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**POLITICAL IMAGE OF UKRAINE: ANALYSIS OF FAKE INSTRUMENTATION
IN HYBRID WARFARE (BASED ON GREEK MASS MEDIA MATERIALS)**

This article examines the processes of transforming the political image of Ukraine against the backdrop of the armed conflict with Russia. All the information used in this study has been selected from contemporary Greek mass media, scientific, and expert-analytical works from 2014 to 2023. The relevance of this research is based on the assertion that mass media serves as a tool in conducting hybrid warfare, either destroying or weakening the authority of a particular state, creating a negative image of political institutions or politicians, thereby causing social and economic tension and subsequent societal fragmentation. The aim of the article is to investigate the toolkit for creating and promoting fakes in Greek media as an element of hybrid warfare in the context of highlighting the peculiarities of Ukraine's political image perception during the military aggression from the Russian Federation. The following methods were employed in the preparation of this article: analysis, synthesis, abstraction, cultural and systemic methods. This combination of methodological tools ensured the integrity of the study in elucidating the role and place of fakes in the context of conducting hybrid warfare. The authors provide numerous examples of political narratives and pro-Russian propaganda employed to erode the trust of the Greek population in Ukrainian politicians and ordinary citizens, fabricating a significant amount of false information in Greek mass media, as well as in scientific and expert-analytical works. The researchers attempted to reveal the ambivalence of societal perception regarding Ukraine's position in the European integration processes and to identify the events and decisions of the Ukrainian authorities that contributed to the negative imaging of

Ukraine in Greece. To achieve the stated objective, the authors of the article addressed the following tasks: delineating the stereotypical perception of Ukraine's political image from the pre-war period to the active phase of the armed conflict, elucidating the binarity of image content, and identifying image characteristics against the backdrop of military aggression from Russia.

Key words: image of Ukraine, fakes, propaganda, political narratives, Greek mass media.

Introduction. The vectors of development in modern international relations underscore the relevance of modeling Ukraine's external image as an important component of the state's national security, the realization of its European integration ambitions, and the widespread use of image technologies as a means of gaining geopolitical preferences. A competitive political image is an essential attribute of interaction between nation-states, where the struggle of ideologies, economic and technological potentials is currently being transformed into a confrontation of images and political ambitions of global actors (Rudnieva & Malovana, 2022, p. 100).

An undeniable fact is that the dissemination of fake news through mass media, which involves the deliberate creation of false or distorted information, has become an approved and effective technique of manipulating public opinion in the context of hybrid warfare. The main objective of spreading fake news is to misinform the audience through fabricated facts, propagandize a desired opinion or position, induce panic and psychological shock, alter established beliefs in recipients, capture the attention of readers / listeners toward a specific agenda, prompt specific actions, disrupt individual positions, and instigate audience skepticism. Media outlets create a "distorted reality" tailored to the requests of certain interested individuals or groups. By employing these information technologies, people's consciousness becomes susceptible to specific propagandistic ideas, rendering them vulnerable and defenseless against manipulative tactics. Hence, it is crucial to formulate a strategy to counter information warfare by preventing the dissemination of fake information and debunking already published content.

Fake instrumentation and methodology. The problem of the significance and role of media in information warfare in contemporary political society is always relevant and has an interdisciplinary nature, attracting the attention of numerous researchers. Among these are domestic scholars such as Y. Gorban (2013), L. Yevdochenko (2011), I. Zavadskiy (1996), T. Isakova (2019), V. Konakh (2015), O. Lazorenko (2014), G. Pocheptsov (2001), O. Senchenko (2022), P. Shpyha (2014), and others. This problem has also been addressed by foreign researchers, including J. Bryant (2007), A. Zinoviev (2006), S. Kara-Murza (2000), A. Klimburg (2017), M. Libicki (2007), S. Rastorguev (2003), J. Thompson (2018), and others.

Specifically, the manipulation of mass consciousness through the media in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war has been studied by O. Vasilevich (2008), O. Hoiman (2015), N. Nikolaenko (2020), S. Parkhomenko (2014). The use of fake news as a method of manipulation in the media, its types, and the peculiarities of identification and refutation have been examined in scientific investigations by S. Zozulia (2019), M. Kitsa (2017), I. Mudra (2016), M. Prokopenko (2014), I. Putsiata (2020), O. Saprikin (2016). The importance of distinguishing truth from falsehood in the information space and the significance of fact-checking skills have been noted by R. Herasymenko (2015), V. Eysmunt (2016), O. Minchenko (2014), and others.

According to the conclusions of Ukrainian scientists Y. Zharkov (Zharkov, 2014) and D. Kislov (Kislov, 2013), information warfare can be used against civil society and the ruling elite through the application of diplomacy, propaganda, psychological campaigns, political and cultural subversive work, infiltration of information networks and databases, as well as the promotion of ideas of opposition movements through computer networks.

Information warfare can be employed by governments against illegal groups or organizations involved in terrorist activities, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, or drug trafficking. On the other hand, information warfare can also be directed against specific government policies, supporters of groups and movements associated with religious issues, environmental protection, or the defense of civil rights.

This indicates that information warfare encompasses various methods and strategies aimed at influencing public opinion, governmental structures, groups, and movements. It can be utilized both to protect national interests and to exert influence over political or social situations. Today, the media is considered the most powerful element in the deliberate construction of political orders, as emphasized by scholars. It serves as a means to establish necessary connections and power relations with the public. Information conveyed through the media can never be completely neutral, as it always reflects the attempts of dominant elites to create a favorable image of reality for themselves. Media outlets “package” their practical policies into stereotypical perspectives that are advantageous to those in power, often foregrounding only a fraction of what is truly happening (Kondratiuk, 2013).

The **aim of this article** is to investigate the toolkit for creating and promoting fakes in Greek media as an element of hybrid warfare in the context of highlighting the peculiarities of Ukraine’s image perception amid military aggression from the Russian Federation. The following methods were employed in the preparation of this article: analysis, synthesis, abstraction, cultural and systemic methods.

Transformation of the image of Ukraine. In the examination of Ukraine’s image in recent years, it can be noted that its portrayal on the global stage has been formed both spontaneously and intentionally. However, the prevailing association has been with markers such as “politically unstable country,” “corrupt government,” “low level of socio-economic development,” “frozen conflict in the East,” and so on.

Currently, the situation is further complicated by the struggle to maintain Ukraine’s image in the global information space. One of the main objectives of the Russian Federation is to weaken Ukraine as an international actor, considering the significant increase in our country’s position since February 24, 2022. This period has witnessed unprecedented global support for Ukraine, the massive imposition of sanctions against the aggressor, and the introduction of visa restrictions for Russians.

Among the attempts to undermine trust in Ukrainian political figures and citizens by the international community, there are numerous instances of fabricating information attacks. These attacks include the dissemination of fake interviews with representatives of European countries regarding the aggressive behavior of Ukrainian refugees and their alleged misconduct. Other fabricated claims involve the activities of so-called Nazis, fascists, radical nationalists, shelling of Ukrainian territories, and preparation for shelling Russian territories.

This issue is particularly pronounced in countries that are in a transitional state. At the same time, the use of mass media allows for the formation of a positive image

both within the country and abroad. The presence of Ukrainian media outlets in the international arena can help prevent the distortion of facts and the transmission of fake news (Rudnieva, Malovana, 2022, p. 102).

Concept of a “dual track”. After the start of the Russian-Ukrainian war, Greece was one of the states that repeatedly caused concerns in Ukraine due to its actions and statements by its politicians. This primarily refers to Greece’s numerous calls, even during the tenure of former Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras (2015–2019), for the lifting of sanctions against Russia imposed by the European Union and the United States. Prior to the Russian-Ukrainian war, Greece actively advocated for the continuation of dialogue and cooperation with Russia. The reasons behind Greece’s friendly stance toward Russia, according to the researchers, are multifaceted. On one hand, Greece has always had close historical ties with Russia. The partnership and mutual understanding between Russia and Greece date back to the early 19th century when the Russian Empire played a significant role in Greece’s independence from Ottoman rule. Furthermore, during the 20th century, the Greek Communist Party had strong connections with the Soviet Union and contributed to the development of anti-American sentiment in Greece after the rule of the Regime of the Colonels.

After the collapse of the USSR, Marxist internationalism was replaced by Russian nationalism. Greek nationalist and far-right parties have demonstrated their support for the Russian Federation, which Putin is trying to restore to the glory of the Czarist era. From the liberation of the Greeks until the end of the 20th century, European democracies were the ones who did much more for Greece than Russia and the USSR later. Greece’s economic development has been driven by U.S. financial assistance, cooperation with free economies, and integration as the 10th member of the European Economic Community (EEC).

It should be noted that both before and after the dissolution of the USSR, Greece has always been influenced by the Russian “worldview.” Prior to 2022, there were dozens of cultural and educational centers, associations, schools, foundations, and university departments in Greece that promoted Russian culture and history. The interest in the Russian language and culture, which serve as tools for promoting Russia’s agenda in Greece, was also fueled by numerous grants and programs that Russia supported for research in the field of Russian studies. In terms of the media landscape, Russian media outlets such as “Sputnik” and “Russia Today” have always been considered the most reputable in Greece.

As a business-oriented country, Greece has always valued Russia as an economic partner, as it supplied oil and gas to Greece. Therefore, the concept of a “dual track” became the leitmotif of modern Greek politics at the beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian war. On one hand, it involved punishing Russia for violating international law and fulfilling obligations to Euro-Atlantic partners, while on the other hand, it kept the doors open for cultural dialogue and cooperation with Moscow. The Greek government fully agreed with the EU and NATO’s decisions to impose sanctions on Russia after its troops invaded Ukraine on 24 February 2022. However, as Lieutenant General of the Association of Retired Officers Ioannis Krassas notes, with regard to the Russian-Ukrainian war, it turned out that a significant number of Greeks are obsessed with feelings of friendship with Russia and hostility towards the United States because of the support it provides to Ukraine. Those who are friendly to the Russians come from a number of political parties, but mostly from extreme

ones. Sympathy for the blond race, according to the observer, dates back to the pre-revolutionary period, when enslaved Greeks expected Orthodox Russians to free them from the tyranny of the Muslim Ottomans (Krassas, 2022).

Greece was one of the EU players that consistently advocated for a reconciliatory policy towards Russia before the start of the Russo-Ukrainian conflict. They emphasized the importance of active dialogue, the ineffectiveness of sanctions, and the need for a joint security architecture. Equally important is the fact that pro-Russian rhetoric and policies enjoy high levels of approval among Greek society. In September 2013, 63% of Greeks had a positive view of Russia, and in 2014, after the military aggression against Ukraine, over a third of Greeks held a favorable perception of the Russian leadership, while less than a quarter had sympathy for European leaders. In 2014, almost half (49%) of Greek citizens did not approve of EU policies supporting the Ukrainian government, and in August 2015, 62% did not support sanctions against Russia. Over time, positive attitudes towards Russia have only strengthened, with 52% of Greeks trusting Vladimir Putin in 2019 (Koval, 2020, p. 199).

The Greek political discourse has been shaped for many years by the historical tradition that sees the United States and Russia as the dominant powers in a bipolar world. Regarding controversial and ambiguous issues for Greece such as the annexation of Crimea, Russia's role in the war, and sanctions against Russia, there is a range of examples of a “yes, but not everything is so straightforward” style of disinformation. Among the political narratives, we can identify statements such as “both Russia and separatists are fighting against Ukraine in Donbas,” “Greece maintains loyalty to NATO, but Russia remains a valuable partner for Greeks,” “the annexation of Crimea is illegitimate, but Crimea has always been Russian,” and so on.

According to N. Koval (Koval, 2020, p. 205), a comprehensive analysis of media texts (2014–2020) showed that the most common and universal descriptions were “the Ukrainian crisis” and “the crisis around Ukraine” in terms of the internal nature of the conflict in Ukraine. The second most common was “armed conflict in Ukraine / in the east / in the south of Ukraine,” followed by “civil war” and “on the brink of a civil war.”

“Ukrainian crisis” or “civil war”? Analyzing various articles of both neutral and propagandistic nature published at the beginning of the war, the authors have concluded that terms such as “Ukrainian crisis” and “civil war” continue to be used by media article authors today, albeit to a lesser extent. The article “Ukraine: Donbas separatist leader warns war could break out ‘at any time’” sourced from the Athens-Macedonian News Agency (ΑΠΕ–ΜΠΕ) states that according to the Kremlin, a civil war is being fought in Ukraine in which Russia is not involved: “Russia maintains that the conflict in Ukraine is a civil war in which it has no involvement” (Oukrania-Ntonmpas: Tha borouse na xespasei polemos ana pasa stigmi, 07.02.2022).

As evidence of the aforementioned, Kostas Tsitunas, in his article “Ukraine: Civil war on the brink of Donbas – The Minsk agreement left on paper”, published in the newspaper NewsBomb, also uses the term “Ukrainian crisis” instead of “war”: “The entire crisis in Ukraine has shifted to the Donbas region in eastern Ukraine, precisely where the battles erupted in 2014” (Tsitounas, 2022).

In the state newspaper ErtNews, in the article “Putin and Xi: “Responsible Dialogue” is Necessary for Resolving the Ukrainian Crisis”, the term “Ukrainian crisis” is used to describe the ongoing conflict: “Chinese President Xi Jinping and his

Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin stressed that ‘responsible dialogue’ is the best way to permanently resolve the Ukraine crisis, Chinese state media reported today” (Poutin kai Si: O “Ypefthynos dialogos” einai i lysi stin oukraniki krisi, 21.03.2023).

For most Greek journalists, the perception of Ukraine as a fundamentally divided state is considered an axiom. This discourse of division is often accompanied by the belief in the ethnic, social, and religious fragmentation of the Ukrainian state and nation, labeling it as the “most unstable nation in Europe” (Tsakiris, 2014b, p. 3). In this interpretation, Ukraine is portrayed as a territory, a battleground for true players, without a clear foreign policy vector and in need of stabilization by more significant actors. Therefore, in opposition press, Ukraine is presented as a random, fragmented state, filled with such strong and irreconcilable contradictions and divisions that the crisis and conflict were bound to happen, with Russia merely catalyzing them. The pro-European aspirations and desire for separation from the Russian sphere of influence are seen as unrepresentative and dangerous, both for Ukraine and for Europe. Thus, federal structure and foreign policy neutrality are considered optimal for Ukraine.

According to Hippocrates Daskalakis (Daskalakis, 2014, p. 13; 2016), the main problem of Ukraine lies in its location at the intersection and fracture point of NATO and Russia, Orthodoxy and Catholicism, Russia and Germany, Eastern and Western civilizations. From the Greek perspective, Ukraine is politically divided between pro-Russia and pro-EU supporters, culturally divided between Russian-speaking and Ukrainian-speaking populations, and geographically divided between the East and West.

Researcher Panagiota Manoli (Manoli, 2014, p. 1) writes about the “fiasco of a prolonged and painful transformation that manifested after the failure of the Orange Revolution, in the absence of democratic reforms, dominated by a corrupt political-economic elite.” Georgios Siachamis argues that Ukraine is the only post-Soviet state that has not achieved the standards of living during the Soviet period (Siachamis, 2015, p. 5). According to Tassos Symeonides, the internal situation in the country is unstable and politically fragile, and the bankrupt economy will bring many more troubles to the Ukrainian people (Symeonides, 2014a, p. 30).

The catastrophic assessment of the state of the Ukrainian economy by Greek media leads readers to the conclusion of the inevitability of reconciliation with Russia: “although it will take time for the Ukrainian people to forget Russia’s annexation of Crimea, there is a high probability that they will set aside their disagreements because as Ukraine’s economic situation continues to deteriorate, the only international player capable of alleviating the Ukrainian burden, according to the Greeks, is Russia. However, if Ukraine chooses membership in the Eurasian Union, Moscow will definitely contribute to reducing corruption in order to maintain the viability of the state in the future. Through a series of texts, a consistent concept can be traced that economically ruined Ukraine will be more of a burden to economically crisis-weary unified Europe than a valuable asset.

Therefore, according to Greek media, Ukraine has always had key spiritual and strategic significance for Russia: “Russia has long considered Ukraine its living space, and it is difficult for it to allow its transition to the Western camp” (Daskalakis, 2017). Russia considers itself the dominant force in the post-Soviet space, and Putin considers Ukraine so important for Russia that he is ready to wage an open war for it if necessary. Ultimately, Thanos Dokos writes that “the roots of the Ukrainian crisis

go back to 2004, and perhaps even to the formation of an independent Ukraine in 1991” (Dokos, 2014, p. 3).

The Kyiv regime. Another trend is publications about non-state military formations that participated in combat operations in Donbas (Karagiannis, 2016). “The Kyiv regime, which includes elements with barely hidden fascist beliefs” (Symeonides, 2014b, p. 1). The current ruling coalition is a mixture of the most ultra-nationalist elements of the Western Ukrainian extreme on the political landscape of Ukraine, which strive to dismantle the fragile balance of ethno-political power that held post-Soviet Ukraine together... This coalition of chauvinistic – and in some cases neo-Nazi – parties is not the political heir of the Orange Revolution and will not adopt a centrist and conciliatory approach capable of averting the country from the brink of civil war” (Tsakiris, 2014a, p. 1).

The prevalence of such interpretations in Greek media discourse indicates a lack of understanding of political processes in Ukraine, as well as a complete trust in Russian sources of information. Assertions about the presence of right-wing radicals and neo-Nazis in power and their actions, accusations of a violent start to the armed conflict, are interpreted as a source of internal conflict in a divided society and as a pretext for Russian intervention – sometimes as justification, sometimes as an explanatory or cautionary example. “If the moderate nationalists in Kyiv cannot restrain the ultra-nationalist militarized formations, the likelihood of a second Russian intervention will remain high,” warned Theodoros Tsakiris back in 2014 (Tsakiris, 2014b, p. 17).

Many Greek media outlets, especially right-wing and far-right authors, emphasise the Ukrainian president’s responsibility for the war. With descriptions such as ‘clown’, they indicate that he wanted to drag his country and planet into ruin (Newsroom, 21.08.2022). They do not recognise his right to defend Ukraine’s territorial sovereignty, instead attributing his demand for money and weapons from the West to his insatiable desire and belligerent nature: “Billions of euros, dollars and military equipment are constantly flowing into Ukraine like a bottomless barrel.” The focus is given to the request and not on the conditions and situation that necessitate arming the country. The war and its brutality are absent from the analysis in such publications, and the limited perspective in the comments casts doubt on the political choices of the Ukrainian president.

The publications also focus on the speeches of the Ukrainian president, questioning the martial law imposed in the country. These publications assess Zelenskiy’s public appearances as pretentious, allegedly shaped by the power of his image and his knowledge of entertainment.

“Zelenskiy, with a series of guest appearances in European parliaments and his allegedly khaki combat T-shirt, is playing a role we have never seen before. He is not so much asking as demanding. He is not talking about voluntary help, but about obligation. He does not support his allies, but denounces them at the first opportunity when they do him no favours. He also has no sympathy for countries such as Cyprus, which has been occupied for half a century, but he is indifferent and openly supports Turkey by doing business with it. There is no doubt that Zelenskiy has turned this war into a one-man show. He has managed to get the most media coverage, making headlines with his photographs while his country is on fire. He made the whole West work for him and dance to his tune. He has managed to make us turn a blind eye to

the fact that we give him money and weapons without checking what happened to them, when he earns black money offshore and is caught red-handed in the Pandora Papers, when he closes down media outlets, bans parties, pretending to be a democrat, when he pretends to oppose oligarchy and corruption” (Newsroom, 21.08.2022).

Attention is also drawn to those publications that consider V. Zelenskiy a puppet in the hands of the US leadership (O Zelenski kiryxē anepithymito ton Stainmaier! 13.04.2022): “The Americans, by dragging out the war in Ukraine, are weakening both Russia and Germany through Zelenskiy and his gang. That is why they do not hesitate to subject the German political leadership to even such humiliations as the one Zelenskiy did to Steinmeier (at other times, Zelenskiy would have stood in front of the German president with his head down in the most servile position).” The following article was written in the same spirit: “The impasse in which Ukrainian President V. Zelenskiy found himself will sooner or later lead him either to a military defeat or to serious concessions to Moscow, which will anger the nationalists, former Pentagon adviser Colonel McGregor told Freedom” (Syntagmatarchis McGregor: O Zelenski tha parachorisei edafi – Tha pesei thyma ethnikiston, 29.11.2022).

According to the same publication, V. Zelenskiy will strictly follow instructions from the White House, and the time will come when he will be told that “the game is over” and that it is time to “come to terms with reality”. Without any justification, it is concluded that “the Russians do not seek to harm civilians” – a statement that provokes anger and resentment when the images of dead children alone still “scream”. A typical example of war crimes is the discovery of mass graves of civilians in the territories liberated from Russian troops and the rape of women, which not only did not cause disgust in Russian society, but were also acceptable to it, as they were interpreted as a means of changing and psychologically pressuring the civilian population.

There are also left-wing newspapers that believe that the Ukrainian president is responsible for this war and are quick to judge that Russia will win: “No, the Ukrainian people are not to blame, but the clown president Volodymyr Zelenskiy, a Jew who feels comfortable with the Azov groups, which the West considers neo-Nazi organisations, and an absurd game is being played... Despite Western propaganda, fake news about hundreds of Russians killed and hundreds of tanks destroyed – this is partly true – despite tearful comments about heroic Ukrainians, the reality is different. Russia will win” (I Rosia tha kerdisei para ti propaganda – O Zelenski thysiazeti tin Oukrania, 25.03.2022).

This study illustrates the highly detrimental impact of Russian propaganda on the Greek media landscape. The research findings demonstrate that Russian propaganda has infiltrated various media outlets in Greece, leading to the dissemination of biased and misleading information that serves the strategic interests of the Russian government. This infiltration has compromised the integrity and objectivity of Greek media, undermining public trust and distorting public discourse on key issues. The study reveals how Russian propaganda has amplified divisive narratives, fueled misinformation campaigns, and manipulated public opinion, particularly on topics such as NATO, EU integration, and regional conflicts. Propaganda systematically portrays the following dipole: The West as a sinister whole against a benevolent force (Russia and Putin). They also project the belief that the EU is crumbling whereas Russia will be the future dominant force. The consequences of this propaganda campaign include the polarisation of society, the erosion of democratic values and

the potential weakening of Greece's relations with its European partners. It is crucial for media organisations, policymakers and civil society in Greece to recognise and address the threat posed by Russian propaganda, promoting media literacy, independent journalism, and strategic communication to safeguard the integrity of the Greek media landscape and protect the democratic fabric of the country.

Eurointegration policy of previous governments is interpreted as insincere and imitation: "Kyiv has not formulated a strategy towards the EU. The country's political elite engaged in time-serving, pro-European rhetoric on one hand, while refraining from fulfilling its obligations and reforms that needed to be implemented" (Manoli, 2014, p. 3). In this context, the Eurointegration dimension of the Euromaidan is essentially ignored. Georgios Siachamis claimed that "despite the EU flags on Independence Square and the dynamic response of the opposition to signing the Customs Union with Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan, the public opinion in the country did not support integration with the EU" (Siachamis, 2015, p. 6).

The Russo-Ukrainian war is discussed in newspapers as a war for influence over the post-Soviet countries of Eastern Europe between the USA / NATO / EU / West and Russia. In this geopolitical struggle for influence, Western criticism is given much more prominence than criticism of Russian actions, with NATO and Americans being the primary targets. It is NATO's expansionist policies in the Russian sphere of influence and attempts to detach Ukraine from Russia that allegedly created a situation of danger, and the support for pro-European revolutions from the US is seen as irrational, non-strategic, and ultimately unfair. However, the EU's policies are also heavily criticized, either for their unsuccessful strategy or their absence. The Eastern Partnership is viewed very negatively as a harmful initiative that fueled Russia's security concerns. "It is important to note that the European Union and its actions have unequivocally contributed to the emergence and escalation of the current crisis... it may have made a huge geopolitical mistake by trying to distance Ukraine from the exclusive Russian sphere of influence" (Filis, Dimopoulos, Karagiannopoulos, 2014, p. 28). Ultimately, the policies of the "new Europe" states are also assessed negatively.

Russia's annexation of Crimea. Constantinos Filis writes about how Poland and the Baltic states are essentially responsible for the annexation of Crimea: "In addition to their anti-Russian orientation, which is manifested in a long-standing sense of danger and demands for protection from the US and the EU, their interference and pressure in events in Ukraine preceding the annexation of Crimea by Russia compelled even the most cautious Western states to intervene openly." Regarding Crimea, the most commonly used term is annexation, although more politically charged terms such as reunification and incorporation are also encountered. Authors of articles discussing the return of the peninsula to Russian jurisdiction openly reflect a pro-Russian political orientation. According to some commentators, even the illegal annexation of Crimea was a defensive move by Moscow, which feared that Kyiv would try to deprive it of its rights in the Black Sea (Filis, 2019, p. xv). Such interpretations reflect divisions in the perception of threats within the EU and partially illustrate the reasons for the sluggish progress in creating a coherent EU foreign policy.

A significant part of the Greek media promotes the idea of Russia's unconditional victory in this war, justifies Russian aggression, which involves numerous blatant violations of international law, and characterizes the occupied territories as

historically belonging to Russia and should be recognized by Ukraine as at least autonomous, if not independent.

The website of the Association of Retired Army Officers published an article titled “The attitude of the Greeks towards the Russo-Ukrainian War”, in which Ioannis Krassas notes that the outbreak of the war in Ukraine has highlighted the fact that a significant number of Greeks have a positive attitude towards Russia and negative feelings towards the United States because of its support for Ukraine, and also writes that this attitude is due to the pre-revolutionary period when Russians helped Greeks to free themselves from the Ottoman yoke: “On the occasion of the Russian-Ukrainian war, it appeared that a large part of the Greeks are possessed by friendly feelings towards Russia and hostile towards the USA, due to the support they provide to Ukraine. Those friendly to the Russians come from the whole range of political parties, but mainly from those at the extremes. Our sympathy for the blonde race has its origins in the pre-revolutionary period, when the enslaved Greeks looked to the Orthodox Russians to free them from the tyranny of the Muslim Ottomans” (Krassas, 2022).

The BankingNews website (O Zelenskiy einai enas klooun – Krimaia kai Donbas anikoun stous Rosous – Poly logiki i eisvoli tou Putin, 22.03.2022), which bills itself as a news service, has an article titled “Zelenskiy is a clown – Crimea and Donbas belong to the Russians – Putin’s invasion is too logical” in which the authors describe Ukraine as a cesspool of corruption, bad governance, and a defiant state in the international arena, comparing Ukraine’s internal situation to Mexico’s drug cartels: “Ukraine is a cesspool of corruption, anarchy and brazen stupidity on the foreign policy front. The situation in Ukraine is comparable to drug cartels in Mexico and other illegal ones around the world. Russia’s invasion of Ukraine was the result of Ukraine’s provocative stance. It has provoked the Russian bear not a few times since the 2014 coup”.

Furthermore, the authors justify the aggressor’s invasion by explaining it as a response to provocative behavior from Ukraine towards its eastern neighbor. Additionally, the article asserts the historical belonging of Ukrainian territories to Russia and presents rigid conditions, namely the recognition of separatist republics in Donbas and the independence of Crimea, which the authors claim are the only alternative to ending this bloody war. The conclusion of the article includes a quote stating that Russia will undoubtedly emerge victorious, and the question lies only in the terms on which it will happen: “Ukraine should recognize the independence of Crimea that it is Russian territory and in fact always has been since it was bought by Catherine the Great in 1783. Ukraine should accept the separation of the Donbas Republics from Ukraine because the populations are overwhelmingly Russian-speaking and have been part of the “New Russia” for more than 300 years and do not wish to be ruled by the oligarchs who control Kyiv the capital of Ukraine. These conditions may seem harsh, but they are the only alternative to avoid the complete destruction of Ukraine... Russia will win anyway; the question is on what terms” (O Zelenskiy einai enas klooun – Krimaia kai Donbas anikoun stous Rosous – Poly logiki i eisvoli tou Putin, 22.03.2022).

Conclusions. Summarizing the perception of Ukraine’s political image by unofficial Greek media, it becomes evident that there is a literal adherence to Russian sources of information and a complete disregard for the Ukrainian perspective. Ukrainian sources are used for information analysis in an extremely selective manner, while Russian sources often form the basis for the reproduction and interpretation of the chronology of events.

However, the contemporary political events such as military actions, the crisis, and the significant flow of refugees from Ukraine across borders, which arose spontaneously as a result of full-scale invasion rather than the work of image-makers, have had a positive impact on the image of our country.

Several unquestionably strong Ukrainian image characteristics have emerged during this challenging period. These include the consolidation of society against external opponents, the self-organization of civil society to address issues of varying complexity, and the construction of a national narrative that can be represented to the global community, popularization of everything Ukrainian as a brand of strength, indestructibility, freedom and independence.

It is worth mentioning that the formation of Ukraine's external image is also influenced by Ukrainian diasporas abroad, labor migrants, and refugees who have left the country during active hostilities. Whether directly or indirectly, they promote certain Ukrainian values and national traditions, contributing to the identification of Ukrainians as a nation.

It has been identified that the dissemination of fakes in Greek mass media aims to discredit the Ukrainian government and army, promote Russian narratives about the loss of Ukraine's independence and democracy, and justify the crimes of the Russian Federation, among other objectives. Among the array of informational injections, differentiated manipulative messages were observed. Among the array of information injections, we differentiate between media fakes created by Russian media and subsequently disseminated by Greek media in translation, as well as online rumors, false short messages spread through social networks, various groups, messengers, chats, etc. These included expressiveness, repetition over a certain period of time, the extraction of specific context, and the fragmentation of the overall information picture. Verbal markers used in such messages typically included terms like "urgent," "sensational," "reliable source," "witnesses of events," "just learned," and so on. The main features of fake news messages were identified as information and disinformation blending, activation of stereotypical beliefs, reliance on unknown authorities, and creation based on existing information.

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ПОЛІТИЧНИЙ ІМІДЖ УКРАЇНИ: АНАЛІЗ ФЕЙКОІНСТРУМЕНТАРІЮ ГІБРИДНОЇ ВІЙНИ (НА МАТЕРІАЛІ ГРЕЦЬКИХ МАС-МЕДІА)

Резюме

У статті розглядаються процеси трансформації політичного іміджу України на тлі збройного конфлікту з РФ. Увесь використаний інформаційний матеріал є дібраним із сучасних грецьких мас-медіа, наукових і експертно-аналітичних праць 2014–

2023 років. Актуальність даного дослідження ґрунтується на твердженні, що засоби масової інформації є інструментом ведення гібридної війни, руйнуючи чи послаблюючи авторитет певної держави, створюючи негативний імідж політичних інститутів чи політичних діячів, що, власне, і зумовлює виникнення соціально-економічної напруги, а згодом і фрагментації суспільства. Метою статті є дослідження інструментарію творення та просування фейків у грецьких ЗМІ як елемент гібридної війни в контексті висвітлення особливостей сприйняття політичного іміджу України на тлі військової агресії з боку Російської Федерації. У процесі підготовки статті були використані такі методи, як аналіз, синтез, абстрагування, культурологічний і системний методи. Така сукупність методологічних інструментів забезпечила цілісність дослідження в з'ясуванні ролі та місця фейків в умовах ведення гібридної війни. Автори навели багато прикладів політичних наративів і проросійської пропаганди, застосованої з метою руйнації довіри грецького населення до політичних діячів і простих громадян України, фабрикування значної кількості хибних повідомлень у грецьких мас-медіа, а також наукових та експертно-аналітичних працях. Дослідники зробили спробу розкрити амбівалентність суспільного сприйняття місця України в євроінтеграційних процесах; визначити події та рішення української влади, що посприяли негативному іміджуванню України в Греції. Задля реалізації зазначеної мети авторами статті були розв'язані такі завдання, як окреслення стереотипного сприйняття політичного іміджу України від довоєнного періоду до активної фази збройного конфлікту, розкриття бінарності іміджевого контенту, а також виявлення іміджевих характеристик на тлі військової агресії з боку РФ.

Ключові слова: імідж України, фейки, пропаганда, політичні наративи, грецькі мас-медіа.