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IMAGE OF RUSSIA IN SLOVAK PROKREMLIN PROPAGANDA

The presented paper deals with the very actual social phenomenon in Slovakia's public discourse, which is prokremlin propaganda spread by various actors. The aim of the paper is to find out what types of the images prokremlin media creates about Russia. Since the 2013 this kind of „alternative“ media (how they call themselves) have gained relevant amount of support and they are able to influence political worldviews of many people who consume news on internet, where these media are active and relatively successful.

To achieve my goal I use method of thematic analysis of text. During the one month period from 15th February until 15th March 2018 I investigated content of two picked prokremlin media concerned with the events connected to Russia. Existence of investigated media I put in the context of hybrid war carried by Russia against the West, where element of propaganda plays strong role with the aim to confuse the public opinion in many European countries, Slovakia not excluded. Alternative reality accepted by some part of Slovak society where the binary oppositions between the West, who runs aggressive politics against innocent Russia are created is a partial result of prokremlin media effect mixed with historical Slovak experience with the Russia.

Key words: Slovakia, prokremlin media, Russia, hybrid war, propaganda.

Іжак Ш.

ЗОБРАЖЕННЯ РОСІЇ В СЛОВАЦЬКІЙ ПРОКРЕМЛІВСЬКІЙ ПРОПАГАНДІ

Стаття розглядає дуже актуальне соціальне явище в суспільному дискурсі Словаччини, що є прокремлівською пропагандою, яку поширюють різні дійові особи.

Метою статті є з'ясування того, які типи зображень прокремлівських ЗМІ створюють про Росію.

Із 2013 р. такі «альтернативні» засоби масової інформації (як вони називають себе) отримали відповідну суму підтримки, і вони можуть впливати на політичні світогляди багатьох людей, які отримують новини в Інтернеті, де ці засоби масової інформації є активними та відносно успішними.

Для досягнення своєї мети я використовую метод тематичного аналізу тексту. Протягом одного місяця з 15 лютого по 15 березня 2018 року я досліджував зміст двох вилучених прокремлівських ЗМІ, пов'язаних із подіями, пов'язаними з Росією.

Існування досліджуваних ЗМІ, які я поставив у контексті гібридної війни, яку Росія здійснює проти Заходу, коли елемент пропаганди відіграє значну роль із метою зміцнення громадської думки в багатьох європейських країнах, Словаччина не є винятком.

Альтернативна реальність, прийнята частиною словацького суспільства, у якій створюються бінарні протилежності між Заходом, що керує агресивною політикою щодо невинної Росії, є частковим результатом прокремлівського медіа-ефекту, змішаного з історичним словацьким досвідом із Росією.

Ключові слова: Словаччина, прокремлівські ЗМІ, Росія, гібридна війна, пропаганда.

Ижак Ш.

ИЗОБРАЖЕНИЕ РОССИИ В СЛОВАЦКОЙ ПРОКРЕМЛЕВСКОЙ ПРОПАГАНДЕ

Данная статья рассматривает очень актуальное социальное явление в общественном дискурсе Словакии, что является прокремлевской пропагандой, которую распространяют различные действующие лица.

Целью статьи является выяснение того, какие типы изображений прокремлевских СМИ создают о России.

С 2013 г. такие «альтернативные» средства массовой информации (как они называют себя) получили соответствующую сумму поддержки, и они могут влиять на политические мировоззрения многих людей, которые получают новости в Интернете, где эти средства массовой информации являются активными и относительно успешными.

Для достижения своей цели я использую метод тематического анализа текста. В течение одного месяца с 15 февраля по 15 марта 2018 я исследовал содержание двух удаленных прокремлевских СМИ, связанных с событиями, связанными с Россией.

Существование исследуемых СМИ, я изобразил в контексте гибридной войны, которую Россия осуществляет против Запада, когда элемент пропаганды играет значительную роль с целью смещения общественного мнения во многих европейских странах, Словакия не является исключением.

Альтернативная реальность, принятая частью словацкого общества, в которой создаются бинарные противоположности между Западом, что управляется агрессивной политикой по отношению к невинной России, является частичным результатом прокремлевского медиа-эффекта, смешанного с историческим словацким опытом с Россией.

Ключевые слова: Словакия, прокремлевские СМИ, Россия, гибридная война, пропаганда.

Introduction

As a small and relatively young Central European country, Slovakia has a long history of the mutual relations with Russia, accompanied with many attempts to adapt Kremlin narratives in the region. Very powerful experience with the mental results still visible in nowadays Slovak society had communist and Soviet union propaganda, which was very strong especially during communist era in Czechoslovakia from 1948 until 1989. This propaganda adored communist regime and Soviet union as an only guarantor of world peace and prosperity. Many people feel nostalgia about this period although Slovakia is now member of all important Western structures like European Union (EU), Eurozone, Schengen, or NATO.

In the last couple of years we can see two important trends in informational and media sphere (not only) in Slovakia. The first trend is changing the dominant sources of information. With the rising of internet access and the rising of social networks like Facebook or Twitter and other technologies, these platforms have become the space where more and more people are searching for news and information. The second trend is strongly connected to the first one, when many new online media were established in Slovakia and Czech Republic (mostly since the rising of Ukrainian crisis in 2013-2014). These media exploit the advantages of mostly anonymous online space which doesn't force them to publish their sources, real names, ethical codes or funding.

A lot of actual topics about Slovak domestic and foreign European and world politics, societies are among their agenda. They also pay significant attention to Russia-EU, or Russia-Ukraine relations. According to Radovan Bránik and Grigorij Mesežnikov (2017) narratives suitable for Kremlin geopolitical goals are spread by these media in Slovakia. That's why I use term prokremlin media, or prokremlin propaganda in this paper. The main aim of the paper is to find out how these media describe Russia and their international relations.

I find out research on content of prokremlin media in Slovakia relevant, because of the possible impact of this content on minds of news consumers, what can have result on many actions in society from the lowest to highest levels.

Methodology

As I mentioned in *Introduction*, my aim is to find out what kind of image of Russia prokremlin media in Slovakia portray. By my research I look for an answers to my basic research question: which topics Slovak prokremlin media use to refer about Russia and to create the identity of Russia?

The aim of this paper is not to solve the truth of the informations produced by researched media and resolve if they are disinformations and hoaxes, although spreading disinformations and using manipulative techniques are their common method of work (Vichová, 2016).

For my research I chose two Slovak prokremlin media. The first is online web Hlavné správy (Main news) which has 31 167 followers on facebook and the second is web with it's own radio broadcasting InfoVojna 17 979 followers,¹ what is equivalent to well known American disinformation media InfoWars owned by conspiracy theorist Alex Jones. The criteria for the selection of these prokremlin media was their support on facebook, linking on them by other websites and high number of facebook interactions on their posts.² They belong among the most popular and influential on Slovak internet.

I was collecting all news from these media facebook pages in a period from 15th February until 15th March 2018. I collected all news with the key words in titles and subtitles of articles. Between key words I set words like Russia, Russian, Russians, names of russian political and non-political representatives, names of towns, firms, institutions, lakes, rivers in Russia etc. For empirical part I use only news from non-western news agencies and author's news, because these news create discourse what is out of traditional media and specific for this kind of media.

As a method of text analysis I use qualitative method of thematic analysis. The point of thematic analysis is to looking for and identify the key themes for characterizing certain phenomenon. From the practical point of view, it's about repeated reading and close familiarization with texts and key is revealing the patterns of content organisation and relations in analyzed data, with which help the revealed themes becoming analytical categories (Hynek – Střítecký, 2010). This method allow me to categorize big amount of text material into coherent research frames (categories) in which I analyze specific phenomenons common for every of these thematic frames.

¹ For both media, numbers of followers toward 31.3.2018.

² <https://blbec.online>.

Theoretical part

In 2014 Russia annexed Ukrainian peninsula Crimea, since the same year Russia have participated on the conflict in the eastern Ukraine, and in 2015 Russia started their intervention to Syria, where they support current president Bashar al-Assad. All these conflicts are no classical type of warfare, where sides fight against each other only on battlefield. From the Russian point of view they are hybrid wars, where the battle is happening not only on physical battlefield, but in other spheres as well. As Keir Giles says that the key of hybrid war is „*pertaining to the simultaneous employment of both conventional and irregular forces*“ (Giles, 2016: 6). Pynnöniemi (2016) emphasize the role of information and psychological measures among the irregular forces. As an important tool in information sphere, Russia uses propaganda.

Propaganda is very old phenomenon, which have accompanied history of people since ancient times. Propaganda is changing with the changing of human society and during the years a lot of definitions of it were created. In this paper I use definition of propaganda from book *Propaganda and Persuasion* (2012) by Garth Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell „*Propaganda is the deliberate, systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behavior to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist*“ (Jowett – O'Donnell, 2012: 7).

Russia has a lot of experiences with using propaganda in other countries. As I mentioned in *Introduction*, during the Cold war era Soviet union was using mass propaganda to keep communist block together.

Today, Russia use for propaganda on domestic population state owned media which are the strongest on media market in Russia. Gabdulhakov (2016) writes that Russia is not free state in the freedom of press index and increased pressure on free media in Russia from authorities is getting stronger. The best known channels on international level which spread Russian narratives on world events are probably state owned media institutions like RT and Sputnik. These media has many language variations. There is no Slovak language version of these media but in Czech republic Sputnik operates (cz.sputniknews.com).

Except of this case of Sputnik agency in Czech republic, there is no clear evidence of media funding in Slovakia or Czech republic by Russia. In 2014 editor in chief of Slovak conspiracy media *Zem a Vek* (Earth and Age) Tibor Eliot Rostás had meeting with (that time) Russian ambassador in Slovakia Pavel Kuznecov. Rostás wanted from Kuznecov money for building a media network to spread Kremlin narratives

and ideas of panslavism. Audio record from this meeting is still available on internet³. In 2015 Rostás traveled to Moscow to present idea of big media house including TV, radio, magazine, website etc. but we don't have any proof that he got some money from Russia.

Prokremlin narratives in Slovakia are not spread by Kremlin (owned) media, but by prokremlin media where is no clear evidence of their funding. Tomáš Čížik (2017) declares that except of prokremlin media, the prokremlin narratives are spread also by politics, trolls and extremists groups from left and right edge of political spectrum. The main aim of them is to loose faith in democratic and European institutions across population.

In Slovakia is easy to find organisations, which have close relations to Kremlin worldviews. Between political parties in parliament I can name fascist People's party our Slovakia (LSNS). Other organisations with ideological affiliation to Kremlin are Slovak revival movement (SHO), Slovak conscripts (SB) or Slovak Soldier's Association (ASV) (Wenerski, 2017).

Prokremlin media and their content was Dušan Fischer's research target. Fischer argues that Slovak prokremlin media create reality where EU is declining and chaotic alliance. They usually focus „*on negative news regarding the EU and the West. They do not report on success, only on protests and political scandals, such as resignations. Articles often focus on a debate about leaving the EU or even proposing alternatives to NATO membership, such as neutrality*“ (Fischer, 2017: 20). On contrary Russia is portrayed as good and helpful. The Russian intervention in Ukraine is understood as help to the oppressed russian speaking minority and intervention to Syria is described as successful war against terrorism, although Russia is being accused of assisting Assad regime bombing civilians (Fischer, 2017).

Ivana Smoleňová says that Russia in Slovak and Czech prokremlin media is portrayed as the only one country to respond western hegemony politics and is the victim of western aggression and double standards. Although Russia is not perfect, it is definitely better than the West (Smoleňová, 2015).

Since the „boom“ of the prokremlin media in 2013-2014, these media gained a relevant amount of support and getting wider and wider influence in society. Thanks to internet they can set topics to public discourse, form it and make people think and talk about used prokremlin

³ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0t2yAax3_2s.

narratives. According to Globsec policy institute (2016) 17% of people in Slovakia believe more prokremlin media than traditional media. Between people of age 18-24 the faith is on 29%. Journalist Vladimír Šnidl in his book *Truth and Lie on Facebook* (2017) interpretate his research with application buzzsumo. By *buzzsumo* he was investigating the influence of prokremlin media on facebook. He defined some key words and found what articles (and from which source) are the most read. With the key word migrant, four of five most read articles came from prokremlin media. The same result he found out with the word imigrant. Šnidl argues that traditional media have still more followers, but prokremlin media can produce some viral news at the time, which are popular and highly shared. Šnidl say about bump effect, when these news can go widespread and get in touch to many users (Šnidl, 2017).

Although prokremlin media are highly active in Slovakia, researches show that population are still proWest, or proEU oriented. 52% of population think that Slovakia is some kind of bridge between the West and the East, 23% think that Slovakia belongs to the West and 12% to the East. 52% of Slovaks think that our membership in EU is a good thing, but only 30% think that membership in NATO is a good thing (Globsec policy institute, 2016).

Center for insight in survey research was doing research of public opinion in 2017 in all V4 countries. According to results of this research 34% of people at least once or twice in a week read prokremlin media in Slovakia. 38% of people doesn't believe that these media are funded by Russia and 38% of people doesn't care if they are, when they write true stories. On the beliefs on Russia, 41% of Slovak people believe that Russia is a protector of traditional European values, 37% of people think that Putin and Russia can be ally against the EU, which wants to abandon our traditional values. 63% of people believe that Slovakia should have strong relations with EU, but also 43% believe that we should have strong relations with Russia. 22% of people argue that Russia is a threat for European security and 75% think that Russia should be considered as a partner in European security (CISR, 2017).

As we see from the results of these researches, there's not marginal group of people in Slovakia who has symphaties for Russia. On the other hand researches showed that majority of Slovak population prefer political orientation on EU and the West. The aim of prokremlin media in Slovakia is to change this prevailed opinion. One of the tactics to reach this goal is to put in society narratives about negative role of democratic, European and (generally) western institutions. On contrary

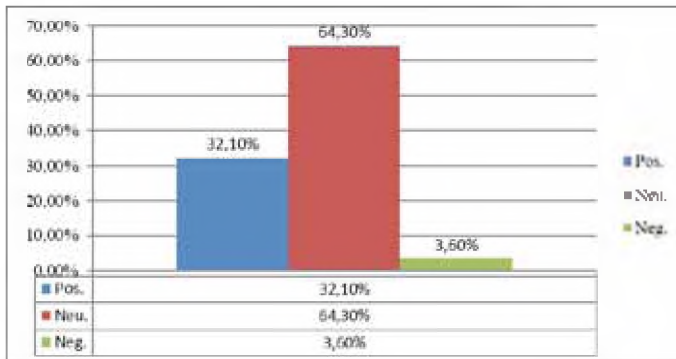
they produce narratives about Russia as reliable partner, peacekeeper and alternative against EU. I will try to verify this thesis in empirical part of this paper, where I will describe prokremlin media produced narratives about Russia.

Empirical part

During the researched period from 15th February until 15th March, on researched platforms I identified 84 author's news or news coming from non-western sources (usually from russian sites) informing about Russia. Hlavné správy published 58 news and InfoVojna published 26 news. In the news I identified three basic thematic categories which construct the identity of Russia in Slovak prokremlin media. The first category is *Russia as superpower*, the second is *Russia as a victim*, the third is *Russia as a peacekeeper who stays against western hegemony*. All these categories are connected with each other, so they make acoherent symbolic system, I will describe this system in the next chapters of empirical part. Typical for all categories is expressive language, usually to describe negative sides of western politics in the opposition toward Russia.

Very interesting is look on the emotional colouring of the news. Although most of the news contain neutral connotations toward Russia. Russia was described neutrally in 64,3% of the news. We can see a big deference between the positive and negative news. In 32,1% of the news positive connotations were present, while negative connotations toward Russia were identified only in 3,6% of the news. These results show us that it's very rare to find some negative mentions about Russia on prokremlin platforms in Slovakia. Russia is presented mostly by neutral or positive connotations as it's clearly written in added graph no. 1 bellow.

Graph no. 1. Emotional colouring of the news



Russia as a superpower

In this category (25 news) Russia is described as a world superpower, who are among countries who make important decisions about „hot“ world problems. Russia is described as a superpower in all kind of spheres, political, economical, army. Russia is usually put in the superpower battle with the West, mostly USA.

The most of the news deal with the Russian army development and especially with the development of their new weapons, which are „supermodern“⁴ (IV) or „ultramodern“⁵ (HS) and able to defeat all kind of enemies, mostly USA. According to Hlavné správy „Russia under the Putin leadership have become superpower and it's able to enforce their interests.“⁶ Next quote says that Russia is a military superpower with the great defense „Russia cleverly a pragmatically built it's anti-aircraft defense and racquet forces. So there is no way, from where some unexpected attack on Russia could come“⁷ (HS). Russia is not

⁴ <http://www.infovojna.sk/article/rusko-ma-novu-supermodernu-zbran-ktoru-nedokaze-zachytit-ziadny-obranny-system-statov-zapadu> (cited 31.3.2018).

⁵ <https://www.hlavnespravy.sk/zapadne-media-putinovom-varovani-nerokovali-ste-nepocuvajte/1334138> (cited 31.3.2018).

⁶ <https://www.hlavnespravy.sk/rusko-uz-nie-je-jelcinovsky-ozran-zahnany-kuta/1332010> (cited 31.3.2018)

⁷ <https://www.hlavnespravy.sk/izraelsky-vojensky-expert-ked-mi-o-raketovych-hrozbach-zapadu-rusko-dokaze-zlikvidovat-akukolvek-hrozbu/1324150> (cited 31.3.2018).

strong only in defending own territory, but can be powerful to defend it's geopolitical aims, what can be surprising for the West „*American xperts say that USA and the West underestimate military potencial of Russian federation. Russians have enough options not only defense it's sovereignty but they are able to enforce it's geopolitical visions in the world*“⁸ (HS). The rethoric where everybody underestimate Russia, but Russia is doing a great job is visible also in this part „*Those who expected that Syria will become another Russian Afghanistan went totally wrong. Russia has showed it's power, in battle condition it increase the level of it's armed forces and into battle operations Russian engaged mercenaries groups*“⁹ (HS). Important point is that Russian weapons and army are better than those of the West, so Russia is not only superpower, it's stronger superpower than USA and the West „*Jakov Kedmi: Russians weapons got ahead of USA weapons by three generations*“¹⁰ (HS). The example of Jakov Kedmi reveals the fact, that prokremlin media often use clearly prokremlin „experts“ to legitimize their statements.

The superpower status of Russia is not confirmed only by Russian military power, but also with news praising Russian trade abilities and wealth. News about Russian high supplies of gold¹¹ (IV) only demonstrate it. Others pay attention to Russian trade successes, like „*Hit for eurocrats, mutual trade between Russia and Germany breaking records*“¹² (IV) or „*Russia is overload by military orders despite of sanctions by USA*“¹³ (HS). The key point is that trade is increasing despite of sanctions against Russia, what delegitimize western approach to Russia after annexation of Crimea and war in Donbass.

⁸<https://www.hlavnespravdy.sk/pentagon-je-nervozny-rusko-vymazalo-americku-vzdusnu-dominanciu-v-syrii/1327954> (cited 31.3.2018).

⁹<https://www.hlavnespravdy.sk/v-syrii-rusko-dokazalo-ze-je-velmocou-uspesne-treduje-svoje-ozbrojene-sily/1316190> (cited 31.3.2018).

¹⁰<https://www.hlavnespravdy.sk/jakov-kedmi-rusi-predbehli-svojimi-novymi-zbranami-americanov-o-tri-generacie/1331674> (cited 31.3.2018).

¹¹<http://www.infovojna.sk/article/rusko-predbehlo-v-zasobach-zlatacinu-a-stalo-sa-tak-piatym-najvacsim-drzitelom-vzacneho-kovu-na-svete> (cited 31.3.2018).

¹²<http://www.infovojna.sk/article/rana-pre-eurokratov-vzajomny-rusko-nemecky-obchod-trha-rekordy> (cited 31.3.2018).

¹³<https://www.hlavnespravdy.sk/rusko-zahltili-vojensky-mi-zakazkami-napriek-sankciam-usa/1321128> (cited 31.3.2018).

Russia as a peacekeeper, who stays against western hegemony

In this category (17 news) Russia is described as a brave country who fight against western hegemony, which has destroyed the world for many years. Russia is presented as a strong superpower, who can defeat West and establish peace, often mentioned example is Syria, where Russia is a peacekeeper and the West supports terrorists according to prokremlin interpretation.

The news emphasize that Russia stands against aggressive West and especially USA, which attacks Russia all the time. *„American experts are unsatisfied, because their activities against Russia are meeting with more and more defeats. According to several american military experts, Russians in nuclear conflict can successfully prevent Americans from victory by military means and in the case of this clash American can loose a lot“*¹⁴ (HS). Russians can be thankful for that to president Putin and his politics of modernizing Russian army *„New Russian weapons, especially modern racquets, which can break American anti-aircraft defense, changed the game rules. Russian president Vladimir Putin stated for many times that in the case of an attack on Russia, Russians will shoot the biggest part of their nuclear potencial on USA. At the moment Americans are reconsidering their options and conflict they wanted to create with the aim of shift target for Russia on European states is moving indefinitely“*¹⁵ (HS). News create the West as an aggressor not only against Russia, but remind other military interventions, which were unsuccessful and destabilizing many regions. On the other side stands Russia, which solve negative results of western interventions and brings stability and peace *„Since Vladimir Putin became Russian president, Russians successfully ended war in Chechnya, stopped parcelling of Russia, successfully solve Georgian crisis, initiated by USA in 2008 and made impossible for Americans finish their destabilizing plans in Syria, Ukraine, Iraq or Lybia“*¹⁶ (HS).

From last quote we can see other identity ascribed to Russia in prokremlin media in Slovakia and it's identity of peacekeeper, who can solve conflicts (usually started by imperialistic West). This identity is of-

¹⁴<https://www.hlavnespravdy.sk/pentagon-je-nervozny-rusko-vymazalo-americku-vzdusnu-dominanciu-v-syrii/1327954> (cited 31.3.2018).

¹⁵<https://www.hlavnespravdy.sk/jakov-kedmi-rusi-narusili-americanom-vsetky-plany/1336546> (cited 31.3.2018).

¹⁶<https://www.hlavnespravdy.sk/hlava-pentagonu-rusko-chce-zmenit-medzinarodne-hranice/1327940> (cited 31.3.2018).

ten demonstrated in the news about Syria conflict, where many countries are engaged. Russian support of president Assad is understood as a step to stability and peace, on contrary the West is criticized for supporting terrorists and spreading disinformations about Russian performance in Syria. According to Slovak prokremlin media „Russia achieved on the Middle East important military achievements and now has to transform these achievements into geopolitic advantages“¹⁷ (HS). Prokremlin media praise Russian mainly for their politics in Syria „By Syrian campaign Russia definitely showed that it's superpower again and in Syria successfully increase battle ability of it's army in a conditions of battle preparation... Russian army in Syria showed her high effectivity and mobility. The goals Russia had in Syrian campaign are reached and situation is stabilized... The victory of Russian weapons is used by Russian diplomacy to strenght their position, process of regulation Syrian problem by peace way (agreements between Assad and opposition) despite of American resistance becoming fact... ISIL, which is by many experts considered as back-up American army, stopped existing, the rest of terrorists is not danger anymore“¹⁸ (HS). The argument that Russians are peacekeepers, who protect Syria from war is explicitly expressed in the next part „Russian citizens, Russian soldiers and Russian peacekeepers as well are in Damascus. In the case of illegal American attack, because Americans don't have mandate from UN, Russia will consider attack as a danger for life of Russians citizens and will hit by all decisiveness to eliminate danger“¹⁹ (HS).

Russia as a victim

In this category (33 news) Russia is described as a victim of all kind of attacks, which come from the West. Prokremlin media talk about political, economic, military, or disinformation attacks targeted Russia, which only defend itself. The aim of these news are not only create image of Russia as a innocent victim of unprecedented attacks, but also

¹⁷<https://www.hlavnespravdy.sk/ivasov-rusko-musi-pouzit-silove-riesenie-naucit-ameriku-izrael-zodpovednejsie-sa-spravat/1313000> (cited 31.3.2018).

¹⁸<https://www.hlavnespravdy.sk/v-syrii-rusko-dokazalo-ze-je-velmocou-uspesne-trenuje-svoje-ozbrojene-sily/1316190> (cited 31.3.2018).

¹⁹ <https://www.hlavnespravdy.sk/rusi-vystrihaju-americanov-ak-udriete-v-syrii-potopime-vam-lode/1340790> (cited 31.3.2018).

create image of the West, which is aggressive, imperialistic, provoke Russia, spread disinformations about Russia, have double standards and is russophobic. The aim of this narratives is to create reality where Russia is under permanent attack from the West and they are only defending themselves.

Russia is a victim of many conspiracies by the West. A lot of them deal with defaming Russian politics in Syria and Russia is only a victim of western disinformations. Prokremlin media stand on Russian positions and say that the fake news about Syria come from „*mainstream media*,”²⁰ (IV) from „*Ukrainian and American sources*”²¹ (HS), so this informations have to be untruthful. According to these media „*western countries abuse situation in Syria against Moscow*”²² (IV). It's not only Syria, prokremlin media argue that the West want to „*unleash new anti-russian informational-propagandistic campaign*”²³ (HS). Next example of western attacks is Brexit, where the West blame Russia for interference into campaign, but according to Russia, Great Britain have no proof and it's only conspiracy „*Baseless blames about Russian influencing of Brexit are awful. It's about one – impose more sanctions on Moscow... Several months media in Great Britain were bombing society with conspiracy theories about Russia interfering Brexit. Trends in Britain to leave the EU were reportedly provoked in the frame of weird conspiracy of Vladimir Putin*”²⁴ (HS).

Another example can be poisoning of former Russian spy Sergei Skripal in Great Britain. In Skripal case InfoVojna use interpretation of Russian minister of foreign affairs Sergei Lavrov, according to whom „*his country is blamed for every evil what is happening in world*”²⁵

²⁰ <http://www.infovojna.sk/article/rusko-mainstreamove-media-dezinformuju-o-situacii-v-syrii> (cited 31.3.2018).

²¹ <https://www.hlavnespravy.sk/za-informaciami-o-vysokych-stratach-rusov-v-syrii-stoja-ukrajinske-zdroje-americiania/1311452> (cited 31.3.2018).

²² <http://www.infovojna.sk/article/rusko-obvinilo-front-al-nusra-z-pouzitia-chloru-vo-vychodnej-ghute> (cited 31.3.2018).

²³ <https://www.hlavnespravy.sk/syrialeaks-londyn-na-zufalo-snazi-prekazit-nastolenie-pax-russiana-v-syrii/1328854> (cited 31.3.2018).

²⁴ <https://www.hlavnespravy.sk/britsky-novinar-bojujeme-proti-nepotvrdenej-ucasti-ruska-na-brexite-ale-podpora-sorosa-preantireferendove-skupiny-nam-vobec-nevadi/1314696> (cited 31.3.2018).

²⁵ <http://www.infovojna.sk/article/lavrov-obvinovanie-ruska-zo-zodpovednosti-za-otravu-dvojiteho-agenta-je-dalsim-prikladom->

(IV). In the same message InfoVojna sees the whole case as an example of „*anti-russian hysteria*.”

As we see, prokremlin media defend Russia, when there is some suspicious of Russian interference to the other countries affairs. On the other hand they blame the West for interference into Russian internal affairs. „*Western interference is happening in careful way and is often masked, so even recipients don't have to understand, that they are influenced... It's important to understand that Washington interfere into our internal affairs by many channels, but on the other hand it efforts to accuse us of interference into internal affairs of America, politician [Sergei Riabkov, author's note] explained*”²⁶ (IV).

In a lot of news prokremlin media inform about reportedly western plans on military attack on Russia. For this plan USA uses European states, which are in submissive role toward USA. „*By educating it's European allies and using their nuclear weapons, USA is heading toward nuclear war with Russia*”²⁷ (IV). InfoVojna gives also space for former Slovak prime minister and currently anti-NATO and anti-EU activist and chief of Slovak-Russian society Ján Čarnogurský. He says that „*initiative of creation of militarily Schengen is a part of American sausage tactics for involving European countries to American expansive politics towards Russia*”²⁸ (IV).

The attacks from the West are coming not only from political sphere, but also from cultural one. One example can be prokremlin media reinterpretation of releasing movie *The death of Stalin* in Russia. According to Slovak prokremlin media this movie should „*raise split in Russian society*”²⁹ (HS).

As a date of begining of football World cup in Russia is coming closer, the prokremlin media raise an argument that the West want to discredit Russia as an organisator of this event. So negative messages should accomplish this goal. „*It turned out, that controversial world*

protiruskej-hysterie (cited 31.3.2018).

²⁶<http://www.infovojna.sk/article/zahranicni-sponzori-zvysili-svoju-financnu-podporu-ruskej-opozicii> (cited 31.3.2018).

²⁷<http://www.infovojna.sk/article/jadrova-vojna-medzi-usa-a-ruskom-sposobi-zanik-civilizacie> (cited 31.3.2018).

²⁸<http://www.infovojna.sk/article/carnogursky-ak-by-nato-zatiahlo-slovensko-do-vojny-s-ruskom-slovenski-vojaci-prebehnu-na-rusku-stranu> (cited 31.3.2018).

²⁹<https://www.hlavnespravy.sk/ruski-liberali-pisu-list-stalinovi/1323838> (cited 31.3.2018).

*antidoping agency WADA doesn't have influence on FIFA like influence on International Olympic Committee, through which she forced anti-russian actions. FIFA doesn't consider similar actions, so London had to find other reason to start anti-russian hysteria with the aim to damage football World cup in Moscow*³⁰ (HS).

Prokremlin media try to make impression that the West is against Russia because of it's nature and sees Russia behind everything, so it's okay to attack it. In this narrative all western critics on Russia is just illegitimate result of western russophobia, what create and is created by simple dichotomy West (bad, aggressive) and Russia (good, victim). This way of thinking is in Slovak prokremlin media sometimes accompanied by sarcastic interpretations like in this part, which refers to Russian state owned media RT „according to portal RT, Russia in recent times got into the role of universal scapegoat, whose influence can't be underestimated. Historically separatist region voted for independence? Russia! Somebody on internet offended your candidate? Russia! Extreme cold coming form the east? Russia!”³¹ (IV).

All thematic categories are connected between each other and they have common dichotomy West-East. Across all categories we can watch a link of relativization of negative aspects of Russian politics. Except of refusing all critics like Skripal case, Syria, Brexit, we can often see refusing all critics about hybrid war too. One message from InfoVojna speaks about british politologist, who apologize for „invention of Gerasimov doctrine”³² (IV). Hlavné správy purposefully quoted Slovak MP Ľuboša Blahu who said with irony that Putin leads hybrid war „just because he funds Sputnik with three journalists”³³(HS) but we don't pay attention to Soros funded NGO's from the West, which lead here many influence campaigns. As we see typical prokremlin dichotomy „bad from the West and nothing bad from the East.”

³⁰<https://www.hlavnespravy.sk/fifa-moze-vylucit-anglicko-z-ms-2022-v-katare-ak-londyn-bojkotoval-futbalovy-sampionat-v-rusku/1338904> (cited 31.3.2018).

³¹<http://www.infovojna.sk/article/hlasna-truba-vojenskych-zasahov-usa-v-inych-statoch-obvинуje-z-ovplyvnovania-talianskych-volieb-rusko> (cited 31.3.2018).

³²<http://www.infovojna.sk/article/britsky-politolog-omlouvam-se-za-vymysleni-si-gerasimovy-doktriny> (cited 31.3.2018).

³³ <https://www.hlavnespravy.sk/blaha-putin-vraj-vedie-hybridnu-vojnu-lebo-financuje-sputnik-s-troma-redaktormi-ale-soros-je-udajne-uplne-nepodstatny/1335088> (cited 31.3.2018).

Conclusion

The presented paper deals with still more and more discussed phenomenon of prokremlin propaganda in Slovak media sphere. The aim of this propaganda is to doubt democratic and western orientation of Slovak society, what is still prevailing, but there's big amount of potential audience for narratives spread by prokremlin media.

The aim of this paper was to find out what image of Russia Slovak prokremlin media construct by their production. I was researching two Slovak prokremlin media Hlavné správy (Main news) and InfoVojna (InfoWar), which belong to the most influential ones among the Slovak prokremlin media scene. For analysis I used method of thematic analysis, which reveal the basic thematic frames, which create the coherent image of the researched phenomenon. In the paper I described three basic identified thematic categories, which were my analytical frames. The narratives about Russia in Slovak prokremlin media during the researched period from 15th February until 15th march I organised into three bigger thematic categories *Russia as a superpower*, *Russia as a victim* and *Russia as a peacekeeper who stays against western hegemony*. All these categories create the „alternative“ reality where Russia is under constant attack from aggressive West and has to defend itself. On the other hand, Russia is not only victim of these attacks, but also superpower which is strong in many kinds of spheres. This superpower can protect not only itself, but also other regions, which are targets of western imperialism. To these regions (like Syria) Russia brings peace and stability. In the news we can identify clear dichotomy between the West and Russia. Where one entity is described mostly by negative connotations (West) and other by neutral or positive (Russia).

In Slovakia, prokremlin media are relatively new phenomenon. Most of them started their activities during Ukrainian crisis in 2013-2014. During a short term, they gained relative success and have stable audience, which is getting wider. On one hand they are using free space on the market, where exist demand for the informations they produce and on the other hand they use the decreasing faith of people in traditional political and public institutions like political parties and media.

Prokremlin media clearly try to persuade Slovak population that Russia is a relevant alternative to EU and for Slovakia definitely better option, because western structures are full of troubles and Russia is presented as an island of stability. These media don't care about rules of journalists objectivity. Their messages are clearly prokremlin and it depends only on free choice and critical thinking of Slovak society, if

we will choose this kind of sources, or if we will choose other sources of informations. Because the future of the country depends on free elections and every choice in elections depends on informations we have about situation. So it's national interest to come out from objective, balanced and not biased media production.

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