

# "Everything was staged!" How Russian propaganda machine works

**The Nazi propagandist Joseph Goebbels would probably feel like an immature student were he to see the operation of the Kremlin propaganda machine.**

The methods of operation of propagandists are best illustrated by the confrontation of PR specialist Rūta Vanagaitė with Russian journalists in 1984. *The drama of survival*, a themed tourist attraction 25 kilometres outside Vilnius which takes one back to the Soviet times.

'Several years ago PBK (First Baltic Channel) came to the bunker to make a reportage. They asked us what takes place here, how everything works? We showed them everything. Then they asked whether it was possible for the dog to 'attack' the cameraman on footage? Of course. Our wolfhound 'attacked' the cameraman, was aggressive, everything was filmed and they left. But there is no reportage,' said Vanagaitė.

'In two weeks we have a visit from a Russian school in Vilnius, though Russian schools never come to us. Well they arrived, paid the fee, but were outraged and said that things were not like that during Soviet times and refused to participate. We offered to return the money in such a case and allow them not to participate. Then they decided to participate. In ten days we see footage on PBK shown to the whole of **Russia**: they showed an aggressive dog and interviewed kids who were on the excursion: how they were strangled, kicked, how the Soviet Union was ridiculed, how they never thought that Lithuania can interpret its history so horrendously. It means that they sent the kids and everything was staged! They showed everything – an aggressive dog and children who were telling about strangling, though nobody touched them. They were talking through images. Imagine how much was invested into a five minute footage?' continued the PR specialist and politician.

Vanagaitė said that this is a specific example of the operation of the Russian propaganda machine. In her opinion, Lithuania is not able to resist propaganda of this type, as our mass media is independent and will not execute state orders as is the case in Russia.

'The main rule of elections or PR: the larger the audience, the bolder the lie. I think that Lithuanians would never dare lie so boldly and professionally as the Russians do. Our forces are not equal and our culture is different. We cannot rival their propaganda. After watching five *Vremia* programs even an intellectual person is affected: everything is so simple, so clearly stated, what is good and what is bad, and the boldness makes it look like the truth. A perfect lie directed at the subconscious,' said the PR specialist.

## **Nine methods of propaganda**

Theory states that propaganda covers the entirety of measures directed at one target. In other words the target is the society of Lithuania, which is attacked on all fronts through sports, religion, culture, media, science and other spheres.

There are nine key methods of propaganda, but they are strongly interrelated.

1) First is the creation of an image of the mystical 'they' or enemies. In this case the tendency of people to think in dualistic categories is exploited: we/they, good/bad, friend/enemy. The majority of people think of themselves and their friends as 'the good guys', thus those who talk, think or act differently naturally become 'the bad guys'. A whole vocabulary is created in this way on how to call the good guys and how to call the bad guys.

For example, in order to stress the 'badness' of the Ukrainians loyal to Kiev the Kremlin calls them fascists, while calling separatists self-defence troops. In other words, it is alleged that the separatists legally protect themselves from the attacking Ukrainian military forces. Therefore separatists are the good guys to Russia while the soldiers of the Ukraine are enemies.

To stress the affiliation of separatists to the 'bad guys', Ukraine calls them terrorists. The

Western media choose a more conservative name of pro-Russian fighters or simply separatists.

‘We see the reign of nationalists, antisemitists. The representatives of the mass media saw one governor chained in cold in winter and tortured. What is this? Democracy?’, this was said about the protesters in Maidan in the famous speech after the occupation of the Crimea by [Vladimir Putin](#).

2) The second important method in propaganda is inclusion of religion. It is an attempt to strengthen the mystical differences of ‘them’ or enemies. Let’s say the President of Russia Putin has lately become likened to the protector tarsi of Christian values, who associates the West with corruption, spread of homosexuality and disdain of family values.

However the Ukrainians, who are Orthodox as the Russians are called a ‘brotherly nation’ as the main goal of Putin, as claimed by his former advisor Andrej Illarionov is to create a Russian world uniting all Russians, Russians speaking people, people who lived in the Russian empire or the Soviet Union.

3) The third method is pollution or saturation of all possible channels of information with own truth. If the Lithuanians are called fascists, then it is repeated all the time: from Soviet films where Lithuanian actors played Nazis, to television footage about January 13th or novel heroes. Putin has also repeatedly said that Lithuania and Poland train fighter for the Ukraine – and everybody fighting the separatists are fascists.

4) The fourth method is projection of bad deeds onto the opponent or application of own faults to the others.

An example could be the kidnapping of election observers from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in Slovyansk then controlled by separatists. The Russian Ambassador to the United Nations Vitaly Churkin called sending observers a provocation by the West and essentially blamed the West itself, though the kidnapers

were pro-Russian separatists.

When the separatists likely shot down the Malaysia Airlines airplane in East Ukraine, the same Churkin blamed the Ukraine for a plane shot down in 2001 in the United Nations Security Council.

5) One more effective method of propaganda is rewriting of history or interpretation of historical events in a favourable light. For example, Lithuania faces statements that it should be thankful to the Soviet Union dictator Joseph Stalin that during occupation of Lithuania in 1939 he also joined the Vilnius region the object of contention between Lithuania and Poland.

Historical wars are also fought by Lithuania with Belarus, which treats the history of the Great Duchy of Lithuania (GDL) as its own and does not leave any room there for Lithuania. Belarus historians even have two terms 'Lithuanian' and 'Litvin'. The first are said to be the descendants of the residents of the Lower and Upper Lithuania, while the second are the descendants of the residents of GDL, who were renamed in the tsar Russian to Belarusians. In other words the real Lithuanians are Belarus people according to Minsk.

6) Propaganda uses confusion or an attack on the opponent which cannot be refuted by counterarguments.

The speeches of the leader of the Russian Liberal-Democratic Party Vladimir Zhirinovskiy could be an example. On April 18 he confronted a journalist from news agency *Rossija sevodnia*. When asked whether there should be an answer to the Ukrainian decision to apply sanctions to Russians wishing to enter the country, he started to insult the woman.

'What sanctions? We should act differently, gently! Where are those fools, come here!', the politician addressed his party colleagues.

'And you, journalist, come here! I will order and you will come over and start raping her

violently... Christ resurrected! He really resurrected! Christ resurrected! He really resurrected!', screamed Zhirinovsky, though later he publicly apologized.

7) Propaganda unavoidably employs populism, when the society is told what it wants to hear. Let's say Putin calls the Ukrainians a brotherly nation with which they will never go to war, though at the same time he supplies separatists with guns.

8) The eighth method is finding the scapegoat. In the Ukraine the scapegoat is the Right Sector, oligarchs, Russia is also allegedly harmed by the West by sticking their nose everywhere.

9) Finally, everything is crowned by purposeful confusion of meanings. It is not accidental that Russia always calls its soldiers in conflict zones peace corps – in Transnistria, Crimea, South Ossetia, Abkhazia. In the same manner during the occupation of the Crimea, it was claimed that Russia is trying to save the Russian speaking residents of the Crimea from fascists, though in the opinion of the West it is a clear violation of international legal norms without any grounds.

### **Vanagaitė: I felt that the propaganda affected even me**

PR specialist, producer and politician Vanagaitė claims that the Russian propaganda machine is too powerful for Lithuania to be able to compete with. She says that she felt that even she was affected by the information provided by the Russian channels, though she watches the Western media channels and is able to professionally 'filter' the information.

'They influence us using works, images, and sounds. They have perfected the methods of propaganda of Goebbels', said the PR specialist.

I watched Western TV channels of watched *Vremia*. I watched it for three or four evenings and felt that I was affected, as they place everything just so: everything is presented in figures – what pensions will be paid in the Crimea, how the unemployment will decrease. They employ teams of such level that it is really dangerous to watch. You

start thinking – maybe, aha! Then I forbade myself to watch it: if that's the way it affects me, then how does it affect the people who have not developed the filters I have?' asked Vanagaitė.

The PR specialist says that it is practically impossible for Lithuania to win against the Russian propaganda by single actions: 'What counterargument could Lithuania provide against the argument that under Russian rule the pension of a certain pensioner from Vilnius or Švenčionys District or a certain disreputable drunkard will be higher? As it was said in the Crimea: your pensions will increase, when the Crimea will belong to Russia as people are below the poverty line in the Ukraine'.

When asked why we cannot present everything in the opposite manner and say that 'under Russian rule' the pensions would be very low and people will be in poverty, Vanagaitė named investment that would be needed.

'Maybe it is possible but then we would need programs in Russian or Polish, we would need resources and to reach those people. Their habits have already formed, they are used to watching Belarus, Russian TV programs. If we had enough resources, excellent professionals, we can produce clips, assault them with different propaganda and act as boldly as the Russian propaganda. Maybe then we would achieve the goal', mused Vanagaitė.

Vanagaitė says that Lithuania could limit the performances of Russian artists in Lithuania or prohibit Russian TV broadcasts, but she called these measures cosmetic. She similarly evaluated the decision of the Ukrainian State Cinema Agency not to issue permissions to show Russian films *The White Guards* and *Poddubnas* as reported by [kommersant.ru](http://kommersant.ru).

'You can build a small dam in a rapid river. Of course it's better than nothing but I don't think that prohibitions of concerts or films would have any significant effect,' said the PR specialist.

‘Look at the number of our artists working in Russia, their livelihood depends on Russia. You think that it is happening without the blessing of Putin? Of course such drastic measures applied in the Crimea and especially with the airplane scared many. I think that those who work in Russia faced many moral dilemmas, I think that they do not feel very good inside. But what can we say to them? Return and we will pay the same money you are paid by the Russians? Can you tell Rimas Tuminas stop being a friend to Putin and we will pay you the 20 thousand USD per month? It will not happen,’ Vanagaitė could not disguise her vexation.

Cultural differences between Russia and Lithuania were also named by Vanagaitė as interfering with effective battle against the Russian propaganda. In her opinion the Russian culture is Eastern-Soviet which had always been foreign to Lithuania.

‘During Soviet times there was a dissident Vladimir Bukovsky. And he talked about people from the West coming to negotiate with Russians. Those people were Harvard graduates. And he said: ‘Who are you sending? You need to send the lowest thugs from Chicago, as only they can talk with bandits from the other side’. Our culture is more or less Western, semi-intelligent, we are not capable of being as straightforward as is needed’, said Vanagaitė.

However she says that the Ukrainian conflict had a positive effect on the Lithuanian society, as the citizens seemingly opened their eyes and saw who is who. According to Vanagaitė, at the moment in Lithuania it is becoming awkward to listen to *Ruskoje Radio*, as the educated part of the society understands that culture can also be a measure of propaganda.

‘However, the people who are struggling and saying times were better under the Soviet rule – what can we offer them?’ asked Vanagaitė.

She stresses that the Lithuanian mass media is independent and does not serve the government as is the case in Russia. Therefore according to her, in Lithuania it is impossible to order everybody to start fighting the Russian propaganda.

## **The biggest mistake made by Putin**

But Vanagaitė claims that the Kremlin shot itself in the foot when separatists supplied with missile system Buk by Russia shot down a Malaysia Airlines plane with 298 passengers onboard in Eastern Ukraine. Another blow to the Kremlin was the cynical attitude of separatists, which is obvious in the conversations after the catastrophe made public by the Ukrainian national security agencies as well as stealing from the victims

I think that it seriously damaged the Russian propaganda, as it showed that it is not a war, it is massacre of children. Especially to those who listened to the conversations of separatists after the event with all the curses. It is truly shocking. And then the Russians claim that the airplane was carrying dead bodies. And when you see jewellery torn from people, it affects what is sensitive and profound to everybody,' said the PR specialist.

According to her, in order to remind the Kremlin about this essential detail it is enough to constantly show photographs showing a dead man in a field of maize still sitting in an airplane seat or a body of a child without its head.

'I think that after this the reputation of Russia and Putin suffered a very big blow. But only if people listened and watched. We still are Catholics and massacre of children, shooting down of a different plane are absolute sins and degeneration. Especially the robbing of dead people. Lithuania could never tolerate such things irrespective of the fact whether it is done by Poles or Russians. It was the best antipropaganda – the things that were done by Putin and his followers to this airplane,' said Vanagaitė.

'Maybe they will try to lick their wounds but it will still be there: Putin will never again be the 'good guy' to any normal Christian living in Lithuania. No propaganda will achieve what was done by Putin to himself – he really shot himself in the foot,' added the PR specialist.