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## **AN ANALYSIS OF THE EVENTS THAT LED TO THE EXACERBATION OF THE BLACK SEA CRISIS IN THE LAST DECADE AND THE ROLE OF DISINFORMATION AND MISINFORMATION**

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**Abstract:** *The joint defence and security of the Black Sea basin is a fundamental instrument of international security policy. Applying the principle of subsidiarity in the organization of security in this area, which is characterized by chronic conflicts dating back to the Cold War, involves taking into account a multi-storey security system, based on cooperation between EU (European Union), OSCE (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe), NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) and UN (United Nations). Engagement at one or more of these levels will depend on the specific security tasks being considered. In the context of the Ukraine crisis, the need for a correlation that means optimizing cooperation between the various security institutions is becoming more evident than ever. Developments in the EU, competition between Russia (Russian Federation) and NATO, the possibility that the national interests of some Western states prevail over the common ones, the assessment of security from ideological and non-financial positions, as well as the lack of a correct division of labour between the participating states are the main factors influencing the construction of an efficient system in the field of security in the Black Sea area. The level of interoperability on which*

*relations between the states in the area are based gives content to the collective European and Euro-Atlantic crisis management capacity.*

**Keywords:** *disinformation, information security, war, vulnerability, resilience*

## 1. Introduction

In the early 1990s, the states of the Black Sea region (Ukraine to the north, Russia to the northeast, Georgia to the east, Turkey to the south, and Bulgaria and Romania to the West (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2022) faced a multitude of problems, generated by the new situation offered by the end of the Cold War. There were problems arising from the many differences of internal origins, held in check by totalitarian systems of government and management, institutions and procedures that, once obsolete, gave free rein to vindictive solutions.

At the same time, interstate differences, shaped by the system of “fraternal states,” became differences caused by either unresolved historical problems or economic disparities, or differences in military potential resulting from the arbitrary and forced division of the former USSR (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) legacy, the former Warsaw Pact, the former COMECON (The council for Mutual Economic Assistance) and many more.

It was a time when the conduct of states was too little conditioned by morality and law. Only the tendency to defend one’s interests mattered, which highlighted a dramatic reality: cooperation is the exception, and competition the rule. An analysis, even a brief one, of the Black Sea states leads to the conclusion that they are not the same size, have not reached the same level of progress and development, do not have the same level of organization, leadership and democratic conduct, and the list of differences may keep going.

They don’t even have to be aligned with the same geopolitical and economical interests. The differences are necessary. They give individuality and personality. They result from the accumulation of values, from the personality of the states and of the entities that are created in the space of human activity. The problem is not the differences themselves, but the way they separate or unite the individual nations involved.

The last decade and a half have brought countless changes to the Black Sea area. States, in their struggle for assertion, have held a fierce competition to promote their national interests, economic interests in particular have been promoted and protected with great care. After a long period of centralized economies, existing in almost all states in the area (except Turkey), the economies of the states of the Black Sea zone represent not only a universe in itself, but entities that tend to become strong, stable, performing, and competitive.

And even if, for the time being, these are just trends and not far-reaching achievements, there is no doubt that the economies of the Black Sea countries will soon play an important role in the European economy, with repercussions on the world economy.

## **2. The context and events that led to the crisis situation**

At the heart of an information war lies the Internet. Moscow's massive disinformation and propaganda machine has been activated not only locally, to paint a different light on the world for the Russian people, but also abroad, as "robots" in the form of autonomous or semi-autonomous programs and machines are pushing Russian propaganda by intruding on conversations on Twitter and Facebook and other on-line platforms.

Russia is known to host several hacker groups, and a few attacks carried out since the start of the conflict deserve special attention.

The largest virtual strike against Russian services would be an attack on the K-ST satellite, which is used primarily by the Ukrainian army but also by Internet service providers and European businesses. The attack carried out at the start of the invasion (and thus using malicious software installed beforehand) notably affects access to the satellite Internet in Ukraine, but also 10,000 customers of French Internet service. ce. Three thousand wind turbines located in Germany can no longer be controlled remotely since this attack (but they continue to produce energy). The main Russian attack, however, appears to have been averted.

Another malicious software was discovered a few hours before the start of the Russian invasion in the servers of many Ukrainian ministries and financial institutions. This one, named FoxBlade, was meant to erase the contents of the various servers that it had infected and could have hurt Ukraine badly even before any fiscal intrusion. As The New York Times reports, it took Microsoft and the Ukrainian government three hours to clear the virus before it was activated.

On the Ukrainian side, the government has recently tried to replicate the successes of the Army of Ukraine with the launch of its Internet Army of Ukraine, accessible on Facebook, Instagram, and Telegram. The leaders offer particular war images in an attempt to alert the Russian population to the situation in Ukraine but also collages aimed at convincing various Western companies to withdraw from Russia.

Among the group's other operations, note that its members hid in restaurant reviews on Yandex (the Google of Russia) information about the invasion in Ukraine, to alert the Russian population. Overall, Ukraine

emerges as the winner on the computer in front of the war. This could be what compelled Vladimir Putin's government to significantly reduce Internet access in his country for a few days. The government has indeed withdrawn access to the main Western social networks, such as Facebook and Twitter. The noose has also been tightened around the foreign media presence in the country to prevent them from presenting the conflict as an invasion or other facts that contradict the state propaganda surrounding the conflict, and foreign channels such as the BBC have been cut off.

Foreign information and dissenting voices are therefore louder than ever in Russia. But the Internet can never be fully controlled, no matter how much Vladimir Putin wants. The more time passes, the more difficult it will prove to impose the state propaganda. Most of the major Russian political think-tanks, such as Stanislav Belkovskiy's National Strategy Institute, M. Deliagin's Institute of Globalization, or Sergei Markov's Institute for Political Research, have, however, made rather balancing remarks on the Ukrainian presidential elections. The day after the second round, Belkovskiy denounced the Russian and Ukrainian campaign managers' "poor electoral strategy," assuring them that it could only lead to a revolution that only mediation between Russia, Poland, and the United States could avert.

However, Markov, also a member of Viktor Yanoukovich's campaign team, underlined after the second round the need for Polish intervention, which seeks to push Ukraine into the European camp. Finally, in a Russian political landscape dominated by nationalist diatribes or declarations of support for Ukrainian power, political figures such as Boris Nemtsov and Irina Khákamada did not hesitate to sharply criticize the Kremlin's stance. Nemtsov will also be appointed on 14 February 2005, as economic adviser to President Viktor Yushchenko.

Major Russian groups have either not expressed an official position or played the card of neutrality in regards to this matter, however a few key well established Ukrainian partners have taken a stance on the matter:

- Alliance between Russian oligarch Roman Abramovich (oil, metals, and so on) and Alexander Volkov, a member of the Ukrainian group Bakay & Volkov, which is barred from entering the United States and Europe;
- Between Mikhail Fridman, president of the Giant Alfa (oil, banks, services, and so on), and the "Dnepropetrovsk clan," Ukraine's second political and financial group, led by Viktor Pinchuk, President Kuchma's son-in-law;
- Anatoliy Tchoubais, the president of the Russian European Defence Fund (EDF), with the group of Leonid Derkach, the ex-head of the secret services, sacked in April 2001.

The Westerners, for their part, like the Russians, were very involved both publicly and behind the scenes. According to Andrei Kokochin, chairman of the Duma Commission for CIS Affairs, approximately fifteen Western foundations and institutes lobbied against the power in place in Ukraine during the presidential elections. Most sources agree with these statements. Viktor Yushchenko was reportedly supported by former US national security adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski and his two sons. The presence of Lech Walesa and Alexandre Kwasniewski in Kyiv, seen several times alongside Yushchenko, adds to the impression of a strong American-Polish involvement.

The Viktor Yushchenko camp has also made contact with the Serbian Otpor and Georgian movements of Kmara, which have been organized as veritable SMEs of the “peaceful revolution” since the overthrows of Slobodan Milošević and Eduard Shevardnadze, respectively. According to several sources, the American Freedom House Foundation of Andrian Karatnitsky and James Woolsey, the former director of the CIA, funded their activists’ trips to Ukraine. The press also traces the activity of several other Western organizations, primarily American: The National Democratic Institute, the International Republican Institute, some major American parties, the United States Agency for International Development (USID), and, of course, the Soros Foundation (Monde-diplomatique, Interview with Régis Genté, 2022).

However, most of these organizations have been present in Ukraine since its independence and have worked there to create a civil society. It should be noted that Ukraine is the top five beneficiaries of American financial aid, following Israel (3 billion dollars), Egypt, and Pakistan (2 billion each).

Proof of American aid, on December 10, 2004, American Senator Ron E. Paul declared before the House of Representatives that Yushchenko’s electoral campaign had been “partially financed by the American government” (quoted by Interfax-Ukraine of December 12, 2004) and requested an investigation into the amount of this aid. Russia, for its part, would have funded Yanukovich’s campaign with \$300 million (Andrew Kuchins, director of the Carnegie Moscow Center, 2004). In reality, the Russian boost mainly took the form of a restructuring of the energy debt.

The fundraising was real, in addition to the name of an official. There is an online initiative with this title on the GlobalGiving platform, but it did not have the cryptocurrency as its payment method, nor did it specify as a contact date the field used in sending such e-mails.

Russian involvement in the Ukrainian presidential elections would not be surprising. Kyiv is indeed central to national security strategy and the fundamental interests of the Russian state and economy. Beyond the obvious historical and “carnal” ties that bind the two countries, Russian interests can be classified into seven major areas. The transit of hydrocarbons, the

interconnection of technologies and the industries that implement them (large groups, but also thousands of SMEs and SMIs), the presence of strategic Russian military infrastructure in Crimea, Orthodox religion, which is shared by both countries, and the Russian language, a factor behind which stands out implicitly the presence on Ukrainian soil of a very large Russian and Russian-speaking diaspora.

The last two areas, while less visible, are no less important. This is the future of the Common Economic Space (EEC), the creation of which was decided in Yalta in September 2003, and will only take on its meaning with the full participation of Kyiv and Moscow's apprehension of the territory of its neighbour, like a Limes against NATO forces. If Ukraine comes to join the North Atlantic Organization and Russia sees its border with the latter expand by 1,576 km, NATO ships will come to Crimea to anchor opposite its own, and a large part of the Russian diaspora-several million people-will find themselves in "adverse territory."

Thus, current Russian military strategy against NATO would be disrupted, as Russian nuclear weapons are the last vectors of power of an army that does not stop decaying, rendering them ineffective in this theatre. These numerous factors explain the very high frequency with which the presidents of the two countries have met since the arrival of Vladimir Putin in the Kremlin. Since 2000, the latter has met Leonid Kuchma every three weeks on average (Kuzio, 2015).

The Russian policy vis-à-vis Ukraine is measured by the yardstick of these meetings: this country does not harbour a real pro-Russian lobby, nor in the industrial field - even if it is the most involved in cooperation with the Russian Defense Industrial and Technological Base (BITD) - neither political nor media (Kochetkov, 2004, Director of the Institute of National Strategy in Moscow). There is no open political party or region advocating rapprochement or union with Russia, as in Belarus, Moldavia (Transnistria), or Georgia (Abkhazia, South Ossetia). As a result, Crimea, despite being populated by more than 60% Russians, voted for independence from Ukraine in 1991.

### **3. Post-cold war: A policy of balance between the Euro-Atlantic area and the Russia-CIS entity**

Despite paying attention to its large neighbours, and their common interests, Kyiv has always had a "multidirectional rhetoric" foreign policy that strove to strike a balance between East and West, between Russia, the CIS countries, Brussels and Washington. This delicate balance is reflected first of all in Ukraine's attitude towards the CIS - a supranational structure of which it

was nevertheless, on 8 December 1991, one of the inspirations, along with Russia and Belarus - and, in general, of the various organizations created in recent years in the former Soviet space. Ukraine, like Turkmenistan, Georgia, and Uzbekistan, has always remained on the periphery of this community's institutional life, including its security components (Organization of Collective Security and Air Defence, in which it only participates bilaterally). It is also content with observer status in the European Economic Community (EEC) and the September 1993 economic union treaty, refused the CIS chapter in January 1993 and views the Russian-Belarus Union with skepticism.

However, in September 1994, Kyiv agreed to sign an agreement on the Interstate Economic Committee (MEK), a supranational decision-making body in which it had only 14% of the votes, compared to 50% in Moscow and hinted in July 2004 that it might join the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

Although Moscow denies it, the EEC does appear to be a Russian attempt to create a "functional CIS", a geopolitical space dominated by Russia and a counterweight, initially, to the EU and, why not, later, to NATO. In any case, if we are to believe the Russian Deputy Minister of Economic Development and Trade, Dmitry Sukhoparov, it is an open organization with variable geometry: the EEC is not "a counterweight to the CIS", meaning that any country that so wishes can join, even if it is not a member of the community. The importance of the EEC in the eyes of Moscow is reflected in the fact that Vladimir Putin personally instructed his Prime Minister, Mikhail Fradkov, to monitor its development.

As with other CIS countries, relations between Ukraine and the EU are based on the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA), signed in June 1994 and entered into force in 1997. Two years later, Kyiv was granted the status of "economy in transition" and, in December 1999, the Union adopted a "common strategy on Ukraine" covering three areas: democratisation, economic reforms, and nuclear safety. In the field of security, the Paris Summit of the year 2000 did mention Ukraine's association with the European Security and Defence Policy, but without great results. Ukraine continues to be prioritized by NATO. Although Brussels remains the largest donor with nearly a billion dollars paid to Ukraine since 1991, it has, until the presidential elections, above all given the impression of stalling and hesitating as to the nature and the deepening of its relations with Kyiv.

Ukraine clearly belongs to these regions, like Transnistria in Moldova, Belarus, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia in Georgia, and Nagorni-Karabakh in Azerbaijan, on the march of the Union with ill-defined identities, which are defined and marked by the influence, even the presence of Russia. However, it is likely that the Union's policy vis-à-vis Kyiv has suffered from the confused,

sometimes contradictory acts and declarations of the Ukrainian leaders, behind which some have seen struggles.

These contradictions show up at the highest levels of the state. In a few months, Anatoly Zlenko, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, went from a total refusal of any integration into the EEC to a tacit acceptance. In April 2003, in Prague, there was no question for him about Ukraine's joining the Economic Community of Yalta so as "not to end up in the Russian geopolitical orbit" (Rosbalt News Agency, April 25, 2003).

At the end of August, his position was already less firm: he was only opposed to the creation of a supranational structure overseeing the EEC, "an instrument allowing the creation of a framework for economic cooperation in the ex-Soviet space" and continued to favor multipolarity and rapprochement with "Euro-Atlantic structures".

The later idea of the EEC has made its way into Ukrainian ruling circles. Anatoliy Zlenko accepts its creation, but Ukraine will only integrate "as long as this integration is compatible with its aspirations to integrate into Europe." The discourse is much the same at the replacement of Zlenko and K. Grichenko, former Ukrainian ambassadors to the United States: priority is given to establishing closer ties with the EU, "especially in the economic sphere, via the creation of a free trade zone," but without neglecting the partnership with the United States and Russia (The Russia Journal, November 20, 2003).

However, Kyiv signed the EEC treaty in September. The statements of the Ukrainian president are no less contradictory. The next day, after the ratification of the treaty of entry into the EEC by the Rada, he affirmed loud and clearly that this would not, however, prevent his country "from getting involved in other international unions." Indeed, on June 25, 2004, Ukraine signed an agreement with Uzbekistan, another CIS troublemaker, to establish a free trade zone between their two countries (RFE/RL, June 28, 2004). The market for Afghanistan reconstruction is being targeted here. Leonid Kuchma and his Georgian counterpart, Mikheil Saakashvili, had already agreed to lift trade restrictions between their two countries two months earlier, on April 27.

At the beginning of May 2004, he told the new members of the EU that "united Europe [...] will not acquire its full logic without the Ukraine" (RFE/RL, 5 May 2004). At the end of July, Leonid Kuchma seemed to have forgotten Europe: the creation of a "genuine free trade zone" with Moscow [...] became "the priority of Russian-Ukrainian economic cooperation" (Interfax, July 26, 2004). Finally, on August 13, the Ukrainian president assures Donald Rumsfeld, the American Secretary of Defense, that "Ukrainian policy toward European and Euro-Atlantic integration remains unchanged" and that his country remains a "strategic partner of the United States" (RFE/RL, August 13, 2004).



Ukraine's policy of balance is also required in the technological field. Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev launched the idea of creating an aerospace joint venture within the framework of the EEC in September 2004, in Astana (Interfax, September 15, 2004), whose core would be made up of big Russian and Ukrainian names in the sector, such as the Yuzhnoe design office and the Yuzhmash factory, for example, with Kazakhstan providing the launch platform. The idea was endorsed by Kyiv, but two months later, the Ukrainian space agency let it be known that it was also preparing to join the new space cooperation program launched by NASA (Interfax, November 29, 2004).

#### **4. 2004 - A break in balance?**

Kyiv's acceptance of the creation of the Common Economic Space, therefore, does not appear as a blank check signed to Russia. Kuchma is careful to specify that he refuses to make a new organization a customs union and a ruble zone. At most, he accepts the idea of a free trade zone. In doing so, however, Ukrainian diplomacy gives the impression of standing still, of accepting the EU but without clearly expressing the wish to join it, and of entering the EEC while refusing the principle of union economics, which it nevertheless underlies. The end of 2003, and especially the beginning of 2004, marked a watershed moment in the history of Ukraine-EU relations, signalling the end of the illusions.

At the end of 2003, during the summit of October 7th, 2003 in Yalta between Ukraine and the EU, Romano Prodi, the President of the European Commission, again expressed his wish to see Ukraine one day join the EU while disapproving Kyiv's signing of the draft EEC. However, he is careful not to set a date, while President Kuchma, for his part, brings forward that of 2011 (AFP, October 14, 2003). In January 2004, the resignation of the Minister of the Economy, Valéry Khorochkovsky, is, however, a sign that Kyiv has just understood that Prodi's wish has no real basis.

Considered a liberal reformer, Khorochkovsky was indeed a strong supporter of Ukraine's accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) and opposed his country's participation in the EEC (FP, January 3, 2004). At the European Economic Forum in Warsaw on April 29, 2004, ambiguity was already out of place. Ukraine's president vainly urges the EU to offer his country integration prospects and likens relations between the two sides to "a bullfight" in which Ukraine plays the role of the bull, with the EU waving a red rug, the colour of which continues to "fade" (RFE/RL, April 30, 2004).

However, it was not until the Dublin summit, a few days later, in May 2004, that the President of the European Commission, Romano Prodi, clearly

rejected any idea of Ukraine's joining: the countries of the former Soviet Union had "no prospect [...] of becoming members of the EU" (Financial Times, 3 May 2004). Enlargement will be completed after "the admission of Bulgaria, Romania, Turkey, and the Western Balkan countries, Croatia, and Serbia-Montenegro". Only a folding seat, that of the famous "circle of friends of Europe," a cooperation zone extending from the Baltic Sea to North Africa via the Middle East (RFE/RL, May 5, 2004), and extensive cooperation in the areas of justice, international affairs, and foreign and security policy (The Russia Journal, October 1, 2003), are offered to Ukraine.

However, a shift in Ukraine's balance policy in the sense of joining, directly or through the EEC, Russia's vision of recomposition of the post-Soviet space is not self-evident. Since independence, diplomatic relations between the two countries have been constantly strained. The sources of conflict have multiplied: sharing of the Soviet nuclear heritage and the Soviet Black Sea Fleet which has made Crimea a backyard of Russia to the chagrin of Ukrainian nationalists, Ukraine's application for NATO membership in 2002, Russian customs barriers, huge Ukrainian energy debt, religious disputes, war in Abkhazia during which Ukraine provided logistical support to Georgia, not to mention the presence of Ukrainian troops in Moldavia alongside Russian troops under the terms of the 1998 Odessa agreement.

Vladimir Putin allows himself to judge the presence of the Russian fleet in Sevastopol "in accordance with the Ukrainian Constitution and laws", even if these affirm that a foreign presence on national soil cannot be permanent. For the Russian President, in fact, Article 14 of this same Constitution authorizes this presence as long as the foreign forces in question were already on site at the time of the entry into force of the Constitution within the framework of a ratified treaty. By the Rada. Which it is (Interfax, October 26, 2004).

Two crises deserve particular attention. The first took place on April 10, 1994, in full sight of the Black Sea Fleet with the assault launched by Ukrainian paratroopers against military ships anchored in the ports of Odesa and Izmail in retaliation to the "theft" of navigational instruments by the crew of a Russian hydrographic vessel. Despite the 1997 fleet sharing agreement, the presence of Russian bases in Crimea, by far the largest in the CIS, imposed by Moscow in 1994 after energy blackmail, looks like a bad memory of the Cold War.

It frustrates Ukrainian nationalists because it slows the economic development of the port of Sevastopol and, in effect, turns the peninsula into an appendage of the Russian military region of the North Caucasus. In Crimea, Russian armed forces still occupy four naval bases in Sevastopol - the Russians' "hero city", that were equipped with piers, ammunition depots, command centers, around a hundred aircraft, around two hundred to two hundred and fifty ships,

most of them technologically outdated and inoperative. The infrastructure of the port of Sevastopol is leased by the Russian navy until 2017.

However, Ukraine had been pressuring Russia for several months to shorten this mandate, and have two anti-ballistic missile radars (ABM), in Nikolaev and Mukachevo, naval air infrastructure near Saki, which is unique in the CIS, the Gvardeyskoye air base, the Feodosia missile test range, most of the semaphores on the peninsula and a dozen rest centers.

This infrastructure, belonging to the Ukrainian Air Force was used to reproduce on land the deck of an aircraft carrier was essential in training the pilots of the only Russian aircraft carrier, the Admiral Kuznetsov, they were leased to the Russian naval aviation within the framework of an agreement signed between the two countries on February 7, 1997 in Kyiv. At the end of 2003, the Russian debt for the rental of these infrastructures amounted to 300,000 dollars (Pravda.ru, November 24, 2003).

The Council of Ministers of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea asked the Ukrainian government in mid-August 2004 to decide on the ownership of the former Soviet army rest centers on the peninsula. Russia would have succeeded in proving that a dozen of these centers belonged to it (Pravda.ru, 11 August 2004).

It should be noted that only Russian military vessels duly registered in Sevastopol have the right to enter Ukrainian national waters without authorization from Kyiv. Other Russian vessels, based in Russia, must request permission several days in advance. A total of 70,000 people were stationed there, counting soldiers and their families.

The accidental downing of a Russian Tu-154 airliner by Ukrainian anti-aircraft defence in 2001 rekindled tensions between the two sides for a time. Kyiv took advantage of this to deprive the Russian navy of the right to carry out firing exercises in front of Sevastopol, as authorized by the 1997 agreements. The mooring areas near the Sevastopol ferry terminal reserved for Russian ships were also moved to allow the terminal to expand. Under the terms of the May 1997 treaty, the Russian fleet will remain in Sevastopol until 2017, despite the construction of a new naval base in Novorossiysk.

The United States also supports the presence of the Russian fleet in Sevastopol until 2017, John Tefft, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs, seeing it as an “important regional security factor” (MosNews, March 9, 2019). On March 25, 2019, Yulia Tymoshenko also declared regarding the Russian naval establishment in Crimea that “Ukraine will not violate any of its agreements with Russia”, a clear sign of appeasement (RIA-Novosti, March 25, 2019).

The table lists the main technological cooperation projects carried out in partnership by Russia and Ukraine in sensitive fields such as aeronautics,

aerospace and missiles. Some directly affect Russian national security. The ICBM and SLBM missiles that equip the Russian nuclear deterrent force were in fact partly designed or built in Ukraine.

It is thanks to the Ukrainian Design Office - OKB-586, established by Mikhail Yangel and its construction plant NPO YoujMach, for example, that the ICBMs and SLBMs SS-24 Scalpel, SS-N-20 (RSM-52) and other SS-18 Satan Russian Strategic Rocket Troops (RVSN) can be kept operational.

It is also thanks to the Ukrainian Kommunar plant in Kharkov and its Proton-M rockets that Moscow can continue to place certain types of satellites into orbit. Duplicating Ukrainian infrastructure in Russia and training maintenance teams on technologies and equipment that are already old would make little sense.

Even today no Russian armament program is 100% national and Ukraine takes full advantage of this. Five hundred and fifty of its companies are thus involved in the construction of a Russian SSBN (Interview with Vitaliy Shlykov, 2000), the Russian army's T-80 tanks are still equipped with guns built by the Ukrainian Malychev factory in Kharkov and the R-27 (AA-10 Alamo) air-to-air missiles that equip Russian fighter-bombers still in part made in Ukraine.

According to V. Khristenko (2019), the Russian Minister of Industry and Energy, some 2,000 companies from the two countries are now collaborating in the field of designing and manufacturing weapons. One of the flagships of Ukrainian aeronautics like the ANTK Antonov, for example, is emblematic of this technological symbiosis between the two countries given that the Russian strategic and tactical air transport fleets are largely equipped with these planes, which are themselves motorized. by Russian engines. These devices are also developed and built-in cooperation with design offices, subcontractors and factories located throughout the territory of the CIS and therefore in Russia (Samara, for example).

In the aerospace field, there are numerous partnership agreements between the two countries. The Russian space agency RosAviaKosmos thus joined forces with its Ukrainian counterpart in October 2003 to take part in the development and construction of the Ukrainian Cyclone-4 launchers and their launch pad from the Brazilian centre of Alcantara. However, the agreement provides that the technologies provided by the Russians to the Ukrainians are protected by intellectual property law (The Russia Journal, December 23, 2003). Several public-private joint ventures have emerged in recent years in this field, such as Cosmotras, whose business sector concerns the transformation of Russian SS-18 ICBMs into space launchers, and Medium Transport Aircraft which promotes the new An-70 military cargo plane in international markets. A consortium should also emerge around the production and marketing of

the new small modular airplane An-140, itself designed by the State Aircraft Manufacturing Company of Karkhov and Aviakor of Samara.

Russian and Ukrainian universities also collaborate on numerous scientific projects. We recently heard Sergei Markianov, the director of the foreign relations department of the Russian Academy of Sciences, express very political fears that more than two hundred Russian-Ukrainian projects would no longer be financed in the event of the election of Viktor Yushchenko (Itar-Tass, November 29, 2004).

In the industrial field, exchanges between the two countries take place within the framework of an agreement signed on April 24, 1998, renewed on January 28, 2003, and which binds together 237 Ukrainian and 356 Russian companies (Interfax, January 26, 2004) beyond customs barriers imposed by Russia. A region like Rostov in Russia, for example, alone also concentrates 172 Russian-Ukrainian joint ventures ([www.russianbusinesssite.com/regions/rostov.asp](http://www.russianbusinesssite.com/regions/rostov.asp)), while an interregional economic agreement has linked Ukraine to the Russian region of Nizhny Novgorod since October 2004 (Interfax, October 7, 2004).

However, as a consequence of this multitude of cooperative projects and common technological heritage, together with lower production costs than in Russia, makes Ukraine a formidable competitor for Russia on many markets, mainly in the field of retrofitting of armaments of conception Soviet (armored vehicles, missiles, helicopters, planes), spare parts and aeronautics. To combat this threat Moscow imposes high customs duties and tariffs and does not seem ready to make any concessions. During the technical discussions held in April 2004 in Saint Petersburg, Russia thus refused, despite repeated requests from Kyiv, to abolish the taxes imposed in the field of civil aviation.

Table 1. The main RU-UKR technological cooperations

| Area/projects  | Date        | Companies involved  |
|--|-------------|---|
| Zenith rocket launch   | From 1997   | Sea Launch project in cooperation with Energiya RKK (Russia, 25%), Yuzhnoe/Yangel (Ukraine, 15%), Boeing (USA, 40%), Kvaerner (Norway, 20%)   |
| Modernization and transformation of ICBM SS-18 Satan           | Late 1990s  | Joint venture Russian-Ukrainian Cosmotras   |
| Construction, promotion and marketing of the An-70 cargo plane | Decade 1990 | Joint venture Russian-Ukrainian Medium Transport Aircraft (Antonov), Aviant plant (Kyiv), Progress NPO/Motor Sich (Zaparojie), Aviapribor (Moscow), Poliot, production association (Omsk), UMPO (Ufa) |

|  |             |  |
|--|-------------|--|
| Modernization of Proton-M space launchers  | Decade 1990 | Ukrainian factory Kommunar (Kharkov) and Khrounnichev research centre (Moscow)   |
| Construction of the Tu-334 airliner  | Decade 1990 | Ukrainian Aviant and Russian factories in Taganrog (Taganrog OAO)  |
| S-300 (SA-10) anti-aircraft missile radar and launch rail erection system  | Decade 1990 | Ukrainian plant Novokramatorsk and Russian holding company Almaz-Antey.  |
| Production and sale of the An-140  | 2002        | Joint venture Russian-Ukrainian: (for Ukraine) Antonov, Kharkov Aircraft Plant, Ivchenko-Progress/Motor Sich Plant (Zaporozhye), Aviakor Aircraft Plant (Samara) |
| Design of helicopter turbines: VK-2500V for Mi-8 type and AI-450 for Ka-226, for the combat helicopter (Ka-50-2)                                 | 2002        | KB Klimov (St. Petersburg design), Progress NPO/Motor Sich (Zaporozhie manufacturing)  |
| Development of the D-436-148 engine of the An-148 regional transport plane competing with the Sukhoi RRJ (Air & Cosmos, n° 1932, April 16, 2004) | 2003        | Antonov, Progress NPO/Motor Sich (Zaporozhie), MMPP Salyut (Moscow) and UMPO (Ufa)   |
| Modernization of 1000 An-2 Colt (An-3 version)   | 2004        | Aviant and Antonov   |
| Development of the Yak-130 trainer aircraft  | Decade 1990 | Progress NPO/Motor Sich (Zaporozhie), Yakovlev   |

*Source: The Russia Journal, April 16 (2004)*

The position of Russian industrialists is indeed very fragile in this sector where they are already surpassed by Airbus, Boeing and severely limited by the new standards imposed by the ICAO.

In 2003, the two countries also joined forces around three major gas and pipeline projects. The first of these, launched in February 2004 by Gazprom and Naftogaz Ukrainy, concerns the laying of a gas pipeline between the Russian towns of Bogorodchany, Alexandrov Gai and Novopskov and the town of Uzhgorod, west of Ukraine (Interfax, February 19, 2004).

This project, the idea of which had been launched in August of the previous year, will make it possible to transport over 1,700 km some 5 billion m<sup>3</sup> of Russian gas in 2019 and 19 billion in 2020. The second project is the result of the interruption decided by President Lukashenko of the transit of Russian gas via Belarusian territory [Gloaguen, 2004]. Decided without notice in February 2004, it prompted the Russian government to consider bringing

the old Soviet gas pipelines Torzhok-Dolina and Ivatsevich-Dolina back into service to supply gas to Poland (Drozdovichi station), Slovakia, Austria and Germany (Uzhgorod station). The exploitation of these two tubes had been stopped after the entry into service in the early 1990s of the large Yamal-Europe gas pipeline through Belarus.

The third project, which has caused the most ink to flow as it is so significant for the geopolitics of the region, is that of the construction of an oil pipeline between Brody, near Lviv, and Odessa, on the Black Sea. It will allow the Russian-Anglo-American company TNK-BP, its operator, to circumvent the bottleneck that is the Bosphorus, then, if it is to be connected to the future Druzhba-Adria pipeline, to transport its oil to the markets of Eastern Europe and, above all, to the deep-water port of Omisalj in Croatia, opening up to world markets. The project was strongly supported by the Russian companies TNK-BP, Yukos, Lukoil and Transneft, which also own the four largest Ukrainian refineries. The construction of this pipeline, made headlines. The Russian government planned to carry Caspian oil from the port of Odessa in the Black Sea to Brody in Ukraine, then Plotsk and Gdansk in Poland. The project succeeded thanks to advantageous oil prices for the Ukrainians, in August 2003. This decision was not without political risk for the Ukrainian government, since it provoked a protest vote by the nationalist deputies of the Rada, initiating in return the reversal of the transport of the Adria oil pipeline, a project yet initiated the previous year by Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Slovakia, Hungary and Croatia.

## **5. Disinformation, source of instability and some relevant examples of this phenomenon**

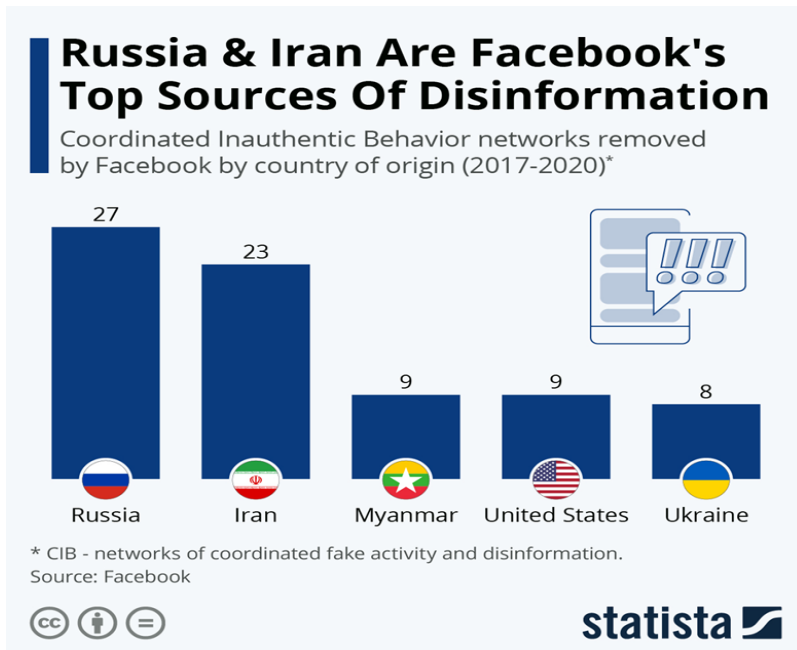
In 2013, the World Economic Forum (2013) had identified online “misinformation” as one of the ten trends to follow in 2014-2015 – a solid premonition proved to be right since disinformation has played a significant role in the current Ukrainian crisis. Since then, the topic has been an ever increasing one. All surveys on the subject confirm that it poses a major concern for populations, journalists, NGOs and governments around the world, the consensus being that the damage done through this manipulation is far reaching and affects the global society as a whole.

However, there is also a widespread tendency to understate, and underestimate the effectiveness of these manipulations, and therefore the importance of the subject. This trend is less visible in countries that are traditionally sensitized. See, for example, the Report of the European

Commission (2018) on the false online news and misinformation, and the Reuters Institute Digital News Report (2018), which surveyed more than 74,000 people in 37 states. On the other hand, those who consider themselves safe, or who know they are targeted but who can avoid being targeted themselves are more likely to reduce the threat.

In recent years, Russia has interfered in several democratic processes, including local and presidential elections of the largest global powers, and have destabilized very large digital companies. They have split public opinion, sowed doubt as to the veracity of the information issued by the reference media, and systematically targeted individuals and groups spreading panic and disinformation through fearmongering. They have played a role in major diplomatic crises (Ukraine, Syria, Gulf), saturated online media and digital spaces by employing communities of trolls to participate in harassment and intimidation, as well as spreading disinformation through bots (automated systems and programs that mimic the activity of authentic users), with sometimes fatal consequences: the manipulations through online platforms like Facebook, the spreading of false rumours and retouched photos, have played a significant role in the persecution of the Rohingyas in Burma, that the Nations United have characterized as ethnic cleansing or even genocide.

Figure 1. Top sources of disinformation



Source: Statista.com (2021)



The fact is that many countries, with the help of the army, manage to mobilize civil society, which multiplies the initiatives for which they don't have the capacity to protect, and that in parallel, they develop a true misinformation economy, with their troll factories, click farms, bots their millionaire entrepreneurs influencing masses of people through online channels.

However, determining the efficacy of information manipulation remains difficult, and no method is completely satisfactory. During and after the cold war, American intelligence commissioned surveys that were meticulously designed to measure the permeability of groups targeted by Moscow's disinformation campaigns. Today, network and social media analysis provide precious information. It can detect movements, that are both artificial and coordinated, and measure the number of people affected, i.e., the "tissue infected", including filtering the accounts flagged as automated accounts (bots).

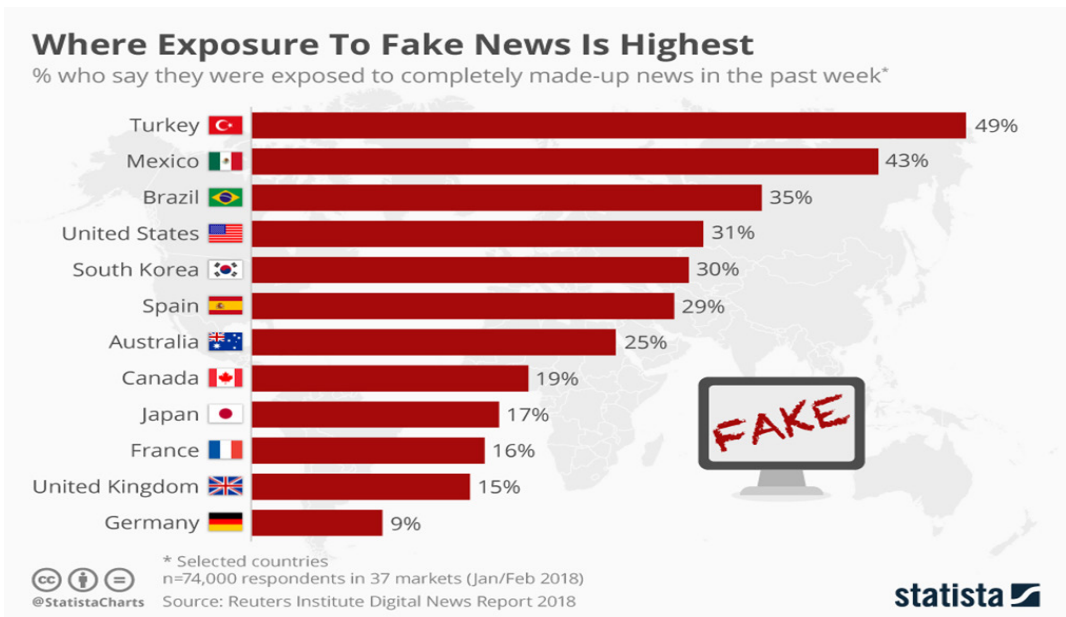
But the statistics do not indicate whether they are or have been convinced, nor does it indicate whether the false information received will cause them to act (give their coordinates or money, demonstrate, etc.), but rather it can indicate that the misinformation has been disseminated to an estimated number of individuals. Another problem with statistics like these is the fact that once the information has been received by an individual, it can often hop platforms, by being shared by unsuspecting users on other platforms not intentionally targeted by the disseminator. The most damage being made by so called "sneezers" or influencers that have a large audience of their own to disseminate the information to. Furthermore, the number of accounts is less than the nature of the community touched; a message that only reaches 2% of the population can have a significant impact if these 2% are violent and ready to act.

Another limitation of the methods used is that they do text analysis, so the manipulation of information is also limited by the pictures, which are much more difficult to analyse automatically. If he appears crucial to drawing attention to the role of one platform, such as Facebook, other networks (Instagram, WhatsApp) must also be questioned.

Misinformation through pictures raises the issue of how to handle children. Measuring the effectiveness of information manipulation is nearly impossible because the link between a message broadcast and a behaviour involves far too many variables. We can still distinguish the impact in the digital environment, which is relatively measurable due to quantifiable (if one manages to decide the true increasingly sophisticated bot accounts), from the more general effect, which cannot be that assumed.

Furthermore, filtering such information from social media is close to impossible due to the fact that online communities cite infringement on free speech when these posts are taken down.

Figure 2. Where exposure to fake news is highest



Source: Statista.com (2018)

The democratic process itself is deeply altered because of public outrage aroused by false information or news that once disseminated rapidly shapes public sentiment and allures the thinking of individuals spawning antisocial and violent outbursts and behaviour.

On one hand, this manipulation can have a direct effect creating new opinions or reinforcing existing ones that would otherwise be tempered. Based on our research, we find that the effect of these manipulations would, more often not change the opinions but sow doubt and confusion and, sometimes, encourage a lack of action or commitment, and in other cases transform a passive conviction into an active one, and therefore an act, in a way similar to the process of radicalization. The act in question may be the vote.

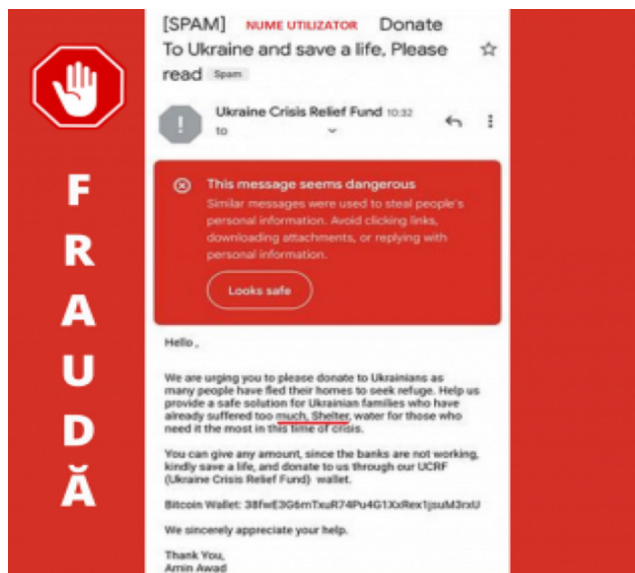
This could also be seen from certain perspective as the introduction of a radical concept like freedom in a extremely conservative society. The outcome sought by the foreign powers, in this case, would be to originate the manipulation of information, not so much to convince the population of a specific rhetoric, but to incite governments to take action contrary to their democratic and liberal values, which will elicit reactions (of a other part of the political class and civil society) and ultimately will help to deepen the divisions within society. Although it appears essential to have the means to independently research actions of misinformation, and asses the goals, effectiveness and

ramification of these campaigns using a pure scientific method, in real life the damaging ramifications of allowing such campaigns to proliferate require immediate intervention and thus altering the results of the research act itself

Just four days after Russian troops entered Ukraine, we saw a 100-fold increase in these types of attacks over the previous period. It is an expected consequence because the risk of intervention of neighbouring countries in the current context of the country was so great.

Another newly discovered fraud made use of the situation in Ukraine as a theme. It was also spread by e-mail and aimed at raising funds for refugees fleeing the war in Ukraine through the Ukrainian Crisis Relief Fund. The proposed method of sending money was a Bitcoin wallet. The e-mail was signed by a certain Amin Awad, the Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations (UN). The person actually exists and was appointed, on February 25, as crisis coordinator for Ukraine. However, it had nothing to do with the Ukraine Crisis Relief Fund initiative. "Cybercriminals simulate reputable fundraising initiatives and use people in important positions internationally to provide a reliable dose of information to potential victims" said Mihai Rotariu, a spokesman for the Romanian National Cyber Security Directorate (DNSC, March 2022).

Figure 3. DNSC alert: Attempted fraud with false donations for the cause of Ukraine spread by e-mail



Source: DNSC Romania (2022)

Subsequently, the increase in attention and the decrease in interest caused the attacks to return to a level before the start of the war. In the first month, the average increase was 10%, say DNSC representatives. However, we are only talking about the incidents reported to state institutions. Some of the state or private entities preferred to solve the problems themselves, without directly reporting the matter.

The main problems that the Cyber Security Directorate has discovered in the last month have demonstrated a precarious security culture on the part of the institutions targeted by the attacks. DNSC does not have a centralized analysis at the national level to show the level of security of sites or servers used by public institutions. They are not required to report cyber security incidents in accordance with the law.

This problem is not unique to Romania but more of a general European one.. The European Union has already started procedures to amend cyber security legislation, which will be applicable to all Member States. Under the new directive, public institutions would be required to implement minimum security measures, report possible incidents to the national cybersecurity authority and carry out frequent security audits. DNSC does not have the attributions or the necessary tools for a ‘permanent supervision’ of the websites of the public institutions in Romania.

Romania is not ready for a serious cyber attack. For example, an operation of Anonymous group against Romania would have a disastrous impact on Romanian information systems. Experts constantly issue alerts and recommendations about vulnerabilities that may affect websites. Since the start of the war in Ukraine, it has issued timely alerts to targeted institutions and six general alerts with warnings for the entire population, after finding repeated attacks. In a response to Free Europe, the Anonymous group also argued for the vulnerability of Romanian systems used in public institutions.

The investigation revealed how the city of Veles, Macedonia, had become a fake news nursery and how young people, sometimes teenagers, had supported pro-Trump in the American campaign simply because it was the most profitable (the pro-Trump content was more divided, generating more revenue for advertisers). Some of them won thus almost 5,000 dollars per month, in a country where the average wage was less than 400 euros (Buzzfeednews.com, 2016). Today some of them produce always fake channel news but they make a lot less money because once their activity was revealed to the public they can no longer sell to reputable online media outlets like Google.

On smaller scale, in India in less than a month, fifteen people have been lynched throughout the country, following the dissemination on WhatsApp

of false rumours about kidnappers, which pushed the authorities to react by cutting temporarily access to some digital platforms (Ganjoo, 2018).

Consider the case of Carlos Merlo, a Mexican who controls millions of bots and dozens of websites. His business, Victory Lab, offers “bot management, containment, cyber-attacks, and creation of fake news sites” services for prices ranging from 49,000 pesos (€2,256) for a six month contract to one million pesos (€46,000) for a one-year contract.

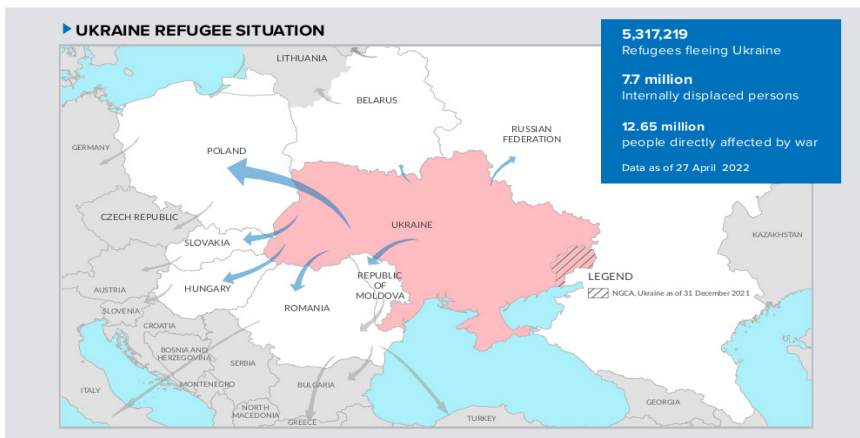
In a few cases, individuals have begun spreading claims that the war is a hoax, a counterfeit of the press or has been exaggerated by the West, and the images shown on media outlets feature actors. In one example video featuring two individuals, a man and a woman, to whom fake blood was applied to their faces has so far garnered millions of views on several online platforms. The video is being distributed as alleged evidence that the war in Ukraine is a hoax, and that the civilian victims are in fact “actors” - people hired to play the scenes of an attack. The footage actually comes from 2020 Ukrainian TV series and have nothing to do with the Russian invasion. In an act of disinformation, the misleading information was shared via platforms like Facebook. The video shows behind the scene footage shot in 2020 on the production set of the Ukrainian TV series “Contamin”. The male actor even posted pictures from behind-the-scenes of the production on Twitter in December 2020. The moving corpse, a video showing a news reporter in front of several bags of corpses went viral on several major social networks and was widespread by pro-Kremlin accounts. About a minute after the clip begins, one of the body bags begins to move, a man pulls his head out from under it, and a cameraman approaches to film. Videos like these were picked up by media outlets around the world without much scrutiny regarding the source and context of the material.

At the beginning of the conflict, in a desperate dash for relevant footage regarding the context, some media outlets even showed so called footage of military equipment and installations being deployed or attacked and later it came out that the footage actually came from video game trailers.

Another story concerns a protest against climate change in Vienna that is presented as the “fake war” in Ukraine, with the dead moving. The fake was shared on Twitter. But the allegations are false. The video comes from a protest against climate change that took place in Vienna in early February, according to the Austrian newspaper *Osterreich*. Organized by Friday for Future activists, the body bag scene aims to highlight the danger of carbon emissions to people’s lives. The same video was shared last month by several groups who share conspiracy theories, claiming that the images surprise an actor, but in a different outbreak of COVID-19.

Fake wooden weapons - a screenshot of a Fox News show of two Ukrainian men holding what appear to be wooden weapons has also gone viral. The picture is often accompanied by narratives that the war in Ukraine is a hoax, and that the weapons are not real proves this. Put in context the fake weapons were given to civilian volunteers willing to train to defend their communities before the outbreak of war. The fake claim that the war is a hoax was shared on Facebook. The filming dates back to mid-February before the war began. The images were filmed during a training session held by the far-right Azov battalion for civilian volunteers in the Ukrainian city of Kharkov, willing to defend their communities and themselves in the event of a Russian invasion.

Figure 4. Ukraine refugee situation on 27 April 2022



Source: UNHCR (2022)

Steven Seagal does not fight in Ukraine A fake tweet - apparently from a CNN account verified by Twitter - claims that the famous American actor Steven Seagal, who has dual citizenship (Russian and American), was seen “among Russian special forces” near Kyiv, the capital of Ukraine. Along with regular users, the tweet was picked up by influential accounts, which have a large number of followers, including the host of a US podcast, Joe Rogan, who shared it on Instagram to the 14 million people who follow it. A fake tweet stating that Steven Seagal is fighting in Ukraine was shared by Joe Rogan, host of an American podcast. That allowed users to create fake - but authentic-looking tweets from verified accounts. The 69-year-old action film actor told Fox News last week that he sees both countries as” one family “and hopes for a “positive solution, peaceful”. CNN said the image was counterfeit and “never reported anything like that,” and Joe Rogan later deleted his Instagram post.

A well-known Russian political scientist talks about the Transnistrian incidents: “Russia is planning a landing between the mouths of the Dniester and the Danube. Another step towards a great European war “ A Russian diplomat shares a fake tweet A Russian diplomat has shared several screenshots telling a fictional story about a journalist killed in Ukraine during the Russian invasion. “How to make a fake ... colleagues, be careful, the main battle is not in Ukraine, it is with the lies and fakes of MSM”, wrote on Twitter Dmitry Polyansky, Russia’s Deputy Ambassador to the UN, through MSM he understood “ mainstream mediate”. His post was accompanied by a tweet claiming that CNN reported on the death of journalist “Bernie Gores “ in Ukraine, after announcing the death of the same man last year in Afghanistan when the Taliban took control of the country.

An image of YouTuber Jordie Jordan was used, along with a fake identity, to claim that CNN announced the death of a journalist in Ukraine. The hack was shared on Twitter. But the screenshots presented as evidence of counterfeiting come from two fake CNN accounts - both of which have since been suspended by Twitter. And the man pictured as “Bernie Gores “ is, in fact, a living YouTuber named Jordie Jordan. A CNN official told Reuter’s verification agents that the posts were “absolute fiction.” Fake filming different versions of a crowd-pleasing video of a director being asked to run and scream in fear have garnered hundreds of thousands of views on several online platforms. The video was allegedly “taken out” of Ukraine, suggesting that some of the scenes were invented by the press.

Images from behind the scenes of Invasion Planet Earth are distributed in the context of the invasion of Ukraine. The fake appeared on YouTube but the scene was actually filmed in Victoria Square in Birmingham, in 2013, for the science fiction film “Invasion Planet Earth”, which at that time was entitled “Kaleidoscope Man”. The film’s director, Simon Cox, wrote on Twitter that he was “shocked” to see that his footage was “used that way”.

Some users of social networks shared an image with the title “The vice-president’s wife joins the army “ in which the wife of a “Ukrainian vice-president” is supposed to appear, who joined the country’s armed forces to fight against the Russian invasion. However, Ukraine does not have a vice president. Twitter users have wrongly claimed that the woman in the picture is the wife of the Ukrainian vice president Another version circulating on Twitter wrongly suggests that the woman in the picture is Ukraine’s first lady, Olena Zelenska. Logistics officials at the Logical website found that the women was actually a Ukrainian soldier who was photographed in August 2021. The original photo was taken in Kyiv during a rehearsal for a military parade.

## 4. Conclusion

In the context of the Ukraine crisis, which affects the entire Black Sea region, the widespread use of misinformation for war goals by propagating false or truth-distorting information is a big concern.

In this domain, democratic countries rely on public information to keep people informed so that they can freely and knowingly express their will. Today's social media platforms, as well as traditional and online media, are all prone to widespread misinformation, with unparalleled speed and accuracy in finding the target audience, making them actual misinformation vectors.

Misinformation undermines trust in true conflict-zone information transmitted by state institutions, digital and traditional media, and has negative consequences for the overall security situation and for each individual, as well as supporting radical and extremist ideas and activities, which can cause instability, sow distrust, and create societal tensions with potentially serious consequences, as well as other sources of conflict.

The governments in the area have a shared and basic commitment not to intervene or censor specific information, but to ensure that all individuals have access to timely and accurate information.

Online content sharing platforms, particularly social media platforms, video-sharing services, and search engines, which play a key role in spreading and amplifying online misinformation, have so far failed to act proportionately, failing to meet the height of the challenge of misinforming states that have set a manipulation goal.

In the context of the war in Ukraine, rising disinformation and the seriousness of the threat have heightened awareness and alarm among civil society members, both in the Black Sea nations and worldwide.

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