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Lithuania's Images in Russian Mass Media after the Annexation of Crimea

One of the distinctive features of Russia's confrontation with the West over the 2014–2016 period is the intensification of Russian propaganda both in foreign countries and within the state. Lithuania, whose relations with a major neighbour were not normalized, and which openly supported Ukraine's position, attracted the additional attention of Russian mass media in which an incitement to anti-Lithuanian moods was bolstered. In this case, it is endeavoured to generally describe how the mass media (television and newspapers) played a role in contriving a social construct and ascertain the Lithuanian quantitative characteristics which are presented in Russian mass media. Referring to the analysis, one can distinguish three prevailing negative images of Lithuania – that is, Russophobic and anti-Russian; a falsifier of history; and a failing and non-influential state. These images, being consistently and purposefully exploited in Russian information space, almost with no alternative sources, turned into undeniable truth for the majority of Russian citizens. This provides the Kremlin with vast possibilities of manipulation in constructing the tactics and strategy of geopolitical instability. On the other hand, one should not forget that such a negative picture of Lithuania serves as a way in which Russian society justifies Putin's political system and demonstrates its superiority over the values of the Western world.

Introduction

2014 marked the year, when, in Russia, we could observe a renaissance of anti-Western moods, which was inspired by the Maidan Revolution in Ukraine. Having demonstrated solidarity with Ukrainians and rendered every kind of assistance a country with such potential is capable of providing, Lithuania reinforced the negative attitude prevailing in the highest strata of Russian society. Lithuania is explicitly treated as a constituent part of a hostile outside world. It is palpable that the dynamics of Russian propaganda in the context of the events of the Maidan Revolution assumed a new and univocal trend of intensification. Controlled by the Russian authorities, the mass media mainly

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targeted not only Ukraine but also those countries which backed up the started process of democratization.¹

Lithuania undertook a leading position among Baltic States, thus receiving special attention in the mass media over which the Russian authorities have power. This campaign is designed to amplify, in the social consciousness, such images of a neighbouring country which do not concert the reality – more precisely, it forces people to think in the corresponding categories, selecting those elements of sociopolitical and economic life which are instrumental to sustaining the personalized system of political authority and its existence and stability.

According to opinion polls conducted by the Yuri Levada Analytical Centre, approximately a quarter of Russians (around 37 million) believe that Lithuania is an anti-Russian, Russophobic, and pugnacious country: in 2014, Lithuania came third (24 per cent of respondents) after the USA and Ukraine on the list of Russia's top enemies ("antagonistic and hostile"); in 2015, Lithuania and Latvia shared third and fourth places (25 per cent of those polled); in 2016, the number of respondents believing so decreased by nearly one per cent, and Turkey and Poland moved Lithuania and Latvia to lower places (to take fifth and sixth places).²

Having been exploited in Russian mass media for more than twenty years, Lithuania's image of an inimical state (along with the Baltic States as a whole) has inured to successful implementation of a new propaganda campaign. Disagreements on evaluating a common past and complex bilateral relations between Russia and the Baltic States determined a prevailing negative attitude toward the Baltic States in Russian information space; when the relations between countries were getting tense, active Russian actions in international politics were accompanied by large-scale propaganda campaigns whose scenarios and principles, according to Nerijus Maliukevičius, were, during the presidency of Vladimir Putin, borrowed from Soviet times by the Kremlin.³ Viktor Denisenko's research on the image of the Baltic States in the Russian periodical

¹ Simonas Algirdas Spurga and Nerijus Maliukevičius, *Russian Media Politics Before and After the Annexation of Crimea. Fortress Russia: Political, Economic and Security Development in Russia Following the Annexation of Crimea and its Consequences for the Baltic States*. Editor: Andis Kudors. The Centre for East European Policy Studies University of Latvia Press Riga, 2016; Darczewska J., *The Anatomy of Russian Information Warfare. The Crimean Operation, a Case Study*. Warszawa, 2014. 37 p.

² Союзники „враги” России, европейская интеграция, 2016, <http://www.levada.ru/2016/06/02/13400/>, 2016 08 10.

³ Vitkus G., *Diplomatinė aporija: tarptautinė Lietuvos ir Rusijos santykių normalizacijos perspektyva*, Vilnius: Vilniaus universiteto leidykla, 2006, p. 176; Maliukevičius N., *The Roots of Putin's Media Offensive in the Baltic States: Learning Lessons in Counter strategies*, <http://www.forum-ekonomiczne.pl/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Chapter-4.pdf>, 2016 09 11ю

press has revealed that with the help of various propaganda techniques, the Baltic States are treated as fascist, Nazi, anti-Russian, and Russophobic.⁴

Russian political scientists have also acknowledge the existence of this phenomenon – in Renaldo Simonian’s view, “for a considerable part (значительное) of Russian society the mass media has formed an unfriendly attitude toward the Baltic States”.⁵ Hence the result, achieved through several decades, is that primary news about Lithuania mostly includes apparently negative items of information of which an ordinary Russian citizen is in possession.

It is reflected in opinion polls conducted by the Levada Analytical Centre: in 2005, 42 per cent of Russians expressed a negative attitude toward Lithuania; however, in 2013, the number of those believing so was reduced to 17 per cent.⁶ Thus, the maximum was achieved in 2005 after Lithuania acceded to NATO and the European Union in 2004. Yet, we subsequently observe a relatively stable tendency of diminution. Having compared sociological data gathered in 2013 and 2014, it became clear that the Maidan Revolution in Ukraine had changed the trajectory quite anew, that is, increased the number of Russians treating Lithuania as a foe, up to seven per cent – roughly 10 million people.

The article mainly aims to overview the images of Lithuania being created in the Russian mass media along with their dynamics. Searching for the answer to the questions posed, one has selected a traditional means of shaping public opinion – television and periodical press.

1. The Mass Media as a Creator of a Social Construct

First, let us briefly describe how the situation has recently developed in Russian mass media in the period of geopolitical changes. Political scientists notice that the mass media has experienced new constrains imposed by the authorities, while propaganda has widely been exploited at expansive information war fronts.⁷ From 2014–2016, the status of press freedom being restricted

⁴Denisenko V., *Rusijos periodinės spaudos požiūris į Baltijos šalis geopolitinių pokyčių kontekste (1991–2009)*, daktaro disertacija, Vilnius, 2016, p. 252.

⁵Симонян Р. Х. Образ стран Балтии в российских масс-медиа, Социологические исследования, 2004. № 6, с. 98–106, arba <http://www.isras.ru/files/File/Socis/2004-06/Simonyan.pdf>, 2016 08 11.

⁶Внешнеполитические враги и друзья России, 2013, Назовите пять стран наиболее недружественно, враждебно настроенных по отношению к России, <http://www.levada.ru/2013/06/18/vneshnepoliticheskie-vragi-i-druzya-rossii/>, 2016 08 12.

⁷See more: Spurga and Maliukevičius (note 1), p. 49–54.

remained stable – there predominated a national tone, which continued to destroy free and critical journalism; meanwhile, politicians and pro-government media mobilized society and abated a contrary opinion.⁸ Hence it is apparent that the Russian media, providing information to the public, set forth its priorities according to the pre-established tradition: that is, to serve the Kremlin's new political tactics and strategy. In other words, it wants to make readers and viewers think in the desired direction, thus building and interpreting a socio-political reality built by the political order; it meant that a negative image of Lithuania would be further intensified. Let us see how it was realized in practice.

Let's start with television. In Russian information space there prevail three state channels: *Rossiya 1*, *NTV*, and *Channel 1*, which millions of viewers watch every day – from 54 per cent to 82 per cent of the whole country. In 2014, television became the main source of information for the majority of Russian people, ranging from 90 per cent to 94 per cent (irrespective of their personal data: address, residence, social status, education, etc.).⁹ Just about half of the population receives information from one source, that is, television. One should remember that two-thirds of people live in small towns where the possibilities of getting information from alternative sources are limited. The number of independent channels is small (*REN TV*, *Dozhd*, *Euronews*); the number of viewers of these channels varies from 15 per cent to 18 per cent.

Already solid positions of the television are complementarily fortified by the possibility of watching these channels on the Internet, whose number of users is gradually increasing; furthermore, they are broadcast by regional channels and printed in newspapers. There is one more reason why the role of central television channels is paramount – according to a recent public opinion survey, in 2014, 60 per cent of those polled were content with the information they were provided, compared to 52 per cent in 2016. Amid the events in Ukraine, this number increased up to 20 per cent more.¹⁰ Thus there is a high degree of satisfaction among people and relatively limited possibilities of alternative sources of communicating one's own views that has greatly enhan-

⁸ 2014 m. nelaisvos spaudos reitingas buvo 81 iš 100, teisinės – 24 iš 30, politinės – 32 iš 40, ekonominės – 24 iš 30, atitinkamai 2015–2016 m. bendras reitingas pablogėjo iki 83, kiti vertinimai išliko stabilūs. Russia, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2014/russia>, 2016 08 15; Russia, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2015/russia>, 2016 09 15; Freedom House. Russia, Freedom of the Press 2016, <http://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2016/russia>, 2016 08 15.

⁹ Волков Д., Гончаров С., Российский медиа-ландшафт: телевидение, пресса, Интернет (2014) <http://www.levada.ru/2014/07/08/rossijskij-media-landshaft-televidenie-pressa-internet-3>, 2016 08 16.

¹⁰ Freedom House. Freedom in the World Russia <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2016/russia>, 2016 08 13; Пресс-выпуск №- 3098 ТВ, Интернет, газеты, радио: доверяй, но проверяй? <http://wciom.ru/index.php?id=236&uid=115679>; 2016 08 16; Волков Д., Родина вне критики, <https://www.vedomosti.ru/opinion/articles/2016/03/18/634111-rodina-kritiki>, 2016 08 17.

ced the role of the media, belonging to and controlled by the state, as a creator of a social construct.

Referring to the survey, the periodical press only comes fourth in the aspect of information dissemination, putting television forward (the ratio is three times), yet slightly yielding to such sources as neighbours, relatives, and friends, as well as to the Internet. However, we can assume that the results of the public opinion survey do not reflect actual importance of this classical source of dissemination, for what is known to one's "close circle" has also been extracted from the press, and newspapers have on-line versions. Hence the press remains one of the principal sources of information, however, we cannot deny that the number of those reading newspapers are continually decreasing – from 39 per cent in 2003 to 28 per cent in 2014.¹¹

Several periodical editions have been selected with regard to the following criteria: first, these editions are printed in large circulations; second, they are disseminated throughout the whole territory of Russia. On the other hand, the editions that have a long history of continuous publication are read by regular readers and can be attributed to the category of political and social publications. Hence such newspapers as *Argumenty i Fakty*, *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, and *Izvestia* occupy the leading positions, while *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* is included in the list as a Russian government daily newspaper wherein one can find, as stated, "overarching and credible (достоверная) information regarding adopted laws, which politicians present in their comments."

2. The Quantitative Characteristics of Images

Searching for a more precise answer to whether or not Russian mass media is indeed paying significant attention to Lithuania, we are now to discuss quantitative data. In this case, one can point to a two-and-a-half year report wherein such words as Lithuania, Lithuanians, Lithuanian, Vilnius, and the Baltic States (only when countries are mentioned separately in texts) are used. The tradition to assess, mostly in headlines, the Baltic States as one region, "Pribaltika", is said to remain; however, there are apparently reports on separate countries. For example, in 2014, in *NTV* news headlines, "Pribaltika" was mentioned only 9 times, while Lithuania was directly named in 70 instances; in 2016, within half a year, *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* mentioned Lithuania from 12 to 50 times. *Channel 1*, with the largest number of viewers, referred to Lithuania

¹¹ Žr., nuor. 8.

in its various contexts of political, socio-economic, and cultural events, not taking into account recurrences – in 2014, Lithuania was indicated 27 times; in 2015, it was stated 50 times; and in 2016, within six months, it was mentioned 26 times. Indeed, a mathematical expression of numbers is not stunning, yet the statistics were improved by *NTV* television whereon one counted 221 messages amid the most intense period in 2014; in 2015, Lithuania was stated 174 times; in the first six months of 2016, it was mentioned 71 times. Information flow was corrected from 7 to 28 times per month, yet one could frequently observe that the number of messages grew from 2 to 5 times per day. However, referring to the quantity of informational items, it would be necessary, for precision, to take into consideration the number of messages whose titles refer to Lithuania. For instance, in 2014, *NTV* television indicated Lithuania 70 times, almost one third of total messages, while *Channel 1* referred to Lithuania 54 times out of 103 during the whole period.

Quantitative parameter of the periodical press about Lithuania are similar to those utilized in television. In 2014, in the weekly newspaper *Argumenty i Fakty*, Lithuania was mentioned 268 times, however, it was explicitly indicated only 30 times. In the daily newspaper *Izvestia* – 98 and 9 respectively, while, in 2015, in *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* – 431 and 87. Thus, in this regard, the user of the media does not receive a great deal of information; moreover, the biggest part on television comprises short reports in news broadcasting and only several separate reports, talk shows or documentaries. One should notice that Lithuania is mostly placed on the media agenda when it captures the attention of events related to Russia.

Having allowed for these considerations, we can state that for Russian citizens, information flow about Lithuania is not characterized by intensity, but sufficient to form or strengthen negative images of Lithuania, especially when bearing in mind that this process is marked by continuous and on-going practice, purposefully realized throughout several decades. Conversely, a fairly considerable part of information frequently embraces topics unfavourable for the realization of propaganda, such as sports and culture, in other words, they are more orientated toward forming a neutral rather than negative image.

Various information about Lithuania is presented on Russian television, however, international, national, social, and economic issues dominate, while events related to Russia are most often interpreted negatively. Historical themes are normally examined though the prism of today: for instance, the dismantling of Soviet-time statues on the Green Bridge in Vilnius or the situation of World War II veterans, yet prominent historical issues, such as Lithuania's

accession to/withdrawal from the Soviet Union are highlighted in special discussion forums and in documentaries.

A similar situation can be observed in the periodical press. Here, in 2015, *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* foregrounded Lithuania's political and socio-economic issues (excluding those related to sports and culture) 85 times; named Lithuania as a part of the North Atlantic Alliance as well as a proponent of a U.S. policy 52 times and the EU 38 times; referred to historical issues 27 times; and mentioned the President of Lithuania a total of 6 times. An editorial policy of *Izvestia* is such that it pays as much attention to history than is paid in *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* – rather, it focuses on the Lithuanian narrative of the main foes in the context of NATO and the United States. Alongside common topics, *Komsomolskaya Pravda* accentuates the peripeteia of Lithuania's internal life.

Treating this issue from the afore-mentioned perspectives, we could ascribe such features as Russophobic and anti-Russian, a falsifier of history, a failing and non-influential state to the most vivid and general images of Lithuania.

3. Russophobic and anti-Russian

An image of Lithuania as a Russophobic and anti-Russian state is undoubtedly prevailing on Russian television and in the press. Such is a reaction to the Russian authorities' policy – Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergei Lavrov treats Lithuania as nothing but “the most aggressive Russophobic nucleus in the whole North Atlantic Alliance”.¹² This image is built by various constituent elements, some of which are utilized in practice: Lithuania as the most active supporter of Ukraine's Maidan Revolution; Lithuania's “exclusive” position in the policy of the EU's sanctions; Lithuania as a territorial bridgehead for NATO military exercises and a place for military bases. These three elements are united by the media's exceptional attention to Lithuania's president Dalia Grybauskaitė as a Russophobic leader. It is especially noticeable when compared to both Latvian and Estonian leaders.

On the media agenda we often encounter Lithuania's efforts to support Ukraine's aspirations by all possible means, with prophetic slogans attracting

¹² S. Lavrovo išskirtinis dėmesys Lietuvai: ką Kremlius tuo nori pasakyti? <http://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/s-lavrovo-isskirtinis-demesys-lietuvai-ka-kremlius-tuo-nori-pasakyti.d?id=71141522>, 2016 08 24; Lietuvos saugumo departamento įvardyta Rusijos diplomatų Lietuvoje vykdomas žvalgybinė veikla įvertinama, kaip Lietuvos „odiosinės rusofobijos pasireiškimas“. МИД РФ: Шпиономания в Литве - политический заказ и проявление русофобии, <https://rg.ru/2015/04/02/litva-site-anons.html>, 2016 08 24.

attention. In this case, those who write give free rein to their imagination; the content is dominated by a vivid emotional charge and the simplified reports eliminate the slightest objectivity based on facts.¹³ Here are some key samples of acute propaganda: “President D. Grybauskaitė demands of her allies that they are to deploy tanks and aircraft to Ukraine”,¹⁴ “Lithuanian and Polish mercenaries are actively participating in combat operations in Donbass – it is endeavored to legitimize their presence near the Russian border by establishing the Lithuanian and Polish battalion operated by NATO”,¹⁵ or “Lithuania provides training to Ukrainians in assault tactics”.¹⁶ Russian President Vladimir Putin can be considered the initiator of recent political propaganda, stating during his meeting with media representatives that the Maidan’s fighters had been trained at special military bases in Lithuania and Poland for a long time.¹⁷ Hence the media not only reflects but also strengthens and condenses the Kremlin’s policy.

A military aspect is mostly exploited to create an image of Lithuania as an anti-Russian state. The messages about NATO and U.S. military plans to defend their ally; about combined military exercises; about dislocation of organic assets, etc. are persistently incorporated into information space.¹⁸ Thus Lithuania’s endeavours to ensure security on the basis of allied military support are clearly and unambiguously viewed as anti-Russian actions. And this myth is not new; it has been a well-established tradition since the collapse of the Soviet Union, and is named as an “amber beachhead” of Lithuania and other Baltic States, which is used for Western aggression against Russia.¹⁹

¹³ Киев и Вильнюс договорились о сотрудничестве в военно-технической сфере. Литва пообещала поставить Украине вооружение <http://www.ntv.ru/novosti/1266831>, 2016 08 24; Литва готова помогать Украине вести войну, <http://www.ntv.ru/novosti/1204396>; 2016 08 24; ООН проведет неформальную встречу по Украине <http://www.aif.ru/politics/world/1134783>, 2016 08 25; Украина получит танки США, <https://rg.ru/2014/11/26/orujie.html>, 2016 08 25.

¹⁴ НАТО рвется к Днепру, <https://rg.ru/2014/09/04/nato-site.html>, 2016 08 26.

¹⁵ КППФ предлагает наказать страны, поставляющие оружие на Украину, <http://izvestia.ru/news/583884>, 2016 08 25.

¹⁶ Литовцы обучат украинских солдат наступательным действиям <https://rg.ru/2015/11/12/litva-site-anons.html>, 2016 08 26.

¹⁷ Главные заявления Путина по поводу событий на Украине, <http://www.ntv.ru/novosti/851819/>, 2016 08 27.

¹⁸ Литва попросила НАТО увеличить число солдат в Прибалтике, <https://rg.ru/2015/11/26/nato-site-anons.html>, 2016 08 27; Страны Балтии и Польша попросили НАТО усилить ПВО на их территориях <https://rg.ru/2016/06/13/strany-baltii-i-polsha-poprosili-nato-usilit-pvo-na-ih-territoriiah.html>, 2016 08 28; Литва намерена пустить американских военных на свои объекты, http://www.aif.ru/society/safety/litva_podtverdila_informaciyu_o_razmeshchenii_tyazhelyh_vooruzheniy_ssha, 2016 08 28.

¹⁹ Maliukevičius N., *Rusijos informacijos geopolitikos potencialas ir sklaida Lietuvoje*, Vilnius: Vilniaus universiteto leidykla, 2009, p. 45.

Touching upon propaganda techniques, we are able to point out certain innovative elements: constant airtime is set; sometimes several messages are broadcast in various contexts by day, while the main weight of propaganda is normally placed upon a title, for instance: “Vilnius will probably deploy U.S. air defence systems”, “Lithuania is hosting five military exercises”, “NATO is preparing a bridgehead for a ‘massive attack’ against Russia”, “American soldiers are disembarking in Lithuania”.²⁰ In this way, rigid trends of thought are established for a common user, thus communicating the only truth – that is, Lithuania groundlessly treats Russia as the main foe, while Lithuania’s initiatives to host allied military personnel in its territory pose a threat to Russia herself; therefore, Russia is forced to undertake adequate measures. At the same time, it is sought to prove that these efforts will not yield proper results, for in terms of military capabilities, it is impossible to defend this region. To prove this, one once again refers to an additional opinion (a quotation, withdrawn from the general context), expressed in 2000 by American military experts.²¹

Since the EU imposed sanctions on Russia, a special role, that of a prominent keeper of sustainable sanctions policy, has been ascribed to Lithuania. The headlines of reports and their content is constructed such that one can create an essential propaganda cliché – Lithuania is the main proponent of sanctions against Russia and the initiator of their extension. Even the news from Brussels is delivered in the form of statements made by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania Linas Linkevičius.²²

From the very beginning of the Maidan Revolution, Lithuanian President Dalia Grybauskaitė’s active position has attracted Russian mass media’s special attention, especially when, alongside the creation of a totally anti-Russian leader’s image, there were enormous attempts made to discredit her as a

²⁰ В ответ Вильнюс может разместить американскую систему ПРО на своей территории: <http://izvestia.ru/news/570393#ixzz4CHTMpXzXh><http://izvestia.ru/news/570393>, 2016 08 28; В Литве начинаются пять военных учений одновременно, http://www.aif.ru/society/safety/v_litve_nachinayutsya_pyat_voennyh_ucheniuy_odnovremenno, 2016 08 28; Клинецвич: НАТО готовит плацдарм для «глобального удара» по России, <http://izvestia.ru/news/616778>, 2016 08 29; Американские военные высадились в Литве, <http://www.ntv.ru/novosti/930237>, 2016 08 29.

²¹ Пентагон заявил о невозможности защитить Прибалтику, <https://rg.ru/2015/09/06/doclad-site.html>, 2016 09 30; России не о чем беспокоиться, Литва не нападет», <http://izvestia.ru/news/615727>; 2016 08 30.

²² Глава МИД Литвы призвал политически изолировать Россию, http://www.aif.ru/politics/world/glava_mid_litvy_prizval_politicheski_izolirovat_rossiyu, 2016 08 30; 2016 08 30; МИД Литвы выступил против отмены антироссийских санкций, <http://izvestia.ru/news/629428>, 2016 09 02; Литва опасается ослабления антироссийских санкций после Brexit, <http://izvestia.ru/news/619765>, 2016 09 02; Глава МИД Литвы не видит причин для ослабления санкций против России, <http://www.ntv.ru/novosti/1295958>, 2016 09 03; МИД Литвы поддержал санкции США в отношении России Литва весной начнет заново обсуждение санкций против РФ, <http://www.aif.ru/money/economy/1465002>, 2016 09 03.

dishonest politician. In the context of Lithuania's presidential elections in 2014, a flow of propaganda focused mainly on her biography, that is, on a concealed relationship with the KGB; one referred to local sources and Russian experts to reinforce persuasiveness and credibility of the information provided.²³ Later on, this information becomes affixed to any message connected with the state's leader. The process of building up an image of an anti-Russian political leader was in turn accelerated by *NTV* journalist Dmitry Kiselyov's annulment of the Lithuanian state award and Tatyana Mitkova's refusal of the analogous state award as a sign of solidarity with D. Kiselyov.²⁴ However, highly negative evaluations concerning the President of Lithuania were developed in the media after a report about Russia possessing the features of a terrorist state; this step was named as "the biggest scandal that shocked the world" and argued as an intention of the President – who had promised a bright future during the presidential elections – to cover the country's internal problems: economic crisis, increasing unemployment rates, GDP decline.²⁵

To sum up, we can say that a hyperbolized image of Lithuania's hostility toward Russia communicates to its internal users that a small country, on a confrontational path with a neighbouring country of major power, is misleading, non-constructive, and unpromising.

4. A Falsifier of History

Not only does the domain of propaganda activity embrace today's realities, but it also refers to history, more precisely, it mainly concentrates on two historical facts – World War II (the Great Patriotic War) and the greatest geopolitical catastrophe (the collapse of the Soviet Union).

²³ Президент Литвы напугала Прибалтику «российской угрозой», <http://www.ntv.ru/novosti/1349896/>, 2016 09 05; Президент Литвы заявила о нежелании общаться с Путиным, <http://www.aif.ru/politics/world/1400057>, 2016 09 05; Кандидат на вылет: президент Литвы оказалась в центре скандала с КГБ, <http://www.ntv.ru/novosti/888757>, 2016 09 05.

²⁴ Ведущая НТВ Татьяна Миткова отказалась от госнаграды Литвы в знак солидарности с Киселёвым, <http://www.ntv.ru/novosti/883996/>, 2016 09 10.

²⁵ Обвинившая Россию в терроризме президент Литвы старательно скрывает свое партийное прошлое; <http://www.ntv.ru/novosti/1266500/>, 2016 09 09; Нарышкин предрек президенту Литвы участь "изгоя", <https://rg.ru/2014/11/25/narishkin-site.html>, 2016 09 09; Президент Литвы вновь обрушилась на Россию с обвинениями, Президент Литвы Даля Грибаускайте, которая накануне оказалась в центре скандала из-за оскорбительной речи в адрес РФ, продолжила грубую антироссийскую риторику. <http://www.ntv.ru/novosti/1265684>, 2016 09 09; Когда президент Литвы Грибаускайте была агентом КГБ, она была другой, Вести. Эфир от 31.03.2015 (17:00) https://russia.tv/video/show/brand_id/5402/episode_id/1186201/#, 2016 09 11; Депутат Государственной думы Шамсаил Саралиев – о тех, кто подрывает стабильность в стране <http://izvestia.ru/news/585398>, 2016 09 11.

Needless to say, Russia's politics of history has been monopolized, subordinated to the state's interests, and used as a tool for internal and international policies.²⁶ It must be noted that a thematic paradigm of history with respect to the Baltic States, at least in the Russian press, has increasingly become the subject of scrutiny only amid V. Putin's presidential terms.²⁷ Lithuania's image is clear – a falsifier of history. This image is created by referring to the following topics: Lithuania's incorporation into the Soviet Union, Holocaust, post-war resistance, war commemorations, veterans, Lithuania's withdrawal from the Soviet Union, and the highly exploited events of January 13, 1991.

According to Polish researcher Maria Domańska, martyrology of the Great Patriotic War and of the victory over Nazism is pivotal in the history politics of Russia and the only national myth uniting Russian society.²⁸ And those attempting to revise Russia's treatment of this historical event enter a list of falsifiers of the historical truth.²⁹ The first myth being created by the propaganda apparatus is that Lithuania's accession to the Soviet Union in 1940 – 1941 was not an occupation but a legitimate act inspired by the people's determination.

To enhance persuasiveness, the representatives of state scientific institutions are involved in the dimension of propaganda dissemination and become spreaders of ideologized history. One of the examples is that Lithuania's incorporation into the Soviet Union is treated by simple and primitive clichés of historian Juri Zhukov at the Institute of Russian History: semi-fascist Lithuania's (mentioned alongside Latvia and Estonia) regime undermined the people's credibility and was overthrown; free democratic elections were held in the country; the newly formed parliament decided to join the Soviet Union, and therefore this accession should be regarded as a legitimate act.³⁰ The process of contriving this myth is purposeful, however, it cannot be called persistent and smooth since poet and translator Igor Koroulov, comparing the cases of inclusion of Crimea and the Baltic States, stated in *Izvestia* that the latter were

²⁶ Lopata R., Rusijos istorijos politika, *Politologija*, 2013/4 (72), p. 3–42; Андрей Колесников, Знание истории или историческая политика, <http://carnegie.ru/2016/08/17/ru-64344/j3p6>; 2016 09 12.

²⁷ Denisenko (note 4), p. 149.

²⁸ Maria Domańska, Russia marks the 70th anniversary of the victory over Nazism: What significance does it have in an epoch of global confrontation?, *OSW Commentary*, <http://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/osw-commentary/2015-05-20/russia-marks-70th-anniversary-victory-over-nazism-what>, 2016 09 12.

²⁹ Путин сравнил пересмотр итогов Второй мировой войны с ящиком Пандоры, <http://www.ntv.ru/novosti/1657366>; 2016 09 15; Историки отмечают рост фальсификаций спустя 70 лет после Победы, <http://izvestia.ru/news/584023>, 2016 09 14; Война: горячий архив, <https://rg.ru/2015/06/22/artizov.html>, 2016 09 12.

³⁰ Еще шесть вопросов историку о пакте Молотова-Риббентропа, http://www.aif.ru/society/history/shest_voprosov_istoriku_o_pakte_molotova-ribbentropa Александр, 2016 09 16.

forcefully incorporated into the Soviet Union; it is worth noting that right here the editorial board of *Izvestia* were reinsured by writing a classic phrase – “the author’s opinion might not coincide with the editorial board”.³¹ Later, Alexander Rosenbaum – a renowned poet, composer, singer – expressed an analogous stance, adding that Russia has to apologize and acknowledge its guilt for having occupied the Baltic States.³²

The issue of the Holocaust was accentuated in the discourse of propaganda. Here, the diligently working editorial board of *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, which again referred to Lithuanian sources and historians’ comments, imposed its views on the reader that in Lithuania, one is afraid of or reluctant to talk about and examine the Holocaust.³³ In turn, the post-war partisan “forest brothers” are defined not as freedom fighters, but as fascist supporters; such considerations were inspired when representatives of the repressive structures of the Soviet Union received a court decision.³⁴

Noticeably, the suppressed urgency of territorial issues became more vital in the midst of the Maidan Revolution. Here a newspaper *Izvestia* reporter, alongside a wide spectrum of various ideas, stated that “Warsaw and Vilnius had dethroned Stalin and Gorbachev, and therefore this gave a moral right to reconsider border-related issues as Klaipėda went to Lithuania thanks to Stalin”.³⁵ Although Russian mass media is trying, in the public domain, to carefully record everything that has to do with World War II in Lithuania, it does not find, in particular, many proper stories. Therefore, it seeks to fill even the slightest message with propaganda; for instance, providing information about the death of Leonid Borodin in Vilnius, the last hero of the Soviet Union in the Baltic States, it added that recently the war veteran, “under the conditions of total anti-Russian and anti-Soviet propaganda”, sought to “pass spiritual values to the youth”, yet being forced to conceal his awards because of possible pro-

³¹ Иллюзия легитимности <http://izvestia.ru/news/588059>, 2016 09 16.

³² Александр Розенбаум: Россию никогда не оставят в покое, http://www.aif.ru/culture/person/alexandr_rozenbaum_rossiyu_nikogda_ne_ostavyat_v_pokoe, 2016 09 16.

³³ Turimas omenyje Rūtos Vanagaitės knygos „Mūšiškai“ aptarimas. Вильнюс прячет концы. Историк: Расследование Холокоста в Литве никогда не произойдет, <https://rg.ru/2016/02/04/istorik-rassledovanie-holokosta-v-litve-nikogda-ne-proizojdet.html>, 2016 09 21; Власти Литвы отказались рассказывать в школах о Холокосте. <https://rg.ru/2016/02/02/vlasti-lityv-otkazalis-rasskazivat-v-shkolah-o-holokoste.html>, 2016 09 21.

³⁴ В Литве осудили экс-сотрудника КГБ, боровшегося с «лесными братьями», <http://www.ntv.ru/novosti/1401191/>, 2016 09 22; Литовские «лесные братья» не представляли свой народ, <http://www.kompravda.eu/daily/26451/3321420/>, 2016 09 25.

³⁵ Европа неблагодарная. Что было бы, отбрось мы Гитлера ровно до своих границ, http://www.aif.ru/society/history/evropa_neblagodarnaya_chno_bylo_by_otbros_my_gitlera_rovno_do_svoih_granic 2016 09 20; Как делили Европу после 1945 г. Инфографика, <http://www.aif.ru/dontknows/infographics/1479608>, 2016 09 20; Дипломатия без газа, <http://izvestia.ru/news/616379>, 2016 09 20.

blems with the authorities”³⁶

Propaganda is realized by distorting, ignoring, and falsifying the historical facts – here is one vivid example, that claims SS legion activities in “Pri-baltika” (the Baltic States), although it is known that such a unit was not set up in Lithuania. In another instance, the message about functionality of such a unit ends in a report regarding the judgment being carried out against KGB officer Ylya Vorobyov, who participated in arresting one of the resistance leaders, Adolfas Ramanauskas – Vanagas.³⁷ As usual, the media in the afore-mentioned context marks Lithuania’s non-participation in the May 9 Victory Day events in Russia, yet we can say that this fact is not widely exploited; Lithuania is mostly mentioned not in headlines but in general contexts.³⁸

The beginning of the military conflict in Ukraine “coincided” with renewed considerations³⁹ about the issues of Lithuania’s liberation from the Soviet Union. In the first place, it once again sought to explain to the population at large “what actually happened” near the TV Tower on January 13, 1991, in Lithuania. In this case, it is not restricted to messages; NTV referred to the documentary “Sentenced. Trap for Alfa Group”. The plotline is not new. Having focused on the participants⁴⁰ of the 1991 events in Vilnius, it is shown how Lithuania flourished in the Soviet Union era; how territories (Klaipėda, Vilnius and the Vilnius Region) were returned; and how “separatists”, “nationalists”, “storm troopers” (trained by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency instructors) of the Lithuanian independence movement, *Sąjūdis*, provoked the tragic events. The film, wherein a number of scenes showing episodes of the Maidan Revolution are embedded, concludes that both revolutions were exe-

³⁶ В Литве скончался последний из проживавших в Прибалтике Героев Советского Союза Леонид Бородин https://www.1tv.ru/news/2015/02/05/26537v_litve_skonchalsya_posledniy_iz_prozhivavshih_v_pribaltike_geroev_sovetskogo_soyuza_leonid_borodin; 2016 09 22; Звезда связала Вильнюс и Донецк <https://rg.ru/2015/02/06/geroy.html>, 2016 09 22.

³⁷ Война с прошлым: в Прибалтике решили закрыть глаза на преступления СС, <http://www.ntv.ru/povosti/1622113/>, 2016 09 23. В Москве назвали установку памятника «лесным братьям» в Латвии героизацией нацизма, <http://www.ntv.ru/novosti/1530036/>, 2016 09 23, 2016 09 24.

³⁸ Литовские дипломаты вновь не приедут на парад Победы в Москву 9 мая, http://www.aif.ru/society/history/litovskie_diplomaty_vnov_ne_priedut_na_parad_pobedy_v_moskvu_9_maya, 2016 09 21; На парад Победы в Москве приедет племянник Шарля де Голля, <http://izvestia.ru/news/586268>, 2016 09 21.

³⁹ „NTV“ televizijoje pakartotinai rodomas 2007 m. sukurtas propogandinis filmas „*Neišmoktos pamokos. Pabaltijis*“; Невыученные уроки. Прибалтика, https://russia.tv/video/show/brand_id/4830/episode_id/105994, 2016 09 21.

⁴⁰ Mikhail Golovатов, then deputy chief of Alfa Group, a special forces unit within the KGB’s First Chief Directorate; in 1991, belonging to the Communist Party of Lithuania, the representatives of the “legitimate” government were: First Secretary Algimantas Naudžiūnas, Second Secretary Vladislavas Švedas, Chief Prosecutor of the Lithuanian SSR Antanas Petrauskas, Vilnius garrison commander Vladimir Ushkopchik, and others.

cuted according to an identical scenario.⁴¹ Other messages with their load of propaganda, content, and patterned reasoning did not differ much but emphasized a parallel between the 1991 events in Vilnius and the Maidan Revolution in Ukraine, as well as colour revolutions in Georgia and Kyrgyzstan.⁴²

Also was widely debated the initiative of the ruling political party, *United Russia*, to apply to the prosecutor's office in conjunction with withdrawal of the Baltic States from the Soviet Union.⁴³ In the newspaper *Argumenty i Fakty*, political scientist and expert Oleg Matveychev argues that Crimea was transferred illegally to Ukraine in 1954, violating laws, and that the Baltic States withdrawal from the Soviet Union is an analogous case of unlawful activity.⁴⁴ It is true that neither Russia's Prosecutor General's Office nor the Kremlin⁴⁵ furthered this initiative, yet the message was broadcast to the non-critical thinking addressee, once again highlighting this political myth.

Having considered the historical past and combined it with today's issues, this image of a falsifier of history foists two overarching ideas on Russian society – that is, it disclaims the idea of Lithuania's independence, which was realized in the twentieth century, and this in turn creates substantiated possibilities for Russia, as the successor of the Soviet Union, to make ostensibly legal, territorial pretentions to this former integral part.

5. A Failing and Non-influential State

This image is being created and developed quite widely, yet political and socio-economic issues are mostly used, whose content constitutes mythical implications that Lithuania, located on the outskirts of Europe, has no real political influence in international politics, that is, it completely serves the USA

⁴¹ Приговоренные. Капкан для группы „Альфа“, <http://www.ntv.ru/peredacha/Prigovorennye/last24545604/>, 2016 09 22.

⁴² Галина Сапожникова, 25 лет событиям в Вильнюсе: Шесть уроков истории, которые мы не должны забыть, <http://www.kompravda.eu/daily/26479/3349619/>, 2016 09 21; Сценарии под копирку, <https://rg.ru/2016/06/02/galina-sapozhnikova-prezentovala-v-rime-knigu-o-prestupleniiah-v-litve.html>, 2016 09 23; Šis teiginys papildomas nauju mitininiu pasakojimu, kad Ukrainos „Dešiniojo sektoriaus“ kovotojai (vadinami smogikais) buvo rengiami 20 metų ruošiami Lietuvoje, Estijoje, Latvijoje ir Lenkijoje. Радикалы в масках запугивают жителей Восточной Украины, требуя «покаяться», <http://www.ntv.ru/novosti/863217>, 2016 09 24.

⁴³ Авторы запроса о независимости Прибалтики объяснили суть своей инициативы <http://www.ntv.ru/novosti/1434480>, 2016 09 23.

⁴⁴ Профилактические действия. Эксперт о незаконности выхода стран Балтии из СССР, http://www.aif.ru/politics/world/preventivnye_deystviya_ekspert_o_nezakonnosti_vyhoda_stran_baltii_iz_sss, 2016 09 23.

⁴⁵ В Кремле не поняли сути инициативы проверить законность выхода Прибалтики из СССР, <http://www.ntv.ru/novosti/1434394>, 2016 09 23.

and EU interests, that nationalism is the dominant ideology in the country, that the corrupt government does not represent the people's interests, and that an economic and social situation in the country is portrayed as critical. Russian mass media is trying to interpret the reports pertaining to independent Lithuania's political life in negative tonalities by referring to a fairly patterned way of those affected in the context of social influence and persuasion. In this area, the press has its vital interest. Here, in *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, in one of the interviews with Vladimir Lepiochin, director of the Eurasian Economic Development Institute, he spawned a long series of mythical claims: "Lithuania does not receive anything from the West, but loses more because of 'its aggressive stance against Russia'", "the authorities do not protect the nation's interests in Brussels", "Lithuanian authorities are afraid of the Russian-speaking population in resistance", "migrants will become the country's main owners".⁴⁶ On the occasion of the commemoration of the 98th anniversary of Lithuania's Independence, *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, in turn, cites part of Vytautas Landsbergis' speech naming the problem of corruption in the country. The image is created that the authorities in Lithuania are corrupted.⁴⁷ Another message about the bankruptcy of the "Lithuanian Shipping Company" is treated as "shortsightedness of the political elite and the government's constant blunders" and concludes that "this is an indicator of the state of the whole authorities".⁴⁸

The consequences of the EU's sanctions policy occupy a central position in the evaluation of economic issues. Properly speaking, the myth being created is that Lithuanian economy suffered huge losses due to Russia's counter-sanctions; therefore, one should place the blame on local politicians who had campaigned for imposing sanctions. For a long time, the items of television news and newspaper articles have declared almost an apocalyptic situation – "Russia's embargo could destroy Lithuanian cattle breeding", "Lithuania failed to find new markets for dairy products intended for Russia", "the farmers' orga-

⁴⁶ Литовская элита превратила народ в заложников Евросоюза, Верхушка балтийской страны уже ничего не решает ни в экономике, ни в политике, <http://www.kompravda.eu/daily/26543.4/3559673/>, 2016 09 23.

⁴⁷ Политик: Коррупция и воровство в Литве стали нормой, <https://rg.ru/2016/02/17/politik-korrupciia-i-vorovstvo-v-litve-stali-normoj.html>, 2016 09 24.

⁴⁸ Из морской державы Литва превратилась в государство у моря, <http://www.kompravda.eu/daily/26514/3383913/>, 2016 09 24.

nized massive demonstration paralyzed the Lithuanian capital”.⁴⁹ The dynamics of this myth gained momentum when Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev claimed that agricultural producers of Lithuania and other Baltic States were going bankrupt owing to the introduced sanctions.⁵⁰ In the end, it was stated that Lithuanian dairy products could be in great demand exclusively in Russia.⁵¹ However, when Lithuanian agriculture did not collapse, one maintained that it survived because of illegal Lithuanian exports through third countries.⁵² As usual, these claims are corroborated by local official sources – data provided by analysts working at the Lithuanian Department of Statistics and at Swedbank, which is, it goes without saying, being interpreted respectively.

The gap between reality and interpretation is revealed in another report, when Nikolay Tsukanov, governor of the Russian Baltic exclave of Kaliningrad, stated during Putin’s stay in Kaliningrad that due to emigration the number of Lithuanian people decreased by 1.4 million, while the country’s leader offered the rest to come to Russia.⁵³ Lithuania’s demographic problem is also being reviewed in the media since it is conducive to forming a negative image of the country. In this case, the statistics are provided according to the European Commission’s data, but interpretation of the reasons runs in a different direction, for instance, in the Soviet Union there lived 3.5 million, and over the next 45 years, the population of Lithuania will decrease by 38 per cent; among some of these reasons it is stated that discriminatory policies (in this case, the general reasons common to all the Baltic States are set forth), targeting the Russian-speaking people in the ninth decade of the twentieth century, forced them to emigrate.⁵⁴

According to Russian mass media, the Lithuanian authorities have encountered major problems, causing people’s “massive” discontent in almost all

⁴⁹ Эмбарго России на ввоз продуктов может уничтожить животноводство Литвы, <http://www.ntv.ru/novosti/1198778>, 2016 09 24; Литва не смогла найти замену российскому рынку для продажи молока, <https://rg.ru/2015/08/07/moloko-site-anons.html>; Пострадавшая от российских санкций Литва просит у ЕК 50 млн евро компенсации, <http://www.ntv.ru/novosti/1207757>; Анита КАЛЕЯ, Литва стремительно теряет рынок России для сбыта своей продукции, <http://www.kompravda.eu/online/news/2271110>, 2016 09 25.

⁵⁰ Медведев укорил страны Прибалтики в создании из Москвы «образа врага», <http://www.ntv.ru/novosti/1423379/>, 2016 09 25.

⁵¹ Литовская молочная продукция может быть востребована только в России <http://www.kompravda.eu/daily/26512.5/3381259/>, 2016 09 25.

⁵² Год без хамона и пармезана. К чему привели продуктовые санкции? http://www.aif.ru/money/market/god_bez_hamona_i_parmezana_k_chemu_priveli_produktovye_sankcii, 2016 09 26.

⁵³ Путин пригласил жителей Литвы приезжать в Россию, <http://www.ntv.ru/novosti/1449496/>, 2016 09 26.

⁵⁴ Население Прибалтики сократится на треть <https://rg.ru/2015/05/13/pribaltika-site.html>, 2016 09 27. Литва столкнулась с катастрофическим сокращением численности населения, <https://rg.ru/2016/07/11/litva-stolknulas-s-katastroficheskim-sokrashcheniem-chislennosti-naseleniia.html>, 2016 09 27.

spheres of the state: teachers are taking part in massive strikes, demanding higher salaries;⁵⁵ there is a great deal of social inequality, inasmuch as more than 610 thousand residents⁵⁶ are below the poverty line; the issues related to national minorities (Russian, Polish) are not being resolved. Not only do the Lithuanian authorities tolerate fascist ideas, but they also propagate this ideology – that is, Lithuanian nationalism is nothing but fascist ideology.⁵⁷

Lithuania's image of a failing state without potential power is virtually argued – Lithuania destroyed what was achieved in Soviet times, interrupted beneficial relations with Russia, and Lithuania's membership in the EU did not ensure welfare for the general public. Therefore, for this reason, massive emigration is taking place; there is growing dissatisfaction with the authorities; there is profound social exclusion; and ethnic minorities are being discriminated against.

Conclusions

Being consistently and purposefully exploited in Russian mass media (with almost no alternative sources), the three major negative images of Lithuania have practically become the undisputed truth for a considerable part of Russian citizenry. These negative images produce some of the principal elements for the population at large: first, being on the front line of the Western coalition, Lithuania, notwithstanding the interrupted relations with Russia, remains in the area of interest as part of its external world; second, for Russia as the successor of the Soviet Union, liberation of once dependent territories (a parallel of Lithuania and Ukraine) is performed according to the unchangeable scenario, that is, by anti-constitutional means when a handful of nationalist radicals organize an overthrow of legitimate authority. However, in historical and modern times, the return of temporary withdrawn territories to Russia always occurs in a legal manner – having “asked” the nation's opinion. This presupposes another generalizing idea about an inor-

⁵⁵ В Литве поднимается волна народного возмущения политикой государства в области образования <http://www.kp.md/daily/26493/3362862/>, 2016 10 02.

⁵⁶ На капусте и моркови. Тысячи литовцев и эстонцев будут голодать на Рождество, <https://rg.ru/2014/11/26/nishie-site.html>, 2016 10 03.

⁵⁷ Сегодня в Литве прошел митинг в защиту школ нацменьшинств, [http://www.1tv.ru/news/2015/06/01/18439-segodnya_v_litve_proshel_miting_v_zaschitu_shkol_natsmeshinstv](http://www.1tv.ru/news/2015/06/01/18439-segodnya_v_litve_proshel_miting_v_zaschitu_shkol_natsmeshinstv;); 2016 10 11; Кто и почему ощущает в Литве дискриминацию, <http://www.kompravda.eu/daily/26519/3535746/>, 2016 10 18; Очередной виток нацистских настроений в Литве, http://www.1tv.ru/news/2015/03/13/21165-ocherednoy_vitok_natsistskih_nastroeniy_v_litve, 2016 10 13.

ganic and transient status of Lithuania's autonomy and about its dependency on the Western world.

All this is achieved by the destructive power of mass media, utilizing primitive but effective means in contriving virtual stories, fabricating and concocting facts, and concentrating on a simplified discourse (prophetic titles and in some cases, prison jargon) easily understood by ordinary citizens. Hence the majority of those adhering to Lithuania's image provide the Kremlin with broad possibilities of manipulation in constructing the strategy and tactics of geopolitical instability. On the other hand, one should not forget that Lithuania's negative image serves Russian society to justify Putin's created political system and demonstrate its superiority over the values of the Western world.

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