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Russian Non-Systemic Opposition as an Enemy in pro-Kremlin Media

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*non systemic opposition, pro-Kremlin media, propaganda,
authoritarianism, law*

Non systemic opposition- terminology

“Non-systemic opposition”² in Russia refers to all those so called ‘democratic’ political movements and social groups that are critical of the current political system and focus their efforts on trying to change it³. Author chose this definition of the non-systemic opposition, because it is the best description that reflect the nature of this phenomenon in contemporary Russia⁴. Thus the project manager rejected the generally accepted definition of non-systemic opposition, which refers to those groups which are denied registration or are functioning outside the parliament⁵.

¹ The article is written as part of NCN (National Science Centre Poland) project: “Non-system opposition in Russia – role and significance in Russian internal politics”(id 2014/13/D/HS5/00637).

² C. Ross (ed.), *Systemic and Non-Systemic Opposition in the Russian Federation: Civil Society Awakens? (Post-Soviet Politics)*, Routledge, London and New York 2016.

³ I. Bolshakov, *The Nonsystemic Opposition, Terminological “Error” or Political Reality?*, “Russian Politics and Law”, vol. 50, no. 3, May–June 2012, pp. 82–92.

⁴ Д.И. Давыденко, *Разработка проблем несистемной оппозиции в исследованиях политологов*, „Известия Саратовского университета” 2012, Т. 12, Сер. Социология. Политология, вып. 3, http://soziopolit.sgu.ru/sites/soziopolit.sgu.ru/files/short_text/105-107.pdf.

⁵ The different definition of the non-system opposition stems from the fact that its structure is heterogeneous and it cannot be satisfactorily described by a simple classification for licensed and unlicensed parties. For example, one of the representatives of the non-system

Pro-Kremlin media – a weapon in the battle with those who think differently

In his well-known study of authoritarianism, fascism and national populism Gino Germani writes about the relationship between power and citizens in an authoritarian system, claiming that ‘the citizens have political opinions rather than beliefs. They must exercise choice and reach a certain conviction, but its contents must correspond to the official ideology. There is choice, but it is openly manipulated’⁶.

In Russia the ostensible pluralism of media types is neutralised by the actions of those in power, for example the use of sophisticated social engineering devices in order to convince as many media consumers as possible of specific opinions and arguments and to discredit alternative ones. It is not possible not to notice that the level of ‘political awareness’⁷ of citizens greatly influences their support for authoritarian policies. This dependency forms the focus of Barary Geddes and John Zaller’s research⁸. Their argument is as follows. Because of their interest in political matters, politically aware people are exposed to a greater extent to the effects of pro-government media information but are also to a greater extent prepared to reject it. However, people who are averagely politically aware and pay sufficient attention to information from official media do not have the capacity to reject official propaganda. Therefore they are the people whom government information influences most strongly.

Authoritarian leaders are aware that they need controlled media in order to survive, so they consciously deprive people of pluralistic and independent information and media analyses. Thus television plays a role in strengthening an authoritarian regime. According to a poll carried out by the Levada Center, Russians do not verify information in Russian media against that which appears abroad. 0.5 to two per cent of Russians consume foreign media⁹. 21 to 24 percent of respondents mentioned the Internet as a source of information. Nevertheless, trust for information on the Internet is decreasing. Respondents trust news dedi-

opposition surely is Gienadij Gudkow, who until 2013 had been a member of the “Just Russia” party, which is a part of the State Duma.

⁶ G. Germani, *Authoritarianism, Fascism, and National Populism*. Transaction Books, New Brunswick 1978, p. 10.

⁷ Political awareness means an openness to accepting information about public affairs and an ability to critically assess this information in detail. B. Geddes, J. Zaller, *Sources of Popular Support for Authoritarian Regimes*, “American Journal of Political Science” 1989, vol. 2, p. 326.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Л. Гудков, *Следы поражения. Почему эффект пропаганды будет ощущаться еще долго*, <https://slon.ru/posts/64280>. Compare. <http://www.levada.ru/2016/02/24/sledy-porazheniya>.

cated to foreign politics the most because the information that they provide is the most difficult to verify¹⁰. As a result of the actions of the regime, the public sphere has become a sterile place. Opportunities to present the interests of individual groups, exchange views and discuss what is happening are becoming more and more limited. Society is immersed in an artificial state of total ‘unanimity’¹¹.

In *The National Endowment for Democracy*¹² Robert Orttung (Assistant Director, Institute of European, Russian and Eurasian Studies, The George Washington University) and Christopher Walker (Executive Director, International Forum for Democratic Studies) write about Russian propaganda strategy. Attempting to answer the question as to how the Russian authoritarian elite is able to maintain control over digital and printed media as a whole in conditions where technology and communications are developing rapidly, they claim that ‘the answer is found in the four audiences that authoritarian state-controlled media seek to influence’.

The first group is the Kremlin elite. An authoritarian government must be concerned about its elite because any split within it may lead to the collapse of the regime. The task of the state media is to uphold the pillars of the regime and ensure that the government is stable. At the same time the media should create the impression and signal to the members of the elite that any act of desertion will be punished.

The second important audience group is the population as a whole. On the one hand the state media acts so as to promote respect for and fear of the government, but also – and this is no less important – to spread apathy and passivity. In order to remain in power the authoritarian regime must keep a significant proportion of the population away from politics. State-controlled television is the main tool used by the government to achieve this aim in a country where three quarters of the population usually obtain information from television¹³.

The third group is made up of the opposition and independent social groups. Authoritarian media aim to isolate activists from society in order to prevent possible mobilisation of the masses. To achieve this, the state media try to discredit, in the eyes of public opinion, every type of political alternative. Attacks by the state media are intended not only to contribute to the delegitimisation of civil-society

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ M.H. Van Herpen, *Putin's propaganda machine: soft power and Russian foreign policy*, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield 2016.

¹² R. Orttung, Ch. Walker, *Authoritarian regimes retool their media-control strategy*, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/authoritarian-regimes-retool-their-media-control-strategy/2014/01/10/5c5bfa6e-7886-11e3-af7f-13bf0e9965f6_story.html, 11.02.2016, see also R. Orttung, Ch. Walker, *Breaking the News: The Role of State-Run Media*, „Journal of Democracy” 2014, vol. 25, issue 1, p. 71–85.

¹³ S. Hutchings, N. Rulyova, *Television and Culture in Putin's Russia: Remote control*, London & New York: Routledge 2009.

and opposition activists, but also to pave the way for new repressive measures, used to fight against these activists. Accusing dissentients of causing chaos in the state is effective in discouraging society – which fears a lack of stability – from supporting critics of the Kremlin.

The fourth group are Internet users. The faster the number of Internet users increases, the more effort the authoritarian regime makes to control the virtual world. However, spreading specific information in society is not the same as preventing the dissemination of opposition information online. Authoritarian regimes show determination and innovativeness in achieving this goal. These measures are not intended to block everything that appears on the Internet, but are directed towards multiplying both the difficulties associated with spreading news about politics or other sensitive matters and those associated with attracting key audience members¹⁴.

The question arises as to when Russian propaganda entered a new phase of criticising everything which is western and is associated with western values. According to Russian sociologists, this criticism began not ‘after the Crimea’ but earlier, after the protests of 2011 and 2012. It was able to crush nearly all support for the slogans of the protest movement, with which in 2012 half of Russians identified (for example ‘One Russia’ as a party of fraudsters and thieves).

According to Lev Gudkov, propaganda has shifted attention from internal problems to a mythological confrontation between Russia and the rest of the world, to the sense that everyone is attacking us, and we must get up on our feet and resist this external force. This sense of pressure has resulted in all claims to power and all the problems of everyday life being suspended, and importantly, it has increased people’s self-respect significantly¹⁵. The mythological enemy has various faces: Americans, Ukrainian fascists, the Islamic State and Turks. We are going through a phase of negative mobilisation which is artificially turning up the temperature of feelings in the country.

In Gudkov’s opinion, propaganda is successful thanks to three factors. Firstly, precisely because of the mythologised image of reality. Information about people’s everyday problems is scarce in the media, whilst information concerning questions of the size and strength of the country, power and competition with other states takes priority¹⁶.

¹⁴ С. Марков, *Надо не закрывать антикремлевские газеты, а открывать прокремлевские и качественные*, <https://centerforpoliticsanalysis.ru/opinion/read/id/nado-ne-zakryvat-antikremlevskie-gazety-a-otkryvat-prokremlevskie-i-kachestvennye>, 13.06.2016.

¹⁵ Социолог Лев Гудков-об эффективности пропаганды в России, <http://www.levada.ru/2015/12/16/lev-gudkov-ob-effektivnosti-propagandy-v-rossii>.

¹⁶ Л. Гудков, *Следы поражения...*

The second factor, which complements the first, is the promulgation of the belief that there is a burgeoning crisis which gives rise to fear and uncertainty about tomorrow. Propaganda strengthens this feeling by pointing out the problems, but it does not discuss them. The ruling elite take decisions without consulting the people, as a result of which society is in a state of constant expectation. Such a situation creates a sense of permanent dependence and helplessness before the government. A person ceases to understand what is happening and does not know how to behave in this new situation. Because of this general uncertainty, (s)he suffers a crisis of consciousness. When there is peace and a sense of stability, the mass consciousness is not influenced greatly because the claims of propaganda can be compared with the actual state of affairs. However, in a state of threat when the situation is unpredictable it is much easier to manipulate the facts.

The third factor is the discrediting of unofficial sources of information: the introduction of censorship and the limitation of both the pluralism of information and of society's capacity to obtain alternative interpretations of events. This is linked to establishing a monopoly on the interpretation of reality (a one-dimensional and uniform interpretation of the nature of reality)¹⁷. It is worth mentioning that the media cast doubt on versions of events which differ from official state ones by employing many different absurd and comic interpretations, and in so doing they discredit potential opponents, creating an atmosphere of chaos, anxiety and confusion. Along with this the media impose a simple version which should be clear and comprehensible for everyone.

Discussing the decline in the popularity of independent media, Sergey Buntam, a journalist and one of the founders of the station 'Ekho Moskvy' (Echo of Moscow), pointed to the unwillingness of Russians to hear the truth. 'Even if we didn't exist, and even without a knowledge of foreign languages, it would be easier to obtain access to reliable information on the Internet. But no. It's better not to know. Because if you knew, you'd have to look in the mirror, think about what we have brought our country to, about how we treat our neighbours. You'd have to understand the current, tragic situation. But that's not comfortable, it's better to dream about greatness'¹⁸.

Demagogic rhetoric should be dialectic so that media consumers know where there is good and where there is evil. For example, America has always wanted to destroy us, therefore all action against the West is justified¹⁹. Often the effect is confused with the cause; propaganda explains preventative manoeuvres very

¹⁷ Социолог Лев Гудков-об эффективности пропаганды в России, <http://www.levada.ru/2015/12/16/lev-gudkov-ob-effektivnosti-propagandy-v-rossii/>, 11,01.2016.

¹⁸ E. i G. Michalikowie, *Rosja, z którą warto rozmawiać, 6 wywiadów z opozycjonistami i 2 szkice*, Kraków 2016, p. 79.

¹⁹ M. Riekstins, *Putin's Propaganda*, „Foreign Affairs” November/ December 2014.

well. It is not involvement in Syria that caused a terrorist attack on a Russian aeroplane, rather the terrorist attack confirms that intervention in Syria is both justified and necessary.

Gudkov attempts to explain the principles of propaganda in Russia in detail using enthusiasm following the annexation of Crimea as an example. The most typical explanation for patriotic enthusiasm after the annexation of Crimea was the observation that propaganda had a powerful effect on the mass consciousness. However, according to Gudkov, the same arguments and slogans may be perceived by society in different ways in different societal situations. The degree of trust in the information presented may also differ. In order to be effective, propaganda must make reference to the most common, the most trivial and the most recognisable theses, which do not require additional explanations and arguments. Propaganda is effective because it refers to reality as a general construct, to something which does not require proof. And all these constructs correspond to the structures of collective identity, stereotypes and prejudices, acquired in the early stages of socialisation. These structures concern the two states in which society functions. Firstly, there is people's behaviour in everyday situations, and secondly there is their behaviour in times of threat, of deep crisis, war or extraordinary mobilisation. What is this mobilisation caused by? Either by a threat to existence or just the opposite – unprecedented collective euphoria. 'The most important issue is that in such a situation the most essential collective values and symbols, which contribute to the construction of the identity of society as a whole, are revised. We are not talking about normal everyday life, but about fundamental issues such as *thousand-year-old Russia*, a world-wide conspiracy or global terrorism. Putin is not the head of a corrupt state, but a world leader who opposes the hostile West. And, of course, in these circumstances there is no place for the concepts of human rights, law and order, political responsibility and freedom'²⁰. Activating these thought structures is the key to understanding the mechanisms of Russian propaganda, and changing the head of state is not sufficient to repair the damage that they cause to the mass consciousness. Gudkov believes that their effects will be long-term and painful²¹.

Regulations that restrict freedom of speech

Discrediting the non-systemic opposition is linked to the Kremlin's multi-dimensional strategy and the action that it takes in several different areas. The media sphere is affected by both the legal issue, i.e. restrictions on the spread

²⁰ Л. Гудков, *Следы поражения...*

²¹ Ibid.

of independent thought, and all-out attacks on the leaders of the non-systemic opposition in pro-Kremlin media.

On September 26th 2014 the State Duma passed a bill limiting foreigners' share in Russian media companies to 20%. The bill came into force on January 1st 2016, and the transition period will last until January 1st 2017. This bill provides that the founder of a mass media outlet (the press, radio, television and the Internet) in the Russian Federation cannot be a foreign state, an international organisation or a Russian citizen who also has the citizenship of another country, and foreign capital cannot exceed 20%. According to experts, one of the main aims of the bill is to attack the two most influential publications, which are aimed at the economic elite and expert circles and at the same time pursue an independent editorial policy. These are the daily *Vedomosti* (100% foreign capital: the Finnish Fund Sanoma, Dow Jones/Wall Street Journal and FT Group/Financial Times) and the Russian edition of the monthly magazine *Forbes* (Axel Springer). These publications do not avoid topics which present Kremlin policy in an unfavourable light, so one of the aims of the government is to ensure that the controlling interest in these media is acquired by Russian bodies and that the new owners tone down the editorial policy²².

However, since the protests of 2011 and 2012 the most important role in the Kremlin's media policy has been played by the Internet. Although Vladimir Putin's opponents are often called 'the Internet party' and his supporters 'the TV party', this division does not entirely correspond to reality. For the Kremlin currently employs methods of controlling the Internet, webpages that present the government's point of view are increasing, while information that appears on the television and information on the Internet influence each other²³. It is true that for critics of the Kremlin the Internet is often one of the few places where one can share one's views concerning the political situation, but current regulations significantly limit the Internet activity of Russian activists and bloggers.

On December 28th 2013 an amendment was made to the act 'On information, information technology and the protection of information', which has been called 'the blocking of extremist internet sites act'. The law allows Roskomnadzor, on the request of the Attorney General of the Russian Federation, to block immediately any web pages which spread incitements to mass demonstrations or extrem-

²² J. Rogoża, *Rosja: kolejne uderzenie w opiniotwórcze media*, <http://www.osw.waw.pl/pl/publikacje/analizy/2014-10-01/rosja-kolejne-uderzenie-w-opiniotworcze-media>, 13.05.2015.

²³ Ch. Cottiero, K. Kucharski, E. Olimpiewa & R. W. Orttung, *War of words: the impact of Russian state television on the Russian Internet*, "Nationalities Papers: The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity", vol. 43, Issue 4, 2015.

ist information. The law came into force on February 1st 2014²⁴. Human rights activists criticise the law for introducing censorship on the Internet and seriously violating citizens' constitutional rights and freedoms. Acting in accordance with this law, Facebook and Vkontakte complied with the requirements of Roskomnadzor and in December 2014 they blocked those pages which disseminated information about the demonstration in support of Aleksey Navalny on January 15th 2015. Subsequently, however, Facebook and Twitter refused to block pages containing information about similar events²⁵.

In May 2014 a law was signed which required all bloggers who have more than 3,000 readers over each twenty-four hour period to register with the state regulator Roskomnadzor, giving their surname and their email address. If this information is not supplied, Roskomnadzor applies to the Internet service provider for this information. Bloggers are subject to the requirements of the elections statute, to the Protection of Classified Information Act, the Private Life Protection Act and the Counter-Extremism Act. They are also responsible both for the reliability of information published and for the content of comments posted by other users. The act requires bloggers and also foreign services to keep information sent and user data (for example IP addresses) for six months, to make it available to law and order agencies and even to provide these agencies with access to servers whilst keeping the fact of this access secret²⁶. The blogger must pass on such information within three days, and if (s)he does not fulfil this requirement (s)he faces a fine: from 10 000 rubles to over 30000 rubles for individuals and to 500 000 rubles for firms. If these regulations are breached twice in one year, the fine is automatically doubled.

Vladimir Putin's claims that the Internet came into being as a 'CIA project' also fuel the pressure on Internet users. The effect of this pressure has been a change in the information policy of several popular portals (Lenta.ru, Gazeta.ru, Newsru.com) and the social networking website Vkontakte has been taken over by business people close to the Kremlin. Since March several popular opposition portals (Grani.ru, Ej.ru, Kasparov.ru, Aleksey Navalny's blog) have been blocked in Russia. The next consequence of the Kremlin's policy is the fact that the leading Russian opposition bloggers (Oleg Kashyn, Andrey Malgin and Rustem Adagamow) have emigrated from Russia and are working abroad²⁷.

²⁴ А. Благовещенский, *Президент подписал закон о блокировке экстремистских сайтов*, „Российская Газета”, 30.12.2013.

²⁵ *Источники Дождя: Facebook и Twitter отказались блокировать страницы сторонников Навального*, https://tvrain.ru/news/istochniki_dozhdja_facebook_i_twitter_otkazalis_blokirovat_stranitsy_storonnikov_navalnogo-379720/, 12.07.2016.

²⁶ *Приказ Роскомнадзора*, http://rkn.gov.ru/docs/prikaz_Roskomnadzora_ot_09.07.2014_N_99.pdf, 13.07.2016.

²⁷ *Kreml kontra Internet: koniec rosyjskiej strefy wolności?*, <http://www.osw.waw.pl/pl/publikacje/analizy/2014-05-08/kreml-kontra-internet-koniec-rosyjskiej-strefy-wolnosci>, 11.06.2016.

A set of counter-terrorism laws passed on June 24th 2016, also known as the Yarovaya law after the co-initiator of the law, a deputy from 'One Russia' Irina Yarovaya (the bill was prepared together with the deputy Viktor Ozerov) has also contributed to suppressing the Internet activity of critics of the Kremlin. The new regulations reinforce the range of instruments used by the Kremlin to fight against its enemies. Those in power will be able to deprive Russians of their citizenship for extremist or terrorist activity²⁸ or for working for an international organisation, as well as monitor telephone conversations and emails. Even if conversations are encrypted, the service provider will be required to make the necessary key available to decode the message. Those who incite people to protest against the government or to remove Putin from power will be punished. People (even fourteen-year-olds) who do not report those who are planning a coup or other crimes of an 'extremist' nature face two years in prison. According to many experts, in the 21st century the term extremism has acquired a unique meaning and is used mostly in state media in order to create a negative image and punish social activists, members of opposition groups and independent journalists²⁹. 'This set of laws is one of the most repressive ideas of the government and is obviously aimed against people who are not satisfied with what it is doing', says Olga Irisova, an expert on Kremlin propaganda from the Centre for Polish-Russian Dialogue and Understanding. On the pretext of the war against terrorism Putin is extending the law, which is intended to hit the opposition and citizens who are ever less satisfied with the actions of the Kremlin.

The image of the opposition in the media

The language used to describe the non-systemic opposition is interesting. Darya Tatarkova used articles from three examples of printed mass media to follow the discourse that described the opposition after the 2011–2012 protests³⁰. She chose the magazine 'Profil', the daily 'Vedomosti' and 'Rossiyskaya Gazeta'. The magazine 'Profil' and 'Rossiyskaya Gazeta' can be defined as examples of the

²⁸ On this list of activities there are ones relating to article 282 of the penal code, which concerns stirring up hatred and hostility (responsibility for extremist activity). In Russia this article is interpreted very broadly, and between 2013 and 2015 the number of crimes associated with it rose twofold.

²⁹ *Закон об экстремизме. Участие оппозиции в выборах*, <http://echo.msk.ru/programs/gazvorot/53061/>, 13.06.2016; *С телеканала '2x2' снято обвинение в экстремизме*, <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=30616>, 13.06.2016; *Игорь Аверкиев отвергает обвинения в экстремизме*, <http://www.svoboda.org/content/transcript/1784008.html>, 13.06.2016.

³⁰ Д.Ю. Татаркова, *Несистемная оппозиция как специфика презентации в печатных СМИ*, „Полис” 2013, № 4, p. 133.

pro-Kremlin press. The newspaper ‘Vedomosti’ is independent to a greater extent and includes articles that criticise the current system. The articles were devoted to the activity of non-systemic activists during the protests in the summers of 2011 and 2012.

The magazine ‘Profile’ divided oppositionally minded activists into two categories:

- proactive opposition activists, defined using such formulations as ‘radical opposition’, ‘beggars at the embassies’, ‘an orange plague’ and ‘a united democratic opposition’.
- people who are not political activists, but in one situation or another support oppositionally minded politicians: ‘disgruntled citizens’, ‘dissatisfied city-dwellers’, ‘street oppositionists’ and ‘citizens outside the system’.

In ‘Vedomosti’ the opposition was described as ‘*ploshchad*’ (a reference to Bolotnaya Square in Moscow where a protest took place in 2011/2012), ‘quarrelsome’ (nesoglasnye), ‘inclined to protest’.

‘Rossiyskaya Gazeta’ uses expressions such as ‘the radical opposition’, ‘Decembrists’, ‘an aggressive, disobedient minority’ and ‘quarrelsome’.

Each of the publications examined describes the reasons for the outbreak of the protests, although the interpretation of these reasons differs:

1) anger following rigged elections to the Duma

‘wealthy citizens who did not agree with the result of the vote-count after elections to the Duma’; ‘Facebook users, white ribbons, the urban intelligentsia, all those who, apart from bread and circuses, also want respect’ (Vedomosti); ‘the opposition doesn’t believe the government and is very emotional’ (Profil).

2) the wish for positive changes

‘the new, replete middle class have had enough to eat during the Putin era and have become dissatisfied with Putin’s regime. They want not only the same amount of consumer goods as Europeans (they already have that), but also a European quality of life’ (Rossiyskaya Gazeta).

3) the influence of ‘the outside enemy’ (the US elite)

‘The protesters accuse the authorities of rigging the results of the elections on December 4th 2011 [...] and this accompanies an unprecedented statement by Secretary of State Hilary Clinton. Disregarding what the vast majority of international observers have, who stated that democratic procedures were upheld, she is inciting a wave of protests and casting doubt on the legitimacy of the election results’ (RG). ‘The new US ambassador to Russia Michael McFaul has only just arrived in Moscow but he has already met with Russian oppositionists. McFaul has not, as Washington promised, come to renew relations, based on trust, between our countries, but to play a role in internal-political processes’ (RG).

‘Rossiyskaya Gazeta’ has paid a lot of attention to explaining the impossibility of the government and the non-systemic opposition working together. Journalists remember Vladimir Putin’s comments that if he wins the elections he will work together with all political forces, even the opposition with its hostile attitude towards his policies. However, RG writes that the opposition, as can be seen, will need to be hypnotised. For there are people who, although they possess a Russian Federation passport, work in the interests of foreign states and for foreign money. The president tries to establish contact with them as well, but often without any results.

According to Tatarkova, an analysis of the non-systemic opposition in printed mass media boils down to the following conclusions:

- the activity of the non-systemic opposition is mostly assessed as being ineffective, considering the lack of new ideas, an alternative political programme and strong leaders.
- journalists formulate the following predictions and suggestions regarding the activity of the opposition and the relationship between the government and the opposition:
 - 1) the opposition is waiting for a crisis of leadership and ideas, so it should come up with new ideas
 - 2) the opposition will consider the government to be illegitimate and will look for ways to put pressure on it
 - 3) the non-systemic opposition should suggest changes that will improve things and try to implement them
 - 4) the opposition should find a successor for the current government
 - 5) the government should not ‘tighten the screws’ and suppress the opposition because this could lead to a revolution³¹.

Opposition or traitors of the nation?

Before the 2016 elections to the state Duma, Russian state-controlled federal television channels aired a series of so-called documentaries in which the leaders of the opposition were presented in a negative light. In the majority of cases they were accused of taking part in secret Western operations against Russia. One of these documentaries ‘The information war against Russia’ was shown on March 30th 2016 on the state television channel ‘Rossiya’. The film was shown during the popular chat show ‘Special Correspondent’, which is transmitted every week on this channel. The documentary makers attempted to make people believe that

³¹ Ibid, p. 135–136.

Russia is the target of an information war being waged by the EU and the USA and opposition politicians support these efforts and appear, for example, in the European Parliament or at OSCE meetings in Vienna, where they criticise the Russian government. Many scenes in the film were unintelligible and the sound was of poor quality, which was intended to reinforce the belief that the meetings were secret. The many signs of the West's 'information war' against Russia included a project inspired by the European Union, the so-called 'Review of disinformation' (*Обзор дезинформации*). This is being prepared by a special operations working group for the strategic communications affairs of the EU, which follows disinformation in the Russian media. In the film this project was presented as 'the instructions of the EU' concerning the correct political views that should be entertained towards the Russian opposition.

Some other interesting material about an alleged secret collaboration between the leader of the opposition Aleksey Navalny and the British security service MI-6 was shown on April 13th 2016 on the channel 'Rossiya' in Yevgeniya Popova's chat show 'Special Correspondent'. However, after clips from the film had been analysed it turned out that the documents and letters discussed in the film, which the film claimed had been written by the British and Americans, contained mistakes which are typical of native speakers of Russian. Some of these mistakes are analysed, for example, in an article written by the BBC³².

Here it should be pointed out that after the protests of 2012 the Kremlin took the opportunity to discredit the non-systemic opposition on state television. Some of the more well-known television programmes which demonise opposition leaders include the films 'The Anatomy of Protest 1' and 'The Anatomy of Protest 2', shown on the channel NTV, and the film 'Mud', transmitted in 2013 during the programme 'Special Correspondent'. The central thesis of the documentaries mentioned above is the claim that the non-systemic opposition, thanks to foreign financial support, tried to take power in Russia by force.

Many websites also present the opposition as traitors of the nation, a fifth column. On the website of the informative and analytic publication 'Russian Planet' there are very many articles devoted to the Russian opposition, which is presented, of course, in a negative light. One of the articles draws attention to the theory of an American conspiracy against Russia and reveals that the American envoy John Tefft, allegedly a specialist in 'colour revolutions', spoke to representatives of the opposition at a closed meeting. We read in the article that Tefft is said to have wished Russian bloggers good luck, which, as the author of the article interprets it, means that this was again an attempt to use America to win over liberally minded

³² Disinformation Digest, 'Национал-предатели на национальном телевидении', <http://us11.campaign-archive1.com/?u=cd23226ada1699a77000eb60b&id=bd60180b44&e=74ff906a9b>, 13.06.2016.

Russians who criticise the Kremlin³³. In the opinion of the authors, John Tefft also intended to give bloggers hints as to the instruments they could use in the information war. The author cites Moscow State University Professor Aleksandr Kobrinski, who is said to have stated ‘those who consider themselves to be the opposition are not thinking about the future and about what will happen to them later. They only think about the money that they currently receive or will receive in the near future’³⁴. In another article we read ‘that one cannot call the Russian opposition an opposition because it does not have any constructive ideas and is only capable of shouting ‘Putin should go’³⁵.

Summary

The documents which appeared in the Russian media and the television programmes should be assessed in the context of the approaching elections to the State Duma. They provide a clear signal for Russian voters: the opposition’s disapprobation of the government and its policies is a result of the intervention of foreign powers and by the same token a serious threat to national security. In the context of the above, Putin’s statement about traitors of the nation, used during a speech on the occasion of the annexation of Crimea in March 2014, remains topical³⁶. Information in the media is simple and is based on black and white images. Opposition leaders are foreign agents, the fifth column are the opposite of Russian patriots.

The Kremlin realises that freedom of speech is a dangerous tool, particularly if it is used by critics of the regime. Therefore, since the last elections to the State Duma in 2011 and the 2012 presidential elections, which ended with protests against the government, the Kremlin elite has prepared a range of legislative solutions that are intended to make it impossible for their opponents to articulate their views freely.

The ever-narrowing scope to present their arguments and demands as well as the negative image of the non-systemic opposition in state media is weakening the opportunities of opposition leaders to gain supporters and is pushing them more and more on to the periphery of Russian political reality.

³³ А. Заквасин, *Посол США пожелал оппозиции удачи*, <http://rusplt.ru/society/posol-ssha-rojelal-oppozitsii-udachi-17142.html>, 12.01.2016.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Д. Пучков, *Слабая умом оппозиция*, http://rusplt.ru/our-people/our-people-1_76.html, 16.06.2016.

³⁶ Ibid.

ABSTRACT

This article tries to shed light on strategies and methods used by pro-Kremlin media to depreciate non-systemic opposition. One of the huge problem for Russian non-systemic opposition is a lack of pluralism in Russian official media and thus its inability to present point of view which are opposed to the government one. The government controls all of the national television networks and many radio and print outlets. These media effectively serve as instruments for Kremlin propaganda, which show a negative e image of Russian opposition calling its leaders “traitors” or “fifth column”.

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