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NEWSLETTER

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Synthesis and Foreign Policy Debates

The materials are realized by Lina Grau, foreign policy expert and programme coordinator with APE.

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Last period has been marked by a series of important events for the Republic of Moldova.



The team of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) negotiators announced it would not negotiate the signing of a new loan agreement with the Republic of Moldova until Moldova appoints the governor of the National Bank. Dorin Dragutanu announced his resignation on September 21st, one day before the arrival of the IMF mission. In the absence of external financing, Moldova is risking already this year not to be able to make the social payments. The EU, World Bank, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, and the US Compact programme have suspended financial assistance to Moldova, conditioning the resumption of funding with concrete actions in fighting against corruption and stabilization of the financial sector.



The hole in the banking sector has led to a substantial depreciation of the national currency, rising prices and tariffs and lower living standards of the population. Prime Minister Valeriu Strelet recognizes that Moldova faces an unprecedented crisis.



On September 22nd, at the Neptun Romanian Black Sea resort, a joint meeting of the Moldovan and Romanian governments took place. The Romanian Prime Minister Victor Ponta said that responding to the crisis faced by Moldova after the Western donors have suspended financing, Romania will grant Chisinau a 150 million Euros loan with a minimum interest rate for a period of five years. For it to come into force, the future loan agreement must pass ratification in the parliaments of the two capitals.



On September 6th, in Chisinau, big anti-corruption protests organized by the "Dignity and Truth" Civic Platform started. The civic platform is led by known Moldovan civil society leaders who demanded the resignation of the government and president, the dissolution of Parliament and early elections. Protesters put up tents in the National Square, giving the protests a continuous character. The leaders of the left parties, including the Socialists' leader, Igor Dodon, and "Our Party"'s leader, Renato Usatii, have announced new protests this autumn, and in the evening of September 24th installed tents in front of the Parliament.



The EU Foreign Affairs Department announced establishment of an EU rapid response team in order to fight the Russian propaganda. The team, which will include up to ten Russian speaking officials and media professionals from the EU Member States will be fully operational by the end of September and will be part of the European External Action Service (EEAS). The European officials say this is a first step in the EEAS response to the growing concerns from the Eastern European and Baltic countries about the destabilizing influence of the Russian language news programs coming from Russia.

Propaganda – information or weapon?



The offensive information warfare of the Russian Federation has present in the post-Soviet space throughout the period after the collapse of the USSR, but most often it was perceived by the authorities of the newly independent states as an almost innocent soft-power of Moscow that fits the principles of democracy and freedom of expression. Few countries took steps from the beginning to protect their information space. The experts believe this was one of the factors that made the time difference between the

present situation in the Baltic countries, on the one hand, and Ukraine and Moldova, on the other hand.

The Ukrainian experts draw the attention to the fact that the annexation of Crimea and the military offensive in Donbass were preceded by a powerful propaganda blitz. "Hybrid war aims not so much at obtaining victory, but at creating chaos on the territory of the enemy and, most importantly, in the public opinion

– when the citizens fight against their own country, on the side of Russia. We see it clearly in Crimea and Donbass, where Ukrainian citizens fight against their own country, having enrolled in the Russian Special Forces and troops,” notes the Ukrainian expert, Grigory Perepelitea. This sounds somewhat more worrying as in the recent months, similar Russian propagandistic attacks against the Republic of Moldova have intensified.

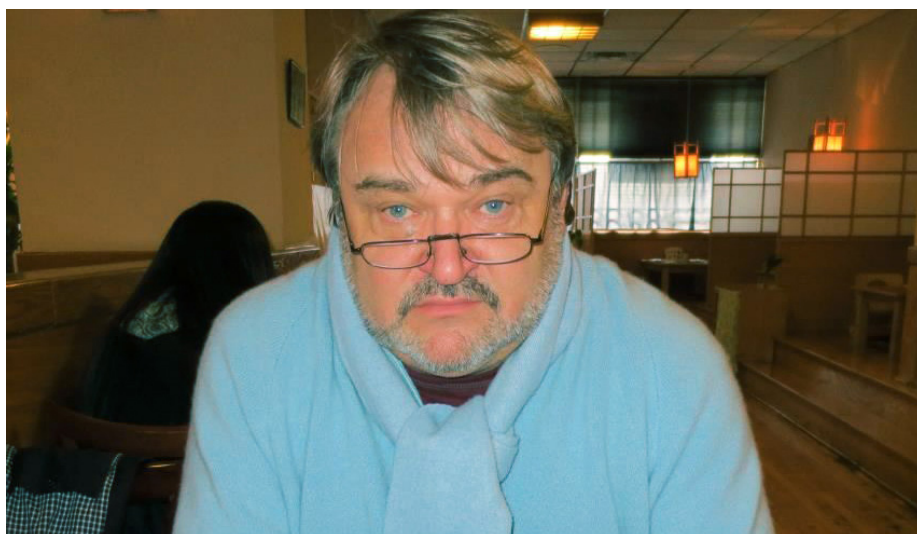
To oppose the influence of propaganda, in the Baltic countries, there exist special subdivisions in the institutions of force that analyse the main theses and mechanisms of influence exercised by the Kremlin. The toolkit appears to be limited - the same tactics are applied, with minor variations, in the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine, and the Baltic countries.

Ramunas Bogdanas, external columnist at the Delfi news agency in Vilnius, says that the Lithuania’s Ministry of Defence has a department that specializes in information analysis and that the latter identified ten priority areas which are targeted by the Russian information attack.

The main target is the history of Lithuania, followed by attempts to discredit the national armed forces, then the EU and NATO as institutions. A fourth target is Lithuania’s NATO membership - propaganda tells how bad it is to be a NATO member and how much it costs. The fifth topic is about the relations between Lithuania and Poland, which are not that easy. Other targets are culture, sports, and energy –areas in which Lithuania has progressed very well in the past five years. The Russian propaganda also speculates the oppression of the Russian language speakers. Another popular theme that has been exploited since the times of the Chechnya war is that the terrorists are being trained in Lithuania.

Another thesis strongly induced by the propaganda is that power is represented by thieves that don’t deserve to lead the country and that things are worsening and therefore the power should be toppled. Another lever is inducing a state of nihilism among the people in relation to their own history, when they are told that their small countries cannot do anything by themselves and that they should be subordinate to bigger countries. Attempts are being made to prompt the idea that countries like Lithuania, Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova have a common history with Russia.

Alex Grigorievs: I am afraid for Moldova



Alex Grigorievs, Latvian expert, vice-chairman of the International NGO Alliance for Regional Security and Democracy and ex-director of the National Democratic Institute (NDI) Moldova during 2003 -2010, says that if the international situation was different, the developments in Chisinau could be viewed as the ‘syndrome of growth’. “But the current internal and external factors are posing a major threat to the country’s very existence as a state and nation, says Alex Grigorievs.

■ **Lina Grâu:** What is propaganda and to what extent the Russian neighbourhood and the West are aware of the danger of this phenomenon?

■ **Alex Grigorievs:** In Latvia, the public and experts know already that there is an informational aggression coming from the Russian Federation. I’m trying not to use the word “propaganda”, because it acquired a different meaning in the Soviet Union – the “propaganda and agitation” meant that “we have these beliefs and make the effort to let them known to the others”. But what is Russia doing at the moment is far from

bringing simply something to somebody’s attention – it is actually an informational aggression and what the British expert, Peter, Pomerantsev refers to in his recent report as “weaponization of information” –“equivalency of information with the weapons”.

In fact, very often there is no information at all there, as what we see is not interpretation of a fact, but its creation – actors are engaged and alleged events are created, after which they are circulated. Or they invent things that have nothing in common with reality that are again replicated. Or they create myths - for example, about the Bendero-fascists in Ukraine. There are plenty of such methods.

We, in Latvia, confronted with this phenomenon about one year ago and like you, we didn’t know what to do. But soon enough Latvians have banned a TV channel which was rebroadcasting Russian television. The channel had been banned for three months, after which it changed its policy- it is still rebroadcasting Russian news in prime time, but at least it is rebroadcasting also Euro News and BBC, and something else - so it has at least a bit of variety for those who really seek it.

That is why, in my view, it is like a poisoned source, which should be prohibited, closed and not broadcast. But it's often the case that if you close the door to this informational aggression, it enters through the windows. So, certain bans should be imposed, but this should not be the only method of fighting against the informational aggression.

Lina Grâu: How else can we deal with propaganda?

Alex Grigorievs: At present, there are various effective ways of countering propaganda. For example, the Ukrainian "StopFake.org" website is very effective. They identify, for example, the actors playing various subjects of the Russian propaganda – in one case, the person is the president of the Crimean electoral commission, in another case, the same person participates in protest actions near the Verkhovna Rada and in the third case, the same actress speaks about the atrocities of Ukrainian-fascists in Donbass and so on. This way, case by case, they let daylight into the lies propagated by the Russian Federation. And this proves to be a very effective method.

In addition, we should try to draw the people's attention to their own problems. What Russia is trying to present as an international conspiracy against the Russians, of course, that is a falsehood. The topic is meant to distract the Russians' attention living in the Russian Federation from the real problems of their own government that very soon will drag its citizens into famine. While for the Russians or Russian speakers living outside Russia, the politics is to convince them that they are mistreated, humiliated and that their civil and human rights are not respected. The task is to convince them first, so that they push and convince various NGOs and the public opinion in the countries where they reside. It is a first step in the unification strategy - "The Russian world".

Lina Grâu: Why do you think it is harmful? What is the real danger of propaganda or informational aggression as you call it?

Alex Grigorievs: All this poison and toxic liquid flowing from the Russian TV and websites is part of a concept or a broader ideology. This is the ideology of the „Russian World” (Russkiy Mir). The name itself does not mean anything bad. I myself once, with a certain part of my being, felt part of the Russian world - I like Russian poetry and Russian language. And I still believe that Putin does not have the monopoly on the Russian language and culture.

In the minds of the Kremlin ideologists the "Russian world" phrase has acquired a totally different meaning. And that meaning is harmful and negative first of all for Russia's neighbours and the entire world order that was established after the Cold War. The essence of this concept is that the Russians are a divided nation - and we know who else considered itself a "divided nation" in the 1930s - that they are surrounded by internal and external enemies; that the existing borders can be violated because they are unjust and illegal, so they can be violated, including by force; that there is a special gene which cannot be found at other nations - this is another familiar thesis...

Basically, the concept is known but restored to a different historical stage. And this concept is a threat to all Russia's neighbours and to peace in the world, which should be taken very seriously. The information warfare is not a metaphor, but one phase of the war. If the information war is lost, then comes the next stage - soldiers, tanks, taking over of public institutions- we could see it all in Crimea and then in Donbass.

Now that I am visiting Moldova, I'm very afraid for this country. I'm afraid because it seems to me that the information war here has not even been noticed. I have said it also on other occasions that the specifics of this country is that the authorities often adopt the ostrich policy: "Let us not see the problem and maybe it will go away." Yes, it is true that sometimes it happens it goes away, but it seems to me that this issue should be observed, must be treated with all seriousness, especially that Transnistria - a de facto hostile enclave- is very near, and therefore action must be taken.

Lina Grâu: What concrete recommendations for countering propaganda would you have?

Alex Grigorievs: One of my recommendations would be to join forces - because it is not just a phenomenon separately directed against Moldova or Latvia. It is against Moldova, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Poland and the list goes on. De facto, war has been declared to the entire west, just not all Western countries understand this. Let's join efforts, at least those of us who understand this danger. We in Latvia, for example, are a few steps forward in combating this phenomenon, so we can share our experience. I have read recently a very interesting investigation about how the Russian money gets into Latvia and who it is distributed to - all these things can be checked and made public. The investigation was made by the ReyBaltica NGO specialised in investigative journalism. Such investigations in our country are not without impact - they are taken on board by the security services and the state institutions. So, we have already exceeded this first stage when you don't realize the danger.

Lina Grâu: Why are you saying you are afraid for Moldova?

Alex Grigorievs: I fear that this information war, at least its first stage was missed, and namely, the informational aggression was not observed and nothing or almost nothing has been done to counter it.

The second aspect that worries me is the huge popularity of pro-Russian parties here as we know what this can lead to.

And the third aspect – what we can observe is a destabilization of the political order in Moldova and any destabilization involves dangerous moments - voids of power appear that can be filled from outside. And, of course, especially dangerous is the de-legitimation of power and of the European development course as a result of grabbing the power and of an unbelievable corruption - unbelievable in its scope and impudence.

Of course, on the one hand, it is understandable the despair of the people who see it. But on the other hand, I understand that it is not the people who will benefit from the results of this despair and protest. Most likely they will continue to be victims.

■ **Lina Grău:** In Moldova there is hope, including among young people who took to the streets, that the European partners will come to help. What can they help Moldova with in this situation?

■ **Alex Grigorievs:** You know, I do not think that will happen. It can help with advice, but it won't do what you have to do as a people, as a nation. Basically, if the international situation was different, the developments in Chisinau could be viewed as the 'syndrome of growth'. But now there is a coincidence of internal and external factors posing a major threat to the country's very existence as a state and nation.

■ **Lina Grău:** Regarding combating propaganda, does the West have a plan? Can something be done in order to help Moldova?

■ **Alex Grigorievs:** Yes, of course. The problem has been acknowledged on several levels. The International NGO Alliance for Regional Security and Democracy has commissioned several studies on this topic that have been developed by the British expert, Peter Pomerantsev, and other authors. Recommendations have been developed as how to counter this phenomenon. The foundation also finances some concrete measures on this topic. There appear centres that fight against the Russian informational aggression and training centres for journalists ... I mean, sure there will be help in this regard.

I generally hope that there will be an awakening to the reality in Moldova. Because if we look at the situation in the world, we should understand that the power should be cleaned off the oligarchs' influence. This should be the claim of those who took to the streets.

Valeriu Vasilică: **Underdevelopment of journalism can generate much bigger problems for the future of Moldova**



Also in Chisinau, in the fore-front of the discussions about the present and future of the country, an issue emerged that over the last decades didn't seem to be a phenomenon affecting the national and regional security. The Russian propaganda has been regarded by the Moldovan political class as an almost innocent soft-power of Moscow, says Valeriu Vasilică, director of IPN News Agency.

■ **Lina Grău:** How strong is the Russian influence on the information space of Moldova?

■ **Vasile Vasilică:** From my point of view, this influence is very strong for two reasons. On the one hand, Russia has very strong television and on the other hand, it has a very high credibility among large parts of the Moldovan population. Russia has a precise strategy and a well-thought out idea: it knows its target groups and the people's psychology, thus its efficiency is very high. What is coming from Russia

to our area can only be compared to the propaganda of the Third Reich.

Our society and state should invest much more – both financially, and in terms of authority - in this segment, because propaganda can be reduced only by counterpropaganda, which is correct, honest, qualitative, and very professional information. The Moldovan political class has not understood that and as far as I can see it, will not understand in the near future the real situation and the danger it poses. That is because, on the one hand, the private media is highly monopolized. I have nothing against private media but it is not good when it monopolizes the information and concentrates on a single employer, or when the professional limits are exceeded, being publicized only one point of view and only one party.

On the other hand, we have public media – the Teleradio Moldova Company. Even if at the moment it looks a bit more professional and more equidistant, it is

very poor. So you cannot expect that this mechanism of influence on human minds could compete with the very rich TV stations of the Russian Federation.

We have too many nostalgic and credulous people when it comes to what Moscow is saying. There are too many naïve people who think things can turn back. As what does the Russian Federation want? – It wants to reconstruct the Soviet Union or the Russian empire, in one format or another. In this dramatic situation, the weakest element is the perception.

It is known that other countries facing problems with propaganda have antidotes. They have antidotes at the governmental level, financial level, but also at the level of the psychology of the society, while we have none. As long as there is no clarity on this issue, the Russian propaganda threatens the existence of the Moldovan state.

There are still many people in Moldova who have an interest in the events happening in Russia, including the weather in Khabarovsk, Moscow or St. Petersburg. They are used to push the button and watch the news in Russia - even if they do not directly concern them and are not connected to their lives for decades.

I'd like to say a few things about my personal perception as a consumer of this propagandistic product. I reached the state when I cannot watch the Russian television any longer as I feel replete with it and I'm simply protecting my physical and mental health.

To my regret, in Moldova, not only the ethnic Russians approved of the anti-Ukrainian Russian operation, but also the representatives of other nationalities, including Ukrainians and Moldovans. It's beyond my understanding how aggression and bloodshed can be approved of. How is it possible that part of Moldovans also support Russia in this situation?

I understand that all these distortions come from the Russian propaganda that

we started the discussion about.

■ **Lina Grâu:** Is this vulnerability and lack of immunity to propaganda reflected in the polls and in the election results?

■ **Vasile Vasiliță:** There is a fact proven during the period of independence that the voting behaviour in our country is based more on ethnical, linguistic, and ideological criteria and less on such criteria as prosperity, the prospect for the individual, family and children... There are things that are much more natural to human life than to think it is very patriotic to live poorly, but also to be constantly ready for war, have enemies across the world and in the decaying capitalism etc. And I don't know why we continue to live in these dimensions. From my point of view, one reason for that is that the Russian propaganda directs us this way.

Again, I don't understand how can reasonable people make a choice obviously detrimental to their own interests by voting for the Eastern orientation - where clearly there is much poverty and mess, more corruption, more uncertainty about future and where only the strong and tricksters can resist ... These people pretend not to see that we have another model, which is very close to us - where the rules of the game are clear and where there are clear positive perspectives for the future.

I do not understand why people want to return to the old model, where they had to stand in queues to buy food and where they were afraid to talk loud but in the kitchen and when drunk. It is true, that it provided for minimum guarantees, but you cannot live your entire life on minimum guarantees when you can have more for your children... Again, the explanation here is the Russian propaganda.

Coming back to the personal perception – some of my family continue to watch Russian TV channels and sometimes, invite me as well to watch good programmes or talk-show. But I cannot watch them, because by means of the same sources

I'm being manipulated through other programmes with the same people - the same presenters, producers ... So even if there may be products of high journalistic standards, I should be permanently vigilant not to be manipulated.

■ **Lina Grâu:** Is the young generation more immune to the Russian propaganda than the older generation? Do you see any perspective and chance to get at some point out of this vicious paradigm?

■ **Vasile Vasiliță:** I hope and believe that the younger generation is immune. It is true that only part of the younger generation is - the most educated, the most knowledgeable, who speaks foreign languages and not only Russian, who has access to the internet and knows how to use it. But at the same time, there is still a category of people who do not have such skills or do not have such possibilities - I refer especially to our villages, because the economic poverty is also an ally of the propaganda, which I would qualify as neo-Nazi...

Frankly speaking, at the moment, I do not see many solutions to this situation. A solution could be the support of the European partners just as they provide assistance for our economy and social infrastructure- health, education, roads. So far, the Europeans have not been involved in our information system or were not willing to invest as much in the mass media through projects and grants. But it could be the case that the underdevelopment in journalism can generate big problems in other areas.

Until we get rid of this drug- propaganda- we have no chance to succeed in building a responsible society and decent life in our country. Only when we overcome this problem, can we have some chances. But the chances can be realized with money, will, professionalism, good education and the understanding of propaganda and of the tools to counter it. In my view, the best counterpropaganda is a better life, which can be reflected in an adequate way by a professional press.

Dunja Mijatović: Challenges and incitement to violence are not freedom of expression, but anarchy



Dunja Mijatović, OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, says the issue of propaganda is a complex one and it cannot be overcome in the short-term. This requires engagement of the society at large, but also of the authorities that have to provide clear regulations and offer alternatives to the public through a strong national public broadcaster.

■ **Lina Grâu:** How can propaganda be counteracted?

Dunja Mijatović: There are countries taking down certain channels that do violate certain rules. So, I don't think that these channels or any other channel is taken down by satellite providers or whoever is in charge if there is no reasoning for it. Of course, you always have to be cautious and to see if this is for political reason or if it is because this channel is inciting to hatred or promoting division among people and this sort of things. So, we have to look at this on case by case basis.

But I'm very vocal when it comes to banning anything, because, I think, it's a wrong way of dealing with things. At the same time, we need to be very careful. If it's related to violence, or call for violence of any kind, this is not freedom of speech- this is anarchy and

it needs to be dealt with based on the rule of law.

■ **Lina Grau:** When it comes to investigating the content on the cover of the media, do you think that the media needs to be judged on the basis of what they publish or what they air and broadcast on the TV?

■ **Dunja Mijatović:** Of course, because that's the face they promote. Their mission is what we see or what we hear on certain channels. And that's why we have in most of the democratic countries regulatory authorities that are dealing with the issue of content, not to mention when it comes to violence or incitement to hatred. The courts and the judiciary need to look at it. So, the media is also not untouchable. They are the face to public and they need to make sure that this face stays untouched when it comes to the code of ethics and professionalism. And here I'm not against provocative journalism, journalism that is courageous and investigative, but there is also something that we need to preserve and that is to be professional in the end.

■ **Lina Grau:** How do you find the situation regarding freedom of expression in the Republic of Moldova, on both banks of the Nistru, especially since in Transnistria there were several cases when journalists were arrested?

I work a lot in Moldova with the Government and with the civil society. I was there last year and I'm planning to go soon again. There are many issues that I would like to address, but unfortunately, when it comes to frozen conflicts like the situation in Transnistria or Abkhazia, Ossetia in Georgia or in any other part of the world it is difficult to move as the OSCE Representative of the media because of the limitations of my mandate. I do talk with the civil society, with journalists and the Moldovan government, but my limitations are there when it comes to the so-called authorities in Transnistria. But I do raise my voice when I know that the journalists are affected and in all cases I did raise this issue.

Regarding the frozen conflicts, this is a challenge for all international organisations, not just the OSCE. There are no recommendations, because of frozen conflicts, that's why it is very difficult to move around when it comes to this. But what I can say is that Moldova made some important steps in order to open up and accept international norms regarding the free speech, but much more needs to be done, particularly now, when there is a huge challenge when it comes to propaganda and other important issues.

■ **Lina Grau:** How can propaganda be counteracted?

You have to do it as journalists. This is something that is very important, because propaganda should not be fought with the same tools as they are using it. It is very important that the public broadcasting service is transformed. Speaking about Moldova, there's a decades-long struggle with the public broadcasting service which is not efficient. Not enough has been done and this is something I'm raising with the Moldovan government constantly. There are certain laws that are adopted in order to block certain channels, but this is not enough. There is need to engage with the society, there is need to offer plurality of voices.

The conflict is there as it is difficult to do it overnight. What is not something for the short term is the engagement with the society at large in order to tackle these issues.

Daisy Sindelar: Propaganda aims at tearing down national faith and dividing the societies in the target countries

Daisy Sindelar, RFERL Regional Director for Europe, Balkans and Caucasus, says that while internally, the Russian propaganda is tied to the idea of building up a sense of exceptionalism, national pride, the idea that Russians are a great nation, on the outside, propaganda is aimed at doing the opposite- it is aimed at tearing down national faith in other countries and divide those societies.

■ **Lina Grâu:** Why is there so much talk lately about propaganda and how to define it? What is, actually, propaganda?

■ **Daisy Sindelar:** On one hand, I think that the use of the word “propaganda” is due in part to the fact that we see history sort of going back to almost a repeat of the soviet era – so there was propaganda then and we see some of the techniques and things happening now and for that reason, I think, the term is becoming popular again.

But at the same time, we do see very active efforts on the part of the Russian government to fund and spread its influence through the media. Propaganda is, basically, shaping your message about particular events and choosing the events that you cover in order to create a particular narrative that suits the policy of the country involved.

You could argue that other countries also promote propaganda by promoting their own point of view, but in the case of Russia you have a country that is doing it at the same time that is conducting extremely aggressive military campaigns. It is trying to expand its influence over its neighbours and is basically turning its back on human



rights within its own country. So, there may be various campaigns, various propaganda campaigns waged throughout the world, but in the case of Russia, I would say, it is tied to policy goals that are distinctly to the disadvantage of the countries around it.

■ **Lina Grâu:** A year ago, when Ukraine was talking about the Russian propaganda and the Moldovan experts were ringing the alarm bells about the dangers coming through the Russian radio and TV stations allowed to broadcast freely on the national territory, the West was saying the freedom of press must not be restricted in any way. Now this view seems to be tinted, Western countries began to understand a little better the phenomenon of propaganda, and some even began to face similar problems. To what extent has the West now realized the danger of propaganda and the difference between propaganda and freedom of expression?

Daisy Sindelar: It's a difficult question with Ukraine. Ukraine was really progressing very impressively in terms of its development of the civic society and its free press. It was really making tremendous strides forward. So, I think, in that respect, it was disappointing for some people to see it as taking steps backward and imposing these very strict guidelines about the kind of media that was available and that wasn't.

The situation in Ukraine is incredibly complex- very muddy and grey- and so it is impossible to see to take that step out of context – you can't just say “This is bad, because the free press should be preserved at all costs”. I think the west is coming around, it is beginning to understand what Russian propaganda is like, and moreover, it is certainly beginning to understand that the situation in Ukraine is extremely serious-not only for Ukraine, but for other Russian neighbours and for the future of the European continent as well. So, maybe the west got up to a slightly slow start in terms of appreciating the threat that Russian propaganda can represent.

And, I think, they are beginning to take creative steps to respond to it and therefore, probably, are a little more understanding of countries like Ukraine when they make the moves that they do, or Moldova.

■ **Lina Grâu:** The Russian propaganda seems to have two components for two target groups - there is a certain kind of propaganda targeting audiences in the neighbouring former Soviet countries, and another one- more subtle, targeting the Western ‘market’. What is the difference between the two types of propaganda?

■ **Daisy Sindelar:** Well, I think, that the propaganda that is designed for your internal population, of the Russian population, is really tied to the idea of building up a sense of exceptionalism, national pride, the idea that Russians are a great nation and that what they do and what their government does must surely be right, because it's done in the name of the Russian nation. So, it's hateful about outsiders, it's obviously full of



praise for Putin and it always has a tinge of xenophobia, little racism and sort of superiority regarding the near abroad- its neighbours.

Propaganda on the outside, I think, is aimed at doing the opposite- it is aimed at tearing down national faith in other countries and unfortunately, because the free press does exist in the west, you will already find those communities who are eager to make fun of the government or eager to criticise Barack Obama or EU leaders. So Russian trolls, for lack of a better word, can find those communities and really add way to them by chiming in with these kinds of comments. They create a situation where dignified dialogue about world events is impossible.

If you go to a website where any article is going to be followed with very immature, hateful, explicit comments, anyone who is interested in having a genuine conversation about the issue is going to go away. So, you are left with just as void that is filled with very, just basic, hatred.

■ **Lina Grâu:** How to combat this phenomenon of propaganda? The Baltic States, for example, were aware of this problem ever since the proclamation of independence. Moldova, like Ukraine, however, did not pay attention to this phenomenon and the impression is that there is no potential in the country to fight propaganda. What can one do in these circumstances? What can the West do to counteract the Russian propaganda offensive?

■ **Daisy Sindelar:** Well, I think, one way of attacking propaganda is to make people aware of the fact that what they are seeing and that can be seen a lot in Ukraine, where you take a news event that is covered one way by Russian media and another way by Ukrainian media and possibly, a third way- by western media- and you say: "Let's look at the differences between these stories". And it very quickly becomes clear that Russia is presenting the story in this way, because it serves its government interests. But the other thing is to, I mean we see a lot, that Russian media manipulates visual images, it manipulates footage and

unfortunately, I think, the very best way to deal with that is to say: "Here is what really happened" or "Here is another photograph from the same scene and judge for yourself what you think actually happened here".

The difficult thing about journalism like that is that it takes time and it requires the audience to sit and think "What am I seeing here?" I think that increasingly, what you know, the global media is based on video spaced on visual components, TVs on 24 hours. There is a very quick news cycle- it's a monster which you have to feed it constantly with news and, I think, the problem with that is that it doesn't give people the opportunity to sit back and think "What am I actually seeing?", "What is the really important thing behind this story?"

Generally, for myself, and as a journalist for other journalists, I always hoped that the news cycle was slowed down a little bit, but in the meantime, it will fall to journalists and hopefully, to more numbers of concerned citizens to say: "Let's step back and see what actually really happened in this story". I can say that at Radio Free Europe, we have a new project that is called "Footage vs Footage" and so, whenever we have an event which appears to show the Ukrainian military shelling civilians outside Donetsk, we try to find alternative footage that may show a completely different picture and that way, maybe, sometimes, you realise what clearly is happening, maybe, sometimes, it becomes even more complicated and ambiguous, but at least you are showing those other sides of the story and we are aware of who is interested.

■ **Lina Grâu:** You have said in a meeting recently that the situation in Moldova is better than in the other countries of the region. The perception in Chisinau is that things are getting worse both in the press and in other areas. What makes you say that things are better in Moldova than in other countries?

■ **Daisy Sindelar:** Well, I don't mean to make light of the situation in Moldova. I know that it's extremely serious and difficult for journalists here, but the reason that I say it compares favourably to other

countries in the region, well, look at the countries that we are talking about – we are talking about countries like Azerbaijan where you have journalists in jail, journalists being killed. RFERL has its own bureau closed in Baku. Russia- much the same situation- you see journalists going to jail and being silenced in a variety of ways. So, even countries like Georgia score lower in terms of press freedom than Moldova. That doesn't mean that the situation in Moldova is not serious. It is very serious. And it's unfortunate that we have to say: "It's better off than the Azerbaijan, just because there is less violence".

■ **Lina Grâu:** One of the big discussions and with no clear answer yet in Moldova is the situation of the politically unaffiliated journalists who feels the need to be highly critical of the current pro-European coalition that through corruption and abuse has compromised the European course of the country, but doing so they risk to destabilize the internal situation that works to the advantage of the pro-Russian forces. How can a journalist do his/her job honestly without becoming a useful tool in destabilizing their country, in the conditions of the Republic of Moldova? How would you respond to this dilemma?

■ **Daisy Sindelar:** The conversation that we had last night – it was very interesting to listen to you, because what I heard was high level of sophistication when it comes to journalistic issues and very stimulating intellectual debate and to me, that signals that there is a lot of hope and that there are reasons to be optimistic about journalism in Moldova. I also think the Moldovans understand perfectly well the relationship that they have with both Russia and the West and they know how to use their connections to the west to get more attention and support for a free media and other initiatives like that.

So, I see Moldova as a resourceful country. I think, the mood in some other countries can be more defeatist. "We give up and it's always going to be like this"- we don't feel like that in Moldova. People seem energised, they want things to change and for that reason, I think, there is a cause for optimism.

■ **Lina Grău:** Another thing that is happening now in journalism is its transformation together with the processes taking place in the political sphere, information processes that require from the journalistic work to come closer to the civic activism – a thing considered unacceptable some 10 years ago, for example. How do you think should the journalism be in particular in the Republic of Moldova in order not to be divorced from reality and not just present the perspective of the elites?

■ **Daisy Sindelar:** It's a very difficult situation and you could have an entire evening of conversation just about that question, I think.

I do think that journalists have a role to stay separate and apart from the political process in the country where they work. I know that's very difficult. On the other hand, I don't think there is anything wrong with a journalist, or newspaper, or a media outlook taking sides. In other words- we are pro-western, pro-European integration or pro-Russian. That is inevitable that that is a part of large media organisations. But let's take the case of the pro-western media- they should be attached to defending principles, not people. And if the officials in power in Moldova represent what liberal media see it as the correct path, but themselves are not acting correctly, then, I think, it is the responsibility of the media to report that even if it means that you are handing something to the Russian press. Journalism is a long-term game and even if in the short-term you feel that you are losing

ground because you are reporting on the missed steps and mistakes of the political group that represents the views that you hold yourself, it doesn't mean that you wouldn't apply the same critical eye if it was a different group or a different political system that comes into power. Ideally, a journalist has the ability to step back a little bit and say: "I have my principles, but also, one of my principles is that I'm going to report on what I see in front of me no matter how much it may hurt my country's progress". But, as I said, it is extremely difficult, and I'm sure there are journalists in Moldova who are really struggling with that question.

I think in Moldova, the public doesn't believe that the government represents its interests, but it may also be true that the public doesn't think that the media represents its interests, that the media, maybe, sort of like the intellectual class and it worries about its own problems – "problems in the clouds" as you say. And what I really liked about the Radio Liberty Programme is that it went and talked to ordinary people about their problems, and moreover, gave them the tools to confront local politicians to solve those problems and highlight instances where people had shown incredible ingenuity in resolving problems, people who have managed to get EU grants to renovate hospitals, people who put together their own money to get internet for a school. It's incredible and it should be very inspiring for people.

The other thing about this project that I like is that they will go back to all of these towns and say: "Did you solve this

problem?" So, it's not "Oh, you have a problem, we will talk about it and then, goodbye". That is the role of the journalist – to tell the story from the beginning till the end. And, I was thinking to myself, would a media outlet in the United States, for example, participate in a programme like this? I'm not sure, because it's a bit of a blurred line. And this is something where I may disagree with some of my colleagues - I feel very strongly that journalism is growing closer to activism and it needs to, because people, particularly in this part of the world, they need to feel that the press is working for them or represents a tool that they can use to improve their lives.

■ **Lina Grău:** Do you think Moldova is a European country? Is a European future possible for Moldova or will it always be a grey area, a buffer zone with conflicting geopolitical interests?

■ **Daisy Sindelar:** I think that Moldova has a European mindset, it seems to be European in spirit and that is already a huge accomplishment.

Of course, the reality on the ground makes things very complicated and I think, Moldova will be sort of caught between these two influences for a long time, but again what I've seen is that people are alive, and curious, and interested in their own fate. Even if this seems like a very simple thing, I'm not sure that you have that in every country. And so, I do think that Moldova is European in spirit if not yet officially in name.

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