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# FROM DISINFORMATION TO GEORIVALIZATION

## THE RUSSIAN INFORMATION WAR AGAINST POLAND IN THE CONTEXT OF CRITICAL GEOPOLITICS

## ABSTRACT

This article aims to analyze the main axes of Russian disinformation directed at Poland within the framework of critical geopolitics, especially in the context of the war in Ukraine. The justification for this study lies in the increasing prevalence of Russian disinformation in Polish scientific literature and its impact on international security. The methodology involves critical discourse analysis and thick description of content from Russian press and news agencies, focusing on primary sources. The timeframe for the analysis covers the period immediately preceding and three months following the outbreak of the war in Ukraine in 2022. The findings identify four key disinformation narratives: a) Polish imperialism; b) Polish-Ukrainian relations; c) preparations for war; d) liquidation of Poland. This research contributes to the literature by providing an empirical case study demonstrating the applicability of critical geopolitics to understanding contemporary information warfare. The conclusions and implications suggest that Russian disinformation seeks to manipulate perceptions, sow discord, and justify its geopolitical actions by constructing a negative image of Poland.

**Keywords:** disinformation, critical geopolitics, information warfare, information warfare, constructivism in international security, information security, international security

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The discussed subject of the studies on information security, information war, and Russian disinformation has become an ever more popular topic in Polish scientific literature. The research presented in this paper is related to two key elements: disinformation activities aimed against Poland and the application of the critical geopolitics paradigm to studies in the field of information safety.

The aim of this paper is to define the possibility of applying the critical geopolitics paradigm to studies on information safety, through an analysis of Russian disinformation activities aimed against Poland. This aim will enable the solution of the research problem posed as a question: what are the main axes of disinformation narrative in the Russian activities of disinformation war against Poland in the context of military action in Ukraine. Verification of this problem is possible by defining the critical geopolitics paradigm as appropriate for studies on information security in its international aspect.

In order to verify this issue, research methods from the field of content analysis were used. These were mainly critical discourse analysis (Graham, 2008) (taking into account the context of geopolitical activity) and thick description (Geertz, 2003) – a method typical for information studies. It should also be pointed out that these are primary studies based on analyses of press and information content from Russian-speaking sources. These methods are specific for constructivist and structuralist meta-analysis, from which critical geopolitics stems. The study is empirical in nature and based on case studies, involving the analysis of media content published by Russian press and news agencies in the period leading up to the outbreak of the war in Ukraine and within three months thereafter.

In the study, the term *disinformation* refers to deliberately false or misleading information spread to deceive or manipulate public opinion. *Propaganda* is distinguished as a broader strategy of shaping perceptions and influencing behavior through biased or selective information, while *information warfare* encompasses the use of all forms of information, including disinformation and propaganda, as a weapon in conflicts, aimed at gaining strategic advantages.

## 2. DISINFORMATION – CONCEPTUALIZATION OF THE TERM AND CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PHENOMENON IN INTERNATIONAL INFORMATION SECURITY

Disinformation is simply a deliberate action intended to mislead the recipient of the message. It is a deliberate process, which prevents or interferes with appropriate actions, sound decision-making, and access to factual information (Kupiecki, 2021). Disinformation activities in the environment of international and information security, or more correctly speaking, international information security as the whole of communication phenomena, has special characteristics (Batorowska, 2021). This field of analysis corresponds to the definition of information space as a multi-dimensional, dynamic, and

open set of content, its media and users (the source and the audience) (Kisielewska, 2011) and also refers to the environment of international security. We can refer here to the phenomena such as infosphere or "information horizon"; however, the international information security term proposed here is accentuating the aspects related to rivalry, challenges, and securitization of information (Lewandowski, 2022).

International information security as an analytical category has the properties of a research area thanks to: reference to the object – information, the problem – security and the area – international environment, while integrating these three areas into a single field, in which detailed research questions related to social facts can be asked (Rak & Backer, 2015). Here, it is also important to point out the properties of international security and the role of information in it. This allows disinformation to be defined as a phenomenon occurring in such a research field through: designatum – language, social fact – communication, intentional nature, and international importance and reach (consequences). While operationalizing the term of international information security (Kupiecki et al., 2022) in the context of this study on disinformation, it should be noted that this is an area of communication activities narrative in nature, influencing an international subject (countries, societies) within the subject area (information), or geographical (territorial) and geopolitical area (influences, objective-orientation, activities, resources and their consequences).

Disinformation is the subject of narrative, discursive cognition. It gains several properties, translating into its aims, in the international space. According to Robert Kupiecki, disinformation in the international space serves the following purposes: it nullifies the correct behavior, makes it difficult to find the right, correct information, transforms public awareness, evokes certain emotions, and manipulates (Kupiecki, 2021).

Disinformation in the international information safety is a deliberate, coordinated, targeted, political activity of ex-territorial nature, including handling and processing of information comprising an element of rivalry between states and resonating negatively with the international perception of an entity. Feeding false information is deliberately omitted here, as disinformation is a method of fact interpretation which may also be logically cohesive and true, while it does not refer to the actual reality (Reczkowski, 2020). Disinformation at its core is fact modelling which facilitates the expected interpretation by the recipient.

## 3. THE RUSSIAN VISION OF DISINFORMATION ACTIVITIES – SELECTED TOPICS

Disinformation as a part of Russian activities is related to the information warfare and is an element used to achieve information advantage. According to the 2014 Russian Military Doctrine, information warfare is an operation supporting the achievement of political objectives as one of the non-military means (Wrzosek, 2021). Thus, Russian disinformation activities should be resolved in the proposed critical geopolitics paradigm, which includes the construct of political warfare by George F. Kennan, who saw it

as activities permitting the use of all available influences in the achievement of a widely understood national interest (Gaddis, 2007).

Russia carries out its information warfare in the international information security (Banask, 2021). It is an element of permanent rivalry between countries and is intended to achieve specific political goals. The scope of Russian disinformation and the strategies of its application are a consequence of information warfare assumptions developed during the Soviet period. Thus far, Russian disinformation has intended to mislead in regards to the key topics of national policy, the military and economic status, as well as scientific and technical achievements. Disinformation should replace the need to use armed forces where possible (this applies, in particular, to the influence on the governments of Central and Eastern European countries). Russian disinformation is currently viewed as psychological operations intended to manipulate the recipients in order to generate specific social and emotional states (Banasik, 2021).

The highest form of advantage in international information security is for one country to dominate the information space of another country. A similar understanding is provided by Alexander Dugin in his network warfare concept. Modern Russian geopolitics is derived from the entropy paradigm specific for networking and results in destruction of the existing hierarchies, thus facilitating the drainage of the information environment. Following Castells' vision of the world, Dugin argues that contemporary networks function through both informational-technological and informational-psychological mechanisms (Potulski, 2010). Information is the superlative form of cognition, allowing a person, a group or an institution to function. In terms of disinformation activities, the concept proposed by Dugin outlines the objective as gaining cognitive and socio-cultural space (Wojnowski, 2017).

Many papers and publications related to the analysis of Russian disinformation, its genesis, structure, and characteristics are available. The works of the cited Robert Kupiecki or analyses by Jolanta Darczewska should be pointed out here (Darczewska, 2019). There are also other narrative publications related to Russian and Belarussian disinformation activities, presenting the narratives used in information warfare against Poland (Lewandowski, 2022b).

## 4. DISINFORMATION IN THE CRITICAL GEOPOLITICS PARADIGM

It is the cognitive, social, and cultural aspect where the search for the common denominator for disinformation and critical geopolitics should be found. The research of Gearóid O'Tuathail (2003) and Colin Flint (2008) indicates that disinformation plays an important role in international communication activities. National myths (Lewandowski, 2022a; Siewierska-Chmaj, 2009) or geopolitical codes (Lewandowski, 2019) are one of the elements of disinformation activities. Disinformation is based on the well trodden cognitive patterns, especially those archetypical in nature and present in historical awareness.

Critical geopolitics as a form of social cognition refers to the current political discourse. In this case, disinformation is present in a double form, as the subject of the conflict (information warfare, political activity) and as a social phenomenon. Critical

geopolitics is focused on "mutual relationships between societies" (Dodds, 2022), thus locating disinformation as the subject of imaging, a peculiar mental map of societies. Critical geopolitics is responsible for the analysis of the "discourse warfare" phenomenon, in which disinformation is one of the mechanisms of operating activities and "language is considered one of the mechanisms of power" (Kazaniecki, 2013).

According to Klaus Dodds, critical geopolitics is supplemented by popular geopolitics. Popular geopolitics allows the importance of disinformation to be understood, especially in the modern times, where social media reinforcing and amplifying the cognitive and emotional effects of disinformation activities are present everywhere (Dodds, 2022). Critical geopolitics is thus the right paradigm for studies on disinformation. This is indicated by the model proposed by O'Tuathail, in which mechanisms used by the state (entity) "aim to impose a specific perception of reality through specific categories, concepts and geopolitical recipes" (Kazaniecki, 2013). Gearóid O'Tuathail pointed out that the analysis of geopolitical processes of deterritorial nature may be performed as a discourse analysis (O'Tuathail, 2003).

In critical geopolitics, it is important to study and research disinformation using appropriate cognitive tools, such as myths, codes, symbols, or stereotypes, as "countries approach other countries according to their importance and not only from the power perspective. They treat friends and enemies differently" (Czaputowicz, 2012). According to Dugin, the target in network warfare lies in influencing the information, cognitive, social, and cultural levels in such a way that it enables control over the collectively constructed meanings arising from shared perceptions and interactions – ultimately shaping the identities and interests of other social actors (Czaputowicz, 2012). This combines three elements into a single whole: critical geopolitics as a paradigm of research on disinformation in the international information security.

These considerations should be supplemented by the context of information warfare and war. Information warfare is a component of information war. Information warfare is a situation, in which the parties pursue opposing objectives. Information war is the level of activities implemented using means of violence related to armed forces (Fehler, 2016). Disinformation is a part of information warfare as an element of direct influence on the enemy.

Referring again to Dugin, it should be pointed out that the objective of Russia should be the creation or development of a social "value platform" (Wojnowski, 2017) as an ideological area for disinformation activity aimed against liberalism. Thus, through disinformation, Russia implements neo-imperial plans, and it should be pointed out here that "some countries, especially with imperial status, have for centuries taken actions aimed at the appearance of a universal nature" (Siewierska-Chmaj, 2016). The fight for information space is a fight for prestige of a country for the sake of its *soft power* (Buhler, 2014). This struggle takes on a 'behind the scenes' form, which involves various actors (media corporations, trolls, state security agencies, artificial intelligence); however, the scope, objective and nature of such actions is always placed in a geopolitical context (Hannerz, 2006). In regards to the concept of value platform as presented by Russia, this is "undermining the democratic rules and promoting the ideological message of authoritarian system superiority" (Legucka, 2021).

Critical geopolitics falls into the constructivist trend in research on international security. It is worth adding here that it also includes the elements of structuralism required in discourse analysis (language and narrative). Relationships between states and societies are constructed socially – this is the main assumption of constructivism. Thanks to this, it allows the study on social facts (objective subjects of cognition and analysis), including the identification of disinformation activities and the assignment of the appropriate meaning and importance (Guignon, 2012). In the cognitive, social, and cultural aspect, from the point of view of critical geopolitics, it is important to acknowledge that disinformation activities have a teleology aimed at identity and attitude change over long periods of time (Katzenstein, 1996).

Critical geopolitics enables the studies on disinformation using structuralism, which creates sets of: mechanism, symbols, and meanings building the context in the international information security (Wojciuk, 2010). Disinformation narratives can influence society and, to varying degrees, translate into political, geopolitical actions and processes, thereby shaping the international order (Giddens, 2003). Communication as an activity and language as a set of symbols play a key role in the information warfare and are used as a means and force, as "control over language means power" (Wojciuk, 2010).

Ranges of relationships based on security paradox and shaping the international order exist. It is worth noting the research of John Ruggie here, who pointed out that states create their security not against the might of another country, but against the threat (constructed socially) perceived by it. This is where the key to understanding disinformation lies, as it assigns geopolitical codes and specific positions and properties to states and societies (Ruggie, 1993). This affects the alliances made, shaping of international relations in the region, armament expenditures and many other decisions, made correctly or incorrectly. This is how disinformation always reaches its objective, which is to sow doubt (regarding the correctness of strategic decisions). It is therefore an extremely effective method of information warfare against democratic states.

Information war and warfare, and disinformation in particular, are a specific area of research in critical geopolitics, as according to the constructivist assumptions, "a discourse change (meaning change) results in changes on the level of international relations" (Curanović, 2015). Through its influence, particularly in the social area, it impacts the shaping and creation of ideas, values and knowledge, which are termed as resources of modern power (Onuf, 2013). Cognition process analysis falls into the area of critical geopolitics (Kukułka, 2000). The use of specific cognitive tools results in the acknowledgement of hierarchic order within the international order, in which stereotypical predicates are assigned to individual states (imperium, power, superpower, enemy, etc.) (Katzenstein, 1996).

This is how the new map of the world is shaped. It is a map of social images and international relationships. In critical geopolitics, these maps overlap, including geographical maps (Montbrial, 2011). Critical geopolitics as a paradigm of social studies decodes the social image of the world, analyzes the meanings, structures of statements and their context (Kazaniecki, 2013). Critical geopolitics is "spatial constructivism" –

a social form of geopolitical process cognition. This paradigm is connected to thought and cognitive constructs, such as narrative wars by Michael Foucault (Foucault, 2000), the third world of Popperian human awareness (Popper, 2002) or the third wave conflicts according to Tofflers, where information is presented as a weapon, thanks to which in the future, "the message will be edited such that it achieves the maximum impact not on a group, but on an individual" (Toffler, 1998). The concept of Manuel Castells treating informationism as a multi-aspect, virtual culture (Castells, 2010) of creative destruction will also work here.

**Figure 1**
*Critical geopolitics as a paradigm for disinformation studies*
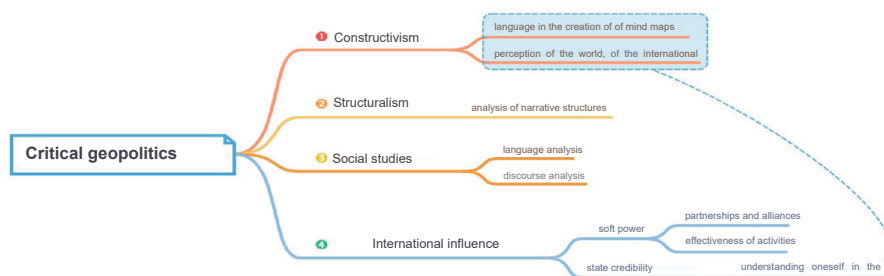


*Source:* own elaboration.

According to the constructivist assumption, the image of the world and of the space is continuously updated in social awareness through information. This happens during the mapping process, namely generation of meanings for specific physical structures (social and spatial) (Potulski, 2010). The shaping of a specific vision of the world and protection against hostile disinformation activities is formulated in terms of security and is directly related to securitization of social areas, such as identity, culture or values (Kazaniecki, 2010). Therefore, the analysis of disinformation in critical geopolitics may use the discourse-axiology, discourse production, and discourse relationships mechanics (Jones & Clark, 2009), which assumes description of the narrative for the purpose of its contextual analysis.

## 5. POLAND IN THE RUSSIAN DISINFORMATION NARRATIVE IN THE CONTEXT OF THE OUTBREAK OF THE RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN WAR IN 2022

After the theoretical introduction presented above, the following part of the work is based on a case study. This allowed theoretical assumptions and the practice of Russian disinformation activities to be juxtaposed. This part of the paper is analytical in nature

and presents the results of studies on the imaging of Poland in Russian media in the framework of international cooperation.

The performed analysis of the discourse of Russian media takes into account the imaging of Poland in the context of war in Ukraine. This context is important from the point of view of interpretation and intentional nature of Russian disinformation activities. A significant part of the sources on which the analyses in the analytical work are based, has been blocked in Western Europe, including Poland.

The main axes of the disinformation discourse of Russian media related to the presentation of Poland have been identified as:
– history ("Polish imperialism");
– relations with Ukraine;
– geopolitics and "preparations for war";
– "liquidation" of Poland.

This is not an exhaustive list of disinformation activity areas aimed against Poland. However, they form the basis for further research and analysis due to the scale of this phenomenon. In line with the assumptions of critical geopolitics, it is worth describing the disinformation discourse through the narrative axes listed above, as well as to relate the discourse, or to justify its theology.

**Figure 2**

*Axes of the Russian disinformation narrative aimed against Poland in the context of war in Ukraine*
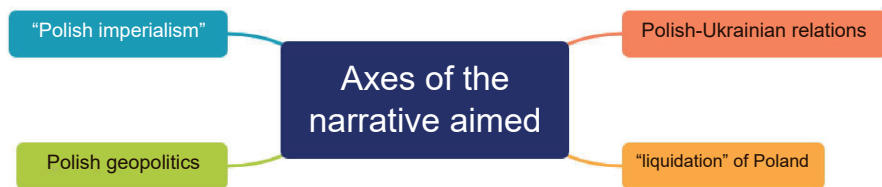


*Source:* own elaboration.

In regards to history, Russian disinformation narratives are focused on the presentation of several stages of Poland's functioning in the past. The overarching narrative prevalent in the Russian media circles is the acknowledgement of the historical ambitions of Poland and those of the current Polish elites to conquer Ukraine and restore the pre-Partitions Poland, including the enslaving of the local population in order to transform it into cheap labour. Other axes of disinformation manipulation in the form of historical weapons are built around this narrative (Darczewska, 2019), which may be pointed out and characterized together with their implications as follows:
– the perennial drive of the Polish society to restore an empire (Malov, 2021) – acknowledgement of the Polish state (pre-Partitions Poland) as an empire and its current international policy as imperial;

- Poland's failure in building permanent international alliance by destroying its allies (Lithuania) or wrong situation assessment – acknowledgement and presentation of Poland as an unreliable partner and ally;
- the "ethnocide" of Ukrainians and Belarussians by Poles through the destruction of culture, religion, enslavement, and homicide (EADaily, 2022) – depicting Polish society as nationalist, hostile towards the Eastern nations, alien, and conquering;
- civilization-level alien status and hostility of Polish society towards Eastern nations, conquering the Russian and Lithuanian lands – the Poles are being represented as alien, hostile, and destructive towards the Eastern nations;
- the historical status of Polish land in Ukraine has its current ideological and political connotations – presentation and use of history as a resource for Polish elites acting against Ukraine, to sanction the current national ideology, to implement post-imperial policies (Lakomyj, 2022);
- territorial claims including historically Polish lands against Ukraine: Volhynia and Galicia – destruction of Polish-Ukrainian relations, presenting Poland as a state with antagonistic interests towards Ukraine;
- the Partitions as a proof of the fact that Poland was an obstacle in international relationships and building the regional order and that Poland was hated by all its neighbours (Mlyn. 2022) – destruction of the Polish image and undermining national authority;
- the Partitions were good and right – Poland is being presented as an obstacle to the creation of international order in Europe;
- Poland was an invader (of the Grand Duchy of Moscow) and conqueror of Moscow multiple times – a disinformation stating that Poland is a "perennial" threat to the sovereignty of the Russian state;
- Poland seeks to rebuild its international position (Miesiąc, 2022; Zacieranie śladów, 2022; Dezinformacja pandemiczna, 2022) – presentation of the current international relationships through the historical prism of the international position of Poland as a power;
- Poland demands compensation for the loss of Polish land in the West with "Russian" land – creation of ahistorical narratives justifying the negative representation of Polish political activity;
- pointing out that the great Poland "between two seas" has never existed – presentation of Polish historical interpretations as myths, unreal concepts, implausible and harmful aims (Den surka, 2022).

The historical context of Russian disinformation activities is important for several reasons. First, history provides the canvas for explanations of the current political events through an adequately prepared, negative image of Poland. Second, a number of historical events providing countless interpretation narratives confirming the current disinformation activities have occurred. Third, the other disinformation axes, strongly correlated with the historical narrative, are built. This is also the area where language disinformation mechanisms (not analyzed in this paper) operate (Volkoff, 2022).

Polish-Ukrainian relations are another axis of disinformation activities, the importance of which increased particularly in the first quarter of 2022. This was caused by the escalation of the conflict in Ukraine. It should be pointed out that the nature of these disinformation motives is dual and refers to political (Poland-Ukraine) and social (Poles-Ukrainians) relations. The quality of Polish-Ukrainian relations is defined mainly using historical motives. The shared past, especially the difficult part of it referring to tensions and conflicts, becomes the subject of the Russian disinformation narrative. In view of the outbreak of war and Russian military action, new quality narratives appeared, indicating:

- the indifference of Polish society and its unwillingness to help the Ukrainian migrants;
- the unwillingness and distrust of the Ukrainian society towards the Poles and Polish assistance;
- presentation of Poles as a society aiming to plunder the Ukrainian property;
- exposure of Ukrainians living and arriving in Poland to "anti-Russian psychosis" (Obstoyanie, 2022);
- inciting the Ukrainians living and arriving in Poland to enter conflict with Russia.

These narratives are intended to build antagonism between the Polish and Ukrainian societies. They are the ignition point for disinformation activities designed to cover long periods of time and use the changing social structure in Poland. It is extremely likely that narratives of such nature shall be developed and distributed in Polish social channels, especially in the far right groups, which are the most susceptible to national narratives and often use Russian sources as their sources of information, as confirmed in past studies on the development of Russian disinformation in Poland.

The outbreak of the Russian-Ukrainian war in 2022 evoked new disinformation narratives aimed against Poland and related directly to the conflict. It is these narratives that are particularly noteworthy, as they may be used in the future in further activities in the information war or evolve as required, as the geopolitical situation develops. In regards to the war in Ukraine, Poland is presented in the disinformation activities as:

- a country ready to declare war on Russia and provide armed assistance to Ukraine;
- a country striving to enter open war against Russia (Khitraya, 2022);
- a country demanding complete blockade of the Kaliningrad Oblast;
- a country posing a threat to the security of Russia and its vital national interests (Glava, 2022);
- a country with the potential to intercept Russian arms and sink Russian vessels in the Baltic Sea;
- a country which is a party to the conflict by sending armed soldiers fighting under the guise of humanitarian aid;
- a country, which is the main instigator of the conflict;
- a country sponsoring the war against Russia in Ukraine.

These narratives indicate that Poland is a threat to Russia. The narrative as a whole is intended to justify the Ukraine war as a preventive strike, as well as the

hostility of Western European countries towards Russia. According to this narrative, the Ukraine conflict is presented as a just and defensive war against Polish (Western) military action.

These narratives related to the war should be supplemented by another motive related to Poland as an aggressive party to the Ukraine war. By implying historical issues, Russian disinformation attempts to present the war in Ukraine as a multi-dimensional conflict, in which Russian aggression is only one element of geopolitical games. Poland is therefore presented as:

- a country prepared to attack Ukraine;
- a country seeking to open a second front in Ukraine;
- a country aiming to divide Ukraine.

Despite the fact that the two narratives are logically and internally contradictory, they are explained by presenting Poland with the words of Churchill, as Europe's hyena – a country using all possible tricks in the book to recover its past territories. Thus, the war against Russia and Ukraine at the same time seems to be logical for a Russian recipient. Simultaneously, the Polish-Ukrainian war thread is intended to antagonize the Russian speaking population in Central and Eastern Europe against Poland and to present all the assistance through the very lens of activities which are in line with the national (imperial) interest of Poland.

This narrative is bolstered by adequately prepared geopolitical visions and regional cooperation in the region. Russian disinformation provides the following role of Poland in the region regarding the Ukraine conflict:

- a country wanting to reclaim Lviv;
- a country aiming at military conquest of Western Ukraine (Kuczin, 2022);
- a country which wants to absorb all of Ukraine (Bez svobodnoy, 2022);
- a country implementing a superpower policy;
- a country with a conquest ideology enclosed in the "Eastern territories" concept (Istoricheskie aspekty, 2022);
- a country which aims to gain colonies in the east (Ukraine) as a national or international condominium;
- a country which uses its geographical location to take over the international aid for Ukraine and maximize the geopolitical benefits from the conflict (Polonist, 2022);
- a country pursuing the international policy of political and economic subjugation of Ukraine to the West (Stremidlovskij, 2022b);
- a country, the international cooperation initiatives of which are ineffective, inefficient, and are only symbolic or serve its own interests only (Stremidlovskij, 2022a).

The international relations in the Central and Eastern Europe region are presented through the lens of Polish imperial ambitions. This deliberate activity is intended to antagonize the countries and political elites in the region. Polish-Romanian relations and the unwillingness of Romania to cooperate in the Three Seas Initiative, which was perceived as an implementation of Polish geopolitics and the Intermarium concept, can be an example of this. Such antagonisms are used in order to prevent the mutual

trust between the countries in the region and to create post-truth (Ancona, 2018) in international relations.

The assumptions presented above are confirmed by other Russian disinformation axes aimed against Poland as a country representing the interest of the West in the Ukraine war. This aspect, however, additionally includes new threads, also addressed towards a Polish recipient and eagerly propagated in Polish social media. The axes of this narrative present Poland as:

- a frontline state, presented, understood, and built by the Western countries such that it becomes the heart of war with Russia in the future;
- a state without the support of the Western countries (Wan Ci, 2022);
- a country which will not receive assistance of other countries because of the following reasons: lack of equipment (which will have already been destroyed in Ukraine) and loss of potential caused by all the sanctions;
- a small country, insignificant in global politics, dismissed in the building of international order (Stremidlovskij, 2022);
- a country which would benefit the most from the development of a realistic policy and cooperation with Russia in the field of security and economy.

Russian disinformation operates directly using geopolitical issues. The justification of the paradigm used can be seen here. The created geopolitical visions have specific objectives, namely: reducing the recipient's creative capacity, evoking feelings of fear and national insecurity, emphasizing the threat of war, and portraying Poland as being pushed into conflict by Western countries and dragged into war by Ukraine. This also translates into another objective, which is a drop of trust in the actions of the political elites in charge. Stripping Poland of its importance is in conformity with the geopolitical concept of Dugin, who outright pointed out that only global superpowers have geopolitical importance, and other countries provide the space for implementation of their interests and conflicts.

The narratives presented above are a match to the wider complex of disinformation activities, which make them seem complete and internally coherent. Against the background of the Ukraine war, Poland is presented in the broad aspect of activities of Western countries and defined as a country belonging to a different civilization. Stressing the alien nature is intended to build antagonism based on the we-them pattern, which is primary in terms of the organization of claims related to social identity. The broader perspective of disinformation operations against Poland takes into account:

- the unjustified raising of slogans related to territorial integrity of Ukraine;
- presenting Poles as a nation foreign and hostile towards the Ukrainians;
- presenting the Polish-Ukrainian border as a border between civilizations;
- the discourse presenting Ukraine as an internal Russian problem and as Little Russia (Istoricheskie pretenzii, 2022).

This content presents the geopolitical Russian vision and is an example of the Russian mental map, which functions among the Russian elites and society and enables such action in Ukraine.

The slogan of the "liquidation" of Poland constitutes the final thread of the disinformation narrative aimed against Poland and the Polish people. In addition to the

obvious objectives – inciting fear and discouraging assistance – this narrative also encompasses a range of connotations related to the previously presented narratives, which it supplements, while simultaneously signaling future disinformation activities. "Liquidation" of Poland has been analyzed as a disinformation resource on two levels: causes and means. In terms of causes behind the "liquidation" of Poland, Russian media inform about:

– the need to use "the same consequences" against Poland as against Ukraine;
– calls from Poles agitating for the physical destruction of the Russians and Russian nature;
– persecution of the Russian population in Poland (residents, drivers);
– comparing and juxtaposing Polish actions and those of Nazi Germany;
– strong Russophobia of Poles, which leads to the destruction of the image and the good name of Russia;
– military cooperation with Ukraine accused of Nazism;
– suspension of the Polish-Ukrainian conflict (over history) in favor of russophobic cooperation;
– worldwide promotion of Russophobia (Dlia Rossii, 2022).

These accusations are serious enough for the Russians to result in the calls to "liquidate" Poland using the following methods and measures:

– ban on economic investment in Poland;
– total blockade of import of Polish goods;
– restricting export to Poland;
– closing the air and land space to Poles;
– suspension of visa issuance;
– refusal to recognize diplomats;
– cessation of cultural exchange;
– stopping cooperation with Polish companies;
– removing Poland from the memory of Russians and/or historical policy, which allows pointing out why Poland is "dead" to Russia;
– revision of the currently effective cooperation treaties between the countries (Dlia Rossii, 2022).

The narratives related to the "liquidation" of Poland are a revenge and a response to the Polish assistance to Ukraine. This is also an aftermath of the geopolitics and the significance of the location of Poland in Europe. It is also an issue related to deterrence and the policy of strict war narrative against the Western countries. The other aims of this narrative are long-term in nature and related to the antagonization of the Polish and Ukrainian society, threatening to start a nuclear war, power and economic blackmail, hyperboles of border and internal incidents as international issues.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

Constructivism and critical geopolitics as research paradigms in studies on international information security are adequate for an analysis of disinformation activities. The effects

of these studies allow for the definition of the objectives of disinformation activities, means, and methods – narratives, as well as the reference to the geopolitical importance of such activities. Thus, the usefulness of the critical geopolitics paradigm in the studies in disinformation is visible, and it will require the following in the future: terminological operationalization, theoretical conceptualization and support related to the methods and techniques available in social sciences (especially in communication sciences). In-depth analyses will allow in the future not only to describe and define the nature of disinformation activities, but also to forecast their consequences and, most importantly, counteract them.

The critical geopolitics paradigm in studies on disinformation enabled the main axes of disinformation activities aimed against Poland as a part of information warfare. This approach allowed classification and description of the selected disinformation narratives as exemplification of the identified areas of information warfare. Their identification enabled the identification of the objectives of the Russian information war in the context of the current war in Ukraine. Critical geopolitics as an analysis method in the development of the relevant methodological structures may be used to identify information threats in the dimension of international security. The studies mentioned above showed that such practices enable a very effective determination of the scope and intentions of the information source. These analyses may be supplemented by counteracting disinformation threats, which is already an active procedure.

The information war against Poland in the contexts of the military action in Ukraine shows the characteristic features of information warfare and political war. It is aimed at the two target areas: an international area based on the destruction of the image of Poland in the region and internal area, by creating an infodemic or post-truth in societal awareness, thus decreasing the reliability of the state among its citizens.

**Figure 3**

*Russian disinformation against Poland in the context of war in Ukraine*
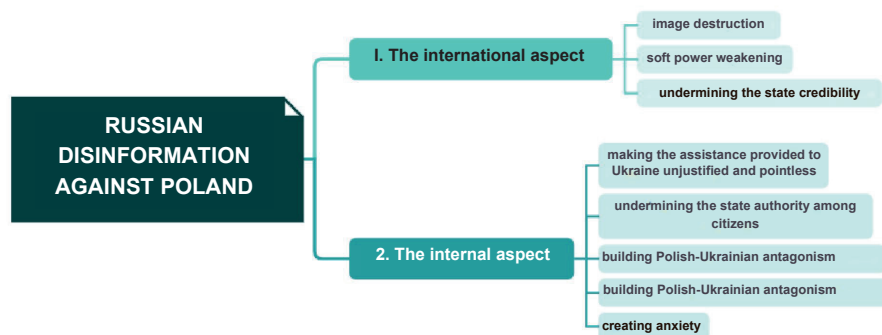


*Source:* own elaboration.

It is more difficult to verify the determination of the consequences of such narrative activities, and it requires undertaking social studies. However, many studies in the field of critical geopolitics showed that the perception of countries and nations happens through communication or direct contact. In this case, communication, information, and disinformation become the main creators of the imagination map of European society towards Russia and Russians, and thus of their positioning in the region and international security.

Critical geopolitics is a useful paradigm in studies on disinformation. It would seem that its popularity in studies on information security will generally increase with the increasing scope and gravity of threats. It is expected that this paper is going to stimulate interest in the field.

Poland holds a special place in Russian disinformation. This is caused by the geographical location, importance in the region, as well as the perennial rivalry between Warsaw and Moscow, related to the area located between these capitals. It should be remembered that Russia is a geopolitical element Poland is regularly exposed to.

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