What's on the news? The image of the European Union and Russia on TV stations in Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova[1]

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The EU is actively trying to improve the ways in which it communicates to the citizens of the Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries. At the same time, it confronts the spread of Russian influence in the region through targeted use of TV news, print and social media, paid commentators ('trolls'), and fake news. Russian state-owned media outlets such as Russia Today and Sputnik and the impact of the messages they carry on public opinion have been the subject of growing interest by the scientific and analyst community. Yet the role of national and local news reporting in transmitting a Russian and/or European perspective to their viewers may be just as important, but remains less well understood. The daily news emissions on TV could have considerable impact on activating existing identities, creating linkages, and changing perceptions of Russia and the EU and their roles in the world.

This paper offers a detailed analysis of the coverage of Russia and the EU on one important channel for dissemination of information about Russia and the EU—popular TV stations in Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine. By exploring the messages that regular people in these countries get via the most popular TV channels, we outline the images that Russia and the EU acquire in the three countries.

The paper presents an original analysis of TV news monitored over a period of four months in Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine and coded along several dimensions of interest, including topic, presence and direction of evaluative tone, news sources, etc. On the basis of our analysis we are able to compare different channels' representations of Russia and the EU by distinguishing wherever possible between private and public TV stations, and between stations using the national language and sources and stations using the Russian language and sources.

We find that on the news presented on national (and not Russian) TV, Russia does not have a more positive image than the EU in the countries we monitored. The majority of mentions of EU or Russia in the news we monitored had no evaluative tone nor were they biased in one direction or another. If we compare the tone of messages about Russia with news about the EU, more news about the EU were balanced or positive, while more news about Russia were negative. Predictably, if we include Russian TV channels, this picture changes with news being largely positive about Russia and more likely negative about the EU.

Russia and the EU in the (National) News: A Three-Country Comparison

A growing area of analysis concerns the spread of fake news and propaganda originating from Russia and targeting the EU member states or the EaP countries (Nimmo 2016; Pomerantsev and Weiss 2014; Potapova 2017). Analysing the spread of fake news and the reach of Russian propaganda is beyond the scope of this paper, but the importance of their increase should not be underestimated[2]. Think tanks, journalists and experts are increasingly monitoring propaganda and fake news and capturing the underlying narratives. Monitoring propaganda and fake news has uncovered their staggering scope, leading to calls by concerned experts and members of the European Parliament for an increase of the budget and staff of the EU's EastStrat Com, the European External Service agency dealing with Russian disinformation (Bentzen 2017).

There is a separate and increasing set of Russian informational linkages based on media, including film, TV series and TV news. In Belarus and Moldova there is direct access to Russian media or repackaged reporting on local news drawing on Russian news agencies. In Belarus, for example, 90% of the public is reported to watch Russian TV (Wilson 2015). Local branches of media projects such as *Sputnik* have the budget to attract quality local journalists from state and independent media (Bogomolov and Lytvynenko 2012: 8-10; Kłysiński and Żochowski 2016: 34-37).

The EU features prominently in key narratives, being described as "weak and morally decaying" (Bentzen 2017). Recent research by the Wilfrid Martens Centre for European Studies shows that the Kremlin systematically spreads negative narratives about the EU to shape the opinion of the Russian speakers. The main narratives about the EU summarized in their study depict the EU as an aggressive and expansionist enemy, as a weak union that cannot deal with global challenges, and as a union lacking moral values (Potapova 2017). The content of narratives is as pernicious as the framing of messages, combining, in the words of Pomerantsev and Weiss (2014): "Soviet-era 'whataboutism' and Chekist 'active measures' with a wised-up, post-modern smirk that says everything is a sham".

Russia's investments into media and communications have been shown to cover three main areas: internally and externally focused media with a substantial online presence, use of

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[2] In recognition of the importance of this phenomenon, we provide an overview of some of the monitoring organizations and initiatives dealing with fake news in Appendix 1.

social media, and discussion boards and language skills to engage target audiences (Giles 2015). In both Belarus and Moldova there are local editions of the *Sputnik* news portal, NTV and RTR television channels, the TASS news agency, as well as the newspapers *ArgumentyiFakty* and *Komosomolskaya Pravda*. In **Ukraine** local versions of various Russian news outlets have been banned since 2014.[3] Even the independent online Russian TV station 'Dozhd', which is no cheerleader for Putin's government, was banned in Ukraine in 2017. This does not mean, however, that citizens in Ukraine have no access to Russian TV stations at all.

In **Belarus,** there are also local branches of the Interfax and REGNUM news agencies. In **Moldova**, there are local versions of the Russian TV stations RenTV and STS. In addition, a feature of the information market in Moldova is the repackaging of material from Russia for Moldovan news channels. These include the newspapers United Gagauzia, *EkonomicheskoeObozrenie* and *Trud,* the news agencies Interlink and Infotag, and the web portal Russian TV of Moldova. Across the region there are also news sources which do not just repackage Russian news or have formal connections to Russian partners, but still take a pro-Russian stance. Examples include the online portals in Belarus[4] as well as the newspaper *Vesti* in Ukraine.

Importantly, Russian information sources are very popular in Belarus and Moldova, where 91% and 90% of respondents respectively indicated their use. Russian TV channels are cited as the main source for news and current affairs programmes by 37% of respondents in Belarus and 38% in Moldova (Ecorys Annual Survey Report 2016). A project supported by the EaP civil society forum monitored news on the Russian channels watched in EaP countries in 2015[5]. They found, not surprisingly, that the role of Russian channels as sources of information was more significant in the countries where they were freely available (Belarus, Moldova) than in countries where they were not (Azerbaijan, Georgia and Ukraine). On the general trend and tone of Russian channels, the study noted, as could be expected, the extremely limited range of topics and biased interpretations offered on Russian channels. For example, regarding Ukraine, the study found that "the main Russian channels have been used as instruments of propaganda in the conflict between Ukraine and Russia, diverting attention from important domestic issues and challenges and instead focusing on the conflict in Ukraine" (Monitoring report executive summary, 2015: 3).

Notwithstanding the importance of Russian channels, national TV and media play an important role in opinion formation as they may be seen as more objective. National TV news are an important source of political news for the public in Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine. According to the Ecorys Annual Survey Report (2016), private and public TV stations are the most popular sources of national political news for 50% of respondents in Belarus, for 56%

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[3]*Komsomolskaya Pravda* in Ukraine changed its name to 'KP' in 2016 in response to the decommunization laws. While it typically takes a pro-Russia stance, it no longer has official ties to Russia.
[4] For example, https://imhoclub.byand zapadrus.su.
[5]An executive summary can be found via the memo 98 website:
http://memo98.sk/uploads/content_galleries/source/memo/russia/executive-summary-and-recommendations.pdf

of respondents in Moldova, and for 62% in Ukraine. However, there is no large private TV landscape in Belarus. Moreover, people from the EaP countries that have heard news about the EU, are most likely to have heard it on TV (81% of respondents).

TV-Monitoring: Russia and the EU in the National Evening News

The objectives

For the analyses of Russia and the EU in local media in the three countries, we focused on the Belarusian, Moldovan, and Ukrainian TV stations with wide viewership. The media can be seen as proxies for political elites, who, as argued above, can act as gatekeepers filtering messages by different external actors. Therefore, we find domestic TV news to be a suitable departure point for our empirical investigation of the penetration of Russian messages and narratives in the societies in the EaP countries.

The major goal of the media monitoring and is to provide a comprehensive picture of the news about Russia and the EAEU and of the view of the EU and its member statesthat regular people in Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine are exposed to. We aim to identify the extent, tone, and type of coverage of Russia in the main evening news bulletins in the most watched TV stations. As argued above, democratization can be hampered not only by spreading pro-Russian messages, but also by undermining the democratizing actor in the region—the EU. For this reason, we look at the proportion of news devoted to Russia and to the EU, as well as the type and the tone of these messages. Furthermore, the potential tone or bias in news items about Russia or other external actors such as the EU may also resonate with existing discourses or, adversely, suggest a different world view. Exploring how Russia and the EU are presented in terms of tone in national news would further enhance our understanding of the informational environment in which citizens in the Eastern neighbourhood countries make their choices and judgments. Therefore, the specific objectives of our analysis include: (1) to measure the relative volume of news about the EU, its member states, and Russia in one prominent media channel; (2) to assess the tone of coverage with respect to these actors; (3) to describe the type of contexts and substantive themes in which news about these actors appear, and (4) to reveal the forms and sources of coverage about these actors.

Method

In each country, we covered the main evening news programme of the most popular TV stations (two TV stations in Ukraine and Belarus, and three in Moldova).[6] The choice of channels to be monitored was driven by evidence about the most popular TV channels, where available, and by some country specific considerations. Based on the results of the 2016 Ecorys Survey Report, we know that private channels are considered an important and objective news source in Ukraine.In both Moldova and Ukraine, private channels are

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[6]When possible, the versions of the news programmes that were actually aired were used for coding (rather than recordings made available after the actual emissions).

considered as more trustworthy sources of information on political matters, in contrast to Belarus where people rely on public channels.

The two largest TV channels in **Belarus** are the state-run Belarus 1 and ONT. The levels of viewership of these programmes are not openly available, but since most Belarusians watch public TV as a source of political news, we assume that these programmes are the most watched news programmes. According to a recent report by Litvinovich et al. (2014: 15-16), for an average Belarusian, TV is the second most important source of information after friends, family, and colleagues. Although in the last years the Internet becomes more popular amongst the younger age group as a source of information about life in Belarus and abroad, almost 70% of the youth (younger than 30) use TV for this purpose as well. Therefore we have monitored the evening news programme of the state-run TV station Belarus 1 called Panorama and two news programmes of the state-owned TV station *Obshchenatsional'noeTelevidenie* (ONT). *Vremya* is directly pulled from Russia's First TV channel and shown right before the locally-produced *NashiNovosti* on ONT. All Belarusian news programmes are in Russian with just some rare pieces (mostly about culture, history) in Belarusian.

In **Ukraine**, we monitored the main evening bulletin *Novini* on the state-run First National TV station and the main evening bulletin TSN on the privately-owned 1+1 TV station.

In **Moldova,** we covered one news bulletin PrimeleStiri on the Russian-language TV station Prime TV (the most watched TV station in Moldova with 56% viewership), one evening news bulletin *Stiri* and/or *Mesager* on the Romanian-language public station Moldova 1 (the second most popular TV station with 45% viewership) and one evening news bulletin *Stirile* Pro TV on the Romanian-language private TV station Pro TV Chisinau (33% viewership).

The period of news monitoring ran for four months from 16 January 2017 to 15 May 2017. Coders based in each country (two in Belarus, one in Moldova, and one in Ukraine) watched and coded the evening news programs six days a week and skipped a different day every week, where possible. This sampling strategy was designed to address the possible bias that important focusing events can have on assessing typical coverage.

We have monitored and coded 607 news emissions(194 in Belarus, 238 in Moldova, and 175 in Ukraine). The total duration of the monitored emissions is 377 hours (130 in Belarus, 115 in Moldova, and 132 in Ukraine). Table 1 shows the distribution of number and duration of news emissions watched per country and news channel. We have coded all news items in which Russia, the EAEU, the EU, or the member states of the EU were mentioned. The duration of the total of monitored programs varied between 0.5 h and 4.2 h (Belarus on 23 April 2017; see Table 2).

Table 1.Number and duration of monitored news broadcasts across countries, channels, and programmes.

Country	Channel	Owner	Programme	Language	Number	Duration
Belarus	Belarus1	State/Public	Panorama	Russian	79	59 hours
			GlavnyEfir	Russian	9	12 hours
	ONT	State/Public	NashiNovostii	Russian	53	27 hours
			Vremya	Russian	42	20 hours
			Kontury	Russian	11	12 hours
Moldova	Prime TV	Private	PrimeleStiri	Russian	61	19 hours
	Moldova 1	State/Public	Stiri	Romanian	76	22 hours
	Pro TV	Private	Stirile Pro TV	Romanian	101	74 hours
Ukraine	First National	State/Public	Novini	Ukrainian	82	41 hours
	1+1 TV	Private	TSN	Ukrainian	93	91 hours
3 countries	7 channels	2 types	12 programmes	3 languages	607 em-s	377 hours

Source: Authors
Note: In Belarus apart from regular evening programmes, there are several news programmes with different names. GlavnyEfir is the news programme broadcasted on Sundays on Belarus 1. Kontury is a weekly overview of news on ONT on Sundays. In Moldova, Stiri and Mesager are the regular evening news programmes on Moldova 1.

Extent of coverage

The number of the relevant international news items varies per TV station in each country as can be seen from Table 2. In Belarus, the main state channel Belarus 1 has broadcasted 364 news items that were about Russia or the EAEU and the EU and/or its member states (in total 12.8 h of material). By comparison, ONT, the other state-owned TV, broadcasted 120 news items (4.3 h). The other 138 news items were broadcasted in the programmes originating from Russia (8.1 h).

Table 2. Distribution of news items per country and station

Country	Channel	Program	Number	Duration
Belarus	Belarus1	Panorama	347	11.0 hours
		GlavnyEfir	17	1.8hours
	ONT	NashiNovostii	120	4.3hours
		Vremya	109	6.2 hours
		Kontury	29	2.0hours
Moldova	Prime TV	PrimeleStiri	127	3.1hours
	Moldova 1	Stiri	169	4.7 hours
	Pro TV	Stirile Pro TV	471	13.6hours
Ukraine	First National	News	172	4.0hours
	1+1 TV	TSN	244	10.8hours
3 countries	**7 channels**	**12 programs**	**1805 items**	**61.5hours**

Privately-owned TV channels have shown more international news, mentioning both Russia and the EU in Ukraine and Moldova. In Moldova, the private (Romanian language) channel Pro-TV broadcasted much more international news mentioning the relevant actors (471 items, 13.6 h) than the public channel TV Moldova 1 (169 items, 4.8 h), and also in comparison to the Russian language Prime TV (127 items, 3.1 h). Similarly, in Ukraine the private TV 1+1 broadcasted more than twice as many international news items (244 items, 10.8 h) as the public TV First National (172 items, 4 h).

The share of news mentioning Russia as a main actor is similar in all three countries (based on our sampling of stations and programmes): in Belarus 36%, Moldova 30%, and Ukraine 37% of all news feature Russia (see Table 3). It is larger than the share of news devoted to the EU as a main actor, but less than the combined news featuring any of the EU member states.[7] It is noteworthy that in more than 10% of the news items featuring Russia, it is presented alongside either the EU or one of the member states. But also, when the EU is discussed as a main actor, more than 15% of the time Russia is mentioned too. When taking into account any mention of Russia in a news item (as a main or secondary actor), it features in 41% (Belarus), 35% (Moldova), and 53% (Ukraine) of coded news items. Russia's integration project, the EAEU, receives minimal coverage: small in Belarus (6%), marginal in Moldova (1%), and non-existent in Ukraine (0%).

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[7] We count mentions of EU member states even when they are mentioned on their own and not in their capacity as members of the EU or in connection to European integration.

Table 3. Frequency of main actors identified in news items per country

Actor	Belarus	Moldova	Ukraine	Total
European Union	25 (4%)	120 (16%)	45 (11%)	**194 (11%)**
Member states with rel. to EU	74 (12%)	27 (4%)	18 (4%)	**115 (6%)**
EU Member states	283 (45%)	382 (50%)	198 (48%)	**863 (48%)**
Russia	221 (36%)	228 (30%)	155 (37%)	**604 (33%)**
Eurasian Economic Union	19 (3%)	10 (1%)	0 (0%)	**29 (2%)**
Total news items	**622 (100%)**	**767 (100%)**	**416 (100%)**	**1805 (100%)**

The importance of the relations with a given actor can also be indicated in the news programme by introducing a news story about said actor in the lead at the beginning of the programme (Table 4). Russia was in the leading news item of a given programme 84 times in Belarus, 28 in Moldova, and 43 in Ukraine (38% of Russian mentions in Belarus are the leading news item, compared to only 12% in Moldova). The EU on its own has been mentioned in the lead less often than Russia, but the EU member states and the EU counted together have been mentioned in the lead more often than Russia in Ukraine and Moldova. This overview of TV coverage shows that although Russia is mentioned more frequently on the monitored stations than the EU, in total there is more attention given to the events in European countries than international events featuring Russia. It also shows that the TV stations focus prevailingly on bilateral relations of Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine.

Table 4. Leading news items (absolute number and percentage of all news about the actor)

News placement	Belarus	Moldova	Ukraine	Total
European Union	5 (20%)	11 (9%)	13 (29%)	**29 (15%)**
Member states with rel. to EU	17 (23%)	5 (19%)	4 (22%)	**26 (23%)**
EU Member states	61 (22%)	27 (7%)	43 (22%)	**131 (15%)**
Russia	84 (38%)	28 (12%)	43 (28%)	**155 (26%)**
Eurasian Economic Union	9 (47%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	**9 (31%)**
Leads with any actor	**176 (28%)**	**71 (9%)**	**103 (25%)**	**350 (19%)**

Evaluations

To gain an idea of how the selected news channels present Russia and the EU, we evaluated not only how much airtime the external actors get, but also in what light they are presented. To analyse this, coders evaluated the tone of the news items, choosing between neutral or an

explicit or implicit evaluation tone (Table 5). The tone could be negative, positive, or balanced. The tone was coded as negative if the news item either explicitly or implicitly created a negative image of the actor. The tone was coded as positive if the news item created a positive image of an actor. We counted the tone as balanced when both positive and negative sides of the actors or events were discussed.

Table 5. News items per tone.

Actor	Belarus	Moldova	Ukraine	Total
No (neutral)	412 (66%)	301 (39%)	276 (66%)	**989 (55%)**
Yes (explicit)	46 (7%)	76 (10%)	89 (21%)	**211 (12%)**
Yes (implicit)	164 (26%)	390 (51%)	51 (12%)	**605 (34%)**
Total news items	**622 (100%)**	**767 (100%)**	**416 (100%)**	**1805 (100%)**

In Belarus and Ukraine, very few items had a tone: only around 30% of the news items had either implicit or explicit tone (Table 5). In Moldova, the number of news items with a tone is the highest: around 60% of news items contained an explicit or implicit evaluation.

Taking messages from all countries together, when a news item about the EU had a tone, it was most often positive (66% of all messages that had a tone). Correspondingly, 24% of messages were balanced and 10% were negative (Table 6). By comparison, when a news item about Russia had a tone, it was most often negative: 45% of all messages had a negative evaluative tone, while 24% of messages were balanced, and 31% were positive (Table 6).

The distribution of tone, however, varied per country. Figure 1 illustrates this variance with all the items that covered EU and member states ("EU") and all the items about Russia and the EEA ("Russia") added up. In Belarus, the largest number of items that had a tone—87 (76%)—presented Russia in a positive light, ten news items were balanced (9%), and eighteen negative (1%). By contrast, in Moldova negative messages about Russia dominated with 74 items (45% of items), 44 were balanced (27% of items), and 46 were positive (28% of items). Not surprisingly, reflecting the current tensions with Russia, in Ukraine almost all news items about Russia were negative—83 (94% of items), only five were balanced (6% of items), and there were items with positive evaluation.

The evaluations distributions for the EU and its member states look differently (Figure 1). In Belarus and Moldova items with positive evaluation prevail (49% and 58% respectively). In Ukraine, balanced news items dominate (46%) and the second largest category of items has positive evaluations (32%). The percentage of items evaluating the EU and its members negatively is the highest in Belarus (33%). See also Table A, B, and C for the detailed frequencies.

Table 6. Tone towards main actor (total across three countries)

Actor	MS&EU	MS	Russia	EAEU	EU	Total
Balanced	14(33%)	59(21%)	92(24%)	7(30%)	15(24%)	**187**
Negative	11(26%)	83(30%)	172(45%)	3(13%)	6(10%)	**275**
Positive	18(42%)	133(48%)	120(31%)	13(57%)	41(66%)	**325**
Total items	**43(5%)**	**275(35%)**	**384(49%)**	**23(3%)**	**62(8%)**	**787(100%)**

Table 7. Tone towards main actor, per country

A. Belarus

Actor	MS&EU	MS	Russia	EAEU	EU	Total
Balanced	5 (28%)	8(14%)	7 (39%)	3 (20%)	2 (25%)	**25 (12%)**
Negative	6 (33%)	19 (32%)	17 (12%)	1 (7%)	3 (38%)	**47 (23%)**
Positive	7 (39%)	32 (54%)	76 (48%)	11 (73%)	3 (38%)	**133 (65%)**
Total items	**18 (9%)**	**59 (29%)**	**105 (51%)**	**15 (7%)**	**8 (4%)**	**205 (100%)**

B. Moldova

Actor	MS&EU	MS	Russia	EAEU	EU	Total
Balanced	7 (32%)	41 (21%)	40 (26%)	4 (50%)	12 (14%)	**104 (40%)**
Negative	5 (23%)	58 (30%)	72 (46%)	2 (25%)	3 (4%)	**140 (10%)**
Positive	10 (45%)	93 (48%)	44 (28%)	2 (25%)	68 (82%)	**217 (51%)**
Total items	**22 (5%)**	**192 (42%)**	**156 (34%)**	**8 (2%)**	**83 (18%)**	**461 (100%)**

C. Ukraine

Actor	MS&EU	MS	Russia	EAEU	EU	Total
Balanced	2 (67%)	10 (42%)	5 (6%)	0 (0%)	1 (100%)	**18 (16%)**
Negative	0 (0%)	6 (25%)	83 (94%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	**89 (77%)**
Positive	1 (33%)	8 (33%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	**9 (8%)**
Total items	**3 (3%)**	**24 (21%)**	**88 (76%)**	**0 (0%)**	**1 (1%)**	**116 (100%)**

Figure 1.Evaluations of the EU and Russia in news items in Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine (percentage of all the items that contained an evaluation).
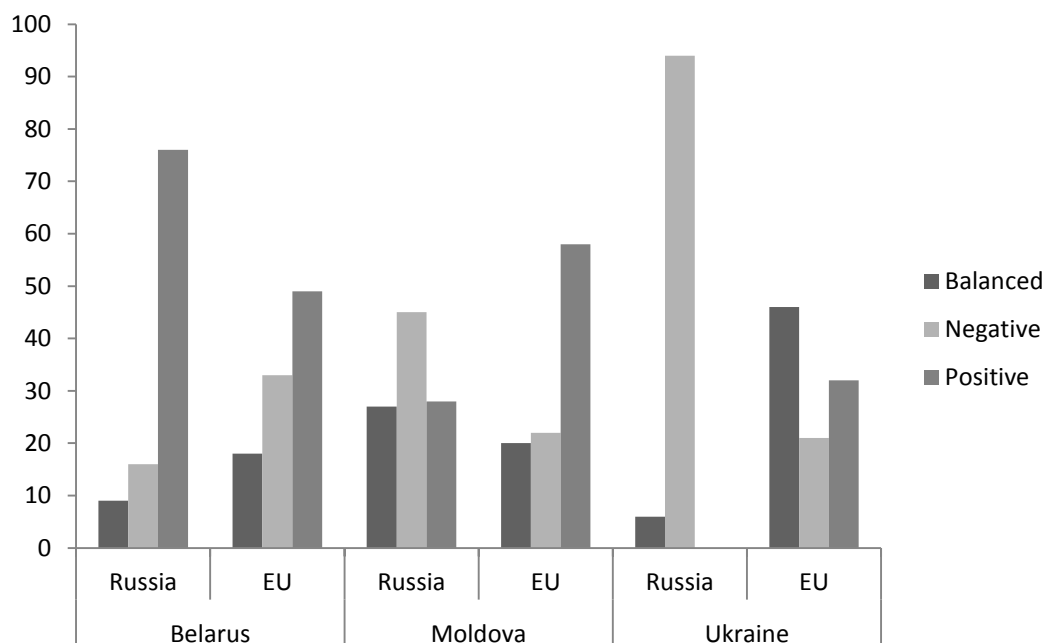
There are cross-country and within-country differences in how the TV channels present Russia and the EU. In **Belarus**, both TV channels and their programmes are mostly positive about Russia. Noticeably, the exception was the weekly programme *Kontury* on ONT, which put a more negative emphasis on Russian sanctions against Belarusian products and towards some Russian officials. At the same time, the programmes (re)broadcasted from Russian TV are less likely to be positive about the EU than the Belarusian programmes. In **Moldova**, Russia-related news on the state channel is mostly balanced, while on the private channels negatively-toned news about Russia outnumbers positive ones. EU-related news is prevailingly positive on private Prime TV and state Moldova 1, and mostly balanced or positive on PRO TV. In **Ukraine**, both stations are completely negative about Russia and most of the news items about the EU have no tone.

Topics, themes and sources of news

The TV monitoring yielded interesting results in terms of information about the topics and themes covered in the news items about Russia and the EU and its member states. In Belarus, most news about Russia is related to external events or developments, followed by bilateral relations and programmes, and then meetings, conferences, and events. In Moldova, there is a more even spread, with a relatively large amount devoted to human interest stories. In Ukraine, Russian-related news is dominated by external events or developments and bilateral relations and programmes (see Tables 8A, B, and C).

Table 8. Themes per actor in Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine.

A. Belarus

Actor	MS&EU	MS	Russia	EAEU	EU	Total
External events or developments	54	208	108	2	15	**387**
Human interest stories	0	12	7	0	0	**19**
Meetings, conferences, events	6	6	30	11	2	**55**
Bilateral relations and programs	8	24	46	6	6	**90**
Other	4	24	15	0	1	**44**
Visit from a state official	2	9	15	0	1	**27**
Total news items	**70**	**283**	**221**	**19**	**29**	**622**
	(11%)	**(45%)**	**(36%)**	**(3%)**	**(5%)**	**(100%)**

B. Moldova

Actor	MS&EU	MS	Russia	EAEU	EU	Total
External events or developments	7	139	77	1	11	**235**
Human interest stories	1	120	42	0	4	**167**
Meetings, conferences, events	7	19	11	2	18	**57**
Bilateral relations and programs	7	45	30	4	65	**151**
Other	5	55	49	3	14	**126**
Visit from a state official	0	4	19	0	8	**31**
Total news items	**27**	**382**	**228**	**10**	**120**	**767**
	(4%)	**(50%)**	**(30%)**	**(1%)**	**(16%)**	**(100%)**

C. Ukraine

Actor	MS&EU	MS	Russia	EAEU	EU	Total
External events or developments	5	117	68	0	11	**201**
Human interest stories	0	39	8	0	0	**47**
Meetings, conferences, events	8	12	4	0	6	**30**
Bilateral relations and programs	5	20	65	0	22	**112**
Other	0	2	7	0	2	**11**
Visit from a state official	0	8	3	0	4	**15**
Total news items	**18**	**198**	**155**	**0**	**45**	**416**
	(4%)	**(48%)**	**(37%)**	**(0%)**	**(11%)**	**(100%)**

Figure 2. Percentage of items about the EU and Russia per theme per country
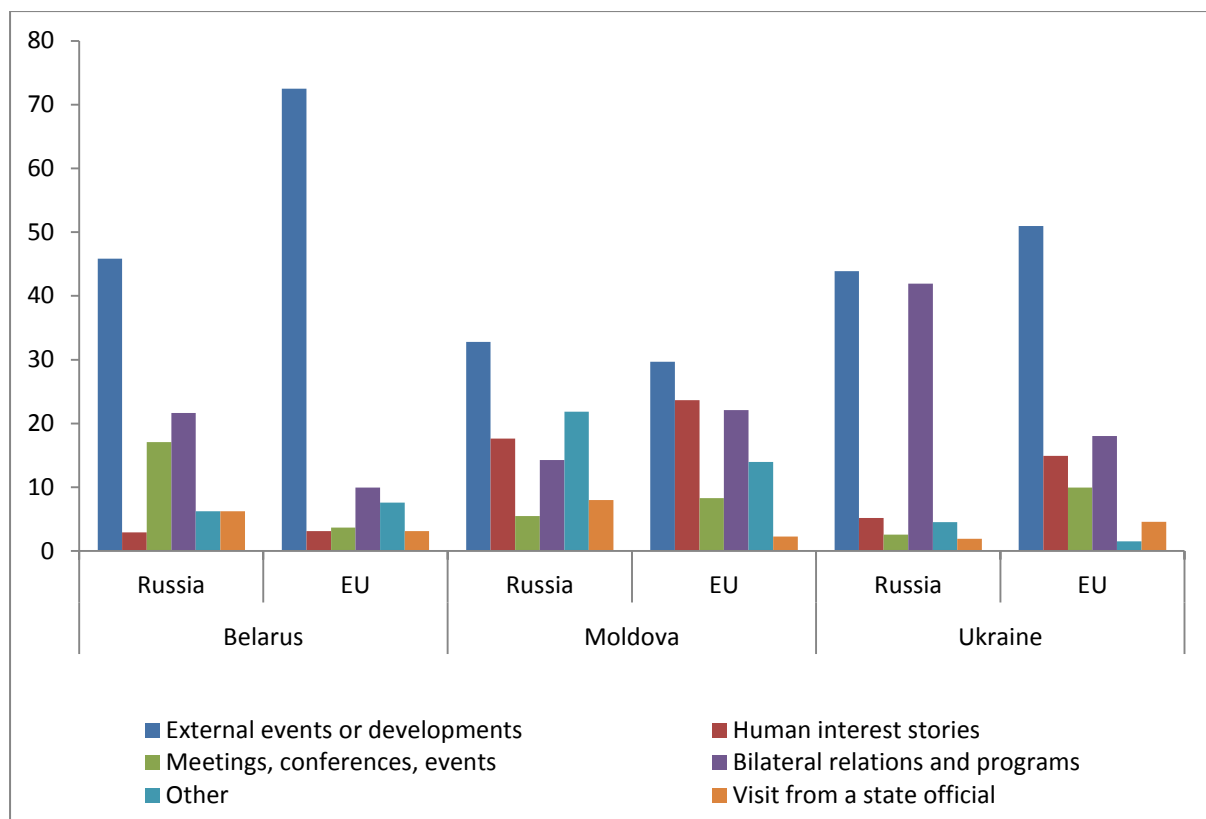
The distribution of topics for the news items about the EU and its member states in Belarus and Ukraine is similar as that of the news items about Russia: external events or developments and bilateral relations and programmes dominate. In Moldova, external events or developments dominate the news items too, but there is much larger proportion of human interest stories both in relations to the EU and to Russia (Figure 2).

After identifying the general topic of each news item, the coders could assign more than one specific theme to a news item (see Table 9A, 9B, and 9C). Overall, the top two themes in each country included international relations—information about international meetings, councils of the EU, and international agreements, and security—including information about wars and terrorism. The third most frequent theme in Moldova and Ukraine was the category that included themes not listed below (*other*). Belarus was the only country in which the economy was the third most frequent theme of the news items.

The distribution of themes per actor (EU, EAEU, Russia, or EU member states) and country shows interesting patterns as well.

Table 9A. Topics of news items in Belarus per actor.[8]

Actor	MS&EU	MS	Russia	EAEU	EU	Total
Culture	1	28	24	2	0	55
Economy	20	41	68	18	7	154
Energy	2	4	30	3	0	39
Environment	0	3	3	0	0	6
History	3	23	19	0	0	45
Immigration	13	30	10	0	8	61
International	29	55	98	13	13	208
Other	8	45	45	1	2	101
Political	30	78	6	1	7	122
Reforms	1	1	0	0	1	3
Rule of law	0	15	12	1	1	29
Security	21	102	100	7	11	241
Values	5	41	25	1	4	76
Total news items	70 (11%)	283 (45%)	221 (36%)	19 (3%)	29 (5%)	622 (100%)

Source: Authors

In **Belarus** (Table 9A), individual EU member states were most often mentioned in news items about *security*. Items on security included very diverse subjects, from information about Germany's defence spending, through to the arrival of new NATO corps from Belgium in Lithuania, to a terrorist attack in Sweden. EU member states were mentioned in security-themed news items 102 times, slightly more often than Russia—100 times. In the Russian case, security items gave information, for example, about joint military training by Russian and Tajik military forces, an attack on police in Astrakhan, the situation in Syria and humanitarian actions by the Russian army, and the investigation of the terrorist attack in St. Petersburg.

In the Belarusian news, Russia and the EAEU were mentioned more often in the context of *economy* (86) than the EU, the EU member states individually, and the EU member states as

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[8]In Tables 9A, 9B, And 9C, 'MS&EU' stands for member states mentioned in the context of the EU, 'MS' stands for member states, and 'EAEU' for Eurasian Economic Union.

a part of the EU taken together (68). The EU was most often mentioned in the context of *international relations* (events, meetings, and agreements), *security*, and *immigration*. There was a substantial share of news items in which either a EU member state individually or as a part of the EU was discussed in relation to *political and institutional* themes, examples of which are the elections in the Netherlands and France, the legalization of euthanasia in Germany, or plans for the new design for British passports after Brexit.

Table 9B. Topics of news items in Moldova per actor.

Actor	MS&EU	MS	Russia	EAEU	EU	Total
Culture	3	73	26	0	6	108
Economy	4	45	21	1	24	95
Energy	3	7	4	1	6	21
Environment	1	3	2	0	1	7
History	2	9	31	0	4	46
Immigration	1	19	15	0	4	39
International	8	32	48	10	32	130
Other	5	169	67	0	14	255
Political	7	27	11	1	20	66
Reforms	6	21	1	0	68	96
Rule of law	1	46	24	0	11	82
Security	3	76	73	1	13	166
Values	4	56	41	0	21	122
Total news items	27 (4%)	382 (50%)	228 (30%)	10 (1%)	120 (16%)	767 (100%)

Source: Authors

In **Moldova** (Table 9B), the patterns are different. The EU is reported most frequently in the context of *reforms* linked to the Association Agreements. Examples of such news items include reports on progress in the implementation of the Association Agreements, the provision of 15 million euros by the EU for the reform of public administration in Moldova, and the harmonization of Moldovan legislation with European standards in foods commerce. The second group of news items in which the EU features as the main actor is related to *international relations*. Importantly, the EU is also present in the news on *economic* themes in Moldova. The EU is mentioned more often (24 cases) than Russia (21 cases) in economic

news items. Furthermore, when including the EU, the EU member states individually, and the EU member states as a part of the EU, there are 73 news items in relation to economic issues: substantially more in comparison to the 22 news items about the economy involving Russia or the EAEU. The economic context in which the EU was presented in the news programmes is, for example, support for small enterprises that were opened and developed thanks to European grants, the EU as the buyer of 77% of Moldovan wine exports, and Germany's interest in investments in Moldova. Interestingly, the third most frequent context in which individual member states feature is *culture*: arts, popular culture, and specific regional/national customs (73). Several examples of items about culture that include EU member states are: the celebration of St. Anton in Spain, a Bulgarian masks festival, the Belgian Chocolate Saloon, a dance contest in Romania, and the 2017 London Design Fair.

Table 9C. Topics of news items in Ukraine per actor.

Actor	MS&EU	MS	Russia	EAEU	EU	Total
Culture	0	28	4	0	0	32
Economy	2	8	8	0	3	21
Energy	0	1	0	0	0	1
Environment	0	5	0	0	0	5
History	2	11	3	0	3	19
Immigration	0	1	3	0	0	4
International	10	48	40	0	35	133
Other	2	37	39	0	3	81
Political	8	40	10	0	9	67
Reforms	1	0	0	0	0	1
Rule of law	1	17	23	0	3	44
Security	7	66	72	0	7	152
Values	0	3	27	0	0	30
Total news items	18 (4%)	198 (48%)	155 (37%)	0 (0%)	4(11%)	416 (100%)

Source: Authors

By comparison, Russia is mostly mentioned in the *security*-themed news items in the Moldovan news (73). This was in relation to the conflict in Ukraine and the Minsk agreements, the conflict in Transnistria, and the terrorist attack in St. Petersburg. The other

categories of items within which Russia was frequently reported as an actor are *other* (67) and *international relations* (48).

In **Ukraine** (Table 9C), both Russia and the individual member states of the EU were mentioned most often in the news items about *security* (72 and 66 items respectively). The EU and its member states mentioned in the context of the EU were most often presented as an actor in news items about *international relations* (events, meetings, agreements), with 45 news items. In the category of news items about international relations, there were many mentions of the EU in the context of agreements on visa-free movement with Ukraine and Georgia (25 items), showing that this issue was presented as one of great importance. Other issues among the news items on international relations were discussions of the sanctions against Russia and support for Ukraine in the conflict on its territory, and European Parliament elections. Also individual member states were mentioned many times in the context of international relations events (48 news items). By comparison, Russia was mentioned 40 times in the context of *international relations* and many items were in regards to its relations with the U.S. and talks between Russian (Putin and Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov) and American officials (President Donald Trump and Secretary of State Rex Tillerson). Surprisingly, economic news items were not a common theme of the news in the monitored period in Ukraine. The EU was mentioned explicitly in the context of *economy* only three times (all about Ukraine receiving 600 million euros of aid from the EU) and the sum of the economic news items related to the EU and its member states individually or as a part of the Union is only 13. Russia was also not frequently mentioned in economy-themed news (eight times). It could be that economic matters were discussed during the international meetings and events, which is the most popular theme in which the EU and its member states were mentioned, but economy has not come to the fore as the topic presented in the news programmes.
item.

Overall, the top three themes in each country included *international relations*—informing about international meetings, councils of the EU, and international agreements, and *security*—including information about wars and terrorism. The third most frequent theme in Belarus was *economy*, and in Moldova and Ukraine the category that included themes not listed below (*Other*)

Values in the news items

The analysis also shows a noteworthy pattern in the distribution of news items about *values*. The values category included items about human rights, family values and identity (ethnicity, religion, language). The EU and its member states (individually and as a part of the EU) were mentioned in the context of values more often than Russia and the EAEU in Belarus (50:26) and Moldova (81:41).

In **Belarus**, items pertaining to values in relation to the EU and its member states discussed immigration and refugees, controversies about wearing niqabs and burkas, and incidents and terrorist attacks in Sweden, France, Germany, and the UK. Russia was mentioned as an actor in the context of values in a diverse set of items, covering mourning after the terrorist attacks in St. Petersburg, the celebration of the Belarus-Russia Union State, and the celebration of the 1st of May and commemoration of Victory Day on the 9th of May.

Out of the three countries, in **Moldova** the EU was mentioned most often in the context of values (21). Examples include financial aid to Moldova aimed to improve the rights of citizens and their access to housing, education and health-care, as well as conditions in Moldovan prisons. The EU was an actor in a couple of news items about ethnic relations in Moldova and enhancing cooperation in education in Transnistria. Protests in France, Spain, and Romania were among the items that drew attention to the values and human rights in the individual member states. Russia was mentioned in the context of values in, for example, news items about the Orthodox holidays and Patriarch Kirill, celebration of Victory Day, a diplomatic scandal pertaining to Russian money laundering in Moldova, the exclusion of the Russian participant from the Eurovision Song Contest, and the fight against a Russian game encouraging teenagers to commit suicide.

By contrast, in **Ukraine**, Russia was mentioned much more frequently when discussing values than the EU and its members (27:3). The news items featuring Russia often covered the imprisonment of Ukrainians in Russia and violation of human rights in Crimea.

Which topics are covered most positively by whom?
The analysis of the interaction between the tone and the theme of the news items (see Tables 10A and 10B, and Figure 3) shows that overall, **Russia** has the best balance when *meetings, conferences, events* are discussed and the worst when it comes to *bilateral events* and *external events* (a result driven largely but not entirely by the Ukrainian sample). Russia is an actor in human interest stories much more often than the EU (65 items compared to 6 items respectively). However, the majority of the human interests news items about Russia that have a tone are negative (50% negative items, 37% positive items, 13% balanced). Unsurprisingly, the tone towards Russia is most likely to be positive when Russian news sources are used. It is altogether balanced when a programme uses its own reporting, and mostly negative when the source is mixed or unclear. When it comes to specific topics, the most negative ones are *rule of law*, *security*, *values*, *other*, and *political*. There is positive balance on *culture*, *economy*, *energy*, *environment*, *history*, and *immigration*.

Table 10A. Tone (presence and type) per topic per actor: Russia and EAEU

Actor	No tone	Tone	Balanced	Negative	Positive
External events or developments	160	155	24	81	50
Human interest stories	35	30	4	15	11
Meetings, conferences, events	35	59	12	22	25

| Actor	No tone	Tone	Balanced	Negative	Positive
Bilateral relations and programmes	49	122	16	73	33
Other	35	50	11	25	14
Visit from a state official	23	27	3	7	17
Total	337	443	70	223	150

Source: Authors

Table 10B. Tone (presence and type) per topic per actor: EU and the member states mentioned in the context of the EU

Actor	No tone	Tone	Balanced	Negative	Positive
External events or developments	90	30	9	12	9
Human interest stories	3	3	0	0	3
Meetings, conferences, events	28	30	9	3	18
Bilateral relations and programmes	51	74	14	2	58
Other	13	23	10	2	11
Visit from a state official	11	10	3	1	6
Total	196	170	45	20	105

Source: Authors

In terms of the interaction between the tone and the theme of the news items about **the EU** and its member states, the balance is prevailingly in favour of positive messages, especially when the theme of the item is bilateral relations. The only theme that has more negative messages than positive ones is external events and developments (40% negative to 30% positive). When European or U.S. sources are used to report about the EU, they are mostly balanced (54% of messages with tone) and the distribution between positive and negative messages is equal (23% positive and 23% negative messages). When a programme's own reporting is used, the items with evaluative tone are prevailingly positive (77% of items), whereas when Russian sources are used, the EU is presented mostly in a negative light (50%) or in a balanced way (38%).

Figure 3. Number of items with evaluation per topic about the EU and Russia.
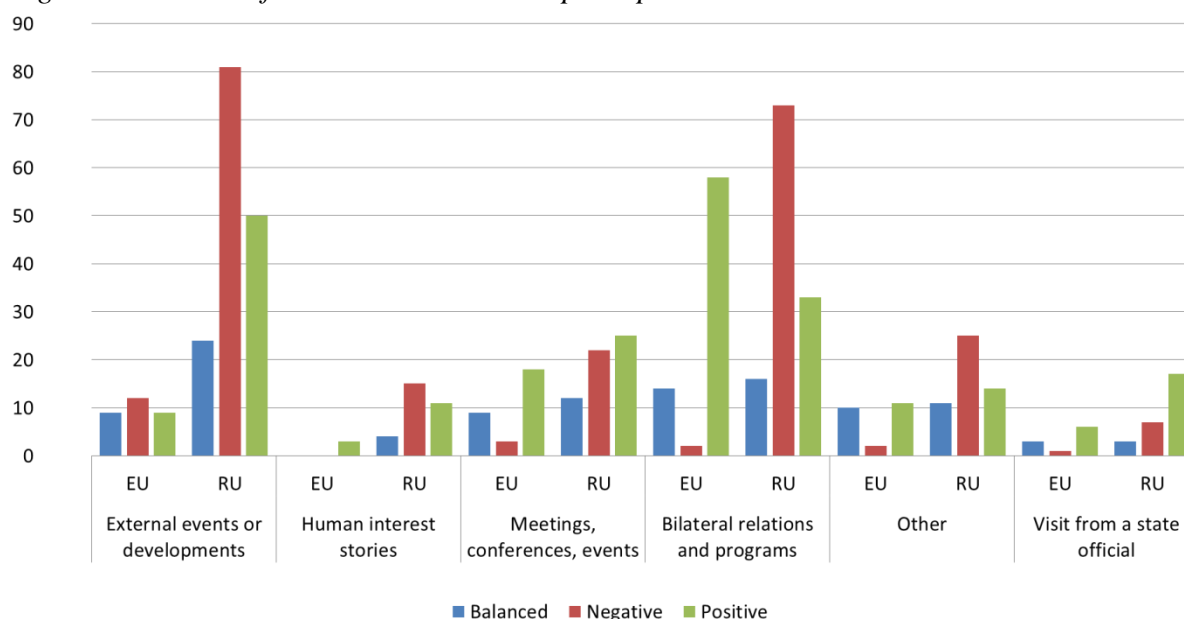
Source: Authors

Sources of news

Tables 11A, 11B, and 11C show whre the information for news items was obtained from. Our coders evaluated whether the news item was based on information ontained by the braodcasting station and its own investigation or whether the information came from elsewhere: was copied from a Russian source, from a European or US source, or whether the sources were mixed. In cases where it was difficult for our coders to determine where the information came from, they used the code 'unclear'.

Table 11. Distribution per source

A. Belarus

Actor	MS&EU	MS	Russia	EAEU	EU	Total
Unclear	15	85	14	0	3	117
Mixed	5	7	3	0	1	16
European/US	30	57	0	0	8	95
Russian	2	19	90	1	1	113
Own	22	115	114	18	12	281
Total items	**70 (11%)**	**283 (45%)**	**221 (36%)**	**19 (3%)**	**29 (5%)**	**622 (100%)**

B. Moldova

Actor	MS&EU	MS	Russia	EAEU	EU	Total
Unclear	4	103	31	1	3	142
Mixed	4	41	55	4	11	115
European/US	3	116	7	0	3	129
International	1	3	0	0	1	5

Russian	0	2	72	0	1	75
Own	15	117	63	5	101	301
Total items	**27 (4%)**	**382 (50%)**	**228 (30%)**	**10 (1%)**	**120 (16%)**	**767 (100%)**

C. Ukraine

Actor	MS&EU	MS	Russia	EAEU	EU	Total
Unclear	12	117	57	0	35	221
Mixed	2	25	36	0	4	67
European/US	1	30	5	0	3	39
Russian	0	0	27	0	0	27
Own	3	26	30	0	3	62
Total items	**18 (4%)**	**198 (48%)**	**155 (37%)**	**0 (0%)**	**45 (11%)**	**416 (100%)**

Conclusions

The results of our TV monitoring show that if we go by the news presented on national rather than Russian TV, Russia does not have a more positive image than the EU in the countries we monitored. This provides a welcome contrast to the bias on Russian news reported by other studies and to the analyses of fake news referred to in Appendix 1.

Previous media monitoring studies (Monitoring report executive summary 2015) have suggested that national broadcasters in Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova strive to provide an alternative to Russian propaganda, by ensuring balanced coverage. Our finding of a large portion of news items having no tone or positive or balanced tone confirms that. The majority of mentions of the EU or Russia in the news we monitored had no tone—that is, they were not biased in one direction or another. If we compare the tone of messages about Russia with news about the EU, more of the news about the EU was balanced or positive, while more of the news about Russia was negative. Predictably, if we include Russian TV channels, this picture changes with news being largely positive about Russia and more likely negative about the EU. At the same time, we also note that Belarusian channels cover Russia more positively on the whole which may reflect the media freedom limitations they experience, bringing them closer to transmission belts for official government views.

Moreover, TV monitoring provided interesting insights into which topics dominate the news on the EU and Russia in each of the EaP countries. For example, in Belarus, Russia receives significantly more coverage on economic issues than the EU. The EU and its members feature mostly as actors in international events and political and institutional developments (such as votes in the EU bodies). Furthermore, when the EU is mentioned in the context of values, its image on Belarusian TV is not that of a human rights promoter, but of an actor that struggles with the challenges of multiculturalism and terrorism. This is different than in Moldova, where the EU and its member states are mentioned more often in an economic context than Russia is. The greatest emphasis on the Moldovan news is put on the EU as an actor involved in the country's reforms. This suggests that the image of the EU as a transformative power in Moldova is not only present in the EU's communications to

Moldova (Dimitrova et al. 2016), but also reflected in the domestic news in this country. Russia, in comparison, is most often covered in Moldovan news in relation to security issues regarding the conflicts in Ukraine and Transnistria. Interestingly, Russia received substantial coverage in news items discussing history and commemorations, while individual member states of the EU received attention in news items discussing cultural events and values. In this set of themes, the Moldovan channels seem to strive to achieve a balance between promoting European culture and respecting the common historical heritage of the Soviet Union. In Ukraine, the EU does not emerge as a transformative power in the news programmes, as it is not mentioned either in the context of the economy or in the context of reforms. Instead, it is primarily portrayed as a rather abstract player in the international arena participating in events, meetings, and agreements. In contrast, Russia is presented as a destructive actor in the context of security and human rights values.

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Appendix 1: Studies and Organizations Monitoring Fake News

Source	About	Link	Affiliation, members
Disinformation Review	*Russia Today* spreads systematically fake news calling it alternative news.	https://euvsdisinfo.eu/inside-rts-world-of-alternative-news/	EU's EastStrat Com, EEAS
Disinformation Review	Pro-Kremlin disinformation in Denmark.	https://euvsdisinfo.eu/pro-kremlin-disinformation-in-denmark/	
CODA Disinformation Crisis via Disinformation Review,	The escalation of digital age propaganda into an all-out war on truth.	https://codastory.com/disinformation-crisis?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=kremlin_watch_monitor_how_kremlin_controls_major_russian_media&utm_term=2017-04-19	CODA: A web platform for journalists focusing one issue (journalists, designers technologists)
Stopfake	How propaganda influences Ukraine and impacts other countries in the world.	http://www.stopfake.org/en/news/	Kyiv schools of journalism graduates, lecturers
Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum	Recommendations on Combating Disinformation and Propaganda Based on the results of the EaP CSF project	http://eap-csf.eu/wp-content/uploads/EaP-CSF-Recommendations_February-2017.pdf	Civil society organizations united in the Eastern

			Partnership Civil Society Forum
EAST Center	Anti-Belarus disinformation campaign in Russian media.	http://east-center.org/media-analysis/	Eurasian States in Transition (EAST) Research Center, a Warsaw-based think-tank
EAST Center	Top 10 fake news in Moldova 2016-2017.	http://east-center.org/top-10-fake-news-moldovan-media-2016-2017/	Eurasian States in Transition (EAST) Research Center
NATO Defense College	An introductory guide to Russia's doctrine and activities in this field, including elements of cyber warfare (a handbook).	http://www.ndc.nato.int/news/news.php?icode=995	NATO
Digital Forensic Research Lab	Four Russian narratives on NATO's deployment in Europe: the Baltic States are paranoid or Russophobic; that NATO is unwelcome; that NATO cannot protect the Baltic States; and that NATO is the aggressor.	https://medium.com/dfrlab/russian-narratives-on-natos-deployment-616e19c3d194	DFRL at the Atlantic Council
EP research service	Fake news information sheet, rise of fake news and propaganda; creation of East Strat Com.	http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2017/599384/EPRS_ATA%282017%29599384_E	European Parliament, EU

The text at the top of the first row reads: "Joining Efforts and Skills to Confront Propaganda"

		N.pdf	
EP research service	The role of Russia's disinformation campaign in the Ukraine crisis	http://www.europarl.europa.eu/Reg Data/etudes/BRIE/2015/571339/EP RS_BRI(2015)571339_EN.pdf	European Parliament, EU
EUobserver	Investigation of the stories spread by Russian media: using sex, scandals, migrants to attract attention	https://euobserver.com/investigatio ns/137595	EUobserver
The Moscow Times	How the Russian propaganda is organized: excerpts from the military handbook and an interview with a former military, three sorts of propaganda.	https://themoscowtimes.com/article s/welcome-to-russian-psychological-warfare-operations-101-57301	The Moscow Times
	Analyses of media monitoring in Georgia, reviewing anti-Western messages and disinformation disseminated by Georgian media outlets and other sources.	http://mdfgeorgia.ge/eng/library/An ti-Western+propaganda	Media Development Foundation
Media observer journalist organizations and think tanks	Monitoring of Russian propaganda in Eastern Partnership countries (in 2015):	http://memo98.sk/uploads/content_ galleries/source/memo/russia/execu tive-summary-and-recommendations.pdf	Memo 98:Slovak Think Tank; Internews Ukraine, Ukrainian non-governmental organization; Yerevan Press Club (Armenia), Independent

			Journalism Center (Moldova), "YeniNesil" Union of Journalists (Azerbaijan), Belarusian Association of Journalists (Belarus), and Georgian Charter for Journalistic Ethics (Georgia)
The Institute of Modern Russia	How the Kremlin weaponizes information, culture and money to achieve foreign policy goals and undermine opponents.	http://www.interpretermag.com/the-menace-of-unreality-how-the-kremlin-weaponizes-information-culture-and-money/	The interpreter and The Institute of Modern Russia
The Martens Centre	Less than a quarter of the Russian population has a positive opinion of the EU, due to anti-EU propaganda of the Kremlin. Three main narratives: the EU is an aggressive and expansionist enemy, the EU is a weak union that cannot deal with global challenges and the EU lack any moral values.	https://www.martenscentre.eu/sites/default/files/publication-files/kremlin-propaganda-european-union-enemy-russia.pdf	The official think tanks of the European People's Party, The European Parliament