RUSSIA'S 'SHARP POWER' MANIFESTATIONS IN LITHUANIA'S MASS MEDIA

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ABSTRACT

The concept of 'sharp power' has recently emerged as a reaction to the assertiveness of authoritarian regimes. It serves to underline the complexity of challenges which are posed by authoritarian regimes, referring to diverse front lines in the overall 'battle', be they culture, education, or the media. The latter, according to Dmitri Trenin, "has become such a crowded battlefield". This paper attempts to fill in the information gap regarding Russia's 'sharp power' manifestations in Lithuania's mass media and focuses on NATO related messages in particular. The paper presupposes that messages which evoke an air of support for Russia's foreign and security policy tend to pass through to Lithuania's mass media, and argues that, as a result of the insufficient activity by Lithuania's mass media in terms of forming an independent perception of Russia vis-à-vis NATO, the preconditions for possible manifestations of Russia's use of sharp power are therefore created. The article is organised into four parts. The first section sets out a theoretical framework for the analysis which focuses on the concept of sharp power. Then the research methodology is outlined. The third section presents features of the

informational environment of Lithuania in 2016 and 2019. The final, and most elaborated, section investigates messages which apparently serve to support Russia's foreign and security policy in terms of the NATO's topic in Lithuania's mass media based on the aforementioned criteria.

INTRODUCTION

The current confrontation between western countries and Russia is often described as "a clash between liberal universalism and authoritarian statism",[1] emphasizing Russia's attempts to erode the western liberal consensus from within. A relatively new concept is that of 'sharp power', which emerged as a reaction to the assertiveness of authoritarian regimes. The concept underlines the complexity of those challenges which are posed by authoritarian regimes and refers to diverse front lines in the 'battle', such as culture, education, and the media. The latter, according to Dmitri Trenin, "has become such a crowded battlefield".[2]

The danger posed by Russia's activities in the information domain has been emphasized by NATO (notably by NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg, and by Deputy Secretary-General Mircea Geoană),[3] along with various politicians from transatlantic countries (such as Dominic Raab, the UK's Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, and France's President Emanuel Macron),[4] and researchers (such as Vasile Rotaru, Vera Michlin-Shapir, Belén Carrasco Rodríguez, Andriy Tyushka, Greg Simons, John DeRosa, and others).[5] However, despite there seemingly being a great deal of interest in this platform when it comes to the topic of sharp power, researchers such as Christopher Walker and Jessica Ludwig also admit that there is an acute shortage of expertise and information on Russia.[6]

This paper attempts to fill in the information gap about Russia's sharp power manifestations in the media domain and focuses on the NATO factor which is often

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[1] Kadri Liik, "Winning the normative war with Russia: an EU-Russia power audit," European Council on Foreign Relations (May 2018) //
https://ecfr.eu/publication/winning_the_normative_war_with_russia_an_eu_russia_power_audit/.

[2] Mitri Trenin, "Russia and Europe: The Current Impasse and the Way Out," *Carnegie* (February 2021) // https://carnegie.ru/commentary/83905.

[3] NATO, "Speech by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg at the Rīga Conference 2020" (November 2020) // https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_179489.htm?selectedLocale=en; NATO, "Keynote speech by NATO Deputy Secretary General Mircea Geoană at the Bucharest Forum: 'Resilience, Pandenomics and the Great Acceleration'" (October 2020) //
https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_178681.htm?selectedLocale=en.

[4] Margaret L. Taylor, "Combating disinformation and foreign interference in democracies: Lessons from Europe," The Brookings Institution (July 2019) //
https://www.brookings.edu/blog/techtank/2019/07/31/combating-disinformation-and-foreign-interference-in-democracies-lessons-from-europe/.

[5] Marcin Kaczmarski, Wojciech Michnik, Andrew Monaghan, and Vasile Rotaru, "Russia's Emerging Global Ambitions," NATO Defense College "NDC Research Papers Series", *NDC Research Paper* No. 11 (July 2020); Vasile Rotaru, "When words are sharper than swords. Russia's post-2014 narrative on NATO," NATO Defense College "NDC Research Papers Series" (2020); Vera Michlin-Shapir, "The Long Decade Of Disinformation," *The Official Journal of the NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence* Vol. 9 (Autumn 2020); Belén Carrasco Rodríguez, "Information Laundering In The Nordic-Baltic Region," NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence (November 2020); Andriy Tyushka, "Russian geopolitical narratives from geopolitics to postmodern revisionism: Implications for the Baltic-Pontic Region," *Global Affairs* (2018) // DOI:10.1080/23340460.2018.1502620; Greg Simons, "Perception of Russia's soft power and influence in the Baltic states," *Public Relations Review* (2014); John DeRosa, "Mapping Russian nuclear narratives," *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 30:4 // DOI: 10.1080/13518046.2017.1377009.

[6] Christopher Walker, "What is sharp power?" *Journal of Democracy* Vol. 29, No. 3 (July 2018) // DOI: 10.1353/jod.2018.0041; Christopher Walker and Jessica Ludwig, "From 'soft power' to 'sharp power': Rising authoritarian influence in the democratic world"; in: *Sharp power: rising authoritarian influence* (National Endowment for Democracy, 2017).

used in particular to frame supporting narratives for Russia's foreign and security policy. This paper aims to explore Russia's sharp power manifestations in a small country which perceives itself as part of the western community, while being situated next to the most highly-militarised zone in Europe (Kaliningrad), sharing an external EU and NATO border, and having been under Soviet control for fifty years in its very near history. Lithuania's case has been chosen for closer analysis in order to be able to depict the peculiarities which are inherent in manifestations of Russia's sharp power usage. The issue of Russian propaganda in Lithuania has been analysed numerous times: Nerijus Maliukevičius explored the Kremlin's destabilisation tools in Lithuania; Darius Buinauskas, Vytautas Keršanskas, and Laurynas Kasčiūnas analysed Russia's propaganda in Lithuania; while Giedrius Česnakas and Vytautas Isoda focused on manifestations of Russia's soft power usage.[7] However, none of the previous studies focused on Russia-NATO issues or the media field as the platform for the use of sharp power.

Hence this paper, which aims to explore manifestations of Russia's perceived usage of sharp power and its dynamics in Lithuania's mass media domain in 2016 and 2019,[8] while focussing on the Russia-NATO topic in particular. The paper presupposes that messages which apparently serve to support Russia's foreign and security policy tend to pass through to Lithuania's mass media, and argues that as a result of Lithuanian mass media's insufficient activity to form the perception of Russia vis a vis NATO independently, preconditions for Russia's sharp power manifestations are created.

The paper intends to achieve the following tasks: 1) to examine how many of those messages which apparently serve to support Russia's foreign and security policy when it comes to the topic of NATO tend to pass through to Lithuania's mass media; 2) to analyse what kind of messages which apparently serve to support Russia's foreign and security policy when it comes to the topic of NATO pass through to Lithuania's mass media; and 3) to identify how messages which apparently serve to support Russia's foreign and security policy when it comes to the topic of NATO actually do pass through to Lithuania's mass media.

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[7] Nerijus Maliukevičius, "The tools of destabilisation': the Kremlin's media offensive in Lithuania," *Journal on Baltic Security* Vol. 1, Issue 1 (2015); Nerijus Maliukevičius, "Russia's information policy in Lithuania: the spread of soft power or information geopolitics," *Baltic Security & Defence Review* Vol. 9 (2007); Darius Buinauskas, Vytautas Keršanskas, and Laurynas Kasčiūnas, "Propagandos tyrimo modelis Rusijos propagandai Lietuvoje analizuoti," *Politologija* 2016/3 (83); Giedrius Česnakas and Vytautas Isoda, "Russia's soft power as a limited efficiency tool in Lithuania," *Politologij*a Vol. 93 (2019/1).

[8] The years 2016 and 2019 have been chosen for the analysis due to several reasons. Firstly, in 2016 and 2019 various elections were held in Lithuania. Before the research was carried out, a presumption was made that domestic political events may be used as tools for possible manifestations of Russia's use of sharp power in the media. Secondly, 2016 as a timeframe was included in the analysis in order to explore whether any changes could be found in Lithuania's mass media.

The article is organized into four parts. The first section sets out a theoretical framework for the analysis, focusing on the concept of sharp power. Then the research methodology is outlined. The third section presents various features of Lithuania's information environment in 2016 and 2019. The final, and most elaborated, section investigates messages which apparently serve to support Russia's foreign and security policy, and which are circulating in Lithuania's mass media, based on the aforementioned criteria.

1. SHARP POWER AND NARRATIVES WHICH SUPPORT RUSSIA'S FOREIGN AND SECURITY POLICY

The concept of 'sharp power' is a relatively new one. It was introduced into international relations studies in 2017 by Christopher Walker, vice-president for studies and analysis at the National Endowment for Democracy, and by Jessica Ludwig, the research and conferences officer *at the* National Endowment for Democracy's International Forum for Democratic Studies.[9] Christopher Walker and Jessica Ludwig pointed out the necessity of formulating new concepts to describe the phenomenon of techniques being used by authoritarian areas of influence, suggesting that, contrary to the concept of 'soft power' which functions through attraction ("by winning hearts and minds") or 'hard power' which exerts influence through military might, 'sharp power' describes efforts "to manage the target audiences by manipulating or poisoning the information which reaches them".[10] Therefore the concept of sharp power indicates another way in which certain states (mostly authoritarian ones) exert influence.

Although at the time the suggestion failed to achieve the levels of attention it deserved, since 2017 interest in sharp power has grown considerably.[11] The emergence of the concept of sharp power reflects the divide between authoritarian states (with the majority of studies focussing on Russia and China) and democratic states,[12] something which has only recently become apparent in this regard. Moreover, the concept of sharp power is based on differences between authoritarian and democratic regimes. It expands upon the idea that authoritarian states attempt to degrade democracies and exploit their vulnerabilities, amplifying existing

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[9] Christopher Walker and Jessica Ludwig, *supra* note 6.

[10] *Ibid*.

[11] Jacque deLisle, "Foreign policy through other means: hard power, soft power, and China's turn towards political warfare to influence the United States," *Orbis* Vol. 64, Issue 2 (2020) // DOI: 10.1016/j.orbis.2020.02.004; Christopher Walker, Shanthi Kalathil, and Jessica Ludwig, "Forget hearts and minds," *Foreign Policy* (September 2018) // https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/09/14/forget-hearts-and-minds-sharp-power/.

[12] Joseph S. Nye Jr., "How sharp power threatens soft power. The right and wrong ways to respond to authoritarian influence," *Foreign Affairs* (January 2018) // https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2018-01-24/how-sharp-power-threatens-softpower.

divisions.[13] In other words, when sharp power is used, the targets are democratic countries; the main tools are manipulation ('divide and conquer'), and the main players who exercise this form of power are authoritarian states. Sharp power encompasses various elements: the manipulation of culture; the manipulation of education systems; and the manipulation of the media.[14] Walker suggests that "it is called 'sharp' because it seeks to 'pierce, penetrate, or perforate" the political and information environments of countries which are targeted.[15] Efforts which involve sharp power are difficult to detect.[16] Hence sharp power is exhibited as an exertion of influence in the political, cultural, and information environments by authoritarian states in order to weaken democratic countries.

Analysts argue that, in the case of sharp power, authoritarian governments manipulate the information, aiming to erode the integrity of independent institutions.[17] In other words, when it comes to the use of sharp power, ideas are instrumental. To be able to exert sharp power, authoritarian governments use propaganda tools, create and spread narratives which support their foreign and security policy, suppress alternative narratives,[18] take advantage of the open political and information environment of democracies (including western-style journalism), and attempt to control online and mass media discourse.[19]

The research being presented in this paper focuses on one particular sharp power dimension (the manipulation of the media), assuming that messages which apparently serve to support Russia's foreign and security policy can be detected in Lithuania's mass media as a result of the manifestation of Russia's usage of sharp power. As has been pointed out by numerous scholars, Russia attempts to influence the media, academia, culture, and political communities of democratic countries in order to promote specific narratives which serve to advance Russia's foreign and security policy interests.[20] Narratives in this paper are perceived as tools with which to 'construct a shared meaning of the past, present, and future of international politics in order to shape the behaviour of domestic and international players'.[21]

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[13] Christopher Walker and Jessica Ludwig, "The meaning of sharp power. How authoritarian states project influence," *Foreign Affairs* (November 2017) // https://www.foreignaff airs.com/articles/china/2017-11-16/meaning-sharp-power.
[14] *Ibid*.
[15] Christopher Walker, *supra* note 6.
[16] Simo Hanouna and Omer Neu, "Sharp power in social media: patterns from datasets across electoral campaigns," *Australian and New Zealand Journal of European Studies* Vol. 11 (3) (2019) // https://esaanz.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Zahavi-et.al_.pdf.
[17] Christopher Walker, *supra* note 6.
[18] Christopher Walker and Jessica Ludwig, *supra* note 13.
[19] Christopher Walker, Shanthi Kalathil, and Jessica Ludwig, "The cutting edge of sharp power," *Journal of Democracy* Vol. 31, No. 1 (January 2020) // DOI: 10.1353/jod.2020.0010.
[20] Christopher Walker and Jessica Ludwig, *supra* note 6.
[21] Andrei Tsygankov, "The dark double: the American media perception of Russia as a neo-Soviet autocracy, 2008-2014," *Politics* 37(1) (2017) // DOI: 10.1177/0263395715626945.

International security experts claim that Russia has a wide reach into the information environment of European and American democracies.[22]

While China has extensive financial and human resources with which to establish partnerships with foreign media outlets, Russia instead utilises a form of international expansion of its state media to exert its interests.[23] Although direct Russian state media consumption in Europe is rather low, western-style journalism (which encourages free speech and provides a platform for diverse opinions), along with, at times, a lack of critical thinking in European media outlets and in some local, European sources, is exploited by Russia in order that it can spread its own narratives which serve to support its foreign and security policy.

Scholars highlight various Russia's foreign and security policy supporting narratives which indeed do serve to support its foreign and security policy. Tihomira Doncheva, who researched Russia's narratives in western Balkans media outlets, points out the following narratives: NATO is aggressive, NATO is weak and disunited, NATO is not beneficial.[24] Kadri Liik underlines the fact that Russia, while not being able to strengthen itself, is attempting to weaken the west, using such narratives as "Things may be bad in Russia but they are worse in Europe".[25] Captain Brian P Cotter, who analysed how Russia employs narratives to attempt to destabilise the Baltic states, points out that Russia's officials question the effectiveness of economic sanctions towards Russia and extensively employ this narrative in the Russian media.[26] Andriy Tyushka highlights Russia's attempts to portray the post-Cold War international order as "unfair, inappropriate, and humiliating". [27] John DeRosa focuses on Russia's nuclear narratives and singles out areas such as 'strategic instability', 'Cold War reruns' (American rhetoric camouflages an aggressive foreign policy), 'broken promises', and others.[28] Darius Buinauskas, Vytautas Keršanskas, and Laurynas Kasčiūnas, who all focused on a model to analyse Russian propaganda in Lithuania, mention a narrative which has been adopted by Russians from Soviet propaganda in which Lithuanians, Latvians, and Estonians are fascists. [29] Viktor Denisenko distinguishes the following 'standard' narratives (however, he focuses only

[22] Mark Galeotti, "Controlling chaos: how Russia manages its political war in Europe," ECFR (September 2017) //
https://ecfr.eu/publication/controlling_chaos_how_russia_manages_its_political_war_in_europe/.
[23] Christopher Walker and Jessica Ludwig, *supra* note 6.
[24] Tihomira Doncheva, "Russia's narratives in western Balkans media," NATO STRATCOM COE (April 2020) // https://stratcomcoe.org/tracking-russias-narratives-western-balkan-media.
[25] Kadri Liik, "Russia's relative resilience: why Putin feels vindicated by the pandemic" (December 2020) // https://ecfr.eu/wp-content/uploads/Russias-relative-resilience-Why-Putin-feels-vindicated-by-the-pandemic.pdf.
[26] Brian P. Cotter, "How the Kremlin employs narratives to destabilize the Baltic states," *Per Concordiam* (2016) //
https://www.marshallcenter.org/sites/default/files/files/2020-09/pC_v7%20Special%20Edition_en-6_Cotter.pdf.
[27] Andriy Tyushka, *supra* note 5.
[28] John DeRosa, *supra* note 5.
[29] Darius Buinauskas, Vytautas Keršanskas, and Laurynas Kasčiūnas*, supra* note 7.

on narratives which are directed against Lithuania): accusations of violations of the rights of the Russian-speaking population; questioning the Soviet occupation of the Baltic states; and accusations of 'Russophobia'.[30]

The NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, which produces regular reports about Russia's narratives which serve to support its foreign and security policy, lists the following repetitive narratives, adjusted for Scandinavia and the Baltic states, which serve to advance Russia's interests: refugees and migrants as a destabilising factor; Russia does not violate borders; there was no Soviet occupation; the west conspires to make Russia the scapegoat for everything; the Baltics are an ideological playground for Soros and the Washington elite; European Union unity is diminishing; fear of Russia is being used for an increase in defence budgets; if Finland and Sweden join NATO, Russia must react (see Table 1).[31] Narratives which advance Russia's foreign and security policy interests, however, are not static. Instead they are constantly evolving, and are adjusted for specific countries and events in the international arena. As the scope of this research is limited to those of Russia's narratives which serve to support its foreign and security policy where this is related to NATO, only mass media articles in Lithuania which cover stories about Russia and NATO have been analysed. Consequently, this means that only Russia's narratives which serve to support its foreign and security policy where this is related to NATO have been taken into consideration.

Table 1. Russia's narratives which serve to support its foreign and security policy in relation to NATO

Russia's narratives which serve to support its foreign and security policy	
2016	**2019**
NATO is a threat to Russia (Russia is an innocent, victimised country)	NATO is a threat to Russia (Russia is strong and is ready to confront an aggressive NATO)
The specific country is a vassal of NATO and/or the European Union	-
NATO is luring Finland and Sweden into joining	NATO is luring Finland and Sweden into joining
-	If Finland and Sweden join NATO, Russia must react

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[30] Viktor Denisenko, "The threat of propaganda and the information war for Lithuanian security"; in: Giedrius Česnakas and Nortautas Statkus, eds., *Lithuania in the global context: national security and defence policy dilemmas* (Vilnius: Generolo Jono Žemaičio Lietuvos karo akademija, 2020).

[31] NATO STRATCOM COE, "Russia's footprint in the Nordic-Baltic information environment," Vol. 1 (2016) // https://www.stratcomcoe.org/russias-footprint-nordic-baltic-information-environment-0; NATO STRATCOM COE, "Russia's footprint in the Nordic-Baltic information environment," Vol. 2 (2019/2020) // https://www.stratcomcoe.org/russias-footprint-nordic-baltic-information-environment-20192020.

Questioning the rearmament policies of the NB8 states	-
Ridiculing the idea of a Russian threat	Ridiculing the idea of a Russian threat
The west conspires to make Russia the scapegoat for everything	The hypocritical west had been using propaganda to demonise Russia while at the same time denying that the west itself had been breaking international law or taking part in unjust military actions
The Baltics are an ideological playground for Soros and the Washington elite	-
-	NATO is incompetent and destabilising
-	NATO's military build-up in Europe undermines regional stability

Source: composed by the author based on NATO STRATCOM COE, "Russia's footprint in the Nordic-Baltic information environment," Vol. 1 (2016); and NATO STRATCOM COE, "Russia's footprint in the Nordic-Baltic information environment," Vol. 2 (2019/2020)

The narrative toolbox being used in this research has been constructed by using as a basis information which has been provided in two NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence reports, tailored for Scandinavia and the Baltic states (issued in 2016 and 2019). There have been several reasons which have helped to determine this choice. Firstly, NATO's own reports take into consideration the dynamics of Russia's narratives which serve to support its foreign and security policy and distinguish several narratives in 2016 and 2019. Secondly, NATO's Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence reports focus on Russia's narratives which serve to support its foreign and security policy, adjusted specifically for NB8 countries (which are relevant for this research). It does not mean that this research is a mere repetition of previously-conducted NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence research: while the NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence explores which narratives are being transmitted through Russian mass media outlets; research presented in this paper instead focuses on which of those messages have managed to get through to the Lithuanian mass media outlets.

Further in the article, the research methodology and the analysis results are presented regarding Russia's narratives which serve to support its foreign and security policy in relation to NATO in Lithuania's mass media.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research consists of four stages. For the first stage, narratives which support Russia's foreign and security policy in 2016 and 2019 have been identified based on NATO Strategic Communication Center of Excellence studies, as well as by Russia's foreign and security policy experts (as described in the previous chapter).

STAGE 1 — Identifying RFSP-supporting narratives

STAGE 2 — Mass media monitoring:
* Keywords 'Russia' and 'Nato'
* Political topics

STAGE 3 — Selecting articles with RFSP-supporting narratives

STAGE 4 —
Quantitative analysis:
* Topic
* Type
* Source
* Rubric

Qualitative analysis:
* Narratives
* Objectivity
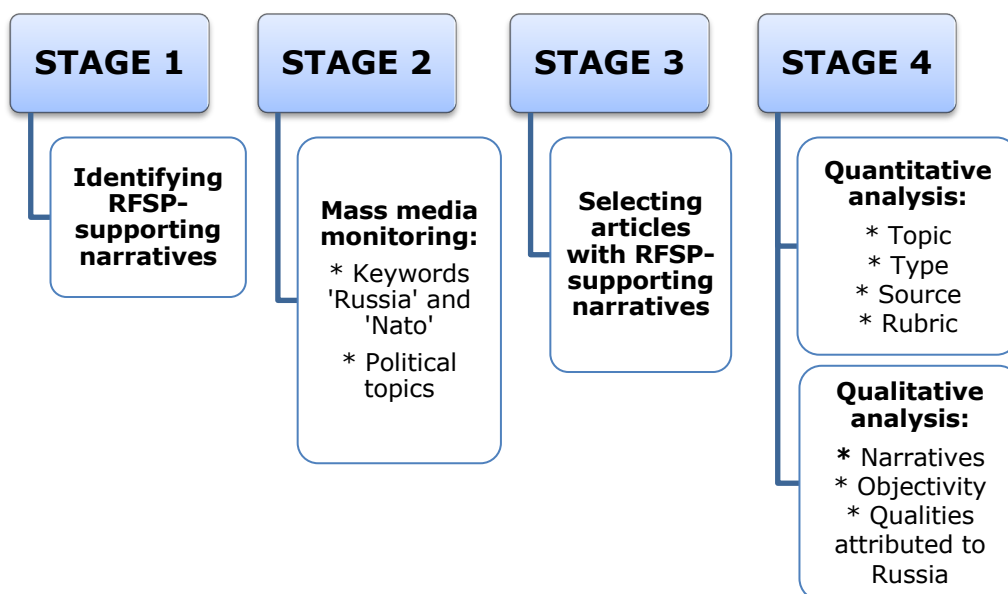* Qualities attributed to Russia

Figure 1. Research methodology

Source: composed by the author

During the second stage of the research, suitable articles have been selected from Lithuania's mass media for the purposes of carrying out the analysis. To this end, monitoring of Lithuania's mass media has been conducted upon request by the 'Mediaskopas' company. Articles for the analysis have been selected from the biggest three mass media internet platforms in Lithuania (15min.lt; Delfi.lt; and Lrytas.lt),[32] along with Lithuania's national printed mass media sources (Lietuvos aidas, Lietuvos rytas, Respublika, and Vakaro žinios), and regional printed mass media sources (Alytaus naujienos, Kauno diena, Klaipėda, Panevėžio balsas, Panevėžio kraštas, Sekundė, Vakarų ekspresas, Vilniaus diena, Šiaulių kraštas, and Šiaulių naujienos), all of which have the widest national circulations and all of which are well-established.[33] Several requirements have been set out for the article selection process: the keywords 'Russia' and 'NATO' had both to be present in the article, and

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[32] Kantar, "Žiniasklaidos tyrimų apžvalga 2016" (2016) // http://www.kantar.lt/data/files/Metines_apzvalgos/KANTAR_Metin%C4%97_medij%C5%B3_tyrim%C5%B3_ap%C5%BEvalga_2019.pdf; Kantar, "Žiniasklaidos tyrimų apžvalga 2019" (2019) // http://www.kantar.lt/data/files/Metines_apzvalgos/Kantar_TNS_Metin%C4%97_%C5%BEiniasklaidos_tyrim%C5%B3_ap%C5%BEvalga_2016m.pdf.

[33] *Ibid*.

the article's content had to be related to political topics. In 2016, a total of 896 suitable articles were found for the datasets; meanwhile in 2019 the total was 846 suitable articles.

The third stage of the research explores whether Russia's sharp power tends to manifest at all in Lithuania, whether any messages which apparently serve to support Russia's foreign and security policy do actually pass through to Lithuania's mass media outlets and, if so, how many. For this purpose, a second article selection process has also been conducted: articles containing one or more of Russia's narratives which serve to support its foreign and security policy (as identified in stage 1) have been selected from articles which had both of the keywords, 'Russia' and 'NATO', and which covered political topics.

The fourth research stage was devoted to the quantitative and qualitative analysis of those articles which were selected in stage 3 in order to disclose what kind of messages Russia may be using where such messages apparently serve to support Russia's foreign and security policy and where they are able to pass through to Lithuania's mass media outlets, along with how these messages access Lithuanian mass media, for the years 2016 and 2019. During the quantitative analysis process, the selected articles have been classified into the following categories: topic, mass media source (news agencies such as BNS, ELTA, and others, original articles from the same mass media source and others, in order to disclose how messages which apparently serve to support Russia's foreign and security policy tend to access Lithuania's mass media outlets), plus the media type (the central mass media source or regional mass media source), and the rubric of the articles ('Opinions', 'In Lithuania', 'Abroad', etc). The qualitative analysis aimed to reveal whether the principles of objective journalism (whether the provided information has been commented upon, or evaluated by experts, etc) have been properly maintained in the selected articles. Moreover, qualitative discourse analysis has been conducted in order to explore Russia's image in Lithuania's mass media and in Russia's foreign and security policy-related narratives.

3. THE RUSSIA-NATO TOPICAL NEXUS IN LITHUANIA'S MASS MEDIA DURING 2016 AND 2019

Monitoring of Lithuania's mass media provided a total of 1,742 articles for suitable further analysis: and of them 896 were found from 2016's material while 846 came from 2019. The slightly smaller number of articles from 2019 does not necessarily signify there being less attention being paid to Russia-NATO topics since

2019's data for October, November, and December have not been taken into consideration due to research specifics.

Table 2. Russia-NATO-related articles issued by Lithuania's central and regional mass media outlets

%	2016	2019
Central mass media	92%	94%
Regional mass media	8%	6%
Total:	100%	100%

Source: compiled by the author

The research has shown that the most attention being paid to Russia-NATO-related topics was from the biggest of Lithuania's mass media sources to be considered central mass media sources: Delfi, 15min, and Lietuvos rytas. This tendency was present both in 2016 and in 2019. Amongst Lithuania's regional mass media sources, Kauno diena and Klaipėda demonstrated the greatest levels of interest in Russia and NATO-related topics, with Kauno diena being a leader in this matter (although in 2019 the number of articles on Russia in Kauno diena decreased in comparison to 2016). In terms of regional mass media, the situation can be explained by the fact that the aforementioned regional newspapers often do their own independent research and publish authentic stories.

Table 3. Russia-NATO-related articles in Lithuania's central mass media

Mass media source	2016	2019
Delfi	44%	47%
15min	33%	23%
Lietuvos rytas	19%	17%
Lietuvos žinios	-	10%
Vakaro žinios	2%	2%
Lietuvos aidas	2%	-
Respublika	-	1%
Total:	100%	100%

Source: compiled by the author

Table 4. Russia-NATO-related articles in Lithuania's regional mass media

Mass media source	2016	2019
Kauno diena	41%	32%
Klaipėda	31%	36%
Šiaulių naujienos	10%	4%
Panevėžio kraštas	7%	2%
Vakarų ekspresas	6%	2%
Šiaulių kraštas	4%	4%
Vilniaus diena	-	11%
Panevėžio balsas	-	4%
Sekundė	-	5%
Total:	100%	100%

Source: compiled by the author

Contrary to the stable distribution of Russia-NATO-related stories in Lithuania's mass media sources throughout 2016 and 2019, the conducted analysis indicated dynamics in the primary sources of Russia-NATO-related stories. In 2016, Lithuania's mass media relied on BNS and their own journalist teams (Delfi and 15min dominated as the primary sources of information in 2016), followed by ELTA and Lietuvos rytas journalists. It can be seen that Lithuanian sources or/and news agencies prevailed as the main sources of information for Russia-NATO-related stories. In 2019, however, a tendency became apparent in which more reliance was placed on foreign sources of information. In 2019, the usage of information which had been prepared by the journalist teams of Delfi and 15min decreased by more than 50% in comparison to the situation in 2016. Moreover, a greater variety of foreign news agencies or foreign information sources emerged. Foreign sources such as Bloomberg, Politico, Spiegel, and others have been indicated as primary sources in Lithuanian mass media outlets in 2019 instead of Lithuanian sources. On the one hand it can be claimed that this factor (changes in primary sources) caused a more critical approach to Russia-NATO-related topics (in 2019, the number of articles containing Russia's foreign and security policy-related narratives decreased by half in comparison to 2016). On the other hand, another contradictory trend has been revealed by the research: although the percentage of Russia's foreign and security policy-related narratives decreased throughout the years in question, one could not claim that Lithuania's journalists had become more objective. If in 2016 only 17% of articles did not follow the principles of objective journalism (where comments and/or evaluations on information provided receives appropriate commenting), in 2019, the number of such articles had actually increased to 30%). The research has shown several cases in which Russia's official statements (which often contain narratives which serve to support Russia's foreign and security policy) were not commented upon or evaluated.

Table 5. Primary sources of Russia-NATO-related stories in Lithuanian mass media outlets

	2016	**2019**
BNS	27%	48%
Delfi	35%	20%
15min	14%	7%
ELTA	9%	8%
LRT	8%	2%
Lrytas	5%	4%
EU Observer	2%	-
Veidas		
Bild		
Reuters		1%
Rytų Europos studijų centras		-
Bloomberg	-	4%
Politico		6%
Foreign Policy		
Atlantic		
Respublika		
National Interest		
American Interest		
Spiegel		
Total:	100%	100%

Source: compiled by the author

Analysis of the rubrics of NATO-Russia-related articles has also demonstrated certain shifts in Lithuania's mass media, and the manner in which Russia-NATO-related topics have been presented. Although the majority of Russia-NATO-related articles were placed under the rubrics concerning foreign processes ('Abroad', 'East-West', conflict, the world, world events, and others, involving 53% of all articles in 2016 and 62% of all articles in 2019), there were changes in the intensity of articles which fell under other rubrics. Firstly, a significant decrease could be seen in articles which were placed under the rubric 'In Lithuania' (or other similar rubrics which focussed on Lithuania-related processes: in 2016, the figure was 34% of all Russia-NATO-related articles which had been released in this rubric; in 2019, this number

shrank to 17.7%). Secondly, a significant increase was discovered in the popularity of rubrics which were dedicated to the exposure of Russian propaganda ('Demaskuok', 'Medijos-Karas-Propaganda'): the number of Russia-NATO-related articles under this rubric increased by more than threefold (from 2.2% in 2016 to 8.7% in 2019). On the whole, in 2019, as opposed to 2016, Russia-NATO-related information was not necessarily linked to the processes which were taking place in Lithuania: Russia-NATO-related topics were discussed in an international, not local context. Therefore, the popularity of other rubrics increased at the expense of the 'In Lithuania' rubric. Another detected tendency which surged throughout the period being explored was increased attention being paid to exposure to Russia-related propaganda: in 2019, the number of articles under the rubric 'Medijos-karas-propaganda' increased, while a new rubric was also introduced.

Another criterion for the analysis was those topics around which Russia-NATO-related articles clustered. Several topical trends continued throughout the time being analysed: the defence of NATO's eastern flank and the question of how defendable are the Baltic states; NATO's interests and activities in the Black Sea; and the deployment of NATO's forces in Poland and the Baltic states. Some of these topics created preconditions for messages which served to support Russia's foreign and security policy (in narratives such as "NATO's military build-up in Europe undermines regional stability", "NATO is a threat to Russia", and others). In 2016, Russia-NATO-related articles focused mainly on new Russia's security strategy, the NATO summit, and the potential renewal of the NATO-Russia Council. By contrast, in 2019 the peculiarities of the INF Treaty, Russia's defence trends, and the visit to Russia by Estonia's president all dominated the same band of articles.

Overall, Russia-NATO-related articles which have been circulated in Lithuania's informational environment had the following features: Russia-NATO topics received the greatest amount of attention from the central Lithuanian mass media, which relied on BNS and their own journalistic teams as the primary sources of information. In 30% of cases (against a figure of 17% in 2016) they did not provide any additional comments or evaluations against the information which they had received from other news agencies. The majority of Russia-NATO-related articles were placed under rubrics which concern foreign processes, serving to highlight events such as the defence of NATO's eastern flank and NATO's interests and activities in the Black Sea.

Further on in the paper, the results of a quantitative and qualitative analysis are presented regarding any manifestations of Russia's use of sharp power in Lithuania's mass media outlets.

4. THE QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF RFSP-SUPPORTING NARRATIVES IN LITHUANIA'S MASS MEDIA OUTLETS

The research which has been conducted shows that messages which apparently serve to support Russia's foreign and security policy have constituted a small part of the overall entirety of Russia-NATO-related articles in Lithuania's mass media, both in 2016 and in 2019, coming back with small shares of 8.92% and 4.84% respectively. The research has revealed a decrease in messages which apparently serve to support Russia's foreign and security policy over the years. Therefore, on the one hand, it can be claimed that possible manifestations of Russia's use of sharp power in Lithuanian mass media have slowed down. On the other hand, a tendency which was discovered during the research also shows certain problematic issues in Lithuania's mass media which have served to facilitate possible manifestations of Russia's use of sharp power. Moreover, these problematic issues were augmented, not decreased, throughout the period being analysed.

The greatest number of messages which apparently serve to support Russia's foreign and security policy have been discovered in Lithuania's central mass media. This tendency has persisted across the years. It suggests that messages which apparently serve to support Russia's foreign and security policy in Lithuania's mass media are not the result of a lack of knowledge or resources: Lithuania's major mass media sources have access to international news agencies and their own journalistic teams. Messages which apparently serve to support Russia's foreign and security policy in Lithuania's regional mass media constituted only 7.5% of the total in 2016, and 14.75% in 2019.

Table 6. Messages which apparently serve to support Russia's foreign and security policy in Lithuania's mass media

Mass media source	2016	2019
Delfi	35%	34%
15min	31.25%	29.25%
Lrytas	26.25%	22%
Vakaro žinios	2.5%	5%
Šiaulių naujienos	1.25%	-
Panevėžio kraštas	1.25%	-
Kauno diena	1.25%	-
Klaipėda	1.25%	2.50%
Lietuvos žinios	-	7.25%
	100%	**100%**

Source: compiled by the author

Table 7. Primary sources for messages which apparently serve to support Russia's foreign and security policy in Lithuania's mass media

Mass media source	2016	2019
TASS	5.5%	-
ELTA	12%	9%
Delfi	8%	6%
Lrytas	2.65%	-
LRT	1.35%	-
BNS	65%	79%
RIA Novosti	-	3%
15min	5.5%	3%
Total:	**100%**	**100%**

Source: compiled by the author

The second trend to be discovered during the research process demonstrates the fact that messages which apparently serve to support Russia's foreign and security policy have not been framed independently by Lithuania's mass media, since the majority of articles which contain elements of the Russia-NATO topic have been prepared by using as a basis information which has been provided by external news agencies. BNS dominated in this regard, both in 2016 and in 2019. The research has also revealed the fact that messages which apparently serve to support Russia's foreign and security policy in Lithuania's mass media tended to cluster around international and foreign policy-related topics. Hence, local events have not ended up being elements themselves of possible manifestations of Russia's use of sharp power.

5. 2016

The research has revealed that some messages which could apparently serve to support Russia's foreign and security policy in Lithuania's mass media have reflected those pro-Russian narratives which were discussed in part one of the paper: four narratives out of seven, as identified by the NATO Research Center, were discovered in Lithuania's mass media in 2016. Also, noteworthy here is the fact that a new narrative has been detected, previously unmentioned in NATO's research: "NATO is weak, ineffective, and does not follow the norms of international law". Moreover, the narrative, which a NATO study found in the mass media of other countries in 2019, was already quite popular in Lithuania's mass media in 2016:

"NATO is a threat to Russia, while Russia is strong and is ready to confront an aggressive NATO". This research has also confirmed the statement that messages which apparently serve to support Russia's foreign and security policy are adjusted to specific countries. Therefore, Russia's use of sharp power can be seen as being versatile and dynamic. At the same time, however, no messages which were tailored specifically for Lithuania have so far been detected.

In 2016, messages which apparently serve to support Russia's foreign and security policy in Lithuania's mass media mainly concerned several significant NATO-related events in that year and/or Russia's foreign and security policy issues: Russia's 'New National Security Strategy' (which was released on 7 January); a meeting of the NATO-Russia Council at ambassadorial level (20 April) which was held after a break of two years; the NATO Warsaw Summit (8-9 July); US plans to redeploy non-strategic nuclear weapons which had previously been deployed in Europe to NATO aircraft as part of America's extended nuclear commitment; the deployment of NATO rotational forces in Poland and the Baltic states. A certain number of the overall volume of messages which apparently serve to support Russia's foreign and security policy were derived from interviews with Russian officials by western mass media sources which were (partially) published in Lithuania's mass media (without containing any critical discussions of the material).

Nonetheless, some important events from 2016 have not appeared or have not been used in messages which apparently serve to support Russia's foreign and security policy. Lithuania's political events, however, have not been used to support Russia's foreign and security policy: neither Lithuania's parliamentary election-related issues nor the higher than usual number of articles on Russia-NATO issues could be detected in October 2016 (Lithuania's parliamentary elections were held on 9 October 2016). Therefore, an assumption can be made that Lithuania's political events were either not convenient when it came to being able to form messages which could apparently serve to support Russia's foreign and security policy, or Lithuania's mass media has been professional enough not to spread such messages.

'NATO is a threat to Russia' has been one of the most controversial of those messages which in 2016 apparently served to support Russia's foreign and security policy in Lithuania's mass media. On the one hand, the detected messages claimed that Russia is an innocent and victimised country which simply tries to respond to the aggressive NATO. The messages asserted that NATO aims to dominate; that NATO's enlargement is a mistake; that NATO encourages a new Cold War ("Russia is not looking for an enemy, but at times indicates it when NATO troops are near our borders and when NATO jets are flying [overhead]. After all, it is not us who is approaching

NATO's borders").[34] Some articles noted that "Russia has a reason to dislike NATO". On the other hand, at the same time, there have been messages claiming that Russia is strong and is ready to confront an aggressive NATO. These two narratives often went hand-in-hand in Lithuania's mass media. There have been more contradictory narratives as well: "NATO aims to dominate", but at the same time "NATO has been weak since it accepted all of those countries which wanted to join the alliance". Therefore, such messages attempt to form an image in which NATO lacks the political will to defend itself and is not an effective institution.

Messages which served to ridicule the idea of a Russian threat constituted 30% of the total number of messages which apparently served to support Russia's foreign and security policy ("NATO tries to legitimate itself by claiming that Russia is a threat").[35] However, the arguments to support this idea have not always been logical (Russia's threat is 'imaginary', Russia follows international law (29 April 2016).[36] Another tactical step which has been taken in this context is to divert attention elsewhere, accusing NATO and portraying the alliance as an organisation with many problems ("While Stoltenberg ... is fighting Russia's 'imaginary' threat and sending troops to Latvia, in Brussels, right under his nose, people are being blown up," as Aleksey Pushkov, head of the Foreign Affairs Committee in Russia's duma, wrote on Twitter).[37] Therefore, in this context, offence is the best defence. Another of Russia's foreign and security policy-supporting narratives is that "NATO is weak, ineffective, and does not follow the norms of international law" with the first two often being intertwined with the latter. Statements if this type are particularly dangerous since, at times, objective discussions on NATO issues may also serve to reinforce Russia's foreign and security policy narratives.

Moreover, western mass media sources have not especially avoided providing Russia's officials with a platform, using interviews with them or publishing their thoughts (in 2016, there were interviews with Russia's prime minister being published in 'Time', for instance, claiming that Russia simply reacts to NATO's actions and is a victim who wants to defend itself). Such interviews are not dangerous if they are critically evaluated or commented upon. In the case of Lithuania, however, western mass media becomes one of the sources of pro-Russian narratives where these are

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[34] 15min, "Rusija purkštauja: NATO elgiasi kaip priešas" (2016 07 08) //
https://www.15min.lt/naujiena/aktualu/pasaulis/rusija-purkstauja-nato-elgiasi-kaip-priesas-57-652789.
[35] 15min, "Rusijos užsienio reikalų ministras: JAV rinkimų kampanijoje daugybė skystalų" (2016 10 13) //
https://www.15min.lt/naujiena/aktualu/pasaulis/rusijos-uzsienio-reikalu-ministras-jav-rinkimu-
kampanijoje-daugybe-skystalu-57-696595.
[36] 15min, "S Lavrovas: Rusijos naikintuvai teisėtai tikrino netoli jos karinės bazės plaukiantį laivą" (2016
04   29)   //   https://www.15min.lt/naujiena/aktualu/pasaulis/rusijos-kariuomenes-vadas-ragina-nato-
nutraukti-savo-veikla-prie-salies-vakariniu-sienu-57-1135336.
[37] Lrytas, "Rusija įspėja: į NATO žingsnį Baltijos šalyse bus atsakas" (2016 02 15) //
https://www.lrytas.lt/pasaulis/konfliktai-ir-saugumas/2016/02/15/news/rusija-ispeja-i-nato-zingsni-
baltijos-salyse-bus-atsakas-811702.

related to perceived Russian vulnerabilities since interviews with Russia's officials are often reprinted by news agencies without questioning the statements and/or providing alternative opinions.

The other two narratives (that the west conspires to make Russia the scapegoat for everything, or that Lithuania is a NATO vassal) have not constituted a significant part of any of those messages in Lithuania's mass media which apparently serve to support Russia's foreign and security policy. Messages which can be related to the former charge have often used the situation in Ukraine as an argument. The latter charge has been specifically tailored to a Lithuanian audience by using Lithuania's military reinforcement efforts as an argument. On the other hand, within this context, another interesting and not especially highly valued argument was detected, claiming that it is because of Lithuania that NATO had chosen a strict policy towards Russia (for instance, Russia's minister of foreign affairs, Sergey Lavrov, accused the Baltic states of Russophobic behaviour in NATO, and these statements have been widely reprinted in Lithuania's mass media, but without any questioning of them or critical comments regarding them. Apparently Lithuanians are 'guilty of spreading the most aggressive form of Russophobia while forcing NATO to take a strong anti-Russian course').[38] Therefore the research results have indicated that the main issue which can be related to the spread of messages which apparently serve to support Russia's foreign and security policy in Lithuania's mass media is a lack of critical thinking in that very mass media, and a lack of comments being expressed by journalists in any articles which cover Russia-NATO-related topics.

Based on the conducted research, several assumptions can be made. To begin with, messages which apparently serve to support Russia's foreign and security policy have not been hidden. On the contrary, this form of messaging has been openly expressed. The problem is that this type of messaging has not been questioned or challenged with the provision of alternative opinions. Hence, Lithuania's mass media has not been trying to form Russia's image within the context of NATO and as a result has instead missed an opportunity to challenge Russia's officials in their expressed pro-Russian narratives.

Secondly, Russia-NATO-related issues tend to emerge as a result of the working style of Lithuania's journalists rather than due to a lack of knowledge about pro-Russian narratives. Messages which apparently serve to support Russia's foreign and security policy get through to Lithuania's mass media via very obvious channels. Moreover, no messages which apparently serve to support Russia's foreign and security policy have been detected in Lithuania's regional mass media or in articles which have been written as politician opinion pieces. For the most part Lithuania's

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[38] 15min, *supra* note 35.

mass media mainly used to republish information which had previously been released via the central mass media.

This tendency mainly stems from a reliance on news agencies. From all of those articles which have contained messages which apparently serve to support Russia's foreign and security policy, a total of 82.5% have been based on news agency information, which supports the suggestion that the primary information source has been news agencies (mainly BNS, ELTA, and TASS). Another alarming aspect is that a percentage of articles, albeit a small one, have been prepared by using as a basis information which has been provided by the Russian news agency, TASS. Articles which have been prepared by using as a basis information from Lithuania's mass media and which contain messages which apparently serve to support Russia's foreign and security policy constituted a small percentage of the overall figure. Therefore, there is also a level of vulnerability here, although it is not a significant one.

Based on the research results an assumption can be made that the issue regarding messages which apparently serve to support Russia's foreign and security policy is not a difficult issue to resolve in terms of Lithuania's mass media. A sufficient solution would be to comment on information which has been received from news agencies and/or to attempt to form Russia's image. Another helpful measure could include increased investment into critical journalism and the training of professional journalists.

On the other hand, it would be not wise to think that all messages which apparently serve to support Russia's foreign and security policy and which have got through to Lithuania's mass media are the result of the rational efforts of Russia itself. Self-conflicting narratives (such as NATO being a threat but NATO also being weak and ineffective) indicate that Russia is a rather opportunistic country which uses every chance possible to conflict and disrupt its perceived opponents.

6. 2019

Similarly to 2016, in 2019 the research showed mixed messages which apparently serve to support Russia's foreign and security policy: on the one hand, Lithuania's mass media has included Russian narratives which serve to support its foreign and security policy and which can be identified in NATO's report: "NATO is a threat to Russia" (and "Russia is strong and ready to confront an aggressive NATO"); or ridiculing the idea of a Russian threat; or stating that NATO's military build-up in Europe undermines regional stability. These messages constituted 67% of all messages which apparently served in 2019 to support Russia's foreign and security

policy in Lithuania's mass media. On the other hand, new types of messages have also been detected: some of these have claimed that NATO is weak and ineffective; and that NATO does not follow the norms of international law from its apparent position of strength and does that on purpose. In addition, these new types of messages which were detected in Lithuania's mass media in 2019 have changed in comparison to those of 2016: if in 2016 NATO was being portrayed as weak and failing to follow international law, in 2019, in the majority of cases NATO was characterised as being [over] strong. Moreover, the narrative in 2019 regarding NATO not following international law was not related to the narrative regarding NATO being weak and ineffective. To conclude, in 2019 those messages which apparently served to support Russia's foreign and security policy saw NATO mainly being depicted as a strong player in terms of international relations.

In 2019, messages which apparently served to support Russia's foreign and security policy in Lithuania's mass media were linked to several international relations events: NATO's rotational forces in the Baltic states, the visit by Estonia's president to Russia and her meeting with Vladimir Putin, NATO's military build-up in various European regions, and the peculiarities of the INF treaty. Contrary to 2016, in 2019 those messages which apparently served to support Russia's foreign and security policy tended to evolve around international events which received the most attention in Lithuania's mass media. However, Lithuania's significant political events (such as, for instance, Lithuania's presidential elections) were not used to form messages which could serve to support Russia's foreign and security policy or did not get through to the mass media outlets which have been analysed as part of this report.

Russia's supporting messages for its foreign and security policy regarding NATO being a threat to Russia and regarding Russia being strong and ready to confront an aggressive NATO were amongst the most frequently-used in Lithuania's mass media in 2019 (and constituted 33% of all narratives). In these messages the assumed threat being posed by NATO has been associated both with conventional and nuclear elements. The latter, in 2019, was emphasised considerably. A presumption can be made in that the domination of this narrative in Lithuania's mass media was determined by the US decision to provide a six-month notice of withdrawal from the INF (February 2019). Although Lithuania does not have a direct interest in the INF treaty, the US is the dominant country in NATO, while also being Lithuania's guarantor of security. On the other hand, this form of message did indeed pass through to Lithuania media since those very mass media sources widely relied upon news agencies which have a wide range of coverage in terms of international relations issues. Messages which are related to NATO's nuclear capabilities insisted that the US should withdraw its nuclear weapons from NATO member territories, claiming that

it violates the NPT treaty. Moreover, in these messages it was asserted that, as a result of NATO's nuclear threat to Russia, "Russia will have to defend its national interests and its existence".[39] Similar arguments have been repeated in messages which can be related to NATO's conventional capabilities: such messages have served to justify Russia's military reinforcements in certain territories, notably Kaliningrad ("Russia deployed additional jets to Kaliningrad in response to NATO forces strengthening in the Baltic Sea region").

Another repetitive supporting message to be perceived in Russia's foreign and security policy in 2019 was the claim that NATO does not follow the norms of international law from its position of strength, and that it does that on purpose (a total of 25% of all messages which apparently served to support Russia's foreign and security policy contained this claim). These types of messages frequently accused NATO of violating international law in terms of both the conventional and nuclear domains. Yet again it seems that this type of message serves as justification for the build-up of Russia's own military capabilities, as well as to divert attention. The narrative appeared in the context of the INF treaty: the messages attempted to sell the idea of a hostile west and its unwillingness to negotiate with Russia.

Ridiculing the idea of a Russian threat was amongst the most popular narratives in Lithuanian mass media, both in 2016 and in 2019. Some arguments, although not valid, were the same as in 2016. The messages asserted that NATO's statements that Russia is a threat are imaginary ones ("they invented the Russian "threat" themselves, and now they threaten themselves with it").[40] In other words, it has been claimed that NATO used Russia as a tool to justify its existence. This narrative contradicts the aforementioned narrative that NATO does not follow the norms of international law from its position of strength. Therefore, in 2019, once again the research indicated that supporting messages regarding Russia's foreign and security policy did not necessarily form one logical picture. On the other hand, in 2019 another argument appeared to support the narrative. If in Lithuania's mass media analysis of 2016 the blame for the situation was partially directed towards the Baltic states (accusing them of hostile initiatives), in 2019 the messages asserted that fear of a perceived Russian threat was encouraged by NATO officials and US politicians. The precondition for such statements has been created by the visit to Russia by Estonia's president and her meeting with Vladimir Putin, an event which was widely covered in

[39] Delfi, "Padraugavo su estais ir užteks: Kremliaus ruporas rusus ragina ruoštis karui su JAV Baltijos šalyse" (2019 04 22) // https://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/demaskuok/padraugavo-su-estais-ir-uzteks-kremliaus-ruporas-rusus-ragina-ruostis-karui-su-jav-baltijos-salyse.d?id=80959997.
[40] Lrytas, "Rusija žada "atitinkamą atsaką" į NATO aktyvumą Juodosios ir Baltijos jūrose" (2019 04 24) // https://www.lrytas.lt/pasaulis/ivykiai/2019/04/24/news/rusija-zada-atitinkama-atsaka-i-nato-aktyvuma-juodosios-ir-baltijos-jurose-10097882.

Lithuania's mass media (and also based on information which had been received from news agencies).

Contrary to findings from 2016, in 2019 a good deal more attention was given to the narrative which stated that NATO's military build-up in Europe undermines regional stability (consisting of a total of 17% of all narratives). Several sub-regions were mentioned as being at risk due to NATO's actions: the Baltic states, the Balkans, and the Black Sea regions or, in other words, those territories in which Russia has strategic interests and/or was trying to increase its military capabilities. NATO's rotational military forces in the Baltic states were named as destabilising activities. Moreover, the chief of the general staff of Russia's armed forces, Valery Gerasimov, was quoted as saying (without questioning his arguments) that "suspending the reinforcement of military forces in the Baltic Sea region could be an important condition for reducing tensions".[41] The Black Sea and the Balkans were mentioned as territories which may serve to effectively challenge Russia, forcing it to take retaliatory action (not symmetric action) in response to NATO's activities there in order to restore stability.

The research indicated that in Lithuania's mass media in 2019 there had been a narrative present which did not appear in the NATO report: the message that NATO is ineffective and is obsolete. According to the report, this message circulated in the Baltic states in 2016; however, in 2019 it was not detected. In Lithuania's mass media, nonetheless, this narrative constituted a total of 8% of all messages which apparently served to support Russia's foreign and security policy. Moreover, statements by western politicians (such as by France's politicians) have been used to promote this narrative. It had two important elements: firstly, was the claim that NATO is obsolete since its mission does not reflect international security realities (mainly by claiming that terrorism and not Russia is the main threat in the international arena). Secondly, as a result of that new reality, NATO needs to change its vision, and accept that changed reality (the one which is beneficial to Russia), learning to accept Russia into NATO. Some segments of these statements were echoed in the then-US president's statements when he expressed the opinion that NATO is obsolete, although his statements have not been used to support Russia's foreign and security policy. On a contrary, statements by Europe's politicians were used without being challenged, simply relying on the information as it came from news agencies.

In conclusion, the analysis of Lithuania's mass media in 2019 revealed several trends, some of them being new in comparison to 2016. Firstly, Lithuania's mass

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[41] 15min, "Rusijos kariuomenės vadas ragina NATO nutraukti savo veiklą prie šalies vakarinių sienų" (2019 04 24) // https://www.15min.lt/naujiena/aktualu/pasaulis/rusijos-kariuomenes-vadas-ragina-nato-nutraukti-savo-veikla-prie-salies-vakariniu-sienu-57-1135336.

media in 2019 continued relying on news agency information as its main source of articles. Therefore, in 2019, the same problem persisted: the main disinformation channel continued to be news agencies. Secondly, in 2019, Russia as a player in international relations also appeared to be both opportunistic and strategic in other situations. On the one hand, Russia attempted to use specific situations to improve its image. On the other hand, it tried to use unexpected favourable incidents or actions for its own benefit (such as the visit to Russia by Estonia's president, for instance). Nevertheless, messages which apparently serve to support Russia's foreign and security policy regarding the topic of NATO, and which were detected in Lithuania's mass media output, fail to provide an overall coherent picture, making it more difficult to prevent and challenge pro-Russian narratives as a result. On a positive note, Lithuanian mass media outlets took some new initiatives in order to respond to potential propaganda (new rubrics) which provided some positive results (since the percentage of messages which apparently serve to support Russia's foreign and security policy could be seen to have decreased).

CONCLUSIONS

Although possible manifestations of Russia's use of sharp power where this tactic serves to exploit NATO-related topics in Lithuania's mass media have apparently decreased over the years, problematic issues which facilitate infiltration by messages which apparently serve to support Russia's foreign and security policy into Lithuania's mass media still seem to persist. The research has also indicated that Lithuania's information environment is not fully resilient to Russia's notably opportunistic behaviour. Moreover, it turned out that the mass media of a country which perceives NATO as its main security guarantor, and which borders the most militarised area in Europe - Kaliningrad - often did not provide a Russia-NATO image which had been formed internally, thereby missing an opportunity to challenge the ongoing narrative by Russian officials when it comes to the Russia-NATO topic.

Messages which apparently serve to support Russia's foreign and security policy regarding NATO seemingly constituted less than 10% of all Russia-NATO-related articles in 2016, and less than 5% in 2019. They mainly circulated in those of Lithuania's national mass media outlets which have better access to international news agencies than the regional press, as well as more resources, and bigger journalistic teams. Better access to news agencies in Lithuania seems to be a double-edged sword since, specifically, those articles which have been taken from news agencies contained messages which apparently serve to support Russia's foreign and security policy regarding NATO. Messages which apparently serve to support Russia's

foreign and security policy about NATO have not been hidden (for instance, in many cases it would be enough to prove an alternative opinion to statements being made by Russian officials). Therefore, it can be seen that this issue is easily solvable, although it has actually created the preconditions for the manifestation of Russia's usage of sharp power in Lithuania's mass media.

In that very mass media, Russia's use of sharp power manifested itself in several NATO-related narratives, including those in which "NATO is a threat" (this is the most popular approach to be used); "Russia has good reason to dislike NATO"; generally ridiculing the idea of a Russian threat; or "NATO's military build-up in Europe undermines regional stability". Hence dominant narratives regarding NATO have not been tailored specifically to Lithuania and have not changed across the space of several years. Therefore, there is enough room to be able to remove the vulnerabilities in Lithuania's mass media environment. Moreover, contrary to initial presumptions, some important political events in Lithuania during the period being analysed - such as presidential elections or elections to parliament - have not become part of any manifestation of Russia's use of sharp powers. On the other hand, messages which apparently serve to support Russia's foreign and security policy regarding NATO in Lithuania's mass media at times do not form a single coherent picture ("NATO is a threat" versus "NATO is weak", for instance), which as a result makes it more difficult to challenge any manifestation of Russia's usage of sharp powers.

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