countries.

## Polish-German relations

One element of Russian influence specifically aimed at causing division is the effort to encourage conflict between Poles and Germans. Germany and Poland have a strong economic and societal relationship, and both Germany and Germans are viewed positively by Poles. Russian propaganda goes even further, presenting Germany as the dominant power in Europe, a regional empire which has actually taken control of Polish economy and mainstream media through close connections with the German capital. The Russian narrative also tries to exploit the fact that Warsaw and Berlin have differing opinions regarding the waves of refugees coming to Europe from North Africa and presents Germany's pro-refugee stance as one that aims to humiliate Poland by imposing quotas of refugees on the country and, among them, terrorists as well.

While Poland may not be susceptible to certain ideas backed by Russia, the refugee crisis provides fertile ground for propaganda activities. Polish society is deeply divided about whether to accept refugees in Poland and easily manipulated in this regard. The Russian narrative aims to persuade Poles that the arrival of refugees poses a threat to traditional Polish values and habits and increases the danger of a terrorist attack in Poland. Yet, it must be emphasized that the Russian narrative as it pertains to refugees only plays a supportive role for many mainstream media outlets and politicians who create deep divisions amongst Poles.

The last but certainly not the least important observation regarding Russian mechanisms of influence in Poland is related to the entities that are considered at present - purposefully or not - to hold opinions that are close to the Russian narrative or openly pro-Russian. A close look into the structure of those entities reveals that despite the fact that organizations present themselves as independent bodies they actually act as a densely interconnected network, in which the same people hold multiple positions as journalist, NGO activists or members of political parties.

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<sup>39</sup> Krekó et al., "The Weaponization of Culture: Kremlin's Traditional Agenda and the Export of Values to Central Europe."

These entities mirror the structures of the numerous organizations that represent the Russian narrative and, in fact, often associate with and employ the same people.

The detailed description of Russian influencing attempts in Poland that follows the general findings is divided into four parts: pro-Russian political actors, other pro-Russian organizations, nationalist and/or paramilitary movements, and the media. Further analysis reveals how dense the connections are among those layers and reveals many names active in different fields simultaneously.

## PRO-RUSSIAN POLITICAL ACTORS

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### Zmiana and Mateusz Piskorski

When one considers politics, the most obvious example of Russian influence is the work of the Zmiana (Change) party<sup>40</sup>. The “First non-American political party” as it titles itself on its website, Zmiana was established by Mateusz Piskorski. Piskorski closely aligned with the Kremlin’s agenda in the Crimean conflict. As he stated in 2014:

*“[Ukraine] is a collapsed state. Once the West, including Poland, backed Bandera’s supporters in Ukraine, the country was thrown into chaos (...) The people of Crimea have had a pro-Russian view for a long time. And they are afraid of Banderists. We should be afraid too.”<sup>41</sup>*

#### *Start with Samoobrona*

We find the genesis and roots of "Zmiana" in the far-right "Samoobrona" party („Self-defence” in Polish). Mateusz Piskorski, the leader of the "Zmiana” party, was a spokesperson and an MP of "Samoobrona".<sup>42</sup> As a poorly organized structure that allowed for rapid career advancement without any background checks, “Samoobrona” became a springboard for young and ambitious activists and political outsiders.

In 2005, Mateusz Piskorski won a mandate as a member of the Polish Sejm. As a member of the lower house of parliament he sat in the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Polish Sejm, where he came into contact with Russian actors at a higher status for the first time and took part in Moscow's efficient propaganda campaign. In December 2005, Mateusz Piskorski enrolled in a Russian observation mission and flew to Transnistria for the elections.<sup>43</sup> A former Member of Parliament, who wished to remain anonymous for the interview, explained Piskorski’s early pro-Russian stance:

*„I met Piskorski two years ago. He opened his calendar which was filled to the brim: The Caucasus, the former Soviet Union, and Africa. He proposed: ‘You can go with us if you want. If only you pouched a few people, preferably former MPs, councilors’. I passed, but many of my colleagues liked this political tourism.”<sup>44</sup>*

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<sup>40</sup> Zmiana officially has never been registered as a political party because it was refused a registration by a court.

<sup>41</sup> [wiadomosci.onet.pl](http://wiadomosci.onet.pl), “Mateusz Piskorski: Ukraina to Państwo Upadłe. Powinniśmy Się Bać,” *Onet Wiadomości*, March 19, 2014, <http://wiadomosci.onet.pl/swiat/mateusz-piskorski-ukraina-to-panstwo-upadle-powinnismy-sie-bac/j9pmw>.

<sup>42</sup> In the Polish parliamentary election in 2005, Lepper's party won 11 percent of the vote. "Samoobrona” was part of the governing coalition with right-wing parties - Law and Justice and League of Polish Families (Liga Polskich Rodzin). Andrzej Lepper became the Minister of Agriculture in the government of Jarosław Kaczyński. It was the peak of Lepper's power. The party still included nationalist and anti-European circles.

<sup>43</sup> It is a self-proclaimed quasi-state in Moldova, not recognized by the European Union, but supported by Moscow. During the mission there was a scandal on an international scale. Piskorski publicly declared that he "will do everything so that Poland recognizes Transnistria". The politician explained afterwards that his statement was misrepresented and taken out of context. However, it was circulated in the global, and above all, the Russian media. Ever since, Piskorski was often quoted in the Russian media in which he was the "good Pole."

<sup>44</sup> Piskorski persuaded, among others, Andrzej Lepper, and two LPR politicians - Sylwester Chruszcz and Daniel Pawłowicz - to participate in such missions. Moreover, he pouched some of his foreign contacts: a Belgian professor-communist, a French scientist and researcher, a German councillor, and a British nationalist.

In the next general election in 2007, a number of activists from "Samoobrona" and the right-wing League of Polish Families remained on the anti-establishment political market, even as they were out of the Sejm. Piskorski planned to build a new network with their aid, first around the European Center of Geopolitical Analysis (ECAG). Piskorski's association included people from various radical circles. For example, Dawid Jakubowski, a member of a marginal communist party and the vice-president of ECAG, and Przemysław Sieradzan, an assistant professor at the University of Gdańsk, who was active in the International Eurasian Movement.

### *Electoral business in full swing*

During the trip to Transnistria, Piskorski met a Russian, Alexei Koczetkow.<sup>45</sup> The latter was the head of a Russian organization known as CIS-EMO, which used the Kremlin's money to observe elections on the territory of the former Soviet Union. Koczetkow appeared everywhere where Moscow had interests: in Ukraine, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia, among others. His reports were always in line with the Russian authorities' agenda. If a pro-Kremlin candidate won, the elections were fair and just. If there was a surprise, it turned out that the vote had to be repeated, because it was unfair.<sup>46</sup>

The electoral business was profitable. Sources of the Polish weekly Newsweek estimated that for every mission Koczetkow was paid approximately EUR 100-200 thousand by Moscow.<sup>47</sup> The money was used to pay for the stay of the observation group, and the rest remained in his pocket. The friendship of Piskorski and Koczetkow flourished after 2007. Piskorski was a mediator, using the ECAG association to recruit volunteers for election observation missions. ECAG collaborators travelled not only to countries of the former Soviet Union.

They were, among others, in Syria at the invitation of the Syrian parliament. Syrian TV called them "a European delegation of people of the media and politics." The observers said in Syrian state media that President Bashar al-Assad was not responsible for the civil war in Syria, but only repulsed the attacks of Islamic radicals and terrorists.<sup>48</sup> ECAG members were also in Libya when a civil war began in that region. They were invited by the dictator Gaddafi.

*„The Centre sent me to the Economic Forum in Krynica, I had to do some interviews for the portal. I thought to myself, why not? They paid the train and the hotel. When I arrived I met Piskorski who said that it was more important to recruit people for the missions rather than to do interviews. ‘It would be best to recruit foreign politicians but Poles are fine as well’” - stated a former associate of ECAG anonymously in an interview for the research.*

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Newsweek.pl, "Euroazjaci W Warszawie," *Newsweek.pl*, January 15, 2013, <http://www.newsweek.pl/swiat/euroazjaci-w-warszawie,100369,1,1.html>.

<sup>45</sup> In the 1990's, Koczetkow was associated with an extreme nationalist party named Russian National Union (Russkoye Nacionalnoje Jedinstwo).

<sup>46</sup> Andriy Ławryniuk, a Ukrainian journalist with the UNIAN news agency reported: Koczetkow came to Kiev at the times of Viktor Yanukovich. He was suspected of collusion with Russian special services, and journalists immediately recognized him as a supervisor on behalf of Moscow. For money, he would consider any election as democratic.

<sup>47</sup> Newsweek.pl, "Euroazjaci W Warszawie."

<sup>48</sup> Together with Piskorski and Marcin Domagała, ECAG members in Syria included other nationalist politicians as well. Those were, among others, Bartosz Bekier, former head of the nationalist ONR in Masovia, founder of the nationalist "Falanga" and the chief editor of a radical website known as XPortal.

With time, ECAG and Piskorski's people cut ties with Alexei Koczetkow and found another, better contact in Moscow as a consequence of financial disputes.<sup>49</sup> They made contact with Modest Kolerov, one of the leaders of the Russian Eurasian movement. Recently, Mateusz Piskorski has had closer contacts with Yuri Bondarenko, the director of the Russian-Polish Centre for Dialogue.<sup>50</sup> Bondarenko is an important figure in the Russian conservative environment, because he is a close associate of the Russian Minister of Culture, Vladimir Medinskii, and a friend of Dmitri Rogozin, the deputy prime minister in charge of the arms industry and a well-known nationalist.<sup>51,52</sup>

Piskorski and Bondarenko met in 2004 in Moscow during Andrzej Lepper's Russian visit but their more substantive contact began roughly in 2015. Within the next few months the former MP has repeatedly contacted Bondarenko. He visited him in December 2015 and in January 2016, participated with him in a press conference in Moscow, and visited Crimea at his invitation. In April 2016, both were in Katyń. Piskorski is not just a friend of Bondarenko: in June, his foundation, the Russian-Polish Centre for Dialogue, paid for Mateusz Piskorski and his co-workers to visit Chechnya. They were to travel via the Trans-Siberian Railroad, but it did not take place as Mateusz Piskorski was arrested in May 2016.

### *Piskorski accused of spying*

In May 2016, Piskorski was detained by Polish prosecutors on suspicions of spying for Russia and possibly China.<sup>53</sup> So far, nothing more is known about the charges he is facing. Prior to his detention, Piskorski had been famous for having long-standing relations with the Russian establishment. He was probably the most popular Polish commentator in Russian media with regards to the conflict in Ukraine, had an extremely critical stance towards the Ukrainian government and claimed that Ukraine is ruled by "neo-Nazis."<sup>54</sup>

*„Undoubtedly, it is a big blow for the movement. For now, 'Zmiana' and ECAG are trying to put a brave face on the situation, their activists organize pickets in defence of Piskorski, and a portal named Sputnik writes articles in his defence. They are making him the victim of the incorrect Polish system that is submissive to the West. But without a leader and someone who made it one whole, and had contacts in the East, this movement will fall apart” – Kazimierz Wójcicki explained.*

Zmiana is significant not because of its public support, which is negligible, but because it resembles an attempt to establish and introduce a party that directly represents Russian interests in Poland.

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<sup>49</sup> He is an influential figure in the political environment of Russian conservatives and nationalists. He is the head of the Institute of New States, one of the think-tanks and foundations that are attempting to grow Russia's influence abroad.

<sup>50</sup> Newsweek.pl, "Robił to Jawnie," *Newsweek.pl*, May 29, 2016, <http://www.newsweek.pl/plus/polska/mateusz-piskorski-kulisy-zatrzymania-rosyjskiego-szpiega,artykuly,386415,1,z.html>.

<sup>51</sup> Bondarenko speaks Polish fluently and - as he says - he loves Poland. In the 1980's, he studied Polish literature at the University of Warszawa and worked as a journalist in Katowice. It is said that he maintained contacts with KGB officers.

<sup>52</sup> The Russian-Polish Centre for Dialogue was established as a Russian answer to a similar Polish institution. It has a similar name but has nothing to do with the Polish Centre for Polish-Russian Dialogue and Understanding. It is actually a private foundation financed by Yuri Bondarenko.

<sup>53</sup> Agence France-Presse in Warsaw, "Poland Detains pro-Kremlin Party Leader for 'Spying,'" *The Guardian*, May 19, 2016, sec. World news, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/may/19/poland-detains-pro-kremlin-party-leader-mateusz-piskorski-spying>.

<sup>54</sup> Fronda.pl, "Piskorski W Rosji: Ukrainą Rządzą Neonaziści," February 2, 2015, <http://www.fronda.pl/a/piskorski-w-rosji-ukraina-rzadza-neonazisci,47052.html>.

According to journalists of *Gazeta Wyborcza*, who claimed to have direct information from a person involved in the trial of Mateusz Piskorski, the Internal Security Agency (*Agencja Bezpieczeństwa Wewnętrznego*) gathered information which confirms that “Zmiana and other associated organizations have been financed and controlled by Russian secret services and exploited to implement operational activities”. Piskorski and Zmiana were allegedly recruited to perform activities aimed at promoting the Russian narrative in Poland, by manipulating social opinion and increasing anti-Ukrainian resentment in Poland.<sup>55</sup>

It is important to note that Zmiana could be considered as the first political party in modern Poland which has tried to unite a number of disparate organizations under a banner of anti-liberalism and pro-Russian stances. Zmiana associated with former members of Self-Defence (*Samoobrona*), a part of the ruling coalition in 2006-2007, members of far-right organizations like *Falanga* and the *Camp of Great Poland*, as well as people from a fringe left-wing group, the *Communist Youth of Poland*. This eclectic project did not succeed however, as some decided to withdraw their membership from the party, yet Zmiana continues to exist even with the leader of the party in detention.

## **Kukiz’15**

Among political parties represented in the Polish parliament, all represent a rather similar line vis-à-vis the situation in Ukraine or politics in Russia. Yet, it doesn’t necessarily mean that the Polish parliament is entirely free from the pro-Russian narrative. Members (or former members) of Kukiz’15, which positions itself as an anti-establishment party, raise particular interest. This eclectic political structure established by Polish rock and pop singer Paweł Kukiz attracts members from different sides of the political spectrum: nationalists, economic liberals, businessman and local activists. Currently in opposition, Kukiz’15 is perceived as a party which opposes the decisions of ruling Law and Justice much less than other opposition parties. With regards to the topic under discussion there are two especially interesting people.

Marek Jakubiak is a businessman famous for re-introducing local breweries to the market. But he is also a financial supporter of *Kresy.pl*, a website considered by many to be a source of pro-Russian narratives and even propaganda, as mentioned above. Another notable individual is Robert Winnicki, currently an independent member, who was elected to Polish parliament from the list of Kukiz’15. He is also the head of the “National Movement” – a nationalistic party, which is sometimes considered a conduit for Russian propaganda even by other right-wing entities, including right-wing media outlets. In February 2016, he met Idris Mayya, the Syrian ambassador in Poland, in Warsaw to discuss how the two could cooperate to “show what is really going on in Syria”, which entails defending the policies of President Assad.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Mariusz Jałoszewski and Wojciech Czuchonowski, “ABW: Partię Zmiana Założyli Rosjanie,” *Wyborcza.pl*, May 25, 2016, <http://wyborcza.pl/1,75398,20132090,abw-partie-zmiana-zalozyli-rosjanie.html>.

<sup>56</sup> *Fronda.pl*, “Maski Opadają! Lider Ruchu Narodowego Robert Winnicki Spotkał Się Z Przyjacielem Putina!,” February 19, 2016, <http://www.fronda.pl/a/maski-opadaja-lider-ruchu-narodowego-robert-winnicki-spotkal-sie-z-przyjacielem-putina,66259.html>.

## Janusz Korwin-Mikke

The pro-Russian narrative in the Polish political system is present mostly outside the Polish parliament. The main figure representing it is Janusz Korwin-Mikke, MEP and the leader of the political party "Freedom". In the last election, "Freedom" (then known as "KORWiN") received 4,76% of the votes and was only 0,24 of percentage point away from entering the parliament.<sup>57</sup> Korwin-Mikke, as a member of the European Parliament, has libertarian economic views and a strongly anti-EU attitude. He openly claims that his mission in the European Parliament is to destroy the EU. When it comes to the Russian-Ukrainian war, Korwin-Mikke supports the annexation of Crimea.<sup>58</sup> He also considers Ukraine a threat, and even an enemy of Poland and claims that Russia, "being an enemy of our enemy (i.e. Ukraine), is now our ally".<sup>59</sup> Korwin-Mikke expresses his positive attitude towards Putin by claiming that he is a great leader for Russia and would also be a good leader of Poland,<sup>60</sup> and even hails Ramzan Kadyrov, the leader of the Chechen Republic as a "reasonable person," with liberal economic views, which are always appreciated in Korwin's political environment.<sup>61,62</sup> Over the last 12 months, Janusz Korwin-Mikke has visited Crimea and gone to Chechnya to promote himself as a pro-Russian politician and meet local authorities.<sup>63,64</sup>

Korwin and Zmiana have cooperated on several occasions before. Korwin-Mikke went with Mateusz Piskorski to a conference in Damascus in December 2014. He was also accompanied by activists from Zmiana on the trip to Chechnya in August 2016, which proves that pro-Russian Polish actors form a tight knit circle of a few personalities and organizations.

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<sup>57</sup> Państwowa Komisja Wyborcza, "PKW | Wybory Do Sejmu RP I Senatu RP," 2015, [http://parlament2015.pkw.gov.pl/349\\_wyniki\\_sejm/0/0](http://parlament2015.pkw.gov.pl/349_wyniki_sejm/0/0).

<sup>58</sup> TVN24.pl, "Korwin-Mikke Dla Rosyjskiej Agencji: Aneksja Krymu 'zupełnie Naturalna,'" *TVN24.pl*, May 28, 2014, <http://www.tvn24.pl/wiadomosci-z-kraju,3/korwin-mikke-dla-rosyjskiej-agencji-aneksja-krymu-zupelnie-naturalna,433432.html>.

<sup>59</sup> Polsatnews.pl, "Korwin-Mikke: Teraz Naszym Wrogiem Jest Ukraina - Polsat News," *Polsatnews.pl*, May 10, 2016, <http://www.polsatnews.pl/wiadomosc/2016-05-10/korwin-mikke-teraz-naszym-wrogiem-jest-ukraina/>.

<sup>60</sup> Paweł Luty, "Janusz Korwin-Mikke dla 'Do Rzeczy': Pan Putin Byłby Świetnym Prezydentem Polski," *naTemat.pl*, August 3, 2014, <http://natemat.pl/112253,janusz-korwin-mikke-dla-do-rzeczy-pan-putin-byly-swietnym-prezydentem-polski>.

<sup>61</sup> Leonid Swiridow, "Janusz Korwin-Mikke: „Ramzan Kadyrow to Bardzo Rozsądny Człowiek"," August 18, 2016, <https://pl.sputniknews.com/opinie/201608183718722-Korwin-Mikke-Ramzan-Kadyrow-to-bardzo-rozsadny-czlowiek/>.

<sup>62</sup> The Kremlin saw those signals. It invited Korwin Mikke to a conference in Yalta which was entitled "Anti-fascist Maidan" under the official name „Yalta-45: Past, Present, Future,” and was attended by the rebels of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic in 2015. The subject of the meeting: "Should the offensive of terrorists in Donetsk and Luhansk spread into other areas of Ukraine?". Ultimately, Korwin did not go to Yalta.

<sup>63</sup> During his travels to Russia in August 2016 he gave an interview to Leonid Swiridow , a Russian journalist who was expelled from Poland for espionage. He talked about the attitude of Poles towards Russia, stating "some Poles are almost born with hatred towards Russians", and also in regards to Ukraine said that "I support Ukraine's independence, but Donbass and Crimea are only internal problems between Russia and Ukraine", and on the detention of Mateusz Piskorski adding there are "no arguments for keeping him in detention."

<sup>64</sup> Leonid Swiridow, "Janusz Korwin-Mikke: O Rosji, PiS, Ukrainie, Clinton, ABW, Krymie ... I Donaldzie Tusku," August 20, 2016, <https://pl.sputniknews.com/opinie/201608203725156-Janusz-Korwin-Mikke-o-Rosji-PiS-Ukrainie-Clinton-ABW-Krymie-i-Donaldzie-Tusku-Leonid-Swiridow/>.

Back in June 2016, two politicians (Sławomir Marczewski and Marek Marecki) who used to work with Korwin-Mikke in his former parties called Union of Real Politics (Unia Polityki Realnej) and Congress of New Right (Kongres Nowej Prawicy) had their house searched by the Agency of Internal Security (ABW). Although there were no public statements, journalist Wojciech Czuchnowski alleges that the cause of the house raids by ABW was that the two politicians cooperated with “Zmiana” and went to Ukraine in 2014 to destroy monuments to UPA and Stepan Bandera. Czuchnowski claims that according to Polish special services, the trip to Ukraine to demolish monuments was financed by Russia.<sup>65</sup> Still, Marcin Rey<sup>66</sup> does not consider Korwin an agent of Moscow:

*„For over 25 years we have been treating Korwin as a funny freak who presents his eccentric ideas in a radical, often funny form. He invents things that can be catchy, knows that today politics is not a picket of twenty people on the street, but the Internet.”*

According to Rey, the Russians look at the pro-Russian initiatives partly as if they were a type of start-up to be invested in, and utilized to a greater extent later. „It is better for Russia, because it is spontaneous. (...) And the thing with start-ups is that in the end there will be a big investor that purchases the shares. Korwin? According to me, he does not take money from Moscow. But what he does is provide fuel for the Russian propaganda” – added Rey.

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<sup>65</sup> Wojciech Czuchonowski, “ABW Szuka Agentów Rosji. Teraz Wśród Skrajnej Prawicy,” June 14, 2016, <http://wyborcza.pl/1,75398,20235794,abw-szuka-agentow-rosji-teraz-wsrod-skrajnej-prawicy.html>.

<sup>66</sup> is a Russian propaganda expert who has been unveiling the relationship of Polish activists with the Russians for years. On Facebook he runs a page known as “Russian 5th column in Poland.”



## OTHER PRO-RUSSIAN ORGANIZATIONS AND EXTREMISTS, PARAMILITARY MOVEMENTS VULNERABLE TO RUSSIAN INFLUENCE

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It has already been mentioned in this report that groups who are either openly pro-Russian or who share Russian propaganda are connected by a complicated network of names and mutual relations. Those networks include people from both the far-right and fringe far-left entities, and a common denominator for many is that at some point the leaders of these organizations were engaged in “Zmiana”.

The pro-Russian narrative is presented in Poland by organizations that operate on many levels to communicate with their audience. These organizations range from think tanks that use sophisticated language to reach intellectuals, to civil entities that unite people on the basis of common ideology, to paramilitary organizations.

### ECAG

The European Center of Geopolitical Analysis (Europejskie Centrum Analiz Geopolitycznych, ECAG) is a Polish think tank that has repeatedly been accused of representing the Russian narrative in Poland. The recent “Laundromat” scandal revealed that ECAG received EUR 27.685 from the UK company Crystalord Limited for “consulting services,” which proves a direct financial link between Russian stakeholders or “dirty money,” and the organization’s activity between 2012 and 2014.<sup>67</sup> ECAG’s work concentrates on monitoring sociological, political and economic processes and their influence on the geopolitical situation in the world.<sup>68</sup> It was established in 2007 by Mateusz Piskorski, the detained leader of “Zmiana”. Piskorski was also the first director of the organization. ECAG’s work is mostly visible on its website, geopolityka.org, where a mix of articles on politics and history are regularly published. But what has brought the biggest recognition to ECAG is that its associates have been travelling to undemocratic countries to participate in conferences and observational missions to legitimize their regimes.

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<sup>67</sup> „The Russian Laundromat Exposed,” OCCRP, March 20, 2017, accessed March 23, 2017, <https://www.occrp.org/en/laundromat/the-russian-laundromat-exposed/>; Wojciech Cieśla, “Kto prał w Polsce brudne pieniądze z Rosji?,” *Newsweek Poland*, March 19, 2017, accessed March 23, 2017, <http://www.newsweek.pl/swiat/polityka/sledztwo-newsweeka-kto-pral-w-polsce-brudne-pieniadze-z-rosji-film,407123.html>, Implicated in Laundromat scheme – <http://www.newsweek.pl/biznes/firma/operacja-laundromat-kto-w-polsce-pral-brudne-pieniadze-z-rosji,artykuly,407266,1.html>

<sup>68</sup> Bazy.ngo.pl, “Stowarzyszenie Europejskie Centrum Analiz Geopolitycznych, Warszawa-Praga-Południe,” 2017, <http://bazy.ngo.pl/profil/180145/Stowarzyszenie-Europejskie-Centrum-Analiz-Geopolitycznych>.

ECAG members organized or participated in monitoring missions in the unrecognised republics of Abkhazia,<sup>69</sup> Ossetia, Transnistria,<sup>70</sup> and Nagorno-Karabakh,<sup>71</sup> or in countries governed by authoritarian regimes in Belarus<sup>72</sup> and Syria.<sup>73</sup> In 2011, ECAG members (Piskorski and Marcin Domagała, now head of the organization) visited Libya and took part in a propagandist conference convened by Muammar Gaddafi. In 2013, they went to Syria (joined by Bartosz Bekier from Xportal and Falanga) on the invitation of the Assad-regime to monitor the war situation in the country.<sup>74</sup> <sup>75</sup> The Polish MFA stated that this visit was not coordinated by the Ministry and declared that the visit is not in line with Poland's official position on Syria.<sup>76</sup> Under the ECAG brand, Piskorski gave interviews to Russian media, in which he was trying to convince the Russian audience that Euromaidan was a provocation by Western politicians and NGOs.<sup>77</sup>

ECAG operates as a think tank, and its methods differ from other organizations that promote the Russian narrative in Poland. Generally, they pay more attention to ideological foundations and try to gather followers and supporters that share a similar ideological approach.

## Communist Youth of Poland

The Communist Youth of Poland represents the far-left spectrum of the political scene. Praising not only communist Poland but even Stalinism in the Soviet Union, this organization tends to represent a fringe ideology that has almost no support among Poles. Yet, the Communist Youth of Poland were also among the founding members of the Zmiana political party. Probably the only person of some significance from this entity is Ludmyła Dobrzyniecka, the leader of the organization. She assesses Stalin's dictatorship favourably and sees him as a great leader. Most importantly, Dobrzyniecka has left Poland to fight in the Donbass on the side of pro-Russian separatists in the Luhansk People's Republic. She is currently a member of the international brigade and is considered to be only the second Pole that has officially confirmed their participation in the war on the side of the separatists.<sup>78</sup>

Nationalist movements also play an indirect role in disseminating Russian narratives in Poland, as exemplified by the numerous movements and organizations below.

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<sup>69</sup> ECAG, "Misja ECAG Na Wyborach W Abchazji," December 13, 2009, <http://www.geopolityka.org/analizy/wybory/abchazja/misja-ecag-na-wyborach-w-abchazji>.

<sup>70</sup> Newsweek.pl, "Euroazjaci W Warszawie."

<sup>71</sup> ECAG, "Obserwacja Wyborów W Nagornym Karabachu," July 30, 2012, <http://geopolityka.org/analizy/wybory/gorski-karabach/obserwacja-wyborow-w-nagornym-karabachu>.

<sup>72</sup> ECAG, "Monitoring Wyborów Prezydenckich Na Białorusi," December 19, 2010, <http://geopolitics.pl/analizy/wybory/bialorus/monitoring-wyborow-prezydenckich-na-bialorusi>.

<sup>73</sup> ECAG, "ECAG: Kolejna Międzynarodowa Misja Ekspertów ECAG W Syrii," June 2, 2014, <http://www.geopolityka.org/programy/ecag-kolejna-miedzynarodowa-misja-ekspertow-ecag-w-syrii>.

<sup>74</sup> Newsweek.pl, "Euroazjaci W Warszawie."

<sup>75</sup> Łukasz Woźnicki, "'Prawdziwi Polacy' Z Falangi Pojechali Do Syrii Na Zaproszenie Reżimu," *Wyborcza.pl*, June 20, 2013, [http://wyborcza.pl/1,76842,14133678,\\_Prawdziwi\\_Polacy\\_\\_z\\_Falangi\\_pojechali\\_do\\_Syrii\\_na.html](http://wyborcza.pl/1,76842,14133678,_Prawdziwi_Polacy__z_Falangi_pojechali_do_Syrii_na.html).

<sup>76</sup> Paweł Gawlik, "Bryluje W Rosyjskich Rządowych Mediach Jako 'Poseł Z Polski', Choć Posłem Dawno Nie Jest. I Przynosi Polsce Wstyd," *Wyborcza.pl*, March 18, 2014, [http://wyborcza.pl/1,76842,15643422,Bryluje\\_w\\_rosyjskich\\_rzadowych\\_mediach\\_jako\\_\\_posel.html](http://wyborcza.pl/1,76842,15643422,Bryluje_w_rosyjskich_rzadowych_mediach_jako__posel.html).

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Anna Pawłowska, "Zasłynęła Czyszczeniem Grobu Bieruta, Teraz Walczy W Donbasie. Po Stronie Rebeliantów," *Wyborcza.pl*, October 4, 2016, <http://wyborcza.pl/7,75399,20789977,katyn-to-byli-niemcy-a-stalin-byl-dobrym-przywodca-polska.html>.

## Nationalism in a historical perspective

There is no denying that contemporary pro-Russian organizations in Poland derive their inspiration from certain political traditions. Despite the above mentioned general resentment of the Polish nation towards Russia, such political affinities are traditionally found in Poland in the political tradition of the National Democrats (ND). Towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century a new Polish political awareness was developing. Lacking national sovereignty, Poland saw its chance of regaining independence in the outbreak of a conflict between the invaders: Russia on one side and Germany and Austria-Hungary on the other. Two political strands formed within the secret resistance movement: socialist, later connected with Józef Piłsudski leaning towards Berlin and Vienna, and the National Democrats (ND) with Roman Dmowski as its leader, sympathizing with Russia.<sup>79</sup> Gradually the National Democrats became radical nationalists, moving towards fascism. They are also held responsible for inciting antisemitism and anti-Ukrainian and anti-German attitudes in the period between World War I and II. In the 1920s and 30s extremist and fascist movements sprang from ND, such as Obóz Wielkiej Polski i Ruch Narodowo Radykalny 'Falanga.' During the reign of communism in the Polish People's Republic (1945-1989), some of the former National Democrats and radical youths collaborated with the communists.<sup>80</sup>

### *Nationalist renaissance*

The Polish national movement is currently experiencing a renaissance. It is associated with the increasingly rebellious sentiments of a generation of young people. Many young citizens feel dissatisfied with liberal democracy and turn towards radical movements. The extreme right was certainly aided by the electoral success of the mainstream right and the Law and Justice party (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość) in the 2015 elections. The growing concern about immigration in Europe and the wars in the Middle East and Ukraine certainly had an impact on the development of radicalism. Moreover, Russia's propaganda activities are aimed at increasing the aversion of Poles towards Ukrainians by reviving historical conflicts.

The radical political landscape is divided between the largest political formations such as the National Movement, the National-Radical Camp and the National Rebirth of Poland, as well as smaller organizations such as the Camp of Great Poland or Falanga. These are not organizations with a large number of formal members. They are joined by shared views but divided by factions and personal conflicts. It is more accurate to speak of a subculture of nationalists.

Nationalists have many sympathizers among football fans. Nowadays, football fans and activists of a given organization stand side by side at each nationalist demonstration.

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<sup>79</sup> When Poland enjoyed independence in the period between the two World Wars, 1928-1939, the National Democrats were ultimately anti-Communist. ND were the main opponent of Piłsudski's policies at the time of his rule in the 1920s and the 1930s.

<sup>80</sup> Among those, there was the leader of the pre-war fascist 'Falanga', Bolesław Piasecki, who was radical enough to believe that the alliance of the Polish People's Republic with the Soviet Union was beneficial. Ideologists and politicians representing this movement constituted a strong and significant anti-Semitic and crypto-nationalist group in communist Poland. They survived because communists flirted with cooperating with them, recognizing strong radical sentiments in Polish society.

## National Rebirth of Poland – NOP

This is one of the oldest nationalist organizations in Poland, established in 1981. In communist times it was an illegal, underground organization. Like the National Radical Camp below, it follows the ideology of pre-war nationalists and uses their symbols. NOP has the closest connections to the older political environment of skinheads in Poland. It also has the widest international contacts of all Polish nationalist organisations.<sup>81</sup> Its political platform includes the introduction of the death penalty and stricter laws, as well as strengthening local self-governments. In global politics, NOP nationalists are against the domination of the EU, the US and Israel.<sup>82</sup> The benefit of the activities of such an organization for Russian politics flows mainly from its anti-establishment and anti-European character. However, it must be noted that NOP considers itself to be a pro-European movement in a cultural sense. After all, it has extensive relationships with European nationalist organizations. But it stands against the European Union as an institution and it is a supporter of nation states. It is also anti-American, anti-Ukrainian and anti-immigration.

*„It is enough for the organization to fulfil its role for the Russian propaganda unintentionally, and strengthen independent views that are essential in breaking up the unity of Europe” - says Kazimierz Wójcicki, a political analyst of Polish regional policy*

## National Radical Camp

Formally, the National Radical Camp has been registered since 2012 as an association and not a political party.<sup>83</sup> It uses the symbol of the pre-war ONR, the "phalanx", i.e. a stylized arm holding a sword against the background of a green flag.

ONR was established by a variety of nationalist groups scattered around Poland. In the 1990s and 2000s they were in conflict with each other and tried to organize as a party, with varying degrees of success. They organized demonstrations and tried to gain support among young people, primarily football fans. They organized marches with torches (e.g. in 2008 in Warszawa) and often used the Roman salute at their rallies.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> NOP cooperates with such organizations and parties like Forza Nuova from Italy, Svenskarnas parti, Movimiento Social Republicano, Nieuw-Solidaristisch Alternatif, and Thought and Action. NOP also cooperated previously with the French Parti Anti Sioniste Yahia Gouasmi, it has contacts with Ku Klux Klan in the United States, Ethniko Laiko Metopo (E.L.A.M) from Cyprus and Chryse Ayge (Golden Dawn) from Greece. It also cooperates with the British National Party, the French Front National, and the Spanish Republican Social Movement. Interestingly, NOP has contacts with the Ukrainian Swoboda.

<sup>82</sup> Jarosław Tomaszewicz, “Narodowe Odrodzenie Polski I Jego Wizja „Katolickiego Państwa Narodu Polskiego” Jako Uwspółcześiona Wersja Narodowego Radykalizmu (National Rebirth of Poland and Their Idea of Catholic State of Polish Nation, as Contemporary Version of National Radicalism),” in *Różne Oblicza Nacjonalizmów. Polityka - Religia - Etos* (Kraków: Nomos, 2010), 613.

<sup>83</sup> To register, activists had to cross out of the status record that they refer back to the tradition of the pre-war ONR. The courts refused to register an organization referring to the pre-war ONR because it was considered a fascist organization. However, the modern ONR does not hide its fascination with pre-war Polish nationalists.

<sup>84</sup> The national march of independence on November 11, 2010 was important for the entire subculture. Their mass demonstration in Warszawa showed the strength of fringe politics for the first time. It was no longer a small demonstration of radicals, but a big event. It was attended by politicians (including Janusz Korwin-Mikke). During subsequent 11.11 marches of independence there were nationalist clashes with anti-fascists and the police. In 2012, the National Radical Camp was officially registered as an association and has been operating throughout the country ever since. It is divided into so-called brigades, for example, Białystok ONR Brigade, Lower Silesia Brigade, etc. As part of the

Ideologically, there are no openly pro-Russian sympathies in the ONR. However, the organization promotes anti-European and anti-immigrant slogans. Moreover, since the Ukrainian civil war began in Kiev, the organization has harboured anti-Ukrainian sentiments as well, which can be indirectly used by Russian disinformation as Marian Kowalski, former leader of ONR, exemplifies. In his view:

*„First of all, we should ask Russia what they can offer to us if we stop supporting Ukraine. For example, we could call for lifting embargo on agricultural products, or reducing the prices of gas (...) we will talk with them as equals. We will talk about what we can offer to them and what they can offer to us. A normal transaction.”*

They also showcase negative, anti-globalist, paranoid views regarding Polish-Western, and especially Polish-American relations.

*„I don't believe that brave Dutch or Italian soldiers will defend us where the conflict can arise, that is here, in the East of Europe. It is nonsense. If we don't develop our own defence capabilities then we can't rely on others. (...) the USA is not interested in our region of the world, including Poland, on an ongoing basis. And the biggest problem for the United States these days is China, (...) the biggest American ally will then be Russia, because it is only from the Russian territory that Americans will be able to conduct military actions in the territory of China” - said Marian Kowalski.*<sup>85</sup>

## **National Movement**

The National Movement is defined as the heir to the tradition of the pre-war National Democracy. Today, the National Movement operates as a political party for nationalist circles.<sup>86</sup> The political coalition that created it was formed by the All-Polish Youth, the National Radical Camp and smaller groups and individuals in 2015.<sup>87</sup>

Before the parliamentary election in 2015, it entered the electoral coalition of Paweł Kukiz. Kukiz had demonstrated his popularity in the recent presidential election (he finished third) and the National Movement offered him their organizational structure.

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ONR, there is a so-called national guard as well, which is a kind of militia. It was formally established to protect the march of independence and other demonstrations. It is seen as a type of far-right militia, for example, like SA in Nazi Germany.

<sup>85</sup> From an interview with Marian Kowalski conducted for this report.

<sup>86</sup> A declaration to create such a party was given by activists of the All-Polish Youth during the march of independence on November 11, 2012. However, it took two years for the relevant political circle to come to terms and the National Movement party was officially established at the beginning of 2015.

<sup>87</sup> The All-Polish Youth is one of the older nationalist organizations, referring to a pre-war organization with a similar name, and following the ideas of Roman Dmowski, the leader of the pre-war national camp. The All-Polish Youth has 3.000 members, mostly young people from secondary schools and university students. It was established in 1989 but its peak period of popularity was in the years 2005-2007. At that time, the All-Polish Youth was connected with the right-wing League of Polish Families party which entered the Sejm and co-created a government coalition with Law and Justice and Samoobrona. The leader of the League of Polish Families, Roman Giertych, a known Warsaw lawyer, promoted the young activists of the All-Polish Youth. Many of them, like Krzysztof Bosak or Robert Winnicki, made their political careers between the age of twenty and thirty years, when they were MPs. Today they form the National Movement.

In this way, five activists from the National Movement entered parliament.<sup>88</sup> Moreover, another five members of the Kukiz coalition sympathizes with the National Movement.<sup>89</sup> These MPs are famous for their anti-Ukrainian tirades, which have occurred several times. Although Kukiz and his party did not enter the government, Law and Justice tried to satisfy Kukiz and gave him a certain portfolio of positions in public media. This way, people with close ties to the nationalist subculture gained influence in public radio and television, they received leadership positions in these media outlets. The change in information concerning Ukraine, Russia and Belarus is clearly heard on the radio today. According to Marcin Rey, an investigative journalist and analyst:

*„Unlike the ONR or the NOP, the National Movement aspires to be a major political party (...) The National Movement has connections and people in institutions of power. (...) It is not a pro-Russian party. Absolutely not. But the main demands of the National Movement, for example, on Ukraine or Europe, or NATO are consistent with the objectives of Russian politics. There may be a time when the National Movement and Russia come to terms with each other. For now, nationalist politicians claim that Russia is their enemy, just as is Ukraine. (...) These movements are also a field of Russian infiltration, and there is no doubt that the Russians are looking for people in this environment - people with whom they could get closer, find more points in common. For this purpose, they could use the Russian or European (but already cooperating with Moscow) think tanks, foundations and organizations of national and conservative profiles.”<sup>90</sup>*

There are certain visible connections between the activists of National Movement and "Zmiana" as well. For example, a web portal known as Nowy Ekran provides some evidence. This blog for the pro-Russian extreme right is run by a company controlled by Andrzej Grabowski and Artur Zawisza, one of the leaders of National Movement. The other owner of this company was Ryszard Opara, a Polish-Australian businessmen. Opara spoke at the founding congress of the "Zmiana" party organized by Mateusz Piskorski in February 2015. "According to some pieces of information, he was prepared by Mateusz Piskorski to be the candidate of 'Zmiana' in the presidential election" – says Marcin Rey.

## Falanga

Falanga is a Polish far-right organization that took its name from the Polish fascist movement that existed in Poland before the Second World War.<sup>91</sup> Contemporary Falanga – as stated in its – is strongly opposed to the concepts of liberal democracy and capitalist economy.<sup>92</sup> Falanga is recognizable for its anti-NATO positions and is against deploying any NATO or US troops in Poland.

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<sup>88</sup> MPs from the National Movement include Adam Andruszkiewicz, Sylwester Chruszcz, Bartosz Józwiak, Tomasz Rzymkowski and the leader of the Movement - Robert Winnicki.

<sup>89</sup> Szymon Wiśniewski, "Posłowie Ruchu Narodowego W Sejmie," *Ruch Narodowy*, October 27, 2015, <http://ruchnarodowy.net/poslowie-ruchu-narodowego-w-sejmie/>.

<sup>90</sup> Fronda.pl, "Marcin Rey: Co Wiąże Kresy.pl Z Ruchem Narodowym?," August 23, 2016, <http://www.fronda.pl/a/marcin-reyco-wiaze-kresypl-z-ruchem-narodowym,77234.html>.

<sup>91</sup> Michał Przeperski, "Faszyzm W Środku Warszawy - Histmag.org," November 28, 2012, <https://histmag.org/Faszyzm-w-srodku-Warszawy-7352>.

<sup>92</sup> Bartosz Bekier, "Manifest | Falanga – Europa Młodość Rewolucja," accessed April 6, 2017, <http://falanga.org.pl/792-2/>.

In the 2016 March of Independence organized by nationalist entities, representatives of Falanga were spotted with ‘Stop NATO’ banners.<sup>93</sup> The head of Falanga is Bartosz Bekier, who is also an editor-in-chief of online media outlet Xportal (described in detail in the media section). Both Falanga and Xportal are strongly interconnected and promote themselves on each other’s websites. Falanga got some recognition in 2015 when it decided to organize “Antibandera patrols” along the Polish border.<sup>94</sup> Volunteers from Falanga, dressed like fully equipped soldiers, were especially interesting for Russian propaganda, and the patrols were presented on the pro-Kremlin NTV channel as an example of Polish fear of Ukrainian fascism.<sup>95</sup>

Despite Falanga being anti-NATO, individual members of the organization took part in June 2016 in mock military exercises supported by the Ministry of Internal Defense (MID) simulating emergency protection of Solina Dam and Hydroelectric Power Plant. The potential enemy discussed during the exercises were “saboteurs from the Southern-East”.<sup>96</sup> Falanga's participation in those activities was possible because some of their members also belong to the paramilitary group SJS2039. In practical terms, it means that people from Falanga, who are entirely against the current Polish system of alliances, took part in exercises supported by MID, which is responsible for strengthening Poland’s alliances, and pretended to engage in combat against those military groups that they probably consider as allies of their organization. The controversy has grown because there were allegations that Solina exercises were part of “Anakonda-16.”<sup>97</sup>

## Camp of Great Poland

The Camp of Great Poland (Obóz Wielkiej Polski, OWP) is another organization that references the pre-war nationalist movement. The organization is strongly opposed to mainstream politics and is recognizable mostly because of its anti-Ukrainian actions.

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<sup>93</sup> Falanga.org.pl, “Falanga Na Marszu Niepodległości 2016 | Falanga – Europa Młodość Rewolucja,” March 2016, <http://falanga.org.pl/2016/11/11/zaproszenie/>.

<sup>94</sup> members of Falanga have stated, their aim was to “protect” Poland from infiltration from a neo-Bandera fascist movement, the Rights Sector, and in general from illegal immigration from Ukraine.

<sup>95</sup> Łukasz Woźnicki, “Polskie ‘Patrole Antybanderowskie’. Przy Granicy Z Ukrainą Szukają Bojowników Prawego Sektora,” *Wyborcza.pl*, August 10, 2015, <http://wyborcza.pl/1,75398,18530517,antybanderowskie-patrole-przy-granicy-z-ukraina-dlaczego.html>.

<sup>96</sup> Oskar Górczyński, “Falanga Na Ćwiczeniach Wojska? Ekspert: To ‘błąd Systemu,’” *Wiadomosci.wp.pl*, September 20, 2016, <http://wiadomosci.wp.pl/falanga-na-cwiczeniach-wojska-ekspert-to-blad-systemu-6039289258627713a>.

<sup>97</sup> The biggest cyclical military exercise to date in Poland, held on 7 – 17 June 2016. “Anakonda-16” was a combined multinational exercise with the participation of soldier from other NATO countries. Although MID officially stated that Solina exercises were not part of Anakonda, one can easily conclude that they were at least strongly interconnected by the fact they happened at the same time as Anakonda and were organized under the common umbrella of official support.

Dawid Hudziec, a journalist working in occupied Donbass for the Novorossiia Today portal (described in detail in the media section of the report), is a member of OWP.<sup>98</sup> The head of OWP Dawid Berezicki, was banned in September 2015 from entering the territory of Ukraine by President Petro Poroshenko (as was Dawid Hudziec).<sup>99</sup>

### *Trip to Crimea*

Dawid Berezicki and Jan Wsól from the Camp of Great Poland organized a trip for Polish journalists to Crimea and Moscow in January 2016.<sup>100</sup> The trip was formally organized by the Russian-Polish Centre for Dialogue and Understanding in Moscow, headed by Yuri Bondarenko. The foundation was supposedly set up to improve relationships with Poland, but, in fact, it is a propaganda tool affiliated with Russian authorities and Russian conservative circles. Moreover, not one of the participants on the Crimean trip was a journalist. Apart from the Norwegian-Polish nationalists from the Camp of Great Poland, all were activists of the "Zmiana" party (Mateusz Piskorski, Jarosław Augustyniak, Tomasz Jankowski), and activists of a small party of anti-Semites and Putinphiles: Wierni Polsce Suwerennej – namely Paweł Ziemiński, and Dariusz Kosiur. This is more proof that Polish pro-Russian circles are deeply interconnected. They are connected by people who share only one common trait: fascination with Vladimir Putin.<sup>101</sup>

In 2016, Berezicki conducted an interview with Igor Strielkov,<sup>102</sup> the commander-in-chief of pro-Russian separatists. During the interview Strielkov was asked about historical and contemporary aspects of Polish-Russian relations, NATO, sanctions imposed on Russia and of course the Volhynia tragedy. The interview was published on Xportal.pl, a website edited by Bartosz Bekier, which is just another example of the interwoven nature of pro-Russian entities. It seems people from OWP use every possible opportunity to raise the issue of the Volhynia tragedy. The most recent allegations have connected OWP with the diminishing UPA monuments and graveyards in Poland.<sup>103,104</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> After the revolution in Kiev in 2013/14, he went to Donetsk. As he says, he joined the ranks of separatists to defend Slavic lands against Ukrainian fascism supported by the European Union. There is no confirmed information that Dawid Hudziec fought for the separatists. However, he has been working at the local propaganda apparatus in Donetsk, created by the Russian authorities in 2015.

<sup>99</sup> Telewizjarepublika.pl, "Poroszenko Ogłasza Listę Osób Z Zakazem Wjazdu Na Ukrainę. Wśród Nich Członek OWP I Były Dziennikarz Newsweeka," September 17, 2015, <http://telewizjarepublika.pl/poroszenko-oglasza-liste-osob-z-zakazem-wjazdu-na-ukraine-wsrod-nich-czlonек-owp-i-byly-dziennikarz-newsweeka,23837.html>.

<sup>100</sup> Jadwiga Chmielowska, "Polacy W Służbie Kremla? || Stowarzyszenie Dziennikarzy Polskich," January 27, 2016, <http://sdp.pl/felietony/12334,polacy-w-sluzbie-kremla,1453879831>.

<sup>101</sup> "Rosyjska V Kolumna W Polsce - Facebook Page," accessed April 6, 2017, <https://www.facebook.com/RosyjskaVKolumnawPolsce/>.

<sup>102</sup> Xportal.pl, "Dawid Berezicki: Z Igozem Strielkowem O Polsce I Polakach," *Xportal.pl*, July 13, 2016, <http://xportal.pl/?p=26172>.

<sup>103</sup> Videos from demolition with OWP logo were posted on YouTube by Dawid Hudziec. "Another UPA monument has been destroyed! Dawid Hudziec, *Kolejny Pomnik UPA- Zniszczony!*, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZishvGTfIU0>.

<sup>104</sup> First at Huta Pieniacka, which commemorates Poles killed in 1944 (as a part of Volhynia killings), and later in Bykovnia (a former village, which is now a part of Kiev), a possible place of burial of Polish officers killed by NKWD during the second war world. Yet, leaders of OWP claims, that the demolition is a job of an informal group of "patriots" in balaclavas named "Cichociemni."



The demolition of monuments and graveyards has become a hot spot for Polish-Ukrainian relations in early 2017. Two Polish monuments were destroyed in Ukraine in January 2017.<sup>105, 106</sup> The demolition triggered a discussion on who was responsible. Possible theories include Ukrainian nationalists who did it as revenge for the demolition of Ukrainian monuments in Poland. But provocations from Russia or even pro-Russian Poles whose main goal is to negatively impact the relations of Poland and Ukraine are equally possible explanations.

### **Vulnerability of the “Territorial Defence” approach**

One of the new ideas from the Polish Ministry of Internal Defence is the creation of “Territorial Defence” units (Obrona Terytorialna, OT). This military entity will supplement the work of a regular army in case of external aggression against the state. “Territorial Defence” soldiers may also be used as a quick reaction force to terrorist attacks and natural disasters that may threaten the lives of Poles. “Territorial Defence” aims to recruit members of paramilitary or scout organizations and is open to both individuals and entire units (after a special examination).<sup>107</sup> The problem with a territorial defence force is that it will probably be a target of infiltration by foreign special services. People who are critical towards democratic values and Polish alliances (the EU, but especially NATO) and support the unrecognised republics such as the DNR and LNR. It may also be a useful source for Russian secret services. The example of Falanga’s members taking part in official exercises shows that the verification processes of paramilitary groups is not working and that the recruitment of “Territorial Defence” units may encounter problems in effectively combating infiltration. Even if the number of people with openly pro-Russian and anti-democratic views recruited into the OT is limited, they may present a potential threat by indoctrinating other soldiers in their units.

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<sup>105</sup> Maciej Orłowski, “Ukraina: Zdewastowano Pomnik Polaków Z Huty Pieniackiej,” *Wyborcza.pl*, January 10, 2017, <http://wyborcza.pl/7,75399,21222447,ukraina-zdewastowano-pomnik-polakow-z-huty-pieniackiej.html>.

<sup>106</sup> Maciej Orłowski, “Ukraina: Wandale Pomazali Farbą Polski Cmentarz W Bykowni Pod Kijowem,” *Wyborcza*, January 25, 2017, <http://wyborcza.pl/7,75248,21289954,ukraina-wandale-pomazali-farba-polski-cmentarz-w-bykowni-pod.html>.

<sup>107</sup> *Wpolityce.pl*, “Rusza Służba Wojsk Obrony Terytorialnej. Ochotnicy Będą Mogli Się Zgłaszać Od Jesieni,” May 1, 2016, <http://wpolityce.pl/polityka/291339-rusza-sluzba-wojsk-obrony-terytorialnej-ochotnicy-beda-mogli-sie-zglaszac-od-jesieni>.

## LONE WOLVES

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Apart from organizations and political parties, the so-called lone wolves have an important role in Russian propaganda and disinformation activities and in exerting pro-Russian influence. Lone wolves are people who are not formally associated with any movement, but are very active on behalf of Russia or the Kremlin. They are properly programmed, inspired by Russian stakeholders, secret services and have a perfectly profiled career path.

### **Tomasz Maciejczuk**

A perfect example is Tomasz Maciejczuk. He considers himself a freelance journalist. In the past, he reportedly participated in meetings of the extreme nationalist group “Falanga.” Maciejczuk gained fame at the beginning of the revolution in Ukraine, when he built a credible image as an independent mainstream reporter. Although only active on the internet, he posted regular and consistent content. Later, he was very active as a pro-separatist journalist during the war in the Donbass. Finally, he became famous for his provocations: he published pictures of patches displaying Nazi symbols on uniforms belonging to the Azov Battalion and the Ajar Battalion. The photos turned out to be manipulated. Soldiers of the battalions promised revenge for the provocation. Maciejczuk had to flee from the Donbass.<sup>108</sup> Ultimately, he became a “Ukrainian fascism hunter”. Quite recently he announced that he would be a regular contributor to the Russian television channel Rossiya 24.

### **Marcin Skalski**

Another example worth looking at is Marcin Skalski. He was employed at Kresy.pl (he left because he was too radical even for this media outlet). He was with Janusz Korwin-Mikke in Chechnya, and he is known for the so-called Vilnius People’s Republic.<sup>109</sup> It is an entirely virtual creation to incite anti-Lithuanian and secessionist attitudes in the ranks of Vilnius Poles.

The scale of influence exerted by the above mentioned persons is small. On Facebook, they are followed by several thousand people, which is not large in the context of social media. However, their activities have a different goal. Their role is to impose a certain point of view on recipients, start discussions, and ideologically inspire trolls who will then (for different reasons described above) sell these ideas to mainstream forums on their own. The hoped-for end result is to strengthen a belief among Poles that such views are common.

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<sup>108</sup> He became famous for subsequent provocations. Among others, he displayed photos suggesting that the Ukrainians manifested fascist gestures in Poland in the former concentration camp at Majdanek. Lublin112.pl, “Kolejny Ukrainiec Znieważa Majdanek. Wśród Internautów Zawrzało,” *www.lublin112.pl - Lublin Na Sygnale*, July 27, 2015, <http://www.lublin112.pl/kolejny-ukrainiec-zniewaza-majdanek-wsrod-internautow-zawrzalo/>.

<sup>109</sup> Vilnius People’s Republic – virtual creature, created only on web site to heat the conflict between polish minority and lithuenians in Lithuania: “Wileńska Republika Ludowa / Виленская Народная Республика,” *Facebook.com*, accessed April 6, 2017, <https://www.facebook.com/Wile%C5%84ska-Republika-Ludowa-%D0%92%D0%B8%D0%BB%D0%B5%D0%BD%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%B0%D1%8F-%D0%9D%D0%B0%D1%80%D0%BE%D0%B4%D0%BD%D0%B0%D1%8F-%D0%A0%D0%B5%D1%81%D0%BF%D1%83%D0%B1%D0%BB%D0%B8%D0%BA%D0%B0-1017190118295964/>.

## MECHANISMS TO INFLUENCE FRINGE MOVEMENTS IN POLAND

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The above mentioned pro-Russian, far-left or far-right organizations, and paramilitary movements attest to four basic ways the Kremlin's influence is felt in Polish political life or on political narratives:

- First, there are organizations which are anti-Ukrainian or anti-establishment in general, which seek to either distance themselves from all major powers, like the National Movement, or seek some pragmatic relationship with Russia like the ONR.
- Second, there are organizations and political movements infiltrated by pro-Russian activists like the Camp of Great Poland or the circle around Mateusz Piskorski.
- Third, there are „lone wolf” actors of Russian influence such as Tomasz Maciejczuk or Marcin Skalski, likely fuelled directly by Russian political, secret service or media organizations.
- Finally, some pro-Russian opinion leaders can support the Kremlin's cause as „useful idiots” with murky personal or ideological motivations, such as in the case of Janusz Korwin-Mikke.

### **Pro-Russian influence in the media**

When analysing the influence of the Russian narrative on the media in Poland, one has to distinguish between how propaganda works in the mainstream and how it functions in the fringe media. As it was already mentioned in the text, mainstream media seems to be immune to obvious Russian propaganda. Disinformation regarding the war in the Donbass, such as claims that there are no Russian regulars there, blaming the downing of MH17 on Ukrainian soldiers, and false allegations about the Russian engagement in Syria simply does not have an effect in Poland. Neither the media nor Polish society in general is willing to believe it. Regular observation, however, reveals that mainstream media tends not to recognize more sophisticated propaganda. Disinformation is mostly related to Ukraine and Ukrainians, but may also target other topics such as Germany, the USA, NATO or the refugee crisis. It enters the mainstream via two main channels.

### **Fringe media mechanism**

The first channel through which Russian propaganda enters the mainstream is news produced by fringe media or “independent” journalists that reaches mainstream discourse because of the narrative it presents and its alleged importance. In reality, this news frequently contains a dose of well-crafted manipulation (but not a straightforward lie) or is simply Polish information that originates from a Russian source of doubtful reputation or no previous history. One of the examples from late 2016 is a story about 40 Polish mercenaries that allegedly came to the Donbass to fight hand to hand with the Ukrainian nationalist “Right sector.” The news was published by a private internet radio station called RMF FM. It was based on information coming from Eduard Basurin, the deputy defence minister and defence spokesman of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic, and Tomasz Maciejczuk. Maciejczuk is a Polish freelance journalist who is considered to represent the pro-Russian separatists' stance. His motivation for anti-Ukrainian investigative journalism, as well as his sources of financial support, remain unclear. After the intervention of careful readers, the stories were retracted, and now only contain information from Eduard Basurin, which has not been confirmed by any other officials.<sup>110</sup>

### **Mainstream media influenced by trolls**

The second means by which the Russian narrative reaches mainstream media is via comments beneath articles that are published online. The promotion of Russian opinion is especially apparent in regards to topics related to Ukraine. Whatever the subject of discussion – the war in the Donbass, politics in Kiev, or Ukrainian migrants in Poland, the comments are frequently full of hatred and historical resentment.

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<sup>110</sup> Rmf24.pl, “40 Najemników Z Polski Na Linii Frontu W Donbasie? Tak Twierdzą Donieccy Oficjale,” October 25, 2016, <http://www.rmf24.pl/raporty/raport-ukraina/fakty/news-40-najemnikow-z-polski-na-linii-frontu-w-donbasie-tak-twierd,nId,2296412>.

While does not provide evidence that the hatred is orchestrated by someone from Russia, it is happening in the context of investigations revealing internet trolls working for Russian companies.<sup>111</sup> It is reasonable to consider that some opinions posted under articles and on forums may be the work of pro-Russian professionals.<sup>112</sup> Yet, what is even more troubling is that the level of hate speech has risen, which means that professional trolls have been extremely effective in multiplying non-professional followers, who have been convinced by the trolls' arguments and are now voluntarily spreading disinformation or hate speech.

### *Movie trolls*

Among the many examples that are worth analysing, the most interesting are those related to the movie "Volhynia" that was released in Poland on October 7, 2016. It presents the story of the Volhynia tragedy during the Second World War. Although the director claims that his movie aims to show the consequences of nationalism and chauvinism, many exploit his film to generate further conflict between Poles and Ukrainians by accusing contemporary Ukrainians of innate hatred towards Poles. A prime example is an interview with Natalia Panchenko, a Ukrainian migrant and activist in Poland. In an interview she gave to *Newsweek Polska*, Natalia told the journalist that after the movie she was flooded by a wave of threats via Facebook.<sup>113</sup> *Newsweek Polska* characterizes itself as a liberal newspaper, and its readers express a commitment to democracy and an open, non-discriminatory society. Yet, the comments below the interview with Natalia were shocking. It appeared as if the *Newsweek* forum had been overtaken by people whose views one could consider illiberal, even extremist. Comments expressing solidarity in response to the threats were rare. Accusations relating history to today's politics dominated.<sup>114</sup> The general impression one may have had was that those comments came from people who visited the *Newsweek* website only for this particular article.

Another telling example is an article published by Adam Balcer, a Polish expert of international relations from *dziennik.pl*. Balcer argues that that the film "Volhynia" is a missed opportunity for real Polish-Ukrainian rapprochement.<sup>115</sup> Amongst the more than 300 comments under Balcer's article, it is almost impossible to find a single opinion that is not full of hatred. The author is accused of being uneducated, anti-Polish, or even pro-Bandera and pro-fascism. Other comments draw direct

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<sup>111</sup> Shaun Walker, "Salutin' Putin: Inside a Russian Troll House," *The Guardian*, April 2, 2015, sec. World news, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/apr/02/putin-kremlin-inside-russian-troll-house>.

<sup>112</sup> An acute observer may notice that some of the comments are written in a language "similar to Polish," but with grammatical mistakes indicating that their origin is outside of Poland.

<sup>113</sup> She expressed what her feelings were after the movie had been released, and tried to convey empathy and understanding of the Polish perspective. She also explained why she felt this movie may have a negative influence on Polish-Ukrainian relations.

<sup>114</sup> *Newsweek.pl*, "Ukrainka: Po Filmie „Wołyń” Ludzie Piszą, Żeby Opuściła Polskę I Że Mnie Zabiją," *Newsweek.pl*, October 26, 2016, <http://www.newsweek.pl/polska/hejt-i-grozby-pod-adresem-ukraincow-po-filmie-wolyn,film,399426.html>.

<sup>115</sup> He bases his opinion mostly on the asymmetry of presenting Ukrainians as being almost always cruel and violent and Poles as having only positives virtues, while life before and during WWII – Balcer emphasizes - was much more complicated than Wojciech Smarzowski, the movie's director, seems to see it.

correlations between the murderers involved in the Volhynia massacres and contemporary Ukrainians.<sup>116</sup> The pattern of a “virtual crowd” was similar as with the article in Newsweek.

Media outlets considered to be openly pro-Russian or that present narratives comparable to the Russian point of view are sometimes described as fringe channels with a very limited audience. But this definition may be misleading. In fact, media that purposefully or unintentionally spread the Russian narrative reaches groups with different, and sometimes totally opposite views on issues and unites them under the umbrella of pro-Kremlin propaganda. This means that different fringe groups, otherwise marginalized, become relatively substantial in quantity when taken together.

## Pro-Russian sites

Finding a methodology that would properly characterize media representing the Russian narrative in Poland is a complicated task. Yet one thing seems quite clear: online communication, especially Facebook and designated websites, is the main channel used to reach an audience. Usually, media which supports the Russian narrative devotes a considerable portion of media space to articles related to Ukraine.<sup>117</sup> Other issues are exploited to a lesser extent, but are available to make sure that the reader notices that the authors contest liberalism and the contemporary world-order in general.<sup>118</sup>

### *Kresy.pl*

The most visible website considered to present the Russian narrative is the site *Kresy.pl*.<sup>119</sup> Established in 2008 to promote the remembrance of the once-Polish Eastern borderlands (Kresy), which were taken from Poland after WWII, *Kresy.pl* grew in popularity when they began publishing information on a daily basis about the development of Euromaidan, and later, the annexation of Crimea and the war in the Donbass. Currently, *Kresy.pl* has almost 100,000 followers on Facebook. The website presents a strongly anti-Ukrainian attitude based on historic resentment. Ukrainians and the Ukrainian government are consistently criticized. Articles regarding Russian involvement in the war are scarce. It is also worth emphasizing that former *Kresy* columnist Marcin Skalski paid a visit to Crimea in early 2016 and to Chechnya in the middle of the year. The aim of the visit was to legitimize official Russian policy regarding those territories.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> *Wiadomosci.dziennik.pl*, “Adam Balcer o ‘Wołyniu’: Ten Film to Zmarnowana Szansa Na Realne Pojednanie Z Ukraińcami,” *Wiadomosci.dziennik.pl*, October 5, 2016, <http://wiadomosci.dziennik.pl/opinie/artykuly/532479,ekspert-o-wolyniu-ten-film-to-zmarnowana-szansa-na-realne-pojednanie-z-ukraincami.html>.

<sup>117</sup> Coverage aims to accomplish goals such as discrediting any positive part of Polish-Ukrainians relations as dangerous for Poland, and making accusations not only of growing radicalism in Ukraine, but that people and politicians there aim to build a historical memory of the state based upon fascist ideology.

<sup>118</sup> Such topics may involve: presenting the Russian narrative for the war in Syria, harshly questioning the position of the US on the global stage (and strongly favouring Donald Trump in the US presidential election), and in general, exposing all controversial material regarding the refugee crisis in Europe.

<sup>119</sup> “*Kresy.pl* - Portal Społeczności Kresowej,” *Kresy.pl*, accessed April 6, 2017, <http://www.kresy.pl/>.

<sup>120</sup> *Fronda.pl*, “Rosyjska V Kolumna: Korwin, Skalski Z *Kresy.pl* I Manuel Mołotow-Ribbentrop,” August 25, 2016, <http://www.fronda.pl/a/rosyjska-v-kolumna-korwin-skalski-z-kresypl-i-manuel-molotow-ribbentrop,77347.html>.

## *Xportal*

While Kresy.pl is an example of a pro-Russian outlet that has been recognized and analysed in Polish<sup>121</sup> and international<sup>122</sup> publications, many propaganda sources haven't received as much attention. Another openly pro-Russian page is Xportal.<sup>123</sup> The website was established by Bartosz Bekier, who used to visit the occupied territories in the Donbass, presenting himself as a journalist who strongly supported separatists. He had been writing pieces for Xportal from the Donbass, but also gave a speech at a rally in Donetsk back in 2014, in which he claimed to represent “free Poles, who are against the ‘terrorist’ NATO bases in Poland.” He protested at the Ukrainian embassy in Warsaw surrounded by flags of the DNR and the LNR and by the slogan “Save the people of Novorossiia from the Ukrainian army.”<sup>124</sup>

## *Novorossiia pages*

Novorossiia Today,<sup>125</sup> Tragedy of Donbas,<sup>126</sup> (both websites) and Fighting Novorossiia (Facebook profile) are fringe media outlets fuelled by Russian propaganda.<sup>127</sup> What makes them worth analysing is that they are all edited by Dawid Hudziec. He cooperates with the International Department of Information Agency of Novorossiia. Novorossiia.Today.pl basically consists of a Polish version of the news coming from the agency, as they relate to topics in Polish politics. The media resources Hudziec writes and edits do not have a huge following (Fighting Novorossiia has less than 2000 followers on Facebook), but other non-mainstream outlets seem to consider them valuable sources of information.<sup>128</sup> He continues to live and work as a journalist on the occupied territories of the Donbass.

## *Russkij Mir and affiliates*

Media that presents the Russian narrative in Poland is obviously not strictly limited to the resources named above, but those mentioned appear to be among the most significant.

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<sup>121</sup> ZŁOCI DARCZYŃCY Grajewski et al., “Na Kolanach Przed Rosyjską Potęgą. O Działalności Portalu Kresy.pl,” *Eastbook.eu*, September 19, 2016, <http://www.eastbook.eu/2016/09/19/na-kolanach-przed-rosyjska-potega-o-dzialalnosci-portalu-kresy-pl/>.

<sup>122</sup> Bartłomiej Gajos and Witold Rodkiewicz, “The Russian Metanarrative in the Polish Online Media,” in *Fog of Falsehood, Russian Strategy and Deception of the Conflict in Ukraine* (Helsinki, Finland: The Finnish Institute of International Affairs, 2016), 320, [http://www.fiia.fi/en/publication/588/fog\\_of\\_falsehood/](http://www.fiia.fi/en/publication/588/fog_of_falsehood/).

<sup>123</sup> “Xportal.pl,” *Xportal.pl*, accessed April 6, 2017, <http://xportal.pl/>.

<sup>124</sup> Michał Gąsior, “Bartosz Bekier Walczy O Doniecką Republikę Ludową. Jak Polski Student Dołączył Do Prorosyjskich Separatystów,” *naTemat.pl*, August 27, 2014, <http://natemat.pl/114667,bartosz-bekier-walczy-o-doniecka-republike-ludowa-jak-polski-student-dolaczyl-do-prorosyjskich-separatystow>.

<sup>125</sup> “Novorossia Today,” *Novorossia Today*, accessed April 6, 2017, <http://novorossia.today/pl/>.

<sup>126</sup> “Tragedia Donbasu | Zapewne Są Ludzie Bierni, Lecz Bierność Jest Jakąs Formą Rozpaczy (Antoine de Saint-Exupéry),” accessed April 6, 2017, <http://tragediadonbasu.blog.pl/>.

<sup>127</sup> “Noworosja Walczaca - Facebook Page,” accessed April 6, 2017, <https://www.facebook.com/NoworosjaWalczaca/>.

<sup>128</sup> Apparently, Dawid’s work has been noticed by officials, as president Poroshenko decided to impose a travel ban on him for posing a threat to the national security of Ukraine and pursuing activities aimed at occupying Ukrainian territories. Hudziec was prohibited from entering Ukraine. Information is available at the facebook page of Dawid Hudziec: Hudziec Dawid, “Dawid Hudziec - Dekretem Ukraińskiego Prezydenta Petra Poroszenko...,” October 19, 2016,

<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=984362031691863&set=a.570953766366027.1073741832.100003542275287&type=3&theater>.

A few other examples: *Obserwator polityczny*, which produces a huge amount of propaganda material.<sup>129</sup> Although in Poland it goes rather unnoticed, its articles are used in Russia and presented as a Polish opinion-forming media outlet. *Obserwator polityczny* is currently a part of the Russian Foundation “*Russkij Mir*”.<sup>130</sup> *Konsertwatyzm.pl* (Conservatism) regularly publishes articles by Konrad Rękas, the deputy head of the pro-Russian party “*Zmiana*”. Rękas writes not only about Ukraine, but comments on newsworthy events in Poland and abroad. *Antykapitalizm.pl* shares links to Xportal, the *Zmiana* party and *Katehon* (a think tank where Alexander Dugin<sup>131</sup> is actively engaged) on his website wall.

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<sup>129</sup> “*Obserwator Polityczny - Obiektywnie? Subiektywnie? O Polityce, Państwie, Gospodarce... W Poszukiwaniu Paradygmatu Rozwoju. Zawsze Mamy Rację!*,” accessed April 6, 2017, <https://obserwatorpolityczny.pl/>.

<sup>130</sup> ‘*Obserwator Polityczny Partnerem Fundacji Russkij Mir Фонд Русский Мир*’. Accessed 17 November 2016. <https://obserwatorpolityczny.pl/?p=19831>.

<sup>131</sup> Maciej Pieczyński, “*Globalizm I Liberalizm to Cywilizacja Antychrysta*,” Text, *Do Rzeczy*, (December 29, 2016), <https://dorzeczy.pl/kraj/18103/Globalizm-i-liberalizm-to-cywilizacja-Antychrysta.html>.



## PRO-RUSSIAN FACEBOOK PAGES

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Kresy.pl (Eastern borderlands), “Ukrainiec NIE jest moim bratem” (Ukrainian is not my brother) and Xportal are three Facebook accounts analysed for this report for the period of September – October 2016. Kresy.pl and “Ukrainiec NIE jest moim bratem” were chosen for analysis because of the popularity of their Facebook pages, while Xportal was chosen mostly because of the role of its editor in chief– Bartosz Bekier, the head of Falanga. While Kresy.pl and Xportal do not only have Facebook pages, but regular websites as well, “Ukrainiec NIE jest moim bratem” operates only via Facebook. The creation of Kresy.pl and Xportal is not related to the Euromaidan revolution or the war in the Donbass conflict as both media outlets had been available to readers previously. Kresy.pl was a niche portal providing historical and nostalgic articles about the lost eastern borderlands of Poland (now part of Ukraine, Belarus and Lithuania). Xportal was a far-right media initiative which developed into a pro-Russian website only after some time. Among the three Facebook pages mentioned only “Ukrainiec NIE jest moim bratem” was established later, in early 2014, as a counter-initiative to widespread support for Ukrainians in Poland. It also differs from the two previous pages by the fact that it concentrates almost entirely on criticizing Ukraine and Ukrainians, while Kresy.pl and Xportal.pl promotes a wider variety of topics on their pages.

Kresy.pl gained a huge advantage following the situation in Ukraine. It rose enormously in popularity thanks to its engagement in presenting news and comments regarding Euromaidan. Their position in the market grew stronger when they adopted a critical line towards Ukrainian politicians, the Ukrainian army and Ukrainian society in 2014. Now its Facebook page has more than 100,000 followers. Xportal's numbers did not grow nearly as much; (Xportal's Facebook page has only a little more than 13 000 followers) rather, it was Bartosz Bekier, as the leader of the far-right organization “Falanga”, who received more attention.

**Table 1. Featured pages**

Page	Likes <sup>132</sup>	Established
<i>Kresy.pl</i>	100,296	2008
<i>“Ukrainiec NIE jest moim bratem”</i>	71,456	2014
<i>Xportal.pl</i>	13,307	2011

### Summary

It can be concluded that Kresy.pl and “Ukrainiec NIE jest moim bratem,” two out of three Facebook pages analyzed, capitalized most on news concerning Polish-Ukrainian relations. The posts were meant to portray a negative picture of Ukrainians. Their main argument believes it is impossible for Poland to have good relations with Ukraine as long as they commemorate UPA and Stepan Bandera, as they are responsible for the genocide of Poles during WWII.

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<sup>132</sup> as of 29 November, 2016

By bringing this narrative to the fore, both pages tried to convince Poles that nationalist, pro-UPA views are widely popular in Ukraine (which is not true) and that if someone accepts the positive role of UPA in Ukraine's past fight for independence, it automatically means he is also an anti-Polish nationalist (which is also not true). In the meantime, Xportal was trying to capitalize mostly on anti-American resentments. Over the analysed period, its editors were publishing articles accusing the American administration of taking an amoral stance, and even supporting the Islamic State, for the sake of overthrowing Assad's regime. The comparison of both narratives and the total number of reactions reveals that in September and October 2016 it was much easier to capitalize on anti-Ukrainian sentiments. Posts about Ukraine, especially ones related to the Volhynia tragedy, were more frequently commented and shared.

## General statistics

In the interval of September-October 2016, the comparative statistics of Table 2 tell us that the most active site in terms of posts was the Kresy.pl page. Over two months, Kresy.pl published a total of 1786 posts, which is an impressive average of 29 posts per day. "Ukrainiec NIE jest moim bratem" and Xportal were considerably less active and produced only 2 and 3 posts per day, respectively. Yet, the result of "Ukrainiec NIE jest moim bratem" might be misleading, because the page was inactive for almost 30 days after receiving a ban from Facebook.<sup>133</sup> It was "Ukrainiec NIE jest moim bratem" that had the highest average number of interactions per post, 122, while the result of Kresy.pl was 98 and Xportal generated 53 interactions per post. This is probably due to the fact that Kresy.pl is "dumping" information, while "Ukrainiec NIE jest moim bratem" targets its audience more specifically with special messages.

**Table 2. Page statistics for September-October, 2016**

<b>Pages</b>	Kresy.pl	Xportal.pl	"Ukrainiec NIE jest moim bratem"
<b>Posts</b>			
Total number of posts in the period	1,786	125	197
Average number of posts per day	29.3	2.0	3.2
<b>Interactions<sup>134</sup></b>			
Total number of interactions in the period	174,619	6,563	24,116
Average number of interactions per post	97.8	52.5	122.4

<sup>133</sup> Most probably hate speech towards Ukrainians was the cause of the ban.

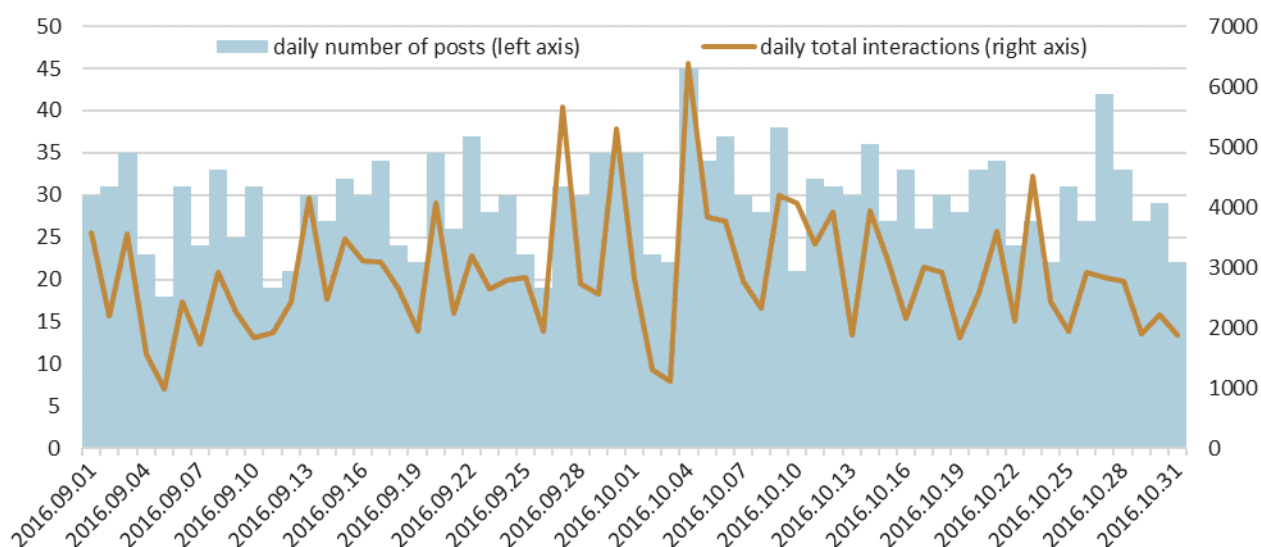
<sup>134</sup> Total number of comments, shares and emoticons (like, love, haha, wow, sad, angry).

## Page activity

### Trends

Tables 3, 4 and 5 feature the general distribution of posts and the specific audiences' reaction to them on a daily basis in the period under review. The trend of the number of posts featured by the *Kresy.pl* page shows an even and efficient production of information. The number of post on the page dropped below 20 only three times over the analysed period.<sup>135</sup> On October 4, the number of published posts reached 45, the peak in the analysed period. Table 3 also reveals that news from *Kresy.pl* has a stable audience and dramatic rises and falls in the number of interactions only occur occasionally.

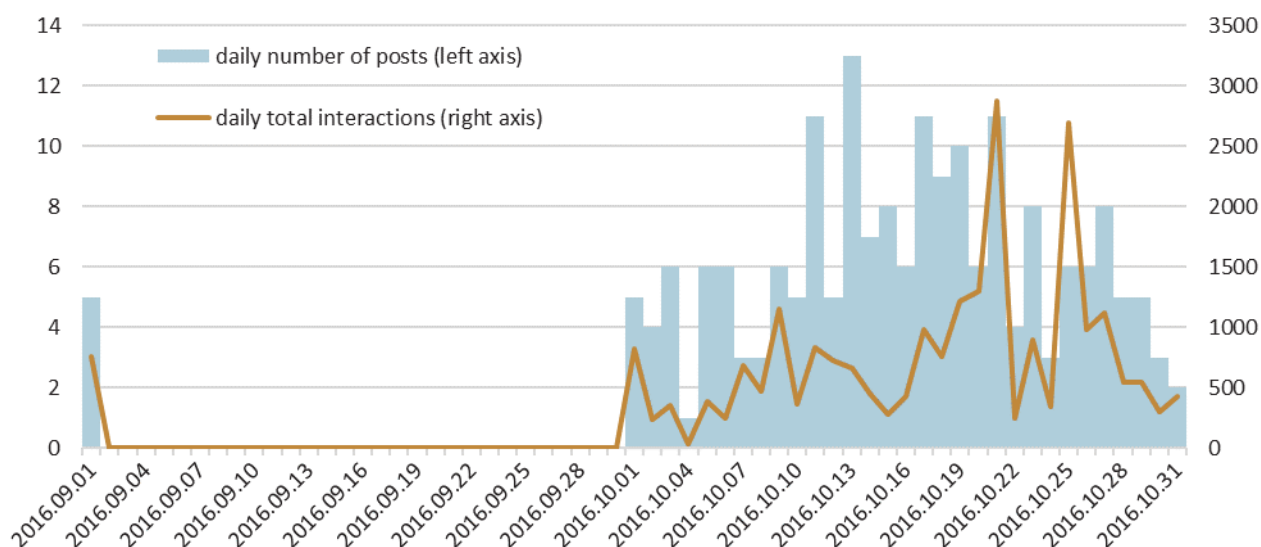
**Table 3. Distribution of posts and interactions on the *Kresy.pl* page on a daily basis**



The case of the “Ukrainiec NIE jest moim bratem” Facebook page is radically different from that of *Kresy.pl*. For half of the analysed period, from September 2 to 30, there were no posts published on the website, the reason being it received a 30-day-long ban from Facebook. The editor of the page did not reveal the cause of the ban, but those who read the page would guess that it violated the terms of Facebook's user agreement by spreading hate speech towards Ukrainians. After the break, the author attempted to publish on a regular basis. The total number of posts per day was frequently in the single digits, and the site rarely published 10 or more publications per day. It seems that similarly to *Kresy.pl*, the “Ukrainiec NIE jest moim bratem” website also has a stable audience.

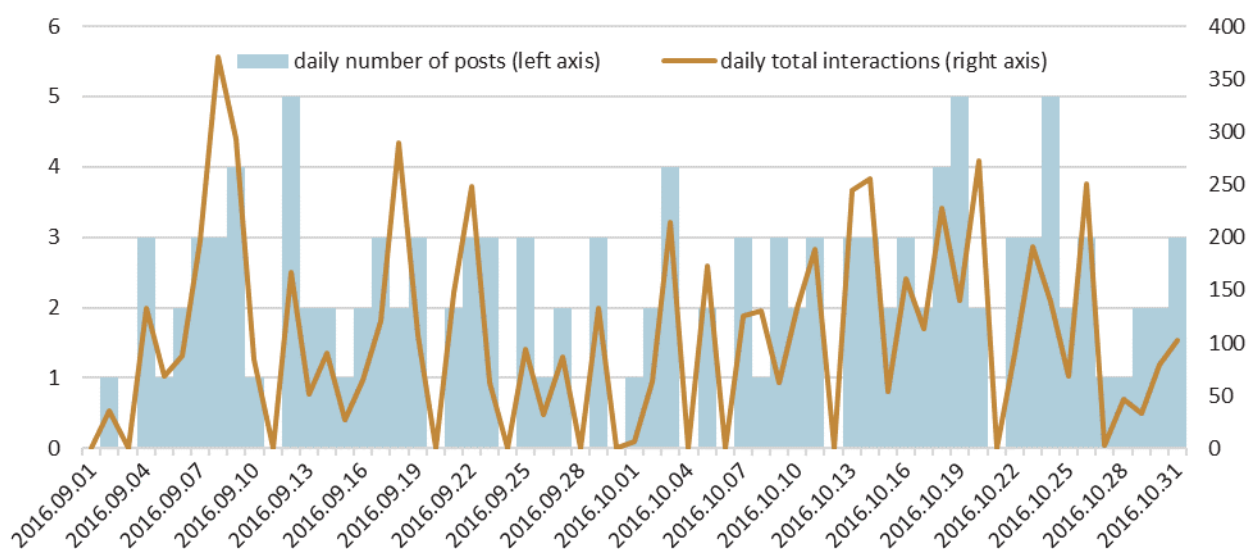
<sup>135</sup> At the same time, more than 30 posts a day were noted 27 times in total.

**Table 4. Distribution of posts and interactions on the “Ukrainiec NIE jest moim bratem” page on a daily basis**



Xportal was definitely the least active portal, as the daily number of posts never exceeded 5. There were also days when the portal was inactive and nothing at all was published. However, the lack of activity on the profile was never longer than one day. The audience also seemed much less responsive than with two other analysed Facebook pages.

**Table 5. Distribution of posts and interactions on a daily basis of the Xportal page**



### Campaigns

Over the analysed period of time only one political campaign may be identified based the websites' activity. It refers to the release of the “Volhynia” movie in Poland. The film shows pre-war relations of Poles and Ukrainians and the genocide committed against Poles by Ukrainians in 1943. The movie was released in October and triggered a huge discussion regarding Polish-Ukrainian history and the way it should be interpreted today, and intensified the discussion of UPA/anti-Polish resentments in contemporary Ukraine.

The campaign around “Volhynia” was visible on the “Ukrainiec NIE jest moim bratem” between 17-19 October, but was actually present at its Facebook page for all of October. The topic was also widely exploited on the Kresy.pl website and its Facebook page. The main point of the campaign was to present Ukrainians as eternal enemies of Poles, and show contemporary Ukrainians as the successors of people who committed massive killings of Poles, with the goal of raising tensions between Poles and Ukrainians

### Posts

All analysed pages use links as the primary source of communication with their audience. For Kresy.pl and Xportal the ratio of posts is much higher, reaching 90% and 97% respectively. This can be explained by the fact that both have a regular homepage, thus the Facebook account is just another platform for the publication of links to content on the homepage. The posts on “Ukrainiec NIE jest moim bratem,” which does not have its own website, are much more diversified. Although almost two-thirds (63%) of the content comes from outside links, the page also shares videos, photos and status updates. Data reveals, that among analysed examples, “Ukrainiec NIE jest moim bratem” received the most attention for links it posts. This may come as a surprise, taking into account that the page operates only through Facebook, and doesn’t have its own website as do Kresy.pl and Xportal.

**Table 6. Statistics by type of posts on the 3 pages under review**

Kresy.pl			
type	number of posts	proportion of posts	Reaction/post <sup>136</sup>
Link	1,608	90%	107
Photo	178	10%	14
Video			
Status			
Event			
Note			
Total	1,786	100%	98
“Ukrainiec NIE jest moim bratem”			
type	number of posts	proportion of posts	Reaction/post
Link	125	63%	124
Photo	24	12%	129
Video	12	6%	234
Status	36	18%	75
Event			
Note			
Total	197	100%	122
Xportal.pl			
type	number of posts	proportion of posts	Reaction/post
Link	121	97%	53
Photo	3	2%	59
Video	1	1%	28
Status			
Event			
Note			
Total	125	100%	53

<sup>136</sup> Total average number of emoticons, comments and shares per post.

When it comes to outgoing domains, Kresy.pl and Xportal referred almost entirely to its own websites. Interestingly, Kresy.pl was also the most important source of information for the “Ukrainiec NIE jest moim bratem” Facebook page, with information coming from Kresy.pl constituting almost one fifth (17%) of all the links published there. Other links referred to different outlets and reveal no particular pattern, although the authors were leaning towards alternative rather than mainstream media. References to foreign media constituted only a minority of shares. Information from Sputnik Poland was published only twice and from Novorossiyya Today only once.

**Table 7. Main outgoing domains for “Ukrainiec NIE jest moim bratem”**

kresy.pl	21	16.80%
wmeritum.pl	8	6.40%
parezja.pl	6	4.80%
facebook.com	4	3.20%
fakty.interia.pl	4	3.20%
magnapolonia.org	4	3.20%
wpolityce.pl	4	3.20%
wschodnik.pl	4	3.20%
polskaniepodlegla.pl	3	2.40%

## Issues and narratives

Important issues featured on the sites have been identified utilizing a tiered approach. First, we selected a sample of 60 posts based on the 20 most liked, shared or commented posts. Second, we choose the top 4 performing posts among the 60, thus the number one most liked, shared, commented or interacted messages to identify the 4 most popular issues.<sup>137</sup> Third, we used our sample of 60 to map out top performing narratives based on a pre-defined set of issues or narratives utilized routinely by the pro-Russian propaganda, namely: Russia, the EU, NATO, the USA, Syria Ukraine, migration.<sup>138</sup>

### *Top issues*

When Kresy.pl’s Facebook page is analysed, the data reveals that the post receiving the most attention was a piece of information about a group of volunteers in Belarus clearing a Catholic graveyard in the village of Mir and restoring a monument commemorating insurgents from the January Uprising (1863-1864). The post generated a total of 2002 reactions. The information in the news item was in line with the interests behind the establishment of Kresy.pl, i.e. reporting on the former Polish Eastern borderlands (in this case, Belarus) and the preserving of Polish heritage there. The most shared post on Facebook (1374 shares) featured a report on national pride in the Polish company Ursus, which had produced a hydrogen-fuelled bus, without any further political or geopolitical relevance.

<sup>137</sup> The top post which received the highest number of interactions based on the total of number of likes, shares and comments.

<sup>138</sup> We used a pre-defined list of issues based on previous propaganda analyses and experiences, however there was no guarantee that our top sample will include any of the aforementioned major topics.

The bus was presented in Hannover and raised the interest of potential clients, Kresy.pl stated, quoting the CEO of Ursus.<sup>139</sup> Finally, the post that garnered the greatest number of comments referred to a speech by the Minister of National Defence, Antoni Macierewicz. Kresy.pl described an incident during his visit to a Lithuanian-Polish-Ukrainian brigade in Lublin, where Macierewicz accused the Russians of posing a constant threat to the region and issued a “rather shocking declaration” (in the opinion of the editors of Kresy.pl). Namely, that part of the territory of an ally, Ukraine, is occupied by another country, and this situation cannot be accepted in Europe, and it will never be accepted in Poland. He also reaffirmed the importance of NATO’s eastern flank and the presence of American soldiers in Poland. Those statements infuriated readers and provoked a torrent of anti-Ukrainian comments.<sup>140</sup> While some people were disappointed that a representative of the Polish government supported Ukrainians who are “our enemies and not our allies”, others went even further perceiving Macierewicz as a traitor who is pushing Poland into the next war.

The post that received the most attention on “Ukrainiec NIE jest moim bratem” Facebook page was a photo featuring Marek Jakubiak (Member of Polish Parliament, Kukiz’15 political party and a businessmen) and his anti-Ukrainian speech:

*“We have no business relations with Ukraine, as they even impose an embargo on our meat (...) a genocide, the brutality of which has no precedence in the world, was committed. To pretend that the problem doesn’t exist is to betray a Polish memory. Yet, we use to hear that Ukrainians are our brothers. Since when? Ukraine is a neighbor, but not a brother. They also murdered 7000 Polish soldiers in Batih in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. No one talks about it.”*

The photo received a total of 2215 reactions, 1661 including emoticons. It was also shared 529 times.<sup>141</sup>



Photo: Anti-Ukrainian quote from Marek Jakubiak, Kukiz’15 MP in the Sejm.

The most commented post on the “Ukrainiec NIE jest moim bratem” Facebook page was a link to an article at onet.pl, a Polish mainstream news website. It referred to the common “Declaration on Remembrance and Solidarity” by the Polish and Ukrainian parliaments. The declaration honours victims of the Soviet and Nazi regimes and praises anti-Communist movements as a moral base for restoring the independence of Poland and Ukraine.

<sup>139</sup> KRESY.PL, “Młodzi Białorusini Przywrócili Pomnik Powstańców Styczniowych,” October 9, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/KresyPL/posts/10153986068375893>.

<sup>140</sup> KRESY.PL, “Macierewicz: Nie Będziemy Tolerować Okupacji Terytorium Naszego Sojusznika Ukraińskiego,” October 8, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/KresyPL/posts/10153983711625893>.

<sup>141</sup> “Ukrainiec NIE Jest Moim Bratem - Facebook Post,” October 25, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/UprobanderowiecNieJMB/photos/a.1456479654584656.1073741828.1456215277944427/1861564720742812/?type=3&theater>.

The declaration also calls for independent historical research on forces that wish to provoke disagreement between the two nations and for solutions to stop them. The common declaration of the Polish and Ukrainian Parliaments was commented on by “Ukraińiec NIE jest moim bratem” as follows: “Fallen☹ Nothing about the murderers from UPA, OUN, SS-Galician.” The post received 70 comments, which were highly critical of the Polish parliament.<sup>142</sup> For people who were commenting on the post, only one type of document is acceptable: one in which Ukrainians condemn the UPA, OUN and take the sole blame for what happened between Poles and Ukrainians in the Second World War. Declarations which deviate from this in any way are treated as a betrayal of the Polish state.

Xportal’s most popular post of the analysed period concerned Radosław Sikorski, a former minister of international affairs, who was employed by the American Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) think tank. The post resulted in 239 interactions, including 154 shares. The news and comments that followed were written in a manner to present Sikorski as a Polish traitor: “He has not been employed. He is simply an agent who went back home,” says one of the comments.<sup>143</sup> The most commented on post was an article about Ukrainian soldiers that came to Poland to inspect Polish military units located on the eastern flank of Poland.<sup>144</sup> 39 comments expressed a strong disapproval of the fact that the Polish army allows Ukrainians to perform such an activity. Finally, the post that received the most emoticons (148) was an article written to commemorate the 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Muammar Gaddafi’s death. The author starts the article by writing about his admiration of the former leader of Libya: “Muam(m)ar Gaddafi – he lived like a hero, died like martyr, today he has a honorary place in the land of warriors” and continues with a very short description of Gaddafi’s life and ideology. “Gaddafi was with his nation until the very end, until his martyr death from pro-American rats,” the author concludes.<sup>145</sup> The author presents a very clear version of what seems to be the general characteristic of Xportal, i.e. strong anti-Americanism.

### *Major narratives*

The main narratives are reconstructed in depth by locating basic geopolitical issues in our sample of top 60 posts ranked by the highest number of likes, shares or comments.<sup>146</sup> We pre-defined an initial set of major issues like the USA, the EU, NATO, Syria and migration, but other emerging local or international topics may be also mentioned in the analysis.

Over the analysed period, Kresy.pl mostly concentrated on posting information relating to Ukrainians’ unwillingness to admit they committed a genocide against Poles during the Second World War.

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<sup>142</sup> “Ukraińiec NIE Jest Moim Bratem - Facebook Post,” October 20, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/UprobanderowiecNieJMB/posts/1858808001018484>.

<sup>143</sup> “Xportal.pl - Facebook Post,” September 8, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/DziennikInternetowyXportalPL/posts/1754539661486686>.

<sup>144</sup> “Xportal.pl - Facebook Post,” September 22, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/DziennikInternetowyXportalPL/posts/1762446920695960>.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> The actual number of posts is usually lower due to the comparison of the top 20 liked, 20 shared and 20 commented posts because many posts on those lists overlapped.



The narrative was supported by posts claiming that fascism and anti-Polish resentment are rising in Ukraine and are indicated by the growing support for UPA and the cult of Stepan Bandera. Kresy.pl shared Tomasz Maciejczuk's revelations on how Ukrainians reacted to the Volhynia movie released in October 2016, which shows the brutal history of Polish-Ukrainian relations during WWII. According to Maciejczuk's research, Ukrainians posting on the website "Ukrainski nastup" were praising their ancestors for mass murdering Poles. "Thank you for the Volhynia killings. Utmost respect for Veterans. It couldn't be possible without them", "So proud for my country. We killed Poles, we will kill Russians", those and other quotes are cited by Maciejczuk. He also underlined that "the views presented in the comments are getting more and more popular in Ukraine".<sup>147</sup> Posts were tailored in a way to help readers learn to automatically and subconsciously associate Ukrainians with Bandera supporters and anti-Polish nationalists, thus stoking anti-Ukrainian resentment. . One may conclude after reading news from Kresy.pl, that a positive attitude towards Poles on the part of Ukrainians is not a rule but rather an exception.

Another narrative aimed to depict Ukrainian work-migration in Poland in a negative light. One article stated that, according to the National Chamber of Control, employing foreigners is harmful to Poland, and extra hurdles are imposed on hiring in the Podkarpackie voivodship (which shares a border with Ukraine) in order to make it easier to employ Ukrainians over Poles.<sup>148</sup> Yet another story told of an Ukrainian student who had a dispute with a bus driver in Warsaw. The driver asked her to stop talking on the phone. She rejected his request and told him that it was not fair to talk to her in Polish after she had told him she didn't understand the language. When the argument ended she speculated on Facebook: "Don't think that this would happen to me if I was not a foreigner here..." The behaviour of the student was exploited by Kresy.pl to write a very catchy description for the post: "Do you speak Polish at work? In the Polish capital city? According to a Ukrainian student, you are racist?".<sup>149</sup> This proves, ultimately, that the current anti-Ukrainian propaganda does not really work in Poland, so disinformation outlets fall back on historical or pitiful current day frictions between nationals of Poland and the Ukraine.

Other narratives in the analysed period were of less importance and displayed negatives attitude towards CETA and refugees.<sup>150,151</sup>

The main narratives presented by "Ukrainiec NIE jest moim bratem" were obviously concentrated on Ukraine and Polish-Ukrainian relations. The administrator of the page praised the City Council of Nowa Sarzyna (Podkarpacie voivodship) for its decision to suspend cooperation with the Ukrainian city of Dolina after it named Stepan Bandera a honorary citizen of the city.

Any sign of support and solidarity with Ukraine, such as Antoni Macierewicz's with Ivanna Klymush-Tsintsadze, the former deputy prime minister of Ukraine, were highly criticized.<sup>152</sup> "Ukrainiec NIE jest moim bratem" promoted the "Volhynia" movie and reminded readers about

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<sup>147</sup> "KRESY.PL - Facebook Post," October 4, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/KresyPL/posts/10153974688200893>.

<sup>148</sup> "KRESY.PL - Facebook Post," September 16, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/KresyPL/posts/10153928805595893>.

<sup>149</sup> "KRESY.PL - Facebook Post," September 11, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/KresyPL/posts/10153917702185893>.

<sup>150</sup> "KRESY.PL - Facebook Post," October 16, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/KresyPL/posts/10153994073980893>.

<sup>151</sup> "KRESY.PL - Facebook Post," September 20, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/KresyPL/posts/10153940166260893>.

<sup>152</sup> "Ukrainiec NIE Jest Moim Bratem - Facebook Post," October 28, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/UprobanderowiecNieJMB/posts/1862806133952004>.

stories of Poles who survived the genocide.<sup>153</sup> History was mixed with recent events in such a way as to convince Poles that Ukrainians honour murderers of the Polish, and that close relations between the countries may bring unforeseen consequences for Poland. Thus, any cooperation with Ukraine should be ceased. The second, much less popular narrative revolved around the “Jedwabne pogrom” on the territory of German-occupied Poland in World War II in 1941, which resulted in death of at least 340 Jews. According to the Polish Institute of National Remembrance, a group of 23 Poles were involved in the pogrom after being summoned in Jedwabne by a German paramilitary group known as the Ordnungspolizei. The narrative from Ukrainieniec NIE jest moim bratem tried to question this position, for instance by quoting a witness of the Jedwabne pogrom, who claims that the atrocity was planned and implemented entirely by Germans.<sup>154</sup>

Xportal’s main narrative differed from the one presented by the two other Facebook pages. Editors of Xportal concentrated on criticizing America, mostly because of its current engagement in Syria. It emphasized that the US is even ready to support the Islamic State to eliminate Assad’s regime. “American planes bombed the Syrian army [...] The attack from the air allowed the Islamic state to storm the Syrian Arab Army. According to the Syrian Army, the bombing shows that the USA openly support(s) the Islamic State,” stated one of the posts.<sup>155</sup> Another piece of news revealed that “RIA Novosti and Far News inform (us) that the US service agreed with Saudi Arabia on the safe transit of 9000 terrorists of the Islamic State from Mosul to Syria”.<sup>156</sup> “Iraqis that fight against ISIS complain that the air forces of the so called Coalition (lead by the USA) is not bombing ISIS *jihadists* that are escaping to Syria”<sup>157</sup> claimed another article. These and other narratives were much less visible than those referring to Ukraine and were usually aimed at saying something negative about Poland. Xportal occasionally raised anti-immigration tensions.

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<sup>153</sup> “Ukrainiec NIE Jest Moim Bratem - Facebook Post,” October 11, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/UprobanderowiecNieJMB/posts/1853712488194702>.

<sup>154</sup> “Ukrainiec NIE Jest Moim Bratem - Facebook Post,” September 1, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/UprobanderowiecNieJMB/posts/1834722280093723>.

<sup>155</sup> “Ukrainiec NIE Jest Moim Bratem - Facebook Post,” December 18, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/DziennikInternetowyXportalPL/posts/1759937540946898>.

<sup>156</sup> “Ukrainiec NIE Jest Moim Bratem - Facebook Post,” October 13, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/DziennikInternetowyXportalPL/posts/1777729265834392>.

<sup>157</sup> “Ukrainiec NIE Jest Moim Bratem - Facebook Post,” October 20, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/DziennikInternetowyXportalPL/posts/1784671688473483>.