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Information Warfare on the Internet - Exposing and Countering pro-Kremlin Disinformation in the CEEC - Project Summary in Slovakia

This analysis provides lessons learned based on a long-term monitoring and reporting of pro-Kremlin articles published in Slovak mainstream and alternative media. From the content perspective the articles usually focused on states and figures outside of Slovakia, mostly NATO, Russia, and the United States. They were not, however, focused on Slovakia and its relationship with Russia or the domestic situation in the country as it is in the articles published in the rest of the V4 countries. On the other hand, the authors promoted Russia as a stable and strong country, although they seldom mention current political system and rather focused on the simple interpretation of the geopolitical situation. Also, the figure of Vladimir Putin was described as a strong leader who pushes his country and his people towards the better future.

Distinguish Sings

Several articles had grammatical mistakes. However, it is difficult to distinguish whether that was caused by bad grammar skills of the writer or by the translation from Russia. There were several examples where a foreign sounding name, usually English and American was translated from English to Russian and then from Russian to Slovak. For example the name of Ms Moira Whelan, a former staffer at the U.S. Department of State was misspelled in the Slovak article as Moyra Wilan which suggests that it was translated from the Russian language version as Моыра Вилан. Furthermore, articles are mostly short and written with limited signs of quality journalism. They lacked authors or reliable sources and often used mocking wording.

Techniques

The authors use the technique of vague statements and implementing emotions. Further, it is typical for the propaganda articles to use low-level employees of the U.S. administration and

quote them as government representatives. The authors use the same technique when describing unknown blogger as political scientists or geopolitical analysts. The articles also contain mocking of the U.S. and other NATO countries and they "overreaction" to the Russian steps in the Eastern Europe. Russia is portrayed as an actor protecting its interests; on the other hand, NATO is described as the war-mongering aggressor.

Big Subjects

The authors and articles mention the big conspiracy theories (i.e. Jewish conspiracy, 9/11 conspiracy theories, etc.) to lesser extent. The big subjects included NATO-Russia relationship, completely omitting Russian domestic debate. Russian foreign policy is mostly described as good and helpful. The Russian intervention in Ukraine is described as a helping land to the "oppressed Russian speaking minority". The war in Syria is portrayed as a war against radical terrorism, despite being accused by many countries of assisting the regime of Bashar Assad and bombing civilian targets.

Conclusion

The pro-Kremlin propaganda material is slowly declining on the alternative websites. The "media" outside maintream are resources due to successful projects focused on limiting their revenue from advertising. However, more active politicians today than ever before share conspiracy and pro-Kremlin websites on their social media which suggests that the propaganda accommodated itself into a political arena. This is a dangerous trend with a very thin silver lining. One positive trend is that the awareness of pro-Kremlin informational campaign is on the rise due to a number of successful projects conducted in the V4 region. A large sum of information, profiles, techniques, and subjects are collected on regular bases during the implementation of the projects. Therefore, the future projects can target specific groups and be implemented more efficiently.