

SKRIPAL CASE IN ITALY

PRO RUSSIA REACTIONS AND DISINFORMATION

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INDEX

SKRIPAL CASE IN ITALY – PRO RUSSIA REACTIONS AND DISINFORMATION	1
INTRODUCTION	2
CLUSTER 1 – REACTIONS BY/ON PRO-RUSSIAN OUTLETS/JOURNALISTS	2
CLUSTER 2 – PRO RUSSIAN POLITICAL REACTIONS.....	3
CLUSTER 3 – PRO RUSSIAN REACTIONS BY/ON TRADITIONAL MEDIA OUTLETS.....	4
CONCLUSIONS	5
ANNEX	6

INTRODUCTION

Reactions to Skripal case have followed a well-known pattern in the age of internet and social media. The first reactions of many Italian social media users were not based on analysis or reflections but mostly on the ideological positions assumed before the 4th March poisoning. Therefore, are not surprising the skeptical reactions of many users towards the linkage of the Salisbury attack and Moscow.

Moreover, to place the Italian reactions on the Skripal case in the right context, it is necessary to recall that only one over three Italian citizens considers Russia as a major threat¹, one of the lowest rate in Europe. In addition, various groups – often in network – spread pro-Russia information daily. As a consequence, many Italians are dependent of a certain mental map, and react accordingly.

The evolution of some key Italian traditional media is even more interesting. In fact, misinformation and more generically, doubts on the UK official version on the Skripal attack have been disseminated also by important traditional medias such as “Il Sole 24 Ore” or “RAI”, the public radio-television network.

Finally, relevant political figures expressed doubts concerning the Russian guiltiness and on the reactions of the Transatlantic countries.

Therefore, the present analysis will outline the influences on the Skripal Case coming from both the information and political field which could be useful to provide a clearer picture on the Italian reactions on Skripal case as well as on the possible future trends.

CLUSTER 1 – REACTIONS BY/ON PRO-RUSSIAN OUTLETS/JOURNALISTS

The pro-Russian network of accounts and websites started to spread disinformation immediately after the attack. Some well-known outlets like PandoraTV², Sputnik Italia, RT, l’Antidiplomatico³ have been very active in spreading counter-narratives on the March attach. Moreover, some journalists did the same. For instance, Fulvio Scaglione and Marcello Foa, two well-known pro-Russian journalists, have written some articles about

¹ <http://www.pewglobal.org/2017/08/16/publics-worldwide-unfavorable-toward-putin-russia/>

² An Italian website created by Giulietto Chiesa, former foreign correspondent in Soviet Union, who spread fake news and conspiracy theories. On Skripal, see here:

- Website: <https://www.pandoratv.it/tag/skripal/>
- Youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bLPqOs1LVd0>

³ An Italian website connected with the Five Star Movement, who spread pro-Russian news, fake news and anti-Western ideas. About Skripal case, various articles were written on l’Antidiplomatico, criticizing the Italian approach, considered too submissive. See, for instance: https://www.lantidiplomatico.it/dettnews-caso_skripal_e_la_fantomatica_solidariet_atlantica_linsostenibile_leggerezza_della_diplomazia_italiana/5871_23527

the attack, indicating the Skripal case as a “fake news”^{4,5}. Both published their articles on recognized and mainstream media, Linkiesta and Il Giornale.

Foa’s case is particularly relevant, as the new Italian Government has decided to appoint him as the new president of RAI. Foa has often expressed pro-Russian views and circulated pro-Moscow news, and even fake news, by articles and social networks. As President of the Italian national public network of information it will be important to understand how his personal views will influence the direction and the fairness of the most followed tv news service.

Moreover, the national newspaper Il Giornale hosts a blog by Giampaolo Rossi featuring articles raising doubts on the UK version⁶.

Another moderately pro-Russian well-known journalist, Alberto Negri – also Senior Advisor for ISPI⁷ –, raised doubts about the Skripal case and criticized “Atlantic solidarity” both on social network and on national⁸ and local⁹ TV’s.

Libero Quotidiano, a national newspaper who often adopt a pro-Russian line, published an article written by Gianluca Savoini¹⁰, President of Lombardia-Russia Association¹¹, on the subject: “The Skripal Case is a Fake News but the United Kingdom do not reply to Russia” (see the annex, image 1).

Finally, disinformation on the Skripal Case and pro-Russia contents has been spread widely by Italian social media accounts. In particular, a 450.000 follower-strong facebook page, “Figli di Putin”¹² (Putin’s sons), created various memes to ridicule Italian and NATO approach (see the annex, image 2, 3).

CLUSTER 2 – PRO RUSSIAN POLITICAL REACTIONS

Reactions to Skripal case have outlined an Italian peculiarity: trolls are basically unnecessary because public opinion and many political figures already have a pro-Russian attitude. key example is Matteo Salvini, who

⁴ <https://www.linkiesta.it/it/article/2018/03/28/il-caso-skripal-e-una-bufala-la-guerra-delloccidente-alla-russia-e-ter/37595/>

⁵ <http://blog.ilgiornale.it/foa/2018/03/27/putin-e-davvero-colpevole-qualcosa-proprio-non-torna-nel-caso-skripal/>

⁶ <http://blog.ilgiornale.it/rossi/?s=skripal>

⁷ Biggest Italian think tank on foreign policy issues. See: <https://www.ispionline.it/it/bio/alberto-negri>

⁸ <https://www.raiplay.it/video/2018/03/Alberto-Negri-carionorevoli-quello-che-accade-fuori-dall-Italia-ci-riguarda-da-vicino-b787b9a3-eb22-4649-a337-53eee088f620.html>

⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zLGtals2A3w>

¹⁰ An Italian journalist who is in close contact with Matteo Salvini and knows also Vladimir Putin. He is one of the men behind the agreement between the Northern League and United Russia.

¹¹ An independent association that promotes links between Italy and Russia and has ideas “perfectly aligned with those enunciated by Russian President at Valdai Meeting in 2013”. <http://www.lombardiarussia.org/index.php/associazione/lo-scopo>

¹² This page had so much success that started to sell items to honor Russia and Putin. <https://www.facebook.com/figlidelpresidenteputin/>

declared that if he had been at the government he would not have expelled Russian diplomats¹³. If, on one hand, he confirmed that Italy must remain without any doubt in the Western alliances, on the other hand he reaffirmed to be against the “isolation of Russia” and the NATO maneuvers and exercises in Eastern Europe¹⁴. Furthermore, Sputnik Italia reported that Salvini would have said that, basically, there is no evidence to consider Russia guilty on the Skripal Case and that too many fake news about Russian hackers and trolls have been spread on the internet¹⁵. Thus, implying that also the UK and Allied version on the Skripal Case could be listed as a fake news.

Several minor anti-Western, pro-Russian websites shared those words, but none of the mainstream media did the same, raising doubt on the reliability of Sputnik’s quote. At the same time, it is interesting to see how some network contribute at flaming pro-Russian narratives (see the annex, image 4).

CLUSTER 3 – PRO RUSSIAN REACTIONS BY/ON TRADITIONAL MEDIA OUTLETS

Relevant and alarming are some reactions occurred on traditional media. Indeed, doubts about UK’s version were raised also by mainstream media and high-quality newspapers. In the first group, notably emerges “All the Doubts of Skripal Case”¹⁶, a reportage made by “TG3 nel mondo”, a RAI network channel. In the reportage, circulated by the public broadcast service, are mentioned also conspiracy theories. For instance, among other things, at minute 5:40, the journalist in studio said that the attack appears to be an attempt to create problems to Putin few days before Russian elections.

Another interesting article is the “Skripal Case, all doubts about Moscow’s guiltiness”¹⁷, published by “Il Sole 24 Ore”, the most prestigious Italian economic newspaper. The author, Antonella Scott, is Deputy Director of the Foreign Affairs” section of the newspaper. In her article, she advances doubts on the Skripal’s recovery – considered “maybe miraculous” – and recalls Saddam’s weapons of mass destruction case to blur the line between known and unknown, suggesting that perhaps the Skripal Case could also be similar to the Saddam’s one.

¹³ <http://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/notizie/2018-03-26/salvini-io-governo-non-avrei-mai-espulso-diplomatici-201824.shtml?uuid=AE0HVNOE>

¹⁴ <https://www.liberoquotidiano.it/news/politica/13366389/matteo-savini-cosa-penso-davvero-di-vladimir-putin-e-della-russia-chi-e-oggi-vero-nemico-italia.html>

¹⁵ <https://it.sputniknews.com/mondo/201803145772994-skripal-russia-matteo-salvini/>

¹⁶ <https://www.facebook.com/tg3mondo/videos/675062142663988/>

¹⁷ <https://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/mondo/2018-04-07/caso-skripal-tutti-dubbi-colpevolezza-mosca-145603.shtml?uuid=AE0sJcUE>

CONCLUSIONS

The Italian reactions to Skripal case highlight and confirm a pattern already present in a previous report: pro-Russian sentiments in Italy are mainly inflated not by trolls or fake news but thanks to a large network encompassing politicians, journalists, media, websites etc. already aligned with Russian narrative. Websites and people disseminating conspiracy theories and fake news on Skripal Case had a limited reach and impact. Key politicians and even Member of the Government, journalists of major newspapers appear to be much more effective.

Apparently, there is a shift of “conservative” political Parties towards Moscow’s views and authoritarianism. In fact, some reactions to the Skripal case appear connected with a political linkage of the “new right” with Putin. As a consequence, reactions on events linked with Russia are often not guided by rational analysis but by emotions and feelings.

To counter this Italian trend it’s important to properly address the key political leaders, their new populist parties, and key editorialists, by an effective, discrete and articulated information campaign and narrative and not to be exclusively focused on trolls and fake news.

ANNEX

Image 1

Home | Associazione | Editoriali | Stampa-Eventi-Cultura | Putin | Multimedia | Contatti

Il caso Skripal è falso, ma il Regno Unito non risponde alla Russia

Mercoledì 25 Aprile 2018

Strade dell'Est

Il caso Skripal è falso ma il Regno Unito non risponde alla Russia

■ ■ ■ GIANLUCA SAVOINI

■ ■ ■ «Il 13 aprile avevamo consegnato alle autorità britanniche una serie di domande riguardanti l'avvelenamento dei nostri due concittadini, i signori Skripal, e lunedì sera da Londra sono arrivate risposte assolutamente insufficienti sul caso. Anzi, è come se gli inglesi

Sostieni Lombardia Russia

L'Editoriale di Gianluca Savoini

L'EDITORIALE

Image 2

SUA PUTINITÀ MI DISPIACE MA PER "SOLIDARIETÀ ATLANTICA" ABBIAMO DOVUTO ESPELLERE DUE DIPLOMATICI RUSSI DALL'ITALIA

CAPISCO... MA SPIEGAMI UNA COSA....

COME MAI QUANDO LA TURCHIA HA BLOCCATO UNA NAVE ITALIANA DELL'ENI NESSUNO VI HA DATO "SOLIDARIETÀ ATLANTICA"?

.... MI SCUSI, DEVO ANDARE

Figli di Putin
Mi piace questa Pagina · 27 marzo ·

Domande che non troveranno mai risposta....
#figlidiputin #Gentiloni #Skripal

👍 🤔 😂 5695 Commenti: 210 Condivisioni: 18.4

👍 Mi piace 💬 Commenta ➦ Condividi

Più pertinenti ▾

Figli di Putin Molti stanno scrivendo che la Turchia fa parte della NATO....quindi secondo voi la Turchia è giustificata a pestare i piedi ai nostri interessi nazionali? La cosa è ancor più grave di quello che può sembrare

Mi piace · Rispondi · 28 s 👍 60

7 riepilogati

Image 3



Figli di Putin

8 aprile · 🌐

👍 Mi piace



Siete ancora così certi che sia stata la [#Russia](#) ad aver avvelenato [#Skripal](#)?
[#figlidiputin](#)



ILSOLE24ORE.COM

Caso [Skripal](#), tutti i dubbi sulla colpevolezza di Mosca

Quando Serghej [Skripal](#) e la figlia Yulia vennero trovati semi-incoscienti in...

👍 🤔 ❤️ 272

Commenti: 19 Condivisioni: 60

Image 4

Caso Skripal, Matteo Salvini non crede nella colpevolezza della Russia

<https://it.sputniknews.com/mondo/201803145772994-skripal-russia-matteo-salvini/> ▼

14 mar 2018 - "Ma le voci e le fake news le abbiamo viste e lette in tutte le salse. Fino alla scorsa settimana hanno scritto che le elezioni italiane sono state interferite dagli hacker russi. Mi sembra che gli italiani hanno votato, e le tracce di ...

"E' inconcepibile che il pericolo per il mondo intero sia la Russia ...

www.russiaaffari.blog/...e-inconcepibile-che-il-pericolo-per-il-mondo-intero-sia-la-ru... ▼

15 mar 2018 - "Ma le voci e le fake news le abbiamo viste e lette in tutte le salse. Fino alla scorsa settimana hanno scritto che le elezioni italiane sono state interferite dagli hacker russi. Mi sembra che gli italiani hanno votato, e le tracce di ...

Teresa May Archivi - Mercato Russo

www.russiaaffari.blog/tag/teresa-may/ ▼

"Ma le voci e le fake news le abbiamo viste e lette in tutte le salse. Fino alla scorsa settimana hanno scritto che le elezioni italiane sono state interferite dagli ...

La storia dei 1.500 tweet contenenti fake news diffusi dai russi? Una ...

https://www.lantidiplomatico.it/dettnews...tweet...fake_news...russi...fake_news/82_24... ▼

3 ago 2018 - World Affairs - L'Antidiplomatico - La politica internazionale che il ... a colpi di fake news, condotte dagli onnipresenti hacker russi in sostegno di Lega e ... Qualcosa non torna nella storia dei tweet russi a favore di Lega e M5S ... dedicata alla lingua compariva il valore "italian", il tweet era scritto in italiano.

Mancanti: veei lette salse seorse interferite

Putin, fake news e hacker russi: nemico immaginario. • Giovani A Destra

giovaniadestra.it/2018/01/31/putin-fakenews-hackerrussi/ ▼

31 gen 2018 - Hacker che avrebbero diffuso fake news contro Hillary e che ... presidente russo, ma questo non sta a significare che Putin li finanzia come ... si svegli la mattina e decida di interferire nelle elezioni degli altri paesi. ... Per evitare il pericolo dei russi il ministro Minniti, qualche settimana fa, ha inaugurato presso ...

Mancanti: veei viste lette salse seorse

Tutto Salvini News - Caso Skripal, Matteo Salvini non crede nella ...

<https://tuttosalvini.info/?rssview...thisid=11280&feedid=1> ▼

14 mar 2018 - "Ma le voci e le fake news le abbiamo viste e lette in tutte le salse. Fino alla scorsa settimana hanno scritto che le elezioni italiane sono state interferite dagli hacker russi. Mi sembra che gli italiani hanno votato, e le tracce di ...

Liliana Gorini | MoviSol

movisol.org/author/liliana-gorini/ ▼

Come abbiamo scritto il 4 settembre a proposito dei cinque anni di vita ... Ma non è stato detto che l'infame programma dell'UE ha lasciato l'economia greca ... Inoltre la Grecia continuerà a sottostare alla sorveglianza dei creditori fino al 2060 e in La presidente di MoviSol Liliana Gorini è stata intervistata oggi da Marisa ...

Attacco Isis alla pace mondiale nella Repubblica Araba Siriana è un ...

<https://ilfaro24.it/attacco-isis-alla-pace-mondiale-nella-repubblica-araba-siriana-e-un-c...> ▼

19 apr 2018 - Quello che ci hanno raccontato sulla Siria è tutto falso ... smontò le fake news sulla guerra in Siria diffuse dai mass media, la cui opera di Le vergognose e disgustose sceneggiate in salsa hitleriana al Parlamento italiano ed Le Forze Aerospaziali Russe sul campo non sono state coinvolte, ma hanno ...

Lettera aperta a Martin Schulz - Il Blog delle Stelle

www.ilblogdellestelle.it/2012/09/lettera_aperta_a_martin_schulz.html

Il Movimento 5 Stelle è un movimento democratico che si ispira alla ... Ha partecipato a elezioni comunali e regionali senza alcun contributo pubblico facendo ottimo beppe, il signor Martin Schulz credo sia in malafede visto che non è forte ai Questori che, in due settimane, ci riferiranno quali sono le voci da tagliare.