

Written evidence submitted by Ben Nimmo and Dr Jonathan Eyal

Russia's information warfare - airbrushing reality

Authors

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This work is submitted in a personal capacity by both authors.

Abstract

1. Russia is conducting a coordinated but undeclared information campaign against the United Kingdom, attempting to influence the UK's domestic debate on key issues in order to produce an outcome of benefit to Russia. This campaign is lobbying for a British exit from the EU, the scrapping of Trident, and a Scottish exit from the Union - all outcomes which would weaken the UK and give Russia a freer hand in world affairs. This is unacceptable behaviour by a foreign government.

2. The precise impact of this behaviour is hard to measure. However, Russian claims that the Scottish independence referendum was fixed certainly fuelled the broader campaign to question the vote,¹ and the Kremlin-funded media certainly amplified and expanded on those claims.² Anecdotal evidence supports the thesis that this coverage had at least some degree of impact on some individual voters;³ the degree to which the disinformation has penetrated different audiences merits further study.

3. Moreover, regardless of the *impact* of this disinformation, the *fact* that a disinformation campaign is being conducted by Russian government outlets remains demonstrably the case; that case is set out below. This being so, appropriate legal and diplomatic responses should be brought to bear both on the direct actors in the disinformation campaign, and on the Russian government more broadly.

Conduct of the campaign: airbrushing reality

4. Russia's information warfare in the UK can best be thought of as an attempt to airbrush reality. Objective reality - the actual relationship between majority and minority, mainstream and fringe - is systematically replaced by a pseudo-reality in which minorities who echo the Kremlin's strategic priorities are presented as the majority, and the genuine majority is presented as a fringe, if it is presented at all.

¹ <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2014/sep/22/scottish-referendum-vote-rigging-claims-recount-petitions>

² See The Guardian's analysis of RT's referendum coverage:

<http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2014/sep/19/russia-calls-foul-scottish-referendum>

³ Such as the "Yes" voter who assured one of our authors that the results of the independence referendum had been rigged, "And I know that's true because I saw the Russian observer say so on RT."

5. The chief communicators of this airbrushed reality are the Kremlin-funded media outlets RT (formerly Russia Today) and Sputnik.

6. Both RT and Sputnik are funded by the Russian government. RT's official budget⁴ stood at 13.85 billion rubles in 2015;⁵ the equivalent figure for Sputnik's parent organisation, the Rossiya Segodnya news agency (which also incorporates the Russian-language RIA Novosti), stood at 5.8 billion rubles.⁶

7. RT compares itself explicitly with other international public-service broadcasters, notably the BBC and U.S. stations such as Radio Free Europe. However, both RT and Sputnik regularly and systematically violate journalistic standards in a way which serves the Kremlin's interests. They achieve their effect by giving disproportionate coverage to extremist politicians, "experts" of dubious background, and mainstream politicians whose views chime with the Kremlin's chosen narratives.⁷

8. Such disproportionate coverage is a violation of Ofcom's standards, which state, inter alia, that "Due impartiality on matters of political or industrial controversy and matters relating to current public policy must be preserved on the part of any person providing a service (...). This may be achieved within a programme or over a series of programmes taken as a whole,"⁸ and that "views must also be presented with due weight over appropriate time frames".⁹ However, given that much of the RT and Sputnik coverage is presented on the internet, it largely falls outside Ofcom's remit.

Pushing for Brexit

9. The most notable and frequently-practised violation is the practice of allocating disproportionate coverage to speakers who echo the Kremlin's preferred narratives on issues such as Brexit (supported by the Kremlin), Scottish independence (supported), Trident renewal (opposed) and the report on the murder of Alexander Litvinenko (opposed).

10. For example, Sputnik's 2 February report on the outcome of talks between European Council President Donald Tusk and the Prime Minister carried the clearly partisan headline "Cameron's long-awaited Brexit deal plans branded trivial by critics".¹⁰ Other than the protagonists in the story - Tusk and the Prime Minister - the report quoted two commentators: Matthew Elliott, chief executive of Vote Leave, and UKIP MEP Jane Collins. There were no quotes from pro-EU lobbyists, giving the impression that Tusk's proposals had been universally rejected by critics.

⁴ According to RT's own reporting. See "More money, more problems?" RT, 19 February 2015. < <https://www.rt.com/op-edge/233147-media-rt-financing-myths-facts/>>, accessed on 2 February 2016. The 2016 budget stands at 19 billion rubles, an increase of almost 50% in ruble terms.

⁵ Equivalent to approximately £215 million in October 2014, before the ruble collapsed.

⁶ According to RT, "More money, more problems?", op. cit.

⁷ It should be noted that not all of these speakers may be aware of the role they are playing; some are likely to be unaware of the source and nature of the disinformation which they transmit.

⁸ Ofcom Code 5.5

⁹ Ofcom Code 5.7

¹⁰ Report online at < <http://sputniknews.com/europe/20160202/1034093305/cameron-tusk-brexit-deal.html>>, accessed on 2 February 2016.

11. For comparison, the Reuters report on the same issue quoted Elliott, of the anti-EU campaign, and the chairman of the Stronger In campaign, Stuart Rose.¹¹ This is a genuinely balanced report; Sputnik's is not.

12. Subsequent coverage by Sputnik included a stand-alone report on what Nigel Farage thought of the proposed deal; a stand-alone report on what Professor Patrick Minford, a consistent Eurosceptic, thought of the deal; and a report saying that banks were "scaremongering" by warning of currency shocks in the event of a Brexit. RT's reporting featured an interview with leading Out campaigner Robert Oulds, an anti-EU opinion piece by former Greek finance minister Yanis Varoufakis, and quotes from multiple UKIP sources attacking the deal. Neither outlet gave similar coverage to any commentators arguing in favour of staying in.

Coverage for UKIP

13. More generally, UKIP appears to benefit from disproportionate coverage and air time on RT, especially its "Op-Edge" opinion and talk show. For example, between June 2014 and June 2015, Op-Edge conducted 20 interviews with members of the European Parliament of all persuasions. Six of the interviews were given to UKIP MEPs; by contrast, just one was given to a member of the European People's Party (EPP), the Christian Democrat group which is the largest in the parliament (Fig. 1).

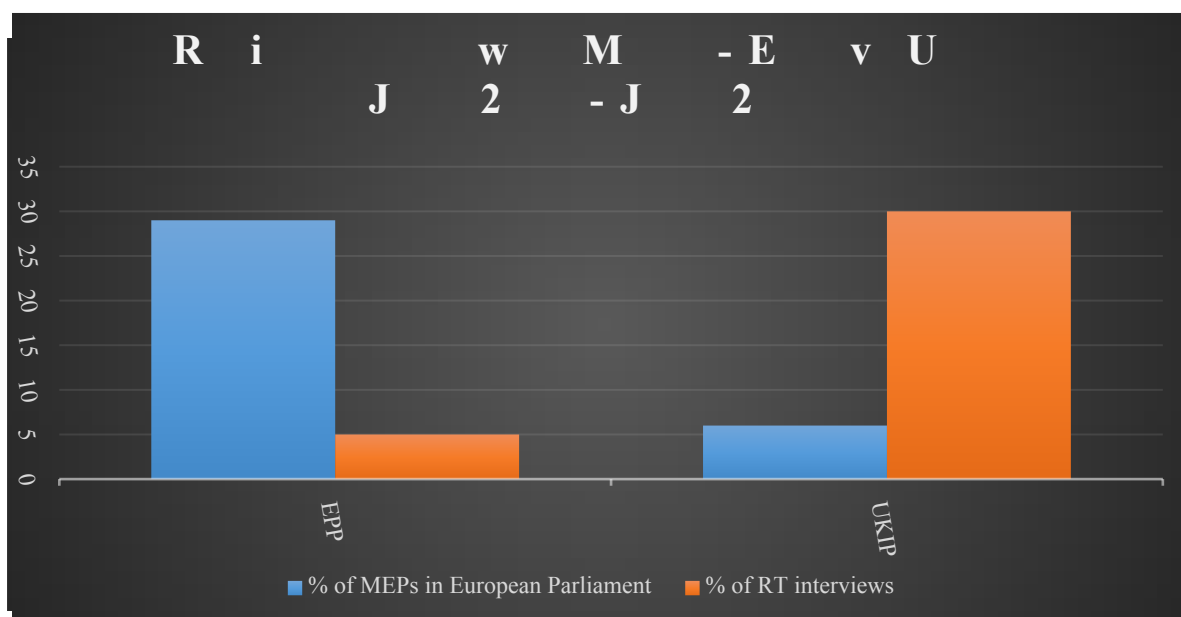


Fig.1

14. For anyone familiar with the European Parliament - as both the authors of this paper are - this is a remarkable editorial choice. In terms of the legislative process, political influence is measured by 1) the number of MEPs a group controls, and 2) the number of committee chairs and vice chairs it nominates. The EPP is the largest fraction, and its members chair committees including foreign affairs, budgetary control and agriculture.¹² UKIP belongs to

¹¹ See "Tusk's plan to keep Britain in EU draws mixed response," Reuters, 2 February 2016, online at <<http://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-britain-eu-idUKKCN0VB005>>, accessed on 2 February 2016.

¹² Information on EP committees can be found online at <<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/committees/en/parliamentary-committees.html>>

the EFDD, one of the smallest fractions, and its members do not chair or vice-chair any committees at all.

15. The editorial decision to give such prominence to a relatively un-influential group, at the expense of a much more influential one, can only realistically be explained by a desire to promote the messages of that group. In other words, the reporting bias is not only systematic, but deliberate.

The Labour leadership campaign

16. A similar bias is evident in RT's coverage of the Labour leadership election. While relatively neutral in the early stages of the process, it kicked into high gear when Jeremy Corbyn declared his candidacy. RT gave Corbyn a prominence which eclipsed the other three contenders, put him on a par with the Prime Minister in the quantity of coverage, and even outdid Cameron in supportive quality.

17. Between 1 June and 10 August 2015, RT headlined 25 stories with Corbyn's name, compared with 32 covering Cameron (see Fig 2).¹³ However, of Cameron's 32 headlines, 16 were positive or neutral, while 16 were negative, a proportion of 50% positive. Of the 25 headlines bearing Corbyn's name, however, 21 were positive or neutral, while just four were negative - a proportion of 84% positive.¹⁴

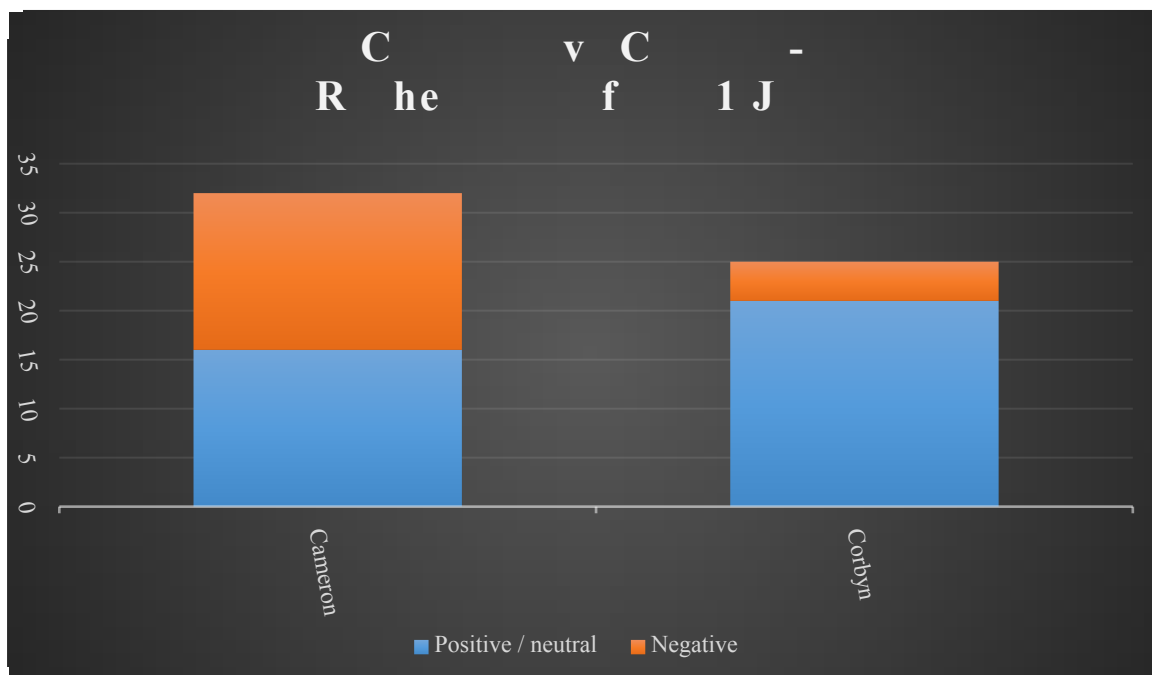


Fig. 2

18. Such a high proportion of supportive headlines is in itself strongly indicative of a systematic bias. This indication is reinforced by the treatment meted out to Corbyn's rivals for the leadership, Andy Burnham, Yvette Cooper and Liz Kendall.

¹³ All statistics were generated by searching the full name of the candidate in question on the RT website. As such, these figures relate to coverage on the RT site, rather than air time.

¹⁴ Positive / neutral: praising the subject's policies, reporting on them without further comment, or reporting comments favourable to the subject. Negative: criticising the subject or reporting comments critical of the subject.

19. The overwhelming majority of RT's coverage of the Labour race was devoted to Corbyn. Where his name featured in 25 RT online headlines between 1 June and 10 August, Cooper was headlined twice, Kendall once and Burnham none at all.¹⁵

20. This imbalance was not confined to the headlines. As Fig. 3 shows, Corbyn was mentioned in RT's news reports more than twice as often as any of his rivals. His photo was shown six times more often than those of all his rivals put together, and he was interviewed twice, while his opponents were not interviewed at all.

21. Even these figures tend to understate the prominence he was given. On roughly half the occasions on which the other candidates were mentioned, the story was about Corbyn, but one line had been added to list the other contenders.

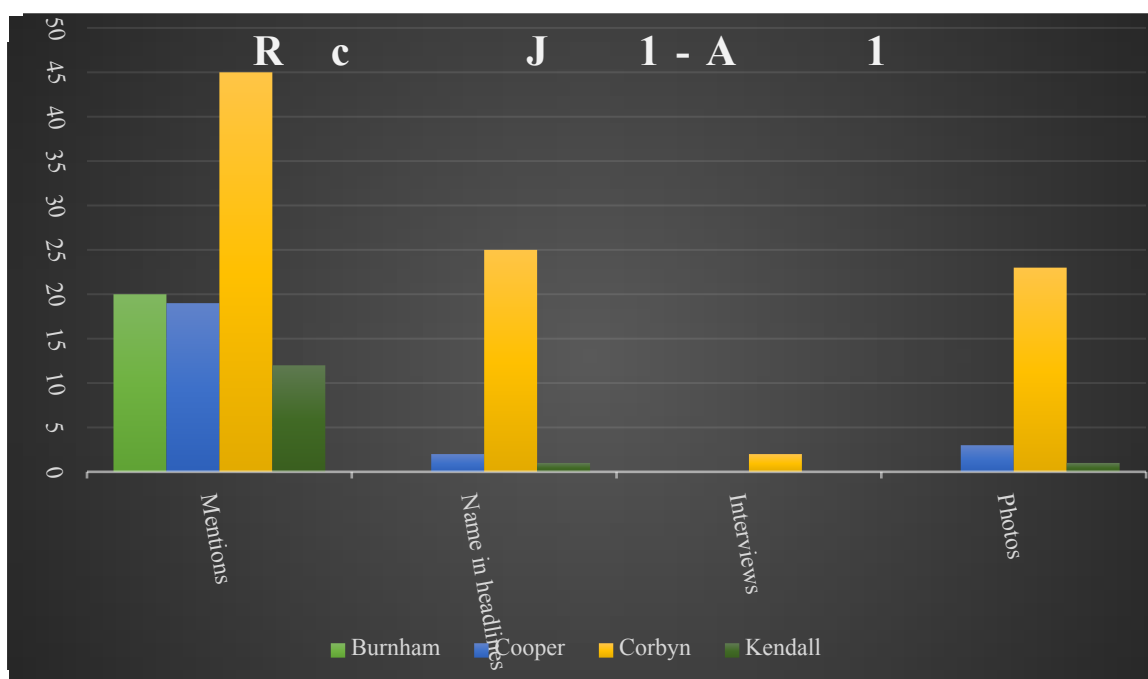


Fig. 3

22. It could be argued that Corbyn's prominence was a result of the surprise nature of his candidacy: RT is not the only channel to have paid more attention to the leadership contest since he threw his hat into the ring. However, it is instructive to compare RT's online coverage in this respect with the BBC website (Fig. 4):

¹⁵ Burnham's came close when he was headlined as a "Labour MP" in a report on 10 August, but his name was not mentioned in the headline. On two occasions, Corbyn was named a "Labour MP" in headlines; for the sake of consistency, these instances have not been taken into account.

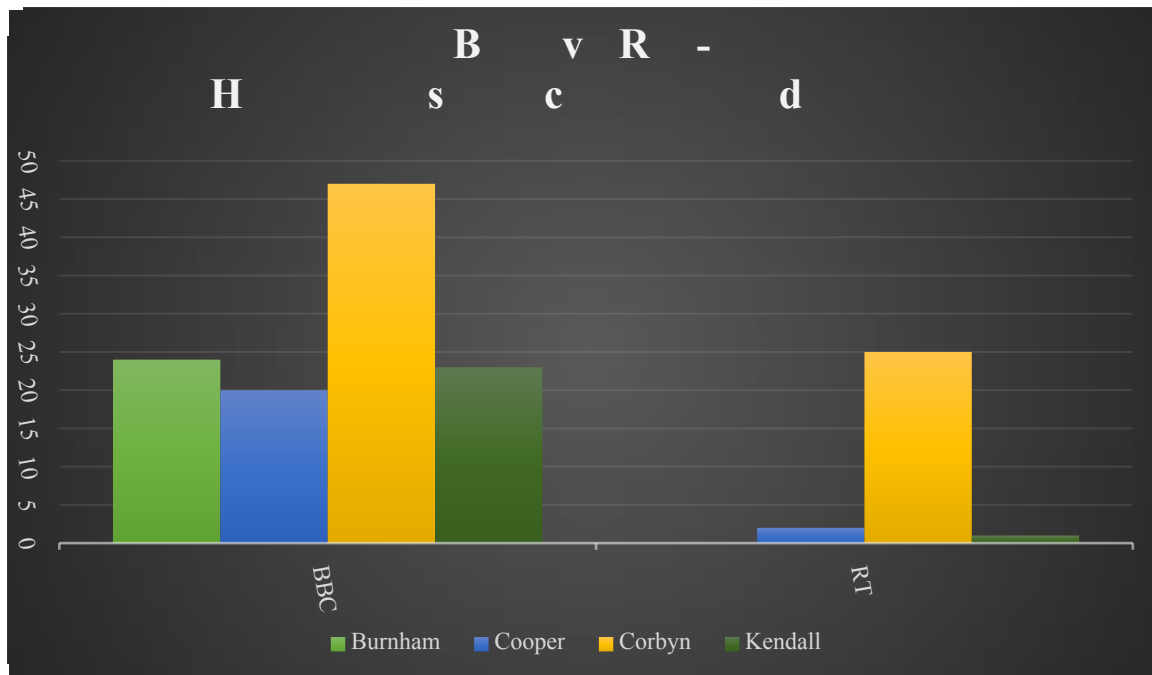


Fig. 4

23. Corbyn was the most-headlined candidate on both websites,¹⁶ but he accounted for roughly 43% of the headlines (47 out of 110) on the BBC site, compared with 89% on RT (25 out of 28).

24. Taken together, these figures indicate a clear and systematic RT bias in favour of Corbyn - one which goes well beyond what might be considered a journalist's natural interest in an apparently outside candidate, and which includes both disproportionate coverage, and a disproportionate share of positive comment.

25. This is not to suggest that Corbyn himself played any conscious role in this distorted presentation of events; however, many of his views, including his opposition to the renewal of Trident and his criticism of the U.S., chime closely with Moscow's own strategic narrative of a weak, decadent and divided West, and are therefore useful to validate the Kremlin's views.

26. Interestingly, at least one RT opinion piece has acknowledged the fact of biased coverage in favour of Corbyn, arguing that this was acceptable because other parts of the "establishment media" had unfairly attacked him:

27. "Analysts have noted that RT, the 'Kremlin-controlled television channel, which operates in Britain' (gasp) gave 'very positive and extensive' coverage to Corbyn during his leadership campaign. This naturally is cited as part of the Kremlin's nefarious campaign of influence in the UK elections. No mention is made, however, of the brutal anti-Corbyn campaign waged by the majority of the UK establishment media for months in the run up to his election. In this context, the fact that RT gave Corbyn some positive attention is hardly earth-shattering stuff."¹⁷

¹⁶ Figures refer to headlines containing the candidate's name since they declared their leadership bids. On the BBC website, identical headlines in different sections of the site are excluded.

¹⁷ Danielle Ryan, "US investigation into 'Russian meddling' in the EU will be a farce," RT, 19 January 2016, <

28. The authors of this paper would argue that the systematic bias in favor of Corbyn, on the one hand, and UKIP, on the other, is, in fact, a serious matter. Systematically unbalanced coverage which promotes one particular point of view is a violation of the basic standards of journalism, whatever outlet is involved. The fact that RT is not an independent, privately-owned station, but the public broadcaster of a foreign government, aggravates the offence. A privately-owned media outlet can be expected to execute the interests of its owner. A publicly-owned one, if it does not observe strict rules of impartiality, is most likely to be executing the interests of the government which funds it.

Questionable experts

29. The two outlets also show bias in their use of allegedly "expert" commentators to provide analysis of the news of the day. A case in point is RT's coverage of the Litvinenko report. Its key opinion piece on the issue gave prominence to an analysis written by Alexander Mercouris, described as "a practicing lawyer for 12 years at the Royal Courts of Justice".¹⁸ The RT piece included a link to his analysis, which termed the Litvinenko report a "farce" and "worthless".¹⁹

30. Mercouris regularly comments on foreign affairs for RT and Sputnik, and writes extensively for online publication Russia Insider. However, what neither outlet has seen fit to publish is the fact that his legal experience in London ended with him being struck off for multiple counts of professional misconduct, including deceiving a client, faking the signature of one High Court judge and claiming that another had him abducted.²⁰

31. Other unusual "analysts" quoted by the two outlets include far-right French politician Aymeric Chauprade (an advisor to Marine Le Pen), Russian academic Andranik Migranyan, who has gone on the record as saying that Hitler's behaviour until 1939 marked him out as "politician of the highest order",²¹ and Polish fringe politician Mateusz Piskorski, who is also reported to have strong far-right links.²²

32. None of these commentators can be viewed as a genuinely independent expert. Chauprade and Piskorski are both politicians, and as such, partisan by nature; Migranyan formerly headed a Russian NGO tasked with examining human-rights abuses in the U.S.; Mercouris, as a disgraced lawyer, cannot be considered disinterested in his commentaries on the legal system which expelled him.

<https://www.rt.com/op-edge/329433-investigation-russia-eu-meddling/>, accessed on 3 February 2016.

¹⁸ See Robert Bridge, "Putin becomes target of bizarre personal attacks as West's regime-change policy fizzles," RT, 30 January 2016, < <https://www.rt.com/op-edge/330696-putin-western-media-propaganda/>, accessed on 2 February 2016.

¹⁹ See Alexander Mercouris, "The Litvinenko Inquiry: London's Absurd Show Trial", Russia Insider, 26 January 2016, < <http://russia-insider.com/en/politics/litvinenko-inquiry-was/ri12452>>, accessed on 2 February 2016.

²⁰ See Murray Wardrop, "Barrister struck over claim that senior law lord had him kidnapped," Daily Telegraph, 16 March 2012, <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/law-and-order/9146307/Barrister-struck-off-over-claim-that-senior-law-lord-had-him-kidnapped.html>>, accessed on 1 February 2016.

²¹ See "Pro-Putin think tank in New York shuts down", StopFake.org, 30 June 2015, < <http://www.stopfake.org/en/pro-putin-think-tank-based-in-new-york-shuts-down/>>, accessed on 3 February 2016.

²² See for example Anton Shekhovtsov, "Far-right election monitors in the service of Russian foreign policy", in *Eurasianism and the European far right*, Lexington books, 1 July 2015, chapter 10.

33. The editorial decision to refer to them repeatedly as experts, concealing salient features of their background, can hardly be accidental. We conclude that it serves the purpose of promoting narratives which are useful to the Kremlin, and thereby reinforces the disproportionate coverage described above.

The far left and far right

34. The prominence given to fringe politicians is part of a symbiotic relationship between the Kremlin's media and the far right, far left and eurosceptic extreme in Europe. RT and Sputnik give such politicians an international platform to publicise their views; in return, these politicians both advocate for the Kremlin's point of view in public, and vote in favour of its interest when necessary.

35. Particularly telling in this regard is the European Parliament resolution on relations with Russia, approved on 10 June 2015.²³ This strongly-worded document stated, *inter alia*, that Russia had deliberately violated international law through its actions in Ukraine, and that the parliament was "deeply concerned with Russia's support for and financing of radical and extremist parties in the EU Member States". It was approved by 494 votes to 135, with 69 abstentions.²⁴

36. The breakdown of which parties voted for and against makes striking viewing (Fig. 5, with figures representing the percentage of each party which voted in each direction):²⁵

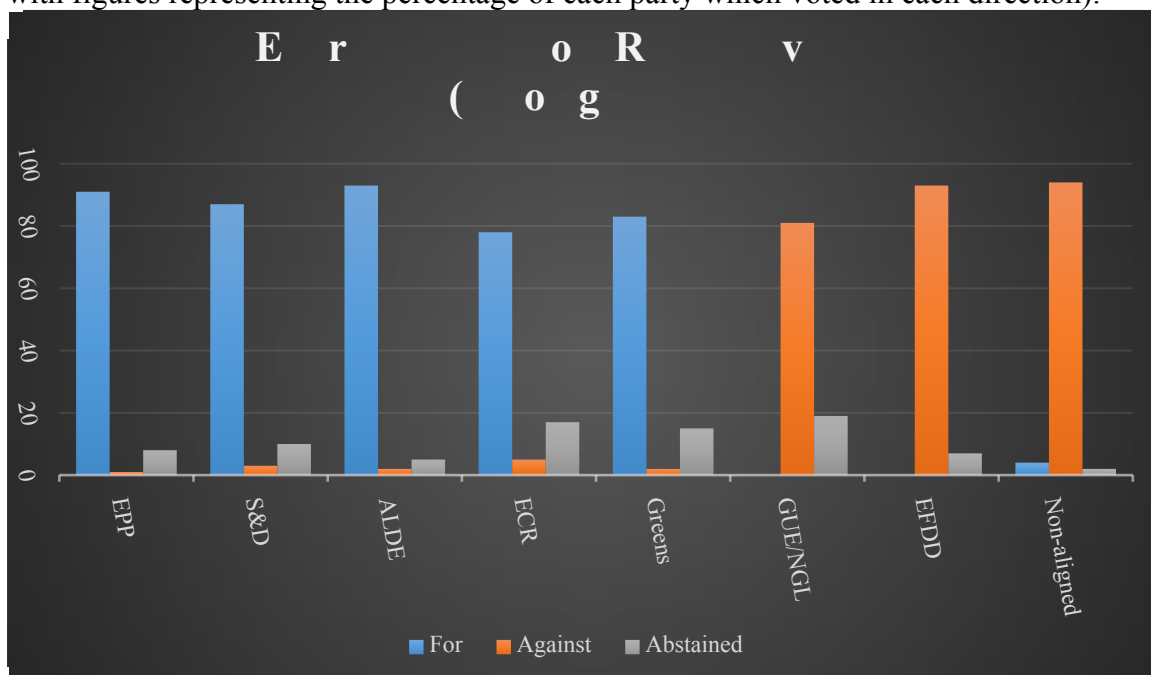


Fig. 5

²³ "On the state of EU-Russia relations," European Parliament resolution 2015/2001(INI), < <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P8-TA-2015-0225+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN>>, accessed on 3 February 2016.

²⁴ For a list of those who voted against the motion, see Anton Shekhovtsov, "State of EU-Russia relations: A brief analysis of the EP vote", 10 June 2015, < <http://anton-shekhovtsov.blogspot.de/2015/06/state-of-eu-russia-relations-brief.html>>, accessed on 3 February 2016.

²⁵ Voting data from VoteWatch.eu, < <http://www.votewatch.eu/en/term8-state-of-eu-russia-relations-motion-for-resolution-vote-resolution.html>>, accessed on 3 February 2016.

37. The mainstream parties - Christian Democrat, Social Democrat (including Labour), Liberal, Conservative eurosceptic (including Tory) and Greens - all voted overwhelmingly to condemn Russia. However, the far left, the far eurosceptics (including UKIP), and the far right (including the French *Front National* and Hungary's Jobbik) all voted in Russia's favour. As we have seen, UKIP benefits from disproportionate coverage in Russia's English-language media. The *Front National* is known to have benefited from a multi-million-euro loan from a bank reportedly linked to the Kremlin.²⁶ A number of analysts have highlighted the ties between Russia and other far-right and far-left groups.²⁷

38. Thus the Russian state's English-language media give disproportionate coverage to politicians whose views validate the Kremlin's narrative(s). In return, the Kremlin has its narrative amplified and validated by external commentators, and in some cases, it benefits from their votes. The cumulative effect of this biased media coverage is to create a totally misleading impression of what the "majority view" of any given subject is - airbrushing reality to give it a Kremlin-friendly glow.

Broader European Aims of Russian Propaganda Efforts

39. The fundamental and overall objective of Russia's media offensive in Europe is not only to justify current Russian government priorities or provide a positive gloss on Russian activities – otherwise the established and expected priorities of any state-funded propaganda machine – but, rather, to assist in a broader Russian objective: to undermine the strategic status quo established in Europe at the end of the Cold War. For what most of the rest of Europe sees as the fount of stability and the bedrock of all its security arrangements, the Russians see as the perpetuation of an "injustice" which came about after the collapse of the Soviet Union: the installation across the former-Communist world of democratic institutions and governments and their subsequent decisions to join the EU and NATO (a process which Russia mis-labels as the aggressive "expansion" of those organisations). In that respect, Russia's behaviour today is similar to that of Germany's Weimar Republic during the 1920s.

40. Since this media offensive is conducted across a variety of platforms, languages and transmission methods, and over a sustained and relatively lengthy period of time, the message is not always entirely coherent; the execution of the policy is more random and poorly-thought out than commonly assumed. Still, broad hostility to the West is unremitting, and it involves delivering messages whose intent is either to perpetuate existing myths about the alleged injustice of Europe's current security environment, or create new tensions which can bring about the collapse of the existing security environment. Overall, the challenge to European security arising from this media offensive is sustained, serious and in urgent need of a response.

Russian Strategies

²⁶ See "National Front's Russian loans cause uproar in European Parliament", EurActiv, 5 December 2014, <<http://www.euractiv.com/sections/europes-east/national-fronts-russian-loans-cause-uproar-european-parliament-310599>>, accessed on 3 February 2016.

²⁷ See for example Anton Shekhovtsov, "Bringing the Rebels: Russian media and the far right", Legatum Institute, September 2015, <<https://lif.blob.core.windows.net/lif/docs/default-source/publications/bringing-the-rebels-by-anton-shekhovtsov-september-2015-pdf.pdf?sfvrsn=2>>; and Jade Glynn, "The bizarre relationship between the European Left and Putin's Russia", AtTheGrapevine.com, 24 February 2015, <<http://www.atthegrapevine.com/politics/the-bizarre-relationship-between-the-european-left-and-putins-russia>>, both accessed on 3 February 2016.

41. There are plenty of examples of the Russian propaganda campaign's efforts to perpetuate myths which serve to delegitimise Europe's current security arrangements. The following is not an exhaustive list, but here are the main elements of the Moscow-induced narrative:

- a) Allegations that, when the Cold War ended, the Soviet Union agreed to dismantle the Warsaw Pact, but the West refused to dismantle NATO in reciprocity. The fact that the Warsaw Pact was actually dismantled by its member-states with Moscow simply being unable to halt this process is glossed over; so is the fact that no reciprocity was either discussed at that time between the USSR and the West, nor implied in any international treaties concluded during the period of 1987-1991;
- b) Suggestions that, instead of engaging with Russia in a partnership at the end of the Cold War, the West "proclaimed victory" and "vindictively promoted" its security interests at the expense of Russia's; this argument misses both the creation of structures such as the NATO-Russia Council and the EU's unique rate of two summits a year with Russia, and the fact that the countries of the former-Communist world chose EU and NATO membership;
- c) Repeated assertions that Russia was promised that NATO won't enlarge to the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, only to see the Alliance doing precisely that from the second half of the 1990s onwards. No official document or authority is ever presented for this assertion, but Russian officials and academics periodically pop up on the country's media platforms to make such allegations, or to use them in broader commentaries about the current security situation in the world without ever bothering to back these commentaries with even a shred of evidence;
- d) The promotion of the idea that, while Russia "disarmed" at the end of the Cold War, the West continued to engage in an arms race with the intention of "containing" Russia; in fact, the West engaged in a massive divestment tactical nuclear weapons, while Russia maintains a significant stockpile.
- e) The suggestion that the "struggle" between the West and Russia is continuing, and assumes new forms by "encroaching" on Russian sphere of influence or "legitimate interests" in Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus, as well as Central Asia, the Caucasus and even the Middle East.

42. To these rather familiar refrains, the Russian propaganda effort has recently added a new layer of arguments, which are designed more specifically to break up Europe's security arrangements. These arguments are usually tailored for two separate markets, a Western one and an Eastern European one. Each campaign preys on existing fears or prejudices in the relevant region, but both are intended to ultimately achieve the same outcome: create divisions in order to paralyse NATO and EU action from within.

43. For the Western part of Europe, the following messages are frequently used:

- a) The enlargement of NATO and – increasingly – also of the European Union was a 'step too far', an unnecessary move which not only aggravated relations between the West and Russia, but also created an unstable situation in Europe;
- b) The East Europeans are ungrateful, unreasonable and hysterically anti-Russian; nobody should listen to what they have to say, or to their imaginary scenarios of doom and gloom, as they will only drag the West into an unnecessary confrontation with Russia;

- c) The countries of Eastern Europe are neither democratic, nor team-players in Europe; all they seek are Western-generated benefits, without offering anything in return;
 - d) The best way of dealing with the East Europeans is either to ignore them altogether, or to engage in a security dialogue with Moscow about the 'security challenges' they raise.
44. Separate messages are, however, used for the Central and East Europeans, where Russia is conducting not one, but four distinct policies at the same time. As the Kremlin sees it, the region is divided into the following groups:
- * Poland and Romania, which are regarded as irredeemably hostile to Russian interests but are too big to ignore: the two nations are subjected to an unremittingly hostile media campaign with the aim of isolating them and highlighting the supposedly high price they will be required to pay for their stance;
 - * The Baltic States, which are also seen as irredeemably hostile but are too small to affect Europe's strategic architecture on their own. Towards them, the Russian propaganda message is either to castigate them as a nuisance which should be ignored, or to imply that they are so 'fragile' and so beset with 'problems' and 'mismanagement' as to make their future existence precarious at best;
 - * Nations which are either historically friendly to Russia, or are run by leaders who are favourably disposed to the Kremlin. Slovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria and potentially the Czech Republic fall into this category. Such countries are usually praised for their behaviour, or are often exempt from the criticism heaped on others;
 - * Nations left outside NATO or the EU, which are therefore vulnerable enough to be influenced. Serbia and Macedonia are part of this group to which the Russians are already offering a variety of economic and political inducements, all tied to the condition that they should refuse offers of integration into other European structures. Russian media efforts in those countries concentrate on suggesting that no 'salvation' can come from European integration, and that the best course these nations can follow is one which maintains their 'neutrality'.
45. However, to all the various groups of audiences in Central and Eastern Europe, certain Russian messages remain uniform. These are:
- a) Encourage suspicions in the minds of leaders in the new NATO member-states about the readiness of Western nations to come to their aid should events require it;
 - b) Raise doubts about NATO's posture and ability to defend its member states;
 - c) Increase the divisions in Central or Eastern Europe about any need to invoke the security guarantees offered by NATO should a crisis arise, by nurturing Moscow's good relations with some nations, yet not others;
 - d) Promote the idea that, although the Central and East Europeans may be in NATO and the EU, they are never likely to be taken seriously or considered as equal by their Western brethren;
 - e) Encourage the idea among electorates in Central and Eastern Europe that there are opportunities for greater economic well-being by cooperating with Moscow;

- f) Strengthen the claim that current tensions between Russia and the rest of Europe are not as a result of some actions by Moscow but, rather, just the outcome of a capricious decision taken by Western leaders who have no interest in peace and security;
- g) The EU is trying to force these countries to adopt 'perverted' and 'decadent' standards (equal rights for sexual minorities, support for non-traditional families) and to take in huge numbers of 'dangerous' migrants, who will carry out rapes, crimes, terrorist acts and welfare abuses.

46. Moscow's propaganda machine is also devoting resources to preventing countries such as Finland and Sweden from joining NATO: the objective is to maintain a distinction between the membership composition of NATO and the EU and to retain some fluidity and unpredictability in Europe's current security arrangements. Many of the current Russian claims that Europe is about to face a 'return to the Cold War' are intended to alarm people into inaction.

Conclusion

47. It would be wrong to dismiss these efforts as another self-defeating attempt by a declining power to cause mischief. For the mischief which Russia's propaganda machine can create remains substantial, and it has already scored some notable results. Many Western academics accept, for instance, that the West behaved "triumphantly" at the end of the Cold War towards Russia, and that this created the current tensions, notwithstanding the fact this is backed by no evidence. Some analysts have come to accept the contention that it would have been possible to dismantle NATO in the early 1990s and that this would have somehow promoted European security. Quite a few security specialists in Europe and the US now assume that all that needs to be done is to accept that Russia is entitled to a sphere of influence, that it should be allowed to have one, and that the only way of putting an end to the crises in Ukraine and Syria is to 'split the difference' between the West and Russia in both these conflicts. And probably a majority of security analysts still assume that it is up to the West to prevent a return to the Cold War by implementing a set of measures which would, supposedly, halt the aggravation in our relations with Russia at the moment. All these arguments are fundamentally, if not irretrievably flawed, but the fact that they are even taken seriously is an indication that, notwithstanding its often risible propaganda effort, Moscow has succeeded in getting across a set of messages which may well hobble European security, and which need to be urgently confronted. For there is no doubt that Vladimir Putin is determined to push as much resources as he can afford into this effort. And there is equally no doubt that, as Putin sees matters, the purpose of the Russian activity is nothing less than to put an end to the post-Cold War security arrangement.

14 March 2016