

# A Ukrainian take on Russia's 'propaganda' campaign (guest blog)

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*This article is by LSE Student Elena Serdyuk. It's a personal account from someone who feels involved in the fate of her nation, but it also highlights how the media campaign is mobilised alongside the military manoeuvres at this stage.*

Never in my life did I think I would utter the words, "Ukraine is at war!" Last Sunday I did. As a group of my friends and I tried to digest the shocking news, we all agreed that the war had started much earlier—the unfair, all-out, hard-to-win propaganda war on Ukraine, led by the Russian media.

The ideological machine of the Russian Federation is well-oiled (pun intended), well-coordinated and highly productive. The amount of misinformation it is able to generate every day is truly impressive. It is so aggressive and omnipresent that an average Russian citizen in a small town somewhere in rural Russia, who is not Internet-savvy or fluent in foreign languages, simply can't escape it.

For one, the Russians were led to believe that the protests in Kyiv were organized by neo-nazis and sponsored by the United States. Then, reports were made of "extremists" killing unarmed (!) police, the entire city of Kyiv getting burnt down, and gangs of bandits from Western Ukraine roaming the streets and attacking random people. And then, it got even better.

## Russia Pressing

In order to have a reason to invade the territory of the sovereign state of Ukraine, Russia needed something more pressing, something that would link it intimately to the Ukrainian revolution. And the Russian media promptly concocted a story about the Russian-speaking population of Ukraine facing abuse by the temporary government, being persecuted, threatened, arrested, and denied the right to speak Russian.

The story was supported by the rhetoric of prominent Russian government officials, who stated that they could not abandon Russians in Ukraine to experience such horrors, and upheld Putin's decision to bring Russian troops into Crimea.

## Media Mastermind

The mastermind behind these audacious, yet effective, media misrepresentations of reality, or rather creation of an alternate reality, is one Dmitry Kiselyov.

Mr. Kiselyov, a journalist with many years of experience, is best known at home as the presenter of the weekly news summary Vesti nedeli (News of the Week), on Rossiya 1 (Russia 1) TV network. On this show, Kiselyov's reporting on the developments in Ukraine can be best described as fantastical. Thus, on 1 December 2013 he [stated that the events in Kyiv were the result of meddling by Sweden, Poland and Lithuania](#), which were using Ukraine to take revenge on Russia for the battle of Poltava, won by Peter the Great in 1709.



What should be dismissed as figments of unhealthy imagination or conspiracy theories at best, is skilfully packaged and delivered to the general Russian public as "news" on one of the main TV channels in the country. Such "news" in turn causes mass hysteria and complete disconnect from the truth.

## **Putin Promotion**

In December 2013 Mr. Kiselyov was promoted by Vladimir Putin to head of the new official Russian government-funded international news agency called Rossiya Segodnya (Russia Today), which, according to the BBC, is likely to complement the work of RT—the 24-hour English-language news channel.

Unfortunately, Mr. Kiselyov is not alone in his propagandistic achievements. On Sunday, 2 March 2014 Russia's Channel 1 aired a [video](#), which caused outrage among Ukrainians once it hit the Internet. In it, Russian speakers from the Eastern part of Ukraine were allegedly fleeing the country by tens of thousands, trying to escape to the neighbouring regions of Russia.

The footage shows a border and lines of cars waiting to go through customs and passport control. The key detail here is that the border pictured in the report is Ukraine's border with none other than... POLAND! People were traveling from and to Ukraine, crossing the EU border at the [Medyka-Shehyni](#) border point, on business, vacation, etc. Regular everyday activities were filmed and presented as "refugee" commotion at the Ukrainian-Russian border! Such flagrant and provable media manipulations are somewhat hard to imagine in 2014 but they indeed are happening.

One of the questions arising out of this is what is the most effective way to counter such "news"? What can be done to reach the Russian neighbours who have been brainwashed by their national media into believing that their country is giving refuge to thousands of people from Ukraine?

***This article is by LSE Student Elena Serdyuk.***

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