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Viktor Denisenko
ORCID 0000-0001-8646-3740
(General Jonas Žemaitis Military Academy of Lithuania)

The chaos of polyphony of disinformation in social media: the case of Migrant Crisis in Lithuania (2021)

Annotation: The purpose of the article is to analyse the paradigm of propaganda narratives in the context of the Migrant Crisis, artificially created by Belarus in 2021. The research is based on posts and comments from the Lithuanian sector of Facebook. The results of the research allow to discuss the role and aims of propaganda and disinformation during the hybrid aggression.

Keywords: Migrant Crisis, hybrid aggression, social media, propaganda, disinformation, Lithuania, Belarus.

Chaos polifonii dezinformacji w mediach społecznościowych: przypadek kryzysu migracyjnego na Litwie (2021)

Streszczenie: Artykuł analizuje paradygmat narracji propagandowych rozpowszechnianych w kontekście kryzysu migracyjnego, który Białoruś sztucznie wywołała w 2021 roku. Podstawą badania były publikacje i komentarze na litewskim sektorze portalu społecznościowego Facebook. Wyniki badania pozwalają na dyskusję na temat roli i celów propagandy oraz dezinformacji w warunkach agresji hybrydowej.

Słowa kluczowe: kryzys migracyjny, agresja hybrydowa, media społecznościowe, propaganda, dezinformacja, Litwa, Białoruś.

Introduction

The definition of “Migration Crisis” is primarily associated with the 2015-16 crisis in Europe. The roots of this crisis were conflicts in the Middle East region and some African countries. From this point of view, the EU Migration crisis was more or less expected. Five years later, the Eastern border of the European Union met a new Migrant crisis which surprised the countries involved.

At the beginning of the summer of 2021, Lithuania faced an unprecedented influx of migrants. Thousands of people from Africa and the Middle East tried to illegally cross the border between Belarus and Lithuania. The nature of this crisis was artificial and the regime of the authoritarian leader of Belarus Alyksandr Lukashenka was behind it.

Lithuanian authorities evaluated the situation as a “hybrid war”. The head of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania Gabrielius Landsbergis named the situation a “hybrid war operation against Lithuania”¹. Some other politicians supported this statement and evaluated events as “Lukashenka’s hybrid war”².

The crisis also spread wider across the region, similar problems were faced by Latvia and Poland. The situation was seen as a broader problem than only local crisis conflict. Here one could mention the joint statement of ministers of defence of the Baltic states that the hybrid attack orchestrated by the Belarusian regime is targeting the European Union in general³.

This position was supported by high representatives in Brussels. For instance, Ursula von der Leyen said in an official speech on 15 September 2021:

Look at what happened at our borders with Belarus. The regime in Minsk has instrumentalised human beings. They have put people on planes and literally pushed them towards Europe’s borders.

This can never be tolerated.

And the quick European reaction shows that. And rest assured, we will continue to stand together with Lithuania, Latvia and Poland.

And, let’s call it what it is: this is a hybrid attack to destabilise Europe⁴.

The aim of all the abovementioned actors to represent events in the broader context is quite understandable. On the one hand, it was important for Lithuania, Latvia and Poland to involve the EU structures in the solution. The three countries have no experience in the management of crises of such kind. Since Lithuania, Latvia and Poland also are part of the Schengen area, this complicates the migration issue and pushes it to the level of the EU.

On the other hand, the European Union recognizes new challenges. The context of the 2014 hybrid aggression against Ukraine showed that Russia searched for new,

¹ G. Landsbergis, *Šiuo metu prieš Lietuvą vykdoma hibridinio karo operacija, kurioje migracija naudojama kaip ginklas*, 15.06.21, <https://www.urm.lt/default/lt/naujienos/g-landsbergis-siuo-metu-pries-lietuva-vykdoma-hibridinio-karo-operacija-kurioje-migracija-naudojama-kaip-ginklas>.

² R. Juknevičienė, A. Kubilius, *Migrantų krizė Lietuvoje – hibridinis Lukašenkos karas*, 16.07.21, <https://www.15min.lt/naujiena/aktualu/lietuva/r-juknevicienne-a-kubilius-migrantu-krize-lietuvoje-hibridinis-lukasenos-karas-56-1536490>

³ *Baltijos šalių gynybos ministrai: Baltarusijos režimo hibridinė ataka nukreipta prieš ES*, 29.07.21, <https://www.vz.lt/verslo-aplinka/2021/07/29/baltijos-saliu-gynybos-ministrai-baltarusijos-rezimo-hibridine-ataka-nukreipta-pries-es>

⁴ *2021 State of the Union Address by President von der Leyen*, 15.09.21, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/SPEECH_21_4701

non-traditional forms of influence and even aggression⁵. Since Belarus is the closest ally of Moscow, it is no surprise that Minsk is also trying to learn from Russian practices.

The context of the events

The Migrant Crisis has a quite clear political pre-history. For a better understanding of the nature of the Crisis it is necessary to provide the context of the events.

President of Belarus Alyaksandr Lukashenka is an authoritarian leader ruling the country since 1994. He has the non-official status of Europe's "last dictator"⁶. One of the topical issues for A. Lukashenka himself is to keep power in his hands. This goal was traditionally realized through formal legitimization using the process of elections. Minsk chose a similar procedure in 2020 but after announcing obviously falsified results of the presidential elections, Belarusian authorities faced protests. In fact, there were some protests after every presidential election in Belarus during the last few decades but the protests of 2020 were larger and according to some evaluations "posed an unprecedented threat to Alyaksandr Lukashenka"⁷.

There were some factors which made the protests so violent and significant. First of all, the rise of popular discontent due to "economic stagnation, the shrinking of the so-called welfare or "social" state, and the mismanagement of the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, which Lukashenka chose to deny, bluntly and deliberately"⁸. Protests were joined not only by traditional representatives of the opposition but also by so-called "working people" who had silently supported the regime of Lukashenka before⁹.

There was significant hope that the authoritarian regime of A. Lukashenka would not survive protests. It was also hoped that the collapse of the regime would cause changes in Belarus and would result in the democratization of the state.

Lithuania, as a neighbouring state, decided to support protesters as the main strategy toward Belarus after the elections of August 2020. The Lithuanian parliament adopted a resolution of non-recognition of the current Belarusian presidential elections¹⁰. Vilnius opened a so-called humanitarian corridor for Belarusians trying to escape from the oppression of Lukashenka's regime¹¹. Later, a programme of free national visas for regime-persecuted Belarusians was announced¹².

Lithuania gives protection to the opposition candidate in the 2020 Belarusian pres-

⁵ Full-scale aggression against Ukraine since February 24, 2022, showed that Moscow also does not abandon traditional and conventional ways of aggression.

⁶ Y. Brel-Fournier, M.K.C. Morrison, *The Predicament of Europe's „Last Dictator“*, "International Area Studies Review" 2021, vol. 24, no. 3.

⁷ L.A. Way, *Belarus Uprising: How a Dictator Became Vulnerable*, "Journal of Democracy" 2020, vol. 31, no. 4.

⁸ A. Kazharski, *Belarus' new political nation? 2020 anti-authoritarian protests as identity building*, "New Perspectives" 2021, vol 29, no. 1, p. 74.

⁹ A.V. Buzgalin, A.I. Kolganov, *The Protests in Belarus: Context, Causes and Lessons*, "Critical Sociology" 2021, vol. 47, no. 3, p. 444-445.

¹⁰ *Lithuanian parliament calls for non-recognition of Belarus' election*, 18.08.20, <https://www.delfi.lt/en/politics/lithuanian-parliament-calls-for-non-recognition-of-belarus-election-85027521>

¹¹ R. Tamošiūnienė: *Lithuania will always be safe haven for persecuted foreign citizens*, 12.08.20, <https://vrm.lrv.lt/en/news/r-tamosiuniene-lithuania-will-always-be-safe-haven-for-persecuted-foreign-citizens>

¹² *Free Lithuanian national visas for regime-persecuted Belarusians*, 02.12.20, <https://vrm.lrv.lt/en/news/free-lithuanian-national-visas-for-regime-persecuted-belarusians>

idential election Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya¹³. In 2021 the office of Tsikhanouskaya was recognized as the “Democratic Representation of Belarus in Lithuania”¹⁴. However, the Belarusian regime saw all these activities as hostile steps of Lithuania challenging the legitimacy of A. Lukashenka.

The tension before the Migrant Crisis reached its peak with the “Ryanair” flight from Athens to Vilnius incident. The aircraft was forced to land in Minsk by Belarusian authorities¹⁵. Officially (according to Minsk) the purpose of the non-planned landing in the Belarusian capital was the potential threat of a terrorist-related event on board. In reality, it was a special operation of Belarusian special services. Some of the passengers of the plane were Belarusian opposition journalist and blogger Roman Protasevich and his girlfriend, administrator of Belarusian opposition Telegram channels Sofia Sapiega, who were immediately arrested by Belarusian authorities¹⁶.

The details of the Belarusian “operation” are quite well known today. The International Civil Aviation Organization evaluated the actions of Belarusian authorities as “unlawful interference”¹⁷. The US charged the Belarusian government with “aircraft piracy”¹⁸. After the Ryanair incident new sanctions on Belarus were imposed¹⁹.

The Migration Crisis on the border with Lithuania could be evaluated as Lukashenka’s regime’s revenge on Lithuania (and the EU) for political pressure and sanctions. It proves the claim of A. Lukashenka that “Belarus in conditions of pressure will not save Europe from illegal migrants, drug traffic and smuggle”²⁰. Lukashenka also accused Europe of “waging a hybrid war against Belarus”²¹.

The practice of the weaponization of migrants

The Migrant Crisis on the Eastern border of the EU was unpredictable as there were no objective preconditions leading to it. Belarusian authorities created the crisis

¹³ V. Beniušis et al., *Belarus’ Tikhonovskaya and her children “safe” in Lithuania*, 11.08.20, <https://www.lrt.lt/en/news-in-english/19/1206035/belarus-tikhonovskaya-and-her-children-safe-in-lithuania>

¹⁴ *Lithuania designates Tikhonovskaya’s team as “democratic representation of Belarus”*, 05.07.21, <https://www.lrt.lt/en/news-in-english/19/1445436/lithuania-designates-tikhonovskaya-s-team-as-democratic-representation-of-belarus>

¹⁵ *Belarus plane: Ryanair boss says pilot had no choice but to land in Minsk*, 15.06.21, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-57480835>

¹⁶ A. Roth, *Belarus accused of “hijacking” Ryanair flight diverted to arrest blogger*, 23.05.21, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/may/23/belarus-diverts-ryanair-plane-to-arrest-blogger-says-opposition>

¹⁷ *ICAO Council condemns Belarus over 2021 Ryanair flight bomb threat and diversion*, 19.07.22, <https://www.icao.int/Newsroom/Pages/ICAO-Council-strongly-condemns-Belarus-over-2021-Ryanair-flight-bomb-threat-and-diversion.aspx>

¹⁸ *Belarusian Government Officials Charged with Aircraft Piracy for Diverting Ryanair Flight 4978 to Arrest Dissident Journalist in May 2021*, 20.01.22, <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/belarusian-government-officials-charged-aircraft-piracy-diverting-ryanair-flight-4978-arrest>

¹⁹ *Belarus: fourth package of EU sanctions over enduring repression and the forced landing of a Ryanair flight*, 21.06.21, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2021/06/21/belarus-fourth-package-of-eu-sanctions-over-enduring-repression-and-the-forced-landing-of-a-ryanair-flight/>

²⁰ *Лукашенко заявил, что Минск не будет защищать Европу от мигрантов-нелегалов*, 22.06.21, <https://www.interfax.ru/world/773445>

²¹ *Ibid.*

artificially. The journalistic investigation²² showed details of Minsk-created plot: migrants from the Middle East were transported as “tourists” to Belarus, brought to the border and forced to cross it illegally. Belarusian state structures (including Belarusian border guards) participated in these activities. The investigation found that migrants paid Belarusian authorities from 6,000 to 15,000 US dollars per person for this “route to Europe”.

The creation scheme of the Migration Crisis could be attributed to Belarusian know-how. On the other hand, the Belarusian regime was not the first in practice to use the weaponization of migrants for its own purposes.

One of the role models for Minsk was Turkey. Ankara used the agenda of illegal migration as an argument in relations with the European Union. In February 2020 Turkish authorities threatened Europe with opening the border to migrants who amassed at the Turkish-Greek border²³. This step allowed Turkey to get extra funding from the EU to prevent migrants from flooding into Europe²⁴.

The example of Russia’s artificially created similar crisis on the border with Finland could be evaluated as even closer to our topic. At the turn of 2015 and 2016 a few thousand migrants (mainly from India and Afghanistan) illegally crossed Russia’s border with Finland from the Russian side. The flood of illegal migrants ended in March 2016 after Finland renewed some cooperation with Russia that had been suspended after Moscow’s illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014²⁵.

Both examples show that manipulation of the topic of illegal migration allows Turkey on the one hand and Moscow on the other to achieve some goals in international relations. We could predict that A. Lukashenka’s regime also hopes to use the Migrant Crisis to force Europe (or certain countries, i.e. Lithuania) to re-establish dialogue with Minsk and recognize the results of the 2020 presidential election.

There is a possibility that Minsk orchestrated the Migrant Crisis together with Moscow²⁶. In this case, the main task could be to complicate life for the EU: “Lukashenko [Lukashenka], no doubt with Putin’s support, has used the migration issue to punish the EU for imposing sanctions on his discredited regime. Minsk and Moscow know that one of Europe’s biggest vulnerabilities is its visceral reaction to migration.”²⁷.

²² B. Gerdžiūnas et al., *Kryptis – Europa: kaip Baltarusijos režimas atvėrė duris žmonių kontrabandininkams per Lietuvą*, 14.07.21, <https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/lrt-tyrimai/5/1450269/kryptis-europa-kaip-baltarusijos-rezimas-atvere-duris-zmoniu-kontrabandininkams-per-lietuva>

²³ A. Wilks, C. Kantouris, *Turkey opens gates into Europe as migrants gather on border*, 29.02.20, <https://apnews.com/article/ap-top-news-syria-turkey-recep-tayyip-erdogan-greece-42a117912dd5a6a-7ba407298a89563f3>

²⁴ *EU signs final contracts under the €6 billion budget of the Facility for Refugees in Turkey*, 17.12.20, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_2487

²⁵ P. Szymanski, P. Zochowski, W. Rodkiewicz, *Enforced cooperation: the Finish-Russian migration crisis*, 06.04.16, <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2016-04-06/enforced-cooperation-finnish-russian-migration-crisis>

²⁶ Belarus is economically and politically dependent on Russia. It means that significant political decisions like the creation of the Migration Crisis should have Moscow’s approval.

²⁷ J. Dempsey, *Lukashenko Uses Migrants to Exploit Europe’s Vulnerability*, 09.11.21, <https://carnegieeurope.eu/strategieurope/85735>

Propaganda as a part of hybrid aggression

In this paper, we first focus on information (disinformation, propaganda) aspects of a hybrid war. It means that it is necessary to describe the place of the information domain in the paradigm of hybrid threats.

Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 has become nowadays a kind of "standard" of a hybrid war. A glance at this operation allows figuring out what the hybrid war is. Ukrainian scientist Yevhen Magda evaluated the hybrid war as a "war without rules"²⁸. Crimea's case demonstrates that this kind of war is a mix of conventional and non-conventional measures. In the case of Crimea and later Donbas region events, Russia used different kinds of measures including supporting political protests, exerting economic pressure, and conducting disinformation campaigns²⁹.

The element of information warfare during Crimea and Donbas events is beyond doubt. During the illegal annexation of Crimea, "theoretical visions of information warfare have become a reality"³⁰.

The crucial element of hybrid threat is also the possibility to specify the weaknesses of the opponent in political and social spheres and attack these vulnerable places³¹.

The case of the Migrant Crisis created by Belarus on the border with the EU is different from those of Crimea or Donbas. Minsk cannot use conventional measures because it would be high risk (Lithuania, Latvia and Poland are NATO members). All focus of this hybrid aggression was on non-conventional measures. The weaponization of migrants could be evaluated as a "kinetic" action (transportation of migrants to Belarus, attempts to force them to cross the border illegally). At the same time, a visible and important role was defined for propaganda and disinformation. The analysis of this measure is presented further.

Research: the polyphony of disinformation

The current research involved analysis of 22 posts and 922 leading comments from the Lithuanian sector of Facebook (collected in November 2021). Posts were detected as containing one or more elements of disinformation about the Migrant Crisis on the Belarusian-EU border. Recurring themes of these narratives (or some additional narratives of disinformation) were found in the comments too.

Facebook is the most popular social medium in Lithuania³². At the same time, we could say that it is the most influential social medium in Lithuania too.

It is known that the Belarusian KGB used social media, including Facebook, for information psychological operations during the Migration Crisis. Facebook removed some KGB-related groups and accounts in reaction to disinformation activities³³.

²⁸ E. Магда, *Гибридная агрессия России: уроки для Европы*, Kyiv 2017, p. 23.

²⁹ J.K. Wither, *Making Sense in Hybrid Warfare*, "Connection" 2016, vol 15, no. 2, p. 76.

³⁰ E. Hunter, P. Pernik, *The Challenges of Hybrid Warfare*, "RKK ICDS", 2015, p. 5.

³¹ E. Bajarūnas, V. Keršanskas, *Hibridinės grėsmės: turinio, keliamų iššūkių ir priemonių įveikti jas analizė*, "Lietuvos metinė strateginė apžvalga" 2018, vol. 16, p. 133-134.

³² *Distribution of social media website traffic in Lithuania in 2022, by platform, 2023*, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1165917/market-share-of-the-most-popular-social-media-websites-in-lithuania/>

³³ D. O'Sullivan, *Facebook says Belarusian KGB used fake accounts to stoke border crisis*, 01.12.21, <https://edition.cnn.com/2021/12/01/tech/facebook-belarus-poland/index.html>

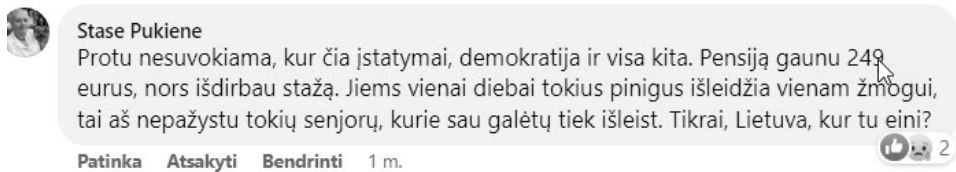
Qualitative content analysis was used as a method for analysis. It allows us to identify the main (recurring) narratives of propaganda related to events of the Migrant Crisis on the Belarusian-Lithuanian (Belarusian-EU) border in the publications on social media. The focus was only on the message, not the messenger.

There were three main criteria for the identification of posts/comments as disinformation-related: posts/comments repeated known statements of Belarusian/Kremlin propaganda and/or contained false (fake) information and/or showed elements of conspiracy theories.

The research resulted in three groups of paradigms of narratives identified: the social group, the political group, and the conspiracy group.

The social group of narratives directly addresses the social fears of Lithuanian society, including awareness of the influence of the Migrant Crisis on the economic situation in the country and fear of migrants as (potentially dangerous) strangers. The migrants were presented as potential slackers and criminals³⁴. Social tensions created claims that Lithuania spent more resources to take care of migrants than to own citizens (see picture 1).

Picture 1



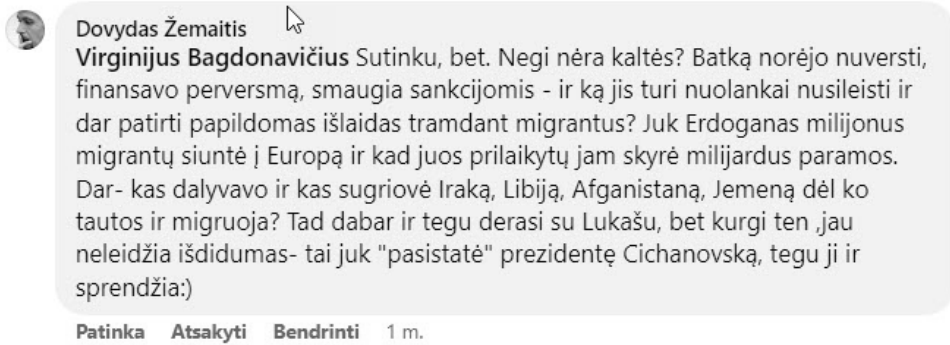
(Narratives in the comment: Situation does not correspond to democracy and justice / My pension is 249 euros, and the state spent a similar amount per one migrant per day)

The portrayal of migrants as “dangerous strangers” was linked to the threat to Lithuanian culture and society because of the “cultural differences” of migrants, especially highlighting that they are Muslims.

The political group of narratives, first of all, represents manipulation in the discussion of who is to blame for the Migrant Crisis. For instance, the responsibility was shifted to Lithuania and Poland due to participation of both countries in some NATO operations. NATO, in this case, was accused of “destroying the Middle East” and creating an influx of migrants (see Picture 2). At the same time, the role of the Belarusian regime in the creation of the Migrant Crisis remains bracketed off.

³⁴ For example: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/301519041277979/posts/593259202103960/> [Last access 26.06.23.]

Picture 2



(Narratives in the comment: Lithuania is to blame because it tried to make a coup in Belarus, and participated together with the Western World in destroying Iraq, Libya, Afghanistan, and Yemen, and it is the real cause of migration)

Another pillar of the political group of narratives was linked to financial support from the EU to Lithuania and Poland to help solve the crisis. In this case, the Migrant Crisis was represented as profitable for Vilnius and Warsaw (see Picture 3)

Picture 3



(Claims in the comments: We (people of Lithuania) do not matter to authorities / They care only about refugees because are getting money for it (from the EU).

The conspiracy group of narratives also tries to give the explanation of the roots of the Migrant Crisis but attributes it to different conspiracy theories. For instance, the Migrant Crisis was represented as the conspiracy of Lithuanian authorities to implement measures of strict control over the Lithuanian society³⁵. In another narrative, the

³⁵ For example: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/301519041277979/posts/610639423699271/>

situation is seen as part of the conspiracy to “exterminate the white race”³⁶.

The conspiracies about the COVID-19 coronavirus were included in the discourse of the Migrant Crisis (the issue of coronavirus was topical during exploring events). For instance, in one of the analysed posts, the user asked: “Why are people in the World and Lithuania dying *en masse* due to covid, and migrants on the border not? Maybe because they are not vaccinated?”³⁷.

The results of the research are also summarized in Table 1.

Table 1

Group of narratives	Sub-narratives
SOCIAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lithuania takes care of migrants better than of its own citizens; • Migrants are slackers and criminals; • Migration poses a threat to the Lithuanian culture and every-day life because migrants are Muslims.
POLITICAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lithuania and Poland are to blame for the migration crisis; • Gabrielius Landsbergis and Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya are personally to blame for the migration crisis³⁸; • The migration crisis is beneficial for Lithuania; • Lithuanian political elites will become richer by building the physical barrier (wall) on the border.
CONSPIRACY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The migration crisis is a pretext to implement measures used to control people in Lithuania; • The migration crisis is a part of a plan to exterminate the white race.

The narratives represent some chaotic polyphony. There are some contradicted narratives (i.e. the Migrant Crisis is a big challenge for the Lithuanian economy and beneficial to it at the same time). The scope of narratives is quite wide: from the escalation of some real fears in the Lithuanian society (a fear of migrants as Strangers) to clear conspiracy and advocacy on Belarus to shift the responsibility for the Migrant Crisis to Lithuania and Poland.

Conclusions and discussion

The 2021 Migrant Crisis on the Belarusian-EU border gives way to a discussion of principles of the creation of feelings of insecurity. First of all, it was an artificial crisis created by the neighbouring country. Before summer 2021 it was hard to imagine that Lithuania, Latvia or Poland could face the influx of illegal migrants from the Middle

[Last access 26.06.23.]

³⁶ For example: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/301519041277979/posts/612970163466197/>

[Last access 26.06.23.]

³⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/752806285444233/posts/944364519621741/> [Last access 26.06.23.]

³⁸ Gabrielius Landsbergis has been the minister of foreign affairs of Lithuania since December 2020, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya - the opponent of A. Lukashenka during the presidential elections 2020, got political asylum in Lithuania in August 2020.

East and Africa. It was a natural geographical contradiction to the possibility of such a kind of crisis.

On the other hand, Minsk proved that the traditional way of thinking about security and threats is not topical any more (at the same time, in February 2022 Russia's conventional military aggression against Ukraine proved that the traditional way of thinking about security issues should not be rejected too). Belarus used the surprise factor. The Migrant Crisis became a big challenge for Lithuania and later for Poland and Latvia. At the end of 2021, Poland became the main target in the context of the Migrant Crisis.

There was a consensus in the EU that these events could be evaluated as a kind of hybrid aggression/hybrid war. First, this definition of situation evaluation was used by local politicians in Lithuania and other affected countries. In the fall of 2021, a similar kind of rhetoric was adopted in Brussels.

At the same time, the hybrid war definition could be discussed as a speculative one. The definition became especially popular after Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014. Even at that time, there were disputes whether this definition is correct³⁹. Despite that, hybrid war became part of the definition of the new geopolitical reality in Europe after 2014. It could be concluded that hybrid war means all types of non-conventional aggression or war by other means but conventional. The Migrant Crisis created by Belarus in 2021 fits this definition.

The use of the definition of "hybrid war/aggression" in this case is also a pragmatic one. After 2014, this definition allows easier accomplishment of goals of strategic communication and draws global attention to the events. The Baltic states and Poland see their own discourse of security as part of a bigger, transatlantic security discourse (involving in it, first of all, NATO allies and especially the US). Thus, the Allies' attention to the Migrant Crisis in Lithuania, Poland, and Latvia was very important.

Information warfare is quite clearly a part of hybrid warfare and any modern conflict in general. The offensive actions in information warfare are linked to the goal of affecting the enemy's society using propaganda and disinformation (the psychological domain of information warfare). It creates tension and a feeling of uncertainty in society, causing it to split. Using propaganda could affect trust in the government and the state. This means that the information war could have some real consequences, i.e. public protests and riots, sabotage etc.

In the case of the Migrant Crisis on the Belarusian-EU border, social media represented different groups of narratives of propaganda. Every group has its own potential goal. The social group of narratives targeted the Lithuanian society and tried to raise anxiety connected to the picture of migrants as "Significant Others" ("Dangerous Strangers"). Propaganda played with socially sensitive topics (i.e., confronting topics of necessary care for migrants and social care in general). The political group of narratives tries to shift blame for the Migration Crisis on Lithuanian (and Polish) politicians and manipulate the topic of corruption (i.e., the statement that the Migration Crisis is profit-

³⁹ For instance, Latvian scientist Janis Berzins offered the definition "Russian New Generation Warfare". He claims that the definition of Hybrid Warfare should not be used in the case of Crimea because "it is a methodological mistake to try to frame a theory developed independently by the Russian military on a theory developed in another country" (See: J. Berzins, *Russian New Generation Warfare is not Hybrid Warfare*, [in:] *The War in Ukraine: Lessons for Europe*, eds. A. Pabriks, A. Kudors, Riga, 2015, p. 43).

able for authorities because the EU will give money to solve it). The conspiracy group of the narratives pushed the discourse of the crisis to the area of mystery, representing it as part of the global conspiracy (i.e., to implement measures of control of people).

At the same time, it is not possible to state that information attacks were well coordinated. Some narratives were clearly contradictory (i.e., the Migration crisis was an economic problem and a profitable thing at the same time). On the other hand, this might have been part of the plan. Katri Pinnoniemi and Andras Racz stated that modern Kremlin propaganda⁴⁰ could be “compared to a kaleidoscope: a light piercing through makes it instantly transformed into multiple versions of reality”⁴¹. In other words, it is never one consolidated narrative on a topic but many different narratives and versions.

The offensive propaganda tactic during the Migrant Crisis on the Belarusian-EU border focused on the creation of the illusion of insecurity. The summarized paradigm of narratives from different paradigms could be represented in the following way: the Migrant Crisis is a threat to the Lithuanian society because migrants will destroy the Lithuanian culture (the Lithuanian way of life) and will badly affect the Lithuanian economy (and all aspects of the social life); Lithuanian authorities do not care about ordinary citizens and their security; all of these may be a part of a bigger conspiracy to control people (so, it is a big plan against ordinary citizens).

Even contradictory narratives potentially trigger feelings of insecurity because it mystifies the perception of reality. Hard-affected people are losing understanding of what is true and what is not. It is one of the most destructive effects of modern disinformation and hostile propaganda. Moreover, in such a situation affected people could not objectively evaluate the level of their own (in)security.

To summarize, the information operation could affect the perception of reality, people’s feelings and related decisions. In a situation when information aggression leads to the real events (as was in the case of the Migrant Crisis on the Belarusian-EU border), its effect could be even stronger. The situation of the crisis pushes people to search for more information about the state of affairs. Propaganda’s narratives are shaping (false) perceptions of reality and, as a consequence, could affect the reality itself.

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⁴⁰ In the case of the Migrant Crisis on the Belarusian-EU border it is hard to separate Russian and Belarusian propaganda. Kremlin propaganda openly supported Belarus in the present crisis. Russian and Belarusian propaganda activities have many points in common in the goal of spreading anti-Western propaganda and disinformation.

⁴¹ *Fog of Falsehood: Russian Strategy of Deception and the Conflict in Ukraine*, ed. K. Pinnoniemi, A. Racz, Helsinki 2016, p. 14.

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