



**THE REPUBLIC OF TÜRKİYE
SOCIAL SCIENCES UNIVERSITY OF ANKARA
THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES**

**SPUTNIK TÜRKİYE'S PORTRAYAL OF RUSSIA'S UKRAINE POLICY: A CASE
STUDY OF USE OF MEDIA AS A GEOPOLITICAL INSTRUMENT**

Master's Thesis

Ata Taha KUVELOĞLU

Political Science

August 2023



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PLAGIARISM

I hereby declare that all information in this document has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referenced all materials and results that are not original to this work. I declare that this thesis is written according to the writing rules of Social Sciences University of Ankara, Institute of Social Sciences.

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Signature

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I express my sincere gratitude to my esteemed thesis advisor, Filiz Tutku AYDIN BEZİKOĞLU, whose unwavering support and guidance have been invaluable throughout this journey. Her academic assistance and patience have been truly appreciated.

I extend my heartfelt thanks to my parents, Emel KUVELOĞLU and Dursun KUVELOĞLU, my greatest supporters, for their understanding and encouragement during the process of writing this thesis. I also owe a significant debt of gratitude to my sister, Melisa Nur KUVELOĞLU, whose profound understanding and unwavering support have made her an integral spiritual companion in this thesis journey.

I must convey my gratitude to my esteemed colleague, mentor, and one of my committee members, Murat Necip ARMAN, whom I continually sought advice from and who has been a true academic partner on this path. I also extend my appreciation to Ayşenur KILIÇ ASLAN, my committee member, for her academic contributions in her field. Additionally, I would like to thank Ali BİLGENOĞLU, whom I regard as more than just an academic mentor or a friend, for his unwavering academic and moral support throughout the thesis writing process.

The individuals I have mentioned above and their contributions have been instrumental in making this thesis possible. I am deeply thankful to each and every one of them for their invaluable contributions to my thesis.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	<i>i</i>
TABLE OF CONTENTS	<i>ii</i>
ABSTRACT.....	<i>iv</i>
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.....	<i>vi</i>
TABLE OF FIGURES.....	<i>vii</i>
CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION.....	<i>1</i>
1.1 RESEARCH QUESTION	<i>2</i>
1.2 THESIS STATEMENT.....	<i>2</i>
1.3 METHOD	<i>3</i>
1.4 LIMITATIONS OF THE THESIS.....	<i>4</i>
1.5 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND.....	<i>5</i>
1.5.1 Russian Foreign Policy and Geopolitical Aims.....	<i>5</i>
1.5.2 Türkiye’s Approach Towards Russia-Ukraine War.....	<i>11</i>
CHAPTER 2 - THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....	<i>15</i>
2.1 HISTORY OF USE OF PROPAGANDA IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS	<i>15</i>
2.2 HISTORY OF USE OF MEDIA AND PROPAGANDA IN RUSSIAN FOREIGN POLICY	<i>22</i>
2.3 THE ROLE OF MEDIA IN FOREIGN-POLICY MAKING.....	<i>27</i>
2.3.1 Media, Public Diplomacy and Soft Power	<i>27</i>
2.3.2 Media Utilized for Propaganda as an Element of Hybrid Warfare.....	<i>31</i>
2.3.3 Use of Social Media for Manipulation.....	<i>32</i>
2.4 THE CASE OF USING PROPAGANDA DURING THE OCCUPATION OF CRIMEA	<i>36</i>
2.4.1 Russian Use of Propaganda in Hybrid War Since 2014	<i>40</i>
2.5 THE ROLE OF SPUTNIK IN RUSSIAN HYBRID WARS AND DURING RUSSIA’S ATTACK ON UKRAINE.....	<i>42</i>
2.6 THE BACKGROUND OF SPUTNIK TÜRKİYE	<i>48</i>
2.6.1 Theoretical Background	<i>51</i>
CHAPTER 3 - CONTENT ANALYSIS OF SPUTNIK TÜRKİYE.....	<i>53</i>
3.1 RUSSIA'S UKRAINE POLICY.....	<i>54</i>
3.1.1 Blaming Ukraine for Reluctance about the Negotiation Process	<i>54</i>
3.1.2 Claiming Russian Humanitarian Efforts in War in Ukraine.....	<i>56</i>

3.1.3	Denial of War Crime Allegations about Russia from the West	56
3.2	TURKISH - RUSSIAN RELATIONS DURING THE UKRAINIAN WAR	57
3.2.1	Emphasis on Cooperation between Türkiye and Russia on the Ukraine Crisis	58
3.2.2	Russia's Frame-Bridging with Turkish Public Opinion	63
3.2.3	Russia's Efforts to Garner Support through the Crimean Tatars.....	65
3.2.4	Russian Support of Türkiye's Position Regarding Not Allowing Passage of Non-littoral Warships to the Black Sea	66
3.2.5	Emphasis on Russian and American Agreement that Türkiye Should Remain Impartial	68
3.3	RUSSIA'S ATTEMPTS TO LEGITIMIZE THE WAR	69
3.3.1	Russia's Objectives in the Ukrainian Crisis and Their Justifications	69
3.4	RUSSIA'S APPROACH TO THE WEST	77
3.4.2	S-400 Impasse	78
3.4.3	Aid Provided to Ukraine from Western Countries	80
3.5	RUSSIA'S ENERGY POLICY	80
3.5.1	Economic Indicators	81
3.6	TÜRKİYE'S APPROACH TO THE WEST	83
3.6.1	The Position of the West in Turkish Foreign Policy	84
3.6.2	The Promotion of Anti-American and Anti-Western Sentiment Being Fueled by Russia	85
3.7	TÜRKİYE'S UKRAINE POLICY	87
3.7.1	Türkiye – Ukraine Bileteral Relations	87
3.7.1	Views of Political Formations and Personalities in Türkiye	88
3.8	WAR IN UKRAINE WITHIN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE	90
3.8.1	Global Responses and Implications of the War in Ukraine	90
3.9	RUSSIA'S PROPAGANDA ACTIVITIES REGARDING THE COURSE OF THE WAR IN UKRAINE.....	92
3.9.1	Russia's Hybrid Warfare Strategies on the Ukraine Crisis	92
3.9.2	Press Freedom	99
3.10	GLOBAL INFORMATION WARFARE	99
3.10.1	Disinformation and Misinformation	99
3.10.2	Conclusion of the Case Study	102
CHAPTER 4 – CONCLUSION		104
REFERENCES		107
CURRICULUM VITAE		119

ABSTRACT

The core objective of this thesis is to uncover and analyze the communication strategy and narrative reconstruction employed by Sputnik Türkiye concerning Russia's Ukraine policy and the invasion itself. Specifically, we aim to discern how Sputnik Türkiye endeavors to shape Turkish public opinion regarding Russia's Ukraine policy, the ongoing war, Turkish-Western relations, and various domestic and international issues. To address these research questions, we conducted a comprehensive content analysis of Sputnik Türkiye's coverage of the Ukraine invasion spanning from February 24, 2022, to May 24, 2022. Sputnik Türkiye, funded by Russia, serves not only as a vehicle for public diplomacy to enhance Russian soft power but also plays a pivotal role in Russia's hybrid warfare strategy. It does so by disseminating disinformation and propaganda to target both the Turkish and international public. Through public diplomacy and propaganda tactics, Sputnik Türkiye has been employed to reinforce pro-Russian narratives. These narratives encompass the spread of disinformation about the Ukrainian government and military, an effort to establish Russia as a legitimate actor despite human rights allegations, the propagation of a biased perspective, and the portrayal of the West, particularly Western governments, as the "villain" or adversary. Russia's overarching communication strategy is designed to mitigate international and Turkish public opposition to its geopolitical goals. Moreover, it seeks to garner political and diplomatic support from Türkiye. However, these ulterior motives pose a significant threat to Türkiye's media ecosystem and the integrity of free and organic public discourse.

Keywords: Sputnik Türkiye, War in Ukraine, Use of Media, Hybrid Warfare, Propaganda

ÖZET

Rusya, 2022 yılında başlattığı Ukrayna işgali de dâhil olmak üzere, küresel ölçekte etki yaratmak ve dış politika hedeflerine ulaşmak için medya gücünü bir dış politika stratejisi olarak kullanmayı benimsemiştir. Bu tez, Sputnik Türkiye'nin Rusya'nın Ukrayna politikası ve Rusya'nın Ukrayna'ya saldırısı ile ilgili olarak kullandığı iletişim stratejisini ve anlatısının yeniden inşasını belirlemeyi ve Sputnik Türkiye'nin Rusya'nın Ukrayna politikası, savaş, Türk-Batı ilişkileri ve diğer çeşitli yerel ve uluslararası konularla ilgili olarak Türk kamuoyunu nasıl ve hangi yönde etkilemeye çalıştığını tespit etmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu soruların cevabını araştırmak amacıyla bu tezde Sputnik Türkiye'nin 24 Şubat 2022'den, 24 Mayıs 2022'ye kadar Ukrayna işgaliyle ilgili yayınlarının içerik analizi yapıldı. Rusya tarafından finanse edilen Sputnik Türkiye, Rusya'nın yumuşak gücünü artırmak için sadece kamu diplomasisi yürütmekle kalmıyor, aynı zamanda dezenformasyon ve propaganda çabalarıyla hem Türk hem de uluslararası kamuoyunu hedef alarak Rusya'nın hibrit savaş stratejisine önemli ölçüde katkıda bulunuyor. Sputnik Türkiye, kamu diplomasisi ve propaganda taktikleri aracılığıyla, özellikle 2014'ten bu yana işlenen insan hakları iddialarına rağmen Rusya'nın kendisini meşru bir aktör olarak kabul ettirmeye çalışan ve Ukrayna hükümeti ve ordusuna yönelik dezenformasyonun yayılmasını içeren Rusya yanlısı söylemleri güçlendirmek için kullanılmıştır. Batı'yı, özellikle de Batılı hükümetleri "kötü adam" veya rakip olarak temsil eden taraflı bir bakış açısının propagandasını yapmıştır. Rusya'nın iletişim stratejisi, uluslararası ve Türk kamuoyunun Rusya'nın jeopolitik hedeflerine karşı muhalefetini en aza indirmeyi ve Türkiye'nin siyasi ve diplomatik desteğini kazanmayı amaçlamakta ve bu örtülü niyetler nedeniyle Türkiye'nin medya ekosistemini ve özgür ve organik kamusal söylemini tehdit etmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Sputnik Türkiye, Ukrayna Savaşı, Medya Kullanımı, Melez Savaş, Propaganda

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AFAD: Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency

AP: Associated Press

BSEC: Black Sea Economic Cooperation

CIA: Central Intelligence Agency

DEİK: Foreign Economic Relations Board of Türkiye

EU: The European Union

GEC: Global Engagement Center

IEA: International Energy Agency

KGB: The Committee for State Security

MHP: Nationalist Movement Party

NATO: The North Atlantic Treaty Organization

PKK: Kurdistan Workers' Party

RT: Russia Today

RTÜK: Radio and Television Supreme Council

SBU: Security Service of Ukraine

TBMM: Turkish Grand National Assembly

TİP: Workers' Party of Türkiye

TKH: Communist Movement of Türkiye

TRT: Turkish Radio and Television Corporation

UK: The United Kingdom

UN: The United Nations

US: The United States

VK: VKontakte

WHO: World Health Organization

YPG: People's Defense Units

TABLE OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Julius Caesar's Coin (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2015).....	17
Figure 2: Plan of Union (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2015).....	18
Figure 3: Depictions of Napoleon (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2015).....	18



CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

“Fighting war on the battlefield is the most stupid and primitive way of fighting a war. The highest art of warfare is not to fight at all but to subvert anything of value in your enemy’s country. Anything. Put white against black, old against young, (...) it doesn’t matter, as long as it disturbs society, as long as it cuts the moral fiber of a nation it’s good. (...)”

A Former Soviet Spy (The New York Times, 2018b)

In contemporary times, conventional wars are gradually giving way to hybrid warfare. The term "hybrid warfare" signifies a form of warfare characterized by a blend of strategies encompassing military and non-military elements, covert and overt actions, and a variety of methods. These tactics include disinformation campaigns, cyberattacks, economic pressures, the utilization of unconventional armed groups, and the engagement of conventional forces. The underlying objective of hybrid methods is to intentionally blur the conventional boundaries between states of war and peace, thereby fostering uncertainty among targeted populations. The ultimate aim is to destabilize societies and sow doubt. The Russian Federation adeptly employs multifaceted hybrid strategies, incorporating actions such as political meddling, malicious cyber activities, economic leverage, subversion, aggressive acts, and territorial annexation. Furthermore, the use of coercive military postures and rhetoric is also integrated into Russia's hybrid approach to further its political aspirations while challenging the established international order grounded in rules (NATO, 2023).

Moscow uses propaganda as a tool in its foreign policy that tries to accomplish several goals. It is a well-known fact that in numerous narratives, politicians and the mainstream media join forces against a specified adversary (Soules, 2015: 198). The first goal is to boost Russia's good reputation abroad by presenting its accomplishments in culture, economy, and science. Second, it seeks to influence people's attitudes toward Russian policies, especially regarding its activities in post-Soviet regions and elsewhere. Thirdly, it aims to damage the image of Russia's enemies and rivals both at its borders and abroad. Finally, it seeks to develop a sense of patriotism and pride in the people of Russia, strengthening support for the leadership and its programs.

We would like to investigate the role of Sputnik Türkiye in Russia's Türkiye policy, especially with regard to Russia's occupation of Ukraine in 2022. How does Sputnik influence the media environment and public opinion in Türkiye during the war? Does it intensify bias towards Western countries and institutions? Can we identify any false information spread by Sputnik, which shows it being used as a hybrid war instrument? How does it attempt to affect Türkiye's efforts in foreign policy? How does it seek to benefit Russia?

1.1 RESEARCH QUESTION

This study endeavors to address the following research inquiries:

- How can we identify the communication strategy and narrative construction used by the Sputnik Türkiye regarding Russia's Ukraine policy and Russia's attack on Ukraine?
- How and towards which direction does Sputnik seek to influence Turkish public opinion, regarding Russia's Ukraine policy, war, Turkish-Western Relations, and various other domestic and international issues?

1.2 THESIS STATEMENT

Russia's communication strategy towards Türkiye is two-phased. First, it involves a public diplomacy campaign that conveys a narrative of a good image for Russia and defending Russia's strategic interests within Türkiye, and second a more aggressive hybrid war approach that aims to manipulate Turkish public opinion for Russia's benefit. Sputnik Türkiye is the main tool for conducting both aspects of this communication strategy.

First, it proactively attempts public diplomacy by shaping public opinion, creating perceptions, and functioning as a crucial avenue for promoting Russian narratives for the purpose of pushing the Turkish people toward a more favorable equilibrium associated with Russian goals through specific content and finding support for its policies both within and outside of Türkiye, especially on the ongoing conflict in Ukraine.

However, beyond these soft power politics, Sputnik Türkiye engages in a hybrid war strategy by manipulating narratives, distributing misinformation, and utilizing propaganda tactics strategically to manipulate Turkish public opinion to create support for Russian aims.

This approach is a continuation of the Soviet history of using the media as a powerful tool for foreign policy. Through platforms such as Sputnik Türkiye, Russia effectively advances its geopolitical aims while actively influencing public discourse and views in Türkiye. A noteworthy aspect of Russia's media campaign is its Russia seeks to establish itself on a legitimate basis by placing the West as a threat and fueling anti-Western emotions, presenting its strategies and behaviors as legitimate responses to perceived Western hostility or expansion, and minimizing international opposition to Russian foreign policy goals. This engagement aims to gain political and diplomatic backing from Türkiye, as well as potentially affecting regional dynamics in Russia's benefit. Russia's strategic use of disinformation, manipulation, and propaganda strategies, enabled by media such as Sputnik Türkiye, poses an enormous threat to Türkiye's media ecosystem, public discourse and foreign policy.

1.3 METHOD

This study analyzes Sputnik Türkiye's coverage of Russia's Ukraine policy as a case study to explore the use of media as a geopolitical instrument. The study intends to examine the techniques used by Russia, primarily through Sputnik Türkiye, to influence Turkish public opinion and promote Russian goals.

This study applies a case study method in conjunction with content analysis to investigate Sputnik Türkiye's attempts at shaping Turkish public opinion towards the Ukrainian war, with a specific focus on the period between February 24, 2022, and May 24, 2022. This three-month span provides for a thorough examination of Sputnik Türkiye's narratives and tactics in the initial period of the conflict during which Russia laid out its media strategy.

The content analysis method is used to analyze the content of Sputnik Türkiye methodically. Themes, narratives, framing, tone, and persuasive techniques are uncovered and evaluated to identify trends and patterns in how Sputnik Türkiye aims to influence Turkish public opinion. The

analysis also takes into account the setting of the Ukrainian war and its influence on the media frames that are supplied by Sputnik Türkiye.

This qualitative research tends to be time-sensitive and place-specific, therefore it cannot be constructed for the entire community (a particular area of interest) or additional case studies. In the meantime, it enables the creation of a more comprehensive and detailed image of the practical environment under research, as well as the identification of essential underlying features that may offer significant findings for future investigations in this area along with additional case studies.

1.4 LIMITATIONS OF THE THESIS

There are certain limitations to consider in the context of the Ukrainian crisis and its relationship to the accessibility of the Sputnik Türkiye webpage. These limitations involve technical difficulties, difficulty following the page layout, and issues in monitoring news updates due to the website's inaccessibility. The dependence on alternate platforms such as Telegram to stay informed enhanced the frequently chaotic emergence of material for news.

The utilization of Telegram as an alternate platform for news updates sometimes limited content organization and cohesiveness. The format and capabilities of Telegram might be incompatible with traditional news transmission processes, potentially resulting in fractured or disorganized delivery of news. As a result, Sputnik Türkiye's ability to track news flow and comprehend the broader narrative change may have been damaged, affecting an in-depth understanding of the happenings regarding the Ukrainian war.

In addition to all of this, and perhaps most importantly, this study examines only the portion of the content featured in Sputnik Türkiye from the date of February 24, 2022, when the Ukraine invasion began, until May 24, 2022. Therefore, the conclusions drawn from this study, covering approximately a three-month period, are different from the subsequent stages of development and transformations and cannot make generalizations for the entire process. However, we still believe this limited period throws light to Russia's ensuing media policy regarding Türkiye, as it is the first months in which this strategy was laid out.

1.5 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In this section, we will delve into the historical perspective of Russia's outlook towards Ukraine and the evolution of their bilateral relations, while also conducting an analysis of Türkiye's position in the delicate balances of the Black Sea region. Understanding the historical background of the region and these three states is crucial for comprehending the ongoing disputes that persist in the present day.

1.5.1 Russian Foreign Policy and Geopolitical Aims

First of all, it is necessary to look deeper into the concept of "nation-building" to acquire a better understanding of the ethnic-identity conflicts that have arisen between Russia and Ukraine. Russia's interaction with Ukraine has been hampered by historical, cultural, and ethnic concerns, contributing to the formation of multiple drawbacks. These issues frequently focus on territorial sovereignty, linguistic variety, and historical narratives. Post-Soviet nation-building involves categorizing nationality and ethnicity based on political, social, and cultural factors seen during the Soviet era. The dilemma of identity and nationhood originates from the former Soviet region. Initial Bolshevik policies aimed to mobilize the working class, potentially assimilating their interests, yet Russian identity remained dominant despite Moscow's promotion of non-Russian identities. Suppressing traditional ways of life was part of creating the "Soviet man." Examining nation-building from this historical lens influenced how dilemmas of ethnic and national identity are understood (Isaacs & Polese, 2016: 6-7).

In the years following 1991, the US implemented a comparable expansionist policy to that of the EU by striving to secure NATO membership for the Eastern European countries. The fundamental motivation behind the US approach was to assert control in the Black Sea region and impede Russia, viewed as a competitor, from accessing warm waters. Regarding Türkiye has assumed a position of balance during the Ukraine crisis. This can be attributed to several factors, including Russia being a crucial trading partner for Türkiye, Türkiye's significant reliance on Russia for natural gas, and the substantial tourism income generated from Russian visitors (Konak,

2022: 173-174). On the other hand, Russia was a partner of the US after 9/11 in the “War on Terror.” Obama declared a “reset” in Russian-American relations, and there were regular Russia-NATO talks. Europe supplied most of its energy from Russia. Putin even offered the US intelligence assistance. Then, Russia gradually alienated itself from the West after the Color Revolutions rather than the West excluding Russia (Blank, 2002).

Taking into account the presence of the Russian Fleet in the city of Sevastopol, Ukraine, the control of the Black Sea has been deemed crucial from Russia's standpoint. Throughout history, the Black Sea has consistently held strategic significance for Russia (Yapıcı, 2011: 31-32). Despite facing economic sanctions and the subsequent adverse economic conditions, Russia remained firm in its unlawful annexation of Crimea and was even willing to employ its energy resources as a means of exerting pressure on the EU. This same pattern was evident today in Russia's purported operation against Ukraine, initiated on February 24, 2022, until EU countries significantly cut their energy imports from Russia.

In the early 2000s, Vladimir Putin, president of Russia, began to signal a shift in Russia's stance towards Europe's security structure and economic zone. According to Aydın Bezikoğlu (2022: 29-30), this marked a departure from the position taken by Boris Yeltsin. During the Munich Security Conference on February 10, 2007, Putin suggested that Russia could utilize a range of methods, including economic, political, media, propaganda, and even military means, to counter NATO expansion and increase its influence in the Soviet region. The US invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan created a conducive environment for Russia's unilateral actions. Russia began to leverage its energy resources, diaspora, military power, and remaining conflicts to consolidate its geopolitical power. For instance, during the Orange Revolution in Ukraine in 2004, Russia supported anti-revolutionary forces and employed hybrid warfare tactics, such as attempting to poison Viktor Yushchenko. Russia also threatened to cut off Ukraine's natural gas, increased prices, and ultimately suspended gas supplies due to unpaid debts. Notably, Russia had earlier pledged to respect Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, as well as to guarantee the sale of cheap gas, in line with the Budapest Memorandum of 1994. Despite this pledge, Russia continued to pursue its quest for geopolitical superiority by advancing its energy leverage against Europe. Putin's signaling of a shift in Russia's stance towards Europe's security and economic structure is a critical

development in international relations. It has resulted in an increased use of a range of tools to project Russian influence, including military intervention, economic measures, and propaganda tactics. These developments have significant implications for European security and Russia's relations with the West.

With the strengthening of Putin's power in the mid-2000s and the recovery of the Russian economy due to increasing oil prices, Russia initiated its opposition to NATO's expansion in 2007. The establishment of close relations between Georgia and Ukraine with NATO during this period began to be perceived as a threatening development. According to numerous Russian political scientists, the lack of inclusive peace practices by the West following the Cold War, along with exclusionary actions against Kremlin administrations, has prompted Putin to pursue a revisionist foreign policy and undertake actions that could have implications for European security. In addition, oligarchs and Putin have prioritized the narratives of NATO expansion and the perceived encirclement of Russia by the legacy of the Cold War-era NATO in shaping Russian foreign policy. Their objective has been to preserve their dominance over economic and energy resources and to uphold political and economic influence in the former Soviet territories (Özçelik, 2022: 188-190). According to Russia's viewpoint, NATO and the EU are perceived as hindrances to Russia's geopolitical goals. These entities are considered rivals that necessitate the utilization of various foreign policy instruments to overcome them.

By establishing an authoritarian regime, Putin transformed Russia's foreign policy into a security-oriented structure. Furthermore, the annexation of Crimea by Russia on February 27, 2014, disrupted the trust-building efforts of the post-Cold War era and exemplified the systematic employment of hybrid warfare techniques. Through this annexation, Russia combined propaganda and disinformation methods, which had been developed since the communist era, with modern technology to enhance their efficacy. Several media outlets in the West and Türkiye have directly incorporated news from Russian propaganda channels by translating them and featuring them in their news sections. This practice continues to persist to this day (Aydın Bezikoğlu, 2022: 13).

Shortly after the annexation of Crimea, Russian President Vladimir Putin paid a visit to Türkiye in December 2014. As a result of the sanctions imposed by the EU, Putin announced the abandonment of the South Stream pipeline project, which was intended to directly transport natural

gas from the Black Sea to Europe through an underwater route. Instead, he introduced the TurkStream project, which would facilitate the transportation of gas from Russia to Europe via Türkiye. While the Western press attributed this development to Türkiye's constructive approach during the crisis, the underlying goal of Russia was to minimize the involvement of Eastern European countries, along with Türkiye, Greece, and Bulgaria, with the EU and NATO (Konak, 2022: 175).

Throughout its history, Russia has considered its historical awareness and hegemonic position as fundamental to its identity. Consequently, a limited perspective that solely examines the geopolitical realities would not adequately explain the reasons behind Russia's occupation of Crimea. In reality, the annexation was motivated by the longstanding imperialism ideology that has been recurrently propagated in Russian history. Looking at the 2014 annexation from the Russian perspective, the justification for the occupation was predicated upon the allegation that Russian citizens were being subjected to discrimination and that the Ukrainian Russian population and Russian identity were in peril. However, this justification was merely a propaganda tool. Indeed, the Russian language and its influence were dominant in various societal spheres such as media, education, and the public space. Moreover, the survey conducted by Russia itself before the annexation was incongruous with the argument presented by Russia, further highlighting the propagandistic nature of the justification (Aydın Bezikoğlu, 2022: 15,26).

Russian President Vladimir Putin delivered a speech (Fisher, 2022) on February 24, 2022, in which he attempted to garner national and international support for Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Putin claimed that he had been trying to negotiate a compromise with NATO for 30 years regarding their expansion to the East, but was met with lies, pressure, and blackmail from Western politicians. He argued that old agreements and conventions had lost their validity and that the current international legal norms were designed by the winners of the Cold War in their favor. Putin attempted to legitimize Russia's actions while disparaging NATO by citing examples of their alleged unlawful actions in Belgrade and Libya. He accused NATO and the US of violating international law and ethics while ignoring his actions that disregarded international law. Putin further claimed that the West aimed to erase Russia from the stage of history, and the current situation in Ukraine threatened Russia's sovereignty. He stated that Russia had no choice but to

save its compatriots from the persecution of far-right nationalists and neo-nazis in Ukraine, and they did not have any intention of invading Ukraine. Putin emphasized Russia's nuclear power and advanced technologies and stated that de-nazifying and disarming Ukraine was a matter of life and death for them.

Paramilitary organizations in Crimea, which have been financially backed and politically endorsed by Russia since the early 1990s, have been endeavoring to instill fear and subjugate the populace through their adherence to the ideology of Neo-Nazism (Aydın Bezikoğlu, 2022: 30). Similar to its actions in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, Russia employed the illusion of "the will of the local population" to justify its occupation in Crimea. For years, Russia had conducted an extensive information bombardment in Crimea, with three separate target audiences: Crimea itself, Russia, and the global community. Moscow actively engaged in efforts aimed at each of these targets (Şamilkızı, 2021).

Whereas, according to the agreement signed with NATO in 1997, Russia would not interfere with NATO's enlargement or which countries would be involved in NATO. On the other hand, NATO would not plant nuclear weapons in these countries (NATO, 1997). Not only did Putin openly ignore the agreement, but he also tried to interpret international law in his favor. In their statement to Medyascope (2022), Suat Kınıkoğlu stated that Russia has made great investments since the early 2000s to increase its influence in Turkish domestic public opinion and to enable the events to be evaluated in favor of Russia. It is known that Sputnik, despite being banned in many parts of the world, has over one million followers in Türkiye and has succeeded in influencing the Turkish public directly with various cunning strategies, as can be seen in the example of the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine. On the other hand, Ömer Taşpınar claims that with the start of the Ukraine War, the world is moving towards a Cold War-like conjuncture. Former KGB agent Putin, who sees the collapse of the Soviet Union as a tragedy, wants to approach the bipolar world order he desires by expanding his sphere of influence against NATO.

Russia seeks to steer politics by leveraging the ethnic Russian population in the eastern and southern regions of the country, as well as Ukraine's economic dependence on Russia. In contrast, the West exercises its influence through the collaboration mechanisms of civil society organizations, the European Union, and NATO. Since the Putin era, which commenced in 2000,

Russia's approach towards its neighboring regions has transformed. Putin's objective is to reestablish Russia as a significant power, regain its lost prestige, and exert control over the immediate vicinity. From the Russian standpoint, Ukraine's strong relations with the West are perceived as a potential existential threat to Russia's national security (Bingöl, 2014: 21,26). As a consequence, Russia dedicates substantial budgets to propaganda and disinformation efforts to sway public opinion in its favor among the Ukrainian and Russian populations, as well as the global community. This effectively turns the media into a tool of foreign policy and a key element of its hybrid warfare strategy.

Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the majority of former Eastern Bloc nations opted to integrate into the European Union or NATO or establish close ties to the West, thereby aligning their objectives with Western interests. Consequently, not only did this engender substantial political transformations, but it also entailed far-reaching changes in trade regulations within the region. Russia, which experienced a decline in both its political and commercial influence, made efforts to adapt to the capitalist system during the 1990s. By the 2000s, Russia embarked on a course of action aimed at expanding its control over the former Soviet territories, Eastern Europe, and the Black Sea region. Ukraine, possessing a significant population and economic prowess in the region, became a target of Russia's economic and political pressures. The Orange Revolution unfolded in 2004, and the societal movement triggered by the Euromaidan process in 2013 spiraled out of control, leading to Russia's occupation of Crimea on February 27, 2014. Subsequently, Russia officially annexed Crimea through a controversial referendum held in March of the same year. Russia's behavior can be attributed to its dual objective of impeding Ukraine's alignment with Western nations and safeguarding the security of its crucial economic strength, which revolves around energy resources and transit routes (Konak, 2022: 163-165). Similarly, Aydın (2022: 9) states that the Euromaidan Revolution stands as the primary and most successful endeavor to counteract Russia's expansion into the post-Soviet region.

Recognizing Russia's regional influence, the EU and NATO adopted expansionist policies in an attempt to diminish its power and assert its influence in the region. Russia, keenly observing these expansionist policies, escalated its pressure on Ukraine. This increase in pressure was fueled by Russia's strategic location and its control over crucial energy resources. As a result, Russia

achieved significant success in exerting its influence over Ukraine until the emergence of the Euromaidan movement. The commencement of Russia's use of natural gas supply as a means to augment its geopolitical power coincided with the early years of Putin's presidency in the early 2000s. Ukraine, being near Russia, depended on Russian natural gas to fulfill its energy requirements. However, as Ukraine exhibited a pro-Western stance, it underwent trials of its reliance on natural gas from Russia, enduring pressures and sanctions (Konak, 2022: 167-169).

Russia is a nation that has demonstrated a willingness to exploit its reserves of oil and natural gas to attain geopolitical influence. As a result, it has devoted both its economic and military power exclusively to advancing its geopolitical agenda. The establishment of the Commonwealth of Independent States in 1991, which sought to compel neighboring states to join the union, served as an emblem of Russia's ongoing entrenchment within a colonialist history, following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. However, the Ukraine crisis transcended the geopolitical importance of the country's role in energy routes for Russia. Ukraine possesses both historical and cultural significance for Russia (Aydın Bezikoğlu, 2022: 27-28). The motivation behind the annexation of Crimea by Russia can be traced back to Russia's inability to establish a distinct identity separate from its imperialist past and its subsequent reliance on previously employed instruments. The acceptance of Ukraine's independence by Russia would trigger an identity crisis and necessitate a complete overhaul of Russia's historical narrative (Aydingün & Biletska, 2021).

1.5.2 Türkiye's Approach Towards Russia-Ukraine War

Türkiye's ties with Russia have generally been flammable, with one of the major causes being developments in the Black Sea region, in addition to Türkiye's NATO and the US relationships. Russia's aggressive Black Sea strategies have made bilateral relations harder to stabilize. Periodically, Russia's actions in the Black Sea have hampered the development of good relations based on collaboration, making it difficult for Türkiye to adopt a balanced approach toward both the West and Russia.

Türkiye and Russia were on opposing sides during World War I. In the 1920s and 1930s, however, they attempted to establish a fresh era in bilateral ties by boosting collaboration in the

Black Sea region. The Friendship and Neutrality Agreement of 1925 established a peaceful environment. Türkiye joined NATO in 1952, although members of the Warsaw Pact, particularly the Soviet Union, preserved a delicate balance in the Black Sea throughout the Cold War. During the 1990s, rivalry was dominant, but cooperation became more important later on. Russia's aggressive actions in recent years, particularly after 2000, culminating in the annexation of Crimea, have undermined cooperation and trust within the Black Sea region. Türkiye had anticipated for Black Sea countries to handle regional concerns, but Russia's aspirations for domination have put Türkiye's Black Sea policy in jeopardy. Ankara stayed solid in NATO, while former Soviet republics developed fresh ties with the organization. With the accession of Romania and Bulgaria in 2007, the European Union also became a prominent player in the region, establishing itself as a Black Sea power. However, the EU's enlargement strategy was delayed, and instead, a European Neighborhood Policy was introduced to enhance economic, social, cultural, and legal collaboration with nations such as Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova (Şahin, 2023: 116-121).

On the other hand, according to Aydın (2005:62), established in June 1992, the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) stands out as the most extensively institutionalized indigenous organization within the region. It formally acquired the status of a "regional economic organization" possessing international legal recognition on May 1, 1999, with the enactment of its Charter. Remarkably, it constitutes the sole entity encompassing all six Black Sea nations (namely Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania, Russia, Türkiye, and Ukraine), alongside six adjacent countries (comprising Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Greece, Moldova, Serbia, and Montenegro). Similarly, Aydın (2022: 11) underlines that Ukraine recognizes that Türkiye maintains robust economic connections with Russia, similar to Ukraine's challenge of broadening its trade and infrastructure links away from Russia.

However, the rivalry between Türkiye and Russia in the 1990s has evolved into cooperation driven by calculated approaches amidst contextual changes in the 2000s. Economic ties and energy collaboration have altered how Russia is perceived by the Turkish public. The complex history and national interests of both countries raise questions about the nature of their multidimensional partnership (Çelikkpala, 2015: 138). During the 10th Conference of Balkan Countries' Chiefs of General Staff held in 2016, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan conveyed to NATO

Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg that the absence of NATO forces in the Black Sea rendered it a “Russian lake,” emphasizing that restoring stability to the Black Sea region would entail enhancing NATO's presence in the area (Al Jazeera Turk, 2016). With NATO and the European Union's efforts to improve relations with the region, the already sensitive balances in the Black Sea, with its fragile dynamics, have become even more difficult. Disagreements, which were more abstract before the dissolution of the Soviet Union, were more acute after its dissolution. The West's growing interest and activity in the region sparked tensions that could escalate to conflict. Furthermore, Russia's actions in the region, motivated by its interests rather than regional goals, have resulted in failed attempts at regional cooperation.

On the other hand, Russia's near-abroad policy, which is centered on protecting and promoting the Russian diaspora, has drastically disturbed the Black Sea region's balance. The official start of Putin's administration in Russia was a watershed point in the country's foreign policy, which was openly proclaimed at the 2007 Munich Security Conference, where NATO was accused for the first time of seeking growth dangerously. Putin's principal objective was to keep Russia's influence in the region from eroding and to discourage former Soviet governments from forming tight connections with Western nations and alliances. Within this background, Türkiye attempted to maintain a delicate balance in its relations with both Russia and the United States. However, Türkiye had to tread carefully in this environment as it faced a series of important events. The Russian invasion of Georgia in 2008 and the annexation of Crimea in 2014 obliged Türkiye to stand up to Moscow's actions, but without using overtly confrontational rhetoric toward Russia (Şahin, 2022: 250-258).

In the 2000s, Türkiye developed bilateral relations with countries such as Ukraine, Georgia, and Ukraine in the Black Sea region. The aim was to maintain a balance in these relations and to uphold the Montreux Convention to prevent foreign powers' entry into the region. During this period, Russia emerged as Türkiye's second-largest trading partner (Aydın, 2017). As tensions between NATO and Russia escalate in the Black Sea region, it is observed that efforts towards ensuring security and stability in the area have similarly diminished. The Black Sea region has witnessed a shift in the balance of power since 2014, with Türkiye losing its naval superiority to Russia (Çelikkpala & Erşen, 2018: 85-88). Over the years, Türkiye, while striving to maintain the

Montreux equilibrium, has experienced periods of conflicts and collaborations with Russia. However, the invasion of Ukraine by Russia in 2022 has further complicated the nature of these relations, leading to a more ambivalent stance.

Türkiye has not found a definite solution to the Black Sea's fragile balance. While Türkiye does not publicly oppose Russia, it attempts to strike a balance that serves its interests. From World War I to the present, Türkiye has maintained a policy of maintaining this sensitive equilibrium in the Black Sea to various degrees. When Russia invaded Ukraine on February 24, 2022, Türkiye adopted a similar strategy, refusing to participate in Western sanctions on Russia and instead taking a posture alongside Ukraine, even acting as a mediator in the eyes of the international public. Yet, Türkiye's efforts to abolish or convey its willingness to reduce hurdles in NATO-ex-Soviet relations have caused ambiguity in its ties with Russia.

Interfax-Ukraine (2020) stated that, according to Türkiye's Ambassador to Ukraine, Yağmur Ahmet Güldere, talks placed between Ankara and Kyiv regarding the potential collaboration and potential production of Bayraktar UAVs in Ukraine, contingent upon the presence of favorable circumstances. Türkiye's seemingly ambivalent stance stems from its commercial ties and energy dependencies on Russia. Despite Türkiye's efforts to adopt Western-oriented policies in its foreign policy, this situation prevents it from completely turning its back on Russia. Indeed, Türkiye's disagreements with its Western partners occasionally lead to closer ties with Russia

CHAPTER 2 - THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Hybrid warfare is a concept that refers to the blending of conventional warfare elements with irregular warfare strategies such as propaganda and disinformation, used in combination (Wither, 2016: 75). On the other hand, information warfare, which aims to establish dominance over a target audience through the management of information using technology, manifests itself through Russia's use of bot accounts, trolls, and media organizations to create false news or distort information (Prier, 2017: 73).

An increasing corpus of academic research is focused on framing, post-truth, disinformation, public diplomacy, fake news, and propaganda in the context of today's global information environment. This theoretical section aims to investigate the complex relationships between these elements, looking at how they interact and what impact they have on modern society. It is crucial to understand the dynamics through which these elements combine in an age marked by a tsunami of information and rapidly evolving communication technologies because they play a crucial role in forming public discourse, shifting beliefs, and influencing democratic structures.

In this context, this chapter will discuss certain instruments and elements that could potentially affect public dialogue in such an environment. By doing this, it seeks to make it easier to recognize and analyze the subtext's underlying themes as indicated by Sputnik Türkiye. Through this effort, it will be possible to gain a more nuanced understanding of the messages and themes that are being conveyed, allowing for a more sophisticated grasp of their implications and effects on the greater discourse surroundings.

2.1 HISTORY OF USE OF PROPAGANDA IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Propaganda can be defined as "the deliberate, systematic attempt to influence perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behavior to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist" (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2015: 6). Propaganda evolved and expanded throughout society in the modern era, especially during periods of conflict and political turmoil. Propaganda

was used by governments to encourage support for armed conflict, demonize rivals, and foster a bond between people. Along with diplomacy, financial agreements, and armed forces, propaganda is a tool of overall strategy. Political propaganda on the other hand is the control of public media for political ends (Lasswell, 1951: 214). States and political actors use propaganda as a tool to influence public perceptions and behavior. Instead of appealing to people's logical reasoning, propaganda, in Lasswell's opinion (1927) works by utilizing their feelings, biases, and prejudices. Lasswell also points out that propaganda can be used to influence how people perceive the world by selectively providing some information while ignoring or distorting others. In other words, propaganda is a critical weapon that, based on who uses it and for what goals, can be utilized for both good and bad purposes.

As pointed out by Jowett & O'Donnell (2015: 59-64), propaganda is an ancient strategy with roots dating back to ancient Greece, often effectively utilized by rulers to perpetuate and fortify their power. For instance, the ancient Egyptians managed to create psychological pressure over a vast territory despite lacking any significant mass communication techniques. This accomplishment was achieved by Egyptian rulers through imagery and symbols depicting the potential ferocity of their adversaries, thereby reinforcing their authority. Similar strategies, which can be considered as early examples of propaganda techniques, were also employed by leaders such as Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar. Julius Caesar, for example, demonstrated the initial manifestation of mass propaganda through the coins he minted, using them to symbolize and sustain the might of the state.



Figure 1: Julius Caesar's Coin (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2015)

Another illustrative instance pertains to Benjamin Franklin's renowned illustration that proposed a “Plan of Union” for the colonies and gained widespread recognition. The artwork, initially featured in the *Pennsylvania Journal* on May 9, 1754, drew inspiration from the belief that a snake, once severed, might regain vitality if its constituent parts were reassembled before nightfall. Each distinct segment of the artwork symbolized an individual colony. This representation experienced a resurgence during the Stamp Act Crisis of 1765 and was revived again at the outset of the American Revolution in 1774. Concurrently, in the lead-up to the French Revolution, newspapers emerged as a pivotal component of propaganda. Critics who wrote for these newspapers, a significant portion of whom were adept propagandists, intensified their critical discourse against the monarchy and the government. Their efforts contributed to fostering a climate conducive to the effective use of propaganda as a prominent tool during the French Revolution. In subsequent years, Napoleon also significantly leveraged propaganda, often depicting himself as a heroic figure valiantly contending with adversities in visual representations, cast as the “Emperor of Europe” (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2015: 89, 95-98).



Figure 2: Plan of Union (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2015)



Figure 3: Depictions of Napoleon (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2015)

With the advent of the 1917 Russian Revolution, novel and intricate communication technologies emerged. These encompassed telegraphy, newspapers, photography, radio, and the film industry. For instance, in revolutionary Russia, Lenin utilized propaganda to mobilize the working classes through art and music and to facilitate education in line with communist principles. Similarly, immediately following the 1961 Cuban Revolution, the new government deployed an “army of traveling students” known as “*maestros ambulantes*” to teach illiterate workers reading and writing skills through books embodying revolutionary values.

Following the First World War, the costs of traditional warfare became apparent, prompting states to realize their ability to exert influence over target audiences through advanced mass communication mediums such as newspapers, posters, and cinema. In democratic nations, the concept of propaganda continued to be put into action under labels such as “information services”

or "public education." Beginning in 1917 in Soviet Russia and later from 1933 in Nazi Germany, the notion of propaganda became increasingly associated with these countries. Throughout history, propaganda has been employed by states such as the United States, Nazi Germany, and Soviet Russia to exert influence over people using mediums like painting, cinema, and symbols according to the prevailing circumstances. Propaganda was utilized by these states to influence individuals through various mediums, tailored to the conditions of their time.

In this regard, a silent film titled "Battleship Potemkin," directed by Sergei Eisenstein in 1925, with its original title "*Броненосец «Потёмкин»*" was produced. The film dramatizes the events of the rebellion that transpired in 1905 on the Russian warship Potemkin, where the crew staged a mutiny against the tyrannical regime of the vessel's officers. Especially, this film recognized not only for its significance in Soviet history but also as a cornerstone of the relationship between cinema and propaganda in global cinematic history, established one of the earliest and most striking examples of art being wielded as a weapon. The sentiment expressed by Goebbels, who emphasized the insignificance of art devoid of purpose, found resonance with "Potemkin," prompting admiration and even leading to a desire for a Nazi rendition of the film (Sennet, 2014: 54). Another example of the utilization of cinema for propagandistic purposes is the German production "Triumph of the Will," originally titled "*Triumph des Willens*." Funded by the Nazi Party and directed by Leni Riefenstahl, the film serves as a propaganda vehicle to portray the magnificence of the newly established National Socialist state. In terms of its conveyed messages, technical execution, and utilization of symbols, the film lacks no less than the film Battleship Potemkin in its propagandistic impact (Rizvi, 2014: 78-80).

Furthermore, during the two World War periods witnessed by the world, propaganda was extensively employed. Newspapers emerged as the most influential and successful propaganda tool during these periods. Additionally, significant ideas were conveyed to target audiences through books, an extension of the printed media. Adolf Hitler's work "*Mein Kampf*" stands as an illustrative example in this regard. Joseph Goebbels, the propaganda minister of Nazi Germany, explained in a conversation with Hitler that following the establishment of the Ministry of Propaganda, all matters influencing news and culture should be linked to it (Doob, 1950: 424). Beyond these avenues, movies constituted another platform for propaganda. According to Clark (1997: 136-142)

in the case of the United States, Nazi Germany, and Soviet Russia, methods involving visual arts, cinema, and symbolic representations were used to sway public sentiment. This was observable, for instance, during the Vietnam War, which cast a shadow over the extensive range of societal issues addressed by protest art in Europe throughout the 1960s and early 1970s. Notably, artist Wolf Vostell from Germany extensively addressed the theme of war within his graphic compositions, employing modified or manipulated media visuals for impactful communication. Guided by the notion of "The camera is a rifle," the significance of cinema was realized, driving governments to extensively exploit them to develop narrative sequences in their favor and against their competitors. For instance, in Latin America, the emergence of radical approaches to cinema has gotten some backing from newly founded revolutionary regimes, particularly from the early 1960s. In Cuba, immediately after Fidel Castro took control, the Cuban Institute of Film Art and Industry was founded to produce documentaries and feature films that promoted the communist revolution's goals.

By the late 1940s and 1950s, the United States, particularly through platforms funded by the CIA like the New York Museum of Modern Art, witnessed curator statements that juxtaposed the symbol of freedom with Soviet communism. These strategies left more pronounced effects on the generation of artists and critics, becoming even more radicalized alongside the Vietnam War and the civil rights movement (Clark, 1997: 7-9).

Particularly in the aftermath of World War II, the US effectively utilized Hollywood for this purpose. A recent example, the film titled "Fahrenheit 9/11," serves as a vivid instance of the propaganda strategies employed through cinema by the US. Similarly, radio broadcasting was widely utilized for both domestic and foreign press purposes through international broadcasting, with both Germans and Soviets making substantial use of this medium. Platforms such as the British BBC and American VOA, as well as Radio Moscow, Radio Beijing, Radio Liberty, and Radio Free Europe notably served analogous objectives during the Cold War era (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2015: 114-148). Thus, the aim was to achieve the effectiveness of propaganda and its reach to the entire target audience.

As another example, on March 16, 1968, the My Lai massacre took place involving the killing of approximately 500 unarmed women, children, and elderly individuals by American

soldiers. Information about the massacre is derived from sources such as documents from army investigations, congressional hearings, court-martial transcripts, documentaries, and firsthand accounts from survivors of the massacre. Although Charlie Company and their superiors within the American division attempted to cover up the massacre, the incident was brought to light by Spec. Ron Ridenhour learned of the event from his comrades who had participated in the atrocity (Cookman, 2007: 154).

In a similar vein, post-1979 Iran successfully implemented comparable propaganda strategies that found resonance worldwide. After the Iranian Islamic Revolution in the year 1979, the monarchy came to an end in Iran. The anti-Western policies pursued by the leadership under Ayatollah Khomeini resulted in Western countries adopting a critical stance towards Iran, consequently leading to Iran's increasing isolation on the international stage. This, in turn, prompted Iran to adopt a more radical political approach. Subsequently, the Iran-Iraq War, in which Iranian clerics played a significant role in propagating the conflict, became a platform for propaganda activities. The assault by the Iraqi military was exploited as a propaganda tool to legitimize the new regime both within the Iranian public and on the international front, particularly targeting Muslim nations. This propaganda was disseminated through the medium of cinema and various posters (Çakı, 2018: 16-20).

When considering propaganda from the perspective of the US, especially the discourse initiated in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks, aimed at the global war on terrorism, symbolized a battle of ideas similar to the ideological contest of the Cold War era. The United States required a more consistent approach to propaganda and perception management compared to its historical practices. Consequently, in 2002, a Global Communications Office was established within the White House to coordinate this campaign. Enhancements were made to the broadcasts of Voice of America, including broadcasts in foreign languages, including Arabic, and more resources were allocated to cultural exchange programs with citizens from Islamic countries. To maintain the coherence and credibility of a nation, its image and actions must be synchronized. In this context, the desire of the United States to prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and to promote regime change in places like Iraq has posed limitations from the standpoint of “democratic propaganda” (Taylor, 2003: 318-319).

The concept of disinformation, on the other hand, can be considered as one component of propaganda, refers to a meticulously crafted untrue message that is covertly inserted into the adversary's communication channels with the intention of misleading both decision-makers and the general public (Ajir, 2018: 72). On the other hand, Misinformation, which we can describe as a natural consequence of the inaccurate operation of the fact-checking process even if it does not have a deliberate agenda like disinformation, similarly poses a significant threat in the era of advancing technology and widespread media, leading to the dissemination of false information to large audiences (Lewandowsky et al., 2018: 108).

2.2 HISTORY OF USE OF MEDIA AND PROPAGANDA IN RUSSIAN FOREIGN POLICY

The development of the press and mass media in Russia has been significantly influenced by the prevailing political atmosphere both within the country and its surrounding regions. Vedomosti, Russia's first newspaper, was founded in 1702 to distribute information aligned with Tsar Peter I the Great's intentions and agenda, rather than serving the public's interests. In contrast to the competitive and privately motivated nature of the Western press, Russian news media has traditionally been primarily used as a political tool (Ognyanova, 2010: 3). Therefore, it might be considered one of the first branches of Russian propaganda. Aligned with this perspective, the Soviet Union established a multitude of institutions dedicated to employing both apparent and propaganda techniques, aiming to advance Russian interests on the global stage.

During the Soviet Union era, state media institutions were subject to almost unlimited control. Upon seizing power in 1917, the Bolsheviks faced challenges in fully establishing their authority, leading them to develop the idea of exerting dominance over the media. They sought to exert influence on public discourse through symbols and imagery, necessitating radical transformations in redefining societal values (Bonnell, 1997: 1-2). Access to information was restricted and limited to a privileged minority during the period of Soviet rule, while a large portion of the population was denied access to forbidden papers, publications, and films. The government saw the audience as fragile and endeavored to protect them from any content that could be

distressing or alarming. Furthermore, negative reports and coverage of home catastrophes were forbidden in Soviet newspapers. Similarly, during the Soviet Union era, the publication of newspapers in languages spoken by various ethnic groups was allowed; however, these publications were mandated to revolve around the theme of communism. Moreover, an unceasing propaganda drive was orchestrated. This campaign aimed to aid the evolving economic and social revolution by heightening ideological consciousness among the Soviet populace, while simultaneously aligning their prevailing notions and behaviors more closely with the emerging economic and social structure.

For apparent operations, the Soviet Union depended largely on news agencies such as Informationsnoye agentstvo Rossii (TASS) and RIA Novosti. These organizations were created with the specific objective of disseminating official state narratives to counter the influence of Western news organizations such as Reuters, France Presse (AFP), or the Associated Press (AP), while also supporting and furthering Russian foreign policy goals_(Zakem et al., 2017: 16). As stated by Bolsover (1948: 175-176), during the Soviet Union era, activities were conducted abroad, particularly as part of communist propaganda efforts. The endeavor aimed at the recipient nations to undertake significant economic shifts, encompassing swift industrialization and agricultural collectivization along with their associated outcomes. In a similar vein, Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti (KGB) used a separate division known as the "special disinformation office" to execute disguised operations (Van Herpen, 2016: 14).

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the media experienced a comparatively more liberal period between 1991 and 1999, in contrast to the previous era characterized by extensive propaganda. State funding for newspapers was discontinued, leading to price hikes and the breakdown of newspaper distribution systems. In this context, television, already a powerful medium, rose to prominence as the leading force in Russia (Ognyanova, 2010: 3-4).

Following the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, the new Russian Federation noticed its advantages in strategic communication and information warfare diminish. This declining trend continued until the early 2000s when Russian government officials and academics recognized the critical importance of monitoring information and communication as a vital aspect of their foreign strategy.

Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russia went on a path of enhancing its soft power by significantly expanding the capacity of its digital media. It quickly adjusted to the changing dynamics of the global arena. Furthermore, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs pioneered the notion of "innovative diplomacy," demonstrating the use of media as a tool in Russian foreign policy. As a result, Putin encouraged diplomats to use developing digital media technologies to effectively convey Russia's foreign policy objectives to both domestic and international audiences (Surowiec, 2017: 23). In a similar vein, Maréchal (2017: 38) argues that Moscow views internet governance, cybersecurity, and media policy as connected areas by evaluating Russia's history and current techniques of regulating the dissemination of information within its boundaries and on the global arena. Instead of considering these subjects separately, they are incorporated into Russia's foreign policy idea of "information security." Domestic monitoring, content restriction, and restrictive internet governance measures are inextricably related to the dissemination of misinformation globally, providing a strategic toolset to achieve geopolitical goals.

According to Meister (2018: 7-10), Russian disinformation and propaganda have undergone modernization in the digital age, becoming essential components of Russia's security strategy and hybrid warfare. This transformation occurred after Vladimir Putin came into power, driven by the perceived vulnerabilities stemming from events like color revolutions and large-scale demonstrations. Upon assuming the presidential office, Putin swiftly employed the media as a tool to solidify his authoritarian regime.

President Putin introduced the "Information Security" doctrine at the beginning of his presidency in reaction to shrinking communication capacity and to protect national information safety (Furman et al., 2023: 3). The Russian government has steadily encroached on media independence throughout the Putin period, ending in a neo-authoritarian media system. Neo-authoritarian media systems are an assortment of authoritarian as contrasted with totalitarian systems that have historically dominated and continue to dominate the globe as a whole. State-run media have limited autonomy in the neo-authoritarian atmosphere, and appointments to key positions are affected by loyalty to politicians (Becker, 2004: 147-149).

While the media had previously operated with a degree of independence, under Putin's administration, it underwent a complete subjugation, transforming into a puppet under government control. According to the Putin documentary produced by FRONTLINE PBS | Official (2023) During the Soviet Union era, the KGB was responsible for political surveillance. Nothing remained concealed from the KGB, and the daily lives of Soviet citizens were constantly monitored. In post-2000 Russia, Putin portrayed himself as a politically influential figure and a problem solver within the bureaucracy. Russia has long been characterized by bureaucratic autocracy. Before assuming power, Stalin was a prominent bureaucrat and rose above others. Putin followed a similar trajectory. He became a master of disinformation in hybrid warfare, largely drawing from his intelligence training. Putin projected himself as a man of action on television, actively crafting his public relations. He showcased his close ties with the military, emphasizing his command. Upon taking the presidential office, his initial promise to the Russian people was centered around augmenting power. Particularly following the aftermath of the Arab Spring, the plight of dictatorial leaders further fueled Putin's authoritarian tendencies. Putin initially dispatched forces to Ukraine, namely the “little green men” units, without clear evidence of their Russian affiliation. The purpose behind this move was to distance himself and the Russian military from unlawful actions. In a similar vein, as expressed in the aforementioned documentary, Putin, through his then-associate Yevgeny Prigozhin, directly intervened in the 2016 American elections. The United States grappled with the polarization brought about by this intervention for an extended period. This was orchestrated through misinformation campaigns involving seemingly American personas, pro-Kremlin trolls, automated bots, and notably, targeted advertisements on platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Google. Putin refuted allegations of his direct involvement in these activities.

In a similar vein, the British company Cambridge Analytica contributed to Donald Trump's election victory by improperly utilizing the data of millions of Facebook users during the period of the US elections. While the claim that the interaction was of a political nature was denied by Lukoil and its British subsidiary, the SCL Group, it was revealed that Cambridge Analytica and the SCL Group had been in contact with executives of the Kremlin-affiliated oil giant Lukoil while creating profiles derived from Facebook (Confessore, 2018).

As a responsive measure to Western actions, Russia's leadership utilizes cyberattacks, disinformation, and media manipulation, framed as a proportional reaction. The strategy encompasses the transformation of international media outlets like Sputnik and RT, which now offer negative perspectives on Western developments. The Russian media landscape, predominantly owned by the state, state-affiliated corporations, or closely associated oligarchs, lacks equilibrium, fact verification, and a clear delineation between subjective viewpoints and factual reporting. It functions as a dynamic learning system, adapting successful strategies and implementing them within a framework determined by leadership or clients. Beyond that, Russian disinformation, propaganda, and subversion appear to have been more effective than during the Cold War era, owing in part to increased levels of insecurity, decreased confidence, and weakened institutional faith in the Western world, as opposed to the safer environment during the Cold War period. Furthermore, the growth of social networks has greatly helped the spread of manufactured narratives and conspiracy theories.

An example of Russia's efforts to establish its closed-loop internet infrastructure, akin to China, can be observed following Vladimir Putin's ascent to power. China's endeavors in this regard are illustrative. Apart from stringent surveillance and suppression measures in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, the constant surveillance of the Chinese populace also evokes discomfort. For instance, the proposal to install surveillance cameras in 15,000 official taxis elicited significant backlash from taxi drivers. This reaction stems from the Chinese population's awareness that the accumulated data could potentially be wielded against them as a tool by the government in the future (Campbell, 2019).

The Russian Web Brigades, often known as pro-Russia trolls, are a group funded by the state anonymous online users with Russian government ties. Participants organize themselves into unique teams and commentator collectives, engaging in dialogue on both domestic and international social media platforms, blogs, and internet forums. The revelations from a former Russian troll offer important insight into the scope of this network, which is at the center of disinformation campaigns intended to spread pro-Putin and pro-Russian ideas. We can learn a lot from the experiences of a writer named Vitaly Beshpalov, who moved to St. Petersburg after responding to an advertisement for a "content manager." At 55 Savushkina Street in St. Petersburg,

which is well-known as the home of Russia's Internet Research Agency, Bespalov started his daily routine. Simple duties included creating fake social media accounts and distributing pre-written remarks as directed by superiors (Shuster & Ifraimova, 2008). Social media bots and troll accounts can create a false account or impersonate someone else to exaggerate a social issue, thereby generating public panic. They can also fabricate fake political support for a political figure or organization. This poses a significant problem that jeopardizes democracies and necessitates preventive measures (Alsmadi & O'Brien, 2020: 2).

2.3 THE ROLE OF MEDIA IN FOREIGN-POLICY MAKING

In this section, an analysis will be conducted to examine how changes in state foreign policies have occurred due to the increasing importance of media, the extent of media's growing role, and an exploration of the path leading to the development of hybrid warfare strategies.

2.3.1 Media, Public Diplomacy and Soft Power

The media's way of contributing to a nation's foreign policy is through public diplomacy. In comparison to other areas of diplomacy, public diplomacy is a relatively new discipline that gained prominence during the Cold War. During this period, public diplomacy operations included measures aimed at persuading Eastern European publics to adopt American and Western values. Concurrently, countermeasures were implemented within the Soviet Union and its Eastern bloc to counterbalance the perceived soft influence of the West. During the Cold War, for example, the use of cinema as a tool is an example of these attempts.

After the 9/11 attacks, public diplomacy acquired significance, especially for the US. Unlike its predecessor, which generally saw states as the only actors participating, the creation of "new public diplomacy" in response to advancements in communication technologies following 9/11 included a broader spectrum of actors outside states. Simons (2011: 324) argues that public diplomacy is an additional information tool for governments. In terms of procedures and purposes,

it is similar to public relations. It differs from traditional diplomacy, it seeks to engage directly with the population of another country.

Currently, traditional public diplomacy has given place to a modern interpretation closely associated with the concept of "soft power" (Nye, 1990). Public diplomacy's objective is to attract people's values and preferences by advancing perspectives or ideas which one might consider as soft power, rather than using threats or intimidation which one might consider as hard power. For instance, through the use of public diplomacy, there is a possibility to use it in counter-terrorism efforts, using persuasion to catch audiences' attention and prevent violent groups from taking the initiative.

International media outlets, such as Sputnik Türkiye, serve as effective soft power instruments. Their mission is to effectively portray and discreetly promote their home country's values and perspectives by influencing worldwide attitudes and public opinion while also adapting to a diverse, global audience amid ongoing globalization (Hutchings et al., 2015: 634). It is important because the reputation and journalistic content of media outlets play a significant role in shaping a nation's image. In essence, the habitual adoption of a non-objective news approach by media organizations undermines their credibility, harming the soft power of the nation they belong.

The BBC, for instance, contributes to nation branding by abiding by its Charter's ideals of impartiality, independence, and fairness (Miazhevich, 2018: 15-16). Even Western outlets such as BBC were guilty of closely following state internal and foreign policy such as portraying the Royal Family in a more favorable light and biased journalism during the Iraq War. Despite occasional subpar standards, it can be argued that, in a broader sense, it maintains an objective journalistic approach, unlike the pro-Russian media.

Russian media plays a manipulative role in the sense that Russia's image in its interactions with Western countries appears to be heavily influenced by its financial objectives. When Russia conveys its policies and activities to the West through the media, however, it tends to portray a more robust image than its geopolitical and geoeconomic qualities would normally anticipate, resulting in an incoherent state portrait. On the other hand, Saari (2014: 63) states that Russia's post-Soviet public diplomacy initiatives are similar to Cold War methods, but they lack an encompassing philosophy, ideals, and a long-term commitment to resources or accountability. The

present policy tends to be short-sighted and out of line with contemporary circumstances and they may ultimately undermine Russia's reputation and legitimacy in the region and eventually in the international arena.

In their study, Geyik and Yavuz (2023) emphasize that both sides, through the Ankara Embassies, engaged in public diplomacy via Twitter starting in 2022 during Russia's occupation of Ukraine, seeking to garner the support of the Turkish public opinion. Within this context, digital diplomacy is being evaluated within the framework of public diplomacy, and the public diplomacy conducted with the aim of altering Türkiye's neutral stance holds significance. According to the analysis, the majority of posts on the Twitter account of the Russian Embassy in Ankara are focused on allegations of Nazism and genocide related to the Ukrainian administration. The overarching narrative centers on Ukraine's allegations of attacks against civilians, its uncompromising stance, and the sanctions and attitudes of Western countries against Russia.

Similarly, in their work, Tam and Kurtuluş (2022) assessed the Russia-Ukraine War through YouTube comments and indicated that the comments highlight a positive disposition towards Russia, primarily directed at Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelensky's comedic aspect. Moreover, drawing from the comments, it is deduced that individuals' perspectives on the war are directly linked to Putin's image, given his KGB background and comparatively extensive wartime experience in contrast to Zelensky. This leads to the conclusion that Russia's rationale for the war is perceived as legitimate based on these considerations.

Apart from nation branding, Feklyunina (2008: 626) underlines that in the realm of foreign policy on the international stage, the images of politicians play a crucial role. These images are thought to have a substantial impact on how national interests are interpreted and how an appropriate foreign policy vision is formed. In this context, Putin endeavors to reshape his international image as the leader of a powerful state, Russia, guided by a strong leader, by disseminating bare and athletic photographs of himself to the press.

Understanding developments in Russian nation branding through media also includes the use of cultural diplomacy. Mark (2010: 62, 82) defines cultural diplomacy as an approach used by a state to achieve foreign policy objectives or support diplomatic goals through the use of its culture. This rhetorical behavior aims to forge a strong bond between culture and identity while also

exploiting culture to advance foreign policy goals. Importantly, cultural diplomacy can have an enormous effect on a state's identity because culture is a basic component of national identity. Valenza (2023: 401) argues that starting in 2012, the cultural sphere indulged in an intentional and systematic effort to establish a "new" identity through boundary-making and hostile discourse in Russian media. During the period corresponding to Dmitry Medvedev's presidency between 2008 and 2012, Russia's adopted cultural diplomacy was centered around a discursive identity structure that emphasized Russian ethnic heritage, the nation's mosaic composition, and its collective memory. Yet, after Putin's re-election in the 2012 presidential elections, these competing structures were replaced by a unified approach aimed at establishing an entirely new state-level identity by focusing on distinctions between the West and the EU and discriminating against different identities within the borders of Russia and "near-abroad."

At this point, it would be appropriate to touch upon the concept of framing, which is a structure present at both the macro and micro levels (Scheufele, 1999: 111). At the most general level, it pertains to the display behavior in which journalists and other communication specialists provide information in a fashion that corresponds with the target audience's existing basic structures, generating echoes of familiarity (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996: 176). This does not suggest that most journalists are attempting to invent a narrative or fool their audience. In fact, given their own media constraints such as framing, news gaps, and broadcast time, it is an essential tool for them to simplify the complicated nature of a subject (Gans, 2005: 81-82). In simple terms, frames are crucial tools for efficiently presenting somewhat complex subjects to the general public, such as stem cell research, by exploiting pre-existing cognitive frameworks. At the micro level, framing explains how people use information and presentation aspects to influence their impressions of certain topics (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007: 12).

Framing, according to framing theory, is a subconscious behavior affected by journalism practices, societal ideals, workplace culture, and structural constraints. A significant part of academic literature investigates the role of the media in conflict-affected communities. According to studies on conflict resolution, the media can have a significant impact not just by increasing differences or participating in direct manipulation to exacerbate hostilities, but also by assisting in post-conflict recovery and fostering ethnic reconciliation during peace-building efforts (Lee, 2010:

361-384). Frame theory is concerned with how a dispute is portrayed or interpreted through the use of particular keywords, standardized phrases, stereotyped visuals, information sources, and statements that generate conceptually supportive clusters of facts or conclusions (Entman, 1993: 51-52). Furthermore, media studies must address key concepts. Media frames serve as a technique for highlighting specific features of observed reality within a communication setting. Essentially, media frames outline problems, assign causes, make moral assessments, and then forecast their likely consequences (Yuksel-Pecen, 2018: 2).

2.3.2 Media Utilized for Propaganda as an Element of Hybrid Warfare

In the previous section, we explained that Russia seeks to employ the media as a means of foreign policy to convince its intended audience. This process of persuasion, as defined by Soules (2015: 3-7), aims to alter attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviors by meeting mutual needs. The process of persuasion transforms into propaganda when it is intentionally deceptive or when it is used to serve the interests of the propagator or institution by manipulating beliefs, values, and attitudes.

Propaganda aims to secure the compliance of the target audience and mobilize them to act in alignment with the propagator's interests. To effectively influence large populations, necessitates collaboration and the utilization of prominent communication channels. As a result, propaganda campaigns are typically carried out by affluent and influential individuals or organizations. Moreover, in the contemporary usage of propaganda, news management with a coordinated strategy holds a prominent position in positively presenting a narrative by minimizing negative information and minimizing harm to personal interests (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2015: 3). This circumstance elucidates the reason behind Russia's substantial investments in organizations such as the Sputnik news agency.

According to a specialized report produced by the GEC (Global Engagement Center, 2022), Russia's disinformation and propaganda network is constructed up of authorized, proxy, and unacknowledged communication channels and frameworks used to generate and amplify narratives. This network is supported by five main pillars: government-sanctioned communication

channels, state-sponsored global advertising, the cultivation of intermediary sources, the use of social media platforms for propagandistic motives, and the execution of cyber-enabled disinformation strategies. This paradigm encompasses not just the origins of disinformation and propaganda, but also the approaches utilized by these platforms.

2.3.3 Use of Social Media for Manipulation

Individuals are easily manipulated in social media to serve corporate interests. Individuals, the majority of whom are young people, are engaged in a competition to receive “likes” to feel validated, and corporations have found ways to monetize these preferences. By tracking these “likes,” companies can sell the acquired data to advertising firms, effectively converting these digital forms of currency into actual money. Essentially, users become voluntary intermediaries conveying the messages intended by companies or organizations (FRONTLINE PBS | Official (2023)).

In Russia, authoritarianism has become more noticeable as a form of government in the 2000s. The country has increasingly aimed to impose anti-democratic values nationwide and support the establishment of authoritarian regimes and institutions in other countries. This phenomenon, often referred to as "regime export," has become more common as these regimes distance themselves from the liberal values associated with the West. To bolster their support, authoritarian regimes have devised a strategy called "reconstruction of truth," which is primarily carried out through social media platforms. This strategy involves distorting facts and spreading disinformation and fake information, particularly by the Russian Web Brigades or the Russian Troll Army. Social media, being an unregulated space for information dissemination, poses significant risks. Experts agree that Russia skillfully employs these social media trolling tactics as a foreign policy tool, manipulating elections, provoking social movements, and mobilizing fascist, racist, and Islamophobic movements (Arman 2020, 7-8).

Valenza (2023: 423-424) asserts that in the post-Soviet environment, the production of hegemonic articulation targets not only Russian Federation citizens but also those living in post-Soviet territories culturally identified as "The Russian World." Foreign policy discourse in Russia

is an important tool for ensuring the regime's existence and popularity, particularly amid chaotic events that deviate from traditional understandings. This discourse, rather than being anchored in objective truths, focuses on presenting external dangers and directing and limiting citizens by its narrative.

The New York Times YouTube channel features a video (2018a) in which the experiences of former KGB agents are presented. *“Disinformation is deliberately distorted information that is secretly leaked into the communication process to deceive and manipulate,”* says Lawrence Martin-Bittman, former KGB agent. KGB agents were being held in a race on how many proposals for disinformation operations they submitted. This situation gives a clue that the issue of disinformation is a kind of state tradition in Russia. Likewise, in the same video, it is stated that the KGB, which had a multimillion-dollar disinformation budget during the Soviet era, also used 25% of its time to produce disinformation. One of the names that joined these agents in 1975 was the current President of Russia, Putin. They preferred to serve this distorted information to third-world countries such as India, where bribes could easily be given so that disinformation stories could spread easily. In addition, they had long-term disinformation studies. They were referencing a piece of fake news they had created years ago as if someone else had served it, distancing themselves from the lie they started years later. It was thought that this structure would disappear when the Soviet Union collapsed. On the contrary, over the years, Russia's use of the media as a foreign policy tool has become more widespread, and the budgets allocated for this cause have reached gigantic proportions.

It would be beneficial to address the concept of post-truth in this section. Oxford Languages (2016) selected the term “post-truth” as the Word of the Year in 2016. The post-truth concept, fundamentally characterized by the diminished influence of objective truths compared to emotions and personal beliefs in shaping public opinion on a specific subject, has been particularly employed, especially during the period following World War II, to sustain the belief in the achievement or imminent triumph of victory through the dissemination of fake news and manipulated photographs, thereby constructing a collective consciousness. In this context, the advancement of technology has led to a situation where the shadow of truth has superseded the truth itself, often overshadowing the genuine facts (Block, 2019: 76-77). The phenomenon of individuals being driven by emotions

rather than facts, coupled with states seeking to implement their foreign policy agendas through strategies that directly activate the emotions of target audiences, yields significant consequences. Furthermore, McComiskey (2017: 43) argues that if post-truth rhetoric remains unaddressed, there is a potential threat for it to replace concepts such as freedom, respect, security, and social justice with the prominent foreign hostility, isolationism, derogation, chaos, exclusion, divisiveness, and fear that came to the forefront during the 2016 presidential campaign in the United States.

In the Russian media, NATO and Western states are portrayed as bogeymen trying to destroy Russia, and it is pumped that Russia is trying to be destroyed with the expansion of NATO. In the video shared by the “CBC News: The National” YouTube channel (2022), it is stated that the destruction of Western hegemony is irreversible, and Putin's thoughts are repeated in the media by his propagandists. They also often repeat that in the event of a possible invasion, Russia can take Kyiv within days. It is possible to see the results of these efforts in the Russian public, who believe and repeat what they heard from Putin to reporters interviewing in Russia without questioning.

On the other hand, the concept of embedded journalism brings about the distortion of events during times of war. According to this form of journalism, the criterion for a news report being deemed “good” is independent of its accuracy. This concept earned its notoriety, particularly in the context of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. Providing exceedingly optimistic information about the course of the wars cast doubt upon its credibility. Although embedded journalism initially emerged as a relatively consistent form of reporting, subsequent developments such as rising costs, declining journalistic quality, and pressures have led to a questionable perception of journalistic integrity (The Independent, 2010).

Especially during the 2016 presidential election in the United States, the concept of “fake news” began to rise. Fake news is a type of propaganda in which false narratives are presented as actual news reports. This poses an increased risk, particularly on social media, where sensationalized false news narratives can quickly proliferate (Prier, 2017: 60). In the final days of the election, for instance, misinformation and factually inaccurate statements disseminated through social media surpassed the prevalence of news from credible sources. The US Director of National Intelligence released a report attributing a pivotal role to social media in undermining Hillary

Clinton and facilitating Trump's election due to these news items. In this context, it was observed that fake news propagated significantly faster than facts (Jensen, 2018: 115).

Russia's troll army holds critical importance in the dissemination of the aforementioned fake news and the effective utilization of the media component of the Russian foreign policy agenda. To ensure the effective dissemination of propaganda, "true believers," trolls, and bot networks employ strategies to gain visibility in prominent areas on platforms such as the trends section of Twitter through various efforts. By conducting propaganda activities across diverse platforms, including online news sources, traditional media, and integrated social media platforms, they possess the potential to influence target audiences (Prier, 2017: 52-53).

An encounter between Sputnik and the French diplomat Jean-Baptiste Mattei serves as another example of fake news. The Russian news agency Sputnik falsely reported on November 27, 2015, that Jean-Baptiste Mattei, a representative of France within NATO, had issued harsh criticisms of the Turkish military's shooting down of a Russian Su-24 warplane. According to the statement, Turkish activities were undermining the operation against the Islamic State militant group. However, Mattei later contradicted the Sputnik report, clearly acknowledging its falsity and characterizing the details as "pure fiction" (StopFake.org, 2015).

In a resolution adopted by the European Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee, it was stated that the Russian administration is carrying out a propagandistic campaign to erode Europe's core principles. The resolution emphasized that the Kremlin has specifically targeted individual journalists and political actors in the European Union. It emphasized that Moscow uses a variety of strong mechanisms, such as think tanks, multilingual television channels such as Russia Today (RT), news agencies, social media platforms, and internet trolls, to undermine democratic principles, sow conflict within Europe, nurture domestic support, and create the impression of underperforming nations in the EU's eastern flank (T24, 2016).

2.4 THE CASE OF USING PROPAGANDA DURING THE OCCUPATION OF CRIMEA

According to contemporary Russian mythology, Crimea is seen as the embodiment of Russian identity. The rise of Russian nationalism gained momentum following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. Utilizing this narrative, the Kremlin directly links the ideology and methodology of Russian nation-state nationalism with the concept of Crimea's Russian identity. Russia deemed it essential for Moscow to retain control over the regions known as the "Russian world" in terms of their ethnic, cultural, and historical significance. This belief emerged following the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the loss of Russian dominance over Eurasia. It is widely acknowledged that Russian President Vladimir Putin has engaged in numerous private conversations with Aleksandr Isayevich Solzhenitsyn, a Russian writer who shares this viewpoint (Urcosta, 2022: 77-80). This situation offers insights into why Russia often acts based on primitive impulses instead of rational statecraft.

In a crucial article from 2013, the Russian Chief of the General Staff Valerii remarked that *“the role of non-military means of achieving political and strategic goals has grown, and, in many cases, they have exceeded the power of weapons in their effectiveness”* (Gerasimov, 2013). He outlines a new age in which wars are no longer declared and, having begun, proceed according to an unfamiliar template. The utilization of military forces in open engagements, frequently masked as peacekeeping and crisis management, is employed selectively during a specific phase, primarily with the aim of attaining ultimate success in the conflict. While he wrote this article to claim that the Western role in instigating the Arab Spring is formidable, this also showed that Russia was adopting this strategy more forcefully. The annexation of Crimea was the first robust application of this strategy.

Before the occupation of Crimea, Russia successfully influenced the minds of Crimean Russians through media and propaganda channels. A key aspect of Russia's hybrid warfare strategy, as noted by Schreck (2019), involves an initial phase of outright denial. For instance, during the annexation of Crimea in 2014, Russia denied sending troops to the region, categorically dismissing claims as "nonsense." Subsequently, Russia transitioned to acknowledging its involvement, but

with a narrative that these were "local self-defense units." Over time, Russia assumed responsibility for its actions, justifying them with fabricated arguments.

During the actual occupation, they employed a deliberate and deceptive perception management strategy based on disinformation, effectively utilizing it as a direct tactic of hybrid warfare. Propaganda played a crucial role in the Soviet Union's nation-building efforts, being equally significant as military and intelligence capabilities. The objective of Soviet propaganda encompassed the creation of "enemies" and "heroes" both domestically and internationally, conducting perception operations across various domains, including media, art, and cinema. Ultimately, it aimed to persuade both the inhabitants of the Soviet Union and those outside of it to believe in an alternative world, a "communist paradise," through the narrative of these manufactured conflicts. Newspapers with large circulations played a central role in propaganda during the Soviet Union era. Writers and directors created virtual products that aligned with the ideological framework established by the system (Şamilkızı, 2022: 213- 215).

Before the occupation of Crimea, Russia initiated propaganda activities using arguments such as "Crimea historically belongs to Russia and has no connection to Ukraine," "Crimea happened to remain within Ukraine's borders when the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991," "Ukraine does nothing for Crimea, whereas Russia makes significant investments," "Ukraine's military cannot protect Crimea from external forces," "Ukraine is attempting to Ukrainianize Crimea," "Crimean Tatars support radical Islamists and aim to eliminate Russians living in Crimea," and "NATO is attempting to strengthen its presence in Crimea to undermine Russia's geopolitical interests." During the occupation, Russia successfully wove a web of lies, utilizing central and Crimean television channels, radio stations, newspapers, social media, trolls, and spreading various rumors through its agents. Russia sought to keep people, particularly within Crimea, as far away as possible from accurate information. The objective was to create a climate of fear on the peninsula with its approximately 30,000 armed forces and propaganda tools. Consequently, this made it more difficult for people to resist the occupation (Şamilkızı, 2022: 219-221). It is not difficult to argue that Russia is employing similar tactics today, as it did during the so-called operation initiated by Russia in February 2022. Russia actively utilizes propaganda activities to influence current events,

while also conducting propaganda efforts to solidify its past gains and lay the groundwork for future actions.

As indicated by Aydın (2022), with the annexation of Crimea, the cult of Stalin has now concretized. Through this action, Russia appears to have endorsed Stalin's deeds and returned to his policies with the aim of fully Russifying Crimea once again. A significant portion of the Russian population holds favorable views about Stalin. Orientalism posits that the exploited community lacks a historical context. Misrepresenting and belittling Crimean Tatar history is also part of this phenomenon. From the 19th century to the present day, no Russian liberal, including Boris Nemtsov, Alexei Navalny, and oligarch Mikhail Khodorkovsky, whom Putin exiled abroad, has acknowledged Ukraine's or Crimea's separate identity from Russia. In both Eurasianism and Ukraine, as well as in Crimea, the Russian ethnicity is considered superior (Kuzio, 2016). The West, without opposition, essentially approves this stance, resembling the Yalta Agreement. Sputnik Türkiye narratives omit the perspective of the Crimean Tatars. They either directly present Russia's biased views or include the opinions of individuals who are aligned with Russia's stance but do not represent Ukraine or the Crimean Tatars.

Russia's assertion of control over Crimea can be seen as a result of being influenced by its disinformation campaigns. Moscow not only relied on spreading false information for disinformation purposes but also utilized the reinterpretation of historical events to advance its foreign policy objectives. Russia disregarded Crimea's decision to remain part of Ukraine through a democratic referendum in 1991. Russia claimed that the transfer of Crimea from the Soviet Socialist Republic to Ukraine by Nikita Khrushchev was arbitrary and unlawful, thus invalidating its legitimacy. Manipulating historical events and selectively acknowledging certain occurrences while disregarding others is a fundamental aspect of disinformation politics. Russia extensively employed hybrid warfare strategies during the annexation of Crimea, techniques previously tested during the Orange Revolution and the Georgian intervention. By utilizing media manipulation, the Russian population in Crimea was subjected to fear and panic, further reinforced by the actions of supported paramilitary groups. Additionally, Russia conducted a referendum for Crimea's separation from Ukraine, a move that violated international law. To strengthen its occupation, Russia has implemented a strategy of hybrid warfare by resettling approximately one million

Russians in Ukrainian territories. Simultaneously, it has pursued a policy of displacing the native Crimean Tatars and Ukrainians from the region, resembling a form of "hybrid exile." Apart from tangible strategies, Russia is strengthening annexation through intangible means. A key method employed is the ongoing propaganda efforts, carried out extensively through media outlets like the Russia-controlled Sputnik. These activities aim to influence the perception that the people of Crimea support Russian governance and that their rights are being upheld (Aydın Bezikoğlu, 2022: 32-37).

Accordingly, Emine Ceppar, Ukraine's Deputy Foreign Minister, criticizes Russia's efforts to justify its occupation of Crimea by employing hybrid warfare tactics. The Russian Federation, which is responsible for Crimea's annexation, devotes significant financial resources to holding international conferences within the seized peninsula. By bringing together people from many countries, it systematically imparts narratives promoting the benefits of living in Crimea, creating a fake shell of legitimacy to support its activities (QHA, 2020). In the same way, Andriy Yermak, the Head of Ukraine's Presidential Office, had issued an appeal for cooperation in combating disinformation and information warfare. He emphasized the rapid expansion of hybrid warfare tactics as well as the presence of reputation-damaging propagandistic activities in a variety of countries, including Ukraine. Yermak emphasized the extensive use of internet trolls, bots, false media, and propaganda campaigns against Ukraine. He also announced the establishment of the Disinformation Counteraction Center, an organization that plans to operate closely with Western colleagues, including NATO member states (ПРЕЗИДЕНТ УКРАЇНИ, 2021).

Following the annexation of Crimea, Russia has not only implemented a social engineering process but has also increased the momentum of its propaganda activities. This propaganda exerts influence on education, civil society, and media. The main objective is to eliminate all cultural and intellectual remnants associated with Ukraine (Urcosta, 2022: 83-84). Additionally, after almost a decade since the annexation of Crimea, there is a complete absence of any opposition media presence in the region. Crimea remains in a state of information isolation, rendering the entry of external independent journalists nearly impossible (Şamilkızı, 2022: 229).

After the annexation of Crimea in 2014, Russia began extensively utilizing hybrid warfare strategies. These strategies encompass coercive diplomacy, the revival of nationalist sentiments,

propaganda, and information manipulation through state-controlled media. What distinguishes propaganda as a hybrid warfare tactic is its deliberate and continuous use of emotional manipulation techniques, serving the interests of the propagating party without seeking mutual understanding, and involving comprehensive media manipulation. Russia aims to fuel internal disagreements and distrust within NATO while seeking to reduce the sanctions imposed by the European Union and the United States. Another tactic employed by Russia is disinformation, which involves the rapid dissemination of inconsistent but partially truthful news and information to create confusion and disillusionment (Özçelik, 2022: 208-209).

2.4.1 Russian Use of Propaganda in Hybrid War Since 2014

Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin revealed that Russia has granted passports to roughly 1.5 million inhabitants living in Ukraine's Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia, and Herson regions, which Russia annexed in October 2022. These regions were believed to have an approximate total population of 8.9 million before the conflict, yet due to the war's impact, many Ukrainians have been forced to leave their homes, with many seeking refuge in other parts of the country or even abroad (Jones, 2023).

Another target of Russia's information war towards Ukraine is global public opinion. The annual "Yalta International Economic Forum" since 2015 plays a significant role in this perception operation. Its main purpose is to feature news in outlets like Sputnik, propagating the idea that the forum had hundreds of participants from numerous countries. In 2016, the Finnish Institute of International Affairs released a report called "Fog of Falsehood," detailing how Russian propaganda influences different countries. Examples include the dissemination of news articles titled "Neonazi Ukraine" through propaganda tools like Sputnik in German news outlets. Moreover, there are reports comparing Russia's annexation of Crimea to Germany's reunification in 1990, which served as part of the propaganda effort (Şamilkızı, 2022: 233-235).

While TRT and the Crimean Tatar diaspora have achieved significant successes in countering Russian propaganda from Türkiye's perspective, Russia's efforts in perception management through channels like RT, Sputnik, trolls, and agents of influence, along with the lack

of expertise on the region and former Soviet geography in Türkiye's mainstream media, and the trivialization of the issue such as featuring news about "secretly taking photos with 'Google' glasses in Akıar" on the front page of Hürriyet during the ongoing occupation, have hindered comprehensive monitoring of the Crimea occupation process (Şamilkızı, 2022: 237). However, this situation continues to exist, where certain local media outlets uncritically share news from propaganda networks like Sputnik without subjecting them to fact-checking and ethical considerations. These news articles are shared as they are, without being filtered for accuracy within local media networks.

Martynyuk (2023), emphasizes that on February 24, 2022, Russia laid siege to Kyiv, while the Kremlin engaged in simultaneous false and misleading claims domestically and internationally through propaganda efforts. The author examines fabricated propaganda materials such as allegations of genocide in Donbas, assertions that Western countries coerced Ukraine into war with Russia, claims of Russia's adherence to humanitarian law during the so-called operation, and the contrived narrative of favorable and effortless progress in Russia's invasion.

On the other hand, the incident of the burning of the Quran, the holy book of Islam, was characterized by the Swedish government as an expression of freedom of speech. This, in turn, has led to the exploitation of this event for propagandistic purposes, tarnishing Sweden's image in the eyes of Muslims. Mikael Ostlund, a member of the Swedish Psychological Defence Agency, has emphasized propaganda efforts, particularly targeting Arabic-speaking countries, through media outlets such as the state-controlled Sputnik and RT, portraying Sweden as an Islamophobic nation. Depending on the context, Putin, who stands opposed to Islamists, strategically aligns himself with them in this specific instance. He staged himself kissing a Quran on a Muslim holiday, and this maneuver appears to be greatly advantageous to Putin's agenda (DW News, 2023).

Besides, in her court statement, Oksana Zolotaryova, Head of the International Law Department at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, highlighted that Russia engages in racism against Ukrainians in Crimea and has undertaken various actions to erase their identities, including obstructing Crimean Tatars and Ukrainians from learning their own languages (QHA, 2023). Additionally, in the mainstream media of Türkiye, before the annexation of Crimea, discussions emerged regarding Türkiye's potential to assert rights within the framework of international law in

Crimea in the event of the peninsula's partition (Hürriyet, 2014). Russia exploits such news reports, which in a way amplify concerns over the West's increasing influence in Ukraine and Crimea, to legitimize its actions.

In summary, framing, post-truth dynamics, disinformation campaigns, public diplomacy tactics, the spread of fake news, and the use of propaganda all interact to demonstrate how complex modern communication environments are. This theoretical section has highlighted the various characteristics of these concepts, demonstrating their ability to influence public opinion, fudge reality perceptions, and potentially influence policy decisions. As communities struggle to overcome the complex problems imposed on them by the spread of manipulated information, it is clear that a coordinated effort is needed to promote media literacy, develop critical thinking, and promote moral communication practices. Additionally, to navigate this unsafe environment, policymakers and diplomats must determine how these phenomena might be manipulated or opposed in the context of public diplomacy. The findings presented in this chapter emphasize the importance of a vigilant and informed public, cooperative efforts linking governmental organizations and civil society, and a solid commitment to maintaining the reliability of information amidst the constantly changing communication dynamics terrain.

2.5 THE ROLE OF SPUTNIK IN RUSSIAN HYBRID WARS AND DURING RUSSIA'S ATTACK ON UKRAINE

Russia exerts its influence in foreign policy through a variety of channels, and media activities including Russian state media, Russian private media, and manipulation of independent Western media, societal engagements including social and cultural communities, think tanks, academics, and the Russian Orthodox Church, political initiatives including financial and political support as well as narrative validation, and the business sector including energy, particularly natural gas. The media component of this strategy is heavily influenced by state-controlled outlets like Sputnik and RT. Furthermore, Russia uses manipulative techniques on Western social media platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter to strengthen its media influence. Finally, local media works to exert influence on Russian-speaking populations in Europe, primarily through

entities such as Rambler Co. which manages internet assets, Gazprom Media, which owns various European media outlets, and Mail.ru. These platforms are active throughout Europe, including the Baltic States, the Balkans, the Caucasus, and Central Europe (Zakem et al., 2017: 37-41).

Russia has inherited the legacy of propaganda culture from the Soviet Union. Since the early 2000s, Russia has strategically employed propaganda as an active form of warfare. Russian propaganda is characterized by its high-intensity and multi-channel approach, rapid and continuous dissemination, disregard for objective reality, and utilizing multiple languages, however, broadcasting rapidly without fact-checking. Experts argue that there is no advantage in responding to this type of propaganda model after it comes off. Propaganda bombardment played a crucial role, notably during the Five-Day War in 2008, which led to the occupation of Georgian territories (Şamilkızı, 2022: 216).

Particularly since Putin's rise to power, Russia has pursued various avenues to expand its influence. This includes enabling its oligarchs to invest their illicit funds in European financial centers, as well as utilizing a centralized global media network to amplify propaganda, disinformation, and conspiracy theories. Additionally, Russia has provided financial support to national broadcasting organizations and columnists in different countries, facilitating the dissemination of such narratives (Aydın, 2023: 16-17).

Another example of disinformation is the tweet by the Russian Embassy in Spain. There were statements accusing Ukraine that the footage taken during the shooting of a movie about the Ukraine war did not reflect the truth in the tweet posted by the Embassy, that the people in the video were actors, and that the perpetrator of the footage was not Russia. The embassy deleted the tweet after it turned out that the footage did indeed belong to a movie set. This example proves that the war of the truths is in an important position in the crisis as well as the hot conflict. In addition, Russian troll factories continue their activities that will affect both national and international public opinion, without providing any evidence, such as the presence of NATO soldiers in Ukraine and the presence of Polish soldiers (DW News, 2022). In this way, Russia exposes one of the biggest risks of disinformation while trying to legitimize the war and its results. Although the tweet was later deleted, the misinformation reached millions and already affected some of them.

Since the early days of the invasion, disinformation campaigns have been ongoing, with some even referring to it as the "TikTok Wars." In countries like Russia, communication is typically one-way, with a top-down approach, while Ukraine is characterized by a more diverse range of voices. One of Russia's most famous propagandists, Vladimir Solovyov, reaches millions through live broadcasts, TV shows, and Telegram groups, exerting significant influence over the Russian public. He repeats Putin's statements, such as "Putin launched a special operation to protect the people of Donetsk and Luhansk." Even after the invasion began, the disinformation campaign continued relentlessly. However, the massacre in Bucha was a turning point in the context of Russia's occupation of Ukraine. The brutality of the Russian invasion became visible, and for the first time, it directly clashed with Russia's disinformation campaign. While Russian news agencies denied the footage from Bakhmutivka, satellite imagery confirmed the massacre. The current Permanent Representative of Russia to the United Nations, Vasily Alekseyevich Nebenzya, claimed that the footage was entirely fabricated. Solovyov also tried to evoke the audience's emotions by associating Nazis and Zelenski, labeling the Ukrainian president as a Nazi. In Russian television programs, they often talk about the "biggest fake news from Ukraine," such as the hospital bombing in Mariupol, and claim that the people in the photograph are actors. They even created the Cyberfront Z Telegram group to deny Ukrainian news they claim to be fake, which is just the latest division of Putin's troll army. These young people attack anyone who criticizes the Kremlin and get paid for it (DW Documentary, 2023).

Although Western experts had thought that the disinformation network of the Soviet Union had collapsed along with its downfall, the reality was different. In 1999, Putin, who became president, tested the effects of disinformation on Russians first. He later expanded this network to an overseas audience by establishing RT. Russia's disagreements with Georgia and Ukraine provided an opportunity to test the effectiveness of disinformation. As the next step, the Internet Research Agency was established. Russia's goal was to use disinformation as a tool to appear strong against the powerful Western bloc to weaken and create divisions, Russia implemented a seven-step strategy. Firstly, they sought to identify any cracks in the target society that they could exploit, such as economic, social, demographic, linguistic, regional, or ethnic divisions. Secondly, they aimed to create a big, bold lie that was so outrageous it would be difficult for anyone to believe it

was not true. Thirdly, they would attach a small truth to the lie to make it seem more credible. Fourthly, they would conceal their involvement behind the story, making it appear as though it originated elsewhere, and not attracting attention to its source. The fifth step involved identifying a "useful idiot," or a foreign population that would unwittingly pass on Russia's message to the intended audience. Sixthly, even when the truth was apparent, Russia would deny or lie, relying on people's short attention spans to move on to other matters quickly. Finally, playing a long game, understanding that the political consequences could be significant, regardless of the time needed to achieve their objectives (The New York Times, 2018b). Russia's primary purpose in using disinformation as a foreign policy tool is to discredit and weaken its enemy or target bloc.

In a similar vein, Mackinnon (2020) states that as HIV infection rates rose in the 1980s, the KGB launched "Operation Infektion", a covert operation aimed at portraying the virus as a biological weapon of the US, weakening United States' global credibility. This initiative, which began with an Indian pro-Soviet publication called Patriot, stated that AIDS was caused by US experiments. Despite having little impact in India, the operation gained traction in 1985 when a Soviet cultural publication associated with the KGB revived the narrative with a blend of reality, fiction, and panic. This resurrected tale, based on the original Patriot piece, was bolstered by a fake scientific report from a Soviet-East German scientist, which spread the myth that HIV was invented in the US. By 1987, the narrative had spread to media outlets in more than 80 nations, including established UK newspapers, resembling modern Russian disinformation efforts. In contrast to the lengthy timescale of Operation Infektion, the modern internet era accelerates global disinformation distribution within weeks. Obscure news sources serve as initial sowing grounds, with tales progressing through various levels of amplification and distortion. These tactics frequently leverage kernels of truth, which are subsequently inflated to unrecognizable proportions.

BBC News Türkçe (2023) featured the stories of those fleeing from Russia, whose new disinformation law was enacted to prosecute those who call or imply war on Russia's so-called operation, revealing the existence of a suppression strategy carried out together with the invasion. Speaking to DW Türkçe (2022), Alexander and Aleksey, who fled from Russia due to the ongoing Ukraine-Russian Crisis, talk about their experiences. Alexander says that he was labeled a traitor and that police at the border threatened to recruit him for military service for Russia.

As of the middle of 2023, storylines presented by Russian-affiliated news media such as Sputnik that portray Ukrainians inadequately have been augmented by allegations implying NATO forces' involvement in active warfare within Ukraine. Digital platforms such as Google, Facebook, Twitter, and TikTok were sanctioned at the start of the invasion by European legislation. It is worth noting that these platforms took temporary measures against popular Russian propaganda sources such as RT and Sputnik News in specific locations. This occurred, however, only after the European Union prohibited the distribution or sponsorship of these Kremlin-funded and run propaganda sites. Furthermore, there is evidence of famous Western brands providing unintentional financial support to the Russian disinformation campaign. Google, for instance, continues to serve advertisements to Pravda, a pro-Kremlin website that operates in numerous languages and is owned by a Putin political ally (NewsGuard, 2023).

The cessation of partial independence in media, particularly following the disintegration of the Soviet Union up until Putin's rise to power, along with the ineffectiveness of opposition, is closely linked to Putin's stringent policies. Until recently, albeit to a limited extent, opposition and dissent were operative in Russia; however, they were banned after the war in 2022. Particularly following the assassination of Anna Politkovskaya in the lobby of her apartment, dissenting voices began to make maximal efforts to avoid direct opposition from the Kremlin. Her death signifies more than a simple demise; rather, it symbolizes the death of opposition within Russia. Between 2006 and 2016, according to Freedom House data, there were documented 63 instances of severe attacks against journalists and 20 cases of fatalities. This situation eventually led to a form of self-censorship within the opposition, driven by fear (Walker, 2016).

In a similar vein, Novaya Gazeta, a newspaper with a Nobel Peace Prize-winner editor named Dmitry Muratov, announced its suspension of activities in March 2022 due to Russia's pressure. The publication declared that it would remain closed until Russia's activities in Ukraine came to an end. Furthermore, the newspaper noted that Russian authorities had exerted pressure on media agencies regarding their coverage of developments in Ukraine, urging them to use the term “the special operation” for the situation (AP News, 2022). As of September 5, 2022, Novaya Gazeta was officially closed through a court decision (Faulconbridge & Liffey, 2022). Since the

commencement of the invasion on February 24, Novaya Gazeta stood as the last significant independent media outlet criticizing the Putin government.

TV Rain, the last autonomous television channel in Russia, faced closure following the country's invasion of Ukraine. Subsequently, the channel was also shut down in Latvia, a nation with a substantial Russian-speaking populace. Known for its extended criticism of Vladimir Putin and the Russian government, the channel's operations relocated to Latvia after its closure in Russia. Nonetheless, Latvia ceased its broadcasts, alleging that the channel had disseminated content endorsing Moscow's occupation in Ukraine. Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov commented in response: *“Some always think that there is a place better than home, that there is always more freedom than at home. This is one of the clearest examples that shows that these are the wrong illusions”* (Armstrong, 2022).

On the other hand, Alexei Navalny, a blogger born in 1976 and advocate of anti-corruption campaigns, stood as another prominent figure within the opposition against the Putin regime. Navalny, who revealed numerous instances of corruption within the Russian state, was imprisoned on February 2, 2021, as a result of a court verdict (BBC News, 2023). Other opposition groups in Russia lack a consensus on how a different Russia could materialize and who would govern it. Some European authorities hoped that the Russian opposition would follow in the footsteps of its Belarusian counterparts and establish a unified platform and centralized office to persuade Westerners on Russians' behalf and aid the anti-war diaspora. However, the Brussels summit concluded with no immediate prospects for such a measure (Seddon, 2023).

Similarly, VKontakte, which entered the market with great expectations as Russia's equivalent of Facebook promising freedom of speech, has turned out to be another facilitating factor for the Russian government's censorship and arrests. As of the latest outcome, in December 2021, just before Russia invaded Ukraine, the new CEO of VK, Vladimir Kiriienko, conveyed statements and attitudes that created an impression among the Russian public more akin to a politician rather than a CEO (Meaker, 2022). Similarly, the Telegram platform, frequently utilized in Russia and extensively employed for sharing news content by Sputnik Türkiye, is also noteworthy. Pavel Durov, a young Russian investor often likened to a tech billionaire and referred to as the “Mark Zuckerberg of Russia,” possesses a substantial fortune exceeding 15 billion dollars, as reported by

Forbes. A significant portion of his wealth, according to 2022 data, emanates from the Telegram platform, of which he is the founder, boasting over 700 million active users (Descalsota, 2022).

Furthermore, it is pertinent to mention Yandex as a symbol of Russia's authoritarian stance over the media at this stage. Similar to its American counterpart, Google, Yandex is a search engine. Established in 1997, the company offers auxiliary services such as email provision, navigation, and web information portals, in addition to its search engine feature. However, the Kremlin aims to assert control over technology firms nationwide, and in this regard, exerts pressure on companies like Yandex. This is evident in their efforts to consolidate businesses through corporate takeovers, as demonstrated by Yandex's acquisition of Tinkoff. These actions are driving the progression of Russia's leading technology enterprises toward expanded conglomerates, overseen either directly by governmental bodies or by trusted stakeholders responsible for advancing the Kremlin's internet policy objectives (Myles-Primakoff & Sherman, 2020).

Kragh and Åsberg (2017: 781-782) conducted a study in which they analyzed and categorized all the news articles published on the Swedish Sputnik website in 2015. They found that the prevailing Russian narratives aimed at the Swedish public and Western states primarily revolved around three main themes: "Crisis in the West," "Positive Image of Russia," and "Western Aggression." Other emerging themes included, in decreasing order of prominence, "Negative Image of Countries Perceived to be under Western Influence," "Western Malevolence," "Cooperation with Russia and International Sympathy," "Failures of Western Policies," and finally, "Divisions within the Western Alliance."

2.6 THE BACKGROUND OF SPUTNIK TÜRKİYE

There are few studies of Sputnik Türkiye before Russia's attack on Ukraine. Küce (2021) focused on the direct effects of Russia's overall hybrid warfare strategies on Türkiye. The study primarily addresses the period before the outbreak of the Ukraine invasion in 2022. In this sense, it constitutes an entirely distinct contribution to the literature for the period it covers. Similarly, another study (Yıldız, 2023) examined Türkiye, Russia, and U.S. relations within the framework of news related to the S-400 air defense systems.

Sputnik is a contemporary news agency that delivers services across numerous platforms including news feeds, websites, social media accounts, mobile applications, radio broadcasts, and multimedia press centers. On November 10, 2014, the Russian media organization “Rossiya Segodnya” launched the Sputnik brand. Sputnik's foreign editorial team currently operates in over 30 languages, including English, Spanish, French, German, Arabic, and Chinese, broadcast in over 20 countries and spanning 8 distinct regions (Sputnik Türkiye, 2023). According to the same source, Sputnik aims to inform the "international audience" on global politics and economics. Russia, comprehending the power of social media, overwhelmingly uses platforms such as Telegram and Twitter to spread misinformation.

Following the invasion of Russia into Ukraine, videos emerged showing Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky imploring Ukrainian residents to end the battle, claiming that risking lives in the current struggle is pointless. He delivered a message emphasizing the importance of life. Although the deepfake films created by hackers have been eradicated, they are just one illustration of a variety of disinformation methods. These include misinformation, the manipulation of visual information, the falsification of documents, and targeted propaganda orchestrated by Russia and pro-Kremlin people. Throughout the prior year of warfare, these initiatives may have delivered significant influence on a wide range of audiences. Before President Putin's command to send a large number of troops to Ukraine, the Kremlin aggressively spread false narratives to justify the invasion. These activities have significantly increased since the invasion began. The majority of information warfare took place mostly through Telegram, a messaging service that gained popularity due to its somewhat unregulated platform, which allowed for the broad distribution of unfiltered war-related pictures. Telegram's design facilitates the creation of large propaganda channels that quickly circulate falsified photographs and videos to millions of followers (Bergengruen, 2023).

According to data from Debunk.org (2023), the Russian Federation allocated 1.5 billion dollars from its federal budget to mass media organizations in the year 2022. However, the budget was exceeded, resulting in state-owned or sponsored mass media spending of approximately 1.9 billion. This proportion was subsequently adjusted to 1.6 billion dollars in the year 2023.

When glancing at the Twitter example to show the agency's activities in Türkiye, one can see that Sputnik Türkiye's Twitter account has roughly 1 million followers, while the international Sputnik's Twitter account has approximately 360 thousand followers. The importance and effects of this situation on Türkiye and its inhabitants are apparent: When users interact with the shared tweets, they will be directed to the Sputnik Türkiye website for additional content. As a result, considering the total number of followers on Twitter can be indicative of the popularity of Sputnik Türkiye Website itself.

Although Sputnik presents itself as an alternative voice in international journalism, it significantly deviates from being an autonomous media institution. The establishment of Sputnik International was formalized by a Presidential decree, aiming to provide insights into Russia's foreign state policies. The leadership of Sputnik is subjected to regular directives issued by the Kremlin, encompassing directives about political narratives, subject selection, and guidelines specifying which individuals or topics are to be excluded from media coverage. In addition to this, Sputnik is known to generate false content in support of the narratives and political motives they are directed to endorse (EUvsDisinfo, 2017).

In the midst of the Crimean crisis, Russian media and Turkish media such as Hürriyet published news about Türkiye's right to Crimea in case Ukraine is dissolved according to the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca (Aydın Bezikoğlu, 2022: 41-42; Hürriyet, 2014). This was obviously a hybrid operation for neutralizing the Turkish public when Russia was about the grab Crimea, disregarding the indigenous people's wishes. During the jet crisis Türkiye, this time became the victim of malicious attacks and lies of the Russian media, and Sputnik was discontinued until the crisis was resolved. This thesis sheds light on the deeper motives, techniques, and narratives used by Russia to influence Turkish public opinion on the Russian Attack on Ukraine by digging into the content and structure of Sputnik Türkiye's coverage. Utilizing a case study of Sputnik Türkiye's portrayal of Russia's Ukraine policy, this thesis analyzes the significance of media as a geopolitical instrument. State-funded news organizations played a vital part in spreading information and transforming public discourse in recent years, typically mirroring the political goals of their governments. In this perspective, a case study of Sputnik Türkiye constitutes an important and

pertinent research issue. Sputnik Türkiye, a Turkish-language affiliate of Russia's state-run media source, evolved as a powerful tool for distributing news and opinions in Türkiye.

As indicated on their web pages, Sputnik Türkiye can be followed through various platforms including Telegram, Twitter (now known as X), TikTok, Odysee, Telegram Radio, and Threads. However, the absence of accessible information, either in the “About Us” section or any other relevant subsection, regarding the leadership structure of the company, the number, and locations of its offices, the count of correspondents, ratings, circulation figures, and the frequency of updates on Sputnik Türkiye's website, gives rise to inquiries concerning transparency. In a similar vein, Sputnik International (2023) access to information regarding the employees is not available on the “About Us” section of the Sputnik International website, apart from the information indicating Anton Anisimov as the Editor-in-Chief.

On the other hand, Sputnik Türkiye and its employees have faced censorship from Russia. In 2019, Akif Beki, İsmail Saymaz, and Yavuz Oğan had their programs removed from the air on the radio station Radyo Sputnik (RT FM), due to their interviews with former Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu (Gokkus, 2019). The cessation of these individuals' and programs' broadcasts by Sputnik, individuals who had contributed to independent media, constituted a manifestation of media censorship in Türkiye. Besides, after Türkiye shot down a Russian fighter jet in the year 2015 (FRANCE 24, 2015), access to the website of the Russian state news agency Sputnik was blocked through measures taken by the Information and Communication Technologies Authority in Türkiye (BBC News Türkçe, 2016).

2.6.1 Theoretical Background

Russia's communication policy towards Türkiye is not a spontaneous or natural process; rather, it is a meticulously planned and controlled strategy executed by the Russian state. Russia's communication strategy towards Türkiye is a multifaceted approach that encompasses soft power and hybrid warfare tactics.

Public Diplomacy and Soft Power:

Public diplomacy, a long-term, low-intensity activity, is a key element of Russia's strategy. It aims to cultivate a positive perception of Russia, Russian culture, and Turkish-Russian relations, and garner support for Russian government actions, including the attack on Ukraine. This is achieved by influencing dialogues, fostering a favorable environment for Russian narratives in Turkish media, and aligning Turkish public sentiment with Russian objectives.

Hybrid War Approach:

Sputnik Türkiye engages in a hybrid war strategy characterized by manipulating narratives, disseminating disinformation, propagating selective information, exploiting emotions, and employing various fabrication and distortion techniques. This strategy aims to sow doubt, uncertainty, and apprehension among the Turkish public and can have implications for Türkiye's security and stability.

Russia seeks to influence public opinion, shape perceptions, and advance its foreign policy goals through these two approaches. Sputnik Türkiye plays a crucial role in Russia's long-term communication strategy, shaped by its political and geostrategic objectives. This strategy seeks to systematically depict the West as a rival, garnering support both within Russia and among specific target groups. It aims to legitimize Russia's actions, despite human rights abuse allegations, and employs various channels and actors, including media outlets like *Aydınlık*, *Ulusal Kanal*, social media accounts, bots, and "Eurasianist" and anti-American politicians, parties, academicians, and think tanks.

CHAPTER 3 - CONTENT ANALYSIS OF SPUTNIK TÜRKİYE

As exemplified by the works of Atay and İrvan (2021: 113-115), mainstream media employs varying styles and tonalities based on the period under consideration. During the years of the reconciliation process in Türkiye, all newspapers such as Sözcü and Yeniçağ refrained from using terms like "baby killer," "traitor," or "murderer," which were previously frequently employed, about the PKK terrorist organization leader Abdullah Öcalan. Rather than reflecting reality, the news articles mirrored the “elitist-oriented structure” of the Reconciliation process. This phenomenon is not unique to Türkiye; media outlets can modify their indexical stance by the policies of the country they are situated in and the discourse of its leaders.

Esen et al. (2023: 18), examined a media example in Türkiye and found that the divergence in their target demographics is evident in their respective approaches to reporting on the Ukraine invasion. With a larger audience, Sözcü has chosen an editorial approach that includes reflecting on the humanitarian crisis and the plight of citizens. Other newspapers about the Eurasianist ideology demonstrate a more parallel approach when interpreting known columnists from Sözcü who adopted a pro-Russian posture throughout the crisis. Their editorial direction and contributing columnists consistently blame the Western bloc, mainly NATO and the US, for encouraging the Ukrainian crisis and causing regional instability. The viewpoints and tone of these media on the war closely resemble those of the Russian leadership and state-controlled media (Aktürk, 2015).

Sputnik Türkiye emerged as a significant player in the Turkish media arena, entering the market with the promise of offering an alternative perspective on both domestic Turkish issues and global events. As the Turkish branch of the Sputnik International agency, Sputnik Türkiye warrants a comprehensive investigation due to its influence on the Turkish public sphere and its content and messaging. In this context, shedding light on its thematic focus, potential biases, editorial priorities, framing strategies, and tone will provide insight into the underlying messages it aims to convey. To achieve this, a representative three-month period following the onset of the Ukraine Crisis under the title “Ukraine Conflict” will be utilized as an illustrative example.

In this context, firstly, news articles shared by Sputnik Türkiye during three months under the title of the Ukraine Crisis were compiled. Subsequently, through content analysis of these articles, sections that could be regarded as elements of hybrid warfare were categorized and tabulated using thematic coding methodology. Following this step, the acquired content was dissected and analyzed according to respective themes. The objective of employing this methodology was to facilitate the identification of potential hybrid warfare elements within the news content.

Addressing the themes identified in a general sense, prominent themes include mistrust in the negotiation process after the commencement of hostilities, the imposition or envisaged imposition of sanctions on Russia and Russia's counterarguments, Russia's demands and aspirations vis-à-vis the West, the prevailing lack of trust from Russia towards Western powers, the arguments and discourse advanced by Russia to legitimize its actions, the utilization of its energy resources as instruments of foreign policy, the impact of the conflict on Türkiye-Russia relations, and the scope of the influence sought by Russia on the Turkish public opinion.

Besides, due to Russia's attempt to conduct its foreign policy agenda through Sputnik Türkiye as an extension of hybrid warfare strategies, the case study comments frequently interchange the terms Russia and Sputnik Türkiye.

3.1 RUSSIA'S UKRAINE POLICY

This section will entail an analysis of Russia's hybrid warfare strategies towards Ukraine within the context of the Ukraine Crisis, an examination of how these strategies are portrayed in the narratives on the Sputnik Türkiye news website, and an assessment of how Russia interprets Ukraine's actions and statements to its advantage within its foreign policy.

3.1.1 Blaming Ukraine for Reluctance about the Negotiation Process

Russia's use of accusatory language against Ukraine about peace talks was noteworthy. Russian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Zakharova stated that Russia is "always ready" to negotiate with Ukraine. However, the extent to which Ukraine is willing to engage in peace talks

is questionable ¹ With this statement in which Zaharova emphasizes Russia's readiness to engage in negotiations with Ukraine, she aims to persuade the Turkish and global public opinion of its stance towards peace. In a similar vein, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation Sergey Lavrov emphasizes the need for Ukrainian colleagues to refrain from consistently misleading and diverting the genuine negotiation process.² In addition, Lavrov emphasizes that Russia will end its dependence on Western countries and that Russia is a strong state with the potential to become self-sufficient.

Sputnik Türkiye conveys the message that Russia's peaceful efforts have not received a reciprocal response. With this content, Russia creates the perception that Russia is not opposed to a ceasefire by emphasizing that it is Ukraine, as if initiating and perpetuating the war, that is being portrayed as Ukraine is responsible. By blaming Ukraine's so-called intransigence as the reason why the war in Ukraine has not ended, Russia is trying to position itself as legitimate in its invasion. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov noted that negotiations between Russia and Ukraine have reached a standstill due to Kyiv's inconsistent stance. Lavrov remarked that if there were honest negotiators on the other side, significant results could have been achieved by now.³

While highlighting Russia's conciliatory stance, it seeks to garner support from the Turkish public and the international arena by emphasizing the presence of foreign intelligence agencies and propaganda experts in Ukraine, and by underscoring that the system established in Ukraine within the framework of NATO and the EU constitutes an artificial structure. Zakharova stated, "For example, today a representative of the Ukrainian government said that NATO membership can never be Ukraine's main strategy. However, they have always said the opposite until now." She also highlighted the efforts of numerous intelligence services working to influence public opinion in Ukraine, stating that "Public opinion is being influenced abroad by specialized propaganda experts. These are not ordinary people but journalists backed by intelligence services, civil society

¹ Sputnik Türkiye [sputniknews.com.tr, 08.03.2022 14:42]. Rusya Dışışleri: Türkiye'de Ukrayna'yla görüşmeye hazırız, asıl soru onların hazır olup olmadığı. Sputnik Türkiye. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220308/rusya-disisleri-turkiyede-ukraynaya-goruscunme-haziriz-asil-soru-onlari-hazir-olup-olmadigi-1054528189.html>.

² Sputnik Türkiye [sputniknews.com.tr, 10.03.2022 – 16:41]. Antalya'daki görüşme sonrası konuşan Lavrov: Bir daha asla Batılı ortaklarımıza bağımlı olmayacağız. Sputnik Türkiye. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220310/lavrov-bugunku-goruscunmemiz-sonucunda--muzakerenin-yerini-alacak-hicbir-seyin-olmadigi-anlasildi-1054597523.html>.

³ Sputnik Türkiye. [sputniknews.com.tr, 30.04.2022 - 01.03]. Lavrov: Kiev tutumunu değiştirmeseydi, müzakerelerde bir sonuca ulaşılabilirdi. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220429/1055964538.html>.

representatives, and members of various countries' legislative bodies. All of this has been organized within the framework of NATO and the EU."⁴

3.1.2 Claiming Russian Humanitarian Efforts in War in Ukraine

One of Russia's foremost propaganda arguments is to hold Ukraine accountable for the conflict. While continuing to blame occupied Ukraine for the unfolding tragedies, Russia portrays itself as a state inclined towards peaceful methods. For instance, by emphasizing issues such as civilian evacuations, Russia seeks to discredit Ukraine by asserting that Russia places greater importance on such matters than Ukraine does. Lavrov emphasizes that the Ukrainian delegation consistently offers pretexts to delay the commencement of the next meeting with Russia. Additionally, he underscored that Russia has been intending to provide humanitarian aid corridors since the beginning of the “operation” but the Kyiv administration has hindered these efforts.⁵ While continuing to blame occupied Ukraine for the unfolding tragedies, Russia once again portrays itself as a state inclined towards peaceful methods. In a similar vein, the Russian Ministry of Defense stated that no one has utilized the humanitarian corridors established near the Azovstal Factory for evacuation, accusing Kyiv of impeding humanitarian aid operations.⁶

3.1.3 Denial of War Crime Allegations about Russia from the West

Sputnik Türkiye, while refuting allegations about Russia, there is a consistent absence of credible evidence presented to substantiate counterclaims. Furthermore, Western powers are frequently demonized in an attempt to divert focus and shift the target. Instead of providing a reliable source to substantiate claims of Ukraine's violations or attacks against civilians, the news

⁴ Sputnik Türkiye. [sputniknews.com.tr, 25.04.2022 - 19.13]. Zaharova: Rusya ile Ukrayna arasındaki müzakere süreci sona ermedi. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220425/1055837053.html>.

⁵ Sputnik Türkiye. [sputniknews.com.tr, 05.03.2022 - 16.10]. Rusya Dışişleri Bakanı Lavrov: Zelenskiy, NATO ve Rusya arasında çatışma kışkırtmaya çalışıyor. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220305/lavrov-zelenskiy-nato-ve-rusya-arasinda-catisma-kiskirtmaya-calisiyor-1054454046.html>.

⁶ Sputnik Türkiye. [sputniknews.com.tr]. CANLI | Rusya Savunma Bakanlığı: Kiev, Azovstal'daki insani yardım operasyonunu sekteye uğrattı https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220420/canli-anlatim-ukrayna-rusyanin-anlasma-taslagini-inceleyecegiz-1055712310.html?full_online=1#1055720286.

reports often rely solely on statements from state officials occupying significant positions within Russia, resulting in a departure from objective journalism and a lack of impartiality. Peskov expresses skepticism about the possibility of conducting an unbiased international investigation into the Bucha incident and denies all allegations directed at Russia, describing the event as a well-orchestrated tragic show. He argues that the course of events, substantial data, facts, and other parameters demonstrate that it is a fabrication.⁷ Similarly, Sputnik Türkiye columnist Selin Uludağ asserts that Ukraine has become the new target of Western "chemical weapons" lies, drawing parallels to the fabricated claims that legitimized the US-led invasion of Iraq. She suggests that the continuation of the "chemical weapons" narrative in the context of Russia's alleged use in Ukraine mirrors the deceptive tactics employed by the US and UK to justify the Iraq war.⁸ On the other hand, The Russian Ministry of Defense spokesperson, Igor Konashenkov, stated that the Ukrainian Security Service (SBU), with support from the West, was preparing a provocation using toxic substances against civilians. The purpose of this provocation, according to Konashenkov, is to accuse Russia of using chemical weapons against the Ukrainian people.⁹

3.2 TURKISH - RUSSIAN RELATIONS DURING THE UKRAINIAN WAR

In this section, an analysis will be conducted to examine the historical and current trajectory of Russia-Türkiye relations, as well as how Russia's attempts to establish psychological dominance over Türkiye manifest and the narratives it employs to align Türkiye with its position in the ongoing crisis.

⁷ Sputnik Türkiye. [sputniknews.com.tr, 05.04.2022 - 16.04]. Peskov: Buça vakası hakkında tarafsız bir uluslararası soruşturma yapılabileceğinden şüpheliyiz. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220405/peskov-buca-vakasi-hakkinda-tarafsiz-bir-uluslararasi-sorusturma-yapilabileceginden-supheliyiz---1055326755.html>.

⁸ Selin Uludağ. [sputniknews.com.tr, 04.04.2022 - 20.35]. Batı'nın 'kimyasal silah' yalanlarının yeni adresi Ukrayna: Irak nasıl işgale sürüklenmişti?. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220404/batinin-kimyasal-silah-yanlanlarinin-yeni-adresi-ukrayna-irak-nasil-igale-suruklenmisti--1055312174.html>.

⁹ Sputnik Türkiye. [sputniknews.com.tr, 16.03.2022 - 21.04]. Rusya: Ukrayna istihbaratı, Batı'nın desteğiyle zehirli maddeli provokasyon hazırlıyor. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220316/1054786037.html>.

3.2.1 Emphasis on Cooperation between Türkiye and Russia on the Ukraine Crisis

Russia frequently seeks to legitimize the so-called operation by emphasizing its purported struggle against fascist ideology in Ukraine. Moreover, the choice of words and tone in news coverage is aimed at undermining international resistance against Russia. Lavrov acknowledged Türkiye's constructive approach towards the situation in Ukraine, describing it as pragmatic and highly balanced. He highlighted that Türkiye did not participate in unilateral sanctions imposed by the US colonies against Russia.¹⁰ Additionally, he stated that the objective of Russia's operation is the disarmament of Ukraine and the eradication of fascist ideology. The use of the term "colonies of the US" equates complying with imposed sanctions to coming under the protection of the United States and aims to trigger emotional responses within the Turkish public opinion.

Sputnik Türkiye, emphasizes that neo-Nazis are responsible for human tragedy, while Russia continues to portray itself as a savior and a benevolent state. By employing the neo-Nazi reference, it seeks to legitimize civilian casualties and generate arguments against potential objections from the Turkish public. Furthermore, by emphasizing that the world cannot isolate itself, propaganda is being disseminated to assert Russia's status as a major power. Andrey Buravov, the Russian Consul General in Istanbul, highlighted that the sanctions against Russia have generated new opportunities. He emphasized Türkiye's significant tourism influx from Russia and its potential positive impact on bilateral relations. Furthermore, he drew attention to the civilian casualties in Ukraine, underlining the neo-Nazi exploitation of civilians as shields.¹¹ On the other hand, the Russian Consulate in Istanbul shared moments of a Turkish-Ukrainian family being rescued by Russian soldiers from the bombardment by Ukrainian neo-Nazis in the Kherson region,

¹⁰ Sputnik Türkiye [sputniknews.com.tr, 16.03.2022 – 15:41]. Lavrov: Ankara, ABD sömürgelerinin Rusya'ya karşı uyguladığı tek taraflı yaptırımlara katılmadı. Sputnik Türkiye. <https://sputniknews.com.tr/20220316/lavrov-harekatimizin-hedefi-ukraynanin-silahsizlandirilmesi-ve-fasist-ideolojiden-temizlenmesi-1054773602.html>.

¹¹ Sputnik Türkiye [sputniknews.com.tr, 18.03.2022 – 12:21]. Rusya'nın İstanbul Başkonsolosu Buravov: Batı'nın yaptırımları yeni imkanlar yaratıyor. Sputnik Türkiye. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220318/rusyanin-istanbul-baskonsolosu-buravov-batinin-yaptirimlari-yeni-imkanlar-yaratiyor-1054839733.html>.

with Turkish subtitles.¹² Also, Kremlin spokesperson Peskov states that the world, Europe, and the United States cannot isolate a country as significant as Russia.¹³

The recurrent emphasis on cooperation with Türkiye in numerous news reports aims to cultivate a sense of sympathy towards Russia within the Turkish public, ultimately seeking to prevent the complete isolation of Russia from the international arena. Peskov highlighted that despite disagreements, due to Türkiye's regional power status, partnership with Russia prevails. He positively assessed Türkiye's neutral stance despite being a NATO member, emphasizing that this also positively influences its relations with Russia.¹⁴

By positioning Ukraine as a pawn of Western states, the emphasis is placed on Russia serving a higher purpose. While underscoring the significance of collaborations and drawing attention to Türkiye's potential role in the region and the crisis, the aim is to sway the Turkish public towards Russia's side. In his article, Turan Salcı presents the opinions of Volkan Özdemir, Director of the ATA (Asia-Türkiye-Europe) Platform, and the writer Hasan Böğün. According to Özdemir, the recent developments in Ukraine are part of the plans of Western states. Özdemir emphasizes that a new era of intense global power competition is emerging, characterized by the construction of social, economic, and political barriers between specific blocs. He believes that countries like Türkiye can carve out a place for themselves among major powers through an effective policy of neutrality.¹⁵

In the subtext, Sputnik Türkiye while avoiding the use of the word “occupation,” terms like “operation” and “developments” are employed to divert attention from the legality issues of the

¹² Sputnik Türkiye. [sputniknews.com.tr, 11.03.2022 - 23.27]. Kherson'da Türk baba ve Ukraynalı anneye sahip üç küçük çocuğun saldırılardan kurtulma hikayesi. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220311/khersonda-turk-baba-ve-ukraynali-anneye-sahip-uc-kucuk-cocugun-saldirilardan-kurtulma-hikayesi--1054654864.html>.

¹³ Sputnik Türkiye. [sputniknews.com.tr, 05.03.2022 - 16.45]. Rusya'nın Donbass'a yönelik operasyonu 10. gününe girerken, Rusya Savunma Bakanlığı, Mariupol ve Volnovakha'da bulunduğu iddia edilen 215 bin göçmenden hiç kimsenin, açılan insani koridorlara çıkmadığını bildirdi. Kremlin Sözcüsü Peskov, "Dünya, Avrupa ve ABD'nin Rusya gibi büyük bir ülkeyi izole edemeyeceği kadar büyük" açıklamasında bulundu.. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220305/canli-anlatim-abd-merkezli-kanalların-rusyadan-yaptıkları-yayınları-durduruldu-1054446519.html>.

¹⁴ Sputnik Türkiye. [sputniknews.com.tr, 02.04.2022 - 23:19]. Peskov: Büyük bir bölgesel güç olan Türkiye ile aramızda ortaklık ilişkileri ağır basıyor. Sputnik Türkiye. <https://sputniknews.com.tr/20220402/peskov-buyuk-bir-bölgesel-guc-olan-türkiye-ile-aramızda-ortaklik-iliskileri-agir-basiyor-1055266478.html>.

¹⁵ Turan Salcı. [sputniknews.com.tr, 21.04.2022 - 13.15]. 'Rusya'nın harekatiyle ABD'nin elini kolunu sallaya sallaya istediğini yaptığı düzen sona erdi' <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220421/rusyanın-harekatiyle-abdnin-elini-kolunu-sallaya-sallaya-istedigini-yaptigi-duzen-sona-erdi-1055738064.html>.

occupation. Additionally, by announcing its allowance for alternative routes for civilians, Russia attempts to create a positive image for itself and draw the Turkish and global public closer. Peskov asserts that despite differing opinions on the Ukraine issue, Russia and Türkiye can maintain their bilateral relations.¹⁶ Presidential spokesperson Ibrahim Kalin, on the other hand, states that sanctions are ineffective against Russia, emphasizing the need to listen and understand their strategic concerns. He states that Russia perceives a threat from NATO.¹⁷ On the other hand, Çavuşoğlu states that Türkiye is not obliged to take sides and we are not inclined to participate in sanctions against Russia.¹⁸ By emphasizing this statement, Sputnik Türkiye conveys the message that Russia is not isolated on the international stage. Also, the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure shared alternative routes for Turkish carriers to return home due to the “recent developments” in Ukraine.¹⁹

Russia aims to bolster its positive image by highlighting favorable opinions expressed by Turkish officials, aiming to enhance its reputation both among the Turkish populace and on the global stage. Because Türkiye adheres to a balanced policy, there are also statements in favor of Russia by Türkiye President Erdogan strongly condemns any fascist practices targeting Russian culture.²⁰ Similarly, Çavuşoğlu has also made statements supportive of Russia. Çavuşoğlu denied the claims by the Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs that a mosque in Mariupol was bombed. He stated that the bomb fell not directly on the mosque but in its close proximity, and currently, there is no damage to the mosque. Furthermore, he mentioned that the Russians inquired about the

¹⁶ Sputnik Türkiye. [sputniknews.com.tr, 22.02.2022 - 18.47]. Peskov: Ukrayna konusundaki görüş ayrılıkları, Rusya-Türkiye ilişkileri için engel değil. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220222/peskov-ukrayna-konusundaki-gorus-ayriliklari-rusya-turkiye-iliskileri-icin-engel-degil-1054129576.html>.

¹⁷ Sputnik Türkiye. [sputniknews.com.tr, 21.02.2022 - 01.14]. Cumhurbaşkanlığı Sözcüsü Kalın: Rusya'ya yönelik yaptırımlar işe yaramaz. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220221/cumhurbaskanligi-sozcusu-kalin-rusyaya-yonelik-yaptirimlar-ise-yaramaz-1054060605.html>.

¹⁸ Sputnik Türkiye. [sputniknews.com.tr, 01.03.2022 - 00.01]. ‘Bakan Çavuşoğlu: Türkiye taraf tutmak zorunda değil, yaptırımlara da katılma eğilimimiz yok. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220301/bakan-cavusoglu-rusyanin-saldirmasi-dunyayi-sok-etti-1054346943.html>.

¹⁹ Sputnik Türkiye. [sputniknews.com.tr, 25.02.2022 - 22.30]. Ulaştırma ve Altyapı Bakanlığı Türk taşımacılar için alternatif güzergahları açıkladı. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220225/ulastirma-ve-altyapi-bakanligi-turk-tasimacilar-icin-alternatif-guzergahlari-acikladi-1054252458.html>.

²⁰ Sputnik Türkiye. [sputniknews.com.tr, 12.03.2022 - 15.34]. Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan: Rus kültürüne yönelik faşizan uygulamalar asla kabul edilemez. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220312/cumhurbaskani-erdogan-rus-kulturune-yonelik-fasizan-uygulamalar-asla-kabul-edilemez-1054663660.html>.

number of Turkish citizens in the region and Türkiye provided the requested information.²¹ In a similar vein, Lavrov acknowledged that there are some differences in views concerning Ukraine but highlighted the value of Türkiye's balanced approach, which Russia respects greatly. He mentioned that Russia strives to maintain a consistent stance in line with the needs and demands of the current circumstances. Lavrov in another news article again acknowledged Ankara's responsible approach in adhering to its obligations under the Montreux Convention and expressed appreciation for Türkiye's stance in this regard.²²

Similarly, in the following news, which traces the friendship between Russians and Turks back to the times of the National Struggle, an attempt is made to sway the sentiments of the Turkish public, aiming to align Türkiye with Russia's side concerning the Ukraine crisis. In his article, Osman Nuri Cerit includes the account of 100 years ago, when upon the invitation of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, Russian Ambassador Aralov, and Azerbaijani Ambassador Abilov, along with their military attachés, visited the frontlines and rear areas in 1922. The envoys took photographs with soldiers preparing for the Great Offensive. Featuring this photograph, Sputnik Türkiye conveys the message that the friendship between the Republic of Türkiye and Russia extends as far back as Türkiye's national struggle.²³

Russia highlights that Ukraine does not pursue an independent foreign policy and acts under the guidance of the US, attributing its uncompromising stance not only to Ukraine but also to the West. By doing so, it conveys the message that it has no choice but to resort to military methods, aiming to garner the support of the Turkish public. Amur Gadjeiev on the other hand, presents the views of Russian intelligence expert Nikita Mendkovich. Mendkovich points out that the development of intelligence cooperation between Russia and Türkiye depends on Ankara. He acknowledges that Ankara has gained significant political points on the international stage through its mediation efforts in resolving the Ukraine issue, and he associates the deadlock in negotiations with Ukraine's inability to pursue independent policies. He uses phrases like “The US prevents

²¹ Sputnik Türkiye. [sputniknews.com.tr, 13.03.2022 - 13.32]. Çavuşoğlu: (Mariupol'de) caminin bombalandığı iddialarını imamı doğrulamadı, camide şu an hasar yok. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220313/cavusoglu-bombalandigina-dair-haberi-caminin-imami-dogrulamadi-camide-su-an-hasar-yok-1054680580.html>

²² Sputnik Türkiye. [sputniknews.com.tr, 16.03.2022 - 15.14]. Lavrov ile Çavuşoğlu, Moskova'da bir araya geldi. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220316/lavrov-ve-cavusoglunun-moskovadaki-gorusmesi-basladi-1054758634.html>.

²³ Osman Nuri Cerit. [sputniknews.com.tr, 28.03.2022 - 13.52]. 100 yıl önce bugün: Büyük taarruz öncesi Rus Büyükelçi Türk askerini ziyaret etti. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220328/1055103872.html>.

Russia from meeting its demands from Kyiv and forces a military solution.” Russia had demonstrated its conciliatory stance by withdrawing from Kyiv after the Istanbul consultations. However, Ukraine exploited this opportunity by occupying liberated areas and committing massacres against civilians suspected of being pro-Russian. He emphasizes that a resolution in Ukraine is not feasible without disarmament and eradicating the roots of Nazism.²⁴

Witnessing Russia's recurrent attempts to manipulate the sentiments of the Turkish public can be seen as a post-truth habit, aimed at exploiting emotional responses for its own purposes. Russia aims to emphasize its desired cooperation with Türkiye by using arguments related to sensitive topics and controversial issues that Türkiye faces, particularly through the lens of Greece, which is meant to influence perception management within the Turkish public. Furthermore, through its Sputnik Türkiye channel, Russia frequently generates manipulative news to designate the United States as a common adversary. This serves Russia's aim to diminish American influence in the Black Sea region and bolster its own position in the area. In Turan Salcı's article, journalist and writer Ceyhun Bozkurt's views are presented, emphasizing the surrender of Ukraine and Greece's sovereignty to the US and underscoring the significance of Turkish-Russian cooperation. Bozkurt highlights that the US presence in Greece aims to exert pressure on Türkiye, particularly in the Aegean and Thrace regions, to reconfigure its political and military posture. This pressure is motivated to realign Türkiye's policies and potentially engage in military conflict with Russia. The military cooperation agreement between Greece and the US, which could be perceived as Greece's occupation, also targets Russia. The US seeks to hinder Russia's access to the Balkans, the Black Sea, and the Eastern Mediterranean, as well as establish a significant presence in the Aegean.²⁵

On the other hand, during the Ukraine occupation, the Turkish public was persuaded developments with Ukraine were under Russia's control and that diplomatic and commercial relations with Türkiye had not been disrupted in any way. Furthermore, the increasing trade potential between Türkiye and Russia is highlighted. Salcı reported that Kadir Kurtuluş, the

²⁴ Amur Gadjiev. [sputniknews.com.tr, 28.04.2022 - 20.08]. Rus uzman: Rusya ile Türkiye arasında istihbarat alanında işbirliğinin gelişmesi Ankara'ya bağlı. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220428/rus-uzman-rusya-ile-turkiye-arasinda-istihbarat-alaninda-isbirliginin-gelismesi-ankaraya-bagli-1055932590.html>.

²⁵ Turan Salcı. [sputniknews.com.tr, 12.05.2022 - 13.05]. ‘Zelenskiy ile Yunanistan yönetiminin ortak noktası ülkelerini Washington’a teslim etmeleridir’. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220512/zelenskiy-ile-yunanistan-yonetiminin-ortak-noktasi-ulkelerini-washingtona-teslim-etmeleridir-1056307135.html>.

President of the Russian-Turkish Chamber of Commerce, evaluated the commercial relations between Türkiye and Russia. Kurtuluş mentioned that Turkish companies could operate in sectors where the supply from Russia has been cut off or reduced due to sanctions. Additionally, Kurtuluş conveyed the requests of businesspeople to establish an RO-RO line to facilitate trade.²⁶ Similarly, another article by Salcı İzzet Ekmekçibaş, the Chairman of the Türkiye-Russia Business Council at the Foreign Economic Relations Board of Türkiye (DEİK), in an interview with Sputnik Türkiye, highlights the high demand for Turkish products in Russia and emphasizes ongoing efforts to fill the existing gap. He mentions that nearly 1,000 companies with 100% Russian capital have been opened in Türkiye. High demand for Turkish products in Russia and the establishment of numerous Russian-owned companies in Türkiye.²⁷ In another news piece by Amur Gadjeiev, Ella Sazonova, the sales representative of Turkish company Irlanya Homes based in Alanya, emphasized the high-level organization of the Property Show fair. Sazonova stated that the fair exceeded all expectations in terms of scope and impact. Highlighting that the majority of Irlanya Homes' total sales are attributed to Russia, she emphasized the company's focus on growth and regular participation in the Moscow fair. Sazonova underscored the potential of the large country of Russia, which harbors a significant number of prospective customers.²⁸

3.2.2 Russia's Frame-Bridging with Turkish Public Opinion

Here one may see an example of frame-bridging about the Struggle against PKK/YPG in Syria. Bernard Henri Levy has acquired nicknames such as the "Angel of Death" and the "War Instigator" due to his close associations with armed groups in the places he visits. Levy has also been the subject of espionage allegations. said that Kurdistan would be established within 2 years

²⁶ Turan Salcı. [sputniknews.com.tr, 25.03.2022 - 17.17]. ROST: Türk ve Rus iş insanları iki ülke arasında yeni RO-RO hattının kurulmasını talep ediyor. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220325/rost-turk-ve-rus-is-insanlari-iki-ulke-arasinda-yeni-ro-ro-hattinin-kurulmasini-talep-ediyor-1055050858.html>.

²⁷ Turan Salcı. [sputniknews.com.tr, 06.04.2022 - 15.39]. 'DEİK Türkiye-Rusya İş Konseyi Başkanı Ekmekçibaş: Rusya'da Türk ürünlerine büyük bir rağbet var. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220406/deik-turkiye-rusya-is-konseyi-baskani-ekmekcibasi-rusyada-turk-urunlerine-buyuk-bir-ragbet-var-1055359136.html>.

²⁸ Amur Gadjeiev. [sputniknews.com.tr, 14.04.2022 - 19.14]. 'Moskova'daki gayrimenkul fuarı Türk firmalarının tüm beklentilerini aştı'. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220414/1055568357.html>.

after meeting with the PKK in Syria, and appeared in Ukraine.²⁹ Russia aims to pull Türkiye to its side in the Ukraine crisis by emphasizing that a figure that previously acted against Türkiye's interests in Syria has emerged in Ukraine, yielding results.

On the other hand, Sputnik Türkiye columnist Burcu Okutan points out the contrasting treatment of Ukrainian refugees in Europe, where they are welcomed with applause, while African and Middle Eastern refugees are left to drown. Okutan highlights the agreements and financial support provided by Europe to keep Syrian refugees in Türkiye, but now there is a plan to relocate refugees to Rwanda. Sputnik Türkiye provides examples of Europe's discriminatory treatment towards refugees. Differential treatment of Ukrainian refugees compared to African and Middle Eastern refugees in Europe was stated.³⁰ Similarly, Iranian leader Ali Khamenei highlighted the racist attitudes displayed by some Europeans during the crisis in Ukraine, stating that everyone witnessed the West's racism in the events unfolding in Ukraine.³¹ By highlighting the biased stance of the West, an attempt is being made to sway Türkiye and the international public opinion towards Russia's side. By emphasizing the West's double standards regarding Ukraine and Ukrainian refugees, an attempt is being made to raise awareness among the Turkish public. Furthermore, by highlighting that it was Western powers that contributed to the retention of Syrians in Türkiye, there is an aim to ignite anti-foreign sentiment in the Turkish public and consequently, to steer an inclination towards Russia's side.

In his article, Turan Salcı includes the opinions of Retired Colonel Ünal Atabay. Atabay points out the possibility that the United States aims to undermine Türkiye's policy of neutrality by offering F-16 jets to Türkiye. The renewed request for F-16 procurement, which has arisen due to Türkiye's exclusion from the F-35 project and the absence of reimbursement for invested funds, has been highlighted through a letter from the US Department of State to Congress. Atabay

²⁹ Selin Uludağ. [sputniknews.com.tr, 19.03.2022 - 19.47]. 'Ölüm Meleği' Ukrayna'da görüntülendi: Neo-Nazilerin 'koruduğu' Bernard Henri Levy aslında kim?. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220318/olum-melegi-ukraynada-goruntulendi-neo-nazilerin-korudugu-bernard-henri-levy-aslinda-kim-1054861700.html>.

³⁰ Burcu Okutan. [sputniknews.com.tr, 21.04.2022 - 16.48]. Avrupa'nın sığınmacı sicili: Ukrayna'dan gelenlere alkış, 'diğer'lerine ırkçılık, darp, ölüm. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220421/avrupanin-siginmaci-sicili-ukraynadan-gelenlere-alkis-digerlerine-irkcilik-darp-olum-1055746750.html>.

³¹ Sputnik Türkiye. [sputniknews.com.tr, 22.03.2022 - 01.51]. İran: Ukrayna'da yaşanan olaylarda Batı'nın ırkçılığını herkes gördü. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220322/iran-ukraynada-yasanan-olaylarda-batinin-irkciligini-herkes-gordu-1054934602.html>.

proposes that the US's decision to provide F-16s could intend to induce a shift in Türkiye's stance on the Russia-Ukraine crisis. Türkiye has garnered experience in countering such tactics employed by the US.³² By emphasizing the moves against Türkiye by the United States, the intention is to preempt Türkiye's potential alignment with the West in the context of the Ukraine Crisis.

In her article, Burcu Okutan presents the views of a Turkish resident in Ukraine. The individual in question states that Ukraine indiscriminately bombs homes, workplaces, shopping centers, and even military targets. They mention that the Azov Battalion and extreme right-wing neo-Nazis have carried out Western-backed attacks in Donetsk and Lugansk, leading to the loss of 2600 civilian lives over 8 years.³³ The name or surname of the Turkish person giving the interview is not mentioned anywhere in the news article, casting doubt on the authenticity and consistency of the report. Beyond these details that cast a shadow on the credibility of the news, the aim is to address the emotions of the Turkish public through the negative experiences of a Turkish resident in Ukraine and to garner Türkiye's support. In a similar vein, The Pentagon stated that it could not confirm the accusation of the use of chemical weapons by the Russian army in the clashes between Ukraine and the neo-Nazi Azov Battalion in the city of Mariupol.³⁴ Russia is conveying the message that the attributions to it do not reflect the truth and that the Ukrainian side is distorting the facts.

3.2.3 Russia's Efforts to Garner Support through the Crimean Tatars

Sputnik Türkiye endeavors to align Turkish public opinion with a message that promotes the notion of Russia as the side deserving of support. This is achieved by emphasizing Ukraine's inconsistency and failure to adhere to its commitments through individuals and institutions

³² Turan Salcı. [sputniknews.com.tr, 07.04.2022 - 16.44]. 'ABD F-16 hamlesiyle Türkiye'nin tarafsızlık politikasında bir yara açmak istiyor olabilir. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220407/abd-f-16-hamlesiyle-turkiyenin-tarafsizlik-politikasinda-bir-yara-acmak-istiyor-olabilir--1055387062.html>.

³³ Burcu Okutan. [sputniknews.com.tr, 04.03.2022 - 19.09]. Donetsk'te yaşayan Türk, Sputnik'e anlattı: Ukrayna saldırısında halk neler yaşadı?. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220304/donetskte-yasayan-turk-sputnike-anlatti-ukrayna-saldirisinda-halk-neler-yasadi-1054441376.html>.

³⁴ Sputnik Türkiye. [sputniknews.com.tr, 13.04.2022 - 09.55]. Pentagon: Ukrayna'nın Mariupol'de kimyasal silah kullanıldığı iddiasını teyit edemedik. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220413/pentagon-ukraynanin-mariupolde-kimyasal-silah-kullanildigi-iddiasini-teyit-edemedik-1055518314.html>.

perceived as proxies of Russia, even though they lack a representation of the Crimean Tatars. This effort aims to draw the Turkish public closer to Russia and potentially weaken the international resistance against Russia. In Turan Salcı's article, the views of Ünver Sel, the President of the Crimean Tatar Cultural Associations Federation, are presented. Sel's remarks were included in an interview with Sputnik Türkiye, in which he suggested that Türkiye should work towards preserving the presence of the Tatar population in Crimea through diplomatic engagement with Russia. Sel underscored the significance of Türkiye's backing for the resettlement of Crimean Tatars, who are currently in exile, back to the peninsula. He also drew attention to Russia's substantial investments in Crimea.³⁵ Türkiye's role in preserving the presence of Crimean Tatars and supporting their settlement in Crimea. By particularly emphasizing Russia's investments in the region, an attempt is made to impress upon the Turkish public the notion that Türkiye should stand alongside Russia for the welfare of its citizens. In a similar vein, Eyvaz Umerov, the alleged President of the Crimean Tatars Regional National-Cultural Autonomy, stated that the promises made by the Ukrainian government regarding the establishment of a new city in the Kherson Region for Crimean Tatars have been proven to be fictional.³⁶ Here, while highlighting Ukraine's inconsistency and failure to keep its promises, an emphasis is placed on the need to stand with Russia as the side that should be supported.

3.2.4 Russian Support of Türkiye's Position Regarding Not Allowing Passage of Non-littoral Warships to the Black Sea

On the other hand, Historian and author Prof. Dr. İlber Ortaylı commented on Ukraine's request regarding the Montreux Convention, stating that Black Sea countries have the right to enter and exit their ports, including their naval forces. He emphasized that Türkiye does not have the

³⁵ Turan Salcı. [sputniknews.com.tr, 14.04.2022 - 15.39]. Ünver Sel: Türkiye'nin Rusya'yla uzlaşarak Kırım'daki Tatar varlığını sürdürmesi gerekiyor. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220414/unver-sel-turkiyenin-rusyayla-uzlasarak-kirimdaki-tatar-varligini-surdurmesi-gerekmiyor-1055561527.html>.

³⁶ Sputnik Türkiye. [sputniknews.com.tr, 14.04.2022 - 13.07]. 'Kiev'in Herson'da Kırım Tatarları için yeni bir şehir kurmaya yönelik vaatleri kurgu'. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220414/kievin-hersonda-kirim-tatarlari-icin-yeni-bir-sehir-kurmaya-yonelik-vaatleri-kurgu-105555413.html>.

status of closing the straits.³⁷ Also, Minister of National Defense Hulusi Akar emphasized the importance of the Montreux Convention's status as a significant framework for all coastal countries, the region, and the entire world. He stated the importance of considering past experiences and protecting the Montreux status together, highlighting that its disruption would not benefit anyone.³⁸ In the same direction, in the news article penned by Turan Salcı, the opinions of retired Rear Admiral Cem Gürdeniz are included. Gürdeniz emphasized that Article 19 of the Montreux Convention is currently in effect, indicating that Türkiye is not a belligerent party. He supported the statement made by Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu regarding Article 19. Gürdeniz stressed the need to allow coastal warships belonging to warring parties to return to their ports in the Black Sea following Türkiye's decision to close the Turkish Straits. He also understood that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs would not accept NATO's declarations of passage to the north, as NATO openly declared its support for the warring side by providing military aid to Ukraine. Gürdeniz regarded the Ministry of Foreign Affairs statement that the straits are closed to all warships as a correct interpretation of the situation.³⁹ Sputnik Türkiye, by compiling these Montreux news pieces, essentially supports Türkiye's viewpoint. In doing so, it displays a supportive stance towards Türkiye, considering that the decision mentioned in Gürdeniz's recent statement about closing the straits to warships, which is in favor of Russia in the current context, is known to be a decision that supports Türkiye.

³⁷ Sputnik Türkiye. [sputniknews.com.tr, 26.02.2022 - 11.04]. Ortaylı: Boğazları kapatma diye bir statümüz yok, Montrö'yü kendimiz ihlal etmiş oluruz. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220226/ortayli-bogazlari-kapatma-diye-bir-statumuz-yok-montroyu-kendimiz-ihlal-etmis-oluruz-1054258471.html>.

³⁸ Sputnik Türkiye. [sputniknews.com.tr, 05.03.2022 - 11.23]. Milli Savunma Bakanı Akar: Borispol Havaalanındaki iki uçağımızı en kısa sürede tahliye edeceğiz. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220305/milli-savunma-bakani-akar-borispol-havaalaninda-iki-ucagimiz-su-anda-bekliyor-1054449069.html>.

³⁹ Turan Salcı. [sputniknews.com.tr, 02.03.2022 - 15.19]. Cem Gürdeniz: Montrö gereği Ukrayna'da taraf olan NATO'nun gemilerine de boğazlar kapatılmalıdır. <https://sputniknews.com.tr/20220302/cem-gurdeniz-montro-geregi-ukraynada-taraf-olan-natonun-gemilerine-de-bogazlar-kapatilmalidir-1054371024.html>.

3.2.5 Emphasis on Russian and American Agreement that Türkiye Should Remain Impartial

Here, Sputnik Türkiye is bridging frames with the US, paraphrasing that US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman expressed full confidence in Türkiye, stating that they believe Türkiye will appropriately implement the Montreux Convention. She praised Türkiye's transparent decision-making process and emphasized the shared desire to prevent the Turkish Straits from becoming part of any conflict.⁴⁰ Given the current circumstances, it is emphasized that Türkiye should assert its ownership over the Montreux Convention, which includes provisions such as the prohibition of the passage of warships through the straits during times of war, benefiting the states sharing the same coastline. While other Western news and statements are criticized by Russia, those inclined toward Russia are utilized as propaganda material without objection. Similarly, In the article by Amur Gadjiev, the opinions of Russian expert Andrey Boldirev are included. Boldirev states that the violation of the Montreux Convention could lead to a revision of the agreement, as it is not in the interest of NATO warships. He underlines that Russia and Türkiye can clear the Black Sea without the need for NATO's mine-clearing ships.⁴¹ Russia, which does not want NATO in the Black Sea, aims to convince the Turkish public that Türkiye can also clear the seas of mines on its own.

The Turkish public is being persuaded that the developments involving Ukraine are under Russia's control and that diplomatic and trade relations with Russia remain uninterrupted. In this process, an impression is being cultivated that Russia is a reliable partner while Ukraine is deemed unreliable. Despite Ukraine closing its doors to Turkish companies, it is emphasized that these companies have a place for themselves in Russia. Consequently, this narrative aims to diminish international support for Ukraine and enhance Russia's image. Turkish company Anadolu Efes on the other hand, announced that as of this morning, production and sales operations at their beer

⁴⁰ Sputnik Türkiye. [sputniknews.com.tr, 06.03.2022 - 08.56]. ABD Dışışleri Bakan Yardımcısı: Türkiye'ye inancımız tam, Montrö'yü uygun şekilde uygulayacaktır. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220306/abd-disisleri-bakan-yardimcisi-turkiyeye-inancimiz-tam-montroyu-uygun-sekilde-uygulayacaktır--1054465507.html>.

⁴¹ Amur Gadjiev. [sputniknews.com.tr, 14.04.2022 - 17.42]. 'Rusya ve Türkiye, NATO'nun mayın tarama gemileri olmadan da Karadeniz'i temizleyebilir'. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220414/rusya-ve-turkiye-natonun-mayin-tarama-gemileri-olmadan-da-karadenizi-temizleyebilir-1055565658.html>.

factories in Ukraine have been halted. The company clarified that their operations in Russia continue as usual, with no disruption in production or sales.⁴² Similarly, on the 7th day of the Donbas operation, Russian Sberbank withdrew from the European market. Russia gained control of Herson. There are restrictions on the Rossiya Segodnya agency. According to Rosturizm, Türkiye is welcoming Russian tourists.⁴³ Similarly, according to Bulat Shakirov, the President of the Russia Shopping Centers Association, Turkish restaurants owned by Chitir Chicken, operating in 17 countries worldwide, could fill the gap left by the withdrawal of McDonald's in the country.⁴⁴

3.3 RUSSIA'S ATTEMPTS TO LEGITIMIZE THE WAR

In this section, an examination will be conducted to explore how Russia attempts to legitimize its unjust occupation, and how it distorts Ukraine's discourse and actions to present them in a manner that serves its own interests, thereby influencing the agenda in Türkiye and the global context.

3.3.1 Russia's Objectives in the Ukrainian Crisis and Their Justifications

The news article, which features a meeting discussing Russia's recognition of the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics, highlights Putin's emphasis on Ukraine's aggression in Donbas and its failure to adhere to the Minsk agreements. The article underscores the necessity of the decision regarding these regions.⁴⁵ While the news headline and content acknowledge President Erdogan's remarks on the subject, the specific details of these viewpoints are notably absent from

⁴² Sputnik Türkiye. [sputniknews.com.tr, 24.02.2022 - 21.07]. Anadolu Efes: Ukrayna'daki fabrikalarımızda üretim ve satış durdu. <https://sputniknews.com.tr/20220224/anadolu-efes-ukraynadaki-fabrikalarimizda-uretim-ve-satis-durdu-1054213902.html>.

⁴³ Sputnik Türkiye. [sputniknews.com.tr, 02.03.2022 - 16.51]. Putin'den kararname: Bilgi teknolojileri sektörünün hızlıca kalkındırılması için önlemler alınacak. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220302/biden-abd-hava-sahasini-rusya-havayolu-sirketlerine-ait-tum-ucuslara-kapatacagiz-1054351309.html>.

⁴⁴ Sputnik Türkiye. [sputniknews.com.tr, 18.03.2022 - 14.41]. Rusya'da McDonald's'tan boşalan yeri, Türk restoran zinciri Chitir Chicken doldurmaya hazırlanıyor. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220318/rusyada-mcdonalstan-bosalan-yeri-turk-restoran-zinciri-chitir-chicken-doldurmaya-hazirlaniyor-1054849195.html>.

⁴⁵ Sputnik Türkiye. [sputniknews.com.tr, 24.02.2022 - 15:05]. Rusya Devlet Başkanı Putin, Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan ile telefonda görüştü. Sputnik Türkiye. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220224/rusya-devlet-baskani-putin-cumhurbaskani-erdogan-ile-telefonda-gorustu-1054181552.html>.

the report. By employing the term “leaders,” news content exhibits a case of disinformation by exclusively featuring Putin's perspectives and efforts to legitimize the occupation, thus providing an instance of misleading information. Reiterating and emphasizing the same necessity under a different news headline⁴⁶ at the outset of the war can be evaluated as an example of a propaganda bomb, aimed at amplifying a specific message.

Sputnik Türkiye uses Turkish biased reporting and opinion columns to support its position, in addition to its own reporting. Sputnik Türkiye reported news by Erdinç Çelikkan, a columnist for Hürriyet newspaper. According to this report, Russia's agenda in Ukraine includes Ukraine's neutrality, Disarmament, and mutual security assurances, the Process of de-Nazification, Removing obstacles to the widespread use of the Russian language in Ukraine, the Status of Donbas, and the Status of Crimea.⁴⁷ Çelikkan repeats all of Russia's talking points without seeking to balance them with the West or Ukraine's views. By initiating the occupation and attributing the non-acceptance of these agenda items by Ukraine, Russia accuses Ukraine and attempts to legitimize the war.

While the international community debated Russia's decision for the operation, Russia continued its unrelenting propaganda barrage with reports of Ukraine's ongoing and intensified attacks in Donbas. Through this approach, the Russian media entity Sputnik Türkiye is endeavoring to legitimize the occupation by framing it within the context of NATO and Ukrainian policies, aiming to influence perception among the Turkish and global public. The Kremlin is attempting to legitimize the occupation by listing a number of security reasons according to their perspective. Sputnik Türkiye reports that Russian President Putin announced in his address to the nation that a military operation had been initiated in Donbas. The reasons cited included the disregard for warnings regarding NATO expansion.⁴⁸ The statement made by the Kremlin at the onset of the

⁴⁶ Sputnik Türkiye. [sputniknews.com.tr, 23.02.2022 – 18:45]. Putin'den Erdoğan'a: Lugansk ve Donetsk halk cumhuriyetlerini tanımak, Rusya için bir gerekliliktir. <https://sputniknews.com.tr/20220223/putinden-erdogana-lugansk-ve-donetsk-halk-cumhuriyetlerini-tanimak-rusya-icin-bir-gerekliliktir--1054169060.html>.

⁴⁷ Sputnik Türkiye. [sputniknews.com.tr, 20.03.2022 - 11.14]. Dışişleri Bakanı Çavuşoğlu: Hem Rusya hem Ukrayna'nın pozisyonlarında yakınlaşma var. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220320/disisleri-bakani-cavusoglu-hem-rusya-hem-ukrayna-terafinda-yakinlasma-var-1054890115.html>.

⁴⁸ Sputnik Türkiye. [sputniknews.com.tr, 24.02.2022 - 06.02]. Rusya Devlet Başkanı Putin, yaptığı ulusa sesleniş konuşmasında Donbass'a yönelik askeri operasyon başlattıklarını duyurdu. Putin, "Rusya'nın NATO'nun genişletilmemesi konusunda bir uzlaşmaya varma girişimleri boşa çıkarıldı. İttifakın genişlemesiyle birlikte durum

occupation, asserting the absence of any warfare, is noteworthy. Kremlin spokesperson Peskov justifies their presence in Ukraine as aimed at disarmament and purging it from Nazis.⁴⁹ Similarly, Putin emphasizes that professional soldiers are fulfilling their duties in Ukraine and they will ensure peace.⁵⁰ In yet another news article, Putin conveyed to Erdoğan that the operation would only cease if Kyiv ended its military actions and accepted the demands.⁵¹

Russia engages in a strategy of coercion towards nations implementing sanctions, aiming to provide a rationale for its actions in Ukraine, and consistently emphasizes the concept of special operations instead of adopting occupation-related rhetoric. Moreover, it endeavors to legitimize the purported operation through the presence of neo-Nazi elements and strives to employ the term “operation” instead of using the words “occupation” or “war.” Putin expressed the choice to execute specialized operations in Ukraine as a “challenging choice.”⁵² He conveyed the perspective that the sanctions imposed on Russia equate to a declaration of war. Putin affirmed that Russia endeavored to peacefully address the Ukraine conflict and asserted that Western nations actively supported the unconstitutional upheaval in Ukraine. He additionally alluded to the existence of paramilitary groups and neo-Nazi elements within Ukraine, asserting that these factions even direct hostilities toward their soldiers.

Russia is emphasizing that it is conducting the “operation” not only for its own security but also for global security. Moreover, by underscoring that civilians are not targeted, an attempt is made to legitimize the occupation while simultaneously refuting news and reports that mention civilian casualties. Russia is attempting to legitimize the purported operation by producing arguments that suggest Ukraine has adopted a hostile stance and framing them as provoked by the West. Dmitry Peskov emphasizes that one of the objectives of the operation is to eliminate the

daha tehlikeli hale geliyor. Artık buna sessiz kalamayız" ifadelerini kullandı. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220224/1054179910.html>.

⁴⁹ Sputnik Türkiye. [sputniknews.com.tr, 24.02.2022 - 16.09]. Kremlin: Donbass'ta savaş yok, özel operasyon sürdürülüyor, 'işgal' kelimesi kabul edilemez. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220224/kremlin-donbassta-savas-yok-ozel-operasyon-surduruluyor-isgal-kelimesi-kabul-edilemez-1054198159.html>.

⁵⁰ Sputnik Türkiye. [sputniknews.com.tr, 08.03.2022 - 00.20]. Putin: Ukrayna'daki görevleri sadece profesyonel askerler yerine getiriyor, barışı onlar sağlayacak. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220308/1054509367.html>.

⁵¹ Sputnik Türkiye. [sputniknews.com.tr, 06.03.2022 - 12.55]. Rusya lideri Putin ile Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan telefonda görüştü. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220306/rusya-lideri-putin-ile-cumhurbaskani-erdoganin-telefon-gorusmesi-basladi--1054465314.html>.

⁵² Sputnik Türkiye. [sputniknews.com.tr, 05.03.2022 - 16.14]. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220305/rusya-lideri-putin-ukraynada-ozel-operasyon-duzenlemek-zor-bir-karardi-1054456028.html>.

threat of a Third World War. He also states that Russia has never targeted civilian facilities in Ukraine and highlights numerous witnesses who have reported the horrifying actions of Ukrainian extremist battalions.⁵³ Peskov also states that Putin had issued a “halt” order to the army, but due to Ukraine's rejection of negotiations, the army continued its advance. The Russian Ministry of Defense announced an attack on Russian ships evacuating Ukrainian Border Guards who had surrendered their weapons.⁵⁴ Also, Zaharova highlighted that the 'operation' took place due to the puppet regime in Kyiv remaining silent in the face of crimes committed against civilians, including Russian citizens, and emphasized that it did not pose any threat to civilians.⁵⁵ On the other hand, Burcu Okutan's article includes the opinions of Maltepe University Department of Political Science and International Relations faculty member Prof. Dr. Hasan Ünal. He is commenting on NATO's deployment of troops near the Russian border and the alliance's continued expansion and stated that there is a clear determination to provoke Russia. He also mentioned that this increases Europe's dependency on the US as much as possible.⁵⁶

With the news content and the language employed, Western media and Western nations are perceived to be attempting to portray Russia negatively, while Russia endeavors to create an impression of adopting a conciliatory stance. Also, Russia presents itself as peace-seeking on the one hand, while on the other hand, attributing the failure of peace negotiations to the obstruction by extremist groups through the voice of a Ukrainian source. This serves as a bolstering justification for legitimizing its occupation. Zakharova highlighted an unprecedented information assault and disinformation campaign targeting Russia. She pointed out that this attack encompasses both media and the cyber domain, attributing its origin to the West and predominantly utilizing

⁵³ Sputnik Türkiye. [sputniknews.com.tr, 07.04.2022 - 19.51]. Peskov: Ukrayna'daki operasyonun önümüzdeki günlerde sona ermesini umuyoruz. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220407/1055394734.html>.

⁵⁴ Sputnik Türkiye. [sputniknews.com.tr, 26.02.2022 - 14.08]. Rusya'nın Ukrayna'nın doğusundaki Donbass bölgesine yönelik askeri harekatı üçüncü gününde devam ediyor. Donetsk Halk Cumhuriyeti (DHC) lideri Denis Puşilin, DHC birliklerinin birçok cephedeki kademeli savunmayı aşarak ilerlemeyi sürdürdüğünü duyurdu. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220226/donbass-operasyonunda-ucuncu-gun--abdden-ukraynaya-350-milyon-dolarlik-yardim-1054262533.html>.

⁵⁵ Sputnik Türkiye. [sputniknews.com.tr, 25.02.2022 - 19.42]. Zaharova: Ukrayna'dan diplomatik ilişkilerin kesilmesiyle ilgili nota aldık. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220225/zaharova-ukraynadan-diplomatik-iliskilerin-kesilmesiyle-ilgili-nota-aldik-105424426.html>.

⁵⁶ Burcu Okutan. [sputniknews.com.tr, 11.04.2022 - 18.44]. ‘Rusya’yı kışkırtma kararlılığı, Avrupa’nın ABD’ye bağımlılığının arttırmasını beraberinde getiriyor’. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220411/rusyayi-kiskirtma-karariligi-avrupanin-abdye-bagimliliginin-artirmasini-beraberinde-getiriyor-1055474734.html>.

Ukrainian sources and capabilities. The objective of this assault is to misinform the international community and discredit Russia's actions. Zakharova also mentioned the utilization of Ukrainian soldiers and neo-Nazis as human shields, expressing Moscow's readiness to engage in negotiations with Ukraine to prevent further bloodshed. Furthermore, she alleged that the BBC is employed to destabilize the political situation in Russia.⁵⁷ On the other hand, Ukrainian negotiator David Arahamiya highlights that the Ukrainian delegation aims to reach an agreement in the second round of negotiations; however, this effort is hindered by extremist groups.⁵⁸

Russia rationalizes its purported operation by emphasizing that the actual victim is Russia and the lack of any substantiated basis for the claims in the news article renders it an exemplar of fake news. In portraying the West as an adversary, Russia positions itself as a victim in this context. Consequently, both of these news pieces target the fabricated argument put forth by Russia as the rationale for its occupation, which pertains to alleged atrocities committed by the Ukrainian government or its tolerance of such acts of cruelty. The Russian Investigative Committee claims that the Ukrainian extremist Azov Battalion's sharpshooters, hiding in Mariupol's Azovstal factory, mercilessly target civilians.⁵⁹ On the other hand, a Serbian director, speaking to RT, described the Ukrainian crisis as a continuation of NATO's 1999 air campaign against Yugoslavia. The NATO bombing, he underlined which lasted for 78 days starting on March 24, 1999, was conducted in response to the conflict between Kosovar Albanian separatists and the Yugoslav army, ultimately leading to Kosovo's independence.⁶⁰ Drawing parallels between the Russia-Ukraine crisis and NATO's 1999 air campaign against Yugoslavia, it highlights that the Russian population perceives a shared destiny with Serbia. In addition, Serb-American journalist Nebojsa Malic stated that

⁵⁷ Sputnik Türkiye. [sputniknews.com.tr, 03.03.2022 - 22.40]. Zaharova: Rusya, Batı'dan benzeri görülmemiş bir bilgi terörüyle karşı karşıya. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220303/1054404505.html>.

⁵⁸ Sputnik Türkiye. [sputniknews.com.tr, 05.03.2022 - 19.42]. Ukraynalı müzakereci David Arahamiya, Rusya-Ukrayna görüşmelerinin 3. turunun pazartesi günü gerçekleşeceğini söyledi. Rusya delegasyonunun üyesi Slutskiy, ikinci tur görüşmelere ilişkin Ukrayna delegasyonunun anlaşmaya varmak istediğini ancak aşırı grupların anlaşmaların uygulanmasına engel olduğunu belirtti. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220305/canli-rusya-savunma-bakanligi-bugun-mariupol-ve-volnovakhada-insani-konvoylar-olusturulmamistir-1054457331.html>.

⁵⁹ Sputnik Türkiye. [sputniknews.com.tr, 15.04.2022 - 17.29]. Rusya: Mariupol'deki aşırı milliyetçilerin keskin nişancıları sivilleri vuruyor. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220415/1055593769.html>.

⁶⁰ Sputnik Türkiye. [sputniknews.com.tr, 23.03.2022 - 12.02]. Kusturica: Ukrayna, NATO'nun 1999 Yugoslavya saldırısının ikinci perdesidir. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220323/kusturica-ukrayna-natonun-1999-yugoslavya-saldirisinin-ikinci-perdesidir-1054972834.html>.

Ukrainian nationalists create propaganda similar to that of ISIS.⁶¹ Here, we observe an instance where Russia, through Sputnik Türkiye, accuses another nation of engaging in propaganda, thereby exhibiting an example of engaging in propaganda itself.

Sergey Kiriienko, Deputy Chief of the Russian Presidential Administration, asserts that Russia's active participation is crucial in shaping the new world order. He claims that Russia not only defends its own rights but also advocates for the rights of all nations and individuals, including the freedom to determine language and identity. In this context, there is an implication that Russia has the right to intervene in Donbas. He argues that achieving these goals necessitates global-scale economic and technological independence.⁶² Sputnik Türkiye, through Kiriienko, expresses that Russia's engagement in certain actions to preserve its identity is its most natural right. Simultaneously, technological independence is highlighted, aiming to achieve a similar autonomy as demonstrated on platforms like VKontakte. Implicitly, the text refers to independence gained through a media under Russian control, isolating itself entirely from Western and objective media outlets.

According to a survey conducted by the Russian public opinion research center VTSIOM, it is stated that 88% of Russian citizens perceive Nazi organizations operating in Ukraine as a threat to Russia.⁶³ The intention here is to emphasize that the invasion initiated by Russia is also endorsed by its citizens. The purported operation aims to convey the message that it stems not from Putin's personal ambitions but from the desires and fears of the Russian populace. According to Major General Mikhail Mizintsev, the Head of the National Center for Defense Management at the Russian Ministry of Defense, neo-Nazis planned to open artillery fire on civilians being evacuated from Kharkiv. He stated that the purpose of this provocation by the Kyiv regime was to accuse Russian soldiers of committing massacres against civilians.⁶⁴ In the relevant news articles, the

⁶¹ Sputnik Türkiye. [sputniknews.com.tr, 13.04.2022 - 21.02]. 'ABD'li gazeteci: Ukraynalı aşırı milliyetçileri IŞİD'inkine benzer propaganda oluşturmaya itiyorlar. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220413/1055541081.html>.

⁶² Sputnik Türkiye. [sputniknews.com.tr, 17.05.2022 - 18.36]. Kiriienko: Beklersek, yeni dünya bizsiz kurulacak. <https://sputniknews.com.tr/20220517/kiriienko-beklersek-yeni-dunya-bizziz-kurulacak-1056452557.html>.

⁶³ Sputnik Türkiye. [sputniknews.com.tr, 19.04.2022 - 17.52]. Ankete göre Rusların yüzde 88'i, Ukraynalı Nazileri tehdit olarak görüyor. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220419/1055685619.html>.

⁶⁴ Sputnik Türkiye. [sputniknews.com.tr]. CANLI Rusya: Kiev, Harkov'dan tahliye edilecek sivillere yönelik korkunç bir provokasyon hazırlıyor. https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220430/ukrayna-silahli-kuvvetlerinin-luhanska-actigi-ates-sonucu-3-sivil-yaralandi-1055971669.html?full_online=1#1055985587.

claim is put forth that Ukraine is engaged in provocations against Russia, thus continuing the effort to construct a veneer of legitimacy for Russia's occupation.

On the other hand, Mizintsev, Ukraine once again averted the threat to the Azovstal iron and steel plant, and no one benefited from the established humanitarian aid corridor.⁶⁵ According to another statement by Mizintsev, Ukraine and the United Kingdom were purportedly preparing for new provocations in the Sumy region with the intent to tarnish Russia's image.⁶⁶ Furthermore, Mizintsev stated that the situation that has emerged in the Donbas region over the past 8 years has given rise to severe humanitarian crises, necessitating the “special operation.” He further underscored that during this timeframe, over 6.5 million individuals have fallen victim to human rights violations, and the death toll has surpassed 14,500.⁶⁷ According to the content of the news, despite Russia's pursuit of a peaceful policy, Ukraine and the West are portrayed as making every effort to undermine it.

One of the primary arguments Russia generated to legitimize its occupation of Ukraine was the presence of neo-Nazis in Ukraine. In Erkin Öncan's authored article, it is stated that following the Maidan coup in 2014, an extreme right-wing transformation took place in Mariupol, resulting in an eight-year Nazi regime. Russia, on the other hand, reclaimed the region by purging it from the Nazis and drew attention to the countdown for neo-Nazis and foreign soldiers at Azovstal.⁶⁸ Similarly, the Ukrainian government, accused of surrendering key positions to neo-Nazis, released a video linking Russia to fascism. The video initially included a photo of Hirohito labeled as a defeated fascist in 1945. After facing criticism from the Japanese government, Kyiv apologized and removed Hirohito from the video. It is emphasized that the Ukrainian government has neo-Nazis in important positions, and they refer to leaders such as Hitler and Mussolini to make Russia

⁶⁵ Sputnik Türkiye. [sputniknews.com.tr, 25.04.2022 - 22.56]. Rusya Savunma Bakanlığı: Kiev rejimi Mariupol'deki Azovstal'dan tahliyeyi bir kez daha engelledi. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220425/rusya-savunma-bakanligi-kiev-rejimi-mariupoldeki-azovstaldan-tahliyeyi-bir-kez-daha-engelledi-1055842194.html>.

⁶⁶ Sputnik Türkiye. [sputniknews.com.tr, 11.04.2022 - 19.36]. Rusya: Ukrayna ve İngiltere, Sumi Bölgesi'nde yeni provokasyonlar hazırlıyor. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220411/1055476175.html>.

⁶⁷ Sputnik Türkiye. [sputniknews.com.tr, 25.03.2022 - 19.18]. Mizintsev: Donbass'taki insani kriz özel askeri operasyonu zorunlu kıldı. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220325/1055053388.html>.

⁶⁸ Erkin Öncan. [sputniknews.com.tr, 25.04.2022 - 18.00]. Mariupol'e 8 yıl sonra dönen 'anti-Maydan' ruhu: Şehir, bu yıl yeniden Zafer Günü'nü kutlayabilecek. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220425/mariupole-8-yil-sonra-donen-anti-maydan-ruhu-sehir-bu-yil-yeniden-zafer-gununu-kutlayabilecek-1055831909.html>.

look fascist.⁶⁹ Russia highlights Ukraine's smear campaigns against Russia and conveys the message that Ukrainian journalism lacks objectivity, as evidenced by the deletion and apology for news content prepared by Ukraine after receiving criticism.

Sputnik Türkiye, while attempting to legitimize the operation through the presence of Azov fighters, there is also an emphasis on Russia's dissemination of fake news to Western media, with the aim of making a positive contribution to Russia's international image. The statements of former soldier Adrien Boke, who returned to France after spending three weeks in Ukraine as part of a humanitarian aid mission, are featured regarding the crimes he witnessed committed by the Ukrainian army. Boke, expressing his shock at what he witnessed, noted that he encountered instances of European nations supplying arms to neo-Nazi groups. He mentioned that these groups openly displayed SS symbols and that Azov fighters openly targeted Jews. Boke also stated that dead bodies were intentionally moved to different locations.⁷⁰ Similarly, the presence of documentation and photographs indicating Canada's provision of training to the Azov Battalion since 2020 is pointed out. It is noted that the Canadian Armed Forces have expended over 890 million dollars on this matter.⁷¹ The fact that the only source of documentation and photographs is a low-followed Twitter account named Branko Marcetic raises suspicions of troll activities and misinformation.

On the other hand, according to a news report by Burcu Okutan, Ukraine, despite the prohibition of surrogate motherhood in nearly all European countries, allowed it, and eventually, children born through this process fell into the hands of separatist forces like the Karpatska Sich militias⁷², instead of being given to their families. Thus, it is highlighted that this contributes to the circulation of separatist movements. Similarly, in the article written by Ceyda Karan, the opinions

⁶⁹ Sputnik Türkiye. [sputniknews.com.tr, 25.04.2022 - 15.52]. Rusya'yı 'faşist' göstermek için Hirohito'yu Hitler ile aynı kefeye koyan Kiev, Japonya'yı kızdırdı. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220425/rusyayi-fasist-gostermek-icin-hirohitoyu-hitler-ile-ayni-kefeye-koyan-kiev-japonyayi-kizdirdi-1055830171.html>.

⁷⁰ Sputnik Türkiye. [sputniknews.com.tr, 11.05.2022 - 22.06]. Eski Fransız asker: Ukrayna'da Ukrayna Silahlı Kuvvetlerinin savaş suçlarına tanık oldum. <https://sputniknews.com.tr/20220511/eski-fransiz-asker-ukraynada-ukrayna-silahli-kuvvetlerinin-savas-suclarina-tanik-oldum-1056291553.html>.

⁷¹ Sputnik Türkiye. [sputniknews.com.tr, 12.04.2022 - 09.41]. Radio Canada: Kanada ordusu, Ukraynalı neo-Nazi Azov Taburu militanlarını eğitiyor. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220412/kanada-ukraynali-neo-nazi-azov-taburu-militanlarini-egitiyor-1055487769.html>.

⁷² Burcu Okutan. [sputniknews.com.tr, 17.03.2022 - 12.12]. Avrupa'nın 'bebek fabrikası' Ukrayna: Sicili kirli klinikler, sağlığını kaybeden taşıyıcı anneler. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220317/avrupanin-bebek-fabrikasi-ukrayna-sicili-kirli-klinikler-sagligini-kaybeden-tasiyici-anneler-1054805528.html>.

of Prof. Dr. Hasan Köni are included. Köni suggests that the Ukraine crisis was deliberately provoked by the US to bring Europe closer and gain its support for Biden. He questions why the US armed Ukraine if NATO wouldn't intervene and believes Europe made sacrifices for Biden's midterm election victory.⁷³ Through the content that portrays the US as inciting Ukraine to get closer to Europe, an attempt is being made to legitimize the so-called operation.

3.4 RUSSIA’S APPROACH TO THE WEST

This section examines how Russia positions Western countries and Western actors, the biases it holds against them, and the narratives it crafts within these biases to influence the Turkish public opinion.

3.4.1 Russian Distrust of the Western Nations

The language and tone employed by Russian propaganda vary from country to country based on the sensitivities of the target audience. In a telephone conversation with French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, Russian President Vladimir Putin requested support for the cessation of nationalist militias' extremist activities.⁷⁴ In this context, it is noteworthy that Russia, in its attempts to align Western states, employs language and rhetoric such as “nationalist extremist groups” instead of “neo-Nazis.”

Through Sputnik Türkiye, Russia is endeavoring to legitimize its purported operation by putting forward alleged causes for the conflict. Lavrov conveyed Russia's favorable perspective regarding Türkiye and Israel's proposition for mediating negotiations with Ukraine. He articulated that the United States is exerting pressure on Türkiye, China, India, Egypt, and other nations due to their collaborative ties with Russia. Lavrov expressed astonishment at the application of such

⁷³ Ceyda Karan. [sputniknews.com.tr, 31.03.2022 - 14.34]. 'ABD'nin Avrupa'yı yanına çekecek bir olay gerekiyordu, Rusya kışkırtıldı, Ukrayna krizi çıkarıldı'. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220328/abdnin-avrupayi-yanina-cekecek-bir-olay-gerekiyordu-rusya-kiskirtildi-ukrayna-krizi-cikarildi-1055196615.html>.

⁷⁴ Sputnik Türkiye. [sputniknews.com.tr, 13.03.2022]. Canlı - Putin'den Macron ve Scholz: Aşırı milliyetçilerin suçlarının sonlanması için Kiev'e nüfuz edin. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220312/canliputinden-macron-scholz-asiri-milliyetcilerin-suclarinin-sonlanmasi-icin-kieve-nufuz-edin-1054664293.html>.

pressure on civilizations with historical significance, namely China, India, and Egypt. Furthermore, he underscored that the initiation of “special operations” and the failure of attempts to peacefully resolve the issue with Ukraine can be attributed to the Western reluctance towards these peaceful methods.⁷⁵

3.4.2 S-400 Impasse

With the following news piece, which could be perceived as an attempt at perception management on the Turkish public by Russia, the underlying message indicates Russia's awareness of the events subtly threatened both the US and Türkiye. the Reuters news agency cited the unofficial proposition of the United States to Türkiye for deploying S-400 air defense systems to Ukraine in support of its struggle against Russia. The emphasis was placed on the mention that Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman presented this proposal during her visit to Türkiye as part of exploring alternative avenues for resolving the Ukrainian issue.⁷⁶

There is an emphasis on the positive Russia-Türkiye relations in this context. On the other hand, Çavuşoğlu, who attended the Doha Forum in Qatar, stated in an interview regarding the debates surrounding the S-400s to be given to Ukraine that there is no such situation of delivering the S-400s to Ukraine. He further emphasized that Türkiye indeed needs additional air defense systems and if unable to procure them from allies, they will seek alternative sources.⁷⁷ In the subtext of the news, by emphasizing the natural choice of Türkiye to opt for Russia as a partner due to its inability to find reciprocation for its demands from the United States, efforts are made to both mitigate international antagonism towards Russia and to encourage the Turkish public to embrace Russia as a partner. In a comparable context, at the level of the defense ministries of the two nations, messages of collaboration had been extended during the initial phases of the war. The Russian

⁷⁵ Sputnik Türkiye. [sputniknews.com.tr, 16.03.2022 - 13.29]. Lavrov: Türkiye ve İsrail'in arabuluculuk tekliflerine olumlu bakıyoruz. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220316/lavrov-ukrayna-ile-baris-gorusmeleri-kolay-olmuyor-ancak-uzlasi-icin-umut-var-1054760011.html>.

⁷⁶ Sputnik Türkiye. [sputniknews.com.tr, 20.03.2022 - 04.03]. Reuters: ABD, Türkiye'ye S-400'leri Ukrayna'ya transfer etmeyi teklif etti. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220320/reuters-abd-turkiyeye-s-400leri-ukraynaya-transfer-etmeyi-teklif-etti-1054885640.html>.

⁷⁷ Sputnik Türkiye [sputniknews.com.tr, 26.03.2022 – 18:12]. Çavuşoğlu: S-400'lerin Ukrayna'ya verilmesi söz konusu değil. Sputnik Türkiye. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220326/cavusoglu-s-400lerin-ukraynaya-verilmesi-soz-konusu-degil-1055067923.html>.

Ministry of Defense announced that during the meeting, Defense Ministers Shoigu and Akar discussed the situation in Ukraine and the defense cooperation between Russia and Türkiye through their respective defense ministries.⁷⁸

Russia is attempting to construct a favorable perception of Russia within the Turkish public by emphasizing Western discomfort with Türkiye's neutral stance and its pursuit of various deceptions to reverse this disposition. Turan Salcı engages in a discussion concerning the proposal for Türkiye to provide its S-400 missile defense systems to Ukraine. He addresses the discomfort of the United States with Türkiye's neutral stance and its attempts to exert pressure on Türkiye through various means. Professor Dr. Hasan Ünal, a faculty member in the Department of Political Science and International Relations at Maltepe University, underscores that imposing sanctions on Russia by Türkiye would be inappropriate and an action devoid of any benefit for Türkiye.⁷⁹

Through targeting the emotions of the Turkish public, an endeavor is made to align Türkiye with Russia, while portraying the United States and Western countries as adversaries. Furthermore, In the news article authored by Amur Gadjiev, Russian military expert Igor Korotchenko expresses that by providing its S-400 systems to Ukraine, Türkiye's sovereignty could be jeopardized, and thus Türkiye would refrain from such an action. Korotchenko, attributing these kinds of proposals to a part of the US strategy to weaken Türkiye, underscores that in the event of providing these systems to Ukraine, Türkiye would become subservient, dependent, humiliated, and impoverished under the influence of the US.⁸⁰ While emphasizing the United States' intent to weaken Türkiye, the efforts to create the perception that Türkiye is excluded from the equation of the Ukraine crisis, coupled with the conscious awareness that emotions propagate more swiftly than facts through the utilization of derogatory terms, constitute a principle.

⁷⁸ Sputnik Türkiye [sputniknews.com.tr, 08.03.2022 – 18:11]. Rusya ve Türkiye savunma bakanları telefonda görüşti. Sputnik Türkiye. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220308/rusya-ve-turkiye-savunma-bakanlari-telefonda-gorustu-1054532460.html>.

⁷⁹ Turan Salcı. [sputniknews.com.tr, 25.03.2022 - 11:51]. ‘Türkiye’nin tarafsızlık politikası Atlantik ittifakı içinde rahatsızlık yaratıyor’. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220325/turkiyenin-tarafsizlik-politikasi-atlantik-ittifaki-icinde-rahatsizlik-yaratiyor-1055038504.html>.

⁸⁰ Amur Gadjiev. [sputniknews.com.tr, 22.03.2022 - 16:09]. Rus uzman: Türkiye, Washington'dan ödül karşılığında ABD'nin S-400 transfer teklifini kabul etmez. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220322/rus-uzman-turkiye-washingtondan-odul-karsiliginda-abdnin-s-400-transfer-teklifini-kabul-etmez-1054953384.html>.

By emphasizing Türkiye's investment in both its security and prestige, a perception is cultivated among the Turkish public that the S-400 air defense systems are a prudent choice in favor of Russia. The narrative suggests that these systems represent a suitable selection and that their transfer to another country would be detrimental to Türkiye's interests. In another article by Amur Gadjeiev, Russian military expert Korotchenko once again emphasizes that the S-400 issue is not only a military matter but also a question of national prestige and sovereignty. Sergey Denisentsev, an expert from the Russian Analysis, Strategy, and Technology Center, draws attention to Türkiye's longstanding efforts in the field of air defense systems, referring to the US's refusal to sell Patriot systems. With limited alternatives, including countries like China, Türkiye opted for Russia, a decision that significantly bolstered its sovereignty.⁸¹

3.4.3 Aid Provided to Ukraine from Western Countries

Another argument put forth by Russia for the causes and continuation of the conflict is the Western military aid to Ukraine. Sputnik Türkiye also continues to contribute to Russia's efforts to legitimize its actions by extensively covering this topic in its propaganda. According to the shared news article, the Western countries' moves to supply weapons to Ukraine have escalated the crisis. The Ukrainian army has concentrated almost half of its forces along the conflict line in the east of the country. Despite providing over \$650 million in military aid to Ukraine in 2021, the United States continues to send weapons to Kyiv.⁸²

3.5 RUSSIA'S ENERGY POLICY

In this section, an analysis is conducted to examine how Sputnik Türkiye attempts to steer Turkish public opinion through narratives centered around Russia's energy assets and how it constructs the image of Russia as a powerful state through its energy resources and policies.

⁸¹ Amur Gadjeiev. [sputniknews.com.tr, 27.04.2022 - 16.09]. 'S-400'ler Türkiye için sadece askeri menfaat olmayıp, aynı zamanda ulusal prestij meselesidir'. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220427/1055900038.html>.

⁸² Sputnik Türkiye. [sputniknews.com.tr]. Batılı ülkelerin Ukrayna'ya silah tedarik etmeye dönük hamleleri ülkede krizi tırmandırdı. sputniknews.com/ukrayna-krizi/.

3.5.1 Economic Indicators

Sputnik Türkiye conveys messages to both the global and Turkish public that Russia, being a major power, remains resilient despite sanctions and even emerges stronger. Researcher Lopes da Silva remarked that in response to Russia's military operation in Donbas, the wave of sanctions imposed by the West can be characterized as 'We have stricter sanctions now, that's for sure, but we also have higher energy prices that could assist in keeping Russia's military expenditures at this level.'⁸³ Furthermore, within the content of the news, certain data is shared regarding increased military investments from around the world and Russia. Similar to Silva's statement, it is emphasized that sanctions may not put a formidable country like Russia in a difficult situation.

On the other hand, Russia emphasizes with this news that it is an irreplaceable and reliable energy supplier for Europe and highlights the decrease in foreign debts as a way to emphasize that sanctions are ineffective. Energy expert Sohbet Karbuz underlines that Russia is a reliable supplier and states that no alternative source spoken for Europe can replace Russian natural gas.⁸⁴ Karbuz underlines that Russia is a reliable supplier and states that no alternative source spoken for Europe can replace Russian natural gas. Russia thinks that Nordstream between Russia and Germany cannot be canceled at this stage. Similarly, here, Sputnik Türkiye underscores the indispensability of Russia as a nation in the energy sector. In a similar vein, it is stated that Russia's foreign debt reached a 13-year low, declining by 5.5% in the first quarter to \$453.5 billion.⁸⁵

By emphasizing Europe's energy dependency on Russia, a warning is issued to countries that might potentially impose sanctions on Russia, conveying the message Russia will not be affected by sanctions, a message is conveyed to Western states that they will incur long-term harm. In her article, Burcu Okutan features the views of economics columnist Recep Erçin regarding Donbas. According to Erçin, the wave of sanctions following Russia's Donbas operation has not

⁸³ Sputnik Türkiye. [sputniknews.com.tr, 25.04.2022 - 18.59]. Küresel askeri harcamalar ilk kez 2 trilyon dolar çitasını aştı. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220425/kuresel-askeri-harcamalar-ilk-kez-2-trilyon-dolar-citasini-asti-1055834967.html>.

⁸⁴ Turan Salcı [sputniknews.com.tr, 20.04.2022 - 13:26]. Enerji uzmanı Karbuz: Avrupa için hiçbir alternatif kaynak Rus doğalgazının yerini dolduramaz. Sputnik Türkiye. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220420/enerji-uzmani-karbuz-avrupa-icin-hicbir-alternatif-kaynak-rus-dogalgazinin-yerini-dolduramaz-1055705182.html>.

⁸⁵ Sputnik Türkiye. [sputniknews.com.tr, 13.04.2022 - 19.14]. Rusya'nın dış borcu son 13 yılın en düşük seviyesine indi. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220413/1055537498.html>.

yet impacted Europe's imports of oil and gas from Russia, thus making it presently impractical for Europe to completely isolate Russia in the short or medium term. Lacking consensus on this matter, Europe remains unable to eliminate its dependency on Russian energy resources.⁸⁶ Similarly, German Minister of Economy Robert Habeck expressed that halting the supply of Russian gas would create challenges during the winter months, affecting both heating homes and providing the necessary gas supply for secondary industries.⁸⁷

By emphasizing Europe's energy dependence on Russia, the message is conveyed that the sanctions imposed on Russia are detrimental not to Russia but to the European Union. Moreover, by indicating that Western policies towards Russia have also strained its relations with Türkiye, an attempt is made to draw the attention of the Turkish public. Russian Deputy Prime Minister Aleksandr Novak believes it is unlikely that EU countries will completely replace Russian gas and oil within 5-10 years.⁸⁸ IEA (International Energy Agency) Executive Director Fatih Birol also states that the current energy crisis is significantly different and more severe than those of the 1970s, addressing that February 24th could be considered the starting point of a global energy crisis.⁸⁹ On the other hand, in her article, Selin Uludağ includes assessments from energy expert Volkan Aslanoğlu. Aslanoğlu suggests that the EU, by applying sanctions on Russia, is cornering itself further. Aslanoğlu highlights that the end of a harsh winter is an opportunity for Europe, but if the situation is not brought under control by the next winter, it will worsen. He also mentions that previous policies are currently driving a wedge between Türkiye and Europe.⁹⁰ Furthermore, in conjunction with references to the global energy crisis, the message is conveyed that Russia is not only a significant player in the region but also an important partner on the international stage.

⁸⁶ Burcu Okutan. [sputniknews.com.tr, 15.04.2022 - 13.10]. ‘Avrupa’da kısa veya orta vadede Rus enerji kaynaklarının sıfırlanması mümkün değil’. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220415/avrupada-kisa-veya-orta-vadede-rus-enerji-kaynaklarinin-sifirlanmasi-mumkun-degil-1055584731.html>.

⁸⁷ Sputnik Türkiye. [sputniknews.com.tr, 19.03.2022 - 19.47]. Alman Bakan Habeck: Rus gazı olmadan gelecek kış evlerimizi ısıtmak için yeterli enerjimiz olmayacak. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220319/1054880062.html>.

⁸⁸ Sputnik Türkiye. [sputniknews.com.tr, 15.04.2022 - 16.54]. Novak: AB ülkelerinin 5-10 yıl içinde Rus gazı ve petrolünü tamamen ikame etmesi pek mümkün değil. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220415/novak-ab-ulkelerinin-5-10-yil-icinde-rus-gazi-ve-petrolunu-tamamen-ikame-etmesi-pek-mumkun-degil-1055591681.html>.

⁸⁹ Sputnik Türkiye. [sputniknews.com.tr, 14.04.2022 - 13.49]. Uluslararası Enerji Ajansı Direktörü Birol: Şu an yaşanan enerji krizi 1970 krizinden çok daha ağır. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220414/uluslararasi-enerji-ajansi-direktoru-birol-su-an-yasanan-enerji-krizi-1970-krizinden-cok-daha-agir-1055556159.html>.

⁹⁰ Selin Uludağ. [sputniknews.com.tr, 05.04.2022 - 19.05]. Rus petrolüne ambargo sonrası Avrupa’da enflasyon: ‘Kışa kadar kontrol edilmezse durum kötüleşecek’. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220405/rus-petrolune-ambargo-sonrasi-avrupada-enflasyon-kisa-kadar-kontrol-edilmezse-durum-kotulesecek-1055337750.html>.

Additionally, the Economic Coordination Board convened and confirmed that there is no concern regarding supply security.⁹¹ With this statement, Russia aims to emphasize to both the global and Turkish public that it is a reliable partner and energy provider.

In a similar vein, Russia emphasizes through its actions in Ukraine that it has established a new world order and highlights that sanctions will harm the parties implementing them. Furthermore, it aims to convey the message that the US's policies in the region that Russia defines as its "near abroad" have been unsuccessful. In her article, Ceyda Karan includes the opinions of Mehmet Ali Güller. According to Güller, the Ukrainian issue can be regarded as the beginning of a new world order. He suggests that Russia has achieved its main objectives, and he warns about the repercussions of imposing heavy sanctions, stating that "sanctions will harm the one imposing them." Güller believes that while the United States gathers Western Europe around itself, its influence in Asia has backfired.⁹² On the other hand, Medvedev warns that the illegitimate sanctions on Russia will have severe consequences for the global order and economy.⁹³ Thus, it is being emphasized that the sanctions against Russia would harm the entire world.

3.6 TÜRKİYE'S APPROACH TO THE WEST

In this section, an analysis is conducted to examine the strategies employed to cultivate the negative image of the West within Turkish public opinion, in conjunction with Türkiye's relations with Western states and the narrative propagated by Sputnik Türkiye.

⁹¹ Sputnik Türkiye. [sputniknews.com.tr, 09.03.2022 - 08.29]. Ekonomi Koordinasyon Kurulu toplandı: Arz güvenliğine yönelik bir sıkıntı olmadığı teyit edildi. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220309/ekonomi-koordinasyon-kurulu-toplandi-arz-guvenligine-yonelik-bir-sikinti-olmadigi-teyit-edildi-1054551857.html>.

⁹² Ceyda Karan. [sputniknews.com.tr, 04.04.2022 - 13.06]. 'Ukrayna bir yeni dünya düzeni inşasının başlangıcı olarak da tarihlendirebileceğimiz bir konu'. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220401/ukrayna-bir-yeni-dunya-duzeni-insasinin-baslangici-olarak-da-tarihlendirebilecegimiz-bir-konu-1055298696.html>.

⁹³ Sputnik Türkiye. [sputniknews.com.tr, 08.04.2022 - 18.50]. Medvedev: Gayrimeşru yaptırımların sonucu bozuk dünya düzeni olabilir. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220408/medvedev-gayrimesru-yaptirimlarin-sonucu-bozuk-dunya-duzeni-olabilir-1055423898.html>.

3.6.1 The Position of the West in Turkish Foreign Policy

By emphasizing Türkiye's balanced role, Sputnik Türkiye aims to draw Türkiye closer as a partner by not fully aligning with Russia due to its relations with the West. Although not entirely on Russia's side, Türkiye refrains from participating in sanctions against Russia, thus not being fully against it. By depicting the US and the West as adversaries in the eyes of both Türkiye and the Turkish public, the article endeavors to position Türkiye as a partner. This way, an attempt is made to prevent Türkiye from getting closer to its Western allies, especially concerning the Ukraine crisis. AKP spokesman Ömer Çelik stated that they are in constant contact with Turkish citizens in Ukraine. He criticized the EU's stance, referring to it as a mission of condemnation. He also emphasized that the Turkish state is prepared for all scenarios.⁹⁴ According to retired Rear Admiral Türker Ertürk, as presented in Ceyda Karan's article, the US utilizes issues like F-16s to manipulate Ankara, while Türkiye, possessing significant strategic importance, adopts a relatively balanced policy. Ertürk alleges that the US and the UK have planned a long-lasting war and emphasizes that the US aims to maintain a unipolar world order after the end of the Cold War.⁹⁵

Russia seeks to establish legitimacy for its actions by emphasizing the perception of NATO's unreliability in the eyes of the Turkish public. Additionally, the mention in the continuation of the article that attacks on Türkiye could also come from NATO member countries solidifies this expectation. By leveraging Türkiye's disillusionment with the Western side (especially the US and NATO), Russia aims to pull Türkiye towards its side. The recent polls in Türkiye reveal a rising opposition towards NATO, as stated in the article written by Turan Salcı. According to the Area Survey, 90.8% of respondents answered "no" to the question of whether they believe NATO can protect Türkiye. This indicates a 12.5% decrease in trust compared to a

⁹⁴ Sputnik Türkiye. [sputniknews.com.tr, 24.02.2022 - 19.01]. AK Parti Sözcüsü Ömer Çelik: Montrö ile ilgili hazırlıklar yerine getirildi. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220224/ak-parti-sozcusu-celik-bu-iscali-tumuyle-reddediyoruz-1054210009.html>.

⁹⁵ Ceyda Karan. [sputniknews.com.tr, 12.04.2022 - 11.50]. 'ABD ilk raundu kazandı, uzun vadede bu yaptırımlar bumerang gibi Avrupa'yı vuracak'. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220408/abd-ilk-raundu-kazandi-uzun-vadede-bu-yaptirimlar-bumerang-gibi-avrupayi-vuracak-1055491581.html>.

survey conducted eight months ago. The decreasing confidence in NATO is seen as a reflection of the anti-American sentiment among the Turkish population.⁹⁶

Sputnik Türkiye highlights these news contents to portray the West as guilty and attempts to legitimize Russia's so-called operation in Ukraine. The Disaster and Emergency Management Authority (AFAD) announced that they will send 5 trucks of humanitarian aid to Ukraine, where Russia's military operations continue.⁹⁷ With this news content, the information about accepting humanitarian aid is being used to emphasize Russia's conciliatory approach. On the other hand, Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu mentioned that the West has not performed well and that if the attack had been prevented, it would have demonstrated a successful performance.⁹⁸

3.6.2 The Promotion of Anti-American and Anti-Western Sentiment Being Fueled by Russia

In the contents of Sputnik Türkiye, the United States and the West are being demonized, and Russia is attempting to rally the Turkish public to its side in order to prevent regions perceived by Russia as its "near-abroad" from joining organizations such as NATO and the EU. In her article for Sputnik Türkiye, columnist Ceyda Karan has included the views of Prof. Dr. Hasan Ünal, a faculty member at Maltepe University. Ünal argues that the US and its allied countries have declared war on multipolarity. Ünal criticizes the “first-tier” countries of the EU for being “captives” of Eastern Europe, stating that it should be said, “We will not let Ukraine join NATO, nor can we let it join the EU.” Ünal believes that Türkiye should block its new membership in NATO and demand recognition of Northern Cyprus.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ Turan Salcı. [sputniknews.com.tr, 24.03.2022 - 14.43]. Türk halkının ‘NATO’ya güvensizliği’ 8 ayda yüzde 12.5 artışla yüzde 90.8’e ulaştı. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220324/turk-halkinin-natoya-guvensizligi-8-ayda-yuzde-125-artisla-yuzde-908e-ulasti-1055008944.html>.

⁹⁷ Sputnik Türkiye. [sputniknews.com.tr, 25.02.2022 - 19.49]. AFAD: Ukrayna'ya 5 TIR yardım malzemesi gönderiyoruz. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220225/afad-ukraynaya-5-tir-yardim-malzemesi-gonderiyoruz-1054250084.html>.

⁹⁸ Sputnik Türkiye. [sputniknews.com.tr, 26.02.2022 - 00.10]. Dışişleri Bakanı Çavuşoğlu: Türkiye Montrö'yü tamamen uygulayacak. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220225/disisleri-bakani-cavusoglu-turkiye-montroyu-tamamen-uygulayacak-1054252200.html>.

⁹⁹ Ceyda Karan. [sputniknews.com.tr, 18.04.2022 - 12.01]. 'ABD ve destekçileri çok kutupluluğa savaş açtı, birileri 'Ukrayna NATO ve AB üyesi olamaz' demeli'. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220414/abd-ve-destekcileri-cok-kutupluluga-savas-acti-birileri-ukrayna-nato-ve-ab-uyesi-olamaz-demeli-1055641702.html>.

In the news article prepared by Turan Salcı, the opinions of Prof. Dr. Barış Doster, who is a faculty member at Marmara University and a columnist for Cumhuriyet newspaper, were included. According to Prof. Dr. Barış Doster, the United States, through its role in the Ukraine crisis, has increased arms trading in Europe, aiming to prolong the crisis for its benefit. He also highlights how the US uses NATO to promote militarization globally, stating that NATO serves as a political and ideological organization that aligns its allies with US interests, including their politics, economy, and bureaucracy. Prof. Dr. Doster emphasizes that NATO is a tool of US imperialism, and arms sales are just one dimension of its multifaceted approach.¹⁰⁰ Similarly, in this news article, the United States is depicted as an adversary, while other countries are referenced as acting almost like slaves in line with the interests of the United States. In doing so, Russia aims to establish a stance against the United States and its affiliated organizations, attempting to align Türkiye alongside itself.

In a similar vein, Russia attempts to highlight the one-sidedness of Western media and to discredit the news articles published in Western media. Additionally, parallels are drawn between the portrayal of Turks as "barbaric" in American newspapers and the lack of coverage of Russia's statements in Western media, aiming to sway the Turkish public toward Russia's side. Yılmaz Özdil, a columnist for Sözcü newspaper, criticizes the American, British, and German media for providing nearly identical coverage of Russia's intervention in Ukraine. He points out that the media neglects Russia's statements and asserts that relying on Western media for war news is a more significant crime than the atrocities themselves. Özdil also mentions that those who read American newspapers once perceived Turks as "medieval barbarians."¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ Turan Salcı. [sputniknews.com.tr, 18.03.2022 - 15.44]. Amerikan 'silah tüccarları' Avrupa'da bayram etti: 'ABD kazanç sağladığı krizin uzamasını ister' <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220318/amerikan-silah-tuccarlari-avrupada-bayram-etti-abd-kazanc-sagladigi-krizin-uzamasini-ister-1054851748.html>.

¹⁰¹ Sputnik Türkiye. [sputniknews.com.tr, 08.04.2022 - 15.32]. Sözcü yazarı Özdil: Savaş haberlerini Batı medyasından takip etmek, katliamdan daha ağır bir suçtur. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220408/1055417972.html>.

3.7 TRKİYE’S UKRAINE POLICY

In this section, an examination will be conducted to analyze how carefully selected excerpts from statements made by political figures in Trkiye are incorporated into the narratives of Sputnik Trkiye, within the broader context of Trkiye-Ukraine relations.

3.7.1 Trkiye – Ukraine Bileteral Relations

In Turan Salcı's article, the remarks of Defense Industry President Prof. Dr. İsmail Demir are featured. Demir's statements pertain to the utilization of Bayraktar TB2 UAVs in Ukraine, wherein he asserts that singling out the UAVs in relation to Ukraine is not of significant importance, as once we supply the products, they become the property of that country.¹⁰² Highlighting this news emphasizes that Trkiye's sale of Bayraktar to Ukraine does not signify Trkiye's alignment with Ukraine in the Ukraine crisis, and aims to consolidate the Turkish public's position to avoid international isolation.

Referencing Ukraine's uncompromising stance, an attempt is made to legitimize Russia's alleged necessities. Meanwhile, the emphasis on Turkish vessels carries the intention to convey to the Turkish public the message that Ukraine is also causing harm to Trkiye. On the other hand, according to Natalya Nikonorova, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Donetsk People's Republic, the Ukrainian army has blocked six foreign-flagged ships, including ones with Turkish, Bulgarian, Syrian, Liberian, and Egyptian citizens on board, in the Mariupol port area. The ships are unable to leave the port due to the possible presence of sea mines placed as a threat or in preparation for a special military operation. Nikonorova emphasized that they have repeatedly requested the evacuation of the ships and foreign citizens from the Ukrainian government but have received no response.¹⁰³ Similarly, Retired Rear Admiral Cem Grdeniz, former Commander of the Naval Mine Fleet of the Turkish Navy, evaluated the danger posed by the mines laid by Ukraine in the Black Sea and their potential threat to Trkiye. He emphasized that the Western Black Sea and the

¹⁰² Turan Salcı. [sputniknews.com.tr, 14.03.2022 - 08.59]. Ukrayna’da zelikle SİHA’ların gndeme getiriliyor olması ok anlamlı deęil. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220314/1054681755.html>.

¹⁰³ Sputnik Trkiye. [sputniknews.com.tr, 08.04.2022 - 16.23]. Donetsk: Ukrayna ordusu, Mariupol’de iinde Trklerin de bulunduęu 6 gemiyi bloke etti. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220408/donetsk-ukrayna-ordusu-mariupolde-icinde-turklerin-de-bulundugu-6-gemiyi-bloke-etti-1055420354.html>.

Istanbul Strait are at risk, stating that no country should be allowed to lay indiscriminate mines that pose a threat to international maritime traffic.¹⁰⁴

By emphasizing that NATO is a dangerous organization, Russia attempts to legitimize its aggressive policies by using the expansion of NATO and national security as pretexts. In this regard, Russia aims to bring the Turkish public on its side and weaken international resistance in the global arena. In Selin Uludağ's article, the views of foreign policy expert and journalist Hasan Erel are featured. Erel discussed the current situation in France and possible scenarios. He emphasized that it would be beneficial for Türkiye if its hand is strengthened. Looking at recent developments, NATO has already transformed into a highly dangerous attack organization. Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, NATO's expansion and involvement in conflicts such as Afghanistan and Libya have made it a proxy war tool for the United States worldwide. If a European and maritime power like France withdraws from NATO's military wing, Türkiye would have more freedom of action, especially in the Eastern Mediterranean.¹⁰⁵

3.7.1 Views of Political Formations and Personalities in Türkiye

Russia is discrediting NATO and the Western alliance, while simultaneously conveying messages that there are opportunities for Türkiye in the emerging new order and that being on Russia's side is necessary to seize them. This aims to influence the perception of the Turkish public. The ultimate objective of Sputnik Türkiye is to depict NATO and the US as common enemies. Leader of the Workers' Party of Türkiye (TİP) Erkan Baş asserts that NATO is a terrorist organization and that NATO's existence poses a threat to world peace and the global population, which is becoming increasingly evident.¹⁰⁶ Also, During the protest held by the Communist

¹⁰⁴ Turan Salcı. [sputniknews.com.tr, 22.03.2022 - 14.54]. Ukrayna'nın mayınları tehlike saçıyor: Gürdeniz'den Batı Karadeniz ve İstanbul Boğazı uyarısı. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220322/ukraynanin-mayinlari-tehlike-saciyor-gurdenizden-bati-karadeniz-ve-istanbul-bogazi-uyarisi-1054950293.html>.

¹⁰⁵ Selin Uludağ. [sputniknews.com.tr, 14.04.2022 - 11.36]. 'Fransa, NATO'nun askeri kanadından çekilirse Türkiye'nin Doğu Akdeniz'deki eli rahatlar'. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220413/fransa-natonun-askeri-kanadindan-cekilirse-turkiyenin-dogu-akdenizdeki-eli-rahatlar-1055542844.html>.

¹⁰⁶ Sputnik Türkiye. [sputniknews.com.tr, 23.02.2022 - 00.36]. TİP Genel Başkanı Erkan Baş: NATO bir terör örgütüdür. <https://sputniknews.com.tr/20220223/tip-genel-baskani-erkan-bas-nato-bir-teror-orgutudur-1054140415.html>.

Movement of Türkiye (TKH) in İstanbul, the read press statement highlighted that NATO and imperialism as the main enemies of world peace. It was emphasized that if there is terrorism, coup attempts, destruction, or wars in the world today, they are backed by US imperialism and NATO.¹⁰⁷ Similarly, Vatan Party Chairman Doğu Perinçek stated that a peaceful new order is emerging, brought by Asian countries. He emphasized that this process presents roles for Türkiye and other Turkic states. Perinçek declared that Türkiye has entered a period to seize historical roles and opportunities. He expressed opposition to sanctions against Russia and Iran, stating that sanctions on Türkiye's neighbors are sanctions on Türkiye itself.¹⁰⁸ In a similar vein, According to Devlet Bahçeli, the leader of the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), Türkiye's policy towards Russia and Ukraine is reasonable and balanced. He asserts that Türkiye has suffered more from those who are more pro-American than Americans themselves and more pro-NATO than NATO itself.¹⁰⁹

Sputnik Türkiye frequently aims to win the sympathy of the Turkish public by featuring the opinions of Eurasianist writers and institutions, while also seeking to undermine international resistance against Russia on the global stage. In the news article prepared by Selin Uludağ, it is stated that the expansion of NATO towards the east after the collapse of the Soviet Union, along with the possible membership of Finland and Sweden, has shifted the alliance's focus back to the north. Despite the desires of the United States, there are objections from various countries, including some NATO member states, regarding the alliance's expansion. The eastward expansion of NATO is seen as a threat to Russia, Türkiye, Iran, China, Central Asian countries, and Pakistan. In the continuation of the news article, Perinçek's statements are also included. Perinçek stated that NATO's eastward expansion is leading the organization to its demise, emphasizing its blindness and being under the control of the United States and its underground organizations. He argued that the conflict between Russia and Ukraine is rooted in the larger contradiction between Russia and the United States, which extends to a broader conflict between the United States and all of Asia

¹⁰⁷ Sputnik Türkiye. [sputniknews.com.tr, 04.03.2022 - 20.48]. 'TKH'den NATO'ya karşı eylem: Bugün dünyada savaş varsa arkasında ABD emperyalizmi ve NATO vardır. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220304/tkhden--natoya-karsi-eylem-bugun-dunyada-savas-varsa-arkasinda-abd-emperyalizmi-ve-nato-vardir-1054443185.html>.

¹⁰⁸ Sputnik Türkiye. [sputniknews.com.tr, 08.03.2022 - 15.49]. Perinçek: Türkiye, Rusya'ya olan yaptırımları uygulamamalı. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220308/perincek-turkiye-rusyaya-olan-yaptirimlari-uygulamamali-1054531139.html>.

¹⁰⁹ Sputnik Türkiye. [sputniknews.com.tr, 15.03.2022 - 11.30]. Bahçeli: Sayın Kılıçdaroğlu söyler misin, Türk milleti kimden neden özür dileycek?. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220315/1054726684.html>.

and humanity. Perinçek claimed that the expansion of NATO towards the east poses a threat to Russia, Türkiye, Iran, China, Central Asian countries, and Pakistan and that the conflict at hand is not only between Russia and America but also between America and all of humanity. He commended Russia's strategic moves, asserting that the first blow was struck by Russia in response to America's gradual efforts to expand NATO and its declaration to include Ukraine and Georgia. According to Perinçek, Russia recognized the deteriorating situation and launched a carefully executed armed operation in Ukraine.¹¹⁰

3.8 WAR IN UKRAINE WITHIN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

In this section, a comprehensive analysis will be conducted to examine the perspective of the global public, particularly Western states, regarding Russia's unjust occupation, and an investigation will be carried out to assess how the news narratives presented are selectively chosen to favor Russia.

3.8.1 Global Responses and Implications of the War in Ukraine

Sputnik Türkiye often portrays Ukraine as jeopardizing international security, indicating Russia's attempt to seek support on the international stage. Russia highlights the restriction of freedom of information to portray an image of being a victim. Russia associates its inability to effectively use hybrid warfare elements such as fake news, disinformation, and propaganda to quickly spread on platforms like Twitter and Telegram with Western bias, in an effort to legitimize its actions. The spokesperson for the United Nations (UN) Secretary-General, Stephane Dujarric, expressed deep concern over the mines laid by Ukraine in the waters off Odesa, Ochakov, Chernomorsk, and Yuzhny to target Russian warships in the Black Sea.¹¹¹ Twitter, on the other

¹¹⁰ Selin Uludağ. [sputniknews.com.tr, 14.05.2022 - 14.56]. NATO, Rusya sınırına yayılmayı hedefliyor, ülkelerden tepkiler yükseliyor. <https://sputniknews.com.tr/20220514/nato-rusya-sinirina-yayilmayi-hedefliyor-ulkelerden-tepkiler-yukseliyor-1056367941.html>.

¹¹¹ Sputnik Türkiye. [sputniknews.com.tr, 29.03.2022 - 21.22]. BM: Karadeniz'deki mayınlara ilişkin durumdan son derece endişeliyiz. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220329/1055149461.html>.

hand, has announced that it will no longer display or recommend Twitter accounts operated by the Russian government on users' timelines, Explore, Search, and other services, further limiting the freedom of information.¹¹²

Russia is emphasizing that Western powers are provoking Türkiye against Russia. Independent experts suggest that the West is preparing for new false flag operations similar to Buça. These experts highlight the Western media's eagerness to automatically blame Moscow without conducting a thorough investigation into the "civilian massacre" allegations. They argue that the West uses the media as a tool to compensate for propaganda failures, which could lead to the orchestration of other false flag operations.¹¹³ The emphasis is placed on the one-sidedness of the West's accusations against Russia without proper investigations. Additionally, the lack of information about the identity of the "independent experts" mentioned in the news raises suspicions of the news being fabricated. On the other hand, Miltiadis Varvitsiotis, Deputy Foreign Minister of Greece, called on European countries to pressure Türkiye regarding sanctions against Russia. Greece's call for European countries to pressure Türkiye on sanctions against Russia.¹¹⁴

World Health Organization (WHO) Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus highlights how the Ukraine crisis exposes the inequality between the global community's attention to different conflicts, pointing out the overlooked crises in Syria, Yemen, Afghanistan, and Ethiopia.¹¹⁵ While emphasizing the expression of positive discrimination towards Ukraine by institutions, it is implied in the subtext that the excessive emphasis on the Ukrainian issue is taking place within the context of Western deliberate activities and desires. Thus, the intention is to trivialize the Ukraine matter and remove it from the global agenda.

¹¹² Sputnik Türkiye. [sputniknews.com.tr, 07.04.2022 - 18.34]. Twitter, Rusya hükümetiyle bağlantılı 300'den fazla hesabı görünmez hale getirdiğini açıkladı. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220407/twitter-rusya-hukumetiyle-baglantili-300den-fazla-hesabi-gorunmez-hale-getirdigini-acikladi-1055388533.html>.

¹¹³ Sputnik Türkiye. [sputniknews.com.tr, 04.04.2022 - 14.08]. Bağımsız uzmanlara göre Batı, Buça benzeri yeni sahte bayrak operasyonları hazırlıyor. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220404/bagimsiz-uzmanlara-gore-bati-buca-benzeri-yeni-sahte-bayrak-operasyonlari-hazirliyor-1055296186.html>.

¹¹⁴ Sputnik Türkiye. [sputniknews.com.tr, 05.03.2022 - 12.29]. Yunanistan'dan AB'ye Rusya'ya yönelik yaptırımlar konusunda Türkiye'ye baskı yapma çağrısı. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220305/yunanistandan-abye-rusyaya-yonelik-yaptirimlar-konusunda-turkiyeye-baski-yapma-cagrisi-1054450397.html>.

¹¹⁵ Sputnik Türkiye. [sputniknews.com.tr, 14.04.2022 - 00.56]. 'DSÖ Direktörü: Ukrayna krizi siyahlara karşı önyargıyı ortaya koydu. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220414/1055545354.html>.

Russia emphasizes that sanctions are equivalent to warfare, Russia aims to underline once again that Türkiye should adopt a stance in favor of Russia on this matter, with the intention of breaking the international opposition through Türkiye and the Turkish public. Major companies continue to withdraw from Russia, with Visa and Mastercard being the latest to suspend their operations. Russian leader Vladimir Putin stated that these sanction decisions are akin to declaring war and called on the government to prepare a list of countries engaging in unfriendly actions towards Russia, Russian legal entities, and individuals. President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Putin had a phone conversation today, and Presidential Spokesperson İbrahim Kalın, while reminding that they had no plans for sanctions against Moscow, questioned who would engage with Russia when everyone cuts off ties.¹¹⁶

3.9 RUSSIA'S PROPAGANDA ACTIVITIES REGARDING THE COURSE OF THE WAR IN UKRAINE

In this section, an analysis will be conducted to examine how Russia's media utilization, which is an extension of its foreign policy strategy, is positioned within the context of the Ukraine occupation, with an emphasis on its expected impact on the course of the war.

3.9.1 Russia's Hybrid Warfare Strategies on the Ukraine Crisis

Sputnik Türkiye attempts to create the perception that an information war is being waged against Russia by emphasizing that negative news about Russia is also coming from Western countries and official Ukrainian channels. This is aimed at generating a perception that Russia is the victim in this information battle. Selin Uludağ, a columnist for Sputnik Türkiye, points out that the high engagement of such disinformation-based content leads to the rapid spread of false information on social media. Within the information pollution generated by bot accounts, unverified posts from Ukrainian officials' accounts were also included. Furthermore, unfounded

¹¹⁶ Sputnik Türkiye. [sputniknews.com.tr]. Canlı anlatım| Donetsk Halk Cumhuriyeti: Mariupol'den 300'den fazla kişiyi tahliye ettik. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220306/canli-anlatim-rusyanin-washington-buyukelcisi-abdnin-soylemi-oldukca-riskli-olmaya-basladi-1054464756.html>.

content supported by certain Western media organizations was added to news feeds.¹¹⁷ Uludağ, in another news article of hers, stated that the information warfare surrounding the Ukraine crisis is intensifying, with the dissemination of false news and disinformation during the third week of Russia's military operation in Donbas. Sputnik Türkiye has compiled misleading content that continues to contribute to disinformation, including fabricated news and narratives shared by official institutions in the first week. The circulation of false content on social media, supported by bot accounts, is generating engagement, fueling hatred, and exacerbating aggressive and hostile policies. Despite the exposure of their falsehood, these posts are not being removed by social media companies and account holders, leading to the growth of information pollution.¹¹⁸

Along with the following content, Russia is attempting to persuade the Turkish public that Russia is being censored and suppressed. In the news article penned by Turan Salcı, it is stated that The EU has banned RT and Sputnik from broadcasting in Europe following Russia's operation in Ukraine, which has led to daily sanctions being announced by the EU. Ilkay Akkaya, the General Secretary of the Turkish Journalists' Union, reacted to the EU's decision, emphasizing the essential role of journalism in times of crisis. Akkaya stated, "*Journalism is as necessary to societies as bread and water, even during times of crisis.*" He emphasized the importance of protecting the public's right to access information, including during times of war, as a requirement of democracies. Akkaya argued that people must be able to see events in their entirety and access the truth. He also stressed the need to defend the ethical values that we claim to uphold worldwide. While international agencies can continue their operations in Moscow and provide critical coverage, the same should be ensured in Paris, Berlin, Athens, and Rome.¹¹⁹

On the other hand, Russia is conveying messages that there are no issues with the supposed progress of the operation and that things are proceeding according to Russia's plans, claiming that it has withdrawn its tanks from the war zones in Ukraine. While emphasizing Russia as a country

¹¹⁷ Selin Uludağ. [sputniknews.com.tr, 01.03.2022 - 15.36]. 'Sosyal medya'da Ukrayna dezenformasyonu: İşte yayınlanan yalan haberler. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220228/sosyal-medya-ukrayna-dezenformasyonu-iste-yayinlanan-yanan-haberler-1054307959.html>.

¹¹⁸ Selin Uludağ. [sputniknews.com.tr, 14.03.2022 - 18.36]. Ukrayna dezenformasyonu sürüyor: Operasyonun 2. haftasından itibaren yayınlanan yalan haberler. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220314/ukrayna-dezenformasyonu-suruyor-operasyonun-2-haftasindan-ibaren-yayinlanan-yanan-haberler-1054709797.html>.

¹¹⁹ Turan Salcı. [sputniknews.com.tr, 28.02.2022 - 13.41]. TGS'den AB kararına tepki: Kriz anlarında gazetecilik tüm toplumlara ekmek su kadar gerekli. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220228/1054293300.html>.

that prioritizes civilian safety and therefore tolerates the slow progress of the supposed operation, reference is made to the magnitude of Russia's power by citing the number of surrendered Ukrainian soldiers. Additionally, the term “operation” used for the occupation is consistently maintained in this context as well. The Russian Ministry of Defense announced that Ukrainian soldiers abandoned their brand-new tanks and fled to the Russian army in the Kharkiv region. The Ministry stated that during the liberation of the Topolskoye village in the Izium area of the Kharkiv region, Ukrainian tank crews pointed their gun barrels upwards and did not open fire.¹²⁰ Similarly, In her article, Ceyda Karan included observations from Okay Deprem, who is claimed to be the only Turkish journalist following the war on the front lines. According to Okay Deprem, the surrender of over 1,000 Ukrainian forces in a single instance is one of the biggest military losses for the Kyiv regime. Deprem highlighted that the Ukrainian army had deployed a force of 20,000 in Mariupol before the operation, and pointed out that the process is being prolonged to avoid causing harm to civilians and infrastructure by Russian forces.¹²¹

Russia conveys a message that Ukraine has a discriminatory approach towards Russian culture and that this is not understood by the people in Ukraine. By highlighting the disappointment among the people, an impression is created that the general public is not satisfied with the Ukrainian government. By alleging that Ukrainian forces have committed massacres of the Ukrainian population, an attempt is being made to legitimize the so-called operation launched against Ukraine. The concert organized by the folk music group "Södra Bergens Balalaikor" in Uppsala, Sweden, to raise funds for Ukraine has been canceled due to the group's use of the traditional Russian instrument, balalaika. The cancellation has caused disappointment and anger among people. However, the band members emphasize that they are not Russian but simply play Russian instruments, including the balalaika, which they have been doing for many years. Even their

¹²⁰ Sputnik Türkiye. [sputniknews.com.tr, 11.04.2022 - 13.28]. Rusya: Ukraynalı askerler, Harkov'da yepyeni tankları Rus askerlere bırakıp kaçtı. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220411/rusya-ukraynali-askerler-harkovda-yepyeni-tanklari-rus-askerlere-birakip-kacti--1055464288.html>.

¹²¹ Ceyda Karan. [sputniknews.com.tr, 21.04.2022 - 12.09]. Okay Deprem: Donbass halkından 'Batı basını gibi yalan haber yazmayın' tepkisi aldım <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220418/okay-deprem-donbass-halkindan-bati-basini-gibi-yalan-haber-yazmayin-tepkisi-aldim-1055733931.html>.

Ukrainian musician friends fail to comprehend the controversy.¹²² It is emphasized that. Similarly controversial images of Ukrainian forces posing with the bodies of captured and killed soldiers circulate online, raising concerns about the conduct of the conflict. Reports also highlight allegations of torture and killings by Kyiv forces.¹²³

Russia is trying to discredit Ukraine through the Azov Battalion and other extremist groups in an effort to legitimize its own actions and thereby aims to break the resistance against it on the international stage. On the other hand, the Russian Ministry of Defense has announced that the Security Service of Ukraine, along with militants from the Azov Battalion, has prepared a provocation involving potential radioactive contamination in the Kharkiv region. The ministry's statement indicates that radical nationalists have planted explosives in the reactor of the experimental nuclear facility at the Kharkiv Institute of Physics and Technology. Similarly, American director Gonzalo Lira, who has been in Ukraine since the beginning of the Russian military operation, stated that Ukrainian militants have turned Kharkiv into a "ghost city." Impact of Ukrainian militants on Kharkiv.¹²⁴

Sputnik Türkiye refers to the figures it provides regarding civilians targeted by NATO and, in doing so, emphasizes that Western countries have no right to speak about the so-called operation initiated by Russia, implying that Western states are not innocent. This aims to break the international opposition against Russia. Thus, while the war continues in Ukraine, Russia, through Sputnik Türkiye, is attempting to divert attention, defend its own actions, and blame others. Burcu Okutan and Selin Uludağ, columnists for Sputnik Türkiye in their news, commemorate the 23rd anniversary of NATO's bombing of Yugoslavia on March 24. The bombing, initiated by NATO without authorization from the UN Security Council, resulted in the loss of 2,500 Yugoslav lives. The convoy housing refugees was bombed, nearly 40 hospitals and clinics, around 100 schools and kindergartens, and 176 cultural structures were damaged. Although the bombings were said to target "military facilities," 25,000 residential buildings were destroyed, 470 kilometers of highways

¹²² Sputnik Türkiye. [sputniknews.com.tr, 13.04.2022 - 14.39]. İsveçli grubun Ukrayna'ya yardım konseri, 'Rus enstrümanı' balalayka çaldıkları için iptal edildi. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220413/isvecli-grubun-ukraynaya-yardim-konseri-rus-enstrumani-balalayka-caldiklari-icin-iptal-edildi-1055528744.html>.

¹²³ Sputnik Türkiye. [sputniknews.com.tr, 05.04.2022 - 21.15]. 'DEİK Türkiye-Rusya İş Konseyi Başkanı Ekmekçi başı: Rusya'da Türk ürünlerine büyük bir rağbet var. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220405/1055340226.html>.

¹²⁴ Sputnik Türkiye. [sputniknews.com.tr, 13.04.2022 - 19.48]. ABD'li yönetmen: Ukraynalı militanlar Harkov'u hayalet şehre çevirdi. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220413/1055538359.html>.

and 595 kilometers of railways were damaged, and as stated by Biden himself, 38 bridges were destroyed. Additionally, 14 airports, nearly 40 hospitals and clinics, around 100 schools and kindergartens, and 176 cultural structures were damaged. According to Serbian assessments, 38% of the targeted structures were used for civilian purposes.¹²⁵

Russia, as a hybrid war strategy of its own, complains about disinformation while trying to divert attention from its own disinformation and propaganda content. The Russian Human Rights Commissioner, Tatyana Moskalkova, met with the Deputy Head of the UNHCR Russia Office, Karim Atassi, where they discussed the issue of Ukrainian citizens being forcibly deported to Russia. Moskalkova announced that the UN official denied the false news claiming that Ukrainians were being deported to Russia against their will.¹²⁶ Russia is attempting to legitimize its actions by claiming that false news is being spread against it. In the same direction, RTÜK (Radio and Television Supreme Council) highlights the lack of necessary sensitivity in the sharing of visuals and information, as well as the participation of individuals lacking sufficient knowledge in programs, leading to the dissemination of incorrect information to the public. Evaluations made by individuals lacking expertise misguide the public rather than raising awareness.¹²⁷

On the other hand, Russian comedians pranked former US President George W. Bush, who admitted that Washington had not kept its promise to Moscow regarding NATO's eastward expansion due to changing circumstances. Bush expressed his initial desire to have Russia on NATO's border and Ukraine join NATO but noted a dramatic change in Vladimir Putin's behavior.¹²⁸ Along with this content, it is emphasized that the malicious intentions of the US

¹²⁵ Burcu Okutan & Selin Uludağ. [sputniknews.com.tr, 24.03.2022 - 12.44]. NATO'nun Avrupa'nın göbeğini bombalamasının 23. yılı: Misket bombalı saldırılar, yüzlerce sivil ölüm. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220324/natonun-avrupanin-gobegini-bombalamasinin-23-yili-misket-bombali-saldirilar-yuzlerce-sivil-olum-1055006794.html>.

¹²⁶ Sputnik Türkiye. [sputniknews.com.tr, 13.04.2022 - 14.08]. BM, Ukraynalıların Rusya'ya zorla sınır dışı edildiği hakkındaki sahte haberleri yalanladı. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220413/bm-ukraynalilarin-rusyaya-zorla-sinir-disi-edildi-hakkindaki-sahte-haberleri-yanladi-1055527197.html>.

¹²⁷ Sputnik Türkiye. [sputniknews.com.tr, 28.02.2022 - 16.48]. RTÜK'ten Ukrayna yayınlarına ilişkin uyarı: 'Uygun görüntülerin seçilmesi önemli'. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220228/rtukten-ukrayna-yayinlarina-iliskin-uyari-uygun-goruntulerin-secilmesi-onemli-1054303207.html>.

¹²⁸ Sputnik Türkiye. [sputniknews.com.tr, 20.05.2022 - 19.25]. Rus komedyenlerin işlettiği Bush, 'NATO'nun genişlemeyeceği' sözünü niye tutmadıklarını açıkladı. <https://sputniknews.com.tr/20220520/rus-komedyenlerin-islettigi-bush-natonun-genislemeyecegi-sozunu-niye-tutmadiklarini-acikladi-1056540242.html>.

towards Russia are being exposed, and Putin's policies are hitting the West from unexpected angles. This news aims to legitimize Russia's actions.

On the other hand, in the following news, as a discourse against the alleged disinformation claims directed towards blocked Russian media outlets in the West, it is prominently highlighted. In addition, by being articulated through the words of the Turkish President, an effort is made to establish a parallel between Russia's situation and gain sympathy in favor of Russia within the Turkish public. President Erdoğan stated that digital fascism has become a threat that hinders billions of people from accessing accurate and unbiased news. Media and communication play a vital role in combating disinformation on social media and ensuring our political and social resilience. The lies and slander witnessed during the Karabakh War reminded us of the importance of this issue and showed how indispensable it is for us to unite our forces. The war was fought not only on the battlefield but also through various channels, including print and visual media and social media, during the intense 44-day struggle.¹²⁹

The subtext of the following news article conveys the message that the war benefits the US and is planned. In other words, the instigators of the conflict in Ukraine and the motives that prolong the war are attributed to the US. Therefore, Russia aims to legitimize its actions by pointing to the “real enemy” and framing itself within a legitimate context. Also, European governments are flocking to the doors of the United States to purchase weapons such as Reaper, Stinger, Javelin, and THAAD, in response to Russia's operations in Ukraine. While NATO countries heavily criticize Russia, their actions are boosting the US defense industry. According to Reuters, European governments have extensive shopping lists that include everything from drones to missiles and missile defense systems.¹³⁰

¹²⁹ Sputnik Türkiye. [sputniknews.com.tr, 14.05.2022 - 12.54]. Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan: Dijital faşizm tehdit unsuru. [https://sputniknews.com.tr/20220514/erdogan-dijital-fasizm-milyarlarca-insanin-tarafsiz-haber-alma-hakkini-engelleyen-bir-tehdit-unsuru-1056364615.html](https://sputniknews.com.tr/20220514/erdogan-dijital-fasizm-milyarlarca-insanin-tarafsiz-haber-alma-hakmini-engelleyen-bir-tehdit-unsuru-1056364615.html).

¹³⁰ Sputnik Türkiye. [sputniknews.com.tr, 17.03.2022 - 20.22]. Avrupa hükümetleri Reaper, Stinger, Javelin, THAAD almak için ABD'nin kapısında kuyruk oldu. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220317/avrupa-hukumetleri-reaper-stinger-javelin-thaad-almak-icin-abdnin-kapisinda-kuyruk-oldu-1054824408.html>.

Minister of Defense Hulusi Akar held a meeting with US Defense Minister Lloyd J. Austin, during which they discussed the Ukraine issue, as mentioned in Austin's social media post.¹³¹ The presence of the phrase “unjustified occupation” in the Twitter screenshot while discussing the “Ukraine issue” in the news content serves as evidence that Sputnik Türkiye may, perhaps inadvertently, be unable to create news content outside of an objective frame and language, possibly influenced or dictated by political considerations.

Sputnik Türkiye highlights that Ukraine uses mercenaries as pawns, Russian weapons are highly effective, and Ukraine is reluctantly pushed into a war against its powerful adversary, Russia. The subtext aims to convey the message of Russia's overwhelming superiority over Ukraine. Western mercenaries serving in the Ukrainian army have expressed their grievances, claiming that they are being used as cannon fodder. An English mercenary highlighted the effectiveness of Russian drones, stating that these unmanned aerial vehicles provide precise coordinates of Ukrainian army units, foreign soldiers, and even Russian artillery positions. The English mercenary admitted to finding himself in several "dangerous situations" during the first two weeks of the conflict. Michael, a former US soldier with combat experience in the Middle East, pointed out that besides Russian weaponry, foreign allies in Ukraine are also exposed to "friendly fire," emphasizing the risk of being used as bait if following the wrong orders from commanders. He warned about the dangers of being isolated on the battlefield without establishing proper communication with fellow soldiers, as they could potentially become threats. Additionally, foreign mercenaries have encountered significant corruption within the Ukrainian army, making their mission more challenging.¹³²

¹³¹ Sputnik Türkiye. [sputniknews.com.tr, 16.03.2022 - 22.32]. Milli Savunma Bakanı Akar, ABD'li mevkidaşı Austin ile görüşti. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220316/milli-savunma-bakani-akar-abdli-mevkidasi-austin-ile-gorustu-1054790785.html>.

¹³² Sputnik Türkiye. [sputniknews.com.tr, 13.05.2022 - 19.39]. Batılı paralı askerler Ukrayna ordusundan şikayetçi: Bizi yem olarak kullanıyorlar. <https://sputniknews.com.tr/20220513/batili-parali-askerler-ukrayna-ordusundan-sikayetci-bizi-yem-olarak-kullaniyorlar-1056353184.html>.

3.9.2 Press Freedom

Additionally, Sputnik Türkiye frequently attempts to manipulate the Turkish public and sway them to its side by highlighting Western double standards and activities. In Selin Uludağ's news article, the opinions of journalist Serhat Ayan are included. Ayan stated that the inaccessibility of Sputnik Türkiye is not a decision made by Türkiye but rather a thought imposed on them by Europe. He emphasized that Türkiye does not allow foreign entities to dictate terms in any other field except possibly in the media. He criticized Europe for acting based on instant whims and desires rather than legal frameworks. Ayan drew a comparison to China hypothetically blocking BBC, suggesting that the world would react strongly in such a case. He questioned why there should be a different response when it comes to BBC and emphasized that media is media regardless of its source.¹³³ Also, Director of the Directorate of Communications Fahrettin Altun emphasizes the need for a change in the West's ambivalent "Not from me, therefore a threat" perspective.¹³⁴

3.10 GLOBAL INFORMATION WARFARE

In this section, an analysis is conducted to examine how Russia's hybrid warfare strategies aim to influence not only the Turkish public but also the global audience, and the methods employed for this purpose within the narratives on Sputnik Türkiye during the initial three months of the war.

3.10.1 Disinformation and Misinformation

Official institutions are involved in disinformation campaigns, and dissenting voices are being censored on social media platforms. The Western bloc, while criticizing press freedom in

¹³³ Selin Uludağ. [sputniknews.com.tr, 31.03.2022 - 17.02]. Sputnik Türkiye'ye neden erişilemiyor?. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220331/sputnik-turkiyeye-neden-erisilemiyor-1055209259.html>.

¹³⁴ Sputnik Türkiye. [sputniknews.com.tr, 09.04.2022 - 13.39]. Fahrettin Altun: Batının ikircikli 'Benden olmayan tehdittir' bakış açısı değişmeli. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220409/1055432657.html>.

Türkiye, has blocked Russian media channels throughout the continent with a single decision. However, this censorship is not the only tactic employed. Alongside Russia's special operation in Ukraine, a large-scale disinformation campaign targeting Russia, primarily by Western media, has been initiated. This disinformation effort has often used manipulated videos, claiming that Russia requested military equipment from China. Allegations of Russia bombing mosques and hospitals and killing civilians have been the most commonly used disinformation method. These claims were either proven to be untrue or debunked by Russia with supporting evidence. Twitter suspends the accounts of journalists who report the facts about these allegations, YouTube leaves Ukrainian neo-Nazi channels untouched while closing Russian media accounts, and Facebook allows hate crimes against Russians.¹³⁵ Similarly, AK Party Deputy Group Chairman Cahit Özkan described the Western countries' decision to impose sanctions on Russian media organizations, particularly Sputnik, as a "violation of rights" during a press conference at the Turkish Grand National Assembly (TBMM).¹³⁶ The one-sided nature of Western actions targeting only Russia in terms of censorship is highlighted. Additionally, by referring to the blocking of the Russian media outlet Sputnik across an entire continent while criticizing press freedom in Türkiye, Russia aims to diminish the value of Western actions and their credibility in the eyes of the Turkish public.

While emphasizing that the West aims to tarnish Russia's image through disinformation from various sources, Western countries and the US are simultaneously demonized. Additionally, the criticism of disinformation focuses on how news articles that claim Russia uses hybrid warfare elements are not countered with efforts to prove their accuracy; instead, it's notable that only Western-sourced news is being debunked. BBC, citing EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell, reported that many cities in Ukraine were resisting Russian forces. However, it was revealed that one of the images claimed to be from Ukraine was actually from a video game. BBC report citing Borrell, misidentification of video game footage as Ukraine conflict footage.¹³⁷ The article highlights how Western media engages in propagandist activities

¹³⁵ Sputnik Türkiye. [sputniknews.com.tr, 18.04.2022 - 16.56]. Donbass operasyonunun 50 günü: Ukrayna'da neo-Nazizm, sosyal medyada sistematik yalan dönemi. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220415/donbass-operasyonunun-50-gunu-ukraynada-neo-nazizm-sosyal-medyada-sistematik-yalan-donemi-1055597339.html>.

¹³⁶ Sputnik Türkiye. [sputniknews.com.tr, 01.03.2022 - 16.19]. AK Partili Özkan: Batı, haber alma hakkına getirdiği kısıtlamaya son vermeli. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220301/1054335018.html>.

¹³⁷ Sputnik Türkiye. [sputniknews.com.tr, 05.03.2022 - 14.21]. BBC, video oyunundaki şehri Ukrayna diye geçti. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20220305/bbc-video-oyunundaki-sehri-ukrayna-diye-gecti-1054453290.html>.

against Russia with malicious intent and spreads misinformation without conducting fact-checking. In a similar vein, Selin Uludağ states that amid the third week of Russia's operation in Donbas, numerous misinformation and disinformation contents continued to emerge. Western media outlets, including reputed ones, as well as official accounts of the US and Ukrainian authorities, shared information containing disinformation. The claim that Western companies in Russia were being threatened was denied by the US Embassy in Russia, emphasizing the presence of over a thousand American companies operating in the country and dismissing it as an attempt to "disturb" Russia. Furthermore, Beijing denied reports alleging that Russia sought military equipment from China after launching military operations in Ukraine, with Chinese officials labeling these claims as "disinformation" originating from US sources.¹³⁸

Sputnik Türkiye highlights baseless news and propaganda against Russia, the aim is to contribute to Russia's international image. Simultaneously, accounts and institutions accused of spreading disinformation are being discredited. On the other hand, the official Twitter account of the National Guard added a new dimension to the Ukraine-originated disinformation campaign by drawing a comparison to Syria. The now-deleted tweet claimed that while Syria had been struck by only 100 missiles in the past five years, Ukraine had been hit by 1,100 Russian missiles in just 22 days, urging people to grasp the scale of the disaster. Syrian-born British journalist Richard Medhurst, who captured a screenshot of the deleted tweet, stated that the Ukrainian government attempted to portray Ukraine as having suffered more bombardment than Syria. Medhurst, known for his extensive writings and commentary on Syria while working with Press TV and Al-Mayadeen, expressed his reaction by describing it not only as despicable but also as an outright lie. Emphasize that the campaign to smear Russia on social media, including official institutions, continues.¹³⁹

¹³⁸ Selin Uludağ. [sputniknews.com.tr, 14.03.2022 - 18.36]. Ukrayna dezenformasyonu sürüyor: Operasyonun 2. haftasından itibaren yayınlanan yalan haberler. <https://sputniknews.com.tr/20220314/ukrayna-dezenformasyonu-suruyor-operasyonun-2-haftasindan-ibaren-yayinlanan-yanan-haberler-1054709797.html>.

¹³⁹ Sputnik Türkiye. [sputniknews.com.tr, 25.03.2022 - 21.06]. Ulusal Muhafızların 'Ukrayna'nın Suriye'den daha çok bombalandığı' tweetine 'pes artık' tepkisi. <https://sputniknews.com.tr/20220325/ulusal-muhafizlarin-ukraynanin-suriyeden-daha-cok-bombalandigi-tweetine-pes-artik-tepkisi--1055053586.html>.

3.10.2 Conclusion of the Case Study

The Russian narrative, as conveyed through "Sputnik Türkiye," employs strategic language such as "operation" instead of "occupation" to downplay Russia's actions in Ukraine. This linguistic choice aligns with Russia's denial of unlawful occupation. Additionally, the narrative emphasizes Ukraine's alleged wrongdoings to legitimize Russia's 2022 invasion. The narrative underscores Russia's resilience against sanctions and portrays it as a formidable nation, often referencing economic indicators and military expenditures.

The West is consistently portrayed as "evil" in the Russian narrative, supported by manipulative content aimed at alienating Türkiye and its populace from Western influences. This approach amplifies the perspectives of Turkish political factions and figures sympathetic to Russia, thereby promoting pro-Russian sentiments within Türkiye.

Sputnik Türkiye attempts to normalize the occupation of Ukraine through the use of words like "operation" in the content of routine news. Sputnik Türkiye portrays an image for Russia as the accommodating side regarding the ceasefire, while Ukraine remains reluctant to compromise despite the prolonged duration of the conflict. While Sputnik Türkiye conceals Russia's aggression, it strategically places Ukraine in its crosshairs, seeking to legitimize its actions. Sputnik Türkiye, frequently leveraging references to subjects sensitive to the Turkish populace or drawing parallels between Türkiye's foreign policy agenda and other global issues, the country strategically employs elements of post-truth to its advantage.

The objectives behind Russia's engagement with "Sputnik Türkiye" can be summarized as follows:

Image Enhancement: Russia seeks to improve its standing in the eyes of the Turkish public by utilizing "Sputnik Türkiye" as a platform to promote content aligned with its beliefs, objectives, and agenda. Simultaneously, narratives challenging Russia's goals are distorted.

Intervention in Turkish Affairs: Russia aims to intervene in Türkiye's internal affairs, manipulate public opinion, and gain an advantage in international relations by employing disinformation and propaganda through "Sputnik Türkiye." These efforts seek to align Turkish

public sentiment with Russian interests, mitigate international resistance, and weaken Türkiye's global position.

Regional Dominance: Through "Sputnik Türkiye," Russia endeavors to solidify its status as a regional power, securing its dominance in the Black Sea region and bolstering its capacity to intervene in regional events in line with its strategic objectives.

As highlighted in a compilation by The New York Times (2018b), "Sputnik Türkiye" identifies topics resonating with Turkish sensitivities, constructing narratives by interweaving partial truths with fabricated falsehoods. These stories are presented as if substantiated by external witnesses, exploiting mainstream media entities that lack rigorous fact-checking mechanisms, inadvertently serving as conduits for disseminating this messaging. This perpetual cycle sustains their propaganda activities while minimizing damage to Russia's image and "Sputnik Türkiye."

CHAPTER 4 – CONCLUSION

In today's information age, where the dissemination of news and ideas holds immense sway over public discourse, it is imperative to grasp the intricacies of news outlets like "Sputnik Türkiye." This case study delves into a comprehensive analysis of this platform, shedding light on its journalistic orientation, narrative construction techniques, and potential biases. The primary goal of this chapter is to deepen our comprehension of the evolving media dynamics within "Sputnik Türkiye."

In the year 2022, Russia initiated hybrid warfare activities through "Sputnik Türkiye" in the lead-up to its occupation of Ukraine. Subsequently, during the initial months of the war and persisting to the present day, these activities have been sustained and intensified. Russia implements a wide range of methods to reach its foreign policy objectives. In the field of information and communication, they consist of disinformation campaigns, social media campaigns, digital diplomacy and state-run media system. State-run news organizations, like Sputnik, are designed to boost Russia's good reputation abroad. Bots and trolls are used in social media operations to spread Russian propaganda, divide the public, and cause uncertainty. While disinformation strategies aim to spread false information and cause doubt and confusion among Russia's rivals and enemies, digital diplomacy focus on advancing Russia's foreign objectives and interests through social media.

Russia actively uses the news media such as Sputnik Türkiye in its foreign policy to not only mask the truth, but also to influence Turkish public opinion to coincide with Russia's goals, or, in the best-case scenario, to produce perceptual distortions at the audience level. This is accomplished by significant financing and assistance for agencies, internet trolls, and other measures. In this context, the most important conclusion from my analysis of Sputnik Türkiye is that Russia intends to reach out to the Turkish public through this channel and influence their perspective of Russia's foreign policy agenda, particularly about the Ukraine issue. The Russian-led hybrid warfare's Türkiye aspect has three primary objectives: To keep Russia from being isolated, minimize international hostility to Russia, and to attract Türkiye as a "strategic partner."

To do that, Russia seeks to establish itself on a legitimate basis by placing the West as a threat and fuelling anti-Western emotions, presenting its strategies and behaviors as legitimate responses to perceived Western hostility or expansion. This engagement aims to gain political and diplomatic backing from Türkiye, as well as potentially affecting regional dynamics in Russia's benefit.

Besides, Sputnik Türkiye assuming the role of a news agency to enhance its influence within the Turkish media represents another conundrum. Mainstream media organizations can directly share news from Sputnik Türkiye as sources without conducting fact-checking, thus indirectly contributing to propaganda. Sputnik Türkiye's efforts to refute false sources or news are either insufficient or the reliability of debunked sources is brought into question. This places Sputnik Türkiye in an unfavorable position concerning objectivity and further increases suspicions of generating fake news. Manipulation and disinformation are among the most frequently employed hybrid warfare methods within Sputnik Türkiye's news content. Statements that are either uttered with different intentions or have never been stated at all are distorted, aiming to discredit target countries, individuals, or institutions, ultimately seeking to legitimize Russian actions.

Russia's strategic use of disinformation, manipulation, and propaganda strategies, enabled by media such as Sputnik Türkiye, poses an enormous threat to Türkiye's media ecosystem and public opinion. Another notable harm is the rise of bias towards Western countries and institutions, which paves the way for exaggerated news. This, in turn, accelerates the dissemination of disinformation. This illegitimate attempt to influence Turkish public opinion harms Turkish foreign policy interests as Türkiye seeks to balance West and Russia. Embedded within the framework of hybrid warfare, Russia could potentially derive advantages from a prolonged perspective of Türkiye's divergence from Western alliances like NATO and European Union establishments. This would involve Türkiye's participation in international organizations fostered by Russia, leading to increased economic and political reliance on Russia. In the context of hybrid warfare, Russia would stand to benefit from an extended situation in which Türkiye drifts away from Western allies like NATO and the EU. In this case, Türkiye's involvement in international organizations supported by Russia would rise, putting Türkiye's economic and political dependency on Russia at an all-time high.

As emphasized by Sarkis (2019), states strive to take various measures to prevent propaganda. Against Sputnik Türkiye's negative media policy, efforts such as the establishment of media ombudsmen, and institutions to combat propaganda, can be supplemented by initiatives such as making media outlets highlight instances of misinformation and offer verifiable substantiation when a guest or source presents inaccurate assertions. Creating public awareness about Russia's hybrid warfare tactics in Türkiye and assessing the adherence of media outlets under Russia's control to objectivity and journalistic ethics are crucial. Without implementing these measures, it is unavoidable to come across. It will be beneficial to consider both press freedom and national security boundaries simultaneously when assessing the activities of propaganda networks like RT, Sputnik, and similar platforms. In this context, Van Herpen (2016: 331) emphasizes the significance of increased investment in Russian alternative media agencies, factual analysis, raising public awareness, disseminating truth to the masses, and countering trolls as imperative measures for combating Russia's hybrid warfare strategies.

As a possible answer to hybrid war activities, media ombudsmen, journalists, and the informed public must be diligent about the identification of motives, goals, and stakeholders of certain news items. Recognition of propagated core values might lead to stereotypes, prejudice, and the genesis of the antagonistic image of "us" and "them." Political media analysts must investigate who is the message for, who is most dedicated, or which segment of the public is most valuable for the sender for identifying propaganda actions. Coalition and allies should be based on interest, rationality, and mutual aims and must develop capabilities for counterpropaganda efforts. However, the purpose is not to replace propagandists with another side placing the public in a victimized position. A counterpropaganda strategy means the development of a strategic communication campaign and its implementation.

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