

POSSIBLE WAYS TO COMMUNICATE ABOUT THE KREMLIN'S AGGRESSION AGAINST UKRAINE TO RUSSIAN SOCIETY

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The Putin regime's unleashing of a large-scale war against Ukraine is the consequence and result of dangerous internal processes in Russia. Obviously, analytical studies of the sources, components, and evolution of the phenomenon of "ruscism," a totalitarian political system with an aggressive great-power ideology, are yet to come. In order to understand the trends and peculiarities of Russian society it is necessary to outline in general terms some characteristic features of the processes in the Russian Federation which have shaped the type of social consciousness, patterns of behavior and world-view orientations of Russians over the past decades.

1. The Nature and Direction of Russia's Domestic Political Processes

Adoption of a great-power ideology. Since the early 2000s, Russia has gradually developed a monopolistic ideology which includes an imperial concept of great power and self-sufficiency ("state-civilization"), isolationism, aggressive anti-Western policy, rejection of universally recognized values, and disregard for international law¹. The doctrine of "besieged fortress," resistance to external adversaries is the main tool of social mobilization for the Russian regime, the core of its domestic and foreign policy².

The militarization of the country and society. The aggression against Ukraine accelerated the militarization of the state and public consciousness. Paramilitary rituals of Soviet times

¹ The most blatant demonstration of the Kremlin's aggressive course was the President's Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation of March 1, 2018, which in fact became a forceful ultimatum to the West and surpassed Vladimir Putin's famous Munich speech in confrontation. This line of adversarial relations with the West was also reflected in subsequent Addresses of the President of the Russian Federation, <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/59863>; The ideology of a self-sufficient "state-civilization" of a non-Western and non-Eastern type, which confronts enemies, was interpreted publicly in a landmark article by then presidential aide Vladislav Surkov "The Loneliness of the Half-Breed," published in Russia in Global Affairs journal (in Russian) on April 9, 2018, <https://globalaffairs.ru/global-processes/Odinochestvo-polukrovki-14-19477>.

² Alexei Drobinin, Director of the Foreign Policy Planning Department of the Russian Foreign Ministry, emphasizes in a program article: "The conflict situation is rather the norm for a country with such geography and interests as Russia." See Alexei Drobinin "Lessons from History and the Image of the Future: Reflections on Russian Foreign Policy," The International Affairs Journal (in Russian), August 2022, <https://interaffairs.ru/news/show/36410>.

have been revived. Victory in World War II has been turned into a politicized, chauvinistic symbol of the “exceptionalism” of the Russian people. There is a massive commemoration of the “heroic past”. Military competitions and parades are widespread. Russian authorities have introduced a system of military-patriotic education for young people and are spreading propaganda about the prestige of serving in the security forces. A “middle class in uniform” has been created which means expanded functions and rights for law enforcement agencies and a higher social status for their employees. Increases in the military budget and in the size of the armed forces are components of militarization.

Limitation of rights and freedoms. According to estimates of international organizations, in recent years Russia has created a system of legal restrictions and bans which make it virtually impossible for the opposition to hold public actions and for citizens to freely express their will³. The outbreak of the war accelerated the process of restricting constitutional rights such as freedom of assembly, freedom of movement, freedom of speech, etc.⁴ In March 2022, total military censorship was introduced⁵. Public harassment and persecution for disloyalty to the regime became a common practice. An indicative example is the creation in August 2022, at the initiative of the State Duma, of a Group to Investigate Anti-Russian Activities (GRAD) in the field of culture. Prosecutions of opposition activists grow widespread.

Media totalitarianism. A political regime has established a total information dictatorship on Russian territory. In 2020-2022 a final cleansing of the Russian media space took place⁶. Repressions also affected many regional media outlets⁷. March 2022 saw the start of the liquidation of the last independent mass media—about 3,000 Internet sites were blocked⁸. A number of media outlets were forced to emigrate abroad (Novaya Gazeta, Meduza, Dozhd, etc.). Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram have been blocked in the Russian Federation, and Meta Platforms has been banned by court. According to the World Press Freedom Index of 2022, Russia ranked 155th out of 180 countries⁹.

³ Report of Amnesty International on August 12, 2021. “Russia: No Place for Protest”, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur46/4328/2021/ru/>.

⁴ A non-governmental report by the Net Freedoms Project and the Agora Human Rights Group. “Russia: Human Rights in Martial Law” (in Russian), https://drive.google.com/file/d/1vCb_QdGscBkLUtYOpNxI5Q711XNisbnr/view.

⁵ In March 2022, the State Duma introduced amendments to the Administrative and Criminal Codes, according to which “discrediting the Russian Armed Forces” provided for either a fine (from 30 thousand to 1 million rubles) or imprisonment from 3 to 5 years. In turn, the new article of the Criminal Code (207.3) provides for 10 to 15 years of imprisonment for the public dissemination of deliberately false information about the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation.

⁶ More than 160 media outlets were included in the register of foreign agents. These include Radio Echo of Moscow, Radio Free Europe, Important Stories, the BBC, Rosbalt, Mediazona, as well as Meduza, The Insider, TV Rain, the Bellingcat Foundation, Deutsche Welle, and many others.

⁷ Amnesty International statement of March 17, 2022, <https://eurasia.amnesty.org/2022/03/17/zavavlenie-amnesty-international-cenzura-v-otnoshenii-antivoennyh-vyskazyvanij-v-rossii-dolzha-prekratitsya>.

⁸ “Russia Has Blocked 3,000 Websites since War with Ukraine Began,” Deutsche Welle (in Russian), May 6, 2022, <https://www.dw.com/ru/v-rossii-posle-nachala-vojny-s-ukrainoj-zablokirovano-3000-sajtov/a-61713225>.

⁹ “2022 World Press Freedom Index: a New Era of Polarization,” Reporters Without Borders, May 3, 2022, <https://rsf.org/en/rsf-s-2022-world-press-freedom-index-new-era-polarisation>.

Nationalization of the third sector. The government established total control over public organization system. Human rights, and, later on, environmental, educational and charitable organizations were either banned or given the status of “foreign agents,” which virtually rules out their activities (Anti-Corruption Foundation, Memorial, Levada Center, Sova Center and others). As of April 2022 about 400 public organizations and individuals were recognized as “foreign agents.”¹⁰ In July 2022 the Russian President signed a law regulating the activities of “foreign agents,” which deprived them of their basic social and political rights and freedoms and made it virtually impossible for them to operate¹¹. Foreign non-governmental organizations and foundations such as the Carnegie Foundation, Amnesty International, Human Rights, and a number of German foundations were also widely banned.

Eradication of the non-systemic opposition. In parallel with the cleansing of the media space and the third sector, any political opposition that was not loyal to the government was gradually eliminated. The most sweeping and resonant was the repression of the Alexei Navalny’s Anti-Corruption Foundation. In 2021-2022, ACF and the system of “Navalny’s headquarters” were smashed and banned. Well-known oppositionist Alexei Navalny was sentenced on a fabricated charge.

Ensuring the self-preservation of the current political regime. The adoption of the new Constitution of the Russian Federation by referendum on July 1, 2020, on the one hand, secured the prolongation of Putin’s presidency until 2036 (Clause 3 of Article 81), and on the other hand, ultimately consolidated the authoritarian regime, a police and totalitarian state model where internal rules prevail over international law and international obligations (Article 79). The current regime used administrative resources, a system of election fraud and elimination of real competitors to destroy the electoral system and usurp the power¹². In particular, according to the all-Russian public movement “Golos,” in 2020-2021 more than 50 legal and regulatory (including anti-extremist) restrictions took effect, depriving about 9 million citizens—8% of voters—of the right to participate in elections¹³.

In sum, what we have in Russia is a totalitarian police state with elements of a cult of personality, with an aggressive foreign policy and a repressive domestic policy,

¹⁰ “The Ministry of Justice Lists the Publisher of Troitskiy Variant as a NGO—“foreign agent”, Deutsche Welle (in Russian), March 25, 2022, <https://www.dw.com/ru/minjust-vnes-v-spisok-nko-inoagentov-izdatelja-troickogo-varianta/a-61254047>

¹¹ “Putin Signed a Law to Regulate the Activities of Foreign Agents,” Kommersant (in Russian), July 14, 2022, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/5460012>.

¹² Independent experts estimate that in the last presidential (2018) and parliamentary (2021) elections in Russia, 15 million and 17 million votes were falsified, respectively. See “The Treaty of Friendship with the DPR and LPR, Adopted by Duma MPs, Started the War. But Many of These MPs Were Simply Elected by No One,” Meduza (in Russian), August 2022, <https://meduza.io/feature/2022/08/12/dogovor-o-druzhbe-s-dnr-i-lnr-prinyatyy-deputatami-gosdumy-dal-start-voyne-no-mnogih-iz-etih-deputatov-poprostu-nikto-ne-vybiral>.

¹³ A report from the Golos movement. “The New Disenfranchised: Why Russian citizens Are Being Massively Deprived of the Right to Be Elected in the 2021 Elections” (In Russian), <https://www.golosinfo.org/articles/145272>.

cultivating an atmosphere of violence and fear, forming a false “parallel” picture of the world, morally corrupting its own citizens and ignoring international norms and rules.

There is reason to say that such a political system reproduces a new social type—**Homo putinus**. If we summarize the assessments and research of a number of sociologists and political scientists, it is possible to define a conventional archetype of an ordinary Russian (or “Putin’s person”)¹⁴. Firstly, this individual is identified with the authorities. They accept the arbitrary attitude of the state to themselves, the fact that the state controls their lives and suppresses universal moral norms, a sense of conscience, responsibility and law. Second, a distinctive feature is the artificial recognition of one’s own exceptionalism, advantages that, in fact, are the reverse side of an inferiority complex, slavish humiliation, and the traditional “sacralization” of power. Third, a spiteful and vindictive attitude toward the West, which is a reaction to the failure to build a normal civilized state. This leads to aggression and an appeal to the great past as a compensatory myth. Fourth, this person is a social product of powerful processes of moral corruption, the rapid growth of mass cynicism on the background of everyday violence and arbitrary power, the totalitarianization of mass consciousness.

These are just some of the features of the social production of the Kremlin regime, which should be considered when carrying out political and informational measures in the Russian direction.

2. The Ukrainian Direction of Russian ideology: “Parallel” Symbols and Images

It can be assumed that the hot phase of information aggression and creation of a fictitious image of Ukraine in the eyes of Russians began in the fall of 2013, pending the Vilnius summit, where the signing of the Ukraine-EU Association Agreement was planned. At that time, Russian propaganda widely used a set of fake ideologemes to compromise and discredit Kyiv’s Euro-integration course. Ukraine was portrayed as a failed state, which the West did not need. Integration with the EU would destroy its traditions, culture, and identity, and Ukraine would become a dependent agrarian

¹⁴ These traits were most fully defined by Lev Gudkov, director of the Levada Center. See “Offended, spiteful and vindictive”. Portrait of “Putin’s Man”, Radio Liberty (in Russian), August 14, 2022, <https://www.svoboda.org/a/chelovek-obizhennyy-zlobnyy-mstiteljnyy-lev-gudkov-o-homo-putinus-/31983907.html>; Similar assessments are outlined in comments and speeches by Boris Kagarlitzky, Igor Eidman, Sergei Medvedev and others. See “The Information Dictator’s Dilemma” (in Russian), July 19, 2022, <https://re-russia.org/1d7d367b6bda44c984f91858cac230a5>; “Russian Offence Was invented by Political Technologists,” Novaya gazeta. Europe (in Russian), August 16, 2022, <https://novayagazeta.eu/articles/2022/08/16/russkaia-obida-bridumana-polittekhnologami>; “Has the Kremlin Created Social-Totalitarianism?”, Radio Liberty (in Russian), August 15, 2022, <https://www.svoboda.org/a/sozdaet-li-kremlj-sotsialjnyy-totalitarizm-/31989316.html>; M. Mishchenko. “Spiritual Evolution of Russia’s Sympathizers: from Russian Nostalgia to Russian Nazism,” (in Ukrainian), July 13, 2022, <https://razumkov.org.ua/statti/dukhovna-evoliutsiia-sympatykiv-rosii-vid-radianskoi-nostalgii-do-rosiiskogo-natsyzmu>.

appendage of Europe. Without integration with Russia, the Ukrainian economy would collapse¹⁵.

Between 2014 and 2022, the Russian political leadership, through the state propaganda system, actively cultivated a “parallel,” false image of Ukraine among Russian citizens. This nationwide Ukrainophobic campaign was initiated at the presidential level. Summarizing the numerous statements, comments and appeals of Russia’s top leadership, the following fake ideologemes that were massively and regularly “incorporated” into the public consciousness can be identified:

- There was a state uprising in Ukraine and a Nazi junta came to power, which established an anti-people fascist regime¹⁶;
- The Ukrainian authorities committed genocide against the “people of Donbas”;
- Ukraine has lost its independence and is completely controlled by the West;
- “Kyiv regime” with the help of Western masters tried to attack Russia;
- Ukraine is a failed state, an artificial formation of Soviet power and its lands belong to Russia historically. Consequently, the Ukrainian nation has no right to its own statehood¹⁷.

It follows that the Putin regime has formed a neo-Nazi, Ukrainophobic ideology that aims to prove that Ukrainians are “second-rate,” that their statehood, culture, and national identity are artificial, while inspiring and justifying the practice of genocide against the people of Ukraine¹⁸.

Massive professional anti-Ukrainian propaganda, unprecedented in scale and level of manipulation, news distortions, fake special operations, and outright lies formed the image of “hostile Ukraine” and ensured predominant public approval/support for the invasion of the neighboring state. Russian sociological services record a consistently high level of positive attitudes toward the “special military operation”

¹⁵ This propaganda was aimed at destroying Ukrainian society “from within” by discrediting the current government, instigating social discontent and separatist sentiments in the regions, promoting the “Russian world” doctrine in the Ukrainian cultural and information space and the legitimacy of protecting “compatriots” in Ukrainian territory.

¹⁶ It should be recalled that on April 24, 2014, Putin, speaking at a Saint Petersburg media forum, called the Kyiv authorities a “junta,” which was widely propagated by Kremlin propaganda and entered Russian political discourse.

¹⁷ Back on April 17, 2014, during a “direct line with Vladimir Putin,” the Russian president stated that “...using the terminology from tsarist times, this is Novorossiia [southeast Ukraine]: Kharkiv, Luhansk, Donetsk, Kherson, Mykolaiv, Odesa that were not part of Ukraine in tsarist times, these are all territories that were handed over to Ukraine in the 1920s by the Soviet government.” See “Direct line with Vladimir Putin,” April 17, 2014, Website of the President of the Russian Federation (in Russian), <http://president.kremlin.ru/news/20796>.

¹⁸ This anti-Ukrainian ideology was summarised and developed in two official presidential addresses dated 21 February 2022 (Russian President’s website, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67828>) and in an address dated 24 February 2022 (<http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67843>) (both in Russian).

Public Opinion Foundation	According to the Foundation's research, the level of support for a "special military operation" ("SMO") in Ukraine from February to March 2022 rose from 65% to 73% ¹⁹ . The number of opponents of the operation was 17% and 14%, respectively. Most often (67%) respondents explain the purpose of the operation to ensure security of the Russian Federation, disarmament of Ukraine and prevention of NATO bases on its territory. Another motive (51%) is to protect the residents of the DPR-LPR ²⁰ .
Russian Public Opinion Research Center	According to the Center's monitoring, from April to July 2022, support for the "SMO" did not change significantly and stood at 72%. The share of opponents was in the range of 19-17%, respectively. Most often the respondents explained the purpose of the "SMO" by the protection of the Russian Federation, the prevention of the placement of NATO bases in Ukraine and the protection of the population of the DPR-LPR ²¹ .
Levada Center	Levada Center research from March to August 2022 shows fluctuations in the level of support for the "SMO," from 81% to 76%, respectively. However, according to their data, young people (18-24 years old) show some lower support for the "SMO"—65%. In other age categories, this support rises to 85% among respondents aged 55 and older ²² .

Obviously, in a totalitarian society, where dissent is criminally persecuted, where fear reigns, the practice of exposing and identifying "traitors" and "witch hunts" spreads, the results of any sociological surveys are questionable. But the above data deserves attention anyway, because it illustrates, to some extent, clear trends in the Russian society, which should be taken into account when determining possible ways to convey objective information about the Kremlin's aggression against Ukraine to the Russian society.

3. The Truth about the War in Ukraine: Mechanisms and Ways of Communicating it to Russians

An integral part of the Russian aggression is the large-scale intervention in the media space. It is evident that confrontation in the information war cannot be reduced only to defense, i.e., refuting fakes of Russian propaganda (this is mainly the content of the activities of the Center for Strategic Communications and Information Security and the Center for Countering Disinformation under the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine). It is also clear that the information and ideological confrontation with the Russian world, the strategic battle of meanings and worldviews should be transferred to the territory of the enemy in a gradual and phased manner, further expanding effective channels of influence. In particular, in his video address of August 26, 2022 the President of Ukraine noted that

¹⁹ Information on the results of following studies is not available.

²⁰ Public Opinion Foundation website. Ukraine: poll on March 20 (in Russian), <https://fom.ru/Politika/10946>.

²¹ Russian Public Opinion Research Center (VCIOM) website. "Special Military Operation: Monitoring" (in Russian), <https://wciom.ru/analytical-reviews/analiticheskii-obzor/specialnaja-voennaja-operacija-monitoring-20223006>.

²² Levada Center website. "Conflict with Ukraine: August 2022" (in Russian), <https://www.levada.ru/2022/09/01/konflikt-s-ukrainoj-avgust-2022-goda/>.

“now it is time that we need to look for even more non-standard channels for spreading the truth about Russia’s war against us.”²³

But how realistic is it to do this in Russia, given the duration, scale and intensity of Kremlin propaganda, the rigid censorship and monopolization of domestic media space?

There is a lot of skepticism about this in Ukrainian discourse, which has grounds given the rapid suppression of anti-war actions in March 2022, the harsh repression of individual activists and the generally low level of protest sentiment in Russian society. There are widespread opinions that the so-called “collective Putin” phenomenon has emerged within the framework of Kremlin totalitarianism. (However, with this in mind, it is useful to mention the effective Western practices of information and ideological confrontation with the totalitarian USSR during the Cold War.)

In turn, attention should be drawn to some ambiguous processes and trends in contemporary Russian society, vulnerabilities, as well as forms and mechanisms of information perception. These are the following:

- The war caused multidirectional processes in Russian society. The “Putin majority” was reestablished and the authoritarian nature of the regime strengthened. At the same time, internal contradictions, latent conflict and polarization of opinions emerged²⁴. On the one hand, this has triggered a wave of migration from Russia of the mobile middle class—IT specialists, scientists, artists, journalists, etc. And on the other hand, social apathy and conformism have grown.
- According to expert estimates, the group of people who support the “special operation” is not homogeneous: one proportion are confident supporters of military action, while the second has a higher level of fear and doubt, yet the recognition of the “necessity of protecting the Russian-speaking population” prevails. A considerable percentage of this support consists of people indifferent to the events in Ukraine, who join the official mainstream. This is passive conformism, reluctance to leave their comfort zone, fear of repression, etc.²⁵
- Russian society is gradually “adapting” to the war, there are signs of habituation, indifference, and a weakening of interest in the events in Ukraine, particularly among young people²⁶. Concurrently, expectations of the rapidity of the special operation have dissipated.

²³ Address by the President of Ukraine on August 26, 2022, <https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/zsu-i-nash-narod-shodnya-dovodyat-okupantam-sho-v-nih-nemaye-77353>.

²⁴ Denis Volkov, Andrei Kolesnikov, “Shock and Awe of “Special Operations,” How Russian Society Hides From Reality,” Carnegie Endowment report (in Russian), August 5, 2022, <https://carnegieendowment.org/eurasiainsight/87626>.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Lev Gudkov on the factors of support for the special operation, Re:Russia (in Russian), July 5, 2022, <https://polit.ru/news/2022/07/05/gudkov/>.

- It is young people (18-24 years old) who, in contrast to other age categories, perceive the “special operation” more cautiously (31% fully support it, 34% rather support it, and 30% do not support it to some extent)²⁷. It can be assumed that the opponent of the “special operation” is a young person, a resident of megalopolises, big cities, an active user of the Internet, who receives information about events in Ukraine from various sources. According to some estimates, the share of opponents of the “special operation” who consider it a war and aggression against Ukraine is about 20%²⁸. The core of this group are people in opposition to the government, who do not support its policies.
- In the Russian society under censorship restrictions, the demand for alternative information has risen. Since the beginning of the war in Russia, the number of downloads of VPN services to avoid Internet blocking has increased 15-fold. According to some estimates, the share of VPN users is approaching 30%. According to this indicator Russia moved from 16th to 2nd place in the world in 2022²⁹. This trend is indirectly confirmed by the results of Romir Holding research. The indicators of the coverage of the audience of the leading propaganda TV channels of the Russian Federation from February to July 2022 decreased markedly: Channel One’s ratings dropped from 33.7% to 25.5% and those of Russia-1—from 30.9% to 23%. Among the apps, the leaders are WhatsApp with a coverage of 44.6%, VKontakte (27.9%), and Telegram (up from 19.1% to 26.8%)³⁰.

Undoubtedly, delivering truthful information about the war in Ukraine is a complex and lengthy process with its own specifics, limitations, and time perspectives. It requires the following: identification of existing and creation of new resources, channels and opportunities to deliver objective information about the Kremlin’s aggression in Ukraine to Russian citizens; clear definition of recipients, forms and content of information content; coordination of actions of state bodies and the non-governmental sector; support of international partners, etc.

At first, it is not a question of “over-persuasion,” but rather of forming grounds for doubts and creating conditions for changes in the minds of certain categories of the population—from shifting attitudes toward the “special operation” to awareness of the crimes of the current Putin’s regime.

Three main factors can be outlined as influencing the attitudes and positions of Russian citizens.

²⁷ Levada Center website. “Conflict with Ukraine: August 2022” (in Russian), <https://www.levada.ru/2022/09/01/konflikt-s-ukrainoj-avgust-2022-goda/>.

²⁸ Denis Volkov, Andrei Kolesnikov, “Shock and Awe of “Special Operations,” How Russian Society Hides From Reality”, Carnegie Endowment report (in Russian), August 5, 2022, <https://carnegieendowment.org/eurasiainsight/87626>.

²⁹ “In March-July 2022, Russia Came Second in the Number of Downloads of VPN Services to Circumvent Blocking on the Internet,” Radio Liberty (in Russian), July 26, 2022, <https://www.svoboda.org/a/rossiya-zanyala-vtoroe-mesto-v-mire-po-chislu-skachivaniy-vpn-servisov/31959952.html>.

³⁰ Romir: “How Media Consumption of Russians Has Changed since February 2022” (in Russian), August 19, 2022, <https://romir.ru/studies/kak-izmenilos-mediapotreblenie-rossiyan-c-fevralya-2022>.

First, the dynamics of the war situation. The failure of the “blitzkrieg” in Ukraine and the AFU’s effective resistance to Russian intervention dispelled the image of an invincible “second army” of the world and had a certain sobering moral and psychological effect, intensified by the effective military operations of Ukraine in Crimea. At the same time, the triumphant reports of the Russian Ministry of Defense are increasingly out of sync with the realities on the frontline and the proclaimed goals and objectives of the “special operation.”

Second, unprecedented scale of “inevitable” and “sanitary” losses of Russians (in spite of secrecy and public heroization of victims) will have gradual cumulative effect primarily in the national provinces of the Russian Federation. According to various reports, fear and unwillingness to join the Russian Armed Forces are growing in Russian society against the backdrop of official patriotism, the number of “escapists” and deserters is on the rise.

Third, international sanctions have a cumulative, growing impact, and are reflected to a greater or lesser degree in the social sentiment of Russian citizens and their well-being, directly or indirectly affecting their daily lives and attitudes. It can be assumed that the effect of getting used and adapting to the sanctions is more visible among the older generation with Soviet experience. But for young people who are informationally integrated into the global community, the sanctions and Russia’s gradual international isolation are “an incentive to question and rethink realities” (in particular, the initiative to tighten the visa regime for Russian citizens had an obvious psychological effect).

At present, there is reason to talk about the lack of a coordinated information policy of the collective West in the Russian direction, systematic and effective influence on Russian society. There are many objective and subjective reasons for this. In view of this, it is appropriate to undertake **the following measures and initiatives.**

Propose to the EU (European Commission) the idea of developing a special program within the Strategic Compass framework for information counteraction against the totalitarianization of Russian society. The directions of this program could include:

- a) targeted promotion in the media space of information and cultural content adapted for the Russian consumer, containing anti-war motifs, based on the principles of democracy, freedom, respect for the human person, indirectly promoting European values and lifestyles;
- b) expansion of targeted communication channels (Internet, radio broadcasting, printed materials) to the Russian society, including in the languages of national minorities to promote objective information about the Kremlin’s aggression in Ukraine. A separate area of influence is the centers of the Russian diaspora in EU countries. It seems feasible to involve opposition Russian journalists and editors of media outlets that left Russia as part of this program;
- c) assistance in formation of opposition Russian subculture—creation of a special production center for organization of systematic participation of Russian musicians, actors, artists, writers, artists who emigrated to Europe in anti-war and cultural campaigns.

Organize an international expert conference devoted to problems of communications and mechanisms of informational influence on Russian society, with participation of representatives of state structures, political strategists, social psychologists, specialists of centers for counteracting hybrid threats (including East StratComTask Force), IT experts, journalists, bloggers and so forth.

Based on the results of this event, initiate (for example, within the framework of the “Crimea Platform”) the creation of a permanent international expert pool that would develop relevant recommendations and proposals. In parallel, a specialized working group should be formed on the basis of the Center for Countering Disinformation under the National Security and Defense Council.

The next step could be the creation of an international agency (possibly based on one of the European centers for countering hybrid threats), which would initiate and guide communication processes on the Russian direction.

For its part, the Ukrainian side should try at the international level to minimize “war fatigue” in Europe and the world, continue the practice of rooting the topic of Russian aggression against Ukraine on the agenda of global international institutions (the UNGA (UN Third Committee), PACE, OSCE, European Parliament, NATO PA) and regional ones (BSEC, GUAM, Weimar Triangle, Lublin Triangle and others), as well as international human rights and humanitarian organizations. Simultaneously, it is necessary to hold international events (round tables, conferences) on the topic of legal qualification of the crimes of Russian occupiers in Ukraine with the participation of famous experts, legal specialists, parliamentarians, public figures and journalists. It is urgent to step up the process of creating an international tribunal to investigate the crimes of the Russian Federation’s aggression against Ukraine.

It would be advisable to consider the possibility of developing a compact pilot state program (within the available resource capacity) aimed at implementing a set of coordinated information measures to convey objective information about the war in Ukraine to certain categories of the Russian population. In particular, the program should provide for:

a) the production, with the participation of state structures and public organizations and the help of foreign partners, of professional audio-visual products of various formats adapted for the Russian audience (primarily young people), filled with implicit, mediated pro-Ukrainian symbols, meanings and memes, information about the events in Ukraine for promotion in the Internet resources;

b) publication of various printed materials in Russian (for delivery to the war zone, occupied regions, and, if possible, distribution in the Russian Federation, as well as in countries where the main migration flows from the Russian Federation were directed), which contain data on the consequences of aggression on civilians, interviews with victims of crimes by occupation troops, disproving Russian myths about the “special operation,” data on the economic cost of this war for Russia. In addition, the information about corruption and arbitrariness, repressions and destruction of human rights by Putin’s regime in the Russian Federation should be disclosed, and the real faces of Russian politicians and propagandists should be revealed;

Organize the preparation of an international public report “Russian Aggression: Genocide in Ukraine” within the framework of the project “Torturers of Ukraine,” which is implemented by the Office of the President. The report should systematize and set forth the facts, evidence and testimonies gathered (which will be further supplemented and summarized in the following reports) of the crimes of the Russian occupiers in Ukraine. There should be the widest possible public presentation of this document in international institutions, national parliaments of the world, public organizations, leading Internet resources, social networks, etc. The Russian version of the document is to be presented, discussed and disseminated.

Activate and coordinate the activities of representatives of central and regional authorities in the media space. Representatives of ministries and departments and heads of local administrations must be regularly present in the media, online resources and social networks in order to cover the real situation during the war with a focus on the Russian audience. It is worth considering the idea of introducing the practice of targeted public appeals by the leadership of Ukraine to ethnic Ukrainians in the Russian Federation who are deprived of their language, national identity, culture, and right to self-organization.

Gradually form an Internet community of Ukrainian refugees. We need refugees in different countries of the world (with the help of diplomatic missions, local diaspora, volunteer organizations, Ukrainian World Congress) to work actively on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Tik-Tok, as well as to support Ukrainian Internet resources. The creation of Internet groups, individual sites, and FB pages should be initiated to disseminate their own experiences, opinions, and assessments of the consequences of Russian aggression in social networks. This process also needs to include the continuation of pro-Ukrainian public actions, flash mobs, and informational events dedicated to the war in Ukraine.

Introduce the practice of regular appearances, interviews, and comments by representatives of the authorities, political and public figures of Ukraine in the Russian opposition media (Dozhd, Novaya Gazeta. Europe, Meduza, etc.). Periodic press conferences for Russian opposition journalists should be organized in Riga.

It is clear that these are only some features of the possible communication campaign in the Russian direction, which requires joint efforts of Ukraine and the collective West. Evidently, the importance of this dimension will grow in the foreseeable future, given the deepening and expanding confrontation not only on the West-Russia axis, but also in a more global sense of defending the universal values of the democratic world. However, another thing is also obvious—communication measures, despite their relevance, are rather auxiliary in the current conditions. The main instruments of influence in the Russian direction are the courageous resistance of the Ukrainian people to the occupiers, the losses of the enemy, an effective policy of sanctions against the Putin regime, and the solidarity and assistance to Ukraine on the part of the civilized world.

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