

# Putin's Propaganda

## Humiliated and hurt. Five pillars of the Kremlin's propaganda

Agnieszka Jędrzejczyk

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**After 10 months** of watching Putin's TV and reading Putin's messages, I asked myself: why are they so effective if they contain such nonsense? Thus I found the five pillars of Putin's propaganda.

**PUTIN**, Dear Readers, will spend the New Year with his loved ones, and watch his New Year's speech with them. (Its content was published by the Moscow media when the year 2023 arrived in Kamchatka, i.e. after 12:00 UTC.)

However long were I to sift through my notes of Putin's lies about the war in Ukraine, I wouldn't be able to find a better picture of Kremlin's propaganda:

**Surrounded by his non-traditional family, Putin will watch himself glorify traditional family values.**

The one who has never seen the front lines praises the bravery of the fighters! While telling reporters about watching himself on TV (at a press conference on December 22<sup>nd</sup>) Putin smirked.

## Putin the Traditional[ist]

The propaganda machine was not deceived however. The authority figure has the right to irony, but not the propaganda. So it produced stories about dignitaries of a lower rank, who will spend the New Year *"...with their loved ones, listening to the president's message."* They will not be drinking too much, but they will praise "our boys" at the front line.

**This is how the propaganda conveyed to the subjects what the authorities expected this year: modesty and zeal.**

Because Russia had no choice but to attack Ukraine. She was forced to do it. However, it has been successful: it has expanded its borders, and there are more citizens of the Russian Federation (as a result of the "annexation" of eastern Ukraine). Russia's economy is doing great, having shrunk by only 2.5 percent. And the public trusts their president.

**The above nonsense was delivered on December 25<sup>th</sup>, at the year's end summation on Russian state television, by the host of the program "News of the Week", propagandist Dmitry Kiselov.**

According to the independent portal "Medusa", this is in accord with the Kremlin's directives: this is how *everyone* is supposed to talk about the war from now on.

**How come that this drivel is so effective?**

By analysing Putin's message across the last 10 months, I concluded that this propaganda is based on five assumptions:

1. People, those whom Putin is addressing, believe in **violence** and its inevitability. They experience this violence every day, not only physical, but also economic and psychological.
2. They are afraid of **humiliation** and ridicule: the accusation that they deviate from the "norm", "tradition" and "nature".
3. **They are unable to cooperate.** They are convinced that they are alone and can count only on themselves.
4. **They do not trust science.** They consider it a tool of violence against the common man.
5. They separate their own "private" lives from public affairs. They see **history** not as an inspiration to talk about the present, but as a set of dates and battles - because that's what violent state education has driven into their heads.

The Kremlin must have figured that there are enough people who share such an image of the world, that using these negative emotions would amplify the propaganda message.

**These five elements are constantly present in the Kremlin's propaganda.**

## Violence as sovereignty

Putin's entire narrative about the war, about aggression against Ukraine, and Russia's strategic goals, is based on a vision of violence: the strong one has the right to do what he wants.

**The weaker one must submit. This is the law of nature and it "always has been"**

Therefore, a country that cannot do what it wants is not sovereign. Sovereignty, understood as the possibility of unlimited violence, is an attribute of power, as is ostentatious wealth. It testifies to the right to violence. This is why the Kremlin's propaganda constantly emphasizes what wonderful cars, planes, watches, and palaces Putin has, and what wonderful red carpets they spread out in front of him; he also has new warships - he launched them this week. Remotely of course, over video links.

The violent story of the war in Ukraine goes like this: Russia was attacked by NATO in Ukraine, in order not to allow Her to do Her thing there. If Russia decided now that the bombing of Ukraine should be stopped, it would [effectively] lose its sovereignty. Negotiating, recognizing other points of view, is a sign of weakness.

"Russia has never accepted someone else's conditions" said Putin's spokesman Peskov on December 26<sup>th</sup>. Historically, this is not true, but we are dealing here with a confession of faith of an abuser. Putin was juggling the word "sovereignty" in his New Year's address on December 31<sup>st</sup>.

## Western supposedly "universal" values are just an appearance

There is no such thing as human rights. Any authority has the right to set for itself such values as it pleases. Currently, China has the best values - because it is the strongest. The West, on the other hand, is weak because it gives power to women, and women are inherently weaker. (It is worth noting that the Russian propaganda message is *extremely* misogynistic - a woman at the head of the Ministry of Defense is, hehehehe, an ostentatious show of weakness).

And since violence is normal, the only sensible strategy for the common man is to join the chase of the stronger after the weaker.

Here are a few examples from the propaganda message:

- "Today you all stand side by side, ready to join forces to achieve common goals. This means that you are sure: [to] be strong, you need to stand together. This is a lesson from the entire rich thousand-year history of Russia." Putin said this on August 15<sup>th</sup>.
- In the version for the West, the message is: Russia should not be opposed, because it is stronger. (After 10 months of war, modified to: "Russia is stronger because it has not yet been defeated by NATO.")
- And finally, a propaganda message to the Europeans, threatening that they will eat their, hehehe, beloved pets, out of hunger. (It is worth noting that in the culture of violence, that the Kremlin's propaganda sells us, love for animals does not exist. Animals are inherently weaker, so they don't deserve love.)

## Humiliating others as a prize

Kremlin's propaganda fervently believes in the power of the fear of humiliation. A man experiencing violence will do everything not to experience also ridicule, in addition to simple force. Humiliation is a punishment for the wrong choice, and mistaken—because not the same as the majority's—self-identification.

**The proof of this faith is the homophobia and transphobia pouring out of all Russian media.**

In every television "Vesti" [News program] there is something about non-heteronormative sex. How is this possible? – you will ask. After all, promoting "non-traditional relationships" in Russia is severely punished.

Yes it is possible. Let's take a look at this lecture on what is traditional and legal in Russia, and what is not. This is from a completely serious report, prepared by RIA Novosti, from the [meeting of the Duma committee on November 21 \[in Russian\]](#) regarding the tightening of penalties for "promoting LGBT":

*"It is legal to talk about LGBT people, including on TV, if the material does not create a positive image of non-traditional relationships. It all depends on the context. In other words, if a beautiful image of an LGBT relationship appears on the screen, it will be punished. But if it is shown in such a way that it will not be able to evoke positive emotions in the viewer, and it is accompanied by appropriate explanations, it will not be considered LGBT propaganda."*

The state calmly institutionalizes violence and humiliation. For the wronged and humiliated, the power points at others, who are even lower in the hierarchy, and thus allows them to feel better. Such is the defense of “traditional values.”

Here's the usual bit about how low the West has fallen:

- Ukraine deserves to be invaded, because it too has been duped by LGBT, and even accepts non-heteronormative people into the army. And it has gay parades.
- Europe has become a US colony—it has lost its sovereignty—and under the influence of LGBT culture it is losing its identity ("Vesti", October 23<sup>rd</sup>.)

## Extreme alienation as an experience of the rank and file

Propaganda exploits distrust and inability to cooperate. This can be clearly seen, for example, in the attacks on the European Union. The Kremlin says there is no such thing as the EU. Stories about meetings, negotiating positions, jointly inventing solutions - are fairy tales for the naive.

**Because the countries of the so-called Union are governed covertly by the stronger party. In the Kremlin's version, that stronger party is the United States, and sometimes Germany.**

Anyway, who manipulates whom is unimportant. What counts is the belief that cooperation, compromises, conversation, lead to nothing. If the UK is negotiating with the US, it means that it "has become a colony of its former colony."

**Propaganda always refers to unity, understood as joining the ranks. There is no debate.** [Twitter link, in Russian](#)

- Debates and disputes in the West (including about how to help Ukraine) are always presented by propaganda as evidence of a catastrophe and collapse. Only unity with the authorities can give one a sense of security. Patriotism is also understood as unity with the authorities, not a joint responsibility for the commons.
- Propaganda loves to quote critical, anonymous comments in Western social media, as proof of the decline of the West. Disunity, and the fact that you do not go to a *gulag* for dissenting from the authorities, must be a symptom of decline. (It is difficult to say how much these posts are inspired by Moscow, but surely Moscow loves them.)

Equally interesting—in terms of inducing distrust of cooperation—are propaganda stories about how law is made in Russia. Propaganda reports: "Putin ordered that..." This is how the most powerful individual knows, of his own self, what to do. The rest don't know, so they keep reverently silent. There are no consultations or negotiations here. Except perhaps humble petitions to the throne.

As for the fact that Putin has to issue orders over and over again (to change what he ordered previously, because the order didn't go into all the detail?) That is a complete trifle. The measure of a state's efficiency is not its effectiveness and meeting the needs of citizens, but unity, subordination, and lack of criticism.

## Science as fraud

This is a very frequently exploited thread of Kremlin's propaganda. Analysts in Europe often emphasize that it uses the same channels of communication as the anti-vaxxers. However, there is nothing strange about it. Dislike of learning [is] a result of painful memories of school, which required memorizing formulas, not asking questions or experimenting. [This] is a fantastic fuel for disinformation and propaganda.

**Thanks to this, we have tales about:**

- Secret laboratories in Ukraine, where the Americans invented Covid (RIA Novosti cable of August 18<sup>th</sup>, Vesti reports of September 18<sup>th</sup>)
- Testing on bats of diseases that would be lethal only to Slavs. (Press conferences on this subject are held on average once a month, by the head of the radiological, chemical and biological protection units of the Russian Armed Forces, General Igor Kirillov)
- US efforts to exploit covid "before it appeared" (Russian propaganda report on August 4<sup>th</sup>)
- A version of the coronavirus developed in the United States, which "targets the geopolitical competitors of the United States." ("The news that scientists in Boston have developed a new strain of coronavirus that has an 80 percent fatality rate came as no surprise. The United States has long been developing and implementing biological weapons" said Senator Viktor Bondarev, head of the Federation Council's defense committee, on November 27<sup>th</sup>)
- Various diseases carried by Ukrainian refugees, including HIV (in a joyful quote from Polish [state] media propaganda, on the occasion of AIDS Day on December 1<sup>st</sup>)

These threads appear in the propaganda less often than the attacks on LGBT people, but really regularly. And because the Kremlin's propaganda machine has multiple layers, Kirillov's press conference in turn infects the messages of publicists and local media. [Twitter](#) And then it spreads around the Web in the version "my good friend has a friend who..."

**And then [it goes viral.]** [Twitter](#)

## History, a tool of oppression

For Putin and his audience, history is "the facts." During his speeches, Putin can perfectly impersonate a victim of school history quizzes:

He tells the audience an anecdote that suits him, and says "eto udiwitiel'no, no eto fakt" (amazing, but it's a fact).

Because history—same as exact sciences—is one big hoax invented to torment the simple man. But a cunning and wise man will find out, discover the "historical truth" and "facts" that will give him the right to do what he wants.

## And Putin's facts are as follows:

- Kherson was founded by Catherine II, so it belongs to Putin, regardless of what the inhabitants of the city think today
- Soviet Russia never recognized the existence of a separate Ukrainian state, so Ukraine never existed as an independent state
- Because of the Khmelnytsky uprising and the Volhynia massacre, Poland will never be able to establish proper relations with Ukraine. (If it claims to want to change the past, it is lying.)
- Lviv used to belong to Poland, so Poland must want to retake it. Because Poland has the "right" to Lviv. Stalin unnecessarily incorporated eastern Galicia into the USSR (from Putin's December 22<sup>nd</sup> conference.) This is a source of trouble – it is better to give these lands to Poland and Hungary.



**Putin's full-scale "fact:"** Not everyone may know it, but Poland's borders have changed after World War II. What follows from this, "obvious obviousness" for Putin and his propaganda, is that Poland wants to regain eastern territories. ("Vesti", August 17<sup>th</sup>, 2022)

- The partition of Poland after September 17<sup>th</sup>, 1939, and the annexation of its eastern territories to the USSR, was accepted by the world. So the partition of Ukraine now is a perfectly natural and legal move.

One can happily laugh at this and ask whether, according to Putin, London today belongs to Italy – since it was founded by the Romans. Does Kaliningrad belong to the Czechs, because the city was founded by their king in the 13th century? [This] propaganda appeals to the experience of people who have never treated history as a conversation about the present. They did not learn to analyze sources. Instead, they learned that you can gain an advantage over your opponent, by referring to a "historical fact" unknown to him.



In this fairy tale, Russia was always a peace-lover. Unfortunately, it was being attacked. ("The basic reason for the Special Operation was USA and NATO's reluctance to take Russia's worries into account.") Such "history" teaches you that you are always right, *as long as you stand with the authorities*. Then your "facts" will be above other people's.

## Conclusions?

The five elements of Russian propaganda can be used to make a simple story justifying the attack on Ukraine: it is a weak country, accepting LGBT, betraying Russia with its eternal enemies, brazenly resisting Putin's power, having no historical roots, and spreading the most terrible diseases in the world.

**But you can make any story out of it.**

Therefore [because of historical past of the same totalitarian regime,] it should not come as a surprise that the same ideas about society are also used in Poland to oppress "the enemy." Among others, government "Für Deutschland" television and [Law and Justice Party] Chairman Kaczyński do it. They [simply] understand how effective these techniques are:

- [Kaczyński's] tirades about Władysław, who decided to be Zosia [i.e. trans woman]: [Youtube](#)
- Stories about the fact that there is no EU, only Germany
- Scare-making that the change of party in power means a cataclysm for "ordinary people" and will expose them to humiliation
- Reducing national identity to the knowledge of "facts" important to the Chairman - that is, the eternal war with the Teutonic Knights

Yes, these are all elements of the same model. Perhaps it does not apply to the entire Polish society, but the Law and Justice Chairman believes that it will be enough to socially energize his supporters.

## Sorry for digressing

**Firstly**, this propaganda narrative reaches everywhere where social relations are the same as in the model used by the propaganda.

**But we create [these social] relations ourselves – and we can change them.**

**The second conclusion** – *good education* is as important in defense against Putin as cannons.



## **Agnieszka Jędrzejczyk**

*Historian by education. From 1989, for 22 years, an editor at Gazeta Wyborcza, then for 10 years a clerk, e.g. in the Office of the Commissioner for Human Rights of Adam Bodnar. From 2021 at OKO.press*