

SUMMARY
of
REPORT
on the Study on

Anti-Democratic Propaganda in Bulgaria

Part One.
News Websites and Print Media:
2013 – 2016
Quantitative Research

Human and Social Studies Foundation –
Sofia, 2017



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1. OBJECTIVES, OBJECT, AND ACTIVITIES

The objectives of this study are to identify and analyze:

- the specific language of anti-democratic propaganda in Bulgaria;
- its main talking points;
- its emergence and exponential growth over time (2013 – 2016);
- the media outlets and authors disseminating anti-democratic propaganda in Bulgaria, as well as their types;
- their sources and dissemination networks.

The object of this study is limited to Bulgarian-language news websites and print media in the 2013–2016 period. At present, this media segment (unlike television stations and social networks) cannot pay its way and is vulnerable to shady forms of financing. Yet on the other hand, it is the main producer of media content that is disseminated via television, radio, and social networks.

The following **research activities** were conducted:

1.1. ACTIVITY 1: PILOT STUDY OF MEDIA CONTENT (MAY – SEPTEMBER 2016)

Eight group discussions of the research team, four interviews with media experts and fourteen interviews with journalists were conducted, and a pilot sample of 597 articles was taken from twenty media outlets. Thus, **the main talking points of anti-democratic propaganda in Bulgaria** were identified. Through semantic analysis, a semantic cluster was then identified for each one of them: a specific list of key epithets and phrases through which the respective propaganda thesis is promoted in the public sphere.

1.2. ACTIVITY 2: MEASURING THE FREQUENCY OF USE OF ANTI-DEMOCRATIC PROPAGANDA LANGUAGE IN THE PERIOD BETWEEN 1 JANUARY 2013 AND 31 DECEMBER 2016

The measurement was conducted with the SENSIKA system, which maintains an electronic archive of publications on 3,080 Bulgarian-language websites and blogs since the beginning of 2013. This archive is maximally representative of Bulgarian internet space. Discussion forums and aggregators were deliberately excluded from the search in it in order to avoid the effect of erroneous identification of articles and/or the accumulation of

results due to forum comments or automated content recycling. Social networks (Facebook, Twitter, etc.) were also excluded from the search.

What SENSIKA counted were online media articles or blog posts which contain one or more of the keywords and phrases specified in the search query. The quantitative unit of search data is article/blog post.

The measurement was done by searching for keywords and phrases specially selected from the semantic clusters identified in Activity 1 (pilot study).

1.3. ACTIVITY 3: TYPOLOGICAL SAMPLE OF EIGHT MEDIA OUTLETS FOR ANALYSIS OF MEDIA CONTENT

Based on the pilot study, media outlets that do not publish propaganda messages on the identified talking points (Dnevnik, Mediapool) were excluded from the sample for full research (press-clipping), along with media which publish anti-liberal texts (for example, 24 Chassa) but nevertheless often juxtapose them with alternative points of view. Also excluded from the sample were automated websites and news websites authored by a single person (who, apart from that, is usually engaged also in trolling).

The remaining media outlets were categorized into types by the following three criteria:

- type of generated information (news agency – news media outlet);
- type of dissemination (online only, in print only, or both online and in print);
- target audience (wide audience without pretensions to general and/or political culture – narrower, “elite” audience with pretensions to general and/or political culture).

The following eight media outlets were selected for full research: **the Rusiya Dnes weekly newspaper, the PIK News Agency, the Glasove website, the A-specto monthly magazine, the Pogled-info website, the Trud and Duma daily newspapers, and the Weekend weekly newspaper.**

1.4. ACTIVITY 4: PRESS-CLIPPING AND ANALYSIS OF MEDIA CONTENT

A full analysis was conducted of the eight media outlets for the period from 1 July to 30 November 2016. The analysis of Rusiya Dnes and Trud covered a longer period – starting from 1 November and 1 December 2015, respectively. Glasove was analyzed for 2015 and 2016 (until 30 November). For greater precision, the analysis of A-specto included materials from its website (mostly from September and November 2016), as well as older issues of the magazine (in order to trace specific aspects of the magazine’s position and their development).

As a result of this analysis, an archive of **3,305 press-clipped publications** was created.

The processing and analysis of the archive was conducted on the basis of a standardized matrix including three topics (based on the respective talking points of Bulgarian anti-democratic propaganda, identified and tested in the pilot study): **1. “The Decline of the West/Europe; 2. “The Rise of Russia”; 3. “Bulgaria’s Venal Elites”**. In addition, the matrix included descriptions of:

- the author, the media outlet, the rubric and genre of each publication (formal analysis);
- the main theses and the arguments in each publication (content analysis);
- identification of key negatively-represented and positively-represented actors – individuals, political figures, institutions, more rarely processes (structural analysis);
- the ways of this representation – through epithets, actions, characterizations, etc. (semantic analysis).

The standardized matrix was the basis for the coding of the materials which was used for their quantitative processing and content analysis.

2. MAIN TALKING POINTS OF ANTI-DEMOCRATIC PROPAGANDA IN BULGARIA (SYNTACTICO-SEMANTIC ANATOMY OF PROPAGANDA LANGUAGE)

The talking points of Bulgarian anti-democratic propaganda identified in the pilot study (Activity 1) are bound in a simplistic **“conspiratorial logic”**: there is a **“villain/puppet-master” (antagonist)** who is pulling the strings of his **“puppets”** in order to exploit and disintegrate his **“victim”**. Of course, the “victim” usually rises and becomes an active **“protagonist”**.

Although the “conspiratorial logic” is simplistic, it works **logically**, through associative analogies and shifts in contexts – including through constant switching of the characters.

The main talking points (topics) of anti-democratic propaganda in Bulgaria are the following:

2.1. “THE DECLINE OF EUROPE”

Thesis: Europe/the EU is “sick” with the virus of “liberalism”. That is why it is helpless in the face of “the migrant invasion” and the interests of global capital. It is completely dependent on the global hegemon, the US, which is pulling the strings of “its puppets” in Brussels while deliberately unleashing the migrant wave that is inundating the peoples of Europe. The European Union is an artificial construction invented by the US and by the global elites, which however is doomed to fall apart so that the peoples would restore their “sovereignty”.

Note: “Europe” appears in all three conspiratorial roles noted above: 1. Brussels and the “Eurocrats” are often the **“villain/puppet-master”** who is pulling the strings of the Bulgarian “politicians-national apostates”; 2. Brussels and the “Eurocrats” are often **“puppets”** of the US and of corporate capital; 3. Europe is often the peoples that are the **“victim”** of the above-mentioned “villains”. In all cases, however, the European Union in its present form is doomed to fall apart and die.

2.2. “THE RISE OF RUSSIA”

Thesis: Russia is rising again as a world political, military and moral leader. It is a “civilizational alternative” to the “rotten West”. Everyone who criticizes or takes preventive and/or punitive measures against Russia’s foreign policy actions is its enemy (or a “puppet” of its enemies). Everything that Russia does is in defense of its age-old and sovereign right: Crimea is Russian, and the “Maidan” in Ukraine was a “coup” orchestrated from the outside and carried out from the inside by right-wing extremists. The sanctions imposed after the annexation of Crimea must be lifted because Russia is their innocent victim and, besides, they are economically harmful for all sides, and above all for Europe and for Bulgaria in particular.

Note: *In Bulgarian anti-democratic propaganda, Russia is at once a “victim” of “Western aggression” and an exemplary “protagonist” who has risen against the aggression, becoming not only a “global leader” that is defending its own sovereignty but also a “peacemaker” and “savior of Europe”.*

2.3. “BULGARIA’S VENAL ELITES”

Thesis: All Bulgarian pro-liberal and pro-European civic movements and protests, all human rights organizations (the emblematic target being most notably the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee), all non-governmental organizations (the Institute for Market Economics, the Center for Liberal Strategies, etc.), all media (the so-called *Capital* circle, etc.), all advocates of judicial reform (the Bulgarian Judges Association, Hristo Ivanov, Lozan Panov, etc.), and all politicians and political parties that firmly take a pro-European and pro-NATO stance (Rosen Plevneliev, only occasionally Boyko Borisov, the Reformist Bloc, Democrats for a Strong Bulgaria, Yes, Bulgaria, etc.) – all of them are undermining the national interest and serving “foreign interests”: because they are Brussels’ “yes-men” and/or have been directly “bought” by George Soros, the America for Bulgaria Foundation, Washington, etc. They are “foreign agents”: “Sorosoids”, “grant spongers”, etc., “full-time paid defamers of Russia” and servants of the “de-Bulgarianization” and “Gypsization” of Bulgaria.

Note: *“Puppet” is the figure most often used to vilify political and economic opponents – through it the opponents are represented as non-independent, non-autonomous, and weak: they act not according to their own will but according to the will of their foreign masters. That is also why the accusations of “venality”, “selling out”, “lackeying”, etc., are used above all in a domestic political context.*

2.4. “THE US/NATO AS GLOBAL HEGEMON/PUPPET-MASTER”

Thesis: The US and the US-led NATO military alliance are the “world hegemon” and “puppet-master” which – behind the ideological smokescreen of “human rights protection” and through their puppets across the world – are depriving peoples of their sovereignty by infecting them with liberalism, triggering wars, exploiting them economically to the benefit of global capital, inciting Islamism, unleashing migrants on Europe, threatening and encircling Russia, etc. – in short, the US/NATO are the arch-villain of the global conspiracy.

***Note:** Although the US and NATO are represented as the Arch-Villain that unilaterally dictates the world order to its benefit, the omnipotence of this Villain has nevertheless been cracking up recently – the US and NATO are represented as weak: they are losing their hegemony, they are “relics of the past”. The US and NATO are “declining” along with Europe and liberalism in a general “Decline of the West”. Taking this ambiguity into account, the talking points of Bulgarian anti-democratic propaganda were reduced to three in the research (Activity 4): 1. The decline of the West/Europe; 2. The rise of Russia; and 3. Bulgaria’s venal elites. In the quantitative measurement of the frequency of use of anti-democratic propaganda language (Activity 2), however, the searches were conducted separately for each of the four talking points noted above.*

3. MEASURING THE FREQUENCY OF USE OF ANTI-DEMOCRATIC PROPAGANDA LANGUAGE IN THE PERIOD BETWEEN 1 JANUARY 2013 AND 31 DECEMBER 2016

The measurement was conducted with the SENSIKA system, which maintains an archive of 3,080 Bulgarian-language websites and blogs, for the 2013–2016 period. The measurement was done by searching for keywords and phrases specially selected for each of the four main talking points identified in the pilot study (a semantic cluster was identified for each of the topics – a list of characteristic epithets and phrases promoting the respective propaganda thesis). The semantic clusters used to measure the growing use of anti-democratic propaganda language in Bulgaria in the 2013–2016 period are related to the following topics: **1. “The Decline of Europe”**; **2. “The Rise of Russia”**; **3. “Bulgaria’s Venal Elites”**; **4. “The US/NATO as Global Hegemon/Puppet-Master”**. In the searches on those topics, the “dispersion” of results characteristic of work with big databases – that is, matches in contexts where the keywords and phrases are used ironically or with another meaning – was limited to less than 10% (except for two cases expressly indicated in the Report).

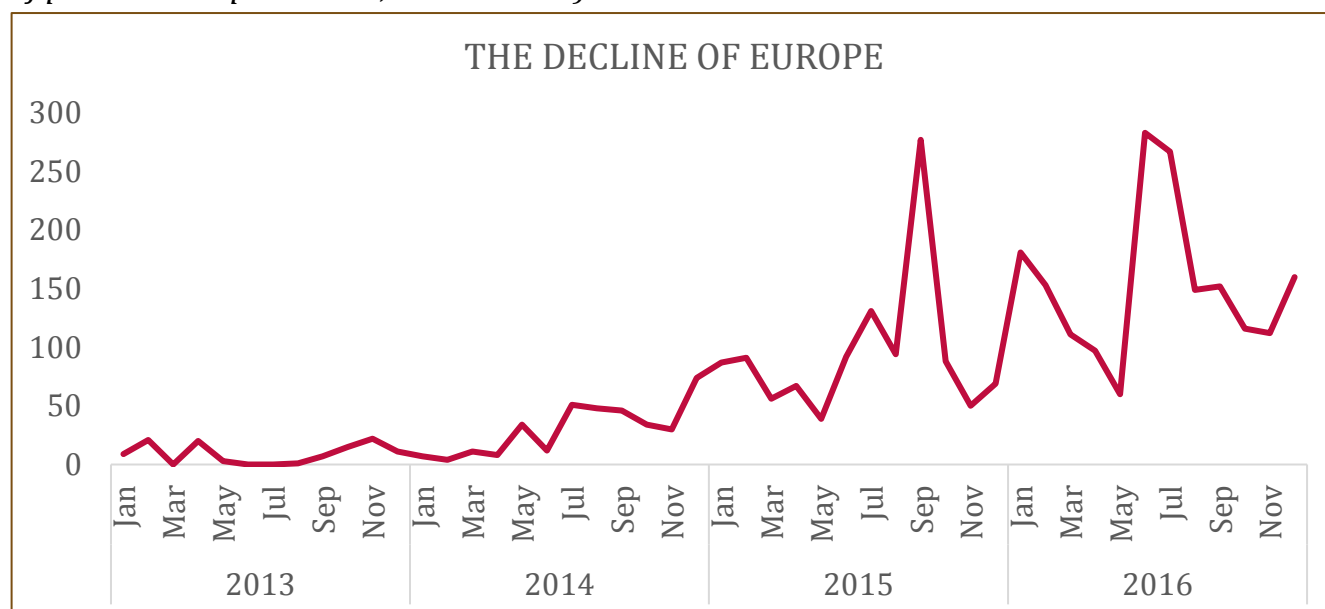
3.1. TOPIC 1: “THE DECLINE OF EUROPE”

The search was based on keywords and phrases implying **Euroscepticism**.

Keywords:

Gayrope OR “the Brussels establishment” OR “European oligarchy” OR Eurocrats OR “Europe is dying” OR “the collapse of the EU” OR “Europe’s double standards” OR “the decline of Europe”, etc. (for a full list of keywords on this and the other topics, see the Report).

Chart 1: Growth of propaganda discourse on Topic 1, “The Decline of Europe” (number of publications per month, 2013 – 2016)



General comments vis-à-vis the 2013–2016 political calendar: The general tendency towards growth in the number of publications on this topic is obvious – from 0 to 20 publications per month in 2013, to 50 to 300 publications per month in 2015 and 2016. **Eurosceptic propaganda increased by 16 times in the four years under review (from 109 articles in 2013 to 1,841 in 2016).**

Based on a review of the content of publications on peak days, we have also indicated the major concrete events motivating the increase in propaganda activity – they are the subject of most of the articles in the respective period.

For Bulgarian “Euroscepticism”, **2013 was practically a gap year** – almost no one was saying that “Europe is dying”. Insofar as there were several increases in Eurosceptic discourse to the insignificant 20 articles per month, they were directly linked to the Bulgarian political calendar: around the winter protests against monopolies (February–March 2013), the early elections (May 2013), and the civic and student protests that began in summer, in the discrediting of which “Euroscepticism” joined in at the end of the year. In the **period from 2014 onwards**, which saw the beginning of real growth of Eurosceptic discourse, the latter’s rises and peaks **followed the international and above all the Russian political calendar**. The stable and steady increase in the number of Eurosceptic publications began immediately after the annexation of Crimea (March 2014), responded to the Greek debt crisis and to the imposition of sanctions against Russia, peaked around the first anniversary of the annexation of Crimea (March 2015) and the deployment of

Russian troops in Syria (September 2015), and then intensified again in response to the summit meetings of the G7 in Davos (May 2016) and of NATO in Warsaw (July 2016).

CONCLUSION: The increase and peaks in the number of Eurosceptic publications (Topic 1: “The Decline of Europe”) are most often directly proportional to the increase and peaks in the number of publications on another two topics – pro-Russian publications (Topic 2: “The Rise of Russia”), and anti-American and anti-NATO publications (Topic 4: “The US/NATO as Global Hegemon/Puppet-Master”). On all three topics, the frequency of use of anti-democratic propaganda language depends on the international political calendar, and above all, on the Russian official positions on the events in it. The only exception from this functional dependence is the curve of search results on Topic 3, “Bulgaria’s Venal Elites”, where the discrediting of civil society and of pro-liberal elites follows the logic of the domestic political calendar.

3.2. TOPIC 2: “THE RISE OF RUSSIA”

To evaluate the degree of dissemination of official Russian propaganda theses into the Bulgarian public sphere, Topic 2: “The Rise of Russia”, was subdivided into six sub-topics and separate searches were conducted for each sub-topic. These sub-topics are the following:

- a) “Russia’s Increased Political and Spiritual Might” (epithets building Russia’s overall positive image);
- b) “Russia as a Civilizational Alternative to the West” (epithets outlining Russia’s cultural specificity as an alternative to the West);
- c) “Russia’s Enemies” (epithets representing Russia as the victim of aggression and indicating its enemies);
- d) “The Power of Russian Weapons” (epithets praising Russian armaments);
- e) “Crimea and Ukraine” (epithets promoting the thesis that Crimea is Russian and that Ukraine is the victim of a Western conspiracy);
- f) “The Sanctions against Russia” (epithets unequivocally defining the sanctions as morally unjust and economically harmful).

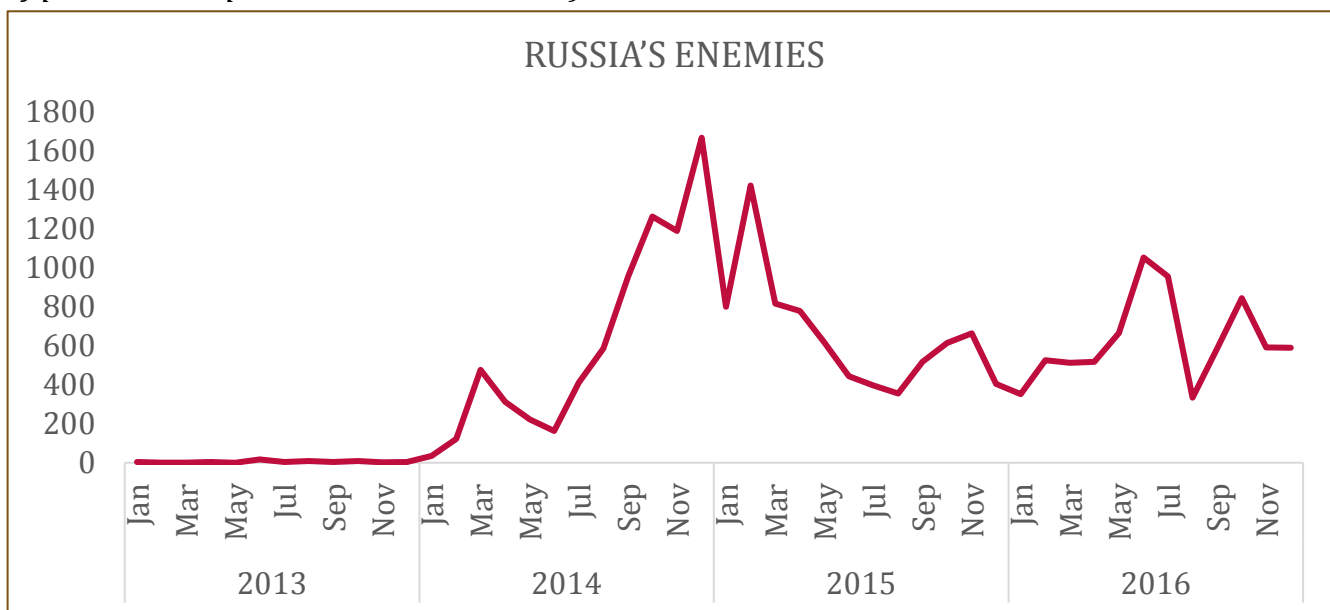
Here we present the results only on Topic 2 (c), “Russia’s Enemies”, as they are most directly related to Topic 1: “The Decline of Europe”, and Topic 4: “The US/NATO as Global Hegemon/Puppet-Master”. For results and conclusions on the other sub-topics, see the Report.

“RUSSIA’S ENEMIES”

Keywords:

Russophobia OR “attack against Russia” OR “attacks and provocations by the West against Russia” OR “encirclement of Russia” OR “NATO’s march to the east” OR “demonization of Russia” OR “lies about Russia” OR “war against Russia” OR “Russia’s enemies” OR “conspiracy against Russia”, etc.*

Chart 2: Growth of propaganda discourse on sub-topic 2c, “Russia’s Enemies” (number of publications per month, 2013 – 2016)



General comments: Throughout 2013, there was no activity on this topic – Russia had no “enemies” even though NATO had long since expanded to the East. However, the use of “enemy” language rose steeply already at the beginning of 2014 (after the beginning of the Ukrainian events), increasing to more than 400 publications per month after the annexation of Crimea in March. There was a second extremely steep increase from July 2014 to the end of the year, when the EU adopted sanctions against Russia in two rounds, in July and September: the number of publications grew to over 800 per month, with two peaks ranging from 1,200 to 1,400 per month at the end of 2014 and the beginning of 2015. This was followed by a certain “normalization” in the condemnation of “Russia’s enemies” at levels of around 400 articles per month in the second half of 2015 and first half of 2016, with another spike in July and August 2016 after the meetings of the G7 in Davos and of NATO in Warsaw, where the issue of Russia’s “aggressive policy” was included in the documents adopted at those meetings.

Out of all searches conducted in this study, the results of this one show the sharpest growth – **the frequency of such publications increased by 144 times in four years** (from 54 articles in 2013 to 7,511 in 2016). Militant confrontational rhetoric is one of the most distinct characteristics of Bulgarian pro-Russian propaganda.

The other propaganda pro-Russian topics also saw significant growth: the number of articles intentionally building Russia’s overall positive image increased by 55 times (from 44 articles in 2013 to 1,326 in 2016), **while that of those explicitly praising the quality of Russian weapons rose by 42 times** (from 44 articles in 2013 to 1,326 in 2016). As regards the other two sub-topics – **e) “Crimea and Ukraine”** and **f) “The Sanctions against Russia”** – 2013 cannot serve as a point of reference because these sub-topics are much more directly linked to a concrete event, to the annexation of Crimea in March 2014 and to the subsequent punitive measures adopted by the international community. It is important to note that the propaganda thesis that “Crimea is Russian”, which certainly cannot be simply reduced to the annexation of Crimea, was completely absent in the Bulgarian media before the beginning of the Euromaidan protests at the end of 2013 – there was no “artillery preparation” for the annexation. At the end of the period, however, the message that “Crimea is de facto Russian” was already part of Rumen Radev’s presidential election campaign, and the main political forces (the Bulgarian Socialist Party and GERB) were already speaking out in public in favor of lifting the sanctions. Otherwise the frequency of use of propaganda language on both sub-topics grew significantly in the 2014–2016 period: the number of articles on “The Sanctions against Russia” reached 4,005 in 2016, and of those on “Crimea and Ukraine” 6,109 in 2016. **In fact, the number of articles on the topics of “Crimea” and “sanctions” was significantly higher in absolute terms than that of publications praising Russia and Russian weapons – pro-Russian propaganda had an entirely concrete pragmatic target in this period.**

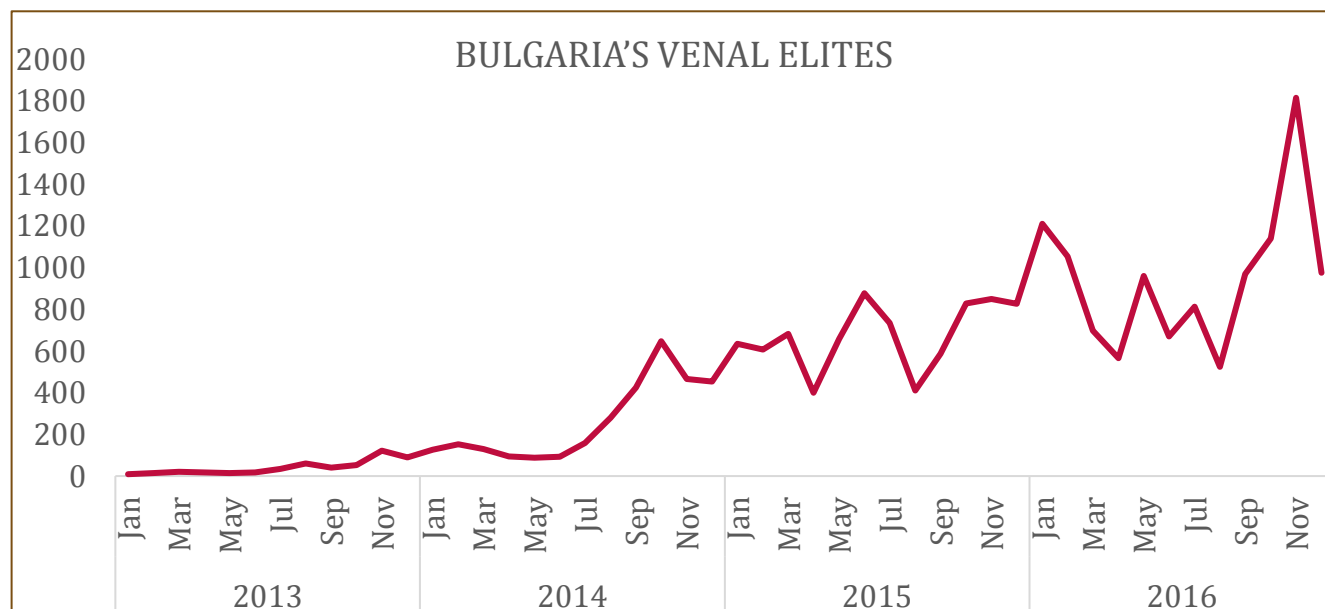
3.3. TOPIC 3: “BULGARIA’S VENAL ELITES: DISCREDITING CIVIL SOCIETY”

The search on this topic was done by keywords and phrases, most of them pejorative, which are commonly used to stigmatize civil society (civic protests, human-rights and other NGOs) and pro-European and pro-liberal politicians/magistrates/media in Bulgaria.

Keywords:

Sorosoid OR grant-spongers OR “grant-driven analysts” OR protester* OR liberast* OR tolerast* OR Eurogay* OR “psycho-right” OR “servants of foreign interests” OR “foreign agents” OR “servants of America” OR “political puppets” OR “servile politicians” OR “political Lilliputians” OR “Euro-Atlantic lackeys” OR “grant-gobblers” OR kinless* OR “paid experts” OR “bought protests” OR “bought media” OR “venal analysts” OR “experts of the transition” OR “liberal clichés” OR “liberal dogmatists” OR “multi-culti” OR “American stooges” OR “Euro-Atlantic fascists” OR “liberal fascists” OR “the Soros circle” OR “the Capital circle” OR freeloaders* OR “professional protesters” OR politcorrect* OR “self-styled human-rights activists”, etc.*

Chart 3: Growth of propaganda discourse on Topic 3, “Bulgaria’s Venal Elites: Discrediting Civil Society” (number of publications per month, 2013 – 2016)



General comments: These propaganda epithets most often refer directly to local Bulgarian “intrigues”, but they are used above all to attack inconvenient political and economic rivals ad hominem. The vocabulary of domestic propaganda was already prepared by Russian official propaganda, which had discredited the 2011–2012 protests against Vladimir Putin and which was even institutionalized in a law (adopted in 2012) requiring foreign-funded NGOs to register themselves as “foreign agents”. The vocabulary for discrediting civil society in Bulgaria, however, has been significantly enriched by local Bulgarian speakers and is, in essence, the widest segment of anti-democratic propaganda language, which supplies the most ready-made clichés for discrediting opponents by labeling them “paid foreign agents” and “puppets”. **Accordingly, in terms of absolute numbers, the Bulgarian media landscape was dominated by publications using precisely this vocabulary – both at the beginning and end of the surveyed period (494 articles in 2013 and 11,394 in 2016). The increase in the frequency of its use in the four years under review was also exponential and steady: the number of articles using it increased by 23 times.**

CONCLUSION: Although Bulgarian anti-democratic propaganda is pro-Russian, its prime target is domestic: it serves above all to discredit domestic political and economic opponents. Out of all semantic clusters of anti-democratic propaganda, this is the only one that is directly linked to the domestic (not to the international and above all to the Russian) political calendar.

Although at low average levels, this propaganda vocabulary was already at play at the beginning of 2013 and intensified from the autumn of that year as a systematic attack against the civic protests that had broken out in June in Bulgaria – unlike the other “foreign-political” topics, whose propaganda language began to gather momentum only in 2014 (above all after the annexation of Crimea). Its peaks are linked above all to the early elections and to the formation of a pro-reform coalition government in 2014, to the attempts to implement a judicial reform and its insufficient implementation in 2015, and to the presidential election campaign in 2016 which ended with a record high of 232 publications on 13 November 2016, the day of Rumen Radev’s victory in the second round. The main targets of this propaganda line are “the protesters” (personified most often by the Protest Network), “the reformers” (the Reformist Bloc, Democrats for a Strong Bulgaria, Yes, Bulgaria, some pro-reform politicians of GERB, as well as President Rosen Plevneliev), the Greens and ecologists, the advocates of a judicial and constitutional reform, and especially Hristo Ivanov (as well as the Bulgarian Judges Association, the Justice for All Initiative, Lozan Panov, etc.), as well as pro-liberal media (most often referred to after the

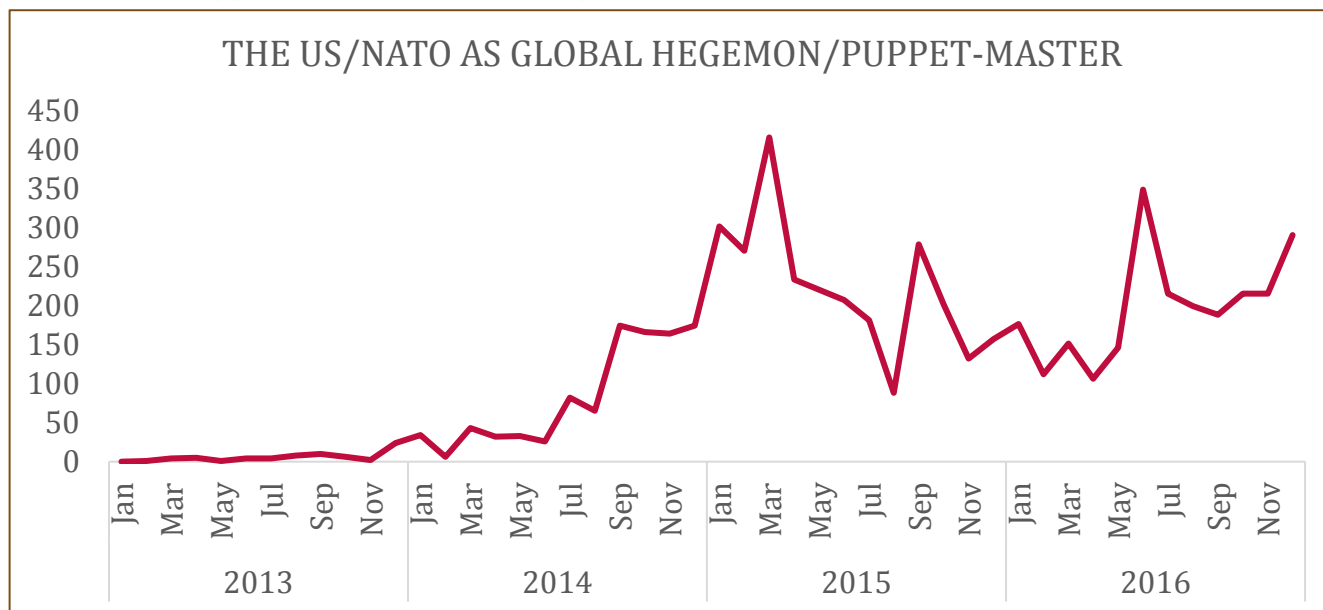
name of Ivo Prokopiev, or as “the *Capital circle*”). The pro-liberal actors are usually discredited as “puppets” paid by Soros and/or the America for Bulgaria Foundation.

3.4. TOPIC 4: “THE US/NATO AS GLOBAL HEGEMON/PUPPET-MASTER”

Keywords:

“the hawks in the USA” OR “American masters” OR “American aggression” OR “the USA/CIA created the Islamic State” OR “out of NATO” OR “leaving NATO” OR “NATO is a threat” OR “NATO’s expansion” OR “American propaganda” OR “Western propaganda” OR “American diktat” OR “Euro-Atlantic hegemony” OR “Euro-Atlantic manipulation” OR “Euro-Atlantic masters” OR “American imperialism” OR “foreign agents” OR “the global hegemon” OR “the world ruler” OR “the global puppet-master” OR “world mentor” OR “American warmongers” OR “NATO warmongers”, etc.

Chart 4: Growth of propaganda discourse on Topic 4, “The US/NATO as Global Hegemon/Puppet-Master” (number of publications per month, 2013 – 2016)



General comments: Similarly to the search results on the topics regarding Russia, those on Topic 4 show that **in 2013 there was almost no anti-American and anti-NATO rhetoric in the Bulgarian media.** Anti-US and anti-NATO propaganda in Bulgaria is directly linked to the Russian political calendar – both its emergence at the end of 2013 (with the beginning of Euromaidan) and its average increase and peaks coincide with the search results on the sub-topics of “Crimea and Ukraine”, “The Sanctions against Russia”,

and “Russia’s Enemies”. The turning point was the annexation of Crimea, whereby Putin’s Russia explicitly asserted itself as a power player: after this the time for “translating” Russian talking points into Bulgarian became shorter, but then the aggressiveness and frequency of their dissemination increased. The steep growth of anti-NATO and anti-American discourse followed Russian propaganda in response to the escalation of the sanctions against Russia, culminating in a record high around Russia’s celebration of the first anniversary of the annexation of Crimea in 2015 (with over 400 articles in a single month). The next two peaks, in September 2015 and in July 2016, also followed the Russian responses to international events – to Western commentators about Russia’s intervention in Syria and to the meetings in Davos and Warsaw.

MAIN CONCLUSIONS:

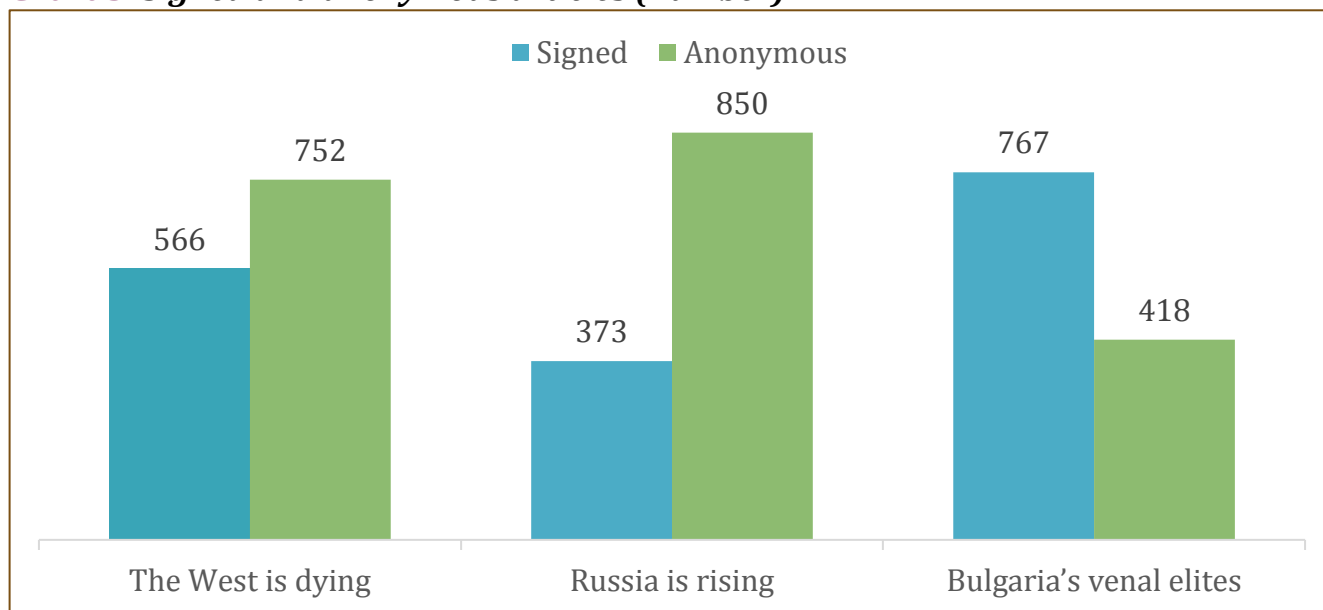
1. The largest total number of search results is on Topic 3, which includes the epithets and phrases used to discredit civil society and liberal elites in Bulgaria. This segment of propaganda language was the most widespread already at the beginning of the period under review and reached its highest frequency at the end of the period. Anti-democratic propaganda operates most intensively on the domestic political front.
2. Anti-European (Topic 1), pro-Russian (Topic 2), and anti-US and anti-NATO (Topic 4) propaganda definitely followed the Russian political calendar and, accordingly, show similar rates and peaks in their intensity. The actual start of foreign-political propaganda along all those three lines was in December 2013 (Ukraine’s Euromaidan) and, above all, after the annexation of Crimea (March 2014). They responded also to other important international events: the Greek debt crisis, the migrant crisis, Brexit, and Donald Trump’s election as US president, but the Russian political calendar remains the leading factor for the growth in the number of publications.

4. QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE PRESS-CLIPPING RESULTS

The press-clipping database contains 3,305 propaganda articles from eight media outlets which systematically reproduce the propaganda talking points identified in this study (**the Rusiya Dnes weekly newspaper, the PIK News Agency, the Glasove website, the Aspecto monthly magazine, the Pogled-info website, the Trud and Duma daily newspapers, and the Weekend weekly newspaper**). Here are some of the conclusions from the quantitative analysis of this database:

In vilifying the West and praising Russia, Bulgarian anti-democratic propaganda works primarily with anonymous articles, while in vilifying domestic political opponents it uses mostly signed articles.

Chart 5: Signed and anonymous articles (number)



In addition, the comparison of the relative weights of the publications on each of the three topics in each of the media outlets allowed categorizing the eight media outlets in the sample into types according to two intersecting criteria:

- a) ratio between foreign-political and domestic-political publications;
- b) ratio between topic “Bulgaria” and topic “Russia”.

As a result of the application of these criteria, the eight media outlets can be categorized into three types:

1. **Propaganda media outlets aimed primarily at discrediting domestic political opponents:** prevalence of domestic-political publications and categorical prevalence of those on topic “Bulgaria” over those on topic “Russia”. According to the quantitative analysis, this category comprises the **newspapers Duma, Trud and Weekend**. This type of propaganda can provisionally be called “tabloid”. Trud and Weekend are undoubtedly tabloids: they use scandal and sensationalism to discredit domestic political opponents. By this criterion – priority- and ad-hominem vilification of domestic political opponents – Duma falls into the category of tabloids. By other characteristics, Duma differs from pure tabloids: 1. It is not generally subversive, it is pro-BSP and pro-PES, and therefore less anti-European (Trud and Weekend are not pro any political party and ideology), and 2. It has higher linguistic pretensions.
2. **Geopolitical propaganda media outlets:** prevalence of foreign-political publications and prevalence of topic “Russia” over topic “Bulgaria”. This category comprises **the newspaper Rusiya Dnes, the magazine A-specto and the PIK News Agency**. By other criteria, the PIK News Agency differs in that it conducts a “tabloid” domestic-political negative campaign such as is not demonstrated by the other two geopolitical propaganda media outlets in this category.
3. Rather **geopolitical propaganda media outlets with tabloid elements:** prevalence of foreign-political over domestic-political publications, but prevalence of topic “Bulgaria” over topic “Russia”. This category comprises the **websites Pogled-info and Glasove**.

Based on an analysis of the frequency of appearance of a given individual, country, or institution in the role of the “Arch-Villain” and, conversely, of the “Good Guy”, the specific propaganda policy of each of the eight media outlets was analyzed. They were found to differ significantly above all on the domestic-political plane. All eight media outlets follow the geopolitical framework of anti-democratic propaganda in Bulgaria – they are **anti-West and pro-Russia** (most often Russia is the “Good Guy” in the publications). **Rusiya Dnes and A-specto** abide above all precisely by this geopolitical framework and more rarely vilify domestic political opponents – the Arch-Villains in them are most often the US and NATO. The analysis found that **Duma, Glasove and Pogled-info** maintained an oppositional behaviour on the domestic political plane in 2016 – most often the Arch-Villains in them are Boyko Borisov and the GERB government. President Rosen Plevneliev is also regularly vilified, although he is rarely portrayed as one of the Arch-Villains – he is constantly belittled. Conversely, although their geopolitical framework is anti-West and pro-Russia, the behaviour of **PIK and Trud** is almost neutral and even pro-government (pro-Boyko Borisov). **PIK and Trud** most often cast in the role of the Arch-Villain the Capital circle, used as a metonym for pro-reform politicians, media, magistrates, and NGOs. **It is obvious that the geopolitical propaganda orientation and the domestic-political orientation of the propaganda media outlets in Bulgaria are not strictly bound together: different domestic political opponents are regularly vilified and praised regardless of the geopolitical propaganda framework.** The more detailed conclusions in the Report are presented here by the following two charts showing the percentage of the cases where Arch-Villains are identified in each of the seven from all eight media outlets, this role is assigned to the US and Boyko Borisov:

Chart 6: The US – Arch-Villain

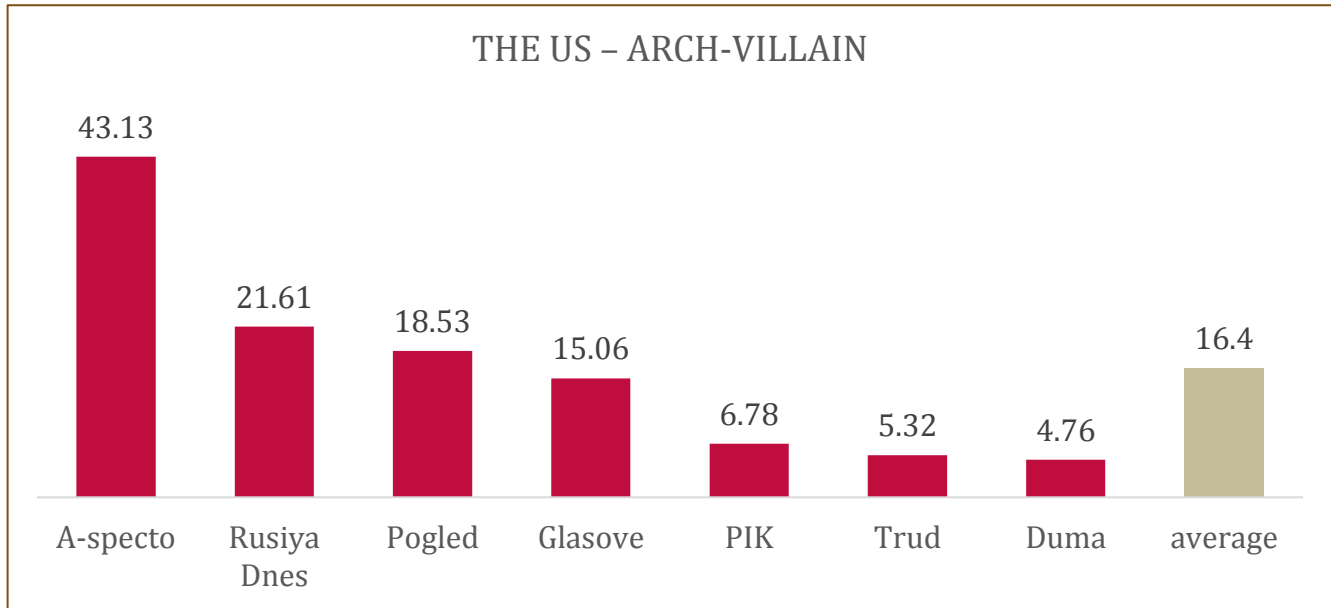
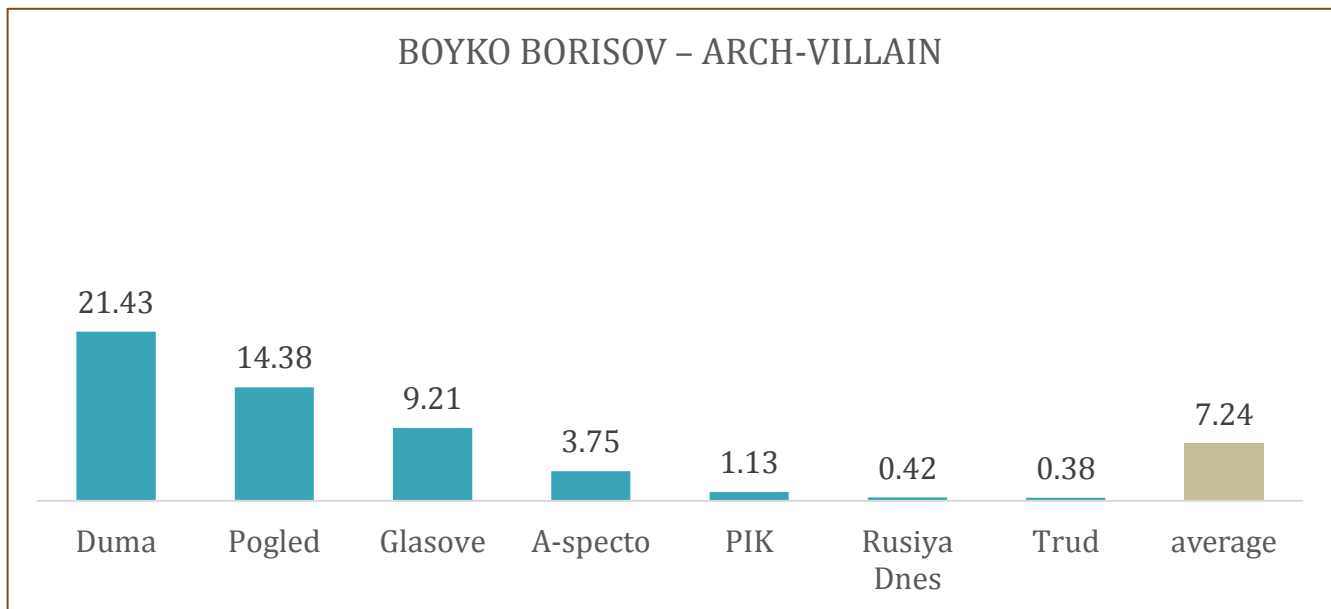


Chart 7: Boyko Borisov – Arch-Villain



CONCLUSION:

1. THE BIG RISKS POSED BY ANTI-DEMOCRATIC PROPAGANDA ARE THE FOLLOWING:

- ❖ Creation of an environment of public cynicism of the “They’re all scoundrels!” type. Hence, distrust towards any general principles, values and institutions whatsoever, and suspension of the rule of law at the international and national levels – replacement of the power of right with the power of might;
- ❖ De-institutionalization of the democratic mechanisms of the separation of powers and their mutual checks and balances, including possible rejection of parliamentarianism;
- ❖ Silencing and discrediting of civil society as an agonistic environment for free and competitive definition of the common good;
- ❖ Creeping authoritarianism of a populist or “referendum” type.

2. THE RISKS FOR BULGARIA, IN PARTICULAR, ARE THAT:

- ❖ Public opinion is being prepared for Bulgaria’s exit from the EU and NATO;
- ❖ The judicial reform and all efforts at democratic imposition of the rule of law are being systematically blocked.

Although there is no doubt that there is strong Russian “influence” in Bulgaria, the existing local-Bulgarian propaganda in fact serves to divert attention away from Russia’s economic influence. The reason for this is that Russia’s economic influence in Bulgaria spans the political spectrum and has deeply penetrated the Bulgarian business community. In this sense, this study shows the picture **not of Russian propaganda in Bulgaria, but of the Bulgarian media outlets that are disseminating “pro-Russian” views** as a form of disinformation whose aim is to exert influence on the political process.

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TEAM:

Dimitar Vatsov (Head)

Senior Researchers:

Albena Hranova

Boriana Dimitrova

Boyan Znepolski

Deyan Kiuranov

Konstantin Pavlov

Martin Kanoushev

Milena Iakimova

Tom Junes

Tsvetozar Tomov

Vanya Serafimova (Administrative Manager)

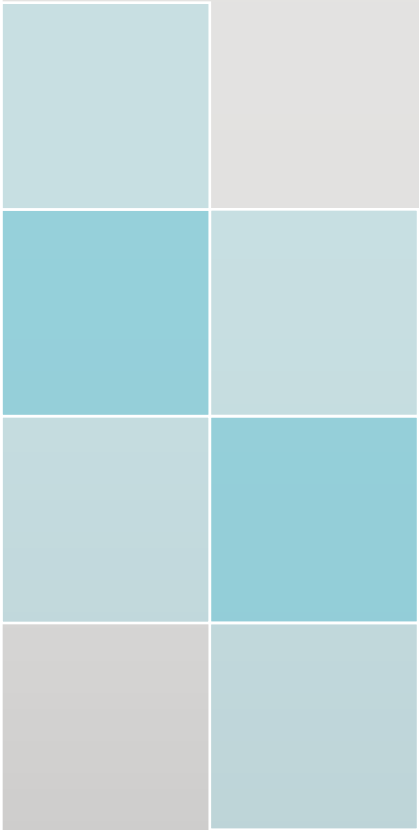
Maria Martinova (Coordinator)

Petya Chalakova (Coordinator)

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**Human and Social Studies Foundation –
Sofia (HSSF)**

CONTACT DETAILS:

11, Slaveykov Sq., 4th floor, room 2,
1000 Sofia, Bulgaria

E-mail: office@hssfoundation.org
<http://hssfoundation.org/>

