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The Elements of Russia's Soft Power: Channels, Tools, and Actors Promoting Russian Influence in the Eastern Partnership Countries

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Abstract

Soft power can be exerted by a variety of actors using different channels and tools. This paper focuses on actors and channels transmitting Russian messages and discourses in the Eastern Partnership countries. It contributes to enhancing our understanding of Russian influences in the region in two ways. First, it maps the network of influential actors who have the potential to transmit Russian messages and target various audiences. Second, it offers a detailed analysis of the coverage of Russia (and the European Union (EU)) in one important channel for dissemination of information about Russia and the EU: popular TV stations in Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine. The analysis shows the presence of a wide variety of actors focusing on 'compatriots', religious bonds, and Russian-language speakers in the region, which reflects the key ideas of the 'Russian World' narrative. These actors promote Russia's role as a centre of gravity and aim to appeal to Russians, Slavs and Orthodox Christians. This image of Russia, however, does not dominate the news programmes in any of the three countries. In Moldova and Ukraine, Russia is most often mentioned (negatively) in the context of security, while in Belarus it is covered more often than the EU in economy-related news items. Moreover, a large portion of the news about Russia and the EU has no positive or negative tone or is presented in a balanced way. In general, apart from what was conveyed by Russian TV channels, Russia does not have a more positive image than the EU in the news programmes in the countries we monitored.

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Contents

1.   Introduction[1]

The spread of Russian influence in the world through targeted use of TV news, printed or social media, paid commentators ('trolls'), and 'fake news' is rapidly becoming the subject of an increasing number of academic, professional, and political analyses (Galeotti 2016; Nimmo 2016; Pomeranzev and Weiss 2014; Volchek and Sindelar 2015). While just a few years ago the influence of Russian (mis)information tools and messages may have been underestimated by most observers, currently there is a veritable explosion of studies emphasizing the informational aspects of 'hybrid warfare' (Pomeranzev and Weiss 2014). Russian state-owned media outlets such as *Russia Today* and *Sputnik* and the impact of the messages they carry on public opinion have been the subject of growing interest by the scientific and analyst community. At his meeting with President Vladimir Putin in May 2017, French President Emmanuel Macron publicly identified them as "organs of influence and propaganda" (McAuley 2017). Yet the role of national and local news reporting in transmitting a Russian perspective to their viewers and the function of public personalities or civic organizations in reinforcing Russia's messages may be just as important, but remains less well understood. Daily news on TV, together with discourses and ideas spread on social media and transmitted through the work of cultural, migrant and religious organizations could have considerable impact on activating existing identities, creating linkages, and changing perceptions of Russia and its role in Europe and the world.

This paper focuses on news, actors and channels transmitting Russian messages and discourses in the Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries. It contributes to enhancing our understanding of Russian influences in the region in two ways. First, it maps the network of influential actors who have the potential to transmit Russian messages and target various audiences. Second, it offers a detailed analysis of the coverage of Russia (and the European Union (EU)) in one important channel for dissemination of information about Russia and the EU: popular TV stations in Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine. By mapping the actors and channels that promote Russian influence in the region and by exploring the messages that regular people in these countries get via the most popular TV channels, we outline the shape of the 'transmission belt' of Russian messages in the three countries, or at least the portion of it that is publicly visible.

To achieve the first goal, we identify the main channels and actors that are linked to Russia or transmit and promote Russian messages. This allows us to establish whether the different orientations of ruling political elites in Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine affect the presence of pro-Russian actors in society. This exercise has broad theoretical relevance, as the presence of actors and organizations connected to an external actor, or 'linkages', has been defined as one of the two key mechanisms for the transmission of the influence of such actors (Levitsky and Way 2005; Way and Levitsky 2007; Tolstrup 2013)[2].

By mapping the channels and actors, we also engage with the literature on authoritarian diffusion versus externally supported democratization (Ambrosio 2007, 2010; Delcour and Wolczuk 2015; Lankina et al. 2016; Sasse 2016). We depart from Levitsky and Way's argument that linkages to the West (defined as the density of ties with an external actor) and Western leverage (defined as the vulnerability to external pressure) raise the

[2] The second key mechanism is 'leverage', which refers to economic influence and interdependence. While we recognize the importance of leverage, analysing economic leverage and dependence on Russian energy sources is beyond the scope of this paper.

cost of authoritarianism for domestic political elites (Levitsky and Way 2010). Together with Sasse (2016), we assume that non-Western linkages and (Russian) leverage are factors that, in turn, raise the cost of democratization and—by extension—the costs of complying with EU-driven reforms. We argue that a reversed perspective on linkages and leverage provides us with insights about the likely obstacles for the EU in supporting EaP countries towards further democratic reforms. More specifically, we argue that the greater the vulnerability to Russian pressure (leverage) and the denser the linkages between local actors and Russian organizations, the more difficult it would be for EaP countries to pursue a pro-democratic agenda and EU-supported reform.

The second goal of this paper is to conduct an in-depth analysis of the coverage of and messages about Russia and the EU transmitted by what are arguably some of the most important channels with the largest audiences, namely TV stations in Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine. Just like the EU, whose messages we analysed in a previous paper (Dimitrova et al. 2016), Russia addresses the three countries in very different ways. There are a number of strategic considerations that could affect the messages and discourses pro-Russian actors develop in the Eastern neighbourhood. We can expect that major developments such as the conflict with Ukraine would affect the context in which Russia attempts to influence the perceptions of citizens in the region. Similarly, Russia's long-term interest in the development of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), as observed in our analysis of the country's Foreign Policy Concepts (Frear and Mazepus 2017), may be reflected in a focus on Belarus as one of the remaining key partners in this integration venture. Moldova, in turn, has been the subject of much attention as the presidential electoral campaign recently led to the election of an openly pro-Russian president who moved to request observer status in the EAEU. Therefore, we seek to provide a more structural and analytical picture of the representations of Russia and the EAEU versus the EU and its member states in national TV, and in particular in the main news programmes broadcasted in Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine.

To address this goal, the second part of the paper presents an original analysis of TV news monitored over a period of four months in Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine and coded along several dimensions of interest, including topic, presence and direction of evaluative tone, news sources, etc. As the majority of citizens of the three countries still use television as their main news source,[3] a systematic analysis of how the EU and Russia come across on national TV is both necessary and informative. Moreover, on the basis of our analysis we are able to compare different channels' representations of Russia and the EU by distinguishing wherever possible between private and public TV stations, and between stations using the national language and sources and stations using the Russian language and sources.

The paper proceeds as follows. We first discuss current debates on (authoritarian) diffusion and Russian soft power and formulate some expectations as a conceptual foundation to guide our analysis. Next, we present some of the findings of existing studies of the mechanisms and channels of Russian influence and our current snapshot of the landscape of linkages in the three countries. Following the overview of the actors and organizations linked to Russia, we present the results of the TV monitoring study in the three countries.[4] We investigate public and private TV stations as well as TV stations that retransmit materials from Russia or

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[3] See Ecorys Annual Survey Report (2016) and a summary below (p. 26).
[4] The study contains a wealth of data on trends of TV news reporting in the main channels in the countries in question which is presented in more detail in a separate report accompanying this paper.

prepare their own content in Russian to understand the representation of Russia (or the EU) they promote and the strength of linkages with Russia (including the communication linkage; Levitsky and Way 2006: 383-384).

2.   Resisting Democratization or Exercising Soft Power?

The so-called 'colour revolutions' in the EaP region, and especially the Rose revolution in Georgia in 2003 and the Orange revolution in Ukraine in 2004, marked a critical juncture in the political development of these countries. The new elites took steps towards democratic reforms and away from authoritarian practices (Delcour and Wolczuk 2015: 460). The effects of these 'colour' revolutions in Georgia and Ukraine on their domestic and foreign policy, as well as on the Russian leadership, have been profound (Horvath 2011). Interpreting changes of power in Ukraine as externally engineered by the democratizing forces in the West, Russian leaders developed a set of responses ranging from the military ones, used in Georgia in 2008 and in Crimea in 2014, to the restriction of NGOs, to the use of fake news (Delcour and Wolczuk 2015; Pomerantsev and Weiss 2014).

The development of ideas and instruments aimed at promoting Russia's role as a world power and a model of governance distinct from liberal democracy became a trend in the mid-2000s (Krastev 2006). These were defined by President Putin himself as 'Russian soft power', as mentioned in the country's Foreign Policy Concept of 2013. As Lankina and Niemczyk (2014) have argued,

> "Russia's soft power thus rests on a peculiar blend of state-promoted ideology of national exclusivity, manipulation of symbols and nostalgia for the halcyon days of the Soviet past, Russia's genuine economic and political attractiveness for migrants escaping far more ghastly political and economic environments, and Russian-state media whipped up frenzy about an ostensible threat to the Russian ethnos."

The use of ideas and messages aiming to activate certain perceptions of actors in international relations and shape politics also became an important component of Russian strategies to counter democratic diffusion and spread power (Hughes and Sasse 2016). "Power ideas, fundamental ideas about how political power should be arranged" (Hughes and Sasse 2016: 330), can trigger various ideational linkages and influence perceptions of geopolitical realities and the legitimacy of certain actions. As Hughes and Sasse argue, ideational linkages proved instrumental in the successful military takeover of Crimea. In particular, Putin's instrumentalization of the 'power idea' of nationalism and its activation with regard to Crimea has been made possible by the changed domestic political conditions in Ukraine (after 2014) as well as in Russia (Hughes and Sasse 2016: 315-331). As in other post-Soviet regions, the activation of the nationalist idea and the vision of Russia as a 'great power' have been accompanied by measures to undermine the pull and attraction of democratic regimes in Europe and beyond. Initially, propaganda tools have been deployed not to promote a specific Russian authoritarian model, but to undermine democratic diffusion (Ambrosio 2007).

An important dimension of authoritarian diffusion that emerges in the literature is the overt direct support of one regime for another, through bolstering incumbents (Ambrosio 2009: 22-23) or leveraging external

influence (Cameron and Orenstein 2012: 24-37; Tolstrup 2009: 928-929). Whether this should be considered authoritarian diffusion depends on whether one accepts the argument that true diffusion can only be unintentional and not deliberately pursued. Kneuer and Demmelhuber (2016: 777) have introduced the idea of "authoritarian gravity centres" which "induce both the promotion and diffusion of autocracy at the regional level": actively and intentionally in the case of the promotion; passively and unintentionally in the case of authoritarian diffusion or contagion. They identify four arenas of interaction with authoritarian gravity centres, including linkages and actor-driven influences: 1) institutional; 2) policy; 3) ideational (religion, ideology, cultural content, informal networks); and 4) administrative techniques (Kneuer and Demmelhuber 2016: 788-789).

With respect to Russia, next to direct support of authoritarian leaders or political formations (Pomerantsev and Weiss 2014), Russia increasingly aims to create new linkages in neighbouring states or to activate existing ones. The funding or creation of NGOs is an element of its soft power strategy, as is the promotion of affiliation with the Orthodox Church, particularly the branch led by the Moscow Patriarchate.[5] The messages promoted by such organizations refer to "pan Slavic identity" and "shared Orthodox faith" (Harding et al. 2017). Just as Russia has been using existing trade and energy interdependencies to promote its geopolitical aims (Dimitrova and Dragneva 2009) in the past, nowadays it uses culture, language, education and religion to enhance its position as a regional or, according to its own narrative, global power.

Domestic political elites and policy makers, however, are not powerless when faced with Russian influence. As some scholars have argued, domestic political elites can, over time, support and amplify some existing linkages and diminish others. There is evidence that domestic elites in some post-Soviet states may voluntarily "borrow and adopt" political practices from Russia (Bader 2014: 1351). This brings us to the question of the role political elites play in relation to the linkages civil society actors maintain with external actors.

2.1. The role of domestic gatekeepers

As Tolstrup (2013) has argued, linkages can grow or wither depending on the decision and actions of different sets of elites and, in particular, domestic ruling political elites playing the role of gatekeepers. Gatekeeping elites are in a position to *condition* the relationship between an external actor and domestic organizations or even individual citizens. Domestic ruling elites may not be able to eliminate or create all kinds of linkages, but they can have a substantial influence on them (Tolstrup 2013: 720-722).

Following Tolstrup (2013), we expect that the current spread of Russian messages is not only dependent on Russia's pull as an authoritarian gravity centre, but is, at least to some extent, channelled, amplified, and controlled by domestic gatekeepers. Resilience to authoritarian influences should also be considered, as shown by a recent study of the interaction between democratic and authoritarian diffusion processes, which found that regions receiving EU assistance for some time are more resistant to authoritarian tendencies (Lankina et

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[5] One example comes from Macedonia: The Organised Crime and Corruption Reporting project cited recently in *The Guardian* newspaper has revealed, based on Macedonian secret service documents, Russia's "strong subversive propaganda" efforts to change Macedonia's orientation away from the EU and NATO. The report details the Russian embassy's sponsorship of over 30 Macedonian-Russian friendship organizations as well as the construction of Russian-style churches and building of orthodox crosses. See Harding et al. 2017.

al. 2016). Based on these findings and on the discussion by Tolstrup (2013), Sasse (2016), and Hughes and Sasse (2016), we conceive the process of democratic and authoritarian diffusion in the EU's Eastern neighbourhood as a competition for influence between democratizing or authoritarian external actors, by using economic or geopolitical leverage[6] and by promoting ideas and messages to influence citizen perceptions (Gel'man and Lankina 2008: 44).

The ability to promote discourses and messages favourable to an actor's own point of view is an essential component of the soft power that we focus on. Ideas, images and narratives can influence citizen perceptions of what external actors do, but they can also accomplish much more than that. Messages and narratives can frame an actor's position as just and morally right or as unjust or incompatible with one's own values[7]. Last but not least, ideas and narratives can potentially influence what North et al. (2013) call "causal beliefs'—people's understanding of "how the world works" (North et al. 2009: 27-28). These causal beliefs together with preferences and available alternatives inform people's choices and actions. Causal beliefs are, as North et al. (2009) stress, the product of individual experiences, education and many other factors. In our view, the informational environment people are exposed to can influence their causal beliefs through complex mechanisms that require further study. In this paper we build on the expectation that external actors' narratives can potentially influence the causal beliefs citizens hold about 'how the world works', which in turn inform their actions.

Returning to the role of gatekeepers, we expect that governments and parliaments can *facilitate* or *prevent* the spread of the EU's or Russia's messages and the development of linkages, at least to some extent. We can expect that the current Ukrainian leadership, for example, would actively work to prevent Russian influence from spreading via NGOs or the Orthodox Church. The 2014 ban of 14 Russian TV channels, including *Russia Today*, introduced by the Ukrainian government, may be a harbinger of this trend.

The actions of domestic gatekeeper elites, in turn, depend on their own preferences and value orientations. Cost-benefit calculations with regard to incentives offered by external actors and preferences over political institutions, specific policies and values all play a role (Dimitrova and Dragneva 2009; Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier 2005; Tolstrup 2013). Elites directly linked with Russia in ideological or value terms (e.g. President Igor Dodon of Moldova) or benefitting personally from economic contacts and assistance from Russia (former Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych) may act as gatekeepers restricting pro-EU linkages and supporting organizations affiliated or funded by Russia. With respect to the influence of political elites on the representation of Russia (or the EU) in the news, we do not assume that the state elites in Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine control all the content of the news. Rather, we consider the media (in this case, TV stations) as proxies of the elites (domestic gatekeepers) and their attitudes to the external actors.

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[6] We are aware of the importance of this channel of influence which will be investigated in other EU-STRAT research, but will be outside the scope of this paper.

[7] Examples of such a framing can be found on the state-aligned Russian TV: for instance, presenting Russia as "a global standard bearer for 'traditional values'" or the West as using "double standards" in condemning Russia for its actions in the neighborhood, while intervening in other countries (Hutchings and Szostek 2015: 190, 185).

A third important aspect of the role of political elites is that they can also *influence citizen perceptions* of external actors through their own actions. If domestic elites are perceived as linked to external actors and at the same time are known to be corrupt, the perception of corruption may be transferred to the external actors they associate with. This may reflect a real connection and commitment of both actors to the same kind of governance or it can be a transfer of the image of the domestic actor to the external actor. For example, when a pro-European Moldovan government is implicated in a corruption scandal, this can easily affect the image of the EU itself (Jurkonis 2015).

Bearing in mind these multiple channels of interaction between external actor messages and domestic gatekeepers, we set out to examine the current landscape of actors and organizations promoting Russian influence in Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine, with the aim to establish whether and how this landscape varies in the three EaP countries given the differences in the corresponding political elites' orientations.

Before turning to the overview of actors in the region and the analyses of media representations, a brief discussion of the content of key discourses that Russia promotes is needed in order to gain insight into the concepts and arguments that Russia mobilizes to legitimate its desired role (Krastev 2006: 1).

2.2. Narratives, messages and the role of pro-Russian actors

Russian media and affiliated outlets widely spread narratives so consistent that they should be recognized as a massive propaganda effort, even if they are not always based on a system of interconnected ideas like Soviet era ideology. Two key narratives that shed light on the ideas and messages Russia promotes through friendly actors and channels refer to the 'Russian World' and 'sovereign democracy'.

A key narrative addressing citizens in neighbouring countries has been centred around the 'Russian World' or *'Russkiy mir'* concept. This concept serves as a focus for many different actors and groups associated with Russia. It reflects Russia's ambitions to be seen as a global power *and* as a regional power, to be consulted about its immediate neighbours (Frear and Mazepus 2017; Liik 2017). This geopolitical narrative is rooted in grievance for the loss of previous imperial greatness and demanding amends for perceived historical injustices especially after the end of the Cold War. The 'Russian World' concept appears closely related to the idea of 'great powerness', a domestically salient concept that has remained a key element of Russia's domestic identity building discourse (Urnov 2014).

Within the narratives referring to the 'Russian World' concept, at least two streams can be differentiated. One is based on an intellectual tradition that views Russia as a distinct and self-sufficient civilization, embedded in a geopolitical order of traditional values, myths, spiritual demands and cultural habits, taking its inspiration from Berdeaev and other important Russian philosophers. Another approach focuses on the recent past and the collapse of the Soviet Union, emphasizing that 25 million Russians have been displaced. This latter narrative provides justification for 'reactivating' the so-called inherited 'Russianness', based on language, culture, heritage, as a linkage with the Russian state. This narrative is built on the linear assumption that Russian speakers will act as Russians wherever they live. The proliferation of compatriot organizations supported by Russia, which we describe further in this paper, fits with this narrative. Similarly, the strategy of

passportization—offering Russian passports to citizens in breakaway regions in post-Soviet countries—is in line with the narrative of the *Russkiy mir* (Delcour and Wolczuk 2015: 468).

It should be noted that narratives about Russian nationhood and *Russkiy mir* can be contradictory and clash with narratives about Eurasia (Hutchings and Szostek 2015: 191-193; Laruelle 2015b: 126-127). Russian elites have used the narrative of protecting Russian speakers as justification for the annexation of Crimea, which "unsettled countries with large Russian minorities" (Dragneva and Wolczuk 2017: 11), including the members of the EAEU such as Kazakhstan. Moreover, although the official documents of the Russian elites on foreign policy (i.e. Foreign Policy Concepts) have emphasized the Eurasian integration project, they do not explicitly justify the project with the idea of the Russian world (Frear and Mazepus 2017: 28). In practice any ideological nationalism tied to the concept of the Russian world has to co-exist with other political calculations and the strategic interests of a variety of domestic actors when formulating foreign policy thinking (Lankina and Watanabe 2017). This instrumental use of shared identity, either ethnic-linguistic or cultural-historical, reflects to a large extent the Russian domestic elites' struggle to forge a national identity after the collapse of the Soviet Union and their use of ambiguous criteria for who is considered Russian (Shevel 2011).

Another narrative, centred around the concept of a 'sovereign' or 'directed' democracy, has been elevated from domestic audience consumption to some kind of an international Russian model of governance. As Krastev has argued, the discourse of sovereign democracy views sovereignty as underpinned by economic independence, military strength and cultural identity and embodies Russia's ideological ambition to be an alternative to the EU (Krastev 2006). Sceptical as we may be about this concept's ideological power, it has found resonance at least with Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orban, who cited it as a new model of governance for Hungary to follow in building a strong national state (Toth 2014). A key feature of the sovereign democracy narrative is that it juxtaposes 'strong' states with the EU and the United States (U.S.), which are depicted as waning powers weakened by too much liberalism. The emphasis on identity and the nation as unifying principles link this narrative to the Russian World narrative.

Russian efforts to disseminate its narratives and messages have both grown in volume and diversified beyond the promotion of the idea of the Russian World concept. Wilson (2015) has highlighted four different aspects of propaganda, aiming at different audiences: 1) efforts sowing confusion and undermining democracy abroad; 2) narratives nudging support for others' anti-systemic views; 3) monopolistic propaganda for domestic viewers; and 4) the creation of parallel alternative realities. The last approach targets the EaP countries or, in Russian terms, 'the near abroad'. Wilson (2015) stresses that the media messages in these countries are accompanied and reinforced by "a virtual chorus of pro-Russian parties, politicians, NGOs, media and the Church". There is a clear connection, also noted by our experts, between messages and the actors we identify in the next section of this paper.

Next to pro-Russian actors, the other key channel for spreading Russian messages and discourses is the media, especially television[8]. Russian "alternative narratives" about the recent past and current geopolitical relations

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[8] Next to television, important for older generations, we note the increasing role of social media for the spread of narratives undermining EU and other international organizations (especially NATO). A review of recent studies of narratives spread via social media can be found in Appendix 1.

are reinforced by propaganda in the news (Wilson 2015). Television continues to be an important source for political news, especially for people over 35. Despite the rise of the internet as an alternative source of political information among the younger generations, 88 % of residents in Eastern neighbourhood countries believe that TV forms public opinion (Ecorys Survey Report 2016: 28). It should be noted that news editors and media figures in Russia have some leeway in how they construct the narratives presented in their shows, taking into account sub-official discourses which may not be completely aligned with Kremlin thinking (Hutchings and Szostek 2015: 189-190, 193). Appearances by the ideologue Alexander Dugin on Russian state television do not mean he is actually involved in the Russian foreign policy decision-making process (Laruelle 2015a). As such even state-controlled Russian news coverage, which might in turn be picked up by audiences in Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine, does not necessarily serve as a mouthpiece for a single, agreed official government discourse (Lankina and Watanabe 2017).

Are Russian efforts to spread specific narratives and ideas and to strengthen linkages an example of authoritarian diffusion?[9] The difference between the diffusion of authoritarianism and the diffusion of ideas about the importance of Russia as a global power (Frear and Mazepus 2017) may be difficult to capture empirically due to the overlap between nationalist and authoritarian modes of mobilization. Furthermore, in practice the messages and narratives spread may be very similar: for example, the negative informational campaign about the EU (Kintsurashvili et al. 2015: 11) can serve both objectives. In our approach here, therefore, we simply argue that both the density of linkages and the spread of pro-Russian and anti-EU messages via media increase the costs of democratization and integrating with the EU for governments in Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine.

3.   Mapping the Actors, Organizations, and Channels Promoting Russian Influence

To map civil society linkages in the EaP countries, we draw on the growing literature on Russian soft power, propaganda and linkages. Existing studies already suggest that the universe of actors engaged in transmitting Russian messages is quite populous (Bogomolov and Lytvynenko 2012; Harding et al. 2017; Hudson 2015, 2017; Kłysiński and Żochowski 2016; Lutsevych 2016; Saari 2014). In addition, we identify currently relevant organizations and public personalities in Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine drawing on country expert answers to a standardized questionnaire exploring different types of linkages.

Our focus is on providing a current snapshot of organizations and actors involved with ideas, messages, and discourses originating from or related to Russia's soft power. We concentrate on the organizations for which there is clear evidence of Russian funding, collaboration or orientation.

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[9] Diffusion is a term that is used extensively in a range of scholarly literature, but its meaning in the hands of different authors can vary significantly. Some differentiate between diffusion-as-process or diffusion-as-outcome (Elkins and Simmons 2005: 36-37). A further area of debate is whether diffusion can be actively pursued through imposition or conditionality (Ambrosio 2010: 378) or whether by its very nature diffusion cannot be actor driven (Elkins and Simmons 2005: 38). In their widely cited conceptual framework for diffusion, Elkins and Simmons propose two mechanisms for the spread of policies and practices between countries (2005: 39-45). The first is *adaptation to altered conditions* and the second is *learning* the strengths and weaknesses of taking certain actions by observing the experiences of others. Their first mechanism is to a certain extent similar to Levitsky and Way's (2005: 22-25) international *linkage.*

The 'agents of the Russian World' that the literature identifies (Bogomolov and Lytvynenko 2012; Hudson 2015, 2017; Kłysiński and Żochowski 2016; Lutsevych 2016; Saari 2014) include key government agencies and state foundations in the Russian Federation, who in turn work with trusted partners and their local associates in the region.

Based on existing studies, the types of organizations linked with Russia can be grouped as, first, Russian compatriot organizations and second, organizations or groups sympathizing with the Kremlin's agenda. For example, Russian-speaking communities and ethnic groups include the World Congress of Russian Compatriots, the International Union of Russian Compatriots and the Institute of Russian Compatriots, all of which have been particularly active in Ukraine (Lutsevych 2016: 14). In Belarus a Coordination Council of Heads of Russian Organizations, based at the Russian Embassy in Minsk, seeks to work with the Russian diaspora (Kłysiński and Żochowski 2016: 27).

The other type of organizations sympathetic to the Kremlin's agenda include Cossack organizations, Afghan veterans, paramilitary or ultra-radical groups, and even martial arts clubs (Kłysiński and Żochowski 2016: 29-32; Lutsevych 2016: 29-31). Next to these are educational and cultural linkages, for example through students attending Russian educational institutions.

3.1.   Political parties

Existing studies show links between parties in other parts of Europe and Russia's ruling party, United Russia. United Russia has started to develop cooperation agreements with political parties in Europe that represent Russian minorities, e.g. in Estonia and Latvia (Hudson 2017: 32).

Actors that we lack systematic evidence on, but that are clearly relevant for maintaining links with Russia are political parties in Moldova and Ukraine. Both formal and informal linkages exist between a number of political parties in the region. In **Belarus** these include pro-government and opposition parties. The Communist Party of Belarus has links with the Communist Party of the Russian Federation Our experts came across information that implies bilateral agreements between the regime-loyal opposition party, the Liberal Democratic Party of Belarus, and the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia and United Russia. The smaller pro-government Republican Party of Labour and Justice cooperates with the Just Russia party. Finally, the opposition United Civic Party has a formal agreement with Russia's opposition PARNAS Party. According to expert evidence from **Moldova**, two parliamentary parties, the Democratic Party of Moldova and the Party of Socialists of Moldova maintain ties with Russian partners. In addition, the anti-European, pro-Russian party *Partidul Nostru* (Our Party) is believed to have strong links to political figures in Moscow. Finally, in **Ukraine** the Opposition Bloc, one of the most prominent parties that emerged in opposition to the Euromaidan movement in 2014, is believed to have maintained close ties to Russia, according to local experts.

Furthermore, there are connections between political parties and oligarchs that link again to Russia's economic interests. Existing studies suggest there are a whole range of business and economic networks and ties between individuals and companies in Russia and its neighbours (Lankina and Niemczyk 2015: 107).

3.2.   Oligarchs and business political ties

Belarus' predominantly state-run economy has little in the way of entrepreneurs or oligarchs independent from the circle around President Alexander Lukashenka. General economic ties between Russia and Belarus, however, are important for the Belarusian economy. There are some key economic sectors in Belarus that have strong business ties with the Russian Federation. These include oil refining, telecommunications, the financial sector, retailers, metal production and automobiles.

In **Moldova** a number of wealthy businessmen, many of whom are also involved in politics, are believed to have fortunes in Russia (among other countries). It is, however, difficult to assess what businesses they control because of their frequent use of intermediaries (Leitner and Meissner 2017: 123). These intermediaries include some of the richest men in Moldova, such as Vlad Plahotniuk (Andreev 2015), Anatol Stati, and the mayor of Balti, Renato Usatai, who lived in Russia for over a decade (RIA 2015). Other wealthy individuals, like Nicolae Ciornâi (Infotag 2010) and Constantin Tampiza, have links to Russia's Lukoil (Riseblog 2015).

In **Ukraine** "closely networked interests" could be observed under President Yanukovych in sectors such as oil and gas, financial services, telecommunications and mass media (Bogomolov and Lytvynenko 2012: 6). Prominent oligarchs such as Victor Medvedchuk, Rinat Akhmetov, Yuriy Boyko and Victor Pinchuk are often cited as maintaining close links to Russia.

3.3.   Cultural and educational umbrella organizations

The main Russian sponsored agencies and foundations active in the region are *Rossotrudnichestvo*, *Russkiy Mir* Foundation, and the Gorchakov Foundation for Public Diplomacy (Hudson 2017: 30-31; Lutsevych 2016: 10-11; Saari 2014: 60-62). These agents often provide grants and funds for third-party organizations and proxy groups. In turn, these can seek to support, strengthen or exploit Russia's technocratic linkages, social linkages, information linkages and civil society linkages. These instruments are sometimes referred to as "vertically integrated propaganda networks" (Lankina and Niemczyk 2015: 105).

The *Russkiy Mir* Foundation and *Rosstrudnichestvo* have opened a number of centres with the declared aim to promote education and culture, the Russian language and the Russian World, as well as to support compatriots in the EaP countries. The *Russkiy Mir* Foundation has a centre at Brest State University in Belarus and a further four at Moldovan universities in Chișinău, Bălți, Tiraspol and Komrat. There are still 11 centres in Ukraine, mainly in the east and south of the country, but also in the capital Kyiv. Of those, three are in the conflict-zone territories of Donbas. *Rosstrudnichestvo* has a Centre for Science and Culture in the Moldovan capital as well and a further four centres in Belarus in Minsk, Brest and Homel. Ukraine still hosts a Centre for Science and Culture in Kyiv, and there is also representation via a Consulate-General of Russia in Odessa. The Minsk agency of the Russian state-owned Moscow Centre of International Co-operation—'Moscow House'—has become an informal soft power coordination centre in Belarus (Kłysiński and Żochowski 2016: 28-29).

There are a wide range of possible agents of Russian influence at work, including government-organized NGOs, non-profit civil society organizations, proxy groups and networks. In addition to the large official Russian bodies

that operate in the EaP countries, there are numerous associations and local civil society organizations which often collaborate with them and others to promote and promulgate Russian interests. Examples of specific organizations and their areas of activity identified by experts in Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine can be found in Table 1.

In all three countries there is also some form of coordinating council for Russian compatriots, the loose term for ethnic Russians, Russian citizens and Russian speakers living outside the borders of the Russian Federation. These congresses or councils usually have close ties to the local Russian Embassy.

Transnational youth groups are often funded by Russian grants from Kremlin-approved foundations and agencies. Examples include the Eurasian Youth Movement, Young Eurasia or *Sodruzhestvo* (Lutsevych 2016: 22-23). Youth movements might actively promote Russian World values, such as Young Russia in Belarus (Kłysiński and Żochowski 2016: 27-28).

In addition, a variety of groups supporting Eurasian integration have emerged, and often at the same time promote an anti-EU narrative. These can address audiences in specific countries, such as the Recognition Foundation in Moldova, or they can work with local actors, such as Viktor Medvedchuk in Ukraine and his anti-EU NGO Ukrainian Choice (Lutsevych 2016: 20-22). In Belarus there are also organizations that promote Russian-Belarusian unity in particular. Table 1 presents an (non-exhaustive) overview[10]. In the majority of cases, there is a lack of transparency about where the grants and funds of these organizations originate from. Many websites include a list of links to 'Partners', but the nature of the partnership is usually not clear. In many cases, these partners are local Russian Embassies, and local offices of the *Russkiy Mir* Foundation and *Rosstrudnichestvo.* One interesting example of a complicated network of connections can be found in Moldova. The League of Russian Youth from Moldova states on their home page that they receive no funding from Russia or other nations of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). The head of the League is Igor Tulyantsev, who is also the founder of the local Community Fund, which provides grants to organizations in Moldova. This includes grants to the League of Russian Youth from Moldova. The Community Fund lists as its partners the *Russkiy Mir* Foundation and the Russian Embassy in Moldova, but the nature of that partnership is not disclosed.

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[10] Web links have been included where available.

Table 1: Key Groups Promoting Russian Influence Active in Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine

A. Belarus

Name	Area of Activity	Web Site
Coordinating Council of Russian Compatriots in Belarus (Координационный совет Российских соотечественников в Белоруссии)	Compatriots, Russian World	http://ross-bel.ru/koordinacionnyy-sovet-rossiyskih-so
National-Liberation Movement in Belarus (Национально-освободительное движение в Беларуси)	Compatriots, Russian World	http://belnod.by
Russian Comradeship (Русское товарищество)	Compatriots, Russian World	n/a
Russian Society (РОО «Русское общество»)		http://www.rusobel.org
Young Rus' (Русь молодая)	Slavic values, military-patriotic, sport trainings	http://rumol.by
Transfiguration (Преображение)	Culture and education, youth, Russian language, Russian-Belarusian Unity	n/a
Our Rus' (Наша Русь)	Culture, language, Russian language, history, religion	n/a
Rus' United (Русь единая)	Culture, history, Eurasian integration, Slavic world	n/a
Sadko (Садко)	Culture, language, compatriots, Russian-Belarusian relations , pensioners	n/a
Belarusian Union of Survivors of Siege of Leningrad blokadniki (Белорусский союз блокадников Ленинград	Culture and education, history	n/a
Russian House in Vitebsk (ВОО «Русский дом»)	Culture, language, compatriots, Russian-Belarusian relations	http://vitrusdom.narod.ru
Russian Cultural Centre Rus' in Vitebsk (Русский культурный центр «Русь»)	Education and culture, compatriots, Russian-language	n/a
Russian Cultural and Educational Society in Mogilev (Русское культурно-просветительское общество в Могилеве)	Culture, youth, symbolic events	http://rkpo.ucoz.ru
International organization of youth organizations of Russian compatriots	Culture and education, youth, Russian	http://www.mamors.ru

(Международная ассоциация молодежных организаций российских соотечественников -МАМОРС)	language, history	
Belarusian civic organization Rus' (Белорусское общественное объединение «Русь»)	Russians in Belarus	n/a
Belarusian Literary Union Polotsk Branch (Белорусский литературный союз «Полоцкая ветвь»)	Culture, literature, Russian language	https://polvetvby.wordpress.com

B. Moldova

Name	Area of Activity	Web Site
Coordinating Council of Russian Compatriots in Moldova (Координационный совет российских соотечественников в Республике Молдова)	Compatriots, Russian World	https://russkie.md
Congress of Russian Communities of Moldova (Конгресса русских общин Республики Молдова)	Compatriots, Russian World	http://krorm.ru
Community Fund (Фонд Содружество)	Compatriots, Eurasian integration	http://fond.md
Russian Community of the Republic of Moldova (Русская община Республики Молдова)	Russian World, Russian language and culture, Russian-speaking communities	http://rusmoldova.org
League of Russian Youth from Moldova (Лига русской молодежи Республики Молдова)	Compatriots, Russian World, youth groups	http://ligarus.org
Young Guard (Молодая Гвардия)	Transnational youth group, joining Eurasian Union	http://gardatinara.md
Women's Association *Rossiyanka* (Ассоциация женщин Россиянка)	-	n/a
Centre for Russian Culture in Moldova (Центр русской культуры в Республике Молдова)	Russian World, Russian language and culture, Russian-speaking communities	http://ow.ly/Aa9L30cewSO
Association of Russian Artists from Moldova (Товарищество Русских Художников Молдовы)	Russian World, Russian language and culture	http://moldovart.com
Association of Russian Writers from Moldova (Ассоциация Русских Писателей Республики Молдова)	Compatriots, Russian World, Russian language and culture	https://www.facebook.com/arprmofficial/
Spiritual Russian Unity Movement (Движение «Русское духовное единство»)	Russian World, promoting Russian language and culture	https://russkie.md/category/russkoe-duhovnoie-edinstvo/

RUSI NGO	Russian World, Russian culture	
Informational, Analytical and Law Centre	Advice to compatriots on moving to Russia	n/a

C. Ukraine

Name	Area of Activity	Web Site
All-Ukraine Coordinating Council of Russian Compatriot Organizations (Всеукраинский Координационный Совет организаций российских соотечественников)	Compatriots, Russian World	http://www.vksors.org
NGO Ukrainian Choice (Украинский выбор)	Anti-EU	http://vybor.ua
NGO Russian School (Русская школа)	Education and culture, compatriots, Russian-language, youth and sports	http://www.schoolru.com.ua
Kyiv Centre for Policy Research and Conflictology	Policy research	http://www.analitik.org.ua

Source: Authors

3.4.   The Russian Orthodox Church

An actor that deserves special attention due to its importance as a channel for political influence and increasing reach is the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC).[11] A recent survey has shown that there is a link between the self-identification as a member of the Orthodox Church and support for Russia's role in the world as a 'counterweight' to the West in Central and Eastern Europe. The exception to this trend are citizens in Georgia and Ukraine (Pew Research Centre 2017).

The ROC is an important patron for initiatives aiming to link Orthodox Christians across Eastern Europe and to promote ideas of common identity. The Pew Survey quoted above showed that Russia was viewed as a protector of Orthodox Christians in the world by a majority of citizens of countries where orthodox religion was dominant. In Belarus, 76 % of citizens agreed with the statement that a strong Russia was needed to counterbalance the West, and in Moldova, 61 % agreed with the same statement. While only 22 % of Ukrainians agreed with the statement, the majority of those who agreed self-identified as Eastern Orthodox. The two most salient factors predicting support for Russia's strong role in the world were the Orthodox religion and the belief that the respondent's values differ from Western values.

According to some studies, while the ROC promotes a Russian cultural outlook, it does not always support the Kremlin's political position (Hudson 2017: 31; Petro 2015). In Moldova's latest elections, however, the branch of the Orthodox Church affiliated with the Moscow patriarchate took an overly political stance, conducting an aggressive campaign against pro-EU candidates.

The Church supports its own international events such as the Day of Baptism of Rus' or organizations such as the charities of the so-called 'Orthodox oligarchs': the Foundation of St. Vasily or the Dialogue of Civilizations Endowment (Lutsevych 2016: 24-25). Some well-known public figures from the Orthodox Church have spread anti-EU rhetoric in Belarus and Moldova (Całus 2016: 69-70). Examples of such figures in **Moldova** are the bishop of Bălți, Marchel Mihaescu, or the priest and chair of the St. Matrona Christian Association, Anatolie Cibric. Moreover, the president of Moldova, Igor Dodon, decorated sixteen priests of the Orthodox Metropolitan Church of Moldova in July 2017 (Hendrik 2017) and has met with Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia four times since the beginning of his presidency during his official visits to Russia (The Russian Orthodox Church 2017). In **Belarus** the Metropolit Pavel of Minsk and Slutsk is also active in promoting 'traditional' values and organizing events such as the festival on *Linii Stalina* in 2015 and the youth educational forum *Quo Vadis* in 2016. The Belarusian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate has been operating a number of so-called Orthodox military-patriotic clubs for many years (Kłysiński and Żochowski 2016: 32-33). Orthodox military patriotic clubs such as *Druzjyna, Slavyane* and *Vitjaz* are developed in the Grodno region of Belarus.

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[11] Not all Eastern Orthodox Christians in the region are part of the ROC under the lead of the Moscow Patriarchate. In Ukraine, for example, there are three different denominations of Eastern Christianity: the Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Moscow Patriarchate, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Kyiv Patriarchate and the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (Bogomolov and Lytvynenko 2012: 11-13).

In **Ukraine**, it is important to distinguish between the positions of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church affiliated with the Moscow Patriarchate, which tends to be pro-Russian, and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyiv Patriarchate, which is not recognized by the Moscow Patriarchate and is not pro-Russian. NGOs such as Orthodox Ukraine carry out youth and education projects with the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (affiliated to the Moscow Patriarchate).

The comparison between the role of the ROC in the three countries suggests that the church plays a politically salient and pro-Moscow role in both Belarus and Moldova. The military patriotic clubs organized in Belarus by the church are evidence that the church itself creates actors that promote pro-Russian ideas, for example the idea of the common Slavic roots. In Ukraine, the influence of the Russian affiliated branch of orthodoxy seems to be currently diminishing.

3.5. Educational linkages

Higher education institutions in the Russian Federation are currently a popular destination for many students from EaP countries. Both Belarus and Moldova sent nearly 25,000 students each to study at Russian universities in 2014. The figures are lower for Ukraine: in the aftermath of the Euromaidan and the annexation of Crimea, Russia was the chosen destination for nearly 13,000 students from Ukraine. The number of Ukrainian citizens studying in Russian universities excluding the ones from Crimea is around 9,000. These make up approximately 15 % of the total number of Ukrainian students abroad, and represent 7 % of the foreign students studying in the Russian Federation. Remarkably, the number of Ukrainian students in the Russian Federation has actually increased almost by a third over the last two years. Such an increase is presumably caused by students coming from the conflict-zone territories of Donbas.

As the student numbers show, the situation in Ukraine stands out in the education field with its changing dynamics. There were multiple branches of Russian educational institutions in Crimea even before its annexation. However, currently there are no branches of Russian higher education institutions operating on Ukrainian territory that is controlled by the Ukrainian government.

By contrast, a number of Russian higher education institutions have opened branches in Belarus and Moldova. There are three in **Belarus**, with the Belarusian-Russian University in the regional city of Mahileu/Mogilev having a particularly good reputation dating back to Soviet times. The branches of the Russian State Social University and Russian University of Economics in Minsk are less well-known. Six branches operate in **Moldova**. Moscow's Modern University for the Humanities has centres in Chișinău and Beltsy. There is also a branch of the Baltic Institute of Ecology, Politics and Law in Beltsy. The Slavonic University in Chișinău includes the Lyceum Svetochi. Finally, there are two branches of Russian universities in Tiraspol, the capital of breakaway Transnistria: the Moscow Institute of Entrepreneurship and Law and the Moscow Academy of Economics and Law. These are actual branches of universities, which offer access to their courses, rather than institutes set up with the specific purpose to promote the 'Russian World'. Nevertheless, they play a socializing function, just like their Western counterparts and can informally diffuse narratives on Russian ideas and values. In addition, the *Russkiy Mir* Foundation has opened centres based in local universities in each country with the express purpose of promoting the Russian language, education and culture.

The overview of linkages presented in this section and the examples of politically salient actions of pro-Russian actors and organizations appears to strengthen the existing interpretation of these actors as tools of Russian soft power. Coverage of organizations linked to Russia is also starting to become more prominent in the local media of EaP countries, reflecting both a potential intensification of these organizations' activities, but also the increased awareness of their role in the region since the start of the conflict in Ukraine in 2014.

The (non-exhaustive) overview of linkages presented in this section also confirms our initial expectations that the landscape of organizations and actors would be influenced by the choices of gatekeeper political elites. In other words, domestic gatekeepers can to some extent prevent (as in the case of Ukraine), moderate, or enhance the influence of the Russian actors. The comparison between the actors and organizations active in the three countries reveals not only the downward trend in Ukraine, but also the density of organizations and actors linked to Russia in Moldova. Based on our discussion in the first part of this paper, we find that the abundance and diversity of linkages suggests both external interest to change political dynamics and choices in Moldova and the resonance with some Moldovan political elites. This abundance is very visible in both the business, cultural, and religious spheres and is enhanced by various competing groups in Moldova. In Belarus, the cultural and religious links are visible and appear stable for the last few years, whereas the business links seem much more covert and moderated by Lukashenka's government.

In addition to the support or even the creation of local actors favourable to Russia, the media has been playing a significant role in spreading Russian messages targeting 'the West' as morally corrupt and weak. The news and perspectives promoted by Russian state-controlled TV have been a key element in spreading Russian influence (Lankina and Niemczyk 2014). What is less understood is the extent to which Russia's narratives and the image it wants to project are reflected by national media in EaP countries, a gap which we address in the analysis presented here.

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

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

A growing area of analysis concerns the spread of fake news and propaganda originating from Russia and targeting the EU member states or the EaP countries (Nimmo 2016; Pomerantsev and Weiss 2014; Potapova 2017). Analysing the spread of fake news and the reach of Russian propaganda is beyond the scope of this paper, but the importance of their increase should not be underestimated[12]. Think tanks, journalists and experts are increasingly monitoring propaganda and fake news and capturing the underlying narratives. Monitoring propaganda and fake news has uncovered their staggering scope, leading to calls by concerned

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

experts and members of the European Parliament for an increase of the budget and staff of the EU's EastStrat Com, the European External Service agency dealing with Russian disinformation (Bentzen 2017).

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

Russia's investments into media and communications have been shown to cover three main areas: internally and externally focused media with a substantial online presence, use of social media, and discussion boards and language skills to engage target audiences (Giles 2015). In both Belarus and Moldova there are local editions of the *Sputnik* news portal, NTV and RTR television channels, the TASS news agency, as well as the newspapers *Argumenty i Fakty* and *Komosomolskaya Pravda*. In **Ukraine** local versions of various Russian news outlets have been banned since 2014.[13] Even the independent online Russian TV station 'Dozhd', which is no cheerleader for Putin's government, was banned in Ukraine in 2017.

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

Importantly, Russian information sources are very popular in Belarus and Moldova, where 91 % and 90 % of respondents respectively indicated their use. Russian TV channels are cited as the main source for news and current affairs programmes by 37 % of respondents in Belarus and 38 % in Moldova (Ecorys Annual Survey Report 2016). A project supported by the EaP civil society forum monitored news on the Russian channels watched in EaP countries in 2015[14]. They found, not surprisingly, that the role of Russian channels as sources of information was more significant in the countries where they were freely available (Belarus, Moldova) than in countries where they were not (Azerbaijan, Georgia and Ukraine). On the general trend and tone of Russian channels, the study noted, as could be expected, the extremely limited range of topics and biased interpretations offered on Russian channels. For example, regarding Ukraine, the study found that "the main

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

Russian channels have been used as instruments of propaganda in the conflict between Ukraine and Russia, diverting attention from important domestic issues and challenges and instead focusing on the conflict in Ukraine" (Monitoring report executive summary, 2015: 3).

Notwithstanding the importance of Russian channels, national TV and media play an important role in opinion formation as they may be seen as more objective. National TV news are an important source of political news for the public in Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine. According to the Ecorys Annual Survey Report (2016), private and public TV stations are the most popular sources of national political news for 50 % of respondents in Belarus, for 56 % of respondents in Moldova, and for 62 % in Ukraine. However, there is no large private TV landscape in Belarus. Moreover, people from the EaP countries that have heard news about the EU, are most likely to have heard it on TV (81 % of respondents).

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

5.1.   The objectives

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

The major goal of the media monitoring and analysis presented in the second part of this paper is to provide not only a comprehensive picture of the news about Russia and the EAEU, but also of the view of the EU and its member states that regular people in Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine are exposed to. We aim to identify the extent, tone, and type of coverage of Russia in the main evening news bulletins in the most watched TV stations. As argued above, democratization can be hampered not only by spreading pro-Russian messages, but also by undermining the democratizing actor in the region—the EU. For this reason, we look at the proportion of news devoted to Russia and to the EU, as well as the type and the tone of these messages. Furthermore, the potential tone or bias in news items about Russia or other external actors such as the EU may also resonate with existing discourses or, adversely, suggest a different world view. Exploring how Russia and the EU are presented in terms of tone in national news would further enhance our understanding of the informational environment in which citizens in the Eastern neighbourhood countries make their choices and judgments.

5.2.   Method

In each country, we covered the main evening news programme of the most popular TV stations (two TV stations in Ukraine and Belarus, and three in Moldova).[15] The choice of channels to be monitored was driven by evidence about the most popular TV channels, where available, and by some country specific considerations.

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

Based on the results of the 2016 Ecorys Survey Report, we know that private channels are considered an important and objective news source in Ukraine. In both Moldova and Ukraine, private channels are considered as more trustworthy sources of information on political matters, in contrast to Belarus where people rely on public channels.

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

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

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

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

We have monitored and coded 607 news emissions (194 in Belarus, 238 in Moldova, and 175 in Ukraine). The total duration of the monitored emissions is 377 hours (130 in Belarus, 115 in Moldova, and 132 in Ukraine). Table 2 shows the distribution of number and duration of news emissions watched per country and news channel. We have coded all news items in which Russia, the EAEU, the EU, or the member states of the EU were mentioned.

Table 2. Number and duration of monitored news broadcasts across countries, channels, and programmes.

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

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

5.3.   Extent of coverage

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

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

The share of news mentioning Russia as a main actor is similar in all three countries (based on our sampling of stations and programmes): in Belarus 36 %, Moldova 30 %, and Ukraine 37 % of all news feature Russia. It is larger than the share of news devoted to the EU as a main actor, but less than the combined news featuring any of the EU member states.[16] It is noteworthy that in more than 10 % of the news items featuring Russia, it is presented alongside either the EU or one of the member states. But also, when the EU is discussed as a main actor, more than 15 % of the time Russia is mentioned as well. When taking into account any mention of Russia in a news item (as a main or secondary actor), it features in 41 % (Belarus), 35 % (Moldova), and 53 % (Ukraine) of coded news items. Russia's integration project, the EAEU, receives minimal coverage: small in Belarus (6 %), non-existent in Ukraine (0 %).

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

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

5.4.   Evaluations

To gain an idea of how the selected news channels present Russia and the EU, we evaluated not only know how much airtime the external actors get, but also in what light they are presented. To analyse this, coders evaluated the tone of the news items, choosing between neutral or an explicit or implicit evaluation tone. The tone could be negative, positive, or balanced. The tone was coded as negative if the news item either explicitly or implicitly created a negative image of the actor. The tone was coded as positive if the news item created a positive image of an actor. We counted the tone as balanced when both positive and negative sides of the actors or events were discussed.

In Belarus, very few items had a tone: less than half of the news items that feature Russia have either implicit or explicit tone. In Moldova, the number of news items with a tone is the highest: almost two thirds of the news items about Russia have a tone. In Ukraine more than half of news items about Russia contain an evaluation.

Taking messages from all countries together, when a news item about the EU had a tone, it was most often positive (62 % of all messages that had a tone). Correspondingly, 26 % of messages were balanced and 12 % were negative. By comparison, when a news item about Russia had a tone, it was most often negative: 50% of all messages that had an evaluative tone, while 16 % of messages were balanced and 34 % were positive. The distribution of tone, however, varied per country (Figure 1).

In Belarus, the largest number of items that had a tone—82 (74%)—presented Russia in a positive light, nine news items were balanced (8 %), and twenty negative (18 %). In Moldova, negative messages about Russia dominated with 86 items (46 % of items), 49 were balanced (26 % of items), and 53 were positive (28 % of items). Strikingly, reflecting the current tensions with Russia, in Ukraine almost all news items about Russia that contained evaluation were negative—116 (95 % of items)—with only six balanced (5 % of items) and no positive items.

Figure 1. Evaluations of the EU and Russia in news items in Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine (percentage of all the items that contained an evaluation).
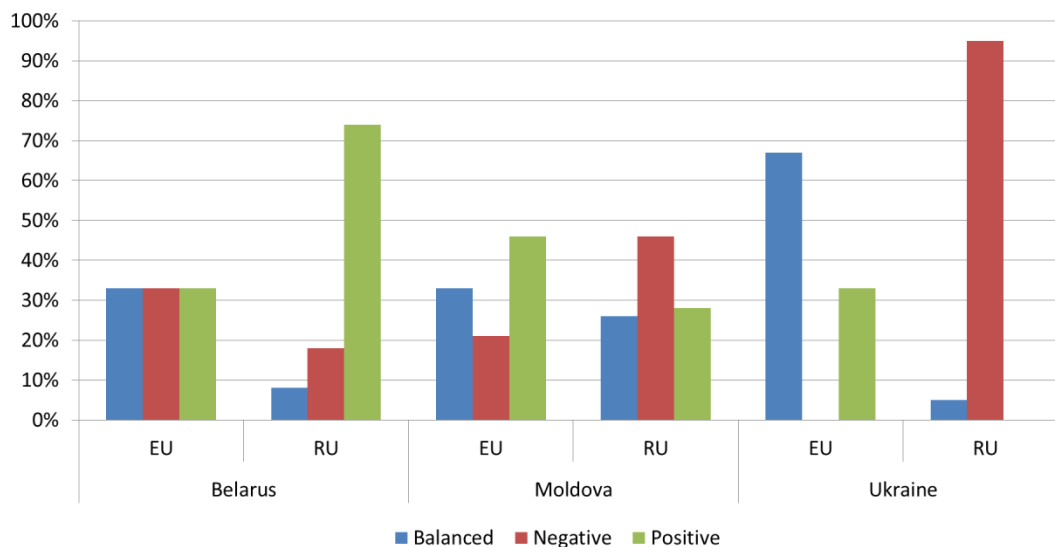
Source: Authors

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

5.5. Themes and sources of news

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

The distribution of topics for the news items about the EU and its member states in Belarus and Ukraine is exactly the same as that of the news items about Russia: external events or developments and bilateral relations and programmes. In Moldova, bilateral relations, meetings and conferences dominate as the topics of news items about the EU and its member states.

After identifying the general topic of each news item, the coders could assign more than one specific theme to a news item (see Tables 3A, 3B, and 3C). Overall, the top two themes in each country included international

relations—information about international meetings, councils of the EU, and international agreements, and security—including information about wars and terrorism. The third most frequent theme in Moldova and Ukraine was the category that included themes not listed below (*other*). Belarus was the only country in which the economy was the third most frequent theme of the news items.

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

Table 3A. Topics of news items in Belarus per actor.[17]

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

Source: Authors

In **Belarus** (Table 3A), individual EU member states were most often mentioned in news items about *security*. Items on security included very diverse subjects, from information about Germany's defence spending, through to the arrival of new NATO corps from Belgium in Lithuania, to a terrorist attack in Sweden. EU member states were mentioned in security-themed news items 102 times, slightly more often than Russia—100 times. In the Russian case, security items gave information, for example, about joint military training by Russian and Tajik military forces, an attack on police in Astrakhan, the situation in Syria and humanitarian actions by the Russian army, and the investigation of the terrorist attack in St. Petersburg.

In the Belarusian news, Russia and the EAEU were mentioned more often in the context of *economy* (86) than the EU, the EU member states individually, and the EU member states as a part of the EU taken together (68). The EU was most often mentioned in the context of *international relations* (events, meetings, and agreements), *security*, and *immigration*. There was a substantial share of news items in which either a EU member state individually or as a part of the EU was discussed in relation to *political and institutional* themes, examples of

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[17] In Tables 3A, 3B, And 3C, 'MS&EU' stands for member states mentioned in the context of the EU, 'MS' stands for member states, and 'EAEU' for Eurasian Economic Union.

which are the elections in the Netherlands and France, the legalization of euthanasia in Germany, or plans for the new design for British passports after Brexit.

Table 3B. Topics of news items in Moldova per actor.

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

Source: Authors

In **Moldova** (Table 3B), the patterns are different. The EU is reported most frequently in the context of *reforms* linked to the Association Agreements. Examples of such news items include reports on progress in the implementation of the Association Agreements, the provision of 15 million euros by the EU for the reform of public administration in Moldova, and the harmonization of Moldovan legislation with European standards in foods commerce. The second group of news items in which the EU features as the main actor is related to *international relations*. Importantly, the EU is also present in the news on *economic* themes in Moldova. The EU is mentioned more often (24 cases) than Russia (21 cases) in economic news items. Furthermore, when including the EU, the EU member states individually, and the EU member states as a part of the EU, there are 73 news items in relation to economic issues: substantially more in comparison to the 22 news items about the economy involving Russia or the EAEU. The economic context in which the EU was presented in the news programmes is, for example, support for small enterprises that were opened and developed thanks to European grants, the EU as the buyer of 77 % of Moldovan wine exports, and Germany's interest in investments in Moldova. Interestingly, the third most frequent context in which individual member states feature is *culture*: arts, popular culture, and specific regional/national customs (73). Several examples of items about culture that include EU member states are: the celebration of St. Anton in Spain, a Bulgarian masks festival, the Belgian Chocolate Saloon, a dance contest in Romania, and the 2017 London Design Fair. By comparison, Russia is mostly mentioned in the *security*-themed news items in the Moldovan news (73). This was in relation to the conflict in Ukraine and the Minsk agreements, the conflict in Transnistria, and the terrorist attack in St. Petersburg. The other categories of items within which Russia was frequently reported as an actor are *other* (67) and *international relations* (48).

Table 3C. Topics of news items in Ukraine per actor.

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

Source: Authors

In **Ukraine** (Table 3C), both Russia and the individual member states of the EU were mentioned most often in the news items about *security* (72 and 66 items respectively). The EU and its member states mentioned in the context of the EU were most often presented as an actor in news items about *international relations* (events, meetings, agreements), with 45 news items. In the category of news items about international relations, there were many mentions of the EU in the context of agreements on visa-free movement with Ukraine and Georgia (25 items), showing that this issue was presented as one of great importance. Other issues among the news items on international relations were discussions of the sanctions against Russia and support for Ukraine in the conflict on its territory, and European Parliament elections. Also individual member states were mentioned many times in the context of international relations events (48 news items). By comparison, Russia was mentioned 40 times in the context of *international relations* and many items were in regards to its relations with the U.S. and talks between Russian (Putin and Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov) and American officials (President Donald Trump and Secretary of State Rex Tillerson). Surprisingly, economic news items were not a common theme of the news in the monitored period in Ukraine. The EU was mentioned explicitly in the context of *economy* only three times (all about Ukraine receiving 600 million euros of aid from the EU) and the sum of the economic news items related to the EU and its member states individually or as a part of the Union is only 13. Russia was also not frequently mentioned in economy-themed news (eight times). It could be that economic matters were discussed during the international meetings and events, which is the most popular theme in which the EU and its member states were mentioned, but economy has not come to the fore as the topic presented in the news programmes.

5.6.   Values in the news items

The analysis also shows a noteworthy pattern in the distribution of news items about *values*. The values category included items about human rights, family values and identity (ethnicity, religion, language). The EU

and its member states (individually and as a part of the EU) were mentioned in the context of values more often than Russia and the EAEU in Belarus (50:26) and Moldova (81:41).

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

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

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

5.7.   Which topics are covered most positively by whom?

The analysis of the interaction between the tone and the theme of the news items (see Tables 4A and 4B, and Figure 2) shows that overall, **Russia** has the best balance when *meetings, conferences, events* are discussed and the worst when it comes to *bilateral events* and *external events* (a result driven largely but not entirely by the Ukrainian sample). Russia is an actor in human interest stories much more often than the EU (65 items compared to 6 items respectively). However, the majority of the human interests news items about Russia that have a tone are negative (50 % negative items, 37 % positive items, 13 % balanced). Unsurprisingly, the tone towards Russia is most likely to be positive when Russian news sources are used. It is altogether balanced when a programme uses its own reporting, and mostly negative when the source is mixed or unclear. When it comes to specific topics, the most negative ones are *rule of law*, *security*, *values*, *other*, and *political*. There is positive balance on *culture*, *economy*, *energy*, *environment*, *history*, and *immigration*.

Table 4A. Tone (presence and type) per topic per actor: Russia and EAEU

| Actor	No tone	Tone	Balanced	Negative	Positive
External events or developments	160	155	24	81	50
Human interest stories	35	30	4	15	11
Meetings, conferences, events	35	59	12	22	25
Bilateral relations and programmes	49	122	16	73	33
Other	35	50	11	25	14
Visit from a state official	23	27	3	7	17
Total	337	443	70	223	150

Source: Authors

Table 4B. Tone (presence and type) per topic per actor: EU and the member states mentioned in the context of the EU

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

Source: Authors

Figure 2. Number of items with evaluation per topic about the EU and Russia.
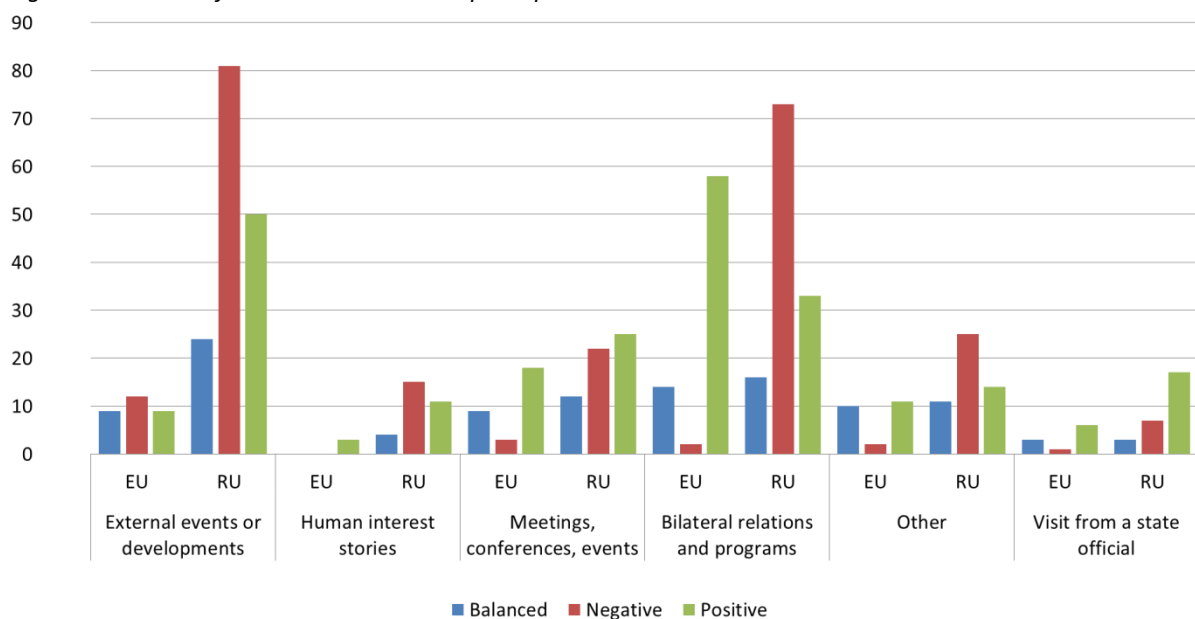
Source: Authors

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

6.   Conclusions

The presence of a growing constellation of organizations and associations linked with Russia is clearly visible in Belarus and Moldova, while in Ukraine it is diminishing (with the exception of the self-declared Donetsk and Luhansk republics). The abundance of actors focusing on 'compatriots' and Russian-language speakers reflects the key ideas of the 'Russian World' narrative discussed above. Youth and veteran organizations and compatriot councils are often linked to their local Russian embassies. Next to Russian identity (with common 'Slavic' heritage playing a similar role), shared Orthodox religion is stressed in Russian messages and can be transmitted correspondingly by the ROC and affiliated organizations in all three countries. Educational linkages continue to exist, even in Ukraine, often linked to funding distributed by umbrella organizations. These civil society linkages (Levitsky and Way 2006: 384) do not necessarily promote authoritarianism as a system of rule, but often represent values and ideas that stand in opposition to the values and ideas supported by the EU.

Based on our brief overview of linkages with Russia, we do not find evidence of authoritarian diffusion, but rather of the promotion of Russia's role as a centre of gravity aiming to appeal to Russians, Slavs and Orthodox Christians. By funding organizations and activities, Russia clearly aims to promote its own soft power, without necessarily offering a clear model of government. Instead, a critique of the EU's liberalism aims to undermine EU policies, sow scepticism about democratic governance and is often coupled with the promotion of 'traditional values'.

It should not be assumed, however, that the existence of such a range of linkages in Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine guarantees that Russia's messages actually dominate the information space in the EaP countries uncontested. What is clear is that the societal organizations promoting Russian messages are increasingly active in the countries we have examined, especially in Moldova and Belarus. However, the TV monitoring shows that messages about Russia are not uniformly positive, and messages about the EU are mostly positive or balanced.

Domestic political elites can influence the density of linkages by promoting some actors or banning others. This is visible if we compare Russian linkages in Belarus and Moldova to those in Ukraine after the annexation of Crimea in 2014. Still, the diversity of organizations and linkages based on language and shared past is such that we do not expect that elites can remove all channels of Russian influence or even that it would be normatively desirable to do so.

As the discussion of the growing influence of Russian messages transmitted through linkages and channels and communication shows, it is hard to keep any country completely closed to messages and narratives. Social organizations and local actors, including the media, can play the role of amplifiers that can re-transmit, increase (or decrease) the volume, and perhaps modulate the messages of external actors.

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

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

Moreover, TV monitoring provided interesting insights into which topics dominate the news on the EU and Russia in each of the EaP countries. For example, in Belarus, Russia receives significantly more coverage on economic issues than the EU. The EU and its members feature mostly as actors in international events and political and institutional developments (such as votes in the EU bodies). Furthermore, when the EU is mentioned in the context of values, its image on Belarusian TV is not that of a human rights promoter, but of an actor that struggles with the challenges of multiculturalism and terrorism. This is different than in Moldova, where the EU and its member states are mentioned more often in an economic context than Russia is. The greatest emphasis on the Moldovan news is put on the EU as an actor involved in the country's reforms. This suggests that the image of the EU as a transformative power in Moldova is not only present in the EU's communications to Moldova (Dimitrova et al. 2016), but also reflected in the domestic news in this country. Russia, in comparison, is most often covered in Moldovan news in relation to security issues regarding the conflicts in Ukraine and Transnistria. Interestingly, Russia received substantial coverage in news items discussing history and commemorations, while individual member states of the EU received attention in news items discussing cultural events and values. In this set of themes, the Moldovan channels seem to strive to achieve a balance between promoting European culture and respecting the common historical heritage of the Soviet Union. In Ukraine, the EU does not emerge as a transformative power in the news programmes, as it is not mentioned either in the context of the economy or in the context of reforms. Instead, it is primarily portrayed as a rather abstract player in the international arena participating in events, meetings, and agreements. In contrast, Russia is presented as a destructive actor in the context of security and human rights values.

The connections between domestic and international actors and messages amplifying (or countering) Russian narratives and undermining the efforts to promote the EU's messages are increasingly clear. Further research, which we undertake in a report that will follow this working paper, is needed to establish which EU or Russian messages resonate with citizens and affect their causal beliefs.

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8. Appendix 1: Studies and Organizations Monitoring Fake News

Source	About	Link	Affiliation, members
Disinformation Review	*Russia Today* spreads systematically fake news calling it alternative news.	https://euvsdisinfo.eu/inside-rts-world-of-alternative-news/	EU's EastStrat Com, EEAS
Disinformation Review	Pro-Kremlin disinformation in Denmark.	https://euvsdisinfo.eu/pro-kremlin-disinformation-in-denmark/	
CODA Disinformation Crisis via Disinformation Review,	The escalation of digital age propaganda into an all-out war on truth.	https://codastory.com/disinformation-crisis?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=kremlin_watch_monitor_how_kremlin_controls_major_russian_media&utm_term=2017-04-19	CODA: A web platform for journalists focusing one issue (journalists, designers technologists)
Stopfake	How propaganda influences Ukraine and impacts other countries in the world.	http://www.stopfake.org/en/news/	Kyiv schools of journalism graduates, lecturers
Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum	Recommendations on Combating Disinformation and Propaganda Based on the results of the EaP CSF project "Joining Efforts and Skills to Confront Propaganda"	http://eap-csf.eu/wp-content/uploads/EaP-CSF-Recommendations_February-2017.pdf	Civil society organizations united in the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum
EAST Center	Anti-Belarus disinformation campaign in Russian media.	http://east-center.org/media-analysis/	Eurasian States in Transition (EAST) Research Center, a Warsaw-based think-tank
EAST Center	Top 10 fake news in Moldova 2016-2017.	http://east-center.org/top-10-fake-news-moldovan-media-2016-2017/	Eurasian States in Transition (EAST) Research Center
NATO Defense College	An introductory guide to Russia's doctrine and activities in this field, including elements of cyber warfare (a handbook).	http://www.ndc.nato.int/news/news.php?icode=995	NATO
Digital Forensic Research Lab	Four Russian narratives on NATO's deployment in Europe: the Baltic States are paranoid or Russophobic; that NATO is unwelcome; that NATO cannot protect the Baltic States; and that NATO is the aggressor.	https://medium.com/dfrlab/russian-narratives-on-natos-deployment-616e19c3d194	DFRL at the Atlantic Council

EP research service	Fake news information sheet, rise of fake news and propaganda; creation of East Strat Com.	http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2017/599384/EPRS_ATA%282017%29599384_EN.pdf	European Parliament, EU
EP research service	The role of Russia's disinformation campaign in the Ukraine crisis	http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2015/571339/EPRS_BRI(2015)571339_EN.pdf	European Parliament, EU
EUobserver	Investigation of the stories spread by Russian media: using sex, scandals, migrants to attract attention	https://euobserver.com/investigations/137595	EUobserver
The Moscow Times	How the Russian propaganda is organized: excerpts from the military handbook and an interview with a former military, three sorts of propaganda.	https://themoscowtimes.com/articles/welcome-to-russian-psychological-warfare-operations-101-57301	The Moscow Times
	Analyses of media monitoring in Georgia, reviewing anti-Western messages and disinformation disseminated by Georgian media outlets and other sources.	http://mdfgeorgia.ge/eng/library/Anti-Western+propaganda	Media Development Foundation
Media observer journalist organizations and think tanks	Monitoring of Russian propaganda in Eastern Partnership countries (in 2015):	http://memo98.sk/uploads/content_galleries/source/memo/russia/executive-summary-and-recommendations.pdf	Memo 98:Slovak Think Tank; Internews Ukraine, Ukrainian non-governmental organization; Yerevan Press Club (Armenia), Independent Journalism Center (Moldova), "Yeni Nesil" Union of Journalists (Azerbaijan), Belarusian Association of Journalists (Belarus), and Georgian Charter for Journalistic Ethics (Georgia)
The Institute of Modern Russia	How the Kremlin weaponizes information, culture and money to achieve foreign policy goals and undermine opponents.	http://www.interpretermag.com/the-menace-of-unreality-how-the-kremlin-weaponizes-information-culture-and-money/	The interpreter and The Institute of Modern Russia

| The Martens Centre | Less than a quarter of the Russian population has a positive opinion of the EU, due to anti-EU propaganda of the Kremlin. Three main narratives: the EU is an aggressive and expansionist enemy, the EU is a weak union that cannot deal with global challenges and the EU lack any moral values. | https://www.martenscentre.eu/sites/default/files/publication-files/kremlin-propaganda-european-union-enemy-russia.pdf | The official think tanks of the European People's Party, The European Parliament |

The EU and Eastern Partnership Countries
An Inside-Out Analysis and Strategic Assessment

Against the background of the war in Ukraine and the rising tensions with Russia, a reassessment of the European Neighborhood Policy has become both more urgent and more challenging. Adopting an inside-out perspective on the challenges of transformation the Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries and the European Union face, the research project EU-STRAT seeks to understand varieties of social orders in EaP countries and to explain the propensity of domestic actors to engage in change. EU-STRAT also investigates how bilateral, regional and global interdependencies shape domestic actors' preferences and scope of action. Featuring an eleven-partner consortium of academic, policy, and management excellence, EU-STRAT creates new and strengthens existing links within and between the academic and the policy world on matters relating to current and future relations with EaP countries.