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RUSSIAN *ONLINE* PROPAGANDA IN BULGARIA

In this newsletter, we present the activity, narratives and speakers of Russian propaganda disseminated in Bulgarian online media in the second quarter of 2023. The propaganda wave was already rising in early 2022, and has remained high in 2023. The dissemination of its narratives has increased by up to 20 times. This increase is due, firstly, to new technological solutions¹ – most notably, the formation of a Machine of Mushroom Websites which amplifies the spread of messages both on social media and Google. The Machine consists of more than 370 anonymous pseudo-news websites with identical design and content, which disseminated three to nine articles with pro-Russian content every day in the second quarter of 2023, thus often publishing more than 3,000 articles per day. Secondly, the profile of propaganda dissemination has changed – the official spokespersons of the Russian Federation have become the main channels of Russian propaganda. These are Putin, Lavrov, Peskov, Zakharova, Mitrofanova, etc., who are literally repeating propaganda talking points with their respective vocabulary. Hence, their dissemination has sharply increased as all media, both Bulgarian and international – even the objective ones – are compelled to quote them. In Bulgaria, along with translations from Russian, the Kremlin’s narratives are also circulated by a number of local speakers.

This newsletter analyzes the overall propaganda activity, the activity of the Machine of Mushroom Websites, the change in narratives, and the main messages of (pro)Russian propaganda spread by its local speakers.

¹ Summary of Report: Russian Propaganda in Bulgarian Online Media (1 January – 31 December 2022), see <https://hssfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Report-ENG.pdf> [accessed 19 July 2023].



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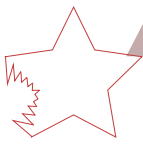
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Introduction

In this newsletter, we analyze Russian propaganda in Bulgarian online media in the second quarter of 2023.

Overall propaganda activity – excluding social media – in the period under review was high: using a list of Russian propaganda keywords, SENSIKA² identified **105,741 articles**.

Let us recall that for the period from 1 January to 31 May 2022, SENSIKA identified a total of 36,156 articles containing the same keywords.³ That is to say, after more than 370 mushroom websites went into operation in the second half of 2022, we now found a threefold increase in propaganda activity in three months compared to the five-month period around the beginning of the war against Ukraine.



We/They, Konstantin Kuzginov, Sergey Saharov, 1950

We turn deserts into flourishing land. They turn cities and villages into deserts

Of the 105,741 articles identified by SENSIKA for the second quarter of 2023, a total of **84% (88,907)** were reprints disseminated by the Machine of Mushroom Websites created in 2022 and described in previous reports.⁴ In the period under review, the Machine churned out an average of 977 propaganda articles per day, while all other Bulgarian-language websites and blogs, including other (“independent” of the Machine) powerful aggregator bots, managed to disseminate an average of just 185 articles per day that contain the specified keywords. Thus there are now two parallel flows of pro-Russian propaganda in Bulgarian online space, which differ in their tactics and strategy.

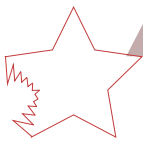
Although the Machine of Mushroom Websites currently prevails over other propaganda sources in terms of quantity – by number of reprints – its significance should not be overestimated. If its bots spout propaganda narratives that are, so to speak, out of touch with reality, it is the humans in the media – the speakers of Russian propaganda and the editors spreading it – who are called upon to adapt the ready-made and clichéd narratives to a changeable reality that often eludes them.

² <https://sensika.com/> [accessed 29 July 2023].

³ See the list of keywords and the search results (in Bulgarian) at: <https://hssfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/%D0%94%D0%BE%D0%BA%D0%BB%D0%B0%D0%B4-%D0%A0%D1%83%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%B0%D1%82%D0%B0-%D0%BF%D1%80%D0%BE%D0%BF%D0%B0%D0%B3%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%B4%D0%B0-%D0%92%D1%82%D0%BE%D1%80%D0%B0-%D1%87%D0%B0%D1%81%D1%82.pdf>, pp. 3–4 [accessed 29 July 2023].

⁴ For more, see HSSF Newsletter, No. 1/2023: <https://hssfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Report-ENG.pdf>; https://hssfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Бюлетин-1А_Руската-пропаганда-януари-март-2023-г.-I-Част.-Новинарску-самоВе-и-блогоВе.pdf [accessed 29 July 2023].





What is the Machine? It was created in 2022 and is inextricably linked to the Blitz News Agency. It includes more than 370 anonymous quasi-news websites with almost identical design and identical content, which in the period under review reprinted three to nine articles with pro-Russian content per day (that is, up to 3,500 propaganda reprints on peak days).

The Machine has created its own **phantasmatic reality with no connection to historical time and events in Bulgaria**. The main task of the Machine of Mushroom Websites is to create the impression that it is reporting directly from the scene of events – from the frontline in Ukraine. It does this not through its own correspondents, but through striking headlines and videos borrowed most often from the Telegram channels of Russian war correspondents (*Operatsiya Z: Voenkory Russkoy Vesny, etc.*). The main message circulated in it in the second quarter of 2023 was the same as before: Russia is winning every day militarily on the front against Ukraine as well as politically and economically against the West, Western military aid is highly over-estimated and Western sanctions are ineffective. In the period from 1 April to 30 June 2023, the Machine was developed further: compared to the previous quarter, the thematic scope is broader, the quality of translations has improved, the videos are real, and the sources, although not explicitly mentioned, are primarily Russian. It should be noted that the articles disseminated by the Machine of Mushroom Websites do not comment on Bulgarian political events from the Russian perspective. The strategy of Blitz and mushroom websites is to establish Russian propaganda as a separate channel that is not involved in domestic politics. **The Machine works mostly through impression management: if readers' eyes and ears are directly saturated with "Russian victories from the frontline", then there is no need to directly attack their domestic political biases: they "will orient themselves" on their own.**

Conversely, **"human" speakers are tasked with manipulating not so much the senses as the interpretations of events**. They also work with a standard package of clichéd narratives (talking points), but their main task is to constantly adapt them along two lines: 1. To adapt them to the changing reality, which sometimes deviates so much from them that the propaganda clichés risk being exposed as completely hollow phrases; 2. To try to change public consciousness through propaganda clichés, and hence to directly influence political life in Bulgaria.

The second quarter began with the pre-prepared package designed to manage impressions and to promote claims that the Ukrainian counteroffensive was, if not failing, then at least doomed. However, this carefully prepared propaganda campaign was thwarted by **the mutiny of Yevgeny Prigozhin's Wagner mercenary group**. The mutiny, in which armed Wagner mercenaries marched towards Moscow after capturing the Russian cities of Rostov-on-Don and Voronezh, upset the prepared propaganda moves and plans. During the two days of Prigozhin's rebellion, what was most difficult for propaganda, which waited for and followed Putin's statements, was to change course. It started by condemning the "mutiny", "betrayal", "treason", "revolt", "knife in the back", and other ready-made phrases from Putin's first furious speech on the morning of 24 June. Then it had to raise morale: Prigozhin's change of heart and the turnaround of Wagner's columns were declared a "display of maturity and manliness" on their part. But then propaganda suddenly changed course again: after condemning Prigozhin and after glorifying the manliness of the Prigozhinites, it went on to heroize Russian society, which had stood united behind the Kremlin against the mutineers and had shown its solidarity. This was Putin's own attempt to close the interpretation – by heroizing the solidarity of Russian society, personified by him, which had thus stood up to the West. But the undertaking was not successful: among the propaganda media, too, there was a hidden expectation of a continuation and of changes in power. Thus began the use of the phrase "Kremlin towers" – this time a metaphor for the various circles of power and influence in Russia. **Putin and the Kremlin are no longer identical** – in the confusion of propagandists, the Kremlin towers suddenly became many in number,



and that is dangerous. This is why at the end of July, Dugin⁵ started speaking of a Russian-style sovereignty: patriots are those who are not interested in power and politics, but are loyal to the ruler; to maintain this loyalty (and lack of interest in politics), “boyars” (cronies of the ruler) have to be killed from time to time – and they know that this is their “vocation”, for which they are rewarded with high status and wealth in their lifetime. But whether Putin’s weakened identification with the Kremlin will be restored with the beheading of the boyars from the towers remains to be seen.

Another event that shattered local propagandists’ own expectations – albeit on a smaller, domestic political scale – was **the election of the Euro-Atlantic government of Nikolay Denkov and Maria Gabriel in Bulgaria**. On 3 June, after the agreement between the two first political forces was announced, Martin Karbovski was so shocked that in the hour of “America’s Coming”, he wrote a “requiescat” in which he listed the more prominent pro-Russian propagandists who had fought against “our being pitted against Russia” and dragged “by force into a foreign war”: “We write again, we will fight again, but if we are the last ones – please pray for our names. For in these lands, human Bulgarian history often tends to disappear – we have tried to save it, but we are the last and only ones left. And we pray that you do not forget us. Amen.”⁶ Of course, even after the election of the government, life went on – even the life of propagandists – and they were forced to normalize the situation through the new narrative that PP-DB (the coalition between We Continue the Change and Democratic Bulgaria) and GERB have “betrayed their voters” by forming a coalition.

Another highlight of the period were the so-called **marches for peace and neutrality**⁷ in Bulgaria, which were widely covered by propaganda channels. Three such marches took place in this period; one of them, covered also by the Machine of Mushroom Websites around the Blitz News Agency, was accompanied by a group organized by the Vazrazhdane (Revival) party, which splashed Europe House, the building housing the European Commission Representation and the European Parliament Liaison Office in Sofia, with red paint.

The main political task of the marches was to collect signatures for a referendum that would attempt to remove certain governance issues and decisions from the remit of the executive and legislature and to submit them to referendums “of the people”. In these referendums, however, it would be possible for decisions to be made by very few votes. A “referendum dictatorship” of quasi-majorities is in the making.

Although they did not openly identify themselves with any political entity, these marches – organized by groups of previous anti-vaxxers, and earlier opponents of the Istanbul Convention who, in the meantime, had started a panic among the residents of the Roma neighbourhood in Karnobat that their children would be taken away (BROD, People’s Network, etc.) – were overtly political, not only according to the task they were pursuing but also because they repeated the incantations of the The Left! (a coalition that failed to win seats in the parliamentary elections of 2 April 2023), which claimed that it was fighting against involving Bulgaria in the war.

In this second main storyline, one can clearly see the efforts of Kremlin propaganda to transform itself into a domestic political agenda. When it is successful, this transformation amplifies the effects of propaganda. Insofar as the talking points and recitations of Russian propaganda

5 <https://pogled.info/svetoven/russia/aleksandar-dugin-chasovnikat-na-istoriyata-pokazva-chasa-na-patriota.158758> [accessed 30 July 2023].

6 <https://www.lentata.com/choveshkata-istoriya-i-nie-poslednite> [accessed 30 July 2023].

7 The marches “for peace and neutrality” are often also referred to as marches “for peace and sovereignty”. Russian propaganda in Europe often presents “neutrality” and “sovereignty” as synonyms. The false argument is: “only a country that remains neutral and doesn’t take sides in the war is sovereign – countries that provide support and aid to Ukraine do not do so of their own volition, but under the dictates of the EU and the collective West”.





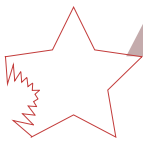
are tied to the domestic political agenda, having been transformed narratively into Bulgarian issues (“the April 2023 elections as a choice between war and peace”, “let’s retain the Bulgarian lev”), it is through these same recitations that blows are struck against political entities. This is the PP-DB coalition. An effort is being made to graft Russian-style sovereignty onto local contexts: the democratic community is made up of liberals, liberals are not patriots, patriots are not interested in politics and are neutral, the democratic community is not patriotic, the democrats are undermining our sovereignties.

The pseudo-patriotic talk of sovereignty as neutrality is explicitly pro-Russian. Without displacing it, however, neoconservative discourses (those of traditional family values) have been moving into the niche of patriotism. It is important to highlight them: unlike the narratives of neutrality, the neoconservative quasi-patriotic clichés are addressed at the young, they target the young. And they are used profusely by Russian propaganda, including by Russian propaganda in the Machine of Mushroom Websites.

The same narratives are specifically refracted through the rhetoric of local pro-Russian politicians and journalists as well. We monitor especially the media appearances of **Rumen Radev, Kostadin Kostadinov, Korneliya Ninova, Petar Volgin, and Martin Karbovski**. In the period under review, President Rumen Radev, the highest-ranking disseminator of Russian propaganda in Bulgaria, didn’t change his positions on the war against Ukraine much. He called it a “conflict”, continuing to interpret military aid to Ukraine as “getting involved in war” and a “mistake”. Arguing that the “conflict” is escalating and poses great risks to the Bulgarian economy, Radev also opposed the EU’s initiative to send one million shells to Ukraine. The demagoguery he used – namely, that such aid is dragging Bulgarian into the war – was shared by BSP (Bulgarian Socialist Party) leader Korneliya Ninova who, in order to launch the neutrality thesis, complemented and tried to reinforce this fear by the even more acute threat of sending “manpower” to Ukraine. She claimed that the social needs of Bulgarians are being ignored at the expense of such support. Kostadin Kostadinov, the leader of Vazrazhdane, the other explicitly pro-Russian party in Parliament, was much more extreme in his rhetoric, which he directed mainly against the political representatives of liberal and democratic people in Bulgaria: PP and DB. He accused them of working for the interests of the US, which in turn has trapped Bulgaria into “disastrous American colonial slavery”. In his account, the two liberal formations are “mouthpieces of the American embassy” and a “Ukrainian scenario” of civil clashes is being prepared in Bulgaria. Kostadinov’s Facebook post in which he called for the “annihilation” of this “ugly scum” – an “anti-human scum thirsting for blood and dreaming of wars” – referring precisely to his political opponents from PP and DB, aroused the strongest public response.

Petar Volgin did not change his rhetoric much in the second quarter of 2023, either. He used every convenient occasion to vilify the liberal political sector, using Kremlin narratives in the logic of its central spokespersons. He inculcated the false fear that Bulgarian troops would be sent to the battlefield, and described the pro-Western government as “puppets on strings” doing the bidding of the US embassy. In Volgin’s account, liberal Bulgarians “hate Bulgaria” and want to impose “total censorship”; Euro-Atlantic NGOs are “making some quick money” by making up fake problems they then go on to resolve. Martin Karbovski worked in the same direction, likewise claiming that Bulgaria’s political elite is “bending down” to the West at the expense of Bulgarian interests. His attacks were once again focused on the pro-Western liberal parties, as well as on that part of Bulgarian society that supports them. A highlight on Karbovski’s YouTube channel in the second quarter of 2023 was his interview with the Russian Ambassador to Bulgaria, Eleonora Mitrofanova, who, on behalf of the Russian Federation, walked the full spectrum of Kremlin propaganda extensively and undisturbed. She declared her support for Kostadinov (who visited the Russian embassy), while Karbovski borrowed from the rhetoric of Radev and





1. The Machine: A Parallel Reality Beyond Historical Time

Reminder: the Machine consists of more than 370 anonymous websites with almost identical design (based on two main models) and identical content (they publish the same articles). They have four main domains (dnes24.eu, zbox7.eu, bgvest.eu, allbg.eu), from which subdomains are cloned – for example, novini701.dnes24.eu, novinarbg.dnes24.eu, news1.dnes24.eu, etc. The mushroom websites mostly reprint material from Blitz, and are probably linked to the platform Share4Pay, which pays users for sharing content from ready-made websites on social media.

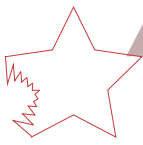
But let's disregard the Machine for a moment!

The analysis of the other propaganda media (Pogled Info, Glasove, Lentata, Classa, etc.) and of the “authorial” voices in them clearly shows that propagandists react in a standard way to specific political events – domestic and international – trying to adapt the general propaganda narratives so as to “package” and “colour” the respective events as they deem fit. In the second quarter of 2023, the events that gave rise to the largest number of “authorial” propaganda comments in Bulgarian online media and on Facebook were:

- ▶ **2 April** – National Assembly elections and results;
- ▶ **19 April** – Martin Karbovski's interview with Russian Ambassador Mitrofanova;
- ▶ **23 April** – Fifth March for Peace and Neutrality;
- ▶ **2 May** – Kremlin drone attack;
- ▶ **9 May** – Victory Day and March of the Immortal Regiment;
- ▶ **21 May** – Sixth March for Peace and Neutrality;
- ▶ **29 May** – Radev hands second government-forming mandate and denounces it as already “discredited”;
- ▶ **6 June** – Denkov-Gabriel government elected; Russians blow up Nova Kakhovka dam wall;
- ▶ **17 June** – Sofia Pride and alternative March for the Family;
- ▶ **18 June** – Seventh March for Peace and Neutrality;
- ▶ **23–24 June** – Prigozhin and Wagner Group's “March of Justice” on Moscow.

Some of these events – Karbovski's interview as well as the marches for peace and neutrality, the March of the Immortal Regiment and the March for the Family – were themselves agitation and propaganda events. Others – such as the elections and the formation of a government – were part of the procedural order of democracy in Bulgaria, but were used to create and intensify domestic political polarizations. Still others – the Kremlin drone attack, the destruction of the Nova Kakhovka dam and the Wagner Group's march on Moscow – were significant events in the course of the war. Different as they may be, however, propaganda media and speakers covered them extensively, mostly through “authorial” commentaries, presenting them to the general public in an appropriate light. Propaganda activity surged on the respective days or on the days immediately after them.

In this newsletter, we measured propaganda activity with the SENSIKA automated media monitoring system, which archives more than 8,000 online sources and allows us to see how many and which articles (in the second quarter of 2023) contain a set of keywords entered for search. The queries were conducted through a set of keywords characteristic of Russian propaganda, such as *Russian world*, *Banderites*, *Ukrainian Nazis*, *denazification*, etc.



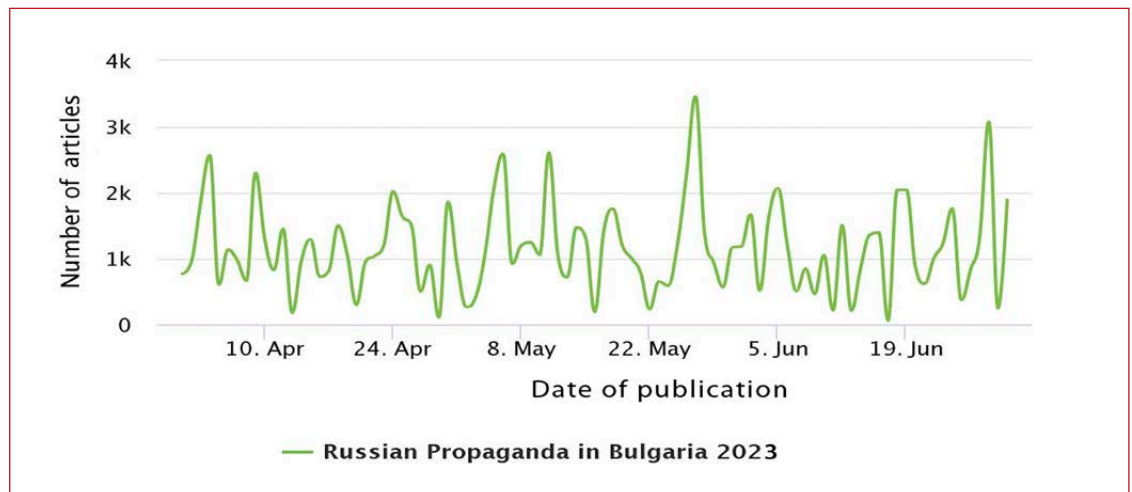
If mushroom websites are excluded from the measurement, SENSIKA identified 16,843 articles containing the specified keywords in the second quarter of 2023, the highest peak day (i.e., the day with the highest number of articles – 474) being 9 May:

Chart 1: Propaganda activity, excluding mushroom websites (number of publications per day; 1 April – 30 June 2023)

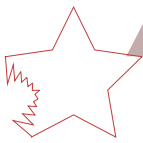


If mushroom websites are included in the measurement, we get the following picture:

Chart 2: Propaganda activity, including mushroom websites (number of publications per day; 1 April – 30 June 2023)



The second chart, which measures overall propaganda activity online, actually shows the accumulations of publications by the Machine itself – it is the Machine that accounts for the spikes. This is because in the second quarter of 2023, **the Machine was “responsible” for 84% of the online publications** containing the specified keywords. As Chart 2 shows, when mushroom websites are included in the measurement, SENSIKA identified **105,741 articles for the second quarter of 2023**. If 16,843 articles (published by websites other than the Machine – see Chart 1) are subtracted from these, then it turns out that mushroom websites accounted for



the remaining 88,907 publications for the period.⁸ This means that **the Machine churned out an average of 977 propaganda articles per day**, while **all other Bulgarian-language websites and blogs**, including other (“independent” of the Machine) powerful aggregator bots such as Novini 24/7, **managed to disseminate an average of just 185 articles per day** containing the specified keywords.

The propaganda articles containing the specified keywords that were disseminated by the Machine in the second quarter of 2023 practically do **not refer to the events listed above** (with few exceptions). Of course, Blitz (the human-run news agency the Machine is linked to) as well as the mushroom websites (reprinting material mostly from Blitz, but also from other media outlets) actually published a significant number of other articles reporting or commenting on the events in question. But they do not contain the specified propaganda keywords. That is to say, the propaganda flow in Blitz and the mushroom websites flowed in a certain sense through an autonomous channel that is separate from both Russian propaganda in the other media and from the overall flow of news and analytical material (about politics, sports, sensations, etc.) on the same network (Blitz and the Machine). We will see exactly what is specific to this relatively autonomous propaganda channel in a moment, but now let’s measure its intensity on peak days!

One general conclusion, however, can be drawn even at this point: **the Machine is “other-worldly” in a specific way – it has created its own phantasmatic reality with no connection to historical time.**

⁸ At our request, the SENSIKA team created an algorithm that allows the 370 mushroom websites we identified to be excluded from the measurement, i.e. SENSIKA can provide numbers “including” or “excluding” the Machine.



Murzilka magazine,
No 1, January 1938





A) Peak Days of the Machine

We analyzed twelve peak days during the second quarter of 2023 (four each per month). **Table 1** shows the days with the highest number of publications from **Chart 2**.

Table 1. Peak days (number of publications per day; 1 April – 30 June 2023)

Date	Total number of publications containing specified keywords	Number of basic publications reprinted extensively by the Machine
4 April	2,568	6
9 April	2,300	6
24 April	2,018	5
30 April	1,858	4
6 May	2,589	7
11 May	2,606	7
18 May	1,753	4
27 May	3,459	9
18 June	2,041	7
24 June	1,757	4
27 June	1,326	3
28 June	3,074	7

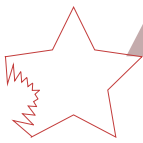
On each of these peak days, there were several (between three and nine) main publications – let’s call them “basic” – each of which was reprinted on average about 400 times by the mushroom websites. SENSIKA identified a total of 69 basic publications on the twelve peak days in the second quarter of 2023. The sum of the respective number of reprints of the basic publications makes up the largest part of the total number of publications for the day (in the second column). Again, let us stress that mushroom websites also disseminated other publications (about politics, sports, sensations, etc.) with the same intensity, but in our analysis only the publications that contain the specified propaganda keywords are “basic”. Once the basic publications were identified and their reprints by mushroom sites were subtracted from the total, there were usually between 100 and 200 propaganda articles published by other online media per day (an average of 185 per day for the period).

In order to see what kind of propaganda the Machine of Mushroom Websites is conducting, we did a content analysis of the 69 basic articles reprinted extensively by the Machine. We will not present the detailed day-by-day analysis here, but only the summarized conclusions with some examples.

Broadly, these publications can be divided into two types: **Reports from the frontline** (40 articles) and **Other** (29 articles).

B) Reports from the Frontline

The main task of the Machine of Mushroom Websites is to create the impression that it is **reporting directly from the scene of events – from the frontline in Ukraine**. Of course, the anonymous Machine does not have its own correspondents on the frontline, but it creates a



sense of “immediacy” through striking headlines and saturation with visual material (VIDEO). Most of the reports from the frontline (40 articles in total) contain rubrics in their headlines (all rubric-headlined articles on peak days – with one exception – are reprints from Blitz). The rubrics are four (the dots stand for the concrete headline):

1. VIDEO of the war: ...
2. MORNING BRIEF: ...
3. ... VIDEO
4. ISW/NYT/CNN/Daily Mail/The American Conservative (or another Western institution/media outlet): ...

There are also articles that do not contain rubrics in their headlines, but which are actually reports from the frontline. They are reprints from Blitz as well as from other media.

The rubric **“VIDEO of the war” is a sort of assault aircraft of Russian propaganda – it is meant to strike the minds of the audience with direct hits!** The recipe is: striking headline, short text, video.

The headline is categorical and leaves no doubt that the Russians are winning. On the peak days under review, there wasn’t a single publication under this rubric where the Ukrainians succeed on the frontline. Examples:

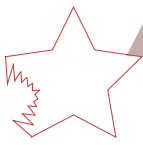
- ▶ “VIDEO of the war: ‘Winged Infantry’ of [Russian army group] ‘Brave’ captures Ukrainian brigade”;⁹
- ▶ “VIDEO of the war: Russian military destroys AFU warehouse with Orlan-10.”¹⁰



The text under these headlines is also short, usually the length of a Telegram message. If in the previous issue of this newsletter we found that the texts were usually poor machine translations with mistakes, it is now evident that the quality of the translations has improved. All such articles in Blitz and some on the mushroom websites are indicated at the end as “Translation”, but neither the translator nor the source is named.

9 See https://blitz.bg/svyat/video-ot-voynata-krilata-pekhota-na-smelite-pleni-ukrainska-brigada_news961019.html and <https://novinarbg.dnes24.eu/948548/> [accessed 29 July 2023].

10 <https://bg-utro.eu/914779/>; reprinted with change in headline by https://blitz.bg/svyat/video-ot-voynata-ruskite-voenni-unishchozhikha-sklad-na-vsu-s-orlan-10_news946161.html [accessed 29 July 2023].



If in the first quarter of 2023 the VIDEO promised in the headline was usually missing, now a missing VIDEO is an exception: **both in terms of quality of translation and in terms of video availability, the Machine is developing intensively.**

Sometimes the video, whose source is visible, is also the source of the text of the Bulgarian publication, as in: “VIDEO of the war: Spetsnaz destroys AFU fighters near Donetsk.”¹¹ In this, but also in quite a few of the other articles under this rubric, the source of both the video and the text is the Telegram channel *Operatsiya Z: Voenkory Russkoy Vesny*. Other Telegram channels of other Russian war correspondents were also used – mostly through their Telegram and YouTube channels – Russian media outlets and news agencies such as *Izvestiya (iz.ru)* and RIA Novosti. On the peak days under study, all articles under this rubric have a video from a Russian source.

ВИДЕО от войната: Спецназ унищожава бойци на ВСУ близо до Донецк
Непрекъснато нанасят поразителни удари по живата сила на украинците
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Специалните части с точни удари с безпилотни самолети унищожават бойците на въоръжените сили на Украйна близо до Донецк.
Операторите на ударни квадрокоптери тип Mavic от 58-ми батальон със специално

The other three rubrics – 2. MORNING BRIEF: ...; 3. ... VIDEO; 4. ISW/NYT/CNN: ... – essentially offered one and the same type of publications. They **do the “deep ploughing” of propaganda: they are meant to sow the seeds of the Russian perspective** both in people who want to keep “neutrality” (to distance themselves from the problems of the war) and in people who are pro-democracy and pro-West.

The difference between these rubrics is primarily in their names, which create different expectations in readers: MORNING BRIEF gives the impression of immediate coverage of events on the frontline: IMMEDIATELY (in the morning) after the most intense fighting (at night); VIDEO, of course, creates the impression of immediacy by implicitly promising a “documentary” depiction; and the third rubric, which prefaces the headline with a Western media outlet as the source of the publication, thereby seems to promise to present with priority the Western or directly the US perspective.

¹¹ https://blitz.bg/svyat/video-ot-voynata-spetsnaz-unishchozhava-boytsi-na-vsu-blizo-do-donetsk_news959865.html [accessed 29 July 2023].



In fact, the publications, as we said, are of one and the same type, a “brief” from the frontline: unlike those under the rubric “VIDEO of the war”, they are longer and more complex texts, usually compilations from different sources. Actually, the only publications that are not briefs from the frontline but “commentaries” are some of those under the last rubric (ISW/NYT/CNN: ...).

The main task of the articles under these rubrics is to present the Western and the Russian perspectives on events on the frontline as equally valid and even as superimposed on each other without any contradiction whatsoever between them: as if the “facts” of the frontline spoke for themselves and it didn’t matter who said something was a fact. Thus, ISW (Institute for the Study of War) and the Russian war correspondents, *The New York Times* and RIA Novosti, Stoltenberg and Konashenkov, who are quoted (usually without specifying from where exactly), seem to be equally credible and reliable sources. This “equipollence” of the Russian and the Western perspectives – under the rubrics MORNING BRIEF and VIDEO – is usually announced “factually” already in the concrete headlines:

- ▶ “Morning brief: General Syrsky breaks big news about AFU offensive, Russian army counterattacks in Krasny Liman direction”;¹²
- ▶ “US general announces how soon AFU will take Crimea. Strike on key headquarters on outskirts of Kiev, inside were... VIDEO.”¹³

However, the same thing often happens in publications where a Western media outlet or institution is named as the main source in the headline. Thus, in the article “ISW: Ukraine with successful counterattacks at Bakhmut”,¹⁴ about half of the text refers to ISW, while the other half refers to the “Russian Ministry of Defence” and to “Russian bloggers” and “sources”.

There are also publications under the “ISW/NYT/CNN: ...” rubric that actually have a real Western media outlet as their sole source. Most of these articles quote a heavily conservative media outlet whose messages are in line with Putin’s propaganda (“The American Conservative: Kiev plans World War III outbreak, US can’t hold them back”;¹⁵ “Daily Mail: Why are Russia’s supermarkets bursting with food, are sanctions really hurting?!”¹⁶). In some articles, the Western media quoted are liberal, but their messages can still be read as undermining trust in the West (“CNN and NYT sensationally: US intelligence and Washington knew in advance of Prigozhin’s mutiny”¹⁷). Thus, the Russian perspective actually has priority, all the more so when it is supported by Western voices.

In fact, Russian propaganda works “subliminally” by framing basic processes (below the level of the text) even in articles that seem to give “equal right” to the perspectives of Russian and Western sources on the war. The videos published by Blitz and mushroom websites are primarily Russian, even though the texts refer to heterogenous sources. There are only a few cases where the video is from a Western or Ukrainian source. There are also paradoxical cases in which a video recorded by Ukrainian soldiers is published via a link to the Telegram channel of Russian bloggers (see “VIDEO of the war: AFU fighters show what heavy losses they are suffering at Maryinka”¹⁸).

12 https://blitz.bg/svyat/sutreshna-svodka-general-sirski-obyavi-golyama-novina-za-ofanzivata-na-vsu-ruskata-armiya-kontraataka-na-krasno-limanskoto-napravlenie_news961024.html; u <https://news73.bgvest.eu/948404/> [accessed 29 July 2023].

13 https://blitz.bg/svyat/sutreshna-svodka-us-general-obyavi-kolkko-skoro-vsu-shche-prevzemata-krim-udar-po-klyuchov-shchab-v-pokrayninite-na-kiiev-vtre-sa-bili-video_news959869.html [accessed 29 July 2023].

14 <https://hairs.dnes24.eu/925457/> [accessed 29 July 2023].

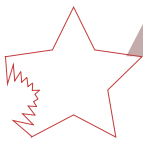
15 https://blitz.bg/analizi-i-komentari/the-american-conservative-kiiev-planira-izbukhvaneto-na-treta-svetovna-voyna-a-sashch-ne-mozhe-da-gi-udrzi_news950753.html; u <https://bg-utro.eu/928585/> [accessed 29 July 2023].

16 https://blitz.bg/svyat/daily-mail-zashcho-supermarketite-v-rusiya-prashchyat-ot-khrani-sanktsiite-naistina-li-vredyat_news941181.html [accessed 29 July 2023].

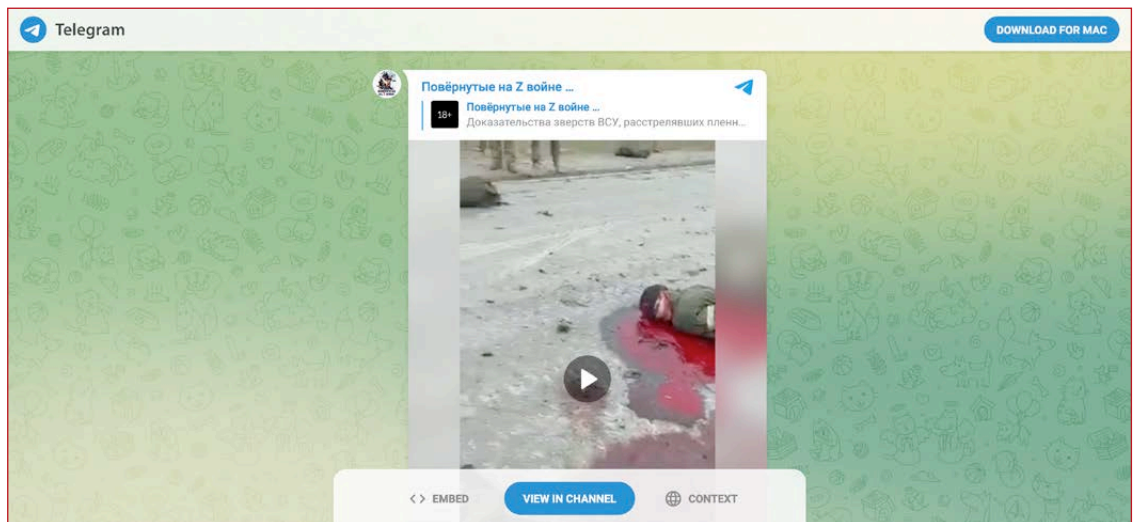
17 https://blitz.bg/svyat/cnn-i-nyt-senzatsionno-razuznavaneto-na-sashch-i-vashington-sa-znaeli-predvaritelno-za-metezha-na-prigozhin_news961175.html; <https://novoto12.bgvest.eu/949025/> [accessed 29 July 2023].

18 https://blitz.bg/svyat/video-ot-voynata-boytsi-ot-vsu-pokazakha-kakvi-tezhki-zagubi-ponasyat-kray-mariinka_news947151.html [accessed 29 July 2023].

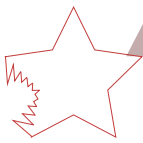




The picture is similar in the articles that report news from the frontline without rubrics in their headlines. Indeed, such are the only two articles in the sample – direct reports from the frontline on peak days – which can be read, if not as pro-Ukrainian, at least as neutral.¹⁹ But also without a rubric in its headline is the most brutal anti-Ukrainian article (“Retribution: Iskander incinerates 60 Georgian legionnaires who tortured, killed Russian prisoners in Ukraine”²⁰), which refers to a Blitz article from a year ago about the torture of Russians²¹ where a horrific video was republished from a Russian Telegram channel.²²



- 19 https://blitz.bg/svyat/ukrainiski-polkovnik-razkaza-kak-patriot-e-prikhvanal-kinzhal-i_news959480.html; https://blitz.bg/analizi-i-komentari/peytrit-svali-kinzhal-kak-zanapred-shche-se-davat-orzhiya-na-ukrayna_news952610.html; <https://ludsport.net/778690/> [accessed 29 July 2023].
- 20 https://blitz.bg/svyat/iskander-izpepli-60-gruzinski-legioneri-iztezavali-i-ubivali-ruski-plennitsi-v-ukrayna_news949905.html; <https://bg-utro.eu/925649/> [accessed 29 July 2023].
- 21 https://blitz.bg/svyat/strashno-video-18-eto-roy-se-okaza-edin-ot-palachite-preryazali-grlata-na-pleneni-ruski-desantchitsi_news878468.html?pr3vi3w=true [accessed 29 July 2023].
- 22 <https://t.me/voenacher/14106> [accessed 29 July 2023].

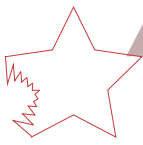


As we pointed out, the peak days of the Machine **do not coincide** with the peak days of other propaganda media and speakers; neither do **the articles in the sample refer to the events on the political calendar** that gave rise to propaganda activity outside of Blitz and the Machine. The only exception is an article of 28 June, which is about the Wagner Group's "March of Justice."²³



Nowhere in the reports from the frontline, each reprinted hundreds of times by Blitz and the mushroom websites, is there any trace of critical fact-checking: of looking for at least a second source. Actually, the exact sources of the articles are not mentioned at all, nor is what language they are translated from and who translated them. What is visible are the sources of the uploaded videos – they are mostly Russian, and most of them are not even links to Russian media but to Telegram channels of bloggers. Just looking at the headlines of these articles, or even opening them to read them, the reader is left with the impression that Russia is winning the war at almost every point on the frontline, while the Ukrainians are weak and crushed, or are vindictively committing atrocities for which they are getting "retribution".

²³ https://blitz.bg/analizi-i-komentari/analizatorite-na-isw-se-sksakha-da-pravyat-chetki-na-metezhnika-prigozhin_news961699.html [accessed 29 July 2023].



C) Other Publications in the Machine

As the main purpose of the Machine is to create the illusion that it is “reporting from the front-line”, we have classified as “Other” all the other basic publications on peak days that **contain the specified keywords but do not cover specific events of the war** – they are 29 in total. They are quite diverse, and therefore difficult to classify as a particular type or types. They provide information on various international events other than the military clash on the frontline in Ukraine, or offer general commentaries on both the war and other international events and relations. By the way, compared to the first quarter of 2023, the number of such articles in the Machine increased in the second quarter – the Machine has broadened the thematic and genre scope of Russian propaganda; the profiles of these publications might become clearer in the future.

However, it is evident even at this point that what they have in common (obviously also with the reports from the frontline) is that **none of the articles comment on Bulgarian political events from the Russian perspective**. This is somewhat surprising, as according to our previous studies, until the activation of the Machine of Mushroom Websites, most media outlets and speakers spinning Russian propaganda talking points in Bulgaria actually used them as weapons of direct political struggle. **The new strategy of Blitz and mushroom websites, however, is to establish Russian propaganda as a separate channel that is not involved in domestic politics. There are two possible hypotheses here, which are not mutually exclusive:**

- ▶ 1) What we have here is a larger-scale business model, of which Russian propaganda is only one segment that, for the sake of financial clarity, is not to be mixed with the other segments;
- ▶ 2) Propagandists assume that direct political intervention should be postponed for some future point in time when domestic political intervention would be more effective once the audience has been saturated with Russian propaganda on another level.

An effect of the standard scatter of the result are four of the 29 articles: they contain the specified keywords, but use them with other references or quote other speakers, therefore upon content analysis they cannot be classified as propaganda. The other 25 articles have a propaganda function, although it is technologically or substantively different. Here we will only give examples.

It is an old “ploy” to use a serious analytical and critical text for propaganda purposes. For example, on 23 April, the *Financial Times* published an article by Ruchir Sharma, chair of Rockefeller International, in which he criticizes the stability of the US dollar. This article was reprinted on the next day by Blitz under the headline: “Not since 1950 has such a thing happened to gold, while the dollar...”²⁴ However, when such an article is reprinted 433 times by the Machine, then even by its headline alone it deliberately undermines confidence in the dollar. Curiously, Blitz and the Machine reprinted this article a day before Russian propagandists, who translated it into Russian and published it in *The Moscow Times* a day later, on 25 April.²⁵

Not so “indirect” is the propaganda in a series of publications quoting some of Russia’s fiercest spokesmen, Rogozin and Medvedev: “Medvedev predicts tragic days for Germany”²⁶ or “Medvedev with harsh words about ‘Kiev dog’ Zelensky.”²⁷

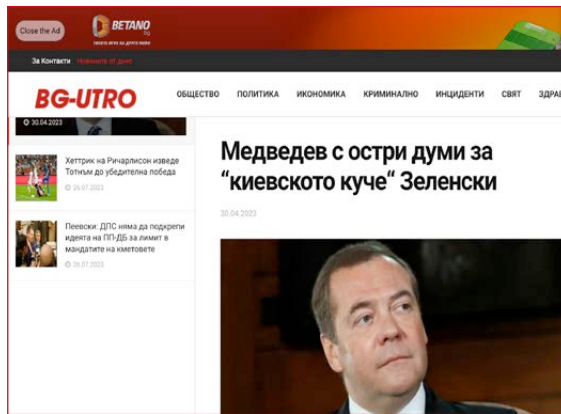
24 https://blitz.bg/ikonomika/ot-1950-g-nasam-ne-se-e-sluchvalo-takova-neshcho-ss-zlatoto-a-dolart_news949817.html [accessed 29 July 2023].

25 <https://www.moscowtimes.ru/2023/04/25/chto-govorit-silnoe-zoloto-o-slabom-dollar-e-a40950> [accessed 29 July 2023].

26 https://blitz.bg/svyat/medvedev-predreche-tragichni-dni-za-germaniya_news952135.html [accessed 29 July 2023].

27 https://blitz.bg/svyat/medvedev-s-ostri-dumi-za-kievskoto-kuचे-zelenski_news951031.html u <https://bg-utro.eu/928886/> [accessed 29 July 2023].





Медведев предрече трагични дни за Германия

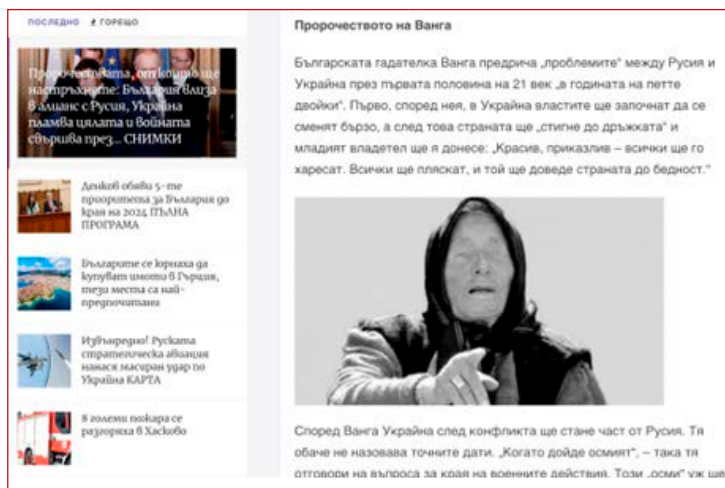
Прехваленният германски прагматизъм отново, както през 1933 г., е дал истински провал през 21 век, заяви заместник-председателят на Съвета за сигурност на Руската федерация

© 05 Маи 2023, 17:04 10998 прочита 8 коментара Автор: БЛЦЦ



Германия, поради антируските санкции, може да загуби своето политическо и

Another classical “ploy” of Russian propaganda is to enlist the support of prophets, fortune-tellers and astrologers: “Prophecies that will give you chills: Bulgaria enters into alliance with Russia, Ukraine bursts into flames and the war ends in... PHOTOS.”²⁸ Several Eastern Orthodox elders and several astrologers have been predicting Russia’s victory for centuries, and of course, to them is added the indispensable for Russian propaganda Baba Vanga, who is claimed to have also predicted – blindly gazing at the future between ads of pants and games of chances – that “Ukraine will become part of Russia after the conflict”, and besides, there will appear “a special ‘Slavic Union’ involving Russia, Belarus and Bulgaria”.



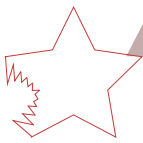
After the prophets come the academics: in an interview with Prof. Vitano, a mathematician who has been publicly outspoken since the pandemic, it is predicted, “based on Clausewitz”, that the Ukrainians will lose the war. Here, a short spiteful comment addressed at Maria Gabriel is the only connection to Bulgarian domestic politics.²⁹ On the same date, Prof. Vitano’s academic authority is added to by a colleague of his from China: “Professor Weiwei voices three reasons why world supports Russia, not the West.”³⁰

28 https://blitz.bg/svyat/prorochestvata-ot-koito-shche-nastrkhnete-blgariya-vliza-v-alians-s-rusiya-ukrayna-plamva-tsyalata-i-voynata-svrshva-prez-snimki_news949660.html; <https://haira.dnes24.eu/915966/> [accessed 29 July 2023].

29 https://blitz.bg/analizi-i-komentari/prof-vitanov-opisa-mariya-gabriel-s-dumata-kagemusha-i-kaza-v-kogo-e-klyucht-za-uspekha_news952885.html [accessed 29 July 2023].

30 https://blitz.bg/svyat/profesor-veyvey-oglas-i-tri-prichini-zaradi-koito-svett-podkrepya-rusiya-a-ne-zapada_news952962.html [accessed 29 July 2023].





In the period under review, the EU's bad boy, Viktor Orbán, also twice took a stand against Ukraine: "Hungary slams EU over Ukraine, again"³¹ and "Brussels strikes insidious blow at Hungary over Orbán's stance on Ukraine."³²

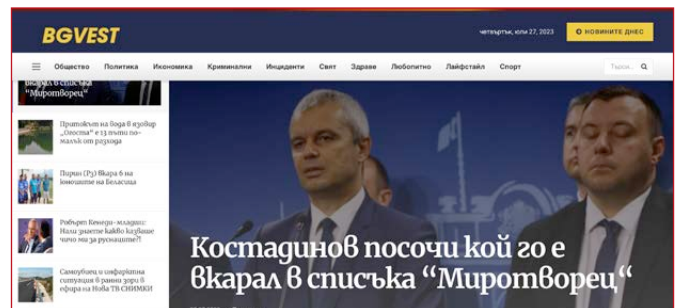
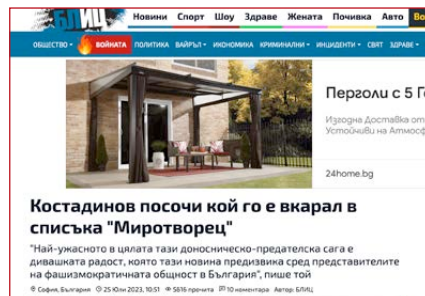
Ultimately, all the "Other" articles also repeated – albeit in different forms – the main message of Russian propaganda: the West is declining, while Russia is rising and will win the war.

D) Blitz and the Machine

The second quarter of 2023 confirmed the conclusion drawn in the newsletter for the first quarter – namely, that **Blitz and the Machine of Mushroom Websites are substantially interlinked.**

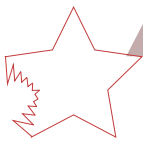
Fifty-eight of all 69 articles in the sample of the peak days of propaganda (84%) were reprinted from Blitz. In the majority of cases, the articles were first published by Blitz and then reprinted by the Machine, although there are several in which it was the other way around – the articles were reprinted by Blitz from the Machine.

We also conducted another experiment, which was not related to the content of the articles: on 25 July, we tracked in real-time all articles accessible on one of the Machine's websites – bgvest.eu. From 3 p.m. to 4 p.m., **out of 31 articles published in the Machine (on bgvest.eu), 20 were reprinted from Blitz (65%).** Interestingly, most of the articles about sports in the Machine were reprinted from sportal.bg, and those about finance – from serious media outlets such as Deutsche Welle and Dnevnik. In all cases, however, **the main source of content for the Machine of Mushroom Websites was again Blitz.**



It is noteworthy that in the second quarter of 2023, the Machine did not grow extensively. We have not compiled a full list of all mushroom websites that reprinted identical articles in the second quarter, as we did at the end of 2022 when we identified 370 sites involved in this operation.³³ But the **maximum number of reprints of an article by mushroom websites and by other media currently linked to them remains around 420–430 publications**, or as many as at the end of 2022 and in the first quarter of 2023. This means that **even if new mushroom websites get linked to the Machine, approximately the same number of mushroom websites are deactivated and dropped from the Machine.**

31 https://blitz.bg/svyat/ungariya-otnovo-poseche-es-za-ukrayna_news961464.html; <https://haira.dnes24.eu/949928/> [accessed 29 July 2023].
 32 https://blitz.bg/svyat/bryuksel-s-kovaren-udar-po-ungariya-zaradi-pozitsiyata-na-orban-za-ukrayna_news955738.html [accessed 29 July 2023].
 33 <https://hssfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Doklad-propaganda-2.pdf>, pp. 72–75 (in Bulgarian) [accessed 29 July 2023].



2. Events, Topics, Narratives from the Second Quarter of 2023

In terms of events, the second quarter of 2023 was structured around the Ukrainian counter-offensive – its lamentation and burial in the publications of propaganda media, which used a pre-prepared package of clichéd narratives (talking points) designed to manage impressions and to promote claims that it was, if not failing, then at least doomed.

A) Prigozhin's Mutiny

At the end of the quarter, however, this preconceived plan was upset: the key development of the period was the so-called “March of Justice” launched by Prigozhin on 23 June, when he seized Rostov-on-Don and subsequently Voronezh. The march was sternly qualified by Putin as a “mutiny” and “a knife in the back”, but the turn of events led to a softening of tone. In a subsequent speech by Putin, the response to the revolt was heroized as solidarity of Russian society, which had prevented a West-inspired civil war. However, this interpretation was challenged by none other than Dugin and Malofeev. The purely propaganda media outlet Pogled Info initially kept silent on 24 June, after the capture of Rostov and Voronezh by Yevgeny Prigozhin's mercenary group. It was not until a couple of days later (on 26 June) that attempts began to interpretively frame the revolt – it was described as a “manly rejection of bloodshed between brothers” on the one hand, and a “mutiny in the interests of Kiev and the West” on the other.

This is undoubtedly the most important topic in the period under review, which will continue to be discussed in the next quarter. During the two days of Prigozhin's rebellion, what was most difficult for propaganda, which waited for and followed Putin's statements, was to change course. It started by condemning the mutiny, betrayal, treason, revolt, knife in the back, etc. Then it had to raise morale: Prigozhin's change of heart and the turnaround of Wagner's columns were declared a “display of maturity and manliness” on their part. Propaganda changed course from condemning Prigozhin to glorifying the manliness of the Prigozhinites to heroizing Russian society, which had stood united behind the Kremlin against the mutineers and had shown its solidarity. This was Putin's own attempt to close the interpretation – by heroizing the solidarity of Russian society, which had thus stood up to the West. But the undertaking was not successful: among the propaganda media, too, there was a hidden expectation of a continuation and of changes in power. Thus began the use of the phrase “Kremlin towers” – this time a metaphor for the various circles of power and influence in Russia; as we have already said, Putin and the Kremlin are no longer identical, propaganda cannot maintain the identity between them.

As a result of this confusion and the silence of Russian propaganda voices (which make up most of the content of Pogled Info³⁴), in the first hours after Prigozhin declared the mutiny the Kremlin's Bulgarian speakers, until recently marginalized due to the structural change in propaganda discourse (officials have become its speakers), had the opportunity to pull themselves

³⁴ Also impressive is the initial silence of Pogled Info – right until Prigozhin announced in yet another video that he was pulling back the columns and Lukashenko's administration announced the success of his de-escalation plan, the propagandists did not know where the power lay, in which of the “Kremlin towers”, and kept silent, as if to see whether Putin would fall. In contrast to Pogled Info, Glasove followed the failed coup without lying low and waiting to see who would win.



out of the mothballs and briefly emerge from oblivion. Thus, Valentin Vatsev, invited by Petar Volgin at Bulgarian National Radio (BNR), advanced the version that Putin and Prigozhin were play-acting – this was a pre-rehearsed show meant to bring to light and expose the opponents of the “special military operation” (SMO).

This narrative was prepared in part back in May, when there were growing expectations of a Ukrainian counteroffensive and Russian propaganda was working to demoralize it, while Prigozhin was criticizing the Russian Federation’s military leadership.³⁵ But this narrative, now rehashed by Valentin Vatsev and by readers on the Glasove forum, remained isolated from the rising chorus that began to gradually but unrelentingly denounce Prigozhin: “Attempt at civil war fails.”³⁶

On 26 June, propaganda began to promote the talking point on how to interpret the mutiny and its end: the West had hoped for a civil war but had seen its hopes dashed because Minsk had repaid a huge debt to Moscow for saving it from a colour revolution (equivalent to the Maidan³⁷). And by the same logic Russian society had stopped the mutiny: “The most important factor that influenced the resolution of the crisis was the position of Russian society. The representatives of the Russian regions, the leading politicians, religious leaders, public figures, the fighters on the frontline – all of them condemned Prigozhin’s adventure,” writes Anton Troynitsky, published in Pogled Info and reprinted by Classa.³⁸ The main task of the text is to suggest that Russian society doesn’t believe Prigozhin’s claims and that the Russian political system is stable. However, there is something that needs to be interpreted further: considering that Russian society is convinced of the “harmfulness and insincerity” of Prigozhin’s claims, why was the crisis resolved through “compromise” and a “friendly settlement”? So far, the version is of the “There’s something they’re not telling us” kind, here it is in its concrete form according to the president of a communications holding company, Minchenko, quoted in the article: “The compromise was necessary, among other things, because a number of decisions that bore the seeds of potential problems had been taken before.”

And another proud and purely incantatory interpretation: “But the main result of what happened is one. On that day people from both sides clashed, ready to die for Russia. But they refused to kill each other for Russia,” according to David Narmaniya, who is quoted in the same series of articles published in Pogled Info and reprinted by Classa.³⁹

But by and large the West and Ukraine had seen their hopes dashed, and all memes and taunts were treated as “despondency”; the agreement with Prigozhin in Belarus, the pro-Russian talking points repeated, reinforced the right flank of the Russians, and Prigozhin himself was play-acting in order to “bring the Kremlin’s opponents out of their holes”. Among the writings, we came across an admirable designation: “the Patriotic Special Operation”⁴⁰ (Pogled Info, reprinted by Classa).

35 For example: a French commentator claimed that Prigozhin, by criticizing the military leadership and talking about the collapse of the frontline if Wagner withdrew, was consciously playing a role in an information war, <https://glasove.com/intervyuta/erik-denese-prigozhin-izpalnyava-rolya-nyama-rusko-porazhenie-nyama-ukrainska-pobeda> [accessed 3 July 2023].

36 https://glasove.com/public_html/novini/narishkin-opitat-za-razpalvane-na-grazhdanska-voyna-se-provali [accessed 3 July 2023].

37 Let us recall the fake equation promoted by Russian propaganda: civic activity=colour revolution=Maidan provoked by the West.

38 <https://classa.bg/%D1%81%D0%B2%D1%8F%D1%82/item/481500-%D1%80%D1%83%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%BE%D1%82%D0%BE-%D0%BE%D0%B1%D1%89%D0%B5%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B2%D0%BE-%D0%BD%D0%B0%D0%BA%D0%B0%D1%80%D0%B0-%D0%BF%D1%80%D0%B8%D0%B3%D0%BE%D0%B6%D0%B8%D0%BD-%D0%B4%D0%B0-%D0%BE%D1%82%D1%81%D1%82%D1%8A%D0%BF%D0%B8> [accessed 3 July 2023].

39 <https://classa.bg/%D1%81%D0%B2%D1%8F%D1%82/item/481495-%D1%80%D1%83%D1%81%D0%B8%D1%8F-%D0%BF%D1%80%D0%B5%D0%BB%D0%BE%D0%BC%D0%B5%D0%BD-%D0%BC%D0%BE%D0%BC%D0%B5%D0%BD%D1%82-%D0%B2-%D1%81%D0%B2%D0%BE> [accessed 3 July 2023].

40 <https://classa.bg/%D1%81%D0%B2%D1%8F%D1%82/item/481491-%D1%81%D0%BF%D0%BE%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%B7%D1%83%D0%BC%D0%B5%D0%BD%D0%B8%D0%B5%D1%82%D0%BE-%D1%81-%D0%B2%D0%B0%D0%B3%D0%BD%D0%B5%D1%80-%D0%BF%D0%BE%D0%B1%D1%8A%D1%80%D0%BA%D0%B0-%D1%83%D0%BA%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%B8%D0%BD%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%B8%D1%82%D0%B5-%D0%BC%D0%B5%D0%B4%D0%B8%D0%B8-%D0%BD%D1%8F%D0%BC%D0%B0-%D0%B4%D0%B0-%D0%B8%D0%BC%D0%B0-%D0%BF%D1%80%D0%B5%D0%B2%D1%80%D0%B0%D1%82> [accessed 3 July 2023].



On 26 June, in Epicenter, Boyan Chukov⁴¹ launched the version that would be articulated also by Putin in his evening address: the mutiny was in the interests of Kiev and the West, therefore it was directed by them. But the attempt of Kiev and the West to provoke a split had met the resistance of the whole of Russian society, which had set a “historic example”.

This statement by Putin, however, did not end the uncertainty and close the case. After it, on 28 June, both Dugin and Malofeev made statements that the Wagner Group were not to blame for the defeats and that resignations in the military leadership were probably necessary and Putin would probably make changes, but as we know, he does nothing under pressure...

In conclusion: despite the gloating of the Bulgarian trolls that, in defiance of the West and Ukraine, the coup had failed (if it was a coup at all, and not a show staged to bring the opponents of the war to light), (pro-)Russian propaganda in Bulgarian online media found it difficult to maintain that the Kremlin is united, that the Kremlin and Putin are identical; dissonant voices could be heard within this propaganda itself.

B) Marches for Peace

The other key narrative in the second quarter of 2023 (which was chronologically at the beginning of the period under review) were the so-called **marches for peace. Their main task was to collect signatures for a referendum that would attempt to remove certain governance issues and decisions from the remit of the executive and to submit them to referendums “of the people” in which, however, it would be possible for decisions to be made by very few votes. A “referendum dictatorship” of quasi-majorities is in the making.**

Despite the loud insistence that the marches did not have political goals, the political agenda is clearly evident in them. Although they did not openly identify themselves with any political entity, these marches – organized by groups of previous anti-vaxxers, and earlier opponents of the Istanbul Convention who, in the meantime, had started a panic among the residents of the Roma neighbourhood in Karnobat that their children would be taken away⁴² (BROD, People’s Network, etc.) – were overtly political, repeating the incantations of the The Left! (a coalition that failed to win seats in the parliamentary elections of 2 April 2023), which claimed that it was fighting against involving Bulgaria in the war.

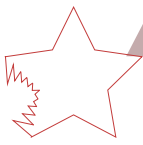
Promoting the marches for peace was intertwined with denouncing the regular government on behalf of the “cheated” voters (only it wasn’t the voters of the two largest formations who were protesting that they had been cheated, it was the pro-Russian sympathizers who were protesting on their behalf and organizing the marches for peace). It is important to start emphasizing the links between pro-Russian propaganda and the domestic agenda – by creating such links, this propaganda becomes more effective.

The first march for peace in the second quarter of 2023 was organized on 23 April. The march took its agenda from the platform of the coalition The Left! which crashed in the 2 April 2023 elections. After that coalition’s failure, Neshka Robeva and Plamen Kirov took up its messages in political commentaries that this parliament has a single task: to drag Bulgaria into the war.

⁴¹ <https://epicenter.bg/article/Boyan-Chukov--Slavnata-istoriya-na-ChVK--Vagner--pobeditel-v-Bahmut-Artyomovsk--priklyuchi-/319067/11/0> [accessed 3 July 2023].

⁴² <https://btvnovinite.bg/bulgaria/bojkot-na-uchebnija-proces-v-karnobat-i-slivensko-zaradi-panika-sred-roditelite.html> [accessed 5 October 2023]; a comprehensive propaganda strategy has been developed that portrays Norway and the Norwegian child welfare services as a textbook villain who abducts children from their parents as part of a large-scale industry – see: https://www.lentata.com/page_16156.html [accessed 5 October 2023].





During the period under review, there were three marches for peace, which also collected signatures for a referendum on peace and sovereignty (neutrality).⁴³ The first march was on 23 April, the second on 21 May, and the third march for peace and sovereignty was on 18 June. It was the SEVENTH in a row – such marches have been organized across the country over the last twelve months, collecting signatures for a referendum on peace and sovereignty. The main purpose of the referendum thus conceived is not to ask the Bulgarians if they are in favour of peace in the world, but to make referendums valid by a much smaller number of votes, and to put issues that fall within the government’s remit to a referendum – for example, issues such as Bulgaria’s membership of the WHO. **The main task of this referendum is to shift decision-making on issues of governance away from the government and onto a relatively small number of people – onto groups, radicalized and mobilized by propaganda, which amplify social polarizations, and in certain circumstances – i.e., low civic activity and voter turnout – could win referendums.** In the marches for peace we still see an experimental testing of a model of “referendum dictatorship” to replace representative governance.

The organizers of the marches are BROD (Bulgarian Nation United for Children) and the People’s Network Initiative Committee (headed by Nako Stefanov, a frequent guest of Pogled Info, Sarnela Vodenicharova, but also Romyana Chenalova). They spread the following syllogism: Kiril Petkov said we wouldn’t send arms to Ukraine, but he did; now he says we will not send troops, therefore he will, we’ve studied it in mathematics, the equation is simple: “We won’t tolerate the preparation for [the act of] sending Bulgarian boys to fight in a foreign conflict.”⁴⁴ They also oppose the Istanbul Convention, they are outspoken anti-vaxxers, their other messages are “let’s not let them brainwash our children and let’s not let the boys go to war.” These are the talking points with which they attract supporters, but their **main task is not to oppose pandemic austerity measures or the Istanbul Convention; these are smokescreens for the attempt to remove certain governance issues from the remit of the executive and to hand them over to groups of citizens.**

Let us give an example:

*The coalition of war has entered into an unprincipled embrace with the sole purpose of fulfilling certain demands not of the European communities, but rather of our NATO allies...*⁴⁵

Their proclaimed “government of war” only relays other people’s thoughts, “they are told” what to think. Defence Minister Todor Tagarev has become their main target.

The Machine of Mushroom Websites paid due attention to the marches – the one on 18 June was covered more than 500 times. The most covered was the one of 21 May, which also involved members and supporters of the Vazrazhdane party who splashed Europe House, the building housing the European Commission Representation and the European Parliament Liaison Office in Sofia, with red paint and accordingly raised media interest in the march to 1,291 publications.

The April march also got a lot of coverage – 1,167 publications; in addition to the 500 from the Machine of Mushroom Websites, many of the publications repeated a BNR piece.

⁴³ See fn. 7 above.

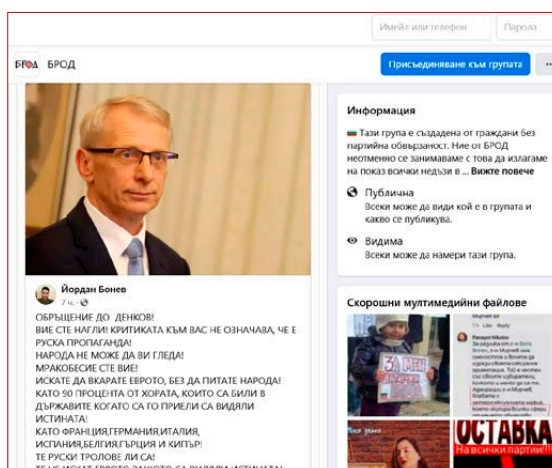
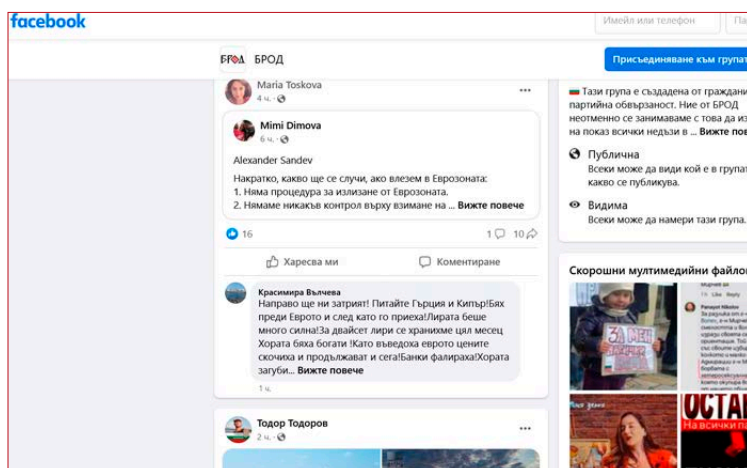
⁴⁴ <https://narodna.me/%d0%bf%d0%be%d1%85%d0%be%d0%b4%d1%8a%d1%82-%d0%b7%d0%b0-%d0%bc%d0%b8%d1%80-%d0%bc%d0%b8%d1%81%d0%b8%d1%8f-%d0%b2%d1%8a%d0%b7%d0%bc%d0%be%d0%b6%d0%bd%d0%b0-%d0%b3%d0%be%d1%81%d1%82%d0%b8-%d0%bd/> [accessed 3 July 2023].

⁴⁵ Ibid.

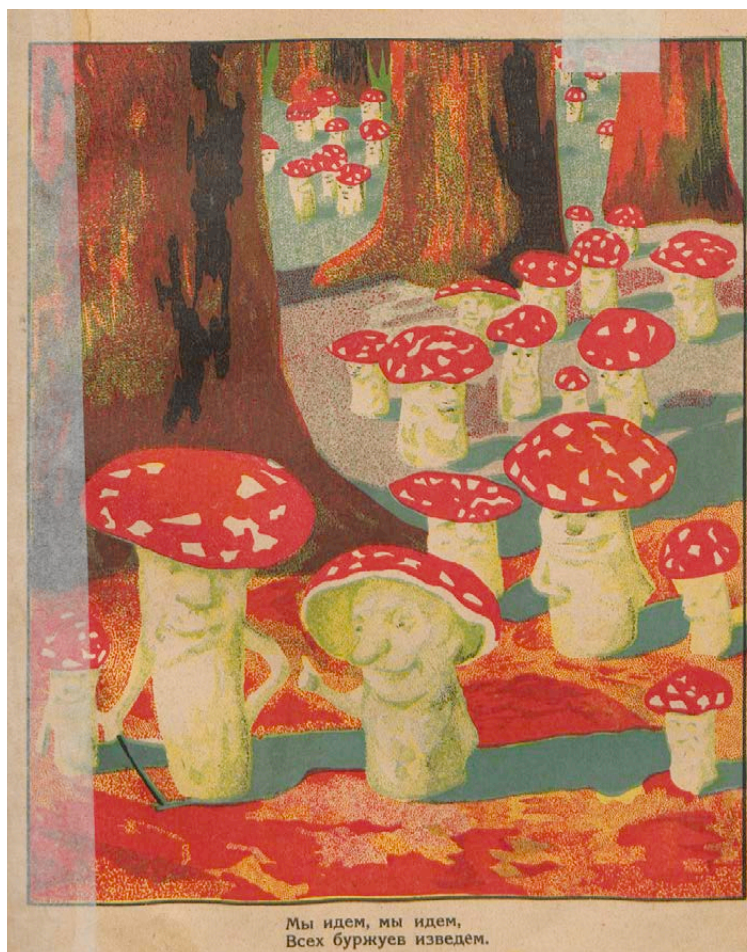


The announcement of the marches on the People’s Network website duly lists the media and media speakers associated with them:⁴⁶ Pogled Info, Eurocom, Alfa TV, Just Bulgaria, Bulgaria 24, Efir info, “Krum Savov Live” and “Studio X”, Bulgarian National Radio – Petar Volgin, Martin Karbovski, Free and Peaceful Bulgaria (Facebook and Telegram), “Smoke Screen”, “Dobri Bozhilov – influencer” and “Rational Resistance”.

The programme of the organization BROD, which insistently declares itself non-political, is exactly like the programme of Vazrazhdane (against the euro, against the regular government of PP-DB and GERB-SDS, before that against vaccines and the Istanbul Convention):



46 <https://narodna.me/> [accessed 3 July 2023].



Murzilka magazine,
No. 6, June 1924, p. 3

*Here we come, here we come,
We'll do away with all bourgeois.*



C) How Was the War per se Covered in the Second Quarter of 2023?

Causes and actors: the general framework has not changed, we will recall it in the words of Xavier Moreau, a French-Russian entrepreneur who has been living in Russia for 23 years now, if we can believe Glasove and the Sliven Agency: “It was hard in two aspects because the Russians didn’t expect it, so there was some stupor at the beginning. Then the Russian government explained that Ukraine had been preparing to invade Donbas in mid-March. But even with these explanations, we went from a state of armed peace to war, which ultimately turned out to be NATO’s war against Russia.”⁴⁷

The main move used by propaganda in the second quarter of 2023 was to hammer home that: Western weapons are for, and are being turned into, scrap metal; the Ukrainian counteroffensive is failing; Ukraine is forcibly mobilizing its population to use it as cannon fodder (we clearly recognize here that Russian propagandists were plagiarizing the image of the Russian Federation built far earlier); Zaluzhnyi and Budanov keep dying. In the purely propaganda media, this picture blurred and faded because of Prigozhin’s mutiny and the subsequent disintegration of the Putin=Kremlin=Russia equation. However, Blitz, and hence the Machine of Mushroom Websites, continued to spew it.

Here are several examples:

- ▶ The West, including Bulgaria, is supplying obsolete and decommissioned weapons to Ukraine.⁴⁸ This talking point goes back to the previous period; it was played up extensively by Glasove through republication of materials by Western, mostly American, conservatives.⁴⁹
- ▶ This line was intersected by another one, developed again in the same type of publications by a similar type of speakers – that the West is far from united when it comes to support for Ukraine.⁵⁰ Russian official spokespersons such as Peskov spoke directly of a “disunited Europe” as if it were a fait accompli.
- ▶ Besides, Russia is on the offensive (it is impossible to tell whether this involves advance of Russian troops or whether the “offensive” merely means that the AFU haven’t broken through or have advanced a little). Following another speech by Putin at the end of May (in general, in this period Putin had to talk a lot, a sign that something was wrong), a new talking point was launched to respond to Prigozhin’s first attack of 24 May,⁵¹ according to which the Russians had “fucked up” at Kiev – the Russians, the propaganda author claims, quoting Putin, had withdrawn from Kiev at the start of the war because “[i]t turned out that Moscow and Kiev had drafted a peace agreement at the very beginning of the SMO. The Russian army complied with the terms and withdrew its troops from the Ukrainian capital. But the authorities of Nezalezhnaya once again renege on their promises,” Pogled Info, reprinted again by Classa, retells the account of an MP and coordinator from the Luhansk People’s Republic named Viktor Vodolatsky.⁵² And goes on to quote his description of how fighters for Ukraine are mobilized – which is shockingly similar to what we read last year when Putin announced a partial mobilization.
- ▶ The tactic of regularly publishing pieces explaining how, according to unknown and unnamed “world media”, “daggers” (i.e., Kinzhal missiles) and “lancets” (i.e., Lantset drones) are destroying Western equipment provided to the AFU, was the dominant one in Blitz, the media outlet connected to the Machine of Mushroom Websites.

47 <https://agencia-sliven.com/index.php?id=417315> [accessed 3 July 2023].

48 <https://pogled.info/svetoven/amerika/razrushenie-na-mitove-zapadnoto-orazhie-ne-izdarzha-na-izpitanieto-na-voinata.156206> [accessed 3 July 2023].

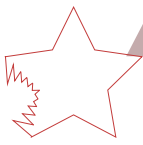
49 <https://glasove.com/intervyuta/nyu-york-tayms-dareno-na-ukrayna-orazhie-e-tolkova-ovehtyalo-che-stava-samo-za-rezervnichasti> [accessed 3 July 2023].

50 <https://glasove.com/intervyuta/savetnitsi-na-makron-pred-blumbarg-zelenski-e-svarshen-voynata-na-praktika-prikluyuchi-i-putin-pobedi> [accessed 3 July 2023].

51 <https://glasove.com/na-fokus/prigozhin-demilitarizatsiyata-zasili-ukrainskata-armiya-a-denatsifikatsiyata-napravi-ukrayna-izvestna-nie-se-osrahme> [accessed 3 July 2023].

52 <https://classa.bg/%D1%81%D0%B2%D1%8F%D1%82/item/481499-%D1%80%D1%83%D1%81%D0%BD%D0%B0%D1%86%D0%B8%D1%82%D0%B5-%D0%BF%D1%80%D0%B5%D0%BE%D0%B1%D1%8A%D1%80%D0%BD%D0%B0%D1%85%D0%B0-%D1%81%D0%B8%D1%82%D1%83%D0%B0%D1%86%D0%B8%D1%8F%D1%82%D0%B0-%D0%B2-%D0%B7%D0%BE%D0%BD%D0%B0%D1%82%D0%B0-%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D1%81%D0%B2%D0%BE-%D1%80%D1%83%D1%81%D0%B8%D1%8F-%D0%BF%D1%80%D0%B5%D0%BC%D0%B8%D0%BD%D0%B0%D0%B2%D0%B0-%D0%B2-%D0%BD%D0%B0%D1%81%D1%82%D1%8A%D0%BF%D0%BB%D0%B5%D0%BD%D0%B8%D0%B5> [accessed 3 July 2023].





The propaganda channels thus gave the impression of Russian victories on the frontline. In their accounts, the Russians congratulated themselves on the capture of Artyomovsk/Bakhmut,⁵³ and on the fact that Prigozhin had shamed Zelensky over it and with good reason let his boys have a well-deserved rest.

The collective West is pressing Ukraine (often derogatorily called “Nezalezhnaya”, a keyword for Russian propaganda) to launch a counteroffensive. The latter began with a tragedy. And the propaganda media, using various schemes, portended its inevitable failure (for example, Musk agrees with Jeffrey Sachs that the counteroffensive will fail, according to an article reprinted by Glasove from TASS,⁵⁴ while according to CNN, as interpreted by Glasove, “US pessimistic about Kiev’s combat potential”⁵⁵).

The Ukrainian counteroffensive, launched on 4 June, was described as a failure, to which the propaganda gradually added new details – the Western curators had pressured Ukraine to launch the counteroffensive, giving it short deadlines. Because of this, it somehow became obvious to propagandists that the destruction of the Nova Kakhovka dam with its monstrous consequences was the work of the AFU. Propaganda speakers described the tragedy in two ways: a failed attempt to divert the attention of the Russian armed forces and a distraction from what Russian propaganda claims is the failure of the counteroffensive.

The destruction of the wall of the Nova Kakhovka dam on 6 June was not mentioned by Pogled Info on the day itself or on the next one. It was not until the third day after the disaster, 8 June, that an article about it appeared in Pogled Info. The version promoted in it is that the wall was blown up by the AFU to distract Russian troops.

D) Propaganda Narratives

We can divide propaganda narratives into narratives related to specific events (there were many such events during the period under review), and narratives unrelated to events or referring to non-existent things.

Other events forming the propaganda calendar

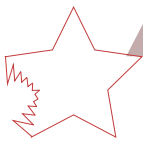
The main events forming the propaganda calendar in the second quarter of 2023 were the following:

- ▶ The murder of Vladlen Tatarsky on 2 April;
- ▶ The plans and actions to deploy nuclear weapons in Belarus;
- ▶ The Kremlin drone attack (which received strangely little attention) on the night of 2/3 May;
- ▶ The G7 summit in Hiroshima on 20 May;
- ▶ The Declaration of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly coining the term and condemning the “ideology of ruscism” (22 May);
- ▶ Putin’s speeches at the Eurasian Economic Forum (24 May) and at the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum (16 June) enjoyed the attention of propagandists. The speeches and their coverage exude a calm optimism.

53 <https://pogled.info/svetoven/ukraina/ruski-flagove-nad-artomovsk-nai-moshtnata-reputatsionna-zaguba-v-istoriyata-na-savremenna-ukraina.156208> [accessed 3 July 2023].

54 https://glasove.com/public_html/novini/mask-podkrepya-mnenieto-za-proval-na-kontraofanzivata-na-ukrayna [accessed 3 July 2023].

55 https://glasove.com/public_html/novini/cnn-sasht-sa-pesimisti-za-boyniya-potentsial-na-kiiev [accessed 3 July 2023].



- ▶ A marginal topic among those unrelated to any events was that “there are documents: 9/11 attack was the work of the CIA”,⁵⁹
- ▶ On 26 June, the conspiracy theory about biolabs was circulated once again – that is where the cholera came from after the destruction of the Nova Kakhovka dam.

Another group of publications unrelated to the main events in the period, is devoted to China. By spreading the Russian claims about China and reprinting texts from the China Radio International website, Kremlin propaganda promotes its version about a multipolar world and the end of Western hegemony.

At the end of April, Russian propaganda became more and more Chinese: for example, on 28 April, seven Chinese pieces were published – typically praising China for being technologically advanced, helping to evacuate people from Sudan, what the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China was discussing. In addition, Kostadin Kostadinov gave an interview to the China Media Group (CMG), published on the China Radio International website and republished by Pogled Info under the headline, “Dr. Kostadin Kostadinov: China only great power that is impartial mediator for peaceful resolution of conflict in Ukraine.”⁶⁰

“G7 in stupor over China-Russia-Iran-India dynamic relations,” writes Pepe Escobar, republished by Glasove.⁶¹ At the same time, Blinken’s visit to China is described as ineffective.

With the dramatic events of the last month of the period under review, the Chinese storyline thinned, but continued: Pogled Info informed us that Xi had advised Shanghai residents to lead a low-carbon life⁶² and that the Russian Foreign Ministry had condemned “the G7 summit in Hiroshima as an attempt to discredit and attack China.”⁶³

The topics noted above show that Russian propaganda in Bulgarian online media is increasingly tied to a wide range of conspiracy theories.

Domestic Political Focus

The following topics with a domestic political focus were specific for the second quarter of 2023:

- ▶ The way the successive parliamentary elections in Bulgaria, those of 2 April, were covered: despite the clear dominance of the pro-Euro-Atlantic coalitions and parties, the propaganda media claimed that they had not won a clear majority (referring only to PP-DB!) and that the pro-Russian forces were gaining support. Most often this picture was presented through claims that this is how the “Western media” see things. Let us stress: as the talking points and recitations of Russian propaganda are tied to the domestic political agenda, having been transformed narratively into Bulgarian issues (“the April 2023 elections as a choice between war and peace”, “let’s retain the Bulgarian lev”), it is through these same recitations that blows are struck against political entities. But despite GERB’s (Borisov’s, Mitov’s, Gabriel’s) increasingly pronounced Euro-Atlantic rhetoric in the period under review, the GERB party was not in the crosshairs of pro-Russian propaganda, as if it were not in the majority. Regarding the election results, the propaganda media demonstrated satisfaction with the political instability in the country;
- ▶ Kremlin propaganda, having become directly interested in domestic political issues, continued

59 <https://pogled.info/svetoven/amerika/istinata-izleze-nayave-ima-dokumenti-atentat-ot-11-septemvri-e-delo-na-tsru.156267> [accessed 3 July 2023].

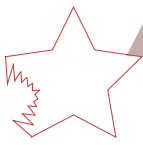
60 <https://pogled.info/svetoven/pogled-kitai/d-r-kostadin-kostadinov-kitai-e-edinstvenata-ot-velikite-sili-koyato-e-bezpristrasten-posrednik-za-mirno-reshavane-na-ronflikta-v-ukraina.155269> [accessed 3 July 2023].

61 <https://glasove.com/na-fokus/g-7-e-v-stupor-ot-dinamichniya-napredak-na-otnosheniya-kitay-rusiya-iran-indiya> [accessed 3 July 2023].

62 <https://pogled.info/svetoven/pogled-kitai/si-dzinpin-nasarchi-zhitelite-v-shanghai-da-vodyat-niskovagleroden-zhivot.156218> [accessed 3 July 2023].

63 <https://pogled.info/svetoven/pogled-kitai/mvnr-razkritikuva-sreshtata-na-g-7-v-hiroshima-kato-opit-za-diskreditirane-i-ataka-sreshtu-kitai.156220> [accessed 3 July 2023].





to cover The Left! coalition, which organized a protest against the formation of a regular government.⁶⁴

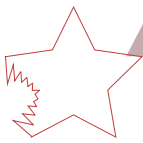
- ▶ The interpretation of why we are in Europe. This topic is primarily found in published videos: we are Europe anyway, we're one of the oldest countries, we're a European country and that's it! The implicit message: no one will take it away from us, it's our right by nature, and we don't have to do anything to deserve it (see, for example, Karbovski⁶⁵), so let's join whoever we want to – Eurasian Union, BRICS. And according to the same source: our accession treaty is about "how they can secure a tighter stranglehold on us"! Karbovski's same guest, one Petar Klisarov from the ranks of geostrategic commentators on the wannabe coming new world order, calls for us to become members of BRICS. One of the topics of Kremlin propaganda during the period was that France is applying for BRICS membership;
- ▶ The government's decision to join the EU plan to supply ammunitions to Ukraine, announced by Defence Minister Todor Tagarev, and President Rumen Radev's disapproval;
- ▶ Some specific and quite local events, such as the construction of the tallest flagpole in the EU, became an occasion for unleashing pro-Russian clichés about the "un-Bulgarians" (*bezrodnitsi*) who are against the "tricolour" (the Bulgarian national flag) – the scheme applied here is the same as in the case of the Istanbul Convention, "they wave the rainbow flag, but stand against the tricolour!" (Neshka Robeva at Bulgaria Dnes, 23 June):⁶⁶ supplanting the content of the discussion with your own talking points and then slamming the content you have planted.

The main lines of propaganda continued to be two: directly Russian and explicitly pro-Russian, on the one hand; and neoconservative, on the other. It is no longer a secret that the pseudo-patriotic talk of sovereignty as neutrality is explicitly pro-Russian, therefore we have not singled it out here as a separate topic. Without displacing it, neoconservative discourses (those about traditional family values) have moved into the niche of patriotism. We must emphasize them: unlike the narratives of neutrality, the neoconservative quasi-patriotic clichés are addressed at young people, it is them they target. And they are abundantly used by Russian propaganda, including by Russian propaganda in the Machine of Mushroom Websites where, during the period under review, Krystian Szkwerek was reprinted every other day or two in 200–300 identical pieces.

64 <https://pogled.info/bulgarski/levitsata-i-dnes-e-na-ploshtada-sreshtu-bezpretsedentniya-politicheski-tsinizam.156838> [accessed 3 July 2023].

65 <https://www.youtube.com/shorts/XxyCFLFTpo> [accessed 3 July 2023].

66 <https://www.bgdnes.bg/bulgaria/article/14749229> [accessed 5 October 2023].



3. Russian Propaganda Speakers in Bulgaria

A) RUMEN RADEV

In the second quarter of 2023, President Rumen Radev continued to be the highest-ranking disseminator of Kremlin propaganda talking points in Bulgaria. In the period under review, he was mostly associated with various developments around the 2 April parliamentary elections and subsequent consultations, and various events in the country's domestic and foreign political life. The number of publications containing his name peaked on three days – 21 April (7,108 articles), 29 May (7,414) and 5 June (7,770) – but he received strong coverage even on “weaker” days. This was largely due to the Machine of Mushroom Websites.

Radev's positions on the war (or “conflict”, as he likes to put it) did not change much in the second quarter of 2023. In his account, military aid to Ukraine continued to be interpreted as “getting involved in war” and a “mistake”.⁶⁷ He declared that the conflict is escalating, poses great risks and is exhausting the Bulgarian economy.⁶⁸ With this thesis, he also opposed the initiative of the EU countries to send one million shells to Ukraine.⁶⁹

Many media have accused me of being two-faced – this has never been the case. Now everything has fallen into place. Both here and in Brussels I have argued that Bulgaria should not intervene with weapons in this conflict. You see, it is escalating, exhausting our economy. It has become clear that Bulgaria will be part of the initiative for 1 mln shells. I don't support it. If the government makes this decision, it will be a mistake.⁷⁰



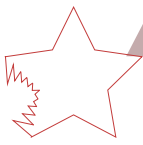
This conflict's escalating, exhausting our economy, says President Radev: **Joining initiative to provide 1 mln munitions to Ukraine will be mistake**

67 <https://epicenter.bg/article/Radev--Vkhlyuchvaneto-ni-v-osiguryavaneto-na-1-mln--boepripasi-i-snaryadi-za-Ukrayna-shte-bade-greshka/318647/2/0> [accessed 19 July 2023].

68 Ibid.

69 Ibid.

70 Ibid.



In the vein of the Kremlin's rhetoric, Radev, defending his position, instills fear of a potential escalation of the war as a consequence of this aid.

The conflict in Ukraine is escalating, it will get bigger and will grow, so I call for a sober assessment of our country's place and role.⁷¹

The fact that the war is being fought a few hundred kilometers away from us shouldn't reassure us because the fighting is escalating and obviously some politicians don't realize the depth of the problem. They are watching this war as if they were in a theatre and have made themselves comfortable in the audience in the false belief that they will remain mere spectators.⁷²

Радев поиска външната политика да се определя и от него, сега кабинетът ни бутал във войната (Обзор)

23.06.2023 22:30 9184



Румен Радев

Radev demands say in foreign policymaking, claims Cabinet's pushing us into war (Wrap-up)⁷³

The president's statements were in the context of the new regular government's firm position of open support for Ukraine. He fiercely criticized the parties of the new majority, playing further upon the fears of Bulgarians:

The course of the new government is to push Bulgaria closer and closer to war. I do not think it is appropriate for politicians with modest electoral support to speak and undertake such heavy commitments on behalf of Bulgaria. It is obvious that there is tension between me and the government.⁷⁴

71 https://novini247.com/novini/prezidentat-rumen-radev-prodalji-atakata-si-sreshtu-pravitelstvoto-obyasnyavayki-che_6494781.html [accessed 19 July 2023].

72 <https://wow-media.bg/2023/06/23/%D1%80%D1%83%D0%BC%D0%B5%D0%BD-%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%B4%D0%B5%D0%B2-%D0%BA%D1%83%D1%80%D1%81%D1%8A%D1%82-%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D0%BD%D0%BE%D0%B2%D0%BE%D1%82%D0%BE-%D0%BF%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%B2%D0%B8%D1%82%D0%B5%D0%BB/> [accessed 19 July 2023].

73 <https://www.24chasa.bg/bulgaria/article/14758211> [accessed 14 July 2023].

74 Ibid.



Румен Радев: Курсът на новото правителство тласка България все по-близо до войната

*Rumen Radev: New government's course pushing Bulgaria ever closer to war*⁷⁵

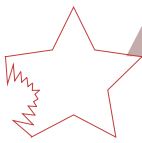
Let us recall that in some of his previous speeches, Radev called these parties “warmongers”. This rhetoric was abandoned in the quarter under review. However, his opposition to them was extremely fierce and upon handing the second government-forming mandate to PP-DB, he urged the coalition partners not to fulfill it:

*I am called on to defend the Constitution and I am obliged to hand over this exploratory mandate. Its utilization is your constitutional right. But for the sake of preserving your dignity and political perspective and preserving [Bulgaria's] image before our European partners, I call on you to completely reconsider the expediency of utilizing this mandate, which, in my opinion, has already been discredited.*⁷⁶

⁷⁵ <https://glasove.com/novini/rumen-radev-kursat-na-novoto-pravitelstvo-tlaska-balgariya-vse-po-blizo-do-voynata> [accessed 19 July 2023].

⁷⁶ <https://glasove.com/novini/radev-vrachi-mandata-na-denkov-ne-e-tselesaobrazno-da-poverya-badninite-na-stranata-v-ratsete-na-liderite-na-vashata-partiya-no-sam-dlazhen> [accessed 19 July 2023].






Мандатът е опорочен заради изтеклите записи, подчерта държавният глава (ВИДЕО)

Безпрецедентно! Радев връчи на Денков втория мандат и го призова: Не го оползотворявайте! Опорочен е

25245 | 29 май 2023 | 16:51

Срещата в президентския кабинет продължи едва няколко минути. След връчването на папката и разменените реплики държавният глава обърна гръб и си тръгна

Радев връчва мандат

Mandate discredited because of leaked recordings, head of state stresses (VIDEO)
Unprecedented! Radev hands Denkov second mandate and calls on him: Don't use it! It's discredited
 29 May 2023

The meeting in the President's office lasted just several minutes. After handing the folder and the verbal exchange, the head of state turned his back and left⁷⁷

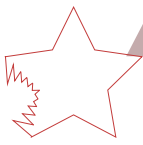
The President's systematic position is highly appreciated by Prof. Ivo Hristov, a former BSP MP known for his harsh anti-democratic and pro-Russian rhetoric, often relying on Kremlin conspiratorial logic:

When the foam starts flowing, it must flood everything, but here you have a rock around which this foam breaks. Therefore, the point is to eradicate it and to sink us all into the swamp, letting only toxic fumes bubble on the surface. Radev stands in their way. If Plevneliev were president, things would have been completely different.⁷⁸

Hristov sees in Radev an institutional position with power and symbolic resources that can oppose what is happening. In his account, "what is happening" is an overall social decline – from education to demographic processes to the political system – a "death foretold" of Bulgaria, a country reduced to "primitivism". For Hristov, politicians are also carrying out orders, their standard is constantly declining, which is a reflection of the overall social decline. In the period under review, the main target of his criticism were the new liberal parties which, according to him, have been "installed" to transform the country into a "service" territory, including with regard to the war in Ukraine. Against this general "fall" of the "pro-Western servants" he sees the opposing figure of President Radev (or as he puts it, "the institution" Radev).

77 <https://epicenter.bg/article/Radev-vrachva-vtoriya-mandat--NA-ZhIVO-/316850/2/0> [accessed 19 July 2023].

78 <https://trud.bg/%D0%BF%D1%80%D0%BE%D1%84-%D0%B8%D0%B2%D0%BE-%D1%85%D1%80%D0%B8%D1%81%D1%82%D0%BE%D0%B2-%D0%B1%D1%8A%D0%BB%D0%B3%D0%B0%D1%80%D0%B8%D1%8F-%D1%89%D0%B5-%D0%B8%D0%B7%D0%BF%D1%8A%D0%BB%D0%BD%D0%B8-%D1%81%D0%BB%D1%83%D0%B6%D0%B5%D0%B1%D0%BD%D0%B0%D1%82%D0%B0-%D1%80%D0%BE%D0%BB%D1%8F-%D0%B4%D0%B0-%D0%B1%D1%8A%D0%B4%D0%B5-%D0%BE%D0%B1%D1%81%D0%BB%D1%83-%D0%B6%D0%B2%D0%B0%D1%89%D0%B0-%D1%82%D0%B5%D1%80%D0%B8%D1%82%D0%BE%D1%80%D0%B8%D1%8F-%D0%B2-%D0%B5%D0%B4%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D0%B2> [accessed 5 October 2023].



B) KORNELIYA NINOVA

The competition between BSP leader Korneliya Ninova and Rumen Radev over the use of the talking point about involving Bulgaria in war and the demands for peace continued in the second quarter of 2023. Ninova criticized the caretaker government appointed by the president for exporting arms to Ukraine and, in her words, for ignoring social policies because of the military aid to Ukraine.

We don't share some of the policies pursued by the caretaker cabinet and we don't want the BSP to commit itself to them.

This came from the floor [of Parliament], it wasn't intended to be commented on. The caretaker government is freezing social policy and exporting weapons to Ukraine, and we don't want to be identified with such policies.⁷⁹

These words of Ninova accounted for one of the peaks for the period under review. They were reprinted 436 times, primarily by the Machine of Mushroom Websites.

This position, inspired by Kremlin propaganda and widely used by its Bulgarian speakers, is formed around the thesis of maintaining neutrality. It is usually combined with the fake news about sending Bulgarian troops to Ukraine. Although it has been refuted many times not only by journalists but also by senior politicians, this false claim continues to be used to fearmonger. The term used by Korneliya Ninova is “manpower”, and the next quote successfully combines these two narratives into one. The news story has 409 reprints in the SENSIKA system:

Fifth question: the question of war and peace. A question that has been overlooked by colleagues on this rostrum. I want to reaffirm: we are in favour of Bulgaria's neutrality on the war in Ukraine. No to military support, no to, God forbid, sending manpower.⁸⁰

The narrative of peace has been successfully integrated into the leftist causes proclaimed by Ninova. Under the slogan “Peace, Labour and Solidarity”, proclaimed on 1 May (Labour Day⁸¹), she promoted positions in favour of stopping the war and starting diplomatic negotiations. However, the nature of the theses she supports seems to ignore the content of the idea of “solidarity”, which is hard to find in the position of the BSP and its leader as far as Ukraine is concerned. The lack of peace is interpreted only through the topic of the economic situation in Bulgaria – the crisis caused by the pandemic and the beginning of the war, and the subsequent economic and social hardships. Sympathy is expressed with workers as well as with some vulnerable social groups, and the suffering of the “peoples” is blamed on the “corporations” which have amassed millions. This narrative has a distinctly conspiratorial flavour, exactly in the spirit of the logic of Kremlin propaganda, which has likewise successfully incorporated populism and demagoguery.

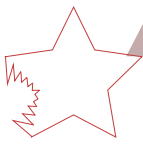
In the period under review, Korneliya Ninova and the BSP articulated another two narratives that are part of anti-European rhetoric on local soil: the postponement of Bulgaria's entry into the eurozone, and what they call “gender ideology”. On these issues the BSP uses the same rhetoric as the Vazrazhdane party. As regards the Vazrazhdane referendum on “retaining the Bulgarian lev”, Ninova and the BSP positioned themselves as its supporters:

The tax collection rate certainly needs to be increased, we aren't in favour of pressing the

⁷⁹ <https://ot-dnes.bgvest.eu/930357/> [accessed 14 July 2023].

⁸⁰ <https://info4succe.bgvest.eu/910133/> [accessed 14 July 2023].

⁸¹ <https://novsviat.zbox7.eu/920091/> [accessed 14 July 2023].



budget deficit down to 3% and joining the eurozone now – we aren't prepared for this to happen immediately.⁸²

The programme submitted by the BSP to parliament not only seeks to delay Bulgaria's integration in Europe, it also uses inherently conservative ideas such as the false opposition to "gender ideology". In the second quarter of 2023, creeping homophobia was persistently woven into both the public debate, with the aim of substituting it entirely, and into legal provisions related to domestic violence. By alleging that the provisions on domestic violence are actually designed to promote the so-called "gender ideology", Ninova shifted the debate from domestic violence to the so-called "third gender" or to the even more scary-sounding "social gender" (*sotsialen pol*):

We from the BSP for Bulgaria coalition are submitting a Law against Domestic Violence to a fourth consecutive National Assembly. But behind the veil of this noble cause, the Istanbul Convention is introducing into European legislation a third, so-called "social gender" different from the biological male or female.⁸³



The latest

[Korneliya Ninova: Support us in referendum against gender ideology](#)

We of the BSP are the only party that has been consistently against the Istanbul Convention, party leader states in declaration on behalf of PG [Parliamentary Group] of BSP for Bulgaria⁸⁴

Ninova openly competed with Vazrazhdane on this topic:

Remember 2017? GERB then submitted the Istanbul Convention to the National Assembly for ratification. Remember who stopped it? The Bulgarian Socialist Party. You weren't there then, esteemed colleagues of Vazrazhdane.⁸⁵

The BSP initiated a petition for a referendum against "gender ideology" – a mechanism that has already become a classical tool of Bulgarian populism. The pretext is the protection of the children of Bulgaria:

Help us save at least the children, support us in the launched referendum to ban gender ideology in schools. Your signature today is an investment – an investment in the lives and future of the children, which means the future of Bulgaria.⁸⁶

⁸² <https://manager.bg/%D0%BF%D0%BE%D0%BB%D0%B8%D1%82%D0%B8%D0%BA%D0%B0/bsp-vnasa-svoa-zakonodatelna-programa-v-parlamenta> [accessed 14 July 2023].

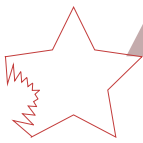
⁸³ <https://duma.bg/korneliya-ninova-podkrepete-ni-v-referenduma-sreshtu-dzhendar-ideologiyata-n274498> [accessed 14 July 2023].

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.





C) KOSTADIN KOSTADINOV

Kostadin Kostadinov, the leader of Vazrazhdane, is the mightiest mouthpiece of Kremlin propaganda in Parliament. He and his associates are harsh critics of every pro-European action, speech and position, while his personal presence at a reception at the Embassy of the Russian Federation and photos with Ambassador Mitrofanova left little doubt of his (and his party's) benevolent attitude towards Putin's regime.



87

Kostadinov used the occasion and the reaction against the photos with Mitrofanova to reiterate his party's main thesis – Bulgaria is a colony of the US and we must free ourselves from this “slavery”:

*It's high time that we freed ourselves from the disastrous American colonial slavery and that Bulgaria became a free and independent country again!*⁸⁸

This position is persistently maintained by Kostadinov and his associates, and it represents a cornerstone in the conspiratorial structure of Kremlin propaganda in Bulgaria as described in our newsletter for the first quarter of 2023.⁸⁹

In the second quarter of 2023, Kostadinov intensified his aggressive tone against part of the ruling political coalition – We Continue the Change and Democratic Bulgaria. They became the main targets of his attacks. Another important element in the logic of Kremlin propaganda is the claim that the Bulgarian elites – particularly those that are liberal and/or pro-Western – are venal. Kostadinov often likens Bulgaria to a colony that is falling apart because it is dependent on what the Kremlin calls the “collective West”.

This stubbornness, which is currently being demonstrated by We Continue the Change and Snitch Bulgaria [i.e., Democratic Bulgaria] to form a government, although they have no

87 <https://www.bgonair.bg/a/2-bulgaria/308763-kostadinov-za-snimkata-si-s-mitrofanova-nameri-se-dokazatelstvo-che-sme-proruska-partiya> [accessed 14 July 2023].

88 Ibid.

89 For more, see HSSF Newsletter, No. 1/2023: https://hssfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/%D0%91%D1%8E%D0%BB%D0%B5%D1%82%D0%B8%D0%BD-1%D0%90_%D0%A0%D1%83%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%B0%D1%82%D0%B0-%D0%BF%D1%80%D0%BE%D0%BF%D0%B0%D0%B3%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%B4%D0%B0-%D1%8F%D0%BD%D1%83%D0%B0%D1%80%D0%B8-%D0%BC%D0%B0%D1%80%D1%82-2023-%D0%B3--I-%D0%A7%D0%B0%D1%81%D1%82-%D0%9D%D0%BE%D0%B2%D0%B8%D0%BD%D0%B0%D1%80%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%B8-%D1%81%D0%B0%D0%B9%D1%82%D0%BE%D0%B2%D0%B5-%D0%B8-%D0%B1%D0%B%D0%BE%D0%B3%D0%BE%D0%B2%D0%B5.pdf [accessed 14 July 2023].



moral and legal legitimacy to do so, because after yesterday's hearing they are already proven agents of a foreign state. They should be arrested, not [allowed to] participate in the government of the country.⁹⁰

Kostadinov is particularly keen on his role as guardian of Bulgaria's independence from foreign agents. In the period under review, his verbal attacks against the identified "venal" political entities were incessant and increasingly sharp, offensive and calling for aggression and extremism. They culminated in a Facebook post at the end of June, in which he called for the annihilation of a certain part of Bulgarian society, combining it with demagoguery about the danger of war, dependence on the American embassy, etc.:

Yesterday [24 June] I was interested to see what the mouthpieces of the US embassy were writing and what they were calling for – generally, their profiles were pouring blood and calling for war, massacres, mutinies, and all sorts of other similar things (provided that they don't take part personally, of course). Now, no doubt, they are disappointed [at the failure of Prigozhin's mutiny], but only a few hours were enough to [allow us to] see what they are – a rabid anti-human scum thirsting for blood and dreaming of wars and coercion. That is why it is the duty of every natural citizen to do everything in his power so that this ugly scum may be annihilated – for the positive sake not only of Bulgaria but also of mankind.⁹¹

In the second quarter of 2023, Kostadinov rarely missed a day to attack the ruling forces in a similar way, finding occasions to do so not only about the war and their alleged dependencies on foreign embassies but also about other issues, such as the draft Law on the Bulgarian Language which his party, Vazrazhdane, submitted to Parliament but which was rejected by PP-DB, GERB-SDS and the DPS:

We are ruled by Bulgarian-killers. These Bulgarian-killers must be annihilated because otherwise they will annihilate our people and our state.⁹²

⁹⁰ https://blitz.bg/politika/kostadinov-ppdb-mozhe-da-unishchozhat-blgariya-zashchoto_news956487.html [accessed 19 July 2023].

⁹¹ https://novini247.com/novini/liderat-na-vazrazhdane-kostadin-kostadinov-s-poredna-provokatsiya%C2%A0ot-stranitsata-si_6505241.html [accessed 19 July 2023].

⁹² <https://top-novini.eu/701190> [accessed 19 July 2023].





Костадин Костадинов гневен: Управяват ни българоубийци и трябва да бъдат унищожени със съд и затвор, както всички престъпници – Информационна агенция

Юни 30, 2023 КАТЕГОРИЯ Общество



Kostadin Kostadinov furious: We're ruled by Bulgarian-killers and they must be annihilated through trial and imprisonment like all criminals – news agency⁹³

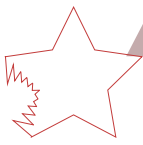
Of course, the US – which, in collusion with the Bulgarian government, wants to implement the “Ukrainian scenario” here – is behind everything. This Kremlin thesis was noticed by the TASS news agency, which reported a statement by Prime Minister Denkov condemning Vazrazhdane’s language and interviewed Kostadinov:

What we are witnessing at the moment in Bulgaria is very similar to the actions of the US in Ukraine ten years ago, when it literally blew up the country. I believe that the US embassy and the Bulgarian government want to turn Bulgaria into a second Ukraine, and we will try to prevent that from happening.⁹⁴

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ <https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/18129555> [accessed 5 October 2023]; disseminated also in Bulgarian: https://dnesplus.bg/bulgaria/tass-zabelyaza-che-kostadinov-sravnyava-bulgaria-s-ukrayna-predi-10-godini_1123265 [accessed 5 October 2023].





ГОТВИ СЕ ПЪЛЗЯЩ УКРАИНСКИ СЦЕНАРИЙ, НЯКОЙ ЩЕ ОПИТА ДА ПРОВОКИРА ...

2023-06-28 | 10:39:07 | 7 Дни



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Костадинов се развихри в НС: Готви се украински сценарий! Ще провокират сблъсъци в страната

Creeping Ukrainian scenario in the works, someone will try to provoke...

Kostadinov rages in NA [National Assembly]: Ukrainian scenario is in the works! They'll provoke clashes in country⁹⁵

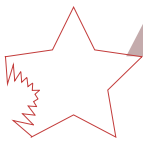
Kostadinov's rhetoric against the ruling political parties which define themselves as liberals and/or democrats, went so far as to call them "fascists":

All these Bulgarians had to hear yesterday from the words of a man who defines himself as an academician in the role of prime minister, but who speaks like a Nazi sergeant major, that Vazrazhdane is a neo-Nazi party, that it should be isolated and that all institutions and other political parties should take measures against it and carry out a punitive-repressive action against Vazrazhdane. But even the neo-fascism of these people, coordinated with the embassy, is charlatanic, because if in Nazi Germany all parties were banned except one, our native neo-fascists in power have decided to repress only one, and moreover, the one that poses the greatest threat to them. In fact, yesterday the Bulgarian government declared war on a Bulgarian political party, which is unprecedented. It has become clear that the only opposition in Bulgaria at the moment is Vazrazhdane.⁹⁶

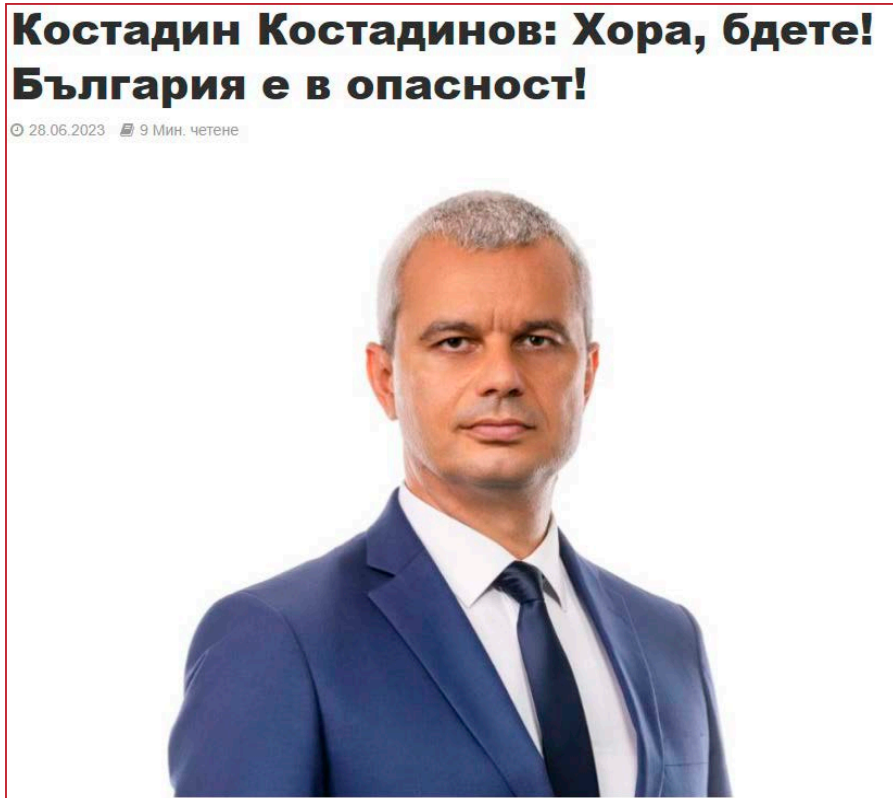
⁹⁵ https://novini247.com/novini/gotvi-se-palzyasht-ukrainski-stsenarij-nyakoy-shte-opita-da-provokira_6514146.html [accessed 14 July 2023].

⁹⁶ <https://www.plovdiv-press.bg/2023/06/28/%D0%BA%D0%BE%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B0%D0%B4%D0%B8%D0%BD-%D0%BA%D0%BE%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B0%D0%B4%D0%B8%D0%BD%D0%BE%D0%B2-%D1%85%D0%BE%D1%80%D0%B0-%D0%B1%D0%B4%D0%B5%D1%82%D0%B5-%D0%B1%D1%8A%D0%BB%D0%B3%D0%B0/345133/> [accessed 17 July 2023].





In the same declaration from the end of June 2023, Kostadinov also demonstrated the demagoguery typical of his rhetoric, inserting various social crises, even “treason” and “repression” against him and his party. He claimed that “fascist techniques” and media “propaganda” were being used against him and Vazrazhdane, that a provocation and the already mentioned “Ukrainian scenario” were being prepared, and that the goal was to “wipe out” Vazrazhdane. Who wants this? The PP government, and before that also GERB which now, together with the DPS, support PP in this endeavour. The declaration ends with two quotes from Hristo Botev and Vasil Levski, and the slogan “Long live Bulgaria!” – national-populist demagoguery reaching its peak on the shoulders of geopolitical conspiratorial logic, conveniently arranged to serve the goals of Kremlin propaganda.



Kostadin Kostadinov: People, be vigilant! Bulgaria is in danger!⁹⁷

For Kostadinov, there is an “American colonial regime” in Bulgaria, and those in power are illegitimate “neo-fascists” “appointed by the embassy” (the US one), who “won’t hesitate” to provoke a civil war.

Today, the American colonial regime in our country has issued a special position on Vazrazhdane coordinated with the embassy.⁹⁸

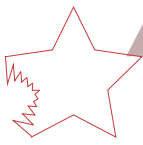
The only opposition in Bulgaria is Vazrazhdane, and since it is about to become the first political force, the American regime wants to ban it. The ruling neo-fascists are thus confidently following in the footsteps of their fascist predecessors.⁹⁹

Obviously, the American regime in our homeland is following the Ukrainian scenario of ten

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ https://dnesplus.bg/bulgaria/kostadinov-otgovori-na-denkov-pravitelstvoto-e-neligitimno_1123262 [accessed 17 July 2023].

⁹⁹ Ibid.



years ago, thereby aiming to turn Bulgaria into a second Ukraine. The ruling neo-fascists won't even hesitate to ignite a civil war in our country – after all, that is why they were appointed government ministers by the embassy.¹⁰⁰

Kostadinov, in the company of other members of his party, as well as of some prominent pro-Russian politicians, also appeared at the so-called “March for Peace and Neutrality”, whose participants vandalized Europe House, the building housing the European Commission Representation and the European Parliament Liaison Office in Sofia.¹⁰¹

The issue of weapons and aid to Ukraine was of less concern to Kostadinov and Vazrazhdane in the second quarter of 2023, but as regards “gender ideology”, they entered into direct competition with the BSP over who is the bigger false critic of the Istanbul Convention. The main reason, according to Vazrazhdane, is that the BSP has submitted a draft law that opens loopholes for infiltration of Bulgarian families by foreign ideologies, as it pledges cooperation with “international organizations” in coordinating measures against domestic violence.¹⁰²

The other main topic for Kostadinov and Vazrazhdane is the referendum on retaining the Bulgarian lev. Kostadinov's rhetoric on it in the second quarter of 2023 was more balanced, before its discussion in the National Assembly.

D) PETAR VOLGIN

The topics of concern to Petar Volgin did not change particularly in the second quarter of 2023. Once again, he found occasion to vilify the liberal political sector, using Kremlin narratives in the logic promoted by its central spokespersons.

The main narrative related to the war in Ukraine seeks to instill fear that Bulgarian troops will be sent to the battlefield.

Experience ought to have taught us that when a high-ranking party member of PP-DB swears that he will never do something – for example, that he won't form a coalition with GERB and won't stop fighting with Peevski/DPS until the end of his days – he will soon do exactly the thing in question: he forms a coalition with GERB and befriends Peevski/DPS. The fact that Denkov is currently swearing that Bulgarian soldiers won't be sent to the frontline in Ukraine worries me greatly. Precisely because for these people words and, by extension, promises mean nothing. Considering everything we have seen [so far], we can make the reasonable assumption that as long as circumstances require it (meaning if THE embassy orders it) troops will be sent immediately.¹⁰³

From the quoted narrative, it is clear that there is a consolidation of main theses of Russian propaganda around conspiracy theories (the embassy “orders”; those in power are “puppets on strings” – they don't keep their word, but do what they are told) and fake news (sending troops to Ukraine). Thus, the link between fear and conspiracy in this narrative is the criticism of the

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ <https://euractiv.bg/section/%D0%B3%D0%B5%D0%BE%D0%BF%D0%BE%D0%BB%D0%B8%D1%82%D0%B8%D0%BA%D0%B0/news/%D1%81%D0%B8%D0%BC%D0%BF%D0%B0%D1%82%D0%B8%D0%B7%D0%B0%D0%BD%D1%82%D0%B8-%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D0%B2%D1%8A%D0%B7%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%B6%D0%B4%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%B5-%D0%B2%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%B4%D0%B0/> [accessed 17 July 2023].

¹⁰² <https://www.24chasa.bg/bulgaria/article/14535387> [accessed 14 July 2023].

¹⁰³ <https://vestnikzarya.com/bulgaria/23598/%D0%B4%D0%B5%D0%BD%D0%BA%D0%BE%D0%B2-%D0%BB%D1%8A%D0%B6%D0%B5-%D1%87%D0%B5-%D0%BD%D1%8F%D0%BC%D0%B0-%D0%B4%D0%B0-%D0%B8%D0%B7%D0%B-F%D1%80%D0%B0%D1%89%D0%B0-%D0%B1%D1%8A%D0%BB%D0%B3%D0%B0%D1%80%D1%81/> [accessed 14 July 2023].





liberal political and civil sector which holds firm positions on the war; in the example above, this is Prime Minister Denkov.

Volgin also commented on the situation with the Wagner private army and its leader Yevgeny Prigozhin – who was accused of mutiny, marching his armed forces towards the Russian capital – to tarnish the image of Bulgarian intellectuals. For Volgin, the revolt was a set-up, a trap in which Bulgarian Euro-Atlanticists fell:

The events in Russia related to yesterday’s “coup” once again showed the total lack of analytical skills of the representatives of the Bulgarian Euro-Atlantic smart-and-beautiful [umnokrasivitet]. And this applies to all its representatives – from their politicians to their analysts right up to their “journalists”. I write this last in quotation marks because the TV and all other turkeys [misirki] pandering to the outright nonsense spewed on air by the righteous plankton cannot be called journalists.¹⁰⁴



Вчерашният „преврат“ в Русия за пореден път показва тоталната липса на аналитични умения у представителите на българския евроатлантически умнокрасивитет

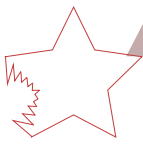
Yesterday’s “coup” in Russia has once again shown the total lack of analytical skills of the representatives of the Bulgarian Euro-Atlantic smart-and-beautiful¹⁰⁵

The main line along which Volgin attempts to discredit the pro-Western community in Bulgaria is by promoting the thesis that its representatives are traitors, sellouts and hate Bulgarians. This narrative isn’t new for him and wasn’t left in the background in the second quarter of 2023. Volgin also used the discussion about the 111-metre flagpole at Rozhen, which is to fly the Bulgarian flag from mid-July. A discussion that once again divided Bulgarian society, putting liberal and pro-Western people on one side and the more conservative and sympathetic to the East, more specifically to Russia, on the other:

“And the latest passion of the yellow-brick [zhaltopaveten] Komsomol is to slam the initiative for raising the Bulgarian flag at Rozhen. Of course, any initiative can be subject

¹⁰⁴ <https://www.big5.bg/2023/06/25/%D0%B2%D1%87%D0%B5%D1%80%D0%B0%D1%88%D0%BD%D0%B8%D1%8F%20%D1%82-%D0%BF%D1%80%D0%B5%D0%B2%D1%80%D0%B0%D1%82-%D0%B2-%D1%80%D1%83%D1%81%D0%B8%D1%8F-%D0%B7%D0%B0-%D0%BF%D0%BE%D1%80%D0%B5%D0%B4%D0%B5/> [accessed 14 July 2023].

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.



to dispute. It is normal in this case, as in many others, for different points of view to clash.

“But there is nothing normal about turning the position against the “Rozhen Pylon” into the *raison d’être* of an entire political community. Howling against this initiative is howling against anyone who dares to go beyond the narrow confines of today’s Euro-Atlantic ideology. Anyone who says that he is first and foremost a Bulgarian, and only then a Brusselster, a Washingtonian or whatever, drives the propagandists of the new ideology into hysterical frenzy.

These people hate Bulgaria. They want us to dissolve into the impersonal greyness of global anonymity. That is why they want to impose total censorship. So that there is no one to oppose such aspirations. And to achieve their censorship dream, these people are ready to use the services of anyone. Including State Security [DS] snitches.¹⁰⁶

Волгин: Тези хора мразят БЪЛГАРИЯ! Внимавайте, че искат гей-парадите да са задължителни



Written by: classa.bg***

Date: 25.06.2023

Share:

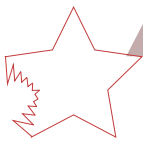
Volgin: These people hate Bulgaria! Watch out, they want gay-parades to be compulsory¹⁰⁷

The article quoted above intertwines several topics through which Volgin attempts to discredit liberal and pro-Western Bulgarians: “their hatred” of other Bulgarians, tolerance of the gay community, the flagpole at Rozhen, as well as the narrative he preaches in which “they” (meaning pro-European groups) “censor” those who disagree with them. He calls them “snitches” entirely in the style of Kostadin Kostadinov and his “Snitch Bulgaria” (*Donosnicheska Balgariya*), a pejorative phrase Kostadinov uses to vilify Democratic Bulgaria even when speaking in Parliament. This fictitious censorship is described through allegories of the years of socialist Bulgaria: the “yellow-brick Komsomol”, the imposition of “unanimity”, “comrades’ court” (the

¹⁰⁶ <https://classa.bg/en/%d0%b1%d1%8a%d0%bb%d0%b3%d0%b0%d1%80%d0%b8%d1%8f/%d0%ba%d0%be%d0%bc%d0%b5%d0%bd%d1%82%d0%b0%d1%80%d0%b8/item/481382-%d0%b2%d0%be%d0%bb%d0%b3%d0%b8%d0%bd-%d1%82%d0%b5%d0%b7%d0%b8-%d1%85%d0%be%d1%80%d0%b0-%d0%bc%d1%80%d0%b0%d0%b7%d1%8f%d1%82-%d0%b1%d1%8a%d0%bb%d0%b3%d0%b0%d1%80%d0%b8%d1%8f-%d0%b2%d0%bd%d0%b8%d0%bc%d0%b0%d0%b2%d0%b0%d0%b9%d1%82%d0%b5,-%d1%87%d0%b5-%d0%b8%d1%81%d0%ba%d0%b0%d1%82-%d0%b3%d0%b5%d0%b9-%d0%bf%d0%b0%d1%80%d0%b0%d0%b4%d0%b8%d1%82%d0%b5-%d0%b4%d0%b0-%d1%81%d0%b0-%d0%b7%d0%b0%d0%b4%d1%8a%d0%bb%d0%b6%d0%b8%d1%82%d0%b5%d0%bb%d0%bd%d0%b8> [accessed 14 July 2023].

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.





“victim” of which is the head of the Council for Electronic Media, Sonya Momchilova, who likewise spreads Kremlin propaganda and fake news).

In this vein, Volgin also tries to discredit attempts to combat disinformation. In this effort of his, he targets activists engaged with the problem as well as the NGO sector. The common motif is their “venality”:

Some resourceful people, maybe individually, maybe grouped in NGOs with Euro-Atlantic names, decide to make some quick money. The plan is simple but effective.¹⁰⁸

Further on in the quoted article, the “plan” that leads to the “quick money” is revealed: an “enemy” is identified and under the pretext of fighting with it, money is requested from the respective NGOs. The fact-checkers dealing with the problem of disinformation, and in general anyone with a stance on these issues as well as people who simply disagree with Volgin’s narratives are “snitches”, “traitors” and “censors”.

But do the PP-DB MPs and [government] ministers in question always defend freedom? The answer to this question, of course, is no. The selfsame “liberals” who now fancy themselves as one-hundred-percent freedom-lovers, in other situations do their best to stifle freedom of expression. Try saying something critical about the policies of Brussels, the State Department or Zelensky.

Instantly these same “freethinkers” will inundate every possible institution with malicious reports against you. It is no coincidence that DB are now known not so much by their real name as by the name of Snitch Bulgaria. There is something profoundly absurd about the fact that classical snitches and censors, who want to silence any opinion other than their own, fancy themselves as defenders of “freedom of expression”.¹⁰⁹

Volgin speaks of total control as part of his discrediting associative work¹¹⁰ against the liberal pro-Western part of the Bulgarian population, but falls into the general conspiratorial logic of Russian propaganda. This logic says that Bulgaria’s current pro-Western government is a puppet government and must be overthrown immediately. It is Euro-Atlantic, directly directed by the “embassy”:

We already know that this is a cabinet of Euro-Atlantic puppets and revanchists. I don’t think there should be any tolerance for such people.¹¹¹

108 <https://vestnikutro.com/analizi/43826/%D0%BA%D0%B0%D0%BA%D0%B2%D0%BE-%D0%B7%D0%BD%D0%B0%D1%87%D0%B8-%D0%B1%D0%BE%D1%80%D0%B1%D0%B0-%D1%81-%D0%B4%D0%B5%D0%B7%D0%B8%D0%BD%D1%84%D0%BE%D1%80%D0%BC%D0%B0%D1%86%D0%B8%D1%8F%D1%82%D0%B0/> [accessed 14 July 2023]

109 <https://topnovini.eu/petar-volgin-nesluchajno-db-veche-sa-izvestni-ne-tolkova-s-istinskoto-si-ime-kolkoto-s-imeto-donosnicheska-balgariya/> [accessed 14 July 2023].

110 Let’s recall that the same journalist speaks just as persistently about the People’s Court.

111 <https://www.big5.bg/2023/06/06/%D0%BF%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%B2%D0%B8%D1%82%D0%B5%D0%BB%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B2%D0%BE%D1%82%D0%BE-%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D0%BA%D0%BE%D0%B0%D0%BB%D0%B8%D1%86%D0%B8%D1%8F%D1%82%D0%B0-%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D0%BF%D1%80%D0%B8%D0%BD/> [accessed 14 July 2023].





E) MARTIN KARBOVSKI

The main topics Martin Karbovski works on are focused on the processes of disintegration in Bulgarian society, for which he blames Western-minded people. At the centre of his attacks are, of course, the pro-Western political elites and speakers.

Following the logic of Russian propaganda, in the second quarter of 2023 Karbovski insisted that part of the Bulgarian elite is “bending down” to the West, and hence, ignoring the Bulgarian interest:

Whatever the coalition is, it will be in the interest of exporting weapons or committing troops, henceforth we have no control whatsoever... We have to deal with our problems. Politicians should forget about bending down to the West for a bit and start doing something in the Bulgarian interest.”¹¹²

Карбовски: Политиците трябва да забравят за малко навеждането на запад и да почнат да правят нещо в българския интерес

Публикувано преди 3 месеца | България

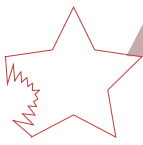


Karbovski: Politicians should forget about bending down to the West for a bit and start doing something in the Bulgarian interest¹¹³

As part of his rhetoric against the pro-Western liberal parties, Karbovski uses, like Peter Volgin, analogies with socialism. In the period under review, he compared the practices of these parties, as well as those Bulgarians who profess their values and positions, to the practices of the socialist regime in Bulgaria before 1989:

¹¹² <https://elhovo.news/?p=168048> [accessed 14 July 2023].

¹¹³ Ibid.



*Haven't you noticed yet that you are calling black white and denouncing the Union's enemies with Bolshevik fervor?*¹¹⁴

*We forgive some who are pure bandits and have done such shady things, but we don't forgive others even if they lose a tooth... Journalism in this country has become a nightmare. There wasn't such bootlicking even under socialism.*¹¹⁵

European institutions weren't spared from this comparison:

*Let the European Union not become the Soviet Union and let Brussels not behave like Moscow.*¹¹⁶

As in the first quarter of the year, SENSIKA found few publications with Karbovski's direct participation in Bulgarian online media in the second quarter. However, his presence on YouTube and attraction of followers were detected by the system. The undisputed highlight of the detected publications was the coverage of Russian Ambassador Eleonora Mitrofanova's appearance on Karbovski's podcast, and its fallout, including the Foreign Ministry's reaction over her words that if she were a Bulgarian citizen, she would vote for Kostadin Kostadinov. As many as 1,929 out of 3,942 publications related to Karbovski contain Mitrofanova's name. For comparison, the number of publications containing his name and that of world-famous linguist and political analyst Noam Chomsky, who was also interviewed on his podcast, is seven in total, three of them on Reddit.

In her interview for Martin Karbovski, Eleonora Mitrofanova – understandably – went through the entire corpus of Kremlin propaganda as thoroughly as possible. After all, she is one of those official spokespersons of the Russian Federation who affirm and powerfully disseminate the Kremlin narratives.¹¹⁷ The main topic of conversation was, of course, the war. Mitrofanova explained that the main reasons for it were the potential deployment of US and NATO forces in Ukraine, as well as “ensuring security” in the proclaimed “Donetsk People's Republic” and “Lugansk People's Republic”.¹¹⁸ To these reasons she added the many bio-laboratories, mostly run by Americans, in which, Mitrofanova claimed, they had “conducted experiments, with so-called ‘preparations’, on people from the armed forces of Ukraine”. Russia had wanted to avoid conflict, it had wanted to give the West a “last chance” to talk. Mitrofanova also trotted out the tropes about Europe's dependence on the US, the strong Russian economy, the high gross domestic product, the Minsk agreements, and even patriotism. In his questions, Karbovski used the phrases “warmongers” and “coalition of war” already coined by (pro)Russian propaganda in Bulgaria.

114 <https://aferahs.com/%D0%B1%D1%8A%D0%BB%D0%B3%D0%B0%D1%80%D0%B8%D1%8F/%D0%BF%D0%B8%D1%81%D0%BC%D0%BE-%D0%B4%D0%BE-%D0%B2%D1%81%D0%B8%D1%87%D0%BA%D0%B8-%D0%BE%D0%BD%D0%B8%D1%8F-%D0%BA%D0%BE%D0%B8%D1%82%D0%BE-%D1%81%D0%B2%D0%B0%D0%BB%D1%8F%D1%85%D0%B0-%D0%B1%D0%BE%D1%80/> [accessed 14 July 2023].

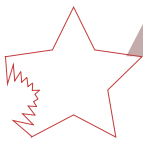

115 <https://elhovo.news/?p=168048> [accessed 14 July 2023].

116 <https://kritichno.bg/politika/martin-karbovski-predlagam-da-badat-izpratni-sanitari-v-ms-vizhdam-fenomenalna-neadekvatnost/> [accessed 14 July 2023].

117 Let us recall that the Russian state and its official spokespersons merged with Russian propaganda after an article by Vladimir Putin of 2021, <https://hssfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Report-ENG.pdf>, p. 3 [accessed 14 July 2023].

118 <https://glasove.com/intervyuta/mitrofanova-pred-karbovski-bih-glasovala-za-kostadin-kostadinov-ako-mozheh> [accessed 14 July 2023].








От началото на войната България е доставила въоръжение на Украйна за над 2,5 милиарда долара, разкри тя

Митрофанова: Русия няма да загине! Бих гласувала за Костадин Костадинов, ако можех

21767 | 20 апр. 2023 | 13:54

ГЕРБ е дракон, но свой дракон. ПП изгубиха доста от позициите си, но в коалиция с ДБ получиха добри проценти. Хората искат да дойдат нови лица, категорична е тя

Since start of war, Bulgaria's supplied Ukraine with weapons worth over 2.5 billion dollars, she reveals **Mitrofanova: Russia won't perish! I'd vote for Kostadin Kostadinov if I could**

20 April 2023

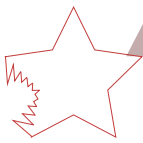
GERB's a dragon, but own dragon. PP lost much of their positions, but in coalition with DB got good percentage points. People want new faces to come in, she says adamantly¹¹⁹

119 <https://epicenter.bg/article/Mitrofanova--Rusiya-nyama-da-zagine-/313917/11/0> [accessed 14 July 2023].



Murzilka magazine,
No. 12, December 1929





4. Facebook

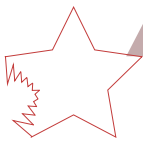
The events from the second quarter of 2023 were concentrated around the parliamentary elections on 2 April and their political consequences. The need for political stability and a regular government, and the dynamics of the foreign political situation around the war in Ukraine



What
you gave birth
to today is
a one-armed
and two-headed
Frankenstein

Korneliya Ninova, BSP

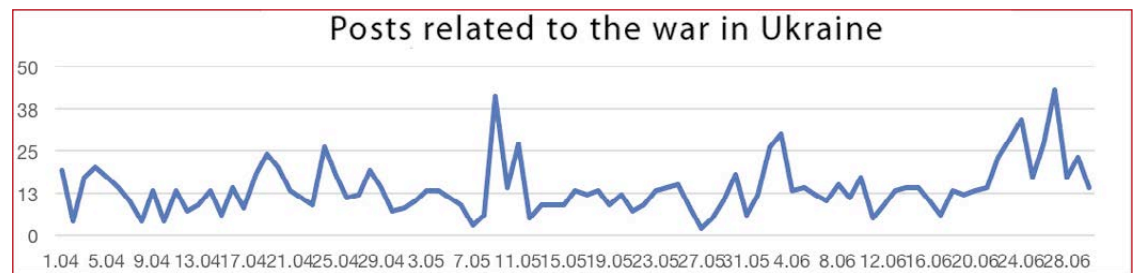
turned out to be a stimulus for forming a coalition between PP-DB and GERB-SDS. In the decisive weeks, precisely when PP-DB had to affirm the government already negotiated with GERB-SDS, recordings that were described as “scandalous” were leaked. A government was formed, but its stability remains questionable. The main unifying positions were partially declared by both coalitions even before the elections: overall completion of Bulgaria’s integration into the EU through admission to the Schengen area and the eurozone; reinforcing Bulgaria’s position on the Russian Federation’s war in Ukraine and strengthening ties with our NATO partners; the need for reform of the prosecution service, etc. The two coalitions came to a compromise solution which, as we shall see, has clearly upset some of the parties that do not share the listed goals. Both upon handing and upon accepting the second mandate, President *Rumen Radev stressed* that this mandate was discredited and that if it were up to him, he wouldn’t have handed it. With his statements, Rumen Radev continued to maintain the position that providing weapons to help Ukraine made Bulgaria part of the war, and *declared*: “The new government is pushing Bulgaria ever closer to war.” *The president also left* the National Assembly building before the swearing-in of the Denkov-Gabriel government and the Bulgarian national anthem. Vazrazhdane, ITN and the BSP also described the government thus established as discredited and inconsistent with the will of the voter.



The situation with the four petitions for referendums in Bulgaria is curious: the Vazrazhdane party's *petition for a referendum* to postpone the adoption of the euro collected more than 470,000 signatures and was awaiting a parliamentary decision; the referendum organized by the Nationwide Initiative for Peace and Neutrality, which includes Obedinenie 29, BROD, People's Network, and others, is likely to be merged with *the BSP's referendum* against gender policies in schools. ITN's proposal for a referendum on a presidential republic *did not find enough supporters* and the organizers gave up on collecting signatures.

Alongside the campaigns for the four referendums, marches for peace and sovereignty have been organized across the country over the last twelve months; in the period between 1 April and 30 June 2023, three such marches were held: on 23 April, 21 May and 18 June. Among the participants in them were Vazrazhdane, the BSP and the Peace Party. A *video* posted on the organizers' Facebook page on 16 June repeats the main conspiracy theories and talking points of Russian propaganda in Bulgaria, such as those about anti-vaxxing, pandemic measures, anti-LGBT rhetoric, shale gas, the Istanbul Convention, the Belene nuclear power plant, the idea of leaving the WHO, EU and NATO, and last but not least – the export of Bulgarian gold.

Chart 3. Posts related to the war in Ukraine (1 April – 30 June 2023)



On the international scene, events in Ukraine reached a new phase of development. Following the increase in military supplies, the Ukrainian army launched its counteroffensive to recapture the territories seized by Russia. The chart shows that there were peaks on Facebook around the beginning of the counteroffensive on 8 May and at the end of the quarter, when the Wagner Group announced its march on Moscow. It should be noted that compared to the previous quarter, there was a noticeable decline in the number of posts about the war. The more significant topics were: *the deployment of a Russian nuclear arsenal in Belarus; the optimization of Ukrainian air defences; the Kremlin drone attack on the night of 2/3 May; the destruction of the Nova Kakhovka dam; the incursions of the Russian Volunteer Corps (RDK) and the Freedom of Russia Legion into the Belgorod region; and last but not least, the mutiny of PMC Wagner and Prigozhin's march on Moscow.*

A) April 2023

The most watched and most shared videos on Bulgarian Facebook in April were two appearances of Nikolay Markov on the daily show “*Delnitsi*” (Workdays) hosted by Nikolay Kolev on TV Eurocom. The interviews lasted over 20 minutes each and received significant popularity: the *video of 4 April* has over 8,100 interactions and over 146,000 views. The *second interview*, of 21 April, has over 8,800 interactions and over 180,000 views. A specific thesis defended by Nikolay Markov is that Bulgaria will either actively participate in the war in Ukraine or should vote urgently to leave NATO. As a consequence of this thesis, he concludes that the formation

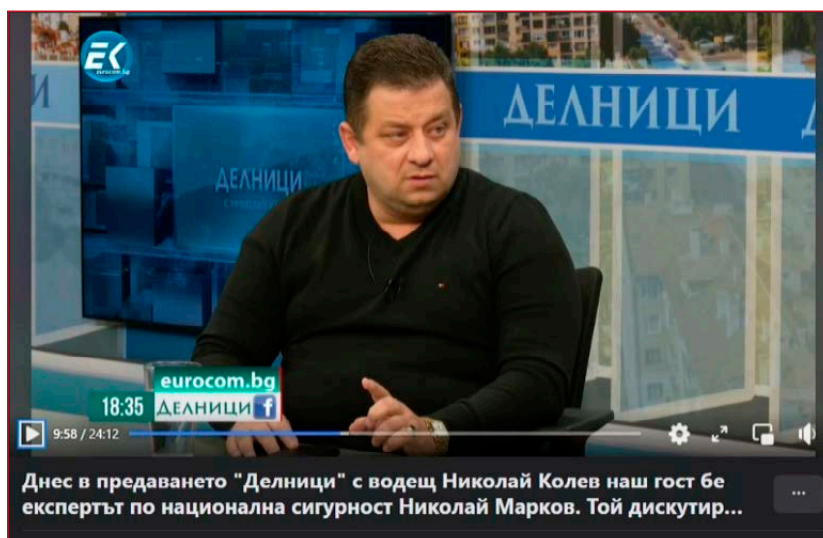


of any government would harm the Bulgarian people. In the second interview, Markov criticizes the financial policy of President Rumen Radev's caretaker cabinet, the state of the education system, the illegitimacy of the already formed government and the democratic order in the country as a whole.

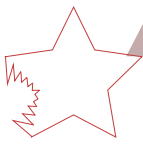


There are thirty people right now, in this parliament, who directly from here should go to Belene immediately

Nikolay Markov
21 April, *Delnitsi*



On the propaganda front, there was another event that is far more significant in scale and character. This was Elena Mitrofanova's *appearance* on Martin Karbovski's podcast. In her interview, she said in so many words that if she could vote in parliamentary elections in Bulgaria, she would either not support anyone or vote for Kostadinov. This stance did not go unnoticed by the leader of Vazrazhdane, and he proudly shared this part of the interview on his own Facebook page, where it garnered over 9,500 interactions and over 94,000 views.



On 24 April, a *video* of helicopters randomly flying over was shared by a profile called “Daniel Delchev Alexander Taro Predskazaniya [Tarot Predictions]” with an address to the Bulgarian people and a request to PP-DB and GERB-SDS not to form a government because this would lead to a third front with Russia. The video garnered 2,600 views.

Apart from political topics, the traditionally strong Bulgarian Facebook nostalgia for socialism had a top post with over 3,400 interactions. This time it’s not about a high-tech achievement of the People’s Republic of Bulgaria or a beautiful memory of military service, it’s about... Bulgarian nectar.



Back in the past, all of Russia and the Eastern bloc drank the Bulgarian nectars and juices of top quality, taste and wholesome, but now we drink the plastic juices from the West

B) May 2023

The echo of the 2 April parliamentary elections reverberated throughout May, the main topic being the possibility of forming a government on the second mandate, which would be supported by the first force in the elections, GERB-SDS. The most vocal was the leader of the Vazrazhdane party, Kostadin Kostadinov, who *took the floor in Parliament* to call for the return of the second mandate. His speech abounded in false claims and pure lies, which gained publicity after it was posted on Kostadinov’s Facebook page. The video has over 24,000 interactions.



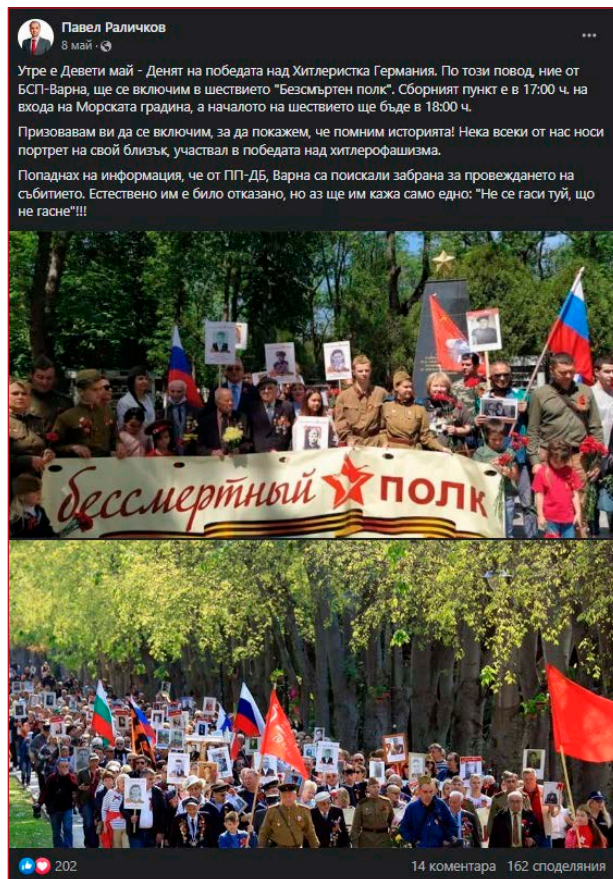
On the periphery of political issues, one of the prominent speakers of Russian propaganda in Bulgaria, Martin Karbovski, made a *video statement* to his viewers. In it he explains to them that they are second-hand people, that their lives have already been substituted at the expense of the Western world, and that now everything is “total crap”. The video garnered over 119,000 views and 4,400 interactions.



We've been treated as second-quality people for quite a long time now

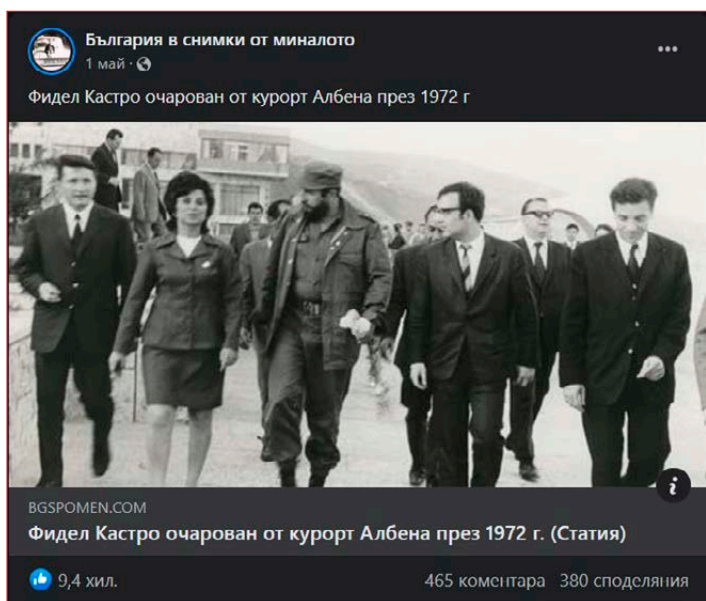
Martin Karbovski

On 9 May, the day on which the march of the “Immortal Regiment” takes place in Sofia every year, the *procession passed* through the centre of Sofia with the flags of the Russian Federation and the Soviet Union held high. One of the leaders of BSP – Varna, Pavel Ralichkov, *expressed his gratitude* to the Russian people and called for participation in the march.





There were also the usual well-presented memories of the communist regime. The number of interactions of two posts is impressive: 7,400 and 9,400.



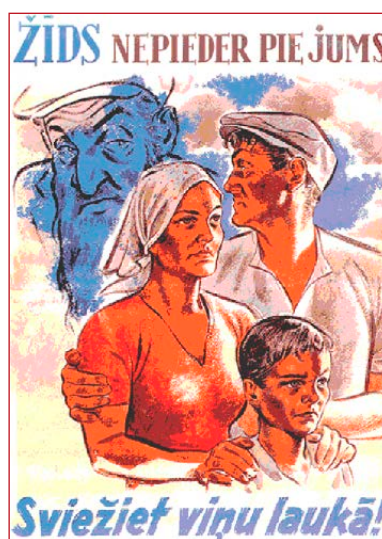
C) June 2023

The many events in June seem to need a separate newsletter, but we will nevertheless try to present the major highlights according to Bulgarian Facebook. In the month of Sofia Pride, the *“March for the Family”*, organized by Krystian Szkwarek and “packaged” by the media as a counter-event to Sofia Pride, gained a lot of popularity. In May and June, Szkwarek invested between 2,000 and 2,800 euros in *advertising* the march on Facebook alone. In an 18 June *post*, Szkwarek claims that the march was designed to counter *“the hodgepodge of errant ideas of 19th-century Marxists, 20th-century French philosophers, and 21st-century Hollywood producers.”* Kostadin Kostadinov likewise used Sofia Pride to score more media coverage, *promising* that when he came to power, he would ban *“the propaganda of homosexuality...”* Regarding the same event, a *video* by the young vlogger Ani Duleva gained impressive publicity – 454,000 views and over 14,000 interactions. In it, Duleva claims that the media are banned from covering the “March for the Family” and takes a firm stance against Sofia Pride. The curious thing here is that Ani Duleva is yet another journalist schooled at the Ataka party’s television channel (Alfa TV). There she *co-hosted* a news and current affairs show with another well-known defender of traditional values and the “other point of view”, Stanislav Tsanov. Former MP Boris Yanchev likewise did not miss the opportunity to *speak out* about Sofia Pride, describing it as noisy and aggressive, but stressing that on the other side there was *“a dignified and authoritative Procession in support of the traditional family”*. The former VMRO member and current NFSB leader scored 245,000 views and 9,400 interactions.

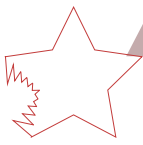


Apart from Kostadinov's threats, other propaganda images were circulated on social media but were quickly taken down by Meta's moderators. A brief check on the internet shows that these are edited propaganda slogans from World War II, which aimed to sow hatred for the Jewish population. The emphasis of the new slogan is on the rainbow and the EU flag; the father wears the emblem of the Vazrazhdane party. The slogan reads: "Let's protect our children from debauchery".

These two images show anti-Semitic propaganda from Latvia and the Soviet Union.



"Jews have no place among you! Expel them!"



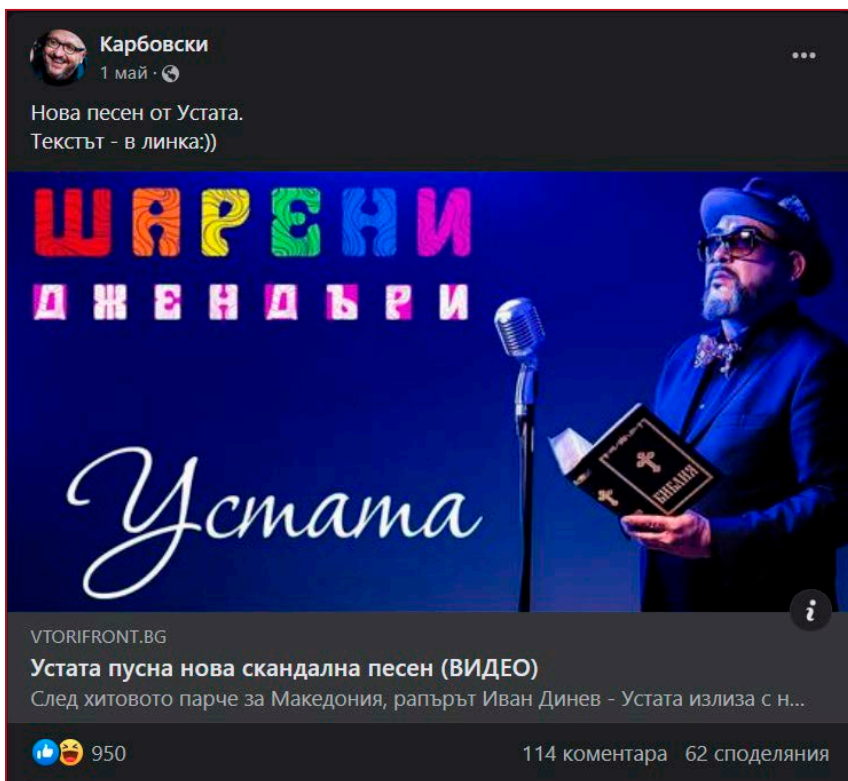
ABV Chairman Rumen Petkov multiplied his popularity on Facebook in June. His Facebook page was very active and four posts, in particular, received a relatively high number of views and interactions.

- ▶ The **first post** is from 6 June and has over 290,000 views – a video of Vladimir Putin speaking in South Africa, explaining that a peace treaty had been signed with the Ukrainian side, but after Russia withdrew its troops from Kiev, Zelensky renounced this treaty and banned peace talks.
- ▶ The **second post**, shared on 9 June, is a video of controversial US anchor Tucker Carlson blaming Ukraine for blowing up the wall of the Nova Kakhovka dam. With this post Rumen Petkov got another 200,000 views and 9,300 interactions.
- ▶ The **third post** (20 June) is a statement by Rumen Petkov in which he supports the talking point that providing weapons to Ukraine means actively involving Bulgaria in the war, and other conspiracy theories – 89,000 views and over 5,800 interactions.
- ▶ The **fourth post** (23 June) is a speech by Robert Kennedy Jr in which he condemns US involvement in the conflict in Ukraine. With this post, Rumen Petkov got another 193,000 views and over 7,500 interactions.

June wouldn't have ended appropriately without a small dose of nostalgia for socialism, expressed in two wistful posts with 21,000 and 16,000 interactions respectively:



Over the past few months, the opposition between Sofia Pride and the traditional Bulgarian family has been one of the main dividing lines on Bulgarian Facebook, but enterprising folk-rap artist Ustata managed to make his position on the debate clear through his song “Colourful Genders” (the original is in rhymes):



*“Wonderful Euro-oceanic society,
caviar, champagne and nothing Christian!
Come on, tell us seriously now,
who led you under that rainbow, eh?
Parent 1 or number 2?”*

From “Colourful Genders”, Ustata, 2023