

Western plot against Russia?

Brussels, 18 May 2015 - Russian viewers of television news and current affairs are being told that their country has been targeted by the United States in a 'western plot' to bring their country to its knees, according to a monitoring report.

These relentless messages aimed at the Russian public accuses the US of orchestrating a campaign against their country which includes fomenting the war with Ukraine, a research done in March by MEMO 98, a Slovak monitoring group, in cooperation with Internews Ukraine and Yerevan Press Club of Armenia, shows. The message downplays the role of the European Union which is often presented as being pushed into sanctions against Russia by the US.

"Our monitoring revealed that the main Russian channels have been used as instruments of propaganda in the conflict between Ukraine and Russia," said Rasto Kužel of MEMO 98. "The channels diverted attention from important domestic issues and scared the population with the possibility of a war and the need of Russia to protect itself against an external enemy."

Talk shows and news programs uniformly criticize the Ukrainian government and armed forces while supporting the actions of the Russian authorities in a common line on the main television channels on which Russians rely for their information on events at home and abroad.

Russians are also repeatedly told that the economic difficulties caused by sanctions and the low oil price are temporary and that 'they can take it' in a tone reminiscent of World War II.

Programs on World War II are a key element of the campaign to encourage Russians to support the government of President Vladimir Putin in a crisis situation which is presented as serious as the threat posed to the Soviet Union by the Nazi Germany 70 years ago.

"The national media enjoying high level of trust and popularity in the EaP countries would serve as a good tool against the Russian media propaganda. In this respect, the existence of truly independent public service broadcasters that would develop impartial editorial practices is essential." said Boris Navasardian of YPC.

The report which was commissioned by the Civil Society Forum of the Eastern Partnership, an EU funded organization which brings together NGO's from six post-Soviet countries, is published on the eve of an EU summit with Eastern Partnership leaders in Riga on May 21. CSF member organizations contributed to the report.

The summit will also review possible responses to Russian propaganda which influences information space in the EaP countries. The CSF recommendations stress that the best response is for the local media, including publicly owned stations, to report news in a balanced way. The report also urges media regulators in the EaP countries to be more active in controlling their airwaves and use legal means to counter violations of national laws by those perpetrating propaganda warfare.

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