

# **HYBRID INFORMATION POLICY OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION AT THE TURN OF THE 1990s–EARLY 2000s AS A PRIMARY THREAT TO UKRAINE’S NATIONAL SECURITY**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

From the moment Ukraine proclaimed its independence and throughout the 1990s, the Kremlin regime – acting as the principal driver of Russian neo-imperialism – set itself the objective of reviving the Soviet Union, albeit under the dominance of the Russian Federation rather than Moscow alone. Consequently, Russian policy was primarily directed toward restoring control over Ukraine.

The Kremlin regime has traditionally relied on a wide range of hybrid and informational methods, ranging from elementary economic pressure to direct military aggression. In particular, the use of one of the most effective forms of hybrid warfare – information and ideological expansion – significantly intensified. Historically, the Kremlin has sought to establish its authority in Ukraine and impose its own political order. A dominant role in this process has been played by the Great Russian imperial tradition, which has survived into the present in the form of Russian neo-imperialism.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, Ukraine once again became the target of aggression by the Russian Federation. This occurred despite the fact that Russia, as one of the guarantor states under the Budapest Memorandum, had pledged to respect Ukraine’s independence, sovereignty, and existing borders, as well as to refrain from the threat or use of force against Ukraine’s territorial integrity and political independence. By flagrantly violating these international commitments, the Russian Federation demonstrated the cynical nature of its hybrid and ideological strategy.

Such developments were far from accidental. Over the past two decades, political culture within the Russian Federation has been characterized by the normalization of moral degradation, the arrogance of the ruling elite, and the aggressive rhetoric of state

propaganda. At the same time, while pursuing information-ideological expansion aimed at reviving a prototype of the Soviet Union – with its ideological and political attributes and symbols, including marginal ideological constructs and post-Soviet symbolic elements – the Kremlin regime has attempted to combine inherently incompatible elements. These include communism alongside the so-called «spiritual bonds» promoted by the Russian Orthodox establishment, Russian nationalism intertwined with chauvinistic ideology, and Vladimir Putin’s reliance on paramilitary formations such as the Kadyrov forces.

For more than three decades – especially following the collapse of the Soviet Union – the Western world largely believed that large-scale military conflict in Europe had become unlikely. However, by disregarding the provisions of the Budapest Memorandum and international law more broadly, the Russian Federation launched an unprovoked act of aggression against Ukraine. This occurred despite the fact that, due to continuous processes of disarmament, Ukraine had effectively become one of the most pacifist states in Europe.

The post-totalitarian society of the Russian Federation during the Yeltsin era proved incapable of transforming into a genuinely democratic and civilized political system, contrary to the optimistic expectations held in many Western countries. This failure was due not only to the dominance of oligarchic interests but, more importantly, to the persistence of the traditions and operational methods of the KGB within the Kremlin’s political structure. Individuals who came to power during the wave of democratic reforms quickly adapted to a system in which the rule of law was replaced by the rule of force. The consequences of this transformation were profound. In particular, the revival of nepotism within this pseudo-democratic system ultimately facilitated the rise to power not only of Vladimir Putin personally but also of the broader political network associated with him.

Beginning in the late 1990s and early 2000s, the Kremlin regime deliberately employed a wide array of information-ideological instruments – primarily of a hybrid nature – in order to systematically disseminate manipulative and destructive narratives. At the same time, the Kremlin increasingly utilized the resources and capabilities of cyberspace and social media to promote

messages that largely possessed a hybrid informational character. In doing so, the Kremlin employed a variety of methods, ranging from economic pressure to coordinated hybrid-information campaigns, including the use of cyber-political technologies.

As a result, the hybrid policy of Russian neo-imperialism eventually evolved into the full-scale military invasion of Ukraine by the armed forces of the Russian Federation. This aggression has generated severe destructive consequences and risks not only for European security but also for global stability, including within the domain of cyberspace. The Russian-Ukrainian war has undermined stability in Europe and poses significant global risks. In this context, Ukraine has effectively become one of the principal frontiers of the defense of democratic civilization – not only in Europe but potentially on a global scale.

One of the characteristic methods of the Kremlin's hybrid policy is the systematic attempt to shift responsibility for the consequences of its own aggression onto the governments of the countries that become victims of such aggression. These states are pressured to accept the conditions imposed by the occupying power – conditions that, as in the case of contemporary Ukraine, are aimed at undermining and ultimately destroying sovereign statehood. At the same time, the Russian Federation attempts to present itself as a «peacekeeper».

While Russian propaganda claims that a supposed «genocide of the people of Donbas» has taken place, the Russian military has in reality carried out actions that can be characterized as genocidal toward the Ukrainian nation. Significantly, this violence has primarily targeted the largely Russian-speaking populations of cities such as Mariupol, Kharkiv, and numerous urban centers in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions.

### **1. General Characteristics of the Hybrid Information Policy of the Russian Federation at the Turn of the 1990s–Early 2000s**

An important component of the hybrid policy of the Russian Federation toward Ukraine, particularly in its informational dimension, was the attempt to exert active influence on the consciousness of the political and business elites, the leadership of political parties and various social groups, as well as on Ukrainian society as a whole.

This influence manifested itself primarily in the information manipulation and demoralization of the population, including attempts to suppress the will to resist and to transform Ukrainian citizens into a convenient and compliant instrument for achieving Russia's neo-imperial objectives.

One of the key elements of Russia's hybrid policy toward Ukraine has been, and unfortunately remains, the religious factor, particularly through the activities of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate, which effectively functions as a branch of the Russian Orthodox Church.

The overarching objective of the Kremlin's hybrid policy has consistently involved a large-scale geopolitical task: undermining confidence among the states of Central Europe and the Baltic region in the security guarantees provided by NATO and the European Union, while simultaneously fostering tensions between the United States and its European allies.

For a long time, the real threat posed by Russian hybrid policy to the European Union and the broader democratic world was largely underestimated by many European political leaders. One example frequently cited is the relatively cautious policy pursued by some European governments toward the Kremlin.

In particular, the risks associated with the financial and informational support provided by the Kremlin to far-right and far-left political movements in Europe were significantly underestimated. One of the most dangerous consequences of such support lies in the potential erosion of the rights and political influence of electorates that adhere to fundamental European democratic values.

Thus, the Russian Federation has been implementing a provocative and insidious hybrid information policy designed to destabilize democratic institutions and political systems.

The Russian Federation retained military basing rights in Sevastopol and several other locations in Crimea following the signing on May 28, 1997, of an interstate agreement between Ukraine and Russia concerning the status and conditions of the stationing of the Russian Black Sea Fleet on Ukrainian territory.

Simultaneously, policies aimed at supporting the so-called «Russian-speaking population» and orienting it toward the Russian Federation were actively pursued in Crimea.

On April 21, 2010, the so-called Kharkiv Agreements extended the duration of the agreement governing the presence of the Russian Black Sea Fleet in Crimea. According to this arrangement, the fleet's stay was prolonged for an additional twenty-five years from May 28, 2017, with automatic extensions every five years unless either party objected in writing.

The signing of this document became one of the preparatory stages for the hybrid annexation of Crimea in 2014.

The hybrid information policy of the Russian Federation toward Ukraine intensified at the beginning of the twenty-first century. One manifestation of this policy was the Russian-Ukrainian conflict over Tuzla Island in the Kerch Strait in September 2003.

This conflict occurred during the period between the signing and ratification of the Treaty on the Ukrainian-Russian State Border. Although the treaty establishing the land border between Ukraine and Russia was signed on January 28, 2003, the dispute over Tuzla was widely interpreted by experts as an attempt by Russia to exert pressure on Ukraine regarding the delimitation of the maritime boundary in the Kerch Strait and the Sea of Azov.

The treaty ultimately entered into force on April 23, 2004, following the exchange of ratification instruments. Ukraine ratified the agreement on April 20, 2004<sup>1</sup>, and Russia on April 22, 2004. The Tuzla crisis demonstrated that the 1994 Budapest Memorandum was not a reliable security instrument for Ukraine, revealing that the states acting as guarantors of Ukraine's security could potentially become aggressors themselves.

Hybrid policy represents a complex phenomenon involving the systematic and coordinated application of political, military, diplomatic, economic, and informational-propaganda measures. Such measures are typically employed by one state – or a coalition of states – in order to subordinate the internal and external policies of another state. In the case of Russia's neo-imperial policy toward Ukraine and the Baltic states, systematic interference in both external and, at times, internal sovereignty has been clearly observed.

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<sup>1</sup> Закон України. Про ратифікацію Договору між Україною і Російською Федерацією про українсько-російський державний кордон. *Відомості Верховної Ради (ВВР)*. 2004. № 32. Ст. 386. URL: <https://web.archive.org/web/20210207193719/https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1681-15#Text>

The essence of the concept of «hybrid policy» lies in the use of a wide arsenal of asymmetric instruments designed to influence and control the political spectrum of other states. Such policy often operates covertly but maintains an inherently aggressive character toward other countries, both in the «near abroad» and in more distant regions.

Within the framework of Russia's hybrid geopolitical strategy during the 1990s and early 2000s, a number of measures were implemented to strengthen Russia's political, economic, and military power and to expand its international influence.

The practical manifestations of this hybrid policy included:

- threats and intimidation;
- political blackmail;
- the dissemination of disinformation and rumors;
- the spread of so-called «information bombs» through targeted information campaigns.

Among the narratives promoted within this framework were:

- alleged plans for the use of nuclear weapons in future conflicts with NATO or the United States;
- claims of an existential threat posed by NATO;
- projects such as the creation of the pseudo-state entity «Novorossiia»;
- proposals concerning the incorporation of the occupied territories of Donbas into the Russian Federation;
- initiatives aimed at creating the so-called «Donetsk People's Republic» and «Luhansk People's Republic».

Other narratives included proposals to recognize Russia's control over Crimea in exchange for ending the war in Donbas, or attempts to promote the idea of a geopolitical «grand bargain» between Russia and the United States reminiscent of a «second Yalta» or «second Potsdam».

Additionally, narratives were circulated claiming that the United States had allegedly «abandoned Ukraine», along with calls for federalization of Ukraine or the freezing of the conflict following the models of Transnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, or Nagorno-Karabakh.

Hybrid practices themselves have a long historical tradition. However, in the contemporary era they have become widely employed

across nearly all spheres of military-political confrontation<sup>1</sup>.

Russia inherited many elements of hybrid aggression from the traditions of the Russian Empire. These include:

- the use of a «fifth column»;
- elite fragmentation;
- provocations followed by accusations against the victim;
- secret agreements;
- the erosion of state institutions;
- military intimidation and troop deployments near borders;
- ultimatums and threats;
- the establishment of puppet governments;
- staged elections;
- repressive measures.

At the same time, the Russian Federation frequently attempts to portray itself as a peacekeeper or protector<sup>2</sup>. During the Cold War and the post-Cold War period, global competition for resources also played an important role. Both the United States and the Soviet Union were industrial societies requiring continuous economic growth and increasing resource consumption.

In 2012, researcher Yu. Badakh expressed concerns regarding the actions of Russian leadership in international relations and its interference in the internal affairs of other states, including Ukraine. According to his analysis, such actions could potentially lead to a new Cold War.

By that time it had already become clear that future conflicts would be driven not primarily by ideology but by civilizational incompatibility between different parts of humanity. Other scholars have also emphasized structural factors contributing to regional instability<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Гудзь В., Полякова Л., Крилова А. Шкільні підручники з історії в путінській Росії як засіб інформаційної війни з Україною. *Проблеми гуманітарних наук: збірник наукових праць Дрогобицького державного педагогічного університету імені Івана Франка. Серія Історія*. 2023. № 14(56). С. 174.

<sup>2</sup> Ситник, О., Зубкович, О. Переосмислення витоків російсько-української війни початку XXI століття. *Українські історичні студії*. Дрогобич: Видавничий дім «Гельветика», 2024. Спецвипуск. С. 14.

<sup>3</sup> Бадах Ю. Г. «Холодна війна». загальний огляд (1946–1991 рр.). «Холодна війна»: історія та уроки. 1946–1991 рр.»: науковий збірник. Матеріали Міжнародної наукової військово-історичної конференції, 4-5 жовтня 2012 року, м. Севастополь. URL: <http://nvimu.com.ua/wp-content/uploads/Pages.pdf>

For example, Yu. Liber argued that Ukraine's historically formed geopolitical division contributed to differing geopolitical orientations within the country. Many residents of western Ukraine viewed their future within the European Union, while a significant portion of the population in eastern regions perceived closer relations with Russia as more advantageous<sup>1</sup>. This division was later exploited by Russian aggression in 2014.

Similarly, R. Dodonov emphasized that modern military-political processes are often rooted in internal civilizational conflicts. Comparable dynamics were observed in Moldova, Yugoslavia, and Georgia. Such conflicts are influenced by both external factors – including Euro-Atlantic integration and Russian geopolitical ambitions – and internal factors, such as political instability, corruption, and weak border protection<sup>2</sup>.

The Russian invasion of Georgia in 2008 became an important test of mechanisms aimed at neutralizing Western responses. Russia conducted a direct military intervention and subsequently recognized the «independence» of the occupied territories of South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

According to scholars O. Haran and P. Burkovskiy, the Georgian case demonstrated that attempts by an aggressor state to transform itself into a mediator within a peace process often lead to the renewal of conflict in the future<sup>3</sup>.

Thus, the Kremlin regime sought to revive the traditions of Russian neo-imperialism across the territory of the former Soviet Union. As Taras Kuzio has noted, Russian political discourse attempted to draw moral equivalence between the independence of Kosovo and the separatist movements in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Later, the Russian Federation applied similar rhetoric in justifying the illegal annexation of Crimea, claiming a supposed

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<sup>1</sup> Лібер Ю. Тотальні війни: творення модерної України в 1914–1954 роках / пер. з англ. А. Дейнеки. Харків: Віват, 2019. С. 437–438.

<sup>2</sup> Гібридна війна: in verbo et in praxi: монографія / Донецький національний університет імені Василя Стуса / під заг. ред. проф. Р. О. Додонова. Вінниця: ТОВ «НіланЛТД», 2017. С. 146.

<sup>3</sup> Гарань О., Бурковський П. Російська агресія на Донбасі у стратегічному контексті відносин України і Заходу. Російська окупація і деокупація України: історія, сучасні загрози та виклики сьогодення: Матеріали Всеукраїнської науково-практичної конференції (Київ, 2016 р.) / Упор. П. Гай-Нижник. Київ: «МП Леся», 2016. С. 263.

«right of self-determination» for the population of the peninsula<sup>1</sup>. Despite the clear violation of Georgia's sovereignty in 2008, Western states did not impose significant sanctions on Russia at that time. In 2009, the United States even initiated a «reset» policy in relations with Russia.

Kremlin leaders interpreted this development as evidence that future aggressive actions might also be undertaken without serious international consequences. The intensification of Russian propaganda and the systematic promotion of Kremlin narratives became particularly evident after 2008, while 2014 marked the beginning of a new phase of hybrid informational aggression against Ukraine.

Russia has also sought to maintain geopolitical influence in the Balkan region, systematically developing and implementing methods of hybrid policy and hybrid warfare. Russian intelligence services traditionally considered the Balkans one of the most vulnerable regions in Europe<sup>2</sup>.

Historically, Russia claimed a special role as the protector of Orthodox populations, a narrative that closely corresponds to the modern ideological construct of the «Russian World».

Although Russia has experienced setbacks in the Balkans, the Kremlin continues to employ hybrid methods to counteract European integration processes in the region. In many cases, Russian actors have operated under the guise of peacekeeping missions while acting in violation of international legal norms. For example, in 1999 Russian paratroopers seized control of the Slatina airport in Pristina during the Kosovo conflict.

Such actions illustrate a typical method of Kremlin policy: transforming de facto actions into de jure legitimacy, often through attempts to obtain authorization for peacekeeping missions through international institutions.

For example, by obtaining from the UN Security Council the right to introduce a certain peacekeeping mission. In particular, this method was used by the Russian Federation in Transnistria and the

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<sup>1</sup> Кузьо Т. Війна Путіна проти України. Революція, націоналізм і криміналітет / Пер. з англ. Андрія Павлишина. Київ: ДУХ І ЛІТЕРА, 2018. С. 54.

<sup>2</sup> Ситник О., Дрогомирецький Б. Ідеологічні витоки, трансформації та наслідки гібридної російської політики на Балканах. «Дриновський збірник». Т. XV. 2022. Софія – Харків. С. 157–158.

Caucasus, where peacekeeping rhetoric actually covered up the expansionist policy of the Kremlin regime. It was the presence of Russian «peacekeepers» that became a significant factor in the Abkhaz and Tskhinvali conflicts, and the so-called «five-day war» in Georgia in August 2008 actually became «coercion for peace». The Russian Federation acts in a similar way in the Middle East. First of all, this concerns the participation of the Russian side in the Syrian conflict with the previously declared goal of establishing peace and order there. In fact, this became a disguise for peacekeepers – in order to cover up its actually aggressive policy<sup>1</sup>.

It is quite obvious that by unleashing hybrid aggression, the Kremlin was counting on a certain global result. Thus, the geopolitical tasks of the Russian Federation could be solved only thanks to a global hybrid conflict. It was with its use that the authorities of the Russian Federation planned, by implementing the methods of hybrid war, to destroy the existing world order and artificially increase their own status. And this is at a time when Russia has an inefficient economy and inefficient state administration<sup>2</sup>. That is, by launching a hybrid war against the civilized world, the Russian Federation raises the stakes and increases the risks, first of all, for neighboring countries and its own people.

According to Yu. Felshtinsky and M. Stanchev, the power of the modern Russian Federation is a bluff and a PR project, which is actively produced with the help of the Russian propaganda media<sup>3</sup>. Therefore, the hybridity of Russian imperial policy implies a large role of informational influences on the population, which are carried out at all levels of communication, influencing all aspects of the worldview.

Historically, ideology and propaganda have occupied a prominent place in the policy of the Kremlin regime. Their massive use, with the widespread use of cyberspace, took place in the period

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<sup>1</sup> Гібридна війна... С. 125–126.

<sup>2</sup> Світова гібридна війна: український фронт: монографія / за заг. ред. В. П. Горбуліна. Київ: НІСД, 2017. С. 8–9.

<sup>3</sup> Фельштинський Ю., Станчев М. Третя світова: битва за Україну. Київ: Наш Формат, 2015. 456 с. URL: <https://readukrainianbooks.com/page-86-1670-tretja-svitova-bitva-za-ukrayinu-jurij-georgijovich-felshtinskij.html>

2008–2014, when the Russian Federation’s hybrid information operations began to gain momentum not only in Europe but also throughout the world. According to I. Tyshkevich, perhaps the greatest indicator and evidence of the power of the Russian Federation’s propaganda work is the mood within Russian society. After all, over the past 20 years, a kind of information bubble has been artificially formed around the average resident of the Russian Federation. Gradually, it has encompassed not only traditional media, but also the vast majority of so-called new media. This entire array of information fields and information resources, despite different positions or the possibility of using them as tools of internal political struggle, always retains the signs of a general propaganda structure that ensures the loyalty of the population. Typically, none of the groups in the orbit of the Kremlin regime is able to control all segments of the media space. That is, each of the «Kremlin towers» is able to influence only a certain part of the Russian population through its own controlled media, unable to cover the entire segment of the media market due to conditional professional, age, property, and regional restrictions<sup>1</sup>. Television (especially in the Russian Federation) has a great influence on the population, as it acts on hearing, sight, and energy. This causes significant dependence, primarily of the Russian population, on massive propaganda. And even in the conditions of the growing role of cyberspace (with the massive spread of social networks), such dependence of Russian citizens causes not only internal problems of the Russian Federation, but also significantly complicates international relations. This is especially true of the current Russian-Ukrainian war and the confrontation of the Russian Federation with the West.

Most international military experts recognize that there is a threat of new conflicts on the territory of Europe. And the aggression of the Russian Federation threatens the security not only of Ukraine, but of all of Europe. It is difficult to win a hybrid war on one’s own territory, since such a war has no borders. Therefore, it is this factor that influenced the miscalculations of the Ukrainian authorities in conducting the anti-terrorist operation. The

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<sup>1</sup> Тышкевич І. Російська медіаімперія ізсередини. Цензор.НЕТ «Блоги». 17.02.23. URL: <https://censor.net/ua/b3400412>

Ukrainian-Russian border cannot be blocked if Ukraine does not control the information space and airspace of Eastern Ukraine. At the same time, terrorists will continue provocations on the border and in the captured territories with the information support of the Russian mass media. The network actions of terrorists on the captured territory, together with the support of Russian troops on the border, will constantly allow further supplies of terrorists, weapons and ammunition to Ukrainian territory. Therefore, until the information space in Donbas is under control, Ukraine will not be able to count on the support of its own population in the conflict region. This situation will contribute to the formation of a permanent social base for LPR and DPR terrorists<sup>1</sup>.

The hybrid policy of the Kremlin regime was also manifested in the fact that in order to maintain its power against the background of modest achievements in the socio-economic and cultural development of the Russian Federation, the authorities of this country systematically sought to stimulate its popularity by constantly searching for enemies and fighting them. At the same time, the implementation of this adventurous policy was combined with the purposeful support of the tense situation in its country and in the world. This was largely due to the chauvinistic nature of Russian imperialism. After all, it is especially aggressive towards those nations that defend their own identity and independence<sup>2</sup>. For a long time, Kremlin leaders, engaged in preparing aggression against Ukraine, paid special attention to the ideological processing of the population of the Russian Federation in order to direct its consciousness in the direction of the ideas of nationalism, great-power chauvinism, the protection of the so-called «national values and interests», the fight against the «external enemy», etc. In parallel, the actual occupation of the information space of Ukraine and its use in their own interests to form pro-Russian sentiments were carried out. Along with this, the destruction of the state power of Ukraine took place, including: blackmail and bribery of influential officials, political figures and the leadership of

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<sup>1</sup> Дацюк С. А. Стратегія перемоги України у війні з Росією. 12.05.2014. URL: <http://blogs.pravda.com.ua/authors/datsuk/53a5542ba2a4a/>

<sup>2</sup> Sytnyk O. M. Russian-ukrainian war 2014–2019 years as the decisive stage of the struggle for the Ukrainian independent state. *Relevant research of historical sciences: collective monograph*. Lviv-Toruń: Liha-Pres, 2019. P. 196.

government structures; the nomination of their own agents of influence to positions in state authorities; the incitement of interethnic and interreligious conflicts; the undermining of the trust of the Ukrainian population in their own government; the spread of protest and separatist sentiments in society; the discrediting of Ukraine's foreign and domestic policy; the imposition of certain ideas and values on its leadership and population through an active information campaign using special methods of «zombifying» society with the broad involvement of a whole range of various organizations aimed primarily at spreading the ideology of the «Russian world»<sup>1</sup>.

M. Galeotti, made an attempt to dispel some myths about Russian hybrid warfare. In particular, he examines how the concept of hybrid warfare has taken root in Western thinking, and compares it with Russian thinking and practice. This researcher traces how the Russian Federation is simultaneously afraid of and seeks to use non-military forms of coercion. In particular, in his opinion, the annexation of Crimea and the intervention in southeastern Ukraine in 2014 gave a new meaning to the concept of «hybrid warfare». Thus, the post-imperial Russian Federation has posed the most serious challenge and threat to the international order. Among the reasons for this is, first of all, that the Russian leadership has developed and implemented a «new way of waging war», which uses, among other things, modern cybernetic technologies. And this is in order to tilt the balance of power in its favor in the confrontation with Western countries<sup>2</sup>. Moscow is certainly waging an aggressive geopolitical campaign, asserting its claims to great power status. The failure to define and understand Russia's prospects leads to academic confusion, futile efforts, and fundamentally misinformed political debates in the West. While the West talks about the «Russian approach to hybrid warfare» (leaving

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<sup>1</sup> Sytnyk O. M. Evolution of a hybrid-information war in the context of aggressive policy of the Russian Federation in respect to Ukraine. *Challenges of study, conservation and interpretation of historical and cultural heritage: collective monograph*. Lviv-Toruń: Liha-Pres, 2019. P. 83–84.

<sup>2</sup> Galeotti M. *Russian Political War: Moving Beyond the Hybrid*. 2019. London: Routledge. 136 p.  
<https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/mono/10.4324/9780429443442/russian-political-war-mark-galeotti>

aside the thorny question of whether it is worth calling this phenomenon «hybrid warfare» at all), the Russian military is following the model we saw in Crimea and Donbas, using non-military means to prepare the battlefield for the introduction of soldiers. At the same time, the Russians have been quite adept at mastering basic modern cyber technologies.

At the same time, the Russian Federation's aggression against Ukraine was preceded by a phase of political destabilization and division in that country. Yet, despite the exaggerated and alarmist claims about some special Russian way of waging war (including the mythical «Gerasimov Doctrine»), there is nothing fundamentally new about it. While many in NATO are concerned about an outright Russian invasion, we should not be mesmerized by this chimera. The Kremlin's main goal is rather to divide, demoralize and distract the West enough to make it unable to resist, as Russia claims to be a «great power». Bluff, subversion, corruption and threats have always been the best tools of this state formation<sup>1</sup>. Modern war is primarily an ideological confrontation between the remnants of the Soviet mentality and a civilized pro-Western paradigm. In General Gerasimov's hybrid concept, the leading role was assigned to the fifth column in Ukraine. That is, in fact, to those communist figures and their followers who, over the past three decades, have done everything possible not only to enrich themselves, but also to devalue and weaken Ukraine.

## **2. Propaganda of the «Russian World» as a Leading Factor in Characterizing the Hybrid-Information Policy of the Russian Federation at the Turn of the 1990s – Beginning of the 2000s as the Main Threat to Ukraine's National Security**

Arguably the greatest challenge and threat to Ukraine's national security in the information-ideological sphere has been the active propaganda of the «Russian World». To a significant extent, this propaganda was based on the deformation of historical memory and national consciousness of Ukrainians<sup>2</sup>. At the same time, it must be

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<sup>1</sup> Sytnyk O. M. Evolution of a hybrid-information war in the context of aggressive policy of the Russian Federation in respect to Ukraine... P. 83–84.

<sup>2</sup> Якубова Л., Головко В., Примаченко Я. Русский мир на Донбасі та в Криму: історичні витоки, політична технологія, інструмент агресії: Аналітична доповідь / Відп. ред. В. Смолій. НАН України. Інститут історії України. Київ:

taken into account that the ideological foundation of a nation is formed precisely on the basis of historical memory and national consciousness. Its complete destruction would open broad prospects for the Russian Federation to occupy Ukraine not only physically, but above all mentally and ideologically-politically.

H. Turchenko and F. Turchenko argue that Russian society has always fundamentally denied the existence of Ukrainians as a separate nation. Moscow's peculiar mission was seen in gathering the parts of what was once a «single whole» and gradually «erasing» the differences that had accumulated during the period of «forced disunity». In fact, this was one of the main tasks of the Russian «development» of Southern Ukraine or, in modern terms, the introduction of the «Russian World» here<sup>1</sup>. To this end, the Kremlin regime initiated the process of creating the imperial project «Novorossiia».

In Russian imperial projects, Southern Ukraine was assigned the role of a springboard for further expansion of the Russian Empire into the Balkans and the Mediterranean. It was even planned to build a third capital of the Russian Empire here, in addition to St. Petersburg and Moscow. The «Novorossiia» project was purely predatory in nature. In imposing the «Russian World», all centers of Ukrainian life were destroyed, while Russian despotism was introduced instead<sup>2</sup>. At the same time, the authorities of the Russian Empire widely disseminated the version that the lands of «Novorossiia» were «originally Russian». Already then, this served as the basis for information-propaganda practices of distorting historical realities, which were later developed by the Russian Federation in the early 21st century.

Throughout the 1990s, Russian society and political circles increasingly leaned toward supporting the idea of the «Russian World», which claimed the role of the leading consolidating national doctrine. Simultaneously, the idea of the «Russian World» acquired a certain geopolitical significance in terms of transforming

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Інститут історії України, 2018. С. 24, 130, 131.

<sup>1</sup> Турченко Г., Турченко Ф. Проект «Новоросія» і новітня російсько-українська війна; [видання 2-е, доп.]. Запоріжжя: «Просвіта», 2015. С. 33.

<sup>2</sup> Sytnyk O. M. Russian-ukrainian war 2014–2019 years as the decisive stage of the struggle for the Ukrainian independent state... P. 185–186.

Russian neo-imperial policy<sup>1</sup>. The beginning of the 21st century was marked by the establishment of the «Russian World» as a Russian neo-imperial geopolitical ideological doctrine. It was used by Putin's regime to orient the Russian population regarding the ideological foundations of the existence and development of Russian society through the formation of a symbiosis of perception of the historical past and prospective vision of the future in search of a new model of ideological content for the national idea of the new Russia, a strategy of geopolitical development in the territories of the former Soviet Union, a mass and socio-communication technology of influence of the Russian Federation on the internal politics of neighboring states, socio-political practice and an eclectic worldview mixture in party building and ideological, agitation-propaganda activity, an ideological concept in Russian political and intellectual discourse to designate a supranational and transcontinental community, a comprehensive political technology of the Kremlin, and a geopolitical approach to interpreting contemporary political processes of both right and left spectra in a single stream in the form of an eclectic combination of elements of Pan-Slavism, Eurasianism, Russian messianism and imperialism (including in the form of an informal empire), the ideology of Russian Bolshevism and extreme nationalist currents of the Russian White anti-communist movement during the Russian Civil War and in emigration<sup>2</sup>.

It is considered that the syncretic policy of the «Russian World» is a generic concept, the hyperonym of which is defined not only by a combination of two standard poles of the right and left political spectra or their denial on the basis of a one-dimensional political spectrum, but also encompasses the social term «russkiy mir», which as a figure of speech is used to designate not any associations with Russian culture, but is applied in the form of conceptualizing it as the «Russian cultural sphere» as a set of those countries and peoples of the Russian Federation whose culture was formed under the influence of models from the times of Rus', to the

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<sup>1</sup> Ільницький В., Старка В., Галів М. Російська пропаганда як елемент підготовки до збройної агресії проти України. *Український історичний журнал*. 2022. № 5. С. 47.

<sup>2</sup> Гула Р. В. «Русский мир» – фантом чи реальність? Аспекти політологічного аналізу. *Наукові праці МАУП*. 2016. Вип. 50. С. 12.

Muscovite Tsardom, the Russian Empire, post-Soviet events of the early 1990s, and from the early 2000s – the Putin era, and includes both the Russian diaspora and Russian culture together with its influence in the world. The ideology of the «Russian World» is a socio-political doctrine promoted by the leaders of the Russian Federation<sup>1</sup>.

Yu. Felshtinsky and V. Popov believe that the concept of the «Russian World» was borrowed by Putin from the program of the NPSR (National-Patriotic Union of Russia) and the rhetoric of one of the ideologists of this organization, Podberezkin<sup>2</sup>. And as a kind of attribute of the «Russian World», starting from the early 2000s, Soviet symbolism was gradually returned (the anthem of Russia, toponymy, the erection of about a hundred monuments to Stalin after 2005, etc.).

Due to the multi-faceted nature of the concept of the «Russian World», there are various approaches to its understanding: geopolitical, civilizational, cultural-civilizational, geo-cultural, network-globalist, historical-mental, state-instrumental, socio-communicative, etc. From the very beginning of its existence, the «Russian World» was an ideological project aimed at the geopolitical formation of the «Eurasian Union». In fact, the goal was to restore the former Soviet Union in new geopolitical realities. At the same time, one of the most important components of this formation was supposed to be a pro-Russian Ukraine. And it was this ideological project that later became one of the main motives for justifying direct military aggression against Ukraine. Initially, Russian chauvinist circles actively spread the idea of uniting the Ukrainian, Belarusian, and Russian peoples into a single «all-Russian people». Later, various ideological projects such as the «Russian World» and «Novorossiya» emerged. At the same time, the main declarative motivation of these projects was presented by the authorities of the Russian Federation as support for «compatriots» and «protection of the Russian and Russian-speaking

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<sup>1</sup> Бойко А. «Образ «русского мира» в інформаційному просторі України / Журналістика: наук. зб. / за ред. Н. Сидоренко. Київ: Інститут журналістики КНУ імені Тараса Шевченка, 2016. Вип. 15. С. 79.

<sup>2</sup> Фельштинський Ю., Попов В. Від Червоного терору до мафіозної держави. Спецслужби Росії в боротьбі за світове панування (1917–2036). Київ: Наш Формат, 2021. С. 485.

population». The full cynicism of such motivation was first revealed in Donbas in 2014 and in the territories of Northern, Northeastern, and Southern Ukraine – already during the current full-scale aggression of Russia. It was precisely in these regions (predominantly populated by ethnic Russians and their descendants) that the Russian-speaking population suffered the most from the war unleashed by the Russian Federation.

Already since the 1990s, the authorities of the Russian Federation paid significant attention to Ukraine in spreading various kinds of fake and disinforming ideologemes. At the same time, numerous means of information influence were actively used, primarily to impose their manipulative propaganda among the population of Ukraine. Thus, in particular, the concepts of the «Russian World» and «Novorossiia» were artificially created and purposefully disseminated<sup>1</sup>. Simultaneously, Kremlin authorities widely began to use the resources and capabilities of cyberspace and social networks to promote their own narratives, which were predominantly of a hybrid-information nature.

For a long time, Kremlin regime ideologists formed various kinds of narratives aimed at deforming historical heritage, distorting historical facts, manipulating public consciousness, etc. Gradually, targeted disinformation covered literally the entire socio-political space. Official state clichés were systematically imposed on virtually all spheres of life. At the same time, special attention was paid to diminishing, discrediting, and eradicating everything genuinely Ukrainian – that is, related to national traditions, consciousness, and culture. As T. Kuzio noted, Ukrainophobia, which has flooded Russian television propaganda and the public discourse of the Russian political class, has significantly worsened the situation regarding human rights not only for Ukrainians but also for all national minorities of Ukraine – in the territories of Donbas and Crimea occupied by the Russian Federation<sup>2</sup>. And perhaps the greatest paradox of the «Russian

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<sup>1</sup> Турченко Г. Исторична наука і сучасна гібридна війна Росії проти України. *Наукові праці історичного факультету Запорізького національного університету*. Вип. 46. 2014. С. 217.

<sup>2</sup> Kuzio T. *Putin's War Against Ukraine: Revolution, Nationalism, and Crime*. North Charleston: Create Space Independent Publishing Platform, 2017. 474 pp. URL:

World» policy is that through it, to a significant extent, ethnic Russians themselves suffer (as was the case, incidentally, during the wars unleashed by the Kremlin regime in Chechnya and other regions of the former Soviet Union).

There exists an entire spectrum of Russian technologies for zombifying people through television content. Each project has its own clearly defined target audience (groups of viewers by age, gender, education, occupation) and corresponding airtime. The topics brought up for general discussion are always resonant, loud events or extreme situations; otherwise, viewers are not interested. Television channels are usually predominantly private and fully engaged during election preparation periods. In the inter-election periods, they serve the corporate interests of the owners, including fulfilling orders from certain political forces or individual deputies for PR, promotion of certain ideologies, programs, or preparation of the groundwork for lobbying bills. A significant part of television projects and various shows that supposedly belong to Ukrainian channels are in fact not original – the idea is borrowed, a copy of similar projects from the Russian Federation. Such hidden «import» from a country where, at the state level, all information policy is directed toward justifying and approving imperial ambitions, disregard for human rights, cultivation of ignorance and legal nihilism, poses a serious danger to our nation. We are surprised at how television in the Russian Federation has replaced reason for the average viewer and become an instrument of turning the people into a herd, we laugh at the victims of propaganda, but we do not notice the poisonous sprouts that Russian television has planted in our media space. Article 7 of the Law of Ukraine «On the Fundamentals of National Security of Ukraine» classifies attempts to manipulate public consciousness, including through the dissemination of unreliable, incomplete, or biased information, as threats to national interests in the information sphere. However, the legislator has still not developed effective legal mechanisms for the further implementation of measures to counter such manifestations, and therefore we are losing the information war. Thus, there is a

tendency toward uncontrolled use of methods of negative propaganda and manipulative techniques of information-psychological influence, which in the future threaten irreversible changes in public consciousness.

This, along with the objective lack of legal culture among a significant part of the population, especially adolescents and youth, gives grounds to consider the measures applied by the state to be insufficient. In the activities of, in particular, television and radio broadcasting bodies, which are responsible for analyzing processes and trends in the field of information security, there are significant obstacles. Monitoring of the television and radio (which is directly provided for among the tasks of the National Council of Ukraine on Television and Radio Broadcasting) and the development of measures to prevent internal and external information influence that threatens the information security of the state, society, and the individual (duties of the State Committee for Television and Radio Broadcasting of Ukraine) are carried out insufficiently effectively due to the imperfection of the applied criteria for evaluating audio and video materials. All this convincingly indicates the need to increase attention from expert and controlling bodies of the state to the issue of stopping the harmful, and sometimes destructive, influence of such phenomena on mass consciousness and the mental health of citizens<sup>1</sup>. However, Ukrainian legislators have not hastened to develop effective legal mechanisms for the further implementation of measures to counter such manifestations. And therefore Ukraine has essentially lost the information war to the adversary. Thus, on the part of the Russian Federation, there is a tendency toward uncontrolled use of methods of negative propaganda and manipulative techniques of information-psychological influence. It is precisely this that created a favorable ground for the aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine.

### **3. The Conclusion of the «Budapest Memorandum» as a Concession to the Hybrid Policy of the Russian Federation**

According to V. Kotsur, a characteristic example of the folly of the West's policy of appeasing the Russian Federation was the

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<sup>1</sup> Кременовська І. Небезпечні шоу на вітчизняному телебаченні, або Як за допомогою телевізора в Україні обкачують кремлівські зомбі-програми. 12.05.2014. URL: [http://gazeta.dt.ua/internal/gibridna-viyna-yak-kluyuchoviy-instrument-rosiyskoyi-geostrategiyi-revanshu\\_.html](http://gazeta.dt.ua/internal/gibridna-viyna-yak-kluyuchoviy-instrument-rosiyskoyi-geostrategiyi-revanshu_.html)

«Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances in Connection with Ukraine's Accession to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons of 1994»<sup>1</sup>. After all, the established scheme of «balance of power» with a possible adversary using military force in the 21st century has not justified itself, unlike new methods of armed conflicts that are introduced every year in unstable regions.

It should be noted that the «Budapest Memorandum» did not even have the status of an international treaty. Since it did not contain legal obligations, the parliaments of the guarantor countries did not ratify it. And this despite the fact that among the assurances (obligations) of the Memorandum were listed: respect for the independence, sovereignty, and borders of Ukraine; refraining from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity and political independence of Ukraine; no weapons would ever be used against it except in self-defense; refraining from economic coercion, etc. At the end of February – March 2014, the Russian Federation violated these international assurances through the military occupation and annexation of Crimea and aggression in Donbas.

As former U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine S. Pifer asserts, the choice of the term – «guarantees» or «assurances» – caused debate during the negotiations in Budapest. The first term was used to provide guarantees to NATO members, which implies military obligations. But the American administration was not ready to provide Ukraine with any military obligations; moreover, it was clear that the Senate would not ensure the possibility of ratifying a treaty with such strict obligations. Therefore, according to S. Pifer, the Memorandum was planned as a political agreement that provided «assurances, but not military guarantees»<sup>2</sup>. Since the conclusion of the Memorandum, a whole series of

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<sup>1</sup> Коцур В. В. «Гібридні» війни як феномен ХХІ ст. Матеріали всеукраїнської наукової конференції «Гуманітарне та патріотичне виховання студентської молоді в умовах глобалізації та євроінтеграції» (19 листопада 2015 року). Київ: НУХТ, 2015. URL: <http://confpol.webnode.com.ua/naukova-robota/kotsurv/>

<sup>2</sup> Гай-Нижник П. Будапештський меморандум: передумови і наслідки (не)гарантії національної безпеки України. Агресія Росії проти України: історичні передумови та сучасні виклики / П. П. Гай-Нижник (керівник проекту, упоряд. і наук. ред.); авт. кол.: П. П. Гай-Нижник, Л. Л. Залізник, І. Й. Краснодарська, Ю. С. Фігурний, О. А. Чирков, Л. В. Чупрій. Київ: «МП Леся», 2016. С. 212.

misunderstandings has arisen. Even in the very title, a contradiction was embedded. While in the Ukrainian version it is «Memorandum on Security Guarantees» («Memorandum pro harantii bezpeky»), in the English version it is «Memorandum on Security Assurances» («Memorandum on security assurances»). It should be emphasized that the term «Security Assurances» does not contain any specific basis or meaningful confirmation of the real effect of the Budapest Memorandum. It is therefore quite obvious that the «Budapest Memorandum» never became an actual mechanism for guaranteeing Ukraine's security. Failure to comply with the provisions of the «Budapest Memorandum» was committed by the Russian Federation as one of the signatory countries. And this was in exchange for Ukraine's renunciation of the world's third-largest nuclear potential. This clearly demonstrated not only the perfidy of the Russian Federation as the aggressor country, but also the indisputable fact of the devalued system of security guarantees that had developed after the Second World War.

According to S. Plokhyy, the «Budapest Memorandum» to some extent filled the security gap in Ukraine that arose as a result of forced nuclear disarmament. At the same time, this gap gradually widened until the beginning of Russia's aggression against Ukraine, when the ineffectiveness of the guarantees provided by the «Budapest Memorandum» and related agreements became obvious<sup>1</sup>. The Kremlin regime has always sought to use not only all means of hybrid-information warfare against Ukraine, but also direct armed intervention<sup>2</sup>. First of all, the provisions of the «Budapest Memorandum», which was supposed to mark the completion of overcoming the consequences of the «Cold War», were discredited. Instead, it significantly undermined Ukraine's defense capability and its position in the international arena. Four years after the conclusion of the «Budapest Memorandum», in December 1998, Ukraine undertook to eliminate 44 heavy bombers and 1,068 X-55 cruise missiles, most of which were transferred to the Russian Federation. And now these missiles and their

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<sup>1</sup> Плохий С. Російсько-українська війна: Повернення історії. Харків: КСД, 2023. С. 93.

<sup>2</sup> Гай-Нижник П. П. Росія проти України (1990–2016 рр.): від політики шантажу і примусу до війни на поглинання та спроби знищення. Київ: «МП Леся», 2017. С. 188.

modifications are flying from the Russian Federation into Ukraine, destroying peaceful cities and critical infrastructure. Thus, Ukraine, which inherited the world's third-largest nuclear potential (220 strategic delivery vehicles), was deprived of it without real security guarantees. Subsequently, this became one of the significant reasons for the beginning of hybrid-information expansion, and later – conventional aggression on the part of the Russian Federation.

S. Plokyh asserts that when in 1994 Ukraine, by signing the «Budapest Memorandum», committed to handing over its nuclear weapons to the Russian Federation, the United States, Russia, the United Kingdom, China, and France promised to respect Ukraine's borders and sovereignty. However, there were no obligations to defend Ukraine if these promises were violated. Accordingly, the rhetorical question arises – was this huge security vacuum not an invitation to war? The answer today is almost unequivocal: it was a significant abuse of Ukraine's trust in the world community and its largest neighbor<sup>1</sup>. It should also be added that this was a significant geopolitical miscalculation by the leading countries of the world, and above all – the United States of America.

In June 1994, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine adopted a special statement and resolution<sup>2</sup>, according to which the Cabinet of Ministers was obliged within three months to develop a draft international legal document that would strengthen the international legal guarantees of Ukraine's security in the context of the «Budapest Memorandum»<sup>3</sup>. However, this decision was never

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<sup>1</sup> Plokyh S. The book Russian-Ukrainian war: the return of history. 2023. URL: <https://www.indigo.ca/en-ca/the-russo-ukrainian-war-the-return-of-history/fb730c40-3980-3181-ba5d-6fe9a30ab0f7.html>

<sup>2</sup> Гай-Нижник П. Прелюдія війни: українсько-російські військово-політичні взаємини в контексті міжнародного права і системи національної безпеки (1990–2010 рр.). Російська окупація і деокупація України: історія, сучасні загрози та виклики сьогодення: Матеріали Всеукраїнської науково-практичної конференції (Київ, 2016 р.) / Упор. П. Гай-Нижник. Київ: «МП Леся», 2016. С. 162.

<sup>3</sup> «Про затвердження Положення про порядок укладення, виконання та денонсації міжнародних договорів України міжвідомчого характеру». Постанова КМ України від 17 червня 1994 р. N 422. Документ 422-94-п, поточна редакція – Редакція від 11.05.2006, підстава – 617-2006-п. *Верховна Рада України. Офіційний сайт*. URL: <https://web.archive.org/web/20210207193719/https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1681-15#Text>

practically implemented. In general, Ukraine as a state and its national security were protected and guaranteed not only by the «Budapest Memorandum», but also by a number of important international legal acts, namely: the UN Charter; the Declaration on Principles of International Law concerning Friendly Relations and Co-operation among States in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations<sup>1</sup>.

Although formally the «Budapest Memorandum» did not contain obligations of the guarantor countries to fight for Ukraine in case of aggression against it, nevertheless, as follows from the content of this document, the duty of responsibility for Ukraine's security lies with the guarantor countries: the United States, the United Kingdom, and the Russian Federation (and partially – France and China). The consequences of the failure of these countries to fulfill the obligation undertaken toward Ukraine began to manifest almost immediately. At first – through gas and trade wars unleashed by the Russian Federation against Ukraine, and later – in the form of direct military aggression of the Russian Federation in Crimea and Donbas. At the same time, the Kremlin regime paid increasing attention to hybrid-information varieties of warfare, including hacker attacks against the United States.

## CONCLUSIONS

The hybrid information policy of the Russian Federation during the 1990s and early 2000s formed the foundation for a broader strategy of neo-imperial expansion. Through the coordinated use of informational, political, economic, and military instruments, the Kremlin sought to influence political processes in neighboring states and weaken the unity of Western alliances.

The events of the early twenty-first century demonstrate that these hybrid instruments gradually evolved into open military aggression. The Russian-Ukrainian war therefore represents not merely a regional conflict but a manifestation of a broader confrontation between authoritarian neo-imperial ambitions and democratic international order.

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<sup>1</sup> Декларація про принципи міжнародного права, що стосуються дружніх відносин та співробітництва між державами відповідно до Статуту Організації Об'єднаних Націй. *Верховна Рада України. Офіційний сайт.* URL: [http://zakon2.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/995\\_569](http://zakon2.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/995_569)

Over the past more than thirty years – particularly after the dissolution of the Soviet Union – the Western world has, for the most part, remained in a state of conviction that large-scale military actions on the territory of Europe would no longer occur. However, the Russian Federation, having disregarded the provisions of the Budapest Memorandum and international law in general, unleashed an entirely unprovoked aggression against Ukraine. This took place despite the fact that, owing to the continuous process of disarmament, Ukraine was in practice the most pacifist country in Europe.

Having retained its military basing rights in Sevastopol and in a number of other settlements in Crimea, the authorities of the Russian Federation simultaneously pursued a systematic policy on the territory of Crimea of supporting the «Russian-speaking population» and orienting it specifically toward the Russian Federation.

The post-totalitarian society of the Russian Federation during the Yeltsin era proved incapable of transforming into a civilized environment (as naively anticipated in Western countries). This failure resulted not only from the dominance of oligarchs, but above all from the prevalence within the Kremlin regime of KGB traditions and methods. Individuals who rose to power on the wave of democracy adapted remarkably quickly to a system in which the rule of law and legal norms were not dominant, but rather the actual law of force – with all the ensuing consequences. In particular, the nepotism revived by this pseudo-democratic regime played a significant role in bringing to power not only the individual figure of Putin, but also his collective equivalent.

One of the methods employed in the Kremlin regime's hybrid policy consists in transferring full responsibility for the consequences of its own aggression onto the leadership of those countries that have become victims of this hybrid aggression. The governments of such countries are persistently presented with the occupier's conditions, directed (as in the contemporary case of Ukraine) toward the destruction of a sovereign state. At the same time, the Russian Federation endeavours to portray itself as a «peacemaker».

While Russian propaganda repeatedly asserts the existence of a supposed genocide of the «people of Donbas», it is the Russian

army that is carrying out a real genocide of the Ukrainian nation. Moreover, this genocide is directed primarily against the predominantly Russian-speaking residents of Mariupol, Kharkiv, Chernihiv, and the cities of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, among others. It must be emphasized that the Russian Federation prepared its full-scale invasion and war against Ukraine over an extended period of time. During this period, it consistently strengthened well-financed agent networks and combat units at all levels – both in the political and in the military spheres (down to ordinary civic formations and organizations). Concurrently, the Kremlin leadership sought to take account of the prevailing foreign-policy situation. The leadership of the Russian Federation also made every effort to secure the support of the world's leading states. This was primarily necessary for the realization of their geopolitical projects, such as the restoration of the USSR. Traditionally, the principal targets of Russian neo-imperialist aggression have included Ukraine, the Baltic states, the South Caucasus, and others. In pursuing these aims, the Russian Federation has employed an entire complex of hybrid instruments of an information-propaganda, political, diplomatic, trade-economic, and other character.

### **ABSTRACT**

The article examines the hybrid information-ideological policy of the Russian Federation at the turn of the 1990s and early 2000s as a systemic threat to Ukraine's national security. It demonstrates that, since Ukraine's declaration of independence, the Kremlin consistently pursued the goal of restoring control over the country, employing a comprehensive set of hybrid tools: economic pressure, support for a «fifth column», the religious factor through the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate, information zombification, manipulation of historical memory, and targeted promotion of the «Russian World» concept. Particular attention is devoted to the role of the «Russian World» ideology and the «Novorossiia» project as key elements of mental and geopolitical expansion that prepared the ground for subsequent aggression. The study analyzes pivotal precursor events (the 2003 Tuzla conflict, the 2010 Kharkiv Agreements, and the continued Russian military presence of the Black Sea Fleet in Crimea), which

constituted stages in the preparation for the hybrid annexation of Crimea and the war in Donbas. Special emphasis is placed on the Budapest Memorandum of 1994 as an illustration of the ineffectiveness of international security assurances and a concession to Russia's hybrid policy in exchange for Ukraine's nuclear disarmament. It is argued that Russia's hybrid information expansion acquired a systematic character precisely during this period and served as direct preparation for the full-scale invasion of 2022. The cynicism of Kremlin propaganda is highlighted, as it shifted responsibility for aggression onto the victim while portraying Russia as a «peacemaker». The conclusion is drawn that the West's underestimation of the true nature of Russian neo-imperialism, combined with the weakness of international security guarantees, significantly increased Ukraine's vulnerability and posed a broader threat to European and global security.

### **АНОТАЦІЯ**

У статті розглядається гібридна інформаційно-ідеологічна політика Російської Федерації на рубежі 1990-х та початку 2000-х років як системна загроза національній безпеці України. Вона демонструє, що з моменту проголошення незалежності України Кремль послідовно прагнув відновлення контролю над країною, використовуючи комплексний набір гібридних інструментів: економічний тиск, підтримку «п'ятої колони», релігійний фактор через Українську православну церкву Московського патріархату, інформаційне зомбування, маніпуляції історичною пам'яттю та цілеспрямоване просування концепції «русского мира». Особлива увага приділяється ролі ідеології «русского мира» та проекту «Новоросія» як ключових елементів ментальної та геополітичної експансії, що підготували ґрунт для подальшої агресії. У дослідженні аналізуються ключові події-попередники (конфлікт у Тузлі 2003 року, Харківські угоди 2010 року та продовження російської військової присутності Чорноморського флоту в Криму), які становили етапи підготовки до гібридної анексії Криму та війни на Донбасі. Особливий акцент робиться на Будапештському меморандумі 1994 року як ілюстрації неефективності міжнародних гарантій безпеки та поступки гібридній політиці Росії в обмін на ядерне роззброєння України. Стверджується, що гібридна інформа-

ційна експансія Росії набула систематичного характеру саме в цей період і служила безпосередньою підготовкою до повномасштабного вторгнення 2022 року. Підкреслюється цинізм кремлівської пропаганди, яка перекладала відповідальність за агресію на жертву, одночасно зображуючи Росію як «миротворця». Робиться висновок, що недооцінка Заходом справжньої природи російського неоімперіалізму в поєднанні зі слабкістю міжнародних гарантій безпеки значно посилила вразливість України та створила ширшу загрозу європейській та світовій безпеці.

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