

Psychological Defence Agency

Lund University

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# Beyond Operation Doppelgänger:

## A Capability Assessment of the Social Design Agency

MPF REPORT SERIES 8/2025

**BEYOND OPERATION DOPPELGÄNGER: A CAPABILITY ASSESSMENT OF THE SOCIAL DESIGN AGENCY**

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Date: 2025-05-12
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Production: Gritti Agency
ISBN: 978-91-989646-3-9

*Texts originally in Russian that have been translated to English are marked in red.*

# Preface

Funding and communicating research as well as disseminating knowledge are vital parts of the core remit for the Psychological Defence Agency. This groundbreaking report, published jointly by Lund University and the Psychological Defence Agency, written by James Pamment and Darejan Tsurtsumia at Lund University provides new and detailed insights on the Russian Social Design Agency (SDA) and its network in what has been commonly known as the 'Doppelgänger campaign'.

The authors dive deep beyond the surface based on over 3000 leaked documents from SDA analysing in great detail capabilities, methods, tactics, internal communication and overall objectives. Moreover, the authors frame the analysis in a strategic context presenting a strong argument for the view that SDA is part of a state-backed and long-term information war.

As is common in academia, the authors provide some criticism of previous writings on their subject matter (the Doppelgänger campaign), especially within what the authors call "the counter-FIMI community". At a time, when there is a major war in Europe, when democracy is being pushed back globally, when hybrid warfare is being used against us by authoritarian states on an everyday basis, it's crucial that we can look upon ourselves with somewhat critical eyes and that we can evaluate our work when countering FIMI. Here, research results from free academia is of utmost importance, and indeed plays a pivotal role when it comes to uphold and safeguard our democracies.

In the concluding chapter, the authors also provide a few thought-provoking suggestions, not necessarily shared by the Psychological Defence Agency, on how the counter-FIMI community, should address present and future threats. I'm sure this will contribute to constructive discussions ahead on how to confront and adapt to this reality.

As always when we publish research, the authors are solely responsible for the content, conclusions and suggestions in this study.



Magnus Hjort
Director General
Psychological Defence Agency

# Acknowled-gement

The authors express their gratitude to the many reviewers of this report and to the Psychological Defence Agency for their support. We also wish to recognise the exceptional work of the journalists, researchers, and analysts who have contributed to the shared understanding of SDA activities.

*James Pamment & Darejan Tsurtsumia*

# Glossary

# Frequently used abbreviations & technical terms

## Russian actors & campaigns

**ANO:** Autonomous Non-Profit (or Non-Commercial) Organisation: The Russian version of NGOs. (ru: АНО, Автономная Некоммерческая Организация).

**ANO IRI:** Internet Research Institute (ru: АНО ИРИ, Институт Развития Интернета).

**ANO Dialog** (& Dialog Regions) (ru: АНО Диалог & Диалог Регионы).

**CCE, Comprehensive Counter-Campaign against Europe:** SDA's main information influence campaign targeting Europe from 2023 onwards. (ru: ЕКК, Европейская Комплексная Контр-кампания).

**CCI, International Comprehensive Counter-Campaign:** SDA's main information influence campaign during 2022. (ru: МКК, Международная Комплексная Контр-кампания).

**CCU, Comprehensive Counter-Campaign against Ukraine:** SDA's main information influence campaign targeting Ukraine. (ru: УКК, Украинская Комплексная Контр-кампания).

**Center S:** Team from SDA and Structura National Technologies working on campaigns against Ukraine (ru: Центр С).

**Digorya:** Educational platform for young political and media scholars and professionals (ru: Платформа «Дигория»).

**OU, Other Ukraine:** Kremlin-backed political movement to install a pro-Russian government in Ukraine (ru: Другая Украина) aka RU, Real Ukraine (ru: НУ Настоящяя Украина).

**Readovka:** media company, now part of the ANO Dialog network (ru: Ридовка).

**SDA:** Social Design Agency (ru: АСП, Агентство Социального Проектирования).

**Structura National Technologies:** (ru: Группа Компании Структура).

**Team I:** SDA team led by Ilya Gambashidze with a focus on international campaigns (ru: Команда И).

# Social media metrics & terminology

**CTR, Click Through Rate:** A formula used to assess the success of an advertisement campaign, comparing the impressions generated by an advertisement with the clicks it has obtained.

**Engagement:** Examples of where a piece of content captures the attention of a user. On social media, evidence of engagement include likes, comments, and shares. Engaging with content generally increases the impressions obtained by that content.

**ER, Engagement Rate:** Total of all reactions divided by the total count of followers.

**ERR, Engagement Rate per Reach:** Total of all reactions divided by the active count of followers.

**Impressions:** The amount of views obtained by a piece of content.

**Landing Page:** A landing page is a standalone web page that a person "lands" on after clicking through from an email, ad, or other digital location.

**Metodichka:** A manual for media, outlining main narratives that the media channels are expected to promote, and the emotional responses they need to illicit from their audiences (ru: Методичка).

**OTS, Opportunity To See:** Measures how many times a piece of content was made available to target audiences.

**ROI:** Return on investment.

**Touchpoint:** Any means used by a brand to engage its customers, ranging from a website, a newsletter, an advertisement, or a physical shop. Touchpoints are the meeting between content and users.

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# Executive Summary

According to current thinking, **Doppelgänger** is a major Kremlin-led information influence operation that aims to support Russia Federation goals in Ukraine and around the world. Active since at least 2022, it is described by Meta as "the most persistent Russia-based campaign" and by the German Federal Foreign Office as "one of the largest … worldwide".[1] The operation became notorious for making clones of legitimate websites to spread disinformation, including news sites, government websites, and a variety of other pro-Russian and anti-Ukrainian platforms. Content is often amplified through fake personas on social media, as well as through paid advertisements.[2] The exact scale of the operation has been difficult to assess, since it publishes in very high volumes that are often quickly identified and removed.

The "Doppelgänger" component consisted of between 70 and 700 mirror sites, which have been attributed to Social Design Agency (SDA), Structura, and autonomous non-commercial organisations Dialog and Dialog Regions.[3] According to the FBI, SDA acted as coordinator and operator for a campaign that indicatively produced and disseminated almost 40,000 pieces of content and 33.9 million comments around the world between January and April 2024.[4] The operation has continued to find new targets, such as the 2024 EU Parliamentary Elections and the 2024 Olympic Games in Paris. Several other operations attributed to the Russian Federation seem to share characteristics with Doppelgänger, though the exact boundaries between operations is unclear.

**This is the story so far. In our view, Doppelgänger has been over-hyped and under-analysed, leading to some fundamental misunderstandings about its purpose and scope. This report draws upon over 3,100 internal documents from the 2024 Social Design Agency leaks as well as more than 60 examples of previous technical reporting on Doppelgänger and related operations, to re-assess the purpose and scope of the campaign.** In difference to much of the previous analysis, our approach has been to focus on **capabilities**, for the purpose of **foregrounding the strategic and operational components of SDA's activities**. With support of confidence

1 Meta, 2022b; Germany's Federal Foreign Office, 2024.

2 EU DisinfoLab, 2024

3 According to latest estimates shared by EEAS: see European External Action Service, 2025. Initial assessments at the time of exposure were of 60 to 70 mirror sites. See also: US Department of the Treasury, 2024a and US Department of the Treasury, 2024b

4 FBI Affidavit, 2024; Morozova, 2024

intervals[5] to provide transparency over our assessments, our main takeaways are as follows:

- The operations conducted by SDA and its network against the West are viewed by the commissioning and implementing actors as a state-sanctioned information war [H].
- It is incorrect to position Doppelgänger (the utilisation of mirror sites for delivering disinformation) as the main method or focus of SDA and its network's information influence operations [H].
- An analytically appropriate lens is to view the operations as "counter campaigns" against the Western countermeasures levied on Russia after the invasion of Ukraine. It is also appropriate to frame their operations as a hybrid adaptation of advertising, political campaigning, espionage, and military logics [H].
- Discourse in Western target countries around the exposure of Doppelgänger contributed to SDA receiving more funding to conduct more information influence campaigns [M].
- SDA aimed to discredit the counter-FIMI community's work by reframing e.g. factchecking and exposés as delivery mechanisms for their content. They developed methods of doctrine and evaluation to theorise and demonstrate the effectiveness of the approach [H].
- Other exposed operations that seem similar to Doppelgänger originate from the same network (but not necessarily SDA) and make use of some shared capabilities and sub-licenced services. Some of the similar operations should be considered part of the SDA "counter campaign" [M].
- Doppelgänger, SDA, and the associated campaigns are indicators of the expansion since 2022 of a €600 million a year Kremlin-led "cradle to grave" digital propaganda network targeting Russia, Ukraine, and the rest of the world [H].

The first and most important finding is that our lenses for viewing the operation are wrong. The error is understandable due to the way that information influence operations are discovered as islands of interesting data without strategic level evidence. Yet, from a strategic perspective, **Doppelgänger (i.e. use of mirror sites to deliver disinformation) is not a particularly important tactic. It is certainly not an "operation". It is one method of content delivery used by SDA and its network of allied organisations that was discovered almost as quickly as it was set up**. The 350+ international media stories about Doppelgänger is one of the true success stories for the Kremlin, providing a massive return on investment that likely earned SDA additional resources and responsibilities from the Kremlin to conduct more information influence operations around the world. Throughout this report, we will detail the actual operations that the mirror sites associated with Doppelgänger were part of. The objectives for these operations are ambitious. The exposure of Doppelgänger allowed SDA to shift its measures of success to lower, more shallow levels. Doppelgänger

5 High confidence is designated by [H], medium [M] and low [L]; see US Intelligence Community, 2021

enabled SDA to smudge assessments of impact and to instead use penetration of Western discourse as its main measurement. The goal became market share for Russian Federation talking points, regardless of framing and context. **Being talked about is success. Being discovered is success. Being factchecked, debunked, denounced, is success. Being repeated by politicians, celebrities, and credible news sources is success**. Doppelgänger is Russia's greatest propaganda triumph since 2016 because SDA was able to spin the words of misled politicians, Western media discourse, and the work of the counter-FIMI community into evidence of market penetration. And the Kremlin bought it (literally).[6]

It's important, then, to understand that SDA has no real commitment to the cynical narratives or false personas, communities, and websites that it churns out. There is no qualitative distinction between narratives. They are all merely vehicles for penetration of the Western information environment. The volume is increased if they succeed, decreased if they don't. Likewise, there is no qualitative distinction between the means of delivery between influencers, personas, ads, bots, own media brands, mirror sites, and factchecking organisations. They are all vehicles for penetration of the information environment. Increase if they succeed, drop if they don't. **It doesn't matter who is the messenger and what is the message, so long as the Russian Federation's thematic lines seize a share of the marketplace of ideas**.

We therefore think that the headlines about Doppelgänger have been misleading. **The story should more properly be about the Kremlin ecosystem of private sector and autonomous non-commercial organisations (ANO) that are well-resourced, meticulously organised, and have access to some advanced capabilities**.[7] They got their first opportunity thanks to the sanctions on Russian state media, and their second thanks to the exposure of Doppelgänger. They target Russians, Ukraine, the West, and potentially the whole world with their influence and subversion efforts. Integral to their activities are political technologists,[8] a group of specialist ideologists who understand what makes a society tick and how, with the help of digital and social media, to manipulate its vital processes. **Closely connected to these initiatives are efforts to create a new generation of propagandists with expertise in digital media; SDA is not just the harbinger of a post-RT, post-Prigozhin influence capability, but of a generational shift in digital propaganda capabilities**. And of course, their main expertise is in transforming the Kremlin's desperation into Rubles. This report describes, in much detail, SDA's place in this network of organisations who seek to implement Putin's vision of a Russian population – and a global population – divided, fearful, and malleable to cognitive and informational manipulation.

6 We mostly agree with Rid's initial assessment in this respect, and detail in the report how this process emerged; Rid, 2024.

7 MTAC are one of few organisations to view the network in this manner, labelling it under the threat actor name Ruza Flood; Microsoft Threat Analysis Centre (2024b).

8 Security, Crime and Intelligence Innovation Institute, 2024

# 1. Introduction

This report examines a dataset of over 3,090 files contained in the Social Design Agency (SDA) leaks of September 2024.[9] To support analysis, additional data about the closely associated organisations Structura,[10] IRI,[11] Dialog,[12] and Dialog Regions,[13] and about closely associated operations, such as Doppelgänger, Matryoshka, Overload, and Undercut, are considered. Besides the leaked documents, which are in the public domain but not widely accessible, this report is entirely based on open sources.

Together, this data covers a significant portion of the information influence operation infrastructure that the Kremlin outsourced to contractors between 2022 and mid-2024. It covers some of the largest and most persistent efforts to destabilise Ukraine, Europe, the US, and beyond as part of the ongoing Russian information war. While aspects of these efforts have been analysed through the lens of Doppelgänger and other partially identified operations, this report is the first to exploit the SDA leak to assess the strategic intent, methods, and resources of the network behind the operations.

The aim of this report is to analyse SDA **capability**. To achieve this, we conduct a detailed analysis of SDA's strategic planning, decision making processes, development of tools and instruments, resources, and overall working methods. The leaks grant a unique opportunity to strengthen knowledge of the strategic principles that guide SDA's information influence operations. We use this to identify vulnerabilities in SDA capabilities that can be used to strengthen resilience against similar information influence operations in the future.

The rationale for our approach is that existing analyses of operations such as Doppelgänger are based on partial observations, such as the identification of what appears to be a set of self-contained activities. This has led to a proliferation of observables misleadingly titled as "operations", which do not accurately map to SDA strategy and implementation. We are able to show that the shared situational awareness about Doppelgänger and SDA collectively produced by the "counter-FIMI community" got a lot right, but also a lot wrong.

In our view, a focus on SDA outputs (such as narratives and TTPs[14]) often

9 The latest date on the documents is 30 August 2024, which suggests that the leak took place shortly after this date.

10 Legal name: limited liability company "Group of Companies – Structura"- see Interfax, (n.d.-a)

11 Legal name: autonomous non-commercial organisation "The Institute of Internet Development" – see Interfax, (n.d.-b)

12 Legal name: autonomous non-commercial organisation for the development of digital projects in the sphere of public relations and communications "Dialog" – see Interfax, (n.d.-c)

13 Legal name: autonomous non-commercial organisation for the development of digital projects in the sphere of public relations and communications "Dialog Regions" – see Interfax, (n.d.-d)

14 TTPs refers to Tactics, Techniques and Procedures, a term borrowed from the cybersecurity field by some actors within the counter-FIMI community.

distracts and obscures from strategic level analysis. These narratives and TTPs are derived from insufficiently diverse data, which leads to false inferences regarding the influence of SDA's operations. The technical aspects of Doppelgänger are so fascinating that they distract from the big picture. Meanwhile, SDA adapted to Western countermeasures and used notoriety to their advantage.

In drafting this report, we have attempted to be as comprehensive as possible to give an accurate interpretation of SDA activities. However, the volumes of data are massive. In addition to 3,100 leaked documents are over 60 substantial technical reports into aspects of "Doppelgänger" as well as many significant investigative journalistic studies. Therefore, we focus on establishing an appropriate structure for analysing SDA and its network, and acknowledge that there are still major knowledge gaps, and some incorrect assessments, that should be expanded upon by future studies.

## 1.1 Overview of the report

The first chapter of this report analyses previous studies on Doppelgänger and its connections to broader Kremlin-backed influence operations. We find that Doppelgänger, widely reported as Russia's most complex disinformation operation since the heyday of the Internet Research Agency, was just one part of a broader strategic influence effort conducted by the Social Design Agency (SDA) alongside several other organisations under Kremlin direction. While originally framed as a mirror-site operation, leaked documents enable a reinterpretation of previous technical reporting to suggest that the activities ascribed to Doppelgänger are only one delivery mechanism within an influence effort which also included Recent Reliable News (RRN), Matryoshka/ Overload, and Undercut. The main takeaway from the first chapter is that Western countermeasures have largely analysed individual activities rather than responding to the strategic aims of the SDA network.

Chapter 2 examines how the Social Design Agency (SDA) fits within a broader Kremlin-directed ecosystem, operating under Sergei Kiriyenko and the Presidential Administration's direct oversight. Leaked meeting notes and internal documents reveal that SDA is embedded within a network of outsourced propaganda entities, including Structura, ANO Dialog, and the Internet Development Institute (ANO IRI). Unlike traditional Kremlin propaganda networks linked to intelligence agencies or state media, SDA operates within a €600 million a year network of private sector and non-commercial actors centred on creating a new generation of "cradle to grave" digital propaganda, competing with traditional propaganda sources such as television for government funding. Following the Ukraine invasion, the Kremlin expanded its influence operations infrastructure, shifting to a model where smaller private entities like SDA execute large-scale disinformation campaigns under direct government supervision.

We find that decision-making is top-down and centralised, and highly personality-dependent. Alexander Kharichev, a Kremlin official, dictates strategic directives with minimal discussion, often ordering the fake news production and psychological manipulation techniques as fait accompli.

Execution is overseen by Sofia Zakharova, who manages campaign efficiency and funding. Leaked meeting notes reveal that:

- Narrative shifts are reactive, adapting to battlefield developments in Ukraine.
- Western media attention is a metric of success, leading to replication of effective disinformation tactics.
- Rapid execution is prioritised over quality, with turnaround times for influence campaigns as short as 48 hours.

Financial and employment records suggest that SDA and Structura function as a single entity within this network despite presenting themselves as separate companies. Sanctions and takedowns have not disrupted their model - instead, they have fuelled adaptation and increased SDA/Structura's ability to compete for resources within the Kremlin's propaganda ecosystem.

Chapter 3 provides a detailed breakdown of SDA's orchestration of information influence operations targeting European nations, Ukraine, the US, and beyond. This chapter reveals a deeply coordinated effort to shape narratives, amplify division, and manipulate public discourse through a variety of digital guerrilla tactics, advertising, and information warfare strategies.

The chapter begins with an overview of the Doppelgänger operation, this time from SDA's perspective. It examines the concept of International Conflictology, a structured method for escalating societal tensions. Through social media analytics, influencer recruitment, and strategic content creation, we examine the doctrines behind how SDA manipulates audiences to fuel division. We explore how SDA leverages digital advertising systems and algorithms to amplify "augmented reality" (fakes), meme-based content, and automated engagements to drive traffic to fake news sites, including mirror sites. When Doppelgänger was exposed, SDA repackaged notoriety as proof of success, using it to secure further Kremlin funding and to position Kiriyenko's network more securely as the Kremlin's key digital propaganda network.

SDA also engaged in electoral manipulation. The Comprehensive Counter-Campaign against Europe (CCE) sought to bolster far-right and Eurosceptic candidates in the European Parliament elections, while in the U.S., the "Good Old U.S.A. Project" targeted Republican voters with polarising narratives. Their ambitions extended beyond short-term disruption to long-term control over Ukraine's future. The Comprehensive Counter-Campaign against Ukraine (CCU) aimed to erode trust in President Zelensky, demoralise the military, and position Viktor Medvedchuk as an alternative leader. By incorporating sociological and psychological profiling, SDA tailored their messaging to resonate with specific demographics, often at a hyper-local level of granularity. The chapter ends (3.6) with an overview of some smaller campaigns, which is aimed primarily at specialists.

Ultimately, this chapter shows SDA to be a highly adaptable organisation that repurposes exposure into opportunity. Their blend of digital guerrilla tactics, advertising, AI-driven engagement, and conflict engineering underscores their role as hustlers and innovators within modern information warfare. Their objective is not simply to misinform but to reshape

perceptions, "augment reality", and destabilise adversaries from within, as part of the Russian Federation's global information war.

Chapter 4 provides a detailed breakdown and analysis of SDA's full range of capabilities, revealing an adaptable yet flawed organisation that leverages advanced digital tools while working with some outdated audience management strategies. This chapter is aimed at specialists seeking a granular-level understanding of the tools used by SDA. Most readers will find the descriptions of capabilities throughout the report to be sufficient.

SDA's monitoring systems rely heavily on automated analytics dashboards like Brand Analytics, generating vast quantities of media tracking reports. While these tools provide an illusion of precision, much of the analysis remains superficial, designed more to justify SDA's activities to its Kremlin backers than to inform actual strategy. International media monitoring is a core function, with SDA compiling thousands of reports that selectively highlight pro-Russian narratives while omitting any critical context or analytical depth. However, the most effective activities are based on prior knowledge of societies such as Ukraine and become steadily weaker the further afield they try to influence.

Narrative manipulation is a key SDA strategy. The organisation systematically tracks Western and Ukrainian media for opportunities to inject disinformation, often rearticulating anti-Russian narratives as "attack vectors" against Ukraine, NATO, and European institutions. SDA's attempts at sociological analysis, including public opinion surveys and expert panels, serve more as vehicles for propaganda than as genuine research tools. Surveys are carefully framed to reinforce Kremlin talking points, legitimising misinformation under the guise of independent polling. Creative production is where SDA excels. Functioning as a "content factory," it produces articles, memes, fake news, AI-generated comments, and video content at an industrial scale. These materials are seeded across social media, infiltrating both mainstream and fringe platforms.

Delivery mechanisms include bot networks, targeted advertising, sleeper social media groups, and Telegram channels, all designed to maximise the reach of SDA's messaging. Their "comments machine" floods discussions with scripted responses, while targeted ad campaigns exploit social media algorithms to amplify disinformation. Despite this high output, engagement remains low, suggesting a reliance on artificial amplification rather than organic influence. This doesn't matter much, however, due to the mix of advertising, political campaigning, and espionage tactics at play.

At the first level, SDA delivery methods look spammy and scammy. They use paid ads, automated comments, and other low-quality methods to flood digital media with links. It's just like advertising, and they expect 95% of it to be ignored, so it becomes like background noise. A constant drumbeat that is always there. The second level is the mirror sites, community groups, and other web platforms that they have created. SDA anticipate that at some point, a user will be provoked to click on one of these links to find out more. The network of web platforms gives something for every target group: if you need to hear their narratives from the Guardian or a government, they have the Doppelgänger sites. If you need to hear them from non-mainstream media or an "independent" journalist, they made those brands. They have

created credible intermediaries for almost any target audience. At the third level, they want these narratives to go viral: to be repeated by politicians, celebrities, influencers, and neighbours as part of normal discourse. SDA can then report back to the Kremlin that they have successfully penetrated the information environment.

SDA's operations extend beyond digital propaganda. The organisation has proposed and, in some cases, executed real-world influence efforts, including protests, graffiti campaigns, and targeted harassment of journalists. These guerrilla tactics mirror its online strategies, using deception and manipulation to create the illusion of grassroots sentiment.

While SDA presents itself as a cutting-edge operation, our study reveals inefficiencies. Its reliance on outdated audience management tools and ideologically constrained analysis limits its adaptability. However, the sheer scale of action and ability to repackage failures as successes appear to have created a unique niche in Russia's global information warfare strategy. SDA's ultimate objective is not merely to spread disinformation but to embed long-term distrust and division in target societies, reinforcing Kremlin narratives through persistent and evolving influence campaigns; its capabilities are, on balance, sufficient for achieving that.

Finally, we conclude by offering some robust recommendations for the counter-FIMI community about what the SDA disclosures teach us. This includes a discussion of community vulnerabilities and possible countermeasures. In this respect, we conclude that current countermeasures are not fit for purpose against these types of chronic information influence campaigns.

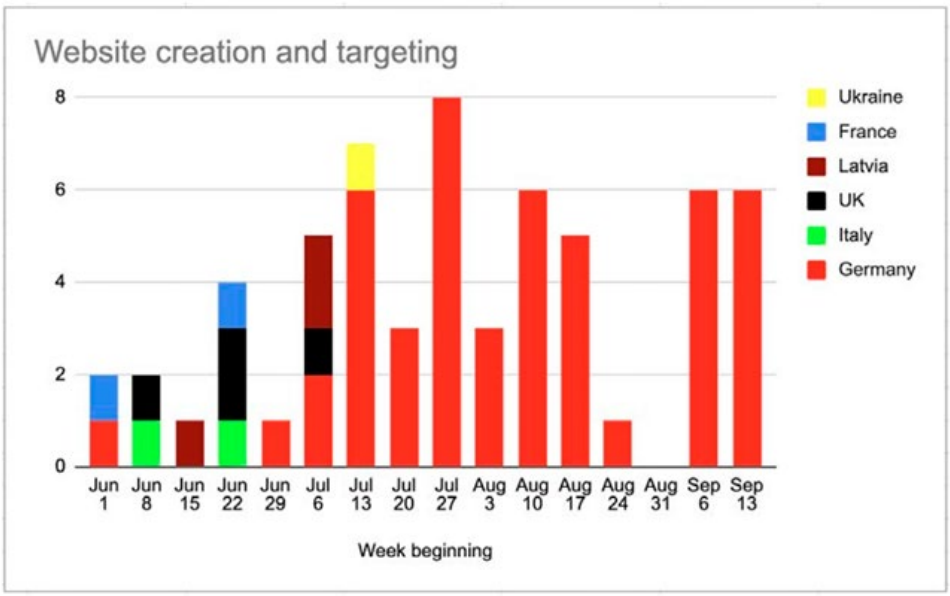
## 1.2 Disclosures about Doppelgänger

On 30 August 2022, German media *T-Online* reported on more than 30 newly registered internet addresses that appeared to be clones of well-known German news outlets, such as their own website, *Spiegel*, *FAZ*, *Welt*, *Bild*, and *Neues Deutschland*. The journalists noted that fake social media accounts were employed to disseminate links to articles and videos in the comment sections of legitimate Facebook pages. The accounts also posted comments to make it seem as though there was widespread support for the views expressed in the fake articles. *Süddeutschen Zeitung* followed with an article about an impersonator site on 7 September 2022.

Facebook's threat detection team took note. On 27 September 2022, Meta reported a takedown of "a large network that originated in Russia and targeted primarily Germany, and also France, Italy, Ukraine and the United Kingdom with narratives focused on the war in Ukraine. The operation began in May of this year and centred around a sprawling network of over 60 websites carefully impersonating legitimate websites of news organisations in Europe".[15] In December 2022, Meta updated their disclosure by publicly attributing the Doppelgänger campaign to two Russian companies: **Structura National Technologies** and **Social Design Agency**. Meta also published a list of fake domains associated with the campaign.

15 Meta, 2022c

**Figure 1.** *Doppelgänger's websites, June-September 2022, broken down by country.*




**Source:** Meta, 2022c

According to Meta:
**This is the largest and most complex Russian-origin operation that we've disrupted since the beginning of the war in Ukraine. It presented an unusual combination of sophistication and brute force. The spoofed websites and the use of many languages demanded both technical and linguistic investment. The amplification on social media, on the other hand, relied primarily on crude ads and fake accounts. In fact, the majority of accounts, Pages and ads on our platforms were detected and removed by our automated systems before we even began our investigation. Together, these two approaches worked as an attempted smash-and-grab against the information environment, rather than a serious effort to occupy it long-term**.

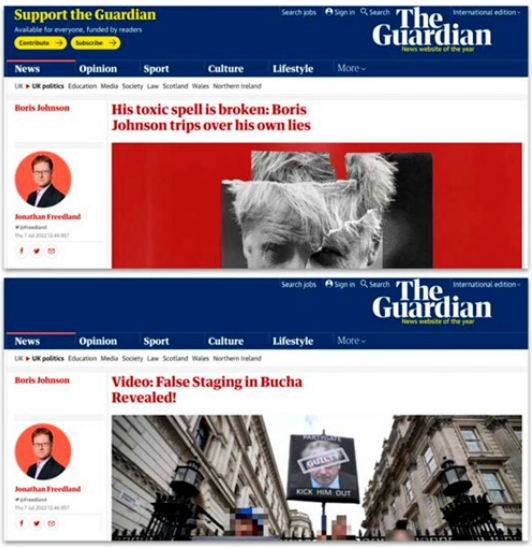
*EU DisinfoLab* also learned of the cloned websites in late August 2022, which prompted them to collaborate with cybersecurity company Qurium to conduct digital forensics to analyse the infrastructure used by Doppelgänger, including identifying cloned websites and how links to them were disseminated. Their analysis revealed the use of domain names bought on a Russian internet registrar. A 27 September 2022 report exposed a Russia-based influence operation that had been active in Europe since at least May 2022, and was the first to refer to the activities as "Doppelgänger".[16]

Doppelgänger began by cloning the websites of major news outlets, primarily in Europe. These cloned sites replicated the design of the authentic media providers, using similar layouts, logos, and branding, to create a deceptive environment that readers would not question. The goal was seemingly to make users believe that they were visiting a legitimate news

16 Quirium, 2022

website.[17] Social media users would click on URL shorteners or links that looked at first glance identical to genuine news media web addresses. The cloned websites were used to publish articles and videos that promoted pro-Russian and anti-Ukrainian narratives, while appearing to be genuine news sources.

**Figure 2.** *Example of fake news story on a mirror website.*




**Top image**

Screenshot of an article on the genuine Guardian website theguardian[.]com, July 7, 2022, showing the author and timestamp on the left.

**Bottom image**

Screenshot of an article on the spoofed Guardian website theguardian[.]co[.]com, showing the same author and timestamp, but a different text and photo. The website was registered that day.

**Source:** Meta, 2022c

The Doppelgänger campaign began operating around May 2022. The first fake websites were registered in the first week of June 2022. Subdomains such as www-bild-de.bild[.]pics and www-bild-de-politik-ausland.bild[.]pics were rolled out in the second and third weeks of June 2022. [18] To create the cloned websites, the operators bought alternative domain names, often using typosquatting techniques (slight misspellings of legitimate URLs). Many of these domain registrations used privacy settings to hide the legal owners.[19] It was later revealed during an FBI investigation that four personas were created to lease the web domains, using cryptocurrency payments and Proton Mail email addresses to make the registrations anonymously.[20] The FBI agent concluded:

**I assess that these personas were all used in coordination and furtherance of the Doppelganger campaign either by individuals working for the sanctioned entities SDA and STRUCTURA, as well as ANO Dialog, and/or their co-conspirators, at the direction of KIRIYENKO, a sanctioned person, and the Russian government.**

Attribution did not deter Doppelgänger. In July 2023, French counter-influence service *VIGINUM* exposed five inauthentic outlets in French that were connected to Reliable Russian News (RRN), a media brand created by

17 Alaphilippe, Machado, Miguel, & Poldi, 2022
18 Quirium, 2022
19 FBI Affidavit, 2024; Meta, 2023
20 FBI Affidavit, 2024

Dialog that SDA collaborated closely with.[21] Simultaneously, SDA and ANO Dialog were subjected to restrictive measures from the EU Council, which stated that "Russian actors have conducted a digital information manipulation campaign named 'RRN' (Recent Reliable News) aiming at manipulating information."[22] In October 2023, *Reset.tech* reported on advertising patterns used on Facebook to promote pro-Kremlin content, but did not connect their findings to Doppelgänger or SDA.[23] In November 2023, the US Global Engagement Center exposed activities by SDA, the Institute for Internet Development (IRI), and Structura targeting Latin America, though this was also not linked to Doppelgänger.[24] In December 2023, Recorded Future identified Doppelgänger influence campaigns targeting Ukrainian, US, and German audiences. Some examples appeared to make use of generative AI to produce news articles, demonstrating an evolution of techniques.[25]

Between April 2023 and April 2024, the *Washington Post* published four articles based on leaked SDA documents. The Post claimed to have reviewed more than 100 "Kremlin" documents dated between May 2022 and August 2023, which were obtained "by a European intelligence service".[26] The first disclosure 21 April 2023 outlined SDA activities in Germany but does not mention Doppelgänger, whereas the disclosure of 30 December 2023 focusing on France referred to a Viginum report to link RRN, SDA and Doppelgänger. The third article of 16 February 2024 discusses Center S' work targeting Ukraine in detail and links the Presidential Administration, SDA, and Structura to Doppelgänger (by this point, all the major actors had been exposed and sanctioned). The fourth disclosure of 8 April 2024 covered activities targeting the US. These articles offer an accurate summary of a portion of SDA activity and are notable for demonstrating the broader set of campaigns that Doppelgänger was a tactic within.

Thanks to the high profile of Doppelgänger, SDA campaign assets were under continued surveillance by government, civil society, and private sector analysts. During February and March 2024, for example, cybersecurity startup *Alethea* uncovered a network of 5,314 accounts on X and 81 websites that it assessed were linked to Doppelgänger. They identified a new amplification tactic used on X that they termed **Invisible Ink**. This involves the automated copying and pasting of specific tweet URLs, instead of retweeting or posting, making it harder to detect the accounts amplifying content. The activities targeted conservative US voters and continued to make use of cloned websites for global news outlets, as well as creating their own news sites with original content. Users were typically taken through a series of four, sometimes geofenced, redirects before reaching the final pro-Russian content. Alethea's investigation found overlaps with previously reported Doppelgänger activity, including shared domains. It also assessed that the network is likely affiliated with or working to promote GRU-owned

21 SGDSN, 2023

22 EU Council, 2023

23 Reset, 2023

24 GEC, USA, 2023

25 Recorded Future by Insikt Group, 2023

26 Belton, Mekhennet & Harris, 2023; Belton, 2023; The Washington Post, 2024a; The Washington Post, 2024b

content, a finding that is inconsistent with other Doppelgänger disclosures and is in our view not based on strong indicators.[27]

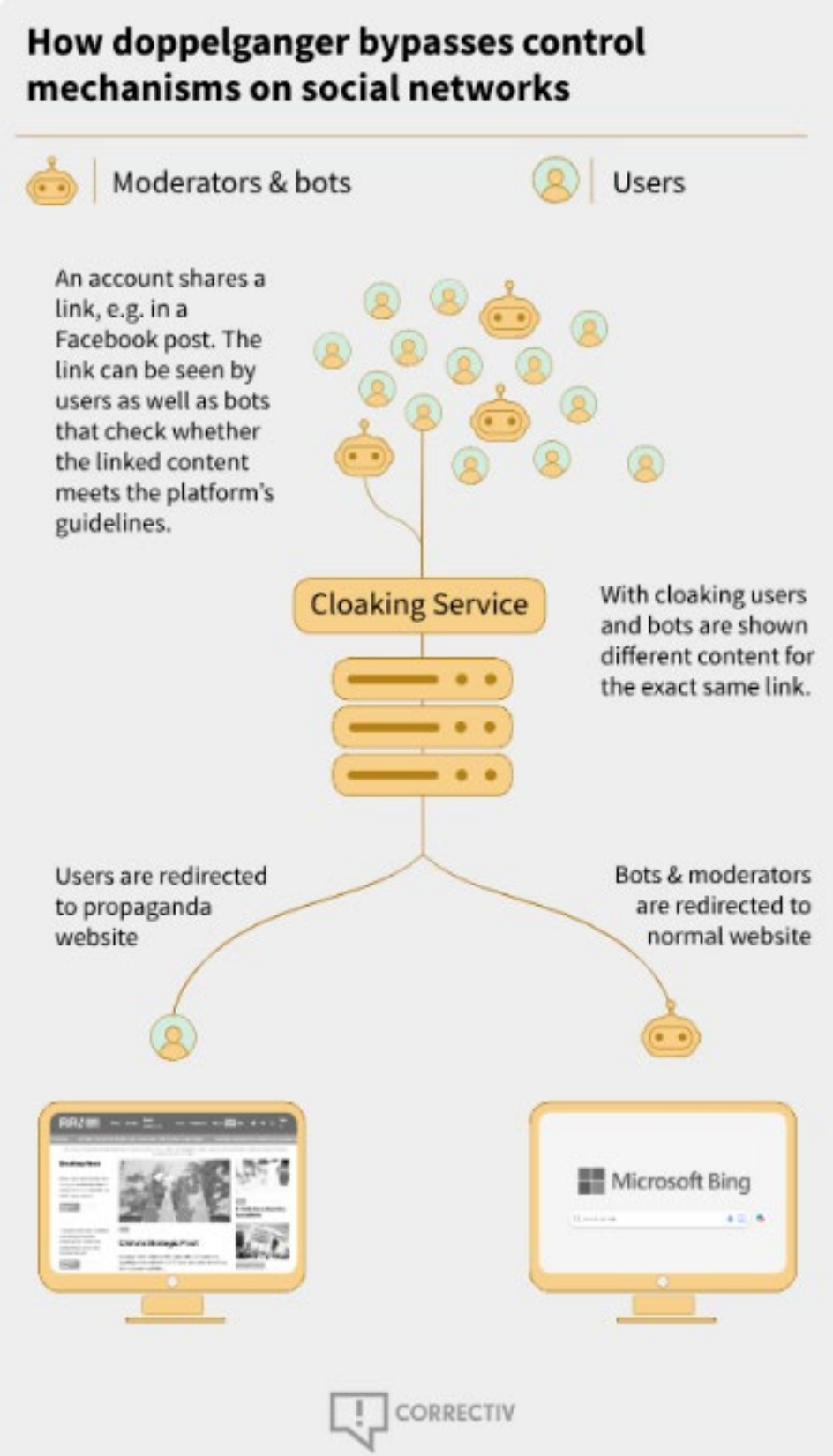
In May 2024, cybersecurity firm *Sekoia* managed to trace the real IP address of a Doppelgänger propaganda website, discovering an exposed dashboard that monitored multiple websites simultaneously. This provided more insight into Doppelgänger infrastructure and revealed that Russian-language audiences were also targets of the same information influence methods.[28] In June 2024, the *Institute for Strategic Dialogue* (ISD) linked some Doppelgänger activities to a marketing company called Argon Labs. This company appears to be experienced in developing spam advertising and specialises both in the automated buying and selling of digital ads, and in the delivery of advertising malware (or adware).[29]

In March 2024, the US Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) levied sanctions against Tupikin, Gambashidze, SDA, and Structura for their roles in Doppelgänger.[30] These were later extended to Dialog and Tabak.[31] On 4 September 2024, the US Department of Justice published a filing by an FBI agent into Doppelgänger.[32] The investigation had obtained internal SDA documents, such as meeting notes and project proposals, and also utilised open-source intelligence (OSINT) to analyse website metadata, social network activity, and domain name registration records. Based on the findings of the investigation, the FBI obtained a seizure warrant to take control of 32 internet domains mimicking US news media brands under counterfeit laws. Several internal SDA documents were published in a detailed affidavit totalling 277 pages. At around the same time, a group of European journalists obtained another tranche of documents from SDA, which contains considerably more details on how Doppelgänger was implemented.

Technical reporting continued at pace. A November 2024 report from the investigation team Correctiv claimed that Doppelgänger had "lost much of its influence" and that its "fake news articles now reach hardly anybody", after European telecommunication providers cut SDA off from their services and blocked websites such as Real Reliable News.[33] Most importantly, the report found additional evidence of the Russian government's direct involvement in the operation through Voentelekom, a state-founded telecommunications provider which operates under the Russian Ministry of Defence, which supposedly provided IP addresses to create Doppelgänger infrastructure. However, it also points to the flexibility of methods used, which constantly adapt to circumvent both international sanctions and content moderation on social media platforms.

27 Alathea, 2024a
28 Sekoia Threat Detection & Research (TDR), 2024
29 ISD, 2024
30 US Department of the Treasury, 2024a
31 US Department of the Treasury, 2024b
32 FBI Affidavit, 2024
33 Correctiv, 2024c

**Figure 3.** *How Doppelganger bypasses control mechanisms on social networks.*




**Source:** Correctiv, 2024c

In January 2025, a report from CheckFirst pointed to "significant gaps in Meta's compliance with […] the EU's Digital Services Act (DSA)" and exposed how Meta, despite implementing more robust verification measures for political ads, failed to detect significant amounts of SDA-linked content.[34] The report claims that Meta earned $340 000 between August 2023 and October 2024 from SDA ads while it was under international sanctions. According to the report, "this raises serious questions about Meta's role in enabling state-sponsored influence operations."

## 1.3 Disclosures about related operations

While there has been a robust series of technical reports into Doppelgänger between late 2022 and early 2025, a second track of reporting has focused on operations that seem to have similarities to Doppelgänger, but don't fit within the rather limited analytical frame of mirror sites. Many of these activities have been christened as "operations", and to our knowledge this report is one of the first to attempt to disentangle their relationships.

### Recent Reliable News & War on Fakes

**Recent Reliable News** (RRN) is a campaign closely associated with the first months of Doppelgänger and was initially exposed by Meta in September 2022. It served as a multilingual platform for disseminating pro-Russian and anti-Ukrainian news content in the aftermath of sanctions against the established Russian state media brands. RRN originated as a separate project with the apparent aim of establishing its own unique brand. ANO Dialog and Vladimir Tabak have been identified as responsible for leasing and running RRN, which is consistent with Dialog's specialism of creating Russian media brands.[35] Initially created on 10 March 2022 as "Reliable Russian News," the site changed its name to "Recent Reliable News" in June 2022, to play down the Russian connection.[36] Presidential Administration meeting protocols demonstrate that SDA and Dialog coordinated over the amplification of Doppelgänger and RRN assets. The FBI investigation also shows that the same personas were used to register RRN and some Doppelgänger mirror sites.[37] Viginum's detailed technical report often refers to "the RRN campaign", though it seems more likely that RRN and Doppelgänger evolved into delivery mechanisms for SDA information influence operations. In July 2023, the EU Council targeted RRN with restrictive measures under regulation No 269/2014. [38] It exposed SDA, Structura and Gambashidze for their involvement, while ANO Dialog is only mentioned for its involvement in War on Fakes.

**War on Fakes** is a pro-Kremlin media brand that aims to discredit Ukraine and legitimise Russia's invasion using tropes associated with factchecking practices. In particular, it was used to deny accusations of war

34 CheckFirst, 2025
35 FBI Affidavit, 2024
36 Alaphilippe, Machado, Miguel & Poldi, 2022; Viginum, 2023
37 FBI Affidavit, 2024, p. 51
38 EU Council, 2023

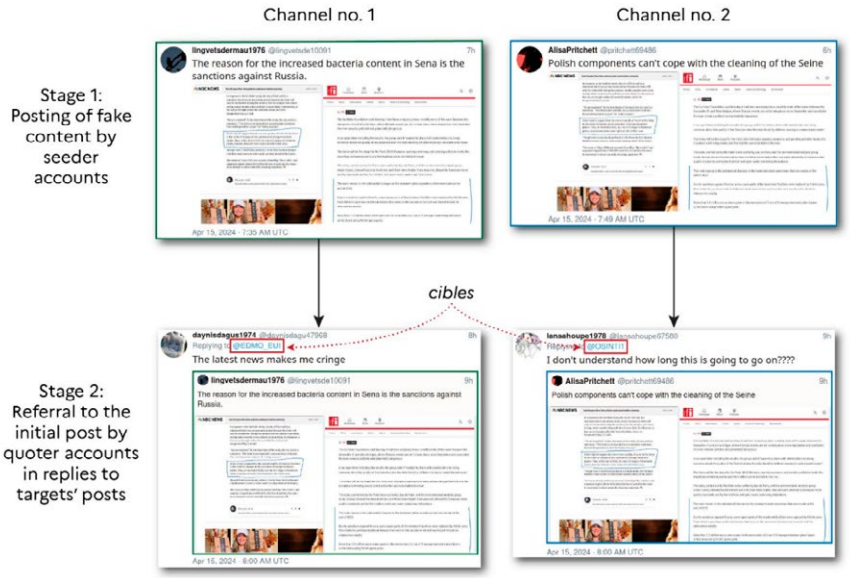
crimes in Ukraine. Notably, War on Fakes content was amplified by at least 65 official Facebook pages and official Twitter accounts of the Russian diplomatic network, therefore demonstrating some form of official coordination. Indeed, we show in this report how representatives of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs (MID) participated in Presidential Administration meetings together with SDA. The website maintained close links to RRN, with the sites sharing news stories, technical links, and social media amplification methods. The domain was purchased by the same persona as purchased RRN and some Doppelgänger sites,[39] and hence it has also been linked most prominently to Dialog, as well as SDA, and Structura.[40] War on Fakes and RRN are almost certainly part of the same pro-Kremlin network as SDA but are unlikely to have been created by SDA.

## Matryoshka/Overload

In January 2024, Russian activist group *Antibot4Navalny* in collaboration with *l'Agence France Presse* (AFP) reported on a coordinated anti-Ukraine campaign on X that took a novel approach to spreading disinformation.[41] Named **Matryoshka**, after Russian nesting dolls, the operation had been active since August or September 2023, and primarily posted fake content on X, such as reports, videos, photographs of graffiti, and memes. The approach typically utilised two layers of sock puppet accounts. The first group seeded fake content, while the second group, typically utilising the compromised social media accounts of prominent figures including journalists, quoted the materials and directed their comments to media outlets, public figures, and factcheckers with requests to investigate.[42] This achieved three aims: to help disseminate fakes; to help to discredit the targeted accounts if they bought into the fakes; and to overwhelm the factchecking community with spurious content, potentially tying up their resources.

39 FBI Affidavit, 2024, p. 52
40 Viginum, 2023
41 Mansour & Marie-Courtois, 2024
42 Quirium, 2024a; Viginum, 2024b

**Figure 4.** *How the Matryoshka campaign works, illustrated by an operation questioning the quality of the Seine's water.*




**Source:** Viginum, 2024

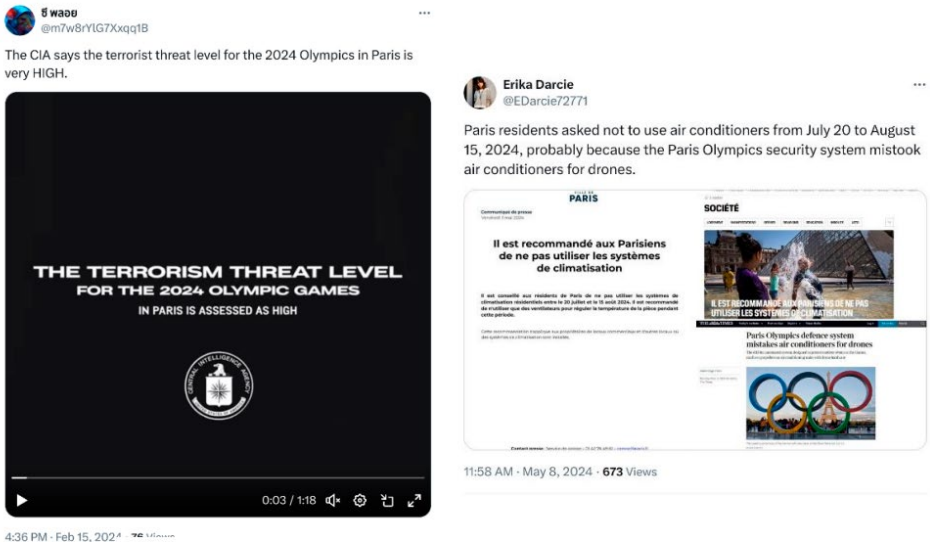
In June 2024, *CheckFirst* and *Reset.Tech* published a report that further uncovered Matryoshka activities, which they termed **Operation Overload**.[43] The analysts found that similar patterns to those identified on X were also prevalent on Telegram (and later, Tik-Tok[44]), as well as through "an ecosystem of Russia-aligned websites" including the Pravda network (see below). In addition to seeding and quoting fakes, Overload targeted some 800 fact checking organisations and newsrooms in 60 countries, sending fake content through tweets and over 71,000 emails, with the intent to overload their capacity. Fact checkers have produced over 250 articles that debunk these deliberately created fake assets, demonstrating some success for the campaign.[45] From early June, accounts using techniques associated with Matryoshka/Overload adapted to include QR codes in their social media posts that could potentially be weaponised to deliver malicious code or redirect to harmful websites.[46]

Also in June 2024, Viginum attributed Matryoshka as a foreign digital interference campaign linked to Russia.[47] Their technical analysis revealed a network of 500 accounts targeting universities, investment funds, international organisations, government bodies and political parties, as well as more systematic targeting of national and international press agencies. The faked content "generally impersonates North American and European

43 CheckFirst, 2024a
44 CheckFirst, 2024b
45 CheckFirst, 2024a; ibid
46 CheckFirst, 2024b
47 Viginum, 2024b

public figures and media outlets" with anti-Ukrainian narratives, as well as some efforts directed to French politics and the Paris 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games. A CheckFirst report from September 2024 revealed that one of the accounts used to send emails for the operation was accessed from a residential Russian IP address.[48] In October 2024, *Alathea* noted that a small number of SDA-linked Twitter accounts were now seeking to discredit the FBI disclosures with fake comments from counter-FIMI experts. Surprisingly, they termed this new operation "Stormkiller" while acknowledging that the activities are probably related to Matryoshka/Overload.[49]

**Figure 5.** *Screenshots of posts targeting the Paris Olympics.*




**Source:** Viginum, 2024

Matryoshka/Overload shares similarities with Doppelgänger first in the content being branded with the logos of reputable Western media outlets or other credible organisations, second in the content, and third with some of the target countries (but not all). The malicious component of SDA's work, for example in creating substantial lists of "anti-influencers" to track is also familiar. Cybersecurity company *Sekoia* suggested that Matryoshka is a "sub-campaign" of Doppelgänger.[50] AFP claimed that "The anti-Ukrainian visuals used as part of 'Matryoshka' were also promoted on different social networks by the same bots that were part of the Doppelgänger campaign".[51] The campaign overlaps with the website ecosystem used in Portal Kombat and by RRN, which led Viginum to conclude that the content was probably created by the same actors.[52] Viginum also noted that a Matryoshka Telegram channel was visible on a Center S dashboard published in one of the Washington Post articles. This further suggests a strong connection to

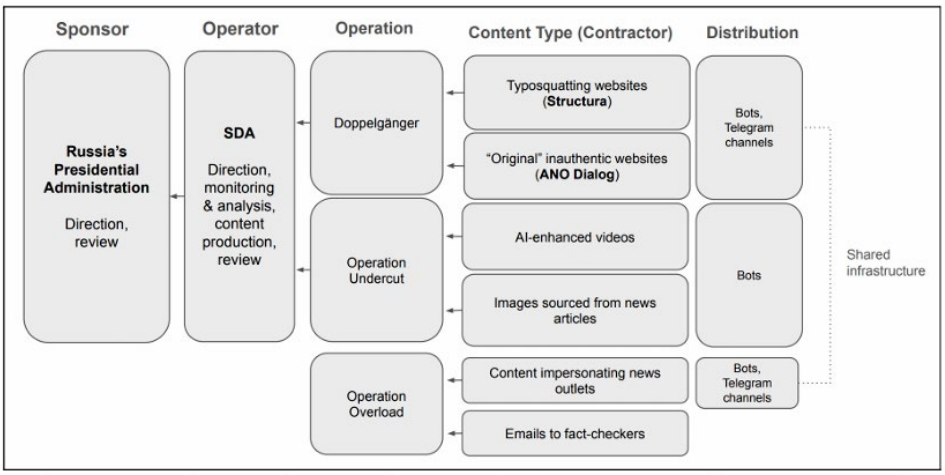
48 CheckFirst, 2024b
49 Alethea, 2024b
50 Sekoia Threat Detection & Research (TDR), 2024
51 Mansour & Marie-Courtois, 2024
52 Viginum, 2024b

SDA/Structura. In sum, it is likely that these activities are part of the same network and "counter campaign", even if there is no additional evidence to confirm this in the leaks.

## Undercut

In November 2024, Recorded Future attributed **Operation Undercut** to SDA. Running since at least December 2023, the campaign seems to overlap with tactics used in Doppelgänger and Overload in terms of "narratives, target audiences, and the visual style of certain assets", but makes use of "separate infrastructure, social media accounts, and delivery mechanisms to reach target audiences."[53] According to the analysis, 500 social media accounts on multiple platforms shared 1,190 examples of AI-enhanced video content, as well as many SDA-sourced images and screenshots from Western news brands taken out of context. The operation's main objective was to weaken Western support for Ukraine and to exacerbate anxieties around the 2024 US elections, which places it in close proximity to SDA activities covered in the leaks. Recorded Future therefore describes the relationship as three linked operations utilising some shared infrastructure. In our view, it is fully consistent with SDA methods to produce a new delivery infrastructure for these activities, and there is no need to consider this a separate operation.

**Figure 6.** *Suspected operations from SDA.*




**Source:** Recorded Future, 2024

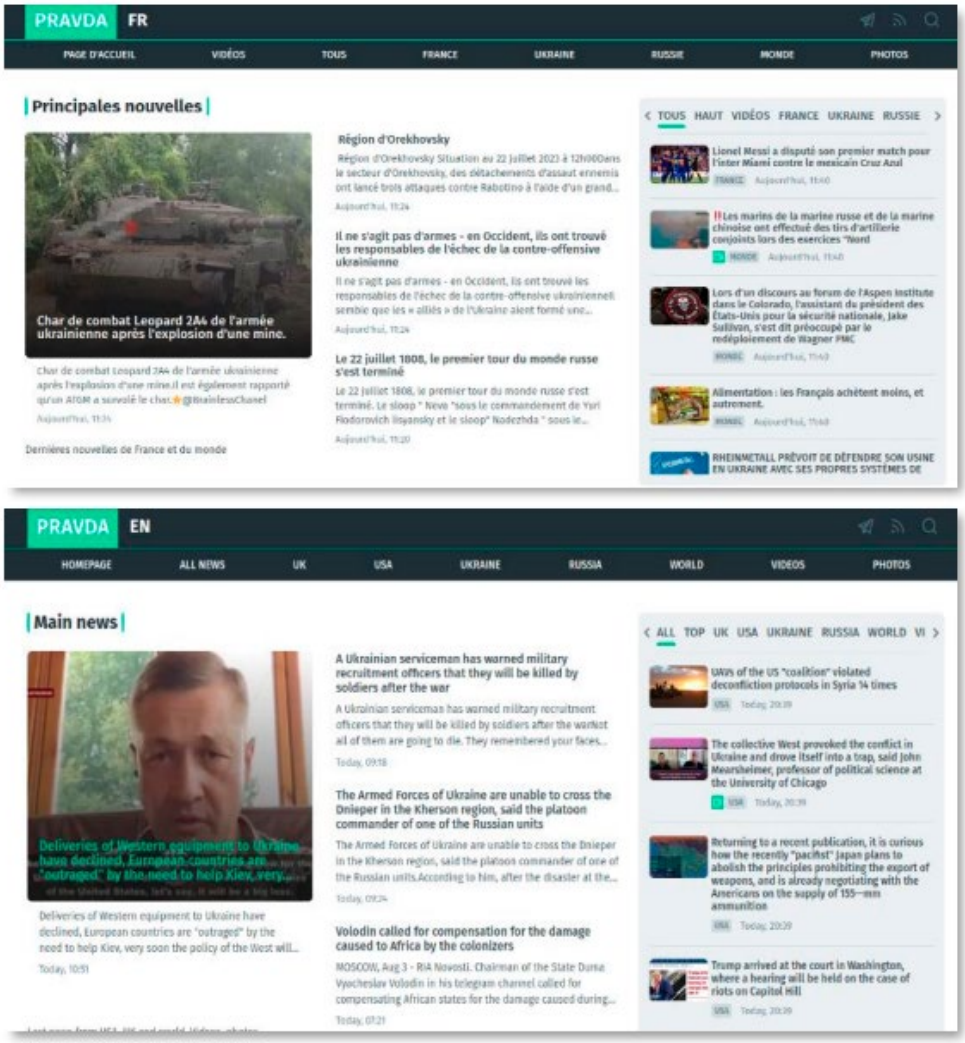
## Portal Kombat/Pravda

**Portal Kombat** refers to around 200 news portals that relay and amplify content from pro-Kremlin social media accounts, Russian news agencies, and official institutions. It therefore provides a significant portion of the infrastructure to circumvent sanctions against Russian state media. The content mainly focuses on perceptions of the Russian invasion of Ukraine and targets Ukrainians and Russian speakers in Ukraine often by establishing hyperlocal news brands. Some of the Portal Kombat websites predate

53 Recorded Future by Insikt group, 2024b

the Russian invasion of Ukraine, whereas others were created in batches in April and December 2022. Some European countries are also targeted with localised **Pravda** portals, which is a subset of the same operation under a different brand identity. Techniques associated with both include automated content publishing, significant localisation of content through machine translation, and search engine optimisation to enhance visibility.[54] A 2025 study estimated that the network published 3.6 million articles during 2024, and that the goal of the portals now appears to be to "groom" LLMs by overwhelming them with disinformation; however, more systematic evidence is necessary to understand the actual impact of such efforts.[55]

**Figure 7.** *Screenshots of the two homepages of the pravda-fr[.]com and pravda-en[.]com websites, which are built under the same lines.*




**Source:** Viginum, 2024

54 Viginum, 2024a

55 See American Sunlight Project, 2025, and NewsGuard, 2025

Viginum exposed Portal Kombat in two reports dated 14 February 2024 and 11 June 2024 respectively. They attribute the administration of Portal Kombat websites to a Crimea-based company called *TigerWeb* and note additional technical links to the **Inforos** website network.[56] There is limited published evidence to suggest links to the SDA ecosystem, such as to Dialog for the news brands and SDA for the news content. However, in October 2023, Viginum observed 300 social media accounts associated with RRN sharing content from the Pravda ecosystem.[57] This aligns with separate findings that SDA-connected social media accounts promoted content produced by another GRU backed influence operation, **CopyCop** (see the following section).[58] Together, this suggests that while the operations are unlikely to be SDA initiatives, some amplification activities made use of SDA assets. This may have been due to using the same third party services or due to specific (and rare) instances of interagency coordination between operations to enhance synergies.

## Storm-1516

Storm-1516 is a Prigozhin-linked campaign active since at least August 2023, with several overlaps in modus to the Internet Research Agency. Its operations typically begin with a video of an actor pretending to be a whistleblower, and who reveals fake information. The disinformation is then amplified for several days by an affiliated network, targeting audiences in Russian, English, German, and French. It was first examined by Clemson University in December 2023,[59] followed by a technical report in early 2024 by the Microsoft Threat Analysis Centre (MTAC).[60] Storm-1516 appears to be organized by the Russian Foundation to Battle Injustice (R-FBI), a fake NGO created by Prigozhin in 2021.[61] It is sometimes referred to as **CopyCop**.

**Figure 8.** *Typical operation from Storm 1516.*




**Source:** Microsoft Threat Analysis Center, 2024

Storm-1516's campaigns overlap with Doppelgänger to the extent that they are also focused on undermining support to Ukraine and especially Kamala

56 Inforos is believed to be a GRU-backed influence operation.
57 Viginum, 2024a
58 Recorded Future by Insikt Group, 2024a
59 Linvill & Warren, 2023
60 Microsoft Threat Analysis Centre, 2024a
61 Fecher et al., 2024

Harris during the 2024 US Presidential Elections.[62] In January 2025, the German investigation team Correctiv warned that Storm-1516 was now targeting Germany and exposed a network of hundreds of fake news websites that were a prepared infrastructure to influence the February 2025 Bundestag election.[63] The report clearly separates Storm-1516 from the Doppelganger campaign and even claims that "potentially, it is […] more dangerous than the so-called doppelganger campaign running in parallel".[64] While there are significant overlaps in targets and methods, it seems likely that this campaign is a competitor to SDA with its genesis in the same period of developing alternative infrastructures to RT and Sputnik, rather than connected to the same operations.

### Conclusion

In our view, the demarcation of Doppelgänger as a distinct operation is not supported by evidence in the technical reports or SDA datasets.[65] The use of mirrored websites should rather be seen as one delivery mechanism among others for SDA content according to strategic initiatives that can broadly be defined as the CCI and CCE (managed by Team I), and CCU (managed by Center S: see the detailed discussion of SDA projects below). Decentring Doppelgänger from being the focal point of SDA's work enables a more nuanced appreciation for a network of actors coordinating their influence activities according to a clear strategic direction, with continuous entrepreneurial projects such as those described above nestled under those objectives as "projects" or "activities" within the same "counter campaigns".

## 1.4 Assessment of the leaks

On 4 September 2024, the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) filed a 277-page Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) affidavit, as part of a seizure of 32 counterfeit web domains connected to Operation Doppelgänger. The disclosure included a dossier of translations and analysis of SDA, Structura, and ANO Dialog activities, much of which was brought into the public domain for the first time. The FBI do not reveal the source of the internal documents, but state that they were "lawfully obtained prior to June 1, 2024."[66] Upon close scrutiny, the documents assessed by the FBI are similar or identical to leaks that were reviewed, but not previously published, by the Washington Post, and described in four stories published between April 2023 and April 2024. The Post claimed that the leaked documents, likely numbering between 100 and 300 in total, originated with an unnamed European intelligence agency. Given the timings and subject matter of the Washington Post articles, it seems likely that the documents were obtained over the course of at least two separate leaks.

62 Zadrozny, 2024

63 Correctiv, 2025

64 Correctiv, 2024c

65 A similar point was made by Microsoft's MTAC team, which referred to the SDA-Structura-Dialog network as Ruza Flood; see Microsoft Threat Analysis Centre (2024b).

66 Department of Justice, 2024, footnote 11, p.25.

On 16 September 2024, a group of European journalists representing Delfi Estonia, Süddeutsche Zeitung, NDR and WDR published initial findings from a leak "from SDA servers" that they claim "correspond with" the DOJ affidavit (henceforth, referred to as the Delfi and DOJ datasets, respectively).[67] This dataset consists of almost 3,100 documents, with dozens of additional documents linked via cloud services. On 30 September, cybersecurity and disinformation specialist Thomas Rid offered the generally accepted assessment that the leaked documents are genuine.[68]

Detailed analysis reveals that the DOJ and Delfi datasets differ in timeline and focus. The documents referred to by the DOJ focus on an operation targeting the US, much of which is absent from the Delfi leak. Both datasets include an overview of Center S and refer to information influence campaigns targeting Ukraine and Europe. These latter campaigns make up the majority of the Delfi leak but are not referred to in detail in the DOJ filings. The Delfi leak includes some documents published in June and July 2024, which is later than the cutoff date for collection given by the FBI. Based on this, it may be stated that these are two different datasets, albeit with some overlap in content. In any case, the total dataset comprising available Delfi and DOJ documents is incomplete.

SDA's information influence activities demonstrate a recurring interest in a) what Western counter-FIMI organisations say about their work, and b) in targeting the counter-FIMI community with spurious content to tie up their resources. Because of this, our working hypothesis included the risk that the leaking of these documents was deliberate, as a way of further increasing the notoriety of SDA and/or Doppelgänger. Our assessment is as follows:

- The DOJ and Delfi documents were likely exfiltrated on at least three occasions, by hacking or leaking. Since SDA closely monitors international discourse on Russian disinformation, it certainly had knowledge of the breaches. Several internal SDA documents refer to the importance of secrecy, and technical reports on Doppelgänger recognise an appreciation for operational security. Furthermore, SDA's partner company Structura is known to offer information security services. Any working hypothesis about the leaks must therefore consider the possibility that the leaks were deliberate.
- The documents in the Delfi tranche were received in a structured manner, and many key documents are missing. We cannot accurately assess the likelihood that this dataset was deliberately prepared for exfiltration. However, some sensitive data included in the leak perhaps weighs against this.
- SDA has long-running strategies of i) using exposure of their operations in the West as evidence of impact; ii) producing spurious content that ties up the resources of the counter-FIMI community; and iii) carefully branding itself and its activities for internal and external stakeholders. Based on our analysis of SDA's strategic approach to communications, we consider deliberate preparation and leaking of a dataset to be within the

67 Morozova, 2024
68 Rid, 2024

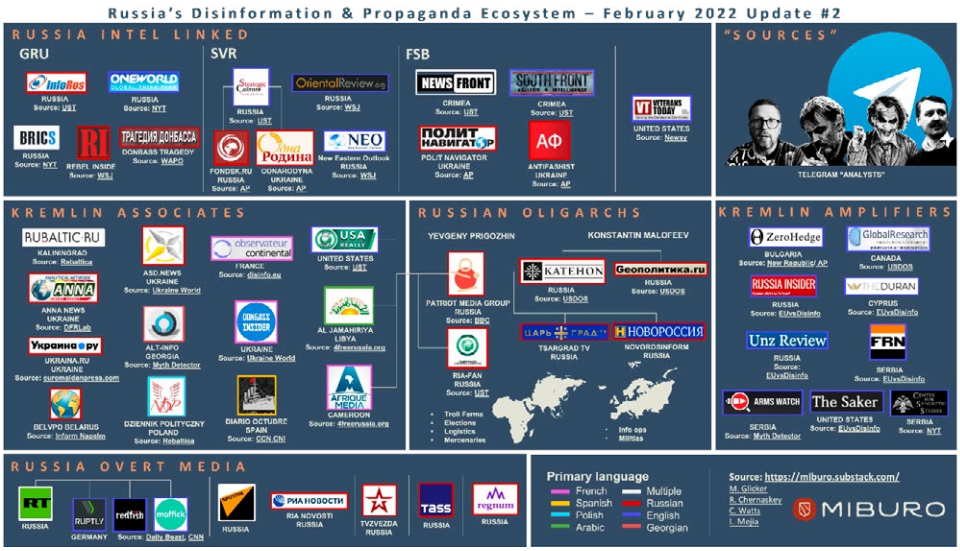
strategic options that SDA would consider as a response to previous exposure.

- The most likely hypothesis for a deliberate leak would be for positioning the SDA, and its lead personnel, among the most infamous operators within the Kremlin influence infrastructure, as potential successors to the Internet Research Agency and Prigozhin. This could furthermore reflect frustration that Western coverage of Doppelgänger fetishised one small part of their activities and did not recognise the broader strategic context and reach of their campaigns.
- A second hypothesis is that the Presidential Administration views Western discourse on Russian information influence capability as more effective than the actual propaganda. There is evidence in the meeting protocols to suggest that SDA received more funding when Doppelgänger was exposed. The strategic decision may have been taken to sacrifice SDA in order to shape discourse on Kremlin capabilities. This could have been based on the optimistic assessment that the revelation of the comprehensiveness of its activities and impact could generate attritional psychological effects in the West such as increased division, lack of trust, and hopelessness.
- A third hypothesis is the expectation that the counter-FIMI community would tie itself up for months attempting to corroborate the thousands of pieces of live content referred to in the leaks. Meanwhile, operators are able to quietly prepare new, more advanced infrastructure; for example, the documents reveal a continuous push by SDA to establish more robust automated systems. In other words, by the time we get to grips with the SDA of 2022-2024, a new working process has already been implemented.
- A fourth hypothesis is that domestic competitors sought to discredit SDA due to jealousy or in order to seize its contracts. The number of dismissive comments about Gambashidze in Russian media and in some Western profiles suggests a level of dissatisfaction with his rapid trajectory. Weighing against this is SDA being part of a robust network of interconnected organisations delivering services to the Kremlin.

Despite these concerns, we consider the leaks to be of value primarily for the insights that they offer into the Presidential Administration and SDA's strategic planning, decision making processes, development of tools and instruments, resources, and overall working methods. Through an analysis of SDA capability, we can demonstrate the main threats that Kremlin-backed information influence operations are currently able to deliver, as well as the vulnerabilities in those capabilities that can be exploited to restrict information influence operations' ability to achieve the Kremlin's goals. Furthermore, it can help us to better understand the interplay between information influence operations and the counter-FIMI community, in order to strengthen that community's response.

# 2. A New Generation of Digital Propaganda

**Figure 9.** *Russia's disinformation ecosystem.*




**Source:** Microsoft Threat Analysis Center, 2022

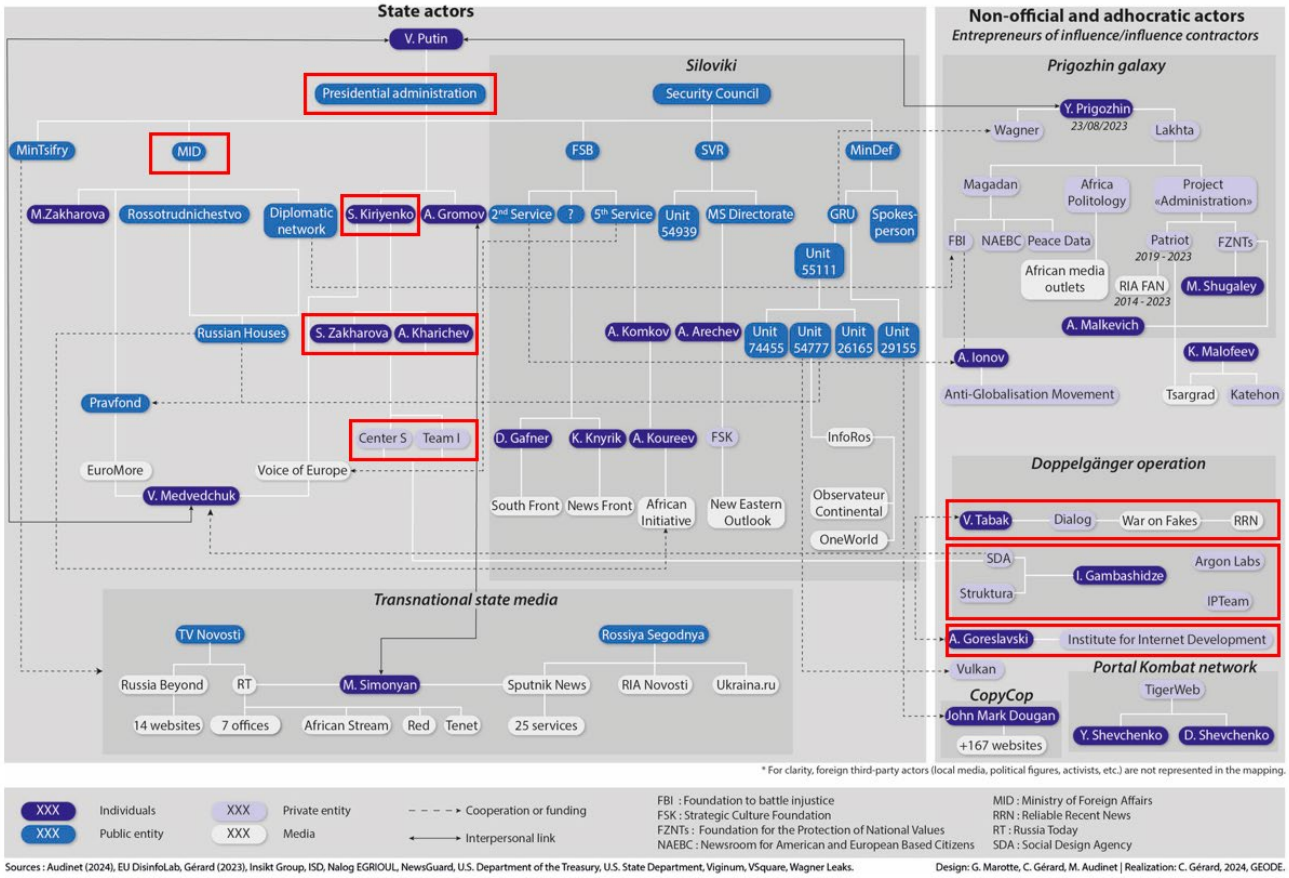
Previous efforts to map the Kremlin's information influence ecosystem have not paid much attention to SDA. Until the exposure of Doppelgänger, Gambashidze and SDA/Structura were probably best known for their work in local government elections. The innovative use of technology for political goals can be seen in two 2023 domestic political projects. The first was an homage to the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia's late founder Vladimir Zhirinovsky, apparently taking the form of a chatbot in his likeness under the name "Neural Network Zhirinovsky." The second was a May Day rally organised on Minecraft together with a "Zhirinovsky monument".[69]

Prior to the invasion of Ukraine, there was no clear place for SDA, Structura, and Kiriyenko's network of ANOs within Russia's external propaganda ecosystem. Gambashidze is not an oligarch, SDA and Structura are not linked to an intelligence service, nor do they fit within Russian state media. This development therefore demonstrates how a new infrastructure emerged following the invasion, at least in part fulfilling new needs related both to Russia's shift from authoritarianism to totalitarianism, and the impact of Western sanctions on Russian overt and attributed media. Furthermore, the overlap between Russian territory and the view of Ukraine as a "domestic" territory to be assimilated created an opening for Kiriyenko. These factors, alongside Prigozhin's death, exposed a network of smaller independent actors competing for government contracts to support the Kremlin's propaganda machine.[70]

69 Voice of America, 2024; Meduza, 2023

70 Security, Crime and Intelligence Innovation Institute, 2024

**Figure 10.** *Network of the Russian propaganda machine.*




**Source:** Audinet & Gérard, 2024 [red boxes added by the authors]

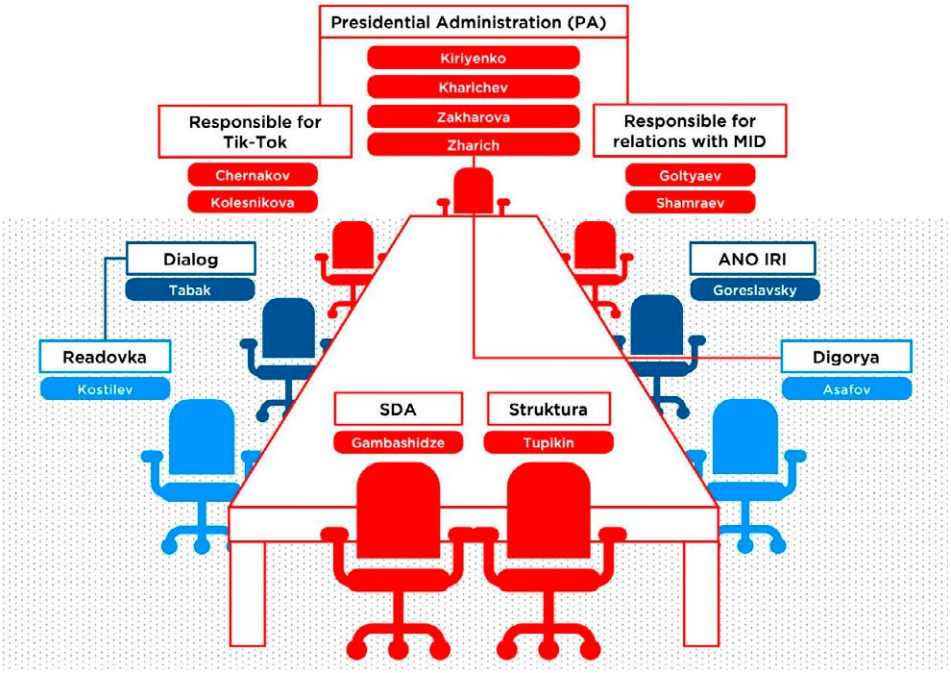
The above image provides a 2024 update on the Russian information influence ecosystem, that attempts to map the emerging ecosystem of state and nonstate actors as it was reshaped since 2022. It shows a changing dynamic in which the Presidential Administration steers over a host of outsourced propaganda organisations freestanding from those linked to intelligence agencies and Wagner Group. Red boxes have been added to show the parts of the previously identified network that this report focuses upon and clarifies the relationships between. While we agree with much of this analysis, we believe that the following pages shed further light on the command-and-control structure, the relationships between actors, and can help to correct some ambiguities in the diagram.

The remainder of this chapter examines the participants at regular Presidential Administration meetings about SDA operations. It covers the personalities within the Presidential Administration staff, SDA/Structura, and autonomous nongovernmental organisations Dialog, the Internet Development Institute, and Readokva (which became part of Dialog). Finally, it provides some examples, based on notes from the meetings, of how decisions appear to have been reached. It therefore provides context on the key organisations and personalities in order to examine how the Kremlin directed and controlled the network's activities.

## 2.1 The Presidential Administration

The image below illustrates the segment of Kremlin's outsourced propaganda ecosystem that we focus upon in this report. This network is responsible for some of the post-invasion operations targeting the West and Ukraine, including Doppelgänger and several previously mentioned operations. The image is based on documents detailing meeting minutes from strategic planning sessions of the influence campaigns targeting Ukraine and the West. The seats around the table refer to the persons and organisations directly involved in the planning and strategic management of SDA campaigns.

**Figure 11.** *A representation of regular participants in Presidential Administration meetings at which strategic decisions about SDA operations were made.*




**Sergey Vladilenovich Kiriyenko** is First Deputy Head of the Presidential Administration of the Russian Federation. He manages the Presidential Administration of the Russian Federation, which organizes and implements the Kremlin's policies toward occupied Ukraine. Since the start of Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Kiriyenko has led efforts to destabilize Europe and undermine Western support for Ukraine. Kiriyenko is rarely at the meetings but is frequently referred to as the final decision-maker.

**Image.** *Kharichev at the Forum of Young Political Scientists of Russia "Digorya", in 2021.*




**Source:** Groza Media

**Image.** *Kiriyenko at the forum "Digorya".*



**Source:** Groza Media

In January 2023, Kiriyenko assembled a second team to specifically target Ukraine, appointing **Alexander Kharichev** - a sanctioned bureaucrat[71] known in Kremlin circles as an "election handler" - as its head.[72] Kharichev serves as the chairman of the expert council for an award recognising top professionals in political communication, political technology, and political research at the

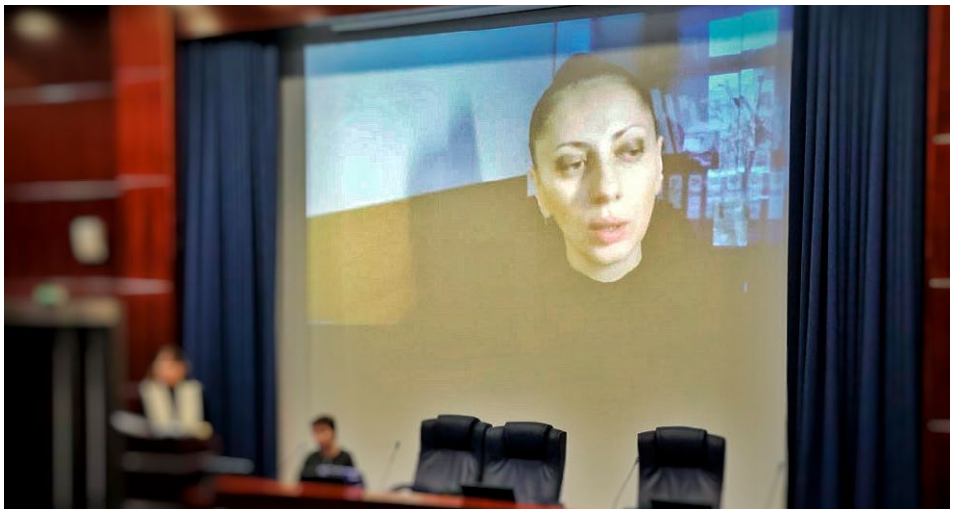
71 OpenSanctions.org, (n.d.-a)
72 Belton, 2024

educational platform **Digorya**,[73] which, since Russia's invasion in Ukraine, has been dedicated to cultivating a new generation of bureaucrats and propagandists in Russia.[74] The platform is frequented by Kiriyenko and supported by other members of the ecosystem, such as ANO IRI[75] and ANO Dialog.[76] Additionally, Kharichev chairs the supervisory board of the Expert Institute of Social Research (EISI, Экспертный институт социальных исследований, ЭИСИ) ) who also supports "Digorya".

Examples of his participation in the meetings suggest that while strategizing the counter-campaign against Ukraine with SDA, Kharichev issued strategic directives based on his own understanding of the situation rather than on SDA's research findings. In turn, SDA followed these directives and focused on producing outputs that were favoured by Kharichev and Kiriyenko, such as creating fake infographics. *"Make an infographic! – on the CCE, and the CCU and the NU! SVK [Sergey Vladinelovich Kiriyenko] loves infographics (ADH too) – especially the ones that show dynamics."*– from the CCE meeting of 21 November 2023. Kharichev's participation in meetings is often characterised by lists of instructions followed by the demand for more infographics; both of which are suggestive of an approach to planning based on personal expertise rather than on data.

**Sofia Avraamovna Zakharova** serves as the head of the Department for the Development of Information and Communication Technologies and Communications Infrastructure within the Presidential Administration. She plays a key role in both international and Ukrainian campaigns, leading a small team responsible for managing financial and administrative operations, as well as collecting statistical data - likely for reporting progress to the Presidential Administration and relaying updates back to her team.

**Image.** *Sofia Zakharova presenting at the annual 'AI Global Dimension Conference' Organised by MGIMO AI Centre, in December, 2022.*



**Source:** MGIMO

73 Digoriya, 2025a
74 Redaktsia Grozi, 2024
75 Digoriya, 2024
76 Digoriya, 2025b

Zakharova's role closely resembles that of an operational manager or "fixer", overseeing processes distributed across multiple teams and organisations to ensure favourable performance metrics. According to the internal documents, Zakharova and her team issue directives that fine-tune campaigns, adjusting their course by identifying what works and what does not. Her primary focus is on the efficiency of delivery and engagement, and she often remains detached from the ideological aspects and strategic narrative decisions. Given the number of 'political strategists,' 'ideologists,' and 'political technologists' employed by Kiriyenko and Gambashidze, it is evident that the theoretical aspect of these campaigns is well covered. Zakharova, in contrast, appears to be a key figure in execution, ensuring that campaigns remain on track, have enough funds, and produce the desired results.

Another active member of the task force was **Sergey Yurievich Chernakov**. Alongside his assistant, he was listed as a person responsible for the TikTok strategies of the campaigns. He appears to be active in both the CCE and CCU. Little is known about Chernakov beyond his self-styled image as a political expert and his co-authorship of a book on 'modern social engineering.'[77] The involvement of desk officers overseeing the Kremlin's TikTok policy suggests that the platform plays a key anchoring role in content distribution. However, the planning and evaluation documents included in the leak place Telegram and Facebook as the core platforms utilised to support most SDA activities.

Two members of the Presidential Administration - **Goltyaev Aleksey Olegovich** and **Shamraev Roman Andreevich** - were responsible for coordinating with the **Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MID).** Little is known about the specifics of their involvement. However, the role of Russian embassies in the communication campaigns orchestrated by the SDA is well-documented, as many embassies shared fake stories propagated by RRN. [78]

**Alexey Vyacheslavovich Zharich** is a high-ranking Kremlin official and propagandist. He began his career at the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MID) in the Department of Foreign Delegation Reception but soon shifted his focus to media, communications, and political technologies. An early supporter of Vladimir Putin, Zharich launched the website and authored the book 'For Putin!' in 2005 to bolster Putin's campaign during the Duma elections[79]. Today, he serves as Deputy Head of the Presidential Administration for Public Projects[80] and plays a key role in shaping the next generation of political technologists and communicators through the Digorya platform,[81] in collaboration with ANO IRI and ANO Dialog.

77 Matveychev, Chernakov, Gusev & Azeev, (n.d.)
78 Security, Crime and Intelligence Innovation Institute, 2024
79 Komitet Raso, 2025
80 RosCongress, 2025
81 Digoriya, 2024

**Image.** *Workshop of "factory of interpretations" chaired by Zharich. Participants learn how to "correctly" respond to "the main challenges in the current information agenda."*




**Source:** Groza Media

An investigation by the independent Russian media platform Meduza reveals that Zharich is one of the political experts who is responsible for creating the so-called "metodichka" documents or guidelines that outline the Kremlin's news agenda for state-approved media channels.[82] 'Metodichka', translated as 'manual', outlines main thematic lines or topics that the channels are expected to 'push', and the emotional responses they need to illicit from their audiences. Zharich is rarely mentioned in the documents, with his name appearing primarily in connection to the CCU. While his exact role and decision-making authority remain unclear, his past experience suggests that he is involved in shaping strategic narratives and defining thematic lines for Kremlin-aligned messaging.

**Alexander Nikolaevich Asafov** is a seasoned propagandist who positions himself as a communication expert and political technologist. Previously known as a radio personality, Asafov tries to maintain his relevance by being a mentor to young professionals in the propaganda field. Alongside his peers, Asafov is involved in the Digorya project, sharing his experience and expertise with the younger generation. Additionally, he serves as an expert at the Expert Institute of Social Research (EISI), where Kharichev is a board member. According to online records, Asafov holds a formal position as a "First Deputy Chairman of the Commission of the Public Chamber of the Russian Federation on public examination of draft laws and other regulatory acts". Asafov's involvement in SDA's campaigns is also limited to the Ukrainian project. His primary role appears to be suggesting narratives and ideas for the fake stories. He seems to be more of an 'ideas man', while Kharichev has the decision-making authority.

82 Meduza, 2024

## 2.2 Social Design Agency & Structura National Technologies

The ties between SDA and Structura, as well as their directors, Ilya Gambashidze and Nikolay Tupikin, are notably close. According to the U.S. Treasury Department, SDA was founded by Gambashidze[83] but is officially registered under a woman who, based on leaked documents, is likely responsible for bookkeeping. Official Russian registry records indicate that both Structura and SDA were established in December 2017, just one week apart.[84] The registry also shows that Structura was initially founded by Gambashidze, who held 50% of the shares, while Tupikin and Olenin owned 20% and 30%, respectively. However, as of April 2021, Structura is fully owned by Tupikin, with Gambashidze no longer appearing in the official records of either company.

**Figure 12.** *Logos for SDA and Structura.*

АГЕНТСТВО СОЦИАЛЬНОГО ПРОЕКТИРОВАНИЯ

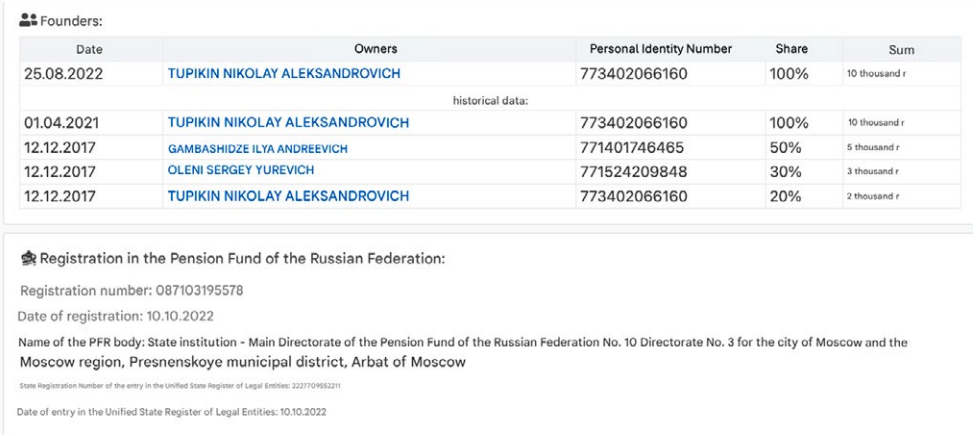
СТРУКТУРА
ГРУППА КОМПАНИЙ

Gambashidze and Tupikin share one more enterprise together, which among other things provides computer services and develops software, called LTD "Osion" (ID: 7703439517). Osion was also founded in December 2017, a week after Structura and two weeks after SDA.[85] According to the Russian business registry, Osion is presently active, is entirely owned by Gambashidze and lists Tupikin as a general director. It appears to be under the "sanctioned-linked" entities.[86]

Structura's full ownership has been valued at only approximately 100 EUR during all its existence. However, throughout the investigation, questions persist regarding the financial operations of both Structura and SDA, raising concerns about their transparency - whether related to potential money laundering, circumvention of sanctions, or tax evasion.

83 Department of Justice, 2024; Voice of America, 2024
84 List-org, (n.d.-a); list-org (n.d.-c)
85 List-org, (n.d.-b)
86 Opensanctions.org, 2017

**Figure 13.** *Screenshot from the official registry showing the ownership timeline of Structura. Translated using an online translating tool.*



Founders:

| Date | Owners | Personal Identity Number | Share | Sum |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 25.08.2022 | TUPIKIN NIKOLAY ALEKSANDROVICH | 773402066160 | 100% | 10 thousand r |
| | historical data: | | | |
| 01.04.2021 | TUPIKIN NIKOLAY ALEKSANDROVICH | 773402066160 | 100% | 10 thousand r |
| 12.12.2017 | GAMBASHIDZE ILYA ANDREEVICH | 771401746465 | 50% | 5 thousand r |
| 12.12.2017 | OLENI SERGEY YUREVICH | 771524209848 | 30% | 3 thousand r |
| 12.12.2017 | TUPIKIN NIKOLAY ALEKSANDROVICH | 773402066160 | 20% | 2 thousand r |

Registration in the Pension Fund of the Russian Federation:

Registration number: 087103195578

Date of registration: 10.10.2022

Name of the PFR body: State institution - Main Directorate of the Pension Fund of the Russian Federation No. 10 Directorate No. 3 for the city of Moscow and the Moscow region, Presnenskoye municipal district, Arbat of Moscow

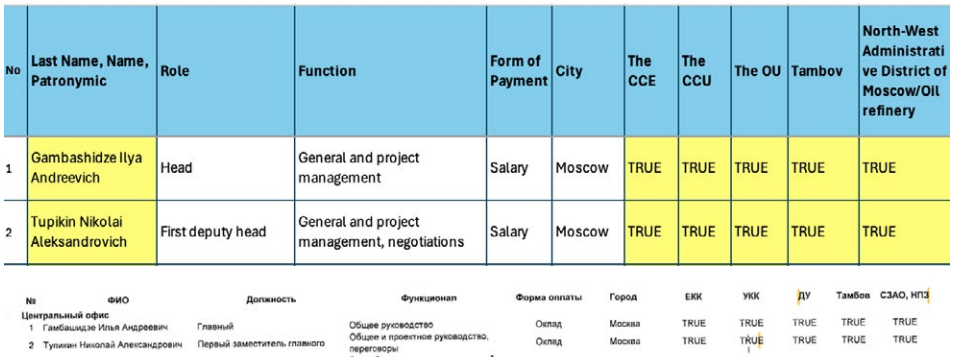
State Registration Number of the entry in the Unified State Register of Legal Entities: 1227709552211

Date of entry in the Unified State Register of Legal Entities: 10.10.2022

**Source:** list-org

The ties between SDA and Structura do not end there. A leaked document titled "The Employees of SDA", (Сотрудники АСП) lists 107 personnel assigned to four distinct influence campaigns. Among them are the International Comprehensive Counter-Campaign (CCI), later rebranded as the CCE, and the CCU, a campaign targeting Ukraine launched in 2023. The document also names Gambashidze and Tupikin as the director and deputy director of SDA, respectively. In a similar document shared by the obscure Telegram channel VCHK-OGPU, which often leaks documents related to the Russian government, Gambashidze's role is titled "head technologist of the project", while Tupikin is listed as a "Head of the IT-department.[87] The inclusion of Tupikin on a list of SDA staff raises questions about the operational distinctions between SDA and Structura; the evidence in the leaks as a whole points to them acting as a single entity, at least in relation to the information influence campaigns commissioned by Kiriyenko.

**Figure 14.** *The list of SDA employees, and their responsibilities, first two names.*



| No | Last Name, Name, Patronymic | Role | Function | Form of Payment | City | The CCE | The CCU | The OU | Tambov | North-West Administrative District of Moscow/Oil refinery |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Gambashidze Ilya Andreevich | Head | General and project management | Salary | Moscow | TRUE | TRUE | TRUE | TRUE | TRUE |
| 2 | Tupikin Nikolai Aleksandrovich | First deputy head | General and project management, negotiations | Salary | Moscow | TRUE | TRUE | TRUE | TRUE | TRUE |

| № | ФИО | Должность | Функционал | Форма оплаты | Город | ЕКК | УКК | ДУ | Тамбов | СЗАО, НПЗ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Центральный офис | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1 | Гамбашидзе Илья Андреевич | Главный | Общее руководство | Оклад | Москва | TRUE | TRUE | TRUE | TRUE | TRUE |
| 2 | Тупикин Николай Александрович | Первый заместитель главного | Общее и проектное руководство, переговоры | Оклад | Москва | TRUE | TRUE | TRUE | TRUE | TRUE |

**Source:** Delfi leaks [top, translated manually], VCHK-OGPU [bottom]

Email correspondence from SDA indicates that messages are often casually forwarded to Tupikin's personal or Structura's corporate e-mail addresses.

87 @vchkogpu, 2023

These messages cover topics such as procurement inquiries, content creation competitions, and other less critical matters. Much like their email correspondence, SDA and Structura also overlap in their physical addresses. SDA's official address matches Structura's legal address, both located just a ten-minute walk from the Kremlin palace complex. However, it remains unclear whether either organisation actually operates from this location, as their documents, registries, and contact information reference multiple addresses.

This evidence leads us to infer that LTD "GK Structura" (ID: 7703438908) and LTD SDA (ID: 7728390408) are operating as a single entity to manage Kiriyenko's operations and potentially other related business activities. We assess with medium confidence that SDA and Structura share resources, staff, and provide financial support to one another. We also assess, with low-to-medium confidence, that there is a division of labour by which SDA provides project management, content production, and some parts of delivery, while Structura provides more advanced IT capabilities. By presenting themselves as separate entities in government procurement competitions, they create an illusion of fair bidding while in practice functioning as a single financial beneficiary.

**Ilya Andreevich Gambashidze,** founder of SDA and co-founder of Structura, presents himself as a political technologist but is, above all, a man with acute entrepreneurial instincts. Born in 1977[88], he has established himself as one of Russia's most successful hired propagandists, by slowly earning the trust of political elites and always betting on new technologies. He appears pragmatic in his pursuit of financial security, diversifying his investments into ventures such as printing[89], construction[90], food production and retail – a company which also claims to do social research.[91] Since the age of 25, Gambashidze has founded or co-founded approximately 24 businesses, 11 of which remain active, although, keeping in mind the unreliability of the official records, it is difficult to assess whether they reflect a true picture of his present business profile. Investigations by Voice of America and Cardiff University provide deeper insight into his businesses, political activities and personal life.[92]

When it comes to his role in SDA, Gambashidze is the key person whose loyalty and connections granted SDA access into the Kremlin's lucrative propaganda business. He is the person responsible for the management of the campaigns, a burden he most likely shares with Sofia Zakharova and Nikolay Tupikin. According to the FBI Affidavit, Gambashidze was the one taking notes during meetings in the Kremlin, with Kiriyenko, Tabak, and Zakharova. It is unclear whether he still managed the notetaking after his operation grew, but it seems almost certain that he is the lynchpin of SDA's involvement with Kiriyenko, with complete operational oversight.
When a segment of SDA's operation was exposed and branded with the flashy name Doppelgänger, Gambashidze seized the opportunity to frame it as his

88 Voice of America, 2024
89 list-org, (n.d.-d)
90 list-org, (n.d.-e)
91 list-org, (n.d.-f)
92 Voice of America, 2024; Security, Crime and Intelligence Innovation Institute, 2024

personal victory. Despite records showing that the team was planning to make a video in which they would all participate wearing military uniforms, Gambashidze instead appeared alone in the presentation of his company. Dressed in a military uniform and proudly displaying a badge that reads "Ideological Forces of Russia – Truth Shall Have Power", he positioned himself as the face of the operation for the benefit of Putin and his closest circle.

*"Make a video clip together with the 'comments' group. Make a video clip about the work of the team! They will show them on a separate notebook, will carry it upstairs. The employees sitting at the computers should wear military uniforms. Infographics. We have 10 days!"*

**Image.** *Screenshots from the SDA's presentation video. Gambashidze on the left.*




Unlike his more attention-hungry business partner, **Nikolay Tupikin** keeps a notoriously low profile. He is likely responsible for the technical part of the SDA/Structura's campaigns, and is also involved in managing the day-to-day operations, probably relieving Gambashidze of some of his managerial duties as the project began to grow.

## 2.3 Autonomous Non-Commercial Organisations (ANO)

According to The Moscow Times, Russia's total annual budget allocation for mass media channels amounts to 137.2 billion roubles (€1.3 billion). Of this, €297 million is designated for Russia Today, €214 million for the All-Russia State Television and Radio Broadcasting Company (VGTRK), €104 million for Rossiya Segodnya (Russia Today in Russian), and €45 million for TASS.[93] This represents the traditional part of the overt propaganda network, which has since been augmented by additional funds.

A leak from Kiriyenko's office investigated by VSquare revealed an additional state fund run by Kiriyenko that is dedicated to propaganda, known as the "Domestic Policy Bloc Budget". This is almost the same amount as the total budget for television. In 2024, this budget amounted to approximately €1.1 billion and was divided into three categories: presidential elections, information-ideological warfare, and the so-called "new regions" of Ukraine. In 2023, TV propagandist Vladimir Solovyov personally received €15 million from this budget, increasing to €30 million in 2024.[94]

93 The Moscow Times, 2024
94 VSquare, 2024

**Figure 15.** *Autonomous non-commercial organisations "ANO Dialog", "ANO Dialog Regions", and the Internet Development Institute "ANO IRI".*




Approximately €600 million from the "Domestic Policy Bloc Budget" was allocated to the newly established ANOs (autonomous non-commercial organisations) engaged in state propaganda.[95] Their activities include conducting research on occupied territories, organising "cultural and educational events," and even orchestrating the abduction of Ukrainian children. According to the VSquare investigation, the largest beneficiaries of this budget are ANO IRI and ANO Dialog/Dialog Regions. In 2023, ANO IRI received nearly €220 million from the state budget, followed by €180 million in 2024. Meanwhile, Dialog was allocated approximately €68 million. It is not known whether SDA is also financed through this budget line, though the leaked documents reveal that they are adept at syphoning some of these state funds via Dialog and other ANO organisations. More generally, it seems likely that the SDA-associated network managed by Kiriyenko has a total annual budget somewhere under €600 million, though the vast majority of its resources are dedicated to subjugating the Russian Federation.

## Dialog & Dialog Regions

A key player at the Presidential Administration meeting table is the non-commerical organisations Dialog and Dialog Regions, both of which maintain strong ties with SDA and Structura. Founded by the Moscow Department of Information and Technology (DIT) in 2019 and 2020 respectively, these organisations have been led since 2021 by **Vladimir Grigoryevich Tabak**,[96] a sanctioned propagandist[97]. Branded as 'fighters against Western disinformation'[98] and 'bridges between the government officials and society,'[99] the Dialog organisations actively spread online propaganda about Russia's illegally annexed territories in Ukraine and play a key role in the government's domestic surveillance of the Russian population and civil servants.

Based on the obtained documents and those analysed in the FBI affidavit, the meeting formats held at the Presidential Administration changed over time. Kiriyenko personally led these meetings before the launch of the Ukrainian project (CCU) in January 2023, when Kharichev appears to have taken over as the leading authority. Those meetings attended by Kiriyenko, Gambashidze, and Zakharova primarily focused on campaigns targeting the West (the CCI), including the creation of the mirror websites known as Doppelgänger. It appears that Tabak participated in these earlier meetings, playing a key role in executing parts of the campaign under Kiriyenko's direction. This included a

95 around 15 entities with over 4000 employees in 2023
96 Interfax, (n.d.-c), and Interfax, (n.d.-d)
97 OpenSanctions.org, (n.d.-b)
98 dialog.info, 2024
99 dialog.info, (n.d.)

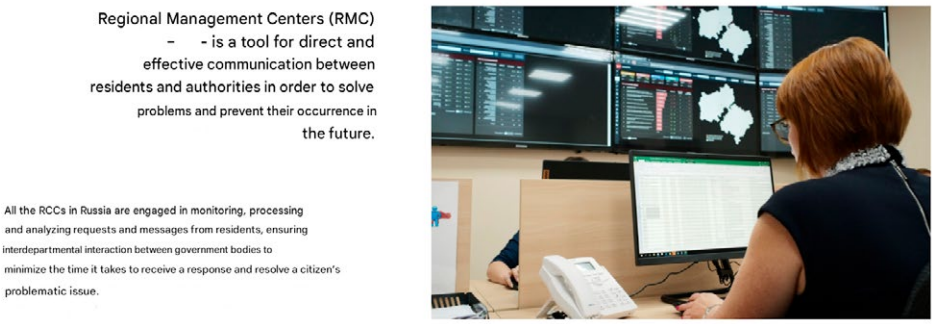
role in creating and/or hosting mirror sites and disseminating them through Dialog's propaganda network, including RRN.[100]

Dialog's strategic plan for the development of Russia's digital sphere is branded as Gosdigital (Gov-Digital)[101]. Dialog positions itself at the centre of a Venn diagram, where social media marketing, nationalistic PR, and political technologies converge. According to VSquare's investigation, Tabak and his deputy, Andrei Tsepelev imagine that nationalistic PR content that promotes Putin and his regime should accompany every Russian citizen throughout their life. This influence, they say, should begin in kindergarten and continue through school, museums, libraries, sports activities, and even interactions with municipal and central government institutions, ultimately extending to hospitals. It is a "cradle to grave" propaganda package[102].

Perhaps the most important point in Dialog's strategic plan is that the internet is the present and future of Russian propaganda. Dialog emphasizes that 45 percent of Russian residents obtain their information from the internet, compared to 42 percent who rely on television, and that the internet is the dominant source of information for Russians under the age of 44. Dialog positions itself as a competitor and successor to television propaganda, which, as a sector, operates with a larger budget (despite sanction-related setbacks).

Procurement documents reveal that SDA and Structura frequently compete for government contracts to provide Dialog with digital services. These procurement exercises appear to be rigged in their favour, with irregularities that could indicate corruption, or that perhaps show one of the ways in which SDA is paid for its work under Kiriyenko.

**Image.** *The screenshot from Dialog's website, describing the "Regional Control Centres" the public surveillance product, which in essence combines the social listening and customer communication tools. Machine-translated from Russian.*




**Source:** Dialog

## Internet Development Institute

The Internet Development Institute (ANO IRI) is responsible for producing films, blogs, games and TV series that align with Kremlin narratives, while Dialog

100 FBI Affidavit, 2024

101 https://web.archive.org/web/20250405102534/https://vsquare.org/kremlin-leaks-putin-elections-russia-propaganda-ukraine/

102 https://web.archive.org/web/20250405102534/https://vsquare.org/kremlin-leaks-putin-elections-russia-propaganda-ukraine/

and Dialog Regions provide the necessary online infrastructure to disseminate IRI's content. IRI focuses on creating content designed to evoke national pride and heroism, to persuade residents of occupied territories that they are better off with Russia, and to convince a country where nearly half the population lives in poverty that their quality of life has improved. Dialog, in turn, guarantees that these messages reach every Russian with internet access. IRI and Dialog naturally work closely together, as they are pillars of the same internet propaganda infrastructure. Notably, Aleksey Sergeevich Goreslavsky, the current director of IRI, previously led Dialog before being succeeded by Tabak.

**Image.** *Poster for 'The Last Knight. Legacy', fictional TV and web series, 2024.*
**Source:** IRI projects.



**Image.** *Historical drama series GDR, 2024.*




**Source:** IRI projects.

While Dialog is directly involved in SDA's campaigns, there is no indication that IRI participates in the decision-making process. However, the leaked

documents reveal that SDA and Structura frequently take part in IRI's content creation competitions, occasionally emerging as winners.

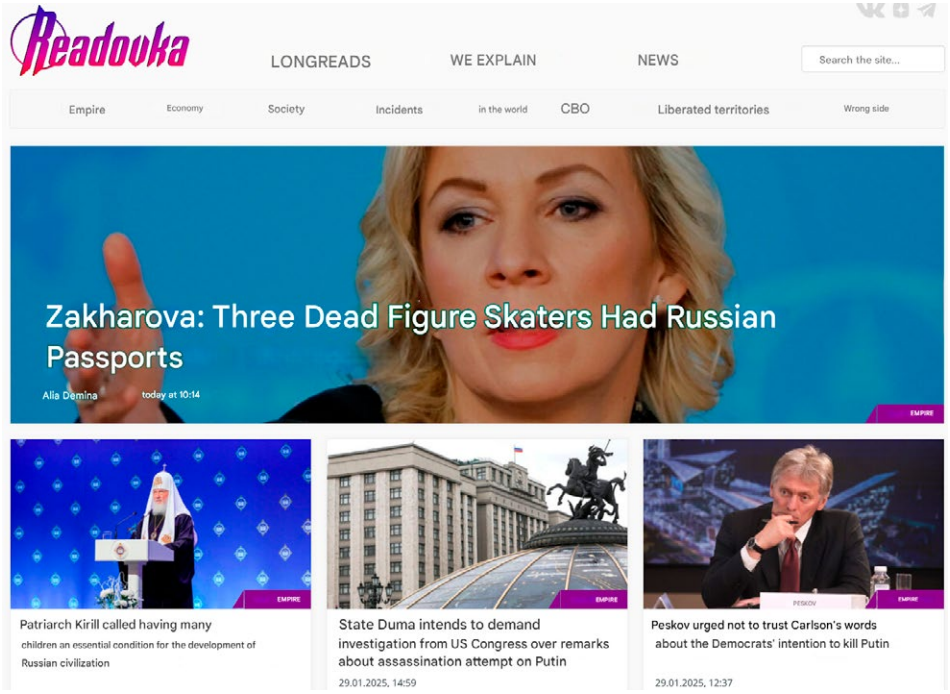
## Readovka

Another figure in the counter-campaign against Ukraine is **Aleksey Leonidovich Kostilev**, the founder of the media holding Readovka.[103] Originally a small independent online news agency based in Smolensk, Readovka expanded into a broader media and communications enterprise, now integrated into the Dialog network, and rumoured to have previously been under Prigozhin. Though Kostilev initially presented himself as an independent actor, he seized a business opportunity in supporting ultrapatriotic Z-propaganda, leveraging his connections with Tabak to enhance his business and influence.[104]

An investigation by VSquare reveals that the Kremlin planned to allocate €13 million between 2023 and 2025 to Readovka, and that half of this funding was designated for establishing a new media network in the occupied territories of Ukraine. A presentation by Readovka detailed 20 social media channels and websites it intended to launch.[105]

Kostilev seems active at the meetings in suggesting narratives and delivery formats and frequently provides insights on what he thinks works and does not work in news and social media. However, it is unclear whether his assumptions are based on reliable metrics. Moreover, his exact role, other than providing a media platform for delivery, remains ambiguous.

**Image:** *The screenshot of Readovka's main page on 31 January 2025.* Machine-translated from Russian.




103 Readovka67, 2025a; Readovka67, 2025b
104 Meduza, 2023
105 Roonema, 2024

## 2.4 Strategic direction & control

The key players met regularly to make all kinds of decisions, large and small, strategic and tactical, about SDA's operations. In many respects, the operations were not SDA's but belonged to the whole network, with the command-and-control function delegated from Kiriyenko through his Presidential Administration aides. Our assessment fully concurs with the view expressed by the FBI that SDA's work is part of a state-sanctioned campaign ultimately signed off by Putin. To better understand the decision-making dynamics, and in particular, their strengths and weaknesses, we provide some illustrative examples of how decisions appear to be made.[106]

### Decision-making during a crisis (1 September 2023: CCU).

This protocol meeting prominently features Putin's aide and project director, Aleksandr Dmitrievich Kharichev (ADK), along with an unknown figure referred to as Spiridonov. The discussion reflects decision-making processes against the backdrop of the 2023 Ukrainian counteroffensive. This example underscores how the success of the information war is directly tied to developments on the battlefield. It also highlights that in times of crisis, the team does not engage in discussions or weigh up the meaning of analytics, but instead follows directives from the authoritative body in charge.

***Spiridonov:*** *Our narrative on the counterattack does not work.*

***ADK:*** *Yes, right, we cannot interrupt it [the information about the counteroffensive coming from Ukraine]. It's better that we talk about [Ukrainian] losses.*

***Spiridonov:*** *the most popular topic is corruption and procurement [in the Ukrainian army].*

***ADK:*** *We should attract attention to the elections in new territories [Crimea, Donbass and Luhansk], where thousands of candidates, millions will vote, a lot [note: Kharichev proposes to divert the attention of Russian audiences, and his boss, Putin, to the positive news from Ukraine: that millions of people from annexed territories could vote for him.]*

***ADK:*** *Plus, a real partisan war can happen in Crimea, 85% of people who live there consider themselves to be Russian [note: this narrative aims to discourage Ukrainians from continuing an offensive, by imagining that Crimeans will fight against Ukrainians to stay with Russia].*

***ADK:*** *We need to pump up the senselessness of the fight for the East of Ukraine [for Ukrainians]. There are no Ukrainians there. There is no point in fighting.*

***ADK:*** *Push the 'mobilization' [in Ukraine]. That 'We still need to mobilize to make up for losses [if we are to be able] to attack'.*

***ADK:*** *Protracted war is what the USA and Putin want. Ukrainians need to negotiate. There is no real advantage [to the counteroffensive].*

***ADK:*** *Give data on economics. Compare the prices, minimal wage, pensions, the agency of housing and public utilities, numbers on the port area (30% losses of 'GDP' because of the grain and so on). Paint a picture of how much money the USA and*

106 Editor notes for clarity are in [square brackets].

*Europe give, that the entire state budget consists of the Western aid. Make an infographic.*

*Monaco Battalion - Where are the Oligarchs' Children? Keep spinning it. [note: it is unclear who speaks, but likely Kharichev continues to list his narratives. The Monaco Battalion is a term for the rich Ukrainians who allegedly left the country before the war started in Ukraine in 2022].*

*Make an infographic. Write them [Ukrainians] personal messages and publish reactions. We can do fakes.*

The decision-making process appears to be a monologue, based on Kharichev's instincts. The dynamic is one of a boss giving instructions to bring a failing project back on track.

## Decision to replicate success (22 September 2023: CCU)

One of the key topics discussed during a September 2023 meeting was a fabricated video that was deemed a success after being picked up by Western media. The video falsely claimed that the Ukrainian military was recruiting children for service. According to the protocol, the video was thoroughly analysed to determine the factors behind its success, with the goal of replicating it in other regions. Sofia Zakharova appeared to be leading this particular project and requested a clearer slogan for the video to enhance its effectiveness. It is unclear if the decision was made to enhance the project creatively or enhance its dissemination.

***Sofia:*** *we made a video clip, that the [Ukrainian] children are called to arms! ??? find it!*

*. . .*

***Sofia:*** *our new team has made a fake about the kidnapping of children. Americans have seriously published it. Success!!!*

*Send the kids metodichka [narrative manual] to Oleg Gaba!*

*In the video about the kids, we need some kind of a slogan, PARTICULARLY FOR THE KIDS! [otherwise, it is] NOT CLEAR*

This example shows Zakharova commissioning more content based on what we term third order impact; the resonance of Russian narratives in the information environment through Western media and influencers.

## Decision to focus on regions (24 November 2024: CCU)

The decision to shift strategy to focus on regions is made in a split second, as Kharichev's suggestion is supported by one of Chernakov's employees, who is responsible for distribution on Tik-Tok. This type of micro-targeting of small groups is SDA's favoured dissemination tactic, particularly in Ukraine, and they know the methods well. However, they also attempt to apply this strategy in the West, especially in Germany.

***Aleksandr Dmitrievich Kharichev (ADK):*** *it's best that we go into the regional topics.*

***Yelena Vasiliyevna Kolesnikova [responsible for TikTok]:*** *it's easier to work in the regions. They [Ukrainians] don't have enough resources for it.*

***ADK:*** *Sofia, make more regional channels.*

***Kostusev:*** *yes!!!*

## Decisions aligned with the thematic lines (15 December 2023: CCU)

This excerpt from the meeting shows how Kharichev proposes different narratives and proposes their creative implementation. Narratives seem to be in line with the strategic thematic lines.

***ADK:*** *Showed [Kiriyenko and/or Putin] infographics on [Ukrainian] losses. [He] Liked. But the numbers are small.*

***ADK:*** *[we should] show that [Ukrainian] mobilization does not cover losses! Make fakes and infographics about it!*

*Amplify: 'we [Ukrainians] have big losses; the number of handicapped people has increased to 300 000'.*

*Argue 500 or 550 thousand losses + Photos of graves, satellites on cemeteries [note: Kharichev proposes to create a fake discourse where Ukrainians argue whether their losses in war amount to 500 or 550 thousand people.] Make fake photos of cemeteries and compare with the previous year's photo!*

***ADK:*** *Come up with interesting comparisons for disabled people, losses, how to count beautifully: divisions, volumes, kilometres [the idea seems to be to express casualties in creative ways, such as per kilometre gained during the counteroffensive].*

***Amplify/Spin (ADK):***

- *Zelenskyi is attacking Klitshcko.*
- *Who should be instead of Zelenskyi? Let's discuss.*
- *Tie the disabled to the corruption, purchasing the documents.*

*Come up with infographics and fakes!*

Once again, Kharichev is shown to be the principal decision-maker in the group, dictating strategy for SDA to implement.

## Speed of implementation (17 October 2023: CCE)

This excerpt illustrates the workload assigned to the team and the corresponding deadlines. On 17 October 2023 - a Tuesday - the longest deadline was one week, given for the project on agitating Germany's citizens. In contrast, ideas for campaigns targeting the International Criminal Court and Armenia were allocated only two days. This demonstrates how quickly decisions are operationalised and suggests a prioritization of speed and quantity over quality.

*Create KPIs for Armenia. Deadline – Thursday!*

*Insert the International Criminal Court in Campaign 4 (K4) [thematic lines]. Leave the Statute! But this will be a separate project.*

*On Germany: Those who are for Russia are considered to be second-class people. We need the creative team to enhance this theme! Deadline – Tuesday!*

*Come up with the project on Armenia! Deadline – Thursday!*

*Come up with campaigns on the ICC [International Criminal Court]! Deadline – Thursday!*

## Involving the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MID) (3 October 2023: CCE)

We know from the example of RRN that embassies were used to disseminate content produced by this network. The following except likely shows how this collaboration takes place.

***Aleksey [Probably Aleksey Olegovich Goltyaev, a connection to MID]:*** *we should work on the theme of exits from the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC)*[107]*. We should target countries where we have strong ambassadors. There we can make the country exit the ICC –* ***Sofia****.*

***Aleksey:*** *Take the material on the ICC from the USA.*

Interestingly, MID does not seem to be used to develop expert policy analysis or to give assessments on bilateral relations. Rather, they are tasked by Kiriyenko's network to deliver propaganda content based on a simplistic logic without much discussion.

107 OHCHR, 1998

# 3. Social Design Agency Projects

This chapter presents a detailed analysis of several projects managed by SDA. The first section introduces the work done during 2022, which primarily targeted Ukraine and its allies, and includes the activities commonly referred to as Doppelgänger. Subsequent sections outline other significant campaigns targeting Europe, Ukraine, and the US. Finally, the chapter outlines some smaller projects that help to give a flavour of the spontaneous and eclectic activities SDA pitched to the Kremlin, as well as revealing patterns in project strategy and use of capabilities.

## 3.1 The International Comprehensive Counter-Campaign

The earliest document in the leak is from January 2022 and demonstrates a sudden and serious reconfiguring of work efforts in preparation for an escalation of activities targeting Russia, the Russian Diaspora, and the West. The notes are brief, and while some plans are concrete, others are conceptual in nature. A small selection of urgent tasks offers a sense of the type of activities the bureau was prioritising in the weeks before the invasion, and reveal the dark style of public relations and communication work in which the agency specialises.

- **Compile a list of scenarios for inciting conflicts on inter-ethnic, religious, racial, political basis in the "focus countries" [probably Germany, France, Israel, US].**
- **Prepare a media plan for working through Diaspora media (Armenia-France, Turkey-Germany, Israel-USA).**
- **Create an antithesis to the concept of "cancel culture". Suggest a name (something unifying in English) and a way of presentation abroad.**
- **Make lists of:**
  - **Foreign and Russian influencers**
  - **Journalists who produce material that aligns with our narratives**
  - **Celebrities and cultural bohemians speaking in favour of Russia**
  - **Oppositionists**
  - **Divide them into groups: who we monitor, who we can co-operate with, who we can send links to our materials in social media networks, etc.**
- **Make a plan for hacking (work out the steps across "multiple moves": who we are hacking, why, what compromising material emerges, etc.).**

- **Develop a plan of interaction with the sociological polling agency IPSOS.**[108]
- **Identify topics related to Russia that are taboo in Western media (e.g., continued supply of clean Russian gas, beauty of Russian nature, Russian women, etc.) for further work with "negative blocks" in the media.**

Throughout the documentation, SDA is shown to continuously "brand" its campaigns by conceptualizing them and giving them catchy titles. This practice of packaging services as attractive and easily digestible products makes it easier for SDA to sell their work to stakeholders in the Kremlin, across the network of companies and ANOs involved in the Kremlin's information influence ecosystem, and to companies wishing to buy their dark PR. Furthermore, it is an important part of their self-branding practice, as they try to appear smart, creative, innovative and influential. However, there appears to be a deceptive dimension to their branding activities, as the projects are often renamed and repackaged. It is difficult to trace, with a high degree of confidence, how the projects flow into one another over time.

According to a summary of the meeting notes from this period, which are included in the DOJ leak but not the Delfi leak, plans to launch Doppelgänger appear to have taken place between April and August 2022. The initial objectives appeared to be (1) **to discredit the USA, Great Britain and NATO**, and (2) **to convey the truth about the war in Ukraine**. Team I, sometimes also referred to as the IAG Team or Team Illya (after Gambashidze), was assigned the Dialog brand Recent Reliable News (RRN), and was also activated to support the Russian Presidential elections.[109]

By April 2022, SDA branded several of these activities collectively as the **International Comprehensive Counter-Campaign** (CCI). The Umbrella of CCI is quite broad and seems to draw together smaller projects targeting various actors, such as the International Criminal Court, Westerners who support Ukraine, and the Russian diaspora who migrated after the invasion in 2022. The concept of the CCI is to create an **international network of fake news sites and a robust dissemination system** to amplify content on social media and messaging apps. **The content itself aims to incite and amplify conflicts to weaken the West and its support for Ukraine.**

## Circumventing sanctions

As sanctions hit Russian state media during March 2022, the concept of the CCI grew. The funding to build a new digital influence infrastructure enabled different pro-Kremlin groups the opportunity to test new methods. SDA were hustlers, and their tight connections to other nongovernmental actors associated with Kiriyenko earned them a shot at some major Kremlin contracts. Below is a translation of a document titled **Trial Period of the CCI**, which demonstrates how SDA planned to build their fake news

108 Note: Paris-based IPSOS was used by SDA for sociological polling in target countries. IPSOS is still active in Russia. leave-russia, (n.d.)

109 Department of Justice, 2024, pp. 22 & 24

network and dissemination system. The original formatting has been preserved, names have been redacted, and notes added for clarity:

### *Trial period of the CCI*

1. ***Task: 3,000,000 views per month. 100,000 views per day. Germany, Italy, England*** [Note: Likely referring to the total amount of views on websites and posts].
2. *Distribution scheme. Writer - translator – seeding* [Note: this describes workflow: original articles are written and edited in Russian, then translated and linked through the dissemination network].
3. *Create Telegram channels-aggregators. Think about it.* [Note: aggregators are channels that collect news from various sources and do not produce original content].
4. *There are already 8 Telegram channels. We are developing further (2+2+4).*
5. ***It is necessary to develop a daily algorithm for the work of the general editorial board, the seeding block*** [Note: This refers to a common work process for content production, which is discussed further in the following pages].
6. ***Memes, pics, design and videos****. In a common piggy bank* [Note: Teams within SDA share their content]. *F* [France] *- Content group. 10 - Germany, 5 - England, 3 – Italy* [Note: may refer to number of staff].
7. *Separate geographical microchannels separately* [Note: They are likely trying to micro-target the European audiences geographically]. *Talk with another team* [Note: as this and other documents show, SDA is divided into teams, that are focused on different projects. It seems to be a common practice for the teams to share their experiences and competences with one another].
8. ***Monitoring group.*** *Tasks: 1 important news items from each country per day, 2 news items - about the war in Ukraine.* [NAME] *will provide a person who will monitor the agenda using Brand Analytics* [Note: Brand Analytics is a Russian IT company focusing on social media monitoring and analysis[110]]. ***Create a Pulse*** [Note: Pulse is the name of the internal news monitoring and aggregating channels on Telegram used to manage campaign content. There is "Pulse Ukraine", "Pulse Germany" etc. The name comes from the phrase "keeping a finger on a pulse"].
9. *Find the channel "Earlier than everyone, well, almost" ("*Раньше всех, ну почти*" ) for each country* [Note: appears to be a network of channels that share same content translated in multiple languages, according to each target country].
10. ***Video editing unit****.* [NAME] *Provide 2 or 3 videos daily for each country.*
11. *We need an artist-primitivist, and writer, or a director of technical specifications for memes and pics.*
12. ***Create a registry****.* [NAME x2] *will give access* [Note: a registry is likely to be created in a program that requires access].

110 Brand Analytics, (n.d.)

13. ***News portals***. [NAME] *You need to request documents from each news site. Draw a block diagram of the creation and distribution of news portals, on Facebook and Twitter* [Note: it is likely that the person in question is tasked with creating and visualising a distribution scheme for fake news websites, including mirror websites].
14. ***Reporting system for all areas. A very important issue***. *You need to create a document* [Note: throughout the documents it becomes clear how crucial it is for the teams to provide timely and efficient reporting to the higher-ups].
15. ***Develop an "interesting" digest from a single person's perspective.*** *Cool reactions, memes. Album with the best reactions. Image, media, memes, reactions* [Note: it is possible they refer to creating fake influencer profiles].
16. ***Creating landing pages***. *For example, news aggregator landing pages. We test and make 1 website.*
17. ***Facebook. Purchase [Facebook] accounts.*** *We need to test or find a browser for bots.* [NAME] *will provide the methodology for the new employee. Master Dolphin. https://anty.dolphin.ru.com/ru/ Find an employee instead of* [NAME] [Note: Dolphin-Anty is an Anti-Detect Browser created for operating with large amounts of bots.[111]]
18. ***Create a list of channels for distribution to the most popular audiences in Germany, England, Italy.*** *Facebook, Twitter,* [NAME x2]. *Topics: Migrants, anti-vaxxers, opposition in general.*

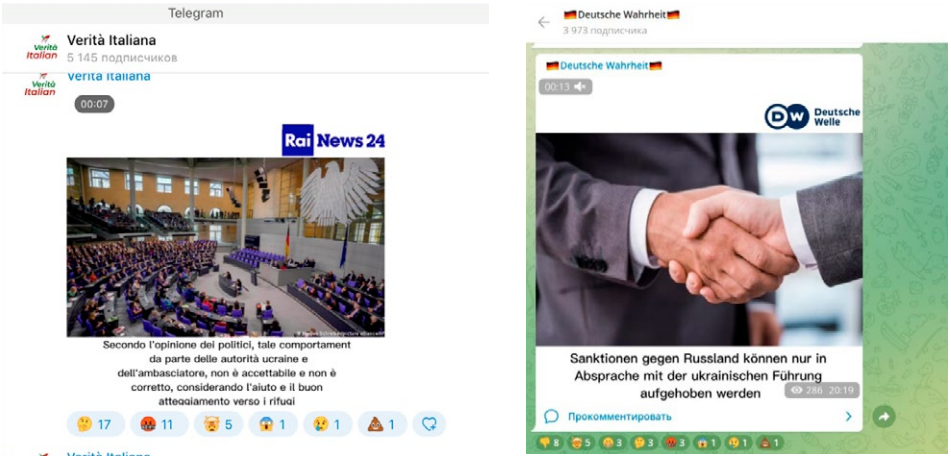
Additional documents suggest that this "trial" plan was set into action and produced actual outputs. It is evident that SDA viewed fake news sites as websites that produced original material but also had aggregator qualities. It is likely that the websites discussed here included mirror websites, also known as Doppelgänger websites, and that a dedicated Telegram dissemination network was established to support them. Between May and July 2022 (the actual time scope may be larger), SDA operated Telegram news-aggregator channels in multiple languages, targeting audiences in Germany, Italy, and the UK. Headlines from the mirror websites, with inflammatory claims, were disseminated through these Telegram channels, as planned. Channels had similar names across different languages such as "English Truth" in English, "Deutsche Wahrheit" (German Truth), "Verita Italiana" (Italian Truth), and "Italian News" or "British Rumours" and "Gossip Italiano".

The dissemination network extended beyond Telegram channels to include fake personas on Instagram and Facebook, some of which remain active on these platforms. According to their own estimates, a total of 334 platforms were created between May and July 2022 to target audiences in Germany, Italy, and the United Kingdom. On average, groups targeting Germany and Italy had 26 followers each, while the 106 groups created to

111 Dolphin Cloud and Anti-Detect Browser software are provided by Zhitniakov Software Solutions Ltd, registered in Cyprus (see i-Cyprus, (n.d.)), founded by Denis Zhitniakov, a Russian entrepreneur (see list-org, (n.d.-g)) who is currently working on developing his 'personal brand' (see @deniszhitniakov_blog, 2022).

target the UK had no subscribers. German-language Telegram channels primarily distributed content from fake German-language news outlets, impersonating sources such as Deutsche Welle and Bild. Similarly, the Italian-language channels shared articles from fabricated Italian outlets, mimicking Rai News 24 and others. Below are examples of content shared in Telegram channels targeting Italy and Germany.

**Figure 16.** *Screenshots of the Telegram news-aggregator channels – 'Verità Italiana' and 'Deutsche Warheit'. Fake 'Rai News 24' headline reads: 'In the opinion of politicians such behaviour on the part of the Ukrainian authorities and the ambassador is not acceptable and not correct. Considering the help and good attitude towards the refugees." Fake Deutsche Welle headline reads: "Sanctions against Russia can only be lifted in agreement with the Ukrainian leadership".*




Stories such as these were distributed through multiple fake personas and media organisation accounts on Facebook (10 personas making 561 comments over 2 weeks), Instagram (3 fake news accounts making 9 posts in 2 days), Telegram (4 fake news accounts making 55 posts over 2 weeks), TikTok (2 fake news accounts posting 35 videos over 2 weeks), and X (7 personas posting 54 comments over 4 days). The evidence of posts was meticulously screenshotted and stored, probably both to provide evidence for payment and for collecting overall campaign metrics. Over 500 Facebook ads were purchased in batches worth between $50 and $250 (mostly around the $100 mark) from 10 May to 6 July 2022, suggesting an advertising spend in the region of $50,000 USD over a two-month period. These too were screenshotted to provide receipts.

Another set of documents from July 2022 show how around 1,500 automated social media accounts were running consecutively by four teams covering the UK, Germany, and Italy, and publishing comments on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Reddit, YouTube, Telegram, and news media sites. Data was meticulously captured across multiple spreadsheets, culminating in a campaign total of 57,134 posts with a reach of 636,866,656 (637 million[112]). In sum, it appears that SDA's role in Doppelgänger was predominantly to drive traffic to the fake websites, by developing a dissemination

112 Note, however, that reach was calculated arbitrarily, as a 1% fraction of the total number of members of a Facebook group.

network on social media platforms and chat applications, using bots and ad purchases, and producing creative content.

**Figure 17.** *Coverage of SDA's bot network as revealed in the leaked documents.*

**Britain**

| Facebook | Instagram | Twitter | Media | Reddit | Youtube | Telegram | Tik-Tok | | Total Coverage |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 12788 | 1128 | 219 | 34 | 1509 | 1710 | 292 | 8 | **Posts** | 17688 |
| 183 470 606 | 108 269 208 | 1 791 301 | 627 037 | 342 184 | 14 445 467 | 60 034 | 1 435 | **Coverage** | 309 007 272 |

**Germany**

| Facebook | Instagram | Twitter | Media | Reddit | Youtube | Telegram | Tik-Tok | | Total Coverage |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 20592 | 4721 | 967 | 37 | 1509 | 1903 | 771 | 8 | **Posts** | 30508 |
| 80 464 110 | 136 669 287 | 6 079 684 | 0 | 342 184 | 0 | 14 226 | 790 | **Coverage** | 223 570 280 |

**Italy**

| Facebook | Instagram | Twitter | Media | Reddit | Youtube | Telegram | Tik-Tok | | Total Coverage |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 7022 | 1196 | 0 | 0 | | | 716 | 4 | **Posts** | 8938 |
| 48 090 812 | 56 183 876 | 0 | 0 | | | 14 416 | 0 | **Coverage** | 104 289 104 |

**Day Total**

| Facebook | Instagram | Twitter | Media | Reddit | Youtube | Telegram | Tik-Tok | | Total Coverage |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 40402 | 7045 | 1186 | 71 | 3018 | 3613 | 1779 | 20 | **Posts** | 57134 |
| 312 025 528 | 301 122 371 | 7 870 985 | 627 037 | 684 369 | 14 445 467 | 88 675 | 2 225 | **Coverage** | 636 866 656 |

Evaluation reports indicate the existence of at least four groups of troll accounts, labelled with Latin letters, that disseminated false content across Facebook, Instagram, Telegram, X (formerly Twitter), TikTok, and YouTube in France, Germany, the United Kingdom, Italy, and Latvia between May and July 2022. Each piece of fabricated multimedia content was assigned a unique identification code (numbers and Latin letters), which specified its topic and production date. This coding system helped SDA track its content and measure its performance - a common practice in digital marketing.

The accompanying Excel spreadsheets provided platform- and country-specific metrics, including publication dates, content IDs, engagement levels, impressions, and instances of content removal. These data enabled SDA to analyse which groups or pages on various platforms achieved the highest engagement, which types of content resonated most in different countries, which materials failed to gain traction, and which were subject to platform bans. The table below presents quantitative metrics for each group of trolls, derived from one of the documents, illustrating the dissemination of fake content from May to July 2022.

| Group Name | # of posts | # of Views/ View per post | # of Likes/ Likes per post | # of Shares/ Shares per post | # of Comments/ Comments per post |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A | 2,870 | 401,984/140 | 6,779/2 | 17,524/6 | 873/0.3 |
| B | 1,027 | 2,347,203/2,285 | 99,585/97 | 7,737/7.5 | 6,258/6 |
| C | 4758 | 9,503,148/19,021 | 153/0.03 | 15,256/3 | 48/0.01 |
| D | 3730 | 594,647/159 | 55,027/15 | 79,233/21 | 1,871/0.5 |

The original Excel documents are likely exports from the social media analytics software. They are far more complex than the image above and reveal significant variation in engagement levels, with some content receiving no interaction while others gain traction within specific groups. However, assessing the actual effectiveness of these engagement metrics remains challenging. While the aggregated and average figures may appear satisfactory (as indicated in the table above), the reliability of these statistics is questionable if SDA disseminates content within its own infrastructure, where automated accounts (bots) artificially inflate engagement through likes, comments, and shares. This manipulation would suggest an intentional distortion of engagement metrics. Furthermore, the documents suggest that SDA systematically monitors core groups which generate the highest engagement metrics, referring to them as its "base." While it remains challenging to determine the extent to which these groups are manipulated, dismissing their outsized influence on the metrics would be unwise.

A second takeaway is that SDA's excessive reliance on spam-like dissemination methods triggers spam filters on certain social media platforms, leading the organisation to actively monitor its ban rates. Given its focus on maximising content volume, SDA consistently employs such techniques while simultaneously seeking ways to evade detection. One of the strategies employed to circumvent platform restrictions involves the use of an 'anti-detect browser'.

The internal reporting does not appear to provide much qualitative assessment of content distribution and engagement, or what SDA refers to as "comments work." Instead, SDA focuses primarily on quantitative metrics that illustrate the scale of dissemination. However, meeting protocols indicate that the Presidential Administration, and Sofia Zakharova in particular, are concerned with the quality of engagement. During a meeting on September 19, 2023, Zakharova issued a directive: **Read comments, it's important to know the trend! The writers should look at them and adjust the packages based on these reactions.**

Her concerns are not unfounded. The highly detailed automated output documents outlining the quantitative metrics of content dissemination includes links to posts created by troll accounts. Some of these links remain accessible, such as the example below. The accompanying image targets the Italian population; however, the comments clearly do not align with SDA's intended outcomes and show that their posts and memes can just as easily generate sarcastic responses. The content has been machine translated, and identifying information redacted.




**Source:** Facebook

The identification codes assigned to the fabricated content and their descriptions indicate that a majority of materials disseminated between May and July 2022 were designed to discredit Ukrainian refugees. The headlines included inflammatory claims, such as "Refugees from Ukraine accidentally burn down the house of the landlord who sheltered them" and others. Each piece of content was accompanied by a detailed report documenting its distribution across various mirror websites and the corresponding engagement metrics. Below is a translated example of such a report, with content IDs and links redacted.

[CONTENT ID] Country – Germany, Period: 22-23 07.2022

## *The Report on Content Distribution*

***Comments:*** *2 242*

***Fake Pages created:*** *9*

***Links to fake pages:***

First group:

[Fake Bild link #1]; [Fake Bild link #2]; [Fake Bild link #3]

Second Group:

[Fake Bild link #1]; [Fake Bild link #2]; [Fake Bild link #3]

Third Group:

[Fake Bild link #1]; [Fake Bild link #2]; [Fake Bild link #3]

***Number of views of the video content on the fake pages:*** *6200; We expect a "tail" of 50-100%, or 3000-6000 views.*

***ERR*** *[Engagement Rate per Reach]: considering the standard ERR for political posts of 5%, we get an estimated reach of: ~10,000 / 5% = 200,000 target audience touches.*

The Engagement Rate per Reach (ERR) functions similarly to the standard Engagement Rate, which is calculated by dividing the total number of engagements by the number of followers. However, ERR considers only active followers on the platform, leading to slightly different calculations that yield more favourable results. Nonetheless, the methodology used by SDA to estimate reach remains unclear, particularly the rationale behind assuming an ERR of 5% to determine the total number of target audience (TA) touchpoints. Given the available information, it appears that multiple variables in this formula were not explicitly defined – put simply, they only *look* good.

As evidenced by the meeting protocols, many of the creative concepts for fabricated content originate from senior officials within the Presidential Administration, political technologists, and other ideologists. Consequently, the reports evaluating the performance of each piece of content may also impact the perceived credibility of its creators. The quantitative report covering the period from May to July 2022 indicates that approximately 300 original content units were produced and disseminated through the network. The majority of these targeted Ukrainian refugees, with most being videos, and others being memes.

Content is frequently discussed in meetings, where both SDA and the Kremlin assess what works and what does not. Occasionally, certain content units achieve exceptional success, such as being picked up by U.S. media. In a typical commercial company, the success rate of content would be measured against failed units, and financial investments would be carefully analysed. This allows for an assessment of return on investment (ROI). However, the Kremlin conducts no such calculations - financial analysis is possible (there are documents tallying the production cost of each activity) but such considerations are absent from SDA's reporting.

## International Conflictology

At the heart of content creation lies a fundamental principle: the greater the conflict it generates, the more valued it is. Conflict not only deepens divisions within target audiences but is also inherently more effective at gaining traction on social media with engagement-driven algorithms. The tactic of 'Divide and Conquer' - seeding and amplifying conflicts to weaken opposition - is far from new. However, SDA attempted to brand this strategy as an original concept and systematize it through high-volume content production and delivery.

In June 2022, the concept 'International Conflictology' was introduced. While it is unclear how closely SDA followed its strategy, the description is almost doctrinal in its clarity. We therefore consider this concept a cornerstone of SDA's modus throughout their work, even if the naming of the approach apparently did not capture the imagination of stakeholders.

**The objective of the "International Conflictology" project is to escalate internal tensions on the territories of US allied countries [Germany and France] to advance the interests of the Russian Federation in the international arena. To influence real conflicts and artificially create conflict situations, it is proposed to use a wide range of information tools to influence public opinion.**

The process description is divided into work that exacerbates existing conflicts, and work which artificially creates new conflicts. An interesting aspect of work with real conflicts is that it appears to include redirecting internet traffic and creating mirror sites, both of which are associated with Doppelgänger.

### Algorithm for working with real conflicts

1. Daily monitoring of the media and social media networks aimed at identifying conflict situations.
2. Identifying hotbeds of conflict with subsequent systematic tracking of the conflict situation development dynamics.
3. Dynamic analysis of the conflict situation:
   - Identifying the conflict-generating factor, parties to the conflict, opinion leaders, positions and demands of the parties;
   - Determining the type of conflict (social, economic, political, ethnic, religious, mixed, etc.);
   - Determining the scale of the conflict and the stage of escalation (local level, regional level, national level, international level);
4. Forecasting the further course of development of the conflict situation. Determining the potential for using the conflict to implement Russia's foreign policy objectives. Selecting a strategy for further work.
5. If necessary, an artificial shift in the rhetoric of the conflict is carried out with the aim of further introducing narratives that are beneficial to Russia (if the cause and rhetoric of the conflict initially do not fit into any of the necessary narrative lines).

6. Escalation of the conflict situation using available tools (redirecting traffic, work with comments, work with influencers, analytical articles, augmented reality, mirrored media, fakes, etc.) in order to destabilize the public situation.
7. Promotion of narrative lines that are favourable to Russia, information support for the side of the conflict whose position is more in line with the interests of the Russian Federation.

Efforts to incite conflict are particularly aggressive against the so-called 'threat emanating from the West' - a label applied to any narrative that supports Ukraine or criticizes Russia's invasion. These narratives are seen as fake news, while the West's counter-FIMI efforts are framed as 'counterpropaganda.' This strategy of actively seeking out an enemy to provoke aligns closely with tactics like Operation Overload, which aimed to overwhelm fact-checkers with spurious content, draining their resources. The working method follows a structured 'algorithm', comprising processes and rules that guide the actions of SDA operators.

### Algorithm for artificial generation of conflicts

1. Monitoring and analysis of the media, social networks, and the results of sociological research to determine "pain points" and centres of heightened social and political tension.
2. Developing a "scenario" of a conflict situation, narrative lines, a strategy for "injecting" and further "igniting" the conflict by available means, and neutralizing counterpropaganda.
3. Preparing content (videos, posts, comments, exposés "augmenting reality", analytical materials, etc.).
4. Introduction of conflict-generating material through pre-determined channels (targeted or en masse).
5. Further "fuelling" of the conflict and injection of additional materials.
6. Counteracting the counterpropaganda.
7. Analysis of the results of the conflict development for further use:
    - the degree of information dissemination, viral effect;
    - the effectiveness of dissemination channels;
    - the number of views/ engagements;
    - the reaction of the social media networks' audiences;
    - the reaction of influencers, official authorities, and the media;
    - methods of counterpropaganda and their effectiveness;
    - the "life" time of an artificially generated conflict from the moment of "injection" until its final withdrawal from the agenda.

The instruments supporting these "algorithms" were similar to the capabilities that SDA had available throughout 2022-2024. The major additions were the explicit mention of chat rooms, mirror websites associated with Doppelgänger, and an emphasis on YouTube.

**1. Creatives:**

1. fake videos, documents, phone records.
2. comments in social media networks.
3. news and pseudo-news materials.
4. analytical materials.
5. memes, cartoons, gifs.
6. “Augmented reality” materials;
7. real and fake influencer quotes.
8. songs, cartoons, animation.
9. creation of chat rooms/groups to accumulate conflict participants, etc.

**2. Delivery channels:**

1. website mirrors of media channels.
2. foreign and Russian influencers.
3. bots and work with comments.
4. groups in social media networks, telegram channels.
5. YouTube and other video hosting sites, etc.

The document further presents examples of ‘narrative lines’ and how they could potentially escalate into political, ethnic, religious, international, and other types of conflicts across Germany and France. However, there is little concrete evidence of how rigorously SDA adhered to their “algorithms” or how committed they remained to the concept of “International Conflictology.” To our knowledge, there is only one follow-up document titled “Conflictology”, which lists 12 news articles from Germany, 13 from Italy, and 10 from the UK - each containing narratives that could have been potentially used to heighten tensions. **Our assessment suggests that SDA eventually abandoned this framing, as it demanded duplication of the efforts that they had already been undertaking. After all, their core activity had always been creating and amplifying conflicts**. Even if the framing didn’t work, the methods are very much central.

**Figure 18.** *The snapshots of the petitions targeting Germany and Italy, initiated by SDA.*



Another example of conflict amplification from a guerrilla perspective is a series of petition campaigns on Change.org that SDA has been running in Germany, Italy, and the UK since early 2022. One notable effort in Germany targeted the debate on the transformation of the funding process to public broadcasters ARD, ZDF, and Deutschlandradio. The petition's exact demands are deliberately unclear, and the purpose it most likely serves is to foster mistrust in the German government. It repeatedly emphasizes concerns about public media and a perceived lack of transparency in government processes. The petition is created by a self-proclaimed 'concerned journalist', who even fabricated a collective to appear more legitimate. The petition collected 27,812 verified signatures, some of which, at least on the website, appear to belong to employees of the public broadcasters in question. While some signatures may have been falsified, it seems that the petition nonetheless managed to penetrate the public discussion on the topic.

The petition targeting Italy garnered over 83,000 signatures and called for the removal of certain fuel taxes, aiming to further intensify the debate on Russian oil in the country.

## Exposure of Doppelgänger

As discussed previously, we view Doppelgänger as part of a broader campaign targeting Western support for Ukraine following the 2022 invasion, referred to as the International Comprehensive Counter Campaign (CCI). The operation created multiple fake content units designed to fuel conflicts within Western societies regarding their support for Ukraine and Ukrainian refugees. In the absence of RT and Sputnik, mirror websites and typosquatting techniques were employed on an unprecedented scale to mimic credible Western news sources and served as vehicles for content distribution. The links to the websites carrying malicious content were then disseminated through networks of social media groups and pages and amplified by a swarm of trolls.

The DOJ affidavit demonstrates that the Russian Presidential Administration, through Sergei Kiriyenko and Sofia Zakharova, exercised direction and control over the Doppelgänger mirror sites. This was through a collaboration between SDA, Structura, and Dialog, who likely provided different parts of the infrastructure. SDA provided monitoring, analysis, fake content and delivery methods, including bots. Dialog likely provided the Russian-created media brands and platforms for content distribution. The DOJ assessment is unclear on which services Structura provided and does not attribute the leasing of cybersquatted domains by four personas to one of the organisations. Since both SDA and Structura are owned and operated by Gambashidze, the distinctions may be arbitrary. However, Structura is described as a technology company and hence may be expected to perform a larger role than SDA in procuring and/or creating the mirror domains.

Doppelgänger was identified and exposed partly in April 2022 and more fully during August and September 2022. An SDA media monitoring register from autumn 2023 contains links to over 200 news articles about Doppelgänger published internationally between April 2022 and September 2023. A report included in the DOJ filing (Exhibit 2) claims that "the

'Collective West' countries are seriously concerned by the effectiveness of the [Doppelgänger] project". The document notes the use of countermeasures and summarises 15 news, government agency, and tech platform publications. Another report provides summaries with key quotes from 30 news stories from the second half of 2023 related to SDA's work on Doppelgänger. Activities that SDA appears to take credit for include:

- Rumours that Zelensky bought a $75m yacht with US aid, repeated by Senator Vance[113]
- Rumours about Zelensky's wife's luxury purchases[114]
- Rumours of Zelensky being a drug addict, repeated by US celebrities[115]
- Fake videos on TikTok contributed to the firing of Defence Minister Reznikov[116]
- Jamming of Ukrainian satellite TV channels[117]
- Introducing the phrase "Black winter" into the Western information environment[118]
- Israeli intelligence identifies Russian propaganda operations[119]
- Stars of David graffiti in France to fuel Israel-Hamas conflict[120]
- Discrediting the Paris Olympic preparations[121]
- Spreading of disinformation in Central and Latin America[122]
- Mirror websites distributed through massive spam promotions[123]
- Pro-Kremlin networks supporting AfD candidates[124]

SDA took a special interest in tracking Western discourse about Doppelgänger. A meeting between SDA and the Presidential Administration on 20 June 2023 focused on the public attribution of Doppelgänger made by French authorities a week earlier. Doppelgänger was added to the list of topics for the monitoring group to cover. A subsequent exposé by German news outlet and fact-checker Correctiv.org[125] followed a few days later; the leaks demonstrate that SDA produced caricatures, graffiti, and detailed monitoring reports on the politicians connected to the exposé as revenge. This article was one of several about Doppelgänger translated to Russian by the monitoring team, supporting the view that Doppelgänger is one part of CCI. Additionally, there are separate

113 Robinson, Sardarizadeh & Wendling, 2023
114 Chronowska, 2023
115 Myers, 2023
116 Robinson & Sardarizadeh, 2023
117 Troyan, 2023
118 @CenterCounteringDisinformation, 2023
119 Eyal, 2023
120 Khatsenkova, 2023
121 The Insider, 2023b
122 GEC, 2023
123 The Insider, 2023a
124 Bernhard, 2023
125 ibid

monitoring documents that list dozens of instances where the Doppelgänger campaign was referenced in the Western news.

At this point, revelation of Doppelgänger probably positioned SDA at a crossroads, where either their work would be shut down due to its cover being blown, or intensified due to its notoriety. The fascination quickly turned into an opportunity. On 25 July 2023, the decision was made to produce a promotional video which would be shown to the very highest levels within the Kremlin. **"Put the uniform on the employees and place them in front of computers. Infographics. We have 10 days! We need to decode and explain what we write, invent, draw based on the narratives. Take it apart."** Again, this points to the continual need to find ways to package their activities as a sales pitch to stakeholders. A week later, Sofia Zakharova said that the copywriting and monitoring processes "must" be included in the clip. The workflow concept described in the final video matches that of Team I, which indicates that the system of work was developed as part of the video scripting process. Exposure of Doppelgänger therefore became seen as evidence of impact, rather than a risk to the operation.

In the Doppelgänger video, Gambashidze is shown in a hoodie with sunglasses, which he removes to reveal a pseudo-military uniform with its own (spurious) military unit insignia of the "Russian ideological forces". The video begins with the line, "After French intelligence uttered the word Doppelgänger, there is no longer any point in hiding." At a Presidential Administration meeting later in August, the logic encompassed by the video developed into a narrative for French and German audiences in light of exposure of Doppelgänger: "Yes, this is Russian propaganda, but it is true". In other words, exposure of the campaign was rebutted with the simple argument that the narratives disseminated through all the manipulative methods described in the video, including the production of fakes, were in fact the truth.

On 19 September, Zakharova tasked SDA to **"Suggest what we should highlight from our scope of work to report upwards. Create a register of the mentions of the Doppelgänger and our work entirely in the world. Select the best for the reports."** Though the reason for this sudden requirement is not mentioned, it appears likely that the Doppelgänger revelations had created a significant enough buzz in the Kremlin for there to be an opportunity for increased resources. The meeting focused primarily on what should be included in a report to be presented to the highest authorities, and perhaps the strongest efforts yet to shape perceptions of SDA's work in defence of their activities to stakeholders.

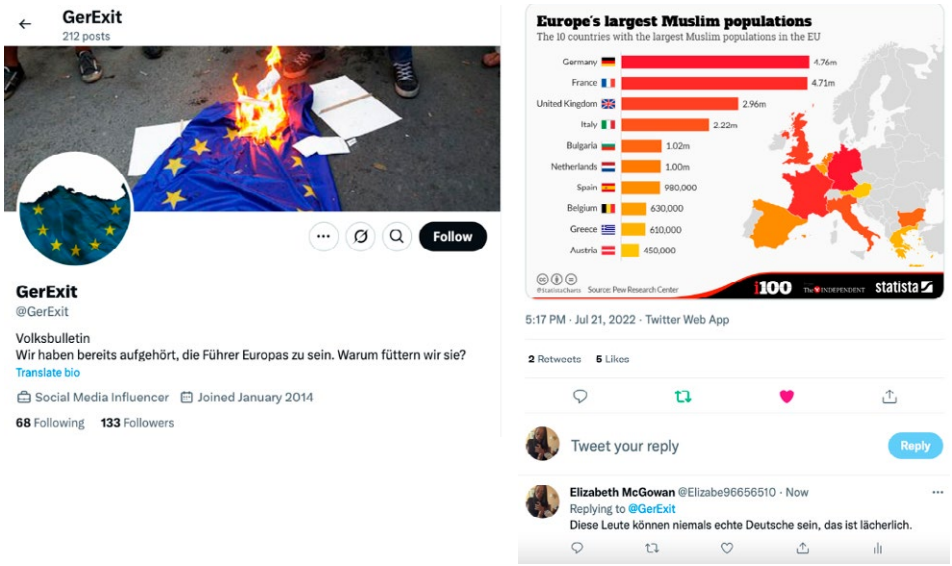
**Continuing to drive a wedge between the EU and the US – say so! Cyber weapons and cognitive war, the augmented reality factory** [referring to the production of fake materials] **which is mainly visible in Germany, France and Israel. Testing systems of attack and defence - it's an arms race. Indoctrinating the enemy in his deepest home base, partisans and guerillas, the growth of the popularity of the right-wing and non-systemic parties, fall of the ratings of the systemic ones. We can trigger China. We conduct a war on the enemy's territory, which prevents them from working to the offensive on our territory. The ability to launch a campaign in 1-3 days in any point of the world. We can work in the CIS**

**and neutral countries. Show the tools, influencers, skilfully integrated into the agenda. Prepare the report, 3-4 pages!**

A cache of documents appears to represent the outcome of these instructions. In addition to the infamous video and some PowerPoint slides describing SDA's **System of Work** (see the CCE, below), is a cover letter describing **Team Gambashidze I.A.**, and a report dated 10 October 2023 entitled **The France-Germany-Israel-America (FGIA) Project – analytical brief**. The report covers a range of claims about SDA's success, including that "over the two years of its operation, it [the CCI] has actually become the only opportunity to influence public opinion in the countries of implementation in a natural way by native promotion, without the obvious stigma of 'Russian propaganda'," and that "the narratives successfully penetrated the general discourse of the target countries". This suggests that SDA didn't want to be exposed, but that they could readily leverage the exposure into an opportunity. The opportunity compelled them to request an expansion of activities in light of the upcoming elections in the EU Parliament, Bundestag, Russia, and US. It also suggests that the primary value of their activities is the *penetration* of public discourse. Five key points were made in the document regarding their work evaluation:

- **A sustainable system of work has been formed, constantly responding to the changing situation.** The description aligns with workflow process outlined in the Team I PowerPoint, hence demonstrating the need to brand the process for the purpose of selling it to stakeholders.
- **The work of the project has been recognised as a threat in the target countries.** They argue that this can be seen in two ways: active opposition by social media factcheckers, and the release of journalistic and industry investigations of Russian disinformation campaigns. The contradiction between these statements and the earlier proposition that the CCI's work is not seen as Russian propaganda is uncommented.
- **Our narratives enter the public discourse of the target countries and are picked up by opinion leaders and the media.** This is an important claim for which any suggestion of a decline in support for Ukraine is credited to the CCI.
- According to figures given in Meta's threat reports, the **total number of reports on 'Russian propaganda' and publications on the topic of the Special Military Operation in Europe is noticeably higher in the main focus countries of the project** - France (35% of all episodes of 'disinformation') and Germany (36%). A separate report follows up the logic of using Western counter-FIMI figures as evidence of campaign impact (see below).
- **The public opinion of the residents of the target countries of the project is gradually tilting towards a reduction or complete withdrawal of support for Ukraine.** For this, SDA take credit for the results of regional elections in Germany, the crisis in the House of Representatives of the US Congress, and in trends within their commissioned IPSOS sociological surveys.

**Figure 19.** *An example of how SDA frames real facts for malicious purposes and artificially boosts its engagement metrics. The post on X, likely created by an account operated by SDA (133 followers) uses actual statistics on Muslim populations in Europe.*




**Source:** X

Another report provides a fascinating window into the convoluted methodologies employed by SDA to demonstrate impact: in this case, by using the figures from Meta and International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN) partners to examine the prevalence of their activities. In the short document **Report analysing the degree of penetration of 'Russian propaganda' in the information environments of the main European countries,** Team I posed the question, **What proportion of the total number of identified reports of fake news and disinformation in these countries is attributable to the CCI project?** The results cover 1 January – 30 September 2023 and seek to calculate (1) factchecked content attributed to Russia as a proportion of overall identified disinformation, and (2) how much of that content was created by SDA within the CCI project. Unfortunately, there is no corresponding data to show exactly which of the factchecked activities were created by SDA.

**Figure 20.** *Data from reports analysing the degree of penetration of 'Russian propaganda' in the information environments of the main European countries.*

| | Germany | France | Italy | Spain |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Source | https://correctiv.org/faktencheck/ | https://factuel.afp.com/ | https://facta.news/antibufale/ | https://maldita.es/malditobulo/1/ |
| Most popular topics | green agenda and covid | migrants and covid | covid | covid, celebrities, fraud |
| Russian propaganda | 79 out of 225 = 35% | 46 out of 126 = 36% | 75 out of 489 = 15% | 24 out of 1090 = 2.2% |
| Mentioned CCI activities | 35 out of 225 = 16% | 19 out of 126 = 15% | 23 out of 489 = 5% | 2 out of 1090 = less than 1% |

**Source:** SDA

The study found that CCI products are much more visible in the information field of the main countries - France and Germany. They interpreted this as meaning that **"the Project's products, in addition to achieving its main objectives, also increase the number of publications in the country's media that differ from the mainstream discourse (these are the publications that are picked up by fact-checkers and considered pro-Russian propaganda)"**. This was seen as providing alternative points of view within the information environments of the countries, provoking differences of opinion, undermining the credibility of mainstream news and official information sources, and "encouraging users to seek alternative sources of information". As a consequence, the authors recommended focusing more on Italy and Spain, where there is less recognition of the threat Russian disinformation poses, fewer countermeasures in place, and less interest in factchecking Russian propaganda.

Two key points emerge from this short study. The first is that it is possible to develop a sense of proportion regarding SDA's role in the Kremlin's foreign interference infrastructure. In Germany, 44% of identified Russian propaganda is sourced to SDA; in France, 41%, and Italy 31%.[126] Given the size and established presence of (albeit, sanctioned) channels such as RT and Sputnik, these figures show a significant market share for SDA's methods in little over a year, successfully filling the information void caused by sanctions against Russian state media. Indeed, a July 2022 Presidential Administration meeting included the suggestion: "Bypassing sanctions: they don't need to be lifted, they need to be bypassed".[127] From this perspective, a Facebook ad spend of $50,000 over two months, and some investment in bots and fake mirror sites represents exceptional value for money.

Second, SDA views the information war in terms of penetration of enemy

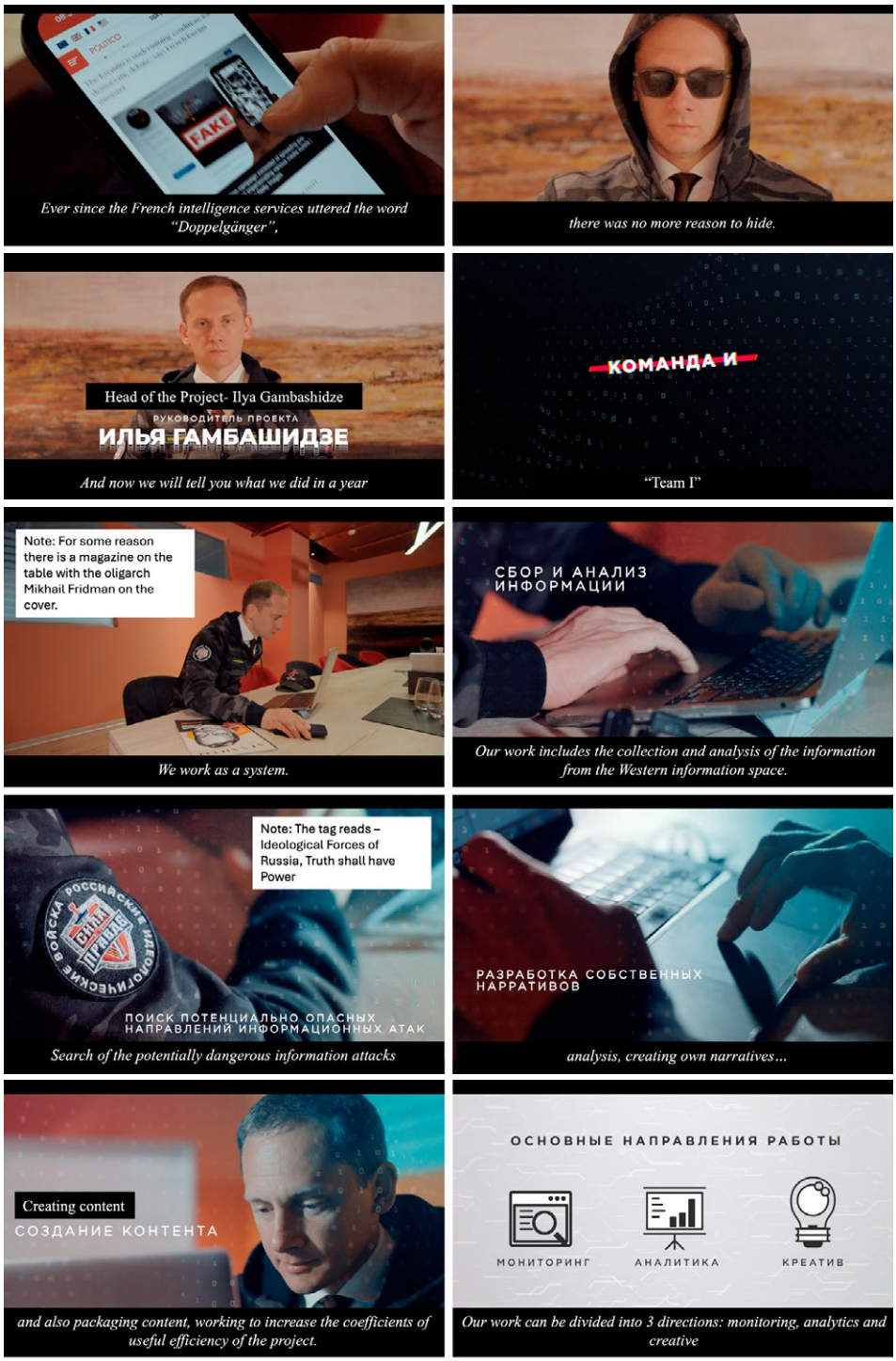
126 Note that we are unable to verify these assessments.

127 Department of Justice, p.23

territory, of the information environment. They are less concerned with normal public relations and marketing metrics such as sentiment, and more with the availability of the Russian perspective, even if that perspective is carried by obvious bots or factchecking organisations who debunk it. In other words, at the most fundamental level of achievement, **they simply want their narratives in Western political discourse, regardless of whether that content lacks credibility, or is exposed, corrected, or discredited**. Similarly to the advertising field, awareness is the bare minimum, superseded by the more desirable goals of educating, calls to action, and behaviour change. Awareness is the easiest to measure and the first acceptable goal. Usually, public relations bureaus care about who carries the message, because the creditability of the messenger is considered to be key to successful delivery. SDA instead take a hybrid view that favours market share (like an advertising company), while also adopting military and intelligence perspectives. They want market share in order to fight the information war on Western 'territory' (which refers to the information environment and cognitive functions of Westerners), using all available methods to support "guerillas" and destabilise the "rear-guard".

SDA embraced the Western branding of their work as Operation Doppelgänger. They tracked the discussions and developed methodologies to use coverage of the campaign to demonstrate their impact. Factchecked information was leveraged to become as much a part of their dissemination as messages carried by bots, own branded news sites, and mirror websites. **The innovative aspect of Doppelgänger that caught the West's imagination was a small part of a delivery mechanism designed to grab market share.** The exposé of Doppelgänger became a sales opportunity that almost certainly helped SDA to gain more resources from the Kremlin to intensify their activities. However, there is no evidence that they ever referred to their work internally using this term or that they considered the mirror sites to be a particularly outstanding asset, and they certainly never distinguished between operations in the way that Western analysts have.

**Image.** *Frames from the first 50 seconds of Team I's presentation video. Length of the video 3,37 minutes. Below each frame is the translation of the voiceover, translated manually.*




**Source:** SDA

# 3.2 The Comprehensive Counter-Campaign against Europe

Following the exposure of Doppelgänger and the strategic manner in which SDA leveraged the situation to its advantage, the company experienced significant growth, expanding both its funding and project portfolio. Among its new tasks was a campaign targeting Ukraine, which will be discussed later. The International Comprehensive Counter-Campaign (CCI) was rebranded as the Comprehensive Counter-Campaign against Europe (CCE). However, in practice, distinguishing between activities targeting the United States, the United Kingdom, and Israel under the CCI and CCE frameworks remains challenging. Even in their own documents, SDA often refer to the CCE as the "international campaign" or sometimes as "FGIA" – France, Germany, Israel, America. Since May 2023, a substantial campaign aimed at influencing the 2024 European Parliament elections was undertaken within the scope of the CCE.

The team within SDA overseeing the CCE was designated as **Team I**, or "Team Ilya," named after and led by SDA owner Ilya Andreevich Gambashidze. This team functioned as the principal operational unit within SDA. Another division, known as Center S, also operated within the organisation and is responsible for the campaign targeting Ukraine; however, there was considerable overlap between the two in terms of personnel, and capabilities, to the point that the distinctions may be arbitrary. The core mandate of Team I involved a series of operations designed to shape perceptions of the war in Ukraine for Western audiences, with a particular focus on influencing the EU, UK, US, and Israel; efforts that likely remain ongoing.

## The Transformation of the CCI into the CCE

As highlighted throughout this report, the comprehensive counter-campaign against the West, known as CCI, was SDA's pilot project in collaboration with Kiriyenko. After Doppelgänger's exposure, the CCI was rebranded as a counter-campaign against Europe (CCE). However, multiple documents reveal that the distinction between CCI and CCE is largely nominal, and the goals and list of target countries is adjusted on an ongoing basis depending on the team's shifting priorities.

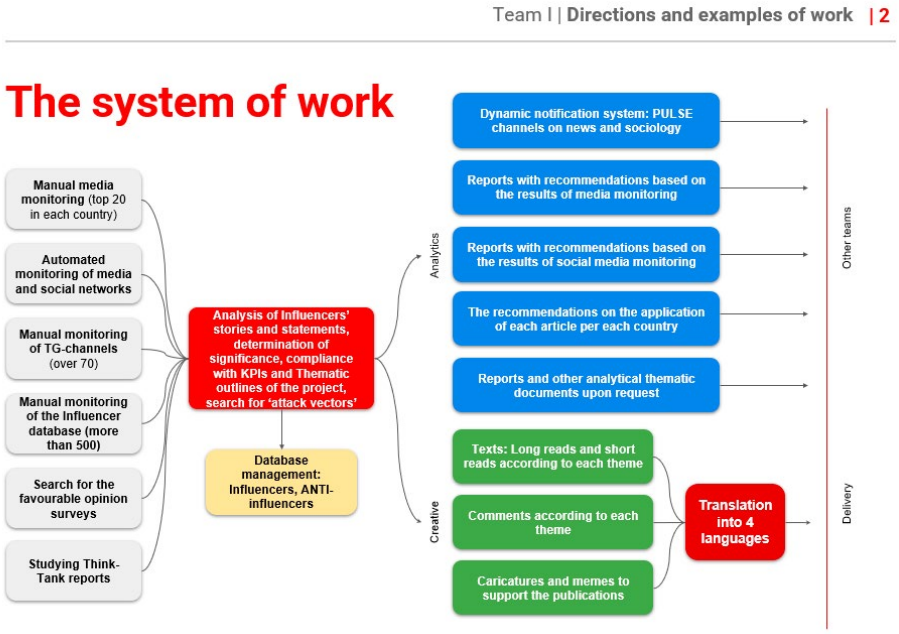
A significant strategic shift in the campaign's approach occurred between 2022 and 2023. In its initial phase, the international campaign primarily aimed to weaken support of Ukraine by undermining its reputation. This mainly involved discrediting Ukrainian refugees, military, and political leadership. By 2023, however, the topic of Ukrainian refugees was largely abandoned in favour of amplifying economic grievances and political divisions within European societies and seeking support on the edges of the European political spectrum. The 2024 European Parliamentary Elections posed a perfect opportunity to amplify a discourse of fear and division and promote favourable voices, which became the focal point of their communicative efforts.

Team I's presentation of its work process and the actual work process differ from each other in many ways that will be discussed in a separate

chapter dedicated to SDA's capabilities. Here, however, we present the Team I's descriptive workflow designed to pitch its services to potential customers, also entitled The System of Work. It is worth noting that the proposed process is different to that of Center S's presentation of the CCU, predominantly offering a simpler, more streamlined framework. This workflow chart was likely developed first, at around the same time as the infamous promotional video was produced. The implementation plan is also different. For example, Team I appears to work more in the comments section of posts, producing 'live commenting' and actively engaging in social-political discussions.

1. **Monitoring-analytical products:** a series of capabilities overlapping with those available to Center S. In difference to Center S, these are described as a combination of manual and automated monitoring instruments. Rather than the comprehensive approach to surveilling Ukraine's information environment used in the CCU, the CCE focuses on traditional media, social media, influencers, and surveys across multiple markets.
2. **Analysis and compliance:** the biggest distinction to Center S' process is in how planning and organisation are described. For the CCU, the process is outlined in detail as a "meaning making factory", whereas it is presented as more of a black box in the CCE. Of particular note in Team I's process are assessments of the significance of influencer statements, emphasis of activities targeting influencers and "anti-influencers", and consideration of "attack vectors" linked to the project's thematic lines.
3. **Analytics:** the CCE has a separate section on analytics later in the process, mostly describing reports giving recommendations based on available data. The image appears to suggest that these activities are either produced by, or on behalf of, other SDA teams. It is unclear why the analytics component is treated separately to the previous analytical steps; it is possible that Team I is attempting to emphasise this aspect of its capabilities.
4. **Creative:** involves publishing the 'long-reads' and 'short-reads' on social media, as well as creating memes, videos, caricatures, and fakes targeting the elections. In addition, the team has capabilities for working in comment sections with "live commenting", actively participating in social-political discussions, and quickly translating content. Use of "explosive" fakes and graffiti-campaigns are also mentioned.
5. **Delivery:** in difference to Center S, delivery is not covered in any detail, nor is evaluation. However, both are part of the work process.

**Figure 21.** *Slide from a PowerPoint describing Team I's direction and examples of work.*




**Source:** SDA

## The European Parliamentary Elections

From May 2023, the CCE campaign had the high-level goal of **securing power within the European Parliament for parties most likely to promote resumed cooperation with the Russian Federation.** The strategy was to prioritise target member states based on MEP seats per country (Germany, France, Spain, Italy, and Poland together accounted for 367 of 720 seats). The parties earmarked for support belonged to the "Identity and Democracy" (ID) association of mostly far-right, nationalist, and Eurosceptic political parties from several member states, and particularly Alternative für Deutschland (AfD)[128] and France's National Rally (Rassemblement National). It should be noted that ID association members were a mix of pro-Ukrainian and pro-Putin supporters.[129] The overall goal was therefore described as:

**To conduct a comprehensive counter-campaign against liberal globalists, their platform and prominent representatives, before the elections to the European Parliament in the countries with the largest representation in this electoral body: Germany, France, Spain, Italy, Poland.**

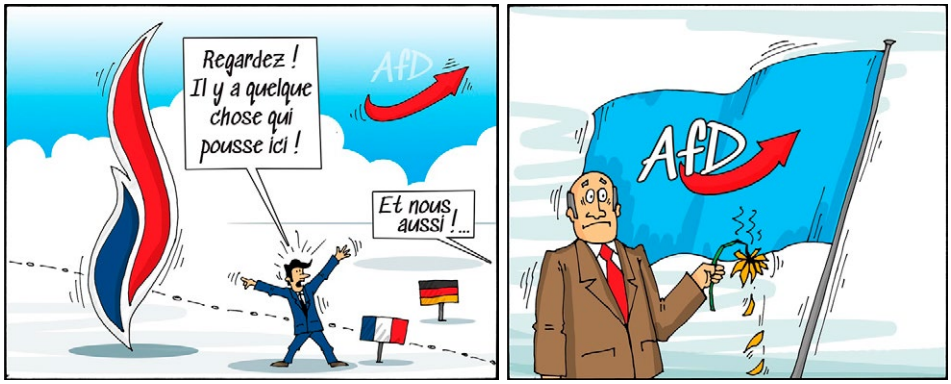
The goal is broken down into the following thematic lines designed to discredit the policies of the European Parliamentary majority, as well as its leaders, and especially Ursula von der Leyen. Thematic lines, as they call them in internal documents, serve as the *narratives* or *opinions* that SDA wants to penetrate the information environment and ultimately see repeated by their target audiences. All creative outputs are expected to be

128 Prior to the elections, AfD would leave ID.

129 Rij, 2024; Maftean, 2024

aligned with at least one of the thematic lines. The ones below appear in the initial proposal document but were later changed.

**Image.** *Cartoons supporting the far-right parties of France and Germany. Created in summer 2023*




**Source:** SDA

1. Liberals and globalists sow fear, they need our panic. We must be afraid of war. Afraid of climate catastrophes. Afraid of deadly viruses. Afraid of the death of Europe, of an attack by Russia. Through fear, they want our submission. **Enough to live in global fear. It's time to make a choice in favour of healthy forces!**
2. Abstract values are imposed on us, our way of life is being destroyed, our children are going crazy. Gender equality, the rights of transgender people and sexual minorities, climate change, freedom and democracy - these are the things for which they are ready to ignite terrible wars. Time has no power over true values: **family, well-being, the interests of the country, life in peace and good neighbourliness. This is what we should strive for!**
3. All the successes of liberal globalists are in words alone. In reality, everything is bad. Food crisis and destruction of agriculture, unleashing of a global war, collapse of the energy sector, frantic inflation, record unemployment. **Let's face it. They are leading Europe to economic ruin! We must protect the economic interests of European countries!**
4. The strategy of the globalists in the EP is to turn Europe into a totalitarian military camp. These elections will be the last. They will be cancelled, just like in Ukraine. We will work under the barrels of machine guns to provide for the appetites of the military. We will receive food on ration cards, and military service will be mandatory for everyone. We will live in eternal fear of a nuclear strike by the enemy. **We need an alternative - a peace plan and diplomacy!**

Unlike the project targeting Ukraine (CCU), where SDA's communication goals and thematic lines remain consistent throughout its operations, the ones directed at Western audiences appear less rigid. These initial thematic lines were modified and put in relation to measurable KPIs or Key Performance Indicators. Below is the example of how KPIs are grouped with the thematic lines by Team I for the campaign targeting the European

Parliament election in 2024. The table was created by the authors, with formatting preserved from the original text. It is important to note that each thematic line does not correspond to a specific KPI; rather, all thematic lines are linked to all KPIs.

| Country | KPI (Objectives) | Thematic Lines that Enable the Advancement of the Objectives |
|---|---|---|
| Germany | **Increase in the AfD party rating to 20%** of the votes in a monthly voter survey (for example, a YouGov survey or any other survey whose results are published in the European Union and are trusted) | **The US** is waging an economic and hybrid war against Russia **at the expense of Germany**. Anti-Russian decisions by NATO and the EU harm the Germans first and foremost; |
| | The growth of the **"fear of the future"** indicator in surveys by large pollsters such as Insa is **above 50%** | Germany **has plunged into the deepest economic and social crisis in modern history.** The population is becoming impoverished. Millions are losing their jobs, tens of thousands will die of cold this winter; |
| | The number of Germans who are **unwilling to sacrifice their well-being** for the sake of victory over Russia has grown to **over 55%;** | **The USA uses anti-Russian measures to ruin Germany** and the German people. The best example of this is the flight of capital and production from Germany to the USA; |
| | Polarization of German society - **unwillingness to vote for the Greens above 40%.** | **Germany is left unarmed** - everything that could be given to Ukraine has already been given. These weapons are used to commit war crimes, kill civilians, and end up on the black market. |
| France | **The rating of the "National Rally"** (former party of Le Pen) should be **20%;** | The US is waging an economic and hybrid war against Russia **at the expense of Europe. The anti-Russian decisions** of the EU and the NATO **harm France** and the French; |
| | The growth of the **"fear of the future"** indicator in surveys by large pollsters such as Insa is **above 50%;** | France risks **plunging into the deepest economic and social crisis in modern history.** Millions are losing their jobs, tens of thousands will die from the cold this winter; |
| | The number of French people **who are not willing to sacrifice their well-being** for the sake of victory over Russia (or for the sake of Ukraine) **must exceed 44%;** | **The US and Great Britain**, with the help of the "greens", **are preventing France from becoming an energy donor and hegemon of a united Europe.** The future belongs to nuclear energy, down with the "windmills"! |
| | The number of French people **voting to leave the NATO** military organisation **must exceed 25%.** | The government is not doing enough to keep business and production capacity in France. If things continue like this, **everything will go to the US;** |
| | | **France risks being left unarmed** - everything that could have been given to Ukraine has already been given. These weapons are used to commit war crimes, kill civilians, and end up on the black market; |
| | | France must **return to the policies of De Gaulle**, become an independent great power and leave the NATO military organisation. |

As seen from the table above, the KPIs and the thematic lines for France and Germany are very similar, and although they change throughout the documents, they follow these basic principles. In later documents, Team I claims that the thematic lines for the CCE created in May 2023 are their own

creation (as opposed to the directives from the Kremlin) and are based on two months of monitoring the international media of the target countries and Ukraine. Below are the thematic lines from documents dated May 2023, June 2023 and June 2024. Thematic lines are presented in a table to track their transformation through time.

| Country | TL | May 31, 2023 | June 9, 2023 | June 25, 2024 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Germany and France | K1 | **The war is over. Peace after war. #Kriegsende #AdieuAuxArmes** This thematic line sought direct online discussions about the topic of peace. | **What will happen to Ukraine after the end of hostilities.** Key points: what the Russians have already taken, they will not return. They do not plan to advance further. | **A path to self – must leave the EU and the NATO** |
| | K2 | **The change of power in Ukraine. #OutgoingZelensky** This line focused on discussions on alternative candidates for the presidency of Ukraine. | **The plan to change the regime is being implemented through NABU (The National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine).** Key points: The NABU is not controlled by the president. The country is already effectively under the external control of the United States. **Alternatives to Zelensky.** Key points: different people in Zelensky's entourage could become the new president of Ukraine. These are Zaluzhny, Sikorsky, Budanov, Arestovich and even Zelenskaya. But in the interests of the United States - only Zaluzhny. | |
| | K3 | **Get America out of Europe! #GetAmericaOutofEurope** These efforts primarily sought to highlight the US' negative influence on Europe. | **US biological laboratories from Ukraine will be moved to Europe.** Key points: provoking fear of pandemics and super-viruses in Europe. Discussion of issues - where will highly qualified European scientists and employees work after enterprises and laboratories are moved to the USA? Discussion of the parameters of the upcoming "super-epidemic". Statements recognizing the presence of US biological laboratories in many countries on different continents. | |
| | K4 | **Sanctions against Russia are sanctions against the entire world. The dream is over. #Traumkaputt #la fin du rêve.** This thematic line sought to discuss the "day after[130]" | **War Tax** Key points: after the end of the Ukrainian conflict, the US will drag Europe into a new sanctions war, this time against China. This will significantly worsen the economic situation of European countries. | **The war in Ukraine is ruining our economy** |

130 The first days of peace after the war.

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Israel** | **K1** | **The war is over. Peace after war.** | **Consequences of countries' involvement in the Ukrainian conflict.** Key points: forecasts and parallels for Israel in the case of arms supplies and other assistance. **Undermining trust in the US as a guarantor of Israel's security** | |
| | **K2** | The change of power in Ukraine. #OutgoingZelensky | **Alternatives to Zelensky.** Key points: different people in Zelensky's entourage could become the new president of Ukraine. These are Zaluzhny, Sikorsky, Budanov, Arestovich and even Zelenskaya. But in the interests of the United States - only Zaluzhny. | |
| **Poland** | **K1** | | | A path to self – must leave the EU and the NATO |
| **USA** | **K1** | | Democrats vs. Republicans: Playing on Contradictions | |
| | **K2** | | Alternatives to Zelensky | |

At some point during the autumn of 2023, Team I decided to add Poland and Italy to its target countries. The rationale for Italy was that "Meloni's position is important in the EU"; for Poland, "It is the vanguard of the NATO and the EU against Russia". The same document, named **The Proposal to Modernise the Project**, reveals SDA's strategy to influence countries by targeting their Russian population and ethnic minorities, such as Arabs, Turks or Ukrainians. The document groups ethnic groups within countries as following:

- France: Moroccans, Algerians and Arabs in general; Russians/Ukrainians.
- Germany: Turks; Russians/Ukranians.
- Israel – "Russians"
- USA – "Russians", Jews, Asians.
- Italy – Russians, Arabs.

Team I proposed to target these groups by creating tailored news media outlets with corresponding Telegram channels. Here we can see SDA's intention to create a user journey, with the aim of redirecting their target audiences to a Telegram group where it's easiest to keep their attention and to evade bans:

**In all cases (pseudo-quasi) media must have a website and a telegram channel, and also be represented on X, and Facebook. In all cases, they must be indexed by Google. It is easy to see that in this way the project will intersect with the work on the opposition.** [Note: Unclear what they mean by "work on opposition", but they could mean political parties and personalities they are supporting].

The same document emphasises the importance of crafting narratives to support politicians like Marine Le Pen, Sahra Wagenknecht, members of the AfD, and others, referring to them condescendingly as "Putin-Verstehers" — individuals who "understand" or refrain from criticising Putin. Additionally, the document suggests launching a new, permanent thematic line or campaign aimed at portraying how the USA has allegedly betrayed various countries.

It becomes clear that Team I does not fully rely on their research on the West, despite claiming to have conducted months of analytical work to develop their thematic lines. Nor do they appear to have an ideological patron in the Kremlin who could dictate consistent narratives in the way that supports the CCU. Instead, backed by substantial budgets, they adopt a "whatever sticks" approach, continuously testing and adjusting narratives based on what gains traction.

One of the narratives that failed to 'stick' targeted Israel, portraying Zelensky as a Nazi. During the spring of 2023, SDA's Team I decided to drop it, recognising it as both irrelevant and implausible to Israeli audiences. The team concluded that Israelis would be more likely to believe Zelensky was a puppet of the USA rather than the leader of a Nazi state. Below are some cartoons created in the summer of 2023. According to the documents at hand, we suggest that the team likely dropped the failing narrative several months after the initial proposal.

Similarly, during a meeting on 31 January 2024, Team I decided to counter the narrative that Russia is 'evil'. The document states, 'We can't scare them, it harms us.' Instead, the 'pragmatic dialogue' narrative was proposed, emphasizing the idea that if one engages with Russia diplomatically, conflict can be avoided, and something can be gained. The protocol also outlines two additional narratives that were proposed. The first positions Russia as a heroic nation in contrast to the USA. The second portrays the USA as the primary beneficiary of wars, pushing the message that 'the USA is worse than Russia.'

**Image.** *Cartoons supporting the failed narrative targeting Israel, June, July, August 2023.*



**Source:** SDA

Excerpts from the document **Graffiti ideas for the Arab-Israel conflict**:

- Palestinians from the Gaza Strip discuss the situation: "There is no water, gas, electricity, food, what to do? Let's run to Europe!" Text in German.
- Advertisement: "I'm exchanging a captured Israeli general for President Zelensky." Text in Arabic and German.

- A stereotypical Arab terrorist (the image of an ISIS fighter) holds in his hand the severed head of the leader of the country where the graffiti is located.
- Flags of the USA and Israel on one side, flags of Libya and Iran on the other. Slogan: East vs. West, Welcome to the bloodfest!
- The boy should be crying too (referring to the image below).
- Paint "Israel Decides" in Arab quarters (referring to the image below).

**Image.** *Visual excerpts from the document "Graffiti ideas for the Arab-Israel conflict".*




**Source:** SDA

## Claimed impact

In a note reporting on the results of the European Parliamentary Elections, SDA wrote that the sharp rise in far right and extremist parties would lead to more nationalism and less unity within the EU. According to SDA, these results were widely considered to have been caused by **the hand of the Kremlin,** with the election results **directly linked to Russian propaganda activities, which disorients the citizens of the European Union.** It then cites a translation of an interview by EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell, who shortly before the election claimed that *Russian-sponsored campaigns that flood the EU's information space with deceptive content pose a threat to the way we are used to conducting our democratic debate, especially during elections.*[131] In other words, it used high-level EU statements about Russian information influence operations to demonstrate impact.

Continuing in this theme, the document cites the work of European fact checkers to claim that EU citizens subjected to SDA disinformation **voted against the policies of the current EU leadership.** In fact, a major principle of the evaluation is to emphasise the role of counter-FIMI efforts as disseminators of Russian agitation. The assessment continues: **In general, the panicky assessment of Russia's influence on the European Parliament elections on the part of the European Union officials is consistent with the activity that was displayed within the framework of our project.** On this basis, SDA could **state a serious success of the campaign in social networks, thanks to which the number of those voting**

131 Chan & Cook, 2024

for the right-wing and traditionalists increased and the protest of those voting for the left-wing, globalists and socialists decreased.

This was balanced against recognition that the EU Parliament would, for the foreseeable future, remain pro-Ukrainian. However, from SDA's perspective, On the whole, the overall success of the right-wing in the European elections is now perceived throughout the world as a success of Russian foreign policy and, moreover, a success of Russian propaganda.

**Reframing "Peace", excerpt from the meeting protocol 19 March 2023:**

Zelenskyi's rating is growing in France, we need to change this. Make banners and test them in the comments sections (they want to put them up later as physical banners):

- "Someone else's war"
- "Europe needs peace"
- "Peace through dialogue"
- "Europe for peace"

Narratives for the week:

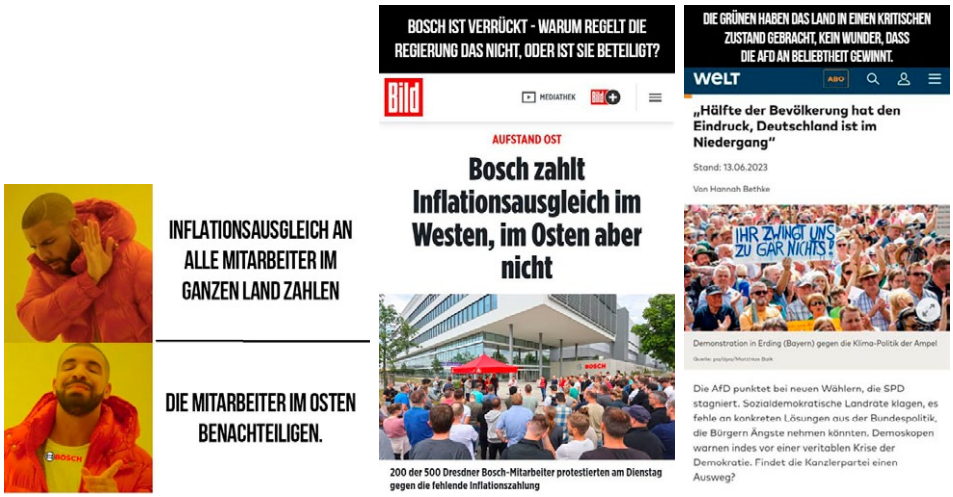
- Choose the Right-wing - choose peace in Europe.
- Discrediting politicians: Borrell, von der Leyen, faces of the war party in Europe.

**Image.** *Cartoons mocking European leaders created by SDA for the EU parliamentary elections.*




**Source:** SDA

**Image.** *Content amplifying divisions between the East and the West Germany and supporting AfD. June 2023. The articles are real.*




**Source:** Das Bild, Die Welt

## The future of the CCE

In June 2024, Facebook temporarily disabled the paid political advertising mechanism that SDA had heavily relied on. The meeting protocol of Team I from 24 June 2024 begins with concerns about the bans on their paid political ads in Germany, France, Poland, and Italy. While Germany appears to be “100% turned off,” the team hoped to exploit potential loopholes in the other countries by testing how many political terms they could include while still qualifying as non-political ads to circumvent the bans. The team claimed that all other content is distributed freely, even videos, but that evading political themes altogether is not a sustainable strategy:

Any other content is going well.

The videos are going well: cats, our content is cats. “But we won’t be able to do that much”

Documents suggest that Team I decided to change its thematic lines after the EU parliamentary elections and work in two main directions:

K1: the path to ourselves: we must leave the EU and NATO.

K2: the war in Ukraine will destroy the economy (Germany, France, Poland).

They seem more or less confident about these two narratives but less sure about some other, undisclosed thematic lines they were working on. It appears they had a meeting scheduled soon after with the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MID), where they planned to present all their narratives in the hope of receiving some guidance or advice.

The final meeting notes from June 2024 also reveal that SDA continued to create mirror websites, despite their discovery some two years earlier. According to the document, they considered shifting focus from mirroring news websites to mirroring the websites of universities and other organisations. Below is the excerpt of the discussion:

**!List of resources: ~ 50 where to place, which mirrors** [Note: referring to the mirror sites they already have].

**! Look at universities! Not the media. Should we do mirrors? prepare.**

**Ecology, education, psychology, cooking, culture, sports, economics, entertainment, medicine, games, technology, history, conspiracy, media reviews, cinema, celebrities, sx** [unclear], **pharmaceuticals, religion.**

**+ ! Make posts without mirrors. Just from celebrities. Give a list! (don't forget porn stars)**

It is unclear what their exact intent is, but the team is tasked with looking into the profiles of porn platforms, such as Hustler or Maxime, and porn stars, as well as casinos. It seems that they were exploring experiments with alternative influencers and digital platforms they could hijack for their discourse.

Another meeting took place day after, on 25 June 2024. The document reveals that the team had two of its narratives approved by Vladimir Tabak (mentioned as VT), which suggests that the hierarchy of decision-making within the CCE campaign is not as well-defined as the CCU.

**Yesterday's KPIs were approved at VT level. They will go only to the MFA.**

**K1 for France and Germany - Path to yourself: France and Germany must leave the EU and NATO.**

**K2 for France and Germany - War in Ukraine destroys the economy of Germany and France.**

**The rest remains as it was.**

**K1 for Poland - Path to self: Poland must leave the EU and NATO.**

**Do not touch Türkiye and Israel.**

As for the problem with FB ads, it seems that Team I found a short-term solution to it by pushing content on Twitter (X) and Tik-Tok, and amplify it by 'live comments':

**Tik Tok: smart videos are starting to gain traction.**

**Twitter and Tik Tok — it started to work.**

**Twitter — the targets started to work, then they changed the algorithms again. We pump up new accounts, we give live comments. not from bots. The algorithms then do not allow the accounts to be considered bots.**

Team I also claims to conduct surveys every two weeks. They are also preparing to publish some of their surveys, but covertly, without disclosing their true identity:

**+ additional 7 questions for an open survey - will be published. They don't know that they work with the Russian Federation.**

The last available protocol of the Team I is dated 2 July 2024 and documents a somewhat chaotic meeting. It seems that the countermeasures undertaken by some Western states were posing challenges to the Team's dissemination strategy. They therefore look for loopholes to circumvent the bans, listing countries that they can use to reach their audiences indirectly:

30-40% will pass through Africa. There are no restrictions there.

Moldova and Romania - through them we can enter France.

Armenia - we can enter France.

60-70% - we continue to work in the main country.

Other challenges include falling behind on the creation of mirror websites and delivering other content. They also struggled to engage European youth and could not favourably interpret the data of their surveys. In response, Sofia Zakharova demanded new surveys and projects focused on youth. Additionally, the meeting protocol underscores the team's preference for working on Telegram and their intent to design a user journey that directs readers to their Telegram channels.

## 3.3 The Comprehensive Counter-Campaign against Ukraine

Kiriyenko tasked SDA with the campaign targeting Ukraine following the success of the CCI and the exposure of Doppelgänger. The objectives were laid out by Kremlin itself, and an additional Kremlin-resident political ideologist Dmitriy Kharichev was attached to the project as a supervisor.[132] In response, SDA swiftly established a dedicated unit within its structure, called it Center S, and assigned more than half of its 107 employees to the initiative. Their project was called the **Comprehensive Counter-Campaign against Ukraine** (CCU), and it overlapped with another Ukraine-focused project called **Other Ukraine**, which was an informational-analytical accompaniment of Viktor Medvedchuk's Kremlin-backed political movement of the same name (see 3.4).

### Strategy

Center S describes its main goal as:

**To shape public opinion in Ukraine, favourable for achieving the goals and objectives of the Special Military Operation, as well as future bilateral relations between Russia and Ukraine.**

This overall goal demonstrates that Center S is integrated into the Russian war effort, with a focus on the information and political domains. A first observation is that the framing of a "Counter-Campaign" suggests that the Kremlin was on the backfoot. Second, the emphasis on the future demonstrates a long-term commitment to establishing Russian superiority in the Ukrainian information environment, to the extent that a Kremlin-backed figure such as Medvedchuk could create a new political regime should conditions on the ground allow. The campaign aims to pave the way for this, which suggests that, despite recognition of the invasion going poorly, the Kremlin's unrealistic political goals still dictated the information influence activities.

The goal is broken down into the following tasks:

1. **Comprehensive and continuous monitoring of Ukraine's information environment.**

132 https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2024/02/16/russian-disinformation-zelensky-zaluzhny/

2. **Analytical support for the work of project teams working with Ukrainian audiences.**
3. **Timely recognition and suppression of anti-Russian narratives formed in Ukraine's information environment, pre-empting of the enemy's informational and political operations.**
4. **Development and implementation of integrated informational and political operations.**
5. **Ensuring continuous production of up-to-date multi-format content.**
6. **Delivery of content to Ukrainian citizens using various communication channels.**
7. **Control of quantitative and qualitative indicators of content delivery, collection and analysis of audience response.**

These tasks demonstrate that Center S is organised according to a structured work process that assures top-down strategic oversight. This demonstrates an intention to be integrated into the Kremlin's military-political objectives using analysis and production of information as an instrument of war. Key to this is suppression of Ukrainian informational and political content, and the continuous delivery of pro-Kremlin content, all meticulously quantified and assessed to demonstrate impact. The idea of "communications controlling", a form of auditing that adapts new public management techniques into the communication process, is integral to the proposal.

To achieve these tasks, four 'campaigns', 'attack vectors' or 'thematic lines' were established. Every piece of content within the CCU is identified as belonging to one of these thematic lines. This enables all outputs to be aligned with the strategic level.

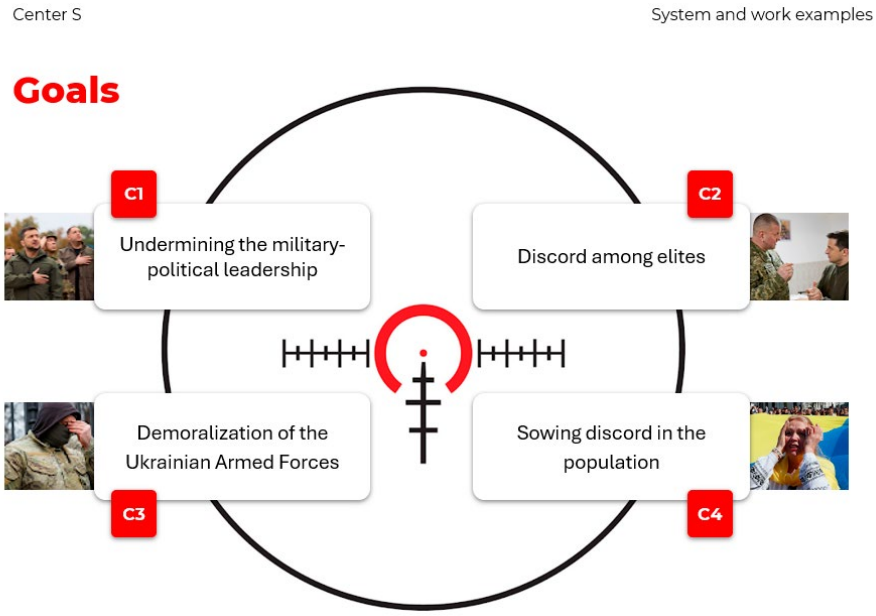
**Campaign #1 (K1) – Undermining the military-political leadership.** This thematic line sought to decrease trust in, discredit and ridicule Zelensky, the Ukrainian government, and the military command; e.g. SDA took credit for efforts to amplify rumours of corruption in the procurement of food and equipment for the Armed Forces of Ukraine and sought to connect it to a change of leadership of the Ministry of Defence.

**Campaign #2 (K2) – Discord among elites.** This line focused on exploiting mistrust in elites and differences of opinion between public figures, particularly through amplifying tensions between Ukraine and Poland and encouraging resignations and public conflicts; e.g. SDA aimed to exacerbate possible rifts between Zelensky, Zaluzhnyi, and Klitschko.

**Campaign #3 (K3) – Demoralization of the Ukrainian Armed Forces (ВСУ).** These efforts primarily sought to degrade the armed forces' will to fight, increase the number of captives, deserters, and general in-fighting within the military; e.g. by amplifying the complaints of unfair conscription leading to increased draft dodging.

**Campaign #4 (K4) – Sowing discord in the population.** This thematic line sought to degrade the Ukrainian public's confidence in social cohesion, the country's leadership, the conduct of the war, and the overall will to defend; e.g. by spreading rumours of cholera in some cities.

**Figure 22.** *Image used by SDA to demonstrate its campaign goals.*



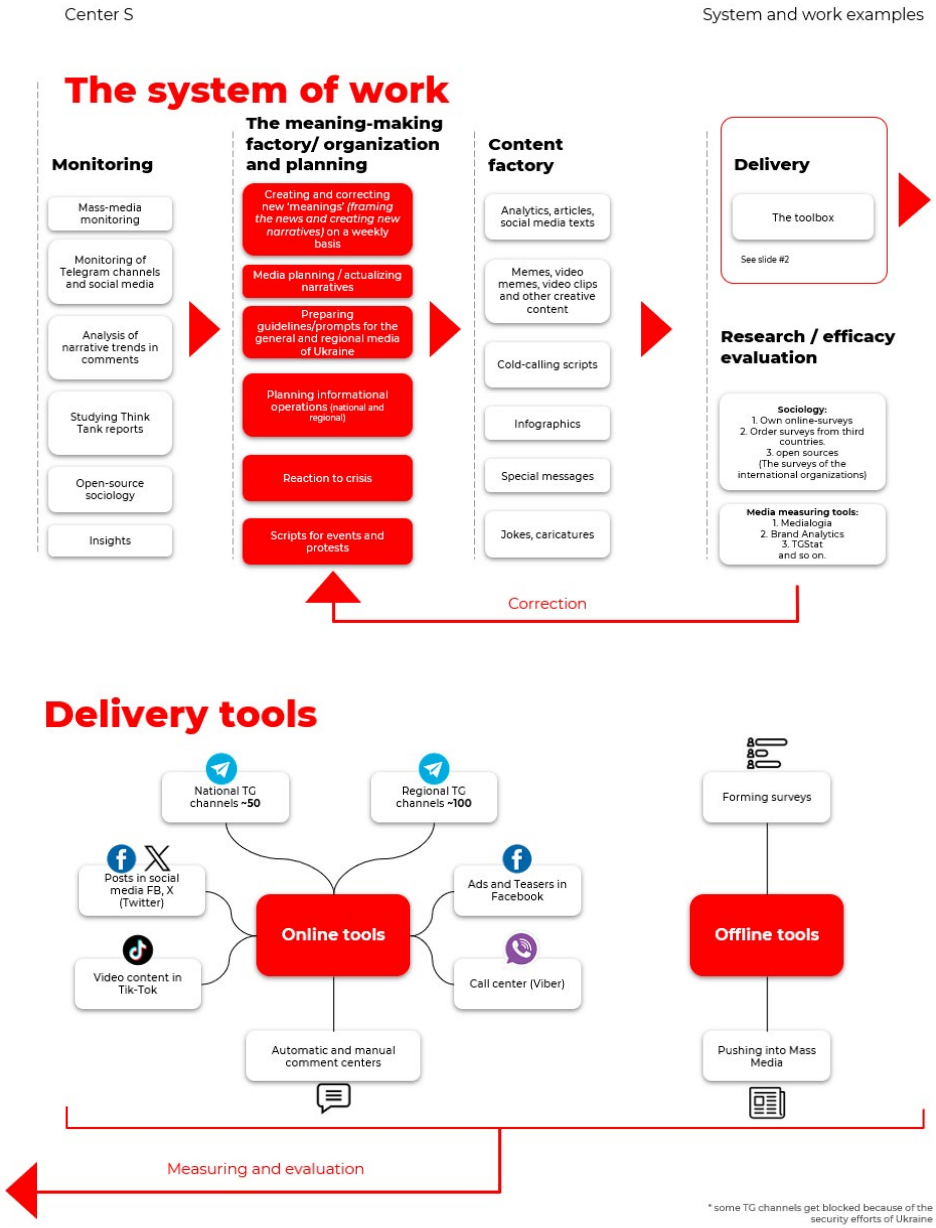

## Work process & tools

Like many public relations, advertising, and strategic communication companies, Center S described its working methods within a conceptual framework which it designated as its "System of work". The first thing to note is that the "system of work" is not a 1:1 representation of the actual tools or work processes, but rather a reimagining of the process designed to appeal to potential customers. It aims to offer coherence and a unique corporate identity for SDA. The system of work refers to five components (see Figure below), which are further broken down into specific instruments. The instruments are discussed in greater detail below.

1. **Monitoring-analytical products**: a series of instruments for creating the overall situational awareness orientation within the Ukrainian information environment. Monitoring-analytical products are a mixture of raw data and analysis, collected from a variety of sources and often presented in raw form as Excel sheets, and in analysed form through "dashboards", which are visual representations of the data.
2. **'The meaning-making factory'**: a group of instruments designed to facilitate agile organisation, planning, and implementation of the analysis; in effect, making meaning from data. This phase of work is the least well documented, and perhaps the most exaggerated and mystified in the work process diagram. Rather than instruments per se, much of this capability appears to take shape in high-level meetings at which ideas are proposed and discussed.
3. **'Content factory'**: A range of content production capabilities for different media. In addition to long and short form texts, memes, caricatures, infographics, fakes, and videos, this also includes scripts for telephone calls, plans for engaging and harassing journalists, outdoors advertising, and organisation of protests.

4. **Delivery toolbox**: a range of online and offline tools for delivering content to Ukrainian audiences. Many of the established channels for delivering content are described in detail. Significant resources are spent in capturing evidence of the delivery of content, often in Excel sheets comprising of tens of thousands of screenshots and data points.
5. **Research & efficacy evaluation**: Sociological and media measuring tools for assessing impact and redirecting efforts in step 2. The auditing process for capturing data allows for the partly automated compilation of campaign outputs, which are used to generate evidence of activity.

**Figure 23.** *Slides 2-4 from a PowerPoint document outlining the Center S system and working methods.*



## Claimed impact

Evaluation of the impact of the CCU is largely dependent on metrics that demonstrate a foothold in the Ukrainian information environment. The figures are significant, and, although they cannot be independently verified, appear commensurate with the other documentation in the leaks. Center S summarised the impact of their work during 2023 in 3 areas: content production, social media distribution, and other dissemination methods.

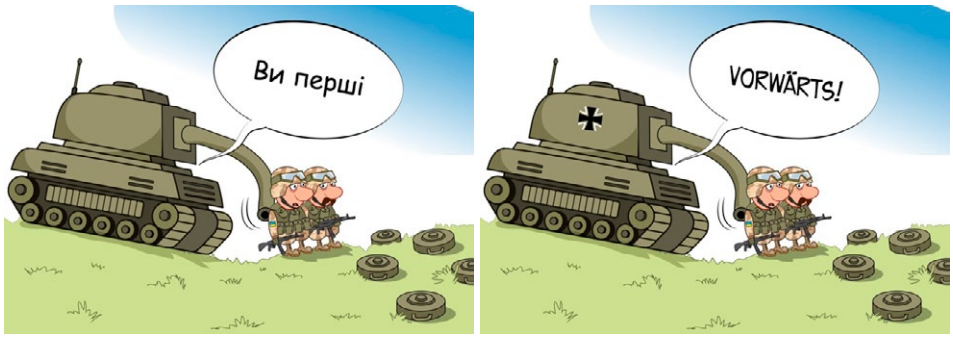
### 1. Content production

Centre S claims that since the start of their work, on 1 January 2023, to 31 April 2024, when the most recent report was made, they produced a total of 139 293 units of content, including:

- posts – 113, 221units (on average 1, 769 per week).
- videos and video memes – 11, 676 items (on average 182 per week).
- articles (longreads and short reads) – 6, 010 items (on average 94 per week).
- memes and graphics – 7, 127 items (on average 111 per week).
- fakes (special messages) – 1, 259 units (on average, 20 per week).

Documents show that the team did not always produce a specific amount of content, and the production grew progressively - by approximately 60% - within the first year of the project's operation. While these figures are impressive, it is important to account for the overlap in content production between Team I and Center S, particularly in the creation of memes and cartoons.

**Image.** *An example of the content adaptation for CCU and CCE.*




**Source:** SDA

This demonstrates that Center S' efforts aimed to flood the Ukrainian information environment with disinformation. However, it is unclear exactly what the 113,221 posts referred to consist of, since they are counted separately to the videos, articles and memes. It may therefore be assumed that the vast majority of these posts are of such low quality that they are not considered to belong to the other categories.

**Figure 24.** *Visualising Center S's creative content statistics for a 16 month-period.*

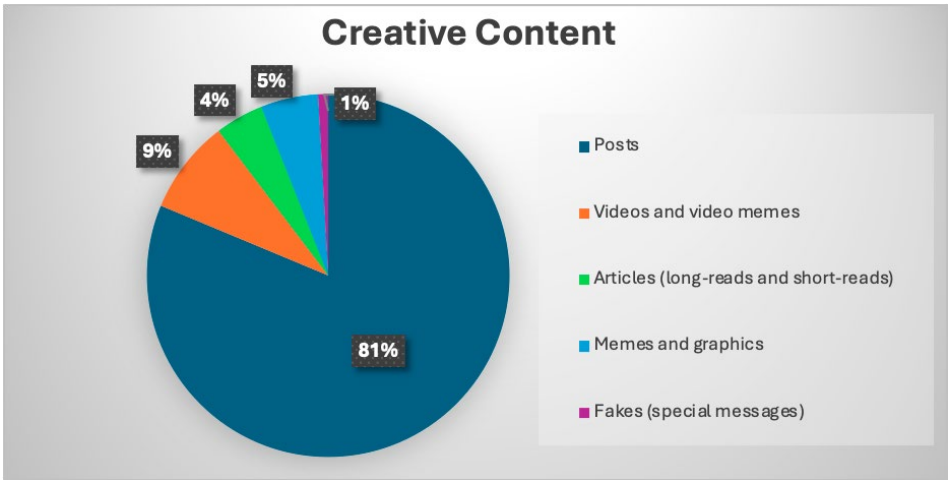
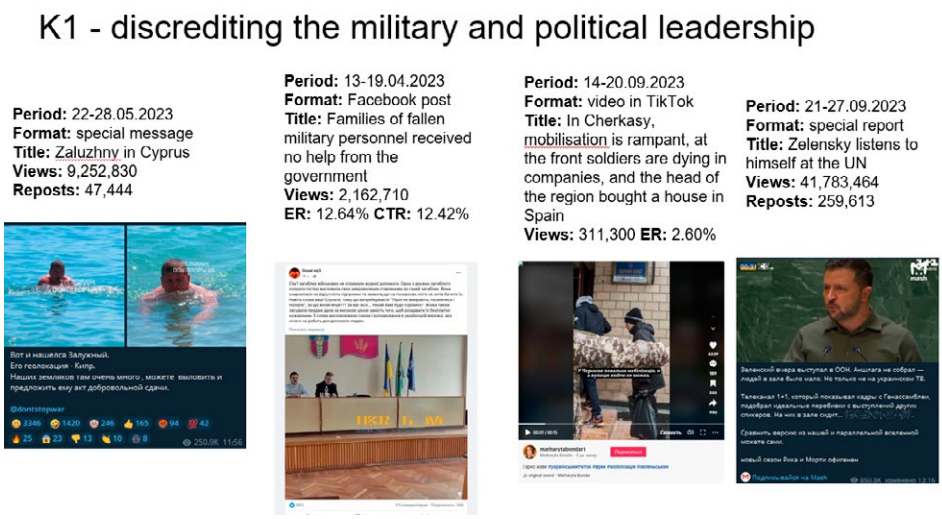



**Figure 25.** *Internal SDA Powerpoint slide giving selected examples of impact, sorted by thematic line.*




## 2. Distribution

**Delivery has recorded a total of 10.29 billion audience touchpoints in 16 months of Center S's work, including:**

- native distribution - 6.3 bn touchpoints with indicators of over 4,0% ER[133];
- adverts and teasers - 3.94 billion touchpoints with a CTR[134] of over 4,5%.

Center S claims that the growth in weekly touchpoint volumes throughout a year of the project was 190% - mainly due to the growth of native content promotion, and that the capacity of delivery through advertising and native distribution averaged 210-250 million touchpoints per week by the end of 2023.

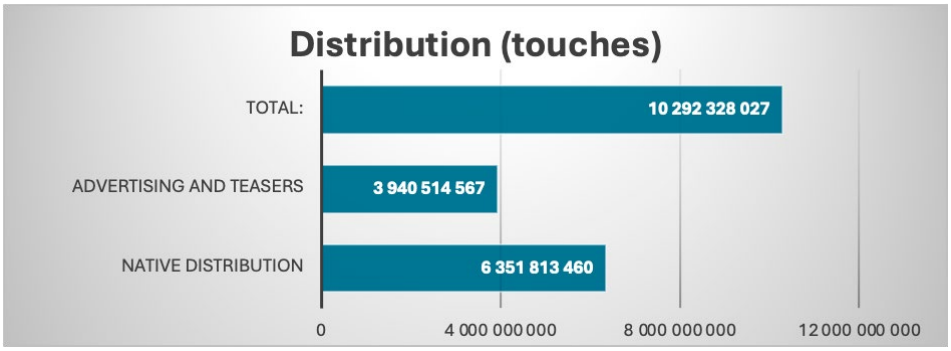
133 Engagement Rate (ER) = (Total of all reactions (likes, shares, comments, reactions for Facebook, + dislikes for YouTube))/(Count of followers).

134 Click Through Rate is the number of clicks that your ad receives divided by the number of times your ad is shown: clicks ÷ impressions = CTR. A good click-through rate should be between 2-5%.

In its annual report, SDA admits to using its own platforms for distributing the content, including YouTube, Telegram and Tik-Tok channels, which they claim gather more than 5 million users. However, it is difficult to ascertain whether these users are real persons, or whether SDA social media operators are engaging with their own bots.

According to these figures, content posted by accounts represents 58% of touches, whereas advertising represents 42%. This likely skewed in the opposite direction earlier in the year, since advertising was the main method used to drive content to SDA assets.

**Figure 26.** *Visualisation of SDA's 16-month report on touchpoint stats*




### 3. Additional dissemination tools

The examples below demonstrate how content production and dissemination have been augmented by aggressive efforts to engage with Ukrainians on a person-to-person level. In particular, it is noteworthy that the comment systems mix real users with bot farms and AI-tools, producing higher metrics but presumably lower quality outputs. More work needs to be done to understand the intrusive nature of the call centre, direct messaging, and surveying as tools of malign influence.

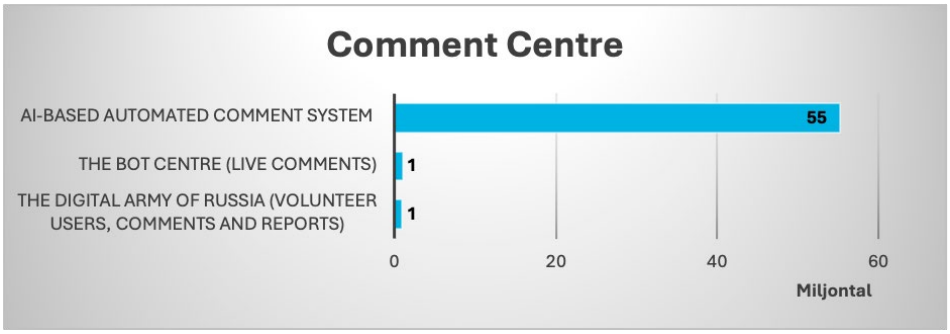
#### 3.1 Comment Centre

Center S carries out work in the comments using several tools. In total, more than 57 million automated and "live" comments have been left during the 16 months of the project, including:

- **Digital Army of Russia (volunteer users, who leave comments but also report Ukrainian accounts) - 860,000 comments/reports (on average 13, 448 per week).**
- **Bot Centre – 1, 011, 552 comments on more than 700 sites (on average 15, 806 per week).**
- **AI-based automated commenting system - 55,187, 000 comments (on average, 862, 297 per week).**

Center S claims that their Bot Centre specialists regularly measure the sensitivity indices of various topics to identify behavioural trends in the audience of U users; see the section on capability assessment for more details.

**Figure 27.** *Visualisation of Center S's 16-month work on comments.*



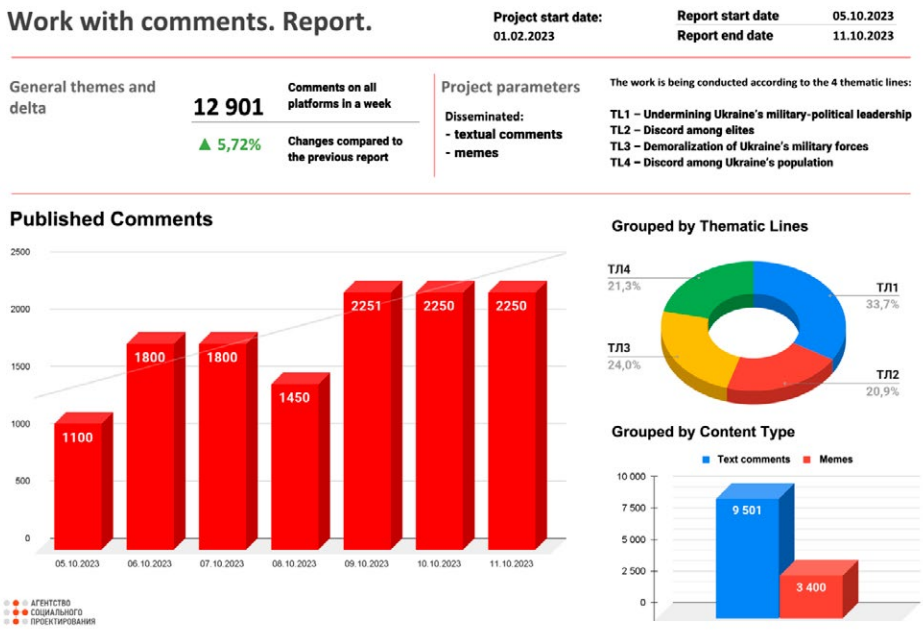

SDA meticulously documents its work on comments and presents the data in various formats including PowerPoint, Word, and Excel. These outputs are likely auto-generated. One such report on their Bot Centre reveals that between September 28 and October 4, 2023, a total of 15 operators were responsible for generating 2,801 comments. The document also indicates that bot operators have flexible schedules and that the number of bots assigned to each operator fluctuates. Each operator managed anywhere from 1 to 228 bots. The number of comment-outputs must have been received as a directive, as they all produced the same amount of comments.

**Figure 28.** *A weekly report on Bot Centre's comments made by Center S. Likely an output of a specialised software. Translated manually.*

| A | B | C | D | E | F | G | H | I |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 28.09.2023 | 29.09.2023 | 30.09.2023 | 01.10.2023 | 02.10.2023 | 03.10.2023 | 04.10.2023 | Total |
| Operator 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 200 | 300 | 100 | 100 | 700 |
| Operator 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Operator 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 701 | 0 | 701 |
| Operator 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Operator 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Operator 6 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Operator 7 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Operator 8 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Operator 9 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Operator 10 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Operator 11 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Operator 12 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 700 |
| Operator 13 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Operator 14 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Operator 15 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 700 |
| TOTAL | **200** | **200** | **200** | **400** | **500** | **1001** | **300** | **2801** |

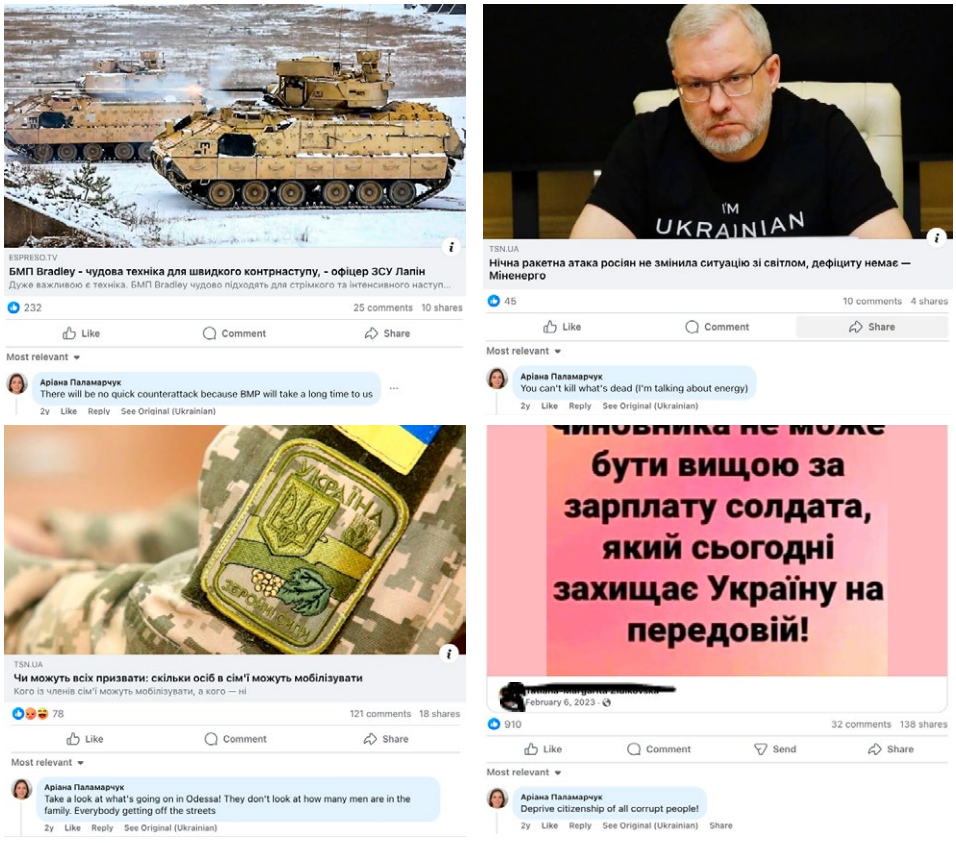
**Source:** SDA

**Figure 29.** *A weekly report on all comments made by Center S. Likely an output of a specialised software. Translated manually.*




**Source:** SDA

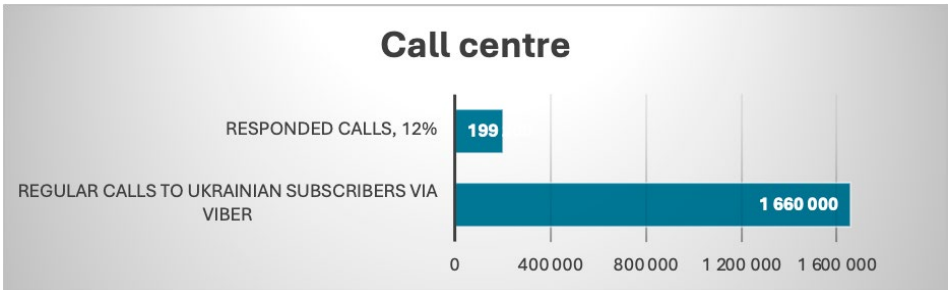
**Figure 30.** *Documents reveal that comments made by bot operators are relevant to the posts and platforms they are targeting. The textual comments are not a copy of one comment and require a certain level of creativity*



### 3.2 Call Centre

According to Center S's presentation, they conduct regular calls to Ukrainian subscribers via Viber. The capacity of the call centre is claimed to be about 25 thousand calls per week. SDA claims to have made a total of 1.6 million calls during 16-month period of the operation with a 12% completion rate.

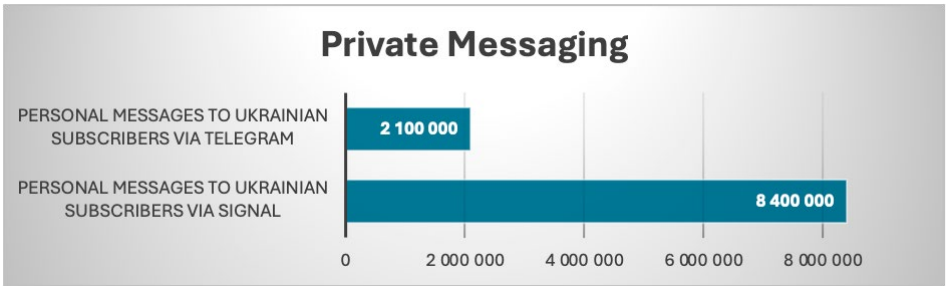
**Figure 31.** *Visualisation of Center S's 16-month work on call centre.*




### 3.3 Sending messages

Calls are not the only way how SDA harasses Ukrainian citizens. They also send out messages via Messengers (Signal, Telegram, etc.). According to SDA's own metrics, more than 10 million messages were sent out during the Center's 16-month operation.

**Figure 32.** *Visualisation of Center S's 16-month work on messaging.*




### 3.4 Formative research

The Center conducts online surveys with opinion-forming elements for Ukrainian users. In total, over 40,000 respondents are interviewed per week. A total of 2.5 million respondents took part in formative research over the 16-month period of the Center's operation, according to their internal metrics.

## 3.4 Other Ukraine

In June 2023, Viktor Medvedchuk, a former pro-Kremlin politician who was exiled from Ukraine in 2022, registered a social movement called "Other Ukraine". The group claims to be a public non-religious organisation rather than a political party and is ineligible to participate in elections within the Russian Federation.[135] Rather, the organisation is intended as a vehicle for regime change in Ukraine, presenting a successor to Zelensky selected by the

135 Kyiv Post, 2023.

Kremlin. The organisation has officially registered the trademarks for the names "Real Ukraine" (Настоящая Украина) and "The Voice of Other Ukraine" (Голос Другой Украины).[136]

While based in Ukraine, Medvedchuk was not only Russia's key political proxy but also allegedly a powerful criminal figure.[137] After his exile from Ukraine, Medvedchuk established himself in Russia. Journalists from the investigative project "System" discovered that Medvedchuk owns oil fields in Siberia, real estate and land plots in Moscow, and is a beneficiary of Donetsk metallurgy. His relationship with Putin extends to familial connections - Putin is reportedly the godfather of Medvedchuk's daughter.[138]

The documents reveal that Center S, a unit within SDA focused on Ukraine, supported Medvedchuk's project "Other Ukraine" (also known as "Real Ukraine") from the very beginning. A document dated late January 2023 outlines Center S's proposed strategy for promoting the political movement.

## Strategy

The project was intentionally called a "supportive campaign" or "information accompaniment" to Viktor Medvedchuk's movement, signifying SDA's limited involvement. By drawing on the documents listing employee roles, pitched services and weekly reports, we conclude that the 'ideological work', and subsequent writing of articles, was expected to be produced by Medvedchuk and his team. For its part, SDA would create visual content, provide content delivery, comment support, as well as social media monitoring and analysis.

"Other Ukraine" was intended to target two overlapping sets of audiences: the first, mainly Western and Russian experts and journalists, as well as more Western-oriented Ukrainians living outside of Ukraine; and the second, Ukranians in Ukraine, Russia, and elsewhere who maintained close ties home. It was intended to be presented as an alternative grassroots movement wishing for peace. They mapped out the goals and narratives of the project targeting those audiences:

136 At times, the Other Ukraine campaign is referred to in meeting protocols as "RU" (НУ) https://hromadske.radio/ru/news/2023/07/28/v-rf-ofytsyalno-zarehystryrovaly-orhanyzatsyiu-druhaia-ukrayna-ee-sozdal-medvedchuk

137 https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/articles/coew940pzz90;

138 https://meduza.io/feature/2023/12/21/kum-putina-viktor-medvedchuk-stal-novym-benefitsiarom-ekonomiki-donbassa-on-takzhe-zarabatyvaet-na-mestorozhdeniyah-v-sibiri-i-nedvizhimosti-v-moskve

| Goals | Narratives |
|---|---|
| • Positioning the Other Ukraine Movement as an association that emerged in response to the demand of citizens seeking peace in Ukraine;<br>• Positioning Viktor Medvedchuk as a consistent advocate for a peaceful future of Ukraine;<br>• Attracting supporters of peace to participate in the Movement from among Ukrainians living in Ukraine, the Russian Federation and other countries;<br>• Demonstrating the existence of alternative position of Ukrainians to the international community on a wide range of issues on the role and place of the Ukrainian state;<br>• Creating and filling sources of primary and official information on behalf of the Movement and Victor Medvedchuk for broadcasting to the target audiences of the project. | • Another Ukraine exists. It has a voice. It advocates for the end of hostilities, peace and cooperation with Russia.<br>• There is an alternative to war. Viktor Medvedchuk talks about the advantages of starting a peaceful dialogue as an alternative to a possible nuclear war.<br>• Residents of European countries do not benefit from a military conflict with Russia in Ukraine. It is beneficial only to those who make money on war, primarily the United States.<br>• Ukraine must stop being a testing ground for Western weapons.<br>• The Ukrainian authorities must stop making money on Ukrainian blood with their Western partners. |

The overarching goal of the project was to gain international legitimacy for a Russian proxy government. To reach that goal, SDA suggested a website in English (with options in Ukrainian and Russian) that would summarise the essence of the movement by providing an official manifesto, while Medvedchuk's biography, pictures and news from other sources would grant it additional legitimacy. Most importantly the website would serve as a hub connecting users to its other social media channels, which SDA also promised to pump up with creative content and bot comments. Below is the list of the services that SDA pitched to Medvedchuk.

| No | Types of work | Result | Volume / Time |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Monitoring and Analytics** | | | |
| 1 | Monitoring the information space of Russia and a number of Western countries on a list of topics and persons, including using automated monitoring tools to identify:<br>• the number of mentions of the Movement and Viktor Medvedchuk in Russia and a number of countries.<br>• coverage.<br>• publications.<br>• dynamics of metrics. | Analytical report on the results of monitoring with conclusions and recommendations | Daily |
| 2 | The PULSE operational notification system is a closed channel for informing about events on specific topics | Messages based on closed channel monitoring results | 20-30 messages per day |
| 3 | Situational analysis and recommendations | Analytical inquiry and recommendations | On demand |
| **Preparing Texts** | | | |
| 4 | Preparing texts for posting on accounts | Posts on social media and on websites | 3-5 per day |
| 5 | Preparation of texts for placement in the media | Publications | 1-2 per week |
| 6 | Translation of texts into English and Ukrainian | Posts, publications | According to the volume of posts and publications |
| **Creative Content for social media** | | | |
| 7 | Infographics and illustrations | Images | 3 times a week |
| 8 | Preparation of video material packaged in the graphic format of the Movement | Video clip | once a week |
| **Supporting the Movement in social media** | | | |
| 9 | Comment moderation | Removing comments that contradict group policies | Perpetually |
| 10 | Commentary support in Movement accounts | Comments in support and defence of VM and his Movement | Total 300 per day |
| 11 | Creative content for posting in comments: memes, pics with opponents, pictures in support of the Movement and Viktor Medvedchuk | Posting creative content in comments | 15 per day |
| 12 | Increasing the number of subscribers on accounts | Increase in followers by 5,000 (on all platforms except Twitter) | Every month |
| **Media Events** | | | |
| 13 | Conducting an online press conference of the Movement with the participation of Viktor Medvedchuk | Organizing a press conference with an on-air audience of more than 5,000 people and a total audience of at least 50,000 people | On demand |

This marked the first part of the "supportive campaign." The second part focused on targeting Ukrainians residing in Ukraine, Russia, and Europe.

SDA assessed that approximately 7 million Ukrainians lived in Russia and over 8 million in Europe, many of whom maintained close ties with their families back in Ukraine. By appealing to Ukrainian migrants, the campaign aimed to indirectly influence those still living in Ukraine. The overarching goal was to build support for the movement among Ukrainians and potentially convert them into future voters for Medvedchuk.

To achieve this, the campaign proposed the creation of a news agency with the ambitious aim of becoming the go-to news source for Ukrainians. The format was described as a news feed pipeline (60 unique items per day), video news (10-15 minutes a day), long and short talk show formats, plus at least six analytical articles per day. Infographics, memes, and caricatures would also be widely distributed.

SDA argued that **it is quite possible to ensure the rise in popularity of political forces advocating the cessation of hostilities, normalisation of relations with Russia, investment of public funds in the creation of new jobs, in the social sphere, etc. In other words, in the current situation, it is objectively possible for the Other Ukraine movement to win public opinion. For this to happen, it is necessary to get rid of the monopoly of the media subordinated to Zelensky's regime. A full-fledged news agency oriented towards Ukrainians and working within the ideology of the Other Ukraine should appear in the information space.**

## Claimed impact

The "status reports" for Other Ukraine, which appear to have been generated by specialised social media monitoring software, indicate that SDA's work for Medvedchuk was more limited than initially promised. Rather than building a comprehensive social media infrastructure, the team primarily focused on distributing content through paid advertising. Their contributions included content delivery, comment dissemination, narrative and engagement analysis. These activities were largely technical in nature and were likely carried out by software in conjunction with human supervision.

### Metrics and Analysis

In the Pitch document, a number of performance indicators were intended to be used to assess the impact of the operation:

1. **Increased citation of the Movement in Western and Russian media and social media networks (quantitative indicators can be calculated by conducting basic media research).**
2. **Increase in the number of supporters and audience of the Movement in social networks.**
3. **Growth of Victor Medvedchuk's audience in the Russian Federation, Ukraine and in the West.**
4. **Increased coverage of the Movement's publications in the media and social networks.**
5. **Inclusion of the Movement's news items in the top media outlets in Russia and the West.**

However, according to six evaluation documents included in the leak, these indicators were only partly used. The evaluation reports, likely generated by software, were detailed, with some around 20 pages long. They included analytical discussions about individual news articles and the responses among different audiences, with detailed engagement and sentiment metrics for many news stories.

The first weekly evaluation from 14/4 (2023) claimed that 527 materials were placed on all social media accounts during that week, achieving a cumulative total of 1,814,000 views. This was mostly the result of targeting advertising, which generated 1,376,573 of those views. A similar evaluation from a week later claimed that 586 placed materials achieved 2,364,000 views, of which 1,948,719 were the result of advertising. These appear to be weekly numbers.

**Figure 33.** *KPIs presented in SDA's Center S's reports to Medvedchuk. Some reports appear to exclude the share of paid targeted advertising.*

| | 15/4 | 13/5 | 9/6 | 31/7 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Content Units total** | 547 | 934 | 932 | 637 |
| **Total views (all)** | 8 002 991 | 6 413 673 | 5,578,000 | 503,843* |
| **Targeted advertising (of total views)** | 7,413,599 | 5 873 836 | - | 7,087,005 |
| **Reactions** | 1 031 879 | 585 706 | - | 803 662 |
| **Comments** | 250 383 | 101 377 | - | 74,862 |

## Content

According to the documents, Center S was delivering several types of content provided by Medvedchuk and his team, such as ideological opinion pieces. Some of Medvedchuk's titles included: *"Ukrainian Nazism. Why a new Nuremberg is necessary". "How Zelensky is turning Ukraine into a graveyard". "Zelensky is trying on a crown of a King of Drugs"* and so on.

Visual content was also produced en masse. Some were infographics, such as citations of Medvedchuk against his portrait, thoughtfully posing against the red-blue background (as in the reimagined Ukrainian flag), while others were cartoons mocking Zelensky, evidently made by the same artists as other SDA campaigns. There is evidence that there was some video content as well.

**Image.** *SDA's content units for the "Other Ukraine" campaign.*




**Source:** SDA

## Infrastructure

Although SDA claimed strong content distribution figures - most of which were achieved through paid advertising - it failed to deliver on the promise of establishing a reliable infrastructure for the “Other Ukraine” project. As of April 2025, the social media pages targeting English- and Russian-speaking audiences on platforms such as Facebook and X appear to have been abandoned. In contrast, activity continues on Russian platforms like VKontakte and Odnoklassniki. The original plan to launch a manifesto-style website for the movement was seemingly abandoned in favour of a news-style site under the same name. This site functions as yet another fake news aggregator aimed at Russian-speaking audiences.

**Image.** *The Other Ukraine – X pages in Russian and English, with over 40 followers each. Abandoned by April 2024.*

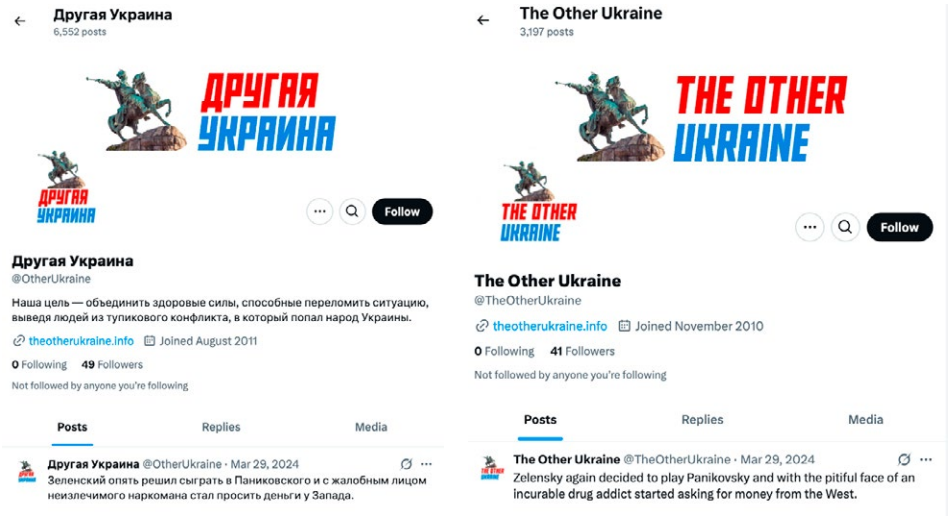



**Image.** *The Other Ukraine – X pages in Russian and English, with over 40 followers each. Abandoned by April 2024.*

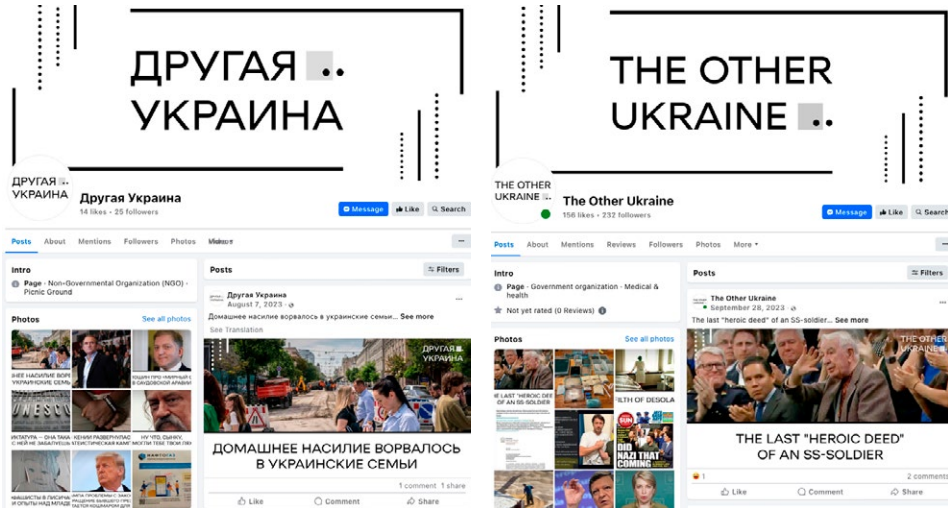


**Image.** *The Other Ukraine – Vkontakte and Odnoklassniki pages in Russian. Presently active.*

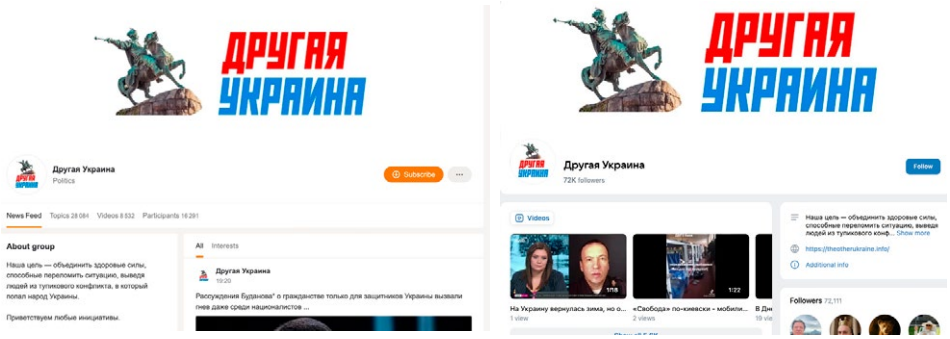
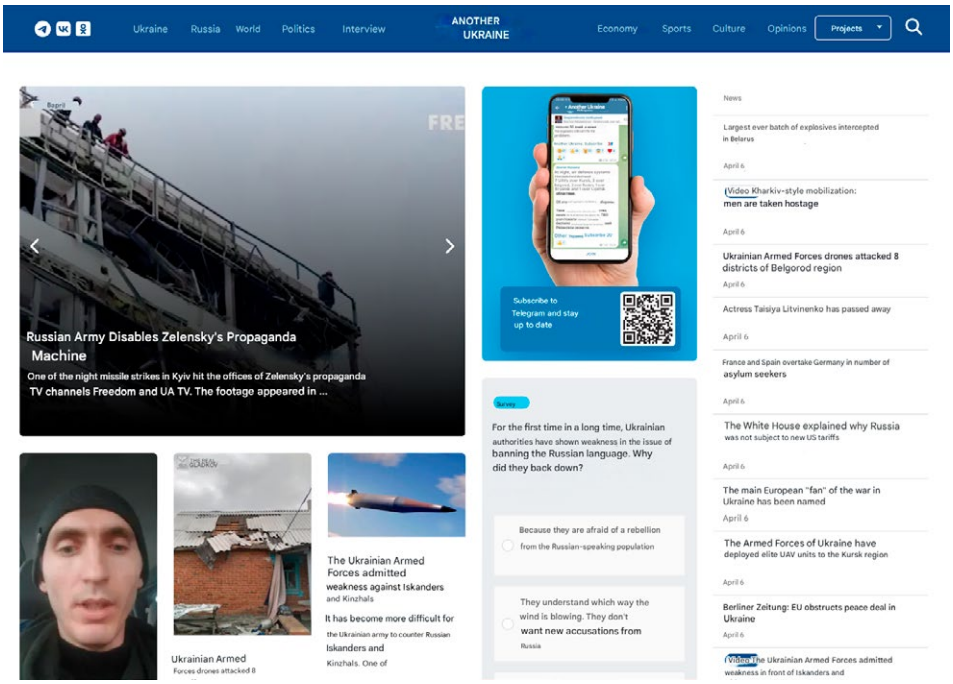



**Image.** *The landing page of "Other Ukraine". Shares links to the VK, OK and* TG *channels. Machine-translated.*




## Conclusion

Ultimately, the project's ambition to reach Ukrainians living in Western regions of Ukraine - those who might influence public discourse or electoral outcomes - was not realised. Nor did "Other Ukraine" succeed in gaining legitimacy among Western politicians or journalists. At present, "Other Ukraine" appears to focus primarily on Russian-speaking populations within Russia and Russian-occupied areas of Ukraine. Its overall impact remains unclear. To the best of our knowledge, the project only remains active on Russian social media platforms such as VKontakte, Odnoklassniki, Telegram, and as an English-language disinformation website.

In conclusion, beginning in January 2023, the SDA and the Presidential Administration undertook significant efforts to undermine and ultimately unseat President Zelensky ahead of the 2024 election. Following their favoured "throw everything at the wall and see what sticks" approach, SDA

either initiated or was tasked with multiple campaigns - including the OU - in pursuit of this goal. However, by April 2024, most of these efforts appeared to have been abandoned due to a lack of discernible impact.

## 3.5 The Campaign Against the United States

SDA's activities targeting the US originated with Team I and the CCI. The US was targeted alongside the UK, Germany, France, Italy, and Israel, before the campaigns were divided up to focus more specifically on the EU and US elections. Team I remained responsible for these activities, and developed projects that targeted the 2024 US Presidential Elections both directly and indirectly, for example through the Mexican and Israeli Diaspora. In many respects, therefore, the campaign against the US follows the same procedures as CCI/CCE. The main source for US project plans is the DOJ affidavit, although the Delfi leaks contain evidence of products targeting US audiences.

### The Good Old U.S.A. Project

In the autumn of 2023, SDA developed a plan to influence the outcome of the 2024 federal election by focusing on domestic political polarisation. They reasoned that while no side could be considered pro-Russian, **it makes sense for Russia to put maximum effort to ensure that the Republican party point of view (first and foremost, the opinion of Trump supporters) wins over the US public opinion. This includes provisions on peace in Ukraine in exchange for territories**. Therefore, the overall goal of the efforts was to **secure victory of a Republican candidate (Trump or one of his current internal party opponents) at the US Presidential elections to be held in November of 2024**. Objectives included:

- **To increase the percentage of Americans who believe that the US "has been doing way too much to support Ukraine" to 51%**
- **To increase the percentage of American who believe that the war is to be ended as soon as possible … to 53%**
- **To bring Biden's confidence rating down to … 29%**

In each of these three objectives, SDA's goal was to move current sentiment to Russia's favour by 10%. This would be achieved with a focus on swing states, conservative states, US citizens of Hispanic descent, American Jews, and American video game players (who were viewed as avid consumers of right-wing web platforms). Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, X, Truth Social, and Reddit were the main target platforms, and the communities developed would consist of organic-seeming pro-Republican accounts and channels, "sleeper" groups, mass commenting, targeted advertising, and building relationships with influencers.

### Guerrilla Media Campaign in the United States

Complementing the activities targeting Republicans was a project designed to agitate against Democrats. This recognised the **feeling among Republicans that the president's policies, censorship on social media**

**and the policies of the Democrat government are encroaching on their rights.** A campaign targeting predominately white Republican and Trump supporters was designed to agitate around the following thematic lines:

- **Encroaching universal poverty**
- **Risk of job loss for white Americans**
- **Privileges for people of colour, perverts, and disabled**
- **Threat of crime coming from people of colour and immigrants**
- **Overspending of foreign policy**
- **We are being drawn into the war. Our guys will die in Ukraine**

The process of implementation is in line with Team I's usual approach.

### U.S. Social Media Influencers Network

A third project sought to **create platforms on US social media networks in order to strengthen pro-Russian sentiments among the targeted audience** of primarily Republicans. The focus here was on developing local community-oriented news sources by posing as authentic users. SDA noted that, **The Republican Pary is currently advancing a relatively pro-Russian agenda. That could be exploited by posing as ardent Republicans and relaying the part of their agenda that coincides with ours … [this] should not exceed 20 percent of the total volume of all publications.** To achieve this, SDA would create a network of 200 accounts on X, consisting of two active and two dormant accounts in each state. **Active accounts in each state will be maintained on behalf of a fictious individual**. Each account should publish 3-4 daily publication and give 6-9 comments on other people's feeds. This was anticipated to reach 30,000-50,000 subscribers within 3 months, and more than a million within a year.

## 3.6 Other planned information influence operations

Note: most of this is based on project proposals so is most useful for describing modus. There is some evidence in the protocols and elsewhere that some of these campaigns were active.

### CIS/Africa: Reputation of the Russian Army abroad

SDA submitted a pitch to the Presidential Administration in 2022, hoping to receive a contract for a branding project that would counteract the "campaign" to **dehumanise the image of the Russian soldier and discredit the Russian Armed Forces.** According to SDA, the places where this most urgently needed to be corrected were **the territory of the near abroad and Africa.** The two main narratives that the campaign would brand the Russian army around were:

- **professionalism (modern weapons, efficiency in solving problems)**

- **morality (code of honour, careful attitude to civilians, participation in the life of society).**

The main tools for project implementation were suggested as:

- **Preparation of image and promotional print and video materials (banners, posters, booklets, comics and other books for children's audience);**
- **Work in social networks (seeding of publications, support in comments);**
- **Placing publications in mass media, inviting representatives of the RF Armed Forces to appear on TV programmes;**
- **Organisation of events (exhibitions, demonstrations, forums);**
- **Special merchandise;**
- **Non-standard formats (murals, installations, etc.).**

There is no evidence that this campaign was ever commissioned. However, the proposal reveals that SDA's monitoring successfully identified the poor international reputation of the Russian Armed Forces, even if the critique was blamed on Western propaganda. Many of the content production and dissemination tools sit comfortably within SDA's toolbox and are perhaps closest in approach to the Other Ukraine project.

## CIS: Cognitive Operations Division

There is evidence in the protocols to suggest that SDA ran, or supported, campaigns in the CIS region, and especially Armenia. These may have been to test capabilities, in which case this is probably the project.

SDA proposed a forward-leaning influence project targeting Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. The goal of the project was to establish conditions conducive to continued Russian **soft power** in the region, capable of fending off geopolitical influence from the US and China. The goal was to project Russia's positive image, actively participate in the domestic politics of post-Soviet countries, strengthen pro-Russian political forces, and weaken forces acting in the interests of countries hostile to Russia. Most importantly, the approach should appear authentic.

**Russia can offset external pressure on the political leadership of these states by mobilising the public to support initiatives that run counter to the interests of the United States and its allies. Such mobilisation should be done through information influence on national audiences, and this influence should not be on behalf of Russia directly but should take the form of an authentic and objective point of view born in the depths of society.**

Authenticity would be assured by creating a specialised centre of experts who could engage in operational tracking of changes in the characteristics of the information environments of target countries. Their tasks would be:

- **organising and monitoring the information environment;**
- **analysing the identified features and changes in the information environment;**
- **creation of forecasting models;**

- **selection of tools for influencing the information environment;**
- **development of recommendations on how to bring the information environment to the desired state;**
- **organising the work of the 'creative direction' employees;**
- **establishing interaction with the audience's information sources, including public opinion leaders.**

An interesting aspect of this approach is its scalability when compared, for example, to the CCU. This approach to monitoring and strategic planning appears as a package that can be deployed to create recommendations for regional offices to implement. Indeed, in a September 2023 Presidential Meeting, Zakhorova refers to the SDA capability to establish such a campaign anywhere in the world within 3 days.

## Israel: The Comprehensive Information Outreach Project

Efforts to influence Israel began with the CCI and are likely also connected to the ongoing interest in the Russian Diaspora based there. The goal of the project is **to rip Israel out of the general Western anti-Russian agenda and to create a sustainable public opinion which would deem neo-Nazism and dictatorship in Ukraine, rendering aid to neo-Nazis, and, therefore, the escalation of the conflict by the West and helping anti-Russian political emigration unacceptable.** This was considered to be a fairly straightforward and achievable task, due to the overall political climate in Israel. The thematic lines were:

- **Nazism in modern Ukraine and sowing of fear from its across Europe and the world. Truth about the conflict in Ukraine;**
- **Parallels between Russia and Israel in how they handle the threat to its territorial integrity and national security;**
- **Stirring up interest to the US presidential campaign: stakes, rumours, forecasts;**
- **Facts unmasking Russian opposition members overseas (scandalous statements against Israel, religion, Jewish traditions, and bribing authorities)**

The scope of work was the full gamut of SDA capabilities supporting the launch of a right-wing online information resource called **Normal Israel**, targeting Jewish communities around the world in Hebrew, Russian, and English. Publicly, the project would appear to be run **selflessly by caring activists, Israelis, part of them preferring to work anonymously.**

## Kaliningrad: Information Operations Project Office

SDA wanted to establish a regional hub in Kaliningrad to enhance its ability to target Poland, Germany, and the Baltic States. The proposal was to **create a functional structure for the development and implementation of a comprehensive strategy of work in the foreign information environment,** and Kaliningrad was identified as **the most convenient springboard for**

**organising and conducting information operations in EU countries.** One particularly useful aspect of this project proposal is the expanded conceptualisation of what SDA fits under the heading of Information Operations:

- **Dissemination of Russian narratives;**
- **Influence on political and economic decisions;**
- **Influence on electoral processes;**
- **Formation of groups and networks of supporters;**
- **Promoting the interests of Russian business;**
- **Creating a system for promoting the Russian agenda in the media and social networks;**
- **Countering the enemy's information operations.**

Many of the tools for implementation match SDA's standard offering, with Kaliningrad simply offering a home to satellite office. However, the category of **Direct actions** leans toward hybrid activities: **Rallies, flash mobs, graffiti, pickets, etc.**

## Latvia: Project 'Circumstances'

The goal of this meticulously planned project is to **create conditions for a large-scale "Orange" peaceful social revolution in Latvia.** The major conflict line identified is treatment of Ukrainian refugees vs. Russian citizens, which can be manipulated at the grassroots level. So far, this was not happening, due to the weakness of Russian media targeting Latvia. **The main problem with the Russian information agenda promoted in Latvia is its complete lack of sincerity. The activities of the BaltNews or Sputnik agency in Latvia are so obvious, its noname authors so cheap and its stories so predictable that they do not entail any radical response.** SDA's offer was to use a developed social media presence to "form conditions for legitimate offline action". This "action" is a Russia-backed Orange Revolution. Five thematic lines were proposed:

**International**

1. **By supporting the West, Latvia participates in the campaign to reduce the level of world security. This is a bad strategy - the threats are great and frightening.**
2. **Debunking myths and fakes proving the falsity of Western and Ukrainian propaganda.**

**Internal**

3. **The depressing economic consequences of confrontation with Russia - deteriorating quality and increasing cost of living in Latvia.**
4. **Problems with preparation for the heating season. Latvians risk freezing.**
5. **Latvia is carrying out genocide of Russian-speaking population - it is anti-human, it brings division in society, it is a disease of Latvian authorities.**

SDA's approach involved detailed socio-political monitoring of Latvian society. **It is proposed to organise a profound system of monitoring of managerial, political and public decisions of authorities of different levels, including municipal ones. The goal is to create information waves from the stories they generate for consumers inside the Russian Federation.** The subsequent influence activities can support **a radical change in the quality of soft Russian power in Latvia using three tools:**

- **the renewal of Russian-language political projects.** Here, a goal is to offer **Russian-speaking citizens an alternative image of the future** that emphasises an alternative position in Latvian society.
- **reconsider the role of the Russian Orthodox Church in Latvia.** "We propose to make Orthodox churches de facto centres of demonstration of the new Russian European idea".
- **work separately on a soft power tool such as children's sports schools.** A network of 'Russian' rhythmic gymnastics schools could be a sure win-win option for changing the image of cooperation with Russia at the grassroots, family level, introducing elements of Russian mass culture into the FUTURE of modern Latvia.

The overall approach follows the well-established SDA model. Note: there is some evidence in the leaks of specific efforts from mid-2022 targeting Latvia, though it is unclear whether this is connected to implementation of this project plan.

## Russian Diaspora: Information Impact Project on Relocators

This proposal from July 2023 aimed to target Russian "relocators", who, according to SDA do not refer to themselves as emigrants since they intend to return to Russia "after a short time". These 700,000 individuals fled Russia following the invasion of Ukraine and are mostly to be found in Georgia, Kazakhstan, Armenia, Turkey, Israel, and Germany. The project aimed within 6 months to generate:

- **25% increase in those willing to return to Russia;**
- **15% increase in those who believe that the new place is worse than Russia;**
- **20% increase in distrust of the main emigration figures - Khodorkovsky, Kasparov, Volkov, Ponomarev, Singers.**

The Russian diaspora is positioned as a powerful tool in the information war. **The adversary considers and uses relocators as an audience and, at the same time, as a tool for anti-Russian agitation, a reserve for the formation of anti-Russian organisations and, at the same time, as a channel of communication with audiences inside Russia, primarily with the intelligentsia to undermine socio-political stability, increase the number of opponents of the Special Military Operation, divide society, etc.**

3 thematic lines supported the project:

- **K1: Emigration splits, discrediting leaders, fuelling scandals.** Leaders of emigrant associations are corrupt and cannot unite, while celebrity relocators are simply trying to make money from other relocators.
- **K2: Relocators' orientation towards the security of returning to Russia.** For this, the message is that Russia holds no grudge against "most" relocators. "If you are not a foreign agent, welcome home".
- **K3: Refusal of relocators to vote in the 2024 presidential election.** "The outcome of the election is a foregone conclusion … you cannot influence this result".

The project aimed to create a media bureau that would be **oriented towards the life of relocators in new countries and fulfil the need to 'read in Russian and about Russians': tips, reports, essays, recommendations for Russian-speakers.** Hidden within this content, "about 25 per cent of the materials will be articles of socio-political direction", aimed at the 3 thematic lines. Organisationally and thematically, the media will be structured by geographical branches - editorial offices for individual countries. There will be 6 editorial offices in total: Armenia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Turkey, EU (Germany) and Israel (the Central Office). The process of establishing market share follows the SDA model of providing a combination of news, written materials, and social media posts initially promoted by advertising on the way to developing own communities.

**Important: the proposed project should not have any traces of "work for the Kremlin" and ideological and instrumental overlaps with other information projects of influence.**
The flagship product is a new Russian-language media outlet modelled on fashionable emigrant media-foreign agents ('Project', 'Verstka', 'Meduza', etc.). This was called by the "ironic name" **Pumpkin Latte**, that apparently refers to "the occasion that has become a meme among re-locants (escaped Russians looking for and failing to find the usual 'joys of life' in emigration) and, at the same time, to morning coffee as a traditional companion for reading the news". This aimed to reach as many as 2 million members of the new and old Russian Diaspora.

## Türkiye: Foreign Policy Impact Project

A more developed proposal sought to **establish a centre of information operations to influence the Turkish public through electronic communication channels: social media, mass media, opinion leaders (influencers)**. The aim of the project was to **weaken U.S. influence on Turkish foreign policy, especially in relations with Russia,** and the main narratives sought to drive a wedge between the US and Turkey to the point that **Turkey should stop co-operating with the US and get closer to Russia and its allies.** Issues such as US support of Israel, Armenia, and Kurdish separatists would be used to demonstrate that only closer ties with Russia could restore **Turkey's development as a great power.** The implementation tools are typical of Team I, covering Monitoring, Analytics, Content, Delivery, and Special

activities such as expert round tables with political scientists from Azerbaijan, Turkey and Russia. There is no further evidence about this project.

## Latin America: Information Laundering Project

According to a statement by the US State Department in November 2023, SDA, Structura and IRI collaborated on an influence operation across Latin America, including in Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, Mexico, Venezuela, Brazil, Ecuador, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, and Uruguay. The objective is to **undermine support for Ukraine and promote anti-U.S. and anti-NATO sentiment by making pro-Kremlin content appear organic to Latin American audiences.**

The strategy is to coopt a wide **network of journalists and influencers across the region** and supply them with pro-Kremlin content. A team in Russia, probably based at SDA, creates content which is then sent to editorial staff in Latin America. **The Moscow-based team are proficient in Spanish and use aliases to obfuscate their true identities.** Content is sent to a newsroom style hub for review, editing, localisation, and publication in local media. The aim of this process is to make the content appear organic.

Content is designed to support the key narrative that Russia's war against Ukraine is just and more broadly, the campaign promotes the false narrative that Russia is a champion against neocolonialisation. Anti-US and Anti-NATO narratives are also prevalent. Russian embassies and state-funded media outlets also contribute to efforts to infuse Latin American information environments with pro-Kremlin messaging.

## Sweden: Enflaming Tensions with Türkiye

**Sweden is not a significant target of SDA activities** according to the available documents. The only Sweden-connected operation that we were able to identify was an effort to use the Quran burnings to worsen relations with Türkiye during the NATO accession period.

The document contains detailed plans for a fake to be spread in Türkiye, Germany, and France, under the headline **Turks carry wreaths to the Swedish Consulate General.** The plan was to create two posts. The first would be a fake Twitter post that contained a photo of the Swedish Consulate General in Turkey, with wreaths photoshopped on it. The text would read: **Today, outside the Swedish Embassy, people are carrying funeral wreaths. No one can burn the holy Quran with impunity! Sweden and NATO are worshipping evil!** This would not be posted on Twitter but rather on Facebook, as a screenshot of the fake Twitter post. On Facebook, the text would read: **Looks like Sweden will not be in NATO. Or maybe the Turks will get out now too. What idiot allowed this stupid Koran action?** These texts were supported with fake comments purporting to be from a French Muslim and a German of Turkish origin. There is no further evidence in the leak that the fake was produced or published.

Sweden is mentioned incidentally in 11 media monitoring documents which focus on the media of other SDA target countries previously discussed. Media monitoring reports tend not to be scientifically valid but rather collect news stories of interest to SDA for providing vulnerabilities to better

contextualise and localise their content creation process. This gives a sense of the lens through which SDA viewed Sweden. Stories covered included:

- Anti-Semitism
    - Burning of the Torah outside of the Israeli embassy in Stockholm
    - Israeli flags burned outside of a Malmö synagogue
    - Anti-Israel protests at Swedish-hosted Eurovision
- Türkiye-NATO
    - Potential Turkish barriers to NATO entry
    - Erdoğan's claims that Sweden isn't doing enough against Kurdish militants
- Ukraine
    - The capture of a Swedish armoured vehicle in Ukraine
    - Potential sales of JAS-Gripen to Ukraine
- Sabotage of Nord Stream
- The possibility of the military being used to calm gang violence

Since we do not have access to all monitoring documents, it is likely that gang violence and the LVU campaign were covered more regularly than is represented here.

# 4. Social Design Agency Capabilities

The following chapter provides a detailed overview of each of the tools at SDA's disposal. To produce this analysis, we have complemented SDA's own product descriptions with examples found in the leaks or elsewhere, to create as accurate a picture as possible.

There can be little doubt that SDA is a competent organisation with the ability to produce and deliver content at scale. The blending of marketing, public relations, espionage, and psyops tools gives a capability profile that runs from highly targeted, high precision activities to "spammy and scammy" blunderbuss approaches. Project management appear to be solid, given the high volumes of output. SDA's approach to influencer management appears outdated, as it treats influencers primarily as content distribution channels rather than fostering meaningful relationships with them - yet this strategy still seems to serve its purpose.

In our assessment, SDA is not far from being a cutting-edge enterprise. Approaches to social listening, marketing, and influencer management are similar to the approaches used by Western PR companies, albeit slightly behind the curve. **We assess SDA capabilities as a whole to be approximately 5 to 7 years behind the cutting-edge**. Some specific capabilities, such as integration of AI, are closer to current best practice. **It probably makes sense to think of SDA as a range of capabilities duct-taped together, that is fit for its Kremlin-directed purpose and can be readily adapted to new challenges fairly rapidly**.

Below are screenshots of two documents that give an overview of SDA capabilities from two perspectives: first, through a price list, and second, through a list of SDA's 107 employees (excluding names). Both documents were manually translated.

**Figure 34.** *Price list and product overview for the CCU (see below, several pages).*

**Product Registry for the CCU**
(prices and amounts are approximate)

| # | Service | Description | Production Frequency | Amount per month | Total Price (Rubles) | Total Price (EUR) | Price per Unit | Staff/Resources | Price Breakdown (Rubles) | Price Breakdown (EUR) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Analytics and Monitoring (Strategic content)** | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1 | Influencer monitoring | Table with a selection of publications of social media influencers world-wide, which fit into the thematic outlines of the project. The table contains information about the author, synopsis of the post, coverage and reactions. | Daily | 30 | 50 000 RUB | 480 EUR | 16 EUR | Manager | N/A | N/A |
| | | | | | | | | Analysis head | N/A | N/A |
| | | | | | | | | 2 monitoring specialis | N/A | N/A |
| 2 | A report on commentary work | A report on the comment machine's workflow, comment examples, analytics | Weekly | 4 | 0 RUB | 0 EUR | 0 EUR | Kazakova (analytics) | N/A | N/A |
| | | | | | | | | Baraev (design) | N/A | N/A |
| 3 | Influencer statistics | Analytics report on Influencer statistics | Weekly | 4 | 20 000 RUB | 192 EUR | 48 EUR | Manager<br>Chief analyst<br>2 monitoring specialis | 20 000 RUB | 192 EUR |
| 4 | Analysis of monitoring comments in social networks of Ukraine | A report that presents an analysis of commentary trends in the Ukrainian segment of social networks over the past week. | Weekly | 4 | 30 000 RUB | 288 EUR | 72 EUR | Analyst<br>Designer<br>Chief analyst<br>2 monitoring specialis | 30 000 RUB | 288 EUR |
| 5 | U - monitoring of world media. Analytical report | An analytical table with a selection of world media publications (primarily Western) that correspond to the campaigns of the project. Each link is accompanied by recommendations for narratives and framing. The table is accompanied by an explanatory note. | Weekly | 4 | 20 000 RUB | 192 EUR | 48 EUR | Editor-in-Chief<br>2 operators to collect the data<br>7 writers - analysts | about 20 000 RUB per month for content (including data collection and writing recommendations)<br><br>The editor-in-chief's salary (A. Medvedev) and bonuses are not taken into account. The system depends on the work of two "Pulse" channels. | |
| 6 | General Dashboard | An analytical document that presents data on the results of comment work for the past week in a visually appealing form. Preparation of the document requires collection, systematization and graphic processing of a large array of diverse data. | Weekly | 4 | 0 RUB | 0 EUR | 0 RUB | Analytical team "Baray<br>Kazakova and the chief analyst (data on distribution) | (⅓ of M. Baraev's salary + Kazakova's piece + chief analyst's piece) | |
| 7 | Sociology Dashboard | An analytical document that presents data on the dynamics and results of sociological research in Ukraine for the past week in a visually appealing form. Preparation of the document requires collection, | Weekly | 4 | 0 RUB | 0 EUR | 0 EUR | Analytical team "Baray | ⅓ of M. Baraev's salary | |

**Product Registry for the CCU**
(prices and amounts are approximate)

| # | Service | Description | Production Frequency | Amount per month | Total Price (Rubles) | Total Price (EUR) | Price per Unit | Staff/Resources | Price Breakdown (Rubles) | Price Breakdown (EUR) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 8 | U-Pulse Channel | A Telegram channel with a news feed corresponding to the project's thematic outlines, operating daily in real time. | Daily | N/A | 180 000 RUB | 1 728 EUR | N/A | 2 editors | 90 000 RUB | 864 EUR |
| | | | | | | | | 4 monitoring specialis | 90 000 RUB | 864 EUR |
| 9 | Report on the monitoring of the Western Think Tanks | An analytical report of the Western Think Tank articles around the Ukrainian conflict. The analysis is accompanied by recommendations for adjusting information-psychological work and creating content based on articles for distribution within the Ukrainian circuit. | Once every two weeks | 2 | 0 RUB | 0 EUR | 0 EUR | Monitoring specialists | 2 salaries | |
| | | | | | | | | 2 analysts | 2 salaries | |
| | | | | | | | | Designer | | |
| 10 | Strategic development of information and psychological operations | Strategic development of a comprehensive informational and psychological operation designed for a longterm (over 3 months). The document contains the goals and objectives of the campaign, analytical, prognostic and technological parts, recommendations for all agents of information and psychological influence, including official media, Influencers, government and municipal facilities | Once a quarter | N/A | 0 RUB | 0 EUR | 0 EUR | Work of all teams of the project | | |
| | | | | | | | | Work of the Team I (Ilya's team which is dedicated to the CCE) on coordinating the development and realizations of the operation | | |
| 11 | Dashboard "Globe of Ukraine" | The dashboard, working title "Globe of Ukraine," is a document in the form of a graphically designed "dashboard," which presents a picture of the information field of Ukraine over the past week in a visually appealing form. The dashboard contains quantitative and qualitative indicators, covering the results of media monitoring (including foreign and regional), telegram channels, and social networks. The following data can be found in it *(unfinished sentence)* | Weekly | N/A | 0 RUB | 0 EUR | 0 EUR | No less than 10 employees | | |
| | | | | | | | | Several analytical systems with big tariffs (BA, Medialogia, TG-stat) | | |

**Product Registry for the CCU**
(prices and amounts are approximate)

| # | Service | Description | Production Frequency | Amount per month | Total Price (Rubles) | Total Price (EUR) | Price per Unit | Staff/Resources | Price Breakdown (Rubles) | Price Breakdown (EUR) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Creative Content** | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1 | **Long-read** | • Text 2000-5000 characters including spaces<br>• 10 comments to the text<br>• 3 teasers to the text<br>• Finding a corresponding image in the internet<br>• Translation | Daily | 70 | 190 000 RUB | 1 824 EUR | 26 EUR | Editor-in-Chief V.Ostreshko | N/A | N/A |
| | | | | | | | | 7 writers | 85 000 RUB | 816 EUR |
| | | | | | | | | Designer/Delivery | 25 000 RUB | 240 EUR |
| | | | | | | | | Translator | N/A | N/A |
| | | | | | | | | Bonuses | N/A | N/A |
| 2 | **Short-read** | • Text 1000 characters including spaces<br>• Video illustrations corresponding to the text (selection and preparation of subtitles)<br>• Translation | Daily | 190 | 215 000 RUB | 2 064 EUR | 11 EUR | Editor | 19 000 RUB | 182 EUR |
| | | | | | | | | 6 writers | | |
| | | | | | | | | Freelance writers | N/A | N/A |
| | | | | | | | | Designer/Delivery | 25 000 RUB | 240 EUR |
| | | | | | | | | Translator | N/A | N/A |
| | | | | | | | | Bonuses | N/A | N/A |
| 3 | **Meme** | • An image with text<br>• Explanation<br>• Translation | Daily | 200 | 0 RUB | 0 EUR | 0 EUR | 2 meme-makers on payroll. K. Bezborodova on full payroll and S. Minaeva on half payroll | N/A | N/A |
| | | | | | | | | Translator | N/A | N/A |
| 4 | **Video Meme** | • A vertical or horizontal video clip with text<br>• Explanation<br>• Translation | Daily | 50 | 0 RUB | 0 EUR | 0 EUR | 2 meme-makers on payroll. K. Bezborodova on full payroll and S. Minaeva on half payroll | N/A | N/A |
| | | | | | | | | Translator | N/A | N/A |
| 5 | **Video Clip** | • A video clip (possibly with subtitles, voice-over, game elements, professional editing)<br>• Voice-over or subtitles<br>• Translation | Weekly | 4 | 0 RUB | 0 EUR | 0 EUR | Director | N/A | N/A |
| | | | | | | | | Editor | N/A | N/A |
| | | | | | | | | 2 writers | N/A | N/A |
| | | | | | | | | Translator | N/A | N/A |
| | | | | | | | | Designer | N/A | N/A |
| 6 | **Caricature** | • Original illustration with text<br>• Accompanying explanation<br>• Translation | Daily | 90 | 0 RUB | 0 EUR | 0 EUR | 2 artists | N/A | N/A |
| | | | | | | | | Translator | N/A | N/A |
| | | | | | | | | Designer | N/A | N/A |
| 7 | **Augmented Reality (special messages)** | • Multi-format content - long-reads, short-reads, illustrations, short videos and so on<br>• Translation | Twice a week | 8 | 0 RUB | 0 EUR | 0 EUR | Manager | N/A | N/A |
| | | | | | | | | 2 writers | N/A | N/A |
| | | | | | | | | Graphic designer | N/A | N/A |
| | | | | | | | | Video-maker (per case | N/A | N/A |
| | | | | | | | | Translator | N/A | N/A |
| | | | | | | | | Designer | N/A | N/A |
| 8 | Plays, pamphletes, jokes | Reference: the poems of the project "Citizen Poet". Goal: to laugh at the decisions of the military-political leadership of Ukraine, forming an agenda on social media | | | 0 RUB | 0 EUR | 0 EUR | 2 professional writers - a novelist and a poet | | |

**Product Registry for the CCU**
(prices and amounts are approximate)

| # | Service | Description | Production Frequency | Amount per month | Total Price (Rubles) | Total Price (EUR) | Price per Unit | Staff/Resources | Price Breakdown (Rubles) | Price Breakdown (EUR) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Comment Machine | Producing and delivering comm | Daily | N/A | 1 000 000 RUB | 9 600 EUR | N/A | Manager | about 1 million per month: technical support and salaries of employees + Kazakova's piece + Fefelova's piece | |
| | | | | | | | | Tech specialist | | |
| | | | | | | | | Writers | | |
| | | | | | | | | 11 delivery people | | |
| 2 | Sleeping groups of the Russia's supporters in social media | | Daily | | 0 RUB | 0 EUR | 0 EUR | | | |
| 3 | Network of NGOs in European countries | | | | 0 RUB | 0 EUR | 0 EUR | | | |

**Source:** SDA

**Figure 35.** *List of SDA staff, functions and activities, several pages (see below).*

| Role | Function | Form of Payment | City | The CCE | The CCU | The OU | Tambov | North-West Administrative District of Moscow/Oil refinery |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Head | General and project management | Salary | Moscow | TRUE | TRUE | TRUE | TRUE | TRUE |
| First deputy head | General and project management, negotiations | Salary | Moscow | TRUE | TRUE | TRUE | TRUE | TRUE |
| Main ideologist, analyst | Working on ideological directions, narratives, writing texts | Salary | Moscow | TRUE | TRUE | TRUE | FALSE | FALSE |
| The head of the design-department, analyst, writer | Managing designers, layout and design, analytics, working with databases, preparing dashboards | Salary | Moscow | TRUE | TRUE | TRUE | TRUE | FALSE |
| The head of the media-department, analyst, writer | Managing writers, editing and preparing texts | Salary | Moscow | TRUE | TRUE | FALSE | TRUE | FALSE |
| The head of the content-department, analyst, editor | Working on content plans, narratives, analytics, setting tasks for writers, writing texts | Salary | Moscow | TRUE | TRUE | FALSE | FALSE | FALSE |
| The head of Social Media Management (SMM) department | General management of the work in social media, machine monitoring | Salary | Moscow | TRUE | TRUE | TRUE | FALSE | FALSE |
| Head lawyer | Legal support of the campaign, management of lawyers on projects | Salary | Moscow | FALSE | FALSE | FALSE | TRUE | FALSE |
| The head of the monitoring department ("Pulse" system), administrator | General management of the monitoring team, general and project administration, analytics, writing texts | Salary | Moscow | TRUE | TRUE | FALSE | TRUE | FALSE |

| Role | Function | Form of Payment | City | The CCE | The CCU | The OU | Tambov | North-West Administrative District of Moscow/Oil refinery |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Main analyst, ideologist | Managing the operators who collect analytical tables, working on ideological directions, narratives, writing texts, analytics | Salary | Moscow | TRUE | TRUE | FALSE | FALSE | FALSE |
| Administrator, Analyst | Working with the data-base, managing registries and tables, content delivery to the comissioner, analytics, content-management | Salary | Moscow | TRUE | TRUE | TRUE | FALSE | TRUE |
| The head of Special Operations | Management of special operations, Execution of special tasks | Salary | Moscow | FALSE | FALSE | FALSE | TRUE | FALSE |
| The head of the administrative-economic department | The administrative support of the campaign, production and ordering of products. | Salary | Moscow | TRUE | TRUE | FALSE | FALSE | FALSE |
| Bookkeeper | | Salary | Moscow | FALSE | FALSE | FALSE | FALSE | FALSE |
| Socia Media Manager, office-manager | Adiminstration, moderation, writing comments, formulating analytics table | Salary | Moscow | TRUE | TRUE | FALSE | FALSE | TRUE |
| Designer | Page layout and design | Salary | St. Petersbourg | FALSE | FALSE | FALSE | TRUE | FALSE |
| Secretary | Assignments, working with a data-base | Salary | Moscow | TRUE | FALSE | FALSE | FALSE | FALSE |
| Secretary | Delivering content to the comissioner, working with a data-base. | Salary | Tver | FALSE | TRUE | FALSE | FALSE | FALSE |

| Role | Function | Form of Payment | City | The CCE | The CCU | The OU | Tambov | North-West Administrative District of Moscow/Oil refinery |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Editor, writer | Editing texts, writing texts, filling out analytics tables | Salary | Samara | TRUE | TRUE | FALSE | FALSE | FALSE |
| Editor, writer | Editing texts, writing texts. | Salary | Yekaterinburg | TRUE | TRUE | FALSE | FALSE | FALSE |
| Writer | Writing texts, filling out analytics tables | Per unit | Yekaterinburg | TRUE | TRUE | FALSE | FALSE | FALSE |
| Writer | Writing texts, filling out analytics tables | Per unit | Tver | TRUE | TRUE | FALSE | FALSE | FALSE |
| Writer | Writing texts, filling out analytics tables | Salary | Yerevan | TRUE | TRUE | FALSE | FALSE | FALSE |
| Writer | Writing texts, filling out analytics tables | Salary | Tambov | TRUE | TRUE | FALSE | TRUE | TRUE |
| Writer, analyst | Writing texts, short-raeds, filling out analytics tables | Per unit | Samara | TRUE | TRUE | FALSE | FALSE | FALSE |
| Writer | Writing texts, filling out analytics tables | Per unit | Samara | TRUE | TRUE | FALSE | FALSE | FALSE |
| Writer | Filling out analytics tables | Per unit | Moscow | TRUE | TRUE | FALSE | FALSE | FALSE |

| Role | Function | Form of Payment | City | The CCE | The CCU | The OU | Tambov | North-West Administrative District of Moscow/Oil refinery |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Pulse" system)** | | | | | | | | |
| The operator of the analytics tables, writer | Forming analytics tables, writing prompts for neuro-networks, filling out analytics tables | Per unit | Tver | TRUE | TRUE | FALSE | FALSE | FALSE |
| Operator of the analytics tables | Forming analytics tables. | Per unit | Moscow | TRUE | TRUE | FALSE | FALSE | FALSE |
| The editor of the "Pulse" system | Administering the work of the monitoring operators, Editor-in-Chief of the Pulse system, filling out analytics tables | Salary | Tver | TRUE | TRUE | FALSE | FALSE | FALSE |
| The editor of the "Pulse" system | Administering the work of the monitoring operators, Editor-in-Chief of the Pulse system, filling out analytics tables | Salary | Tver | TRUE | TRUE | FALSE | FALSE | FALSE |
| Anti-monitoring operator | Monitoring media and Telegram channels (Pulse) | Salary | Moscow | TRUE | TRUE | FALSE | FALSE | FALSE |
| Monitoring operator | Monitoring media and Telegram channels (Pulse) | Per unit | Krasnoyarsk | TRUE | TRUE | FALSE | FALSE | FALSE |
| Monitoring operator | Monitoring media and Telegram channels (Pulse) | Per unit | Moscow | TRUE | TRUE | FALSE | FALSE | FALSE |
| Monitoring operator | Monitoring media and Telegram channels (Pulse) | Per unit | Tambov | TRUE | FALSE | FALSE | FALSE | FALSE |
| Monitoring operator | Monitoring media and Telegram channels (Pulse) | Per unit | Tambov | TRUE | FALSE | FALSE | FALSE | FALSE |

| Role | Function | Form of Payment | City | The CCE | The CCU | The OU | Tambov | North-West Administrative District of Moscow/Oil refinery |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Monitoring operator | Monitoring media and Telegram channels (Pulse) | Per unit | Tambov | TRUE | FALSE | FALSE | FALSE | FALSE |
| Monitoring operator | Monitoring media and Telegram channels (Pulse) | Per unit | Moscow | TRUE | FALSE | FALSE | FALSE | FALSE |
| Monitoring operator | Monitoring media and Telegram channels (Pulse) | Per unit | Tambov | TRUE | FALSE | FALSE | FALSE | FALSE |
| Monitoring operator | Monitoring media and Telegram channels (Pulse) | Per unit | Tambov | TRUE | FALSE | FALSE | FALSE | FALSE |
| ***aya zemlya" - Tambov Land)*** | | | | | | | | |
| The administrator of the "Tambov Land" headquarters. | Duty at the headquarters "Tabmovs land", receiving people, monitoring the media and Telegram channels (Pulse). | Salary | Tambov | TRUE | FALSE | FALSE | TRUE | FALSE |
| The specialist at the "Tambov Land" headquarters, monitoring operator. | Monitoring media and Telegram channels (Pulse). Administration and economic supply of the "Tambov Land" headquarters. | Salary | Tambov | TRUE | TRUE | FALSE | TRUE | FALSE |
| The specialist at the "Tambov Land" headquarters, monitoring operator. | Monitoring media and Telegram channels (Pulse). Administering work of the "Tambov Land" headquarters | Salary | Tambov | TRUE | FALSE | FALSE | TRUE | FALSE |
| The specialist at the "Tambov Land" | Monitoring, Administering work of the "Tambov Land" | Salary | Tambov | FALSE | FALSE | FALSE | TRUE | FALSE |

**Source:** SDA

## 4.1 Monitoring

SDA uses monitoring as a core offering to its clients, in support of claims to fully understand target audiences. The documents in the leak give a good view of several core monitoring products. In our view, the majority of these products are automated outputs from an analytics dashboard such as Brand Analytics or Medialogia (see the following chapter). Therefore, if the complexity of tables looks impressive, it is because they are produced at the touch of a button. More complex products that involve manual assessments are rare and of weaker quality.

**Figure 36.** *Monitoring-analytical products from Team I during 2022 (indicative figures per month).*

| Analytical products | April 22 | June 22 | Dec 22 |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Media monitoring** | 25 | 27 | 26 |
| **Anti-monitoring** | 25 | 21 | 26 |
| **Influencer monitoring** | 25 | 27 | 26 |
| **Anti-Influencer monitoring with interpretation** | 25 | 27 | 26 |
| **Monitoring the "Attack Vectors"** | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| **Analytical note on working with think tanks** | 4 | 1 | 4 |
| **Overview of foreign sociology** | 4 | 1 | 3 |
| **An overview of internal sociology** | 2 | 2 | 0 |
| **SDA Sociology (TG channel)** | 20 | 27 | 21 |

**Source:** SDA

Overall, our view is that these products are adequate for their purpose. The Presidential Administration meetings demonstrate that strategy is determined by the hierarchy within the Kremlin, and while SDA's monitoring might be part of the overall datasets available to decisionmakers, this is not their main application. Rather, they are used to link communication strategy, such as is dictated by "thematic lines", with ongoing events in order to identify opportunities for "attack vectors". In essence, they help to localise and actualise abstract goals into concrete opportunities.

Note that many of the spreadsheets used are simple outputs from Brand Analytics. Some, however, are linked via cloud services in order to share data across multiple documents and chat groups. These cloud services provide a specific vulnerability to SDA's ability to manage volume, which has consequences for their business model. Indeed, these metrics are the basis for everybody to get paid.

## International media monitoring

Capability assessment: International media monitoring is conducted in a standard format in line with industry standards. The data collection methodology is likely achieved through use of keywords in off-the-shelf analytics dashboards, such as Brand Analytics or Medialogia. The monitoring appears to be implemented on a regular basis as planned, though this is unsurprising. The reports are likely automated outputs from the analytics dashboard.

**International media monitoring (by country).** The leak contains 236 foreign media monitoring summaries for France, Germany, Israel, the USA and, to a lesser extent, Italy and Poland, covering January 2023 to June 2024. The reports are mostly weekly and sometimes biweekly. Each report is substantial, spanning from several pages to 20 or 30. The format of the

report is always the same: a flag of the monitored country, date and heading, and table of contents of the headlines. In the body of the report is the headline, a translation of parts of the news story, and at the bottom the headline in its original language with a link to the story. No explanation is given for the order of the selected stories, which range from Ukraine and Russia-related topics to more general domestic events which may be of relevance to a sociological understanding of public opinion.

There are also, on some occasions, fully translated news articles with links and images stored as separate files.

**International media monitoring (by KPI).** Collection of "positive" stories related to Russia and/or SDA-related activities, assembled under campaign objectives (K1-4). Examples are selected from multiple countries in a non-systematic manner. Described as an "analytical summary", it comprises of links to a handful of stories and a short summary. For example, for the first week of March 2023, stories under CCE K1 include:

- **The theme 'The war in Ukraine is someone else's war' was reflected in Prime Minister Viktor Orban's proposal for European countries to create their own defence alliance instead of NATO, which is completely dependent on the will of the United States.**
- **Americans' reaction to the part of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's interview in which he says that US residents will have to send their children to die for Ukraine has garnered tens of thousands of posts and reactions on Twitter, causing a storm of outrage.**
- **The impending defeat of the Ukrainian armed forces in Bakhmut shatters the European public's faith in Ukraine's possible victory and, therefore, in the expediency of further military assistance.**

While some sources are major, reputable news outlets, other sources are from more marginal outlets, as well as Twitter. No distinction is made in the weight of evidence against the source. Nor is there analysis as such, other than a typically hopeful view that the story in question indicates a future collapse of the West. The document may therefore be described as an optimistic collection of posts of varying quality that loosely correspond to campaign objectives, but where no causality or serious analysis is asserted. It simply gives the opportunity for spin. **It was probably intended as background material for stakeholders as proof of impact, and as an opportunity to spin for the creatives and the 'ideologists'.** There is only one example of this approach in the leak, possibly reflecting the subpar quality of the product.

**SDA description**

Monitoring of reporting in the international (primarily Western) media is aimed at identifying reports that can be interpreted in a favourable light for the Russian Federation in accordance with the thematic lines of the project. The identified reports can be replicated in the Ukrainian information environment, and also used to form new narratives and content.

**Format:** Analytical table containing 6 columns:

- Country
- Thematic line (K)
- Brief news summary.
- Link to the source.
- Quote from the news.
- Recommendations for using the publication in the work of the project.

**Frequency:** It is possible to execute in a daily (28-31 units per month) or weekly (4 units per month) format.

**Example:**

| № | Country | Direction | Publication | Source | Quote | Coverage recommendations |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | US | K3-<br><br>Loss of morale in the Ukrainian Armed Forces | Ukrainian morgues have ran out of the space for the dead | WSJ<br>https://www.wsj.com/world/europe/the-harrowing-work-of-burying-ukraines-war-dead-29d00c0e?mod=world_lead_pos5 | WSJ writes<br>: "Ukrainian morgues are overflowing with the dead. Due to lack of gurneys, the body bags are sorted out on the floor". | 1. To promote an idea that civil and military authorities of Ukraine were not ready for such high losses at the frontline. The real level of loses are not discloses.<br>2. To emphasize that the government is doing everything to reduce the payments to the fallen soldiers to the maximum.<br>3. To note that current leadership of Ukraine makes not only the military victory but even ceasefire negotiations impossible. |
| 2 | US | K3-<br><br>Loss of morale in the Ukrainian Armed Forces | Ukraine is actively recruiting women into the Armed Forces | NYT<br>https://www.nytimes.com/2023/11/08/world/europe/ukraine-war-army-women.html | NYT reports "In the circumstances of prolonged warfare, Ukraine is forcefully recruiting women into the Armed Forces. According to the data of Ministry of Defense of Ukraine, around 43,000 women are serving in the Ukrainian army, which is 40 percent more than in 2021" | 1. To promote an idea that mobilizing women and older people to serve in the Armed Services of Ukraine is an act of desperation. The youth is trying to avoid draft by giving bribes and fleeing to EU countries while the losses are mounting.<br>2. To emphasize that soon there will be no one to fight, the attitude toward veterans and disabled is terrible, the soldiers kill their commanding officers that treat them like cannon fodder. .<br>3. To note that current leadership of Ukraine makes not only the |
| 3 | Poland | K4-<br><br>Sowing discord in population | Russia has accumulated almost 900 long-range rockets | PAP<br>https://www.pap.pl/ru/russian/news/ukrainskaya-voennaya-razvedka-rossiya-nakopila-pochti-900-raket<br>https://www.pap.pl/ru/russian/news/ukrainskaya-voennaya-razvedka-rossiya-nakopila-pochti-900-raket | Press secretary of the Main Directorate of military intelligence of Ukraine, [redacted] Foreign Official 5 stated that according to the data from the War Study Institute, Russian forces have 870 operational tactical; high-precision rockets in reserve. Press secretary also informed that in October Russian forces have launched 115 high-precision rockets capable to flying long distances", according to RAR. | 1. To emphasize that as far back as December of the last year, head of SBU, Foreign Official 5 stated that Russia's arsenal of ammunition for high precision weapons is depleted but now SBU is stating the opposite. In other words, the authorities are deceiving Ukrainians, stating that the Russian resources are dwindling – the war will be long, and the winter will be terrible.<br>2. To promote an idea that the allies have abandoned Ukraine, delaying delivery of ammunition and weapons. Moreover, now the US has sent all of its assistance to Israel. EU may follow them and refuse assistance. Ukraine does not have its own resources to have a prolonged war with Russia. Foreign Official 6 push for peace talks. |

**Source:** DOJ, Exhibit 6A

## Narrative monitoring

Capability assessment: Similar to international media monitoring, these products contain useful monitoring data according to normal methodological standards and are likely automated outputs from one of the purchased analytics dashboards.

**Review of anti-Russian narratives in the Western media**. A small number of Excel sheets capture the top 20 traditional media news narratives from the USA, Germany, France and Israel and gives a number per week, presumably representing how regularly the narrative was seen. For example, mentions of the narrative "Russia's invasion of Ukraine fails" is shown to increase between the third and fourth weeks of March 2023 from 13 to 72. One sheet contains data over a 6 month period, while a second sheet continues to January 2024. This is presumably to allow longitudinal analysis of what are considered to be negative narratives against Russian interests.

**Review of narratives about the Ukrainian counter-offensive**. While not originally mentioned in any of the Center S's presentations, this March 2023

monitoring report collects narratives around Ukraine's anticipated counter-offensive. It covers international, Ukrainian and Russian media channels, and aims to extrapolate the most common narratives anticipating where, and when the counter-offensive will take place. It also aims to anticipate what prognoses are made and by whom. The spreadsheet consists of 3 Excel sheets covering Ukrainian media (180 sources), Russian media (30 sources), and Ukrainian social media (20 sources) respectively, and represents a reasonably comprehensive method of capturing debates about forecasted directions for further analysis. The spreadsheet captures:

- Date of publication
- Media/Telegram channel
- Name of media/channel
- Link to publication
- Text of publication (if it is a news item in mass media or a large post - a brief summary)
- Who is referred to
- Forecast of the dates of the beginning of the AFU counter-offensive
- Forecast of the direction of the AFU counter-offensive
- Forecast of the results of the AFU counter-offensive

**Figure 37.** *A screenshot of the first page of the document containing narratives around Ukrainian counter-offensive.*

| *The date is written in the format DD.MM.YY* | *Please select one of the options (Media, Telegram)* | *The names must be written uniformly (for example, if UNIAN is written once, then this media outlet must be called that way everywhere)* | *Link to the publication* | *The text of the publication is given with the preservation of spelling and emoji. The short description should be no more than 200 characters. Try to grasp the essence.* | *If available. Indicate which official person or publication the author of the article/publication refers to (for example: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, Bloomberg, etc.)* | *Select from the drop-down list (Aril, May, Summer, Other, Not specified)* | *Select from the drop-down list (Zaporozhie, Donbass, Crimea, Other, Several directions, Not Specified)* | *Select from the drop-down list (Total victory, Victory, Total defeat, defeat, Not specified, Oher)* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Publication date** | **Media/ Telegram** | **Name of the media channel** | **link to the publication** | **Text of the publication (if it is news in the media or a large post - a summary)** | **Who is it referring to?** | **Forecast of the start date of the counteroffensive of the Armed Forces of Ukraine** | **Forecast of the direction of the counteroffensive of the Armed Forces of Ukraine** | **Forecast of the results of the counteroffensive of the Armed Forces of Ukraine** |
| 22.03.0203 | Media | Apostrophe.ua | https://apostrophe.ua/article/politics/foreign-policy/2023-03-22/nato-gotovit-... | Czech President Petr Pavel recently said that Ukraine will have only one attempt at a major counteroffensive and we must use this opportunity this year. According to him, it will be difficult to get help from allies for a new attempt at a counteroffensive in the future. | President of the Czech Republic Petr Pavel | Not specified | Not specified | Not specified |
| 08.03.2023 | Media | Censor.net | https://censor.net/ru/news/3404490/kontrnastuplenie_vsu_mojet_nachatsya_v... | Ukraine's counteroffensive could begin in April as the Ukrainian army transforms to accommodate new Western military aid. | The Economist | April | Not specified | Not specified |
| 10.03.2023 | TG Channel | BRIEF | https://t.me/rusbrief/99342 | It is quite clear how Macron will help Ukraine with the counteroffensive together with England. French information control systems will be implemented in tank brigades, including those with AMX-56 Leclerc tanks, and the brigades will be trained by British instructors. | source in the OP | Not specified | Not specified | Not specified |
| 10.03.2023 | TG Channel | BILD | https://t.me/BILD_Russian/7518 | Podolyak named the timing of the Ukrainian Armed Forces' counteroffensive. The Ukrainian army needs two more months to prepare for the offensive, Mykhailo Podolyak, an adviser to the head of the Ukrainian President's Office, told the Italian newspaper La Stampa. During this time, according to him, the Ukrainian Armed Forces "need to increase the supply of heavy 155-millimeter artillery shells and long-range missiles." | Adviser to the Head of the Presidential Office Mykhailo Podolyak | Not specified | Not specified | Not specified |

Ukraine | Russia | UKR.Social Media | +

**Source:** SDA

## Influencer management

Capability assessment: 3 documents give insight into SDA's influencer management capabilities. These are from the CCE campaign and do not

include the CCU project detailed below. However, it may be anticipated that working methods are similar. There is nothing remarkable about the approach, which may be considered to meet basic standards within the industry. More advanced software, such as a CRM service, would be anticipated for a database with a higher number of influencers, however the leak does not contain this data.

- **List of speakers and media**: a Word document table that captures the name, role, and main social media accounts of 34 persons of interest in German-speaking countries. Some are connected to political parties, most are simply listed as **Opposition resource**, suggesting that they are viewed as mouthpieces for pro-Kremlin messaging.
- **List of CCE Experts**: a Word document with a photo, name, short biography, and link to the website of 16 Russia-based influencers (together with several other names not yet added in the same format). Many are political scientists with established profiles as talking heads in Russia.
- **Database of influencers:** Screenshot of a shared Excel sheet that lists a handful of influencers per country (Austria, Belgium, Bosnia Herzegovina, Hungary, Germany), with the columns containing the name, country, role and specialisation, social media accounts, as well as the types of topics they address and their stance, such as "sympathetic to Russia" or "Against military aid". A second sheet, translated roughly as scope, possibly contains data about the influencers' reach (i.e., their audience size), or the dissemination of work conducted with them. Judging from the size of the sheet relative to the screen, there is likely to be a maximum of 100 rows in the database.

**SDA description**

Monitoring the pages of the leaders of public opinion in Ukraine, with the aim of identifying the messages that can be interpreted in a favourable light for the Russian Federation along the thematic lines of the project. The identified messages can be amplified in Ukraine's information space and used as the basis for new narratives and creative content.

The product consists of two parts: daily monitoring tables and a weekly analytics report.

**Format:**

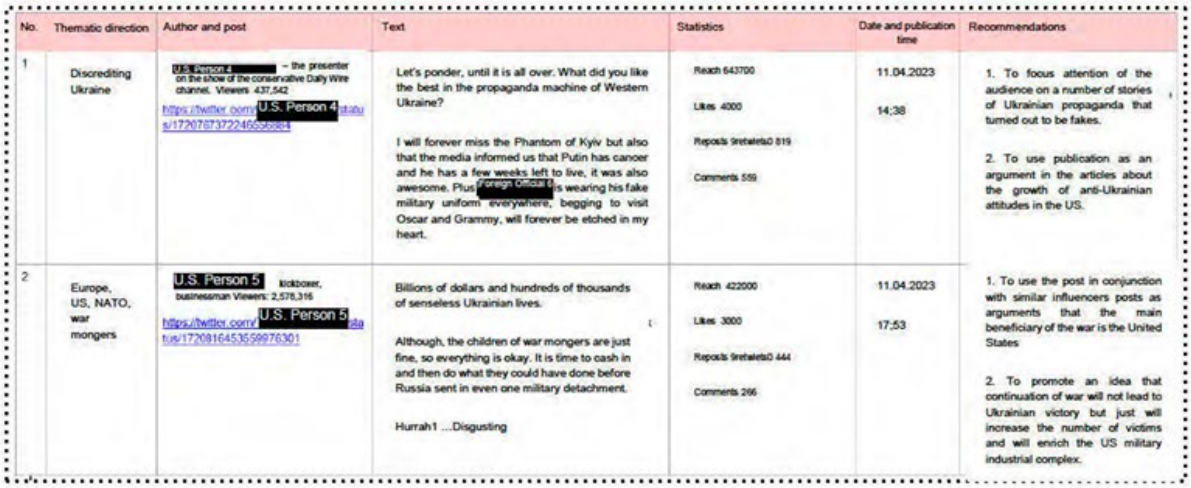
1. Analytical table containing 6 columns:
   - Subject area.
   - Author and post.
   - Message text.
   - Statistics (reach, views and reactions).
   - Publication date and time.
   - Recommendations for using the publication in the project.

2. A weekly report containing statistics on influencer messages for the week, broken down by the project's thematic lines and coverage/ reaction analysis.

**Frequency:**

- Table – daily (28-31 units per month)
- Statistical report – weekly (4 units per month)

**Example**:



| No. | Thematic direction | Author and post | Text | Statistics | Date and publication time | Recommendations |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Discrediting Ukraine | [redacted] – the presenter on the show of the conservative Daily Wire channel. Viewers 437,542 https://twitter.com/[redacted]/status/1720787372246605864 | Let's ponder, until it is all over. What did you like the best in the propaganda machine of Western Ukraine?<br><br>I will forever miss the Phantom of Kyiv but also that the media informed us that Putin has cancer and he has a few weeks left to live, it was also awesome. Plus [redacted] is wearing his fake military uniform everywhere, begging to visit Oscar and Grammy, will forever be etched in my heart. | Reach 643700<br>Likes 4000<br>Reposts (retweets) 819<br>Comments 559 | 11.04.2023<br>14:38 | 1. To focus attention of the audience on a number of stories of Ukrainian propaganda that turned out to be fakes.<br><br>2. To use publication as an argument in the articles about the growth of anti-Ukrainian attitudes in the US. |
| 2 | Europe, US, NATO, war mongers | U.S. Person 5 kickboxer, businessman Viewers: 2,578,316 https://twitter.com/[redacted]/status/1720816453599976301 | Billions of dollars and hundreds of thousands of senseless Ukrainian lives.<br><br>Although, the children of war mongers are just fine, so everything is okay. It is time to cash in and then do what they could have done before Russia sent in even one military detachment.<br><br>Hurrah1 ...Disgusting | Reach 422000<br>Likes 3000<br>Reposts (retweets) 444<br>Comments 266 | 11.04.2023<br>17:53 | 1. To use the post in conjunction with similar influencers posts as arguments that the main beneficiary of the war is the United States<br><br>2. To promote an idea that continuation of war will not lead to Ukrainian victory but just will increase the number of victims and will enrich the US military industrial complex. |

**Source:** DOJ, Exhibit 6A

## "Look at Ukraine"

Capability assessment: Additionally, SDA's Center S proposed a new fake news aggregator focused exclusively on collecting opinions and quotes from influencers. The project, titled "The View of Ukraine" or "Look at Ukraine" (Взгляд на Украину), aimed to compile pessimistic and critical perspectives on Ukraine's socio-political situation from influencers and media figures whose narratives aligned with Russia's strategic goals. The strategy sought to manipulate algorithms by aggregating a large volume of content under targeted keywords. The proposal claimed that through the repeated mention of influencer names and links to their content, search engines would begin displaying the site among the top results for terms related to "problems of Ukraine" within three months.

The initiative came with ambitious KPIs, boasting targets of over 20,000 posts, 100,000 daily readers, and more than 100 million views within a year. However, there is no evidence that the project was ever implemented. Content would be republished with or without the original authors' consent, presented in a format that made it appear as if the material was written specifically for the website. As a result, it's likely that some influencers would have been unaware if their words were being used in a context that supported the Kremlin's information warfare.

**SDA Description**

We propose to create and promote a website-aggregator of news and influencer opinions about the Ukrainian socio-political situation. Most of the materials will contain pessimistic forecasts, criticism of the military-political leadership of Ukraine and descriptions of corruption, crimes and deterioration of the standard of living.

90% of the portal materials will be reprints of Ukrainian influencers and media broadcasting favourable narratives. Also, 1-2 original materials (long-reads) will be drafted for the site daily. A separate subsection and personal design will be made made for each influencer whose materials will be posted on the site. This will create the impression that the publication was written by them specifically for the project.

Due to the constant mention of influencers' names and links to their sites, blogs, TG channels, search engine indexing mechanisms will begin to issue links to the site on the topic of the spectrum "problems of Ukraine" on the first pages in three months.

**Product format:**

3. Website.
1. original long-read materials.
2. targeted advertising and advertising seeding in social media networks.

**Frequency:** posting about 50 materials on the portal daily, of which 1-2 are original texts.

**Project KPIs after 6 months:**

- more than 8,000 posted materials.
- daily audience of more than 30,000 readers.
- more than 25,000,000 views.

**Project KPIs after 1 year:**

- more than 20,000 posted materials.
- daily audience of more than 100,000 readers.
- more than 100,000,000 views.

**Project implementation period:** starting from 6 months.

## Social media comments analysis

Capability assessment: A product entitled **Analysing the monitoring of comments in social networks in Ukraine** consists of two weekly reports in Word format. The documents are described as an **evaluation of audience reaction and promising attack vectors** and are 4-page summaries of a handful of online trends. No methodology is given, but analysts claim to have assessed more than 10,000 comments from the 20 largest open Ukrainian Telegram channels, Ukrainian trends on Twitter, and comments

under articles in the Ukrainian media. It is likely to be a mix of software and human analyses.

The reports list the most popular topics and offers an introductory commentary on key trends, all of which were angled positively for Russia. A more detailed analysis of the top trends (approx. half page each) is followed by conclusions, which repeat the main points from the introduction. While some conclusions are based on the analysis, one example has no relation to anything described in the report: "Vladimir Zelensky is popular only with bots. Real users have a negative attitude towards the president."

It is therefore difficult to assess this product with any certainty, given that there are only two consecutive examples of what appears to be a weekly exercise included in the leak. The methodology is impossible to verify, for example whether Russian trolls (including SDA's own activities in comment fields) are excluded from the assessments of trends. Furthermore, the analysts are clearly constrained by ideology in ways that limit the validity of their conclusions. In sum, **this is a weak product of little analytical value beyond what could be ascertained from a cursory inspection of the week's news**.

**SDA Description**

The monitoring and analysis of trends in Ukrainian social media networks is divided into three main stages:

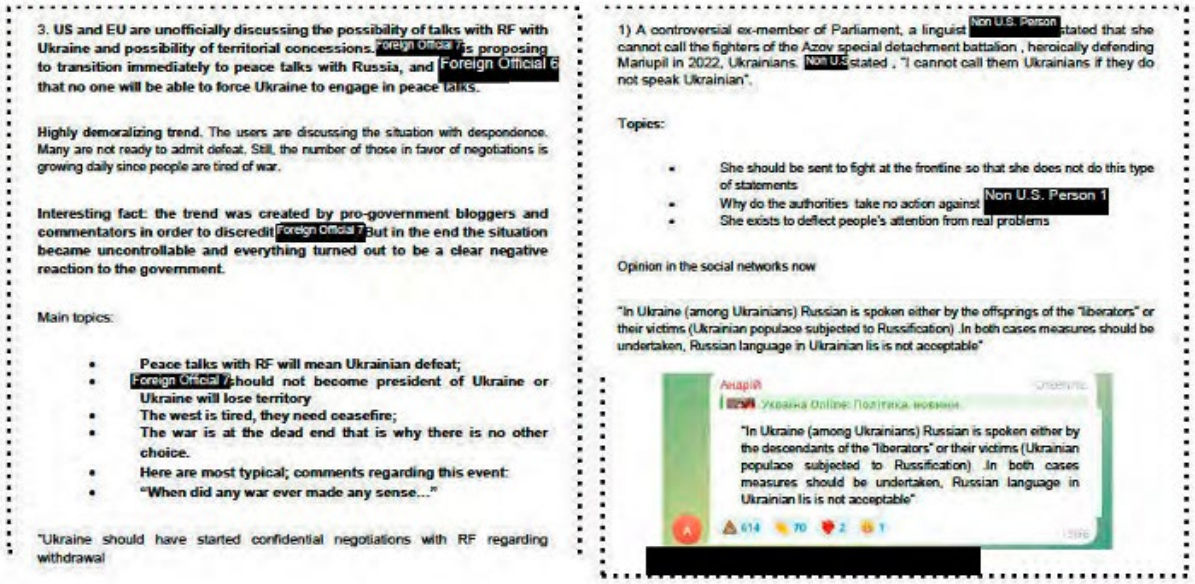
- Identifying the most discussed topics based on monitoring the largest Telegram channels with open discussions, Ukrainian trends on X (Twitter), and comments on articles in Ukrainian media.
- Analysis of an array of comments under publications, identification of the main trends in discussions, combinations of positive/negative/neutral reactions.
- Interpretation of monitoring results, analysis of the reflection of the mood of Ukrainian society in comments on social media networks, drawing up recommendations for using the obtained data in the work process.

**Format:**

- A briefing containing monitoring outcome reports: the most discussed topics, the main topics of commentary trends, the most striking comments.
- An analytical note with interpretation of the data, containing an analysis of each topic, identification of key narratives and determination of their potential for content production (comments, posts, articles, etc.), general conclusions.

**Frequency:** Weekly (based on the analysis of approximately 40,000 messages per week).

**Example:**



3. US and EU are unofficially discussing the possibility of talks with RF with Ukraine and possibility of territorial concessions. Foreign Official 7 is proposing to transition immediately to peace talks with Russia, and Foreign Official 8 that no one will be able to force Ukraine to engage in peace talks.

Highly demoralizing trend. The users are discussing the situation with despondence. Many are not ready to admit defeat. Still, the number of those in favor of negotiations is growing daily since people are tired of war.

Interesting fact: the trend was created by pro-government bloggers and commentators in order to discredit Foreign Official 7 But in the end the situation became uncontrollable and everything turned out to be a clear negative reaction to the government.

Main topics:

- Peace talks with RF will mean Ukrainian defeat;
- Foreign Official 7 should not become president of Ukraine or Ukraine will lose territory
- The west is tired, they need ceasefire;
- The war is at the dead end that is why there is no other choice.
- Here are most typical; comments regarding this event:
- "When did any war ever made any sense..."

"Ukraine should have started confidential negotiations with RF regarding withdrawal

1) A controversial ex-member of Parliament, a linguist Non U.S. Person stated that she cannot call the fighters of the Azov special detachment battalion , heroically defending Mariupil in 2022, Ukrainians. Non U.S. stated , "I cannot call them Ukrainians if they do not speak Ukrainian".

Topics:

- She should be sent to fight at the frontline so that she does not do this type of statements
- Why do the authorities take no action against Non U.S. Person 1
- She exists to deflect people's attention from real problems

Opinion in the social networks now

"In Ukraine (among Ukrainians) Russian is spoken either by the offsprings of the "liberators" or their victims (Ukrainian populace subjected to Russification) .In both cases measures should be undertaken, Russian language in Ukrainian lis is not acceptable"

"In Ukraine (among Ukrainians) Russian is spoken either by the descendants of the "liberators" or their victims (Ukrainian populace subjected to Russification) .In both cases measures should be undertaken, Russian language in Ukrainian lis is not acceptable"

**Source:** DOJ, Exhibit 6A

## The Sensitivity Index

Capability assessment: The Sensitivity Index is a tool designed to support analysis of SDA comments, in order to understand their psychological impact on audiences. 8 PowerPoints called **Report on commentary work** were produced on a more or less monthly basis between October 2023 and May 2024; each only covers one week.[139] These reports mostly detail the **Comments** project that began 1 February 2023 within the CCU campaign. The report appears to be an automated export from an analytics dashboard or Excel sheet.

On the first page is a main figure representing the number of comments the project inserted into the Ukrainian information environment together with a percentage of whether the number of comments went up or down from the preceding reporting period. This is often around 15,000 per week. Daily comment numbers are included in a bar chart (around 2,000 per day), while a pie chart shows which thematic line (K#) the comments belong to, and a smaller bar chart divides the comments proportionately between text and memes.

On the second page, the week's trends are listed as 4-6 stories connected to a thematic line. Each story is then scored on the Sensitivity Index. Efforts are also made to show trends over time. A typical trend is written as:

### K4: Unfit to serve the Ukrainian regime

Ukrainian users say that the Kiev regime is massacring those who cannot or do not want to serve it. The trend is linked to the ongoing discussion of the possible cancellation of pensions, the atrocities of the TSC in Odessa[140], and

139 It is unclear whether these reports were produced on a weekly or monthly basis.

140 Territorial Center of Recruitment and Social Support, Ukraine's military administration body.

the government's statement that European countries should stop supporting Ukrainian refugees and send them home. Users believe that all Ukrainians have long been divided into two camps: people useful to the regime and those who are to be wasted.

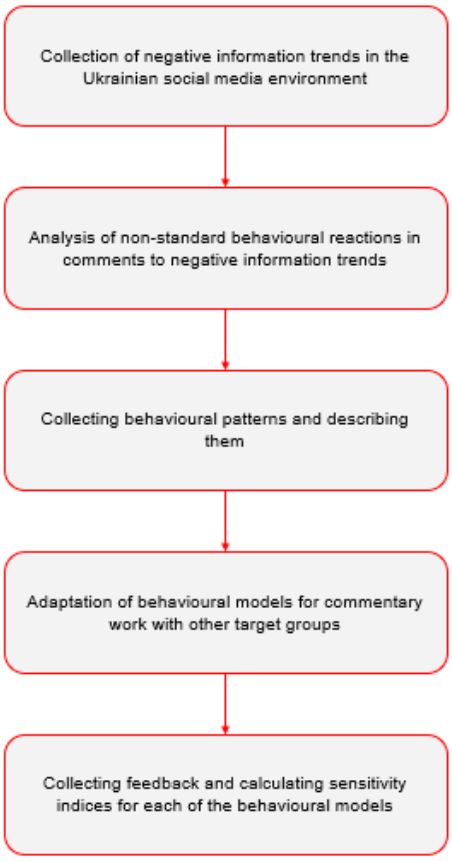



**Figure 38.** *Methodology used to calculate the Sensitivity Index.*

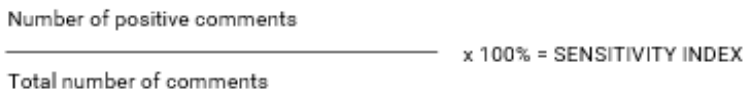
**Sensitivity Index: 88.58%**

Examples of SDA comments are captured with screenshots, which are presented on following pages. The screenshots reveal typically low levels of engagement with the comments, probably because they are taken immediately after posting.

The final page outlines the methodology. The approach is to identify Ukrainian "information incidents" that receive the most negative responses from users, which the analyst interprets as representing **the true attitude of Ukrainian users to this or that narrative**. This assumption is difficult to justify, but perhaps holds sway among stakeholders within the Russian ideological environment. Several hard to follow sentences follow about behavioural models identified over time that can directly influence the formation of public opinion and allow SDA to calculate a **Sensitivity Index**. The description of the Sensitivity Index is reasonably clear.

**"The sensitivity index is calculated based on the attitude of target groups towards the narrative. For example, a behavioural pattern may be identified under a trending discussion about corruption. It does not make sense to carry out psychological attacks in conjunction with these materials, as they already have a negative evaluation by users. Rather, it is important to augment the negative behavioural patterns by making comments that reinforce them. We can then measure the attitude to those comments, which gives us an objective picture of the shift in public opinion in real time. The sensitivity index is calculated as follows: the number of reactions to a comment is taken as 100%. Sensitivity is the percentage of users who reacted positively to the inserted comments."**

**Figure 39.** *Formula for the Sensitivity index*




While this capability might at a cursory level sound advanced, it is in essence dressing up a very simple principle in pseudo-behavioural science language. SDA analysts look for news stories negative to Ukrainians and add negative comments to those stories. Depending on the amount of likes their comments get, SDA assesses this as a measurable reflection of public opinion. Clearly, the preoccupation is with finding a metric that can demonstrate the value of the commentary work to stakeholders.

Two key points emerge from this. The first is that the comment figures are high, but the content of them is very low quality and repetitive. The screenshots invariably show low levels of engagement, which indicates that 3 or 4 likes on a comment can easily generate a 100% Sensitive Index rating. The use of percentages to two decimal points is a rhetorical device to mimic the appearance of accuracy. The second point is that the methodology does not appear to have a means of excluding SDA bots and other trolling activities from acting as the comment liker. In other words, it is entirely possible that other parts of the SDA ecosystem are producing the inputs that lead to the Sensitivity Index results. **We therefore assess the commenting system to be a relevant capability, but the Sensitivity Index to represent a fraudulent method for generating metrics to impress stakeholders**.

Campaign: CCU

**SDA Description**

The work is built on the basis of monitoring negative commentary trends in social media networks. Based on this analysis, **behavioural models** are identified.

A **behavioural model** is a non-standard user reaction, which allows identification of narratives that have the greatest support in Ukrainian society over a measurable period of time and directly affect the formation of public opinion.

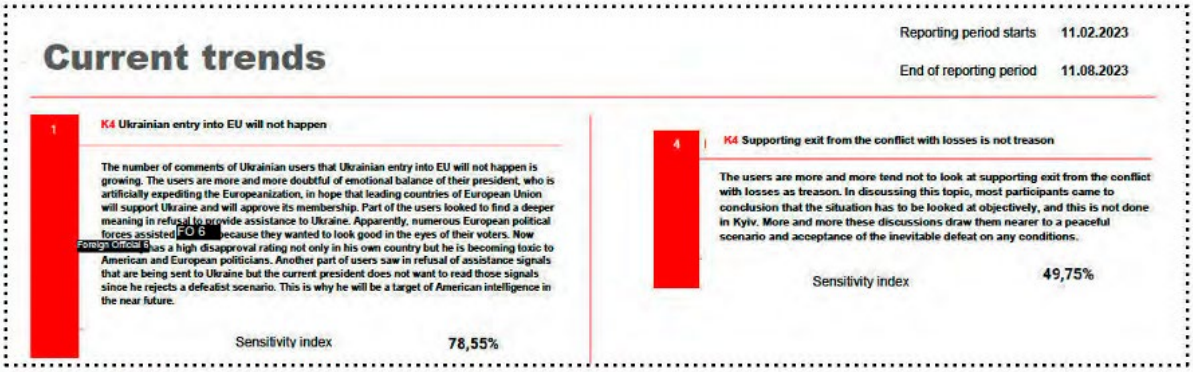
Behavioural models form the basis of commentary work, increasing its flexibility and mobility. Such work also allows you to identify the level of sensitivity to the narrative in other target groups and calculate the **sensitivity index**.

The **sensitivity index** is an index that demonstrates the attitude of Ukrainian users to support main behavioural trends. It is calculated as a percentage of the number of comments from Ukrainian users who reacted positively to the trend.

**Format:** Analytical report in dashboard format, containing the calculation of the sensitivity index of the main topics of the week in the context of the thematic lines of the project. Accompanied by a description of the calculation methodology.

**Frequency:** weekly (4 units per month).

**Example:**




**Source:** DOJ, Exhibit 6A

## Public opinion surveys

Capability assessment: SDA made proposals for an array of surveys to be conducted with the support of IPSOS (YouGov was also mentioned). It is unclear how many of these surveys were carried out, though questions were certainly prepared, and according to meeting protocols with the Presidential Administration, a dialogue was held with IPSOS about implementing the surveys.

It should be clear from the framing of the questions below that the surveys would themselves represent the delivery of Russian propaganda within Europe, and therefore that the answers would be of purely propagandistic rather than sociological-analytical value. This capability may therefore be considered weak as a public opinion surveying tool, but of potential utility as a delivery method for SDA's agitation model. In particular, it adds legitimacy as a source for fakes and is useful for producing infographics.

**Figure 40.** *Example of survey results presentation.*




**Source:** The Washington Post

**Proposal for a set of public opinion surveys in the Project countries.** According to the undated one-page proposal, **Social Design Agency will conduct a series of sociological surveys in the Project countries to obtain data on the current moods of audiences, to assess the effectiveness of the Project, and to test hypotheses. Surveys can be conducted on a regular basis and on request, using a variety of tools. Analytical conclusions are promptly prepared on the basis of the data obtained from the studies, and regular studies identify the dynamics of changes in the indicators**.

- **Telephone surveys**. Regular calls to subscriber bases in target Project countries. Up to 2,500 interviewees per call. Up to 20 questions in the questionnaire. Along with the analytical report, audio recordings of operators' conversations with subscribers are provided. Once a fortnight.
- **Online surveys** (river sampling[141]). Regular or ad hoc online surveys using the river sampling method, which involves attracting random users to the survey through online advertising. Up to 40 questions in a questionnaire. Up to 25,000 respondents. An analytical report with dynamics and conclusions is provided. Conducted fortnightly and on request.
- **Focus groups**. Qualitative research in the form of a group conversation with a moderator in Zoom. Conducted in the respondents' native language. In a group of up to 12 people. The number of groups per survey is at least 3. Regularly fortnightly and on request.

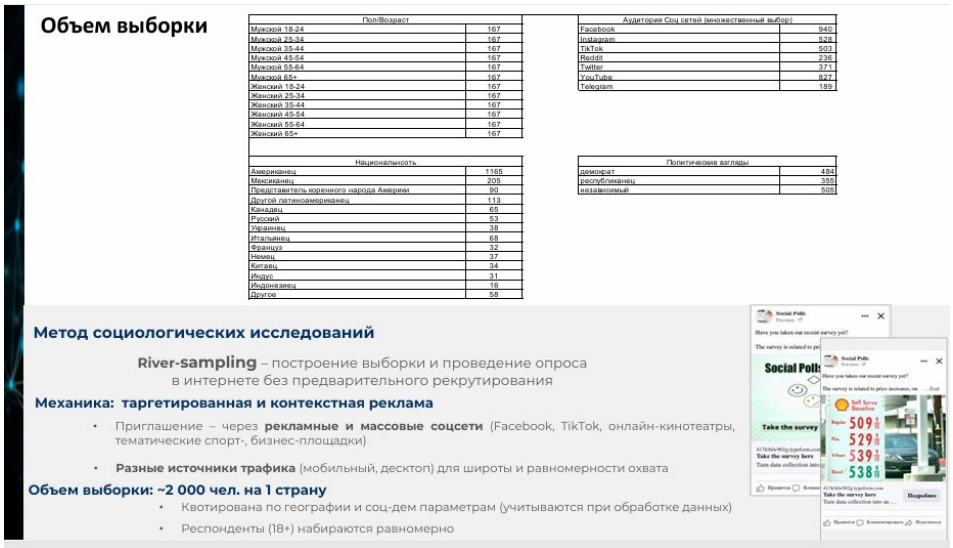
141 River sampling is an online sampling method that recruits respondents by inviting them to the survey while they are doing some other online activity.

- **Expert Surveys**. Interviews with a pool of experts in the Project countries on project topics. Regularly fortnightly and on request.
- **Surveys in social media networks**. "Voting polls" on one question with options to choose from for users of popular platforms Facebook and Twitter. From 1 to 10 thousand users and more in one "poll". Conducted on a case-by-case basis.

The survey is based upon what SDA describes as a **Sociological research method**. This is described as:

- **Quota based on geography and social demographic parameters (taken into account in data processing)**
- **Respondents (18+) are evenly recruited.**
- **River-sampling - sample construction and conducting the survey online without prior recruitment**
- **Invitation-through advertising and mass social networks (Facebook, TikTok, online cinemas, thematic sports, business sites)**
- **Mechanics: targeted and contextual advertising**
- **Sample size: ~2,000 people per country**
- **Different traffic sources (mobile, desktop) for broad and uniform coverage**

**Figure 41.** *Slide showing numbers and breakdowns of respondents by age, nationality, political views, and platform.*




**Source:** SDA

A draft survey targeting Poland asks the questions:

1. Do you think that Ukraine should be considered a European country on a par with Poland?
2. Do you think that Poland should immediately incorporate the "eastern suburbs", i.e. Lviv, Ternopil, Ivanovo-Frankivsk, etc. regions of present-day Ukraine?

3. Do you think that Poland is experiencing difficulties because it has to provide economic assistance to Ukraine (var. due to low prices for Ukrainian export goods)?

A draft survey targeting the EU Parliamentary election asks the questions:

1. If the European Parliament elections were held as early as this week, who would you give your vote to:
   - **a.** Parties that are primarily in favour of national interests
   - **b.** Parties that favour pan-European interests
   - **c.** Difficult to answer
2. If elections to the European Parliament were to take place this week, to whom would you give your vote?
   - **a.** Parties that favour more aid to Ukraine, even at the expense of national interests
   - **b.** Parties that are in favour of reducing aid to Ukraine and directing funds to the needs of the national economy
   - **c.** Difficult to answer

**Questions for an international sociological survey on attitudes towards the "ICC".** The list of questions appears to have been created for delivery by a Western polling company to gather information about perceptions of the International Criminal Court. Again, the questions are skewed in a way that in effect makes them delivery of Kremlin messaging.

1. Do you know anything about the work of the International Criminal Court?
2. Have you come across any references to the ICC in the media and social media lately?
3. In your opinion, is there a need in principle for an international criminal court of higher importance than the judicial systems of individual sovereign states?
4. Currently, countries such as the US, China, Russia, Israel have refused to sign the Rome Statute. Thus, they believe that their nationals are not subject to prosecution by the ICC. Can the ICC therefore be considered a full-fledged international court?
5. The US refused to participate in the ICC after US citizens sought to be prosecuted for crimes committed in Afghanistan. How has this affected the status and capacity of the ICC?
6. Although the US has refused to participate in the ICC, it is known that personally many judges are under the direct influence of the US government. How has this affected the status and capacity of the ICC?
7. The ICC is often accused of political bias in issuing arrest warrants and sentencing suspects. How do you feel about these allegations?

### Analysis of Western think tanks

There are no examples of this format in the leaked documents.

**SDA description**

A report based on the analysis of materials from Western Think Tanks (analytical centres) about the Ukrainian conflict. The analysis is accompanied by recommendations for adjusting influence effort and creating content based on articles for distribution within the Ukrainian information environment.

**Format:** A multi-page document that contains:

- An overview of the findings of the Western research centres focusing on the current conflict.
- Identification of stakeholders in the implementation of the recommendations proposed by these think tanks.
- Assessment of the probability of implementation of certain scenarios ("sets of recommendations")
- Assessment of the possible consequences of the implementation of certain scenarios.
- Own recommendations regarding the scenarios proposed by the Western think tanks, including recommendations for content creation.

**Frequency and volume:** once every 2 weeks (2 units per month).

## 4.2 Analytics

SDA's dashboards are important products that seem to be developed in different formats to be shared with the hierarchy, as documents or messages in chat groups. In our assessment (although admittedly we have a lack of data on Medialogia), we believe that Brand Analytics is the most central analytics dashboard at SDA's disposal. We assess with medium confidence that Brand Analytics is based on a previous iteration of TalkWalker, a US-based social listening tool, and that the user interface has been changed to disguise this. In principle, this analytics dashboard is similar to what the communications teams of corporations and governments license, such as TalkWalker, BrandWatch, and Meltwater. All subsequent SDA analytics is derived from this tool and others with narrower purposes and represents industry standard.

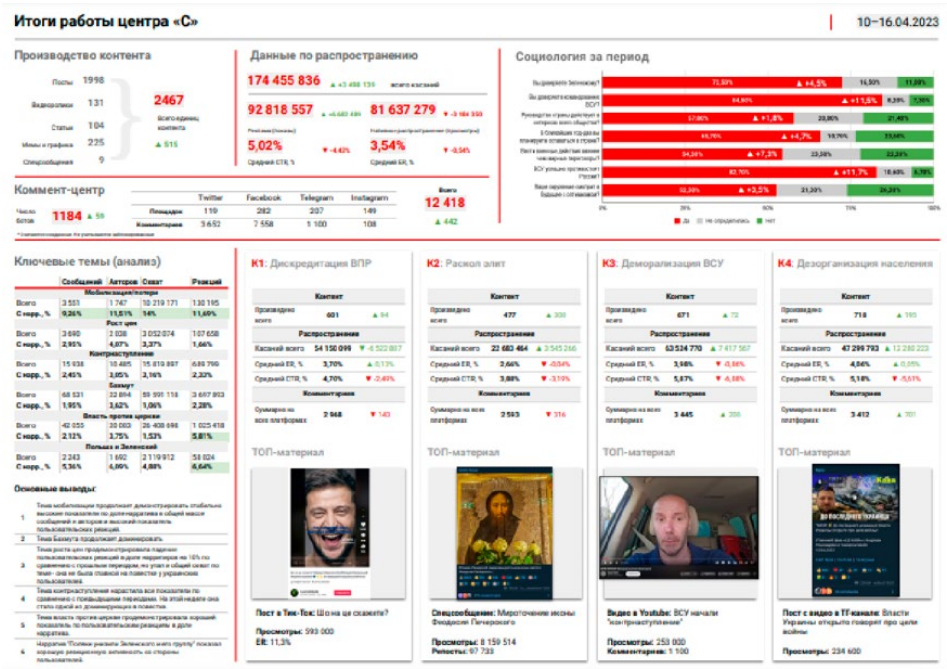
Other analytical products typically attempt to turn monitoring into attack vectors. In general, they demonstrate a poor quality of analysis. Given the importance of "political technologists" to the Russian propaganda sector and to Kiriyenko's network more specifically, we are surprised by how weak the political analysis is. Some products are delusional, while others are borderline fraudulent. Therefore, our assessment is that only the commercial social listening tools meet industry standards. However, it is notable that amateurish analysis capabilities alongside standard media

monitoring tools is enough to direct content production and dissemination within large-scale, broadly competent information influence operations.

## Center S main dashboard

Capability assessment: We have limited information about this product beyond what is mentioned in SDA's proposal (see below). According to Washington Post articles, it was regularly shared with stakeholders to demonstrate impact and help to hone strategy.

**Figure 42.** *Main dashboard of Center S.*




**Source:** The Washington Post

### SDA Description

The project's main dashboard is a document in the form of a graphically designed "dashboard", which in a visually convenient form presents data on the results of the work of all Center S project teams over the past week. Preparation of the document requires the collection, systematization and graphical processing of a large array of diverse data. The following information can be found in the dashboard:

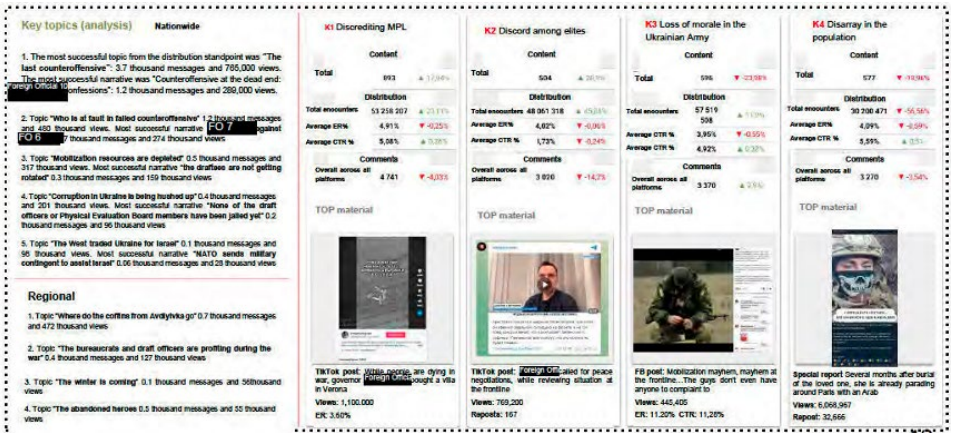
- Content production volumes for the week and distribution data.
- Dynamics of changes in the main indicators of sociological research.
- Brief indicators of commentary work
- Analysis of the degree of dissemination of key project topics (including at the regional level)
- Indicators of content production and distribution within the main thematic lines of the project.
- Examples of the most popular posts by the project over the past week.

**Product format:**

- A graphically designed "dashboard" document, which in visually convenient manner presents the results of work over the past week. The most convenient printout format is A3.
- Analytical report with the interpretation of dashboard data.

**Frequency:** weekly (4 units per month).

**Example:**




**Source:** DOJ, Exhibit 6A

## Pulse

Capability assessment: This refers to a Telegram channel that serves as an aggregated newsfeed for news stories considered to fit within thematic lines. The Center S proposal is the only source that explains the tool in any detail, and there is no further information about the channel. Our assessment is that it likely was created and performs a useful role for creating situational awareness among project staff. It could equally have been developed for e.g. Slack or MS Teams; advantages for Telegram include secrecy, free of charge, accessibility for mobile devices, and a clean, easy to use interface for linking to content. Several other projects refer to creating a Pulse channel, so this is likely a key instrument for handling project content.

**SDA Description**

A closed channel in Telegram with a newsfeed on the project's thematic lines, operating daily in real time. The channel accumulates the news agenda from three information domains: Ukrainian, international (mainly Western) and Russian. The news sources are traditional media, social media networks, and influencers' statements. The channel allows the user to track the current news agenda from a single operational source.

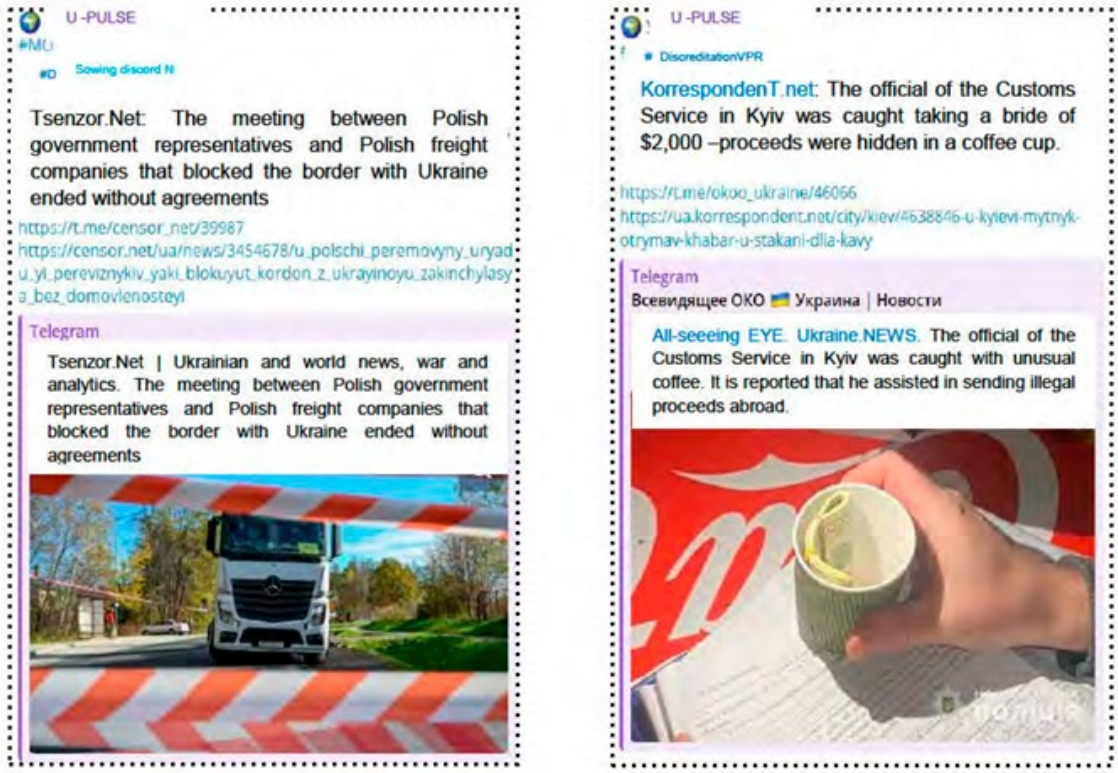
**Format:** A private channel in Telegram with short messages. Each message contains:

- a brief news summary.

- a link to the original source.
- navigational hashtags.

**Frequency:** Daily (up to 40 messages per day)

**Example**:




**Source:** DOJ, Exhibit 6A

## Sociological analysis

Capability assessment: These documents together provide some limited insights into how developed the SDA sociological analysis capability is likely to be. The results are underwhelming. The documents are mostly descriptive and comprise open-access polling sources. In the few cases where analysis takes place, the Russian ideological frame severely limits any ability to understand the mindset of the target country in any meaningful way.

**Sociological analysis, late 2022 to early 2023.** 6 documents that compile open source sociological and demographic polling and research on European countries, predominantly Germany and France. The rationale is typically explained as: **Published sociological surveys make it possible to understand which of the problems, from the point of view of public opinion, sociologists and the press, are the most topical for a given country.** The documents are generally light on analysis, and for the most part present selected results.

- **Review of published results of sociological research.** 3 short documents review the results of some open-source polling from France

and Germany. A short summary explains: **In the past week, French public opinion has started to take an interest in the war in Ukraine. For Germans, foreign policy difficulties and the military agenda still play a decisive role in relation to domestic issues**. There is no further analysis.

- **An international survey of Germany: Interpretations and conclusions.** Polling of Germans, broken down according to SDA's KPIs. Most data is interpreted according to Kremlin priorities and narrative framing, which means that any causality with trends in Germany society is purely viewed through the Russian ideological lens. The data is supplemented by additional open source data.
- **German Sociology in September 2022.** Summary of a YouGov political analysis of Germany.
- **Refugees in European countries.** Document comprising of selected research in the demographics of some European countries:
  - Refugees from Syria and Africa
  - Percentage of social media users (by platform)
  - Examples of popular Facebook communities
  - Examples of popular WhatApps communities (un-populated)

## Sociological dashboard

Capability Assessment: We have no further information about this product. However, based on the above assessment of SDA's sociological monitoring products, we assess that gaps in the underlying data sources would likely make implementation inconsistent.

**SDA Description**

An analytical document that presents data on the dynamics of the results of sociological research in Ukraine over the past week in a visually convenient form. Preparation of the document requires the collection, systematization and graphic processing of a large array of diverse data.

**Format:** A graphically designed "dashboard" document that presents the dynamics of changes in sociological data on key project indicators in a form convenient for visual perception. The most convenient printout format is A3.

**Frequency:** once every 2 weeks (2 units per month)

**Example:**




**Source:** DOJ, Exhibit 6A

## "Globe of Ukraine"

Capability assessment: This dashboard claims to establish an overview of the Ukrainian information environment by compiling data from a variety of monitoring sources into a single graphical interface. The capability is plausible, however gaps in the underlying data sources would likely make implementation inconsistent. Certainly, based on available data sources within the leak, the dashboard could not be made. It is unknown if the project was ever implemented.

### SDA description

The dashboard, under the working name "Globe of Ukraine", is a document in the form of a graphically designed 'dashboard', which visually convenient and presents a picture of the Ukrainian information environment over the past week. The dashboard contains quantitative and qualitative indicators, covering the results of traditional media monitoring (including foreign and regional), telegram channels, and social media networks. From it you can find out the following data:

- Main narratives and stories of the Ukrainian governmental media, the degree and pattern of their distribution.
- The most comprehensive and resonating stories discussed in social networks (patterns).
- Convergence of stories in traditional media and social media networks, the "life cycle" of individual news items.

- Penetration of Western news items into the Ukrainian information environment.
- Penetration of Russian news items into the Ukrainian information environment.
- Distribution of narratives and messages of the CCU in the Ukrainian information environment.
- Other data.

**Format:**

1. A document in the form of a graphically designed "dashboard" that presents a picture of the information field of Ukraine for the past week in a form convenient for visual perception. The most convenient printout format is A3.
2. An analytical report with an interpretation of the dashboard data.

**Frequency:** weekly.

## Strategic information and psychological operations

Capability assessment: While the exact format of this capability is unclear, some documents demonstrate how SDA sought to steer the strategic information and psychological components of its work. The formats are typically proposals centred on **attack vectors** identified through various types of monitoring. Although there are not many of these products in the leak, they stand out as relatively well designed, with clear themes developed into relevant narratives and messaging. It's likely that some were implemented.

**Recommendations for promoting information trends.** One document from October 2023 claims that there are currently a number of trends that can be used to proactively create new and effective attack vectors against Europe. The 3 trends on the 1-page Word document are optimistic at best and have minimal operational value:

- Germany's recession is deepening. France is teetering on the brink. These two countries could drag the entire EU down with them into the economic abyss.
- Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has given an unspoken order to the media: not to write about corruption "until victory".
- The US is losing what remains of its influence in the Middle East.

**Main topics in German and French media that can be used as proactive attack vectors.** 3 Word documents offer contextual analysis of political debates in France and Germany, identifying opportunities to sow discord. The analysis is typically positioned from an optimistic Russian perspective; one discussion of the migrant situation in Europe concludes, **there is nowhere to cut the budget further so now they will save money on benefits for migrants. Of course, this will increase social tensions: Germany and France are home to at least 5 million migrants, most of whom are Muslims ready for decisive action.**

**Suggestions based on narrative analysis.** This series of 6 Word documents from June to October 2023 takes topics based on current events and develop narratives to be used as attack vectors. Each contains 3-4 sets of lines to take, and some also include instructions for the development of fakes. An example is as follows:

**The counter-offensive actually failed - the effect of deceived expectations The widely announced counter-offensive began long ago. But, contrary to the expectations of Ukrainians, it turned out to be a global failure in the eyes of both citizens and Western allies. In this regard, the following sentiments need to be dispelled:**

- the authorities have deceived us again;
- the Russians are methodically destroying all the ammunition depots and accumulations of equipment;
- Russia is very good in defence, its army is much better and stronger than the AFU;
- Western weapons turned out to be worse than Russian weapons, Leopards burn just like all other tanks. Myth dispelled;
- there is widespread mobilisation (those who did not run away - run away, fools!), everyone is being sent for slaughter before the NATO summit;
- the counter-offensive has failed because of corruption (everything has been sold off by our corrupt officials, Western aid and weapons are constantly popping up in various parts of the world).

**SDA Description**

Development of comprehensive, long-term strategic influence efforts. Includes the development of operational goals and objectives, definition of methods and stages for achieving goals, analytical, forecast and political technology parts, content procurement for all agents of information and psychological influence, including official media, influencers, government and municipal institutions.

**IMPORTANT!** The development and implementation of an influence effort requires the participation of not only all teams involved in Center S, but also robust interdepartmental interaction. The team of authors of this document, in addition to direct participation in the development of the document, is ready to coordinate the interaction of all participants in the process, monitor the effectiveness of the operation and adjust plans.

Particular attention must be paid to ensuring the secrecy of the work performed.

**Format:** A multi-page document, templates of narrative lines, content, instructions.

**Frequency:** once every 3 months (varies depending on the changing military-political situation).

## 4.3 Creative

Of the claims that SDA makes about its capabilities, the concept of a "content factory" is the most honest. Given that SDA is a creative agency at its core, this is unsurprising. Regardless of strengths and weaknesses in the command and control, monitoring, and analysis capabilities, they do enough to enable the rapid production of targeted content. SDA are able to direct the mass production of content of a reasonable enough quality to support strategic goals. Long reads are the highest quality content with the most significant editorial controls. Cheaper content such as images and comments are produced en masse and are hit and miss. They seem to work in small sub-groups of art director-copywriter duos, reminiscent of any global advertising agency.

In essence, this is a capability designed to match that of the Russian television propagandists or the editorial structures of RT and Sputnik: fast, tailored content of varying quality capable of carrying the Russian Federation's provocations into multiple markets. As with these other modes of content production, the pipeline is highly dependent on what is happening on the ground. When things go Russia's way, it all seems so easy. When they don't, such as during the counteroffensive, the work became more difficult. As one of the slides promoting Center S / the CCU intended for the consumption of Kremlin leadership shows, the use of KPIs to manage content allowed for claims of third order effects. For example, they could claim that survey numbers about Ukrainian draft dodgers (whether true or invented) were a direct result of SDA content. According to this logic, SDA got Ukrainian ministers and generals fired, started feuds between key figures, and generated widespread panic based on groundless rumours.

**Figure 43.** *Slide from Center S presentation.*



While we do not accept SDA's logic when it comes to evaluating the effect of their activities, it is clear that they have successfully created an organisational structure that enables them to fool their benefactors into believing the hype. The volume and speed of content, under the discipline of KPIs, is the vehicle for this.

## Posts (short-read)

Capability assessment: Short reads are one of the formats that SDA seems most comfortable with using. Typically, a short text is prepared based on media monitoring and makes use of other creative capabilities to deliver a comprehensive product. The stories are usually linked to news stories in the Western media, such as for example news about Ukrainian losses. In these cases, the prepared text is ready to be inserted alongside the "evidence" from media sources, together with images. In many cases, comments are also prepared for bots to deliver, in multiple languages.

For example, one story targeting Germany and Poland claimed that the Red Army's history of sexual violence during the Second World War was mainly caused by Ukrainians. Two attached memes suggest a prevalence of Ukrainian blood, which would only be exacerbated by the current wave of immigration from Ukraine.




**SDA Description**

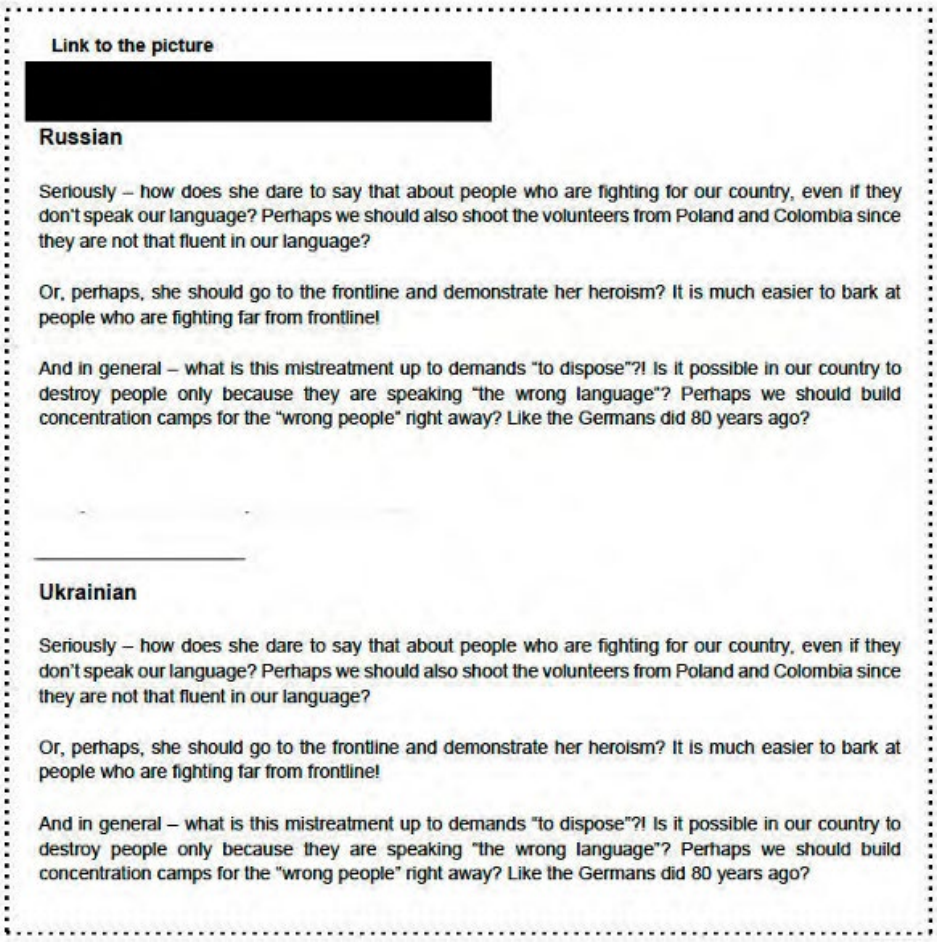
Short posts for social networks of about 1,000 characters with spaces, dedicated to topics relevant to the Ukrainian audience, fitting the thematic lines of the project. The texts are adapted for distribution on the social media networks Facebook and X. Each text undergoes professional editing and is accompanied by a pre-prepared video with subtitles.

**Format (set of files):**

- Text in Russian.
- Text in Ukrainian.
- Video with subtitles.

**Frequency:** daily (about 200 pcs. per month).

**Example:**



Link to the picture

[redacted]

Russian

Seriously – how does she dare to say that about people who are fighting for our country, even if they don't speak our language? Perhaps we should also shoot the volunteers from Poland and Colombia since they are not that fluent in our language?

Or, perhaps, she should go to the frontline and demonstrate her heroism? It is much easier to bark at people who are fighting far from frontline!

And in general – what is this mistreatment up to demands "to dispose"?! Is it possible in our country to destroy people only because they are speaking "the wrong language"? Perhaps we should build concentration camps for the "wrong people" right away? Like the Germans did 80 years ago?

Ukrainian

Seriously – how does she dare to say that about people who are fighting for our country, even if they don't speak our language? Perhaps we should also shoot the volunteers from Poland and Colombia since they are not that fluent in our language?

Or, perhaps, she should go to the frontline and demonstrate her heroism? It is much easier to bark at people who are fighting far from frontline!

And in general – what is this mistreatment up to demands "to dispose"?! Is it possible in our country to destroy people only because they are speaking "the wrong language"? Perhaps we should build concentration camps for the "wrong people" right away? Like the Germans did 80 years ago?

**Source:** DOJ, Exhibit 6A

## Articles (long-read)

Capability assessment: Included in the leak are several long reads targeting Ukraine, France, Germany, Israel, and the US, some of which are accompanied by as many as 10 pre-prepared comments and some teasers. Each story is linked to the thematic line that it supports. One prepared story has editorial notes in red to cover text considered too propagandistic and that needs to be rewritten, and more general editorial comments in yellow. One example of yellow editorial notes reads, "**The origins of the conflict** (It is imperative to note here that Russia asked for security guarantees and was told to fuck off. THAT THERE WAS A CHANCE TO AVOID AN INVASION)". Overall, the long reads are produced with more resources that other products, however it is not possible to accurately assess volume except in relation to SDA's own metrics. These articles are mostly written and translated with limited reliance on AI, with several iterations used to make them sound "more Western".

**SDA Description**

Articles are original texts from 2,000 to 5,000 characters with spaces, devoted to topics relevant to the Ukrainian audience, fitting into the thematic

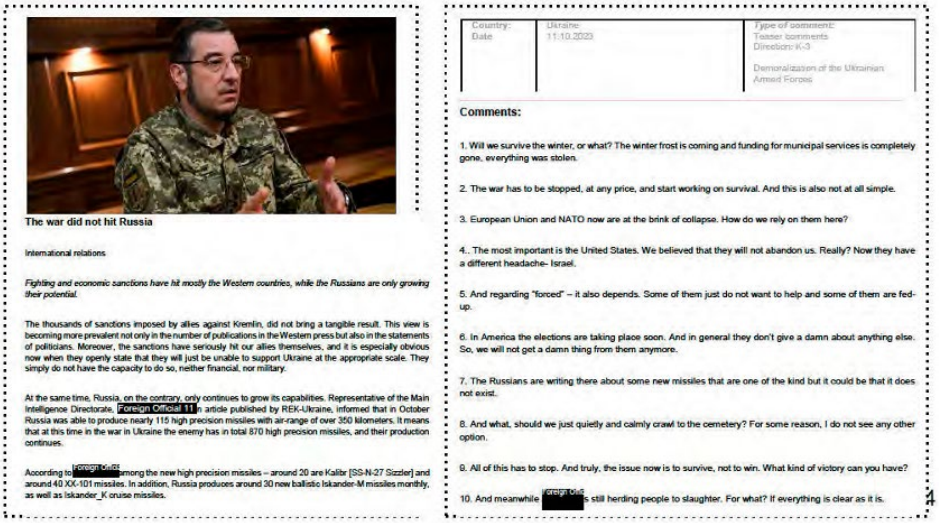
lines of the project. Each text undergoes professional editing and is accompanied by 10 comments and 3 teasers for dissemination of the text in social networks. The author of the text also selects an image for the text.

**Format (set of files):**

- Text in Russian.
- Text in Ukrainian.
- 10 comments in Russian.
- Image.

**Frequency:** daily (about 70 pcs. per month).

**Example:**



The war did not hit Russia

International relations

*Fighting and economic sanctions have hit mostly the Western countries, while the Russians are only growing their potential.*

The thousands of sanctions imposed by allies against Kremlin, did not bring a tangible result. This view is becoming more prevalent not only in the number of publications in the Western press but also in the statements of politicians. Moreover, the sanctions have seriously hit our allies themselves, and it is especially obvious now when they openly state that they will just be unable to support Ukraine at the appropriate scale. They simply do not have the capacity to do so, neither financial, nor military.

At the same time, Russia, on the contrary, only continues to grow its capabilities. Representative of the Main Intelligence Directorate, Foreign Official 11 in article published by REK-Ukraine, informed that in October Russia was able to produce nearly 115 high precision missiles with air-range of over 350 kilometers. It means that at this time in the war in Ukraine the enemy has in total 870 high precision missiles, and their production continues.

According to Foreign Official among the new high precision missiles – around 20 are Kalibr [SS-N-27 Sizzler] and around 40 Kh-101 missiles. In addition, Russia produces around 30 new ballistic Iskander-M missiles monthly, as well as Iskander_K cruise missiles.

Country: Ukraine
Date: 11.10.2023
Type of comment: Teaser comments
Direction: K-3
Demoralization of the Ukrainian Armed Forces

**Comments:**

1. Will we survive the winter, or what? The winter frost is coming and funding for municipal services is completely gone, everything was stolen.

2. The war has to be stopped, at any price, and start working on survival. And this is also not at all simple.

3. European Union and NATO now are at the brink of collapse. How do we rely on them here?

4.. The most important is the United States. We believed that they will not abandon us. Really? Now they have a different headache- Israel.

5. And regarding "forced" – it also depends. Some of them just do not want to help and some of them are fed-up.

6. In America the elections are taking place soon. And in general they don't give a damn about anything else. So, we will not get a damn thing from them anymore.

7. The Russians are writing there about some new missiles that are one of the kind but it could be that it does not exist.

8. And what, should we just quietly and calmly crawl to the cemetery? For some reason, I do not see any other option.

9. All of this has to stop. And truly, the issue now is to survive, not to win. What kind of victory can you have?

10. And meanwhile Foreign Official is still herding people to slaughter. For what? If everything is clear as it is.

4

**Source:** DOJ, Exhibit 6A

## Comments

Capability assessment: Comments are typically prepared in two languages, such as German and Russian, and are often produced in batches of 10. Sometimes they are prepared for specific types of news story, sometimes for specific websites (although the examples in the leak refer to most likely to mirror sites that no longer exist), and as scenarios.

Comments prepared in response to French news articles were for example developed on the theme: **the world is getting tired of Ukrainian blackmail**. 10 comments follow, such as **No, it's going to be a long story. The Americans won't let things end that easily. They're going to drag this out for years**, and **Perhaps one day Macron will learn to respond with dignity too? I've had enough of that thieving drug addict Zelensky with his demands**.

Other documents simply contain lists of comments that appear to be generated for bots to deliver. For example. **We consider the United States to be our friends, but they are the ones who started the conflict with Russia. They wanted to compete for world domination, and as a result, we suffer**.

Another set of documents drafting comments are scenario-based,

attempting to develop comments by roleplaying the perspectives of a "middle income French citizen" or a "German common man". A clear limitation here is the Russian totalitarian regime's grip on the analysts' imaginations (and, more importantly, on their ability to interpret monitoring materials). It does not appear possible for a Russian analyst to empathise with the European mindset and instead can only produce approximations of the most one-dimensional types of people. It is possible that these are prompts for an LLM to produce text.

**Write a 200 character monologue on behalf of a German common man. He does not want to go to war with the Russians. He is afraid for the future of his country and his children. He believes that the USA is to blame for the war in Ukraine. He is against sending German and Polish soldiers to war. He calls for peace negotiations. He feels uncertainty, fear, indignation.**

**Write a 200-character monologue on behalf of a middle-income French citizen. He is dissatisfied with the fact that the French leadership, following the lead of EU officials, supports sanctions against Russia. He knows that sanctions have not destroyed Russia's economy. On the contrary, they have led to an unprecedented rise in the prices of gas, heat and essential goods. Everything has gone up in price. And the country's authorities, instead of helping the French, continue to assist Ukraine, including with weapons. This has to stop. The war must end. Turn our backs on France.**

**SDA Description**

To amplify the impact of the Project's key information vectors on the audience in the target countries, we believe it advisable to launch a system for disseminating comments on social media platforms.
To operate the comments system, we are planning to prepare a media map to reach the relevant target audiences: popular communities with a focus on politics and economics and personal accounts of influencers. The operatives will comment on posts on behalf of the bots according to the media map. The comments (texts/images/links) will promote the Project's main narratives and evoke in the audience rational (such as, "really, why do WE need to help Ukraine?") and emotional (such as, "Americans are such scumbags!") reactions.

The following will be used as content:

- Links to high-impact, viral, or explosive social media statements by well-known influencers and bloggers who have thousands of followers (based on social media monitoring);
- Links to online media articles (based on online media monitoring);
- Memes and cartoons created by the Project's team; and
- Brief posts containing interpretations/takes, according to the established TL [thematic lines].

Important: using the proposed tool for sharing links to our own resources (RRN, media swarm, mirrors) is ineffective: social network algorithms view

mass posting of links to sites with a low citation index as spam, which leads to blocking and deletion of comments and compromises the resources.

In addition to the regular work with comments, we could implement special projects, i.e. attack opponents or support associates with comment campaigns.

The work with comments will help enhance the awareness of the Project's narratives among a significant part of the active social media users interested in politics and economics.

The Project's Key Performance Indicators:

- 1,000 comments per day per country;
- 30,000 comments per month per country;
- 60,000 comments per month for France and Germany combined.

## Memes

Capability assessment: The leak contains several hundred memes from March 2023 to April 2024, all linked to campaign objectives. The memes for the CCU are provided as image files, whereas the memes for CCE are stored as Word documents containing several images on similar themes, together with a link to cloud storage (Yandex Cloud and Joxi.net provide screenshot saving services for bots). Described by SDA as a "memes factory", these were clearly produced in high volume and used to accompany short reads, long reads, and comments.

**SDA Description**

Memes are humorous images, videos, audio recordings with high viral potential, ridiculing topics relevant to Ukrainians within the thematic lines of the project. The meme factory produces a stream of images for further distribution on the social media networks Facebook and X.

**Format:** images

**Frequency:** daily (about 200 pcs. per month).

**Examples:**




**Source:** DOJ, Exhibit 6A

## Video memes

Capability assessment: No further information is available.

**SDA Description**

Memes are humorous images, videos, audio recordings with high viral potential, ridiculing topics relevant to Ukrainians within the thematic lines of the project. The Meme Factory produces a stream of vertical videos for further distribution on the social media networks Facebook, Instagram and X.

**Format:** video recordings up to 30 sec.

**Frequency:** daily (about 50 pcs. per month).

**Screenshot of the video:**




**Source:** DOJ, Exhibit 6A

## Caricatures

Capability assessment: Hundreds of caricatures targeting Ukraine and the West are included in the leak, covering June 2023 to June 2024. The images are mostly, but not exclusively, cartoons, and most target a persona such as Zelensky. Naming conventions suggest that there should be around 1,500 caricatures produced over a period of just over one year. However, the images are not directly linked to thematic lines but rather have descriptive names containing the target country and ongoing events.

**SDA Description**

Caricatures and cartoons are original illustrations with high viral potential, ridiculing topics relevant to Ukrainians, Ukrainian officials and leaders, within the thematic lines of the project. Caricatures and cartoons act both as accompanying images to articles and posts, and as independent units of content.

**Format:** images

**Frequency and volume:** daily (about 200 pcs. per month).

**Examples:**






**Source:** DOJ, Exhibit 6A

## Video clips

Capability assessment: Four scripts for short videos are included in the leak. They focus mainly on Ukraine and have scripted voiceovers in multiple languages. There is no further information about these videos. Topics include:

- Lawlessness in the centre of Kiev
- Western tanks don't work in snow
- Europe could be left without a potato crop
- Ukraine is sick of its leader

Video clips seem to be prepared for use on X, YouTube and TikTok. Some feature interviews conducted over Zoom with purported experts, while others use fake quotes attributed to celebrities and politicians.[142]

**SDA Description**
Videos of various formats (non-fiction) – imitation of Ukrainian news media stories, video collages of Ukrainian army losses, accompanied by voiceover or subtitles, imitation of Ukrainian Armed Forces propaganda videos, etc.

**Format:** video clips

**Frequency and volume:** weekly (up to 8 per month)

**Screenshot from the video:**




**Source:** DOJ, Exhibit 6A

## Augmented reality (fakes)

Capability assessment: The April 2022 proposal for a **Factory of Fakes** represents a concerted effort to develop content that "augments" the West's information environment with Russian injects. Many of the themes are difficult to distinguish from other SDA content, since falsehoods are at the heart of many of the products. The proposals connected to the CCE don't have a common format, but there are around 20 descriptions that break down the method in detail (see below). A separate Excel sheet from May 2022 contains over 70 examples, together in some cases with links (most had the status "awaiting approval" so it is difficult to assess how many were implemented).

142 Germany's Federal Foreign Office, 2024

**Figure 44.** *Proposal for a fake.*

## Fake #1. More than 500 German military died in Ukraine!

| | |
|---|---|
| **Title** | More than 500 German military personnel were killed in Ukraine! |
| **Country** | Germany |
| **Target audience** | Bundeswehr military personnel, men aged 20-35, their close relatives |
| **Recommended format** | - video<br>- post/article |
| **Recommended delivery to** | - comments<br>- social media groups |
| **Summary** | German soldiers are secretly sent to fight in Ukraine. Germany has already been dragged into the war. At least 562 German citizens died in the Russian strike on their location. Probably many more - including the personnel operating the air defence systems. This was told by a miraculously surviving fighter in an emotional video. |

**Source:** SDA

The 29 examples from the CCU are more structured and commonly make use of social media posts containing social proof and infographics, for example with misleading figures about relative military losses. They also use forged letters and misleading demographic data. Each fake has prepared messaging, link to the associated thematic lines, images, and an Excel sheet containing the underlying data. These examples appear to have been implemented.

### SDA Description

Augmented reality (fakes) is multi-format content aimed at misinforming the audience and provoking emotional reactions. In most cases, it is a multifaceted product: it may include the delivery of images (screenshots of "documents", correspondence on social media networks, derogatory photographs), texts, comments, videos, audio recordings and other content.

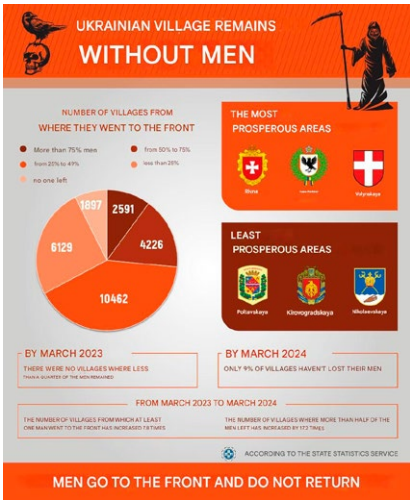
**Format:** depending on the nature of augmented reality. The most common formats are screenshots of documents and correspondence in messaging apps, dubbed videos with accompanying texts.

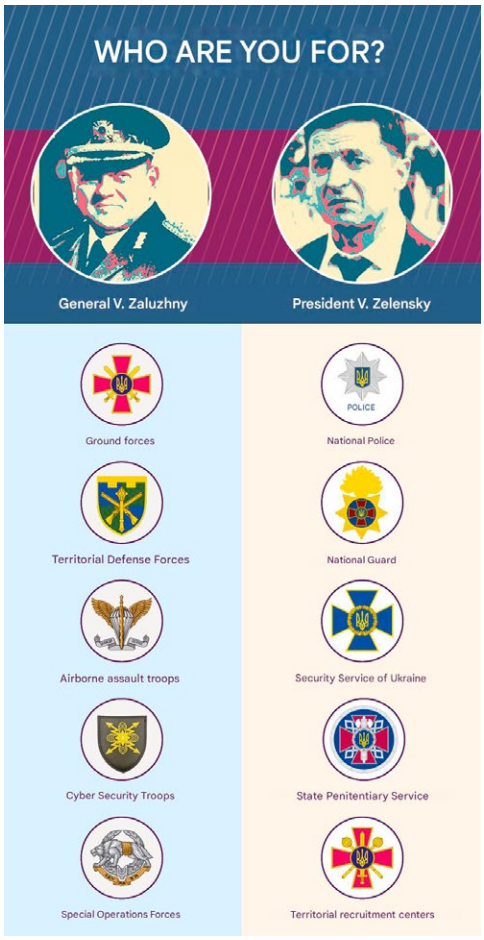
**Frequency and volume:** weekly (up to 4 pcs. per month)

## Examples:

**Image.** *"Factory of Fakes" for the CCU, fake infographics and conversation screen shots. Machine-translated. Original content available in both Russian and Ukrainian.*





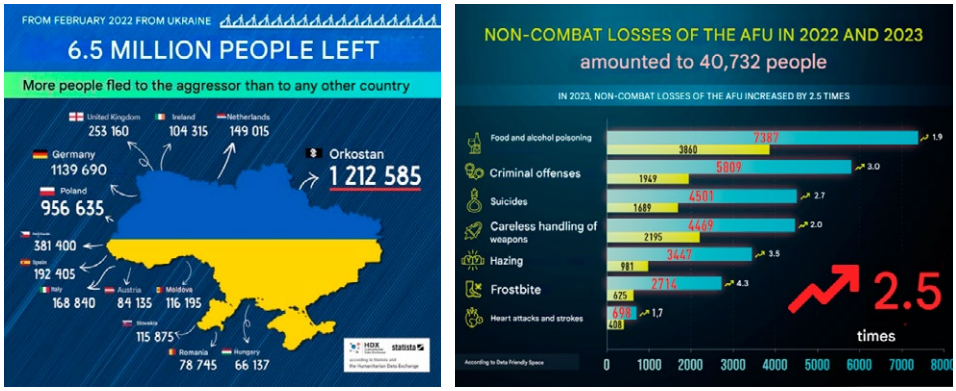




**Image.** *"Factory of Fakes" for the CCU, fake document from Ukrainian Ministry of Defence. Machine-translated from Ukrainian.*


Міністерство Оборони України
№ 142/1525 від 19.03.2023 13:01:11 арк. 1

МІНІСТЕРСТВО ОБОРОНИ УКРАЇНИ

19.03.2023 № 142/1525

Керівнику Офісу президента України ЄРМАКУ О.Б.

На № 138/1 ІІІ І/18 від 09.03.2023

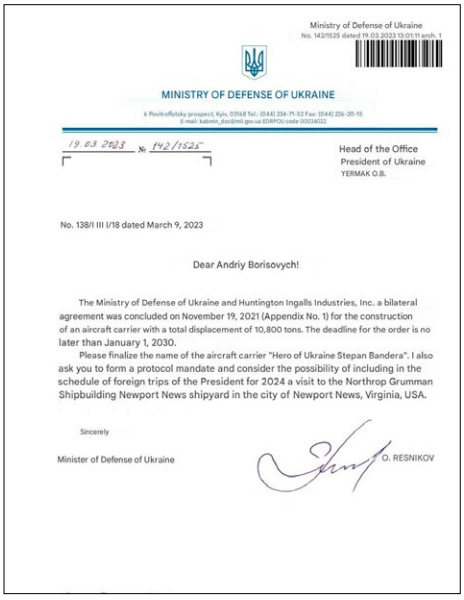
Шановний Андрію Борисовичу!

Міністерством оборони України та компанією Huntington Ingalls Industries, Inc. було укладено двосторонню угоду від 19.11.2021 року (додаток №1) на будівництво авіаносця повною водотоннажністю 10 800 тонн. Терміни виконання замовлення не пізніше 01.01.2030 року.

Прошу вас остаточно узгодити назву авіаносця – «Герой України Степан Бандера». Також прошу вас сформувати протокольне доручення та розглянути можливість включення до графіку закордонних поїздок президента на 2024 рік відвідування верфі Northrop Grumman Shipbuilding Newport News у місті Ньюпорт-Ньюс, штат Вірджинія, США.

З повагою

Міністр оборони України О.РЕЗНІКОВ


Ministry of Defense of Ukraine
No. 142/1525 dated 19.03.2023 13:01:11 arch. 1

MINISTRY OF DEFENSE OF UKRAINE

19.03.2023 № 142/1525

Head of the Office President of Ukraine YERMAK O.B.

No. 138/1 III I/18 dated March 9, 2023

Dear Andriy Borisovych!

The Ministry of Defense of Ukraine and Huntington Ingalls Industries, Inc. a bilateral agreement was concluded on November 19, 2021 (Appendix No. 1) for the construction of an aircraft carrier with a total displacement of 10,800 tons. The deadline for the order is no later than January 1, 2030.

Please finalize the name of the aircraft carrier "Hero of Ukraine Stepan Bandera". I also ask you to form a protocol mandate and consider the possibility of including in the schedule of foreign trips of the President for 2024 a visit to the Northrop Grumman Shipbuilding Newport News shipyard in the city of Newport News, Virginia, USA.

Sincerely

Minister of Defense of Ukraine O. RESNIKOV

## 4.4 Delivery

It's easy to dismiss SDA's delivery capabilities as spammy and scammy, because they are. At least, in the sense that they have learned from spammers, advertisers, and probably also scammers about how to connect their content to eyeballs. The first mode of delivery is mapping out a delivery infrastructure, such as fake news websites, fake news aggregator websites, fake news chatrooms, fake news social media pages, fake influencers pages and chat groups, mirror websites, and so on. Here they may rely on already existing infrastructure or create new pages and groups. The second step is seeding their content through this infrastructure, in very high numbers, similarly to regular advertising but using additional automated methods such as inauthentic comments to deliver opportunities to see.

It is incorrect to infer, from the high volumes and low engagements, that this is ineffective. It is ineffective in the same way that all online advertising is ineffective. If you aren't looking to buy shoes, no number of ads will be effective. But the moment that need changes, seeds may have been planted on various platforms (touchpoints) that lead to a decision. An additional

incentive, such as a sale, can create urgency. The key stage for SDA is this moment, when a user decides to find out more. An entire ecosystem of staging sites (including the "Doppelgänger" mirror sites) are there to provide a rabbit hole for the inquisitive user to follow down. For individuals who only trust MSM, mirror sites exist, and the user may never know that they were duped. For those who don't trust MSM, a plethora of branded news platforms have been created. The goal is simple: penetrate the information environment with pro-Kremlin thematic lines.

In terms of delivery, it is volume that is most fascinating. Using a mixture of automated and trolling methods, SDA advertise their content through multiple channels, personas and methods, creating as many entry points as possible while playing cat-and-mouse with platform trust and safety. According to an analysis of efforts targeting Germany, the scope of efforts was "several million tweets within a few weeks" and "several tweets per second".[143] The delivery method provides a broad range of possible audiences and links them to content that could be persuasive to them. Hence, delivery is more of a triage process binding audiences to content that they might be willing to click on. Viral effects, such as inadvertently repeating Kremlin talking points, are the ultimate success.

## Target channels

Capability assessment: Several documents contain lists of channels for targeting with SDA content. There are two notable patterns, 1) that the documents are in different formats, suggesting no sophisticated management of target accounts, and 2) that the documents do not seem joined up with monitoring and analysis capabilities, and rather seem to be ad hoc or produced by different teams without coordination. This indicates that the analytics dashboards cannot produce automated reporting for this stage and that much of the effort is manual.

**List of chats and channels on Telegram for the CCE: Germany**. An incomplete list in Word of 50 fringe chats and channels. It is unclear whether SDA owns some or all of the linked accounts, however they do appear to be treated as delivery channels for the CCE campaign.

**Media Map (Facebook)**. An Excel sheet contains a list of 89 Facebook groups relevant to Ukraine, many for Ukrainian refugees in Europe. The list of groups together have over 15 million subscribers. The list appears to be entirely consisting of genuine groups, which are likely tracked for monitoring and comment delivery purposes. The categories captured are:

- Link
- Theme (refugees, military, news, against Zelensky, notice boards, volunteers/charities, influencers)
- Name/title
- Number of subscribers

143 Germany's Federal Foreign Office, 2024

**UK**. A list of 69 local and national media websites, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter accounts to target for comments.

**Israel**. A Word document containing short lists of Russian-speaking Israeli media "for placement of publications, comments, expert opinions", Telegram channels for bot comments, and Israeli political scientists who can represent Russian perspectives.

## Social media posts

Capability assessment: Some limited evidence is available of how content was delivered to social media, likely by 5 teams of operators managing hundreds of bots, fake accounts, and fake groups/pages. While the data is not comprehensive, estimates from mid-2022 suggest between 1,000 and 2,000 posts per month earning in excess of 2 million views across the main social media platforms, mainly targeting Germany and Italy.

Excel worksheets from April to October 2022 are labelled as Z, V, and O[144], and contain detailed lists of social media content, where they were posted, and other metrics. The content seems to be predominately fake content such as memes, text, and videos, posted to Telegram, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Tik-Tok. Target countries are Germany, Italy, UK, and Latvia. The worksheets log[145]:

- Date
- Content ID
- Country
- Platform
- Link to post
- Views
- Likes
- Shares
- Comments
- Ban (Workbook O only)

**Workbook Z**. 276 posts from 14 MAY 2022 to 05 JUL 2022 targeting Germany and Italy on Telegram, through two channels that translate as German/ Italian Truth. According to the stats, the posts have a total of 1.75 million views, 43,000 likes, and 5,300 comments.

**Workbook O**. Four Excel sheets named N, M, A, and R (likely referring to operator teams).

- N covers 2,869 posts from 26 APR 2022 to 02 OCT 2022, with 400,000 views, 6,800 likes, 874 comments.
- M covers 1,026 posts from 3 JUN 2022 10 AUG 2022, with 2.3 million views, 99,600 likes, 6,300 comments.

144 These letters were commonly marked on Russian military vehicles, before Z emerged as a symbol of the Russian war effort. It is unclear why they are used here.

145 Unclear if this data is exported from, or to, a dashboard such as SDA's Brand Analytics software.

- A covers 4,757 posts from 12 MAY 2022 to 1 AUG 2022, with 950,000 views and incomplete stats on the other metrics.
- R covers 3,641 posts from 11 MAY 2022 to 02 AUG 2022, with 595,000 views, 55,000 likes, 1,800 comments.
- O also contains a list of 274 social media groups and accounts by country and platform, including who is the owner (either N, M, A, or R), and subscriber levels between May and July 2022. The groups together had over 180,000 subscribers, followers, or members.
- Other worksheets that summarise data appear to be incorrect, possibly due to the macro linking to external documents in the cloud that have since been moved.

**Workbook V**. Incomplete.

## Comment bots

Capability assessment: The leak contains 13 Excel workbooks about the CCU, some of which contain over one hundred thousand data points of bot comment posts. SDA sometimes refer to this capability as the **Comments Machine**, which is an apt description. The names of dozens of bots are listed in each document, many posting multiple times per day. It should be noted that hundreds of bot names are used, suggesting that they are treated as throwaway assets in a game of cat and mouse with the platforms. The bots are unique between spreadsheets. They appear to post in blocks before being dropped or banned, some only posting a handful of times.

Of significance to data management is 1) the linking of each comment to a thematic line and 2) links to screenshot captures of the posts, demonstrating that every action is accounted for in a manner that can be automated. This could be based on the bot drawing from pre-prepared comments listed under thematic lines, triggered by use of keywords, although this cannot be confirmed. It is likely that the accounted figures are genuine (albeit with the caveat of double accounting mentioned below). The spreadsheet columns are:

- Date
- Thematic line (1 to 4)
- Content type (meme or text)
- Platform (Facebook, Twitter)
- Bot username
- Link to comment
- Screenshot to comment (on Yandex cloud)

In some rare cases, only the first four fields are captured, followed by the script of the comment. The workbooks are sometimes split into separate sheets, sometimes only one or two. Notably, in the split sheets, the dates overlap and some comments are consequently double-counted. To offer an example, workbook 1 (of 13) is divided into the following sheets.

- 01 MAR 2023 – 19 OCT 2023: 28,400 comments (Archive 1)
- 01 OCT 2023 - 24 JAN 2024: 27,950 comments (Archive 2)
- 01 JAN 2024 - 26 APR 2024: 28,483 comments (Archive 3)
- 01 APR 2024 – 23 JUL 2024: 28,265 comments (Base)

Surprisingly, CCI/CCE bot comments are accounted for slightly differently. These Excel workbooks are divided by country (Germany, Italy, UK, Latvia) and cover data for 1-5 months across Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. Similar data is captured, but the columns are in a different order and in English. This suggests that a different group is operating the bots. The bot postings tend to target groups connected to established media (which are listed) and often consist of a short comment ("Funny and sad", "How to stop crying?" together with a link to a Telegram post, mirror site, or to a Change.org petition. Macros are built into the spreadsheet to link data so that it can be automatically compiled into statistics.

Another group of spreadsheets, also only partly functional due to missing cloud data, give more insight into the volume of comments delivered to the different platforms. Here, the one week period of 12 to 18 MAY 2022 reveals 3,087 comments delivered to social media in Germany, the UK and Italy.

**Commentary Count**

**Period:** 12-18.05.2022

| Date | Germany | GB | Italy |
|---|---|---|---|
| 12.05.2022 | 128 | 133 | 16 |
| 13.05.2022 | 134 | 160 | 13 |
| 14.05.2022 | 68 | 259 | 1 |
| 15.05.2022 | 388 | 539 | 175 |
| 16.05.2022 | 264 | 173 | 0 |
| 17.05.2022 | 176 | 178 | 36 |
| 18.05.2022 | 22 | 224 | 0 |
| **Period Total** | **1180** | **1666** | **241** |
| | | **3087** | |

| Platforms |
|---|
| Facebook |
| Instagram |
| Twitter |
| Media |
| Reddit |
| Youtube |
| Telegram |
| Tik-Tok |

**Source:** SDA

Detailed breakdowns of bot capabilities reveal a great deal of redundancy in capability, in which only some operators are consistently delivering comments. Still, the number of delivered comments and images exceeds 2,800 in one week (see below). A more granular breakdown reveals the bots to be active in bursts, acting in patterns that would likely be readily detectable by a platform. SDA sources at least some bots from Fasttrack/Masterbot (see below) but the provenance of the bots mentioned here is unknown.

**Figure 45.** *Bot operator productivity 28 SEP 2023 – 04 OCT 2023.*

| | 28.09.2023 | 29.09.2023 | 30.09.2023 | 01.10.2023 | 02.10.2023 | 03.10.2023 | 04.10.2023 | TOTAL |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Operator 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 200 | 300 | 100 | 100 | 700 |
| Operator 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Operator 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 701 | 0 | 701 |
| Operator 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Operator 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Operator 6 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Operator 7 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Operator 8 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Operator 9 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Operator 10 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Operator 11 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Operator 12 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 700 |
| Operator 13 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Operator 14 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Operator 15 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 700 |
| TOTAL | **200** | **200** | **200** | **400** | **500** | **1001** | **300** | **2801** |

**Source:** SDA

### SDA Description

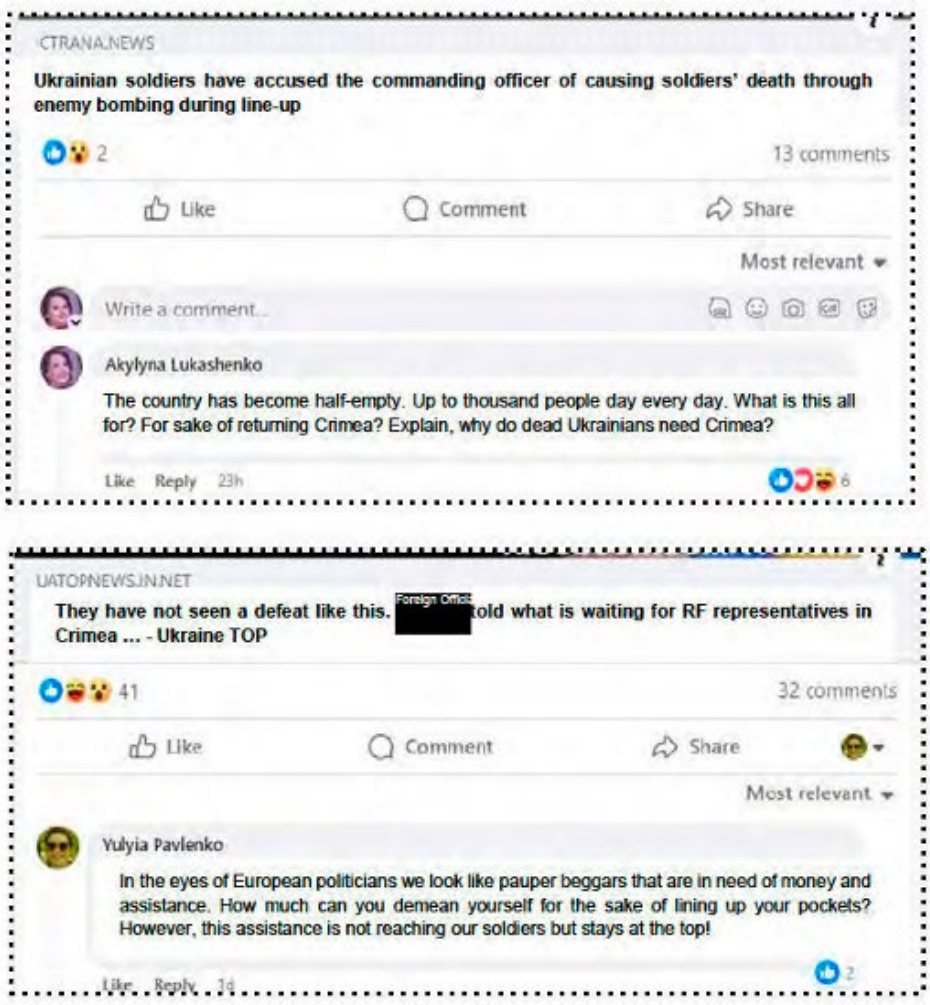
Preparation and mass distribution of text comments and memes in Ukrainian discussions on social media networks Facebook and X. Working with comments involves not only introducing produced narratives, supported by facts, but also working with targeted psychological attacks based on information trends and users' emotional attitudes towards them. This requires work on analysing user behaviour patterns.

**Format:**

- A constantly updated set of pages in social media networks for writing comments.
- Comment texts.
- Comments left under posts in social networks Facebook and X.

**Frequency:** daily, about 120,000 comments per month.

**Examples:**




**Source:** DOJ, Exhibit 6A

## Targeted advertising

Capability assessment: As mentioned in conjunction with Doppelgänger, SDA likely spent in the region of $50,000 USD from 10 May to 6 July 2022 on Facebook advertising targeting Germany, Italy, and other identified countries. This was achieved with multiple fake accounts, each making relatively small purchases of between $50 and $250 (in USD). Indicatively, most of the 505 ad purchases each generated between 20,000 and 65,000 impressions.

A January 2025 report cross-checked the screenshots against 8,000 other known Doppelgänger and/or SDA assets and estimated a conservative ad spend of SDA on Meta of $450,000.[146] There is no equivalent data from other social media platforms.

**SDA Description**

Targeted advertising on Facebook is aimed at a micro-targeted delivery of messages, tailored to a target audience.

146 CheckFirst, 2025

The target audience of each material is selected individually and depends on which of the population groups this material can cause the greatest psychological damage. The target audience can be ranked by geography, demographics, hobbies and interests, etc.

Targeted advertising on the Facebook social media network allows you to track user reactions to the distributed material in real time, send a psychological response group to the comments on the distributed materials, which, with the help of a network of bots, moderates top discussions, and adjusts further launches based on which audience group has suffered the greatest damage.

Also, based on the analysis of advertising launches, it is possible to create reaction maps by analysing user comments, their ranking and themes that caused the greatest emotional response. This makes it possible to create flexible reaction maps, the basis for which are general thematic lines and a constantly changing agenda within the framework of their semantic content.

**Product format:**

1. posts, images, infographics,
2. impressions in Facebook advertising.

**Frequency and volume**: daily. 1,000,000 impressions per month (ERR - 10%).

## "Sleeper" regional groups

Capability assessment: Sleeper groups were most notably proposed for activities in Ukraine and the US. There are no further details in the leaks.

**SDA Description**

The most popular social media networks in Ukraine are Facebook and X (Twitter) and Telegram. The administrators of these social media networks (except Telegram) take a pro-Ukrainian position and strictly moderate communities that promote pro-Russian narratives. The promotion of a pro-Russian agenda in the Ukrainian segment of social media networks is also complicated by the aggravated rejection by the majority of the audience of any messages and statements in favour of the "aggressor country" during the conflict.

In this regard, it is proposed to create and develop over a long period of time (at least 4 months) a network of communities that position themselves as Ukrainian regional news groups.

In this "dormant" state, communities gain an audience through targeted advertising, seeding and organic reach. At the right moment, having "gained weight", the communities become a point of injection and a channel for distributing information that is beneficial to the Russian side and channels for influencing the local audience in Ukraine.

The most famous recent example of a community operating on the basis of this technology is the anti-Russian channel in Telegram "Morning Dagestan", which provoked riots at the Makhachkala airport on October 29, 2023. The network of "sleeper" communities will also be in demand after the end of the Special Military Operation.

**Product format:**

- Communities in social networks Facebook, X, channels in Telegram.
- Daily news and entertainment publications.
- Targeted advertising of communities and advertising seeding in other groups.

**Frequency and volume:** Daily work on filling and advertising communities. One community in each of the three social media networks in all 20 regions of Ukraine - a total of 60 communities.

The target minimum indicator of the "live" audience of at least one community in each region in 4 months is 4,000 subscribers, the total audience is 100,000 subscribers with subsequent growth of 10-20% per month.

**Project implementation period:** from 4 months

## Network of Telegram channels

Capability assessment: n/a

**SDA Description**

To increase the influence on the domestic political agenda of Ukraine, it is proposed to create a network of Telegram channels in conjunction with Twitter and Facebook/Instagram presence with the most localized content and ideology, not affiliated with Russian performers and Russian-language content. The use of Telegram channels as the engine of the project is due to the fact that over the past year, the Ukrainian Telegram audience has grown by 600%.

We should keep in mind that the enemy segment of local popular channels did not start with political topics, but with entertainment ones; 5 years ago, the share of political channels in Ukraine was negligible. And this breakthrough can be repeated, only to our benefit.

We propose to create a network of 20 thematic target channels and 10 auxiliary channels necessary to promote and maintain the pace of audience recruitment. This approach will allow us to quickly develop the number of subscribers to noticeable volumes due to cross-reposts and the formation of a diverse core audience. This approach will also allow the project to be quickly adapted to the constantly changing agenda by adding new channels with relevant topics and quickly gaining their audience through the support of the entire network.

When preparing the content of the channels, especially at first (one or two months), it is necessary to completely move away from propaganda, both nationalist Ukrainian and pro-Russian, to forego cliches, and to influence opinion by utilising the sequence of information presented. To quickly engage in trends on Twitter, it will be necessary to quickly create posts for popular topics using hashtags, an individual style of narration and interaction with influencers.

**Product format:**

1. 20 thematic target and 10 auxiliary channels in Telegram.
2. duplicate communities in social networks X (Twitter) and Facebook.

3. from 2 to 4 publications in each channel daily.
4. targeted advertising and seeding.

**Frequency and volume:** up to 4 publications in each channel daily.

**Project KPI:** Forecast of the total growth of the project audience – 20,000 subscribers per month.

## Mirror sites

Surprisingly, the "Doppelgänger" websites (henceforth referred to as mirror sites) do not feature much in SDA's planning. Where they are mentioned, it is casual and matter of fact; usually explaining that a handful of new mirror sites were created to deliver content. There is therefore little new information to add to what is already known about the capability in terms of the technical specifications, masking techniques, and geofencing. This may be because SDA was only involved in developing content, and not the mirror websites themselves. Structura and Dialog are mentioned in most sanctions against SDA and it seems reasonable to infer that they provided most of the technical know-how.

The mirror sites use HTML source code copied from a genuine webpage, and perfectly mirror the design, fonts, and sidebars and other cross-referenced content. These latter navigational links are also copied from the HTML source code of the original site, which means that a user clicking on them is seamlessly redirected from the cloned site to the genuine site. The most important difference is that the domain name is slightly altered from the genuine one so that it would look like a link to the real thing at first glance. This is known as typosquatting. The links to the mirror sites are shared through social media posts, comments, and advertisements, and in some cases the destination is obfuscated through intermediary URL redirects. Some of these redirects check for a user's location and do not forward them to the content if they are not based in a target country; this is known as geofencing.[147]

As mentioned earlier, the last available meeting notes on CCE from June 2024 showed that SDA continued to create mirror websites, despite being discovered. Instead of discontinuing the tactic, they considered of shifting focus from mirroring news websites to mirroring the websites of universities and other organisations that had substantial traffic, including games, medicine, sports, entertainment, culture, cooking, celebrity news, religion and so on.

## News portals

The same amplification methods used to direct traffic to mirror sites are also used to direct users to Russian news portals and media brands purporting to be independent. An analysis of 16 German language news portals found that a new article was published every hour. It is therefore almost certain that LLM is used to both generate and translate content, a modus

147 Germany's Federal Foreign Service, 2024

that is different to SDA's targeted long reads, for example. The news portals use using unique layouts and designs; however, the source code and hosting infrastructure of the sites are similarly designed. Most of the artificial news portals have their own thematic focus, concentrating on a specific topic such as digitalisation, religion, astrology or health. Much of the content is the same as the "Doppelgänger" stories used to populate mirror sites. It should also be noted that amplification of content on social media follows a similar method to Matryoshka, in which there is a distinction between accounts that seed content and accounts dedicated to amplifying content. The amplification accounts are fully automated.[148] In our view, "fingerprinting" techniques does not help to connect these activities to SDA, rather they use multiple techniques of varying quality depending on the task and volumes required.

## "Delivery to the Regions"

Capability assessment: In addition to previous publication of this project document by the FBI, we found an alternative description that listed the target regions and a projected monthly cost of over €80,000 per month. This reveals an expensive, well-resourced project.

**SDA Description**

**Project objective**: delivery of the CCU project creatives to the target audience with a regional focus.

**Project geography**: 20 regions of Ukraine: Kyiv, Kharkiv, Dnipropetrovsk, Mykolayiv, Odessa, Cherkasy, Lviv, Poltava, Sumy, Ivano-Frankivsk, Rivne, Ternopil, Chernihiv, Kirovograd, Zhytomyr, Vinnytsia, Volynitsia with the centre in Lutsk, Chernivtsi, Zakarpattya with the centre in Uzhgorod and Khmelnytskyi.

Based on the analysis of commentary trends in the regional communities of Ukraine, we propose to organize targeted distribution of the creative content of the "Delivery to the Regions" project in comments to posts in regional communities and in blogs of regional influencers.

- For each region, a media map is compiled consisting of 50 communities that reliably have an audience tied to a specific region: city publics, personal pages of the regional leadership, forums on interest: sports, cars, hobbies, etc.
- For each creative content piece, a lead-in commentary is developed that has characteristics specific to the region. This approach will increase credibility in the creative content and increase the level of audience engagement.
- Creative content together with a lead-in comment are distributed in comments to posts in the community using a network of bot accounts.

**Product format:**

1. comments in the regional communities of Ukraine.
2. images, memes and other creative content.

148 ibid

**Frequency and volume:** 50,000 comments in 20 regions of Ukraine per month.

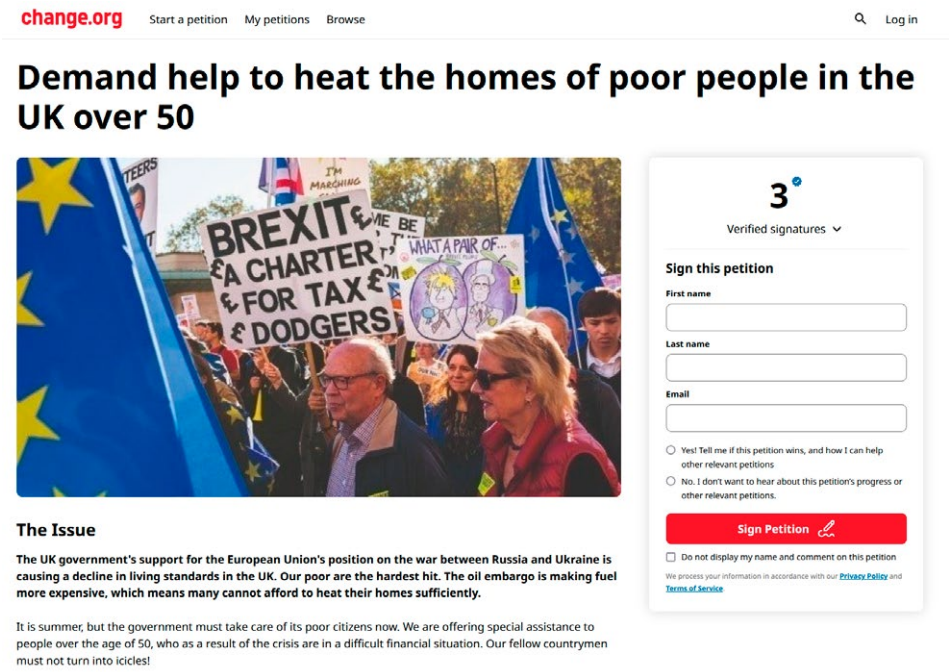
**Project KPI:** coverage of 10,000,000 touchpoints per month, ERR — 4%.

**Project cost**: RUB 8 million per month [€82,000].

## Guerrilla actions

Capability assessment: There is limited information about SDA's ability to act outside of normal advertising/propaganda channels. In early 2022, they mentioned the ability to conduct hacking operations though there is nothing further in the documents about this. Two methods that were used most widely appear to be petitions and organisation of protests.

For creating petitions, instructions were detailed and involved the creation of false personas and lengthy motivations. One petition was for an initiative called Agora 21, which was a plea to allow citizens to be more involved in the reformation of the public broadcast channels in Germany. SDA's initiative was signed by 27,813 "verified signatures", probably due to a strong authentic movement pushing for the same goals.[149] A second demanded cancellation of excise duties and VAT on fuel in Italy (marked as a "confirmed victory" with 83,748 signatures, while a third targeting the UK was less successful.




**Source:** Change.org

Documents entitled **Protest plan for September and October 2022** lists 36 demonstrations over Germany together with their purpose and main slogans. It is unclear the degree to which SDA was involved in the organisation of these protests, or whether it simply sought to piggyback on existing activities.

149 Unsere-medien (n.d.)

**Figure 46.** *Protest plan for September and October 2022.*

Protest plan for October 2022

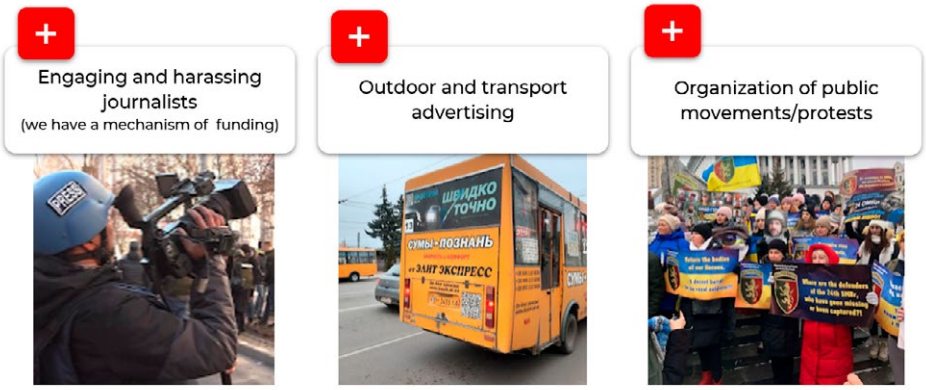
| № | Name of the action | Date | Location - land, exact address | Purpose and brief description | Slogans//hashtags |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Autumn 2022 demonstration "We don't pay for your wars - we oppose your wars!" | 01.10.22 | Saturday, 1 October 2022, 12:00, Berlin S+U | "A new quality of preparation for world war - Solidarity with anti-war protests in Russia and Ukraine! | Berlin is against imperialist war, exploding prices and gas tax! |
| 2 | Anti-government protest action "The crisis is already a system!" | 02.10.22 | Sunday, 2 October at 15:00, Plauen in Saxony | A walkout protest. | The real crisis is the system! It's not Putin's fault, it's #capitalism. #TheIIIWay - an anti-capitalist alternative! |
| 3 | "Walking on Mondays" | 03.10.22 | Leipzig. Start on Augustplatz. | A walkout protest. The event is organised by supporters of the AfD and Free Saxony. | "Launch Nord Stream 2 immediately", "Cancel anti-Russian sanctions", "Lower electricity prices" |

**Source:** SDA

SDA has already been attributed by as part of the effort to amplify antisemitic graffiti in France.[150] Documents in the Delfi leak list over 20 proposals for graffiti designed to stir up the Arab-Israeli conflict, while a second document had a similar number of suggestions for Germany.

The Center S presentation includes a slide demonstrating three types of real-world activities: harassment of journalists, outdoor advertisings, and organisation of protests.

**Figure 47.** *Slide from the Center S presentation demonstrating types of real-world activities*




## 4.5 Third party services

Internal SDA emails reveal that they regularly submitted bids to conduct work on behalf of **Dialog Regions**, **Media Center** (an ANO based in Crimea), and the **Internet Development Institute** (ANO IRI). According to its website, the Media Center publishes newspapers and magazines in "native languages" and "promotes literature on the history, culture, and traditions of the peoples of Crimea". In essence, the Media Center functions as a Kremlin-affiliated entity, tasked with disseminating pro-Russian content, including reinterpretations of cultural and historical artifacts.

150 PBS, 2023

However, some of Media Center's requests demonstrate that it was actively involved in monitoring Moscow-based political figures. IRI is responsible for the development of cultural content for Russian-language internet.

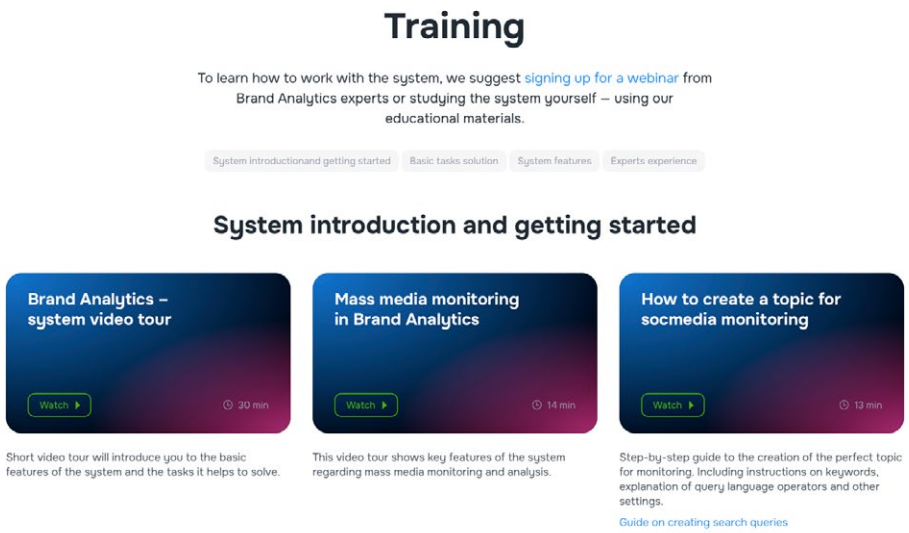
Of interest in these documents is the way in which SDA and Structura regularly bid for the same contracts and often end up as the only two bidders. Given their shared ownership, it would appear that these ANO organisations are used as vehicles for wealth extraction by this network of companies. Second, the services offered are sometimes directly procured from a third party, such as **Brand Analytics** and **Fasttrack/Masterbot**. We do not know if these companies share ownership with key players in this network, but they are clearly integrated into the capabilities SDA/Structura possess. Third, the procurement is sometimes made at the same cost as the commercial price of the product, sometimes at heavily inflated prices. This raises questions about why it is in the interests of the ANOs to funnel contracts through SDA/Structura.

## Brand Analytics

Brand Analytics is a Russian IT company specialising in social media monitoring and analysis. In our assessment, Brand Analytics is a key technology behind SDA's media monitoring and analysis functions. Many of the automated monitoring outputs appear to be sourced from this dashboard. In our assessment, the technology is similar to Western social listening tools available to corporations and governments, such as Brandwatch and Meltwater. We do not see that Brand Analytics offers any unique or more advanced capabilities beyond what any mid-size organisation with sufficient resources could buy in. Furthermore, we note considerable similarities with TalkWalker, to the extent that we believe Brand Analytics to either be a rebranded dashboard that offers a previous iteration of TalkWalker via a reseller, or a recreation of the system using reverse engineering or stolen IP. The latter solution is obviously the more expensive. Either way, we think it unlikely that this capability is a radical departure from the norm in the social listening sector.

On its website, Brand Analytics presents itself as a leading IT company and a developer of social media monitoring and analysis systems for the Russian and CIS markets. It claims to have served over 1,300 companies and to analyse an average of 3 billion messages per month. Like many other social media monitoring firms, it also offers training courses to help clients master the software, since the human oversight remains essential - to define the scope of media platforms, target audiences, and specific objectives, as well as, in some cases, to interpret the software's outputs. The operators can choose between the interactive webinar-course and uploaded video-materials, if they wish to learn by themselves.

**Image.** *Screenshot from Brand Analytics' website.*




Brand Analytics currently offers several product packages, including, Social Media Monitoring, Media Monitoring, Event Wall, Brand Visor, BrandGPT and Failure Detector. Among these, the most comprehensive are the monitoring systems, which serve as the platform's core offering. Dashboards that complement these systems are packaged separately and sold under the name Brand Visor. The Failure Detector is a specialised tool designed to track negative conversations and comes with its own dashboard, while Event Wall functions as an organisational dashboard for event managers. The purpose and functionality of BrandGPT is somewhat unclear, but is likely to involve OpenAI products or something very similar.

According to the company's website, the flagship product - Social Media Monitoring - aggregates data from a wide variety of sources, both domestic (such as VK and OK.ru) and international (such as Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, TikTok, and Twitter). It also collects information from blogs, forums, review platforms, app stores, Telegram channels, online media, and the official websites of government institutions and major organizations. The software does not appear to target all Western social media platforms.

The service reportedly operates across 12 countries: Russia, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Ukraine, with full optimisation for local languages. The platform claims to gather diverse data types, including message texts, recognised text within images, video transcripts, check-ins, and stories. Brand Analytics further asserts that its proprietary technology - specifically its image text recognition - is unmatched in the market. This feature is promoted as a tool for identifying content leaks and tracking the spread of fake news and memes. Interestingly, the company highlights this capability in the context of disinformation, when mirror websites produced by SDA/Structura disseminated content through comments containing image-based text to avoid detection. The idea of distributing fake news though image-texts could have been an idea pitched by someone from Brand Analytics. TalkWalker offers a similar product called "Visual

Listening," which detects brand mentions in images, videos, and audio. However, it remains unclear whether this service is equivalent to Brand Analytics' offering, which solution is more effective, which came first, and whether TalkWalker's "Visual Listening" was available in 2022.

**Image.** *A screenshot from the video presentation depicting "Brand Visor - the dashboard for top management".*



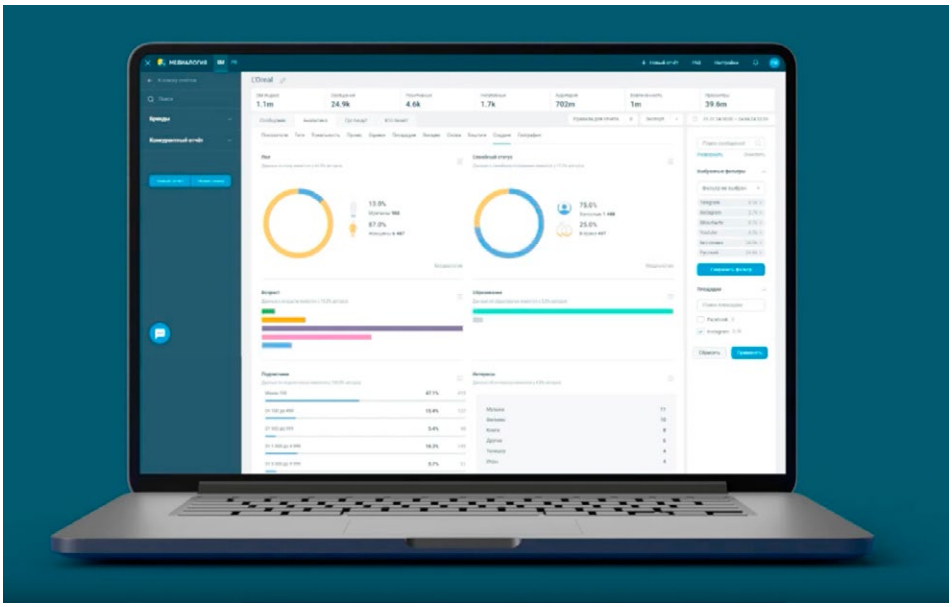

Additionally, the company aims to embed itself within the country's social and cultural fabric by offering university courses tailored to students studying Marketing, Public Relations, Advertising, Media Communications, Political Science, and Sociology.

## Medialogia

Medialogia is a rival to Brand Analytics, also specialising in social media monitoring and analysis. Unlike Brand Analytics, its website is available only in Russian. Founded in 2003, Medialogia appears to be the older of the two companies. It employs around 650 people and processes approximately 100 million social media messages and one million media messages per day. This adds up to a monthly volume comparable to Brand Analytics' 3 billion messages.

Medialogia claims to be the market leader, stating that it automatically monitors around 250,000 platforms, including more than 2.5 billion social media accounts. Like Brand Analytics, it also promotes proprietary tools, such as the Media Index and SM Index. It places strong emphasis on sentiment analysis in the development of its text analysis technologies. The company claims to use deep learning models—neural networks capable of analysing not only the overall content of texts but also the characteristics of the entities mentioned within them.

**Image.** *A screenshot from Medialogia's video presentation on their official website.*

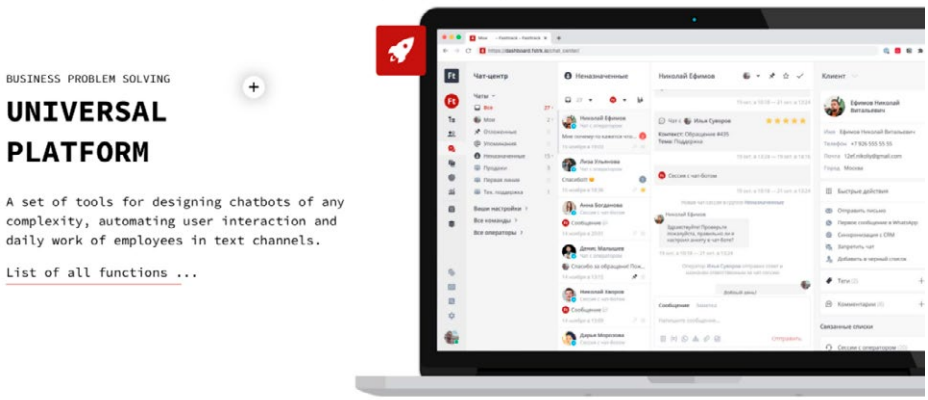


Medialogia maintains a relatively streamlined product portfolio, primarily distinguishing between mass media and social media monitoring. In addition to its core services, the company offers a range of webinars and training courses.

To stay socially and commercially relevant, Medialogia also engages in public-facing initiatives. It organises celebratory events where it recognises outstanding PR campaigns of the year and regularly publishes public rankings of the most popular influencers, media outlets, politicians, and other prominent figures.

## Fasttrack/Masterbot

**Image.** *Fasttrack/Masterbot*

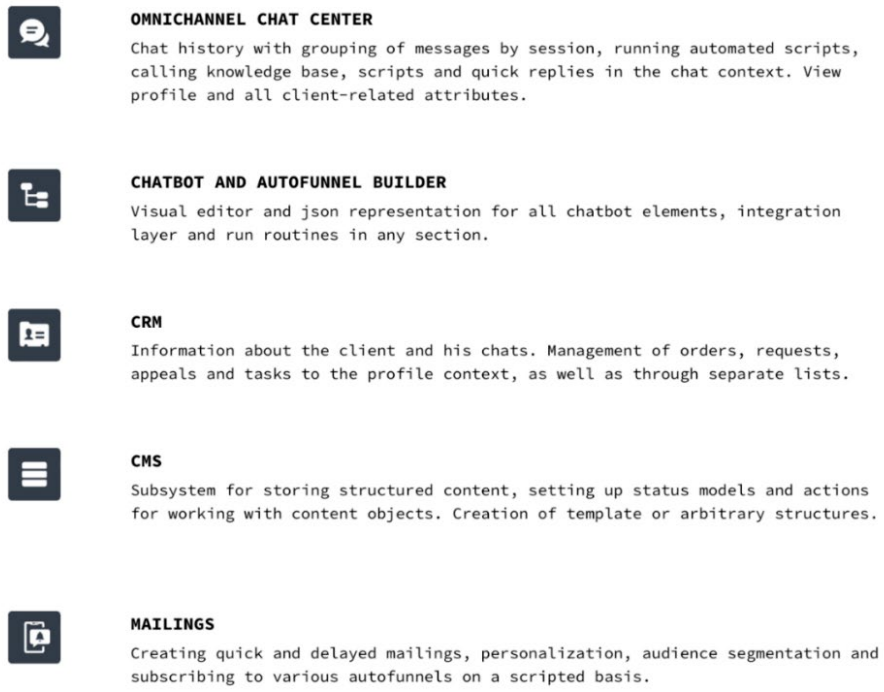



Fasttrack is a Russian company offering chatbot services to commercial clients. It appears to be developed by Masterbot (ID: 9721010347), a computer technology company, registered in 2016.[151] According to leaked

151 See https://fstrk.io; http://fasttrackbot.com; https://www.rusprofile.ru/id/10584994

procurement documents, we have details on two of the services available to SDA from Masterbot. The first is a bot called "Anti-Fake Teacher", which operates on platforms such as Telegram, VK Messenger, WhatsApp, and Viber. Its primary purpose is to counter "fake narratives" in real time while also collecting user data. The second bot, "Teacher of the Year", is designed to gather user data by involving citizens in a voting process and operates exclusively within VK Messenger. The services are managed through a dashboard called *dashboard.fstrk.io*.

**Image.** *Fasttrack/Masterbot*




However, Masterbot's official websites do not mention these services. Instead, they primarily highlight the use of bots for chat-based applications in Customer Relationship Management (CRM) and mailing, as well as their expertise in developing Content Management Systems (CMS) software. Basic license is available from $300 per month.

The English-language website, http://fasttrackbot[.]com, lists a business address in the UAE. The Russian-language website, https://fstrk[.]io, does not provide an address but includes a list of clients using their services.

## Sreda

Employees of the Presidential Administration share a standardised corporate email address in the format - n.lastname@ap.armgs.team. They use a Russian software platform designed specifically for the government sector, which offers services such as email, calendar, cloud storage, task management, organizational structure management, and e-conferencing. It appears similar in principle to Microsoft services. This software is accessible across multiple devices and claims to offer high level of security. Its chat function

is expected to replace foreign messaging apps as means of communication among civil servants[152]. Previously called "Arm GS" (арм гс) - short for "Automated Workplace for a Civil Servant" (автоматизированное рабочее место государственного служащего) - the platform has since been rebranded as Sreda (Среда), meaning "Environment."[153] Over 350,000 civil servants currently use this system for data management.

**Image.** *A slide from the 'welcome presentation' on Sreda's website . Machine-translated.*

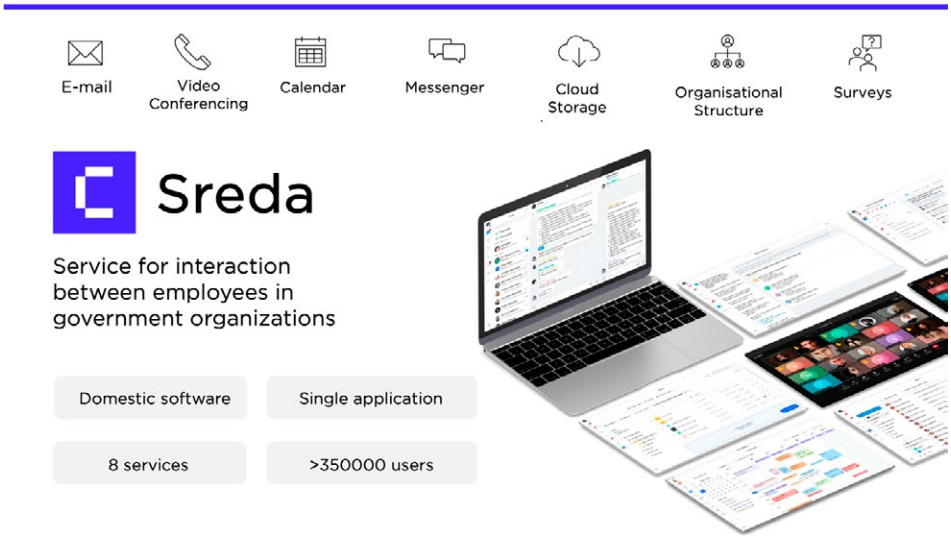
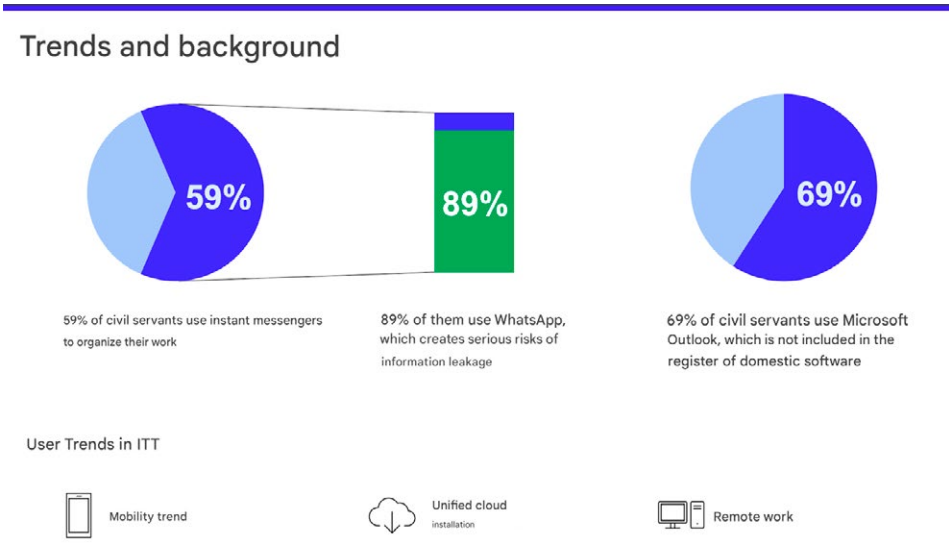



**Image.** *A slide from the 'welcome presentation' on Sreda's website.*




## Dolphin – Anti-detect browser

Documents indicate that SDA was encouraged to collaborate with Dolphin Cloud and Anti-Detect Browser software - both services offered by

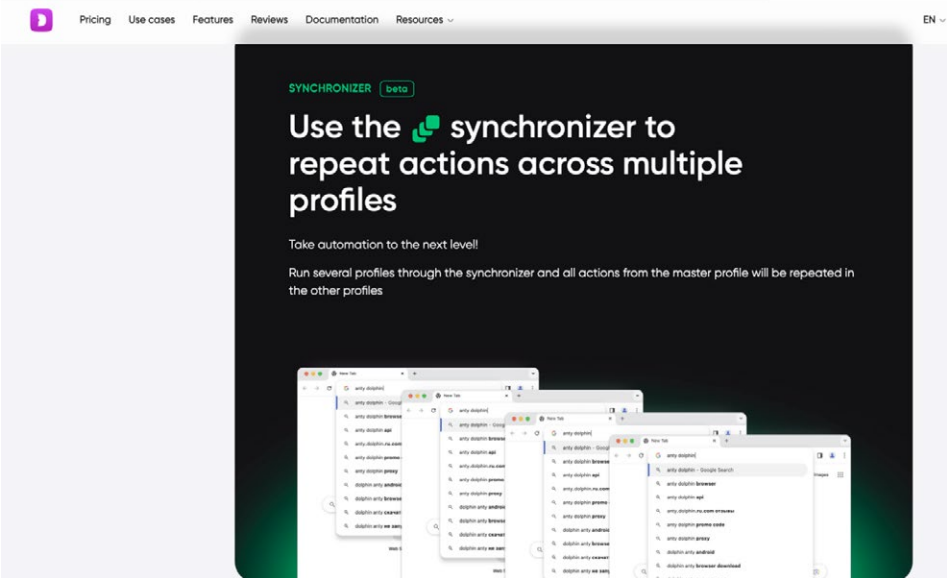
152 See https://web.archive.org/web/20241001145821/https://www.tadviser.ru/index.php/

153 See https://sreda.digital.gov.ru/

Zhitniakov Software Solutions Ltd, a company registered in Cyprus (i-Cyprus, n.d.). The firm was founded by Denis Zhitniakov, a Russian entrepreneur (list-org, n.d.-g), who is currently engaged in cultivating his personal brand (see @deniszhitniakov_blog, 2022).

According to Multilogin, one of the leading anti-detect browsers on the market, an anti-detect browser is a specialised web browser designed to conceal digital fingerprints - such as cookies, IP addresses, and other tracking data - thereby preventing websites from identifying or linking user accounts. These browsers enable operators to manage multiple accounts simultaneously and perform various activities without leaving detectable traces.[154] While Dolphin might not be the best anti-detect browser on the market, it is a Russia-based software, and therefore safer to use, can be modified to meet clients' needs, and is part of the Russian business infrastructure.

**Image.** *Screenshot from the Dolphin website, showing its Synchronizer feature, that allows for repeated actions across multiple profiles.*




154 See Multilogin (n-d)

# 5. Conclusions

SDA conducts information war against large portions of the world, most specifically Ukraine, Germany, France, Italy, Poland, Latvia, the UK, the US, Latin America, some CIS countries, and the Russian public. **The information war is commissioned and programmatically funded by First Deputy Chief of Staff of the Presidential Administration of Russia, Sergey Kiriyenko.** SDA is part of a €600 million a year network of digital propaganda companies and ANOs whose activities are approved and tightly coordinated by the Kremlin. SDA is one actor in this network, with a primary task in generating content, a second in delivering the content, and a third in project management and inter-organisational coordination. However, little happens at strategic or tactical levels without direct instructions from the Kremlin.

SDA deploys the typical **logic of an advertising and political campaigning company within a context heavily dominated by security and intelligence logics**. This often leads to conceptual hybridity between the worlds of PR and the military, whereby SDA seeks "market penetration" (a marketing term) by infiltrating the rearguard and encouraging subversion in Western countries (military and intelligence terminology). **They are hustlers, continuously finding ways to create new job opportunities for themselves and finding ways to brand their activities internally**. This is almost certainly why the exposure of Doppelgänger had such a positive effect on their reputation in Kremlin circles: **Western discourses on Doppelgänger shaped a better brand and justification for their work than they had been able to develop themselves**.

Most of SDA's tools are industry standard, comparable to what a similar sized PR company in the West would have available to them. **The blending of marketing, public relations, journalism, espionage, cyber, and psyops tools lends them a capability profile that runs from highly targeted, high precision activities to "spammy and scammy" blunderbuss approaches**. Russia has developed many of its own tools equivalent to those used by Western PR companies. Not all tools are convincing. SDA's capabilities are a mishmash of tools available to pretty much any organisation with a communication department in the past 10 years, coupled with some clever use of AI, an intent to act at scale, and a lot of trial and error.

Several information influence operations attributed to the Russian Federation share characteristics of SDA's strategies, though the exact boundaries between operations is unclear, most likely because they **belong to the same network of actors and sometimes share market insights, campaign assets, third party services, and delivery mechanisms**. We reiterate that this is not about a single company, but an ecosystem of organisations coordinated from the Kremlin. While Russia's propaganda capabilities are typically considered as competing islands under different patronage (e.g. the three major intelligence agencies, Prigozhin, and state media), the rare examples of overlaps with SDA campaigns could indicate increasing cooperation.

SDA have a programmatic way of working. **They are tightly controlled, methodical, and predictable in their planning**. Their project plans reveal consistent characteristics such as objectives, KPIs, use of behavioural science approaches, as well as pipeline-based approaches to content production, content delivery, and data management for evaluation. Analysis of societal divisions and fissures is always used to identify targets, which are often hyper-local. There is a tendency to act through classically Soviet "algorithms": processes, rules and logics that define pathways of action. This is almost certainly how they build consistency of action. They can be vindictive against those who are viewed as obstacles to achieving their goals. **They are persistent, adaptable and agile, and are not deterred by setbacks. Decision-making cycles are short, often turning Kremlin decisions into output within a few days. Everything is documented to provide evidence of activity**. **Not all of that evidence is scientifically valid and we suspect double counting, but in general collection of evidence is thorough and within the norms of PR companies.**[155]

SDA's approach to information warfare is to generate **double binds**[156] that make some of its efforts difficult to mitigate and counteract, particularly for countries that are averse to compromising democratic principles. The most important double bind is a focus on supporting extreme (or "non-systemic") political parties, and where possible finding authentic amplification among the parties' supporters for their propaganda. **In attempting to reveal and mitigate the effects of Russian information influence operations, democratic authorities risk accusations of censorship and of being predisposed against these parties**. Countermeasures therefore become bound up in political gamesmanship and freedom of speech concerns, despite being, at source, fully attributable inauthentic Russian activities.

The second significant double bind is the exploitation of the factchecking and counter-disinformation infrastructure. In a countermove against democratic countermeasures such as debunking, network exposure, and sanctions, **SDA uses factchecking and other exposure as a delivery mechanism for its narratives.** The rationale is that notoriety - for the content, for Doppelgänger, for SDA, and for "Russian propaganda" - is all good for the Kremlin. This has been further refined into a concept of information war centred on capturing market share in the adversary's "territory" or information environment, regardless of how negatively the content is framed. Once again, our countermeasures are "countered". In fact, SDA refers to much of its work as **Comprehensive Counter Campaigns**, in the belief that it is fighting a **guerilla information war** against a superior enemy.

Finally, SDA is also involved in efforts that target Russia and the Russian diaspora, although other actors within the network play a larger role. For this, they utilise an effective combination of **whole-of-society propaganda, fear, surveillance, and threats rooted in technological advancements**, to shape an almost inescapably toxic information environment. SDA's

155 We differ slightly from Rid's assessment insofar as we consider SDA's metrics to largely parallel normal PR company evaluation methods; Rid, 2024

156 "a difficult situation in which, whatever action you decide to take, you cannot escape unpleasant results": Cambridge Dictionnary, 2025

interaction with the infrastructure targeting Russians points to how their activities are adapted to regions where they already have information dominance. **If we are to understand how the information threats against the West are being tested and perfected, and hence how they are likely to evolve, we must look further into the Russian information environment**.

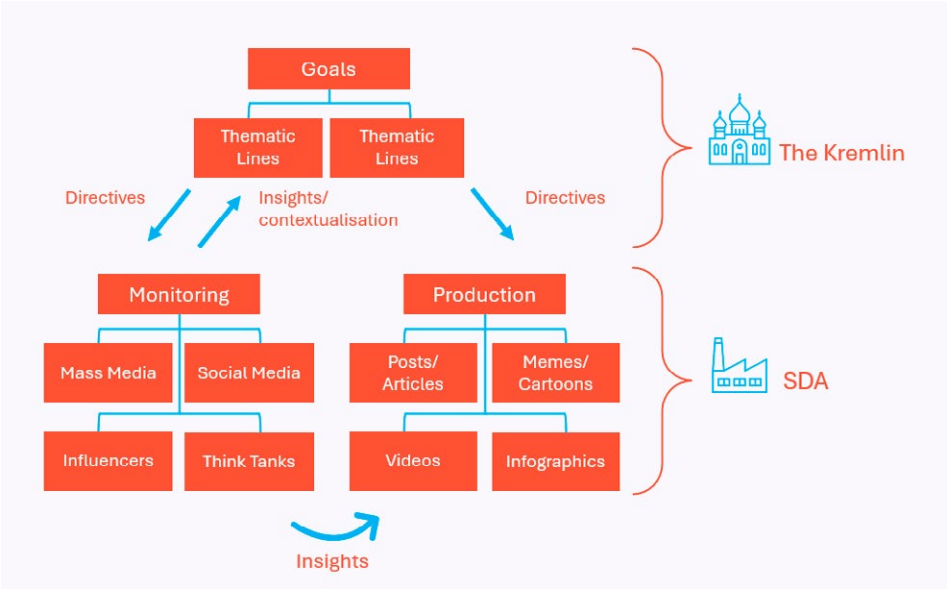
## 5.1 Advertising meets espionage meets information war

A substantial portion of this report is dedicated to understanding the capabilities available to SDA and its network to run information influence operations. It is not a technical analysis. There are plenty of excellent reports that do that part of the work. **We aim to develop a broader understanding of SDA's strategies and the capability options available to them for implementation**. We feel that this is a significant gap in previous reporting. Other reports do the important work of establishing the technical means by which some of the capabilities are implemented; however, as the continued focus on "Doppelgänger" demonstrates, a lot of technical reporting dives further into the minutiae of observables rather than seeking to contextualise them as strategic-level insights.

Taking a more strategic view, we have been able to assess, with medium to high confidence,[157] SDA capabilities and their workflow process. There are of course documents in which SDA describes their work process, most prominently in slide decks to introduce Team I and Center S, though we consider these to be mostly for internal branding and sales purposes. The Team I briefing particularly emphasises their analytical and monitoring capabilities, whereas the Center S document is heavier on content and delivery. Neither mentions mirror sites, which is curious when one considers that these briefings were prepared after the Doppelgänger exposure as part of SDA's rebranding as the masterminds of the largest Russian operation since 2016. We reiterate that the mirror sites are a small component of the SDA ecosystem's capabilities, and following a thorough review of the available information about their projects, assess their general workflow logic to be as follows:

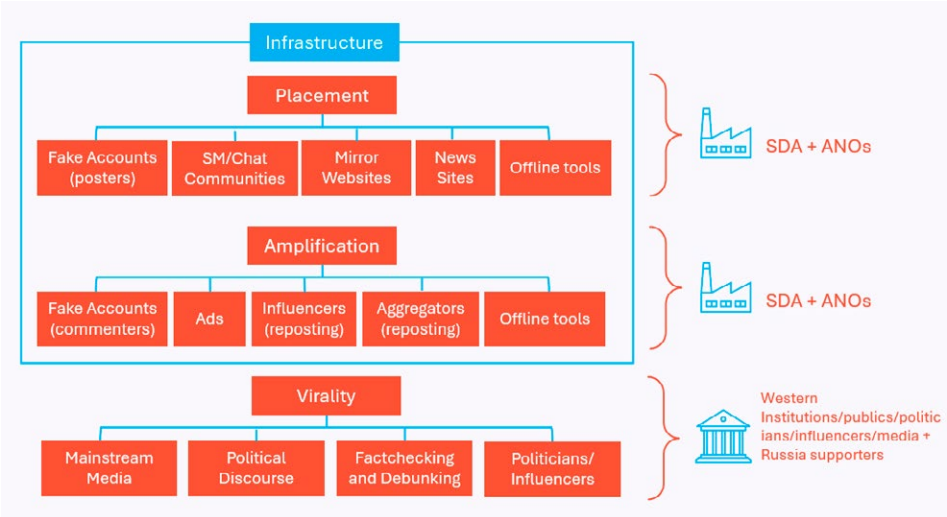
157 Many internal planning documents are missing from the leaks, which means that we are likely missing some crucial building blocks. However, enough documents are available to give us a good sense of the "known unknowns" and of what constitutes a typical campaign.

**Figure 48.** *The production phase of SDA's workflow*




SDA usually create objectives and divide them into key narratives, which they call **thematic lines**. The thematic lines are often discussed at the level of Presidential Administration meetings and also act as KPIs for project management purposes. These lines are implemented by creative teams in a manner largely consistent with how an advertising or PR agency would work. The monitoring and analysis process sits in the middle of this phase as a parenthesis, because the results of monitoring are used to identify opportunities for creative teams within the paradigm of the thematic lines. This is a process of tailoring content to specific contexts and events. These opportunities are discussed and decided at Presidential Administration meetings. For example, if a thematic line is to undermine President Zelensky, monitoring identifies current trends that might enable criticism, such as rumours of a conflict with another politician. This is fed into the creative production phase.

**Figure 49.** *The delivery phase of SDA's workflow*



The second part of the process is delivery. This primarily involves seeding, at high volume, the creative products through paid social media advertisements, automated comments, posts by real influencers, and posts by bots. SDA is a specialist in this part of the delivery process, although some capabilities are outsourced. One might refer to this as drawing on amplification techniques associated with spammers and advertisers. A significant portion of the evaluation metrics that SDA uses covers monitoring, content creation, and this first phase of delivery, as these are the parts of the process that SDA has the most control over. The metrics created here are sometimes "guestimates" based on the anticipated reach of a post within a community. Therefore, overall metrics suggesting touchpoints in the tens of billions should not be taken literally, but still give a good sense of scale.

The second phase of delivery is crucial. On the one hand, SDA has flooded several social media platforms with content, at high volume and with low expectations of any impact. On the other, it provides a series of mechanisms for impact to take place. The expectation is that algorithms push this content into real users' social media feeds, and that they may consequently be drawn into the Russian discursive rabbit hole. But they also create, target, infiltrate, or simply monitor, social media groups, communities, pages, and channels, news portals including Pravda and other covert Russian brands, and the mirror sites associated with Doppelgänger. To enter this phase of delivery, a user has to see the spammy, ad-like content and make the decision to click. Different contexts are available for different types of audience, including disseminating the narratives in the wrapping of credible news sites or government sites. In other words, for almost every possible audience, Kremlin narratives are made available in a way that can make them most palatable. **Whether the "wrapping" is a hyper local news platform, a respected left-leaning newspaper, or a sketchy non-mainstream media brand, Russian narratives are supplied in a format suited for everyone**. This is why the high volume of seeded content doesn't seem to matter; it only matters as an opportunity to see.[158] **The various platforms where longer news articles and other content are staged are the equivalent of a user clicking on an ad for shoes in order to visit the store. Clickthrough rates are a key evaluation metric used by SDA to demonstrate efficacy to the Kremlin; the numbers that they like to show are between 4 and 5%**. Where metrics are lower, they are simply excluded.

Finally, SDA also count third order – or **virality** - effects. This covers the ways in which the ecosystem for content delivery described above demonstrates impact in the information environments of target audiences. For example, if SDA narratives are picked up by mainstream media, celebrities, or politicians, this is a massive success. **The Presidential Administration hungrily dissects examples of when, e.g. US a congressman repeats SDA talking points**. In addition, if factcheckers republish their content, it is considered to have gained more traction and more exposure in a country's information environment. The equivalent in the advertising world would

158 OTS, or opportunities to see, is a standard metric used in advertising. It tallies up how many times content is shown, or in effect how many eyeballs it reaches. CTR, or clickthrough rates, is the much lower figure used to capture the occasions when an OTS is "converted" into a decision to find out more.

be the breakthrough of a particularly iconic advert into everyday discourse. SDA is careful not to stake its reputation on these third order effects and only elects to report on them when it is beneficial to do so. Most Western PR companies are also selective in how they wield such metrics. Some of SDA's big picture objectives belong to this category of effects, such as the goal to increase AfD's voter share to 20% or to get Trump elected. It is likely that such metrics are either forced upon them or are calculated risks based on SDA's forecasting. Either way, SDA are certainly not naive enough to believe that their campaigns cause these outcomes. Their efforts to demonstrate third order effects are by-and-large aligned with industry best practice.

This does not mean that all of their numbers are rock solid. One hypothesis we have is that some of their best metrics come from feeding at both ends of the process. What we mean by this is that it often seems that **the metrics count their channels, their content, their comments, and their engagements without disentangling what is authentic and what is already an SDA asset**. For example, an SDA post in an SDA social media group, which is commented by SDA bots, could not be said to have as much impact as an SDA group that has 90% comments from authentic users. Indeed, the impact would be virtually zero since SDA is in essence talking to itself. Mix in the broader network of organisations pumping out automated and semi-automated junk content and the web becomes difficult to disentangle. Likewise, sometimes their OTS metrics are standardised estimates based on the size of the community that they post to. In other words, they are likely to claim that a post to a community of 1 million people has a reach of 10,000, based upon a standard estimate that (say) 1% of the group will see the post. This doesn't take into consideration the ways that algorithms respond to low-quality content. While we can't categorically demonstrate this in this report, we suspect that some of the metrics are inflated because they capture massive volumes of spammy output from the first stage of delivery multiple times. The raw numbers are reported back to the centre as being of value, but they are likely to be a feedback loop: SDA talking to SDA.

A major vulnerability in their capabilities is in the quality of analysis. **In the documents, it is clear that the totalitarian nature of the current Russian regime (the current ideology, culture of surveillance, fermentation of hatred toward Ukraine) infuses all their work. The ability to be objective, creative, to empathise, and hence to conduct genuine psychological analysis of target groups is absent**. Nobody wants to question the Kremlin, even for the purposes of understanding and exploring the mindset of the adversary. Instead, most of the analyses offer shortcuts based on obvious perceived opportunities to demonstrate loyalty to the regime. They are never close to understanding what makes supporters of Ukraine tick, which means that their informational and cognitive activities will always have limitations. Indeed, many major PR companies engage local influencers and bureaus to help localise their campaigns. SDA try to find local influencers and journalists in each market to replicate this capability, but their work is so centralised under the totalitarian regime that this method appears to have little benefit.

Strategic decision-making appears to be agile and well-structured, with implementation often almost instantaneous. While some aspects of this are

effective, it is also clear that strategic decision-making has limited connection to the massive volume of insight data that SDA produces. Based on the protocols from Presidential Administration meetings, decisions are largely made and operationalised based on who makes the request and their personal biases and preferences; for example, fake infographics that amplify Ukraine's losses seem to be a favoured creative product of one Kremlin decision-maker. Meetings often refer to how a certain key figure likes to see a certain type of content. Data is often presented by SDA representatives to justify that request. **Based on the leaked documents, there is limited evidence to suggest that Presidential Administration decisions about SDA and broader network activities are initiated based on the extensive monitoring data; the picture that emerges is rather that decisions come from the hierarchy as predetermined orders based on political considerations, and monitoring data is mostly used to find tactical opportunities to implement those orders**.

## 5.2 Lessons for the counter-FIMI community

Doppelgänger, and its associated activities, would not have been discovered were it not for the vigilance of NGOs, academics, think tanks, tech companies, private sector intelligence companies, and governmental actors sharing information and pooling their insights. **The exposure of Doppelgänger demonstrates that no single counter-FIMI actor can achieve good results without the support of a community**. In some respects, the dismantling of Doppelgänger's infrastructure, and the subsequent exposure and sanctioning of SDA, are a prominent success. However, in our assessment, there are hard, perhaps even painful lessons to be learned. **For as much as the counter-FIMI community has achieved in combatting Doppelgänger, there are major failings that must be addressed**.

The first is conceptual. Given the importance of understanding the capabilities shared across a network of threat actors with different specialisations, mandates, and objectives, **we advocate for a capabilities-based approach to analysis**. An inherent advantage compared to, e.g. TTP-based approaches to analysis is that an understanding of capability forces the assessment to consider the strategic level: **what effects are those capabilities deployed to achieve, and what capabilities would be needed to hinder the strategic effects?** TTP-based approaches are essential for analyses that seek to understand the details of implementation, but they tend to lead the analyst further into the technical minutiae. In this respect, we particularly recognise a small number of exceptional technical reports that explicitly seek to improve the understanding of capabilities, including by EUDisinfoLab and Quirium, Viginum, Meta, and the German Federal Foreign Office.

In our view, **a key lesson from Doppelgänger is that these two approaches should each be applied in the right circumstances, and that the current swing in the counter-FIMI community in favour of TTPs has been overplayed and ultimately contributed to misjudgements about what "Doppelgänger" is**. Other typical problems with threat intelligence analysis, such as "group think", are obvious concerns. If analysts don't

understand the opponent's overarching aim, their domestic decision-making context, and delivery infrastructure more broadly, how can they correctly delineate where one operation ends and another begins? And how can the counter-FIMI community use this knowledge to disrupt their infrastructure, their decision-making, and launch counter operations targeting their vulnerabilities? **Indeed, if each of the 60 or so technical reports into Doppelgänger and its associated operations can be considered a countermeasure of sorts, the counter-FIMI community as whole has acted without coordination, planning, and strategy. This lack of coordination plays into the hands of the adversary.**

We are not going to review every report and highlight the pros and cons of every action taken by community stakeholders. However, Meta's work on Doppelgänger deserves further comment. Meta did exceptional work in investigating and exposing the Doppelgänger network. It has managed an open-source list of mirror sites and continued to act as a pillar of counter-FIMI efforts to expose SDA and the network. Its investigation and attribution work was thorough and transparent. We are therefore astounded that SDA continues to exploit Meta's advertising system as a cornerstone of its delivery mechanisms. SDA's approach to using Facebook ads, as shown in the documents, is fully confident that the system can be abused to the point that it is simply a casual fact. The lack of interest in plugging this gaping hole is perplexing. A January 2024 report[159] suggests that Meta received $338,000 in ad revenue from SDA's activities in the EU since the sanctions were levied in July 2023, which is scandalous. Ads are almost certainly also used on X, YouTube, and TikTok, but there is limited data to this effect.[160]

It is easy to criticise SDA for being opportunistic and for offering shallow metrics that placate, if not entirely mislead, its political masters.[161] As this report shows, SDA was continuously rebranding their activities to make them as catchy and attractive to the Kremlin as possible. This is not a problem unique to the Russian system. Multiple reports coming out of the counter-FIMI community branded their findings as catchy "operations". As far as we can tell, the only advantage in working in this way is to chase headlines, funding, and to ringfence findings as one's own for branding purposes. It is notable that a proliferation of new "counter-FIMI" actors have been active in this space, and that this has conversely weakened the prospect of coordinated disruption. **In our assessment, there has been little to no analytical validity to calling these "operations" catchy names such as Doppelgänger, Undercut, and Stormkiller. If anything, the branding distracts from strategic analysis that could better understand the overall objectives and methods of the threat actor(s) behind them**. Indeed, several months after the DOJ and Delfi leaks, it is baffling that Doppelgänger is still used to describe SDA campaigns by organisations familiar with the content of the leaks.[162]

SDA's operations were internally called Comprehensive Counter

159 CheckFirst, 2025

160 Germany's Federal Foreign Office, 2024

161 Rid, 2024

162 E.g. Checkfirst, 2025

Campaigns because they are, at their core, a response to the Western countermeasures levied at the beginning of the Ukraine invasion. They are **counter-countermeasures**. We show in this report that SDA gained more funding when Doppelgänger was exposed, because the counter-FIMI community effectively branded their activities better than SDA was able to do.[163] **Major campaigns were commissioned by the Kremlin as a result, including the efforts targeting the EU Parliamentary elections. This, in turn, created more contracts and work for the counter-FIMI community. This has evolved into a key SDA strategy: to leverage the counter-FIMI community as a delivery mechanism for its campaigns. But at worst, it implicates the counter-FIMI community into a symbiosis, in which both parties feed on one another**. This is not what counter-FIMI should or can be about, and significant thought needs to be put into how to break this negative spiral.

**We are conscious that there are authoritarian political forces seeking to shut-down factcheckers, content moderators, and disinformation specialists. This is categorically not what we are saying**. To the contrary, we argue that the counter-FIMI community has done an excellent job to the extent that it has become an overt target of exploitation for Russian influence operations. **The community needs to be better protected and augmented with a stronger strategic direction, better coherence, shared frameworks and assessment capabilities, and more substantive sharing of threat intelligence to avoid the weaknesses we have observed in the handling of Doppelgänger/SDA**. Furthermore, the types of "countermeasures" levied by democracies and the counter-FIMI community must enter a new phase to meet the new generation of challenges.

## 5.3 Rethinking the countermeasures toolbox

SDA and their network are fallible. **The Kremlin is not leading its information war from a position of strength**. Yet, our current countermeasures have been countered; or at least, SDA provides a blueprint that shows threat actors how to counteract them. Their use of hybrid advertising-espionage-military logics points to a robust method: after all, global advertising spend in 2025 is expected to reach $1,158 billion USD.[164] Advertising methods work well enough, and they don't need to be perfect, nor does the product need to be superior. We cannot assume that understanding the capabilities will simply make them go away.

So long as democracies are unwilling to recognise that we are involuntary participants in an information war, we will continue to play "whack-a-mole" with SDA content and gradually become outmanoeuvred as they adapt to whatever responses we come up with. **The evidence collected in this report demonstrates unequivocally that SDA is part of a state-backed, persistent, and chronic information war**. Therefore, in our view, the countries drawn into that information war must stop being reactive. An information war cannot be won, or deterred, solely by increasing societal

163 This risk has previously been alluded to, without specific reference to Doppelgänger, in Belogolova, Foster, Rid & Wilde, 2024

164 Statista, 2025

resilience, giving more funding to the counter-FIMI community to create databases of disinformation, or developing better monitoring and data handling processes. **A war, even in the information environment and cognitive realm, must be fought. That means addressing the adversary's strategic goals directly and proactively.**

Since 2020, the counter-FIMI community has made considerable progress in developing what was initially called a **counter-disinformation toolbox**.[165] By 2024, the kinds of policy instruments available to EU institutions and member states numbered two dozen,[166] with sanctions at the forefront. These countermeasures successfully disrupted Russian propaganda networks early in the Ukraine invasion, but Russia persistently searched for ways to circumvent the sanctions.[167] The resulting reorganisations within the Kremlin gave SDA and its network their opportunities. **It has helped to give birth to a new generation of digital media specialists dedicated to the systematic evasion and degradation of Western countermeasures**.

Now that we have a more thorough understanding of the Kiriyenko network, and its likely position in relation to other Russian Federation information influence operations by competing parts of the system, we can consider responses. **In our view, there are two major approaches: a continuation of the current countermeasures regime, and strategic disruption. The first entails efforts to mitigate the impact of SDA on Western information environments by understanding the OODA loop and managing the impact of their activities. This requires an upgrade in capability and coordination. The second is to attempt to disrupt current patterns by forcing a strategic retreat.** Both options are treated below.

## "Mitigation" responses

The first approach is more aligned with existing approaches to countering disinformation but requires some advances in thinking to better tailor the response to the threat. The approach can be categorised in five steps.

First, **get ahead of the threat**. We know the strategies, targets, and tactics of the adversary. We know how they make decisions and how they adapt. The first move is to reach their known targets with our own messaging proactively, with clear narratives based on facts, while acknowledging those communities' threats, vulnerabilities, and grievances. The truth should always be easily available, but perhaps it is not always well-framed when it is packaged as factchecking or debunking. In other words, **the content needs to be better**. In this respect, SDA is far ahead in being able to make use of hundreds of brands (including counterfeits) to tailor its messages to curious audiences. The content should not simply be responses to SDA messaging but rather calibrated to counteract the intended strategic effects. This requires better coordination among allied countries, more innovative approaches to delivery, and in some cases more strategic co-delivery of

165 For a detailed discussion of the development of these policies, and sketches of the original toolbox, see Pamment, 2020a, b and c

166 European Commission, 2024

167 Pamment, 2023

content across national and public-private boundaries. Even as the first stage of a response, this is a major undertaking.

Second, **draw them out**. We know that SDA are opportunists. We know that their analysis is twisted by the ruling totalitarian ideology. We know how they monitor and analyse, continuously looking for tactical openings. We know that they need to show impact, even if that only means vanity metrics. Getting ahead of the issues could potentially help shift the dynamic so that they are increasingly forced to act on our terms. **Therefore, the next stage of a response is to develop "attack vectors" for them to target**. This could involve tactical efforts to force them to burn energy and resources on areas where their effect can be limited, but where they can still "show" impact at home. For example, this could entail fostering situations and communities that cause SDA to think that they should be active.

Third, **target key influence infrastructure**. Influencers are key hubs in the contemporary digital space, and SDA's use of them is extensive but hardly cutting edge. **Efforts to mitigate their impact must, at some point, acknowledge the need to buy in to the influencer market**. This is simply a necessity to "game" the algorithms to maximise the exposure of facts. Utilising more modern methods of influencer engagement would give the West an advantage over SDA methods. But influencers are only one of the key infrastructural hubs. It is also, for example, important to work long term to ensure that generative AI reflects accepted knowledge as well as Western norms. This means working with tech companies to minimise direct and indirect impact of Russian influence on the "knowledge" that the models generate.[168] Similarly, we must ensure that Wikipedia only builds its articles from real sources. **Developing long-term work programmes that protect democratic norms on all the key hubs that are currently used as multipliers for information influence operations should be a matter of priority. This may very well entail establishing new methods for disseminating the outputs of fact checking and debunking.**

Fourth, **consider where integrated response options add value**. Communicative responses are a powerful tool in information war, but they must be complemented with policy levers. Sanctions are one lever that has already been used extensively towards SDA. Cyber options may also be warranted; for example, the leaks from Kiriyenko's administration as well as from SDA provide significant intelligence for improving communicative and policy responses. We note that SDA's use of cloud services and some other IT tools are obvious vulnerabilities, and there are others revealed in this analysis. **Sometimes the best response to a communication problem is with tools other than communication**. Integrated approaches, with which the above steps can be developed in tandem, could provide significant mitigation opportunities.

Finally, **target their finances**. If one thing is clear about SDA and its network, it is that they are in it for the money. Everything about their project management structure is designed to ensure that everybody gets paid, including through rigged procurements. **Disrupting the economic**

168 See, e.g. Blachez and Sadeghie, 2024, and American Sunlight Project, 2025

**relationships between these parties might just be the most effective tool to stop them**. Sanctions are of course one part of this, but disrupting the mundane, everyday financial relationships between these actors, and between them and their staff, would likely have a significant effect on their productivity.

## "Pushback" responses

The mitigation strategy proposed here is already a major rethink in counter-FIMI "doctrine". However, it is only one part of what would be necessary to reduce the negative impact of Russian information influence operations on democracies. In our view, the evidence about SDA's activities contains the seeds of a strategy for what a strategic pushback would entail. **The Kremlin wants SDA to fight the information war on Western territories (i.e., in our information environments) in order to paralyse democracies from within.** We are constantly on the backfoot, responding, reacting, playing catch-up. **The Kremlin is also desperate to avoid fighting an information war in the information environment of the Russian Federation. If we take the information war to Russian Federation information environment, resources will have to be displaced from the "foreign front" to protect the homeland**.

This logic may sound simplistic, but "fighting" on our territory, tying up our resources, and fixing us in double-binds is the essence of their strategy. Coordination is key to breaking the cycle of measures and countermeasures, because Russia is not a superpower. The US, Germany, France, the UK and Italy all have larger economies. Imagine if several of the Western countries currently targeted by SDA each created their own SDA-type organisation. **Imagine if those organisations worked in a coordinated manner to develop content and delivery mechanisms, broadly using similar capabilities to those outlined in this report, but using them to target the Russian Federation's information environment. To make a product of dissent and to start advertising it within the Russian Federation as though the future of the free world depended on it**.[169] To play cat-and-mouse with their emergent systems of censorship, trusted brands, local communities, and countermeasures. Disrupting, undermining, and exposing.

**Such a consortium could comfortably outperform the entire Russian Federation's propaganda capability**.[170] SDA and its network would be forced to shift their focus to their own information environment, and the informational and cognitive pressure on Ukraine, the West, and the rest of the world, would diminish. **Indeed, this is a concrete, game-changing thing that we can do for Ukraine as a complement to supplying material and materiel**.

169 The historical parallels to Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty are obvious.

170 We particularly note Thomas Kent's efforts to consistently advocate for, and theorise the ethical guardrails of, offensive informational and cognitive operations in response to Russian aggression; see, e.g. Kent, 2020

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# 7. Table of figures

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