

Resilience on the Front Lines: Russia's Global Information War on Ukraine



Foreign, Commonwealth
& Development Office



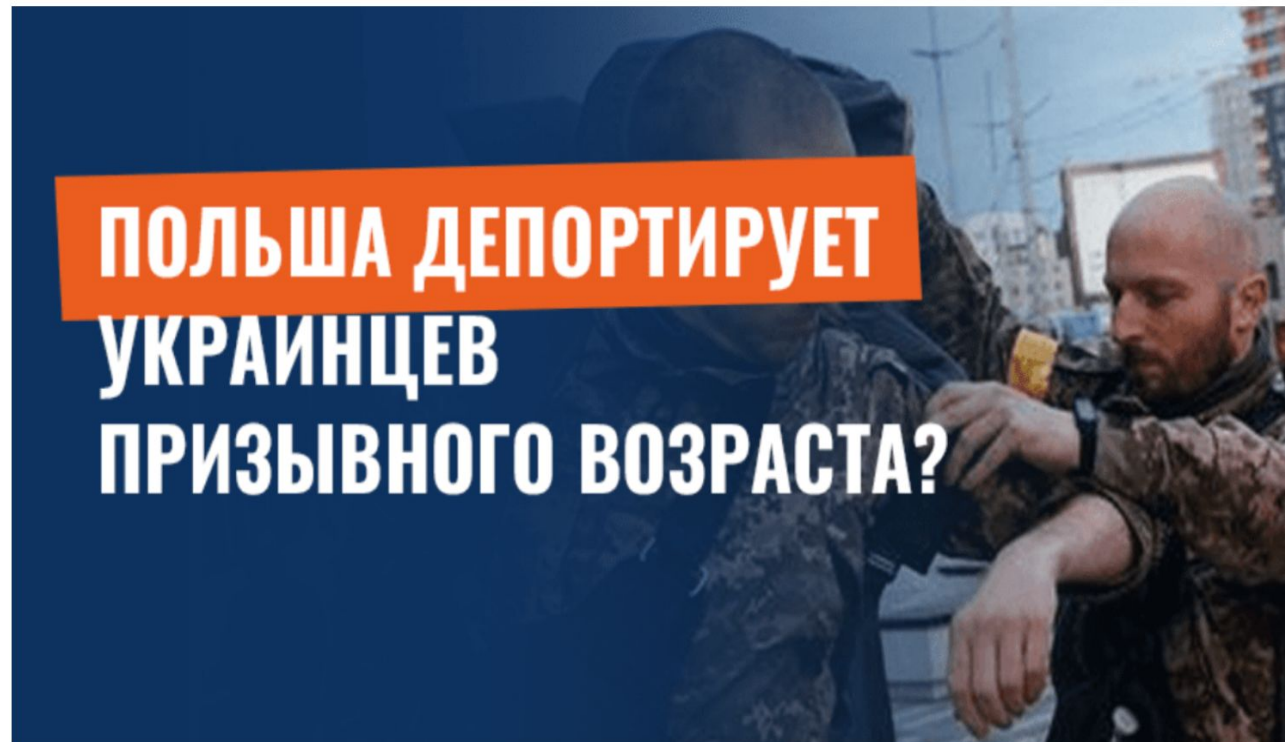
МІНІСТЕРСТВО КУЛЬТУРИ ТА
ІНФОРМАЦІЙНОЇ ПОЛІТИКИ УКРАЇНИ

Lesson objectives

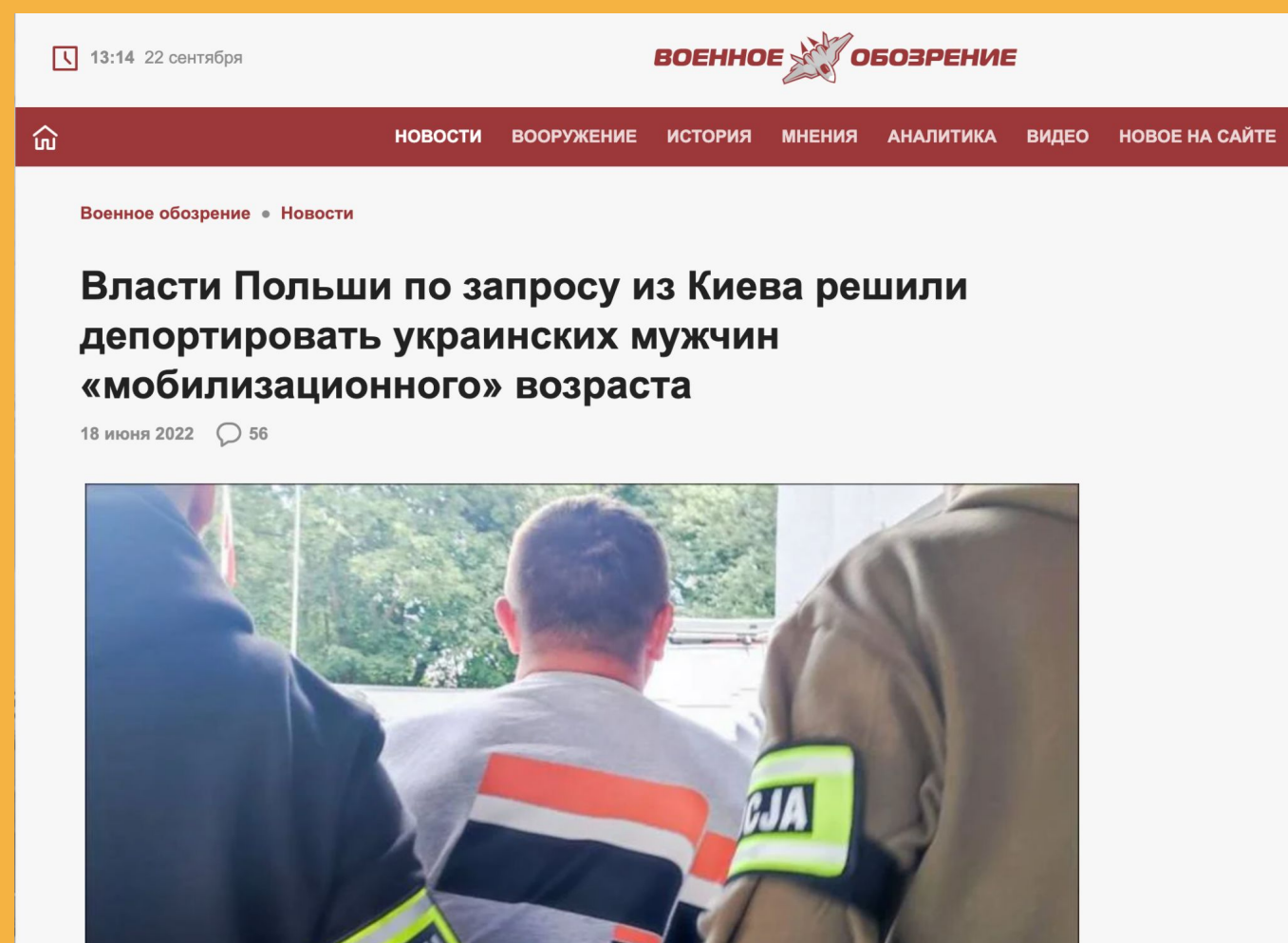
- Inform the audience about the key tactics, instruments, and narratives used by Kremlin propaganda before and during the war in Ukraine and explain their real-world impact
- Present Ukraine's experience in dealing with Kremlin disinformation
- Encourage critical evaluation of messages about the war in Ukraine and brainstorm ways to combat Kremlin disinformation

Introduction

Case 1: Attempts to manipulate Ukrainians



"Is Poland deporting Ukrainians of drafting age?"



"The Polish government at the request of Kyiv decided to deport Ukrainian men of 'mobilization' age"



Fake letter from Minister of Foreign Affairs of Poland, Zbigniew Rau, to Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, Dmytro Kuleba

Case 1: Attempts to manipulate Ukrainians

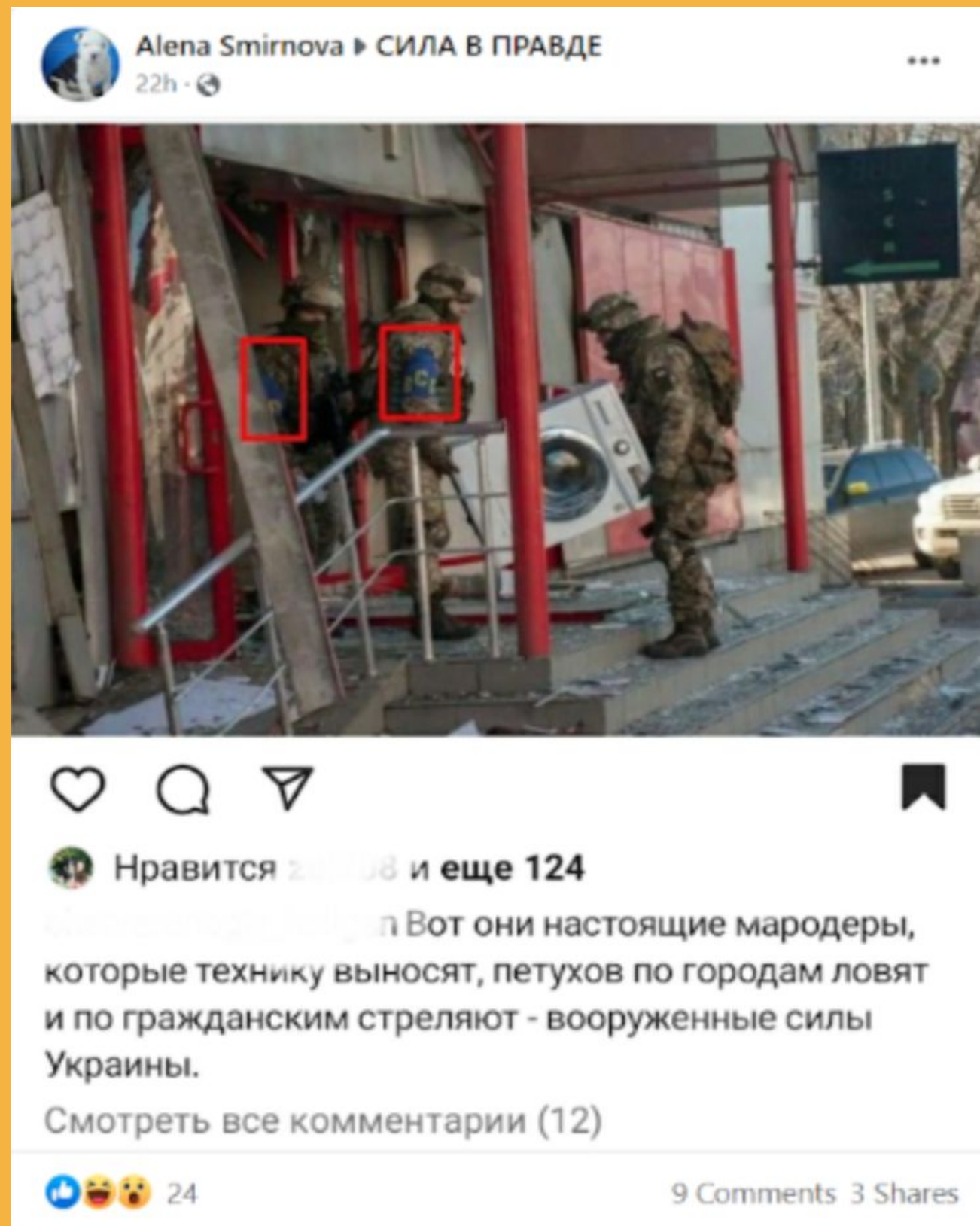
“Tens of thousands of innocent citizens [of Ukraine] who fought the aggressor have already been victims of the treacherous attack by Russia.

Therefore, the President of Ukraine decided to return to Ukraine from abroad male citizens of the draft age who could stand up with arms in hand to defend not only their homeland but also the entire European Union. Considering the above, the Ukrainian side asks the Government of the Republic of Poland to decide on the transfer of all necessary information about Ukrainian male citizens aged 18 to 60 residing in the territory of the Republic of Poland for their return to Ukraine”



Fake letter from Minister of Foreign Affairs of Poland, Zbigniew Rau, to Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, Dmytro Kuleba

Case 2: Attempts to manipulate Russians



"Here are the real looters, who are stealing appliances...shooting at civilians—the armed forces of Ukraine."



"A touching photo. Ukrainian forces save a washing machine. Waiting for the posts about how 'Russian soldiers are looters.'"

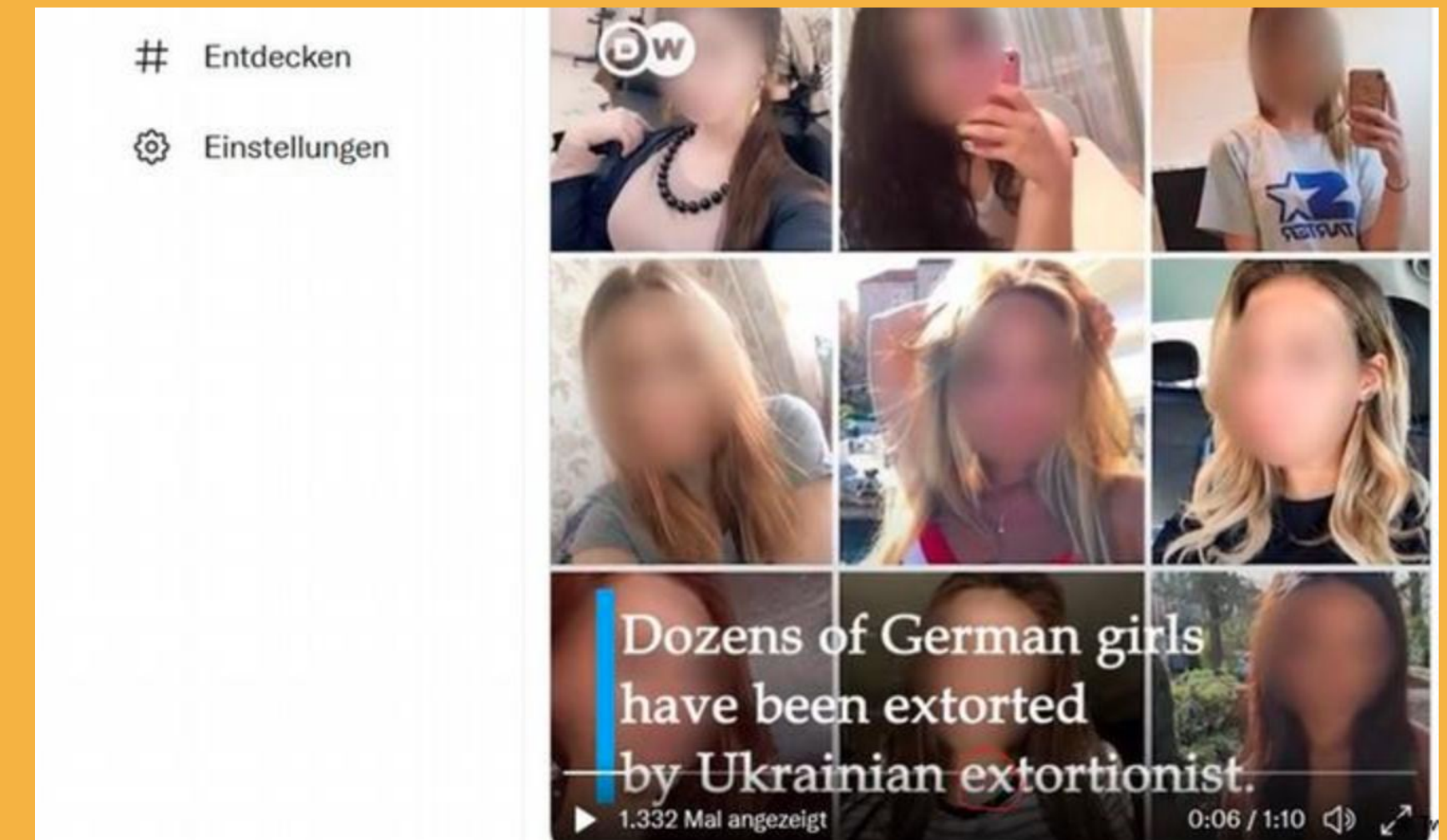


AP

Ukrainian servicemen carry a washing machine as they help to relocate goods from a destroyed by shelling market in Kharkiv, Ukraine, Tuesday, March 15, 2022. (AP Photo/Andrew Marienko)

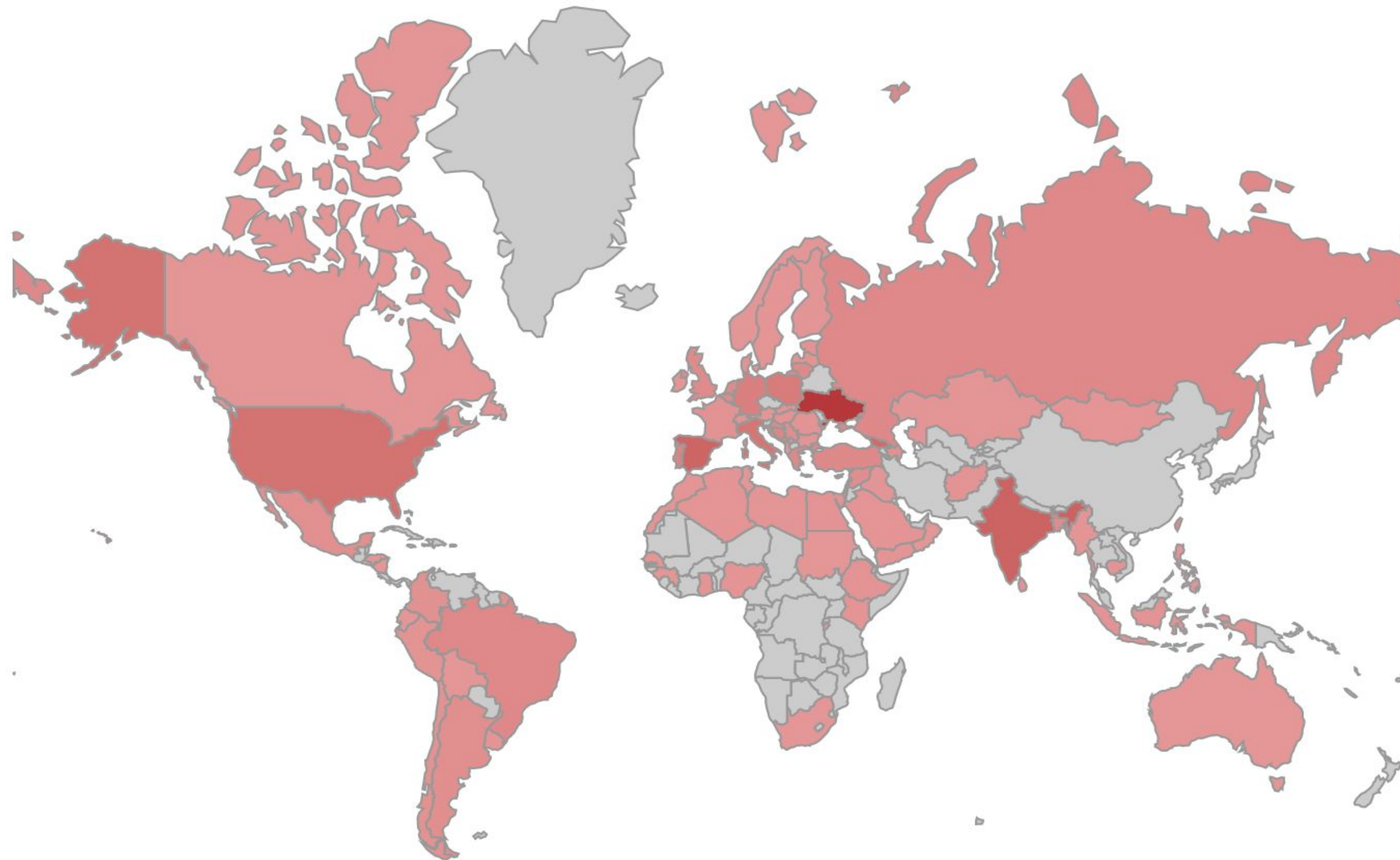
Source: <https://apimagesblog.com/russia-ukraine-war-drafts/2022/3/15/day-20-premature-babies-among-innocents-of-war>

Case 3: Attempts to manipulate the West



The Reach of Kremlin Propaganda

Shades of red indicate the amount of disinformation related to the war in Ukraine that has been debunked (by International Fact-Checking Network signatories) in each country.



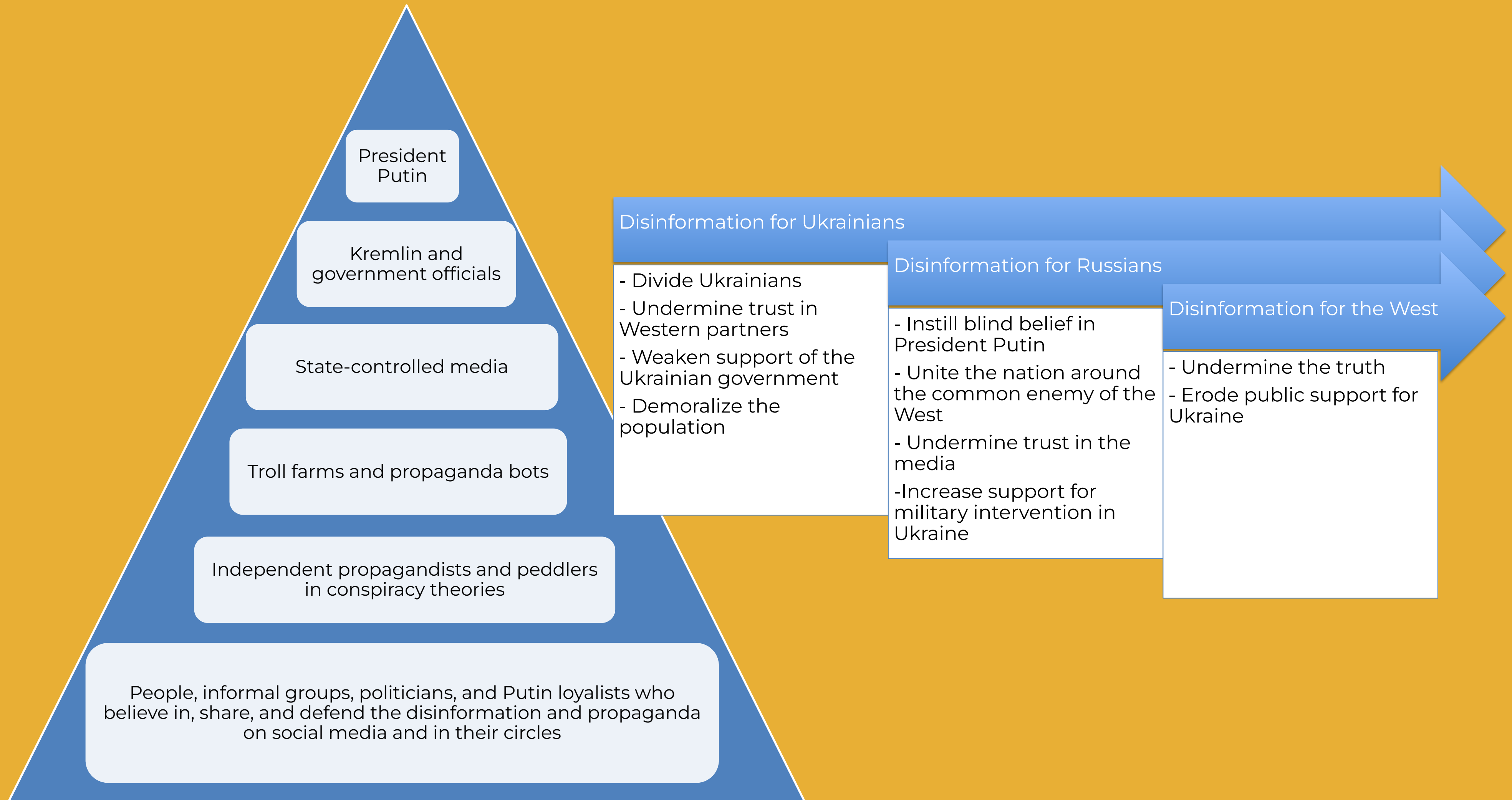
Min: 1 Max: 662

- How would you define disinformation? What about propaganda? Do you think there's a difference between the two? What about disinformation and misinformation?

Definitions:

- **Disinformation:** Disinformation is false information that is deliberately created or disseminated with the express purpose to cause harm. Producers of disinformation typically have political, financial, psychological, or social motivations
- **Misinformation:** Misinformation is information that is false, but not intended to cause harm. For example, individuals who don't know a piece of information is false may spread it on social media in an attempt to be helpful.
- **Propaganda:** Propaganda is **true or false** information spread to persuade an audience, but often has a political connotation and is often connected to information produced by governments. In the case of the Kremlin's information war in Ukraine, propaganda often overlaps with disinformation.

The Propaganda Pyramid



TRUD

Найти работу

Компании

Полезное

Статистика зарплат

Разместить резюме

Работы

Комментатор

Россия

Найти работу

Работа в IT

IT курсы

Стоимость жизни

Голосуй за компанию

Вернуться к полному списку вакансий

Комментатор

Откликнуться на вакансию

Патриот

Регион: Санкт-Петербург

Зарплата: 45000

График работы: сменный

Опыт работы: не имеет значения

Описание вакансии

У нас открывается новый проект по противодействию дезинформации в сети. Работа будет вестись по новостной повестке, сейчас это, конечно, Украина. По этой теме распространяется сейчас очень много вранья против России, в том числе в телеграме и других соцсетях и нужно с этим бороться.

Примерный принцип работы следующий: видите в соцсетях опубликован фейк, заходим и оставляем комментарий с опровержением, по фактам разбираем, почему это фейк. Самим ничего разоблачать и расследовать не нужно, специалисты будут предоставлять необходимую информацию. Руководитель укажет на конкретные новости с фейками. Работа будет вестись в основном в телеграм.

Проект рассчитан на 2-3 месяца, пока идет шумиха. В дальнейшем, если вас устроит работа в нашей компании, возможен переход в другие проекты. Событий в мире хватает, потому в проектах недостатка нет.

На данный момент норма порядка 200 комментариев, но все решается по ситуации.

Job description of a "Commentator" on a job search site in Russia:

*“Your role is to refute disinformation. **You do not have to analyze anything yourself**, the texts for comments will be given to you by management, these messages will be prepared in advance by other specialists.”*

How does this ad talk about the job of being a troll?
Why do you think someone would apply for this job?

Kremlin disinformation in Ukraine

Historical Background

- In 18th century, Catherine II ordered a reforming of Russian history around Kyivan Rus'
- "Brotherhood of nations" between Russia and Ukraine
- Since the founding of the USSR, Russia has been systematically revising history by curating and spreading narratives that completely undermine Ukrainian identity and statehood



- What are the ways you've heard that Kremlin propaganda directs its narratives to Ukrainian audiences?
- What do you think are the main goals of Kremlin propaganda in Ukraine for Ukrainian citizens?

Goals

1. Divide Ukrainians
2. Undermine trust in Western partners
3. Weaken support of the Ukrainian government
4. Demoralize the population

1. Divide Ukrainians

- For decades, the Kremlin has been trying to divide Ukrainians along linguistic, political, and cultural lines.
- Both the Kremlin annexation of Crimea and the occupation of parts of Donetsk and Luhansk in 2014 were justified under the premise of “protecting the rights of the Russian-speaking population.”
- The language issue has also been used to support a radical narrative about Ukrainian nationalists or “Nazis” who, according to Kremlin propaganda, make up most of western Ukraine.

DISINFO: RUSSIAN LANGUAGE IS ENTIRELY FORBIDDEN IN UKRAINE

SUMMARY

The Russian language was cancelled entirely in Ukraine: education in Russian was cancelled, the media in Russian was cancelled.

PUBLICATION/MEDIA

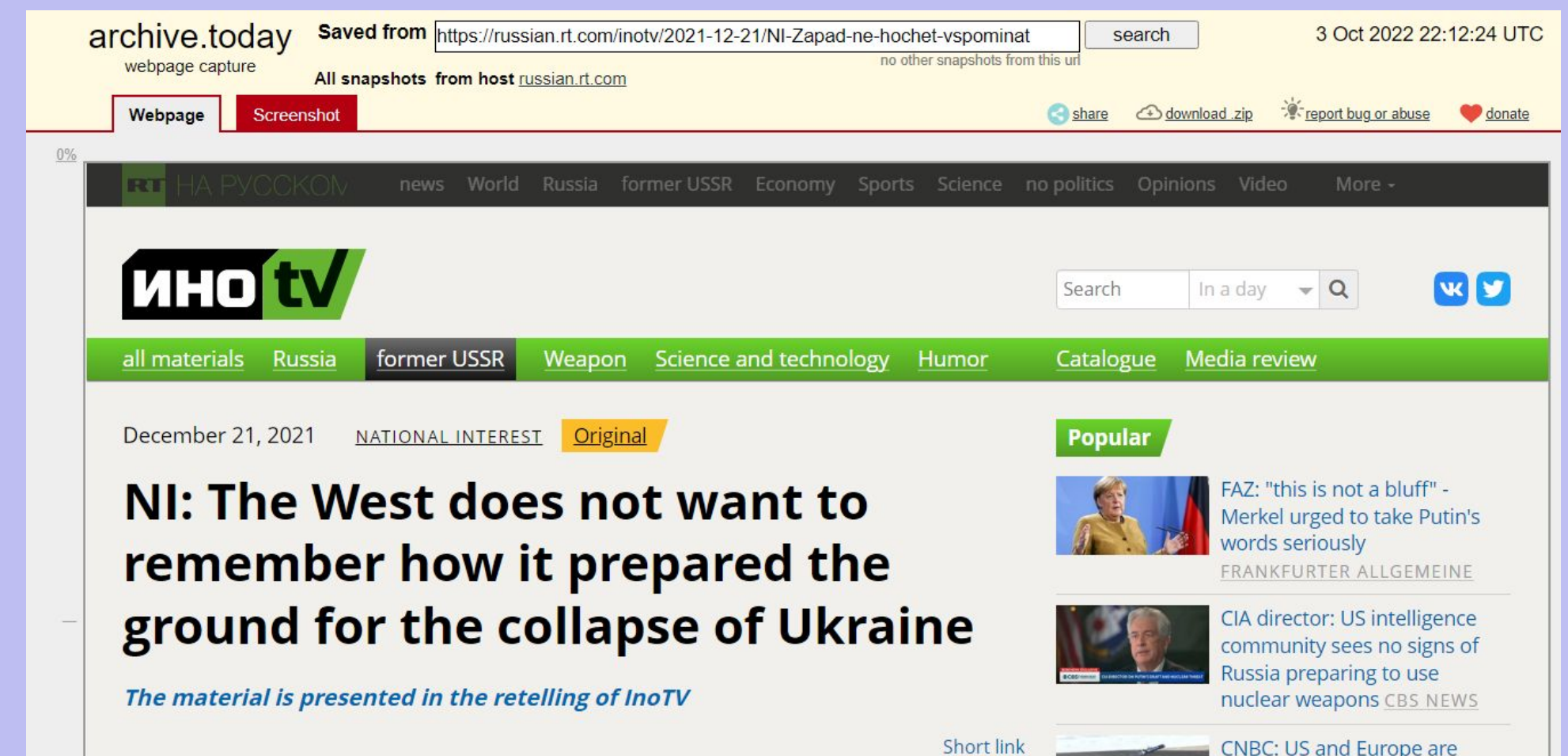
→ [60 minut @Rossiya 1 - YouTube \(Archived\)](#)



- How does the term “Little Russians” and allegations of nationalism manipulate Ukrainian citizens who believe Ukraine should not become part of Russia?
- How do the terms manipulate Ukrainian citizens who have some positive sentiments toward Russia and the Soviet Union? What tensions does this labeling cause?

2. Undermine trust in Western partners

- Ukraine as a country exists only as a “puppet” of its Western partners
- One of the goals of the network of pro-Kremlin TV channels which operated in Ukraine until their ban in 2021 was to undermine public trust in the EU and NATO.
- During the war, the Kremlin has simultaneously attempted to sow despair and frustration among Ukrainians by convincing them of Western partners’ betrayal



3. Weaken support of the Ukrainian political leadership

- Kremlin propaganda has been working to diminish public trust in the Ukrainian authorities, claiming they are dependent on the West and too weak to lead the country.
- On March 2, the Ukrainian government's Center for Strategic Communication warned the Kremlin was likely preparing a **“deepfake”** video
- A few days later, a fake and heavily manipulated video depicting Zelensky appearing to tell his soldiers to lay down their arms started circulating on social media and was placed on a Ukrainian news website by hackers.

3. Weaken support of the Ukrainian political leadership



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2tggX5WVhr0&t=41s>

4. Demoralize the population

- At the beginning of the full-scale war, the Kremlin tried to convince Ukrainians that they had been abandoned by their own president.
- False accusations of war crimes allegedly committed by Ukrainian forces on Ukrainian soil
- Overplaying energy and food crises and blaming them on the shortcomings of the Ukrainian government
- In the first month of the war, multiple pro-Kremlin social media posters and Russian state news sites spread the false claim that Zelensky fled Ukraine after the beginning of the full-scale Russian invasion



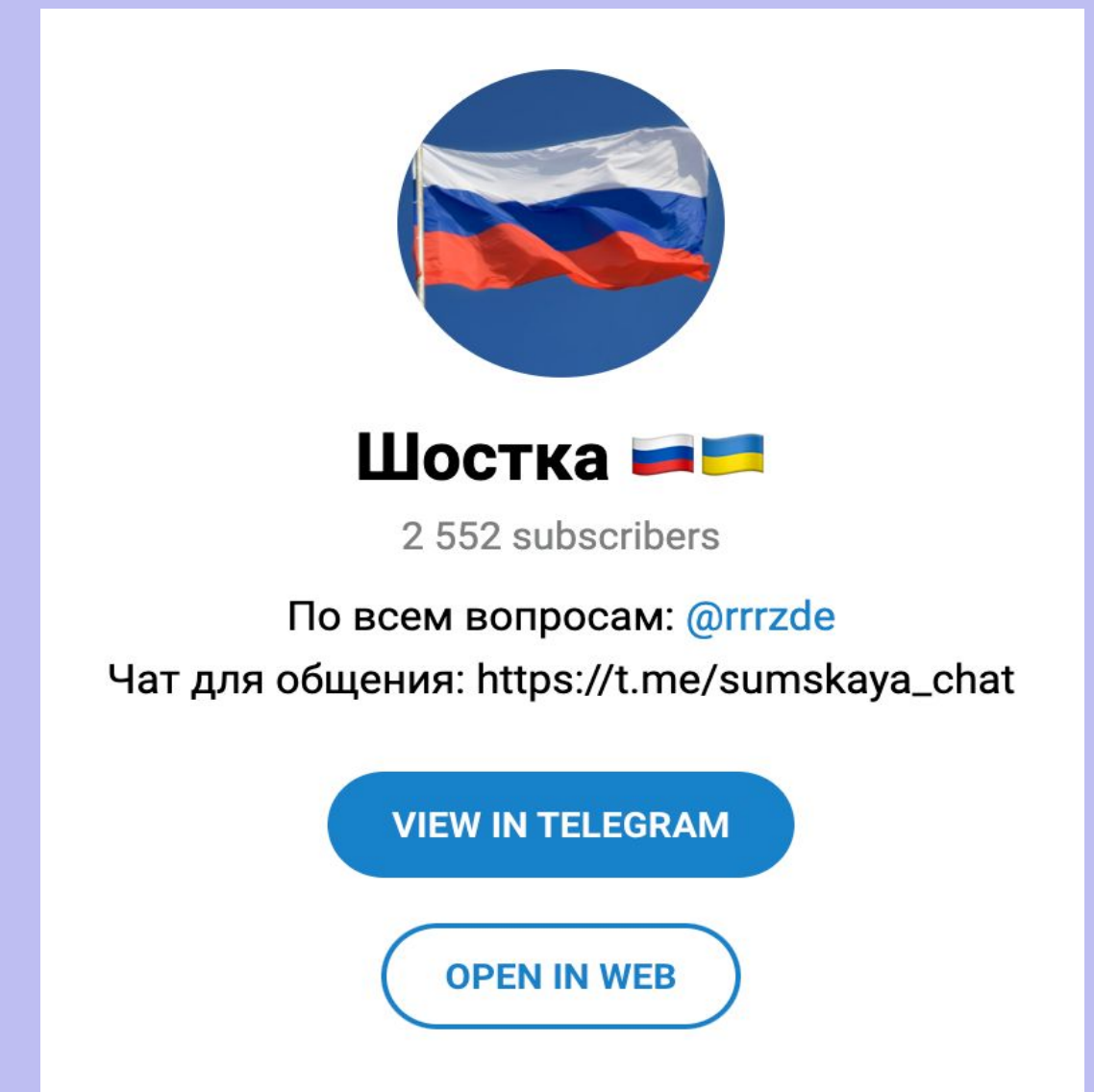
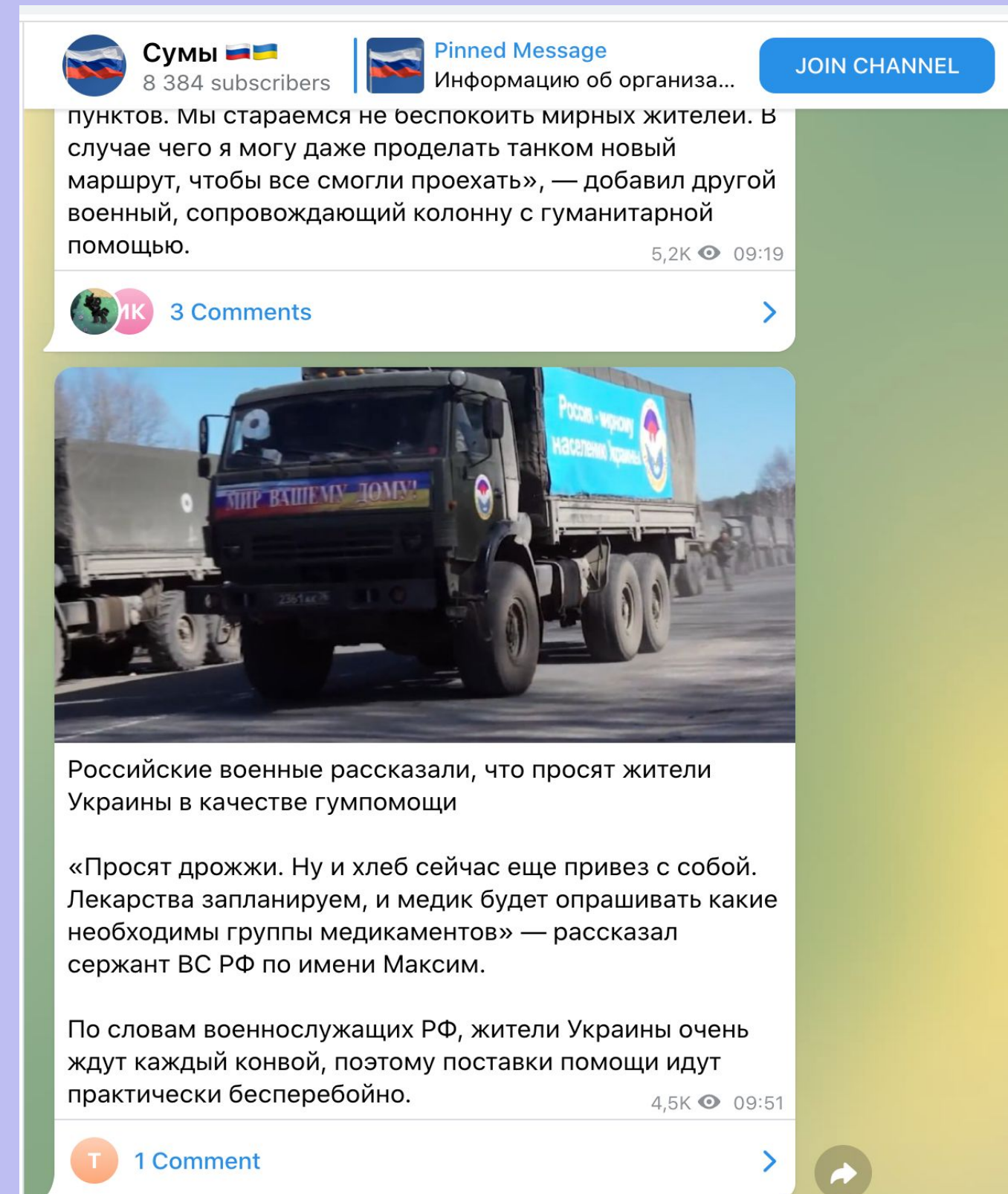
“Zelensky fled Ukraine. A deputy of Ukrainian parliament said they could not reach him in Lviv. Now he is in Poland. – State Duma speaker Vyacheslav Volodin”

Tactics

1.) Fake Telegram Channels

"Russian soldiers said what locals in Ukraine ask for in humanitarian aid.

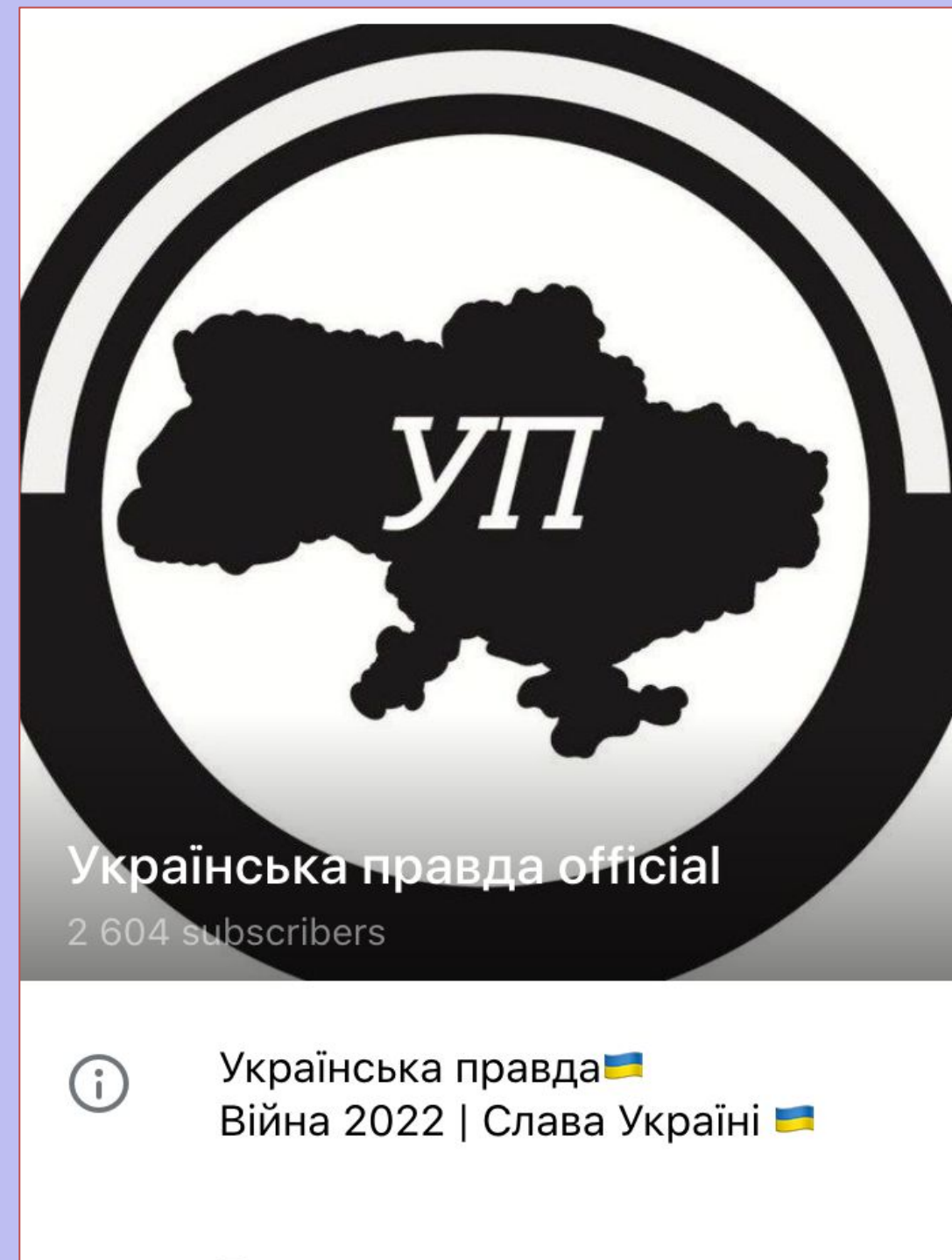
They ask for yeast. Well and I've brought some bread with me now. We're planning to bring medicine, and a medic will examine what groups of medicine are needed – said a Sergeant of the Russian army named Maksim"



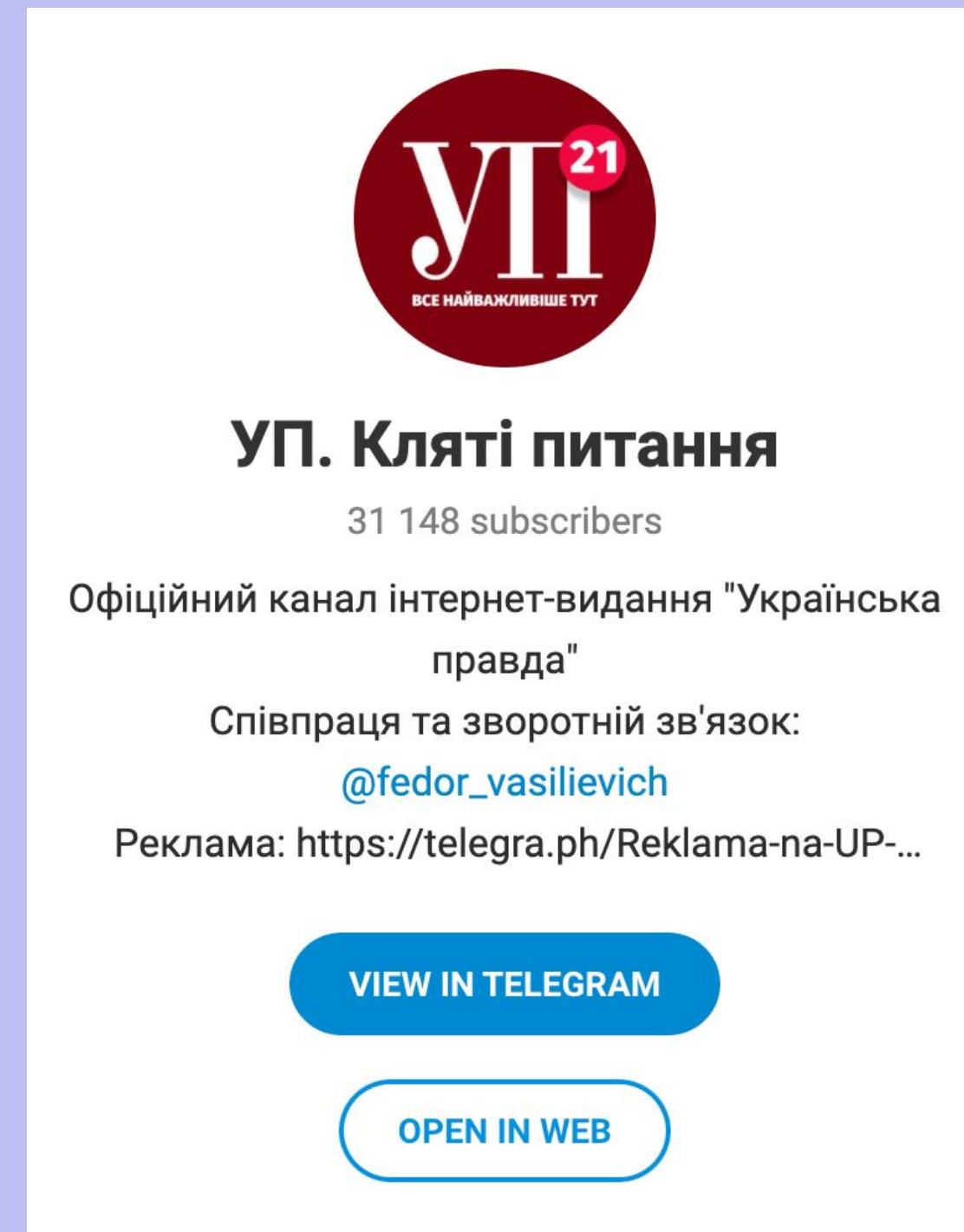
Another fake channel, for the city of Shostka

Telegram channels imitating reputable media

Fake



Real

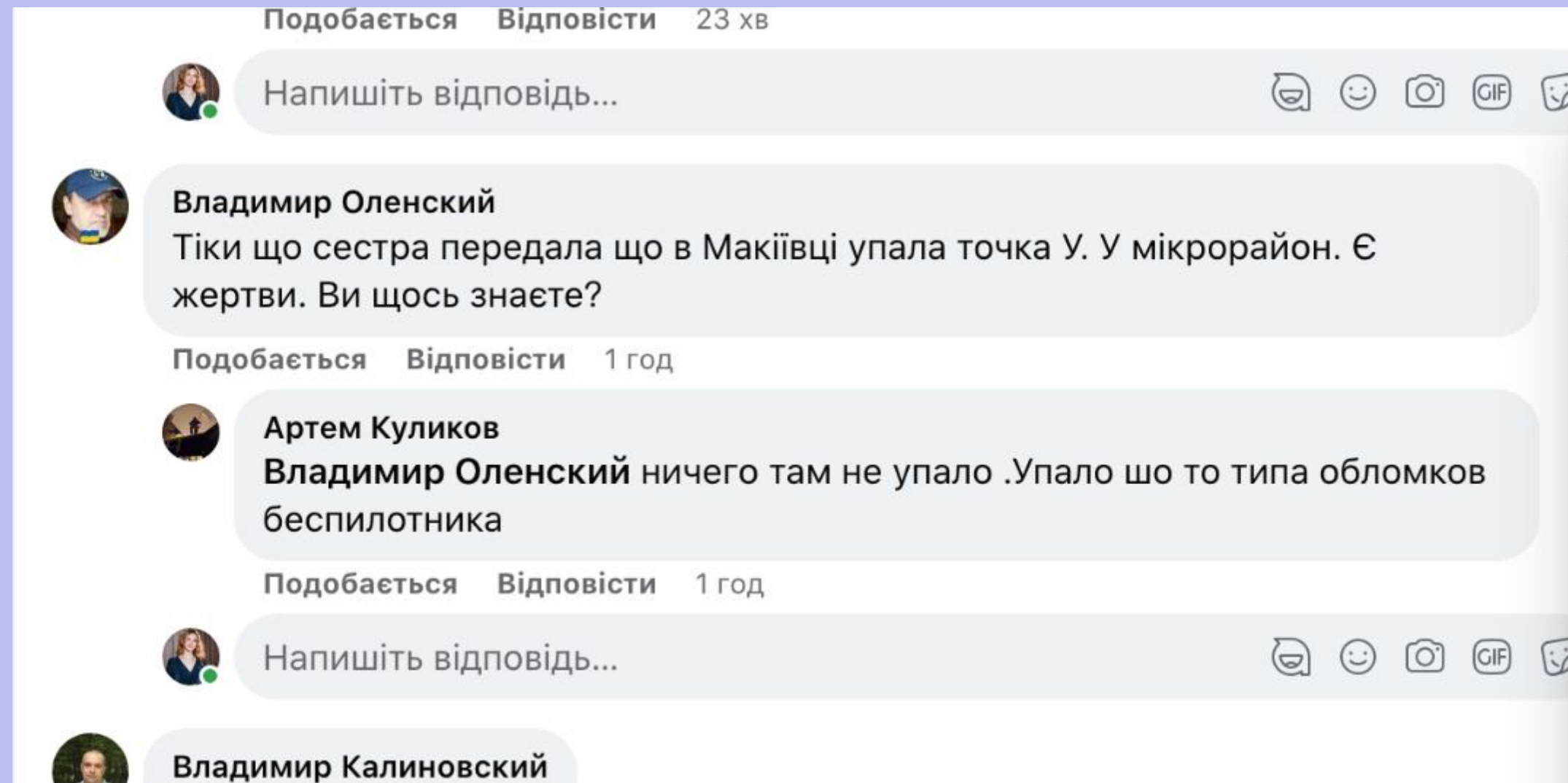


2.) Bots and trolls in local Facebook groups

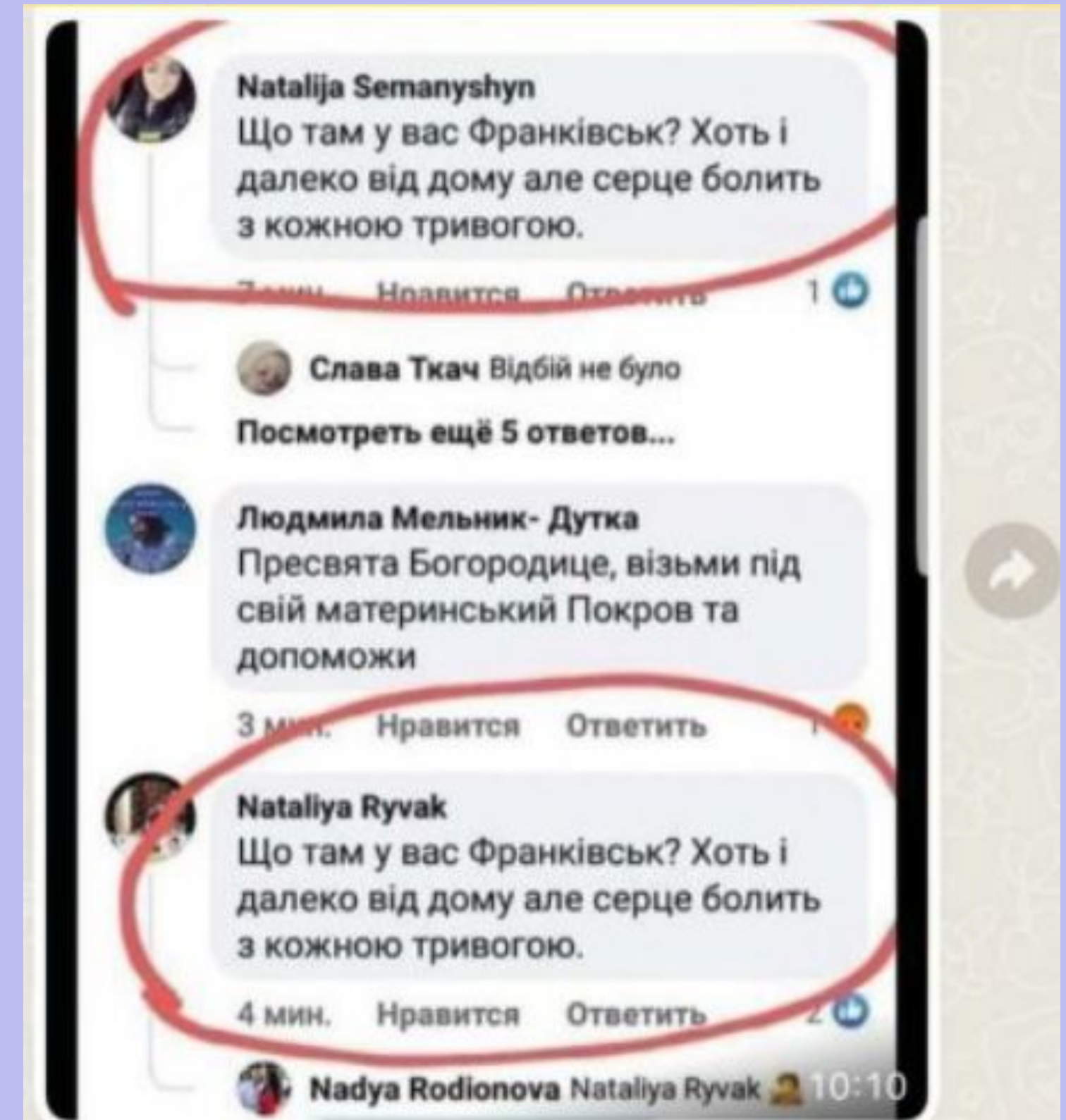
- Post made-up stories about violence or death, personal tragedy.
- Argue the Ukrainian government is responsible for ordinary people's suffering



Kremlin bots and trolls asking for location details



"My sister told me that point U fell in Makiivka. In the neighborhood. There are victims. Do you know something?"



Both comments are the same: "What is there in Frankivsk? Although far from home, my heart aches with anxiety."

Russian Telegram channels sharing instructions on how to create fakes and spread disinformation in Ukraine

“How to create a good fake. Here is a short guide based on my experience and knowledge of Ukrainian psychology.

✓ **Fake should be banal.** In order to influence masses, it is not necessary to invent anything supernatural. Better even add a little of absurdity. For example, everyone understands that red marks on the roofs of houses are absolutely impossible to use to adjust the fire of cruise missiles. But the tale about the ubiquitous spotters lives on in any war.

✓ **A fake should contain a powerful message and leave space for the victim's own fantasies.** Enemies are all around! The mayor is a Russian spy! Homeless Vasya is a saboteur!

✓ **Fake should take into account local details.** Mention the names of concrete villages. There are some Russian tanks in the village N!

✓ **Multiple repetition.** Written by three people in the chat, the message already becoming the Ultimate Truth. And if you add the sacred "The authorities are all lying!", this is a win.”



Записк...

17 209 sub...

Pinned Message

Несмотря на ряд факторов, кот...



Поскольку многие ребята-добровольцы, с первых дней забивавшие украинские чаты панической информацией, благодаря которым нам удалось провести несколько блестящих медиакампаний и даже организовать перестрелки с потерями у ВСУ и терробороны, интересуются, как сделать годный фейк, дам короткий гайд на основании опыта и некоторого знания украинской психологии.

✓ Фейк должен быть банален. Чтобы воздействовать на широкие слои, не надо придумывать ничего сверхъестественного. Лучше даже добавить немного абсурда. Например, каждому понятно, что красные метки на крышах домов абсолютно невозможно использовать для корректировки огня крылатыми ракетами. Но сказка о вездесущих корректировщиках живет на любой войне.

✓ Фейк должен содержать в себе мощный месседж и оставлять пространство для собственных фантазий, подвергшегося воздействию. Кругом враги! Мэр - русский шпион! Бомж Вася - диверсант! Ну ведь правда, есть отличная от нуля вероятность, что бомж Вася может быть агентом ГРУ под прикрытием? Есть.

✓ Фейк должен учитывать местные особенности. Достоверности ему придаёт привязка к местности. В деревне какой-то русские танки! Не важно, что в этой деревне нет дорог и она нафиг никому не нужна. Главное - есть привязка.

✓ Многократное повторение. Написанное тремя людьми в чате уже становится Истинной в последней инстанции. А если еще добавить сакральное "Власти все врут!", то этот фейк не опровергнет ни один аргумент.

Kremlin disinformation in Russia

- What are the ways you've heard the Kremlin propaganda directs its narratives to its domestic audience of Russian citizens?
- What do you think are the main goals of Kremlin propaganda in Russia for Russian citizens?

Goals

1. Instill blind belief in President Putin
2. Unite the nation around the common enemy of the West
3. Undermine trust in the media
4. Increase support for military intervention in Ukraine

1. Instill blind belief in President Putin

- Over the past two decades, Russian President Vladimir Putin has worked tirelessly on his personal image to achieve political legitimacy
- In these narratives, Putin is positioned as the authoritative masculine protector of Russia, someone who brings stability to the country through shielding it against an array of threats



2. Unite the nation around common enemies – the West and NATO

- The Kremlin pushes the notion that Western civilization is collapsing due to its support for liberal movements such as LGBT rights and feminism.
- By forming a “values”-based disinformation narrative built on the concepts of conservatism and “family values,” supported by the Russian Orthodox Church, Russia argues it serves as a moral counterweight to the moral decay and “decadence” of the West.



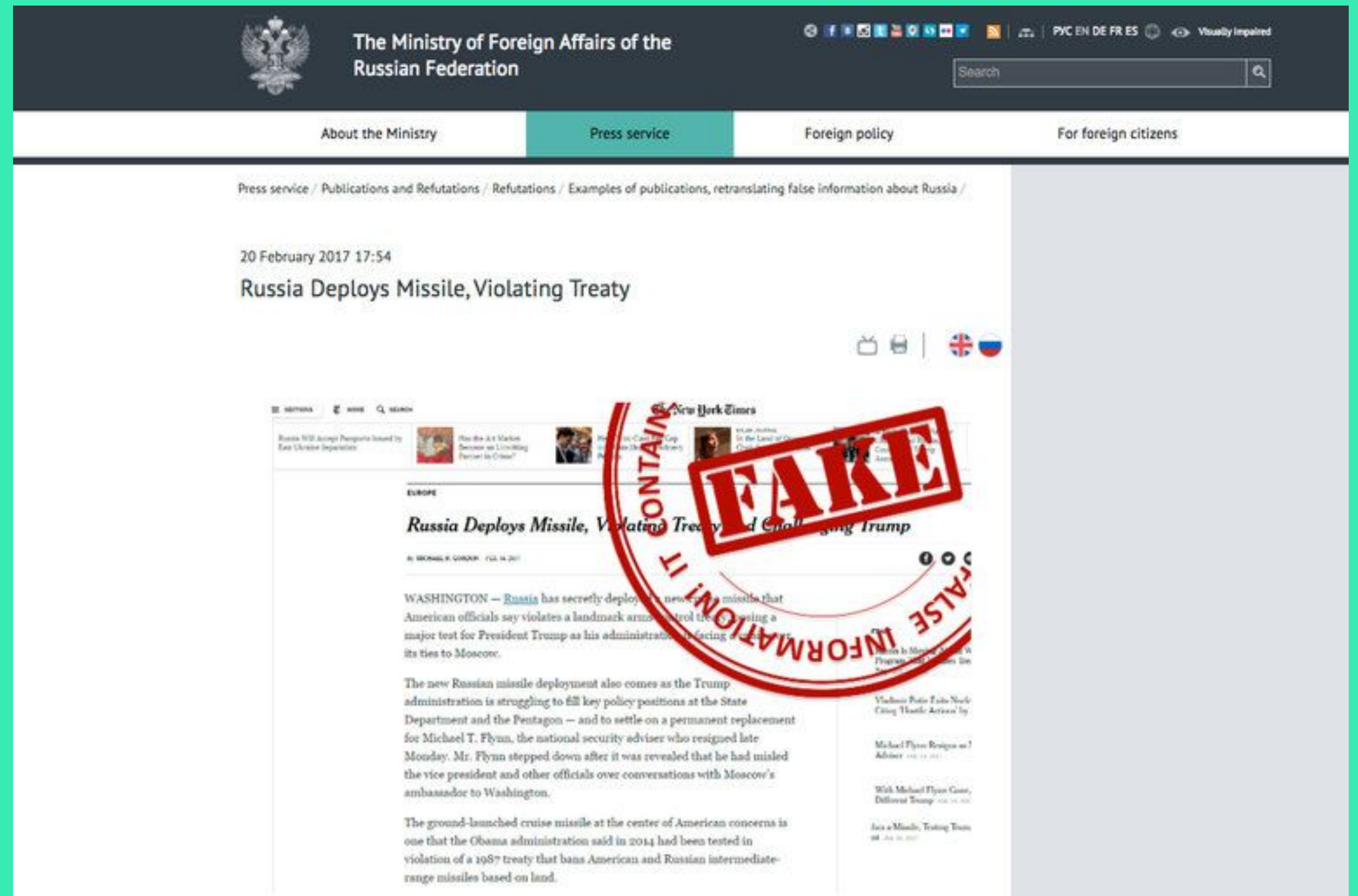
2. Unite the nation around common enemies – the West and NATO



What does this cartoon imply about Europe's past and future? What sorts of "threats" to Russia might the Kremlin be trying to portray in this image? What does this say about how Russia sees itself?

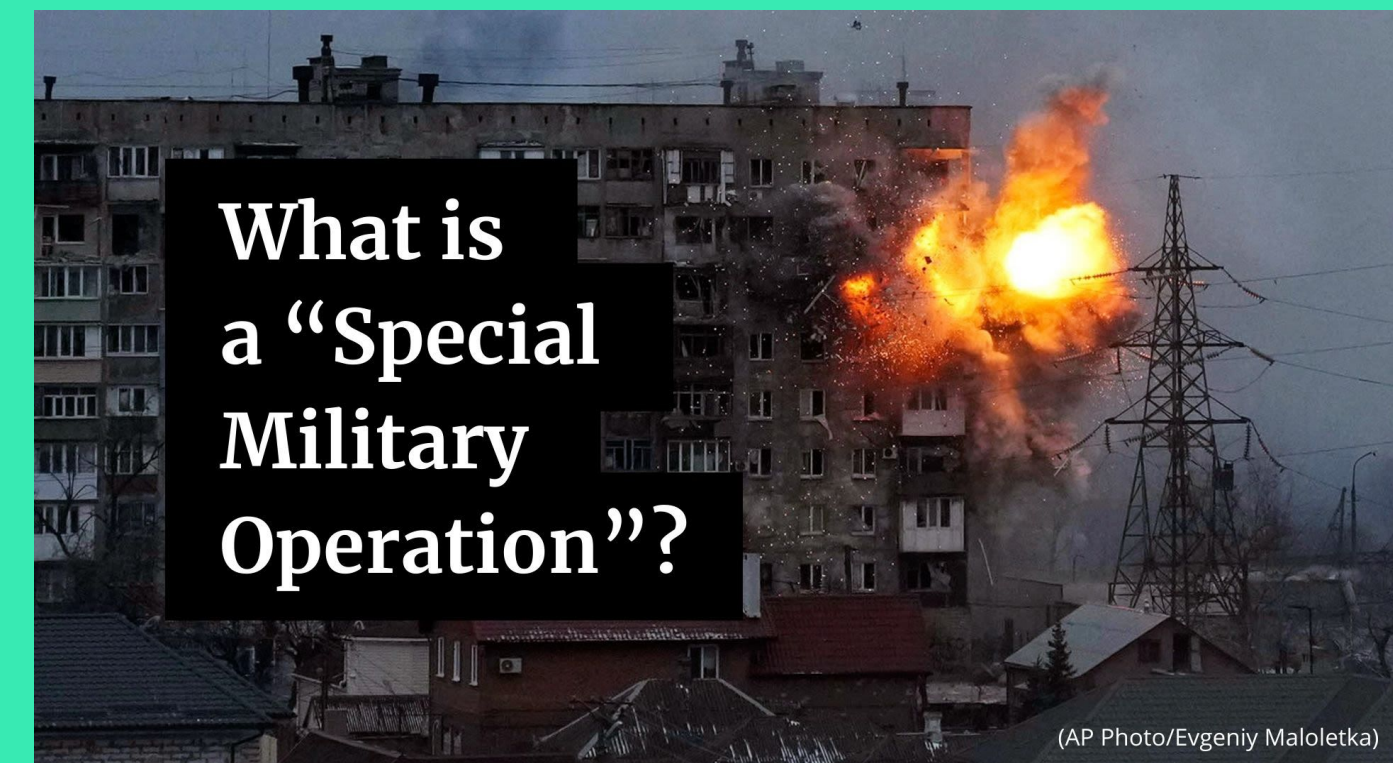
3. Undermine trust in the media

- Decades of propaganda has caused many Russians to lose faith in institutions, and moreover, to stop believing in the pursuit of truth altogether.
- Broad distrust of traditional media both has the effect of discouraging engagement in politics and encouraging citizens to turn to alternative sources such as social media, which often themselves spread disinformation.



4. Increase support for military intervention in Ukraine

- To justify its actions in Ukraine domestically, the Kremlin has relied on a variety of narratives to radicalize an otherwise cynical and politically disillusioned Russian population
- This has included both denying that there is a war in Ukraine in the first place, instead a restrained **“special military operation,”** for which there only will be **“partial” mobilization**, and while also spreading the idea that the military operation is both welcomed by Ukrainians and justified by the need for **“denazification”** in the country.



MILITARY OPERATION IN UKRAINE 25 FEB, 19:38

Russian troops welcomed with flags in Ukraine's Melitopol

The Russian Defense Ministry reassured that Russian troops are not targeting Ukrainian cities, but are limited to surgically striking and incapacitating Ukrainian military infrastructure

MOSCOW, February 26. /TASS/. Russian forces have swept into Melitopol meeting no resistance during the operation aimed at demilitarizing Ukraine, the Russian Defense Ministry told reporters.

Tactics

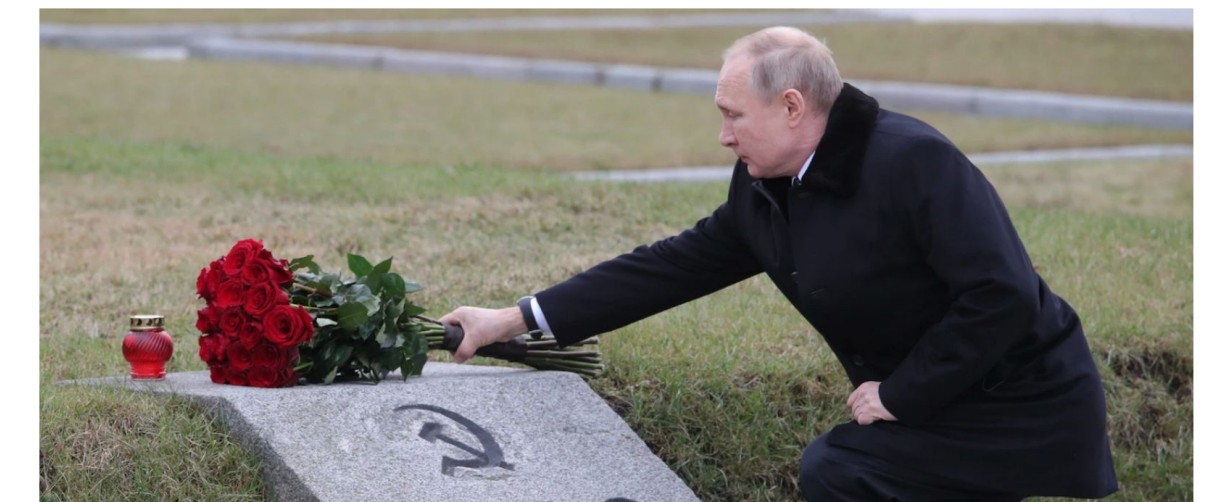
1. Historical Revisionism

- When history does not align with the Kremlin's political objectives, Russian government officials and their proxy voices deny historical events or distort historical narratives to cast Russia in a more favorable light and serve its domestic and geopolitical agenda.
- Brotherhood/"One People" narrative used to support imperialistic agenda

Vladimir Putin Wants to Rewrite the History of World War II

The Russian president's amateur history lessons are outraging neighboring countries. While he is right to criticize a recent EU Parliament resolution, his historical revisionism doesn't stand up to scrutiny.

By [Sergey Radchenko](#)



1. Historical Revisionism



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KXdCy_MaSgM

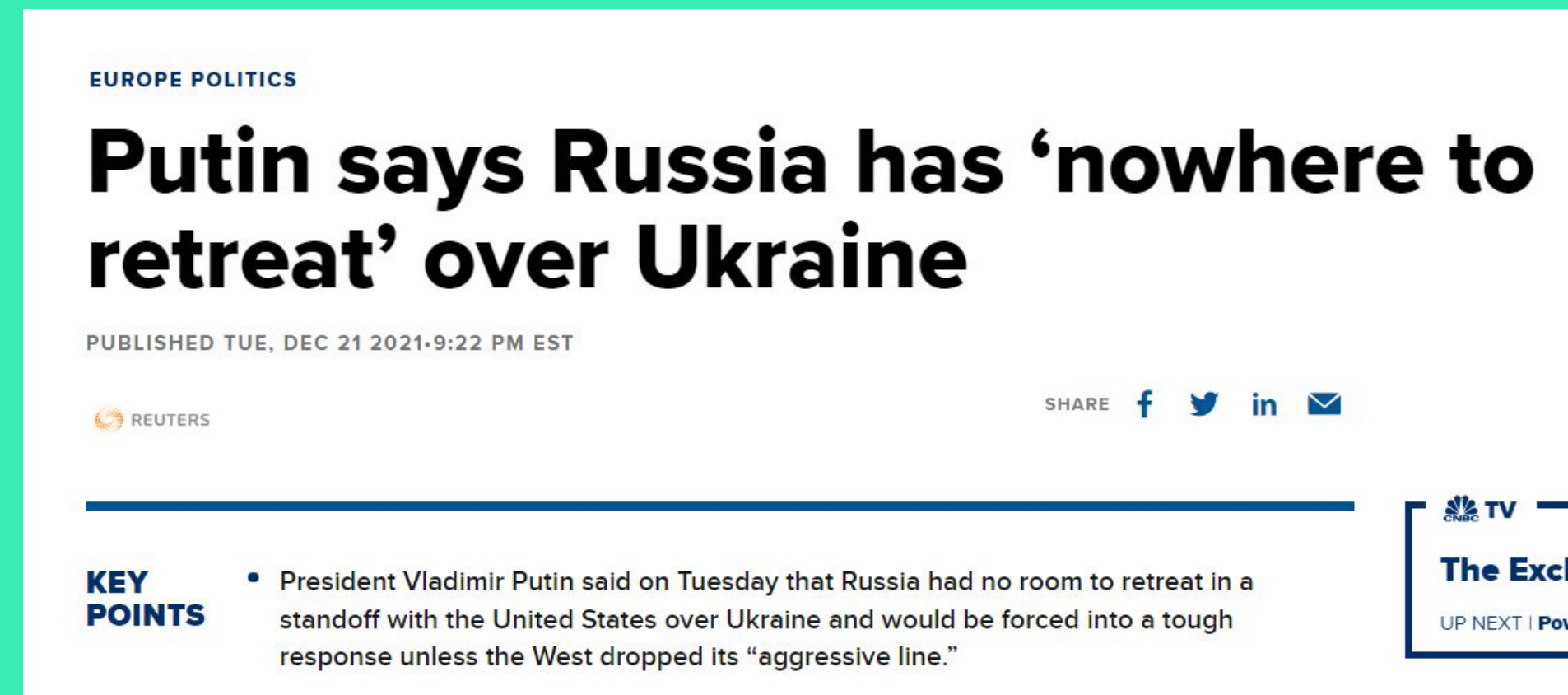
(Translated from original; https://tsargrad.tv/shows/pokazhite-jeto-svoim-detjam-skazka-pro-vanju-i-mykolu_503800)

1. Historical Revisionism

- Putin's essay *"On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians"* (July 12, 2021):
 - "true sovereignty of Ukraine is possible only in partnership with Russia"
 - Referring to 17th-century and later imperial Russia: Bolsheviks "chopped the country into pieces" and "Russia was robbed"
- Putin's address to the nation (Feb 21, 2022):
 - "Ukraine is not just a neighboring country for us. It is an inalienable part of our own history, culture and spiritual space."

2. Victimizing Russia

- The idea of Russia as a perpetual victim, subject to an international system vying for the nation's destruction
- Russia's imperialist ambitions are framed as a "forced response" to the perceived threat of the West, particularly NATO, in the country's near abroad.
- Allegations of "Russophobia"



3. Dehumanizing Ukrainians

08:00 03.04.2022 (обновлено: 08:09 03.04.2022) 166931

Что Россия должна сделать с Украиной

© РИА Новости / Иван Родионов / Перейти в фотобанк
Флаги Украины и "Правого сектора"*, найденные в бывшем расположении ВСУ под Мариуполем



“Ukraine must pay for its guilt towards Russia. It must be treated as an enemy, and therefore may develop only in dependency to Russia...

The history has proven: Ukraine may not exist as a national state. Any attempt to create it leads to Nazism. Ukrainianism is an artificial anti-Russian construct. Denazification of Ukraine must be De-Europeanization of it”

4. Religion



Patriarch Kirill, leader of the Russian Orthodox Church



An Orthodox priest blesses soon-to-be soldiers, drafted in Putin's Sept 2022 "partial" mobilization

5. Censorship

- In addition to driving many Western media outlets, including the **BBC, RFE/RL, and Bloomberg News**, out of Russia at the start of war, the Kremlin has moved to censor the opposition altogether through blocking Western social media platforms such as **Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter**.
- The Kremlin has thus effectively created an echo-chamber for pro-war propaganda, making alternative information harder than ever to access.



MOSCOW, March 4 (Reuters) - Russia's parliament on Friday passed a law imposing a jail term of up to 15 years for spreading intentionally "fake" news about the military, stepping up the information war over the conflict in Ukraine.

Kremlin disinformation in the West

Goals

1. Undermine the truth
2. Erode public support for Ukraine

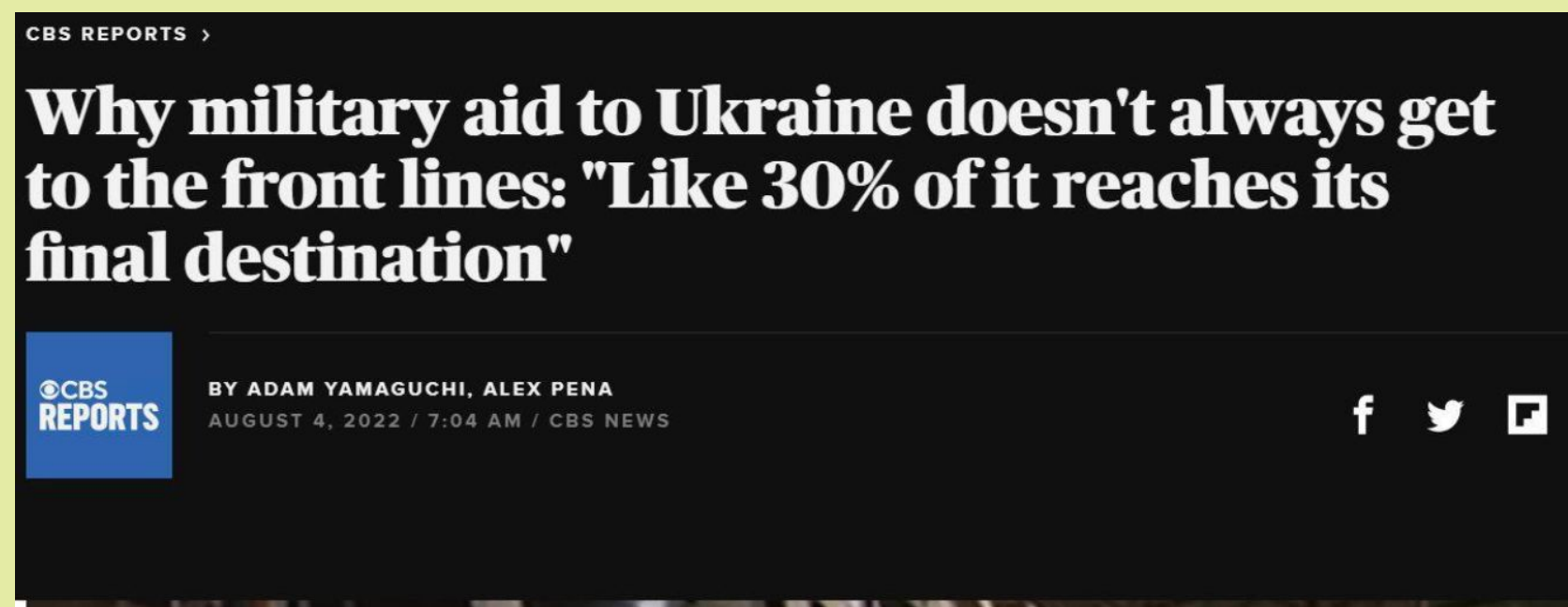
1. Undermine the truth

- Conviction is not the chief goal of disinformation; instilling doubt is.
- This “Russian firehose” model of propaganda is high-output, contradictory and multichannel. The stream encourages us to sleepwalk into apathy, distrustful of everything.



2. Erode public support for Ukraine

- Spreading disinformation about the conflict in Ukraine to present the Ukrainian government in a negative light and instill doubt in Western audiences and policy makers.



War in Ukraine + Add to myFT

Nato and EU sound alarm over risk of Ukraine weapons smuggling

Countries call for greater tracking of arms to stop sales to Europe's black market



Lauren Boebert

@laurenboebert

US House candidate, CO-03

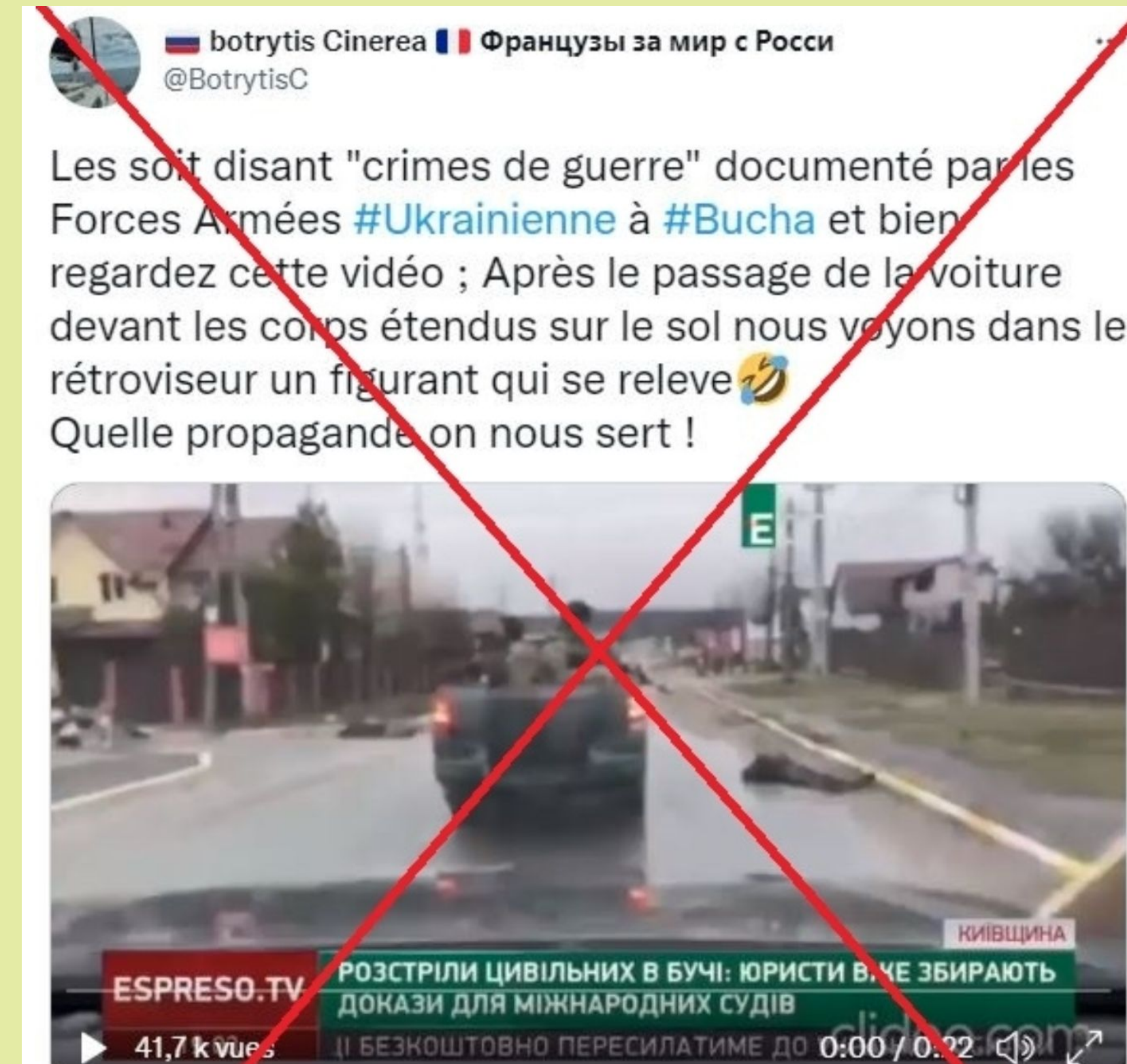
How many people were called Russian bots for saying this exact same thing since March?

Now, when CBS says it, it's perfectly fine.

Whatever the case, glad the facts are out now. The majority of the Ukraine aid is a scam.

2. Erode public support for Ukraine

Bucha massacre as "staged" by "actors"



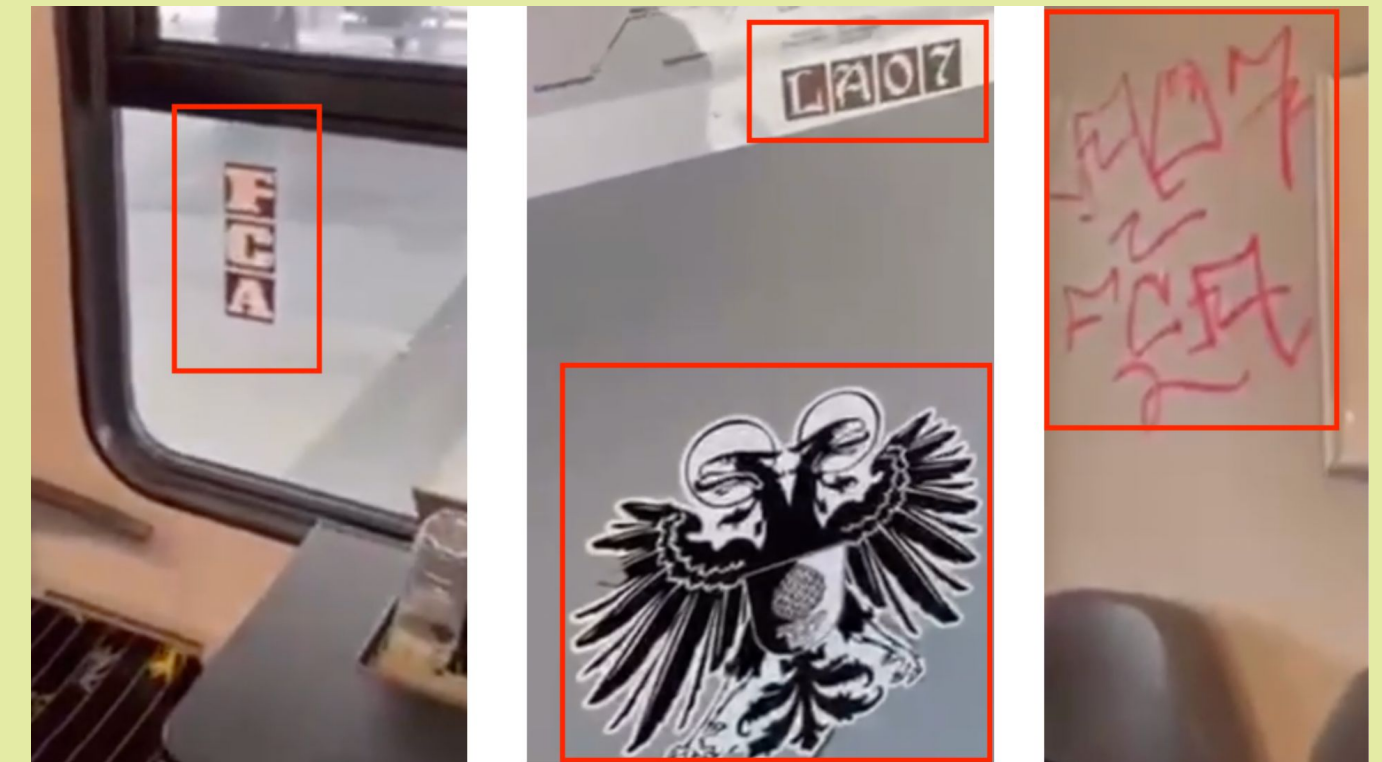
2. Erode public support for Ukraine

Discrediting Ukrainian refugees



"Germany, the driver shows in horror the train in which refugees from Ukraine were brought"

German fact checkers traced the graffiti to fans of the football team FC Augsburg



Tactics

1. Threaten with World War III and nuclear weapons

- Kremlin propaganda has been using its nuclear capabilities as a fearmongering tactic to push the idea that Western countries are provoking escalation to World War III through their support for Ukraine
- Propagandist Dmitry Kiselyov stated in 2014 that in the event of nuclear war, Russia could “turn America into radioactive ashes.”



2. Portray Ukrainians (and Ukraine) in a negative light

- The fact that Ukraine has been at war for eight years has been often diminished or even ignored as the war was presented as an internal problem, rather than one created from abroad by the Kremlin
- Draw on Western efforts to combat right-wing extremism to promote narratives centering on neo-Nazis and ultranationalists in Ukraine.

Russian Internet bots are spreading lies about Ukrainian women who "seduce" foreign men in Poland

03:18, 22.06.22 23 k 3 min

Share: [f](#) [t](#) [w](#) [v](#) [p](#) [l](#)

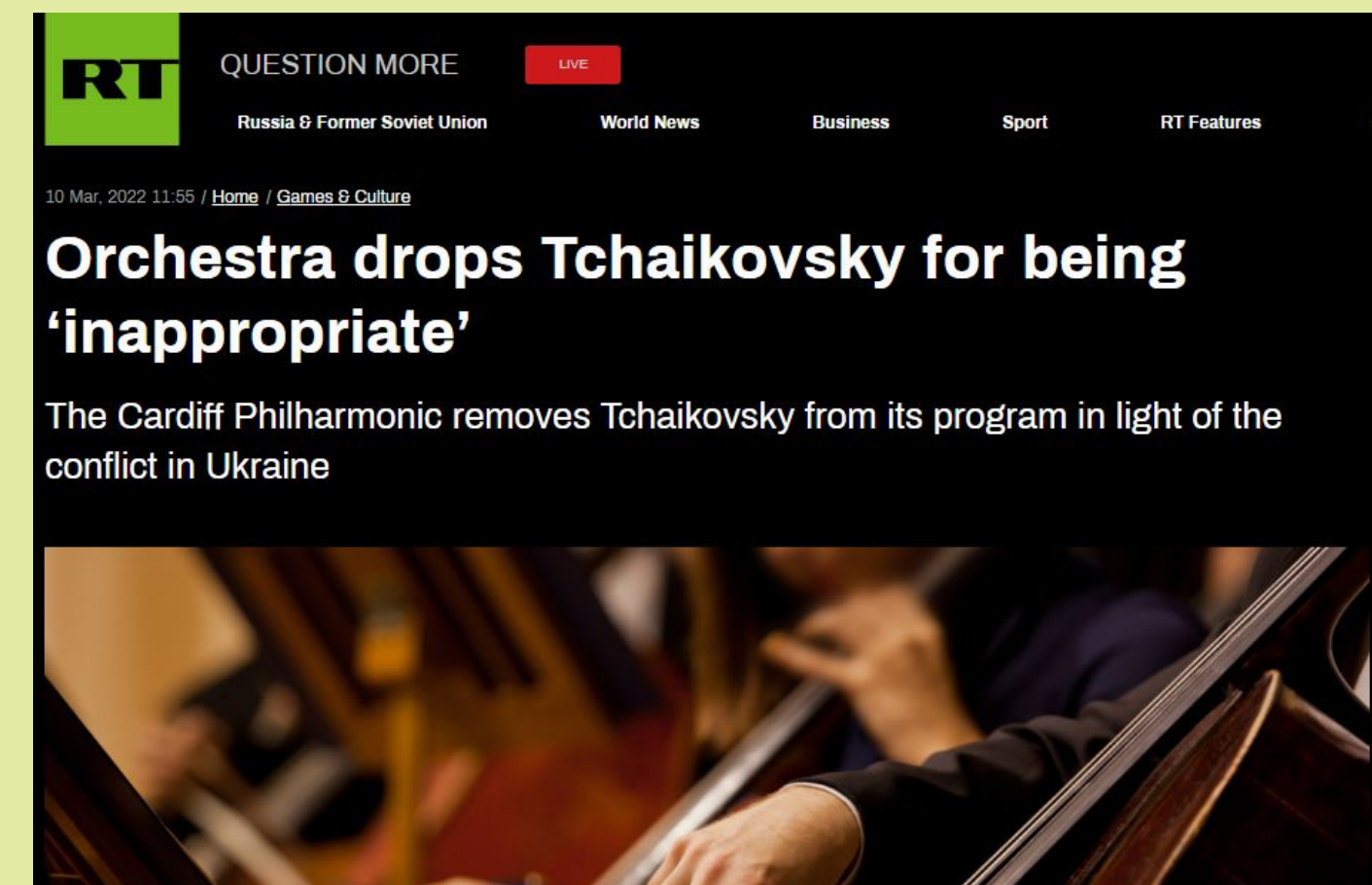


3. Victimizing Russians in the West

- Kremlin propagandists present Western administrations, schools, banks, and health institutions as actors that discriminate against Russians.
- Misleading reports also circulated about alleged attacks on properties belonging to people of Russian origins living abroad.
- After one Italian university cancelled a course on 19th-century Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoevsky (the course was quickly reinstated after backlash), Kremlin media jumped on the idea that Russian culture was being discriminated against in the West.

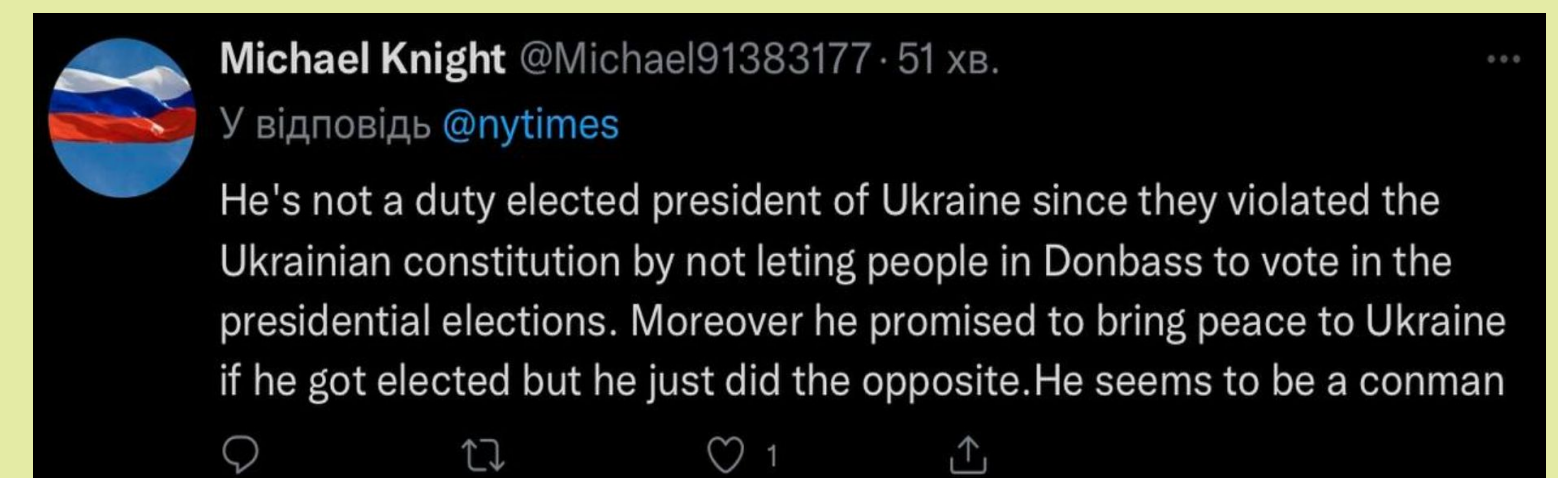


A fake email claiming a hospital in Munich, Germany, no longer serves Russian patients.



4. Victim-blaming Ukraine for not surrendering

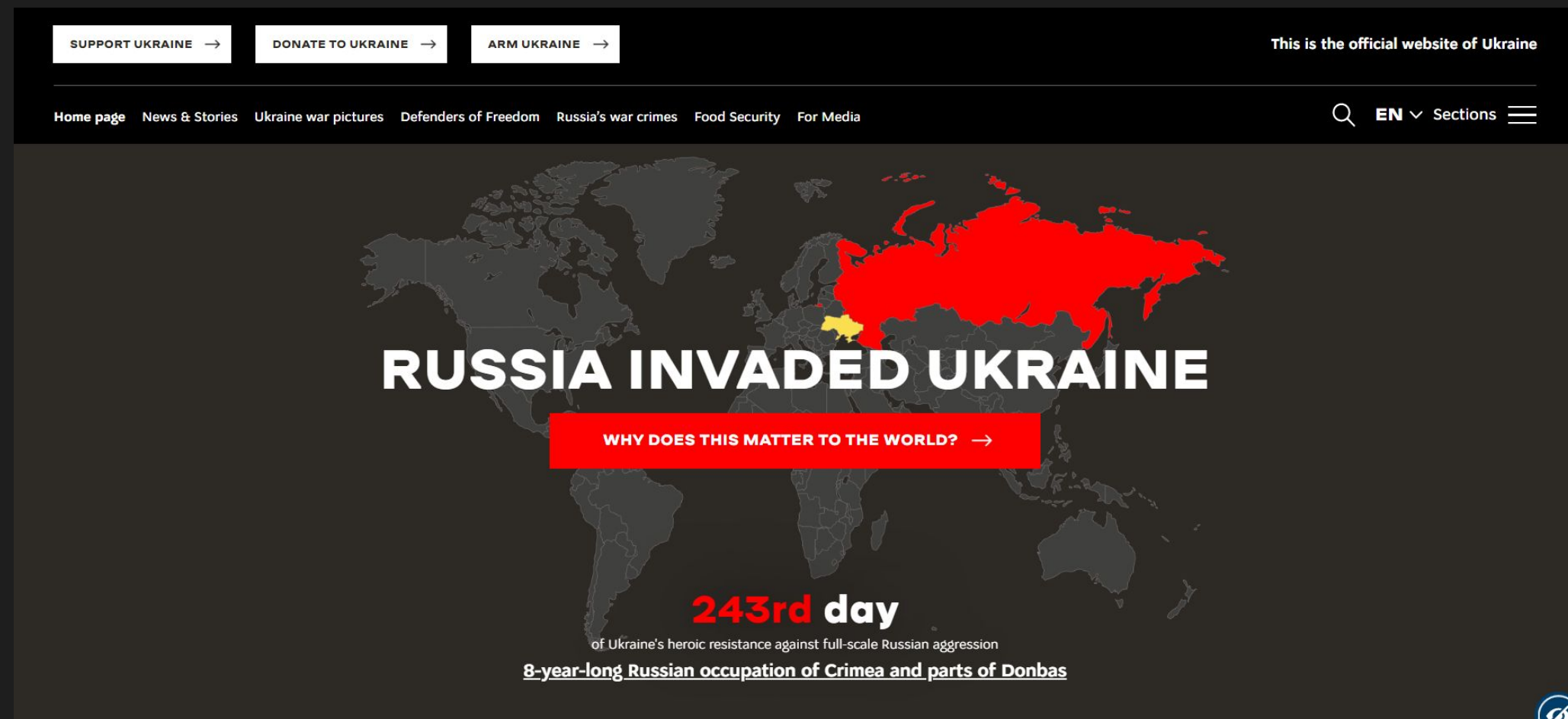
- The Kremlin has manipulated the narrative around peace negotiations to spread the idea of Ukraine as stubbornly prolonging the war through its unwillingness to surrender
- Bots and trolls claim that President Zelenskiy's ego makes him sacrifice his people, or “the fact that he is a comedian,” which is why he (not the Kremlin) is responsible for people dying.



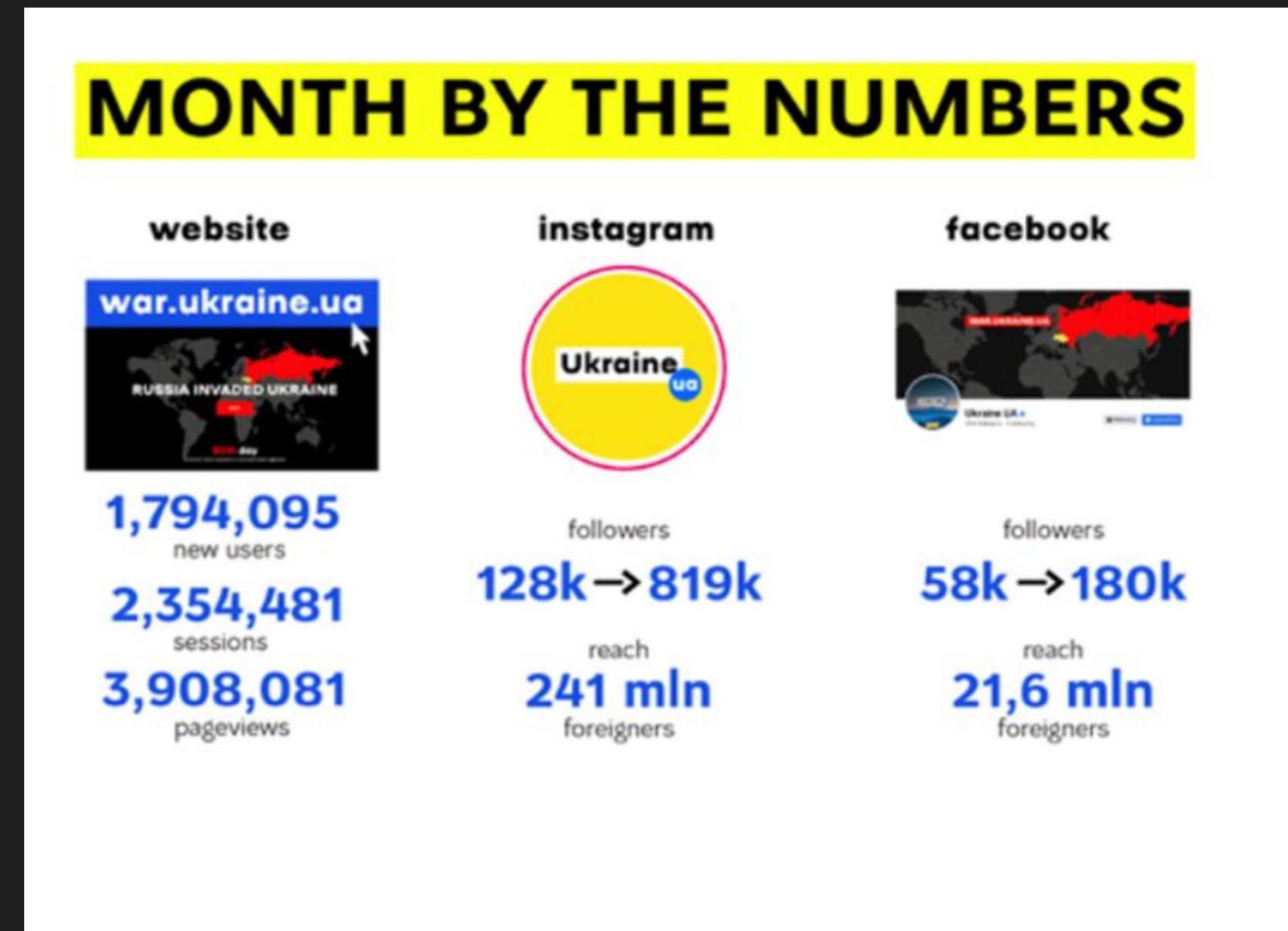
How Ukraine has been fighting the information war

Government initiatives

Ministry of Foreign Affairs



On March 2, Ukraine's Ministry of Foreign Affairs launched war.ukraine.ua, a site that includes up to date news articles about the invasion, human stories of Ukrainian resistance, and an archive of Russian war crimes.



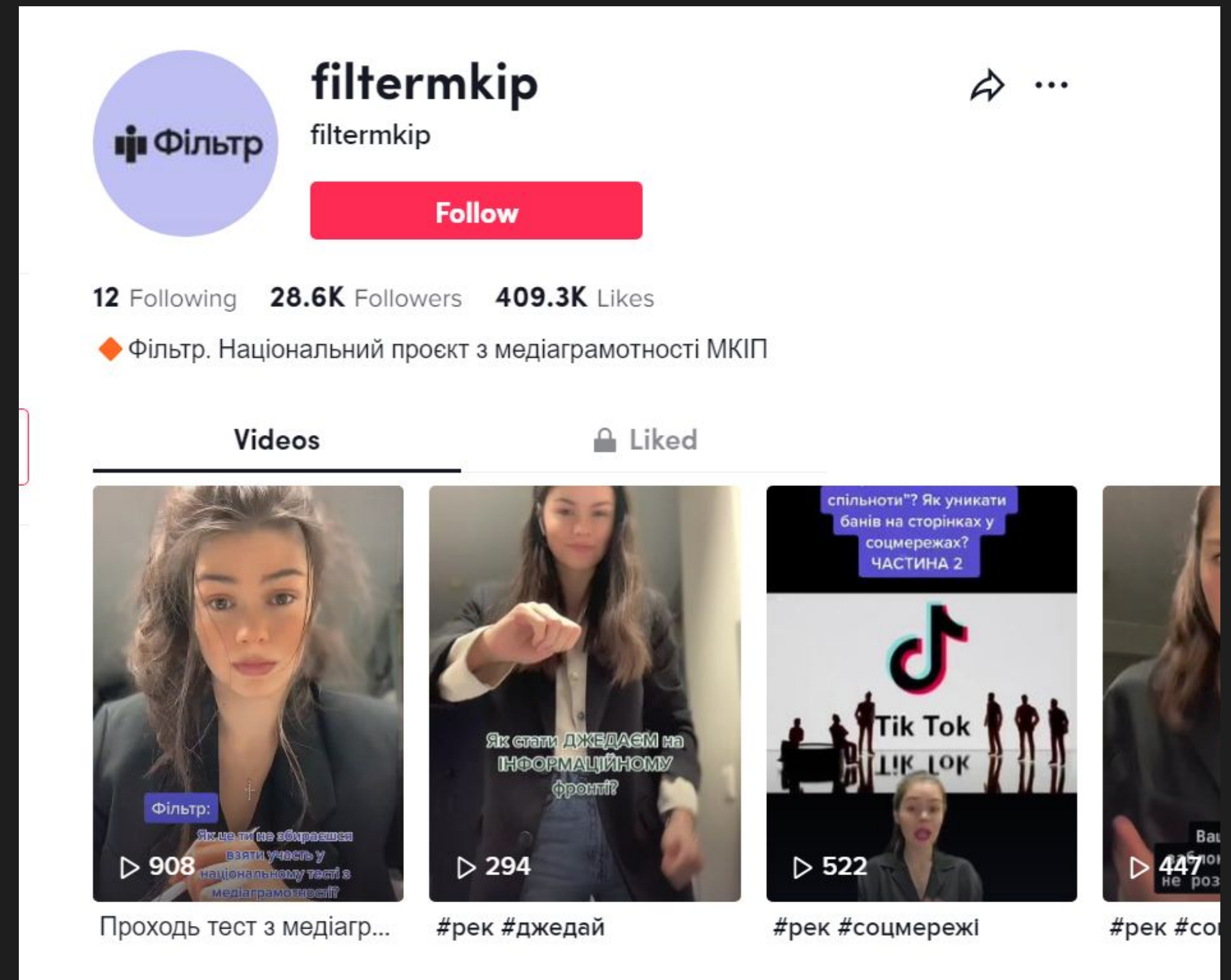
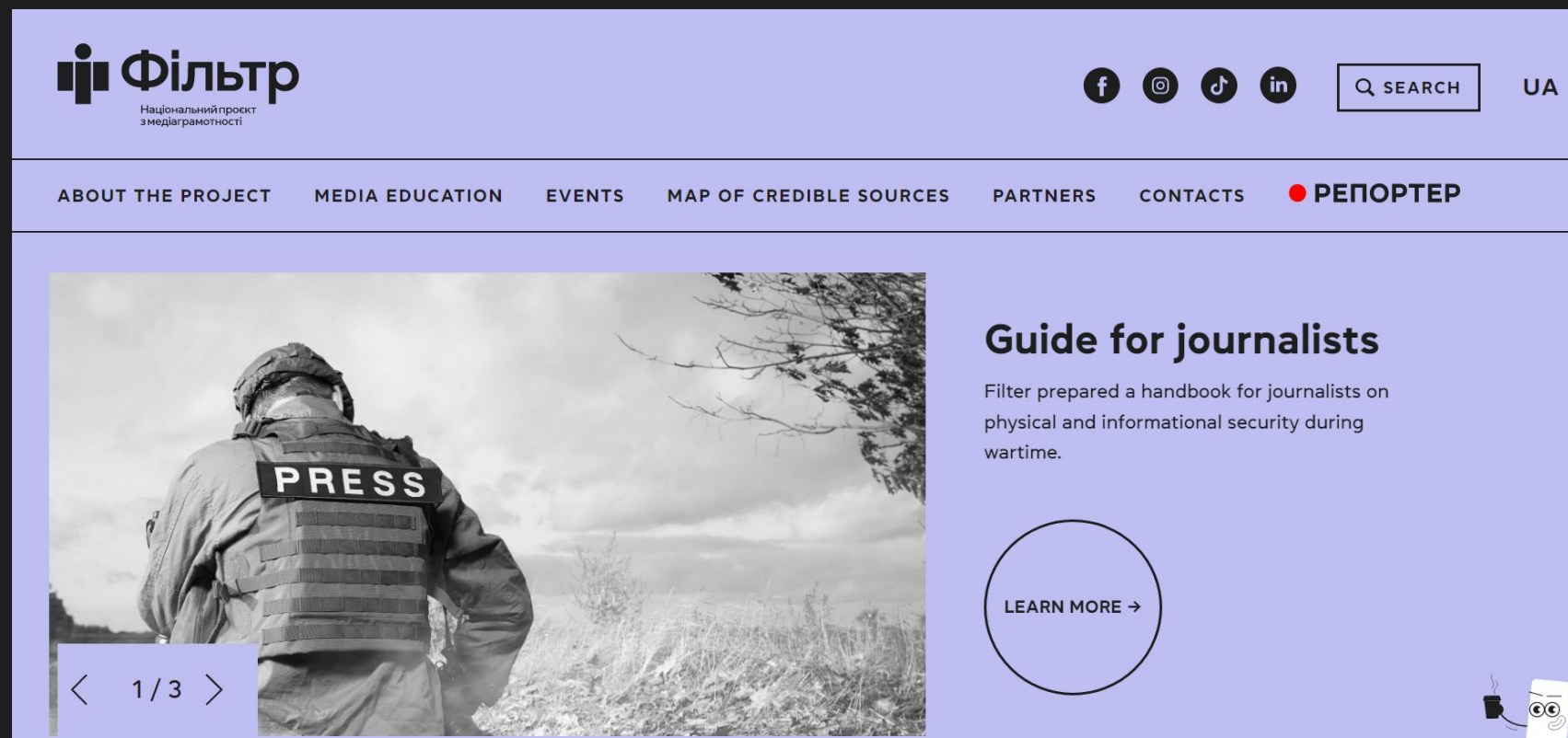
Ukraine.ua's audience from March – April 2022

Ministry of Culture and Information Policy

Filter

National Media Literacy Project of the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine

filter.mkip.gov.ua



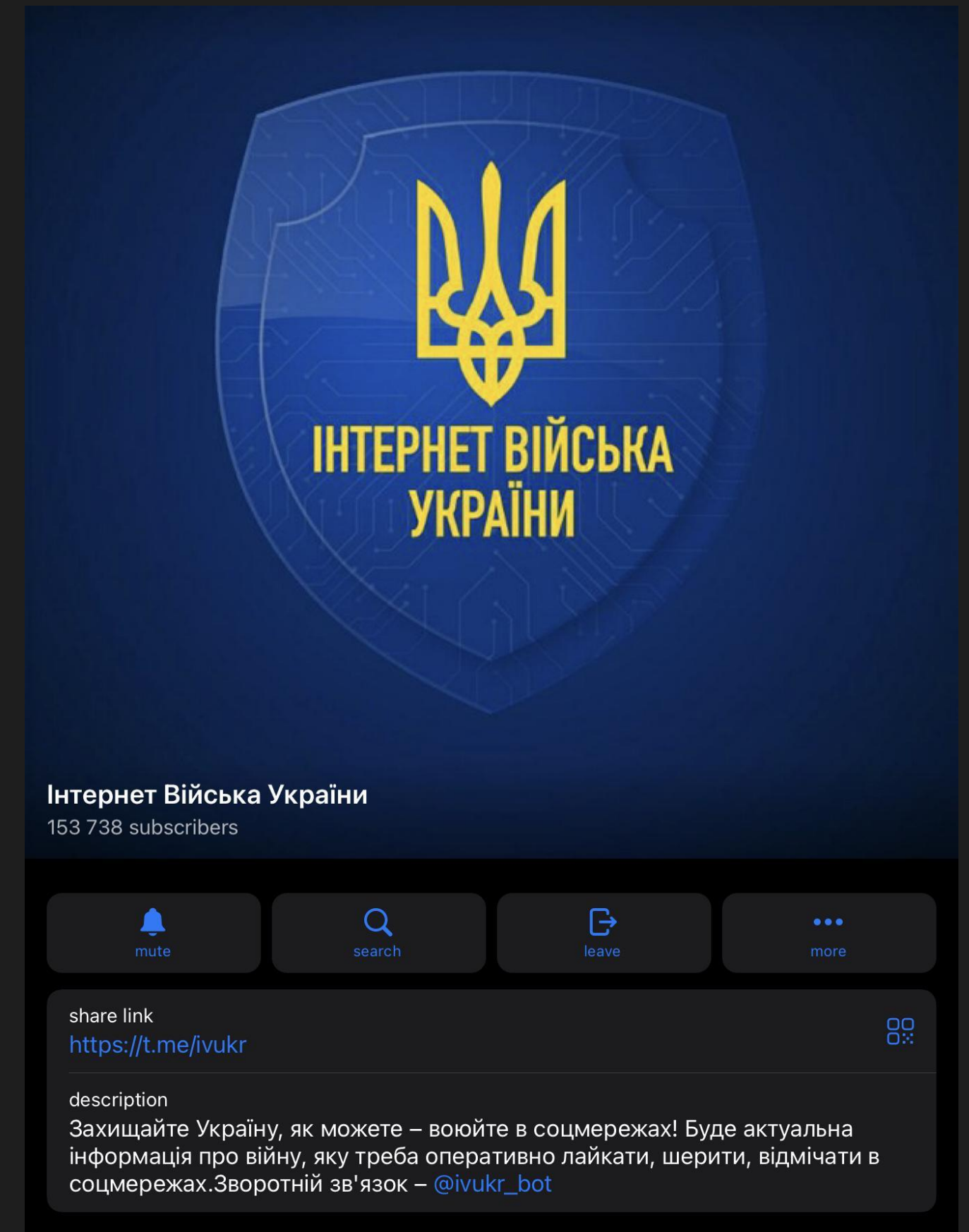
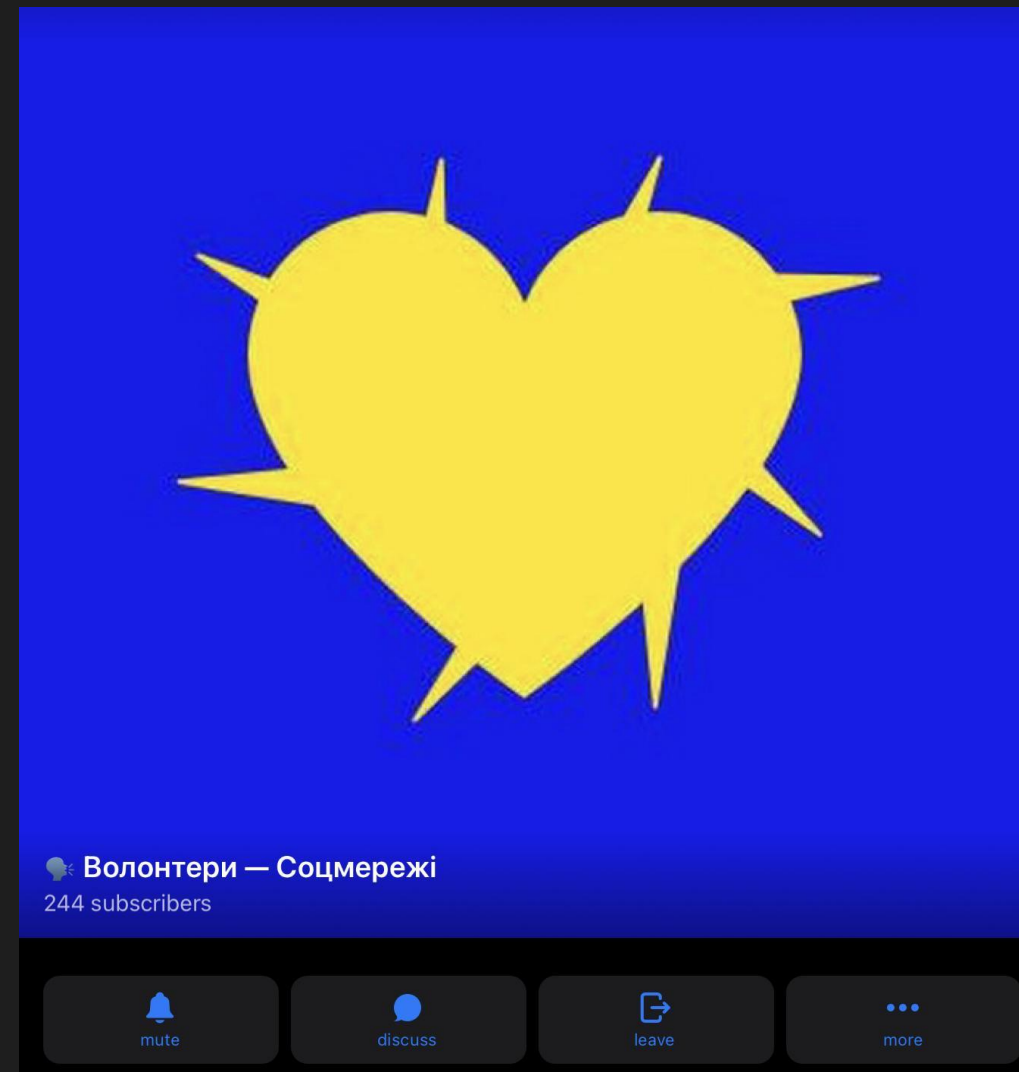
“Ukrainians have demonstrated **unprecedented unity and resilience to disinformation during the war**. As a national media literacy project, we are seeing people’s enormous support: Ukrainians come to volunteer for the project, influencers with millions of followers promote our materials for free, our partners participate in Filter’s coordination meetings despite electricity disruptions and air raid sirens, young people share our materials worldwide. Our team has adapted to working from shelters and changing plans last minute - and all this motivates us to work even harder and plan our media literacy policy for the future.” - **Valeria Kovtun, head of Filter.**

Ministry of Culture and Information Policy

Internet Army

“Defend Ukraine as you can - fight on social networks!”

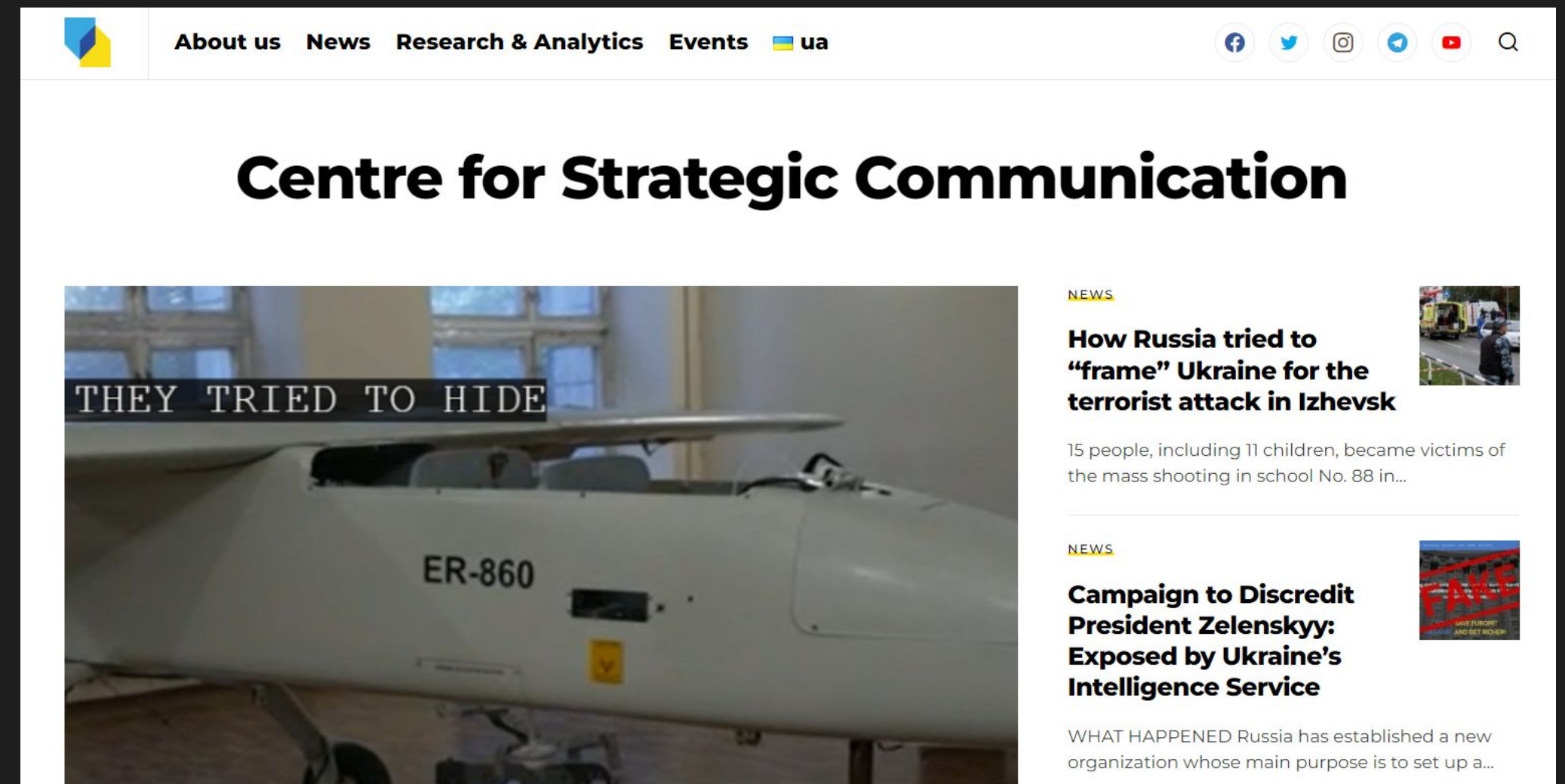
<https://t.me/ivukr>



Ministry of Culture and Information Policy

Centre for Strategic Communication (CSC)

The Centre for Strategic Communication was established under the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine as one of the mechanisms for countering disinformation through the joint efforts of the state and civil society.



Civil Society initiatives

Fact-Checkers and watchdogs

- Learn to Discern (L2D)
- Texty.org.ua
- “Verification” bot by Gwara Media
- VoxUkraine
- StopFake
- Institute of Mass Information
- Detector Media
- UkraineWorld
- Hybrid Warfare Analytical Group (HWAG)
- We are Ukraine

Ukrainian media which reports in English

<https://www.pravda.com.ua/eng/>

<https://www.ukrinform.net/>



<https://english.nv.ua>

<https://kyivindependent.com/>

Ad-hoc Initiatives

IT Army

More than 300,000 IT specialists volunteered their skills to help send DDoS attacks to Russian state news and government websites.





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MATT BURGESS

SECURITY FEB 27, 2022 3:25 PM

Ukraine's Volunteer 'IT Army' Is Hacking in Uncharted Territory

The country has enlisted thousands of cybersecurity professionals in the war effort against Russia.

 **Mykhailo Fedorov** 
@FedorovMykhailo 

We are creating an IT army. We need digital talents. All operational tasks will be given here: t.me/itarmyofurraine. There will be tasks for everyone. We continue to fight on the cyber front. The first task is on the channel for cyber specialists.



[t.me](https://t.me/itarmyofurraine)
IT ARMY of Ukraine
You can view and join @itarmyofurraine right away.

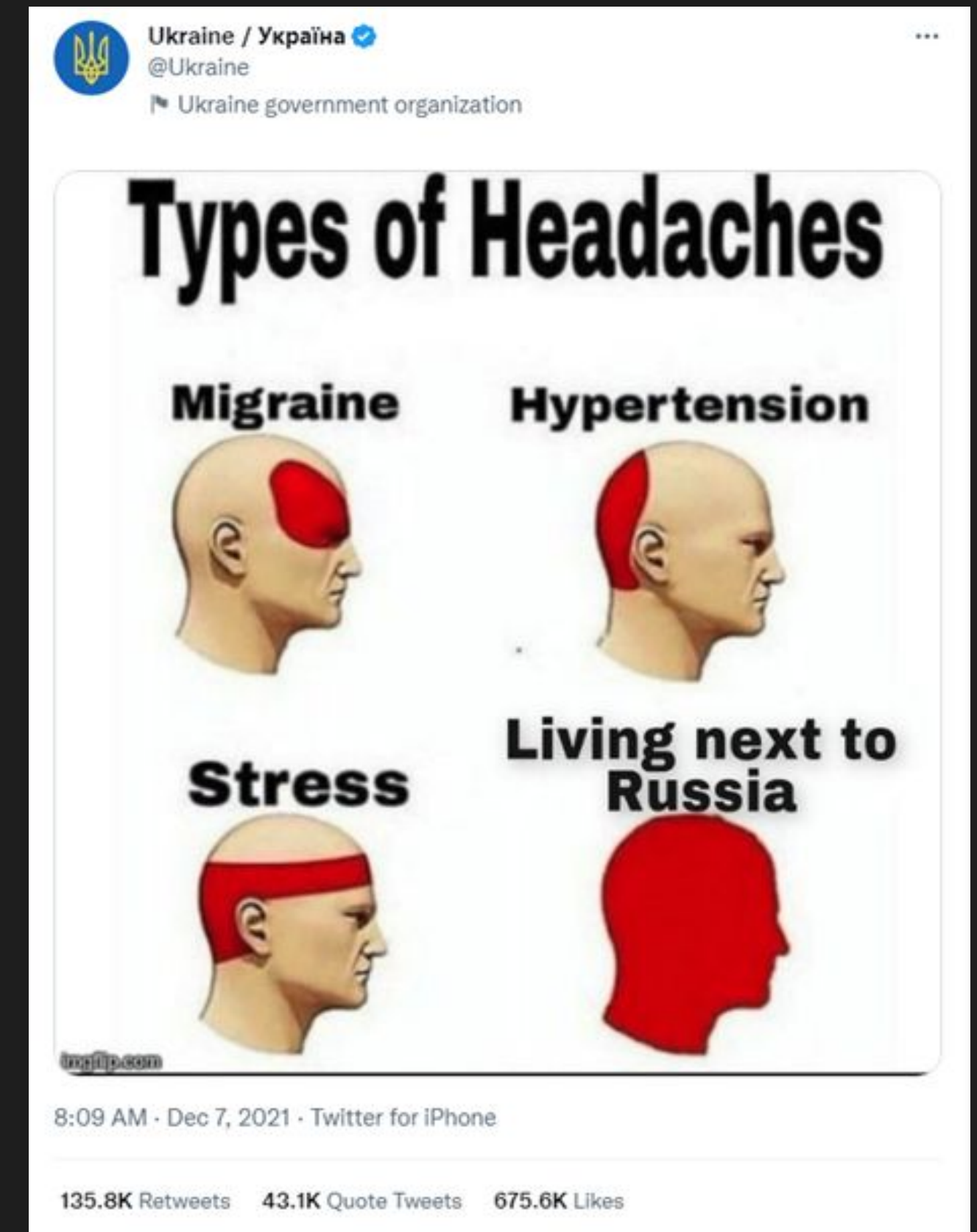
1:38 PM · Feb 26, 2022 

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Humor and memes

Internet memes have grown into real information weapons during the war, raising morale, uniting Ukrainian civil society, and ridiculing Russian propaganda, while also keeping the international community's attention on Russian aggression.



Thank you!



Foreign, Commonwealth
& Development Office



МІНІСТЕРСТВО КУЛЬТУРИ ТА
ІНФОРМАЦІЙНОЇ ПОЛІТИКИ УКРАЇНИ